

WATERS OF AKAYA

by Darrin Drader

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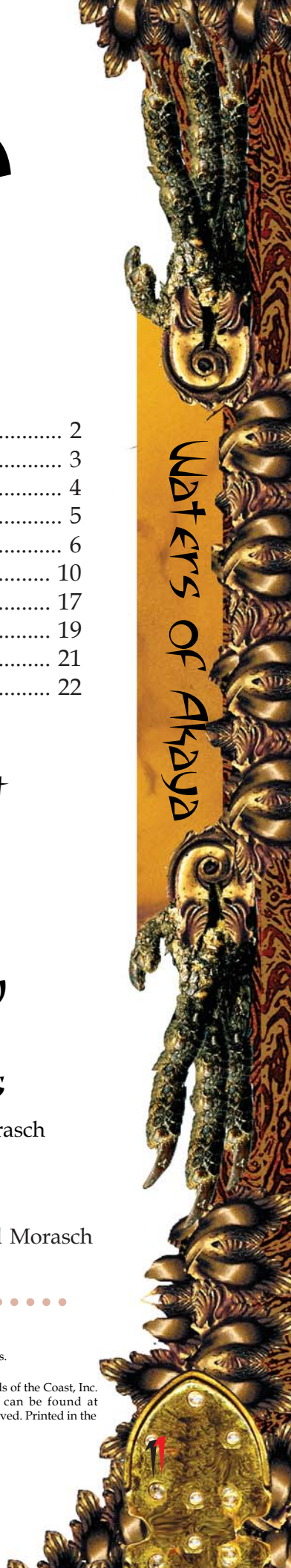


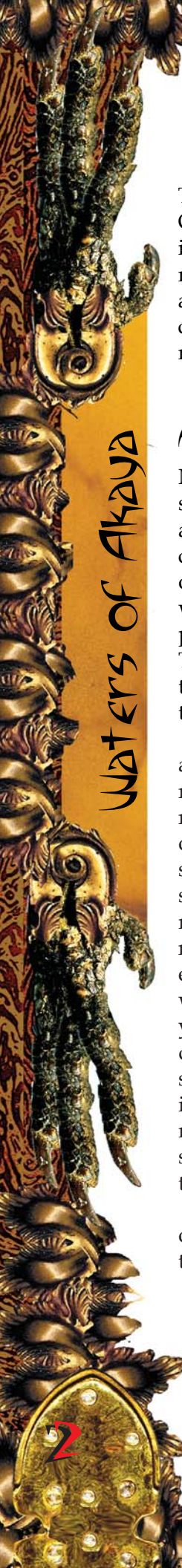
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WATERS OF AKAYA





An adventure for newly generated 5th level characters.

This adventure introduces new players to the Oathbound campaign. The players are thrust into a strange land of limitless potential, mysterious races, and hidden agendas. In this adventure, the characters find themselves caught in the middle of a turf war caused by a most unusual pool.

Adventure Background

Nearly 600 years ago, the Nkoll, an evil snakelike species with tentacles for limbs, arrived on the Forge. An aggressive and charismatic race, the Nkoll reproduced rapidly on their new world. Though their martial skills were impressive, they preferred not to personally enter combat if it could be avoided. To this end, the Nkoll became masters at taming and charming monsters, which they then employed as their soldiers.

On their home world of Kasara, the Nkoll are the dominant species, enslaving their natural enemies and destroying those that were resistant to their charms. Their society focuses on the worship of the god Akaya, who represents himself to his followers as an enormous serpent many miles long. According to Nkoll mythology, in the great battle for the dominance of Kasara, Akaya defeated his mortal enemy Bariz, but sustained a grievous lance wound to his tail. Akaya became ill for many years, but eventually grew stronger. His wound did not heal however, and to this day still leaks small quantities of blood into the vast river that is his home. The bloodied waters had transformative powers the Nkoll used to create new servitor monsters or enhance those already in their thrall.

When the Feathered Fowl brought a group of Nkoll to the Forge, the reptilians snuck away to a quiet canton where, within the space of a year, they spawned and raised hundreds of young Nkoll. During this time their shamans created the *Pool of Akaya*. The pool draws a small amount of water from the great river of Akaya's home, very near the point where the god's wound trickles blood into the water. The pool has the ability to trans-

form beings submerged in it into monstrous aberrations. Because Akaya's blood is merely a trickle and the shamans did not want anger their god by depleting the supply, they set the pool to restock its water only once every hundred years. During the last few months of this replenishment cycle however, the pool actually causes less drastic transformation that prove to be beneficial to the being submerged in the waters. In order to activate the *Pool of Akaya*, a priest must be present with the *Amulet of Akaya*.

Several years after coming to the Forge, the Nkoll took control of their canton and established a great temple to their serpent god. Once they were firmly rooted, they embarked on a quest to capture several more cantons. With monsters fighting their battles, Nkollan influence spread as canton after canton fell before them. Enemies captured in battle were taken to the pool and transformed into monstrous allies.

The Nkollan expansion came to an abrupt end when a coalition of united bloodlords formed to stop them from taking any more of their territory. On one front, soldiers launched an attack that drew the majority of the defenders away from the temple, while a circle of druids surrounded the Nkollan temple. The druids combined their powers and exerted one massive effort to cause the temple of Akaya to sink. The Nkoll, realizing that the temple was not adequately defended, fled the temple and attacked the druids themselves. A second army hidden among the nearby structures met them and in minutes most of the Nkoll were eradicated. The Nkollan leaders hid inside the structure, but they were hunted down and killed by the invaders. Those that stormed the temple dismissed Akaya's pool as a mere fountain, and the Amulet was not recovered since they had to leave the rapidly-sinking structure in a hurry.

Over the years, the canton suffered from uninspired leadership, the nearby homes fell to disrepair and ruin. A large house was built atop the old temple and then later abandoned. The only remaining trace of the temple is a hole located in the courtyard, leading hundreds of

feet down. For more than a century before it had been abandoned, the people tossed their waste into the hole.

