

MURMUR THROUGH THE CRACKS

AN ADVENTURE MODULE FROM THE GM'S SECRET STASH

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An Adventure Module from the GM's Secret Stash



Presented by Quickphix

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A 3 - 6 Hour Adventure for 3rd to 4th Level Characters

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“I prepare them for what’s to come. Now, during daytime, it is easy for all of them to play the defenders, the soldiers. They will fight together, and they will persevere together. Yet, in their sleep their comrades won’t be able to reach them. It is these nights where life is at its most dangerous. It is for these nights; I train them. The next attack will come, and we will be prepared.”

– Janir Noga, Captain of the Temple Militia

Summary

Even a decade after the big battle against the necromancer Hermad, the lake region of Janoko has never been the same as before. Most of its towns have been ransacked and their inhabitants were turned into abominations in service of Hermad’s unholy army. The remnants of which still roam the countryside and attack the occasional traveller. Thus, even nowadays, new settlements don’t survive for long. The only exception is the small principality of Samin. While not a key player in the battle against Hermad, it managed to repel his forces for the past 100 years with the help of its sizeable militia. To this day, every citizen serves their time in either the Duke’s Rangers or the Temple Militia. The former are responsible for scouting out potential threats, the latter are in charge of defending Samin itself. This system has served the Saminians well: as the number of deaths by monster attacks have been decreasing each year. Yet, for a while now, more and more people have vanished from the town and even the watchful eyes of the Rangers haven’t been able to turn up their bodies. Could it be that a previously unheard-of monster has managed to infiltrate the resilient little town?

In this 3 – 6-hour adventure, a party of 3rd to 4th level characters rescue the life of one of the Duke’s Rangers and quickly find themselves involved in a dangerous investigation. Is someone in the town aiding a monster? Why does the Temple Militia hesitate to investigate the matter? To find out, the players must leave no stone unturned and keep an ear to the ground, listening to the “Murmur through the Cracks”

In your Campaign:

This adventure relies on variants of the D&D 5e monster Gibbering Moulder (MM. p. 157). It is best run with a smaller party, which can’t just fight its way through each obstacle. The final battle presents a high chance of TPK.

Premise – One Ranger’s Demise

While passing through the beautiful countryside of Janoko, the players happen upon an unsettling sight: a female half-elf is standing on a platform bolted to the top of an 18 ft. high oak, waving around the bloody carcass of a fawn. She has used its blood to draw some sort of war-paint on her face and is doing her best to be seen. As soon as she senses the players’ approach, she whirls around and points a loaded crossbow at them. Just a heartbeat later she lowers her weapon and yells at the players to get away from her. Just as she’s about to elaborate, a tall figure jumps from the thicket all the way up to the platform, snatching the carcass and throwing the half-elf off in the process. They hit the ground at the same time with the nasty crack of breaking bones. The jumping figure – already chewing on the fawn – turns its ugly head towards the players. Roll for initiative!

Carrion Leaper

Resembling a naked man with a large-teethed maw and strong, goat-like legs. Whatever unholy creator dreamed up this abomination wanted to make it abundantly clear what it would be used for: jumping high & biting down hard.

Ability Scores

AC: 14 / HP: 48 / Speed 40 / Challenge Rating: 3

STR: 15 (+2) / DEX: 17 (+3) / CON: 17 (+3)

INT: 8 (-1) / WIS: 8 (-1) / CHA: 6 (-2)

Traits

Resistances: cold, fire, lightning:

Immunities: necrotic, poison, charmed, frightened, poisoned

Created for Leaping: The Carrion Leaper's high jump with or without a running start is 20 feet. It takes no falling damage from falls of this height when landing on its feet. It has advantage on any saving throws made against effects that would push it or knock it prone.

Carrion Eater: If any of the Carrion Leaper's attacks pierce a target's skin, it has to pass DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 1d6 necrotic damage.

Actions

Multiattack: The Carrion Leaper makes two bite attacks or a leaping maw attack and a bite attack.

Bite: (+4 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d12+2 damage.

Leaping Maw (Recharge 5-6): The Carrion Leaper bolts into the air and crashes down, wildly snapping in all directions. Each creature in a 5ft. radius must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful throw, the target takes 2d6+5 bludgeoning damage from the impact, on failed throw it takes an additional 1d12 piercing damage from its snapping maw.

How to run this encounter

The half-elf ranger was knocked unconscious from the fall. Fortunately, the monster seems to have completely forgotten about her. The Carrion Leaper is driven by its hunger for flesh. It usually tries to take out single targets and then retreat. However, the scent of too much blood drives it into a frenzy; causing it to attack anything in sight. Such is the case with this one.

Rude Awakening

The noises of the fight (or its conclusion) will eventually wake up the half-elf. She has broken her shooting arm and several ribs from the fall. She introduces herself to the party as Zofia Dabrowa and thanks them for her

rescue. She wants to hire them to escort her back to Samin safely and offers a safe place for the party to stay and a warm meal as a reward (as she doesn't have much else).

Arriving in Samin

Whether or not the players take Zofia's offer, she'll show them the way to Samin. She also warns them to clean themselves of all blood they might have gotten on them. Should the players not heed this warning, they'll be attacked by another Carrion Leaper on their way through the dark Janoko woods.

Ranger Talks

Zofia is thankful to the players and is wondering what led a group of travellers into the infamous Janoko woods. After walking a while in quiet, Zofia might reveal the following information to the players:

- Zofia is a lieutenant with the Duke's Rangers, one of the two branches of the citizens' militia of Samin (true).
- She was out here as part of an exam, trying to earn a marshal's badge. This new rank would earn her the honour of commanding her own ranger troop. The test was to kill a Carrion Leaper alone and bring its head back to Samin as proof. She doesn't want to take the head of the Leaper the players just killed, as she sees it as unhonourable (true).
- The lake region of Janoko is still infested with all sorts of unholy creatures left-over from the battle against Hermad. Some of these creatures are able to conjure up further monstrosities – which is why the region hasn't become much safer in the past decade (true).
- Samin is the lone safe haven in Janoko, thanks to the citizens' Militia. Each adult Saminian is required to go through basic training and spends at least one year of their life in service with either of the two branches (true).

- The most accomplished soldiers of each of the two branches get the chance to join the permanent forces and lead their own troops (almost true – there is also a lot of political choices getting promoted).

Stew for the Rescuers

The players are welcomed warmly in the Duke's Yard (the Rangers' Headquarters – see Appendix I) by Zofia's colleagues and her Marshal Leonard Jordan. After getting Zofia some first aid, the players are treated to a hearty meal. During which, the players can learn the following things:

- For a bit longer than month now, people have been disappearing at an alarming rate (true - see Appendix II for details)
- Apart from a larger monster-attack 42 days ago, where several hitherto unclassified monsters directly attacked the city, there haven't been any signs of unusual monster activities (true). There also haven't been any deaths by monster attacks since (false – some general recruits died, but they don't want to admit that).
- The Captain of the Rangers, Edmund Krupa, and the Captain of the Temple Militia, Janir Noga, have been at odds with each other since the attack. Each one blames the other for the incident (true).
- There has been political infighting between the two factions for a while now (true). For this reason, both factions want to solve the disappearance cases themselves instead of collaborating (false).

Forming a Posse Comitatus

Leonard wants to hire the players to investigate the mysterious disappearances happening around Samin. The Duke has long suggested to forming an investigation unit of outsiders without any political ties: A Posse Comitatus. The Rangers would vouch for the players

and they'd be able to negotiate a high reward after finding the missing people or the cause of their disappearance. Meanwhile, they'd be able to live at the "Piotar's Honor" inn for free. Their investigator-status would also grant them access to all facilities owned by the militia.

