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SERPENT IN THE FOLD

SERPENT AMPHORA CYCLE
BOOK ONE

AN ADVENTURE SOURCEBOOK FOR 3RD EDITION FANTASY ROLEPLAYING

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LANDS

SKYKEEP

1 Square = 10 feet



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BOOK ONE

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Dedication

Harrot Pensilver, Bailey of Tanil, Ute Gorg Washeim, and Vicars Torquist, for falling to the evils of *The Serpent Amphora*. Your endeavors and victories will be remembered. We'll try and forget about the rest. Thanks Dave, Cat, Amy, Benjamin, and Garrett!
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Blaine "Nightfall" Seitz, Evangelist and Crusader-at-Large. Thanks for spreading the word, buddy. Here's to an awesome future for the Scarred Lands.

SERPENT ^{IN} THE FOLD™

SERPENT AMPHORA CYCLE
BOOK ONE

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The Tale of the Serpent Amphora

Listen and write carefully, priest, for my time is short. I have seen things I would have remembered this day, and I know my death is at hand. I have lived longer than accursed Mormo, though, and in this I must be content.

My archers and I were at the last battle against the Hagqueen. Summoned by our goddess, the Huntress Tanil, we took up arms against the final muster of Mormo's forces. Little did we know that this battle was a trap—aye, a trap set by our gods, my good priest—but I am not bitter, for this trap was successful. That is all a hunter cares for.

Of late, Mormo had taken a more active hand in the war, actually appearing among her troops in order to turn the tide of battle. I myself saw one such confrontation—indeed, I put one of my arrows in her foul, slitted eye. Tanil, Madriel, and Vangal appeared at that battle, however, and Mormo disappeared. The serpents of her body broke apart and fled into a hundred cracks and crevices. Even had we managed to capture every one of them, however, it would have availed us not. Her blighted spirit had already fled that form.

A troop of hags and gorgons marched on the settlements in the Broadreach. My children, my students, and their students were at the forefront of the line, bows to hand. Long ago, my husband Thoresk and I had taken oaths to defend the Broadreach from all incursions. We would not shirk our oaths now. Though Thoresk was long dead—the peril of elf marrying half-elf, I suppose—we rallied our archers and led the defense.

My grandson Thoreskul was slain by gorgons, though he sundered his mage-staff at the last moment. The explosion blew a crater in the ground and decimated a score of gorgons, both high and low. My daughter, Illia, Thoreskul's mother, was grief-stricken, and she expended her life slaying a trio of serpent-druidesses, though she was struck down by one of Mormo's venomous assassins. My second husband Erunn died wielding his razor-bow against a powerful moon hag. She died screaming, but her death poisoned him.

And her screams were not a mere death-cry, it would seem. No, they were words of invocation, powered by her last breath. All grew dark in the skies and quiet on the battlefield. I cursed, for I knew what this meant. I called a retreat, but my words were drowned out by the rasp of scale on rock and bark. As my people turned to flee, a mound of ophidians rose in the midst of Mormo's army. Half of my command cheered aloud. The other half panicked and fled.

In their midst, Mormo took shape. We were doomed. But then the skies brightened with a peal of thunder and the gods were among us, too. Our armies were heartened by their appearance. I was as well, although my own goddess was not there. I wish even now that I could gaze upon her face once more. I think I could die easily, then.

Ehh? Yes, priest. I know that I will see her again shortly. The comforts of the dead do little to succor the yet living—

Shall I continue?

We fought well. Madriel hovered overhead, casting bolts of pure white sunlight into the fray, while radiating a warmth that healed the bite of venom. Chardun directed our forces, his mastery of tactics and his supreme dominion overcoming even our own love of freedom — we wished only to please the Slaver and obey.

I shall never forget that feeling. I loath it still.

At some point, the witches of Mormo ceased their attacks. I myself went to scout out their position, to discover what new evil they were planning. There, strangely, I found Belsameth the Hag, with Mormo's witches gathered under her vulture's wings as chicks to a hen. She saw me and smiled, motioning me away. I fled as she drew them into her own darkness.

Soon, the battle had churned through its earthly participants as both titan and god slew the mortals standing in their way. Madriel was the first to engage Mormo, launching her mighty spear into Mormo's breast. The purity of it burned the Queen of Witches, who plucked it out and spat a curse upon it, blackening and putrefying the weapon.

Belsameth struck then — the only sign of her presence was the silent slipping of a midnight black blade through the coils that made up Mormo's body. Mormo screamed and whirled, lashing out at the Slayer. Madriel attacked again and Mormo was like the dusk, trapped between Night and Day.

Chardun stood aside. I didn't know if he was waiting for some opportunity or was plotting some betrayal. All I knew was that the Divine Twins battled the Mother of Hags while he merely observed.

Hours passed and the swath of destruction caused by this battle ate into the heart of the Broadreach. I ran ahead of the devastation, warning those settlements that lay in its path. In some cases I was too late, as the great battle ranged ahead of my ability to keep up; in others, I was able to sound the alarm in time.

I followed them into the Broadreach, praying all the while that Tanil should appear and aid the goddesses. The battle took its toll upon the Twins of Light and Darkness, while Mormo simply called more serpents to her and absorbed them into her body when she was sorely wounded.

Finally, Mormo struck a savage blow to Madriel, who crumpled with a strangled cry. Her body was wracked with black venom so potent I could actually see it coursing through the body of the Angel. I wept then, and the sun was doused. Belsameth backed away from the battle with Mormo. I'm sure it was simply out of fear of continuing to battle the great titaness alone, but... there was perhaps a flicker of something else. Fear for her sister, it seemed. Perhaps the Dark does not know if it can exist without the Light, after all.

"I deny thee!" Madriel cried aloud, the light that once radiated from her body turned wan. "I deny thee as my mother, foul Witch of Ages! A thousand-thousand ills have you wrought upon this land and its people. You do not deserve to be the mother of this or of any land. I deny you, as do all the gods! I call upon the One True Mother! Aid us!"

At this, the world was rocked with quakes and the very land shifted. Where Mormo's coming was heralded by the drawing together of serpents, now the very land pulled into itself, building a body great and powerful, one the equal of Mormo's.

Denev had come.

Titan met titan and the world shook. Mormo hissed in hatred, while Denev's voice was the roar of the earthquake, the sharp report of a tree cracking in the storm. In her voice could be heard all the animals of the world roaring in anger and hatred, and I — who am born of Denev's people and worship her as I do her daughter — was sore afraid.

It was in the midst of this titanic battle that Chardum struck from behind. Denev drew back and the Slaver was suddenly there. He smote Mormo thrice with his scepter of war and then drove its barbed and bloodied end through her chest.

Dark energies coursed through her, pulling the serpents that formed her body tighter, it seemed. Her body now seemed less fluid and sinuous, somehow more solid than before.

"I bind thee, bitch-mother," he whispered — I heard him, though, his voice burning my ears like acid. "Now I repay thee a hundredfold for the torments I suffered at your hands. Never did I think I should have freedom from you — nor shall you ever know freedom again. I bind thy essence, hated hag-mother — forevermore!"

Denev stepped forward then, and, plunging her fist into the hole made by the warscepter, pulled forth the heart of Mormo. Both Denev and Mormo screamed then, as Mormo felt her power of witchery ripped from her body along with her heart. Denev screamed as those same fell powers burned her, and she hastened back into the succor of the land.

A great gout of venom-black blood issued from the ruined body of Mormo, and Chardum cupped it in his gauntleted hands. A darkness writhed there, serpent-like. He, too, screamed as the very essence of Mormo burned him. But with words of power he caused his gauntlets to flow upwards, encasing the clotting ichor into a vessel of iron. Ere the cap formed upon it, though, some of the poison within bubbled over the rim, etching serpentine patterns into the vessel's surface.

Chardum then closed the newly formed amphora and sealed it with a part of his power. The corpse of Mormo gave a strangled cry and then exploded outward, showering everything with gore. The force of this explosion cast down every tree for miles and covered me in venomous ichors as well. I think I would have died, but for the sudden touch of Madriel upon my brow.

I looked up at the wounded goddess, where she crawled weakly, her flesh burning from a venom so virulent that all of her power could do naught but keep it at bay. Yet she lent me part of this power; I know not why.

"Tell thy story, O Blessed of Tanil," she said and then pulled me into her arms. I passed into unconsciousness before we passed the tops of the ruined trees. But I saw enough. My beloved forest was beginning to warp and twist. Mormo's blood traveled with the speed of serpents, creeping into every crevice and tree-knot.

Even the unicorns have been made ill, if the stories I have heard are true.

I am tired, priest. I have done as the Angel has bid me. I have told my tale. My family, all dead save Marillus in Vera-tre, await me in Tanil's paradise. I have lived my life well and I have fought the enemies of the gods. Let me go to my rest.

Bless me, dear father, for I have failed in my mission. The Broadreach is no more. Let Lilliandel go now to her rest, for I am weary and would quit this world.

Introduction

The Serpent Awaits

Thus began the story of the Serpent Amphora. In the time since, the Amphora, crafted of Chardun's hate and containing the essence of Mormo, has passed through many hands. Most of its possessors have tried to determine its powers, to no avail. It seems, to all powers of divination and detection, to be a simple leaden vessel of incredible strength and resiliency.

The Serpent Amphora

Very little is capable of harming the Serpent Amphora. There is little need of game statistics for this vessel — its hardness is beyond quantification in mortal terms and it resists all damaging magic used on it. It does not radiate magic, although to spells that detect the presence of evil, it certainly does detect as such; however, it also detects as an item of law, leading sages who have studied it to conclude that they are in fact detecting the power of Chardun that seals the Amphora, rather than any malign influence or power the vessel itself may have.

By the same token, the Amphora does not negate non-damaging magic used on it or against those carrying it. Such spells can be used on it freely; indeed, the *asaatthi* have in the past used tactics including *grease* cantrips to extract it from their foes' clutches and *mage hand* to bring it into their own hands. It is simply unaffected by any powers that would alter its form, whether by transmutation or damage. Sages have theorized that this is because Chardun imbued great powers of stasis into it — it is forever unchanging, at least by the powers mortals can bring to bear.

The Amphora was last known to have been held in the vaults of the Amalthean museum, which may have been one reason that peaceful city-state of learning and culture was attacked during the Druid War. With Amalthea razed and the armies of Khet beaten back, the Amphora went missing. Its possessor(s) during this time remain a mystery.

But it is missing no more. A small patrol of vigilants from the Pelpernoi Vigil stumbled upon it during an investigation of increased titanspawn activity in the Blood Steppes. There, they discovered a cabal of *asaatthi* and red witch slitheren guarding the vessel.

Even when the vigilants attempted to draw off some of these enemies with guerrilla tactics, the normally violent and vengeful titanspawn simply withdrew back to defending the vessel when their assailants were gone. Needless to say, this concerned the patrol — anything that was that well and systematically guarded by titanspawn couldn't be good. Additionally, the patrol discovered that the titanspawn were actually awaiting the arrival of a hag from the Hornsaw Forest. It was then that they resolved to take action.

In a daring assault, they seized the Amphora, losing fully half of their number in doing so. The others escaped with the quick-moving *asaatthi* in hot pursuit. Time and again, the *asaatthi* caught up to the vigilants, using poisoned arrows to kill horses and thus prevent escape. And every time, just before the serpent men caught up to the fleeing patrol, a small number of the vigilants would find a defensible place and hold it, paying for the escape of their fellows with their lives.

Eventually, however, the vigilants were reduced to just a few men. The Amphora was placed into the care of a junior member of the patrol, who was told to flee for the small town of Trela, on the riverbank that formed the border between the Blood Steppes, New Venir, and Lageni. Barely evading the *asaatthi* who slaughtered the rest of the patrol, the young ranger stumbled into Trela and, in desperation, sought out the aid of a small company of adventurers.

Unfortunately, the *asaatthi* followed him to Trela and attacked while the village slept, stealing away the Amphora. The adventurers gave chase and finally retrieved the Amphora, and have brought the vessel to Lave, before the Home Commander of Vesh.

Now, a decision must be made as to what to do with it.

What Has Gone Before

The recap of the events that have led up to this adventure actually tell but a small part of the whole story of the true beginning of the Serpent Amphora Cycle. This beginning, an adventure called **The Serpent Amphora**, can be downloaded from www.swordsofceremony.com. It is an adventure for characters of between 1st and 2nd levels, and is the perfect prelude to **Serpent in the Fold**.



The Adventure

Serpent in the Fold takes a group of 3rd- to 4th-level characters on a mission for the Home Commander of Vesh. The PCs, along with a number of other adventuring groups, are asked to assist in discovering the nature of the Amphora. To this end, the PCs are sent to Hedrad to scour the library there. Along the way, they are met by the Herald of Hedrada, who bids them find the book they seek in the ruins of fallen Sky Keep.

The PCs encounter resistance along the way, in the form of asaathi servants of the Dar al Annot. Ultimately, the PCs return to Lave just in time to stop an attack on the Hall of Command by forces of Mormo, who are actually just providing a smoke screen to allow their “serpent in the fold” to strike and steal back the Amphora.

While the Vigils deal with hags, titanspawn, and a woodwreck dragon, it is up to the PCs to stop the traitor and prevent the theft of the Amphora.

The major players of this adventure, both good and evil are:

The Dar al Annot

The Witches of the Hornsaw, Keepers of the Dread Citadel. A collection of witches, hags and serpent druidesses, the Dar al Annot (“Those Who Will Find,” in the Dark Speech of Mormo) recently experienced quite a shakeup in the form of a change in leadership. The Dar al Annot was once ruled by a powerful druidess of Mormo, but a short time ago the Blood Crone herself demanded audience with the leader.

In short order, the Blood Crone slew the druidess. When her right to rule was challenged, she vomited forth the very thing that gave her power — nothing less than the heart of Mormo herself, black and beating listlessly. She reingested it as the hags and witches of the Dar al Annot made her their mistress.

The exact reasons for this sudden seizure of power in the Dar al Annot is unknown; for years the Blood Crone had been content simply to dwell alongside the witches, letting them use their network of thieves, assassins, and sellswords to scour the lands for the viscera of Mormo.

Those with eyes to see, however, know that it may have something to do with the Serpent Amphora. Shortly after she came to power, she ordered a hunt for the Amphora, directed by the storm hag Hielaa. Eventually, a gathering of red witch slitheren and their asaathi allies found the Amphora.

But it was lost again almost immediately, and it is said that many Dar al Annot died beneath the talons and spells of the enraged Blood Crone.

The Cannibals of Khet

The Cannibals of Khet do not, in actuality, exist as an organization, at least not in the way that the Dar al Annot or the Vigils do. Rather, they are a culture, the theocratic masters of the forest of Khet and the city-state of Khirdet within. They are led by the mightiest and most brutal of their number, who rule over a cowed populace that knows the harsh realities of life can be summed into one phrase: “Eat or be eaten.”

There are many factions among the druid-kings of Khet. One, perhaps the best known, is that led by the Serpentkiss herself, a medusa priestess of Mormo who is the putative queen of Khirdet. But there are others.

The Bringers of Autumn, for instance, are a small gathering of druids whose only discernible link to one another lies in the druid who taught them each to wield the powers of Mormo—the strange Autumn King, Ilkuthsra. Those who have seen Ilkuthsra say that his visage is that of a fleshless, dried skull inscribed with serpentine, twisted knotwork.

That Ilkuthsra is a druid of immense power, none can deny. He is too old to be mortal, although even the druids of Khet cannot say with certainty precisely what he is. “Lich,” say some, “Undead.” Others believe him to be a dark creature of the fey, the likes of which has not been seen since well before the Titanswar. The Autumn King is an enigma even to his fellow druids in both deed and form; he seems to share their goals, yet he spends as much time working toward his own as he does cooperating with them.

Ilkuthsra and his vast spy network discovered that the Dar al Annot held the Amphora; indeed, it may well have been he from whom the Amphora was taken by the Blood Crone. It was Ilkuthsra who revealed to the Vigils, through his system of proxies and spies, that there were titanspawn “massing” in the Blood Steppes. His precise interest in the Serpent Amphora is as yet mysterious, but suffice it to say that such interest cannot bode well for anyone involved.

The Vigils of Vesh

The Vigils, quite frankly, aren't sure what to make of these events. They may believe that their discovery of the Serpent Amphora is simply a result of their unceasing vigilance, but the truth is that they are simply cat's paws in a rivalry between two hostile groups with very different ideas on how to raise their unholy Queen of Hags.

On one hand, the Bringers of Autumn have tapped into the Vigil spy networks with their own operatives, and while they are unlikely to be able to know everything that the Vigils know, one thing is certain—they are well able to feed information to the Home Commander.

On the other hand, the Dar al Annot have managed to do the seemingly impossible: to corrupt a vigilant, and a highly-placed one at that. Amra Varith, the Home Commander's lieutenant and trusted right hand, is more than merely a vigilant; she is also one of the Ladies of Serpents, wicked assassin-seductresses who serve Mormo.

But ultimately, the Vigils are driven by a desire to do what is right. Though they have their weaknesses, they have a strength born of conviction. Anyone seeking to manipulate the Vigils treads on dangerous ground, for the wrath of the Vigils of Vesh might prove truly awesome to behold once aroused.

For now, the Vigils seek to discover the nature of the Serpent Amphora. They have launched a flurry of research, tapping even their allies in Mithril and Vera-tre for information. Nothing has turned up as yet, so, desperate and afraid that their own normal vigilant operatives are too well known, they must turn to the great unknown. To adventuring companies.

After all, the gods have appeared to one such company in the course of these events, aiding them not once but twice in keeping the Amphora out of the hands of Mormo's children. Perhaps these adventurers can succeed where others fail...

The Gods

As with far, far too many things in these Scarred Lands, the gods are indeed tied up closely in the events of the Serpent Amphora. They have no intention of allowing Mormo to be brought back.

But the fact remains that they are removed from the world; rarely do even their avatars walk the land anymore. The days are long past wherein seeing a god in one's lifetime was a virtual inevitability. Certainly, divine heralds may be seen from time to time (whether folk realize it or not), but the presence of the gods themselves is now felt primarily through their servants, both supernatural and clerical. The gods do not take a personal hand in things if it can be avoided (and even sometimes if it can't); Corean does not these days appear in his mithril plate and start smiting things.

From a practical game-play point of view, the use of *deus ex machina* limits the PCs, shifting the spotlight off of them and onto some GM-run puppet, forcing them to sit on the sidelines. Ultimately, fantasy roleplaying games are about the player characters and their ability to make a difference.

From a setting perspective, the gods simply are not wholly able to act. As time passes, the gods become more deeply entrenched in the vital essence of the universe, progressively embodying but also being limited by their divine duties. Madriel does not show up, despite any personal hatred she may have for Mormo, because what goes on here generally has little to do with her powers of healing, the sun, or growth. Chardun, however, has appeared in this story—part of his power coincides with bondage and imprisonment, so he is acting in accord with his essence to make sure that one of his greatest prisoners remains imprisoned.

Nonetheless, the gods are busily at work, usually through their heralds and other servants. There are many powers visible and invisible in this story, and the PCs are witness to just one sequence of events. The Dar al Annot have many more operatives involved than the PCs will ever see—they witness only those that manage to make it past the agents of the gods and the Vigils.

Ultimately, the PCs shouldn't feel that the powers in the world greater than they are merely sitting back and doing nothing while they risk their necks. Rather, they should feel that everyone is doing all that they can, and the dirty work they are left with is their part of it all.

In short, they should feel like they are making a difference — without being coddled.

Setting Up the Game

Serpent in the Fold is an adventure in three chapters, meant for an adventuring party of approximately four members of 3rd to 4th level.

Veterans of "The Serpent Amphora"

Those PCs who went through **The Serpent Amphora** are perfect for this adventure — they already have something of a vested interest in the scenario, recruited as they were by the dying Vigil patrolman. They are a natural choice for the Home Commander to contact in his search for operatives who are not known Vigils.

After they arrived in Lave, they were given accommodations and possibly even a reward. They have had several weeks of rest, and now the Home Commander sends them a letter (see "A Message Arrives," below).

A New Company

A group of PCs new to the Serpent Amphora Cycle may be contacted for any number of reasons. Perhaps one or more members have expressed an interest in becoming vigilants, or have established themselves as adventurers willing to lend their strengths for the common good. Those with close ties

to the faiths of Madriel or Tanil (or Denev) may be approached by those higher in the organization, asking them to aid the Home Commander.

Opening of the Cycle

The opening of the Serpent Amphora Cycle assumes that the PCs are either in Lave (or somewhere nearby in Vesh), or else have sufficiently strong and established connections to the Vigils and/or Home Commander to warrant their reception of a letter while far afield.

Whatever the situation, the PCs receive a letter from a messenger. If they are outside of Vesh, the messenger is obviously a ranger — he is, in actuality, a junior member of the Vigils on a mission that happened to bring him near the PCs, so he was assigned to deliver the message.

If they are within Vesh, the messenger is a paid courier: likely a horseman if they are outside of Lave, or a young lad paid to deliver the message if they are within Lave. The letter is sealed with deep blue wax imprinted with the heraldic image of a stylized sun, one sword above and another below it.

A successful Knowledge (nobility and royalty), Knowledge (local: Vesh), or Intelligence check (DC 10) will allow a character to recognize the symbol as incorporating the Vigilant Sun heraldry of Vesh. Those who make a Knowledge (nobility and royalty) or Knowledge (local: Vesh) check (DC 12) will recognize the seal as being that of the Home Commander, the leader of Vesh.

The letter is presented below, allowing the GM to photocopy it as a player handout.

My friends:

Please forgive the suddenness of this message. It is imperative that I speak with you; I have heard of your exploits from a variety of sources, including some of my own vigilants.

A situation has arisen that demands action, but I fear that my vigilants are hampered — quite frankly, they are too well known. We need someone of strength and dedication who is willing to undertake a task of no little danger. Rest assured, I would not seek to use outsiders unless it were absolutely necessary and the task of the utmost importance.

I would ask that you come as quickly as you might to the Hall of Command in the Veshian capitol of Lave. Present yourselves to the Majordomo there, a man named Trophion. Time is of the essence.

I thank you.

With kind regards,

Kelemis Durn,

Home Commander of Vesh

The Quest

The PCs should find their way to Lave, a town of garrulous and friendly folk. For more information on the city of Lave, see the **Scarred Lands Campaign Setting: Ghelspad**. Nearly anyone in town can point the PCs to the Hall of Command, the palatial villa that overlooks the Grand Square.

The Hall of Command

Once used as the king's palace when he was in residence in the capitol, designed exclusively for comfort and beauty, the Hall of Command now houses a number of offices used by various officials in the government of Vesh.

For more information on the Hall of Command, see Chapter 3 herein.

The PCs meet the Major-domo, Trophion (see Appendix, pg. 53), a man with a strong jaw and a coloration that suggests years spent under the sun. He carries himself with the poise of a warrior, yet he walks with a pronounced limp. He also seems to be missing part of his right hand. Although he is loathe to speak of it, Trophion used to be a part of Lolharden's Vigil until he was maimed terribly while battling titanspawn.

He guides the PCs into the Sun Room, a large and beautiful chamber with huge picture windows that contain flecks of mica, so that when the sun shines into the room its rays are split into glittering golden spangles. Gathered here are several others, obviously fellow adventurers.

