

Estarion

THE CITY OF KNIVES

AN URBAN SOURCEBOOK FOR OLD-SCHOOL GAMING

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	2
Introduction.....	3
About This Booklet	3
Estarion, City of Knives	4
History.....	4
Geography.....	4
1. The Old City	4
2. The Second Ward	5
3. The New City.....	5
4. Selindra, The Second City.....	5
5. The Riverfront	6
6. The Waterfront	6
7. Red Lanterns.....	6
8. Downwind	6
Groups and Factions	7
Political.....	7
Religious.....	8
Other Factions.....	9
Tales from Estarion	10
A Small Social Gathering.....	10
Young Lovers.....	10
Disappearances in the Night	10
A Simple Job.....	11
Night Terrors	12
A Simple Job.....	12
Just Look Tough	13
Grave Mistake.....	13
New Monsters.....	15
Corbin	15
The Grey Man.....	15
Serpentmen.....	15
Kalsha the Raven Witch.....	16
Kalsha's Familiar.....	16
Raven	16

INTRODUCTION

The Storm Wolf, it is said, once challenged Astarte and Shamash to seize the people of the land. The Storm Wolf was defeated, and his people saved, but the Wolf declared that in time, the gods would fade and not be able to stop him. He would come back, and his faithful would grant him a place in the world, where he would devour their souls and bring the Great Storm of Blood.

It is said that three witches worship the Storm Wolf, and that each has a secret cult of chaos in the city. They seek to bring the Storm Wolf into this world, to cleanse the land of the Empire, to cleanse the land of the works of men, and to make the world free again for the wild, for magic, and for chaos.

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

Estarion is a setting for urban adventure in an old-school game such as Basic/Expert D&D, *Labyrinth Lord*, *Swords and Wizardry*, or *Lamentations of the Flame Princes*. However, the minimalistic presentation of the rules in this supplement can be used to adapt this game to any version of D&D or a d20 fantasy game or, with a little work, to other systems.

ESTARION, CITY OF KNIVES

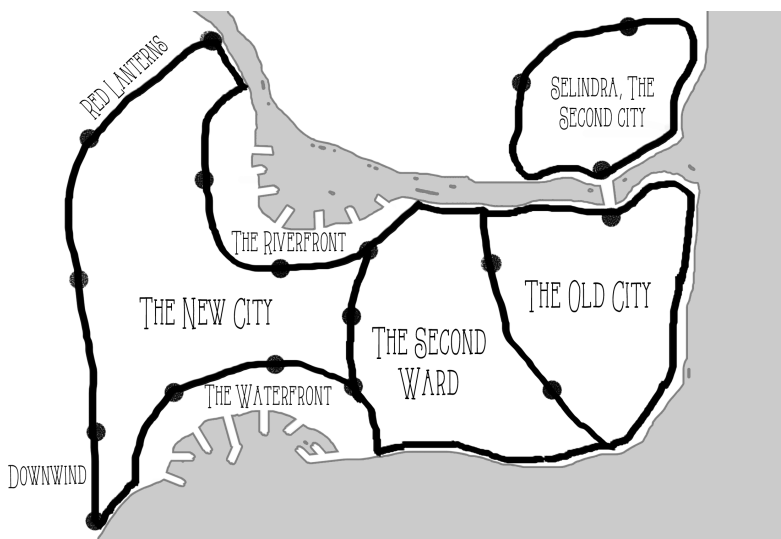
HISTORY

Estarion was founded as a trade city between the Aquilan Empire and the eastern nomads, the Goblin Khans, and the Elven lands of Cathay. Originally a minor trading colony, the city became well known first for the trade in Cathayan steel and spice, earning the nickname of the City of Knives and Spice. Over time, this was shortened to the City of Knives.

The city has expanded multiple times, and become a fortified eastern outpost. And it has also become a dumping ground for nobles, priests, and soldiers the Empire can't eliminate, but would like to disappear. It also represents the vulnerable edge of the Empire.

