

NUMENÉRA

THE DEVIL'S SPINE

BY MONTE COOK

THE DEVIL'S SPINE



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INTRODUCTION

The Devil's Spine is an adventure in many parts—a mini-campaign in its own right. Each part can be used separately, or they can be run as one grand story arc. It's entirely up to you, the game master (GM). This adventure has been written to provide a new and hopefully imaginative look at the Ninth World and the kinds of things that player characters (PCs) will do there. It has also been designed so that the PCs can play different sections of the adventure in whatever order they choose. However, what the characters do in each section may have repercussions on what they do in the next.

Obviously, the material in this product is for the GM only.





CHARACTERS

This adventure works well with beginning characters. More advanced characters might require the GM to make a few modifications (suggestions are provided in each chapter). The action starts in the city of Uxphon, and it's best if the PCs know one another ahead of time; the connection information in the characters' descriptors should be enough to join them together. The most obvious initial hooks to get them involved assume that the characters are (or appear to be) relatively upstanding or trustworthy individuals. If this isn't the case, use one of the alternative hooks.

OVERVIEW

The first section of the book, "Noble Pursuits," presents a framing story for the other sections. In other words, the first adventure provides the hooks for all the other adventures, if it goes well and that's the way you want to run it. It's basically one big hook to get the PCs involved.

The entire arc of *The Devil's Spine* might unfold as follows: The PCs find themselves in the manor house of the Tichronus estate in the city of Uxphon. They discover that a much older chamber lies beneath the house, and it's filled with eggs. In this chamber, one or more of the PCs becomes host to a parasitic entity that grafts onto his spine, granting him great strength. However, he soon learns that it will consume him.

Seeking a way to free themselves of the spinal parasites, the PCs eventually find the "mother," a creature called Devola. She agrees to remove the parasites—for a price. The PCs must defeat her enemy, an intelligent virus that threatens to spread not only to Uxphon and her progeny, but to all creatures in the region. But there's more. To safely rid themselves of the spinal parasites, the PCs must also procure two things: a device called the Impossible Blade, which will aid in the operation, and a substance called gharolan, which will allow a safe recovery from Devola's removal procedure.

VIRAL TRANSMISSIONS

To defeat Devola's viral foe, the characters must travel underground, perhaps awakening an ancient vehicle, to find a transmission tower that allows all aspects of the virus to communicate as a single mind known as the



COREBOOK CALLOUTS

Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the Numenera corebook, where you can find additional details about that item, place or creature. It isn't necessary to look up the referenced items in the corebook; it's an optional way to learn more about the Ninth World and provide additional information to your players.



SHOW 'EM ILLUSTRATIONS

Throughout this adventure, you'll also see a different kind of symbol. This denotes that the image on the page is a Show 'Em. These images are designed to be shown to your players at just the moment they come upon a particular scene in the adventure. The symbols are accompanied by a page number as well as a Show 'Em letter. Show 'Em's are found toward the back of the book, starting on page 88.

Insidious Choir. The PCs must battle their way through legions of engineered guardians to destroy the transmitter and sever the ties that bind the virus together.

THE MECHANIZED TOMB

To get the Impossible Blade, the PCs must travel to the southern edge of the Cloudcrystal Skyfields, the location of the tomb of Queen Starloscet, built within an ancient complex. The PCs can find the device in this tomb, but first they must survive an array of guardians and traps, and then they must brave far more ancient dangers beyond the bounds of the royal crypt.

BEYOND THE MAELSTROM

To procure the gharolan, the PCs must travel to the port city of Harmuth and find a strange expert in nautical matters, for gharolan is produced by creatures that dwell only by deep-sea thermal vents. Getting down to the vents is tricky enough, but the PCs find that a terrifying undersea creature watches over the vents, using their energy for purposes of her own.





NOBLE PURSUITS

This section of the book presents a framing story for the other sections in The Devil's Spine. In other words, it provides the hooks for the rest of the adventures. However, you can run it as an adventure in and of itself, separate from the others.

GMs will want to take note of the optional adventure material, An Unexpected Complication: The War Effort (page 86), which features the baron in a devious subplot designed to enhance the characters' experience and add excitement and intrigue.



Uxphon is pronounced "Oosh-fahn"



Uxphon, page 176

BACKGROUND

Baron Tichronus, a nobleman living in the city of Uxphon, was exploring an ancient complex beneath his city when he encountered Devola, a nagaina matron. The two engaged in parlay rather than combat, and after much negotiation, they made a rather dark pact. Tichronus agreed to provide Devola with the victims she needs to start hatching her young. In return, she promised him a dangerous numenera weapon to be delivered upon the successful hatching of a clutch of her eggs. But now war is coming to the northern lands. The Amber Pope has called for a crusade against the Gaians moving into the Cloudcrystal Skyfields, and Baron Tichronus has been summoned to help marshal the troops. Tichronus must leave his estate and the secret hatchery beneath it.

SYNOPSIS

One way or another, the PCs end up in Baron Tichronus's home. They discover the hidden egg chamber beneath the manor house and become the unwilling hosts of parasitic organisms that attach to their spines (or they discover innocent victims of the parasites). To free themselves of this malady, they must find Devola and negotiate to get her help in removing the parasites, or they will die. Devola is willing to help the characters, but only if they complete a dangerous task for her and provide the means for removing the parasites.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

More or less, all the GM has to do is get the PCs into the Tichronus estate in a curious mood, and interesting things will happen. You can use any of the following hooks or come up with your own.

Caretakers. Tichronus is leaving for the Cloudcrystal Skyfields to help organize the Order of Truth's troops for the crusades. He

is taking his trusty manservant Dorial with him and can't leave his slaves on their own. He needs someone to watch over his estate. After interviewing the PCs and checking their references, Tichronus hires them to keep his estate safe while he is away. He pays each character 1 shin per day. He also entrusts them with 100 shins to cover expenses, but they have to keep careful accounting of where this money goes. He doesn't expect to be gone for more than a month.

Robbers. The PCs seek to divest Baron Tichronus of some of his considerable wealth. They have heard that he has a secret vault somewhere below his manor house. Tichronus is not present when the PCs break in, but Dorial is.

Rebels. The PCs oppose decadent, slave-owning nobles like Tichronus and want to break into his estate to deal him a real blow. Tichronus is not present when the PCs break in, but Dorial is.

Investigators. People have been disappearing off the streets of Uxphon, and the PCs want to find out what's going on. Specifically, they know a woman named Shaias who vanished mysteriously just one week ago. After much legwork, the characters find a witness who saw two burly men escorting a woman who might fit her description near the Tichronus estate. If the PCs inquire within, Tichronus is not present, and Dorial gives them a rude and dismissive brush-off. This very likely makes them suspicious enough to try to break or force their way in.

UXPHON

In which we set the stage for an epic adventure, amid the streets of a city where danger ever lurks beneath its ancient conduits.

The adventure begins in Uxphon and assumes that the PCs are either from there or have travelled there from their home(s). The city lies within a massive, winding canyon at the edge of the Black Riage. Called Deathwater Canyon,



the entire area is threaded with ancient pipes. Uxphon is built within this maze of pipes and even uses some of the empty conduits as enclosed thoroughfares. Other pipes still function, transporting something quite warm. Ingenious construction techniques next to the pipes provide for heated buildings and even hot water on demand in certain quarters.

USEFUL PEOPLE AND LOCALES

The PCs might want to spend time in Uxphon, gathering supplies or information. The following locations and NPCs will be useful to GMs when running encounters in the city.

Derris's Shop: Derris is a weaponsmith of the highest order. He is muscular and handsome, with curly hair and a bushy mustache. People praise his wares throughout Uxphon. However, he is known to have quite a temper, and a few residents claim that, a few years ago, he may have murdered a man that he suspected of sleeping with his lover. Rumors say that a noble patron helped to cover up the situation.

Derris sells strange weapons of his own creation and design—bizarre bladed things, formidable-looking bludgeons, and often unwieldy or complex combinations of nets, spikes, and polearms.

Om the Orsbergian: Om appears to be a mutant, although he claims to be from a race

of creatures called orsbergians. However, no one has ever seen any other orsbergians. Om is tall and extremely thin. Gaudy rings cover the six fingers he has on each hand. His long white hair and wrinkled skin make him seem old, but his real age is unknown. He is an eccentric but learned expert on the numenera, particularly the items related to travel.

Om sells or trades a variety of wares out of his home, and he also takes payment (usually 10 to 20 shins) to act as a consultant on numenera issues. For ten times that amount or its equivalent, he will accompany someone he trusts to offer advice or instruction on the numenera. However, Om is not a combatant, and if seriously threatened, he uses a cypher to teleport away.

Om can help the PCs in various ways. For example, he could help them activate the catena in the “Viral Transmissions” chapter, or he might provide the means to travel to one of the adventure locations very quickly (which is particularly useful for reaching Harmuth in the “Beyond the Maelstrom” chapter).

Sabazia: Although she calls herself a fortune teller, Sabazia is actually an information broker. She employs the trappings of mysticism, but in fact she gathers information through a network of paid informers and experts and provides this knowledge to customers for a fee. Strangely, she somehow gains the necessary information before the customer comes to her, so there

Om: level 5, level 6 with numenera knowledge; has a variety of cyphers that facilitate travel or defense, as needed

Derris: level 4, level 5 with any weapon, level 6 with weaponsmithing

Sabazia: level 7, level 8 with almost any information topic

LAW ENFORCEMENT IN UXPHON

Uxphon is an oligarchy and a true aristocracy—a place where the noble class, as a whole, are the only rulers. In effect, the nobles own the city, all of its businesses, and to some degree even the citizens of the lower classes. The city has no military of its own, and the town guards are employed by the nobility. In effect, a person of one of the many noble families can do no wrong in Uxphon, and only the other nobles (who see order as good for the city and thus for themselves) keep them in check.

Thus, if the PCs suspect Tichronus of being behind the disappearances in the city, there is nothing the “authorities” can or will do about it. When Lady Isaltha has her guards break down the door of the Tichronus manor house (*An Interesting Complication: A Woman’s Fearsome Heart*, page 13), she does so without fear of reprisal from anyone but Tichronus himself. (Although Isaltha is not from Uxphon, she would claim that her noble birth affords her automatic rights, and she’d very likely be vindicated.)

Dorial: *level 4, level 5 at perception*

Slaves: *level 2*

Thugs: *level 3, level 4 at intimidation*

may be some temporal shenanigans going on. Regardless, she insists that her information comes from otherworldly spirits that only she can see and speak to.

Sabazia wears a numenera synth mask that conceals her features but changes to match her mood. She has long dark hair that flows to her waist.

She might be a crucial source of information on the Mechanized Tomb or other topics important to the PCs.

THE TICHRONUS ESTATE

In which the characters find employment in the house of a noble gentleman with a dark secret.

As estates go, Tichronus’s home is small. The baron has never been one to spend much money on ostentatiousness, and he has no family, so—at least by the standards set by his fellow nobles—the estate is modest.

BARON TICHRONUS

The baron may not be “on stage” for much of this scenario, as he is likely off helping to organize the initial stages of the Amber Pope’s crusade against the Gaians. However, he is the crux of the events that set things in motion. The baron is a barrel-chested boor, with a crude sense of humor and a low opinion of everyone in the world other than himself and perhaps his manservant, Dorial.

THE STAFF

Dorial is an obnoxious snob. His callous, rude behavior is the source of much of Tichronus’s

mirth. He acts superior in all ways and attempts to come across as couth and cultured, but his contempt for everyone around him other than his master betrays his real crudeness.

Dorial is about fifty years old, although his bald head, thin frame, and gold-rimmed monocle make him appear older. He wears a tailored suit of expensive clothing.

The rest of those who live and work in the Tichronus estate are slaves. Three serve as maids and kitchen workers; they sleep in the kitchen at night. A stable boy and a groundskeeper live in the stables.

Tichronus also regularly employs a variety of thugs to do his dirty work when he needs them, but they aren’t slaves and don’t live on the estate. However, chances are good that two are present at any given time (unless the PCs are serving as caretakers for the estate, in which case no thugs come around).

MAP LOCATIONS

The buildings of the estate are made of dark stone. The exterior surfaces show somewhat garish reliefs of historical battles and fearsome beasts.

Pipes: The city of Uxphon is built around a series of ancient pipes. Some of them are closed and still conduct a type of hot liquid, while others are now empty and open and provide a means of moving about the city while staying inside. The open pipe that connects to the estate passes through a large market and eventually leads to the central hub of the city.

Stables: With Tichronus gone, there are no animals in the stables. Normally, he keeps a pair of thurdens here—reptilian, camel-like creatures used as mounts by people in the area—as well as pack and draft animals. Two slaves sleep here at night.

Storage: This outbuilding contains tools, supplies, lumber, and other necessities.

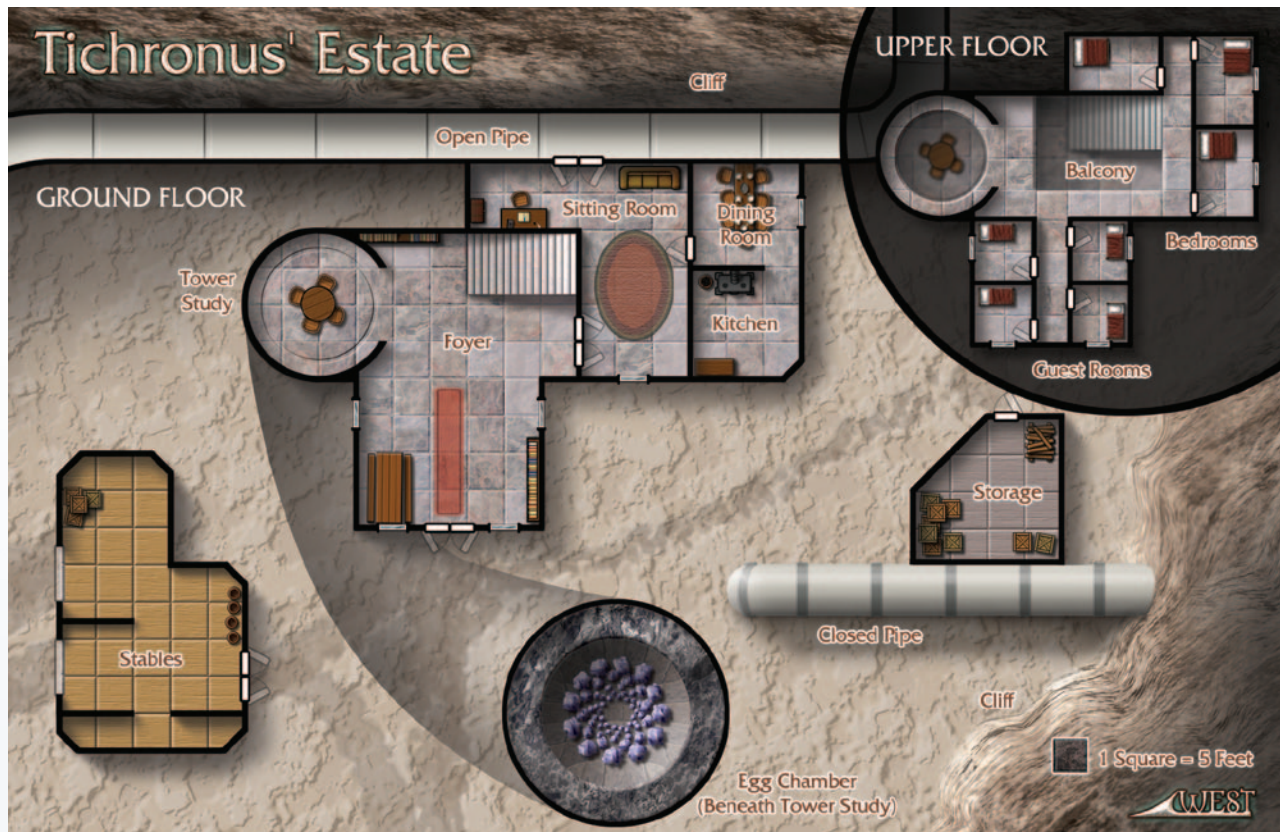
Foyer: This is the grand entrance into the manor house. An impressive staircase leads up to the second floor. Like the exterior of the house, the walls of this room bear reliefs of battles and strange, fearsome creatures, showing the interests of the estate’s master.

Sitting Room: Comfort is more important here than beauty or taste.

Kitchen: The kitchen is small and crowded—especially at night, for the house slaves make their beds on the floor here.

Dining Room: The heads of dozens of beasts are mounted on the walls here, making it more of a trophy room than a dining room.

Baron Tichronus: *level 5, level 6 with most weapons and riding; 24 health; 4 points of Armor; +2 points of damage with all weapons*



Tower Study: This round room extends up through the second floor of the house, where a balcony circles the upper perimeter. There is no way to reach the balcony except by going to the upper floor. The room has many shelves filled with books on all topics, but the collection has a focus on hunting and warfare (in both fiction and nonfiction). In the center is a great wooden desk piled high with drafts of a book that Tichronus is writing—a mixture of memoir and a tactical guide. It's not very good and reveals no pertinent details useful to the PCs.

A secret panel built into one of the bookcases reveals a series of old metal buttons, each bearing various symbols in various colors, none of which have any particular meaning to anyone alive today. Nothing happens if the buttons are pushed unless four particular buttons are pushed in a certain order.

The proper buttons, in the proper order, resemble a bluish circle, a green half moon with an odd squiggle, a red "M" shape with a line through it, and a pair of white, horizontal wavy lines. Tichronus remembers these as "circle, green, em, water."

If these buttons are pressed in order, a circular section of the floor about 6 feet (1.8 m) across disappears, giving access to the egg chamber below.

Bedrooms: These chambers are nicely appointed. Two of the doors into the bedrooms are locked (level 4). These are the bedrooms of Tichronus and Dorial, who keep the keys to their rooms on their persons.

Tichronus's room has hunting trophies and weapons mounted on the walls and in glass cases and trunks. On one table is an oddity that looks like a set of nested cylinders of various metals. If a PC listens carefully, strange voices randomly whisper from the object, speaking a language no one knows. The room has clothing and personal goods worth about 75 shins. Hidden under the bed is a purse with 40 shins.

Dorial's room has fine clothing and personal items worth about 20 shins.

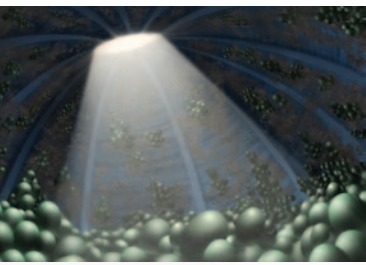
The unlocked bedroom is unused and has nothing of value.

Guest Rooms: These rooms are also nicely appointed but empty. If Tichronus hires the PCs to watch his home, they stay in these quarters while on the job.

THE EGG CHAMBER

The floor of the egg chamber is 30 feet (9 m) below the secret opening in the tower study.

GM Intrusion: *The disappearing section of the floor is directly beneath the feet of a PC, who falls through.*



Show 'Em:
The Egg Chamber,
Image A, page 88

Despite the distance, a character falling into the chamber from the study takes only 1 point of damage because the floor is full of a soft, spongy, almost fleshy substance secreted from the eggs as they develop.

Every surface of the egg-shaped chamber is coated in that organic secretion, and hundreds of glistening, green egglike structures are mounted within it. These range in size from just 6 inches (15 cm) long to being almost as tall as a human.

An exit leads out of the chamber to the south, but that opening is mostly covered by the spongy matter and thus not immediately obvious (nor is it shown on the map).

The Eggs: Despite their appearance, the green structures aren't eggs. A better analogy might be seed pods or fungal fruiting bodies. Close examination of the base of each pod reveals the twisted remains of human corpses that have been cultivated for their biomass. In other words, the pods have grown out of the corpses, and most of the flesh and bones have been liquefied, incorporated into the base of the pod, and hardened into the new shape.

The pods hold one stage of the development of the nagaina, although this stage has two bodies, not one.

The Nagaina: The sleepers in the pods don't stir or awaken—they're not yet ready. However, the nagaina defenders leap out instinctively and attack if their pod is disturbed.

NAGAINA DEFENDER 3 (9)

This tiny creature lives inside the egg pod of a nagaina and exists only to protect the pod and its sleeping sibling. The nagaina defender looks like a mucus-covered worm about 2 feet (0.6 m) long with an eyeless face and a toothy maw. Its body is covered in tiny cilia that it uses for locomotion.

Motive: Defense

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Speed defense as level 4 due to size. Stealth actions as level 5.

Combat: A nagaina defender leaps out of its pod. If its victim fails an Intellect defense roll, the nagaina gains the initiative, and the difficulty to dodge its initial attack is increased by one step. If the foe makes the Intellect roll, initiative is determined normally.

If a nagaina defender strikes a living character, it grabs hold of her somewhere—an arm, a shoulder, a leg, or whatever is handy. On the next round, it moves to her back (assuming the character is a vertebrate). At this point, she can't effectively reach the nagaina, and unless she gets really creative, the creature latches onto her spine. Another character can try to prevent this from happening, but the only real way to help is to kill the nagaina defender in one round. Striking the nagaina while it's on the character inflicts an equal amount of damage to her as well.

Once a nagaina has latched onto its new host, it fuses with her spine. At this point, there is one round left in which the parasite can still be attacked separately from the host. However, the host can't reach or target the creature. Any damage inflicted on the nagaina during this round also affects the host. If the nagaina dies, the host takes another 10 points of damage immediately.

After that round, the nagaina can no longer be targeted separately from the host. It can't die unless the host dies. If left alive to fulfill its role, the creature consumes its host within three months and then dies.

Interaction: No interaction is possible other than violence or symbiosis. After the nagaina defender achieves its symbiotic state, it immediately fully restores the host's stat Pools. Further, the character's Might Edge or Speed Edge (player's choice) increases by 1 for as long as she remains the host.

The new host is immediately compelled to not harm the egg pods or the creatures within. After 28 hours, the host is immediately compelled to stand watch and defend the eggs against others who might do them harm. This latter compulsion occurs only if the host is within long range of the egg pods.

Host Guardians: Three human hosts hiding in the egg chamber attack all intruders. They are under the control of nagaina defenders grafted onto their spines. The hosts are compelled to fight to the death defending the chamber. They go so far as to throw themselves between an attacker and an egg pod.

A fight with these guardians in the egg chamber is almost certain to disturb the pods, releasing more nagaina defenders—at least one for each PC in the chamber.

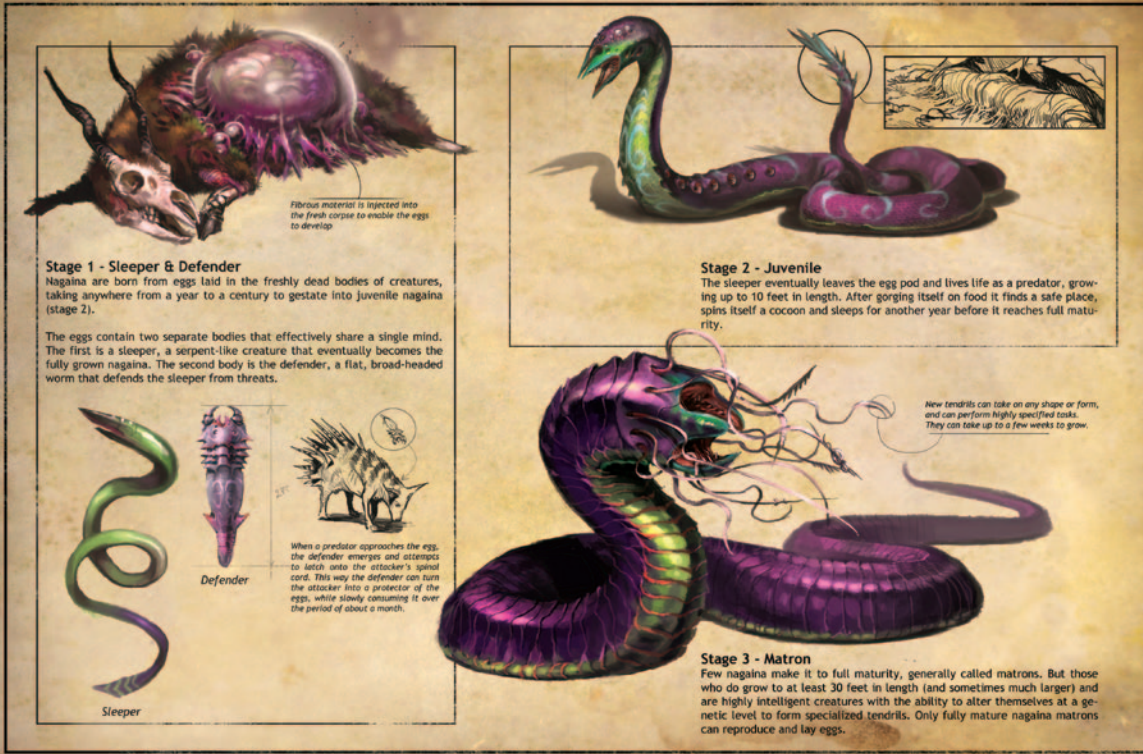
GM Intrusion: An additional nagaina defender emerges from a pod and attacks a PC in the egg chamber.

Host guardians: level 3. Two are armed with clubs. One has 15 health, 3 points of Armor, and a huge axe (+3 damage).



LIFE CYCLE OF THE NAGAINA

Nagaina Life Cycle



The life cycle of the nagaina is very complex and alien, involving not only different stages, but sometimes multiple stages that coexist at the same time. The process requires the freshly dead (or, in some cases, still-living) body of a creature about the size of a human or a deer. An injection of fibrous materials into the corpse allows egg pods to develop over the course of three months. The pods then lie dormant for at least a year, and perhaps for as many as a hundred years (or even longer).

Each egg pod contains two creatures that share the same genetic directive. They are, in effect, two creatures with a single mind. The first is a long, coiled, serpentlike creature (the sleeper) that takes up most of the interior of the pod. The other is a flat, broad-headed worm (the defender) about 2 feet (0.6 m) long. If an egg is disturbed in any way, the defender pops out and attacks the intruder. If the victim is a vertebrate, the worm rapidly scuttles to the spine and attempts to latch on. If successful, the new host is immediately compelled to not harm the egg pods or the creatures within. After 28 hours, the host becomes compelled to defend the eggs against others who might do them harm. The defender consumes its host within three months and then dies.

The sleeper eventually leaves the egg pod. At this stage, the nagaina lives as a simple predator for ten years or so, wandering the world and growing to be about 10 feet (3 m) long. During this time, it gorges on food, finds a safe place, spins a structure like a cocoon, and sleeps for another year, after which it emerges in its "matron" stage.

Most nagaina die in the wilds and never reach the matron stage. Those that do become matrons mature to a state of extremely high intelligence and grow to a length of at least 30 feet (9 m). They also gain the ability to control their genetic structure, which lets them grow specialized tendrils or other appendages as needed (although doing so takes a few weeks). Only in the matron stage can a nagaina inject living or newly dead organic tissue with the filament structures that eventually grow into an egg pod, using the biomass of the injected creature.



At no time will Tichronus or Devola acknowledge the existence of the Lily. No one knows who she is or why she is there. No one will even believe that she exists unless shown conclusive proof (and then they will still strangely dismiss her as something beneath concern).

The three hosts are locals from Uxphon who were kidnapped by Tichronus's thugs and thrown into the egg chamber. The PCs can try to subdue them rather than kill them, but removing the parasites on their backs will kill them. One host carries a level 3 anoetic cypher that is a pill that restores 1d6 + 3 points to one of the user's Pools.

THE LILY

At some point during the confrontation with the host guardians, a new figure emerges: an artificial creature calling herself the Lily. She comes from the hidden exit to the south, slipping through folds in the fleshy mass that covers it. If the egg pods appear to be in danger, the Lily intervenes as best as she can, although she is not an overly potent combatant.

The Lily appears to be a life-size statue of a human woman that has been excellently crafted out of white marble. The statue is obviously very old, and its surface is cracked. From these cracks, a bluish fluid slowly leaks, leaving stains on its white "skin." A blue-green mold grows on the wet fluid and the dried stains. When the Lily moves, she does so jerkily, with much creaking and cracking of her stone form. She is an artificial creature but is free-willed and fairly intelligent. Although ancient, she no longer retains most of her memories.

She speaks telepathically, although it is faint—barely "audible"—as though she were whispering from far away. Much of what she says simply can't be heard or understood.

The only way to communicate

with her effectively is if one of the PCs has a telepathic ability.

If the Lily is destroyed, she shatters, revealing a metallic green dodecahedron inside her chest cavity that pulses like a beating heart. This fist-sized dodecahedron holds her consciousness. She can still

telepathically communicate with anyone

touching the metal shape, although her voice is no clearer than before.

This dodecahedron is the "real" Lily, far older than the ancient marble body.

The Lily knows the complete life cycle of the nagaina. Although she had another purpose at one time, she made an agreement with Devola to watch over the egg chamber. She has had only the briefest encounters with Baron Tichronus and doesn't even know his name.

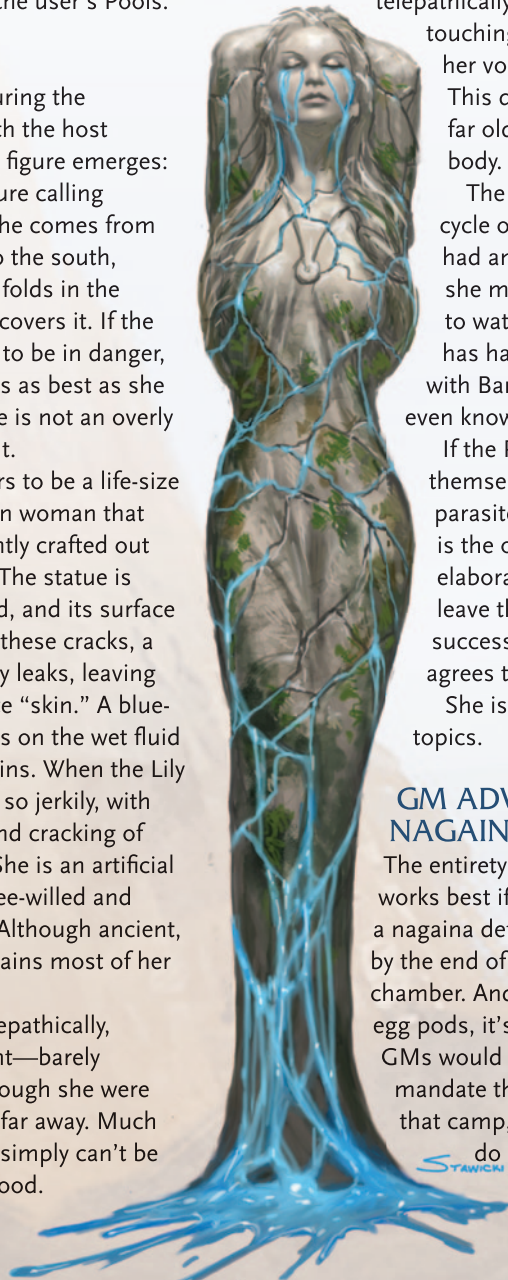
If the PCs inquire about ridding themselves (or others) of the spinal parasites, the Lily says that Devola is the only way, offering no further elaboration. If the PCs agree to leave the egg pods alone, or if they successfully intimidate her, the Lily agrees to lead them to Devola.

She isn't really conversant on other topics.

GM ADVICE: PCs BECOMING NAGAINA HOSTS

The entirety of this adventure probably works best if at least one of the PCs has a nagaina defender latched onto his back by the end of the encounter in the egg chamber. And frankly, given the number of egg pods, it's likely to happen. But many GMs would consider it heavy-handed to mandate that it happens. If you fall into that camp, the answer is simple: don't do it. Consider these facts:

- It probably will happen anyway without direct interference from you.





- The PCs may still want to help the NPCs already infected with parasites. In fact, they may have come to Tichronus's estate to find and help them.

- The Lily is a way out. If no PCs are hosts, the Lily can steer them toward Devola for other reasons. The nagaina matron, after all, knows the most about what's actually going on. She also has a great deal of treasure, if the PCs are motivated by greed. The Lily could provide that information as well.

Also remember that having a bizarre creature fused with your spine is an interesting turn of events, and as GM, it's your job to make the PCs' lives interesting. If, for example, you use GM intrusions to make it more likely that one or two PCs become hosts, you're not "screwing" the players. A PC host drives the adventure in the most dramatic way possible and is beneficial, not detrimental, in the short term.

AN INTERESTING COMPLICATION: A WOMAN'S FEARSOME HEART

In which Baron Tichronus's past attempts to catch up with him, and catches the PCs instead. While the PCs are in the Tichronus estate (for whatever reason), there is a knock at the door. A woman of great finery and noble bearing has arrived, with two male bodyguards and a thurden-drawn carriage laden with luggage. The woman is Lady Isaltha. She wears a feathered headdress and a hoverdress that allows her to float a few inches off the ground. Two floating vuechi follow behind her.

She has come because Baron Tichronus proposed marriage to her, and she has decided to accept. Thus, she is ready to move in.

The first of her bodyguards is Brune, a hulking slab of a man with mechanical limbs and thick plate armor. He has a jeweled two-handed greatsword on his back and wears the half-skull symbol of the Gresh, a grim but minor sadism cult. The other bodyguard is Drast, a squat man with a red helmet that covers his entire head and face and has only a single round lens on the front. He carries a dart thrower and a brace of six knives.

Some of what Isaltha says is true. Tichronus came to her city six months ago and, after courting her, proposed marriage. While taken with the baron, Isaltha was smart enough to know that his proposal was insincere and that he merely wanted to sleep with her. (Tichronus

is an infamous life-long bachelor.) She said that she would think about it but had no intention of saying yes—she simply enjoyed sleeping with him as well. But then she heard that Tichronus was hiding some kind of treasure in a secret chamber under his home. That's when she remembered that while he slept one night, he muttered "circle, green, em, water... circle, green, em, water..." She didn't know what that meant, but she figured it must be a password or code to get into his secret treasure vault.

So now she has shown up at his estate without announcement, planning to use her acceptance of his proposal as an excuse to get in. She figured that either she could grab the treasure while Tichronus schemed to get out of the proposal, or he would go through with the marriage, which was fine because she does like the baron a great deal. (Just not so much that she wouldn't steal his secret treasure.)

Isaltha will do anything to get into the house. For example:

- She demands to speak to Tichronus and won't take no for an answer.
- She doesn't believe the PCs if they say that Tichronus is not there (or, at least, she demands to be let inside to see for herself).
- She claims that as the betrothed of Tichronus, the estate is now hers, so anyone who works for the baron works for her.
- She has her bodyguards break down the door if she is utterly refused or if it appears that no one is home.

If Lady Isaltha gets inside the house—through force or diplomacy—she is actually glad that Tichronus isn't there. She begins searching the house surreptitiously, but she is no good at hiding her eagerness. No matter what the reason the PCs give for their presence (if any), she treats them as slaves, giving them orders and having her bodyguards use force if her commands are disobeyed.

If the PCs observe her, they see that as she explores the house, she occasionally whispers "circle, green, em, water..." as if doing so will activate something. It won't, of course, but if they found the secret panel in the study, it might provide them with what they need.

THE PATH TO DEVOLA

In which the way toward the truth is filled with darkness and danger. Like always.

If the PCs are in the company of the Lily, she leads them out of the egg chamber through

Lady Isaltha: level 4, level 5 in persuasion, level 3 in combat; two vuechi

Brune: level 3, level 4 with greatsword; +3 damage

Drast: level 3, level 5 with perception; dart thrower has poisoned darts (level 3, inflicts 3 points of Speed damage if a Might defense roll fails)

Drast's cyclops helm: level 3 artifact; gives wearer an asset to all visual perception tasks; depletion —

GM Intrusion: *The nagaina grabs the character and bites him automatically as part of the same action.*

GMs may want to use the tables on page 15, perhaps slightly modified, when the PCs explore other very large ruins that are mostly empty.

the hidden exit to the south down a rough passage hewn through the rock. Not long after, the tunnel leads to another underground chamber that is quite different from the one in which they found the pods. The new area is a part of an aeons-old complex now long buried beneath the earth. However, the Lily knows precisely where to go, making a difficult trip far easier.