A Gathering of Heroes

The other adventurers here are somewhat taciturn; none of them have any idea of the nature of the Home Commander's request. There are three other adventuring companies gathered here:

The Company of Stalwarts

This company is a strange collection of folk, indeed. They are led by Thalkis of Hedrad (*male half-orc, Sor3/Mnk2, LN*), a tattooed half-orc of deadly grace. The rest of the company are Aishanna (*female human, Bbn5, CG*), a tall Albadian woman in furs; Koryn Lightfoot (*female half-elf, Rgr2/Brd3, NG*), a Veshian who bears a lute and a strange double sickle; and Durondel Runeson (*male dwarf, Wiz3/Ftr2, N*), a dwarf of Burok Torn skilled in alchemy and armed with plenty of alchemist's fire and burning spells, as well as his battleaxe.

GM's Note: If the PCs did not participate in **The Serpent Amphora**, then this company is assumed to be the one that aided the Vigils in bringing the Amphora to Lave. The Company of Stalwarts are depicted on the cover of this book.

The Blades of Mullis Town

The Blades hail originally from Mullis Town, the rough-and-tumble frontier town at the edge of the Plains of Lede. Their defacto spokesperson (but hardly

leader) is Theris Sevenstone (*male half-elf, Ftr4/Rog2, NG*), a man with close-shorn black hair, who is plainly armed with a large number of finely balanced daggers. His companions are Arrka (*female half-orc, Bbn2/Clr3, CN*), a half-orc woman in a full-face leather mask fitted with copper finishing and wielding a dire flail in the name of her goddess, Enkili; and Ombarinn Mullis (*male human, Wiz6, N*), a goateed man with light-colored hair, wearing leather traveling gear and bearing only a quarterstaff.

The Bronze Arrows

The Bronze Arrows hail from Vesh proper. Allies of the Vigils (with a standing offer of membership should they ever desire such), the Bronze Arrows are dedicated to Tanil and Denev, and have ranged as far as Ontenazu, Amalthea, and the eastern Ganjus in their work in those benefactress' names. The Arrows claim in fact to have been brought together by Garra, Tanil's herald. The group is led by Morwen (*female half-elf, Rgr4/Clr4, CG*), a renowned archer and cleric of Tanil. She is accompanied by Arivann Hale (*male elf, Rgr2/Drd5, N*), Morwen's grandfather and a druid of the Ganjus; Cannerly (*male halfling, Brd6, CG*), a young halfling songster; Josephus of Ontenazu (*male half-elf, Sor5/Rgr3*), a skilled warrior and spellcaster; and Thorvius (*male human, Ftr7, CG*), also a renowned archer, and Morwen's husband.

The Mission

A while after the PCs are shown into the Sun Room, a trio enters the room. The one obviously in charge is a man in his late forties, who introduces himself as the Home Commander of Vesh, Kelemis Durn (*male human, Rgr6/Ftr6/Vig5, NG*). He is accompanied by a young woman wearing the amber necklace that marks her as a vigilante; Kelemis introduces her as his lieutenant, Amra Varith (see Appendix, pg. 52). The third figure wears the robes and leathers that denote the clergy of Tanil in Vesh; Kelemis introduces this scroll-carrying priest as Erem of the Huntress (*male half-elf, Clr7/Lor3, CG*), a Tanilite chronicler who works closely with the government of Vesh.

Kelemis asks Erem to hand out the scrolls (the GM is encouraged to make a photocopy of "The Tale of the Serpent Amphora" located at the beginning of this Introduction, and to give the copy to the PCs). As the priest hands a scroll to each of the gathered adventuring groups, Kelemis explains that the Vigils recently came into possession of a strange lead vessel sealed with the mark of Chardun. He had Erem do some research, and they turned up this account of Mormo's demise from the end of the Divine War.

Kelemis relates the story of how the vessel was retrieved from the possession of the titanspawn in the Blood Steppes, thanking those responsible (the PCs if they played through **The Serpent Amphora**, or the Company of Stalwarts otherwise). He then explains

Family Ties

At the GM's option, an elf or half-elf PC may very well be related to Lilliandel, the archer-bard who relates "The Tale of the Serpent Amphora" and who was the founder of an organization of archers blessed by Tanil, the Lilliandeli. Erem, a loremaster of some skill, can reveal this fact to the PC; indeed, Kelemis mentions that this is one of the reasons he asked the elf PC and his companions to help them, hoping that he might wish to continue the legacy begun by one of his renowned forebears.

that their collective mission is now to discover as much as they can about the Amphora. To this end, he is assigning each of the groups a specific goal.

Kelemis also explains that servants of Mormo from the Hornsaw are searching for the Amphora. He is actually sending out small parties of known vigilants, complete with false amphorae, to try to draw these forces into the open. In the meantime, he will be using the adventurers present for the true searching.

As an epilogue, he apologizes for the necessity of giving his listeners their missions in separate groups;

however, the nature of the missions requires that as few people as possible know what each group is to do. He cannot risk one party being captured and forced to tell the goals of the others. With that, he asks the Bronze Arrows to follow him, and they leave.

In a short while, Kelemis reenters the room and asks the PCs to follow him. He leads them to a small conference room (room 25 on the map of the Hall of Command, see page 41). There is an oak table with seats arrayed around it; on the table is a map.

He points out the city of Hedrad, explaining that that city maintains a vast system of libraries and sages. He wants the PCs to go there and to seek out any information from these sages regarding the Amphora. He also gives them a letter of introduction to the merchant Gemiano, a Veshian native sympathetic to the Vigils, who resides there. If the PCs need any funds to pay for library fees or sage consultations, they are to ask Gemiano for those funds in Kelemis' name.

He then discusses potential rewards, ranging from training among the vigilants to money. If the PCs turn up no information, he will still offer to compensate them up to 300 gp each for their troubles. If, however, they do discover information, the rewards will certainly be greater, from fine equipment (though not necessarily magic items) or money to training or even grants of land. Alternatively, if the PCs have other goals or rewards in mind, he may be willing to assist them in reaching these goals.

Chapter One:

Eve of the Taurosphinx

Now that the PCs have agreed to undertake this mission for the Vigils of Vesh, they may feel the need to re-equip or to otherwise prepare themselves before leaving. This is a reasonable course of action; Lave is a large city, and the GM should allow the PCs to locate any basic (nonmagical) equipment among the capital's bustling marketplaces. Costs range from 90% to 130% of those base prices given in the PHB. However, characters may attempt to haggle to lower some of the more outrageous prices (see the "I Have Five Starving Children At Home!" sidebar).

I Have Five Starving Children At Home!

When a PC is haggling for better prices, both parties make a Diplomacy or Profession (merchant) check. If the merchant wins the opposed check, the base price is increased by 5% for every point by which he bested the PC (of course, the PC is not in any way obliged to buy the object at this point). If the PC wins, the asking price is decreased by the same amount. If the player makes a particularly eloquent attempt at roleplaying the negotiation, the GM should grant her PC a competence bonus of anywhere from +1 to +4.

Don't let the players abuse these rules: in nearly any case, even the most charismatic haggler in the world isn't going to convince a merchant to sell her something without his making *any* profit.

The equipment available is standard quality. Since they do not have much time, PCs are unlikely to locate masterwork quality goods ready for sale, nor will they have much luck finding goods or materials that are particularly rare or expensive.

Framed

Encounter Level: 2

While any PCs are in the streets, Sangrus Dar, a local cutpurse, is watching their every move. Sangrus has no knowledge of the Serpent Amphora or of any

other thing relevant to the adventure; he was paid a large handful of gold by a hooded stranger to perform a task, however, and he's going to do just that.

Sangrus follows the PCs, watching them intently. Allow each PC to make a Spot check against Sangrus' Hide check to notice him following; Sangrus gains a +2 synergy bonus on this Hide check, however, since he has 5 ranks in Knowledge (local) and thus knows the best hiding spots in town from which to trail strangers.

Sangrus is trying to determine who of the PCs seems least alert — this character will be Sangrus' target. Have him make Sense Motive check (DC 15); success indicates that he's figured out which member of the group has the lowest total Spot bonus, while failure means he's misjudged — so roll or choose his target randomly.

Once Sangrus has selected his target, he will then make a Pick Pocket attempt to plant a brooch on the target. The GM should let the player roll an opposed Spot check (or better yet, roll it in secret); if Sangrus is detected, he will act as though he was merely trying to steal a few coins from the victim, but will not let on that he was, in fact, trying to place something on the PC.

Sangrus will attempt to flee if the opportunity arises, but he will not fight or struggle if caught unless he fears for his safety. He allows himself be turned over to the authorities, having been promised by his employer that he will not remain in prison for long. (This is true: the day after he's arrested, Sangrus is bitten by a venomous spider and dies.)

Sangrus Dar, male human, Rog2: CR 2; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 5 in.); HD 2d6+2; hp 13; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 leather armor); Atk +2 melee (1d6+1, short sword), +4 ranged (1d4+1, darts); SA sneak attack +1d6; SQ evasion; AL CN; SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will -1; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 10.

Skills: Appraise +2, Bluff +3, Climb +5, Disable Device +3, Escape Artist +6, Hide +7, Jump +2, Knowledge (local: Lave) +5, Listen +1, Move Silently +7, Open Lock +4, Pick Pocket +10, Search +2, Sense Motive +2, Use Rope +6. **Feats:** Run, Skill Focus (Pick Pocket). **Languages:** Common (Veshian).

Possessions: Leather armor, cloak, short sword, thieves' tools, 2 darts, silver Albadian brooch with amber stone.

The Journey to Hedrad

The PCs have a choice to make: what's the best way to get to their destination? The Hornswythe River flows strongly southward, but also takes them many leagues off course at first. It would be the easiest way to travel, certainly, and there are many boats to be chartered at the docks outside of the city — but it is not the fastest route.

Alternately, the party might choose to take the road southeast from Lave to Barel, where they may hire a ferry to cross to the east side of the Hornswythe. This is a more arduous journey, for it involves over a hundred miles of overland travel, but it is a far more direct route than that offered by the river.

Ultimately, both courses have much to recommend them, and there is no best answer. (While the PCs are in something of a hurry, they are not yet as pressed for time as they will be later in the adventure.) The GM should allow the party to travel by whichever method they prefer.

Of course, both routes have their hazards as well. This is far from the most dangerous region of Ghelspad,

The Skiprock

Should the party choose to charter a boat, they will eventually encounter Captain Yengly (*male human, Exp4, LN*), a short man often mistaken for a halfling at a distance. He and his flat-bottom riverboat, *The Skiprock*, are headed downstream, and he's more than happy to take on passengers. *The Skiprock* is only going as far as Barel, but the PCs should be able to acquire new transportation there — or, at worst, to travel on foot as far as Lake Repose, where boats will certainly be available. Yengly is willing to negotiate, but he won't go much lower than standard passenger fares listed in the DMG, and he'll insist that his passengers pull their own weight and follow orders.

Yengly and his crew of four (*male human, Exp2, N*) beach the boat along the bank to make camp every night, as they know too well the dangers of nighttime river travel, refusing to attempt it except in the gravest of emergencies.

Because Yengly and his boat are the only immediate means of river transport, it is assumed that the PCs will take *The Skiprock* if they choose to travel by river. If this is not the case, the GM should develop another boat and crew accordingly, and make any required alterations to the events below.

but it's hardly safe. Assuming a normal rate of travel, the journey to Barel alone requires approximately four to five days by land, and over a week by river. The chance of a random encounter is 5% per hour — but in order to speed play, the GM is encouraged to roll only once for any given 6-hour block, at a base 30% chance. Should the dice indicate a random encounter, roll d% and consult the "Random Encounters Between Lave and Sheer Falls" chart below, based on both time of day and the party's route.

The Gates of the City

Regardless of their route, the PCs must pass through Lave's main gates. Well-armed city guards stand at the gates just ahead of them, the controlled chaos that is daily life in Lave recedes, and they're almost certainly expecting no trouble...

They're likely in for a shock, then, when the first cry of "Stop! Thief!" sounds behind them. Those who turn to look (including the guards and most citizens in the immediate vicinity) see a middle-aged, overweight merchant puffing his way toward the PCs from the direction of the marketplace. His tunic and leggings are sweat-soaked from the unaccustomed exertion, and his beard is actually flung over one shoulder after his run.

"Stop!" he gasps, coming to a halt some steps from the guards. He nearly doubles over, panting loudly, but he has the strength to level a finger at the PCs. "Thieves!" he wheezes. "They... stole... one of my... best... pieces."

The party is no doubt puzzled by this, but their best bet is to cooperate fully. Should they attempt to leave, the guards will step forward and very politely but firmly ask that they remain until this mess can be "sorted out." These are professional soldiers, and they're quite willing to draw steel if it means preventing accused thieves from escaping.

The merchant, Vanovri, will insist that the PCs subject themselves to a search. "We are looking," he will tell the guards stiffly, "for a silver brooch, perhaps the size of your eye and in the shape of a horseshoe. It has an amber stone in the center, and Albadian designs engraved about its edge."

This is, of course, the same brooch that Sangrus Dar attempted to plant on the party earlier. If Sangrus failed, the PCs will have little difficulty clearing their names. Vanovri grumbles loudly, accusing them of having hidden it — but without any evidence, the guards aren't willing to hold the PCs. If, on the other hand, the brooch is found on them, the guards start to believe the merchant's story. As the guards are effectively taking 20 on their Search check, they will find the brooch if Sangrus planted it.

The situation looks bad, but it is possible for the PCs to talk their way out of the situation. They can, if pressed, call on the Vigils, who will come with alacrity and order the characters released. (The same happens

Troubleshooting

Encounter Level: 5+

Although unlikely, it's possible that a party may prove thickheaded enough to attempt to battle their way out past the guards. There are 6 guards present at first. Two more arrive on the sixth round after combat begins, and 2 more every other round after that, until 12 more guards have arrived (total 18 guards). The guards (*human, War2, LN*) are clad in chainmail and carry longswords, small shields, and light crossbows. Once battle has begun, they fight to the death, but will accept a surrender should the characters offer it.

If the party attempts to disable rather than slay the guards — doing subdual damage, for instance —

the Vigils can still get them out of trouble, ordering the party freed if they are arrested and halting pursuit if they've left Lave. They will express their displeasure to the party in no uncertain terms, however, and make it very clear that if something like this were to happen again, there would be no aid forthcoming.

If the characters kill any of the guards, the Vigils wash their hands of the matter. They do not aid the party, and the PCs are declared wanted fugitives, to be attacked, arrested, or killed if they ever again approach Lave (or, after word has spread for a month or so, any major city of Vesh).

if they are arrested and imprisoned.) Alternately, the guards are willing to listen to any reasonable explanation the party may offer, especially if they express a willingness to submit themselves to *zone of truth*, *discern lies*, or other truth spells at the nearby temple of Tanil.

Vanovri (who is actually an ally of the traitor among the Vigils) won't push too hard, although he expresses dissatisfaction with any result other than the imprisonment of the PCs. His primary purpose here is simply to delay their departure and give the servitors of Mormo a head start.

Random Encounters Between Lave and Sheer Falls

Road, day	Road, night	River, day*	River, night*	Creature (# Appearing)	CR	EL	Source
01–09	01–09	–	–	Acid shambler (4)	1	4	CC2
10–14	10–13	–	–	Ankheg (1)	3	3	MM
15–24	–	–	–	Ant, giant soldier (2)	2	4	MM
–	14–20	–	01–05	Belsamaug (2)*	3	5	CC
25–26	21–26	–	–	Blight wolf (1)	5	5	CC
–	–	01–20	06–20	Blood maiden (4)	1/2	3	CC2
27–31	27–28	–	–	Charfiend (1d4+1)	1	2–5	CC
–	29–32	–	–	Dananshee (1)	2	2	CC2
32–39	33–40	–	–	Dire wolf (1)	3	3	MM
40–44	41–44	21–30	–	Dragon, mock (1)*	4	4	CC
–	–	31–50	21–30	Ebon eel (1)	1	1	CC
45–49	45–49	–	–	Hell hound (1)	3	3	MM
50–58	50–58	51–63	31–38	Hydra, 5-headed (1)	4	4	MM
59–66	59	–	–	Lion (1)	3	3	MM
–	–	64–84	39–50	Lurker below (1)	3	3	CC2
–	60–66	–	51–55	Orc (6)*	1/2	4	MM
67–71	67–68	–	–	Proud (3)	2	3	CC
–	69–74	–	–	Ratman (4)	1/2	3	CC
–	–	–	56–72	Ratman, foamer (3)	1	3	CC
–	–	–	73–84	River nymph (1)	3	3	CC
–	75–77	–	85–87	Shadow mastiff (1)*	5	5	MM
72–78	78–81	85–00	88–00	Snake, huge viper (1)	3	3	MM
79–83	82–85	–	–	Vengaurak (1)	4	4	CC
84–88	86–89	–	–	Vertigen (1)	2	2	CC2
89–94	90–93	–	–	Wolf spider, giant (1)	3	3	CC
95–00	94–00	–	–	Wolfrat (3)	1	3	CC2

CC = Creature Collection.

CC2 = Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie.

MM = Core Rulebook III.

* River encounters are with semi- or non-aquatic creatures and actually take place along the riverbank (such as when the party is camped for the night). If a roll indicates such an encounter when it isn't feasible, the GM should either reroll, consider the result to be "no encounter," or hold the encounter until a more appropriate time, as she prefers.

Dreams and Portents

The weather remains tolerable for at least the first day of travel, regardless of the PCs' route. During the late afternoon, a gentle rain falls for a few moments. Otherwise, the plains wave gently in the breeze on both sides, blazing green in the sun and emitting the strong but not unpleasant odor of growing grasses and rich soil. It is, barring the occasional random beast, a relatively peaceful journey.

Things start to get interesting when the party beds down for the night, whether at the side of the road or aboard *The Skiprock*. The GM should secretly roll a Will save (DC 15) for each of the PCs. If all the PCs succeed, this happens again the second night, and again every subsequent night until someone fails or until the night before the PCs reach Sheer Falls.

The character who fails by the greatest amount on any given night experiences a horrifying nightmare (see sidebar), although the GM should not make it clear that the character is dreaming at all! Should the party somehow manage to make the entire journey without any character failing the save, the character with the lowest Will save in the party still experiences the dream on the last night before reaching Sheer Falls — but he is not subject to the compulsion.

Dream Interpretation

Mormo's servants have learned that the Herald of Hedrada, the Taurosphinx, is seeking the PCs. So far, these servants have managed to hide the party from his sight and his spells, but they cannot keep him away forever. The herald knows that the heroes must pass Sheer Falls, and he will await them there if he can reach them no other way. Mormo's minions wish to ensure that the PCs do not trust him when that meeting occurs.

The dream is sent by these servitors of Mormo, calling on the Witch Queen's powers and using a ritualized variant of the *nightmare* spell. The character affected must make a second Will save (DC 15) to avoid the effects of the nightmare (described below). Note that although elves are not normally susceptible to *nightmare*, they are vulnerable to this particular effect. They do have some advantage, however; elves may apply their racial saving throw bonus against Enchantment to their Will save to resist the dream.

When he awakens, a character who suffered the dream and failed the second Will save is absolutely convinced that it was a divine sending — perhaps a warning of things to come. The dream is supposed to make the victim feel, of course, that the Taurosphinx is an enemy, a danger to his own life and the lives of his companions. The dream is not a standard *nightmare*, however; rather than damaging the target, it sets up something like a post-hypnotic suggestion, a compulsion with the following effects:

- The victim is absolutely certain, to the depths of his soul, that the dream was a divine warning, and cannot be convinced otherwise.
- Upon first seeing the Taurosphinx, the victim will attack it unless physically restrained by his companions (although he is not so mindless that he will harm his friends in the process).
- Even if the victim possesses Knowledge (religion), or describes the dream to someone who does, he will not believe that the image he saw was Hedrada's Herald. He may acknowledge the similarity of appearance, but the creature he saw in his dream was evil. He doesn't have to explain how he knows this; he simply does.

There are no immediate ill effects of this dream (other than the victim waking everyone with his screams) — the victim does not suffer any damage and is unaffected except as listed above, despite the usual effects of a *nightmare* spell. The true impact only becomes clear later, when the PCs meet the herald at Sheer Falls.

The Other Dream

While the nightmare is certainly the most dramatic dream of the night, it's not the only one. While one PC suffers the nightmare, the character who rolled the *highest* on her Will save has a very brief, cryptic dream of her own. She is standing in a dark hallway, surrounded by doors. In the distance, she hears the voice of her father (or, if her character background indicates a bad relationship with her father, some other figure, preferably male, with whom she feels safe and whom she respects) calling for her. He sounds worried, frightened even, and she can hear the sound of doors opening and slamming as he searches. Yet no matter what she does, she cannot seem to make herself heard, and he never finds her.

This dream is not a deliberate sending, but neither is it entirely natural. The character's subconscious mind has very briefly touched that of Hedrada's herald, who is trying desperately to break through Mormo's wards to locate the heroes. Unlike the nightmare, which should be played out in front of the entire party for maximum effect, the GM might wish to take this second dreamer aside and describe her dream in private, leaving it up to her whether or not to tell the others.

Barel and Beyond

Remember that *The Skiprock* is going only as far as the port town of Barel, the last convenient location for the PCs to cross the Hornswythe if they are on foot. Thus, regardless of which route they chose, the first part of the PCs' journey culminates here. They may seek further transport downriver, but they are bound for disappointment. Only a single boat was due to leave Barel toward the Placid River, but it was damaged only yesterday by a



The Nightmare

“With a gasp and an abrupt start, you jerk yourself awake. Everything is quiet, save for the gentle whisper of the breeze — but surely you heard something! Around you, your companions sleep peacefully — even [name of the character(s) on watch] seem(s) to have dozed off near the edge of camp.

“Before you have a moment to think of chastising your errant sentry, an ear-splitting roar reverberates out of the night sky. The clouds swirl about violently, as though disturbed by the passing of some great force. Thunder shakes the earth, lightning cracks the sky overhead — and yet your companions seem deaf to it all, still sleeping blissfully unaware of anything amiss.

“The clouds roil once more, then suddenly part like curtains. An enormous, ravening horror of a beast plunges out of the sky to land in the midst of your camp! It’s hideous, with the lithe but powerful body of a lion, the dark-feathered wings of some merciless bird of prey and — far worse than the rest — the head of a gargantuan,

dark-haired bull. Its wicked horns jut impossibly far from its skull, reflecting the lightning that flashes in the sky above.

“With a mighty bellow, the creature spins — and begins mauling your sleeping companions! And still, still they *won’t wake up!*”

(Precisely how the dream plays out from this point depends largely on the character’s actions. The GM might consider rolling dice as if for attack rolls for the beast, or saves for the sleeping PCs, just to further worry the dreaming character’s player. Should he attack the beast, the GM should allow him to make his rolls as normal. Nothing he does will seem to have any effect, however, nor will he prove able to wake his companions. Only once the creature has mauled all of the sleepers will it turn to face the dreamer. It opens its mouth to bellow once more — and the character awakens, screaming and drenched with sweat.)

mysterious fire. (Whether the blaze was truly an accident or else was another attempt by Mormo's servitors to slow the party is left to the GM.) It will be some days before another ship is prepared to depart southward. The PCs would be better served continuing the journey afoot; after all, the villagers tell them, it shouldn't prove difficult to hire a boat at the shores of Lake Repose.

Should the party require any gear or goods, they might take a few hours to shop at Barel's open markets, but eventually they will need to resume their walk (or ride) south. The ferrymen at the docks can take them across to the east side of the Hornswythe for a handful of coppers.

Wood and Bone

Encounter Level: 2

This particular encounter occurs the night after the PCs leave Barel. Minutes after midnight, allow any PCs on watch to make a Listen check (DC 13); those who succeed hear a sudden snapping and rustling along the riverbank or a creaking of footsteps in the foliage beside the road. This gives them a round to awaken the rest of the party before a half-dozen shambling skeletons rise up from the grasses (or the mud of the riverbank) and move to attack! If none of the PCs on watch succeed at a Listen check, the skeletons are able to creep close before rising. (They do not get a surprise round — they aren't *that* sneaky — but the sentries do not have a free round in which to wake sleeping characters.)

