

PLANE

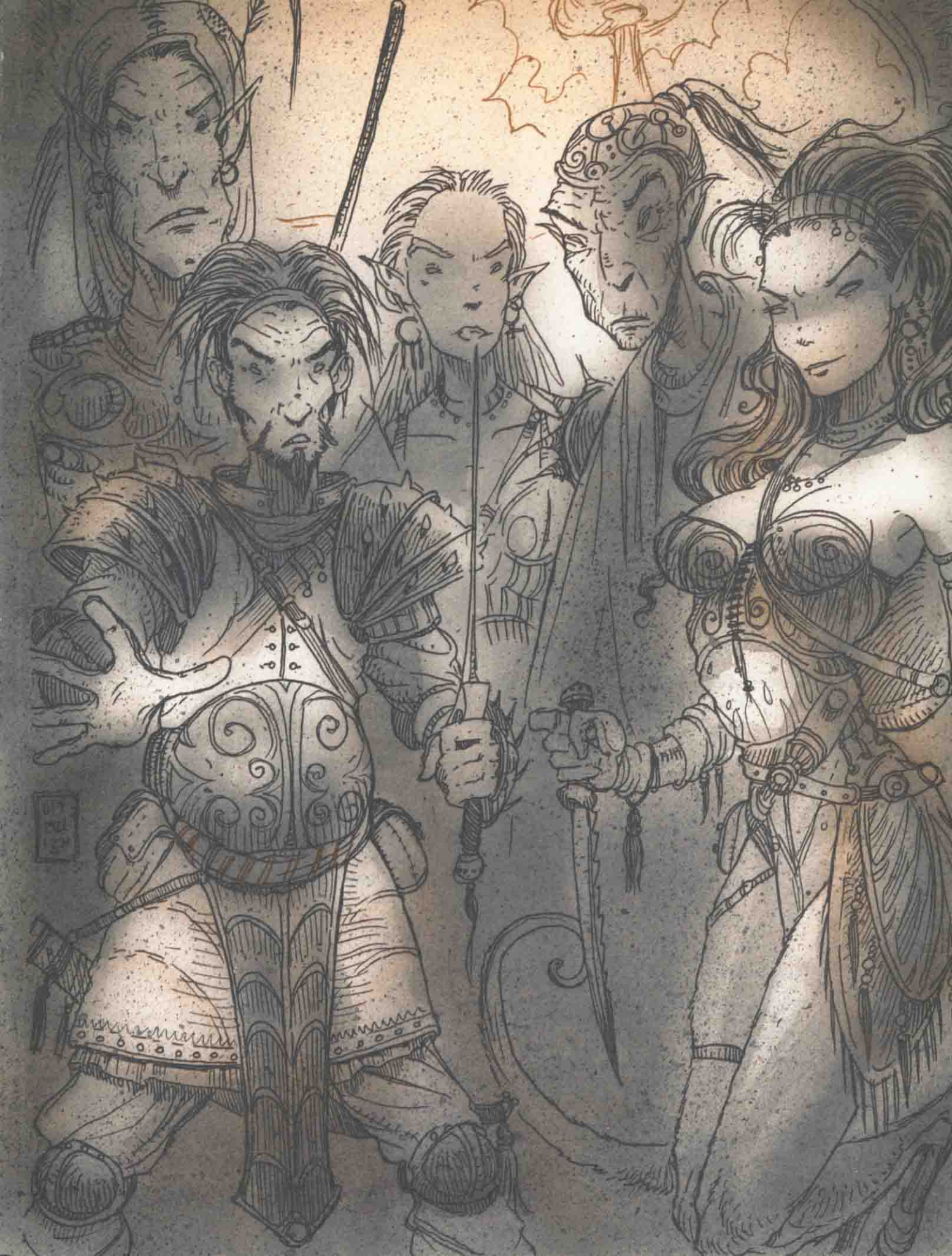
SCAPE

ADVENTURES

WELL of WORLDS

ROBB





THE ♦ WELL ♦ OF WORLDS

*Being a Collection of Adventures in which
Player Characters of all Levels may
explore the Wonders of the Multiverse.*

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AN INTRODUCTION

Including notes on Preparing for Play, the Format of each Adventure, and the Places and Personalities contained herein.

Adventuring in the planes might seem like a whole different barrel of fish to those who haven't yet scanned the chant. What's there to do? Where's a basher to go? What's the *real* difference between planar and prime adventurers?

Relax, berk. Planar adventurers are like prime characters, mostly. They still go adventuring to spice up their lives; they still seek fame and fortune — 'cept that's far more fleeting in the planes. Celebrity comes only from behavior so outrageous as to shock even the bloods — and it's never certain, even then.

So what's key about the planars? *They know that philosophy can change their worlds.*

By living up to their own beliefs, they work to shape the multiverse toward their own views, molding it (or at least their part of it) to

their ideals. See, in the planes, philosophy isn't just empty words. A thousand

bashers living out their chaotic philosophy can literally drag their

town into a more

chaotic plane, just on the

strength of *belief* alone. It's the ideal place to live, a multi-

verse where a berk has the power to dream up his own territory.

But what about the others? What about the sods who don't necessarily agree with the way some other berk's trying to restructure the planes? Won't this lead to battle, especially if members of different factions are adventuring together? In a word, no. Just as primes with different beliefs can work together, so can planars from a variety of factions. They may clash every once in a while and occasionally find themselves working at cross-purposes. Usually, though, they act together to achieve their goals. Fact is, the only player characters that have any difficulty getting along are faction leaders (factols), PCs with diametrically opposed allegiances, and bashers that seem a little more . . . *radical* in their beliefs. Many Dungeon Masters use philosophical differences within a party to liven up the interaction. Characters work together one day, get a little peery about each other the next, then band together again to give a common foe the laugh.

On the planes, a body won't love or hate other folks because of their race. Factional alliances and rivalries replace that sort of prejudice. Just because a cutter's an elf doesn't mean he'll find unquestioning love among other elves. Even though lots of elves tend to think alike, no one ever said they all hold the same opinions. Out on the planes, everyone's an individual, understand? Characters align themselves with the factions that most closely reflect their beliefs, but absolute conformity is strictly for the modrons. Even the Harmonium, with its philosophy of "Be like us or else!" remains a collection of individuals. *That* is the main difference between primes and planars. Primes lump folks in with others based on race and looks. Planars take in the spiritual and mental sides as well. 'Course, this doesn't mean planars aren't as quick to judge — they just judge differently, according to a body's nature.

And, speaking of judging, prime characters on their first jaunt on the planes may sense an . . . attitude in planar adventurers they meet. To put it plain, berk, planars view many primes as yokels, closed-minded sods who can't understand that the planes are far larger than the petty worlds in the Prime Material. Living in the planes, a body gets used to the scope of the scene, but lots of primes don't want to know that their preconceived notions of the cosmos are just plain wrong. That's why they go barmy.

Of course, there's a few primes who're here because they're looking to prove something. Bet on it: Cutters who come to the planes show themselves tougher than anything on their home worlds. Even if one's not physically as strong, the mental challenge of adapting to the planes gives a body a bump on the brain-box — but those that make it survive through intense willpower. They've got more gumption than those back home, and it shows.

PREPARING FOR PLAY

The adventures in *The Well of Worlds* work best in the PLANESCAPE™ campaign setting, though DMs can run the scenarios in other settings as well. For help creating additional planar opponents (or just to read more about the ones in this book), see the PLANESCAPE setting's *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix*.

The *italicized text* in each adventure should be read or paraphrased to players. But DMs should keep the information under the "Dungeon Master's Notes" sections to themselves until the proper moment.

The scenarios contain some new magical items, detailed in the appendix. On reading a reference to an unfamiliar magical item, just flip to its description there.

Finally, don't expect the text to give the DM an out for every action the PCs might try. A body's got to be creative to survive in the planes, after all, and that includes the DM. To quickly motivate PCs who've strayed from the adventure, the DM can, at any point, hand them the old standby, "The factol tells you . . ." Sure, it's dragging the PCs by their noses, but it's a rare basher that can refuse a factol's "request" and get away with it.

ADVENTURE FORMAT

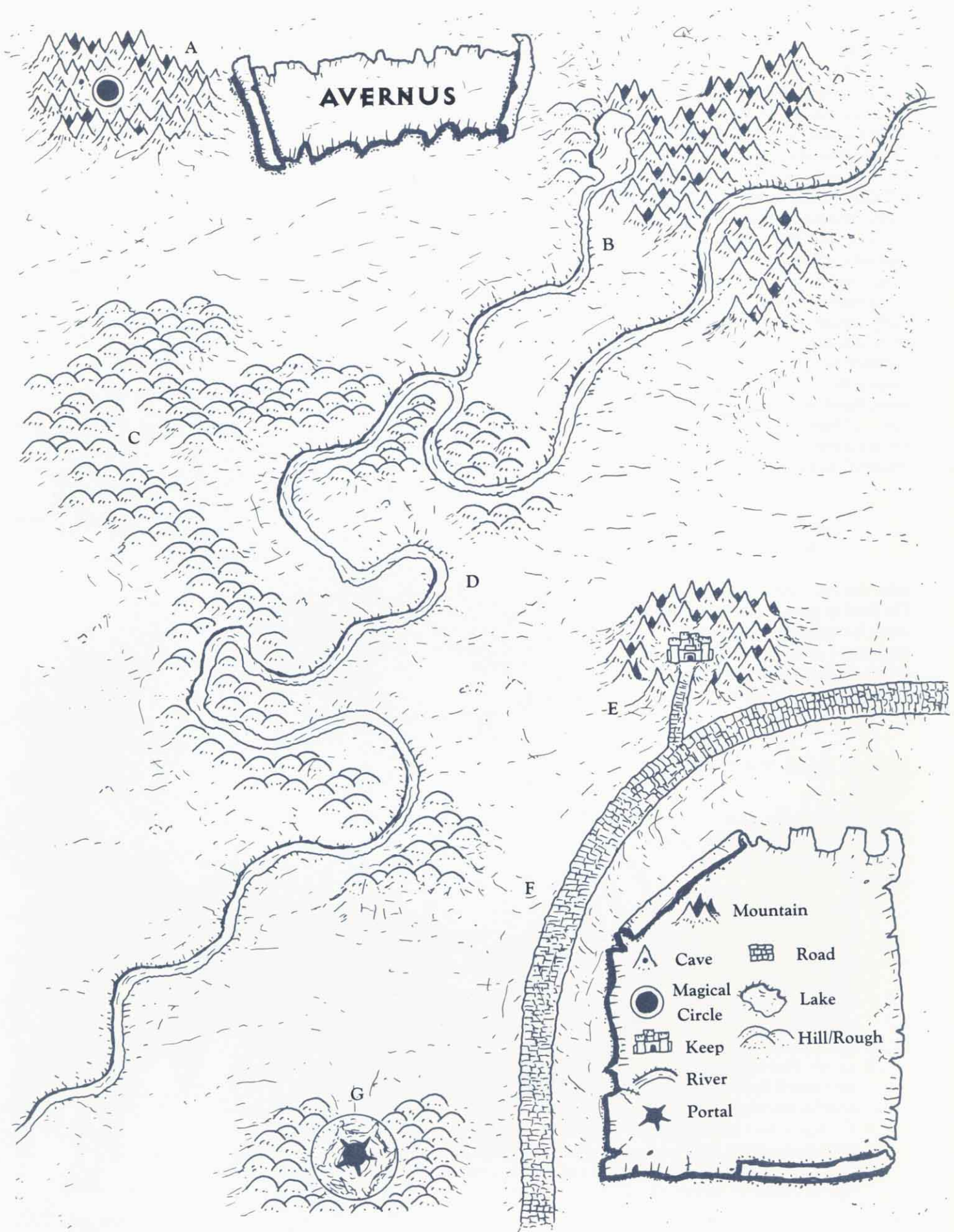
After the first, the other eight scenarios in *The Well of Worlds* can be played in any order, but DMs should familiarize themselves with an entire adventure before beginning to run it. Each scenario is divided up into various sections.

JUST THE FACTS. BERK

For quick reference, look for important details on the first page of each adventure in these categories:

- ◆ **NUMBER OF PCs:** Pretty self-explanatory. 'Course, this is just a recommendation — if a body feels like trying an adventure with a different number of folks, that's his lookout.
- ◆ **LEVELS:** The range of experience levels that's best for a character in the adventure.
- ◆ **PCs PREFERRED:** Which types of bashers will keep a party from seeing their names pop up in the dead-book? Though the adventure might call for a certain type of character (prime, planar, fighter, wizard,





AVERNUS

Mountain

Cave

Road

Magical Circle

Lake

Keep

Hill/Rough

River

Portal

and so forth), daring groups can take the ride with other character types. In adventures specified for planars, the Clueless need not apply; primes should start with a basic idea of what the planes are all about.

- ♦ **FACTIONS:** Describes how the factions fit into the adventure and what their goals'll be. Since most folks somehow get themselves caught in faction activities, this chant tells them what the groups are supposed to be doing in the first place. 'Course, not every faction's going to be interested in every adventure their members go on; these groups have immense memberships, and the factol can't keep track of *everyone*. However, most of them have enough interest in the doings of the planes to have their bloods catch a spy here and there.

'Course, there's always the adventures that involve the PCs personally, quests in which there's no call to be drawn in by a faction.

- ♦ **SYNOPSIS:** A one-line description of the adventure, to help DMs decide whether it's right for their campaigns.

DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

The dark of what Dungeon Masters should know about an adventure comes next. The intricacies of the scenario, surprises the DM'll have to look out for – it's all here. These notes also contain a sequence of the adventure's events – at least, how they *should* go, if a party isn't too addle-coved.

I+ BEGINS

A chapter's introduction outlines the circumstances that get the PCs all caught up in the adventure – anything from a factol's request to a brawl in the middle of Sigil, the City of Doors.

BUILD-UP

The bulk of a scenario, this section covers the characters' preparation for their quest, investigation, and travel. In short, it's the part in which the PCs find clues and act on them. (But don't think they're safe from attack at this time, or any other, berk.)

CLIMAX

The high point comes when the PCs figure out the dark of their quest, then try to decide what to do about it. An adventure could climax in a big fight, a big treasure, or a combination of both. Only one thing's sure in the planes: It don't come easy.

EPILOGUE

A chapter's final section details routes the PCs could take at a scenario's end (that is, if they haven't ended by getting themselves lost). The epilogue also mentions the repercussions of the characters' actions (who's likely to react and how) and adversaries they might have picked up by the by (including their plans for the sods).

THE MAPS

The back of this book holds a poster map. The front (color side) details part of Avernus, the first layer of the Outer Plane of Baator. Use it in Chapter I to show players their characters' location after their first trip through a portal. DM-only details do not appear on the poster, so players can lay it out to use. The DM refers to the version on the opposite page, keyed to the encounters in the first adventure.

The other side of the poster map shows where in the planes each adventure takes place.

In this book, the areas on exterior adventure maps are labeled with letters (A, B, C, and so forth). Locations on maps of building interiors use numbers instead (1, 2, 3, etc.). Maps detailing both indoor and outdoor locations use either numbers or letters, but not both. Whichever, the labeled areas are described fully in the adventure.

Remember that the planes don't have prime-material limitations like compass directions. No north, south, east, or west here, berk; on the planes, characters travel straight ahead, backward, or to the right or left. However, to make it easier for players to use the maps, the adventures sometimes refer to these directions anyway. 'Course, maps of locations on the Prime are read normally.

NONPLAYER CHARACTERS

A one-line character description in the text of an adventure indicates an NPC the party members should have only minimal interaction with. In case a DM ain't wise to the PLANESCAPE setting's standard NPC statistics format, here's the dark of it:

Character name or title (Origin*/gender and race/class and level**/faction if any/alignment)

* Prime, planar, petitioner, proxy

** A letter indicates class: **F**ighter, **W**izard, **P**riest, and **T**hief. A number designates experience level. So, a F/T 2/3 means a multiclassed 2nd-level fighter and 3rd-level thief.

CHAPTER I: TO BAA+R AND BACK

Wherein the Heroes step through a Portal to find themselves in a Location Most Foul, from which they make their Entrance into the infinite Planes of Adventure.

JUST + THE FACTS, BERK

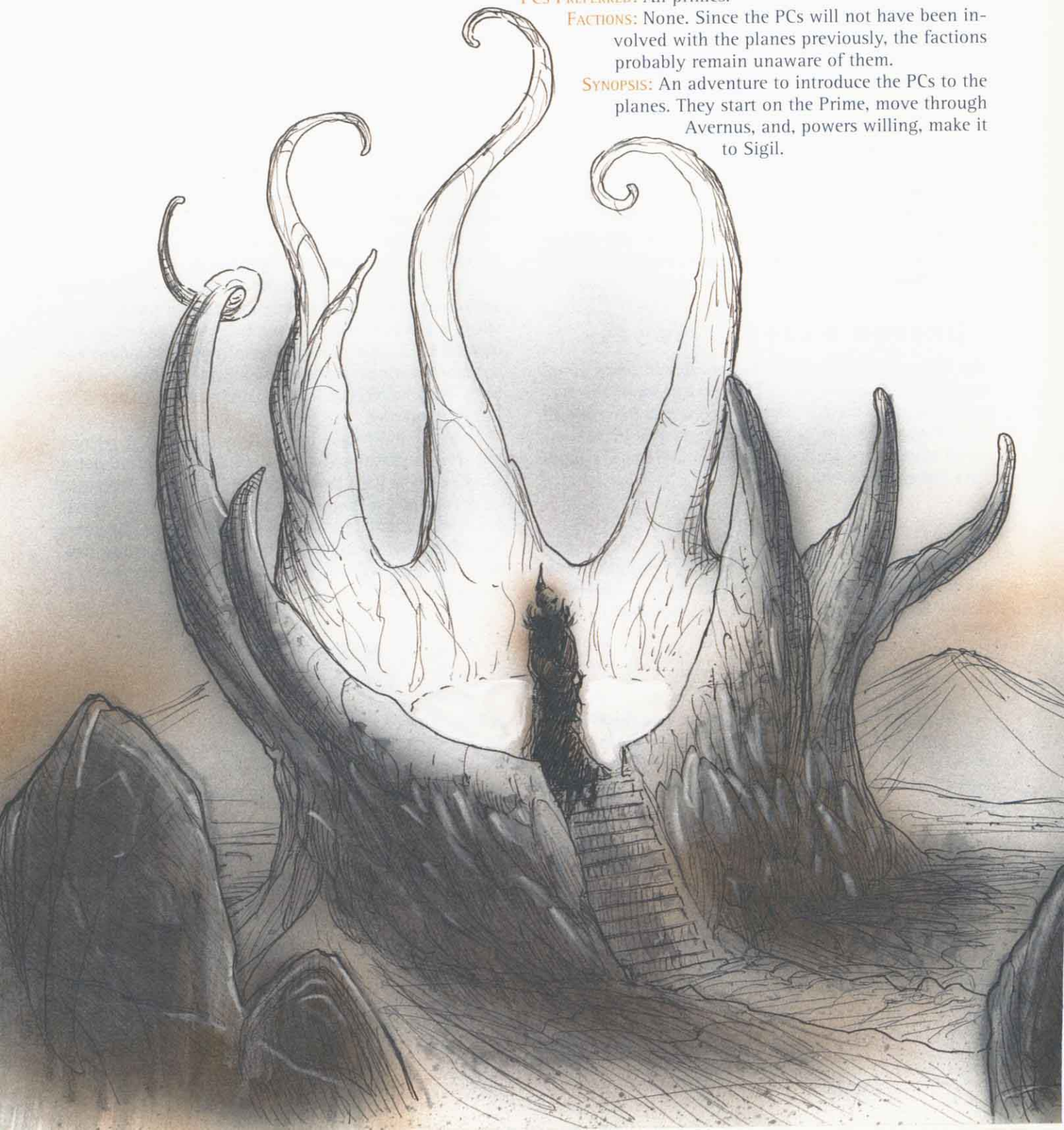
NUMBER OF PCs: 4 to 6.

LEVELS: All (totaling 4 or more levels).

PCs PREFERRED: All primes.

FACTIONS: None. Since the PCs will not have been involved with the planes previously, the factions probably remain unaware of them.

SYNOPSIS: An adventure to introduce the PCs to the planes. They start on the Prime, move through Avernus, and, powers willing, make it to Sigil.



DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

This first adventure is designed solely for prime characters, those who have not yet found their way into the planes. It introduces them to the PLANESCAPE™ setting and quickly gets them to the city of Sigil.

The ride begins in the Prime Material Plane but soon lets the PCs off in Avernus, the first layer of Baator in the Outer Planes. (See the back of the poster map.) The first portion of the adventure can take place in any campaign world on the Prime. Once characters arrive in Avernus, they find themselves far from any planar gates. Escaping the plane means locating the nearest portal to Sigil — no mean task, for a prime. The color side of the poster map describes the PCs' surroundings in Avernus.

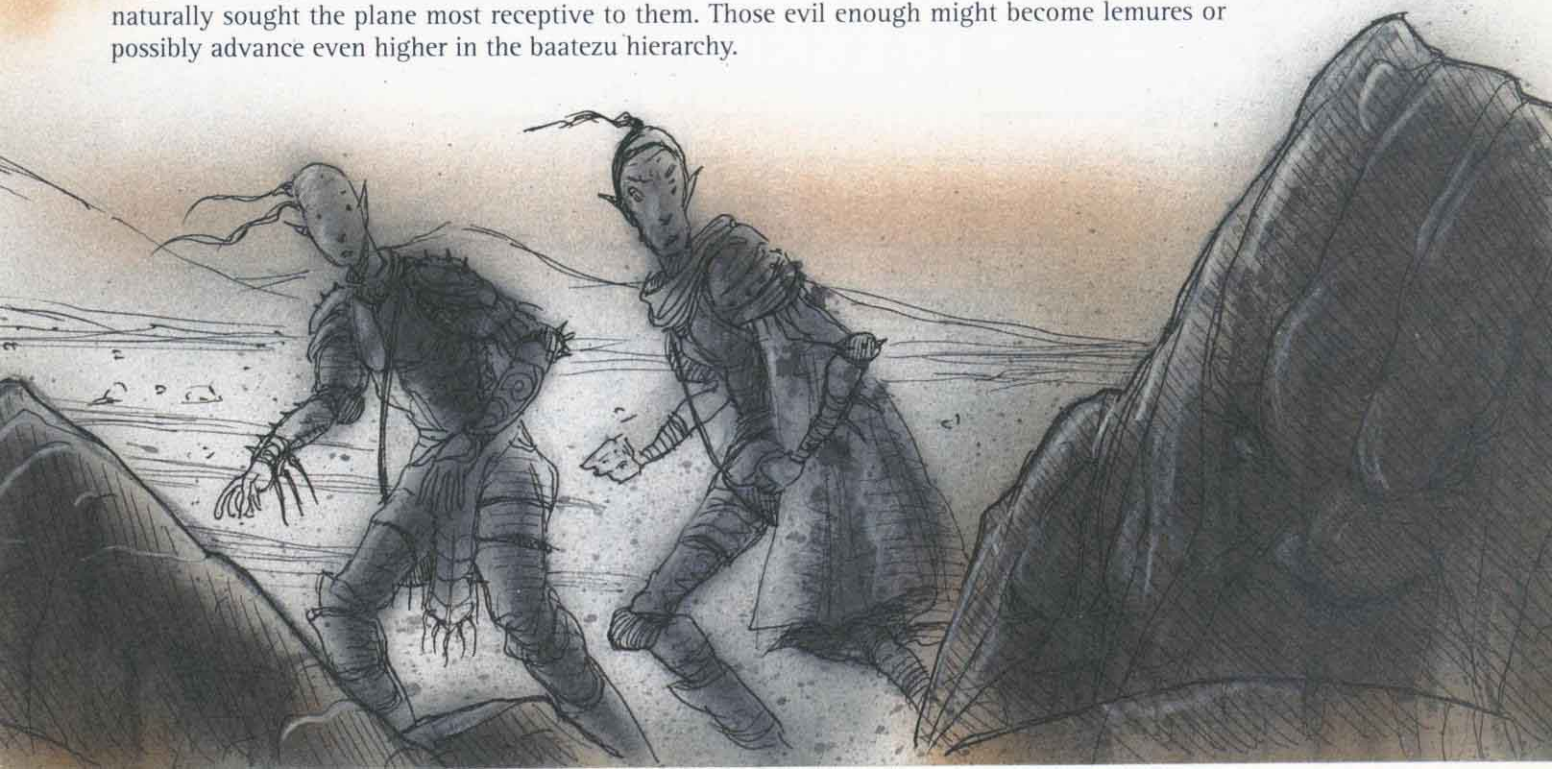
AVERNUS

The sky above stinking, torrid Avernus never changes. Characters arriving in this wasteland may look up to the dark red, starless expanse and mourn the absence of day and night — there's only the constant passing of time and the screams of petitioners. The rocks that lie jumbled about seem to have come from nowhere, haphazardly strewn all the way to the horizon. Random fireballs burst furiously from the ground, weave about the landscape, then flare into brightness and explode in a rush of heat and energy. If one explodes near the PCs, they stumble back from the wave of heat, blinded for 1d4+1 rounds unless they save vs. spell. None comes so close as to cause further damage; these bashers've got worries enough without having to dodge fireballs as well.

The plane rises and falls in rough little hills, some high enough to be called mountains. The blasted rocks present a real danger to any cutter that tries to run here (Dexterity check for every round of running; failure indicates a stumble and 1d3 points of damage).

Hordes of fiends sweep across the wastes of Avernus searching for invaders, as stated in *A DM™ Guide to the Planes* (in the *PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting*). However, no legion should spy the party until nearly the end of the adventure, as the creatures would make short work of almost any group of primes. Any DM with a sense of drama will save such an encounter until the last minute, so the PCs can taste true fear before escaping. They'd better get used to that taste.

Most of the NPCs in Avernus are petitioners or baatezu. The baatezu mentioned here, though not incredibly powerful, are the epitome of law and consummate evil, striking bargains and waging orderly war to drag others to the pits of deepest despair. These scheming nasties seek only the most dire destinies for player characters who get scragged. 'Course, they'll pretend to be helpful, but it's just a peel — they'll destroy the PCs readily when the time comes. The petitioners in this chapter actually chose Avernus; their lives intersected so often with the path of evil, their spirits naturally sought the plane most receptive to them. Those evil enough might become lemures or possibly advance even higher in the baatezu hierarchy.



HERE'S +HE CHAN+

A century or two back, an up-and-coming mage fastened onto the idea of other planes, obsessed with studying them as fully as possible. Years later, having progressed as far he could on the Prime Material, he decided to travel to the planes for a firsthand look. Using resource material he discovered in an ancient library, he etched a round diagram into the stone floor of his secret laboratory. Stepping into the center of the circle, he summoned spellpower to open an extraplanar conduit where he stood. The berk remembered to leave the conduit open, thinking he'd be returning.

'Course, he didn't know his book described how to reach only dreaded Baator. It was designed to trap over-inquisitive folks, and the addle-coved wizard fell for it all. Once he realized his error, he tried to return, only to discover the portal was one-way. (Nice of him to leave it open, so other Clueless could make the same mistake he did.) He fell to the next passing fiend.

This fiend, Ar'kle-mens by name, recognized the conduit for what it was and posted a constant guard of spinagons (least baatezu) over it. Seems he'd love to see an invasion force enter Avernus, just so he'd come to the notice of his superiors when he put it down. The guard rotates every year, but so far only a single intruder has

come through — and no one knows about him, since the guard failed to mention to his relief the fiendish fun he'd had with the sod.

It'll be a new chant once the PCs enter the wizard's chamber — their arrival should attract some infernal attention. Though hardly the first to loot the place, they are among the first to enter the hidden laboratory. One of the humans who recently discovered the lab's secret door, a sod named Cari, stepped into the circle as he entered the chamber, then vanished. His companions fled.

SEQUENCE

Below is a quick preview of this adventure. Remember, the events below suggest the *most likely* course, not the only course!

1. The PCs are resting from their previous adventure when someone nearby drops a remark about a wizard's abandoned home. If they're interested, they can pick up the trail to the mage's kip.

2. The home (dug into a grassy mound) appears decrepit. The door stands open, and the PCs probably will enter through it, though they may decide one of its skylights or the chimney looks like a better way in.



3. Exploring the mound, they find it mostly looted, except for one spellbook lying on the library floor.

4. As the PCs explore the wizard's laboratory, they find fragments of a personal journal, which indicates that the former occupant was quite interested in contacting other worlds, having conducted extensive research on the topic. When they walk through the open secret door, they enter a passage to another, hidden laboratory. A dust-covered, magical circle is inscribed on the floor of this lab. Although the PCs may think they can avoid the circle's effects merely by stepping around it, the diagram *hidden under the dust* shows that this portal's borders actually encompass the entire room. The conduit is still active. A character will activate it just by entering the secret room, plunging the party into the Outer Planes.

5. The characters arrive in Baator, on a large plateau. A bored spinagon watches the portal, a circular black diagram on the ground. Nothing has ever emerged, as far as he knows, but his duty is to guard against cutters from the other side. Although completely unprepared to see PCs emerge, he talks with them, hoping to stall them long enough to give him a chance to call for reinforcements. A clever group may be able to wrench some information from him, and prevent him from summoning help. In any case, there's folks on this plane who can tell them where to find the nearest exit from Baator: a portal that leads directly to Sigil. 'Course, they might *not*.

6. The PCs may or may not have to fight their way to the gate; regardless, they'll find the way challenging, thanks to the nature of Baator. (Ask any planar.) As they get near to the portal, the small army of baatezu intent on scragging them grows larger and closes in.

7. With hordes of baatezu on their heels, the PCs activate the portal and emerge into Sigil and their new lives as planar adventurers.

I+ BEGINS

The cutters are regathering their strength at their neighborhood hospice, inn, tavern — any old kip'll do. They overhear the following conversation:

"Hey, Ranph, did ya hear 'bout Farnie and Jeya? Them and Cari went out to that old wizard's place, you know, the one that everyone says is haunted. . . ."

"Sure, 'n' I heard that they was just lookin' around, but they musta tripped something, 'cause they heard this great big roaring outta this secret room.

Then Cari disappeared. Jeya and Farnie took off from there, and who wouldn't?"

"Y'bet I would! Where'd they get to?"

"They're hidin' now, afraid somethin's gonna come after 'em."

A few locals gather 'round Ranph and his pal to join in the discussion, tossing off chant about the old mound and speculations about what Farnie and Jeya might have "tripped," before moving on to other news of the burg. If the PCs listen in, they glean that the wizard's place, which lies about a half day's walk to the east, has been abandoned for some time now. Although they hear cross-traders have cleaned the place out, they might decide that whatever scared the tar out of the two villagers might be worth examining.

If the PCs don't seem likely to investigate the happenings at the mound, one of the villagers eventually approaches them and asks them to go out and look around for the lost Cari. Should the party ask about getting some jink for their trouble, the villager shuffles his feet and looks around, finally coming up with, "I woulda thought you'd do it out of natural curiosity, seein' as you're adventurin' types and all."

Don't force the player characters to go look if they don't want to. They can happen upon the wizard's home some time later, and the adventure can continue.



THE APPROACH

The party sets out bright and early. During the uneventful trip to the wizard's home, the sky remains clear and bright, and the local animals are doing what local animals do to keep things lively and loud. Birds scold the PCs and each other all morning, and insects hum lazily in the undergrowth. While the group encounters no monsters along the way, the characters see some unusual claw tracks: evidence that a creature not quite natural has been this way not too long before.

The tracks lead right past the old mound, clearly visible from the trail. The group might leave the trail at this point to check out the mound, but PCs that pursue the unusual tracks before them eventually find the lair of an owlbear. If they want a fight, they can get one from the monster — it attacks them the moment it senses them, and will not retreat from combat. The owlbear's lair holds nothing of interest, forcing the characters to return to the mound and continue the adventure.



OWLBEAR: Int low (6); AL N; AC 5; MV 12; HD 5+2; hp 35; THACO 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1-6/1-6/2-12; SA hug; SZ L (8 feet tall); ML steady (12, but fights until death); XP 420.

THE WIZARD'S MOUND

From the outside, the dwelling built into the mound appears decrepit, cracked, and violated. Its wooden door swings awkwardly in the mild breeze, producing an eerie creaking. The little hill, a rounded spot just off the trail, looks curiously bare, though trees stand all around the base of the slope. The hill is covered with dry, brown grass and dotted with the occasional boulder. It rises about 50 feet above the door, which is set in its very base.

PCs who climb to the top of the mound and search carefully discover windows (skylights) hidden in the crackling, dry grass. A window opens into every room in the wizard's home, except for the secret laboratory (room 9). They also might see the hole where the crumbled chimney used to be. If the characters choose to enter through one of these methods instead of the door, they must lower themselves 30 to 50 feet to the floor of the kip. (The rooms toward the back of the mound involve a bigger drop than the ones toward the front.)

Once inside the wizard's home, the PCs find it has been thoroughly looted. Furnishings have been pushed around, piled in heaps on the floor, and thrown haphazardly around the rooms. Nothing of much value remains in the mound; the place is a shambles. It looks as though it has seen few visitors of late – the dust on the floor lies fairly thick and undisturbed, except for some recent tracks that trail into every room. The lack of obvious tracks from woodland animals might strike some as odd; the snug mound would make a fine shelter against the elements, and its door has remained open for months.

1. ENTRYWAY AND MAIN HALL: The entryway shows evidence that seasons have passed since the mage left his home. The open door has all but invited in the elements; leaves, both withered and fresh, lie heaped on the floor in places and pushed into piles against the walls. Only a few lie scattered across walkways.

Evidence of the looters is just as obvious. A berk looking for secret compartments has gouged holes in the walls and pulled down paintings and plaques.

The main hall is a large room capped by a dome of bronze. Ivory paint peeling on the walls attests to its former glory. Doors and passageways lead off to the other rooms. Dust thickly coats everything in the chamber, disturbed only by the recent tracks.

1A. COATROOM: Inside a small coatroom, characters find only more dust and long-ignored cobwebs. Though several cloaks hang here, they are so moth-eaten and bedraggled that only a barmy would want to wear one. Closer inspection reveals that they are full of dead lice and fleas. ('Course, a berk that puts one on may discover that they're not *all* dead.)

2. GUEST ROOM: A guest chamber contains the frame of a bed with a mattress that's been torn wide open. Along the walls stand the remains of dressers and a wardrobe, all nearly reduced to splinters by miffed looters who found no valuables in them.

3. LIVING ROOM: A fireplace has partially crumbled in the wizard's main room, allowing rays of sunlight to stream in the room from the hole in the ceiling where the chimney'd been. Otherwise, this room seems just as the others – destroyed and dusty. PCs who examine the loose bricks of the fireplace find three vials of holy water and two *potions of extra-healing* the mage hid there.

4. KITCHEN: The wizard's store of food has long since been eaten by insects and mold. Not even flies buzz about the kitchen any longer. The mage's last meal, lying on the easternmost stone counter where he left it months ago, has become infected with green slime spores. No longer dormant, the slime has flourished, growing into a small colony. If the PCs let it alone, it won't hurt them.

GREEN SLIME: Int non (0); AL N; AC 9; MV 0; HD 2; hp 14; THACO 19; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA dissolves objects, turns anyone touching it into green slime in 1-4 melee rounds; SZ S (2-foot diameter); ML average (10); XP 65.

5. DINING ROOM: The dining hall stands completely desolate, except for the ever-present dust and cobwebs. Even the destroyed furniture from this room was scavenged by intruders long ago.

6. BEDROOM: Sawdust fills a bed frame without a mattress (now, no doubt, gracing some sod's bedroom). Inside the frame lies a corpse, which has been there for some months; the once luxurious bed that had dominated this room is now squirming with maggots scouring the bones. The PCs see a walk-in closet at the south end of this rank-smelling chamber.

While the characters investigate the room, the DM should make a surprise roll for them. A failed roll

means they find themselves completely surprised by two lemures, which burst out of the large closet. Summoned by a wizard from afar and then abandoned, the lemures have been unable to find their way home. Drawn to the mound by its aura of planar magic, they have made their lair in the closet. They have begun readjusting to life on the Prime Material Plane and have regained enough of their minds to realize they do not want to return to Baator. Viewing the PCs as a threat (possibly someone wanting to return them to Baator), the two creatures waste no time in getting across the message that they'll never return — that is, they attack.

LEMURE, A BAATEZU (2): Int semi (3); AL LE; AC 7; MV 3; HD 2; hp 14, 12; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3; SZ M (5 feet tall); ML fearless (20); XP 120.

If the PCs examine the closet, they find the partially-eaten remains of a peasant girl. Her belt pouch holds 4 cp, plus a stick she found, which she thought might be magical. (It wasn't.) This runaway had stopped to investigate the mound and catch some sleep. Her family, living 20 miles away, has no idea where she is.

7. LIBRARY: Books are strewn across the floor of the wizard's library, and the furniture has been reduced to kindling for the fireplace in the corner. Few of the old, moldering tomes are even legible anymore. Light streams in faintly from the skylight above, casting an eerie pallor across the room. If the PCs look carefully through the books on the floor for more than two rounds, they strike gold: one of the wizard's spellbooks, the words "Finott's Book" written on its cover, somehow missed by the many looters. Inside, the characters find a collection of low-level spells, including:

◆ **1ST LEVEL:** *Audible glamor, change self, detect magic, erase, grease, and shield.*

◆ **2ND LEVEL:** *Alter self, flaming sphere, pyrotechnics, and whispering wind.*

The only useful item here is the spellbook.

8. THE WIZARD'S LABORATORY: The characters can see that the mage's spellcraft chamber, like all the other rooms, is covered with dust disturbed only by the tracks of the villagers. (The lemures haven't been in this room in a long time.) Somehow, those sods discovered a secret door hidden behind a lab table pushed into the wall. Their tracks lead into the black passageway beyond.

The room's not entirely empty, though. Beakers and ingredient bottles have been smashed, and it's



probably best for weak-stomached primes not to look too closely at some of the dust-covered shapes lying amid the shattered glass on the floor. One thing the looters apparently missed: a book clearly marked "Lab Notes." It's been brushed clean of dust, as though someone had looked at it, then dropped it to the floor.

OH, TORM,
I + THINK I JUST FEL+ SOMETHING
WRAP AROUND MY LE — {SPLASH!}

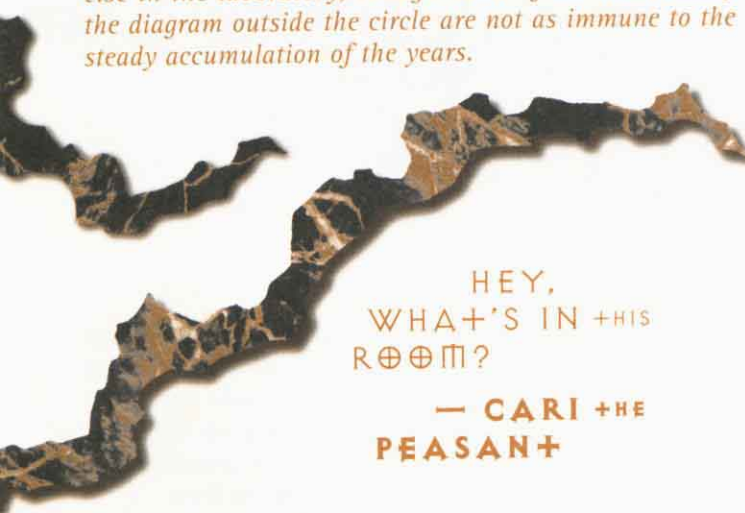
— KYRIA ICEDAUGH+ER.
A PRIME CROSSING
+THE RIVER OF BLOOD

Characters who pick up the book and leaf through it discover that the mage who had lived in the mound had been very interested in discovering how to travel to other planes. The journal describes his initial frustrations and his later successes in contacting beings from beyond this land. Eventually, the book speaks of the circle the mage created to transport himself bodily to worlds outside even his imaginings. The book ends there, as though the owner had left it behind as a testament to his magnificent discovery of new realms.

9. THE SECRET LABORATORY: The room at the end of the secret passage is the wizard's hidden laboratory. The door, still stout enough to resist being ripped from its hinges, has iron bands that can withstand chopping with a normal axe for at least six rounds. If any of the PCs simply try the door, they find it's unlocked.

The door opens into a vaulted chamber, lit by a pale blue glow that seems to radiate from the walls. The ceiling rises a good 30 feet above the floor. Supporting buttresses meet in the center, as in a cathedral's dome. Alchemical equipment lines the far walls, while potion bottles, chalk, and vials litter the table closest to the center of the room. Dust coats nearly everything, from floor to ceiling.

In the exact center of the room, a magical circle is inscribed into the floor in solid gold plating. The circle seems to repel the dust that has gathered everywhere else in the laboratory, though some of the traceries of the diagram outside the circle are not as immune to the steady accumulation of the years.



HEY,
WHA+’S IN +HIS
R⊕⊗⊖?

— CARI +HE
PEASANT+

The circle does not, as it appears, end in the obvious boundaries in the center of the room — under the dust lies the rest of the wizard's diagram. The diagram's plating runs throughout the entire chamber, making the whole room, in effect, one giant, active portal. Anyone who enters (breaking the plane established by the door), activates the portal. It don't matter whether a berk steps in, leaps, flies, crawls, phases through the wall, or even pokes a stick in that room: The gate's magical power, radiating up from the floor design, still traps a body that enters — plus anyone else touching the poor sod. Unless they save vs. spell at a -6 penalty, the portal holds affected PCs transfixed while it readies to transport them.

The rest of the room looks absolutely normal, but it's only so much window dressing, as the PCs can access none of it. Unless they have somehow guessed the magical command word necessary to deactivate the portal, they remain vulnerable to its power.

Read the following to PCs who enter the laboratory:

As you step into the room, dust rises in little clouds near your feet, revealing more gold plating on the floor. In fact, the gold inscriptions, hidden under the dust of the years, extend far beyond the circle in the center of the laboratory — the diagram covers the entire room! Your entrance has triggered the etching's magic.

A warm wind hurls the dust up into the air, where it sparkles and shines in the room's blue glow. The hazy nimbus surrounds you, sweeping you up in a surge of magical force, and the room spins around and around in a blur until your eyes feel as though they will fly from your head and a whirring fills your ears and suddenly —

The room stops spinning. No, it's not the room anymore. You're lying supine within a glowing lattice. And you feel hot.

The berks who entered the laboratory have been transported to Avernus, the first layer of Baator in the Outer Planes. They proceed right to "Welcoming Party," described in the "Build-Up" section, on the next page.

If any characters remain behind, read the following:

A fence of glowing blue fire leaps up around your companions from the gold-etched diagram, which you now see encompasses the entire room. The flames crackle and hiss in the vaulted chamber, and the very air begins to emit a strange whirring noise. The faces and forms of your comrades blur rapidly, obscured by rising clouds of dust in the laboratory. A sudden, soundless explosion pushes you back from the chamber door. The door slams shut, but not before a cloud of sulphur and ozone bathes you in its stench.

Characters who try the door find that it opens easily, as it did before. Inside, the room is fast resuming its former appearance, the dust again settling over the outer borders of the diagram on the floor. But there's no sign of the other PCs. Anyone entering the room now becomes trapped inside the vortex of force rising from the magic etching, with exactly the same result as the first time the portal was activated. This effect lasts as long as the circle remains unbroken. It takes either the command word or a deliberate attack to mar the surface of the inscribed plating to close the gate. Of course, if the PCs do that, they'll have destroyed the conduit to Baator, cutting themselves off from their comrades. Unless the plane hoppers choose to come back for their companions later, the adventure effectively would end for these berks. (And most planars would be *glad* to see fewer primes mucking about the planes.)

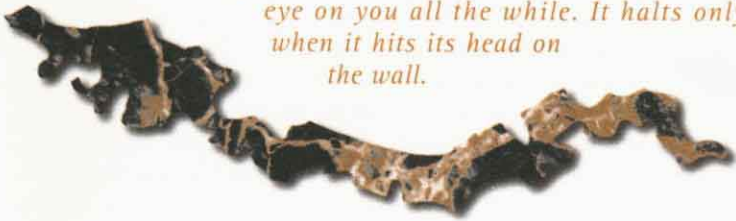
BUILD-UP

Now show players the color poster map of Avernus, from the back of this book. The letters A through G on the map refer to locations described in the next few pages.

WELCOMING PARTY (A)

You have a moment of disorientation while your head clears from the magical transit. The stench of sulfur and ozone fills your nostrils. Hard stone supports your weight. The glowing blue lattice has faded from your sight, allowing you to notice that you're lying atop a circular inscribed diagram – an exact duplicate of the one that brought you here, but black instead of gold. From off to one side comes a sharp intake of breath. Turning, you see the fiend.

Staring slack-jawed at you is a spiny little critter about three feet tall with wings and a spiked tail, carrying a military fork. It is backing into the gloom of a nearby crevice in a stony wall, keeping a close eye on you all the while. It halts only when it hits its head on the wall.



The fiend, a “least” baatezu of the spinagon variety, is named Halitsu. He’s newly assigned to his lonely post high atop a rocky plateau to watch the circle, in case an invasion force tries to penetrate Avernus via the portal. He has no shelter here except the rocky outcropping he now stands against, which does shield him a bit from the scorching wind. Halitsu figured this was punishment duty; he never seriously expected anyone to emerge from the circle while he was guarding it.

Consequently, he finds himself completely unprepared for the party’s appearance. The large horn of brass and bone he was told to use to summon reinforcements stands far out of his reach, at the edge of the jagged outcropping. The PCs have plenty of time to gather themselves and take in their surroundings a bit before Halitsu finds his wits.

Characters wishing to leave the circle now can do so, as the conduit they passed through generates no magical barriers to keep travelers inside. As soon as a PC steps off the diagram, Halitsu begins gasping and floundering about. He appears exceedingly frightened and prostrates himself on the ground in front of them. It’s not the first time a planar has mistaken primes for powerful cutters.

If the PCs attack Halitsu, he fights to the best of his ability but takes the first opportunity to escape to warn

his superiors of the “invasion force” threatening Baator. However, he’s no addle-coved spinagon; he won’t turn his back foolishly on the otherworldly bashers, but will flee only when he can get away safely. If the characters are on the verge of putting him in the dead-book, Halitsu begs for his life, offering information in exchange for his miserable hide.

HALITSU, A LEAST BAATEZU

(PLANAR/♂ SPINAGON/HD 3+3/LE): Int average (10); AC 4; MV 6, Fl 18 (C); hp 20; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1–4/1–4/by weapon; SA flame spikes; MR 15%; SZ S (3 feet tall); ML average (8); XP 7,500.

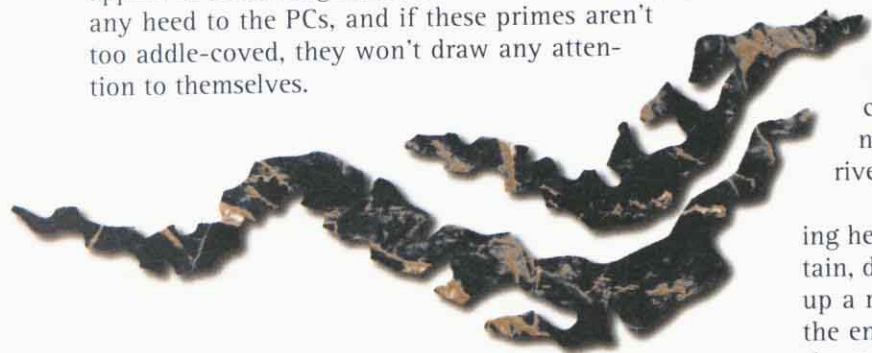
Should the characters wish to question Halitsu instead of (or after) attacking him, they must first restrain the creature. The spinagon will reveal nothing voluntarily; PCs must ask direct questions to get the chant below. With one exception, Halitsu is too frightened to lie.

- ◆ **LOCATION:** The PCs have emerged on a plateau on the first of the nine planes of Baator: Avernus. The fortress of the pit fiend Bel lies not far away.
- ◆ **BEL:** As leader of the armies on the first layer, Bel is most fearsome. He is in charge of repelling tanar’ri invaders.
- ◆ **HOW TO LEAVE:** Halitsu has no idea how a body exits Avernus. He knows the conduit he guards operates in only one direction, so the cutters will have to find some other way to leave. Waving toward the mountains to the east, he suggests visiting the mad witch to get further directions.
- ◆ **HALITSU:** A mere spinagon, one of the watchmen and messengers of Baator, Halitsu claims no special significance and pretends to be unconcerned about his fate (until he really believes he’s about to find himself written into the dead-book, that is).
- ◆ **THE WITCH:** A crazy old planar has taken up residence in Avernus. She lives in a shack in a mountain cave. (On the map, her hut sits just past the point where the river flows out of the mountains.) After repeatedly repelling fiends with strange magic, she has come to an agreement with Bel. The nasties ain’t bothering her much any more.
- ◆ **PLANARS:** Halitsu looks confused and says, “You know, folks who live on the planes.”
- ◆ **HALITSU’S PLANS:** The creature claims not to care about the PCs’ arrival on his home plane, swearing he’ll just go back to watching the portal after they’ve gone. This is an out-and-out lie; he’ll take off immediately toward Bel’s fortress to warn the armies there of the “invaders.”

Halitsu can't provide the PCs with much information on the planes. The spinagon believes that the forces of evil created the planes and use the rest of the cosmos as a kind of giant testing ground for the baatezu. He can tell the party about the Blood War or how a beastie gets promoted within the ranks of the baatezu, but little more, other than what he has observed personally on Avernus. All in all, he knows less than the PCs, so the DM should feel free to wing it if the party asks for Halitsu's slant on the nature of the planes.

After questioning Halitsu, the characters may bind him with sturdy material (if they haven't already), kill him, or set him free. Freeing the spinagon is a leather-headed thing to do, as Halitsu will take the opportunity to fly to Bel's fortress as soon as the PCs are out of attack range.

Armed with the chant they got from the guard, the group of bashers can now set off for the mountains in search of the mad witch. On the way, they see vast numbers of fiends marching about to the south and leathery-winged flyers above them. The creatures appear to be holding battle drills. None of them pay any heed to the PCs, and if these primes aren't too addle-coved, they won't draw any attention to themselves.



MOUNTAINS (B)

The characters find their trek across the reddish plain largely uneventful. The sweltering heat makes the journey uncomfortable, more so if they brought no water. Great blocks of black basalt lie scattered about, and fireballs explode at random intervals, shedding light and heat across the land. None of the missiles get close enough to threaten the PCs directly, but a wave of heat ripples their clothing every time one bursts nearby. Even when the fireballs explode far away, their thunder rolls across the plain like a stampeding herd.

After several miles of travel across the barrens, the PCs reach a river. Closer inspection of the red, sluggish stream reveals that it's a river of blood coursing across the plain! Images of tormented faces spring up in the foam caught in the eddies of the river, to be dashed to bits on the rocks. Each such "face" seems to let out a faint scream when the current forces it against the rocks, though that might be simply the splashing of the fluid on the basalt. A muted howling comes from much farther upstream, from the lake in the mountains.

As long as the PCs travel on a fairly direct line to the River of Blood, they have no trouble finding a ford across this nauseating flow. Small fords of pebbles – jagged bits of basalt and obsidian, the remnants of exploding fireballs – dot the river roughly every hundred yards or so on this stretch, until it flows down into the hills. The prospect of wading through ankle-deep blood might cause one or two berks to quail. However, since the river is 100 yards across at its narrowest point, the PCs have little choice but to wade across . . . unless they can fly.

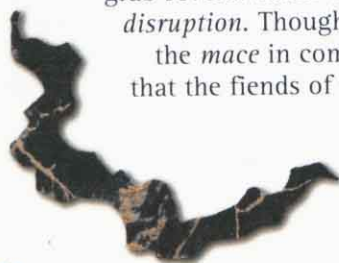
The experience of crossing the river is one best left to the imagination. The stench of blood, both old and fresh, combined with the horrible squelching of blood-slick rocks against the soles of the PCs' boots and the sight of congealing, scabby masses on the river's edge are the stuff of nightmares. Also, the reek of hot blood cooked by the occasional fireball doesn't exactly soothe a sod's stomach.

Once across the River of Blood, the PCs should have no trouble finding the quarters of the mad witch. The mountains are a short distance away, and a cloud of smoke rises from the base of the one towering before them. This billowing cloud differs from the dirty black smoke of exploding fireballs in that it looks white, as though from a cooking flame or hearth fire. The column originates approximately a half mile south of where the river emerges from the mountains.

If the PCs investigate, they find the smoke pouring heavily out of a small cave in the base of the mountain, directly on their line of approach. Someone has set up a ring of posts around the cave some 30 feet from the entrance. As the posts have no crossbars spanning the 5 feet between each, they do not seem a handy method of repelling intruders. As the PCs approach, they see a white-haired woman clad in red robes stagger, coughing, from the cave. She glances up with bleary, bloodshot eyes, curses, and begins to make a series of gestures.

The characters must roll for surprise. If they succeed, they either manage to hoof it out of the area before the old woman throws up a *web* spell, or else they tackle her, thereby disrupting her spellcasting. Failure means the web (anchored on the posts) catches them unaware. They still are allowed a saving throw to determine if they can leap free or if the web is at half strength. While the PCs struggle with the effects of the spell, the old woman rushes back inside the cave to

grab several flasks of holy water and a *mace of disruption*. Though she cannot effectively use the *mace* in combat, the old woman knows that the fiends of this land (at least the lesser baatezu) fear the weapon and stay well away from her.



Should the PCs disrupt the woman's spellcasting and detain her, she screams pitifully. When she realizes they aren't planning on killing her just yet, she stops. Studying them with a peery eye, she weighs her options and speaks.

"If I knew you wasn't fiends, I'd invite you inside. Let me go inside and grab somethin' to make sure. I promise not to do anythin' to hurt you if you turn out to be good folks."

Most bashers aren't going to buy her line. This is, after all, a plane on which only evil folks come to dwell. She'll let one of them escort her inside, but she'll fight and fuss to her death if any others try to accompany her. If the PCs all insist on going inside, she stays outside, asking them to grab the bottle on the top shelf across from her fireplace, then come out and pour a few drops from the bottle on themselves in her sight. Seeing the characters pass through the warding screen she has put up over the door, she knows that they're either not fiends, or else they're fiends far too powerful for her to fight. In either case, she might as well be polite.

If the characters let her up, she hobbles into the cave mouth. She returns in a moment carrying the holy water and the *mace*, as well as a *gem of seeing* that she's looking through as she emerges. She inspects the entire party, and, seeing nothing suspicious (no shape-changers, no fiends, etc.), she invites the group inside. As the PCs enter the cave, passing under the witch's warding magic, they feel a strange tingle.

Once inside the small cave, the PCs spy an even smaller hut, from which white smoke still emerges in fitful, acrid puffs. The woman leads them in, introducing herself as "Hexla, the Mad Witch. 'Least, that's how I was called back home. You folks can call me Hexla."

HEXLA (PLANAR/♀ HALF-ELF/W7/FREE LEAGUE/N): Int high (14); AC 7; MV 9; hp 22; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (quarterstaff); SA spells; SZ M (5 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 975.

The mad witch plays the perfect hostess, offering food and refreshment. She'll answer questions the PCs put to her, including those about her life and how she arrived here. Hexla claims it was a mistake. She had been living peacefully at home on the Outlands ("the place in the center of everything"), until she caught the chant about the rest of the planes. She worked and worked on her magic, perfecting a spell to enable her to travel the planes. One day, she finally cast the spell. But all that seemed to happen was that the resulting flash of smoke and fire chased her, coughing, out of her hut. When she nearly ran smack into a cave wall, she realized that something *had* happened, something that had landed her and her hut in a cave on Avernus. Now she

doesn't know where to gather the materials to cast the spell again and escape.

Hexla professes not to know much about Avernus, saying she can't leave her little yard without fear of attack from roaming fiends. She does know the spell key for the plane (a chunk of obsidian from an exploded fireball), which she doesn't volunteer unless specifically asked. However, if the characters have been generally polite and friendly, Hexla offers:

"I don't know exactly how you can get out of here, but I can tell you who, or rather what, would know: the Pillar of Skulls. It's some sort of punishment for sages who've cheated their customers, and it's got the answers to 'most any questions about the area. Ask it about the way out, and make sure you ask it about the key, too. You have to be more clever than it is, and they say the pillar's made of the skulls of petitioners who lied for a livin'. It'll try to cut a deal with you, but you have to make sure you're gettin' the better end of it."

"To get to the Pillar of Skulls, follow the river through a set of hills. Once past 'em, you'll come to a plain surrounded by more hills that form a cul-de-sac at the bend in the river — a dead end. Head off to the right, toward those hills across the plain, and soon you'll reach the pillar. If you want it to give you information, you're s'posed to pay the music, so have something ready to give it in return."

"Most of all, don't trust anyone here! You can't even be sure I'm tellin' the truth."



Some PCs may ask how Hexla manages to stay alive if she can't leave the yard around her cave. She replies that she makes her own food and water by magic, and adds that she has come to an agreement with the pit fiend Bel. After all, she says, she can hardly be expected to hold her own against a pit fiend on its own plane, even armed with holy water and a *mace of disruption*. Though these items might make an attacking fiend a little cautious, they only prove really effective against the lower orders of fiend.

Smell a rat yet, berk? In return for amnesty, Hexla agreed to report intruders in the realm to Bel. But, although she won't tell the PCs her secret, she'll report them as soon as they leave. She's too frightened to leave the cave with the characters, and she's unwilling to part with any of her magic, should they ask.

As the party leaves, she calls out, "See if you can find me some sweetgrass and bat skulls! If you bring them back to me, I can get out of this infernal plane!"

THE PILLAR OF SKULLS (C)

The Pillar of Skulls is not exactly made of skulls. Instead, it is a pile of the *living heads* of humans, dwarves, elves, and other beings not so easily identifiable. The heads, in various states of decay and decomposition, are little more than bone-boxes. They argue among themselves constantly about various points of no importance, raising a cacophony of sound in the still air of the hills. Some of the heads remain silent, keeping a watch over the surroundings, while others stay quiet only because they're missing pieces of their jaws or tongues.

The pillar is huge, at least 20 feet tall and 10 feet around. It looks as though it extends into the ground, with half-buried heads still trying to talk, despite the earth filling their mouths. The pillar has no visible support.

The heads in the pillar squabble with each other until the PCs approach and address the structure directly. At that point, all heads fall silent, and all eyes turn toward the characters. The heads begin a hushed babble, each seeking to gain the characters' attention, until one voice cuts off the rest with a booming, "Nuff!" The other heads fall silent.

The head that spoke, larger than the rest, perhaps belonged to an ogre or even a giant. Though remarkably ugly and decayed, it manages a slurred, slow, but still understandable speech. This head becomes the speaker for the pillar. (If the PCs ever visit the pillar again, another head might be the dominant one.) When the PCs have gathered before the pillar, the ogre head rolls its eyes grotesquely, trying to spy them all, then asks them to state their business. If the sods hesitate too long, the other heads begin piping up with their comments, until the pillar's speech becomes a chaotic jumble once again.