If the PCs wander out of the egg chamber on their own, they very likely get lost in the ancient labyrinth. They might wander for hours or days before they find Devola's lair—assuming they even know to look for it and take the time to find it.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPLEX

This ancient place appears to have once been a sophisticated city, perhaps, or a massive residential structure. It's hard to know for certain, but many of the closely clustered chambers appear to have been apartment-like living quarters, joined by large, winding corridors. There are other rooms, however, with unfathomable purposes, and even the main causeways don't always follow understandable or predictable paths. The entire complex is metal, although the floors are often—but not always—covered in triangular tiles of artificial stone. In many places, the ceilings and walls have collapsed, and the path requires climbing over or under metal girders or through holes in walls. Although there are many doorways, most are open. The few doors to be found are made of thick metal and can't be opened—they would need to be battered down.

PROGRESS THROUGH THE COMPLEX

Rather than provide a map of the entire complex (which is mostly empty, anyway) or force the story to bog down into a crawl through one dark, ruined chamber after another, simply describe the general nature of the place and roll on the Progress table (page 15) for each hour of exploration. For each consecutive hour of wandering, add 10 to the roll (or add 20 if the Lily is guiding them). This determines what the PCs encounter and how long it takes them to reach Devola.

AWAKENED NAGAINA SLEEPER 5 (15)

At this stage of the nagaina life cycle, the creature is a dark-colored serpent up to 10 feet (3 m) long with a wide mouth that is surrounded by long tentacles.

Motive: Hungers for flesh, curious

Health: 24

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short

Combat: An awakened sleeper grabs an enemy with its tentacles and brings him into its maw. Thus, if the nagaina's first attack succeeds, the victim is held fast. If he doesn't break free, the nagaina bites him in the next round. This attack is two steps more difficult to avoid and inflicts 7 points of damage.

Awakened sleepers that have been active for some time usually have at least one offensive or defensive cypher that they use to make a nasty ranged attack or perhaps to augment their natural armor.

Interaction: Nagaina in this stage are quite intelligent and can speak many languages. Although usually hungry (and thus prone to attack), if they are given a good reason to hold their strike—perhaps, say, an interesting offer or bribe—they might be open to negotiations and can be convinced to remain peaceful.

Loot: Very often, nagaina at this stage possess one or two cyphers—usually something that can be worn or used by their tentacles.

DEVOLA'S LAIR

In which the PCs find both villain and savior in one serpentine package.

Deep within the ancient, abandoned complex, far from prying eyes and most any threat, the nagaina Devola makes her home.

To reach the lair, the PCs pass through a hole that appears to have been punched through a metal wall. The corrosion around the twisted, ragged edges of the hole suggests that the damage was done decades earlier. Beyond the hole is a metal catwalk, slightly tilted and unstable because it's also damaged (although it's safe). The walkway runs along the wall to the right about thirty paces and then turns left, suspended above a drop into darkness of many hundreds of feet. The sound of thrumming generators rises from the depths, accompanied by a moist heat. The catwalk crosses over this expanse to reach a



PROGRESS


- 01–40 **More of the Same:** The PCs move farther into the complex but find nothing of interest.
- 41–70 **Strange Feature:** The PCs find a strange feature (roll on the Strange Features table below).
- 71–90 **Creature:** The PCs encounter a creature that dwells in the ruined complex (roll on the Creatures table below).
- 91–115 **Lost:** *Ignore this result if the Lily is guiding the PCs or if they have rolled this result already, instead treating it as "More of the Same."* The PCs lose their bearings and can no longer easily retrace their steps back to the egg chamber. Finding their way back is an Intellect task with a difficulty of 5. Each time a PC fails a roll, it adds one additional hour to the time required to get back (minimum of one hour). Thus, if the PCs wander for four hours, then get lost, then wander for another hour before deciding to go back, it takes them at least six hours to get back (five hours of wandering, plus at least one for being lost). However, if the PCs fail the roll three times before succeeding, it takes them eight hours to get back.
- 116–130 **Inactive Device:** This might be a built-in control panel or an abandoned machine of some kind. The PCs can scavenge it for 3d6 shins, 1d6 random cyphers, and a random oddity.
- 131–150 **Collapse:** The floor collapses beneath a PC, or the ceiling collapses from above. Either way, unless the character makes a Speed defense roll with a difficulty of 4, he takes 8 points of damage and becomes trapped or pinned, requiring help from his friends. Freeing the trapped PC takes 1d6 ▣ 10 minutes.
- 151+ **Devola's Lair:** The PCs find Devola's lair (see page 14).

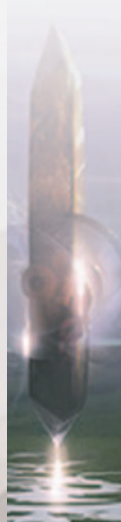
STRANGE FEATURES

- 01–10 Corpse of a mysterious creature, recently dead
- 11–20 Scattered grey carbon sheets covered with unintelligible writing and diagrams of unknown machines and creatures
- 21–45 Still functioning (but mysterious) machine with lights and whirring motors
- 46–50 Huge glass wall that glows with a flickering light
- 51–55 Floating platform
- 56–70 Very large pool of fresh water
- 71–80 Pile of cylinders filled with poisonous chemicals
- 81–90 Metal cube filled with miscellaneous tools
- 91–98 Random oddity
- 99–00 Hermit lair where a human from Uxphon had been living a meager, solitary life more than a year ago

CREATURES

- 01–30 Swarm of 1d6 + 10 laaks
- 31–50 Band of cutthroats hiding from the authorities (1d6 + 4 bandits)
- 51–60 1d10 murders
- 61–80 Awakened nagaina sleeper
- 81–85 Philethis
- 86–90 Disassembler
- 91–00 Hermit (level 4)


 Laak, page 243
 Bandit, page 270
 Murden, page 247
 Philethis, page 252
 Disassembler, page 238



glistening metal cylinder that rises up from below. A few bluish lights illuminate parts of the cylinder, suggesting that it is perhaps 120 feet (36 m) in diameter. Where the catwalk connects to the cylinder, a black doorway beckons.

Anyone passing through the doorway is immediately sprayed with an extremely fine mist. This is an antiviral disinfectant.

Devola found the one place in the complex with reliable power. Ancient generators in a vast chamber still produce energy, and she set up her lair in a cylindrical structure at its heart. Within the cylinder, her round chamber resembles a laboratory, filled with bubbling vats and high platforms covered in equipment. It is immaculate and sterile. The ceiling is 50 feet (15 m) high. Nothing in the room is at human scale, for Devola is a gigantic worm 70 feet (21 m) long. A dozen tentacles surround her mouth, many of which have been adapted to serve as various kinds of laboratory tools—even syringes and the like.

Devola speaks in a hoarse voice that sounds like the feeling of a slimy tendril against the back of your neck. She tries a number of different languages before finally using the Truth, which the PCs likely speak. “Why are

you here?” (If anyone asks her how she knows their language, she says, “I have spoken with your kind before.” This is a reference to Tichronus.)

Devola immediately recognizes hosts of her offspring, and if any are present, she speaks only with them. She doesn’t treat them with any particular affection, but she does hear them out. If the PCs come to her lair with no hosts, they have to do some quick explaining to stop her from attacking them as intruders.

The Lily doesn’t speak under any circumstances in the presence of Devola, and the nagaina matron never recognizes that the Lily is even present.

DEVOLA, NAGAINA MATRON 8 (24)

A nagaina matron is a massive serpent, 50 to 70 feet (15 to 21 m) long. Her mouth is surrounded by tentacles 15 feet (4.6 m) long, most of which have been adapted so that they end in cybernetic or bioengineered tools, syringes, or weapons.

Motive: Mysterious, but it usually involves procreation and scientific curiosity

Health: 60

Damage Inflicted: 10 points

Armor: 4



Show 'Em: Devola, Image B, page 88





Movement: Short

Modifications: Level 9 in most areas of knowledge. Level 7 for Speed defense due to size.

Combat: First and foremost, nagaina matrons use numenera weaponry and defenses. For example, assume that a prepared matron has an additional 2 points of Armor due to some kind of protective field and a long-range attack artifact that inflicts at least 10 points of damage (or a ranged Intellect attack device that ignores Armor and inflicts at least 6 points of damage).

Further, a matron's tentacle tools often include injectors with various chemicals. Some of them are poisonous and inflict 10 points of damage, while others might have more insidious effects that alter a victim's personality, outlook, or perception.

If a matron must engage in melee, she grabs an enemy with her tentacles and brings him into her maw. Thus, if her first attack succeeds, the victim is held fast. If he doesn't break free, the matron bites him in the next round. This attack is two steps more difficult to avoid and inflicts 12 points of damage.

Interaction: Nagaina matrons are amazingly intelligent and can speak many languages. They usually have more important needs than mere hunger and are willing to talk before resorting to fighting. While they are merciless and often vengeful, they are not sadistic or inherently violent.

Loot: Very often, nagaina at this stage possess one or two cyphers—usually something that can be worn or used by their tentacles.

DEVOLA'S OUTLOOK

Although the PCs are probably interested in getting rid of their parasitic tagalongs and learning more about the egg chamber (and why it's under Tichronus's house), Devola has her own agenda. Frankly, she likely has the upper hand in almost any interaction they might have.

The nagaina matron is extremely confident, intelligent, and cunning. While monstrous, she no more wants to eat or kill the PCs for pleasure than she wants to welcome them as friends. However, she might want to use them in her studies and experiments—unless they appear to have some other value to her.

She made the deal with Tichronus because it allows her to create a clutch of eggs without needing to stay with or even near them. Due

to her work, she values her privacy and her safety well away from other creatures. Devola sees all non-nagaina as inferior, almost inconsequential beings. They are nothing more than tools or test subjects to her.

Even other nagaina are only of moderate interest. Devola is concerned about reproducing, but she isn't obsessed with it or with her offspring. The egg chamber is important to her, but her own survival is more important. What's more, nagaina defenders grafted onto a host have already served their purpose, so she has no special affection for them.

The matron also has other interests and goals. Devola is a scientist of sorts, specializing in surgical experimentation and evolutionary biology. She is far more learned in her chosen areas of expertise and far more intelligent than the vast majority of Ninth World humans.

First and foremost on her mind, however, is an entity she calls the Insidious Choir. The Insidious Choir is a sentient virus interested in domination on a massive scale.

For more details about the Insidious Choir, see the "Viral Transmissions" chapter (page 21). For now, what's important is what Devola knows (or thinks she knows) about the virus:

- It's intelligent and is a collective entity. In other words, despite the fact that the virus consists of countless individual virons, it operates as a single being.
- It's interested in nothing less than complete control of everything it finds.
- The individual components of the virus can communicate somehow, but only while in the same body.
- It has created physical macroscale bodies that it uses to explore and interact with the world. For some reason, these biological constructs are always the same shade of green.
- It has a technological transmitting device that allows all the virons in all the bodies they infect to communicate over what might be a limitless distance.

Devola is greatly concerned—for herself and her offspring—that the Insidious Choir will not stop until it has infected everything. Far more than just about anything, she wants the viral intelligence stopped or at least slowed, and she has a plan to do it. She simply needs to find some expendable creatures to attempt to carry it out for her.

GM Intrusion: *The matron injects the character with a paralytic agent that makes it impossible for him to take physical actions for one minute.*

GM Advice: *The last thing you want is for the encounter with Devola to feel like the PCs are "supposed" to talk to her. There should be a real feeling of danger here. Do whatever you can to convey that she could attack at any moment.*

REMOVING THE SPINAL PARASITES—THE DEAL

If the PCs want nagaina defenders removed from their spines (or the spines of others), Devola explains that the procedure is possible but requires three things:

1. A dose of something called gharolan for each host. It's a sophisticated chemical cocktail that allows the host to survive the procedure. Without it, his chances of survival are nil. Devola knows where the PCs can find gharolan.
2. A special numenera tool that she calls an "Impossible Blade." She doesn't know where to find the device, but she can provide a description of it.
3. Payment for her services. Devola is well aware that the PCs can't destroy the Insidious Choir—that might not even be possible—but they can deal it a terrible setback that will keep her and all other living creatures in a thousand miles safe for a long time. As payment for services rendered, she wants the PCs to destroy the transmitting device that allows the virons to communicate. She provides the exact location of the device, a few details that might help, and some tools and weapons the PCs will find handy. The matron won't remove the grafted spinal parasites until after the transmitter is destroyed.

Bargaining with Devola is difficult. She won't budge on point 3, and the procedure isn't possible without points 1 and 2.

The Details

Devola knows that gharolan can be found only in a deep-sea thermal vent, created by creatures called celosia. She tells the PCs to travel to the city of Harmuth and find Cagyn Rilid, who can tell them where to go next. She won't explain if or how she knows Cagyn, simply stating, "Tichronus is not the only human I have had to deal with in the past."

Unfortunately, the matron has no idea where the PCs can find an Impossible Blade, the primary surgical tool she needs to assure a clean and complete removal of the parasite from its host. Further, she has no idea how one can be made. However, her specifications might be the first step in finding a blade. The nearest large community is Uxphon—perhaps inquiring there is a good start.

The transmitter for the Insidious Choir lies at the top of a strange open tower in what Devola describes as an ancient field of towers. This field is quite distant—on the other side

of the mountains—but tunnels lead there from here, and the matron tells the PCs of a "means of ancient conveyance that will make the journey far faster and safer if you can figure out how to free it from its shackles." She provides basic directions (but not a map).

The Insidious Choir has a number of host bodies that watch and guard the tower. The PCs should be concerned not only with sneaking past or overcoming the bodies but also with avoiding being infected themselves. Devola offers to inoculate the PCs now and disinfect them when they return. If they accept this offer, she injects each one with a dark fluid from one of her tentacles. The injection is extremely painful and leaves a dark red welt, but it reduces the difficulty of Might defense rolls versus infection by the Insidious Choir by two steps. The inoculation lasts for 1d6 + 3 weeks.

Last, Devola says that she knows of a location in the complex that has some interesting tools and devices. The PCs can scavenge the items to find anything that might help them on their mission. This cache can be found back out the way the PCs came in and two levels down. She provides precise directions (but again, no map).

THE REST OF THE LAIR

Most likely, the PCs see only the lab, which is just one of many chambers in the tall cylinder. Each room in the lair is more than 50 feet (15 m) tall. The other rooms, higher and lower in the cylinder, bear bizarre decor of Devola's own creation, furnishings difficult for humans to understand (mostly things to coil around), and the remains of hundreds of dead creatures upon which she has experimented. Some of the bodies are preserved, some have been dissected, a few remain in bits as trophies or keepsakes, and some Devola just hasn't disposed of yet. Very few of these creatures are human or even recognizable by the PCs.

LOOT

If the PCs kill or drive off Devola, they find many valuables in her lair. These include the following:

- 150 shins
- Six doses of a concoction that restores 10 points of Might at the cost of 3 points of Speed. This is not a cypher—more like a special item of equipment.
- Four doses of a glowing blue fluid that is



a level 4 poison. It inflicts 1 point of Intellect damage per round until the victim makes a successful Might defense roll or until her Intellect reaches 0, whichever comes first.

- A level 6 cypher in the form of a harness that fits around the user's torso and draws mass to the user from another dimension, allowing her to grow 50 percent larger for one hour. During this time, the user gains 12 points to her Might Pool and deals +2 points of damage with all melee attacks.

- A level 5 artifact that looks like a short, fat tube joined with a long, thin tube. It fires pulses of energy up to 200 feet (61 m) that explode in an immediate radius for 5 points of damage. However, whenever the device is used, if the player rolls a 1 or 2, the pulse explodes early at a point determined by the GM. Depletion: 1 in 1d20.

- A level 10 cypher that Devola promised to Tichronus in return for the creation of the egg chamber. This formidable weapon looks like a solid black cube about the size of a human fist encased in a larger clear cube. When the cypher is activated, the clear cube begins to dissolve, which takes 10 minutes. After the outer cube dissolves fully, the black cube causes all eligible victims (living creatures the size of a small dog or larger) in long range to belch forth a cloud of black vapor. This vapor fills the immediate area around the victim, inflicting 10 points of damage to the victim and all other living creatures within the cloud. One round later, all eligible victims within long range of every affected victim belch forth the same cloud (even if they already did so before). This continues until no creatures are affected. The cypher is a horrific doomsday device that could easily destroy an entire city or wipe out an army.

THE CACHE

If the PCs follow Devola's directions to the cache of numenera, they find that she spoke truly. To get in, they must pry open a door braced from the other side by a synth rod (a level 6 task). Inside, they find a storehouse of useful numenera and other equipment, along with a pair of skeletons of humans who appear to have died while lying on bedrolls on the floor. The dead-end chamber has no food or water, although remains suggest that there once was food here.

The equipment is varied (GMs should feel free to allow the PCs to find almost anything they might need), but the numenera is specific

TROUBLESHOOTING

This part of the adventure can go in different directions. Rather than force events to unfold exactly as written, you'll need to roll with what the players do and how things transpire.

If no PCs end up with a spinal parasite: Find other ways to motivate the characters. The NPC guardians, who already have grafts on their spines, certainly need saving. Alternatively, the PCs might reach a different agreement with Devola. Perhaps she offers them some of her numenera in exchange for dealing with the Insidious Choir or retrieving the gharolan and the Impossible Blade for her.

If the hook for the other adventures rests on the shoulders of the NPCs with parasites, the characters must figure out what to do with them. Do they escort the NPCs back to their homes, or do the NPCs accompany the group on its missions?

If the PCs don't meet Devola: The information that Devola provides about removing the parasites could be given to the characters by someone else. Perhaps an Aeon Priest can perform the operation for them. The priest would still need the gharolan and the Impossible Blade, providing an impetus for the PCs to take on the tasks involved in "The Mechanized Tomb" and "Beyond the Maelstrom."

If the PCs don't work with Devola: The repercussions of not accepting Devola's terms are obvious if one or more of the PCs has a spinal parasite. It's reasonable that someone else in the world can help them, but finding that person should be as difficult and dangerous as carrying out the missions for Devola.

Each of the separate adventures has its own means of getting the PCs involved. You can always use those motives instead.

If the PCs fail: If the characters fail at one of the three tasks, Devola won't be able to help them. Again, the repercussions are obvious. But perhaps PCs with the means can learn of a different way to find an Impossible Blade or some gharolan or another way to defeat the Insidious Choir.

and has already been adapted so it's ready to use, as opposed to something the characters must scavenge.

Three Cyphers

- **Leap belt (level 5):** When attached to a standard leather belt, this device allows the wearer to leap up to long range in a single bound (vertically, horizontally, or both), landing perfectly.

- **Healing salve (level 2):** This clay jar contains greasy paste. When applied to a wound, the paste restores 1d6 + 4 points to the recipient's Might Pool.

- **Magnetic boots (level 3):** These extraordinarily powerful electromagnets affix to the soles of standard leather boots.



With subtle toe movements, the wearer can activate or deactivate the magnets (no action required), allowing him to climb up a metal wall or remain, unmoved, while standing on a metal surface. The magnets' power lasts for one hour.

Two Artifacts

- **Beam lance (level 6):** When mounted on a creature's forearm, this weapon fires a beam of concentrated green light up to 200 feet (61 m), inflicting 6 points of damage. Alternatively, the beam can be shortened to 6 feet (1.8 m) in length and used as a melee weapon for one minute, inflicting 6 points of damage. Depletion: 1–3 in 1d100.

- **Stasis projector (level 7):** This handheld device projects a wide ray at a target that is already immobile (perhaps a creature that is bound or willing). The target is placed in safe suspended animation within an energy sheath. The sheath floats about 4 feet (1.2 m) off the ground and can be pushed along easily, almost as if it were weightless. The sheath lasts for 28 hours and is impervious to attacks of a level lower than the artifact that created it. Depletion: 1 in 1d10.

Three Oddities

- A device that fits over your ears and plays strange noises that sound like atonal, mostly unpleasant music.

- A pair of multifaceted lenses set into leather goggles that make the wearer see things as an insect would.

- A handheld device that makes everyone within immediate range relive the previous one or two seconds. No one can change anything that happened; they simply experience the same events again. The device can be used 1d6 times each day.

SPINAL PARASITES AS THE ADVENTURES PROGRESS

It may be three months before the PCs return to Devola, considering the distances they have to travel and the challenges they must face. This is pushing the limit of how long PCs with a parasite on their spine can survive before it consumes them.

As time goes on, the benefits of the parasite increase and then wane. About a month after attaching, the parasite increases the character's Might and Speed Pools by 3 each, in addition to the increase to Edge already

conferred. However, after two months, this benefit goes away, followed two weeks later by the loss of the bonus to Edge. A week later, the character is debilitated all the time. At three months, the character must make a Might defense roll each day. Failure means he moves one step down the damage track and remains in that condition until the parasite is removed or he is dead.

RETURNING TO DEVOLA

If the PCs defeat the Insidious Choir and return to Devola with the Impossible Blade and the gharolan, she keeps her word. In a long and elaborate surgery, she removes the grafts (which kills the parasite). The PCs survive, but recovery to the point where they can move on their own takes about twelve hours, and it takes another three to four days to be fully functional again. At no point does Devola become friendly to the characters—this is an obligation for her, nothing more. If nothing else, remember that the parasites she removes (and thus kills) are her own offspring.

Once all the PCs are able to leave, Devola forces them out and tells them that if they return, she will treat them as intruders and deal with them as such.

RETURNING TO TICHRONUS

Sooner or later, the PCs might return to the Tichronus estate. At the very least, they have unfinished duties there. Mostly, however, they may wish to deal with the noble who is turning over human hosts to inhuman creatures.

When the baron returns from the beginning of the crusade, he tries to silence PCs who know about the egg chamber and Devola—one way or another. The first and easiest way might be bribery. If there's any hint that such a strategy won't work, he gathers some thugs to have the characters eliminated.

Remember that in Uxphon, there is no legal way of "bringing Tichronus to justice." As a noble, he is above such things. The PCs will need to bring their own justice, if it is important to them.

See An Unexpected Complication: The War Effort, page 86, for the optional adventure subplot featuring Tichronus.



VIRAL TRANSMISSIONS

This adventure takes place as part of The Devil's Spine if the PCs go after Devola's enemy, the Insidious Choir. As a standalone scenario, it offers the characters a chance to deal a significant blow against a great threat to humanity (and, in fact, most biological creatures).

BACKGROUND

Viruses fit no precise definition of life that we know and perhaps are best classified as “biological agents.” Yet they are far more common than any other biological entity. At some point in the distant past, through evolution or intelligent engineering—or perhaps a little of both—a common, ordinary virus gained awareness. This was not just a step from biological agent to living creature but a quantum leap forward.

The virus existed only as an Insidious Choir entity. One individual particle—called a viron—could do little or nothing by itself, but together with many others infecting the same biological system, this entity could think, feel, and desire. It craved understanding of its world and adapted itself so that it could, over time, take control of most organisms that it infected. However, virions couldn't communicate from infected host to infected host. Each infected entity was like a new colony, and there was no communication between them. This was a problem for the virus because it had no concept of individuality. Each “colony” wasn't a new individual but a missing part of the whole. Infection was not a way to create offspring; rather, it was more like losing a limb. The virus eventually learned to force infected creatures to act in ways that allowed virions to transfer back to already infected creatures, thus enabling a crude means of communication. But this was mind-numbingly slow and inefficient for the growing intelligence.

To make matters worse, infected biological entities had problems. They resisted infection and control. They had various requirements for food and water that were cumbersome. Most inefficient of all, they died. So the virus studied the ways of ancient civilizations and learned to engineer and craft (through infected, controlled creatures) hosts to its specifications. These mindless biological automatons were more like vehicles for the virus than creatures to infect, and the virus

soon learned to build different kinds of hosts for different duties.

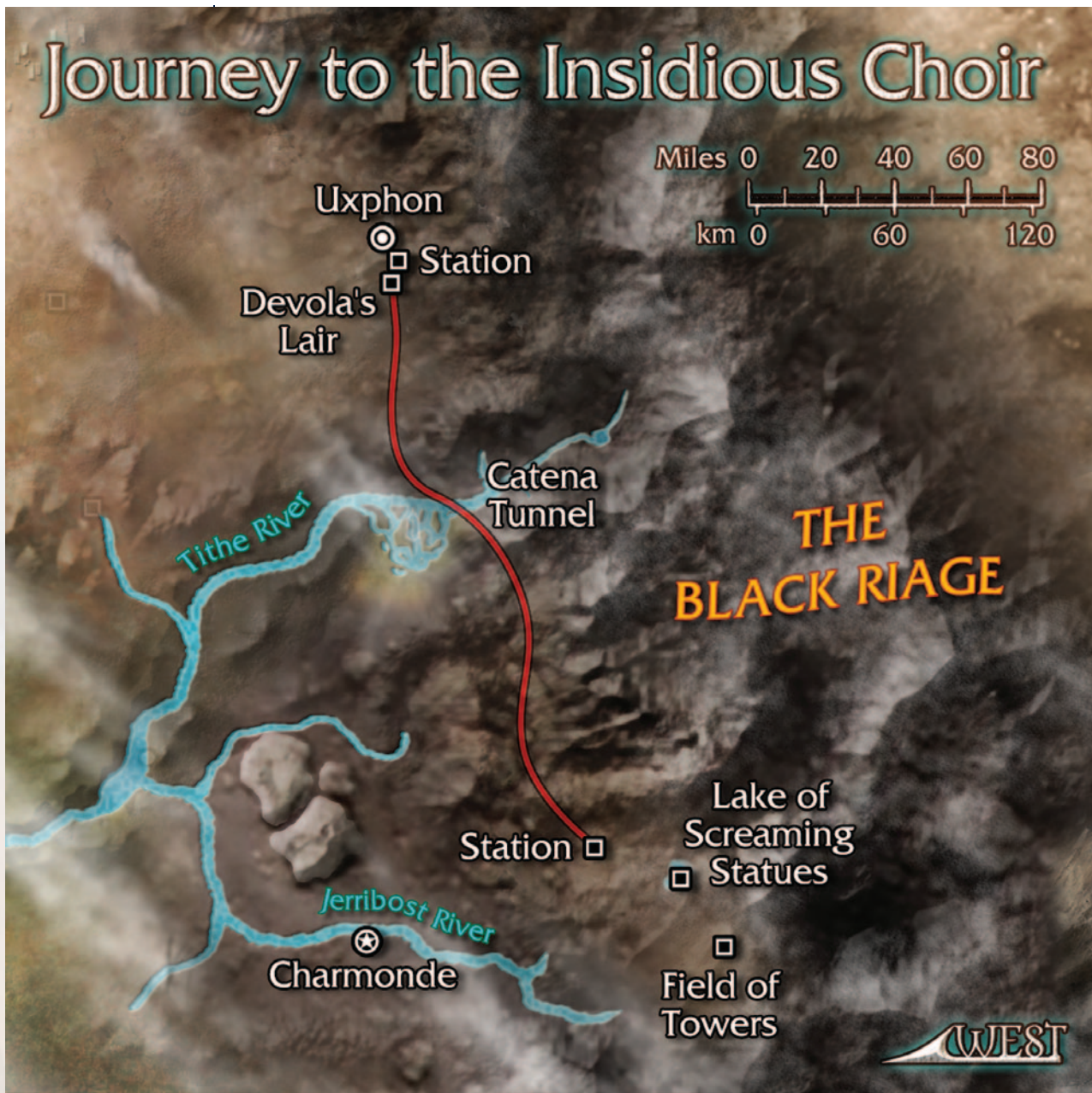
However, the communication problem remained. So the virus again delved into the past and learned of a technology that could tap into the same frequencies it used to communicate among virions in a single host and then broadcast those same frequencies as radio waves across vast distances. Its engineered hosts were good at building things now, and so through them it created a transmitter. It called this device the Spinneret because it created a web of communication strands. Suddenly, all the lost parts of itself were joined together in glorious union. As a result, its intelligence and ambitions grew. The virus still seeks knowledge and understanding of its world, but its ultimate goal is the elimination of all threats to itself through total domination.

Only a few creatures know of the existence of the virus, but its explorer hosts have begun moving farther and farther afield. One being that has come to know of the virus and understand its true threat is the nagaina matron Devola.

SYNOPSIS

The PCs follow the directions given to them by Devola and find the “conveyance” she spoke of: a string of super-fast connected vehicles (a hovertrain). If the PCs get the train to function, it saves them about two weeks of walking through dark, dangerous tunnels (or even longer if they travel through the mountains on the surface). Either way, they are likely attacked by investigating probes from the Insidious Choir, the sentient virus they hope to stop. Eventually they reach the wilderness area and a location called the Field of Towers. There, after a few trying encounters, they reach the tower that holds the Spinneret. The building is inhabited by all the engineered hosts of the Insidious Choir. The PCs must reach the top of the tower, destroy the transmitting device, and get out alive.

Devola, page 16



GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

Obviously, the most straightforward way to bring the PCs into this adventure is by having them make a deal with Devola and getting instructions from her. If that doesn't work out, try one of the following options.

Strike Team. Someone else in the campaign substitutes for Devola. Another NPC wants to see the Insidious Choir defeated and agrees to give the PCs something they want if they destroy the Spinneret. GMs should tailor this to fit the characters, based on what they need or want—information, assistance, a device, or even just money.

Curious Wanderers. In this scenario, the PCs wander through an ancient complex and discover the catena. This likely results in them being attacked by the engineered viral hosts of the Insidious Choir, and suddenly they are drawn into the adventure. Alternatively, the characters wander the wilderness and come upon the Field of Towers. Curious PCs are attacked by the viral observers there and drawn into the action.

Rescue Mission. From time to time, the Insidious Choir infects biological creatures that it has not engineered. In this case, the virus has infected a friend of the PCs (or a



family member of a friend) who disappeared into the wilderness after coming down with a strange but powerful cold. Tracking this person leads the PCs to the Field of Towers.

Hunters. A local clave of Aeon Priests has learned of the existence of the engineered hosts, but the group doesn't fully understand the virus. The priests want pieces from as many of these strange "creatures" as they can get, and they offer to pay 5 shins for each bit taken from a different individual. Even a piece the size of a fist is big enough for their purposes.

MODIFYING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure is designed with first- or second-tier characters in mind. Although characters of higher tiers could partake in the adventure as written and still find excitement and challenge, they would likely approach it very differently. The tower at the end wouldn't be as threatening—it would be something to conquer by brute force.

Third- or Fourth-Tier Characters: Increase the level of all the hosts by +1, which means increase their health by +3, the damage inflicted by +1, and so on. In addition, add +1 Armor to the ocular and tactile hosts, and add

+2 Armor to the warrior hosts. Add +1 to the level of the other foes in the adventure (steel spiders, the cragworm, and all the human NPCs), which means increase their health by +3, the damage inflicted by +1, and so on. Add +1 Armor to the steel spiders and the cragworm.

Fifth- or Sixth-Tier Characters: Do everything mentioned above, and add another +1 Armor to all the engineered hosts and the steel spiders. Double the number of steel spiders and all the engineered hosts encountered. Give the cragworm all its normal cragworm abilities plus its mutant ability outlined in the text, and add a second cragworm mate that accompanies it (without the mutant ability). Give three ocular hosts in the tower (of your choosing) interesting and useful artifacts from the Numenera corebook.

AWAKEN THE TRAIN

In which the PCs discover a way to facilitate their journey, if only they can understand and control it. If the PCs proceed toward the Insidious Choir's tower immediately after leaving Devola, the directions are easy to follow. It's a short trip (perhaps 25 minutes) to reach the "chamber with the conveyance," which is



Show 'Em:

The Catena, Image C, page 89

"Train" isn't a very Numenera word. It's too grounded in the modern day. "Linked vehicles" or "hovering caravan" are better terms. As another alternative, we use the more ambiguous word "catena" in much of this section.

a location we'll call the Station (for obvious reasons).

If the PCs leave Devola (and possibly go on one of the other missions) and then attempt to follow her directions later, they'll probably need to return to the underground complex or do some extrapolation of aboveground terrain, because all of her instructions are subterranean. Aboveground, the PCs will deal with difficult, mountainous terrain and a very high chance of getting lost, but generally they must head south-southeast for almost 250 miles (402 km).

SUMMARY OF THE STATION

The chamber is very large, but the most important fact is that it's vertically oriented. It consists of five levels. Here's a brief overview of the levels:

1. The Entry Level, where the PCs come in, is essentially a ledge overlooking the rest of the chamber.

2. The Catena Level is immediately below, about a 30-foot (9.1 m) drop, and is—not surprisingly—where the catena of hovering vehicles rests on the elevated track. Three clawlike magnetic clamps hold the catena in place.

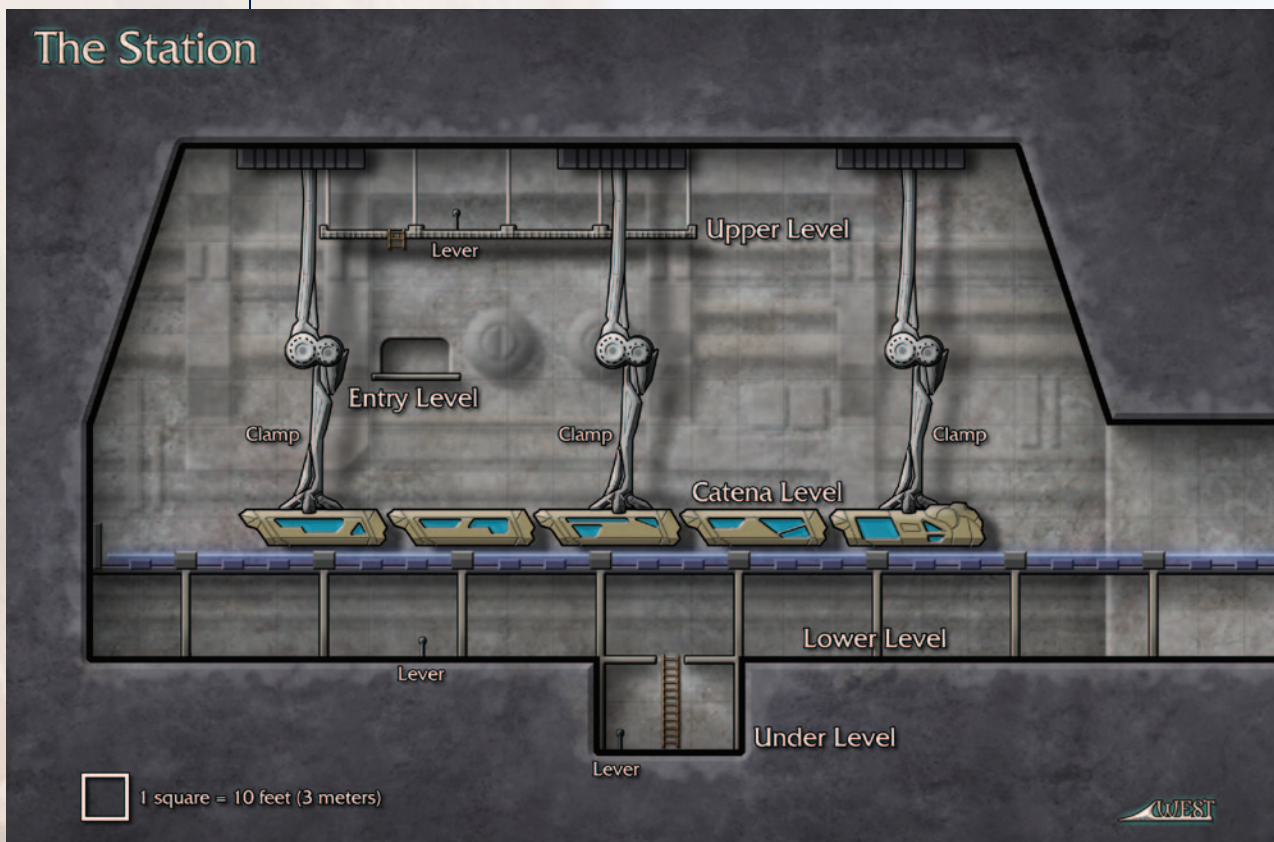
3. The Upper Level is high above the rest, a metal mesh platform suspended from the roof. One of the three release levers is here. (More on those in a bit.)