GEOGRAPHY

This is an intentionally sketchy overview of Estarion. The format is intended for simple ad lib creation of elements of the city, random determination of locations, but enough detail to start with. Much of the city is likely to evolve and develop out of decisions made in play, rather than being pre-determined before the game.



1. THE OLD CITY

The original site of the original trade city of Estarion, the Old City is built of stone, with flat-roofed houses and shops, typically of two or three stories. The streets in the old city tend to be winding, narrow, cobblestone, and without easy drainage.

Location

- 1 The Palace
 - 2 Temple of Zeus and Hera
 - 3 Temple of Hecate
 - 4 The Court of Justice
 - 5 The White Dragon Inn
 - 6 The City Jail
-

2. THE SECOND WARD

The second phase of the city's development, this area has wider, more organized streets. The second ward was built by and for merchants, and serves as the heart of the city's economy.

Location

- 1 The Grand Guildhall
 - 2 The Three Lions Tavern
 - 3 The Temple of the Pantheon
 - 4 The Great Bazaar
 - 5 The Grand Academy
 - 6 The City Watch Armory
-

3. THE NEW CITY

The outermost of the city's main wards, the New City was expanded on in the last five decades, built as the Empire sought to expand its interests eastward. The plans never came to fruition, so the New City is home to more foreigners, poor, and outcasts than other portions of the city.

Location

- 1 The Sanitarium
 - 2 The Temple of Astarte
 - 3 The City Baths
 - 4 The Great Arena
 - 5 The Farm Market
 - 6 The Horse Market
-

4. SELINDRA, THE SECOND CITY

Located across the River Selintan, the Second City was once a small orchard village called Selindra. When the Eastern Hordes invaded a hundred years ago, Selindra fell under the protection of Estarion, then became an official part of the city, connected by a great bridge and walled for its protection.

Location

- 1 Fish market
 - 2 Herbalist
 - 3 Fruit Market
-

-
- 4 The Temple of Apollo
 - 5 The Golden Apple Tavern
 - 6 The Lighthouse
-

5. *THE RIVERFRONT*

The river docks on the southern side of the River Selintan are part of the barge traffic inland leaving the city. This bustling area is filled with foot traffic, stevedores, porters, and barge handlers who work hard, drink hard, and leave the city quickly.

Location

- 1 The Happy Eel tavern
 - 2 Warehouses
 - 3 Stevedores' Guildhall North
 - 4 Severian's Barge and Boat Repair
 - 5 Jovialus the Black, Work Crew Recruiter
 - 6 Honest Hari's River Supplies
-

6. *THE WATERFRONT*

The southern ocean docks are the center of a different sort of trade, though the sort of rough customers here are similar to those on the riverfront.

Location

- 1 The Tippy Mermaid Tavern
 - 2 Warehouses
 - 3 Shipbuilders' Guildhall
 - 4 Navigators' Guildhall
 - 5 Shipyards
 - 6 Stevedores' Guildhall South
-

7. *RED LANTERNS*

Located outside of the walls of the city, the Red Lanterns district is a small section of buildings dedicated to vice and general lawlessness. The city watch turns a blind eye to this place, but that also means it is unpatrolled and potentially dangerous.

Location

- 1 The Silk Slipper brothel
 - 2 The Gold Lilly brothel
 - 3 The House of Fortuna casino
 - 4 The Three Lotuses opium den
 - 5 The Two Dogs tavern
 - 6 The Slave Market
-

8. *DOWNWIND*

Downwind is the poorest of neighborhoods of the city, but it isn't truly in it. It's a shanty town outside of the walls of the city. It is filled with the poorest of the poor, industries too noxious or foul to exist within the walls of the city, and to the city's

necropolis. It is unpatrolled, overrun with crime, and largely controlled by Nestor, King of the Beggars.

Location

- 1 Necropolis
 - 2 Garbage Pits
 - 3 Ibn Fazl, the Surgeon
 - 4 Illegal Cage Matches
 - 5 The Black Market
 - 6 The Green Skull Tavern
-

GROUPS AND FACTIONS

People are at least as important as places in breathing life into a campaign. This quick sketch of major players is intended to serve as a springboard for play.

