

For 4-6 characters of levels 11-13

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Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®
2nd Edition

DARK · SUN

WORLDP

Official Game Adventure

Forest Maker

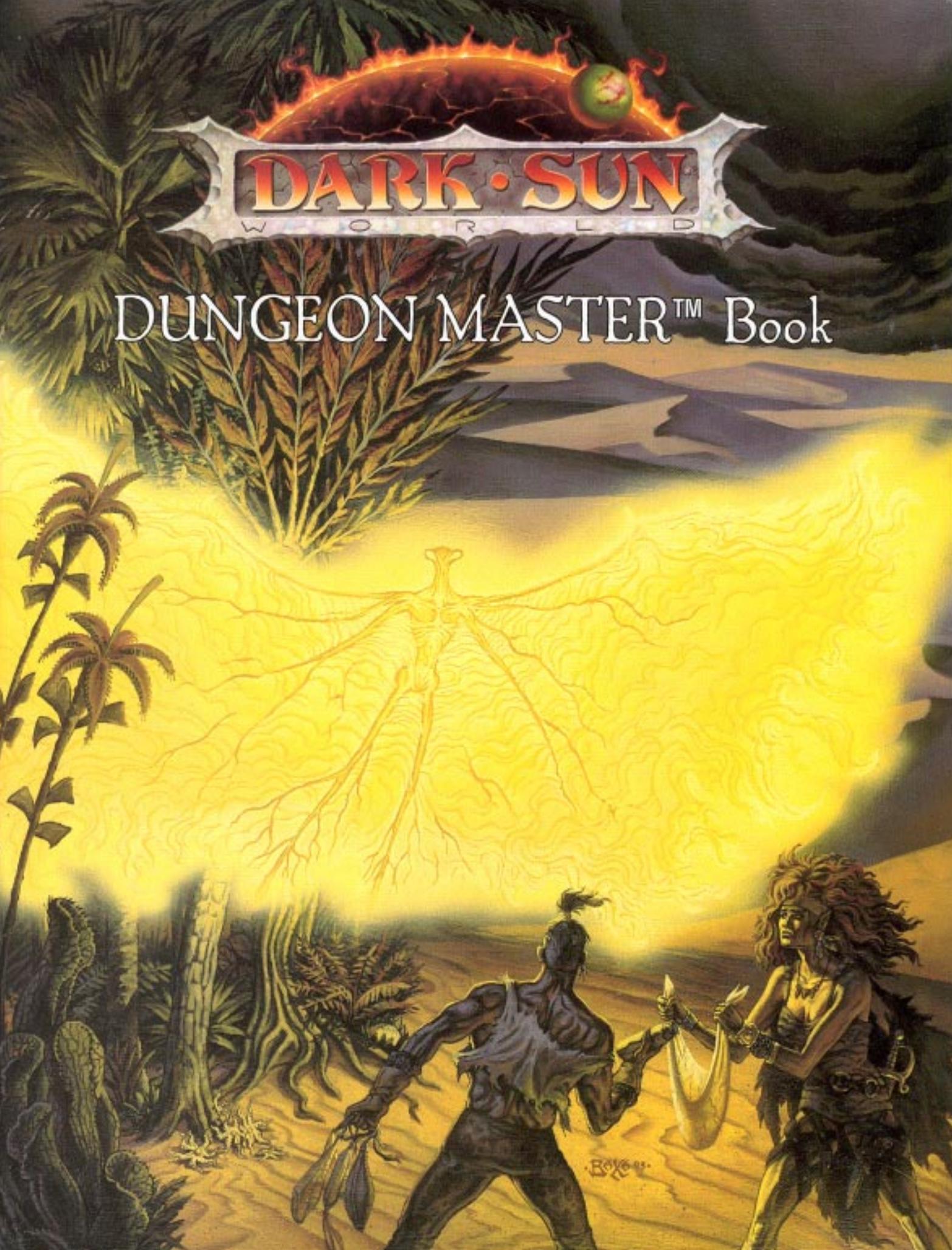




DARK·SUN

WORLD

DUNGEON MASTER™ Book





Forest Maker

A DARK SUN® Campaign Adventure

DM's Book

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Starting the Adventure

Forest Maker is designed for four to six player characters of levels 11 through 13, though as many as eight characters may play the adventure with little harm to play balance. Something strange is going on in the Alluvial Sand Wastes; rumors speak of the existence of a new forest and someone who has the power to create new life. If the rumors are true, it could mean salvation for Athas.

Materials Needed to Play. In addition to this adventure, you must have copies of the AD&D® 2nd Edition core rulebooks, the DARK SUN boxed set, and *The Complete Psionics Handbook*.

The *Prism Pentad* novel series is also a useful tool in getting a feel for the world of Athas. Events in this adventure occur before those in the fifth novel, *The Cerulean Storm*.

This adventure is not part of any series of DARK SUN modules, though it is assumed to be taking place after the events in *Freedom*. *Forest Maker* is a stand-alone adventure though you may wish to read *Freedom* and the accessory *City-State of Tyr* for background on the city of Tyr.

In addition, you may want to have access to *Dragon Kings* and the *Dune Trader* supplement, as well as the DARK SUN appendix of the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®. These products provide greater details of the creatures, features, and characters encountered in this adventure.

Preparing For Play. Look over the pregenerated characters in the *Player's Book* and decide if you want your players to use them or create their own.

If using the pregenerated characters, make sure that each player understands all the information on the character sheet, particularly race and class abilities, and psionic powers.

Next. Consult the following sections "Adventure Overview" and "Adventure Background" before beginning with Part One.

Adventure Overview

Part One of the adventure begins with hooks to bring the player characters to the city of Tyr, and alerts them to rumors about some odd goings on in the Tyr area as well as in the Alluvial Wastes.

Once in Tyr proper, the PCs have the chance to rest, recuperate, and learn more of the current gossip, news, and rumors. During this time, the PCs come upon an old man being beaten up by a group of toughs. Rescuing the man gives the PCs their first solid lead about something big happening in the Great Alluvial Wastes, as well as the hint that more information can be gained in the trade fortress of Altaruk.

Part Two takes the PCs to Altaruk, though the journey there includes a few encounters to keep them occupied along the way. These encounters include a caravan, a strange prophet, a wandering bard, and a few monsters.

Once the party arrives at Altaruk proper, they see firsthand how bands of what seem to be mesmerized pilgrims are traveling to the south. Here, the party has the chance to mingle with the people of Altaruk and get more information.

Finally, in Part Three, the PCs travel to the ultimate site of the pilgrimage: a magical forest in the middle of the desert, created by what appears to be an avangion named Rafernard.

This part features the forest/garden of Rafernard as well as the central plaza, which is a ziggurat on a flat plane. The avangion is really the sorcerer-queen of Raam, Abalach-Re, who is trying to metamorphize from a 21st level to 25th level dragon, courtesy of an ancient spell.

By the conclusion of the adventure, the PCs should have stopped the sorcerer-queen, prevented the spell casting, and released the mesmerized pilgrims.

Adventure Background

Abalach-Re, the sorcerer-queen of Raam, wishes to make a leap from the 21st level to the 25th level of her draconic

Starting the Adventure



transformation. In order to achieve this end, she has studied ancient spells and the story of Kalak, and acquired an artifact of great power.

In order to make the four level leap, Abalach-Re needs 50,000 gold pieces (which she has), and the life energies of living beings that add up to at least 5,000 Hit Dice. Abalach-Re's artifact, the *skull of Dorag Thel*, enables her not only to cast preserver magic, but she has warped it to call living beings of Good alignment. Lawful Good characters are the most prone, and a few Neutral Goods are likewise compelled. Those of Chaotic Good alignment hear the call but cannot be forced to answer it.

The sorcerer-queen has used the artifact to create a lush forest in the Sand Wastes and to populate it with birds and small animals. Her ziggurat was built on a flat plane in the center of the forest, and here Abalach-Re's power is concentrated. The site Abalach-Re chose contains a *tree of life*.

Once the forest garden was grown and stocked, Abalach-Re began sending out her call, which spread in growing concentric circles from her ziggurat. As the call spread farther and farther, people began to drop what they were doing and replace it with but one thought: travel to the site.

One person who heard that call was Amalak Pul, a Chaotic Good preserver wizard who is a member of the Veiled Alliance in Urik. Due to his alignment, Amalak heard the call but was under no obligation to obey. Still, being the curious sort, he voluntarily made the journey, first notifying the Alliance in Tyr.

Once Pul arrived at the forest, he was able to ascertain Abalach-Re's true nature. A terrible battle of magic ensued, in which Abalach-Re was certain that she had eliminated Amalak. In truth Amalak was not killed, but the battle proved to be such a strain that he was reduced to wandering through the Wastes, his mind shattered and his energy drained.

While all this was happening, another wizard became

interested in the site for a different reason. Lerilyn Toar, a defiler and sometime rival of Amalak, had heard stories of an as yet uncharted *tree of life*. Since a *tree of life* can become crucial to a defiler, Lerilyn made it her personal goal to find it.

Lerilyn had been *scrying* Amalak Pul, and when he notified members of the Veiled Alliance in Tyr about his planned journey, she determined to watch his journey, but lost track of him when he reached Abalach-Re's forest.

Lerilyn's lackeys informed her when the shattered Amalak wandered into Tyr. She wasted no time ordering his capture. It is this capture attempt that the PCs stumble upon when they are wandering around Tyr as the adventure begins.

Kalak's Story

The sorcerer-king Kalak of Tyr was an ambitious ruler whose hunger for power knew no bounds. Unwilling to accept the staged metamorphosis toward full dragon form, Kalak attempted to jump from 21st to 30th level by a single destructive deed of grand magnitude. Through his study of ancient texts, Kalak believed he could succeed.

The sorcerer-king was slain before he had the chance to complete the spell. There is some speculation that Kalak may not have succeeded even if permitted to complete the ritual casting. With Kalak gone, the high templar Tithian is the new King of Tyr.

Running This Adventure

The Dungeon Master (DM) should remember that the world of Athas is unlike any other campaign fantasy world. Magic is distrusted by the common people, psionics abound, metal is scarce, and water is precious. Life is harsh on the sun-blasted plains of Athas, and people do not welcome or trust strangers.

Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees

Introduction

The adventure begins with the PCs traveling to Tyr with a merchant caravan. **Part One A: Opening Scenes** gives some suggestions on how to get the PCs involved in the adventure. Choose or modify one of these options to set them on to the next section, **A Job Nearly Done**. This section gives the party a chance to “limber up” with some combat, as well as to make friends with merchants who may be of service in the future. No matter how the adventure starts, the PCs must wind up in Tyr before they go to Altaruk.

The rest of Part One deals with various encounters in Tyr, including an assault on Amalak Pul, a preserver.

Before the adventure even begins, however, secretly make a saving throw versus death magic at +2 for each Lawful and Neutral Good member of the party. Note which ones fail. Once the party reaches Tyr, Abalach-Re’s compulsion to travel to Altaruk overtakes those characters and they join the mindless groups of pilgrims on the road. See the introduction to **Part Two: Pilgrimage** (p. 13) for more information on the compulsion and its effects.

General Role-playing

The purpose of the visit to Tyr is to pick up rumors about the events in the Wastes, and to convince the PCs to travel to Altaruk for more information. Bear in mind that the rumors are extensive both in number and in degree of truth and outrageousness. Initially, the PCs should have no reason to believe that any one rumor is “more likely” to be true.

The thing to keep in mind regarding the rumors is that many of them have a common denominator, namely the arrival or anticipated arrival of someone who can make Athas green and lush again. This idea alone should be enough to make any veteran Athasian player characters stand up and take notice.

Tyr is a good place for the PCs to make contacts, enemies, and possibly even friends. DMs should keep track

of how the PCs react to established NPCs in Tyr; those who are alive at the end of the adventure are still in Tyr the next time the PCs are there, and they can provide story hooks for further adventures.

Part One A: Opening Scenes

Setup: To begin play, choose one of the following beginnings for the adventure. A short description of each follows.

Hired Guards. The PCs have been guarding a caravan from Urik to Tyr. Their employers treat them with a quiet aloofness, speaking to them only to give them orders or answer questions pertaining to their roles as guards. This is the simplest way to begin the adventure.

Alliance’s Request. If a PC is a member of the Veiled Alliance, a contact sends the PC (and, presumably, his or her friends) south with a merchant caravan to search for a missing preserver.

The Alliance’s contact relays the following information to the characters:

“Several weeks ago, one of our mages, a fellow named Amalak Pul, mentioned to us that he was experiencing some odd sensations, a compelling pull to the south.

“He resolved to follow the odd tugging, and thus set out from Urik. We have not heard from him since, and we are growing concerned.

“We desire for you and those you travel with to find Amalak, or at least ascertain his fate.

“All that we know of Amalak’s route was that he was going to visit Tyr on his way to the source of the compulsion. No doubt he intended to check in with the Alliance there.”

The contact offers each Alliance wizard the privilege of copying one spell into their spellbooks (the spells are from the Invocation, Summoning, and Conjuring schools).

For the PCs’ non-Alliance party members, the Alliance can offer each one a single potion fruit (any

Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees



potion, but no more than two of any one potion type for the entire group), or a magical (+1 enchantment), non-metal version of a PC's favored weapon. The Alliance also offers the PCs transportation in the form of kanks.

Once the PCs have agreed to go, the Alliance contact offers what little information he has.

- Amalak Pul is a male human in his late 60s. He is an Invoker.
- Amalak said that he would stop in Tyr to see if he could collect more information.
- All that Amalak would say about this odd compulsion was that he could see in his mind's eye fields of grass and trees blooming in the desert.

Forces of Order. The characters are approached by a member of the Order, who sends the characters to Tyr by way of merchant caravan to investigate some odd emanations in the air. The discussion is aimed primarily at a psionicist PC. Read the following to the PC or PCs who are of the psionicist class:

Your sleep was a fitful one, with dreams haunted by disturbing premonitions. Though features and images were indistinct, you got the sense of death on a massive scale, and of life blooming in the barren wastelands. A siren call seemed to hang in the hot air, only to be replaced by the distinct feeling that you were being watched. You woke in a sweat, heart pounding and mouth excessively dry. Standing before you is a slim humanoid figure wearing an ornate mask that covers his entire head.

This is Tem Gar, an elven psionicist of the Order. Rather than talk openly, Tem Gar uses his mental powers to talk exclusively to the most powerful psionicist PC. Read the following to only that PC:

"At last, I have found you. I am Tem Gar, of the Order. I have used my powers to seek you out, for there is work for you to do.

"In recent weeks, the more sensitive members of our

Order have sensed a great disturbance in the air. Something grand and terrible is afoot, but its nature is shrouded from our probing.

"All concur that one possible place to find answers is in the city of Tyr. You may wish to start your search there. Look for an aged man in distress, in the Tradesman's District near the Caravan Gate.

"That is all that I can impart to you. Unless you have any queries, I shall take my leave of you."

If he is asked why the PCs have been chosen for this task, Tem only replies cryptically that all psionic dreams and probing about this "disturbance" have shown this party of adventurers to be crucial in whatever events are unfolding. As a reward, Tem offers to provide training for PCs who need a teacher on the psionic arts.

Next: Go on to **Part One B: A Job Nearly Done** to start the adventure.

Part One B: A Job Nearly Done

Setup: This encounter takes place on the road, a day's journey from Tyr. For whatever reason, the PCs are traveling with a caravan run by a group of standoffish merchants. Tell the players to turn to *Player's Book p. 2, The Caravan*.

Start: Read the following aloud:

You are traveling as caravan guards for a group of merchants on the road from Urik to Tyr. You are presently about a day's travel from Tyr. The trip has thus far been uneventful. The merchants are rather snobbish, not bothering to speak to you unless it pertains to matters of work.

The caravan has been traveling at night. It's now dawn, and the temperature is rising with the sun. The two wagons halt, and you make camp.

Give the PCs a chance to talk among themselves for a while, determining guard duty and so forth. If the PCs



Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees

wish to try to speak to the merchants again, then let them.

The merchant caravan consists of two large wagons, each pulled by a pair of mekillots. There are 24 merchants, and eight bodyguard/servants who attend them. The caravan is carrying 500 square yards of rich cloth, 800 square yards of fine cloth, 1,200 square yards of common cloth, and 2,000 square yards of leather. There are also a half dozen bone long swords, and eight suits of mekillot armor (seven human and one dwarf sized).

Inside the first wagon there is a small chest. The chest contains 10 silver pieces, 88 ceramic pieces, and a few letters. One letter appears to be a series of random scribblings. The scribblings read:

"Lush forests? . . . Tyr, Tradesman's District. . . trade fortresses . . . preservers and defilers. . . prophet who makes grass grow in her wake . . ."

Encounter: Just as the caravan is about to settle down for a day's worth of sleep, the PCs on guard duty notice a bunch of figures riding kanks over the crest of a rocky rise, 100 yards away. With a loud cry, the figures urge their mounts forward and charge down the rise, weapons banded.

This group is known as the Dawn Raiders, for obvious reasons. The most unusual feature about them is that they are all half-elves. The Dawn Raiders are all outcasts and past targets of racial intolerance who have banded together for mutual survival—and to make everyone else suffer.

The Dawn Raiders have only recently set up camp nearby. Their last known position previous to this was near Nibenay, but resistance there got too intense, and the Raiders decided it was time to move on.

The Dawn Raiders' only goal is to rob the caravan of its goods. While they don't go out of their way to kill, they will gladly do so if offered any resistance.

A charismatic half-elf named Galorthas Amoratas leads the Dawn Raiders.

Role-playing: If the merchants are approached before the fight, they are aloof and have little to say. The merchants see the PCs as a necessary fact of life in Athas, but it doesn't mean they have to like them. They are coolly polite, but generally stay apart from the PCs.

The Dawn Raiders are convinced that the "pure" races of Athas despise them, and this gives the Raiders license to rob and kill.

Galorthas is a devil-may-care robber, but has occasional fits of violence that contrast oddly with his good manners and infectious laugh.

Dialogue

"You are our bodyguards, we are your employers. Let us keep it at that. You are not being paid to socialize with us." (merchants)

"All this way, and nothing has attacked us! Perhaps hiring your little group was an unjustified expense!" (merchants)

"Good travelers, since your kind is so quick to scorn us half-breeds and claim that we are brutal and worthless, let us not disappoint you. Feel the wrath of my Dawn Raiders, as they relieve you of wealth and health!" (Galorthas)

Reactions: Any PC who rudely persists in making the merchants talk to him or her is met with open scorn, and an unspoken threat from at least four of the personal bodyguards.

The Dawn Raiders won't attack a half-elf PC or merchant unless that half-elf attacks them first. Galorthas himself alternates between the "cordial stranger" and the "cold heartless bandit" routines. If he sees that the PCs are putting up a good fight, Galorthas tells his Raiders to only subdue the PCs, strip them of their weapons, and let them keep their lives in recognition of their skills.

If the Raiders suffer more than 50% casualties, Galorthas sounds the retreat. Ideally, Galorthas should survive this encounter to meet the PCs again in the future.

Statistics: *Dawn Raiders (19):* F4; AL NE; AC 6 (mekillot hide); MV 12; HD 4; hp 32 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1;

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Dmg 1d8-1 (bone long swords), 1d8-1 (obsidian spears); ML 14; Str 17; Dex 14; Con 15; Int 15; Wis; Cha 11.

Galorthas Amoratas: F10/Ps5; AL NE; AC 1 (+2 chitinous scale armor); MV 12; HD 10; hp 68; THAC0 11; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8 (steel long sword); ML 18; Str 17; Dex 18; Con 18; Int 17; Wis 16; Cha 19. Psionic Summary: PSPs 82, At/Df EW, PB/TW, MB, MiBa; Telepathy – Sciences: mass domination, psychic crush; Devotions: attraction, awe, conceal thoughts, contact, ego whip, ESP, psionic blast; Psychometabolism – Sciences: complete healing; Devotions: body equilibrium, displacement, ectoplasmic form.

Galorthas is a suave, cocky half-elf who is a brilliant strategist and a cunning raider.

Kanks (20): AL N; AC 5; MV 15; HD 2; hp 7; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SA Class O Poison (save vs. poison or paralyzed for 2d12 rounds); SZ L; ML 14; XP 35.

Merchants (24): Tr5; AL NG; AC 10; MV 12; HD 5; hp 13; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4-1 (bone daggers); ML 12; Str 11; Dex 12; Con 11; Int 15; Wis 14; Cha 14.

Bodyguard/Servants (8): F3; AL NG; AC 6 (mekillot hide); MV 12; HD 3; hp 22; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8-1 (bone long swords); ML 13; Str 16; Dex 14; Con 14; Int 9; Wis 8; Cha 12.

Gudak, Bodyguard Captain: F5; AL NG; AC 6 (mekillot hide); MV 12; HD 5; hp 36; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8-1 (bone long swords); ML 13; Str 16; Dex 14; Con 14; Int 12; Wis 8; Cha 12.

The captain of the bodyguards is Gudak, a snarling, crusty dwarf female whose focus is to build up her own caravan company.

Outcome: If the PCs defeat the Raiders, the merchants' tune changes dramatically. Suddenly, a day's ride from Tyr seems an eternity, and the merchants become all too aware of their own mortality. Thus, they begin to treat the PCs with a great deal more respect. The PCs are invited into the second wagon, where they are offered fine

food, drinks, and conversation with the merchants.

Conversing with the merchants yields the following rumors, though they should be revealed gradually. It is even better if the PCs ask questions which accidentally prompt a rumor.

- A prophet has come forth from the masses, preaching the restoration of the land. Grass grows in her footprints where she walks.
- Going to Tyr these days is risky; there is talk of some crazed defiler and her network of spies, looking for news about a new *tree of life*.
- To the northeast of Tyr, a cousin of mine tells of finding a small grotto at the foot of the mountains, with fresh water, and the remains of several warriors dressed in metal armor.
- A forest has grown up overnight, to the southeast of Tyr. It is a lush paradise with water, succulent fruit, and beautiful men and women who wait to welcome you.
- The spirit of Kalak is wandering Athas, doomed to this fate until he pays for his misdeeds done to the people of Tyr.
- Before we left Urik, my brother-in-law abruptly left his pottery booth, threw a few necessities into a sack, and wandered, glassy-eyed, out of town.
- An acquaintance of mine claims that those people most gifted with powers of the mind are rather agitated. Some feeling is heavy in the air, and it bodes ill for all of Athas.

The merchants insist that the PCs stay with the caravan until it pulls into Tyr. It enters the city via the Caravan Gate, and unloads at one of the shops in the Tradesmen's District located on Caravan Way.

Next: After the PCs have heard a few rumors, and the caravan arrives in Tyr, turn to **Part One C: Welcome to Tyr**.



Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees

Part One C: Welcome to Tyr

Setup: This encounter takes place after the PCs have entered Tyr. They enter by the Caravan Gate (see the Map of Tyr included with the DARK SUN® Boxed Set). This section gets the PCs settled and gives them a chance to rest, rearm, and study up on spells.

Start: Once the PCs are in the district in question, read the following:

At long last, your journey ends in the great city of Tyr. Though the city is still reeling from events that happened during Kalak's reign, it is nevertheless a relief to be among civilized people again.

The shops and booths along Caravan Way are bustling with merchants and customers, each trying to out-deal the other. The hot air hangs heavy with cries of offers and counteroffers.

One prominent building catches your eye – a two story mud brick building with a signboard showing a bowl, a drinking vessel, and a sleeping mat. You notice that the sign board is shaped like a mekillot.

The inn is located in a convenient place; there are stalls and shops that offer all kinds of goods.

Your mouths begin to water involuntarily as your mind conjures up images of relaxing in the cool, dark drinking room, a ceramic mug of cold beer raised to dry lips.

Consult Map One for locations of the various businesses described below.

Encounter: The following is the key to the map of the neighborhood.

1. The Sleeping Mekillot. This is a two story inn that provides decent food and drink, plus sleeping quarters upstairs. The place is run by Bevis Gorridin, a dwarf ex-gladiator. He employs a half-giant named Twister as a bouncer.

The drinking room (or common room) is a favored spot for mercenaries, merchants waiting for their caravans to form, and, unknown to all, the spies of Lerilyn the defiler. There are three private rooms (one ceramic each for an evening) where a group can eat and drink in quiet privacy. At any given time, Bevis has four females working in the drinking room, usually humans and half-elves.

The upstairs rooms have secure locks on the doors. Each room has a two sleeping mats, a lamp and oil, and hooks to hang clothes and gear. At the customers' request, two hammocks can be hung up in a room, enabling up to four people to sleep in one room. The rooms are five bits per night, and meals are three bits.

Bevis Gorridin (dwarf male): G9; AL CG; AC 7; MV 12; HD 7; hp 73; THAC0 12; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8 (steel battleaxe); ML 19; Str 19; Dex 17; Con 19; Int 11; Wis 15; Cha 11. Bevis is a bit of a growler, he snarls at everyone, but his customers accept this idiosyncracy gladly due to his excellent home-brewed beer and his savory stews.

Twister (half-giant male): F7; AL CG/CN; AC 7; MV 30; HD 14; hp 85; THAC0 14; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6 (club); ML 19; Str 20; Dex 15; Con 18; Int 6; Wis 7; Cha 6. Twister got his name from his habit of twisting the appendages of his victims (arms, legs, and heads). He is fanatically loyal to Bevis but is also amazingly stupid, totally useless in noncombat situations.

2. Stables. Located conveniently adjacent to the inn, the stables are run by Goren, a mul. For 2 ceramic pieces, Goren houses, feeds, and cares for a mount, for one night.

Goren (male mul): F5; AL LN; AC 8 (leather); MV 24; HD 5; hp 37; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (steel dagger); ML 14; Str 16; Dex 14; Con 15; Int 14; Wis 11; Cha 10.

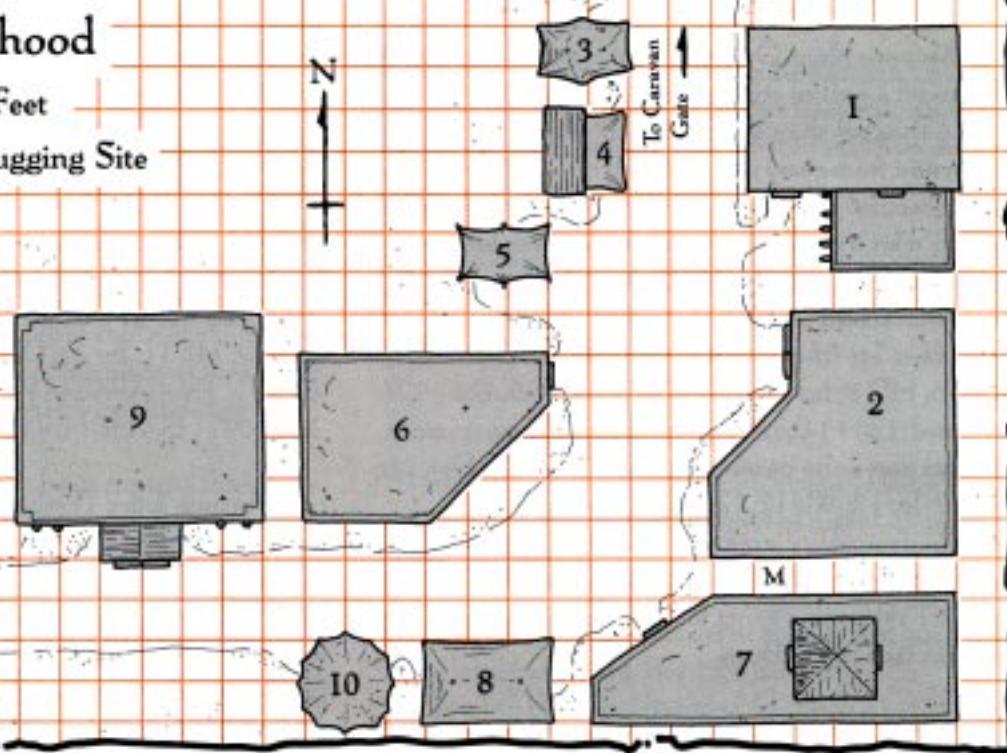
3. Money Changer. This colorful booth is manned by Agar Coinmaster, an elven merchant. He can convert coinage, make change, and even give cash for gems. He has coins of all denominations, from all over Athas. Changing

Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees



Tyr Neighborhood

One square = 10 Feet
M = Amalak's Mugging Site



currency of other cities to Tyr minted coins carries a 10% fee. For simple change-making transactions, Agar charges one bit per ceramic piece. Just to make sure that no one cheats him, a very watchful half-giant named Ogramar Shatterface stands ever vigilant as Agar's bodyguard.

Agar (elf male): W6; AL CN; AC 5; MV 24; HD 6; hp 13; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4-1 (bone dagger); ML 14; Str 11; Dex 19; Con 14; Int 18; Wis 15; Cha 18. Spells (4/4/2)—First level: *alarm, armor, charm person, comprehend languages, identify, sleep*; Second Level: *deppockets, detect psionics, ESP, fool's gold, know alignment*; Third Level: *dispel magic, hold person*.

