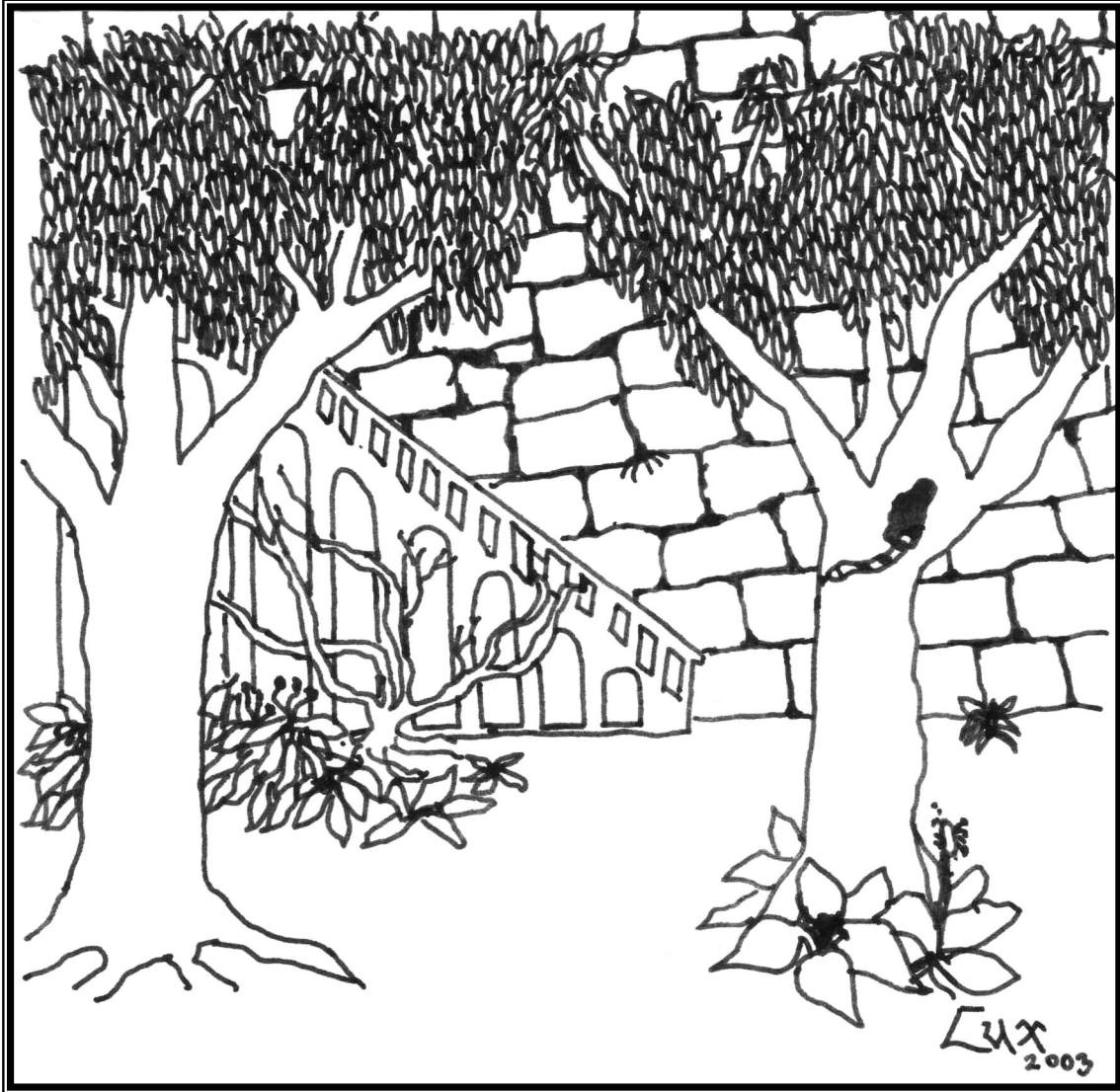


The Garden of al-Astorion

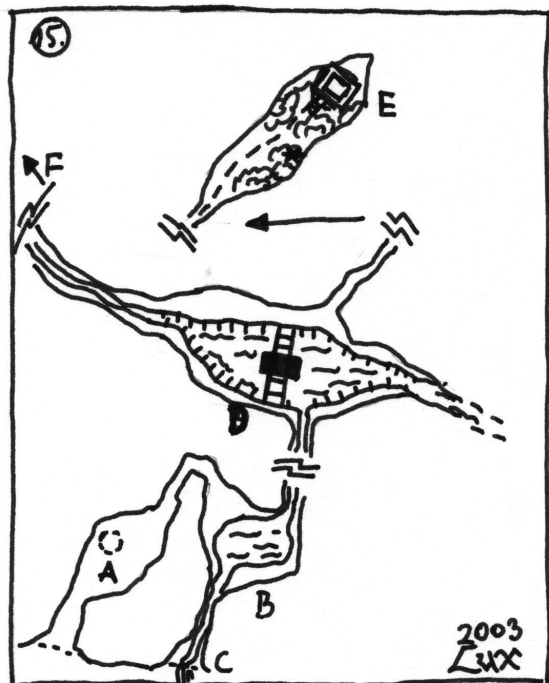
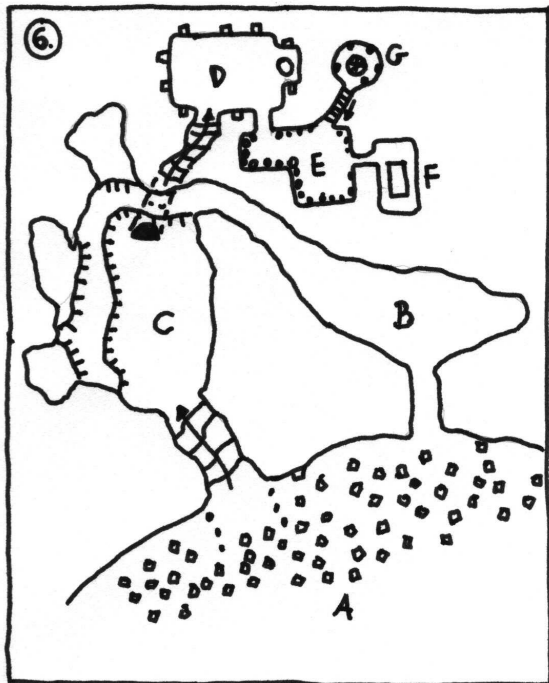
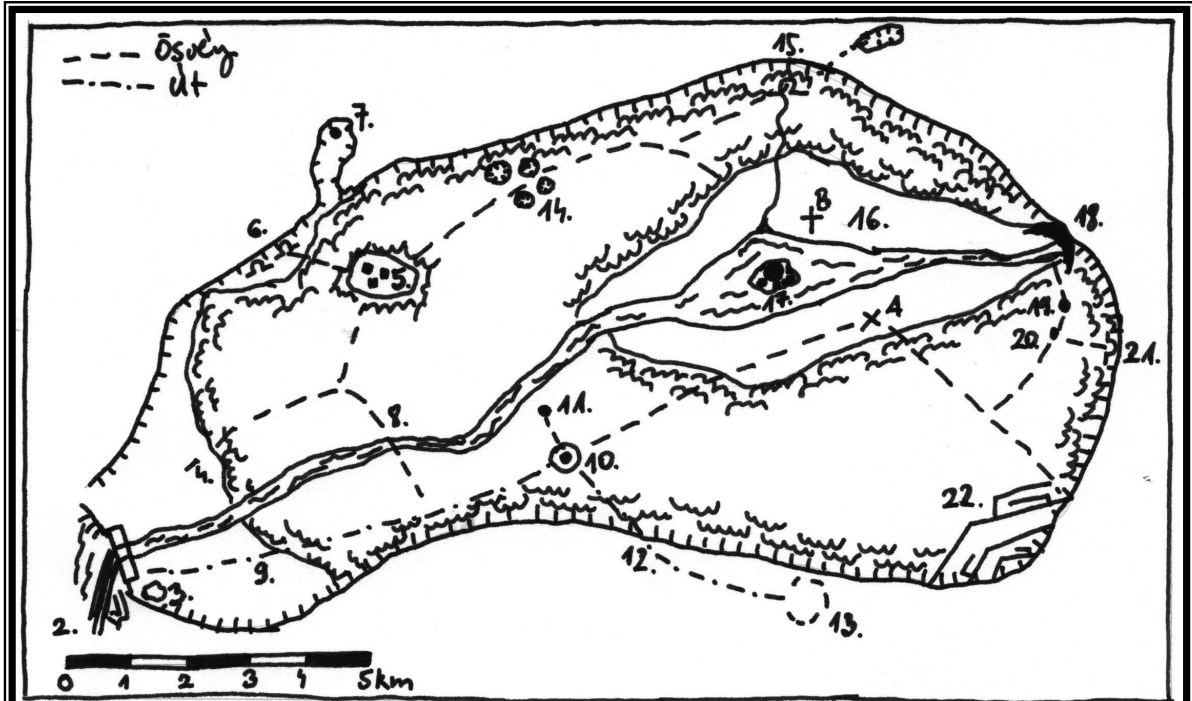
by: Gabor Lux



d20 adventure module for six characters of 6th to 9th level

**Requires the use of the DUNGEONS&DRAGONS® PLAYER'S HANDBOOK, Third Edition,
Published by Wizards of the Coast®**

E.M.D.T.



The Garden of al-Astorion

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Gentle Reader!

The Garden of al-Astorion is the translation of an adventure module I originally designed in a single evening for a Hungarian game convention and later revised and expanded for self publication on a whim. To this date, it remains the only adventure to be released in the country under the d20 license – although it was successful as an amateur effort, others were reluctant to follow in its steps, and I lacked the time to do a follow-up.

Although more than three years have passed since initial inception and almost three since first publication, I nevertheless decided to do a translation for the benefit of interested gamers who didn't have a chance to read the original. Although I would do some things differently if I designed the module today (hopefully better, too), I decided to preserve the original as well as a translation could allow instead. I believe it can and it should stand on its own merits. Let it be judged with this consideration – but let it be *Judged* with a critical eye towards its failings!

Gabor Lux

Background

It was many years ago that Rammah al-Astorion, a priest in the service of the goddess Emoré, had become disillusioned with city life. He tired of the busy markets, the beggars chanting on every street corner, the calculating and false women – and, first and foremost, his own flock, whose demands and empty promises had become all too transparent to tolerate any longer. It was just as well that Emoré, goddess of orchards and gardening had little to do with the bearded, round-bellied deities found in the City of the Vultures, and her doctrines were completely antithetical to those of Shakkur, the patron of degenerate beggars and outcasts, or Set, who is known to be even less benevolent.

al-Astorion, who was in his early forties at the date of his pilgrimage, only took a simple wooden staff and a set of traveller's robes with him and, having left the small chapel and equally small congregation to the care of a disciple, embarked on a journey to the unknown southern lands. For a month, he wandered the trackless wastelands of stone, where only his spells and faithful staff saved him from nightly beasts and curious monsters, but after these tribulations, he finally reached the great forests. One day as he passed between two high mountain chains, he happened upon an abandoned road built of rough stone slabs, which lead directly to a sheer cliff-face, and climbed upwards in a long serpentine, although much of it had been smashed and washed away by the waterfall plummeting from the heights.

His curiosity aroused, al-Astorion spent his night at this location, and in spite of the great difficulties involved in the climb, braved the treacherous incline. Much to his surprise, he had found an undisturbed and fertile valley hidden among the mountains, which bore an uncanny resemblance to a mythical place described in legends about the ancient cycles of the world and the long forgotten human races of the south. When he finally

beheld the great, crumbling stone terraces at the furthest end of the valley, he knew he had been brought here by divine intervention. This, at last, was the place to build the garden of his dreams, a proper monument to Emoré's arts, with well-tended orchards, meandering roads and small pavilions for rest and contemplation.

al-Astorion's work lasted decades, and during this time, he became well acquainted with his environment. His suspicions were proven correct when he discovered more of the old ruins he had read about, and on one occasion, he had to flee for his life from the strange, degenerate ape-men residing in the caverns to the north, clearly the descendants of old races from the ancient days. Additionally, it was clear that a magic-user had once inhabited the tower found in the middle of the valley's small lake – this building, and the surrounding cottages, were constructed in an architectural style he wasn't familiar with. He also paid close attention to the seemingly artificial passages radiating from an empty cave to the northeast, but abandoned his observations due to a sense of foreboding, and never dared to return.

During all this, work progressed smoothly on his grand design, but the initial feeling of triumph gradually turned into cruel doubt... something was never right about the garden, and his sleep brought feverish nightmares and faceless phantoms. Despite the magical fruit trees and pleasant terraces, rest and contentness proved elusive. He had not realized that all those years of solitude had finally taken their toll, and he was slowly going insane. He still possessed the powers granted to him by his goddess, but as his sanity began to fail, he made more and more weird things; vile monsters and blood-drinking flowers instead of Emoré's gentler creations. When, at last, strangers had discovered his retreat a few months ago, he mercilessly destroyed them all. Only two could flee his inhuman wrath, and of them,

only the fighter Mal-Bazhar made it back to the more civilized lands, the first among the garden's visitors. His wild tales didn't fail to ignite the imaginations of those seeking danger and prosperity, but thus far, no one has returned laden with treasure – even though, as it is said, that too is found in abundance, not to mention the magical fruit trees in the garden of al-Astorion...

Preparation and Adventure Hooks

Since the garden of al-Astorion is a perilous place far away from the densely inhabited lands, it is recommended that only a strong and well-equipped party should attempt to seek it out. Four 7th to 9th or six 6th to 8th level PCs would do reasonably well in most encounters, although there are some which may still prove fatal if they aren't accustomed to a strategic retreat. One cleric and two to three fighting types are highly recommended.

There are numerous ways a Judge could involve his group in the module, of which three ideas are described here:

- A merchant who had heard of the valley's enchanted trees believes he could make a fortune if he could plant their seeds in his own garden and sell the resulting fruits. He offers 400 gp for each seed sample he is brought, but he is prepared to pay up to 800 per type if the PCs bargain well. He has a method to know if he had been tricked (as he correctly guesses, the more valuable seeds radiate magic), and hires assassins to recover his money later on anyhow.
- The characters hear of the legend at the same time as one of their sworn rivals. Both groups are in pursuit of a valuable item or piece of information found in the garden. The rival party embarks on the journey with several retainers, and exploits every possibility to

violently dispose of the player characters.

- It is also possible that an NPC mentor or former companion disappeared in the same general area. The PCs are drawn to the valley to find this individual. In this case, Dahim ap Tolvin (location **22k.**) is a probable candidate, but he may easily be replaced by others if necessary.

At the Judge's discretion, he could reveal some of the following rumours to his group, employing random generation (1d12) or choosing as appropriate.

1. The original inhabitants of the region worshipped monsters and were themselves strange looking. It is said that they were struck down by a powerful curse, and haven't been seen since. (T)
2. A few months ago, a company of adventurers left to plunder a lost city, where magical opals are rumored to be kept. They didn't find the city, but the sole survivor spoke of a forlorn mountain valley and carnivorous apes. (T; however, the city isn't described here)
3. Salamar the wizard has inquired about the new rumours from the southern lands on multiple occasions, and was seen purchasing travel supplies. (T – Salamar indeed plans an expedition in pursuit of the valley's magical treasures, and he is looking for suitable hirelings as well)
4. The leader of those adventurers was a man named Mal-Bazhar. He soon fell ill after his return, and no priest could help him. I saw him myself – he was in a horrendous shape in his final days... (F – complete fabrication. Mal-Bazhar has left town on a new adventure, in perfect health)
5. The human inhabitants of the southern jungles are said to go naked and worship metal. (Who knows?)