4. The Lower Level is actually the floor. There is little here other than a great deal of detritus, another release lever, and a hatch down to the Under Level (hidden by debris).

5. The Under Level is beneath the floor. It has the third release lever, and it's also the lair of some steel spiders.

The Release Levers: Three extremely powerful magnetic clamps hold the catena in place. If the clamps are released, the catena moves to the next station on its own, following an ancient program that it has been waiting to undertake for aeons. Each clamp is keyed to a different lever—one on the Upper Level, one on the Lower Level, and one on the Under Level. Pulling or activating each lever releases one of the magnetic clamps. (Determining this before the first lever is pulled is a difficulty 4 task.)

Although activating each lever presents its own challenges, all of them are essentially the same. Each lever is a rod of metal about 4 feet (1.2 m) long that is connected to a





heavy metal mechanism built into the floor. Currently, each is set into a reset niche in the floor so it's flush. The levers are difficult to move, but when one is pulled up from the floor, there is a loud clank sound, a red light at the end of the lever flashes brightly, and a klaxon sounds once for each lever pulled so far (thus, the first lever makes it blare once, the second twice, and the last three times). This is followed by a hum, and one of the magnetic clamps visibly detaches from the catena, sending a shudder through the chain of cars. When all three levers are activated, the catena begins moving after one round.

THE ENTRY LEVEL

The PCs come into the chamber about 60 feet (18 m) above the floor and 50 feet (15 m) below the ceiling. The passage that they used to reach this place ends in a ledge overlooking the large, dark chamber. Without some particularly powerful lights, all they'll know is that they've found a big, empty space. At this point, the GM should check the range of their light and reveal only what is within that range. For example, if the PCs have torches or glowglobes, they dimly see the catena and the Upper Level, but they don't see the floor.

Climbing: From the ledge, climbing up or down the relatively smooth wall is a level 5 task. Climbing a rope is a level 0 task for able-bodied characters. Unfortunately, there is no easy place to secure the rope on the ledge. One PC can hold a rope while another climbs down. If the two characters are about the same size, holding the rope is a level 1 task. If the climber is larger or heavier than the first PC, increase the difficulty by one or two steps (or more, depending on the size of the climber).

A fall from the ledge inflicts 6 points of damage.

THE UPPER LEVEL

This level is a metal mesh platform 20 feet (6 m) wide and 80 feet (24 m) long. It is suspended 20 feet (6 m) below the level of the ceiling by metal cables. The edge of the platform has a metal and synth ladder, but it's been severed about 2 feet (0.6 m) below the platform (very cleanly, a character might note).

Once the PCs reach this level, they can tell that the room used to have more platforms positioned here and there, but they apparently collapsed. More metal cables hang from the ceiling, severed at various lengths. One

platform hangs against the wall opposite the side where the PCs entered, a pair of its cables still hanging on. The ceiling has seen some damage as well, with missing supports and other sections. (All the damage in the room is due to the infestation of steel spiders, which tend to destroy their environment. PCs looking very carefully will find a few of their razor web strands here and there throughout the chamber.)

In the middle of this large platform is a release lever and the associated mechanism. Activating this lever is a difficulty 2 task.

If a PC reaches this level, she startles a small flock of **red bats**. These harmless creatures inhabit this chamber and the catena tunnels in great numbers. Each has a wingspan of about 3 feet (0.9 m).

THE CATENA LEVEL

This level is a metal and synth track held aloft by 30-foot-tall (9.1 m) supports that rise from the floor. The track is about 7 feet (2 m) wide but is uneven and precarious.

The Catena: The catena (hovertrain) is made up of five separate cars with hulls of extremely smooth, thick yellow synth; light metal frames; and furnished and comfortable interiors. Each car is 8 feet (2.4 m) high, 12 feet (3.6 m) wide, and 30 feet (9 m) long. High windows of blue glass are placed asymmetrically around each car.

The catena is held in place magnetically by three massive, clawlike clamps. The clamps hang down from the ceiling on long metallic rods.

Entry is through side doors located on every car, which are very difficult to open because they are sealed and have no handles or grips. The mechanism to open them no longer functions, so they would need to be forced open—a difficulty 7 task. An easier method is to use the hatches on the top of each car, which are not sealed. Inside each car, a ladder runs from the hatch down to the floor.

Inside, there is no "driver's seat." The catena is fully automated and moves immediately to the next station once released from the clamps. Instead, each car has couchlike seats, enough to seat 40 people, although judging by their configuration, it may be that the catena was not meant to be used by creatures built like Ninth World humans, but rather by taller and more angular creatures. The interiors of the cars are somewhat dusty and tattered but quite well preserved.

Red bat: level 1, level 3
for Speed defense

A level 0 task is considered routine. That means anyone can do it basically every time. Players don't need to roll for level 0 tasks.

Steel Spiders: level 3, level 6 for balancing and climbing; 2 points of Armor; bite has poison that inflicts an additional 4 points of Speed damage; webs inflict 4 points of damage



Steel Spider, page 260

UNDERSTANDING THE INSIDIOUS CHOIR

The trick to understanding the Insidious Choir is realizing that viruses are not living creatures in any way that we would define that concept. The virus looks at all biological beings as strange and alien, and after observing them for untold millennia, has decided that they are wildly inefficient. That's why the Choir engineered its own hosts—so it wouldn't have to rely on biological creatures. The idea is not unlike early humans turning from hunting and gathering to a more agrarian lifestyle.

Sliding doors between each car allow the PCs to move between them. The cars always remain together although they're not physically tethered in any way. The space between cars is about 2 feet (0.6 m), but invisible force fields ensure that this step is always safe (these same fields hold the cars together in procession).

THE LOWER LEVEL

The floor is 20 feet (6.1 m) below the track. The floor is 80 feet (24 m) wide and covered in debris—mostly twisted metal girders and metal platforms fallen from high above. This clutter makes it a bit difficult to move around in the room.

The Lever: One of the release levers is located in the floor, partially blocked by debris. Moving the debris is a difficulty 5 task and takes at least two minutes. Once the blockage is moved, it is still a difficulty 3 task to pull the somewhat stuck lever.

Hidden Hatch: If the PCs actively search the rubble and wreckage, it is a difficulty 4 task to notice that the debris covers a hatch in the floor. Clearing the hatch takes about twenty minutes, after which it is easily opened. The hatch leads to the Under Level.

THE UNDER LEVEL

This enclosed chamber is about 30 feet (9 m) long, 15 feet (4.6 m) wide, and 20 feet (6.1 m) tall. A large glass panel occupies most of one wall, but it's cracked and no longer has any power or function. One of the three release levers is in the floor near the panel.

Three steel spiders make their lair here. They feed mainly on the red bats in the

area (the hatch is not the only way into this chamber, but other means are too small for the PCs).

The entire level is filled with razor-thin metallic webs. An intact ladder leads from the hatch down to the floor, 20 feet (6.1 m) below. Climbing down safely requires a Speed defense roll (difficulty 4) to avoid the strands. Characters who fail suffer 4 points of damage.

Spiders: Three steel spiders move to attack anyone that comes into the chamber. They are hungry and fight to the death.

The Lever: One of the release levers is located in the floor, but it's blocked by a web strand. If the PCs pull the lever before cutting the strand, the lever will be sliced through. It still releases the clamp, but the red light won't flash.

The Panel: If PCs break the glass screen, they expose a number of numenera components. From these, they can scavenge one level 4 anoetic cypher in the form of a handful of glass pellets. If thrown—as a group—at the floor, they burst into flame, filling the immediate area with fierce flames that burn for 28 hours, inflicting 6 points of damage to anyone in or passing through the area. There is just barely enough time for a character to drop the pellets and move out of the area of the fire in one action.

THE MOVING CATENA

In which the PCs go for the ride of their lives. If the PCs manage to pull all three release levers and get on the catena, they can enjoy the 100-mph journey down a dark, cylindrical tunnel about 50 feet (15 m) across. The ride is smooth and lasts about an hour.

THE CATENA SLOWS DOWN

After about an hour, alert PCs feel the vehicle slow down. Looking out the windows, the surrounding area is dark, so it's difficult to see that the conveyance is entering a very large chamber and switching from one track to another. This happens automatically.

Then there is a noise on the top of the catena as though something quite heavy and solid landed on it—perhaps multiple somethings.

When the catena slowed to a leisurely 30 mph, creatures formed by the Insidious Choir used the opportunity to leap on it to investigate. The creatures are called tactile hosts, as they are effectively blind but have a



The real trick to using the catena is to pull all three levers and get inside the cars before they take off. There are many ways to do this, and clever players won't have any trouble devising a plan. The most straightforward method is probably to pull the lever on the Upper Level last, and the character activating it leaps down or slides down a rope before the catena takes off.

keen sense of touch, to the point where their sense of vibrations and movement give them a sort of "sight." They're also sometimes called viral explorers.

These particular explorers have never seen a catena before and want to find out more. They attempt to get inside. There are four of these creatures, but it is likely that the PCs are aware of only three at first. Those three are on top of the catena cars, and the fourth is on the very back, and likely out of sight.

If the characters go up to the top of the cars to investigate, the explorers attack—one of the easiest ways to investigate living creatures is to infect them. In addition, they want to get inside the cars, and the PCs are likely in their way.

MOVING OR FIGHTING ON TOP OF THE CATENA

Being on top of the vehicle while it's moving can be difficult. If characters are atop the moving catena at 30 mph, that's not too hard. However, a PC struck in combat must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 2) to keep her footing. A character that loses her footing must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 2) or fall off the catena. Fallen characters are immediately impaired and suffer 6 points of damage, but worse, they are left behind. Smart players will use Effort to make these rolls as they're quite vital, but doing so drains their resources. And it gets worse when the train speeds up.

About three rounds after the viral explorers leap on the cars, the vehicle begins to speed up, taking four rounds to return to its original speed of 100 mph. Characters on top of the catena at this point must make more difficult rolls, and new events make things even worse.

THE CATENA SPEEDS UP

Round 1: A character on top of the catena struck in combat must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 3) to keep her footing. A character that loses her footing must make

a Speed defense roll (difficulty 3) or fall off the catena. Fallen characters are immediately impaired and suffer 8 points of damage, and they are left behind.

Round 2: PCs on top of the catena see a new viral explorer climb up from the back of the cars. This is the one that was on the back, and it's interested in the motive force of the vehicle and has decided to investigate by tearing at the mechanism that causes the rear car to hover and move. Anyone inside hears horrible noises that sound like metal tearing and screeching.

A character on top of the catena taking any action other than hanging on must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 1) or begin to fall. A PC who begins to fall must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 1) or fall off the catena. Characters struck in combat must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 4) or begin to fall, and then they must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 4) or fall off the catena. Fallen characters are immediately impaired and suffer 10 points of damage, and they are left behind.

Round 3: The fourth explorer continues its work, unless stopped.

Characters on top of the catena must crouch and stoop due to the speed. A character on top of the catena taking any action other than hanging on must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 2) or begin to fall. A PC who begins to fall must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 2) or fall off the catena. Characters struck in combat must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 5) or begin to fall, and then they must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 5) or fall off the catena. Fallen characters are immediately impaired and suffer 12 points of damage, and they are left behind.

Round 4: The fourth explorer continues its work, unless stopped. The catena has returned to its normal speed of 100 mph.

Characters on top of the cars must hang on to something or they will fly off. Such a character taking any action other than hanging

A character between two cars who makes a difficulty 3 Intellect task can figure out how to disengage the cars. Training in the numenera or mechanical devices applies.

on must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 3) or start to slide off. A PC who begins to slide off must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 3) or fall entirely off. Characters struck in combat must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 5) or begin to fall, and then they must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 6) or fall off the catena. Fallen characters are immediately debilitated and suffer 12 points of damage, and if they survive, they are left behind. (When a PC is debilitated, if even one stat Pool is reduced to 0, the character dies.)

Round 5: Unless stopped, the fourth explorer damages the last car enough that it begins to list and buck, and it pulls on the other cars, slowing the catena down to the speed it had in round 3. At this point, even if the viral explorer is stopped, too much damage has been done. If the last car is not disengaged within three rounds, it drags the entire catena to a lurching, violent, metal-screaming stop. If the PCs are to continue, it will be on foot for almost 100 miles (161 km) down the tunnel.

GM Intrusion: A character striking the tactile host is exposed to a viral cloud and a spurt of caustic fluid (5 points of damage).

TACTILE HOST (VIRAL EXPLORER) 3 (9)

This artificial creature looks like a transparent, rubbery membrane molded into a vaguely humanoid shape and filled with dark green liquid. Its headless body is broad, and its arms

are very large compared to its legs, giving it the appearance of an ape more than of a human. The membrane is very smooth, and the liquid is filled with bubbles.

Motive: Curiosity

Environment: Anywhere

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Combat: The tactile host releases a viral cloud each time it suffers even 1 point of damage. All within immediate range must make a Might defense roll or become infected. About 28 hours after infection, an infected character begins to unwillingly transmit all thoughts and sensory input information to the Insidious Choir. After seven days, the virus can control the actions of the infected character, but he can attempt an Intellect defense roll to resist. Successful resistance means that he does nothing for one round. The difficulty of the Might defense roll is 1 for each day of infection after the first seven days. Regardless, the difficulty of all actions forced upon the character is two steps higher than normal. The tactile host can also form an orifice and spray a stream of caustic fluid. This costs the creature 1 point of health, but it inflicts 5 points of damage to all within an immediate distance.





Last, a tactile host can attempt to infect a creature intentionally (rather than accidentally, when it suffers damage). To do this, the host must strike the creature with a melee attack that inflicts no damage. If successful, the viral explorer holds the creature still for a moment and sprays him with a virus-laded fluid.

The tactile host and the virions within it are immune to mental effects or Intellect damage.

Interaction: Communicating with a tactile host is extremely difficult. It doesn't speak or understand speech. If a mental link is established, real communication is still impossible, but the character mentally connected with the host hears a choir of thousands (perhaps millions) of voices all "talking" in unison, asking questions such as "What is this?" "Where does this go?" "What does this do?" and "What is that?" The questions are occasionally punctuated with the phrase "Infect to investigate."

THE CATENA STOPS

The catena stops a bit more than an hour after the tactile host incursion. The place where it stops is another station not unlike the one where the PCs boarded, and three

huge clamps hold the cars in place. However, this station lies in a state of far greater ruin. A large portion of the ceiling has collapsed, leaving an enormous hole where daylight (and weather) comes in. If the characters climb up about 80 feet (24 m) to the hole, they can get out and once again reach the surface.

WALKING THE TUNNEL

In which the characters discover that there are always multiple ways to achieve a goal.

If one or more characters falls off the speeding catena and must walk the rest of the way, the path takes them down a cylindrical tunnel about 50 feet (15 m) across with the metallic track running through its center. The trip takes more than two long, arduous weeks in the dark—a bit less than a week if they really push.

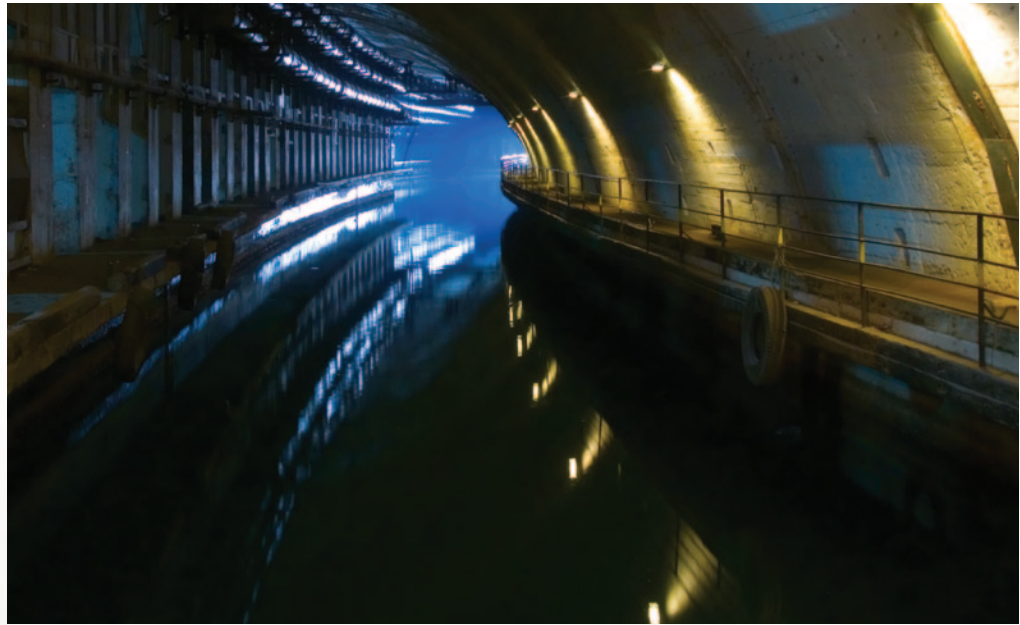
THE FELD

About five days into the journey, after nothing has happened or changed—not even branches in the passage—the characters come upon a nest of feld. Feld are intelligent insects that are similar to cockroaches but about 7 inches (17.8 cm) long. They live in the darkness, keeping to themselves, feeding on other insects that they raise in the same fashion that a human might raise livestock.



Show 'Em: The Feld, Image D, page 89

Feld: level 1; 1 point of Armor



The feld have their own unique language, but a few of them can speak the Truth—with one caveat. They speak in one-word responses only. If an idea requires more than one word of the Truth, they can't express it. The feld have little to offer the PCs, but they are not necessarily hostile unless it is to meet aggressive behavior from the characters. The tunnel is their entire world, and they know nothing of either end.

VIRAL EXPLORERS ON FOOT

Somewhere around seven or eight days into their subterranean journey (depending on their overall pace), the PCs reach a wide chamber. It's the same chamber discussed above where the catena would slow down.

Four viral explorers inhabit raised platforms in the upper reaches of this place. They leap down to investigate the PCs unless the characters are extremely stealthy (and somehow move through the chamber without light). The explorers seek to infect the PCs.

END OF THE LINE

The place where this long journey stops is another station not unlike the one where the PCs boarded the catena, and three huge clamps hold the cars in place. However, this one lies in a state of far greater ruin. A large portion of the ceiling has collapsed, leaving an enormous hole where daylight (and weather) comes in. If the characters climb up about 80 feet (24 m) to the hole, they can get out and once again reach the surface.

THE WILDERNESS

In which new weirdness is found, new friendships are forged, and new dangers arise.

The PCs now find themselves in a wild and untamed region of northeast Navarene, somewhere south of the Obelisk of the Water God (though they probably won't know that). This area is thick with overgrown and collapsed ruins of the prior worlds, with few human inhabitants. Devola's directions take the group south and east into a rough, hilly region of



It's worth taking a bit of time to stress how arduous it is to walk down a dark tunnel for days. How claustrophobic and isolating it is. How cold, damp, and uncomfortable it is. It's also worth discussing where the PCs get food, water, and light during the journey. Water, fortunately, can be found here and there through leaks in the ancient walls. But if the characters didn't bring enough food, there's little to eat beyond rats and insects.



rocky crags. Soaring raptors fly high above, and the lands teem with deer, mammals, and small reptiles living amid ancient architectural skeletons and scattered stones.

The journey overland to the Field of Towers is about 40 miles (64 km), meaning that it probably takes the PCs three and a half days to get there.

THE SCREAMING STATUES

On their route, the PCs hear distant screams to the southeast. Following these screams takes them off their designated path, so many characters may choose to ignore the screams and keep going.

Those who investigate ascend a rise and then another. At the top of this craggy hill, which is covered in black and purple flowers, the PCs see a large, calm lake about three-quarters of a mile (1.2 km) long. Rising up out of the lake are huge statues of metal, synth, and glass. These six monstrosities stand 80 feet (24 m) or more above the calm surface of the lake. The statues appear vaguely human, but the figures are contorted impossibly (heads and necks are turned around the wrong way, and arms are bent in impossible angles).

And the statues are screaming.

The more time the PCs spend looking at the statues, the more they get the sense that the statues were created by someone or something that only vaguely understood what a human looked like. It's as if the sculptors had the right pieces but had no idea how they fit together.

The Shore: If the PCs go down to the lake to investigate further, the descent is a bit treacherous (difficulty 2 climb). No animals live anywhere around the lake. Not even insects buzz around the water's edge. The shore is thick with an oily, blue-black slime. This slime is poisonous and caustic to the touch (inflicting 1 point of damage per round).

The screaming of the statues does not get as loud as one would expect at the shore, considering that they could be heard from far off. Still, it is loud, grating, and continuous. Those on the lake's edge can tell that the screams come from different statues at different times. First one statue screams, then another. Then two others scream, and then another. And so on.

From the shore, the PCs can tell that the six statues are individually distinct but generally the same. What appear to be metal rods and massive hoses connect into the flesh of twisted bodies at various spots from somewhere



Show 'Em: *The Screaming Statues*, Image E, page 90



beneath the surface of the water. The statue nearest the shore is about 300 feet (91 m) away. Thanks to the slime, it's difficult to tell how deep the water is just by looking at it. Direct investigation reveals that the lake is very deep. The shoreline drops off 10 to 15 feet (3 to 4.6 m) in most places, and the middle of the lake is 50 feet (15 m) deep or more.

The Shack: An old shack of stone and wood stands on the north side of the lake, where a small brook feeds into the larger body of water. The structure is long abandoned, and the roof is ready to collapse. There are only a few remaining bits of evidence to suggest that perhaps one person lived here, but probably not for thirty years. Particularly observant characters might note that there are no signs of anything you'd expect to find in a shack by a lake—no fishing gear, for example.

Next to the shack is an intact wooden rowboat with a pair of oars. It can hold four people.

The Statues Up Close: If the PCs use the rowboat (or some other means) to reach the statues, they notice that the figures are coated in the same blue-black slime found at the shore. The water is murky, with no signs of fish living in it.

Close proximity to the statues (which is to say, close enough to touch them, even if one does not actually touch them) causes strange effects in humans. Everyone should make Might defense rolls (difficulty 4). Those who fail immediately feel strange and perhaps a little ill. However, no real effects take place for 1d6 days. After that time, roll on the Harmful Mutations table in the Numenera corebook. Have the player make another Might defense roll (difficulty 4). If successful, also roll on the Beneficial Mutations table. Although GMs rarely roll dice in Numenera, it's important that you roll on the tables so the players won't know how the statues have affected them.

The mutations begin to express themselves slowly in the PCs. For story reasons, you should introduce these effects and changes very gradually. For example, a character who receives the "useless eye" mutation should develop blurry vision in one eye and slowly lose the use of it. A character who gains improved musculature (+5 to Might Pool) would slowly feel stronger, although the changes might initially be painful and disorienting. Add the new points to the Might Pool slowly—perhaps 1 point every day or every other day.

The Bottom of the Lake: If the PCs have the ability to determine such things, they find that

the statues almost certainly didn't stand in a lake originally. In fact, the figures surround a completely submerged structure that is now flooded. If the PCs have the ability to explore this structure, which involves diving down 50 feet (15 m) and breathing underwater for extended periods, the GM should elaborate on a very strange (ultraterrestrial) laboratory that involved biological study and manipulation of humans and other creatures in the distant past.

Nothing is alive in the lab or the lake. Anyone breathing or ingesting the water suffers 1 point of damage and an additional point of damage every 10 minutes of exposure.

THE TATTOO ARTIST

On their journey, the PCs may come upon a man riding an aeneen covered in packs. The man is Larix Festus, a tattoo artist who is moving from a small village called Narnis to Charmonde. He plans to set up shop in the city, where he hopes his prospects will be better.

Larix is a nano tattoo artist. He creates tattoos laced with microscopic numenera. When tattooed in certain patterns on the skin, the designs generate various effects. The strength of the effect depends on the precision of the artist. Typically the patterns are multilayered, so although the overall pattern might be visible, the process of laying it down is secret to the individual artist. Each artist has specializations, and Larix specializes in granting senses beyond those normally possessed by humans. Certain patterns he has developed can be used to sense electromagnetic fields, active nano esoterics, transdimensional energies, and more. The designs enable the wearer to feel strength and direction, much like a person's hand can sense the heat of a flame.

Larix is a thin, wiry man in his late twenties with black hair and greenish-yellow eyes. He is covered with tattoos—some nano, some ordinary artistry—of his own design. One prominent tattoo shows the metallic skeleton of a dragon wrapped around his right arm from his wrist to his shoulder.

If the PCs are friendly to him, Larix responds in kind. He just wants fair compensation for his hard work and talent, and he is happy to explain what he does. For 20 shins or an interesting cypher or oddity, he will inscribe one temporary (single-use) nano tattoo on a PC. When the character activates the tattoo (by taking an action), she will be able to mentally sense one of the following in

Larix Festus: level 5; 1 point of Armor; various defensive effects from nano tattoos



Charmonde, page 138
Aneen, page 231



Harmful and Beneficial Mutations tables, page 124



The submerged laboratory was built by ultraterrestrial visitors who came to Earth in a time when there were no intelligent inhabitants of any significance. These visitors attempted to use genetic material they found to rebuild prior residents of our world—mostly humans. They failed miserably and eventually built the statues as monuments to their failure before leaving Earth. Of course, learning all these details would be extraordinarily difficult for PCs.

long range, regardless of line of sight:

- Temperature (including the degrees of heat, the location of heat sources, and so on)
- Electrical energy (active devices, power conduits, and so on)
- Bioelectrical fields (living creatures)
- Transdimensional energy (including creatures and portals)
- Radio waves (transmissions, transmitters)
- Active nano esoterics (including other sorts of nanotechnology use)

Larix is not an adventurer or explorer, and he has no interest in joining the PCs. If he must defend himself, he can produce a number of defensive effects from his tattoos, granting him invisibility and +4 to Armor. His aneen has about 120 shins' worth of gear, most of it tattooing equipment and special nano inks.

MUTANT CRAGWORM

The last leg of the journey laid out by Devola leads through a long ravine and finally into an open field, called the Field of Towers by the few humans who have visited it. Toward the end of the ravine, three figures crouch behind a portion of a ruined structure of some kind—perhaps the overgrown remnants of a toppled tower of metal. They are hiding from a predator, and if they spot the PCs coming toward them, they try to get the characters' attention and signal for them to do the same.

The predator in question is that ubiquitous danger of the Ninth World, a cragworm. But it is no ordinary cragworm—this one is a mutant of its kind. It doesn't have a paralyzing howl or poisonous bite. Rather, it sprays a stream of sticky goo from an orifice within its massive mouth. This goo envelops a single foe, immobilizing him until he can break free. The worm can do this in lieu of making a bite attack. Of course,

immobilized foes are struck automatically by the creature's bite attacks.

This is a dangerous encounter. Even without its venom or howl, the cragworm could easily chew through a number of characters. Wise PCs will follow the advice of the three NPCs already hiding. If the characters remain well hidden for three rounds, the cragworm leaves in search of prey elsewhere. In fact, it moves into the Field of Towers and begins causing trouble for the viral hosts there—perhaps even causing a distraction that smart PCs can use to their advantage.

The NPCs are the treasure-hunter Askalar, her friend Ederana, and their guide, Theobald. Askalar is looking for cyphers and artifacts, and she has used a detection device that indicates the presence of a significant artifact in the fields ahead (she doesn't know it, but she has detected the Spinneret). Ederana also claims to be a treasure hunter, having met up with Askalar in Charmonde. However, this is a lie. Ederana is here to rescue her friend Dro, who was infected by the Insidious Choir and recently came into this region while controlled by the virus. Theobald has helped them find their way here overland from Charmonde.

Although the three are traveling companions, they are not truly friends. Askalar is greedy to a fault. Ederana is a liar with her own (mostly altruistic) agenda. Theobald loves exploring and traveling, but he makes a point to avoid developing any ties to those he guides—they have a way of dying out in the wilds.

Theobald is short and stocky but light on his feet. His long, curly, dark brown hair gets in the way of his green eyes at times. He wears a leather jerkin and carries a bow, a quiver, and a sword-staff.

Askalar is a rather stocky, muscular woman who knows her way around a fight. Her hair is cut in a style practical for exploration. Her left arm bears tattoos that suggest that she



Cragworm: level 6, level 7 for hiding in rocky terrain, level 5 for Speed defense, level 4 for perception, level 3 for resisting trickery; 2 points of Armor; 36 health; 8 damage

Theobald Malachis: level 3, level 5 with geography and nature knowledge; 1 point of Armor; 12 health

Askalar Veen: level 4, level 5 with Speed defense; 2 points of Armor; 18 health; possesses a handful of useful cyphers that produce effects as needed

Homing Volt

Projector: This level 5 artifact weapon fires tiny pellets that veer toward organic targets and burst with a jolt of electricity that deals 5 points of damage (ignores Armor). Attacking inorganic targets increases the difficulty by two steps, but attacking an organic target decreases the difficulty by one step. Hiding behind inorganic cover provides no protection, but hiding behind organic cover (like a tree) increases the difficulty of attacking the target by one step.
 Depletion: 1 in 1d20.

Ederana: level 2, level 4 with all interactions; 1 point of Armor; injector with level 8 catholicon



Catholicon, page 282

GM Intrusion: The ocular host suddenly bursts with virus-laden liquid, potentially infecting all creatures within immediate range.



Show 'Em: The Tower, Image F, page 90



is a veteran of a number of past wars and has served in a variety of armies. She wears chainmail armor and carries a sword and a dagger, but she also uses a homing volt projector.

Ederana is tall and broad shouldered with long, dark hair. She has come this far pretending to be an adventurer and explorer, but in fact she is just a charismatic and persuasive talker. She wears a leather suit under a flowing tunic and carries a mace and a dart thrower. She also has an injector with two doses of a level 8 catholicon that will kill all the virions of the Insidious Choir in a single host creature. This could be used to save Dro or as a weapon against some of the choir's infected creatures. The injector would also immediately destroy one engineered viral host of any kind.

If the cragworm attacks, Askalar gets involved. Theobald fights only if it seems like he might be at risk. Ederana attempts to steer clear of the worm, but she makes a good show of providing support with her dart thrower.

Once the threat is passed (one way or another), the NPCs are eager to find out who the PCs are and what they're doing here. Theobald is just curious, Askalar is worried about competition for treasure, and Ederana is looking for as much help as she can steer toward wherever the Insidious Choir has taken her friend.

If the PCs offer to join forces, Theobald and Askalar might agree, as it seems like they're all heading to the same place (for different reasons). If the PCs appear more capable than Theobald and Askalar, Ederana attempts

to ingratiate herself with the characters, regardless of what the other two do or if any offers are made. In any event, Theobald might be convinced to share some of his knowledge about the area with the PCs. This includes hearing reports of strange "green spies" and "liquid apes" that have been seen in this area by explorers and travelers in the past, and the talk of some rather serious diseases plaguing the region.

THE FIELD OF TOWERS

In which the Insidious Choir gathers power and information for its own dire purposes.

A wide, open field ringed by rising hills, the Field of Towers is a mile (1.6 km) across and filled with at least two dozen metal towers from the distant past. Most of the towers here are open structures, more like the massive supports of a very large single structure or object rather than individual buildings. As further evidence of this, the tops of all the towers are at least somewhat mangled or broken. Some towers have collapsed entirely. Many are overgrown with thick, ropy, ivylike plants.

The field is heavily patrolled by ocular hosts. These watchers keep a lookout for intruders and provide the first line of defense against any that might approach the Insidious Choir's transmission tower and the Spinneret device within.

Patrols consist of two ocular hosts working in tandem. If they spot or even suspect an intruder, they move in fearlessly to investigate, and—if need be—deal with him violently. And, of course, if they know about something, all of



the Insidious Choir knows.

More ocular hosts come from the transmission tower and the surrounding area to reinforce the patrols. Two more hosts arrive on the scene two rounds after the first patrol spots something, and two more show up every other round, to a maximum of ten hosts. If ten hosts can't deal with the problem, the virus will instead shore up defenses inside the tower.

OCULAR HOST (VIRAL WATCHER) 3 (9)

This artificial creature is a featureless human shape, almost like a mannequin, made of a dark, dense, spongy material. Ocular hosts have absorbed a great deal of a dark greenish liquid (the same liquid inside a tactile host).

Motive: Curiosity

Health: 10

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Movement: Short

Combat: An ocular host releases a viral splash each time it suffers even 1 point of damage in melee. A character who strikes the host must make a Might defense roll or become infected. About 28 hours after infection, an infected character begins to unwillingly transmit all thoughts and sensory input information to the Insidious Choir. After seven days, the virus can control the actions of the infected character, but he can attempt an Intellect defense roll to resist. Successful resistance means that he does nothing for one round. The difficulty of the Might defense roll is 1 for each day of infection after the first seven days. Regardless, the difficulty of all actions forced upon the character is two steps higher than normal. The ocular host and the virions within it are immune to mental effects or Intellect damage.

Interaction: Communicating with an ocular host is extremely difficult. It doesn't speak or understand speech. If a mental link is established, real communication is still impossible, but the character mentally connected with the host will hear a choir of thousands (perhaps millions) of mental voices all "talking" in unison, asking questions such as "What is this?" "Where does this go?" "What does this do?" and "What is that?" The questions are occasionally punctuated with "Infect to investigate."



The Tower of the Insidious Choir



THE TOWER

In which the characters must make a dangerous climb to put an end to the threat of the Insidious Choir.

The tower of the Insidious Choir, which houses the Spinneret, lies at the center of the Field of Towers. The lattice tower stands about 850 feet (259 m) tall and is 50 (15 m) feet across. It's mostly a hollow cylinder with sides formed by an intricate lacing of metal braces and support spars rather than solid walls. This outer structure then supports seven interior platforms and a platform at the very top, the site of the Spinneret.

Because the walls are a weblike system of crisscrossing metal spars, one can easily see out from inside the tower (and vice versa). From the ground looking up, one can see human-sized figures moving around inside, but no details beyond that are possible. One can also see at least two guardian hosts clinging to the exterior of the middle section of the tower.

The interior platforms are solid metal sheets that are visible from outside the tower. An observer can tell that there are eight, not counting the ground level. Each level is approximately 100 feet (30 m) above the one below it.

Climbing the interlaced supports, either on the inside or the outside of the tower, is difficulty 5.

The metal of the tower is level 9. Toppling the whole structure by destroying the base would make short work of things, but it would be very difficult.

SPIRAL PATH

Sometime more recent than the original construction of this tower, but still clearly a very long time ago, a spiral ramp of metal gridwork was added. It rises from the ground level interior up to levels 1, 2, 3, and 4, then outside the exterior of the tower to levels 5 and 6, then back inside up to level 7, and eventually up to the top of the tower at level 8. Unlike the metal of the tower, the walkway is level 6. It's easier to affect and destroy, if the need arises.

Using the spiral path, most creatures and characters take three full rounds to go from one level to the next if they are hurrying—longer if they are being careful.



THE OUTER HORDE

Once the PCs get inside the tower, the real danger isn't the hosts they encounter on the way up (although the defenders are numerous and dangerous). The real threat is all the hosts that come as the Insidious Choir pulls in its forces from the surrounding area to defend its most precious resource. After the PCs enter the tower, two new ocular hosts arrive every other round and move up the tower ramp to attack the intruders. The best thing the PCs can do is block the entrance so that no new hosts can enter.

GROUND LEVEL: THE BASE

The floor here is just dirt and drit. The entrance is a 12-foot-wide (3.7 m) opening in the outer structure; there is no door. The spiral path follows the inner perimeter up and around to level 1, almost 100 feet (30 m) overhead.

Ocular Hosts: There are three ocular hosts here at all times, and they attack intruders immediately. Their strategy is to hold and delay intruders until more hosts arrive from outside (see "The Outer Horde," above).

LEVEL 1: STRANGE STORAGE

The room is jammed with all sorts of miscellaneous junk. The spiral path follows the inner perimeter up and around to level 2, about 100 feet (30 m) above.