Agar is a preserver. He has somatic concealment and appraising as nonweapon proficiencies. Agar is a jaunty sort, always looking for a good deal. He enjoys drinking at the Mekillot.

Ogramar Shatterface (half-giant male): F5; AL CN/LN; AC 10; MV 24; HD 5; hp 40; THAC0 16;

#AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (steel long sword); ML 18; Str 20; Dex 13; Con 17; Int 8; Wis 8; Cha 4. Ogramar is fairly sharp for a half-giant. He is loyal to Agar.

4. Clothes and Cloth. This cloth-shaded booth is owned by an old human woman named Adris Zil, who sells clothing and whole cloth, and charges an honest price. The other businesses featured here watch out for her, out of neighborly loyalty. Adris' ears and eyes are still good, and she sees and hears much. She is a good source of rumors.

5. Water and Jars. Bryndren Orek, a half-elf, runs this booth, where he sells filled water containers. Due to the breakdown of the templar system in Tyr, the water supply is distributed in a different manner, using authorized merchants to sell water and split the proceeds with the city. Two gallons of water cost one bit if the PC already has a container. Otherwise, one bit buys one gallon of water plus the container to hold it.



Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees

6. Weapons Shop. Over the portal of this establishment are carved a pair of stylized crossed obsidian swords. Within the cool shop are weapons of every conceivable design and from every possible material, and even a few metal weapons! The shop is run for an anonymous owner by T'rkk'tt'ktt, a retired thri-kreen gladiator who loves working with weapons. T'rkk, as he is known, charges a fair price and is even known to buy weapons in good shape.

T'rkk'tt'ktt (thri-kreen male): G8; AL CG; AC 3; MV 36; HD 8; hp 68; THAC0 13; #AT 5; Dmg 1d4 (x4 claws), 1d4+1 (bite); SA Victims of bite must save vs. paralyzation or be paralyzed; ML 17; Str 15; Dex 16; Con 19; Int 12; Wis 12; Cha 7.

T'rkk is a polite creature who is fascinated with weapons. He has the weaponmith nonweapon proficiency. T'rkk enjoys going to the Mekillot and arguing gladiator tactics with Bevis.

7. Armor Shop. This shop is owned by Alamara Doren Ral, a female human warrior. "Mara" is an expert armorer, and she offers a wide selection of shields and armor in all materials save metal. She also accepts commissions to take an animal hide, cure it, and shape it into armor for a customer. This takes about a week, and requires three fitting sessions.

Alamara Doren Ral (female human): F3; AL CG; AC 5; MV 24; HD 3; hp 21; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (steel dagger); ML 17; Str 16; Dex 18; Con 15; Int 14; Wis 15; Cha 15.

Alamara has the armorer nonweapon proficiency. Mara keeps a very close eye on Adris Zil's safety. She wears a +1 leather headband of protection.

8. Eyes and Ears of Tyr. This brightly colored booth is always crowded with limber, eager young men and women, who for three bits per day act as guides for people new to Tyr. Each guide is conversant in local laws and customs, knows where everything that is common knowledge is located, and is familiar with current gossip and

rumors. There is a 50% chance that a guide is a practicing thief. Some guides have knowledge of things not known by the public, as reflected by the following percentages: reliable fence 15%, Veiled Alliance contact 5%, Thieves Guild den 30%, illegal goods sold (includes material components for magic spells) 25%.

Average Guide (Thief): T5; AL N; AC 2; MV 12; HD 5; hp 17; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4-1 (bone dagger); ML 11; Str 13; Dex 18; Con 12; Int 14; Wis 14; Cha 15. Thief Abilities: PP 80%, OL 52%, F/RT 50%, MS 60%, HS 41%, HN 25%, CW 90%, RL 20%.

9. Fortune Teller. This building is in excellent repair, with an exterior decorated with scores of astrological and spiritual (not magical) symbols. Within is Paroosa, a Priest of Earth. Paroosa has the habit of tossing handfuls of dirt on people and saying "all praise the earth!" The building serves as a shrine to the elemental power of Earth, a business place where Paroosa can make his predictions, as well his residence.

Paroosa can cast horoscopes, cast bones, and read entrails (one ceramic piece each). He is also an excellent source of priestly healing. Contributions to the Earth shrine are always welcome.

Paroosa (male priest of Earth): P9; AL LG; AC 10; MV 24; HD 9; hp 63; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (staff); ML 15; Str 17; Dex 14; Con 16; Int 17; Wis 18; Cha 11. Spells (6/6/4/3/2): Sphere of Earth, Sphere of the Cosmos.

Paroosa is clad in an earth-brown robe, and appears to shed dirt wherever he goes. People get rather annoyed at his dirt-tossing (which he calls "blessings"). Bevis has yelled at him on numerous occasions for tracking dirt into the inn. Paroosa has the astrology, healing, and religion proficiencies.

10. Tattoos. This booth is run by Stratyn, a hard-drinking dwarf who is an excellent artist. His tattoos are famous in this section of the city. He wears a large amount of his talent on his own body, what he calls his "advertising method."

Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees



Rumors

The most important thing the PCs can get in this neighborhood are rumors. The following ones can be picked up through the course of the PCs' stay in the area, particularly at the inn.

- Funniest thing. A few days ago, a band of mercenaries just up and left their table at the Mekillot, left their gear, and walked out of the place in the heat of the day. Last anyone saw, they were wandering out of town, heading southeast.
- Some crazy sorceress has been turning the neighborhood on its ear. She has been sending her henchmen to look for anyone who has witnessed the great forest that is springing up in the southeast.
- Some old man in robes was seen wandering through the neighborhood late yesterday. His mind seems to be gone, probably crazy from the heat. He looked like he had been spending a bit too much time wandering the desert. Kept mumbling "I'm Amalak, my mind is my own."
- A beautiful woman called Greenbringer, of great mental and magical powers, has appeared southeast of here near Altaruk. Her messengers are a prophet and a bard, who are rallying the people to her side. She promises to restore Athas' greenery, and has already done so in a small area.
- A hideous elemental creature that eats young people is sending out a siren call and mesmerizing poor innocents into traveling to its lair, located near Altaruk. It feasts especially on those who call themselves "good."

Reactions: All strangers who come to this neighborhood are treated well—provided they behave themselves. The shopkeepers in this neighborhood all watch out for each other. An attack on one is considered an attack on all.

The more a PC visits a particular business, the more likely the proprietor remembers him or her and is willing to talk and share rumors.

Outcome: There should be enough common threads among the gathered rumors (Altaruk, southeast, trees growing) to give the PCs the hint that they are supposed to travel to the southeast.

Next: Once the PCs realize where to go next, move them into **Part One D: Preserving the Preserver**.

Part One D: Preserving the Preserver

Setup: The night before the PCs plan to leave Tyr (or the morning, if they plan to travel at night), they see an assault in progress.

Start: This encounter occurs in an alley just out of view of the local businesses. Read the following:

Thus far, this neighborhood has been a useful place for your group. Food, drink, rest, equipment, stories, and friends—all have been found in sufficient supply.

As you make your way through the neighborhood, you catch some movement out of the corner of your eye, in the alley that your group has just passed.

Taking a closer look, you see three figures attacking a fourth. The victim is an old man. As your eyes adjust to the alley's dim light, you can make out his features. You cannot tell if his eyes are wide with fear or heat madness.

If the PCs listen, they hear the following exchange:

"Please! Please! Leave me be! I am a great wizard, and if you do not leave me be, I shall strike you all dead, if only I can remember the spell—!"

"Oooo, he's gonna strike us dead, he is! Shouldn't we all be on our knees, beggin' fer mercy?"

"Now old man, stand still and do what we says, our magic lady wishes to speak with ye!"

"He's not standing still. Looks like we'll have to beat him some more!"



Part One: Tall Tales of Tall Trees

"A pleasure, but remember, he has ta be alive, the mistress ordered it so."

Encounter: The PCs witness the missing preserver, Amalak Pul, being attacked by Lerilyn Toar's henchmen. If the PCs have not made any noise thus far, the ruffians won't notice them, giving the party the opportunity to surprise them. Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p.2—*Amalak*.

Role-playing: Amalak is clearly addled, a victim of mindwreck (see the *Short Story Book*). All of his spells have been burned out of his mind, and he is beaten, dazed, starving, and dehydrated.

The three mul henchmen are cocky and arrogant, confident in their mistress's magical powers. Interrogating any surviving henchmen is difficult.

Statistics: Amalak's stats are in the *Short Story Book*.

Mul Henchmen (3): F9; AL LE; AC 3 (scale mail); MV 12; HD 3; hp 76; THAC0 12; #AT 3/2; Dmg 2d4-1 (obsidian bastard swords), 1d6+1 (metal wrist razors); ML 15; Str 19; Dex 17; Con 16; Int 10; Wis 8; Cha 6.

Outcome: If two of the muls die or are captured, the third attempts to escape. Lerilyn uses the psionic discipline sight link to monitor the mul's progress.

Amalak only mutters "... woods ... forest ... tree of life ... must preserve it ... keep it from that she-kank ..."

A quick search of Amalak reveals that he is not well-prepared for traveling on Athas. He carries no food, water, or weapons, and only a small pouch of spell components. One unusual item rests among the components. It is a small ball of dirt wrapped in a sheet of papyrus. The valuable sheet, nearly as rare as water on the sun-baked world, bears a crude map. Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p.3—*Amalak's Map*. The ball of dirt, roughly six inches in diameter, is dry and flaky on the outside. Inside, the ball holds rich, moist soil that smells fertile and alive. There are blades of green grass mixed with the dirt.

Amalak also holds something tightly in his left hand, so tightly that blood wells from between his clenched fingers. If the PCs try to open his hand, Amalak mutters, "No, I need this for the next time I meet her." But his protests are weak and his strength spent; if the PCs exert any effort, Amalak opens his hand and lets the contents spill out.

The object, a jagged shard of obsidian, is streaked with Amalak's blood. Wiped clean, the true nature of the shard shows through. The black glass is imperfect. Swirls of crimson just below the surface mar its shiny dark appearance. Amalak says nothing more about the shard. Note which PC (if any) decides to carry it. The shard could come into play at the conclusion of the adventure (See **Part Three F: Showdown** for details.)

No amount of healing, psionic or otherwise, is going to restore Amalak instantly. He requires lengthy bed rest and regular meals and rehydration. His mind is so burnt by the heat and the battle with Abalach-Re that it is an unreadable swirl of chaos. After a month of rest, psychic surgery can cure him. If this is done, the PCs will have a very grateful ally for future adventures.

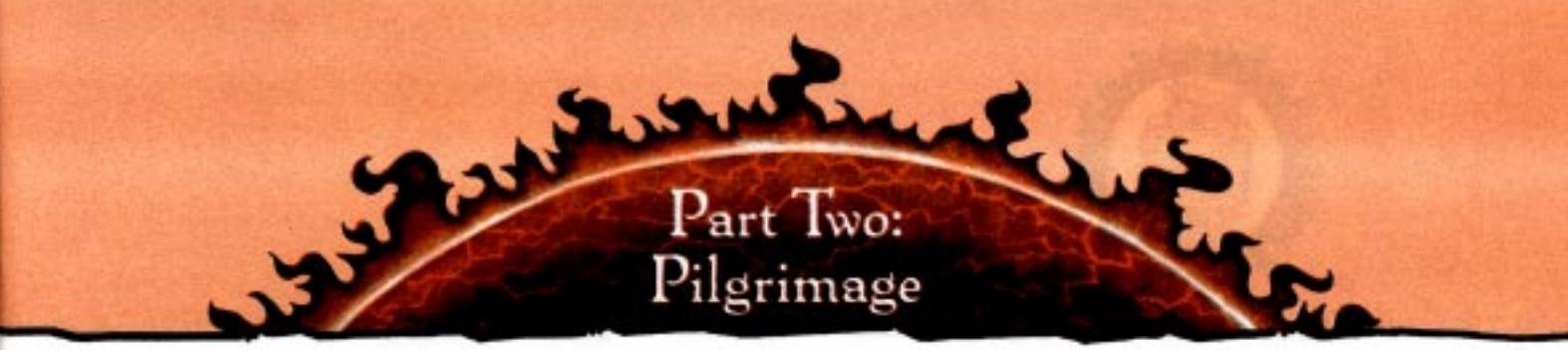
If any of the muls are captured and successfully interrogated, the following is all they can reveal:

- "We work for a spellcaster named Lerilyn Toar. The lady wanted us to capture this old man and bring him to her. She's stayin' somewhere in the city, but we was supposed to take the buzzard bird out of the city and meet her at midnight outside the Caravan Gate."
- "We dunno why she wants the old kank alive. All she tells us is she wants to find a magic tree."

Each mul has the rune of Lerilyn (see page 29) tattooed on his bald head.

From this point on, Lerilyn takes her remaining muls and follow the PCs herself, hoping to catch them in a tight spot.

Next: When the PCs are done with this encounter, go to **Part Two: Pilgrimage**.



Part Two: Pilgrimage

Introduction

This part covers the PCs' journey on the road from Tyr to Altaruk, as well as dealings within the trade fortress itself.

In **Part Two A: Music Critics**, the PCs save a wandering bard from a pack of gith. The bard has more information on the Forest Maker.

Part Two B: Low Elf Esteem brings the PCs face to face with an elven merchant caravan. The elves are unaffected by the call of the forest, but they have more information to impart . . . for a price.

A strange wandering prophet is encountered in **Part Two C: A Prophetable Meeting**.

A creature making a feast out of mesmerized followers must be dealt with in **Part Two D: Pilgrims' Feast**. The encounter seems odd, since the pilgrims are doing nothing to defend themselves.

The PCs arrive in the evening at the trade fortress of Altaruk in **Part Two E: Arrival at Altaruk**. This section details the fortress, including locations the PCs can visit.

Finally, the PCs gather the last of the information they need and plan their trip to the forest in **Part Two F: News, Rumors, and Events**. The defiler Lerilyn Toar attempts to attack the PCs at this time.

Traveling to Altaruk

A road runs from Tyr to Altaruk. As long as the PCs remain on that road, there should be no extra surprises. DMs need not roll for random encounters.

If the PCs elect to travel off the road, the trip takes longer. The DM should roll a wandering monster encounter (using the DARK SUN® *Rules Book* from the boxed set, or the DARK SUN MC) every four hours. The terrain types involved are stony barrens and sandy wastes.

The DM should make sure to convey to the players the unique hazards and features of traveling overland in Athas. The heat, dust, desolation, and lack of vegetation

all should be readily noticeable. This becomes important when the PCs see the lush forest in **Part Three**; it is necessary to establish how barren the land is in order to make the impact of the forest that much greater.

It takes a PC with a base movement of 24 three days to travel by the road from Tyr to Altaruk.

The optimum time to travel is at night, when it is cooler and less water must be consumed.

The Mesmerized Pilgrims

Abalach-Re is using her artifact to send out a summons to sentient races, compelling them to obey. The principle alignment affected is Lawful Good, though there are some Neutral Goods in the mix. Chaotic Goods and True Neutrals hear the call, but are not compelled to obey it. Thri-kreen, regardless of alignment, cannot hear the call and are unaffected, due to their alien physiology.

The pilgrims come from all of the races of Athas (except thri-kreen), ranging in age from young teens to elderly, from all walks of life. Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p.4—*Pilgrimage*.

The pilgrims are aloof and distant, and do not speak to each other. They do not respond to any questions, threats, pleas, or insults, either.

The pilgrims' faces are frozen in masks of passive obedience, and their eyes stare blankly ahead. Regardless of social station, all of the pilgrims are clad in simple clothing and carry few possessions. They are unarmed, regardless of their profession.

If a pilgrim is attacked, he or she ignores the damage and continues on. If an obstacle is put in a pilgrim's path, the devoted follower simply walks around, taking only as much of a detour is needed.

While in the catatonic thrall, the pilgrims are immune to all mind-affecting spells and psionic powers. Attempting to read the mind of a mesmerized pilgrim yields little of use. There is but a single readable image in all the pilgrims'



Part Two: Pilgrimage

minds: a lush, tall tree that seems to radiate life and health.

DMs should not use the words "mesmerized," "hypnotized," or any other term that implies outside control to describe the pilgrims.

Three days away from Altaruk, the PCs encounter 1d6 pilgrims. For every day closer, add another 1d6. Thus, PCs one day away from Altaruk encounter 3d6 pilgrims. The frequency of pilgrim encounters is up to the DM. Considering how little information and interaction is to be had from these bands, DMs are advised not to overdo it.

DMs should feel free to toss in gladiators, priests, preservers, and other interesting sorts among the pilgrims. The fact that the PCs may encounter a gladiator who does not have a single weapon on him is a significant clue that something is terribly wrong.

The stats given below are for the "average" pilgrim.

Statistics: Pilgrims. F1; AL LG/NG; AC 10; MV 12; HD 1; hp 8; THAC0 20; #AT 0; Dmg nil; ML 20; Str 14; Dex 14; Con 15; Int 12; Wis 12; Cha 11.

The pilgrims travel continuously, not stopping for sleep or food. The pilgrims take their meager food and water rations as they walk, their stony expressions never changing.

The most insidious thing about traveling with the pilgrims is that groups of more than six pilgrims exert the compulsion locally. PCs who are eligible to follow the compulsion (Lawful or Neutral Good characters) must make a saving throw vs. death magic, at a -1 penalty per six pilgrims present in the group, up to a penalty of -3.

If the PC fails the saving throw, he or she assumes the same demeanor as the pilgrims and quietly joins the ranks. A PC who makes the save is immune to the compulsion until the following day, when he or she must make another save if a group of pilgrims are met that day.

DMs should give the PCs that failed another save every day, at the same penalty that the PC had when he or she initially failed the save. This represents the hero's strong willpower attempting to "shake off" the outside influence.

Part Two A: Music Critics

Setup: This encounter occurs at the place marked "A" on the inside cover map (Map Two), which the average party should reach at the end of their first day of travel. A pack of gith have set upon Domera Thal, a wandering bard.

Start: Read the following aloud:

You have traveled as far as you can this day, and are now on the lookout for a comfortable place to camp and get some sleep. The trick of finding a decent place to sleep is to not stray too far from the road, yet not camp by the edge, where you may attract unwanted attention.

Speaking of unwanted attention, someone ahead of you has certainly done that. A woman's voice shouts out a challenge to the over two dozen humanoid creatures that surround her and are closing in.

The gaunt figures, resembling crosses between elves and reptiles, wield wicked-looking spears. One need not understand their guttural hissing to know that they are taunting their prey. Still, their prey is anything but helpless: two of the creatures already lay dead at her feet.

The woman ceases shouting. At once, you realize that she sees you. Though you are too far to make out her expression, her attitude has obviously changed, for now she is singing an inspirational war song.

Initial range from the party is 90 yards. Thus far, the gith have not noticed the party, so intent are they on their cruel sport.

Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p.4—*Domera's Stand*.

Encounter: There are 25 gith here, including their leader. The would-be victim is the bard Domera Thal. If the PCs simply charge the gith, they hear the party when the distance is closed to 45 yards. At that point, the gith leader plus 19 of his warriors break off and move to intercept the party while

Part Two: Pilgrimage



the remaining four stay to engage Domera.

If the PCs make an effort to be quiet, they are able to close within melee range of the gith without the latter realizing it.

Domera is singing an inspirational song. After three rounds of singing, the PCs gain either a +1 to attack rolls or +1 to saving throws (PC's choice).

Role-playing: Once the PCs move closer, they see that Domera's expression is one of relief and quiet confidence. While she sings for the three rounds, she parries the giths' attacks. Once the song is done, she launches herself into battle with frightening fury.

The gith are here for sport. They had not anticipated any significant resistance. If the gith lose one third of their number, they begin pulling back. Their lair is a large cave in the stony barrens, two miles due south off the road.

In any event, the gith leader is the one who is most ready to make good his escape if things go badly. If any gith survive, he should be included.

If the PCs and Domera manage to defeat the gith, the bard is calmly grateful for the assist, though she only says that what the party truly did was to save her the time and energy of having to kill all the gith herself. At no point does Domera imply that she was in any real danger.

Dialogue

"Come on, you gith filth! Two of you have already fallen—who wants to be the next to join them?"

"My thanks for your hand against the gith scum. It would have been a real bother if I had to kill them all myself."

"So, travelers. You wield weapons and such in ways that betray your level of skill. You have been doing this for a while, eh? Have you any interesting tales that I may transcribe?"

Statistics: Domera's stats are in the *Short Story Book*.

Gith (25): AL CE; AC 8; MV 10; HD 3; hp 19 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d6-1 (obsidian gith spears), or 1d4/1d4; SZ M; ML 10; XP 175. Each gith

has an obsidian spear and 2d4 bits.

Ganek, Gith Leader: AL CE; AC 5; MV 10; HD 5; hp 30; THAC0 16; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d6-1 (obsidian gith spear) or 1d4/1d4; SZ M; ML 16; XP 450. Str 17; Dex 16; Con 16; Int 16; Wis 16; Cha 6. Psionic Summary: PSP 80, At/Df II, MT/TW MB, MiBa; Telepathy—Sciences: tower of iron will, project force; Devotions: id insinuation, mind thrust, contact, mind blank, mental barrier; Psychokinesis—Sciences: telekinesis; Devotions: animate object, animate shadow, ballistic attack, control body, control flames.

Ganek is a cunning leader who rules his gith pack with a fearsome unpredictable cruelty. He has a cowardly streak that compels him to retreat when even slightly outmatched.

Ganek wears a +3 amulet of protection (a stone disc on a leather thong). He also carries 3d6 ceramic pieces, 1d6 silver pieces, and a beautiful black topaz worth 10 gp.

Outcome: Once the gith have been slain or driven off, Domera (providing she is still alive!) offers to share camp with the PCs. If they seem reluctant, she hints that something odd has been going on in the Alluvial Wastes, and she has some interesting insights to share. She is more likely to talk to elf, half-elf, or human PC males with Charisms of 15 or greater.

Domera imparts the following information, though she does it gradually and with much fanfare, like she is telling the grandest of stories:

- "A few weeks ago, I received an odd vision of a lush forest. Folk of every race and tribe were gathered round a large tree, and a glowing being descended from the heavens."
- "I had a compulsion to go to Altaruk, but that's where the vision lost my favor... no one, but no one, compels me to do anything. I intend to go to Altaruk, but on my own initiative, at a time of my own choosing."
- "I have seen bands of people, pilgrims, most likely, walking in the general direction of Altaruk. They are beyond communicating, almost as if they were swept up in some contemplative ecstasy."



Part Two: Pilgrimage

Domera offers to take her turn at guard duty while the group is camped. However, when the PCs are ready to continue their journey, Domera replies that she intends to continue her wanderings, and that she "is not yet ready to be a pilgrim."

Next: Once the PCs have conversed with Domera at length, and the PCs have rested, go to **Part Two B: Low Elf Esteem**.

Part Two B: Low Elf Esteem

Setup: In the middle of the second day of travel, at location "B" on the inside cover map, the PCs come upon a small elven caravan bound for Altaruk.

Start: Read the following aloud to the players:

At the halfway point of your second day of travel, you notice a series of many tracks, humanoid prints mingled with inix tracks.

In the ensuing hour, the tracks become more and more distinct, until at last you see up ahead on the road a half dozen inix and riders, and a dozen figures walking alongside.

Initial range is 150 yards.

Encounter: This is an elven caravan from the tribe of Fastcoins, bound for the fortress of Altaruk.

Once the PCs announce their presence, the elves call a halt. A half dozen of the striders race up to the PCs to ascertain their intentions while the inix riders, already taking an educated guess of the PCs' intentions, dismount and begin laying out goods to be traded.

The elves do not act violently toward the PCs provided the latter do not initiate any hostile actions.

Role-playing: The Fastcoin tribe is not known for its integrity, even among other elven merchant tribes. They are shrewd traders for whom the ends (accumulation of

massive wealth) justify the means (anything that works).

The elven merchants give the PCs their sales pitch, trotting out all sorts of interesting wares and trinkets, making each product into a great production.

The elves are friendly, even fawning, though under this obsequious veneer they are laughing with derision at the PCs, whom they see as easy targets.

The pilgrimage phenomenon has not been missed by the elves. If they get even the slightest idea that the PCs are seeking information about this event, the elves are delighted, and they attempt to sell (or barter) information, giving as little as possible while still making it look like a bargain.

If the PCs are particularly friendly, the elves invite the PCs to share food and drink with them—their treat, in fact. The elves try to get the PCs drunk and invite them to play games of chance (for wagers, of course).

Dialogue

"Look at these juicy fruits, each filled with an exotic liqueur! Where else in this forsaken desert are you going to find such succulent treats? Or these weapons of fine obsidian?"

"Well, if it is information that you seek, we have more than enough that we shall be willing to share, provided we can reach a mutually agreeable price!"

Statistics: *Kel Fastcoin, Caravan Leader:* Tr8; AL CN; AC 2 (leather); MV 13; HD 8; hp 37; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (steel long sword); ML 16; Str 16; Dex 20; Con 17; Int 18; Wis 17; Cha 19. Wild Talent: conceal thoughts; PS 14; Cost 5/3 rd; PSPs 39.

Kel is a cocky elven merchant who leads this caravan. He is always looking for a way to make an honest (as well as a dishonest) ceramic piece. He has the gambling and persuasion nonweapon proficiencies.

Kel carries a wineskin filled with elven wine, a pouch with his favorite dice, deck of cards, one fruit with a *potion of healing*, 4d6 ceramic pieces, and 2d10 silver pieces.

Elven Scouts (12): R3; AL N; AC 2 (leather); MV 18; HD 3; hp 20; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8-1 (bone

Part Two: Pilgrimage



long swords), 1d6 (short bow); ML 14; Str 17; Dex 19; Con 16; Int 14; Wis 18; Cha 17.

Each ranger has a pouch with 2d8 ceramic pieces.

Elven Merchants (6): Tr5; AL N; AC 3 (leather); MV 17; HD 5; hp 18; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (steel long swords); ML 15; Str 14; Dex 18; Con 13; Int 15; Wis 15; Cha 16.

Each merchant has the gambling nonweapon proficiency, and carries a pouch with 4d6 ceramic pieces, and 1d4 silver pieces.

Inix (6): AL N; AC 6; MV 15; HD 6; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d8; SA Crush; SD Nil; SZ H; ML 12; XP 650.

The caravan contains eight tuns of elven wine, two gallons of perfume, 500 pounds of nuts, 2,000 sheets of paper, four gallons of ink, 40 pounds of wax, and 20 pounds of cinnabar.

In addition to this cargo, the elves also have a complete range of mage spell components, though the presence of this cargo is volunteered; the PCs must ask. Assume that all components cost double normal price.

The Fastcoin tribe engages in raiding, hunting, herding, or trade, as dictated by their current circumstances. For now, the Fastcoins are interested in trading.

Outcome: Once the trading/gambling/drinking is over, the elves are willing to negotiate for information. Each of the following tidbits of information commands a starting price of 10 ceramic pieces, divided by the conversing PC's Charisma.

For example: Gulak the Ugly, with a Charisma of 5, talks to the elves. The starting price for a tidbit about the true nature of the pilgrims costs him 2 cp. At the same time, Sareena Eye-ease, with a Charisma of 20, tries to get information. Her starting cost is 5 bits.

The elves have the following information to sell:

- "One of our own tribesmen, a merchant with more con-

science than business sense, suddenly decided a few weeks ago to abandon the free life of a trader, and become, in his own words, 'a pilgrim seeking the rebirth of the green.' Then he took off, presumably in this direction."

- "There is talk of a prophet, wandering the desert, supposedly proclaiming the return of some elemental being of unheard of power. Wherever this prophet walks, grass grows."
- "Back in Tyr, there was this woman, a sorceress, though I wager she'd deny it . . . who is very interested in this supposed forest. She travels with a pack of mul henchmen. Her name is Leris, Lyn, Lerlyn, something like that. Who knows with human names?"
- "Since we left Tyr, we have seen packs of pilgrims, all glassy-eyed and oblivious to their surroundings, walking in this direction. Not even talk of our amazing bargains would sway them, or cause any sort of reaction at all."
- "There is word that a pack of halfling cannibals infused with magical power are bringing their jungles to the Great Alluvial Wastes, where they intend to trap passersby and eat them."
- "One of our best spell component customers, a respectable preserver who I shall not name, says that a powerful preserver had come to investigate the supposed forests, but has not been heard from. The Veiled Alliance is looking for him."

Next: Once the PCs have exhausted their options with the elves, take them to **Part Two C: A Prophetable Meeting**.

Part Two C: A Prophetable Meeting

Setup: At the end of the second day of travel, the PCs encounter the wandering prophet, ideally as they have camp set up and are sitting down to eat. This is spot marked with a "C" on the inside cover map.



Part Two: Pilgrimage

Start: Read aloud to the players:

Your second day of travel ends at last, and you make camp and prepare the last meal of the day. Camping out in the sandy wastes is perhaps not the most ideal thing, but it is all you can do. Would that there were trading posts or isolated inns between Tyr and Altaruk!

