

CHAPTER 4. THE SECRET OF THE BOOK

Orbea, the Maze-like home of the krig, was the last place that the gnome scholar Valcryn Vorpos was seen alive. Supposedly, he knows the secret of the mysterious, unreadable book called Prime and why so many are interested in getting their hands on it. Of course, the characters won't be the only ones looking for Vorpos and the book. A vast conspiracy begins to unfold in this fourth chapter of the *Hand of the Eight* adventure path, *The Secret of the Book*.

The Secret of the Book is a 3rd-level Fifth Edition adventure for 3-5 characters. Characters who survive the adventure should be two-thirds of the way to level 4 by the adventure's conclusion unless the characters first played Chapter 3 of the adventure path, *The Black Bird*. In that case, they will reach the 4th level by this adventure's conclusion and be 25-33% of the way to the 5th level.

The campaign is intended to be set in the DMDave crowdsourced campaign world of Omeria, but can just as easily be inserted into any other large, mysterious town overlooking an expansive ocean or sea.

BACKGROUND

A little over two months ago, a gnomish scholar named Valcryn Vorpos came into possession of an ancient, unreadable tome. Unsure of what to do with it, Vorpos traveled to the fishing village of Haver to meet with a group of scholars to discuss the nature of the book. However, one of the sages, Ruhmeid Nammod was secretly working for a vile fiend named Hulay. Under the cover of a powerful hurricane of his own summoning, Nammod contracted a gang of orcish pirates called the Odzedoz to raid the village, kill the

sages, and collect the book. Ironically, Nammod did not expect a doublecross from the leader of the orcs, an intelligent orc chief named Mega the Brash. Mega stole the book and fled to his island fortress in the Ghost Holm.

Interested in the book, Mega kidnapped Nadia Mansouri, an expert on dead languages, with the hope she could translate it to determine its value. Mega's plans were disrupted when Nadia's father, a powerful Castlegraspian noble, named Baariq, hired a group of adventurers to sneak onto the island, disable the orc, and reclaim Nadia. The pirate, Mega, was arrested by the Castlegraspian Navy and brought to Castlegrasp's dungeons. Before he could be arrested, Mega hid the book with his first mate, Gluronk. Gluronk escaped up the Weysevain Coast with the book.

Shortly after his capture, Mega escaped the dungeons of Castlegrasp thanks to a doppelganger. On the run, Mega planned to hide out at a nearby farm until the heat died down. That is until a powerful sorcerer known only as The Black Bird discovered him, forcing Mega to flee north through the desert. With adventurers and experienced bounty hunters hot on his trail, Mega entered the abandoned city of Qola. There, he attempted to hijack a cargoblomp from Odonburg, hoping he could ride over the mountains in it. Just as he was about to escape the bounty hunters and adventurers, the Black Bird appeared again. The sorcerer subdued Mega and wrecked the blimp. Then, in the confusion, the Black Bird and its swarms carried Mega away.

Now, investigators from Odonburg are involved. They've sent one of their best mago-detectives, Omnaweahl (or just "O" for short) to learn more about the incident in Qola, the orc, Mega, and the location of the book that's caused this whole mess. She has already flown to Castlegrasp

aboard a Dinzer peregrine and spoken to both Baariq Mansouri and Khan Hayyar Harruk XI, ruler of Castlegrasp. Now, O hopes to speak with the enigmatic group of people who have been involved from the start: the characters.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The characters are asked to join Baariq Mansouri, Khan Hayyar Harruk XI, and Omnaweahl at the Violent Qsar in Castlegrasp. Omnaweahl explains that she has been dispatched by the Seven Eyes of Odonburg to learn more about an ancient book that was at some point rumored to be in possession of the orc pirate named Mega. Omnaweahl questions the characters' involvement and asks them for any clues they may have that could lead to the book. If the characters have trouble remembering, she mentions the Knotsider gnome, Valcryn Vorpos, who the characters should remember. Whether the characters work with the Dinzer Omnaweahl or not, they should head back to Haver to learn the direction Vorpos went. There, they learn that Vorpos traveled to the krig city of Orbea.

While the characters explore Orbea looking for Vorpos, they come across Gluronk, Mega's first mate, who has hidden a book with her friend, a powerful casino owner. Before their rendezvous with Gluronk, the characters learn that Vorpos was murdered. Plus, whoever killed the gnome framed the characters for the crime.

During the final scene, just as the characters retrieve the book from the casino owner, a deadly construct attacks the characters, trying to capture the book. Just in the nick of time, Omnaweahl arrives in her peregrine and helps the characters escape the nearly indestructible machine.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

While many of the descriptions and background elements assume that the characters are playing through the *Hand of the Eight* adventure path, it's possible to play this adventure as the starting point for the *Hand of the Eight* or as an unrelated one-shot adventure. Here are some suggested adventure hooks to help get the characters involved in the story.

FIND THE GNOME

The Dinzer mago-detective, Omnaweahl hires the characters to find the gnome Valcryn Vorpos. Supposedly, the gnome has information regarding the last known location of an important artifact. Not only does O fear for the gnome, but she fears that if the artifact falls into the wrong hands, all of Omeria could find itself in grave danger.

LEGENDARY BOOK

Asorin the Black is the grand sage of the Great Equinox Library in Arruquetta. He was one of the sages killed during the Odzedozi raid on Haver. Fortunately, his acolytes secured his body and revived him. Now, he wants to learn more about the book and why it was important enough to have him and the others in his pact murdered. He sends the characters to Orbea to find and protect the sage, Valcryn Vorpos and learn the location of the book, *Prime*.

KEEP THE BOOK HIDDEN

If the characters have the book (which is a possibility) they must find somewhere to offload it. Knowing that Vorpos was once in possession of the book and knows more about it than anyone else alive, they go to Orbea to find the gnomish sage. If this is the hook, chances are the story plays out a little differently. The characters never meet Gluronk. Instead, they learn from Meros Scarletfoot that Vorpos was staying at the Tame Cave. Just as they enter Valcryn's room, they arrive just after Vorpos' murder, and the remote traveler alpha-class is still present. The alpha-class attacks the characters and they flee as O saves them at the last minute.

THE VIOLET QSAR

The story begins when the characters are invited to the royal palace of Castlegrasp, the Violet Qsar. A squad of four elite Stonearms (LG Ditimayan human **knights**) escorts the characters from wherever they are currently located in the city to Orchard Park. As they pass through the Park, they notice something unusual.

As you walk past the olive trees lining the stone paths through the park, a glint of brass catches your eyes. Resting in the grassy knoll 100 feet from the front of the Khan's palace is a huge, metallic bird, easily 75 feet long and 30 feet wide. Its body is seemingly made of equal parts polished brass and dark wood. Its eyes are made of dense, tinted glass. Getting closer to the bird, you recognize that it is actually some sort of flying vehicle designed to look like a falcon. Painted over its wing span are the red and blue colors of Odonburg.

The vehicle is a **Dinzer peregrine**, a magical flying vehicle. Omnaweahl used it to quickly cross the Obsidian Plain from Odonburg.

The Stonearms kindly announce that the characters are set to enter the Violet Qsar and meet the Khan. However, there are specific rules which they must follow.

- They must hand over all weapons, spellbooks, magic component bags, arcane focuses and holy symbols, familiars and animal companions, plus any other items that the Stonearms view as "troublesome" (lock picks, wearable magic items, etc.)
- Absolutely no magic may be cast within the Violet Qsar unless it is performed by those the Khan deems worthy. (No, the characters aren't worthy.)
- The characters cannot come within 30 feet of the Khan unless the Khan approaches them first.
- There must be at a minimum two militia members or Stonearms accompanying each character at all times. The Khan is always guarded by at least three of his personal bodyguards, the Granite Nine.
- They are not to directly address the Khan. Instead, they must address the Khan's personal bodyguard, Yousouf El Hajjam, who will then relay the message to the Khan. However, if the Khan addresses them directly, they are free to speak with the Khan.

- Failure to follow any of the rules results in immediate arrest and incarceration. Breaking any of the Qsar's rules is considered high treason by the jury of Castlegrasp. The minimum sentence for treason in Castlegrasp is one year in the Yard of Deterrents.

The Stonearms do not take these rules lightly. As some of the characters are likely to scoff at such rules and attempt to circumvent them those who do not wish to comply are politely asked to wait outside. Be sure to drive home the fact that while the Khan is Fair Eleven, those who violate the Qsar's rules will be severely punished.

MEETING THE KHAN

After the characters relieve themselves of their weapons and magical items, they are escorted into the Violet Qsar by 2 **guards** per characters led by the 4 Stonearm **knights**. At the front door to the Qsar, two members of the **Granite Nine** (see Supplement B) greet them and introduce themselves. Their names are Ghariba Skali and Chama Sabbag. Both of these young women have short, dark hair, and caramel-colored eyes. Like the other Stonearms, the right arms of the women have turned to solid stone. However, the rock surface extends beyond their shoulders, to their collar bone, neck, and jawbone like an earthy rash. Both women are friendly, but deadly serious about their duty to the Khan. At all times, they are prepared to fight—assume that they have already rolled initiative, scored 20s, and are constantly using the Ready action each round to attack anyone who attempts to make a move on the Khan.

Similarly, the militia and Stonearms who accompany the characters are trained to reflexively act. If a fight breaks out, they roll initiative as normal. However, any initiative roll that they make that is lower than 10 + their Dexterity modifier is considered to be 10 + their Dexterity modifier.

Should an attack break out, the Khan's personal bodyguard Youssouf El Hajjam will quickly escort the Khan from the greeting chamber and through a secure door, which he will lock behind him. If that is not enough, the Qsar has many secret tunnels below it. Youssouf never leaves the Khan's side.

Still, despite their tense nature, all of the Khan's militia, Stonearms, and even the three members of the Granite Nine are always polite, friendly, and kind. "Rudeness invites conflict," was a common saying of the original master of the Granite Nine, Zamen Fadel, that all Stonearms now live by.

The greeting chamber is a 60-foot wide circular room with 40-foot high ceilings. Against the north wall, two staircases rise to a balcony 15-feet above the floor. The balcony is filled with impressive artwork of immeasurable value.

A glass skylight 60-feet above you bathes the room in natural light. A water fountain carved to look like the second Khan, Violet Two, is at the center of the room. On the left and right sides 20-feet from the fountain are two separate seating areas.

After a moment of waiting, the tall, white double doors at the center of the north wall open and a large, man with a head that appears to literally be carved of rock enters. In a

booming, gruff voice, the man announces, "All please kneel in the presence of his Excellency Khan Hayyar 'Fair Eleven' Harrak XI, Khan of Castlegrasp, its satraps, colonies, and retainers, Defender of Central Omeria, Watcher of the Obsidian Plain."

All of the stone arms kneel and expect you to do the same.

Finally, a man wearing a long kandora made of white silk steps through doors. He is a handsome man with dark skin and curly dark hair peeking out from beneath his violet keffiyeh. Judging by the confidence he exudes, this is no doubt the infamous Fair Eleven, Khan of Castlegrasp. Standing just behind the Khan you see two more figures. The first is an older Castlegraspian noble dressed in dark violet livery. The second is a young woman, perhaps no older than thirty, with dark skin, close cut hair, and a gold chain headpiece. Her robes are deep blue with bright red details.

The stone-faced man stands and turns to you, gesturing. "Behold, Fair Eleven, the ones you have requested have arrived."

"Thank you, Youssouf," the Khan says with a smile. He then approaches each of you extending a hand. "Thank you for coming." Youssouf seems taken aback by the Khan's gesture.

Khan Hayyan Harrak XI (N male Ditimayan human **noble**) is friendly, warm, and above all, an excellent listener. When he speaks, it's usually in the form of a question. And he never makes a quick decision.

Joining the Khan are Baariq Mansouri (LN male Ditimayan human **noble**), an important political figure and friend of the Khan, and Omnaweahl (N female Dinzer **mage**), a mago-detective from the southern nation of Odonburg.

Baariq is a no-nonsense authoritarian who rarely jokes. If the characters have had pleasant dealings with Baariq in the past, he is friendly and welcoming towards them.

Meanwhile, Omnaweahl (or just "O" for short) is a fast-talking Dinzer who frequently sprinkles conversation with nervous laughter. She has little respect for Castlegraspian traditions, despite receiving the same rules presentation that the characters did. Plus, she is extremely intelligent—and she knows it. And she wants others to know it, too.