POLITICAL

The Imperial faction is the de facto governing body of the city. With control of taxation, law, and military, the Imperials have cornered the market on state power. However, the Merchant Families have both local credibility and economic power in terms of controlling markets and trade.

THE IMPERIALS

Prince Lucius Gallus Martellus is the current governor of Estarion, granted that station by his eldest brother, the glorious Nestor Julius Martellus, Emperor of Aquila, master of the malachite throne, to remove his little brother and his reputation as a rake and lothario from the court. Prince Lucius is seen as a frivolous fop, easily manipulated by his lusts and his self-interest. Young, pretty, and always surrounded by wine and women, the Prince is not well-respected or –loved in Estarion. But he is also politically astute, and keeps those who circle around him in constant chaos while he makes sure he is protected.

Captain Marius Bellus Escandar is the commander of the Imperial Guard as well as nominal commander of the city watch. Escandar is a middle-aged professional soldier, very conservative and by-the-book. He is rigid, honorable, but chauvinistic about the Aquilan way of life— he sees provincial people as backward, and sees little need to care about local traditions, ways, or audiences. He tends toward a very black-and-white perspective.

Watch Captain Rel Duran is a local, raised in Estarion as the youngest son of merchants who joined the watch to avoid joining the church. He is outgoing, folksy, and very well-connected to many influential families. He works in the community to keep peace, and is said to maintain a system of patronage and favors as well, which makes Escander see him as corrupt, but which Duran sees as a way to keep people connected.

Exchequer Ingnatius Otho Novian is a fat, fastidious man whose interest is in the flow of money. He tends to reduce all things to a matter of cash, and sees his job as making sure that the local barbarians keep paying their due into the Imperial coffers. He enjoys the power his job as chief accountant and tax collector grants him, and his

small force of publicans are greatly feared. He believes that his role gives him great power over the prince.

Madame Hermia Aemelia Pallida was once a well-placed courtesan for the prince's father. Today she maintains her grace and beauty, though she is now in her forties. She serves as an advisor to the Prince, where she watches others, gathers rumors, and whispers in the Prince's ear. She is, in short, the Prince's spymaster, and her network of agents is subtle and deadly.

THE THREE GREAT FAMILIES

House Crius is led by **Horace Juvenal Crius**, and crusty old merchant with strong ties to Imperial royals. House Crius is closely tied to shipping, shipbuilding and trade, with a strong influence on teamsters and carters. He is cunning and ruthless, and largely humorless. His sons **Horatius Nero Crius** and **Secundus Martus Crius** are his eyes, ears, and fists in the world. His daughter **Nessa Innocenta Armada** married a minor nobleman, who died a year later, leaving her with a large estate just outside of the city and deep coffers. She is seen as many as Horace's closest advisor. House Crius is not subtle.

House Loxus is led by the widow **Bricea Marada Loxus**, a prim, proper woman whose interests are tied to the banks of Estarion. House Loxus controls the flow of debt in Estarion, and thus funds most major merchant ventures, purchases, and mergers. The family is closely watched by Ignatius Otho Novian, who is concerned about its economic power. Madame Loxus has two children — the twins **Antonius Cassius Loxus** and **Antonia Cassia Loxus**, both of whom are feared as ruthless businesspeople.

House Vendustus is known for its land holdings and its patronage of the arts. The patriarch of the House is **Gaius Albus Vendustus**, a jovial man known for his love of large parties and for collecting favors and friends. His two children are **Flavius Cassus Vendustus**, a wastrel and rake who parties with the prince and otherwise makes little of himself and **Junia Marina Vendustus**, who is known for her large gatherings of poets, thinkers, and outcasts, often as part of huge masques or street carnivals. This House is seen as particularly decadent.