The aroma of your finished meal wafts through the desert. Hopefully, no predators are about with their noses in the air. You eat and talk, accompanied by the background noises of insects and small animals that stubbornly live in the wastes.

Suddenly, the background noises stop. Before you can react to this development, the air is rent by a loud howl that rises and falls with an eerie rhythm.

The howl's last echo has barely had time to fade when a loud voice booms:

"All gather round and tarry for the Day of Return! Repent from the practices of the defiling wizards and sorcerer-kings! Cast away the trappings of all magic, reject the primitive, impotent belief in the elementals! Repent, for healing and judgment walk hand in hand, and they are nigh!"

Stepping into your camp is an old human male dressed in tattered cloth. He carries a sapling with green leaves still clinging to it. The man uses the sapling as a staff. His hair and beard are a tangled mess of gray. It is obvious that he has been wandering around unprotected in the hot Athasian sun. He suddenly looks at you as if he just noticed your presence, and keeps talking:

"You! You with your own eyes have seen the faithful! They walk night and day, protected only by their faith! Follow them! Join them!"

"Strangers, repent your evil ways! All who embrace the coming of the Forest Maker shall lie in cool grass, be shaded by great leafy trees, drink from cool brooks, and pluck the succulent fruit and hunt the plump game! The Forest Maker comes, and she . . ."

The old man halts in mid-sentence and looks at your bowls and plates. "I say! Is there enough food for a wandering prophet such as myself?"

The prophet is named Coggalan, formerly a psionicist of great power, now reduced to a gibbering madman courtesy of Abalach-Re's mindwreck. Abalach-Re has cast advanced domination upon Cogalan, and uses him as a prophet to invite people to Rafernard's forest.

Encounter: Coggalan has been wandering the sandy wastes for days now, and it shows. He walks the desert aimlessly, announcing the arrival of the Forest Maker.

Coggalan makes every attempt to join the PCs' camp, hoping to eat, drink, and relentlessly proselytize the PCs.

Coggalan has no intention of attacking the PCs.

Role-playing: The expression "He's been out in the sun too long" definitely applies here. Coggalan, once a bastion of logic, discipline, and restraint, now babbles his "prophecies" in random phrases.

Coggalan is subject to rapid mood swings. One minute, he stridently proclaims the coming of the Forest Maker, the next he halts in mid-sentence and notices some nearby detail; he follows this with a 10 minute tirade about how his listeners are rotten to the core, worse even than the sorcerer-kings.

Dialogue

"Believe in the Forest Maker, for she can restore the green both in your hearts and on Athas' soil!"

Statistics: Coggalan's statistics can be found in the *Short Story Book*.

Reactions: If Coggalan is asked about the Forest Maker, he gets all excited and is willing to answer any questions. The following sums up what he says:

- "The Forest Maker is a being of great power who has returned to Athas after abandoning it for so long. She is a benign soul who seeks to restore Athas's life."
- "She returned because she had become disgusted with the sorcerer-kings' destruction of the land, ruining it with their corrupting magics."

Part Two: Pilgrimage



- "I now wander the desert proclaiming her return. The most spectacular sign of her coming is the forest that she has brought into being near the trade fortress of Altaruk."
- "Altaruk is important, for it is the gathering area for the pilgrims. When they gather there, the pilgrims form themselves into larger groups for protection as they prepare to walk out into the wild areas where the forest lies."
- "The precise location of the forest is a secret divulged only once the faithful have passed through the gates of Altaruk."
- "There are those who oppose the Forest Maker! If they succeed in their quest to destroy her, then all hope for Athas will be lost! These unbelievers come from the ranks of power-defilers, secretive psionists, and even a crazed warrior with a sword of flames! If you are true believers, you must heed the words of the Forest Maker and destroy both warrior and sword! For within its blazing flames even the Forest Maker can be consumed!"

Outcome: Once the prophet has had his share of food and drink, and he is done haranguing, pleading, and preaching to the PCs, he gets up and leaves their camp. He declares that "My work here is done!" and heads west, ostensibly the direction the PCs came from.

Next: Once the PCs have finished with Coggalan (and vice versa), go on to **Part Two D: Pilgrims' Feast**.

Part Two: Pilgrims' Feast

Setup: When the party begins its third day of travel, or when they reach area "D" on the inside cover map, run this encounter.

Start: Read the following aloud to the players:

You begin your third, and by all indications the last,

day of travel. You break camp and resume your trek.

The terrain has shifted from sandy wastes to stony barrens, a definite sign that you are nearing Altaruk. The terrain change indicates a greater likelihood of encountering life, and after the stretch of wasteland you traveled yesterday, seeing some sign of life, any life, would be an improvement.

Loud, rumbling sounds of laughter and the stench of still-burning flesh invalidates that last idea. A small plume of black smoke drifts up from behind a small rocky rise. Since the road goes up that rise, it is obvious that whatever is ahead lies right on your path.

Over the slope, you see the source of the stench, the smoke, and the roaring laughter. Ahead of you, down on the road, you see a large band of pilgrims, three dozen easily. They are marching very deliberately in the direction of Altaruk, never leaving the road. At the side of the road is a huge beast. At least a couple dozen feet long, this spiny, scaly reptile is grabbing fistfuls of pilgrims and shoving them in to its mouth.

Off to the creature's right, a pile of corpses burns brightly. The worst part of this whole scene is that the pilgrims are not fazed by this horrendous attack. The ones who have not been touched by the beast simply continue on the road to Altaruk. Even the pilgrims who lie in the claws of the beast are silent. They are silent even when the beast lifts them to its jaws and bites.

With what looks to be an expression of boredom, the beast focuses its gaze on a human female pilgrim. In a few seconds, the woman bursts into flames, walks another three steps, then flops to the ground, the flames now spreading hungrily. Her limbs twitch pathetically for a few more heartbeats, then she is still.

The pilgrims closest to her simply walk around the smoldering body. No eyes turn with looks of concern, no hands reach out to help. They march onward to Altaruk.

Still looking bored, the creature nonchalantly picks up another three pilgrims and begins raising them to its maw.

Initial range is 80 yards. Have the players turn to Player's Book p.5— Pilgrims' Feast.



Part Two: Pilgrimage

Encounter: This fire drake noticed the pilgrims and picked up quite quickly that they were mesmerized in some way. There are 34 pilgrims left, still marching inexorably to Altaruk, heedless of the death and devastation caused by the fire drake.

Unless the fire drake is stopped, it continues to devour, torture, or kill pilgrims.

Optionally, once the drake finishes off the pilgrims (which probably happens if the PCs do not intervene), it seeks out more prey for its amusement and spots the PCs.

Role-playing: The fire drake is incapable of speech, and the pilgrims are incapable of any action save going to Altaruk. Still, the drake can show signs of boredom, cruelty, and perhaps even the desire to be challenged by a stronger foe.

In general, the drake prefers to use physical attacks over psionics, though it does not hesitate to use the latter if pressed. The drake attempts to cause the most pain possible before consuming its meal.

Reactions: If the PCs try to rescue the pilgrims, the fire drake is enraged at their interfering with its "fun." It immediately halts any further attacks on the pilgrims, and focuses instead on the PCs.

If the PCs wind up running away from the drake after engaging it in combat, it pursues only if it has suffered less than one third of its total hit points of damage. Otherwise, it returns to eating pilgrims, satisfied that it got the chance to do something different, at least for a little while.

Statistics: *Fire Drake*: AL NE; AC -3; MV 12, Jp 3; HD 20+8; hp 103; THAC0 5; # AT 4; Dmg 1d10+10/1d10+10/3d8/4d8; SA Bite/swallow, psionics, elemental gate, tail lash; SD Psionics; SZ G (25' long); ML 19.

Psionics Summary: Level 15; PSPs 150; Score 18; At/Df PB, MT/M-, MB, TW; Discipline: Clairsen-

tience – *Devotions*: feel light, hear light; Discipline: Psychokinesis- *Sciences*: telekinesis; *Devotions*: control flames, control light, molecular agitation; Discipline: Psychometabolism – *Sciences*: energy containment, shadow-form; *Devotions*: displacement, double pain, ectoplasmic form; Discipline: Telepathy – *Sciences*: mind link, mass domination; *Devotions*: awe, contact, ego whip, false sensory input, inflict pain, mind bar, mental barrier, mind blank, psychic crush.

Once a week, the fire drake can gate a 50' diameter sphere of fire from the elemental plane of fire. The fire burns for 1d6+4 rounds. An unprotected being must save versus breath weapons or take 4d10 hit points of fire damage per round they remain in the fire (save for half damage). Any combustible material within the sphere's flames will ignite. Anyone holding or wearing such materials take an additional 3d6 points of damage (save vs. breath weapon for half damage). Unprotected and nonmagical metal within the fire melts in two rounds. Those carrying or wearing such items suffer 2d4 hit points of damage on the first round, and 3d10 in each of the following rounds for the duration of the flames, no saves allowed.

If a successful bite roll exceeds the required attack number by four or more, the drake clamps its jaws on the victim and shakes its head violently, doubling the damage of the first attack. If the victim is still alive, the drake continues using this attack, scoring an automatic hit and doing damage equal to the original bite damage (before it was doubled). Drakes try to swallow dead or injured victims. The drake's stomach acids cause 1d20 points of damage per round, no save.

Finally, the drake has a sweeping tail area attack that can affect unseen targets (thus no -4 penalty). Each victim hit must save vs. petrification or be stunned for 1d6 rounds. Tail damage is 4d8.

The drake's lair is 500 yards to the northwest, on a stretch of rocks and sand that catch the sun's rays especially well. The drake lives under the rocks. There is no

Part Two: Pilgrimage



treasure in the lair. All items have either been destroyed by elemental fire, or digested along with their owners.

Outcome: The drake has no treasure except for its hide. The pilgrims do not notice that the PCs have killed or driven off the drake. They simply continue to walk toward Altaruk.

Next: Once the PCs have either defeated the drake or evaded it, take them to **Part E: Arrival at Altaruk**.

Part Two E: Arrival at Altaruk

Setup: This encounter gets the PCs into the trade fortress, and gives them the opportunity to explore the place a while.

Start: Regardless of when the PCs started their third period of travel (beginning their walk either at dusk or dawn), it is important to the story that they do not arrive at the trade fortress until dusk. Perhaps a sandstorm rises up and causes a delay.

When the party arrives at Altaruk that evening, read the following aloud:

The trade fortress of Altaruk looms in front of you. The fortress is a rough square, with walls about 15' high and half as thick. Each corner is capped with a 20' high tower. Guards with lances patrol the parapets.

The two gates, located on the north and south walls, are huge doors fashioned of granite and metal, their exteriors carved with reliefs of merchants doing business.

The doors are currently open. If they follow standard procedure, they remain open until night falls, then reopen at dawn.

What sets this trade fortress apart from any you have ever seen before is the vast throng of pilgrims that are entering it, milling about at the walls, sitting on the ground, and staring in to space. The assembly is eerily

quiet; the only noises come from the fort's normal occupants, as they go about their business. It seems as if the citizens are determined to ignore the pilgrim hordes.

Still, it is good to see some sign of civilization again. In fact, as you walk through the open passage, you catch the scent of roasting meat and spilled beer, sure signs that an inn is nearby.

Encounter: The pilgrims are still not communicative. They simply mill about, forming themselves into groups of 20 to sit patiently in a circle, awaiting the dawn so that they may continue their journey.

The PCs are not challenged by the fortress guards, provided they behave themselves. The authorities and citizens of Altaruk see the PCs simply as travelers on business. since they do not mirror the trance-like states of the pilgrims.

For more details on life and personalities of Altaruk, consult the accessories DSR2 *Dune Trader*, and DSR3 *The Veiled Alliance*.

The following is the key to Map Three: The Trade Fortress of Altaruk.

1. Fortress Walls. The 10 foot thick, 15 foot high fortress walls are made of solid granite. The walls are capped with parapets to enable the guards to have some cover during battle. A six foot wide catwalk enables the guards to walk a complete circuit around the fort, simply staying on the walls. Guards constantly patrol the walls, keeping watch in every direction.

Pyracantha thorn bushes grow at the base of the walls. These are used to test wizards who wish entry. See **Area 3: Main Gates**, for details.

2. Towers. The two-story towers are 25 feet high. There is a ballista mounted on each roof. Each tower roof is watched over by a pair of sentries.

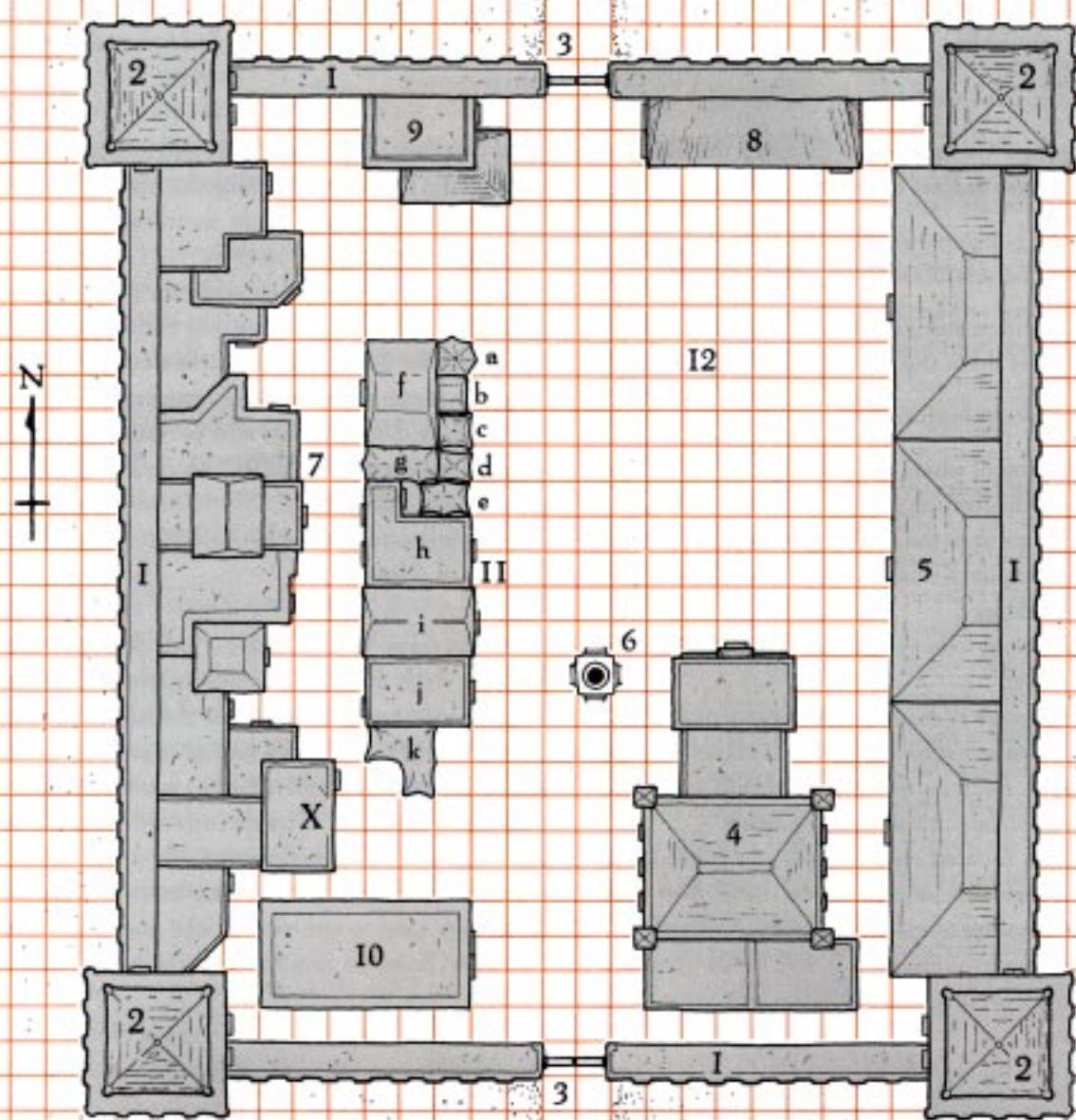
3. Main Gates. These 20 foot wide gates are fashioned



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Trade Fortress of Altaruk

One square = 10 Feet



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of granite and metal. They open at dawn, and close when darkness falls. People who wish access during the closed hours better have influence with the leader of Altaruk, or at the very least, connections with the guards.

When any obvious-looking spellcasters seek entry into the fortress, they are tested. Wizards are asked to cast a *cantrip* or other small spell. If the bushes wilt, the mage is a defiler, and is consequently refused entry.

Two guards man each gate around the clock.

4. Keep. This inner building is the home of Arisphistaneles, the leader of Altaruk.

Arisphistaneles, Preserver and Leader of Altaruk
M4/Tr12; AL LG; AC 8; MV 12; HD 12; hp 50; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (steel dagger); ML 17; Str 15; Dex 16; Con 18; Int 17; Wis 16; Cha 18. Wild talent: feature alteration; PS Con -2; Cost 7+1 /turn; PSPs 59.

Also known as the Captain, Arisphistaneles is a human male in his mid-50s. He is paunchy and completely hairless. He is an outspoken curmudgeon, but also has the capacity to be charming and humorous. He considers anyone who seeks knowledge a kindred spirit.

Feature alteration is a rare and minor variation of metamorphosis. With this talent, a character can change his or her facial features, the shape of hands and ears, and so on. Arisphistaneles uses this talent to move quietly among the people. His favorite disguise is a mul mercenary.

5. Barracks. This long structure quarters the mercenary guard force. The small structure attached to the barracks is the quarters of Zul Akfrenar, the mul who commands the mercenaries.

Mercenary Guards (500): F5; AL N/CN/CG; AC 5 (bone scale mail and shield); MV 12; HD 5; hp 32 each; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6-1 (wooden lances), 1d4 (bone daggers); ML 15; Str 17; Dex 16; Con 19; Int 12; Wis 10; Cha 12.

The guards are mercenaries of all races, though pre-

dominantly human and mul. They carry distinctive mekillot hide shields, each decorated with the symbol of Altaruk. Each guard carries a purse of 3d6 cp.

Zul Akfrenar, Mercenary Leader (male mul): F10; AL LN; AC 0 (bone scale mail and shield); MV 12; HD 10; hp 92; THAC0 11; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8 (steel long sword); ML 18; Str 19; Dex 19; Con 20; Int 13; Wis 11; Cha 13. Wild Talent: danger sense; PS 8; Cost 4+3/turn; PSPs 60.

Zul is a law and order, by the book commander. A wanderer for the longest time, he finally found a place to belong: Altaruk. As a result, he is fanatically loyal to Arisphistaneles.

Zul carries a purse of 4d8 cp and 1d6 sp. His prized possession is his steel long sword.

6. Water Source. A narrow but deep well ringed with stones stands in the middle of the courtyard. It is always watched by three guards.

7. Homes. Built into the walls of the fortress and as stand-alone buildings, these are the quarters of the 1,200 people who dwell permanently in Altaruk.

8. Stables. 100 kanks are stored here. These are the mounts for the fortress cavalry. In addition, visitors may stable their mounts here and expect them to be tended and cared for. The cost is two ceramic pieces per mount per night. There are always two guards on duty here.

Kanks (100): AL N; AC 5; MV 15; HD 2; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SA Class O Poison (save vs. poison or paralyzed for 2d12 rds); SZ L; ML 14; XP 35.

9. The Four Bits. A stone tablet fastened next to the door shows a rendition of four bits of a ceramic piece, grouped together in a semi-circular arc.

The two-story inn is run by Gelrade Osnabryk, a female human. Due to the plentiful city guard, no



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bouncers are needed.

Accommodations are five ceramic pieces per night, which includes two meals and six drinks. Separate meals cost one ceramic piece, and most drinks cost four bits.

Gelrade knows her prices are high, but she doesn't care; she has the only inn in Altaruk, and she knows it. Besides, her inn is of the finest quality; the customer definitely gets what he or she pays for.

The upstairs rooms have secure locks on the doors. Each room has two real beds made of wood, a lamp and oil, a basin and a gallon pottery pitcher filled with fresh water, and a dresser to store clothes and gear. The dressers all have mirrors.

The drinking room/common area is always bustling with off-duty guards, visiting caravan members, or citizens of Altaruk.

Gelrade Osnabryk (female human): W8 (preserver); AL CG; AC 0; MV 12; HD 8; hp 23; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4-1 (bone dagger); ML 17; Str 13; Dex 20; Con 14; Int 19; Wis 15; Cha 16. Wild Talent: heightened senses; PS 14; Cost 5+1/rd; PSPs 41. Spells (4/3/3/2); First Level: *cantrip, change self, comprehend languages, friends, identity, light, message, read magic, sleep*; Second Level: *blindness, detect psionics, detect magic*; Third Level: *delude, dispel magic, gust of wind, hold person, lightning bolt*; Fourth Level: *confusion, emotion, fire shield, psionic dampener, wall of ice*.

Gelrade is an female preserver with a quick wit and a winning smile. She's a shrewd businesswoman, who, though she sometimes flirts with the customers, never gets involved with them.

She wears a leather bracer AC 5 on her upper arm, and she has a bone ring of spell turning.

10. Warehouse. This large storage building takes care of the needs of the caravans. PCs can have items stored here for one silver piece per day per 10 square feet of space. The warehouse is always watched by two guards.

11. Traders' Row. This is the name given to the avenue of booths and small shops run by the natives of Altaruk. Due to the frequency of caravans from all over Athas, the selection and quality of goods is impressive and worth the money. Items purchased here are at a 20% markup.

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. melee weapons | g. herbs |
| b. perfume | h. books, paper, scrolls, ink |
| c. leather goods | i. metalsmith |
| d. tattoos | j. wine and spirits |
| e. arrows, bolt | k. footwear/clothes |
| f. pottery | |

12. Courtyard. This is a large smooth stretch of ground where the people of Altaruk often gather to socialize. Currently, however, a different breed of folk choke the courtyard: pilgrims, and hundreds of them. Most mill about quietly, forming themselves into bands of 20 or more. Others merely sit or lie on the ground, trying to get some rest after their grueling journey.

General Notes on Altaruk

Altaruk's businesses stay open long into the night, when each booth is lit by lanterns. Altaruk's business is business, so no opportunities are missed.

With the huge influx of pilgrims, as well as a recently arrived caravan from Gulg, the shops stay open until midnight.

The Veiled Alliance is strong in Altaruk, and have contributed much to the town's well-being, especially with Arispistaneles in charge of everything. Therefore, there is little if any bias against mages—assuming they are preservers. Defilers have no place here, and are turned out (or killed, if they provoke anyone).

Altaruk is a client village of the Balic-based merchant houses of Wavir, Rees, and Tomblador.

All caravans not belonging to one of the above three

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houses must pay one gold piece per caravan mount—an exorbitant price. Individual travelers pay one ceramic piece visitors' tax.

Altaruk has a chronic problem with giants who regularly raid and raze the town. Half-giants, while not scorned outright, nevertheless have a few extra guards watching their outdoor movements.

Outright suspicion and sometimes rudeness and hostility is common against elven merchants. The elven reputation precedes such characters.

Lerilyn's Persistence

Lerilyn and her three remaining mul servants have followed the PCs from Tyr. Hastily assembling the necessary food and water to make the desert journey, she and her muls were about two hours behind the PCs during their three day trek.

She has heard of Altaruk, and is able to bribe a guard and enter the fortress without her true nature being detected. Naturally, the Four Bits is one of the first places that she and her muls visit.

While in Altaruk, Lerilyn stays with a sympathetic ally (shown as an "X" on Map Three). Her muls stay at the Four Bits.

Note that if any of the muls from the Tyr attack on Amalak survived, they, too, are here. Thus, while Lerilyn has a minimum of three muls with her, she may have a few more, so all accounts and news about her retinue must be adjusted to accommodate this.

Role-playing: Altaruk's guards are very businesslike. They do not talk to anyone unless absolutely necessary, and then they have little to say.

The merchants of Altaruk are a friendly enough group, though they love a good bargain and are used to dealing from an favorable position.

Arisphistaneles makes time to meet with any

announced preservers. If the PC mages are members of the Veiled Alliance, so much the better; Arisphistaneles offers whatever services he can.

Reactions: The citizens and merchants of Altaruk enjoy conversing with the PCs, getting the latest news from whatever cities and towns the PCs have visited. Excessive rowdiness and rudeness on the PCs' part is met with looks of disapproval, a refusal to do business, and perhaps even a summoning of the guards if the situation is getting out of hand.

The locals do not exchange gossip quickly. They need to sound out and get a feel for the person they are talking to.

Outcome: As long as the PCs behave and spend money, they are in a prime position to be accepted and trusted by the locals. This lays the groundwork for the next encounter, which presents events that occur once the PCs have settled in.

Next: Once the PCs have looked around Altaruk to their satisfaction, begin **Part Two F: News, Rumors, and Events**.

Part Two F: News, Rumors, and Events

Setup: Once the PCs have had a chance to wander around Altaruk, things begin to happen.

Start: When the PCs are settled in, read aloud the following:

Wandering the village, you see that Altaruk is a bustling, prosperous trading village that never sleeps. There are several places that you realize offer the best chance for information: the common room of the Four Bits, the market area, and of course, the home of Arisphistaneles, leader of the fortress.



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One thing is certain: trying to speak to the pilgrims milling about in the fortress' courtyard is a waste of time. The stone-faced pilgrims appear more addled than ever, uncommunicative and blank-eyed.

Encounter: DMs should be ready to run encounters at any of these sites. There is no set order. Of all the encounters, dinner with Arispistaneles is the most important. Unless the PCs have been ill-mannered and disruptive in Altaruk, they'll receive an invitation for dinner with the keep's leader. After all, the PCs stick out like sore thumbs (unless they have already donned pilgrim disguises).

The Four Bits' Common Room

Read the following aloud to the players:

The common drinking room of the Four Bits is crowded day and night. The place is jammed with humans, elves, dwarves, muls, half-elves, thri-kreen, and a few half-giants. As many occupations are represented here as there are races: mercenaries, merchants, caravan drivers, city guards, common laborers, bards, an even wizards.

The cool room is a buzz with conversation and merriment, and food and drink are plentiful and good.

Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p. 6—*The Four Bits' Common Room*.

There are three half-elven women who serve the customers. The clientele in the common room includes: the three muls under the employ of Lerilyn, a wandering bard, a squad of six fortress guards, a preserver, several merchants who work and live in Altaruk (as can be told by the symbol of Altaruk on their clothing), a group of eight mul and dwarf mercenaries looking for work, a dozen caravan merchants from Gulg, Urik, Tyr, and Balic, 20 common workers, an nine elf merchants.

The following information can be gathered from the people in the common room:

- Dorak Fhel (male preserver): "These pilgrims have been arriving for the past month. They form themselves into packs of about 20, then head off through the south gate."
- Shenna, Eleehna, Trahdoie (half-elf bar maids): "Those stony-faced pilgrims are no fun . . . they sit around in the courtyard, staring off into space, then form up like herds of mekillots and wander off to the south."
- Gelrade (innkeeper): "Once I saw all these people come into the fortress, I thought it would mean a business windfall for the inn. Ha! Some windfall! Those stodgy killjoys just mill about the courtyard, then leave once enough of them have gathered. I will say this much, their minds are not rooted to this world. They are totally oblivious to everything."
- Fortress Guards (four men, two women, all human): "Lotta people comin' into the fortress lately. Caravans from three cities, a pack of elven traders, a beautiful woman and her retinue, a wealthy nobleman and his bodyguards, those eight mercenaries over there, and of course, all those bloody pilgrims. Fortunately, they're harmless as sleeping renks."
- Mercenaries (four dwarves, four muls, all male): "We are from Gulg, looking for better work. Things in Gulg are the same, the war with Nibenay rages on. The biggest news, however, was the presence of a defiler sorceress who, along with a dozen mul bodyguards, gave some people in Gulg quite a scare. Apparently, she was seeking some kind of information about *trees of life* or something. It was quite a fight. The woman and her guards got away, though a few did fall."
- Twon (male half-elf bard): "I actually entered the fortress by following a pack of these pilgrims. The closer we got to Altaruk, the less aware they were of their surroundings. They are most decidedly tiresome. They don't sing, dance, or laugh."

Note that the Lerilyn's muls are linked to her by the use

Part Two: Pilgrimage



of sight link. If the muls see the PCs in the inn, so will she, which lays the groundwork for her night assault on them.

The Merchant Shops

Read aloud to the players:

The various booths and stalls are open for business and ready to make deals. The quality of merchandise is indisputably good.

Many of the merchants seem interested in talking. The crowd of pilgrims is a topic that invites much discussion and speculation.

The PCs find the merchants' tongues a lot looser if they purchase something, even something small.

