



Signs & Portents Roleplayer

53

SNAKES

Ophidian beasts for *RuneQuest*

TOXIC SECRETS

The Minbari screw things up for everyone in this adventure

MONSTERS OF LEGEND

Need to show a *Conan* party the true fury of nature? Look no further...

Plus more about the Voralans, *RuneQuest* creatures, adventures for *Conan* and *Hawkmoon*, and more...

S&P Roleplayer 53

February 2008

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Far too busy to write a witty and incisive editorial this week, so here is one of my favourite illustrations from the Hyborian Bestiary – the hyena-man by Ryan Horvath:



Oh, and a quick note for Traveller-watchers: in response to damn-near unanimous public condemnation, we'll be changing the font for the Spinward Marches cover. You read it here first.

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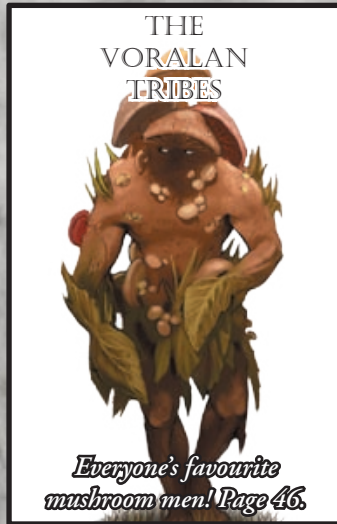
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THE LEAST INFORMATIVE INTERVIEW EVER*

'Gar' is Gareth Hanrahan, scholar, gentleman and all-round man of quality.

'Ed' is the editor of this fine publication, a weaselly little man who is not to be trusted.

Ed: Give us a quick overview of your writing background.

Gar: I started out writing convention scenarios for various Irish gaming cons. (The second one I ever wrote, if I recall correctly, was a Traveller scenario.) One of those scenarios got noticed by Greg Benage at Fantasy Flight Games, and he invited me to write a part of a Blue Planet supplement. I kept freelancing on the side for a while, then a full-time job at Mongoose came along at just the right moment.

Ed: What were your first thoughts when asked to write the new version of Traveller?

Gar: 'I'm going to get beaten to death by a Blues Guitar.'

Ed: What was the thinking behind the timeeffect dice mechanic?

Gar: I was thinking about space combat, and how to keep everyone involved - specifically, a sensors operator.

If you want a guy sitting at a console looking at a blip on a radar screen, how do you turn that into a mini-game without getting bogged down in detail? How do you take what's effectively just a skill check and give the player a choice?

From there, I went to personal combat. I wanted something that felt different to the normal you go/I go turn sequence, and something that emphasised cover and reactions. I was also playing a lot of Gears of War at the time. With a lot of tweaks, the current iteration of the combat system evolved.

Ed: What part of the new Traveller rules do you think works best?

Gar: The connections rule, which rewards players for building connections between their characters before play begins. Traveller's always had a great and flavourful character generation system, but it tends to produce several strong personalities instead of a unified group, and a unified group is better for play. The connections rule was inspired by a mechanic in Spirit of the Century, where pulp characters 'star' in each other's novels. The novels never really come into play in that game, but I liked the mechanic and wanted to build on it.

Ed: What part of the new Traveller rules was the most difficult to write?

YOUR GLORIOUS EDITOR ASKS THE AUTHOR OF THE NEW TRAVELLER HALF A DOZEN EASY QUESTIONS

Gar: Probably ship combat, because it's something that doesn't come up in most of the games I run myself.

Ed: What parts of Traveller have you updated to take into account more modern technology?

Gar: Mainly, personal equipment. I don't want to make Traveller into cyberpunk or transhuman space, but one of the most important things to do is ensure that modern day items aren't better than their three-thousand-years-in-the-future equivalents. Stuff like computers and personal communicators needed to be tweaked.




Look familiar?

* My fault, not Gareth's. - Ed.




MEATY

CONAN
SECOND EDITION



TEMPLE OF TEARS

AN ADVENTURE FOR FOUR 2ND LEVEL CHARACTERS, BY URI KURLIANCHIK



'He who seeks vengeance must dig two graves: one for his enemy and one for himself.'

'The Temple of Tears' is an event-based investigation adventure suitable for a group of four 2nd level characters. It works best if the group includes at least one scholar to advise on occult and investigation matters, and the stealth abilities of the thief may prove extremely helpful in this adventure. However, these are not vital and 'Temple of Tears' can be played with any set of characters, provided that they are willing to use their brains and diplomatic skills while leaving their blades safely sheathed until they are truly needed.

This adventure takes place before the events in *Drums of Tombalku*. The village of Ansuz has nothing to do with that story, but the demon lord Ollam-Onga is alive and well (for certain values of 'alive' and 'well') during this adventure. If you wish to set the Temple of Tears after *Drums of Tombalku*, then you will need to replace Ollam-Onga with a different demon lord.

Characters can be of any race or class. Ironically, it is Nordheimir characters (especially Vanheimir) that may have social problems in Ansuz due to the many blood feuds and grudges between the various tribes. However, due to the village's desperate situation, its people will tolerate even Vanheimir as long as they seem genuinely interested in catching the murderers.


ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Ansuz is a small and not overly friendly Aesir village populated by fearless barbarians who perform daring raids on the civilized lands every summer. Yet, all is not well in Ansuz; for the last few weeks someone has been murdering its dignitaries and bravest warriors; someone as quiet as a shadow, as quick as a lightning and as remorseless as death. Four of the five victims are relatives of the village's jarl, Hilgvar Olthun, the other is seemingly unrelated. The people of Ansuz are mighty warriors who fear neither the Cimmerian barbarians nor the Vanir raiders of this savage land, but before this faceless, nameless terror they are powerless. No matter how the PCs are drawn into the story, they will have to investigate the grisly murders in order to discover the surprising villain behind these heinous crimes.

The killer employs two distinctive styles of killing – some of the corpses were torn to ribbons by the claws of some mighty beast while others were killed by a single, well placed strike of a fine northern blade. The reason is that there are two murderers – the first is a young vampire girl called Gerda Isa and the other is the village's insane and treacherous priest, Ve Olthun.

Their identities and motives are discovered through examination of the bodies and the crime scenes, questioning key-figures in the village, gathering rumors (some of which are false and misleading), and exploration of the area (following footsteps left in the snow, speaking with local hunters and trappers, and so on...)

About a decade ago, the Olthun family slaughtered the entire Isa family for refusing to join its warband. The sole survivor of this massacre was the then-six-year old Gerda, who hid in an abandoned temple south of the village and prayed for the gods to help her to avenge her family. Gerda's tears and anguish reached across the borders between worlds and drew the attention of the demon



lord Ollam-Onga. Gerda's pleas for the power of vengeance were answered – the demon preserved her life so long as she sheds the blood of others in his name. After almost a decade of mastering her newfound abilities Gerda was ready to start her eye-for-an-eye campaign of terrible retribution against those who butchered her family. She still lives in the old temple together with a host of mindless risen dead given to her by her new master.

Ve successfully investigated the crimes and came to the following conclusion – if a simple, untrained girl was able to gain such a prize from the bestial god then he, a trained and dedicated priest, could become very powerful indeed. So far, all his attempts to attract the evil god's attention have failed; perhaps the deaths of these do-gooding investigators will do the trick? They have been sniffing around for far too long anyway...

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to draw the PCs into the adventure; they can be locals, maybe even Hilgvar's kinsmen, seeking to avenge their brethren's death (this hook works best if this is the PCs' first adventure), they can be mercenaries hired by Hilgvar to find and slay this mysterious enemy while defending the Olthun family or they can simply be travelers stuck in the village because of the poor weather and suddenly find themselves the targets of an insane but cunning assassin. In any case, the adventure should begin in the village's Great Hall.

Read or paraphrase the following if the PCs are locals:

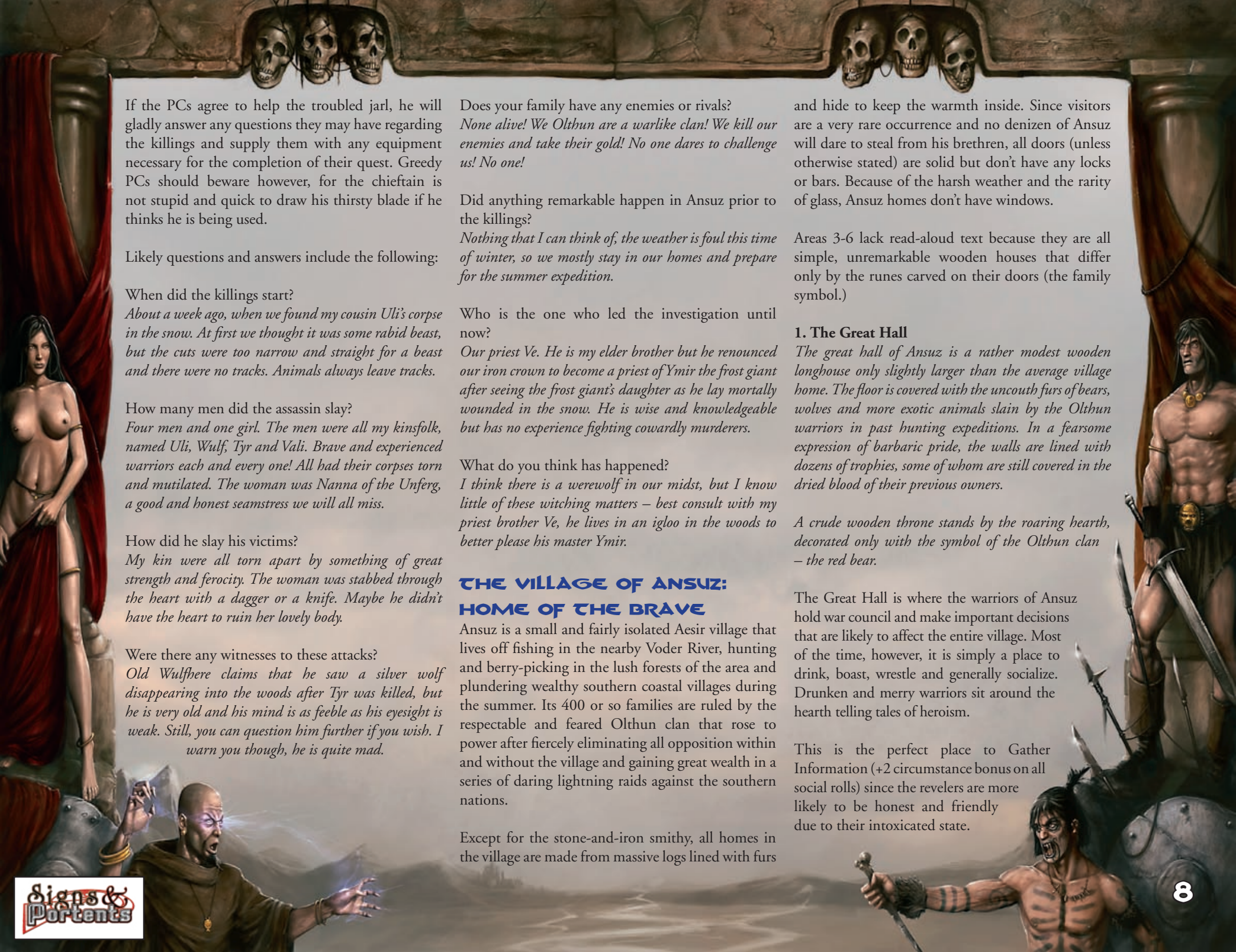
The great hall of Ansuz is the centre of your home village, adorned with the trophies of countless raids against the civilized nations of the south. In its centre, by a roaring hearth where a freshly slain boar is sizzling over exposed fire, sits a muscular giant of a man whose golden mane is partially hidden under a rough iron crown. He wears unprocessed bear and wolf hides, and massive steel sword of supreme workmanship hangs from his thick leather belt. This is your jarl, Hilgvar Olthun.

'I've heard that you are wise beyond your years, young warriors,' Hilgvar says in a booming and careless voice, characteristic of men of great authority and courage, 'I say it is time to test the sharpness of your minds against that of the craven assassin who slays our warriors in their sleep, cowardly and dishonorably. Find him for Ansuz's sake and you might begin to earn your place among the heroes of our noble tribe. Do not fail me, my sons.'

Read or paraphrase the following if the PCs are strangers:

The great hall of Ansuz is a crude and savage-looking wooden building adorned with the gruesome trophies of countless raids against the civilized nations of the south. In its centre, by a roaring hearth where a freshly slain boar is sizzling over exposed fire sits a muscular giant of a man whose golden mane is partially hidden under a rough iron crown. He wears unprocessed bear and wolf hides, and massive steel sword of supreme workmanship hangs from his thick leather belt.

'Welcome to Ansuz, strangers,' he speaks in a booming and careless voice characteristic of men of great authority and courage, 'I am Hilgvar Olthun, king and master of this land! My people are brave warriors willing to face any man or beast in open combat! But recently a craven assassin has taken to slaying our greatest men with cowardly and backhanded means. Perhaps your southern wit and arts will help you to find him so that we could slay this traitor as the rules of honor demand! Will you help us? I swear before Ymir the frost giant to shower enough gold and jewels upon you to make your time and risk worthwhile. So, what do you say, southerners?'



If the PCs agree to help the troubled jarl, he will gladly answer any questions they may have regarding the killings and supply them with any equipment necessary for the completion of their quest. Greedy PCs should beware however, for the chieftain is not stupid and quick to draw his thirsty blade if he thinks he is being used.

Likely questions and answers include the following:

When did the killings start?

About a week ago, when we found my cousin Uli's corpse in the snow. At first we thought it was some rabid beast, but the cuts were too narrow and straight for a beast and there were no tracks. Animals always leave tracks.

How many men did the assassin slay?

Four men and one girl. The men were all my kinsfolk, named Uli, Wulf, Tyr and Vali. Brave and experienced warriors each and every one! All had their corpses torn and mutilated. The woman was Nanna of the Unferg, a good and honest seamstress we will all miss.

How did he slay his victims?

My kin were all torn apart by something of great strength and ferocity. The woman was stabbed through the heart with a dagger or a knife. Maybe he didn't have the heart to ruin her lovely body.

Were there any witnesses to these attacks?

Old Wulfhere claims that he saw a silver wolf disappearing into the woods after Tyr was killed, but he is very old and his mind is as feeble as his eyesight is weak. Still, you can question him further if you wish. I warn you though, he is quite mad.

Does your family have any enemies or rivals?

None alive! We Olthun are a warlike clan! We kill our enemies and take their gold! No one dares to challenge us! No one!

Did anything remarkable happen in Ansuz prior to the killings?

Nothing that I can think of, the weather is foul this time of winter, so we mostly stay in our homes and prepare for the summer expedition.

Who is the one who led the investigation until now?

Our priest Ve. He is my elder brother but he renounced our iron crown to become a priest of Ymir the frost giant after seeing the frost giant's daughter as he lay mortally wounded in the snow. He is wise and knowledgeable but has no experience fighting cowardly murderers.

What do you think has happened?

I think there is a werewolf in our midst, but I know little of these witching matters – best consult with my priest brother Ve, he lives in an igloo in the woods to better please his master Ymir.

THE VILLAGE OF ANSUZ: HOME OF THE BRAVE

Ansuz is a small and fairly isolated Aesir village that lives off fishing in the nearby Voder River, hunting and berry-picking in the lush forests of the area and plundering wealthy southern coastal villages during the summer. Its 400 or so families are ruled by the respectable and feared Olthun clan that rose to power after fiercely eliminating all opposition within and without the village and gaining great wealth in a series of daring lightning raids against the southern nations.

Except for the stone-and-iron smithy, all homes in the village are made from massive logs lined with furs

and hide to keep the warmth inside. Since visitors are a very rare occurrence and no denizen of Ansuz will dare to steal from his brethren, all doors (unless otherwise stated) are solid but don't have any locks or bars. Because of the harsh weather and the rarity of glass, Ansuz homes don't have windows.

Areas 3-6 lack read-aloud text because they are all simple, unremarkable wooden houses that differ only by the runes carved on their doors (the family symbol.)

1. The Great Hall

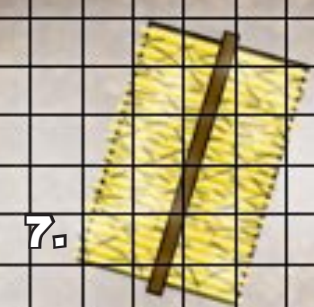
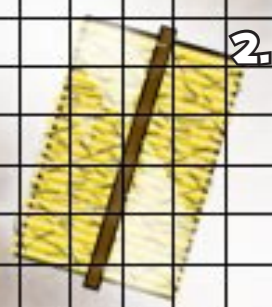
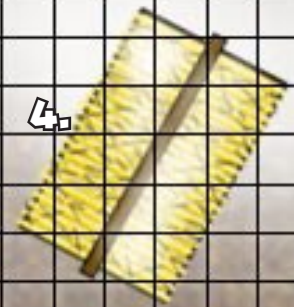
The great hall of Ansuz is a rather modest wooden longhouse only slightly larger than the average village home. The floor is covered with the uncouth furs of bears, wolves and more exotic animals slain by the Olthun warriors in past hunting expeditions. In a fearsome expression of barbaric pride, the walls are lined with dozens of trophies, some of whom are still covered in the dried blood of their previous owners.


A crude wooden throne stands by the roaring hearth, decorated only with the symbol of the Olthun clan – the red bear.

The Great Hall is where the warriors of Ansuz hold war council and make important decisions that are likely to affect the entire village. Most of the time, however, it is simply a place to drink, boast, wrestle and generally socialize. Drunken and merry warriors sit around the hearth telling tales of heroism.

This is the perfect place to Gather Information (+2 circumstance bonus on all social rolls) since the revelers are more likely to be honest and friendly due to their intoxicated state.

THE CENTRE OF THE
VILLAGE OF ANSUZ





However, since Aesir are quick to anger and their hot blood is warmed even further by ale and savage company, the PCs should be wary of getting into brawls that can quickly deteriorate into bloody fights to the death. Every time a PC fails in any social roll by 5 or more points, someone takes offence at the PC's actions and his attitude becomes hostile. Fortunately, Aesir are as quick to forgive as they are to anger and, unless any serious harm was done to one's body, family or honor, the 'offended' person will not hold a grudge after the conflict is resolved.

During the day there are 2-20 Aesir warriors and half as many servants. During the night the hall is usually empty except for a single thrall (usually an old male) who looks after the fire.

2. The Blacksmith

The Smithy is the only building in Ansuz made of metal and stone rather than wood. It is also the only house that has a massive gate with a powerful lock obviously designed to fend off potential thieves.

The blacksmith is a huge, sullen-eyed Cimmerian named Cael [Craft (smith, weapons) +10]. Cael was exiled from his homeland for raping a young woman he fancied, which causes him to deeply hate his former countrymen. If any of the PCs are Cimmerian, Cael will not do any business with the group unless convinced that the Cimmerian PCs are exiles just like him, in which case his attitude will become helpful.

Although extremely unfriendly, moody and rude, Cael is undoubtedly the best blacksmith Ansuz ever had, so his antisocial behavior and discourtesy go unpunished as long as he continues to supply the Olthun clan with excellent swords and mighty shields.

Cael doesn't know anything that can help the PCs to solve the mystery plaguing Ansuz and will not help the PCs fighting Gerda or Ve. He simply doesn't care. However, Cael can create any weapon or armor and will do so for the standard price.

3. Average House

The living homes of Ansuz are built from sturdy logs held together by thick ropes and dozens of mismatched rusty nails. Most homes have a large fireplace in the middle, above which there is a small opening to let the acrid smoke out.

These houses greatly vary in size, ranging from meager, single-room huts to great abodes where large extended families live, often with half a dozen pets and farm animals crammed inside for the winter.

Like most Aesir, the people of Ansuz are hearty, open and bluntly honest. Unless the PCs have done something to stain their reputation in the village (such as openly visiting the abandoned Isa house or harming one of the locals) any person they approach will insist that they spend the evening in his home, drinking and sharing tales of exotic lands and high adventure. If the PCs refuse and wish to get 'straight to business' they must succeed on a DC 15 Diplomacy check or offend the person who invited them, changing his and his family's attitude to Hostile until next morning.

On the other hand, if the PCs accept the invitation they will receive their share of local gossip (see Rumor Table on page xx), a hearty meal and warm place to spend the night.

4. The Jarl's Home

Jarl Hilgvar Olthun lives in this home with his younger brother Eric, their wives, six sons and five daughters between them. The large living room

is in a constant state of joyful disarray with the younger children playing 'Wolves and Reavers', the older fighting with toy swords and shields, scaring chickens and cats that run around wildly while the women and girls do their best to keep the house from falling apart.

For this very reason, the chances of actually meeting the grim jarl here are very small; most of the time, he either patrols the town with a host of his strongest warriors or drinks with his friends in the Great Hall.

However, if the PCs have nowhere to spend the night or long for some good home-cooking instead of their cold, dry and tasteless iron rations, this is the place where they are most likely to get both on a regular basis.

Also, two of Hilgvar's eldest sons, Grom and Hors, are aspiring warriors and will aid the PCs in exploring the abandoned temple with a DC 15 Diplomacy check. They bore easily, however, and cannot be trusted to do any monotonous or boring task. If they die, PCs will need good reasons or silver tongues to avoid becoming the subject of a blood feud.

5. Wulfhere's Home

Wulfhere Kaunan (CN venerable Nordhemir Barbarian 3) is an old and senile man who spends most of his time sitting by the hearth waited on by a young thrall girl given to him as a gift by Hilgvar seven years ago. Unmarried and brotherless, he is the sole reminder of his once-proud clan, now a dying shadow of the bold reaver he once was.



The thrall girl takes good care of him (more out of fear of Hilgvar than love of Wulfhere) and his home is more clean and tidy than most homes in the village. There is nothing of value in Wulfhere's meager hut, except for his dented breastplate and notched greatsword that hang on the wall, reminding him of his days of past glory.

Clues: On the night when Tyr was murdered, Wulfhere was sitting on the porch staring longingly at the forest where he used to strangle savage boars with his bare hands many decades ago, when he was young and strong. For a second, he glimpsed the slim and pale figure of Gerda jumping on the unsuspecting Tyr and tearing out his throat before he even had a chance to scream. Gerda knew that he spotted her, but Wulfhere was not guilty of any crime against her so the thought of harming the old hero never entered her mind. However, in his failing wits, Wulfhere mixed the family names and symbols and now thinks that what he saw is a silver wolf (the Isa symbol) killing a red bear (the Olthun symbol.)

He will gladly cooperate with the PCs but there is little else that can be gained from the old man.

6. Isa Home

This is the home where the Isa family used to live before being slaughtered in a sudden attack by Olthun warriors more than a decade ago. Most adults know of this dark chapter in Ansuz history but none suspect it to be somehow related to the current slayings.