The PCs may be particularly disturbed to learn that these are clearly not normal skeletons (assuming any walking corpse can be called normal). Leafy vines twine themselves around spines and hips, looping through ribs like a seamstress' thread, and thorns jut forth from between bony fingers. Even worse, the vines and branches seem to be driving the corpses, flexing like ligament and sinew! The skeletons jerk and twitch towards the PCs, erratic but swift.

Despite their strange and fearsome appearance, these creatures are not substantially more dangerous than standard skeletons. In fact, the only real advantage they have over their "brethren" is that they are immune to turning (because they are, in fact, constructs created by the druid spell *vines of the dead*; see Appendix, pg. 54). The party should dispatch the vinedead in short order — but then, the constructs were intended to serve only as a distraction...

Once combat is joined, a tiny mockingbird swoops down into the camp. Only those PCs not engaged in melee (perhaps those who are standing back and launching missile weapons or spells) have a chance to notice the Diminutive invader, and even then only if they succeed at a Spot check (DC 25). Assuming it is not seen, the bird will land at one of the PCs' backpacks (GM's choice as to which one) and place inside it a tiny talisman it drops from its beak, a coin-sized circle of thin wooden strips woven into an

intricate knot-work loop. The talisman falls to the bottom of the pack and will not be found through casual examination; only if the pack is emptied or deliberately searched will it be turned up.

Should the mockingbird be spotted, it will simply flee, attempting to return later in the night when most of the party is once again asleep. Should it be spotted a second time, it departs for good.

PCs (and players) may be somewhat puzzled by this encounter, as plant-ridden skeletons are not exactly Mormo's style, but they can find no clues as to who or what might have been behind the assault.

The Eyes of Khet

For reasons of his own, Ilkuthsra the Autumn King has chosen to involve himself, at least peripherally, in the events surrounding the Serpent Amphora. The vinedead are creatures of his creation, constructs that use the bones of the dead as their primary component. For now, he is content merely to observe; the talisman he has planted is one he has studied and knows well. Though nonmagical, it grants him a familiar locus for his scrying magics, enabling him to spy easily on the PC who carries it and thus to learn all that transpires around her. The character in question may detect this scrying if her Intelligence score is 12 or higher, as usual, but the Scry check DC is 30, making it highly unlikely that the characters will ever realize they are being spied upon.

For now — and for the duration of—*Serpent in the Fold* — this is the extent of the Autumn King's activities. As to what his future plans may be, not even his own druids can guess, but his interest can hardly bode well for either the PCs or the people of Ghelspad...

Vinedead (6)

CR 1/2; SZ Medium-size construct; HD 2d10; hp 11; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+4 natural); Atk 2 claws +2 melee (1d4+1); SQ immunities, flame susceptibility, construct; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 11, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11.

Special Qualities: Immunities [Ex] (half damage from piercing or slashing weapons); flame susceptibility [Ex] (double damage from fire); plant (cannot be turned as undead; can be turned as plant creatures by clerics with the Plant domain); construct.

Source: New monster; see Appendix.

The Falls

Unless circumstances dictate otherwise, the PCs should reach Sheer Falls just before sunset. As the party approaches, marching (or riding) along the riverbank, they are treated to an absolutely spectacular sight.

Ahead, it looks as though the struggle between gods and titans split the earth like a piece of warped timber, cracking it down the center and leaving one half tilted up and away from the other. An enormous wall of rock makes further progress difficult at best — but few eyes or minds are on that journey.

From atop the wall, the waters of the Placid thunder earthward. The river's deafening roar puts the lie to its peaceful name. Clouds of soaking spray drift upward from the base of a scintillating column of water that, given the radiance of the setting sun, might as well be molten gold.

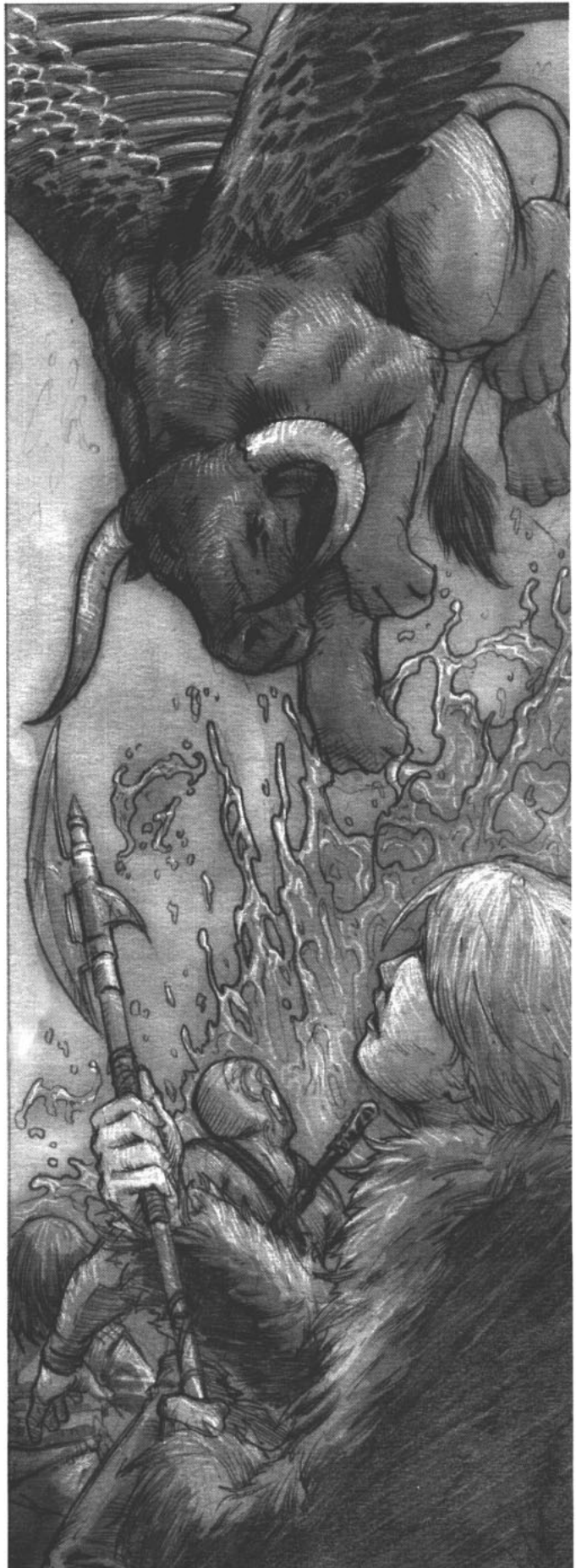
As though in a scene choreographed by the hands of the gods, the clouds drift before the sun, permitting a single shaft of light to strike at the very base of the falls — and where it strikes, the foam abruptly parts!

From the depths of the water, seemingly drawn forth by the last touch of day, an enormous form launches itself into the air, circles overhead, and lands with a majestic flourish on the rocky bank of the river, not quite 20 yards from the party. It's an enormous creature, at least as long from nose to tail as two tall men. Its body is that of a magnificent lion covered in golden fur. A pair of enormous feathered wings stretch outward as though to encompass the world, shake once to rid themselves of excess water, then fold primly along the creature's flanks. Its head, oddly enough, is that of an enormous bull, with horns of ivory and eyes of deepest brown.

"I have been seeking you," the creature announces in a thunderous, bellowing voice that carries clearly over the roar of the falls.

What happens next depends on the PCs. Anyone who succeeds at either a Knowledge (religion) or Intelligence check (DC 10) recognizes the being before them as the Taurosphinx, the Herald of Hedrada.

On the other hand, a character who had and failed to resist the nightmare earlier is absolutely convinced that this is the same creature of malevolent evil about whom he dreamed. Further, the compulsion now kicks in and he will attack the Taurosphinx to the best of his ability. If he does not suffer the compulsion (i.e., he made the second Will save), he is not *forced* to attack, although he may still choose to do so.



The Taurosphinx, Hedrada's Herald

CR 17; SZ Large outsider (lawful); HD 16d8+112; hp 208; Init +0; Spd 60 ft., fly 90 ft. (average); AC 39 (-1 size, +25 natural, +5 divine); Atk gore +24 melee (2d8+9), 2 claws +19 melee (2d6+9); Face 5 ft. by 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA hammer of law, pounce, rake, charge, bellow, spells; SQ damage reduction 15/+3, protective aura, omnilingual, telepathy, SR 28; AL LN; SV Fort +20, Ref +13, Will +18; Str 28, Dex 10, Con 24, Int 18, Wis 20, Cha 17.

Skills: Concentration +26, Diplomacy +22, Intimidate +22, Jump +28, Knowledge (history) +24, Knowledge (religion) +24, Listen +24, Sense Motive +24, Spot +24, Wilderness Lore +24. **Feats:** Alertness, Cleave, Flyby Attack, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Track. **Languages:** All (see "omnilingual," below).

Hammer of law (Su): Hedrada's herald is treated as having the lawful weapon special ability: all its physical attacks deal +2d6 points of damage against any creature of chaotic alignment.

Pounce (Ex): If the Taurosphinx dives or leaps upon a foe during the first round of combat, it can make a full attack even if it has already taken a move action.

Rake (Ex): If the Taurosphinx pounces onto a creature, it can make two rake attacks (+19 melee) with its hind legs for 2d6+5 points of slashing damage each. It can continue to rake its target each subsequent round if it makes a full attack against the target; if it moves or attacks another target, it cannot rake until it again pounces on a target.

Charge (Ex): The Taurosphinx can make a special charge attack using its fearsome horns as impaling weapons. It must move at least 10 feet, and can move up to twice its base speed, with all the usual effects of a charge. In addition, if the attack succeeds, it deals 4d20+18 points of piercing damage. If the Taurosphinx uses this attack, it cannot use its claws in the same round.

Bellow (Su): The Taurosphinx can bellow 3 times per day, affecting all within range. Those who are not worshippers of Hedrada and who are within 500 feet of the Taurosphinx when it bellows must make a Will save (DC 21) or be affected as if by a *fear* spell for 15 rounds. All creatures within 250 feet must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 25) or lose 2d4 points of Strength, which return fully after 2d4 rounds, and all those within 90 feet take 2d8 points of sonic damage and are deafened for 3d6 rounds (no save); stone or crystalline objects within 90 feet that have not been blessed by a Hedradan priest take 50 points of damage — magic items and held or carried items can avoid this damage with a successful Reflex save (DC 21). Each range's effect stacks with those previous, so that a creature within 90 feet who is not a Hedradan must save against fear, Strength loss, and sonic damage and deafness.

Spells: The Taurosphinx casts spells as a 16th-level cleric, with access to the Knowledge, Law, and Protection domains.

Protective aura (Su): Hedrada's herald is constantly surrounded by an aura of divine protection that grants it a +5 divine bonus to AC and a +3 divine bonus on saving throws. (This bonus is incorporated into the statistics above.)

Omnilingual (Su): Hedrada's herald can speak and understand the language of any intelligent creature.

Telepathy (Su): Hedrada's herald can communicate telepathically with any creature up to 60 feet away that has a language.

Source: *The Divine and the Defeated*, page 52. Where statistics between this sidebar and *The Divine and the Defeated* differ, this sidebar's information takes precedence.

Answers and Explanations

The herald is, of course, in absolutely no danger from the PCs, but he will refrain from subduing his attacker for a round or two in order to see what the victim's companions do. If they restrain their friend from attacking, at least for long enough to try to determine what is really going on, the herald is pleased and announces to the party that they indeed have the proper mettle to face the challenges to come. Should the party allow their friend to attack or, worse, join with him in the assault, the Taurosphinx uses his spells and special abilities to subdue them without killing them. He is clearly unhappy, and makes many disparaging comments about "the quality of so-called heroes in times that cry out for true saviors." He even rolls his eyes heavenward and, as

though addressing Hedrada himself, asks "Are you certain *these* are the ones you want?"

In either case, he first approaches the victim of the nightmare. "You have been beset by illusion and nearly unmade by falsehood. You labor on behalf of the Mother of Serpents, although you know it not." The Herald places a single huge paw on the victim's chest and intones a solemn prayer to Hedrada, casting *greater dispelling* on the nightmare's compulsion effect and thus canceling it. "The dream you suffered was a sending, inflicted upon you by the Witch Queen's servants, that you would be disinclined to trust my good council.

"Now, may we speak?"

The characters undoubtedly have many questions, and at least one of them probably recognizes

the Taurosphinx for what he is. Presumably, then, they'll be willing to hear him out.

"As some of you know already," he intones, his voice nearly sufficient at close range to knock the PCs off their feet, "I speak for Hedrada the Lawgiver. I have sought you for many days now, that I might warn you of your plight, but the Witch's magics cloaked you from my sight. I could only wait here, knowing that you must needs pass the Falls on your way to Hedrad."

Night has fallen as the Taurosphinx speaks — and strangely, although there was no trace of inclement weather mere moments before, a faint wind has begun to blow from the south, bringing with it the tang of waiting rain.

"You have *all* been deceived. A traitor lurks amidst the ranks of the Vigils, another of the Hag's vipers in the grass. I know not whom, for he is hidden from me even as you were, but I know that it is so. You have been sent on a fool's errand; the repositories of information in Hedrad's temples and libraries are vast, but they do not contain the knowledge you seek. Your journey was to have ended in failure, the time wasted sufficient to allow the Witch's servitors to steal away with your goal.

"But all is not yet lost. The information you seek is not to be found in Hedrad, but do not take this to mean that it cannot be found at all! High up in the Kelder Mountains, scattered about the peak of Mount Croiganne like the toys of a child, lie the ruins of Sky Keep. There, amidst the wreckage, may be found the Vault of Chardun the Overlord, brother of my own master. In that vault, you will find a manuscript that will tell you and the Vigils what you must know."

The wind has picked up, now blowing strongly enough to send shivers down the spine. From the south, the PCs can faintly hear the rumbling of distant thunder, barely audible over the roar of the falls.

"And you've time yet, though precious little! Only now are the children of the Serpent Mother on their way to Sky Keep, for the presence of the Vault was hidden from them by Chardun's will. They've a head start on you, yes, but they are still many days away from Mount Croiganne. If you hurry, you might yet arrive before they."

In an expression hideously inappropriate to a bull's face, the Taurosphinx smiles. "Knowing the importance of what you face — the Witch's minions must not attain the manuscript — my master and his brother Enkili have arranged to speed your way. What you now hear and feel are the stirrings of a great storm out at sea. It would have struck in due course; it has simply been moved southward, where it will benefit you. By dawn tomorrow, as is its wont, the Hornswythe will have reversed its flow and may carry you northward once more at great speeds. This will

not last long — we cannot risk allowing the storm to rage indefinitely, lest the Blood Basin grow once more and corrupt the land around it. But if you hurry and risk night travel, you may reach the Blood Basin before the river resumes its natural course. Then you need merely cross the basin to the Kelder Mountains.

"What could be simpler, aye?"

There is little more the herald can reveal to the PCs. If they ask why he doesn't stop Mormo's servitors himself, or why he cannot at least take them to Sky Keep, he will reply, "Think you that I am sitting by idly? I and many others labor even as you do against the machinations of the Serpent Mother, assisting you in ways you cannot see, on battlefields other than this one. I have my own tasks to perform, even as you do. I have already tarried too long with you as it is."

Should any of the heroes be injured, the herald is willing to cast *cure* spells. He then stretches his magnificent wings and calls out a final farewell. "Take to the road by dawn, and be swift! The fortune of all the gods be with you!" With that, the Taurosphinx leaps into the air and is gone swiftly, riding the growing winds and disappearing into the night sky.

The Journey to the Mountains

The PCs may set up whatever sort of watch they like; for the duration of this night, no random monsters will trouble them. The party awakes to a dismal, dreary day. The air is thick and wet, the grasses covered with a red-tinged dew, and it feels as though the clouds loom a mere few feet above their heads. They can still hear the sounds of thunder in the distance, and the waters of the Placid River are murky as the northward flow of the Hornswythe forces just a bit of the Blood Sea's backwash up against the currents caused by the Sheer Falls.

The party can find *The Skiprock* still anchored at Barel; again, if they choose to find an alternate vessel, the GM should develop it as needed. Captain Yengly is probably more than happy to take the PCs on again (if no foolish or criminal actions were perpetrated by the PCs while onboard), under the same conditions as the first trip; this trip will, of course, cost more, since the party wishes to go all the way to the Blood Basin. Yengly's ship is not built for travel beyond the river, so he cannot take them across the Basin to the Kelder Mountains, but he assures them that they will be able to find passage on a ship near Mansk.

If the PCs journeyed from Lave by foot, they do not know Yengly, of course. The GM may still choose to use him here anyway, or may allow the PCs to hire a similar boat to return north.

Due to the rapid currents, the journey back up the Hornswythe to the Blood Basin will take only twelve days or so — *if* the PCs are willing to risk some river travel at night. It will require some fast talking to convince

I'm Not Going *That* Way

Despite the Taurosphinx's "good council," and despite the convenient northward flow of the Hornswythe, it's possible that some players may choose not to follow some (or all) of the herald's advice.

Some may simply prefer not to ride the river and will insist on traveling north by foot. This slows them down a bit, but not dramatically so. The GM should alter the encounter with Mormo's minions (see "Ambush," below) so that it takes place on land rather than on the river, but no other major changes are required. They will still have to take a boat across the Blood Basin, however; travel by land through the Kelder Steppes is remarkably slower than travel over the relatively flat plains between Sheer Falls and the Blood Basin, and it will slow them down enough that they will never beat their enemies to the prize.

Some heroes may want to return to Lave and warn the Vigils about the traitor. It's a nice thought, but they still don't know who the traitor is, and the time it would take them to investigate will again be enough to allow Mormo's minions to obtain the manuscript. If the GM wants to be heavy-handed about it, she can have the Taurosphinx (or even Hedrada himself) come to a PC in a dream and remind them of this fact. If she prefers, she may simply allow the PCs to do as they will. Their mission will fail, the Vigils will likely never trust them again, and they will almost certainly be unable to root out the traitor — such is the price of ignoring the word of the gods.

Some players may even decide that the entire meeting with the herald was a trick, and will proceed to Hedrad. There they can search as much they want, all to no avail. If they are still there after a few weeks, they will receive a message from the Vigils informing them of their failure. The GM may even have them receive a thank you note from one of Mormo's witches. Again, they will have failed; if they spend even a few days in Hedrad, there will be insufficient time to reach Sky Keep before their enemies have won the manuscript.

Captain Yengly to take such a risk, but if the party offers him at least twice the standard fare to take them back north, or if they can convince him of their mission's importance (Diplomacy check, DC 13), he will do so. If the party can neither bribe nor convince him, the journey takes more than three weeks. However, this isn't actually a critical loss of time — Mormo's servants have their own hazards to deal with, thanks to the efforts of the Taurosphinx and other servants of the gods — but the PCs should be made to think that their success hinges on making use of every available moment.

Ambush

Encounter Level: 4

Even if Yengly has agreed to night travel, *The Skiprock* will not travel for the *entire* night. The crew needs to rest, so Yengly will insist on beaching the boat and camping for at least 6 hours every night. On the second night after leaving Sheer Falls, some of Mormo's agents make their move against the heroes.

Three asaatthi approach the boat using their spells to enhance their stealth. They attack regardless of whether the PCs sleep on the shore or onboard the vessel. Each asaatthi scout has cast *chameleon skin* and *rabbit feet* on itself. Thus, anyone on watch has a chance of seeing or hearing the asaatthi as they approach, but, with their spells in effect, the asaatthi have effective Hide bonuses of +8 and Move Silently bonuses of +14. (Further, Spot checks suffer a -4 circumstance penalty due to darkness, unless the viewer has darkvision.)

If they succeed in sneaking past the sentry, the asaatthi will try to murder the party and the crew in their sleep. One attacks *The Skiprock* crew while the other two engage the PCs. The GM may determine the results of the former battle randomly, run it as part of the combat, or simply declare that Yengly loses two of his crew before they are collectively able to slay their single attacker. In either case, the other two asaatthi battle the party to the death.

Mansk

The PCs do not have time to dawdle here and may not even enter the city itself, as the docks on the Blood Basin are not actually part of Mansk proper. Few ships cross the basin regularly, save those which ferry cargo to and from the northern branch of the Hornswythe River, where it is picked up by other river boats and taken to the Bridged City. The only ship available when the PCs arrive is the

Dojann Ahklain, a dual-masted sailing ship belonging to a captain named Tamalaine (*female half-elf, Exp5, N*). She offers the PCs an honest price for passage: 1 sp per mile traveled (see DMG, Table 5-6). She is unwilling to negotiate; she doesn't have much cargo, so she must charge full price if this trip is to be worth her while. She is willing to accept a letter of credit from the Vigils, however, should the PCs be able to produce such a thing.

Asaatthi (3)

CR 3; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 3d8+3; hp 16; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 20 (+3 Dex, +5 natural, +2 leather armor); Atk +3 melee (1d6+1, scimitar), +3 melee (1d3+1, unarmed strike), bite +3 melee (1d3+1 and poison), or tail slap +3 melee (1d6+1); or +5 ranged (1d6+1, javelin); SA poison, spells; SQ keen senses; AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 13.

Skills: Alchemy +3, Hide +5, Jump +2, Listen +3, Move Silently +8, Spellcraft +7, Spot +4, Use Magical Device +2. *Feats:* Combat Casting. *Languages:* Asaatthi, Draconic.

Special Attacks: Poison [Ex] (Bite, Fortitude save (DC 12); initial damage nausea for 2d4+2 minutes, no secondary damage); *Special Qualities:* Keen senses [Ex] (four times human vision in low-light conditions and darkvision to 60 feet, plus scent: it can use its sense of smell to detect approaching enemies within 30 feet, can sniff out hidden foes as a standard action, and may track by sense of smell).

Sorcerer spells (6/6): 0 — *arcane mark, enumerate**, *flare, mage hand, read magic*; 1st — *chameleon skin**, *jump, rabbit feet**. All spells are cast as if by a 3rd-level sorcerer.

Possessions: Serpent-skin leather armor, scimitar, 3 javelins.

Source: *Creature Collection*, page 12. Where statistics between this sidebar and *Creature Collection* differ, these revised stats take precedence.

*These spells are from *Relics & Rituals*.

Storm at Sea

Considering the speeds of which the *Dojann Ahklain* is capable and the fact that Captain Tamalaine runs at night (her crew of 20 works in multiple shifts), this journey across the Blood Basin would normally take only three days and the better part of a fourth.

Three days of travel pass uneventfully. The PCs have time to relax, to watch the crew dashing back and forth rigging sails, tying lines, and performing many other nautical activities about which the heroes are likely clueless. The sky is cloudy and the waters of the basin a bit turbulent, but the air itself is clear. The water is tinted ever so slightly brown, but since the Hornswythe only flowed north for a few days, the basin received only a little of the corrupted waters of the Blood Sea. Gulls fly overhead, and all seems well.

Until Hielaa the storm hag catches up with them.

If the players have been through the events of *The Serpent Amphora*, they've encountered Hielaa before. This encounter promises to be even less pleasant than the last.

Starting early in the morning of the fourth day, the sky grows increasingly dark and oppressive, the winds ever stronger. For hours, Captain Tamalaine has been barking orders, her crew tying down hatches, loosening sails, and otherwise preparing for the worst.