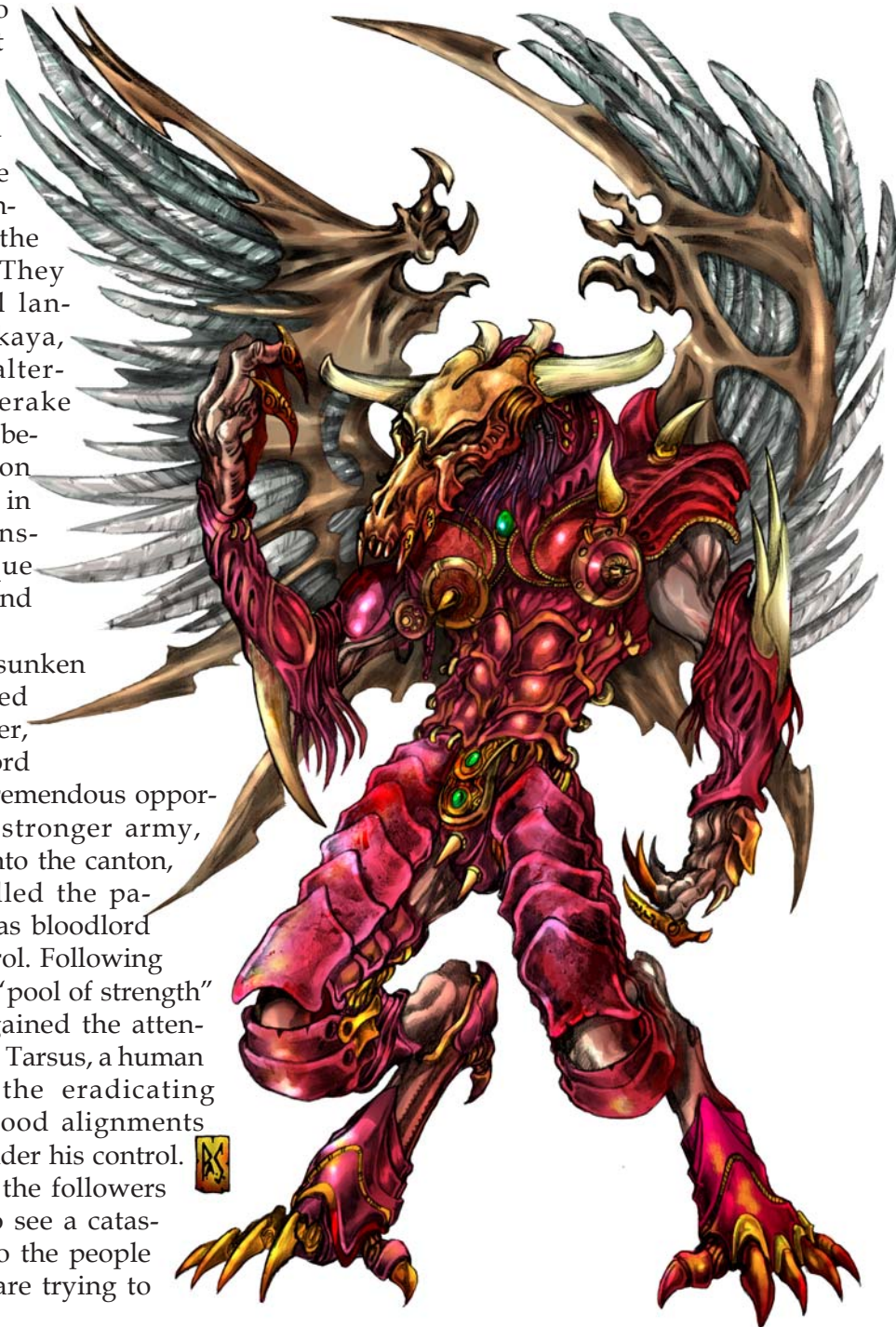
This canton became an area for the lame, the outcast, and the poor. That changed three weeks prior to the events in this adventure; an asherake delver named Chaaza explored the house ruins and flew down into the hole in the courtyard. Beneath the ruins, he found the *Pool of Akaya* and the corpse holding the amulet that activates the pool. Amulet in hand, Chaaza waded into the pool to find that some scratches he had recently received rapidly faded. While he could not read the inscriptions around the base of the pool (They read, in the Nkoll language, "Behold Akaya, and his blessed alterations!"), the asherake had long wanted to become stronger. Upon submerging himself in the pool, he transformed, his physique becoming bulkier and stronger.

Chaaza left the sunken temple and reported his find to his leader, the asherake bloodlord Gracken. Seeing a tremendous opportunity to create a stronger army, Gracken marched into the canton, challenged and killed the pathetic rogue ruling as bloodlord here, and took control. Following this, rumors of this "pool of strength" have spread, and gained the attention of the bloodlord Tarsus, a human paladin bent on the eradicating bounders of non-good alignments from the cantons under his control. Also interested are the followers of Lord Follo, who see a catastrophe happening to the people of this canton and are trying to

help (and claim another canton for their overlord). Asherake fighters have claimed several key positions within the canton, and street fights between the various factions have become all too common in this normally quiet area.

Adventure Summary

The Waters of Akaya begins when the party arrives on the Forge



and is almost immediately attacked by an asherake patrol. After overcoming their adversaries, the PCs observe numerous factions uneasily patrolling the streets of this normally insignificant canton. It rapidly becomes apparent which inhabitants represent the various groups. There is a definite difference in the way that those fighting for this canton treat the party. The asherake fear what the PCs' arrival may represent, and this fear provokes the attack shortly after their arrival. As long as the PCs are of good alignment, the forces of Lord Tarsus try to recruit the party. When encountered, the followers of Lord Follo are respectful of the PCs, and request that the party render assistance against both the asherake and the followers of lord Tarsus. After making their initial observations, the PCs encounter a picker named Dromoda who tells them how strange it is that this area is being fought over, and asks their help to rid their canton of the asherake.

The quick investigation of the canton reveals three large asherake outposts. Two of the outposts watch the comings and goings of the locals, while the third secures a house of some importance. The PCs observe a badly wounded asherake in distinctive armor enter the residence. Shortly afterward, the forces of Lord Tarsus see that the PCs are new to the area and (assuming that they are mostly of good alignment), try to recruit them. Whether the party accepts or rejects the offer, a human follower of Lord Follo takes note of their efforts and explains to them that this canton has become an area of interest because of the rumored Enhancement Pool.

Later, the PCs notice the asherake they had seen with the distinctive armor, who now appears to be in perfect health and much bulkier and more muscular than he was previously. In order to rid the neighborhood of the asherake presence, the party must fight their way down into Akaya's ancient temple, over-

come several traps, and retrieve the amulet that activates the pool. Once they have done this, they must decide what to do with the amulet.

Part 1: An Unexpected Departure

Oathbound is much different than many other settings. In preparation for this scenario, it is a good idea to have pictures of the various beings commonly encountered in the Forge handy so that the players can more easily visualize the new creatures with whom they interact. It is also a good idea to read through the scenario in its entirety before attempting run it.

The PCs may start in whatever campaign world you wish to place them in (or in which they already played up to 5th level) at the beginning of the adventure. You may also place them in a generic fantasy world, and choose to pay little notice to the specifics of their situation. Starting them in a generic wilderness space works for the purposes of this adventure, since they will not be there long. Begin by reading the following description to the players:

Seemingly out of nowhere, a cloud of inky blackness swoops out of the sky in your direction. You hear the flapping of wings and loud screeching as thousands of blackbirds fly directly towards you. The air around you becomes a flurry of feathers, wings, and beaks. The ground, the trees, and even the sky all disappear in the swarm of blackness as the birds fly mere inches from you, surrounding you. You can feel the air move violently around you, though the birds fail to make physical contact with you.

Within this field of feathery blackness, you finally notice a bizarre figure not far from you. Standing mere feet from the swirling mass of birds is an upright humanoid figure that appears to have a bizarre combination of human and avian aspects. The nearly unclad head, torso, and arms of this creature appear to be feminine and very human, though her flowing robes are silky and

keep her feet and lower legs hidden. Glossy black-feathered wings sweep behind her shoulders, and four bluish-black horns sprout from the forehead. Raven hair and a tight blindfold frame her face, making her even more forbidding. A book appears to be bound to the left hip of the creature by a chain. She stares at you wordlessly, and then your perceptions go utterly black. You can no longer see or sense your surroundings, and you aren't entirely certain that your feet remain on the ground. All is shadow for long moments, and then your perceptions return as the birds begin to drift away. In place of the cloudy blue sky that had been above you now looms an angry red sky. A cobblestone street and run-down houses replace the trees and forest. Numerous beings of several races—humans, elves, goat looking creatures, and upright lizard folk—look at you with concerned expressions on their faces. An odor, more powerful than you have ever experienced before, wafts in your direction—that of cooking meat. Perhaps as an explanation for this turn of events, two scrolls lie at your feet.

These scrolls are detailed at the end of this adventure in Handouts 1 and 2.

Part 2: Initiation to the Forge (EL 7)

The party should be allowed to ponder their new situation as you fill them in on many of the sites and sounds of this place. (See the Oathbound sourcebook for more details and be sure that the PCs all gain their arrival gifts as noted in Chapter One of that book.) The party abruptly arrives in the middle of a busy street in a canton currently held by the asherake within the city of Penance. It is the tenth day of the month and both the red and yellow suns are in the sky. During this scene, the PCs may gather information about Penance, as well as

discover more about the turf war being fought among the Bloodlords Gracken, Follo, and Tarsus.

