

Fritz Leiber's
Lankhmar

SWORDS AGAINST SORCERY



VERKORZUM HAALAH
RuneQuest
DREI PUNDE HAALAH

The logo for Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar is a large, ornate, diamond-shaped emblem. It features intricate Celtic knotwork and stylized lettering. The words "Fritz Leiber's" are at the top in a smaller, gothic font, and "Lankhmar" is written in a large, bold, stylized font across the center. The background of the emblem is filled with complex, interlocking patterns.

Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar

SWORDS AGAINST SORCERY

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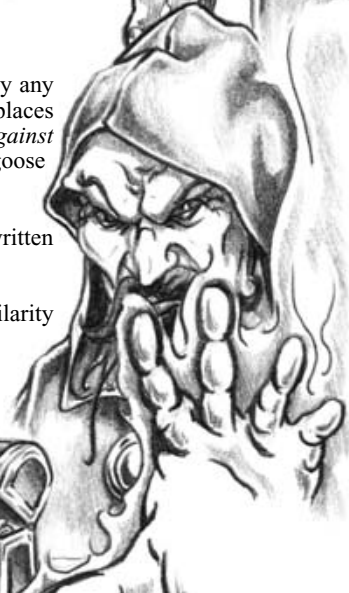
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INTRODUCTION

Swords Against Sorcery is designed for 3-5 characters of either Beginning or Seasoned levels of experience, as detailed on page 103 of *RuneQuest*. Whether the Games Master wishes this to be the first adventure for the group or carry over characters from his own plotlines is unimportant. Both types of adventurers will work equally well in the following scenario.

However, if characters wish to tie the events of *Swords Against Sorcery* into the earlier published adventure, *Swords Across Nehwon* (in the *Nehwon* sourcebook) then it adds another dimension to the storyline. After all, the characters will have already encountered several of the Non-Player Characters that crop up here, such as Sheelba, Helena and Jahol. If the Games Master is running this scenario directly after the events of *Swords Across Nehwon*, the story is set one month after the previous adventure. The Games Master will need to remember which, if any, of the characters looked at the red orb in the previous scenario, for their curse will still play a part in this scenario.

If the Games Master is not dealing with a veteran group of hardened mercenaries and adventurous vagabonds who already have tales of their exploits as a team, he is likely to be bringing the characters together for the first time. In this case, the opening scene presents a fine opportunity to do just that. If the PCs are already bonded, then it will be just another night in a drinking hole, looking for work.

Is that a little cliché? Well, absolutely. It is also a cliché that works because it is how sell-swords, treasure-hunters and adventurers find work in Lankhmar. Better yet, it is how Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser found most of their work as well.

Storyline

The plot of *Swords Against Sorcery* deals with thievery, faith and forbidden worship in Lankhmar. Like all

dealings involving religion in the City of the Black Toga, it is not an altogether simple matter. Two cults that have been forbidden from worship or acknowledgement for several centuries are beginning to resurface, much like the cult of Tyaa in Leiber's *Swords* tale *Claws from the Night*.

The characters become inextricably entwined in the conflict between these two cults through an inopportune job. Depending on how the characters handle themselves and the petty war in the shadows between the two banished cults, the Gods of Lankhmar – those brown-boned revenants who founded the city in antiquity – may rise to seek their vengeance on those who would imperil their beloved Lankhmar.

Act I: The Gods Slumber

In the first act, the characters attract the attention of both the cult of Bainra and the order of Maal, the two banished gods who find themselves worshipped once again so many centuries since their faith was decreed illegal by the order of the Great God's priests and the mandate of the then-reigning Overlord of Lankhmar.

Act II: The Gods Awaken

The cults are now aware of the characters' meddling and they move to eliminate the agents of chaos who threaten their grand plans. The characters pry deeper into the cult of Bainra, eliminating the High Priestess.

Act III: The Gods Walk

Sorcery reaches out from the shadows, seeking to kill the adventurers and maintain the cults' hidden status from the authorities. The Gods of Lankhmar rise from their crypt in order to slay those who dare threaten the city. The characters may be forced to fight off the cold, dead hands of the death-dealing skeleton-gods of yore, or they might fight alongside the resurrected deities, bringing peace and order to Lankhmar once again.



ACT I: THE GODS SLUMBER

Overview: This first section deals with the characters' initial involvement between the two cults of Bainra and Maal. The characters are contacted by Black Garrick, a member of the Thieves' Guild, for the purposes of investigating a building being used as a hideout by renegade thieves in the docks district. The building is actually the abandoned temple of Bainra, a god cast out by the decree of the Great God many centuries before, and the renegade thieves are actually the first members in the cult's resurgence.

Some of the following scenes take the liberty of assuming the classic Silver Eel tavern as the characters' watering hole of choice, though it is easily moved to another locale if the Games Master desires.

Scene 1: Sell-Swords in the Den of Iniquity

The Silver Eel is alive with business tonight – the usual crowd of sell-swords looking for work, thieves and throat-cutters looking to spend their ill-gotten gains, farmers drinking off the boredom of a day in the grain fields and slave dancers with tiny metal bells around their wrists and ankles, wearing naught but wisps of coloured silk. The tap room of the bar smells faintly of spicy narcotic smoke, ale-soaked wood and the blood from last night's brawls.

A Night on the Town

A typical night in the Silver Eel awaits the characters. Games of chance and skill are going on at various tables: gambling games played with bone dice, knife-throwing in the corner to strike a red circle target painted on the wall, and arm wrestling attracting small crowds of betting onlookers.

The characters are free to participate if they choose to do so; no one will refuse a bet or some healthy competition. Arm wrestling matches are handled by opposed Athletics rolls. Knife-throwing resolved by two contestants each striving to hit a hand-sized target on the wooden wall (–10% penalty for the small target) with the first to miss being declared the loser. Gambling on dice is simple enough – just bet on what number will come up on 2D6 roll. The bets range from a few copper coins to a handful of rilk on the hotly-debated contests, such as if a character develops a winning streak or looks increasingly hard to beat.

If the characters seem uninterested in the entertainments on offer they will be approached and asked if they wish to join in, though none of the regulars are overly pushy about it. If a character wants to start off the adventure with a brawl, it is perfectly fine to do so. The Silver Eel is well used to that type of thing and as long as no one dies or gets seriously injured, no one will be thrown out onto the street for the behaviour. Starting a brawl is as easy as throwing a fist at an annoying Non-Player Character. If it happens regularly but everyone enjoys it and it does not derail the game session, don't worry. This is thematic stuff; enjoy it for what it is. It might even make way for well-developed 'rival' characters who occasionally show up when the characters go drinking and looking for work in the future.

Black Garrick

Sitting at a table towards the back of the tavern is Black Garrick. He is accompanied by three cohorts dressed in peasant's clothing and a Kleshite slave girl clad in indigo silk, who is sitting on his knee. Garrick is a ranking member of the Thieves' Guild, loyal to his organisation but with a hopeful eye for the Master Thief spot one night. He is here now investigating a personal matter that he is hoping to keep from the rest of the Thieves' Guild, hoping to get to the bottom of a mystery before it gets round to the rest of the guild and receive credit from his superiors both for his initiative and competence.

Act I





The man sitting at the table nods as you stand before him and he gestures for his companions to leave, freeing up the chairs for you. The first thing you notice about him is that his exposed skin – his face, hands and forearms – are dark with oil smears, dried blood and general unwashed grime. He smells like he has not bathed in some days and grins with teeth that are more black than yellow.

If the characters have played through the events of *Swords Across Nehwon*, Black Garrick introduces himself like this:

'Before you say a word, let me tell you that I know who you are. You can call me Black Garrick, an' I heard all about that nasty business in the north, choppin' off that barbarian king's head like you did. As it happens, I be needin' folks like you for a little caper I can't trust to anyone else. Money's good, not much risk, and you get the satisfaction of workin' for the real power in the city – the Thieves' Guild. Cards are on the table, true as the sun sets and purses get cut. Interested?'

If the characters are newly gathered together, he introduces himself like this:

'I be Black Garrick. Forgive me calling you together but you look like the kind of souls I be needin'. What be your names, then?'

Allow a few moments for introductions and any background information that gets mentioned. Then Black Garrick continues:

'As it happens, I be needin' capable sorts like yourselves for a little caper. Money's good, not much risk and you get the satisfaction of workin' for the real power in the city – the Thieves' Guild. Cards are on the table, true as the sun sets and purses get cut. Interested in a night's work?'

The players are going to have questions, of course. They are dealing with an unusually forward (and rather detestable-looking) character. The following questions and answers can be used wholesale or altered by the Games Master to adapt what his players ask. They convey all the necessary information regarding the job.

Any rolled tests to see if Black Garrick is lying show that he is telling the truth in everything he says.

Black Garrick has discovered that two thieves who were presumed dead since last month are alive and apparently well. He saw them lurking around an abandoned building in the docks district for several nights in row and means to discover just why they are content to be considered dead and why they are now keeping their dealings a secret from the Thieves' Guild. Garrick therefore wants a look inside the building these thieves seem to be living in, but there is one catch: the building is one of the old temples that has been abandoned for centuries, and are considered cursed. This is why the thief wants to send someone else in his stead, someone unattached to the Thieves' Guild, in order to see what is going on in there.

After watching the characters for a while, they can make Perception checks to see a man clad in dark clothes with a dirty face watching from another table. Black Garrick makes no attempt to hide his scrutiny. He is here to recruit capable agents, after all. If the characters do not go over to ask him his business, the Kleshite slave girl (young and pretty but with eyes glazed from narcotics) will take a message to each of them in turn, saying that her employer for the evening wishes to speak with them.

‘Why are you called Black Garrick?’ *‘Bit of a joke, that. I don’t wash much, so I get all dirty, like you see now. Truth is I can’t wash like most folk. Water against my skin makes me all raw and swollen. Been like this since I was a babe, an’ the priests couldn’t do a thing about it.’*

‘What is the job?’ *‘Simple enough, like all the best plans. Ye know I work for the Thieves’ Guild, right? Two of my men, cutpurses I trained as it happens, went missing for months and were presumed slain. Only they never turned up dead in the harbour, and I found out the other night they’re hiding out by the docks instead of laying in their graves. I need you to sneak into the building they’re hiding out in and find out what they’re doing in there, maybe find out why they’re avoiding the Guild.’*

‘...And payment?’ *‘Five rilk a head. Can’t say fairer.’*

‘That is a lot of money / What is the catch?’ *‘Well, here’s the truth of it. You may not think it to look at me but I’m a pious sort. I tithe regular, like, all going to the Great God. This building where my thieves are hiding out is one of the old temples that used to be for the old religions that were banned by the Great God’s priests for all manner of dark behaviour. I need someone with iron courage and a keen lust for coin to go in there and find out why my boys are brave enough to be hiding there.’*

‘What about the City Watch?’ *‘This old church is in the south end of the docks, far from the taverns and in the warehouse district. Not far from that moneylender’s place – Muulsh, you know him? Anyway, there’s no chance of the Watch stumbling along. The only thing you’ll need an eye out for are the mercenaries or the guards outside any nearby warehouses.’*

‘Anything else?’ *‘Before you do this, remember that I’m paying a high price to buy your silence. I know the beggars and street-talkers will know all about this in a few days but until then you keep your lips sealed on anything you see in there. This is Guild business and I want to deal with these rogue bastards without talk hitting the streets just yet.’*

‘What if we get caught?’ *‘Bribe the guards, scare ‘em off or give them some iron in the guts for all I care, friends. I need what I need, and to the Shadowland with any fool guardsmen who get in the way. Shed blood if you have to. No skin off my back.’*

‘Who are these thieves?’ *‘Varni and Liss. Varni is tall, dark-haired and with a scar down his cheek from a knife fight. Liss is a fat little man, good for picking pockets. They’re both a fair hand at the crooked trade, right enough, but I know something’s going on. They’re happy enough to let the Guild believe their dead and spend their nights lurking around that abandoned church. I’ve got to know why. If you break in and have to see ‘em dead, then don’t you fret about it. Just make sure they’re really dead this time is all I ask. The information is enough, though. No need to split heads if that’s not on the cards.’*

Black Garrick wants the characters to do it tonight. If they are pushy about payment, he pays them a rilk up front as a sign of good faith. His last words before they leave are a friendly farewell.

Scene 2: The Streets of Lankmar

On the way to the docks, the characters have two encounter possibilities that the Games Master may wish to use. The first is designed to dramatically foreshadow the eventual rise of the Gods of Lankmar. This takes the form of a meeting with Paucus the Pardoner, a shaven-headed priest. The second highlights the immorality that is so deeply ingrained in the city itself. This takes the form of an encounter with a warrior-turned-beggar called Enfreel.

If the Games Master wishes to hurry on to the temple scene, feel free to skip Scene 2 completely.

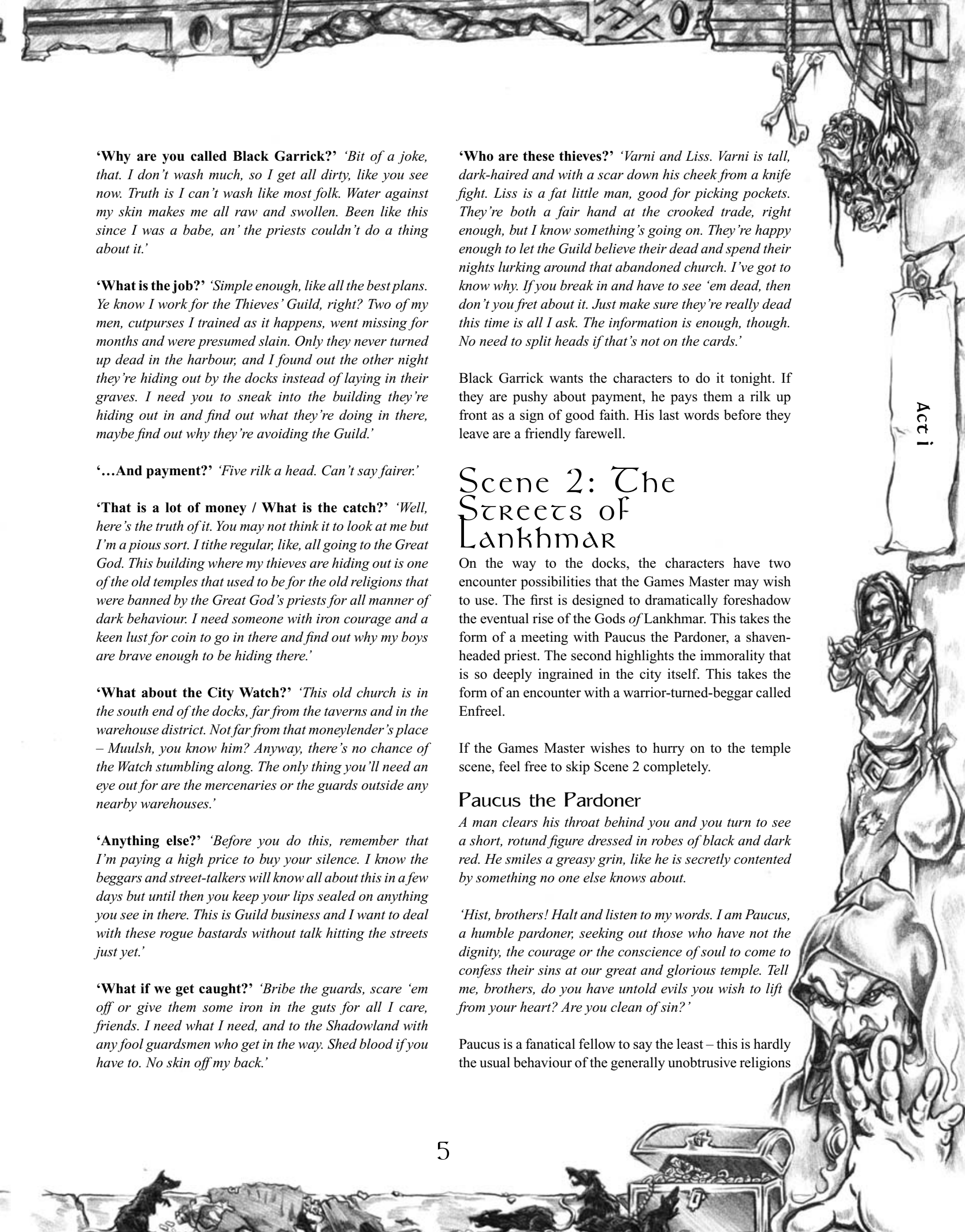
Paucus the Pardoner

A man clears his throat behind you and you turn to see a short, rotund figure dressed in robes of black and dark red. He smiles a greasy grin, like he is secretly contented by something no one else knows about.

‘Hist, brothers! Halt and listen to my words. I am Paucus, a humble pardoner, seeking out those who have not the dignity, the courage or the conscience of soul to come to confess their sins at our great and glorious temple. Tell me, brothers, do you have untold evils you wish to lift from your heart? Are you clean of sin?’

Paucus is a fanatical fellow to say the least – this is hardly the usual behaviour of the generally unobtrusive religions

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Act I

in Lankmar. Here is a priest that wanders away for the Street of the Gods, often through the slum district at no small risk to himself, and essentially accosts people about the state of their souls. Annoying, to say the least and that is the point. It is not easy for the characters to shake Paucus off.

If the characters seem receptive to Paucus' initial questions about their sins, he becomes increasingly fervent, occasionally spraying spittle as he speaks and gesticulates. He congratulates them for remaining pure in these dark times and warns that 'the Gods see all'. What he is never clear on is which gods he is talking about. If asked, he seems confused: *'Why, the true gods, of course. The only real gods!'* He is talking about the Gods of Lankmar, though the players will have to guess that for themselves. A Lore (Lankmar) roll with a +20% bonus will allow a player to recall that the dead gods of the city are occasionally referred to by that name. If the players guess (and they likely will) then Paucus is surprised it took them so long to realise.