Mystery in three phases

From here on out, the adventure follows three consecutive phases:

1. Investigation: finding leads on what happened during the night of the attack 42 days ago and how the Temple Militia might be the cause behind of the disappearances.
2. Infiltration: Finding where the Temple Militia are hiding their secrets and gaining access to the temple.
3. Confrontation: Foiling the Temple Militia's plan and surviving the encounter.

This module contains several encounters for each phase, which the GM can use to lengthen or shorten the adventure.

The Mystery in Overview

In order to improvise encounters, the GM needs a firm understanding of what happened and is happening in Samin. In the following, the true events are listed as they happened in chronological order:

- A group of a hitherto unknown species of monster attacks the city. Most of them are killed by the Duke's Rangers before reaching the city walls. Their corpses disintegrate into an acidic puddle after death – the Rangers burn the remains, just to be safe.
- Nevertheless, a few of these vaguely humanoid monsters infiltrate the city. All but one of them are killed by the Temple Militia. A young Ranger (victim no. 1, see Appendix II) follows the last one into the temple. After a short fight without any witnesses, it devours him and turns into a puddle of corrosive goo, burning

- a hole through the temple floor and deep down into its cellar.
- The resulting hole is first noticed by the clean-up crew and later by some citizens still holed up within the temple. They follow the path of destruction down into the temple's cellar. There, stuck in a crack, is a newly formed monster (Gibbering Mouter, MM p. 157). Its horrible murmurs echo through the cellar, driving all but the strongest willed insane. Both the clean-up crew and the siblings fall into the crack and are immediately killed.
 - Janir Noga (Temple Militia Captain) and one of his Sergeants (Klara Kumor – see Appendix II) investigate the disappearances and find the monster stuck in the cellar. Unprepared, Sergeant Kumor isn't able to withstand the murmurs and throws herself down the crack and is absorbed by the monster.
 - Janir Noga doesn't report the incident and declares the cellar to be caved in after the attack. The hole leading from upstairs into the cellar is fixed by the Temple Militia itself.
 - Janir Noga devises a plan, to use the monster's whispers to train the mind of his soldiers. He reasons, only the strong willed will be able to withstand the monster. After all, he was able to do it.
 - Janir Noga successfully tests his closest Sergeants by subjecting them to the murmurs. They survive and agree to his plan, to use the monster to strengthen the Temple Militia by strengthening the mind of its members.
 - They build a wall around the ancient cellar and both hide and trap the entrance. Nobody uninvolved in the plan is supposed to find their newly created "test chamber".
 - Janir Noga calls a new secret unit called "The Resolute" into being. All the members are handpicked by him and tested by having to listen the monster's murmurs for a full minute. Most of his recruits survive the challenge – those who don't wind up on the missing person list (see Appendix II).
 - Janir Noga is noticing, that repeated exposure to the murmurs not only strengthens the mind (at least that is what he thinks), but it also dampens the body's pain and the flight response. As a result, his "Resolutes" can shrug off incredibly painful blows and keep on fighting.
 - Janir knows, that the Duke would never allow him to keep using (and sometimes feeding) the monster, if he knew of its existence. Therefore, his plan is to strengthen his political ties, dissolve the power balance between the Temple Militia and the Duke's Rangers to his advantage and control Samin through his superior "Resolute" soldiers.

Phase 1: Investigation

The investigation phase takes place over a couple of days and consists of several false leads or distracting events. They can be run in any order and spread across as much time as the GM wants to.

First Interrogations

Depending on who the players interrogate about the disappearances, they will get different answers. Below is an overview of what the different factions will tell the players. They are separated by how hard the players must work to get to the answer (persuasion, intimidation, etc.):

The Duke's Rangers

1. Freely given: They believe a monster from the attack 42 days ago is behind the disappearances. It has managed to infiltrate the city and has made it its den.
2. After pushing a bit: They think it is weird that nobody in the militia has managed to find any trace of the bodies, signs of a struggle or a monster.
3. After earning trust: They believe the Temple Militia is much farther in the investigation than they are and that they aren't sharing their

insights to solve the case themselves and earn political favour with the Duke.

The Temple Militia (not aware of Janir's plans)

1. Freely given: They believe a new kind of monster is prowling the streets and causing these disappearances.
2. After pushing a bit: They think the monster is coming in from the outside – because if a monster from the attack 42 days ago were hiding in the city, they would have found it by now.
3. After earning trust: They believe the Rangers messed up during the night of the attack and let a new kind of monster escape into the woods. Rumour has it, that Janir has created an investigation unit of his own to spy on the Rangers (talking about the “Resolute”).

Janir Noga & The Resolute (lying)

1. Freely given: It doesn't matter where the monster is hiding, they'll find it sooner or later. It most likely is a new powerful enemy the Rangers let escape and aren't willing to admit they lost sight of.
2. After pushing a bit: The Temple Militia has been ramping up their patrols, because the Rangers are having trouble keeping up morale and discipline, despite being hit less hard by the disappearances.
3. After earning trust: More members of the Temple Militia have disappeared than Rangers. The Rangers might be trying to use this crisis to gain more political influence and is time to stop them.

The Duke and affluent citizens

1. Freely given: They believe the monster is clearly hiding in the city. Both the citizens and the Rangers would have noticed a beast wandering into the city every couple of nights.
2. After pushing a bit: The Rangers have been searching the woods tirelessly and have destroyed several monster dens in the process. Meanwhile, the Temple Militia hasn't been

able to protect the city from the mystery monster.

3. After earning trust: The Temple Militia has traditionally been getting as much funds as the Rangers – yet their services haven't been needed as much as the Rangers in recent years. They might be prolonging this investigation to establish their importance to the city.

Citizens from outside the city walls

1. Freely given: The monster must be somewhere within the city walls, as not many people living outside them have disappeared.
2. After pushing a bit: They believe the Duke's Rangers keep stirring up the monsters outside the city instead of helping the Temple Militia to make them look bad.
3. After earning trust: They believe the Rangers' Captain Edmund Krupta is trying to prolong the investigation to make the Temple Militia look bad and tire out Janir Noga – because the traditional captain's duel will take place at the end of the week.

Path tracing & Gathering clues

The players' investigation will reveal rather quickly, that most of the missing persons were either heading towards or coming back from the city's inner circle (Piotar Square & The Temple). Here are some ideas for diversions to make it harder to figure out where the people disappeared to.

Searching the Temple

Most players will want to investigate the temple first. The Temple Militia is really welcoming and shows them around their training grounds (see Appendix IV). They are even allowed to see the cellar (the Resolute have boarded up parts of it – see Appendix VI).

Piotar Square

The guardian (a Temple Militia Sergeant) of the armoury refuses to give the players access to both the armoury and the Militia's archives. He has nothing special to hide, he just doesn't trust these outsiders. The

players can either try to sneak in, convince him by challenging him to a 1-on-1 duel or by getting the Duke to order him to do it.

Piotar's Honour Inn

The innkeeper gets weirdly nervous when the players want to search his establishment. He's been asking some of the Ranger envoys to smuggle in rare and illegal spirits into Samin. Since he stores these exotic looking bottles in crates hidden on the attic, he's trying his best to divert the players from there. However, he's a terrible liar and gets nervous very easily. He will try to bribe the players to not spill his secret to the Duke but won't resort to violent means.

The Duke's Estate

The Duke will not grant the party entry past his foyer. Only the city's most esteemed citizens may walk the halls of his ancestral home. He assures the players politely, that everything is in order and even gets his personal Ranger guard to confirm it. Both the Duke and the Duchess won't be swayed from this position. Should the players infiltrate the estate, the only thing they might find is, that both the duke and the duchess are using the estate to freely sleep with multiple members of their staff. A secret they would be embarrassed about getting out but won't employ force to protect it.