The general attitude of the NPCs towards the PCs is indifferent (as described in the DMG). The local inhabitants of the canton note the party's arrival. While it is possible in their minds that the PCs simply teleported in from elsewhere, they are aware of the manner in which newcomers arrive in the Forge. Most of the local bounders view the arrival of the PCs as a possible solution to the turf war.

Upon arrival, the PCs are immediately threatened by an asherake patrol that observed their arrival; the asherake know they could have been pulled here by the feathered fowl to disrupt the balance of power in this canton. No sooner than 1d4 rounds after their arrival, the asherake patrol attacks. Though likely distracted and disoriented by their new surroundings, any PC that successfully makes a Spot check (DC 15) notes the approach of the asherake before they attack.

Asherake (4): 39, 45, 52, 56. (See Appendix I for more statistics.)

The various warring factions all take note of the party's arrival, and they all immediately assume it to be an omen of some sort sent from the feathered fowl (and they're right!). The question on each of their minds is how to manipulate the situation to a better advantage. The bounders do not report the PCs' appearance to the asherake, but because the entrance was so noticeable, agents of Tarsus and Follo soon learn of them. All three groups decide to keep their eyes on them to see whose side their arrival will most likely benefit.

Both Lord Follo's and Lord Tarsus' agents follow the PCs for 1d4 days. During this time, PCs making successful opposed Spot checks are alerted to the presence of those shadowing them. Dar'hurk, an agent for Lord Tarsus, follows the PCs the entire time. Also following them from Lord Follo's camp is a picker named Ahk K'dau. Either of these individuals flees the scene if the PCs approach them and offers no explanation of his actions unless threatened with violence.

At this point, the PCs most likely wish to orient themselves in their new surroundings. PCs that attempt to gather information learn

a single piece of information from the DC category that they rolled and two pieces of information listed in each category below the one they rolled. GMs should ensure each PC gains some new information and the players must roleplay to share those bits of lore. There is a great deal of information to process about the Forge, and because most people are familiar with the orphan nature of the population, much of the base information is easy to gather.

In the Domains of the Forge, there are characters that are drawn here, and the ones that were born here are called bounders. Ordinarily bounders are not involved in the heroic struggles of this land. The majority of the inhabitants in this canton are bounders, and because bounders are not “In the loop,” PCs wishing to retry their gather information check must not only wait a day and suffer a -5 situation modifier.

DC 10

- The party is now in a city called Penance within the domains of the Forge.
- The Forge is ruled by mysteriously birdlike creatures collectively referred to as the Feathered Fowl.
- The neighborhoods of Penance, called cantons, are ruled by warlords known as bloodlords. These warlords fight one another for control, one canton at a time.
- Characters in the Forge are able to evolve into improved forms, helping them realize their full potential.
- There is something about this place that makes perception more intense. Most that enter the Domains of the Forge never want to leave, and those that do long to come back for the remainder of their lives.

DC 20

- This neighborhood was once a much quieter place. It is not usually considered important by the bloodlords.
- This canton is currently held by an asherake bloodlord named Lord Gracken, but his rule is being challenged by other bloodlords.

- Lord Tarsus is a bloodlord that is challenging the asherake’s right to hold this canton.
- The picker, Lord Flolo, has people fighting for control of this canton as well.

DC 25

- Lord Tarsus is actively rooting out all traces of evil, in which he includes the rule of Lord Gracken.
- The asherake seem somehow more powerful than usual.
- The picker lord’s people seem to know something the rest don’t.

Players may wish to ignore the process of information gathering and explore the city instead. This should be allowed to some extent, but after seeing the sites, the talk of the town continually turns to the canton where the party initially appeared. They should return to that point eventually out of sheer boredom with the lack of events currently occurring in the rest of the city. Once the party has gained enough information to ground themselves in their new world and the local canton, proceed to Part 3.

Part 3: Allies, Enemies, and Intrigue

By this point, it should be clear to the party that all is not well in this canton. In addition to this, their arrival could potentially affect the development of this area, so numerous NPCs have discerned their presence here. In this section of the adventure, the party has the opportunity to learn what is truly happening here and perhaps restore a tentative peace.

Scene 3-1: A Plea for Help

Shortly after the PCs have arrived, secured lodging, and gotten their bearings in Penance, they are approached by Thilder Kros, a middle aged leather tanner who observed their arrival. Thilder is one of the few entrepreneurs that lives in this canton, and this turf war has severely reduced his usual clientele. Lately the only ones requiring his services have been

warriors working for one of the factions, and their numbers do not replace his lost customers.

Thilder approaches the party in a public area, preferring to conduct his business publicly to avoid offending anyone. When the party is in a suitably public and open area, he gets the group's attention, asks them if they have a moment to listen to him, and then awaits their reply. If they seem friendly and willing to help, he goes on to give them more information. If he is rebuked by the party, he leaves, looking instead for another group to hire. Assuming that they are willing to hear him out, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

"A couple weeks ago this canton was invaded by a bunch of asherake. They marched in here and killed our old bloodlord Kenen Voes. Everyone knew he was a sneak thief, but he made good rules for us, and didn't interfere much.

"I've been one of the bounders here that actually made something of myself. A few years ago, I started up a leather tannery and started doing good business. Then the asherake showed up. They're brutes, and they've brought my business to a halt. Then Tarsus' people showed up and started throwing folk out of their homes. Finally Lord Flollo's people showed up, and I don't even know what they want here.

"Anyway, I want 'em gone, or at least the fighting stopped. It's no good for business, and the people here are getting hurt. There's never been anything here worth fighting for before. I don't know why they're here now, but I was always told of a big temple that sunk into the ground hundreds of years ago. I wonder if that doesn't have something to do with it.

Thilder says that he's willing to reward the PCs with 500 gp if they can bring the fighting to an end. He would offer more to them, but he doesn't have anything else that he can spare. If the party presses him for a reward, he says that he can't afford to give them any more, but he is willing to provide free leather

goods to them in addition to the offered reward. If the party continues to push for more, he decides that he must have misjudged them, and rescinds his reward offer.

Scene 3-2: The Walking Wounded

This brief scene offers the PCs a clue as to where they must go to reach a resolution to this situation. When they pass near the ruined house that sits atop the sunken Nkoll temple, they see a wounded asherake; he appears normal with the exception that he wears plate mail with golden highlights (in designs much more refined than those normally worn by his kind). As he walks down the street, the red patches on his fur and the blood trail he leaves behind make it obvious that he has been badly wounded. He ignores the party, proceeding directly to the house. If accosted, he breaks into a run to reach the house and the protection of the guards that are posted there (see Part 4, Room 1).

If the PCs do not follow the asherake into the house, they do not see him enter and then proceed down the hole into the temple. The PCs encounter him again after they have met with Marlgo in Scene 3-4, and by then he is not only completely healed, but he now appears much more muscular. He literally has gained twenty pounds of muscle since they saw him last, and the same ornate armor he had been wearing before now seems too small.

The stats are the same as the standard asherake as detailed in Appendix I, with the following exceptions: AC: 22, HP 5 (54 when at max).

Scene 3-3: The Position of Lord Tarsus

After a few days of keeping them under observation, Tarsus' men are now willing to approach the PCs. The operatives of Lord Tarsus take note of any clerics or paladins in the party and can recognize their holy symbols if they are worn openly. If none in the party wears a holy symbol openly, the paladin Dar'hurk nears the party, and while hiding from a discrete location, uses a scroll of *know alignment* on whichever PC appears to be leading the group. If their actions thus far

have been noble and the spell indicates a good alignment, he extends an invitation to the PCs to join his faction. If the party has been hostile or unfriendly to the people here, he warns them away from this canton. In either case, the party observes the **Eviction of a Bounder** after Dar'huk has made contact with them.