Tactile Hosts: There are two tactile hosts here, and they attack intruders immediately. They begin the combat by picking up heavy objects in the room and hurling them up to short range. They remain on this level no matter what.

Room Contents: This level is used to store various objects that the tactile hosts have retrieved in their exploration. Thus, it is a senseless miscellany of the mundane and the valuable. The room has bags of flour, uprooted plants, buckets of water, birds' nests, rocks of various sizes, rotting animal corpses, bits of metal and glass of various sizes, and similar samples of artificial and natural things.

Of interest, PCs searching the whole crowded jumble might find:

- Three bottles of liquor
- A golden box with 72 shins
- Three swords, a spear, and a greatsword
- A sledgehammer
- A wheelbarrow
- A bag of light tools
- A glowglobe

- An oddity that looks like an asymmetrical polygon about the size of a fist that spins whenever placed on the ground with a particular side down
- A level 4 cypher bag that currently contains a level 10 occultic cypher

When activated, the cypher surrounds the user with a nimbus of energy, giving him 10 points of Armor that works only against caustic damage. This lasts for one round, and the armor is ablative, which is to say that each point of damage that it absorbs destroys 1 point of the armor.

The cypher also releases fourteen hailstone-sized motes of roiling caustic fluid that fly toward and attack all targets (including the user) within medium range, one mote per target. If there are not fourteen targets within immediate range, the motes fly out to short range. If there are not fourteen targets within short range, they fly out to long range. If there are not fourteen targets within long range, the targets within long range get attacked twice (or more times) each, starting with those in immediate range.

LEVEL 2: INFECTED HOUND

The floor here is littered with broken and gnawed bones as well as a few gnawed and powerless (destroyed) numenera devices. The spiral path follows the inside perimeter up and around to level 3.

The Ergovore Hound: This beast was infected by the Insidious Choir months ago. Although the virus is slowly divesting itself of traditional organic hosts, it keeps this creature as a guardian. At this point, the Insidious Choir controls its actions, and it serves as a guard dog. The engineered hosts bring it things to eat, but the choir in general finds that need to be tedious and inefficient. The hound will not leave this level.

ERGOVORE HOUND 4 (12)

This creature looks a bit like a bulldog the size of a horse with multiple long, barbed tongues. It often haunts the ruins of prior worlds.

Although the hound is a traditional omnivore, subsisting on small prey, grass, and leaves, its unique aspect—and the reason for its name—is that it also feeds directly on energy fields.

Motive: Hungers for energy

Environment: Dwells alone or occasionally in mated pairs, in hills and wastelands

Health: 30

Drit is a fine artificial soil created from the breakdown, over time, of pieces of ancient, unknown technologies and structures.

Dro: level 3, level 4 with Speed and Intellect defense; 2 points of Armor; +1 damage with his sword]

Dro's Broadsword: This level 4 artifact inflicts +1 damage from the disruptive energy projected around the blade. This energy cannot be turned on or off, and it eats through sheaths at a rate of about one a week. Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (check once each week).]

An "appropriate" cypher to be destroyed by the ergovore is something that is obviously powered by energy, whether it's electrical, nuclear, or something else. Thus, a pill, injector, or poison probably isn't appropriate, but a ray emitter or a teleporter certainly is.

GM Intrusion:
The character is struck by multiple tongues from the ergovore hound and held fast for one round, losing his next turn.

Damage Inflicted: 7 points (one bite attack) or 3 points (up to six tongue attacks)

Modifications: Attacks as level 5

Movement: Short

Combat: The ergovore attacks with its bite, but the special attack danger comes from its tongues. If its foe has any kind of force field protection device, a Ward esotery, or the like, not only does it not function against the hound, but one touch from the beast's tongues utterly destroys it. A cypher or artifact with that kind of defensive field becomes drained and useless. A nano can restore the Ward with an action, but doing so will draw another attack from the hound. If the ergovore's tongue touches a character with no such obvious energy field, she must make an additional Speed defense roll, or one appropriate cypher (or, if she has no cyphers, an oddity or an artifact) on her person is drained of all power. If she has no devices at all, there is no effect.

The ergovore hound can make a bite attack against a single foe that inflicts 7 points of damage (along with the energy drain) or up to six tongue attacks on different foes that inflict 3 points of damage (along with the energy drain) each.

Interaction: Ergovore hounds have the general intelligence and outlook of beasts. Careful use of the energy that they crave, however, allows them to be trained. Some people

in the Ninth World who have access to energized devices that keep the creatures fed and happy can train them to be guard dogs of a sort.

LEVEL 3: THE RELUCTANT HOST

This level is empty except for a human named Dro, who is hiding behind some debris.

Dro: Dro is a human male infected by the Insidious Choir who has recently broken free from its control, at least temporarily. He is strong-willed and temperamental but kind and loyal to those he thinks of as friends. Physically, he is tall, slim-waisted, and quite attractive. Wearing a steel breastplate and greaves and bearing a shield, he looks very much the warrior. He carries a sword that scintillates with energy.

Dro is the close friend of Ederana, who might be with the PCs if she has survived this long. If she is present, the two are thrilled to see each other, and Dro assumes Ederana's companions to be friends. She can use her catholicon to cure him.

Without Ederana, if the PCs appear friendly, Dro latches onto them anyway. They are probably the only way he might get out of here alive.

Dro knows the layout of the entire tower and the contents of each level. He understands the importance of the Spinneret, and although he'd really just like to leave, he can be convinced to help destroy it.

Unfortunately, as time passes, the Insidious Choir will continually attempt to take control of him if he remains infected. This could prove to be a terrible turn of events if





it occurred at just the wrong moment (which should scream “GM Intrusion opportunity” at you).

LEVEL 4: SATURATION VATS

Two huge, round vats, 10 feet (3 m) across and 12 feet (3.7 m) high, dominate the center of this level. Each vat is filled with a bubbling, dark green soup of chemicals and a high concentration of the Insidious Choir virus. A creature directly exposed to this liquid must make a difficulty 5 Might defense roll each round of the exposure.

A raised catwalk runs between the two vats, just a few feet above the tops. A metal ladder on both ends connects the catwalk to the floor.

Attached to each vat is a mechanized crane with a large metal claw. When an engineered host stands on the catwalk, one of the cranes picks it up and dips it into a vat. This restores all fluid to the host and reinvigorates and rejuvenates the virus within it.

The side of each vat, near the floor, has a control panel for monitoring the fluid within it and making small alterations to the chemical mixture. As long as the Spinneret is operating, any host can use this technical machinery, since all hosts of the virus have the knowledge of the entire Insidious Choir.

The mechanisms for the cranes and the vats are level 4. A character who masters them could kill the virus contained in the soup very easily. If a character succeeds at a level 5 task, he could change the mixtures to boil and bubble over or to immediately flush and drain. Either would send a wave of liquid sweeping and splashing down to the lower levels. The GM is free to assign whatever results seem appropriate, but at the very least it would cause a serious diversion.

Ocular Hosts: There are six ocular hosts in this chamber, all on the catwalk awaiting rejuvenation. If trouble breaks out below, they remain here, but if intruders are on the levels above, they move to defend the tower—specifically, the Spinneret.

Loot: Destroying the mechanical devices in this room yields a potential of 15 shins and four cyphers, all level 3. These include:

- A small amount of a chemical that restores 1d6 + 3 points to the imbiber’s Might Pool.
- A small amount of a chemical that restores 1d6 + 3 points to the imbiber’s Speed Pool.
- A small amount of a chemical that increases the imbiber’s Might Edge by +1.
- A handheld device that allows one willing

character to transfer points from his Pools to another character’s Pools. The transferring character can’t reduce a Pool lower than 1, and the receiving character can’t raise his Pools above their normal maximum.

LEVEL 5 AND LEVEL 6: GUARDIANS

These levels are empty on the interior, but two warrior hosts cling to the outside. One is likely to attack while the PCs ascend from level 4 to level 5. Fighting this creature on the outside is extremely dangerous, as it will attempt to push or knock PCs off the spiral path. To knock a character off, the host must make a successful attack, and then the PC must fail a Might or Speed (player choice) defense roll (difficulty 3) to grab hold of something and catch himself from falling. Any characters knocked off the path almost certainly fall to their doom, suffering 40 points of damage and moving one step down the damage track.

If the PCs engage the first warrior host, the other descends from its position higher above in three rounds, joining the fight. Once engaged, the warrior hosts, together or separately, will follow the characters if they withdraw, which means that the PCs could take the fight into the safety of one of the interior levels fairly easily.

If the PCs have been really smashing their way through the Insidious Choir’s defenses, one of the warrior hosts goes to level 8 to defend the Spinneret directly.

WARRIOR HOST (VIRAL GUARDIAN) 5 (15)

This artificial creature looks like a huge, terrifying insect with a large, transparent abdomen filled with dark greenish liquid—the same liquid inside tactile and ocular hosts. The wingless insect has massive mandibles, and its legs end in spikes like cleavers. Much of its body is heavily armored, and it looks like it was designed for fighting (and spreading terror).

Motive: Defense

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short

Combat: The warrior host makes two attacks each round, at different foes or the same foe. Each attack inflicts 5 points of damage. The first attack is with one of its spikes. The second is its bite, which of course



Rion: level 5; 3 points of Armor; 20 health



Cellular disruptor, page 302



Bonded numenera items, page 277



Shallamas: page 139

carries the virus within it. Bitten characters must make a Might defense roll or become infected.

About 28 hours after infection, an infected character begins to unwillingly transmit all thoughts and sensory input information to the Insidious Choir. After seven days, the virus can control the actions of the infected character, but he can attempt an Intellect defense roll to resist. Successful resistance means that he does nothing for one round. The difficulty of the Might defense roll is 1 for each day of infection after the first seven days. Regardless, the difficulty of all actions forced upon the character is two steps higher than normal.

Further, the warrior host releases a viral splash of greenish liquid each time it suffers even 1 point of damage in melee. A character striking the host must make a Might defense roll or become infected.

The warrior host and the virions within it are immune to mental effects or Intellect damage.

Interaction: Communicating with the warrior host is extremely difficult. It doesn't speak or understand speech. If a mental link is established, real communication is still impossible, but the character mentally connected with the host will hear a choir of thousands (perhaps millions) of mental voices all "talking" in unison, asking questions such as "Who goes there?" "What is that?" and "Is

this a threat?" The questions are occasionally punctuated with "Infect to incorporate."

LEVEL 7: THE DANGEROUS HOST

Rion: Barrel-chested, mustachioed Rion has been an infected thrall of the virus for a very long time. He wears ornate plate armor and carries a large two-handed flail (a heavy weapon). He also wields an ornate bonded cellular disruptor that looks like a scepter and produces a great deal of black smoke whenever he activates it. Rion ignores intruders on levels 1 to 3, but if they appear on level 4 or above, he moves to intervene. Unlike all the engineered hosts, Rion will not hesitate to flee if the PCs appear dangerous. In such a case, he moves to protect the Spinneret directly.

If somehow freed from the virus, Rion becomes a juggernaut of vengeful fury against all things having to do with the Insidious Choir. He is a wealthy glaive from Shallamas, and not a particularly nice one, but if the PCs fight against the virus and its hosts, he will be their temporary ally. His need for vengeance is far greater than any small amount of gratitude he might feel for being freed.

LEVEL 8: THE SPINNERET

This top level of the tower is open to the sky above, reached by the spiral path coming up from the level below.

Ocular Hosts: Two ocular hosts maintain



the Spinneret at all times, but by the time the PCs reach this level, it's likely that there will be other guardians here to oppose the intruders. For example, Rion and/or one of the warrior hosts might be here, standing guard below the Spinneret. Any host here fights to the death to defend the device.

The Device: The Spinneret is a rectangular obelisk twice as tall as the hosts that monitor it. The device is covered in mechanisms, screens, and controls. It's located on a platform 20 feet (6.1 m) above the floor, suspended by sturdy supports. The height of the platform is such that anyone standing on it can see over the edges of the tower. Two metal ladders run from the floor to the platform.

The Spinneret is a very complex level 8 device. It's quite fragile, and if it suffers even 10 points of damage, it ceases functioning. However, it's surrounded by a force field globe for protection. The force field provides 10 points of Armor that regenerate every round. In other words, in any given round, 10 points of damage must be inflicted on the force field before damage can be done to the Spinneret. The ocular hosts that maintain the device are inside the force field and can turn it on or off as they desire. If the field goes down, before it comes back online again, the hosts attempt to make melee attacks if anyone is close enough.

Destroying the Device: If the Spinneret ceases to function, all the engineered hosts collapse. This makes it very easy for the PCs to leave the tower, victorious! Infected creatures remain infected, but the virus is now cut off from the rest of its "body." The stunned virus is likely to remain dormant in the infected creature for weeks before it begins to attempt to exert control again, seeking other infected creatures (and perhaps infecting others, if possible) to attempt to reunite the Insidious Choir.

Loot: Characters successfully scavenging the wreckage of the destroyed Spinneret can find the following:

- An oddity: a gyroscopic toy top that spins indefinitely if undisturbed.
- Two level 3 anoetic cyphers that allow

verbal communication between their users at any distance. Both cyphers must be activated at the same time, and communication lasts for 28 hours.

- A level 7 occultic cypher that scans and records everything within short range for one round and can then convey the level and nature of all creatures, objects, and energy sources it scanned. This information can be accessed for 28 hours after the scan.

- A level 5 artifact that must be affixed to a user's forehead (perhaps worn with a headband). It allows the wearer to sense whether someone speaking to him is lying. The speaker must be within immediate range and must be speaking in a language that the wearer understands. Depletion: 1 in 1d6.

THE RETURN TRIP

In which the characters return victorious, perhaps.

The PCs can return to Devola (or go on to one of the other missions) however they wish. The trip back to the nagaina matron is about 250 miles (402 km). The GM can add encounters along the way, or the journey back can remain uneventful. Certainly no engineered hosts will bother them if they destroyed the Spinneret. If they didn't destroy the device, the Insidious Choir is likely to dog their heels for quite some time and—if the PCs get away—will try to follow them secretly.

REACTIVATING THE CATENA

The PCs may want to take the catena back to Devola. The station where it stopped has three levers that must be activated to release the clamps, just as in the original station. These levers are in different places than in the first station, and two are buried in rubble; it takes the PCs many hours of moving debris to find them. One lever is damaged and must be repaired (difficulty 5) before it will function. If the characters activate all three levers, the catena zooms back to the other station in a journey that lasts a few hours.

Experience Point

Awards: *Discovering and using the catena is worth 2 XP for each PC. Destroying the Spinneret is worth 4 XP for each PC.*

These awards are in addition to any XP earned for recovering artifacts or other means.



By the end of this adventure, if the PCs have acquired the gharolan, found the Impossible Blade, and defeated Devola's foe, they can return to Devola (page 16) for the procedure. Otherwise, they can tackle "The Mechanized Tomb" (page 42) or "Beyond the Maelstrom" (page 63).



THE MECHANIZED TOMB

This adventure takes place as a part of The Devil's Spine if the PCs go after the Impossible Blade, a tool that Devola needs to remove the spinal parasite from a host. As a standalone scenario, "The Mechanized Tomb" involves the exploration of a mysterious complex from a prior world that is now used as the tomb of a much more recent queen.

BACKGROUND

The tomb of Queen Starloscet is essentially a Ninth World tomb built in an ancient complex. Its dangers and obstacles were designed by the queen's engineers and architects, not to mention those who built the larger structure for their own purposes literally millions of years earlier.

Starloscet ruled the land of Garamur 150 years ago. Her death saw the beginning of the end for Garamur, as her paramour and chief advisor Bach drove the kingdom into ruin by building her a suitable tomb to ensure her place of comfort (and power) in the afterlife. When Starloscet's heir, her niece Cerlana, tried to stop him, the kingdom erupted into violence from which it would never recover.

Within Garamur lay Aurturi's Pit. This ancient structure was long known to the people there, and for ages they told tales of ghosts and monsters coming up out of the pit. In fact, a whole mythology developed around it, and the locals believed that it was the entrance to the land of the dead (see page 43). Thus, to Bach, it seemed the only fitting place to bury his beloved queen.

Bach not only built an elaborate tomb, he also filled it with the kingdom's wealth in the form of artifacts and valuable goods and then warded it with traps and guardians to prevent tomb robbers from plundering it. Of course, the plunderers came—as they always do—and some even made fantastic fortunes by braving the dangers. However, a few spoke of strange lights and strange voices. Was the tomb haunted, or did Aurturi's Pit still have some semblance of life from the prior worlds?

Now Garamur and Starloscet are barely memories in the mostly uninhabited region of the Cloudcrystal Skyfields, but those who do remember them recall the tales of the queen's grand tomb, built by her grieving lover at the expense of the kingdom she had nurtured her entire life.

SYNOPSIS

The PCs must find a nevajin who has information regarding the Impossible Blade. If they can convince him to reveal what he knows, they learn that the Impossible Blade lies within the tomb of Queen Starloscet, in the now-lost land of Garamur. The PCs investigate the tomb, which is built within a structure from the prior worlds called Aurturi's Pit. Within the pit lies an insectlike creature (Aurturi) who must sting one character and inject him with DNA-modifying venom so the group can access some of the doors deeper in.

The PCs must navigate a number of traps and tricks before they find the tomb, but even then their mission is not done—the Impossible Blade is not there. They must plunge even deeper into the ancient complex to confront the weird creatures called erulians that have stolen the blade.

And still, the adventure is not over. A jealous tomb robber interested in what they have found waits for them at the top of the pit, and he will not hesitate to kill them for the treasure.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

Obviously, as with the previous adventure, the most straightforward way to bring the PCs into this adventure is by having them make a deal with Devola and getting instructions from her. If that doesn't work out, try one of the following options.

Tomb Robbers. The PCs are generally interested in treasure and have heard that the tomb of Queen Starloscet is filled with riches and technological wonders.

The Missing Heir. A woman claiming to be a distant relative of Queen Starloscet employs the PCs to find a metal-bound book that shows the royal lineage (found in area 20 of the tomb).

The Impossible Blade. The PCs hear of the Impossible Blade in their research for a cure for removing a cancerous growth on the



brain of one of their close friends or family members. Finding it will allow a skilled chiurgeon to remove the tumor safely, if they get it to her in time.

MODIFYING THE ADVENTURE

“The Mechanized Tomb” is a very challenging scenario for first-tier characters and probably an average one for second- or third-tier characters. For characters of higher tiers, do the following:

- Increase the damage dealt by all traps and dangers (including creatures) by 2 points.
- Double the number of erulians in each encounter.
- Determine the average tier of all PCs, and for every tier above 1, add two more thugs to Burris's group.

If the PCs are fifth- or sixth-tier characters, increase the level of Burris and the thugs by 2.

THE MYTH OF THE PIT WARDEN

The people of Garamur lived around Aurturi's Pit for more than 200 years. (They died out about 150 years ago.) They believed that Aurturi was the god that watched over this entrance to the land of the dead. Thus, he also was known as the Pit Warden. Aurturi took the form of a large, stinging insect whose buzzing, it was said, was the secret language of the dead. If a living person could master it, she could talk to dead souls she knew in life in the deepest parts of the night.

The dead wishing to pass on from this world approached Aurturi's audience chamber deep in the pit. There, he would sting those he favored. This sting was extremely painful, but it had to be endured to enter the land of the dead. Without it, a dead soul would wander aimlessly forever.

If a living being wanted to visit the land of the dead, she could, but only if she convinced Aurturi to sting her, and only if she survived the experience.

THE INVESTIGATION

In which the characters must find the beginning of the thread that they must follow.

The only suggestion Devola could provide to find the Impossible Blade was to try asking around Uxphon. There, the PCs can encounter many learned sorts, such as Om,



who can confirm what she has already told them—although some have heard of such a tool, there is no one who can craft it. The blade would have to be recovered. The matter isn't so much one of knowledge of numenera devices but one of history or even gossip. This might lead the PCs to talk with Sabazia, who comes highly recommended by Om and others.

The PCs might be reluctant to speak with a “fortune teller,” but she can point them in the direction of a nevajin named Eenosh who is known to have talked about the Impossible Blade in the past. Sabazia can even provide directions to his home, miles into the wasteland to the west of Uxphon. However, she charges them 20 shins for this information.

THE CAPTIVE NEVAJIN

Sabazia's directions to find Eenosh the nevajin are simple and correct. The journey takes approximately three days from Uxphon if the PCs leave from that location. They travel almost straight west into a dry wasteland, crossing dry creek beds and tumbleweed-strewn expanses before they reach the rocky gully where Eenosh dwells.

Eenosh has a small hut of wood and reeds next to a tiny stream that runs through the gully. Recently the nevajin was captured by a

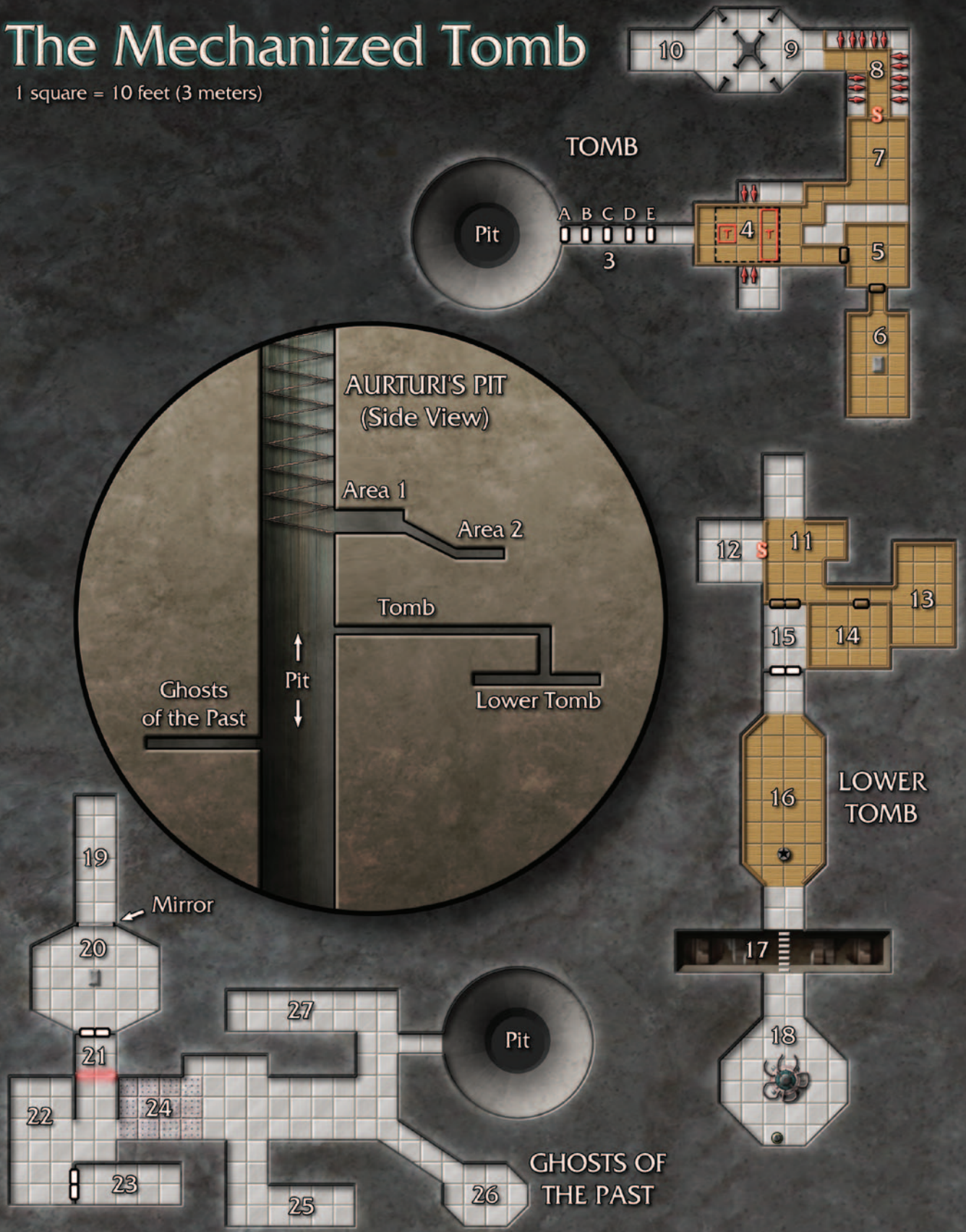
Sabazia, page 7

Om, page 7



The Mechanized Tomb

1 square = 10 feet (3 meters)





band of six abhuman chiros, who force him to impart his wisdom and knowledge for their benefit. The nevajin gives them advice on hunting, survival, and the region in general. In exchange, they allow him to live.

That isn't the way it appears when the PCs arrive, however. The chiros have built a few crude yurts around Eenosh's hut. They rush to meet any intruders who approach. If the PCs react with violence, the chiros react savagely. In the middle of the fight, Eenosh emerges and speaks to the chiros in their own language, clearly telling them to stand down. He appears to be their leader.

This is even more true if the PCs react to the chiros with peaceful gestures. In this situation, the abhumans bring the characters before the nevajin because he can talk to them, and they can't—none of the chiros speaks any language other than their own.

In either case, Eenosh tells the PCs that the chiros are very interested in eating them. He occasionally speaks to the abhumans in their language, saying something the characters can't understand. Then he asks the PCs who they are and what they're doing there.

Finally, while maintaining the appearance that he is addressing the PCs imperiously or even contemptuously for the sake of the abhumans (who watch him closely without understanding his words), he says to the characters, "Get me out of here."

Eenosh quickly explains that he is a captive and that the PCs must help him get away (or kill the chiros). He is not much of a combatant, so he can't help.

If the PCs free Eenosh from the chiros one way or another, he repays them with two level 2 anoetic cyphers:

- A pill that restores 5 points to the imbiber's Might Pool
- A pill that grants a +1 bonus to Intellect Edge for one hour

He also gives them the information they seek. Eenosh explains that the Impossible Blade lies in the tomb of Queen Starloscet, a human monarch dead for more than 100 years. He instructs the PCs to travel to a strange community called Barrow-Town where they can find exactly what they need. He tells them to learn all they can about the legends of the tomb "for some legends are rooted in fact."

Eenosh can also provide directions to Barrow-Town, which lies another two days' travel farther west.

BARROW-TOWN

In which the characters wander about an inhabited ruin to learn the secrets of an uninhabited ruin.

No one knows how it started. A few folks just gathering in the ruins for shelter, probably. But they stayed, and eventually others came, too, living amid the skeleton of an enormous structure from the prior worlds. One forward-thinker among them looked up and formed an ambitious plan. Gathering bits of metal, synth, and stone from the wreckage and combining it with wood and other materials, they built their homes suspended from the still-standing synthsteel girders of impossible size. Those original founders had safety in mind when they devised their houses, workshops, and even a market high above the ground.

Some have commented that it looks more like a hornet's nest than a town, but the people of Barrow-Town don't care about their jibes. A few live on the ground beneath the town, in cavelike burrows (the "burrows beneath the barrow") dug into piles of stone, metal, and glass. Most of the ground-dwellers work at the mill built alongside a river of flowing sludge from deep within the bowels of the ancient wreckage, or they man the pulleylike elevators that grant access to the community above.

Barrow-Town is the largest community in what was once the land of Garamur, but it has existed only a decade or so. Beyond it, abandoned towns and villages dot the landscape, although at this point, even most of those have disappeared.

The 450 or so people who live in Barrow-Town are mainly a quiet, introverted lot, not interested in interacting with strangers. The leaders of the community are a small group of elders.

No Aeon Priests dwell in Barrow-Town.

THE TOMB ROBBER

Burris Han has only recently come to Barrow-Town. While in far-off Ghan, he learned a bit about the treasures in the tomb of Queen Starloscet and would like to obtain them for himself. He specifically knows about the Impossible Blade, a weapon called the temporal maul, and the queen's scepter, said to have been a powerful artifact in its own right.

Burris met with Seniya, the town scholar, and learned a few things from her, though she failed to trust him. He couldn't find anyone willing to accompany him to the tomb, so he

Nevajin: level 4, level 6 with numenera and other knowledge; 10 health (head) and 15 health (body)

In no case will Eenosh accompany the PCs or give them other free gifts or help. With the cyphers and the information, he considers his debt paid. He is not a particularly friendly or inherently helpful creature.



Chiros: level 4, level 7 for climbing; 15 health; 3 points of Armor; grapple holds foes immobile

Burris Han: level 4, level 5 with deception and with attacks with his verred; 22 health; 2 points of Armor; 6 points of damage with his verred

If the characters wonder if they can trust Burris (or any NPC), an Intellect-based task based on the NPC level is appropriate to determine if someone's on the up and up.



Show 'Em:
Barrow-Town,
Image G, page 91

Seniya Arei: level 2,
level 4 for almost any
lore task; 20 health;
4 points of Armor
(this is an innate
resilience that she can't
explain—she is just
strangely hard to hurt)

gave up on that. Now he hangs around town, looking for a better opportunity.

If the PCs come to Barrow-Town and ask about the tomb, the Impossible Blade, or anything similar, Burris pounces. He finds out all he can about the characters and tries to ingratiate himself with them.

If he's at all successful, he cautions them not to trust Seniya. "There's just something 'off' about her," he says. He offers to guide them to the pit, but he refuses to go down into it. (He might tell the PCs this ahead of time if they press him.) He can stand guard, keep their camp safe, and watch over any animals they might have, but Burris claims he's afraid of the myths about the place and its link to the land of the dead. He also says he doesn't want to be stung by an ancient god-thing in order to go into the pit. (If the PCs aren't aware of the myth of Aurturi, he explains it.)

However, Burris is setting them up for a terrible betrayal. See "The Betrayal," below.

Burris wears a chainmail vest and wields a verred and a crossbow.

THE SCHOLAR

Anyone can direct the PCs to the town's only scholar and historian. Seniya Arei has lived in Barrow-Town for four years. She appears to be human, about forty years old, with light brown hair and dark freckles on her face. However, Seniya is actually an artificial creature, a relic of the prior worlds. Put simply, she is a data-collection unit, but she was damaged long ago and has no memory of her real origin. Seniya believes herself to be human, and her need to collect data just seems to be an unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

Of late, she studies the history of Garamur, so she knows a great deal about the now-lost land. Although she has no information about the specific layout of the queen's tomb, she knows its location and history. This includes the legend of Aurturi and the story that one must feel his venom to delve into the pit. She also knows that an artifact called the Impossible Blade was one of the queen's treasures and was buried with her, along with her scepter (also a numenera artifact) and a number of other wondrous things.



Seniya has no skills in fighting, exploration, or survival, but she is very intelligent, and her artificial nature makes her quite tough. It would be relatively easy for explorers interested in finding Aurturi's Pit and the tomb of Queen Starloscet to convince her to come along.

Seniya presents a cheerful exterior, energetic and quick of mind. But beneath the surface, she is tired. Her life is nothing but her work. She would love nothing more than to stop and rest, but something inexplicable drives her. She always feels as if there is something out there—some greater purpose—but she can't recall what.

THE CHIRANI

When people first came to the ruin that Barrow-Town lies within (and above), a few explorers uncovered a device that oozed a pale white fluid with luminescent qualities. Those who touched it were suddenly coated with the milky stuff. The fluid altered both their appearance and their personalities. Calling themselves the chirani, these individuals still dwell in the community but keep to themselves. They don't appear to eat or sleep, and they don't do anything productive in town (for example, they don't have jobs). They don't seem to be the same people that they once were, although they have all their memories and go by the same names as before. However, they have broken all former relationships—the chirani consort only with other chirani.

They can still carry on a pleasant conversation, although they speak with stilted language and inappropriate tones. The people in town don't like or trust the chirani, and for good reason. From time to time some of them have been found breaking into homes, stealing, or assaulting people. There is no conclusive proof that all chirani are dangerous, only individuals, so the group as a whole hasn't been confined or run out of town—yet. Most have lived in Barrow-Town for years without causing any trouble. Truth be told, the townsfolk feel a little guilty about what happened to those who touched the pale white fluid, so they have been tolerant.

There are currently twelve chirani: eight women and four men.

Although most people don't realize this, the chirani have two interesting nonhuman abilities. They can turn invisible, and their touch can be made to burn flesh.

THE TRIP TO THE PIT

In which the characters make a friend who can provide a valuable clue for later.

Either at the direction of Seniya or with her as a guide, the PCs find that Aurturi's Pit lies about 15 miles (24 km) from Barrow-Town on an old, ill-used road choked with weeds and wild grasses.

THE NECROMANCER

On their journey, the PCs may come upon a man with a wooden cart pulled by an

Chirani: level 3; touch inflicts 4 points of damage; can become invisible for up to one minute per hour

While a creature is invisible, the difficulty to spot or hit her is increased by four steps. This effect ends if the invisible creature does something to reveal her presence or position—attacking, performing an esotery, using an ability, moving a large object, and so on. If this occurs, she can regain the remaining invisibility effect by taking an action to focus on hiding her position.

OLD VERSUS ANCIENT

The Mechanized Tomb is an expression of the dichotomy between what a Ninth Worlder might call "old" and what is so old that they (and perhaps we) cannot truly grasp it. It's a 150-year-old tomb built within the confines of a structure that's millions of years old. The tomb builders used wood, brick, and ceramic tiles. The original structure used unknown metals and even stranger materials. In many places, the tomb builders laid their own materials atop the originals, and in others, they walled off or blocked sections or features of the original structure.

Thus, whenever a description mentions wood, brick, or similar "familiar" materials, it's undoubtedly the work of the tomb builders. Such surfaces are likely painted and ornately decorated in honor of the queen, sometimes with images of her, sometimes with symbols (which have little meaning today), and sometimes with ornamentation, adornments, and filigree. These newer additions are old enough that the wood is usually rotting, paint is fading, plaster is cracked and peeling, and everything is covered in dust and grime.

Unless described otherwise, ceilings in the tomb are about 15 feet (4.6 m) high, and all areas are dark.

A toxodon is a massive, hairy mammal with stout legs and wide hooves. Level 4; 19 health

Avindar: *level 5, level 6 with numenera-related tasks; 1 point of Armor; esoterics as needed*

There are many traps in the tomb. A trap functions much like an NPC: it has a level, and a PC must make a defense roll based on that level to avoid being damaged by its attack. Unless stated otherwise, the level also indicates the difficulty to find the trap (or its trigger) and to disable or disarm it once found.

enormous toxodon. Avindar is a nano who is rather obsessed with death. He lost his true love, Gerrid, and now seeks some technology of the past that might bring her back. He is tall and slender, with a broad nose and cheekbones. He dresses in typical traveling clothes and carries a wide variety of tools.

Avindar has been on the road for days and is interested in chatting. If the PCs stop and talk to him, they find him to be intelligent, well spoken, and slightly emotionless. If they tell Avindar where they're going, he is intrigued. He has no interest in braving the dangers of the pit himself, but he is quite interested in what they might find there. He knows the story of the queen and the lover she left behind and feels a real kinship to Bach. He offers to pay (in shins or perhaps trade) for any relics of the queen or Bach that the PCs might find. Avindar is on his way to Barrow-Town and will be there for at least the next week. He tells the characters to come find him if they have anything they are looking to trade or sell. (If they do, he gives them a fair price or trade. He carries a number of oddities and cyphers that he can barter, but the nature of them should be determined by the GM.)

If the PCs treat him kindly during their encounter on the road, Avindar suddenly remembers something and pulls out an old journal. He found it years earlier while researching the tomb builders, though he doesn't know what it means. A code, perhaps? A very odd password? He copies the following onto a slip of paper:

ABACBBAABDCDE

He hopes that it's of some use. The PCs won't realize this yet, but the letters represent the order in which the doors of the tomb must be opened (see area 3).

AURTURI'S PIT

In which the PCs descend into darkness.

Three metal towers, each standing about 100 feet (30 m) tall, asymmetrically surround the pit, naught but empty skeletons now. There is evidence of a fourth tower, perhaps, but if it existed, it's long gone.