The Duke's Yard

The Rangers are willing to let the party see any part of their facility. The only closed door they'll find is the one to the laboratory under the stables. The Rangers' chief scholar in charge of studying beasts performs his experiments down there (see next paragraph). Without his permission, they won't be able to enter.

The Tiny Moulder (Small Aberration)

This event is meant to give the players an idea of what the monster hiding in the city could be and what its attributes are.

During their investigations, the players hear a rumour, that one of Rangers' scholars has managed to obtain samples of one of the weird monsters which attacked the city 42 days ago. Since then, he's only been seen

sporadically – occasionally leaving his cellar to buy large quantities of alcohol. The players find him happy drunk in his cellar lab. The sample, which looks like a mouldy patch of rotten meat, is just lying in a pot on his desk. He informs the players that he learned only two things from the sample. Through his barely coherent ramblings, the players at first don't learn what these two things are. Yet he is keen to explain in detail, how he's been feeling an incredible thirst for alcohol ever since obtaining the sample. If the players press him harder, he'll reveal what he's learned. Laughing he pulls out a piece of meat, says "It still lives, and it eats!" and throws it into the pot containing the sample. The players hear a sucking noise and then the pot shatters. A corrosive puddle of molten flesh and tiny fangs scuttles across the floor and towards the players. Roll for initiative!

Ability Scores

AC: 8 / HP: 32 / Speed 15 / Challenge Rating: 1/4

STR: 8 (-1) / DEX: 10 (+0) / CON: 15 (+2)

INT: 3 (-4) / WIS: 8 (-1) / CHA: 6 (-2)

Traits

Immunities: prone, frightened

Babbling: The Tiny Moulder gives off a low murmur while it can see any creature and isn't incapacitated. Each creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the tiny moulder and can hear the murmurs must succeed on a DC 8 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn and rolls a d8 to determine what it does during its turn. On a 1 to 5, the creature does nothing. On a 5 or 8, the creature takes no action or bonus action and uses all its movement to move in a randomly determined direction.

Actions

Dissolving Bite: (+2 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d6 piercing damage & 1d6 necrotic damage. A creature of same size or smaller than the tiny moulder killed by this attack is absorbed into it.

How to run this encounter

After taking enough damage, the tiny moulder finally dissolves into a corrosive puddle on the floor. The

Rangers' scholar was just watching the fight, dumb-founded. He did not see this coming. However, with the mouther gone, his urge to drink suddenly vanished. He posits, that maybe feeding the thing made it stronger and gave it the power to weaken his mind.

Patrolling with the Nightwatch

This event is meant to inform the party of "The Resolute" and that there isn't a monster prowling the street, as the patrolling guards would've noticed it.

The players are invited by the Temple Militia to patrol the city's walls with them. They want to prove to them, that they are doing a good job and that the threat must be coming from the outside. They are assigned to patrol with one of the soldiers. He will tell the players about the upcoming tournament, during which the two militias will fight in different disciplines to earn glory and support from the population. He'll also inform the players, that Janir Noga has been fiercely preparing for this year's tournament, even going so far as to create a new unit – the Resolute. Their idle chat is interrupted by an attack of a carrion leaper (see above) – which is dispatched quickly by both the players and the soldier. It was followed by one of the Dukes Rangers, which was tailing it from the woods to the wall. In the ensuing argument between him and the guard from the Temple Militia, the players can choose to step in and earn the sympathy of one of the factions.

Janoko's Infested (medium undead)

Zofia and Leonard invite the players to follow up on a lead they received from one of their scouts. Apparently, a pack of undead resembling the monsters from the attack 42 days ago have been spotted in the woods. Upon arriving in the indicated spot, the players spot 4 humanoid figures with molten skin standing perfectly still in the middle of a clearing. Upon sensing them, they attack with incredible speed.

Ability Scores

AC: 8 / HP: 32 / Speed 40 / Challenge Rating: 1/2

STR: 13 (+1) / DEX: 10 (+0) / CON: 15 (+2)

INT: 3 (-4) / WIS: 6 (-2) / CHA: 5 (-3)

Traits

Immunities: poison, poisoned

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the Janoko's Infested to 0 hit points, they must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 +the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, they drop to 1 hit point instead.

Uncanny Speed. Janoko's Infested can move in and out of combat range without triggering an attack of opportunity.

Infested. Janoko's Infested carry a Tiny Mouther inside of them which feeds on their flesh. Once the Infested's hit points are reduced to 0, they are completely absorbed by the Tiny Mouther. If the resulting puddle isn't burned or cleansed with radiant damage, the Tiny Mouther will emerge after 1 minute after the death of its host.

Actions

Slam: (+3 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d6+2 bludgeoning damage.

How to run this encounter

After dispatching the 4 Infested together with Zofia and Leonard, they will want to inspect the remains before burning them. This gives the GM the change to prolong the encounter, by having 1 to 4 Tiny mouters emerging from the puddle. After the encounter, Leonard shares his deductions on the way back to Samin. He reasons, a variant of this monster might be responsible for the disappearances – seeing as it managed to completely dissolve the body of its host. This would explain why no bodies were found so far. However, it most likely isn't coming from outside the city, as these fast moving Infested would be very easy to spot and hear.

The Tournament of the Branches

The next morning, the players are awoken by trumpets. The much talked-about tournament of the branches is

finally here. The players are asked if they want to participate. If so, each of them can choose to aid one of the two branches (The Duke's Rangers or the Temple Militia). Depending on the players' choice, the day is spent in a number of friendly 1-on-1 duels against soldiers (see Appendix II) or even against each other (if the players have chosen different sides). Should one of the players win, they'll be awarded a small medal, earn the trust of the branch they have supported and be more favourably perceived by the citizens overall.

Throughout the day, the players learn that in previous years, the Duke's Rangers have had a slight edge over their competition. Edmund Krupta has also usually won the duel of the captains. However, this year, the Rangers are getting crushed, especially in the tournaments of the higher-ranked members. The reason of this is of course, that the Resolute can fight without feeling fear or much pain from their opponents' attacks. The day culminates with the duel of the captains, which demonstrates Janir Noga's newfound powers, as he was able to knock out his opponent even after being stabbed through the shoulder.

Final Clues

By now, the players have probably picked up on enough clues to suspect the Temple Militia. If not, the following hooks could be used to point towards Janir Noga and his Resolutes being the common denominator behind the disappearances:

- The players overhear two of the Resolute talking after the tournament, about how "The Captain's plan is working", "The stuff in the cellar is a miracle" and "Everything up until now was a small price to pay"
- A soldier from the Temple Militia secretly hands the players a note stating that she's seen something horrible and is fearing for her life. She wants to meet the players behind Piotar's Honour but never shows up. Shortly after, she's added to the list of disappearances.

- The players find a hidden journal of one of the missing persons, stating that they had a personal meeting planned with Janir Noga.
- One of the woodworkers tells the players about the huge hole in the temple's roof he's fixed and that the same hole extended down into the cellar but was apparently repaired by the Militia itself.

Phase 2: Infiltration

Once the players have heard at least one of the crucial clues or start throwing around accusations, Janir Noga will start spreading rumours about the party being foreign agents. He'll also order the Resolute to keep an eye on them and forbids them to roam the temple grounds freely. If confronted directly, he'll deny everything and forcibly throws the players out from the temple grounds.

What's the Plan?

Even if the players are aware, that Janir Noga might be the culprit behind the disappearances, they still need to find out how he did it, why he's doing it and where the missing people are. The following paragraphs outline some of the different approaches the players could take.

Secret Infiltration

The player might not be allowed on the temple grounds anymore, but plenty of other people are. They could either disguise themselves as members of the Temple Militia, woodworkers still repairing some damage within the temple or as cleaning & cooking staff. Using the information in Appendix V, the GM can judge the success of such attempts.