The reason this good and sturdy home has remained uninhabited for so many years is because the superstitious people of Ansuz are sure that the house is haunted by vengeful ghosts that will bestow a terrible curse on any who dares to step into the bloody home. If it becomes known that the PCs


visited this home the locals will begin to shun them, resulting in the PCs needing to succeed on DC 15 Diplomacy check just to start a conversation.

Clues: A silver wolf is unmistakably painted on the smashed door, clear and fresh despite the house's abysmal condition. The reason for this is that Gerda has repainted it before embarking on her murderous quest. All adults in Ansuz know about the 'Isa massacre' (see Adventure Synopsis for more details) but will be reluctant to openly speak on the subject for fear of Hilgvar and his murderous kin. Intimidate or Diplomacy can loosen tongues – the DC is 20 for freemen and 25 for thralls, who are even more scared. Members of the Olthun clan will simply growl at the PCs and turn away angrily.

7. Thrall Barracks

This miserable building is more reminiscent of a filthy and poorly constructed barn than a place fit to house human beings. About two dozen thralls, unhappy slaves captured during the Aesir's frequent raids, sleep here on frigid and rough floors. Unlike normal doors the entrance to the thrall barracks is barred from the outside rather than the inside – in Ansuz even goats have more freedom than the oppressed thralls.

The most underprivileged of Ansuz's slaves live in this rickety building in conditions that can only be described as subhuman – they have no furs or fires to fend off the cold, are fed with rotten remains rejected by the pigs and goats and are regularly beaten by Olthun bullies 'so as not to enjoy life too much.' Most of the village's inhabitants think that Olthun is overly cruel with his slaves but no one wishes to argue with the town's feared jarl over the fate of thralls.



Because there are far more slaves than the basically self-sufficient village needs, Hilgvar will be more than happy to sell up to 20 slaves to the PCs for a lower-than-usual price. Kind-hearted PCs wishing to end the poor wretches' underserved suffering may find this 'bargain' hard to resist. Hilgvar's initial price is 100 sp per head but haggling can lower it by 5 sp for every point above 15 scored on the Diplomacy check to a minimum of 50 sp. Because he is eager to get rid of the extra slaves, Hilgvar will not take offence at the haggling.

8. Graveyard

The Ansuz graveyard reflects this people's somber and fatalistic view on life. West of the village and along the river there are hundreds of wooden shields lying on the ground, some of them bearing the marks of countless bloody battles, others as good as new. On every shield there is a family symbol with a little sword scribbled under it and a date of death – nothing more.

The grim people of Ansuz view death not as a tragedy but something to boast with; the more 'honorable dead' a family has the more esteemed and respected it is. There are no names on the 'death shields' because what members of a family died is not important – only how many. The amount of death shields is far smaller than what might be expected from a village of this size because only men who died by the sword or women who died during childbirth or while protecting their children receive a death shield. All other dead are unceremoniously dumped into the river to feed the fish that will in turn feed their still living kin.

Clues: There are 13 graves marked by a silver wolf and all bearing the same family symbol and exactly the same date. Many of them

are stained where they have been often urinated upon. If the PCs enquire about what disaster caused an entire family to perish in one night they will be told about the 'Isa massacre' (see Adventure Synopsis for more details). Because no one wishes to anger the authoritative and extremely violent Olthun clan, the Diplomacy DC to make someone speak about the incident is 20 unless he or she is a member of the Olthun clan (in which case they will simply grudgingly stare at the PCs and tell them to mind their own business).

9. Ve's Igloo

Ve's home is little more than a large hemisphere of ice with an opening barely wide enough for a man to crawl through. Strange runes and mystical glyphs are carved all over the icy walls, freezing your hearts even more than the chilly wind.

Ve Olthun (see Dramatis Personae for more information on the demented priest) lives here alone. He rarely leaves his grotesque igloo, spending almost all of his time going over ancient texts recovered from Ollam-Onga's temple and praying to the monstrous god to grant him, his loyal minion, the same powers he granted to that stupid child, Gerda.

Ve leads a very ascetic lifestyle and his only valuable possessions are his weapons, armor and the scrolls he stole from Ollam-Onga's temple (worth over 400 sp to the right buyer.) Ve keeps a gruesome golden statue of an ape he falsely believes to be an idol of Ollam-Onga by his bedroll. Despite the poor workmanship, the figure could be sold for 600 sp simply because it is made from low-grade gold.

Clues: On the back of on the incomprehensible scrolls recovered from the sinister temple the following is written in a shaky and crooked handwriting:

I knew about you, O great Ollam-Onga but I thought the frost giant could grant me more. That is, until I saw the truth. A dying girl mumbled your names from between her bloody lips (find out – how she knew?) she didn't ask for life but for vengeance – a true Aesir! And you, for the asking of only a single puny girl made her wish come true!

I shudder to think what will happen when thousands will worship you, O demonic master of lost Gazal! Why do you ignore me? Did I not sacrifice a young virgin to you as the scrolls say? Do you want more sacrifices? Don't forsake me!

10. The Wilderness

Ansuz rules over a harsh and unforgiving land, dominated by a dark and brooding forest and rugged snowcapped hills. The thick layer of snow covering the ground makes movement difficult and unpleasant and quickly erodes any tracks.

The PCs may choose to scan the forest around Ansuz in hopes of locating the 'silver wolf' that attacked Tyr or trying to find any useful tracks.

This is not such a bad idea as Ollam-Onga's forsaken temple lies only a few miles south of the village and the PCs have a rather good chance of stumbling on the ominous building simply by chance.

However, the forests are teeming with ferocious beasts and more sinister abominations. For every hour the PCs spend roaming in the forest roll 1d6, on a result of 1 during days, or 1-2 during nights an encounter occurs.

Daytime Encounters:

1d4	Encounter
1	2-6 Aesir Hunters
2	Bear
3	Boar
4	7-16 Wolves

Nighttime Encounters:

1d4	Encounter
1	1-4 Risen Dead*
2	Badger
3	Snow Leopard**
4	Wolves

* These are Gerda's servants; for every risen dead the PCs slay there will be one less guarding the Temple of Tears (Area 11). If you roll this encounter after the PCs have destroyed 6 risen dead no encounter occurs.

** Use stats for panthers.

Clues: Risen dead are mindless and don't act to hide their tracks in the snow. If the PCs are quick and lucky enough they can follow these shambling corpses' footsteps all the way back to Gerda and her new 'home'.

11. The Temple of Tears

The thick forest ends abruptly and you stand before a blighted clearing where the snow is black and seems to crawl and slither under your feet with a will of its own.

In the middle of this revolting clearing, a horrible structure of pure lunacy stands, a reminder of primordial madness now mostly extinct from the sane world. Its loathsome architecture is completely alien and its debased reliefs speak of dark and teeming antediluvian

jungles where unspeakable horrors performed terrible nocturnal rituals under strange stars.

What nameless secrets or tainted treasure can this abomination hold? So out of place in the cold and desolate northlands...

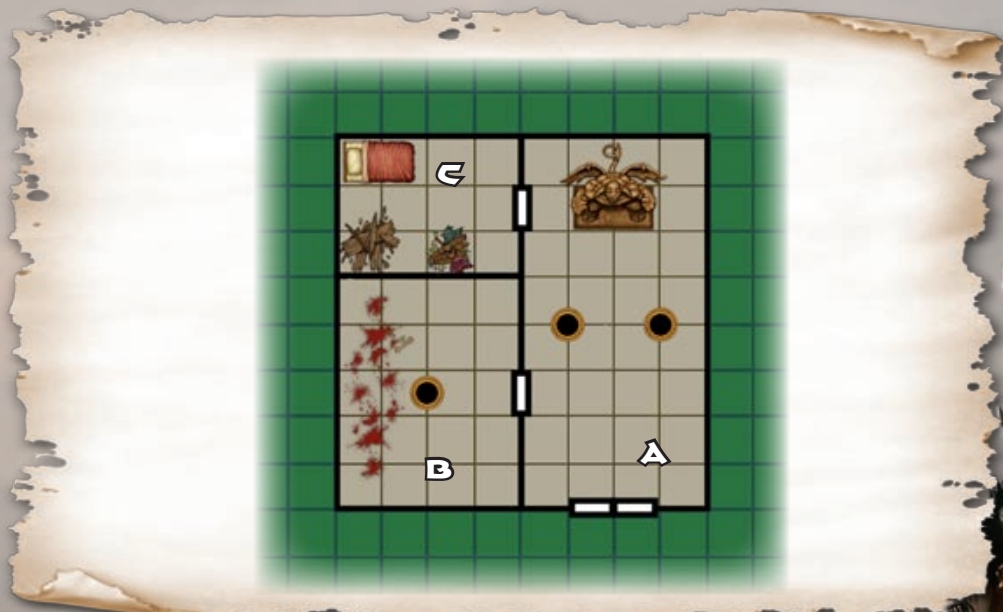
This temple was erected many centuries ago by a maddened adventurer from a now-extinct tribe that inhabited the area now controlled by Ansuz. His degenerate followers gained great wealth and demonic power by performing the blasphemous rites of their diabolical god. However, neither their wealth nor the mystical power of their master helped when their Ymir-worshipping neighbours came en masse and slaughtered the corrupted tribe.


For many centuries the temple lay forgotten, protected from the ravages of time and nature by the mystic idol of Ollam-Onga at its core, until the

bleeding Gerda crawled into the shrine, guided by Ollam-Onga's dark influence and made her terrible pact with the gruesome idol.

The rusty metal gates to the temple are not locked but opening them will emit a terrible screeching noise that will alert all inside to the PCs' presence, unless oiled or carefully taken off its hinges. The shrine can be partially viewed through a crack on the wall, if any of the PCs peeks inside, read or paraphrase the following:

The inside of the shrine far surpasses its outside both in horror and strangeness – artful but disturbing relief of eldritch cities occupied by inhuman things performing unholy rites cover the walls. Two people whose features are hidden by dark crimson robes and gore-colored capes prostrate themselves before some object or creature concealed by the gates.





Clues: PCs who succeed on a DC 25 Knowledge (religion) check will recognize this as a shrine dedicated to Ollam-Onga, although they may be confused by its location so far away from the cult's roots. PCs who succeed on a DC 25 Knowledge (local) check will know that this area was once ruled by a corrupted tribe that worshipped some alien god their chief brought from the far south before the Aesir came and put them to the sword.

11A. Shrine

Two people whose features are hidden by dark crimson robes and gore-colored capes prostrate themselves before a large statue depicting a naked man whose mighty arms are folded on an alabaster breast. His features are classic, cleanly carven, with more than human beauty. But his eyes are two balls of luminous fire, glowing with an appalling and eerie radiance from the eye sockets of that inanimate statue.

Except for the praying men and the white idol the room is completely bare. There are two rusty iron doors on its eastern walls, located on both sides of the hauntingly beautiful statue.

The 'praying men' are, in fact, not man at all, but two of the six risen dead guarding the temple. As soon as they become aware of the PCs they will rise and attack them, fighting mindlessly until eliminated or ordered otherwise by Gerda.

The idol is not a simple statue but a portion of Ollam-Onga's dark will. It serves like a spiritual portal from the lost city of Gazal to the frigid plains of Nordheim. Should it be destroyed, the link will be severed, the glowing fire in the eye sockets will gutter and die, and Gerda and her servants will become what they would have

been without Ollam-Onga's unnatural intervention – simple corpses.

For every 10 points of damage inflicted on the marble statue (Hardness 8, HP 30) Gerda and her risen dead will lose a third of their hit points, dying instantly as soon as the statue breaks apart.

However, there are consequences of angering the diabolical god; every person who participated in the destruction of the statue will suffer a -1 luck penalty to all attack rolls, saves and skill checks for a week and may find himself the target of the mad cultists of Ollam-Onga some day in the future. Also, since the only thing that kept the temple intact all these years was the idol's power the hopelessly rotten building will shudder for 2 rounds, raining boulders and planks at the PCs (2d6 points of damage, Reflex save DC 13 negates) and then collapse completely, causing 6d6 points of damage to everyone still inside and burying him or her under the rubble.

Development: Gerda is asleep during the day and prowls the woods by night in search of new victims. Her sleep is rather deep (-20 to Listen checks) but pitched combat in the shrine may wake her up and even the gentlest of scratches to Ollam-Onga's idol wakes her immediately (or causes her to speed to the shrine if outside).

Unlike her patron, Gerda is not wholly malevolent and will try to appeal to the PCs' conscience before attacking them. She will tell them how her family was slaughtered by the Olthun clan and state that she has the moral right to seek vengeance. If asked about why she killed Nanna, she will reply that she has nothing to do with it.

However, if the PCs seem determined to reveal her location to Hilgvar or harm her or Ollam-Onga's

idol directly, she will attack them with the fury of a cornered panther and fight to the death.


Clues: PCs who succeed on a DC 20 Knowledge (religion) check will identify the idol as Ollam-Onga and the relieved scenes from the history of ancient Gazal. If the PCs carefully search the room (Search DC 15) they will find the footsteps of a large man on the floor. These belong to Ve and can be recognized as such with a successful DC 17 Wisdom check if the PCs ever see Ve's footwear.

B. Sacrifice Row

This barren room is empty but for six rusted but still powerful pairs of manacles that hang from the walls. The floor is covered in dark red powder.

This is where the ancient masters of the temple kept sacrifice victims. Seeing that all was lost, six warriors from this ancient tribe locked themselves in this room in hopes of hiding from their Aesir enemies.





However, since cowardice is deeply abhorrent to their unforgiving god, he made sure the door to this room remained tightly locked until all the warriors died from hunger and madness in the utter darkness of the sacrifice room.

Not content with their terrible death, Ollam-Onga animated the corpses to serve him in death with the loyalty they lacked in life.

Any risen dead not slain in the woods or the shrine will be here, lying on the ground in the same position they died all those centuries ago.

Development: If any fighting breaks out in the shrine, any remaining risen dead will 'awake' and join in to protect Gerda and Ollam-Onga's image. Being mindless, they will fight to the death or until ordered otherwise by Gerda.

C. Priest Chamber

This room was once the quarters of some scholar, with a wide comfortable bed, an extensive library and a working desk complete with ink and feathers. Time has taken its toll on it, however, and the bed is covered in dust and cobwebs, the books are hopelessly decayed and covered in greenish mold and the table is so rotten it is almost shapeless.

A sharp contrast to this scene of negligence and desolation is a bright new parchment nailed to the wall.

This used to be the room of the now-forgotten chieftain who originally brought the evil of Ollam-Onga to Nordheim. Presently, it is used by Gerda, who is so obsessed with her quest for vengeance that she doesn't notice that she sleeps in a rotten and moldy bed, steps in a heel-high layer of filth or worships an abominable Kushite god.

Development: If the PCs enter this room during the night they will find it empty and are free to explore it. During the day Gerda sleeps here, her sleep is very deep and she is unlikely to wake up unless the PCs make a terrible racket or touch her or Ollam-Onga's statue. If the PCs attack Gerda she will try to bolt to the shrine where she (wrongfully) believes Ollam-Onga's presence will aid her in her fight.

Under the bed there is a small passage that leads to what used to be the priest's personal treasure chamber (Area D). Gerda is not aware of the passage.

The parchment is written in Gerda's own blood and reads as follows:

Let every soul I take feed Ollam-Onga the great, master of old Gazal, and fuel my righteous vengeance! Let this blood, the last to flow in my veins testify my willingness to serve he who grants dark vengeance!

It is finished with a stylized wolf – drawn in the dark red of dried blood instead of the shining silver of the Isa clan.

D. Treasury

This small chamber seems very raw and obviously improvised by an unskilled mason. A small mound of shining gold and silver coins, decorative weapons, exotic jewelry and even a few gems glitters on the floor, despite the thick layer of dust and cobwebs that covers it. Strange fungi grow in the corners of the little room, partially eaten by small yellow maggots and strange insects.

This small chamber is where the priest of Ollam-Onga kept his ill-gotten plunder, mostly gained by secretly stripping the bodies of his sacrificial victims and stealing from his own men. Not trusting the secret location to protect his treasure from his greedy minions, the paranoiac priest brought a horrible

defender from the nightmarish jungles of Kush and through mystical taming has trained it to attack anyone but himself.

The defender is, in fact, not a single creature but a large colony of carnivorous maggots that live among the coins and gems of the treasure. Until now, they have feasted on fungi and rats who wandered into the treasury but as soon as any living creature comes in contact with the gold they will slither and launch at him. (See the slithering death, on the next page.)

Treasure: the large pile of treasure includes the following:

- ✿ 2,347 silver coins
- ✿ 127 gold coins (Kushite)
- ✿ Set of Kushite decorative weapons (worth 800 silver pieces)
- ✿ 5 rubies (worth 1,200 silver pieces)
- ✿ Kushite gold and diamond necklace (worth 2,500 silver pieces)

BLOOD ON THE SNOW: THE KILLING GAME

This part lists Gerda and Ve's murders and other events that take place throughout the adventure. Actions taken by the PCs can alter, delay or even prevent some of these events. Other events occur if certain situations come to pass.

Just like the area descriptions, each event is given a general description and then a list of clues the PCs can uncover by wisely investigating it.

Both Gerda and Ve are too obsessed with their respective aims to simply lie

SLITHERING DEATH

Large Ooze

Climate/Terrain: Any

Organization: Solitary

Initiative: -5

Senses: Listen -5, Spot -5, blindsight 60 ft.

Dodge Defence: 4 (-1 size, -5 Dex)

Hit Points: 45 hp (6 HD); DR -

Saves: Fort +4, Ref -3, Will -3

Speed: 5 ft., climb 5 ft.

Space: 10 ft. **Reach:** 5 ft.

Melee: Slam +6 (2d4+4)

Base Atk: +4; **Grp:** +10

Special Attacks: Feast, constrict 2d4+4, improved grab

Special Qualities: Blindsight 60 ft., ooze traits, wormy

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 1, Con 15,

Int -, Wis 1, Cha 1

Feats: -

Skills: Climb +11

Advancement: 7-9 HD (Large); 10-18 HD (Huge)

An abominable mass of moist pale worms slowly slithers on the ground with a disgusting wet sound.

The slithering death is 1,000-pound colony of crawling and ravenous flesh-eating worms. Unable to survive as individuals, these tiny horrors form a huge mindless abomination whose sight alone has driven many men mad.

A slithering death can grow to a diameter of about 10 feet and a thickness of about 6 inches, but can compress its 'body' to fit into cracks as small as 1 inch wide.

Combat

Constrict: A slithering death deals automatic slam and feast damage with a successful grapple check.

Feast: Any creature made of flesh that ends its turn in a spot occupied by a slithering death automatically take 1d4 point of cumulative damage for each turn it spent occupying that spot, for a maximum of 10d4 point of damage per round. Armored creatures reduce their armor or natural armor bonus from that damage.


Being fully covered in thousands of flesh-eating worms is a very traumatic experience and automatically sickens any creature with an intelligence higher than 3. Any spell or ability that grants fear immunity also wards of the sickness.

Improved Grab: To use this ability, an slithering death must hit with its slam attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Wormy: Being a large group of tiny worms rather than a single creature, slithering deaths are immune to piercing and slashing damage and only take half damage from bludgeoning damage.

However, because of the worms' soft and fragile bodies, they take double damage from all energy attacks and automatically fail their saving throws against such effects.

Skills: A slithering death has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened.



low until the PCs leave and the only thing that can put an end to their reign of terror are their deaths. If either of the murderers is caught in the act, they will attempt to flee from the scene and hope to lose any pursuers by hiding their tracks.

For determining when events take place assume the PCs and Hilgvar's meeting to have taken place on day one, regardless of whether the PCs agree to investigate the murders or not.

1. Gerda Murders Eric Olthun (Night 2)

A young and well developed man lies spread-eagled in the snow, still staring angrily at the crescent moon. His stomach is torn open and his icy guts protrude from it like crimson and purple snake, grotesquely frozen in process of crawling out.

His dead hand still clutches a battleaxe, a shiny new one that appears to have never seen real combat.

This young man is Eric, Hilgvar's young brother, who decided to gain some fame by hunting and killing the silver wolf that slew four of his kinsfolk. Naturally, the inexperienced and young warrior was no match to Gerda's supernatural speed and power. As soon as Hilgvar will see his brother's corpse he will go into a berserker rage and it will take six strong men to restrain him.

Clues: PCs who succeed on a DC 20 Search check will notice barefoot human tracks in the snow and can try to follow them, although the heavy snowing and the near-total darkness will make it a formidable quest. If the PCs manage to follow the tracks for a mile they will encounter two risen dead sent by Gerda to frustrate any potential pursuit. Following the risen dead is

useless because they spent last night far from the temple.

Unless the PCs happen to be outside during the night, the body will only be discovered in the morning by a thrall lumberjack named Sof, by which point the snow will have eradicated any tracks completely.

2. Ve Murders Olafina (Night 3)

An unnaturally pale, yellow-haired woman lies dead in the snow, naked save for a bloody loincloth and a single badly used boot on her left foot. Her wrists and feet are nailed to the ground with nine-inch-long nails and a strange sigil is carved on her chest and abdomen, so deeply that shards of her ribs stick from some of the cuts.

The woman is Olfina, a fresh widow who supports her family by hunting in the woods. In order to murder her as quietly as possible, Ve seduced her into the woods for a nocturnal tryst that ended with her brutal ritual murder.

The symbol carved on her body is the mark of Ollam-Onga [DC 20 Knowledge (Religion) to recognize]. A successful DC 10 Gather Information check will reveal that the woman was rumoured to be Ve's lover (true), although the priest will strongly deny that.

If the PCs interview Ve in his igloo – something he will try to prevent, preferring instead to come outside – they will notice Olfina's other boot lying by his bed (Wisdom DC 15 to recognize). If questioned about the boot, Ve's reply will be a sudden and savage attack. Knowing that he has nothing to lose, he will fight to the death.

2. Ve's Preaching (Day 4)

You spot a large gathering of Ansuz men around Ve, the village priest and Hilgvar's elder brother. Standing

almost a head above any other warrior in the village and boasting a powerful and low voice, Ve is both an imposing and charismatic figure.

However, it seems that the people don't like what he says because most replies he receives range from angry booing to violent threats.


After both his ritual murders failed to evoke any kind of response from Ollam-Onga, Ve decided to try a more cunning approach to attracting the murderous deity's attention. Under the pretence of appeasing Ymir, he will try to convince the people of Ansuz that some major sacrifice is needed to appease the demanding frost giant, preferably those newcomers who 'keep sniffing around all the time, thinking they're better than us...'

At first, the reactions he receives are angry and skeptical because human sacrifice is extreme even for the hard men of Asgard. But with every unsolved murder the people become more and more desperate until, after three more Aesir are slain, they are willing to follow the priest's treacherous advice... See Concluding the Adventure below for more details on the manhunt for the PCs and the sacrifice ritual that follows if they're caught.

3. Gerda assaults Norha (Night 4)

A young dark-haired woman bursts into the hall and falls sobbing to the ground. Her meager clothes are torn and bloodstained, exposing dark flesh covered with deep and jagged cuts and what appears to be the bites of some vicious animal.