Odonburg became interested in the book following the destruction of a Dinzer cargoblomp in the town of Qola just a little over 100 miles northeast of Castlegrasp. Omnaweahl was sent by Odonburg's leaders, the Seven Eyes of Odonburg, to learn as much as she could and report back to them. If what the Seven Eyes suspect is true, and the book is, in fact, *Prime*, they must secure it before it falls into the wrong hands.

Before the Khan can introduce her, she steps forward.

"Hello! I am Omnaweahl of Odonburg. You can call me O. Most folks do. It's easier, right? Ha! Anyways! I am told that you know the location of a powerful artifact."

Baariq clears his throat, trying to quiet Omnaweahl. The young woman glares back at the older gentleman, "What? Why all the unnecessary pomp and circumstance? This book is very important and we must find it immediately." She turns back to you. "So where is it?"

From there, the characters chat with the Khan, Mansouri, and O. Fair Eleven listens while Baariq fact-finds with strategic questions. Meanwhile, O cuts directly to the chase, asking any question she can that helps learn more about the book.

Baariq frequently apologizes for the young woman, who, in turn, gets offended by the older gentleman. Meanwhile, the Khan sips wine and watches in silence.

Eventually, someone drops the name of the last person known to have the book that's (hopefully) still alive: the gnome sage from Knotside, Valcryn Vorpos. The characters may recall that Vorpos filled them in on the book's most important details. If not, O repeats the same information:

- The book is written in an ancient language that has not been read or spoken in over a thousand years.
- No spells can decipher the language. If a caster uses a spell such as *comprehend languages* on the book, the book actually gets harder to read.

- It is commonly believed that the book is *Prime*, a long-lost book said to imbue any who can understand it with unlimited power.

FIND THE GNOME

As the conversation winds down, the mission should be apparent: find the gnome sage Valcryn Vorpos and learn the location of the book. The last place anyone saw him was the town of Haver, where he and a group of sages were attacked by orcs. That's where Baariq and O recommend the characters start their search.

HAYER

The journey to Haver is quick: it's two days on the main highway, the Leash, or just one day by boat. Haver is described in greater detail in the first Chapter of the *Hand of the Eight, Storm of Mega*. There are two locations the characters should investigate while they are passing through.

THE WISE SHIRT

After the *Storm of Mega*, Valcryn Vorpos spent his days and nights drinking at Haver's most popular tavern, the Wise Shirt. At night, he retired to one of the rooms in the rear for restless sleep punctuated with nightmares from which he awoke screaming. The owners of the bar and patrons



noticed that the gnome's sanity was starting to slip. Then, just last week, he packed a bag and left. The bartender, Bezka Wells, confronted Vorpos as he left. She tells the characters:

"All he told me was that he had to go north. Said he thought of something and that he had to talk with someone there. But that's all he would say."

Bezka says he purchased passage on a sailing ship about five days ago. Before he left, he stopped by the Sparkling Lookout, a sage's guildhall at the south side of town.

THE SPARKLING LOOKOUT

Once a lighthouse used to guide sailing ships through the dangerous fogs and storms over the Omerian Ocean, the Sparkling Lookout now acts as a guildhall for a trio of young mages named Emar Caden, Zuzen Mahran, and Nebrook Hallowpelt (all three are LN male Ditimayan human **commoners** with proficiency in Arcana and the ability to cast *firebolt*, *mage hand*, and *prestidigitation* at will). The mages' master, Ruhmeid Nammod was murdered by orcs during an incursion nearly two months ago. Since then, they've worked to rebuild the hall and their guild. Although they no longer have Nammod's teachings to guide them, they've since turned their attention to the study of the undead.

As soon as the acolytes learn that the characters are there to investigate the book and its connection to Nammod and Valcryn Vorpos, they are eager to assist in any way they can. They give the characters full access to Nammod's old bedroom and study at the top of the stairs. They also share with the characters that Valcryn Vorpos came to the Lookout five days ago. Saying very little, Vorpos took a book from one of Nammod's shelves and shoved it into his bag. Emar remembers the title of the book: *Glyphs and Scripts* by Aruxius.

"Valcryn kept yelling over and over again 'stupid, we were all so stupid,'" Emar tells the characters. "He seemed really disturbed."

Emar shares that the book Vorpos took from Nammod's library is one of the most boring tomes he's ever read, focused solely on the practice and application of the 1st-level illusory script spell. The author, Aruxius, was a stodgy, old mage from Odonburg who taught enchantment and illusion courses at Pexia, Institute of the Arcane. It's said he was a *danaavrakt*, a descendant of the Striped Conjurers of Karmithyash. (The same ones who destroyed Hearth.)

The characters are free to search the study and the rest of the lighthouse. The three acolytes have nothing to hide. Beyond Nammod's old book collection, there is little of value. Although the characters aren't allowed to take any of the books with them, they can spend as much time as they like doing research. The books provide no more clues for the characters, but a character who spends at least a week of downtime in the lighthouse's library performing research on subjects arcane makes their resolution checks with advantage (see *XGtE* for details on downtime).

THE DOCKS

Five days ago, Valcryn Vorpos booked passage on a sailing ship. When the characters ask around whose ship he left on, they're pointed in the direction of Darebumli Onyxbrow (CN male Von Doral dwarf **commoner**). Onyxbrow is a cranky, red-nosed dwarf, whose attitude is just as salty as the sea on which he sails. Already halfway through his second bottle of *El Aoufi Sweet Fruit Red* for the day, Onyxbrow won't speak unless he's paid to do so. For 2 gp (the price of a third bottle of *El Aoufi*), he admits that he gave the gnome sage a ride to Orbea, the home of the krigs. "And for 15 gp each, I'll bring you all there, too!" he adds, hiccuping. Onyxbrow tells the characters that during the two-and-a-half-day journey, the gnome spent most of his time reading some book about glyphs. Onyxbrow didn't catch the full title.

THE MAZE OF ORBEA

It's a two-and-a-half-day journey by boat to Orbea or a four-day journey on foot or mounted. Regardless of the method the characters travel to the krig town, once they are within 1 mile of the town, read or paraphrase the following:

Framed by the golden majesty of the Basilisk's Spine Mountains, the expanse of canyons, jagged plateaus, and bizarre natural rock formations known as the Maze of Orbea slides into view. At the highest part of the town, the east end, seven 200-foot tall airship docks stand; three blimps bearing the red and blue banners of Odonburg are parked there.

Going west, the main roads and highways that enter the city either climb over its crevasses with expertly engineered bridges or descend into its depths via smooth, wooden ramps. Odd grey and green buildings with curved, crimson rooves decorate the plateaus and cliffs that surround most of the town. Within the maze itself, the raging Zheree River thunders through the center of the city before it crashes into the Keqrab Bay below.

In addition to the Dinzer blimps overhead, sailing craft from all over the Weysevain Coast tread into the docks via the Omeria Ocean. You see banners from all over: Arruqueta, Castlegrasp, Odonburg, and even distant Murktown to the north.

The roads in and out are cluttered with caravans, riders, and wagons coming and going north, south, and east.

At any time, roughly 6,000 humanoids call Orbea home, and only a third of those are actually krig. Humans, dwarves, elves, goblinoids, Dinzer automatons, canids, orcs, and others live and operate in the Maze. The remainder of the 10,000 or so krig estimated to be in existence lives elsewhere in Omeria. A popular conspiracy theory suggests that those krigs are an extension of the krigs' progenitor-diet, the Matriarch.

GATHERING INFORMATION IN ORBEA

| Check Total | Outcome | Example |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1-5 | Nothing important learned | — |
| 6-10 | Basic information | "The Cords are a secret police force from Arruqueta who operate on Gadran's Plateau." |
| 11-20 | Advanced information | "The leader of the Cords is Captain Santxa Goytino, one of Queen Emagavel's most trusted military advisors." |
| 21+ | Confidential or classified information | "The Cords made a deal with the Tribunal to allow them freely persecute Arruquettan Separatists while they turned a blind eye." |

The characters know that Valcryn Vorpos was in Orbea at least a week ago (or longer, if they took a long time to get to the Maze from Haver). The only bit of knowledge that Onyxbrow had to share about Vorpos' location in the city was that he dropped the gnome off at the docks. "He seemed to know where he was going," the dwarf shrugs.

The characters will have to find clues and visit various locations in the town to learn Vorpos' current location—if he is even still there.

GATHERING INFORMATION IN ORBEA

Orbea is a big place with a whole lot of people living and operating within and around its canyon walls. To follow the clues that point to Valcryn Vorpos as well as other potential mysteries (see Side Quests below), they will need to gather information. To simplify the process, use the following rules for gathering information in Orbea.

Resources. Gathering information requires a character to spend one hour or more talking to people and following up on leads.

Resolution. The character declares the focus of the information gathering attempt—a specific person, place, or thing. After one hour, the character makes a Charisma (Persuasion) check with a +1 bonus per 1 gp spent, to a maximum of +6. Determine the type of information that the character learns using the Gathering Information in Orbea table at the top of this page.

Each outcome presents one or more NPCs who can answer questions depending on the level of the information learned. As the GM, you are the final arbiter concerning exactly what a character learns.

Complications. Some subjects may draw undue attention to the characters. For example, if the characters start asking too many people in Khikzux about the Crocodile Crew, they may find themselves the target of a lizardfolk hitman.

Each hour spent gathering information on a single topic brings a 10 percent chance of a complication. Create a complication that best suits the situation.

SIDE QUESTS

The Maze of Orbea is probably like no other location the characters have ever been to. It is a town of canyons, bridges, roads and elaborate tunnels, covered in multi-story buildings and walkways. Above all, Orbea is a town of mystery and exploration. A humanoid can spend a lifetime in the town and never see all it has to offer. As such, there are plenty of opportunities for side quests while in the Maze.

The characters are under no obligation to participate in any of these side quests. However, these side quests can offer valuable opportunities for clues, experience, rewards, and discoveries during their time there.

1 - "MAKE ME LOOK GOOD."

As the characters are traveling through the town's streets, they're approached by a forlorn Knotsider human **knight** named Danyll the Lion. Recently, Danyll's had bad luck in wooing a local girl named Tanya. He believes that Tanya sees him as weak, despite his rank. He asks the characters if they will pretend to lose a fight to him and offers each of them 10 gp for their help. The set-up is simple: the characters pick a fight with Danyll, and Danyll tells them to back away. From there, the characters "attack" the knight. After 3 rounds, Danyll gets the "upper hand" and "defeats them all"

"If you don't mind, knick me with one of your blades just over the eye. I've got to really sell this."

Whether or not the knight's plan works is up to you.

2 - QUEST FOR THE CURE

The characters watch a man collapse in the streets. When they run to assist, they discover that it is an elf who is incredibly ill. His name is Galather Dorxidior. Galather is a traveling historian (**mage**) from Olyothyrr who hopes to meet with a local geologist, Graunder Diamondeyes. Galather believes that the source for the sickness that's plagued him and the elves of Olyothyrr for the last few decades is in the actual soil of the land. When the characters first meet Galather, he has five levels of exhaustion (see the *PHB* for details) and can no longer move on his own. Long rests do not remove the exhaustion, however, a greater restoration spell will remove one level. If the characters can't cast *greater restoration* themselves, they can pay to have a high-level priest at one of the city's many temples cast it. It costs 450 gp per casting. Each week the elf fails to return to Olyothyrr, he gains an additional level of exhaustion. If it seems like he will not be able to complete his quest, he hands the characters a box of soil and asks them to find the geologist, Graunder Diamondeyes in Khikzux Ward (Area 10).

The geologist is relatively easy to find if the characters spend a little time fact-finding (see the section on Gathering Information above). Graunder is not only a geologist: he's an **earth weird**. As a weird, he can touch the soil and sense any unusual qualities about it. Once the characters hand over the box, Graunder places his stoney paw into the soil. Immediately, he recognizes something unusual about it.

"It's tainted," he frowns. "But not as if something has been added to it, but more like something was taken from it. This isn't the first time I've felt this, either. Many years ago, someone brought me a box of soil from a tomb on the northside of the wound. It, too, had the same feeling of... absence."