6. Many years ago, a holy man was reputed to live in the same area these new tales speak about. He followed the goddess Emoré and was said to possess her special blessing... He could make plants grow and change into others as he willed. (T)

7. It is no wonder those careless fools met an untimely end. The holy books of Saz forbid visiting the dwelling places of the accursed peoples. Clearly, Mal Bazhar's men found such a place, and paid in blood for their transgression. Saz is indeed all-powerful, and his wisdom is without measure.

8. When the world was younger and the Sun shone with a stronger light, these lands were populated by an evil people. They allied with the denizens of the Underworld, until the true gods finally slew their kind to the last. Maybe it was one of their ruined settlements the expedition uncovered. (T)

9. This location Mal-Bazhar spoke of is no mystery to the merchants who dare the southern lands. The valley is beyond an abandoned stone road and a treacherous waterfall. Within the high valley, there is a large, clear lake, surrounded by forests with plant life uncommon in the surrounding wilderness. Since Mal-Bazhar spoke of strange and apparently magical trees, there must be some truth to the rumours. (T)

10. The place must indeed be full of treasure, as I know several men who had seen the gemstone fighter brought back. It was the size of a small egg, and worth 500 coins or even more. Where there is one, there are others, although it is a tall tale he had plucked it from a tree – magical plants or not, that is surely a fabrication!

11. A great stronghold of Set is said to be near that place. It is possible the expedition meddled with things they were not meant to know... Indeed, it is suspicious how many of the serpent-kissers embark on pilgrimages to the south... (Who knows?)

12. The wildlife in the southern forests is teeming with dangers: tigers, carnivorous giant lizards, flowers with a poisonous breath and birds of carrion. The ruins you

can find in some corners are even worse, though, and only in part thanks to the traps. Undead and stone golems are also found by the careless, and only the cautious and the swift return to tell their tales. (T)

Setting

It is possible to set this adventure in any warm, wet and mountainous area the Judge deems appropriate. It was originally located in the *Wilderlands of High Fantasy* milieu, in the jungles of Barbarian Altanis (hexes 3217 and 3318), whereas the City of Vultures replaced Kauran in the same region (hex 4502). Another possibility is the Desert Lands or even Lenap. In this case, one of the northern Viridian cities, such as the City State of the World Emperor, could serve the same function. The Underwing Jungle, or one of the other jungle areas of Lenap, could be the location of al-Astorion's garden. Note that nothing in this module requires the use of the Wilderlands setting, and placing it in any other milieu will likely not pose any problems whatsoever.

The journey to the valley should take two weeks if the party is mounted, in a hurry, and has clear directions. Otherwise, up to one month may elapse before they reach their intended goal. The Judge is encouraged to present a number of encounters during this period.

The Valley – General Features

In general, it can be said that the valley is a much more tranquil location than the jungles below, since only a few animals can climb the steep cliffs by the waterfall which marks this lost world. Thus, if the Judge otherwise uses random encounter tables in his campaign (which habit is highly commended by the module's author), it is suggested that he stop this activity during this expedition.

Apart from the beasts described below, the valley's **fauna** is made up of a kind of quickly breeding rabbitlike mammals and large flightless birds nesting on the forested southern slopes. Four types of carnivores exist: to the northwest live the psionic man-apes, to the northwest an old smilodon, flesh-eating minisaurs in the open fields around the lake and the weird monsters of the garden to the southeast.

Intelligent humanoids are not found anywhere here unless specifically indicated. For the people of the jungles, who have little civilisation but a long collective memory, this otherwise forgotten land is well known as a fastness of demoniac and primordial evil. None of these tribesmen can be persuaded, by gifts or coercion, to serve as guides or otherwise go beyond the abandoned road.

As for **movement** in the area, it is very hard to penetrate the underbrush beneath the trees without machetes or the equivalent. Both the old stone road and the forest paths are easily trod. Three men can progress abreast on the first and two on the second. On the valley map, the road is marked with a -.-.- line, forest paths with -----.

Weather is predictable: rain falls every morning and afternoon, and the foliage is perpetually damp. However, the air is not as fetid as in the below jungles due to greater elevation and constant breeze. For the same reason, mist and haze doesn't linger too long. Storms are rare (3% probability one occurs during the expedition), are preceded by unnatural quiet and stillness, and last 1-2 hours maximum. Also, thanks to the favourable conditions, wearing heavy armour in the valley incurs no special penalties.



Key to the Valley of al-Astorion

1. Abandoned Stone Road

The old road starts approximately 500 metres from the entrance of the valley. It is made of small, longish stone blocks sunk into the ground. It is wide enough for a smaller cart, but it must have been in disuse for several years since immense trees have pried the stones apart at multiple locations. The road progresses due east, terminating in a small clearing and a waterfall.

2. Waterfall

The water of the mountain stream plummets from approximately 100 metres in multiple steps. The stone road must have lead upwards on the slope, and its remains are seen at several points. If the characters examine the clearing, they can establish others have preceded their party: in a cleared area surrounded by tall grass are charred logs from the remains of a bonfire, and from a stick in the ground hangs a sun-bleached tatter – the remains of a haversack.

Scaling the heights is no small undertaking, and pack animals may not be taken along in any manner. Fortunately, the previous company has climbed the cliffs with success and placed iron nails at regular intervals. Three DC 10 Climb checks and a large coil of rope are enough for one person to get up there, and once he is in place, others can easily follow (only two checks must be made). The final few meters of the cliff are composed of piled rocks, clearly the remains of ancient construction. There is no sign of binding material, but the polished blocks are very sturdy and fit together well, stone roses in the gaps notwithstanding.

If the characters succeed at the climb, they can see the hidden U-shaped valley for the first time. To the northeast not far from the dam they are standing on, a plentiful mountain stream emerges from dark woods. To the left and right – and far forward – rise unscalable, sheer cliffs

before even taller mountains. Northwards, beyond the trees, a rocky incline can be seen, and a good observer can make out dark cave entrances where it meets the cliffs.

3. Gravesite

Close to the dam, someone has erected a long, makeshift mound at the foot of the steep mountainside. The mound is five feet tall and a larger boulder is set on the top. The skeleton of a woman in chain shirt, with a small metal buckler and a scimitar lies under the rocks. She wears a silver bracelet on her arm (value 10 gp), and has 35 gp and 40 sp in her money pouch. The body belongs to one of Mal-Bazhar's followers, who received a mortal wound from the claws of a psionic ape. Mal-Bazhar could support her this far, but she had no strength to descend the way they came from, and died in a few hours.

4. Path

This is a wide, well-trod path in the dense, scrub-infested forest. A character who makes a successful Survival or Wilderness Lore check (DC 14) can uncover that it is frequently used. There is a 20% probability of encountering 1d3 **psionic apes** (as described below), most likely hiding in the trees. The apes can be seen with a successful Spot check vs. their +2 Hide. They are hostile and must be killed to the last.

5. Village Ruins

A larger clearing is the site of a primitive village consisting of numerous crude huts, long ago abandoned by their former inhabitants. Of the huts, only misshapen stone piles remain. However, gnawed bones, broken skulls and other remains, including those of human origin, lie by smooth, well-worn logs.

A truncated pyramid of black basalt in the middle of the clearing bears an enormous stone head. This image is a mix of anthropoid and apish features; its wide maw displays sharp, conical teeth. The

idol's eyes must have been huge gemstones, but these are gone. Stone steps climb to a small platform before this monstrous effigy, where many more bones are set in a disorderly pile.

At night, the clearing proves to be far from uninhabited. Fire burns before the idol, and degenerate **man-apes**, each larger than a grown man, squat on the wooden logs in debased revel. 2d4+2 are encountered on this occasion, and there is a 10% probability their "**deity**" (as described under **6.d.**) is likewise present. The inarticulate howls and gibbers of the apes almost borders on human speech. If they spot intruders, they attack without hesitation and fight until heavily wounded. One of the apes, usually standing before the stone head, wears a golden skullcap. This decorative headdress is valued at 320 gp, grants a +2 on saving throws vs. psionical attacks and +4 to the DC of the wearer's psionic strike, if such an ability is possessed.

Psionic Apes (2d4+2): CR 3; HD 4d8+8; hp 26 avg; Init +2; Spd 30/30 Climb; AC 14 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk 2*+7 claws 1d6+5 or +2 bite 1d6+2; SA psionic strike; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +2; Str 21, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 3, Wis 12, Cha 7.

Skills: Climb +18, Listen +6, Spot +6.

Psionic Strike (Su): once per hour, 30' range. Target must make a DC 14 will save or be stunned for 1d6 rounds.

"High Priest": hp 28; Will +5 (+7 vs. psionics); Int 5, Wis 18, Psionic Strike DC 18.

6. Cave I. – Tomb of the Ape God

The large mouths of these caves can be clearly seen from almost every elevated observation point in the valley. When the village below was still inhabited by the ancient folk, they used the cave to worship the ape god Ooi, a demonic monster of antideluvian origins. His half-man priesthood held even these hardened

people in fear, and regularly performed human sacrifice to sate the feral hunger of themselves and the hulking behemoth.

The current inhabitants, a dying and degenerate ape tribe, is what has become of the ancient race of the village. In addition to those encountered outside the cave (who are not counted here), they number 16 males, 10 females and 4 young. Half of the males are hunting outside, even going as far as to descend by the waterfall with devilish agility and ambush small merchant companies. Their intellect is basically barely exceeding animal level, and they can only employ the simplest tools. The “high priest”, recognized by his golden skullcap, is more cunning and knows how to make a fire or manufacture more complicated implements.

a. – Incline: The large open space between the woods and the caves is 50 to 60 metres wide (150-180’) and consists of open ground with innumerable shifting stones and a few desiccated bushes. The black basalt heats up during the day until it burns on touch, and stays warm until midnight. Due to heat and treacherous footing, it is hard to run here – a character making an attempt must roll a DC 14 Balance check or strain a leg, halving movement.

The caves are evidently inhabited: white bones are scattered here and there, and rotting animal heads impaled on sharpened stakes attract buzzing black flies. The place is totally abandoned at noon (the heat is nigh unbearable), but any other time, **1d6 apes** guard their turf. They greet intruders with thrown rocks the size of a child’s head.

Psionic Apes (1d6): hp 26 avg; Atk +5 thrown boulder, 1d8+7, range 60’.

b. – Cavern of the Males: A large cavern-hall, with an area of 70’ by 30’ and a height of 50’. The walls are covered in faded frescoes depicting humans working in a village (the heads mounted on spikes suggest warlike tendencies...), hunting,

gathering, etc. There are usually **5 males** in the room. They scratch, wrestle or gorge themselves on raw meat.

Psionic Apes (5): hp 26; +1 to attack and damage rolls; Str 23.

c. – Cavern of the Females: An even larger cavern – it is 50’ by 70’, with height reaching 100’ at certain points. The western side is composed of 20’ ledges leading to three smaller sub-caverns. Frescoes are found as above, richer in number but more faded. Naked, spear-armed warriors march towards the stairs leading down in a long file. The stairs are steep and wide: it is apparent that they were made for giant sized beings. The gaping hole was originally sealed by a carved stone slab, which lies broken and toppled before the entrance now.

The small side-caverns are where the females and young dwell. In case of a fight (very likely), and a young ape (who pelt the party with refuse and stones) is hurt, the females become enraged and gain a +4 moral bonus on attacks and damage, but are unable to concentrate on psionic strikes. Young apes are unable to do so in any case.

Psionic Apes, Female (10): hp 20 avg.

Psionic Apes, Young (4): CR ¼; HD 1d8; hp 6 avg; Init +2; Spd 30/30 Climb; AC 16 (+1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +2 thrown stone 1d6 subdual; AL CE; SV Fort +2; Ref +2; Will +0; Str 10; Dex 14; Con 14; Int 3; Wis 10; Cha 7.

d. – Unholy Temple: The temple is a vaulted natural cavern modified to look less irregular. Grotesque humanoid idols squat and kneel in small niches in the wall, small stone bowls standing before them. Their depressions contain ancient grease mixed with soot, the remains of old fires. The paintings on the wall are much more vivid and almost completely intact: they depict grinning man-apes with sloping

brows, clad in rich clerical garments. In the far end of the hall, there is a sort of altar stone supporting a large four-legged golden bowl. The bowl's monetary value is close to 7000 gp, and it is magical – after the blood of two medium humanoids is poured inside, it functions as a *crystal ball*. Unless previously encountered and slain, the characters come face to face with the “**High Priest**” and **Ooi the “Ape God”**, the terrible entity from the primordial eras! Ooi appears as an enormous four-armed gorilla with burning eyes that hint at a malignant intellect. Statistically, he is a 10 HD half-fiend girallon.

Ooi the Ape God: CR 7; HD 10d8+50; hp 120; Init +3; Spd 40/40 Climb; AC 17 (-2 size, +3 Dex, +6 natural); Atk 4*+12 claw 1d4+8 (10' reach) **and** +7 bite 1d8+4; SA rend, smite good; SQ darkvision, resist fire/cold 15, DR 5/+2, SR 20; AL CE; SV Fort +13, Ref +8, Will +6; Str 26, Dex 17, Con 20, Int 6, Wis 18, Cha 7.

Skills: Climb +16, Creep +8, Spot +7.

Rend (Ex): if Ooi hits with at least two claws, he inflicts an additional 2d4+12 points of damage. Since he possesses four arms, he can do so twice per round if lucky.

Smite Good (Su): once per day, +10 damage versus goodly aligned beings.

Ooi may only be gotten rid of for good if his heart is cut out after being put to rest, or the body is burned to ashes. Otherwise, he returns to life in 48 hours, fully rejuvenated.

e. – Crypt of the Lesser Priesthood:

Ancient, desiccated and blackened bodies are propped against the walls of this room. The bodies are a repulsive combination of ape and man – sloping forehead, deep-set eye sockets and prominent jaws. All in all, there are 23 preserved mummies here, all clad in mouldering rags and decorated with cheap, gaudy golden jewels. Some of them wear wooden masks. The jewels are worth 20 gp per mummy, but disturbing the dead

is perilous: this also disturbs a dust carrying **Mindfire** (DC 14, incubation period 1 day, 1d4 Int per day). If the high priests in room **g.** are animated, so are the members of the lesser priesthood. They are shambling **zombies** and shuffle forward to slay the defilers, spreading the plague as they move.

Zombies (23): CR ½; HD 2d12+3; hp 16 avg; Init -1; Spd 30; AC 12 (-1 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +2 slam 1d8+1; SA disease (mindfire, as above); SQ partial actions only; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 9, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1.

f. – Ooi's Crypt: Formerly the resting place of the Ape God, the lid of the giant sarcophagus is cast aside and broken. Dozens of niches contain piles upon piles of polished half-human skulls: as with the degenerates, they are half man and half animal, with filed teeth. A search of the room uncovers a chisel and a heavy hammer left lying in a corner.

g. – Crypt of the Greater Priesthood:

This round, domed vault is the resting place of the five ancient high priests. In the middle of the room, a thick stone wheel rests on a low dais – its surface is decorated with irregularly placed (?) radial grooves meeting in a round depression. The bodies of the high priests stand by the wall as the underlings did below; however, the ragged green and crimson garbs are much richer, and each **mummy** is bedecked with crude but plentiful gold jewelry worth 200 gp each. One of them has a heavy gold chain around his neck, from which hang largish golden globes. These mummies are in better shape, smelling of the sweet odour of preservative resin. If any of them is bothered, all five animate!