If the characters actually decide to play along or sincerely confess to Paucus, he goes through the motions of blessing them for their honesty and with insisting the gods will look favourably upon them for repenting. Again, if asked just which gods he worships, he will refer to the 'only real gods' and be utterly baffled if the characters insist on knowing more, perhaps even calling them misguided and deceived by false divinities if they persist in questioning him.

If the characters are openly hostile, angry or rude to Paucus from the outset, the priest senses that he is dealing with sinners who need to repent. He could be completely incorrect but fanatics are not always noted for their keen perception or intelligence, and Paucus is a dim-witted fellow at best. He will harass the characters about their past crimes – whether or not they even have any – and is determined to have them *'seek the forgiveness of the true gods before they rise to cleanse Lankmar of such foulness'*.

Try not to let the scene drag. If the players *really* want to shake this fanatic off, then let them disengage and Paucus will hurry along to the next crowd or city-dweller that he comes across.

Note: If the characters have played through the events of *Swords Across Nehwon* and any of them are still

cursed from looking at the red orb during this previous adventure, Paucus somehow senses this. When he is finally shaken off, he calms down and speaks to the affected characters:

'Fine. Leave if you wish. I sense something sick and foul around you, hanging like an aura. You have been about dark business in the past, I fear. I pray someone will speak over your graves, for that is surely where you are heading.'

If asked to elaborate on these words, Paucus will adamantly say nothing and seek to take his unique Confessional elsewhere. If the characters look like they are about to cause him harm, seven of the city guard will interfere, blaming both the characters for roughing up a fanatical fool and blaming Paucus for harassing them in the first place.

Enfreel

A tall, well-muscled man sits on the edge of the street, leaning back against the wall of a tavern. Around his eyes, a soiled bandage is wrapped firmly and tied at the back of his head. He looks like a fighting man by his build and the scars on his forearms and cheeks, and his deep voice echoes out into the night-time street.

'Weapons for sale. Fine Sarheenmar steel, tried and tested in many a battle against the Mingols.' His voice reveals just how exhausted and defeated he sounds. 'Is there no one who can put my swords to good use? They deserve a better fate than as the crutches of a blind beggar or the weapons of a Lankmar cutthroat.'

If the characters decide to talk to him, they will learn that Enfreel is a warrior born in Kvarch Nar who has served as a mercenary all across the north and east, from Cold Corner to Ilthmar. He spent most of his career fighting the Mingols and defending the Land of the Eight Cities and Sarheenmar from the assault of the Steppes nomads.

Although he is only 35 years old, his soldiering days are behind him because he lost his sight when he took a knife wound to the eyes in a bar brawl that got out of hand. His opponent pulled a weapon and Enfreel was injured, rendered blind, before he could reach for his own sword. He admits all of this if the characters ask. He relates that the event was only three nights ago and now he is forced to sell his weapons to pay for food since he can no longer earn coin any other way. He also confesses that his blades



were a gift from a Sarheenmar duke for his exemplary service in defending his family from Mingol slavers as they travelled.

Enfreel is still a proud man he bitterly regrets needing to sell his weapons like this. He offers to sell his two finely-wrought longswords for five rilks for the pair. An Evaluate test will reveal they are worth around 50 rilks; such is their craftsmanship. If the characters offer more than he asks for, he will be very grateful. Either way, he knows he can not keep them.

Enfreel's Swords

The swords are twin weapons, both one-handed war swords. The blades are blue steel, with vines acid-etched onto the metal, curling halfway up both blades. The hilts and pommels are finely-cast bronze with silver wire on the grip for comfort and ease of handling.

The truth is that these blades are of nobleman's quality. If the characters have them in their possession, the swords may be recognised in a later scene. Characters wielding one of Enfreel's swords may treat them as standard war swords, though they gain +10% on all rolls to resist being disarmed and gain +5% on all attack rolls, since the blades are so well made and handle so beautifully.

'I must sell them before they are stolen from me, or before the Beggars' Guild slit my throat for panhandling without one of their licenses. As soon as I have the money, I plan to book passage on a ship bound for Kvarch Nar. If I am made blind, I may as well be blind in my homeland, where I can risk sleep without getting a knife in my neck as I would here in treacherous Lankhmar.'

An Offer of Justice

The characters may offer to hunt down the man who did this to Enfreel. If they do, the ex-mercenary holds his fingertips to his bandaged eyes for a moment, as if in pain. Enfreel wants revenge but he is not an angry or bitter man by nature, and will not insist on having his attacker killed.

'I thank you for offering such a thing. The city watch will take no action, and I am loath to ever ask another to mete out justice on my behalf. If you truly desire to do this deed, the man you are seeking is called Kayven. He spends many of his nights gambling in the Beached Squid down at the docks, which is where he dealt me this dolorous blow. Look for a man with long red hair and a dyed-black beard. That's Kayven.'

If the characters do go after Enfreel's attacker at any point, details of the scene can be found in the Appendix.

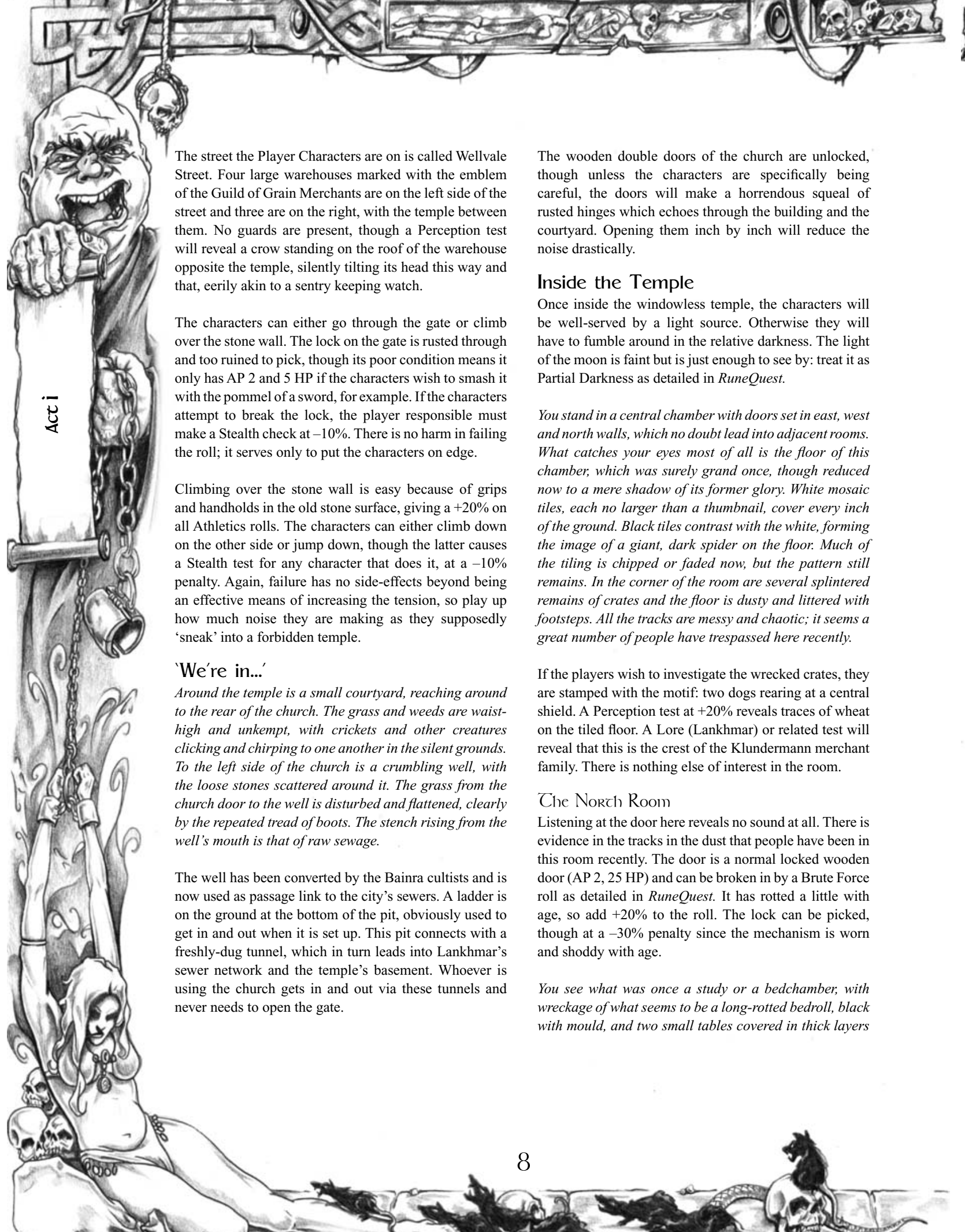
Scene 3: Treachery in the Temple

Once the players reach the street where the temple is based, the building is obvious.

Among a cluster of warehouses, one building stands out as significantly out of place. A church of black stone, capped by a spire of faded, rotting grey wood, is surrounded by a wall that reaches some fifteen feet in height. A gate of old, corroded iron is closed and locked with a rusty chain, apparently not opened in decades or more.

Acci





Act i

The street the Player Characters are on is called Wellvale Street. Four large warehouses marked with the emblem of the Guild of Grain Merchants are on the left side of the street and three are on the right, with the temple between them. No guards are present, though a Perception test will reveal a crow standing on the roof of the warehouse opposite the temple, silently tilting its head this way and that, eerily akin to a sentry keeping watch.

The characters can either go through the gate or climb over the stone wall. The lock on the gate is rusted through and too ruined to pick, though its poor condition means it only has AP 2 and 5 HP if the characters wish to smash it with the pommel of a sword, for example. If the characters attempt to break the lock, the player responsible must make a Stealth check at -10%. There is no harm in failing the roll; it serves only to put the characters on edge.

Climbing over the stone wall is easy because of grips and handholds in the old stone surface, giving a +20% on all Athletics rolls. The characters can either climb down on the other side or jump down, though the latter causes a Stealth test for any character that does it, at a -10% penalty. Again, failure has no side-effects beyond being an effective means of increasing the tension, so play up how much noise they are making as they supposedly 'sneak' into a forbidden temple.

'We're in...'

Around the temple is a small courtyard, reaching around to the rear of the church. The grass and weeds are waist-high and unkempt, with crickets and other creatures clicking and chirping to one another in the silent grounds. To the left side of the church is a crumbling well, with the loose stones scattered around it. The grass from the church door to the well is disturbed and flattened, clearly by the repeated tread of boots. The stench rising from the well's mouth is that of raw sewage.

The well has been converted by the Bainra cultists and is now used as passage link to the city's sewers. A ladder is on the ground at the bottom of the pit, obviously used to get in and out when it is set up. This pit connects with a freshly-dug tunnel, which in turn leads into Lankmar's sewer network and the temple's basement. Whoever is using the church gets in and out via these tunnels and never needs to open the gate.

The wooden double doors of the church are unlocked, though unless the characters are specifically being careful, the doors will make a horrendous squeal of rusted hinges which echoes through the building and the courtyard. Opening them inch by inch will reduce the noise drastically.

Inside the Temple

Once inside the windowless temple, the characters will be well-served by a light source. Otherwise they will have to fumble around in the relative darkness. The light of the moon is faint but is just enough to see by: treat it as Partial Darkness as detailed in *RuneQuest*.

You stand in a central chamber with doors set in east, west and north walls, which no doubt lead into adjacent rooms. What catches your eyes most of all is the floor of this chamber, which was surely grand once, though reduced now to a mere shadow of its former glory. White mosaic tiles, each no larger than a thumbnail, cover every inch of the ground. Black tiles contrast with the white, forming the image of a giant, dark spider on the floor. Much of the tiling is chipped or faded now, but the pattern still remains. In the corner of the room are several splintered remains of crates and the floor is dusty and littered with footsteps. All the tracks are messy and chaotic; it seems a great number of people have trespassed here recently.

If the players wish to investigate the wrecked crates, they are stamped with the motif: two dogs rearing at a central shield. A Perception test at +20% reveals traces of wheat on the tiled floor. A Lore (Lankmar) or related test will reveal that this is the crest of the Klundermann merchant family. There is nothing else of interest in the room.

The North Room

Listening at the door here reveals no sound at all. There is evidence in the tracks in the dust that people have been in this room recently. The door is a normal locked wooden door (AP 2, 25 HP) and can be broken in by a Brute Force roll as detailed in *RuneQuest*. It has rotted a little with age, so add +20% to the roll. The lock can be picked, though at a -30% penalty since the mechanism is worn and shoddy with age.

You see what was once a study or a bedchamber, with wreckage of what seems to be a long-rotted bedroll, black with mould, and two small tables covered in thick layers

of dust. The dust of decades cakes the stone floor, though boot-prints are visible around the old table.

On the table are five slim books, bound in faded peach-coloured leather which is beginning to peel and yellow at the books' corners. Anyone with Crafts (Leatherworking), Medicine or a similar skill will be able to tell that these notebooks are bound in thin layers of human skin. Inside, they are blank, with no trace of any writing anywhere. As the characters leaf through the books, anyone in the room may take a Perception check to detect a slight breath of wind on the back of their necks or hands, as if something just brushed close past them.

If any characters from the events of *Swords Across Nehwon* were cursed from looking at the orb in that adventure, then they do not see blank pages at all. They see pages and pages of writing in blood – though it looks like dark reddish-brown ink – in a language they cannot recognise. They also note several diagrams in the books, showing what look like drawings of flayed limbs and dissected organs, as if someone was painstakingly trying to draw the human body. Characters who see this automatically detect the presence of something brush past them, though the sensation is no more intense than for anyone else.

These are the notes of the last High Priest of Bainra, believed cursed and left when he was executed and the religion was cast out of Lankhmar. The cultists of the resurgent faith have largely disregarded them as little more than a curiosity, which is why they are left unguarded here in the ruined temple. Make note if the characters take it with them.

The East Room

Listening at the door here reveals no sound at all. It is unlocked and shows signs in the dust of recent entry.

The door opens to reveal a large, windowless room that looks as if it was once used for storage. Hundreds of small cages, some wicker and blackened by mould, some metal and brown with rust, rest on shelves set at various heights. In the far corner, a cage large enough to hold a lion stands empty, naught but darkness held within the iron bars. Judging from the disturbed dust on the ground, several people have been through here recently.

This is the room where the cult kept its spiders, just as the cult of Tyaa in the *Swords* tales kept its birds in a tower rookery. The cages are now empty of life, with the

remains of most of the spiders rotted away to pale, chitin husks, or dried smears on the bottom of the cages.

The door of the largest cage in the corner is open, the padlock snapped by shears or an axe strike, though the dust is so smeared around the room that any tests to check for inhuman tracks in the dust are at –50%. On a successful test, the characters learn that something large, heavy and with eight legs ending in rounded pads appears to have walked across the dust recently, headed towards the door.

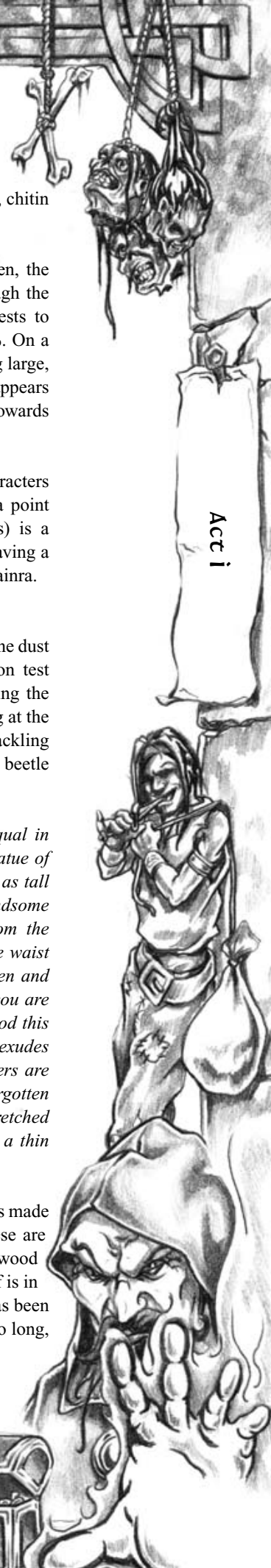
On the back of the door, only visible if the characters close the door behind them or otherwise make a point of searching the room (not just the dust tracks) is a complicated rune symbol resembling a spider weaving a spiralling web. This is the symbol of the cult of Bainra.

The West Room

The door here is unlocked, with obvious scuffs in the dust where people have walked recently. A Perception test at –60% will reveal the hard-to-see prints denoting the giant spider's passing, as detailed above. Listening at the door is at a penalty of –10%, but reveals a soft crackling sound, like someone slowly crunching paper or a beetle underfoot.

The door opens to reveal a windowless room equal in size to the main chamber. The centrepiece is a statue of some kind of black stone or obsidian, three times as tall as a barbarian of the Cold Waste. It depicts a handsome young man with a sculpted, muscular torso from the waist up, though – almost centaur-like – from the waist down he is a giant spider with a swollen abdomen and eight splayed arachnid legs. It would seem that you are in the presence of an image depicting whatever god this temple was once sacred to. Even clad in dust, it exudes a sense of dread majesty, even though its followers are long since banished from Lankhmar, long since forgotten by the people, and long since dead. In its outstretched hands, seemingly held up as if offering a gift, is a thin golden rod the length of a man's forearm.

There was once furniture in the room, rows of pews made for kneeling in worship to the statue, though these are now rotted away and little more than scraps of old wood in a circle around the central icon. The statue itself is in a shallow dip in the floor, though because there has been no wind here and the temple has been sealed for so long, no detritus has collected beyond the dust.