The "worst" is far more than they could imagine; the storm that boils up like a living thing over the southern horizon is enormous; a Wilderness Lore, Knowledge (nature), Profession (sailor), or any other comparable skill check (DC 12) reveals that this storm is not natural. In fact, although the PCs don't know it, they're seeing an offshoot of the storm that reversed the flow of the Hornswythe, broken away from the body of the storm and turned to the enemy's purpose by the storm hag's *control wind* spells.

As the clouds darken and lightning splits the sky, the PCs may catch occasional glimpses of a wild-haired female figure, far taller than any human, flitting back and forth in the coming storm. Her cackling laughter carries even to the decks of the ship, as though propelled by the thunder itself. Slowly at first, but with ever increasing speed and force, fat drops of rain begin to pound heavily on the heroes and the crew of the *Dojann Ahklain*.

The good news is that the heroes need not battle Hielaa directly; the hag is quite convinced that her storm will be enough to sink the ship, and departs to deal with other tasks the moment the vessel is fully engulfed in the storm.

The bad news is that she may be right.

As the storm builds, the sea begins to rock violently under the *Dojann Ahklain*. Tamalaine and her crew make a valiant effort — perhaps aided by the PCs — but ultimately the ship is doomed. What the PCs do during this time is up to them; they may help with repairs, rescue crewmembers trapped in the hold, heal crewmen injured by the violence of the storm, or simply attempt to take to one of the vessel's longboats. Tamalaine fights with the wheel and bellows orders to her crew. The PCs will not be able to convince Tamalaine or her crew to depart until after the mast has broken, at which point there is a sudden rush for the boats.

Rounds 1 through 3: The rocking of the ship forces everyone to make a Balance check (DC 10) each round, or fall to the deck. Getting up requires a comparable Balance check. Anyone standing within 5 feet of a railing who fails a check must make a Reflex save (DC 10) or be thrown overboard. Anyone attempting spellcasting must make a Concentration check or miscast the spell: for those below deck, the DC is 10 + spell level; for those on deck, the DC is 15 + spell level. The creaks of the ship's planking can be heard throughout the vessel; ropes snap and sails begin to tear. There are 8 crewmen below decks at this time.

Hielaa the Storm Hag

It's remotely possible that the players may draw Hielaa's attention, attacking her with long-range spells before she's had the chance to depart. This isn't actually a problem for the DM, since Hielaa won't alter her behavior; she still believes that her storm will sink the ship and slay the fools who attacked her. She will, however, memorize her attackers' features, and she definitely holds a grudge if (when) they meet again.

Round 4: As above, plus the hull begins to leak, causing the lower holds to slowly fill with water. Any characters below must evacuate to the deck, despite the fierce wind and rain. Three of the crewmen below can escape on their own, but, due to water pressure, some of the doors below decks will not open. If the PCs do not rescue the remaining 5 crewmen, they'll drown.

Rounds 5 through 8: The storm is more violent. The Balance check to remain standing and the Reflex save to avoid being thrown overboard, are now both DC 15. Anyone who fails a Balance check by 5 or more takes 1d3 points of damage from being thrown about the deck. In round 6, a crewman trying to cut the sails loose loses his grip and plummets into the rigging, where he breaks his neck.

Round 9: As above, plus a deafening crack, louder than the thunder, reverberates across the deck.

Round 10: As above, plus the mainmast topples like a felled tree. It crushes the aft portion of the deck; anyone near the wheel (including Tamalaine) must make a Reflex save (DC 15) or take 4d6 points of damage and fall into the flooded hold below. Spellcasting on the splintering deck now requires a Concentration check (DC 20 + spell level).

Rounds 11 onward: With the falling of the mast and the cracking of the deck, the ship is now clearly doomed. Each round, the DC for the Balance check and Reflex save increases by 1 point. Because the ship is listing to port, it is impossible to reach the starboard rail without a Climb check (DC begins at 10, rising by 1 every round). If the PCs reach a longboat by round 13, they can make it into one of those on the port side; otherwise, they



Performing Actions in a Storm

The following conditions apply to those on the *Dojann Ahklain*, per the DMG (Chapter 3, “Weather Hazards”):

Severe Wind: In addition to automatically extinguishing any unprotected flames, winds of this magnitude cause protected flames (such as those of lanterns) to dance wildly and have a 50% chance of extinguishing even these lights. Ranged weapon attacks and Listen checks suffer a -4 penalty. All creatures of Medium-size or smaller must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be either checked (unable to move against the wind), knocked down, or blown back, depending on size.

Rain: Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a -4 penalty to Spot and Search checks. It has the same effect on flames, ranged weapon attacks, and Listen checks as severe wind (see above), although these effects do not stack.

Thunderstorm: In addition to wind and precipitation, thunderstorms are accompanied by lightning that can pose a hazard to characters without proper shelter (especially those in metal armor). Assume one lightning strike per minute for a 1-hour period at the center of the storm. Each bolt causes electrical damage equal to 1d10 eight-sided dice.

must climb to a boat held on the starboard railing. Lowering a starboard longboat safely requires a Rope Use or Profession (sailor) check (DC 15); otherwise it hits the water unevenly, and all those inside must make Reflex saves (DC 12) or take 1d3 points of subdual damage and be thrown overboard. Spellcasters in a longboat must still make Concentration checks (DC 10 + spell level) to cast spells successfully.

The PCs (and surviving crew) must struggle at the oars, fighting the waves, the wind, the pull of the

Dojann Ahklain as it goes down — but once they’ve made it to the longboats, the worst is over. It takes many hours of backbreaking effort, but the heroes eventually find themselves, exhausted and soaked with saltwater, at the western shore of the Blood Basin. The storm, thank all the gods, has run its course by the time they reach land.

Above them, as though mocking all their efforts to get even this far, stretch the imposing slopes of the Kelder Mountains.

Chapter Two:

The Ruins of Sky Keep

The heroes stand at the base of the Kelder Mountains, staring up at the monolithic peaks. Daunting, perhaps impassible — yet the PCs have little option if they're to have any hope of reaching the Vault of Chardun before the slaves of the Serpent Mother beat them to the manuscript. The ruins of Sky Keep lie high atop Mount Croiganne, and that is where the party must go.

The Slopes of Mount Croiganne

There is little to see in any direction save dull gray or sandy brown stone, the occasional stray shrub struggling to survive, and the leaden clouds that loom overhead, reminders of the tempest so recently passed.

Some small fortune is with the party. Had Sky Keep crashed on some of the other nearby peaks, it would be out of the reach of anyone save the most daring climber (or flier). Mount Croiganne, although not without its share of hazards, is a far easier endeavor.

Easier, of course, does not mean *easy*.

The Terrain

The climb from the base of Croiganne to the ruins of Sky Keep, which lie on a large plateau perhaps nine-tenths of the way up, is approximately 10,000 feet. Assuming the entire party does not

consist entirely of expert climbers, and assuming that they have a great deal of equipment, the effort and exertion required will prevent the PCs from making the ascent very quickly. Assume the base time from the ground to the ledge is 24 hours; this includes regular rest stops (which are a necessity) and a stop at a ledge or cave for a full night's sleep. This also assumes that all characters are only lightly encumbered and have a base speed of 30 feet. A character with a speed of 20 feet requires 40 hours to make the ascent (including two sleep periods), and a heavily encumbered character cannot make the climb.

Further, this is the *base* time, which is modified by environmental factors.

Much of the slope, while steep, can be walked or at least climbed with little effort. Portions of the slope are quite steep, however. For every hour that passes, the DM should roll 1d10, add the modifiers defined below, and consult the following chart.

Modifiers

The PCs are less than 1/4 of the way up the mountain	No modifier
The PCs are 1/4 to 1/2 of the way up	+1
The PCs are 1/2 to 3/4 of the way up	+2
The PCs are more than 3/4 of the way up	+3

Climbing Terrain

Modified Roll

1–3

4–8

9–10

11–12

13

Terrain Encountered

Easy grade; subtract 1 hour from total ascent time

Moderate grade; no modifier to ascent time

Steep grade; party must make Climb check (DC 10); if check fails, add 1 hour to total ascent time*

Nearly sheer; party must make Climb check (DC 15); if check fails, add 2 hours to total ascent time*

Minor rockfall! Each PC takes 2d4 points of damage and must make a Climb check (DC = 10 + damage) or fall; Reflex save (DC 12) avoids**

* Do not make additional rolls on this table for these "extra" hours added by sharp grades.

** A falling character falls 1d10x10 feet before hitting a ledge or an easy grade on which he may catch himself. Falling damage is only 1d4 per 10 feet rather than the standard 1d6, however, as the PC generally tumbles down along a grade rather than plummeting straight down.

Whenever the party is forced to make a Climb check, they use the average Climb check bonus for the entire party. They may instead move around the slope and attempt to find an easier way up: they eventually find a moderate grade that requires no check, but doing so requires 1d4+1 additional hours. Thus, while it saves them the difficulty of climbing and the danger of falling, it costs them time.

There are numerous ledges and caves, so the party should be able to rest and recuperate when they tire. Further, although Mormo's minions thinned the area somewhat when they passed through, there are still numerous random creatures about. There is a base 20% for an encounter every 6 hours (the longer the party takes to climb, the more they risk being attacked).

Anyone who engages in combat while undertaking a Climb check is considered stunned: Attackers get a +2 bonus to their attack rolls and the climber loses any Dexterity bonus to AC; further, the climber must use at least one hand to hold onto the slope/cliff face (see PHB, Chapter 4, "Climb").

The Plateau

Finally, after much travail, the PCs have reached the peak of Mount Croiganne — or at least as near the peak as they need go.

They stand at the edge of an enormous ledge, a plateau that occupies much of the width of the mountain. A hill-like spur of rock continues upward from the center of this open space. Several openings pierce the spire, permitting access to whatever caves or caverns might exist within the heights of Croiganne.

Scattered about the plateau lie the ruins of the once magnificent Sky Keep. Formerly a floating citadel of marvelous and ancient magics, it was torn from

the heavens during the Titans War. Sky Keep is nothing now save another skeleton of lost wonders, one of the countless ruins that litter the face of the Scarred Lands. Random heaps of stone, cracked masonry, shattered sculpture, tiny fragments of precious metals that might once have been utensils or tools — all these and more bedeck the landscape, lying where they fell when Sky Keep lost its life against the unyielding face of Mount Croiganne.

Yet the work of the ancients was great, their magic mighty; some small portion of Sky Keep survives still. Walls of stone jut from the earth at odd angles, forming imposing barriers and even, at times, complete hallways. Some of these lead to open-roofed rooms, their walls made of equal parts worked stone and natural rock; others lead to dead-ends or to rockfalls, others to nowhere at all. Near the center of the ruins at the base of the spire of Mount Croiganne, which rises farther above Sky Keep's grave, some of the halls have been rebuilt, modified by someone (or something) in the years since its fall. Here the halls are complete, their roofs at least partially intact; some brick-walled corridors lead into and interconnect with the natural tunnels in the rock, forming a veritable complex of natural and worked passages. There is no way to tell who (or what) might have performed such work, at least not from the edge of the plateau where the heroes now stand.

The ground is still ever so slightly damp from the rains of the previous days, the sky still overcast and menacing. Twisted trees and scrub dot the plateau, struggling to survive. The air smells of fresh rain, of rock, of dust... and of blood.

Not far from the cliff face, the PCs find the charred bodies of several trolls and the troll-mangled corpses of a handful of slitheren ratmen.

Random Encounters on Mount Croiganne

Day	Night	Creature	# Appearing	CR	EL	Source
01–05	–	Dragonne	1	7	7	MM
06–15	01–15	Gargoyle	1	4	4	MM
16–25	–	Griffon	1	4	4	MM
26–33	16–30	Harpy	1	2	2	CC
34–38	31–35	Manticore	1	5	5	MM
39–50	36–45	Minotaur	1*	4	4	MM
51–60	46–60	Ratman	4*	1/2	3	CC
61–70	61–76	Ratman	6*	1/2	4	CC
71–80	–	Scythe falcon	1	2	2	CC
81–90	77–85	Spire wyvern	1	4	4	CC
91–95	86–90	Stone giant	1	8	8	MM
96–00	91–00	Troll	1*	5	5	MM

CC = Creature Collection.

MM = Core Rulebook III.

* These creatures are encountered only in caves; if a roll indicates such an encounter when it isn't feasible, the GM should either reroll, consider the result to be "no encounter," or hold the encounter until a more appropriate time, as she prefers.



The servitors of Mormo have apparently beaten the PCs here — but not by much. The ratmen, who wear and carry holy symbols of Venom’s Dam, are cold and stiff, but their fur is only mildly damp as if moistened by the humidity in the air, not drenched.

If these bodies fell here after the great storm, they cannot have been here long. There may still be time to reach the Vault of Chardun...

Somewhere in the ruins of Sky Keep.

Mormo’s Minions

The heroes have staunch competition: The slaves of the Serpent Mother are dangerous, skillful, and fanatically devoted to their cause. They’re also most likely a sight more powerful than the PCs themselves.

Their leader is a red witch slitheren named Tears of Her Enemies. Tears is extremely fair of fur, seemingly an albino to all but the closest inspection. Her eyes gleam maniacally red in direct light, and her fangs are yellowed and stained with the blood of those who opposed her in the past. Although relatively young, Tears is quickly becoming a powerful magic-wielder; even alone, she would likely prove a deadly challenge to the party.

And she is not alone. Always at her side is her devoted bodyguard Spineback, a

slitheren ranger. A hulking creature nearly the size of a foamer, his fur is a deep russet — very nearly the hue of dried blood. The twin blades he wields have claimed more than one of his mistress’ enemies, and he lusts for the day when they may claim yet more.

As if that were not enough, they bring with them a small swarm of their slitheren accomplices who, although less skilled than their masters, make up in numbers and fanaticism what they lack in individual ability. Were the PCs required to confront the assembled might of these servants of Mormo, they would have precious little hope of survival, let alone victory.

Fortunately, the heroes should *not* be required to face their enemies’ full might — but they don’t know that...

The Outer Ruins

Walls, partial rooms, and corridors stand at odd angles, forming obstacles to the party's progress, but they do not resemble a coherent structure. As the PCs peer around walls and creep through disembodied halls, exploring and working their way toward the center of the ruin, they'll discover quickly enough that the corpse of Sky Keep has many hazards.

Due to the haphazard nature of the wreckage, the outer portions of the ruin do not require a map and key as the inner portions do. Rather, the GM should use the following system to determine which encounters the PCs stumble across in their wandering: Roll 1d4, and consult the table below. No encounter or event may occur more than once, and the heroes need not undergo every encounter. Should the dice indicate a repeated encounter, the GM should proceed to "The Death of a Thousand Cuts," below, unless she feels the PCs have not yet been challenged sufficiently (or she simply wants to run them through all four encounters), in which case she may simply choose one that suits her.

Outer Ruins Encounters

Roll	Event
1	Ratman Ambush
2	Dead Ratmen
3	Collapsing Walls
4	A "Divine" Sending

Ratman Ambush

Encounter Level: 4

The party picks its way through a rubble-strewn corridor of ruined walls, stepping gingerly over random chunks of stone that could easily turn an ankle or worse. The little sunlight piercing the clouds illuminates the ground before them — the "passageway" has no ceiling, but is, in fact, little more than a long pair of freestanding walls that have survived the test of time. There would be no reason to pass through it at all, save that it provides a means of moving deeper into the ruins that doesn't require climbing a large number of unstable and teetering piles of rock.

At this point, the GM should either allow the PCs to make Spot and Listen checks (DC 15), or else roll them herself in secret. Those who succeed either see a small cloud of dust sifting down from atop the walls ahead of them or hear the faint scampering of claws on rock, as appropriate. These fortunate PCs may take a partial action in the surprise round to come; those who failed both checks are surprised, unable to act until the first normal round of combat as 4 slitheren appear and begin raining arrows down onto the party.

The ratmen's position in firing over the walls (they are standing in various niches, crevices, and ledges) grants them one-quarter cover (+2 AC, +1 to Reflex saves). These bonuses are not included in the ratmen's stats in the attendant sidebar. Unless the PCs climb the walls or have some magical means of levitation or flight, they can fight back using only missile or reach weapons and spells; see PHB, Chapter 3, "Climb," for details on combat while climbing.

Ratmen (4)

CR 1/2; SZ Medium-size monstrous humanoids (5 ft., 10 in. tall); HD 1d8+3; hp 7; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +1 natural, +2 leather armor, +1 shield); Atk bite +1 melee (1d3), 2 claws —4 melee (1d4); or +1 melee (1d6, scimitar); or +3 ranged (1d6, shortbow); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +0; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +8, Escape Artist +6, Hide +6, Jump +4, Listen +2, Move Silently +5, Spot +3.
Feats: Dodge. **Languages:** Slitheren, Common.

Possessions: Leather armor, small wooden shield, scimitar, shortbow, quiver and 10 arrows, burlap sack.

Source: *Creature Collection*, page 150. Where statistics between this sidebar and *Creature Collection* differ, these revised stats take precedence.

Dead Ratmen

The PCs emerge from behind a crumbling wall barely taller than their heads and stumble a bit over the loose scree that covers much of the plateau, only to find a remarkably unpleasant sight.

Here, in a shallow depression in the earth, surrounded on two sides by a corner that is the only portion left standing of what was once a room, lie the shredded corpses of half a dozen slitheren. Strips of furred flesh litter the floor — even, in some cases, hanging from the walls — in congealed splashes of blood. The corpses are mostly intact, but here and there the heroes can see an arm or a leg neatly severed. The air is thick with flies, and the stench is overwhelming.

No examination, no matter how careful, will reveal exactly how the ratmen died. That is, it's quite obvious that they were hacked to death by something very sharp, wielded by someone or something with a very nasty temper — but beyond that, nothing. The bodies are simply too badly damaged and the area too messy to determine the attacker(s) or even the exact implement used. If the PCs are really determined to take an inventory, they can learn that most of the various body parts are present; that is, whatever did this apparently did not do so to consume its victims.

If the heroes attempt to loot the bodies, they will discover that there are no bladed weapons present.

This is, of course, the work of the blade beast described below in “The Death of a Thousand Cuts.” The PCs don’t know this, however: all they know is that something else is loose on the mountaintop, something that brutally slaughtered half a dozen ratmen for no obvious reason.

Collapsing Walls

Encounter Level: 2

A narrow corridor provides the only easy or obvious means for the heroes to progress from their current location to deeper in the ruins. The PCs must walk in single file. This corridor was clearly not intended as a passageway; the wall to the party’s left is thick and heavy — it was clearly the outer wall of some building, now largely fallen to dust. The wall to the right is smaller, less imposing.

As the party nears the end of the corridor, the GM should make a secret Search check for any dwarf (or other character with the stonecunning ability) to notice that the left wall is unsound. If the PCs continue onward, then just as they see the end of the passage ahead, a loud rumble and a puff of dust come from the west wall. In a matter of seconds, an entire unstable stretch of it begins to collapse inward! Every character may make a Reflex save; the DC of the save depends on how many people there are between a given character and the exit from the collapsing passage (i.e., ahead of the party to the opening). The base DC is 12, increasing by one for every person between a given character and safety; thus, the character in the front rank must make a save at DC 12, the second rank at DC 13, the next at 14, and so on.

Those who succeed at the Reflex save manage to race forward and leap from the passage before the wall comes down (even if in doing so they must squeeze over or past others who have failed their saves). Those who fail suffer 2d6 points of damage and are trapped in the rubble. Freeing a trapped character requires 5d6 “man-minutes” of labor; that is, roll 5d6 and divide the result by the number of people cooperating (not counting the character himself) — Small characters count as only one-half, while Large characters count as double. A trapped character may attempt to free himself; this requires four successful Strength or Escape Artist checks, each at DC 20; further, each such check takes 5 minutes, however, due to the weight and instability of the shifting rocks.

A “Divine” Sending

Without warning, the rock and stone wreckage around the PCs shimmers and blurs. A furious red glow emanates from the earth. Just as the radiance starts to become painful, a humanoid figure, enormous, with the heavy musculature of a great warrior,

rises through the very rock. His hair and his beard are pale, his long tunic white. He wears chains about his waist, and his sandals are covered in blood and powdered bone.

Any PC may make a Knowledge (religion) or Intelligence check (DC 10) to recognize this as the common image of Chardun the Overlord.

The image intones, “Fools! Worthless fools, you have failed us all! The slaves of the Hag have already come and gone, and taken with them that which you sought! Your dawdling incompetence may have doomed us all! Flee this place now, lest I smite thee in my rage!”

The thought of being trapped before an angry god is a terrifying one, but things are not exactly as they seem. The PCs aren’t facing a manifestation of Chardun at all; rather, this is an illusion designed to drive them away, generated by Tears of Her Enemies using a *persistent image* cast from a scroll. The heroes can see Chardun, hear his thundering voice, even feel the heat radiating from the glow surrounding him — but he isn’t real.

There are several ways for the PCs to discover this. Any character may make a Knowledge (religion) check (DC 17) to notice that various minor details of the image don’t feel right, thus prompting an attempt to disbelieve. Any character who experienced the real vision of Chardun in **The Serpent Amphora**, or any other character who has experienced an authentic divine vision or visitation (GM’s discretion), as well as the victim of the *nightmare* sending in Chapter One, may make a Wisdom check (DC 17); those who succeed realize that this image lacks the power, the “weight” of their previous divine experience, and may thus try to disbelieve. Others who reason aloud that Chardun would not appear to them (or that he would not permit them to leave if he were truly enraged) may also attempt to disbelieve the image. Whatever the reason for the attempt to disbelieve, however, the difficulty is the same: Will save (DC 17).

Should the party heed the image and depart, of course, Mormo’s servitors succeed in obtaining the manuscript, much to the detriment of all. If they ignore “Chardun,” or double back later, the PCs still have an opportunity to stop their adversaries.

The Death of a Thousand Cuts

Encounter Level: 3

A large jumble of walls leads the heroes into a haphazard cul-de-sac. Some of the walls around them look quite sturdy, whereas others seem as though they couldn’t stand up to a good sneeze (in fact, all are quite sound). The area itself is perhaps 30 feet from wall to wall in each direction, with no other apparent exits. The party may not have to turn back, however;

from above the low wall that blocks their path to the west (deeper into the ruins), a thin plume of smoke rises toward the heavens. The wall is rough and broken, yet appears relatively stable; it should make for an easy climb, even for those not particularly skilled in such endeavors.

Before they attempt to scale the wall, however, they may wish to examine the bodies. Lying at the base of the wall are three ratman corpses, shredded in the same fashion as those described above in “Dead Ratmen.” These are clearly fresh corpses, however, as the blood has yet to dry. Like the others, these have no obvious weapons on them.

The heroes have but a moment to examine their fallen foes, however, before a deep-throated rumble breaks the silence. From atop the north wall, the PCs catch a quick glimpse of something like a great black panther—and then, with a sudden leap, it’s upon them!

This blade beast has made its lair here in the ruins of Sky Keep for many a year, scavenging swords and other blades from the ruins. This is the creature to which the dead ratmen fell victim—and it fully intends to add the PCs to its tally.

Neither the PCs nor the blade beast are surprised, so the GM should simply have everyone roll initiative.

The Traitor Revealed

Once the blade beast is dispatched, the heroes may attempt to scale the wall to see just what is producing the smoke on the other side. It is an easy climb, with each PC requiring only a single Climb check (DC 5). The rocks and bricks do shift a bit under an armored (Medium-size) character’s weight, but not dangerously so.

From atop the wall, the PCs can see across the plateau before them. The ground dips a bit, forming a large, shallow depression in an area almost completely free of ruins. Beyond the depression stand several structures that look almost completely intact nestled against the base of the spire of Mount Croiganne, which continues up past the plateau.