Mummies (5): CR 3; HD 6d12; hp 24, 47, 45*, 40, 43; Init -1; Spd 20; AC 19 (-1 Dex, +10 natural); Atk +6 slam



1d6+4+mummy rot; SA despair, mindfire, mummy rot; SQ DR 5/+1, weapon resistance (1/2 damage), fire vulnerability (double damage **and** see below); AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +7; Str 17, Dex 8, Con -, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Despair (Su): upon animation, everyone within sight must roll a DC 15 Will save or stand paralysed for 1d4 rounds.

Mindfire (Ex): as above, but with a DC of 16.

Mummy Rot (Su): Supernatural disease—slam, Fortitude DC 16, incubation period 1 minute; damage 1d6 Con and 1d6 Cha. A character attempting to cast any healing spell on a creature so afflicted with mummy rot must succeed on a DC 20 caster level check, or the spell has no effect on the afflicted character. To eliminate mummy rot, the curse must first be broken with *break enchantment* or *remove curse* (requiring a DC 20 caster level check for either spell), after which a caster level check is no longer necessary to cast healing spells on the victim, and the mummy rot can be magically cured as any normal disease. An afflicted creature who dies of mummy rot shrivels away into sand and dust that blow away into nothing at the first wind.

The golden chain worn by the mummy marked with the asterisk (*) is a *necklace of fireballs* with one 6d6, one 4d6 and two 2d6 missiles. The mummy doesn't normally use this item, but if it suffers but a single point of fire damage, the necklace must roll a saving throw (having a +7 bonus). On failure, all four missiles detonate. Everyone within the chamber (including the mummies) suffers 14d6 points of fire damage, DC 14 Reflex save halves. Those standing on the upper one third of the stairs suffer 6d6 points, DC 12, but even if this is successful, they stumble over backwards unless a DC 12 Balance check is made, suffering 2d6 additional points of damage and landing in the midst of the zombies downstairs.

Apart from the gold and the necklace, one mummy has a clerical scroll (*dispel good*, *summon monster VIII – greater earth elemental*) cast at the 15th level of ability. The scroll may not be recovered if fire is used in this battle.

7. Calm Valley

The small valley may only be approached by way of a narrow ravine, whose sides appear exceptionally unstable, but are in fact perfectly safe. Protected from the winds and the weather, a small glade here has a shrine dedicated to Emoré, a pool of clear water and a gnarled, stunted little fruit tree. The tree bears five round, pale orange fruits. Each bestows +4 Intelligence and Wisdom for 1d6 hours. The fruits grow yearly. The seeds resemble those of a peach, and like al-Astorion's other creations, can only be planted under specific conditions: an open place with ample sunlight but completely free of winds.

8. Bath

Several deep footprints are found in the mud by the stream. By day, there is a 20% probability 1d6+2 **psionic apes** are bathing in the shallow waters.

Psionic Apes (1d6+2): hp 26 avg.

9. Stone Road

This is the continuation of the narrow stone road. The winding path is well maintained and looks like it had been renovated at one time (indeed, al-Astorion took good care of it until his mind faded). Here and there, low stone platforms on the roadside support squat basalt idols.

10. The Flaying Tree

Two major paths converge in this large clearing. In the middle, there rises a low mound with a huge, evil-looking tree. Although only twenty years in age, it has surpassed the size of many ancient oaks. Its bark is blood-red and black, and deep cuts on the trunk weep with dark,

blackened resin. Veils of thin, flayed tree-bark hang from some younger branches, and it seems as if rotting skins were hanging from others... The large, leathery leaves are deep purple, the bunched fruits vivid crimson. The heaps lying by the trunk happen to be bloody, formless masses, remains of the tree's victims – surrounded by clouds of buzzing flies. There are also a few scattered, rusting swords and a broken helmet at the foot of the mound.

The **flaying tree** would have been al-Astorion's most ambitious creation, a tree whose shade would grant a meditating sage dreams of divination. These plans went wrong when the blood of a dying tiger fell on the sapling's soil, and the resulting horror developed an evil intellect and twisted hatred. Its fury is such, that if a living being comes close, it slashes it beyond recognition with bladelike leaves and flays the dead or dying body with clinical precision. The plentiful energies in all the shed blood have only enhanced its rapid growth. The tree's creator couldn't check this development, and in fact had to abandon efforts to turn this part of the valley into a fertile paradise.

Fortunately for passers-by, the tree sleeps 80% of the time and may be easily avoided. If awake, it is able to communicate with murmuring leaves, demanding bodies or blood sacrifice for passing through or partaking of its fruits. It breaks the resulting promise 20% of the time, interpreting the command to "bring the bodiessss before mee" as one that includes the "bodies" doing the bringing!

In combat, the flaying tree slashes with its leaves, which it can do in any direction, but with only four limbs per quarter. If pressed, it can uproot itself and follow the enemy, but seldom chooses to do so unless absolutely necessary. Dense wood slows movement to 10' per round.

Flaying Tree: CR 9; HD 7d8+70; hp 105; Init -1; Spd 20; AC 20 (-2 size, -1 Dex, +13 natural); Atk 8*+12 sharp leaves

2d6+9 (18-20/*2), 15' reach; SQ regeneration 10, ½ damage from piercing weapons, *2 damage vs. objects, fire vulnerability (fails all saves vs. magical fire), smoke vulnerability (must save or fall asleep); AL CE; SV Fort +10, Ref +1, Will +6; Str 29, Dex 8, Con 30, Int 6, Wis 15, Cha 12.

The fruits are bunches of berries resembling grapes (14 bunches are available). Consumption results in a state of disorientation, during which the victim becomes gullible and easily controlled (Fort DC 20, 2*2d6 temporary Wisdom loss). The tree's resin (16 doses) may be brewed into a balm healing 1d6+6 hp per application with a DC 14 Alchemy or Wilderness Lore check. Another tree may be brought up only if the seeds and sapling are regularly fed by the blood of carnivorous beasts or humans, the more belligerent the better.

11. The Wool-Tree

Another abandoned experiment: this diminutive tree is like birch with white, hairy prunes growing all over the branches. The developed growth, when harvested, produces a woolly substance fit for the choosiest weaver. The small seeds are plentiful and easy to plant.

12. Incline

The steep mountain trail is very treacherous and narrow at this stretch; some sections were destroyed by landslides and flooding. Two successful Climb checks (DC 14) are necessary to go further. Failure results in 3d6 points of falling damage.

13. Outlook: Altar of the Iron God

The elevated vantage point in the mountains allows one to observe the whole valley and the position of most individual locations, provided they are large enough for the naked eye: the waterfall to the west, caves to the northwest and northeast, a wide pasture and the mountain lake (with

the island and the metal-topped tower in its middle), not to mention the cycloptic hanging garden overlooking the eastern woods.

The jungle-road also ends at this location, with an old, carved slab. Old runes cover the surface of the granite table (Decipher Script DC 16): they praise Tazpaxol, the terrible and mighty God of Iron. Once, pilgrims thronged to visit the site and perform sacrifices. In our day, pilgrimage site and deity are both lost to human knowledge, although the Judge may impart some made-up details upon a PC making a DC 20 Knowledge: Religion roll, and someone who rolls 24 or higher also knows what kind of items are to be sacrificed here.

Upon offering a masterwork or magical piece of iron, lightning strikes from the skies, claiming this offering in a peal of thunder. A character who has sacrificed thus earns the favour of Tazpaxol, with the following results based on the nature of the offered item:

- weapons: within one year, if the character is locked in mortal combat with a superior foe, his weapon strikes and inflicts a critical hit automatically – even against creatures usually immune to such effects.

- armour, shield or any other item: the following weapon which would inflict a critical hit upon the PC must roll a DC 22 Fortitude save or shatter instead of inflicting harm.

Masterwork items confer these blessings for one time, whereas magical items increase this by one additional time per “plus” or special power.

14. Stone Pits

Four very deep, circular pits found in the forest are the results of an ancient catastrophe. Each one has a 20’ diameter (the upper part widens to 30’ to 40’ as a funnel). Two are 40’ deep, one is 60’ and one is 120’.

a. (40’): The bottom is covered with fallen rocks and lush green plants growing in the cracks.

b. (40’): As above, but **10 stirges** nest among the plants.

Stirges (10): CR ½; HD 1d8; hp 5 avg; Init +4; Spd 10/40 Fly; AC 16 (+2 size, +4 Dex); Atk +6 proboscis touch 1 hp plus attach, 0’ reach; SA blood drain; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 3, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills: Hide +6.

Blood Drain (Ex): an attached stirge’s AC falls to 12, but it can thereafter drain 1d4 Con per rounds, for a maximum of 4 each.

c. (60’): This pit widens to 30’ at the bottom. A small “lake” hidden here is surrounded by thick undergrowth... plants with vines and black berries. **Assassin vines!**

Assassin Vines (4): CR 3; HD 4d8+12; hp 24, 37, 27, 33; Init +0, Spd 0, AC 15 (-1 size, +6 natural); Atk +7 vine 1d6+7+grab, 20’ reach; SA squeeze, *entangle*; SQ fire/cold resistance 20, immune to electricity; camouflage; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 20, Dex 10, Con 16, Int -, Wis 13, Cha 9.

Grab/Squeeze (Ex): the vine inflicts 1d6+7 points of damage on a successful grapple check.

Camouflage (Ex): a DC 20 Spot check is required to notice the plant’s nature.

Entangle (Ex): as per the Druid spell, plants in a 30’ range animate to grab and hold a victim... DC 12 or -2 to attacks, -4 to Dexterity and movement is impossible. A DC 20 Strength or Escape Artist check is required to free oneself and allow ½ speed movement.

d. (120’): The fourth pit is the deepest of them all. The lower reaches are as cold as a cellar, and equally damp. Even sunlight can barely illuminate this place: the gloom is constant, even at noon. The walls are

curiously glassy, black in colour and slick from moisture. On a huge rock pile, covered by the leafy plants, there lie deformed, once painted and nailed metal sheets... the remains of a fallen starship. If one takes the time to thoroughly examine the weird wreckage, a DC 32 Search check allows the recovery of a miniature hexagonal metal block hanging from a fine, now torn golden chain. This “key” unlocks the **Tower of Ladgloun (17.)**.

15. Cave II. – the Tiger, the Valley and the City

The expansive cave system opening from the southeastern part of the valley is dangerous for three reasons. An old smilodon (sabre-toothed tiger) has made a lair in the entrance cavern, hunting at night but usually present during the day. An isolated, narrow valley – really a long crevasse – is the site of a wizard’s burial, empty of a corpse but still dangerous. Finally, an underground corridor leads to and beyond the cavern city of the debased deep ones, monstrous beings in the service of eldritch deities.

a. Sabre-toothed Tiger: The tiger’s lair and the entrance cavern is well illuminated and clean. The light comes from a circular hole above where the ceiling gave away. Vines hang from this opening. Otherwise, the grotto is merely 15’ tall. The sole inhabitant of the cavern is the **smilodon**, an ancient and cunning specimen. There is a 60% probability it is here by day, but only 30% it is found at night. If the beast is out, it is hunting and returns in 1d12 hours. If it senses intruders have been in the lair, it waits for them in hiding. The smilodon was once wounded by adventurers, which makes it enraged and particularly ferocious when fighting against humanoids – receiving a +2 morale bonus to attacks.

Smilodon: CR 5; HD 8d8+32; hp 62; Init +2; Spd 40; AC 16 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +5 natural); Atk 2*+10 claws 1d8+6+grab or +5 bite 2d6+3; SA pounce, rake; AL N;

SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 23, Dex 15, Con 18, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills: Balance +6, Hide +5, Listen +3, Sneak +9, Spot +3, Swim +11.

Pounce (Ex): in the first round of attack, the smilodon may use a full round attack even if it has moved more than 5’.

Rake (Ex): once the smilodon has grabbed an opponent, it may also attack with its hind claws, 2*+9 to hit and 1d8+3 damage.

b. Lake: The shallow (5’ deep) lake is ice cold, being fed by a narrow underground stream from the north. Characters who wade in the deeps take 1d6 points of subdual damage each minute. The northern passage gradually rises while the stream by its side doesn’t – the initial height difference grows to 20’ by the time **d.** is reached.

c. Cascade: This is where the cavern stream emerges, and plummets 10’ before reaching the ground. Its sound is loud enough to be heard from 500 metres.

d. Old Bridge: The chamber is a watery, wet grotto. An underground lake fills it 20’ below the ledge the characters enter from – this body of water is inhabited by sightless fish and cave newts. An old bridge arches over the churning waters, its thick planks made of wet but intact wood, with pylons of carved stone. The writhing patterns on the pylons arouse a feeling of uncertain wrongness. The stones are magical but there is no *apparent* effect (if detected for, tell this to the players as matter-of-factly as possible). Destructive spells cast on the bridge are reflected on their caster.

Multiple exits leave the grotto. The majority of the water leaves eastwards, but after a few meters, it plunges underneath a ledge and vanishes underground, only emerging at area **18**. The northern passage is approximately 900’ (300 m) long, and finally terminates in a hidden open-air crevasse (**e.**). To the west, the water comes closer and closer to the level of the ledge, until they are once more at the same height

after some 300' (100 m). The path is underwater thereafter. Characters who wish to go further must wade hip-deep in the cold stream (breast-deep for small characters), which inflicts 1d6 points of subdual damage per minute unless some useful protection is employed. Finally, after a total length of 450' (150 m), the passage terminates in a huge natural vault, location **f**.

e. Ladgloun's Final Rest: Ladgloun the wizard, who once inhabited the tower on the lake (**17.**) built his elaborate burial crypt here, and also deposited magical items to accompany him to the Netherworld. Ironically, although he had later discovered a much more preferable alternative to death, his demise came here in the form of a carnivorous plant.

The crevasse containing the crypt is only 20' wide and 100' long. Its walls are very high, contributing to a shady, gloom-shrouded atmosphere with an earthy smell mingling with the crazed aroma of enormous flowers and wide-leafed plants of giant proportions. The enormous flowers belong to a **venus flytrap** marked with an asterisk on the area map.

Venus Flytrap: CR 3; HD 5d8+15; hp 39; Init +2; Spd 0; AC 14(+2 Dex, +3 natural, -1 size); Atk +7 bite 2d6+5+grab, 10' reach; SA Improved Grab, scent, pollen cloud; SQ plant; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2.

Improved Grab (Ex): the venus flytrap inflicts 2d6+5 points of damage on a successful grapple check.

Scent (Ex): due to the alluring scent of the monster, all within 30' must roll a DC 14 Will save or fall in a dreamlike state and walk towards the flowers.

Pollen Cloud (Ex): once per day, the plant can emit a cloud of pollens covering a 10' radius area. The pollens are poisonous – Fort DC 14, damage 2d6 hp/2d6 hp.

The crevasse ends in a rectangular marble hall. Short stairs lead up to a pleasant columned space with marble benches overlooking the flowers, whispering wind and a simple alabaster sarcophagus. Animals are unwilling to enter this place on their own and remain nervous while inside.