Graunder isn't able to provide any more details than that. He does ask, however, that the characters leave the box with him so he can continue to learn more about it.

3 - THE PARCEL

As the characters are settling in, they meet a woman named Voh (**commoner**) who asks if they are looking for some easy work. She mentions that there is a parcel service over in Khikzux Ward (Area 10) that needs people to run errands. If the characters agree, they will have to go to the address the woman gives them. Outside of the building, via a *magic mouth* spell, the characters are asked to identify themselves and state their purpose. If they explain that they are delivering a package, a slot opens and a black, wooden box slides out. The magic mouth asks them to deliver the package to an address in the Eight Gems Ward. The recipient's name is Osma Jaroh, a retired adventurer and Knotsider ex-patriot (N male Knotsider human **mage**). He will pay the characters 5 sp when the package is delivered.

If the characters open the parcel, they discover shards of dull, green gems. The gems emit faint evocation magic but otherwise seem to have no known use. If sold, they fetch no more than 1 sp for the entire set.

4 - "FANCY A GAME OF BANZO?"

A man with a black eye and bloody nose bumps into the characters. He immediately raises his hand up, as if he is about to be struck, pleading, "Please! I haven't gotten the money yet! Give me more time!" When he realizes that the characters aren't the gangsters he fears, he introduces himself as Briyan and explains his situation. Only a few hours ago, Briyan bet everything he had in a game of Banzo at The Mystique, a gambling hall in the Zhalruvox Channel (Area 13). The person who took his money was a high stakes gambler named Hydrius Suenborn. Briyan begs the characters to help him, claiming that if they don't, Hydrius and his gangsters will come after Briyan and his family.

The entire act is a ploy. Briyan (a **bandit**) actually works for Hydrius. His job is to look for "marks" around the city, sell the story about how he and his family are in danger, and then get heroes and adventures to help out.

The Mystique is simple to find and doesn't require information-gathering checks. It's a seedy joint filled with all manner of scum and villainy. Hydrius plays at a table towards the back of the Casino. Hydrius is a NE **water elemental** with an Intelligence score of 11 and a Charisma score of 13. He can speak Common. At all times, he wears a leather diver's suit so he can maintain his consistency without concentrating. While in the diver's suit, he loses Water Form trait and Whelm action. He can use half of his movement to open the face mask of his diver's suit and escape through the hole and vice versa.



Hydrius surrounds himself with a gang of six **thugs**. If Briyan's name is brought up, Hydrius laughs and makes them an offer: if they can beat him at three hands of Banzo, he will return all of the money he won off Briyan. But if Hydrius wins, he wants something of value from the characters. Choose an item that is special to one of the characters, such as a family heirloom important to the character's backstory, a powerful magic item, etc.

If the characters agree, they must choose among them who will enter the Banzo contest. Hydrius' thugs take the stake for safekeeping (within sight, so the characters don't get antsy).

During each round of Banzo, the character must make three checks: Wisdom (Insight), Charisma (Deception), and Charisma (Intimidation). If the character has proficiency with Three Dragon Ante or any other card game, that tool proficiency can replace the relevant skill in any of the checks.

During the first round, the Charisma (Deception and Intimidation) checks are ringers. Hydrius purposely throws the round. However, the character can use their Wisdom (Insight) check contested by Hydrius' Charisma (Deception) check; Hydrius makes his check at +7. If the character sees through the Deception, they are free to confront Hydrius about the bluff or ignore it, and possibly, use it to his/her advantage.

The second round is the same as the first, with Hydrius trying to bluff the character. This time, he feints frustration, slamming his fists on the table, cursing the characters for their absurd luck. Losing 0-2, Hydrius ups the stake:

"If you win the next hand, in addition to what is already on the table, I'll give you something of great value." The water elemental claps his gloved hands together. One of his thugs steps forward with a chest and opens it for you to see. Within the chest is an ancient, golden amulet with two gashes carved into it. Strange runes decorate both sides. "This is the Herald's Key, a long lost treasure. These runes are written in the ancient tongue, Celestial.

"They say that this medallion will reveal the location of the hidden city of Hearth to anyone who holds it. Within this lost city, you will find untold treasure. In fact, the medallion itself is said to be priceless. Easily worth millions in Castlegraspian din."

He then leans forward. Behind the glass of his helmet, his water form creates on a distorted grin. "But if I win... *I own you*. You will do *whatever* I ask, *whenever* I ask it. Not as slaves, no, but let's just say: perpetual business partners? Do we have a deal?"

If the characters agree, the third hand of Banzo requires the character to make the same three checks. However, Hydrius cheats this hand. The character must first make his Wisdom (Insight) check contested by Hydrius' Charisma (Deception) check to catch the cheat.

If the character's check is successful, the character notices that Hydrius' expression changed for a moment—one of Hydrius' thugs is a magic initiate. He casts a subtle *minor illusion* spell on Hydrius' cards, changing them to Hydrius' benefit.

If the character does not notice Hydrius' expression change or makes no move to confront Hydrius, he/she must play his/her hand using their Charisma (Deception) and Charisma (Intimidation) checks. This time, however, the DC for each check is 20. The character must pass both checks in order to beat Hydrius.

Should Hydrius still lose the third hand or get caught cheating, he flips the table and attacks the characters. Hydrius hates losing more than anything. And as an elemental, he knows that his destruction will only result in his return to the Elemental Plane of Water—a temporary inconvenience. (So much for the thugs, though.)

Otherwise, if and when Hydrius wins, he immediately takes what is his and tells the characters that at some point in the near future he will call upon them to perform a task. What the task is and when it's called on is up to you.

5 - CATCH THE LITTER OF CANID PUPS

A canid mother (**commoner**) chases one of her pups in the street, cursing. She's already got two pups under each of her arms. Exasperated, she asks the characters to help her find the rest of her children. When asked how many children she has, she responds, "Seven total." The characters must find and catch the other four. To do so, a character must spend 1 minute searching for a pup. At the end of the minute, have the character make three ability checks in the following order: a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception), followed by a DC 10 Dexterity, and finally a DC 10 Strength. Each time a character succeeds on all three checks, they find one of the pups and grabs it. Otherwise, they have to spend another minute searching with another series of checks. Once all the pups are returned, the mother is thankful, but, unfortunately, has no reward to offer.

6 - "OHO! MY HAT!"

While walking down the street, a stiff breeze knocks the hat off an elderly Knotsider **mage** named Ka Kazar the Confounding. "Oho! My hat!" Ka Kazar exclaims. "Help me get it back, would ye?" he asks the characters, feinting

a bad back and 'even worse knees.' The old man's hat slides into a nearby alley. As the characters enter the alley, a gang of 3 **bugbears** stops the hat. "Zoomer Territory" they warn. While the bugbears hope to roll the characters, if they recognize a threat, they immediately surrender, instead offering information. While the bugbears don't know anything about Valcryn Vorpos, they can offer some insight into the three major gangs that claim ownership of Orbea: the Crocodile Crew, the Salvation, and the Boars. All three gangs are detailed further in the forthcoming one-shot *War on the Zheree*.

Meanwhile, Ka Kazar forgets that he even asked the characters to help him in the first place.

7 - PUT THE KRIG DOWN

Two men in white robes are carrying a semi-conscious krig by its arms to a horse-drawn carriage 30-feet away. There is a third man, also in white, at the reins. If questioned, the men explain that the krig is sick and that they are taking him to a temple to receive medical attention. The krig, through its haze, gazes at the characters through its many eyes and weakly asks for help. If the characters intervene, the men in white robes attack. All three men are **thugs** who work for a terrorist organization called the Burning Web. The Burning Web believes that the krigs are all part of a vast, global conspiracy that wishes to take over Omeria by putting krigs in positions of power. They were taking the krig to a warehouse by the docks (Area 6) to perform experiments on it. After they save him, the krig thanks the characters, then leaves. If the characters decide to get involved, they must go down to the docks and find the Burning Web's warehouse. This side quest plot continues in the forthcoming one-shot adventure *The Burning Web*.

8 - TURF WAR

As the characters are entering a shop, restaurant, or tavern somewhere within Orbea, a **lizardfolk** dressed in a green cloak enters with them. Suddenly, a cry goes up outside the location: "This is Salvation!" Five halfling **bandits** chuck vials of alchemists fire at the location, setting everything ablaze. Characters caught in the crossfire must make the appropriate Dexterity saving throws (see the *PHB*). However, they are not the intended targets. The lizardfolk shouts back in Draconic, "Crew Forever!", pulls a heavy crossbow from under his cloak, and fires back. The lone lizardfolk and the halfling gangster then trade fire as the place burns.

The lizardfolk is a member of the Crocodile Crew and the halflings are members of The Salvation. Both gangs have a bitter rivalry.

After 2-3 rounds of combat, the local militia (**guards**) shows up and all of the gangsters flee the scene. The lizardfolk is actually an important member of the Crocodile Crew named Draozax. Draozax's death could lead to an all-out war between the rival factions. If he is killed, the guards' captain immediately realizes the trouble the lizardfolk's death could bring Orbea. The guards ask the characters to help them deal with the issue.

The Crocodile Crew's turf is Khikzux Ward (Area 10) and the Salvation's turf is in Azen'qod Ward (Area 17). The war between the two crews continues in the forthcoming one-shot *War of the Zheree*.

9 - FAMILY MATTERS

As the characters are traveling through the Eight Gems Ward (Area 14), they are accosted by Wind in the Valley, the devilkin servant (**commoner**) of an important noble named Makrino. Makrino is a member of the wealthy Urquiza family that lives in western Orbea. Recently, the patriarch of the family, Millan, died, leaving his entire estate to his two sons, Makrino and Maioriano. The brothers were each left a key to their father's treasure vault at his mansion in the Eight Gems Ward. To open the vault and retrieve the treasure, each son must use his key in synchronicity with the other. However, the two refuse to share the treasure. The servant offers the party 500 gp if they will break into Maioriano's home in the Eight Gems Ward and steal Maioriano's key. This side quest continues in the forthcoming one-shot *Maioriano's Key*.

10 - SOMETHING IN THE TUNNELS

Three children have gone missing near a series of tunnels that run under Laris Ledge (area 16). The town militia has sent guards into the tunnels, but they, too, have yet to return. Finally, the militia's captain asks the characters if they will enter the tunnels to find out what is responsible for the disappearances. Within the tunnels, the characters discover that a **roper** has climbed up from the Under and is eating anything that enters its territory. If the characters defeat the roper, the guards pay them 100 gp for their help.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

The Maze of Orbea is loaded with mystery, intrigue, danger, and excitement. It should seem like everywhere the characters turn, there is a side quest or encounter waiting to happen. Roll a d20 three times per day of game time, checking for encounters each morning, afternoon, and evening or night. An encounter occurs on a roll of 16 or higher. Roll a d20 and check the Orbea Encounters table to determine what the encounter is, or simply choose an encounter you like.

IMPORTANT LOCATIONS

The map of Orbea reveals the most important locations in the city detailed below. Of course, Orbea is a mess of buildings, canals, streets, and sidewalks and is easy to get lost in. Assume that almost any time of building or business one would find in a large city also exists in Orbea. Furthermore, Orbea is crowded. While only 6,000 or so humanoids call the Maze their home, 8,000 to 10,000 more are visiting the city for business or pleasure or sometimes both.

Many of the locations have interconnecting clues that lead back not only to finding Valcryn Vorpos but also to some of the Side Quests mentioned above. These clues are detailed at the end of the location's description. You can also find a flow chart of each adventure path on page [pagenumber].

1 - ORBEA AIRFIELD

Seven 200-foot-tall blimp towers organized in a triangle line either side of the main roads heading west out of Orbea. The towers are spaced roughly 250 feet apart. The main control tower is at the center of the towers; through the use of illusory magic, a loud, echoing voice issues commands to the blimps' pilots and porters. Bright, red lights tip each of the

ORBEA ENCOUNTERS

d20 Encounter

1 A **dust mephit** flies past the characters, sneezing as it goes. Each time it sneezes, it launches a cloud of dust into the air.

2 A **mage** strolls down the street pulling a treasure chest with legs (a **mimic**) on a leash like it was a dog. The treasure chest snarls at the characters as they walk past it.