In the center of the depression is a small contingent of ratmen nearly 60 feet away—there are well over a score of them. They stand in a rough circle, scimitars or shortbows in furry hands, staring outward in all directions. Only the slope of the ground and the height of the wall to which they cling keeps the PCs out of sight; there is no way to approach the circle unseen.

In the midst of the slitheren circle, the heroes see a small cooking fire and two additional forms, also ratmen but different from those surrounding them. One is very large, nearly seven feet in height and dark of fur (this is Spineback; see sidebar, pg. 36). The other, crouched low, is almost completely hidden by a hooded cloak the color of old blood. (This is Tears of Her Enemies, red witch servant of Mormo; again, see sidebar, pg. 36.)

Blade Beast (1)

CR 3; SZ Large magical beast; HD 4d10+12; hp 41; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 17 (–1 size, +1 Dex, +7 natural); Atk bite +7 melee (1d8+4), 2 claws +2 melee (1d6+2); Face 5 ft. by 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA project blade; SQ absorb blade, bladed body; AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 17, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Listen +7, Move Silently +5, Spot +6.

Feats: Alertness.

Project blade (Su): Instead of attacking with claws and bite, the blade beast may project any weapon it has absorbed, attacking with it at +7 melee and dealing damage by weapon type +4. It will tend to favor the +2 *longsword of frost* it currently has absorbed, attacking with it at +9 melee and dealing 1d8+6 points of damage (the beast cannot speak the command word to activate the blade’s frost property).

Absorb Blade (Su): Any time a bladed weapon strikes the blade beast, the weapon’s wielder must succeed at a Strength check (DC 15) or the blade is absorbed into the beast. Absorbed weapons can be recovered only when the beast is slain.

Bladed Body (Su): In combat, those blades previously absorbed by the beast jut through its skin; anyone attacking it with a non-reach melee weapon has a 20% chance of taking 1d2 points of slashing damage from these blades; unarmed attackers suffer this damage automatically.

Source: **Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie**, page 17.

Blades: If the blade beast is killed, all weapons that it has absorbed may be recovered from it. Not counting any weapons obtained from the PCs, the blade beast has absorbed the following weapons:

- 1 bastard sword
- 1 dwarven waraxe
- 3 daggers
- 1 greatsword
- 1 handaxe
- 2 longswords*
- 4 scimitars
- 3 shortswords
- 1 shortspear

* One of the longswords has runes carved down one side of the blade that translate from Draconic as “Hoarfrost.” It is a +2 *longsword of frost*, activated by speaking its name aloud.

Tears of Her Enemies is leaning over a small pool of water, one apparently leftover from the storm. She is clearly speaking to the water, and the heroes can just barely make out an image in the pool. (She has cast a *scrying* spell from a scroll—note that this variant, although still a sorcerer/wizard spell, uses a pool as its focus like the druid version.) PCs who wish to eavesdrop must have silence from their companions, and

The Inner Ruins

Troubleshooting

Impatient parties may attack the slitheren circle at once rather than observing the conversation to follow. If this happens, 6 ratmen move to intercept the party, and Tears, Spineback, and the others break away immediately, heading into the inner ruins.

Unfortunately, this means that the party hasn't learned the identity of the traitor. Unless the GM wants to grant them another opportunity—perhaps they succeed in capturing and questioning one of the ratmen within the complex—they will be unable to expose her identity in the following chapter. All this means is that the party will be unprepared for Amra Varith's treachery in Chapter 3, which is perfectly acceptable to the story.

must then succeed at a Listen check (DC 14). Similarly, any character who wants to see the image in more detail must take a moment to scoot along the wall to the right (requiring an additional Climb check at DC 5, and allowing the ratmen a Listen check, at -5 for distance, against the PC's opposed Move Silently check, to hear the movement); the PC must then succeed on a Spot check (DC 14).

Those who succeed at this Spot check see a brown-haired, green-eyed woman's face in the water staring up at the red witch: it's Amra Varith, lieutenant to the Home Commander of the Vigils! Characters who listen successfully hear the following portion of the traitor's conversation.

The End of the Conversation

"...at all with your current progress," Amra the traitor is saying, barely repressed anger making her voice quiver like a lute string. "Do you understand the consequences of failure here, you little rodent?!"

The robe-covered slitheren hisses loudly; the towering ratman beside her tenses also, but she places a quick, calming hand on his arm. "I understand better than you, I think," she warbles, producing tones that no human throat could mimic.

"I don't think you do. I've placed my position here in jeopardy to ensure that your stupid minions would know where they were at every step of the way. Now I learn that not only are they still alive,

Unlike the wreckage surrounding them, the innermost portions of Sky Keep are still partially intact. Three or four structures still stand in the immediate vicinity, interconnected by several partially collapsed passageways. Even casual examination reveals that someone or something has worked on the structures since Sky Keep fell. Portions of the walls have been rebuilt, gaps filled in by loose stacks of haphazardly placed stone. The passages have even been extended, albeit with primitive craftsmanship, to link with various passageways in the stone of the mountain itself.

The Builders

Although the PCs don't know it, a small tribe of spider-eye goblins once dwelt in the caves atop Mount Croiganne, occupying the mountain and the ruins both. These foul creatures repaired many of the crumbling walls, and it was they who added to the surviving corridors, linking the halls with the nearby caves. In fact, it was they who, with much effort, removed the Vault of Chardun from the church (area 1a) and dragged it into one of their caverns (area 9), where they attempted to force it open and plunder the riches they were certain must be inside.

The devil Chardun sent to guard the vault had other plans.

The creature permitted the goblins to move the iron receptacle, figuring that it would be safer in the caves than in the ruins. Once the goblinoids attempted to force it open, however, they drew its wrath; in moments, the infernal guardian slew every one of the tribe.

In the years since, many of the spider-eye goblins' corpses have been animated by the guardian's *animate dead* ability. They still roam the caves, and the heroes will certainly run into them during their hunt for the Vault.

they're headed your way! They could be in the ruins even now! Yet you—"

"They are," the witch interrupts, "and I've better things to do than stand here listening to your sniveling!"

A claw gestures, a tail twitches, and ripples obscure the surface of the pool. When they fade mere seconds later, Amra's face is gone.

"Ignorant wretch," the witch snaps harshly. Then, muttering to her hulking companion in the ratmen's inhuman tongue, she turns and strides toward the nearest intact structure, her retinue breaking the circle one by one to fall into place behind her.

The Ruins

There are plenty of entrances to the ruins. Every uneven portion of a building on the map (such as the northeastern and eastern portions of areas 1 and 1a; the south wall of 3a; and the “dead end” passages southeast of area 3, east of area 3, and east of the corridor between 2 and 3) represents a wall that has collapsed and been “filled in” by the goblins. These rebuilt walls are poorly constructed, amounting to little more than piles of stone, and have multiple gaping holes in them, sufficient to allow even a stout (unarmored) human to squeeze through.

Tears, Spineback, and most of the slitheren move into the nearest building, leaving behind 3 sentries. Even if the PCs attack, they won’t be able to stop the red witch and some of her minions from entering the complex; Tears simply sends additional warriors to intercept them. If this occurs, the PCs face 6 ratmen rather than 3, and the GM should omit the ambush in area 2, below.

Tears and her followers enter the ruins via the holes in the walls in the northeast corner of area 1.

Slitheren (3 or 6): Use stats found above in “Ratman Ambush.”

Ruined Church (1)

Although most of it has fallen into ruin, enough of this structure remains for PCs to determine that it was once a temple of some sort. Stone pews, cracked and in some cases broken into tiny chunks, litter the room. Carvings of the gods battling unseen forces adorn the walls, or at least those walls that have survived relatively intact — primarily the south wall. The massive double doors leading westward are similarly decorated. Although shattered and covered with dust and thick layers of dried bird droppings, the floor seems upon close examination to have once been tiled in a mosaic pattern of symbols holy to various gods. Sparrows and other small birds hop about the rafters, keeping a wary eye on these strange invaders of their domain.

Unfortunately, even though the PCs know that their enemies passed through mere moments before, it is nearly impossible to track them; the dust is completely free of any trail. Before leaving the room, Tears of Her Enemies used a *prestidigitation* cantrip to sweep the dust about, all but obliterating her tracks. Even with the Track feat, it requires a Wilderness Lore check (DC 26) to follow them.

The doors to the west are moderately heavy (Strength check, DC 14, to open), but otherwise aren’t much of an impediment. The hallway beyond bears similar engravings on the walls and a similarly tiled floor. It is impossible to tell what sort of structure or chamber the hall might once have led to; now, poorly placed bricks mortared with simple mud link

it to one of the many passages that honeycomb Mount Croiganne. The air grows more humid and colder when the heroes step from the crafted corridor into the natural one, almost as though they’d stepped through some invisible barrier.

Should any of the heroes examine the structure to the south, allow a Search check (DC 10). Success indicates the searcher has found the rusted remnants of broken iron brackets in the floor at the area marked 1a: something very large was here at one point, but it has since been moved, apparently broken free and dragged away by brute force. Particularly clever characters might guess — correctly — that the Vault of Chardun *was* here, but that it was moved some time ago. They’ve still got a bit of searching ahead of them, but at least it suggests that the red witch might not have found it yet, either.

Sitting Room (2)

Encounter Level: 2

The broken wooden frames and rotted scraps of cushion and cloth suggest that this room was, at some point in the distant past, some form of sitting or waiting room, perhaps intended for those waiting to see the priests in the church. If the heroes battled 6 slitheren sentries outside, this room is empty; if not, they are attacked the instant they step through any one of the various entrances by a trio of ratmen.

Slitheren (3): Use stats found above in “Ratman Ambush.”

Dining Hall (3)

This structure is in better shape than the others; it appears that whoever or whatever shored up the walls also made a point of tidying and straightening this room. An enormous oak table occupies much of the room. Although cracked in numerous places, it too still seems sturdy. Primitive crockery adorns the table, much of it covered with scratches and, more disturbingly, dried blood. Bones are strewn across the table and scattered about the room, including several humanoid skulls. There’s no sign of the feasters, but it’s quite clear that they were dining on humans! The entire chamber smells musty, with the faintest tang of decay.

This is where the spider-eye goblins feasted on those humans who came to explore the ruins of Sky Keep. Although the undead goblins no longer need to eat, the devil has ordered them to maintain this room, and to make it obvious that humans were the main course, in order to frighten any who come here.

The area marked 3a was the kitchen, and is in far worse shape than the dining room. The southwest wall is partially crumbled, allowing any who wish to squeeze through to the outside. The PCs find several old chopping blocks and ruined stoves, but nothing of any interest except the passage leading west into the caves.

Should the PCs attempt to leave this room before examining area 4, the door to that area bursts open and the spider-eye goblin zombies lurking within lumber forth to attack. See area 4 for details.

Lounge (4)

Encounter Level: 3

This was intended as a room to which diners might retire for an evening of conversation and wine, but the furniture is now smashed to little more than kindling. The northeast corner has collapsed, leaving large gaps. A hole in the west wall leads into yet another mountain cave.

The chamber is also occupied by 11 of the guardian devil's zombies. Assuming they haven't already battled the party in area 3, they attack the moment the door opens. Their multiple limbs move slowly but steadily, their faceted eyes gleam dully in the light, and an inky black liquid dribbles and drools from between rotted and broken teeth.

Spider-Eye Goblin Zombies (11)

CR 1/4; SZ Small undead (goblinoid); HD 1d12+3; hp 9; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+1 size, -1 Dex, +2 natural); Atk claw +1 melee (1d4), or bite +1 melee (1d6); SQ darkvision 60 ft., all-round vision, partial actions only, undead; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +2; Str 11, Dex 8, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1.

Feats: Toughness.

Special Attacks: All-round vision [Ex] (cannot be flanked); Partial actions only [Ex] (can perform only partial actions; thus, they can move or attack, but can only do both if they charge); undead.

Source: MM, "Zombie, Small," and "Creature Collection, page 186.

Ambush (5)

Encounter Level: 4

The caves that wind through Mount Croiganne are humid and uncomfortably cold. Drops of condensation form on the armor, weapons, and skin of the heroes, raising goosebumps and sending shivers down the spine.

As the heroes approach the fork in the passage, allow any character with darkvision to make a Spot check (DC 16) to avoid being surprised by the ratman archers here, as a small barrage of arrows arcs from both corridors ahead!



There are 6 slitheren waiting here to ambush the party: 3 ratmen wait down each passage, 50 feet from the fork. They will not advance, but simply launch arrow after arrow until either the PCs close or they are drastically wounded by return fire. If the party chooses to advance down one corridor or the other rather than splitting up, the slitheren from the other corridor will leave their position and attack the party — with more arrows — from behind. Should any 2 of either group be slain, the lone survivor retreats down the passage. (However, the unlucky ratman who retreats towards area 6 will most likely be slain by the zombies there.) The two northern passages lead into a veritable warren of catacombs that have no direct bearing on this story. Whether they contain anything of interest is left entirely to the GM.

Slitheren (6): Use stats found above in “Ratman Ambush.”

The Maze (6)

Encounter Level: 1/2 to 4

In this area, the corridors come together in various twists and turns to form a small, naturally occurring labyrinth of stone. Many of the walls are covered in a slick translucent slime that makes marking the walls (with chalk, for instance) difficult at best.

The maze is also the lair of no fewer than 23 spider-eye goblin zombies. Once the PCs have entered the maze, they are subject to nearly constant assault. At every intersection, the GM should roll 1d6–1. The heroes are attacked by that many zombies, which can come from any direction. If the heroes engage in a running battle, they may end up fighting more than one such group at a time. It’s important for the GM to keep track of how many zombies have been destroyed, as the attacks cease once all 23 are dead.

Spider-eye goblin zombies (up to 23): Use stats found above in area 4.

Corpse Cavern (7)

Encounter Level: 4

This enormous cavern, partially broken into smaller sections by natural walls and thick stone columns, has recently been the site of some truly horrific battle. Blood and a black, viscous ichor are splattered across the floor and the walls; every step is an effort as boots stick to the ground, coming free only with a mighty tug and a hideous slurping sound. Hairy bits of flesh quiver amidst the gore; obviously, many of those who died here were ratmen. Other corpses are those of spider-eye goblins — likely they were zombies, though, judging by the advanced state of decay.

It appears that a small band of ratmen and a larger hoard of zombies wiped each other out. A close inspection of the dead, however, reveals a few discrepancies. Any character who succeeds on a Track

(Wilderness Lore), Search, or Heal check (DC 10) determines that many of the wounds on the ratmen and the zombies were made by some sort of spiked lash, and not by any recognizable weapon.

Just as they come to this realization, or in any case after they have spent 3 rounds in the chamber, a humanoid figure drops from the high ceiling to land some 25 feet from the group. It’s a hideous creature; humanoid, pale of skin, garbed in black leathers — but most strikingly, its face and bald head are covered in ritual scars of revolting design.

Fleshcrawler (1)

CR 4; SZ Medium-size undead (6 ft., 3 in. tall); HD 5d12; hp 48; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft., climb (with tethers) 50 ft.; AC 18 (+4 Dex, +2 natural, +2 leather armor); Atk bite +4 melee (1d6+2 and paralysis), 2 claws +2 melee (1d4+1); or 2 hand tethers +6 ranged (1d6), mouth tether +4 ranged (2d6 and paralysis); Reach 5 ft. (50 ft. with tethers); SA tethers of sinew, paralysis; SQA darkvision 60 ft., undead; AL CE; SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6; Str 15, Dex 18, Con —, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 12.

Skills: Balance +10, Climb +10, Hide +10, Listen +10, Spot +8, Tumble +12, Use Rope +12. **Feats:** Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Power Attack.

Tethers of sinew (Ex): If a fleshcrawler hits with a tether attack, the tether’s barbs or hooks sink into the opponent’s body, dealing 1d6 points of damage (2d6 points of damage with the mouth tether) and latching onto the opponent’s body. This hold allows the fleshcrawler to draw the opponent 10 feet closer each round (provoking no attacks of opportunity); a creature can break free with a successful Escape Artist check (DC 19), or else a Strength check (DC 15). A fleshcrawler that pulls a victim to within 5 feet of itself can bite and claw with a +4 attack bonus to these attacks in the same round.

Paralysis (Ex): The fleshcrawler’s saliva causes paralysis. A victim bitten by a fleshcrawler or hit by its mouth tether must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 13) or be paralyzed for 3d6 minutes.

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage. Immune to effects which require a Fortitude save, unless the effect targets objects.

Source: *Creature Collection*, page 76. Where statistics between this sidebar and *Creature Collection* differ, these revised stats take precedence.

"The manuscript," it hisses in a rasping, bubbling voice, its words revealing blackened, rotting teeth and an obscenely swollen tongue. "Give it to us!"

This fleshcrawler, sent by one of the Abyssal lords, has come for the manuscript, for the demon lord knows that it can cause untold chaos on Scarn with such a vital prize. The PCs will not be able to comply, of course, since they don't *have* the manuscript yet, but try explaining that to an undead Abyss-spawned bounty hunter...

Slime Pit (8)

Encounter Level: 4

Long before they reach it, the PCs can tell there's something odd about the chamber ahead: a steady green glow permeates the corridor. By the time they arrive, the glow is strong enough that the party can see clearly without any light source of their own.

The heroes find themselves in yet another large cavern, this one vaguely oval in form. Stalactites hang above, shining a sickly gray-green in the glow from the floor. And that floor is hideous! The entire cavern is covered in a layer of green slime, at least several inches deep. There is no solid footing at all, save for a few bits of rock and broken stalagmite that rise above the slime. There's so much of the stuff present that its phosphorescent glow, normally barely noticeable except in pitch blackness, is sufficient to light the cave more effectively than any torch.

Other than finding another route — certainly a wise option! — the heroes might find several means of crossing the slime. Perhaps they have something sturdy in which they could wrap their feet and legs; they would lose whatever material they use, of course, but it should require only 2 rounds to cross the cave at a walking pace. (Any attempt to move faster requires a Balance check, DC 10, for double movement, or DC 15 for running; failure indicates the character has slipped on the green slime and fallen into it.)

Alternately, a character might try jumping from stone to stone. The stones are haphazardly placed, with a random distance (1d10+5 feet) between each one. Failure on a Jump check means the character has landed in the slime.

Green Slime

Dungeon hazard: CR 4; 1d6 points of temporary Constitution damage per round; can be scraped off on first round, then must be cut, burned, or frozen off (apply damage to victim as well); deals 2d6 points of damage per round to metal or wood, cannot dissolve stone; destroyed by extreme heat or cold, sunlight, or *lcure disease*.

The Central Chamber (9)

Encounter Level: 6

The winding corridors that lead to this central cavern slope downward as they approach; clearly, this chamber lies some distance below the surrounding caves. As the heroes approach, they hear sounds of combat echoing from the vast space before them; the clash of swords, the sizzling and crackling of magic, and the screams of the dying meld together into a single drone.

If the party enters by the south passage, they will be in sight of the combatants the instant they arrive; should they come from the north, they will have to move into the main portion of the chamber to see what is happening.

The scene before them, once they view it, is brutal. Near the center of the cavern stands a hideous creature some six feet tall, covered in moist slime from its high, pointed ears to its long, twitching tail. Its fingers — wrapped about the haft of a blood-drenched, toothed polearm — are wickedly clawed, and its face is covered by a disgusting beard that is matted into clumps by its own slimy excretions.

Facing this diabolic creature, weapons bloodied by battle, are Tears of Her Enemies and her surviving retinue. The ranger Spineback still stands, his twin short swords dripping devil ichor. Several other slitheren stand with blades raised, even though most of them are unable to harm the devil due to their lack of magic. Tears herself has already depleted some of her spells, but she has several potent surprises remaining.

Under normal circumstances, the party might be tempted to let their opponents fight it out, but here they don't have that option. An enormous iron box, almost like the casket of a giant, stands upright in the northwest corner. Engraved with ancient writings and potent symbols, this is clearly the Vault of Chardun. Several ratmen are clustered around it, studying it, seeking a way in. Tears and Spineback stand between them and the enraged devil, trying to ward off the guardian long enough for their fellows to retrieve the manuscript. If the PCs hesitate, they risk allowing the slitheren access to the Vault — and thus to the manuscript within.

That said, there are several actions the heroes might take.

Attack the Devil

Should the heroes decide the Vault's guardian is the greatest threat and join with Tears and her retinue against it, the red witch is only too glad to have the help. She and the others will cooperate fully with the PCs for as long as it takes to kill the devil — at which point they waste no time at all in turning on their former allies.

Attack the Slitheren

Whether they attack Tears and Spineback or go after the ratmen working on the Vault makes no difference. The slitheren fight back furiously, and the

The Devil and the Ratmen

The following stats represent the combatants after several rounds of melee, not at full strength. Challenge Ratings are lower than normal because the combatants are injured, having depleted some of their abilities fighting each other.

Barbazu Devil: CR 4; SZ Medium-size outsider [evil, lawful] (6 ft. tall); HD 6d8+6; hp 32; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 17 (+7 natural); Atk +8/+3 melee (1d10+3 and wounding, glaive); or 2 claws +8 melee (1d4+2); AL LE; SA wounding, beard, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10/+1, SR 23, baatezu qualities; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 15, Dex 11, Con 13, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills: Concentration +7, Hide +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +6, Sense Motive +6, Spot +6. *Feats:* Cleave, Improved Initiative. *Languages:* Infernal, Celestial, Draconic.

Wounding (Su): A hit from a barbazu's glaive causes a bleeding wound. The injured creature loses 2 additional hit points each round until the wound is bound (Heal check DC 10) or the creature dies. This is an ability of the barbazu, not of the weapon.

Beard (Ex): If a barbazu hits a single opponent with both claw attacks, it automatically hits with its beard for 1d8+2 points of damage. The affected creature must also succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 14) or be infected with devil chills (see DMG, Chapter 3, "Disease").

Spell-like abilities: At will — animate dead, charm person, command, desecrate, magic weapon, major image, produce flame, suggestion. Barbazu also can induce fear by touch as the spell, except it affects only the creature touched. These abilities are as cast by an 8th-level sorcerer (save DC 10 + spell level). A barbazu can teleport without error (self plus 50 pounds of objects only) at will as the spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer.

Baatezu qualities: Immune to fire and poison; cold and acid resistance 20; see in darkness; telepathy 100 ft.

Note: This barbazu has already used its summon baatezu and battle frenzy abilities and may not do so again today.

Source: MM, "Devil."

Tears of Her Enemies, female red witch slitheren, Ill6: CR 3; SZ Medium-size monstrous humanoid (5 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 1d8+3 (base) + 5d4+15 (Wiz); hp 29 (33 unwounded); Init +2

(Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 17 (+2 Dex, +1 natural, +4 *mage armor*); Atk bite +3 melee (1d3), 2 claws –2 melee (1d4); SA spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills: Climb +8, Concentration +11, Escape Artist +6, Hide +6, Jump +2, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (religion) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Ritual Magic +6, Scry +8, Spellcraft +9. *Feats:* Craft Wand, Heighten Spell, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Focus (Necromancy), Scribe Scroll. *Languages:* Slitheren, Ledean, Dwarven, Giant, Goblin, Common.

Illusionist spells remaining [opposed school: Enchantment]: 0 — *detect magic*, *mage hand*, *read magic*; 1st — *disappear**, *magic missile*, *sleep*; 2nd — *invisibility*, *web*; 3rd — *dispel magic*.

Possessions: Ring of spell storing (currently holds *teleport without error*), wand of *manaspear** (caster level 5, with 8 charges remaining), scroll of *persistent image* (unless used in "A Divine Sending" [q.v.]).