RELIGIOUS

The **Temple of Zeus and Hera** is one of the two strongest temples in the city. Stodgy **Tertius Livius Calix** is the priest of Zeus, and the nominal primate, or leader of the Pantheon priesthood in the city. The priestess of Hera, **Julia Venia Nessus**, is known to be a peacemaker and a deal-maker who keeps the priesthoods relevant and respected in the city.

The **Temple of Hecate** is the other most influential temple in the city. Since Hecate is the patroness of Estarion, her temple is deeply influential. **Selena Agrippina Mabno** is the priestess here. She is young, charming, and cunning, using her abilities to manipulate, seduce, bribe, and blackmail others as necessary to make sure she maintains her influence in the city.

The **Temple of Apollo** has its greatest influence in Selindra, where the god's role as sun god makes him a key fertility god for those who remember the days when the area was covered only with orchards. The Temple of Apollo is also well-known for its healers, and for the occasional prophetic vision. The head of the temple is **Octavius**

Vitus Xeres, a virile man in his 30s known for his forceful leadership and his distrust of Selena Malmo.

The **Temple of the Pantheon** is the main place of worship for commoners in the city. Shrines to the Olympian Twelve may be found here, as well as to the Agnostos Theos. The priesthood here is not very influential, but is led by the elderly and wise *Marcus Vergilus Vespasian*.

The **Temple of Astarte** is the last remnant of a cult that predated the Aquilans, but is still common among the peasantry and farmers. Goddess of fertility, love and war, the Aquilans keep an eye on any preaching about war, but are fine with temple prostitution and fertility worship. The Temple of Hecate has certainly poached some followers from her worship, but the cult endures. Their leader is the head temple prostitute, *Nimue Nandara*, an exotic, inscrutable woman who seems content to ply her trade and to bless crops, but maintains an impressive list of clients.

OTHER FACTIONS

Outside of the official channels of power, there are a number of other factions who influence the city.

THE TRADE GUILDS

The trade guilds maintain a monopoly on training, certifying, pricing, and distributing many kinds of craft goods and skilled trades in the city. They are part corporate monopoly, part trade union, and part mafia family. Among the most influential guilds are the guilds of stevedores, porters, and blacksmiths. But the head of the trade guilds is a seamstress named *Namala Needle tongue*. Namala is known above all as a tough negotiator, who is able to keep the factions of the guild together to control markets, influence laws, and fight back against the Houses when they need to in order to get better access to money and credit. She is also known to be ruthless, and to use force when necessary to enforce the Guild's rules.

CRIMINALS

Several criminals form the underbelly of Estarion, and are involved in plots and schemes every day. Adventurers are sure to come into conflict with them regularly.

Decanthus Garm, is said to be the "Guildmaster" of crime in the city. His network of thieves, assassins, and thugs is jokingly referred to as the "Thieves' Guild", and they demand a cut of all criminal profits they discover as protection money.

Nestor, King of the Beggars is the protector of Downwind, and a criminal thug in his own mind. He is cunning and knows a lot about what happens in the city due to his network of beggars. He pays protection money to Garm.

Ibn Fazl, the Surgeon, is a much-feared part of Downwind. The surgeon studies human life. He dissects corpses he purchases from body snatchers, he heals criminals discreetly for a fee, and he is said to take those no one would miss in order to further his knowledge of anatomy, surgery, and the ways of life and death.

The **Three Witches** are a legend in the city. It is said that these three seek to doom the city by summoning a Duke of Chaos who is their master, the Storm Wolf. The three witches are said to be the young and beautiful *Kalsba the Raven Witch*, the powerful and wise *Inna the Serpent Witch*, and the twisted crone *Jekka the Wolf Witch*. Each has powers over animals and the natural world in addition to their

own skills as sorceresses. They also are served by diabolical familiars who serve as their eyes and ears in the world.

TALES FROM ESTARION

Though Estarion is intended to be an open setting for adventures, the following adventure seeds are intended to serve as inspiration for several sessions of gaming. This is not intended to provide a clear path to a full campaign in Estarion. Rather, these are quick seeds of adventures to set the tone and direction of the campaign.