Aurturi's Pit is a 250-foot-wide (76 m) conical depression in a flat stretch of ground. At a depth of about 180 feet (55 m), the pit becomes a shaft 80 feet (24 m) wide, with walls of smooth metal that are occasionally corroded or degraded. Starloscet's builders

created a wooden set of stairs, about 5 feet (1.5) wide, that runs down the cone, and then a wooden spiral ramp about 7 feet (2.1 m) wide that follows the curving wall of the shaft down. It's affixed to the wall, but in places, wooden beams from below support the ramp. In some areas, the ramp is shaky and unstable. The wood is beginning to rot, and some of the boards have fallen away.

The ramp leads from the surface down about 300 feet (91 m) to an open archway in the side of the shaft. Another 60 feet (18 m) almost directly below that is the entrance to the actual tomb. Still 60 feet (18 m) farther past that, on the other side of the shaft, is an opening that leads to a still lower level. This is likely the exit the PCs will need to use, but it is very difficult to see from any other spot in the shaft, so it would be very difficult for PCs to find and use this as an entry. (Only characters that scour every inch of the interior of the shaft would find it.)

The bottom of the shaft is another 1,000 feet (305 m) or so below.

Climbing the sides of the shaft is intimidating (level 6) without ropes or some kind of gravity-defying device or ability.

AREA 1: QUEEN STARLOSCET'S MEMORIAL

The ramp ends at an open archway that glistens with a visible energy field like a membrane within it. If a creature passes through this archway, it is immediately analyzed by the machine in area 18. The creature is not aware of this—there is no sensation from passing through what seems to be a wall of harmless light.

The memorial chamber stretches out more than 100 feet (30 m) beyond the archway (likely farther than the PCs can see if they're using glowglobes or torches). The floor is made of colorful ceramic tiles that have become dirty and grimy. The walls bear painted bas-reliefs, although these, too, are filthy with age and decay. The paint fades, plaster chips, and dirt covers everything. On the sides and the nearest walls, images depict the beautiful queen in full regalia sitting on her throne, riding in a chariot pulled by slaves, and in a ceremony, beknighting a woman in plate armor. On the back wall, the image is of Starloscet descending a deep shaft into what appears to be a glorious land of golden light. A hideous insect-thing watches as she floats down.

The eyes of the insect creature in the



relief are actually secret buttons. If both are pushed, a small portion of the wall slides away to reveal a secret staircase that slopes down. These narrow stairs lead into another chamber—Aurturi's Lair.

AREA 2: AURTURI'S LAIR

The Aurturi of myth is a god of the dead. The Aurturi of reality is a bioengineered creature that resembles an insect the size of a small man. It has crooked wings that would never allow it to fly; a bloated, hairy body; and a broad head with two multifaceted eyes. Its six legs are prehensile, more tendrils than insect legs. Prominently, however, its abdomen sports a massive stinger.

The room is bare metal walls, floor, and ceiling, and it stinks of something acrid and sour. The creature barely moves, and if it does, it does so clumsily. Its wings flutter in short bursts of droning buzz. If approached, it attempts to sting, injecting its dangerous venom into any living thing it finds.

The creature doesn't need to eat or reproduce.

The Nest: Behind the creature is a brownish-yellow nest four times its size. The nest is actually a bioengineered device that will create a new Aurturi when this one dies. The process takes about three weeks. If the nest is destroyed, it will recreate itself, but this process takes about six months.

THE TOMB

In which the characters begin to explore the queen's tomb, only to find traps and tricks at every turn.

The entrance to the tomb lies about 200 feet (18 m) below the entrance to the memorial, but no ramp connects to it. The PCs must lower themselves down on ropes or find some other means to reach it.

The entrance is a circular opening that leads to a circular passage with metal walls, 12 feet (3.7 m) in diameter. After just a few feet, however, the passage is blocked by a large metal door.

Aurturi: level 5, level 3 for any task involving moving; 22 health; 1 point of Armor; stinger injects poison that deals 8 points of damage if a stung victim fails a Might defense roll. The poison also encodes a genetic trait in the victim that allows him to open the doors in areas 15 and 20.



Show 'Em:

Aurturi's Pit, Image H, page 91



AREA 3: THE FIVE DOORS

The entrance to the queen's tomb is a round passageway that is blocked by heavy metal doors (level 10). Each door is 2 feet (0.6 m) thick, and they're spaced about 10 feet (3 m) apart. The doors open by turning a central mechanism that causes them to roll into a pocket in the wall to the side. When fully opened, a bit of each door sticks out from the pocket with a small toggle. If activated, the door closes again.

The doors must be opened and closed in a particular order, or they can't be opened at all. As labeled on the map, the first door on the western side being A, the next B, and so on, the proper order is as follows:

OPEN	A
OPEN	B
CLOSE	A
OPEN	C
CLOSE	B
OPEN	B
OPEN	A
CLOSE	A
CLOSE	B
OPEN	D
CLOSE	C
CLOSE	D
OPEN	E

This leaves all the doors closed behind the characters except E. To get back out again, the doors must be manipulated in reverse order:

CLOSE	E (TO RESET)
OPEN	E
OPEN	D
CLOSE	E
OPEN	C
CLOSE	D
OPEN	D
OPEN	E
CLOSE	E
CLOSE	D
OPEN	B
CLOSE	C
CLOSE	B
OPEN	A



Show 'Em:
The False Tomb,
Image 1, page 92

AREA 4: THE GAUNTLET

This room has brick walls and a floor of simple ceramic tiles covered in grime and dust. It appears empty, but it is actually filled with traps. The only clue to the presence of the traps is a steel arrow with a blunted tip that lies on the floor.

Arrow Traps: These level 3 traps consist of elaborate gear-driven launchers hidden behind the brick walls. Anyone crossing in front of them likely steps on a pressure plate in the





floor, triggering 1d6 Speed defense rolls (at no time do more than six arrows launch, so if there are multiple targets in front of the launchers, divide the 1d6 roll among them). If any of the arrows hit, they inflict 4 points of damage each. The arrow traps reload and are ready to fire again the next round.

Finding all the pressure plates is a difficulty 6 task.

Pit Traps: Built into the wooden floor, these two trapdoors open into the same pit, which is 30 feet (9 m) across and long. The doors open as soon as someone steps on them. (GM intrusion may be useful here, but if a player specifically states that she walks into an area shown on the map to be a trap, it's not needed.) If a trapdoor opens beneath a character, she can attempt a Speed defense roll (difficulty 5) to catch herself. Otherwise, she falls in the pit.

The pit is 30 feet (9 m) deep, and the bottom is lined with long iron spikes. Those falling in suffer 3 points of ambient damage from the fall and 4 points of damage from the spikes (Armor helps protect against the latter damage). Further, such a character moves one step down the damage track.

Amid the spikes are the remains of a number of would-be tomb robbers, some far older than others, but even the most recent is nothing but a dried skeleton. Although most of the belongings of the dead are as rotted and desiccated as the corpses themselves, the PCs can find 16 shins among them, and one of the skeletons wears an artifact called a tentacle helmet.

Tentacle Helmet: This is a level 6 artifact that looks like a smooth, lightweight synthsteel helmet with an octagon-shaped device on the back. When activated, a 9-foot (2.7 m) tentacle comes out of the device. This tentacle resembles that of a very large living creature, but it's also translucent, as it modulates between phase states. The tentacle can be used to pick up or manipulate small objects, push buttons, and so forth, but it has very little strength. It can't pick up an object that weighs more than 10 pounds and could never be used to make an effective attack. Its most remarkable feature, however, is that because of its pandimensional nature, the tentacle can move through energy fields, including solid force fields, as if they were not there.

Once activated, the tentacle lasts for ten minutes. Depletion: 1 in 1d10.

Ceiling Traps: At both eastern exits out of

the room, a pressure plate opens a hidden panel in the ceiling above, dropping a huge stone weight down on the character below. Each weight is a level 4 trap and inflicts 5 points of damage.

AREA 5: THE FALSE EMBALMING CHAMBER

The wooden door to this chamber from the west has been smashed in.

The door to the south is stone and carved with the likeness of the queen's serene visage. It, too, appears to have been forced open in the distant past.

The room has ceramic tile floors and plaster-on-brick walls. Unlit torches rest in sconces on the otherwise undecorated walls. A storage cabinet sits in one corner, and a large table rests in the middle of the room.

The storage cabinet used to hold tools and chemicals for a medical or embalming procedure, but it is mostly empty now.

AREA 6: THE FALSE TOMB

This chamber has ceramic tile on the floor, and the walls are covered in painted reliefs similar to those found in the memorial but in far better condition. In the middle of the room is a sarcophagus of white marble. In the top is carved the image of the beautiful queen reclining in a death pose.

Along the walls are empty wooden chests covered in gold and silver, long since looted. A few broken ceramic urns and other pieces of broken pottery lie on the floor. The sarcophagus, if opened, contains the remains of a well-preserved female corpse, regal garb now just tatters of rotted cloth.

The skeleton is real, but it's not Starloscet. This is a fake tomb built to deter or confuse grave robbers.

AREA 7: THE FAKE TREASURE ROOM

This room appears to be filled with beautiful works of art—golden vases, ceramic urns, silver boxes, and lovely leather bags with copper clasps. At the center of this collection is a large wooden chest bound in iron with a large, obvious iron padlock.

The brick walls here are not covered in plaster, but the bricks are painted black. One wall bears a large royal seal upon a shield.

The Treasures: Everything in this room is fake, made of wood or ceramic and painted to look like more than it really is.

GM Intrusion: *The rust, mold, and maybe just straight-up poison on the spikes are bad for a character who suffers damage from them. She must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 5). Failure means that she suffers 1 point of Speed damage. The character must make a Might defense roll every minute thereafter or continue to suffer 1 point of Speed damage. This continues until she makes a successful Might defense roll.*

The tentacle helmet will come in handy in area 21, but it will probably be a generally useful artifact for the PCs as well.

A careful examination of the corridor before stepping into it would negate the modification for surprise.

The Wooden Chest: The level 5 lock on this chest is real enough. If the chest is opened, a numenera device inside it unleashes a trap. The device is level 4, as is the jury-rigging that has it keyed to the opening of the chest. It sprays superhot plasma at all within immediate range, inflicting 7 points of damage. If a PC finds and disables the trap, he can remove the device and use it as a level 4 detonation cypher that inflicts 7 points of damage.

The chest is otherwise empty.

The Shield: The shield hanging above the chest is real, although it appears to be as fake as the other treasures in the room. The queen's royal emblem has been added to a synthsteel shield, which not only functions as a normal shield but also allows the wielder to add +1 to Speed defense rolls made while using the shield.

The Secret Door: Behind the shield, within the brick wall, is a secret door. Once found (a level 4 task), it can be pushed open.

AREA 8: SPEAR TRAPS

When anyone walks down this corridor, they step on pressure plates in the floor that send piston-driven spears into the hallway from the areas behind the walls. This trap is level 2, but the initial attack increases the defense difficulty by two steps because it likely catches the first victim unaware.

For every 10 feet (3 m) of travel down the corridor, the characters must make a separate Speed defense roll (five rolls for the whole hallway). The spears inflict 6 points of damage if they hit, and they fully retract into the walls.

Loot: If the PCs take the time to break through the brick walls to get at the tomb builders' elaborate and sophisticated spear-thrusting mechanisms, they can scavenge two cyphers:

- A level 3 anoetic cypher that can be affixed to a character's wrist and launch a small object (such as a dart, a stone, or a detonation cypher) up to long range. If the launched object is hard (preferably pointed), it inflicts 4 points of damage. A detonation inflicts its own explosive damage.
- A level 4 anoetic cypher that can project a cable or rope (if the PC has one) attached to a powerful spike up to long range. The projected rope imbeds itself solidly into most surfaces, and the cypher can retract the rope later or pull it extremely taut. If desired, the device can easily be spiked into a surface so that the rope attaches to something solid at both ends.

AREA 9: THE CRUSHER

The tomb builders had no idea what the machine in this room was, but they decided to leave it intact to help keep out intruders. The walls and floor are bare metal, stained here and there by very old blood spatters. Something very much like a lump of old clothes lies on the floor against the southern wall.

The Machine: In the center of the room is a level 6 cylindrical device of metal and synth. It connects directly to the floor and ceiling. The device has four metal plates, each facing one of the corners of the room. In each corner is a similar device with a single plate. All the plates are about 3 feet (0.9 m) wide and rise almost from floor to ceiling. When anything equal to or greater than the size and mass of a dog passes between a pair of facing plates, they slam together with great force, inflicting 12 points of damage. The plates extend out from where they normally rest on powerful metal bars.

When two plates slam together, the entire device pauses for a moment, long enough for a single character to dart between two other plates or slip through the bars of two extended plates. In other words, if someone takes the "hit," someone else can pass through one set of plates. Of course, to get across the room, one has to pass through two sets of plates.

The PCs can use an object to set off the crushing plates, but unless it's incredibly sturdy, it will almost certainly be destroyed in the process. Most likely, an object can be used in this way only once.

The core of the device is protected by a magnetic field that wards away virtually all attacks, so attempts to damage the machine are two steps more difficult (thus, difficulty 8).

The Lump: The lump of clothes is actually a very old and dry corpse, curled into a fetal position. A bent and rusty dagger lies amid the bones and rotten cloth, as do 6 shins. One of the finger bones has a decorative synth ring that could likely sell for 5 shins.

AREA 10: THE ELEVATOR

This area shows bare metal surfaces. A flexible cable hangs from the ceiling down to about eye level, at the end of which is a rubbery ball. If the ball is squeezed, the westernmost 20-foot-by-20-foot area (6 m by 6 m) of the floor begins to descend rapidly down a shaft. The cable extends to keep pace. If, at any time, the ball stops being squeezed,



the floor stops moving. From that position, there is no way to make the floor rise to its original level. Instead, it must descend 160 feet (49 m) to the bottom of the shaft, where it stops (regardless of whether the ball is squeezed). As long as the ball is squeezed, the floor remains at the bottom of the shaft. Two rounds after the ball is released, the floor begins to rise. There is no way to make it stop until it rises all the way.

The characters can't "call" the elevator from below. Another exit must be found. (In theory, clever PCs might find a way to jam the elevator at the bottom.)

Bottom of the Shaft: At the bottom, the walls are painted plaster, cracked and peeling. The elevator platform rests on grime-covered marble floors. An opening leads into area 11.

words seem fevered and important. Then the liquid loses cohesion and turns to mist that fills the room.

(If somehow the PCs can understand the voice, perhaps through a translation device or something already active and at the ready, the words seem to be stern instructions, but without the proper knowledge and context, they are still inexplicable.)

Corpses: These tomb robbers were trapped here because they couldn't bypass the doors in area 15 or get the elevator in area 10 to take them back up. They died of starvation. One has a small pouch with 6 shins, and the other has a buzzer. Otherwise, their gear is rotten and useless.

Buzzer, page 79



In the ruins of the past, explorers can stumble upon things that simply make no apparent sense to a Ninth Worlder.

THE LOWER TOMB

In which the PCs get close to their objective, but the hazards and barriers grow more difficult with each step.

These areas are reached by the elevator in area 10. They are similar, overall, to the areas in the tomb above.

AREA 11: THE FLOATING DISK

The walls here have faded, and peeling murals on the plaster show the queen floating high above her people while they toil in fields and tend flocks in a landscape likely greener and more lush than Garamur ever was.

Two very old corpses lie against the western wall.

A glass disk, 7 feet (2.1 m) across and about 3 feet (.9 m) thick, floats in the center of this area, about 4 feet (1.2 m) off the floor.

Glass Disk: The disk hums and, if touched, vibrates ever so slightly. There is little the characters can do to damage it, move it, or affect it in any way. If the disk is touched, an inexplicable face comes out of the ceiling and speaks.

Inexplicable Face: Liquid pours down from the ceiling, forming a floating ball in midair. The viscous stuff forms the face of a man that looks like a strange amalgam of human and insect. The face speaks directly to the PCs in a language they don't understand, though the

AREA 12: THE SECRET ROOM

Behind the mural, beneath the plaster, there is a hidden door. To find it, the PCs must chip away the plaster, which is not a difficult task. The door is a bit stuck (a difficulty 1 task to open). The room beyond has bare metal surfaces and is filled with dust-covered tools and building supplies such as bricks, plaster, paint, and so on. All of it is too old to be of use.

The builders also left a few skrips behind. These are strange notes and sketches that don't seem to make sense. However, if the PCs study them for at least an hour and succeed at a difficulty 4 task (Intellect based), they discover that these very old notes contain the following information:

- A teleporter is required to get to the queen's tomb, and to use it a yellow button must be pushed.
- One must be stung by Aurturi to get into the tomb.
- A statue of the queen is a potent trap, activated by getting close to it.
- An area lies beyond the tomb, and it is the home of creatures not of the Ninth World.
- The last thing the builders did was make it difficult (or impossible) to use the elevator to get back up. So even if robbers got to the lower tomb, they could not get out again.

AREA 13: THE ANTECHAMBER OF THE AFTERLIFE

Alternatively, rather than move characters damaged by the slime down the damage track, the GM could rule that the part of the character that touched the slime is rendered useless for 1d6 + 4 days.

This area's walls are made of brick and covered in cracked, falling plaster. Large ceramic tiles of soft colors cover the floor. Many are now cracked and broken, and of course they are dirty and stained—even more than much of the rest of the tomb.

This room was used to embalm and prepare the queen for her eternal rest. The walls have small inset shelves that held small trinkets and objects important to the queen, but they were stolen long ago. In the middle of the room is an ornamental, marble-top table and small side tables that once held embalming equipment, but the tools, too, are gone (along with anything else not too heavy to steal).

A substance here has leaked from somewhere else in the more ancient parts of the structure in the intervening years—a slick slime that coats the back half of the floor, the back wall, and one of the tables. Whether it's residue from a prior world process, corroded numenera materials rendered to liquid by time, or the result of mysterious energies, the slime (level 7) reacts badly to flesh. If touched, a creature's flesh turns immediately to rubbery goo. This liquefaction process is incredibly

fast. The amount of damage done depends on how quickly the character can pull away. Have the player make a Speed defense roll. Success means no damage. If the player fails, damage scales based on the degree of failure. Subtract the roll from 20, and the result is the number of points of damage inflicted. Damaged characters also move one step down the damage track. Characters who roll a 1 become debilitated.

Disturbing the slime also causes it to become airborne, in which case all characters in the room should make a Might defense roll. Failure means that a character suffers 1 point of damage. If the affected character moves away from the slime, the next round he must make another roll at difficulty 6 rather than 7. Success means that he is done taking damage after a bit of coughing. Failure means that he suffers another point of damage, and the next round another roll is needed, although it is now difficulty 5. This process continues until the victim succeeds. However, if the victim remains near the slime, the new roll made each round remains at difficulty 7.

This means that scraping up some slime to save for examination (or to use as a weapon) is a very dangerous proposition.



Show 'Em:
The Chasm,
Image J, page 92





AREA 14: THE WHEEL

The Door: The wooden door to this room is locked and the handle has been removed. Picking the lock is a difficulty 5 task, as is prying it open.

The Trap: Keyed to the door opening is a level 5 deadfall trap that causes a heavy weight on a chain to swing down from the ceiling and into the doorway. The weight is effectively a giant spiked ball of iron. The character who opened the door must make a Speed defense roll or take 8 points of damage.

The Interior: This room's walls are brick, and the floor is made of rotting and warped wooden planks. A large iron wheel is positioned in one corner, attached to the wall. A rusted iron chain wrapped around the wheel holds it in place. The chain is also affixed to the wall.

The Wheel and Chain: The wheel, when turned, opens the iron door in area 15, although this is a difficulty 4 task because the wheel is heavy and rusted. Before the PCs can attempt to do this, they must break the heavy chain, which is a difficulty 6 task with an initial cost of 2 Might points.

AREA 15: TWO DOORS

This area has two barriers. The first was placed by the architects of the tomb: a heavy iron door that can be opened with the wheel in area 14 or pried open (a difficulty 7 task with an initial cost of 3 Might points). Marks on the door indicate that someone tried and failed to pry it open with tools.

Beyond this barrier is a short expanse with metal walls and floor that leads to the second door. Like the walls, this metal door is from the original structure. It cannot be opened unless touched by someone who carries the genetically modified code from the venom of Aurturi. When the door opens, it slides up into the ceiling, soundlessly.

AREA 16: THE GALLERY

This long hall is lavish, with paintings in wooden and synth frames on the walls. The walls are covered in fabric that is now stained and worn, even tattered in places. The black-and-white tile floor is covered in a matted red carpet that runs through the middle of the gallery. From the ceiling hang crystal chandeliers.

About three-quarters of the way down the gallery, the carpet runs to the feet of a beautiful white marble statue of the queen looking imperious.

Paintings: The gallery has thirty paintings, all oil-on-canvas works of fine quality. However, hanging here for more than a hundred years has left most of them in poor condition. They depict a variety of subjects: pastoral scenes, portraits, the queen's royal palace, and more.

The Statue: The marble statue of the queen is well made and beautiful. It also hides a level 4 numenera trap that is activated when anyone comes within 10 feet (3 m) of the statue. The statue's eyes glow menacingly and emit beams of powerful energy at any living creature within short range (basically, anyone in the gallery). As the beams fire, a woman's voice echoes throughout the room, speaking the Truth: "Defile not my final rest! Flee now while you have your life—it is the only treasure worth keeping."

Anyone struck by the beams suffers 6 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). Further, victims must make an Intellect defense roll or be overcome with profound terror. They run away to the north as quickly as possible and continue to do so for one minute. If stopped, they cower for that time period and will not go back toward the statue willingly.

Loot: Eight of the paintings are in decent condition. If carefully transported out of the tomb and cleaned up, each is worth about 20 shins.

AREA 17: THE CHASM

The metal hallway is bisected by a deep, dark chasm. A wooden rope bridge with old wooden planks stretches across the expanse, secured to the sides with powerful spikes driven into the ancient metal. The chasm is 80 feet (24 m) deep, and the bottom is filled with machinery that no longer functions.

The Bridge: The rope bridge is old and rotting, but even if it were still in good shape, it's rigged to fall. As soon as the weight of even one character is placed upon the bridge, it collapses. (Determining this is a difficulty 3 task, if the PCs check.) A character on the collapsed bridge can attempt a difficulty 5 task to grab hold of the edge to catch himself from falling. Anyone who falls into the chasm takes 8 points of damage and moves down one step on the damage track.

Before the tomb builders rigged the bridge, they used it to cross the chasm themselves, so the spikes are secure if the PCs want to affix ropes or something else to them.



The Truth, page 133



Initial cost, page 89

No prior tomb robbers ever got past the two doors.

GM Intrusion: *Activity around the chasm draws the attention of the creatures in area 18, which come to investigate.*





Show 'Em:
Cobbled Guardians,
Image K, page 93

Cobbled creature:
level 4

AREA 18: COBBLED GUARDIANS

This large hexagonal chamber was part of the original structure and never modified by the tomb builders. At the center, a bizarre machine of black metal connects to three large, organic-looking pods or egg sacs via thick tubes. The machine is keyed to the archway in area 1, and if the PCs passed through that arch to get here (which is extremely likely), the machine activated and began producing creatures.

The Creatures: The room is now the home of newly formed creatures. These things are almost mindless, driven by hunger and madness to attack what they see. In fact, if the PCs managed to get through area 17 without alerting them, the creatures here are likely fighting among themselves.

There is one creature for each character or creature that entered the tomb through the arch during the last week or so. (Cobbled guardians live for about a week, and then they die and their biomass is consumed by the machine.) One guardian is created each time someone enters through the arch, so if the characters leave the tomb and return through the wall of light, they create additional guardians.

The guardians made by the machine consist of cobbled parts of other creatures fused together. Since the PCs were scanned, some part of a character is duplicated and incorporated into every creature. The creatures are all slightly smaller than a human.

Ideas for the guardians include:

- A spiderlike thing made of human arms, including one of the PC's arms
- A large ratlike thing with five legs and one of the PC's heads
- A creature with the body of a large insect, the head of a dog, and one of the PC's hands at the end of all six of its legs
- A serpentlike creature with the torso and arms of one of the PCs
- A squat, headless humanoid brute with one of the PCs' faces on its chest, next to the face of someone unrecognizable
- A bulbous thing with a bird's head and a PC's legs flailing uselessly amid at least nine tentacles

The creatures attack and fight to the death.

The Machine: This level 7 biomechanical machine takes the data gleaned from various creatures and produces its own new creations by fusing different parts together. If a creature dies in this chamber, long metallic arms



reach out and grab the corpse in one round, and they draw it into the machine in the next round. There, it is immediately broken down into its essential materials to be used for a future creation.

Loot: If the PCs disable the machine and scavenge it, they find the following:

- 16 shins
- Two level 2 anoetic cyphers that inject a creature with restorative chemicals, restoring 1d6 points to a stat Pool of the creature's choice
- A level 3 anoetic detonation cypher that explodes with a poisonous gas cloud in immediate range. All living, breathing creatures within the cloud suffer 5 points of damage. The cloud lingers for 1d6 rounds.

The Teleporter: Next to the wall opposite the entrance stands a cylinder of transparent synth, just large enough to hold a person. On the wall next to the cylinder is a panel that once had many buttons, but all have been removed except for two: a yellow button and a red one. If either is pressed, the cylinder rises about 6 feet (1.8 m) and, on the next round, lowers again.

If the yellow button is pressed, anyone or anything in the cylinder at that time teleports to area 19.

If the red button is pressed, anything in the cylinder is teleported to the top of one of the towers surrounding the pit, on the surface. Unfortunately, it's the tower that is no longer there. A teleported character suddenly falls about 100 feet (30 m), suffering 10 points of damage and moving one step down the damage track. In addition, he is stuck on the surface.

The teleporter is a level 5 device, so there's a chance that a PC could use numenera knowledge to figure out which button to press.

AREA 19: THE FINAL OBSTACLE

The passage here has a white marble floor and blue-and-white marbled walls and ceiling. It leads to a dead end, where what appears to be an ornate mirror hangs on the wall.

Examination of the "mirror" reveals that it's a vertical sheet of some kind of reflective liquid, and touching it causes ripples. The sheet is a level 2 numenera device. The liquid is about 5 inches (12.7 cm) deep, and hidden within it is a lever that, if pulled, causes the entire wall to sink into the floor, giving access to area 20.

However, there is also a terrible trap hidden within the "mirror" liquid. A character who

feels around in it or pulls the lever with his hand must make a Speed defense roll (difficulty 4) as a blade slides down, inflicting 10 points of damage and very likely cutting off a hand or at least a few fingers.

AREA 20: THE QUEEN'S TOMB

The builders chose this chamber to use as the true tomb of Queen Starloscet. Like the outer hallway, it is made entirely of marble, with decorative marble pillars along the walls. A statue of the queen, looming half again as large as life, stands regally at one end in front of a large chest. Both statue and chest are marble as well.

In the middle of the room is a beautiful marble sarcophagus bearing a golden plaque. It reads, in Truth, "Here lies Queen Starloscet, greatest monarch of Garamur, just, wise, and beautiful, who loved her subjects as her children." There is a door here opposite the moving wall the PCs likely used as an entrance.

Chest: Characters who lift the heavy marble lid off the chest (a level 2 task) find inside the work of skilled artisans:

- A lovely painted vase (worth about 20 shins)
- A crystal sculpture of a broad-winged bird (worth about 22 shins)
- A copper diorama that is a tiny replica of the queen's elegant throne room, with the queen on her throne (worth about 25 shins)
- A book whose pages are all sheets of hammered silver, with an engraved synth



GM Intrusion: *The machine spits out a new creature that attacks immediately.*

The tomb builders mastered this machine enough to be able to turn it off while they worked so they wouldn't have to deal with its output. Of course, they turned it back on when they were done.

The teleporter once had multiple destinations, but all were disabled except for two. Obviously, one is a trap.

People in the Ninth World have a very different outlook on the value of materials. Something made of gold isn't valuable for the gold, but it might fetch a good price if it is well made or beautiful.

cover. The book details the lineage of Queen Starloscet (worth about 50 shins both for the artistry and the historical value).

In addition, the chest contains the following numenera items, each wrapped in cloth (now brittle with age):

- A level 5 occultic cypher that is a metal disk that has been made into a lapel pin. It creates a cloaking field that effectively makes the user invisible and completely silent for one minute. While invisible, the user is specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks. This effect ends if he does something to reveal his presence or position—attacking, performing an esotery, using an ability, moving a large object, and so on. If this occurs, he can regain the remaining invisibility effect by taking an action to focus on hiding his position.

- A level 4 artifact called the temporal maul. This time-displacement device has been placed at the end of a metal haft to turn it into a heavy weapon. It constantly shifts back and forth through moments in time, making it very difficult to defend against. All attacks made with the maul have an asset that decreases the difficulty of the attack by one step. Depletion: 1 in 1d100.

- An oddity that is a copper ring about the size of a bracelet. If spun around a finger or a small shaft (like a pen), it continues to spin indefinitely.

If the characters discover the secret compartment in the bottom of the chest (a level 5 task), they also find these items:

- A level 9 anoetic cypher in the form of a thin glove that becomes as tough as the hardest metal. When active, punch attacks made by the wearer inflict an additional 1 point of damage. Further, the wearer's hand can't be harmed. He can handle hot lava or stick his hand into a grinder and suffer no ill effects (though the grinder might be wrecked). Activation lasts for 28 hours.

- A level 4 occultic cypher called an energy siphon. When active, this small metal device hovers around the user, and any energy attack (such as a nano's force blast or a beam from a ray emitter) strikes the cypher instead. The device is not harmed by the attack. Once activated, the energy siphon functions for one hour.

Sarcophagus: The sarcophagus of the queen rests on a raised dais. If examined, it appears to have been opened, which is interesting because nothing else in the room seems to

have been disturbed other than the partially open door. Inside the sarcophagus, the queen's decayed corpse rests within a sealed golden casket (worth 50 shins for its artistry). Next to the coffin is a crumbling wooden and bronze box, lying open and empty. Its contents have been looted by the erulians.

The Impossible Blade: The Impossible Blade is not here. It was in the box in the sarcophagus.

The Door: This door is identical to the one in area 15 and must be touched by someone with the genetic code imparted by Aurturi's DNA-restructuring venom. However, this door is partially open, so the PCs can squeeze through. The erulians (see below) left it open when they entered the queen's tomb in their physical forms.

AREA 21: BEYOND THE TOMB

Beyond the door lies a hallway blocked by a level 8 force field that is impervious to damage. The controls for the field are immediately on the other side of it (the south side). They are relatively simple—one button turns the field off, and another turns it on. This particular field does not block special powers like telekinesis, which could be used to press the button. Teleportation or phase shifting can bypass the wall as well.

If characters can't shut down or bypass the field, further progress will be difficult. However, if they wait here, an erulian might come by and pass through the field in its normal form to observe the intruders. The creature won't react well to the characters, but a particularly well-spoken, fast-talking PC might be able to convince the erulian to shut off the force field.

Although the erulians can pass through the field while in their normal forms, they can't bring objects along. If they are carrying anything, they must shut down the field to get through.

GHOSTS OF THE PAST

In which the characters explore places even the tombbuilders never braved.

Deeper in the pit, in an area accessible from the true tomb, is the lair of the erulians. These nonhuman creatures have lived here for aeons, and they are quite satisfied with that situation. They don't react well if disturbed.

When the tomb builders did their work 150 years or so ago, the erulians kept their

The tentacle helmet from area 4 would be very handy here.



distance. Still, a few sightings added to the myth of the area, and occasional encounters with erulians convinced the builders that the pit was filled with ghosts and was an entrance to the land of the dead. When the tomb was finished, the erulians were the first “tomb robbers.” They came in through the back way and took whatever they liked—including the Impossible Blade.

The areas in this section were not modified by the builders and have never been explored by humans. Surfaces are bare metal.

AREA 22: GUARDPOST

There are always three erulians floating here. They are normally in a meditative state, but the presence of intruders rouses them. One round after that happens, they become solid and attack.

ERULIAN

3 (9)

An erulian is a creature from beyond Earth that is composed primarily of energy but can take a physical form. In its natural state, an erulian appears to be a flickering flame of white, gold, or blue that floats and flitters through the air. If desired, it can take a physical form that resembles a wrinkled, egglike shape with a single eye and a long tail. Some have compared it to a floating brain with an eye and a sort of spinal column. The tail is strong and prehensile.

While in their energy form, erulians are insubstantial, and matter passes right through them. However, for reasons of their own, they prefer to stay in the open if possible. If given the choice between floating through an open doorway or passing through a wall, they'll always go through the doorway. It's likely that they can't perceive anything while passing through matter.

Motive: Inexplicable

Environment: Ancient ruins or deep space

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Movement: Long (short if in physical form)

Modifications: Defends as level 4 due to size

Combat: In its natural state, an erulian is made of harmless, formless energy. It can't be affected by anything that can't affect energy. However, it can't affect material objects while in this form, so if it wants to attack or manipulate objects, it takes solid form. Maintaining physical form takes effort, and if an erulian is killed or seriously hurt, it reverts to its energy state.

In a fight, it uses its tail to whip or grab at foes. An erulian can also wield a weapon with its tail, inflicting 4 points of damage rather than 3.

Interaction: Erulians are normally fairly passive. It is only when their lairs are intruded upon and their meditations disturbed that they become belligerent and violent. When agitated, they can still be reasoned with, but the difficulty of doing so is increased by two steps.

Use: In their energy state, erulians can exist in any environment, even deep space. In the right context, they are well-informed philosophers and thinkers. If crossed, they are monstrous and vindictive.

GM Intrusion: *The character is grabbed by the erulian's tail and loses his next action as he is held fast in its unsettling grip.*



AREA 23: RUINED NETWORK CENTER

This chamber is filled with screens and banks of electronic components but is in a horrible state of repair. It is clear that nothing here functions.

GM Intrusion: *The character is blasted directly by a gout of steam.*

Loot: The PCs can scavenge the components (a level 3 device) for numenera. If successful, and they spend at least an hour here, they find the following:

- A level 3 anoetic cypher that looks like a glowing blue ball and bathes a creature in energy, granting +1 to Intellect Edge for one hour
- A level 6 anoetic detonation cypher that explodes with radiation in an immediate area. The radiation burns so quickly that things affected by it char (taking 8 points of damage) but never catch fire.
- A level 5 anoetic cypher that emits a ray that causes random molecular rearrangement on a small scale. The ray inflicts 7 points of damage at a range of 200 feet (61 m).
- A level 2 occultic cypher that can be affixed to any other cypher, activating it by timer. The user can choose one cypher to activate at a specific time, up to one week after the timer is set.
- 58 shins

AREA 24: STEAM VENTING

The sound of churning mechanisms comes from far below this sweltering chamber. The floor has dozens of holes like puckered metal orifices, each covered in a thick grate about 2 feet (0.6 m) across. At any given time, at least one of these is bursting forth with a geyser of steam.

Being blasted directly by a gout of steam inflicts 5 points of damage. Being next to a burst of steam inflicts 1 point of damage. Although both of these can be avoided by a successful Speed defense roll (difficulty 4), avoiding a direct blast still results in 1 point of damage.

Every round the PCs spend in this chamber—including just passing through it—one character is subjected to a potential direct burst, and those next to her are at risk for taking 1 point of damage.

Aftereffects: The steam is laced with an unknown molecular compound that is extremely harmful to standard terrestrial life forms (but not to the erulians). Anyone who suffers more than 1 point of damage from

the steam must make a Might defense roll or, over the course of the next 28 hours, she will develop red welts and blisters all over her skin. These are painful and debilitating, and she takes 5 points of damage that can't be restored normally via recovery rolls. (If the steam damage is somehow healed without the use of recovery rolls, the blisters and welts disappear and the character is fine.)

After two or three more days, the blisters burst open, and tiny, wormlike parasites grown from the PC's tissue emerge. The emergence of the worms causes her to move one step down the damage track, but after that point, recovery rolls will heal the damage she sustained.