*Spells marked with an asterisk are from **Relics & Rituals**.

Source: **Creature Collection**, page 154. Where statistics between this sidebar and **Creature Collection** differ, these revised stats take precedence.

Spineback, male slitheren, Rgr4: CR 3; SZ Medium-size monstrous humanoid (6 ft., 8 in. tall); HD 4d10+12; hp 30 (40 unwounded); Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +1 natural, +3 masterwork studded leather armor); Atk +6 melee (1d6+4, +1 *short sword*) and +6 melee (1d6+2, +1 *short sword*); or +8 melee (1d6+4, +1 *short sword*); or bite +7 melee (1d3+3) and 2 claws +2 melee (1d4+1); SA favored enemy +1 (magical beasts), two-weapon fighting; SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +14, Handle Animal +3, Heal +3, Hide +5, Move Silently +5, Knowledge (nature) +2, Spot +5, Wilderness Lore +5. *Feats:* Dodge, Mobility, Track. *Languages:* Slitheren, Ledean, Common.

Possessions: Masterwork studded leather armor, "Kalgath" and "Kruuge" (twin +1 *short swords*).

Slitheren (3): Use stats found above in "Ratman Ambush," but each has a 14 Intelligence and skills as follows: Climb +8, Disable Device +4, Escape Artist +6, Hide +6, Jump +4, Listen +2, Move Silently +5, Open Lock +6, Search +4, Spot +3.

devil is unwilling to cooperate. Attacking any of the ratmen results in a furious three-way battle with no cooperation at all between sides. It doesn't end until two of the three factions are dead.

Wait and Watch

For some parties, the sight of the ratmen working at the Vault may not be incentive enough to act. If the PCs wait, they observe several rounds of fierce combat

— and, oddly enough, several of the ratmen at the Vault disappearing into thin air — before one of the slitheren manages to bypass the Vault's mystical protections and opens it. Instantly they dart inside, followed by Tears of Her Enemies. The devil screams in fury, but it's too late for him, or the heroes, to stop the slitheren. Once in the vault, the ratmen grab the manuscript and teleport to safety via Tears' magic ring.



As if that weren't sufficient, the devil will immediately attack the heroes in its rage, unless they depart before it notices them.

The Vault of Chardun

Wearied and no doubt bloody, the PCs are finally able to examine the object of their quest. The Vault of Chardun appears to be constructed of solid iron, unmarked by rust or the ravages of time. It is engraved around its edges with ancient runes and symbols holy to the Great General. A Knowledge (religion) check (DC 15) reveals that several of the symbols do not belong, as they have no relevance to Chardun. Those same symbols, when studied with Knowledge (arcana) (DC 15) are revealed to be an arcane trap of some sort. (Alternatively, a rogue can detect them as such with a Search check DC 20.) In either case, it requires a Disable Device check (DC 22; rogues only) or a successful *dispel magic* (against caster level 10) to bypass the magical trap. Any attempt to open the Vault while the trap is still active

requires the character to make a Will save (DC 18) or be teleported into the center of the green slime cavern (area 8). The same save is also required if any attempt to disarm or dispel the trap fails by 5 or more. The complex lock requires three successful Open Lock checks (DC 18) to open.

(When Sky Keep still floated in the heavens, the trap teleported thieves out into empty air; when the Vault was moved into the caverns, the guardian devil altered the trap to target the green slime chamber.)

When the Vault finally opens with a loud screech and a puff of stale air, the PCs see nothing inside save a small, padded pedestal and, atop that pedestal, a large tome. The cover is bound in burgundy velvet, and is locked with an iron clasp. The clasp has had *arcane lock* cast upon it at caster level 20; the PCs will be unable to open the book, although the Vigils probably have the means to do so.

But first, of course, the PCs have to get the Chardun-damned thing back to Lave...

Chapter Three:

The Serpent Unveiled

The PCs, armed with the knowledge of the identity of the traitor in the very heart of the Home Command of Vesh, rush back to Lave. The GM is encouraged to play through some parts of this trip, helping to foster a sense of urgency. This may even give the PCs a chance to gather allies on the trip, possibly arriving just in time at the head of a small troop of vigilants from other cities.

Arrival in Lave

As the PCs near the city, they enter a thunderstorm that seems to hover centered over the city itself, bolts of lightning arcing down to destroy swathes of the city. The PCs encounter people fleeing the city, babbling fearfully of titanspawn and dragons.

Once the PCs close the distance, they do indeed see a fearsome sight—a massive draconic shape, some 30 feet in length, leaps into the sky, beats its wings to remain aloft, and then breathes a cylinder of white-hot lightning. The clap of thunder that accompanies it is drowned out by the sound of stone shattering, wood cracking, and the cries of the dying.

From this distance, the PCs should make a Spot check (DC 15). Those who succeed also notice a feminine form, some 9 feet tall, swooping among the clouds and bolts of lightning. Most will recognize it as a storm hag.

The City Gates

The gates of the city stand open and blackened, twisted and cast aside by a mighty force, and the corpses of two dead city guards lay nearby, as blackened and twisted as the gates they once guarded.

People run hither and yon, trying desperately to bind wounds, find hiding places, extinguish fires, or simply escape. Any allies that the PCs may have brought with them quickly go to aid those nearby who need their help, or to battle dragon and hag. The streets are filled with people fleeing the small bands of titanspawn that now hunt them—bands of ratmen, asaatthi, and even some great serpents are occasionally seen.

PCs examining the scene who succeed at a Knowledge (tactics) or Wisdom check (DC 15) realize that the attacks by the hag and the dragon seem to draw Lave's defenders away from the Hall of Command, which remains eerily untouched and quiet.

If any PC asks a citizen or defender where Amra Varith or the Home Commander are, she finds that they were last seen in the Home Command itself, reportedly gathering items of power with which to fight the titanspawn.

Troubleshooting

It is vital that the PCs find their way to the Home Command for the next part of this chapter. The GM is encouraged to use whatever means to get them there, alone—city defenders and vigilants are busy fighting off the dragon and hag. If the PCs arrive at Lave with allies, those allies quickly head out to defend the city, urging the PCs to warn the Home Commander. Other allies encountered also make it clear that the PCs should get the book to the Home Commander.

If necessary, the GM may wish to... “herd” the PCs towards the Home Command using various titanspawn, such as blade hoods, ratmen, and asaatthi. (Certainly, woodrack dragons and storm hags are beyond the characters' capability at this point, yet they might make a good means to steer PCs in the “right” direction.)

It soon becomes clear that the enemy creatures have been commanded to avoid the Home Command.

A Hex-Plague

Encounter Level: 4

As the PCs make their way through the city, they hear a scream from nearby. A woman, clutching her child and sobbing hysterically, comes running out of a nearby building towards the PCs. She takes cover behind them, as a low, loud hiss escapes from the shadows of the doorway whence she just emerged.

A massive serpentine creature slithers out of the darkness to attack the PCs. It is a blade hood, which rises up and spreads its hood, sliding the jagged bone shards along its back from their sheathes with a sickly sound. It hisses, and a strange rune glows a dull blue

hue on its throat as it attacks with first its gaze and then its “blades.” (See the “Hexed Blade Hood” sidebar for its combat statistics.)

The creature is under orders to keep any non-titanspawn away from the Home Command. It will attack and attempt to lure PCs away from the large manor that houses the Home Command. It will lunge past other targets in favor of any PCs who seem to be trying to ignore it in order to make it to the Home Command, provoking attacks of opportunity in order to do so if necessary.

Hexed Blade Hood

This blade hood has been altered by a storm hag of the Dar al Annot, one of several such beasts prepared for the assault on Lave: it has been modified with the hex creature template (**Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie**, pg. 224).

Hexed Blade Hood: CR 4; SZ Large magical beast; HD 6d8+12; hp 41; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 17 (–1 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural); Atk—slash +9 melee (1d8+9), or bite +9 melee (1d8+9); Face 10 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA improved grab, quick strike, constrict 1d8+9, gaze; SQ darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, telepathy, immunities; AL CE; SV Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +0; Str 22, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 3, Wis 7, Cha 12.

Skills: Escape Artist +4, Listen +3, Move Silently +5, Spot +3.

Improved grab (Ex): To use this ability, the blade hood must hit an opponent of up to Medium-size with its bite attack. If it gets a hold, it can constrict.

Quickstrike (Ex): A blade hood can launch its body length at an opponent in a lightning-fast strike. It thus gains +4 to its attack roll when charging, rather than the usual +2.

Constrict (Ex): A blade hood deals 1d8+9 points of damage with a successful grapple check against Medium-size or smaller creatures.

Gaze (Su): At will — range 30 feet; 1d4 points of temporary Dexterity damage (Fort negates, DC 14).

Telepathy (Su): A hex creature may communicate telepathically with its hag creator to a distance of 10 miles.

Immunities: Immune to charm and sleep effects, and to electricity.

Source: **Creature Collection**, page 18. Where statistics differ, these revised stats — which will appear in the upcoming **Creature Collection Revised** book — take precedence.



The Hall of Command

Originally built as a lavish manor house belonging to a noble of the Ledean Empire, the Hall of Command sits upon a hill above the city of Lave. With the founding of the Vigils and the institution of the Home Command, this old manor house was turned into the seat of government for the nation of Vesh.

The walls of the Hall of Command are crafted of stone, cunningly fitted together with grooves and mortar. The inner walls of the first floor are crafted much as the strong outer walls, while the upper stories' walls and floors are of seasoned wood, lacquered and waxed.

Exterior Walls, Interior First-Floor Walls: Hardness 8, hp 90.

Interior Upper-Floor Walls, Floors: Hardness 5, hp 60.

As the PCs arrive at the entrance, the doors sit closed, almost ominously so, untouched by the chaos that has enveloped the city. A Spot check (DC 12) will discern a small bit of blood beside one of the doors. The doors themselves are locked from within. If these prove too tedious, however, the windows to either side of the large double doors may be shattered easily and climbed through.

Front Doors: Hardness 5, hp 20; Break DC 23; Open Lock DC 25.

Interior Doors (unless otherwise noted): Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 18, Open Lock DC 20.

First Floor

The first floor is the main operating level of the Hall of Command, holding various offices and meeting chambers.

WC: Those rooms marked "WC" are water closets, small privies complete with narrow drains that empty into the sewers of Lave.

Entry Foyer (1)

The entry foyer has fine hardwood floors and a large woven rug of dark green. There is a massive staircase directly opposite the entryway.

There are signs of some kind of violence having taken place herein — a Track (Wilderness Lore) check (DC 13) indicates that at least one heavily bleeding form was dragged through here, soaking the carpet with blood. The trail plainly leads to the water closet east of the main staircase.

Those who search the closet find the bodies of two guards shoved within, one with his throat slit and the other stabbed multiple times. A second Track (Wilderness Lore) check (DC 18) will reveal that whoever slew these guards promptly climbed the staircase, taking a bit of blood with them. By the first landing, the trail is lost (as the blood wore off by that point).

The Path to Treachery

While the details of the mansion in its entirety are presented herein, some GMs may wish to ensure that their groups get right to the "action." In order to do so, have them notice the bloodstains at the entry foyer, and thus, likely, find the bodies. Make the trail that leads to the infirmary a bit more obvious. This will lead them to the carnage to be found there. Once they are on this "trail," it should be relatively easy to keep PCs moving up the stairs and to the final confrontation with Amra.

West Foyer (2)

The west foyer is sometimes referred to as the Rally Foyer, as it is often where Vigils meet before heading out on their extensive trips from Lave. The floor here is hardwood. The door to the armory is in the southern part of the room, with a small conference room and the archway that leads to the rest of the west wing in the north.

Armory (3)

The door to this room is locked.

The base of a small corner tower, this level of the Hall of Command's armory is where the majority of the truly heavy equipment was stored. This room contains a number of unlocked armor chests and suits of armor hung upon the walls. It obviously holds far less suits of armor and shields than usual, for it is now nearly empty. It contains:

- 2 suits of chainmail, stored in chests.
- 3 chain shirts, hung upon the wall.
- 3 suits of studded leather armor, stored in chests.
- 5 small steel shields, hung upon the wall.
- 2 large steel shields, hung upon the wall.
- 1 tower shield, hung upon the wall.

Conference Room (4)

This room is often used for brief private meetings with visitors. It is furnished with three simple wooden chairs and candle-mountings on the east and west walls.

Sitting Room (5)

Comfortably appointed with antique tables and over-stuffed chairs positioned to allow those seated a view out the large windows, the sitting room is where many after-dinner discussions take place.

Dining Hall (6)

The dining hall is massive, with a pair of wrought-iron chandeliers hanging over the four long oak tables. The table nearest the large picture windows

MANOR HOUSE: GROUND LEVEL



1 Square = 5 feet

boasts fine velvet-covered seats, and is where the Home Commander and his staff and guests normally dine. The other tables are trestle-seated.

It appears as though there was a meal in progress here when the attack began, as the tables are still loaded down with food — a thick, rapidly congealing venison-and-carrot stew, large wheaten rolls (now hard and cold), quartered and sugared pears, and tankards of fine ale.

West Garden Room (7)

This is an elegantly appointed room that looks out onto the garden, with antique Ledeian furnishings and a large marble statue of a kneeling maiden along the eastern wall. The maiden holds out a dish as if in supplication (the dish is often filled with fresh flowers from the gardens).

A Search check (DC 16) will reveal that the maiden's large sunburst amulet can be twisted. When this action is performed, the statue slides silently aside on well-oiled grooves, revealing a secret passage between the west and east garden rooms.

Secret Door: Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 18; Search DC 18.

Gallery (8)

Once the art gallery of the massive Ledeian manor, the Hall of Command has taken to displaying some of the works of Vesh's finest painters and sculptors here.

Major-domo's Quarters (9)

The door to this room is locked.

These quarters are appointed with nice but unassuming furnishings, including a small table with four chairs, a desk and large bed under which are stored various chests of clothing.

Hiding in this room is the Major-domo Trophion (see Appendix, pg. 53), along with the servants of the Home Command: the groundskeeper, Esco (*male human*, Com3, LN; AC 10; hp 9; Spd 30 ft.; sickle +2 melee, 1d6+1); the cook, Gelitta (*female human*, Com2, N); a maid, Ciniele (*female human*, Com2, NG); and Pirezia, another young maid (*female half-elf*, Com1, CG). Esco is armed, and Trophion has donned his (magic) armor and weapons, fully prepared to defend the servants in his charge to the death.

If the PCs knock, Trophion will answer through the door, asking who they are. He will not recognize their voices, but can be talked into opening the door with a successful Diplomacy check (DC 16); however, he will do so very carefully and suspiciously. If the PCs attempt to pick the lock or to simply break down the door, Trophion will position himself to sneak attack the first person entering, hiding so that all the PCs see is three women hiding behind a middle-aged, frightened-looking man in a dirty smock, trembling, with sickle in hand.

The women will not fight, but rather attempt to flee if violence occurs and one of their guardians falls. Esco will fight, urged on by Trophion, although if he loses 5 or more hit points, he will attempt to flee as well.

If told about Amra, Trophion will scarce believe her treachery, thinking the story to be some kind of mistake. It is obvious that he wishes to go and find out what is happening in the manor, but feels beholden to defend the servants who are under his care. If the PCs manage to convince him of their sincerity (he will be somewhat reticent to trust them, given the attack on Lave), he tells them that the Home Commander was headed for the vault of magic items kept at the top of the infirmary tower, in the south-east corner of the Hall of Command.

Gelitta's Quarters (10)

The door to this room is unlocked, and the room itself is decorated poorly but comfortably, with a lovingly hand-knotted rag rug next to the bed matching the knitted pillow-slips. There is a small cloth-bound journal on the small table next to the bed, written in simple Veshian, which contains a number of recipes. Its pages have obviously seen the preparation of many meals in the kitchens.

Kitchens (11)

The kitchens are finely appointed, copper pots and pans scoured bright and hanging here and there over dark walnut countertops. There are a number of sharp knives and other kitchen implements here, as well, and the shelves right beneath the windows have several loaves of cooled bread on them. Dried herbs and some fruits and vegetables hang here and there, and the extensive shelves along the north wall hold wax-sealed wheels of cheese, cured hams, sausages, and bottles of wine.

It is obvious that some kind of meal preparation had been taking place when the titanspawn invasion occurred, as there is a bowl of half-mixed dough with various herbs and crumbled cheese in it sitting on a counter — a legacy of Gelitta's hurried flight from the kitchen and her retreat to the safety of Trophion's quarters.

A Spot check (DC 15) discerns that someone left here in a hurry, leaving a trail that may be followed with a Search or Track (Wilderness Lore) check (DC 10). This trail leads out into the hallway outside, north past the fountain room, and into Trophion's quarters.

Staircase (12)

This is the servants' staircase, which leads to the upper floors. A Spot check (DC 16) discerns a trail of tiny specks of flour on the stairs. A Search or Track (Wilderness Lore) check (DC 10) will reveal that someone fled the kitchens in a hurry, taking refuge in the Majordomo's quarters.

Fountain Room (13)

This part of the manor was built over a natural spring so as to force its waters up into the hollow

northeastern wall, whence it pours from the mouths of the lions and falcons carved along the top of the wall. This forms a natural fountain in the room as the water pours out into a marble pool at the base of the wall, where it may be collected for household use. The top of the pool has a large drain, out of which excess water flows into the gardens beyond the wall.

East Foyer (14)

The east foyer is far more elegantly appointed than the west foyer, with fine tapestries and rugs as well as antique Ledeian furniture scattered here and there. Guests to the Hall of Command are often brought here to await their business, especially if their visit is unexpected.

Storage (15)

This is a small storage closet where things like the weapons, cloaks, and riding boots of visitors are kept for the duration of their stay at the Hall of Command. The closet is currently empty.

Primary Infirmary (16)

Once a library, this room has been turned into the main infirmary of the Vigils. There are a number of beds here, one of which actually has a body lying in it, covered by a dark blanket. Although the man under the blanket was obviously (if examined) recovering from burn wounds, his throat has been slit very recently, coloring his white undersheet a brilliant crimson. The PCs see this only if they investigate under the blanket, of course.

Infirmary Storage (17)

When the PCs open the door to this storage area, they immediately see the body of a young woman dressed in the vestments of a cleric of Tanil crumpled on the floor. A Search, Track (Wilderness Lore), or Heal check (DC 5) confirms that she was dumped into this room shortly after being kidney-stabbed, as the dark blood pooling about her immediately suggests.

This space is where fresh bandages, ointments, medicinal herbs, and other mundane tools of the healing arts are kept for those who work in the infirmary. One shelf contains 6 healer's kits (see Chapter 7, PHB, "Class Tools and Skill Kits" for details). Along one wall is a locked hardwood cabinet.

Hardwood Cabinet Door: Hardness 4, hp 12; Break DC 15; Open Lock DC 25.

The cabinet holds a number of magic items kept on hand for dire emergencies. There are five potions (4 *cure light wounds* and 1 *cure moderate wounds*) and a *wand of cure light wounds* (caster level 1st, with 18 charges).

Waiting Room (18)

A finely appointed chamber with gorgeous artwork on the walls and antique furniture throughout, this is the room where guests are often escorted to await an audience or council in the Sun Room (room 21).

Clerk (19)

A large oak desk and shelves of books and scrolls make up the clerk of the Home Command's office. It is obvious that whoever was working at this desk left in a hurry, as papers are still strewn haphazardly about and a number-ledger of some kind still lies open on the desk.

Antechamber (20)

Decorated with fine tapestries and several small wooden benches, this antechamber is where the various servants and functionaries of those in the Sun Room wait, in case their services should be needed.

Sun Room (21)

The entire eastern wall of this room is made up of huge picture windows shot through with flecks of mica, so that the sunlight streaming through it is split into shimmering golden spangles. This light illuminates the rich golden hue of the massive table that takes up most of the room. On the western wall is a huge shield lacquered with the coat of arms of Vesh.

It is this chamber that sees most of the official business of the nation of Vesh. As such, it is magically warded against scrying and other divination magics (effective caster level 22).

Map Room (22)

This windowless room boasts wall-to-wall shelves, containing all manner of maps. In the center of the room is a large table upon which has been painted the known map of Ghelspad, with metal tokens to indicate the presence of known Vigils (see *Secrets & Societies* for details on the areas of influence of the Vigils).

East Garden Room (23)

An elegantly appointed room that looks out onto the garden, with antique Ledean furnishings and a large marble statue of a youthful warrior dressed in the old uniforms of Ledean soldiery along the western wall. The youth bears the short sword of the Ledean Legions in one hand and holds his other out, almost as though offering help. The bowl at his feet is often filled with fresh flowers from the gardens.

A Search check (DC 16) will reveal that the youth's sunburst amulet can be twisted. When this action is performed, the statue slides silently aside on well-oiled grooves, revealing a secret passage between the west and east garden rooms.

Secret Door: Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 18; Search DC 18.

War Room (24)

The door to this room is locked.

Where the Sun Room is the chamber for politics, diplomacy, and statescraft, the War Room is where the nation of Vesh plans its battles and coordinates its defenses. Its large table is painted with a map of Ghelspad, similar to that in the map room. However,

this table contains far more delicate information, for the markers upon it indicate the presence of known troop placements for all the lands of Ghelspad. The information is shady at best for Dunahnae and the lands along the western shores, but the placements are updated nearly daily for lands such as those of the Calastian Hegemony. This room, like the Sun Room, is warded against divination (caster level 22).

Conference Room (25)

These are small conference rooms outfitted with oak tables and chairs, used for quick conferences with visitors or for debriefing vigilants newly arrived from the field.

Chapel (26)

This beautifully appointed chapel is dedicated to serving the servants of Vesh. There are five shrines herein. The northwest wall boasts a lovely statue of Tanil, bow drawn and ready, her Herald at her feet. The northern wall bears a fine statue of Corean, his sword held before him in one hand and his other hand outstretched in benediction. The western wall bears a statue of Madriel, wings outstretched, both her gaze and her hands turned upward as though she were flying back to her home in the sun. Each of these shrines has a small altar at the base of the statue.

The southwestern wall bears a statue of Enkili and Hedrada facing away from one another. The northeastern wall bears a carved scene depicting Chardun and Vangal also facing away from one another, while the vulture-hag form of Belsameth crouches at their feet, almost as though she were preparing to strike. These shrines also have small altars at the base of the statues.

When the attack began, Erem and his acolytes rushed to bring the wounded here from the infirmary, gathering up several citizens along the way who happened to be here on simple errands and needed protection. The chapel thus now houses a number of frightened folk, guarded by Erem and his acolytes.

The ill from the infirmary were brought here by the clerics and lay healers, though one of their number who went back to fetch the last wounded man from the infirmary has not returned (her body is that in the infirmary storage room, area 17). Erem, feeling that this meant that forces had reached the Hall of Command, refused to allow anyone to seek this woman out for fear of endangering further lives. Rather, he and his acolytes now guard the entrance, he with his mace and shield, they with crossbows. Erem calls out to any who come around the corner and into the field of vision of the chapel entrance, demanding that they stop and identify themselves. The clerics are capable of offering some measure of healing (GM's discretion), but otherwise cannot leave the chapel.



The chapel contains Erem (*male half-elf, Clr7/Lor3, CG*) and his acolytes Elosa (*female half-elf, Clr2, CG*) and Taddeo (*male human, Clr1, CG*), as well as three lay healers (*human or half-elf, Exp2, any good*) and their six patients, plus another five citizens who were at the Home Command for various reasons.

Second Floor

The second floor is the private level of the Hall of Command, providing living quarters for those who work for the Home Command as well as guest quarters for visiting dignitaries.