The sarcophagus, carved with gentle bucolic scenes, bears the following inscription: "LADGLOUN'S FINAL REST". If someone touches the stone, a deep groan from beyond the grave emerges and (if the intruder perseveres) two transparent apparitions materialize. Both are regal, wizened old men in the fashionable and expensive, yet ragged clothes of local royalty. One of them intones in an emotionless, hollow voice:

"We are the kings of Nisir. Our empire lies in ruins, our garments are but tatters and our crowns worthless junk, all because we have opposed LADGLOUN. Depart in peace or share our vigil!"

The spectral images are illusionary, but this is rather hard to verify. If the characters don't leave or disbelieve them, they attack.

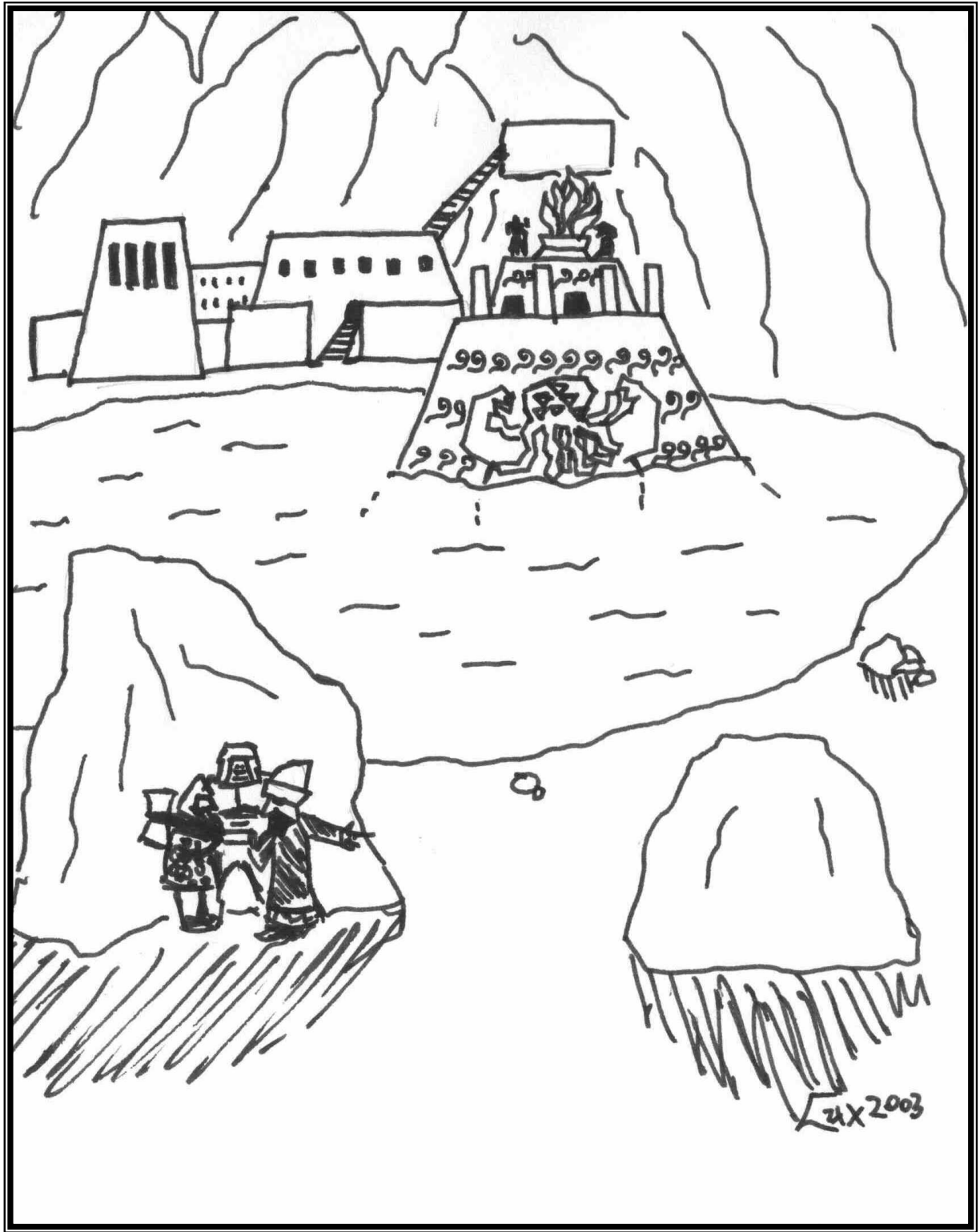
Spectres (2): CR 7; HD 7d12; hp 28, 34; Init +7; Spd 40/80 Fly; AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 deflection); Atk +6 incorporeal touch 1d8+energy drain; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +7; Str -, Dex 16, Con -, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Energy Drain (Su): two negative levels on touch, Fort DC 15.

Illusion: since the spectres are mere mirage, they are not powerless in sunlight, can't be turned – and it is not they who bother animals here either.

If the spectres are done away, and someone lifts the lid of the sarcophagus, the second trap is also activated:

Horrendous Freezing Trap: Fort DC 18 or victim is frozen solid. On a successful save, the damage is 3d6+14 hit points.



There is no body in the sarcophagus, only two items: a *rod of wonder* (it is shaped like a wand and possesses 27 charges) and a *ring of rainbows*. The ring, which may only be used by wizards, calls into being a shimmering rainbow bridge of the preferred dimensions on a verbal command. The bridge may not be larger than 4 metres by 100 metres. It persists for an hour and a minute, and the ring has five charges – it may not be recharged.

f. Temple of the Great Old Ones: If the characters desire an early demise, this is the place to find it! The large underground grotto is mostly occupied by a still lake. On the further shore stands an ancient, megalithic temple complex in the Preatlantic style, built from polished black blocks without any sort of mortar.

The greatest building is a half-submerged stepped ziggurat, whose mirror-smooth side is decorated with stone reliefs. These are writhing geometric patterns on one hand, and the vast portrait of a humanoid monstrosity on the other – the head of the curious entity bears resemblance to a cephalopod with uncounted tentacles; it has six malignant eyes and strong arms also. Only half of the monumental display is visible, however, as the parts below its breast are under water. Intense fire burns in a sizeable stone vessel atop the pyramidal ziggurat, the unnatural green lights casting a pallid hue on the entire scene.

There are multiple smaller buildings behind the pyramid: these form an unified whole with several small windows but only one entrance preceded by steep stone stairs. Another stair leads up to a much smaller edifice far behind and above the lower complex.

The temple complex was erected by the deep ones, servitors of the Great Old Ones. These large-headed subterranean reptile/frog-beings are unreservedly hostile to everyone but their own degenerate kin. They are statistically equivalent to trolls save for their inability to regenerate and the 40' swim speed. They are largely too

stupid to accomplish complex tasks, but the “priests” (whose powers are in fact arcane) are equal to an intelligent human. There are a total of 37 deep ones, two priests and one high priest in the grotto. In case of combat, the deep ones don't employ delicate tactics, instead attacking opponents from underwater. When accompanied by a “priest”, however, they are capable of flanking, feints, faked retreats and so forth.

A few boulders in the cave are sufficiently large to conceal a normal party from the otherwise inept guards. A single guard appears every hour to check the flame on top of the ziggurat – if the characters don't make a loud noise or don't use light on their own, there is only a 5% probability of discovery. Moreover, every 20 hours, a procession appears at the gate of the temple complex; headed by the high priest and followed by two underlings and six additional deep ones, they proceed to the first level of the ziggurat by way of the back stairs and spend a full hour performing sacrifices to the Great Old Ones (the ritual is accompanied by a great deal of chanting and inarticulate screaming, as well as calling on strange gods in the Preatlantic dialect). Once finished, the group returns as they came. As the party enters the vault, the next ritual will start in 1d20 hours.

The waters of the lake are deep, very deep – they lead to the abysmal underworld of the deep ones. This location should be detailed by the Judge if necessary.

g. Ziggurat: There is only one chamber within the great step pyramid; a “sanctum” surrounded by monolithic stone slabs. The sole furnishing is a 2 m diameter stone wheel resting on a 1 m pedestal. The stone is black with chaotically meandering purple veins. It is covered in antediluvian and worn reliefs of an open eye in an eight-pointed star, with writhing tentacles reaching outwards.

Even mere sight of the slab awakens an uncertain feeling of wrongness. If someone

looks into the eye and concentrates, he must roll a DC 20 Will save or immediately and permanently go insane from the sight of foreign and inhuman dimensions. If the saving throw is a success, however, his mind can wander these strange realms freely, learning strange and terrible things within the blink of an eye.

An arcane spellcaster looking in the eye can memorize spells he is unfamiliar with – replacing his own with any spell of equal or one higher level (a total of 1d6+2 may be so replaced). If he possesses a spell book, the formulae may later be scribed with a successful caster level check, DC 15+level. (Obviously, the deep ones gain spells the same way, except they are unaffected by the madness.)

Divine spellcasters age 2d6 years if they are good, 1d6 years if they are neutral and gain +1000 experience points if they are evil.

Any character, including non-spellcasters, who rolls above 24 on the save gains the limited ability to employ a psionic strike. The ability works once per day with a 20' range, affecting one individual, who must roll a Will save with a DC of 10+1/2 character level+Int bonus or be stunned for 1d4 rounds.

It is possible to destroy the altar using +3 or stronger weapons, a *holy word* or similar powers. No matter how the attempt goes, the **Guardian** of the slab immediately makes an appearance. This is a formless mass composed of rubbery black material forming a great, palpitating saclike body crowned by arm-thick tentacles. Statistics resemble those of a shambling mounds with a few key differences.

Guardian: CR 7; HD 8d8+24; hp 60; Init +0; Spd 20/30 swim; AC 20 (-1 size, +11 natural); Atk 4*+10 tentacles 2d6+5+grab, 10' reach; SA squeeze; SQ spell resistance 17, "plant", electricity immunity, fire resistance 30, darkvision, tremorsense; AL

NE; SV Fort +9, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 21, Dex 10, Con 17, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Squeeze (Ex): if the Guardian grabs an opponent, it can squeeze each round for 2d6+7 damage.

h. Hall: The hall of the vast temple is wrought from polished, soot-black stones. Pillars are 20', the reliefs on the walls chaotic and smooth from humidity. Like in all other rooms of the building, sounds are strangely distorted, as if they were resounding from a bottomless pit. Light is reduced to ½ strength; ranged attacks beyond a 5' range have a 10% to miss.

i., j. Deep Ones: there are **nine deep ones** in room **i.** and **five** in room **j.**

Deep Ones (14): CR 5; HD 6d8+36; hp 60 each; Init +2; Spd 30'/40' swim; AC 18 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +7 natural); Atk 2*+9 claws 1d6+6, 10' reach and +4 bite 1d6+3; SA rend; SQ darkvision; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 23, Dex 14, Con 22, Int 6, Wis 9, Cha 6.

Spot +5, Listen +2.

Rend (Ex): a deep one who successfully hits with both claw attacks inflicts an additional 2d6+9 damage that round.

k. Hidden Chamber: The small recess may be approached through two secret doors (Search DC 28, opens by pressing a carving in the wall). Ghostly blue light peers from the thick darkness, coming from a floating glass ball the size of a human head. Next to the water-green globe, there is a curled-up, naked human body, his whole cadaver transformed into some hardened glasslike substance. Two yellow-green metal rods, each one meter in length, lies by the bizarre fossil. The globe may be smashed (20 hp), freeing the light within:

Will-o-Wisp: CR 7; HD 9d8; hp 40; Init +13; Spd 50' fly; AC 29 (+1 size, +9 Dex, +9 deflection); Atk +16 touch, 1d6 Strength; SA strength drain; SQ spell

immunity; AL CE; SV Fort +3, Ref +12, Will +9; Str -, Dex 29, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 12.

Blind-Fight, Dodge, Improved Initiative.

Strength Drain (Su): a character fully drained by the wisp is glassed, forever gone.

Spell Immunity (Su): the creature may only be affected by *protection circle vs. chaos/evil*, *magic missile*, *maze* or *protection from chaos/evil*.

The metal rods in the chamber may be forged into one +2 sword or 25 +2 arrows each; together, they are enough for a +2 large metal shield. Each is valued at 3000 gp on the market.

l. Side Building: The further end of the small hall is occupied by an upright one-and-a-half men tall stone wheel. Its black surface is covered in radial, irregularly placed grooves meeting in a central hub (circular depression). Each groove runs through a number of smaller circular depressions, also irregularly appearing. This relic resembles the wheel found at **6.g.**, except it is of superior design. The purposes are unknown and it radiates no magic.

m. Hall: The low hall has an arched ceiling 10' above ground. Two statues standing by the stairs down depict robed deep ones, mouths open and full of teeth.

n. Deep Ones: another **seven deep ones**. There are five platinum disks in one corner of a smaller chamber. Each one is worth 150 gp, being palm sized and studded with elaborate patterns.

Deep Ones (7): hp 60 each.

o. Hall: Squat columns and alcoves – they contain empty, ancient stone amphorae.

p. Hall of Columns: These chambers are brighter than those on the lower level, but still solemnly gloomy. The light streaming

in the tall, narrow windows is unnaturally sharp (and much more strong than it was outside!), with extreme contrasts - ranged attacks beyond a 15' range have a 40% to miss.

Unless the party took great pains to proceed silently up to this point, this is where they waltz into the greeting party of the deep ones lead by the clerics. **Six** are hiding behind the columns (+10 to Hide checks thanks to lighting) and they attack from all directions. The **lesser priests** cast *flaming spheres* from the back, but hurry towards the room maze if the slightest danger presents itself. Their primary purpose now is to assess intruder strength, and let the troops here soak up spells before the final confrontation.

Deep Ones: hp 36 each.

Also note that contrary to how it may seem, the windows from the *inside* don't open *outside*. That much should be evident from the unnatural light. If someone takes the pains to climb up to one narrow gap, it becomes apparent that he looks outside to *nothing* – open air stretching everywhere, and a bottomless abyss underneath. The source of the light is an immense green sun obscuring the horizon. Venturing out to explore is a death sentence, and radiation will finish the curious in 2d6 minutes.

q. Labyrinth: These rooms and corridors form a maze with the occasional stone bier (for sleeping) and wall reliefs. The walls to the south let in light, but everywhere else is dark. The **ten deep ones** in the labyrinth are lead by the **high priest** and **two attendants**. They know this place perfectly, using their knowledge to employ back or side attacks, hit-and-run manoeuvres, pick off individual characters or catch the enemy surrounded. The lesser priests occupy the party while the high priest and the others slaughter them. Spells marked with a + are cast right before the battle is joined.

Deep Ones (10): hp 60 each.

Deep One “Priests” (2), Wiz4: CR 7; HD3d8+4d4+42; hp 71, 76; Init +2; Spd 30; AC 18 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +7 natural); Atk +11 *obsidian sacrificial dagger* +1 1d4+6 (19-20/*2) **or** 2*+9 claws 1d6+6, 10' reach **and** +4 bite 1d6+3; SA spells, rend; AL CE; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +7; Str 23, Dex 14, Con 22, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Spot +5, Listen +5, Spellcraft +7, Concentration +10

Rend (Ex): a deep one who successfully hits with both claw attacks inflicts an additional 2d6+9 damage that round.