- Melee weapons: "Those pilgrims have no interest in buying weapons to defend themselves. Is it any wonder that none have returned to Altaruk?"
- Herbs: (If asked about the attractive woman) "A very lovely woman with several bodyguards purchased some herbs, the kind that many visiting wizards buy."
- Perfume: (If asked about the attractive woman) "Yes, a lovely stranger came to my stall and purchased some perfumes. She was rather easy to remember, since her beauty stands out from the midst of the drab assembly of pilgrims."
- Books, paper, scrolls, ink: "We sell many items that wizards covet. Haven't noticed any today, though. No! Wait! Some fellow named Dorak . . . he purchased a bound book of blank pages . . . said he needed it for a new spellbook."
- Tattoos: (If shown a rendition of Lerilyn's muls' tattoo) "Spirits of Fire protect us! This is a rune of magic, a sorcerer's personal mark, of a style common in the Ivory Triangle!"
- Wine and spirits: "Bah! All these folks, and none care for a drop! If it wasn't for those new mercenaries and those muls, I would certainly go out of business!"

Dinner with Arisphistaneles

This event occurs if the PCs make known that one or more of their group are preservers and are investigating Amalak's story and/or the pilgrimage phenomenon.

The PCs receive an invitation for a late dinner at Arisphistaneles' house. When they arrive, read the following to the players:

The home of Arisphistaneles is a richly appointed house that is tastefully decorated, achieving a fine balance between opulence and functionality.

Upon entering, you are greeted by the domestic help (servants, not slaves). Water and face cloths are brought out to refresh you, and you are served cool wine and dates while waiting for dinner.

At last, a soft chime sounds, and you are led in to a spacious dining room. The room is dominated by a low, ornate stone table surrounded by reclining cushions.

Once you have found a comfortable place to rest next to the table, a curtain parts and in walks a muscular man in his 50s. He is completely hairless. As he sits, you can tell that he has a bit of a paunch.

He raises a ceramic goblet, and by his expression, he expects you to do the same. "Welcome, strangers. to the home of Arisphistaneles. Captain of the Fortress of Altaruk, Chief Trader, and member in good standing of the Veiled Alliance. I bid you welcome again, and promise that within these walls you will find peace and confidentiality," he announces, then drains his cup.

The servants begin to bring out a lavish dinner.

Coming to Arisphistaneles' place in search of information is just about the best thing the PCs can do. The mage respects knowledge, and admires those who seek it. The following information is divulged by Arisphistaneles, provided the PCs are wise enough to ask the correct questions.



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- "The Veiled Alliance works openly in Altaruk. I am a good administrator, and Altaruk turns a hefty profit thanks to me. Thus, the merchant houses who own the fortress deign to keep me in this position."
- "Practicing sorcery is allowed in Altaruk, but the common people have a very low tolerance for flashy displays of magic. Don't abuse the privilege by casting magic openly."
- "The pilgrims have been arriving here in Altaruk for the past month or so. They are completely unresponsive to all entreaties. It is my guess that they are either caught up in a fervor toward some unknown goal beyond the scope and comprehension of the average Athasian, or they are being controlled somehow."
- "I did manage to get a single word out of one of the pilgrims, obviously someone who still had a little clear thinking left. The word was 'Rafernard.' She said the word reverently, as if she were talking about a loved one, or someone she venerated."
- "I have no idea who, where, or what a Rafernard is. It's not on any maps I have, and believe me, my maps are very accurate. It is not a name from legend. To me, the word evokes something that is more than mortal."
- "The only Lerilyn I know of is an unstable, irrational defiler of great power. She hails from the Nibenay area. I do not know what she looks like, but I do know that she is obsessed with finding a *tree of life* that she can use and abuse for herself."
- "The wizard Amalak is a wise man from Urik. I have not seen him in many a month."
- "My friend Culler, a ranger and roc rider from the nearby mountains, was quite interested in the tales of a Forest Maker. He went to see for himself what was true and what was false. He has not yet returned, and I don't know if that should worry me or not."
- "The pilgrims depart from the south gate, and head southeast on the road, presumably towards Grak's Pool. I have long meant to have them followed, but I

cannot spare their people, what with the frequent giant raids and all. However, if I could find a party of quick-thinking folk who are proficient in spell and sword . . ."

Of course, Arisphistaneles has his own questions for the PCs. He wants to know their business in Altaruk, Amalak's fate, and their role in the pilgrim investigation.

By the time dinner is over, if the PCs have not already made the suggestion, Arisphistaneles suggests that the PCs disguise themselves as pilgrims and gather information on exactly what it is that is influencing people. In return for their agreement to go on the pilgrimage, Arisphistaneles helps the PCs find hard to get spells for their spellbooks, and gives them rare material spell components. In addition, he promises to pay 5 gold pieces to each surviving PC upon successful completion of the task.

Though Arisphistaneles has space enough to put everyone up for the night, he does not do so. Only a PC who impresses him greatly in matters of knowledge is invited to stay; the other PCs have to content themselves with the Four Bits.

Lerilyn Strikes

Sometime during the night, most likely in the middle of the night, Lerilyn, unable to contain herself any longer, moves against the PCs.

Gathering her muls, Lerilyn prepares an ambush, hopefully as the PCs are wandering around the fortress at night. If the PCs prove to be homebodies, the attack comes in their rooms (should this happen, the PCs' rooms are adjacent to each other, and two of the rooms are connected to each other by a lockable door).

Since Lerilyn is more than aware of the forces in Altaruk, she tries her best to attack quietly, without attracting undue attention.

When fighting, Lerilyn endeavors to keep at least half

Part Two: Pilgrimage



the party alive; she needs information, and the dead have little to say. She does her best to simply defeat, disarm, and restrain the PCs, and then take them to her temporary quarters to interrogate them at length.

Statistics: Lerilyn's stats are in the *Short Story Book*.

Mul Henchmen (3): F9; AL LE; AC 3 (scale mail); MV 12; HD 9; hp 76; THAC0 12; #AT 3/2; Dmg 2d4-1 (obsidian bastard swords), 1d6+1 (metal wrist razors); ML 15; Str 19; Dex 17; Con 16; Int 10; Wis 8; Cha 6.

The muls each have a pouch containing 4d6 bits. They bear the sigil of Lerilyn tattooed on their bald heads.

If Lerilyn is reduced to less than half her hit points and/or all her muls are dead or out of action, she retreats into the shadows and makes another attempt later on.

DMs should try to ensure that Lerilyn survives the adventure. If the DM wishes to end Lerilyn's role in the adventure with this encounter, perhaps she retreats due to her wounds, and decides that further pursuit is simply not worth the trouble at this time.

Reactions: As long as the PCs maintain a spirit of civility, they are well treated. The attitude in the Four Bits is one of merrymaking. No one wants a fight, especially in the presence of the fortress guards who are enjoying a few drinks.

If the PCs cause a brawl, the fortress guards attempt to subdue them and lock them up in a cell located adjacent to the barracks. The same penalty awaits pickpockets and market thieves.

Outcome: The PCs should realize that they should dress up as pilgrims and follow the bands on their southerly course. Also, they should have met Lerilyn in combat, and either defeated her, or suffered at her hands.

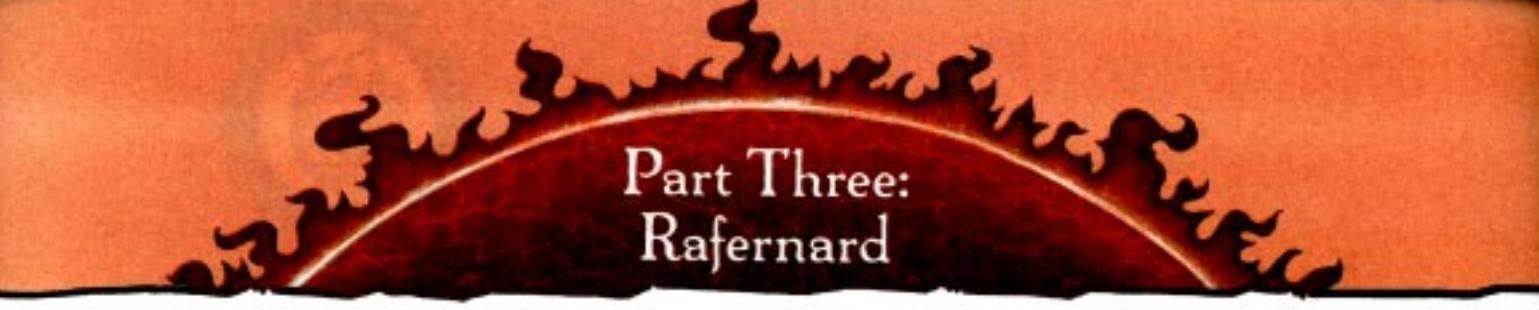
If the PCs somehow captured Lerilyn and ques-

tioned her, she tells them about herself and her goals, including the account of the assault on Amalak back in Tyr. She explains that once the PCs intervened on Amalak's behalf, she assumed that they were his allies. Thus, she followed the PCs, but did not tip her hand until now.

If the PCs report the presence of a defiler to Arisphistaneles, the preserver has her stripped of her spell books and components, and jailed. Depending on how much havoc she wreaked, Lerilyn is either executed outright or banished without food, water, or equipment into the desert.

Next: Since none of the pilgrim bands leave at night, the PCs should realize that tomorrow at dawn is the next probable departure time. At that point, they should begin **Part Three: Rafernard**.





Part Three: Rafernard

Introduction

This final part of the adventure covers the journey to Rafernard's forest, the forest itself, and Rafernard's true form and purpose.

The first encounter, **Part Three A: Big Trouble**, gets the PCs out of Altaruk as part of a group of pilgrims. During their travels, they are set upon by raiding giants.

In **Part Three B: Desert Madness**, the party encounters a crazed warrior who tries to slay all the pilgrims and wishes to see Rafernard's forest destroyed.

The PCs arrive at Rafernard's forest in **Part Three C: The Forest**. This section details the forest and the denizens that dwell within, as well as the first appearance of Rafernard, the alleged avangion, who welcomes the pilgrims and bids them enter the woods, explore and enjoy to their hearts' content. The PCs may visit this section more than once.

Part Three D: The Plaza, is where all the pilgrims eventually gather. The section details the central plaza where Rafernard often sits and watches over all. **Part Three E: The Underground** details the underground sections.

Part Three F: Showdown is the final section, which pits the PCs, now hopefully aware of Rafernard's true nature, against Rafernard's real form—Abalach-Re the sorcerer-queen. The fate of all the pilgrims rests on the PCs' shoulders.

Posing as Pilgrims

If the PCs decide to opt for the wisest course of action and dress like pilgrims, the deception works—provided they adhere to certain observed rules:

First of all, no weapons or armor can be displayed. All such items as well as physical adornments such as necklaces and bracers must be kept hidden.

Secondly, the PCs must make sure not to speak or

react while in the formation. Players may wish to work out a system of subtle signals to convey messages between characters.

Third, the PCs must be dressed appropriately. The pilgrims dress in simple clothing and head coverings. No marks of wealth or status are displayed.

Finally, the PCs must hook up with a pilgrim group of at least 20 people. The pilgrims travel from Altaruk in large groups because they are entering hostile areas. A group of six lone pilgrims invites suspicion from Rafernard and her minions.

DMs can provide the party a group of 24 pilgrims who naturally gravitate to the PCs and begin showing signs that they all should leave the fortress. DMs may also wish to keep track of how many of the PCs' pilgrims wind up making it all the way to Rafernard's forest.

Traveling to the Forest

Rafernard (or rather, Abalach-Re) set up her forest in the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes, 20 miles southwest of Altaruk.

Pilgrims depart Altaruk from the south gate, then after about a mile of walking south, they make a sharp turn westward, cutting through a small strip of the rocky badlands. Once past the badlands, they walk through another small strip, this time of stony barrens, then finally out onto the desert of the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes.

Total travel time is one day. If the PCs depart at dawn, they arrive at sunset.

Before the party leaves, a marching order should be determined, not only to show how the PCs are but where the PCs are in relation to the rest of the pilgrims. This comes into play later.

If the PCs insisted on departing by themselves as a group, something they clearly should not do, the DM can add a few random pilgrims who drift over, then a few

Part Three: Rafernard



more, etc. Before the PCs realize it, they are standing in the middle of a crowd of 24 pilgrims!

However, if the PCs take extreme steps to assure that they travel alone, do not force the issue. Let them travel alone. They alone bear the brunt of the two attacks that occur, and they are viewed with suspicion by Abalach-Re and her cohorts.

Once again, DMs must be sure to emphasize the heat, the dryness, the scorching sun, and the lack of life and vegetation along the way.

Before the PCs depart Altaruk, Arisphistaneles informs them that there is a bounty of 1 silver piece for the heads of giants. Giants are notorious for raiding Altaruk and leveling the fortress on a regular basis.

What to Do With Lerilyn

If there is a compelling reason for Lerilyn to go into the desert, she does so. Once she has tended to her wounds, she goes to the Four Bits to hire some mul mercenaries (if the majority of her original henchmen were killed).

She then dons pilgrim garb and bids her henchmen to do likewise, and follows about a half hour behind the PCs. Note that if the PCs go off by themselves without a pilgrim band, she attacks them out in the middle of nowhere. Attacking them after they have been bloodied by the giants would be ideal.

Lerilyn may actually stay her hand and follow the PCs to their ultimate destination if she was able to gather sufficient information that would justify that action. If she reaches the forest, consult the outcome in **Part Three C: The Forest** for Lerilyn's suggested actions.

Part Three A: Big Trouble

Setup: This section covers the majority of the trip, up until the giant attack (marked "E" on the inside cover map). This should occur at the half-day point.

Start: Read aloud the following to the players:

Dawn breaks at Altaruk, and the pilgrims quietly form into groups of at least 20 and begin shuffling out the south gate. Joining one of these groups is ridiculously easy.

The journey takes you west through rocky badlands and stony wastelands. The sun is hot, but the pilgrims do not seem to mind. They bear the heat and the strain of the march stoically.

Finally, by midday, your pilgrim group is about to clear the stony wastelands and enter the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes.

A boulder comes flying out of nowhere and squashes the pilgrim in front of you. His companions quietly walk around his pulped remains. More boulders come flying through the air.

Encounter: The pilgrims have accidentally wandered across a group of Athasian giants that are on their way to raid Altaruk. Upon seeing the pilgrims, the giants decide to have a little bit of fun before continuing on to the trade fortress.

Have the players turn to *Player's Book p.5 – The Giants Attack*. Initial range is 90 feet.

Role-playing: The pilgrims continue marching on right past the giants, unfazed even when boulders squash more of their number.

When the PCs reveal their true natures, the giants are momentarily taken aback. They quickly regain their wits and smile evilly. Here, at last, is a challenge worthy of them!

Dialogue

"Ha! Human sheep go squish! No fight in them!"

"Oho! Some sheep have claws and fangs!"

"At last, maybe yes a real fight?" (Said once the PCs reveal themselves)



Part Three: Rafernard

Reactions: The giants taunt the PCs as they engage them. If the giants notice that the PCs are taking special pains to keep the pilgrims safe from harm, a few of them deliberately attack the helpless pilgrims.

Statistics: *Athasian Giants, Beastheaded* (6): AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 15; hp 84; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 2d8+14 or 2d10 (boulders); SZ H (25' tall); ML 17; XP 9,000. Psionics Summary: Level 5; PSPs 75; Score 13; At/Df - /Me -, TS, IF; Discipline- Psychokinesis; Sciences: detonate, telekinesis; Devotions: ballistic attack, control body, control light, levitation, molecular agitation; Discipline—Psychometabolism; Science: shadow-form; Devotions: biofeedback, body equilibrium, chameleon power, double pain, heightened senses.

These giants have the same powers because they were all trained by the same teacher.

Outcome: If four of the giants are defeated, the remaining ones retreat. Altaruk has a 1 silver piece bounty on giant heads (note that each giant head weighs about 150 pounds and is about two and a half feet in diameter).

The pilgrims, of course, are unfazed by the battle and continue to travel into the sand wastes.

Next: Once the menace of the giants has been dealt with, go on to **Part Three B: Desert Madness**.

Part Three B: Desert Madness

Setup: This encounter is the last one before the PCs reach the forest. It occurs when the party is about one hour away from their destination. A crazed mounted warrior approaches the pilgrim band and begins attacking them. Fortunately, unlike earlier attacks, the PCs are on hand to prevent casualties.

Start: Once the PCs are about an hour's march away

from the forest (the shadows should begin to get long at this point, as the sun is going down), something catches up to the party. Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p. 7—*Madness*, and read the following aloud:

The day's journey has been an exhausting one. This pilgrimage has taken a lot out of you, physically and mentally. Thankfully, the sun is beginning to set, which means that the air is getting cooler and the forest should be nearby.

An odd noise comes from behind you, and it's the last thing you expect to hear during this pilgrimage: another human voice.

Turning, you see a figure on what has to be the biggest bird you have ever seen. Its wingspan is easily 100 feet.

The figure is a human male, and he appears to be wearing brown armor of some sort. He clutches a flaming sword in his upraised hand.

As the giant bird flies closer, you can make out some words the man is screeching.

"Away! Away, servants of Rafernard! Your blasphemous devotions shall not reach your master! Death to Rafernard! Death to her followers! Death to the deceitful one!"

With this, the man commands his giant bird in to a dive, and heads straight for the crowd of heedless pilgrims.

Encounter: The man on the roc is Culler Aktryn, a ranger who encountered Abalach-Re and attempted to defeat her. Culler's mind was broken in a psionic duel with the sorceress-queen, and it was only the timely intervention of Culler's loyal mount Sundiver that allowed him to get away.

Now, dazed and maddened, his mind shattered by Abalach-Re's mindwreck psionic power, Culler flies around like a maddened knight errant, selecting the best places to confront what he sees as the sorceress-queen's army, but are in fact the pilgrims. Fortunately, Culler's erratic thought processes prevent him from using logic to

Part Three: Rafernard



determine which direction the majority of pilgrims are coming from.

When Culler reaches the group of pilgrims that the PCs are traveling with, he begins by attacking the rear of the column. If the PCs happen to be there, they bear the brunt of the attack.

Role-playing: Culler is wide-eyed and crazed, seeing himself on a self-appointed crusade to cleanse Athas of Rafernard/Abalach-Re's followers. He is mad and does not listen to reason.

Culler should be portrayed as a homicidal madman who wants to see the forest destroyed. He is irrational and prone to fits of shouting and delusion.

Dialogue

"Die, die, foul servants of the Forest Maker!"

"Unholy pilgrims, friends of defilers, your bones shall bleach under the crimson sun!"

"This deception ends now! Death to the defiler!"

"I will kill you all before I let you sell your souls for a few green leaves and a drink of water!"

(Culler's words should be slurred, mispronounced, or have the wrong syllables emphasized. Additionally, he may leave out words or entire phrases.)

Statistics: *Culler Aktryn, demented ranger:* R15; AL LG; AC 0; MV 12; HD 9+18; hp 123; THAC0 6; #AT 2; Dmg 2d4 (steel bastard sword), 1d8+1 (steel heavy lance); ML 20; Str 19; Dex 18; Con 18; Int 14; Wis 18; Cha 17. Wild Talents: animal mindlink (avian), SP Wis-5, Cost contact +8/rd; contact, PS Wis; Cost varies +1/rds; PSP 88.

Culler has a suit of +1 metal chainmail, and a +1 flametongue bastard sword. He also carries four fruits of extra healing.

During his sane days, Culler was a ranger of extraordinary kindness and bravery, putting himself at risk for the sake of many innocents who had no one to defend him.

Since his abortive battle with Abalach-Re, Culler is insane. Though there's the possibility of recovery, it will be a difficult battle. The psionic power psychic surgery can restore him, but will cause him to forget his battle with Rafernard, including his knowledge of the alleged avangion's true nature.

Culler's prized possessions are his metal chain mail and his magical long sword. The sword's command word is "sunray."

Culler's sword is an artifact from the distant past. Its magical properties include defenses against both psionics and magic, as it was constructed long ago for use against the sorcerer-kings. Against all other foes, it operates as a normal +1 flametongue bastard sword. Against a sorcerer-king, its enchantment increases to +5. In addition, the wielder of the sword gets to make a saving throw against rods, staves and wands (with a +3 bonus) whenever dragon magic or dragon psionics is directed at him. A successful save allows the properties of the sword to dissipate the attack before it strikes. A failed save indicates that the attack occurs normally.

Abalach-Re recognized the sword the moment Culler drew close. She immediately began hurling attacks at the ranger, hoping one would get through before he was close enough to strike her with the flaming sword. Mindwreck broke through his defenses, but his roc mount flew off before the sorcer-queen could deliver a killing blow. The sword, of course, is a powerful weapon that could tip the scales in the PCs' favor.

If they defeat Culler and his roc, one of the PCs can take possession of the enchanted weapon. If a PC grips the hilt and makes a successful Intelligence check, he or she can read the command word for the flames, which is hidden within the decorative runes running up and down the metal blade.

Sundiver, the Athasian roc: AL N; AC 6; MV 6, Fl 48 (D); HD 15; hp 105; THAC0 5; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 3d6/3d6 or 5d6; SA Surprise, grip; SZ G (50' long, 100'



Part Three: Rafernard

wingspan); ML 12; XP 9,000.

Sundiver is Culler's loyal companion. The two are linked by Culler's psionic powers. Sundiver would die for Culler. Anyone who attacks the ranger invites the roc's wrath.

If Sundiver hits a victim with both claws, the bird lifts the victim into the air. If the victim resists, the roc strikes the squirming character with its beak. If all else fails, the roc drops his prize from a height of 100 feet.

Outcome: Culler intends to slaughter the entire pilgrim band that the PCs are with. Even if the PCs manage to neutralize Culler, they still have Sundiver to deal with.

Attempts at psychic surgery have to be done in a cool, dry place, after Culler has been fed, rehydrated, and had 24 hours of bed rest.

Next: Once the threat of Culler has been dealt with, take the PCs to **Part Three C: The Forest**.

Part Three C: The Forest

Setup: Rafernard the "avangion" awaits the pilgrims (and the PCs) near the edge of the forest. This encounter is the PCs' first impression of the woods, and descriptions of things found within. The center of the forest should remain a mystery for now.

Start: Once the PCs arrive at the woods (probable arrival time is sundown), the players should turn to *Player's Book p.7 – The Forest*. Read aloud the following to the players:

At long last, your journey is at an end. And, judging by what lies before you, the journey was well worth it.

Rising up in front of you is a beautiful forest, with varieties of trees both commonplace and legendary. The forest is several hundred yards wide, by your reckoning.

Shrubs and grasses cover the ground, extending far beyond the borders of the trees. The grassland and

bushes extend about a half mile to your left and right.

You hear the sound of birds singing in the leafy green trees, and an unexpected but nonetheless refreshing cool breeze wafts over your faces, carrying the scent of fresh flowers.

The pilgrims are wandering into the woods, a look of joy frozen on their grimy, sun-burnt faces.

Have the players turn to *Player's Book p. 8 – Rafernard*, and continue reading aloud.

Before many of them reach the trees, there is a great rustling, followed by a burst of bright light. Before anyone can react, a humanoid with radiant silver skin and gossamer wings rises from the trees and hovers in the air above you, its wings unfurled majestically. The creature appears too delicate to live.

As a tremendous feeling of well-being floods you, a melodic voice, soft as a summer breeze, addresses you:

"Welcome to the Forest Reborn, you poor, mere mortals! I am Rafernard, and I have created this impressive miracle you see before you.

"Well done, worthy pilgrims, on your surviving the grueling trek! For now, wander the woods at your leisure; eat of the fruit of the trees, drink the cold, clean water. Follow the path to the right and you shall find places to sleep built on the branches of the big trees.

"There is still much to be done, and we have enemies who would see this forest destroyed. Rest for now, for soon we must decide what actions to take against our oppressors. The battle will be difficult, but the end result, the reforestation of your land, will be worth the struggle.

"Once again, welcome! Eat and rest now. You are safe. Any questions you have you may ask of me tomorrow."

After her speech, the avangion disappears into the trees.

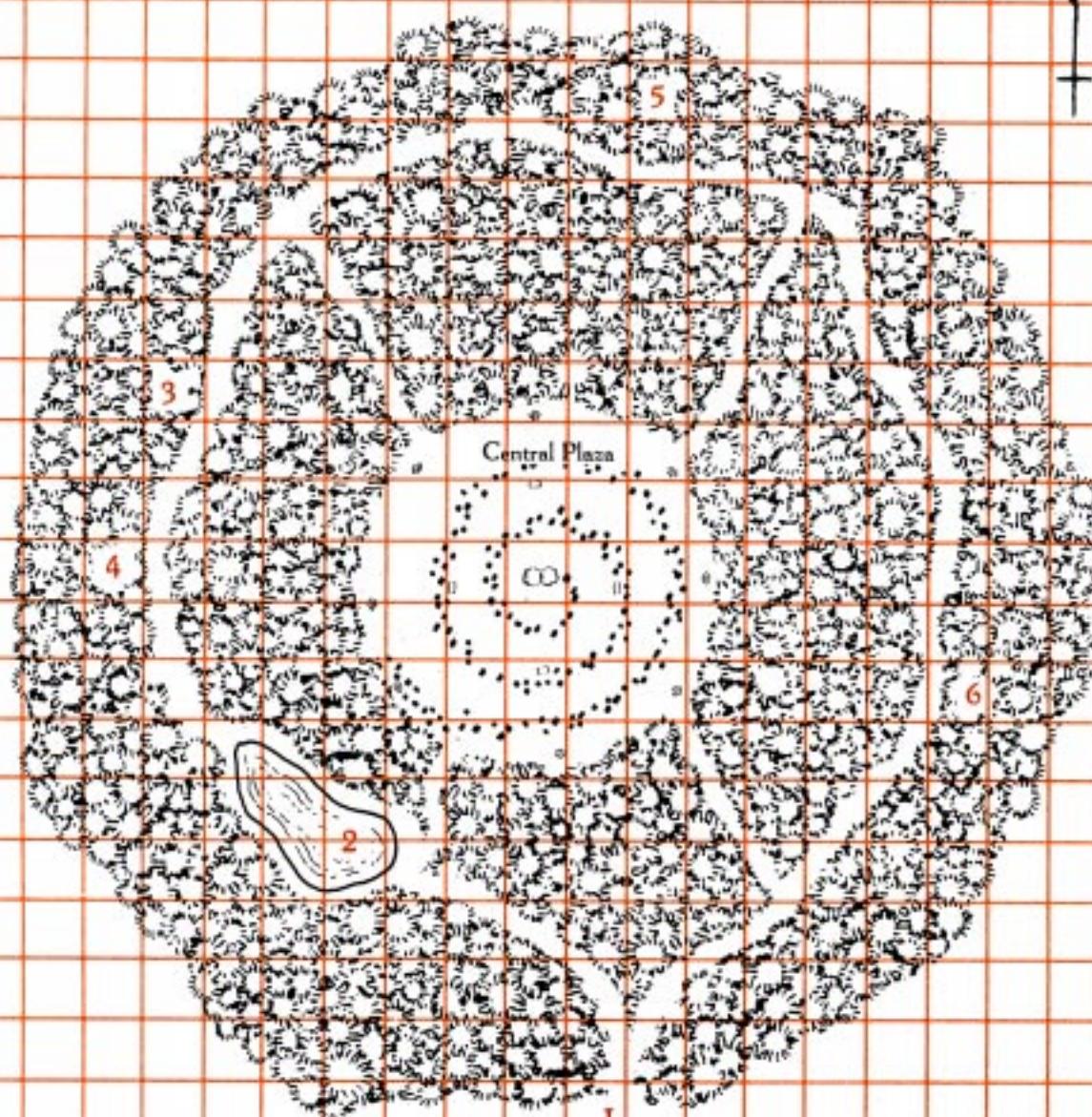
Encounter: The "avangion" Rafernard, having made

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Forest

One square = 20 Yards





Part Three: Rafernard

her dramatic entrance, now leaves the scene, enabling the PCs to investigate the woods. Use Map Four, which details the forest. Consult the key below for area descriptions.

1. Entry point. The PCs are most likely to enter the forest here, where the stream of pilgrims enter. A path composed of smooth slate flagstones branches straight to the north and right to the northeast.

2. Pool. This large pool is filled with cold, clean water, perhaps the finest the PCs have ever drank. The pool is fed by an underground stream. Many of the pilgrims come here to drink and bathe.

3. Tree of Life. This is a huge, lush, 40' tall tree that is set apart from the others by a wall of long, wicked thorns 10' high and 10' thick. Passing through the thorns requires a successful Dexterity check every two feet. Success gets the PC two feet deeper into the wall, taking 4d4 hit points of damage in the process. Failing the check means the PC makes no progress and suffers 8d4 points of damage.

Rafernard/Abalach-Re uses the *tree of life* to help power her defiler spells. The tree was here long before Abalach-Re created her forest, and in fact Abalach-Re chose this site because of the tree's existence.

4. Kirre den. Not only is the forest stocked with game animals, there are also a few predators. A mated pair of kirre range about, looking for game.