'Help me,' she whimpers with a heavy Pictish accent before passing out from pain and blood-loss.



Norha is a Pictish thrall in the service of the Olthun clan who had the misfortune of going to gather some firewood wearing her mistress' robe. Thinking her to be a member of the Olthun clan, Gerda quickly attacked, realizing her mistake only when the girl already lay severely wounded at her feet. Gerda fled in shame, leaving Norha to crawl dying through the snow back to her master with her last remaining strength.

When she first enters the home she is at -4 hp and bleeds severely. Unless the PCs manage to staunch her bleeding (Heal DC 15) within 6 round she dies without ever waking up. After she comes to her senses she tells the following tale:

'I went to bring some firewood for the hearth. Because the night was so cold my mistress gave me her warm robe to wear over my clothes. Anyway, suddenly, out of nowhere a little girl wearing only a thin gown comes running my way. Before I have time to ask her who she is, she jumps on my like a wild beast, clawing and biting like a mad ape.

Suddenly, she stops and looks in my face and I look back at her and she has fangs and nails like some demon. I was sure that she was going to finish me then but she just mumbles 'You're not Hilgvar's wife?' I don't remember what I said but it must have been the right thing because she just stood up and left. Thanks again for saving my life.'

If the PCs are not at Hilgvar's home when this event takes place, no one is able to save the dying thrall and she dies without ever uttering a word.

However, successful DC 15 Heal check on her corpse will reveal her attacker to be human-shaped rather than bestial and a careful examination of her body

(Search DC 20) will reveal some threads of long, black hair tightly clutched in her mortified hand.

4. Gerda murders Hilgvar (Night 5)

Hilgvar sits on his throne broodingly, staring into nothingness with a disturbingly glazed stare. He doesn't seem to breathe. A narrow stream of dried blood, almost invisible at first glance, can be traced from a small gash in his throat, across his chain shirt and dark breeches and ending in a small crimson puddle under his feet.

His dead hand clutches a small piece of crumpled parchment with something hastily scribbled on it.

Hilgvar has the habit of falling asleep on his throne. Usually the only damage from it is an annoying backache in the morning and the occasional fight with his wife, but tonight it proved to be his undoing. Creeping into the Great Hall as silently as a cat, Gerda approached the sleeping and defenseless jarl, her arch-enemy, and bit through his jugular vein, bleeding him out within minutes. A successful DC 15 Heal check will reveal the biter to be human and quite small.

The parchment in his dead hand reads as follows:

'I am Hilgvar of Olthun, I can bravely kill sleeping babies (but only with all my bodyguards with me), little girls are a little too much for me and when I see a maiden I quickly retreat. I like to stick steel into little girls, but tonight a little girl stuck her teeth into me. Now I am going to Valhalla to serve mead and entertain real warriors. Ah... and thank Gerda Isa for ridding Anszuf of me, even I was beginning to get annoyed with my drunken, stinking, useless presence.'

If anyone thinks to check, the handwriting is not Hilgvar's. It is Gerda's, which no one in the village will be able to recognise.

5. All Hail King Ve! (Day 6)

Hilgvar's death drives the people of Anszuf mad with vengeance lust and makes Ve the official and actual leader of the warlike tribe. His advice of sacrificing the PCs to 'Ymir', ridiculed and laughed at just a few days ago, becomes the law.

Suddenly, the PCs find themselves hunted by the very people who sought their help and were so friendly to them just a day ago. A large mob of Anszuf warriors will hunt for the PCs and none will be willing to grant them food or shelter. Unless the PCs quickly escape the town (the people of Anszuf are not quite as bloodthirsty as their leader and will be satisfied by driving the PCs from their land) they will be caught, stripped of their equipment and carried to 'Ymir's abandoned temple' (the Temple of Tears) where they will be sacrificed before Ollam-Onga's idol ('Ymir's true form').

However, since the sacrifice must be performed during midnight and the PCs are more likely to be caught during the day, they still have a chance to escape from their confinement in area 11B (possibly even with Gerda's help, in return for helping her 'rid the town of the Olthun pestilence').

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

It is possible that the PCs will dispatch one of the killers and assume that he is the only one. If the PCs killed Gerda but did not discover Ve's part in the murders then no more random murders will occur until event 2 (see above). The next day Ve convinces Hilgvar that the PCs are the murders and event 5 (see above) occurs.

On the other hand, if Ve is dead and Gerda is still at large, she will proceed with her murderous quest, cautiously choosing members of the Olthun clan until all are dead.

If Gerda finds out that it was the PCs who killed Ve, she may even approach them one night and tell them her story, hoping that they will aid her 'righteous quest for justice'.

In any case, as soon as Gerda slays the last adult Olthun (she doesn't harm children) she discovers that there is more to her condition than she thought. In order to keep her new unholy vitality she must continue to kill others in Ollam-Onga's name. Although she tries to resist the urge and just die, the pain of her failing body drives her to start hunting and slaying innocents on a sporadic basis. If she has made allies, or even friends, of the PCs she will ask them to kill her before she becomes a monster even worse than Hilgvar.

Since 'The Temple of Tears' has very few battles and the main challenge is uncovering the murderers' motives and identities, the PCs' chief source of XP in this adventure is the quality of their investigation and how early they manage to stop the killings.

The following table lists the group XP awards the PCs should receive for the aforementioned actions:

Action	XP Award
Fully exploring and uncovering all hidden clues in a location.	300 xp per crime scene.
Preventing a murder.	900 xp per murder prevented.
Destroying Ollam-Onga's idol	900 xp
Uncovering Gerda	900 xp -200 xp for every person murdered by her since the start of the adventure.
Uncovering Ve	1200 xp -200 xp for every person murdered by him since the start of the adventure.

The PCs should also be rewarded for other actions not listed in the table such as good role-playing, locating and questioning relevant witnesses, saving lives, gathering rumors and uncovering secrets from the past.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HILGVAR OLTHUN

5th level Nordheimr barbarian

Initiative: +1

Senses: Listen +7, Spot +7

Dodge Defence: 14; 17 vs. ranged

Parry Defence: 17

Hit Points: 45 hp (5 HD); **DR** 9

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +1

Speed: 30 ft.

Melee: Broad sword +8 (1d10+4)

Base Atk: +5; **Grp:** +8

Special Qualities: Nordheimer qualities, track, fearless, versatility (-2 penalty), bite sword, crimson mist, trap sense +1, endurance, uncanny dodge, mobility

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 12

Feats: Fighting Madness, Power Attack, Improved Bull Rush

Skills: Hide -6, Intimidate +9, Listen +7, Move Silently -6, Survival +1, Spot +7

Possessions: Broad sword, targe, mail shirt and breastplate, great helm, jarl's crown

Hilgvar Olthun is the jarl of Ansuz. He is brave and loyal to his clan and village but not particularly intelligent and far too ready to use violence, even by the low standards of the warlike Aesir. When calm, however, he is a rather pleasant man to be around; full of interesting tales and amusing anecdotes and always happy to share a meal. Unfortunately, Hilgvar is very easy to offend and his easygoing mood turns to murderous rage in a matter of seconds, usually catching the unsuspecting offender completely unprepared.

The young jarl is extremely popular among the warriors of Ansuz and he enjoys almost absolute obedience from his people, a rare occurrence indeed among the savage and unruly Aesir.

VE OLTHUN

3rd level Nordheimr barbarian / 4th level scholar

Initiative: -1

Senses: Listen +2, Spot +2

Dodge Defence: 13

Parry Defence: 15

Hit Points: 45 hp (7 HD); **DR** 10

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +7

Speed: 25 ft.

Melee: Bardiche +9 (2d10+4)

Base Atk: +6; **Grp:** +8

Magic Atk: +1 (+3 with Curses)

Spells:

Curses – *lesser ill-fortune*, *ill-fortune*

Power Points: 6 (max 12)

Special Qualities: Nordheimer qualities, track, fearless, versatility (-2 penalty), bite sword, crimson mist, trap sense +1, endurance, knowledge is power, lay priest background

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 9, Con 15,

Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 9

Feats: Cleave, Hexer, Power Attack, Priest

Skills: Bluff +9, Concentration +12, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (religion) +11, Profession (Priest) +8, Sense Motive +12

Possessions: Bardiche, mail shirt and scale hauberk, great helm, necklace of ears

Ve is Hilgvar's older brother and the two look remarkably similar, although Ve is slightly slimmer and about an inch taller. However, the two boast completely different personalities; whereas Hilgvar is hearty, forthcoming and reckless; Ve is cold, hostile and extremely calculating. He rarely socializes with his followers in

Ansuz and when he does it is to demand a tribute for Ymir or to prophesize some sort of a terrible disaster that will befall the village if it doesn't seize its wicked ways. 'Just like the great priests of yore,' Ve never removes his armor, which causes him to suffer from eternal back pains that in turn cause him to be even more gloomy and unfriendly.

Lately, however, Ve became obsessed with becoming a servant of Ollam-Onga and gaining the dark deity's blessing in return for his worship. With each failure to attract Ollam-Onga's attention, his frustration grows and he becomes even colder and more alienated than he was before.

Still, the people of Ansuz consider Ve a holy man and attribute his hostility and strangeness to his sacred burden rather than to power-lust and madness.

Note: Neither of Ve's spells require somatic components, so he can cast them freely while wearing armour.

GERDA ISA

4th level Nordheimr vampire thief

Initiative: +7

Senses: Listen +19, Spot +19, darkvision 60 ft.

Dodge Defence: 17

Parry Defence: 14

Hit Points: 26 hp (4 HD); **DR** 6

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +9, Will +2

Speed: 40 ft.

Melee: Slam +7 finesse (1d8+2)

Base Atk: +3; **Grp:** +5

Special Attacks: blood drain, children of the night, dominate, sneak attack +2d6/+2d8, sneak attack style (slam)

Special Qualities: cold immunity, fast healing 5, trap disarming, trap sense +1

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 16, Con -, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 18

Feats: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Eyes of the Cat, Fleet-Footed, Improved Initiative, Light-Footed, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (Slam)

Skills: Bluff +19, Diplomacy +11, Hide +22, Knowledge (Local) +3, Knowledge (Arcana) +2, Listen +19, Move Silently +22, Search +8, Sense Motive +16, Survival +4, Spot +19

Possessions: tattered and bloodstained nightgown

Gerda is a handsome girl with black hair and blue eyes, very rare features among the golden-haired Aesir. At the time, these features caused everyone to doubt the fidelity of her mother. Her slim and fragile-looking body, innocent expression and sad but calm stare, hide great power and terrible, unfathomable hatred towards the people who murdered her family and forced her to make this awful pact with Ollam-Onga. When fighting, her likeness changes to that of the most ferocious beast, and her pale skin quickly becomes red with the blood and guts of her unsuspecting victims.

Although extremely bitter and hateful, Gerda can be very civil and diplomatic when dealing with non-Olthuns, especially if believing that they can aid her destroy the Olthun clan.

RUMOURS

It is highly probable that the PCs will ask the inhabitants of Ansuz what they think is the cause of the murders or had they noticed anything suspicious lately. Here are some of the answers they are likely to get (along with a hearty invitation for dinner and a mostly-made-up tale of heroism and plunder):

1d10	Rumor
1	People disappear because a god who once ruled the area has not been appeased for a very long time. (Sort of true, but only by accident.)
2	There is an evil cult of degenerated Cimmerians in the woods that performs the killings for ritualistic reasons. (False)
3	More than a decade ago, the Olthun clan slaughtered the entire Isa clan for refusing to serve under it. Could the killer be a ghost of an Isa elder? (Partially True)
4	In midnight, you can hear female weeping among the death shields. Some say it's the Frost Giant's Daughter lamenting an Ansuz hero, others believe it to be the ghost of a woman who died unavenged. (False)
5	Sometimes, a beautiful young girl with raven hair is seen wandering the forest. Some even claim to have seen her tracks but were unable to follow her due to the weather. (True)
6	Maybe someone from the Isa clan survived and is now leading a vendetta against his family's murderers... but where can he hide? (True)
7	There are more and more wolf tracks around the town each night. Perhaps one of us is a werewolf cunningly masking his evil... (False)
8	There is a legend of a silver wolf sent by Ymir to punish irreverent Aesir who fail to properly appease him. A good sacrifice should set things straight... (False)
9	Wulfhere Kaunan is not as innocent as he seems... (False)
10	A thrall boy ran into the woods some seven winters ago, what if the wolves raised him and taught him how to kill? (False)

SHAPESHIFTERS AND DECEIVERS

Creatures that are not what they seem, by Carl Walmsley.

The ability to disguise one's self as something else can be a useful tactic for both the hunter and the hunted. There are a number of creatures who specialise in this very tactic, eluding or fooling their enemies by assuming the guise of other animals.

Presented here are several creatures whose metamorphic powers are central to their existence, and who use their beguiling, shape shifting powers to achieve their peculiar goals.

Charlatan Plant

These huge, squat plants have developed a unique way of defending themselves from predators that might otherwise gorge on the honey-nectar they produce as a lure for insects.

Charlatan plants emit clouds of mind-altering pheromones that compel nearby creatures to protect them. In normal animals, this urge will manifest as a territorial instinct that makes them attack any other creature which ventures close to the plant.

In fully sentient beings, the pheromones produce a detailed hallucination that draws upon the subject's own subconscious to manufacture a reason for why he must protect the plant. An example might be the

belief that the plant is an injured comrade who cannot be moved and must be protected until help arrives. Alternatively, someone might believe the plant is a holy site or relic that must be guarded against thieves and infidels.

Whilst protecting the plant even friends and family will be perceived as a threat, being somehow worked into whatever scenario the subject's own mind has contrived. There is simply no way that a creature under the influence of the pheromones can be convinced to willingly abandon the charlatan plant it is protecting. Note that if more than one creature is protecting a plant at the same time, they will not attack each other – even if they are natural enemies.

After being exposed to the pheromones, it will be 1D4 days before a creature returns to normal. At this point, he (or it) will have only a hazy recollection of the days spent guarding the plant, and will go back to whatever he was previously doing.

Occasionally, during these days of stewardship a creature will die – either in battle with perceived intruders or through hunger and thirst. It is therefore common for the area around a charlatan plant to contain a number of skeletons and corpses.

The honey-nectar of a charlatan plant is a sweet delicacy. It attracts a range of insects, which serve to spread the plant's spores and aid fertilization. Insects are quite unaffected by the pheromones produced by the plant. A single scoop of honey-nectar – and a plant contains a few dozen – can be worth as much as 20 SP.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	-	(-)
DEX	-	(-)
CON	2D6+3	(10)
SIZ	6D6+6	(27)
INT	-	(-)
POW	-	(-)
CHA	-	(-)

Charlatan Plant Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-4	Roots*	3/20
5-13	Main Stem*	3/20
14-20	Leaves	3/24

*If either the Roots or Main Stem are reduced to 0 Hit Points, the plant will die.

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Pheromone	Automatic	Special
Cloud		

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	-
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	-
<i>Movement:</i>	0m
<i>Traits:</i>	Pheromone Cloud (see below)
<i>Skills:</i>	-
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick Skin (3 AP)

Pheromone Cloud: Any creature which comes within 10m of a charlatan plant must pass a Difficult (-40%) Persistence Test or feel compelled to protect it until removed from the vicinity and for 1D4 days thereafter.

Cruel Vapour

Whilst effectively non-corporeal, cruel vapours are not spirits – though they are often mistaken for such. Their bodies are actually composed of a white mist, with luminous blue eyes.

Cruel vapours are most often encountered in lonely, damp regions such as swamps and graveyards – lending further credence to the erroneous notion that they are spirits. Their wispy white forms blend with patches of natural fog, making them all but invisible. In such conditions, only an especially observant creature may discern their tiny, glowing frost-blue eyes: this requires an opposed Stealth vs. Perception Test with a -40% skill modifier for the perceiver.

A cruel vapour is able to assume a ghostly, humanoid form at will. If seen out in the open, it is apparent

that it is not a real person. However, when shrouded within an area of fog, it will usually be mistaken for someone lost in the mist. Cruel vapours use this ability to lure their victims into the fog, where they can more effectively ambush them.

The attack of a cruel vapour consists of swirling about a victim and draining him of warmth. This leads to the onset of icy paralysis and eventually death. A creature killed by a cruel vapour leaves a brittle, frozen husk that is all but impossible to thaw out. Exposure to naked flame will cause the husk to crack and splinter. Only by very gradually increasing the temperature of the body can there be any hope of thawing the corpse and of preparing it properly for a burial.

Once a cruel vapour has absorbed some of the warmth from a victim – simultaneously draining points of

CON – it acquires the ability to take on human form. It can sustain this transformation for one hour for each point of CON it has drained. The nature of a cruel vapour's attack has led to speculation that they are created when a lost and lonely person freezes to death. The attempt to regain warmth is seen as an attempt to rediscover human contact and to banish the deathly chill that afflicts them. Whilst this folk tale proves a popular source of fire-side ghost stories, there is no truth to it, and the origin of these creatures remains a mystery.

Points of CON drained by the touch of a cruel vapour return at the rate of one point per hour, but only once the victim is somewhere warm. Casting of the spell *Warmth* will immediately recover an amount of lost CON equal to the Magnitude of the spell.



Fog? Or a cruel vapour?

Once a cruel vapour has taken on human form – something that it will always do within a few hours of feeding – it loses all memory of its true nature. Somewhat befuddled and unsure about who it is, the human-form vapour will seek out human(oid) company and remain there until a few minutes before it is due to change back into its true form. At this point, it will regain its memory and affect a hasty exit lest its true nature be discovered.

If a human-form cruel vapour is 'killed' it immediately returns to its mist-form. Any injuries it has suffered disappear.

In its mist-based form, normal weapons have no effect on a cruel vapour. However, it may be wounded by spells or other magic. Any damage caused by an enchantment on a weapon (such as *Fireblade*) will affect a cruel vapour as normal.

A cruel vapour has only a single hit location. If it is reduced to 0 Hit Points, it is destroyed.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	1D6	(3)
DEX	4D6	(14)
CON	2D6	(7)
SIZ	2D6+6	(13)
INT	3D6	(10)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	2D6	(7)

Cruel Vapour Hit Location*

20 Hit Points (equal to SIZ + CON)

*In human form, a cruel vapour has hit points as a normal human with the appropriate SIZ and CON.

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Touch	50%	1D6 CON Drain

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+12
<i>Movement:</i>	4m (flying)
<i>Traits:</i>	Dark Sight, Disease Immunity, Drain Warmth, Life Sense
<i>Skills:</i>	Perception 45%, Stealth 60%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	None

Drain Warmth: Each touch of a cruel vapour drain's 1D6 CON from the target. This attack may be dodged but not parried.

If a creature's CON is reduced to below half its normal score by a cruel mist it becomes paralysed. The paralysis lasts until its CON is restored to at least half its full rating.

Doppelganger Pool

A distant relative of the undine, Doppelganger Pools are sentient entities formed entirely from water.

They spend their very long lives sampling the experiences of humanoid existence: to them, the notion of intelligent life in a sack of flesh and bone is as curious a phenomenon as most humanoids would find the idea of sentient water.

In their natural state, doppelganger pools may take on any shape they choose and have total control over every molecule in their bodies. However, they cannot disguise the fact that they are made entirely from water.

If a corporeal creature becomes engulfed by a doppelganger pool, its form may be copied. This may occur either if the pool wraps itself around a creature or if a creature – wittingly or unwittingly – immerses itself. There are tales of doppelganger pools hiding within the fountains of ancient ruins or even in bath tubs, waiting for a subject to climb in. Three full Combat Rounds are required for a pool to study a creature in sufficient detail to take on its form.

Once a doppelganger pool has studied a creature's form, it may form a perfect – and solid seeming – copy. Clothes, hairstyle and equipment may be imitated with equal aplomb, though no part of the pool may leave the whole. An imitated object that is forcibly removed, returns instantly to its watery form and slithers back to the body. Touching a transformed doppelganger pools feels just like touching any other living person.

For simplicity's sake – and often to avoid detection – some doppelganger pools will elect to kill a subject that they have copied. This is usually achieved by drowning them. Once a pool has immersed its target with the intention of drowning it, it will not relinquish its grip unless it is damaged in some way.

A doppelganger pool that finds itself facing adversaries capable of injuring it will usually flee, most often to the safety of a large body of water – preferably running water – from where it can effect an escape.

Certain cults that worship the sea or the element of water can count doppelganger pools amongst their followers. Most often they are employed as spies or assassins – two roles for which their unique abilities are ideally suited.

Characteristics

STR	5D6	(17)
DEX	3D6	(10)
CON	3D6	(10)
SIZ	4D6	(14)
INT	3D6+3	(13)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	4D6	(14)

Doppelganger Pool Hit Location
24 Hit Points (equal to CON + SIZ)

If reduced to 0 Hit Points, a doppelganger pool 'dies', becoming simply a puddle of normal water.

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Slam	60%	2D4+1D4
Engulf	50%	Special + drowning

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 2

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 2m, swim 6m

Traits: Damage immunity (see below),
Disease Immunity, Poison Immunity,
Regeneration (see below)

Skills: Athletics 90%, Stealth 60%

Typical Armour: None

Regeneration: As long as a Doppelganger Pool is in contact with a large body of water (a village pond, a flowing stream, and so on), it regenerates 1D6 Hit Points each round.

Damage Immunity: Doppelganger pools are immune to most damage. Only magic, fire or enchanted weapons

will harm them. If injured whilst in a flesh and blood form, a doppelganger pool will 'collapse' into a pool of water. The following round it will regain control of itself, but it will now be in its water form.

Metameleon

A chaotic off-shoot of the normal chameleon, these fearsome lizards take the notion of an adaptive body to its ultimate conclusion. Able to change far more than just their colouring, metameleons can alter their size and shape to duplicate the abilities of other creatures.

By nature, metameleons are placid creatures, though they are territorial and will confront large beasts that intrude upon their terrain. Similarly, when protecting their young – a task shared equally between the male and female – they can be more aggressive than normal. Metameleons produce eggs in winter, hidden in tree-top nests, which hatch in the spring.

The most common use of a metameleon's shapeshifting power is to match its skin colour to its environment and avoid detection. As long as a metameleon has had at least one full combat round to adjust to its surroundings, it receives a +40% modifier to its Stealth skill.

When hunting the rodents and giant insects that make up a metameleon's diet, these impressive camouflage abilities are also employed.

It is in combat, however, where this creature's truly unique abilities are displayed. A metameleon is able to synthesize any poison that it comes into contact with, temporarily replacing its own natural venom with a more lethal toxin. This can be delivered via a bite attack or projected at enemies from pressurised glands

in the lizard's mouth. Metameleons are immune to the effects of all known poisons.