3 Two **thugs** shove a devilkin **commoner** into the mud and start kicking him. If the characters intervene, the devilkin becomes a valuable source of information about locations in Orbea.

4 The characters catch a glimpse of a gnome wearing Knotsider livery, just like Valcryn Vorpos wore while he was in Haver. When they catch up to it, it turns out that it's a female gnome **commoner**. She hasn't seen Vorpos and mutters something about "racist Ditimayans" under her breath.

5 An old woman (**commoner**) hugs onto one of the characters. She smiles and whispers in his ear, "Tall and glowin' green, ain't they? Tall and glowing green." She then wanders off, muttering to herself.

6 A **commoner** merchant pushing a large cart accosts the characters. The cart has the heads of dead young dragons of all colors on it. "Dragon brains! Eat just a scoop and you'll become a sorcerer just like the great beasts! Only 1 sp a spoonful." He holds up a spoon for each character.

7 Three **water elementals** swim through one of the city's canals headed for the river. As they go, they leap like dolphins, splashing the characters as they go. The locals laugh.

8 A nude **krig** approaches the characters and asks in a demanding tone, "Have you seen Reverence?" The krig waits a few minutes for a reply, grunts, then pushes past the characters. A few seconds later, the krig stops another traveler asking if they've seen Reverence.

9 Two canid jugglers (**bandits**) begin performing tricks for the characters. Their trick is a distraction. Make Wisdom (Insight) checks for the characters contested by the canid's Charisma Performance checks (+3 to the roll). The character who fails the check and gets the worst result in the entire party has their entire coin pouch stolen by the jugglers' assistant (another **bandit**). If all of the characters pass their checks, they notice the third man trying to rob them. When the jig is up, all three take off in different directions.

10 The characters almost stumble into a suit of **animated armor** bearing the Golden Eye of Odonburg as it walks down the street. The suit is a remote traveler whose pilot is likely thousands of miles away.

11-20 The characters meet an NPC with a side quest (see Side Quests above).



towers, no doubt used to help guide blimps entering Orbea's airspace to their docks. Currently, there are three blimps docked in Orbea, all bearing the blue and red colors of Odonburg. At the center of the tower's framework, you see levitating platform discs lifting cargo up to the blimp's catwalks.

The blimps currently stationed in Orbea are *The Predator*, *Good Hope*, and *The Red-and-Blue Gentleman*. *The Predator*, a retrooled warblimp, is currently on a mission to collect a group of evacuated animals from a village a few miles outside of Qola (detailed further in the forthcoming *Flight of the Predator*).

The Red-and-Blue Gentleman is a leisureblimp where wealthy nobles from across Omeria can gamble freely. And *Good Hope* brought important delegates from Odonburg to meet with the Krig Bairns (see Area 3).

The airfield itself is unguarded. The four towers not in use are locked up and the control modules for their levitating discs have been removed. The three towers currently in use are guarded by four Dinzer **guards** each. Each guard is equipped with a personal *platform of levitation* (functionally the same as a *broom of flying*) and a *wand of magic missiles*. The guards for *The Predator* and *Good Hope* have instructions to only allow their respective blimps' pilots and crew members into the tower. And the guards for *The Red-and-Blue Gentleman* must see a ticket before they allow a

passenger on board, and loading times won't start until an hour past sunrise the next day anyways.

2 - QIASSITH CLIFF

The industrial hub of Orbea hugs the northwestern cliff of the town. Not nearly as well lit as the other parts of the town, Qiassith is filled with flat, ugly buildings where mostly krig and kobold factory workers labor to build technological commodities. These goods are then carted to one of the four 200-foot-tall blimp towers along the road leading northwest out of Orbea and then transported to its final destination.

3 - SHIRZOSH COMMONS

Although the krig call Orbea their home, they are not the rulers of the city. Or at least that's what the Tribunal of Orbea would have the populace believe. The Tribunal consists of three governors who make all of the decisions for the city and its people. The three governors are Sress of Elsath (N female **lizardfolk**), Clurt Justclurt (LN male **goblin**), and Veronia Winterhunt (LG female **Knotsider knight**). The three reside within Shirzosh commons at their own governors' mansions. Once per week, the Tribunal meets at the House of Records, where they parlay with guild lobbyists and vote on important issues. Of course, most Orbeans are hardly aware that the three even exist. Although they pass many laws, very few of them actually go into effect. And the three almost never make public appearances. In fact, no one even remembers how the three got their jobs in the first place.

The main road that pushes through the Commons becomes a tunnel that leads into the Undermaze, the true home of the krigs. While the tunnels are not off-limits to non-krigs, they are rumored to be dangerous. Furthermore, non-krigs who wander too far into the tunnels eventually get lost within the maze. Dying of starvation and hunger, the trespasser is found by krigs and brought back to the surface where they are given over to one of the temples. This is the only warning the krigs ever give. The second time a non-krig gets lost within the maze, they are left to die.

If there are krig leaders in Orbea, those leaders are likely the 15-20 krig who the Orbeans have dubbed the Krig Bairns. On rare occasions, leaders from other nations come to Orbea to connect with the Matriarch. While the Matriarch's true location is never revealed by the krigs and those who try to find her inevitably become lost in the Undermaze, the Krig Bairns represent her interests and desires.

In addition to the government buildings in Shirosh, the ward is home to many of the city's finest restaurants and taverns, including the Colossal Spider Tavern and Inn, a favorite stopping point for visiting dignitaries, ambassadors, and VIPs who wish to meet the governors or the Krig Bairns.

4 - NORTH WARD/ZATIKETA

North Ward has long been the middle-class residential section of Orbea. In recent years, however, the ward has turned into the home of separatists from Arruquetta, trying to avoid civil war and death at the hands of the Cord, Daria Emagavel's secret police force. As their numbers grew, the separatists began calling the region Zatiketa. Naturally, Orbea's acceptance of what Emagavel considers "war criminals" has harmed relations with Aruquetta to the north, but not even the Spear of Weysevain is willing to go against the krigs and their mother. Plus, the toll on Gadran's Plateau is one of her most profitable ventures.

Along with the Martians came the Boars, a clan of criminals led by a warlock named Hogan Zul (NE male **Ditimayan human mage**). The Boars are recognized by the black tusks they tattoo over their jaws and the thick pelts they wear over their shoulders. Hogan operates from his mother's house in a multi-tiered hovel built into the northern wall of the Yivu plateau. His mother treats visiting members of his gang like they were Hogan's childhood friends. They lovingly call her Mama Zul.

Despite their ready-to-rumble appearance, the Boars prefer intrigue over direct confrontation with the other two gangs of Orbea. Still, when pressed, the Boars' aptitude for violence is rarely contested.

5 - THE BLINDING BRIDGE

Its name comes from its position relative to both the eastern and western horizon. Those traveling out of the maze in the morning catch the rising sun, then, in the evenings, as they return, they're met with the setting. Superstitious Central Omerians believe it was built as a playful offering to Naeyer. Others think it's just lousy engineering.

A natural divider between Khikzux Ward and Zatiteka, the bridge acts as a border between the Boars and Crocodile Crews' turfs.

6 - SALT WARD

Salt Ward is home to Orbea's cluttered docks and warehouses. Despite its proximity to the Orbean militia's barracks to the north in Shirzosh, the Salt Ward is thick with crime. There is not a week that goes by where a body isn't found floating face down in Keqrab Bay. Most of the warehouses in the Salt Ward are owned by wealthy smugglers and merchant houses from all over Central Omeria. They use Orbea as a place to store illegal wares. As such, the warehouses are heavily guarded by well-paid professionals. So brazen are the landlords, they put their clan and tribe symbols on the doors of the buildings they own as a warning to those who would dare enter: "you steal from here, you steal from me."

A narrow flight of steps climbs 500-feet up to Sevari Tower (Area 7). Other than steep ramp leading into the Zik'thath market (Area 8), the steps—dubbed The Killer—is the only way up the plateau. Unlike the other plateaus in Orbea, there does not seem to be any tunnels leading through or even into the base of the tower.

Valcryn arrived at Orbea via ship. Therefore, the docks and the Salt Ward are the best locations to start looking for him and gathering information. See the section on gathering information for details.

7 - SEVARI TOWER

The spire that divides the docks and overlooks the harbor is called Sevari Tower. Once upon a time, the tower was not decorated with the red beacons lining its walls today. As such, the Tower had another nickname—Shipsmasher. Were you to dive into the Bay at the western front of the tower, you'd likely find the remains of dozens of destroyed ships.

The Tower itself is one of the few plateaus in Orbea that isn't hollowed out and littered with dark tunnels. It is also isolated from much of Orbea. There are only two footpaths onto the tower's surface. First, there is the 500-foot climb of steps from the Salt Ward. Lacking any sort of railing, the exhausting staircase has been nicknamed The Killer

by the locals. The second way up is the unnamed ramp that descends at a steep angle into the rear of Zik'thath Market (Area 8). Both make travel and transportation enormously difficult for anyone who lacks a mode of flight. Because of its natural exclusivity, Sevari Tower is a paradise of high-dollar casinos, inns, restaurants, and high-end shops.

Its most famous casino is the Long Shadow, a four-story building that hangs over the tower's western edge. The minimum deposit at the Long Shadow is 1,000 gold pieces. Plus, most games have a minimum buy-in of 100 gold pieces. Like most of Orbea's casinos, the Long Shadow's most popular game is Banzo. Its current Banzo champion is a Knotsider gnome named Felgim Trumda. The casino's owner, a devilkin named Prayer in the Morning is loved and celebrated (and feared) by all who enter the casino's pitch black doors. She also offers a house specialty which she extends to anyone short on luck. "1,000 gp loan. Due in one hour with ten points on top. Or? You get the Drop!" In other words, Prayer loans the sap 1,000 gold pieces. The loan is to be repaid with a 10% interest on the principle in one hour. If the borrower can't pay up, Prayer's pit bosses open up a hole in her office floor and drop the borrower through it 500-feet down into the Bay below. If the borrower survives, they're debt-free. So far, no one has survived.

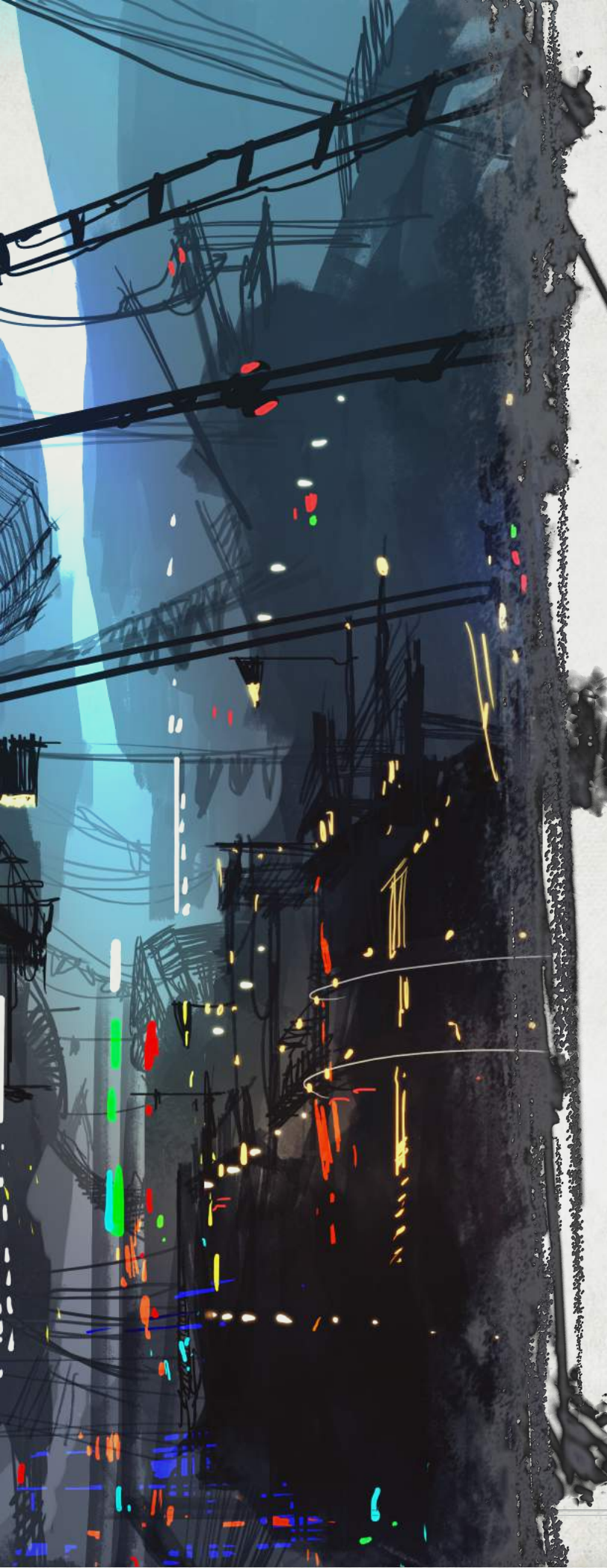
8 - ZIK'THATH MARKET

Alive!—there is seriously no better word to describe the place you're looking at other than "alive." Stacks upon stacks of shops, stalls, street vendors, and hustlers crowd the intersecting streets. The three largest natural columns of the town surround the bustling market on all sides, casting it in perpetual shadow. Regardless, the entire place is incredibly well-lit. At every turn, perpetual light spells have been cast upon the signs, posts, strands of bulbs, and even the railings throughout the area. Each tower of rock is wrapped in a web of scaffolding, then, haphazardly interconnected with natural and manmade bridges. Huge crowds of humanoids of all sorts haggle for goods and services all over. Stray dogs, cats, and infantile grick roam under the feet of shoppers and into stalls. Meanwhile, massive carts pulled by ornery-looking red-striped thornfoots shove their way past the people as their riders shout at passersby in strange dialects. You smell roasting meat and the sweet smoke of hashish pipes. You hear the squawks of rare birds and jingle of traded coins. What a place!