Kirre (2): AL N; AC 7; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 36; THAC0 13; #AT 7; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6/1d8/1d4/1d4/1d6; SA Psionics; SZ L (8' long); ML 14; XP 650. Psionic Summary: Level 5; Dis/Sci/Dev 2/3/10; At/Df PB, II, PsC, TS, IF TW; Score 15; PSPs 100; Psychokinesis—*Sciences*: project force; *Devotions*: soften, levitation; Telepathy—*Sciences*: psionic blast, tower of iron will; *Devotions*: awe, psychic crush, id insinuation, thought shield, intellect fortress, life detection, contact.

5. Resting Place. Set up in some high trees are a series of wooden platforms, accessible by rope ladders. Each platform sleeps four human-sized creatures, and contains blankets, pillows, a large bowl of fresh fruit, and full waterskins.

There are many pilgrims resting on these platforms. Each tree has 2d4 platforms, each set at a different height. Platforms are 10 feet apart. This distance plus the thick leafy cover gives privacy to the platform users.

6. Sloths. A pair of Athasian sloths reside in this area. Attracted by the forest's presence, they have set up a lair here and defend it fanatically.

Sloths, Athasian (2): AL N; AC 5; MV 24; HD 11; hp 66; THAC0 9; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4/2d4/2d10; SA Surprise; SD Resistant to poison; SZ L; ML 3; XP 2,000.

Forest Features and Scenes

The woods extend in a circular pattern with an 180 yard radius, and a circumference of about 1,200 yards. There are 2,623 trees in the forest.

The shrubs and grasses extend another thousand yards beyond the woods' edge in a circular pattern, with a total circumference of five miles.

The forest's temperature is a comfortable 72 degrees. The air lacks humidity, and is richly scented with flowers and greenery. An occasional gentle cool breeze wafts through the woods.

The woods are populated with insects, birds, and small game. Many fruits, nuts, berries, and vegetables grow wild. Survival in these woods should be simple.

Bands of pilgrims wander about, either sitting under shady trees, or meditating on the beauty of a flower. They still do not speak, nor react to any other external stimuli save the forest's features.

It seems that the pilgrims are simply going through the

Part Three: Rafernard



motions of being happy and having a good time. The only other significant change to the pilgrims' demeanor is the stupid satisfied smile that now creases their faces.

The DM should introduce the following scenes as the PCs wander the forest, and in the order presented. Some of these are hints that the avangion is not all she seems to be.

- The PCs stumble upon a patch of withered flowers that look as though the life has been sucked out of them.
- A beautiful songbird lands on the head of a meditating pilgrim. It is there for no more than three heartbeats when a bird of prey sweeps down and snatches it away. The pilgrim never flinches, nor reacts in any way.
- A pack of six feral halflings are attacking an large gourd with spears. They act as if it is some huge vicious predator, repeatedly stabbing it, taking a bite out of it, then running back to a safe distance, only to repeat the process again a few rounds later.
- The group finds a few fragments of obsidian. Anyone with the stoneworking proficiency can judge that whatever was carved out of the obsidian was most likely spherical.
- A group of four kip are attacking a z'tal. Those with the nonweapon proficiency of animal lore who make their proficiency check should know that this is very unusual behavior. Kip are docile noncombatants.
- The PCs come upon a small pile of dead game animals. Their skin is shriveled and drawn tight over their skeletons, as if the life has been drained from their little bodies.

Trying to Crack the Mystery

If the PCs begin to get suspicious, some of them may attempt to use spells or psionics to try to divine the nature of the mystery.

Abalach-Re uses the psionic power of conceal thoughts and mind bar to hide her true motivations and nature.

If the PC uses sensitivity to psychic impressions, he or she gets the feeling of great ambition and power lust, and a grand plot and deception.

Object reading done on the the obsidian gives the impression of a being of great power and age, something more than human.

Attempting to use spells on Rafernard to figure out who or what she really is, is useless.

Rafernard

When the disguised sorcerer-queen greets the PCs and pilgrims, she has already cast *nondetection* upon herself. She has the psionic power of conceal thoughts active, and uses psionic sense to see if anyone in the group is using psionics.

Rafernard's stats are in the *Short Story Book*.

Role-playing: Rafernard acts the benevolent host, welcoming all to the forest. She warns that there are some wild animals in the woods, put there "to maintain the balance."

Dialogue

- "Rest from your journeys, O pilgrims, for you have earned your rest. Your frail little bodies must be so tired!"
- "Explore the woods all you wish. Partake of the water, fruits, and small game, though hunt only what you need."

Reactions: If pressed with a barrage of questions, Rafernard answers a few of them. Rafernard does her best to keep a serene, patient facade, but she is pretending a role she has no familiarity with. She has no patience for rudeness, and is quick to announce that she will not



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respond to rude questions.

If pushed hard enough, Rafernard shows a flash of anger and cuts off all further questions. She reminds the PCs of where they are and who they are dealing with, then storms off and fade into the greenery, disappearing from sight.

Rafernard does everything she can not to tip her hand immediately.

The most likely asked questions and Rafernard's answers are given below:

Q: What are you?

A: I am Rafernard, and I am what your people call a Great One, or avangion.

Q: Why are all these people in a trance?

A: I am not certain. It could be a side-effect of my forest. Perhaps I am unconsciously sending out a summons?

Q: We've met a few people who know about this place, but they all went insane. Why?

A: Ah, yes, a few people have indeed left the woods to tell others. Unfortunately, spending time in these woods can be intoxicating, and you beings are not accustomed to it. I suppose they left in a hasty euphoria, not taking precautions against the heat. Their minds probably were seared by the unforgiving sun.

Q: Why have you planted this forest?

A: I am here to restore the vitality of Athas. For too long, you poor mortals have suffered under the tyranny of the sorcerer-kings and the brutal heat. It is time to change that. Still, there are those who do not wish to see Athas reborn into the verdant paradise it once was.

Q: Who opposes you?

A: Sorcerer-kings and their boot-licking templars, plus a few misguided individuals. In fact, I would not be sur-

prised if some of them made another attempt at attacking my beautiful wood.

Q: Now that we're here, what happens next?

A: For now, rest up, refresh yourselves, and enjoy. In the days to come, there are things that need to be done if we are to not only ensure the continued survival of this forest, but also the spreading of the green all over Athas. But there will be time to talk about this later.

Q: The pilgrims seem to still be in a trance. Why?

A: I am sure that after a few days in the healing embrace of these woods, they will begin to come out of their stupors. Give them time to adjust. Perhaps you could do me a favor; would you watch out for any of these poor unfortunates who may wander into trouble? Thank you.

Outcome: In all likelihood, the PCs rest up in the forest and explore it for a while. Rafernard meanders back to her central plaza, making sure she is not being followed.

Lerilyn, if she has made it this far, realizes that she is far outclassed. She desperately want access to the *tree of life* but is unwilling to face what she believes is an avangion to get it. She leaves the forest, thwarted, and vows to take out her anger on the PCs at some later date.

Next: Once the PCs have reached the central plaza, go to **Part Three D: The Plaza**.

Part Three D: The Plaza

Setup: The plaza is located in the exact center of the forest. This is where Rafernard's ziggurat is located.

Start: When the party arrives at the center, read aloud the following:

The woods end at a circular plaza that measures about

Part Three: Rafernard



180 feet in diameter. The air is still very fragrant and pleasant.

The plaza is composed of paved stone, with low-slung benches for visitors' comfort.

Around the circumference of the plaza are various statues of elves and humans, all with looks of wisdom on their handsomely carved faces. The stones themselves are white marble, with an occasional spot of obsidian tile for added contrast. The effect is striking, and very pleasing to the eye.

In the center of the plaza stand a pair of trees carved from a pinkish marble. The trees are rendered so lifelike that only the color of the stone serves to remind you that they are not real.

The tree statues are intertwined in such a way that their tops create a flat plane big enough for someone to sit upon.

Birds pick at seeds scattered on the tiles, and flit about from statue to statue, singing their songs of life and health.

The area emanates with a quiet, building power, and peace reigns.

Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p.9—Rafernard's Plaza.

Encounter: For every visit the PCs make to the plaza, there is a 25% chance that Rafernard is here. The next earliest time the PCs can check again is at least a half an hour later. Thus, a PC cannot walk into the plaza, see Rafernard, leave the plaza, then come back in five minutes hoping that Rafernard has left.

If Rafernard is here, there is a 50% chance that she is receiving 2d4 pilgrims. If this happens, she is seated atop the twin carved tree statues, wings outspread majestically (and perhaps even a little egotistically). This may be another opportunity to talk with her (see the questions from **Part Three C**).

This encounter occurs on Map Five, Rafernard's Plaza. The following is a map key.

1. Tree Statue. This appears as a pair of 25 foot high columns of marble, cleverly intertwined, carved to resemble trees. Its actual form is an obsidian monument which tops Abalach-Re's ziggurat. It was changed by a *poly-morph any object* spell. Abalach-Re turns it back to normal when the time comes to cast the spell of transformation.

2. Entry to the Lower Level. This entry is hidden under the northern statue. The statue swings away to reveal a six foot wide hole with a set of stairs spiraling downward.

A possible telltale indication that this entry exists is the scratch marks on the floor tiles at the base of the statue, where the heavy thing swings back and forth.

Moving the statue requires a successful lift gates roll.

3. Power Spots. These are obsidian tiles with odd runes carved into them. The runes are only visible if a *read magic* is cast on a tile, then the runes appear. A spellcraft proficiency check (at a -4 penalty) reveals that the runes are ancient magics used for life-draining and some sort of metamorphosis.

The Plaza, Aerial View

Some PCs may have the capability of flight. Characters who can achieve a height of 100 feet directly over the plaza can discern the plaza's pattern. Note that climbing a tree or the tree statues is insufficient.

Characters see the circular plaza, with an obsidian spiral circling inward to the central statue of the two trees. A successful Intelligence check reveals that this is a ziggurat on a flat plane.

The PCs can be made curious about what lies underneath the plaza in several ways:



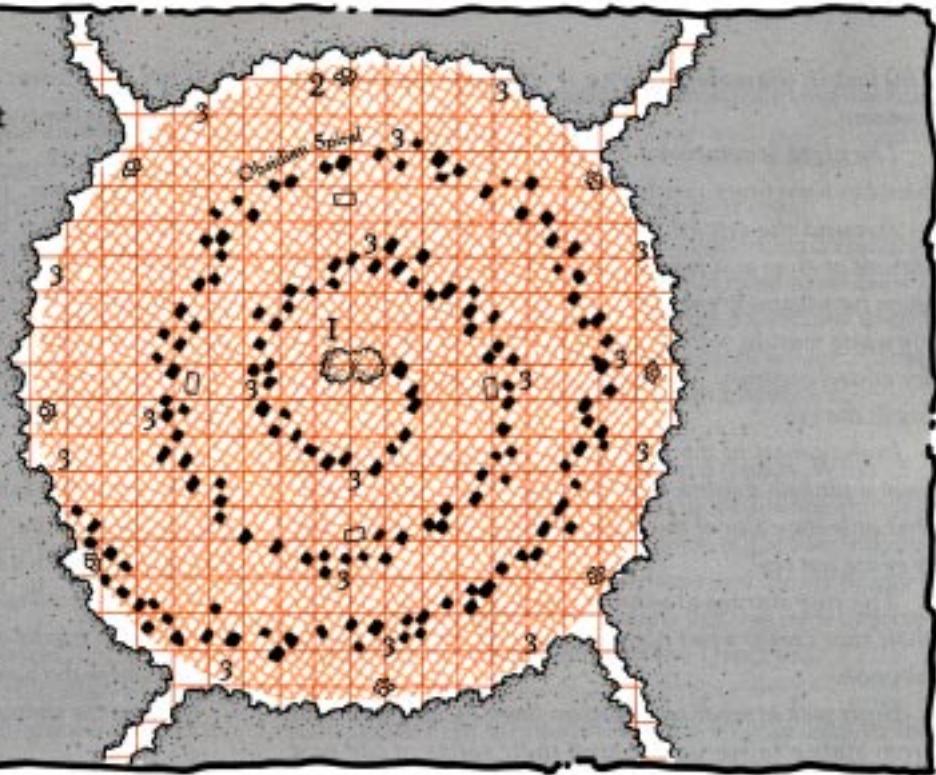
Part Three: Rafernard

Central Plaza

One square = 10 Feet

- ❖ Statue
- Bench

N



- The northern statue is slightly larger than the others, though it is only noticeable if the PCs take the time to look at all the statues.
- Perhaps a few leaves or flower petals are blown across part of the plaza floor due to a breeze puffing through the crack under the north statue.
- A dazed pilgrim wanders out into the plaza while the PCs are investigating the area. She walks over to the north statue, points at it, and makes a pushing motion on it, all the while with that same stupid grin on her face. She was in the brush earlier, admiring the plaza from a distance. She saw Rafernard move the statue and go down the hole. The pilgrim believes that the PCs are seeking Rafernard, and wishes to help them. If a PC reads her mind, he or she is able to get an exact picture of this.
- A successful tracking roll discovers tracks leading to and from the north statue.

If the PCs manage to find the entrance to the lower level without any of these promptings, good for them. An extra experience point bonus should be awarded for their healthy curiosity. Note that the rune-covered obsidian tiles create the obsidian swirl in the floor plan.

Role-playing: If the PCs have any luck, they will not need to role-play because hopefully no one is here, and they may explore the plaza at their leisure.

If Rafernard is here, she answers questions, but if pressed too long or too hard, she will bid the PCs to leave the plaza and "go rest somewhere."

Whatever the event, Rafernard does not want to reveal her true nature, not when the spell is so close to being cast. If the PCs are getting too nosy, or if she manages to catch them snooping around, she does not let them know that she has seen them, or that she suspects anything. It is enough, however, for her to do a psionic probe of the PCs involved.

Part Three: Rafernard



If Rafernard discovers their true natures (powerful adventurers who are not in her thrall), she is understandably angry. Still, she remains calm, wisely seeing that her advantage over the PCs rests in their not knowing that she knows their true nature.

Lurking under the plaza, in Rafernard/Abalach-Re's study area, are an assembly of gith who have become followers of the would-be dragon. These gith act as Abalach-Re's troops. Rafernard dispatches 18 of them to attack the PCs that very night while they sleep in the trees.

Should this attack fail, Rafernard speeds up her timetable, doing the ritual at sunrise and mentally notifying all her pilgrims that they must come to the central plaza. The PCs do not receive this telepathic summons. This is covered in more detail in **Part Three F: Showdown**.

Outcome: The most significant thing that should happen is that the PCs find the lower level and decide to explore it.

Next: Once the PCs find the lower level, take them to **Part Three E: The Underground**.

Part Three E: The Underground

Setup: Once the PCs realize that something is below the plaza, they get closer to solving the mystery. This section covers Abalach-Re's library, sleeping quarters, gith barracks, treasure storehouses, and most importantly, the obsidian spheres that are an essential component to the metamorphosis spell.

Start: Once the PCs have begun their descent down the stairs, read aloud the following.

The stairs are made of gray granite, and wind downward into the earth. Though the air down here is cool and

comfortable, there is an unhealthy feeling of ancient power that is barely kept in check, that is just waiting for release.

Your footsteps echo on the stone steps as you continue your descent. Aside from your footfalls, it is deathly quiet in here.

At last, you reach the bottom of the stairs. The landing is lit by a soft, magical light.

As you come to a halt, you can hear some slight background noises of unknown nature and origin. The air is chilly, and a shudder runs down your spines.

This action takes place on Map Six. Area descriptions follow, in the encounter section.

Encounter: The PCs are now in a defiler's lair. Abalach-Re's sanctum. The PCs should start getting the idea that this is not a place for an avangion.

General Comments on Abalach-Re's Lair

The lair is located 20 feet below the surface of the plaza. It is built completely of granite, and is lit by *continual light* globes.

The underground lair measures 180 feet in diameter and corresponds to the plaza above. In fact, the obsidian globes are situated in locations necessary for the *defiler metamorphosis* spell.

The Lair

1. Stairs and Entry Room. These granite stairs wind down 20 feet from the surface to the entry room. If a PC descends the first few stairs and looks back up, he or she notices that there is a large handle recessed in the statue's underside that enables someone to pull the statue back over the hole, hiding the opening from prying eyes.

The entry room is the area where the stairs end. It is lit



Part Three: Rafernard

by a *continual light* globe, and is decorated with murals showing an avangion restoring the earth to a green paradise. It was these illustrations that gave Abalach-Re the idea of posing as an avangion.

2. Hallway. This wide hall has three doors made of heavy wood, banded with iron for extra durability. Situated in the exact middle of the ceiling lies an obsidian orb six inches in diameter. It is inlaid into the ceiling, and cannot be pried out by any means save Abalach-Re's spell. The orb registers as magical if detection spells are cast.

3. The Pit. This large room contains a narrow walkway, and a huge pit that plunges down 70 feet.

At the bottom of the pit are six tembo, captured by Abalach-Re. Sometimes, when the sorcerer-queen is bored, she tosses a few malcontents (usually kept in area 6) down the pit and watches the fun.

The tembo are not immediately noticeable to the PCs. If a light source is shined down the pit, the PCs see numerous skeletons, and a few odd shadows. The shadows are the tembo, hiding in shadow form.

If the PCs do not wish to tangle with the tembo, that is their choice. However, it may be prudent to remind them about how hated these foul beasts are. Characters who are of Lawful Good alignment may feel the acute need to destroy these horrors, lest they somehow get out.

The walls of the pit are lined with an enchanted alloy that interferes with magical and psionic teleportation or other abilities that allow for an escape. This prevents the tembo from using the ectoplasmic form psionic power to escape. However, once Abalach-Re is slain, the enchantment ceases and the tembo are freed.

There are two obsidian orbs recessed in the ceiling. They are immovable.

Tembo (6): AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 26; THAC0 17; #AT 5; Dmg 1d4(x2)/1d6(x2)/1d8; SA

Psionics, level drain; SD Dodge missiles; MR 10%; SZ M; ML 20; XP 975. Psionic summary: Level 5; Dis/Sci/Dev 1/2/5; At/Df -/IF,M-; Score 10; PSPs 80; Psychometabolism— Sciences: death field, life draining, shadow-form; Devotions: chameleon power, displacement, ectoplasmic form, heightened senses, immovability.

If a tembo scores a hit with its jaws, the victim must make a saving throw versus death magic or lose one level.

When attacked from a distance, tembo have a 40% chance of dodging any non-magical missile fire directed at them.

4. Treasure Room. The door to this room from the hallway (area 2) is solid iron, but it is covered by a false door made of wood, so as not to attract undue attention.

The iron door is *wizard locked* at 21st-level ability. Anyone touching the iron door triggers a *symbol of death*.

The room is lit by a *continual light* globe. A golden glow suffuses everything, hardly surprising since there are 55,753 gold pieces in clay urns, burlap sacks, chests, and even scattered on the floor. Abalach-Re has no magical treasure, for she does not need any.

This is Abalach-Re's treasure, and 50,000 gp of it is needed to cast her spell. There are two obsidian globes recessed into the ceiling. Like the others, they are immovable.

5. Gith Barracks. This door is not locked. This chamber accommodates the 40 gith henchmen and followers of Rafernard/Abalach-Re. They are generally responsible for the care of the prisoners, and tend to any intruders who happen to wander into the underground complex. The gith never appear on the surface in the presence of Rafernard.

Gith (40): AL CE; AC 8; MV 10; HD 3; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d6-1 (obsidian gith spears), or 1d4/1d4; SZ M; ML 10; XP 175.

Part Three: Rafernard

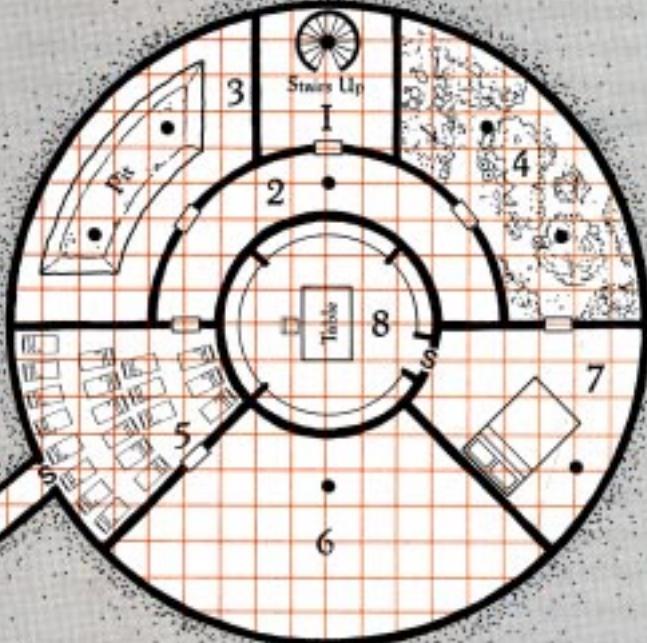


Underground

One square = 10 Feet

- Door
- ↔ Secret Door
- Obsidian Orb

Escape Tunnel



Each gith has an obsidian spear and 2d4 ceramic pieces. As a rule, there are usually 30 gith in here at any one time, the other 10 are scattered throughout the level, on routine patrol.

The chamber has an obsidian orb recessed into the ceiling which cannot be removed.

A secret door on the far outer wall conceals the entry into an escape tunnel. The tunnel goes west for a mile, and emerges onto the surface. This is where the gith can come and go unseen.

6. Prison. Not everyone who heard Rafernard's call was under its control. There were some who came to see what all the fuss was about, and somehow stumbled on Rafernard's secret. Some of these, like Amalak Pul, had their minds shattered. Others, however, were captured by the sorcerer-queen.

Rafernard, not one to waste opportunities, put them in

this prison. The floor is inlaid with the same magical obsidian tiles found on the surface. When the pilgrims get their lives drained, so do these unfortunates.

There are currently 22 prisoners in these cells, and the DM is encouraged to create whatever types he or she wishes, though there are no thri-kreen in the ranks. The one thing all the prisoners have in common is that they know that Rafernard is actually Abalach-Re, the sorcerer-queen of Raam.

The door to the prison is wood with bands of iron, and is locked. The ceiling has an inlaid obsidian orb which cannot be removed.

7. Rafernard/Abalach-Re's Quarters. This room is accessed only through the treasure room (area 4). The door is iron, and is *wizard locked* at 21st-level ability.

Inside is a huge bed, and a massive wall mural on the south wall showing Abalach-Re as a full dragon, sitting on a



Part Three: Rafernard

vast stone throne with throngs of pilgrims worshipping her.

A secret door in the west wall leads to Abalach-Re's study.

There is an obsidian orb in the ceiling, and it cannot be removed.

8. Rafernard/Abalach-Re's Study. (Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p.9 – *Discovery*). This room is lit by a *continual light* globe. The walls are composed of bookshelves that have been carved out of the wall's stone. A huge stone table is set in the center of the room.

Most of the shelves are filled with stone tablets, each one a part of Abalach-Re's spell book (see the *Short Story Book* for which spells are featured).

The second portion of shelves contain huge leather-bound books full of magical and psionic esoterica. One book, which juts out (having recently been used), gives the information on the *skull of Dorag Thel*.

The rest of the shelves contain the spell components necessary for the casting of Abalach-Re's spell repertoire.

There are two interesting stone tablets set out on the stone table. The first one is the spell needed to transform Abalach-Re from a 21st-level to a 25th-level dragon. Once the PCs read this tablet, Abalach-Re's plan is exposed.

The second tablet is actually a spell scroll, with the spell *advanced domination* on it. The scroll has already been read, but the spell words remain on the stone, glowing with a golden light. The spell is currently in effect, and Coggalan is the victim. If the tablet is shattered, Coggalan, if he is still alive, is freed.

A *read magic* spell or ability is needed to decipher both of these tablets.

Role-playing: The prisoners in area six rejoice at being rescued, and are extremely angry at having been imprisoned. Most of them are fellow adventurers, and they chafe at the humiliation of imprisonment. They beg for a chance to help out.

Outcome: Hopefully, the PCs are now wise to Rafernard's plot, and the necessity of foiling it. Also, the prisoners should be freed.

Rafernard is nowhere to be found. The pilgrims are still under the compulsion, and the PCs have no way to halt the spell. They have to confront Rafernard herself. The sorcerer-queen intends to remain out of sight until dawn.

The PCs may be attacked at night by gith sent by Rafernard. The battle should be a short one, and treated like a random encounter.

Next: The next encounter does not occur until sunrise. When the time comes, go on to **Part Three F: Showdown**.

Part Three F: Showdown

Setup: The final encounter between the PCs and Abalach-Re occurs at sunrise. She has sent another mental summons through the preserver artifact she has enslaved, calling her "faithful" to gather in the plaza. Have the players turn to *Player's Book* p.10 – *Rafernard's Last Spell* as you begin to read aloud.

Start: As dawn breaks over the lush forest, the sorcerer-queen sends out her call. The PCs, whether sleeping or awake, must fight off the compulsion to join the pilgrims (if they are of good alignment). Because of their proximity to the *skull of Dorag Thel*, the saving throw is much more difficult. Those good-aligned PCs who do not make a successful save vs. death magic (with a -5 penalty because they are so close to the artifact) become zombie-like automatons who can do nothing except heed Abalach-Re's summons.

Once the unaffected PCs reach the plaza and begin the final battle, summoned PCs can attempt to reinstate their own wills once every round by making another saving throw. Once a PC succeeds, the summons has no fur-

Part Three: Rafernard



ther affect for the rest of this adventure.

All of the pilgrims in the forest slowly crowd into the plaza in response to the call. When the PCs reach the plaza, read the following aloud:

You push through the huge throng of pilgrims to gaze into the circular plaza. Rafernard revels in the center of it all, sitting atop a tall obsidian obelisk that stands where the twin tree statues used to be. On a ledge right beneath her, a glowing human skull rests fitfully, tossing malevolent light from its gem-packed eyes. For a moment, you see her as the great avangion you met the day before. Then Rafernard changes.

The guise of the Great One falls away, revealing a tall, regal, evil-looking woman in ornate robes. "Who am I?" the woman calls out. "Sing my name before you give me your lives!"

The pilgrims sway in time to some unheard song. Then, slowly at first, they start a chant that gains volume and power as it builds. "Abalach-Re! Abalach-Re!" the crowd sings. You think to yourself Abalach-Re – sorcerer-queen of Raam!

Abalach-Re lifts one claw-like hand and utters twisted words of dragon magic. As she emphasizes each terrible syllable, an obsidian sphere rises out of the plaza stonework to twirl around the sorcerer-queen. Eighteen black spheres orbit her, as though she was the crimson sun itself. She grabs the first sphere and swallows it whole while continuing to utter phrases that are actually painful to hear.

She turns to look at you, the few who have been able to ignore her summons. There is a smug look of triumph on her draconic features. Then crackling black energy rises from the tiled plaza floor to slam in to the oblivious pilgrims and connect them to Abalach-Re. She smiles as the energy bathes her, then casually consumes another obsidian sphere.

Encounter: Abalach-Re is casting the spell that will allow her to leap from her current level of power to

become a 25th-level dragon. Both the casting time and effects of this spell are greatly accelerated, making the whole process extremely dangerous and quite uncertain. The spell takes 15 rounds to complete, and two rounds have already gone by. Each round, everyone in the plaza loses a part of their life force.

This energy flows into Abalach-Re, bringing on the change she so desperately craves. During her action in a round, as determined by the normal initiative roll. Abalach-Re consumes another of the obsidian spheres. This signals that another portion of the spell has been completed.

Note that there are more spheres than necessary to complete the spell. This means if the PCs decide to destroy the spheres to disrupt the spell, they will have to destroy four of them.

While casting this powerful yet fragile spell. Abalach-Re is vulnerable to attack. Any significant interruption disrupts the spell and releases all of the energy the sorcerer-queen has already gathered. This, of course, should be the PCs' goal.

However, Abalach-Re has set all of the magical and psionic defenses she could muster around herself, casting all but a handful of offensive spells she is saving in case something goes wrong. The protective spells active when the PCs arrive are outlined below:

1st level: *protection from evil, shield*; 2nd level: *blur, mirror image, protection from cantrips*, 3rd level: *protection from good, 10' radius, protection from normal missiles*; 4th level: *fire shield* (vs. fire-based attacks); 6th level: *globe of invulnerability*, 7th level: *spell turning*.

The PCs suffer the same affects of life draining as the rest of the pilgrims in the plaza. Each round, at the same time as Abalach-Re consumes another obsidian sphere, all the PCs temporarily lose one point from every ability score. If any ability score reaches 0, the character falls unconscious. This character is effectively out of the battle, doomed to have his or her life force sucked away, or to eventually regain consciousness if the rest of the party wins the day.



Part Three: Rafernard

In addition, a number of charmed pilgrims stand between the PCs and Abalach-Re. These pilgrims believe in the Forest Maker completely, and they fight to keep her safe from the unbelieving PCs.

To the mesmerized pilgrims, the spell that Abalach-Re is casting is the enchantment that will save Athas once and for all. There are enough of these pilgrims to keep any NPCs (and the prisoners that the PCs should have released from the underground prison) with the party busy, as well as eight others who will deal directly with the PCs. Each round, these pilgrims lose one point from each ability score, just like everyone else in the plaza. These eight are described in **Statistics**, below.