A SMALL SOCIAL GATHERING

Junia Maria Vendestus throws a large masquerade ball in her Old City home. The characters hobnob with a mix of artists, minor nobles, and misfits. The evening is filled with food, music, and drink. Then suddenly the room goes dark, and when the light returns, Count Nero Livius Silvanus is dead in the middle of the room, strangled and beaten. The doors and windows of the mansion are locked, and everyone is trapped inside with a killer and no clue what is going on.

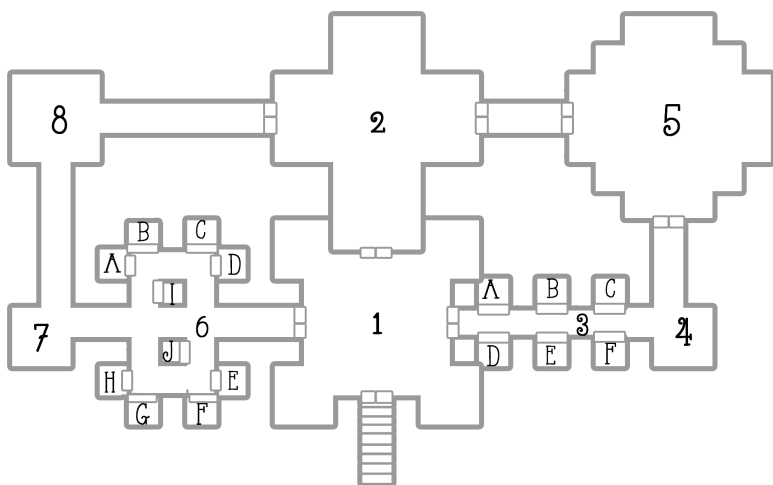
Over the course of the evening, the characters investigate the murder, only to find more people dying in these blackouts, and growing fear in the group. Eventually, a mad beggar woman named Mad Ani tells the players that “the grey man” is making everyone go mad at once. The players begin to piece together that the whole crowd is behind the murders during the blackouts as the room changes, and people become mindless zombies out to kill Ani. The players have to find and stop the Grey Man before it kills them all. As they battle the Grey Man, they find themselves watched by a large, very attentive raven.

YOUNG LOVERS

Lidia Tertia Crius is a distant cousin of House Crius. Her father, Emiliano Attilio Crius, has betrothed her to an Aquilan Duke, Nessus Balbus Dominus, a dull, middle-aged cretin. She is in love with Crispus Decimus Vendestus, a young and idealistic distant cousin of the Vendestus family known as a dreamer and poet. The two have set aside some money for a barge out of town, and are interested in hiring bodyguards to make sure they make it out of town. This seems simple enough, but Emiliano Attilio Crius is not willing to lose the possible connection to a ducal lineage, so he is willing to risk a vendetta to make sure the lovers are not reunited. He has hired a group of thugs, led by an assassin to make sure his daughter is abducted and the boy dies an “accidental” death, which may kill or frame the player characters.

DISAPPEARANCES IN THE NIGHT

The beggars of Downwind are disappearing. Nestor, King of the Beggars, is willing to pay in favors and coin to anyone who can figure out what is going on. Though the Surgeon is an obvious suspect, as are slavers, the truth will lead the player characters into the sewers under the city, and to a cult of chaos worshipers who serve crow-headed monsters with bodies like men; and to the ancient ritual that turns men into monsters.