More remarkable still, a metameleon can adjust the composition of its skin to mirror that of any weapon that wounds it. The lizard's scales immediately take on the hue of the material the item is made from, and its AP on all body parts rises to match the AP of the weapon. For instance, a metameleon struck with a steel war sword will take on a metallic sheen and its AP will rise to 4 (the same as the war sword).

In addition, the metameleon may transform its jaws and teeth – and even the size of its head – to match the style and substance of a weapon that has injured it. A lizard struck with a khopesh or a scimitar could develop wickedly curved fangs; one struck with a greatsword would acquire an overlarge mouth packed with enormous steel fangs, and so on. If the weapon injuring the metameleon inflicts damage greater than the beast's own bite, it will adopt the qualities of the weapon. Striking a metameleon with a greatsword therefore increases its bite damage to 2D8, for example – the same as the weapon!

The metameleon's final ability provides it with some protection against magic. An invisible chaotic aura surrounds each of these beasts. As this is disturbed by magic it adapts, creating an arcane shield. Once a metameleon has been targeted with a spell, it becomes immune to any effects from a subsequent casting of that spell for 24 hours. After this time, the chaotic aura returns to normal and the lizard is once again susceptible to the spell.

Characteristics

STR	4D6+3	(17)
DEX	3D6+3	(13)
CON	3D6+6	(16)
SIZ	4D6+6	(20)
INT	1D6	(3)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	3D6	(10)

Metameleon Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Tail	2/7
3-4	Right Hind Leg	2/6
5-6	Left Hind Leg	2/6
7-9	Hindquarters	2/8
10-13	Forequarters	2/9
14-15	Right Front Leg	2/6
16-17	Left Front Leg	2/6
18-20	Head	2/7

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Bite	50%	1D8 + 1D6
Tail swipe	35%	3D4 + 1D6
Spit Venom*	50%	1D6 or Special

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+8
<i>Movement:</i>	5m, 4m in water
<i>Traits:</i>	Adaptive Form, Chaotic Aura, Night Sight, Poison
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 75%, Perception 55%, Resilience 50%, Stealth 60%, Survival 40%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick Hide (AP 2, no skill penalty)

Adaptive Form: A metameleon may transform its body instantaneously to duplicate the effects of weapons, magic and poisons used against it.

*A metameleon may spit venom up to a range of 10m.

Metameleon Venom

Type: Ingested or smeared

Delay: 1 Combat Round

Potency: 40

Full Effect: 1D4 damage to location struck, -2 penalty to victim's DEX

Duration: 1D10 minutes

Mimic Ghoul

Eking out an existence on the fringes of humanoid civilization, these loathsome creatures use their mimicry skills to prey upon the unwary.

Preferring the solitude of wastelands and marshes, mimic ghouls venture closer to towns and cities only to hunt. Their preferred tactic is to lure a lone victim away from their friends and family and fall upon them unawares.

A mimic ghoule can perfectly imitate the voice or call of any creature it has heard. It need not be able to speak a language in order to perfectly duplicate a phrase that it has heard spoken. Only by passing a Very Difficult (-60%) Perception Test is a character able to discern that something is 'not quite right' about the imitated sounds of a mimic ghoule.

By copying the sounds of a distressed animal, mimic ghouls have lured many a herdsman to his doom.

Similarly, travellers have been tempted away from the safe path by the apparently plaintive calls of a child or an injured soul.

Mimic ghouls are usually solitary creatures, though occasionally they will pair up and attempt to mate. Given the demonic nature of these creatures, it is terrifying to think what sort of progeny they might produce should they ever prove capable of doing so. Thankfully, there are no recorded instances of them ever managing to produce offspring.

Note that, due to the changes in their vocal chords which enables them to mimic other creatures, mimic ghouls cannot produce the demoralising howl of a normal ghoule. Mimic ghoule venom is also weaker than that of normal ghouls.

Characteristics

STR	4D6	(14)
DEX	3D6+3	(13)
CON	3D6+3	(13)
SIZ	2D6+6	(13)
INT	2D6+6	(13)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	1D6+3	(6)

Mimic Ghoul Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	1/6
4-6	Left Leg	1/6
7-9	Abdomen	1/7
10-12	Chest	1/8
13-15	Right Arm	1/5
16-18	Left Arm	1/5
19-20	Head	1/6

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Claw	65%	1D4+1D2
Bite	55%	1D6+1D2+poison

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+13
<i>Movement:</i>	4m
<i>Traits:</i>	Mimicry, Night Sight, Poison
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 50%, Dodge 45%, Persistence 40%, Stealth 40%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick skin (1 AP, no Skill Penalty)

Mimic Ghoul Venom

Type: Ingested or smeared

Delay: 1D3 Combat Rounds

Potency: 15

Full Effect: Paralysis

Duration: 1D10 minutes or until healing is administered that restores at least 1 hit point.

Nemesires and Nemesirens

These elusive creatures are possessed of a grace and beauty that can ensnare a person's heart in moments. They may flit between forms – assuming the likeness of any humanoid race – as they see fit. It seems unlikely that they even have a true form, but rather indulge in a multitude of guises, changing their appearance as other creatures might alter their hair or clothing.

Nemesires (males) and nemesirens (females) have only one real use for other sentient races – and that is to have them sire or bear their progeny. Both the male and female of the race seem to take particular delight in seducing beings whose heart is already promised to another – married or betrothed subjects being their favourites.

If a creature can be enticed into coupling with a nemesire or nemesiren it will always result in a pregnancy. There are even tales of women who were previously unable to conceive who became pregnant after a night with a nemesire.

The birth of such progeny is always a tragedy. Any humanoid women giving birth to such a creature will perish during the birth. The child – which will always be female – will seem normal for the first few years, but then vanish suddenly one day, instinctively seeking out her own race and one of their hidden settlements.

The child of a nemesiren is a similarly dark affair. The child will grow to adulthood in a matter of days. It will have the exact form and likeness of its father – along with all his skills and abilities. For the child to take its place amongst the nemesires and nemesirens, it must seek out any slay its father – for only one of them may live. If a month passes and the sire still lives, the progeny will perish.

Many nemesires and nemesirens take an interest in magic. Spells that allow them to deceive and beguile would-be mates are of particular use.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6+3	(13)
DEX	3D6+6	(16)
CON	3D6+3	(13)
SIZ	2D6+6	(13)
INT	3D6	(10)
POW	3D6+6	(16)
CHA	2D6+12	(19)

Nemesire/Nemesiren Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/6
4-6	Left Leg	0/6
7-9	Abdomen	0/7
10-12	Chest	0/8
13-15	Right Arm	0/5
16-18	Left Arm	0/5
19-20	Head	0/6

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Dagger	45%	1D4+1D2

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+13
<i>Movement:</i>	5m
<i>Traits:</i>	Night Sight
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 65%, Dodge 50%, Influence 80%, Perception 75%, Persistence 60%, Resilience 50%, Stealth 50%, Dance 70%, Language (Any three) 50%, Play Instrument 70%

Typical Armour: None

Toxic Secrets

An adventure for four starting characters, by Charles Green.

Overview

In certain circles of galactic society, it is an open secret that the Minbari have delved deep into the science of biotechnology, although whether they have managed to create functioning, useful technology from their experimentation is not known. It is a less open secret that the EarthForce Defence Bioweapons Division has spent years attempting to prize Minbari biotech secrets out of the innumerable hidden facilities, presumably deep within the Minbari Federation.

After numerous unsuccessful attempts at infiltrating one of these facilities, six months ago, results were achieved. An agent working for Bioweapons Division managed to enter one of the secret research facilities, retrieve a coveted specimen, and escape without notice. This agent, a human named Thomas Gallagher, began the painstaking task of returning the specimen to his superiors at EarthForce Defence. He knows it is a virus of some sort, but is unaware of its true nature: a bioweapon designed to target humans without harming any other life-forms.

Unfortunately for him, the Minbari working in the facility noticed the theft during a routine security scan, and managed to piece together what had occurred. Alerted to Gallagher's actions, and his likely intention, security teams were sent after him. Commercial traffic leaving Minbari space was halted, and all diplomatic personnel were appraised of the situation, although the contents of the stolen material was not revealed.

Gallagher found himself stranded on Babylon 5. With security in the station on constant alert for him, Gallagher took to Downbelow in a disguise that not only serves to make him look inhuman, but also deters security from getting too close to him: he is disguised as a pak'm'ara. Using a voluminous cloak and a mask and sticking to the shadows, Gallagher has, so far, been able to avoid unwanted attention. If his plans had worked out, he could have laid low until the travel restriction was let up, and then sneaked onto a ship heading for a place where he could more easily set up a rendezvous and collect his reward.

As is often the case when plans are intricate, this did not work out. While sleeping in a supposedly hidden place in the lower sections of the station, Gallagher was discovered by a lurker who rummaged through his belongings and discovered the device bearing the stolen virus. The lurker pawned the self-contained refrigeration unit for enough credits to buy a drink.

Gallagher awoke and checked his belongings, and noticed the theft. This is where the adventure begins.

Act One

Scene One: The Zocalo

It has been several days since the Minbari requested a full shut down of the jump-gate leading from Babylon 5, and already tempers are beginning to fray. The traffic freeze has come at a time when the station was at its most

crowded. The increased demand for goods and services has stretched the already overtaxed hospitality services almost to the breaking point.

To illustrate this, the adventure begins with the characters spending an evening in the Zocalo, having just come off duty, been relieved of their responsibilities, or simply looking for a way to while away the hours until their ship is allowed to leave. They might be having a drink in one

Involving the Players

This adventure assumes that the characters will be amongst the hundreds stranded on Babylon 5 while the Minbari bioweapon remains missing. They may be members of the security detail assigned to tracking down Gallagher and the stolen item, or possibly members of other factions who had used the station as a convenient waystation as they traveled to other parts of the galaxy.

Alternatively, this adventure could be set in some place other than Babylon 5, if the nature of an ongoing campaign would make travel to the station unlikely. A closed environment that does not allow easy access to transportation is needed to keep the players from simply leaving to let things sort themselves out, but this can be arranged, perhaps by saying a temporary malfunction has rendered the nearest jump-gate nonoperational until repairs can be made. Also, characters from this adventure can be replaced with comparable characters on other stations.



of the numerous bars, shopping, or working the crowded section for information.

The official story about the traffic freeze is that station security is cracking down on smugglers, and searching every ship for contraband. Characters will naturally be curious about this, and may try to discover the truth behind the rumors. Diplomacy or Intrigue checks may be made. The amount of information earned from these skills will depend on the check result:

Check Result	Information Gathered
<5	The rumors are true, and security is finding more contraband items than they had expected.
5-10	Security is behind schedule on the ship inspections, which is increasing anger among those traveling. If the reason for the delay is to search the ships, then why is it not going faster?
11-15	When they do manage to get around to an inspection, they only perform a cursory one, not even looking for secret compartments. It is like they are not really looking for contraband at all.
16-20	The story of smugglers and contraband is obviously a front. Something else is going on. Security patrols in the Alien Sector and in Downbelow have increased.
21-25	The request for the travel restriction has come through the Minbari ambassador. The Federation claims that vital state secrets have been stolen, and are currently somewhere on Babylon 5. The jump-gate will not be reopened until these secrets are found and returned.
26-30+	The stolen items are some sort of secret Minbari technology, the nature of which they do not want discovered. There are explicit instructions from the Federation that the recovered technology be returned immediately, without examination.

Scene Two: The Canny Merchant

After the characters have gotten as much information from the crowded Zocalo as they can, they hear rumors of an electronics shop that continues to put new merchandise on the shelves, despite the lack of shipments in from customs.

If the players move to investigate, continue on with this section. If not, move on to 'Thievery' below.

Nasheer is a male Brakiri trader (use the statistics on page 331 of the 2nd edition *Babylon 5* rulebook), and owner of a small stall in the Zocalo that sells consumer electronics; games, music, communicator systems, and various parts scrounged from discarded machines. Most of the items available for sale are one or more generations behind the technological curve.

Nasheer himself is ingratiatingly smooth, always attempting to upsale potential customers, but eager to dismiss those who are only browsing the merchandise.

Those looking through the mountains of junk can locate a small device, much newer-looking than the rest of the items. The lights on the surface indicate that the item is still operating. Characters with any levels in the Scientist class will recognize it as a piece of sophisticated medical equipment, and characters with any ranks in the Medical skill can make a DC 10 Medical check to determine that it is a long term cold storage device.

Nasheer, however, does not allow this examination to take place in the stall, and insists that interested characters buy it if they want to examine it any further. If need be, he attempts to snatch the device, although an opposed Dex check avoids this. He asks for 500 credits to purchase the device, but he is willing to bargain. Before the bargaining can begin in earnest, a pak'ma'ra enters and immediately offers twice the current bid.

This is Thomas Gallagher in disguise. Though his costume is quite well done, it is possible that some characters will notice something off about this particular alien. Assume a DC of 10 to determine that something is wrong, but only allow the check if the players specifically describe them looking into the alien. Pak'ma'ra are ignored by most of the station's population. He will express a great deal of interest in the item, but if the price ever reaches 750 credits, he backs away from the bidding and stalks off, quickly vanishing into the milling crowd.



Outcomes

1. If the characters obtain the device proceed to The Riot below, and then to Breaking and Entering.
2. If Gallagher obtains the device, he vanishes into the crowded Zocalo, touching off an angry response from the crowd. Proceed to the Riot, and then to Act 2: Outbreak.
3. If none of the characters wind up with the device, Gallagher goes back and steals the device from Nasheer's stall. Proceed to Thievery.

Scene Three: Thievery

If the characters outbid Gallagher for the device, but do not actually pay for it, Gallagher waits for them to leave, circles back around, and snatches the device from Nasheer's hands. As Nasheer bellows 'Stop, thief! Security, Help!', Gallagher barrels through the Zocalo, dodging past groups of people. In his haste to escape, he bumps into a Centauri couple, who in turn fall onto a handful of Drazi, with predictable results. The Drazi instantly begin brawling with anyone close enough to attack. The resulting panic spreads throughout the Zocalo. Proceed to The Riot.

Note that this event occurs even if the characters avoid going into Nasheer's.

Scene Four: The Riot

Regardless of the outcome of the bidding war over the device, Gallagher manages to anger a group of Drazi workers in the Zocalo.

The riot erupts with surprising speed. The first response of the crowd is to get away from the immediate conflict, which results in a mad rush for the doors. Characters caught in the stampede must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check to avoid being separated from companions and pushed towards the exits. Additionally, everyone must make a

DC 15 Reflex save or take 1d3 damage from scrapes and bruises.

Those who are left behind are exposed to a disquieting scene. In addition to Drazi sparring with security guards, the other alien races common to the station have taken the opportunity to vent old hatreds in a show of violence. Everywhere, Narn and Centauri are literally at each other's throats. Humans fight with Minbari in a conflict that quickly escalates from unarmed melee to armed melee.

Being in the middle of this conflict can be quite a surprise for non-combat personnel. Members of one of the four main races will be targeted by several rounds of attention from an antagonistic alien. Use the appropriate statistics found on pages 328-331 of the *Babylon 5* rulebook.

If it looks like one or more of the characters are not going to survive, end the fight by moving a large security force into the Zocalo to suppress the riot. The force is being run by the station's security chief. If the adventure is being used on Babylon 5 at a time when Garibaldi is still acting security chief, use his stats. If the adventure is being run somewhere else or in another time, use a 10th level NPC of the appropriate race. He takes statements from everyone he can get his hands on, including the player characters.

If Gallagher possesses the device during the riot, he will drop it and release the virus before disappearing into the crowd. Allow the characters to make a DC 15 Notice check to see this happen, and grant a +4 bonus if they indicate they are following the pak'ma'ra.

Scene Five: Breaking and Entering

The characters will likely wish to retire to their own quarters, although those seriously injured in the fight might wind up in the Medlab for treatment. Once the

player who is in possession of the device falls asleep, Gallagher attempts to force his way into the room and retrieve the device. His attempts at penetrating the security on doors and elevators are masterful. Allow the target individual a DC 25 Notice check to hear something if asleep, and a DC 20 check if they are awake.

Once Gallagher has entered, he begins looking through the room for the device. Again, allow the target character a DC 20 Notice check if asleep, and a DC 15 one if awake. Allow another check every 5 minutes or so. If the character awakens before Gallagher finds the device, have the first thing they see be him pulling it out of its hiding place.

After about 20 minutes of searching, Gallagher discovers the device and makes his escape. However, he makes more noise than usual in the last stages of the search, which will almost certainly awaken a sleeping character. The DC for noticing is 15 if sleeping, 5 if awake.

Once awakened, the character sees Gallagher, minus his pak'ma'ra costume, but with a breather mask on, heading for the door with the device in his hands. Should the character attempt to stop him, begin combat as normal, although the character will have a -4 penalty to his Initiative if beginning the fight from his bed.

Gallagher avoids using any energy weapons, instead relying on his melee skills to get past the character and out into the hallway. He will stop short of killing the character, and focus all of his actions on getting out of the room as soon as possible. Each time the character hits him, Gallagher must make a DC 15 Reflex save to avoid dropping the device. If he does, it shatters on impact.

Assuming this does not happen, and that the character is taken out by Gallagher, a security team arrives with enough time to fire a couple of shots at Gallagher as he flees. One of these shots will hit him, but not do enough

damage to immediately kill him. At this time, Gallagher drops the device, releasing the virus.

Act 2: Outbreak

Heretic-165 virus begins spreading through the station. The human security personnel that respond to Gallagher's attempt to steal back the virus are the first exposed to it, as are any Player Characters who were on the scene at the time.

Scene One: Business as Usual

As far as the characters are concerned, their involvement in the immediate situation is more or less over. The plan to capture Gallagher has failed, and the device, which the Minbari were so keen on getting back, is broken. One of the security detail recognizes the device for what it was, and turns it over to Medlab for analysis, who in turn hand it over to the Minbari Ambassador.

For the time being, characters are free to return to their normal activities. The Games Master may call for appropriate skill checks to simulate the day-to-day behavior on the ship. As the day progresses, more and more of the human population becomes infected with the virus, and can infect others before they show symptoms.

After several hours almost the whole station has been exposed to the virus. It is not long before Medlab recognizes what is going on, and at the end of this scene, a call goes out across the station.

'May I have your attention please. Due to a medical issue, all inhabitants of Babylon 5 are to return to their personal quarters and remain there until further notice. Thank you for your swift cooperation.'

Security teams move through the station to escort diplomats and shop keepers to their rooms. As player characters move through

Heretic-165

The virus contained in Gallagher's device is a specialized form of the Heretic virus, which has been modified by Minbari scientists to have the following profile:

Disease	Races Affected	Vector	Fort DC	Incubation	Initial Effect	Secondary Effect
Heretic-165	Human*	Inhaled	20	3 Hours	1 Con & Sickened	1d2 Con

The virus is also particularly deadly in that it takes 3 successful Fortitude saves to end its effects.

*While designed for use on humans, the 165 strain of the Heretic Virus can affect all races. The Fortitude DC is only 10 for non-humans, and the incubation time is doubled. Due to a quirk in pak'ma'ra physiology, that race is entirely immune to Heretic-165.

the station, they see many scenes of important people complaining about the rough treatment.

Scene Two: Looters

Whether or not the characters return to their quarters is immaterial. There are not enough security staff to enforce this. Many of the lurkers from the Alien Sector and Downbelow head into more prosperous areas, looking for easy loot.

At some point, the players will encounter a roving band of lurkers. Assume the lurker band has a number of members equal to twice the average level of the party, and take their statistics from pages 328-331 in the *Babylon 5* rulebook. If the players are holed up (or have actually returned to their quarters), the lurkers attempt to force the door (which takes three rounds and makes a lot of noise). If the players are traveling, the lurkers ambush them.

The fight should last as long as the players enjoy it. If it begins looking bad for the characters (or if the party is made of non-combat classes like diplomats and traders), a small, rag-tag security team arrives

soon after the fighting begins to disperse the lurkers. The team members are all very sick, frequently coughing and leaning against the walls for support. The head of the security team, a human named Michaels, informs the characters that their presence is requested in the security control room.

Scene Three: Security Chief's Request

The characters are ushered in to see the security chief, who is seated behind his console trying to contact security teams. He coughs and sways on his feet a little.

He asks the characters about the situation, and if they are missing any of the information covered in Act One, he fills them in. In particular, he mentions the fact that it is from the Minbari, and said that this was supposed to be a secret technology, not a virus. He has been trying to get more information out of the Minbari Ambassador to the station, but has met with only silence.

The chief also says that, since he does not have enough personnel to do so, he would like the characters to talk

to the Ambassador. He gives them temporary security personnel status to go along with the responsibility.

Just then, Garibaldi erupts into another coughing fit, and his console bursts into noise as a security team reports another, larger, band of lurkers making their way through the station.

Scene Four: The Minbari Connection



The Minbari Ambassador's quarters guarded by two Minbari warrior caste soldiers, (page 331, *Babylon 5* rulebook) who do not allow the characters to pass. Their attitude is Unfriendly, and convincing them to pass will entail bringing this up to Friendly to allow them to see the ambassador. If the characters have received security status, they may take a +4 to their skill check. Alternatively, the characters may attempt to force their way in, which is not a guaranteed avenue of approach, but will attract the attention of the ambassador who will open the door after 1d6 rounds.

Either way, the characters will be allowed an audience with the Ambassador, although if they have started a fight, Diplomacy checks will be

The Minbari Ambassador

If the adventure is being played during the time when Delenn is the Minbari ambassador on Babylon 5, she will of course fill this post. However, if the adventure is being used elsewhere or at another time, assume the Minbari Ambassador is of comparable ability to the game stats given on page 321 of the *Babylon 5* rulebook.

If another race is needed, a 10th level Diplomat NPC should be constructed for use within the ongoing campaign. In this instance, assume that the Heretic-165 virus has a different origin, one that the alien ambassador would have the ability to discover with the proper use of diplomatic contact.

at -4 until her attitude can be raised from Unfriendly to Indifferent. If they have not started a fight, her attitude begins at Indifferent.

The Ambassador knows she is in a precarious situation. The rest of the station's authorities know that the virus is Minbari in origin, and most suspect her of some part in a nefarious plot to destroy Babylon 5. In fact, she knows very little about the virus or how it came to be released on the station, and is being stonewalled by her diplomatic contacts back in the Federation.

In conversation with the characters, she is polite but distracted. If they can bring her attitude from Indifferent to Friendly, she will be more willing to help. Since her contacts are proving uncooperative, he needs more information about the virus: where it came from, and who worked on the project. There is only one person on the station with this information: Thomas Gallagher.

If the characters can locate Gallagher and bring him in alive, The Ambassador can make sure she gets the needed information by pressuring the right people.

Act Three: The Hunt for Thomas Gallagher

Scene One: Sickness and Death

The character may attempt to talk to the security guards who tried to arrest Gallagher on the night of the theft. Of the dozen officers present, only a handful are in any shape to talk. Some have died, others are close to it. Only one, a hardy soldier named Henry Davis, is still conscious. He does not have much to say, only that they lost the thief in Red Sector. He said that they did manage to shoot him right before he seemed to vanish into thin air in the Zocalo. Davis is weakened by the interview, and begins a terrible coughing fit immediately afterwards.