Act I

The giant spider that was caged in the East Room is here, clinging to the ceiling above the door. It will drop on anyone that walks into the room, though the characters have a chance for a Perception test to notice that there are inhuman tracks in the scuffed dust all around the doorway before they take a single step. The cracking sound is coming from the spider, which is clicking its mandibles and its chitin is creaking as it moves into position.

If the characters enter the room, the spider will drop and attack.

The creature before you is a spider the size of a wolf, corpse-white and moving with creaking, snapping sounds. It takes you a moment to realise that the huge creature – surely a salt spider from the Great Marsh – is actually dead. It has been dead for centuries. Its eyes are nothing but eight empty sockets in a fleshless skull, its body and legs are bare chitin or with skin mummified and dried, stretched across what remains of its body. Its bone-white mandibles click hungrily though. Whatever foul sorcery animates this creature somehow grants it sight.

The Giant Undead Spider

This creature is indeed dead, almost mummified with age but held together by the sorcerous power of the resurgent cult. It is the sentry that guards the entrance to the basement under this room, which is where the new cult is actually making their new temple.

Not all salt spiders are capable of spinning webs, though all have poisonous fangs; this creature can no longer do either. In death it has lost the capacity to create web silk or produce poison. Instead it attacks by biting.

It is likely that the spider will have the advantage over the characters here, catching them by surprise and proving a tough foe. The characters will soon learn that they have a surprise advantage of their own, though. The remnants of the spider's feral mind are instinctive and primal. It does not recognise that it is dead, so it attacks with bites in an attempt to inject poison

and tries to spin webs to capture this new prey to eat later. Neither of these tactics work, of course.

To represent the creature's animalistic mind functioning in this manner, each round roll a die. On an even result, the spider attacks by leaping and biting, doing standard damage as detailed in its profile below. On an odd result, the spider makes the bite attack but inflicts only half damage (since it is only attempting to inject poison, not do any real damage). Additionally, if the undead spider reduces any character's Hit Location to 0, it will sacrifice the first combat action in the next round attempting to squirt its injured victim with webbing. While this is happening, the creature tilts its abdomen forward and does not attack, though obviously nothing erupts from the web-spinners.

Once the spider is defeated, the characters are free to take the golden rod from the statue of Bainra. It is actually a brass scroll case, scored all around by carvings of spiders and capped by a baked leather top which can be pulled off and refastened as desired. The case contains a single parchment, covered in dark red runes that make no sense. This is the Codex of Bainra, though nothing sets it apart as such beyond its apparently holy placing.

Further exploration will reveal a trapdoor set in the corner of the room, leading down into the basement. Listening



at this door will confer a +10% bonus to the Perception check. Success reveals the faint sounds of chanting (this door leads to Scene 4).

Giant Undead Spider

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 14
CON 12
DEX 17
SIZ 16
INT 4
POW 5
CHA 2

Giant Undead Spider Hit Locations

| D20 | Hit Location | AP/HP |
|-------|---------------------------|-------|
| 1-2 | 1 st Right Leg | 0/6 |
| 3-4 | 1 st Left Leg | 0/6 |
| 5-6 | 2 nd Right Leg | 0/6 |
| 7-8 | 2 nd Left Leg | 0/6 |
| 9-10 | 3 rd Right Leg | 0/6 |
| 11-12 | 3 rd Left Leg | 0/6 |
| 13-14 | 4 th Right Leg | 0/6 |
| 15-16 | 4 th Left Leg | 0/6 |
| 17-18 | Abdomen | 0/7 |
| 19 | Midsection | 0/7 |
| 20 | Head | 0/6 |

Weapons

| Type | Weapon Skill | Damage |
|------|--------------|---------|
| Bite | 60% | 1D4+1D2 |

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 3

Strike Rank: +10

Movement: 5m

Traits: Life Sense

Skills: Athletics 50%, Perception 50%, Persistence 50%, Resilience 50%, Survival 50%

Typical Armour: None (the toughened remnants of the creature's body are reflected in its hit points)

Scene 4: Bainra Revealed

As you open the trapdoor, the sound of murmuring voices reaches your ears. A set of wooden steps descend twenty feet into a candlelit basement, though you can see little from this angle without going down there. The chanting is not in Lankmarese, instead having some of the southern sibilance of the Quarmallian tongue about it.

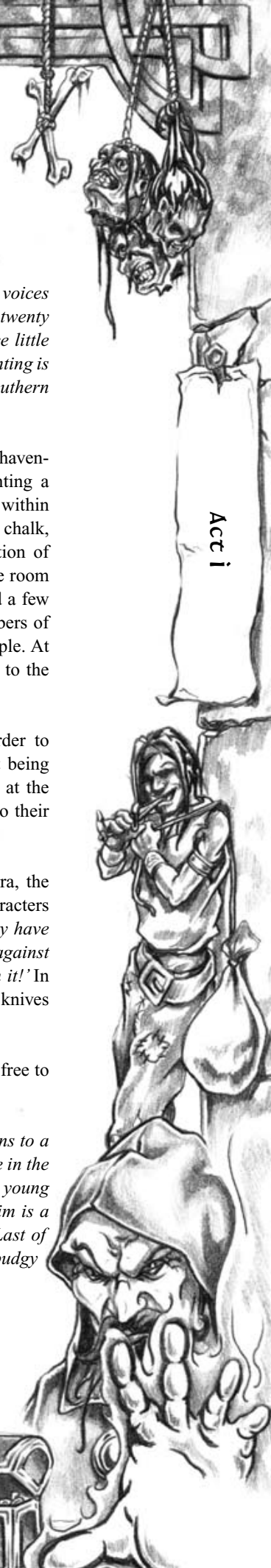
In this expansive basement, three brown-robed, shaven-headed cultists of the new Bainra cult are chanting a murmured prayer to their god. They are kneeling within a pentagram drawn on the stone floor in white chalk, facing a central man-tall pedestal with a collection of scrolls loosely bound to it. Littered at edges of the room are four bedrolls and blankets, pots and pans, and a few ceramic plates. This is where the only four members of the resurfacing cult currently make their true temple. At the far end of the room is a passageway, leading to the well and the sewers beyond.

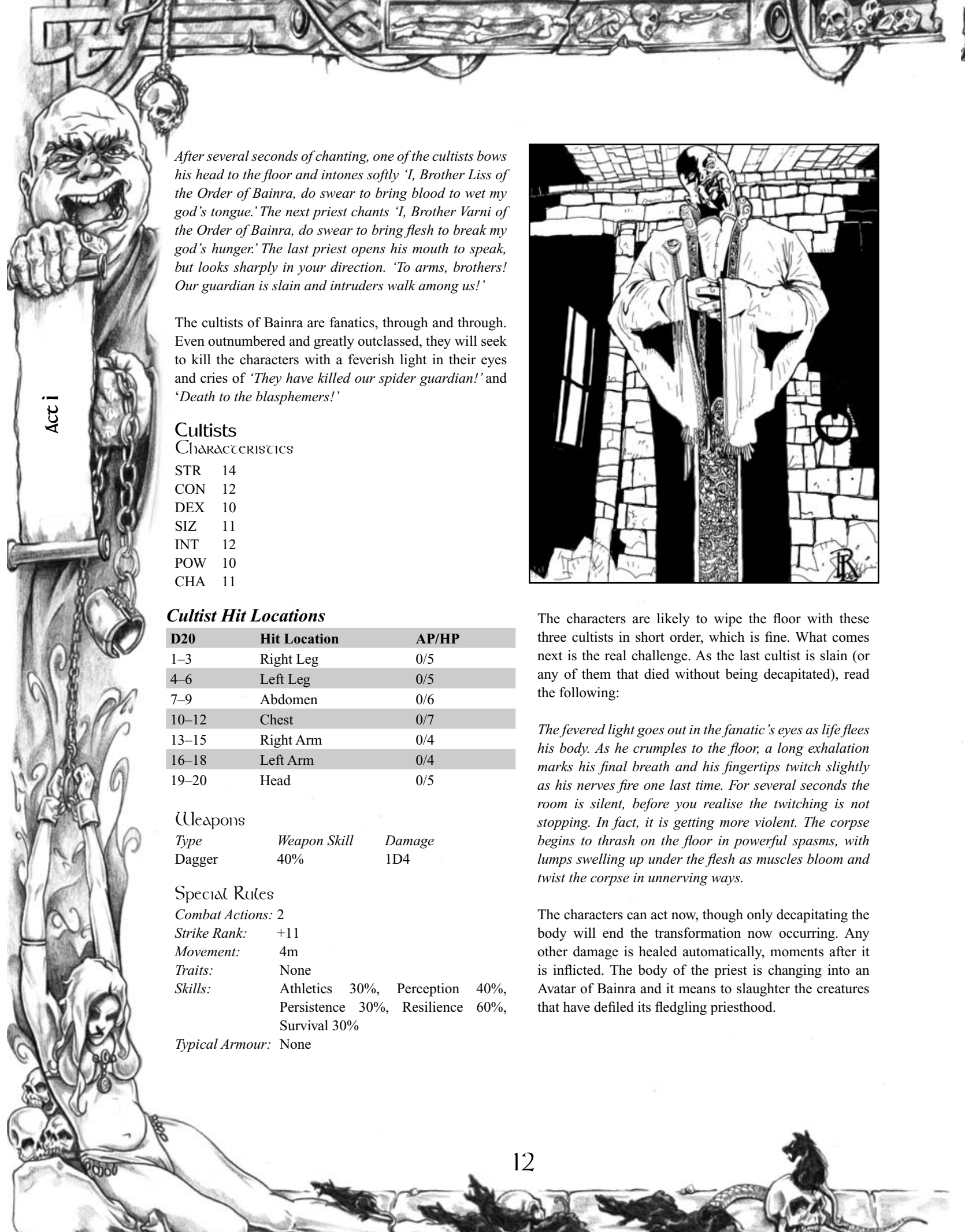
The characters must make Stealth checks in order to sneak down the steps into the basement without being heard. Failure means that the priests are looking at the steps as the characters come down, and reach into their robes for knives.

If the characters are carrying the Codex of Bainra, the priests cease chanting immediately even if the characters passed their Stealth tests. One of them cries *'They have the Codex! Blasphemy against Bainra! Profanity against the spider-god! Even we are not allowed to touch it!'* In this case, the priests leap to their feet and draw knives from their robes, running to attack the characters.

If the characters sneak down undetected, they are free to act as they wish or watch the ritual unfold.

The three shaven-headed priests chant benedictions to a god called Bainra, no doubt the spider deity statue in the abandoned temple upstairs. One is a handsome young man, no older than twenty at the most. Next to him is a lean figure with a vicious scar along his cheek. Last of all is a short man, perhaps five foot tall, with his pudgy hands pressed together in prayer.





Act 1

After several seconds of chanting, one of the cultists bows his head to the floor and intones softly 'I, Brother Liss of the Order of Bainra, do swear to bring blood to wet my god's tongue.' The next priest chants 'I, Brother Varni of the Order of Bainra, do swear to bring flesh to break my god's hunger.' The last priest opens his mouth to speak, but looks sharply in your direction. 'To arms, brothers! Our guardian is slain and intruders walk among us!'

The cultists of Bainra are fanatics, through and through. Even outnumbered and greatly outclassed, they will seek to kill the characters with a feverish light in their eyes and cries of 'They have killed our spider guardian!' and 'Death to the blasphemers!'

Cultists
CHARACTERISTICS

- STR 14
- CON 12
- DEX 10
- SIZ 11
- INT 12
- POW 10
- CHA 11

Cultist Hit Locations

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

Weapons

| Type | Weapon Skill | Damage |
|--------|--------------|--------|
| Dagger | 40% | 1D4 |

Special Rules

- Combat Actions: 2
- Strike Rank: +11
- Movement: 4m
- Traits: None
- Skills: Athletics 30%, Perception 40%, Persistence 30%, Resilience 60%, Survival 30%

Typical Armour: None



The characters are likely to wipe the floor with these three cultists in short order, which is fine. What comes next is the real challenge. As the last cultist is slain (or any of them that died without being decapitated), read the following:

The fevered light goes out in the fanatic's eyes as life flees his body. As he crumples to the floor, a long exhalation marks his final breath and his fingertips twitch slightly as his nerves fire one last time. For several seconds the room is silent, before you realise the twitching is not stopping. In fact, it is getting more violent. The corpse begins to thrash on the floor in powerful spasms, with lumps swelling up under the flesh as muscles bloom and twist the corpse in unnerving ways.

The characters can act now, though only decapitating the body will end the transformation now occurring. Any other damage is healed automatically, moments after it is inflicted. The body of the priest is changing into an Avatar of Bainra and it means to slaughter the creatures that have defiled its fledgling priesthood.

Within ten heartbeats, the metamorphosis is complete. Standing some nine feet in height, with skin grey as ash and eight marble-white eyes, the creature hulking in the basement before you is the fleshy image of the statue upstairs, though its mouth is stretched forever agape, swollen open by the black, hairy spider-like mandibles reaching out from inside its throat. With hisses and chatters it tilts its head to regard you all one by one. It would seem that the god has come to punish those who would do his people wrong.

The Avatar of Bainra fights unintelligently, seeking to bite repeatedly and dodge away, rather than parry or opt for targeted attacks. Its danger lies in the poisonous bite and the amount of punishment it can take, rather than an inherent lethality due to combat skill.

Avatar of Bainra

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 15
CON 20
DEX 10
SIZ 23
INT 4
POW 10
CHA 5

Avatar of Bainra Hit Locations

| D20 | Hit Location | AP/HP |
|-------|---------------------------|-------|
| 1 | 1 st Right Leg | 0/9 |
| 2 | 2 nd Right Leg | 0/9 |
| 3 | 3 rd Right Leg | 0/9 |
| 4 | 1 st Left Leg | 0/9 |
| 5 | 2 nd Left Leg | 0/9 |
| 6 | 3 rd Left Leg | 0/9 |
| 7-9 | Abdomen | 0/10 |
| 10-12 | Chest | 0/11 |
| 13-15 | Right Arm | 0/8 |
| 16-18 | Left Arm | 0/8 |
| 19-20 | Head | 0/9 |

Weapons

| Type | Weapon Skill | Damage |
|------|--------------|----------------|
| Bite | 45% | 1D4+1D6+Poison |

The Codex of Bainra

The parchments on the pedestal are written in Lankhmarese – they are the translation of the Codex of Bainra, detailing how Bainra was a god of lies and spite, who warred with his brother god Maal. The Codex has many passages extolling the virtues of Bainra worship and the virtues of hating all those around oneself in order to never feel guilt at manipulating them or sacrificing them to the spider-god. It also has details of rituals and religious observances, mostly framed around notions of blood offerings and live sacrifices.

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 2

Strike Rank: +7

Movement: 4m

Traits: Dark Sight, Life Sense, Poison

Skills: Athletics 40%, Perception 60%, Persistence 90%, Resilience 50%, Survival 30%

Typical Armour: None (the loose fur and soft chitin flesh covering its body are too thin to offer any protection)

Avatar of Bainra Venom

Type: Smear

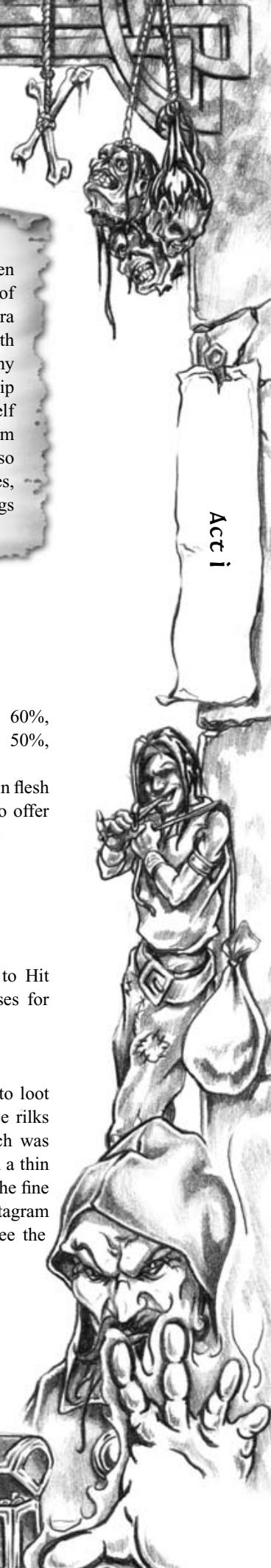
Delay: Immediate

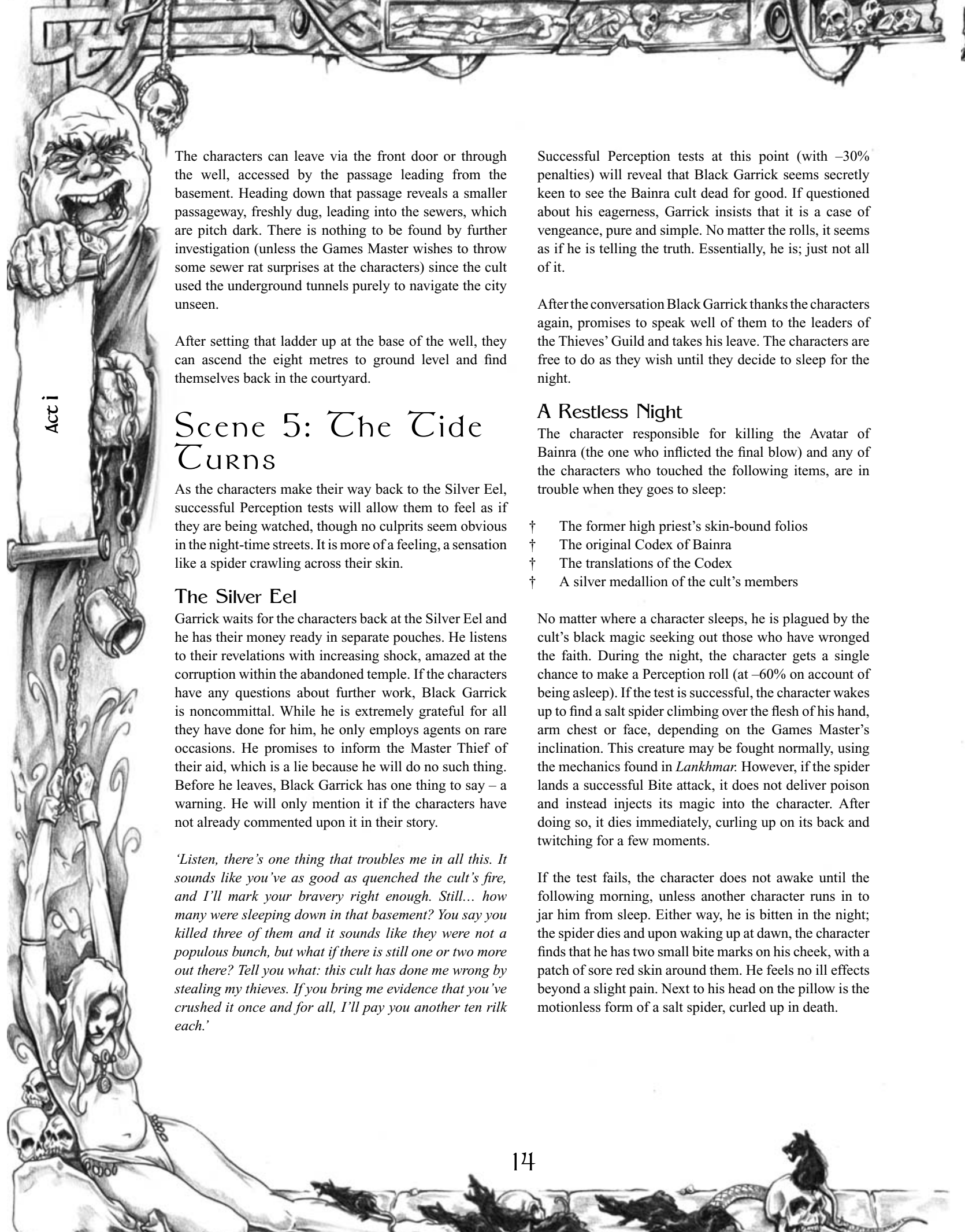
Potency: 50

Full Effect: 2 additional hit points of damage to Hit Location struck (appearing as grey-fleshed bruises for 1D3 days)