Spells (DC 13+lvl): 0:4; 1:4; 2:3; 0: *ray of frost, dancing lights, daze**2; 1: *obscuring mist, charm person**2, *colour spray*; 2: #1 *fog cloud, darkness, flaming sphere*; #2 *hypnotic pattern* (2d4+4 HD), *lesser image, flaming sphere*.

High Priest, Wiz 6: CR 10; HD 3d8+6d4+54; hp 80; Init +2; Spd 30; AC 18/29 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +7 natural, +7 *shield*, +4 *mage armour*); Atk +12 *obsidian sacrificial dagger* +1 1d4+6 (19-20/*2) **or** 2*+10 claws 1d6+6, 10' reach **and** +5 bite 1d6+3; SA spells, rend; AL CE; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +7; Str 23, Dex 14, Con 22, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Spot +5, Listen +5, Spellcraft +7, Concentration +10

Rend (Ex): a deep one who successfully hits with both claw attacks inflicts an additional 2d6+9 damage that round.

Spells (DC 14+lvl): 0:4; 1:4; 2:4; 3:3; 0: *ray of frost**2, *detect magic**2; 1: *shield*+, *mage armour*+, *true strike**2; 2: *detect invisibility, flaming sphere**2, *invisibility*; 3: *dispel magic, fireball, keen edge* (on claws).

r. Hidden Treasure Chamber: The small chamber hidden within the maze of many small rooms and corridors is closed by a secret door with *arcane lock* – Search DC 22, Open Lock DC 34. There is a minor “keyhole”, a barely detectable pentagonal

depression in the wall: it opens with a similarly shaped metal stick hanging from the high priest’s neck. The treasures of the deep ones are within! This includes a +3 *dagger* forged from tung, a metal alien to our world (it is impossible to destroy in any known way), a *staff of fire* with 38 charges, a +2 *armour of rage* (beaten bronze, ugly and strange patterns) and a *periapt of foul rotting*.

16. The Field: Wild tropical flowers with an intoxicating aroma, vines and creepers and waist-high grass covers the gentle slopes. From all points of this open space, someone can see the mountain lake and the small tower on its island. Its steel peak glitters in the sunlight like a spear point! The perfectly intact structure is surrounded by a number of ruins in a dilapidated state. Although idyllic, the field isn’t completely safe: the northern part is inhabited by **green carnivorous minisaurs**, who also venture beyond the stream on occasions and are thus encountered at that location too, mostly rollicking in the mud. Every hour spent in the field, there is a 1:8 chance to the south and 1:4 to the north 3d6 of these miniature horrors attack (4d6 to the north). The lizards live in passages resembling rabbit burrows; a total of 50 dwell in al-Astorion’s valley. They rush opponents from all directions, preferably growing for unprotected throats, arms, etc. These ambushes are made all the more easy by the tall grasses.

Green Carnivorous Minisaurs (50): CR 1; HD 2d8+2; hp 11 avg; Init +4; Spd 30'; AC 18 (+1 size, +4 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +5 bite 1d6 (18-20/*2) + maul; SA maul, jump; AL N, SV Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 1, Wis 13, Cha 4.

Jump +12, Hide +11, Climb +4, Listen +4, Spot +4; Finesse

Maul (Ex): if the minitaur succeeds with a bite attack, it attaches to the victim and automatically inflicts 1d6 points of damage per round.

Jump (Ex): muscled hind legs allow the creature to leap to a distance of 20' and attack in the same round as if it were charging.

a. Statue of Voltagama: The statue of a naked woman stands on a simple stone base. Her hands hold a sheaf of grain. The following words are seen on the base:

“BEFORE VOLTAGAMA’S SIGHT IS PURIFIED ALL / WHOSE SOUL IS NOBLE AND WHOSE HEART IS WHOLE / LO, THE PROPHET OF EMORÉ THE GODDESS / POURS SPIRIT INTO THE HOPE-LOST / ANOINTS THE INJURED AND THE WOUNDED OF HEART”

The humble idol was al-Astorion’s first work in the valley. He carved it in his free hours a long time before his mind was clouded or even before he acquired the ability to do greater works. His goddess rewarded the old hermit by imbuing the statue with a healing ability. If a good or neutral being prostrates himself before its sight and says a short prayer asking for healing, Voltagama rewards him with a *heal* spell. This miracle works only one time on any character.

b. Tree of Chimes: Even from far away, one can hear the pleasant chiming and resounding music caused by the treelet’s fruits swaying in the winds. The trunk and branches of the tree are brass, the leaves are silver and the fruits are three different types of metal. There are eight copper fruits worth 20 gp apiece, four silver fruits worth 150 gp apiece and two beautiful golden fruits worth 350 gp apiece. The eighteen leaves are 10 gp each. Every branch, leaf and fruit sways and makes pleasant bell-like sounds even in the smallest wind. If someone picks a fruit or leaf without the appropriate precautions (that is, a successful DC 14 Pick Pocket check), the tree shakes and a hellish cacophony results. This immediately attracts 2d6+10 **minisaurs** from their

hiding holes, who have already learned that this is the signal for lunch! Every three rounds, the lizards’ numbers grow by 2d6 until all are defeated.

The fruits of the tree are seedless and there is no way to reproduce this musical miracle at any other location.

17. Ladgloun’s Tower

Ladgloun the wizard came to this valley some 400 years before al-Astorion’s arrival. He commissioned salamanders and denizens from the elemental plane of earth to build him an elegant steel-topped tower of outstanding stability, warded from ordinary and extraordinary forms of intrusion. He was well acquainted with the secrets of the valley as they then were: the pleasant calm of a secluded little crevasse to the north (15/e.) had especially enthralled him; in advanced age, he decided to choose this location as the site of his burial and to defend the crypt there with illusions and defensive spells. It was a strange turn of chance which brought him to the remains of a fallen starship in the nearby stone pits; and even more wondrous that he had later deciphered the secrets of the small ceramic tablets lying amidst several other curious items. The decoded text hinted at worlds foreign to our own, and Ladgloun decided to postpone death, instead choosing a lengthy trance so his mind could wander these spheres for a number of centuries. In preparation for the undertaking, and to gain the materials required by the methods he sought to employ, he sold off most of his magical collection, only keeping a small assortment of sentimental valuables. Regrettably, his plans were disrupted once more, as, during a walk in his beloved valley, a carnivorous plant clouded the venerable magic-user’s senses, and devoured him entirely. Since this occasion, the tower has been empty, although undisturbed.

Ladgloun’s tower (indeed, the entire island) is surrounded by an anti-teleportation field, and the walls of the building are also reinforced to prevent

entry or harm in any unlawful way. There are no apparent windows, even, only a single metal door.

a. Ruins: These are old, crumbling stone buildings surrounding the central tower. Some of the buildings still stand, but others are in various states of collapse, and a few are but formless stone heaps. They once housed the extraplanar architects, hence the “weird” style they were built in.

The front door is made of magically treated brass (Break DC 38, Hardness 20, 120 hp), and the singular distinguishing feature on its polished surface is a knocker in the form of a skull grasping a large ring in the mouth; astute observers may easily note a hexagonal depression as wide as a delicate human finger. The depression is a “keyhole”, which only accepts the key found at area **14/d**. A skilful smith may create a duplicate with a bit of work if the proper tools are available (Craft DC 28), or a master thief could pick it with some difficulty (DC 32). Unsuccessful attempts or imperfect keys result in 2d6 points of electrical damage.

The knocker animates on use, inquires about the names and purposes of all present, but finally announces his regrets, as Ladgloun is unavailable, and has been away for the last 300 years. The personality within the skull is highly intelligent (16 Intelligence and Wisdom), and has a taste for philosophy. If the characters show interest, he gladly engages in a lively debate; in fact, if he is impressed by the sufficiently deep knowledge and sharp wits of the participants, he could “make an exception” and open the door. This is a good opportunity for the Judge to test the roleplaying skills and eloquence of his *players*. The “ultimate dilemmas” proposed by the skull are inconsequential hogwash; e.g. “*It is a known fact that parallels do not intersect, but what consequences would result if they did?*” or “*Assuming that some things couldn’t be imagined to exist, what would be their*

most probable characteristics? (And if these characteristics are X, why are they unimaginable; after all, they have just been proven to be within our imagination.)” Only well grounded and theoretically sound hypotheses are acceptable.

b. Entry Hall: The floor and walls of the entry hall are covered in immaculate black and white tiles. Everything is perfectly clean without a single speck of dust. Even the air has a pleasant minty scent. The corridor to the left has racks to deposit clothes, which are arranged and dusted off by unseen servants.

c. Storage: Spoiled, rotten foodstuffs decompose in stacked crates and sacks. The only things of value in the room are five amphorae of wine – an excellent vintage worth 500 gp per container. Transportation may prove problematic, since the amphorae are bulky and weigh 100 pounds each.

d. Library: The old, slightly wormeaten (although dust-free) oak shelves are empty of books – Ladgloun sold or got rid of almost all. A few interesting works still rest on his writing desks. The five leatherbound booklets are about magical theory, and provide a +4 bonus to Knowledge: Arcane checks if they are consulted prior to the attempt (1d4*10 minutes). Titles are as follows: “*The eight radials*”, “*Talgamol’s Almanac*”, “*Mystics*”, “*Instructional tales from the history of magical philosophy*” and “*The projection of the Object on the immaterial milieu*”.

Ladgloun has also left behind a bundle of vellum sheets collectively forming a sort of notebook or journal. The majority is clear, written in a tidy script – these are concerned with mostly mundane matters such as astrological observations, musings on magical theory and daily expenses. Later entries are less collected; it seems Ladgloun wrote them in a hurry. There are vague hints about “strange pits” in the

scrawlings, and the “nigh-hypnotic ceramic tablets” found in their depths, which could “open the way to a myriad worlds, each unlike the others”. These passages are followed by a long series of names such as Cirkea, Yith, Aldebaran, Sol and Fomalhaut; many of them described in a few brief sentences. A few examples follow:

-“*Sfanomoe, a world of ever-present vines and flowers – I have observed a batlike monstrosity as it landed on the ground; in a few moments, the curling, long grasses entangled the avian beast and choked it to death.*”

-“*Xiccarp’s days pass under two suns, one white and one green. At night, they are replaced by a single red orb of enormous proportions. Maaldweb the wizard rules over everything like an omnipotent deity.*”

-“*I couldn’t determine the name of this world. Its entirety is covered by a strange protoplasmic ocean, occasionally forming fantastic shapes on its surface due to unknown forces.*”

-“*This day, I saw a world where only a handful of dwarves still oppose the attacks of the Prince of All Demons. The dwarves did battle against their enemies in a desolate gorge, their five hundred-strong force fighting against several thousand orcs and tower-high shadows with burning eyes. By the time I returned to my observations after the usual meditations, the visions had moved on to yet another dimension, or maybe another area of the previous world. Blackened, soot-covered icebergs, crushed rocks were everywhere, with an occasional grassy patch -- I would like to know what happened to the dwarves, but my attempts to locate them again have resulted in failure.*”

The final sheets are barely legible, as if written in a state of panic – in these, the wizard complains about his mind dulling at a quickening rate. The last entry (surprisingly tidy once more) reads: “*All is finished, but not all is lost. It is time to use the long-prepared place for a new purpose*

– what had once seemed a fantastic folly is now the only rational action left to do.”

e. Bedchamber: A small, cramped but richly furnished sleeping chamber. The heavy fragrance of spices wafts from a bowl of scented oil over greenish fire – the bowl is occasionally refilled by an unseen servant. Incense holders stand on both sides of a regal bed, and an old, empty hookah (decorative, 70 gp) rests on a large pillow nearby. Refreshments are always available in the form of a filigreed silver bowl (130 gp) always full of tantalizing fruits – as long as it stays within the tower. An ebony chest (100 gp) holds five outfits of clothing, including one with a +2 *cloak*. A painted linen map and a silver-framed, octagonal ebon-black mirror hangs from the wall. The map details the lands of another world; the mirror is a *mirror of exchange*, a magical device recovered by Ladgloun.

If someone incautiously peers in the mirror, he has to roll a DC 18 Will save to avoid being replaced by **Vitold Vid the Valiant**, a knight of some renown. Vid possesses all faults usually found in an aristocrat – from looking down on his “inferiors” through overmuch courage to boasting. He could tell numerous tales about his heroic exploits (which, coincidentally, are true), although they had all occurred some centuries before. Naturally, he outright refuses to look in the mirror again, or concede to be exchanged for the lost character. He happily joins the party, but gets irritated if he can’t lead as he pleases, and leaves once the group is back to more civilised lands. The reappearance of Vid may be trouble for multiple notable families, not to mention the fact that inheritance rights are notoriously silent on the question of magical confinement...

Vitold Vid the Valiant, male human
Ftr8: HD 8d10+16; hp 65; Init +1; Spd 20; AC 22 (+8 full plate, +3 *large metal shield*+1; +1 Dex); Atk +10/+5

masterwork bastard sword 1d10+4; AL LG; SV Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 9, Cha 10.

Ride +12, Knowledge (nobility) +5; Mounted Combat, Trample, Ride-by-attack, Spirited Charge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency + Weapon Focus + Weapon Specialization (bastard sword), Weapon Focus (longsword).

The mirror may hold but one victim, who can only be freed by imprisoning another intelligent humanoid. It is very hard to transport due to bulk and fragility (Hp: 16, Break DC 12). If the mirror breaks, the character contained within is instantly slain, only brought back by a *wish* or *miracle*.

f. Observatory: From the inside, the tower's steel cap has the properties of transparent glass, allowing one to observe the sky unhindered. Ladgloun's telescope lies on a metal tripod; both lenses are broken, but if the heavy apparatus is brought back to civilisation, it may be fixed for 600 gp, or sold for 400. A marble basin by the tripod is always full of clear water with a slight metallic taste. Two other treasures are found in the room:

- a **booklet** bound in grey silk contains tables for astrological calculations and fold-out star maps. A skilled astrologue (Knowledge: Arcane DC 20) may prepare a horoscope once per month by following the book's procedures at a given date. The horoscope may concern himself, a chosen character or the party as a whole. The resulting omens are usually vague and challenging to interpret, but always correct – it is a good way for the Judge to pass on hints and “messages” to his playing group. A failed check (whose results shouldn't be revealed to the player) will provide an incorrect or incomplete pronouncement.

- a **crystal icosahedron**, two of whose sides have round crystalline protrusions which may be pressed; one red, one yellow. The icosahedron is one of the objects Ladgloun found in the starship's

wreckage and kept until his disappearance. On pressing the red button, the crystal shoots a ray equivalent to *searing light* (150' range, ranged touch attack for 5d8 fire damage); pressing the yellow button produces a *prismatic ray* (as *prismatic spray*, but needs a ranged touch attack, 30' range, save DCs are 22). The crystal isn't completely trustworthy thanks to a hairline crack. Using the *searing light* power more than one time per day, there is a cumulative 10% probability the device explodes – for the *prismatic ray*, this is 20% on initial use and certain on the second. The detonation inflicts 6d8 points of damage within 20', DC 22 Reflex save halves.

g. Basement: The basement was originally reserved for alchemical and magical experimentation, but most items therein were traded away in Ladgloun's last months. The sole remnants are a thaumaturgic triangle in the floor, with the stubs of wax candles, a small furnace, two acid-scarred tables and a brass mortar filled with cracked glass.