If the party has taken actions indicating that they are good, Dar'huk's attitude is friendly. Assuming that the party stays to hear what he has to say, read or paraphrase the following:

You notice a well armored figure approaching. This person wears plate armor, a great helm, and he carries a two-handed sword at his side. His palm is held outstretched towards you and he says,

"Halt! I would have a word with you all.

My name is Dar'hurk, and I am one of the apprentices of lord Tarsus. I am here because the locals noticed your sudden arrival and we've had agents follow you constantly. Since you have shown yourselves to be a group of rashers of noble intent, we would like to extend the hand of friendship to you and offer you the chance to join us in the service of Lord Tarsus. It is his intention to cleanse his areas of the evil that has taken root

As you may have noticed, this canton is currently the stage for a bloody conflict. A short time ago, the asherake cur named Lord Gracken sent his winged cat-people in here to secure the neighborhood. We aren't entirely certain what he wants here, but we are here to stop him from holding this canton. Will you aid us?"

If the PCs cast *detect thoughts* or any other spell to reveal Dar'huk's intentions or thought, they learn that he is telling the truth, although there are certain areas about which he himself is unsure. When he claims that he doesn't know what the fighting is about, he is being truthful, although he has heard the rumor of the "enhancement pool." While he has placed discreet inquiries within the

ranks of Lord Tarsus's men for more information, his suspicions have neither been confirmed nor denied. He is also being truthful when he says that Lord Tarsus intends to cleanse the area of all evil that has taken root. The information he withholds is that Lord Tarsus' men have orders to clear all territory under his control of any beings of evil or neutral alignments.

With a successful contested Diplomacy checks, the PCs may learn the following:

- It is their intention to rid this neighborhood of evil and neutral beings after they have taken control.
- Lord Tarsus wishes to learn what has drawn the asherake to this canton, and take control of 'it' if possible.
- They wish to defeat the asherake in battle and drive out the followers of Lord Follo.

If the party agrees to join Lord Tarsus, they gain a place to sleep within this canton (though the building is run down and the roof leaks), free meals, and people with whom to socialize. In turn, they are expected to support any moves made against the asherake or Lord Follo's followers. Refusing this offer results in Dar'huk expressing disappointment with their decision, and he warns them that they will be watched. Regardless of their decision, the following day is when the encounter **Eviction of a Bounder** occurs.

If the party has been acting in a self centered, arrogant, or unfriendly manner towards the people here, Dar'huk approaches with ten of his warriors to issue a stern warning. Read or paraphrase the following:

The sounds of booted feet and the clunk of metal armor fills your ears. In the distance, you see eleven armored men closing in on you, though their weapons are not drawn. One of the men holds his hand up to the other warriors, signaling them to stop, and he approaches alone and unarmed.

"I am Dar'huk, and I serve under Lord Tarsus. We took note of your arrival, and we have been watching the way you have been interacting with the bounders. We do not approve of you or your methods and we are here to issue

you a fair warning: Leave this canton. You have spread your evil influence far enough and we will not tolerate your continued troublemaking. You have been warned, and we will be watching you to make sure that you conclude your business here in a timely manner."

In this situation, Dar'huk's attitude is unfriendly, though not hostile. He allows the party up to two days to conclude their business here. If the party is still in this canton when this time has passed, he issues them another stern warning. In neither case will he order his men to initiate combat against the PCs unless they attack first. He is not willing to discuss the terms of their departure, nor is there a chance for them to learn more from him.

Eviction of a Bounder

One of the primary goals of Tarsus is to purge his controlled areas of any non-good beings. In his mind, this leads to the creation of a virtual utopia under his rule; what he fails to realize is that the evil beings he evicts must go somewhere else. Often, this leads to regions of concentrated evil resettling directly on the outskirts of his areas, where they may more easily prey upon innocents than if they were among a more structured environment.

The PCs observe a patrol of ten of Lord Tarsus's warriors approach a house. If the party has joined Lord Tarsus, they are asked to be there to provide backup support. The warriors kick open the door to a run-down shack without knocking, storm the building, and emerge with two male humans, both dressed in rags. These are both 3rd level true-neutral rogues (as found in the DMG).

The warriors enter the home and quickly throw everything they can find into a couple of sacks; they hand the sacks to the rogues and order them to leave the canton. The rogues attempt to argue briefly, but the warriors pat their hands on their swords and intimidate the rogues, who then take up their belongings and walk away dejectedly. Once this is done, the warriors chain up the doorway and secure it with a heavy-duty lock (Open Locks DC 35).



Scene 3-4: The Knowledge of the Picker

This encounter begins with trouble brewing between the asherake loyal to Lord Gracken and those agents that follow Lord Tarsus. Twenty-two fighters stand opposed to 15 asherake. Five wizards stand in the shadows of the nearby buildings, ready to render support to the fighters if the asherake take to the air in the battle. All this takes place in broad daylight a few feet away from the party. While the party's first inclination may be to render assistance to the fighters, a picker in the service of Lord Follo flags them down and indicates for them to follow him into a side alleyway where they may speak more privately.

If the party agrees and follows, he introduces himself as Dromoda, one of Lord Follo's people. He politely asks for a moment of their time and relates to them the tale of the Nkoll. When he is done imparting this information to the party, he asks them for help defeating Lord Gracken. If the party asks what they will get out of it, he answers that they will earn a favor from a powerful bloodlord. Among the information he imparts is the following:

- The Nkoll were a reptilian race that were brought to this canton hundreds of years ago
- The Nkoll built a great temple to their god Akaya.
- Inside this temple was a pool that could transform creatures of all sorts into abominations.
- Once a century, the pool goes through a cycle where the pool has beneficial effects.
- The Nkoll built an army, which they used to conquer several nearby cantons.
- They were eventually defeated by an alliance between several bloodlords and their temple sunk by that same coalition.
- The asherake have most likely unearthed this pool and it may be in the portion of the cycle where it has beneficial effects.
- If the asherake learn of the true function of the pool, they are likely to use it to the same ends it was used before,

tipping the balance of power in the favor of Lord Gracken and his asherake.

- In order to activate the pool, one must first be in possession of the *Amulet of Akaya*.
- Dromoda does not know exactly where the pool is, but suspects that it is in one of the guarded areas.

If the party presses Dromoda for what Lord Follo wants with this canton, a successful contested Diplomacy check reveals that Follo's people are concerned with the plight of the populace caught in the middle of the struggle. They also stand opposed to the forces of Lord Tarsus, because by evicting the evil dwellers in this canton, he will force them into neighboring regions, which include Lord Follo's cantons, among others.

If the PCs ignore Dromoda and rush into combat, have them each engage the enemies they choose. The party should be allowed to fight 1d4 of the asherake, and any that they kill within 2 rounds are added to the death toll. Rather than play out the entire mass combat, the battle lasts no longer than 2 rounds; Tarsus' fighters kill five asherake, and the remainder of Gracken's forces fly away, and are attacked with magic missiles by the nearby wizards, but none are brought down. After the second round, the asherake fly away, provoking any applicable attacks of opportunity.

This attack does not go without consequences. Later this night, the asherake controlling the area round up fifty people they believe associated with Lord Tarsus's troops, and murder them, leaving their bodies in the streets to rot. This does not occur in front of the PCs, but they soon hear stories relating this event and see the bodies.