If the PCs ask the quickest way to escape Avernus, the head counters, asking what they offer in return. To an offer of an information trade, the ogre head scoffs. "Not need more facts! Need service!"

Immediately, an elf head pipes up. "Knock out the ogre head, and I'll tell you what you need to know!"

A chubby head offers, "Bring back a fiend, and I'll tell you!"



A gruff-looking gnome head says, "Tell me the spell key for this layer, and I'll let you know!" Soon, all the heads are chiming in with their own offers in exchange for the secret to leaving the plane. Only the first three heads can be heard over the discord. The bashers'll have to yell to quiet the pillar – not even the ogre head can get them to pike it this time.

DOING THE DEAL: Each of these heads is sincere in its offer to guide the PCs to a portal off Baator – but not all of them know the portal's location as well as they think they do. 'Course, the party can opt to deal with any of the heads, but the easiest choice is to knock the ogre head out of the pillar, as the elf head asked. A few hits against AC 10, inflicting 25 or more points of damage, and the group has rendered the target speechless for 1d10 turns. With the ogre head out of the picture, the elf head becomes dominant. After a moment to adjust itself to its new rank, it says, "The portal leading off Avernus lies to the west, and the key to it is a fiend's spine."

Almost immediately, another noggin pipes in, "You leatherhead, that portal's five days from here!" Its attention turns to the party, and it says, "The nearest portal is to the south, and its key is a brick from the Great Avernus Road." The other heads bob in agreement, but the elf head maintains the truth of its position. Though the elf head is wrong, it continues to argue. The PCs must figure out whose advice to follow.

Should the party choose to deal with the ogre head, it demands the sacrifice of a party member. The group simply must press its smartest member into the pillar, and the ogre will answer five questions. Not a nice way for a body to get lost (the pillar covers the character with digestive juices, consuming the offering in a turn), but the ogre head always gives correct answers. A party that pays this music gets full measure for the jink.

The characters also can try to capture one of the fiends, which the pillar uses for sustenance as well. It draws more power from fiends than from humans or demihumans, and the chubby head stands to gain more from it than any of the other heads, since it was the one to suggest the idea. Fiends abound, but the one most likely to spring to the PCs' minds is Halitsu. If they left him alive but tied up, he could be looking like dinner.

The gnome head can explain to the party that a spell key allows a body to cast spells without seeing 'em changed by the nature of the plane, while a portal key activates a portal gate, if used in the right place. The only wizard the characters likely have encountered is Hexla; they may decide to go back to see if she knows what the key is (which she does). Once they tell the gnome head the key is an obsidian stone from an exploded fireball, it asks the party to go find one. However, since the PCs delivered the answer, they have ful-

filled their part of the bargain and can demand their information. Peeved to be beaten at its own game, the gnome head nevertheless abides by the terms it set.

WHAT THE PILLAR KNOWS: The pillar knows quite a few things of interest to the party, but, as Hexla said, it's stingy with the chant. If the PCs ask only how to escape Avernus, it replies that the nearest portal off the plane lies across the river, southwest of the keep of Bel, the pit fiend. Though it doesn't know where this portal leads, it does tell the characters that the key they need to use it is a brick from the Great Avernus Road, south of the keep on the way to the portal. In addition, it explains that, to use a portal, the PC holding the key must step through first, followed quickly by the rest of the party. Though the pillar knows that a portal can transport only six berks at a time, it neglects to suggest that parties with more than six members take more than one brick from the road to use as keys.

The pillar might tell the characters more about the dark of the planes and planar travel, if they offer another trade. They also might describe the portal, a spiny outcropping of rock atop a low hill, so the PCs'll recognize it when they're upon it.

COMBAT INFORMATION: The pillar cannot defend itself from an aggressor. However, new heads continually emerge from its interior to replace those destroyed in an attack. When a battle begins, the pillar starts shouting, screaming, and hurling curses. Though the noise can't cause damage, it can summon fiends, who arrive in 1d2 turns to see what the racket is about. The pillar has AC 10, with 300 hit points. If destroyed, it reforms again in 100 days, the heads gradually rolling back into position and adhering themselves to each other. Any damage the individual heads have taken disappears, for they're subject only to the forces of decay.

RIVERBED (D)

To get to both the Great Avernus Road and the portal, the characters will have to cross the River of Blood. They find the river much deeper here than upstream. After searching for 1d4 turns, they find a place to cross where the blood runs only waist-high – that is, about 3 feet deep. 'Course, certain demihumans will need to hitch a ride. The river's broad width, roughly 200 yards at this shallow point, prevents a berk from slinging a rope across, and the riverside offers a body no convenient place to anchor a rope, not even one of the large rocks, so prevalent elsewhere in Avernus.



By the by, there is a cumulative 20% chance per character crossing the river of giant bloodworms noticing the splashing; they'll come crawling across the river bottom to attack. If the PCs are low-level (1st to 4th), only one bloodworm will attack, but characters of 5th to 8th level face three, and those of 9th level and higher must deal with seven hungry worms.

If a bloodworm hits, it latches its horrible maw upon a PC and starts sucking the character's blood, causing 1d8 points of damage per round until a berk kills the creature or makes a successful open doors skill roll to detach it from its target. A successful attack roll of 19 or 20 means a bloodworm coils around its victim and drags it beneath the surface. Any PC dragged under must save vs. paralyzation or suffer an additional 1d4 points of damage from swallowing blood. A character who fails the save also suffers a -2 penalty to AC and attack rolls for the next 1d6 rounds.

GIANT BLOODWORM (1, 3, OR 7): Int non (0); AL N; AC4; MV 6, Br 1; HD 6; hp 30; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA blood drain; SZ H (20 feet long); ML fanatic (17); XP 420.

If the PCs somehow manage to escape the river and pull a bloodworm out with them, it ceases its attack and attempts to wriggle back into the flow. Like a fish, it cannot survive out of its environment for long and, after spending one round out of the river, it suffers 1d4 points of damage every round until it returns.

FIEND'S FORTRESS (E)

Bel's huge keep is far bigger than any the PCs could possibly have seen on the Prime Material Plane. Enormous mountains surround the fortress, enclosed by a 30-foot-high iron fence topped with howling skulls. The keep is constructed of iron, marble, granite, and basalt, all jumbled together with an infernal logic that defies description. This palace of jutting towers, thick gates, sharp angles, barbed walls, and spiked fences promises danger to any cutter that gets too close. The keep exudes an aura of hatred and pain, suffering and dark ecstasy.

More to the point, though, the fortress is guarded by hordes of fiends, including lemures, abishai, and barbazu, some of whom have the ability to see items and people enchanted with *invisibility*. Infiltrating the keep is no sure bet, but if a berk wants to seek his

doom, that's his own lookout.

Fortunately, the PCs should be able to observe the keep and the activity around it without drawing close enough to bring attention to themselves – if they take some sensible precautions, like hugging the ground. If the characters choose to venture near after seeing the beehive of activity that surrounds the keep, the fiends will destroy them gleefully.

MUSTER (F)

After rounding the keep, the characters turn south. If they wish to give Avernus the laugh in favor of a more comfortable plane, they've got a key to find. As they approach within a half mile of the Great Avernus Road, read them the following:

You can tell that retrieving this "key" will be far more difficult than you had anticipated, for on the road the pillar described, a vast army of fiends assembles, apparently mustering for battle. There is little break in the mass of thousands of black bodies milling about on the road, and the roaring of the creatures as they sing their cacophonous battle song feels deafening.

If the characters wait long enough (perhaps five hours), they see the horde of fiends move on, marching down the Great Avernus Road toward battle. However, in the meantime, large numbers of fiends loiter near the roadside. Some practice formations, but most appear aimless. Bored PCs may choose to sneak down amid the horde to steal a brick. A body addle-coved enough to creep into a crowd of baatezu deserve whatever he gets. Unless they have a masking magic that renders them invisible to baatezu, they are effectively lost. The baatezu that tear these berks apart won't go looking for more primes, but they gladly dispatch any who come running to their companions' aid.

After four hours of waiting, the characters see a sudden flurry of activity on the road; the fliers land, and the host slams into formation. Moments later, the PCs can spy a huge figure winging out from the fortress north of the road. It lands in front of the host, snarls loudly in an unfamiliar language, and the horde of baatezu moves out, marching east along the road. Those who can fly, do, scouting ahead and guarding the rear against deserters. The great host quickly moves out of sight, into the smoky haze. The road is approachable, and now the primes are ready to give the fiends the laugh.

As soon as the PCs get within 50 yards of the road, though, they hear wings flapping. In the distance, a flight of 50 abishai hurries to catch up to the rest of the fiendish army. However, when they spy the characters stealing a brick from the Great Avernus Road, they come hot on their heels, intent on punishing the sods who would steal from the glory of the baatezu.

RED ABISHAI, A LESSER BAATEZU (10): Int average (10); AL LE; AC 1; MV 9, Fl 12 (C); HD 6+3; hp 43; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/2-5; SA poison, dive, standard baatezu abilities; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, regeneration; MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 7,000.

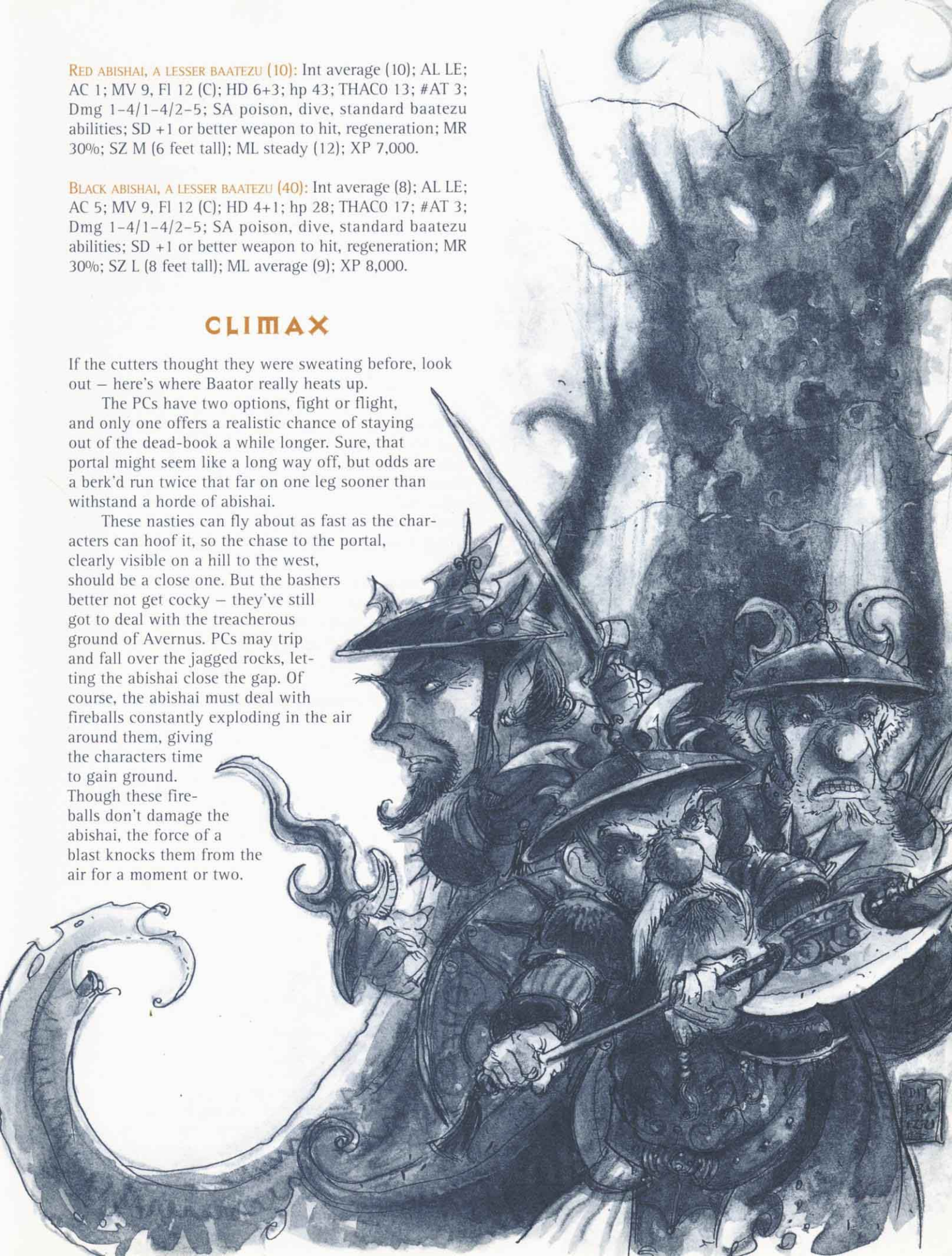
BLACK ABISHAI, A LESSER BAATEZU (40): Int average (8); AL LE; AC 5; MV 9, Fl 12 (C); HD 4+1; hp 28; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/2-5; SA poison, dive, standard baatezu abilities; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, regeneration; MR 30%; SZ L (8 feet tall); ML average (9); XP 8,000.

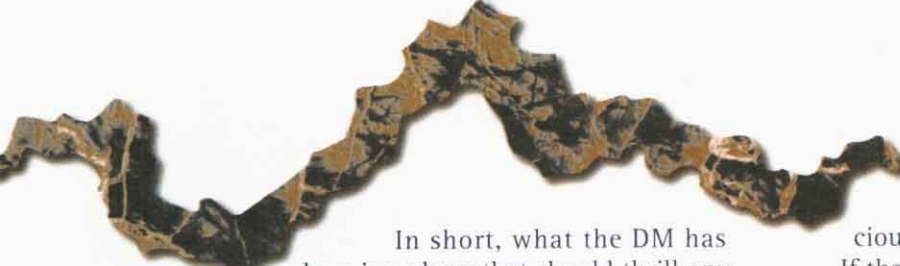
CLIMAX

If the cutters thought they were sweating before, look out — here's where Baator really heats up.

The PCs have two options, fight or flight, and only one offers a realistic chance of staying out of the dead-book a while longer. Sure, that portal might seem like a long way off, but odds are a berk'd run twice that far on one leg sooner than withstand a horde of abishai.

These nasties can fly about as fast as the characters can hoof it, so the chase to the portal, clearly visible on a hill to the west, should be a close one. But the bashers better not get cocky — they've still got to deal with the treacherous ground of Avernus. PCs may trip and fall over the jagged rocks, letting the abishai close the gap. Of course, the abishai must deal with fireballs constantly exploding in the air around them, giving the characters time to gain ground. Though these fireballs don't damage the abishai, the force of a blast knocks them from the air for a moment or two.





In short, what the DM has here is a chase that should thrill any cutter worth his salt. Remember that taste of fear? It's not something a body'd easily forget, especially not one who's found himself barreling across a pockmarked plain, wondering whether he'd rather spend the next few eons feeling his skin boil in a river of blood or toadying to a red-skinned nasty that dined on his liver the night before and now wants dessert.

The abishai come so close, the characters all but feel themselves snatched up in ruthless talons. They know they're lost. They're ready to die.

But they don't.

GA+EWAY +0 FREED0M (G)

As the PCs top the final rocky hill, they spy the portal again, their escape from Avernus. Their way is clear . . . except for a lone humanoid figure silhouetted in the evanescent glow from the torches set near the portal. Its arms are folded across its chest, its feet planted firmly. It seems to be waiting.

The characters near the portal, and the figure, with no need for further patience, drops its arms to its sides. Finally, they can make it out: a male humanoid with black hair, a stabbing gaze, and angular features. Its slight build speaks of power and self-confidence, even arrogance.

In fact, this is Ar'kle-mens, the fiend who discovered the prime mage, after using his *change self* ability. He has befriended the witch Hexla, who reported to him the fact that the PCs came through the portal. She may have thought nothing of it, but the fiend thought different. He came here to wait for the PCs, knowing it was the only way out of Avernus that they were likely to find.

As you draw near, the figure raises both hands in greeting. His hands are empty, but you can't help noticing the extraordinary length of his fingernails – fully three to four inches, at least. He appears to mean you no harm, as evidenced by his hearty welcome, which, as far as you can tell, sounds only in your head.

"What ho, travelers! I bid you good health and hope your journey so far has proved pleasant! I am Ar'kle-mens, the guardian of this portal. What can I do for you?"

The fiend defends himself if attacked, but won't offer violence to the PCs if they do him none. He maintains a light air throughout the conversation, as though unaware of the impending doom at the PCs' backs. But,

mysteriously, the abishai have slowed their pursuit and now circle above the portal.

One of the creatures lands at the foot of the slope and watches the exchange suspi-

ciously.

If the characters attempt to go through the gate, or express an interest in doing so, Ar'kle-mens tells them:

"If you wish to pass through, you must do me a small favor. Simply take this orb through the portal with you. You have my word that it will not harm you directly. Otherwise, you'll have to fight me for the privilege, and I think my friends up there would grow a bit . . . agitated to see that you meant me harm. Take the orb."

The monster won't allow the PCs through the portal until they have agreed. If they try to move around the fiend toward the portal, he attempts to take a prisoner before they can pass through. Should the PCs decline to carry the orb, Ar'kle-mens snarls at them and raises his right fist. His appearance begins to change before their eyes, reptilian gargoyle features emerging briefly as his temper flares, but he regains his composure in a moment. He growls:

"I could just as easily force this on you and throw you through the portal, but I want you to have the chance to volunteer. You can step through like true heroes rather than whipped curs. Again, what say you?"

A second refusal prompts the fiend to threaten:

"I must ask only three times before I can work my magic on you. Take the orb from me now, or die. Carry it through to the other side, and if you drop it before you arrive there, I will hunt you through all the planes of existence and hound your spirits into the River of Blood. Now, will . . . you . . . take . . . it?"

If they do not, Ar'kle-mens attacks, using the full force of his abilities to crush the party. He wants to impress the abishai horde overhead; if the PCs won't take the orb, he will make sure the others see the party suffer before the army arrives.

The player characters might accept the orb. In that case, Ar'kle-mens steps back and lets them pass through the portal. The characters must carry the item of their own accord, or else its magic is for naught, for the nature of this fiend's magic requires the willing cooperation of his victims. He hopes the orb will destroy the wards the Lady of Pain has established around the city of Sigil, which lies on the other side of the portal. Success means the City of Doors stands open to invasion from the Lower Planes and available for domination by

anyone strong enough to take it. Ar'kle-mens is letting the PCs go because he considers his device foolproof and predicts that he'll be promoted because of his genius.

'Course, his magic is not nearly powerful enough to stand against the Lady of Pain. If the powers couldn't break into her city, how could a mere abishai? The device crumbles to dust as soon as the PCs reach their destination, and Ar'kle-mens is left to explain his actions to a horde of onrushing fiends.

AR'KLE-MENS, A LESSER BAAATEZU

(PLANAR/♂ RED ABISHAI/HD 6+3/LE):

Int very (12); AC 1; MV 9, Fl 12 (C); hp 47; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/2-5; SA poison, dive, standard baatezu abilities; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, regeneration; MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 7,000.

PORTAL ⊕ SIGIL

Stepping through the portal, you feel a moment of disorientation as you leave the stench and sight of Avernus behind, but nothing as jarring as you experienced when you entered that horrible plane. You step through an archway into the bustle of a city . . . but it resembles no city you've ever seen before. Mixed in with typical humanoid citizens, fiends walk the streets. Though others give them a wider berth, no one seems to think their presence at all strange.

Sedan chairs carry creatures who can't (or won't) walk, and vendors hawk their wares frantically to passersby. The crowd seems a collection of fascinating bodies, once you've gotten past the shock of seeing fiends alongside ordinary mortals. In addition to the familiar humans, elves, and dwarves, you spy humanoids you've never seen before, and centaurlike beings with the bodies of rams. All these creatures are dressed outlandishly.

"Outrageous" would better describe the characters' own dress. Party members are covered in crusted blood up to their thighs from wading across the river, which attracts peery, hostile, and fearful looks from those in the area. A character who carried the abishai's orb finds his hands and clothing covered in the dust that is all that remains of the device.

The characters have arrived at the Bazaar in Sigil. Sure, it may take them a while to learn to talk the talk and walk the walk, but they're not the Clueless berks they were when they walked into that wizard's

mound. The rest of this ride is up to them and the DM. It's a bet they get themselves into a real blind or two before they've tumbled to the chant.

EPILOGUE

Once the PCs have emerged into Sigil, the planes open wide to them. They may choose to spend their time in the City of Doors, or they may decide to move on to other planes. If they remain, they can learn the city's ins and outs, join a faction, or partake of any of the countless activities urban planar life has to offer. Remember, none of them have ever seen Sigil before, so DMs need to give them eyes to just how confusing it is!

Regardless of their choices in this adventure, the PCs have earned the hatred of at least one baatezu. Halitsu (the spinagon sentry) will do his level best to repay them for the indignities he suffered when they escaped. 'Course, he'll be spending the next several years atoning for his failure, and several more years actively promoting himself for advancement in the baatezu ranks. By the time he's ready to deal with these mortals, they won't be the same Clueless primes he met in Avernus. But Halitsu, too, will become quite powerful through his endless self-promotion. The next time the party bumps into him, he will have advanced to a far better form, perhaps that of a hamatula or even an amnizu. (If Halitsu died in the course of this adventure, the baatezu pursuing the group may instead be Halitsu's best friend — or whatever passes for it on Baator.)

Ar'kle-mens, furious that his device failed, wracks his brains looking for the reason it didn't work. He won't consider the Lady of Pain his equal until she personally bests him, so it never occurs to him that she could have neutralized the orb. The only conclusion he can reach is that the PCs peeled him. His anger knows no bounds, for their escape cost him a serious promotion within the ranks of the baatezu, as well as centuries of face among his fellow abishai.

Speaking of the abishai, a horde of fiends does not take well to seeing prey slip between their talons. Periodically, characters might learn of a fiend interested in returning them to Baator, whether by killing them or by forcing them through a portal. Some might even lurk in disguise, offering the PCs a highly-paid "mission" to venture into Baator. This is, of course, a trap.

Tossing a glance over the shoulder now and then never hurt a berk.



CHAPTER II: THE MAZES

In which the Many seek the One, and the Heroes must retrieve a Sword lost amid myriad Threats to the Flesh.

JUST THE FACTS, BERK

NUMBER OF PCs: Up to 6.

LEVELS: 2nd to 4th.

PCS PREFERRED: Any origin (primes or planars), any class. However, at least one character must have hired on with or declared allegiance to a faction — and not one of those listed below.

FACTIONS: The Harmonium, the Fated, and the Mercykillers want the sword the party seeks; most of the other groups want to make sure this weapon doesn't fall into the hands of those factions.

SYNOPSIS: This adventure sends the party through one of the Mazes of Sigil in search of a powerful sword.

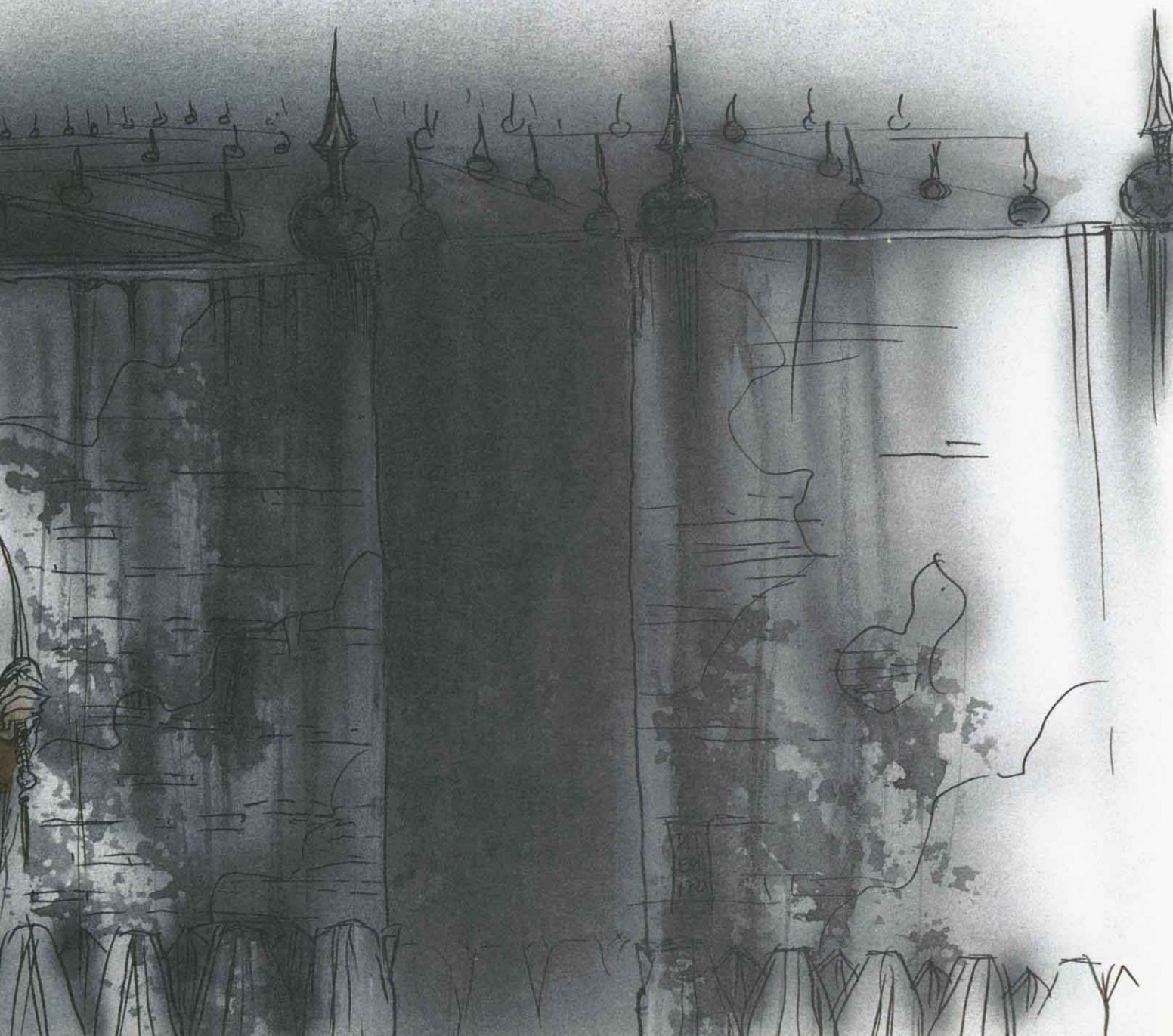


DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

Okay, blood, first things first. Read *Sigil and Beyond* in the *PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting* – in particular, the section in “Doorway to Sigil” that describes the Mazes of the City of Doors. This adventure concentrates on one of these Mazes, home to a former factol who once wielded a sword reputed to hold great power. In reality, this sword was nothing more than a *long sword* +2 with a *continual light* spell cast upon it. As it was forged in the Astral Plane, it bears only a +1 enchantment on all the Outer Planes and on the Prime Material.

The player characters must pass through two separate portals to complete this adventure. The key to the first, a gold-plated rose dipped in honey, takes the PCs into the Maze of the former factol. The key that opens the portal leading out of the Maze is one of the food dishes that mysteriously appear to nourish the former factol, Timlin. The dishes dissolve after 24 hours, so the PCs can't just grab one and hang on to it if they dawdle in the Maze.

Speaking of food, while in the Maze, the PCs can't forget to feed themselves. If the berks don't bring enough rations into the Maze to last them throughout the adventure, impending starvation ought to light a candle under their tails. The Maze manufactures food only for Timlin, which the party is welcome to try stealing. 'Course, cross-trading off a factol ain't such a good idea, especially if a body's only just arrived in Sigil.





RAKELAND '94

HERE'S +HE CHAN+

Vartus Timlin, one-time leader of the now-vanished Expansionist faction, was once one of the most powerful people in Sigil. His influence extended nearly everywhere, and even those of other factions found themselves swayed by his charm, his power, and his ability to crush them if he so desired. Timlin's intense charisma and his fiercely glowing sword had a way of convincing even the most adamant of his opponents that agreeing with him would be a right sound idea. He called the sword *Lightbringer*. Others called it doom. See, his manner of wielding the weapon told the worlds it was the weapon doing the fighting, not Timlin. Didn't take long for rumors to grow into widespread belief that the sword itself contained nearly all the factol's power.

The dark of it is that Timlin possessed such skill as a fighter that he could appear to let the sword direct him. He knew his sword was not that unusual, but he needed it to accomplish two aims: (1) to make people believe him the master of a fabulous, mysterious power, and (2) to lead opponents, believing the sword is the thing, to underestimate Timlin's personal abilities. He succeeded admirably.

Eventually, this high-up man became so full of himself, he began speaking of taking over Sigil. After deposing the Lady of Pain, Timlin said, he'd make himself the center of power. At first, people thought little of his boasts. But when he began planning his takeover in detail and keeping lists of enemies to punish when he came to power, folks started to avoid him. They knew the Lady'd see to this upstart eventually. They were right.

One day, in the midst of a planning meeting, Timlin announced his intention to take a walk to clear his head. He never returned. Some said they saw him take a turn into an alley they'd never seen before or since, while others claimed the Lady herself must have spirited him away. That's neither here nor there. The dark has turned to day, and the chant now is that Timlin languishes in the Mazes. 'Course, the Expansionists dried up pretty quickly; no basher'd want his name associated with the traitor.

The factols don't care about Timlin. What they do care about is *Lightbringer*. They know the would-be usurper had been carrying the sword when he vanished, and they figure the player characters are just the bashers to find it for them — not so powerful that they'll be able to use *Lightbringer* themselves, but canny enough to retrieve it.

SEQUENCE

1. The PCs, called before a factol representative (or various representatives, if they have joined different factions), learn they've been assigned to recover Timlin's

weapon from his personal Maze. The high-up man tells them how to enter the Maze and escape again.

2. Sigil being what it is, the identities of the bashers sent to retrieve *Lightbringer* somehow leak to the other factions. The Harmonium, the Mercykillers, and the Fated each dispatch operatives to follow the characters, in the hopes of obtaining the sword.

3. Entering the Maze, the characters begin their search for *Lightbringer*, daring to hope they can find the sword and still avoid the attention of Vartus Timlin. Members of the three factions mentioned above follow them into the Maze and begin their own searches for the weapon.

4. The PCs find the sword, and, not far away, see Timlin sleeping. They take *Lightbringer* and flee through the ever-changing Maze to find the exit portal, with the faction groups in pursuit.

5. The party leaves the Maze and delivers *Lightbringer*, when it is discovered that the sword isn't nearly the powerful weapon it was thought to be. Depending on the faction they're working for, the characters may have to prove that the sword they've handed over was actually the weapon of Vartus Timlin.

MAPPING IN +HE MAZE

While the bashers go blundering about in the shifting Maze searching for *Lightbringer*, the DM must keep track of time. Since things happen in the Maze at precisely scheduled times, and since the PCs are not the only ones searching for the sword, time is of the essence. Decide how to describe the characters' movement through the Maze, and remember also to indicate how much time goes by. Get ready for a bit of work, blood.

SPECIFIC DETAILS: First, a DM can describe every single turn of the Maze in detail, allowing the players to map it out as their characters see it. The advantage to the players making their own accurate version of the Maze is that their characters can see where they are and where they've been. The drawbacks? Well, describing the labyrinth precisely enough for mapping takes a lot



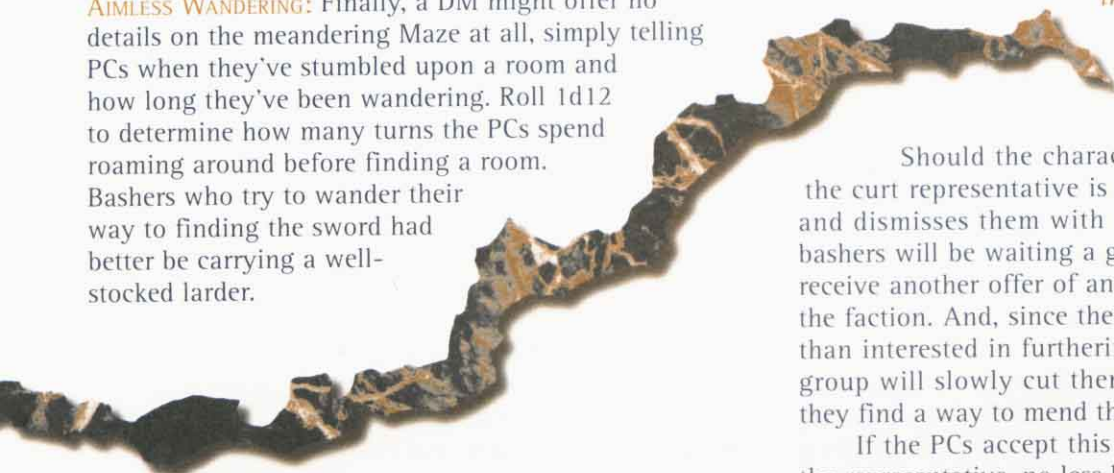
THERE'S G++ +Θ BE
AN EXI+
AROUND
HERE SΘMEPLACE.

—VARTUS
TIMLIN

of game time, and even careful players still get confused. For instance, some halls mysteriously wrap around to the opposite side of the Maze (indicated on the map on page 31 by arrows; hall A leads to hall B, B to A, etc.). The DM should remind players how much game time is passing while the characters work on their map.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: A DM can give characters a good sense of the Maze by describing its twisting, turning, claustrophobic atmosphere without detailing the direction corridors bend, the length of passages, etc. Setting the mood, plus allowing PCs to decide which way to turn at intersection after intersection, conveys the bewildering feeling of walking through the Maze. The DM can trace their progress on the map on page 31. Give regular estimates of the passing time through description. Although this process takes less time than the one above, it does put the PCs at risk of losing their way when they're trying to get out.

AIMLESS WANDERING: Finally, a DM might offer no details on the meandering Maze at all, simply telling PCs when they've stumbled upon a room and how long they've been wandering. Roll 1d12 to determine how many turns the PCs spend roaming around before finding a room. Bashers who try to wander their way to finding the sword had better be carrying a well-stocked larder.



I+ BEGINS

On returning to Sigil from an adventure or mission, the player characters find themselves immediately scragged by a member of a faction that at least one of the PCs has a connection with (preferably one of the most militant groups). This member leaves this curt message before vanishing into the crowd: "The factol wants to see you."

'Course, no berk in his right mind turns down a request from a factol; to do so would spell serious trouble. On the way across Sigil to faction headquarters (a trip that can become an adventure in itself, if the DM so desires), the PCs notice a Harmonium patrol following them. The patrol members leave them alone (that is, they don't hassle the PCs unless the characters do something blatantly illegal), but they try to tail the party members all the way to their destination. If the

PCs belong to an underground faction, they'll have to find some way to lose the pursuit – not extremely difficult in the crowded Cage.

Once the party members have made it inside, they're led into the office of a representative of the factol, for the high-up is far too busy with other matters right now to deal with them. The representative is quick and attentive, keeping the PCs standing only a moment before he pushes his paperwork aside. He greets them, bids them to be seated, and asks whether they know anything about Vartus Timlin. As they likely haven't heard much of him, the representative bluntly cuts them the chant: He was a factol who carried a powerful weapon named *Lightbringer*, but eventually was consigned to a Maze for speaking out against the Lady. That said, the planar pauses, looks at the PCs appraisingly for a moment, then speaks again.

"We want you to get us Lightbringer. Timlin doesn't need it anymore, and we've spent a lot of time and money on finding the way into his Maze – even more on discovering the way out. How soon can you leave?"

Should the characters refuse the assignment, the curt representative is done rattling his bone-box, and dismisses them with a wave. 'Course, now these bashers will be waiting a good long time before they'll receive another offer of an important commission from the faction. And, since the PCs showed themselves less than interested in furthering the faction's interest, the group will slowly cut them off from its services until they find a way to mend the rift.

If the PCs accept this mission, on the other hand, the representative, no less brusque, continues:

"Here's the dark of it. We give you a gold-plated rose dipped in honey. You head down into the Hive, past the Gatehouse. Turn left at the Inn of the Roaring Balor, and make sure you don't rattle your bone-boxes too loud about the fiends inside; they've got sharp ears. In the alley past the Balor, there's a small door set into the inn's wall. Open the door and, whoever's holding the rose, step through first to activate the portal to Timlin's Maze. The rest of you, step through right quick.

"Once you're inside, search until you find Lightbringer, then head for the courtyard in the Maze. Getting out is the trick, so remember: Do exactly as I say, even if it doesn't make sense now.

"From the courtyard, exit on the Lady's right hand. Go as far as you can, staying along the wall to your right. Once you hit a blind, no matter how small, look for a secret door, and you're out. 'Course, you've got to have the key – it's a dish. They just appear out of

nowhere holding food for Timlin. The dishes stay where they're left for one day, whether he eats or not, then they vanish the same way they appeared. Since he gets only three meals a day, always keep an eye peeled for a dish while you're inside.

"Now go. The cutter out front will give you the rose and tell you where to pick up any supplies you think you'll need."

The faction will give the PCs whatever they need, within reason. They can't get magical items, and they'll be denied expensive equipment unless they can justify their needs. After all, the faction has other interests than *Lightbringer* and can't afford to throw away good equipment on every basher's whim.

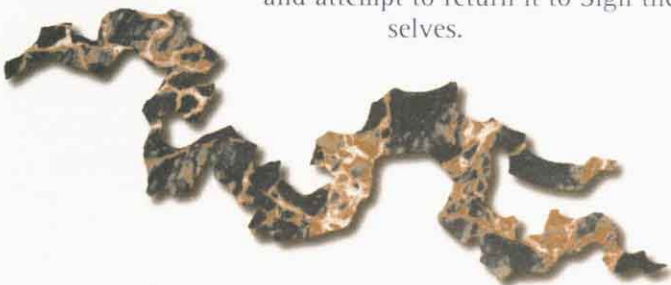
Once equipped, the characters must journey across Sigil to the Hive. The City of Doors is notorious for handing a berk a challenge just when he's got other things on his mind. If the DM thinks this trip across town is one of those times when a body finds it just ain't safe anywhere, the party might run into some trouble.

In any case, the bustling activity of the Hive makes it a cinch that the PCs won't spy the contingents that three other factions have sent to follow them. Give 'em a chance? Okay: If a berk asks whether they're being followed, and if he makes a Wisdom check with a -12 penalty, he spots their tails but does not recognize them. These contingents will not offer help if the PCs fall under attack, but, if the characters get themselves lost, they'll come to loot the bodies and chase away other jackals. Nice bunch of cutters, these.

BUILD-UP

Assuming the characters make it through the crowds of the Hive and past the Inn of the Roaring Bolor intact, they cross through the portal into Timlin's Maze.

This Maze offers four possible encounters for the PCs: three with warriors of the other factions seeking the sword, and one with Vartus Timlin himself. These encounters can happen at any time, but it's a bet Timlin won't fight the bashers unless they threaten him first. The faction warriors following the characters either leave them alone or parley with them on friendly terms — 'cept if they spy that the PCs have *Lightbringer*. Then, odds are they'll attack to capture the sword and attempt to return it to Sigil themselves.



VAR+US TIMLIN

Male Human
18th-level Warrior
Neutral Expansionist (defunct)

STR 20 (+3,+8)	INT 16	HP 105
DEX 18 (+2,-4)	WIS 14	AC 6
CON 15 (+1)	CHA 18	MV 12

THACO: 3 (+6 with long sword, +3 with dagger, +2 with bow)

#AT: 5/2 (log sword, dagger), 2 (bow)

DMG: 1d8+11 (*Lightbringer*), 1d4+10 (dagger), 1d8 (bow)

EQUIPMENT: *Lightbringer* (a long sword +2 {+1}), brace of seven daggers, short bow, quiver of 20 arrows.



Timlin is a tall man, about 6 feet, 3 inches, and he weighs in at 250 lbs. His full head of chestnut hair falls to his shoulders. Above his thick beard and mustache, his bright green eyes twinkle. The man, about 40, always carries his sword and likes dressing in black clothing, since it makes him appear more sinister. His big, bearlike appearance makes some think him a little short on brains.

He prefers it this way. By concealing his true wit and combat skills, he gives himself a secret advantage over an opponent. Everything he does reflects his facade. He acts clumsy in combat and in everyday life, but actually possesses the reflexes of a cat. He acts as if *Lightbringer* controls him in combat, when his sword really bears only a mild enchantment.

If he spies or hears the PCs, he can guess why they have entered his Maze. He wanders their way, acting befuddled and foolish long enough for them to dismiss him as a threat. When the PCs take *Lightbringer*, he pretends not to notice, but follows them stealthily, hoping they'll lead him to the portal that will allow him to escape and reclaim his power in Sigil.

Though he is an excellent warrior, the time he's spent in the Maze's chill climate (about 50 degrees) has dulled his reflexes, despite regular exercise. Timlin suffers a -3 penalty to attack rolls in the first five rounds of any combat. Then, once he's warmed up again, he suddenly explodes into a blur of motion. Unless his enemies can get away in the first few rounds, when he's still moving slowly, Timlin surely will see them put in the dead-book.

TIMLIN'S DAILY SCHEDULE: The bashers in Sigil base their timekeeping on hours relative to the peak hour of light.

The peak is roughly equivalent to noon on a prime world; the six brightest hours in the City of Doors are the three hours before peak (BP) and the three hours after peak (AP). For the primes out there, this means 2 BP corresponds to 10 AM, and 2 AP is the same as 2 PM. "Midnight" in Sigil is called *antipeak*.

The schedule below tells the DM where the party normally can expect to find Timlin.

8 AP TO 8 BP: Sleeping in his room.

8 TO 7 BP: Searching for his breakfast bowl and eating. He usually eats in his bedroom.

7 TO 5 BP: Performing calisthenics to keep loose and conditioned.

5 BP TO PEAK: Searching for any hidden doors that might lead to portals. He always marks where he has searched.

PEAK TO 1 AP: Eating lunch near the portal that brings visitors into his Maze.

1 TO 3 AP: Investigating around the portal that brought him to the Maze, just to make sure no method of returning via this portal has eluded him.

3 TO 4 AP: Shouting apologies or curses to the Lady (depending on his mood), in the courtyard.

4 TO 6 AP: Scouring the Maze again for hidden doors. He must put new marks on the walls, as the ones he made in the morning have vanished.

6 TO 7 AP: Eating his dinner in the courtyard.

7 TO 8 AP: Doing post-dinner calisthenics, then finding his way back to his room.



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

The schedule below *assumes the PCs are ineffective in finding Timlin and the sword*. Their actions could well change the course of the events below.

THE FIRST DAY

1 BP: The PCs arrive in the Maze.

1:30 AP: The Harmonium shows up, after finding the necessary key.

2 AP: The Fated arrive, having taken a little longer to get a key.

2:15 AP: The Mercykillers make their appearance, finally procuring a key and racing to the portal.

7 AP: The Harmonium encounters Timlin and are decimated.

8 AP: Timlin sleeps.

THE SECOND DAY

1 BP: The Fated encounter Timlin and leave unscathed. They spend the rest of their time looking for the exit, having given the prisoner the chant he needs to escape. The Mercykillers discover the exit (they probably knew its location when they arrived) and settle down there to wait for the PCs.

10 AP: Without PC intervention, two Mercykillers exploring the Maze discover Timlin sleeping and steal *Lightbringer*.

11 BP: The Mercykillers all reach the exit portal and vanish through it, bringing *Lightbringer* to Sigil. Timlin follows close on their heels, but does not make it through the portal. He storms over to the PCs, demanding they give him the secret of the key or else take him through themselves.

FAC+I@NAL ENC@UN+ERS

Three factions each sent six operatives in after the PCs. They want the sword for the same reason the party's faction wants it: to gain the power that made Timlin seem invulnerable. 'Course, they all approach this goal using quite different methods.

THE HARMONIUM: The leader of the Harmonium contingent, Karnyne, resembles most members of his faction in that he remains rigid in his viewpoint, not likely to negotiate with the PCs. His faction's power makes him

arrogant, and he doesn't hesitate to show it. He hopes the Harmonium's reputation will be enough to cow the party; if that doesn't work, he'll find himself at something of a loss. Still, this leatherhead does

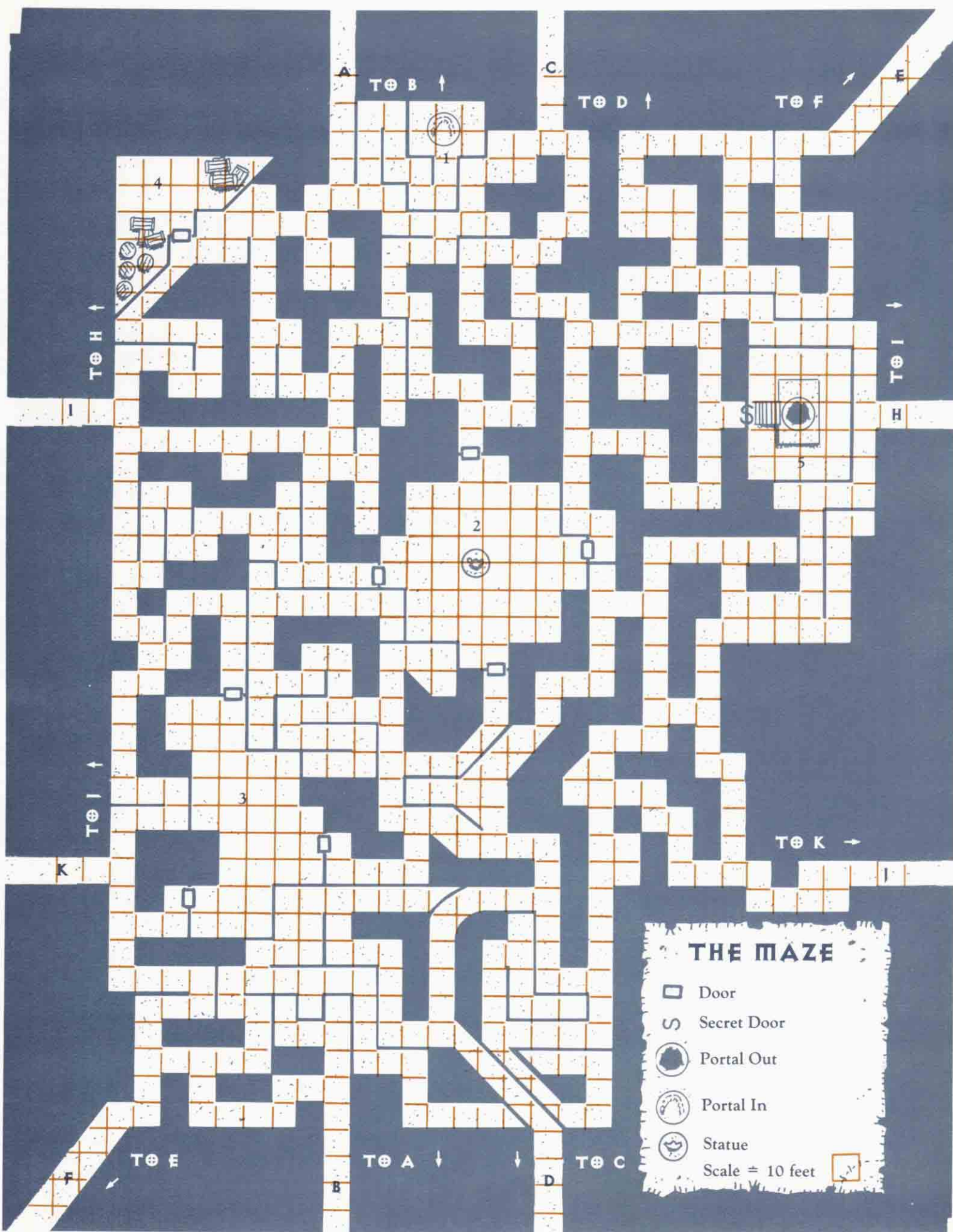
realize that the small army of killers at his back probably gives him the upper hand in a fight. He plans to chase the PCs around the Maze until either they hand over the weapon or lead his warriors to it. He won't kill the PCs unless he has to, preferring to let them live to spread the word about the fearsome abilities of the Harmonium.

KARNYNE (PLANAR/♂ HUMAN/P3/HARMONIUM/LN):

Int very (11); AC 4; MV 12; hp 19; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (mace); SA spells; SZ M (5 feet, 5 inches tall); ML champion (15); XP 120.

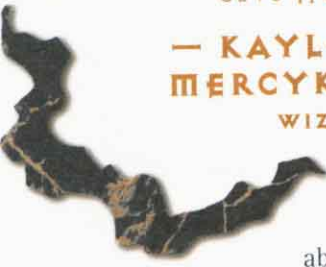
Spells: 1st level — *bless*, *cure light wounds*; 2nd level — *hold person*.

HARMONIUM WARRIOR (5): Int average (9); AL LN; AC 6; MV 12; F2; hp 18, 16, 14, 13, 13; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8 (broad sword); SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 35.



ALL RIGHT, BERK.
HAND OVER
THE SWORD
AND NONE
GETS HURT.

— KAYLE,
MERCYKILLER
WIZARD



THE FATED: Of those leading the factions' attempts to retrieve the sword, Rendela of the Fated seems the most reasonable. She acts friendly and personable to the characters, not using force to

deprive them of *Lightbringer* (or information) unless it becomes apparent the sword is about to slip from her grasp for good.

In that event, she seizes the moment — and whatever else she can get her hands on. But she will not act until she is certain she can win the day.

Since she believes that her cause serves the greatest good in the planes, Rendela has no qualms about sacrificing a few feelings, or even lives, if good triumphs. She does not rely on her underlings, having learned, as a tiefling, it's best to trust only a body's own judgment and abilities.

RENDELA (PLANAR/♀ TIEFLING/F2/FATED/NG): Int very (12); AC 4; MV 15; hp 22; THACO 19 (+1 for specialization, +1 for Strength); #AT 2; Dmg 1-8+3/1-8+3; SA specialized in long sword; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML champion (16); XP 65.

FATED WARRIOR (5): Int average (9); AC 7; MV 12; F2; hp 20, 19, 15, 12, 12; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (battle axe); SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (11); XP 35.

THE MERCYKILLERS: Kayle, leading the Mercykiller contingent, is ambitious, but he knows he has to play by the rules when folks are watching. He feels that laws are for obeying and creating, not breaking. In fact, he has the PCs pegged as possible lawbreakers, and is prepared to pounce on them if they make the slightest wrong move. He acts more as a guardian of laws while in the Maze but will attempt to seize *Lightbringer* if he sees the PCs escaping with it. He plans to find the exit portal immediately and wait there for the player characters to come by with the sword.

After finding the exit, he sends two of the weaker Mercykillers back into the Maze to find a dish and, incidentally, *Lightbringer*. (If the PCs do not intervene or find the sword within three days, it's a cinch the Mercykillers pinch it from the sleeping Timlin.) Kayle hopes the PCs will be less than fresh by the time they reach the exit, so he can negotiate the weapon from them. If that doesn't work, he'll just have to force it from their dead fingers. His favorite tactic is to cast *shocking grasp* through his copper dagger and put them both to use at the same time.

KAYLE (PRIME/♂ HALF-ELF/W3/MERCYKILLER/LN): Int high (13); AC 9; MV 12; hp 9; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4 (dagger); SZ M (5 feet, 10 inches tall); ML steady (11); XP 120.

Spells: 1st level — *magic missile*, *shocking grasp*; 2nd level — *web*.

MERCYKILLER WARRIOR (5): Int average (9); AC 4; MV 12; F2; hp 19, 16, 16, 12, 9; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (hand axe); SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 35.

THE WAY IN (1)

The portal deposits the PCs in room 1 (see map on previous page). A metal bowl sits just to the left of the portal, and characters that turn to look around the room can easily see it.

COURTYARD (2)

Characters walking along the Maze eventually find a door of stout wood bound with iron bands. If PCs try it, it swings open on noiseless hinges, revealing a courtyard beyond. By far the most impressive feature of this area is the huge statue of the Lady of Pain in the middle of the courtyard. Carved from the purest white marble, it expresses both the beauty of the Lady and the harshness of her justice. She stands with her arms spread wide, facing the door the characters opened, with another door behind her. Both her outstretched arms point toward doors as well. However, the statue is far from flawless. In fact, chunks of stone lie scattered about the floor around the base of the statue, as if someone had been hacking angrily at the marble figure.

As you look, the pieces of marble chipped from the statue roll back toward its base, where they are absorbed into the stone. Moments later, the pieces missing from the Lady's statue flesh themselves out, until the statue is once again unblemished.

At the base of the statue, on the south side of the yard, there lies another food bowl. If the PCs feel hungry for a fight with the other factions, this is a good place for it, as the courtyard contains plenty of room to spread out and maneuver. It's also a fine place to rest, for all four ways into the room are closely watched. This fact is one reason the Fated chose the courtyard to rest while searching for the sword and exit.

TIMLIN'S ROOM (3)

The chamber where the Maze's prisoner sleeps holds only a small sleeping pallet, a blanket, a change of clothes, and a jug of water. If the PCs look under the pallet, they find a long sword with the word "*Light-*

bringer" carved into the side. It looks like a cheap sword, but its markings seem to make it the sword the PCs seek. Actually, this is a dupe; *Lightbringer* is never far from Timlin's side. The sword hidden here under the pallet Timlin took from some sod who "accidentally" wandered into the Maze.

STORES (4)

The body of a berk who tried to steal *Lightbringer* from Timlin a long time ago hangs from a hook in this cold room. When her corpse vanished from where Timlin had tossed the body, he assumed it'd been absorbed into the floor of the Maze. In reality, a dabus brought the body here, preparing to dump it in the Deep Ethereal. If any PCs or NPCs die during the course of the adventure, their bodies wind up here, too, unless other characters try to carry them. Since the NPCs won't drag bodies along, all of their slain will end up here eventually.

CLIMAX

Once the PCs want (or need) to leave, they can use the directions their faction's representative gave them to find their way from the courtyard to the exit portal.

THE WAY OUT (5)

Eventually, the bashers spy a tiny passageway that seems to end abruptly: the blind the faction representative mentioned. They should have little difficulty finding the secret door they were told about.

A set of stairs leads up to a dais. The portal, atop the dais, stands about 10 feet tall, with no visible means of support. Its two columns are carved out of marble and wrapped with oak bands. There is no door between the columns. Its interior glows with a faint, cloudy blue light.

One look at that blue light tells bashers worth their salt that there's magic at work in this portal. If the PCs have a dish to serve as a key, they can activate the portal and escape easily. If they don't, the portal just ain't going to work for them.

It's a bet Kayle and three Mercykillers await the PCs with a greeting. If the adventurers took more than three hours (game time) to reach this point, Kayle will have had plenty of time to set up camp. One of the Mercykillers watches the secret door, while the other two remain on relaxed duty. (That is, they're off duty, but ready to spring to action the moment they're needed.)

EPILOGUE

The majority of options to end the scenario assume the PCs succeeded in retrieving the weapon from Timlin. 'Course, they might have been unable to find the sword, seen another faction retrieve it, or been intimidated into flight by the ex-factol, who still holds *Lightbringer*. In this case, the faction that originally sent the PCs on the quest for the weapon likely will feel a little unhappy at the prospect of someone else running around wielding such a marvel. Eventually, word'll get out that the sword is not nearly as special as Timlin made it out to be, but the PCs likely will have been relegated to less-than-pleasant faction duties until this piece of information comes out.

'Course, the factions that saw *Lightbringer* slip from their fingers will feel a little irritated at their own failing. Mere irritation won't prompt them to seek revenge on the PCs, though the DM might arrange instances when Harmonium members "accidentally" scrag the wrong berks, when the Fated's thugs accost them, or when they find themselves spending a night in the Prison on a mistake. This judgment, of course, becomes tempered when folks learn *Lightbringer* is not as powerful as rumored.

In the course of the adventure, Timlin may escape from the Maze, in which case he will feel indebted toward the PCs. He'll do his level best to make sure he pays them back with a favor in the future. Even if he forced them to lead him from the Maze, he knows he wouldn't be free if they hadn't shown him the portal and its key.

Finally, the leaders of the factions that sent parties after the PCs likely won't be too happy with adventurers who managed to retrieve the sword. After all, a bunch of berks can't shame the factols in the eyes of their faction members and all of Sigil. It's a cinch there ain't too much advancement potential for folks who can't successfully complete even a simple operation like this. The PCs may well see surviving NPCs from these contingents later in their careers and may find themselves asked to pay the music.

CHAPTER III: LOVE LETTER

Wherein the Heroes learn that the
Coils of Love wrap 'round Fiends and
Friends alike, and may undertake to aid
in a secret Correspondence.

JUST THE FACTS, BERK

NUMBER OF PCs: Up to 6.

LEVELS: Any.

PCs PREFERRED: Planars.

FACTIONS: None. (The factions are not too interested in the personal dealings of individual tanar'ri and baatezu.)

SYNOPSIS: A baatezu hires the party to deliver a love letter to a tanar'ri.

BU+. SØF+!
WHA+ LIGH+ THROUGH
YØNDER WINDØW BREAKS?
IT IS THE ABYSS
AND CHIRYN IS THE SUN!

— A SMIT+EN
BAA+EZU

⊕ KAS'RARLIN,
KAS'RARLIN,
WHEREFØRE ART+ THØU,
KAS'RARLIN?