Scene Two: Nasheer's Lament

If the characters return to the Zocalo, they find it in shambles. The shops have been nearly gutted, the bars and cafes destroyed, and a few people wandering about aimlessly. One of these is Nasheer, who recognizes the characters from earlier and approaches them.

Nasheer laments the loss of his stock, and complains that, without his stall and customers, his ability to make a decent profit is fatally undercut. He will agree that the potential loss of life is tragic, but his personal tragedy is much more pressing on his mind. Unless the characters persist on talking to him, Nasheer will begin pawing through the detritus on the floor.

If they characters attempt to determine what Nasheer knows, they must make a DC 15 Diplomacy or Intimidate check to get his attention. He says all he knows about the device is that he really did buy it from a pak'ma'ra in Green Sector, but he had no idea what it was or what it held. If pressed, he will reveal the name of this fence with

a DC 12 Intimidate check (with a +4 bonus if threats of legal action are suggested). He says he often buys goods from a pak'ma'ra named T'rik, one of a trio of pak'ma'ra lurkers who live somewhere Downbelow. Nasheer says that he would often find T'rik near the Zen Garden in the Green Sector, and suggests that the characters should look there.

Characters can also attempt to locate Gallagher's hidden passage. A DC 25 Notice check will reveal a slide-away wall panel, which leads to a long, empty corridor that opens up in the Green Sector. Traveling this corridor is largely without risk, although it does take a long time, which may be a concern for those with the virus. It bypasses all security. This may be of little use in this scenario, but can be used again in the future.

Scene Three: The Zen Garden

The three pak'ma'ra are not hard to find. They are alone in the Zen Garden, sitting quietly, conversing in their native tongue. As the characters approach, they stop talking, and regard the characters impassively.

When speaking to the characters, the three pak'ma'ra refer to themselves collectively as 'we,' and each individual will speak as though it was speaking for the group.

If the characters ask for T'rik, the trio says, 'In some ways, each one of us is T'rik. You may speak and know she will hear.' They claim sorrow over the loss of so much life, but are hopeful that they may receive the bodies of some of the dead. They express no regret over this, even if the characters are outraged by the sentiment.

On the subject of the device, the trio say that they know who they got it from, the thief who had stolen it from Gallagher, but know also that the characters are really after the owner, the 'human who wears our skins.'

If asked about this human, they say, 'we've seen him, moving about as though he were one of us, when he is obviously a human. But none of the humans notice, so we do not mind. He is sick with the illness, though, which will mark him as surely as his lack of appropriate smell.'

They tell the characters where in the Downbelow Gallagher can be found., in a 'small chamber near a red bulkhead.' They will offer this information in exchange for a promise that some of the dead will be sent their way when the crisis is averted.

Scene Four: The Hunt

The directions given by the trio prove to be very accurate. Even the normally teeming Downbelow is subdued. The criminal elements are either off in other parts of the station making use of the disaster, or are themselves ill.

Finding Gallagher is easy enough. He is in the chamber near the red bulkhead, mumbling to himself in delirium, but that does not stop him from drawing a weapon and firing on the Player Characters as they approach (opposed Stealth check against his Notice to avoid this).

There are two ways to handle Gallagher: he may be attacked and knocked out, or talked into giving himself up. Attacking him will not be easy; even with his illness and injuries, Gallagher is a well-trained agent, and there is a chance that he will accidentally be killed in the firefight. Talking him into surrendering is trickier; his attitude is Hostile, and all Diplomacy checks are at a -4 penalty if any of the party are Minbari (as he is convinced that Minbari are trying to kill him). However, if his attitude can be changed to Indifferent, he will give himself up.

If fighting occurs during take-down, Gallagher will eventually fall, from the effects of Heretic-165 if not injury. While alive, he is in bad shape, and he must be rushed to Medlab to save him. While a telepath would be

able to dredge his mind for the needed information, the trauma is too much for him, and he expires.

Epilogue

The Minbari Ambassador is able to obtain technical information about the virus, which allows the staff in the Medlab to synthesize a treatment that arrests the virus's ability to replicate. Anyone given the treatment must only pass a single Fort save (with a +15 bonus) against the virus to shake its effects.

The jump gate is reactivated as soon as all of the sick have been treated, and travel through Babylon 5 resumes.

For their acts during the outbreak, the characters may each take a new Local Influence (Babylon 5) and 500 XP as a story award. If they assure that some bodies are given to the trio of pak'ma'ra, they may also take a Criminal Influence as well. Conversely, if they promised T'rik some dead and fail to deliver, the trio will use their underworld influence against them.

As for Thomas Gallagher, his fate is not written in stone. His superiors in EarthForce want him returned for debriefing, and the Minbari Federation wants him turned over to them to be tried for his crimes. He may also face charges for the deaths of those who died in the outbreak. Games Master may make him an object for further scenarios, or allow him to pass through the story, his final fate a mystery.

Additionally, the Earth Alliance will have some questions about the Minbari Federation's development of biological weapons.

Thomas Gallagher, Human Agent

Level: 4

Hit Points: 14 (8 if Gallagher has had a run-in with security)

Initiative: +1 (Dex Bonus)

Speed: 30 feet

DV: 13 (12 Flat Footed)

Attacks:

Martial Arts +4 (1d3, x2 critical, Stunning DC 13)

PPG +4 (+5 if under 30 feet) (2d8. 19-20/x2 critical, AP1)

Special Qualities: Master of the Craft (Bluff), Multi-Skill (Medical), Opportunism (Stunning Attack), Skill Mastery (Subterfuge)

Saves: Fort +2, Reflex +5, Will +0

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12 (9 after Heretic 165 Infection), Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 16

Skills: Acrobatics +8, Appraise +9, Athletics +7, Bluff +11, Computer Use +9, Concentration +1, Diplomacy +3, Drive +1, Intimidate +10, Intrigue +10, Investigate +2, Knowledge (Minbari) +2, Linguistics +2, Notice +6, Pilot -1, Profession (Blue Collar) -1, Profession (Performing +3), Profession (White Collar) +1, Sense Motive -1, Subterfuge +8, Stealth +8

Feats: Martial Arts, Natural Athlete, Point Blank Shot

Influence: Earth Military Influence+10, Criminal Influence +10

Equipment: pak'm'ara disguise, PPG, forged travel documents

THE SERPENTINE HIVE

A set of new monsters for your RuneQuest games, by Bryan Steele.

This article is a small collection of creatures from the collective species known as the Serpentine Hive – a family of vicious predatory snake-like beings that all share a single goal. They each desire to do one thing and one thing only; they want to kill all lesser reptiles. How they were created and for what purpose is a mystery, but considering they view *all* reptiles – even dragons – as lesser to their own species, they are nothing but trouble for most cultures.

The creatures of the Serpentine Hive are as follows, and can be used by any RuneQuest Games Master as they see fit. They are not designed explicitly for Glorantha but considering the presence of the EWF in the Second Age they could make for an interesting addition nonetheless.

King Serpentes

The ruling caste of the Hive, King Serpentes are the patriarchs that make all of the greater choices for their species. They are large and powerful humanoid cobras, often scaled in yellow or gold to show their regency. Through their semi-mystic mental connection with their entire species, the Kings lead their people in their genocide against all other reptilians.

Each King Serpentine is father to a sect within the

Hive numbering roughly two dozen children, thralls and summoned minions. They tend to build their sects within tunnels and catacombs, often far away from sentient humanoid interference in order to better build their empire. King Serpentes always rule alone, oftentimes killing and eating any further Kings that hatch from their broods; they must be sure to keep their hold upon the sect or they will be overthrown and slain by their replacement.

The bite of the hooded King Serpentine delivers a painful neurotoxin that sets the nerves of the bitten ablaze with agony and horrible spasms, a fate that is said to be worse than death. The Kings rarely mar their bodies with adornment or weaponry, but can occasionally be found with jagged daggers made of dragonbone – trophies their sect has managed to take in their thousand-year lives.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	4D6+1	(16)
CON	4D6	(15)
DEX	4D6	(15)
SIZ	3D6+4	(15)
INT	3D6	(11)
POW	3D6	(11)
CHA	2D6+6	(13)

King Serpentine Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–9	Tail	5/8
10–12	Chest	5/8
13–15	Right Arm	5/5
16–18	Left Arm	5/5
19–20	Head	5/6

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Bite	75%	1D6+1D4 plus poison
Claw	65%	1D4+1D4
Dagger	70%	1D4+1+1D4

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+13
<i>Movement:</i>	4m
<i>Traits:</i>	Dark Sight, Poison
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 55%, Dodge 40%, Influence 40%, Perception 65%, Stealth 40%, Survival 55%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick Scales (AP 5, no Skill Penalty)

Notes: No Serpentine can resist the commands of a King Serpentine, as they are connected on a genetic and social level beyond what normal beings can imagine. Additionally, with a successful Perception skill test a King Serpentine can see through the eyes of any other Serpentine with a number of miles equal to their POW.

King Serpentine Venom

Type: Injury

Delay: 1D3 Combat Rounds

Potency: 95

Full Effect: 1D3 Hit Points of damage to location struck. In addition, the pain causes the victim to suffer -5% with all skills per Hit Point of damage inflicted by the poison.

Duration: 2D6 minutes

Constrictor Serpentes

The rank and file soldiers of the Hive, Constrictors are large and powerful humanoid serpents that can tower up on their elongated bodies a full man's height above a common human. It has a much longer coiled body than any other breed of Serpentine, which it uses to grasp and crush the life from its foes. They are always of a dun colour, bland and boring, but are commonly spotted with metallic gold or silver chevrons down their backs.

Although they do not have the deadly venom of their kin, Constrictors are very strong and often wield thick-bladed axes or spears against their enemies. Their coils are long enough to hold one target while attacking another with weapons, but they typically focus on killing one opponent at a time.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	6D6+3	(25)
CON	5D6	(18)
DEX	3D6+2	(13)
SIZ	5D6+6	(24)
INT	2D6+2	(9)
POW	3D6	(11)
CHA	2D6+3	(10)

Constrictor Serpentine Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-11	Tail	4/10
12-14	Chest	4/10
15-16	Right Arm	4/7
17-18	Left Arm	4/7
19-20	Head	4/8

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Axe	75%	1D6+2+1D10
Bite	55%	1D4+1D10
Claw	55%	1D4+1D10
Coil	60%	2D4+1D10

Anything struck successfully by the Coil attack of a Constrictor Serpentine cannot attempt to Dodge or Parry further Coil attacks by the same creature until they defeat the Serpentine in an opposed Athletics skill test, which uses a Combat Action.

A Constrictor Serpentine can also use its Coil skill in place of any Unarmed skill tests when grappling an opponent.

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 3

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 4m

Traits: Dark Sight

Skills: Athletics 75%, Dodge 38%, Perception 45%, Resilience 55%, Survival 65%

Typical Armour: Thick Scales
(AP 4, no Skill Penalty)

Asp Serpentes

Small and stealthy, Asps are the assassins of the Hive. They have thin bodies covered in dark scales, their limbs and coils are wrapped in wiry muscle like all of their kind, but they are built for speed and silence – not physical labour. Most enemies of an Asp Serpentine never even realise they have been targeted by one until their deadly venom is already coursing through their veins.

The long fangs of the Asps are filled with thick brown coagulant venom that turns its victims' veins into wires and blood into acid. They frequently coat their weapons in the stuff as well, hedging their odds against any living enemy. One bite or scratch from an Asp's attack can be fatal, which is exactly why they fill the role that they do in Hive society.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6+1	(12)
CON	3D6+3	(14)
DEX	5D6+1	(19)
SIZ	3D6	(11)
INT	3D6	(11)
POW	3D6	(11)
CHA	2D6+4	(11)

Asp Serpentine Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-9	Tail	3/7
10-12	Chest	3/7
13-15	Right Arm	3/4
16-18	Left Arm	3/4
19-20	Head	3/5

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Bite	70%	1D4+2 plus poison
Claw	60%	1D3+1
Dagger	80%	1D4+1 plus poison

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	4
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+15
<i>Movement:</i>	6m
<i>Traits:</i>	Dark Sight, Poison
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 65%, Dodge 60%, Perception 68%, Resilience 30%, Stealth 70%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick Scales (AP 3, no Skill Penalty)

Asp Serpentine Venom

Type: Injury

Delay: 1D2 Combat Rounds

Potency: 98

Full Effect: 1 hit point damage to location struck per round

Duration: 1D6 minutes



Rattler Serpentes

Rattlers are the runecasters and spell weavers of the Serpentine Hive, ignoring the idea of stealth or secrecy in favour of their flamboyant and dramatic style. Where a Rattler goes several thralls follow, often ensorcelled by their magics. All of the physical labour that the oftentimes eccentric Rattlers will avoid will be taken up by their thralls.

All runes found by the Serpentine Hive are brought to the nearest Rattler for integration and incorporation into its spellcasting ability. For this reason all Rattlers are experienced magicians and powerful runecasters, and while they know that their venomous bite is potent they would rather deal with their enemies through spells and magical treachery.

Rattler venom is dangerous and powerful, even if these Serpentes do not choose to use it often. They are rarely even armed, using their magic to deal with their foes when the sheer numbers of their serving thralls cannot.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6+2	(13)
CON	4D6	(15)
DEX	4D6	(15)
SIZ	3D6+2	(13)
INT	4D6	(15)
POW	4D6	(15)
CHA	2D6+4	(11)

Notes: Rattler Serpentes know at least one spell for each of their runes and possibly more. Many also possess knowledge of sorcery.

Rattler Serpentine Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-9	Tail	4/8
10-12	Chest	4/8
13-15	Right Arm	4/5
16-18	Left Arm	4/5
19-20	Head	4/6

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Bite	55%	1D4+1D2 plus poison
Claw	35%	1D3+1D2

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+15
<i>Movement:</i>	4m
<i>Traits:</i>	Dark Sight, Poison
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 45%, Dodge 35%, Influence 50%, Perception 55%
<i>Magic Skills:</i>	Runecasting (Beast) 45%, Runecasting (Darkness) 40%, Runecasting (Dragon) 30%, Runecasting (Fire) 50%, Runecasting (Man) 55%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick Scales (AP 4, no Skill Penalty)

Rattler Serpentine Venom

Type:	Injury
Delay:	1D6 Combat Rounds
Potency:	65
Full Effect:	1D2 Hit Points of damage to location struck
Duration:	Instant

Sea Serpentes

The only aquatic breed of the Serpentes, Seas are oddly evolved for swimming and lengthy periods of underwater activity. They have blue-green scales that fit together seamlessly for faster swimming, and short, serrated fangs for gripping slippery targets. They are little more than scouts and warriors built for the sea, and only ever hatch when their eggs incubate fully underwater. They are the second rarest of the Serpentes, but are easily the most dangerous in an aquatic environment.

Sea Serpentine venom is paralytic in nature, causing painful spasms in the muscles of the bitten, often hastening the drowning of the victim. They use their bite on unarmoured targets or food prey, preferring to use their spears to tear holes in any other opponent. Seas only use stabbing or thrusting weapons to cut down on water drag, and are equally skilled with them above the surf as below.

Characteristics

STR	5D6	(18)
CON	5D6	(18)
DEX	3D6+2	(13)
SIZ	3D6+2	(13)
INT	3D6	(11)
POW	3D6	(11)
CHA	2D6+2	(9)

Sea Serpentine Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-9	Tail	4/9
10-12	Chest	4/9
13-15	Right Arm	4/6
16-18	Left Arm	4/6
19-20	Head	4/7

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Bite	65%	1D4+1D4 plus poison
Claw	55%	1D3+1+1D4
Longspear	70%	1D10+1D4

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+12
<i>Movement:</i>	3m, swim 6m
<i>Traits:</i>	Dark Sight, Excellent Swimmer, Poison
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 60% (90%), Dodge 45%, Perception 65%, Stealth 45%, Survival 60%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick Scales (AP 4, no Skill Penalty)

Notes: Sea Serpentes are not truly aquatic, but they can act effectively in and underwater without any form of penalty. Additionally, they can hold their breath for a number of minutes equal to twice their CON plus POW scores.

Sea Serpentine Venom

Type:	Injury
Delay:	1D4 Combat Rounds
Potency:	70
Full Effect:	-1 to DEX and STR per Combat Round
Duration:	2D6 Combat Rounds

Serpentine Thrall

The Serpentine have a belief that reptile-kind is superior to mammals in all ways, and that the Serpentine are superior to all reptiles. In their earliest days of existence they began to experiment with their potent eggs, feeding the remnants of the hatched yolk to captured

humans. The result were animal-like serpent-men that serve the Hive with utter compliance.

A thrall is physically the same as a common human in many ways, but they are transformed into scaly things. They have pointed and serrated teeth for slicing tough flesh, thickened skin covered in scales to fend light blows, and taloned hands and feet for dealing with their foes. No more intelligent or crafty than a dog or wolf, a thrall is a living tool used by the Serpentine Hive when their own numbers are not enough.

Characteristics

STR	4D6+2	(17)
CON	3D6+2	(13)
DEX	2D6+2	(9)
SIZ	3D6	(11)
INT	2	(2)
POW	2D6	(7)
CHA	2	(2)

Serpentine Thrall Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	1/5
4-6	Left Leg	1/5
7-9	Abdomen	1/6
10-12	Chest	1/7
13-15	Right Arm	1/4
16-18	Left Arm	1/4
19-20	Head	1/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon skill	Damage
Bite	35%	1D2+1D2
Claw	40%	1D3+1D2
Club	45%	1D6+1D2

Special Rules

Combat Actions:	2
Strike Rank:	+6
Movement:	4m
Traits:	Dark Sight
Skills:	Athletics 60%, Dodge 45%, Resilience 45%
Typical Armour:	Scaly Skin (AP 1, no Skill Penalty)

Notes: Thralls, although actually humanoid in all aspects, have the base intelligence of nothing more than an animal and are bred to serve the Serpentine Hive. Because of that, any member of the Serpentine race can command a thrall to do *anything* – even suicidal acts – without it hesitating for even a moment to fulfil it.

MONSTERS OF LEGEND

UNIQUE AND TERRIBLE BEASTS TO CHALLENGE THE MIGHTIEST HEROES
BY GARETH HANRAHAN

Some creatures straddle the boundary between natural animal and unnatural horror, between mortal, spirit and god. Satha, the serpent of Tsotha-lanthe was one such horror, but others still dwell in the jungles and the far reaches of the wilderness. These beasts have grown old and powerful, worshipped as gods by degenerate Picts and barbarians, as vital and fearsome as Conan himself!

Each of these monsters is a challenge to a whole party of adventurers, and has unique abilities and attacks designed to make a battle memorable.



HELBJORN, THE ICE BEAR

Huge Animal

Climate/Terrain: Nordheim

Organisation: Solitary

Initiative: +0

Senses: Listen +8, Spot +8, Low-Light Vision, Scent

Dodge Defence: 21

Hit Points: 171 hp (HD 18); DR 8

Saves: Fort +18, Ref +11, Will +6

Speed: 40 ft.

Space: 15 ft. **Reach:** 10 ft.

Melee: Two claws +24 (1d12+15, AP 5) and bite +19 (2d8+10, AP 9)

Base Atk: +13; **Grp:** +40

Special Attacks: Improved Grab, Bearhug (4d10+15), Swipe, Crush, Frost Fur, Camouflage, Berserk

Abilities: Str 39, Dex 10, Con 25, Int 4, Wis 12, Cha 12


Feats: Diehard, Endurance, Run, Track, Alertness, Power Attack, Improved Overrun

Skills: Listen +8, Spot +8, Survival +9

The bravest north-men quail when the skalds tell of Helbjorn. Unlike common bears, the white beast walks abroad in the thickest of blizzards. The shattered ruins of log cabins tell of its hunger for man-flesh, and the snapped spear-shafts bear witness to the monster's strength and endurance. Its roar is the wind howling off the Hyperborean glaciers; its teeth are like frozen death. Legend says that those who drink the blood of the bear will be gifted with his strength, and the first berserker was a hero who wounded Helbjorn and drank of the bear's fury. Others say that the bear is kin to the frost giants, and that Ymir will battle him on the last day.

BATTLING HELBJORN

The bear of the north will only be encountered in the snows of the north, in places where exposure and freezing are almost as big a threat as the bear's claws. Helbjorn is a titanic white beast, with a shaggy hide like an auroch instead of the smooth pelt of lesser bears. Dozens of spear-heads and splintered swords are stuck in its matted and frozen fur. The monster is always savage and hungry, and has no fear of man.



In combat, Helbjorn will use its overrun attacks and swipes to inflict as much damage as it can on the group, then it will tear the strongest survivors apart with bear hugs.

Improved Grab: To use this ability, Helbjorn must hit with a claw. If it does so, it may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Bear Hug: If Helbjorn is grappling a foe, it can make a single bear hug in place of its two claw attacks. The bear hug attack automatically deals 4d10+15 damage to the target. Furthermore, any equipment carried by the foe in backpacks or pouches has a 50% chance of being broken by the crushing attack.

Swipe: Instead of making its normal attacks, Helbjorn can swipe. A swipe attack is resolved like a claw attack, but has a reach of 15 feet and is made against all creatures in a 180° arc in front of the bear. Creatures may make a free five-foot step back as an immediate action if they wish to avoid the swipe.

Crush: If Helbjorn makes an overrun attack, any creatures knocked prone as a result suffer 1d6+10 damage.

Frost Fur: Any attack on Helbjorn that hits but inflicts no damage because of the bear's damage reduction gets caught in the matted, frost-rimed fur. The attacker must make a DC 20 Strength check or be disarmed.

Berserk: If Helbjorn makes a massive damage save or is reduced to 0 or fewer hit points, it immediately enters a berserk rage. It gains +4 Strength (increasing all attacks and damage by +2) and +4

Constitution (giving it a +2 bonus to Fortitude saves and 36 bonus hit points), a +2 morale bonus to Will saves and a -2 penalty to Defence. This fury lasts for 10 rounds.

Camouflage: Helbjorn has a +6 racial bonus to Hide checks made in the snow. This rises to +12 if it is currently snowing.

ADVENTURES

❖ Vanir raid an Aesir village where the characters are staying. The village is overrun, but as the characters are battling the Vanir amid the ruins, the smell of blood on the wind draws Helbjorn down upon them...

❖ The characters find the hilt of a sword that is a great treasure to the folk of Nordheim. The sword must be reforged, but the characters must retrieve the shards of the blade from Helbjorn's fur. They can either fight and slay the beast, or steal the shards from him as he sleeps.

KU-IR SHAH, THE DREAM TIGER

Large Animal

Climate/Terrain: Jungles of Khitai

Organisation: Solitary

Initiative: +3

Senses: Listen +10, Spot +5, Foresight, Scent

Dodge Defence: 23

Hit Points: 85 hp (HD 10); DR 6

Saves: Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +6

Speed: 40 ft.