Persuading the Soldiers

If the players have performed well in the tournament or have created a special connection to one of the

members in the Temple Militia (who isn't part of the Resolute), they might be able to convince them to open the doors for them. However: The soldiers are on high alert due to the rumours spread by Janir. Also, if the soldiers have to choose between a direct order of their superiors and the players, they will always follow orders.

Official Orders

The bar might be high, but if the players manage to convince the Duke to write them an official warrant in his name, they'll be able to search the temple. To do this, the players must either have a very good connection to the Duke (e.g. by winning the tournament) or have something to pressure him (e.g. the orgies going on in his estate). Yet, even if the players manage to gain entrance to the temple this way, they'll still be under surveillance by the Resolute.

Storm the Temple!

A friendly fight is one thing – but a situation can always be escalated. Getting caught knocking out guards or even killing or magically incapacitating someone will have dire consequences. Should the players decide to attack alone, without coordinating with the Duke or his Rangers, they'll bring down the wrath of the entire Saminian Militia down on them. If they manage to convince the Rangers to work with them, they'll still have half of the militia as their enemy. Fighting their way through to the temple isn't impossible (see Appendix V) – but not particularly wise.

Phase 3: Confrontation

Regardless of how the players manage to find the hidden cellar below the temple (see Appendix VI) – they'll be greeted by the first three of the Resolute (see Appendix III). They see only one way to end this encounter: removing the meddling foreigners from their temple – forever.

Janir and the Murmur

Once the players burst through the final door, they see Janir Noga on an improvised wooden stage, build over a giant crack in the ancient stone floor. He'll confidently try to reason with the players – telling them, that he has found a way to strengthen the city militia. With this new-found power, the Saminians might even be able to exterminate the remains of Hermad's horde plaguing the countryside once and for all. Should the players agree with him, he'll subject them to the test: standing on the platform for one minute without succumbing to the murmurs. Should the players do that, the GM will be able to skip to the second phase of this battle. Otherwise, they'll have to face Janir in Battle.

Janir Noga (medium male human)

Janir is a middle-aged, muscle-bound man with a leathery and scarred face. He has clawed his way up from the Singin' Saw district into the second highest position of power available in Samin. He believes in the Militia and after the tournament, he's also convinced, that the monster presents a viable way for them to develop and gain strength. However, he also knows that the rest of the city won't see it this way. Hence, he's ready to fight the players if it means saving his plan.

Ability Scores

AC: 20 / HP: 85 / Speed 25 / Challenge Rating: 4

STR: 20 (+5) / DEX: 12 (+1) / CON: 17 (+3)

INT: 6 (-2) / WIS: 15 (+2) / CHA: 10 (+0)

Traits

Mad Zealot. Janir Noga doesn't feel physical pain the same way anymore. Once per long rest, if his hit points were to drop to 0, he regains 1 hit point and can try to make one melee weapon attack with advantage as a reaction to one enemy at 5ft. of him.

Advanced Riposte. Twice per battle, when a creature misses the Janir Noga, he can use his reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the creature.

Immunities. Frightened, Charmed, Sleep, Psychic

Actions

Multiattack. Janir Noga makes three weapon melee attacks.

Warhammer. (+6 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d12+3 bludgeoning damage.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Janir Noga takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; He can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- **Call him forth!** Janir Noga bashes his warhammer against his shield. The sound rings out and shortly after, thousands of murmurs start emanating from the crack in the floor. For this turn, each creature (except Janir Noga) that can hear the murmurs must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn and rolls a d8 to determine what it does during its turn. On a 1 to 4, the creature does nothing. On a 5 or 6, the creature takes no action or bonus action and uses all its movement to move in a randomly determined direction. On a 7 or 8, the creature makes a melee attack against a randomly determined creature within its reach or does nothing if it can't make such an attack.
- **Drink it in!** Janir throws something into the crack and listens to the resulting eating and sucking noises. He recovers 10HP.
- **Only the Strong!** Janir howls the battlecry of the Temple Militia – which echoes in the chamber and mixes with the murmurs. He takes an extra attack action against a target in melee range or gets a free defend action.

How to run this encounter

Janir usually fights defensively – trying to position himself with his back to the pillars. He's completely unfazed by the murmur by now and tries to use them to his advantage – only engaging the players that were able to resist their thrall.

Proving a Dangerous Point

Once it becomes clear, that Janir doesn't stand a chance against the players, he'll manoeuvre himself towards the stage atop the cracks. With the words "If you won't listen to me, maybe you'll listen to him", he throws his warhammer against the stage's support beam, causing it to collapse down the crack. He then slumps against the backwall, laughing hoarsely. Shortly after, the voices from the crack become louder and a horrible stench fills the cellar. Something starts oozing out the crack.

The Saminian Moulder (Giant Aberration)

A giant amorphous mass of screaming mouths and flailing limbs emerges from the crack. A deafening cacophony of murmurs, screams and incoherent babbling fills the cavern and numbs all senses. The fleshy blob senses its prey and slithers slowly towards the players.

Ability Scores

AC: 10 / HP: 71 / Speed 10 / Challenge Rating: 4

STR: 10 (+0) / DEX: 8 (-0) / CON: 17 (+3)

INT: 3 (-4) / WIS: 10 (+0) / CHA: 6 (-2)

Traits

Immunities. prone, frightened

Abberant Ground. The ground in a 10-foot radius around the moulder is doughlike difficult terrain. Each creature that starts its turn in that area must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn.

Gibbering. The Saminian Moulder babbles incoherently while it can see any creature and isn't incapacitated. Each creature that starts its turn in the cellar or within 20 feet of the moulder and can hear the murmuring must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn and rolls a d8 to determine what it does during its turn. On a 1 to 4, the creature does nothing. On a 5 or 6, the creature takes no action or bonus

action and uses all its movement to move in a randomly determined direction. On a 7 or 8, the creature makes a melee attack against a randomly determined creature within its reach or does nothing if it can't make such an attack.

Corrosive Form. A creature that touches the Saminian Moulder or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 4 (1d8) necrotic damage. Any nonmagical weapon made of metal or wood that hits the Saminian Moulder corrodes. After dealing damage, the weapon takes a permanent cumulative -- penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to -5, the weapon is destroyed. Non-magical ammunition made of metal or wood that hits the moulder is destroyed after dealing damage. The Saminian Moulder can eat through 2-inch-thick, non-magical wood or metal in 1 round.

Actions

Multiattack: The gibbering moulder makes one bite attack and, if it can, uses its Blinding Spittle.

Bite: Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 17 (5d6) piercing damage. If the target is medium or smaller, it must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is killed by this damage, it is absorbed into the moulder.

Blinding Spittle (Recharge 5-6). The Saminian Moulder spits a chemical glob at a point it can see within 15 feet of it. The glob explodes in a blinding flash of light on impact. Each creature within 5 feet of the flash must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the end of the Moulder's next turn.

Silence at last

With the last attack, the Saminian Moulder finally loses its form and bubbles away into a corrosive and foul-smelling puddle. In it, small metal belongings of the people fed to the moulder lie polished to a sheen. Finally, the cellar falls silent for the first time in over a month. This doesn't last for long, as the fight caused quite a bit of a ruckus and not just the Temple Militia showed up to find out what was going on. Rangers and Temple Soldiers alike storm the cellar and find the

players standing over this mess. Janir Noga (if the players haven't killed him) is quick to confirm the players charges against him. He has nothing left to fight for.

Reward

Depending on how the players interacted with each faction, they'll receive the following rewards:

- The Duke pays the players the gold they agreed on at the start of this investigation. If they impressed him (e.g. by minimizing deaths amongst the Militia or by sparing Janir Noga's life), he'll add half as much again to the total sum.
- The Rangers gift the players an honorary marshals' badge each (worth about 4 Gold) and offer to share any knowledge about the region with them.
- The Temple Militia might offer the players the Warhammer of Janir Noga as a reward. Holding it reminds the player in question of his mad resolve and gives them advantage against saving throws trying to frighten them.