Duration: N/A

Once the Avatar is dead, the characters are free to loot the room. They find 17 silver smerduks and three rilks on the bodies of the three slain priests, and each was wearing a silver medallion of a spider pendant on a thin chain. These are worth five rilks each because of the fine craftsmanship. If the players wish to enter the pentagram and retrieve the parchments, they may do so. See the sidebar: The Codex of Bainra.





Act i

The characters can leave via the front door or through the well, accessed by the passage leading from the basement. Heading down that passage reveals a smaller passageway, freshly dug, leading into the sewers, which are pitch dark. There is nothing to be found by further investigation (unless the Games Master wishes to throw some sewer rat surprises at the characters) since the cult used the underground tunnels purely to navigate the city unseen.

After setting that ladder up at the base of the well, they can ascend the eight metres to ground level and find themselves back in the courtyard.

Scene 5: The Tide Turns

As the characters make their way back to the Silver Eel, successful Perception tests will allow them to feel as if they are being watched, though no culprits seem obvious in the night-time streets. It is more of a feeling, a sensation like a spider crawling across their skin.

The Silver Eel

Garrick waits for the characters back at the Silver Eel and he has their money ready in separate pouches. He listens to their revelations with increasing shock, amazed at the corruption within the abandoned temple. If the characters have any questions about further work, Black Garrick is noncommittal. While he is extremely grateful for all they have done for him, he only employs agents on rare occasions. He promises to inform the Master Thief of their aid, which is a lie because he will do no such thing. Before he leaves, Black Garrick has one thing to say – a warning. He will only mention it if the characters have not already commented upon it in their story.

'Listen, there's one thing that troubles me in all this. It sounds like you've as good as quenched the cult's fire, and I'll mark your bravery right enough. Still... how many were sleeping down in that basement? You say you killed three of them and it sounds like they were not a populous bunch, but what if there is still one or two more out there? Tell you what: this cult has done me wrong by stealing my thieves. If you bring me evidence that you've crushed it once and for all, I'll pay you another ten rilk each.'

Successful Perception tests at this point (with –30% penalties) will reveal that Black Garrick seems secretly keen to see the Bainra cult dead for good. If questioned about his eagerness, Garrick insists that it is a case of vengeance, pure and simple. No matter the rolls, it seems as if he is telling the truth. Essentially, he is; just not all of it.

After the conversation Black Garrick thanks the characters again, promises to speak well of them to the leaders of the Thieves' Guild and takes his leave. The characters are free to do as they wish until they decide to sleep for the night.

A Restless Night

The character responsible for killing the Avatar of Bainra (the one who inflicted the final blow) and any of the characters who touched the following items, are in trouble when they go to sleep:

- † The former high priest's skin-bound folios
- † The original Codex of Bainra
- † The translations of the Codex
- † A silver medallion of the cult's members

No matter where a character sleeps, he is plagued by the cult's black magic seeking out those who have wronged the faith. During the night, the character gets a single chance to make a Perception roll (at –60% on account of being asleep). If the test is successful, the character wakes up to find a salt spider climbing over the flesh of his hand, arm chest or face, depending on the Games Master's inclination. This creature may be fought normally, using the mechanics found in *Lankhmar*. However, if the spider lands a successful Bite attack, it does not deliver poison and instead injects its magic into the character. After doing so, it dies immediately, curling up on its back and twitching for a few moments.

If the test fails, the character does not awake until the following morning, unless another character runs in to jar him from sleep. Either way, he is bitten in the night; the spider dies and upon waking up at dawn, the character finds that he has two small bite marks on his cheek, with a patch of sore red skin around them. He feels no ill effects beyond a slight pain. Next to his head on the pillow is the motionless form of a salt spider, curled up in death.



ACT II: THE GODS AWAKEN

This act sees the characters summoned by Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and charged with the daunting task of eliminating both guilds once and for all. Before they go to meet the High Priestess of Bainra, they meet with a Lankhmar legend in the flesh, in the form of the Grey Mouser. Finally, they face the High Priestess and learn the surprising truth of her identity.

Scene 1: The Mentor Calls

As one of the characters is getting up and readying for the day ahead, a large black bird clatters and caws at the window, beating its wings and pecking at the glass. The character can clearly make out a roll of parchment wrapped around the raven's right leg. If the character decides not to let the bird in, it will seek out another character at random until it is allowed to deliver its message. More likely, the character will open the window and let the raven fly inside. It grips onto a character's shoulder while he unties the parchment and flies off the moment the paper is taken off. Apparently it was not ordered to wait around for a reply.

If the characters have survived the events of *Swords Across Nehwon*, the parchment reads as follows:

You are foolishly toying with great powers. If my reckonings are correct, you and your allies will already be falling victim to the repercussions.

Come see me. I am in a generous mood. I will help you and you might live through this.

Or do not come see me. Ignore my benevolence. Die in agony. The choice is yours.

Avoid all spiders, if you are able.

It is signed with a blank oval, marking it clearly as a missive from Sheelba. However, if the characters have not run through *Swords Across Nehwon* and never met Sheelba, the parchment says as follows:

Your life and the lives of your companions number in days at best. This is not a threat, it is a warning.

Come to the Great Salt Marsh and seek me out. I will help you. In return, one day I will ask you to help me.

You may call me Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. You will know me when you see me. Until then, avoid all spiders.

It is also signed with a blank oval.

The Great Salt Marsh

The Games Master might decide to play on the characters' fear of spider attacks as they slog through the Great Salt Marsh, perhaps using a nest of salt spiders or a particularly large specimen to threaten them. Otherwise, the journey from Lankhmar's Marsh Gate and into the swampland is uneventful and simply unpleasant.

Once inside the swamp, that changes. At one point the characters pass the stiffened corpse of a marsh leopard, slain by what looks like a savage bite to the throat from another big cat, rotting in the dim sun. If the characters investigate the corpse, nestled at the base of a tree, a Perception test reveals that the corpse has been dragged across the muddy ground to lie where it is. If the characters get within arm's reach of the corpse itself, they are allowed another Perception roll at -60% to hear a low growling and see two bright blue eyes watching them from the near-impenetrable foliage of the tree above them. Then they are attacked from above by a marsh leopard, as detailed in *Lankhmar*.

If the characters do not take the bait of this rather obvious trap, as they venture on through knee-deep marsh water, another Perception check will allow them to hear the

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sounds of water softly being disturbed. Behind them, a marsh leopard stalks through the filthy water with only its nose, eyes and ears above the surface. This beast launches out of the water the moment it is seen, attacking the characters. If they do not notice it, then the combat begins with the marsh leopard gaining surprise for the first round, as detailed on page 45 of *RuneQuest*. **Note:** If the characters came through the last marsh leopard ambush with flying colours and not a single scratch, the Games Master may want to consider running this one as well. The idea is not to see the characters dead, of course, but rather to alert them to the big cats of the swamp taking a sudden aggression to humans, even when vastly outnumbered.

After half an hour of random slogging through the swamp, they come across Sheelba's hut. The descriptions in *Lankhmar* will allow Games Masters to present Sheelba's home in its full and eerie 'grandeur'. The magician is outside his front door, standing impassively on the raised platform and looking down at the characters. Sheelba's full description is likewise found in great detail in *Lankhmar*.

If the characters have played through *Swords Across Nehwon*, Sheelba greets them in his cracking, harsh voice, like so:

'Well, well. Look who returns once more for much-needed assistance. Ning is squatting in his far-off caves, so there'll be no 'Gentle Sonning' today. Today you deal with me and me alone. Tell me all. Tell me everything that led to the beginnings of this sorcerous civil war.'

If the characters have not played through *Swords Across Nehwon*, Sheelba introduces himself:

'Ah, you came as asked. Good, good. To business first and foremost – I am Sheelba, called Sheelba of the Eyeless Face by many. I can help you, if you would but help me in return. But first, tell me all. Tell me everything that led to the beginnings of this sorcerous civil war.'

Either way, Sheelba invites the characters to speak of the events that took place the previous night. He listens in silence, the only sign he is even listening being an occasional nod of his cowl'd head. If they ask questions, he raises a robe-covered arm and hisses, telling them to ask questions later and speak of truths now. Sheelba picks up on any lies told to him, again hissing that the

characters should speak only the truth to him, lest he withdraw his offer of aid and let them die. Once he has heard all there is to say, he speaks again.

'A vile cult and a poisonous faith. It is better that such things die and stay dead. Yet you have been deceived somewhere along your path. I mentioned a civil war of sorcerers, and this is so. Bainra's priests are all slain by your hands, with only a single worshipper remaining – the High Priestess. Your actions in menacing Bainra's cult, the High Priestess perceives as the first battle in a war between her cult and the Maalites. If you would know who poisoned you, it is her, and why; because she believes you are part of a rival faith and wants vengeance.'

Sheelba falls silent then, eerily 'watching' them from within his dark cowl. The characters are bound to have questions and the following Q&A section will provide the Games Master with all the information he will need to convey to the players, which can be chopped and changed to suit the flow of any conversation.

'The Maalites?' *'The cultists of Maal, a godling of some minor renown back before the old faiths were banished from Lankhmar for being harmful. Like Bainra, he was a spiteful deity: a god of hatred. His cult made war upon those of Bainra's church and even – it is said – tried to destroy the Gods of Lankhmar as they slept in their squalid Black Temple.'*

Bainra is resurgent, as is Maal. You, quite foolishly, have allowed yourself to be deceived into striking the first blow in a war between the two resurfaced orders. The Maalites are already hunting you. You have noticed the tenacity of the swamps' great cats, I presume. This is the influence of Maal's one and only priest, who has power over feline creatures as Bainra's priests have a bond with spiders. You have been used as pawns. Your deaths are sought before your anger against those who used you becomes a threat to them.'

'Who is the High Priestess of Bainra?' If the characters have played *Swords Across Nehwon*, Sheelba answers: *'You know me better than that. I am not your nursemaid to be feeding you all you need in order to stay alive. Find out yourself.'*

If the characters have not played *Swords Across Nehwon*, Sheelba answers: *'I am not here to amuse you with stories detailing how you should live your lives. You will*

learn her identity in due time if you are significantly more attentive than you have been so far.'

'What about these spider bites?' *'You are infected with the sorcery-tainted poison of the Bainra cult. That is why I summoned you here. If you wish to survive past sunset, then you need the antidote. However, such a cure would be of immense value. I would be willing to provide it for a single favour in return.'*

'What do you want from us?' *The Cults of Bainra and Maal must both be destroyed. While I suspect you would kill the spider-worshippers out of a need for revenge, I desire that both faiths be returned to their place as footnotes in history.'*

'Why do you want this done?' *'For reasons you are unlikely to ever know and even less likely to understand.'*

'How do we destroy the cults?' *'Gather unseen at the Spire of Rhan come midnight. Your hour of vengeance will be at hand.'* Sheelba offers nothing more specific, emitting a harsh chuckle if questioned about details. At best, he repeats the same thing.

If the characters agree to Sheelba's wishes, he will give them the antidote to the poison they have been infected with. He reaches into a fold of his robe and holds down his sleeve-covered 'arm', dropping several vials of cloudy blue liquid (one per infected character) into their hands.

'These are the temporary cures you require. Smear a few drops on the spider wounds. Do not drink them, if you value your internal organs. Return to me when the cults are destroyed and I will supply you with the full antidote. You will have perhaps three days' grace, so if you are enamoured of your lives, I suggest banishing the faiths quickly.'

Any character that drinks a vial of the antidote enjoys a moment of an oddly spicy flavour, before vomiting violently. He suffers no other harmful effects beyond this sudden and rather dramatic purge. Sheelba can be persuaded to give another vial from within his hut, though he will hold out from doing so until he has delivered a sneering sentence or two about stupidity. Any character bitten by a spider that morning but who does not apply the liquid to their wounds within the following 1D6 hours will suffer a -20% penalty to all physical rolls and take 1 hit point of damage to the head Hit Location each hour

afterward as the poison begins to affect the blood in the brain. The penalty and damage is cumulative, hour by hour, and once the character reaches 0 hit points he dies with no hope of recovery.

If the characters refuse Sheelba's offer, he harshly explains they have perhaps a day to live if they do not receive the cure.

Scene 2 - The Spire and the Mouser

The description of the Spire of Rhan monument and the surrounding area can be found on page 66 of *Lankmar*. In addition to the Spire itself, this part of the Plaza of Dark Delights is busy as always come midnight, with robed figures gathering in clusters, occasional examples of lords, ladies, merchants and prosperous craftspeople mingling and whispering quietly, and peasants, thieves and Red Lantern whores creating other pockets of activity here and there.

Nothing immediately presents itself as overtly requiring the players' attention. Let them casually interact with any nearby characters if they wish to, or partake in any of the delights the Plaza has to offer. There is a great deal to do here, as detailed in *Lankmar*.

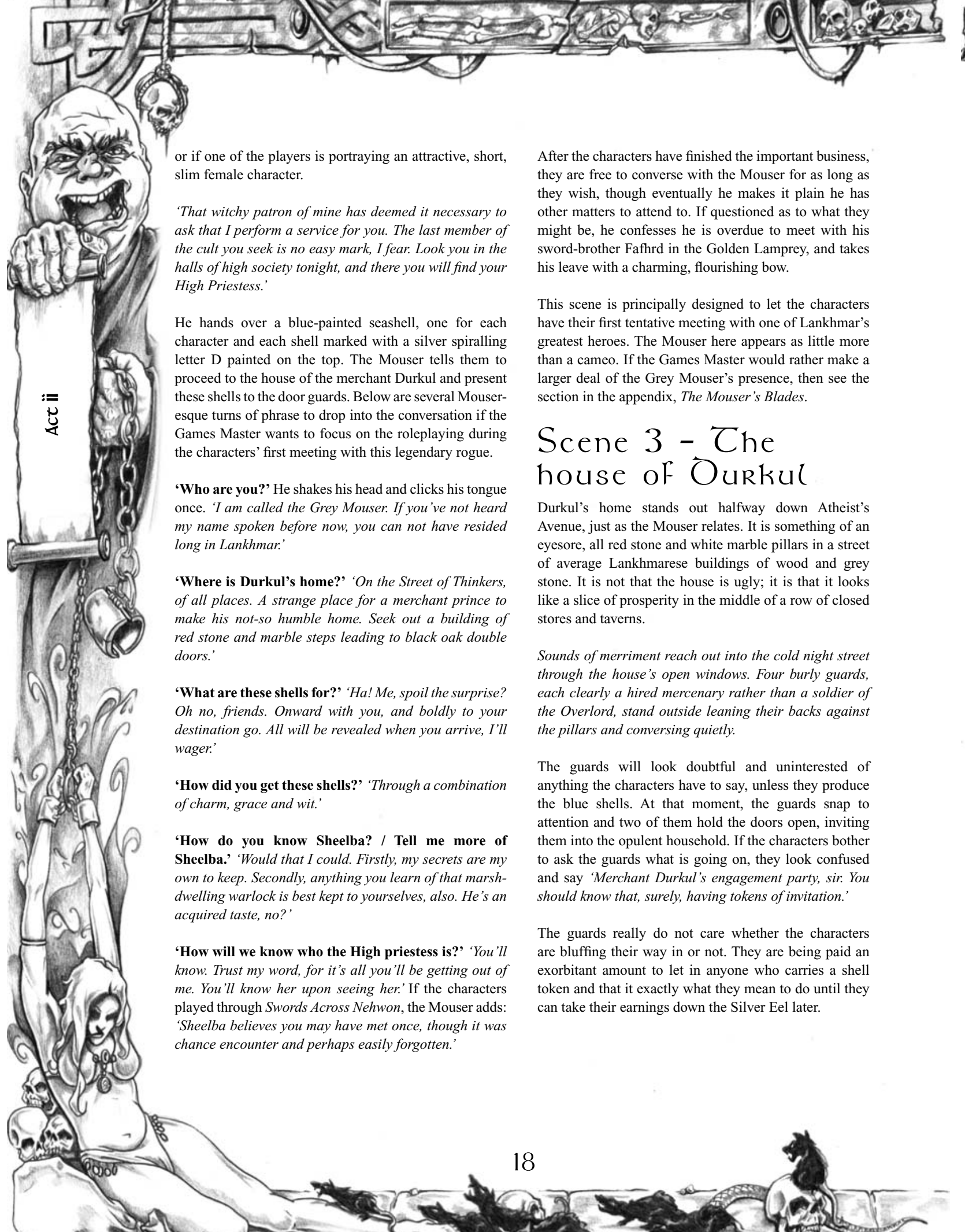
If the players are not inclined to partake of any entertainments here, or if the characters seem completely focused on their mission to the exclusion of all else, then cut the scene short. Though they do not know it yet, they are here to meet a messenger from Sheelba. That messenger is the Grey Mouser.