Space: 10 ft. **Reach:** 5 ft.

Melee: 2 claws +16 (1d10+10, AP 5) and bite +11 (2d10+4 plus puncture, AP 12)

Base Atk: +7; **Grp:** +25

Special Attacks: Pounce, improved grab, rake 1d8+7, puncture, tooth breaking, foresight, dream travel, dream breath, lotus poison

Abilities: Str 30, Dex 16, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 16, Cha 12

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Archer's Bane, Mobility

Skills: Balance +10, Hide +7*, Listen +10, Move Silently +13, Spot +5, Swim +12

The sages of Khitai know of a certain grove, deep in the jungles, where the lotus grows in wild profusion. The boughs hang heavy with brightly coloured blossoms, and the air is thick with intoxicating pollen. It is said that those who enter the grove are so entranced by the lotus that they sit down on the banks of the river and dream strange dreams – until Ku-Ir Shah devours them. No man has ever looked upon Ku-Ir Shah, but the sages know him, for they have seen the tiger in their dreams. The Dream Tiger has breathed so deeply of the lotus (that fabled tool, sacred to sorcerers and demons) that it is like unto an evil spirit, able to leap from dream to dream as a common cat leaps from tree to tree.

Those who seek the riches of that lotus grove must face Ku-Ir Shah, and he will devour their souls before his claws rend their flesh...

BATTLING KU-IR SHAH

The dream tiger is an especially tough sabre-tooth tiger, but what makes it really dangerous are its supernatural abilities. The tiger is so steeped in lotus pollen that it has gained sorcerous powers.

Pounce: If Ku-Ir Shah leaps upon a foe during the first round of combat,

it can make a full attack even if it has already taken a move action.

Improved Grab: To use this ability, the sabre-tooth must hit with a claw or bite attack. If it succeeds it may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Rake: If Ku-Ir Shah gets a hold it can make two rake attacks (+9 melee) with its hind legs for 1d8+8 damage each (AP 4). If it pounces on an opponent, it can also rake.

Puncture: A bite attack from Ku-Ir Shah that scores a critical hit on an opponent is considered to have punctured a major blood vessel. The victim will lose a further 1 hp per round (in blood loss) until the wound is healed by either the Heal skill (DC 15) or some sorcerous means.

Tooth Breaking: If Ku-Ir Shah's bite attack does maximum damage on a critical hit (that is, a roll of 40 on 4d10 on a critical hit) it loses one of its large canine teeth. This sticks in the wound, doing an additional 4d6 damage but the Ku-Ir Shah's bite damage drops to 2d6 + 4 and it can no longer deal a puncture effect (see above). It is possible for the second canine to break off if a maximum damage critical hit is scored a second time (24 on 4d6), in which case the bite damage drops to 2d4 + 4.

The teeth of Ku-Ir Shah are potent magical tools. Carved into a dagger, they have a +4 bonus to attack and damage, and can wound any demon or other supernatural creature. A sorcerer struck by a properly enchanted Tooth of Ku-Ir Shah loses 1d4 Power Points in addition to any other damage.



Foresight: Ku-Ir Shah can see the future as clearly as the present. It is never flat-footed or surprised, and can always at least attempt to ambush trespassers in its domain.

Dream Vision: Ku-Ir Shah can travel into the dreams of another person. If the tiger stalks the dreams of a character, that character must make a Will save (DC 18) or awaken screaming as the tiger murders him in the dream. The character gains no benefit from resting. On the roll of a natural one on the Will save, or on the night of the full moon, then if the victim fails he also suffers damage as if Ku-Ir Shah had pounced on them for 2d10+20 damage. Ku-Ir Shah may only use Dream Vision once per night.

Dream Breath: Ku-Ir Shah's breath is sweet and laden with lotus-fumes. Instead of attacking, Ku-Ir Shah can exhale a cloud that fills a 30-foot radius area around the tiger. Any creature within this area must make a Will save (DC 18) or be entranced for 1d6 rounds. Entrancement has the same effect as stunning except the tiger may cause entranced creatures to move towards it at five feet per round instead of staying still.

Lotus Poison: The tiger's golden fur is covered in potentially lethal lotus pollen. Any character who makes a successful attack on the tiger must make a Fortitude save (DC=damage inflicted) or suffer one point of Constitution damage from the choking pollen thrown up by the blow.

Skills: Ku-Ir Shah has a +6 racial bonus to Balance, Hide and Move Silently checks.

*In the jungle, the Hide bonus improves to +8.

ADVENTURES

- ❖ A prince of Khitai is found dead in his private chambers, torn apart. As foreigners, the characters are blamed for his death, but a kindly sage tells them the legend of Ku-Ir Shah. If they can prove that the dream-tiger is capable of murdering sleepers from afar, they will be spared execution. The prince must have been dabbling in sorcery to draw the dream-tiger's attention, but will the characters' efforts to escape execution just succeed in waking the tiger?
- ❖ Only the rare lotus found in that jungle grove can save a woman's life. The characters must travel through the jungle and somehow avoid Ku-Ir Shah's wrath for trespassing in his domain.

THE GHOST OF PICT-LAND

Large Animal

Climate/Terrain: Pictish Territories

Organisation: Solitary

Initiative: +5

Senses: Listen +6, Spot +6, Low-light vision, Scent

Dodge Defence: 21

Hit Points: 60 hp (HD 8); **DR** 4

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +12, Will +3

Speed: 30 ft.

Space: 10 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.

Melee: Bite +10 finesse (1d10+5) and 2 claws +5 finesse (1d6+3)

Base Atk: +5; **Grp:** +22

Special Attacks: Improved grab, pounce, rake 1d6+3, sneak attack 2d6, ghost, mist walk, followers, shapeshift

Abilities: Str 20, Dex 21, Con 17, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 14

Feats: Alertness, Track, Dodge

Skills: Balance +14, Climb +14, Hide +12*, Jump +14, Listen +6, Move Silently +12, Spot +6

The fabled Ghost of Pict-Land is a panther of great size and beauty. Some tales hold that she is dark as the blackest night, others insist she is the colour of moonlight. She ranges from Cimmeria's border to the alleyways of Kordova, and is so brazen that she sometimes crosses the Thunder River to hunt in Bossonia, though not even the eagle-eyed archers of that land can strike the Ghost with an arrow. The Picts worship her as a goddess, and name her Temmut-Sag, the daughter of Jhebbal Sag, although other stories claim she was once a princess of Atlantis who was cursed by a sorcerer and transformed into the shape of an animal.

BATTLING THE GHOST

The Ghost prefers the dark forests and confined places, where she can outflank and surprise her enemies. She is never far from her Pictish followers, who will come to her aid if she is attacked. She uses her mist walk ability to lure enemies into deep waters or quicksand, and has been known to kidnap babies or children to use as bait. There is devilry in her heart that would blacken even a sorcerer's soul.

Improved Grab: To use this ability, the Ghost of Pictland must hit with her bite attack. She can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Pounce: If the Ghost charges a foe, she can make a full attack, including two rake attacks.

Rake: Attack bonus +10 finesse, damage 1d6+3.

Sneak Attack: The Ghost has a sneak attack of 2d6.

Ghost: At night, the Ghost can become immaterial for brief periods. Doing so is a standard action for the ghost. For the next three rounds, all non-magical attacks on the ghost automatically miss, and she can pass through objects and characters.

Mist Walk: The Ghost of Pictland can move over water or mud as if it was solid ground.

Followers: The Ghost is worshipped as a goddess by many Picts, and there are always 3d6 Picts of varying levels within a few miles of the Ghost, who will come to aid her if they hear her crying out in the night.

Shapeshift: The Ghost can transform herself, by illusion or sorcery, into the shape of a human woman of surpassing beauty. She can only appear human to one person at a time – to all others, she appears as she is, a savage panther. The Ghost cannot speak, but is amazingly eloquent when gesturing and making her desires known. The victim of this ability has no saving throw – the illusion is foolproof, but limited to one person at a time.

Skills: The Ghost has a +8 racial bonus on Jump checks and a +4 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks. She has a +8 racial bonus on Balance and Climb checks. She can always choose to take 10 on a Climb or Jump check, even if rushed or threatened.

ADVENTURES

- ✦ An eccentric Bossonian noble decides to hunt the fabled Ghost, and hires the characters as bodyguards as he rides into Pictland.
- ✦ A sage learns that the Ghost makes her lair in a secret shrine to Jhebbal Sag. Who knows what ancient secrets lie within?

UR, FIRST AMONG APES

Large Animal

Climate/Terrain: Forests of the East

Organisation: King of his tribe (+10-50 grey apes)

Initiative: +2

Senses: Listen +6, Spot +6, Low-light vision, Scent

Dodge Defence: 20

Hit Points: 105 hp (HD 12); **DR** 5

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +10, Will +7

Speed: 30 feet.

Space: 10 ft. **Reach** 10 ft.

Melee: 2 claws +17 (1d8+10, AP 5)

Base Atk: +9; **Grp:** +28

Special Attacks: Improved grab, crush 4d8+10, pummel 1d8+10, throw, beat chest, imitate

Abilities: Str 28, Dex 15, Con 18, Int 6, Wis 15, Cha 13

Skills: Climb +16, Intimidate +9, Listen +9, Spot +9

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Toughness, Improved Disarm, Iron Will

In the forests east of the Vilayet, there is a ruined castle, and there dwells Ur, First Among Apes. Born of a union between a grey ape and a man-ape, he has the

intelligence of one and the brute strength of another. The man-apes hate and fear their bastard kin, and drove Ur from their tribes. Now, he is king of a band of wild grey apes, a lonely monarch with beasts for subjects. Ur is possessed of a fascination and a jealousy of humans and their ways, and sometimes forces his grey ape minions to wear clothes and carry tools. He also kidnaps humans to serve as courtiers, entertainers or consorts, but they never survive his harsh court for long.

BATTLING UR

Ur's ruined castle is full of hundreds of grey apes, all of whom are fanatically loyal to the First of Apes. He has also filled the castle with human corpses, treasures, books of lore than he cannot read, and tools that he cannot use. He knows the castle better than anyone, and will use his amazing agility to scurry up walls and through windows to put himself into the best position to attack.

Improved Grab: To use this ability, Ur must hit with a claw attack. If he hits, he may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Crush: If Ur gets a hold, he can make a single crush attack in place of his two claw attacks. The crush attack automatically inflicts 4d8+10 damage on the target with an AP of 4.

Pummel: If Ur gets a hold, he can make a pummel attack in place of his normal claw attacks. This pummel attack automatically inflicts 1d8+10 damage on the grappled target (AP 5) and lets Ur make another claw attack on a different target within reach.

Throw: If Ur gets a hold, he can make a single throw attack in place of his two claw attacks. He hurls the

held foe up to 20 feet in any direction. The thrown foe takes 2d6 damage (armour is ineffective), and may knock others down if he is thrown into them (treat this as a trip attack with a +9 modifier).

Beat Chest: If Ur beats his chest, he can drive his followers into a frenzy. Beating his chest is a standard action, allowing Ur to make a Charisma check (DC 12). If he succeeds, Ur whips 1d6 grey apes into a frenzy (treat as the fighting-madness feat).

Imitate: Ur can learn amazingly quickly. He can copy the weapon proficiencies, combat feats and mundane abilities of anyone he observes. For example, Ur could learn the Improved Trip feat or the 'to sail a road of blood and slaughter' ability of a pirate. Ur can only copy one ability at a time and can change his copied ability as a free action.

Skills: Ur has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened.

ADVENTURES

- ✦ Shipwrecked characters might take shelter in Ur's castle, only to find themselves the unwilling 'guests' of a bizarre and savage host. Ur's fascination with humanity would force him to welcome the characters and feed them in a weird imitation of polite behaviour, but as soon as the characters or the apes break the illusion of this monkey's feast, Ur will be infuriated.
- ✦ The ancient castle might contain some secret treasure or spellbook sought by the characters.

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THE VORALAN TRIBES

Aldryami Addendum #4: The lands of the Voralans. By Shannon Appelcline.

This article is the fourth in a series expanding upon the description of the Aldryami race found in *Elfs: A Guide to the Aldryami*. It continues the detailing of the Voralans begun in *Signs and Portents* #51 by examining their homelands and providing a black elf enclave for use in your Second Age campaign.

The Black Elf Homelands

The original homeland of the black elfs was the Underworld, that place known to the Aldryami as Trigora. Here they first crept out of the darkness, and here they first grew their lichen and moulds over the rocks and stones, creating the eldest fungi gardens. Most of these ancient gardens were burned when the sun died and was reborn in the Underworld, but in the deepest cracks of the Underworld they still live on.

After the coming of the Sun, the trolls fled the Underworld. Many Uz tribes took Voralans with them up to the surface, for the black elfs grew many medicinal potions for the trolls – as well as certain fortified brews which could add zest to any trollish meal. Thus in the time known as the Darkness black elf gardens were planted in the first troll kingdoms upon the surface.

In the endless time that followed, most Voralans remained with their troll protectors, too docile

to venture out on their own and create their own civilizations. Thus today black elfs are primarily found within the domains of the Uz race. However there were some few among the Voralans who were forced to fend for themselves, either because of the destruction of their troll patrons or because a peculiar black elf was born among their tribe who was not afraid to learn more of the world.

Thus the Three Voralan Tribes were born during the Greater Darkness.

The Voralan Tribes

Though they are traditionally numbered three, it is likely that there were many notable Voralan enclaves that were created during the Greater Darkness, for that time was a great feast for the black elfs. Everything was dying, and so the Voralans were gifted with food unending; everything was dark, so they were able to skulk, to hide, and to enjoy the quiet and soothing balm of Zasara, the non-sun. Thus, those Voralans that overcame their fear and their lassitude prospered on the surface world.

However as the Darkness came to an end, as night turned to twilight then to new day, the Voralan enclaves began to quickly fade away under the light. As a result,

in the Second Age there are only three great Voralan nations which are still remembered: the Three Voralan Tribes.

The first of these lived in the Eastern Rockwoods, a land of light and darkness. This tribe exists only in fragments, but their toadstool forests can still be found from Cliffhome in the west to Shadows Dance in the East. Sporewood, which is described further herein, remains their greatest homeland.

The second Voralan tribe lay in Maniria, on the periphery between the Trachodon Marsh and the elf forest of Tarinwood. Vestigial fungoid forests still remain in this region, some high up in the Marsh, some interwoven with the forest, but they no longer have any unity, and it seems likely that within a few hundred years they will be absorbed and broken apart entirely.

The third great Voralan tribe is the lost tribe. They were brought to Pamaltela with the jungle trolls, and from there came into contact with the red elfs who ravaged Pamaltela for a time. From these Slorifings they learned the secrets of constant movement, and so they became the wandering black elf tribe. They have been spotted across the world in recent generations,

and so are thought to still live. Wherever they settle a toadstool forest grows overnight.

The Promise of Rebirth

Generally, the height of the Voralans is gone with the Darkness. Though there are still these scattered memories of their greatness left in the Second Age, they are doomed to eventually wither away in the sunlight, for the Voralans are too tied to the Underworld and too quiet by nature to prosper in this new age.

However, as the remnants of the Voralan tribes of the Darkness slowly fade away, there is still the promise of rebirth, for it is the central tenet of the fungoid races that life is born wholly from death. Though its shape is unknown, there is little doubt that someday something new and powerful shall arise from the pitiful remnants of Voralan greatness.

Voralan Tribal Society

Traditional Voralan society acts as a single unit. However the great Voralan tribes proved too large for this model to work. Instead of acting as a single unit, larger Voralan societies – of the type which are now disappearing from Glorantha – distribute their work. The result is a multiplicity of group minds, each focused on a singular task, such as gardening, resource collection, or warren maintenance.

The Voralan Tribes also tend to have a much higher percentage of solitaire Voralans than smaller societies. These solitaire Voralans are still a part of the group mind, but they are not a constant, subservient element. Instead they act more like true Aldryami, participating in their communities as an equal rather than a spore.

In normal Voralan society, there are no solitaires, but amongst the larger Voralan Tribes approximately 1 in 1000 individuals is a solitaire. When rolling for Death Sense usage by a solitaire, instead use the higher difficulties found on the Aldryami Life Sense Skill Use chart, found in *Elfs: A Guide to the Aldryami* (page 60).

The Rockwood Voralans

The lands beneath the Eastern Rockwoods are a strange place, divided between light and darkness. Perhaps that is embodied best by Cragspider the Firewitch of Skyfall Lake, for she is a deity of darkness with powers of fire and light.

It is of course the Aldryami who flock to the light in the Rockwoods. Tallseed Forest to the west was once the home of Frotami Golden Tree and still is home to the Golden Grove and the Evergreen Elm. The Redwoods to the east are centered upon the Torch. Finally the Sunflower Altar is at the heart of the Vale of Flowers, toward the middle of the range.

Meanwhile, darkness lies across the realms of the Uz, from Shadows Dance in the east to the troll realms of Cragspider herself. And amidst them all are the remnants of the Voralan Tribe of the Eastern Rockwoods. There are still three major encampments, each larger than any black elf village that Glorantha will know in future ages. Of these the greatest is the Spore Wood, which lies in the heart of Shadows Dance, just south of the Castle of Lead.

Sporewood

Sporewood actually encompasses two fungoid forests, one lying north of the Indigo Mountains (called just Sporewood) and one lying to the northwest (called

Western Sporewood, though considered a part of the larger Sporewood as well). A mountainous spur cuts between them, although the Voralans have tried to keep the forests unified by the maintenance of **Waypoint**.

Theoretically, Sporewood is ruled by the Voralans of **Spore Ring**, a group mind of gardeners whose singular purpose is to oversee the entire region. However in recent generations Western Sporewood has seen a contrary council arise at **Lichen Ring**, generally underlining the problems that the Voralan group mind faces when trying to encompass a tribe of this size.

Though Sporewood considers itself an entirely independent enclave, it nonetheless has close ties to the Uz of Shadows Dance, including the First Tribe at the **Castle of Lead**, the Ongafi Tribe at the **Oltuni Caverns**, and the Indigo Tribe of the Indigo Mountains themselves. The Voralans do not swear any allegiance to the Uz but they are very likely to aid them when requested and they are very unlikely to work against the interests of Kygor Litor and her children.

1. Castle of Lead. The capitol of the Uz lands of Shadows Dance and the home of Kygor Litor lies just north of Sporewood. Twice a year during Dark Season a group of fifty Voralans makes a pilgrimage here to gift the Uz with potions and fermented drinks.

See *Trolls: A Guide to the Uz* (pages 36-38) for more information on the Uz populations of Dagori Inkarth as well as information on the Castle of Lead itself.

2. Oltuni Caverns. This troll cavern is the other Uz enclave that lies near Sporewood. It resides in the foothills of the northern spur of the mountains.

The Voralans maintain excellent trade relations with the Oltuni trolls, who smuggle their fermented drinks all across Genertela – in violation of the trade restrictions imposed by the Castle of Lead, which tries to maintain a strong hold on the special drinks themselves.

3. Spore Expanses. The northern edges of Sporewood are living things which are constantly expanding and contracting; they also mark an ancient conflict between the Trolls and the Black Elfs.

Multitudes of red dust mushrooms, corroding rusts, and faux-alimental toadstools lie just within Sporewood. These fungi constantly produce high numbers of spores. Because of ancient compacts made with zephyrs, breezes blow these spores northward, attempting to expand Sporewood's ancient demesne.

Just beyond Sporewood are numerous long houses filled with trollkin, the Permanent Trollkin Mushroom Deployment. Their daily goal is to eat as much spore and as many invading fungoids as they can. Unfortunately, the spore content is sometimes too much for the trollkins. Every day scores along the borders of the Sporewood are poisoned. Infrequently an entire battalion is struck down simultaneously due to a powerful spore blow. Sometimes dead battalions go undiscovered for days, and their fruiting bodies regain a zombie-like mobility.

4. Foreign Hold. This is a clearing located a few miles into the Sporewood. A winding path – covered in soft, spongy lichen and edged in brightly colored toadstools – runs from the Spore Expanses to the Hold. The clearing is intended to be a dwelling place for foreigners who come to the wood to treat with the Voralans – usually traders interested in potions and other Voralan creations.

Trollkin Fruiting Bodies

Though zombie-like, the Trollkin Fruiting Bodies are actually animated by fungus. They are somewhat aggressive, and must generally be destroyed lest they contaminate even greater areas with their spore.

Whenever a Trollkin Fruiting Body takes damage it emits a cloud of spores. The main purpose of these spores is to propagate fungus, but they are also somewhat poisonous to non-plant creatures. Anyone in combat with the Trollkin Fruiting Body should immediately roll against the poison each time the Fruiting Body is hurt.

Fruiting Body Spores

Type: Inhaled

Delay: Immediate

Potency: 25

Full Effect: 1 hit point damage to the head

Duration: 1D10 minutes

Like true zombies, Trollkin Fruiting Bodies are immune to fatigue, disease, and poisons. They are also immune to attempts to control their mind or influence their personality, since they have been entirely hollowed out by the fungus, leaving nothing.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	2D6+6	(13)
CON	3D6+6	(16)
DEX	2D6	(7)
SIZ	1D6+6	(9)
INT	0	(0)
POW	1D3	(2)
CHA	1	(1)

Trollkin Fruiting Body Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	1/5
4-6	Left Leg	1/5
7-9	Abdomen	1/6
10-12	Chest	1/7
13-15	Right Arm	1/4
16-18	Left Arm	1/4
19-20	Head	1/5

Weapons

Weapon	Skill	Damage / AP
Club	40%	1D6 / 2

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 2

Strike Rank: +7

Movement: 3m

Traits: Dark Sight, Earth Sense, Night Sight

Skills: Athletics 30%, Resilience 35%

Typical Armour: Rotting Troll Skin (AP 1, no Skill Penalty)

The Hold has been created to the Voralans' image of foreign comfort. As such, there are two long houses in the clearing, each grown from fungoid material. They are mockeries of normal dwellings, filled with beds, tables, and all other manner of furniture, all created from fungus. The houses protect from the elements, but all the surfaces are moist and spongy making most visitors feel very uncomfortable.

The Voralans treat more fairly with those who, despite the discomfort, accept their hospitality fully, while they cheat and swindle those who refuse the questionable luxury of these fungus dwellings.

5. Spore Ring. Spore Ring is the traditional center of the Sporewood. According to the Voralan's memories, this is where the first gardeners of the forest planted their first lichen when they left the Castle of Lead to pursue their own destiny in the Darkness. Today the 'ring' is a mixed landscape of lichens, mushrooms, slimes, rust, and all other manners of fungoid matter. They grow over, across, and onto each other in a semi-liquid, putrefying mass. The gardeners find it very beautiful.

The gardeners of Spore Ring, also called the Council, are the leaders of the Wood. They number approximately fifty at all times, and are all siblings, which is to say exact Voralan duplicates. Individuals are known by the names of the fungus that they specialize in, with generalists such as 'All Mushrooms' older and wiser than specialists such as 'Yellow Rust of the Plains in Winter'.