From run-of-the-mill weapons, armor, and equipment to curiosities from afar, anything and everything can be purchased at Zik'thath Market. The characters can expect to find any magic item of common or uncommon value here, as well as the occasional rare magic item, too. Plus, most of the vendors are willing to haggle. On the same token, street vendors can be incredibly pushy. And with all the commotion, theft is common.

Like much of Orbea, the presence of law enforcement in the market is low. If any is here, they only work if it looks like they can collect a "reward" from those they save (aka a shakedown).





9 - YAQUT HEIGHTS

Because it's a popular stopover for travelers on the Leash, Yaqut Heights is crowded with shops, bars, and hostels. In fact, it's home to the most popular inn in all of Orbea, The Married Couple, a pair of buildings connected by an underground tunnel. The western half of the Married Couple is the Restless Groom, a tavern and restaurant known for its spicy Arruquetan cuisine. The eastern half of the Married Couple is the Sleeping Bride, a reasonably priced inn with plenty of space. The Married Couple's owners, a married couple by the name of Ixaka and Ezker Arroquy (LN male Ditimayan **commoners**) are faithful supporters of Queen Dariah Emagavel. As such, no separatists are allowed at either end of the establishment. Cords looking for information on separatists often turn to the Arroquys. Both Arroquys have received numerous death threats, many considering the pair turncoats and traitors to Arruqueta's freedom.

10 - KHIKZUX WARD

The easternmost ward north of Zheree River is Khikzux Ward. Many of the locals give it the insulting nickname, Demi-human Town. It is home to lizardfolk, orcs, and frogfolk. Because the river is at its strongest point where it emerges from Zheree Canyon, the ward easily floods. Mold and biting insects are common. To account for the conditions, canals have been built into the streets. Some of the residents own gondolas, but most choose to walk along the narrow walkways or on the rooftops of the ward.

Khikzux is ruled by the Crocodile Crew, a tribe of lizardfolk led by an albino lizardfolk **druid** named Old Rat. Old Rat is worshipped by the Khikzux as their prophet and savior. The glass-eyed leader often speaks before the members of the Crew—whom he labels "disciples"—with vaguely-worded predictions, which he later uses to prove his value as a diviner.

Currently, the Crocodile Crew is at war with the Salvation.

11 - LENORO'S WALL

Pressed tightly against its sister plateau, Yaqut Heights, Lenoro's Wall is the largest and shortest natural rock formation in the Maze of Orbea. Similar to the Heights, Lenoro's is a stopover for travelers entering Orbea from the west and North. Those who hope to avoid the toll to the south also hang a left to take the circuitous route around the town's borders. For this reason, many of the shops, inns, and taverns on Lenoro's Wall have names that play on the convention: the Go Left Inn, The Shop-Lefter, and Left Arms & Armor just to name a few.

A small park overlooks the east end of the Wall, a favorite spot for Orbean youths to gather and watch the Dinzer blimps as they enter the town. Meanwhile, the constant churn of the Zheree rages below.

12 - THE AUTUMN BRIDGE

Near the mouth of the river, 50-feet above Zheree Falls, the Autumn Bridge connects the wealthy Eight Gems Ward to the thriving Zik'thath Market. The Autumn Bridge is carved to look like one hundred Ditimayan slaves holding themselves above the Zheree. Supposedly the design comes from a legend of ancient Ditimayan nomads who used each other's limbs to create a chain so they could ford the angry river. The view of the sun setting over the Omerian from

the bridge is particularly enticing. It's on this bridge that many travelers passing through Orbea fall in love with the town.

13 - ZHALRUVOX CHANNEL

The Zhalruvox Channel clings to either side of the Zheree. The shops, restaurants, and inns here are a little tamer than those found in the Zik'thath Market. That said, the Channel's shops and services are not what one would normally expect to find in any other town, village, or city. Free from the prying eyes of the town's militia and the Arruquetan garrison, a black market culture thrives in the Channel. Illegal weapons, magic items, rare animals, mercenary services, and more can be bought in the Channel, usually at a steep price.

Ref Gregaz (NE male Knotsider human **veteran**) is the mastermind behind Zhalruvox. Unlike the gangs that infest the northern wards, Ref keeps his business quiet. Nearly everyone is on his payroll and he doesn't cause a stir. And thanks to contracts with powerful people all over Central Omeria, he is well-protected. Of course, you'll never actually find Ref in Zhalruvox Channel. Ref lives in a quiet mansion overlooking the Omerian in the Eight Gems Ward where he tends to his garden and spends time with his grandchildren.

14 - EIGHT GEMS WARD

The well-to-do of Orbea live in the Eight Gems Ward overlooking the Omerian Ocean. As the pinnacle of wealth, the Eight Gems is one of the only wards that has its own standing militia. Some of the guards work for the town and are paid in taxes. Others are former soldiers hired as mercenaries. Although Eight Gems is unwalled, anyone that "doesn't fit in" is quickly accosted by the ward's defenders. A non-resident better have a good excuse or better bribe. Otherwise, they may find themselves bloodied and dragged out onto Market Road, or worse (tossed into the Omerian).

Like most people with too much money, the residents of Eight Gems spend most of their time trying to one-up their neighbors. Every year, the houses get taller and more elaborate. The parties grow more lavish and over-the-top. And the clothing is simply outrageous. A popular trend among the Eight Gems' elite is to dress as a Signature Monster. For example, a dilettante whose chosen monster was a Chimera might wear a golden lion mask, and wear golden epaulets designed to look like a ram and a dragon. Or someone whose monster was a harpy might wear an elaborate cloak made of pink and yellow feathers and not much else. The more risqué the better, darling.

15 - GADRAN'S PLATEAU

Queen Daria Emagavel of Arruqueta made a deal with Orbea: you let me collect tolls from the people traveling through the Leash and through Orbea, and you can do as you please. The Tribunal agreed and the Arruquetan Toll was built along the ramp leading off the plateau. The toll charges 1 sp for two-legs, 4 sp for four-legs, plus 1 sp per wheel. With nearly 1,200 travelers passing through the toll each day, Gadrans' Toll has helped fund Emagavel's continued political and military interests.

As the toll has expanded, so has Arruqueta's presence in Orbea. East of the toll, Arruqueta maintains two huge barracks with 100 trained soldiers (**guards**) each. In addition, they have equipped the plateau with mangonels and ballistas. Plus, the Arruquetans maintain a stable of 20 **griffons** whose riders can have them saddled and in the air in less than a

minute.

Overseeing the operation in Orbea is one of Emagavel's most trusted officers, Captain Santxa Goytino (LN female Ditimayan human knight). Goytino also oversees a unit of 10 Cords, the secret police of Arruqueta, who sniff out separatist forces in Orbea.

16 - LARIS LEDGE

Also called "the Thumb" Laris Ledge is the second-highest point in Orbea, second only to Sevari. Originally, it was intended to be an area of expansion for the town. Many of the Maze's greatest developers pitched it as the new Eight Gems. A few months after residents moved into Laris, an earthquake shook Orbea. The shockwaves knocked a massive chunk off the east cliff, toppling three buildings and killing not only the families within but also twenty people in Azen'qod Ward below. Since then, the project was abandoned. A few of the homes are still occupied, but overall, Laris is a ghost town, which is strange considering the congested nature of Orbea.

17 - AZEN'QOD WARD

There are shrines and small temples all throughout Orbea, each dedicated to a different, unique god or goddess. But if there was one spiritual center of Orbea, it would definitely have to be Azen'qod Ward. The three largest temples in Azen'qod are the Temple of Yrena, Goddess of Destruction; the Temple of Zuton, God of Good Luck (which, let's face it, is more of a casino than a temple); and Usteus, God of Judgment.

Like all temples of Yrena, her temple in Azen'qod is maintained by eight blind seers known as Yrena's Witnesses. For the most part, the seers keep to themselves. Oddly, they don't have the same freedom to perform sacrifices in honor of Yrena as other temples do. That's thanks mostly to the halfling worshippers of Usteus who've made it clear that as long as Usteus' temple stood in Orbea, there would be no unsanctioned murders (aka murders done by anyone but the halflings themselves).

Thirty percent of Azen'qod's population are wanderer halflings and most are devout worshippers of Usteus. The temple is governed by Meros Scarletfoot (LE male wanderer halfling **spy**). But Meros is more than just a holy man. He is also a criminal mastermind. By manipulating the faith of his fellow halflings, he sends them forward to commit "acts of Salvation" on behalf of Usteus. His grip on the halfling culture of Orbea has made him very wealthy. Over the last few months, the Salvation has started a bitter rivalry with the lizardfolk gang of neighboring Khikzux Ward. Since the first incident, fresh bodies from both sides have turned up in the Zheree and Kenqrud Bay every week. The militia originally tried to get involved but was explicitly told to stay out of it by both gangs. With few resources and fewer options, the militia had no choice but to comply.

FOLLOWING VORPOS' TRAIL

This section details the steps Vorpos took once he arrived in Orbea. While this is the best order for the characters to follow Vorpos' path, you are not obligated to run it this way. If the characters become stuck, you can offer a clue that drops them into another part of Vorpos' trail where they can pick up on the mystery once more.

THE TALL GHOST (KHIKZUK WARD)

Through rumors around town, the characters learn that Vorpos' first stop in Orbea was at a small, out-of-the-way bookshop in Khikzuk Ward called The Tall Ghost. The Ghost's owner, Ophiar, was on an expedition in the Wallingmiota when Vorpos first came by. He still hasn't returned. Ophiar's neighbor, Mrs. Wattlesbee (N female kobold commoner) relayed this information to Vorpos, although, she wasn't sure when he would return.

He asked her for an inn to stay at. She mentioned The Blushing Crocodile Inn in Khikuk.

THE BLUSHING CROCODILE INN (KHIKZUK WARD)

The Blushing Crocodile Inn is a ramshackle hovel with three crowded, shared rooms at the edge of a filth-ridden canal. The Blushing Crocodile's owner, Quz (N male lizardfolk **commoner**) doesn't remember Vorpos or any gnome stopping by the inn. He says it's possible the gnome stayed at another inn in the city as there are at least a twenty, most of which are upon the plateaus.

While the characters are at the Crocodile, have one of them notice a gnomish street vendor across from the inn. The sign on her cart advertises "authentic gnomish cuisine." The street vendor's name is Spidira (NG female gnome commoner). She remembers Vorpos well as he stopped by Spidira's cart and purchased a vegetable kabob the day he arrived. "He didn't look thrilled by the condition of the Blushing Crocodile so was asking me where there was an inn worth staying," she recalls. "I told him to look upon Yaqut Heights." Before the characters leave, she adds, "You should probably know this, but your friend was being followed by some tall fella in a gray cloak. Didn't get a good look at him, but I didn't get the impression that he was friendly, neither."