18. Cave III. – the Spring and the Sprites

The stream's clear water gushes forth from a large gap in the cliffside – 30' wide and 5' tall. This spring is fed by the underground lake in the northeastern cave (15/d.). The surrounding area is always wet from the fine spray the cascades produce. It is occupied by a small grove with emerald-green grass and beautiful flowers. A small grotto beyond the gap is filled with several stone columns and boulders standing in a 2' deep pool.

The grove is inhabited by a tribe of **38** diminutive **sprites**, each the size of a little finger. They are completely naked, and glow with an inner honey-coloured light. Their dwellings are nests woven from dried grass in the treetops. They usually hide during the day, only coming out to feast by the spring when the moon is up.

Unless they appear dangerous, a few emissaries cautiously approach the characters and beseech them to save their kind from the guardian demon who dwells in the grotto. This beast, as they claim, is “as big as a mountain, and its spittle instantly dissolves any opponent”. It also comes out at night and eats sprites if it can get them. The sprites are deathly afraid of the creature (whom they call “giganticus terriblicus”), and only a thorough questioning may reveal that it is, in fact, much smaller than any of the PCs...

In the unlikely case of violence or threats, the sprites flee from the characters and fly back to their nests on their gossamer wings. If they are still harassed there, about half of them rush out towards the attackers: they inflict 1d4+1 damage each as a *magic missile*, but die in the process themselves. The sprites are highly resistant to magic as well (SR 20).

The “demon” in the grotto is a **water mephit**. It hides among the boulders, trying to scare away intruders with its booming voice. If surprised, it immediately casts *stinking cloud* and jumps into the pool of water while its foes are preoccupied. Otherwise, it tries to bargain with the party, agreeing to any and all demands they may have – of course, unless killed or chased away for good, it is going to return and resume its gruesome habits.

Water Mephit: CR 3; HD 3d8+3; hp 13; Init +0; Spd 30/40 Fly; AC 16 (+1 size, +5 natural); Atk 2*+6 claw 1d3+2; SA spell-like abilities, summon mephit, breath weapon; SQ fast healing 2; DR 5/+1; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 15.

Spell-like Abilities (Sp): *mel’s acid arrow* once per hour as a 3rd level wizard; *stinking cloud* once per day as a 6th level wizard.

Summon Mephit (Sp): summon one mephit of choice per day, 25% probability of success.

Breath Weapon (Ex): once every 1d4 rounds, cone of acid 15’, 1d8 damage, Reflex DC 12 halves.

If the mephit is slain, the entire company of fae emerge to thank their saviours in high-pitched praise. The small creatures aren’t too intelligent (and mortally afraid of leaving their habitation), but thorough questioning may lead to a few bits of interesting information:

- Their patron deity is called Father Fungus Godling the Honeybringer. He is an “omnipotentated” nature spirit who lives at the end of the world on a mountain reaching to the sky. He brought several gifts to the small folk, but stopped coming after an evil sprite stole his bewitched ring. (This curious entity is al-Astorion himself. The tale of the ring is just a fancy tale, though, and inquisitive questioning only leads to confused and contradictory tales about the palace of the evil sprite and her blood-sucking tiger butterflies.)

- The great lords of the forest have all been looking for the houses of the sprites, but thankfully couldn’t find them. These shambling hills are the Ravening Bigheads, who serve the Bigheadeast Greatling, a monster of legend. (These would be Ooi and his apes.)

- Last but not least, if the great heroes have already saved the fairy-folk from this Tyrannical Peril, they could as well slay his brother; Horrendous Hornnose the Trollogre Malevolent. This new danger has only been spotted once thus far, but it proved to be even more cruel than the cave demon: it slew ten sprites with the snap of a finger by turning them and their surroundings into solid ice. He probably lives nearby, since his riotous singing is often heard. (This is Drahibadar the ogre mage from area 21.)

Finally, the sprites give a commemorative gift to the characters: a fine drinking cup roughly equivalent to a thimble in size. They may also show their greatest treasure to a particularly friendly company. The “World-Gate” is a “major artifact” leading

into another dimension, very similar to our own but entirely different! The “greatest archmages” of the tribe are currently working on getting the portal operational – after all, they had only seen pleasant woods and other sprites there, with no sign of any demons, ravening bigheads or trollogre malevolents. The item in question is a round mirror.

19. Fire nuts

Three stone benches encircle a knotted tree with several thin branches. The tree is similar to walnut in every respect, but the nuts have a ceramic shell (break DC 12, Hardness 5, hp 2) and explode for 2d6 points in 5’ when broken. Aside from this minor inconvenience, the interior is edible and sweet. There are 13 nuts on the tree; they may be cultivated if the ground of the saplings is regularly sprinkled with sulphurous ashes.

20. Warning

The path to the southeast is marked by two rows of stakes bearing skulls; among them two human ones wearing horned helmets. If someone passes between the skulls, one of the pair speaks: “*See, pal, these won’t be getting far either...*” to which the other replies: “*Sure enough, they don’t look so tough to me. The first Breath of Death would kill half of the bunch, maybe more. And remember when that guy was SQUASHED BY THE CEILING?*”

The speaking skulls are just a scare – the ogre mage living further on used a scroll to cast *magic mouth* on the pair of them to go off when a well-armed group approaches.

21. Cave IV. – The Den of Drahibadar

Drahibadar the ogre mage set up his base of operations a year ago in this 20’ by 40’ cavern. He spend most of his time in contemplation and counting his treasure – there is a 15% chance he is out hunting.

Drahibadar, though evil, isn’t automatically hostile, although he is always suspicious. Unless attacked on sight, he is willing to parlay, and if

convinced of good intentions, he welcomes PCs to a keg of homemade ale. Drahibadar knows a bit about al-Astorion’s past and is familiar with his present state, but hasn’t been to his garden beyond the first level. He is unwilling to go into details, except to note that “it is a dangerous place, where nothing is like it seems” (he was almost killed by the hermit’s peacocktrices one time, and only survived thanks to his stone of good luck).

His knowledge on Ladgloun is extensive – he has come here to loot his abandoned tower, but couldn’t bypass the outside door. If he learns the party has been inside, he offers up to 1000 gp for the secret, believing one of the wizard’s spellbooks is still in a hiding place he had once heard about. Alas, the book in question is in the treasury of a salamander lord now, but Drahibadar will suspect the PCs...

In combat, the ogre mage is well prepared: he opens with *cone of cold*, followed by *charm person* on the strongest and dumbest looking (or sounding!) fighter type. The rest he tries to kill with his sword. If Drahibadar is “slain”, he lets the characters loot his lair, as his regeneration ability lets him return from the dead any time. In this case, he stalks his victims while flying invisibly, and picks them off one by one with his *cone of cold* or huge longbow. After every successful attack, he returns to his invisible state and waits for another opportunity. As he is calculating and shrewd, he can choose an advantageous ambush point instead of blindly getting himself killed.

The furnishings of Drahibadar’s cave consists of a rough goat-legged table, a wooden stool, three barrels of his own ale and a barrel of vinegar, a whole lot of smoked meats, a straw bed and a lantern. Drahibadar also has a display of his more important victims on a shelf, each accompanied by a graven iron plate. In order: “Subrahin the Master Thief”, “Zathold the Strong” (in horned helmet), “Hollengrin the Modest” (wears a golden crown which appears to be 4000 gp in

value, but is in fact a 320 gp fake) and “Father Eric”.

He keeps his treasure in an iron cauldron by the table, although it is usually spilled on the table as he admires the hoard. 6100 sp, 1100 gp and two golden ewers (2*400 gp) are found here. His only magical item is a *stone of good luck* woven into his hair.

Drahibadar: CR 8; HD 5d8+15; hp 43; Init +4; Spd 30/40 fly; AC 20 (-1 size, +5 natural, +6 banded mail); Atk +8 *huge greatword*+1 2d8+7 (19-20/*2), 10' reach **or** +2 huge longbow 2d6; SA fly, spell-like abilities; SQ regeneration 2 [also rises from the dead once his hp is back to ½ of the total], SR 18; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +4; Str 20, Dex 10, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 17.

Concentration +7, Listen +6, Spellcraft +5, Spot +6

Fly (Su): the ogre mage can fly at will through simple concentration.

Spell-like abilities (Sp): *invisibility* and *darkness* at will, *charm person*, *gaseous form*, *sleep* and *cone of cold* once per day, as a 9th level wizard.

22. The Garden of al-Astorion

This gigantic terraced garden is al-Astorion's home and greatest accomplishment. Probably not even the hermit knows how much of the three levels had he built himself, and how much had he used from the ruins of the ancient past. In any case, the results are beyond mortal measure: three terraces strengthened by cycloptic stone walls rise above the valley, with a height of 90', 60' and 45' respectively. The stairs to al-Astorion's cave are an additional 30', for a total height of 225' or 75 metres.

The massive slabs of the repaired walls are supplemented by more recent construction. These additions are much more decorative, but also less durable. Whereas the terraces have weathered untold years, the intricate balustrades are falling into disrepair fast. Large blocks have already fallen along the edges, and the rest of the stonework is just

as perilous. Using ropes and grappling hooks, there is a 60% probability of triggering an avalanche of rocks. If the PC fails to pass a DC 16 Reflex save or Tumble check, he suffers 1d6 points per 10' fallen from falling rocks, **in addition to** the usual falling damage.

Although it may look like a good idea on first sight, circumnavigating the garden by levitation and magical flight can be very dangerous: the vigilant **peacocktrices** from the higher garden (area I.) attack the character midair and try to turn him into stone. If they succeed, there is a good chance the petrified body is smashed to smithereens from the fall!

a. Entrance and First Stairs: Visitors to the garden are greeted by a decorative but crumbling stairway. A multitude of plants grow in the cracks or the shade of exotic trees, exhaling an intoxicating fragrance which seems to cause a drunken euphoria of joy and contentness. Strange birdcalls are heard from afar. The variety of the flowers is truly maddening, from round, bulbous pods to slender creepers, from flat leaves to curling stalks. Although all this vegetation grows wild, there is evidence of a creator here: someone once went to great lengths to bring order to the randomness. Even in abandonment, a sort of pattern can be discerned, primarily in the straight row of evenly placed rose bushes whose tendrils have entwined the stairs leading upwards. But again, the tiny red flowers point at a wild origin.

The astute observer (Spot DC 14) can also note a metallic glint at the stone pavilion halfway the climb: someone has hidden a small coppery cylinder in the gaps of the wall. The case contains a single slip of parchment with a written warning: *“Nothing remains here but nefarious hatred and demented malevolence. If you life is dear, turn back – we didn't, and paid the price of our greed in full. – Tal Unnar”* The pavilion is deserted otherwise: it once served as a rest-stop, and its mossy stone benches are still as inviting as ever.

b. Clearing of the Statue: A life-sized statue stands on a rectangular pedestal not far from where the stairs end: it depicts a thin man in simple clerical robes. He appears to be in his mid sixties, with a bald head and a hairless, wrinkled face. The proud nose and piercing eyes (which seem oddly alive, as if they were following the onlooker) lend him an air of nobility. The following inscription is found on the pedestal: “BE WELCOME, TIRED WAYFARER, BE A HUNDREDFOLD WELCOME. YOUR TRAVELS WERE LONG, BUT YOU MAY FIND REFRESHMENT IN MY GARDEN IF YOU HAVE COME IN PEACE AND GOOD WILL.” A discarded pewter cup lies next to the statue.

This statue is al-Astorion’s self-portrait; even a look at the type of the robes reveals him to be a follower of Emoré. It was created in his sane years, before his mind became clouded. In madness, the cleric has imbued it with magical powers. Anyone looking into the statue’s eyes (such as a player who declares his character tries to determine whether the image is *really* following him with its eyes) must roll a DC 18 Fortitude save to avoid being changed into a random animal (as *polymorph other* spell) and a DC 18 Will save to avoid psychological change. Roll on the table below for results.

Once covered or destroyed (Hardness 8, Hp 60), the statue isn’t dangerous any longer. Multiple paths leave this clearing: a path marked by stone slabs sunk into the earth leads southwest, and two less distinct trails enter the northeastern woods.

c. Dark Wood: The narrow trails wind their way among thick-crowned, dark trees, whose twisted trunks and irregular knots make them look like ugly goblins. The air is perpetually cool and humid; a result of inadequate sunlight – even during the day, twilight gloom sits on this place. The undergrowth is rich in ferns, moss and all

Form (1d100)

- 01-20 Mongoose
- 21-35 Lizard
- 36-50 Rabbit
- 51-65 Ferret
- 66-75 Fox
- 76-85 Monkey
- 86-90 Wolf
- 91-95 Panther
- 96-98 Bear
- 99-00 Fantastic

Psyche (d10)

- 1-2 Afraid of former companions, flees in panic
- 3-4 Becomes completely apathetic
- 5-6 Hostile
- 7-8 As usual
- 9 All relations reversed
- 10 Servile and faithful

kinds of plants thriving in an environment of wet rot.

This secluded little corner of the garden hides **six beds of purple moss** clinging to the northern sides of the trees, as well as an inviting magical spring. In the sub-map, moss beds are marked by asterisks (*) and the spring by an encircled dot (⊙). Some beds are accompanied by items left by previous victims.

The spring is found in the middle of a small clearing where the foliage parts to let in some sunlight. A narrow creek flows from within a pile of rocks, collecting in a shallow, 5’ diameter pool created by human hands. The waters have two effects: first, every quaff heals 1d6 hp (6d6 hp per person per day maximum); second, it dulls the mind and makes the imbiber susceptible to mind control, with a –2 to all relevant saves per quaff. The latter effect lasts until it is “slept off” or the character is killed by the moss on his way out. Of course, at first, only a light-headed euphoria is felt.

The contents of the moss-beds are:

#1: the bones of various small animals

#2: the skeleton of a man, which barely protrudes from the soft hummus. It wears a totally corroded and acid-eaten full plate armour, but the magical *+1 heavy mace* is intact and usable.

#3: nothing

#4: small diamond ring (Search DC 26) – non-magical, but worth 1300 gp.

#5: nothing

#6: three skeletons: an elf, a wolf and a human. The elf wears crumbling leather armour with a few intact buckles, and has five 20 gp gems in a leather pouch. The human's chainmail and the contents of his backpack are ruined.

Purple Moss (CR 2): This species of moss usually feeds on the fluids of trees, but also preys on “much richer” sources of nourishment such as animals or sentient creatures. It emits a sweet aroma in a 10' radius which has a strong soporific effect identical to a potent *sleep* spell (Fortitude DC 12 avoids). If someone falls asleep nearby, the seemingly innocuous moss spreads over the body with a devilish speed, covering small creatures in three and medium creatures in four rounds. Beings so covered begin to suffocate as per the DMG. Victims are completely dissolved by the growth's digestive fluids in 1d2 hours. Fire completely destroys purple moss.

d. Thorny Thicket: Unruly brambles have covered this entire area; they have even crept up the trees and started to choke their branches. They are very resilient and have reddish leaves. The growth has also blocked the path leading through it, so that only a sharp blade can create an opening. This thicket is identical to a permanent *wall of thorns* spell (damage 25-AC per round spent moving). Even if cleared away, the mass regrows in 1d4 hours as if nothing had happened. **Four cobra flowers** – sizable vegetable horrors with rubbery, serpentine stalks, “hoods” composed of serrated leaves and toothy

maws – hide by the path; they attack characters passing nearby.