Weaving through the crowd, lazily picking his nails with the point of a long dagger, is a short, slender man dressed in shades of grey. He seems to avoid anyone walking past him without even needing to look up at them. As he draws near, his eyes focus on each of you in turn and you notice his lips purse slightly. He seems unimpressed or irritated by something.

Sheelba has charged the Grey Mouser with investigating the cult of Bainra and bringing news of his findings to the characters. He is singularly resentful of being tasked in such a way and does not mind letting it show. Over the course of the conversation, the Mouser can be charmed by recognising a kindred spirit in one of the characters,

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or if one of the players is portraying an attractive, short, slim female character.

'That witchy patron of mine has deemed it necessary to ask that I perform a service for you. The last member of the cult you seek is no easy mark, I fear. Look you in the halls of high society tonight, and there you will find your High Priestess.'

He hands over a blue-painted seashell, one for each character and each shell marked with a silver spiralling letter D painted on the top. The Mouser tells them to proceed to the house of the merchant Durkul and present these shells to the door guards. Below are several Mouser-esque turns of phrase to drop into the conversation if the Games Master wants to focus on the roleplaying during the characters' first meeting with this legendary rogue.

'Who are you?' He shakes his head and clicks his tongue once. *'I am called the Grey Mouser. If you've not heard my name spoken before now, you can not have resided long in Lankhmar.'*

'Where is Durkul's home?' *'On the Street of Thinkers, of all places. A strange place for a merchant prince to make his not-so humble home. Seek out a building of red stone and marble steps leading to black oak double doors.'*

'What are these shells for?' *'Ha! Me, spoil the surprise? Oh no, friends. Onward with you, and boldly to your destination go. All will be revealed when you arrive, I'll wager.'*

'How did you get these shells?' *'Through a combination of charm, grace and wit.'*

'How do you know Sheelba? / Tell me more of Sheelba.' *'Would that I could. Firstly, my secrets are my own to keep. Secondly, anything you learn of that marsh-dwelling warlock is best kept to yourselves, also. He's an acquired taste, no?'*

'How will we know who the High priestess is?' *'You'll know. Trust my word, for it's all you'll be getting out of me. You'll know her upon seeing her.'* If the characters played through *Swords Across Nehwon*, the Mouser adds: *'Sheelba believes you may have met once, though it was chance encounter and perhaps easily forgotten.'*

After the characters have finished the important business, they are free to converse with the Mouser for as long as they wish, though eventually he makes it plain he has other matters to attend to. If questioned as to what they might be, he confesses he is overdue to meet with his sword-brother Fafhrd in the Golden Lamprey, and takes his leave with a charming, flourishing bow.

This scene is principally designed to let the characters have their first tentative meeting with one of Lankhmar's greatest heroes. The Mouser here appears as little more than a cameo. If the Games Master would rather make a larger deal of the Grey Mouser's presence, then see the section in the appendix, *The Mouser's Blades*.

Scene 3 - The house of Durkul

Durkul's home stands out halfway down Atheist's Avenue, just as the Mouser relates. It is something of an eyesore, all red stone and white marble pillars in a street of average Lankhmarese buildings of wood and grey stone. It is not that the house is ugly; it is that it looks like a slice of prosperity in the middle of a row of closed stores and taverns.

Sounds of merriment reach out into the cold night street through the house's open windows. Four burly guards, each clearly a hired mercenary rather than a soldier of the Overlord, stand outside leaning their backs against the pillars and conversing quietly.

The guards will look doubtful and uninterested of anything the characters have to say, unless they produce the blue shells. At that moment, the guards snap to attention and two of them hold the doors open, inviting them into the opulent household. If the characters bother to ask the guards what is going on, they look confused and say *'Merchant Durkul's engagement party, sir. You should know that, surely, having tokens of invitation.'*

The guards really do not care whether the characters are bluffing their way in or not. They are being paid an exorbitant amount to let in anyone who carries a shell token and that is exactly what they mean to do until they can take their earnings down the Silver Eel later.

The entrance hall of the house is decked out in curtains and carpets of ocean blue, with white marble of polished brown wood the order of the day. A wide staircase leads to the first floor, presumably where the bedrooms are. Two doors lead out of this main room, both open and showing the rooms beyond. One seems to lead into a dining room with tables draped in white cloth, while the other leads to a sitting room with a number of leather chairs in view.

People mill about and crowd in small clusters, mostly dressed in noble's garments, the latest Lankhmar fashions of blue-dyed long dresses, or the ever classic black toga. All those who regard you as you enter seem to find you quite out of place among such finery.

The characters can explore if they prefer, or wait around and hope someone will attend to them. Unless they somehow predicted they were going to end up at a high society party and dressed accordingly, there is practically no way they will be able to fit in here. However, this is a perfect time to open up the opportunity for future adventures. The people at this gathering are rich and influential, and are more than likely to require willing, competent agents in the future. If the Games Master has any ideas for future story arcs that involve the characters working for a member of high society, this is the perfect time to introduce such a character and the possibility of employment in the future.

Either way, the characters are approached as soon as they seek to leave the entrance hall. The western room is the dining room, where a few groups of people are milling about in conversation. Most of the partygoers and the string instrument band are in the sitting room, reclining on couches and seats and drinking brandy and bubbly Ilthmarish wine before an open fire.

As soon as the characters have spent a few minutes in the sitting room (or if they lurk in the entrance hallway doing nothing) they are intercepted by a man in a black toga, descending the stairs and making straight for them. This is Durkul – a portly, balding merchant of advancing years and with piercing green eyes. He looks desperately embarrassed to see the characters here, speaking much like a stereotypical decadent fop.

'By the Great God's mercy; whatever might your names be? I'm certain we've never met and I shudder to think how you got past my guards. Are they dead? Do, even now, my coin-bought defenders lie dead on the ground?'

He is a preening, fussy creature, clearly. The characters will need to convince him to calm down before he has a fit of fear that they murdered the door guards but once they have eased his worries, he becomes a great deal more receptive. He does, however, want to know how the characters obtained the secret invitation tokens. The players have the advantage in that Durkul has convinced himself he knows the answer already. He is an irritating man, much given to interrupting the characters.

'I assume you received them from a wealthy employer who sought to reward you with riches more valuable than coin, yes? Did you believe you could come here dressed as paupers and simply walk amongst us unnoticed? Well, you may stay and bask in the culture for a while. But do not reveal your base manners here, else I shall have you flogged before the Overlord's court.'

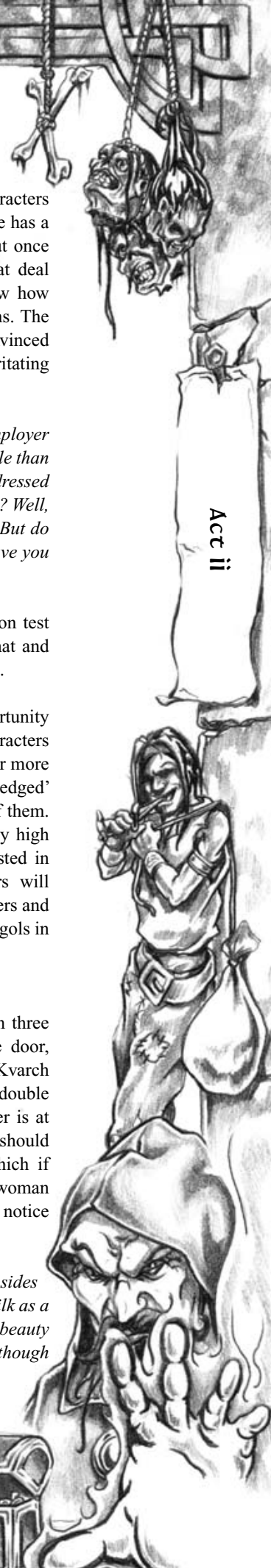
A Lore (Lankhmar) test or a successful Perception test reveals that Durkul is lying when he threatens that and probably does not have the influence to make it so.

The characters are free to mingle, which is an opportunity for the Games Master to create any interesting characters he desires. There is the strong possibility of one or more young noblewomen taking a shine to the 'rough-edged' characters and slumming with the best-looking of them. Unfortunately, at these soirees, there is an equally high chance that the nobles will be politely disinterested in anything the characters say, or former soldiers will recognise fighting men among the Player Characters and bore them to death with stories of battling the Mingols in their youths.

Lady Helena, Daughter of Movarl

In the sitting room, engaged in conversation with three eligible young grain merchants standing by the door, is Helena, the daughter of Overlord Movarl of Kvarch Nar. She is standing (not hiding) behind the open double doors, so that she is only visible once a character is at least ten feet inside the room. The characters should make Perception tests if they try to mingle, which if successful will allow them to notice this young woman first. Otherwise, Helena and the characters will notice each other in the same moment.

She wears a dark red dress with slits along the sides revealing her shapely legs, with a shawl of black silk as a nod to the traditional Lankhmarese fashion. Her beauty is regal, even without ostentatious jewellery, though





the first thing you notice is a curious silver tattoo of a spider on her cheek. No larger than a fingernail, you still find your attention drawn to it even from a distance. It could be explained away as the artistic affectation of a noblewoman, but you know better, seeing also how it matches the silver spider necklace around her slender neck.

If the characters have played through *Swords Across Nehwon*, they recognise Helena from their encounter with her in Kvarch Nar. She is in Lankhmar, working to resurrect the cult of Bainra as the High Priestess. Otherwise, the characters know her only by the cult's image on her cheek.

As soon as Helena sees the characters, she visible pales and tries to run. If the characters seek to pursue, tackle or fight her, things will get ugly. While Durkul's party is filled with the kind of decadent, overweight and unskilled aristocracy of Lankhmar who would offer absolutely no contest to a seasoned fighter, the Player Characters might be arrested after this if they are not careful.

'She was an ex-lover. Honest.'

If the characters let her flee and seek to stay and explain things, then an Influence test at -20% is enough to

convince the stunned guests that they either did not know Helena and there has been a mistake, or that there is some secret (potentially scandalous) reason she reacted the way she did. In this case, if the Influence roll is successful then the characters are free to leave.

'We're leaving.'

The people at this party are not the kind of souls to put up physical resistance to a group of armed and clearly skilled fighting men and women. Unless the characters have given their names, a rough description of them will not be enough for the city watch to prey upon them and, technically, they broke no laws anyway.

If Helena escapes and the characters opt not to pursue her, they could be in trouble anyway. If they pull their weapons on the partygoers to keep them back or try to leave quickly and firmly without actually doing any harm, then they will be able to leave without resistance. If they are overly aggressive in their flight, such as using particularly vicious insulting threats or harming anyone, then once the characters leave unopposed, they are likely to be hunted by the city watch: see *She Got Away* at the end of this scene.

'Stop her! She's a cultist!'

This will probably not fly. An Influence roll at -60% will win the crowd over, making such a possibility extremely unlikely. It will take some excellent roleplaying to go with the roll in order to prove that Overlord Movarl's daughter is a cultist in a forbidden sect. If somehow the roll is successful, the characters will have captured her as the crowd prevents her from leaving.

Capturing Helena

If the characters passed their earlier Perception test and they have seen Helena's tattoo before she notices them, they have several seconds (a full Combat Round) to act with the initiative. This could involve blocking the door and confronting her, or otherwise preventing her escape from the house. If the characters fail their earlier Perception roll and everyone notices each other at once, Helena makes a break for it and initiative is rolled as normal.

If she is tackled and brought down or otherwise barred from leaving the room, she seeks to fight and kill her attackers. As with the priest in the temple, she begins to warp into the Avatar of Bainra: a feat which takes a full Combat Round during which she may only Dodge.



If she manages to transform and is not decapitated before the change is complete, the thirty guests in the room begin to scream and panic, breaking windows to escape, risking flight through the door close to the creature and hiding behind furniture in paralysed fear. Clearly, these fops have no backbone.

The Avatar of Bainra uses the same mechanics as its previous appearance. Helena's human stats are found below. Her chances of actually fleeing out of the house are slim – even slimmer if she hopes to outrun the characters in Lankhmar's streets. It is far likelier that the characters will tackle or injure her quickly, and the change to the Avatar will begin.

As the change does take shape, she shrieks and howls at the characters:

'No! You are mere pawns of that Maalite priest, Black Garrick! I offer you up as blood sacrifice to Bainra for your heresy!'

Helena

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 10
CON 13
DEX 12
SIZ 10
INT 14
POW 14
CHA 17

Helena Hit Locations

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

Weapons

| Type | Weapon Skill | Damage |
|------|--------------|--------|
| None | — | — |

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 2

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 4m

Traits: None

Skills: Athletics 40%, Influence 60%, Dodge 30%, Lore (Eight Cities) 80%, Persistence 30%, Resilience 40%, Survival 30%

The Aftermath

No matter whether the deed was done in the sitting room of Durkul's home or the cobblestoned streets past midnight, the characters are not going to suffer the attention of the city watch after they battled a gigantic spider creature. Helena's only possessions on her person are a spider medallion as also worn by the priests and 10 rilks in a small purse.

The guests are in various states of panic and horror, and have no time for the characters. The city watch arrive but if the characters stay around to speak with them, they will find themselves congratulated, thanked and set free, rather than punished.

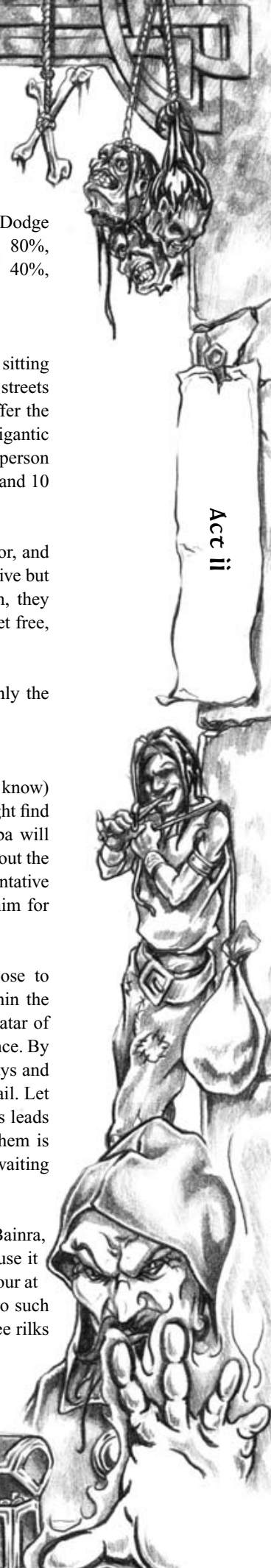
If all goes to plan, the cult of Bainra is dead. Only the Maalites remain.

'She Got Away...'

If Helena manages to flee (unlikely but you never know) then the characters will need a new lead. They might find some clue back at the church, or perhaps Sheelba will summon them again. Perhaps they choose to seek out the Grey Mouser at the Silver Eel and use him as a tentative underworld contact, buying the information off him for the price of a round of drinks.

If Helena does escape, ultimately she will choose to confront the characters when they are alone within the next few nights. She will take the form of the Avatar of Bainra and hope to kill them all if she gets the chance. By this stage she fears that her life is numbered in days and is desperate to slaughter the adventurers on her trail. Let the characters stew for a while, following fruitless leads or investigating a building the Mouser informs them is a possible hideout for her. Then have the Avatar waiting for them...

Once the characters have killed the Avatar of Bainra, they can take the evidence to the authorities and use it to clear their names and explain away their behaviour at Durkul's party. The city watch will be receptive to such an admission and will only fine the characters three rilks each for their 'grave insults to the nobility'.





ACT III: THE GODS WALK

The cult of Bainra is destroyed and the characters know Black Garrick set them up. The cult of Maal seeks to eliminate its pawns before they can become a threat. In the blackest moments, the Gods of Lankhmar rise from their crypt in order to quell the danger to their city.

Scene 1 - SECRETS AFTER DARK

The characters now know of Black Garrick's allegiance to the cult of Maal and are under Sheelba's order to end the cult's business once and for all. However, no matter where the characters make enquiries during the day, Black Garrick is untraceable. Beggars and rumourmongers obviously point the characters in the direction of the Thieves' Guild, though anyone approaching the door of Thieves' House is told by the guards in no uncertain terms that Black Garrick has not been a guild member for months, and resigned for reasons he never saw fit to share. None of the guild seems to have any interest in what their wayward friend is doing now.