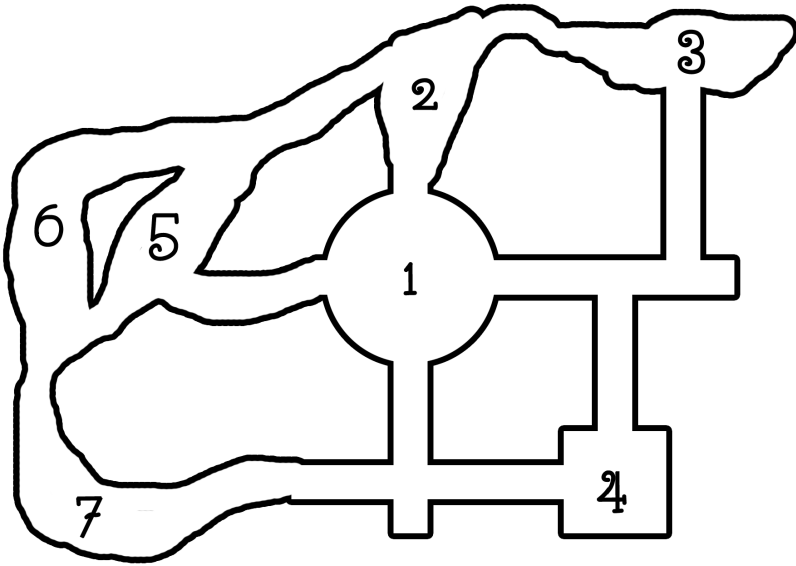
- 1) **Entry with crow demon friezes on the walls.** 3 corbin are here on guard.
- 2) **Shrine to the Crow God.** 2 corbin and 4 acolytes with 2 beggar prisoners.
- 3) **Cells for the Acolytes:** The acolytes sleep here. Each cell has 4 beds, one of which is occupied by a sleeping acolyte. Each room has 4 footlockers with simple clothing and 3d6x10 g.p. in a purse.
- 4) **Guard Chamber.** 2 acolytes stand guard.
- 5) **Old Library:** Ill-maintained, hold mostly religious texts of profane chaotic content. A set of 3d6 books can be recovered, each worth 6d6x10g.p. if you can find a buyer. 4 corbin lair in here.
- 6) **Tombs of the Elders:** Once disturbed, the dead awaken. 10 skeletons. There is treasure in tomb J: a silvered longsword with a jeweled scabbard worth 150 g.p.
- 7) **Empty.**
- 8) **Ritual Room:** 2 acolytes and a cleric 2 are enacting a ritual over a bound beggar to turn him into a dire corbie. 2 corbin watch over the ritual.

A SIMPLE JOB

The player characters are hired by a wealthy tailor to the well-to-do. He wants them to help him avert a blackmail scheme. It seems that blackmailers have stolen a bundle of love letters he wrote to his mistress, and plan to ruin his reputation and marriage if he doesn't pay them off. He, however, wants the bundle back so that he can get his freedom. The problem is that this is all a lie. The blackmailer is Malachi Drake, a 4th level thief and a lieutenant of the master criminal Decanthus Garm. The bundle of letters are actually a set of books from the trade guilds that Namala Needle tongue has cooked, and would be of interest to the Imperial exchequer. The heroes are pawns in a larger-scale set of schemes, and have to come out of it with their skins intact.

NIGHT TERRORS

People are waking up with terrible nightmares of spiders, snakes, bats and other fear-inducing creatures. The dreams all happen to involve an image of these creatures vomiting out of a well in the Old City. The player-characters are hired to explore the well and figure out what is going on. At the bottom of the well, the player characters find a small complex of tunnels and caverns.



1. Entry from well. The room is filled with cobwebs and debris. As soon as the room is entered, the creatures in the complex begin seeking out the player-characters.
2. 8 Giant Centipedes.
3. 4 Giant Crab Spiders.
4. The walls of this room are covered with arcane symbols. Floating in the center of the room is a crystalline sphere about the size of a fist, causing matching, glowing lights to appear in the symbols. While it is here, the rooms continue to create the vermin in them. The sphere is guarded by 3 serpentmen who seem to be making the magic of this work. The sphere can be removed, which shuts down the spawning. Destroying it will require research into how the sphere can be destroyed.
5. 50 rats.
6. 3 spitting cobras.
7. 50 bats.