She tells them that the quickest way up to Yaqut Heights (Area 9) from Khizuk Ward is through a tunnel called Teal Alley that enters the plateau in its northern face.

TEAL ALLEY (YAQUT HEIGHTS)

More of a series of winding staircases than an alley, Teal Alley connects to various passages, tunnels, and other hideaways within the heart of the Yaqut Heights plateau. Although there are easy-to-follow signs that lead up to a surface exit, it's easy to get lost within the maze.

As the characters travel through the tunnels following Spidira's directions, they are accosted by a human **bandit** named Kelvar. "Hey! Hey! Wanna buy a book? Just 10 gold pieces. Brand new... still got that smell, ya know? Take a look! Take a look!" The book is *Glyphs and Scripts* by Aruxius, the same copy Vorpos had with him. Kelvar and his brothers jumped Vorpos while he was traveling through the maze, stole his coin purse, and pilfered the book. The brothers already spent the gold on drugs and alcohol, and are now trying to offload the book. If questioned, Kelvar whistles. Just then, from the shadows, Kelvar's three older, bigger brothers appear (**thugs**).

If the characters defeat the thugs without killing them, they can ask them about the gnome. They admit that they stole the book off Vorpos, but didn't kill him. Last they saw him, Vorpos was still heading up to the top of the Heights. That's all they know.

They don't remember anything about a figure wearing a gray cloak.

MOJA'S (YAQUT HEIGHTS)

There are four inns on Yaqut Heights: the Sleeping Bride (described in the Important Locations section), the Anxious Rhinoceros, the Deep Dandelion, and Moja's. The best move for the characters to make is to investigate each of the inns. The inns are easy to find and most Orbeans will offer directions at no charge.

Moja's is a reasonably priced inn/casino situated across a small merchant area. The person working behind the counter of Moja's, Tedd, remembers the gnome.

"He was a bloody mess when he came in. He told me he got rolled down on Teal Alley. I felt bad for the bugger and would have given him a room but we were all booked up. I recommended to him that he find one of the temples down in Azen'qod Ward. It's a rough section, but there are a few priests of Usteus down there. Just hope he didn't get all mixed up in the insanity."

If asked what he means, he explains that the Temple of Usteus is known to harbor religious extremists.

"Most folks call them a gang. But they're a little crazier than that, you know?"

The innkeeper gives the characters directions. He also mentions that shortly after the gnome left, someone wearing all gray came in asking for him. "There was something strange about the man's voice. Dialect I'd never heard."

THE TEMPLE OF USTEUS (AZEN'QOD WARD)

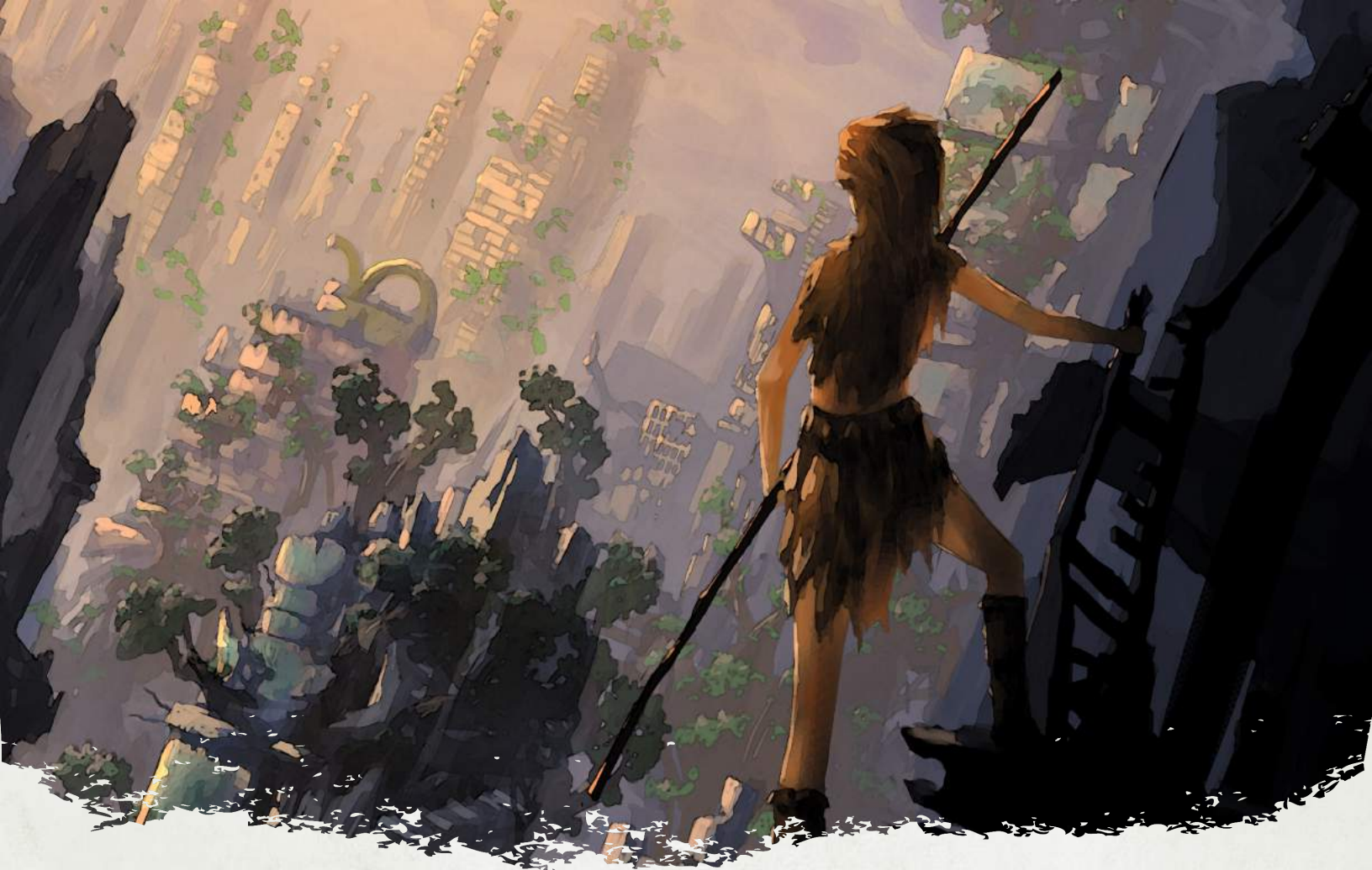
As the characters travel through Azen'qod, towards the temple, read the following:

Azen'qod ward is tucked between a canyon wall and the Zheree river. It appears to be one of the poorer wards, but certainly has a bit more charm to it than the canal-stricken streets of Khikzuk. The streets are narrow and the houses are short. Von Dorals and wanderer halflings are common here, as are canids. There's even a gnome or two. Mushroom gardens, moss-and-vine covered walls, and even patches of glow grass give the location a cozy feeling like being in a shady glade.

The Temple of Usteus is a relatively tall building hewn directly into the canyon wall deep within the borough and far from the river. It's quieter here, only the sounds of halfling marms sweeping off their front porches and the occasional cough of an old-timer. The twin statues of Usteus stand at either end of the entrance into the temple. The right statue, Usteus the Punisher, holds its mighty Maul of the Guilty. The Accuser's eyes stare at the entrance to the temple as if it is waiting for someone to leave. Meanwhile, the left statue, Usteus the Liberator, kneels with its head down as if to ask for forgiveness to those exiting the temple.

Inside, you see the flicker of torchlight and hear voices.

The characters are free to enter the temple without being harmed (unless they act violently towards the Usteusian followers, of course). If the statues give them pause, have one of the temple's priests (N male wanderer halfling **cultist**) invite them in, promising that Usteus only passes judgment on his followers and enemies, of which they are (likely) neither. "Unless, of course," says the priest, motioning to the



imposing right statue "You have reason to fear the Punisher?"

Once the characters enter the temple, read the following:

The main chamber of the temple is a 40-foot-square room with 10-foot high ceilings. Thick columns carved from the same stone as the floors, walls, and ceiling support the weight of the earth overhead. Hung on each of the columns are iron sconces with burning torches.

At the center of the columns, in a 20-foot-square opening, a dais carved like an eight-pointed star covers the floor. At each point of the star stands a halfling wearing a robe with a similar star design. At the center of the star stands two more halflings standing over a third halfling who is kneeling with his head on the ground and his hands behind his back. The halfling on the right wears a white mask with a gentle smile while the halfling on the left wears a black mask twisted in a frown. The black-masked halfling also holds a blood-stained maul, easily twice his size.

One of the halflings outside the star speaks, "Zalorin Petras. You have been accused in the eyes of Usteus of a crime most alarming: consorting with enemies of the temple. Now, as is the will of Usteus, you must present yourself to both forms of our most Holy Judge and seek Salvation. Once you have spoken, our most Holy Judge will decide if he stands before you as your Punisher or as your Liberator."

The halfling speaking is Meros Scarletfoot (see Area 17). The other nine halflings are all LN wanderer halfling **cultists**. And the halfling who begs for his life was an informant for Meros who is under suspicion of double-crossing the Salvation.

Meekly, the informant—whose face is already battered from his former brothers—begins to speak. Before he can say another word, the black-masked halfling representing Usteus the Punisher hits him in the face with the maul. Unless the characters intervene, the Punisher proceeds to beat the man to death.

If this happens, Meros says, "Salvation comes to our fallen brother in the form of punishment. He is saved." The others echo the sentiment in unison, "He is saved." Meros then motions for the remaining halflings to handle the body.

As long as the characters didn't intervene with the Ritual of Judgement, Meros is very welcoming to them, acting as if nothing violent or out-of-the-ordinary had just happened. Despite his devious nature, he is quite forthcoming. He remembers Vorpos and gave him a spot within the temple to rest and recover from his attack. He mentions that Vorpos shared his story with Meros.

"The gnome told me that he was on a mission to find a friend, a bookshop owner across the river. During our talks, he shared that he had discovered something important—something that could unravel all of Omeria. Valcryn believed that his life was

in danger. The poor soul would wake at night screaming.

"After resting with us for two days, he told me that he was going to travel back over the river to see if his friend had returned. I could not send a messenger on his behalf, of course, as we have..." he pauses and smiles. "Well, let's just say my kind aren't exactly *welcome* over in Khikzux.

"I'm afraid he never returned after that."

Meros offers the characters anything they might need. He's even willing to sell *potions of healing* at half the normal rate (25 gp each).

THE MAN IN GRAY (ANYWHERE)

After the encounter with Meros and the Usteus worshipers, the trail goes cold. The characters can return to Khikzux, but The Tall Ghost is still closed and Ophiar has not returned.

Eventually, one of the characters notices a figure in a gray cloak watching them from 30 feet away. Once noticed, the figure bolts and the characters will have to chase them through the busy city. Refer to the rules on Urban Chase Encounters in Chapter 8 of the *DMG*. If the characters catch up to the runner or harm him, the characters learn that it isn't a man at all: it's a female **orc**, Glurong, Mega's first mate. Glurong's incredible build and husky voice are easy for non-orcs to mistake her as male—a frequent point of contention for her.

At this point, Glurong has heard that Mega escaped the Castlegraspians, of course, but she doesn't know about his fate at Qola. Hearing the information, the look of terror on the tough warrior's face is unmistakable.

Glurong shakes her head, "It's all because of the book, isn't it? He just had to know what was in that damned book. It's doomed us all." She spits, cursing Mega's name in orcish.

"I came to Orbea to hide away after The Ghost Holm. We used to lay low here after our big jobs, let the heat die down. After Ghost Holm, he was supposed to meet me here. Then, we'd head up north to his brother's cabin on the other side of the Spine. She sighs, "Of course, he never came."

"So I didn't know what to do. Most of the Odezdoz had been arrested or were scattered across the continent, and I felt this feeling like I was in danger. Like I was being watched. I know this sounds crazy, but I swear I could feel eyes on me everywhere I went. Like something dark in the corner of my mind.

"Then, one day as I was walking down the streets, I saw that gnome. I recognized him right away from the images we were given by that wizard in Haver. If there was someone who knew what was going on, that I could give the book to, it was him."