Garrick has not been seen in the Silver Eel (or in any other tavern the characters ask) since he was seen with the characters on the night he first hired them. Just when everything seems to be reaching a dead-end, the characters finally catch a break.

If the characters have fruitlessly visited Thieves' House either to ask about Black Garrick or attempt to explain things to the guild, or made real efforts to ask around for Garrick's whereabouts, then the next time they are walking the streets at night, their persistence pays off.

The evening is cloudy even in the streets, as fog from the River Hlal and the smoke of ten thousand torches mixes into Lankhmar's greyish night-smog. The streets are blanketed in a thin haze of smoke, reducing visibility to a few dozen feet in front of you.

For this scene, treat the illumination as Partial Darkness as detailed on page 86 of *RuneQuest*. They are approached out of the smog by a beggar boy, covered in the grime of the streets and wearing a ragged black sackcloth that could generously be called a makeshift toga, which reeks of fire-smoke. He is no more than eight or nine years old and asks if they are the ones looking for Black Garrick, since he was given a message for those he seek him. If the characters agree, the boy says simply 'A man named Jerril bade me tell you this. He wants you to meet him in the Golden Lamprey tonight, whenever you are able.'

The boy, whose name is Aster, has no other information at all. He was paid an agol by Jerril to wander the streets and taverns, looking for the characters by description and to deliver this message. He will admit that he knew where to look because Jerril has thieves watching them, though he will only admit that if the characters cross his palm with another agol as incentive to be loose-tongued.

More Maalite Pawns

The cult of Maal is out to get the characters now, using the cover of the night-smog to commit murder in the streets. As the characters make their way to the Golden Lamprey, the ambush is revealed. The characters can make a Perception test as they pass the mouth of an alley or smaller side-street, to see if they notice the figures lurking there. Remember that the Partial Darkness imposes a -20% limitation on the characters' rolls.

Waiting around this corner are three well-trained members of the Slayers' Brotherhood, hired by Black Garrick at significant expense. These are Rodolfo, Marn and Daol. If the characters take them alive instead of killing them, all they know is that a man called Black Garrick hired them and promised that the characters would be here at this time in order to ambush them.

Members of the Slayers' Brotherhood are dedicated to carrying out their job. There is always the possibility, no

matter how slight, that the offer of money will actually sway them from doing their duty. For Rodolfo and Daol, this is not a consideration. They are far too honest (for thugs, anyway) and refuse to impugn their word of honour to their guild or their employer. If offered a bribe to leave the characters alone, they will refuse and press their attack. Marn, however, has acquired some recent gambling debts and is strapped for coin. If the characters make a show of wanting to offer a bribe to their attackers, Marn will turn on his comrades, either asking for twelve rilks before he betrays them, or after the fight, depending on how the scene plays out.

The bodies are carrying their weapons, twenty-eight smerduks, nine agols and a single rilk. Rodolfo also bears a slip of parchment – an official Slayers' Guild contract – signed clearly by himself and Black Garrick, detailing the job that was to be performed.

Games Masters might question the sense of a hired killer carrying evidence of who he works for. Remember, in Lankhmar, this is how things are done. Firstly, the Slayers themselves did not expect to die and have the evidence discovered. Secondly, Lankhmar is so corrupt and life is so cheap that no one in the authorities would ever care, let alone have the power to do something about it, if the characters sought legal proceedings over this. This is not clumsiness on the part of the hired killers. It is just Lankhmar is so corrupt that 'evidence' is a term that has practically no meaning. The Slayers' Brotherhood is an open secret and the Overlord has never made a move to shut them down. Such tacit acceptance of the guild is akin to open recognition in every way that matters.

Slayers' Brotherhood Members

| | |
|-----|----|
| STR | 14 |
| CON | 12 |
| DEX | 14 |
| SIZ | 14 |
| INT | 12 |
| POW | 10 |
| CHA | 13 |

Slayers' Brotherhood Members Hit Locations

| D20 | Hit Location | AP/HP |
|-------|--------------|-------|
| 1–3 | Right Leg | 2/6 |
| 4–6 | Left Leg | 2/6 |
| 7–9 | Abdomen | 2/7 |
| 10–12 | Chest | 2/8 |
| 13–15 | Right Arm | 2/5 |
| 16–18 | Left Arm | 2/5 |
| 19–20 | Head | 2/6 |

Weapons

| | | |
|-------|--------------|---------|
| Type | Weapon Skill | Damage |
| Sword | 50% (36%) | 1D8+1D2 |

Special Rules

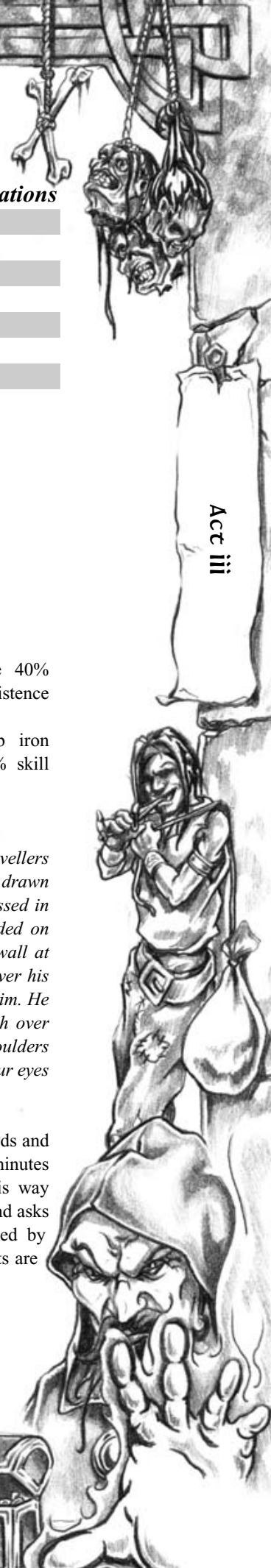
| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Combat Actions: | 3 |
| Strike Rank: | +13 |
| Movement: | 4m |
| Traits: | None |
| Skills: | Athletics 35% (21%), Dodge 40% (26%), Perception 40%, Persistence 60%, Resilience 40% |

Typical Armour: Scavenged armour and cheap iron helmets (2 AP all over, -14% skill penalty)

The Golden Lamprey

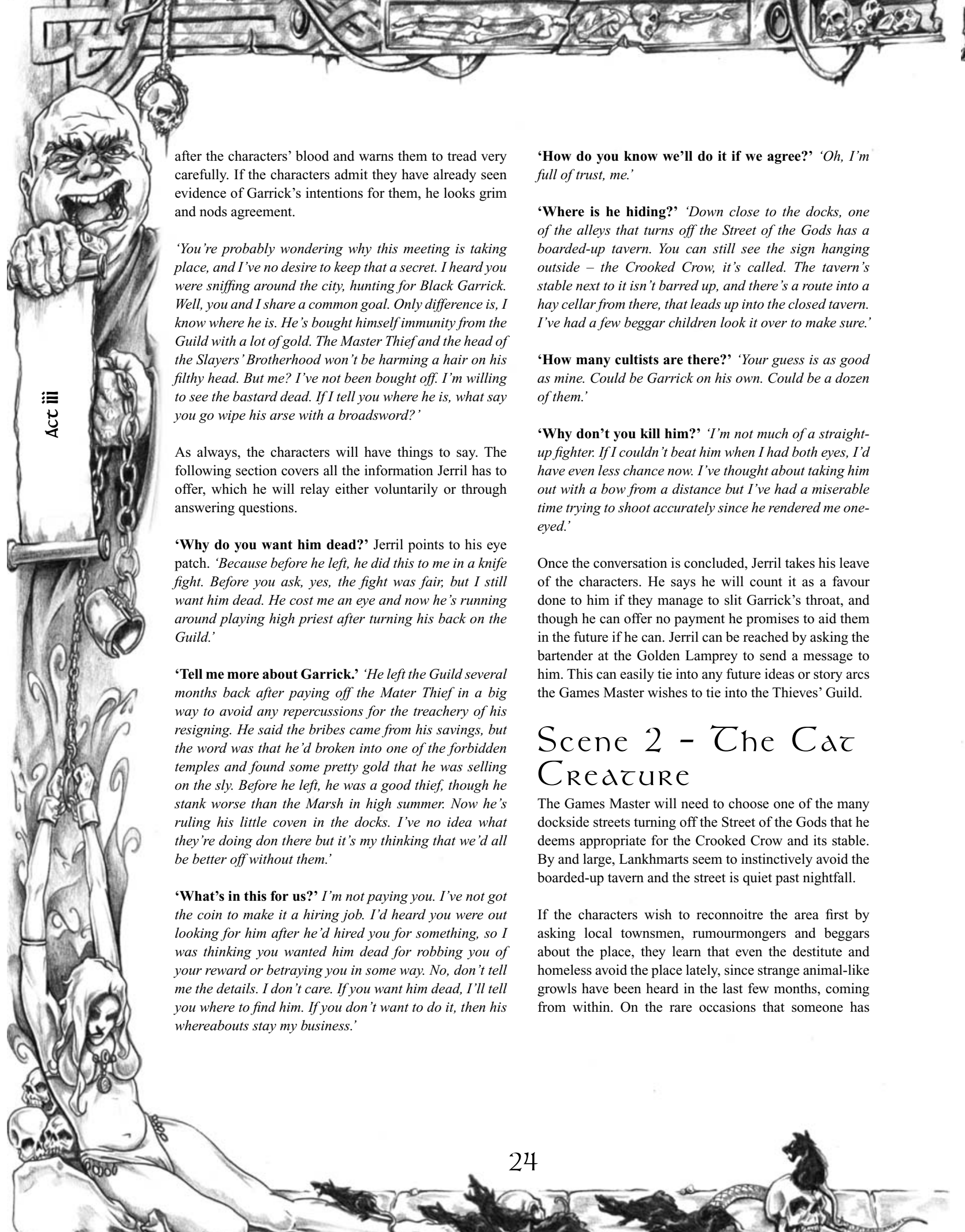
The tavern is busy tonight, with crowds of revellers creating quite a din. Your gaze is immediately drawn to a man sat alone at the only unfilled table, dressed in black clothes and with a wood-brown cloak folded on the tabletop. He is seated with his back to the wall at the far end of the common room, arms crossed over his chest, with a full glass of ale on the table before him. He is handsome but for a grey mouse-skin eye patch over his left eye, with long black hair reaching his shoulders and a very pale complexion. He nods to you as your eyes meet.

The characters are free to mingle among the crowds and join in some betting games though after a few minutes Jerril will cease waiting for them and make his way over to them. Jerril introduces himself by name and asks immediately if the characters have been attacked by the cult of Maal yet. He suspects that they cultists are



Act iii





Act III

after the characters' blood and warns them to tread very carefully. If the characters admit they have already seen evidence of Garrick's intentions for them, he looks grim and nods agreement.

'You're probably wondering why this meeting is taking place, and I've no desire to keep that a secret. I heard you were sniffing around the city, hunting for Black Garrick. Well, you and I share a common goal. Only difference is, I know where he is. He's bought himself immunity from the Guild with a lot of gold. The Master Thief and the head of the Slayers' Brotherhood won't be harming a hair on his filthy head. But me? I've not been bought off. I'm willing to see the bastard dead. If I tell you where he is, what say you go wipe his arse with a broadsword?'

As always, the characters will have things to say. The following section covers all the information Jerril has to offer, which he will relay either voluntarily or through answering questions.

'Why do you want him dead?' Jerril points to his eye patch. *'Because before he left, he did this to me in a knife fight. Before you ask, yes, the fight was fair, but I still want him dead. He cost me an eye and now he's running around playing high priest after turning his back on the Guild.'*

'Tell me more about Garrick.' *'He left the Guild several months back after paying off the Mater Thief in a big way to avoid any repercussions for the treachery of his resigning. He said the bribes came from his savings, but the word was that he'd broken into one of the forbidden temples and found some pretty gold that he was selling on the sly. Before he left, he was a good thief, though he stank worse than the Marsh in high summer. Now he's ruling his little coven in the docks. I've no idea what they're doing don there but it's my thinking that we'd all be better off without them.'*

'What's in this for us?' *'I'm not paying you. I've not got the coin to make it a hiring job. I'd heard you were out looking for him after he'd hired you for something, so I was thinking you wanted him dead for robbing you of your reward or betraying you in some way. No, don't tell me the details. I don't care. If you want him dead, I'll tell you where to find him. If you don't want to do it, then his whereabouts stay my business.'*

'How do you know we'll do it if we agree?' *'Oh, I'm full of trust, me.'*

'Where is he hiding?' *'Down close to the docks, one of the alleys that turns off the Street of the Gods has a boarded-up tavern. You can still see the sign hanging outside – the Crooked Crow, it's called. The tavern's stable next to it isn't barred up, and there's a route into a hay cellar from there, that leads up into the closed tavern. I've had a few beggar children look it over to make sure.'*

'How many cultists are there?' *'Your guess is as good as mine. Could be Garrick on his own. Could be a dozen of them.'*

'Why don't you kill him?' *'I'm not much of a straight-up fighter. If I couldn't beat him when I had both eyes, I'd have even less chance now. I've thought about taking him out with a bow from a distance but I've had a miserable time trying to shoot accurately since he rendered me one-eyed.'*

Once the conversation is concluded, Jerril takes his leave of the characters. He says he will count it as a favour done to him if they manage to slit Garrick's throat, and though he can offer no payment he promises to aid them in the future if he can. Jerril can be reached by asking the bartender at the Golden Lamprey to send a message to him. This can easily tie into any future ideas or story arcs the Games Master wishes to tie into the Thieves' Guild.

Scene 2 - The Cat Creature

The Games Master will need to choose one of the many dockside streets turning off the Street of the Gods that he deems appropriate for the Crooked Crow and its stable. By and large, Lankhmarts seem to instinctively avoid the boarded-up tavern and the street is quiet past nightfall.

If the characters wish to reconnoitre the area first by asking local townsmen, rumourmongers and beggars about the place, they learn that even the destitute and homeless avoid the place lately, since strange animal-like growls have been heard in the last few months, coming from within. On the rare occasions that someone has

been brave enough to venture in there, they have found nothing, yet the animal sounds persist, as if something were infrequently scratching at the boards from the inside, trying to get out. Weeping has also been heard several times; a man crying within, though he is never found by investigators, either.

The Crooked Crow is a single-storey tavern, sealed by wooden boards nailed up over the door and windows. A tavern sign, with a blackbird awing, swings quietly in the night's breeze. Next door to the tavern is a small stable large enough to hold ten horses, with five stalls on each side of a central aisle. The stable's doors are closed but not boarded up. In the centre of the aisle is a wooden trapdoor, which leads into the building's expansive cellar.

While the characters are still outside, they may make Perception checks at -10%. Success allows them to make out the soft sounds of something clawed gently scratching at a door or sealed window somewhere inside the building. Any attempts to break down the reinforced boards covering the doors and windows will likely require an axe and several moments of loud chopping, which will attract the city watch to ask why the characters are vandalising the property. If the characters are committed to that route, however, treat each section of boarding as a reinforced door - detailed on page 93 of *RuneQuest*.

The Cellar

The cellar of the Crooked Crow is a large room where hay and grain were once stored for the stable, and beer barrels were kept for the tavern. It is bare except for the rickety wooden stairs leading down from the stable and the creaky wooden stairs leading to the trapdoor behind the bar.

Making a Stealth test to walk up the second set of stairs creates a -50% penalty because of the creaks. A Perception roll to listen at the door reveals soft footsteps in an irregular rhythm, and quiet scratching sounds of something sharp against wood - though not of the wood against the trapdoor.