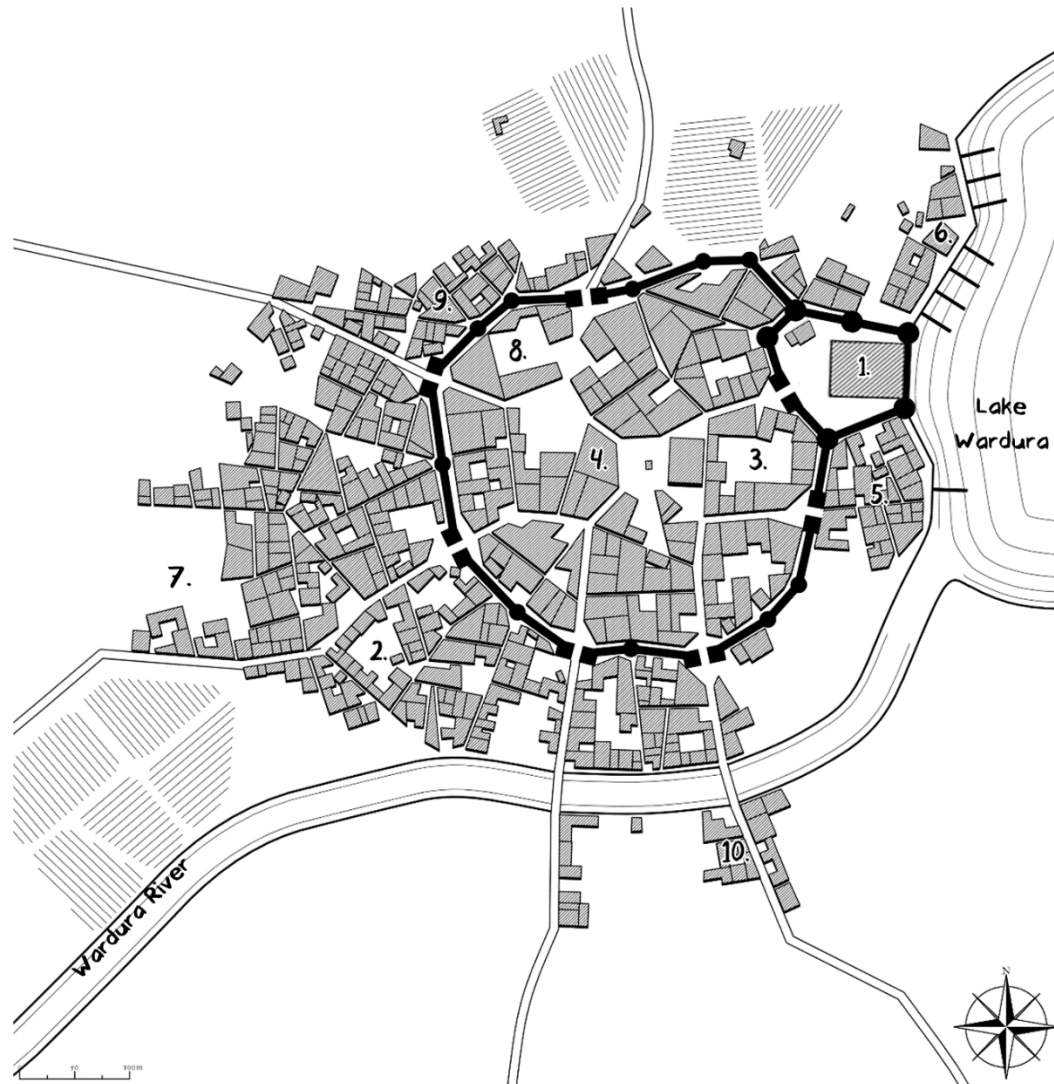
What's next?

With Janir gone and his scheme revealed to the Saminians, the two Branch system might be dissolved forever. However, the threat to Samin and Janoko hasn't been eliminated. Where did this aberration come from? Are there still followers of Hermad hiding out in the woods, creating these beasts?

With the players' good standing with the citizens of Samin, they might be invited to join the quest to find the source of these monsters and bring peace to Janoko once and for all.

After all: this monster was about as big as its kind could get – how much worse could anything still hiding out there possibly be?

Appendix I – Samin Town Map



Legend

1. **The Temple:** Headquarter and training ground of the Temple Militia and the heart of the town's defences. It is also used as a civilian shelter during a larger attack.
2. **The Duke's Yard:** Headquarter and training ground of the Duke's Rangers and the first line of defence against the horrors from the wood.
3. **The Duke's Mansion:** Home of the town's regent Antoni Dunin-Samin the Second. It also houses most of the town's admirative offices, such as the treasury (and a secret pleasure-parlour if the rumours are to be believed).
4. **Piotar's Honour:** The town's only inn, named after the current regent's great-grandfather Piotar Samin, who founded the town's citizen Militia.
5. **The Ranger's Shipyard:** Used for shipping materials outside of Samin and towards various outposts up the river.
6. **Fisher's Harbour:** Used by the town's fisherman and home to the local fish market.
7. **Wood Watcher's District:** Home of the town's artisans and craftsmen.
8. **Piotar Square:** The town's armoury as well strategic headquarter for both branches of the militia during a crisis.
9. **Graintown:** Home of the town's larger and wealthier farming families. Apart from the Duke and the militia, it is these families traditionally wielding the most political power – as it was their ancestors who served in the first militia and kept the town fed during the war against Hermad.
10. **Singing Saw:** The town's poorest district, housing mostly its lumberjacks and woodworkers. Due to their work's high mortality and injury rate, their families are traditionally exempt from the militia – making it difficult for the families to earn the other Saminians' respect.



Appendix II – List of missing Saminians

#	Name	Occupation	Time of disappearance	Notes
1	Julian Sacha	Ranger (Private in training)	42 days ago	Went missing after a skirmish with an unknown monster near the city walls in the Singing Saw district. The monster was killed, but Private Sacha didn't reappear.
2	Stojan & Ewa Kustra	City clean-up	41 days ago	Both went missing the day after the attack on the town. They were last seen in the workshop at Piotar Square preparing to rebuild "woodwork damaged in the attack".
3	Walerian, Medard & Aneta Pala	Siblings from one of the Graintown families. Aged 8, 12 and 14.	41 days ago	During the attack they were sent to the temple for shelter. According to the Temple Militia, they didn't arrive in the citizen's shelter. They were last seen entering the town walls from Graintown.
4	Klara Kumor	Temple Militia (Sergeant)	41 days ago	Last seen by her troop assigning patrol routes in the temple's war-room. It is unclear what her direct orders were or who she was on patrol with herself.
5	Michal Mikos	General Recruit (in Training)	34 days ago	Didn't show up for the morning call. Was last seen after completing his patrols on the city walls, heading back to Piotar Square.
6	Tymon Smolen	Temple Militia (Major)	32 days ago	Last seen receiving training plans from the Captain of the Temple Militia. Didn't report these plans afterwards to his recruits.
7	Michalina Jurek	Vagrant / City clean-up	Noticed 32 days ago	Her disappearance was maybe noticed too late, as she preferred to roam the city streets alone, working for food and shelter.
8	Alicja Miga	General Recruit (in Training)	25 days ago	Didn't meet her troop for evening drinks as promised. Was last seen in the group shower after winning the recruits' shooting challenge.
9	Joseph & Maria Skura	Rangers (Marshal)	20 days ago	Both were supposed to meet with the Captain of the Temple Militia to finalize a raid plan on a nearby monster nest and never showed up.
10	Elias Glod, Walter Deptula, Antonin Wach	Temple Militia (Privates)	16 days ago	Were supposed to be sent on a joint excursion with a troop of Rangers, but never showed up to the meeting at the Duke's Yard. The rest of the troop said, these three went ahead.
11	Filip & Daria Puch	Temple Militia (Lieutenant) & Ranger (Marshal)	8 days ago	Returned from a long trip to the North and reported back to the Duke. They were last seen telling stories at Piotar's Honor and went missing on their way home.
12	Maria Iskra	General Recruit (potential Temple Militia)	2 days ago	Maria Iskra was about to take her oath and join the Temple Militia in the night she disappeared. She was last seen leaving her home in the Wood Watcher's district.