If one of the PCs carries the shard of imperfect obsidian that once belonged to Amalak, that PC is afforded a number of protections. First, the PC gets a +3 bonus to the saving throw against the final summoning. Second, the imperfect obsidian causes the PC's life to drain away more slowly. This PC loses one point from every ability score every other round instead of every round. The obsidian shard has no other effect, and cannot be used against Abalach-Re in any significant way.

If one of the PCs carries Culler's flaming sword, that PC receives both defensive and offensive capabilities for use against the sorcerer-queen. Against Abalach-Re, its enchantment increases to +5. In addition, the wielder of the sword gets to make a saving throw against rods, staves and wands (with a +3 bonus) whenever dragon magic or dragon psionics is directed at him or her. A successful save allows the properties of the sword to dissipate the attack before it strikes. A failed save indicates that the attack occurs normally. This includes the life-draining spell. Every round, the PC holding the sword should make a roll to see if ability scores decrease or remain the same.

Attacks made against the obsidian spheres require hits against AC 2. Each sphere has 25 hit points.

While Abalach-Re casts her spell and consumes the spheres, black energy draws the life out of the pilgrims

and passes it on to her. Her charmed pilgrim defenders battle to keep her safe so that she can complete the spell. During the rounds listed below, after she consumes an obsidian sphere, Abalach-Re gains a new form. Describe the change to the players so that they can see that their PCs are running out of time.

Round 4: Abalach-Re's skin shreds as she grows to a height of 10 feet, her face elongates, and scales begin to appear on her lengthened snout. The stub of a tail appears, and her dragon-like spine becomes more pronounced.

Round 8: Another husk falls away as Abalach-Re grows to 11 feet and gains another 200 pounds of bulk. Her limbs lengthen drastically, as do her fingers and toes. Her hair disappears as her neck stretches to lift a now reptilian head far above her shoulders.

Round 12: All vestiges of humanoid origin are left behind as she progresses through another stage of metamorphosis. Now 12 feet tall and 900 pounds, she is covered with tough scales (AC 4). Her feet are taloned, and true claws drip from draconic arms.

Round 15: As this round comes to an end, the spell is completed. For the PCs, it is too late. Abalach-Re has become a 25th-level dragon. She has an AC 0, and only weapons of +1 magic or better can strike her. At this point, she enters a savage animalistic period—and the first objects of her destructive desire are the PCs (if they have not fallen to the life-draining spell).

Statistics: *Pilgrim Warriors* (6): AL NG; AC 5 (Dexterity, leather); MV 12; HD 6; hp 42, 36, 35, 33, 27 24; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (bone long swords); SZ M; ML 14. One pilgrim warrior succumbs to the life draining in each of the following rounds: 7, 9, 11, 12, 13. The strongest does not fall unconscious.

Pilgrim Psionicist: AL LG; AC 8 (carru leather); MV 12; HD 5+5; hp 29; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (obsidian long sword); SZ M; ML 14. Psionic Summary:

Part Three: Rafernard



PS 13; PSPs 80; At/Df MT/M-, TS; Psychokinesis—*Sciences*: project force; *Devotions*: levitation, control body; Telepathy—*Sciences*: ejection; *Devotions*: conceal thoughts, inflict pain, mind thrust, mind blank, thought shield. Succumbs to life draining in round 10.

Pilgrim Preserver: AL CG; AC 8; MV 12; HD 7; hp 22; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (steel dagger); SA spells; SZ M; ML 14. Spells: 1st level: *burning hands*, *jump*, *magic missile*, *shocking grasp*; 2nd level: *flaming sphere*, *levitate*, *web*; 3rd level: *lightning bolt*, *wind wall*; 4th level: *wall of fire*. Succumbs to life draining in round 8.

Outcome: There are two probable ways for the PCs to disrupt Abalach-Re's spell. They can either smash enough obsidian spheres that the spell cannot be completed (this requires the destruction of four of the spheres), or they can get close enough to strike the sorcerer-queen with Culler's flaming sword.

Of course, inventive players may come up with some other tactic for their PCs. Allow any reasonable action to succeed—as long as it is dramatic and the scene plays out tensely.

If the PCs shatter four of the spheres before the 15th round, Abalach-Re is stymied. She cannot proceed to the conclusion of the spell, and she cannot contain the energy coursing through her for very long. In however many rounds remain until the 15th, she has the form and powers of whatever level she was able to advance to. She will use those powers to destroy those who have ruined her plans—or at least try to.

When time runs out, she reverts back to her 21st-level self. While her metamorphosis can no longer take place, she can still gain revenge on the PCs. She fights until they are dead or she is reduced to less than half her hit point total (at which point she flees back to Raam).

If a PC is able to get past the pilgrims and Abalach-Re's magical defenses to land a blow that actually causes damage, the spell is shattered. The sorcerer-queen

screams in pain as the life forces drain out of her and flow back into the pilgrim horde. If the wound is caused by Culler's sword, Abalach-Re flees. If it is caused by any other weapon, she turns to fight as described above.

If she is allowed to successfully complete her spell, Abalach-Re becomes a 25th-level dragon. Her power increases dramatically and her rage overtakes her. The PCs must now battle to the death (probably their own) or flee her terrible savagery.

A victory for the PCs means a significant defeat for the sorcerer-queen. Not only are the pilgrims released from their thrall and their life forces returned, but the *skull of Dorag Thel* is also freed from its bondage. The PCs can return it to the Veiled Alliance. The forest also survives, though the plaza is destroyed by the failed spell's backlash. Note that the underground lair is completely buried, so PCs cannot go back down and retrieve the remaining gold.

Someday, when Abalach-Re has had a chance to recover and regain her strength, Abalach-Re will seek out the PCs. The hatred and the memory of a sorcerer-queen lasts a long, long time.

Experience point bonuses for successful PCs include 100 points for every prisoner rescued from beneath the plaza, 2,000 points each for stopping Abalach-Re and freeing the pilgrims, and 1,000 points each for returning the *skull of Dorag Thel* to the Veiled Alliance.

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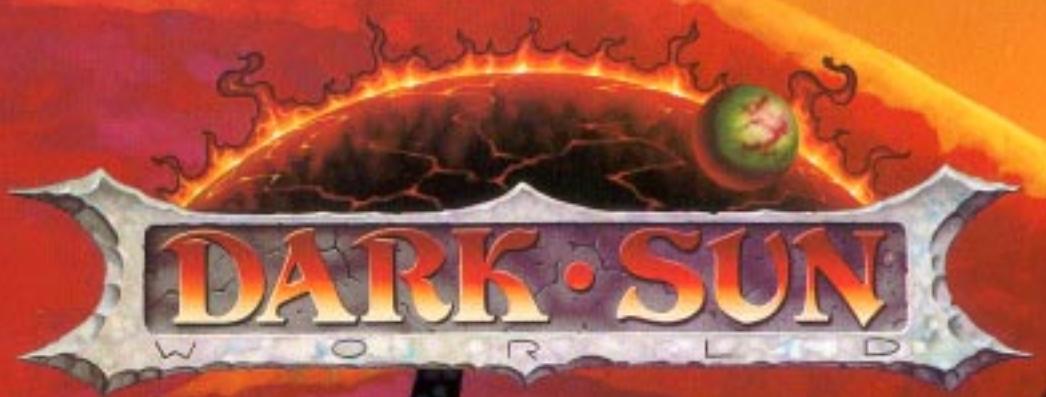


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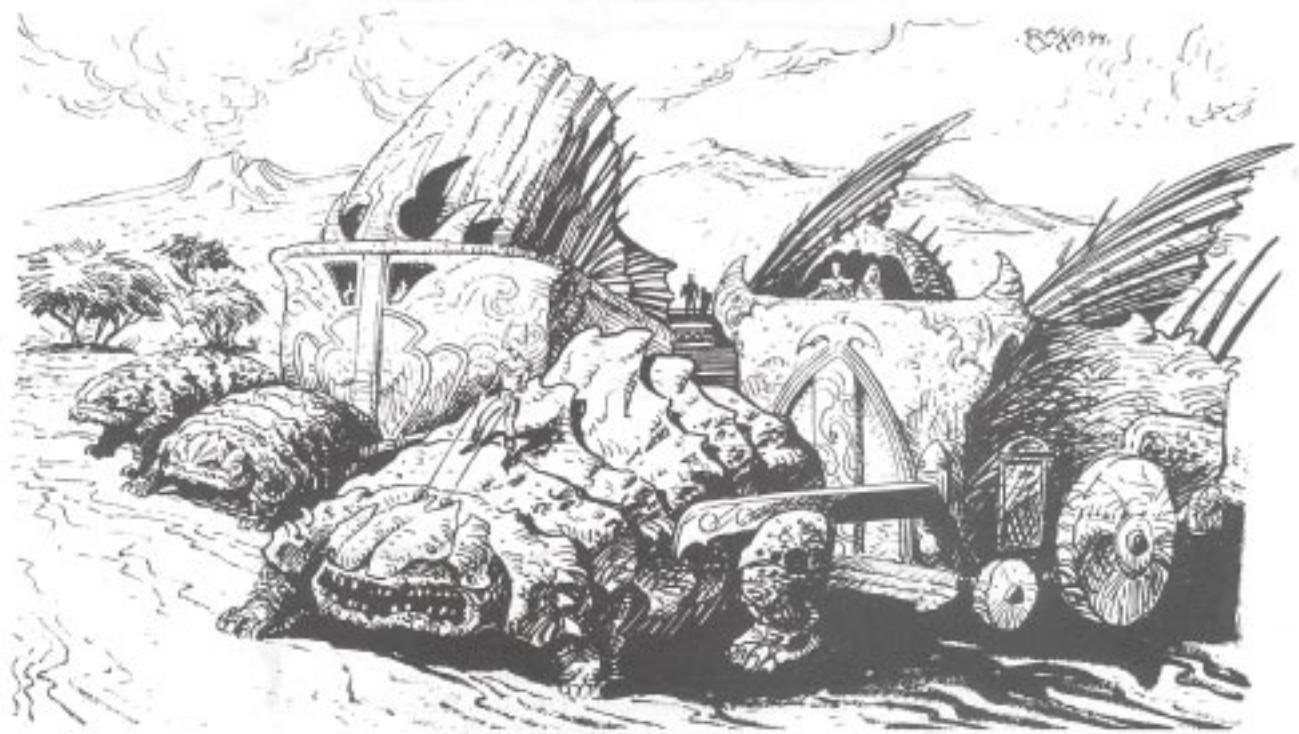
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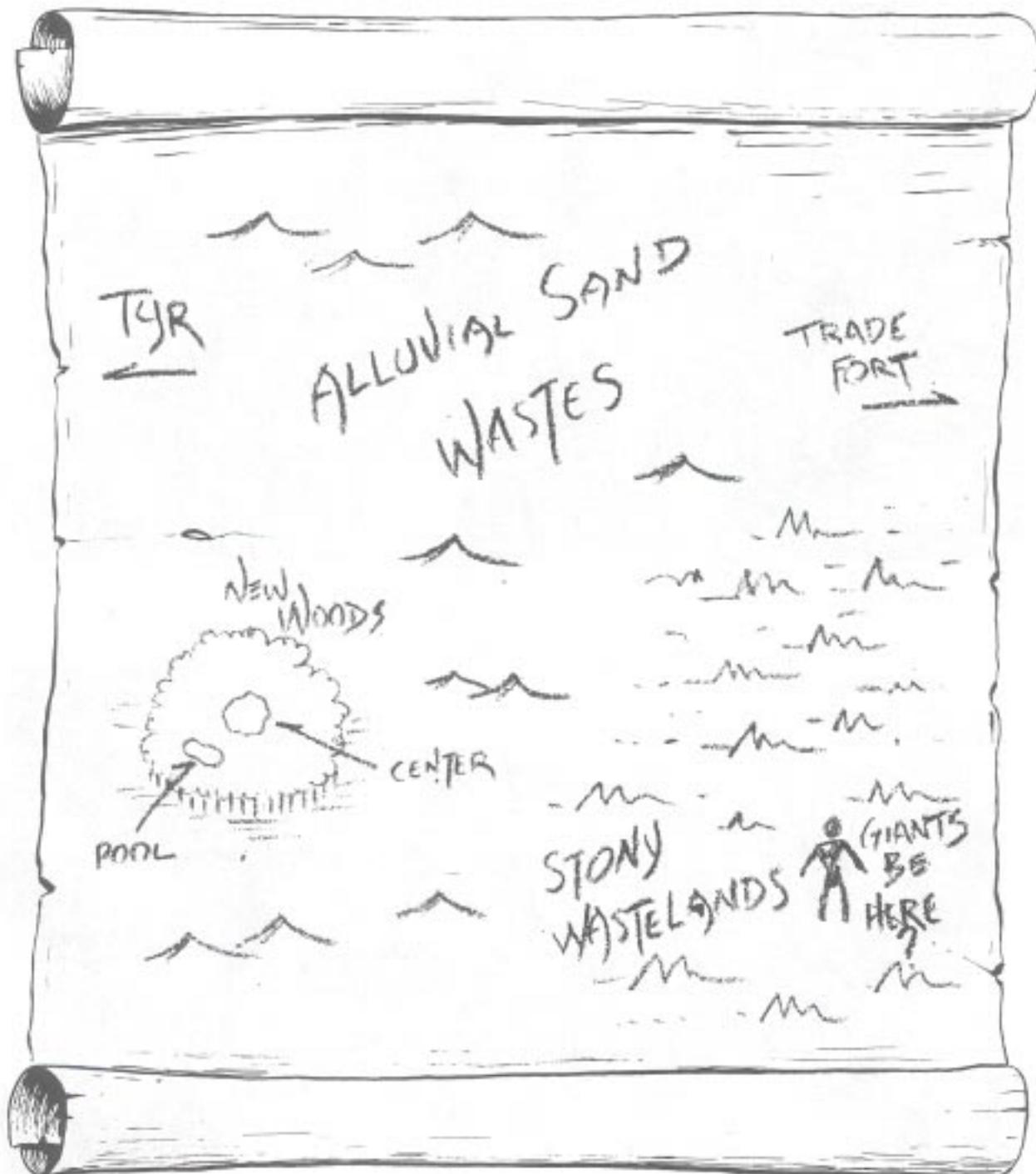
The Caravan



Amalak



Amalak's Map



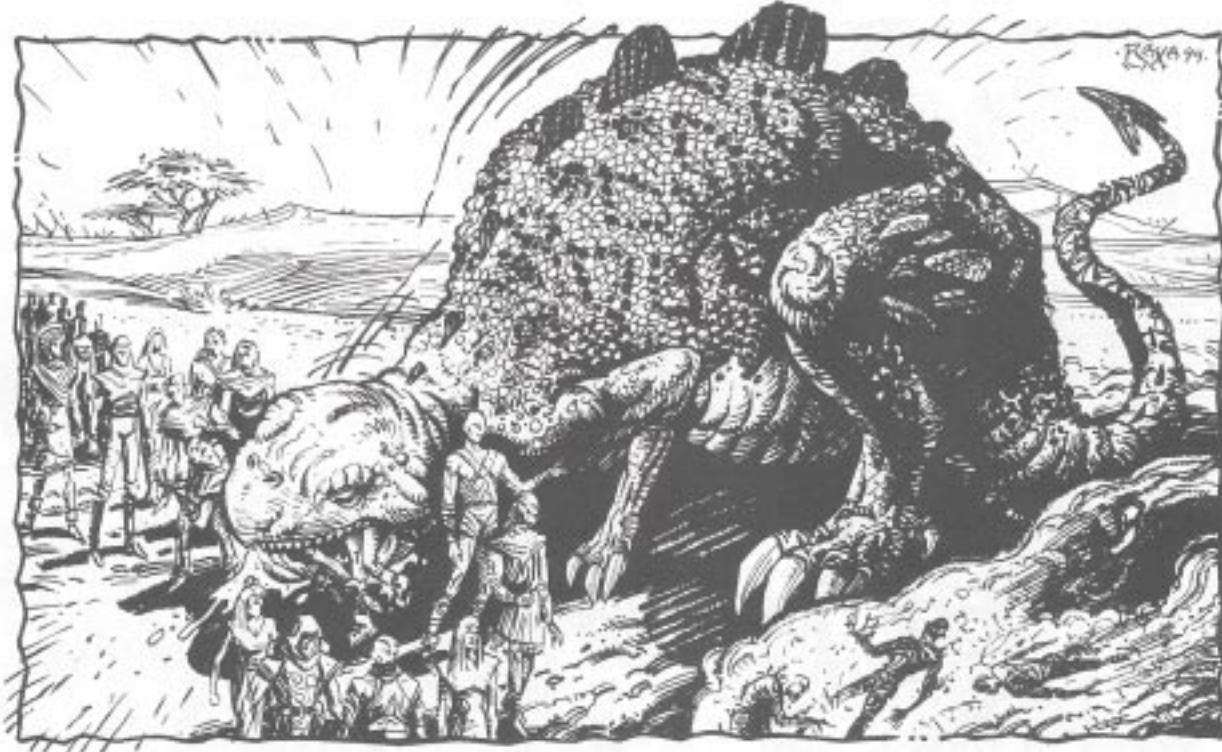
Pilgrimage



Domera's Stand



Pilgrims' Feast



The Giants Attack



The Four Bits' Common Room



Madness



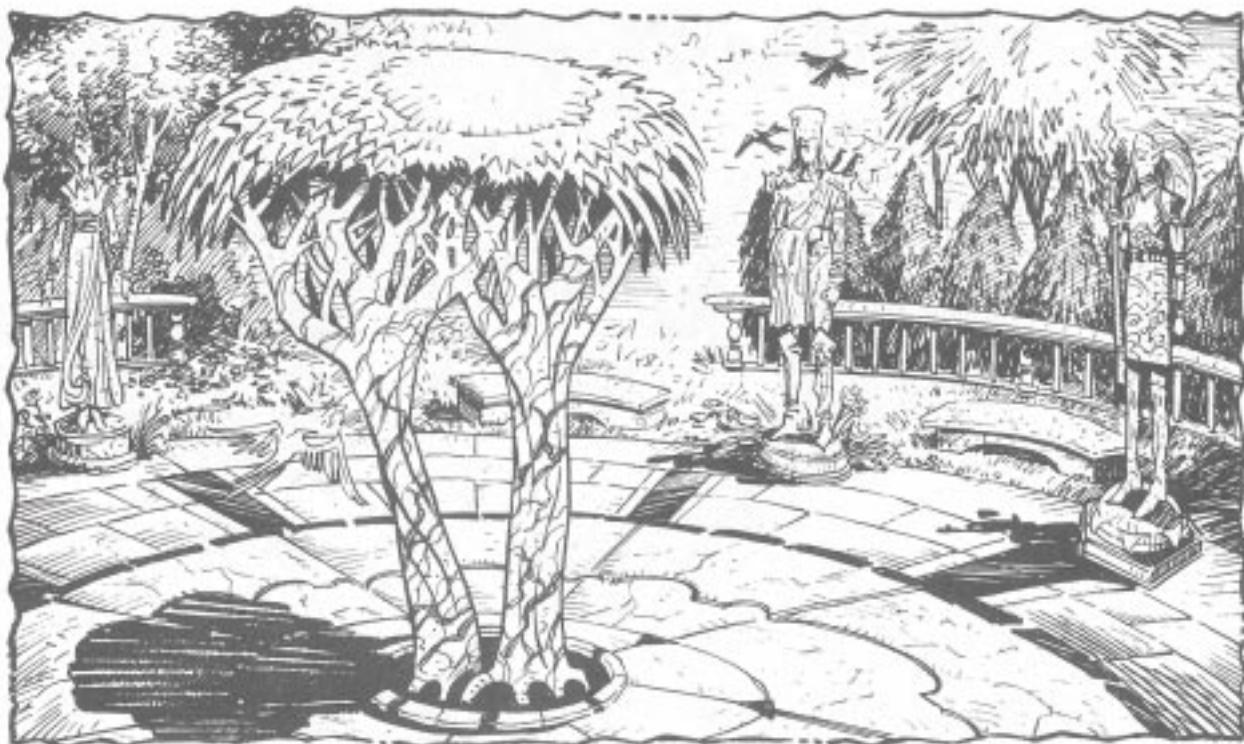
The Forest



Rafernard



Rafernard's Plaza



Discovery



Rafernard's Last Spell



Maluk

Male Mul Gladiator
12th Level
Chaotic Good

Str 20	Int 14
Dex 16	Wis 12
Con 19	Cha 13

Reaction Adjustments: Surprise +1, NPCs +1

#AT: 3/2 (2/1 with spear)

THAC0: 9

4 with spear (3 thrown)

7 with quabone

Damage:

Spear 1d8+11

Quabone 1d4+7

Armor Class: 4 (modified for Dexterity and armor)

8 unarmored

Hit Points: 110

Wild Talent: Combat mind; Score: Int -4, Cost: 6/4 rd, PSPs 60

Gladiator Abilities: Automatically proficient at all weapons; may specialize in multiple weapons; gains a +/-4 modifier to punch and wrestling attack rolls; optimize armor starting at 5th level: -1 to Armor Class for every five levels if armor is worn.

Mul Abilities: Able to work longer and harder than most other races; only requires eight hours rest regardless of heavy exertion.

Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	Sp
7	9	8	8	10

+1 vs. poison for Constitution

Weapon Proficiencies: All

Weapon Specialization: Spear

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Armor optimization, heat protection, land-based riding, weapon improvisation

Languages: Common, dwarf

Equipment: Leather armor, spear, quabone, waterskin

Magic: *fruit of healing*, +1 spear

Money: 36 cp, 2 sp



Background: Born of a dwarf father and a human slave mother, Maluk was taught to be a gladiator by the brutal trainers who raised him.

Maluk fought in the arenas as a gladiator well into adulthood, a slave but at least a live one. He was determined someday to be a free man.

Tithian, formerly Kalak's chief templar, became the new ruling King of Tyr and set free all the slaves. Maluk was at last free. He has used his freedom to explore the world of Athas.

Maluk is a decent being who is loyal to his friends and committed to doing the right thing his own way.

Karnev Airdancer

Male Halfling Cleric/Thief
10th Level/10th Level
Chaotic Neutral

Str 14	Int 15
Dex 19	Wis 17
Con 14	Cha 11

Reaction Adjustments: Surprise +3, NPCs nil

#AT: 1

THAC0: 14

14 with spear (10 thrown)

10 with sling

16 with obsidian short sword

Damage:

Spear 1d8

Sling 1d4

Obsidian short sword 1d6-1

Armor Class: 6 unarmored (modified for Dexterity) 4 in leather armor (modified for Dexterity)

Hit Points: 54

Wild Talent: Know direction; Score: Int, Cost: 1/na, PSPs 25

Cleric of Air Spells: Six 1st-level spells

Six 2nd-level spells

Four 3rd-level spells

Three 4th-level spells

Two 5th-level spells

Major access to the sphere of Air

Minor access to the sphere of the Cosmos

Cleric of Air Abilities: Turn undead

Thief Abilities: Surprise backstab at +4 to hit, x4 damage

Thieving Percentages:

PP	OL	F/RT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL
70	65	60	70	90	75	90	60

Halfling Abilities: +1 to hit using slings and thrown weapons; can surprise opponents if not in metal armor (must be alone, or with a party of elves and/or halflings; -4 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls, -2 if a door has to be opened).

Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	Sp
6	10	3	12	11

+3 vs. magical attack adjustment for Wisdom
+4 vs. wands, staves, rods, spells, poison



Weapon Proficiencies: Spear, sling, obsidian short sword

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Appraising, heat protection, read/write Common, sign language, somatic concealment, water find

Languages: Common, halfling

Equipment: Leather armor, spear, waterskin, thieves' picks and tools, sling and 24 bullets

Magic: two fruits of extra-healing

Money: 28 cp

Background: Karnev Airdancer is a halfling from the jungles at the Forest Ridge. Though he enjoyed the civilized company of his fellow halflings, eventually he was seized with wanderlust and decided to explore Athas for a while.

Karnev has visited most of Athas's major cities, and has been exposed to many Athasian customs, most of which he disdains.

A devoted priest of the air, Karnev enjoys wide open spaces, where the wind can blow free and unobstructed.

Karnev still harbors much of the feral cannibalistic nature of his race. Many is the time when he catches himself making a reference to devouring a hated enemy. Despite his veneer of civilization, Karnev has a sneaky streak of nastiness that he saves for his enemies.

Karnev uses his thief abilities sparingly, taking only what he needs, and from people whom he feels "deserve it."

Olaena Zamaran

Female Elf Preserver/Trader
10th Level/8th Level Trader
Chaotic Good

Str 16	Int 18
Dex 20	Wis 16
Con 13	Cha 17

Reaction Adjustments: Surprise +3, NPCs +6

#AT: 1 (2 with longbow)

THAC0: 17

- 17 with dagger (14 thrown)
- 17 with staff
- 13 with longbow

Damage:

- Dagger 1d4+1
- Staff 1d6+1
- Longbow 1d6

Armor Class: 4 (modified for Dexterity and magic)

Hit Points: 36

Wild Talent: Precognition; Score: Wis -5, Cost: 24/na, PSPs 64

Preserver Spells: Four 1st-level spells

- Four 2nd-level spells
- Three 3rd-level spells
- Two 4th-level spells
- Two 5th-level spells

Trader Abilities: Surprise backstab at +4 to hit, x4 damage; Poison Knowledge, classes: A, B, C, I, J; Fast Talk

Thieving Percentages:

PP	OL	F/RT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL
80	50	30	40	40	40	70	20

Elf Abilities: +1 to hit with longbow and long sword; 60' infravision; surprise opponents in the wilderness against non-elves, -4 penalty; for overland movement, add +13 to 24 (normal movement) or 30 (forced march) to determine actual movement in miles or points per day.

Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	Sp
12	9	11	13	10

+2 vs. magical attack for Wisdom

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, staff, longbow

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Appraising, bargain, bureaucracy, heat protection, land-based riding, read/write Common, somatic concealment, spellcraft



Languages: Elven, Common, gith, halfling, thri-kreen

Equipment: Steel dagger, longbow and sheaf of arrows, thieves' tools, spell books, waterskin

Magic: leather ring of protection +2, fruit of invisibility

Spell Book:

1st level: alarm, cantrip, charm person, color spray, friends, read magic, sleep, taunt

2nd level: deafness, deeppockets, fool's gold, glitterdust, locate object

3rd level: delude, fly, haste, hold person, slow, tongues

4th level: confusion, fear, wall of fire, wall of ice

5th level: dream, fabricate

Money: 45 cp, 22 sp, 10 gp

Background: Olaena is from an elven merchant house located near Urik. Though she proved to be an adept merchant, she wanted more out of life and took up the study of magic. She is now a member of the Veiled Alliance.

Olaena has a strong desire to get her own way. She unhesitatingly uses magic, fast talk, or her charisma to achieve her goals.

When it comes to magic and/or money, Olaena is brilliant at coming up with plans to acquire them both. She is always working on a new scheme that will either make her rich, or get her more magic.

Olaena is good at overcoming the average merchant's distrust of elves. She knows how to talk to people to make them feel at ease.

Glak'kt'kt

Female Thri-Kreen Ranger
12th Level
Neutral Good

Str 19	Int 14
Dex 16	Wis 15
Con 18	Cha 13

Reaction Adjustments: Surprise +1, NPCs +1

#AT: 1 or 5

THAC0: 9

- 6 with gytha
- 8 with chatkcha
- 6 with natural weaponry

Damage:

- Gytha 1d10+7
- Chatkcha 1d6+2
- Bite and claw 1d4+1/1d4 (x4) +7

Armor Class: 3 (modified for Dexterity)

Hit Points: 124

Wild Talent: Displacement; Score: Con -3, Cost: 6/3 rd, PSPs 59

Ranger Abilities: Move Silently 94%; Hide in Shadows 77%; Species enemy: gith (+4 on attack rolls); automatically befriends domestic animals, wild animals; save vs. rods at -4 against ranger's attempt at shifting reaction category by one step

Clerical Spells: cast at 5th-level ability

- Minor access to the sphere of Earth
- Two 1st-level spells
- Two 2nd-level spells
- One 3rd-level spell

Thri-kreen Abilities: Does not need sleep; can leap 20' straight up or 50' straight forward; bite paralyzes size S prey for 2-20 rounds, size M prey for 2-16 rounds, size L prey for 1-8 rounds, size H prey for 1 round; make chatkcha fly 90' and return; dodge missiles fired on a 9 or better on a d20

Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	Sp
7	9	8	8	10

+1 vs. magical attack for Wisdom

Weapon Proficiencies: Gythka, chatkcha

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Direction sense, heat protection, hunting, sign language, tracking, water find, weather sense



Languages: Thri-kreen, tohr-kreen, Common

Equipment: Gythka, chatkcha, waterskin

Magic: none

Money: 87 cp

Background: Glak'kt'kt has been trained as a ranger since she was a young thri-kreen. She has walked the breadth of Athas, in search of the ultimate hunting experience. While she searches for this goal, she does her best to tend to the land and preserve it.