The Tavern

If the characters managed to sneak up the steps then the starving, diseased marsh leopard in the tavern loses the initiative for the first round of combat. Otherwise, it

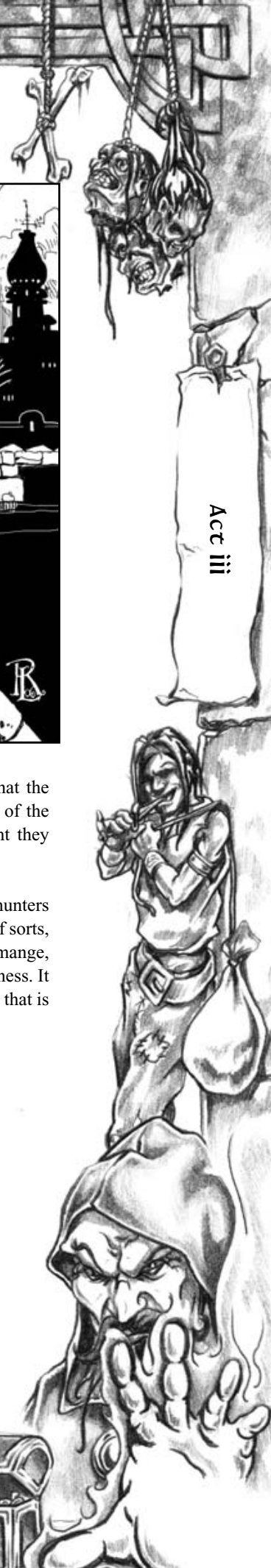


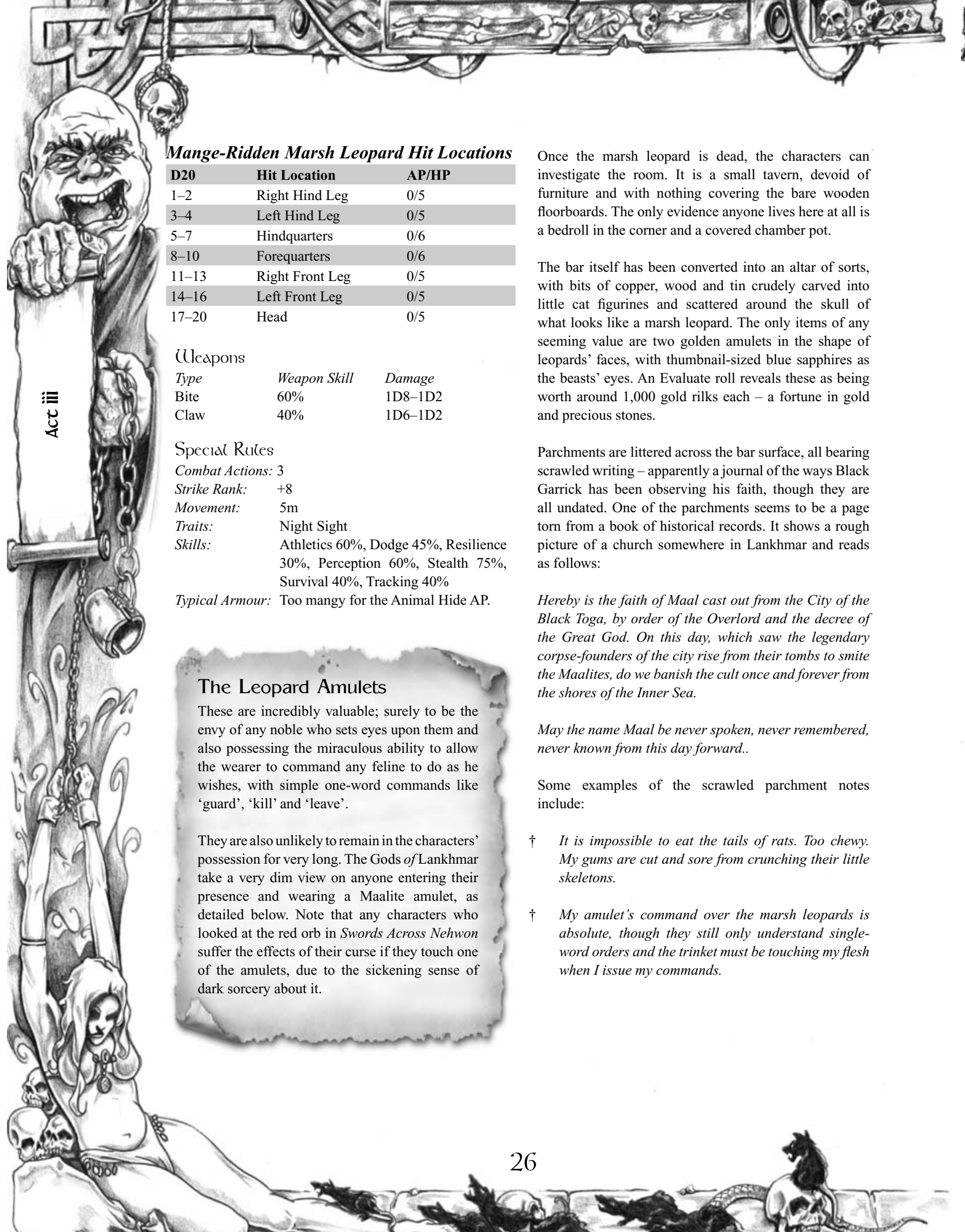
seeks to leap down into the cellar the moment that the trapdoor is open enough to do so. It sits in front of the trapdoor so the characters will see it the moment they begin to emerge.

This is not a healthy creature. Garrick had local hunters capture it and bring it to him for use as a familiar of sorts, though the creature is covered in fleabites and mange, and its blue eyes are dulled by privation and weakness. It seeks to kill any who invade its master's lair, since that is what it has been sorcery-enlaved to do.

Mange-Ridden Marsh Leopard

| CHARACTERISTICS | | |
|-----------------|-------|------|
| STR | 3D6 | (10) |
| CON | 3D6+3 | (13) |
| DEX | 3D6+3 | (13) |
| SIZ | 2D6+2 | (9) |
| INT | 6 | (6) |
| POW | 3D6 | (10) |
| CHA | 5 | (5) |





Mange-Ridden Marsh Leopard Hit Locations

| D20 | Hit Location | AP/HP |
|-------|-----------------|-------|
| 1-2 | Right Hind Leg | 0/5 |
| 3-4 | Left Hind Leg | 0/5 |
| 5-7 | Hindquarters | 0/6 |
| 8-10 | Forequarters | 0/6 |
| 11-13 | Right Front Leg | 0/5 |
| 14-16 | Left Front Leg | 0/5 |
| 17-20 | Head | 0/5 |

Weapons

| Type | Weapon Skill | Damage |
|------|--------------|---------|
| Bite | 60% | 1D8-1D2 |
| Claw | 40% | 1D6-1D2 |

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 3

Strike Rank: +8

Movement: 5m

Traits: Night Sight

Skills: Athletics 60%, Dodge 45%, Resilience 30%, Perception 60%, Stealth 75%, Survival 40%, Tracking 40%

Typical Armour: Too mangy for the Animal Hide AP.

Once the marsh leopard is dead, the characters can investigate the room. It is a small tavern, devoid of furniture and with nothing covering the bare wooden floorboards. The only evidence anyone lives here at all is a bedroll in the corner and a covered chamber pot.

The bar itself has been converted into an altar of sorts, with bits of copper, wood and tin crudely carved into little cat figurines and scattered around the skull of what looks like a marsh leopard. The only items of any seeming value are two golden amulets in the shape of leopards' faces, with thumbnail-sized blue sapphires as the beasts' eyes. An Evaluate roll reveals these as being worth around 1,000 gold rilks each – a fortune in gold and precious stones.

Parchments are littered across the bar surface, all bearing scrawled writing – apparently a journal of the ways Black Garrick has been observing his faith, though they are all undated. One of the parchments seems to be a page torn from a book of historical records. It shows a rough picture of a church somewhere in Lankmar and reads as follows:

Hereby is the faith of Maal cast out from the City of the Black Toga, by order of the Overlord and the decree of the Great God. On this day, which saw the legendary corpse-founders of the city rise from their tombs to smite the Maalites, do we banish the cult once and forever from the shores of the Inner Sea.

May the name Maal be never spoken, never remembered, never known from this day forward..

Some examples of the scrawled parchment notes include:

† *It is impossible to eat the tails of rats. Too chewy. My gums are cut and sore from crunching their little skeletons.*

† *My amulet's command over the marsh leopards is absolute, though they still only understand single-word orders and the trinket must be touching my flesh when I issue my commands.*

The Leopard Amulets

These are incredibly valuable; surely to be the envy of any noble who sets eyes upon them and also possessing the miraculous ability to allow the wearer to command any feline to do as he wishes, with simple one-word commands like 'guard', 'kill' and 'leave'.

They are also unlikely to remain in the characters' possession for very long. The Gods of Lankmar take a very dim view on anyone entering their presence and wearing a Maalite amulet, as detailed below. Note that any characters who looked at the red orb in *Swords Across Nehwon* suffer the effects of their curse if they touch one of the amulets, due to the sickening sense of dark sorcery about it.

- † *Today I killed five rats and drank their blood, all in Maal's name.*
- † *My familiar is infested with fleas. I cleaned her coat by licking it.*
- † *I dream of dead men wearing rotted black robes. Surely they must all be dust by now. Surely. If they yet exist in that crypt, they will know the wrath of Maal for their ancient wrongdoings. I am blessed and I bring the new truth.*
- † *The scum of Bainra are dead! Praise Maal! Praise the cat-god! May she rain fortune on her High Priest!*

As the characters are poking around the tavern, Black Garrick returns. The characters may make Perception checks to notice the sounds of someone walking up the stairs, giving them time to hide behind the bar.

Black Garrick emerges from the trapdoor, immediately on guard and alert to the fact that someone has been in his sanctum. If the characters had the forethought to hide the dead leopard, clean up its blood and close the trapdoor after them, he will still know someone has been here by the fact his 'familiar' does not greet him upon entry. He calls out a tentative 'Hello?' as he readies his throwing knife and looks around.

¶ee!

If the characters reveal themselves or are already in the open as Black Garrick rises from the basement, he throws his dagger and runs back down into the basement. The chase is on.

Garrick flees through the basement, up into the stable and out onto the Street of the Gods. He is making a break for the only place he believes the characters will be too scared to follow: the Black Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar.

Black Garrick

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 14
 CON 12
 DEX 12
 SIZ 10
 INT 10
 POW 10
 CHA 9

Black Garrick Hit Locations

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

Weapons

| Type | Weapon Skill | Damage |
|--------|--------------|--------|
| Dagger | 45% | 1D4 |

Special Rules

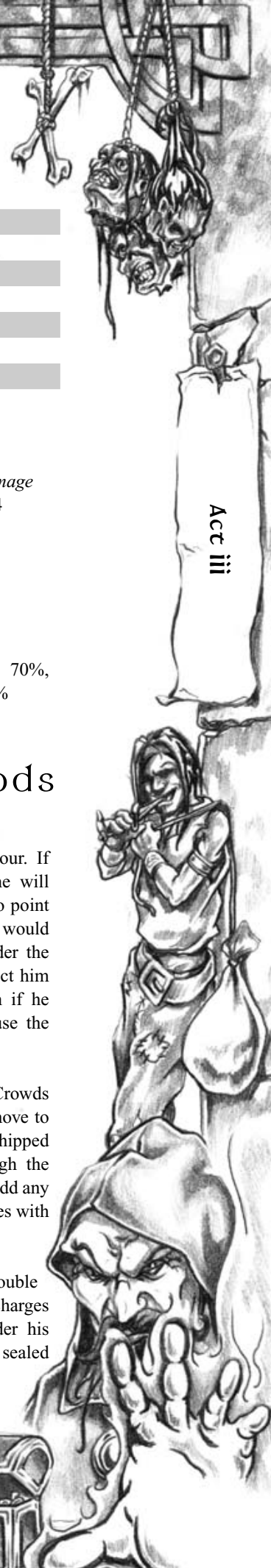
Combat Actions: 2
 Strike Rank: +11
 Movement: 4m
 Traits: None
 Skills: Athletics 90%, Perception 70%, Persistence 60%, Resilience 60%
 Typical Armour: None

Scene 3 - The Gods of Lankhmar

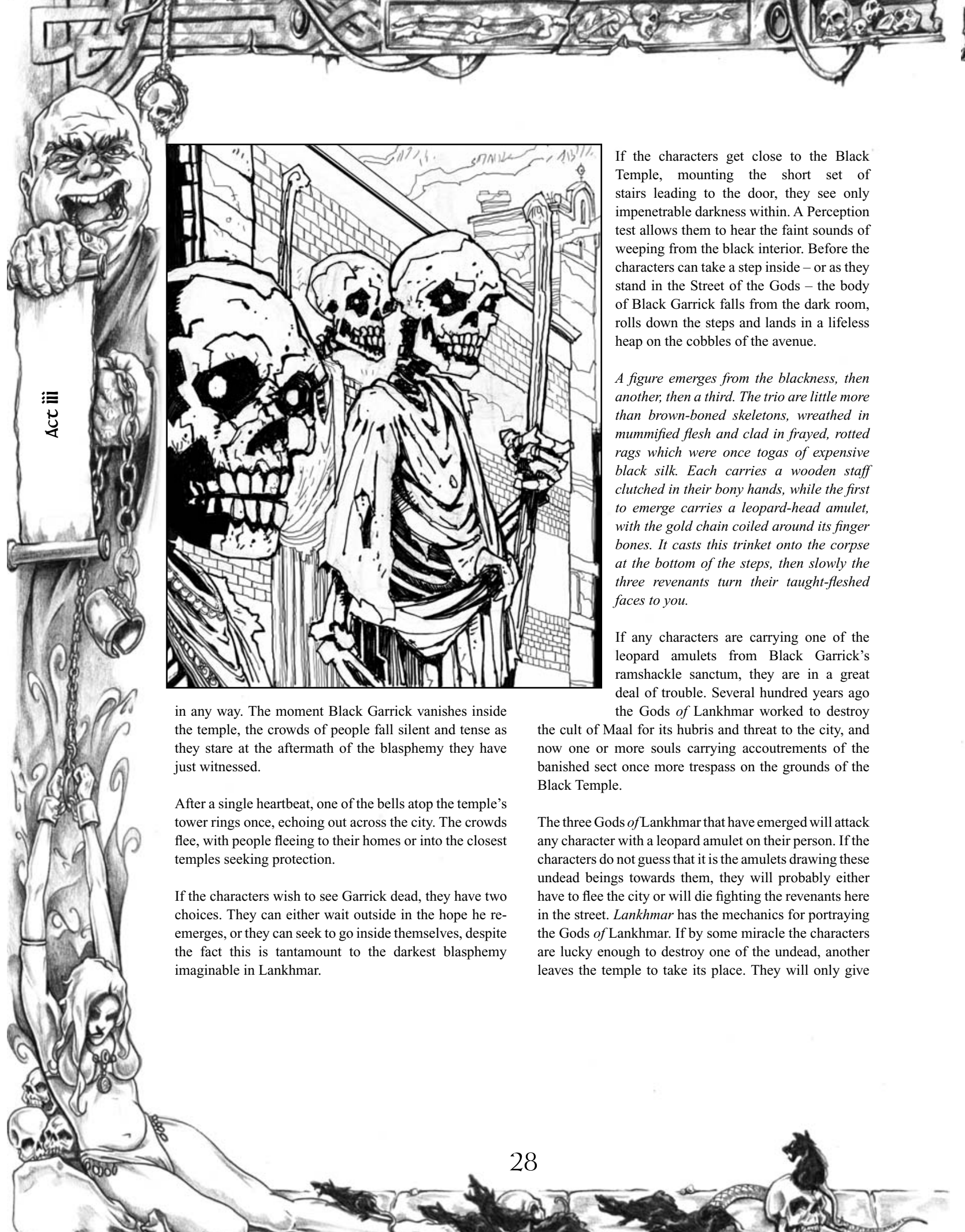
The odds of escape are in Black Garrick's favour. If the characters manage to catch up with him he will fight ferociously to break free of their grip. At no point does he want to stand and fight - he knows he would not survive the confrontation. Instead, he is under the misapprehension that his faith in Maal will protect him from the wrath of the Gods of Lankhmar even if he breaks into their sanctuary, and he intends to use the Black Temple as a place to hide.

The Street of the Gods is busy at the western end. Crowds of worshippers mill about in the streets as they move to and from the grand temples of the most-worshipped deities here. Any pursuit will take place through the loose crowd, in case the Games Master wishes to add any moments of awkwardness when a character collides with a bystander.

As soon as Garrick runs up the short stairs to the double doors leading into the Black Temple, he shoulder-charges the ancient portal, which gives way easily under his assault. Strangely, it does not seem to be locked or sealed



Act iii



Act III



in any way. The moment Black Garrick vanishes inside the temple, the crowds of people fall silent and tense as they stare at the aftermath of the blasphemy they have just witnessed.

After a single heartbeat, one of the bells atop the temple's tower rings once, echoing out across the city. The crowds flee, with people fleeing to their homes or into the closest temples seeking protection.

If the characters wish to see Garrick dead, they have two choices. They can either wait outside in the hope he re-emerges, or they can seek to go inside themselves, despite the fact this is tantamount to the darkest blasphemy imaginable in Lankhmar.

If the characters get close to the Black Temple, mounting the short set of stairs leading to the door, they see only impenetrable darkness within. A Perception test allows them to hear the faint sounds of weeping from the black interior. Before the characters can take a step inside – or as they stand in the Street of the Gods – the body of Black Garrick falls from the dark room, rolls down the steps and lands in a lifeless heap on the cobbles of the avenue.

A figure emerges from the blackness, then another, then a third. The trio are little more than brown-boned skeletons, wreathed in mummified flesh and clad in frayed, rotted rags which were once togas of expensive black silk. Each carries a wooden staff clutched in their bony hands, while the first to emerge carries a leopard-head amulet, with the gold chain coiled around its finger bones. It casts this trinket onto the corpse at the bottom of the steps, then slowly the three revenants turn their taught-fleshed faces to you.

If any characters are carrying one of the leopard amulets from Black Garrick's ramshackle sanctum, they are in a great deal of trouble. Several hundred years ago the Gods of Lankhmar worked to destroy the cult of Maal for its hubris and threat to the city, and now one or more souls carrying accoutrements of the banished sect once more trespass on the grounds of the Black Temple.

The three Gods of Lankhmar that have emerged will attack any character with a leopard amulet on their person. If the characters do not guess that it is the amulets drawing these undead beings towards them, they will probably either have to flee the city or will die fighting the revenants here in the street. *Lankhmar* has the mechanics for portraying the Gods of Lankhmar. If by some miracle the characters are lucky enough to destroy one of the undead, another leaves the temple to take its place. They will only give

up their sedate pursuit if the characters leave Lankhmar or remove the amulets from their possession. After all, to these brown-boned gods, a cult they loathe has mounted another defilement of their temple. They are 'unhappy' to say the least.

Note, however, that the Gods of Lankhmar attack only those characters bearing the amulets. They completely ignore the others, unless attacked by them first.

'What do we do?'

If the characters are either in total flight or making a fighting retreat, yet still either wish to keep the amulets or have not guessed that the Gods of Lankhmar only seek to kill those bearing them, then it is not unfair to give them another hint.

The rictus-grinning god before you holds out his mummified hand and hisses a breathless proclamation. 'Abandon your faith. Abandon the artefacts of your false worship. Renounce your false god, give us the amulets and you will live.'

If the characters either do not possess the amulets at all or drop them after guessing or being told to hand them over, the God of Lankhmar return to their crypt and the doors swing slowly closed on rusted hinges. The characters will be left standing out in the empty street, hearing the sounds of chanting and sobbing in the nearby temples. They have several minutes to leave before the city watch arrive. If they remain, they face arrest and trial for blasphemy, though the evidence at the Crooked Crow is enough to clear their names. Remember that they only have three days from the moment they used Sheelba's antidote before they begin to suffer the effects of the poison again.