Meanwhile, the worms attack the character, inflicting 3 points of damage each round until they are slain or washed away. Any area attack that inflicts at least 1 point of damage kills them, and if the character submerges herself in water (or other liquid) or spends one minute scrubbing, the worms are no longer a problem.

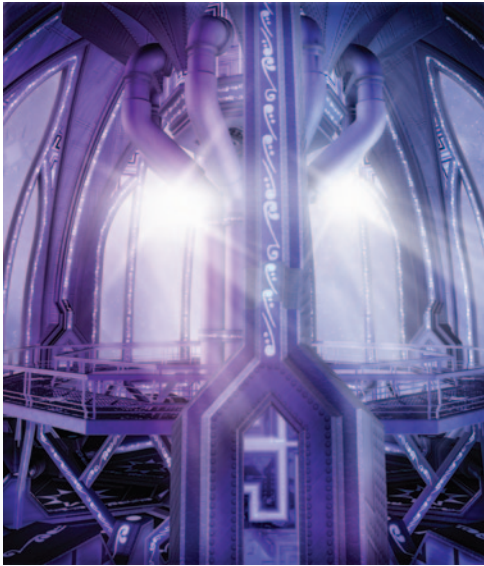
AREA 25: FUNGAL GROWTHS

This long chamber is filled with the fruiting bodies of strange fungi. An enormous rent in the metal of the south wall and the ceiling (perhaps due to seismic damage) has allowed a great deal of soil to spill into the room. Mushrooms and grey conical bodies grow all around the rent and extend long, ropy tendrils across the other surfaces. The room smells of loam and something sickly sweet.

Anyone spending one or more rounds in this chamber must make a Might defense roll with a difficulty of 4. Failure means that the fungal spores get into the character's system. From that point on, every time the PC attempts an action, she must roll a d20. On a roll of 1–5, she does the opposite of what she intended. (The GM may need to adjudicate what the "opposite" of certain actions might be. When in doubt, the character does nothing.)

If an affected character spends 6 Intellect points as an initial cost, she can attempt an Intellect defense roll with a difficulty of 5. If successful, she can act normally for one hour.

Each day (every 28 hours), the affected character can attempt a new Might defense roll. If successful, the effect ends.



AREA 26: THE GATHERING PLACE

In its own way, this chamber looks a bit like a temple, although it's still clearly a place of technological origin. A raised metal platform surrounds a column of pipes and conduits. Windowlike glass panels showing a dark, star-filled sky cover the walls, and luminescent writing is etched into the metal of almost every other surface of the room.

Floating throughout this chamber are six erulians in their energy state, meditating. They spend the vast majority of their lives linked into their own datasphere, living virtual lives of quiet contemplation and meditation. It's possible that their datasphere extends far beyond the Ninth World.

AREA 27: THE MASTER

The leader of the erulians meditates here, although if any other erulians in the complex have been attacked, it is roused and ready for foes. It attacks intruders and fights to the death, pausing only if its opponents surrender and offer it considerable bribes to spare their lives.

ERULIAN MASTER 5 (15)

The erulian master is a fugue-state amalgam of six of the greatest of its kind, so it is six times the normal size, has six times the intelligence and power, and has six eyes and six tails in its material form.

Motive: Inexplicable

Environment: Ancient ruins or deep space

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Movement: Long (short if in physical form)

Combat: While in physical form, the erulian

master wields dangerous psychic and physical powers and can perform six actions at once. On its turn, it can choose six of the following options (and can choose any option more than once):

- It can confuse a foe who is a thinking being by overloading its sensory inputs, increasing the difficulty of that creature's next action by two steps.
- It can alter the perception of time for a foe who is a thinking being, making the creature move at half its normal speed and increasing the difficulty of that creature's next action by one step.
- It can render a foe deaf and blind for one round.
- It can physically attack with one of its tails.

The erulian master wields the Impossible Blade as a weapon and can use it to inflict 5 points of damage. Thus, it adds no extra damage, but it ignores Armor.

Interaction: The erulian master can be bribed with certain numenera items, but it's not interested in any other kind of interaction.

The Impossible Blade: This level 8 artifact is a tool that can be used for very fine work, cutting or carving almost any (small) object with amazing precision. It can also be used as a weapon. It is a light weapon that ignores Armor. However, the blade is somewhat fragile, so using it as a weapon risks damaging it. Depletion: 1 in 1d20.

Other Treasures: The erulians took the following from Starloscet's tomb, in addition to the Impossible Blade:

- A level 4 anoetic cypher that, when activated, becomes a small flying automaton that harasses a foe for one minute. It flies into the target foe, getting in the way of his eyes, his movements, and so on. The difficulty of all actions for the affected foe is increased by one step. At any time, the user can take an action to command the automaton to bother a different foe within short range.
- Queen Starloscet's royal scepter, which has a level 5 artifact built into it. This artifact saps the will of a target creature. The affected creature makes all Intellect defense actions with the difficulty increased by one step. Actions involving seeing through deceptions, resisting urges, and other similar tasks are likewise affected. Creatures are affected for 28 hours. Depletion: 1 in 1d20.

Burris Han: level 4, level 5 with deception and with attacks with his verred; 22 health; 2 points of Armor; 6 points of damage with his verred

Thugs: level 3; 2 points of Armor; 4 points of damage with clubs and huge knives

Chirani: level 3; touch inflicts 4 points of damage; can become invisible for up to one minute per hour



Experience Point

Awards:

The following discoveries (assuming the PCs find and use or bypass them) are worth 1 XP for each PC involved: Aurturi's sting in area 2, the crusher in area 9, the teleporter in area 18, and the force field in area 21. Finding the Impossible Blade is worth 2 XP for each PC.

These awards are in addition to any XP earned for recovering artifacts or other means.

- The headdress of the queen, a delicate crystalline object of beauty (worth 100 shins for its artistry and historical value)

THE BETRAYAL

In which an acquaintance from earlier reveals himself to be a villain at the end.

If the PCs employed the services of Burris Han in Barrow-Town to keep watch at the top of the pit, he is there when they return. However,

so are two thugs he hired to help him kill the characters and take whatever they recovered from the tomb. In addition, Burris somehow convinced four chirani from Barrow-Town to assist him as well. He positions an ambush with his thugs hidden around the camp and the chirani invisible, which allows them to make a vicious surprise attack against one character that is one step more difficult to defend against and inflicts an additional 2 points of damage.

If the PCs didn't join forces with Burris, he, his thugs, and the chirani are still waiting for the characters at the top of the pit, but the attackers won't have the element of surprise.

None of these villains fights to the death if they can help it. They all flee if overpowered.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The pit is a vast complex with many levels. The GM is free to expand on the location by adding more entrances, adding more destinations to the teleporter in area 18, or simply adding more elevators or passages to further areas.



By the end of this adventure, if the PCs have acquired the gharolan, found the Impossible Blade, and defeated Devola's foe, they can return to Devola (page 16) for the procedure. Otherwise, they can tackle "Viral Transmissions" (page 21) or "Beyond the Maelstrom" (page 63).



BEYOND THE MAELSTROM

This adventure takes place as part of The Devil's Spine if the PCs attempt to gain gharolan, a compound that Devola needs in order to remove the spinal parasite from a host. As a standalone scenario, "Beyond the Maelstrom" gives players the chance to explore the Sea of Secrets and discover the dark dangers of its depths.

BACKGROUND

The Sea of Secrets is aptly named, no matter what language you use to talk about it. From its surface, it looks beautiful, sunlit, and sweetly inviting. But beneath that warm blue lies a blackness so impenetrable, so immeasurable, so beyond imagining that it threatens to break the minds and bodies of even the hardest adventurers. Deeper still is the sea floor, a place of shifting plates, hydrothermal vents, ancient ruins, and unknowable, deadly creatures.

It is to this deep, dark place that the PCs must journey to gather the gharolan that Devola needs to remove the spinal parasites. For only along the ocean's floor can one find the celosia—sea spiders that thrive inside the hydrothermal vents at the bottom of the Sea of Secrets. The celosia release blue bioluminescent mucus when disturbed; this biochemical mucus, when mixed with fresh water, becomes the gharolan.

SYNOPSIS

When the PCs choose to tackle this section of the task that Devola has given to them, they first need to make the long, arduous trek from their current location to the seaside town of Harmuth. Whatever route they take, it is likely that they encounter myriad difficulties and perhaps even unexpected opportunities.

Upon arriving in town to meet with Cagyn Rilid—the man who will offer assistance in finding the gharolan—the PCs learn that their mission is not as clear-cut as they might have hoped. The town is in turmoil, and an enormous storm is brewing off the shore. The PCs must choose how to handle the situation in Harmuth while obtaining the necessary supplies for their trip to the deep sea.

Once they are properly supplied, they face the most difficult leg of their journey—heading to the Sea of Secrets. This water is safe for no one, and even the most dangerous and skilled explorers will be plagued by plundering Jaekels, hungry hlyns, or any number of seafaring creatures. To make matters worse,

the vents that they seek are almost directly beneath the brewing storm, a giant maelstrom formed by a creature named Moyag. The PCs must find a way to stop Moyag and her storm before they can gather the chemical compound from the celosia on the sea floor.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

As with the other adventures in *The Devil's Spine*, the most likely way to get the PCs involved in "Beyond the Maelstrom" is to have them deal with Devola and agree to do her bidding. If that's not the way things fall out, you can try any of the following:

Safe Removal: An NPC friend of the characters needs to have some embedded mechanical parts removed and must have the gharolan in order to survive the procedure.

Storm Guard: Someone in the Redfleets has learned about the artificial maelstrom and wants the PCs to investigate.

Hearts of Jelly: A deep sea diver recently returned to shore, telling a tale of a lost companion and jellyfish that seemed to be made of human hearts. He begs for someone to rescue his friend—or at least find out what happened to him.

MODIFYING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure is designed to be fairly difficult, but not impossible, for first-, second-, and third-tier characters.

For PCs of higher tiers, make the following changes: increase the level of the herders by 2, increase the level of the Jaekels by 1 and double their numbers, and increase the number of dabirri and progenitors by 1.

Characters at Tier 4 and above might even be able to take on Moyag and defeat her—or at least not die in the attempt.

In addition to making the adventure harder, remember that there's a lot of player value in making it *weirder*. (See GMing Under the Sea, page 74.)

Redfleets, page 226

CROSSING THE KINGDOM

As the PCs prepare to head toward Harmuth, they will quickly realize that they have a long trek ahead of them. Depending on where they begin, they have a number of options for travel, but most of these options include a fair amount of time and a number of encounters.

Although the GM has the purview to skip much of this travel with a general statement of progress, it's a great chance to give PCs a unique understanding of the Kingdom of Navarene, play up the dangers and opportunities that abound, and make the journey more interesting. Potential encounters are suggested below, but if there's some creature, idea, or encounter that you've been wanting to try, this is a great place to add it.

The PCs may decide to make the trek overland or try to use the nearby Tithe River to their advantage.

Taking the Tithe: Explorers who tackle some part of the journey by traveling along the Tithe River can cover about 20 miles (32.2 km) per day by boat. This cuts their travel time from 20 days of walking (see "The Long, Hard Trek," below) to about a week and a half.

If they decide to use the river, they come upon a small village south of Uxphon on the shore of the Tithe and find boats that will carry up to four people at a time. Built from a combination of floating plants native to the area and scavenged bits of synth, the boats are important to the people of the village. They don't use them as travel devices—indeed, the very idea is odd to them. Instead, they use the anchored boats at night as floating places to protect their food supplies and children from the creature they call the "Hidden Mouth." (The Hidden Mouth is actually an unusually large specimen of a creature commonly called a balikna.)

The leaders of the village are two middle-aged women named Rhotia and Sulucu. The PCs may attempt to obtain the boats through bribes, persuasion, battle, promises to return the vessels, or payment of various objects of worth. If they kill the balikna, the women gratefully give the characters as many boats as they need.

BALIKNA 4 (12)

This large, lizardlike creature has tall back spikes, a spiked tail, and legs that end in fierce pincers. It has bad eyesight and hunts via sound thanks to a series of funneled ears on top of its large jaw.

A balikna is the king of camouflage, with the passive ability to change its pigment to identically match whatever object it rests upon, becoming essentially invisible.

During the daylight hours, the balikna stays motionless and invisible. It hunts only at night, under the cover of darkness. Although its movements are mostly silent, those with good hearing, good night vision, or the proper numenera devices can track this creature in the dark more easily than during the day.

Motive: Hunger

Environment: Any wooded or grassy area, but especially near villages where food and children are present

Health: 20

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 3

Movement: Short

Modifications: Defends as level 5 due to camouflage (if a foe can even see it)

Combat: The balikna's camouflage is a passive skill (a level 3 task). If it's invisible, the PCs must make an Intellect roll every round to see it. Failure means that the character cannot attack the creature this round, and defending against it is two steps more difficult. The balikna knows who cannot see it and always attacks them, if possible.

Its main attack is a sneak attack—a swipe with its heavy, spiked tail that inflicts 6 points of damage and stuns its opponent for one round, meaning that he loses his next turn. The creature follows up with an attempt to close its pincers on its stunned opponent for 4 points of damage.

Interaction: The creature could be lured into a trap by using a small child as bait.

The Long, Hard Trek: If the PCs choose to walk to Harmuth, the time it takes depends on where they start. Characters leaving from Uxphon will need to cross the entire distance of Navarene, which likely takes around 20 days if they stick to the roads as much as possible. If they leave from elsewhere, figure that they can travel 12 miles (19 km) per day (give or take some time for good roads or no roads).

NAVARENE ENCOUNTERS

Once the PCs secure a boat or head off across the land, they might experience any of the Navarene encounters detailed below or have a run-in with creatures like jiraskars, mesomemes, or rubars.



Fighting in dim light,
page 96

Rhotia and Sulucu:
level 3 (9) as a pair;
level 4 with Intellect
defense

GM Intrusion: The balikna's tail swipe hits a PC who cannot see it, knocking the character unconscious for 1d6 rounds.



The Wild Herds: At various spots within Navarene live large herds of enyi, catlike herbivores that feed on the grasses and wildflowers of the kingdom's rich farmland. Each herd consists of half a dozen enyi. Although the enyi pose no threat to the PCs and in fact seem like they would make an excellent meal or possibly solid pack or companion animals if they were to be captured, they are protected by mechanical creatures called "herders" by those in Navarene who know to steer clear of them.

However, the chances are good that the PCs probably won't know. Herders patrol a large territory and are likely to attack any creatures moving in their area, regardless of whether the intruders come close to the enyi flocks.

HERDER

3 (9)

This mechanical creature looks like a very large insect built of metal pipes and bone-colored ceramic. It bears a semicircle of metal spikes down its back, four sharp claws on each foot, and a hard, bonelike spur on the left side of its head. Standing at nearly 3 feet (0.9 m) tall, plus another 1 to 2 feet (0.3 to 0.6 m) for its spikes, herders were clearly created by someone or something, possibly for the protection of the enyi (or the enyi's ancestors).

They typically watch over a flock alone, but sometimes they protect in pairs.

Motive: Protection of its flock

Environment: Anywhere herds of enyi are found—mostly grasslands and plains

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points (or 3 points; see Combat)

Armor: 5

Movement: Long

Modification: Defends against acid, electricity, and detonations as level 2

Combat: A herder displays various forms of aggression toward anything that it perceives as threatening its flock. The displays are nearly ritualistic in their order. First, the herder begins to make a loud clacking sound, created by rubbing its hind legs together. PCs often hear this sound long before they are close enough to see the herder; those with knowledge of the creature know to avoid the sound if possible. If the danger doesn't go away, the herder rises up on its hind legs, doubling its height. The last and final sign of aggression before a herder attacks is that it drops its head and thumps its ceramic spur against the ground. Large herders hit the ground hard enough for PCs to feel the collision beneath their feet. The

Jiraskar, page 242

Mesomeme, page 246

Rubar, page 255

Additional ideas for Navarene encounters, towns, and experiences can be found in the Numenera corebook, starting on page 137.



Show 'Em:
The Wild Herd,
Image L, page 93

GM Intrusion: *Two herders watch that particular flock; the second one appears only after the fight has begun.*

Ring rider: *level 2, defends as level 3 against antigravity attacks*

first display is passive and ongoing; the last two each take one round.

When herders attack, they do so quickly and with a great deal of aggression already built up in their movement. Their main attack is a driving head butt with their ceramic spur, which inflicts 4 points of damage and has a chance to stun a target for one round. If they are in close combat, they switch to attack with their claws, inflicting 3 points of damage.

Herders are difficult to harm with conventional weapons due to their metal and ceramic build, and they are immune to mental effects or Intellect damage.

Their main objective is to defend the herd, but once they begin combat, they don't stop, even if the enyi no longer seem to be in danger. To a herder, once a threat, always a threat.

Interaction: Communication is not possible.

Loot: Players may scavenge 1d6 shins and one random cypher from a herder's body.

A Family Adrift: Anywhere within Navarene, the PCs may come upon a family of three adults and two children, as well as two large seskii and three seskii pups. The family says they were farmers for a rich family in Navarene but

were put off their land and sent away. They've obviously been on the road for a long time, and although they are too proud to ask, it's clear that they could use some food and supplies. They have two cyphers that they don't know what to do with and would trade the devices if the PCs have extra food, water, or supplies. If any of the characters has a connection to animals, the youngest child, a girl named Hasiday, probably takes a liking to that person. If she deems the PC particularly worthy (for example, she sees him interact positively with animals, or they have a conversation about the seskii in which he seems interested and kind), she offers him the seskii pup of his choosing as a companion animal.

THE SCENT OF PAPER MILLS

As the PCs near the seaside town of Harmuth, they might begin to note the odor of wet pulp, electricity, and fermentation. This is the scent of the paper mills that are located outside Harmuth's borders. These mills are scattered in a haphazard semicircle around the town.

Human workers called ring riders use antigravity devices to fell trees and transport them to the mills. These devices allow the workers to float the trees parallel to the ground, but a foot (0.3 m) or so above it,



essentially “riding” on top of the prone trees to guide them to the mill. Although this speeds up production, it also increases the number of accidents, as the trees are heavy and hard to control. Almost all of the mills have boarded-up, broken places where a rider couldn't stop a tree in time. Ring riders are not aggressive as long as no one interferes with them doing their job.

Other than the ring riders, the mills appear to be entirely automated except for one or two people who walk the site and fix whatever has broken down most recently (and there's always at least one bit of machinery that has broken down). If they PCs offer to help repair a piece of machinery and actually do fix it (a difficulty 4 task), the person in charge of the mill invites them to scavenge anything useful from a pile of random machine parts. The PCs find 1d6 cyphers.

THE TOWN ON THE SHORE

In which a seaside town holds the key for the PC's quest.

Harmuth is a medium-sized town on the very edge of the sea. In fact, it's clear that the town was once much larger, but the water has crept in over the years. Out beyond the shore, the PCs can see various structures half standing

against the water's barrage. The streets are a cobbled mix of stone and steel, and the town makes good use of its proximity to the paper mills. There are a surprising number of book and print shops, flyers abound, and on the street corners, hawkers offer not one but two local newspapers.

PCs who take a moment to look at the flyers or read the papers notice that most of the news covers three topics: the recent increase in storms off the shore, an upcoming event called the Festival of the Fish, and a recent rash of robberies. The characters may seek out Cagyn right away, or they may decide to investigate some of the additional things happening in town.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Jewel Box: This local bar is a bustling place for town news, decent food, and a chance to hear the Waterless Whales, a group of musicians who received mouth modifications so they can vocalize whale songs. Abria is the barkeep—a well-muscled woman with a sharp laugh and rainbow-dyed hair, she's happy to serve anyone and talk about town gossip. The PCs can rent out rooms above the Box for 1 shin per night, but it's not the quietest place

Harmuth

Ruler: Mayor Jaehn,
with Constable Eltre as
her right-hand man
Population: 3,000



to stay, as the musicians sing until the wee hours.

Waterway Inn: This small inn in the town square is quiet and quaint. Rooms are 2 shins per night, the owner Neisha silently and swiftly takes care of most needs, and there is a free fish-fry breakfast every morning.

Tentacle's Rest: Located down by the market, this inn and tavern serves a wild mix of Redfleets, sailors, locals, and travelers. Everyone entering must walk through an odd constructed box at the doorway. It rings if it detects numenera items, and everyone must announce their weapons to the large man who stands guard at the door. The PCs should expect a fight or two, as well as an opportunity to watch a few games of Duality—a local pastime where contestants make fist-sized fighting machines and pit them against each other in a small walled ring in the middle of the tavern. Two drinks, a simple dinner, and a room can all be had for 3 shins.

The Market: Located along the water, the market offers a number of places to purchase supplies (see *Stocking Up*, page 73).

POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS

The Missing Twins: Every year, Harmuth has a Festival of the Fish, a two-day long event complete with a parade and other festivities. The event is scheduled to take place in a few days, and the papers and fliers are full of the news. What the fliers don't say is that the two twin boys slated to be this year's Roe Kings have disappeared. The PCs may run into a stocky, red-haired man who questions them about their purpose in town. This man is Constable Eltre, and he believes the boys have been kidnapped by someone who came to town for the festival.

If the PCs convince him that they are harmless (a difficulty 3 task in which all players must roll and the majority must succeed), he asks for their help. If more players fail the roll than succeed, the constable holds at least one member of the party overnight in the gaiole for questioning. The rest of the group may wait the night for their friend(s) to be returned, try to break them out of the gaiole, or search for the boys themselves. Any characters questioned by the constable (or those who convince him of their innocence and talk with him) learn that the boys' mother is sure they ran away to hide in Oldtown because they didn't want to wear the Roe King costumes, although Eltre clearly

doesn't buy this idea.

PCs venturing into Oldtown hear the boys playing near a broken-down, two-story building with a worn sign that reads *The Dea Em li g*. If they return the boys, the constable offers to pay them hush money—5 shins each in exchange for telling anyone who asks that the boys truly were kidnapped and that the constable apprehended the kidnapers.

A Ring on Each Finger: PCs who wander the town might run into a tall, elegantly dressed woman. She says that she was walking down the street to the market and all ten of her rings went missing, just like that. She felt a very small tug, like an invisible rope, and when she looked down, they were gone. Her name is Ateth Rowley the Fourth, and she is willing to pay 3 shins per ring if they are returned to her. She says that a friend of hers lost a necklace the same way, but they found it near the base of the trees along the market road.

The culprit is a tiny creature called a nighthorn, named for its loud nighttime croaking. It's about the size of a human fist and looks like a furry bullfrog with big, bulbous eyes and mottled grey fur that covers everything but its feet. Unknown to most people, the creature is a particularly fine pickpocket. It has a long, thin tongue split into five prehensile ends that it uses to sneak items of interest from people's fingers, out of their pockets and bags, and off their outfits, often without the victims even noticing. The nighthorn uses the objects—often circular items or items with indents—to build a showy nest high in a tree. The creature uses the nest to attract a mate, the implication being that a female nighthorn will be able to lay a single egg in each of the objects, and thus the eggs will be well protected.

The nest is well hidden in one of the trees along the market road, so it's unlikely that the PCs will come upon it accidentally. However, if they're in the area, characters who are trained in animal lore (or similar areas of study) will probably have heard of the nighthorn and will recognize its nest from the ground without needing to make a roll. Otherwise, it's a level 3 task to see something suspicious up in the tree that catches their attention.

PCs who climb the tree to the nest (a difficulty 2 task) find a number of useless round trinkets, as well as eleven rings. The nighthorn isn't the kind of creature that will fight, although it uses its croak as a scare

GM Intrusion: *If the PCs turn down Eltre's hush money, the constable might start telling the townspeople that the PCs were the kidnapers.*



tactic and might try to steal something from the character who takes the rings.

If Ateth gets her rings back, she pays the PCs the promised amount and gives them the eleventh ring: a large, transparent band of synth. It's not hers, and she doesn't know who it belongs to. Captured inside the synth are three red baubles of some kind.

If the PCs aid Ateth and she learns that they need water transport, she tells them to go to Stastin's Boat Dock, and she'll set them up with a craft.

Spoonful of Medicine: If the PCs inquire about gharolan (particularly other possible sources for the substance rather than gathering it themselves), they hear of a man named **Frund** who sells something that sounds a lot like gharolan on the black market. If the characters can purchase some of the compound from him, they could bypass the entire expedition to the deep sea. Word on the street is that he's just arrived back ashore from a recent diving trip and always brings some of the compound back with him.

By asking around, the PCs discover that Frund has been spotted hanging out at Tentacle's Rest. They don't find him there, but the trail leads back to his boat, which is docked on the west end of the market. Frund is a big, broad-shouldered man with a shock of white hair and a tattoo of a green squid on one arm. He won't sell them any gharolan, even though he clearly has a very small container of the compound in his hands while he talks to them. The amount is far less than Devola needs for even one dose.

The PCs might try to purchase the gharolan from him (he won't sell), steal it from him later, or take it by force. However, he has no more of the compound than the small amount they saw.

If the characters converse with him instead, he might tell his story. The seas were too rough this time to get the gharolan. He couldn't get near his usual collection spot. And in fact, he isn't a black market trader; the gharolan he regularly collects is for his partner, who has a terminal illness.

STOCKING UP

On the south side of town, there is a small market along the docks where characters can stock up on supplies like weapons and food. Even more useful, however, is a store called Elstow's Wharfside. Located inside a square building floating on a large block of synth, the Wharfside is clean, well organized,

and stocked with weapons and protection for deep-sea navigation. It offers many of the necessities for deep-sea travel, as well as extra items that will make the trip easier if the PCs have the shins to pay.

CAGYN RILID

While the PCs are in Harmuth, they must prepare for their trip to the sea. Although Devola gave them a small bit of information about what to expect, they probably have no idea what they need for deep-sea travel or how to go about it. To get that information, they must find Cagyn Rilid.

Anyone they talk to in town can tell them about Cagyn. Here's what the PCs can learn by asking around: most people think he's a bit out there, he lives in a blue houseboat (the only blue houseboat) near the center of town, and he does some kind of thing where he sits in the water with tubes attached to his ears. Most townsfolk make it clear that they consider him to be an unusual character, but they don't appear to dislike him.

Cagyn is easy to find. When the PCs arrive in town, he's the only person in the water, standing up to his neck in the sea, with the aforementioned tubes in his ears and a large synth box in his hands. A big burly man with a shaved head, Cagyn is reluctant to come out of the water and give up whatever he's working on, but as soon as the PCs start telling him what they need, he becomes interested. He leaves the water, at which point the PCs discover that he is naked except for more tubes, which are wrapped around his body in complicated configurations. Unless they are aggressive toward him in some way, he invites them to his houseboat. He might also put on some clothes. On the other hand, he might forget.

Both the outside and inside of Cagyn's houseboat are strung with wires and tubes, some of which seem mechanical and artificial, others of which seem to be growing there, like a bizarre type of water ivy. Inside, the main room is large with many shelves, most of which are covered with even more wires and tubes, as well as a variety of metal, synth, wooden, and stronglass objects that seem to have no discernible order or purpose.

Cagyn is considered to be an expert in the Sea of Secrets (as much as anyone can be an expert in such a large and mostly unexplored place), so the PCs might be surprised and dismayed to hear him say that he's never

Frund: level 4

ELSTOW'S WHARFSIDE

EQUIPMENT

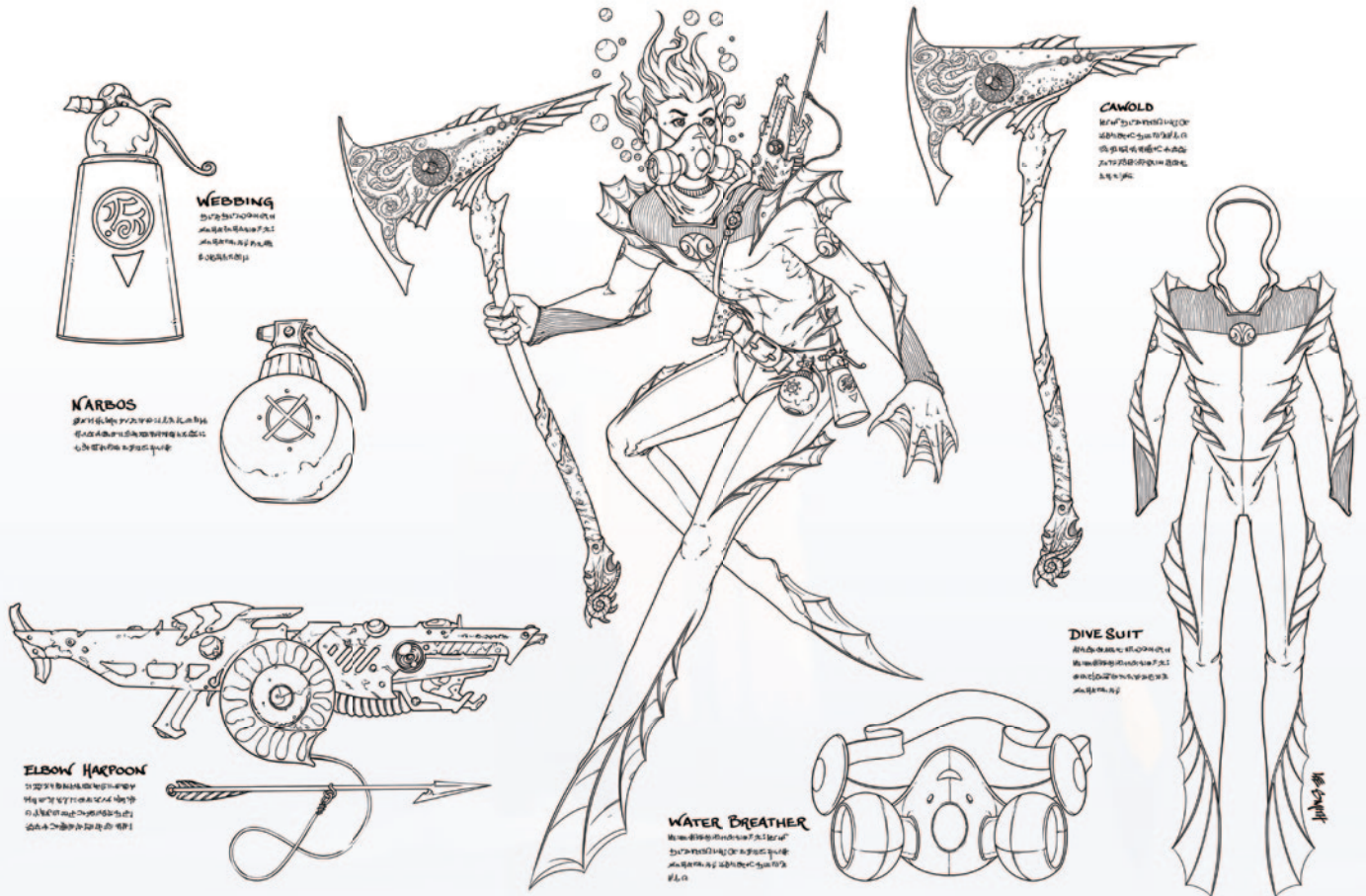
Waterbag	2 shins	Fits over an explorer's pack (or items of an equivalent size) and makes it waterproof and slightly more hydrodynamic.
Waterbreather (external)	20 shins	Creates a seal over your mouth and filters the oxygen out of the water to make it breathable for ten hours.
Waterbreather (internal)	30 shins	An injection that shoots a rice-sized bit of numenera into your neck. After 30 minutes, the numenera opens, creating an internal filtration system that allows you to breathe water. Lasts for five hours.
Webbing	8 shins	A small bottle of material sprayed between your fingers to create webbing. Lasts for one hour and doubles swim speed.
Storage locker	1 shin/day	Large enough to fit two explorer's packs, two large weapons, and one or two other items.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

Spraybreather	50 shins	This tiny canister sprays an opaque gelatin that forms around your head and creates a permeable oxygen barrier, filtering breathable air from the water. Doesn't work above water. Lasts for 28 hours.
Diving bubble	100 shins	This small round bubble converts water into breathable air for up to five people who are connected to it via a 50-foot-long (15.2 m) retractable tube and ventilator. Each person must have his own tube and ventilator.
Diving bubble tube and ventilator	5 shins	

WEAPONS

Fin piercer	1 shin	Light weapon. Dual-edged piercing weapon made of metal, 1.5 feet (.5 m) long. Designed for speed underwater, but feels off-balanced when used on land.
Narbos	5 shins	Light weapon. Bottle of liquid metal that you paint onto your nails; the material hardens into pointed claws that inflict 2 points of slashing damage (or 3 points if you paint and use both hands). One bottle is enough to paint twelve nails, which stay on until clipped or broken off.
Elbow harpoon	8 shins	Medium weapon. Designed as a short-distance propelled harpoon for underwater combat; returns to you through a cable-retrieval system.
Sonar stream	50 shins	Medium weapon. Projectile weapon that shoots a long-range sonar pulse that inflicts Intellect damage. The stream is pinpointed, so you must be able to see your target to aim and hit it. Works only when immersed in liquid. Shoots ten times and takes one hour to recharge.



Supercavitation bubbler 10 shins Medium weapon. Shoots high-velocity liquid projectiles that use cavitation bubbles to aim true and reach long distance.

5 liquid projectiles 1 shin

Cawold 5 shins Heavy weapon. Similar to a greataxe, designed for great hydrodynamics and swifter movement in water.

ARMOR

Bubblewrap 20 shins Offers buoyancy and pressure control, as well as heat and cold protection for five hours. Does not provide Armor but can be worn over light armor.

Dive suit 50 shins Offers buoyancy and pressure control, as well as heat and cold protection for five hours. Treated as heavy armor in all respects (and thus cannot be worn with other armor).

Fish eyes 20 shins A pair of anti-fog, pressure-sensitive goggles to enhance underwater vision (turns darkness conditions into dim light conditions) and protect eyes. Requires ambient light to operate.



How to Survive Underwater

1. Water Breathing

Redfleet member. Mutation? Try Elstow's Wharfside.

2. Protection from the Heat of the Thermal Vents

Ask Elstow about suits?

3. Transportation

Submergine. Pushboat. Skimmer from Stastin's Boat Dock.

*This is just my advice. I am not responsible in any cases of you becoming damaged, destructed, or dead.

actually been there. Instead, he is an electronic mapmaker, building maps of the ocean floor by tracking sound and movement via his tubes and wires. He might also give the PCs the impression that he uses trackers on a variety of animals and creatures to further scout out the topography of the ocean.

Using a complicated contraption, he creates an image of lights, boxes, lines, and various moving dots right in front of the characters. Although the PCs aren't likely to understand what they're seeing, Cagyn is good at explaining what they're looking at—namely, the Sea of Secrets. He points out a spot in the electronic map where the lights that make up the sea floor are a mass of jumbled red dots. These are the hydrothermal vents that the PCs are looking for.

He also warns them of something else that's showing up on the radar, pointing at a number of broken orange lights just west of the vents. These lights are likely indicative of a giant storm. (If the PCs have chosen to do "Beyond the Maelstrom" first, Cagyn tells them how lucky they are to have arrived so quickly. If they've chosen to do this adventure later, he probably laments the fact that they didn't arrive earlier because the storm seems to be growing more dangerous.) If the PCs ask any other questions, he says it's a large storm and seems to be originating in the ocean rather than above it, but that's all he can really tell from his map.

If the PCs inquire further, or if Cagyn just seems to like them (which he will, if they show any interest in his beloved maps or the ocean itself), he bemoans the loss of his location tracker. The tracker—a translucent device that can be worn like a ring—was stolen a

few days ago. It pinpoints the location that is programmed into it. One red light means you're close to the right location, two means you're closer, and three means you're at it. (If the PCs completed "A Ring on Each Finger," the tracker is the eleventh ring they found in the nest. If they kept it, Cagyn sets it for them to help guide them on their way to the vents. If they sold it, they can try to buy it back from the vendor for 1d6 shins more than they sold it for.)

Cagyn offers the PCs a handout titled *How to Survive Underwater*. Next to each of the three numbered items, he has scrawled notes and suggestions. He also answers any questions they have to the best of his ability.