She pauses realizing what she's just revealed.

Unless another circumstance occurred where Glurong didn't leave the Ghost Holm with the book, *Prime*, she's been in



Glurong art by Dean Spencer

possession of the book this entire time.

"Yes, I have it," she admits. "I have the unreadable book. It's not on me, of course. I've hidden it for now. But if giving it to you will help me sleep better at night, then by Suen's arms, I'll give the damn thing to you.

"The gnome and I talked for a while. He didn't even want to touch the thing. That's how afraid of it he was. Said it gave him nightmares. Same ones as me. In our dreams, the skies are dark and there's something roaring in the distance. Just before us stands a... tower... or something. And at the top of the tower is a glowing green light. Brighter than any I've ever seen. I can't explain it, right, but it gives me chills just talking about.

"I had a little money, so I put him up in a spot over on the Thumb, an out-of-the-way spot called the Tame Cave. It's quiet up there with plenty of escape routes. He'd be safe there. I'll bet he'll be glad to see you. Probably just wants to get home, poor bugger."

She won't tell the characters where she's hidden the book but mentions she gave it to someone in town whom she can trust to hide it for her.

"Even if you get it out of me who I gave it to, you probably won't find him. And I told them to never tell me where they're hiding with it."

She tells the characters to meet her at the top of the Killer two hours after sunset.

"Dress nice," she chuckles.

THE TAME CAVE (LARIS LEDGE)

Once the characters use one of the roads, staircases, or tunnels to reach the top of Laris Ledge, read the following:

Glurork wasn't wrong. It's quiet up here. The only sounds are those made by crickets and the dull roar of the town in the canyons below. There are a few souls here and there on the Ledge, but overall, the place feels hollow. Wide, two-story mansions, lie empty, the brown, dry grass of the peninsula grows wild in what was probably once well-manicured lawns.

Regular cracks and rises in the cobblestone paths reveal that the spot is prone to earthquakes, landslides, or potentially both. On the north side of the Ledge, the cut-in-half ruins of houses fuel this thought—looks like the Thumb was once bigger, but part of it tumbled over into the canyon below. A bronze plaque remembering the dead stands 30-feet from the edge.

You discover the inn where Glurork told you to find Vorpos. It appears that it was once one of the mansions on the plateau, but whatever event caused the northside to collapse also caused the building to sink six feet down into the ground, burying almost the entire first floor. Oddly, the building is still mostly intact. A flight of steps was dug and paved down to the original front door. A brightly painted sign over the door reads, "The Tame Cave. 1 sp per night."

The innkeeper is a ruddy-faced Von Doral woman named Hilga (**commoner**). She's half-asleep when the characters enter. Even at the low-price, business is slow. When asked about Vorpos, she shares that he is indeed in the inn, Room 27.

Room 27 is on the second floor. Natural light pours through the mansion's old second-story windows which are now even with the ground. When the characters knock at the door, no voice comes, but they discover that the door is ajar.

The room is 15 feet wide by 20 feet deep with 10-foot-high ceilings. A four-post bed is to your left and a large pair of windows that step out onto a ground-level balcony are directly ahead. In a chair directly in front of that window, you see a small humanoid, his back to you. He nods the back of his head to you, seemingly noting your presence in the room. But he gives no word of welcome.

If the characters call out to Vorpos, he gives no reply. Once they see his face, they quickly understand why: Vorpos is dead, a knife through his left eye. His head jerks up and down while a pair of **rats** eat the flesh around his lower jaw.

A DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that he's been dead for close to a day. In addition to the knife wound, he has strangulation marks around his throat. The knife itself is devoid of any markings. However, in his pocket, he's carrying a small, circular stone with magic runes on it. A character who can cast *identify* on the stone will know that it's a *sending stone*. If a character uses the stone to send a message, they receive a reply from a woman with a demanding, soldierly voice:

"This is Captain Santxa Goytino of the Arruquetta-Orbean Alliance. Identify yourself and your current position at once."

The characters can send one 25-word reply back to Goytino before the stone ceases to function. After that, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

If the characters spend a minute to perform a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check around the room, they notice that the balcony window is unlocked from the inside. Twelve-inch-long humanoid footprints lead over the railing and away from the Tame Cave. As the prints are too large to be Vorpos', it's possible they were his killer's.

There is also an invisible *scrying* sensor in the room. A character that can see invisible objects sees it with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. The moment that the characters notice it, the sensor vanishes.

Hilga doesn't remember anyone else other than Glurork (who she refers to as "that big green gal") visiting Vorpos.

THE CORDS (LARIS LEDGE)

Once the characters exit the Tame Cave, unless they are careful, they find themselves surrounded by 4 Arruquetan Cords (all **guards**) led by Sergeant Simon Delgalarrondo (LN male Ditimayan human **veteran**). All of the guards are armed with light crossbows and all are mounted on **griffons**.

Ten soldiers wearing dark, blue tunics and matching capes train their crossbows on you as you exit the Tame Cave. Each one has a fuschia cord of rope that dangles from the right epaulet. The leader of the group steps forward. "I am Sergeant Simon Delgalarrondo of the Cords of Arruquetta. We have reason to suspect that you have committed murder within that place of business. Drop your weapons and come with us."

The soldiers mean business. They received an anonymous tip that one of the informants was murdered by members of the Separatist movement and that the descriptions given of the Separatists match exactly the characters.

From here, the characters have a four options:

- ***They can fight the Cords and will likely defeat them.*** If the Cords' numbers are reduced to half or less, they make a tactical retreat with the intent of returning to Gadrans Plateau to bring additional reinforcements.
- ***They can run from the Cords.*** Hiding in the Thumb is very difficult as most of the buildings are empty and easily accessible. Plus, the griffons allow the Cords to maneuver quickly. The Ledge itself is 400-feet above the canyon's wards, so jumping off the cliff is likely to result in death. Alternatively, the characters can use enchantments, illusions, etc. to escape.
- ***They can convince the Cords that they did nothing wrong.*** The Cords are stubbornly devoted to their cause, but they *can* be convinced that the characters are innocent. Have one of the characters represent the party and make their case. Then have the character make a Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check contested by the Simon's Wisdom (Insight) check. Simon automatically makes his check at advantage, but the party's

representative can also gain advantage if the character's player did an exceptional job roleplaying the scene.

- ***They can go peacefully with the Cords.*** If the characters surrender themselves to the Cords, the Cords bind their hands with manacles (as in the *PHB*), then lead them to Gadrans Plateau. There, they are placed in one of the holding cells at their command center.

Should the characters escape the Cords by any means other than convincing them that they did nothing wrong, the Cords actively hunt them within the town. Each hour that the characters remain in town, roll 1d20. On a result of 13-20, a squad of 5 Cords (**guards**) led by 1 **veteran** notices the characters and moves to arrest them. You can make these rolls in place of the random encounter checks normal for this adventure.

The Cords' griffons are trained to obey only their command words. However, a character can spend 1 minute with a griffon, then make a DC 16 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. On a success, the griffon will allow the character to ride it as if the character was its true rider (but only that character).

CORD COMMAND CENTER DETENTION (GADRAN'S PLATEAU)

Only run this encounter if the characters are arrested by the Cords following the discovery of Valcryn Vorpos' body.

Before the characters are interred, they are deprived of all of their weapons, armor, and equipment, including arcane focuses, spell books, and component pouches. Characters

who seem particularly dangerous with free hands—such as monks—remain manacled even in the cells.

After traveling down a few flights of stairs into the heart of the plateau, they are placed into a 10-by-10 cell with iron bars. The room is well lit by *continual flame* globes placed at regular intervals in the hallway.

The ceilings, floors, and walls of the cell are made of thick, hewn stone, impossible to easily pass through, even by magical means. The cell bars are each 1-inch thick. They can be bent or pulled from their spot on the floor with a successful DC 21 Strength check. The door itself is locked with a mundane key, necessitating only a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to unlock—although, the Cords should have taken such tools away.

A **guard** keeps watch at all times at the end of the hallway, his back to a locked door. On the other side of the door is a second guard. The two communicate via a special knocking system that changes each time it knocks. A character listening to the knocks can make a DC 20 Intelligence check to determine the nature of the pattern. Each time they hear another knock, the DC lowers by 1.

In addition to the characters, there are six other prisoners in the cellblock. You're free to detail these prisoners however you like, although, it's likely that are or are suspected of being Arruquetan Separatists.

Of course, none of this matters. Within a few minutes of them being incarcerated, read the following:

The door at the end of the hall opens and a stern-looking woman with long, dark hair wearing the blue, black, and



fuschia uniform of a Cord officer enters flanked by a pair of Cord guards. One of the guards unlocks your cell and the woman stares at you. "Go," she snaps, pointing to the door. At the end of a hallway, you see a familiar face.

"How in the Obsidian did you manage to get yourselves arrested this fast?" Omnaweahl stomps over and wags her finger at you. "You're lucky I have friends in high places. Otherwise, you all would've been carted off to a dungeon somewhere in Arruquetta and fed to Emagavel's hyenas."

The dark-haired woman scoffs and steps aside, allowing you to leave.

Once the characters recover their gear, they are escorted outside with Omnaweahl. Outside, a tall, Dinzer man with gray in his beard is waiting.

A tall man with a shaved head and a grey beard wearing robes similar to Omnaweahl's stands outside waiting for you.

"So these are the ones stirring up a commotion in town, eh, little sister?" the bearded Dinzer man says while he smiles at you. However, it's clear there is sadness in his eyes.

The man is Ophiar (N male Dinzer human **mage**), the friend who Vorpos tried to meet in Orbea before he was murdered. He introduces himself to the characters and explains that he had heard the news of his friends' death from the Cords.

"How could Valcryn have possibly been an Arruquetan Separatist?" Ophiar says, shaking his head. The tears well up in his eyes once more. He hated Arruqueta." Omnaweahl tries to comfort her brother. "I should have been there for my friend," he says, choking back sobs.

"I should have known he was friends with you," says O. "You always had such interesting friends.

If the characters are curious about how Omnaweahl knew about the characters' incarceration, she gives a sheepish look.

"I just might possibly have a crystal ball I've been using to keep tabs on you since you entered Orbea. I would have been here sooner, but I was out east handling business in Naqqad. Sorry. Anyways, if this book is as big a deal as my bosses think it is, they want to ensure that it doesn't fall into the wrong hands. After what we've seen her, it's pretty clear there's a bunch of trouble surrounding it already."

O clears her throat and puts her hands into the pocket of her robe. "So, I guess, you'll be meeting the orc woman at Seviri Tower soon? It's already an hour after sunset. If so, my brother and I will be happy to escort you there.

Whether or not the characters accept their offer (they may not trust Omnaweahl after she admits she was spying on them, Glurong is already headed towards The Killer for her rendezvous.

THE LONG SHADOW (SEVARI TOWER)

Glurong has already made the exhaustive 500-foot climb up The Killer to Seviri Tower. However, the characters won't immediately recognize her:

A thin, dark-haired Ditimayan human woman wearing a form-fitting purple-sequin dress with a matching mask fashioned to look like a squid approaches you. "Hey," says the woman in Glurong's familiar deep voice. "It's me. Glurong. I'm in disguise."

Glurong is wearing a *hat of disguise* to make herself look like a noble from the Eight Gems Ward. If the characters didn't have the opportunity to dress up, she rolls her eyes and says, "Well, maybe they'll think you're my bodyguards."

Glurong explains her plan to the characters. The friend who is in possession of the book is in the largest casino on Seviri Tower, the Long Shadow. Once Glurong introduces the characters to her, she will give the characters the book. She will also have enough tickets for each of the characters to leave aboard the Red-and-Blue Gentleman, a casino blimp parked in the airfields. The casino blimp departs for Knotside the next morning.

If the characters agree, Glurong leads them to the Long Shadow.

This impressive sloped building before you looks like it was carved from the stone of the canyon itself. Red and white wisplights highlight the corners, windows, and entrances of the building. Posted at regular balconies, dancers of all races invite passersby to enter. Of course, not just anyone can enter. The line to enter the casino is nearly around the block. Wealthy tourists and Orbean citizens stand impatiently waiting for the two, 7-foot-tall bugbear guards at the front door to allow them entry. All of them wear ornate tunics, cloaks, and jeweled masks fashioned to look like different types of monsters: chimeras, bulettes, woggles, basilisks, cloaklers, even a dragon or two.