The purpose of the Council is to maintain the woods. They usually make their decisions in peace and solitude, though they have occasionally welcomed foreigners who hold knowledge of interest to the Woods overall. Such



foreigners are usually discomfited by the loathsome fungus that grows in the Ring, but nonetheless tend to leave in high spirits thanks to the extremely rare and valuable fungus they are gifted with.

6. The Tower. An enormous mushroom, over a hundred feet tall, towers over the forest here, shrouding a square mile in deep shadows. The Voralans claim it is sentient (though in truth it only has limited intelligence) and that it once moved (which is true, but it has not done since Time began). It is a great and sacred growth.

True Aldryami have heard rumors of The Tower, and would dearly love to destroy it, as they consider it a mockery of their own Great Trees.

7. Deep Fungus. This is the most sacred place in all of the Sporewood. Giant toadstools and mushrooms grow over twenty foot tall, entirely shadowing the ground for several square miles. In this moist and fertile soil the Voralans grow their most precious fungus, including scores of species that were preserved from the Underworld, and can only grow in a place such as this, enclosed by fungus, dirt, slime, stone, and darkness.

The Fighting Fungoids, a rare group of Voralan warriors, guard access into Deep Fungus from the north, while a fungus-worshipping tribe of Indigo Trolls guards it from the south.

Among the most precious of the fungoids grown at Deep Fungus are the Immortal Toadstools, an Underworld mushroom that is said to bestow immortality if prepared correctly. It is even coveted by the gods.

8. Waypoint. Located in the middle of the northern spur of the Indigo Mountains is a mushroom grove that covers several square miles. It is grown and preserved

by the Voralans to allow communication between the two halves of the Sporewood using Death Sense. The fungus here is some of the beautiful of all the Wood, including brightly colored and variegated mushrooms and lichens alike.

Waypoint is regularly guarded by fungoid monsters that are tended by the scant Voralans able to live up here in the mountains, away from the Wood proper. It is regularly threatened by Indigo Trolls, who consider it an invasion of their lands, but thus far the Voralans have kept them away with threats, promises, trades, and an occasional show of force.

9. Lichen Ring. The Lichen Ring lies at the center of the Western Sporewood. Although it sits at the center of an enormous mushroom forest, the Lichen Ring itself is composed of several square miles of undulating lichen. The types of lichen vary widely, and thus the Ring is mottled green, red, brown, and many other colors. Some of the Lichen has grown to enormous size, and can be up to three or four feet deep.

Like the Spore Ring, the Lichen Ring is ruled over by a group of fifty or so gardeners, though these gardeners are specialists in lichens and other highly parasitic fungus which grows only in symbiosis with other life forms. These gardeners are much more aggressive and antagonistic than almost any other Voralans, and as a result all of the Western Sporewood is much more dangerous to non-fungoid beings. Some of its fungus has been known to actively attack visitors, making parts of the west even more dangerous than the Spore Expanses.

The gardeners of the Lichen Ring wish for Western Sporewood to break away from the rest of the forest. They believe that the entire Wood is much too large for

the denizens to act as true Voralans, and further that the eastern Wood does not understand the needs and desires of those in the west.

10. Green Covering. This expansive growth of Green Growing Lichen rises up out of Western Sporewood into the Indigo Mountains. Like most of the fungus in Western Sporewood, it is very aggressive and has grown quickly over the last several decades. The Green Covering is a new attempt by the gardeners of the Lichen Ring to take over the rocky, mountainous regions, something that they have never been able to successfully do in the past. The Indigo trolls have taken little notice of the incursion, but when they do it will lead to a new conflict.

11. The Dead Rooms. Toward the south of Western Sporewood is a desolate land, several square miles in area. All of the fungus here is crumbled and dead. Giant mushrooms and toadstools lie rotting, while lichen and mosses grow dry and brittle. A similar malady is affecting other forests to the south along the Indigo Mountains, and this has caused a rare partnership between the Voralans and the 'true' Aldryami.

For this reason, an enclave of a half-dozen Vronkali gardeners—all members of the Flower Woods to the west—have temporarily settled just west of the mushroom forest. Their leader is Teritha Pinecone. They regularly confer with a group of Voralan gardeners led by Black Moss Seventy-Two. Both groups are very concerned with the spread of this strange blight which is neither disease nor magic.



THE ICHTHUS OF LIFE

Part two of a scenario for *Hawkmoon the Roleplaying Game*, by Richard Ford.

CHAPTER III

A Thief in the Night

In this section the Ichthus will be stolen and the party will possibly encounter one of the most dangerous NPCs they have ever had the misfortune to come across.

Background & NPC Motives

Nezzether has despatched his daughter, Isabella of Qatar, to retrieve the Ichthus since his elite assassins have failed him. She will stop at nothing to serve her father and complete her mission.

What Happens

The PCs and the nobles will retire to their rooms. During the night the party will be woken by the sound of ringing alarm bells and cries of 'The Ichthus, the Ichthus has been stolen!'

If they rise to investigate they will see that the all hell has broken loose in the monastery, Guardians and nobles alike run here and there desperate to discover what has happened or to intercept the intruder. Of course, as the party run through the dark corridors of Castle Brass, it is they who will discover the thief.

As they run toward the sound of the alarm they will discover Count Guntha sitting on the ground nursing various wounds, his sword lying broken

and useless by his side. If the party overlook his now even more hideous appearance and try to speak to him he will tell them that he tried to stop the burglar but he was not strong enough. He will point in the direction the burglar fled, imploring the party to go in pursuit. (In reality, Guntha himself tried to steal the Ichthus and deliver it to the Black Knights. He would have succeeded if it were not for Isabella who, seeing him steal the ancient artefact, waited until he was almost out of Castle Brass and then accosted him).

If the party race off in pursuit of Isabella they will catch up to her near the roof of the castle. She will do her best to escape and the party will find her a formidable foe. When Isabella or one of the PCs is near death she will make her escape using a primitive gas grenade to shield her escape route.

Should any of the party wish to follow her it would be useful to use the climbing gear Isabella has already rigged. If however, they ignore this and simply leap off the edge of the castle (as it appears Isabella has done) they will be hard pressed to survive the fall. The party can always race back through the castle and try to pick up her trail outside but once they do she will be long gone. Following the trail or pursuing her from the roof will lead to the same encounter.

As the party race after Isabella they will be intercepted by Granbretanian horsemen. These

horsemen will demand that the party halt in the name of Lord Alcardy and will not allow them to pass. Fighting a group of heavily armed Granbretanians would be foolish but should the party vanquish or avoid them they can pick up Isabella's trail further on. The trail will lead to Lord Alcardy's stronghold. If the party fails to find Isabella's trail they will have to return to Count Brass and report what they have discovered.

Alternatives

Should the party not wish to engage Isabella, or indeed leave their room at the sound of the alarm bells, have Bowgentle inform them of the night's events. Count Brass will pursue Isabella and run into the Order of the Fox. Not wishing for an unsightly incident he will return to the monastery.

If the party manage to stop Isabella on the roof you will have to think of some other way for Nezzether to gain ownership of the Ichthus. He will accomplish this by either sending the Guardians of the Black Light or entering Castle Brass himself. Either way, if his daughter is alive and imprisoned by Count Brass he will make no attempt to rescue her.

NPCs

Isabella of Qatar

The daughter of Nezzether and an Italian noblewoman, Isabella has been brought up to worship her father and obey his every whim. She has been trained in the same manner as the Guardians of the Black Light but does not follow their fanatical worship of Abbassyn. Nezzether wanted to raise her as a powerful tool but resisted the temptation of giving her soul to his foul master. Despite the necromancer's evil, he still loves his daughter in his own way.

Persuaded by Nezzether's lies, Isabella believes Count Brass and the nobles are planning to use the Ichthus for evil. After witnessing the devastation and suffering caused by the Dark Empire it has not taken much to persuade her that all westerners are evil and power hungry. She believes her father wants to turn the Ichthus over to Queen Frawbra and knows nothing of his real motives.

Characteristics: STR 12, CON 16, DEX 18, SIZ 10, INT 14, POW 14, CHA 12

Gas Grenade

Weapon	Skill	Damage	Range	Load	STR/DEX	ENC	AP/HP	Cost
Gas Grenade	Throwing	Special	10m	-	-/9	1	0/1	900SP

When thrown the gas grenade will explode on contact, unleashing a noxious and blinding cloud. It has a burst radius of 5m and anyone caught in it must make an immediate Resilience skill test or be blinded for 2 minutes and take 1D6 CON damage due to the poisonous fumes.

Skills: Acrobatics 70%, Athletics 70%, Dodge 90%, Evaluate 40%, Sleight 50%, Stealth 75%, Tracking 50%

Armour & Hit Points

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	1/6
4-6	Left Leg	1/6
7-9	Abdomen	1/7
10-12	Chest	1/8
13-15	Right Arm	1/5
16-18	Left Arm	1/5
19-20	Head	0/6

Leather Shirt, Leather Trews: -6% Skill Penalty

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage / AP
Scimitar	90%	1D6+1 / 4
Throwing (Dagger)	85%	1D6 / 4

Special Rules

Combat Actions:	3
Strike Rank:	+16
Damage Modifier:	+0
Movement:	4m

A Grave Request

This section sees the aftermath of the Ichthus' theft and the party offered a difficult proposition.

Background & NPC Motives.

Castle Brass is in turmoil and the rest of the nobles fight and argue over what must be done now the Ichthus has been stolen. After discovering who is behind the theft, Count Brass formulates a plan.

What Happens

When the party return to Castle Brass after pursuing Isabella (if they gave chase that is) they will find all hell has broken loose. Dieter seems ready to kill someone, proclaiming loudly that if the Ichthus had been destroyed when he had demanded it, none of this would have happened. The Mermians, the Knights of Aragon and Count Guntha have left, which may seem strange to the party since Count Guntha's wounds were quite severe*. Duke Manuel and Count Brass are doing their level best to keep cool heads and explore their options.

If the party interrupt the commotion to report what information they have then Count Brass will take them aside so as not to excite or inflame the other orders. If they volunteer no information then he will request that they report what they know.

When the party have told of the Granbretanian patrol or even of the Alcardy's stronghold (if they discovered that much) Count Brass will suddenly don a grave expression:

It seems that our worst fears have been realised. Lord Alcardy has finally succumbed to the will of the Black

Knights. This was what I most feared and why I needed the other nobles to make a quick decision on the Ichthus' fate.

Lord Alcardy is a Granbretanian noble, at best cruel and brutal, at worst ambitious and cunning. I have suspected for a while that he has been colluding with an order known only as the Black Knights, a secret and diabolical order, devoted to the Demon Lords that control its many factions, and unknown to the Grand Constables of the Dark Empire. Alcardy is too weak and cowardly to gain entry through the normal means of selection, he must have stolen the Ichthus as a way of worming his way into the order. In the hands of the Black Knights the Ichthus would be a very powerful artefact indeed, a force for evil previously unknown, worse even than the Dark Empire.

He must be stopped at all costs, if he delivers the Ichthus to the Black Knights we can only guess at what foul demonic creatures will be raised and allowed to stalk the land. There is however a problem we face. None of us may confront Alcardy. Without proof we cannot challenge him, he would simply call upon all the powers of Granbretan.

I offer you a mission. It will be perilous and I know you have done more than enough already but I beseech you to help us one last time.

We know the location of Alcardy's fortress and hopefully he will not have taken the Ichthus straight to the Black Knights. Before he has a chance to deliver his prize we need you to break into his stronghold by whatever means and retrieve the Ichthus.

With this Count Brass will pause to allow the party to consider their answer. If they accept he

will provide the party with any equipment they need for the mission, weapons, ropes, grappling hooks, dark clothing etc.

If the party do not know the way to Alcardy's fortress Count Brass will order a group of his Guardians to guide them.

*Guntha will have left Castle Brass eager to return news of the theft to his Black Knight allies. Despite his wounds he is eager to serve. The Black Knights will order Guntha to now retrieve the Ichthus from Alcardy, thinking that he has betrayed them and now wished to use the Ichthus for his own ends. They do not know of Alcardy's plans to lend the Ichthus to Nezzether for a short time and deliver it to them when the necromancer has finished with it.

Alternatives

There is always the chance that the party will refuse Count Brass' request to retrieve the Ichthus. In this case offer them a cash reward or whatever else they may desire. Count Brass has almost limitless access to any resource, there should be nothing the party can think of that he cannot procure. If they are still not swayed it will be a very short adventure indeed.

If Isabella has been captured neither Count Brass nor the party will be able to glean any information from her. She remains silent, her eyes glazed and unblinking. The first time she is left alone she will inexplicably escape.

Rather than have the other nobles side-lined as the party embark on their mission you may choose to have them actively seeking the Ichthus. Through

some method they may even learn of the Ichthus' location and attempt to breach the defences of Alcardy's fortress at the same time as the party.

Enemy at the Gates

The party will now have to come up with some method of gaining entry to Alcardy's heavily guarded keep.

Background and NPC Motives

The stronghold is an old fort that Alcardy has had converted to satisfy his requirements. It is several miles north of Castle Brass, just outside the Kamarg. Players should be rewarded for any particularly ingenious methods of entry that they come up with.

What Happens

The party will arrive at the fortress just as night is falling. They will know the way from pursuing Isabella in the previous chapter or through the Guardians who have guided them to it.

As they reach the edge of a nearby copse of trees, Alcardy's base will come into view:

The moon seems unnaturally bright for this time of year and lights up the monolithic construction like a coastal beacon. As you draw closer you can see its black stone walls reach up for twenty feet all around, with no obvious means of entry other than a huge drawbridge.

Fires burn within the construction giving it an eerie glow. From their light you can just make out the guards as they stalk the parapets, occasionally stopping to survey the surrounding grounds.

As the moonlight shines down you notice it reflecting on something at the base of the fortress walls. As you strain your eyes in the darkness you see it is a moat encircling the entire building. A pungent aroma seems to rise from the moat's murky depths and you hope you will be able to avoid taking a plunge in your attempt to gain entry to the fortress.

Alcardy must value his security very highly; gaining entry will not be easy.

There are various options open to the party despite the seeming impregnability of the fortress. They would all require the party to spend some time staking out the building and working out the patrol patterns of the guards. If the party spend time doing this they should be rewarded with an easy entrance.

The first and most obvious method of entry would be to use grappling hooks to scale the walls. To do this successfully the party would have to time their approach and scaling of the walls so as to avoid alerting the guards. Once on top of the battlements it should not be that difficult to silently subdue the guards in the darkness.

Another, far more risky, method of entry would be to walk up to the drawbridge, bold as brass, and demand to be let in. This will of course get the party inside but what they do once they are in there is up to them. Donning a disguise of some sort and trying to dupe the guards is one method. The party may wish to use this to cause a distraction and allow their comrades to sneak in when they have made a diversion.

The most unpleasant option can be found, with some investigation, to the rear of the fortress. The party will notice that the moat is part of a stream that runs from southeast to northwest and encircles the huge construction. At the rear of the building there is a stinking hole in the wall used for the expulsion of sewage and other perishable waste. This hole is big enough for a small member of the party to fit through. The tunnel is black and putrid but it will bring the player out in the Kitchen in section xx, see Map XX.

If the party simply cannot come up with a good idea a cart making a very late delivery of firewood will arrive. The party may hijack or hide in the cart to gain entry that way. The Order of the Fox who guard the stronghold are familiar with Boris the delivery man, so if the PCs kidnap Boris they will need an excuse as to why he hasn't turned up. The cart will not be searched if party members hide in the back (there is room for three maximum), as Alcardy's men know Boris quite well. If the party question Boris they will find him helpful but he will not collaborate in any subterfuge (he is far too old to get involved in any of that adventuring rubbish).

Alternatives

If, in the previous section, you have chosen to have one of the nobles pursue the Ichthus they might turn up as the PCs are attempting to gain entry. This may have one of two results. Either the party will be aided by the distraction caused by the nobles trying to break into an impregnable fortress or they will be hindered by the fact that all of Alcardy's guards are now alerted that someone is trying to break in. You can make your decision based on how well the party are doing at the time.

Should the party tarry long enough for morning to break they will find they have missed their opportunity altogether. Alcardy, Nezzether, the Guardians of the Black Light and a contingent of Granbretanian soldiers will stream past them on their way to Chapter III.

NPCs

Boris

Boris is a kindly old man who minds his own business and keeps his nose clean. He has no love for the Normans but has long since resigned himself to their rule. His long life of drudgery has made him apathetic towards most things and he now only wishes to live out his remaining years in peace.

For statistics for Boris see the Peasant on page 139 of *Hawkmoon the Roleplaying Game*.

Guards

See the stats for the Order of the Fox on page 53 of last month's Signs and Portents.

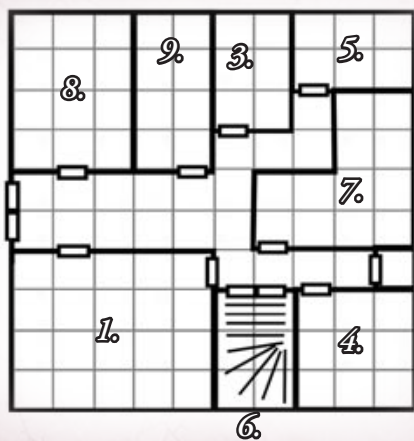
The Break In

Once the party have breached the outer wall of the fortress they will have to make their way into Alcardy's tower. They will ultimately need to find the inner sanctum that is opened via two keys found in Alcardy's chamber and on the Captain's belt.

Background & NPC Motives

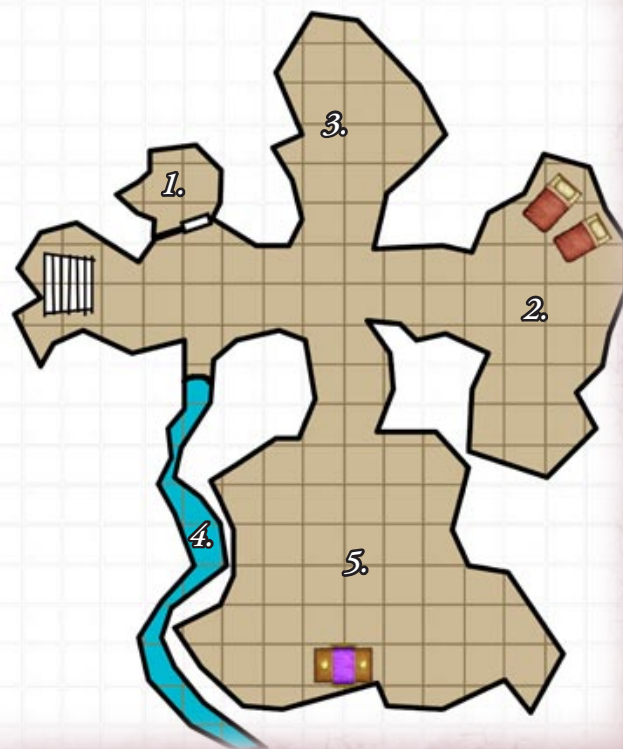
The party must make their way through Alcardy's fortress whilst avoiding the Granbretanian patrols.

1 square = 1.5 metres



Alcardy's Keep

The Catacombs



The Order of the Fox within the confines of the fortress will be nowhere near as vigilante as those guarding the outer walls (as they feel it would be madness for anyone to break in).

What Happens

Once they have helped the party breach the outer defences, the Guardians of the Kamarg (if they accompanied the PCs) will go no further. They will silently leave the fortress and return to Castle Brass.

When inside, the party will be able to explore freely (as long as they avoid the guards) See Map XX. The Sections are as follows:

1. The Guardroom

Alcardy's men sleep here. Within the large stale smelling room are twenty bunks and a door leading to a foul smelling latrine. Alongside the bunks are small chests, some locked others unlocked, containing the Granbretanians' personal effects. Fifteen of the bunks are currently occupied by sleeping Granbretanian soldiers, so if the party are not *extremely* careful in this area they may find their search for the Ichthus comes to a rather premature end.

2. The Stable (Outside)

The stable contains twenty-five dosing horses and the usual tools required to care for them. Pitchforks, hay, tools for shoeing and caring for saddles and bridles, grooming equipment, etc all lay around in a seemingly untidy manner. It appears that Alcardy does not see the upkeep of his horses as a major priority.

3. The Kitchen

The party may either enter this chamber through the waste hole in the north wall or the unlocked door to the east. This room is a standard kitchen, kitted out with all the usual amenities to cater for twenty Granbretanian soldiers. Utensils of all kinds hang from racks above a dead fire to one corner. The food supply is currently quite low due to Alcardy's 'guests' but if the party feel the need to stock up on rations they may do so.

4. Rec Room

This chamber is used by the Order of the Fox for recreation. Despite his ruthlessness it seems Alcardy does realise his men need to entertain themselves from time to time. The room contains discarded tankards of ale, a chessboard with three pawns and a knight missing (the whites are in checkmate), a dartboard and five darts and one sleeping Granbretanian soldier. The soldier is inebriated and the party will find it very difficult to wake him (if they wish to try).

5. Cooks and Stable Hands Quarters

Soundly sleeping in plain bunks are Alcardy's two cooks and two stable hands. The cooks are rather fat greasy men whilst the stable hands are wiry youths. There is nothing else of interest in here.

6. Stairs to the Inner Sanctum

Beyond the locked double doors are the stairs running down to Alcardy's Inner Sanctum. There are two keyholes, one in each of the doors and the party will need to insert and turn the correct keys simultaneously to open them. Above each keyhole is a small sigil, one of a pentagram, the other of a skull. Alcardy is currently in the Inner Sanctum

but he has two spare keys that can currently be found in his chamber and on the belt of Captain Hedrick.

7. Alcardy's Chamber

This is a large, immaculately kept chamber with a plush bed in one corner and a large desk in another. The walls are adorned with shelves containing books of all kinds, though mostly history and poetry. The desk is adorned with papers and writings which, on first examination, will seem like innocent essays on various subjects. On closer examination the party will notice that the writings are those of a paranoid madman. The parchments constantly repeat sentences and ramble aimlessly about prophecies and signs from the heavens. The drawers to Alcardy's huge desk contain books and manuscripts detailing black witchcraft, necromancy and devil worship.

On a hook by the side of the plush bed is one of the spare keys to the Inner Sanctum. The head of this key is fashioned in the likeness of a small, five-pointed pentagram.

8. Captain Hendrick's Chamber

In contrast to the flamboyance of Alcardy's chamber, Captain Hendrick's quarters are sparse and minimalist. Hendrick himself is sleeping soundly on his wooden bed, his sword hanging in its sheath at his bedside. Beneath the sheets on his belt is the small key with a skull shaped head that, along with the key from Alcardy's room, will open the doors to the Inner Sanctum. The party will have to be very careful when approaching Hendrick as he is a dangerous opponent with a loud bellowing voice.