Cobra Flowers (4): HD 6d8+18; hp 47, 52, 46, 48; Init +1; Spd 20; AC 14 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +4 natural); Atk +6 bite 1d6+4+1d6 acid+grab; SA improved grab; SQ blindsight; AL N; SV Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 16, Int -, Wis 13, Cha 9.

Improved Grab (Ex): the cobra flower gains a +11 on all grapple checks. If it grapples its opponent, it inflicts 1d6 points of damage every round and hits automatically with its bite attack.

e. Tool Shed: A 20' by 30' storage area lies below the second stairway. The wooden door has rotted so thoroughly that a good shove sets the pieces flying. Gardening tools: hoes, spades, rakes, shears and other implements lie by the walls, as well as a few wooden ladders, sacks of grain, etc. A monstrous wine press stands before the far wall. The mangled, pulped bodies of a woodsman and a fighter lie in its basin. All of the equipment here is too corroded to be useful anymore.

f. Second Stairway: The second stairway is much more intact than the first. The intricate stonework of the balustrade imitates curling vines and plant life – truly a magnificent work of art. A pleasant rest stop lies halfway, with a round marble table and two stone benches allowing one to observe the valley in comfort. A human skeleton sits on one of the benches, looking at the stairs leading downwards. The bones of the skeleton are covered by a glittering growth of limestone crystals, which also affix it to its seat. It appears inanimate on first sight, but a closer look reveals the ribcage is rising and falling rhythmically, as if the corpse was breathing... This is indeed correct, as although the pitiful being can no longer see or move, he is “alive” in a sense, and is able to communicate in a wheezing and

asthmatic speech, even though this obviously causes it heavy discomfort.

The skeleton is the remains of Frederic, a swordsman who came to this land in pursuit of its treasures. Exhausted by a battle that claimed his companions, he retreated to this easily defensible spot to rest before contemplating further actions. However, when he awoke next morning, he found he was unable to move his stiff limbs. He experienced slow and painful starvation during the next weeks, and was only sustained by the morning dew. Even so, he was delirious and close to death when “He” appeared. This mysterious saviour, a kindly old hermit, treated him with utmost consideration and even brought plentiful food and water to ease his suffering. When, however, Frederic asked him for freedom, he just smiled mercilessly and asked, “Are you not already free of your troubles?” After this, he saw the apparition again and again, always receiving the best treats – fragrant wines, juicy roasts and intoxicating honey “as sweet as sunlight”. Pleas for freedom continued to fall on deaf ears. When at last he cursed his captor and saviour, the old man grew angry and left, never to return. His final words were how he would “regret this despicable ingratitude” and also – even more disturbingly – that “it is useless to think of his freedom, as he has forfeited his soul and will nevermore reach the Netherworld, no matter what he did”. This was the last Frederic saw of the old man of the garden. After a prolonged suffering, he died, but some sort of evil sorcery kept him in a state of existence even in death – blind and immobile, but cognizant.

Frederic is deadly afraid of destruction, but also desires to end the pain. If this is done for him, either by physically destroying the body or clerical turning, he exhales his soul with a hollow sigh. Contrary to al-Astorion’s lies (who was also responsible for the curse that bound him here), he will not be denied the afterlife, whomever this detail may concern.

g. The Madman: Huge blocks have fallen from the walls of the third terrace at this location, creating a large rock pile in the bare clearing. Insane, loud sobbing and laughing is heard from underneath a sizable boulder. Characters who investigate are greeted by a horrendous sight: a filthy wretch of a man writhing in his own waste lies buried by an avalanche of rocks – only the upper half of his body protrudes from the pile. His hair and beard is long and unkempt, his tanned skin wrinkled and caked with dirt, the eyes gleaming in insane glee. Any clothes he might have had have decayed so much that they may not be distinguished from the putrescence he wallows in.

This unfortunate is in an even sorrier state than Frederic, able to speak but mostly incoherent, babbling inarticulately and in a halting manner. He was once a priest, of which deity he no longer knows. He came here as a pilgrim, probably to relay some kind of good news to someone, a singular purpose that still fills him with joy as he tries to remember it, even though he can no longer do so, just like he no longer knows who he is and how he came to be in this position. All he can talk about is “The Holy Man” – he speaks of him in hushed awe – who saved him and nourishes him selflessly, with no concern for his own benefit. If someone dispells the comfortable illusion, a great change comes over the former priest: he becomes panicked, and beseeches the PCs in tears to end it all and save him from his sufferings – but as soon as someone would draw a blade, the recognition lapses, and he again wants to live with every fibre of his being – after all, “he had received such a beautiful and true promise that life is worth living to its inevitable conclusion!”

h. Apple Tree: This small, plain apple tree bears opalescent red fruits. If characters approach and touch either the tree or the apples, it withers before their eyes, collapsing into a heap of thick, grey sludge. It doesn’t attack in any noticeable

way, but after receiving 25 points of damage, it emits a pitiful cry as it transforms yet again – into a bloody corpse, obviously bearing the mark of the weapons who destroyed her.

The *programmed illusion* – for it is an illusion – may be undone with *true seeing*, *dispel magic* (DC 25) or plain doubt (Will DC 20 – if a character provides a good reason for being doubtful, he receives a +4 on the roll), revealing a paralysed young woman looking on the characters in mortal terror. It is evident she is trying to talk, but no words emerge from her mouth. If she is approached by an intelligent humanoid, the paralysis is dispelled for a minute (during which the “tree” changes into the “sludge”) and she tries to ask for help – unaware of the mirage covering her.

The woman, **Lita**, came to the garden with Mal-Bazhar’s expedition. When her companions encountered the peacocktrices in the higher garden, she fled in terror and got lost, too afraid to emerge even when the companions themselves were retreating. She was discovered here by al-Astorion later, who promptly changed her into a tree. Currently, Lita wears a linen shirt and leather pants, having lost the rest of her equipment. All she knows of the valley is what she has seen so far – which is the forest where the apes live (but not their cave), the huge open field with the lake, and the garden itself.

Lita, female human Ftr4: HD 4d10-4; hp 25; Init +3; Spd 30; AC 13 (+3 Dex); Atk +6 (currently unarmed); AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 8, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 11.

Swim +9, Craft: Pottery +10; Profession: Sailor +10; Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus: longbow.

i. Gazebo and Statue: An artistic, pleasant little gazebo constructed of fine marble is found at this place. The statue of a woman wearing flowing robes stands underneath its dome. The sheaf in her hands and the

arrangement of the garment reveal her to be Emoré (Knowledge: Religion DC 14), but the head has been broken off at the neck and replaced with the image of a cow. If the original stone is found (**j.** – not too far from here) and restored, the statue speaks: she asks the characters to heal Rammah al-Astorion instead of killing him. If this task is completed and the characters return before the image of the goddess, the character who was most active in the undertaking receives a *limited wish*, and all PCs – including the previous character – find a magical fruit among their food rations. Eating the fruit permanently raises a randomly determined saving throw (1d3: 1-Fortitude, 2-Reflex, 3-Will) by +2.

j. Silent Glade: Old trees cluster here in an open glade covered with knee-deep dry grass. The old head from the statue at **i.** lies here in the grass (Search DC 16), but directly underneath is a colony of **witherweed:** this dangerous plant resembles dry grass in all respects, and covers a 30’ by 30’ area.

Witherweed: CR 5; HD 5d8+15; hp 35; Init +0; Spd 0; AC 12 (-2 size, +4 natural); Atk 17*+1 fronds (touch) 1d4 Dexterity, 10’ reach; SA dexterity drain, death smoke; SQ camouflage, plant, blindsight; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 16, Int -, Wis 13, Cha 9.

Dexterity Drain (Ex): the touch of a witherweed deals 1d4 points of temporary Dexterity damage to a living foe. A creature can attempt a Fortitude save (DC 14) to halve the loss.

Death Smoke (Ex): if subjected to fire, the witherweed releases a deadly cloud of smoke that billows forth, covering a 5’ radius in a single round and every round thereafter, until it reaches a maximum radius of 30’. Creatures caught in the smoke must roll a DC 14 Fortitude save each round or suffer 2d6 points of Constitution damage. Another save must be made 1 minute later to avoid an

additional 2d6 points of Constitution damage.

Camouflage (Ex): since the witherweed looks identical to grass, a DC 20 Spot, Knowledge: Nature or Knowledge: Plants check is necessary to notice it before striking.

k. Third Stairway – Dahim ap Tolvin:

This stairway is the most ornate of them all. It was built from rosy and red marble, inlaid with jade, onyx and other precious stones. Its perfectly intact floral patterns – reliefs and stonework – betray an extraordinary artistic talent.

This beauty is marred by rusty stains and a steady trickle of blood which has eaten itself into the porous stone and fouled it. Halfway up the stairs stands a virtual embodiment of valour, a warrior of grey stone clad in stone armour, wielding a stone sword and looking upon the characters with unmoving stone eyes. Only his blood betrays a human origin: it leaks in thin streams from underneath the mail, collects in a pool under his feet and runs down the steps until it is hungrily swallowed by the ground. The old knight's noble features, moustache and lined face betray age, yet he still bears himself proudly. The equipment he carries is exquisite, worthy of the greatest heroes even in stone form.

The warrior, **Dahim ap Tolvin**, was luckier than Frederic or the insane priest under the stones. He calls out aloud to the characters and warns them not to approach lest he be forced to slay them one by one in fair combat, as he is bound to do by a powerful geas. He asks them to stay where they are and don't violate his ward.

As long as his request is honoured, he remains friendly although resigned. He can tell the characters what he knows about the garden, or even its current master. In youth, he was Rammah al-Astorion's closest friend and companion, although instead of the clerical profession, he chose a life of swordsmanship and battle. Thus, he was a soldier in distant lands – with his

men, he visited deserts where ancient magic has turned the sands into brittle glass; he breathed the poisonous air in jungle-caves to the south and fought with the crude-hearted, misanthropic nomads of the frozen wastelands. Only upon his return did he learn that al-Astorion had left the city they grew up in so many years ago; when he learned of the fate that befell Mal-Bazhar's companions, he decided to visit his former friend and somehow try to bring him to his senses.

He came alone and almost succeeded in the end. Al-Astorion immediately recognized the knight and gave him a warm welcome. However, he didn't want to speak of the horrors found in his garden, and downright refused to acknowledge he had ever done evil. When ap Tolvin wouldn't relent, he grew furious and hateful, accusing the old champion of betraying their friendship and before he could react, turned him into stone with a snap of his fingers, forcing him to forevermore serve as his bodyguard. ap Tolvin bears no ill will towards the man who did this, and he is prepared to accept fate – someone who has seen so much in life will not be afraid of any destiny, even if it is worse than a clean death. Even now, he holds an unmoving faith that the hermit isn't beyond help and someone may yet break the insanity that befell him. Of course, he doesn't let anyone pass by his post alive, and fights to the end. If necessary, he suggests a fair one-on-one duel. It may also be possible to bypass him somehow – this is up to the players and the Judge. Note that ap Tolvin's spell resistance, high AC and *protection from normal missiles* makes him a formidable opponent even though he can't leave the stairs.

Dahim ap Tolvin, male human Ftr 10: HD 10d10+20; hp 77; Init +5; Spd 20; AC 28 (+9 +1 *full plate armour*, +1 Dex, +8 natural); Atk +16/+11 +2 *bastard sword* (two-handed) 1d10+11 (17-20/*2); SQ spell resistance 20, *protection from normal missiles* (permanent, from a *wish* spell);

AL LG; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8. Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Improved Initiative, Specialisation (bastard sword), Improved Critical (bastard sword), Weapon focus (battle axe), Specialisation (battle axe).

I. Higher Garden: The terrace at the top of the stairs is al-Astorion's most beautiful achievement, intended to be the most flawless garden created by human hands. Even in abandonment and ruin, it is an impressive sight due to the inherent harmony created during its construction. The colourful flowers growing in the flower beds are exquisite both in variety and beauty. Five different kinds of roses grow on the rotting wooden lattices, and the five trees – each bearing a different type of enchanted fruit – would not look out of place in the inner park of an emperor. Glinting gems grow on the first, multicoloured glass globes on another, and the rest bear the most inviting peaches, pears and apples one may see anywhere in the world. The grass (even though weedy) is fresh and emerald-green; the waters of the small round pool are clear and transparent, only obscured by the water lilies on the surface. Masterfully executed statues make the scene all the more pleasing: there is an elf reaching for something in the grass, a hunting dog, a morose dwarf brandishing his axe, a cleric with outreached hands and a calmly standing robed wizard. Four colourfully plumed peacocks look on the characters with lazy interest.

After a single moment of hesitation, the dreadful **peacocktrices** (unholy mixtures between peacock and cockatrice!) attack in a hissing fury. They spread their feathers to hypnotize these new candidates for their statue collection, and at least two rush the immobilized victims to turn them to stone one by one (of course, if their vile poison is ineffective, the hypnosis is broken

immediately!). Of the peacocktrices, there are three roosters and one hen – the latter is incapable of hypnosis. If pressed, the monsters try to flee by flight, and return later to deal with the characters.

In addition to the avian horrors, there is another, more subtle danger in the garden: two rose bushes are **vampiric**, and attack as soon as someone is in range. The peacocktrices avoid the rose garden even in the heat of combat. The roses can also slither in the grass slowly and ambush victims from behind.

Peacocktrices (4): CR 4; HD 5d10; hp 27, 29, 30, 15; Init +3, Spd 20/60 fly; Atk +4 bite 1d4-2 plus petrification; SA hypnotic plumage, petrification; AL CE; SV Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 6, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 18.

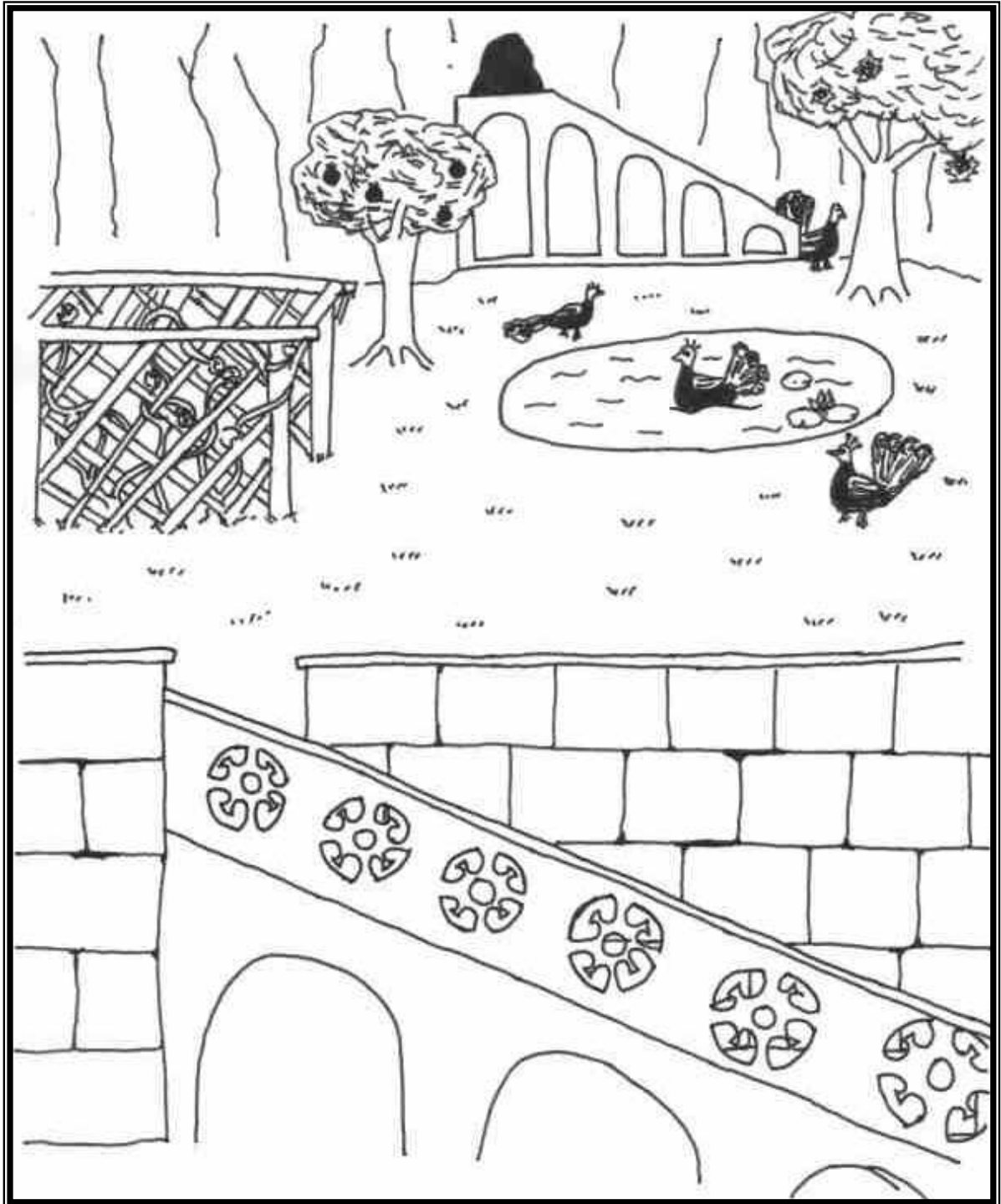
Spot +7, Listen +7; Alertness, Dodge.