Glurong, in the disguise of an Orbean noblewoman, surpasses the line and walks up to the bugbear guards, addressing them in goblinoid.

Translation: "I am the shadow on the water."

The bugbears open the doors and motion for Glurong and you all to enter, much to the dismay of the masked nobles still waiting in line.

If the outside of the Long Shadow was impressive, the inside is even more mesmerizing. All around you, you see insane wealth being thrown around like it was nothing. At a counter to your right, nobles exchange liter pouches full of platinum pieces for painted wooden tokens. Directly ahead games of Banzo, Bouncing Crocodile, Dragon Chess Express, and Three Dragon Ante are played by cheering winners who suddenly find themselves up for the first time in the evening and jeering losers who've sunk even further into debt.

Clustered around leather couches and chairs, drunk nobles are entertained by quick-swapping doppelgangers who encourage them to imbibe more. When one of the drunken nobles dressed in a suit of obviously-fake shining armor gets a little too handsy with a doppelganger girl, a finely-dressed orc—obviously casino security of some sort—grabs the "knight-in-shining-armor's" wrist and gives him a sobering warning in broken Common: "Next time you touch girl you get the Drop!" The noble nods.

While all of this is exciting, it's clear that Gluronk is here on business. She heads straight for the east end of the casino. There, a devilkin woman wearing all white and flanked by two ogres stands and watches everything from a balcony fifteen feet above the casino floor.

The woman is Prayer in the Morning (LE female devilkin **assassin**), the owner of the Long Shadow. Her two **ogre** companions say little, but are never more than 10 feet from her side.

When the devilkin woman sees Gluronk in her human disguise, she raises an eyebrow in amusement. "Don't you know that purple clashes with green?"

"It'll be a pity to get that fancy white outfit all bloody," Gluronk snaps back. The two then embrace and laugh. Gluronk turns to you, "This ugly devilkin wench is my friend, Prayer in the Morning. She is the owner of this casino and many moons ago was one of the most feared pirates on the Omerian Ocean."

"Still am, snout-face," says Prayer, winking. "And it wasn't *that* long ago."

Gluronk snorts and rolls her human eyes.

Prayer leads the Gluronk and the characters into her office overlooking the casino floor.

This large room is 40-feet wide and 15-feet deep. The north end of the room has a curved wall with windows overlooking the Omerian Ocean. The twin moons linger over the dark horizon, lighting the powerful waves below you.



Expensive-looking furniture fills the center of the room. Against the eastern wall, a large, wooden desk stands in front of a cabinet covered in dozens of liquor bottles. Beside the desk, a giant lever sticks out of the floor. The top of the lever is carved to look like some sort of multi-sided die.

Prayer walks over and snatches one of the bottles from the wall with her prehensile tail, then pours herself, Gluronk, and each of you a drink.

"Hope you all like poison," she says behind a grin. Raising her glass, she toasts, "Until the Eighth" then sips.

The liquor isn't poisoned. Prayer just likes toying with her guests.

After the pleasantries, Prayer says, "Straight to business, then!" She walks over to the wall near her cabinet and removes a wooden panel from the wall. Behind the panel is a steel panel. Prayer whispers a single magical phrase and presses her palm to the panel. The panel slides up revealing a hidden compartment with an ancient, leatherbound tome inside.

Prayer pulls *Prime* from its hiding spot, walks across the room, then offers it to the characters. Simple as that.

Just then, two of the orcs from downstairs knock at the door. One of the orcs says in broken Common, "Boss. Got another one. Keep grabbing shifter girls. What you want do?"

Gluronk hops up and down excitedly. "The Drop! The Drop! The Drop!"

Gluronk explains the situation to you: whenever people cause trouble in the casino, they're brought to Prayer's office and forced to stand over a circular trapdoor in the floor, just by the outer windows. From there, Prayer pulls that lever by her desk, and down they go, 500 feet to the ocean floor below. And because Prayer is an entertainer above all, she broadcasts the entire affair on scrying mirrors positioned throughout the casinos.

If the characters are okay with witnessing the Death by Drop, after a moment, the same orc from before drags the "knight-in-shining-armor" into the office. The knight stumbles, clearly drunk, and doesn't seem to realize the severity of what's about to happen.

Gluronk asks Prayer if she can do the honors, to which Prayer agrees. Gluronk trots over to the lever next to Prayer's desk while the orcs put the "knight-in-shining-armor" in place.

Prayer says a magic word. The *continual flames* in the ceiling increase in brightness and fully illuminate the area, revealing the office to everyone standing on the casino floor below. She picks up a magic wand and speaks into its tip: "Ladies and Gentleman of the Long Shadow!" The wand amplifies her voice. The patrons cheer.

"It's that time again!"

The patrons start chanting: "Drop! Drop! Drop! Drop!"

"That's right!" she says like a carnival barker. "Don't let the outfit fool you, my beloved children. This one decided he just couldn't keep his hands off my girls. Naughty, naughty."

The patrons boo.

"On the count of three, my 'good friend here' will remind us all what happens when you can't be good boys and girls and follow the rules in my casino."

The crowd chants with Prayer: one... two...

That's when the remote traveler drops its disguise.

THE MACHINE

Even if the characters didn't allow for the drop to occur, one way or the other, the "knight-in-shining-armor"—which is actually a **remote traveler alpha-class** in disguise—gets into the office. Just as it looks like it's about to get the drop, its disguise ends and its true construct nature is revealed.

It is likely that it gets a surprise round on everyone in the room. In that case, it immediately uses its stored *fireball* spell to level the playing field.

The remote traveler's number one priority is to retrieve the book. It goes directly for whichever character is holding it and will not let up until the book is in its hands.

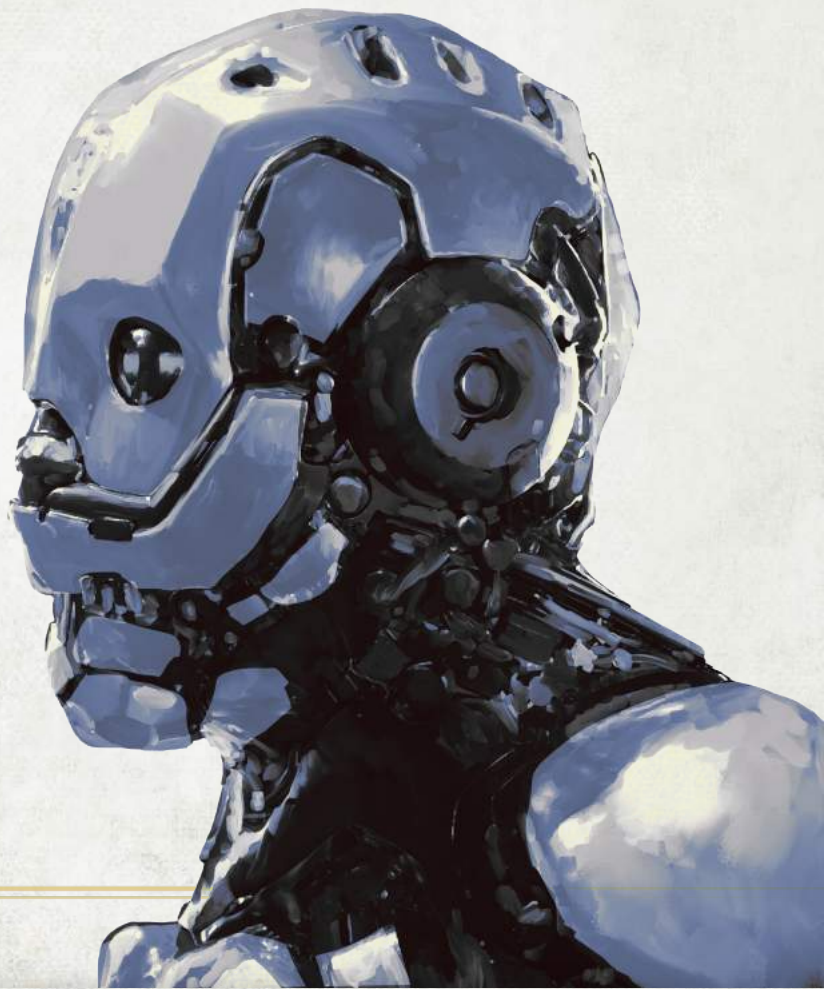
Meanwhile, Gluronk, Prayer, and any of Prayer's security force who survived the initial explosion work with the characters to fight back the construct. You can have the players run the NPCs during the combat if you like.

The *fireball* was enough to send most of the patrons running out of the casino. After three rounds of combat, 10 *guards* armed with light crossbows arrive in the casino. The guards spend 1 round trying to assess the situation. If no one informs them who the "good guys" or "bad guys" are, they open fire indiscriminately, shooting at whoever looks the most dangerous—likely the characters.

After 5 rounds of combat, if the remote traveler isn't dead or close to dead (half its hp or fewer), on initiative count 20 of the 6th round, read the following:

Suddenly, the office is bathed in light from a source outside the office windows. You can't see what it is, but you hear a familiar voice come from whatever it is. "Get down, imbeciles!" shouts Omnaweahl.

Omnaweahl is piloting her Dinzer peregrine 20 feet from the office windows, 500-feet above the surface of the water. The peregrine holds an action to fire its Eldritch Cannons at the remote traveler as soon as she has a clear shot at it; meaning any characters standing in the way need to move or drop prone.



While her cannons may not do enough damage to defeat the construct, it will give the characters enough time to flee the casino (or finish it off). If they run out the front entrance, Omnaweahl wheels the peregrine around to meet, then then lowers a ramp to let them get in.

If the characters agree to join her, as soon as they're all inside, she takes off, flying as far away from Orbea as possible. Otherwise, the characters will need to find another way to escape the deadly remote traveler alpha-class by either defeating it in combat or fleeing—possibly by way of *The Red-and-Blue Gentleman*.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

More than likely, the characters are on their way north. If she is asked why they are headed that way, Omnaweahl explains simply: "Valcryn Vorpos believed that the secret of the book could be unlocked using Aruxius's old texts, right? Well, I say we go ask the man himself, Aruxius. We're going to Wallingmiotta."

Aruxius retired from scholarly pursuits twenty years ago. Tired of politics, war, and the stress of everyday life, he traveled to Wallingmiotta where he could live quietly in the Neutral Lands and has been there ever since. The only trouble is, Aruxius doesn't like visitors.

THE MYSTERIES CONTINUE

There are a number of mystery threads left hanging at the end of this chapter. The intent of this series is to not only surprise players once they've finally had a chance to play the game, but to also surprise my patrons and fans as they read through the adventure series. Once the entire mystery has unraveled, then they will understand the answers to the puzzles themselves. In the meantime, for GMs who hope to run this adventure before the latter pieces arrive, here are a few answers to some of the big questions.

WHO KILLED VALCRYN VORPOS?

By the end of Chapter 4, the biggest mystery is the identity of the murderer Valcryn Vorpos. If it isn't obvious, the remote traveler alpha-class strangled Vorpos and stabbed him through the eye, then fled through the window. But who sent the construct? Why do they want the book? And if it's a remote-traveler, who is on the other end of the remote?

WHY DID THE CORDS THINK THE CHARACTERS MURDERED VORPOS?

A *sending stone* was found on Vorpos' body connected to a *second stone* owned by Captain Santxa Goytino's of the Cords. Goytino believed she was in contact with an informant code-named Quick Badger. Quick Badger fed her valuable information on the locations of Arruquetan Separatists living in Orbea. After Vorpos was murdered, someone gave the Cords the tip that it was the characters who murdered Vorpos and that Vorpos was the real Quick Badger. But was Valcryn Vorpos the real Quick Badger? And why did someone try to frame the characters for Vorpos' murder?

WHAT IS PRIME?

That's the million gold piece question. In its current state, the book cannot be read. However, Valcryn Vorpos believed that the mystery to unlocking its secrets lie within the book *Glyphs and Scripts* by Aruxius. Will the characters learn the book's secrets when they speak with Aruxius? Or is it another dead end?

All will be answered by the conclusion of this adventure path. Until then, the story continues in the next Chapter, *Wallingmiotta*.

Until the Eighth.