Appendix III – Relevant Statblocks

General Recruit

Any Samin citizen coming of age is drafted into the pool of general recruits. After a year of training, they are either assigned to or recruited by one of the militia's branches.

Ability Scores

AC: 12 / HP: 16 / Speed 30 / Challenge Rating: 1/4

STR: 15 (+2) / DEX: 12 (+1) / CON: 13 (+1)

INT: 8 (-1) / WIS: 10 (+0) / CHA: 12 (+1)

Traits

United we stand. The first thing the recruits learn, is to fight as a unit. They have advantage on attack rolls against an enemy if at least one of their allies is within 5 feet of the enemy and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Never break rank. The recruits are focused on the orders of their superiors. They have advantages against intimidation checks and can't be frightened as long as one of their superiors (higher rank) is within 30 feet of them. They have disadvantage against Wisdom & Charisma saving throws if they are alone.

Actions

Pike. (+4 to hit), melee attack, reach 10ft., one target. 1d6+2 piercing damage.

Dagger. (+4 to hit), melee attack, range 20/60ft., one target. 1d4+2 piercing damage.

Duke's Ranger (Soldier)

The Duke's Rangers are the branch of choice for the nimble, quick and brave. They stalk through the surrounding woodlands in search of monster dens or large groups of abominations.

Ability Scores

AC: 15 / HP: 32 / Speed 30 / Challenge Rating: 1

STR: 12 (+1) / DEX: 16 (+3) / CON: 15 (+2)

INT: 9 (-1) / WIS: 11 (+0) / CHA: 13 (+1)

Traits

United we stand. The soldiers are trained to fight as a troop. They have advantage on attack rolls against an enemy if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of the enemy and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Quick reflexes. The Duke's Rangers are known for their twitchy reflexes. If they haven't used their light-crossbow in the prior turn, they can attack one enemy that enters their reach with the crossbow as a reaction.

Actions

Multiattack. The soldier makes two weapon melee attacks of two ranged attacks.

Rapier. (+5 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d8+3 piercing damage.

Crossbow. (+5 to hit), ranged attack, range 80/320ft., one target. 1d8+3 piercing damage.

Duke's Ranger (Marshal)

The Marshals have earned the right to lead their own troop of soldiers into battle. All of them have horrific scars as proof of having passed their exam.

Ability Scores

AC: 15 / HP: 52 / Speed 35 / Challenge Rating: 2

STR: 15 (+2) / DEX: 18 (+4) / CON: 15 (+2)

INT: 10 (+0) / WIS: 13 (+1) / CHA: 13 (+1)

Traits

United we stand. The soldiers are trained to fight as a troop. They have advantage on attack rolls against an enemy if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of the enemy and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Quick reflexes. The Duke's Rangers are known for their twitchy reflexes. If they haven't used their light-crossbow in the prior turn, they can attack one enemy that enters its reach with the crossbow as a reaction.

Sure-footed. The Duke's Rangers ignore natural difficult terrain and have advantage against saving throws for knocking them prone.

Resistances. Poison

Immunities. Frightened

Actions

Multiattack. The marshal makes three weapon melee attacks of two ranged attacks.

Rapier. (+6 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d8+4 piercing damage.

Crossbow. (+6 to hit), ranged attack, range 80/320ft., one target. 1d8+4 piercing damage.

Temple Militia (Soldier)

The Temple Militia were traditionally the branch of the little man. However, as they were instrumental in the defence of the city during the reign of Piotar, they have specialized in heavy armour and weaponry.

Ability Scores

AC: 18 / HP: 36 / Speed 25 / Challenge Rating: 1

STR: 15 (+2) / DEX: 10 (+0) / CON: 15 (+2)

INT: 9 (-1) / WIS: 11 (+0) / CHA: 13 (+1)

Traits

Live to protect. The Temple's soldiers have taken an oath to protect the citizens on cost of their own life. They can use their reaction to impose a disadvantage on any target attacking one of the soldier's allies.

Pushing attacks. When the soldier hits a creature same size or smaller than them, it must pass a strength saving throw or be pushed up to 5 feet away from the soldier.

Actions

Multiattack. The soldier makes two weapon melee attacks.

Cudgel. (+4 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 2d6+3 bludgeoning damage.

Temple Militia (Sergeant)

To become a Sergeant, a Temple Soldier must have served at least 5 years. After that, they are able to prove their worth in the flogging test; by fending off attacks of 5 recruits for 15 minutes.

Ability Scores

AC: 20 / HP: 63 / Speed 25 / Challenge Rating: 2

STR: 17 (+3) / DEX: 12 (+1) / CON: 17 (+3)

INT: 9 (-1) / WIS: 12 (+1) / CHA: 13 (+1)

Traits

Live to protect. The Temple's soldiers have taken an oath to protect the citizens on cost of their own life. They can use their reaction to impose a disadvantage on any target attacking one of the soldier's allies.

Pushing attacks. When the soldier hits a creature same size or smaller than them, it has to pass a strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away from the soldier.

Riposte. Once per battle, when a creature misses the sergeant, they can use their reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the creature.

Actions

Multiattack. The Sergeant makes three weapon melee attacks.

Warhammer. (+6 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d12+3 bludgeoning damage.

Temple Militia (The Resolute)

Passing the test changes people. Getting confronted with the murmurs repeatedly, drives one mad, dampens pain and erases empathy.

Ability Scores

AC: 20 / HP: 63 / Speed 25 / Challenge Rating: 3

STR: 17 (+3) / DEX: 12 (+1) / CON: 17 (+3)

INT: 7 (-2) / WIS: 15 (+2) / CHA: 13 (+1)

Traits

No fear left. The Resolute don't feel physical pain the same way anymore. Once per long rest, if their hit points were to drop to 0, they regain 1 hit point and can try to make one melee weapon attack as a reaction to one enemy at 5ft. of them.

Pushing attacks. When the Resolute hits a creature same size or smaller than them, it has to pass a strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away from the soldier.

Advanced Riposte. Twice per battle, when a creature misses the resolute, they can use their reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the creature.