Part 4: The Sunken Temple of Akaya

This ruined house was once a moderately wealthy estate that housed a powerful merchant family; the merchants were blissfully unaware of the history of this location. After many years, a five-foot-diameter hole opened up in the courtyard. While the family inhabiting this structure vacated for safer territory rather than live atop a potential sink-

site, others moved in and used the hole as a cheap means of disposing of garbage.

The single-story house has a masonry exterior and the partially-ruined remnants of a tiled roof. Now neglected for many years, the windows have all been broken, and the wooden doors hang awkwardly or lie where they fell long ago. A ten-foot-high stone wall encircles the front yard and is attached to the house, completely enclosing the backyard; since the wall is the least ruined part of the estate, this makes it impossible to circle the house to reach the courtyard (also keeping the hole hidden from plain view). The wall is broken only once in the front, fifteen feet before the front door.

1. Guard Post (EL 7)

Originally a living area, this room is now the guard post for the asherake. Two asherake stand guard just outside the front door, and two more asherake listen through the broken windows and are ready at all times to join battle if a struggle erupts outside.

Asherake Tactics: In the event of a battle, the asherake abandon the interior of this structure. They know that any attackers probably



seek the *Pool of Akaya*, and they need to be in the courtyard in order to descend to the sunken temple. Since they alone know this, the guards take to the air and use flight as their primary advantage over the party. Once airborne, the asherake swoop down, attacking the party with their bastard swords. Their first goal is to stop them from entering the house. If they fail to do this, they regroup above the house and attack again when the party reaches the hole in the courtyard. Each asherake carries their standard gear as well as a key to unlock the chests found in rooms 5 and 6.

Asherake: 42, 44, 50, 54

2. Dining Room

This room was used as a dining room. It now serves that function once again now that the house is being used as a guard post. Within this room is a cheap wooden table that seats four, wooden benches lining both sides of it. Crude silverware and plates have been left dirty on top of the table. The floor is littered with wood from the smashed and rotting dining set that belonged to the previous occupants of the house. If the PCs search through the rubble and grime in here (DC 15), they come across a set of good silverware (10 gp), a fine china set with a few pieces still intact (20 gp), a tapestry depicting a feathered fowl (100 gp), and a bag of preserved rations that are still edible.

3. Storage

This room once stored the seldom-used valuables of the occupants of the house. Now, after years of ransacking and exposure to the elements that seeped in through the broken windows and roof, all valuables are gone. In their place are piles of rotting cloth, dirt, and disease. PCs searching through this mess must make a Fort check (DC 15) or become infected with skin rot—a disease that causes 1d4 hp of damage per day and 1d6 points of temporary Con damage per day until cured (or until the afflicted reaches 0 Con and dies).

4. Kitchen

The kitchen has been restored to its original function now that it is occupied by the

asherake. In the center of the room is a standing countertop that is used to prepare food; two recently slain and gutted rabbits lie atop the table, awaiting skinning and spices. Along the north wall is a stove that heats this wing of the house and cooks meals. There are still hot coals in the stove, and the rabbits are edible, once cooked.

5. Bedrooms

Two rope-frame-beds with fresh hay mattresses beds occupy each of these rooms. Each room contains a chest that holds the belongings of an asherake. (One chest is in each room with the final chest in room 6.) Each chest is locked (Open Lock DC 20).

- **Chest 1:** 317 gold coins (317 gp)
- **Chest 2:** 57 gold coins (57 gp), an *everburning torch* (90 gp)
- **Chest 3:** 312 gold pieces (312 gp), one yellow opal, (1,108 gp), cluster of pink fluorite crystals which appear like intertwined blocks (12 gp), a scroll of *burning hands* (25 gp).

6. Master Bedroom

This room is identical to room 5 with the exception that there is only one large hay stuffed bed here rather than 2 smaller ones. This was once the master bedroom, and now it houses a single asherake. The asherake regard these rooms equally, and no special consideration is made with regard to rank when determining which asherake inhabits each room.

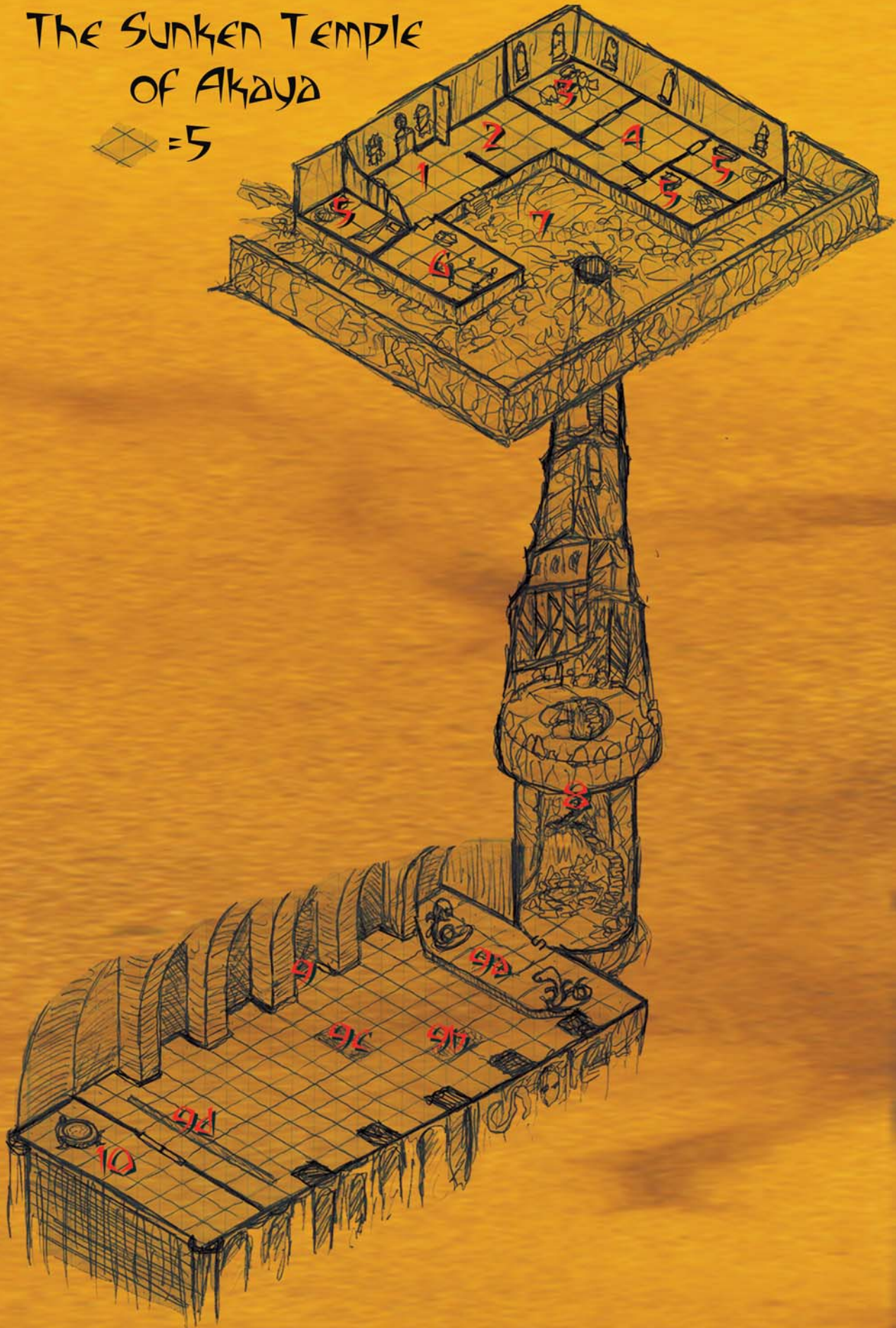
The chest in this room is locked (Open Lock DC 20), and contains the following items: 540 gold coins (540 gp), 33 platinum coins (330 gp), a graveyard plume agate with white flames (30 gp), a yellow topaz (720 gp), and a clear zoiste (126 gp).