Bath: Those rooms marked “Bath” are full bath-chambers, marvels of Ledean engineering that utilize intricate drain-systems for the privies and have large marble baths within. Unlike some old Ledean architecture, however, these rooms boast no water sluices from roof-top cisterns, so that water has to be carried to the individual chambers. All of the rooms do, however, have small braziers upon which copper kettles sit, as well as water casks that are kept filled by the servants.

Blade Armory (27)

This level of the armory holds various melee weapons, all hung along the walls or placed on weapons racks in the middle of the room. Most of the arms here have been taken to aid in the defense of the city. A few remain, however:

- 3 longswords
- 5 short swords

- 4 battleaxes
- 4 shortspears
- 3 longspears

West Loft (28)

This large loft overlooks both the rally foyer and the dining hall much as a balcony. In addition to the small guest bath, it also boasts a small side balcony, set back through a pair of arches that overlooks the gardens.

State Room (29)

The doors to this room are locked.

These are easily the most elegant quarters in the entirety of the Hall of Command, as they are intended for visiting dignitaries of particularly high pedigree — nobility, royalty, and the like. It is said that these chambers have housed Emili Derigesh, some Vera-tren nobility, and even a member of the Calastian royal house from a time before the Druid War. Its fine hardwood and velvet furnishings are elegant, and the tapestries that hang on the wall are always bright and fresh, a feat that some say is accomplished through some small magic woven in. A bell-pull here rings in the Major-domo’s quarters.

Esco’s Quarters (30)

This room is fairly messy, with grass- and dirt-stained clothing here and about. The room smells of freshly turned soil, and the bed is unmade. One cabinet along the north wall contains a number of groundskeeping implements, including several sickles and knives.

Empty Servant Quarters (31)

The door to this room is locked.

These servant quarters, sparsely furnished, are apparently unoccupied.

East Loft (32)

This loft overlooks the east foyer and also bears a large bath for the use of visitors, as well as the entrances to the (separate) private quarters of the Home Commander and his lieutenant, as well as a large storage room.

Additionally, however, just beyond the door to the storage room is a secret entrance. A small panel of wood, seemingly loose, can be depressed, releasing the latch that holds the door closed, allowing it to swing open to reveal the dark secret passage that leads to the Vigilant Infirmary. This passage is often used by Kelemis Durn to check on those vigilants who are resting therein.

Secret Door: Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 18; Search DC 18.

Long-term Infirmary (33)

This infirmary is furnished with a number of comfortable beds and bedstands, which are divided by folding screens. There is also a full herbalist's table along the northern wall, with several shelves full of herbs and the tools used to prepare poultices, ointments, and unguents on the counter itself. Most of the beds are obviously not in use, although a few of them apparently were but have been quickly evacuated.

Vigilant Infirmary (34)

These quarters are similar to the Long-term Infirmary, save that this is for vigilants alone, allowing them to continue to do things such as make reports and debrief without revealing sensitive information to their fellow patients. There is no one here currently, nor does it seem that anyone was here when the attack began.

In addition, there is a secret door here. A small panel of wood, seemingly loose, can be depressed, releasing the latch that holds the door closed; this allows it to swing open, revealing the dark secret passage that leads to the east loft.

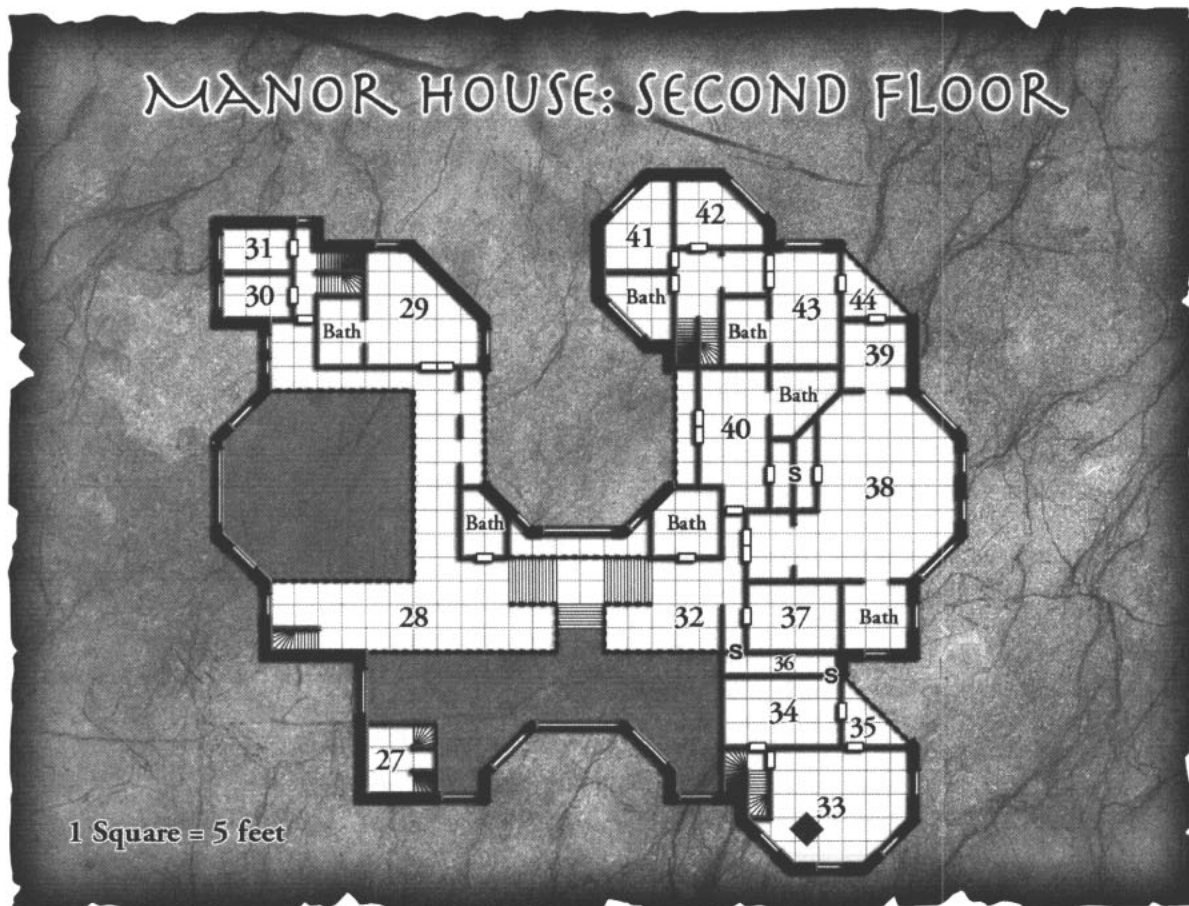
Secret Door: Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 18; Search DC 18.

Balcony (35)

This balcony overlooks the city of Lave past the grounds of the Home Command. From it, the devastation that the woodrack dragon and storm hags of the Dar al Annot have wrought is obvious — plumes of smoke drift skyward here and there, and one of the hags or the dragon might occasionally be seen.

Secret Passage (36)

This passage is dark and can only be navigated by touch or by someone with darkvision or low-light vision (some small amount of light does penetrate the gloom, as there are small spyholes in the wall that



allow someone within to peer out into the storage room as well as the Vigilant Infirmary). At either end of the passage, the latches that hold the secret doors closed are apparent, as are the peepholes; these allow someone using the passage to make sure that no one is outside the door, to prevent anyone from opening it while someone is within viewing distance.

Storage (37)

The door to this room is locked.

This room, once a small bedroom of some kind, now holds excess furniture and other such large items for the Home Command; most of it is covered in canvas, creating a dusty, cobwebbed wasteland of strange shapes.

Kelemis Durn's Quarters (38)

This massive bedchamber has been decorated with Kelemis Durn's taste in natural woods and brass in mind. It is a warm room, with large picture windows in the east. Only a small portion of it is actually reserved for sleeping; Kelemis has turned the southern half of the room into something of an office, separating it from his sleeping quarters with folding screens.

The closet along the western wall of his room actually contains a secret passage that leads to a similar closet in Amra Varith's room. The Ledeon nobles who once owned the manor obviously used this passage for their illicit affairs, but the passage has been blocked off by boxes of possessions. The passages are still there, however, behind those boxes and activated by pressing on a coat-peg. This undoes the latch that holds the door closed, allowing it to slide open.

Secret Door: Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 18; Search DC 18.

Durn's Armory (39)

This room is warded with two *glyphs of warding*, one on the archway that leads into it from Durn's quarters and the other on the doorway that opens to the balcony outside. Anyone who attempts to enter the archway or open the door without speaking the password ("Gergio," the name of Durn's first lover, long dead at the hands of titanspawn while on Vigilride) triggers the rune, a sonic attack that creates a massive noise, ostensibly alerting those nearby.

Thunder Glyph: CR 3; 5d8 points of sonic damage, plus sound alerts all nearby; Reflex half (DC 17); Search (DC 28); Disable Device (DC 28).

There are several chests and wall-mounted weapon racks within; the chests have all had *arcane lock* cast upon them (caster level 12). These chests contain various mementoes as well as space for Durn's various magic items, most of which he currently bears with him, leaving the chests empty. One chest, however, still bears a goodly amount of Durn's mate-

rial wealth: gold and silver bars and coins, and semi-precious stones, which altogether amount to 21,450 gp. Another chest contains six potions: 3 *cure light wounds*, 2 *cure serious wounds*, and 1 *haste*.

Chest: Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 33 (23 without *arcane lock*); [Open Lock DC 25 without *arcane lock*].

It is obvious that the wall racks once bore weapons and armor on them, but those are gone, as well.

Amra Varith's Quarters (40)

Amra's quarters are done in expensive Ezelite lace and velvet, not at all in keeping with the serious demeanor generally displayed by the Home Commander's lieutenant. The soft femininity of her quarters is simply another facade behind which she hides. A thorough investigation of her quarters (Search DC 18) will reveal an alchemist's kit; any character who makes an Alchemy check (DC 15) notes that it seems stocked specifically for concocting and distilling poisons.

Additionally, Amra's closet also bears a trigger for the secret door that separates this room from Durn's: in this chamber, however, the cloak-peg is already pulled, allowing the door to slide open easily.

Secret Door: Hardness 5, hp 15; Break DC 18; Search DC 18.

Religious Library (41)

Though nominally a religious library for the storing of canonical texts, writings of priests, and clerical scrolls, Erem's insatiable scholar's nature has driven him to fill this room nearly to bursting with esoteric books, scrolls, maps, and all manner of writings and things of interest to him.

A locked hardwood cabinet along the western wall contains his most precious volumes. This cabinet is protected by a *glyph of warding* (another "Thunder Glyph") that will trigger unless the opener is a worshipper of Tanil. It holds numerous treasures, including several ancient writings that in times past eventually became the foundation of the primary text of Tanil's church in Vesh, *Words of the Huntress*; an old spellbook with the words "Raelen's Battle Book" inscribed on the front cover; and several clerical scrolls (*resurrection*, *hallow*, *restoration*, 3 *cure serious wounds*, 2 *heal*, and 2 *raise dead*). A few of these scrolls are beyond Erem's spellcasting ability, and are thus irreplaceable save through the aid of more powerful clerics—these are unlikely to be used frivolously.

Hardwood Cabinet Door: Hardness 4, hp 12; Break DC 15; Open Lock DC 25.

Thunder Glyph: As that in area 3.

Acolyte Quarters (42)

These quarters are set aside for the use of Erem's acolytes. There are four bunks in this room, each of which contains a small chest at its foot. The chests

Raelen's Battle Book

A character who makes a Knowledge (local: Vera-tre) check (DC 20) or a Knowledge (history) check (DC 25) can cite the following story. Otherwise, the loremaster Erem knows the story quite well.

This text once belonged to an elven wizard of Vera-tre who served Tanil's clergy and died during the Titanswar. The wizard, known as Raelen Silverbow, was known as a hunter of the undead and an archer of great skill, a great friend to the people of Vesh and a pious worshipper of Tanil. He was slain in battle when he and a handful of Vigils, along with several Lilliandeli allies, were set upon by a company of titanspawn and undead, led by a powerful despair. Somehow, this tome surfaced in the hands of a young human wizard in Bride Lake, who sold it to Erem 12 years ago for a tidy sum.

Contents: 0-lvl — *disrupt undead, flare, resistance, spark**; 1st — *burning hands, mage armor, magic weapon, true strike*; 2nd — *cat's grace, daylight, Lilliandel's flurry**; 3rd — *flame arrow, greater magic weapon, unbuckle**; 4th — *purifying flames**.

* These spells are from *Relics & Rituals*.

contain only spare vestments, journals, and other personal mementoes; all are currently locked, however.

Chest: Hardness 5, hp 10; Break DC 18; Open Lock DC 20.

Erem's Quarters (43)

The quarters set aside for the Chaplain of the Vigils of Vesh reflect both Erem's scholarly nature and his love for the outdoors. His windows are invariably thrown wide, allowing plentiful sunlight in his room. Potted plants flourish near the windows, which are hung with seed-bowls for birds.

The southern wall of these quarters bears a personal altar to Tanil as well as heavily-packed shelves of books and journals. Erem's desk is nearby and is likewise buried beneath a mound of paper, scrolls, and other written scraps and notes. Light in this room is enhanced by several lamps that have been treated with *continual flame*, and that can be covered at night by black shades. Erem keeps nothing of any real value here save his magic items, which he currently bears.

The door to the balcony is protected by a *glyph of warding* identical to those which protect the Home Commander's chambers and the Library, save that the password allowing entrance here is one of the Secret Names of Tanil.

Thunder Glyph: As that in area 3.

Balcony (44)

As on the infirmary balcony (room 35), the city can be seen from this balcony.

Third Floor

The third floor holds the guest chambers for the Home Command, as well as other personal spaces.

Bath: As on the second floor, above.

Missile Armory (45)

This part of the armory tower holds the crossbows and bows used by the Vigils. As with the other levels, many of the weapons normally kept here are gone, save for the following mounted on the walls:

- 2 shortbows
- 1 composite shortbow
- 3 longbows
- 2 heavy crossbows

There are also several crates with full quivers (20 arrows per quiver) and bolt-cases (10 bolts per case), ready to be snatched up and put to use. The crates are mostly empty, although there are several with ammunition yet left:

- 8 quivers of longbow arrows
- 5 quivers of shortbow arrows
- 8 cases of heavy crossbow bolts
- 4 cases of light crossbow bolts

Guest Quarters (46)

The doors to these rooms are all locked.

These quarters, set aside for visiting dignitaries, are all finely furnished. They are all currently empty.

Pirezia's Quarters (47)

Pirezia, one of the maids for the Home Command, dwells here. Her room is neat and filled with hanging potted plants whose fronds drape nearly to the ground. Her bed is covered in a rich green blanket of Vera-tren make, and one of the small tables in her room bears her collection of elven trinkets, purchased from various merchants as part of her fascination with her elven heritage. The center of this near-shrine is a masterwork dagger, the dagger that her human mother took from her elven father's body when he was killed by titanspawn as the two traveled from Amalthea to Vesh in order to start a new life.

Cinieles's Quarters (48)

Cinieles's quarters are, despite the fact that she is one of the Home Command's maids, fairly untidy. The furnishings are very plain and worn.

Healer's Landing (49)

As the PCs come to the top of the stairs in this landing, they find the still bleeding but quite dead bodies of two Veshian guards. They were obviously killed very recently, with precise strikes of a short blade to vital areas. Blood is tracked further up the staircase by delicate, booted feet, likely those of an elf or a slight human woman.

MANOR HOUSE: THIRD FLOOR



1 Square = 5 feet

Lay Healers' Quarters (50)

Several cots and small chests make up the furnishings in these rooms, set aside for the use of the lay healers in the Home Command's infirmary. There is nothing of value here.

Observatory (51)

This small structure is situated atop the Hall of Command, and is often used by Erem in his contemplation of the heavens. The floor of the observatory is inlaid with the zodiac of the Scarred Lands (see **Relics & Rituals 2: Lost Lore**), and there is a spyglass hanging from a hook in the northeastern corner.

Meditation Chamber (52)

This plain, wood-paneled chamber is well away from the ruckus and hubbub of the Hall of Command as a whole, providing a necessary refuge for meditation and contemplation.

Widow's Walks and Attics

This level consists mainly of widow's walks, the railed tops of several of the taller parts of the Hall of Command. The widow's walks currently each have two guards (*human, War2, NG*) armed with longbows atop them. They do not challenge those who seem human as they near the building (which is why the PCs were not accosted as they neared), but mainly keep an eye out for titanspawn and flying hags or dragons.

Attic (53)

The attic is where large furniture, statuary, and the like is stored. More importantly, however, it is also the only entrance into the vaults of the Hall of Command, sealed with an illusion-protected iron door that now hangs open.

Vault (54)

This vault is where dangerous or exceedingly powerful items of magic are stored, as well as those Veshian government funds that are actually kept on the premises.

There are three chests here, each one containing upwards of 10,000 gp each, in a variety of coinage and gems. However, these chests are arcane locked and treated with the "Thunder Glyphs" (see above), which will trigger should the lids of the chests be tampered with without speaking the password first.

Chest: Hardness 5, hp 20, Break DC 17, Open Lock DC 30 (before *arcane lock*).

Thunder Glyph: As that in area 3.

Additionally, there is a glass and ironwood case along the north wall, which has a number of items of magic within it, though they do not detect as magical under a *detect magic* spell, thanks to the enchantments upon the case. Those who choose to do so may easily break through the fragile wood and glass construction of the case — it is meant for display. It, too, possesses a Thunder Glyph trap. The items in the case are:

- A staff of white oak heartwood, capped in bronze on either end and deeply carved with a vines-entwining-arrows motif. There seems to be soot settled deeply in the carved grooves, and the staff seems to have seen quite a bit of battle. This staff is the Staff of Urkan of the Iron, a wizardly devotee of Hedrada and ally of the Veshian archer folk heroine Sun's Flight. The staff is a *staff of defense*, with 14 charges remaining.
- A book whose cover seems crafted of a motley of metals, some finely shaped and fitted, others rough and barely attached. In truth, this is the Book of the Victors, a massive tome that records the mightiest gifts of the gods to their followers — the true rituals that may be cast by clerics. This book, some several hundred pages in length, may be used to learn all of the clerical true rituals from *Relics & Rituals*.
- Ten of each of the Vigil Medallions (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 190).
- A finely crafted, if somewhat neglected longsword. If the grime were removed from the blade, the stylized cloud-and-wind pattern might be made up, but the sapphire that gleams in its hilt is unmistakable. This blade is Huriki, the Air Sword of Scarn (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 218), though none currently living know this.
- Four three-foot long rods crafted of some dark red wood, and set with black bands. Two of the bands have metal loops, as though the rod were meant to be strung on cord and slung across the back. In truth, these items are fully charged *vigilant's rods* (see *Relics & Rituals 2: Lost Lore*, page 178).

"My God! Look at all this stuff!"

It would seem that there are a number of things which might be looted from the vault, between the magical treasures secreted away, and those on the body of Kelemis Durn.

Do keep in mind, however, that the PCs are essentially working on behalf of the nation of Vesh, even in an unofficial capacity. They may very well snatch up items and weapons to use against Amra (who, it should be noted, should not hesitate to do likewise), but keeping them is out of the question, especially once Kelemis is *resurrected*.

The PCs may, indeed, try and do something as foolhardy as flee with these (admittedly great) treasures. But remember — the Vigils specialize in hunting those who would flee their justice.

- A folded silk bundle, which contains a large banner emblazoned with the sun heraldry of Vesh. This is a *renown banner* (see *Relics & Rituals 2: Lost Lore*, page 196).
- The Book of the Grey Circle, one of the few copies of the Codex of Non (see *Relics & Rituals 2: Lost Lore*, page 226) in existence.

The final part of this chapter occurs here in the vault: see "A Serpent in the Nest," below.

A Serpent in the Nest

Home Commander Kelemis Durn lies sprawled in a pool of blood in the center of the vault. The blood appears to be very fresh and his limbs are very rigid and hyper-tensed; a Heal or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 14) indicates the work of some paralytic poison, which an attacker used to render Durn helpless before killing him — there is little doubt that he is dead. He is, however, still equipped with the following equipment:

A *silver bow**, Home Commander's Uniform (+3 *glamered*, *shadow studded leather of silent moves*), Reaperwind (+2 *keen*, *defending longsword*), Raptor (+1 *shortsword of throwing*), *wand of cure moderate wounds* (20 charges) and a *medallion of the fly**.

* These items are from *Relics & Rituals*.

Unless the PCs are attempting to move quietly (i.e., making Move Silently checks) as they come upon the vault, Amra hears them approach. Even if they are moving silently, she should make a Listen check to hear their approach. If she does indeed hear them, she will attempt to avoid being seen, at least until she can identify who they are (making a Hide check against their Spot checks in order to do so).

The Amphora still sits in a glass case sealed with a *glyph of warding* set to trigger when touched by any evil creature. This ward is otherwise identical to those above, and Amra will wait for the characters either to remove the ward or to leave... or to dawdle long enough to exhaust her patience. When any of those things happen, she leaps out of her hiding place and attacks, if possible using her sneak attack ability. She also attacks immediately if she is seen by one of the PCs.

Thunder Glyph: As that in area 3.

Combat Tactics

When the PCs encounter her, Amra has already cast several of her spells. Notably, she has cast *resist elements (fire)* and has treated the giant wasp poison administered to her claws with *Sethris' potency*, which grants it the following stats: Injury DC 21; initial damage 1d6 Dex, secondary damage 1d6 Dex.

She can strike separately with each of her claws if she desires, although she waits until the venoms on her blades have been used before doing so. She does not hesitate to cast *charm person*, which she will use to take an enemy out of the fight if she will not

provoke attacks of opportunity for casting in melee. She does not order charmed enemies to fight, but will instead beseech them to help one of the fallen poison victims (the Home Commander if nothing else).

Amra will attack those characters wearing the lightest armor first (i.e. those who likely rely most on Dexterity bonuses for their AC) with her claws and then switch to those warriors who apparently rely on great Strength for their combat prowess, attacking and poisoning them with her poisoned short swords.

After a couple of envenomed strikes against such characters, however, Amra targets spellcasters for her attacks, starting with offensive spellcasters, as she is fully aware of the damage such individuals can do. She will not break off her attacks until the spellcaster falls (or she is reduced to half hit points — see below), focusing all of her attacks on him. The only thing that will get her to switch targets is if the spellcaster retreats by a route impossible for her to follow without provoking attacks of opportunity, or if a divine spellcaster begins using curative magics too extensively on those she has already eliminated from the fray.