9. Armoury

This chamber contains Alcardy's private collection of arms and armour along with spare equipment for his men. The party can stock up on weapons and ammunition here but there is a special item they may find of interest:

Black Knight Blade: This magnificent sword is covered in a number of mysterious runes. The weapon is light and easy to wield (bestowing the wielder with +10 1H Sword skill). In fact the sword is a weapon of the Black Knights, which Alcardy has procured during his long investigation into the order. If wielded by anyone else other than a Black Knight there are side effects if they deal a fatal blow. When a Black Knight Blade is used by a member of that order it can pass the life force of its victim onto the wielder. This process eventually leads to sword and wielder becoming a symbiotic entity. If used by someone not in the order, the sword has nowhere to pass this life force onto and will grow confused, eventually feeding on its wielder as well as its victim. For every life the sword takes subtract 1 hit point from one random location permanently from the user. These will return at the rate of 1 hit point per week once the sword is discarded.

Alternatives

If the party are spotted the alarm will be raised and they will be left with two options. The first is to try and fight their way out which won't be easy with twenty Granbretanians after them, angry at being woken in the middle of the night. The second option is surrender, (although not an attractive prospect it will not result in complete disaster) in which case the party will be escorted to the dungeons in the *Inner Sanctum*.

NPCs

Captain Hendrick

This scar-faced rhino of a man commands his men with an iron hand. Hendrick is fanatically loyal to Alcardy and ensures that his men share, at least on the surface, the respect and loyalty that he does.

For Hendrick's statistics use the Dark Empire Foot Soldier, on page 138 of *Hawkmoon the Roleplaying Game*, but replace his weapons with the Black Knight Blade (above).

Inner Sanctum

The party will proceed into the subterranean tunnels beneath Alcardy's keep and learn more of the plot surrounding the Ichthus' theft.

Background & NPC Motives

Alcardy and Nezzether are holding a meeting in the large underground chapel Alcardy has erected. Meanwhile Isabella and the Guardians of the Black Light meditate around the Ichthus. At this point it should be difficult (if not impossible) for the party to retrieve the Ichthus and escape.

What Happens

As in the previous section the party are free to explore Alcardy's Inner Sanctum as they wish, only this time if the alarm is raised they will have the added problem of the Guardians of the Black Light as well as Alcardy's contingent of Granbretanian soldiers to contend with.

Tunnel Entrance

The stairs from the keep above lead down to a damp and cold tunnel. Air rushes up from the

dim, carved out hole, which is lit by the occasional torch fastened to the wall. As the party turn the corner south they will see a Granbretanian soldier, dozing beneath a dull, flickering torch.

1. The Dungeon

The dungeon is currently locked behind a heavy wooden door bound with steel. No matter how much the party try they will not be able to open it. By peering through the door's metal grille they will see that the dungeon is unoccupied. The dungeon itself is a standard single room affair with manacles attached to both the walls and a central pillar.

2. Nezzether & Isabella's Chamber

This bare hole in the ground is lit by a number of candles placed in tiny alcoves in the wall. There are two bedrolls at either end of the room, one slightly larger than the other. On the floor by the smaller bedroll is a locked casket containing several manuscripts in a language the party will not understand. Any characters that are associated with the use of magic will recognise them as sorcerous script but will still be unable to decipher them.

Next to the larger bedroll is a second casket somewhat bigger than the first. This casket is also locked and rigged with a spring trap. Anyone who opens the casket will have to make a Sleight skill test to avoid the poisoned arrow or suffer 1 hit point (random location). They will also be infected with the following poison:

Name: Red Tar

Type: Weapon

Delay: 10 Rounds

Potency: 61

Effect: 2 hit points, plus paralysis

Duration: 1 hour

Within the casket there are several throwing knives, a vial of poison, a length of twine, a short sword, two smoke bombs (see Isabella's description on page xx) and a long black sash.

3. Guardians of the Black Light's Quarters

As the party approach this section they will hear a low chanting echoing down the tunnel. As they move closer they will see a large tunnel opening before them containing the remaining Guardians of the Black Light. With them is the thief who earlier stole the Ichthus. They all sit in a wide circle, legs crossed and eyes closed, chanting around a small object in the centre of the room. On closer inspection the party will see that this is the Ichthus. Although the Guardians have most likely had their number depleted they may still outnumber the party and with Isabella at their side it should be obvious that interrupting their group chant would be a foolish thing to do. If the party decide to stay and see what happens they will find the Guardians' tolerance for chanting lasts for hours.

4. Underground Stream

This narrow tunnel slowly slopes downwards to the south until it is suddenly joined by a fast flowing underground stream. The stream is knee high for some time before it widens and becomes too deep to walk in. If the party find themselves forced to follow it they will be swept along in a black underground passage and eventually spat out some distance to the south of Alcardy's keep.

The stream runs past Alcardy's Chapel and the party will be able to hear Nezzether and Alcardy's conversation if they follow it.

5. Alcardy's Chapel

This huge cave is lit by a number of lanterns and braziers. Alcardy's banners hang beside other symbols the party do not recognise along the walls. As they approach they will first see only Alcardy, kneeling before an altar adorned with candles. Then they will hear a chilling voice from the darkness that makes them, and Alcardy, start.

'Your preparations are completed I hope?' says a chilling voice.

'Yes Nezzether, we have discovered the whereabouts of Septimus' Cross. My men are ready to travel at your command,' Alcardy replies.

'Good. There is one final task. You will incarcerate my daughter in your dungeon.'

At this Alcardy looks up, obviously bewildered by the old man's request. 'She knows nothing of my plans Lord Alcardy. If she thought we were to use the Ichthus for anything other than altruistic reasons she would not have requisitioned it for us. Now go, and I suggest you use your best men. She may look as sweet as your French wine but she is poison to those foolish enough to taste her.'

'Are you sure this is completely necessary? She is your own daughter.' Alcardy says, obviously taken aback by Nezzether's request.

'Isabella knows nothing of my... our plans. She believes the Ichthus an evil charm used to subdue her people. She thinks we are to destroy it. When she finds out our real plans she will do everything in her power to stop us. Isabella is not simply a mindless weapon like the rest of my Guardians, no simple automaton.'

She is my daughter, and for her own safety as well as our own, you will do as I ask.'

At this Alcardy will turn to leave while Nezzether remains in the chapel. If the party are in the passage to the north of the chapel the Granbretanian will be heading their way.

Alternatives

If the party are spotted in this section they will have the Guardians of the Black Light to contend with as well as the Granbretanians. The Guardians will be in no mood to capture them as they see the party responsible for their brother's deaths. Only when the Order of the Fox arrive from the keep above will they attempt to capture the party and incarcerate them in the dungeon.

Attacking Alcardy and Nezzether in the dungeon at this point, may have a positive affect although it will alert the Guardians. Nezzether will mysteriously disappear if the party attack although Alcardy will remain and fight for his life, screaming for help all the while. If Alcardy is killed at this juncture the Granbretanians will not accompany Nezzether at the end of Chapter II.

NPCs

Lord Alcardy

Having gained his land and title on the backs of less devious nobles, Lord Alcardy is cunning and cruel even for a Granbretanian. He is a thin wiry man with sallow sunken eyes and drawn skin. Despite his lack of physical stature, Alcardy wears his oversized armour with an arrogant pride and when cornered will fight like a wounded animal.

For years Alcardy has lived in the shadow of Count Renfield of Ael, Grand Constable of the Order of the Fox. He has for years searched for a way to usurp power from beneath his devious leader. Eventually, his chance at real power was stumbled upon by chance when he blundered into an encampment of Black Knights. The patrol of Granbretanian soldiers who accompanied Alcardy were slaughtered without mercy but the Black Knights saw some potential for turning Alcardy and gaining what power he had within the court of King-Emperor Huon for themselves. They spared the snivelling noble, making him promise to return this 'favour' by passing on whatever information they requested. At first Alcardy begrudgingly carried out their orders but was eventually captivated by their mystery and sorcerous strength. He realised that by joining the Order of the Black Knights he could harness their power and resource to topple his neighbouring rivals and possibly usurp even Huon's power for himself. Alcardy attempted to ingratiate himself on his new found 'allies' but to no avail. The Black Knights were impressed neither by his physical prowess nor lack of moral turpitude. However, for the past few months they have dangled the carrot of membership in front of Alcardy in case they might require his services. When they heard of the Ichthus' arrival in Europe, Alcardy was just the powerful tool they needed to acquire it. Desperate to join their order, Alcardy threw himself into the search but was initially unable to find it. That is, until a strange middle-eastern man approached him with a tantalising proposal...

Characteristics: STR 16, CON 12, DEX 14, SIZ 14, INT 15, POW 14, CHA 15

Skills: Artillery 60%, Athletics 50%, Courtesy 60%, Dodge 60%, Evaluate 70%, First Aid 50%, Influence, 90%, Language (Fox) 95%, Lore (Military Tactics) 60%, Lore (world) 70%, Perception 70%, Persistence 100%, Pilot Ornithopter 60%, Resilience 120%, Riding 90%, Streetwise 70%

Armour & Hit Points

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	8/6
4-6	Left Leg	8/6
7-9	Abdomen	8/7
10-12	Chest	8/8
13-15	Right Arm	8/5
16-18	Left Arm	8/5
19-20	Head	8/6

Surpassing Granbretanian Armour (Bulwark x2, Bastion, Light): -42%

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage / AP
Warsword (Greater, Baleful)	80%	1D10+1D2 / 4

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	3
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+14
<i>Damage Modifier:</i>	+1D2
<i>Movement:</i>	4m

Legendary Abilities: Madness of Granbretan

Nezzether the Necromancer

Little is known of his childhood or upbringing and not even Nezzether himself can remember his true age or where he was born. Years of study and

research have turned the ancient Necromancer into a withered and insignificant looking figure but his powers of witchcraft and conjuration are unmatched in Europe and Persia.

During his endless readings, Nezzether uncovered the legend of Abbassyn and was captivated by the myriad tales of the Demon's hunger for destruction. After becoming a powerful sorcerer himself, Nezzether vainly attempted to raise Abbassyn from his planar graveyard. Despite his failure he did manage to contact the demon and soon became encapsulated by promises of unfettered power if he managed to finally set him free. From that day Nezzether has single-mindedly pursued the artefacts that would unbind his malevolent sponsor from beyond and return him to full strength. The old necromancer knew he would need powerful allies to fulfil his task and went about re-establishing the religion that served Abbassyn in centuries past. Intense research into the religion gave Nezzether the skills to reform the Guardians of the Black Light and set about his task in earnest.

Not even Nezzether could have envisioned the hindrance that would soon arise. Seduced by a European noblewoman, hungry for the Necromancer's secrets, he begat a child, his first and only. Not even his fanatical lust for power and worship of Abbassyn could stop the tender feelings Nezzether had for his child. The mother however was surplus to his requirements and when he saw through her fallacious affections, her throat was slit. Isabella was brought up to be as pure as Nezzether could manage. Never before had he owned such an unsullied possession and he was loathe to give her up to Abbassyn as he had done with so many

other souls. Despite his wishes, the girl grew to be wilful and strong and it was inevitable that she would discover the necromancer's affiliation with the Guardians. To disguise their true nature Nezzether made the Guardians swear an oath never to speak in front of his daughter but allowed her to be brought up in their company. Over the years Isabella's skills as a cold killer grew, with Nezzether unable to stop her, but swearing that she would never be lured by Abbassyn's corrupting charms.

Characteristics: STR 8, CON 8, DEX 16, SIZ 10, INT 18, POW 16, CHA 10

Skills: Dodge 40%, Engineering 80%, Evaluate 70%, First Aid 60%, Influence 90%, Healing 30%, Lore (Alchemy) 55%, Lore (Animal) 60%, Lore (Plant) 50%, Lore (Theology) 80%, Lore (World) 100%, Mechanisms 80%, Perception 85%, Sleight 70%

Sorcery: Animate (Corpse) 60%, Cast Back 50%, Dominate (Human) 90%, Hypnotism 85%, Ignite 75%

Armour & Hit Points

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	1/4
4-6	Left Leg	1/4
7-9	Abdomen	1/5
10-12	Chest	1/6
13-15	Right Arm	1/3
16-18	Left Arm	1/3
19-20	Head	1/4

Padded Robes: -2%

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
None	-	-

Special Rules

Combat Actions:	3
Strike Rank:	+17
Damage Modifier:	-1D2
Movement:	4m

Legendary Abilities: Loremaster

To Catch a Thief

Isabella will be incarcerated by Alcardy's men, causing a potential conflict between them and the Guardians. This may be a good opportunity for the party to attempt a grab for the Ichthus...

Background & NPC Motives

The Granbretanians and Guardians are extremely suspicious of one another and the alliance of their prospective masters. Therefore the Order of the Fox will be only too happy to incarcerate Isabella who they see as a foreign witch with ideas far above her station. The Guardians will be powerless to stop them so fearful are they of Nezzether.

What Happens

Alcardy will leave the Inner Sanctum and wake Captain Hendrick. If the party have killed him alarm bells will begin to sound and the whole castle will be searched from top to bottom. If the party stole Hendrick's key while he slept the old Granbretanian will not notice, so flustered is he by his Lord's request. Hendrick will gather ten of his men and proceed to the Guardian's chamber where Isabella is continuing her chant.


The low chanting suddenly comes to a close as the Granbretanians enter the high ceilinged chamber. They approach Isabella quickly hoping to take her by surprise but she is far too quick for them. As the first soldier makes to grab for her she swiftly pats his mailed fist away and strikes out for his neck. He crumbles to the floor clutching his throat, a sickly gurgle issuing from his pursed lips. The rest of the Granbretanians suddenly freeze as the Guardians begin to close in around them. You hear the soft scrape of metal as several weapons are drawn from their scabbards. Before the inevitable ring of steel on steel occurs though, a dark shape enters the chamber from an unseen entrance and the Guardians withdraw. Isabella smiles at the sight of Nezzether but it suddenly disappears as the old man signals for the Granbretanians to seize her. Taken aback by his unexpected motion, Isabella is easily subdued. As they pull her away she screams for her father's help but the old man looks away, his face impassive.

Isabella will be led away to the Dungeon in the Inner Sanctum where she will remain, silently brooding over her father's motives for sanctioning her imprisonment.

Alternatives

At this point the party may simply do nothing and watch the strange events as they unravel before them from the safety of the shadows. Of course there is always the chance that they will be spotted in their hiding place but both the Order of the Fox and the Guardians of the Black Light will be distracted whilst Isabella is led away.

If at any point during the proceedings the party wish to intervene they may do so. Now would be a good opportunity to attempt a grab for the



Ichthus (they will get no better chance until the end of the adventure). Whilst the Granbretanians accompany Isabella to the dungeon, the Guardians and Nezzether will shadow them leaving the Ichthus unguarded. The party will not have long in which to act and will not get far before the theft is spotted. It should be difficult but not impossible to escape. (If they do manage to get away with the Ichthus you may wish to have the Guardians steal it back or Count Guntha dupe them into handing it over to him).

As always if they are spotted during this section they will be incarcerated in the Dungeon alongside Isabella whilst Alcardy and Nezzether decide what to do with them. At this stage Isabella will not speak to the party as she remains in deep contemplation.

Incarceration

Should the party find themselves in Alcardy's dungeon the following will take place...

Background & NPC Motives

At some stage in the game it is highly likely that the party will be captured either whilst they are skulking around Alcardy's castle or if they are apprehended by the Guardians of the Black Light. If this occurs Alcardy will not wish to dispose of his prisoners immediately but rather incarcerate them in his dungeon so he can torture/interrogate them at his leisure. Since he is on a tight schedule at Nezzether's behest, Alcardy will not wish to do this until after he has retrieved Septimus' Cross. This is lucky for the imprisoned members of the party since they will have plenty of time to escape or be rescued.

What Happens

After their capture the party will be chained to the walls of the dungeon. The Granbretanian soldiers will take great pleasure in taunting them and explaining in graphic detail what will happen to them once Alcardy begins his questioning. Eventually Isabella will be imprisoned with them but the party will not initially be able to glean any help or information from her. Give the party plenty of opportunity to plan their own escape before you engineer some 'third party' escape plan.

The Order of the Fox will enter the dungeon from time to time and throw the prisoners scraps of food or douse them in water. This should offer the party the chance they need to make a break for it. The manacles that bind them to the walls are not difficult to pick and they will then be able to lie in wait for an unsuspecting Granbretanian guard. Since the guards are not that bright in the first place almost any plan the party come up with should have a chance of working but you should reward them for their ingenuity.

Alternatives

Should the party's plans escape you may wish for one or more NPCs to come to their aid. Count Brass, having waited for sign of the PCs, may break in and rescue them. He will of course be annoyed that his plan to appear neutral in this situation has now been ruined, but he cannot allow the PCs to rot.

Count Guntha may enter the castle in his desperate search for the Ichthus and stumble across the party. He will set them free but only after they have

answered all of his questions regarding the Ichthus' whereabouts. Once he unlocks the dungeon he will not stay with them.

Isabella may be persuaded to help them. After a while the party may break the ice with her. At first she will be as approachable as a wounded bear but eventually the party may be able to coax her into helping them. Isabella is distraught and cannot understand why her father has done this to her. If the party can persuade her of Nezzether's motives she will do all she can to aid their escape and apprehend the necromancer.

To Find the Cross

Nezzether, Alcardy and their men will ride from the castle in search of Septimus' Cross. They will leave a skeleton crew of Granbretanian soldiers behind to guard it.

Background & NPC Motives

Nezzether now needs the Cross of Septimus to complete his plans. The Cross is hidden in a secret underground monastery and he requires the help of Alcardy and his men to retrieve it. Alcardy, bewitched by the promise of possessing the Ichthus is only too happy to help. Nezzether of course has no intention of turning the Ichthus over once he has the Cross and has a terrifying surprise waiting for Alcardy at the end of Chapter III.

What Happens

Before the pair ride out they will discuss Nezzether's need for the Cross, allowing the party to hear a little more of his plans.

Alcardy enters his huge chapel, closely followed by the Necromancer. He is obviously flustered by his experience with Isabella and the Guardians of the Black Light.

'Once you have the Cross you will hand the Ichthus over to me, we have a bargain Nezzether and I expect it to be honoured.'

'There is the small matter of a summoning ritual but once that is completed you will have your prize,' crows the Necromancer, a smile playing across his lips.

'Very well,' replies Alcardy his patience wearing thin, 'but then our deal is done, I don't expect to see you are your heathen mob ever again.'

'Don't worry, you'll certainly never see us again.'

At this Alcardy leaves the great chapel to prepare his men and horses whilst Nezzether mumbles under his breath. The party will not be able to make out what he says as he speaks in a lilting foreign tongue they do not recognise. Once he has finished the Necromancer leaves.

Alcardy, Nezzether, twenty Granbretanians and the remaining Guardians ride out of the castle heading north east (taking all of the horses with them). If the party are to stop them they must fly in **Pursuit!** (see Chapter III).

Alternatives

Before the party leave the castle they may wish to interrogate one of the guards that is left behind. Since Nezzether has not told Alcardy exactly where Septimus' Cross is, none of the Granbretanians left in the castle will know where they were headed.

The only information the party will be able to glean is that they have taken supplies for a two day journey and they headed north east.

History of the Cross of Septimus

The warrior Septimus was a strong and powerful leader who rose to prominence during the Tragic Millennium, before the days of Granbretan. Although ruthless on the battlefield he was a wise and merciful ruler, allowing clemency to those prisoners who submitted to his rule.

When the fabled demon Abbassyn rose to power among the lands of men, Septimus was the man who stood against him. He raised an army to face the Demon but they were cut down like wheat on a ripe field. Not wishing to surrender to such a foul and unholy beast, Septimus stepped forward to fight Abbassyn in single combat. Their brawl was bloody and furious and eventually Septimus managed to wrest the beast's huge weapon from its hand. Although mortally wounded the warrior had the strength for one final, mighty blow that slew Abbassyn and banished him to from Earth. As the Demon's body vanished, Septimus fell dead before his remaining men.

Septimus was given a secret burial in a place unknown, so that his remains could stay safe should Abbassyn return and attempt to desecrate them. A new leader soon rose to power and as time passed, the legend of Septimus faded into the annals of history.

And so, the body lay in an anonymous stone sepulchre for a thousand years. There was no

monument built in his honour and no visitors until one day the keeper of the tomb found it smashed and broken. The contents of the burial chamber were empty, the thieves long gone.

It was a group of monks who took the ashes of Septimus. After much study they realised that to raise Abbassyn the remains of his vanquisher would be needed and sooner or later one or more of the demon's worshippers would come looking for them. Enclosing the ashes in a large, lead crucifix the monks returned to their secret monastery, ever vigilante for the rise of Abbassyn's followers. As time drew on the monks became more insular and paranoid, protecting their monastery with a series of ingenious traps. Such was their separation from the outside world that they themselves were eventually forgotten. Unfortunately for them, they were not quite forgotten by everyone...

And so ends part two of

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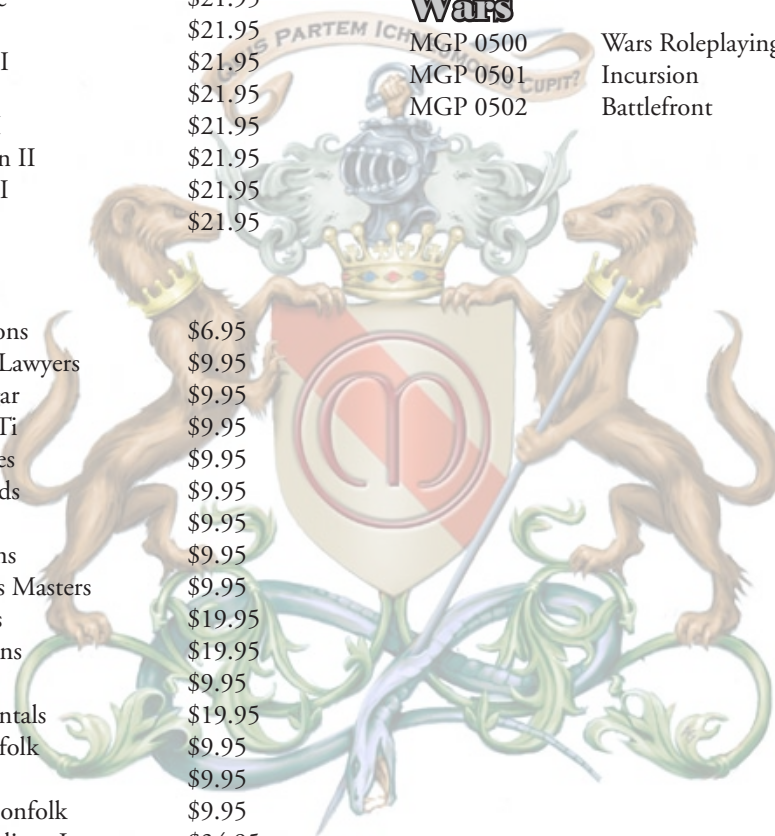
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