— A LØVES+RUCK
+ANAR'RI

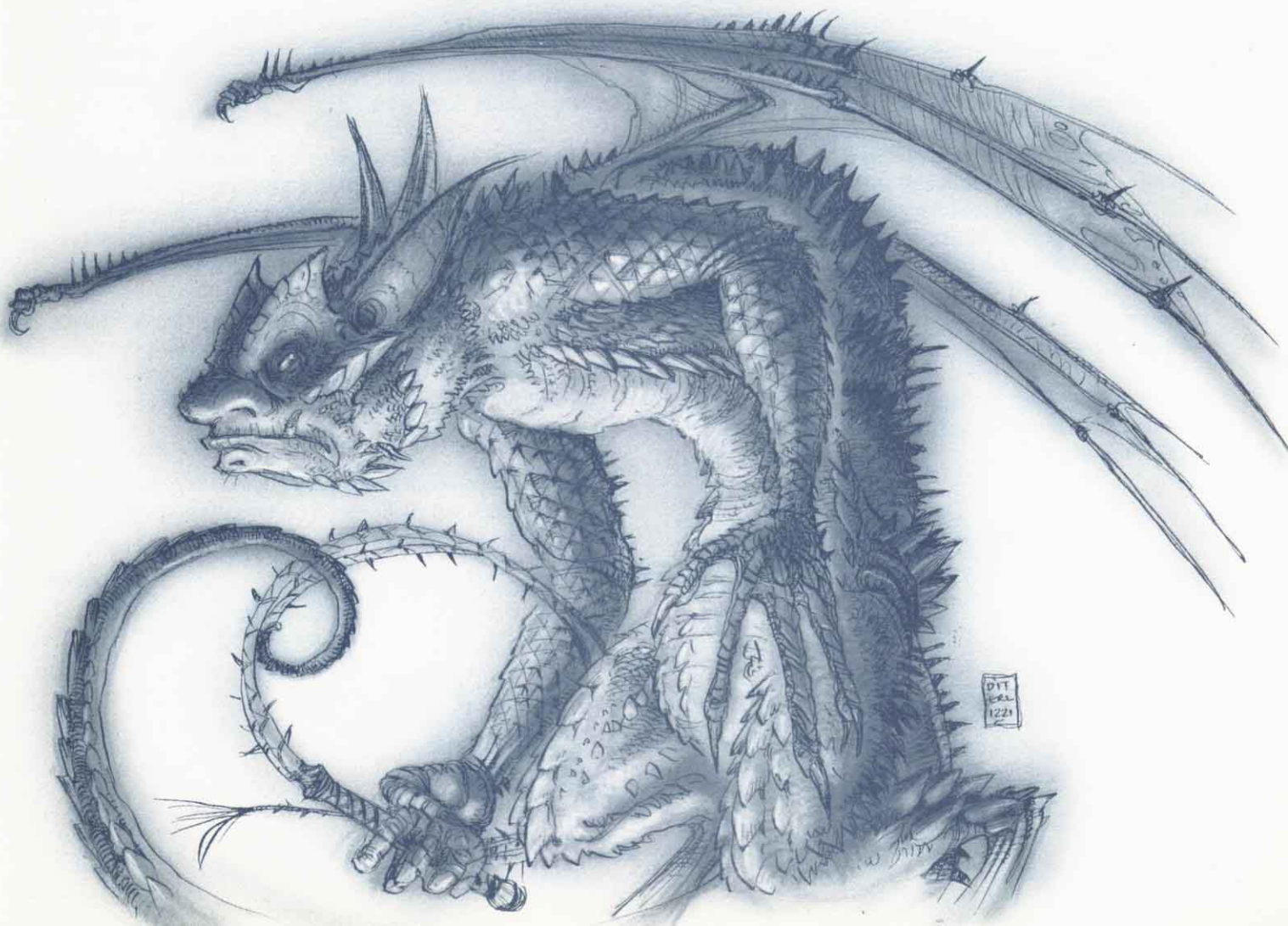


DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

The player characters are approached by a gentleman who wishes them to deliver a note to his beloved, who lives far across the planes. He says he has a device that will transport them close to her home, but he dares not use it himself – the families of the two lovers have been locked in a feud for centuries.

Not an unusual situation, berk? Well, the “gentleman” who has approached the PCs is a baatezu. This unfortunate fiend has fallen in love with a succubus, who oddly enough, fell right back. Such a union is strictly off-limits in the Lower Planes, since most tanar’ri and baatezu have an inherent racial hatred of each other. So, the two must carry out their affair in secret. In the planes, love ain’t a bit easier than in the Prime.

This adventure can suit characters of any level, with a bit of work. If it’s being run for low-level characters (1st to 4th), the PCs are the baatezu’s first-ever recruits to deliver a message to his love. Parties of higher-level characters (5th to 8th) face greater risk: The communication between the lovers has been going on a while, and other tanar’ri and baatezu want it to stop. At the highest levels (9th and up), characters must face pit fiends or balors, who step in to ensure the secret affair between the two fiends ends.



HERE'S +HE CHAN+

Once upon a time, centuries ago, a cornugon baatezu named Kas'rarlin was conducting a covert raid through the Abyss. He and his party slew most of the tanar'ri they came across, finally reaching a small tower. They beat the door down, slaughtered the defenders, and breached the last defenses to reach the heart of the tower. All that remained of the raiding party was Kas'rarlin and one other cornugon. Weary and bedraggled, they still managed to annihilate the last defenders.

Suddenly, standing before them was a vision of beauty. Chiryn, the resident of the tower and a succubus of fairly high standing, had adopted her most alluring form to appeal for mercy from the two invaders. Kas'rarlin could only stare at her in bedazzlement, while thoughts of a more sinister nature raced through the mind of his companion. When this malevolent being stepped forward to put his thoughts into actions, Kas'rarlin drove his spear through his companion's back and into his heart. Thus began the secret tryst between baatezu and succubus, a match that should never have been.

Eventually, the two realized their fundamental differences were too great to overcome. One had a need for structure and order, and betrayal came too easily to the other. Each new day, both wondered whether this day would bring their destruction — they knew from the very beginning that their relationship was forbidden. Their elders would have destroyed them both if the chant ever picked up word of this unholy marriage.

Reluctantly, the two parted, but Kas'rarlin vowed to send one letter a year to her at her home. Since the lawful baatezu can't enter the chaos of the Abyss with impunity, he promised to make special arrangements to send the missives and told her to use the same means to return messages. Because bashers constantly pass through the Abyss, he informed Chiryn, he would use them as couriers. If she perfumed her responses with her scent, he would know the letters he received back were genuine articles.

NOTE: The following background applies only to PCs of high enough level to desire challenges from tough tanar'ri opponents.

As years passed in the eternal plane of the Abyss, higher powers began to notice a veritable flow of bashers seeking the tower of the succubus Chiryn. They questioned her gently but firmly, but could obtain no answers; she protested her complete innocence. Though the higher powers suspected otherwise, they couldn't "question" her as they would a less valuable tanar'ri. Chiryn was one of their best agents on the Prime Material Plane; few other succubi could match her either in a fight or in sheer cunning. Thus, the higher tanar'ri forced themselves to make do with merely setting a watch on her tower, to intercept the next visitors and seize any evidence of her suspected wrongdoing.

SEQUENCE*

1. The characters are approached by Kas'rarlin, in disguise, who seeks couriers to deliver his first (or latest) missive to Chiryn. Optimally, they accept.
2. The fiend gives them a one-way device that lets them reach the Plain of Infinite Portals, the first layer of the Abyssal plane, on which Chiryn resides. Their destination should surprise these cutters — who'd expect anyone to be in correspondence with a tanar'ri?
3. The PCs find their way through the Abyss to the tower of Chiryn. If they are low in level, they should have little trouble. The higher their level, the greater the likelihood of danger, and the greater the challenge when trouble does arise.
4. The PCs enter the tower but must overcome its defenses to reach Chiryn and give her the note. Only then do they discover she is a succubus. They will have to be polite to get a return letter specially scented so Kas'rarlin knows the characters fulfilled their mission.
5. They may then use a portal hidden in Chiryn's tower to return to the cornugon. When they present the note, he examines it to determine whether the PCs have acted honorably. If he whiffs the tell-tale aroma, he rewards them.

- * DMs should watch for notes throughout this chapter that offer additional challenges for mid- to high-level player characters.



G⊕⊕D NIGH+,
G⊕⊕D NIGH+! PAR+ING IS
SUCH SWEET S⊕RR⊕W. . . .

— TENDER CLOSING +⊕
KAS'RARLIN'S LE++ER



I+ BEGINS

Tales of the bashers' recent adventure have begun to make the chant in Sigil – though none of them's a blood, certain parties have noticed their presence.

As they're breaking their fast one day, a tall, cloaked man slides into a seat opposite them. His hood is pulled low over his eyes, hiding most of his features. He looks furtively around the inn for a moment, then seems to come to a resolution.

In low, cultured tones, the stranger speaks. "I understand you solve problems, for a price. My problem is this: I feel a deep attraction for a charming lady, and she feels similarly for me. Unfortunately, our respective families have been at war for such a long time, it seems the feud has lasted nearly as long as the Blood War!"

I would like to enlist you to deliver a message to my beloved, by whatever means, fair or foul. I care not for her family, but only for her. I will reward you most handsomely if you give her my note and return a response to me posthaste. If you do accept, I must insist you treat the lady with respect and deference, for though she is of a flighty disposition, she is very sensitive."

The gentleman promises to reward low-level PCs with a magical item and 250 gp. Midlevel characters would get two magical items and 2,000 gp, and to high-level characters, he offers four magical items and 5,000 gp. However, he won't give the characters any of the jink in advance, stating that far too many folks'd just try to peel him.

The baatezu will not remove his hood, even though he has used his *change self* ability to ensure that no one can see his true form. The only way he'll remove his hood is if the PCs absolutely refuse to go on the mission without seeing his face. He appears to be an ordinary human, except that his right eye is milky white and oozing. As soon as the characters get a good look at his features, he replaces the hood, as if in shame.

When he and the bashers have agreed on terms, the man gives them a small crystal that, he says, will deposit them a short distance from the home of his beloved. (He tells them that rapping it against a stone activates its magic.) Unfortunately, wards set by her family prevent him from sending them directly to her. However, he and his love have a matched set of *seeker stones* (see appendix). He gives the PCs his *stone*, telling them it will lead them right to her. (The *stone* remains inert until after they have activated the travel crystal.) He also suggests that they bring silver and cold-iron weapons, for the wilderness near his beloved's home is full of dangerous, possibly supernatural, creatures.

A berk that tries to question him finds him less than interested in rattling his bone-box. He gives a few

vague responses, but never tells them his name, the name of his love, or the party's destination. ("A matter of safety . . . our families, you know.")

Finally, the gentleman says he'll be waiting for the group in this inn every night until midnight for two weeks. If they haven't returned by then, he'll assume they failed in their quest and will send someone else. (It's a bet the cutters won't get their jink if they don't return in the time he's allotted.) Wishing them luck, he hands them a folded, sealed letter, then steps from the table and leaves the inn.

If the PCs pursue him from the tavern, he'll reach the street before them. Bursting from the tavern, the characters see someone in a black hooded cloak moving quickly away from them. The figure does not answer their calls, and when they touch the person's arm, a short cornugon (an approximation of Kas'rarlin's true form) turns and grimaces at them angrily. This should discourage the PCs from looking further for their mysterious employer.

The bashers now have two weeks to deliver the message. Once they activate the crystal, their ride begins.

KAS'RARLIN, A GREATER BAATEZU

(PLANAR/♂ CORNUGON/HD 10/LE): Int exceptional (16); AC -2; MV 9, Fl 18 (C); hp 73; THACO 11; #AT 4 or 1+ weapon; Dmg 1-4/1-4/2-5/1-3 or 1-3 and weapon+6 (Strength); SA fear, wounding, stun; SD regeneration, +2 weapon or better to hit, standard baatezu abilities; MR 50%; SZ L (9 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 10,000.



BUILD-UP

Once the bashers activate the crystal, there's no turning back:

A lattice of light surrounds you and your companions, enmeshing you in its glow. Suddenly, you find yourself sealed within a room of crystal. Nightmare landscapes rush by outside, each flashing past so quickly you aren't really sure of what you've seen.

HIGH-LEVEL PCs: At the same time high-level characters activate the device, they see several baatezu sprinting toward them. Unless the characters figure out a way to repel them, three barbazu and one erinyes spring into the effect of the crystal's spell and come along for the ride.

Inside the crystal room, the erinyes questions the bashers harshly regarding the nature of their mission: Who sent them? Where are they going? Why are they going? What are their orders when they arrive? She also asks about their employer, for she has been sent to investigate word that a baatezu might be communicating with "the other side." If she finds the group's answers unsatisfactory (that is, if she thinks the bashers're lying) she orders the barbazu to attack and leaps into the fray herself.

ERINYES, A LESSER BAATEZU: Int high (13); AC 2; MV 12, Fl 21 (C); HD 6+6; hp 50; THACO 13; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA *charm, fear, rope of entanglement*; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 7,000.

BARBAZU, A LESSER BAATEZU (3): Int low (6); AC 3; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 49, 47, 43; THACO 13; #AT 3 or 1 (weapon); Dmg 1-2/1-2/1-8 or 2-12 (weapon); SA *glaiive, disease, battle frenzy*; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (11); XP 6,000.

The erinyes holds the barbazu back if the party's answers satisfy her. But that's neither here nor there;

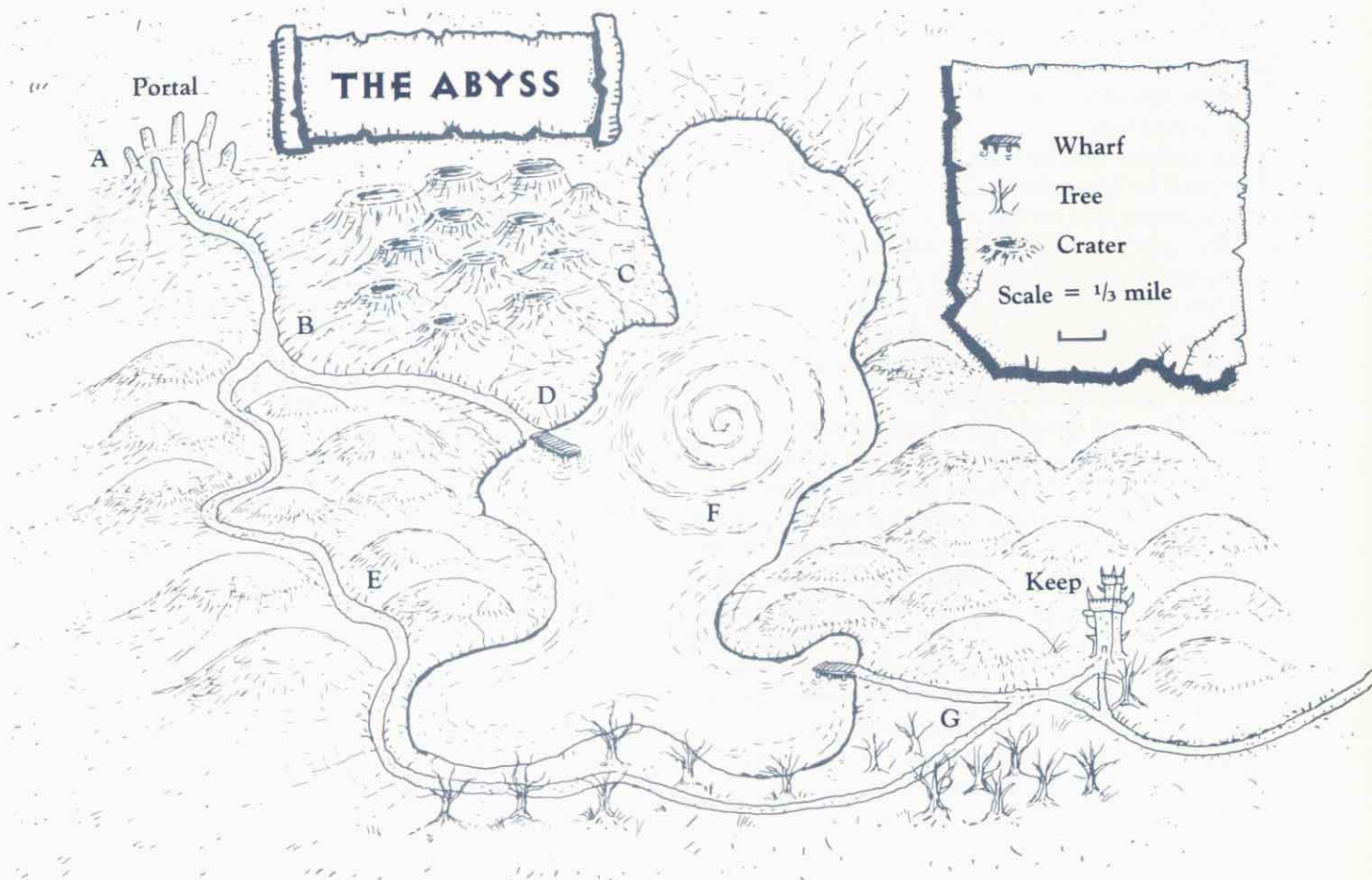
since she cannot stop the transit once it has begun, the PCs have got some fiendish traveling companions. Explaining that the walls around them are the interior of the crystal, the erinyes adds that the device will release them once they reach their destination.

ARRIVAL (A)

Eventually, the buffeting motion of the crystalline room slows and comes to a halt. The faceted walls unfold around you and dissolve into powder on the ground.

Being outside the crystal again isn't as much of a relief as the bashers had hoped when they get a good look around them.

The sky is a dull red, colored by a huge sun. The land seems mostly flat except for clusters of craters dotting the dusty expanse. A few hills lie a few miles off to your right, and a lake of black, evil-looking water is visible straight ahead. A trail tramped through the dirt leads directly from your landing point toward the hills. No sound from any living creature breaks the eerie quiet — not even the squawk of a carrion-eater.



HIGH-LEVEL PCs: The erinyes takes her barbazu and begins looking for a way out; it would not do for them to be caught in enemy territory. She won't accompany the characters on their mission, instead hoping to head home and report to her superiors her belief that Kas'rarlin is in fact a traitor. The DM determines whether she and her crew make it back to Baator. If they do, the PCs might be forced to defend Kas'rarlin before they can claim their reward from him.

The PCs begin facing southeast. However, these berks don't know which way they're facing, unless they have a method of determining compass directions on this plane.

At this spot, Kas'rarlin arrived with his invasion forces, baatezu feet stomping the path into the dust of the chaotic Abyss. All along this trail, the PCs spy rotting bodies of the dead baatezu, slain by defending tanar'ri. Small scavengers that seem all tooth and claw are feeding on the corpses, but they won't hurt the bashers; these beasts have learned a healthy respect for anything in the Abyss that walks and will flee from anyone approaching them. If the PCs search the bodies of the tanar'ri along the way, they won't find any magical items, but they do have a 10% chance per body searched (not cumulative) of finding a weapon wrought of silver or of cold-forged iron.

A berk proficient in planar lore might recognize that the PCs stand on the Plain of Infinite Portals, the first layer of the Abyss. But none of them is leather-headed enough to miss the miasma of evil that shrouds the place. If the characters wonder whether they have found the right place and think to check their half of the *seeker stones*, they see that a wan arrow within the stone points down the trail. The other half of the *seeker stones* lies within range!

CROSSROADS (B)

After traveling along the path for a ways, the characters notice a fork ahead. Something knobby sits atop a stick planted in the ground where the trail splits. Once they get closer, the DM should read the following:

As you reach the fork, you realize that the knobby object is a skull mounted atop a pike! The skull seems human, or at least humanoid. The pike pierces the dome of the skull, and some dark fluid oozes from the cracked bone. Drawing nearer, you see the eyes of the skull light up with an unholy fire, throwing a weird greenish radiance across the path. The mouth of the skull begins working; the long-unused joints squeal as this bone-box opens and closes slowly. Suddenly, the skull bursts into inane chatter, filling the air with clacking nonsense.

After a moment, it

ceases its yammering and turns its lambent eyes upon you. The skull asks, "Which way are you going to take? The road on my left hand — of course, I don't have a left hand anymore, but I think you know what I mean. . . . Where was I? Oh, yes. The road on the left leads through hills and danger worse than you've ever seen. Really!"

"Of course, if you go to the right, and take the water route, well, let's just say you stand an extremely good chance of spending the rest of your mortal existences (and even longer) ruing that decision. On the other hand, the left road is really dangerous. But the right is, too. Oh, decisions, decisions! I just don't know what to tell you. Well, I guess the only way to find which goes to what is to look for it yourselves. However, I'd be pleased to explain what's what and where's where! Just ask!"

The skull, of course, is nothing more than a device set to confuse and perhaps scare travelers. It's a petitioner, stuck in this pathetic form, and it won't give the bashers a single truthful answer — the addle-coved cap don't know any! 'Course, it's unwilling to admit this, so it passes its existence harrying passersby. The skull continues to chatter even after the PCs have moved farther along the trail, finally howling for them to come back and talk to it.

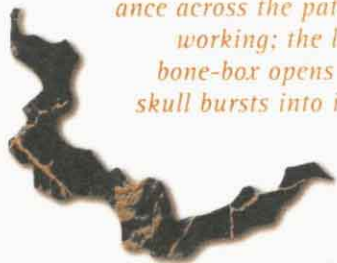
Here's the dark of the skull: Tanar'ri use its eyes to keep a watch on those who pass by this road. When it spies intruders coming through, the skull telepathically warns any tanar'ri that might be keeping watch on the succubus in her tower. If the PCs pull the pike from the ground, the skull ceases speaking and the glow from its eyes fades, but it can still transmit images to its masters. The only way to rid it of this ability is to smash the skull to tiny pieces.

If the party checks the *seeker stone*, the arrow points between the two roads, though it indicates a path marginally more to the left than the right. Either branch will take them to the tower.

CRA+ERS (C)

The pocks in the landscape bubble with various disgusting liquids: organic fluids, lava, filthy water, and other unnameable substances. A berk with the sense he was born with ought to avoid these rocky soup bowls, but if the PCs descend into a deep one, they eventually can find portals to the other layers of the Abyss. What happens then is entirely at the DM's discretion. A Dungeon Master whose party enters these craters can read more about these infernal regions in the *Planes of Chaos* boxed set.

HIGH-LEVEL PCs: Tanar'ri from the lower Abyssal layers may spring up from the portals to attack the characters as they pass by.



WHARF (D)

A dock of rotted, black wood projects out over the black and still waters of the lake, which the bashers reach from the *left* trail (despite what the skull said). A small rowboat attached to the end of the wharf looks to be in poor condition, but still seaworthy. It can hold up to seven people in cramped quarters, with the water line on the hull just inches below the top, but sinks immediately with more than seven passengers. Sudden movement can swamp the boat; the DM may require Dexterity checks throughout a boat trip, to see if the PCs can recover from any sudden moves. Low-level characters should have little trouble crossing the lake – except for the maelstrom (see area F, below). However, mid- and high-level characters may encounter the denizens of the lake.

The slightly caustic water causes 1d4 points of damage for each round a player stays immersed. It burns on contact and can eat through nearly any material within 2d10 rounds (unless it is enchanted or treated against acid). In pockets of greater acid content, the lake water causes up to 1d8 points of damage a round and can eat through material in 1d4 rounds.



The good news: The boat (and its two paddles), specially

treated against the acid, can withstand the waters of the lake. The bad news: It's got a 50% chance per turn of springing a leak. If it leaks constantly for more than six rounds, the acid begins to eat away at the inside of the boat. Unless the bashers can bail the water, it causes the boat to founder 1d12 rounds later.

A body can cross the lake in the rowboat in approximately 30 minutes. Each additional person increases the travel time five minutes, so a group of seven makes it across to the other side in an hour – that is, *if* they make it. An additional danger of the caustic lake, the maelstrom, is described later on this page.

MID- AND HIGH-LEVEL PCs: Experienced cutters encounter the creatures of the lake just a few minutes into the trip; the shore lies just a few hundred feet behind the PCs when they see the surface of the water ahead tattered by a hideous head rising above it. The creature is a dinosaur similar to an elasmosaurus, brought to the Abyss centuries ago. Toughened by its time in the lake, it eats the poisoned fish that swim in its depths – and leatherheaded berks who feel like going boating in the Abyss.

Characters fighting this creature actively must make a Dexterity check at a –2 penalty each round to avoid falling into the lake. Those who do fall in suffer

damage from the acidic water, plus risk drowning. (DMs, see the rules on swimming, drowning, and removing armor in Chapter 13 of the *Player's Handbook*.)

MODIFIED ELASMOSAURUS: Int animal (1); AL N; AC 5; MV 3, Sw 15; HD 13^{*}; hp 71; THACO 7; #AT 1; Dmg 4–24; SD immune to acid-based attacks; SZ G (50 feet long); ML steady (12); XP 6,000.

* This dinosaur has fewer Hit Dice than indicated for the creature in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ rulebook, but a better Armor Class.

THROUGH THE HILLS (E)

The bashers hike a mile down the right path, winding through the eerie quiet of the hills amid Abyssal scenery: more dead baatezu littering the sides of the trail, dinner to scavengers. Then they hear a noise: the sound of flapping wings overhead. If the PCs look up, they see four grotesque creatures, each with a single eye for a head. Their wings span 15 feet, and they swoop in low to attack. They have no treasure and want nothing from the PCs but the pleasure of a fight.

EYEWING (4): Int low (5); AL CE; AC 4; MV Fl 24 (B); HD 3; hp 20, 18, 18, 12; THACO 17; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1–6/1–6/1–4 or eyewing tears; SA tears; SD immune to cold-based attacks; SZ L (15-foot wingspan); ML steady (12); XP 650.

MIDLEVEL PCs: Eight eyewings attack.

HIGH-LEVEL PCs: Sixteen eyewings attack.

MAELSTROM (F)

When the characters are almost halfway across the lake, they hear a strange roaring off to the left. The waters there are moving slowly at first, but in four rounds the wind will be whipping at maelstrom speed. The PCs can take this time to paddle away from the storm's area of effect; paddlers won't find their party in quite as much of a blind as adde-coves that sit in the boat and watch the lake's fury gain strength.

By the time the barmies realize they're seeing a huge whirlpool forming in the center of the lake, it's too late; they must make Strength rolls modified by twice the number of rounds they spent eyeballing the maelstrom. For example, if they spend two rounds watching, the berk at the oars must make a Strength check at a –4 penalty to avoid the whirlpool. However, for boaters who sit admiring the churning waves the full four rounds, the Strength check receives a –12 penalty. The Clueless got no place in the Abyss, berk.

Once caught by the whirlpool, the rower must roll a successful Strength check at a –10 penalty to break

free. Failing this, the bashers on board better hang on – the funnel of water sucks them under the acidic surface, dragging them down to the lake bottom. They each suffer 1d20 points of damage from the wrenching of the rushing water and must save vs. paralyzation to kick free of the whirlpool. Furthermore, the PCs all must roll 1d10 to determine the number of rounds it takes each sod to swim to the surface. (See the *Player's Handbook* for how long PCs can hold their breath.) Not only do the characters receive incidental damage from the acid, they also suffer 1d6 points additional damage if they breathe in the water. Finally, since the waves have made tinder of the rowboat, the characters must swim toward the nearest shore (determined by the DM), suffering damage from the acid all the way.

THE KEEP (G)

Just beyond the spot where the two branches merge into one trail again, the bashers spy a foreboding, grim keep, which, even from a distance, seems a place of pain and punishment. As they draw closer, they know the dark of it without being told: This tower is one of the most terrible places they've ever seen. Thousands of blades jut from its surface at crazy angles, a maze of bloody death, discouraging any who would climb it or land on its top. The few narrow windows might allow flying creatures to enter, but only extremely agile or very small ones. The gate into the courtyard before the tower looks like an angry mouth, with an open portcullis hanging above the cavernous entrance. A keep this fierce don't need to close its gates – no berk'd dare intrude.

But the arrow in the *seeker* stone points right at it.

Fact is, the bashers're going to have to negotiate whatever perils await in this hideous place – the top of the tower, specifically, by the direction of the arrow. Low-level PCs have no encounter at the gate.

MIDLEVEL PCs: One tanar'ri bars the way toward the keep: A chasme, a creature that resembles a giant fly with a vaguely human head, buzzes forth from the entrance of the tower, demanding to know the characters' mission.

CHASME, A GREATER TANAR'RI: Int average (10); AL CE; AC -5; MV 6, Fl 24 (D); HD 8+2; hp 49; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 2-8/2-8/1-4; SA wounding, sleep drone, terror, standard tanar'ri abilities; SD special; MR 50%; SZ L (7 feet long); ML champion (15); XP 14,000.

The chasme won't *gate* in more tanar'ri, for it fears its influence would lessen should word get out that it needed help against mortals. Though this plan may

prove its undoing, the beast fights until impending loss is apparent. Then it'll try to flee, but it won't bring back reinforcements, instead reporting success in killing the mortals. This nasty's afraid of being reprimanded, so it lies to protect herself.

HIGH-LEVEL PCs: A balor watches the gate along with two guardian tanar'ri: molydei, each with the heads of both a snake and a dog. The balor steps forward, the two others two paces behind.

The true tanar'ri asks furiously, in a deep and gritty voice, "What are you doing here? You are mortals, and no mortal comes to the tower of the succubus Chiryn. They are brought here to suffer the thousand and one ways of pleasure and pain, before their spirits are relegated to the Abyss. They never come of their own accord. So who sent you, and where can we find them? Speak quickly and pleasingly, and perhaps I will spare you." His eyes blaze with power and fury, and he caresses his barbed whip as though he aches to use it on the couriers.

BALOR, A TRUE TANAR'RI: Int supra-genius (19); AL CE; AC -8; MV 15, Fl 36 (B); HD 13; hp 101; THACO 7; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg by weapon or 2-12; SA terror, body flames, death throes explosion, standard tanar'ri abilities; SD +3 or better weapon to hit; MR 70%; SZ L (12 feet tall); ML fanatic (18); XP 26,000.



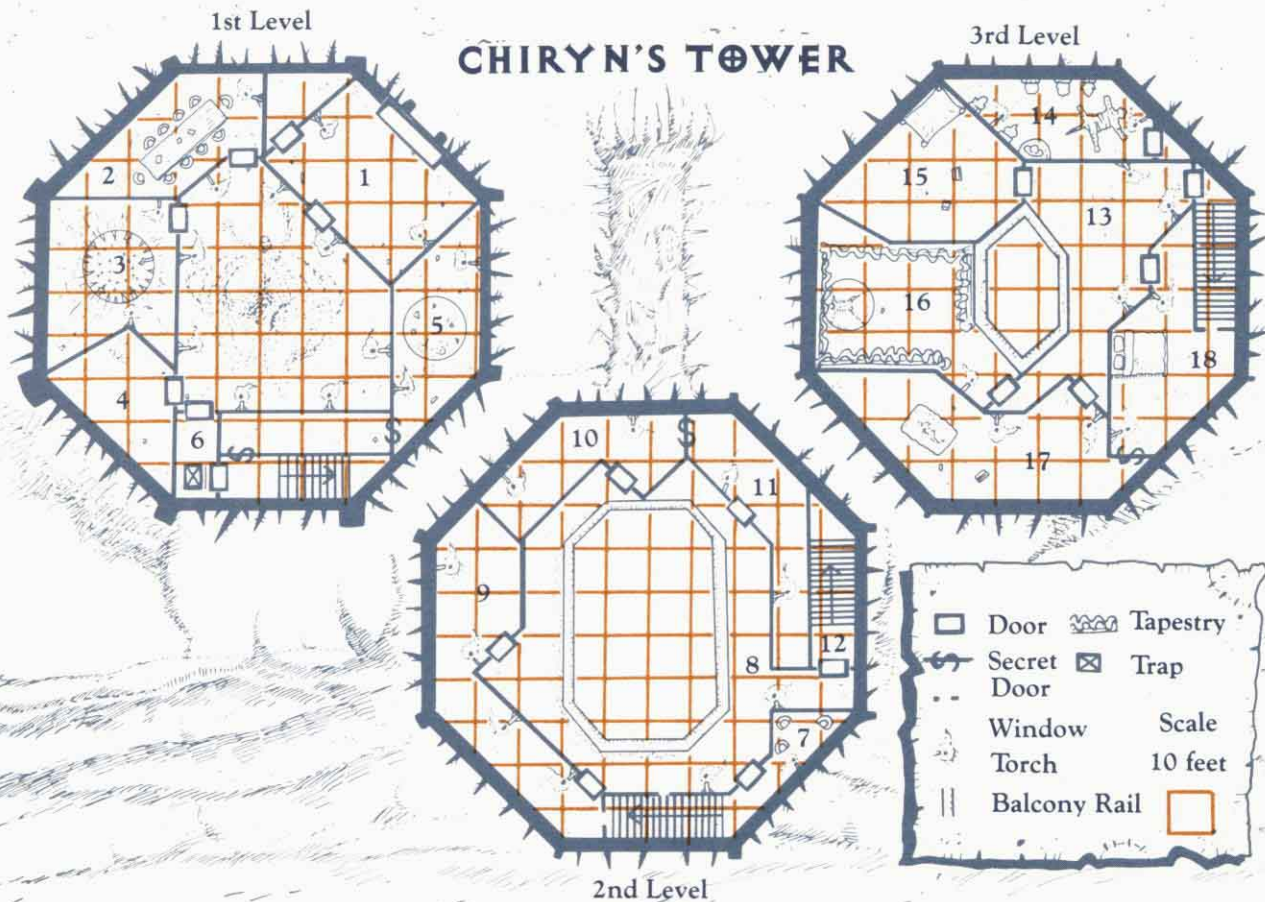
A PLAGUE
BOTH YOUR
HOUSES!
THEY HAVE MADE
WORMS' MEAT OF ME.
— DYING WORDS OF
KAS'RARLIN'S LAST
COURIER



MOLYDEUS, A GUARDIAN TANAR'RI (2): Int exceptional (16); AL CE; AC -5; MV 15; HD 12; hp 80, 78; THACO 9; #AT 3; Dmg 2-12/1-6, 2-20+5 (battle axe); SA *vorpai* and *dancing battle axe*, poison, standard tanar'ri abilities; SD cold-iron weapon to hit, never surprised; MR 90%; SZ H (12 feet tall); ML fearless (20); XP 21,000.

No matter what these bashers tell that nasty, the balor nods and starts to turn away. But it's a peel; almost

CHIRYN'S TOWER



immediately he turns back, motioning the two molydei toward the PCs, and leaps in himself to attack. Furious, he has realized the party's presence at the keep means the rumors are true: Chiryn's turned stag. He's going to have to kill her, but first, he'll kill the characters. So great is his fury that he will not flee, nor will he *gate* in any lesser tanar'ri to help him in the battle. Neither will the molydei, unless the fight is so unmatched in the PCs' favor that the tanar'ri have no hope of winning. And don't forget, berk: In the Abyss, a balor explodes in a ball of flame when he's put in the dead-book.

1st Level

As the player characters cross under the portcullis and near the tower, they can see its octagonal shape. The arrow in the *seeker stone* points upward, glowing quite brightly now.

1. ENTRYWAY: The entry is an austere, rectangular room, quite unspectacular. The main entrance to the keep stands before the group. A smaller door is visible on the wall to the right. Both are unlocked. A baleful green glow emanates from torches in wall sconces about every 20 feet.

Once through the main door, the bashers enter what is obviously a central room. Doors on each wall

lead off to other parts of the tower, and a mosaic on the floor illustrates a mortal being dragged into the Abyss by clutching fingers.

Through the small door to the party's right entering the keep is a small chamber where visitors to the tower can leave their outer wrappings: cloaks, mantles, second skins, or whatever. Three cloaks currently hang here: one black, one brown, and a multicolored Oriental-style robe. The black one is actually a *cloak of the bat*, all that is left of one former caller.

2. RECEIVING CHAMBER: A long, polished table with 10 chairs dominates the center of the keep's formal reception hall. Papers litter one end of the table, accompanied by an ink pot and several quills made from no bird the PCs have ever seen. Some pages are blank, and others look like bookkeeping. Characters who study them more closely (Intelligence check at a -4 penalty) discover the papers describe how many mortals have been seduced to their dooms by succubi in the past year. The sheets also give predictions for the upcoming year — the numbers are truly staggering.

3. OUBLIETTE: This room has a large, spike-filled hole in the center of the floor. Razors line the sides of the pit. Blood drips from the razors, falling 20 feet onto the clots of flesh and bone that lie at the bottom. Activat-

ing a switch on the wall by the door causes the hole in the floor to begin spinning – it's a device designed to shred anything thrown in. Anyone who falls in (or is pushed) suffers 2d20 points of damage each turn the pit remains active. A body trapped down here can't throw a rope out, as the razors cut it to shreds. The only way to escape is to fly or have someone deactivate the mechanism.

4. MEDITATION CHAMBER: This room is "decorated" in pure gray, painted by some barmy artist in such a way that floor vanishes into walls that meld into the ceiling. The room's wooden door is all that keeps this gray expanse from looking absolutely featureless. Yet, the chamber seems to promote a feeling of peace and contentment. It also implants a *suggestion* in the mind of a body that lingers here, physically inactive, for more than two minutes. The enchantment simply suggests that the person work toward promoting the interests of the tanar'ri. The soothing nature of the room forces cutters to save against this spell at a penalty of -2. Sounds do not carry farther than 3 feet.

5. REST CHAMBER: When Chiryne doesn't want to be bothered by anyone, she rests here, in this bare chamber suffused with an angry red light. A berk that steps into the center of the room, onto the circle inscribed there, finds himself lifted about 5 feet above the ground. He remains levitated until he thinks of getting down, at which point the magic reverses, lowering him to the floor.

6. STAIRS: To reach the stairs, a body's got to pass through two sets of doors. If the PCs don't knock on the second door, they trigger the release of a razorblade that sweeps out at knee level. The person at the door must save vs. spell or suffer 1d6 points of damage. Victims face a 50% chance of being unable to walk again until magically healed. There is a secret door at the base of the stairs.

2ND LEVEL

In most cases, bashers will enter the tower's second floor from the stairs (area 6).

7. WAITING CHAMBER: A room at the top of the stairs, furnished with a few tables, footrests, and stuffed chairs, seems to be simply a place to sit and relax for a time.

8. BALCONY: This balcony, which offers access to all other second-floor rooms, looks down 30 feet to the central chamber's mosaic floor. From up here, the design appears different, as if the mortal is being tortured as he is being dragged down. A faint rustling comes from overhead, where another balcony overlooks

the mosaic, but characters notice no other signs of activity. A window looks out onto the staircase.

9. LIBRARY: The keep's stock of books dealing exclusively with the topics of pleasure and pain contains works from all over the Prime Material Plane, as well as by noted authors of Sigil and the rest of the Outlands. Though the library doesn't have a copy of *every* book in the planes on the topic, it holds a good sampling. Chiryne has a couple spellbooks and other magical grimoires here, most of them dealing with conjuring and controlling succubi. Each is annotated in two hands: The first seems male, while the second looks definitely female. (Most of the small messages the female has written in the margins deride the stupidity of the authors.)

10. THE SENSES OF PLEASURE: This room is full of exotic devices designed to stimulate the pleasure centers of most known sentient creatures – and a few that the bashers might never have thought existed. In addition to the more common items the PCs might have seen, there are many that seem to play upon more subtle senses of pleasure. A few devices are completely mystifying.

If the characters wish to study the items within this room, fine. However, should anyone attempt to take a device from the room, a sheet of impenetrable green fire springs up from the floor, barring the exit. The flames die down as soon as the character backs away from the door and replaces the item. Anyone holding an object who tries to pass from the room suffers 1d10 points of fire damage. Nothing leaves this room, berk.

A secret door in the east wall connects with the pain room (area 11). Tugging on one of the torch sconces on the wall opens the door.

11. THE SENSES OF PAIN: This room is exactly the opposite of the pleasure room (area 10), full of devices for tortures both exquisitely subtle and brutally cruel. Although the bashers might not understand quite how some of these creations work, it's a cinch they can tell what they do – and do well. See, this is a room designed to evoke the most pain a body can feel and still live. Strands of razorvine grow over every wall.

Just as in room 10, the devices within this room cannot be removed. If anyone tries to take one of the torturous items, a sheet of coruscating blue flame falls from the ceiling and bars the door, making it impassible. The sod carrying the succubus's property suffers 1d10 points of damage; no matter how fast a body moves or how fast he throws the apparatus toward the door, the blue flame is faster. No devices leave this



room, either. Whenever the blue flame flares up, an alarm rings upstairs, alerting Chiryn to the intruders in the tower (if she isn't already aware of them).

The nearly-naked body of an elf lies mangled on the floor here, his blood spilled down his chest and thickening beneath his wounds. His outer clothes are nowhere to be seen. Oddly, mixed with its expression of horrible pain, the corpse's face wears a look of . . . ecstasy.

12. STAIRS: The staircase from the first floor continues up to the top of the tower. The arrow on the *seeker stone* points up and slightly backward, its brightness almost intolerable. Third-floor windows overlook the stair, and, if the PCs look up, they catch a glimpse of someone peering down at them through the aperture. However, the head jerks back so quickly that those who spied it wonder if they were seeing things.

3RD LEVEL

The keep's top floor is its owner's usual haunt. The characters likely will enter via the stairs (area 12).

13. BALCONY: This balcony, encompassing a space narrower than the one below, looks down 50 feet to the floor. From up here, the mosaic seems to depict the final destruction of the poor berk at the hands of the fiends in the Abyss: There're a few spatters of blood and clutching hands, but nothing more. Looking up, the characters can see that a body might fly into the tower through the skylight at the top of the stairs.

14. TROPICAL CHAMBER: The succubus has decorated one of her chambers of seduction and pain with the motif of the tropical hunter: Hides and shields hang on the wall, with animal skins from some exotic, far-off place covering the floor. The walls look covered in straw, and large leaves covered with skins make up the bed. A brightly colored headdress lies on the floor beside the bed and next to a ceremonial mask with a horrible carved face.

15. OCCIDENTAL CHAMBER: The theme of the next room might look a bit more familiar to this bunch of bashers: an opulently furnished castle chamber. A great canopied bed sits against the far wall beneath a pair of crossed swords. At the center of the room rest two mahogany chests. They're locked, but the locks seem relatively simple to pick. If the PCs force open a chest, a cloud of gas envelops the room. Those who fail to save vs. poison fall to the floor, unconscious for 1d4 hours. They wake in the pain room (area 11), strapped to various instruments. Unless they can prove their mission to Chiryn, they get to experience these interesting devices firsthand. A player character who picks a chest's lock

successfully finds 500 gp, a *dagger* +3, and five gems worth 500 gp each. The crossed swords on the wall of the room, though they look quite fine, are decorative weapons of poor quality, obvious to anyone who takes them from the wall.

16. EXOTIC DESERT CHAMBER: In another theme chamber, multicolored pillows litter the room, and the scent of incense hangs heavy in the air. The walls of purest white marble are festooned with tapestries depicting men in turbans hunting lions, engaging in acts of war and love, and other such romantic activities. Several curved knives lie scattered about the floor, and there are manacles attached to the headboard of the round bed. A skeleton struggles in the chains as the PCs enter. It tries to sit up and speak, but no noise emerges from its mouth. It cannot even gesture to indicate what it wants. The skeleton has an Armor Class of 7 and only 8 hit points. *Speak with dead* and other such spells have no effect on this creature.

17. ORIENTAL CHAMBER: A panel slides open to admit the bashers to this room of paper walls and hanging lanterns. A set of swords is mounted on one of the wall braces. A futon rests in the center of the room, with one occupant: a dead warrior with slanted eyes and a golden tinge to his skin. His belongings lie crumpled at the side of the bed, as though they'd been discarded in a great hurry. The body is a desiccated husk; the clothes are free of valuables. The swords on the wall aren't worth a bit of jink.

18. SLEEPING CHAMBER: This room is plain and functional, with a bed dominant.

Sitting on the bed is a fully clothed, incredibly beautiful woman. She rises, moving toward you somewhat defensively. "Who are you?" she asks. "What do you want here?"

The arrow in the *seeker stone* points directly to her. The PCs may either explain their mission in the tower, or they may simply hand her the note from Kas'rarlin. She glances at the wax imprint on the outside, then excuses herself from their company to read the note.

Should the bashers be unable to convince her of their friendliness or of their jobs as couriers, she will either fight or flee. If the party looks very strong, she flees, transforming herself into a pixie and flying through one of the windows overlooking the stairwell. Flying directly to her masters, she reports that her tower has been invaded again. If the PCs remain in the tower too long, it's quite possible the overlord tanar'ri will find them when he returns with the flustered succubus.

If she decides to attack, Chiryn first approaches the strongest member of the party and attempts to kiss him

or her, draining that poor berk of experience levels. She then attempts to *gate* in lesser tanar'ri to help her in her battle. If her force is being defeated, Chiryn will attempt to escape, as described above.

CHIRYN, A LESSER TANAR'RI

(PLANAR/♀ SUCCUBUS/HD 6/CE): Int exceptional (16); AC 0; MV 12, Fl 18 (C); hp 50; THACO 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1-3/1-3; SA drain; SD +2 or better weapon to hit, immune to fire, never surprised, standard tanar'ri abilities; MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 11,000.

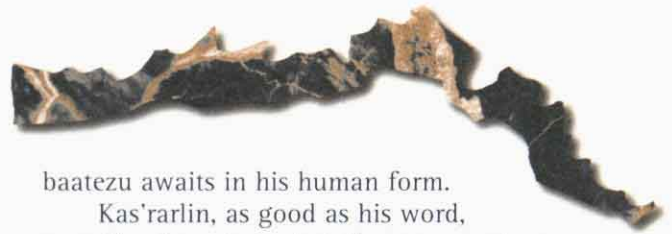
CLIMAX

If it proves unnecessary to fight, Chiryn retires to the reception chamber (area 2) to pen a note to Kas'rarlin. She insists that the couriers come down to the chamber with her, mostly so she can keep an eye on them while they're in her tower. While writing the love letter in return, she scans the PCs to see if they are carrying any of her possessions. (She has an uncanny knack for recognizing by sight and smell items from her tower.)

Should she find they've been cross-trading, she politely asks them to return her items. If they won't, or if they deny that they have any of her possessions, she placates the characters, saying she must have been mistaken. Likewise, if the PCs have destroyed any of her equipment in the tower, she assures them that she doesn't mind. But in reality, she feels furious that mortals would attempt to steal from her or destroy her belongings.

Chiryn knows Kas'rarlin expects to find her special scent on the return note. If she's not happy with the party, she won't spray the note with her perfume. Though she signs and seals it, the fact that she has not included the scent will cause Kas'rarlin to question whether the PCs actually have been to her tower. It's a bet he won't pay them, calling their note a clever forgery. Indeed, he will fly into a rage if the note has not been scented, and, if he thinks he can get away with it, attempts to kill his couriers for betraying him.

If the bashers deal well with her — that is, without lying or other abusive behavior — Chiryn includes her scent on the note and hands it to one of them. She then tells them to gather 'round. When they do, she tosses a small stone into the air over their heads. Instead of falling, it hovers in midair, and when Chiryn speaks a guttural word, a net of black obsidian springs from the stone and envelops the PCs. As soon as the net hits the floor, the characters find their thoughts jumbled and twisted about. When their heads clear, they find themselves near a known portal to Sigil. A cream-colored butterfly, the key to the portal, perches on the shoulder of one of the group. When the characters step through, they find themselves almost directly across the street from the tavern where they were hired. Inside, the



baatezu awaits in his human form.

Kas'rarlin, as good as his word, pays the characters what they are owed, as long as he feels they've dealt with him in good faith. He ain't a bad sort (for someone who personifies evil) and may even grow to "like" the PCs. 'Course, a body shouldn't think too highly of this creature. If the PCs didn't negotiate for specific magical items, the baatezu provides them with only potions, scrolls, or other one-use articles. Should the bashers confront Kas'rarlin about being sent without warning to the Abyss, he admits he is in love with the succubus, and that he is immune to her powers. If accused of being a baatezu, he admits to it, but he won't spill the dark on his own.

EPILOGUE

If the PCs performed this quest well, Kas'rarlin may offer them future assignments, including the chance to carry more letters to Chiryn. 'Course, the dangers (and the rewards) increase exponentially every time they venture into the Abyss and return home safely. On each trip they arrive to find more tanar'ri, until the mightiest of the creatures arrives to take charge of the situation personally. If matters progress this far, the tanar'ri may decide Chiryn is not so valuable to them, or that the bashers merit attention from assassins from the Abyss.

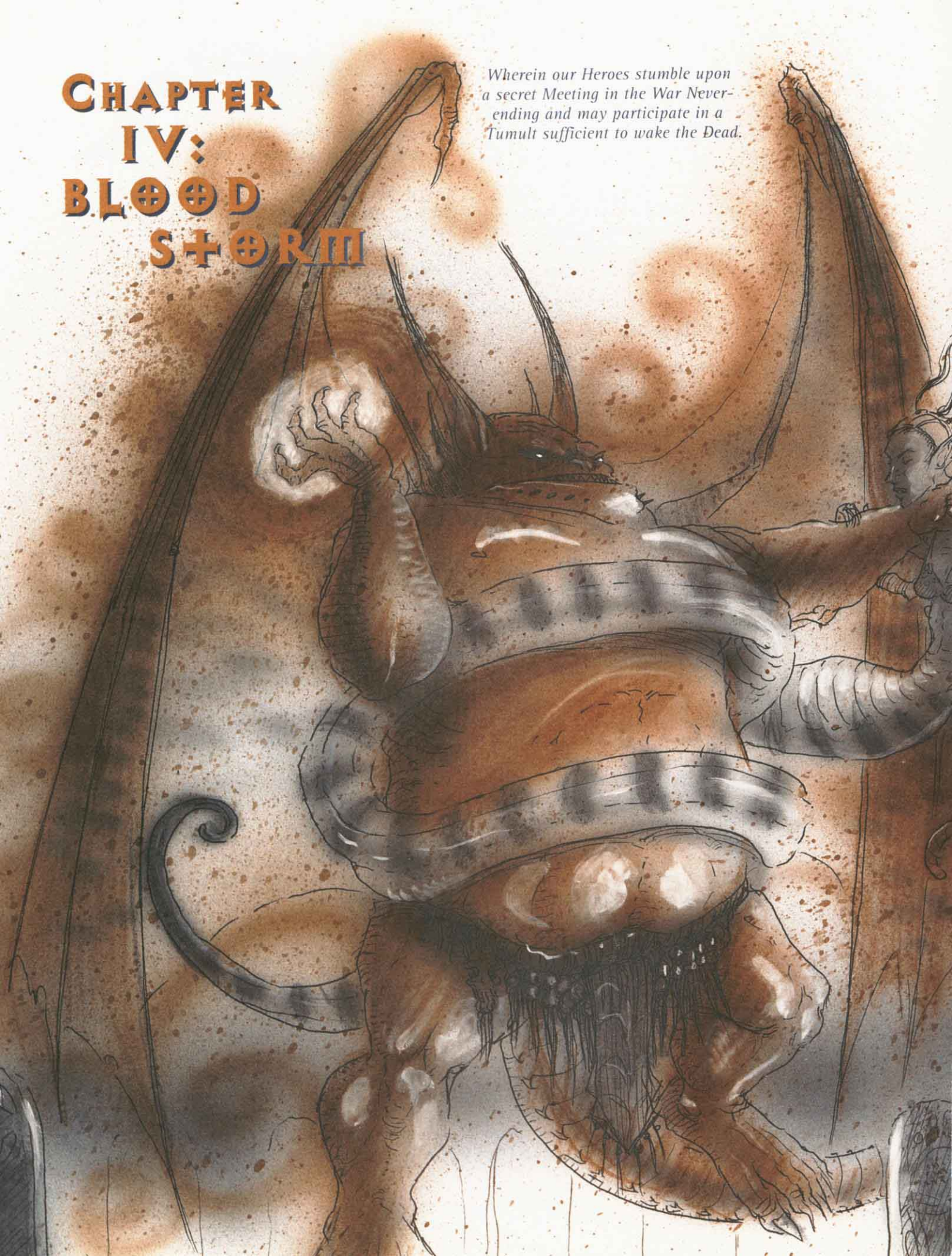
HIGH-LEVEL PCs: If the erinyes and the two barbazu made it back to Baator to report their suspicions about Chiryn (at the DM's discretion), it's a bet more fiends will come hunting the two lovers.

Should the PCs have to slay a great many tanar'ri in their mission, Kas'rarlin may decide Chiryn's life is in danger. (Hey, there's no better way a body can draw attention to herself than with a trail of dead fiends leading right to her front door.) The baatezu will try to recruit these bashers to rescue his love from the Abyss so she can join him in Sigil. 'Course, as tanar'ri and baatezu are not exactly compatible, it might not be long before Kas'rarlin comes to them demanding they take her right back. After all, these lovesick fiends ain't seen each other in a couple centuries. . . .

On the other hand, in the multiverse, sooner or later a cutter sees it all. So who's to say the two don't remain madly in love (or whatever passes for it among denizens of the Lower Planes) and decide they owe the PCs a favor for bringing them together? It's a cinch the effects of this "favor" would fall on the characters from straight out of the blue — and it's any berk's guess how a fiend says "thanks."

CHAPTER IV: BLOOD STORM

*Wherein our Heroes stumble upon
a secret Meeting in the War Never-
ending and may participate in a
Tumult sufficient to wake the Dead.*



JUST THE FACTS, BERK

NUMBER OF PCs: 3 to 8.

LEVELS: 9th or higher.

PCs PREFERRED: All.

FACTIONS: Any.

SYNOPSIS: A chapter in the Blood War impinges on the lives of the player characters.

DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

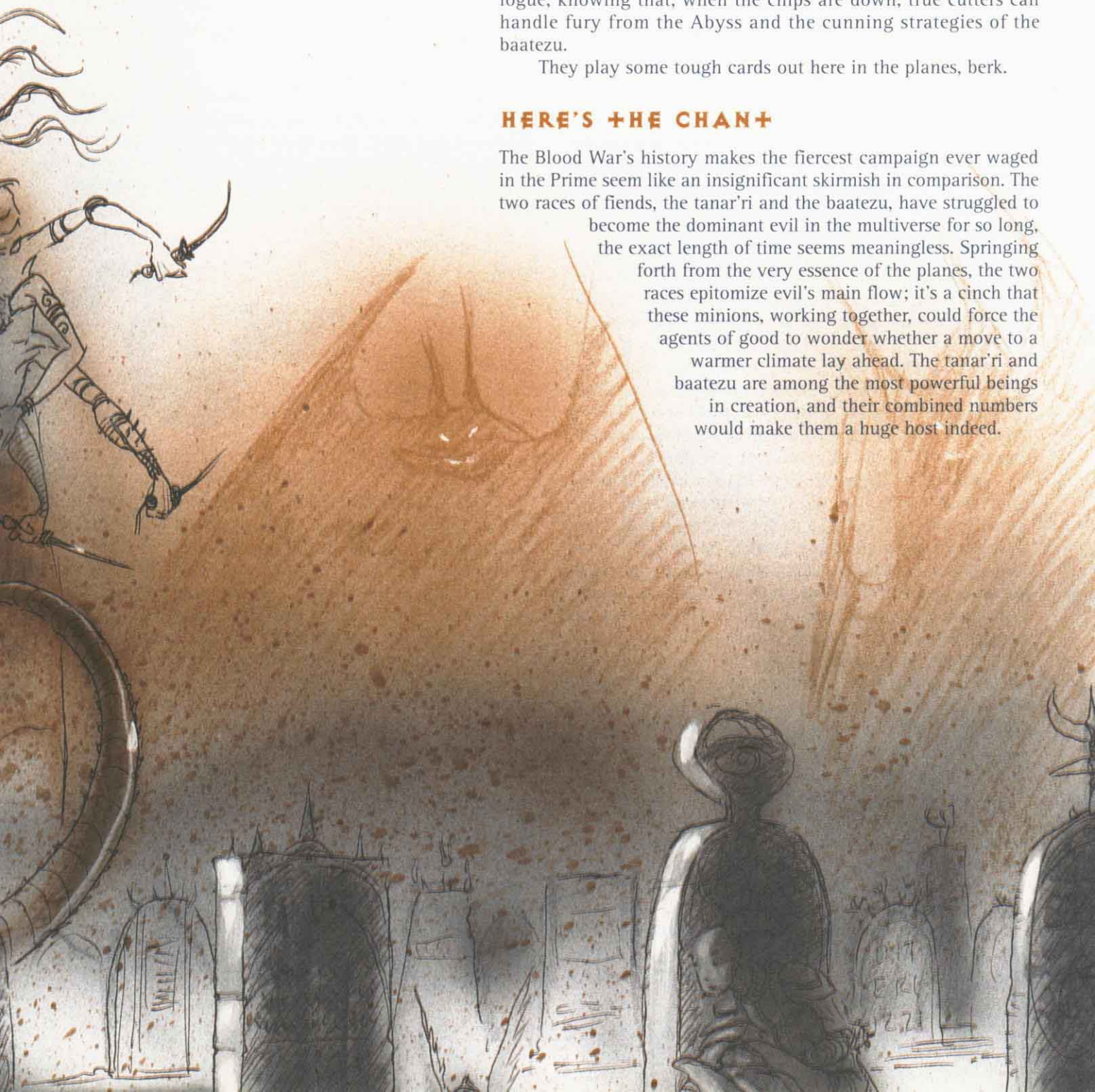
It's a bet this adventure'll have long-lasting consequences on the player characters' future in the planes. 'Course, it involves both baatezu and tanar'ri, so a body'd earn himself some significant fiendish enemies if he doesn't play his cards exactly right. It's the DM's game, so he decides whether to deal in this bunch of bashers and let them gamble that they won't draw the hand that could start a planar feud.

The DM could downplay the importance of the events in this adventure, or he could let things happen as described in the epilogue, knowing that, when the chips are down, true cutters can handle fury from the Abyss and the cunning strategies of the baatezu.

They play some tough cards out here in the planes, berk.

HERE'S THE CHANT

The Blood War's history makes the fiercest campaign ever waged in the Prime seem like an insignificant skirmish in comparison. The two races of fiends, the tanar'ri and the baatezu, have struggled to become the dominant evil in the multiverse for so long, the exact length of time seems meaningless. Springing forth from the very essence of the planes, the two races epitomize evil's main flow; it's a cinch that these minions, working together, could force the agents of good to wonder whether a move to a warmer climate lay ahead. The tanar'ri and baatezu are among the most powerful beings in creation, and their combined numbers would make them a huge host indeed.



Only recently (for the undying) have these creatures noticed the growing numbers of humans, demihumans, and humanoids that crawl across the planes. A few enterprising fiends have figured out that these pesky mortals can prove useful tools against enemies. This makes some primes think the fiends hope to take over the mortal plane and enslave all its inhabitants.

Not so. Most primes aren't advanced enough to become slaves to a fiend: They're raw material, nothing more. Neither the baatezu nor the tanar'ri can even begin to think about enslaving mortals until they have destroyed the other race, assuming the full might of evil exclusively. Listen, why should they see humans as anything but fodder? It's a rare berk who can stand up to a fiend in its full power, and almost no primes have anything like the innate powers that are second nature to a fiend. Mortals flatter themselves.

Still, there are times when the two races find it convenient to foster this barmy mortal illusion, to make the Clueless think they matter in the grand scheme of the multiverse. Though the lives of mortals seem ridiculously transient, the primes have a pride that can be fed. And the fiends can be good cooks, for the sake of evil.

Sometimes these minions find it convenient to meet on the mortal plane to do battle. Nothing like the sight of tanar'ri and baatezu warriors acting out their age-old hatred right there in the town square to strike terror in the hearts of the berks that dare to watch! To use mortals against the enemy in the Blood War, they find places of concentrated evil that allow them to best focus their abilities. They use primes as foot soldiers in battles there, but they also latch onto the mortals' psychic essences, feeding off their emotions and spirits.

Sometimes fiends decide to forgo a battle in favor of a treaty conference on neutral ground; each side wants to win the war, and neither is averse to gaining advantages through treaty making as well as bloodshed. No treaty has ever been successfully concluded, but both races of fiend know these "diplomatic missions" can provide extensive opportunities to commit mayhem in locations unused to such manifest evil.

In this particular city on the Prime, both the tanar'ri and the baatezu have some ardent followers. The worshipers of the baatezu desecrated an old church, reconsecrating it in their fiendish name. Unaware of this, followers of the tanar'ri dedicated the graveyard in back of the church to the Abyssal hordes. The first fiends summoned by these mortal groups realized that nearby was an area of power dedicated to the other, making the area a perfect place for them to "discuss their differences." To this end, they agreed on the basic terms of the meeting and set a date for later in the century. That date is fast approaching.