7. Courtyard

This area is completely enclosed by the ten-foot wall that surrounds this house. While the courtyard had once been a lush garden area, weeds now dominate its expanse. The hole in the courtyard floor leads down to the Temple of Akaya. The area is strewn with garbage, food

The Sunken Temple of Akaya

◆ = 5



WATERS OF AKAYA

byproducts, and discarded items, none of which holds any value.

While the shaft is only 5 feet across at the top, it widens to 25 feet at its base; due to the angle of the walls, it is difficult to descend (Climb DC 30) without the aid of a rope or applicable spells such as *featherfall* or *fly*. The walls are made of smooth stone. PCs descending the shaft may either stop upon the top of the guard tower (area 8), or continue to the

rough floor, fifteen feet below that. As with the opening of the hole, the entire area is choked with garbage and other refuse.

8. Guard Tower

This is a flat circular stone platform with jagged masonry making up what was once an exterior wall. What had been the roof and the wall is now the debris that litters the platform and the bottom of the shaft down below. Although the rest of this tower has fallen into disrepair, the platform itself remains solid and steady.

Litter of all sorts carpets the area thoroughly, including pieces of rotted wood, rags, and the bones of chickens and other animals that have been used as food over the years litter the area. Stairs



cut through the floor and circle the wall of the tower below. The stairway comes to a halt at the bottom of the shaft in an apparently empty chamber. A secret door conceals the entrance to the main worship chamber, and can be found with a successful Search check (DC 20).

9. Main Worship Chamber

This chamber was once the main worship chamber of Akaya. Because the race that had built this temple was snakelike, they eschewed chairs, pews, or furniture of any nature; thus, the chamber seems a bit bare in appearance. On the eastern side of the room is a dais that is raised five feet and connected by a ramp to the floor below. (PCs and any entering via the shaft enter the chamber from the back of the dais.) It is remarkable at least by its absence of refuse and debris, unlike the rest of this complex.

This room's floor is tiled, making the traps extremely difficult to spot. Areas 9a through 9d indicate pressure activated traps that were placed by the asherake. All pressure plates can be found with a successful Search check (DC 25). The asherake are able to fly above the traps, making it easy for them to move in and out of this region without activating the traps.

9a. Gas Trap and Alarm

Upon activation, the traps to either side of the pressure plate activate. The mouth of the statue on the southern half of the dais issues a deadly gas while a raucous noise issues from the mouth of the statue on the north, alerting the asherake in room 10 of the party's presence.

- **Gas Trap:** CR 10; no attack roll necessary (see note below); Search (DC 25); Disable Device (DC 25). Trap releases burnt othur fumes (Inhaled Poison—DC 18; Initial Damage: 1 Con (permanent); Secondary Damage: 3d6 Con (temporary)).

9b. Falling Stone

Tripping this trap releases a huge block of stone in the ceiling of this chamber, causing it to fall directly on the pressure plate.

- **Falling Block Trap:** CR 5; +15 melee (6d6 points of damage); Search (DC 25);

Disable Device (DC 25). Note: Can strike all characters in two adjacent specified squares.

9c. Spear Trap

When tripped, a spear is fired from the north wall at anyone standing in the area of affect.

- **Spear Trap:** CR 2; +12 ranged (1d8/x3 crit); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20). Note: 200-ft. max range, target determined randomly from those in its path.

9d. Spiked Pit Trap

When any pressure is placed on the activation area, ten feet of flooring tile gives way to a spiked pit. The area stretches the entire width of the room, and goes 10 ft. east of the pressure plate.

- **Spiked Pit Trap (60 Ft. Deep):** CR 4; no attack roll necessary (6d6), +10 melee (1d4 spikes for 1d4+5 points of damage per successful hit); Reflex save (DC 20) avoids fall into pit; Search (DC 25); Disable Device (DC 20).

10. The Pool of Akaya (EL 7)

This room once served as the antechamber of the temple. The *Pool of Akaya* is in the northern half of this room (see the description of this item in Appendix II: New Magic Items). Where murals depicting the god Akaya once covered this room, the walls have since been stripped of their decorations. Lord Gracken's symbol—that of a cat's claw in front of a pair of feathery wings—now adorns the west wall. The ceiling of this room is 50 feet overhead, and is lost in shadows beyond any torchlight. What was once the exterior door to the temple on the west wall now opens up to nothing more than the rubble and ruins of the other buildings that have since sunk.

The asherake in this canton are led by one of Gracken's most trusted lieutenants, the asherake-turned-vampire Scrowl. At Scrowl's side are two asherake subordinates. The asherake immediately go into combat mode, ignoring any attempts at diplomacy that they

party might make. Scrowl holds the amulet that activates the *Pool of Akaya*, and will not willingly part with it.

Tactics: The asherake use flight to their advantage during this combat. The ceiling in this room is lost on shadow, and an ascending to thirty feet or higher effectively hides them from all characters that do not possess darkvision, lowlight vision, or other magical vision enhancement. After hiding in the shadows, they try to surprise or sneak attack the PCs during combat.

Scrowl wields *Direspike* (see Appendix II—New Magic Items). He combines his vampiric domination ability with his asherake's snatch ability against the party member perceived to be the largest threat, and he often chooses the most prominent spell caster of the party. Once he snatches a person, Scrowl drains blood from the victim in mid air for as many rounds that

he can safely do so, only to drop the body upon the ground. Scrowl intends to fight to the death as long as the odds are in his favor; if it becomes clear that the battle is lost, he uses his gaseous form to seep through the door leading into the rubble of the other buildings outside the door on the west wall. The *Amulet of Akaya* has special properties that prevent it from becoming gaseous along with the rest of Scrowl's gear; thus, he only uses this retreat option as a last resort to save his own (un)life.

Scrowl's Personal Treasure: 750 gold coins, a brandeen gem (85 gp), a greenstone gem (10 gp), a blue moonstone (70 gp), blue corundum sapphire (975 gp), *oil of protection from chaos* (50 gp), *potion of alter self* (300 gp), *bastard sword Direspike*.



Resolution

There are four possible outcomes of this adventure:

1. The asherake manage to drive off the party and retain control of the pool;
2. The PCs defeat the asherake and turn the amulet over to Lord Tarsus;
3. The PCs turn the amulet over to the followers of Lord Follo; or
4. The party decides to keep the key (the Amulet) to the pool to prevent any from using it;

If the PCs decide to keep the amulet, the party must decide which party member retains the amulet after the adventure. The factions from both Lord Tarsus and Lord Follo attempt to talk them out of the *Amulet of Akaya*, offering up to 10,000 gp for it. If the PCs attempt to return to the pool in future adventures (at least any within the next 95 years or so), they find that it no longer has the beneficial transforming effects and only produces aberrations.

The price of failure is high. If the asherake manage to retain the amulet, they hold the pool past when its properties change, at which time they begin changing their captured foes into aberrations. Following this development, the rival forces of Lord Follo and Lord Tarsus combine to thwart the rising dominion of the asherake. This is a costly battle for all sides. Nearly a thousand troops from the alliance are killed fighting the aberrations. After taking the sunken temple of Akaya, they destroy the pool as well as the amulet.

If the PCs give the *Amulet of Akaya* to the followers of Lord Tarsus, they are rewarded with a 4,000 gp and a *frostbrand*. Lord Tarsus becomes Bloodlord of this canton. Priests from Penance come in to study the *Pool of Akaya*, and they ultimately deem it an item of great evil that they quickly destroy. The eviction of evil inhabitants continues throughout this canton, creating a new canton in a formerly uninhabited area. Those that flee to this new canton are resentful of Lord Tarsus and plot to kill him.