By this time, he is antsy to return to the water. However, if the PCs try to convince Cagyn to accompany them, it quickly becomes clear that he is deathly afraid of being in water above his head and has never been farther off shore than he can walk.

Water Breathing: The PCs can acquire water-breathing abilities in a number of ways. If they are Redfleet members, they may have this capability already. If not, they can try to become members. Some characters might have mutations that help them. They can also go to Elstow's Wharfside and see about purchasing a temporary water-breathing solution.

Heat Protection: If the PCs have diving suits, they offer enough protection to withstand the heat of the thermal vents.

Transportation: Again, the PCs have a number of options. However, unless one of the



characters has sailing skill and experience, purchasing a conventional, small sailing ship (like a cog or a coaster), which will run 50 to 75 shins to even rent, probably isn't an option.

Instead, they can try to hire one of the Redfleet captains at the docks to take them in a submergine (a difficulty 4 task, and the trip costs 10 shins per character). In this scenario, the craft and crew would be for transport only—they would steer clear of any involvement in the PCs' mission. The submergines available here are level 7 craft, have a crew of five, and can take up to ten passengers. They measure about 40 feet (12 m) long and are roughly tubular with a central round bulge (other submergines elsewhere are configured differently). The vessels are transparent craft of extremely hard synth, and a creature inside provides recycled air, food, and fresh water. A submergine can travel on the surface or in the deep sea. For this journey, they would stick to the surface as much as possible due to rumors of an increase in deep sea dangers.

The PCs can also buy a pushboat from Wavers, a boat shop located in the market. Pushboats are fast and cheap (costing about 25 shins, although the shop will take a useful cypher as a trade), but someone must constantly turn a crank to keep the motor running. Pushboats measure about 20 feet (6.1 m) in length and can carry up to six people, although it would be crowded. In good weather, they're not terribly difficult to sail—even for an untrained crew—but are notoriously dangerous in rough seas. Capsizing or outright destruction of the craft in a storm is likely. Most people don't take them far from the coast.

As another option, the PCs might go to Stastin's Boat Dock. Stastin is a young woman who owns the dock and the two numenera craft there called skimmers, which she doesn't sell but will rent for 50 shins per day (minimum 300 shins). This price is likely out of the characters' reach, but if they helped Ateth Rowley recover her rings, they can use that good deed to their advantage. Stastin owes Ateth a great deal of money and will hire her skimmers out, free of charge, to the PCs if told to do so by the wealthy woman. (If the PCs don't already know about this, they might overhear Stastin talking to a dock hand about her debts.) Skimmers are level 6 mechanical craft that float above the water, skimming over the

surface with four automated synth sails. They are about 18 feet (5.5 m) long and can carry up to six people. One does not sail or even steer a skimmer. Stastin preprograms them with a destination and instructs the user on how to activate a homing device that impels the skimmer to return to her dock. (She can also activate this function from the dock controls at any time.)

THE SEA AT LAST

In which the characters' ocean-going mission finally goes on the ocean.

It takes the PCs about six days to reach their destination. The journey is fraught with adventure and danger. Use one or more of the following encounters while the characters are at sea:

A Crew of Jaekels: These fierce fighters come upon the PCs quickly and with a true understanding of the ocean. The boat contains three Jaekels, including their leader, an Araska who can fly short distances on her surgically implanted wings. They are all armed with forearm blades, and the Araska has an elbow harpoon as well. If the PCs are in a boat, the attackers attempt to take it; they don't care as much about the fate of those inside. Jaekels love their boats more than their own lives. If the Jaekels seem likely to lose the battle, they blow up their boat with a hidden explosive rather than have it ransacked or taken over. They don't have a big enough crew to risk attacking a Redfleet submergine.

Storm Interference: The sea seems especially choppy the closer they get to the spot where they're headed. The PCs may find themselves in the midst of high winds, high waves, and rain. If any of the characters have inabilities in balance, they find it hard going. A possible GM intrusion would be to have one of the PCs fall overboard, needing rescue.

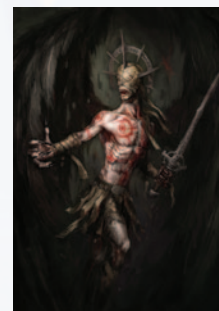
Hlyns: These large creatures (nearly 8 feet [2.4 m] across) look similar to skates and other batoids of today's world, except that their large "wings" are designed for flying instead of swimming and the point of their heads features a large curved beak. Also called cloud kites, they typically fly alone, but juveniles sometimes flock together to make the long trips across the ocean. They might try to land on the ship for respite or to lay eggs, but as meat eaters, they aren't adverse to having a snack while there.

Jaekel: level 5

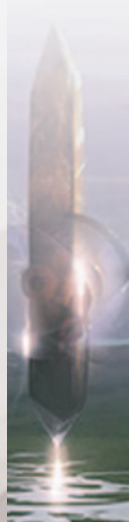
Araska: level 6



Jaekel, page 169



Hlyn: level 3; level 4 for attacking and defending when in the air



GMing UNDER THE SEA

Although your instinct while running the underwater portions of this adventure might be to make everything more difficult and complicated for the PCs, that's not really the spirit of Numenera. Sure, you could increase the difficulty of every movement and encounter by one or two steps to make everything harder, but that kind of gaming experience can quickly get frustrating and boring for everyone involved.

In this adventure, the PCs should be equipped with everything they need to make the underwater portions achievable, and the creatures are already at a level that is appropriate for the encounters. So instead of thinking of underwater combat as more difficult than land combat, try considering the ways in which underwater combat is *different*, especially in terms of flavor and story.

The goal shouldn't be to make the players fight harder, but to make them fight smarter. In the sea, working together to come up with innovative, new solutions is almost always better than attacking with more vigor—and will likely result in more interesting dynamics.

Some thoughts about making water adventures more interesting instead of just more difficult:

Water makes it difficult to hear and communicate. What devices, powers, or other solutions could the PCs put into place to communicate with each other more easily through the water?

Visibility is likely to be limited. What dark creatures can come charging from the shadows, and how can the PCs prepare for that?

Cyphers, artifacts, and mechanized weapons react differently in water. Some won't work. Others will work better. And still others might respond entirely differently than the PCs expect.

Many deep sea creatures have never seen a human before and may not react as expected. They may follow the PCs for a while, trying to figure the humans out. On the other hand, they may decide that these swimming forms are food after all and attack without warning.

Play up the weird. What's down there, and what does it look, sound, or feel like? Do a little research on the bizarre and scary creatures that exist in our modern-day ocean, and then increase the WTF factor tenfold.

Underwater is a great place to use GM intrusions. Perhaps an unexpected current moves a PC a short distance away, a school of fish swarms around a character and blinds her for one round, or whatever breathing apparatus the PC is using becomes clogged.

ABOARD THE WHALEBOAT

In which the characters find friends from far, far away.

As soon as the tracking ring shows two red lights, the PCs are able to see something in the distance. As they get closer, they can begin to make it out. The boat—as large as a small village and looking very much like one—seems to be built on the back of a giant whalelike creature.

At about 500 feet (152 m) away, the ring goes to three red lights. Although the enormous vessel sits over the spot where the PCs need to dive, it's unclear whether the ship is there for the same reason.

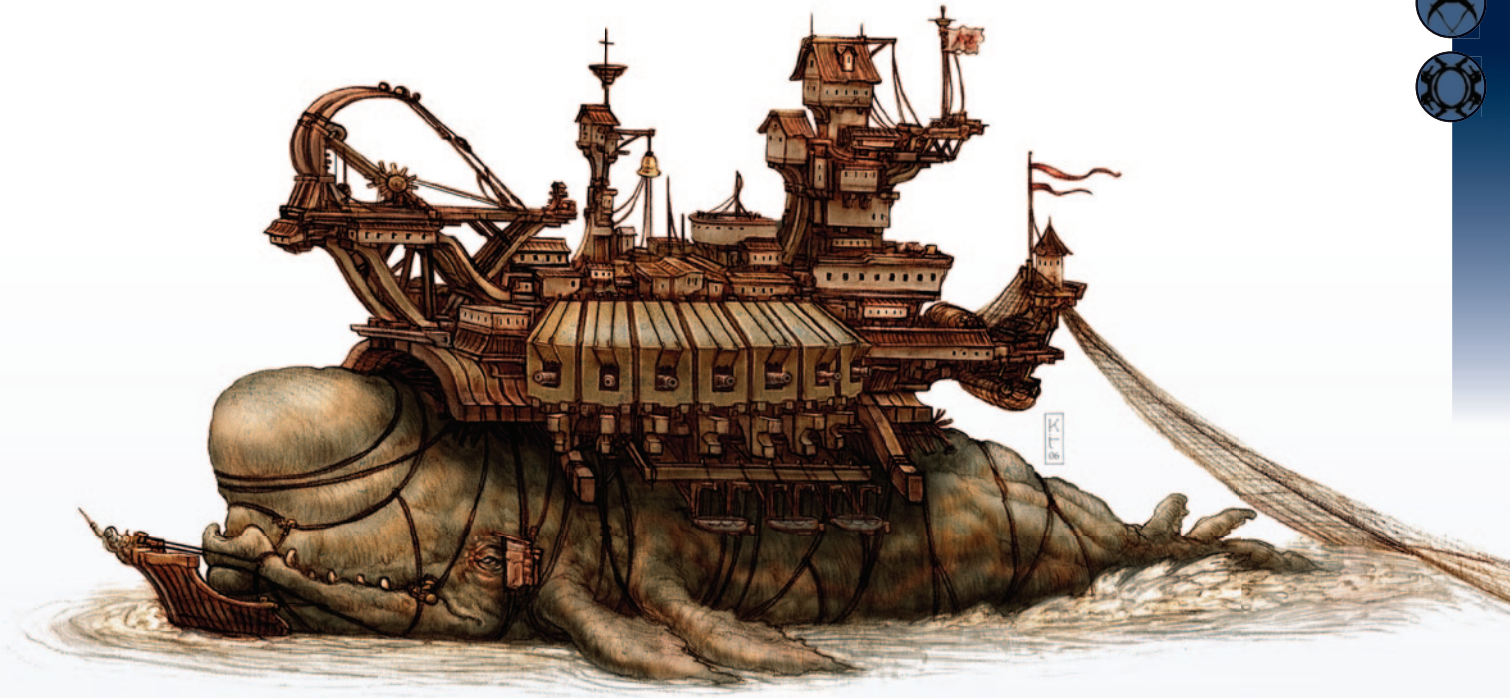
There's nothing menacing about the whaleboat, and it's clearly too well defended for the PCs to take it on. But it's bizarre, probably beyond anything they have ever seen. The creature itself is as large as a city, with blinders around its eyes and a number of large cables wrapped around its body, holding the boat on its back.

The water around the ship—a circle with

a radius of about 500 feet (152 m)—appears to be calm, but elsewhere it is choppy. This might be reason enough for the PCs to approach the ship, even if they're uncertain about its intent.

As the PCs approach the whaleboat, at least one character starts to hear speech in her head. (If a character has telepathic abilities, it should be that person. Otherwise, choose one at random.) The voice scrolls through a list of words, many of which don't seem to be from the same language. Eventually, it hits on a single word in a language that the PC recognizes: *Welcome*.

A number of tall humans (nearly 7 feet [2 m]) with reddish-brown skin and short red hair wave the PCs' ship toward the back of the whaleboat, climbing down the long strands of netting that trail behind it. Although the ship's occupants seem human, they are unlike humans that most PCs will have seen. Their legs are too short and wide for their height, and their trunks are too long. Almost all of them wear an elaborate covering made of



bones wrapped with fabric that shields their pale blue eyes from the sun.

Using mostly hand gestures and the occasional word in Truth (including “welcome,” “safe,” and “come”), they invite the PCs to tie their boat to the netting and come aboard. The tall people move with agility and grace over the unstable netting, clearly at home on the shifting sea.

Once on the whaleboat, the PCs see that it really is similar to a small village. There are houses, stores, and even a few gardens growing here and there. The ground is oddly curved and grey, appearing to be the back of the animal upon which the town is built. The structures are made of wood and a substance similar to concrete. Large basins at the edges of most buildings catch water runoff.

The entire ship bustles with tall people, most of them dressed in simple grey fabrics. It's hard to tell their gender or age, as they all look surprisingly alike. There are no children.

While the PCs garner stares here and there, it is clearly not the first time that strangers have been aboard. Most people just go about their way, moving through the ship and taking care of their business.

SHON'AI

Through more gestures and the very occasional word in Truth—often an incorrect one, which creates a great deal of confusion—one of the people who helped the PCs aboard

beckons them toward a door near the tail end of the ship. From there, they climb stairs to the highest point of the town: a room that houses a laboratory.

A woman greets them, and it's obvious that she has been told of their arrival. She looks nothing like the others on the whaleboat. Slight and athletic, with pale skin that shifts between red and blue hues, the woman introduces herself as Shon'Ai. Judging by her accent, the Truth doesn't seem to be her first language, but she speaks it fluently. She is covered from head to toe in clothes made of a shiny fabric that also seems to shift colors slightly, sometimes blue or red, sometimes purple. There is something vaguely mechanical about her, a tiny bit of oddness in the way she tilts her head and moves.

While talking to her, the PCs can learn the following:

Shon'Ai is a researcher of sorts, and she had this whaleboat built in a land she calls the Sabeta (the PCs have never heard of it). She hired all the people on board for the sole purpose of her studies, although she remains vague about what those studies are, exactly.

She has been down below to explore for her studies. She tells them of a number of creatures that she has encountered, including wisps, dabilirri, and progenitors. However, the last time she was there, right before the storm began, she saw something new: a castle made of water. She wants to explore it but hasn't



Show 'Em:

*The Whaleboat,
Image M, page 94*

SHON'AI

5 (15)

True Senses: *You can see in complete darkness up to 50 feet (15 m) as if it were dim light. You recognize holograms, disguises, optical illusions, sound mimicry, and other such tricks (for all senses) for what they are. Enabler.*

Knowing the Unknown (6 Intellect points): *Tapping into the datasphere, you can ask the GM one question and get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Gaining knowledge of the future is impossible.*

Action.

She can be “worn” by another being, protecting him from harm for up to ten hours and enabling him to use some of her nano abilities. When worn by a host, she offers 5 points of Armor against high temperatures, underwater environments, pressure, and damage from attack by other creatures, but the host cannot wear other armor while “wearing” her. She provides a steady source of breathable air and allows the host to telepathically communicate with any willing creature they touch. Ironically, no communication with Shon’Ai is possible while she is being worn. She also gives the host the power to use her nano abilities of True Senses and Knowing the Unknown.

been able to return because of the maelstrom. Although she could get down there by going through the eye of the storm, she can’t figure out how to get back up.

She knows nothing about the gharolan or the celosia that produce it. However, she says the rifts are right below the boat, and she seems interested in learning more about the creatures.

There is something she seems reluctant to tell the PCs at first, but if they talk long enough, they discover a bit about her true interest of study. A creature—she calls it the Moyag—seems to be creating the maelstrom and the castle beneath the surface. Shon’Ai seems both fascinated with and deeply afraid of the Moyag, and she urges the characters not to tangle with the creature if they value their lives.

If the PCs decide to go below anyway, she asks a lot of questions about their plans and offers suggestions. Then she says that she can protect one of them if they will try to find the source of the maelstrom and shut it down.

If the PCs agree, she chooses one of them and invites that character in. Of course, the PCs have no idea what this means. As it turns out, Shon’Ai is an organic adaptive creature, allowing another living creature to wear her like a suit for up to ten hours. The PC she envelops remains wholly himself, with the addition of her protection and her nano abilities. While Shon’Ai is being worn by another, her consciousness is not reachable in any sense.

Shon’Ai offers the PCs up to ten doses of a level 5 anoetic cypher injection that restores 5 points to any one Pool the user wishes. She also gives them a set of wraparound lenses in a waterproof bag. These lenses allow the wearer to see the “seams” in Moyag’s lair (see page 78).

THE WATERY DEPTHS

In which the storm beneath the waves is far worse than anything above.

Because this storm is manufactured, it doesn’t behave like most storms. Instead, the maelstrom is below the surface of the ocean. It’s growing larger and stronger but hasn’t reached its full potential. Although it makes the water choppy and roiled (except around the massive boat), it isn’t as deadly as a surface storm would be.

The whaleboat is positioned perfectly over the eye of the maelstrom. Because the storm is deep below the surface, the PCs need Shon’Ai’s vision to help pinpoint the eye. If they hit the eye correctly (a difficulty 4 task), the drop toward the ocean floor takes only a few seconds, as they’ll be sucked down by the storm. PCs who fail the roll take 3 points of damage each round until they right themselves (a difficulty 3 task).

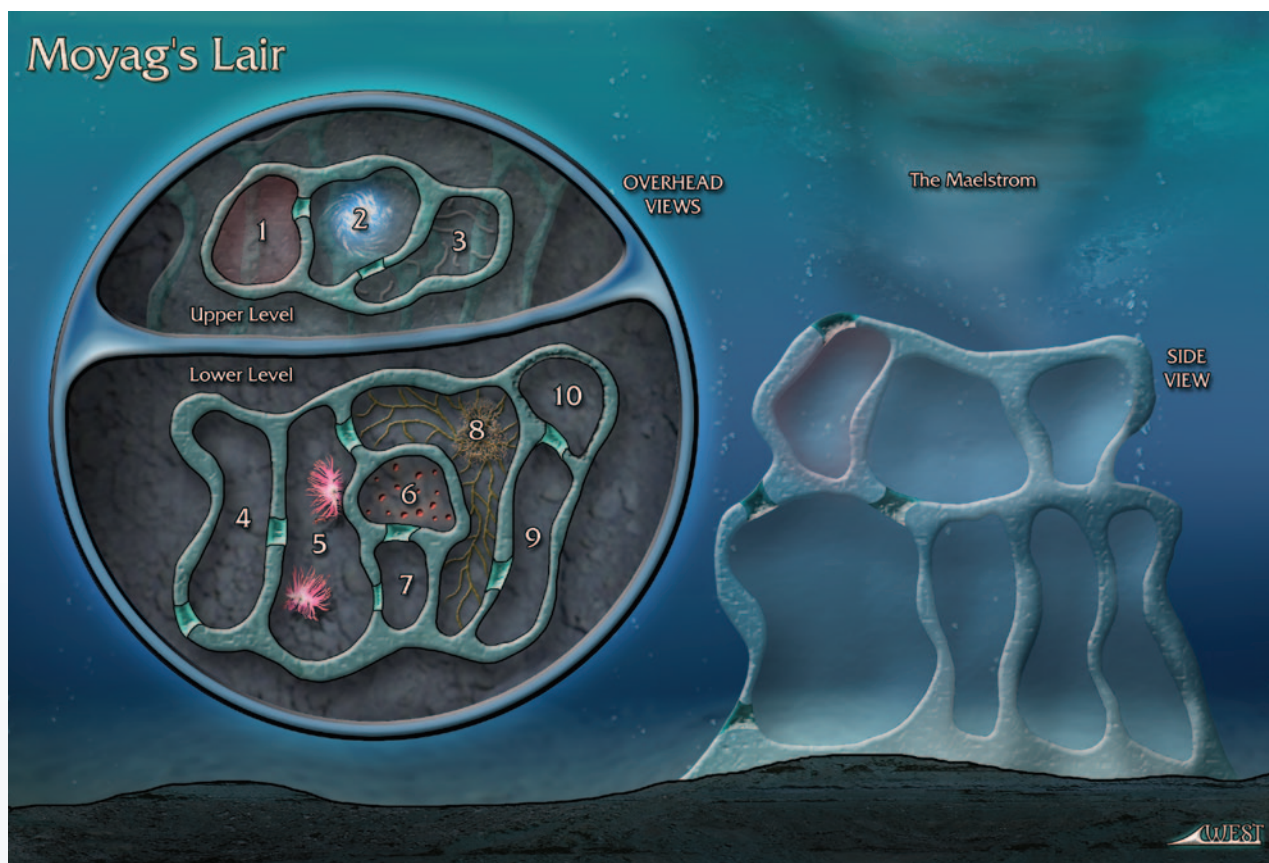
The characters are spit out of the maelstrom at the bottom, but they are not yet on the ocean floor. Instead, they land on what seems to be an invisible platform lit by pale white creatures caught inside it. The creatures—seemingly made of little more than ghostly light—move despite being trapped inside the floor. Through it, the PCs can look down and see more moving lights and creatures.

This is the top of Moyag’s lair.

MOYAG'S LAIR

In which the PCs become inadvertent enemies of a foe most dire.

The lair is built of a material akin to smartfluid. Moyag has the ability to change the viscosity of water into something firm and unyielding. These wavy walls are about a foot (0.3 m) thick. They are impossible to cut through or break into with traditional weapons and are difficult with numenera devices or



UNDERSTANDING MOYAG'S LAIR

The purpose of Moyag's lair shouldn't be readily obvious to the players, but some might figure it out. This is a power station of sorts, designed to create and fuel the maelstrom that grows steadily larger by the day. If you imagine each "room" as an individual component of a computer or a power station, each with its own purpose to add to the whole, you'll have a good understanding of the place to convey to the players.

For Moyag, the maelstrom isn't a deadly storm, but a place of transformation. Despite her scary and ancient appearance, she is still in her larval stage. Once the maelstrom gains enough energy and momentum, she will wrap it around her like a cocoon and use it to protect her body while she mutates into the next stage of her life.

similar special abilities (a difficulty 8 task). If a wall is punctured or damaged, it self-seals within one round.

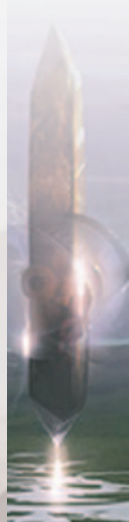
The set of lenses provided by Shon'Ai allow the PC to see particular spots in the walls, essentially where the seams are. By focusing his gaze on the weak spot, the PC can turn the walls from solid to a gelatinous liquid that allow the characters to pass through at that spot. The wall remains in that state for five minutes. A weak spot can be lensed only once per day.

If PCs accidentally touch one of the light fish while passing through a weak spot, they

experience an odd tingling sensation in their bodies, almost like a light shock. They take 1 point of damage.

Moyag's lair is a mazelike structure in which the PCs can see where they need to go—and the creatures that are coming to attack them—but can't always figure out how to move from place to place. Sometimes what appears to be on the other side of a wall is actually four or five rooms away. Other times, things that seem far away are just on the other side of the curved wall.

The entire structure fluctuates in size, contracting and expanding as it powers the



maelstrom (see page 80). It can grow as large as 600 feet (183 m) wide, with the levels growing to as much as 50 feet (15 m) high, but the overall size never gets smaller than 200 feet (61 m) wide and each level never gets smaller than 20 feet (6.1 m) tall (across both levels). The placement of the rooms doesn't change.

GETTING IN

There are a number of ways the PCs can enter the structure:

Attempting to break in at any point using something like a device or a power (not just a sledgehammer). This is a difficulty 8 task.

Searching for the seams, which are weak spots in the structure. Three seams allow access: one on the roof (this leads into the Redroom), one on the top of the ground floor (this leads into the store room), and one on the ground level (this also leads into the store room). A passage between the top and ground floor exits from the Coral Mech room and drops into the store room room. Finding a seam is a difficulty 5 Intellect task. Moving through them is a slow and arduous process which takes an action and a full round per character.

Using the lenses and the seams. Shon'Ai's lenses allow the seams to be spotted instantly and navigated more easily (see page 77).

TOP FLOOR

The top floor has three rooms.

AREA 1

Redroom: Here the walls, ceiling, and floor are tinged with red, including the fish inside the material, making the room glow with an eerie crimson light. Inside are a dozen dabilirri—artificial jellyfish created from hearts and synth. They seem to swim around aimlessly, but their tendrils are so long and tangled that it is difficult for PCs to pass through them without getting stung. The dabilirri attack the characters but do not leave this room.

DABIRRI

2 (6)

Dabilirri are artificial constructs created by taking the heart of a creature the size of a human or so and placing it in a synth shell. They do not eat and are not intelligent, but the malevolent force that created them designed them to attack warm-blooded creatures instinctively with their strangely venomous tendrils.

Motive: Belligerence

Health: 6

Damage Inflicted: 1 point

Movement: Immediate

Combat: Dabilirri are not particularly dangerous to a well-armed group unless they are encountered in a large cluster. If four or

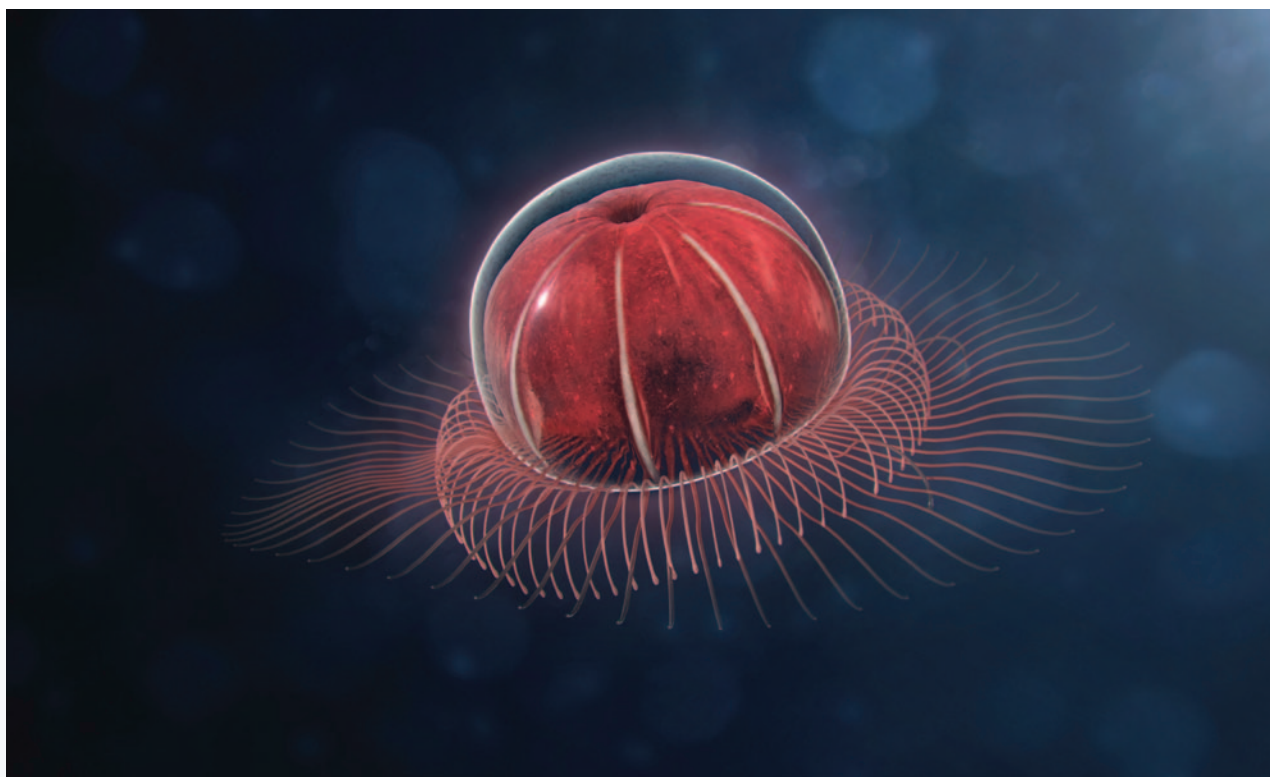
MOVING AND FIGHTING IN WATER

As anyone who has spent time in the ocean knows, moving, fighting, seeing, and doing anything else in the water is very different (and potentially more difficult) than doing these things on land. Being in shallow water can make it hard to move, but it doesn't affect combat. Being in deep water can make things difficult, and being underwater entirely can seem like being on a completely different world.

Deep Water: Being in water up to your chest (or the equivalent thereof) hinders your ability to attack. Attacks made in such conditions are modified by one step in the defender's favor. Aquatic creatures ignore this modifier.

Underwater Melee Combat: For nonaquatic creatures, being completely underwater makes attacking very difficult. Melee attacks with slashing or bashing weapons are modified by two steps in the defender's favor. Attacks with stabbing weapons are modified by one step in the defender's favor. Aquatic creatures ignore the penalties for underwater melee combat.

Underwater Ranged Combat: As with melee combat, nonaquatic creatures have difficulty fighting underwater. Some ranged attacks are impossible underwater—you can't throw things, fire a bow or crossbow, or use a blowgun. Attacks with weapons that do work underwater are modified by one step in the defender's favor. Ranges underwater are reduced by one category; long-range weapons work only to short range, and short-range weapons work only to immediate range.



more of the creatures attack one victim, they make a single attack as a level 4 creature and inflict 2 points of damage. The sting of a dabilirri's tendrils transmits a cell-disrupting "poison" via an energy pulse. In other words, the tendrils transmit a signal via their touch that causes cellular shutdown. This moves a living, organic victim one step down the damage track unless he makes a Might defense roll. The sting works even through the hardest of armor, but not through an energy field.

Interaction: One cannot effectively communicate with these creatures in any way.

Loot: Within the central portion of a dabilirri is a tiny dollop of a useful chemical that restores 1 point of Might to the imbiber if injected or taken internally.

AREA 2: CORAL MECH

Large square snails, about 1 foot (.3 m) across, with mechanical tendrils crawl over a number of large things that look like metal coral. As the snails crawl, they create small, visible sparks, which are drawn toward the center of the room in a large ball of sparking energy. If a PC touches the rotating ball, it releases a smell like burning flesh and explodes one round later, inflicting 3 points of damage to everyone in close range. A PC

can loot 1d6 cyphers from its parts, but to do so without taking an additional 3 points of burn damage from the still-hot material is a difficulty 4 task. The snails are not aggressive.

AREA 3: TURBINES AND TUBES

This room contains a number of smartfluid turbines and tubes, all of which twist and turn in complicated ways. They seem to be connected to each of the other rooms in turn through the walls, or perhaps they are part of the walls extended into these machines. Bright purple sucker fish flow over the turbines, cleaning the debris. They pay no attention to intruders.

BOTTOM FLOOR

AREA 4: STORE ROOM

This room holds a mishmash of items—mostly bits of metal, coral, sandbuild, and bone. PCs who spend more than ten minutes here uncover the following cyphers:

- A level 5 anoetic living solvent that eats through 1 cubic foot (.03 cubic m) of material each round for five rounds.
- A level 5 anoetic injector that restores 5 points to the user's Speed Pool.
- Two level 8 anoetic desiccating detonations. These ceramic spheres explode in an immediate radius, draining moisture

Sandbuild is a type of material that combines sand, an organic glue matter, and bits of shells. It's designed specifically for building in high-pressure, deep-sea environments.



At all times while inside Moyag's lair, the PCs hear the sound of the storm brewing above them. The longer they are down there, the wilder and louder it grows.

from everything within it. Living creatures take 8 points of damage. Water in the area is vaporized. Underwater, this creates a small implosion as water rushes in to fill the void, inflicting another 3 points of damage to anyone in the area. If used against Moyag, she is stunned and unable to act for three rounds, after which she does her best to flee into the deeps.

AREA 5: TUBE ANEMONES

Tube anemones:
level 4

Two large tubed and tendriled anemones rest on the floor of this room. Each is nearly 6 feet (1.8 m) across and 7 feet (2.1 m) high. The end of each tendril features a wide toothed mouth. Although the tendrils are unseeing, they sense movement and quickly flow toward the PCs and attempt to bite them. Their main tactic is to release a sonar noise that disorients those around them (except other tube anemones); characters in the room must make an Intellect defense roll each round to avoid becoming disoriented for that round. This continues until the PCs destroy the core of both anemones or until they leave.

AREA 6: HYDROTHERMAL VENTS

This is the room where the hydrothermal vents—and thus the creatures that make the gharolan—are located. The walls around this room radiate heat and burn a PC for 1 point of damage if they contact bare skin. Much of the steam is vented out through a large tube made of small writhing creatures (it appears to go up into the turbine room), but this room is still incredibly hot. For every round that the PCs are here, they take 1 point of damage from the heat. A character wearing Shon'Ai's body can remain in the room for five rounds without taking damage.

Celosia: level 2

Half a dozen celosia scuttle about the heating vents. The sea spiders give off luminescent blue mucus when scared or disturbed. If the PCs are quick (a difficulty 3 Speed task), they can gather ten doses of mucus, which can be used to make gharolan.

If they fail the Speed task, they can gather only six doses. Shon'Ai would like two as her payment for helping. They can sell the others (for up to 50 shins each on the black market) or take some back to Frund.

AREA 7: PROGENITORS

Thousands of electric eels fill this small room from top to bottom. The brilliant green sparks produced as their bodies rub together make the PCs' hair stand on end. The electricity created by the eels doesn't harm the characters, but the room also contains two progenitors, mermaidlike broodmares whose sole purpose is to give birth to the eels and protect them. The eels make it hard to see, increasing the difficulty from that of dim light to that of darkness until the progenitors are dead.

The progenitors are fiercely loyal to Moyag and will not betray her or her secrets. If the PCs flee, they will not follow.

PROGENITOR

6 (18)

Motive: Protective

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long (underwater) or immediate (on land)

Modification: Resists all mental attacks as level 4

Combat: Although the progenitors are tough physical combatants, their real challenge is their field of psychic energy. They can use this to affect the emotions of creatures within close (immediate) range. If a creature fails an Intellect defense roll, the progenitor either fills him with fear, causing him to do nothing but flee for a round, or fills him with calm love, in which case he moves toward the progenitor and lowers his defenses, meaning that the progenitor's attack hits automatically and inflicts an additional 2 points of damage. Using this field is not an action for the progenitor, but the field affects only 1d6–2 creatures in a given round.



Interaction: Progenitors speak telepathically but are not talkative. They hate and fear surface-dwellers, seeing them as wholly alien and incomprehensible.

AREA 8: THE VEINED MACHINE

This entire room is crisscrossed with dark yellow veins. A golden liquid moves inside them, sluggish and thick. The veins are warm to the touch, but not boiling. All of the veins lead to a metallic tree-like structure in the middle of the room, which shudders softly, as if caught in an invisible current. Five yellow fruit-like objects, each the size of a human fist and with a shiny skin, grow at the end of the

branches. If the PCs pluck one, they notice that the liquid inside the veins starts to move more slowly. If they pluck all of the fruit, the noise of the storm from above suddenly grows much quieter. The veined machine is one of the two main sources of power for the maelstrom.

AREA 9: THE EMPTY ROOM

If the PCs look through the walls of the room, it seems empty. However, as soon as they enter, a large jellylike creature peels itself from the far wall and makes its way toward them. This translucent creature has internal organs that look like the inside of a timepiece; black and red gears whirl and tick, seeming to mark some type of time. If the PCs harm the creature, it explodes, shooting out balls of goo in short range. The balls inflict 2 points of damage to any character they hit. The PCs can scavenge the internal mechanisms to potentially find the following:

- 26 shins
- An oddity that is a metal disk that avoids being touched by anything organic, sliding away if possible (grabbing it by hand is a difficulty 2 task)
- A level 2 anoetic cypher that can be used to breathe water for one hour

AREA 10: THE ZAUZICH

The walls of this room seem to be made of a different material than the others, or perhaps they merely consist of fluid in a different state of matter. The PCs can push their hands into the material about 6 inches (15 cm) and feel a series of small button-like objects. Tweaking the buttons in the correct order (a difficulty 5 task to figure out) suddenly softens the entire wall and grants the PCs access.

Inside this room is the *zauzich*, a creature that seems humanoid but is surrounded by such a large amount of metal that it's hard to tell. He is wrapped in chains and enclosed in a school of skates and odd fish with arms. He below a large orb of etched metal.