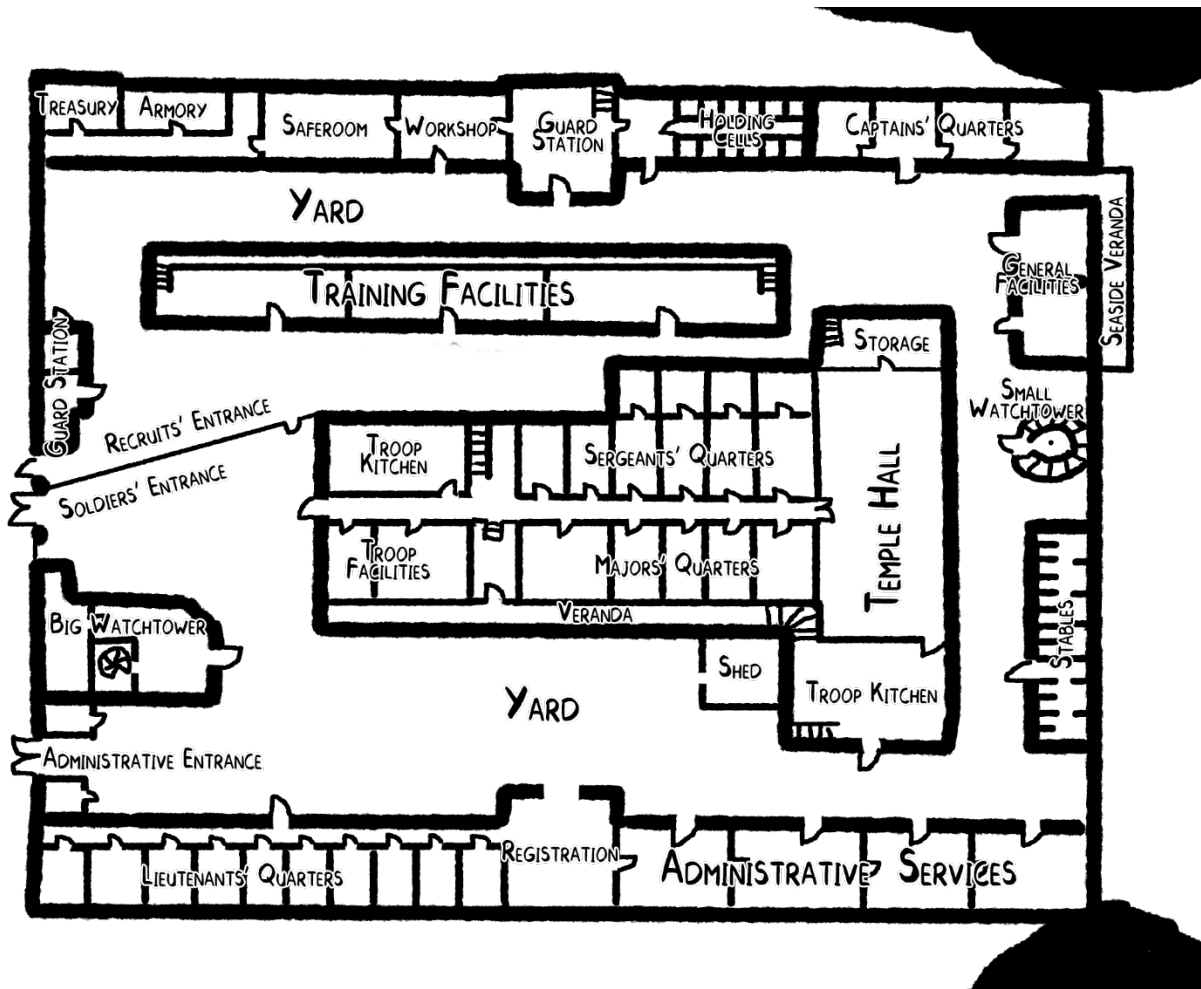
Immunities. Frightened, Charmed, Sleep, Psychic

Actions

Multiattack. The Resolute makes three weapon melee attacks.

Warhammer. (+6 to hit), melee attack, reach 5ft., one target. 1d12+3 bludgeoning damage.

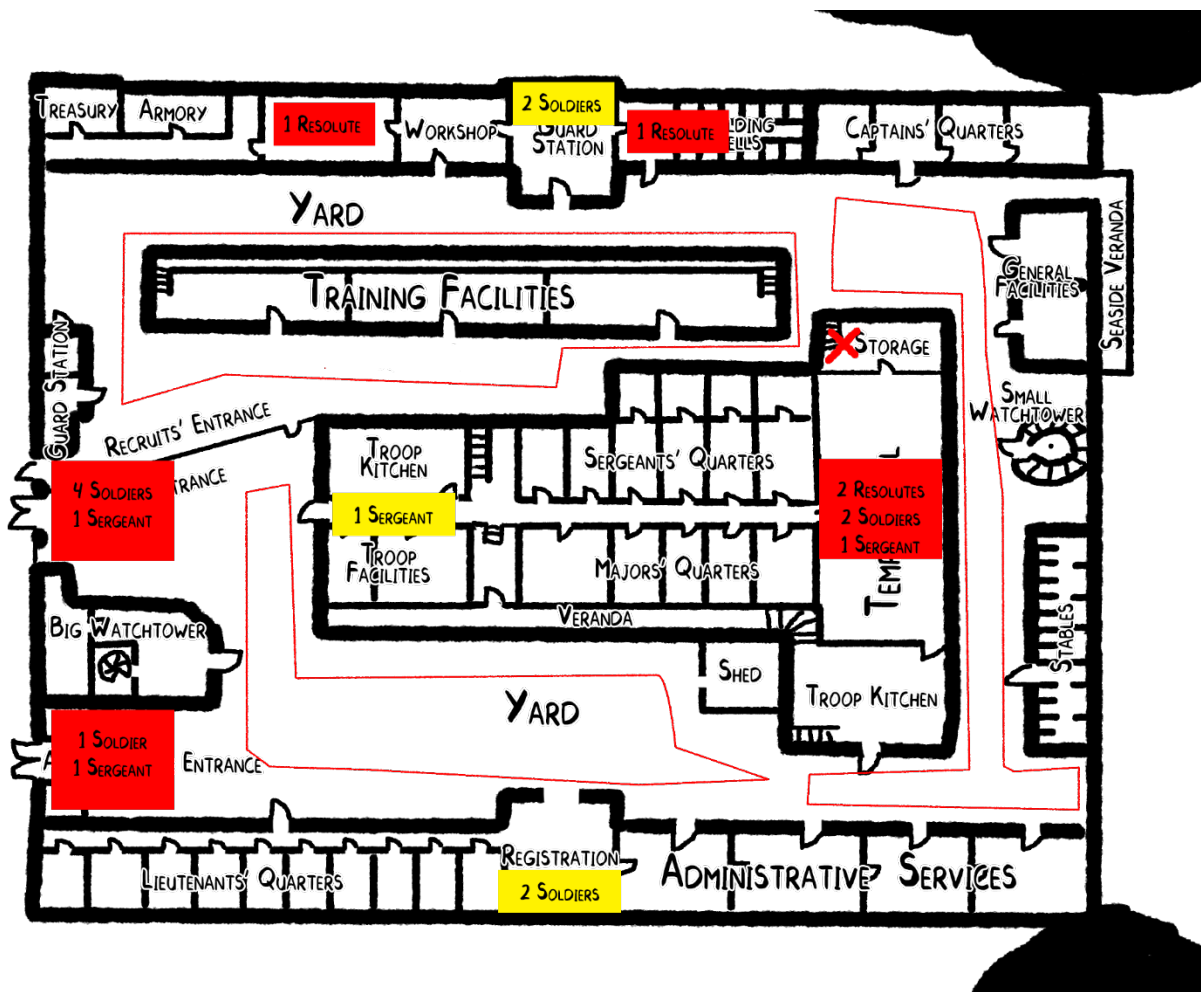
Appendix IV – Map of the Temple Grounds



Legend

Right outside the Temple Grounds lies a small farm and access to a groundwater reservoir. This is because, as the city's innermost ring, it must also be able to sustain its citizens for a little while during a potential siege.