If the PCs give the amulet to the followers of Lord Follo, they study the pool, and also ultimately decide that it must be destroyed. Lord Follo becomes the Bloodlord in this can-

ton and the party is offered 2,500 gp and is given a *ring of elemental command (water)*. Lord Follo doesn't make large sweeping changes to this canton, preferring to allow it to exist quietly and without disruption as it has in the past. He will step in and impose order however, when asked by the people under his protection.

Appendix I: NPCs

Asherake—Large Monstrous Humanoid CR 3.; Size: L; HD 6d8+12; Init +8; Spd 30 ft., fly 70 ft (average); AC 18 (-1 size, +4 Dex, +2 leather, +3 natural); Atk +10/+5 melee (1d10+5/19-20 x2/x3, bastard sword), +10 melee (1d6+5, 2 claws), or +6 melee, (1d8+1, bite); SA: Snatch; SQ: Scent; AL:LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +5; Str 20*, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 13. (* enhanced by the *Pool of Akaya*)

Skills and Feats: Hide +6, Intimidate +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Search +6, Spot +7; Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Multiattack.

Snatch (Ex): If a flying asherake hits a Medium-size or smaller opponent with both claws, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. The grapple modifier for the asherake is +13. If the asherake gets a hold, it flies off with the victim, preferably to be added to the ranks of asherake slaves, but it may drop him from a height or attack him with its bite if pressed.

Dar'huk, Male Human Pal6: Size: M (6' 2", 215 lbs), HD 6+6, hp 44; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 22 (+4 Dex, +8 full plate); Atk +9/+4 melee (1d8+5/ 19-20 x2, *longsword*+2), +8/+3 ranged; SA: Detect Evil, Divine Grace, Divine Health, Lay on Hands 12 hp/day, Aura of Courage, Smite Evil 1/day, Remove Disease 2/week, Turn Undead 5/day, Special Mount; AL:LG; SV Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 16, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Diplomacy +11, Heal +12, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (Religion) +10; Armor Proficiency (Heavy), Armor Proficiency (Light), Armor Proficiency (Medium), Cleave, Great Cleave, Martial Weapon Proficiency, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Shield Proficiency, Simple Weapon Proficiency

Gifts: Willful

Possessions: Backpack; canvas (1 sq. yd); 86 gp; 26 sp; Full Plate armor; *longsword* +2, 5 sheets of parchment; ink pen.

Spells Castable/Known: Paladin (1:2/0) Paladin (1): *Bless, Bless Water, Bless Weapon, Create Water, Cure Light Wounds, Detect Poison, Detect Undead, Divine Favor, Endure Elements, Magic Weapon, Protection from Evil, Read Magic, Resistance, Virtue.*

Dromoda, Male Picker Ftr3/Rg3: Size: M (4'2", 90 lbs.); HD 3d10+3 (Ftr) and 3d6+3 (Rg), hp 33; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 leather); Atk +6 melee (*longsword*, 1d8+2/19-20 x2), +7 ranged; SA: Sneak Attack +2d6, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge (Dex bonus to AC); SQ: Detect Magic, enhanced memory; AL: LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 11, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Balance +11, Climb +10, Gather Information +5, Jump +3, Knowledge (History) +4, Open Lock +11, Pick Pocket +11, Spot +8; Armor Proficiency (Heavy), Armor Proficiency (Light), Armor Proficiency (Medium), Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency, Improved Bull Rush, Martial Weapon Proficiency, Power Attack, Shield Proficiency, Simple Weapon Proficiency

Possessions: Leather armor; 2 pouches containing 12 gp, 1 amethyst (worth 50 gp), thieves' tools, *longsword*.

Detect Magic (Sp): A picker can *detect magic*, as the spell, at will. This works as if cast by a wizard of level equal to the picker's hit dice.

Enhanced Memory (Ex): A picker can recall with great precision every detail that it knows about any object of interest that it has seen, heard of, or read about. This only applies to items; its memory is normal in regards to everything else.

Generic Follower of Lord Flollo: Use the standard 4th level NPC rogue in the DMG/Core Rulebook II.

Generic Follower of Lord Tarsus: Use the standard 4th level NPC fighter in the DMG/Core Rulebook II.

Scrawl (Vampiric Asherake): Monstrous Humanoid; Size: L; HD 6d12+12, hp 66; Init +8; Spd 30 ft., Fly 70 ft (average); AC 24 (-1 size, +4 Dex, +2 leather, +3 natural, +6 vampiric); SA: Domination, Energy Drain, Blood Drain, Children of the Night, Snatch, Slam; SQ: Damage Reduction 15/+1, Resistance, Gaseous Form, Spider Climb, Alternate Form, Fast Healing, Scent; Atk +11 melee (1d8+5, slam); or +11/+6 melee (1d10+6/19-20 x2x3, *bastard sword*), or +11 melee (1d6+6, claw x2), or +9 melee, (1d8+4, bite); AL:LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +5; Str 22, Dex 23, Con -, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 17; CR 5.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +8, Hide +16, Intimidate +9, Listen +16, Move Silently +16, Search +15, Sense Motive +8, Spot +16; Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Multiattack.

SA: Blood Drain (Ex): A vampire can suck blood from a living victim with its fangs by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, inflicting 1d4 points of permanent Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained.

Children of the Night (Su): Vampires command the lesser creatures of the world and once per day can call forth a pack of 4d8 dire rats, a swarm of 10d10 bats, or a pack of 3d6 wolves as a standard action. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve the vampire for up to 1 hour.

Create Spawn (Su): A humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain by a vampire's energy drain attack rises as a vampire spawn 1d4 days after burial. If the vampire instead drains the victim's Constitution to 0 or less, the victim returns as a spawn if it had 4 or fewer HD and as a vampire if it had 5 or more HD. In either case, the new vampire or spawn is under the command of the vampire that created it and remains enslaved until its master's death.

Domination (Su): A vampire can crush an opponent's will just by looking onto his or her eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that the vampire must take a standard action, and those merely looking at it are not affected. Anyone the vampire targets must succeed at a Will save or fall instantly under the vampire's

influence as though by a *dominate person* spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer. The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Energy Drain (Su): Living creatures hit by a vampire's slam attack suffer 2 negative levels.

Snatch (Ex): If a flying asherake hits a Medium-size or smaller opponent with both claws, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. The grapple modifier for the Asherake is +13. If the asherake gets a hold, it flies off with the victim, preferably to be added to the ranks of asherake slaves, but it may drop him from a height or attack him with its bite if pressed.

SQ: Alternate Form (Su): A vampire can assume the shape of a bat, dire bat, wolf, or dire wolf as a standard action. This ability is similar to a *polymorph self* spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer, except that the vampire can assume only one of the forms listed here. It can remain in that form until it assumes another or until the next sunrise.

Damage Reduction (Su): A vampire's undead body is tough, giving the creature damage reduction 15/+1.

Fast Healing (Ex): A vampire heals 5 points of damage each round so long as it has at least 1 hit point. If reduced to 0 hit points or lower, a vampire automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. It must reach its coffin home within 2 hours or be utterly destroyed. (It can travel up to nine miles in 2 hours.) Once at rest in its coffin, it rises to 1 hit point after 1 hour, and then resumes healing at the rate of 5 hit points per round.

Gaseous Form (Su): As a standard action, a vampire can assume gaseous form at will, as the spell cast by a 5th-level sorcerer, but can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect maneuverability.

Resistance (Ex): A vampire has cold and electricity resistance 20.