When Glak'kt'kt took some time to return to her hive-colony, she found that her people had been wiped out by a marauding pack of gith. Coolly, she tracked them down and slaughtered every last one. Her hatred of gith continues unabated.

Glak'kt'kt (or, as she likes to be called by her friends, "kit-kit") relates to everything in the context of hunting. She and her companions do not look for an inn with a vacancy; they hunt for one.

Kit-kit is devoted to restoring the land to its natural green vibrancy, for, she reasons, when the land is bountiful again, the hunting will be spectacular.

The ways and customs of men and the other humanoid races confuse her still, and she asks many questions of her comrades.

Kit-kit does not show much emotion. She hides her feelings and comes across as rather clinical. This harkens back to the destruction of her community. A part of her died that day.

Jork

Male Half-Giant Fighter
11th Level
Neutral Good/True/Evil

Str 20 Int 8
Dex 10 Wis 9
Con 20 Cha 6

Reaction Adjustments: Surprise nil, NPCs -2

#AT: 3/2
THAC0: 10
9 with two-handed sword
7 with club

Damage:
Two-handed sword 3d6+7
Club 1d6+8

Armor Class: 10

Hit Points: 166 (regenerates 1 hp/turn)

Wild Talent: Flesh armor; Score: Con -3, Cost: 8/4 rd, PSPs 64

Fighter Abilities: Operate heavy war machines, supervise construction of defenses, command up to 900 troops, construct heavy war machines

Half-Giant Abilities: Hit Dice are doubled; all personal equipment costs double; alignment varies daily

Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	Sp
7	9	8	8	10

+1 vs. poison for Constitution

Weapon Proficiencies: Club

Weapon Specialization: Two-handed sword

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Blacksmithing, endurance, heat protection, weapon improvisation

Languages: Common

Equipment: Obsidian two-handed sword, club, tun of water, rations for one week

Magic: none

Money: 48 cp

Background: When Jork was but a teenager, a human druid helped his village through a crisis. Before the druid departed, she taught Jork that life was a balance between good and evil.

The impressionable Jork took this lesson to heart and decided to emulate the druid's path of neutrality, with limited success.



His people, their patience with Jork's attempts at preserving the balance of nature exhausted, encouraged him to go out into the rest of Athas, and help the entire land in the same way he helped his village. Inspired, Jork left almost at once, much to the relief of his fellows.

The well-meaning but dim-witted Jork has wandered the Athasian cities, implementing his own heavy-handed conservation attempts on poor unfortunate souls. Though there are some people who would love to kill Jork and remove this pest from their lives forever, word has gotten round that the Veiled Alliance watches over the half-giant, and will brook no violence directed at him.

Some people wonder why the Alliance bothers. Insightful people speculate that the Alliance is impressed with Jork's ends, if not his means.

Jork is a well-meaning half-giant who will never be confused for someone intelligent. He has no manners, and enjoys eating and drinking to excess.

Jork's self-appointed mission is to protect nature and promote respect for the land. His methods of getting his message across vary depending on his alignment. Jork is usually Neutral Good.

Though he does not make friends easily, he is fiercely loyal to those he has.

Badaris Almoralis

Male Human Psionicist

12th Level

Lawful Neutral

Str 12	Int 19
Dex 14	Wis 19
Con 17	Cha 15

Reaction Adjustments: Surprise nil, NPCs +3

#AT: 1

THAC0: 15

13 with dagger

Damage:

Dagger 1d4+2

Armor Class: 10 unarmored

Hit Points: 66

Discipline: Telepathy— *Sciences:* mindlink, psionic blast, superior invisibility; *Devotions:* contact, ego whip, ESP, id insinuation, life detection, mind thrust, psychic crush, send thoughts, telepathic projection

Discipline: Clairsentience— *Sciences:* clairvoyance; *Devotions:* danger sense, know location, poison sense

Discipline: Psychokinesis— *Sciences:* telekinesis; *Devotions:* animate object, ballistic attack

Discipline: Psychometabolism— *Sciences:* complete healing; *Devotions:* body equilibrium, displacement, flesh armor

Defense Modes: all

PSPs: 198

Saving Throws:

D M	R S W	P P	BW	Sp
11	11	8	13	12

+2 bonus on all saving throws vs. enchantment/charm spells

+4 magical defense adjustment for Wisdom

Immune to 1st-level illusions, *cause fear*, *charm person*, *command*, *friends*, *hypnotism*

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Etiquette, heat protection, land-based tiding, meditative focus, read/write Common, rejuvenation

Languages: Common, elven

Equipment: Steel dagger, waterskin, scholarly books, ink, parchment



Magic: scroll of protection from fire, +2 dagger

Money: 66 cp, 23 sp, 3 gp

Background: Badaris Almoralis was born in Tyr to a very wealthy family. When it was learned that the lad had the gift of the Unseen Power, no expense was spared in securing the best teachers to better cultivate this gift.

Badaris joined the Order when in his late teens, quite a feat for one so young. Currently, he travels to Athas's great cities, doing his best to keep the purity of psionics intact.

Badaris is a snobby intellectual who despises manual labor or melee combat. To him, mind power is the one and only power. If he can get away with not getting his hands dirty, he'll do it. He is very particular, in fact, about what constitutes psionics. He sees Wild Talents as a pathetic attempt at emulating true psionic powers.

Badaris is a very intelligent man, and he has no qualms about emphasizing this. He has no tolerance for stupid people (defined by him as anyone under a 16 Intelligence).



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Claw of the Blue Mekillot

by J. Robert King

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This was the boy's secret place, this sweltering attic in his father's inn. Between the slender and twisted pagafa-wood rafters, Tori Bergink sat, watching dusty rays of light rise up through the thatch ceilings of the guest rooms below. Aside from those shafts of light, the attic was dark. Aside from Torj, it was empty.

That's how he liked it, dark and empty: safe. The heat and darkness and spiders would keep everyone out of the attic, everyone but the half-wit Torj. And who would suspect him of gazing down through the thatch as guests placed their purses and bracelets and necklaces on dressing tables? Who would think that a ten-year-old idiot with a latch-thorn twig could steal valuables from barred and bolted suites? Who but the boy's father, who had assigned him the task?

Thoughts of Hital, proprietor of the Blue Mekillot Inn, broke the boy's reverie. The attic was Torj's secret place, yes, but his workplace, too, thanks to Father. It was time to get to work. A half-wit was not good for much around the inn—not much but scrubbing floors, washing linens, emptying chamber pots, cleaning rooms, clearing tables, and half a hundred other tasks. But Torj performed these duties without enticement or threat, assuming them as instinctively as breathing or sleeping. In addition, Father had assigned Torj only one special job—thievery—and the man would brook no failure in it.

The time for stealing had come again.

Rising silently from his observation perch, Torj placed his



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bare feet on the smooth-edged pagafa rafters. He eyed the far corner of the attic; his previous rounds told him that the couple in the corner suite had retired early, unloading lots of trinkets and pouches on their night table. They would be his first mark. As his accustomed feet guided him unerringly to the spot, Torj knew the occupants of the room had fallen asleep, for the banging below had stopped.

He paused and knelt on a beam, unhooking the twig from his belt. With the care of a surgeon, Torj soundlessly parted the thatch and gazed down into the dark room. Though the oil amp had been extinguished, a window stood ajar, and the pale glow of Guthay bathed the room. In its light Torj could see the promised trinkets on the table. Brushing back a lock of black hair, he spied also the room's occupants, a fat noble and his courtesan, lying spent and asleep on the bed.

This was where it got difficult. Doing this job right—doing it quietly—required two hands: one to hold back the thatch and the other to operate the hook. Torj had only one and a half hands, or one hand and one withered, deformed, three-fingered claw. The limb had been disfigured by a congenital disease passed down from Torj's father, whose foot was lame from it. Father and son both took a nightly medication to keep the disease in check, but the medicine would not cure damage already done—would not heal the boy's claw. Every time Torj had to use that limb, whether to pull back thatch or wash dishes, his face flushed in remembrance of the night his healthy arm had deformed into . . . into this scaly *thing*.

Until that time, Torj's father had assiduously administered the vials of medicine—an expensive salve from a merchant in Altarak. But that night, after Hital had gotten his dose, the money box holding the vials was stolen and the merchant would advance them no medication on credit. The innkeeper gathered donations from his guests, and by morning the new vials arrived. Already, though, Torj's arm was withered to the shoulder.

Despite further financial troubles, Hital decided his son must never go without medicine again. That's how Torj's thievery began. Since then, Torj had always stolen

enough each night to buy the next dose. That was good, for the merchant said the next time Torj missed a dose, his whole body would be deformed.

Such thoughts, true as they may have been, would not help Torj with the task before him. He slid the rigid fingers of his claw into the thatch and drew it slowly, crackingly back. Five breathless heartbeats later, he convinced himself the sleepers had not awakened. Grabbing the crooked twig with his good hand, he carefully lowered the hook down into the room. The twig sank into the wash of Guthay's light, and there it glowed like a cragor worm in a mekillot's gut. Still no stirring from the shapeless sleepers in the bed.

Thank the stars for nobles, he thought. They loved wine, women, purse strings, necklace chains, and other such things that made Torj's job easier. With a slow twist of his wrist, he snagged the bulging purse—"Always the coins first," his Father had instructed. "Just 'cause something sparkles don't make it worth enough to buy your vials." Slowly the bulging bag rose, and it barely squeezed through the thatch. When finally it came, a trembling sigh of relief escaped the little thief.

Once the purse was tied firmly to Torj's belt, he hauled up the necklace and bracelets, snagging them in one precarious bundle. A reddish jewel almost fell when he yanked the batch through the ceiling, but at the last moment he snagged it with his hoary claw.

Torj sat back, panting. Enough from this room. That last snatch was almost a fatal fumble, and the stuff that remained wasn't worth the possible detection. He'd been caught only a few times before—not an experience he wanted to repeat.

The last time was six months ago, before the hoopla of the forest maker had begun. Though the Mekillot was situated along trade routes, it was only sporadically patronized then, and Torj's father had warned the boy to steal everything he possibly could from every patron they had. Over the years, the man's fists had taught Torj to take him quite literally. That particular night, the Mekillot had been rather full, and Torj feared he might not be able to



steal *everything*. Surely Father would be angry if he failed.

Torj had a different twig then, a greener one with a bit too much give to it. A green twig and an anxious half-wit spelled certain trouble. Trying for the last ring on one nightstand, Torj had slipped the thorny tip of the branch into the metal loop and begun to lift. The bauble rose satisfactorily at first, but then seemed to snag. He gave a little tug, not realizing the ring was attached to a slender chain that was in turn linked to the sleeper's ear.

In a heartbeat, the man had awakened, lurching up from his bed like a black tigone in a blue-black cave. Next moment, he was yanking down on that green branch, his pull inexorable, drawing Torj into the room. Through the thatch he had fallen—through the ceiling, into the clear air beyond, and down onto the plank floor. In a breathless instant, Torj lay pinned on his back, a knee in his chest and a knife at his throat. The man atop him was quite awake, and his black-ringed and fevered eyes glared mercilessly at Torj.

"Thief! Thief!"

That was the first time Torj realized just what he had become—a thief—and the pain of that realization was worse than the ache in his lungs and the throb in his back. Worse still, though, was the pounding that followed on the door, a pounding Torj knew was his father. On many occasions Torj had felt the blows of those insistent, desperate fists of his father, and he had known he would feel them again very soon.

The room's occupant yanked Torj up by his burlap tunic and suspended him, legs kicking, above the floor. "I've a thief in here!" he shouted through the door as he drew the bar from its brackets. A word of relieved thanks was on the man's narrow lips the moment he saw Hital's face . . . the moment the innkeeper's obsidian dagger flashed across his throat. Hot red spray from the man's neck blanketed Torj, propelled on air exploding from the severed neck, from the smile his father had carved there.

The man dropped toward the floor; Torj somehow found his feet as the sloppy figure slid down him. Next

moment, Hital thrust the crimson dagger into the boy's claw and winked capriciously, his face freckled with blood. On the floor, the man rasped his last, and in the terrible silence, Torj heard footsteps approaching down the hall.

His father apparently did so as well, for he yanked the shaken half-wit up, threw back the shutters, and flung him out into the cold night air. Torj remembered only the wind, chill despite the slick heat that covered him, then the fall and the shouts of his father—"Murdering thief! There he goes!"

Torj hit the ground and ran toward the deepest corner of the desert as torches flared to life behind him and shouts followed him out. Once he'd found a dark and lonely niche in an outcrop of stone, he sat, rubbing sand on his skin until the patron's blood was replaced by his own.

Torj returned to the inn the next morning, but his father, on seeing the "murdering thief," threw him into the cellar. That's where the real punishment began. For nine days, until the last of the witnesses had moved on down the road, Hital kept his son locked in that cold cellar. For nine days, the innkeeper had descended the adobe stairs to bring a pinch of food, a swallow of water, and the ever-needed medication. And for nine days, the man taught the half-wit never to be caught at his thieving again. Torj still remembered the furious glee in the man's eyes as his fists fell in tireless rhythm, still remembered the man's words on the final day of his beatings:

"Get caught again and you'll get twice as bad. 'Course, it might be worth it."

Torj didn't know whether his father meant the nightly beatings might be worth it, or the chance to run a dagger over a man's neck. Either way, the boy vowed never to be caught again. Stealing from guests was bad enough. Getting them killed was intolerable.

"Not tonight," Torj told himself, repeating the vow. He carefully feathered the thatch together and fastened the twig to his belt. "Not tonight."

That vow was more easily made than kept. The inn was



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full tonight, and Torj's distracted ruminations had already wasted much time. No wonder his father called him half-wit. Back to work.

Torj stood, noting that his legs had cramped slightly, and he stretched. The sound of metal in the purse at his hip assured him it held mostly silver and gold, with little ceramic. Good. That meant fewer thefts tonight. Perhaps one more good mark and he could quit. . . . Unless the merchant raised his rates for the medicine again.

There was a sure target in the north wing of the inn, an old hag of a woman traveling alone and bedecked with gaudy finery. She was probably a noble from the city, so certain of her privileged status that she dared flaunt her jewelry on the open road. Or, perhaps, she was merely vain, on pilgrimage to the forest maker in hopes of gaining some elixir of life to restore her beauty. Either way, she deserved to lose the jewels she flaunted; either way, her riches would buy a much more vital elixir for Torj.

With the grace of a tigone in the highlands, the boy picked his way across the dusky rafters, careful to tread where the beams creaked the least. He wended through the main framework of the inn, heading patiently toward the wing where the hag slept. An expectant smile grew across his lips as he thought of the strands and strands of jewels that would be lying on her night table, lying beside soaking teeth, an obsidian eye, and a sable wig. That thought made him snort aloud.

His amusement was dispelled, though, when he saw the section of attic that lay before him. To get to the room of the vain old woman, Torj had to traverse a narrow isthmus of rafters, where the roof above formed a low arch and the beams below were few and far between. Worse yet, the room beneath that awkward space was occupied tonight by a robed and sinister-looking man, who clearly hadn't a jewel or coin to his name. Probably a light sleeper, too, Torj thought—perhaps I should forget the hag for easier prey.

No. That would mean four or five more burglaries tonight, and surely one big heist would be safer than four or five small ones. Besides, if Father knew about the

woman and her jewels—and there was no way he *couldn't* know of her—he'd send Torj back to get them anyway. No. He would have to go now, or go later, and better off now.

I won't get caught, he told himself. Who would think I am up here? Nobody. And if I move slow enough over the rafters, I'll just sound like the wind on the roof.

Even as he stepped out onto the first narrow beam, Torj's mind involuntarily returned to the horrible night he *had* been caught in the room just below. It was before the time of the pilgrims, when the inn had few patrons and fewer still that carried valuables. Pickings were slim then, but Torj's medicine had its price, and his claw-hand exacted payment however it could.

That night, in the very room over which Torj was now tottering, a lame old man had been staying. Though his robes were the shabby garments of a vagabond, a wanderer, they did not smell of dung and dust, but of aromatic oils and myrrh. That scent, added to the man's florid signature and the thin cane of polished ivory he leaned so heavily on, assured Torj and his father that this was a nobleman in disguise.

At that time, Hital had not yet devised the attic ploy. Instead of drawing riches up through the thatch with a twig, Torj and his father worked in tandem from the hallway—Torj with a skeleton key to let him slip inside, and his father with a cudgel, waiting in the hall in case of trouble. That night, as every night, Torj peered beneath the weathered door to make certain the occupant lay asleep. Then, nodding to his father, he slipped the key into its latch and soundlessly opened the door. The leather hinges did not creak, for Torj had softened them that morning with fat, and the boy crept slowly, silently inside.

He had been right. The old man was asleep—and was rich beyond any indication his clothes would give. The man was also cautious, having stowed his riches in a sack tied to his belt as he slumbered. This would be a delicate job, a knife job that would require iron nerve and silky touch. As Torj's good hand reached for his knife, his bare foot slid just above the plank floor. A long sliver, long as a



knife itself, lanced into the boy's foot between his toes and ran like an arrow under the tender flesh of his arch.

Despite the terrific pain, only a whimper escaped the boy's lips. That was enough for Hital, though, who took the sound to be the rousing of the old man. In a flash, the innkeeper was in the room, and his cudgel fell—once, twice, thrice—on that still slumbering face.

Pinned to the ground by the sliver and by the horror of what he had just seen, Torj did not move as his father dragged the limp form from the bed. The man's old feet made a hollow drumming on the floor as Hital hefted him and retreated for the hall. Hital stumbled once under the load, stepping onto and cracking the man's cane, which had been leaning by the door. Even after the loud report, Hital whispered to his son, "Get everything. Hurry!"

Trembling, the half-wit gestured toward the lifeless man and stammered, "But what will he think?"

"He'll be on his way before morning."

"How?" blurted the boy. "How without his cane?"

Hital muttered something indecipherable and snatched up the broken cane, then disappeared out the door with his burden.

That had taken place in the room just below him, and Torj couldn't shake the thought of it as he took the next trembling step. I've got to concentrate, pay better attention, or I'll be sure to—

Before the thought even formed, the boy's dread was realized. His foot missed the beam it was intended to strike, his toes jabbed into the thatch, and he tried to catch his balance, but to no avail. The dark attic pitched for a moment, and then Torj was falling. The terrible hiss of his leg through thatch was echoed from his teeth as Torj flailed for a handhold. His claw raked across a rafter but failed to gain purchase, and his gut struck squarely upon another. The explosion of air from his lungs sounded half-groan, half-laugh, and then he tumbled through the ceiling into the comparatively cold air of the room below.

It all happened as it had the last time. He hit the floorboards with a loose-jointed lurch and sprawled akimbo on

the planks. Then, the room's occupant was up from bed and on top of him. The man loomed black against the blue-black ceiling and the hole gaping above. There was also the knife, keen obsidian at his throat—and the knee on his breathless chest. . . just like the last time.

But unlike the last man, no cry came from this one, no call for help in subduing the thief. Instead, patient eyes fastened on Torj, eyes like embers smoldering beneath that hooded head.

Torj tried to speak, but could not even breathe. He thrashed weakly for a moment, but the pressure of the blade against his throat convinced him to remain still. Then, despite the thick stillness in the room, there came a rushing down the hall outside—footsteps and an anxious voice.

Hital was approaching.

Boom boom boom came the report of the man's meaty knuckles on the door, which rattled in its frame. "What's happening in there?" called the fat, craggy voice, like the voice of a stone.

Torj's captor did not answer.

"Let me in! What are you busting up in there?"

Only then did the man's head lift slightly and eyes turn toward the door. He spoke with a hollow, soulless voice. "I must have fallen out of bed."

"Fallen out of bed?" Hital cried. "Were you sleeping in the rafters?"

The snickers that came from beyond the bolted door told Torj that other patrons had joined his father in the hall; the old man wouldn't be kicking down a door and killing a guest tonight. The realization filled Torj with both relief and panic.

"Please," the hooded man said, his grip still strong as iron, "let an old man retain what dignity he has."

"As long as my old inn retains what it has," Hital replied, bringing laughter from those around him.

"You may check my room for damages come dawn," the man promised.

"Expect me to," replied the innkeeper with finality.



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These words were followed by instructions to the folk with him, directing them to disperse.

That's it, then, Torj realized. He's not saving me this time. The two of them—the claw-handed boy and his hooded captor—stared at each other as the hallway cleared. Torj would have cried out for help, but he had not breathed since his final step in the attic. It was up to the hooded stranger to break the silence, and he did so without moving his keen knife.

"I heard you before you came through my ceiling." The man paused, his rich voice dying away to the sound of the nighttime wind beyond the windows. "I'd hoped you were just a tyrian centipede or some other vermin. I can see matters will be more complicated."

Torj squeezed out a whisper. "I wasn't peeping—"

The man eased his knee up slightly and brushed the bag of coins at Torj's belt. "No, not peeping."

"Please, sir, let me go—I'll give all the gold to you, everything. Just let me go," whined Torj suddenly.

"I do not want your gold, son," came the passionless reply.

"What do you want? I'll give you anything. Just let me go."

"I don't want *anything*," replied the dark voice again, "except, perhaps, *you*."

Despite the knife at his neck and the knee on his chest, Torj squirmed to break free. A wail began in his throat, but before it could pass his lips, the man had clamped a strong hand over the boy's mouth and, setting his knife aside, pinched a nerve at the base of the half-wit's jaw. Whether from exertion, lack of air, or the sharp jab, Torj went suddenly black.

When he awoke, the wan, warm light of a solitary oil lamp seeped into his dark mind. With the light came images of the cramped and squalid room, one of many in his father's inn, and of the cowed man who sat across from him. Though the man's face was leathery with sunlight and years, the sinews beneath his skin were strong and bandlike, and his eyes blue like water. A three-day

scruff covered the man's chin, and a pendant of some twining stalk hung from his neck. Otherwise, though, his form was obscured by a threadbare, dun-colored robe. Only the shadowed face and the gnarled and rootlike hands emerged from it.

His wits clearing, Torj tried to rise from the chair where he sat. Knotted bands of hemp cut into his arms and legs, and a ball of linen on his tongue gagged down his grunt of pain. He nearly swooned again, but fear would not let him.

The man watched, a smile forming on his features. His eyes sparkled beneath looming, hairy brows, and he folded his arms contentedly over the pungent robes he wore. In time, as the man seemed to expect, Torj ceased struggling and sat still.

"Less painful that way," the man commented.

Torj returned only a fearful glare.

"You are wondering who I am," the robed man offered. "My name is Phiron, though that doesn't tell you anything. Am I a slaver, perhaps, who plans to sell you in Altarak? No, you would not fetch a silver, not even on a lean year. A defiler, seeking some victim to power a spell? No, surely a defiler would not dress in rags and smell of kank spoor. A pilgrim, off to see the forest maker, to dream of a greener Athas, a nobler world?"

Phiron rose now, looking away from Torj for the first time. Clearly, he expected no response from the boy. "I have dreamed such dreams many times, son, only to be startled awake by one evil or another," Phiron said with hands clasped behind his back. "Oh, I wish I could be such a dreamer again, but I cannot. I am no pilgrim, but an inquisitor. Yes, an inquisitor. That is why you are tied up, for thieves are puppets of greater criminals, and by merely following your strings I can find your master."

"Do not look at me that way. I wish you no harm. I was a dreamer, once, like your guests who are going to see the forest maker. Indeed, I myself was once a druid . . ."

* * * * *



My powers were ancient and strong in the land when I created Killanji. Yes, I was ancient and strong and vain, though I did not know it then, for in those days my heart ruled my head. Before I came, Killanji was a barren jag of rock rising high above the Silt Sea. There was no more desolate a place in all Athas. Even the giants would not venture there, for the silt was too deep, and not a pinch of soil rested on that blasted finger of stone. The nearest stream lay a hundred miles away, the nearest spring some five miles deep. But here, I awoke paradise.

Ancient and strong, I was, for in my hundred ninety-three years, I had gathered great power as a druid. The elements were at my command; the chants and devotions of generations coursed through my blood. The life-force of the desert was attuned to me. It was by this power that I had lived so long, by this magic that my flesh did not age and fall from my bones. And at one hundred ninety-three I chose to create a wonderland of flora and fauna on the most desolate crag of stone in the world.

It took years of meditation and fasting. At first—nothing. Even my most powerful spells could not bring the basest lichens to cling to those stones, for the silt winds would scour the rock clean every morning and every night. I drained each artifact I had discovered in my travels, drawing the power and channeling it into the forbidding stone. Still nothing. I drew power from my very being in long and futile magic to awaken the rock, but still it slumbered deep.

At last I lay, limp and lifeless, on the headstone of the pinnacle, exhausted from a months-long devotion that ended as emptily as all the others. I knew the merciless sun would not let me live past the hour. There I lay, waiting for death, for the last wisp of spirit to rise from my burned and cracked lips, never to return. And only then, gazing into that blazing orb above me, did I know what my devotions lacked. As defilers draw life from the land into themselves, I had to do the converse—to draw the life from me into my land. Thankfully, that task would prove easier than all the others before. . . .

With my last, trembling strength, I slid from the rock and plummeted, happy, onto the stones below.

When I awoke from death, I did so not on bare rock, but in a lush garden, a garden planted by my sacrifice and watered by my blood. The place had grown verdant around me, verdant and defiant in that wasteland of silt. I knew then that the garden I had given my life to create had somehow returned life to me in kind.

Those first few days of resurrection passed quickly, light to dark to light like the lid of an eye opening and closing and opening. Still I could not move, but I could see the stars circling above me, and by them I knew I had lain in the land's slumber for nigh on a hundred years. Once I could move, I wandered my desolate paradise, eating of the fruit of the trees, drinking the nectar of the flowers, conversing with the beasts. Fortified by this repast, this communion, I knew I must bring others to live in my paradise.

So I left Killanji and wandered Athas in search of a people to bring back, a people who could understand the dance of death and life, the balance of nature. Having been born human, myself, I knew my kin had no place in paradise, and dismissed them. Next I considered dwarves, elves, halflings, the bastard demihuman races . . . but none, I knew, was fit for Killanji.

At last, I found the perfect folk—a small thri-kreen tribe at the edge of the Stony Barrens. They were in conflict with a larger neighboring tribe and, pressed between the advancing silt and their ruthless kin, teetered at the edge of extinction. I appeared to them in power and told them of my paradise. They chose me over death, as you might imagine. On mats spun of vines, I propelled them through the air over the great Silt Sea, to my wondrous world that hovered above it.

Oh, how my heart did thrive to see those savage insect-men spread out with wondrous joy and partake of the glorious fruits that only I had tasted until then. They drank of pools, sat in the shade of spreading trees, and communed with the beasts I had awakened. Beneath the tread of their



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feet my Killanji thrived, nourished by my glad heart.

We lived, my thri-kreen savages and I, in that beautiful land for nigh on a year before the disaster came. In truth, the disaster had been with us all along, but small and silent, like a weed spreading below ground. For the mantis-men were warriors, indeed—ruthlessly loyal to their chief and their clutch and blindly desirous of advancing their power. My charges did not consider me their chief, and they coveted my magical, druidic might for their own.

One night, as I reclined slumbering on the topmost point of Killanji—once the rock from which I had fallen but now a couch of tender shoots and feathery blossoms—the chief thri-kreen scaled soundlessly to that height. As I awoke, he sliced open my chest, yanked out my heart, and feasted on it. You see, he believed, in his primitive purity, that it was my heart that held my power and that by consuming it, he would gain my strength. He was more right than I could have dreamed, for my heart had created Killanji; my heart had exchanged itself for the life of the land.

Oh, that I had died that night. Oh, that I had perished with the cut of the claw, but no—Killanji had too great a hold on me. The land became my heart and would not let me die, though my chest was now empty and gushing blood and water. In sudden wrath and terror, I slew the thri-kreen chief, whose mandibles still ran with my hot blood. I slew him and descended in fury. I was so terrible a sight, covered in his and my blood, that the others fled my presence, my garden. As I pursued them, they flung themselves into the Silt Sea to drown beneath leagues of dust.

So Killanji and I were left alone under the wheeling stars. Nothing had changed from the time when I had first made my paradise, nothing save that I now knew it was no paradise . . . nothing save that where my heart had been was only a gaping, bloody hole.

Look, boy, beneath this robe of mine. You can still see it, the empty hole in my chest. Look at it! Do you see? Do not turn from me; I am not a product of necromancy, but of the power of the land. I may be freakish to you, but I am

no monster, no undead thing. I am merely a man without a heart.

Now all I have are these eyes of mine, these eyes. The eyes of most men are confused by the impulses of their hearts, and that is why they see only appearances. But these eyes of mine see clearly, without passion—see the truth.

When first I gazed on my garden paradise with these heartless eyes, I saw how I had been fooling myself all along. I had thought nature was balance, the dance of good and evil, life and death. Now I know it is not. My garden was a thing of artifice, not nature. It was unnatural in the extreme, so much so that nature, in the form of my savage friends, unmade it. No, nature is not balance, but tyranny. Nature is weak devastated by strong.