Hypnotic Plumage (Su): as per *rainbow pattern*, peacocktrices are capable of hypnotizing up to 24 HD of creatures each. The hypnosis fails if the victim rolls a successful DC 16 Will save, or when the monster hits with its beak. Hypnotized beings stand around and gaze on the plumes – if, for some reason, the monster goes out of sight, the spell is broken n 5 rounds. One character may only be hypnotized one time per encounter, although multiple saving throws may be necessary if more than one monster is encountered.

Petrification (Su): a character hit by a peacocktrice must roll a DC 15 Fortitude save to avoid being turned to stone by the creature's venom.

Vampire Roses (2): CR 3; HD 4d8+12; hp 31, 24; Init +0; Spd 5; AC 15 (+1 size, +4 natural); Atk +6 stalk 1d4+2+grab, 10' reach; SA improved grab, blood drain; SQ camouflage, plant, blindsight; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 10, Con 16, Int -, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Improved Grab (Ex): the vampire rose has a grapple bonus of +2. If it grabs, it can drain blood thereafter.



Blood Drain (Ex): with a successful grapple check, the rose can drain 1d4 points of Constitution every round. For every point, the plant gains 1 hp, even above its usual maximum.

Camouflage (Ex): the rose looks innocent until it attacks. A DC 20 Spot, Knowledge: Nature or Knowledge: Plants check reveals its true nature.

Once the monsters have been dealt with, the treasures of the garden are there for the taking. The most important, of course, are the magical trees. They are as follows:

#1 – pears: 4 fruits. Each pear decreases the consumer's age by 1d6 years. May not be reproduced.

#2 – apples: 2 fruits. Every apple increases Intelligence by +2 *permanently*, although one person may only benefit from a single fruit. The gain doesn't combine with any other form of supernatural ability increase. May not be reproduced.

#3 – peaches: 13 fruits. The peaches cure 3d8+6 hp each. They may be reproduced only in ground periodically consecrated by a priest of Emoré (such as a temple's garden). If the PCs successfully propagate this species in the temples of the goddess, the Judge should award extra experience points in addition to the eternal gratitude of the priesthood.

#4 – gems: 22 "fruits". Every gemstone is worth 200 gp. The tree may not be reproduced in any way.

#5 – glass globes: 4 transparent, fist-sized globes. Each globe is of a different colour and each has a different effect as long as it is kept in one's possession:

Blue: electricity resistance 5.

Green: acid resistance 5.

Red: fire resistance 5.

Yellow: Toughness (as feat).

Characters who thoroughly search the cliffs (Search DC 24) or use *detect magic* in the area may find the two eggs of the peacocktrices in a narrow gap. If they are eaten raw, they grant a permanent immunity to petrification to the consumer. It is also possible to hatch them in a warm

environment (30% probability) or horse dung (80% probability). The hatchlings are faithful to the character they first see ("Mommy!") and may be trained for various tasks or employed as guardians.

The stone statues in the garden are former adventurers once belonging to Mal-Bazhar's expedition:

- **Elf:** Calithena, elf Fighter 5 (Neutral Good)

- **Hunting Dog:** Fifi, war dog (use wolf stats)

- **Dwarf:** Meilgan Erg, dwarf Fighter 5 (Lawful Good)

- **Cleric:** Father Damien, human Cleric 4 (Neutral)

- **Wizard:** Teath Dribble, human Wizard 5 (Lawful Evil)

m. Musical Stairs: the final flight of stairs is made of seven different metals. Stepping on every step produces a note, and going all the way up results in a melody – cheerful at first, but increasingly more sombre, finally culminating in a dissonant cacophony of chaotic accords. Anyone who would take the last step must roll a DC 16 Will save or flee in terror. Another day must pass until a new attempt may succeed.

n. Hermit's Cave: al-Astorion's quarters are spartan and without any sort of decoration. The cave's furnishings consist of a wooden table, two rough benches, a cot and a woven reed mat. This is where characters may encounter the insane cleric... although his goddess no longer grants spells to her former servant, the priest still possesses the divine gifts of Transmutation and Construction, two superhuman abilities granted at the beginning of his great endeavour. Together with the madness, the powers make al-Astorion a dangerous and unpredictable opponent.

al-Astorion is an old man in his 70s or 80s. His tanned skin is full of wrinkles but he has lost all hair – his head is smooth and round. He has a piercing gaze and, in his

clear periods, a manner which is dry and factual. He wears simple robes, copper bracers and a staff that was once magical but has since run out of charges,

Rammah al-Astorion, male human ex-Cleric 10: HD 10d8+10; hp 46; Init +2, Spd 20 (limp); AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 bracers); Atk +6/+1 staff 1d6-1 subdual damage; SA transmutation, construction; AL **varies**; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +14; Str 9, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 20, Cha 14.

Knowledge: Nature +17, Profession: Engineer +17, Knowledge: Religion +10, Heal +9, Concentration +14, Wilderness Lore +17, Profession: Garden Building +27 [+10 as a divine gift]. Iron Will, Brew Potion, Craft Miscellaneous Items, Build Magical Gardens, Scribe Scroll.

Spells and domains: previously Plant, Healing, today nothing.

The Gift of Transmutation (Sp): al-Astorion is able to transform living or unliving matter into almost any other form he desires – practically, this ability is close to being unlimited except the following restrictions:

- a) it is incapable of raising the dead or healing
- b) the size of the transformed object or person may not change
- c) divine beings and artifacts are unaffected.

A person hit by the power may resist its effects with a DC 20 Fortitude save. The effects are permanent unless reversed by appropriate spells.

The Gift of Construction (Sp): with this ability, al-Astorion is able to build any structure he desires up to the size of a smaller castle, or accomplish any manual task he could need to be done. The ability is only capable of actual building, and it isn't any faster than using human slaves or labourers – it is basically equivalent to the work of 100 people.

What happens to al-Astorion and how the expedition concludes is up to the player

characters – and the priest himself. His insanity manifests in quick and drastic mood swings, essentially multiple personalities which have manifested as an unconscious effort to survive his decades-long solitude. When the PCs arrive, roll 1d3 to determine which personality is dominant. Every hour, or any time al-Astorion is subjected to some kind of shock, roll again, but use 1d6 instead. For example, if someone accuses him of evil deeds – e.g. “It is you who have crippled those unfortunates!” – another roll is called for. On the other hand, as long as

Mood (1d6)

1. Depressed: Alignment Chaotic Neutral. In this state, al-Astorion is completely aware of every monstrous deed weighing on his conscience. The realization leaves him completely despondent and helpless – he can neither move nor act, and is in fact only able to stare vacantly or speak slowly.

2. Helpful: Alignment Lawful Good. This is more or less his true nature, with one crucial difference: he is completely incapable of admitting to any wrong, even if he is confronted with concrete evidence. Furthermore, he is amnesiac, and doesn't remember any of the dangers or traps in his garden or points of interest in the valley proper.

3. Fearful: Alignment Chaotic Neutral. He is mortally afraid of everything: the characters, himself, the open sky, stairs, or anything someone could be afraid of. Like depression, this mood essentially turns him into an invalid.

4. Scheming: Alignment Chaotic Evil. The personality appears to be friendly, but this is merely the surface: with every thought, he schemes and plans in order to bring about the PCs' downfall. He may purposely give out bad advice (e.g. „Wall of thorns? Easy enough, it is an enchantment. Say the word 'Azalam' and step through – after all, it is nothing more than an illusion!”), but never implicates himself (e.g. in the above example, he turns the thorns into thin air around himself and merely says that the characters might have „mispronounced the correct word – it is A-zalam, as I have said”).

5. Hostile: Alignment Chaotic Evil. He attacks in a demoniac rage, with an equal chance for using his staff or his powers (if hard pressed, it will always be the latter). A few ideas are provided below.

6. Helpful: As point 2., but completely lost in thought.

conversation proceeds calmly and he is reminded of his fate, he may try to resist his mind slipping – as long as he keeps rolling successful Will saves (DC 20).



What to do with al-Astorion?

There are several conclusions the characters may come to as far as al-Astorion is concerned. Three courses of action and their consequences are listed here for the Judge's convenience.

1. Attack: it wouldn't be surprising if the PCs decided that al-Astorion is thoroughly evil or at least a potent threat and beyond help. If they attack him, he immediately turns **hostile** and attacks with his powers of transmutation. This power is absolutely lethal and almost always results in painful death or total incapacitation. A few examples of what a character could be turned into follow:

- a body made up of swarming centipedes and worms
- skeleton without skin or flesh, but retaining interior organs
- screaming crystal statue (if the Judge is cruel, it could be ice...)
- boneless jelly – the character's skin stays intact, but the flesh and bones inside collapse into a jelly, turning the hapless victim into a pitiful blob
- bleeding and whimpering mass of flesh
- ashes and cinders: the entire body is turned into porous charcoal, and gradually falls apart as the character shifts and moves

Although multiple PCs may be totally destroyed in the fight, al-Astorion is hardly

invincible – once killed, he is gone for good.

2. Capture: it is also possible that the characters intend to capture al-Astorion and bring him back to one of Emoré's shrines for healing. This task is very hard, since his capabilities make escape an almost certain occurrence: if this happens, the priest returns to his domain or attacks his captors during the dead of the night.

3. Restoration: possibly the best course of action. A *heal*, *restoration* from a 9th level cleric or *regenerate* are all sufficient to restore the hermit's broken mind. Scrolls or magical devices may easily be used, or – if this location has been discovered – the statue of Voltagame (**16/a.**) could help if al-Astorion is brought there and convinced to prostrate himself before the image. Of course, such a trek will not be straightforward...

If al-Astorion is successfully restored, he initially listens to the list of his misdeeds with scepticism, and later with growing agitation and finally total horror. With a great sadness, he starts to gradually undo the damage he had done and return his garden into what it was truly intended to be – not as a personal retreat, but a place where travellers may rest and recover under the watchful sight of the goddess Emoré. For this purpose, he recruits young disciples to aid in the task – someone who has seen the depths of isolation and insanity never wishes to return to it.

At first, al-Astorion may only offer his personal thanks, his magical bracers and the fruits found in the valley (which he gladly identifies for anyone). Later on, if his saviours return to the garden at some point in the future, he can also bestow a generous reward upon them in addition to his hospitality and the fruits of his labours.

THE END

APPENDIX – NEW MAGICAL ITEMS

Golden Skullcap (5; 6/d.)

This round headpiece is hammered from a single sheet of gold. It is usually worn by the psionic and clerical followers of certain mystical doctrines, and depending on the station of the person wearing it and the tenets of the doctrine, it may be as simple or elaborately decorated as one wishes. Common in the ancient days, it is no longer widely used. The skullcap gives a +2 enhancement bonus to saving throws against psionic effects and a +4 enhancement bonus to the DC of the psionic strike if the wearer is capable of it.

Caster level: 5. Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Items, *calm emotions*. Market value: 2.200 gp.

Ring of Rainbows (15/e.)

The Ring of Rainbows is an unique item – the sole specimen was owned and created by the wizard Ladgloun, who crafted it from a single piece of mountain crystal and a shimmering opal. With his disappearance, the secrets of its creation are lost to men.

The ring, which may only be used by wizards, calls into being a shimmering rainbow bridge of the preferred dimensions on a verbal command (this command is carved on the insides of the ring in the language of elemental air). The bridge may not be larger than 4 metres by 100 metres. It persists for an hour and a minute, and it may be used to span any gap as long as it is no larger than the maximum. It is able to support any weight placed upon it.

The Ring of Rainbows initially had seven charges; when it is found, it only has five. It may not be recharged.

Caster level: 11. Prerequisites: Forge Ring, *fly*, *rainbow pattern*. Market value: 6.200 gp.

Mirror of Exchange (17/e.)

The Mirror of Exchange is similar to a Mirror of Life Trapping with an important difference. It appears as a large, octagonal mirror with a silver frame and an ebony-black surface – this material was recovered from another dimension beyond our own.

If someone looks inside, he needs to roll a DC 18 Will save or disappear along with his equipment and change places with the mirror's previous occupant. The mirror may only hold one victim at a time, who can be freed by imprisoning another intelligent humanoid. Due to bulk and fragility, it is also hazardous to transport (Hp 16, break DC 12). If the mirror breaks, the character contained within is instantly slain, only brought back by a *wish* or *miracle*.

Caster level: 15. Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Items, *trap the soul*. Market value: 76.000 gp.

The Book of Horoscopes (17/f.)

Only the greatest diviners are said to own a copy of this wondrous folio. The Book of Horoscopes is found in the form of a book in this module, but its form may be completely different in other cultures: it could be a series of acid-etched metal sheets, a bundle of clay tablets bound together by leather straps, or even a complete *building* – a series of murals in an observatory or temple, for instance! Regardless of outward appearance, it always contains accurate astrological calculations, tables and diagrams, as well as detailed star maps. Due to its reliance on the night sky as seen by an observer, it is impossible to use a given volume more than 2000 miles from the point of its creation, or on another plane or planet.

A skilled astrologer (Knowledge: Arcane DC 20) may prepare a horoscope once per month by following the book's procedures at a given date. The horoscope may concern himself, a chosen character or the party as a whole. The resulting omens are usually vague and challenging to interpret, but always correct – it is a good way for the Judge to pass on hints

and “messages” to his playing group. A failed check (whose results shouldn't be revealed to the player) will provide an incorrect or incomplete pronouncement.

Caster level: 7. Prerequisites: Scribe Scroll, Craft Wondrous Items, *divination*. Market value: 6.200 gp.



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