Appendix V – Deployments across the Temple



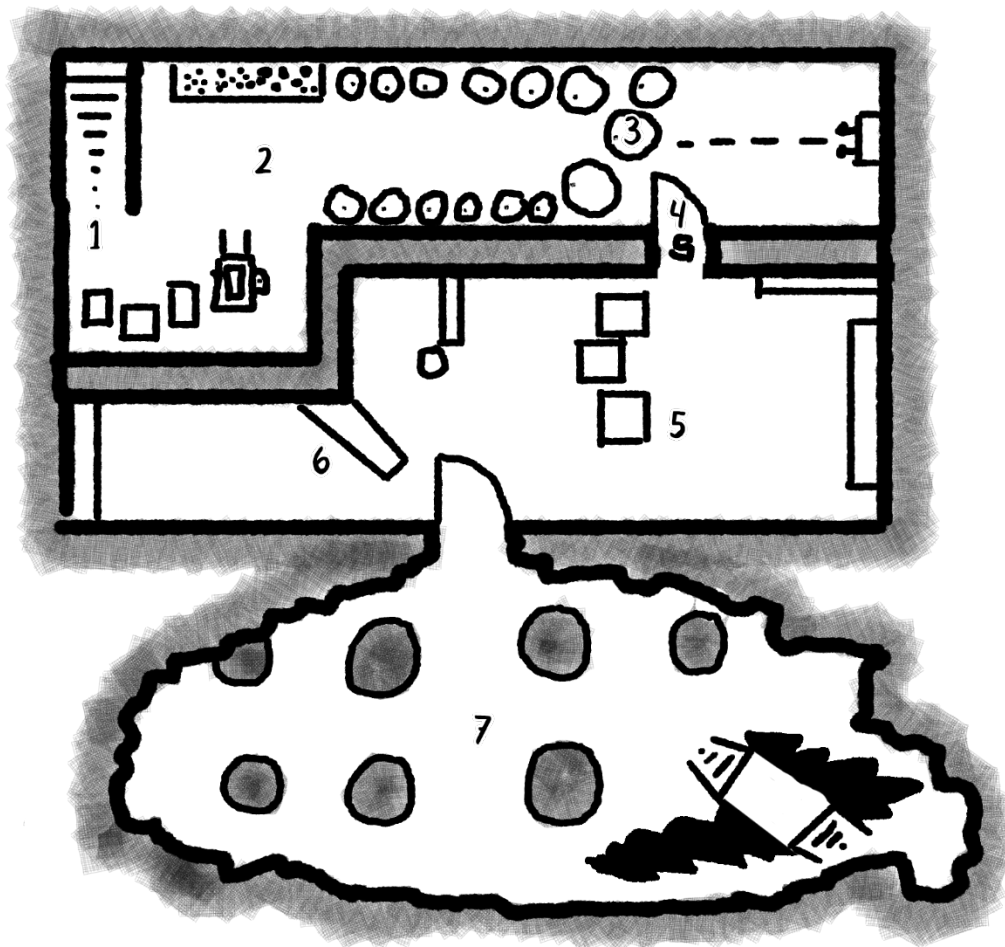
Legend

The troops in red will raise an alarm if they see the players disobeying orders (such as trespassing). The troops in yellow will be suspicious but won't immediately raise the alarm.

The three red lines are guard patrol routes. There are two guards per route – one moving clockwise, the other counter-clockwise. They will notice if one of them goes missing. It takes 10 minutes to walk the entire route and the guards meet approx. every 5 minutes.

The red cross in the temple indicates the forbidden stairs, leading down into the cellar with the Saminian Moulder.

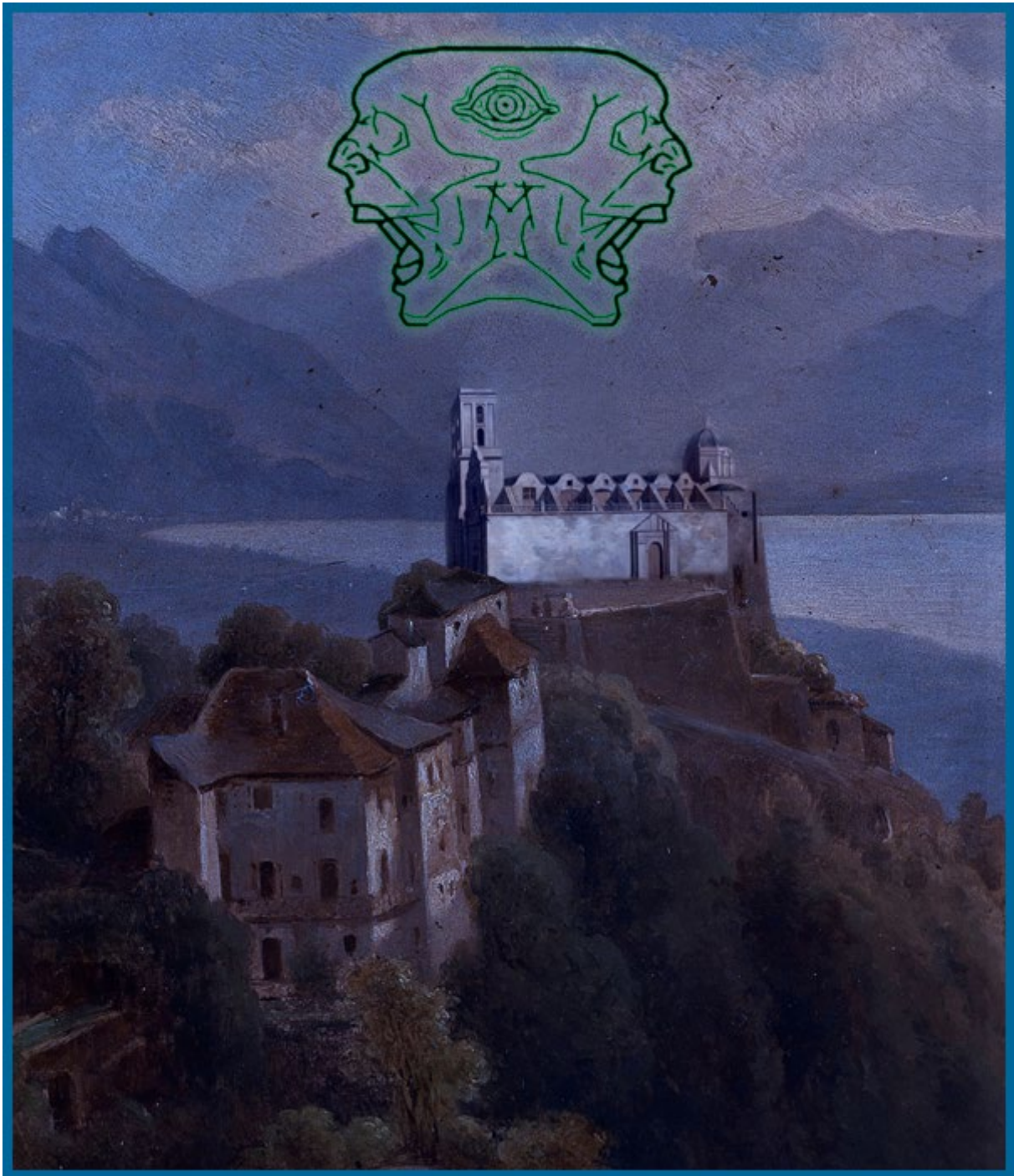
Appendix VI – The Murmuring Cellar



Legend

1. Stairway up into the temple main hall storage room.
2. Wine cellar – only illuminated up to the barrels in the back. It contains a rack of bottles, some crates and barrels filled with wine and beer.
3. Barrel secured with a dart trap. Tiny holes are cleverly hidden amid brass-reliefs adorning the back wall. The DC to spot the string triggering the trap is 15. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a character can deduce the presence of the string trigger by the placement of the barrel. Each dart makes a ranged Attack with a +8 bonus against a random target within the line drawn on the map (vision is irrelevant to this Attack roll). (If there are no targets in the area, the darts don't hit anything.) A target that is hit takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage and must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 11 (2d10+1) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
4. Door hidden amongst the wooden panelling. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check will reveal that the wall was just recently build. The door can also be found by a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check to find the air current flowing beyond the door.
5. 2 Resolutes are guarding this room – standing in front of door to the cellar.
6. 1 Resolute with a crossbow is hiding behind this partial cover, taking shots against the players.
7. Ancient cellar below the temple. The giant pillars are reaching up to the ceiling.

Appendix VII – View of Samin



Painting by Zsigmond Bubics (Public Domain) – alterations by Quickphix.