A SIMPLE JOB

The player characters are hired by a Cathayan merchant to rescue a Cathayan girl from the Silk Slipper brothel where she has been sold into slavery after being kidnapped. Not only does this mean getting past some very dangerous customers, but also the player-characters find that Madame Hermia Aemelia Pallida is also interested

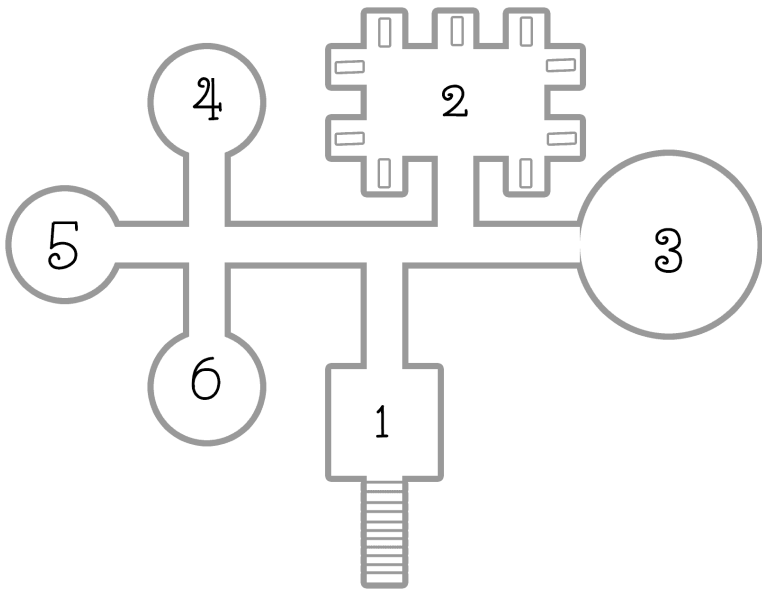
in getting her hands on the girl – because she is really a spy for Cathayan agents looking to infiltrate the city.

JUST LOOK TOUGH

The player-characters are hired as bodyguards for a visiting diplomat from the Goblin Khanates. The official is a priest of Shamash and a minor noble, and his goal is to set up a trade agreement with Estarion trading fruit and fish for steel. They are there to just look tough and make the official seem important. However, things get more problematic when actual assassins wearing raven masks start taking out guards and heading after the priest. Soon, the player-characters find themselves facing attack by corbin, acolytes, and thugs, until they face off the leader of the group, a fanatical cleric, who says that the death of the sun priest paves the way for the storm wolf.

GRAVE MISTAKE

Nimue Nandara hires the player-characters to break into the tomb of the scholar Nero Aetius Catullus. Catullus has in his grave a set of scrolls that outline a legend about the conflict between the native nomads from the region, led by priests of Astarte and Shamash; and the demon called the Storm Wolf. The scrolls are a description of the Storm Wolf, its weaknesses and its strengths as well as the ritual that was used to summon it. The player characters will return from their mission only to be ambushed by a party of chaotic adventurers seeking to relieve them of their prize.



1. Entry. 4 Giant Crab Spiders. The room is filled with cobwebs and a few scattered bones.
2. Burial Chamber. Trap. Attacks as 3HD monster, does 1d8 damage when spearing characters. Spears shoot out of the floor, triggered when individuals walk across the floor. There are 3 broken bodies on the floor that look as if they have been stabbed by very large spears. Each coffin has a 30% chance of holding one piece of jewelry worth 3d6 x 100 g.p.
3. Family Shrine. Friezes here depict the wonders of the Catullus family. 5 Stirges.
4. False Scrolls. The scrolls in the center of the room are trapped. Opening the case shoots out poison darts, attack as 2 HD, save at -2 or die.
5. Scrolls. The case looks empty and the glass is broken. The scrolls are in a hidden chamber inside the case.
6. False Scrolls. The scrolls in the center of the room are not trapped. They are just a good, fake set of scrolls.