If the characters flee before they are noticed, then they are free to return to Sheelba.

Scene 4 - The Great Salt Marsh

Upon returning to Sheelba's hut, which is in the same location as per their last visit, the characters find the warlock once more sitting on his porch. Indeed, it looks as if he has not moved a muscle since they last saw him.

'Back then? With the Bainra cultists and the lone Maalite dead? I know it is so – and your reward is your continued living. Take these. These ones, you drink.'

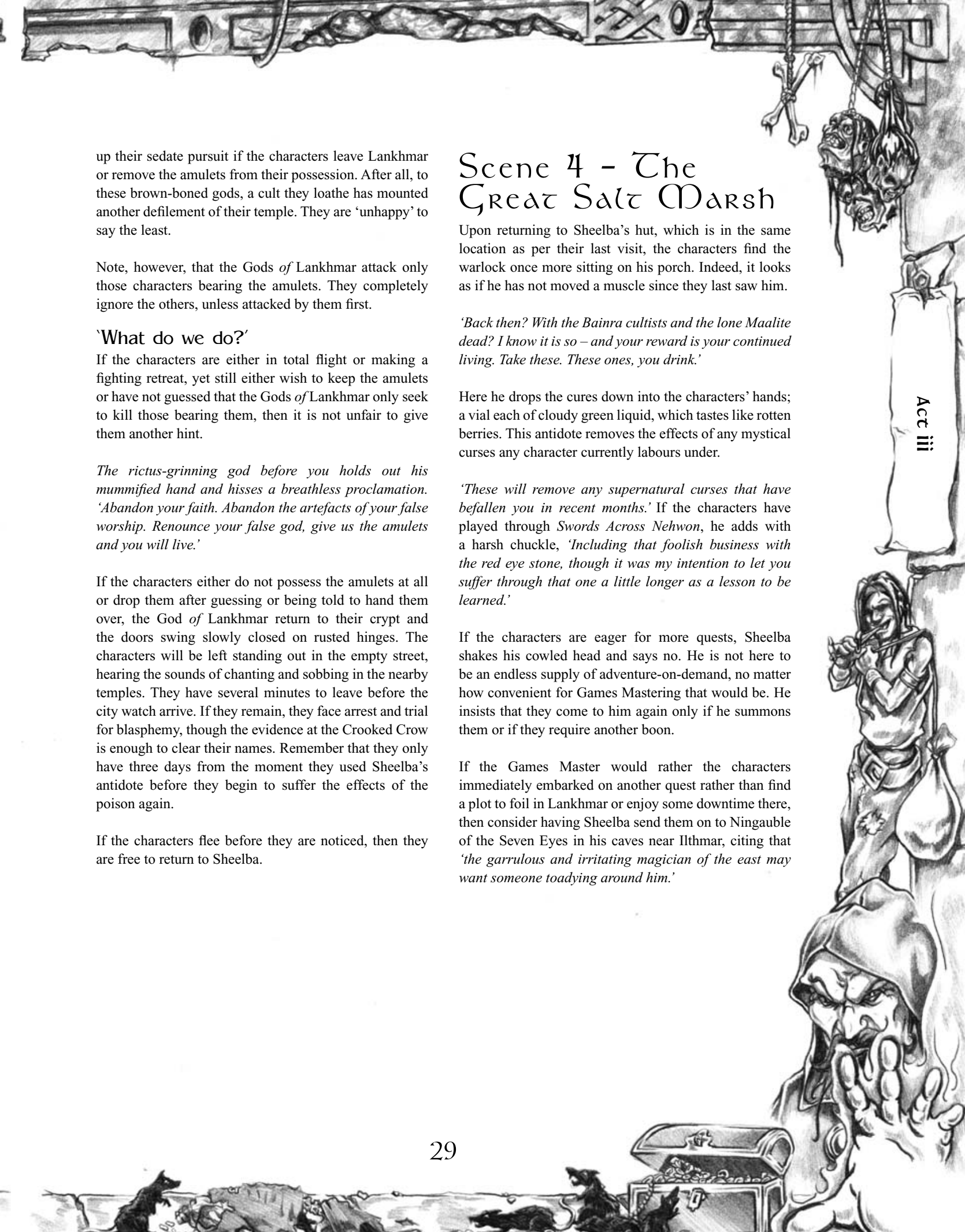
Here he drops the cures down into the characters' hands; a vial each of cloudy green liquid, which tastes like rotten berries. This antidote removes the effects of any mystical curses any character currently labours under.

'These will remove any supernatural curses that have befallen you in recent months.' If the characters have played through *Swords Across Nehwon*, he adds with a harsh chuckle, *'Including that foolish business with the red eye stone, though it was my intention to let you suffer through that one a little longer as a lesson to be learned.'*

If the characters are eager for more quests, Sheelba shakes his cowled head and says no. He is not here to be an endless supply of adventure-on-demand, no matter how convenient for Games Mastering that would be. He insists that they come to him again only if he summons them or if they require another boon.

If the Games Master would rather the characters immediately embarked on another quest rather than find a plot to foil in Lankhmar or enjoy some downtime there, then consider having Sheelba send them on to Ningauble of the Seven Eyes in his caves near Ilthmar, citing that *'the garrulous and irritating magician of the east may want someone toadying around him.'*

Act iii





APPENDIX

The following section caters for additional scenes and story arcs that the Games Master may wish to carry on with during or after the events of the main storyline. They detail events based on meetings with Enfreel and the Grey Mouser, respectively

Justice for Enfreel

The characters have no trouble finding the Beached Squid – it is a single-story tavern on the waterfront and rather unassuming structurally, though the sounds of shouting and beatings being administered and received are audible even on adjacent and parallel streets. Outside, a crude sign of a black squid on a yellow background hangs above the open door.

The tavern has only eight tables and a long bar, where bottled spirits are served. There is no wine for sale here, only rum, brandy, whiskey and cheap ale from small barrels underneath the bar. The Beached Squid is about half-full and fully half of the patrons are either drunk to the point of yelling sailors' songs or actively pummeling the tar out of each other in barroom brawls. Note, of course, that brawling is a common pastime for patrons of Lankhmar's drinking pits. If the characters wish to indulge then let them; perhaps even having a sailor pick a fight with them to get them started.

Jahol

If the characters have played through *Swords Across Nehwon*, they notice Jahol, the leader of the Ilthmar bandit riders they encountered, sitting at a table with three sailors here. If they wish to speak with him, they may do so. If they decide to talk with him, he waves his companions away for a moment and greets the characters grimly.

'Ah, if it isn't the original bearers of the Red Eye. I suspect this is the moment of your revenge upon me, yes?'

If the characters want to tear him a new smile, that is their prerogative, though it will take a hefty bribe for the landlord not to get the law involved in a murder on his premises. If the characters are just curious as to what Jahol is doing here, he is candid enough on the topic.

'I am in this fair city of yours on business, not pleasure. My patrons in Ilthmar have me tracking a certain icon of religious significance again.'

Yes, he is looking for the Red Eye – apparently there were *two*. Jahol is immersed in this luckless little quest, though if the characters wish to get involved themselves and help their one-time mugger, it could spin off to an interesting side-quest. As it is, Jahol's appearance is for characters to either get their revenge upon him if they wish, or feel a snide sense of satisfaction at the poor fellow running hither and thither at the behest of evil Ilthmarish patrons. He does offer to stand a round of drinks for the characters and is curious to hear of their recent adventures.

Games Masters may also wish to note that characters wishing to return to Ilthmar one day soon can likely do so by accompanying Jahol, or potentially use him as a contact with the high-ranking merchants and nobles he works for.

Kayven

Of course, the real reason the characters are here is Kayven. As it transpires, Kayven is the bully here, though he attends to his duty by sitting at the bar and laughing loudly when a fight breaks out, taking bets with those around him. Clearly the Beached Squid's one and only bouncer is employed for more serious threats to the establishment.

He is sitting at the bar even now, nursing a nearly-empty glass of ale and occasionally speaking to sailors who buy drinks. A well-used sword, the blade pitted and with a dirty grip, rests against the front of the bar by his knee. Just as Enfreel said, his distinctive black beard and red hair tied back into a ponytail set him apart, as does his massive size.

Even a short observation shows that Kayven is stinking drunk tonight. In fact, as he rises at one point to go outside and relieve himself, he staggers into a corner and ends up pissing against the wall. In a den like this, nobody really cares, though if the characters are sat with Jahol, it offends his rather polite sensibilities.

'Excuse me?'

If the characters go to speak with Kayven in a relatively friendly manner, they find him a loud, talkative and completely drunk companion who insists on buying them beer after beer. If they go along with this, he will get them as drunk as he is, and the foul, strong stuff they serve here means for every pint a character drinks, he loses -10% on all rolls involving physical activity until he sobers up the following morning (with a bitch of a hangover).

In this state, Kayven will talk about Enfreel willingly. He laughs about how he blinded the *'stuck-up northern git'* and how the idiot should never have come down here with his *'fancy talk and pretty swords'*. If at any point the characters show Kayven the swords, he will go pale and suddenly throw up - on them if they fail a Dodge roll. After that, he is unconscious and can not be roused. If the characters want him dead, it will have to be a rather ignoble throat-cutting or something similar while the man is asleep and where no eyes can see what is going on. The landlord will believe the characters if they say they are just taking him home, for example.

If they wish to wait for him to sober up some other day, they never see him again. Kayven is found hanged in the privies next to the Beached Squid the next morning, apparently killed sometime during the night. Enfreel, in truth, was not totally helpless: he had already sold his armour for enough coin to hire one of the Slayers' Brotherhood to take care of business. The killer struck in the hours after the characters left Kayven alone.

'BRING IT ON.'

If the characters just want to see Kayven dead, there is no need to provide stats for his fighting ability. He is beyond drunk and into a whole new realm of inebriation. The first good hit will see him dead, with no resistance on his part due to slowed, clumsy and dim-witted reactions. It will cost the characters a smerduk each for the inconvenience to the sneering landlord, though. Life is cheap down here.

No matter the result, Enfreel thanks the characters if they return to him. If, on the odd chance they bring an intoxicated Kayven with them for Enfreel to kill, he does so once the characters take him into a dark alley and he finished the deed with grim satisfaction.

If they return once the member of the Slayers' Brotherhood have already done the work for them, he thanks them for their fervour anyway and seems pleasantly amused at their honour in wanting to wait for a man to sober up before demanding satisfaction from him. *'A rare attitude in this city, I wager.'*

Doing this favour for Enfreel potentially opens up the opportunity to work for the same noble in Sarheenmar. Enfreel might give them his name and let them use his name as a reference if they desire.

The Mouser's Blade

If the Games Master wishes to make more of the Grey Mouser's presence, it is not difficult to do so. As it happens, the Mouser has a delicate problem that he is unable to take care of alone. If the characters make a good impression on the Mouser over the course of their conversation in Act II, Scene 2, then consider interjecting the following plot elements.

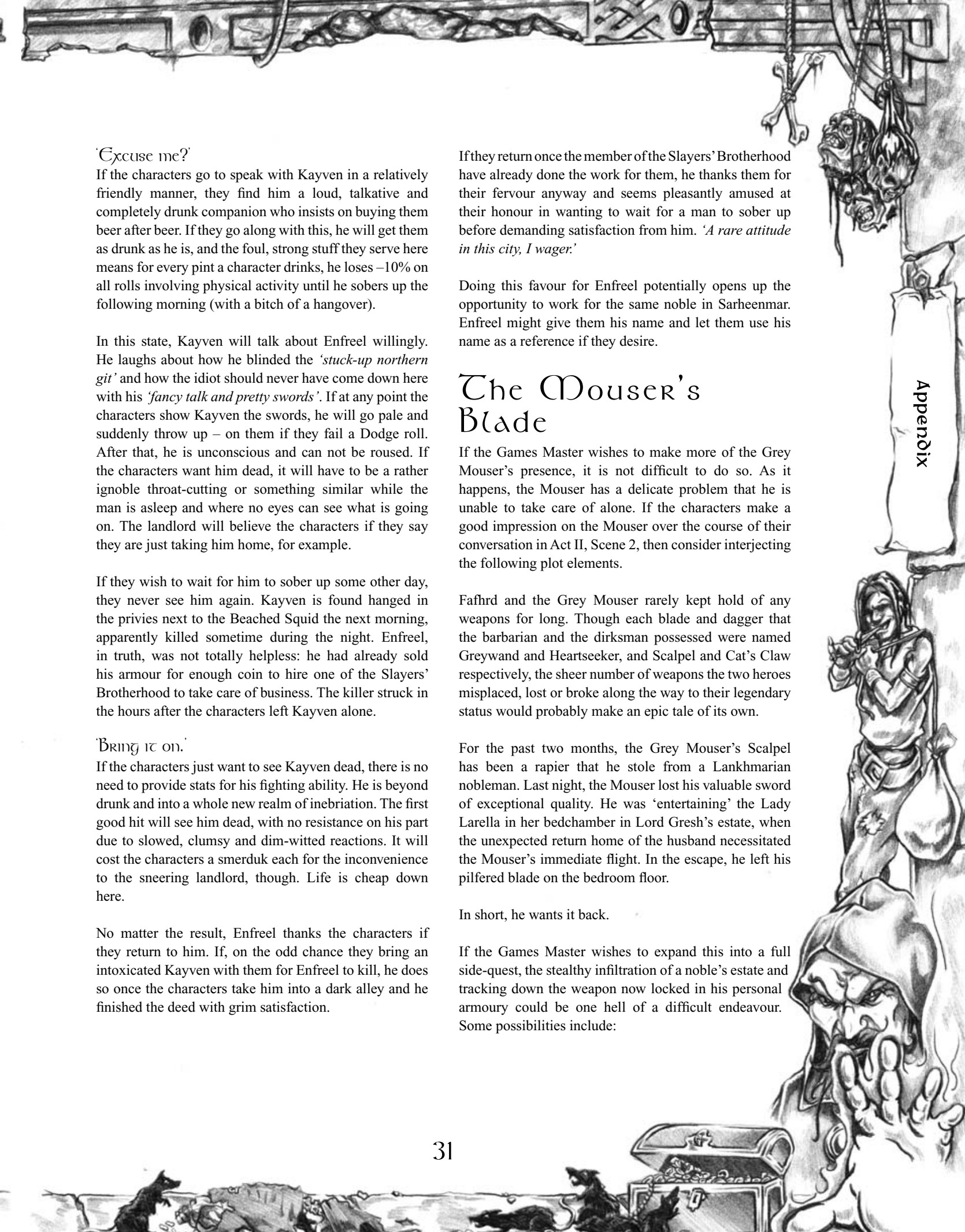
Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser rarely kept hold of any weapons for long. Though each blade and dagger that the barbarian and the dirksman possessed were named Greywand and Heartseeker, and Scalpel and Cat's Claw respectively, the sheer number of weapons the two heroes misplaced, lost or broke along the way to their legendary status would probably make an epic tale of its own.

For the past two months, the Grey Mouser's Scalpel has been a rapier that he stole from a Lankhmarian nobleman. Last night, the Mouser lost his valuable sword of exceptional quality. He was 'entertaining' the Lady Larella in her bedchamber in Lord Gresh's estate, when the unexpected return home of the husband necessitated the Mouser's immediate flight. In the escape, he left his pilfered blade on the bedroom floor.

In short, he wants it back.

If the Games Master wishes to expand this into a full side-quest, the stealthy infiltration of a noble's estate and tracking down the weapon now locked in his personal armoury could be one hell of a difficult endeavour. Some possibilities include:

Appendix





NEGOTIATION

This is perhaps not an immediately obvious answer to the problem but nevertheless one worth considering. The characters might simply hope to appeal to either Lord Gresh (or covertly contact Lady Larella) and simply ask for the blade in return for some kind of payment or service. Since Lord Gresh is very wealthy he is unlikely to accept coin as payment for returning the knave's blade, though there is always the chance that he has enemies of his own that he would like capable fighters to deal with. Such a scenario could give rise to an epic plot of high society treachery.

Lady Larella is a different prospect. If she is contacted, she might be willing to help on the condition that the

characters sneak her out one night in order that she might rendezvous with the Grey Mouser again. Of course, the characters leaving a guarded noble house by stealthy means and taking the lady of the estate with them is not going to be easy. If she is caught in the escape, there is the danger that Larella will actually insist she was being kidnapped, so as not to earn yet more of her husband's ire – he is already furious about her affair, after all.

Sneaking women out of places is something Fafhrd and the Mouser did a great deal of in the *Swords* tales, so this is extremely thematic and is likely to be a lot of fun, too. Female characters could be offended and alarmed at the dainty and pathetic noblewoman, which can also create some interesting roleplaying moments.

DECEPTION

Another possibility would be for the characters to lie their way into the house in order to steal the sword when they are able. Perhaps they dress up as nobles or visiting dignitaries from Ilthmar or the Eastern Lands, or as priests of the Great God hoping to bless Lord Gresh's marriage after the church heard about the recent marital troubles.

One character could take the opportunity to sneak away and steal the sword while the others play their social deception, though there is always the danger of Lord Gresh trying to have the characters arrested when, days later, he finds out about the theft.

BREAKING & ENTERING

The obvious solution is to steal the sword back. This is a fine (if ignoble) and ultimately very Lankhmarese idea. The only flaws in this plan are the estate guards; the locks on the gates, the front door and the armoury door; the presence of servants or family members walking the halls at night; getting back out without being seen and lastly, the fact that Lord Gresh is a master swordsman himself who will be less than thrilled to discover burglars in his household.

Still, what a night that would be...