Yes, weep, my boy. Weep as I myself could not that night when I knew it, when I knew my unnaturally long life had been merely well-intentioned fraud. I was no longer a druid, for a man without a heart can be no druid. For a long while I wandered, unsure of what to do, what to be. In time, these deathless years showed me my destiny—I was to be an inquisitor.

My inquisition, however, does not forward the tyranny of nature, but the freedom of truth. That is what I do. I dismantle and deconstruct the monstrous creations of tyrants and fools, and give them in pieces to children like you. Killanji was one such monstrous creation, and it is gone now, the rocks scoured clean and sunken in the Sea of Silt. And I will likewise bring to naught all other false paradises, all other unworthy castles of hope built on vapors in air.

That is why I seek this forest maker, to learn if her gardens, too, are travesties of truth.

* * * * *

Phiron's story was done, the feverish light in his eyes waning now beneath the hood he still wore. Torj, despite the tight bands on his arms and legs, shook with sadness and fear. He had seen the vacant and scabby cavity in the



man's breast, had heard the druidic voice ring hollow and strident and defiant in the man's empty chest.

During the story, Torj had pictured craggy Killanji rising up in the vast Silt Sea, bursting with blooms and branches, teeming with beasts and mantis-men, shaking with shouts of assassination, withering beneath its heartless creator, sinking again into the sullen silt. Now the whole horrible cycle repeated itself in his head, the rocks thrusting up . . . the plants proliferating . . . the Silt Sea swallowing it all. Torj wondered how many Killanjis had risen and fallen and risen and fallen in the history of Athas, how many men had hurled themselves from cliffs to create worlds destined to follow them into oblivion.

"No. I will never again be a forest maker," Phiron mumbled, repentant. "Life remains in me, though my heart is gone. I have only these eyes, this truth."

Torj watched intently, sadness welling in him.

"Perhaps one day I'll find a hope that *is* true, that does *not* split apart before these eyes. Then, perhaps, I will regain my heart."

Torj had stopped shaking.

Phiron's raving was done, and his old body seemed a leaf burned brown by the sun. His watery eyes fixed on Torj. "That's why I've tied you up and kept you. I am an inquisitor, and these eyes tell me the truth of you is far greater than the lie you wear." He approached, hovering over the boy and reaching to the back of his neck. In a moment, Torj's gag was loose. "Do not cry out, or you may never find the truth."

Torj spit the sodden linen from his mouth and, warily watching the man, worked his weary jaw.

Phiron stood back appraisingly. "The truth is *far* greater."

The boy's gaze dropped. What could this man mean, far greater? The truth was not great at all: Torj was a murdering half-wit thief with a withered arm—that was all.

That thought reminded him of his medicine, his disease. Phiron's riddles about truth could cost Torj his life.

"Let me go, please," Torj entreated quietly. "I'm noth-

ing, just a half-wit."

The old man stared blankly at him for some time, his jaw dropping slowly, absently open. At length, he shook his head gently.

"I'm sick," Torj explained. "I need medicine."

The faraway look on Phiron's face deepened. "You are no half-wit. You are not sick."

Torj shook his claw in the bindings. "Look. This will happen to my other hand, and my legs and neck too if you don't let me get my medicine."

A mirthless smile grew across the man's lips. "You don't even suspect, do you?"

There was no answer to that. "Let me go."

"Far greater . . ."

"I'll scream, and my father will come kill you."

"Is that what he does?" Phiron asked dryly. "He kills his own guests?" Before Torj could respond, the man was talking again, breathless and fevered, "If you are so sick, why haven't you gone out to the forest maker yourself to get healed of this affliction?"

Truthfully, Torj had not thought of it.

"Have you spent so much time here on the way to deliverance, catering to dreamers, but never thought of dreaming yourself?"

Torj's ears burned red, and words failed him.

"Don't you want to be healed? Don't you believe in the miraculous forest maker?"

"You don't," cried Torj angrily. "Don't tease me. You're just going there to wreck everything. Maybe the forest maker is real and maybe not—I don't care. She makes people hope."

"What if that hope is vain?"

"It's still better than no hope."

"Better because you and your father can work your petty larcenies on these hopeless hopefuls?" replied Phiron. He fixed the boy with a piercing, baleful glare. "Don't think I don't see. Don't think I, of all people, don't see!"

A cry for help erupted from Torj's lips, only to be cut short by a tremor that began in his chest and moved out



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toward his fingertips. He groaned involuntarily and shouted, "Let me loose!"

Phiron peered into Torj's eyes, "How long do you have?"

"Let me loose!" Torj repeated, his claw-arm beginning to warp and creak. "By dawn I'll be dead."

The old man drifted toward the window and drew back the curtain. Rose-hued light spilled in from the glowing east. "Sunrise is close," he murmured.

"Let me go!"

"It's better for you this way."

The words had been said without passion, without malice or sorrow. But the tremors running through Torj and the terrific pain of his deformity made the sentence sound like a curse. He screamed now, full-voiced, uncaring if—even hoping that—Phiron would cut his throat. But the old man didn't move, lingering by the window as the first light of the sun scissored across the desert valley.

"It's better for you this way."

The hemp ropes bit angrily into Torj's flesh, which writhed and snaked across his warping bones. He had not stopped screaming, though the sound changed from the pure tone of childish terror to the raw bark of a beast in a trap.

In answer to that sound, fists thundered suddenly on the door, and voices shouted, incoherent and angry, through the shaking wood. Phiron was unmoved, unperturbed by the caterwauling. His water-blue eyes shifted between the birthing sun, which reached blindly out across the wasteland, and the boy, frothing and shuddering and roaring to break free.

Torj's legs were twisted horribly now, twisted and elongated and scaly. His neck grew knobby, as though the vertebrae within were swelling and pushing their way out of the skin. His back arched in the seat, muscles clenched so forcefully that the chair was separating beneath him. Still the ropes held him, prevented him from breaking free.

The wooden door bulged and bent from the force against it. Another lunge. One bracket popped off, and

the wood splintered. Through the fragmenting door, the fiery ace of the innkeeper showed, bulging with exertion. That face was hemmed in by shoulders and arms thrusting at the broken frame. In one final shove, what little metal still held the door gave way, and the thing came crashing into the suite.

A tide of angry folk gushed through the breach. Half of the wave broke toward the convulsing child, whose deformed body hardly resembled that of a child anymore. The other half, led by the red-faced father, rushed upon the old man at the window. No vial of medicine was in Hital's hand, but the golden fire of the now-risen sun shone in his eyes as in the eyes of a cat. He drew an obsidian dagger from his belt and, with an inarticulate shout of rage, rammed it into the old man's chest. Volcanic glass tore like a tooth through the thread-bare robe, between the aged ribs.

Phiron staggered and braced himself for a moment in the window casing as the innkeeper raged, "Filthy dune-trapper, torturing a half-wit!"

The folk behind the father encircled the two men—white face to red face, truth staring baldly into lies. Then Phiron slid down the window casing to the planks, where he sprawled like a corpse.

From his ancient lips came the single phrase: "Father, behold thy son."

Hital turned, and did.

Torj's body was no longer restrained by the torn ropes or the splintered chair, but it was no longer the body of a boy, either. His entire frame had undergone the transformation that had turned his hand into a claw. Now all of his limbs were warped and twisted, elongated and scaly. His head had flattened and grown triangular; his torso had thinned and extended; a second set of arms had sprouted from his sides; his abdomen had lengthened into a bean-shaped protuberance The effect was horrifying, not because the child had become an unrecognizable deformation of flesh, but because his new form was all too familiar.



Torj had transformed into a thri-kreen.

The crowd fell back in awe and revulsion when Torj took a shuffling step forward on his mantislike legs. Four claws snapped experimentally to each side as he studied his body—sleek and powerful and elegant and otherworldly. His faceted eyes took it all in—the new tautness of the muscles, the rigid strength of the carapace, the acute sensations of the antennae

Phiron, forgotten on the floor, gasped out, "Slave, behold thy master."

Torj turned his insect eyes on his father. Hital's face was white as linen, and sweat streamed down it onto his mottled neck. He turned to flee, but some impulse in those standing there—perhaps the desire for justice or explanation—caused them to grab his tunic and bar the way.

"Dear Torj," Phiron said, "the truth is that this man was never your father. You come from a different breed than he. You are a young mantis-warrior, not a boy. You had no warping illness in your blood, for this is your true form. Only the sorcerous potions given you by this man warped your body, polymorphing you into a child's form. He withheld the potion one night so you would suffer a partial transformation, so he could use the fear of it to control you."

Torj's multifaceted eyes shone with disbelief as he studied the man who had claimed to be his father. His voice, innocent still, hissed between twitching mandibles. "But I have his disease."

"No, you do not. Hital's lame foot was not caused by disease, but by the stomp of a half-giant's foot. He used his own lameness as an excuse against working, as another means to entrap you. He took the child of a mantis-warrior and made him into the half-wit cripple of a thief and liar."

Torj's triangular head was shaking on his stalklike neck.

"You are no cripple; you are a thri-kreen. You are no half-wit; you are a child of a great inhuman race. You are no thief; you are a warrior."

Torj lurched forward, still uncertain in his true form.

His clawed hands fastened onto the tunic of Hital, and the crowd released the innkeeper and backed slowly away. Torj's eyes had grown cold with anger, and his insectoid muscles tightened, tugging Hital toward him.

"Son! It's me! Don't do it!" cried the innkeeper.

"You are not his son," Phiron gasped. "Your name is not even Torj Bergink—a mere anagram given you by this liar."

Torj yanked Hital off his feet and held him before his clicking, scissoring mandibles. The rage that hissed from that alien mouth made the crowd fall back again. For a moment, Torj merely held the innkeeper up before him, limbs shuddering with barely contained rage.

"You're not going to eat me, are you, Son?"

"I am not your son," came the hissing response.

And the words seemed to galvanize the giant insect into motion. His legs clicked across the plank floor with even, heavy strides. In an instant, Torj was standing at the open window of the room. He drew the morning breeze into the air sacks in his abdomen and, with one summary motion, flung his one-time father out the window. The man cried out, flailing through the cold air before landing in a heap on the ground.

He lay there only a moment before Torj cried out in a shrill, insectoid voice, "Thief! Murdering thief!"

Hital staggered to his feet and ran straight away from the Blue Mekillot Inn. He seemed propelled by the thri-kreen's cry and the laughter of the patrons in the suite behind him. Now Torj, too, was laughing, a cicadalike clicking sound. Only when he felt a hand pushing back upon his breastplate did he draw away from the window.

Phiron struggled to his feet and drew the obsidian dagger from the cavity in his chest. That ended the laughter of the patrons. They stammered stupidly for a moment about necromancy and the living dead, then fled the suite more swiftly than they had arrived.

Only Torj and Phiron remained now. The former druid had not been slain by the dagger, true, for the blade had sunk into the empty socket of his heart, but Phiron was



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bleeding. He bundled his sleeve in one fist and clutched it against the wound.

Torj, awkward still, latched onto Phiron to keep him from falling and helped him over to the bed. The old man crumpled heavily there, clutching his robe. Torj stared down at him stupidly, not knowing what to do or say.

"Can I help?"

Phiron's head was already shaking. "No. It is an old wound. It will heal, as has always been my blessed curse."

With glinting eyes, Torj gazed about. "I . . . I don't know what to do."

"I'll be fine."

"I mean . . . about me."

That comment drew laughter from the former druid, laughter that ended in a hacking cough. "You don't know what to do? That's how we all enter this world, Torj. That's how all newborns feel."

"Where shall I go? What shall I do?"

"Unfortunately," Phiron replied dryly, "that is one truth I cannot tell you."

"But I don't know anything about—" his four arms waved weakly "—this body."

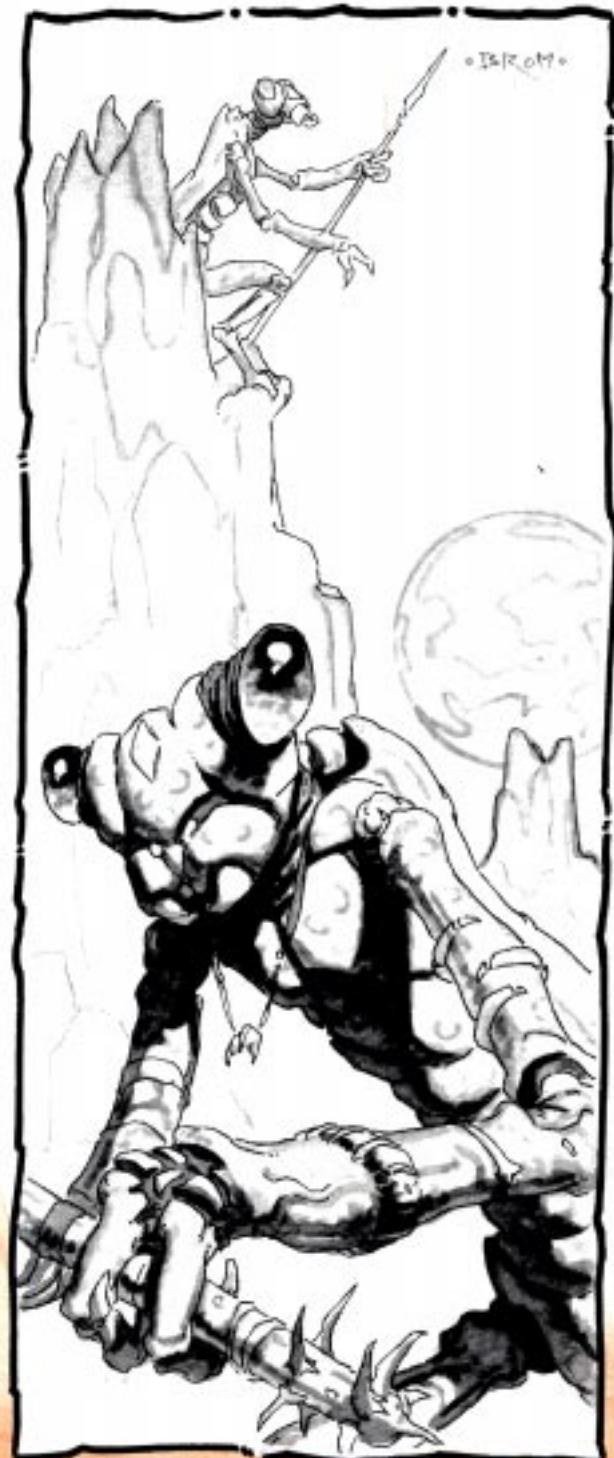
Phiron forced himself up from the bed. "It is ironic. Your heart is still the same, but your body has been taken away. My heart is gone, but my body remains."

"Perhaps the man without a heart could use mine."

More coughing. "Yes, perhaps—though these generations without it leave me out of practice."

"What shall we do, then?"

Phiron smiled weakly. "Let us go see this forest maker, you and I—the dreamer and the inquisitor. I will determine the truth for you . . . and for me, you must dream the dream."



Nonplayer Characters



Rafernard/Abalach-Re, Sorcerer-queen

21st-level dragon (Wizard 21/Psionicist 21)

Chaotic Evil

Str 20	Int 22
Dex 22	Wis 20
Con 24	Cha 21

hp: 173

AC: 1

#AT: 1 or spell or psionics

THAC0: 11

Dmg: 1d6+8



Psionic Summary: PSDs 344

Psychokinesis— *Sciences:* disintegrate, telekinesis; *Devotions:* inertial barrier, levitation, molecular agitation, soften

Psychometabolism— *Sciences:* energy containment, life draining, metamorphosis; *Devotions:* adrenalin control, cell adjustment, ectoplasmic form, flesh armor, heightened senses, mind over body

Telepathy— *Sciences:* domination, ejection, mindwreck, mindlink, mindwipe; *Devotions:* aversion, contact, conceal thoughts, ego whip, ESP, id insinuation, invincible foes, invisibility, mind bar, mind thrust, phobia amplification, psychic crush, telepathic projection

Metapsionics— *Sciences:* aura alteration, psychic surgery; *Devotions:* convergence, mental trance, psionic sense, splice

Spells: (5/5/5/5/5/4/4/4/2/1)

Note that Abalach-Re has her spell books stored in her underground lair. They are carved on stone tablets, and each tablet holds 10 levels of spells (in any combination). While the spells below are the ones she has memorized at any given time, she has access to all spells.

First Level: alarm, charm person, gaze reflection, protection from evil, shield

Second Level: blur, forget, mirror image, protection from cantrips, wizard lock

Third Level: dispel magic, fireball, non-detection, protec-

tion from good 10' radius, protection from normal missiles

Fourth Level: emotion, fire shield, hallucinatory terrain, minor globe of invulnerability, plant growth

Fifth Level: avoidance, cone of cold, domination, feblemind, wall of force

Sixth Level: globe of invulnerability, mass suggestion, permanent illusion, project image

Seventh Level: finger of death, prismatic spray, spell turning, teleport without error

Eighth Level: mass charm, polymorph any object, prismatic wall, symbol

Ninth Level: energy drain, power word kill

Tenth Level: defiler metamorphosis

Items: Staff from tree of life, ring of protection +4, obsidian dagger, stone scroll tablet with advanced domination spell, the skull of Dorag Thel.

Role-playing: In her avangion form as Rafernard (which she achieves using metamorphosis and aura alteration), Abalach-Re acts benevolent, welcoming all the pilgrims to the forest. Her kindness is laced with a slight undercurrent of condescension.

In her true form, she is a ruthless sorcerer-queen who thinks nothing of crushing the life out of thousands of people for her own gain.

Lerilyn Toar

Female Human Defiler

16th Level

Lawful Evil

Str 13	Int 19
Dex 16	Wis 15
Con 15	Cha 18

hp: 43

AC: 2

#AT: 1

THAC0: 16

Dmg: 1d6+3 (staff)





Nonplayer Characters

Wild Talents: *Science: mindlink; Devotions: contact, sight link; PS 14; Cost: contact/5 turn; PSPs 75*

Spells: (5/5/5/5/5/3/2/1)

The following is Lerilyn's spell book, composed of parchment scrolls. The spells marked with an asterisk (*) are her favorite spells, and she will have them at least for the first face-to-face encounter with the PCs.

First Level: *affect normal fires, cantrip, change self*, charm person, comprehend languages, detect magic*, hold portal, identify, magic missile*, phantasmal force, protection from good*, read magic, shield, sleep, taunt**

Second Level: *alter self, blur*, continual light, detect psionics*, detect invisibility*, ESP, fog cloud, forget, glitterdust*, knock, know alignment, locate object, magic mouth, mirror image*, scare, stinking cloud*

Third Level: *dispel magic*, feign death*, fireball, fleet feet, haste, hold person*, lightning bolt*, non-detection*, phantom steed, suggestion*

Fourth Level: *charm monster, confusion*, detect scrying, emotion*, fear, improved invisibility*, polymorph other, psionic dampener*, shadow monsters*, wall of fire*

Fifth Level: *animate dead, chaos*, conjure elemental*, dismissal, feeblemind*, passwall*, seeming, sending, teleport*, wall of stone*

Sixth Level: *contingency*, disintegrate, geas*, mislead**

Seventh Level: *power word stun*, prismatic spray, spell turning*, vanish*

Eighth Level: *binding, mass charm*, prismatic wall*

Items: Lerilyn has a leather *ring of human influence*, bone *bracers AC 4*, and a *staff of striking*. She always carries a purse with 40 cp, 20 sp, and 10 gp.

Role-playing: Hailing from the Nibenay area, Lerilyn is a smart, ambitious woman who has contempt for nonwizards and a hatred for preservers. Her biggest goal currently is to find a *tree of life* for her to exploit on her own.

Lerilyn travels with mul bodyguards.

Amalak Pul

Male Human Preserver

12th Level

Chaotic Good

Str 13	Int 19
Dex 16	Wis 17
Con 16	Cha 14

hp: 34
AC: 8
#AT: 1
THAC0: 17
Dmg: 1d4-1



Wild Talent: body control; PS 12; Cost 7/5 turn; PSPs 60

Spells: (4/4/4/4/4/1)

When the PCs meet Amalak, he does not have any spells memorized.

Items: Under normal circumstances, Amalak has an obsidian dagger, spellbooks, and a *ring of life*. When he is attacked, all he has is his *ring of life*.

Role-playing: Amalak is a member in good standing of the Veiled Alliance. He dwells in Urik.

Amalak is in his late 60s, a curmudgeonly man who chafes at authority and enjoys doing anything he can to help the people of Athas. He is filled with an insatiable curiosity.

Domera Thal

Female Half-Elf Bard

8th Level

Neutral Good

Str 15	Int 15
Dex 19	Wis 17
Con 16	Cha 19



Nonplayer Characters



hp: 36
AC: 3
#AT: 1
THAC0: 17
Dmg: 1d8-1 (obsidian long sword)

Wild Talent: object reading PS 12; Cost 16/na; PSPs 44

Special Abilities: Inspirational singing—after three rounds of singing, the PCs gain either a +1 to hit, +1 to saving throws, or +2 to morale (each PC's choice); Influence reactions—when performing before a nonattacking group, the bard can soften listeners' mood. All in group must save vs paralyzation (-2 penalty). If save is failed, bard can shift reaction one level; Counter effects of songs and poetry used as magical attacks within 30 feet of bard; Identify general purpose and function of any magical item 40%; Knowledge on use and manufacturing of poison types A, E, F, G, I, J, O, and P. Domera can make one dose of poison per day if she has the materials.

Thief Abilities: PP 60%, OL 55%, F/RT 30%, MS 40%, HS 40%, HN 25%, CW 70%, RL 15%

Items: Domera always carries with her a couple of flutes, sheet music, material to make poisons, and a stone amulet mounted on a headband. The amulet bestows *protection* +3.

Role-playing: Domera is a fun-loving bard who wanders Athas looking for stories to write down and recite. She is intensely curious and interrogates interesting strangers at length to get material for new songs.

In essence a loner, Domera wears a mask of self-sufficiency. She hates to admit that she needs help.

Domera is a flirt who enjoys striking up a relationship with attractive male elves, humans, or half-elves. These dalliances last no more than two or three days. Then she moves on, seeking new stories to add to her repertoire and new relationships to pass the days.

Coggalan

Male Human Psionicist
10th Level
Lawful Neutral

Str 14	Int 20
Dex 15	Wis 17
Con 18	Cha 12

hp: 42
AC: 9
#AT: 1
THAC0: 16
Dmg: 1d4 (club)



Psionics Summary: PSPs 72

Clairsentience— *Sciences:* sensitivity to psychic impressions; *Devotions:* know direction, poison sense

Psychokinesis— *Sciences:* telekinesis; *Devotions:* control light, control sound

Telepathy— *Sciences:* mindlink, psionic blast; *Devotions:* contact, daydream, ego whip, life detection, phobia amplification, psychic crush, send thoughts

Metapsionics— *Sciences:* psychic surgery; *Devotions:* cannibalize, enhancement, magnify, psionic sense

Items: Coggalan carries only a club.

Role-playing: Coggalan is a coldly logical psionicist. To him, psionics is a high art, and he looks down on those who are not so empowered. He considers wild talents a feeble imitation of true psionics.

When the PCs initially encounter Coggalan, he is suffering from the effects of Abalach-Re's mindwreck. If he is restored, the PCs will have earned themselves a powerful friend.

Coggalan encountered Abalach-Re when he wandered into the forest. After a brief, furious exchange, Abalach-Re emerged victorious and placed Coggalan under her control. She now has him playing the role of the prophet of Rafernard.



Game Information

New Psionic Powers

Animal Telepathy (Telepathic Devotion)

Power Score: Wis -5 Initial Cost: contact
Maintenance Cost: 7/turn Range: unlimited
Preparation Time: 1 Area of Effect: individual
Prerequisite: contact

Animal telepathy enables the psionicist to establish mental two-way communication with an animal. The psionicist and the target animal are able to exchange precise ideas, instructions, and plans in plain language.

Note that nonintelligent animals will not have much to communicate. This power does not make an animal more intelligent, nor does it guarantee obedience. It merely facilitates communication.

Power Score – The psionicist is able to plant a *suggestion* in the animal's mind.

20 – The animal becomes hostile and immediately attack the psionicist.

Mindwreck (Telepathic Science)

Power Score: Wis -4 Initial Cost: contact +25
Maintenance Cost: 0 Range: 50 yards
Preparation Time: 0 Area of Effect: individual
Prerequisite: contact

Mindwreck is a nasty mental attack that is analogous to a vandal wrecking a building. This is a brutal assault aimed at destroying the part of the brain devoted to sanity.

When an opponent is attacked with mindwreck, the attacker must first defeat the victim's psionic defenses. Then the victim must make a saving throw versus paralyzation. Failure means the victim has gone mad, and is unable to cast spells, or think clearly. All spells are wiped out of the victim's mind. Memory and reasoning abilities work erratically.

A mindwreck victim attempting to use psionics operates at half his attribute. Thus, a victim with a 12 Wisdom effectively has a 6 Wisdom. Anyone attempting to read a victim's mind finds only a confused jumble of images which make no sense at all. Recovery from mindwreck requires two week bed rest, followed by psychic surgery.

Power Score – Victim gets no saving throw.

20 – Psionicist cannot use any psionic powers save defense modes for 1d6 rounds.

Artifact

Skull of Dorag Thel

This artifact is a human skull, browned with age. The teeth are chips of obsidian, and each eye socket contains a 500 gp emerald. A living vine snakes its way through the skull. The entire object is indestructible.

The *skull* is all that remains of Dorag Thel, an ancient druid of Athas from the days before the world became a wasteland. Dorag warned about the adverse effects of defiler magic, but to no avail.

After Dorag's death, preservers venerated him as a visionary, and he became, in death, a sort of patron to the early Veiled Alliance members.

Powers: In order for the *skull* to work, one being must claim it, and own it for at least five years. Attempts at giving it away before the five years are up simply don't work.

The *skull* doubles the results of a *prolific forestation* spell, and acts as a *ring of life* for the owner.

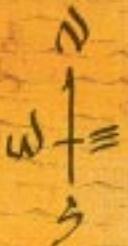
The *skull* casts *preserver metamorphosis* and *life extension*, but only does these once per owner, and even then only once every 10 years.

Abalach-Re has perverted the *skull's* magic. Not only can she cast preserver spells through it, but she has focused her mental "call" through the artifact. The call is heard only by those of good alignment. Thri-kreen are immune. The call gradually emanates from the *skull* like ripples in a pond, out to a 120 mile radius. Those entranced by the call must make a save vs. magic at -1 (Wisdom bonuses allowed). Those who fail drop everything, gather up survival gear, and proceed to the call's source, oblivious to all external stimuli.

The closer the pilgrims are to the *skull*, the less free will they have.



URAK



YANG MOUNTAIN

GBAT ALQUAIK

THE T



SILVER SPRING

RAFERNARDS
FOREST

ALTARUM

A

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D

NPC Master Table

NAME	CL	AC	MV	#AT	Base Damage	AL	Base THAC0
Antipathes	M6/T12	8	12	hp	1	LG	15
Bodyguards	F3	6	12	22	1d4	NG	18
Citizen, average	-	10	12	1d6	1d8 - 1	var.	20
Down Raiders	F4	6	12	32	1d4 - 1 (bone dagger)	NE	14
Elven Merchants	T5	3	17	18	3/2	1d8 - 1	N
Elven Scouts	R3	2	18	20	1	1d8	19
Galorthas, Amaranas	F10/P5	1	12	68	3/2	1d8	N
Ganek, Gith Leader	-	5	10	30	1 or 2	1d6 - 1 or 1d6/1d4	CE
Giants, Beasthead	-	4	15	84	1	2d8 + 14	CE
Gith	-	8	10	19	1 or 2	1d6 - 1 or 1d4/1d4	CE
Gudak, Bodyguard Captain	F5	6	12	36	1	1d8 - 1	NG
Kel Fastcoin	BR8	2	19	97	1	1d8	CN
Mercenary Guards	F5	5	12	92	1	1d6 - 1	LG/NG/CG
Merchants	TR5	10	12	19	1	1d4 - 1 (bone dagger)	NG
Mul Henchmen	F9	3	12	76	3/2	2d4 - 1 or 1d6 + 1	LE
Pilgrims	F11	10	12	8	nil	nil	LG/NG
Thief, average	T5	2	12	17	1	1d4 - 1	N
Zul Aksfumer	F10	0	12	92	3/2	1d8	LN

Forest Maker

by John J. Terra



Most adventurers know better than to listen to rumors. But when the rumors speak of a magical forest blooming deep in the burning stretch of the Alluvial Sand Wastes, even the most battle-hardened gladiator takes notice. A mysterious summons has gone out to the humans and demihumans of the Tyr region, luring them to the new forest and promising Athas's salvation. Now your characters have heard the call—but will they heed the Forest Maker, or seek to destroy her?



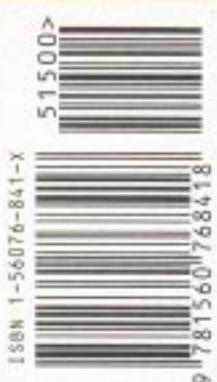
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