The *zauzich* communicates in a way that resembles telepathy but is more like image projection, sharing his story via shimmering mirages in the water. The PCs see his story in segments:

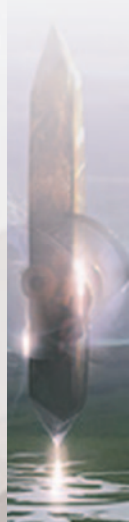


Show 'Em:

Progenitor,
Image N, page 94

The *zauzich*: level 5;
30 health, 5 points of
Armor

The *zauzich's* Captors:
level 3; group attacks
as a single creature,
level 5





Show 'Em:
The Zauzich,
Image O, page 95

- An image of a boat and a crew, barely recognizable as such. The people all wear suits similar to the zauzich's, and the boat is made of an odd material that shines like bone.
- A dive, the zauzich surrounded by the same creatures that surround him now, only it's clear that they were friendly. The zauzich feeds them, and they play around without apparent fear. There are six kites and four hand-fish.
- A sense of darkness and being dragged here. This might be the first time the PCs get a glimpse of Moyag. The zauzich shows her dragging him to the depths, chaining him here. His creatures become his captors, at her will. The images give the PCs the impression that the zauzich has been here a long time.

- An image of the PCs freeing him, and Moyag coming down to attack the group.
- A final image of them all—including the PCs—rising to the surface. These last two images, unlike the others, are in black and white and seem less substantial.

If the PCs attempt to free the zauzich, they must fight his captors and release him from the orb. When they do so, they notice that the sounds of the storm ebb a bit. The zauzich aids the PCs as best he can in the fight against Moyag and shows them images of her weakness. He will even—again, through creating images in the water—tell them about his desiccation explosives and that they lie in the store room, if the PCs have not yet discovered them.

THE ARRIVAL OF MOYAG

Moyag arrives once the PCs have entered six rooms of her lair or freed the zauzich, whichever comes first. She shows up with three progenitors and four daberri. If the characters are within the structure, the walls literally expand and reform to hold her and her retinue, who pass through the walls without effort.

This is a fight that the PCs are not likely to win, and Moyag tells them so in no uncertain terms, somehow speaking underwater so they can hear her.

Her language is slightly off, but it's clear enough for the PCs to understand her intent: Moyag has no interest in killing humans, not when they benefit her much more as living creatures. She explains how

her daberri are made from human hearts, taken from their still-living bodies. She says that the progenitors were once as human as the PCs. She even points out that the zauzich was once fully flesh and blood. And if he is freed, she states that now she needs to rebuild her storm from scratch, using the PCs as its new power source.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH MOYAG

It is unlikely that the PCs will be able to kill Moyag. She is ancient, strong, and incredibly determined to survive. At first, unless she is directly attacked, she simply watches as her servants fight the PCs.

If the characters can think of a way to separate her from the water, they might be



LEVELS OF THE OCEAN

As the PCs descend into the depths, the light fades quickly, moving from a backlit blue to a blackness so stark that even the brightest glowglobe can't invade the gloom. Each level is different and has its own set of challenges and successes.

There are four depth levels:

The Shallows: This is where sea and sunlight still live in harmony. Plants, animals, and other creatures flourish, visibility is mostly clear, and the water is not trying to kill you (for the most part). This layer goes down to around 800 feet (244 m).

The Gloaming: Here, the light is fainter, the pressure higher, and the number of chlorophyll-based plants almost nonexistent. The level is filled with creatures that have adapted, either via natural mutation or genetic modification, to low-light living. Here, you will find creatures that exist nowhere else in the world, like the bioluminescent allies, the squamish sharkfin, and the black kalium. This layer goes down to around 3,000 feet (914 m).

The Deep Dark: This zone begins around 3,000 feet (914 m) and includes most of the ocean. Complications of entering this layer include intense water pressure, near-freezing temperatures, and, of course, creatures that want to eat your face (and the rest of you as well). The Deep Dark has long been considered to be the deepest part of the ocean, and it is where one finds the majority of the sea floor.

The Beneath: This zone is pure speculation (see the sidebar "The Beneath"), but it's likely that the PCs have heard rumors of it, especially if they spend any time asking about the ocean. No one knows whether this zone is beneath the sea floor or is a place where the floor is so deep it has not been found. Another unanswered question: Is the Beneath a naturally occurring element of the ocean or something that was purposefully molded for some other purpose by an ancient (or unknown) race?



The storm is powered by the entirety of Moyag's lair, but the two main components are the zauzich and the veined machine. If the PCs free him and remove the fruits from the machine, the storm dies completely. If they do one or the other, the storm is reduced to half its strength.

able to drive her off. If they have a device that creates a barrier around her or otherwise separates her from the water, or if they use a desiccation attack (such as the detonations in the store room), she is stunned and unable to act for three rounds, after which she tries to flee into the deeps.

The PCs can also try to escape her lair. She may pursue them (or rather, send her servants after them), but only for a few rounds, and only if the characters manage to keep away for that long.

Last, the PCs can attempt a parlay. They can offer her news from the surface, in particular information about the whaleboat, the Redfleets, or anything else that might affect her and the creatures of the deep. If they tell

her what they know and throw in all of their numenera (other than anything that sustains their existence underwater), Moyag allows them to leave with their lives.

Inexplicably, Moyag will not directly or indirectly harm anyone who has a nagaina spinal parasite. In fact, she seems to have an almost complete inability to even perceive such creatures.

MOYAG

9 (27)

Moyag would be a creature of legend if she let anyone live long enough to tell of her exploits. Instead, she is a hidden creature of massive destruction, ruling this level of the ocean with nothing to hinder her. In a world of hunters and killers, Moyag is the queen of the predatory pack.

Nagaina spinal parasite, page 10



Show 'Em:

Moyag,
Image P, page 95

Bearing some semblance of humanity—enough to believe that she or her ancestors (if such a creature can be said to have ancestors) might have some of their genetic makeup, whether as a natural trait or something stolen outright—Moyag might be an ultraterrestrial, the last of her species, or perhaps something built long ago in a laboratory and left on her own.

Moyag would stand nearly 30 feet (9.1 m) high if she were on land. In the water, she is 10 feet (3 m) of head and torso and, beneath that, a mass of squirming, whirling legs.

She wears a rusted helmet, likely taken from an ancient, unfortunate diver. In places where the helmet has rusted through, long, thin spines grow through the holes. The face plate is open. Inside, peering out, is the possibility of something that was once a human face or, more likely, once saw a human and tried to replicate it. The skin, if it is skin at all, is pale green, almost bioluminescent. Two slitted eyes—one brown, one green—look unseeingly out into the world. Beneath that, something that doesn't look at all like a nose. A huge pair of grotesque red lips holds an off-white bone between them, much as an elegant woman might hold a cigarette.

In addition to her wriggling legs, Moyag has two arms. Her internal organs are clearly visible through her translucent skin. Many of the exposed parts of her skin are covered with the same sea-urchin-like spines that cover her head.

Motive: Self-evolution

Environment: The deep sea

Health: 35

Damage Inflicted: 10 points

Armor: 5

Movement: Short

Combat: Moyag avoids direct physical confrontation. She sends her progenitors and dabirri in first, watching with frenzied glee while her foes struggle against her servants. If they somehow best her creatures, she attacks through verbal threats and her power over liquid.

On any given round, she can do one of the following as her action:

Create a small whirlpool within short range that captures all within an immediate area (Speed defense roll to avoid or escape) and inflicts 3 points of damage per round

Create a temporary wall similar to those of her lair (level 8) up to 30 feet (9.1 m) by 30 feet (9.1 m) and up to 3 feet (0.9 m) thick.

The wall lasts for three rounds. It takes her about an hour to make a permanent wall.

Create a containment field of solid water that traps one or two adjacent PCs inside (Speed defense roll to avoid). Once created, it is as solid as the walls of her lair (level 8). This field dissolves after two rounds.

Moyag can also telepathically communicate with almost any aquatic creature within 1 mile (1.6 km) and control its mind completely.

Interaction: Moyag is quite smart and can communicate if she chooses to do so. And

Experience Point Awards: In addition to any XP earned for recovering artifacts or other means, the PCs should get 2 XP for each of the following discoveries: the whaleboat, Moyag's lair, and the zauzich.



THE BENEATH

The Beneath is a speculative layer of the ocean far beneath the Deep Dark. The only information we have on this layer is based on a psionic audio relay that was picked up years ago by one of the Aeon Priests in Ledon. The audio relay was dated as being at least 1,000 years old but probably was much older. The language was unknown, and there have been many different interpretations of the message. Most consider the relay to be the rantings of a mad creature, but others believe that the speaker's ship found something—an impossible place of light and life—far beneath the darkness.

I hereby swear that I have translated this psionic audio relay to the best of my ability, and without swaying the testimony either toward or away from its possible true intent. Signed this day, Gadya Erdos

“Day Y3ui. Captain’s Log. The dark goes on and on and on. It eats you like a many-toothed shadow, like a thousand wriggling water maggots, like your own nails pulling your skin from your bones. It makes us crazy, it does. Every one of us. We have lost our minds, we tug our hair just to release the pressure from our brains, we scrape our eyeballs to see what covers them. We talk into these recorders and our own voices scare us to wailing, because they are not our voices anymore. They belong to this great, horrible expanse, to this place of great nothingness.”

“Day somewhere. Everything. Nothing. Mmmm. My tongue went disappeared. This speak is tentacle voice. This button. Push. What.”

“Light. Lightlightlightlightlightlightlight.”

“Day B8hh. Captain’s Log. We have found something here, beneath the very black bottom of the sea. There is light and food and the pressure in my head goes. I blink and blink. I am the only one of the crew alive, but there are others here, wild creatures of innards and invisibility. We cannot talk, but they have taken me into their sphere. More soon.”

she probably will, most often in the form of gruesome threats about how she will use the still-living bodies of the PCs to her own purpose.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The storm is greatly lessened if the treelike structure in the veined machine is disabled. This makes it possible for the PCs to reach the surface, although they must move very slowly, fighting the artificially stimulated currents all the way. The process is very difficult.

If the zauzich is also freed, the maelstrom is dispelled entirely. Although the PCs must still ascend slowly, they can do so relatively easily (assuming they are not pursued).

If the storm is gone and the zauzich accompanies the characters, he helps them rise to the surface with surprising speed. He collects

all of them with long tubes that extend from his waist and then propels himself upward.

If Shon’Ai is returned to the whaleboat, she thanks the PCs and asks for two doses of the gharolan. If appropriate, she rewards them with 2d6 random cyphers for their actions. She also offers them any provisions they need from the community without charge.

Just before he reaches the surface, the zauzich disappears mysteriously.

The trip back to shore takes less time than it did to reach the whaleboat, perhaps because the sea is so much calmer. If the PCs are determined, they can make it back to Harmuth in about four days. From there, they can restock, sell any remaining gharolan, and rest up before they return to Devola or head to wherever they wish to go next.



By the end of this adventure, if the PCs have acquired the gharolan, found the Impossible Blade, and defeated Devola’s foe, they can return to Devola (page 16) for the procedure. Otherwise, they can tackle “Viral Transmissions” (page 21) or “The Mechanized Tomb” (page 42).



AN UNEXPECTED COMPLICATION: THE WAR EFFORT

This is an entirely optional secondary plot thread that can wend its way through a campaign using The Devil's Spine in its entirety. It plays out very gradually through the course of the separate sections of the adventure. It also makes things even more complex, so GMs should give the inclusion of this second major plot thread some thought before using it in their campaign.

Baron Tichronus,
page 8

Devola, page 16

Egg chamber, page 9

Devola's weapon,
page 19

Nagaina defender,
page 10

Tichronus's Spies:
level 3, level 5 in
stealth, disguise, lies,
and trickery, level 4 in
perception; 1 point of
Armor

As mentioned in “Noble Pursuits” (page 6), Baron Tichronus has been brought in to assist in the Order of Truth’s initial efforts to organize their crusade against the Gaians to the far north. To that end, he has agreed to aid Devola in providing her with the means to create and maintain her egg chamber in exchange for a very powerful weapon.

However, Tichronus has an ulterior motive as well. He knows full well about the lifecycle of the nagaina and the effects of the defender spine graft on its host. Although the graft is ultimately fatal, while it is in place, it actually enhances the host. Tichronus is interested in investigating the use of these spinal grafts as combat enhancements for his troops. Thus, he is interested in studying any host he can get his hands on, and he is even more interested in processes or tools that might remove or alter the defender. Specifically, what he would like to do is experiment to see if a graft can be partially removed, alleviating or delaying the negative effects, while allowing the positive effects to continue.

Tichronus has spies watching Devola’s lair at all times. These agents are well-paid and well-trained observers, and some follow the PCs after they leave the nagaina matron without confrontation. Their goal is only to gather intelligence for the baron regarding anything to do with the grafts. If possible, they attempt to creep close enough to listen in on conversations. They might even pose as fellow travelers at some point and strike up a friendly conversation. If it seems possible and they’re feeling bold, these agents might even attempt to insinuate themselves into the PCs’ group as NPC allies. In any case, they eventually return to Tichronus (or another member of his spy network) to relay information learned.

GMing THE SPIES

Having the spies watch the PCs can be tricky. Ideally (from a story perspective) the spies do get enough information that they can act upon it (as described below), and yet the PCs at some point become aware that someone is following/watching them. Perhaps the best outcome of all is to start things out—from the players’ point of view—with them discovering not that they *are* being spied upon, but that they *have been* spied upon. This might include:

- Finding tracks shadowing their own.
- Discovering a small campsite not far from their own.
- An NPC that they meet and then later encounter again asking them, “Who were those people following you before?”
- Spotting a spy, investigating, but then finding no trace of her.

Eventually, however, the PCs (particularly if they are watchful) may be able to not only see that they are being spied upon, but confront the spies. This is a satisfying moment and shouldn’t be denied to a group that has taken good precautions or has even set a trap for the people they believe are following them. The agents would far prefer flight to fight, as the PCs are very likely to best them. If a captured spy is questioned, he attempts to resist giving information, but a well-spoken or intimidating PC is likely to break him after a while. All the spy can really tell them is that he works for Baron Tichronus, and the baron is very interested in the nagaina grafts and anything and everything having to do with them.

If the PCs attempt to confront the baron then and there (whenever this occurs in the course of events), they are unlikely to find him at his manor in Uxphon until late in the scenario. Particularly persistent PCs, however, might go all the way to the marshaling grounds of the crusade in the



Cloudcrystal Skyfields and find him there, but this is extremely risky because he is of course, surrounded by hundreds—eventually thousands—of soldiers loyal to the cause of which he is currently a vital part. Eventually, however, he returns from his duties to his estate, and the PCs can confront him.

VIRAL TRANSMISSIONS

Tichronus and his agents have no real interest in the Insidious Choir (although they would certainly see the PCs' actions that hinder the virus to be a good thing). Throughout this scenario, the spies watch the PCs and gather what information they can. Eventually, they might try to grab one of the characters who is currently a host of the nagaina parasite. To pull off this daring feat, they will try to isolate the character from the others. Watching and waiting for when that character is alone, five agents attack him or her en masse. Their goal is not to harm, but to subdue, so treat a impaired result as a "knocked out" result. A knocked-out PC is quickly bound and gagged and toted away.

If the spies are successful, they attempt to spirit their captive back to Tichronus's estate, where the character will be held until their master returns.

THE MECHANIZED TOMB

If at all possible, Tichronus's agents would love to get their hands on the Impossible Blade before the PCs do. This is not likely, as they probably do not have access to all the information that the PCs have. However, they might reach Barrow-Town before the PCs. Seniya Arei might already have spoken to them—and she might even mention that to the PCs if they speak to her. But without the information from Avindar, they'll likely not get through all the doors on their own before the PCs get there.

In the end, they might try to take the blade from the PCs. To accomplish this, they might actually work with Burris Han and pay him for it if he successfully ambushes the PCs when they come out of the tomb.

BEYOND THE MAELSTROM

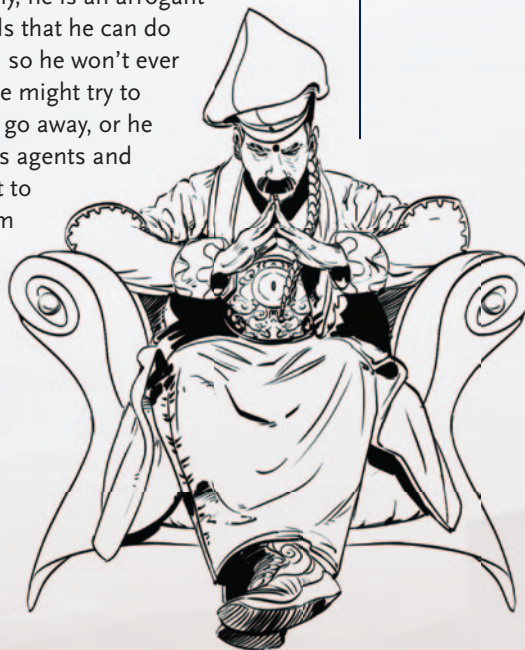
Just learning that gharolan exists and is important is enough to get the agents scouring all their resources to try to get some. They will not follow the PCs across the ocean, however, and certainly not down into the depths. They'll spend their time trying (and likely failing) to obtain some of the stuff by

other means. Eventually, if the PCs return to shore successful, the agents will try to steal the gharolan (and the Impossible Blade, if the PCs have it already) before the characters return to Devola.

The theft occurs at night, when some or all of the PCs are sleeping. The agents attempt to slip in and slip out with the objects they seek. If the PCs spot the spies, they attempt to take the blade and the gharolan by force. There are six agents in this mission, and in addition to normal equipment (they carry broadswords and crossbows as well as blowguns) they each carry a dose of level 4 poison dust that, if inhaled, puts the victim to sleep for one minute. They attempt to use this poison as best they can to incapacitate their opponents—they do not care at this point if the PCs live or die.

WRAPPING THINGS UP

If this secondary plot is used, it is far more likely that the PCs will eventually return and confront Tichronus. Maybe because his agents have stolen something they need, maybe to recover a kidnapped friend, or maybe just to get some revenge for his meddling in their affairs. When this happens, Tichronus appeals to them on the basis that he was doing it on behalf of the Amber Pope and the crusades (this is a dubious justification, of course). Alternatively, he might accuse them of siding with an inhuman monster (Devola) rather than working with "their own kind." The hypocrisy of this accusation is likely lost on him. Ultimately, he is an arrogant noble and feels that he can do as he pleases, so he won't ever be contrite. He might try to bribe them to go away, or he might have his agents and thugs attempt to eliminate them once and for all.



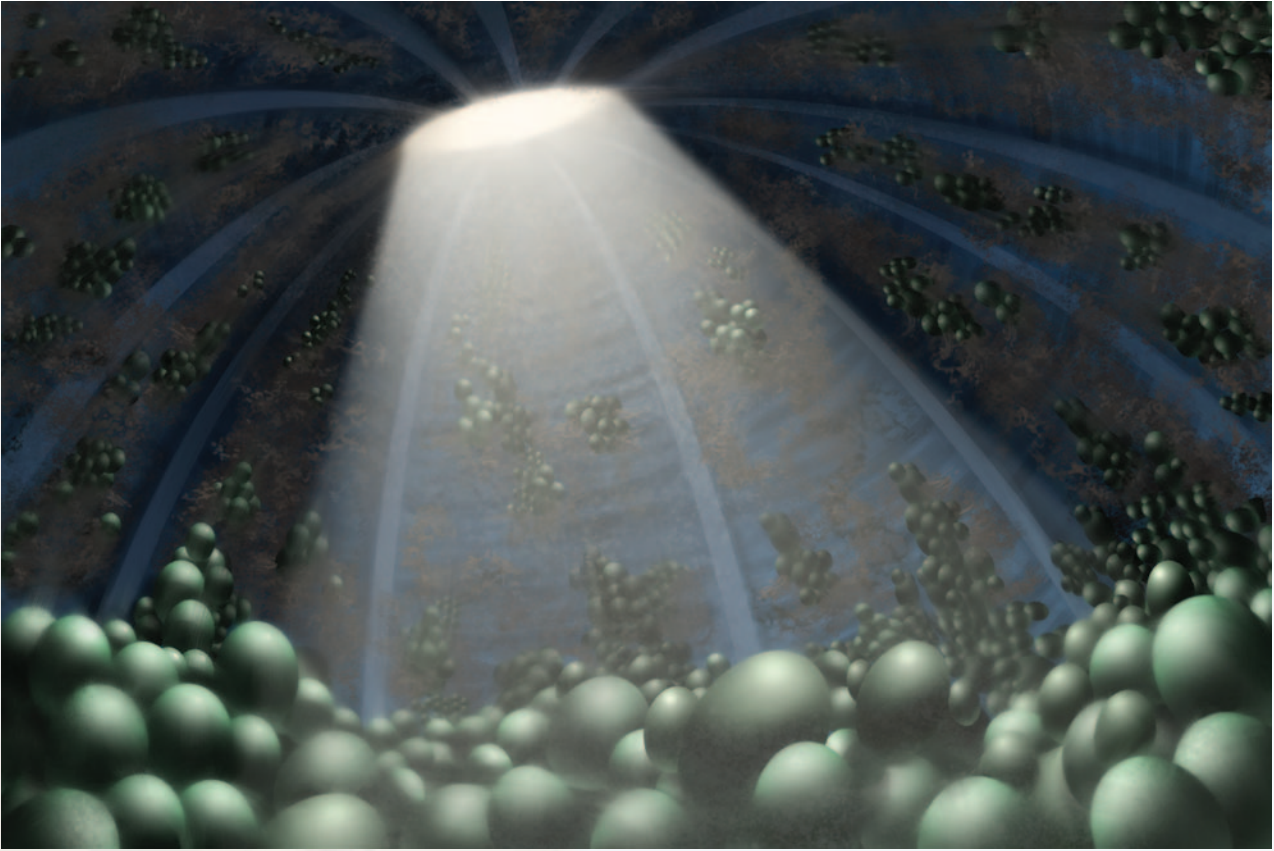
Returning to Tichronus, page 20

Seniya Arei, page 46

Avindar, page 48

Burris Han, page 61

A.



B.





C.



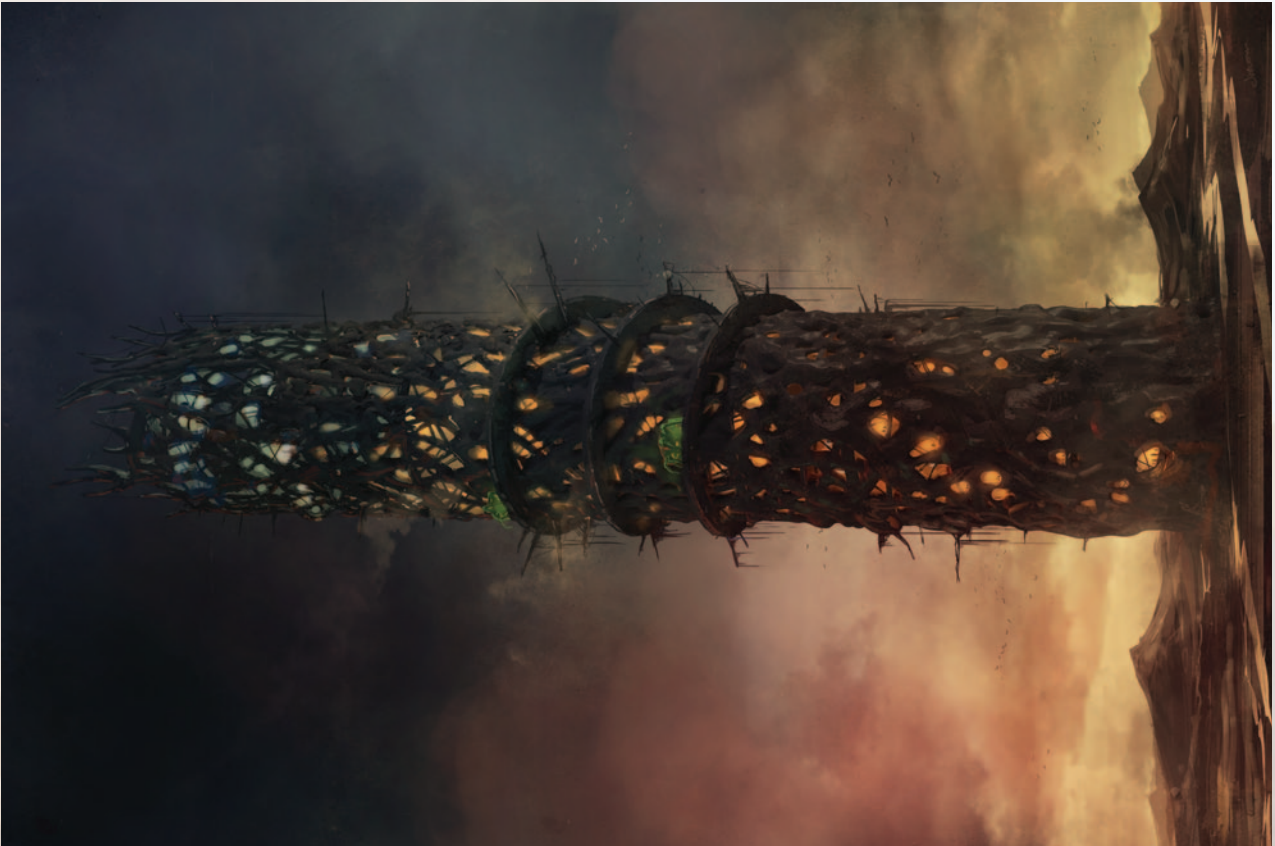
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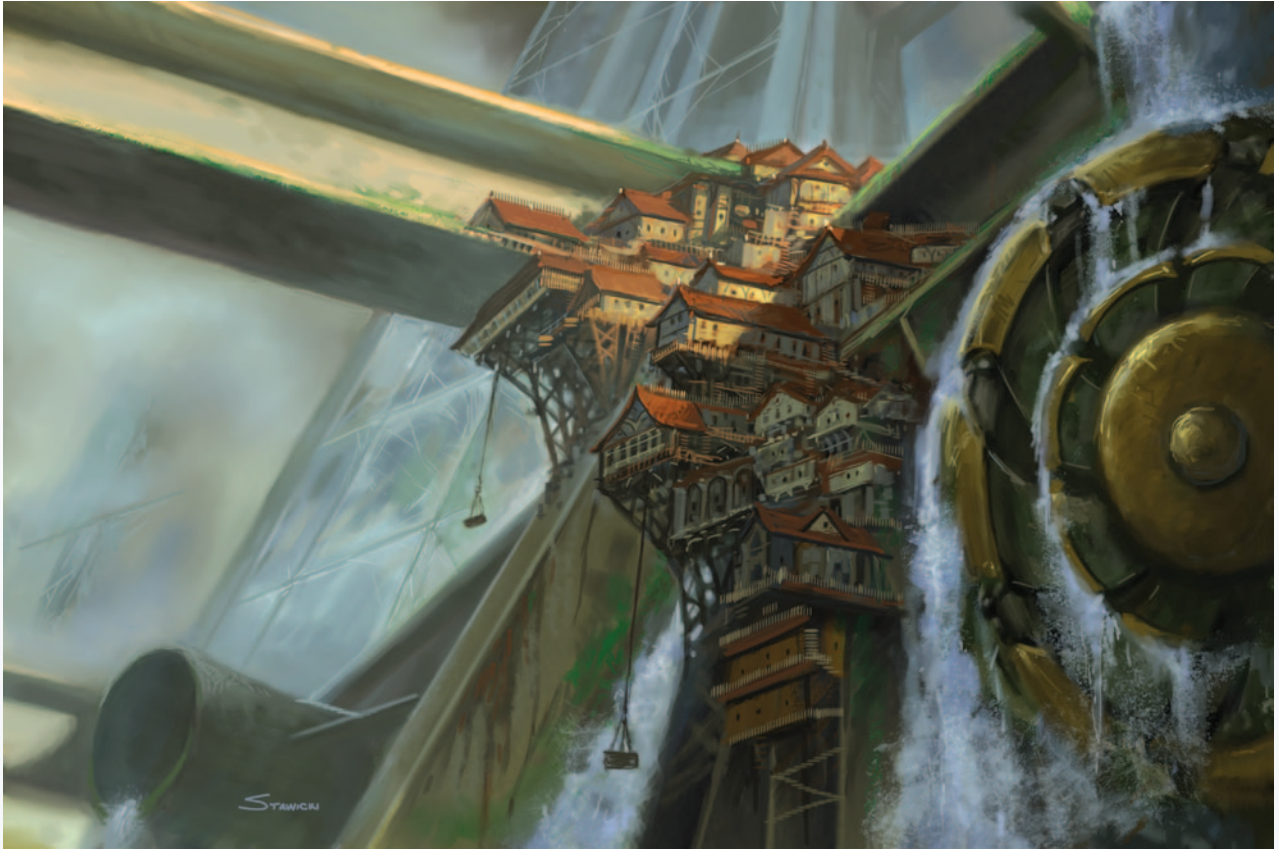


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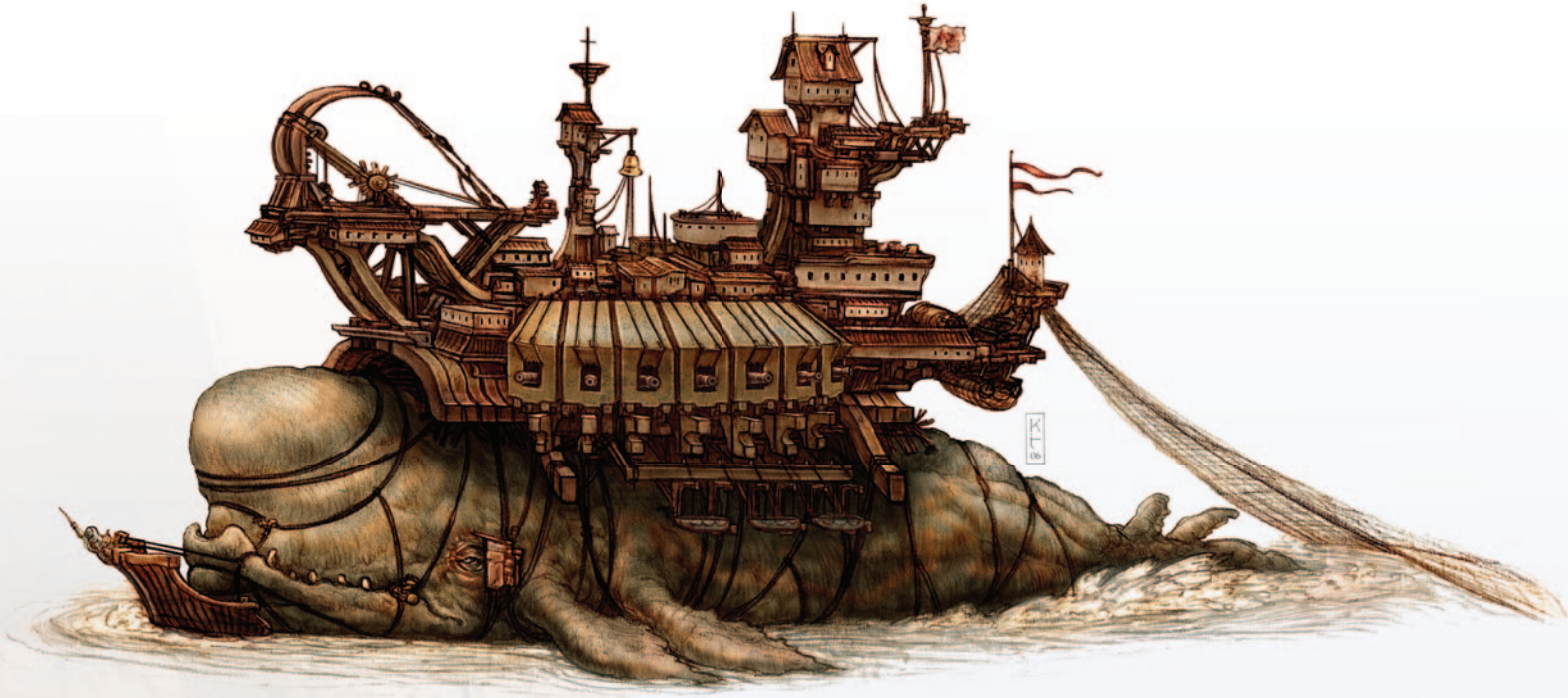
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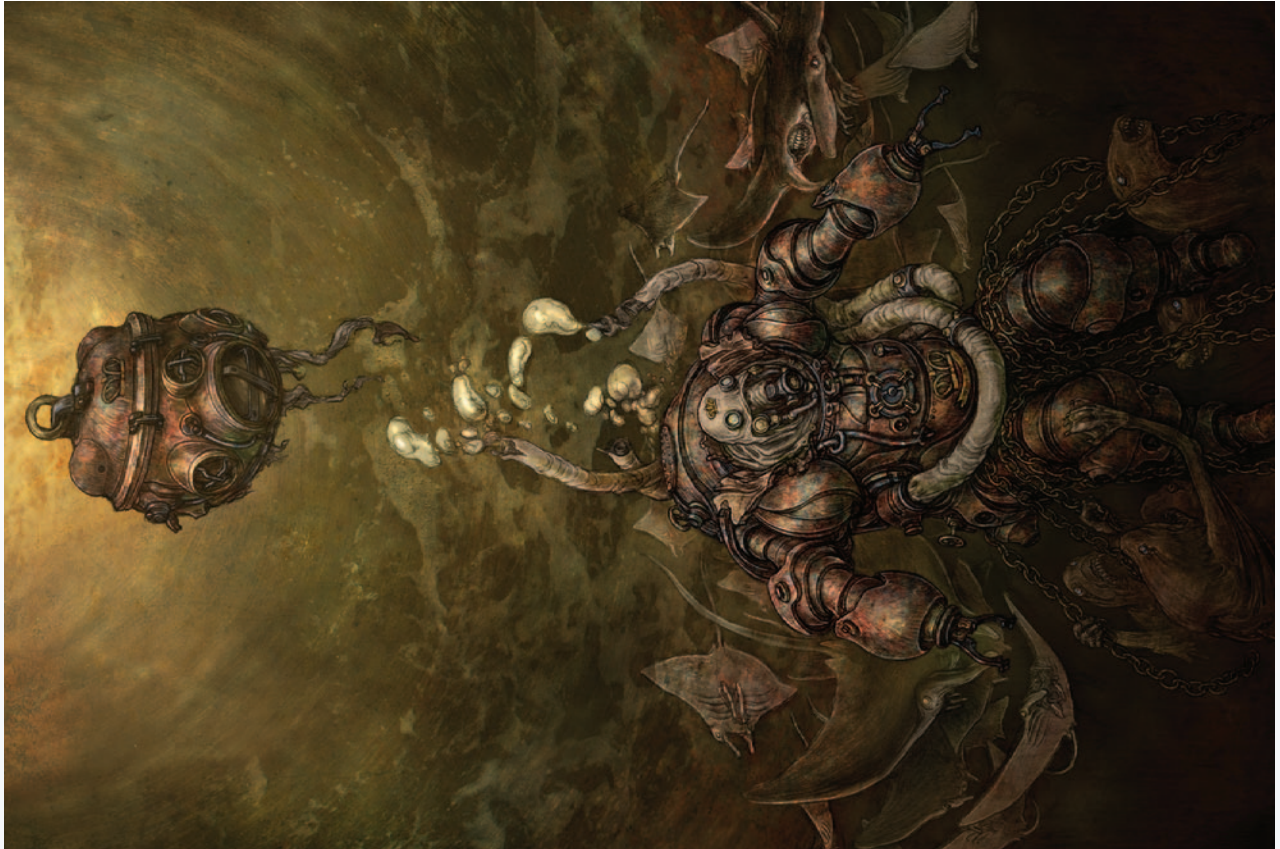


N. _____





O.



P.



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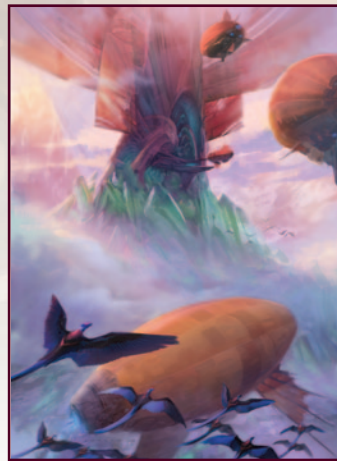
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