'Course, neither group intends to abide by the strictures of the meeting. The tanar'ri have no use for agreements that don't work for them, and the baatezu

know very well that tanar'ri almost never keep to a bargain. However, the meeting's terms force them to bring delegations of exactly the same strength. Neither could win over the other in an out-and-out battle. So both sides are looking for an edge.

The cutters are that edge.

SEQUENCE

1. When the PCs return to a prime city (for whatever reason), they meet a pampered fop (actually a baatezu) wishing to retain their services for a hefty sum. The cutters would be required only to guard this man and some compatriots during a midnight meeting. They accept the job.

2. Later in the day, a beautiful woman (a tanar'ri) approaches the characters, also wanting to hire them for some evening work. She offers a tidy sum and promises to have the bashers to their first client's job at midnight. She assures them they'll find the time under her employ well worth their while.

I +RUS+
WE'LL WORK
WELL
+@GE+HER.
— GALLUS,
+THE PI+
FIEND
(IN DISGUISE)



3. If the characters side with the tanar'ri, she and her companions (disguised as humans) show the bashers a good time around the town, although their tastes are a little . . . bizarre. When the time comes for the fiendish confrontation, the tanar'ri take the party to the old graveyard near the church and reveal themselves. Waiting there are the baatezu, not at all pleased to see the PCs have turned stag. One of their number deals with them, while the two battling factions level the graveyard. The two fiendish sides are so perfectly balanced that the loss of one baatezu to handle the characters tips the balance in this battle of the Blood War. 'Course, the victorious tanar'ri have no intention of paying the party.

4. If the characters instead honor their prior agreement and work with the baatezu, the fiends meet them at the church at midnight as agreed. This time at the graveyard, with the PCs lending their strength (feeble as it is in the face of fiendish power), the baatezu upset the precarious balance and win the battle. The fiends do pay the cutters (in cursed coin) before they vanish back to Baator.

I+ BEGINS

The player characters have left the planes to travel to the Prime Material. Perhaps they're seeking spell components, or, if they were originally primes, maybe they've come back to visit some old companions. Thing is, whatever reason they have for visiting this city, there's one constant in play: The baatezu and tanar'ri are both attempting to establish a base here, as a stepping stone for further incursions across the planes. Their human agents here have prepared areas in which the baatezu and tanar'ri can both feel comfortable and draw upon power. Members of each side now must only find some way to tip the balance of the battle, so their side can spread through this sphere.

Both fiendish groups know of these characters by reputation — after all, a cutter doesn't reach 9th level without attracting some notoriety — and both sides see them as just the tools they need. The tanar'ri do not contact the party right away, inevitably arguing among themselves about the wisdom of recruiting possibly treacherous adventurers to their cause. The baatezu have no such worries.

Thus, while the PCs travel through the streets of this primal burg, a pompous merchant type dressed entirely in black silk approaches them. His face has a faintly saturnine cast, and he appears to have led a pampered life. Holding a ringed hand to his fat face, he sniffs before addressing the party:

"Gentlemen and ladies, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Gallus, and I could not help noticing that you appear to have a somewhat experienced air about you. I refer, of course, to the fact that you all seem to carry yourselves with a certain confidence. I like that. I desire to retain your services, if such is possible. You have my guarantee that my compatriots and I will pay you handsomely. I promise you 1,000 platinum pieces each, if you will agree to this service."

About the nature of the duties, Gallus says only that he requires bodyguard work at a diplomatic conference for him and his compatriots, should the truce between the two sides be broken. He casually drops a hint that the price of service is, of course, negotiable.

If the PCs agree to serve as bodyguards for the conference, the man seems genuinely pleased. He gives them half the money in advance, then tells them to meet him at the old church at the crossroads promptly at midnight. His confidence in the greed of mortals makes him certain they'll arrive in plenty of time. Since the cutters have taken his jink, the client considers the deal sealed. They can't back out now without returning all that money, and these cutters ain't barmy.

Should the characters turn down the offer, Gallus's features shift furiously, his face going beet-red for a

moment. He brings himself back under control, and angrily bids them good day. If they want to reconsider the offer, he becomes, once again, the soul of courtesy toward them. Otherwise, having seen that the PCs won't be of use to him, the man assumes a demeanor toward them that's far less polite.

Gallus, actually a pit fiend, has masked his alignment to appear lawful neutral. His statistics and those of his companions are revealed under the description of the old church (area A). This nasty does his best not to reveal his powers until the meeting at the church, but if the party attacks him here, he will defend himself to the best of his abilities.

Should the PCs ask around town for directions to the old church at the crossroads, the citizens look at them somewhat fearfully. Though they can give directions to the church, they tell the PCs, "No one respectable ever goes into that part of town any more." If pressed, the locals let the cutters know that the area has become a neighborhood of knights of the cross-trade, and worse. 'Course, they don't have any more details, because nobody's gone to that area for years.

BUILD-UP

Later in the day, after the PCs have gone about several of their errands, they see a ravishingly beautiful woman heading toward them. She has long, auburn hair flowing to her waist, a slender build, and a mischievous cast to her green eyes. Sidling up to the most attractive male cutter, she asks him, "Are you interested?" A moment later, she amends, "... in a job?" She winks suggestively, but the gesture seems second nature to her, rather than an affectation.

When the PCs ask about the work, she calls it a minor piece of bodyguard work, one that should take only a small part of the night. She mentions that she and her companions (here she indicates two men dressed in flamboyant colors, who have approached silently during this exchange) are interested in visiting some of the seedier portions of town that night to have a little fun, but adds that they're not sure they could handle any trouble that may arise. If the PCs try to bow out by saying that they have another engagement set for midnight, the woman scoffs and tells them that the three thrill seekers will be done well before midnight. She promises to ensure the PCs are at their engagement before midnight hits.

The fee she offers? Two thousand gold pieces each, just to make sure the three companions stay safe while they look for a good time. They'll pay a quarter of the fee in advance, with the rest due on completion of the night's activities. If the cutters don't accept their offer immediately, the three badger them mercilessly, flattering the characters and making them feel like the most



capable bodyguards in the whole city, if not the multiverse. These strangers should seem like genuinely fun people just eager to have a good time; the DM may portray them as manipulative, but not pushy.

Of course, these fun-loving sorts are the tanar'ri, freshly arrived in town with their alignments disguised as chaotic neutral. Unlike the baatezu, they believe mortals are fickle, more likely to relish a night of pleasure and entertainment than remember their prior commitment. Incidentally, berk, they have no intention of telling the PCs when midnight rolls around. The three are Riza (the woman), Miirta, and Henjar. Tanar'ri statistics can be found under the cemetery description (page 52).

If the PCs accept their offer, the tanar'ri immediately drag them off to one of the seedy sections of town and begin frequenting gambling houses, drinking shops, and other, more illicit establishments. The cutters can join in these pleasures, or they can watch. The three seem to have a definite cruel bent to their fun, tormenting those with whom they come in contact – and enjoying it. Their luck at dice can't be beat, though they're not using magical influence, should anyone check. Though several thugs look enviously at the money the carousers rake in with nearly every pass of the dice, they see that the cutters are ready to deal with trouble and leave the three well alone. The partiers imbibe an amazing quantity of liquor without getting drunk, though they become ever rowdier as the night progresses.

'Course, some might not call it progress. The three thrill seekers drag the characters around the worst sections of town, hopping from tavern to tavern so frequently that the night goes by in a blur. Even if the PCs do not partake of the evening's entertainment, the revelers' frantic pace has thrown off their time sense entirely. (Any Sensates in the party are not at all likely to consider the time, instead concentrating on the fun to be had at the moment.) The cutters must make a Wisdom roll at a –6 penalty to realize that midnight draws near. Should they point this out, the tanar'ri dismiss it, assuring them midnight is still at least an hour away.

These cutters can get away from the three only by slipping off; Riza insists it is not yet midnight, adding that she won't pay them if they don't stay until the middle of the night. If they escape and go to the church, Gallus is there waiting for them. His two companions, who are dressed in dark robes, stand in the shadows at the back of the church. Gallus thanks the PCs for showing up, and directs them to a copse of trees overlooking the center of the cemetery, where they are to keep an eye on things and intervene only if events turn bloody.

But the characters might find themselves too attached to the salaries from the tanar'ri job, or simply unable to escape the revelry. If so, just before midnight, the three disguised tanar'ri grab them and drag them out through the darkened streets. As the group weaves its way down the street, the cutters spy a cemetery with the

gates hanging ajar. Their clients race, giggling, through the gates, though Henjar pauses first, telling the PCs to wait in a copse of trees nearby and keep a close eye on proceedings. He then speeds after the other two.

When the PCs reach the copse Henjar indicated, they have an excellent view of the center of the cemetery. The three disguised tanar'ri are standing in earnest conversation with three other figures. The PCs recognize Gallus among them just as a church bell tolls midnight across the sleeping town.

These cutters have a chance to redeem themselves. If they took Gallus's advance, they can head over to his side now. Though angry that the PCs did not show up on time, he accepts their presence with a tight grin, which turns into a sneer as he faces Riza. This challenge leads directly into the climactic battle, for the tanar'ri is incensed that the PCs

should turn stag on her in such a fashion.

After the battle, Gallus and his companions won't pay the PCs, since the characters were late to their appointment, and thus violated the terms of the agreement.

In any event, the two sides begin the conference speaking pleasantly to one another. However, a berk'd have to be blind and deaf not to sense the hatred between the two delegations: Insults hiss back and forth, and occasionally the figures lapse into shouting. The cutters notice that the delegates' voices seem far more powerful than the appearances would suggest. The speakers begin moving closer, shouting at each other, when, all of a sudden . . .

OH COME ON!
JUST ONE MORE!
— RIZA + THE MARILIH
(ALSO IN DISGUISE)

CLIMAX

Suddenly, the entire conference erupts into bloody combat. Though tempers have been flaring since the two parties met, this attack seems extremely sudden, and you are not at all sure who initiated the hostilities. As you ready yourselves for the attack, you suddenly realize the forms of your employers and their enemies are shifting like melting wax. As the fighting rages, the combatants take on malefic forms. They are fiends, you realize, tanar'ri and baatezu who have brought the Blood War to this isolated town in the Prime Material!

The side the cutters choose as allies wins the battle, though it will be close, and they will not discover their pivotal role until it's all over. If they choose not to participate, the delegation that feels more incensed at their neutrality (DM's discretion) sends a representative over to "persuade" them to join. The other side will win by virtue of having one more fiend in the fray.

The battle seems a full-fledged war, with fiends on both sides unleashing all their magical might against the foe, along with a formidable physical onslaught. Though the sound and light shake the graveyard and church, little of the disturbance seeps through to the outer world, for the two groups have sealed it off with a version of the *wall of force* spell.

However, the battle is not entirely without onlookers. Halfway through, a contingent of the city guard walks into the battle zone to investigate reports of a muffled thumping. Unless the PCs go to their aid immediately, the guards are torn to shreds by the fiends or the undead summoned by this time as reinforcements.

GUARD (6) (PRIME/♂ HUMAN/F2/NG): Int average (8); AC 5; MV 12; hp 12; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (short sword); SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (11); XP 35.

When the battle ends at last, the cutters find themselves standing with the surviving fiends in the midst of a scarred and smoking battlefield, nearly unrecognizable as a graveyard. The church nearby is likewise destroyed, the result of a pitched battle inside. When the fiends disappear from the ruined landscape, only the characters remain – and a crowd of guards gathering in front of the cemetery. This force is about to enter the graveyard to arrest the cutters for defiling it. The PCs either have to flee or explain to the guards exactly what they were doing in the graveyard – and why it looks like a burned-up wreck. The berks'd better make it good.

THE CHURCH

Once dedicated to a goddess of law and good, the temple at the crossroads in this abandoned part of town has fallen into decay, attracting the lower elements of the city.

A. OLD CHURCH: The center of the baatezu's power in the city, this church contains an open conduit to Baator, usable only in exactly the right conditions. The baatezu have used it to send their agents to the Prime Material to sow dissension and swell the ranks of the evil faithful.

GALLUS, A GREATER BAATEZU

CRA'LINGEN, A GREATER BAATEZU

HEBARLZEL, A GREATER BAATEZU

(PLANAR/♂ PIT FIEND/HD 13/LE): Int genius (18); AC -5; MV 15, Fl 24 (C); hp 106, 89, 80; THACO 7; #AT 6; Dmg 1d4×2/1d6×2/2-12/2-8 or weapon+6 (Strength); SA fear, poison, tail constriction, standard baatezu abilities; SD regeneration, +3 or better weapon to hit; MR 50%; SZ L (12 feet tall); ML fearless (20); XP 21,000.

B. PRIEST'S QUARTERS: The chamber used by the priest of the church for changing into his ceremonial vestments,

as well as the tiny room next door, served as storerooms until the temple was closed for lack of worshipers. If the cutters search the room carefully, they can find three vials of holy water stashed inside the closet. If any baatezu are with the PCs at this point, they try to extract a promise that the characters will use the holy water only against the tanar'ri; if they refuse to swear, they'll desecrate the water immediately. 'Course, the baatezu are unwilling to come into contact with the vials, but they insist that it not be spilled inside the church.

If the PCs empty the vials in the church, the conduit to Baator immediately snaps shut, stranding the baatezu. Closing the connection to the evil plane lessens the church's evil aura, as well. Naturally, the baatezu consider such an act a direct attack on their center of power on this part of the Prime Material, nullifying any agreement the two parties may have had.

THE CEMETERY

Although the tanar'ri have claimed the entire church grounds and graveyard as their stronghold, they are strongest at the center of the cemetery.

C. CEMETERY GATE: At the closing of the church, the cemetery gates of black iron were locked shut by a huge chain. Now, one of the gates dangles by its hinges, and the chain lies broken on the ground. The walls of the graveyard are set with black iron spikes to deter intruders. Obviously, it hasn't worked. There is a faint magical shimmer here: a *wall of force* detailed in area G.

Two shattered lanterns by the gates drip kerosene outside the graveyard walls. If the area of effect of a fire-based spell reaches to within 10 feet of the gate, the kerosene flares up into an angry fireball. Any character or object within 5 feet must save vs. spell or suffer 2d6 points of damage. If the cutters pass this way in the company of the tanar'ri, they have a 75% chance of smelling the spilled kerosene. A clever bunch of bashers later could try luring enemies to the area and burning them.

HENJAR, A TRUE TANAR'RI

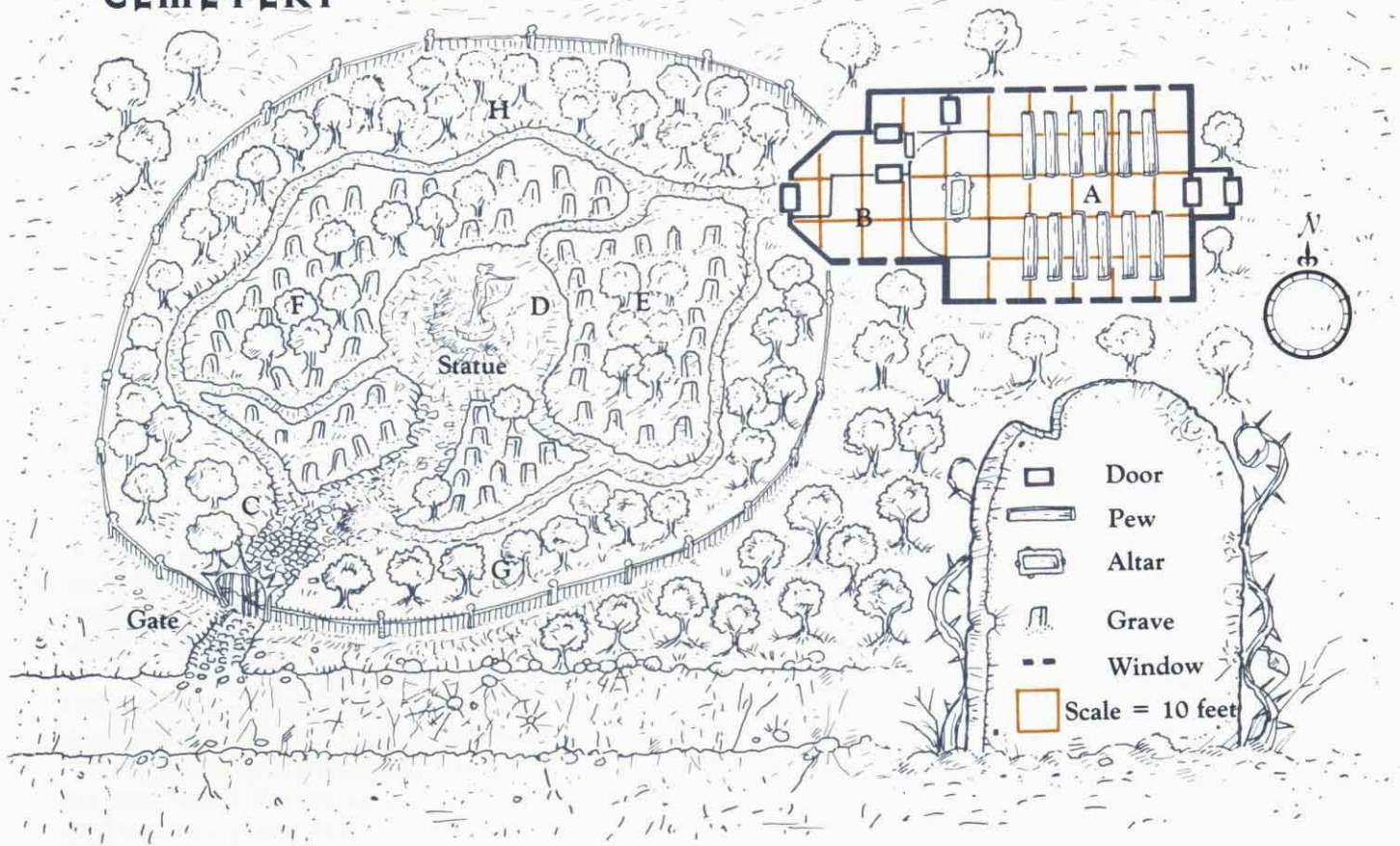
MIIRTA, A TRUE TANAR'RI

(PLANAR/♂ BALOR/HD 13/CE): Int supra-genius (19); AC -8; MV 15, Fl 36 (B); hp 110, 85; THACO 7; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 2-12 or by weapon; SA terror, body flames, death throes, explosion, standard tanar'ri abilities; SD +3 or better weapon to hit; MR 70%; SZ L (12 feet tall); ML fanatic (18); XP 26,000.

RIZA, A TRUE TANAR'RI (PLANAR/♀ MARILITH/HD 12/CE):

Int genius (18); AC -9; MV 15; hp 72; THACO 9; #AT 7; Dmg 4-24 and six weapons; SA magical weapons, constriction; SD +2 or better weapon to hit, never surprised, spell immunity, standard tanar'ri abilities; MR 70%; SZ L (7 feet tall); ML fanatic (17); XP 23,000.

CEMETERY



D. CEMETERY CENTER: In a dark rite, worshipers opened a conduit to the Abyss by desecrating the statue of the goddess overlooking the dead. Spilling holy water here would sever the tanar’ri’s link to their home plane, dramatically lessening their power in this portion of the Prime Material. As with the baatezu, such an action would nullify any agreements the two parties may have had and could signal the beginning of hostilities between the two groups.

E. REINFORCEMENTS: The dead buried in this section of the cemetery will be the first that the fiends eventually raise up to reinforce their efforts. One of the fiends on the losing side steps back from the battle for a moment, raises its hands, and magically forces open the 20 graves here. Spirits of unlucky petitioners flow from the fiend’s center of power and slam into the bodies, animating them to attack the enemy.

♦ If the summoner is a baatezu, a solid flow of red-streaked light streams from the church’s altar to the bodies until all 20 have become animated, becoming wights.

♦ A tanar’ri summoner causes the statue of the goddess to explode, its shards landing on the graves and sinking into the coffins. Ghosts emerge from a tanar’ri’s call.

The bodies, which take a round to become animated, rise as undead (described below) under the control of their summoner. If that fiend is killed or sub-

dued, the more powerful undead stay to fight *against* the race that summoned them, in repayment for the suffering the fiends caused their spirits. Any undead with 23 or fewer hit points will flee the battle, escaping into the city as soon as the ward goes down.

WIGHT (20): Int average (8); AL LE; AC 5; MV 12; HD 4+3; hp 35×3, 31×4, 27×3, 23×3, 20×2, 15×5; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1–4; SA energy drain; SD silver or +1 or better weapon to hit, spell immunities; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 975.

GHOST (20): Int very (11); AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 32×2, 27×5, 23×4, 20×4, 17×3, 12×2; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1–4/1–4/1–8; SA special; SD spell immunities; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 650.

F. SECOND WAVE: If the tide of battle turns again, or if one side continues to lose several rounds after the reinforcements appear, one of the fiends again steps back to summon the dead to its service.

♦ If a baatezu summons spirits a second time, they burst through the windows of the church in a spray of stained glass (2d6 points of damage to anyone within 10 feet, save vs. spell for half damage) and pour into the graveyard ground. It takes two rounds for the bodies they animate to claw their way to the surface from the coffins. Please note that this takes place only if a baatezu

called on the spirits of the dead once before; otherwise, the spirits come forth as described under area E.

♦ Should a tanar'ri summon them, the petitioners' spirits flow from the melting base of the statue and into the waiting ground. The base of the statue continues to melt until it forms a pool of shifting color, nauseating to see. A body that gazes upon it for a round must save vs. paralyzation or suffer a -2 penalty to his attack and damage rolls for 1d6 rounds. As above, these effects occur if this is the second time a tanar'ri has summoned aid; if not, the spirits behave as in area E.

WIGHT (15): Int average (8); AL LE; AC 5; MV 12; HD 4+3; hp 35×2, 28×3, 22×3, 21×2, 14×5; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA energy drain; SD silver or +1 or better weapon to hit, spell immunities; SZ M (5 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 975.

GHAIST (15): Int very (11); AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 32×2, 26×3, 23×3, 21×4, 18×3; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-8; SA special; SD spell immunities; SZ M (5 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 650.

Again, subduing the summoner breaks its hold over the undead, which then can either join the fight or run away. If they have even the slightest chance for revenge on their tormentors, they take it, even though (or maybe especially because) it means oblivion if they fail.

G. NOWHERE TO RUN . . . The tanar'ri told the PCs to keep watch from this vantage point, the ideal place both to bar interested locals from entering the cemetery and to intercept any of the tanar'ri's fleeing foes. Though odds are the baatezu'll run to the church, a few might attempt escape to build an underground against the tanar'ri.

Characters making a break for the cemetery walls see a *wall of force* spring up, shimmering in the dark. For the purposes of *dispel magic* attempts, consider the wall the result of a spell cast at the 16th level of ability. Failing escape, the cutters'd better just try to survive the battle.

H. . . . NOWHERE TO HIDE: The baatezu ordered the PCs to stand lookout from this copse of trees, to warn their employers if tanar'ri are creeping up on them and keep a careful eye on the goings-on in the center of the cemetery. An invisible hamatula, under strict orders from its superiors, spies on the cutters; it'll attack a berk who tries hiding among the trees instead of fulfilling the contract. Otherwise, this fiend remains concealed.

HAMATULA, A LESSER BAATEZU: Int very (11); AL LE; AC 1; MV 12; HD 7; HP 42; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 2-8/2-8/3-12; SA fear touch, hug (2-8), standard baatezu abilities; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 30%; SZ M (7 feet tall); ML fearless (19-20); XP 6,000.
Innate spell-like abilities: *affect normal fires*, *hold person*, *produce flame*, and *pyrotechnics*.

EPILOGUE

Assuming the bashers sided with neither group, all surviving fiends make only halfhearted attempts at revenge, sending minions to hunt the PCs rather than coming after them personally.

But if they took sides, look out.

WITH FIENDS LIKE THIS . . .

Any tanar'ri that escaped will remember the faces of bashers that backed the baatezu and will do everything in their considerable power to make their lives miserable. A long campaign of terror against the characters will culminate in a fiendish personal attack. Only the nasties actually involved in the battle will seek revenge, though – tanar'ri ain't inclined to lend a helping claw, even to fiends in need.

The cutters' baatezu employers remain good as their word; they pay the characters the jink they were promised (1,000 pp – more, if the PCs bargained). Then, they vanish back to their home plane. But a berk'd have to be barmy to think he came out ahead on a fiend job.

The coins are cursed.

♦ If the PCs try to spend the jink on something other than their own selfish interests, the coins begin to bleed. The blood stains their hands until a *remove curse* is cast.

♦ Once it's spent, the cutters will desire more and more of this kind of money, which they can earn only by working for the baatezu. This knowledge springs full-blown into their minds, along with the suggestion that they can do nothing to get rid of the curse. 'Course, they don't know a *bless* followed by another *remove curse* spell negates this layer of the curse.

♦ Finally, the PCs become beacons for baatezu in trouble. (A body don't know what trouble is until he sees what plagues one of these nasties.) Until they receive the effects of a *heal* spell, everything from spinagons to pit fiends comes to the cutters with pleas for help, offers of employment, and so forth. And guess what, berk? The fiends pay for this aid with more of the cursed coin.

The jink's curse does not take effect until the characters receive full payment, so they can spend their advance money safely the day before the meeting.

BAD BLOOD

If the bashers turned stag on the baatezu, the fiends begin a long, involved plot to destroy them by fair means or foul – making them petitioners in Baator, if possible, when they pass from this mortal coil. Baatezu have a long memory, and they can devote considerable resources to manipulating berks like the PCs. Since this was a strategically important battle, the fiends want to make someone *suffer*.

Should the PCs have turned down the baatezu's offer in the first place and sided with the tanar'ri, the

losing fiends won't hunt them down quite as forcefully or in such numbers (though individual survivors still may want to crush them). 'Course, the tanar'ri won't pay the bashers what was promised, instead vanishing back to the Abyss and leaving them to take the blame for the destroyed graveyard. And it's a bet that the nasties'll come calling again the next time they need dirty work done. Then, they'll *promise* to pay the PCs what is owed them . . . after the service is completed.

CLEAN-UP

Good-aligned characters may want to return to the battle site to reconsecrate both the cemetery and the old church to a good- or neutral-aligned god or goddess. If they try to do so, they might walk into a minor battle between the followers of the baatezu and tanar'ri, struggling for territorial dominance. The PCs will have to eliminate both groups before they can successfully rid the church and graveyard of corrupting influences. Don't think this'll be too easy, berk; both groups of worshipers just might be bolstered by a fiend or two in disguise.

'Course, there's always the chance that neither group will do anything to these bashers. Since fiends know they have a reputation for holding a grudge, they may decide that the best revenge is forcing the characters to spend the rest of their lives looking over their shoulders for a threat that'll never come — at least, *probably* not. Then again, they may make an appearance when the sods least expect it, just to scare 'em. Fiends are like that.



In which a Quest for the spirit of a Sage brings the Heroes to dreaded Colothys, where they endure Mountains of Trials only to become Trapped in a struggle of Titanic proportions.

CHAPTER V: HARD TIME

JUST + THE FACTS, BERK

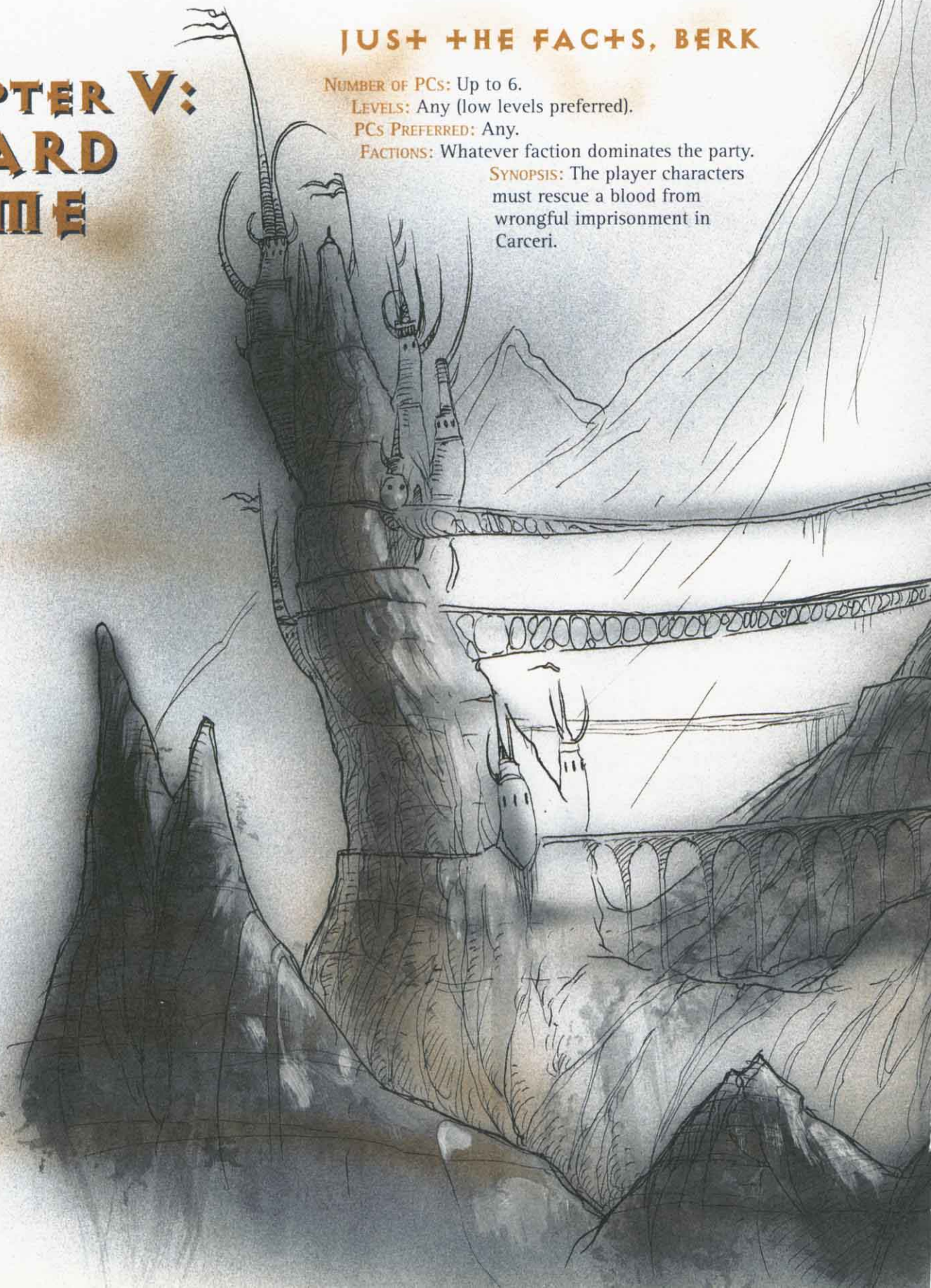
NUMBER OF PCs: Up to 6.

LEVELS: Any (low levels preferred).

PCS PREFERRED: Any.

FACTIONS: Whatever faction dominates the party.

SYNOPSIS: The player characters must rescue a blood from wrongful imprisonment in Carceri.

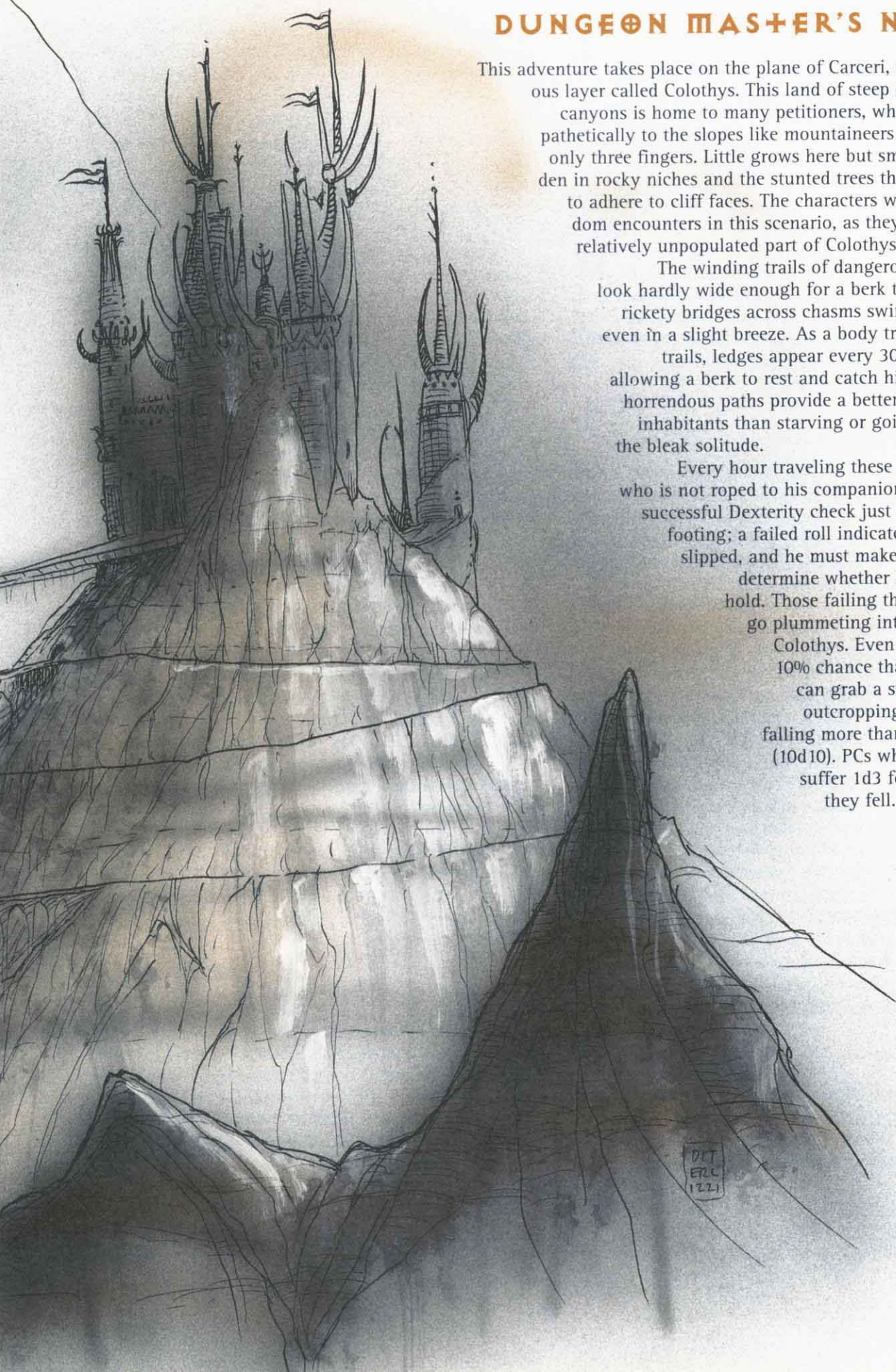


DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

This adventure takes place on the plane of Carceri, in a mountainous layer called Colothys. This land of steep cliffs and sheer canyons is home to many petitioners, whose burgs cling pathetically to the slopes like mountaineers hanging on by only three fingers. Little grows here but small shrubs hidden in rocky niches and the stunted trees that always seem to adhere to cliff faces. The characters will face no random encounters in this scenario, as they're exploring a relatively unpopulated part of Colothys.

The winding trails of dangerous trade routes look hardly wide enough for a berk to pass, and the rickety bridges across chasms swing dangerously even in a slight breeze. As a body travels along the trails, ledges appear every 30 minutes or so, allowing a berk to rest and catch his breath. These horrendous paths provide a better alternative for inhabitants than starving or going barmy from the bleak solitude.

Every hour traveling these roads, a basher who is not roped to his companions must make a successful Dexterity check just to maintain his footing; a failed roll indicates the character slipped, and he must make another roll to determine whether he can regain a hold. Those failing the second check go plummeting into the gorges of Colothys. Even then, there is a 10% chance that the character can grab a stunted brush or outcropping of rock before falling more than 10 to 100 feet (10d10). PCs who do grab hold suffer 1d3 for every 10 feet they fell.



DIT
EFL
1221



Those who travel roped together need make only one Dexterity check for the whole group, rolled either by the character in front or the one in the back (party's choice).

If the roll fails, that PC falls from the path. The next berk in line then makes a new Dexterity roll. If this roll fails, that PC also falls, and the next in line must make the roll at a -2 penalty, which increases by -2 every time a character on the line falls. However, as soon as somebody makes a successful check, the whole line becomes secure, and those who fell can spend the next few rounds climbing back to the path.

HERE'S +THE CHAN+

Every planar knows that when cutters die, their spirits go to the plane most suited to them, where they become petitioners, usually to a patron power. When they've served their time, they may move on to become part of the plane, part of the power's retinue, or part of the power itself. It all depends on the power.

At least, that's how it's supposed to work. Sometimes a body'll slip through the cracks and show up someplace it's not supposed to be. The sod usually has a bad time of it then, because evil folks who go to the Upper Planes are hunted both by fiends (the keepers of the spirits of Lower Planes), and the einheriar (the militia of the Upper Planes). Those who wrongly go to the Lower Planes are in for a bad time simply because they're in the Lower Planes. That's reason enough.

In this case, Zeracuk — a dwarf sage renowned for his knowledge of the gates and conduits of many planes — has got himself put in the dead-book. But, instead of arriving in the Dwarven Mountain as planned, he has appeared in the layer of Colothys on Carceri. When the adventure begins, he's hiking for the temple of the titan Crius, where he knows of a hidden portal to Sigil. From there, he hopes to find a portal to the Mountain, where he can spend the rest of his existence rightfully in contemplation and research.

SEQUENCE

1. The PCs are commissioned to seek out an important contact for a factol — a blood who's just died. This sage, a dwarf named Zeracuk, most likely is headed for the Dwarven Mountain in the Outlands, they learn.

2. When they reach the Mountain, they find out that the sage never arrived, but that a cross-trader destined for the plane Carceri (Colothys, to be exact) arrived at

the Mountain around the time Zeracuk was supposed to. The curator of the domain suggests — in strong terms — that the PCs locate the blood in Colothys.

3. The cutters find their gate and head for Colothys. They arrive at a small mountain burg clinging precariously to the side of a canyon. The villagers report that someone answering Zeracuk's description passed through a while back, headed for the high peaks.

4. Following the trail of Zeracuk, the characters forge ahead into the mountains. On the way, they pass a hill giant petitioner on her way to see her power. The PCs can fight the hill giant, or they can team up with her. She doesn't know anything about being dead, so she wants to avoid fighting until she knows she'll come out of it all right.

5. Continuing along the trail of the dead dwarf, the cutters may enter the cave of a fallen arcanoloth. If the PCs are nonthreatening, the yugoloth leaves them alone, preferring instead to mope in her lair. She might let them know she saw a dwarf pass by, going toward the titan Crius's temple.

6. The characters also may find the town of Straifling. While no one in town has seen Zeracuk, the locals can tell the group all about the whimsically cruel titan.

7. Eventually, these cutters find their way to the temple of Crius. If they sneak in, they can find the birdcage holding Zeracuk, free him, and follow him to the gate to Sigil. But, if they just barge in, Crius's servants drag the PCs before the titan on his throne. After Crius orders them caged, they must find a way to escape and free the dwarf.

8. Once the group reaches Sigil, the characters must convince the sage to see their factol before heading off to his reward in the Dwarven Mountain. Ever argue with a dead, miffed dwarf, berk? It ain't easy.

I+ BEGINS

The player characters have joined or taken work for a faction, so they know that, no matter where they go in Sigil, their faction can always track them down. Shopping, sleeping, eating, or sampling the local brew — whatever the bashers're up to, a faction messenger finds them and presses this small slip of paper into the hands of one of the PCs. It reads:

*Your presence is urgently requested by the factol.
Report at once.*

The PCs may have an exciting time crossing Sigil, or they may make it to faction headquarters without incident. On arriving, the bashers are asked to wait for a short time (10 to 15 minutes), then find themselves ushered into the presence of the factol himself!

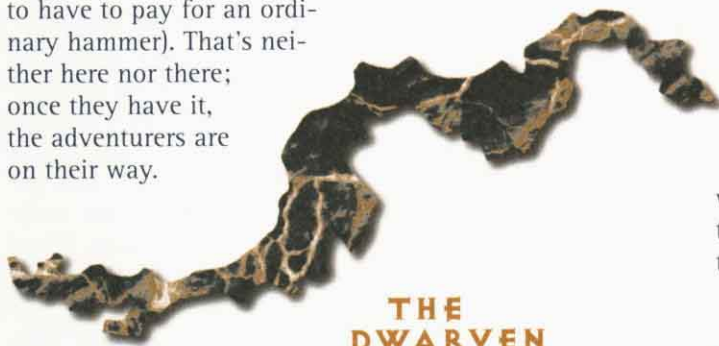
Seated behind a huge desk, the factol looks at the leader of the party and says, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm looking for a dwarven sage named Zeracuk. I need some information regarding gates and portals, and they tell me he's the best blood in the business. Unfortunately, he up and died on us just yesterday, the berk."

The factol leans forward. "I want you to find him. Apparently, he's gone to the Dwarven Mountain to do research in the Soot Hall of Dugmaren Brightmantle. See if he's interested in coming back here to answer a couple of questions for me. Tell him I've got the chant on how to ascend in the Mountain; that should prick his ears."

"This should be a fairly easy little expedition, but I'm willing to pay you 200 gp, because I need the answer fast. Don't stop on the way out of Sigil. Like I said, time is of the essence. The portal to the Mountain is just down the street at the blacksmith's shop, and the key is a dwarf-wrought hammer." The factol smiles, then turns his chair to another portion of his desk, dismissing you from his presence.

The PCs know they don't really have a choice whether to accept this mission; refusing a mission from a factol means renouncing faction allegiance. It's not recommended, berk. 'Course, if the bashers don't actually belong to this faction, they can be a little choosier.

This being Sigil, the characters can find a dwarf-wrought hammer fairly easily (though the price, about 20 gp, seems rather more than a body ought to have to pay for an ordinary hammer). That's neither here nor there; once they have it, the adventurers are on their way.



THE DWARVEN MOUNTAIN

Walking through the portal, the bashers find themselves coming out just inside the back door of a blacksmith's forge in Strongale Hall. The dwarf working the foundry looks up as the PCs step through, sighs, and points toward the front door. He does not interrupt his work, and he will not pause to answer questions. He keeps hammering as the characters try to talk to him, and it's

impossible to speak over the clamor. It's a bet the smith has seen more berks come and go through his shop than he wants to, but just because he's become resigned to it doesn't mean he's going to waste his time rattling his bone-box. If attacked, he falls easily, but the PCs then have to escape the local guards who, with a powerful proxy, will be looking for those who killed the petitioner.

Once the PCs leave the blacksmith shop, they can ask nearly anyone in the massive subterranean complex how to get from Strongale Hall to Soot Hall, the realm of Dugmaren Brightmantle. 'Course, most of the petitioners here are so bubbled up, the directions are liable to be faulty, leaving the PCs to wander in the upper levels of the complex for a time. Eventually, they get directions to Soot Hall, where most dwarf sages end up. For 15 gp, the party can even retain a guide, one Emera Stoutforge (Petitioner/♀ dwarf/F1/N), to take them there. Along the way, the petitioner constantly challenges the bashers to drinking matches, belittling the tolerance any characters might have developed. If they put her off until later, she grumbles that they likely will skip out on the match, but that's just fine, she'll find *real* drinking partners someplace else; she shouldn't have bothered with human types anyway. . . .

Eventually, after a long trip through the winding passages of the Dwarven Mountain, Emera deposits the PCs in Soot Hall with the curator, Pyrus Chertchip, who she says "knows just about anything about Soot Hall." She bids them a gloomy farewell and heads back. Every step she takes seems to make the next step lighter, and before she leaves the party's sight, she is nearly running back toward the upper levels.

Pyrus (Petitioner/♂ dwarf/O/N) is an extremely old dwarf, panting under the load of a large book, which he's trying to place on a table that's just a little too high for him. If the bashers offer to help, he snarls at them to leave him alone, that he has it just fine. However, if anyone gives the book just a little push for him, he's so grateful, he'll answer questions a little more politely.

The curator knows nothing about Zeracuk. He asks when the dwarf died, to figure out the sage's arrival time. He does some figuring in his head, then says to the characters:

"No, ain't seen him. Did get a cross-trader with an eye patch in here yesterday about the same time this dwarf yer talkin' about woulda gotten here. The berk we got we sent t' Colothys in Carceri, where he was s'posed t' go in th' first place. I s'pose it's possible that this Zeracuk fella got misrouted to Carceri."

He pauses, looks at you keenly, and continues, "You bashers want t' get some information outta that dwarf? Why, I s'pose you'd best go find him and bring him back, then! For one thing, he'd prob'ly be grateful

enough to answer yer questions, and for another, I'd let you back in here if you ever needed anything again. If you left him to rot on Carceri, on the other hand, well . . . accidents have a way of happenin' t' folks in the Dwarven Mountain, y'know. Yep, and sometimes even past the mountains, too. Just think about that for a while." With that, Pyrus turns away from you, but he keeps an ear to your conversation, so he'll know what you decide.

If the characters eventually decide to go after the dwarf petitioner, the curator turns back to them. He'll take them to the gate that leads to Carceri, but, he says, they're on their own from there. This is the same portal the dwarves used to toss the thief back to his appointment with destiny, so they're fairly confident it leads to Colothys. The dwarves do not offer the PCs the use of any equipment, though they might provide mountain gear if the bashers ask politely. Arriving at the gate, the dwarf tosses an iron piton through the opening and ushers the party into Colothys.

On the other hand, if the PCs do not wish to seek Zeracuk in Carceri, Pyrus summons guards to send the characters back to Sigil. His stormy countenance as they leave lets them know they won't find themselves welcome in Soot Hall anytime soon – say, the next few centuries.

BUILD-UP

The bashers emerge from the portal through an archway and into Colothys – right at one end of a rope bridge that spans a chasm about 50 feet across. A tiny clump of buildings sits atop two outcroppings from the cliffs on either side of the narrow chasm. Four other rope bridges like the one before the PCs stretch across the canyon, connecting the two halves of this burg.

THE TOWN OF GAOLA (A)

Windy and jagged. That's the impression that hits the bashers when they look at the town. It clings to the cliffside like a fly clings to a wall, then extends out precariously onto the outcroppings. Mountains loom overhead.

The characters step out onto the swaying rope bridge and must make a Dexterity check to avoid stumbling on the poorly-built structure. At least the bridge is wide enough that they won't go tumbling into the abyss yawning below, though they may receive a nasty surprise when they get a look at the drop.

When they recover, the bashers see the locals gathered around either end of the bridges and along the railings on the edge of town. Everyone's watching

avidly to see if any of the PCs fall to their dooms! Fact is, it's happened before, and now the townsfolk enjoy few things more than seeing visitors plunge into the chasm. When it becomes apparent that none of the newcomers are going to fall, the villagers sigh in disappointment and go back to their daily routines.

Though the locals are not actively unfriendly to the PCs, they don't go out of their way to help the party, either. Their attitude is one of indifference, for they can't see how they can gain by helping the bashers. Only if the characters promise a reward (monetary or otherwise) do the villagers voluntarily help them. Since the party does not comprise locals, prices for any services are likely to be 150% to 300% of the listed price in Chapter 6 of the *Player's Handbook*. The service is slow and sullen, though the petitioners' eyes glow with avarice when they glimpse the foreigners' jink.

For a hefty fee (25 gp or more), various townsfolk will tell the bashers where the dwarf went. But clever cutters will keep their purses in their pockets and just look around this burg: There's only one way Zeracuk



THINK YOU CAN
GET ACROSS
BEFORE I CUT
+THE BRIDGE FREE, BERK?
— THE WATCHER



could have gone, since the place has only one non-portal entrance and one exit. The burgers can, however, tell the PCs how they answered the dwarf when he asked where he was. This was the town of Gaola in Carceri, they had said. The petitioner town of Straifling, a steading of the hill giant power Grolantor, and the palatial temple of the titan Crius lay nearby, but none of them know how to get to any of those places. When they finished, the dwarf paused as if reflecting, grunted in satisfaction, then headed out of town.

The townsfolk also can tell the party that the berk with the eye patch who was shoved through the gate a short while after the dwarf had gone fell off the bridge into the chasm. A good time was had by all the spectators.

The small town's personalities include an old blacksmith with a hearing problem who constantly mumbles to himself, a catty gossip, a black-hearted but outwardly charming mayor who'll mislead the PCs just for the fun of it, an angry-faced baker with an even angrier tongue, and the dour tradesman out at the

understocked trading post. 'Course, there are others in town, but they serve their time cheerlessly, answering any questions listlessly and without personality. Their spirits have been mostly broken by the harsh mountains of Colothys.

Exiting the ramshackle burg, the PCs pass over a ravine to a small plateau, about 20 feet wide and 15 feet long. Another long, swaying rope bridge crosses an impossibly deep canyon here. The bridge is 400 feet long, pinned to the mountain walls by stout pegs. The winds whistle around the bridge, causing it to swing dangerously one way, then the other. The ropes look a little frayed, but they're strong enough to hold up to a thousand pounds without creaking too loudly.

Where the bridge begins stands a woman cloaked in black, a hood over her face, holding a sharp sword over her shoulder. She steps aside when the PCs come up, allowing them to step onto the bridge. If asked, she says she is the watcher, set to guard the span from hill giants and other invaders who might wish Gaola harm. She bids the bashers good travel as they step onto the slats.

Once they have reached the halfway point, the watcher calls out to them, above the howling winds. The PCs can barely make out the words. "Forgot to . . . the toll! Ten gold a head! Only one . . . to bring the gold to me!" As if to underscore the point, she places the edge of her sword against the creaking rope. If the party continues moving along the bridge without heeding the watcher, they feel one of the hand ropes slacken in their grip. The watcher slashed through it. The bashers can either send one person back to pay the toll (or fight the watcher), or they can try to race the falling bridge to the other side of the canyon. Given the rickety nature of the bridge, they take an incredible risk by doing the latter.

If more than one person starts coming back across the bridge, the watcher places her sword on another of the ropes, hoping to dissuade the characters from attacking her *en masse*. If they simply begin racing across the remaining half of the bridge, she saws frantically at the ropes to avenge herself for the lost "toll" money. Should the characters tie themselves to the bridge, the watcher gives up in disgust, knowing that she's not going to get revenge or money from these bashers. Instead of watching, she walks back into town.

Assuming the characters decide to pay the toll, the watcher expects them to wait in the center of the bridge until the toll-bearer has given her the money, at which point she tells them they can go. If the toll-bearer acts rude when she counts out the gold, or if they have cross-traded her, the watcher waits until the carrier gets back on the bridge, far enough away to put her out of attack range, then slashes the ropes.

Since the bridge is so long and the rope is so slack, it takes two rounds for the woman to slash each rope. As there are four ropes to the bridge, it takes eight

rounds for her to slice it free. The PCs can move 20 feet a round if they go carefully across the bridge, 40 feet if they hurry. Speed takes its toll, though, since every character that hurries must make a successful Dexterity check every round to avoid losing the poor footing the bridge offers. Those who fail this check go sprawling, suffering 1d3 points of damage from twisting an ankle between the slats. Injured bashers must travel at the slower pace until they reach the other side of the bridge, and their movement is reduced by an additional 3 until 1d4 turns have passed.

Characters holding onto the bridge when it is severed risk further injury from slamming into the cliff wall. The DM must figure out how many feet the characters are from the end of the bridge when the last rope is cut; they suffer damage equal to half what they would sustain if they fell that same distance straight down (see falling rules, Chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook*). The bashers may make a saving throw to take only half that, indicating they twisted to take the least amount of damage on impact with the mountain.

When a body hits the wall, he must roll a successful Dexterity check to maintain a hold on the bridge, or else he plummets into the canyon to certain death. Another character within grabbing distance may make an attack roll against AC 4 to grab onto the falling PC. If successful, this savior must make a successful Strength roll to hang onto the bridge, or else they both fall.

If the bashers figure out a way to fight the watcher, she flees back to town, screaming that the party is out to kill her. The town sides with her instead of the PCs (of course), but won't pursue the characters out of town.

THE WATCHER (PETITIONER/♀ HUMAN/F3/FATED/NE): Int very (12); AC 7; MV 12; hp 19; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 65.

PETITIONER (B)

Just past the trouble at the rope bridge, the trail dips and rises sharply. Finally, it levels off into something resembling horizontal, and you come to a fork in the road . . . and a female hill giant, clutching a club anxiously, scratching her head, and looking repeatedly at one branch of the trail, then the other.

The hill giant appears oblivious to the bashers' presence until they approach within 30 feet or behave with hostility. If they draw near, she turns and holds her hands in the air, as though trying to avoid a fight.



She allows her club to fall to the ground by her feet, and grunts, "No fight! No fight! I only look for Grolantor. I no want fight! Maybe you help me? I help you, you help me?"

The giant, Tanaaka, means it when she says she doesn't want to fight. She wants only to find her god and live in peace. However, she has no idea which way to go at the crossroads and will join with any bashers that look like they have even the faintest clue of where they're headed. Since she doesn't know the way, she follows the lead of the friendliest character, even if it's the wrong way.

Tanaaka is not an evil giant; she fights for the good of her people, not to swell her own head, and only wants to help her people grow strong and prosper, even if she has to suffer to do it. In many regards, she's a lot like a human.

But berks should beware when adopting a giant. If this one joins the party, she'll demand quite a bit of food when meal times come – about four times as much as an ordinary human. She complains about the narrow mountain passes (which seem quite comfortable for a human), and she's quite smelly, since she's wearing uncured animal skins. Tanaaka has her good points though; she's very loyal to the party and willingly forgoes sleep to watch over her companions as they rest. Though she won't go so far as to sacrifice her life for the party, she gladly takes the brunt of most attacks. As a hill giant, she doesn't need to make the Dexterity checks the PCs do to avoid falling; she's very nimble on the rocks. In fact, Tanaaka seems at home here. If the characters are not roped together when the hill giant joins the party, she suggests it. She might become part of the rope chain, giving the PCs an excellent anchor, which guarantees that they won't fall to their deaths, even if they all pitch off the trail.

TANAAKA (PETITIONER/♀ HILL GIANT/HD 12/N): Int low (7); AC 5; MV 12; hp 77; THACO 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1–6 or by weapon (2–12)+7 (Strength); SA hurl rocks (2–16); SZ H (16 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 3,000.

LONE CAVE (C)

As the PCs approach an ill-kept cave, they hear the strangest assortment of noises emanating from within: a muted howling, loud cursing, eerie screaming, and weepy laughter. The noises alternate, with little

transition from one to the next, as though they all came from a single barmy creature.

If the bashers follow the crooked trail up to the mouth of the cave, they

see that the walls of the pass suddenly drop below the level of the

path into a sheer canyon, turning the 3-foot-wide trail into an arch several hundred feet above the canyon floor.

As the bashers draw to within 30 feet of the mouth of the cave, the path widens by 20 feet. Splintered bones gleam among the scattered rocks just outside the cave. Most of the bones are those of animals, though a few of them are obviously human or humanoid. Some of the bones have a definite fiendish look. If the PCs step onto the ledge before the cave mouth, the noises from within stop abruptly, as if cut with a knife.

"Who's there?" a peery voice barks. Whatever the answer, a wolf-headed humanoid pokes its snout from the cave's darkness to eye the visitors. It looks frightened and angry at the same time.

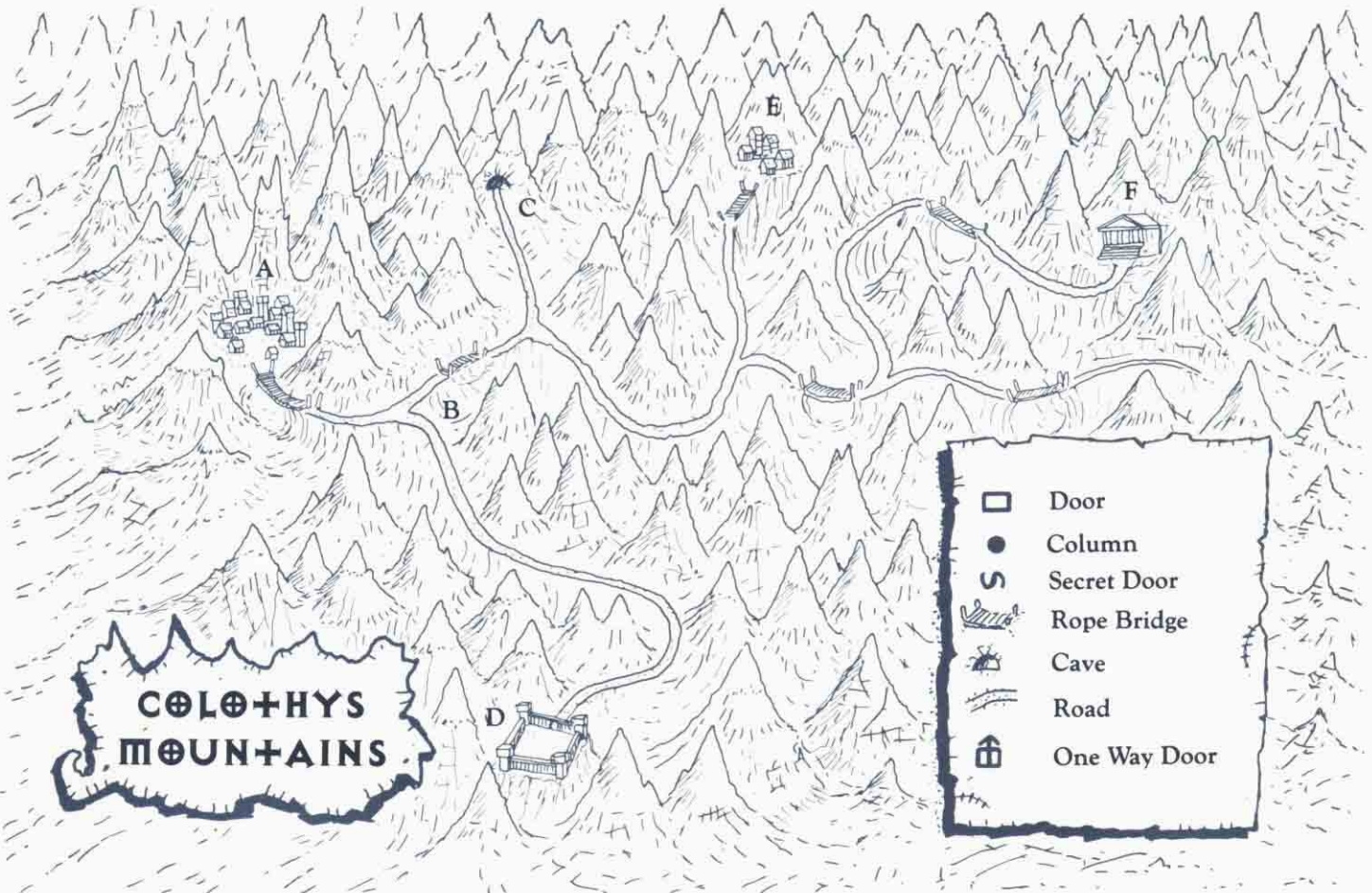
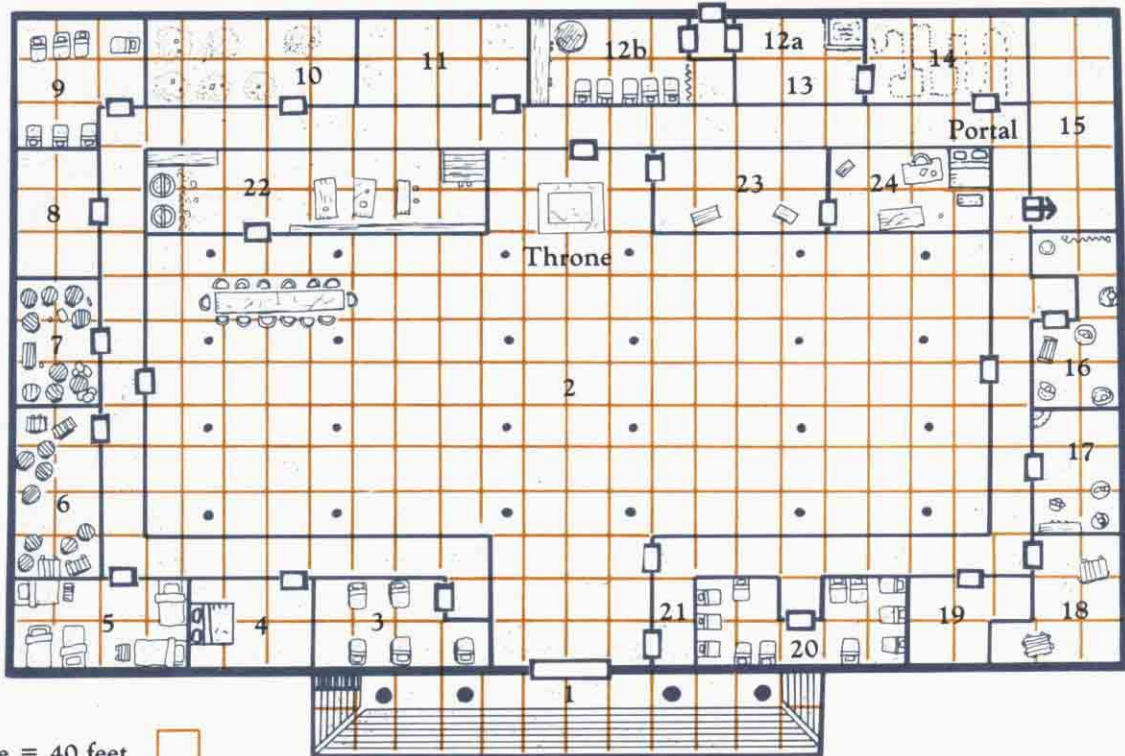
KRELL, A YUGOLOTH (PLANAR/♀ ARCANOLOTH/HD 12+24/NE): Int supra-genius (19); AC –4 (–8 at full health); MV 12, Fl 18 (B); hp 55 (106 at full health); THACO 13 (9 at full health); #AT 3; Dmg 1–4/1–4/2–12; SA claw sting; SD +3 or better weapon to hit, spell immunity; MR 60%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML average (9); XP 6,000.