The chaotic party that will attack the player-characters:

- Balgor Eln: Fighter 3
- Anaxus Nulb: Cleric 2. Spells: Cause Fear
- Sargon: Magic-user 2. Spells: Shield, Sleep
- 2 Corbin thugs

NEW MONSTERS

CORBIN

Armor Class:	6	No. Appearing:	1d12
Hit Dice:	2	Save As:	Fighter 2
Move:	120 ft (40 ft)	Morale:	12
Attacks:	2 talons	Treasure:	L
Damage:	1d4/1d4	Alignment	Chaotic

Corbin are humans transformed by sorcery into a hybrid of raven and man. They have long, black claws, raven heads, and black skin. They are fearless and brutal, hunting in packs and swooping down on their enemies. They lack any clear language, but among their caws, they are known to cry out “Doom! Doom!” as they attack.

THE GREY MAN

Armor Class:	6	No. Appearing:	1
Hit Dice:	4	Save As:	Fighter 4
Move:	120ft (40ft), Fly 120ft (80ft)	Morale:	9
Attacks:	2 claws	Treasure:	None
Damage:	1d6/1d6	Alignment	Chaotic

The Grey Man is a lesser demon called forth to spread chaos and destruction. He appears as a tall, gaunt man in featureless grey clothing and featureless grey skin. He lacks any hair, and his eyes are solid white. He does not speak, and is generally aloof from those he affects.

The Grey Man is effectively invisible to any but the insane, but if anyone points him out to a person, looking for the Grey Man breaks the spell. The Grey Man may be harmed by magic, silver, fire, or acid.

The Grey Man may affect any who do not see him with homicidal madness. Those affected will not remember their actions, and will join as a mob to kill their target.

SERPENTMEN

Armor Class:	7	No. Appearing:	2d4 (6d6)
Hit Dice:	2	Save As:	Elf 2
Move:	120' (40ft)	Morale:	9
Attacks:	1 weapon or 1 bite	Treasure:	D
Damage:	By weapon or 1d4	Alignment	Chaotic

Serpentmen ruled the world before the rise of humanity. Skilled as scientists and sorcerers, the Serpentmen served chaos loyally and made slaves of the other races. The rise of the gods of law led the human and demi-human races to overthrow the Serpentmen, who now live secretly in small enclaves underground.

A typical serpentman has the spell-casting ability of a second level magic-user as well as the abilities for its hit dice. If they bite a target, they inject venom requiring a save vs. Poison to avoid death.

KALSHA THE RAVEN WITCH

Armor Class:	7	No. Appearing:	1
Hit Dice:	5	Save As:	Elf 5
Move: 120ft (20ft), fly 240 ft (80ft)		Morale:	10
Attacks:	1 dagger	Treasure:	
Damage:	1d4	Alignment	Chaotic

Kalsha seems to be a teenaged girl with pale skin and wild blond hair. She dresses in a dress made of black feathers and wears a headdress made of raven bones and feathers. She is usually accompanied by one or more ravens.

Kalsha is able to cast spells as a 5th level magic-user. She is also able to summon ravens at will, to *charm person* at will, and to cast the following cleric spells once per day: *Hold Person*, *Snake Charm*, and *Speak with Animals*.

KALSHA'S FAMILIAR

Armor Class:	6	No. Appearing:	1
Hit Dice:	2	Save As:	Elf 2
Move: 30ft (10ft), 240 ft (80ft)		Morale:	10
Attacks:	1 bite	Treasure:	Nil
Damage:	1d4	Alignment	Chaotic

The familiar is a huge bird. It is intelligent and charming, and has a telepathic link to Kalsha. It is able to speak common and the language of birds. The familiar is able to cast spells as a 2nd level magic-user.

RAVEN

Armor Class:	8	No. Appearing:	5d6
Hit Dice:	1 hit point	Save As:	Normal Men
Move: 30ft (10ft), 240 ft (80ft)		Morale:	6
Attacks:	1 bite per flock	Treasure:	Nil
Damage:	1d6	Alignment	Neutral

These are big honkin' crows. They can attack in flocks of 5, and those flocks can each attack a single target. Targets must save vs. Death or they will be overwhelmed and unable to see or move due to the wings and feathers in the way.