Rooftop Chase

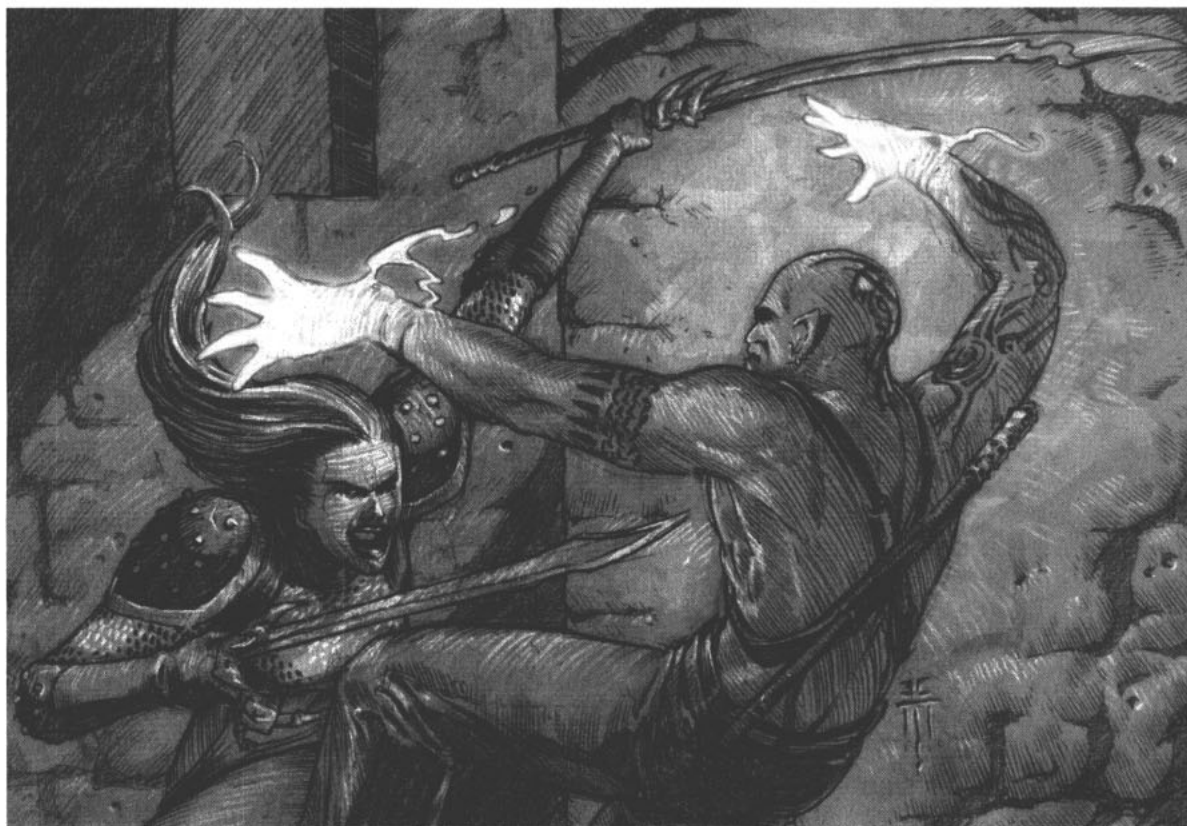
Should Amra's hit points drop to half or less (28 or fewer), she will attempt to flee, taking the Serpent Amphora with her if she can — but her own life is more valuable to her than the Amphora. She will not bother with the stairs, but will instead leap through the western window in the attic to the rooftop below, which she has already opened, attempting a Jump check (DC 15)

to avoid taking damage from the fall (if she fails this roll, she takes 1d6 points of subdual damage). If there is no easy way past the PCs, she will Tumble past them in order to prevent attacks of opportunity.

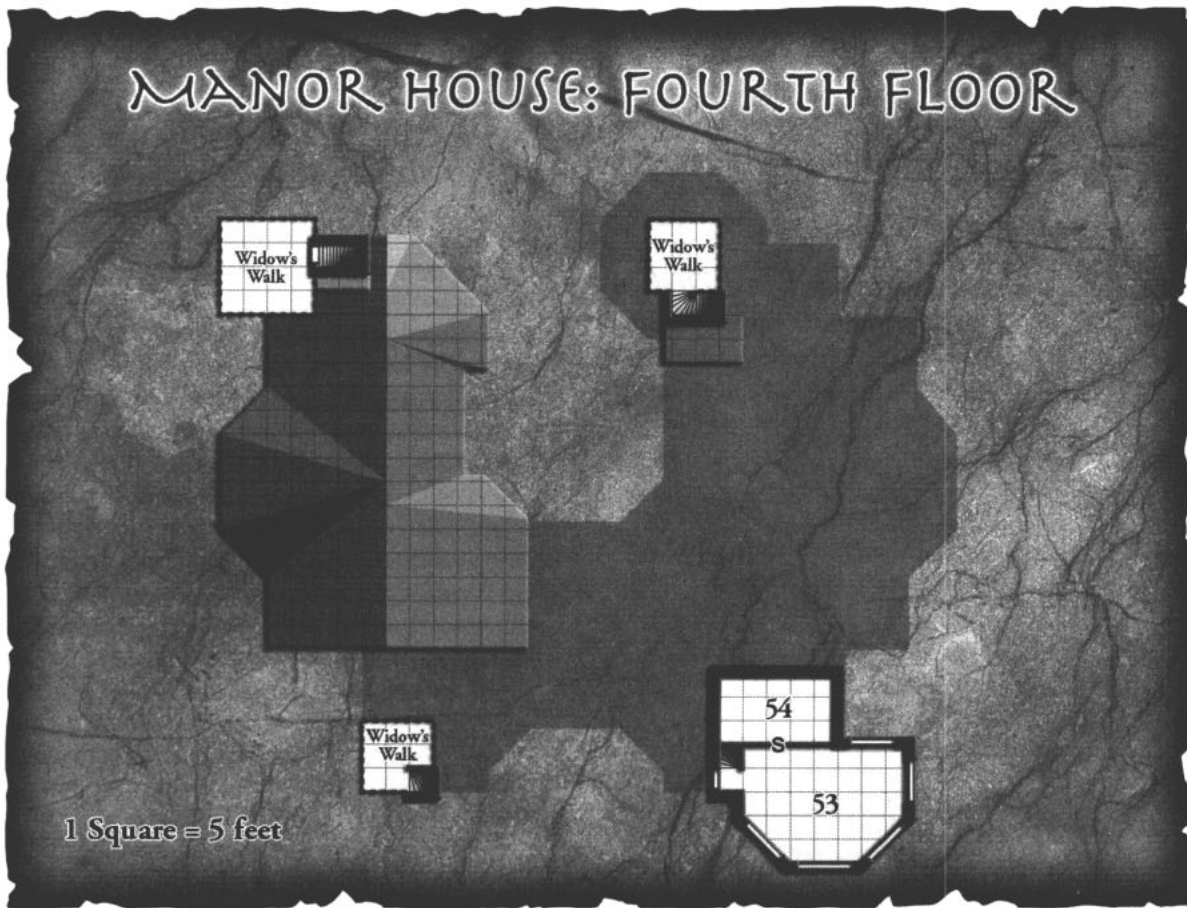
If she makes it out to the roof, she flees from the PCs, calling out to the guards upon the widows' walks (*human*, *War2*, *NG*; longbow +3 ranged, 1d8) to help her. They will fire immediately upon anyone giving chase. However, the driving rain outside imposes a -4 penalty to all ranged attack rolls (see DMG, Chapter 3, "Weather Hazards" for further effects of precipitation), both for PCs firing after the fleeing Amra and for guards firing on pursuing PCs. Further, keep penalties for lighting — based on the time of day at which this encounter occurs — in mind when running this combat (see PHB, Chapter 8, "Concealment").

Pursuing Amra across the wet, slippery roof is a difficult proposition. Moving half speed across the roof requires a Balance check (DC 15). Failing this check in a given round means that the character does not move that round; failing it by 5 or more points indicates that the character has slipped and fallen. If a fall occurs within 15 feet of an edge, the character slides off the roof, plummeting 20 feet to the ground below (taking 2d6 points of falling damage, or 1d6 with a successful Tumble check, DC 15).

Those who wish to move their full speed across the slippery and precarious rooftop may do so as a move-equivalent action, but suffer a -5 penalty to the Balance check. When double-moving at full speed, the character must make two checks, each at the -5 penalty.



MANOR HOUSE: FOURTH FLOOR



Amra will move at double her normal speed in her first round on the rooftop (thus two checks at -5), unless someone is closely pursuing her. In such a case, she attempts a bull rush attack to force her pursuer off the roof. Amra must make a successful Balance check (DC 15) in order to make such an attempt; further, a failure on her attack roll will render her unable to enter the opponent's square, while failure by more than 5 points will send her toppling off the roof instead.

Amra's goal is the window to the bathroom of one of the guest suites (room 46). She intends to shatter the window there, climb into the room, and flee to the hall window just south of Pirezia's quarters (room 47), which she will open in order to climb out and scale down the wall using her rope. After she reaches the ground (which she may do with a single full-round action), she will flee into the nearby darkness and hide or run off, as necessary.

Epilogue

In all likelihood, the PCs will manage to stop Amra from escaping. If they do not, they are likely to have prevented her from getting the Amphora, or at least to have prevented her escaping with it (even if

their success was by some wild, Enkili-driven wild slip during the rooftop chase).

The Aftermath

The PCs are very likely to wish to aid the people of Lave in rebuilding. Unwilling to be bereft of the leadership of Kelemis Durn in such a time of need, Erem uses his cached *resurrection* scroll (see room 43) in order to bring the Home Commander back from the shores of death. The strength and magic of the PCs are greatly appreciated.

In the meantime, the PCs witness firsthand the demoralization of the Vigils, who are greatly shocked by the treachery of one of their own. (Whispers of a "Curse of the Dark Motak Vigil" may be overheard.) Kelemis apparently lapses into a deep melancholy — which, Erem assures those who are concerned, is entirely normal for those recently brought back from death.

The PCs themselves are recognized as heroes by the Home Command and those vigilants in the know, but their involvement is kept covered up to the general populace for fear of reprisals from the Dar al Annot. Kelemis (or perhaps Erem as his spokesperson) also confides in them that he may wish to gain their assistance again in the future.

Appendix

Dramatis Personae

Amra Varith

As a young girl in Moor, Amra wanted nothing more than to be a vigilant. She and her childhood friends often played at “orcs and vigilants,” although she is the only one of her peers who maintained that interest. While the others grew up and married or took up apprenticeships with craftsmen and merchants, Amra spent more and more time in the wilderness near her home. There she met Aronis, a ranger some five years her elder, himself a new recruit to the vigilants. In his spare time, he showed her the real skills that made a vigilant; though she was very apt at stealth, he taught her to survive in the wilderness, to track, and to fight.

Amra, too, eventually joined the vigilants as an apprentice. Her parting with Aronis was a tearful one, as he earned his amber medallion and was sent away as part of the Acernoth Delta Vigil. She trained in earnest in his absence, hoping to earn her way into the same vigil, and to be reunited with him — she’d never realized that she was in love with him until the day he departed.

Soon, sadly, word of his disappearance came. His patrol had been ambushed by slitheren from the Mourning Marshes. Her superiors refused to allow her to depart while she was still a trainee, but once she had earned her own amber medallion, she set out for the Acernoth Delta. She never reported to the commander of the Vigil there, however, but instead found the site where Aronis’ patrol had been ambushed and, remarkably, tracked the slitheren back into the Marshes.

Unfortunately, though she is indeed skilled in woodcraft, the swamps were a new hazard for her, one for which she wasn’t quite prepared. She ran afoul of a patch of quicksand and was found by a patrol from the Coven

of the Celestial Urn (a warren of red witch slitheren; see **Vigil Watch: Warrens of the Ratmen**, page 66). Her time there was spent in a drug-induced haze, as the rat-witches who served Mormo subjected her to various brainwashing techniques, both psychological and magical. Eventually she was allowed to depart, and found her way back to the Acernoth Delta; now, however, she was sure that the Vigil was responsible for the death of Aronis — after all, if they’d let her go right away, she might have done something to save him.

Now she waits, armed with skills in seduction and assassination by poison taught to her by a mysterious woman allied with the red witches. Now on assignment in an administrative post (the Vigils believe — quite rightly — that her time in the Mourning Marshes has made her too unstable for work in the field), she has made herself indispensable to the Home Commander. She recently received word from her slitheren superiors that an item of power has been seized by the Vigils, and she has been set to watch, in order to repay her apprenticeship to the Ladies of Serpents.

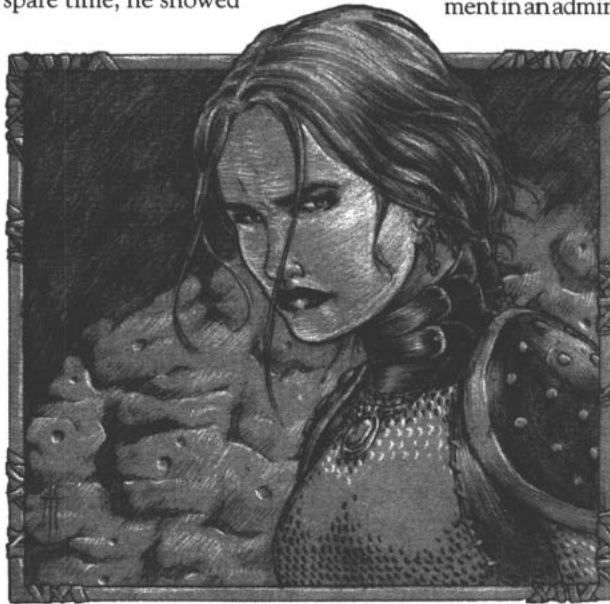
The Lady of Serpents prestige class is found in **Relics & Rituals 2: Lost Lore**.

Roleplaying Notes

Amra is a broken, bitter soul; she dwells entirely in the past and mourns a love that she never expressed — but she has managed to keep these facts hidden from the Vigils. Somehow, through the slitherens’ use of drugs and brainwashing, Amra believes that the Vigils are responsible for the death of the man she loves. She bears no real love for the ratfolk, however — they simply gave her the opportunity to exact her revenge on the Vigils. Neither does she genuinely worship Mormo, though she does fear that the servants of the Hag Queen will betray her to her enemies if she does not do as they say.

Combat

When the PCs encounter her, Amra is prepared, having consumed two potions (*bulls strength* and *cat’s grace*; these adjustments are noted in brackets in her



stat block below) and already cast several of her spells. Notably, she has cast *resist elements* (fire) and treated the giant wasp poison of her claws with *Sethris' potency*. This grants it the following stats:

Giant Wasp Poison: Injury DC 21; Initial Dam 1d6 Dex; Secondary Dam 1d6 Dex.

She can strike once with each of her claws, though she will wait until the venoms on her blades have been used to do so. She does not hesitate to cast *charm person*, which she will use to take an enemy out of the fight. She does not order them to fight, but will instead beseech them to help one of the fallen poison victims (the Home Commander if nothing else).

Amra Varith, The Serpent in the Fold, Female Human, Rog2/Rgr4/Vigl/Los1: CR 8; SZ Medium-size Humanoid (5 ft., 4 in.); HD 2d6+2 + 4d10+4 + 1d12+1 + 1d6+1; hp 56; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 feat) [+9 with *cat's grace*]; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (+3 Dex, +5 armor, +1 natural armor) [21 with *cat's grace*]; Atk +5/+0 [+7/+2] melee (1d6 [+2] + poison, +1 *short sword*), plus +5 [+7] melee (1d6 + poison, +1 *short sword*), or +7/+2 [+9/+4] melee (1d6 [+2] + poison, +1 *short sword*), or +5/+0 [+7/+2] melee (1d3 + poison, courtesan's claws), +5 [+7] melee (1d3 + poison, courtesan's claws); SA Courtesan's claws, ranger fighting, sneak attack (+1d6), sprint; SQ Evasion, favored enemy (humanoids – ratmen), poison resistance (1), poison use; –AL NE; SV Fort +11, Ref +9 [+11], Will +2; Str 11 [14 with *bull's strength*], Dex 16 [21 with *cat's grace*], Con 12, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 15.

Skills: Alchemy +10, Balance +9 [+11], Bluff +11, Climb +8 [+10], Concentration +3, Diplomacy +9, Disable Device +4 [+6], Gather Information +8, Handle Animal +7, Hide +14 [+16], Innuendo +5, Intuit Direction +4, Jump +4 [+6], Listen +5, Move Silently +14 [+5], Profession (herbalist) +6, Search +4, Sense Motive +4, Spot +5, Use Rope +7 [+9], Wilderness Lore +7. **Feats:** Endurance, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Great Fortitude, Track. **Languages:** Ledean, Titan Speech, Veshian.

Courtesan's claws (Ex): Ladies of serpents learn to make and apply their poisons in the form of a special fingernail lacquer, and may then deliver this poison through a scratch, be it an “accidental” one (especially useful if the venom is prepared with the spell *delay poison*) or one occurring during a passionate embrace. She also learns to keep her nails strengthened through various herbal and mineral treatments, allowing her to use them as a natural claw attack that deals 1d3 points of damage (plus Strength modifier, if any).

These claws are considered natural, poison-producing weapons for the purpose of casting such spells as *magic fang* and *Sethris' potency* upon them, despite the fact that the nails do not themselves, in fact, create poison.

Sprint (Ex): 1/hour — A vigilant may achieve triple-speed (rather than merely double) on a single charge action.

Poison resistance 1 (Ex): Part of a lady of serpents' training involves being exposed to various venoms, allowing her effectively to develop a resistance to such toxins. At 1st level, the lady of serpents ignores the first 1 point of damage (even ability damage) inflicted by any poison.

Poison Use (Ex): Ladies of serpents are trained in the use of poison and never risk accidentally poisoning themselves when applying poison to a blade or to their claws.

Possessions: +1 *chain shirt*, amber caterpillar medallion (*amulet of natural armor* +1), +1 *short sword* (treated with Large monstrous scorpion venom: injury DC 18, initial damage 1d6 Str, secondary damage 1d6 Str), +1 *short sword* (treated with Medium-size monstrous spider venom: injury DC 14, initial damage 1d4 Str, secondary damage 1d6 Str), *wand of cure light wounds* (caster level 1, with 25 charges), *potion of cure moderate wounds*, 30 ft. of knotted silk rope.

Ranger spells prepared (1): 1st — *Sethris' potency*.

Vigilant spells prepared (1): 1st — *resist elements*.

Lady of serpents spells prepared (1): 1st — *charm person*.

Trophion

Majordomo of the Home Command, male human, Rgr3/Rog4/Vig2: CR 9; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 8 in.); HD 3d10+9 + 4d6+12 + 2d12+6; hp 64; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 10 ft. (lamed); AC 18 (+2 Dex, +6 magic chain shirt); Atk +9/+4 melee (1d8+3, 17-20/x2 crit, +1 *keen longsword*) and +9 melee (1d6+1, masterwork short sword), or +11/+6 melee (1d8+3, 17-20/x2 crit, +1 *keen longsword*); SA favored enemy +1 (chuul), sneak attack +2d6, two-weapon fighting, favored enemy +1 (aberrations); SQ lame, sprint, tireless, evasion, uncanny dodge; AL NG; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 11.

Skills: Animal Empathy +2, Bluff +5, Climb +7, Decipher Script +5, Diplomacy +8, Gather Information +5, Handle Animal +5, Heal +4, Hide +7, Innuendo +7, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +5, Knowledge (local: Vesh) +6, Knowledge (nature) +3, Listen +10, Move Silently +7, Profession (majordomo) +8, Ride +7, Search +3, Sense Motive +9, Spot +10, Use Rope +5, Wilderness Lore +12. **Feats:** Dodge, Endurance, Expertise, Mobility, Spring Attack, Track. **Languages:** Ledean, Common (Veshian).

Special Qualities: Lame (Trophion's speed is reduced to by 2/3 due to improperly healed wounds in his left leg); sprint (1/hour — triple-speed on a charge action); tireless (no cumulative penalty to Con checks when running long distances); uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC).

Possessions: +2 *chain shirt*, “Swiftbite” (+1 *keen longsword*), masterwork short sword, 3 *potions of cure moderate wounds*.

Vigilant spells prepared (1): 1st — *calm animals*.

Vinedead

	Tiny Vinedead Tiny Construct	Small Vinedead Small Construct	Medium Vinedead Medium Construct	Large Vinedead Large Construct	Huge Vinedead Huge Construct
Hit Dice:	1/2d10 (2 hp)	1d10 (5 hp)	2d10 (11 hp)	4d10 (22 hp)	16d10 (88 hp)
Initiative:	+2 (Dex)	+1 (Dex)	+0	+0	-1 (Dex)
Speed:	30 ft.	30 ft.	30 ft.	40 ft.	40 ft.
AC:	14 (+2 size, +2 Dex)	14 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +2 natural)	14 (+4 natural)	14 (-1 size, +5 natural)	14 (-2 size, -1 Dex, +7 natural)
Attacks:	2 claws -1 melee	2 claws +0 melee	2 claws +2 melee	2 claws +7 melee	2 claws +19 melee
Damage:	Claw 1d2-1	Claw 1d3	Claw 1d4+1	Claw 1d6+5	Claw 2d4+9
Face/Reach:	2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft./0 ft.	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft.	10 ft. by 10 ft./15 ft.
Special Qualities:	Construct, plant, immunities	Construct, plant, immunities	Construct, plant, immunities	Construct, plant, immunities	Construct, plant, immunities
Saves:	Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0	Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0	Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0	Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1	Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +5
Abilities:	Str 9, Dex 15, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11	Str 11, Dex 13, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11	Str 13, Dex 11, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11	Str 21, Dex 11, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11	Str 29, Dex 9, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11
Climate/Terrain:	Any land and underground				
Organization:	Any				
Challenge Rating:	Tiny 1/6; Small 1/4; Medium-size 1/2; Large 2; Huge 6.				
Treasure:	None				
Alignment:	Always neutral				
Advancement Range:	Tiny and Small —; Medium 3 HD (Medium); Large 5–15 HD (Large); Huge 17–24 HD (Huge)				

Description

Rare is the man who has seen the vinedead and lived to tell about it, for these creatures are found only in the service of Ilkuthsra the Autumn King, the twisted master of one of the factions of the Cannibals of Khet. Vinedead, often mistaken for foliage-draped undead skeletons, are actually animated by the strong, thorny vines that twist and wrap around the joints and major bones of the corpse they inhabit. They are created through the rare druidic spell *vines of the dead* (see the sidebar below).

Combat

Vinedead attack with their wickedly sharp claws, barbed with thorny vines. They attack until they are destroyed and serve solely their masters.

Immunities (Ex): Because they lack flesh or internal organs, vinedead take only half damage from piercing or slashing weapons.

Flame Susceptibility (Ex): Fire damage inflicts double damage on vinedead, as it burns away the animating plants that animate them.

Plant: Vinedead cannot be turned as undead; however, they can be turned as plant creatures by clerics with the Plant domain.

Construct: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, disease, and similar effects. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.



Vines of the Dead

Transmutation

Level: Drd 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One or more corpses touched

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Description

This spell has is used only by those who serve or were trained by the Autumn King, Ilkuthsra. The strange "vinedead" created by this spell are known as the servitors of the Autumn King in dread Khet, and there are many druids among the Cannibals who wonder if the Autumn King dabbles in foul necromancies. Such is not the case, however, for the power of the gods holds no dominion over these creations.

Spell Effect

This strange spell animates a clump of vines and plant fronds that grow thorns and being to

writhe, seeking out a corpse. Once a body is found (the corpse must be within 10 ft.), the vines shear away any remaining flesh and soft tissue from the corpse, feeding on it and growing stronger. Within a minute, the tendrils have spread throughout the entirety of the corpse and, by tightening and manipulating their grip on the bones of the new host, the newly formed plant-construct causes the bones to rise once again and take on a semblance of (un)life.

The druid may not create more HD of vinedead than he has caster levels with a single casting of *vines of the dead*. He may control a number of vinedead equal in HD to his caster level x 2. Unlike skeletons created by *animate dead*, however, those vinedead that are released from a druid's control in favor of new ones do not go free; they are instantly destroyed as the animating plants wither and die.

Material Components: A piece of amber worth 50 gp, placed at the center of the plant-body.

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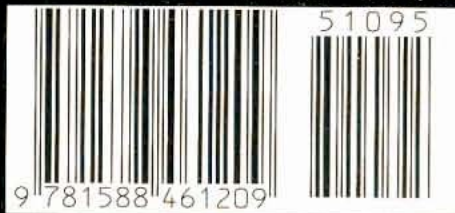
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