Krell fled from Gehenna to Carceri to hide from others of her race, when it became apparent that she would be stripped of her rank and power due to political disagreements with a higher-ranking arcanoloth. She sought refuge in this cave to keep her tormentors from finding her. Unfortunately, the other arcanoloths discovered a way to remove her powers from a distance. Because she can use neither an arcanoloth's powers nor the general powers of a yugoloth against these bashers, she's forced to rely on hand-to-hand fighting instead. She now sits in the cave all the time – except to kill passersby who look like they've come to take her back to Gehenna – mourning the loss of her abilities.

She is in pitiful condition, so gaunt her ribs visibly show through her skin. Her cape is in tatters, her brown fur is mangy, and her eyes are red from weeping. Her tiny cave smells of waste; the odor wafts out periodically during the time the PCs deal with her. She doesn't appear wounded; she's just wasting away.

Krell acts peery toward these bashers but won't attack them unless they make sudden moves toward her. If she feels she is being led into a trap, she won't hesitate to try forcing the characters over the edge of the cliff. If asked, she tells the group that while she was out hunting yesterday, she saw a dwarf go stumping on up the road toward Crius's temple. She can give the PCs a general overview of the area, including directions to various places, but she'll do so only after they give her some food. She'll eat anything, though she'd prefer the life force of a mortal. Nonetheless, she'll settle for any meal she doesn't have to hunt, as venturing out exposes her to needless danger.

CRIUS'S TEMPLE



HILL GIANT+ STEADING (D)

The path twists higher and higher up the mountainside, with switchbacks coming more and more frequently. However, the trail gradually widens, becoming a path that even a giant could use with only minor difficulty. As you round one of these switchbacks, the wind picks up, suddenly turning into a howling shriek that threatens to pluck you from the trail and throw you into a chasm that looks bottomless. The gale has pushed you to the very edge of the gorge — you could so easily go plunging to your death. In an instant, the winds cease their bellowing and drop to a mere breeze. A fortress stands before you, where you had seen only the frightful gorge a moment before.

The tall, wooden steading stands on a large ledge in the trail that was not there mere seconds ago. The fortress is built on a scale to accommodate giants. From its massive doors to its huge arrow slits, this is surely a keep designed for folks far bigger than ordinary sods. Only after you have taken all this in do you notice the many strings of human heads bobbing by the doorposts. Some of these heads still look fresh, and all bear an expression of horrid pain. From behind the walls, you hear the muffled arguing of what sounds like giant guards.



This is one of the minor keeps of the hill giant power, Grolantor. A body'd find only some 150 hill giants that call this steading home. If the bashers ever want to see Sigil again, avoiding a giants' case is a good first step. The nasties here would just as soon kill the characters as look at them. Also, some gehreleths have made this place their home, pressed into service by the fearsome Grolantor. In short, berk, try to break in, and watch the giant forces come tearing out of the fortress to crush everyone in sight like insects. Only very high-level bashers or those with an extremely clever escape plan can hope to survive against this giant horde.

If the cutters have come here in the company of Tanaaka, she volunteers to go in and ask whether any

dwarven petitioners have come this way recently. She bids the characters hide for a moment or two, then goes to pound on the keep's door. The wind starts to howl again, whipping away the words Tanaaka exchanges with the gate guard, a hill giant wearing a large goat skin on his head. The guard shakes his head to several questions, then turns to bellow something to someone below, and the massive gate swings open. Tanaaka jogs quickly over to the PCs and tells them that no one has seen the dwarf. Then she adds that she is leaving them to enter the fortress and live with her kind. She wishes them luck and, before they can stop her, jogs back to the open gate. As the bashers watch, the gate swings shut and the wind whips up again. When the small dust cyclone raised by the gale dies down, the characters see only that the trail ends in the gorge once more. The PCs can expect nothing more to happen here — except disaster if they try to force the stead to appear again.

HILL GIANT (150)

(PETITIONER/♂, ♀ GIANT/HD 12+2/N): Int low (7); AC 3; MV 12; hp 80–98; THACO 9; #AT 1; Dmg (2–12) +7 (Strength); SA hurl rocks, (2–16); SD special*; SZ H (16 feet tall); ML champion (16); XP 3,000.

- * If the PCs, by some miracle, manage to kill a number of the hill giants, the power Grolantor himself descends upon the characters to make sure they never bother his petitioners again.

THE VILLAGE OF STRAIFLING (E)

After a bitter climb up a ledge narrower than most, the party walks around a bend and spies one of the ever-present rope bridges of this plane. Beyond the 200-foot bridge and the chasm it spans lies another small village, its people bustling around efficiently. As soon as the PCs round the bend, a lookout lets loose a shout, and the villagers quickly drop whatever they were doing to draw their weapons. People rush to defend various strategic points, and the town falls silent, waiting for the bashers to make the next move.

As soon as the PCs move to set foot on the bridge, the lookout calls, "Leave your weapons and you can cross!" If Tanaaka accompanies the party, the lookout adds, "And leave the hill giant behind!" Tanaaka complies happily enough, as she doesn't want to risk any more rope bridges than she must. If the party members cross the span, they are subjected to a quick search for concealed weapons as soon as they alight on the other side. Locals toss those they find into a large bin. With the search complete, the questions start coming: Who are you? What do you want? Where are you going? What's your purpose in this town?

Once the bashers have answered satisfactorily, they can ask a few of their own. They learn they've entered the village of Straifling (population 50), a town of misplaced sods who've banded together to fight off the rampaging horrors of Carceri. Though some of these petitioners are good and some evil, all know that their place is not in Colothys. They maintain constant vigil against the gehreleths and yugoloths that come to rend their spirits and against the hill giants that could crush them as they pass by in search of their power.

The villagers work in harmony, for they know it's the only way to survive on this cruel plane. They'd like to leave, if only they knew how. They do know the chant regarding local landmarks, though, including the town of Gaola, the lone cave, the hill giant standing, and Crius's temple. They are happy to offer directions to the temple in exchange for the chant about possible methods of escaping the plane. None of them has seen the dwarf the PCs seek.

The village has a baker, rope-maker, blacksmith, weaponmaker and armorer, and an innkeeper who runs a small tavern. Several houses lie scattered about on the plateau and on the wood platform that make up the village. Though the price of goods here is about twice the listed price in Chapter 6 of the *Player's Handbook*, the burgers aren't out to cheat these bashers: Everyone in town has to pay high prices, due to the scarcity of materials. The town operates so much as a cooperative system, based on barter and services, that the shopkeepers are actually astonished that anyone would pay with money. They're glad to have it, but they've gotten so used to naming a price in gold and receiving services based on that price that the sight of real jink astounds them.

If the PCs have been friendly and wish to stay the night, the townsfolk put them up in separate houses, for no single house can hold the entire party. In the morning, the villagers send them on their way with a good breakfast and return their weapons. They would send someone to guide them to Crius's temple, but they need everyone they have to defend the town and make it as secure as possible. And, of course, if the characters were hostile to the people of Straifling, they'll have to find their way to the temple without directions.

VILLAGER (50)

(PETITIONER/♂, ♀ HUMAN, HALF-ELF, ELF/F1,W1,T1/ANY BUT NE); Int average (8–10); AC 7; MV 12; hp 2–8; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1–8; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP varies.

AWW, IS +HE LI+LE DWARFIE
L⊕S+?

I G⊕S A PLACE F⊕R
YER.

— GUARD AT
CRIUS'S
TEMPLE



CRIUS'S TEMPLE (F)

The terrain along the road here grows even more extreme, believe it or not. The mountains rise taller and the canyons plunge deeper, as if cut into the bedrock by an angry power. Ahead, the glint of white marble against the dark backdrop of the mountains marks the temple of the titan Crius. The road up to it seems particularly steep, but the footing oddly grows less treacherous. You think you can reach it in only a few minutes.

Half an hour later, you finally make it to the temple's plateau. It was much farther away than you thought, but now that you stand before it, you see why it had looked close: It was built to suit occupants 25 feet tall or taller! The temple sits nestled between high peaks, which fail to dwarf this titanic edifice the way they do everything else on this plane.

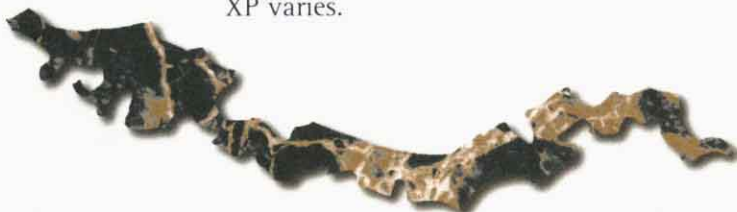
CLIMAX

As the realm of Crius, almost a power in his own right, the great temple is a very dangerous place for bashers. The DM should take pains to impress the players with its vastness, especially those playing low-level characters. This is not the case of some berk, where a body can act brash and bold and still give 'em the laugh; if the characters rattle their bone-boxes to the wrong people around here, they could end up in the dead-book before they know it. Any of the petitioners inside can identify the temple to the characters as that of Crius, the Titan of Weight and Density.

INSIDE +HE TEMPLE

All the doors in the temple are titan-size. However, given the average height of his servitors, Crius has graciously allowed them to install man-size ones, too.

1. ENTRY AND STOA: Each step in the staircase leading up to the entryway is 6 feet high, requiring the bashers to clamber up them as if they were ledges. To one side of this massive staircase are stairs more fitting to a nor-





mal human: only 2 feet high. At the top of the stairs is a huge porch, its marble columns extending high to the roof overhead. It's hard to imagine how a temple as beautiful as this could exist in a realm as harsh as Carceri.

Past the porch is a set of immense double doors, easily 60 feet tall, made of carved bronze and wood. They stand ajar, as if inviting the cutters inside. Images carved on the doors depict the fall of the titans to the mighty powers. Sounds of activity come from within.

2. GREAT HALL: The vast main hall is lit poorly by smoky torches in sconces on the columns supporting the ceiling. A radiance from the back of the hall eclipses the glow of the torches there, however. The brightness comes from Crius's throne at the far end of the hall. The floor is immaculate, white marble tile. Doors in every wall lead farther into the temple proper.

When the PCs set foot past a window on their right, the guard from the guard post there (area 21) steps forth to accost them.

3. WATCHERS' QUARTERS: The guards of the gateway live in this large room, their beds painfully minuscule compared to the vastness of the chamber. The beds are scattered as far as possible from each other, as each guard likes his own space. When night comes to Carceri, the five watchers who live here patrol from one end of the porch to the other, guarding against unauthorized entries into the temple. A table in the center of the room is littered with food and cards. There are no valuables in this room, except those on the guards' persons. Each watcher carries a *short sword* +1 and 15 gp.

GUARD (5)

(PETITIONER/♂, ♀ HUMAN/F4/CE): Int average (8); AC 7; MV 12; hp 22; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA *short sword* +1; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 120.

4. UNUSED ROOM: This room remains empty most of the time, though if a lesser titan or giant were to become a guard (unlikely), it might see some use. Now the chamber gathers dust, as does the man-size *short sword* +2 in the far corner.

5. VISITORS' QUARTERS: The rare visitors Crius receives are quartered in this austere room. The chamber has several beds (titan-size), as well as footlockers and racks for

hanging clothes and cloaks. Nothing in the room induces a body to stay longer than necessary. There is nothing of value here.

6. FOOD STORAGE: Though it might seem barmy to call such a large room a pantry, that's its function. It holds meat (from cattle, horses, dogs, and dead petitioners), grain, vegetables, and some previously prepared foods. The room is filled with flies, which alight on every available surface. Few of the priests and guards open this door twice, preferring not to know what they're eating.

7. DRINK STORAGE: All liquids for the temple are stored here, including the water for washing. Barrels hold types of beer, wine, ouzo, and retsina. Most in the temple leave this room alone, too, for Crius has decreed death for anyone caught sneaking in to drink his liquor.

8. MEDITATION CHAMBER: The white marble of the rest of the temple takes on a rosy tinge here. When the priests and guards need some peace, they come to this chamber and reflect on how lucky they are not to have been destroyed by Crius. The room is permanently enchanted with *silence*, and it is difficult for a body to see more than 10 feet ahead of himself.

9. MINOR PRIESTS' QUARTERS: Ten beds surround a small altar in the middle of this room. The chamber is devoid of other features, except for the black robes hanging at the foot of each bed. The temple's lesser priests lead a life of austerity, learning to preach the ways of Crius, "the god."

Since Crius does not have the ability to grant spells, none of his priests can use them. Petitioners who come here may choose between studying in Crius's priesthood or becoming a guard; most become guards, preferring a life of danger facing gehreleths and yugoloths to the harsh tutelage of Antiphonus, the high priest of Crius. The priests serve as bureaucrats, cleaning staff, and mediators for the guards. Despite their lowly tasks, they rank higher than guards in the temple hierarchy.

LESSER PRIEST (10)

(PETITIONER/♂, ♀ HUMAN/P3/CE): Int average (8); AC 10; MV 12; hp 19; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2 (fist); SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 15.

10. TREASURY: In the first of Crius's two treasuries the titan keeps his coins and unattached gems. In this storehouse of riches, his priests dare touch nothing, for they've seen his wrath when his belongings are disturbed.

The coins and gems seem to be mixed haphazardly, with no apparent rhyme or reason to the piles. However, there are in actuality six distinct piles of jumbled treasure. If the bashers take the trouble to examine them, they find that each pile has exactly the same net worth in coinage. The gems are roughly the same size as each of the others in their pile, though they differ in color and value. Should the PCs go through the coins, they must make sure to stay silent, for any noise in here brings the guards running to investigate those who would trifle with Crius's money. There is exactly 200,000 gp worth of treasure here, with 33,333 gp value in each pile, and one pile with an extra gold piece. Crius can take instant stock of each stack with a glance, and he comes by here every once in a while to make sure that no one's bobbed him.

11. HIGH PRIEST'S QUARTERS: Antiphonus, the high priest, never emerges from his chambers, unless the noise out in the hallway grows so great it disrupts his concentration. He is carefully crafting a reply to his titan master's demand to know how a lone dwarf petitioner was able to get so far into the temple as to actually enter Crius's chambers holding a chip of white marble. The high priest is a tall, skeletally thin man with a shaved head and sunken eyes. He is prone to fits of anger at the slightest provocation, and nearly everyone in the temple agrees he's slightly barmy. Antiphonus has been Crius's high priest for over two centuries now, and the work is wearing on him. Though fanatically loyal to the titan, he yearns to find a successor. This is why he's so cruel to the new priests: He wants to see who might be tough enough to stand up to the difficult Crius as the next High Priest.

Antiphonus does not have any spell abilities, since Crius can't grant spells. However, he still fights as a priest and tries to convert everyone to the worship of his titan lord, as any priest would.

HIGH PRIEST ANTIPHONUS (PLANAR/♂ HUMAN/P13/CE): Int high (14); AC 7 (studded leather armor); MV 12; hp 19; THACO 12; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2 (fist); SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 65.

12. BACK ENTRANCE: The temple's back door has proven useful in the past to guards making a run for the safety of the temple, yugoths or gehreleths hot on their trail. The sturdy door usually stands partially open

while a guard peers out in all directions. 'Course, when a fiend approaches, the door closes and the bar falls. This area becomes the infirmary for guards who are too proud to see the priests. No patients are here now, but the room's medical supplies are quite extensive.

13. GUARD ROOM: Unlike their counterparts in area 3, back door guards remain on duty at all times, not just at night, to protect the temple from intruders. With these bashers here, no one sneaks in the back way.

GUARD (5)

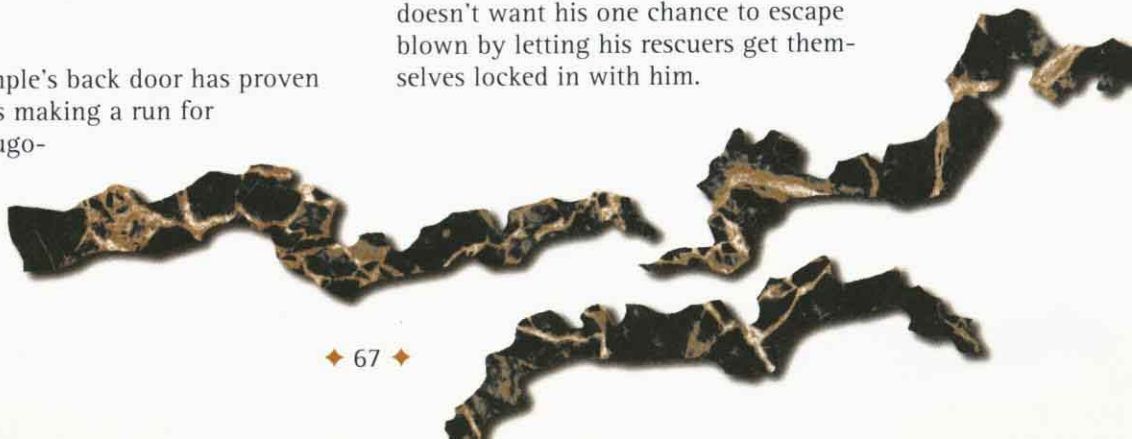
(PLANAR/♂, ♀ HUMAN/F4/CE): Int average (8); AC 7; MV 12; hp 22; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 120.

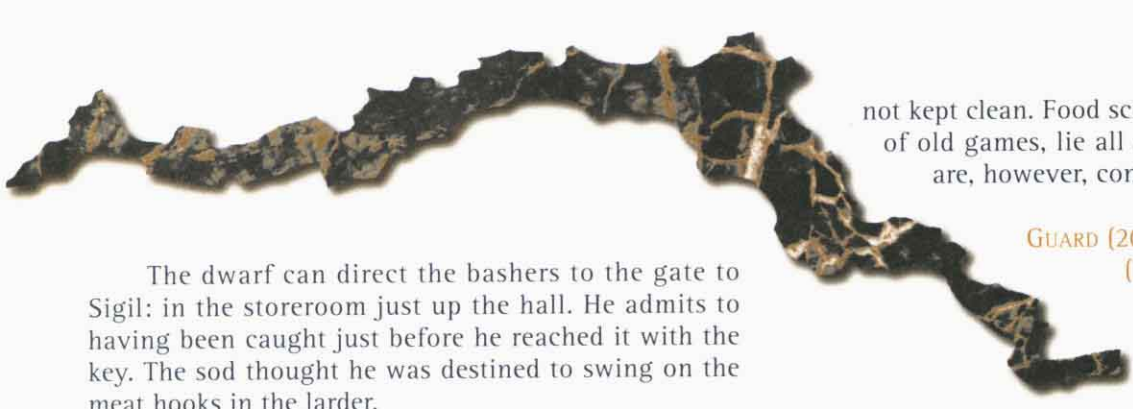
14. PORTAL AND STOREROOM: The entrance to this normal-looking storeroom is actually the portal back to Sigil. The key to the gate, a chip of white marble, can be easily obtained in the temple by chipping off a piece of flagstone. Parties with more than six bashers need two chips to activate the portal long enough for everyone to pass through. The portal drops the party in The Lady's Ward of Sigil.

The storeroom beyond the portal holds sacks of grain and chalk. The bags are piled high to form a maze a body must navigate to find the back entrance and infirmary (area 12). The labyrinth is the guards' answer to the priests' domination of the household – the priests cannot find their way through the maze without a bag or two of flour falling a little too close for comfort.

15. PRISON: The birdcage trapping Zeracuk the dwarf sage is simply a vast expanse of empty white marble, designed to make a body's eyes play tricks on him, driving him barmy. The door has no lock and opens easily – from the outside. Inside, there's no latch, and it swings shut on its own. Someone cooped up in here can't open the door without outside help; its marble texture meshes nearly seamlessly with the wall. A thief using proper tools might open the door on a successful open locks skill roll with a -5% penalty.

Zeracuk is intensely happy to see faces not belonging to Crius's detachment. As soon as he sees that the characters are not from the titan's squad, he tells them not to enter the room any farther; he doesn't want his one chance to escape blown by letting his rescuers get themselves locked in with him.





not kept clean. Food scraps, as well as the remains of old games, lie all over the tables. The tables are, however, conspicuously clear of money.

GUARD (20)

(PLANAR/♂, ♀ HUMAN/F4/CE):

Int average (8); AC 7; MV

12; hp 19; THACO 17;

#AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SZ M

(6 feet tall); ML steady

(12); XP 120.

The dwarf can direct the bashers to the gate to Sigil: in the storeroom just up the hall. He admits to having been caught just before he reached it with the key. The sod thought he was destined to swing on the meat hooks in the larder.

ZERACUK (PETITIONER/♂ DWARF/O SAGE/N): Int exceptional (16); AC 10; MV 6; hp 6; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2 (fists); SZ S (4 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 15.

16-17. ART ROOMS: Crius may be a better artist than a god, evidenced by the works on display. The Titan of Weight and Density has used his unique powers to make each of his pieces immovable by ordinary mortals.

Among his treasures are crystalline statues, epic paintings, busts of long-dead creatures and gods, and so forth. These bashers have never seen anything to equal the work here. The rooms are so absolutely beautiful, a body might believe the titan actually has a heart in his chest after all (or, failing that, a fine sense of the aesthetic principle). If the PCs could somehow move the pieces, they would easily fetch 20,000 gp each.

18. INTERROGATION ROOM: Well, berk, the bad news is that the titan's interrogation is filled with frightening devices of torture and pain, and he's not afraid to use them. The good news is that they are all sized for creatures 15 feet or taller. Since the realm of the hill giants is not far from this place, odds are the devices are intended for those folks. Gruesome evidence shows that the place clearly has seen recent use.

19. ARMORY: The titan owns an absolutely stunning number of weapons. The racks reach to the 40-foot ceiling, a tracked rolling ladder allowing access to the higher levels. There are weapons of all sorts, with at least five representatives from each type of weapon listed in the *Player's Handbook* (excepting the arquebus). The armory resembles a library, with each weapon ordered in its proper place — 'cept they normally don't lock the door to a library.

20. BARRACKS: When not patrolling the temple perimeter, the guards stay in this barracks, which offers plenty of room for each to have a large personal space. They all take advantage of this, as none of them particularly likes the others. Beds are set up haphazardly, and the spaces are

21. GUARD POST: When the bashers pass the initial guard post to Crius's temple, they see a guard peering at them from a 25-foot window that starts 3 feet from the floor. The guard rushes out of the room, demanding to know why the characters have defiled the temple with their presence. Though hostile, he's not concerned about doing his job well; he just wants people to remember that he's done his job. He'll let visitors through on any excuse, unless they mention something about putting Crius in the dead-book. When his superiors are watching, this guard attends much more closely to his job.

GUARD (PLANAR/♂ HUMAN/F4/CE): Int average (9); AC 7; MV 12; hp 19; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 120.

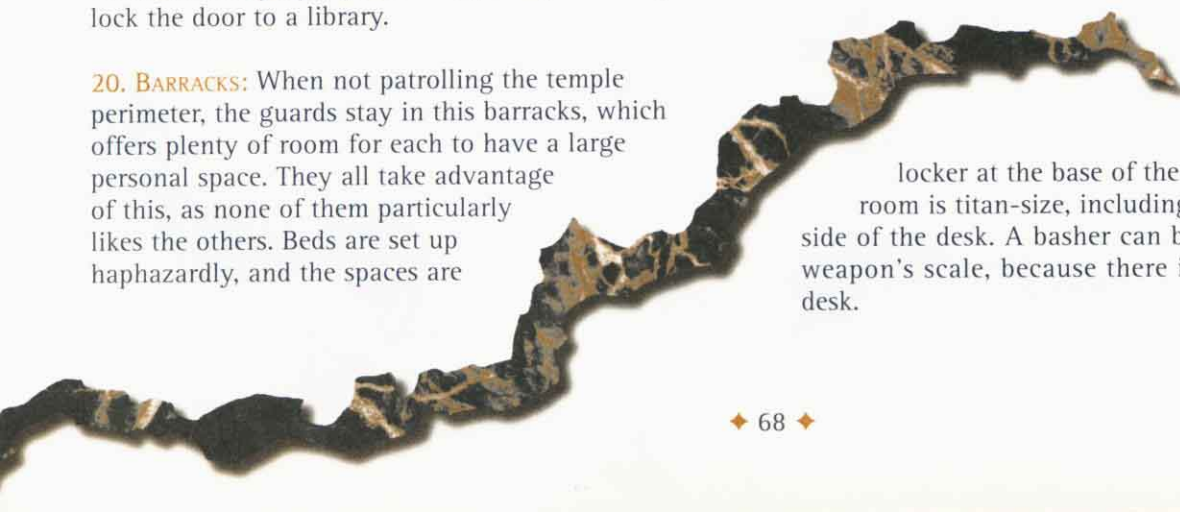
22. KITCHEN: Like so many of the other rooms in the temple, the kitchen is huge. Mindless slaves, the remnants of petitioners who stumbled into Crius's realm, bustle about the kitchen, preparing food for the titan and his minions. The food, though not particularly good, is nourishing. All Crius's minions must eat at a long table set up outside the kitchen. The groups segregate themselves: priests at one end, soldiers at the other.

23. CRIUS'S ANTEROOM: This waiting chamber is sized to titan specifications, its chairs and low table easily 10 feet high. In the far wall is a single, massive door, with a small door at its base. The human-sized door has a small knocker.

24. CRIUS'S ROOM: The titan's huge, spartan bedroom contains a military cot up

against the far wall, a writing desk with scrolls scattered across it, and a relatively small foot-

locker at the base of the bed. Everything in this room is titan-size, including the large sword at the side of the desk. A basher can be pretty certain of this weapon's scale, because there is a titan sitting at the desk.



He looks up, displeased. "So, you're the mortals who've been pestering those of my realm," he says. "Off to the prisons with you! I'll deal with you later." He literally dismisses the party with a wave of his hand, for, unless they each make a successful saving throw vs. spell at a -2 penalty, they are transported instantly to the prison (area 15). He'll come later to question them. Though he may be evil, he is also intelligent.

If any characters make their saves, the titan looks at them more thoughtfully. He leans back in his leather chair and says, "You have one minute to tell me what you're doing here before I destroy you." Crius has a permanent *detect lie* about his person while in his realm, so, if these bashers try to tell a lie, they had better make it an entertaining one. Should they speak truthfully, and with a humble demeanor, read the following aloud:

The titan leans back and shakes his head in mock sorrow at their plight. "Very well, mortals. If you can answer me this, I shall let you and your companions roam free again:

"I pull you down.

"I let you soar.

"I diminish in water

"Yet remain the same.

"I constantly hold you in my grip.

"Some say I'm interminable.

"What am I?"

The answer is "weight." "Gravity," "density," and "mass" are also acceptable answers, though Crius is mildly displeased if one of these is given in preference to "weight."

The titan gives the characters as long as they need to puzzle out the answer. As soon as one person tries to answer the riddle, Crius assumes the answer is for the whole party. If they are wrong, he imprisons them, escorting the bashers to the birdcage personally if they continue to make their saves against his magic.

Should they answer correctly, read the following:



The titan pauses for a long while. He stares hard at the characters, surprised they were able to solve his puzzle. "I should just imprison you," he says. "Who would know I had broken my word?" He pauses again. "Get your friends and get out. You have five minutes to leave. After that time, you're mine." He turns back to his desk.

The characters have five minutes to find the jail (area 15), Zeracuk, any PCs Crius sent to prison with his spell, and the portal. After that time is up, the titan comes looking for them, and there ain't a place in that temple they can hide. His punishment, if he catches them, is left to the DM's imagination. He may kill them, he may make them slaves – he might even let them go with a stern warning, depending on how the PCs have conducted themselves. But don't bet on it, berk.



BLANK
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CRUIUS (PLANAR/♂ TITAN/HD 30/CE): Int godlike (23); AC -3; MV 24; hp 390; THACO 5; #AT 2; Dmg 10-60/ 10-60; SA spells, special; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, immune to missile attacks, casts spells; MR 50%; SZ G (25-100* feet), ML fearless (20); XP n/a (impossible for a party to vanquish Crius in his own temple).

- The titan's exact size depends on his whim; he usually wears a form of about 25 feet so his temple feels larger.)

If the PC bashers are such leatherheads they attack Crius, he toys with them for a few rounds. In the special attack he can make every other round he increases the density of objects to such an extent that they cannot be moved. If he concentrates on a being for four rounds, that sod becomes unable to move or be moved until the titan so desires. The effect lasts 1d4 hours, and Crius can make it permanent if he wants to spend an additional turn concentrating on the hapless mortal. In his realm, what he wants is what he gets, and he'll never voluntarily lose a battle. Only an actual power has any chance of defeating Crius on his home ground, and few powers actually care to make the attempt.

Once the cutters have rescued Zeracuk from the temple, the adventure is effectively over. The DM can guide the players through the return to Sigil or just assume there are no further incidents. The PCs are to be well rewarded for their efforts; the factol will know he can count on them in the future.

EPILOGUE

'Course, old Zeracuk's going to be grateful for being spared the meat hook (though he might not show it, such being the nature of dwarves). If his rescuers ever happen to need information regarding portals or conduits near Sigil, the blood might be able to give them an answer (at the DM's option). All the PCs need to do is find him in the Dwarven Mountain. But remember: A greedy

berk always winds up a sorry berk. The sage's debt extends only so far, after all. If the PCs seek his help too often, he'll declare the debt cancelled.

It's a cinch Crius isn't going to have appreciated people barging in and out of his home, especially if they stole some of his valuables. Just to prove a point, he might decide to send one or two of his minions to go barging into the case of a PC who stole from him, take a couple valuable things, and return home. The minions are instructed, of course, to leave a trail for the cutters to follow. Once they trace the cross-traders back to Crius, he'll just make sure the characters return whatever they pinched from him and apologize for the trouble they've caused. His titanic pride has been insulted, and he'll stop at nothing to make sure he's repaid somehow. If the payment involves seeing the bashers grovel, fine. If it involves beating them to a senseless pulp when they refuse to bow to him, even better.

If the PCs aided Krell, the arcanoloth, she'll remember them later. She hates to owe a debt, even if it is only to mortals, and can grant them shelter or a favor if they ever return to Carceri. She eventually may regain her power, at the DM's discretion, and could decide these bashers'd be worthy allies to an arcanoloth on the way up. On the other hand, if the DM does not want to give the characters a powerful ally in the Lower Planes, she might come cringing to Sigil, sought by yugoloths who no longer fear her. Once in the City of Doors, she seeks out the characters, hoping they'll grant her protection. There's even a slim chance that she could reform and begin to work for the cause of good — 'cept she'll keep it up only until she can regain her old power as an evil being, at which point her true nature will manifest again.

Any advice the party gives the residents of Straifling is well heeded, especially advice on escaping. Unfortunately, Crius tightens up his security after the dwarf and the cutters came barging into his temple, so any petitioners from the town of Straifling are easily caught. Survivors (or escapees) might come to tell the PCs of the plight of the village folk; the bashers might find themselves called upon to rescue the poor berks who foolishly followed their advice. Alternatively, capturing the villagers may be Crius's ploy to lure the PCs back to Colothys to face the justice he now believes they so richly deserve after defiling his temple.

CHAPTER VI: EPONA'S DAUGHTER

In which a fine Steed is captured on the Prime, leading her Sisters to seek the Heroes to Aid in her timely Rescue.

JUST THE FACTS, BERK

NUMBER OF PCs: 1 to 4.

LEVELS: 9th to 11th.

PCs PREFERRED: Any proven planar adventurers. Primes who've never been to the planes will not be approached for

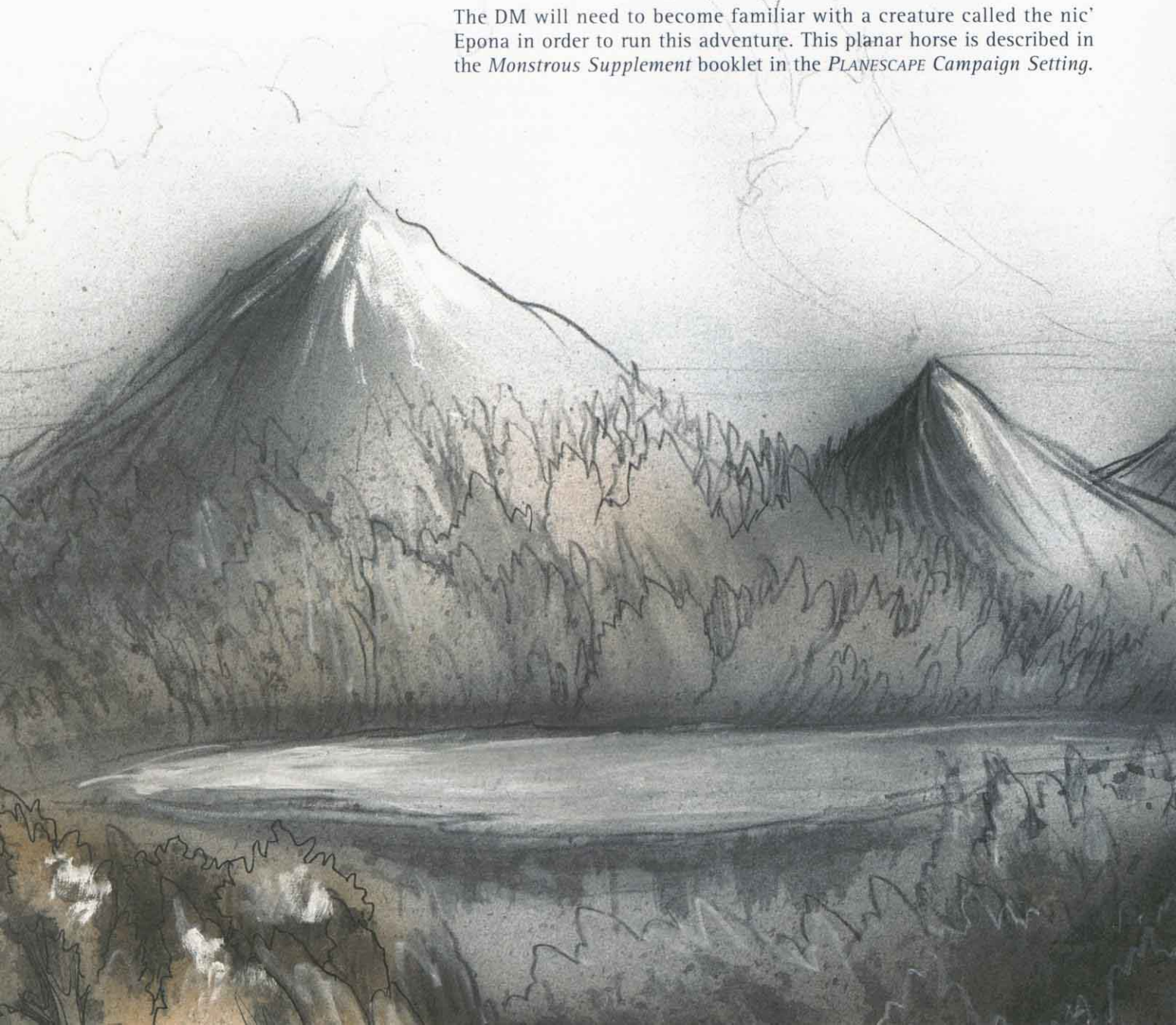
this adventure.

FACTIONS: None (though the factions would be mightily interested in owning a debt from a creature like the planar steed in this scenario).

SYNOPSIS: The player characters are asked to rescue a captured planar horse of extreme rarity: a nic'Epona.

DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

The DM will need to become familiar with a creature called the nic'Epona in order to run this adventure. This planar horse is described in the *Monstrous Supplement* booklet in the *PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting*.



HERE'S +HE CHAN+

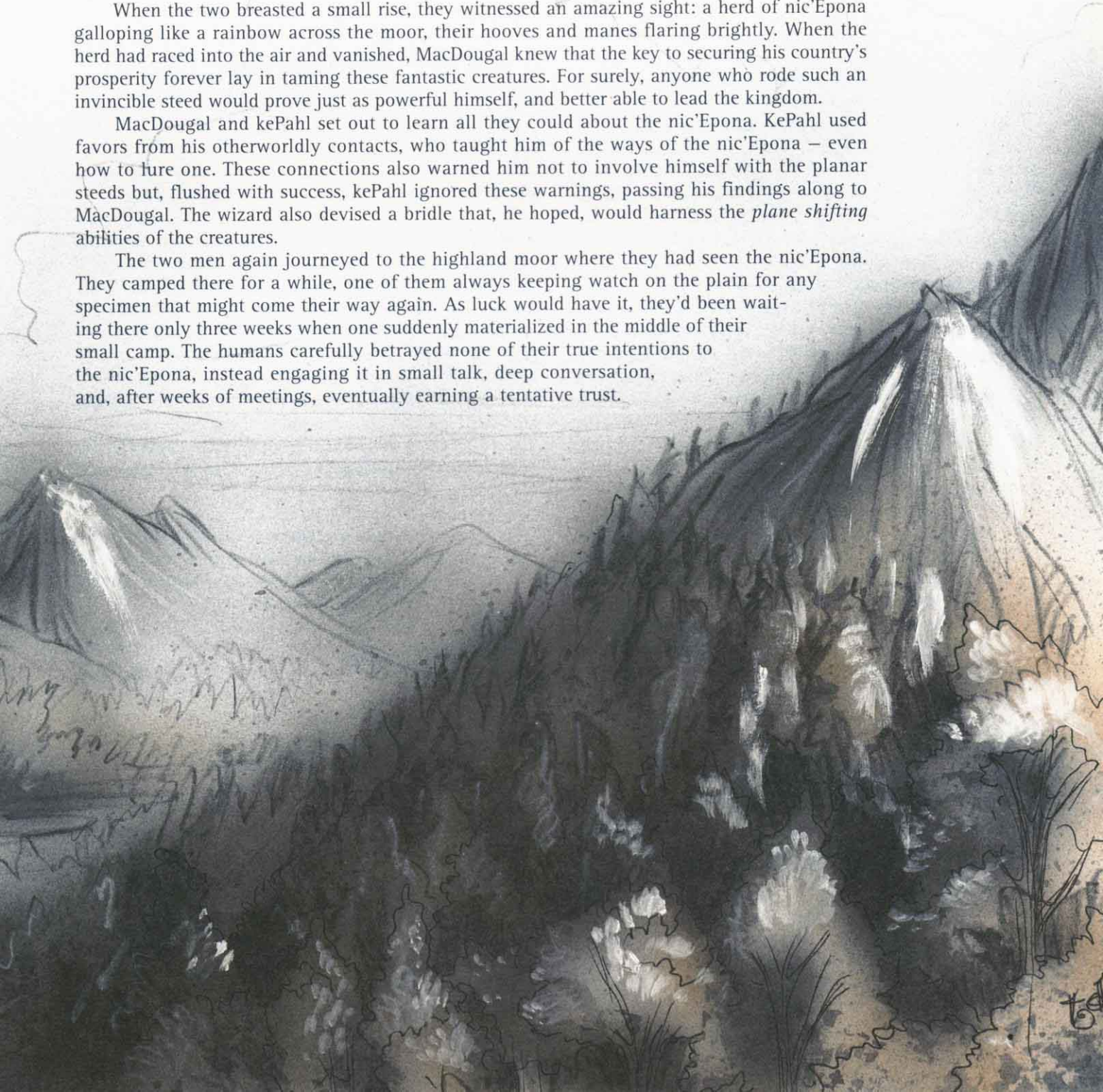
A prime warrior named MacDougal grew to power in the land of Kellinon, carving himself a throne with his bloody swords. He ruled well but sternly, dealing with all transgressions of his law harshly. He was not a despot or a tyrant, but neither was he a loving king. Carrying deep in his heart the desire to promote the welfare of all, he grew to loathe individual freedoms that impinged on the collective good. He was firm because he wanted the best for his people, and anyone opposing this wish of his (including the troublemakers in his land) met with prison or the headsman.

Contemplating possible expansions and the future of Kellinon, MacDougal went riding one day across the highlands with his friend, advisor, and court wizard, kePahl. The king was concerned about the growing unease within his populace at the shadow that seemed to have fallen across the land of late.

When the two breasted a small rise, they witnessed an amazing sight: a herd of nic'Epona galloping like a rainbow across the moor, their hooves and manes flaring brightly. When the herd had raced into the air and vanished, MacDougal knew that the key to securing his country's prosperity forever lay in taming these fantastic creatures. For surely, anyone who rode such an invincible steed would prove just as powerful himself, and better able to lead the kingdom.

MacDougal and kePahl set out to learn all they could about the nic'Epona. KePahl used favors from his otherworldly contacts, who taught him of the ways of the nic'Epona – even how to lure one. These connections also warned him not to involve himself with the planar steeds but, flushed with success, kePahl ignored these warnings, passing his findings along to MacDougal. The wizard also devised a bridle that, he hoped, would harness the *plane shifting* abilities of the creatures.

The two men again journeyed to the highland moor where they had seen the nic'Epona. They camped there for a while, one of them always keeping watch on the plain for any specimen that might come their way again. As luck would have it, they'd been waiting there only three weeks when one suddenly materialized in the middle of their small camp. The humans carefully betrayed none of their true intentions to the nic'Epona, instead engaging it in small talk, deep conversation, and, after weeks of meetings, eventually earning a tentative trust.



But one day, when the nic'Epona, named Myerai, had turned away for just a moment, MacDougal leapt upon her and threw the untested bridle over her head. Shocked that her new friends had turned stag, Myerai attempted to shift to another plane. She found, to her horror and pain, that any attempt to use her power not only proved ineffective, but also caused a horrible burning sensation inside her. She passed out, and MacDougal and kePahl bound her and headed for home.

The poor creature now finds herself a prisoner in MacDougal's dungeons, where kePahl has his laboratory. Meanwhile, Myerai's sisters have missed her and have gone looking. Following her tracks, they traced her to the Prime Material, but lost her "scent" thereafter. In desperation, they now turn to adventurers to recover their sister.

The land MacDougal rules is a superstitious land, one with a well-developed mythology based on the curious creatures occasionally spied throughout the countryside. His people believe in the land of Faerie, ruled by the Seelie Court and opposed by the Unseelie Court. This belief explains for them the existence of gnomes, dwarves, elves, and other "unnatural" creatures, who sometimes pass through this land.

Fact is, there ain't a Seelie Court. That was an idea made up by a passing planar, an elf bard who had to think fast or lose his skin to a howling mob. In the centuries since the bard gave 'em the laugh, though, these locals developed a full-fledged belief around his story and created their own embellishments. Thus, the arrival of demihumans in this area is cause for alarm and excitement, for it means that Faerie has come back to visit, whether for good or for ill. MacDougal is willing to bargain with presumed members of the Seelie Court, in exchange for assurances that Kellinon remain safe from "unnatural" Faerie pillaging.

Here's another bit of the dark: The gods' influence is not felt here nearly as much as in other spheres. Clerics in a party who reveal themselves as agents of gods other than those revered here make the locals very peery — could the character be an agent of the Unseelie Court instead? These folks are more narrow-minded than most Clueless; they've never even seen a priest's spell work.

SEQUENCE

1. The player characters are approached by a nic'Epona, who tells them her sister's plight. She leads the bashers to the site of the other horse's abduction.

2. After setting the PCs down near a loch in the area where her sister was last seen, the nic'Epona disappears to look for clues on her own.

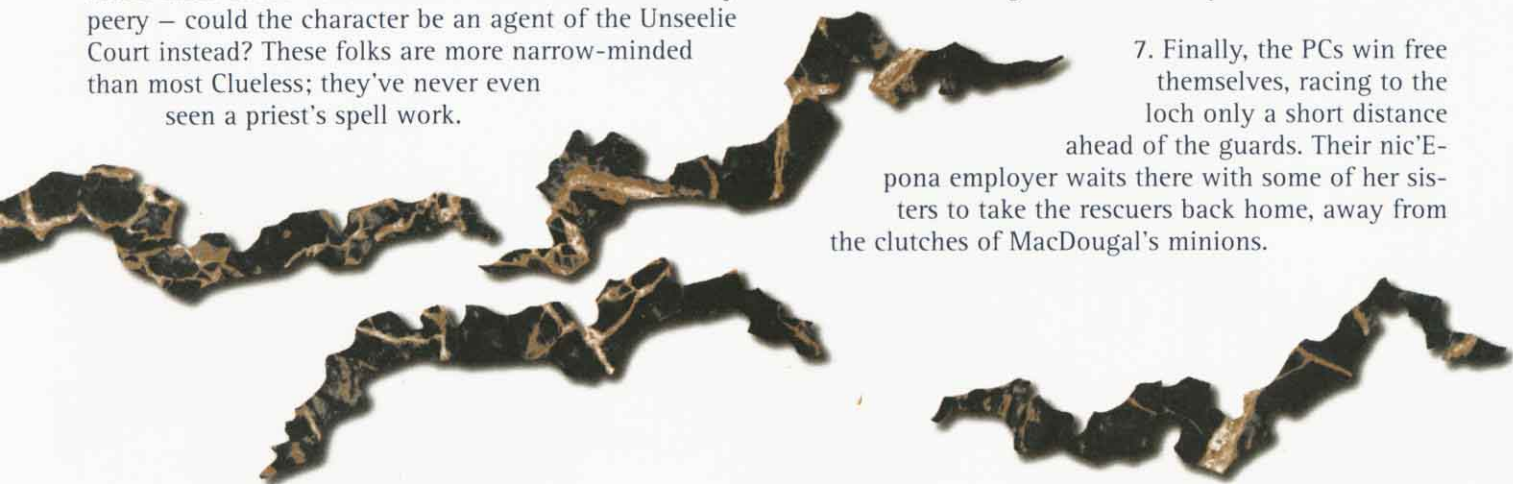
3. The cutters search for tracks, find them, and leave the area of the loch. They encounter a shepherdess, who gives the PCs a room, a meal, and information about the area.

4. The characters make their way across the land to the keep, where the wizard kePahl has anticipated their arrival. The royal advisor makes sure the party is well rested and comfortable, acting very civil all the while. However, that knight of the post drugged the PCs' drinks. If they fail their saving throws, they wake up in the keep's dungeon and must find a way to escape.

5. Meanwhile, MacDougal is interested to see what his prisoners want with this creature. If they disagree with his treatment of the nic'Epona or his rationale for holding her, he angrily threatens to either put them back in the birdcage — or in the dead-book. Should they agree that the magical horse could help his kingdom, he might offer them the chance to leave without bloodshed, for he's got nothing against them. MacDougal is sincerely interested in the good of Kellinon, but, convinced as he is of the nic'Epona's importance to his land, he thinks nothing of her sacrifice for the good of his people.

6. The cutters refuse to depart as MacDougal offered and manage to liberate the planar creature, despite resistance from kePahl, MacDougal, and the guards of the keep.

7. Finally, the PCs win free themselves, racing to the loch only a short distance ahead of the guards. Their nic'Epona employer waits there with some of her sisters to take the rescuers back home, away from the clutches of MacDougal's minions.



I+ BEGINS

The player characters enter this scenario in Sigil or the Outlands: a place where someone looking for them can find them without too much difficulty. If they are between adventures, so much the better, though they need not have finished another to begin this one.

One day as they go about their business, the cutters spy a multicolored splotch in the middle of the air. Even as they watch, this dancing speck enlarges, taking on the silhouette of a horse. Seconds later, a real horse emerges through this midair portal, which collapses in on itself.

The remarkable steed, pale gray with a golden mane, pauses to look at the characters as if judging them, and then speaks.

"Greetings, mortals. I am a daughter of the equine goddess, Epona. I know you have traveled the planes — I, too, can do so, but freely and with my sisters. I come seeking you because I have heard good tales of your reputations, and I need your help. One of my sisters is missing, and I cannot find her, though I know where last she traveled.

"If you help me, I cannot pay you back in the fashion to which you and your companions are accustomed, with gold or magic. However, I can offer you the promise of friendship, from me and my many sisters, if you help us to find our lost one."

Should these cutters prove leatherheaded enough to decline, the nic'Epona thanks them for their time and vanishes just as she came. Likewise, if they make any threatening moves toward her, she prances a few steps backward and vanishes, never to show herself to the characters again — unless it is at the head of a herd of her sisters intent on trampling them.

On the other hand, should the PCs accept this wondrous task, the nic'Epona of the Golden Mane thanks them. She'll not tell them her true name, but she will answer other questions based on her knowledge of the background at the beginning of the adventure. She explains that the nic'Epona occasionally gather around a loch in the Prime Material, to race about and frolic, then determine the new leader of the herd. She knows nothing of MacDougal and kePahl, nor the lay of the land beyond the valley of the loch. The lake itself, she says, is filled with weed and moss, though the water is drinkable. She has heard or seen nothing dangerous about the area.

When the characters decide to aid her and her sisters, the creature ferries them to the gathering place by the loch. She can take them only one at a time, so the characters must wait about 10 minutes before she returns for the next passenger.

KELTEA, A NIC'EPONA: Int exceptional (16); AL N; AC 2; MV 24; HD 7; hp 52; THACO 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1-8/1-8/1-4 or 3-24; SD +2 weapon or better to hit, plane shift; MR 30%; SZ L (6 feet tall at shoulder); ML champion (15); XP 2,000.

BUILD-UP

After many trips on the Golden Mane, the characters finally reassemble on the shores of a small loch in a quiet valley on the Prime.

LOCH ANUIN (A)

You and your companions are all together again beneath a gray and cloudy sky. A firm breeze pushes past you, carrying the scent of lake and pine, as well as the rotting undercurrents of autumn. It smells like rain.

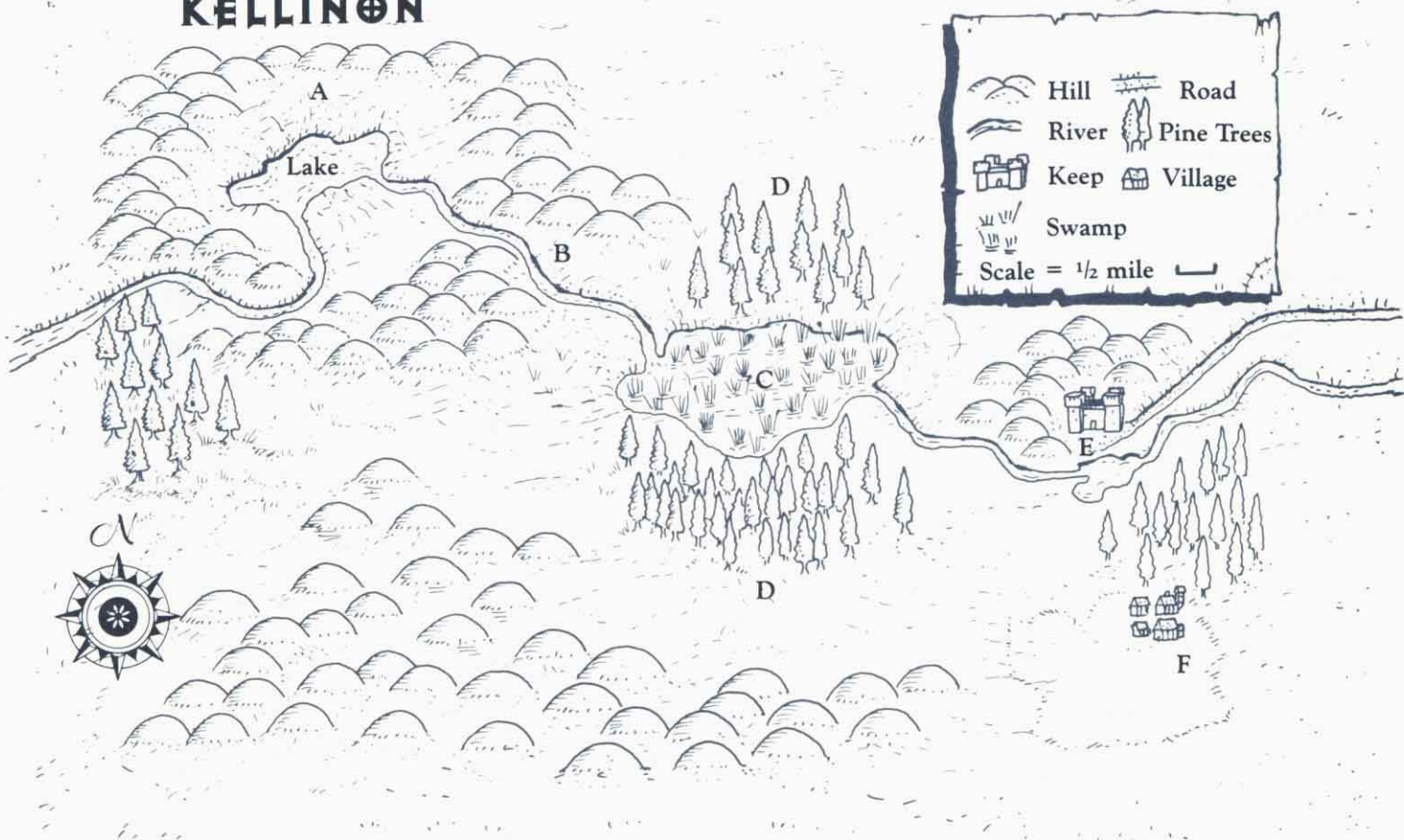
Your group stands on a little plain ringed by hills, in the center of which lies a large lake. A swollen river feeds it, and a smaller branch carries the excess water away in a southeasterly flow. Stunted pines and small brush grow on the hillsides, not enough to offer cover, but enough to provide firewood and some small protection from the wind.

Your general impression of the area is brown and gray, grim yet somehow hopeful. Perhaps it is the hint of green hidden among the bushes, or the occasional splash of a leaping fish, or the tang to the air. Whatever the reason, the place seems strangely vital underneath its coat of austerity.

She of the Golden Mane says, "It was here that my sister disappeared. I could track her to the small stream at the edge of those hills, and no farther. I will come back here every day at eventide for two months, while I continue looking for her myself. If you do not return here by that time, I will assume that you have failed in your quest, and begin to mourn both you and my sister."

With that, she takes a step, and coruscating fires play about her. In a moment, all that is left is a rainbow silhouette of the creature, which fades almost immediately, and you are left alone in the highlands.

KELLINON



The nic'Epona disappears before the PCs can ask her any questions. (The time to talk to her was before they appeared on this part of the Prime Material.) If they start to ask her something after she has begun her *plane shift*, they might as well quit rattling their bone-boxes — she can't reverse the shift. The cutters are officially on their own, on the shores of Loch Anuin.

If they search around the lake, they easily find the tracks of many horses (or nic'Epona, in this case, though the tracks are virtually indistinguishable). Apparently, this area has not seen much rain for the past few days. The plain is absolutely littered with the tracks. Characters who look more closely around the perimeter of these tracks, especially at the eastern edge of the lake, find that only one set of tracks leaves the main herd. This trail follows the little river flowing out of the lake into the eastern foothills but, as Golden Mane said, the track soon disappeared on rocky ground. There are no dangerous encounters in the area. Though the PCs might see a bear or even wolves, these creatures are well fed and leave them alone.

THE HILLS (B)

As the PCs push their way out of the plain surrounding the lake, they come across a middle-aged shepherdess (Prime/♀ human/O/NG) bringing her flocks in from the

hills. She gives a small start to see the outlandishly-clad and -equipped characters emerging from the area of the loch, but quickly recovers her composure. She presents her shepherd's crook in a defensive posture with one hand, while fumbling for her sling with the other.

AMBASSADORS FROM FAERIE!
AND ME IN MY
WORK CLOTHES!

— GYLLA, THE SHEPHERDESS



If the cutters greet her peacefully, she relaxes, though a bit surprised that "faerie folk" should speak common. She feels extremely curious about the land of Faerie and takes the cutters for emissaries from that realm, especially if any of them are not completely human.