Spider Climb (Ex): A vampire can climb sheer surfaces as though with a spider climb spell.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A vampire has +4 turn resistance.

Thilder Kros, Male Human Exp12: Size: M (5'9", 185 lbs.); HD 12d6+24, hp 71; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 armor); Atk +10/+5 melee (1d4+1/19-20 x2, dagger), +9/+4 ranged; AL: NG; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +8; Str 13, Dex 11, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +10, Bluff +4, Craft (Leatherworking) +20, Craft (Pottery) +11, Diplomacy +15, Gather Information +14, Knowledge (Local) +17, Listen +8, Profession (Tanner) +18, Ride +6, Search +9, Spot +12; Armor Proficiency (Light), Endurance, Simple Weapon Proficiency, Skill Focus (Craft—leatherworking), Profession (Tanner), Knowledge (Local), Diplomacy, Gather Information

Possessions: 5 gp; 35 sp; dagger; padded armor.

Appendix II: New Magic Items

Amulet of Akaya

This ornate gold amulet is a flat gold disk suspended on a thick gold chain, the snake symbol of Akaya boldly carved on its face. Its primary purpose is merely to activate the powers of the *Pool of Akaya*, and it also allows the wearer to completely dominate and control any creatures created by the pool. Wearing the *Amulet of Akaya* also provides the wearer with the benefits of an *amulet of natural armor* (+3).

Direspike

Direspike is a powerful yet mysterious weapon belonging to the vampire asherake Scrowl. Whether the weapon was created for him, drawn to the Forge via the Sifting, found amongst the ruins of the Nkoll temple, or some other origin is irrelevant. Scrowl plans to wield this bastard sword for his eternal lifetime.

Direspike uses the following game statistics: bastard sword +1 to hit, +1 damage; (17,690 gp) Damage 1d10+1, 19-20/X2; Int: 13 (1), Wis: 11, Cha: 8 (-1), Ego: 4; Communication: empathy; Alignment: neutral good; grants bearer free use of mobility, find traps at will, sheds light in a 20-foot radius (as a torch).

The Pool of Akaya

The *Pool of Akaya* is a unique magical structure that was created by the Nkoll (see the Adventure Background). The pool's rim rests three feet above the floor of its antechamber (Room 10 in the adventure), and the poolsides are dark grey in color. The depictions of serpents writhing around one another are etched into the side of the pool. The pool contains water, but illuminating the water reveals a faint reddish tint.

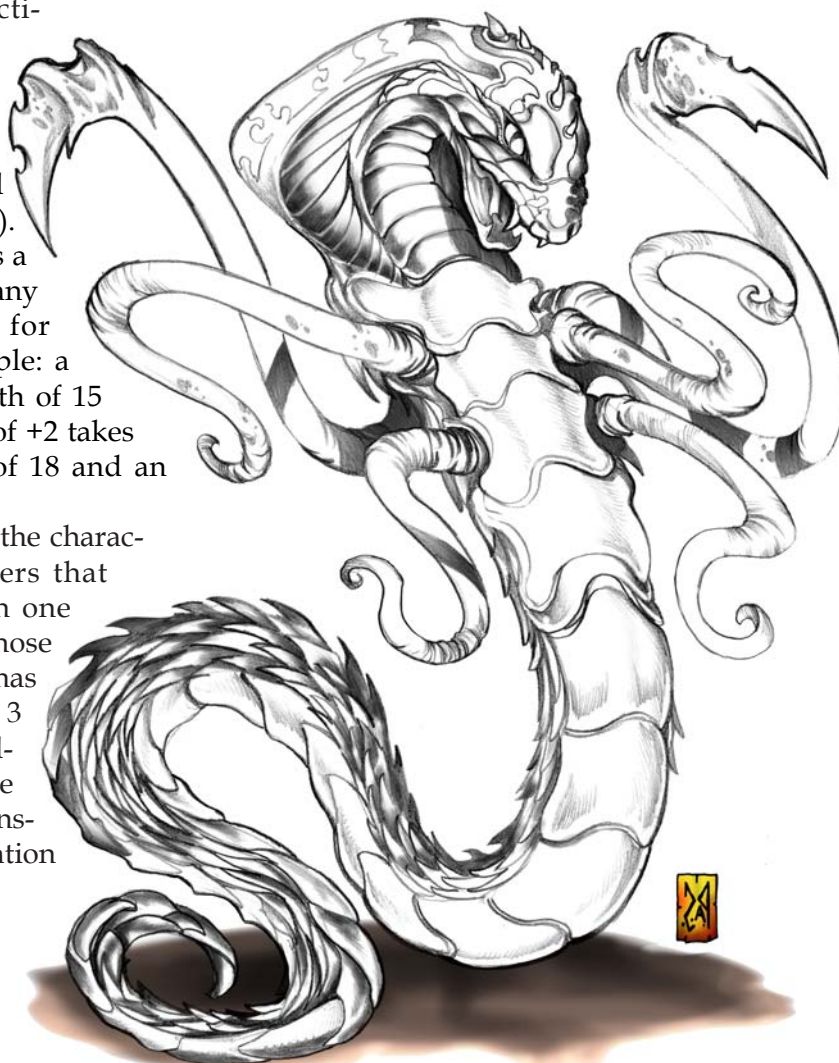
The pool transforms victims into random aberrations that are in the service of the being holding or wearing the *Amulet of Akaya*. The *Amulet of Akaya* must be within 100 feet for the pool to activate by slowly circulating the blood of the wounded god Akaya through its water. A complete cycle lasts roughly one century, but for a brief period at the end of the cycle, the waters become stagnant and the pool takes on beneficial qualities. During this time, the pool provides the following benefits to its bathers while the pool is activated.

- All wounds are healed.
- Any ability damage is immediately healed (as if a *restoration* spell).
- The character acquires a +2 profane bonus to any single ability bonus for 1d4 days. (For example: a character with Strength of 15 and an ability bonus of +2 takes on a Strength score of 18 and an ability bonus of +4).

The effects of the pool on the characters last 1d6 days. Characters that bathe in the pool more than one time during this period or those who bathe in it after the pool has refreshed its waters (about 3 weeks after the close of this adventure) must make a Fort save (DC 25) or permanently transform into a random aberration from the following list:

d20 Aberration Form (Original Source Reference)

1. Dank (*Minions* p. 21)
2. Stranglebark (*Minions* p. 69)
3. Carrion Crawler (MM p.29)
4. Umber Hulk (MM p.180)
5. Delver (MM p.39)
6. Tar Beast (*Minions* p. 73)
7. Aboleth (MM p.15)
8. Destrachan (MM p.47)
9. Ettercap (MM p.88)
10. Gibbering Mouter (MM p.104)
11. Choker (MM p.36)
12. Grick (MM p.112)
13. Mimic (MM p.135)
14. Chuul (MM p.36)
15. Mind Flayer (MM p.136)
16. Otyugh (MM p.147)
17. Rust Monster (MM p.157)
18. Gutwrench (*Minions* p. 39)
19. Skum (MM p.166)
20. Cloaker (MM p.37)



Handout #1: An Invitation to Penance

You have been chosen. The thread of your life on your old world has run out. I have given you a new one, and I shall weave it into a beautiful tapestry of dreams and visions such that you have never imagined.

- Israfel, Queen of Penance

Handout #2: Where you are Now

This is the Forge, a world alien to all, yet home to elements drawn from every world. Everyone that is here now came here from somewhere else, or is the descendant of someone who was pulled here. These people and beings make up the populace of the Seven Domains. You are in the great city of Penance, in a nigh-forgotten neighborhood, where a war as old as worlds is about to be repeated. Can you stop the cancer that has taken root?

- Israfel, Queen of Penance



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