The shepherdess introduces herself as Gylla. The thick burr to her accent makes her sound either exotic or uneducated, depending on one's point of view. Still,

the PCs can understand her perfectly. She seems very willing to answer any questions they might have about the area, but she'll be unable to help them in the matter of the missing nic'Epona.

Gylla lives in a small hut in the hills to the north, but brings her flock to this area because the foraging's better. Bored with her life, she'd be delighted to be offered a chance to travel with the "faerie folk," especially back to their home. If the characters don't invite her, she works the suggestion into the conversation wistfully.

Her useful information includes details on the lay of the land, local customs, the government, and a hint that the monarch, who has been in town quite a bit lately, might have some more answers for them.

There are four salient points to the land, she says. First, there is Loch Anuin, which the PCs have just left. Many think the place haunted or a doorway into Faerie, for the thunder of many hooves comes echoing into the hills at least once a year, but no one ever has caught a glimpse of any horse living there. The people of the area therefore avoid it, afraid of what they don't understand.

The second feature is the bog. This particularly large fen is full of quicksand and other horrors, she explains, not the least of which are the dreaded packs of trolls. Though these trolls tend to stay within the boundaries of the swamp, they occasionally leave the bog to make a raid on sheep in the area. Shepherds not smart enough to run away become part of the meal as well.

The forest is the land's third important feature, also thought haunted because of mysterious lights that play in the trees at night. No one she knows of goes into the forest, and that includes the king's warriors. "But being from Faerie and all," she says, "you shouldn't have any trouble dealing with whatever's in the woods."

Finally, she concludes, the keep dominates the land. It is maintained by a provisional governor for the king, MacDougal. The king has been spending a lot of time around the loch lately, she says, and has been in town longer than ever before.

The burg she speaks of, Flockhaven, south of the keep, seems mostly a gathering place, where shepherds go to drink in the evening and sell their fleece and mutton. The locals dress in gray and don't get loud until after their third or fourth ale. They'll be peery around strangers but won't take action against them, for the laws of MacDougal protect even foreigners, and the locals fear his wrath. It's a cinch this superstitious lot will treat the cutters as representatives from another realm if demihumans are among the party.

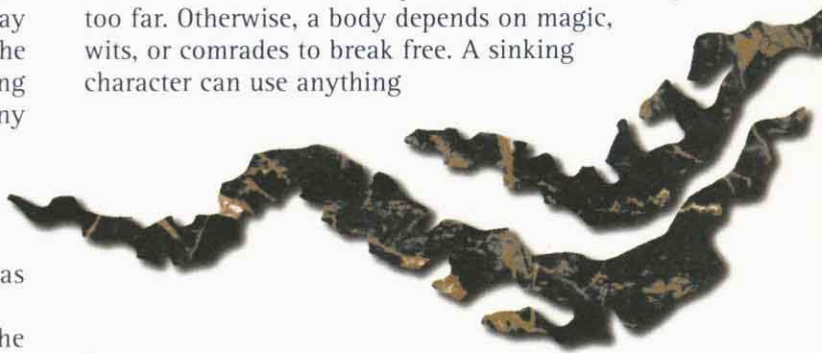
Beyond this information, Gylla offers the PCs a warm place to sleep in her cottage, which might prove welcome, as the autumn air remains as damp as when the group arrived. She might even make them a meal of one of her sheep.

THE BOG (C)

The area's wide expanse of swampy land dotted with leaning, willowlike trees also features patches of water, where the ground sinks too low to hide the water that permeates the land. From the edge of the bog, one can see a few hills rising from this vast, gray land, but these are few and far between. The land seems much like any other swamp the cutters may have encountered, except that it feels cold and clammy, the trees grow straighter and tougher, and the insects are not nearly as cloying. There are no alligators or crocodiles in this swamp, for the climate is too cold for such lizards to survive long.

The morass is quite beautiful on a warm day, when the clouds aren't blocking the sun as they do for as long as the PCs remain in the area (assuming it's less than three weeks). This is the storm season, however, and the gray clouds keep the region looking grim and dismal. The leaves of the trees seem to reflect the gray light, for they too appear cheerless, especially on days when the rain pours down.

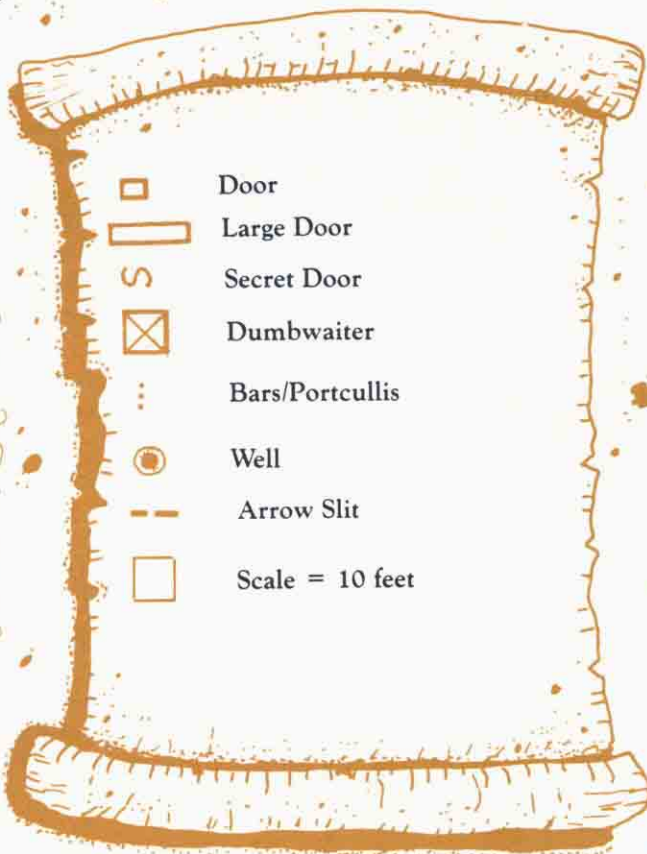
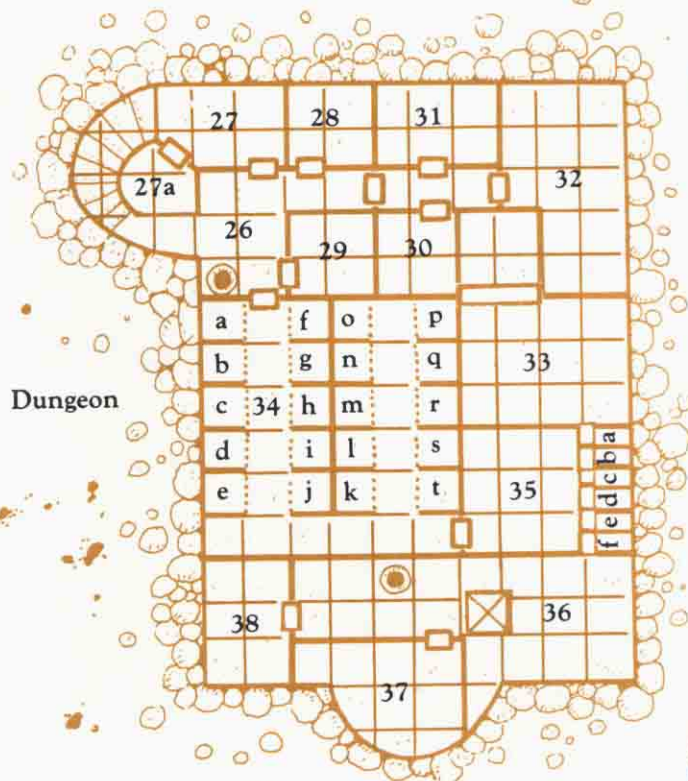
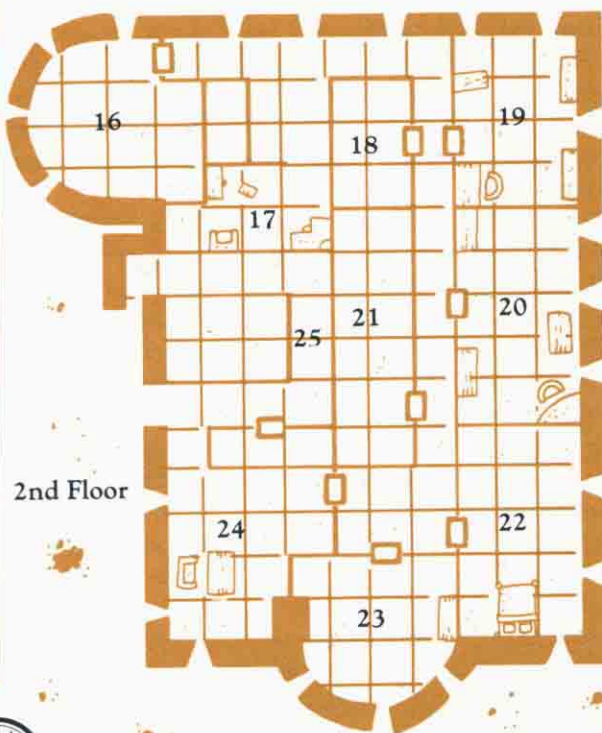
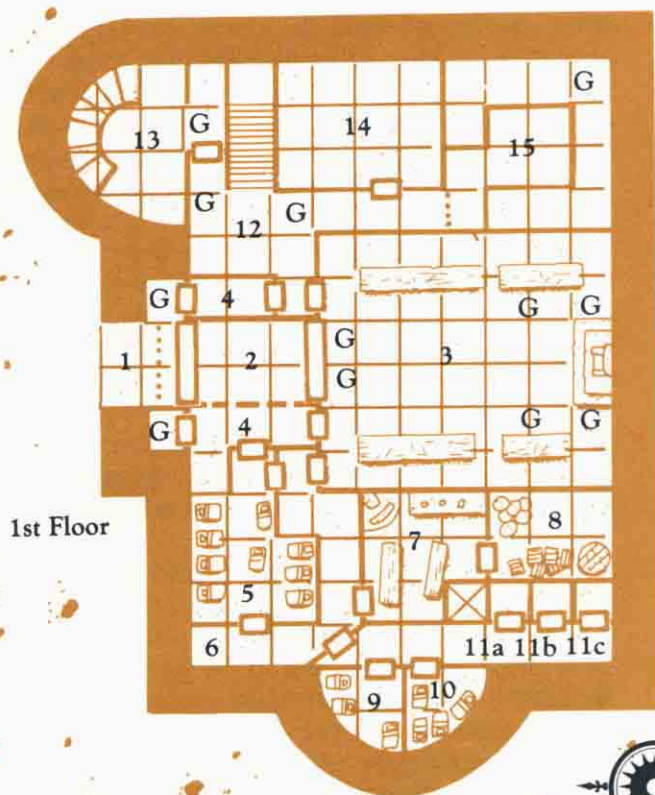
Patches of quicksand throughout the bog can swallow a man in mere minutes, though some may take a few hours or longer. Bashers can avoid the patches, each about 20 feet or more in diameter, by making a successful swampland survival proficiency roll or a Wisdom check at a -4 penalty. When a body does step into the quicksand, he sinks a foot or two instantly, and may slog on an extra few feet before realizing his predicament. He can make a single open doors ability check to break free of the quicksand before sinking too far. Otherwise, a body depends on magic, wits, or comrades to break free. A sinking character can use anything



firmly planted outside the quicksand to pull free of the trap — that is, if there's something in reach. Otherwise, the character slowly drowns in the quicksand.

Far more threatening than the quicksand, though, are the trolls that roam this swamp. They rove in packs of up to 12, seeking food to satisfy their voracious appetites. Literally hundreds of trolls live in the bog — and they're always hungry. Matter of fact, they've cleaned the bog of all creatures larger than a chicken; the smaller creatures often are too fast to catch, or else they'd be gone, too. These days, trolls often creep out of the bog to seek food, since the pickings are so scarce in the swamp. When a troll spies the party and howls for

MACDOUGAL'S KEEP



its packmates, the nasties converge from every direction to get some of the meat the characters are sure to have on their bones.

With all this, a berk'd think the Prime is even more dangerous than the planes.

TROLLS: Int low (7); AL CE; AC 4; MV 12; HD 6+6; hp 45; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 5-8/5-8/5-12; SA special; SD regeneration; SZ L (9 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 1,400.

THE FOREST+ (D)

A forest of pine and brush grows along the edges of the bog. Though along the edges the wood seems small and stunted, even rather airy, the cutters will notice it grows thicker and more dense as they move through. Though small game trails lead in all directions through the woodlands, they're difficult to follow, for the pine boughs drop to about 3 feet above the ground, requiring the PCs to stoop, crawl, or push through the trees to keep to a trail. It may prove frustrating enough to make them decide to try the fen for easier travel.

Gylla's rumors of the haunted forest ain't the true chant. See, a tribe of forest gnomes lives here, and they want to make sure they aren't disturbed by humans blundering into their burrows. Thus, they use their illusion magic to make the forest seem constantly dark and eerie, so the humans'll fear it. The gnomes try to instill a sense of fear in all who come here, through the skillful use of *audible glamor* and other such spells. These folk do their best to avoid being seen, but may emerge if they see a group composed mostly of demihumans; there are too few of them in this area of the Prime for these gnomes to pass up a chance to meet them.

When the PCs reach the center of the forest, they emerge into a clearing. A mostly demihuman party will come upon the forest gnomes here and can exchange gossip and news. The gnomes speak only Elvish and a strange form of Gnomish, though a few understand Dwarvish and speak it horribly.

The gnomes know something of the nic'Epona captured by MacDougal, having surreptitiously followed the expedition back to the keep. They can tell the party they overheard the king mention putting the horse in the dungeon until the wizard could fix the bridle. They won't accompany the cutters to the keep, but will offer whatever assistance they can (mostly in the form of food and chant). They ask the party members not to reveal their location to anyone not "of the Folk."

GNOME (100): Int high (14); AL NG; AC 7; MV 12; HD 2; hp 10; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; SA traps; SD special; MR special; SZ S (3 to 3 ½ feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 120.

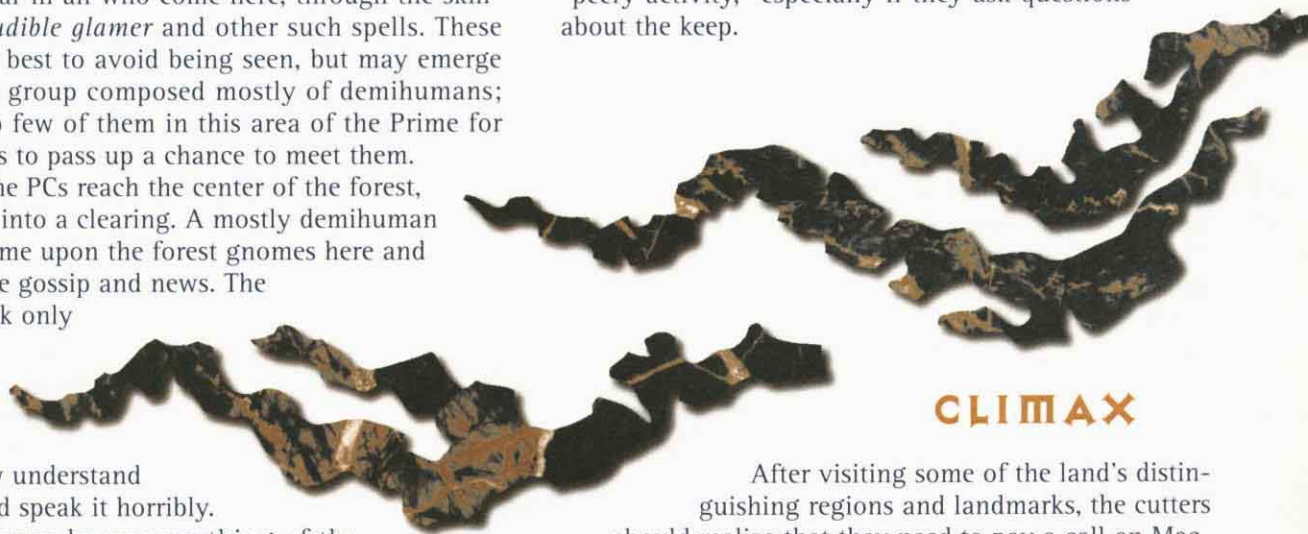
THE KEEP (E)

See the climax section of this chapter for a full description of MacDougal's keep.

THE VILLAGE (F)

The subtle hope that seemed to permeate the land when the characters arrived is not to be found in Flockhaven. The ground is muddy and gray, the peasants stooped and hobbling from their heavy labor. The main product of the tiny burg seems to be sheep, as sheep pens sprawl everywhere, people wear strictly woolen clothes, and, of course, the ever-present odor of dung hangs in the air.

The cutters can find little of value in this town; the locals can tell them nothing more than the shepherdess did, despite their proximity to the keep. The town does boast an inn, though, which serves strong ale and excellent mutton. The beds have a slight problem with vermin, but none of the people in town seem to notice, perhaps because they've got worse vermin of their own. The mayor, a sycophantic boot-licker to MacDougal, sends carrier pigeons every day to the keep to report on any peery activity in town. It's a bet the PCs qualify as "peery activity," especially if they ask questions about the keep.



CLIMAX

After visiting some of the land's distinguishing regions and landmarks, the cutters should realize that they need to pay a call on MacDougal, who's at the keep throughout this adventure.

THE KEEP'S FIRST+ FLOOR

The keep is not large, merely one of MacDougal's borderland estates. However, it is large enough to house a small garrison, as well as provide a good place for MacDougal to stay when he's here. The government encourages the peasants to bring their problems to the gover-

nor who lives at the keep. 'Course, the governor, Chrysta MacEown (Prime/♀ human/F8/LN), defers to the king's authority and vacates the keep's best quarters for her monarch when he comes to visit, which he's been doing with disturbing frequency.

The walls of the castle are thick stone, mortared so tightly that even the thinnest blade can't slip between the cracks. However, the stones are rough-hewn, making them comparatively easy for an expert climber to grab onto. For cutters with experience, the castle is easy to infiltrate. For berks who ain't so sure what they're doing, the castle is virtually impregnable.

Unless otherwise noted, all NPCs in the castle are 0-level humans. The guards described below make up the castle's total contingent. When a guard is killed anywhere in the castle, their total number below goes down by one. Every guard carries a signal whistle to call for help or reinforcements.

GUARD (50)

(PRIME/♂, ♀ HUMAN/F5/NG): Int average (8); AC 5; MV 12; hp 40; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8+2; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 170.

1. GATEWAY: The entrance to the castle is protected by an iron portcullis. If the PCs approach during the day, the portcullis is raised; if they come at night, it's been lowered. The cutters can ring a bell beside the gate to get the attention of the gatekeeper, a grizzled and irritable old veteran (Prime/♂ human/F3/NG).

The gatekeeper keeps a horn constantly by his side, which he blows quickly in case of an invasion. When he blows it, a contingent of 10 guards arrives in two rounds to assist in the defense of the castle, and 10 more arrive three rounds later. If the gatekeeper sees demihumans among the group, he will blow the horn. When the guards arrive, they are astonished to see some of the "Fair Folk" among them, and escort the newcomers directly to the king, as per his orders. If they are obviously outlanders, but not demihumans, the gatekeeper calls guards to escort the PCs instead to the wizard kePahl, who questions them thoroughly.

YE'D BE LØØKIN' FØR
+HE FAERIE HØRSE.

I'D WAGER.

— MACDØUGAL.

+HE KING

2. ENTRY: The entryway is a killing room, with arrow slits and murder holes filling the walls. There are enough holes for at least 20 archers to fire on invaders, and astute PCs may notice the bows trained on them while they pass through this area. If these cutters are invading or entering without an escort, the archers let loose with a deadly barrage of arrows, aiming for the obvious wizards first. The doors here, of thick ironwood, can sustain 100 points of damage before falling.

3. GREAT HALL: MacDougal holds all his important state functions in his Great Hall, including trials, banquets, and various ceremonies. At least one person always remains in the room, keeping the place clean, watching over the throne, or escorting visitors. MacDougal often sits here on his throne, governing his kingdom visibly. Sometimes he comes here just to sit and think. Chances are good that, unless it is the middle of the night, the cutters'll find the king sitting in his throne.

MacDougal is always anxious to see who's coming into his keep, and straightens in his seat to see visitors, even when he's dealing with other business. If he sees demihumans in the group, he shoos away his other work to deal with the "representatives from the Seelie Court." He will do his best to please these ambassadors, though he seems unhappy if they want to take back "their" horse. He demands concessions for the return of the nic'Epona, whom he had hoped to examine and breed into a whole race of servile mounts for his troops.

If the characters do not play the game of the Seelie Court, instead trying to disprove the existence of such a thing, MacDougal gets ugly. He is confident that such a thing exists as he has envisioned it, and demands proof of the cutters' allegations to the contrary. Meanwhile, he grows to believe the PCs are actually agents of the Unseelie.

MacDougal will offer the bashers hospitality, saying he'll ponder their words. Meanwhile, they can explore the castle, though guards attempt to follow them wherever they go. At dinner, the king offers a fine spread, with wine from his fabulous cellar. However, he has ordered his court wizard to poison their drinks.

The cutters wake up scragged the next morning, in the dungeon. On a visit to the birdcage, the king may realize the PCs are not Faerie Folk and give them an opportunity to depart his kingdom safely. All they have to do is agree that the magical horse does belong to him, to help preserve his kingdom. Assuming they'll have nothing to do with his barmy argument, the characters must arrange an escape and free the nic'Epona.

If the party can bargain for the release of the nic'Epona through the subterfuge of the Seelie



9–10. FEMALE AND MALE SERVANTS' QUARTERS:

The servants in the castle are rigidly segregated by

sex. Each room contains 15 beds separated by curtains. The cutters find nothing of value here, unless they wish to disguise themselves as servants.

Court, they need not become involved in violence. MacDougal will grant them a room for the night and have them sign various treaties in the morning. Once these are signed, he has kePahl lead them to the nic'Epona, who *plane shifts* away as soon after she's released as possible.

4. GUARD POSTS: Guards always stand duty by the arrow slits here. Not only do they have visual and missile access to the entry, they also can rush to reinforce the door leading into the main hall, if required.

5. BARRACKS: The keep's barracks houses about 50 soldiers and guards, who drill outside during the day to keep themselves sharp. The barracks is very close to the front door, so guards can respond to the gatekeeper's alarms quickly. The men maintain this room with military precision, the bunks neatly stacked and arranged and the footlockers at the bases of the beds. These lockers hold little of value to experienced cutters: 123 gp, all told. Several well-made swords and daggers lie distributed about the room.

6. ARMORY: The storeroom that outfits the castle's defense stands packed with weapons and suits of armor. Prevailing weaponry includes swords, daggers, spears, arrows, bows, quarrels, and crossbows (none is magical). This area holds effectively an unlimited number of weapons; all of them are serviceable, but none is of exceptional quality.

7. KITCHEN: The keep has a large kitchen, filled with steam at all hours. At least two cooks remain always on duty, preparing the meals for the inhabitants of the castle. The kitchen is commanded by a large, porcine man, the head cook, described more fully under the head servants' quarters (area 11). A dumbwaiter in the corner leads down into the cellar, where a servant loads it with water, wine, or any other stores the cooks might need.

8. PANTRY: The main food storage area for the castle holds meats, grains, vegetables, and breads. A boxed-off part of the pantry remains colder than the rest of it, for storing perishable goods. A staircase in the corner leads down to the cellar (area 36).

11A. BUTLER'S QUARTERS

11B. COOK'S QUARTERS

11C. HEAD MAID'S QUARTERS: The three rooms of the keep's head servants hold personal effects as well as approximately 15 gp total.

The butler, Jaymes (Prime/♂ human/O/NG), is a prim and proper man, well-versed in etiquette and manners. He teaches MacDougal what he can of these things, though he often despairs when he sees the uncouth manner of so many in this primitive area. Jaymes is absolutely loyal to his lord, yet will act as friendly to visitors as decorum allows. He's not a bad sort.

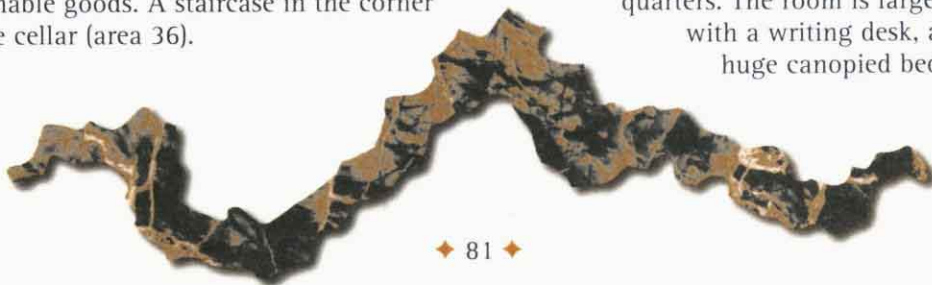
The cook, Gustav (Prime/♂ human/O/NG), is a large, temperamental slob. He is excellent at his job, though, and considers his creations worthy of the same respect as any painting or sculpture. He does not make friends easily and looks to gain advantage in everything he does. Though untrustworthy, Gustav is loyal to the king.

Croila, the head maid (Prime/♀ human/O/N), is a cruel woman who dominates her maids, yet submits utterly to her superiors. Whenever she receives a reprimand, she takes it out on her maids with a stout hickory branch. Her one redeeming feature is her perfectionism when it comes to cleaning; Croila is the force responsible for the immaculate look of the keep.

12. WAITING HALL: From the waiting hall a body can gain entrance to the upstairs, the basement, and the treasury of the keep. The four guards here keep watch on all those who would enter any of these areas, vigorously defending their station against any unauthorized entry.

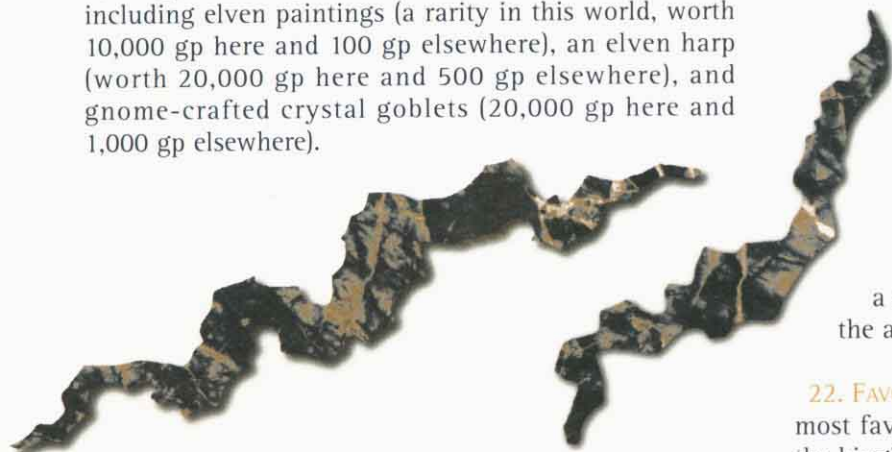
13. CHECKPOINT: Anyone who desires to visit prisoners or the mage's laboratory must register first. Two guards serve here, one of whom is sitting behind a large oak desk littered with papers. Anyone who wants to pass must sign in the large, leatherbound ledger.

14. GOVERNOR'S QUARTERS: When the king stays in the keep, Governor MacEown occupies these opulent quarters. The room is large and well furnished with a writing desk, a large closet, and a huge canopied bed.



15. TREASURY AND VAULT: Only the king and the governor have the keys to enter the treasury – even the butler and kePahl are not so trusted. Visitors to the keep are invited to store their valuables in the vault, reputed to be the safest place in the area. There has never been a successful robbery attempt on the vault, a metal-sheathed room with an exceptionally complex door lock (–30% penalty to the open locks skill). Since the kingdom has few magicians, the room has no wards against magical intrusion.

The vault holds 10,000 cp, 10,000 sp, 5,000 gp, 1,000 pp, and 100 gems ranging in value from 100 to 5,000 gp. The king stores several works of art here too, including elven paintings (a rarity in this world, worth 10,000 gp here and 100 gp elsewhere), an elven harp (worth 20,000 gp here and 500 gp elsewhere), and gnome-crafted crystal goblets (20,000 gp here and 1,000 gp elsewhere).



19–20. DIGNITARIES' ROOMS: The cutters are offered these well furnished but not luxurious rooms. Both rooms have writing desks, well stocked with paper, pen, and ink. Each room has three beds, to accommodate groups of diplomats. And, of course, the speaking tubes hidden behind tapestries allow spies in the study (area 24) to listen in on any confidential conversations the diplomats might have.

21. LIBRARY: For the savage king of a backwater land, MacDougal has a library that displays a remarkable level of sophistication. It is full of volumes on military history and strategy, history of the planet, discussions on the nature of the Fair Folk, and other such memorabilia. There are even books on theology and the possible existence of gods other than those worshiped in the kingdom. The room is well arranged, with placards denoting each section's contents. None of the books is worth much back in Sigil, except as curiosities. The collection of about 100 books here makes this a sizable library, given the level of civilization in the area!

22. FAVORED VISITOR'S ROOM: This room, reserved for the most favored of guests, has a secret door connecting to the king's quarters. A body activates the door by sliding aside the portrait of the king's mother on the wall.

23. KING'S QUARTERS: In the castle's most opulent room, the furniture is all fine as well as sturdy, reflecting a concern for the craftsmanship. There is a fireplace in the western wall and a bed against the southern wall. Comfortable chairs stand scattered about the room, and a wardrobe hides the secret door to the favored visitor's quarters (area 22). The king's outfits hang in this wardrobe, and all look to favor function over form. The clothes could bring some value in a market, but thieves would find little else here, since the king keeps his valuables in the vault.

24. STUDY: The king's study is hung with animals he has hunted, imported carpets, and swords from old campaigns. A huge mahogany desk with its thronelike overstuffed chair dominates the room. Four padded leather chairs sit in a semicircle in front of the desk.

In this room, MacDougal decides most of the political questions that arise while he is at the keep. He gathers his most trusted advisors to discuss with him the positive and negative aspects of any proposal. The desktop looks relatively free of papers, but its drawers hold the royal seal, various certificates waiting to be signed, and other business that the king has not yet gotten around to.

THE KEEP'S SECOND FLOOR

The second level of the castle holds more living quarters and the guest rooms.

16. OBSERVATORY: The observatory stands off the western edge of the castle, away from the brightest lights. In this reclusive spot, used for peaceful contemplation of nature and the stars, kePahl often lingers nights when he's not in his laboratory. A crude telescope looks out the windows.

17. READING NICHE: A niche tucked away behind the stairs is comfortably appointed with leather seats and plants. The fireplace in the southeastern corner provides warmth to the room. A *dagger +1* secreted behind the couch on the southern wall protects a reader against possible assassins.

18. VISITING SERVANTS' QUARTERS: Attendants visiting high-up men are quartered in this purely functional room, lacking in artistic works or anything else that might have brightened its cheerlessness. The furniture is sturdy and blocky, built to resist punishment rather than offer comfort. There is nothing of value here; since the king has no visitors at this time, the room stands empty.



25. WATCHSTATION: The watchstation overlooks the entryway (area 2), its arrow slits providing a good view of it. At least two guards constantly stand duty here. This room holds additional weapons and missiles to back up the keep's main armory.

THE KEEP'S BASEMENT+

The level beneath MacDougal's castle houses the king's dungeon (areas 26, 29, 34, and 35), medical facilities (areas 27, 27a, and 28), the court wizard's quarters (areas 30 to 33), and storerooms (areas 36 to 38).

26. DUNGEON ENTRY: Doors from an entry hall at the bottom of the stairs lead to the infirmary, the jail cells, the jailor's room, and the wizard's quarters. KePahl protects his rooms (areas 30 to 33) with a *fire trap* spell cast on the door here. The spell causes 1d4+14 points of damage to anyone other than the wizard who opens the door, but a knocker beside it allows visitors to summon KePahl safely. Behind this door, the wizard has magically reinforced his entire suite to protect against spells and experiments gone awry. He's also sound-proofed his rooms, so none can hear the results of his failed research.

The well at the base of the staircase draws from the same cistern as the one in the cellar (area 36) under the kitchen. A few rodents on the flagstone floor stare from the dark corners at anyone who disturbs their solitude.

27. INFIRMARY

27A. DOCTOR'S ROOM

28. RECUPERATION: Three rooms make up the medical center of the keep. The doctor (Prime/♂ human/O/LG), constantly available, keeps his room right next to his patients. Once he has operated on them in the infirmary, he sends them to the recuperation room until they can return to their own beds. Only the doctor is here now.

29. JAILER'S ROOM: A simple room, with two cots and a table covered with cards and dice, serves as the staging room for the guards on prison duty. A body can find three guards here at any given time; two of them respond to trouble in the birdcages, with the third watching the gate while the others investigate.

30. MAGICAL STOREROOM: In this big closet KePahl keeps his ingredients and components for spells. The materials and substances in this place are not inherently magical, though all have some application in spellcasting. Whatever components the cutters might need, they can find in this room.

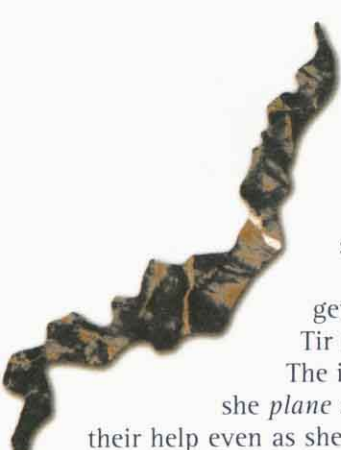
31. KEPAHL'S BEDROOM: The king's wizard sleeps in a spartan bedroom on a single, hard cot in the corner. The wardrobe set into the wall in the northeast corner holds several outfits: riding clothes, court clothes, laboratory aprons, and so forth. Hidden in the back of the wardrobe is a secret compartment in which KePahl keeps his magic items, including *rings of invisibility*, *regeneration*, and *spell turning* (1 each). There is also a *staff of the magi*, a *wand of paralyzation*, and a *wand of lightning*. If ever KePahl is chased to the basement, he comes directly to his bedroom to arm himself against the invaders.

32. LABORATORY: The laboratory is a typical wizard's haunt, though a little underdeveloped, since magic is not a well-understood science here. Beakers and bubbling flasks cover the work tables, tubes spiral all over the laboratory, and a sharp smell pervades the place. On a workbench against the far wall are scattered several strips of leather. Amid the leather is a well-made bridle, engraved with magical runes. KePahl enchanted the bridle using the same magic as the *shifter's manacles*, then he and his king used it to capture the nic'Epona.

The flasks contain potions and poisons in the making. As KePahl has not yet finished his work, their effects are entirely random on any cutters who try them.

33. EXPERIMENTS: KePahl keeps the creatures he wishes to study in a pen. At various times, he has experimented with human prisoners, a basilisk, a young dragon, and a baby roc. He has also examined demihumans, to determine what makes them different from normal mortals. (That's a cinch to be in violation of the king's contracts with the "Seelie Court.") The walls are engraved with runes that suppress any beast's magical abilities, preventing escapes.

Currently, he has covered the floor with straw and hay for the captive nic'Epona. Her *plane shifting* ability has failed her thanks to the runes, and she stands listlessly in the center of the room. Her glossy golden coat has faded to a dull yellowish sheen, and her eyes, once bright with the sparkle of her magical life, now look dim with despair. She lifts her head hopelessly when the cutters enter the room; if any of them are dressed in a fashion unlike that of the locals, she brightens immediately, seeing a chance for escape.



The magical mare has not been mistreated physically, but her captivity has laid her spirit low. Despite this harm, she counsels the cutters against vengeance on her behalf. She just wants to get out of this place and get back to Tir na Og, her home on the Outlands.

The instant she steps outside this area, she *plane shifts*, thanking the characters for their help even as she fades away. When she returns to her sisters, she tells the other nic'Epona what has transpired and asks them to rescue the PCs, should they require it.

Opening the door to this area triggers a mental alarm in kePahl. If the cutters have not yet neutralized the threat he poses (whether by a treaty or more physical means), he *teleports* to his room to get his magical gear. Although the nic'Epona might have left by the time he is outfitted, he still has the chance to punish the PCs for their audacity. When he has the magical items he needs, he returns upstairs to warn his king, who readies a team of men to follow the party. Proceed to "The Chase," page 86.

MYERAI, A NIC'EPONA: Int exceptional (16); AL N; AC 2; MV 24; HD 7; hp 45; THACO 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1-8/1-8/1-4 or 3-24; SD +2 weapon or better to hit, plane shift; MR 30%; SZ L (6 feet tall at shoulder); ML champion (15); XP 2,000.



34. PRISON CELLS: Twenty cells comprise the dungeon, each sturdily constructed of brick, mortar, and iron. The king keeps two prisoners to a cell when conditions are crowded; if they kill each other, that's just one less berk to face MacDougal's justice. Right now, only 10 of these birdcages hold occupants, and the prisoners all have one to themselves. Each of them has been scragged for good reason; five are thieves (cells a, e, k, q, and o), two are murderers (cells c and i), two others get paid to put folks in the dead-book (cells p and s), and one is a rogue wizard (cell g). Clearly, they ain't very good at their cross-trade.

35. QUESTIONING AND SOLITARY CONFINEMENT: In a large chamber set apart from the cells, guards can extract confessions from those with something to hide. Though MacDougal disdains the use of torture, he knows it sometimes gets results that would be unobtainable otherwise. He doesn't stop to think that confessions

obtained under duress are less likely to be true, for he has such strength of spirit, he would rather die than lie. He assumes the same of others.

Instruments of confession scattered about the room include the rack, the iron maiden, the boot, and the thumb screw. Bloodstains mar the floor, though they are faint, for the chamber's keeper likes to scrub them to keep the place clear of vermin.

Several cells with iron walls and doors line the back wall of the chamber. These are the solitary chambers, for prisoners either too dangerous or too uncooperative to remain in the regular cages. KePahl has enchanted them to keep prisoners from using magic to escape. However, the locks are not nearly as sophisticated, requiring only a successful open locks skill roll at a -10% penalty.

36. CELLAR: The dumbwaiter from the kitchen (area 7) runs down to the cellar, loaded by an elderly servant who works here (Prime/♂ human/O/N). The keep's well extends into an underground cistern that keeps the castle supplied with at least 30 days' worth of water at any given time. The cellar feels dank and musty, but the dirt floor is oiled weekly and kept clean. A body sees no evidence of vermin in this cellar. As the stone walls are 4 feet thick, it is nearly impossible to dig through to gain entrance to the castle.

37. STORES: The storeroom here is filled with grain, dried meat, and other non-perishable items. It holds food for the winter and against the possibility of siege, but it contains no valuables.

38. WINE CELLAR: MacDougal has stocked an excellent wine cellar. Some wines are over 200 years old, and others are from more recent pressings. Besides the casks of wine, there are kegs of beer and vats of other beverages as well, all waiting on the fancy of the lord of the keep. The wine, if the bashers take some, can bring up to 300 gp from a knowledgeable

collector. The other liquors burn easily, which is why the king stores them in a stone-lined chamber. However, a cutter worth his salt could spread them throughout the basement and set them aflame to cause quite a bit of damage to the keep.

TRY SOME WINE.
IT'S LOVELY.
— KEPAHL,
COURT WIZARD
AND
POISON EXPERT

MACDOUGAL

Male Human
15th-level Warrior
Lawful Good

STR 19 (+3,+7)	INT 14	HP 91
DEX 17 (+2,-3)	WIS 13	AC 0
CON 16 (+2)	CHA 14	MV 12

THACO: 6, second weapon 8

#AT: 2/1, plus second weapon

DMG: 2-8/2-8

EQUIPMENT: *Girdle of hill giant strength* (+3/+7), *chain mail* +2.

At 6 feet tall, the king has a broad chest and thick arms, as well as long dark hair, pale skin, and flashing hazel eyes that change with his mood. He fights with two broad swords, disdaining the use of a shield.

MacDougal has a quick temper but does his best to keep it under control. The thing is, he gets riled a lot, because he is not a reasonable man — he sees everything as being either black or white, right or wrong. 'Course, his way is always the right way. Only if a body gently points out flaws to him does he listen. Those who present their views more forcefully earn his enmity.

However, the king is not at all eager to irritate the realms of Faerie. If he encounters demihumans, he'll try to bargain with them to gain a trade pact and military alliance with the Seelie Court.

Despite his flaws, the military man loves Kellinon dearly and would disbelieve any suggestion that the shadow over the land and its people lately might be due to his lack of compassion and war spending. The king feels convinced that his plan to create a fabulous magical cavalry will save his country; therefore, it is a plan worth any sacrifice.



KEPAHL

Male Human
14th-level Wizard
Lawful Good

STR 8	INT 18	HP 32
DEX 16 (+1,-2)	WIS 13	AC 2
CON 12	CHA 16	MV 12

THACO: 16

#AT: 1

DMG: 1-6

EQUIPMENT: *Bracers of defense* (AC 4), *amulet of life protection* (six charges), *staff of striking*.

SPELLS: 1st level — *cantrip*, *detect magic*, *charm person*, *light*, *hold portal*; 2nd level — *glitterdust*, *knock*, *mirror image*, *pyrotechnics*, *summon swarm*; 3rd level — *dispel magic*, *hold person*, *slow*, *tongues*, *wraithform*; 4th level — *fear*, *polymorph other*, *remove curse*, *wall of fire*; 5th level — *cone of cold*, *dismissal*, *feeblemind*, *teleport*; 6th level — *flesh to stone*, *true seeing*; 7th level — *prismatic spray*.

KePahl stands about 5 feet, 9 inches tall. He has closely cropped brown hair, blue eyes, and a slight build. He walks with a partial limp, which he tries to hide by using a staff.

His temper is greater even than MacDougal's, but he provides a good balance to the volatile king. KePahl plays the games of politics well, though never for his own ends. He can usually see both sides of an issue, but on certain topics his opinions remain firm: the need to

keep his kingdom safe, the correctness of his king, and the sanctity of law.

When his temper is aroused, he can be as dangerous as his lord.

The court wizard is the foremost magician on this planet; there is little regarding the magic of his world that he does not understand. However, KePahl can't advance much further in his craft, as he has no one to learn from. He is always eager to learn new things.



THE CHASE

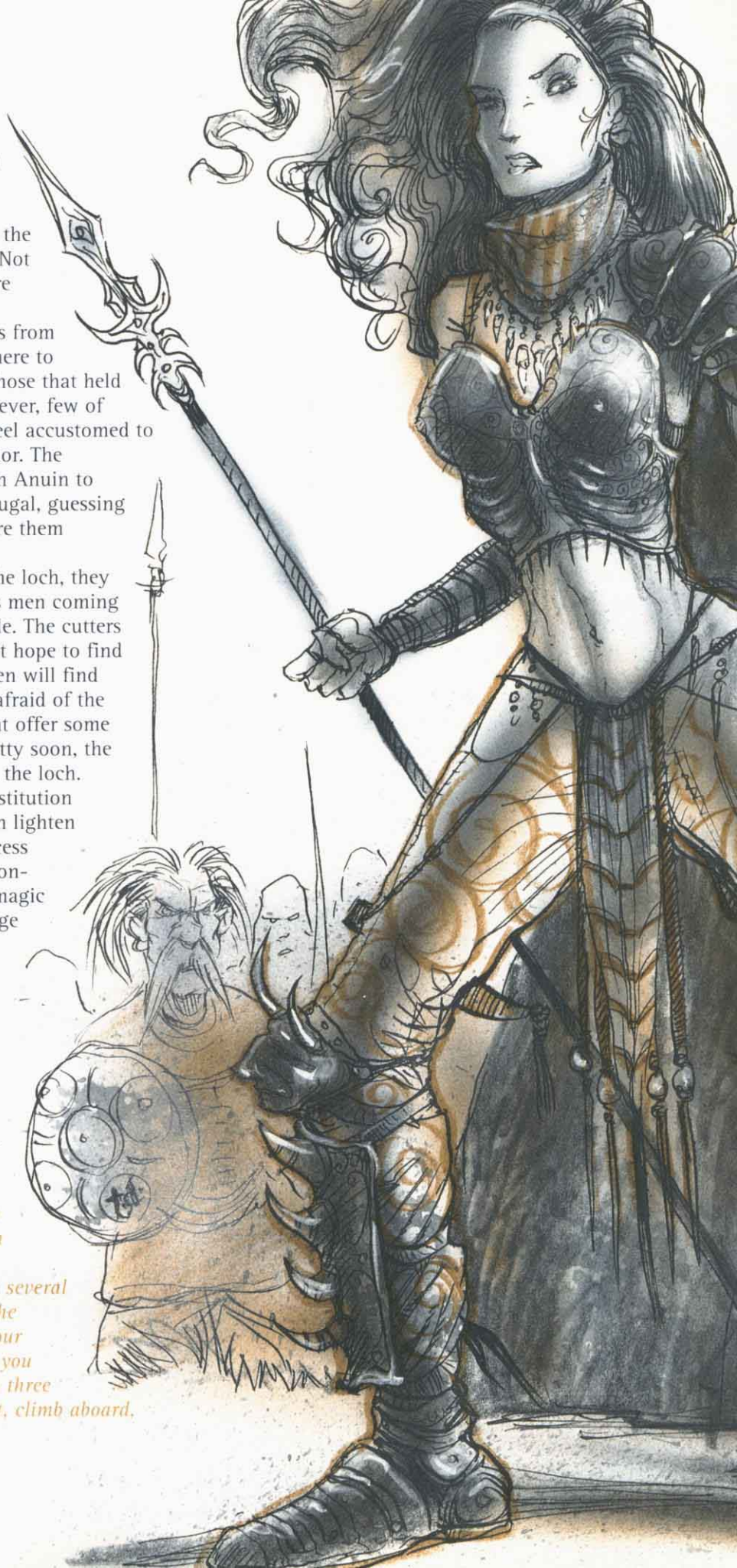
If the PCs have freed the nic'Epona on the sly (as opposed to negotiating her freedom) and have made it outside, MacDougal, kePahl, and the guards that still live give chase. No matter how much of a head start the cutters have, the king and his men pursue. Not at all happy to see their prize vanish, they're intent on punishing the party. They're not mounted, for the king has moved the horses from the keep's stable (including his own) elsewhere to refit the structure with magical runes like those that held the nic'Epona captive in the dungeon. However, few of these men were normally cavalry, and all feel accustomed to miles of training runs every day in full armor. The characters are, most likely, heading for Loch Anuin to meet their nic'Epona employer, and MacDougal, guessing their destination, has given orders to capture them before they get there.

If the characters are walking back to the loch, they can hear the thunder of MacDougal and his men coming toward them from a distance of about a mile. The cutters must find a way to flee, and fast. They can't hope to find cover in the surroundings, for the king's men will find them. The forest gnomes won't help them, afraid of the numerous humans following. The bog might offer some hindrance to the pursuit, but not much. Pretty soon, the chase comes down to a flat-out run toward the loch. Each hour, the characters must make a Constitution check at -4 to maintain their pace; they can lighten the severity of this penalty by shedding excess weight. The pursuers, free of this penalty, continue to close the gap, even if the PCs use magic to escape. After all, the pursuers have a mage on their side as well. Characters who fail a check fall to the ground, exhausted.

As soon as a basher falls, or as soon as the group reaches the loch, read the following aloud:

A strange disturbance appears in the air ahead of you. As it closes, it coalesces into a shimmering rainbow of horse silhouettes. Moments later, the rainbow solidifies into a vast herd of nic'Epona galloping toward you! The herd parts around you like a river flowing around a tree, and moves on toward the king and his men.

One nic'Epona halts her advance, with several of her sisters behind her. It is the mare of the Golden Mane. She says, "I thank you for your efforts to free my sister. As our gift to you, you may each name one of us, and call upon us three times to bear you to another place. But first, climb aboard, and we'll take you where you want to go."





In the background, the planar steeds are trampling the king's party as it attempts to flee back toward the castle. Your last sight before your mounts whisk you away is the litter of crushed bodies on the plain and the nic'Epona herd vanishing into a rainbow haze.

EPILOGUE

If the bashers rescued the nic'Epona from MacDougal and kePahl, she'll be exceptionally grateful – and the gratitude of a planar steed ain't a bad thing in any plane. She'll grant the party a great reward: the honor of knowing her name, Myerai, and permission to call upon her up to **10 times** to carry a character on a planar jaunt.

That's enough to make a factol turn green. Each trip she makes with a rider (one at a time) counts as one call. That is, if a party of six PCs needs to travel to Carceri, they can use Myerai to transport each of them, using up six of the calls she's granted. They can persuade the nic'Epona to summon her sisters, too; the bashers shouldn't turn Myerai into an interplanar ferry. Again, each additional nic'Epona summoned counts as one call.

Should the characters be addle-coved enough to abuse this gratitude (by failing to thank her or toss the chant for a bit) she'll quickly tire of their company and bid them farewell. Though she'll still come when summoned by name until her service expires, she does her duty and leaves without a word. In addition, she'll warn her sisters about the boorish PCs, and they might let the chant pick up word of their behavior. The sods could find themselves socially ostracized unless they manage to prove the charges false.

If the group left MacDougal and kePahl alive, these primes will come looking for vengeance. They're either mad about nearly getting themselves lost under nic'Epona hoofs or about getting peeled by false treaties with the "Seelie Court." The two are livid that the bashers'd try to

uphold individual freedom over the collective good – especially when the collective good is that of their kingdom!

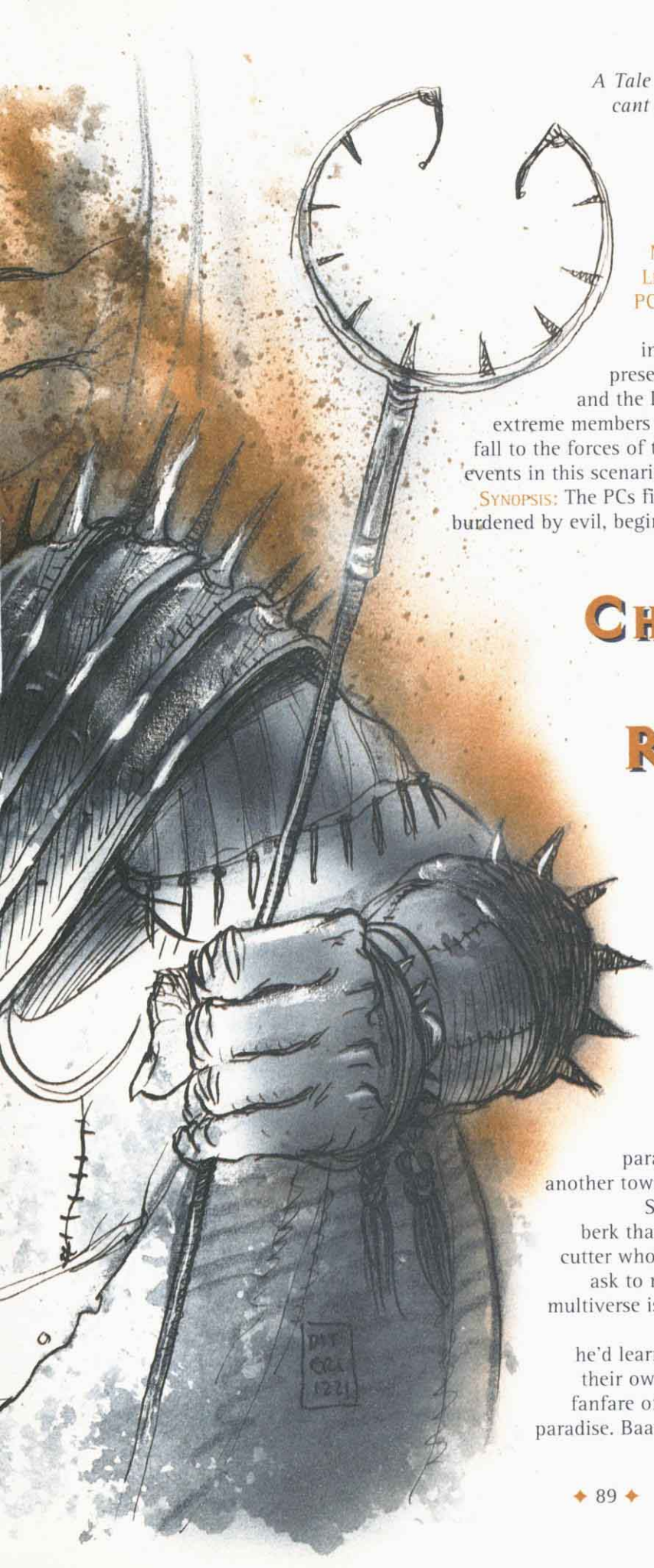
Both MacDougal and kePahl are smart enough to figure out a way into the planes and find the characters. Their goals are:

(1) get back at the PCs, (2) find additional nic'Epona to press into service for the good of Kellinon, and (3) carve a name for

themselves in the multiverse. There's a good chance the defeated monarch and his advisor will take up with the Harmonium, for strict methods and unyielding devotion to one path suit these two just fine. It's a bet they'll cause

some serious trouble for the PCs when they learn to understand the planes and manipulate planar beings.





A Tale of the treachery of Evil and the sometimes Significant dangers of dwelling in a Gate-Town.

JUST + THE FACTS, BERK

NUMBER OF PCs: 2 to 6.

LEVELS: 5th to 8th.

PCs PREFERRED: All.

FACTIONS: None need be used, though any could be interested in helping save the town of Plague-Mort to preserve their interests there. (The Bleak Cabal, the Fated, and the Doomguard all have interests in the town.) The more extreme members of the Society of Sensation also would hate to see it fall to the forces of the Abyss. The Xaositects, once they got word of the events in this scenario, would come rushing to ensure that chaos spreads.

SYNOPSIS: The PCs find themselves in Plague-Mort when the town, overburdened by evil, begins its slide into the Abyss.

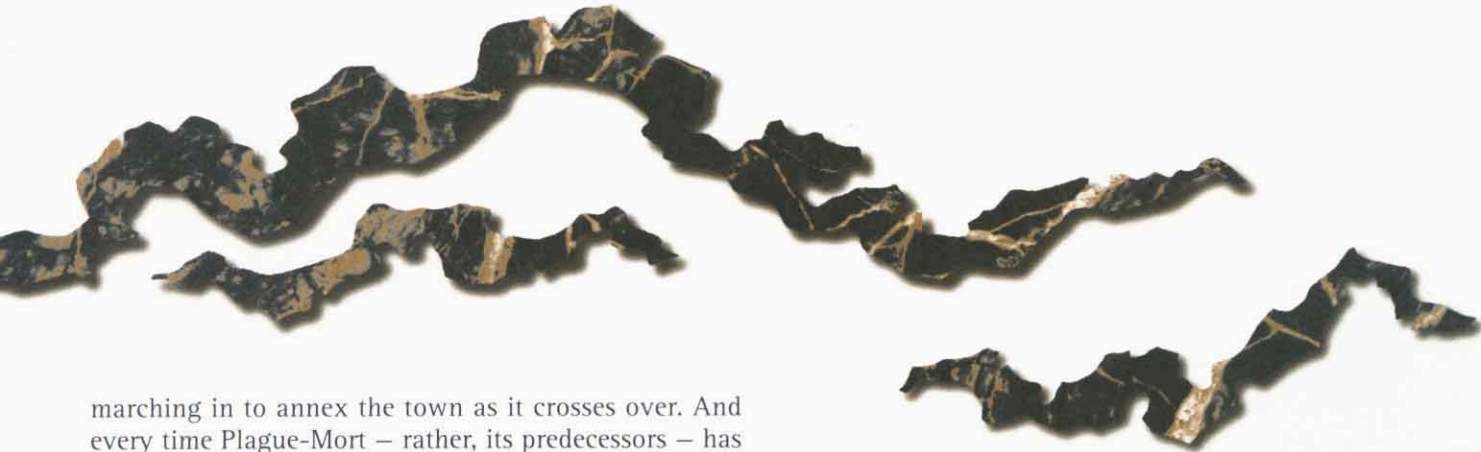
CHAPTER VII: RECRUITERS

DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

Every planar knows that when a burg near a gate grows too much like the plane on the other side, the whole town slides into the plane. It's a shift that requires the prevailing attitude of the town to mirror, almost exactly, the alignment of the neighboring plane. When the two have become exactly parallel, the town vanishes through the gate. Gradually, another town is established around the gate to take its place.

Sure, every basher is wise to the chant. But, it's a rare berk that knows what the experience *feels* like. And to find a cutter who's felt more than one town cross over? Might as well ask to meet a Dustman who doesn't think the whole blamed multiverse is already lost.

But, if a body *could* find a cutter who's been there, he'd learn that different planes have unique ways of claiming their own. For example, Mount Celestia takes its town with a fanfare of trumpets, with gentle aasimon leading the way into paradise. Baator takes Ribcage with military precision, with fiends



marching in to annex the town as it crosses over. And every time Plague-Mort – rather, its predecessors – has slid into the Abyss before, mass riots and full-out mayhem ensued, as though to usher in the new era for the unfortunate petitioners.

In this case, the present town of Plague-Mort has been moving steadily toward a purely chaotic evil bent. But the Arch-Lector's near-insanity, the guards' brutality, and the city's rampant lawlessness aren't enough to force the burg through. The only thing still needed to send the city slipping into the gate is a decisive shift in the beliefs of the people. The Arch-Lector has been working hard to ensure just such a change in attitude – it's all going according to plan, so far.

Once it's begun, Plague-Mort's slide through the gate can be stopped only if the prevailing mood of the town swings far enough away from the chaotic evil that characterizes the Abyss. This can be accomplished *only* through the intervention of the player characters – when the time comes, everyone else in town is too worried about saving their skins from the frenzy to counter the forces of evil and chaos. Little do these sods realize how much more their skins will suffer if the town goes through. The characters, if role-played well, can provide a rallying point, something to stem the tide of evil rising in Plague-Mort.

When the town begins its slide, the gate to the Abyss slowly takes on greater prominence. It seems to expand in all directions and begins to emit lightning and acrid bursts of smoke as it prepares to engulf the town. The locals see this phenomenon, but they have no idea of its significance; it has happened before, and nothing ever came of it. Besides, most of them are so involved in their own struggles that they can't spare a thought for what the gate happens to be doing.

The city enters a gray limbo while the balance tips one way or another. All methods of escape are closed off while the players in this drama decide Plague-Mort's fate. Even walking out of town's not an option, berk – there ain't a thing beyond the city gates but gray haze. And, no matter how long a body walks out into it, each time he turns around, he finds those gates right behind him, and he knows he never moved a step.

Plague-Mort's police, the Hounds, are constantly extorting money and bullying folk, so, odds are the PCs'll have a run-in or two with these cutters. Refer to these typical Hound statistics:

HOUND, PLAGUE-MORT MILITIA (140)

(PLANAR/♂, ♀ VAR/F5/MERCYKILLER, FATED, OR DUSTMAN/CE): S 16 (0, +1), D 15, C 12, I 8, W 10, Ch 8; AC 5; MV 12; hp 30; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8+1 (broad sword and Strength); SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 175.

IMPORTANT: Remember, in Plague-Mort all necromantic spells function at maximum efficiency. Saving throws against these spells suffer a -3 penalty.

HERE'S +THE CHANT+

One of the great coups in the Outer Planes is for a body to pull one of the gateway towns into his own plane. It's been going on for as long as gate-towns have been established, and the Upper Planes recruit just as vigorously as the Lower. The gate remains, but the town goes missing, and a new one usually springs up in its place, just as primed to slip through as the previous one.

In all the planes, perhaps the town with the greatest risk of crossing over is Plague-Mort, the gate-town by the Abyss. Its rulers, many of whom have been under the influence of the tanar'ri, have sometimes actively promoted the evil in this town, driving each successive incarnation of Plague-Mort from the Outlands into the Abyss. The current ruler is no exception. In fact, he's decided that now's the time for the town to go.

This Arch-Lector, Byrri Yarmoril, contacted certain denizens of Plague-Mort who come from the Abyss. Together, they hatched a plan to drive the people of the town into a chaotic frenzy, the final step needed to send this burg right through the gate.

First, they planned to have a few well-placed agents poison the chant by sowing rumors sure to stimulate feelings of, at least, doubt, and, at most, anarchy. Perhaps a few groups would spring up with members intent on installing themselves as the new rulers of Plague-Mort.

Next, add a few bodies to the dead-book to get the groups pointing the finger at each other, and tensions rise even higher. Then, according to the plan, the Arch-Lector fakes his death, leaving the competing vultures to come rushing to fill the power vacuum.

If the city doesn't explode into outright violence, at least everyone would be climbing all over each other seeking a place close to the top in the new order. (Perhaps adding a famine and then some imported food laced with poison would drive the town toward the boiling point, even more ready to explode with the Arch-Lector's death.) The selfish rumblings among the people as they jockey for position would serve to bring Plague-Mort ever nearer to the Abyss.

After an infernal plotting session beyond the gate, the Arch-Lector returned to Plague-Mort, ready to do his duty – and receive his reward for delivering the town to the tanar'ri. The fiends, on the other hand, debated ways to make sure the plan could not fall through, and ways to keep the Arch-Lector's reward in their own vaults. The best way to tie up loose ends, they decided, was to actually kill the Arch-Lector, rather than allow him to muck things up by revealing the plan or turning up alive when he was supposed to be in the dead-book.



SEQUENCE

1. The player characters come to Plague-Mort seeking a certain breed of razorvine that grows on the Gate to the Abyss. If they have ever been here before, they discover that the gate seems to be looming larger than usual.

2. The bashers learn they may not simply take the vine – they need a special permit from the Arch-Lector. Plane or Prime, one thing never changes: "Permit" means "garnish." The characters know this, but they have to make an appointment to come back for their permit the next day.

3. While waiting for their permit to be approved, the PCs spend some time in Plague-Mort. Everything they see here indicates that this is a town ready to blow. Not only is there a shortage of food, ostensibly because of some poisoned imports, people are spreading rumors of the Arch-Lector's impending downfall, and some are actively plotting to replace him. The cutters may hear any number of different intrigues while they wait for their appointment. Rumblings of discontent in the streets seem almost audible.

4. That night, news of the Arch-Lector's death spreads through the burg like dragonfire. All of Plague-Mort bursts into action, each party moving to wrest control for itself.

5. If the PCs attempt to leave town, their selfishness simply adds to the sum of evil in the town. In fact, their crass self-interest can prove the final straw, sending the bashers into the first layer of the Abyss as the gate engulfs the burg. Escape is another adventure entirely.

6. On the other hand, as the townsfolk ready themselves for the coming night of bloodshed, the PCs can attempt to rally them against the mounting evil. To counter them, several tanar'ri have come through the gate, dispersing to advise various ringleaders how best to take control.

7. The cutters race through town, drumming up support to turn back the invaders. If they do their jobs right, they and the townspeople can hold off the forces of evil long enough to prevent the town from slipping into the Abyss. Even if most of the locals wind up lost turning back the tanar'ri influence, their sacrifices did not come in vain: The prevailing mood in Plague-Mort has shifted toward the greater good.

8. After saving the city, the player characters find themselves treated as heroes. But, as they prepare to depart, they see that the people start slipping back toward evil again, each plotting how to gain the most influence in Plague-Mort's new order.



I+ BEGINS

The bashers have begun making a name for themselves in Sigil and the planes. Of course, there's always berks who start to think too highly of themselves when they do a couple things right, so the PCs had better not start thinking of themselves as anything special just yet. To illustrate this point, the DM should send a number of NPCs to ask the player characters to perform some fairly mundane tasks. Granted, the requests come from bloods, and it's nice to have them notice a body, plus they pay pretty good jink. But the jobs are boring nonetheless.

Case in point: Sometime while the PCs are having a bit of fun at their local watering hole in Sigil, an aging mage of some renown enters. His name is Bachalis. (Planar/♂ half-elf/W17/Free League/NG).



He peers around with bleary eyes, seeking something. Once he notices the party, he strides into the midst of the group and drops a heavy bag onto the table in front of them. It jingles as only a purse full of money can.

"Look here," the wizard says, "I need a band of people who aren't afraid to travel to Plague-Mort and retrieve some razorvine for me. There's a bag of 100 platinum just for listening to me, and I've got an extra 200 platinum for each of you if you go. Whaddya say?"

If they're willing to listen to the old man, he shoves the bag of money toward the basher who agrees first. That character can open the bag to find that it's indeed full of platinum. Once the character takes the money, the old half-elf launches into his spiel.

"I'm conducting an important experiment in limiting the growth of razorvine, and also in various other properties of the weed. I think the stuff has enormous potential. However, I need a batch of the Outlands' hardiest specimen of the plant, and I think that's the razorvine grown on the Gate to the Abyss in Plague-Mort. Toughest razorvine I've ever seen. But I need someone to get it for me. I'd do it myself, but I've got stuff brewing all over Sigil, so I can't leave. You'll be well paid, but I need your decision in the next ten minutes. Excuse me while I get something to drink." He heads to the bar, orders a drink, and starts conversing with a tiefling.

Bachalis remains at the bar for exactly 10 minutes, then returns to ask whether the PCs are going to accept the contract. If they decline, he thanks them and, leaving the money on their table, he goes off to talk to a group of cutters with more nerve. The adventure is over for this bunch. (Later, they hear of Plague-Mort's disappearance into the Abyss and the creation of a new incarnation.)

The wizard acts jubilant if the party accepts. He sits down to give the cutters their instructions.

"The very first group I talked to, too," he says. "Imagine that! Very well, the portal you need to get there is in the Clerk's Ward, in the Hall of Records. It's the entryway into the taxation records, so you'll need a clerk escort to make sure you don't go rifling through the files. The key to the portal both there and back is a sprig of razorvine, so make sure you activate the portal with a different sprig than the one you're bringing back to me!"

"Now, razorvine dies when plucked. That's why I'm giving you a special solution that'll keep it alive." He hands you a foot-tall crystal vial filled with brown liquid. "You have to immerse the sprig immediately after it's cut. I'm sure you're smart enough to figure out how to pick the stuff without hurting yourselves."

"Oh, and one more thing. I understand Plague-Mort is getting a little tense. Be careful — if you provoke an incident, you might push the town into the Abyss!" He pauses to gauge your reactions, then bursts into laughter. Standing up, he wipes tears of mirth from his face. "Oh, sometimes I'm too funny for myself. Well, now, do please hurry up with that vine. The barkeep knows how to contact me." With that, the wizard steps out of the bar, still chuckling at his own wit.

BUILD-UP

The PCs arrive at the Clerk's Ward with no more incidents than normal (DM's discretion).

When the bashers pass through the portal into Plague-Mort, it's a bet they'll head straight for the Gate to the Abyss so they can grab the plant and get out of there as quickly as they can. But that'd be too easy, blood.

See, there's a guard at the gate who's not averse to making a quick bit of jink.

This knight of the post's scam is selling "permits" to Clueless wanting to pass through the gate, but he gladly makes up any excuse to line his pockets. He has a keen memory for faces, so he doesn't try to bob the same berks twice. For more information, see the gate description (area 1).

ABOUT THE TOWN

First, a quick guide to Plague-Mort, since the party probably will be seeing some of the sights while in town. Though the whole burg's dirty and dangerous, in some places there's variation from this unhappy medium. Some are safer, and some are far, far more dangerous.

DMs can pick up the adventure's main plot line again following the description of the portal from Sigil (area 18), though the bashers might run into some incidental trouble along the way. In addition, there's the constant threat of the Hounds, who'd bully even a power if they thought they could get away with it.

THE ARCH-LECTOR'S PALACE

The center of town contains important local government buildings, including the jail and the Arch-Lector's home. This palace is the most corrupt place in town, the heart of chaotic evil.

1. ABYSSAL GATE AND PUBLIC SQUARE: Of the three arches leading into the Arch-Lector's palace, the one on the left is the Gate to the Abyss. A Hound guard named Gaz is posted full time nearby to monitor bashers going into and out of the Abyss and, not incidentally, to peel a share for himself while he's at it. Gaz is a tall, dark, and broad tiefling who appears as an ordinary human, except for the slight bumps in his forehead that indicate his otherworldly ancestors.

GAZ THE HOUND (PLANAR/♂ TIEFLING/ F/T 8/9 /FATED/CE):
Int average (10); AC 2; MV 12; hp 55; THACO 12; #AT 2; Dam 1-8/1-6 (+2 for Strength); ML champion (15); XP 5,000.

The Hound keeps a close eye on both sides of the gate, and if he sees that someone's getting ready to go

into the Abyss, he races over and demands a toll. He'll back off in the face of a traveler more powerful than he, but, against a weaker creature, he takes pleasure in enforcing his will.

So, he's watching the player characters when they approach the Abyssal gate to cut their sprig of razor-vine.

The Hound strides up and demands, "What do you think you're doing? Don't you know you need a permit to approach the gate? You stupid berks. Tell you what," and here he drops his voice conspiratorially, "I think I can get you a permit within a day or so. It'll only cost you about thirty gold, and it'll be a lot faster than going through the palace. I assume you want a permit for going through?" He raises his eyebrows expectantly.

If the bashers tell him they want to cut some razor-vine, Gaz looks horrified.

"But that's defacing public property! Well, I could get you a permit for that too, but it'll cost you fifty gold more. I'm gonna to have to pull a lot of strings to get this permit for you. Whaddya say? We got a deal?"

IT'S LIKE THIS, BERK:

MY FATHER

DON'T WANT

TO SHARE.

— MARQUIS FEARSON.

JUST BEFORE

KILLING

THE ARCH-LECTOR



Assuming the characters agree, Gaz tells them to return the next evening with their money. As soon as they've gone, he sets another Hound to watching the gates. (This conspirator gets a quarter of all Gaz's profits, so he has a vested interest in making sure the deals go off in the regular guard's absence.) Meanwhile, the tiefling heads off to a friend's place for some official-looking certificates and a forgery of the Arch-Lector's signature. He takes devious routes to throw off any pursuers.

The certificate looks ready after a few hours' work, and Gaz returns to his post, leaving instructions for the printer to deliver the new "permits" at noon the next day. Since he's back at his post by evening, Gaz becomes one of the first to die when the fighting breaks out at night.

2. STABLES: Occasionally, the Hounds or the Arch-Lector require mounts for transportation or show. In addition to the typical horses a body might find in any stable, the Plague-Mort stables house griffons, hippogriffs, and even a wyvern. If the characters break in, they may be able to steal the animals for their own use. Only after a successful land- or air-based riding proficiency check will a mount submit to a character and allow itself to be saddled; otherwise, it won't recognize the PC's dominance and, indeed, will fight to keep a rider off its back. To one proficient in riding, the animals are all well behaved, since they have been habitually beaten for misbehaving or failing to follow a command.

GRIFFON (3): Int semi (3); AL N; AC 3; MV 12, Fl 30 (C, D if mounted); HD 7; hp 40, 37, 30; THACO 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/2-16; SZ L (9 feet long); ML steady (11); XP 650.

HIPPOGRIFF (4): Int semi (3); AL N; AC 5; MV 18, Fl 36 (C, D if mounted); HD 3+3; hp 24, 21, 20, 16; THACO 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-6/1-6/1-10; SZ L (10 feet long); ML average (9); XP 175.

WYVERN: Int low (5); AL N; AC 3; MV 6, Fl 24 (E); HD 7+7; hp 45; THACO 13; #AT 2; Dmg 2-16/1-6; SA poison; SZ G (35 feet long); ML elite (14); XP 1,400.

3. THE GREAT HALL: From the Great Hall, the Arch-Lector rules Plague-Mort, making the decisions that affect daily life in the town. This large hall can accommodate all the Hounds of the city, all its merchants, or all the illicit priests. The outside walls of the vast, well-built edifice are lined with razorvine. Inside, a body immediately gets the impression of immense space. The two enormous double doors lead into a daunting expanse of empty polished wood floor, at the end of which is a large dais holding a table and thronelike chair.

From this seat, the Arch-Lector Byrri Yarmoril (Planar/♂ tiefling/P16/Mercykiller/CE) rules his city, and from this seat he's betrayed it.

After the riots begin, the tanar'ri direct the course of the chaos from the Great Hall. Five tanar'ri in particular have been plotting to take over Plague-Mort. Their balor superior in the Abyss has entrusted them with the mission of sowing enough discord to push the town to the brink of destruction, and then right over. The five fiends, all lesser tanar'ri, eagerly wish to prove their worth in their master's eyes. Their descriptions follow.

MARQUIS FEARSON, A LESSER TANAR'RI

(PLANAR/♂ MARQUIS CAMBION/HD 6/CE): S 19 (+3, +7), D 17, C 15, I 18, W 17, Ch 17; AC -1 (*chain mail* +2); MV 15; hp 48; THACO 15 (9 with *long sword* +3 and Strength); #AT 2; Dmg 1-8+10/1-8+10; SA spells, never surprised, standard tanar'ri abilities; SD spells, thief abilities (MS 80%, HS 80%); MR 30%; SZ M (6 ½ feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 6,000.

Innate powers: *detect magic* (at will), *fear* (touch), *polymorph self* (3/day).

Spells: 1st level — *affect normal fires*, *burning hands*, *magic missile*, *shocking grasp*; 2nd level — *blindness*, *stinking cloud*; 3rd level — *fireball*, *lightning bolt*.

One of the more capable cambions in the Abyss, Marquis Fearson used his tanar'ri heritage to excellent advantage in the human world, which he has parlayed into an advantage in the nether plane. He works closely with his superior, the balor who fathered him (though the balor does not suspect the relation that fosters the close bond between the two).

Both the balor and Fearson have labored long to push Plague-Mort into the Abyss, and the ranking tanar'ri has decided to allow the cambion the honor of adding the final touches of evil to the town. Fearson coordinates the tanar'ri efforts from the Great Hall. He won't run if he should see his cause go up in flames; he knows horrible tortures await him if he fails, so he'll sacrifice whatever it takes to achieve his objectives.

MORTAI, A LESSER TANAR'RI

(PLANAR/♂ MAJOR CAMBION/HD 4/CE): S 18/00 (+3, +6), D 17, C 14, I 14, W 8, Ch 6; AC 3 (*leather* +2); MV 15; hp 30; THACO 17 (13 with *broad sword* +1 and Strength); #AT 2; Dmg 2-8+7/2-8+7; SA never surprised, standard tanar'ri abilities; SD thief abilities (MS 80%, HS 80%); MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (14); XP 6,000.

Innate power: *detect magic* (at will).



Mortai, Fearson's brother on his mother's side, looks up to his elder and more powerful brother with all the force of hero worship. He obeys his brother's commands implicitly, never thinking to question them. Little does he know that his brother despises him, and plots to have him killed in the fighting.

The cambion's mission is to act as Fearson's errand boy and to infiltrate several of the rebellious groups in town, encouraging the maximum amount of finger-pointing. Like his brother, Mortai feels willing to sacrifice everything, but out of the desire to impress his sibling rather than to avert punishment.

LATANA, A LESSER TANAR'RI

(PLANAR/♀ SUCCUBUS/HD 6/CE): Int exceptional (15); AC 0; MV 12, Fl 18 (C); hp 37; THACO 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1-3/1-3; SA energy drain; SD +2 or better weapon to hit, immune to fire, never surprised, standard tanar'ri abilities; MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 11,000.

Latana is working with this motley group both for her own pleasure in tempting mortals to their doom and for the promise of advancement within the succubus ranks when she has completed her task. She has competed vigorously with the temptress Chiryn in the past, and hopes to use this feat to shoot herself higher in the ranks than her rival.

The succubus's job is to bend the minds of the townsfolk toward paranoia as much as possible. Latana fights as long as she can, but flees if she thinks she'll be killed. She figures she can always lie about her involvement later, if need be.

HAARSA, A LESSER TANAR'RI

(PLANAR/♀ ALU-FIEND/HD 5/CE): Int average (9); AC -1 (chain mail +1); MV 12, Fl 15 (D); hp 35; THACO 15 (13 with long sword +2); #AT 1; Dmg 1-8+2; SA standard tanar'ri abilities; MR 30%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML steady (12); XP 4,000.

Haarsa, though she doesn't know it, is the cousin of Marquis Fearson and Mortai; her father was the brother of the pair's mother. She has been assigned to back up various sides in the night's fighting, prolonging the power struggle until it's gained such momentum that no one could stop it. Haarsa is hateful, spiteful, and not too smart. She fights to the death, though; her fervor is part of the reason her superiors chose her for this job.

STKAL, A LESSER TANAR'RI

(PLANAR/♂ BAR-LGURA/HD 6+6/CE): Int low (7); AC 0; MV 9, Cl 15; hp 46; THACO 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1-6/1-6/2-12; SA spring, standard tanar'ri abilities; SD camouflage; MR 30%; SZ M (5 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 8,000.

Stkal works with this group solely because it fears the powers of Fearson's father, should it not complete its mission faithfully. It despises the other tanar'ri with whom it works, but defers to them so it can return to its brethren all the more quickly. Stkal exerts only the bare minimum of effort needed to complete its mission (and might, therefore, overlook important details). This fiend watches over Haarsa in almost beastlike devotion during the violence of the adventure's climax and during the infighting that might seize the ranks of the fiends before the city's fate is assured. Its love of fighting makes it a cinch this nasty never runs away from battle.

4. THE HOUNDS' KENNELS: When the Hounds aren't able to secure themselves sleeping quarters in the various kips of Plague-Mort, they must return to the kennels the Arch-Lector provides. The kennels are low-roofed, dingy affairs, shoddy buildings that house rats and other vermin. Drafts flow through whenever the wind blows, and the windows are always broken. The guards have no security for their belongings at the kennels; members of different packs rifle through others' belongings as soon as the owners have left. Small wonder, then, that the Hounds choose to force their way into the inns of Plague-Mort. There are no valuables in any of these buildings.

5. THE CHAPEL: All the important religious ceremonies over which the Arch-Lector presides take place in this temple to Oghma, patron god of knowledge. All the local high-ups know the dark of this large chapel: The altar has been desecrated, hollowed out to conceal stairs leading into the depths below the palace.

Below lies a magnificent temple built to serve Umberlee, the goddess of destruction and the Arch-Lector's patron. The boring liturgies of Oghma are held daily in the chapel upstairs by an apostate priest named Bostrak (Petitioner/♂ human/P11/Xaositect/CE), who serves as an acolyte in the realm below.

While Oghma's temple is bare of valuables, the obsidian and steel ceremonial service in Umberlee's is worth 10,000 gp to those who serve the causes of chaos and evil. However, a basher who removes it from the chamber without first enchanting it with *remove curse* finds himself cursed with the wrath of the goddess. This curse gives a victim a -1 penalty to all rolls until a *remove curse* cancels its effects and an *atonement* spell removes Umberlee's taint from the sod's spirit.

6. THE ARCH LECTOR'S PRIVATE HALL: The many rooms in the home of Arch-Lector Byrri Yarmoril add up to the epitome of luxury, especially in poor Plague-Mort. Since the Arch-Lector gets a cut of any legal trade in the town, and has no qualms about dipping into the public treasury, he has made his mansion one of the most opulent mortal homes on the Outlands.

The hall includes a private chapel to Umberlee (the chant is dark about the brutal pleasures the high-up enjoys there, but bodies are dragged from the chapel weekly), the city treasury (the most secure place in the town, it holds literally hundreds of thousands of gold pieces), a huge bedroom and library, a private kitchen, and secluded dens to suit his various moods. The dens that see almost daily use include *Anger*, *Jealousy*, and *Spite*.

7. THE PRISON: The local birdcage holds the sods who have irritated the Hounds in any fashion, however minor, and those who have fallen under the peery eye of the Arch-Lector. Each of the prison's seven floors is devoted to a different function: holding cells, solitary cells, interrogation by fire, interrogation by water, interrogation by other physical means, interrogation by magical and psychic means, and the bureaucratic chamber. *Shifter's manacles* bind each prisoner, and the guards all carry *planar mancatchers*. As most of the prison lies underground, the prisoners' constant screams sound muffled to cutters on the street.

THE MERCHANTS' QUARTER

All the places listed in the Merchants' Quarter are described in the *PLANESCAPE Campaign Setting* and appear on the map here for reference only. Plague-Mort attracts the whole spectrum of merchants, from the dour dwarf jeweler to the excitable fiendish slave driver. Some eagerly solicit customers, while others have such faith in their wares that they wait for trade to find them.

And find them it does. The Merchants' Quarter bustles day and night.

8. MERCHANTS' ROW: The highest quality goods in the Merchants' Quarters – for the highest prices, of course.

9. THE EYE OF THE DRAGON: A good kip for cutters in town for a visit, as long as they don't get too obnoxious.

10. THE GOLDEN GRIFFON: The inn claimed by the Hounds of Plague-Mort. A berk who stays here is asking for a thrashing.

11. SWEET LARISSA'S SAUSAGES: The best sausages in Plague-Mort. Some might even say they're *of* Plague-Mort.

12. THE POISONER'S PHIAL: A shop that sells poisons and their antidotes.

13. THE BELL AND WHISTLE TAVERN: The tavern overrun by the Clueless called the Illuminated. Their leader is Green Marvent (Prime/♂ human/W11/Outsiders/CE).



THE TEMPLES

There are no temples to the chaotic evil gods in Plague-Mort – officially. See, the powers of the Outlands don't deal well with deities from other planes poaching their worshipers. That's why the Temple Quarter boasts one of the largest selections of churches to the neutral gods in *any* of the gate-towns. Though few priests of these gods actually draw from the powers, services in the temples go on with some regularity. Outwardly, the people of Plague-Mort are some of the most devout people on the Outlands.

In reality, the Temple Quarter holds a place of worship devoted to nearly every deity in the Abyss, as well as some tanar'ri who have "established" themselves as powers merely by preying on weak minds. Their temples are hidden in the alleys, in the foundations of the improperly consecrated neutral temples, in the attics of other churches, and other places even more subtle.

The way the chant runs, an evil temple even lies in the sewers beneath Plague-Mort. Evil powers are careful to hide themselves from the not-so-vigilant eyes of the neutral gods of the Outlands, but they're all there, if a body just knows where to look.

Remember, it takes all types in Plague-Mort, and worshipers of all types come flocking to the temples to make sure they get counted. The temples range in scope from the huge – occupying at least half a block – to the tiny, back-alley temples made from scrounged timber and burnt-out inns. All of them manage to attract worshipers. Does the power they call upon answer them? That ain't the point, berk. The point is that these seekers have made sure their power hears their voices; they're covering their bets, just on the off-chance that something bad might happen to them.

Once the city begins its slow slide into the Abyss, clever cutters won't enter the temple area. Most of the priests, eager to be closer to their sinister gods, actively resist efforts to keep the town on the Outlands. Of course, a few suddenly realize that their god isn't *that* great, and work against those more devoted. Overall, however, once the town starts to go, this is not a smart spot for a bunch of out-of-town bashers whose only interest in Plague-Mort was a sprig of razorvine.

And face it: This area ain't exactly Mount Celestia before the slide, either. Folks're always disappearing off the streets, many found later missing limbs or organs. Churches here believe in participatory worship, though nobody ever said participating was voluntary. Visitors usually find it a good idea to walk well armed and with an escort through the temples' area of influence.

RESIDENTIAL AREA (THE SLUMS)

The Slums has at least two distinct divisions: (1) Rich Man's Row, and (2) all the rest. Though the inhabitants might break it down even further, only they understand their divisions. Gangs of beggars and bandits roam the Slums, looking for berks to prey on or customers in need of illicit services. Unlike most petitioners, many here are eager to see their ranks swell — preferably by making sure any uppity planars who come through leave as petitioners. On the other hand, not even petitioners are safe from the roaming gangs.

Most of the merchants of the city stay well away from the residential area, preferring to install lofts over their shops or attachments to the back of them. Not only can they avoid living in the Slums this way, they also can keep close to their businesses to discourage thieves. Visitors usually avoid lodging in the Slums in favor of the Merchants' Quarter, where the inns, though far more expensive, are also safer and cleaner.

'Course inns — along with private homes and taverns of ill repute — dominate the Slums anyway. It's a cinch a berk can find a tavern every second block at least, and an inn every third. These kips often come in handy for clandestine meetings, whether of anarchists plotting to overthrow the government or of a couple of folks who just want to escape the jealous eye of another.

Local shops offer staple goods and services, but the quality they provide is enough to keep these vendors out of the Merchants' Quarter till aasimon start vacationing in the Abyss. Basically, the only well-crafted items for sale around here are the stolen goods.

14. THE PUBLIC SQUARE: With its great stage extending from the Abyssal gate, the square allows the average berk to see the goings-on over on the Arch-Lector's side of the wall. It is also the locals' great bazaar. Since most of them don't have the jink for the Merchants' Quarter, they have to buy lower-quality goods from lower-quality merchants.

15. RICH MAN'S ROW: The wealthy of Plague-Mort all live in the space of exactly two blocks, for two reasons. First, the poorer berks try to tear down those who establish themselves as rich, and they often do a good job. And second, when the row gets any longer, the Arch-Lector likes to go through and prune away the richest. "Suspected sedition" is the word, but the chant is clear: No "suspects" ever come back to claim their confiscated valuables.

16. THIEVES' GUILD: Though it could probably operate in the open with only minimal costs (such as garnish to the Hounds), the thieves of the guild remain in the shadows out of habit. In this democratic guild, members

are represented by a ruling council. When the time comes to make important decisions, each council member offers a plan for the entire guild to vote on. This system started when the guild ran out of pages in its guildmaster dead-book — only a barmy'd want the top job these days.

The guild operates out of a burned-out manor hall, formerly the residence of one of the guildmasters. All the locals know of it is this: Don't go there without knowing the password. See, the Thieves' Guild of Plague-Mort is more than a group of scofflaws who bob their neighbors — they're all real handy with their knives, too. A knight wanting a piece of the cross-trade in Plague-Mort had better be prepared to pay the guild a membership fee (50 gp) and 20% of the take.

Not to say the guild's all bad. It serves as a fence for ill-gotten goods and can provide thieves' equipment for a decent fee. A basher who looks like he might be involved in the cross-trade sooner or later finds a guild member passing him on the street, mumbling the guild's invitation to him. An interested party will follow the blood to the guildhouse. And, if this basher is a thief worth his salt, he'll have realized by the time they arrive that the invitation had a price — namely, whatever was in his pockets. (The guild member has a 60% chance of picking the pockets of an invitee not paying close attention to his surroundings.)

The Marquis Fearson will base his operations in the guildhouse until he can arrange for the Arch-Lector to get lost. The cambion has made an agreement in the dark with the ruling council, promising them a place in the next Plague-Mort as a result of the death of the Arch-Lector. The council members have no idea what their true fate will be when the Abyss claims the city.

17. THE HEART OF THE SLUMS: If the Arch-Lector's palace is cold, calculating evil, the Heart of the Slums is hot, passionate evil. The Heart is the worst part of the Slums, the central point of misery for the underclass of Plague-Mort. It extends from the Temple Quarter to near the Public Square. The gangs of ruffians and the ever-present stink of filth give even the Hounds pause before they enter the area — 'cept that they usually don't enter at all. The Hounds simply patrol the border of the Heart and let its denizens take care of themselves. Riots and fires rage as they will, put down only when they threaten other, more prosperous parts of Plague-Mort.

So, around here it's every blood for himself, and even those in the gangs look peery at their mates. There's no trust in the Heart, and it's a rare berk who comes in alone and survives.

18. THE PORTAL: At the start of this ride, the characters departed Sigil to emerge into Plague-Mort — specifically, into the cold room of the butcher's shop, stepping out right into a stew of guts. They recognize none of the

animals hanging from the hooks, and judging from the smell, the butcher wants to ripen these disgusting fruits a bit before selling them. Flies buzz madly about the cold room, which feels only marginally colder than the air outside. The bashers'd better move carefully if they don't want to get slimed with gore from the carcasses.

Though there are surely other portals into Plague-Mort, this is the only one the PCs know of, and it has deposited them into the center of the Slums. Fortunately, it's not too far from a road that leads right to the Public Square and the Arch-Lector's case. 'Course, those places ain't much better.

If the characters try to escape through this portal once the fiends have set their in motion their plan for the town, they find it blocked. Somehow, the conduit back to Sigil seems mysteriously cut. Checking, they find that all methods of leaving town are gone, including simply walking out its main gate. Though the bashers are in the dark about it, this burg's stuck in a planar limbo (and not the plane of Limbo, either, berk) until its fate comes clear, one way or the other. Until the balance tips, they ain't leaving.

A CHAN+ +HA+ BURNS

Everywhere the bashers go in Plague-Mort, they hear talk of "freedom from the Arch-Lector's yoke," but only in undercurrents and whispers – no one wants to be tagged by the Hounds as subversive. The screams from the birdcage remind everyone of the fate of would-be revolutionaries. Still, lots of folks seem to want to get rid of their ruler and put themselves in his place.

The characters simply can't shake the pervasive feeling of eager anticipation and . . . evil. All the time they're in town, they feel a sense of mounting tension, like charged air before a storm. The thing is, this promises to be a storm of evil, with no good to anyone should the lightning finally strike.

Isolated incidents across the city contribute to this building tension. The DM can let the characters be observers, not taking part in the action, or the party can directly involve itself in the scenes that play out on the streets. The bashers should take part in a few of these encounters – either to join in the chaos, or to work to soothe the locals' fiery attitudes. The event descriptions that follow illustrate the rise of hatred and resentment in the city. After each of these events, those who look toward the Abyssal gate can see that it's rising in prominence, as though it were growing larger. Eventually, it may look like the gate encompasses the whole city. The dark of it is that just one more evil act could send Plague-Mort sliding through to the Abyss, where hordes of tanar'ri wait to claim those within.

Below are some incidents the PCs might witness, though the possibilities are by no means limited to this list. DMs should be inventive.

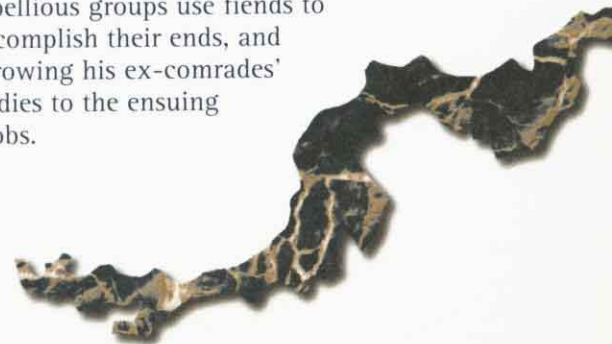




◆ On a street corner, the bashers see a woman preaching against the evils of the Hounds to a large crowd. With a fevered intensity, she works her listeners into a hatred of the burg's corrupt "defenders." Hounds near the area back away nervously as the mob begins focusing its anger on them. However, the woman lets her rhetoric peter out before inciting the crowd to violence. The tension for a fight seems almost palpable, but it drains away bit by bit as the tirade ceases. The gathering melts away, folks muttering angrily among themselves. The speaker, actually the succubus Latana in disguise, reports back to the Marquis, who is staying at the thieves' guildhouse until he gets rid of the Arch-Lector.

◆ Elsewhere, the PCs learn of several impromptu groups preparing to take over the government when the Arch-Lector shows a sign of weakness. Each group knows about the others, and a competitive enmity already has arisen among them. A couple of these parties offer the bashers jobs as bodyguards for their leaders. Regardless of whether they accept, they later hear rumors that several group leaders have died. The chant has it that some had their heads dashed cruelly against walls, or were crushed under a load of falling barrels. Others had their throats slit at home, their food poisoned, or were found slumped over tables with vicious daggers in their backs. The tension flames among all the groups, each blaming the others for the deaths. 'Course these assassinations have been performed by Mortai or Stkal, and each reports back to the Marquis when they have completed each of their tasks.

◆ At the DM's option, the characters might spy Mortai or Stkal fleeing the scene of one of the murders. Each of these creatures is expert at avoiding detection, but every so often bashers wind up in the right place at the right time. They might even slay one or both of these fiends. Putting these fiends in the dead-book won't throw off the plans of the Marquis too much, for the dark of it is that the cambion and bar-Igura have already taken care of the Arch-Lector. Fearson might even play this wrinkle to his advantage, spreading the chant that the rebellious groups use fiends to accomplish their ends, and throwing his ex-comrades' bodies to the ensuing mobs.





- ◆ The PCs see a gathering forming in the Public Square, amid weird shades cast by flickering torchlight. If they draw closer, they see a fiendish, winged shadow playing on the wall, its great wings moving as it speaks to the crowd of warriors gathered around it.

"Hounds of Plague-Mort, why do you suffer the foot of an incompetent ruler upon your necks? Why do you accept the abuse of the ungrateful wretches whom you protect? How much longer will you endure it?"

Should the characters involve themselves, they can count 20 Hounds listening to the tanar'ri strutting before them on the stage. The emotionally-charged speech continues for some time, the audience growing ever more angry. Soon the Hounds are shouting encouragement and agreement; clearly, unless the PCs intervene, violence is coming. If the characters interrupt, the fiend takes to the air, and the Hounds turn on them. This fiend is, of course, Haarsa, inciting the fighting groups of Plague-Mort and promising them her support when the battle begins.

Many other such incidents take place in the city, and not all of them involve the tanar'ri. Some citizens act on their own, feeding off the fear and anger that the tanar'ri are nurturing to an explosive climax. For instance:

- ◆ A mob of townsfolk falls on the Hounds, who have just publicly murdered a woman in the street;
- ◆ Homes burst into flame, the result of arson committed by enemies of the residents; and
- ◆ Tavern brawls erupt across Plague-Mort, their fighting spilling into the streets.

Even taken all together, these horrors fail to drive the city into absolute chaos. Just one more evil, one shocking murder, and Plague-Mort goes spiralling down into a massive frenzy of destruction.



CLIMAX

The simmering resentment of the city is making everyone barmy. Yet, though violence sweeps through the streets, the locals seem to sense an undercurrent that speaks of quieter times to come. Periods of chaos have come and gone before, they tell the bashers. This time, as in the past, nothing has sparked the charged atmosphere.

At least, nothing until the murder of the Arch-Lector.

Eventually, the PCs may find themselves in a local tavern (or any location of the DM's choice). Suddenly, a pimply young man bursts in, shouting, "The Hounds have killed the Arch-Lector!" The fury of the town begins to explode.

Immediately, the patrons of the bar begin to riot. They throw the room into an uproar, sending tables and chairs flying everywhere. They might listen to reason, if the cutters can make themselves heard over the clamor. Otherwise, these townspeople spill into the street, ready to loot and pillage while others begin their bloody struggle for the Arch-Lector's throne. Unless the PCs can make a Strength roll at a -4 penalty, the press of bodies carries them out of the bar.

Out in the streets, they see that parts of the town have gone up in flames. Oily smoke pours from the Heart of the Slums, threatening the Temple Quarter as well. A couple of stray blazes have sprung up in the Merchants' Quarter and near Rich Man's Row. However, despite the thick smoke, the characters can see and feel the imposing arch of the gate pressing down on them, as if readying itself to swallow the town whole.

Rioters turn on each other when they sense weakness or an advantage. Everywhere the characters turn, they see chaos and evil overwhelming the town. People scream their outrages across the shouting of the mob:



*"The Hounds are allied
with the tanar'ri!"*

*"Thieves
are coming!"*

"It was tanar'ri assassins!"

*"What about the priests?
They wanted him dead!"*

*"The poor killed the
Arch-Lector!"*

*"The merchants are
summoning fiends!"*

"The Slums will stop at nothing!"

Every cry brings a new howl from the throng, turning to punish the latest villain for the evil amok in Plague-Mort. The gate seems to grow ever larger.

If the characters still don't realize what's happening, a wild-eyed man grabs one of the characters by the shirt and shrieks: "The gate! The gate! The Abyss is claiming Plague-Mort! Someone's got to save the town! Rally the people!" The frantic local shoves the character aside and rushes on to the next group of rioters, screaming the same thing. This group quickly pummels the man senseless and leaves him bleeding on the ground.

Soon after, the PCs see a winged tanar'ri woman leading a group of Hounds in an assault against an unarmed citizens' group. Minutes later, they watch as an apelike tanar'ri crushes several Hounds and a group of townsfolk tears apart the rest of the squad. The characters' involvement in either side may well lead to triumph in that battle. The tanar'ri flee or head victoriously back toward the Arch-Lector's palace. Within the Great Hall, the tanar'ri bring news to their lord, Marquis Fearson.

If the bashers confront the cambion, he mentally summons all his minions, and within 10 rounds, they arrive to defend him and make sure that the town crosses over. They have no concrete plan of attack, each wanting their own crack at the characters. (Though fierce fighters, the fiends don't work together well.) In this climactic battle, the PCs can gain valuable information, for the papers scattered across the desk in front of the Marquis describe his infernal plan for Plague-Mort. (If the

group does not seem inclined to check them out amid the rioting, the fiend's protective stance alerts the group to their importance.) Reading these, the cutters discover what they need to almost ensure they'll be able to turn away the evil.

Should the PCs win this fight, they still must rally the town against its incipient doom. Even if they do not confront the tanar'ri, they still might have the presence of mind and the charisma to win over the crowd, to make angry members of the mob cease fighting each other in order to save themselves. Once the bashers make themselves heard and their presence felt, they must roll a successful Charisma check at a -4 penalty to keep the crowd quiet enough to hear their short, rallying speech. Reading the tanar'ri plan to doom their city brings a confused hush. Bards may opt to try to influence the reaction of the crowd further, crippling the riot in this part of town.

The DM should role-play the part of the frenzied locals and determine the success of each attempt to bring them to their senses. Converted townsfolk can help to calm the rest of the town in a snowball effect. If the PCs and their followers can move through at least half the town convincing the rioters not to let the Abyss have them, the gate loses its dominance. Though it still looms above the town, the danger has receded. Over the next few days, the locals' behavior can continue to reduce the gate's prominence, ensuring that Plague-Mort will live to fester another day.

And after the town returns to normal, the heroes may return to Sigil and collect the money the wizard owes them – if they remembered to get the razorvine, that is.



HEY!

THESE'RE +HE SODS

WHA+RE CAUSING

ALL +HE +R@UBLE!

— A PACK @F

H@UNDS





HE'S BACK

However events play out after the near disaster in Plague-Mort, something happens a month or so later that throws the townsfolk into shock.

The Arch-Lector returns.

Presumably *raised* by his faithful apostate priest, Bostrak (or an agent sent by his faction, the Mercykillers), Byrri Yarmoril has spent a few weeks recovering from his ordeal. Now he's ready to regain his throne – with a vengeance. And he's gathered a whole contingent of new Hounds to help him accomplish the job.

In short, everything the bashers accomplished by saving the town from the Abyss is negated by power-hungry schemers and the return of a dead tyrant. It's the old Unity of Rings at work: Everything in the planes is a circle, so no matter which direction a body picks, he's bound to wind up right back where he started. The chaotic evil bent of the planars and petitioners in Plague-Mort eventually always drives the town back into its old pattern.

The party members might ask themselves what Bachalis, the mage who hired them in the first place, needed with the razorvine. What are his experiments all about? Is he trying to make it grow and spread even faster? Or looking to wipe it out? If so, what happens to its ecological niche when it disappears?

The DM should do a bit of work to establish Bachalis's motives: He might be working for one faction or another, or perhaps he just suits himself as an independent operator seeking the razorvine to satisfy a whim.

Or, maybe he just wants to figure out how to keep the grounds around his tower free of the stuff.

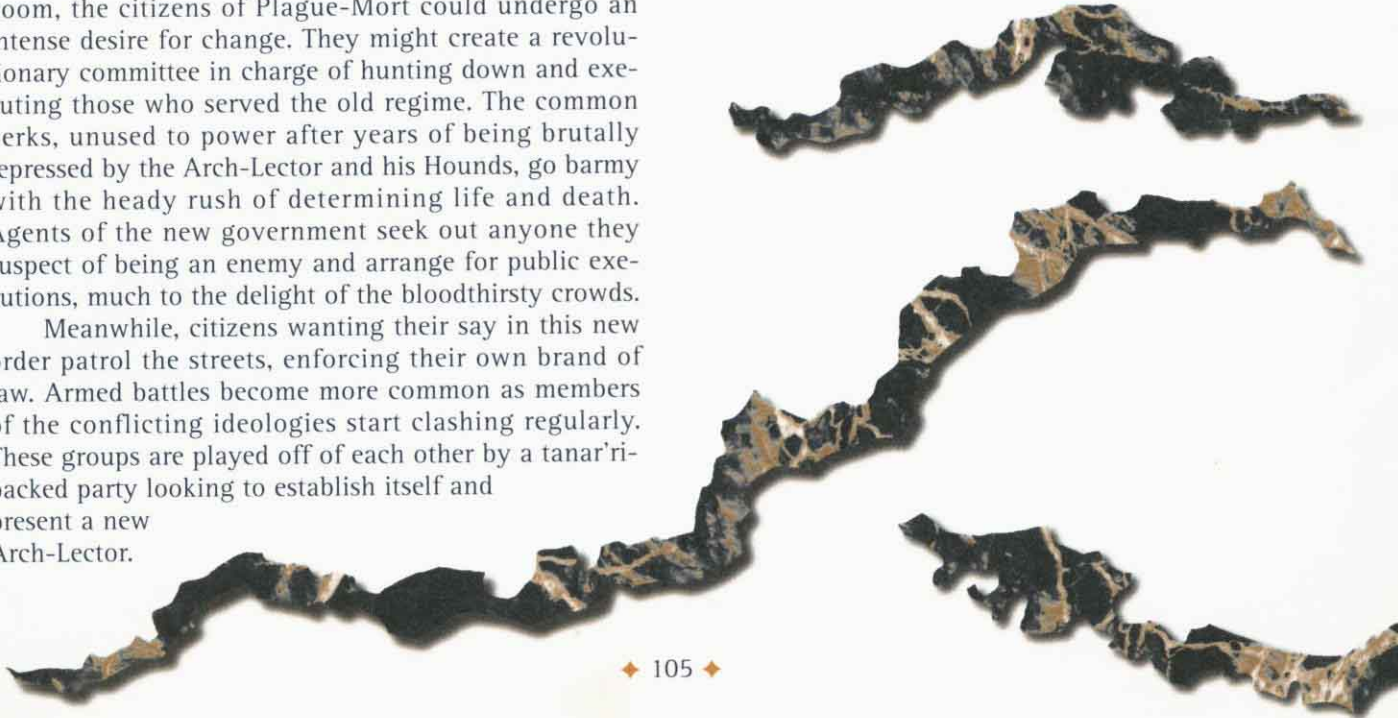
EPILOGUE

The people of Plague-Mort will treat these bashers with gratitude, for a while, at least. The characters can easily find merchants and other folk who remember that they kept the city from sliding into the Abyss. Though some of them may be evil, the locals all respect the PCs for their strength and dedication. But a cutter can't eat respect. So the merchants grant the PCs up to a 50% discount on any goods and services. (A body'd have to be leatherheaded to think they'd give him anything *free*. Abyss or no Abyss, business is business, berk.)

'Course, the death of the Arch-Lector still leaves a power vacuum to fill. While groups will continue maneuvering to take over his position – so that they can “set things right,” they say – they simply start acting a little subtle about it. They don't want to risk letting the meddling PCs ruin their chance for the throne. Still, the political back-and-forth of these parties won't add up to the kind of rush for power that could push the town near the edge. As locals start rebuilding and getting in each other's hair, the town will revert to its old ways, more or less, within a matter of weeks.

On the other hand, after glimpsing their possible doom, the citizens of Plague-Mort could undergo an intense desire for change. They might create a revolutionary committee in charge of hunting down and executing those who served the old regime. The common berks, unused to power after years of being brutally repressed by the Arch-Lector and his Hounds, go barmy with the heady rush of determining life and death. Agents of the new government seek out anyone they suspect of being an enemy and arrange for public executions, much to the delight of the bloodthirsty crowds.

Meanwhile, citizens wanting their say in this new order patrol the streets, enforcing their own brand of law. Armed battles become more common as members of the conflicting ideologies start clashing regularly. These groups are played off of each other by a tanar'ri-backed party looking to establish itself and present a new Arch-Lector.



CHAPTER VIII: THE HUNT+

Wherein a young Lord learns how it feels to become the Prey.

JUST+ THE FACTS, BERK

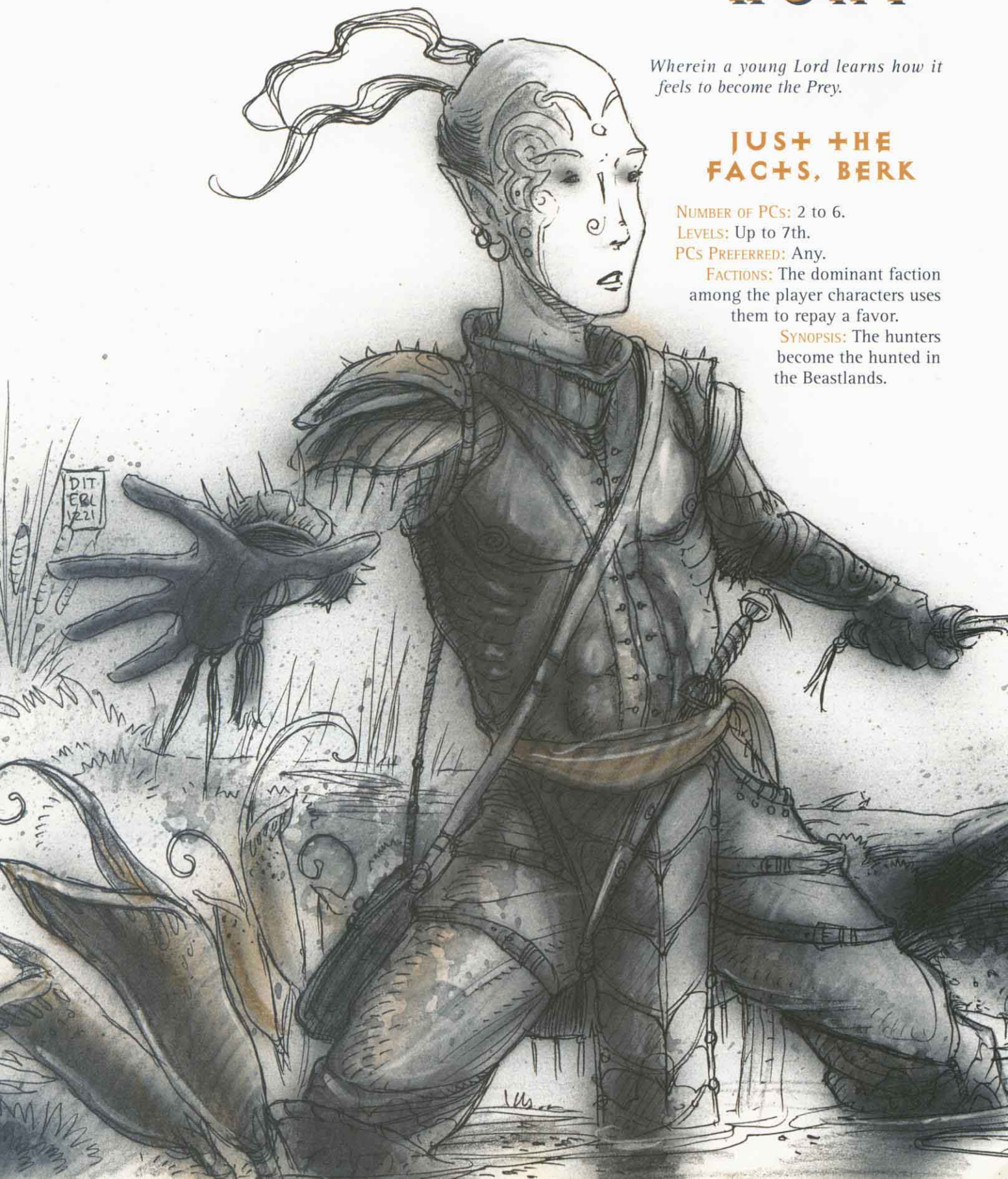
NUMBER OF PCs: 2 to 6.

LEVELS: Up to 7th.

PCs PREFERRED: Any.

FACTIONS: The dominant faction among the player characters uses them to repay a favor.

SYNOPSIS: The hunters become the hunted in the Beastlands.



DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

"The Hunt" features a creature called the *white hart*, a type of deer native to the Beastlands. Though not too numerous, harts are far from endangered. Nonetheless, the powers of the Beastlands don't take kindly to a berk coming in to slay one of these defenseless creatures — there's lots better hunting elsewhere. Killing a hart is considered an offense in the Beastlands.

A rare few white harts can *plane shift* and work a reverse *gate*, transporting themselves and those nearby to a random Upper Plane or the Prime Material, as the semi-intelligent animal determines. When a hunter kills one of these unusual harts away from its home plane, its body and anyone nearby are automatically transported to the Beastlands. Since not many know the dark of the harts, few seek them for their *plane shifting* skills.

On another note, remember that ordinary animals, not just magical ones, live on the Outlands too. They're just as prolific there as on the Prime, making their homes in the wilderness, just as they would in the Prime.

Sometimes, those who live near the large forests and plains of the Beastlands hunt animals for the sheer joy of it. More often than not, they simply leave the carcasses for scavengers, but some bring back the meat for their table. Other hunters fall between the two extremes: They take only the skin, antlers, or claws of the creature (depending on the type of beast) to mount on their walls or to display as signs of their hunting prowess.

This adventure involves the player characters in a hunt. But, though they begin as the hunters, by its climax they wind up on the wrong side of the hunting hounds. DMs should work to evoke the thrill and terror of being pursued by a pack of savage dogs and hawks led by a huntmaster. Here are some other points to keep in mind:

- ♦ The rules on running and jogging in Chapter 14 of the *Player's Handbook* apply only to player characters.

- ♦ The pack chasing the PCs always travels at a movement rate of 18. It's faster than they are, and it's supposed to catch 'em.

- ♦ The pack covers such a wide area that most area-affecting magic will be only minimally effective.





◆ Most character actions (other than fleeing) will have little effect on the pack's progress – except perhaps to allow it to close faster while they take the time to act.

◆ Short demihumans or encumbered characters suffer a –2 penalty to any encumbrance check.

◆ Where the text (or the DM) requires a proficiency check to maneuver across the terrain, characters without the proficiency can try it at a –2 penalty.

◆ Bashers who fly can bypass many challenges in this scenario, but they'll escape the pack only if their flying movement rate exceeds 18. Meanwhile, the hawks in the pack can keep them busy in the air. . . .

◆ If every berk in the party agrees to try placating or talking to the pack, the DM should describe its snarling approach in the most unnerving manner possible. Then turn to the adventure's climax.

This scenario may prove difficult for the characters. Success comes from achieving the group's goal (protecting an NPC), which calls for sharp thinking and quick decisions. Berks that move slowly or carelessly will reap a harvest of bruises and humiliation.

HERE'S +HE CHAN+

Occasionally, a high-up faction member does a favor for a factol that the leader feels bound to repay in kind. In this adventure, a financial backer of a faction some of the PCs serve has asked for a service in return for his donations. His son has been wanting to go hunting on the Outlands for some time, and the backer wants to make sure his child stays safe. He knows no better figure to ask than the head of the faction he's been supporting so long. The backer wants the cutters sent his way fast, to make the little snot stop whining. Casting about for someone to undertake the unenviable task of guarding the child, the factol lets his mind's eye settle on the PCs.

Meanwhile, in the Beastlands, a white hart is getting set to visit the Outlands



SEQUENCE

1. The factol, or a well-placed faction member to whom the PCs are indebted, calls the group to headquarters and explains their new mission: They get to act as "nannies" for the son of one of the faction's clients on a hunting trip. The high-up sends the characters to the house of the wealthy man, who introduces them to his child.

2. The PCs and the son, a snotty 17-year-old who thinks it's beneath him to talk to "the help," travel through a portal to the family's hunting lodge on the Outlands and saddle up.

3. While hunting, the boy spies a white hart and insists on chasing it through the woods. He brings it down with a javelin and administers the death blow just as the PCs come riding up. The group is magically transported to the Beastlands with the body of the hart at their feet.

4. The moment the bashers arrive, their horses rebel. No matter what the PCs do, the mounts all flee into the Beastlands. (Exceptionally loyal animals, such as a paladin's war horse, will rejoin them later.) In the distance, the PCs spy a huge cloud of dust moving straight toward them and hear the baying of many dogs. This feral pack is led by a tall upright figure with antlers sprouting from his forehead.

5. The characters realize they're in serious trouble – or they should. The boy runs for the highest ground in sight, a knoll crowned by a ring of standing stones he thinks might mark a holy spot. The cutters set out after him, with the barking horde in pursuit. The chase is on! (This will be a short adventure for cutters that don't take to their heels.)

6. Fleeing for their lives through the wilderness, the PCs must make a series of endurance and Dexterity checks as they pass various obstacles. Those who fail a check stumble or fall behind; those who miss three are brought down by the dogs, ending the scenario for them.

7. Just as the party nears the knoll, the characters are dismayed to see the boy – the real prey in this chase – collapse in a heap. Can the surviving characters carry him into the stone circle before the pack arrives?

8. The bashers meet the hunter on the high ground, become reunited with companions they've lost, and – if they have done well – learn a secret of the stone circle that gets them home. A group that hasn't performed quite as well finds its way out of the Beastlands eventually and returns the boy to his father.

I+ BEGINS

After a summons, the party of characters assembles at the headquarters of their faction (or the faction of at least a couple members). The factol (or another high-up to whom these sods are indebted) informs the PCs, somewhat abashedly, that he's calling in a debt they owe him. It seems that he owes a favor in turn to a wealthy client, who's asking him to make good on it in an unusual way.

Fact is, the client's son is barmy to go hunting, and Papa wants to make sure the boy is well protected on the trip. Seeking bodyguards, he turns to the factol, and the factol turns to the PCs. 'Course, he can't remove himself from Sigil at present, or he'd go himself, the factol assures the group. And what more perfect way for these bashers to discharge their debt to the high-up than with a day's worth of hunting with the young master? After all, what could go wrong?

In the planes, never ask, "What could go wrong?"

If the characters are willing to accept the mission, their benefactor directs them to the wealthy man's house in The Lady's Ward. A stiff-backed servant shows the party into the posh house and leads them into the study. There they meet the faction's backer, Harway, and his son, Jehnath. The boy is clad in hunting gear that obviously has never been used before. He's only visiting at his father's house, on leave from his studies at a temple. By the sour look on his face, it's a bet the schooling ain't agreeing with him.

Harway tells the PCs that their job is simply to take Jehnath to the family hunting lodge on the Outlands, saddle up some horses, and accompany the boy on the hunt. They are to protect him from any harm that may befall him, but may not interfere with his hunting. Throughout this speech, Jehnath sneers at the characters, obviously considering them his inferiors. He speaks not a word to them if he can help it, seeing them merely as the hired help.

JEHNATH, A STUDENT (PLANAR/♂ HUMAN/F1/FATED/N): S 12, D 11, C 14, I 13, W 8, Ch 9; AC 9; MV 12; hp 4; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (javelin); SZ M (5 feet, 8 inches tall); ML average (9); XP n/a.

THE HUNTERS

The stiff-backed servant takes the group to a portal in a guest room, which leads to the family's hunting lodge on the Outlands. He activates it by tracing its arch with a fragment of a deer's antler.

Once the hunting party is on the Outlands proper, more servants bring a saddled horse and a half dozen javelins for each member of the group. When everything is ready, the hands indicate that all should mount up. The instant he's on his horse, Jehnath spurs the

beast, urging it into the nearby forest. The players must make land-based riding proficiency checks to allow their characters to catch up with him. Each missed check means another round passes before the party can catch the berk.

Jehnath is easy to follow as he gallops through the thin woods, his bright green hunting coat clashing horribly with the forest. After a time, he pulls up in a clearing to let the characters catch up with him.

"I have seen flashes of white," he says, excited. "I wish to hunt this creature eluding me in this woods. But you had better keep up with me, or you will miss my killing strike!"

The creature Jehnath has seen flashing through the trees is a white hart, cavorting through the forest. It feels the characters' presence, but it has not been hunted and so feels no fear. At first it seems the creature is intent on teasing the PCs, but after about 15 minutes of giving only glimpses to them as they crash through the woods in its wake, it stands fully revealed in a clearing.

With a shout, Jehnath is off. He stands in his stirrups, his javelin ready to throw. If the PCs wish to disobey orders and try their own luck with the hart, they must roll an attack against AC 5 (adjust for mounted movement). Any damage the hart suffers beyond 6 points brings it down immediately, wounded.

Every round, the pursuing riders must make a land-based riding ability check at a -2 penalty to keep their seats while galloping through the forest. There is a 30% chance per round that the characters will have a clear shot (without penalty) at the deer's body. Every time the bashers make a successful riding check, the chance goes up another 5%; every failed check decreases the chance by a like amount. Jehnath always makes his riding checks and has no attack penalty for mounted movement.

Despite any warnings the player characters might have shouted to the hart or attempts they have made to protect it or drive it off, the beast always returns in a few minutes, thinking the hunt but a game. If the PCs actually physically restrain Jehnath, he begins whining, threatening to make sure the characters never work for the faction again if they don't release him to hunt like his father said he could.

Eventually, Jehnath hurls his javelin into the animal's side. Once the hart has been downed, the boy dismounts and waits for the cutters to ride up, so he can brag. When everyone has drawn near, he kneels to finish off the creature.

With a quick stroke of his knife, Jehnath ends the struggling white hart's life, marked by a bright gout of blood.

But as the creature ceases its feeble thrashing, a white light emanates from its body and reaches out to engulf you and the rest of the party! Jehnath cries out in fear, stumbling back from the carcass, yet he remains enveloped by the light. It grows intolerably bright, harshly illuminating everything within 20 feet.

BUILD-UP

The white light wrapping around the bashers whisks them away to the first layer of the Beastlands, by the power of the white hart. They now stand on Krigala, the Plane of Eternal Noon. Upon their arrival, they have about two rounds before the wind carries the scent of the fallen hart to the keen noses of the Warden and his pack, the self-appointed protectors of this part of the Beastlands. These guardians will pursue the hunters — Jehnath in particular. As respectable cutters, the PCs'd better protect the berk as best they can.

ARRIVAL (A)

The white glow disappears, leaving you blinking and momentarily blinded. When the splotches clear from before your eyes, you see that nothing looks familiar anymore! The forest is gone, replaced by a savannah dotted with hills and trees and sliced by a river. The noontime sun shines brightly upon the landscape, and the air feels dusty and dry after the temperate woods.

Now you notice that at least one element of your surroundings hasn't changed: The body of the slaughtered hart still lies on the ground in front of you, its blood already beginning to pool onto this new patch of ground.

Jehnath is looking around in astonishment. "Where are we?" he demands to know. "What's happened here?"

As soon as he speaks, any horses transported with the party begin bucking and whinnying frantically, their eyes wide. Each PC still mounted must make a riding proficiency check at a -6 penalty to stay that way. However, it quickly becomes clear that the horses are not going to calm down; to dismount safely, a body's got to make a successful riding check at a penalty of -4. Those who fail their checks suffer 1d4 points of damage from a bad dismount. As soon as the horses rid themselves of the riders, they streak off across the savannah toward a wood, galloping hard until they leave the party's sight.

Jehnath screams in frustration as his mount abandons him, sighs, and sets off toward a large rise about 4 miles away, beyond some scrub land and across a river. Shooting a glance back over his shoulder, he orders one

of the bashers to pick up the dead hart and follow him. If anyone asks, he says he's going to the highest point he can see to survey the land better. Besides, he says, he thinks he can make out some sort of structure atop that knoll (see map on the opposite page). He points himself in the direction of the scrub land (area B) to avoid the low hills between him and the rise (area G); from there, he'll pass at least the river (area C) and another scrubby region (area F) before arriving at the high knoll. The PCs should accompany him, as they are still employed to watch the berk.

Cutters who make a successful Intelligence check realize they've landed in the Beastlands. If they also make a Wisdom check, they can guess the chant in these parts: The locals ain't gonna like berks running around with dead animals. Should they take the hart anyway, it adds 80 lbs. to their encumbrance, in addition to the items they now carry.



IT'S AN ANIMAL.
ANIMALS'RE FOR KILLING.

— YOUNG LORD JEHNATH



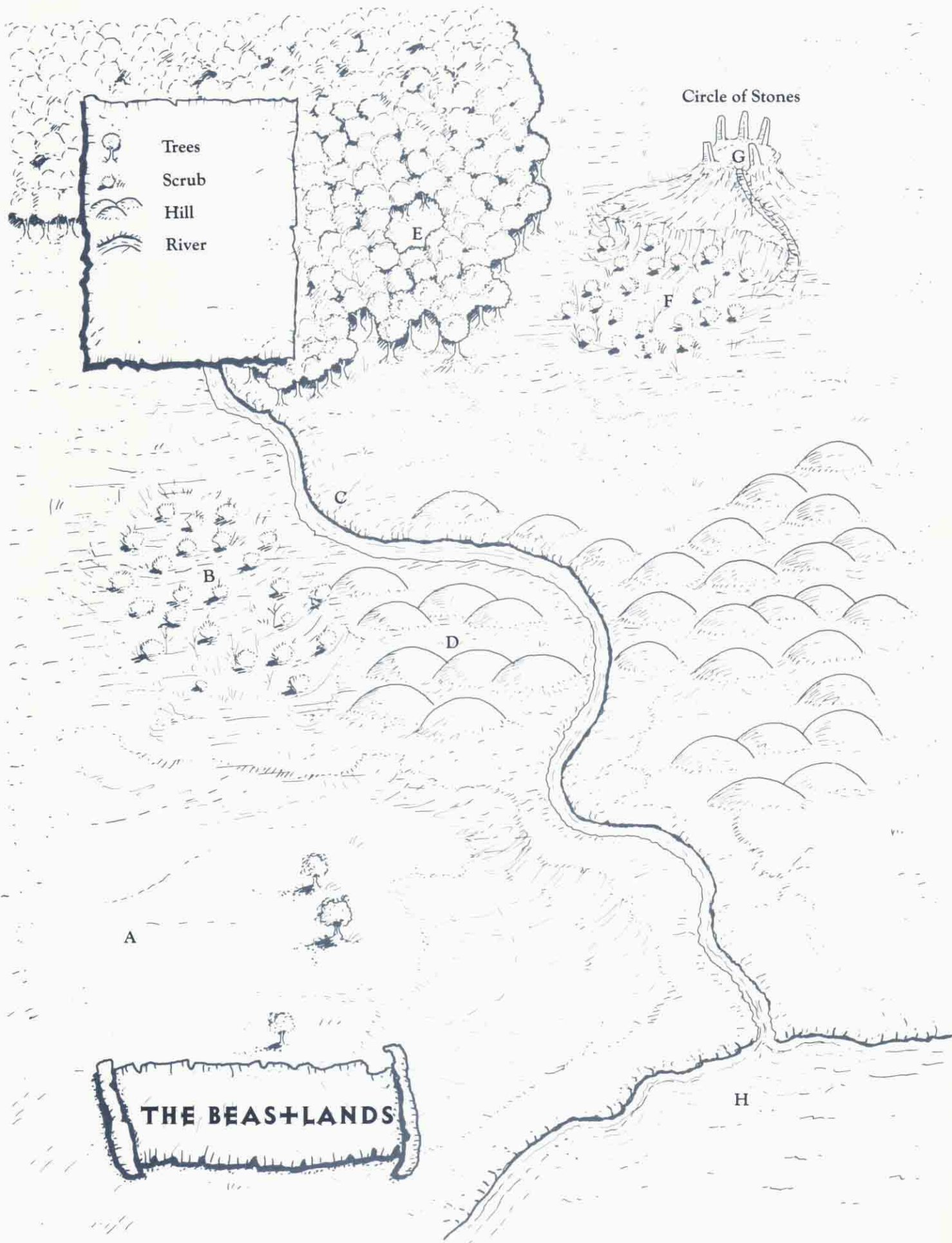
SCRUB (B)

Jehnath keeps to the flat land, circling around the low hills (area D) so he won't have to exert himself any more than necessary. At almost the exact moment he reaches the scrub, a faint echo of baying and yipping reaches the party members' ears.

From this extreme range, PCs looking in the direction of the sounds can make out only a cloud of dust at the very limit of their vision. Nature-oriented folks like rangers and druids — as well as other characters who make an Intelligence check at a -4 penalty — realize that the baying comes from downwind.

Get it, berk? The stench of the white hart's blood on the PCs is blowing directly toward that cloud of dust. And the sound of the hounds tells them all that the cloud is the product of a pack of canines heading their way at breakneck speed. The hunt is on!

Starting now, the characters should flee. As they pass through each of the various map areas (lake, scrub,



etc.), they must make proficiency or ability checks as suggested by the text or the DM. Failing one check causes a character to stumble or fall behind. A basher who's failed three finds the pack upon him the next round. (See details in the section titled "The Pack," on page 113.) At any time, characters who surrender to the pack will be knocked out, as will those who attack it. (But the latter berks get a little more bloodied up.)

Some PCs might think that dropping the dead hart will throw the pack off their trail. It won't. The pack is out for vengeance, and they won't be distracted by bribes of meat.

Meanwhile, Jehnath is shrieking something about a structure on top of the knoll, and he takes off for the rise at a dead run. Bashers who halt him are treated to his nearly incoherent babbles about taking shelter atop the rise. If the irregular building he thinks he sees turns out to be a shrine or home, they should be safe for a while. Then the boy dashes off for the river (area C), with or without the others.

THE RIVER (C)

A brainy basher might decide that wading through water will help the party evade the hounds on their heels. Good logic, but there's little cover after a body crosses the river. So, the PCs remain fully visible to the eyes of the Warden directing the pack. Plus, they're wet.

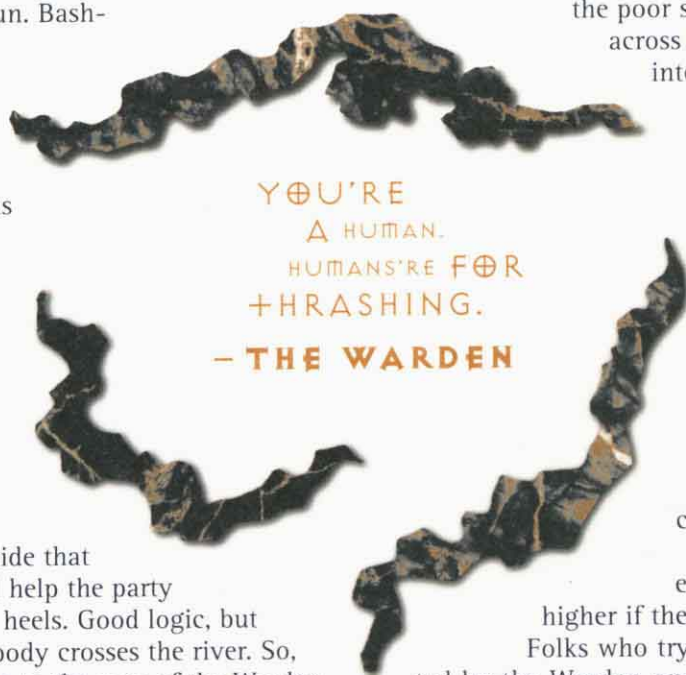
The river is icy cold and fast flowing. However, it's also shallow, making it easy to cross at any point. At its narrowest, this flow stretches about 20 feet between banks and runs only 2 feet deep. But don't get cocky, berk: A bed of pebbles lines the river bottom, making the footing unsure. Every basher trying to cross must make a Dexterity check at a -4 penalty or fall in, allowing the pack to close a little more. But the bad news is also good news. Characters that do take a swim gain a +1 bonus to all future Constitution rolls, because the water invigorates them and washes the dust of the savannah from their sweaty skin.

THE LOW HILLS (D)

These low-lying hills are dry and dusty, though they sit at the edge of a river. Some of the scrub (area B) has crawled up onto the hills, holding the soil down a little. Still, these hills look mostly barren of plant life.

Gopher and badger holes dot the hilly terrain. Anyone sprinting across this area (movement at three times normal rate or more) must roll a successful Dexterity check every round to avoid stepping into these dens or tripping over the rocks the creatures have scattered about. PCs who trip or twist an ankle in one of the holes not only sustain 1d3 points of damage, they also find they can't keep up even a normal pace any more. (Halve their movement rates for 1d3 turns.) A body still can try to run, but'll only manage to limp along in agony at half speed. But those taking enough care to avoid the holes will find the pack nipping at their heels the next round.

Cutters who've separated from Jehnath (and the poor sod stuck totin' the hart) to run across these swells spy a key point of interest. The pack that grows ever clearer at their rear does not alter course to follow them. They're chasing *Jehnath*.



THE FØREST+ (E)

Jehnath won't enter the forest, but the bashers're free to do so. Low-hanging tree limbs practically invite the PCs to scramble up, nicely avoiding any hounds who might come barking after a cutter. These limbs, about 6 feet above the ground, seem thick enough that a body could climb higher if the situation warranted.

Folks who try to hide in the trees'll be spotted by the Warden once he's meted out punishment on Jehnath and the hart-carrier. 'Course, there's always the chance that someone could hide up in the branches, avoiding the pack long enough to discover the location of the nearest portal – but it ain't a good bet.

The trees are far enough apart that running through the forest isn't a problem, nor is moving along the ground, since there's so little underbrush.

CLOSE +Ø HOME (F)

Small shrubs dot the ground here, and small natural paths lead between each of them. It's not hard to find a way through the scrub, though sometimes the cutters have to leap bushes that have grown across these little paths. Every leap requires a Dexterity check for the character to retain footing. (Those who go around instead of through must succeed at two endurance checks to keep the pack from closing.) Jehnath goes charging in.

From this patch of scrub, a body can see that the structure atop the high knoll is a circle of monolithic standing stones. Jehnath notices this, if he's still with the party, and gasps that the standing stones (area G) must protect against the creatures of the plane. Maybe he managed to absorb more temple schooling into his brain-box than the bashers thought.

STANDING STONES (G)

Atop the tallest point in this part of the Beastlands rises a circle of standing stones. More than a few normal boulders have rolled down the 60-degree slope to the ground, some 200 yards below the circle.

From a distance, a body can see there's only one way up this knoll: a small road straight up the rise. The slope is traversable only with difficulty, as it offers as handholds only a few boulders, stunted trees, and narrow crevasses. By this time, the pack should be so close behind that any bashers who pause to defend the path find themselves quickly overrun. Otherwise, a successful endurance check means the PCs keep the lead.

Once at the top of the knoll, the cutters can see that the path leads directly into the circle of stones. The standing stones ring the entire top of the rise, with two more circles inside. It looks as though this area is used occasionally in the service of a local power. A large stone slab rests at the midpoint of the central circle, holding offerings of grain and wine. The top of this knoll proves the setting for the adventure's climax.

THE LAKE (H)

The lake is far too wide to swim across. In addition, despite the blazing sun above, it's too cold. Every round characters remain in the water, they must make a successful system shock roll or suffer 1d2 points of damage. Though a dunking in this water can revitalize an unconscious comrade, it has no other curative powers.

THE PACK

A ranger whose love of nature has developed into a twisted devotion, the Warden left the forests of his home for the Beastlands to protect its animals from hunters. He has no patience with sport hunters, but he won't put 'em in the dead-book. Instead, he enjoys giving them a taste of the hunt through the eyes of the prey.

THE WARDEN (PLANAR/♂ TIEFLING/R12/NG): Int high (14); AC 3; MV 15; hp 81; THACO 9; #AT 3; Dmg 1-8+3/1-8+3/2-8 (stag horns); SA charge; SD makes all saving throws; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML champion (16); XP 2,000.

The Warden is a tall man, cursed from birth to sprout antlers. A deer mask covers his face, so none can see his true features. He wears loose-fitting cotton clothing, making it easy for him to move and run. The powers of the Beastlands allow him to protect the animals — it's less work for them. The petitioners here get along well with the Warden, for they know his efforts help keep them safe in their animal forms.

This figure commands a pack of hounds, a special group bred for size and stamina, which the Warden has raised. Though born wild, they nonetheless have come to develop an intense loyalty to their master.

HOUND (40): Int low (5); AL NG; AC 7; MV 15; HD 2; hp 12; THACO 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-6; SZ M (6 feet long); ML champion (16); XP 35.

The Warden has trained these hounds to attack a body three different ways: kill, subdue, and knock unconscious. Killing attacks inflict normal damage. Subduing attacks use the hounds' superior numbers to overwhelm a party so the canines can get throat holds. Knock-out attacks inflict normal damage, but when a body's rendered unconscious at 0 hit points, only 25% of the damage remains. The rest is temporary bruising damage, which fades in 1d6 days.

The Warden's also trained a veritable flock of hawks in his pack, to attack any prey that takes to the air.

LARGE HAWK (40): Int low (5); AL NG; AC 6; MV 1, Fl 33 (B); HD 1; THACO 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-2/1-2/1; SZ M (5-foot wingspan); ML average (9); XP 65.

The hawks leap to the attack as soon as they see a spell cast. Their attacks are also intended to knock out the prey rather than kill it. The Warden'll bring in these nasties only as reinforcements against flying characters and against spellcasters who might seriously injure him or the hounds. Flying characters who find themselves mobbed by the birds find it impossible to cast spells or concentrate. If necessary, the birds try to drive them into the ground.

THE HUNTED

Should the bashers, tired of fleeing, seek other ways to deal with the pack, they might try some of the following options.

- ◆ **AMBUSH:** Though the pack brings the ambushers down, other PCs pass.
- ◆ **BLOCK PURSUIT:** A cutter could set up snares or set fire to the scrub to slow the pack and become its target.
- ◆ **CONFUSE THE TRAIL:** Laying false trails and scents works only if the pack can't see the party.
- ◆ **CREATE DISTRACTION:** The pack knocks out the distracting character, but the others pass.
- ◆ **DESPERATE DASH:** Making a Constitution check at a -50% penalty doubles the distance between pack and prey, but a basher can try it only once.
- ◆ **HIDE:** Only elves can hide in trees. Others are always found unless they both make a Wisdom check at a -2 penalty and mask their scent. Good luck, berk.
- ◆ **MISSILE ATTACK:** Generally not effective enough to matter; the pack closes on an attacker.
- ◆ **SPELL ATTACK:** Success at DM's discretion, but spells bring on a hawk attack.

When a body's finally close enough to eyeball the individual slaving members of the pack, he might be wondering why in the nine hells he'd never considered being a vegetarian.

Assuming the final confrontation takes place anywhere but within the stone circle, give the bashers a rousing fight against the pack before they're overwhelmed. (Hey, against a horde of trained hunting dogs and fierce hawks, the outcome really isn't in doubt.) If the party ever splits up, the pack follows the trail of Jehnath (and whoever carries the body of the hart, if the two remain together). But don't worry, blood – they come back for the others later.

As the pack limited its combat to mere knock-out attacks, the defeated characters awaken together, in time. If the party became split up, all are reunited on the plain.

Every inch of your body feels battered, bruised, and sore, and it doesn't look any better than it feels. Your clothing is in tatters, and lacerations – as from the claws and teeth of huge hounds – cover your exposed skin. Your party's possessions lie scattered about in the dirt.

A dagger impaling a note flaps near the head of one of your companions. The page reads:

"Next time, why not try hunting the rich berk?"

"Nearest portal is a day upriver."

"Use this note as a key."

"(Signed) The Warden."

Jehnath groans nearby. He looks to be in worse shape than any of the PCs, with dark blood clotting his wounds.

CLIMAX

Face it. Sooner or later the Warden and his pack will catch up to their quarry. The DM ought to encourage the PCs to continue running as long as possible, since being beaten to a pulp does not do a body good.

THE PACK'S TRIUMPH

It's bad enough to hear them coming. The yipping and baying of the pack on the move fills the ears in a cloud of dust. At long range, they can even hear the Warden's hunting horn rousing the dogs to greater fury. As they begin to close, the PCs' fear escalates. It's all too clear, as they see the Warden direct the pursuit, that *they are the prey!*

The characters now have to limp to the portal to find their way back to Sigil and explain how

their young charge came about his injuries. It's a bet no one will ask them do any more favors for a while.

On the walk to the portal, any exceptionally loyal horses the party members brought with them from Sigil return to their owners. The characters won't face attacks from any of the petitioners or the protectors of the plane – that is, assuming the cutters behave themselves. However, word of the hunt has spread before the party, so the locals receive the PCs coolly, if not with outright hostility.

AT THE CIRCLE

Some or all the characters might reach the standing stones without being captured, but it won't be by much. If Jehnath has made it this far, he stumbles and falls on the path on the way up the knoll. Exhausted and afraid — for by now he's realized it's him the fierce canines really want — the boy can't manage to pull himself to his feet. Looking up with a horrified expression, he shrieks in fear as the pack overruns him. Ignoring the rest of the party for the present, they surround Jehnath, barking and howling. When they've subdued him, they turn to the rest of the party members, who certainly have made it to the stones by now.

At last, you crawl into the circle of stone. The pack of hounds bounds up the hill behind you, seeming barely winded. They pull up just shy of the circle, and begin stalking around the outer fringe of stone.

The huntmaster jogs easily up the hill, apparently just as fresh as his dogs. He glares at you as you huddle inside the safety of the circle. "You think you're safe, don't you, cringing in there? You think a shrine will protect you? Bah!" He shakes his head and steps into the circle.

The huntmaster snaps his fingers, and hounds drag the unconscious forms of your fallen comrades into the circle, dropping them at your feet. He gazes at you for a moment longer and finally says, gesturing in disgust at Jehnath, "I'd advise you to pick your friends with more care in the future. However . . . you made it up here, and that's not easy. You can reach Sigil from here by sprinkling a little water on the stone as you speak the name of the City of Doors."

He smiles coldly. "Nice hunt," he says, and steps from the circle.

A hazy light surrounds the hunter and his pack, and they disappear. A cold wind plays among the stones of the hill, and the sky darkens for a moment. Clearly, this day could have gone better.

If the PCs took the grain or wine from the altar in the circle, not only do they offend the Warden and the petitioners of this plane, they earn the wrath of the unnamed power worshiped within these sacred rings. The form this vengeance takes is up to the DM.

EPILOGUE

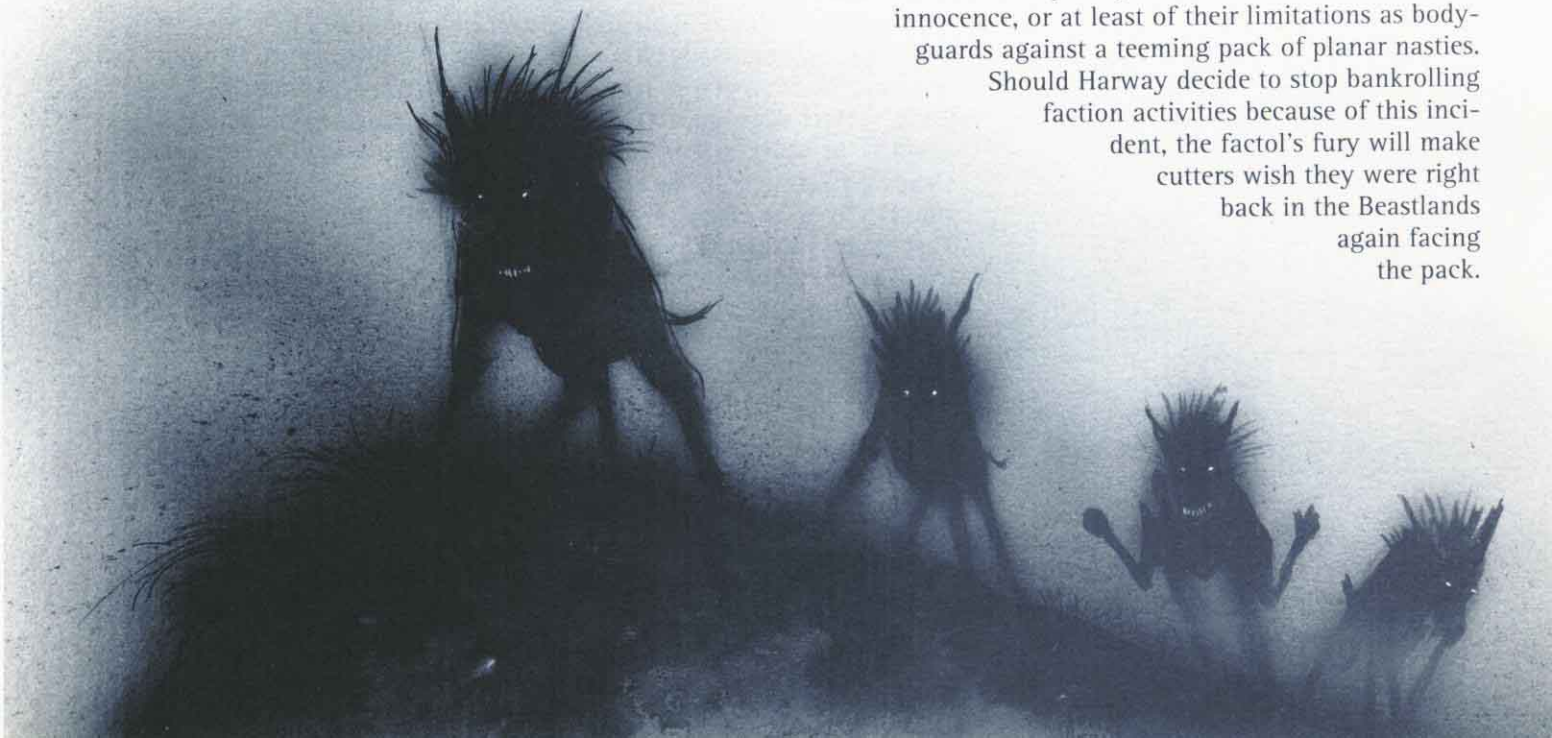
'Course, the PCs won't be welcome in the Beastlands until they make amends for their brutal behavior, or force the young man to apologize for killing the white hart. Jehnath, being a proud berk, won't apologize once he's gotten beyond the reach of the Beastlands. Forcing him back into the Beastlands to tell the pack he's sorry might prove an adventure in itself.

Perhaps the cutters were too busy looking to the safety of their own skins to protect Jehnath after he fell to the pack — an understandable error, especially if they had to listen to the kid's sniveling throughout the entire ride.

Still, they did promise his father they'd watch over him on this hunt, and them becoming the hunted instead of the hunters shouldn't change that. Papa, though relieved his boy's injuries were not mortal, is furious that the bodyguards failed to safeguard Jehnath. He demands that the factol punish the bashers, which the high-up will do immediately, in the interests of securing his continued financial support of the faction. The PCs must act quickly to convince the man of their innocence, or at least of their limitations as body-

guards against a teeming pack of planar nasties.

Should Harway decide to stop bankrolling faction activities because of this incident, the factol's fury will make cutters wish they were right back in the Beastlands again facing the pack.



In which a secret Gate opens on the Prime, engendering the Heroes' perilous Descent into a Complex that is home to Foes both numerous and unpredictable.

CHAPTER IX: PEOPLE UNDER THE FALLS

JUST THE FACTS, BERK

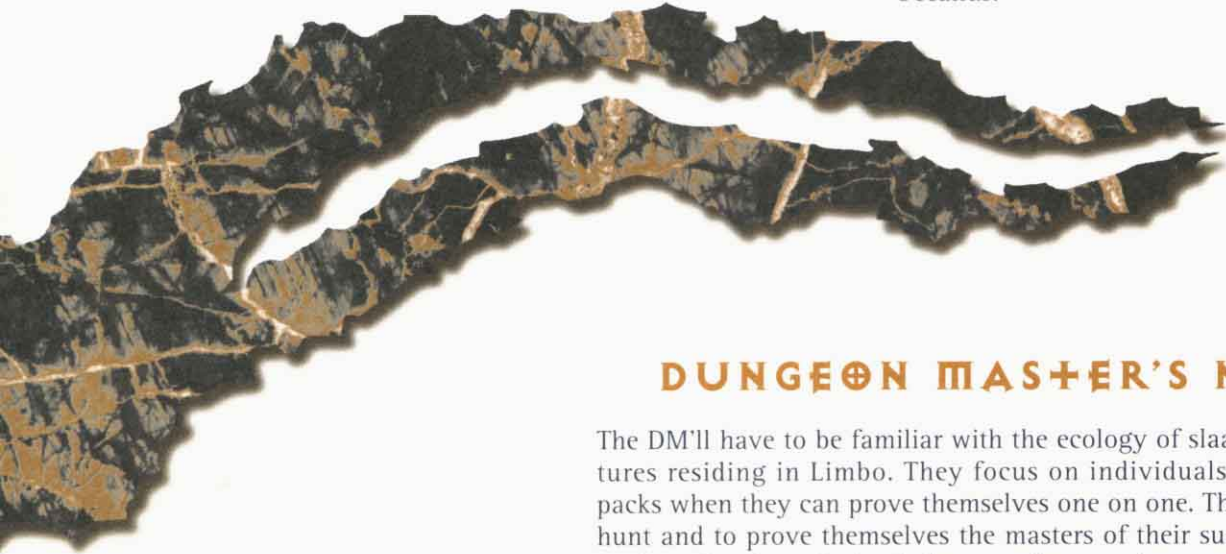
NUMBER OF PCs: 4 to 6.

LEVELS: 9th or higher.

PCs PREFERRED: Any.

FACTIONS: Any.

SYNOPSIS: An army of slaadi is preparing to invade the Upper Planes through a conduit established in the River Oceanus.



DUNGEON MASTER'S NOTES

The DM'll have to be familiar with the ecology of slaadi, a race of creatures residing in Limbo. They focus on individuals, rarely attacking packs when they can prove themselves one on one. They exist mainly to hunt and to prove themselves the masters of their surroundings. Slaadi are brutal and cruel, simply because they can be.

A cutter might run into five different varieties of slaad: red, blue, green, gray, and death slaad. The red is the lowest in rank, and the death slaad the highest. All slaadi have a symbol of power on their forehead to demonstrate their rank among their color; minute variations within the shading reflect how each slaad sees itself in relation to its comrades. The deeper the shade of the tattoo, the higher the status.

Slaadi constantly fight among their own ranks to prove themselves, and they occasionally challenge higher-ranking slaadi in order to advance. When a slaad is ready to fight one of the higher ranks, its symbol of power acquires a faint tinge of the superior color, which fades again if the slaad suffers defeat. Actually killing a superior convinces a slaad of its own considerable skill and prowess, and its tattoo's color changes over the course of the next day to reflect the change in attitude. They never kill higher-ranking slaadi with stealth, for physical might is, to them, the only might that counts. Any berk can be an assassin, but only the best can stand up and confront danger face to face.

When one of the creatures dies, it may become reincarnated as a slaad one rank lower than it enjoyed in its previous life. It remains in the new body for a year and a day, at which point it reverts to its original color. The only way to prevent this reincarnation is to remove the symbol of power from the body of the slain slaad or to kill it so many times that it reaches the status of red slaad. Once a red slaad is slain, it can never be reborn. (For more details on slaadi, see the PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix.)

In this scenario the bashers will go down a hole and into a tunnel near the River Oceanus and a great falls. Once in the tunnel, they're unable to communicate verbally; the sound of the river's pounding echoes so loudly throughout the tunnel and cavern complex under the falls, it's impossible to speak or shout above the roar. The DM should tell the players that any communication between their characters (and, therefore, between them) should be conducted solely in sign language. The players can still tell the DM aloud what they want their characters to do, though.

The adventure requires that the PCs destroy a gate that leads to these caverns from Limbo. Once it's destroyed, the slaadi can no longer move into the Upper Planes as they wish. Since these slaadi see the Upper Planes as a new testing ground, the nasties'll continue coming through as long as they can.

Destroying the gate isn't as hard as a body might think. The arch is built of carved stone blocks covered in ancient arcane symbols. Some of the stones are loose, which might give the bashers the notion to pull one out — that'll break the gate's connection and disable it. They can chip away at the stone, too, or blast the arch into oblivion — whatever. The thing is, they'll have to be careful: The adventure takes place in a cave under the roaring might of the River Oceanus. If the cutters destroy the arch in a flashy manner, the way primes are prone to do, the resulting cave-in could spell doom for them all.

HERE'S +HE CHANT+

A gray slaad has been looking to prove himself the better of a certain death slaad for some time now.

While the physical abilities of the death slaad have never been in question, the lower-ranking slaad is sure that it's smarter than its superior. It thinks that if it can just gain enough magic to offset the death slaad's innate abilities, it can wipe out the high-ranking beast. To this end, it has searched for a portal to one of the other Outer Planes, which it can use to get its hands on the combination of magical items that'll help kill the death slaad.

At last, the gray slaad found a portal to the Upper Planes in a forgotten cavern under the River Oceanus, near a mighty waterfall. The slaad has scouted the area beyond the portal, slaying several berks nearby to prove its right to their possessions. Every time it



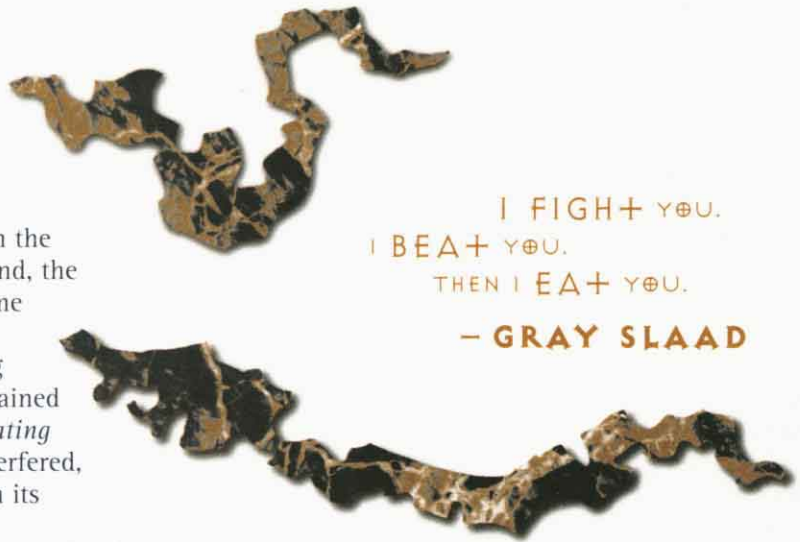
faces off against a human in single combat and wins, it feels free to assimilate that person's powers and confiscate its goods.

However, it's been discovering that humans in the Upper Planes don't just stand around and let some nasty put their friends in the dead-book. If there are hordes of people around, the slaad noticed, odds are some of them will come running to help defend his challenged opponent. This prevented the slaad from achieving the mental state of confidence and might it gained from single combat. So, the creature began *gating* in lesser slaadi to deal with the berks that interfered, while it continued the individual combat with its intended victim.

The slaad has been focusing mainly on the land above the waterfall – the Beastlands – in its search for objects and creatures of power. However, it has found no being worthy of its attention and no items it needs to challenge the death slaad. When the adventure begins, the gray slaad and its minions are beginning to move out into Arborea, which begins just past the falls.

SEQUENCE

1. The player characters, in the Beastlands, are assigned to escort a small barge down the River Oceanus.
2. They travel downriver until they come to the Great Falls – impassable by boat. They unload the cargo, and, with some difficulty, carry the lightweight flat-bottomed boat along the shore past the falls. Only a short ways ahead is Arborea, and, exhausted after the portage, they look to take refuge there for the night, in a small inn at the base of the falls.
3. When the cutters enter the inn, they find that the guests have been slaughtered, and the innkeeper is missing. Following the trail of blood and the two furrows in the grass behind the house, the PCs find a strange hole hidden 100 yards away from the riverbank.
4. When the PCs enter the hole, they descend hundreds of feet, then find themselves rising far higher than they descended. Smart bashers will realize they're entering the cliffs behind the falls.
5. Finally, the tunnel opens into a large cavern complex. It's the kip for a group of slaadi, who have found a portal in Limbo they're using to invade the Upper Planes.
6. The PCs are forced to retreat or fight the slaadi, more of whom keep coming through the portal, ready to reinforce their brethren.



I FIGHT+ YOU.
I BEAT+ YOU.
THEN I EAT+ YOU.
— GRAY SLAAD

7. After defeating most of the strike force, the bashers now must discover how to destroy the portal.

8. Having foiled the slaadi invasion, the characters can man the barge again or leave it sitting below the falls.

I+ BEGINS

The PCs are hired to escort a barge down the River Oceanus to port in Olympus (the first layer in Arborea), whether by a factol or their other contacts. For the most part, they think this is easy duty, a reward for excellent service to their factions. Maybe even a relaxing trip. The pay is an easy 200 pp each, simply for taking an extended cruise – and making sure the cargo reaches its destination, too.

If the party members don't belong to a faction, or if they're not interested in guard duty, they must have another reason for winding up in Arborea near the River Oceanus. They must come upon the Portage Inn or the tracks nearby, to get themselves mixed up in this adventure.

The barge departs from a Beastlands river port in the layer Krigala. As it travels, the party may spy several dead bodies lying near the riverbank. Each of these bodies belongs to a dead petitioner, creatures inhabiting the forms of animals. None of the animals appears to have died without a fight, though it is hard to tell underneath all the gore. Whatever killed the petitioners is obviously a creature of exceptional savagery. The trail of the killer leads straight into the Oceanus and cannot be followed from there.

Eventually, the crew hears the roaring of a huge waterfall. Vacation's over – the bashers have to fight the current to get the flat-bottomed boat to shore before the raging river can sweep them over the edge of the falls, not yet in view. Once ashore, they unload the cargo. A couple PCs must guard it, while the strongest

party members portage the vessel around the falls. The falls are immense, with water cascading over a mile until it reaches the bottom of the cliff. Here it crashes into the Oceanus again in a mighty spray, its pounding resounding in thunderous clamor. Mist wreathes the air for a quarter mile around the base of the falls, spray glimmering as it falls to earth. The PCs have to make several trips to transport the cargo to the bottom of the falls, then load it all again and push off.

About a half mile downstream from the falls, the river crosses into mountainous Olympus terrain, on the plane of Arborea. There lies the Portage Inn, a stopover for travelers tired from the work they put in portaging their craft. There are no other boats at its wharf on the river when the characters arrive.

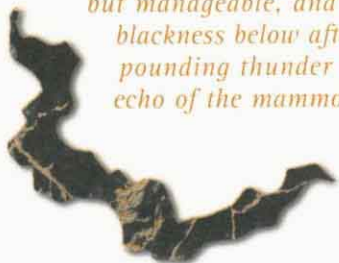
THE PORTAGE INN

The bargemaster steers the boat over to the wharf and says, "Dinner's on me. You cutters've done a fine job so far. I'll be right back." He steps from the barge onto the well-built wharf and enters the wooden inn a few moments later. In seconds he bursts from the inn, his eyes wide with horror. Stammering in fear, he finally manages to tell you that everyone inside has been slaughtered!

If the PCs investigate, they find the inn full of dead sods, gore splashed over everything. No one inside appears to have been the innkeeper, and the bargemaster confirms that the innkeeper's body is not present. Further investigation produces a fairly thick trail of blood leading from the inn, between several furrows that might have been made by bodies being dragged. Rangers with the party can see that the creatures dragging these bodies were reptilian, larger than man-size, with clawed feet. Unless they have tracked slaadi before, that is all anyone can gain by looking at this trail.

If they follow it, the heroes begin to hear a strange, muted roaring farther down the trail. The track leads to a bush several hundred yards away from the bank of the river.

Peering behind the bush, you find the source of the strange roaring. It is a hole in the stony ground, about 10 feet in diameter. Crude stairs are carved out of the rock into the side of the hole, leading down into dank and murky darkness. The stairs appear slippery but manageable, and they disappear into the blackness below after 100 feet. A sound like pounding thunder blasts from the hole, an echo of the mammoth falls 100 yards away. The trail of blood leads into this hole.



The bashers have two choices here: They can enter the hole, or they can walk away. If they leave, the adventure ends for them, though they might hear later of a horrendous slaughter in Arborea, a slaadi army the probable culprits. If they go down the hole, they have the chance to become unsung heroes.

BUILD-UP

The slaadi cave is in an old cavern, built by a forgotten lord who wanted a pleasure dome. However, the king died here before his beloved cavern was completed, and it remains unfinished to this day. The slaadi now roam the area freely, avoiding only the cave of ice (area F), where the spirit of the old king still roams.

The nasties these cutters'll encounter in the tunnels come from two areas within this cave: the green barracks or the blue cave. The two never mix, although a blue might challenge a green. However, except for the occasional bullying, the two colors of slaad keep to themselves.

The gray slaad has brought along these extra minions mainly to ensure that he gets a fair fight, according to the ways of his kind. If one of the PCs is willing to go toe to toe with the gray slaad, the lesser slaadi stand back to watch the fight. Should the party's champion win the fight, the other slaadi see that the bashers're more powerful than they and respect their strength, saving the characters unnecessary bloodshed. Of course, if the champion falls to the gray slaad, the rest of the slaadi may set in on the other characters with a vengeance, giving and expecting no quarter.

UNDER THE FALLS

The tunnel spirals downward, the loose footing growing ever more treacherous. The trail of blood tells you that you're on the right path, though the track is growing fainter. Condensing water drips incessantly down onto your head and the crude rock stairs. Lichen grows along the walls, collecting moisture and dropping the excess back to the floor.

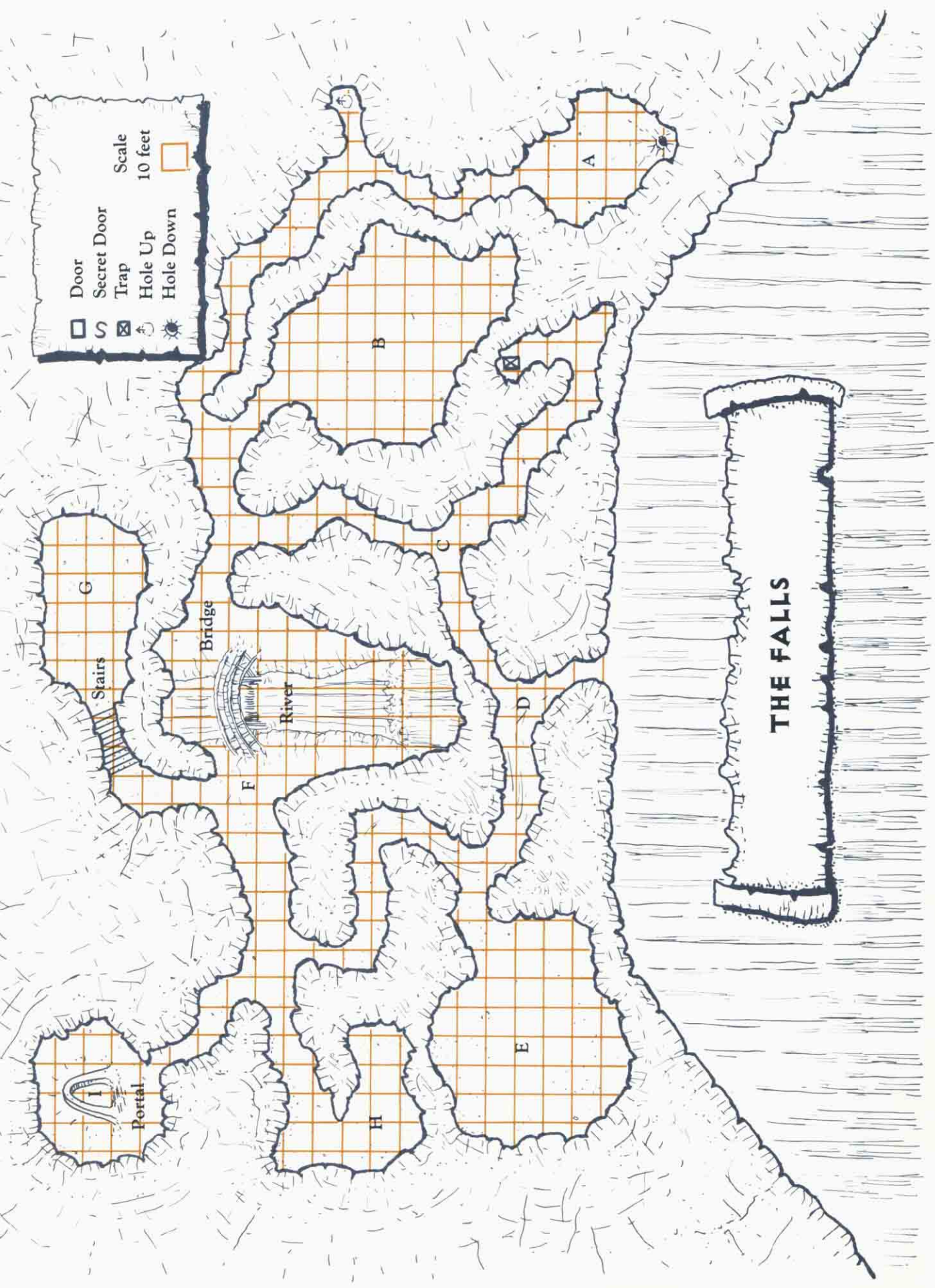
The clamor of the river is nearly deafening, pounding constantly through the old rock, gradually eroding it and shaping it into new forms. Wind whistles past your ears as you move through the tunnel, funneling quickly past you toward the outdoors.

Eventually, you reach the bottom of the descent. A huge iron door set into the wall before you stands ajar. It's free from decoration, though it has gained some rust over the years. It looks ancient, but still very serviceable.



THE FALLS

	Door		Secret Door		Scale
	Trap		Hole Up		Hole Down
	10 feet				



If any of the bashers try to close the door, the rusted hinges shriek loudly. But, thanks to their superb construction, after the initial resistance the door swings closed for the first time in what must be decades. They can see now that the lock doesn't work. And they will see soon that whether they have left the door open or closed will have serious consequences (see area D).

Beyond the door lies a hallway with stairs leading up. The stairs are untrapped, ascending for what seems like miles. Several landings have been interspersed through the stairs, offering plenty of room to rest. The trail of blood peters out once the cutters have put the door behind them.

Finally, the stairs come to an end. Standing on the top step, a body has to stoop to avoid hitting his head on the iron lid set into the ceiling.

ENTRANCE HOLE (A)

The PCs can lift the iron lid easily and climb out of the passage, emerging through the floor of a room of hewn granite. One wall of this chamber looks polished and smooth, though two others still show the chisel marks from where rock was cut away. It's a cinch that some berk left this job half done and never came back to it. The fourth side of the room yawns open into a passage. A few human limbs that once belonged to the innkeeper lie scattered about this room, left here to rot.

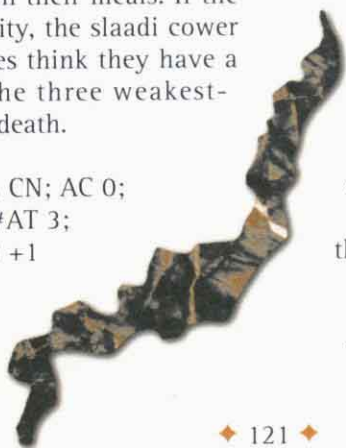
The passageway out twists and turns through the rock. One branching passage leads up to a hole that exits on the Beastlands side of the falls. Bloodstains on the ground beneath the hole show where the inhabitants of this cave let their victims drop to the floor from 15 feet above.

MEAT HALL (B)

This room appears to be the communal eating hall, for dozens of human and animal bodies hang from hooks bolted to the granite ceiling. Each of them looks partially chewed, as though a diner had taken bites from one, then went on to sample others. Three green slaadi from the green barracks (area E) are here, feasting on something that might have been human – once.

Seeing the party, they abandon their meals. If the PCs display clear physical superiority, the slaadi cower before them. However, if the nasties think they have a chance of victory, they target the three weakest-appearing bashers and fight to the death.

GREEN SLAADI (3): Int average (9); AL CN; AC 0; MV 9; HD 9+5; hp 45; THACO 11; #AT 3; Dmg 3–8/3–8/2–16; SA special; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 50%; SZ L (7 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 11,000.



SPLIT DECISION (C)

The tunnel comes to a fork here. The right branch leads off toward noise from the river, while the other seems to dead end. If the PCs enter this dead end without checking for traps, they must save vs. spell or trigger a trap that opens a hole in the roof above them. Water shoots with great force into the cavity. If the bashers don't flee before it, they'll be crushed against the rock or swept out the cave mouth (area D). After one turn, the trap resets itself.

CAVE MOUTH (D)

Just a bit farther along the right branch of the tunnel, the cutters find themselves again faced with two paths: one that goes deeper into the cavern complex and another that opens out directly into the crushing water of the falls. The wind whistles out the opening here so strongly that their clothes flap against their skin and their hair flies all around their faces.

If they closed the door at the entrance to the cave, the wind here is even stronger, since now this is its only way to escape the caverns under the falls. Anyone standing within 5 feet of the opening must save vs. paralysis or be sucked toward the opening – they can be saved only if one person in the party (and only one person is allowed to make the check) can make a successful Dexterity check at a –6 penalty.

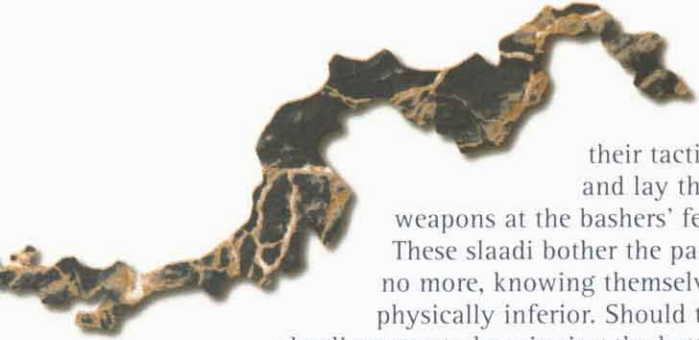
Otherwise, the poor sods're sucked out the opening and plummet with the water to the base of the falls, suffering 20d6 points of damage for the fall, with an additional 10d6 points of damage from the thunderous mass of water pounding down atop them. The characters can save vs. spell to halve the damage from the water's impact.

Should the cutters have left the door open behind them, the wind blows strongly, but not hard enough to pull anyone through the opening.

THE GREEN BARRACKS (E)

In the green slaadi's quarters, roughly 20 of them lounge about on hammocks and divans when the bashers enter. Seeing them, the nasties grab their weapons and make a mad rush for the door, each intent on besting one of the intruders itself in hand-to-hand combat. Fortunately, their eager rush forces the PCs to take on the slaadi in the doorway, where only three of the creatures can attack at a time. Should the characters contrive to push their way into the room, they each find themselves facing one of them.

These slaadi fight to the death, until at least half their number fall. If the PCs don't appear seriously wounded at this point, the remaining slaadi rethink



their tactics, and lay their weapons at the bashers' feet. These slaadi bother the party no more, knowing themselves physically inferior. Should the slaadi appear to be winning the battle, or if they seriously injure a character, they won't hesitate to continue hurling themselves over the bodies of their companions to attack the party.

GREEN SLAAD (17): Int average (9); AL CN; AC 0; MV 9; HD 9+5; hp 50; THACO 11; #AT 3; Dmg 3-8/3-8/2-16; SA special; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 50%; SZ L (7 feet tall); ML elite (13); XP 11,000.

CAVE OF ICE (F)

The cutters arrive in a spectacular cave, seemingly carved from ice. Its domed ceiling reflects the dyed floor beneath it in a rainbow of colors. A gilded wooden bridge spans a river running directly through the center of the chamber.

A translucent shape (a spectre) moves over the waters, carrying its ephemeral form in an attitude of sorrow. It is a barbaric-looking king, dressed in furs, a circlet upon its brow. It floats over the waters as if afraid to touch them. Upon seeing the PCs, it moves to make its presence known. It won't attack as long as the bashers don't, but any hostile moves from them causes the spectre to fight valiantly. If the characters start to win overwhelmingly, the spectre fades into the floor, trying to escape.

Casting *speak with dead* reveals that this was the king who ordered these secret caverns built. The project was barely begun when disaster after disaster struck. The construction had to be abandoned. The king came up here to contemplate his losses but fell victim to a rock slide that crushed him and carried his bones far downstream. His spirit remains here, where he died.

SPECTRE: Int high (14); AL LE; AC 2; MV 15, Fl 30 (B); HD 7+3; hp 55; THACO 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA energy drain; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, spell immunities; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML champion (16); XP 3,000.

FOLLOW THE LEADER (G)

A passage branching off to one side of the wooden bridge (area F) leads to the chamber of the gray slaad. A set of stairs in the passage descends to a curtain of beads blocking the doorway into the leader's spacious room. The chamber is dominated by a large, tepid pool full of murky water and unnameable objects. A few leftover

pieces from the slaad's most recent meal lie haphazardly about the room. A finger on one spare hand still wears a *ring of shooting stars*; the arm appears to have been chewed on many times.

The gray slaad currently is not in this chamber, having traveled back to Limbo to bring more slaadi back to the falls. Though it could *gate* them here, it's trying to conserve its strength for its battle with the death slaad. It carries all its weapons, but has left a *ring of wizardry*, a *potion of extra-healing*, a *potion of human control*, a *staff of wizardry*, and a *helm of telepathy* here. There are 5,000 gp worth of gems heaped carelessly into one of the corners of the room.

THE BLUE CAVE (H)

The blue slaadi have been growing restive; the cutters enter their chamber only to witness a dominance battle between two of the larger creatures. The slaad nearest the door, upon spying the PCs, broadcasts to their minds a message of: *You wait until fight finish. Then we get you.* The slaad turns its attention back to the fight. If the characters attack anyway, all the slaadi in the room except the fighters drop what they're doing and rush the PCs. Because they committed the grave mistake of disturbing a dominance fight, all the slaadi fight them to the death. Only if the group proves its superiority in a dramatic fashion — a body could *fireball* the works, for example — will the slaadi begin making morale checks.

This room holds no valuables, as they've all been confiscated by the gray slaad.

BLUE SLAAD (30): Int low (6); AL CN; AC 2; MV 6; HD 8+4; hp 40; THACO 13; #AT 5; Dmg 2-12/2-12/ 2-12/2-12/2-16; SA disease; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 40%; SZ L (10 feet tall); ML steady (11); XP 9,000.

THE PORTAL (I)

As the PCs enter the room, they see the portal archway in the center. The hundreds of small stone blocks that make up the arch are covered in arcane symbols. A character who approaches to get a good look can see that some of the stones are loose — so loose, a body could pull them right out, disabling the portal.

But the cutters don't have time to get a good look at the portal right now. Even as they walk in, its interior glows in myriad colors, then it belches forth a gray slaad, carrying a wicked-looking axe, and five more green slaadi. Proceed to the climax.



CLIMAX

The gray slaad steps forward and challenges the strongest-looking of the player character to a single combat. It points first at the PC, then at itself. Then it gestures around to its companions, indicating that they are to hold back and not interfere, repeating the process for the basher's companions. The nasty's telepathic contact is limited to this terse missive: *You fight me. None of your slaves. None of my slaves.* It won't negotiate; if the character seems unwilling to fight, the slaad makes another hand gesture, and its minions rush into the fray. (The lesser slaadi all have the same statistics as those from the green barracks.)

If the slaad's choice steps forward — or even signals for a different character to fight the slaad instead — the slaad grins, and its inferiors stay back. If the PCs display any sign that they are not willing to accept this single combat, the slaad sends its minions in.

The fierce gray slaad is battle scarred and tough looking. The symbol of power on its forehead is charcoal gray; a shade darker and it would look black. The creature seems very confident in its abilities, as well as in the magical axe it carries.

The slaad attacks with its *dancing vorpal axe* (which has the abilities of both the *dancing sword* and *vorpal sword*) as well as its formidable magical abilities. The bashers might see the slaad use any of the following abilities: *advanced illusion*, *darkness 15-foot radius*, *fear*, *flame strike*, *infravision*, *invisibility*, *know alignment*, *lightning bolt*, *power word blind*, *shape change*, *symbol*, and *wind walk*. The gray slaad uses them as necessary, alternating them with other attacks. This nasty is a canny fighter — it won't go rushing in when the party's champion has a clear advantage. And it won't fall for ruses — it's seen them all before.

Knowing that the first to fall loses, the gray slaad has no honor. So the cutter in combat had better be ready for anything. The nasty fights to the death and expects the champion to do likewise. If, after the single combat, the bashers still want to fight, the gray slaad sends the green slaadi after them.

That could amount to a lot of slaadi. More minions continue coming through the portal all the while the champion fights the gray; six slaadi (either green or blue) emerge once every five rounds. They continue coming until the characters destroy the portal, disable it, or block it off in such a way that none can pass through. The victorious bashers had better not forget that, if they leave the portal standing intact, it won't be long before more slaadi arrive to plague the Upper Planes.

GRAY SLAAD: Int high (14); AL CN; AC -2; MV 12; HD 10+6; hp 85; THACO 11; #AT 3; Dmg 4-10/2-16 + *dancing vorpal axe* +3*; SA slaad abilities; SD +2 or better weapon to hit; MR 60%; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML champion (16); XP 15,000.

- * The *axe* is strongly aligned to both chaos and evil and will cause 1d6 points of damage to all who touch it, other than the gray slaad.

EPILOGUE

Should the bashers defeat the gray slaad, it eventually becomes reincarnated into the form of a green slaad. When it recovers its gray form, as it eventually will, it realizes that the PCs are stronger than it is. It seeks to prove to itself that it's still worthy to challenge the death slaad. But before it can do that, it must regain faith in itself — faith the bashers destroyed.

Company's coming, berk.

After at least a year and a day, the gray slaad will come looking for the individual cutter that defeated it and challenge this PC to another single combat. It wants to fight only this champion, but may have to settle for another character if it can't find its choice.

Meanwhile, the bashers can return to their assignment aboard the barge, or they can simply abandon it to the bargemaster. Should they not return from their exploration of the hole near the inn, the bargemaster continues downriver without them, failing to notify anyone of the tragedy at the inn. (The DM decides how long the frightened bargemaster will wait for his crew — probably not long, considering he won't want to be discovered docked at a kip full of dead bodies.)

So, when the bashers do resurface, they may be fingered for the murders, as well as for the disappearances of various petitioners in the Beastlands. Unless they leave slaad bodies at the inn, locals may organize a posse to hunt them down, wanting them to pay for their heinous crimes. 'Course, the bargemaster can clear the matter up when he arrives at his destination in Olympus. That is, if he doesn't have an axe to grind with the party for leaving him.

If the bashers come back to find the barge still docked and continue with it downriver, the bargemaster will pay them their jink and offer them a job running the next barge down. Since they are obviously capable, the owners of the barge might even offer the cutters a permanent post as guards. 'Course, a body could argue that's a job for a bunch of bashers looking for retirement, not adventure.

Somehow, though, adventure comes knocking anyway, always ready to take a body for another ride.



Introducing new Items of might and potency,
including Wonders both Fair and Foul, for the
Amusement of the Heroes and Others.

AN APPENDIX: MAGIC

There's plenty of magic on the planes. Mostly, it comes in two forms: spells and items. Sure, a body can divide these even further into *kinds* of items and *schools* of spells, and still further into *types* of kinds of items and *similar* spells in the same school. . . . But

thinking too long on all that's enough to drive a cutter barmy.

Anyone who knows anything about magic in the planes knows that the only other important category is the *availability* of the magic.

COMMON vs. UNCOMMON MAGIC

First, there's the stuff that's readily available, if a basher knows where to look. There's weapons for sale in the shops of Sigil, loot lying around in a fiend's treasure horde, and mage schools where a body can go to get spells. Plus, wizards are producing more magical items all the time, on every plane of existence. If a body can't find what he wants one place, he's sure to find it somewhere else. Finding or making an item like a *dagger +1* or a *potion of healing* is just a matter of imagination and intelligence, and a cutter just has to use his brain-box to find out who's got what.

It's a whole lot harder when a body needs a *vorpall sword* or a *rune of horse repelling* — stuff a basher probably won't find just sitting in a store in Sigil. It doesn't matter how much jink a body's got, these just ain't common items. They're magic specific to a plane or a being, or magic that's designed and destined for a particular purpose. 'Course, chances are *someone* in Sigil has magic like it; chances are also pretty good that the someone doesn't want to part with it.

The stuff listed in this appendix can fall into either category, depending on how a DM wants to use it and how much the DM wants the cutters using it. Unless specifically noted otherwise, this stuff should be generally available in Sigil — for the usual inflated prices, of course. Just because something's available doesn't mean it's cheap.

ORIGIN

One key thing to remember is that items usually reflect the character of the plane they hail from. A basher using an item from the Abyss likely will be viewed as having tendencies that reflect Abyssal teaching, while folks that see a body using an item usually associated with the Beast-

MORNIN'.
I NEED A DOZEN
RUNES OF HORSE REPELLING.
CAN YOU
HELP ME?
— CLUELESS
CUSTOMER
+ A DEALER
IN MAGICAL
ITEMS

lands will finger him as a native of that plane. Are these assumptions always true? No, but there are certain identifying characteristics about most kinds of items that label their plane of origin. A berk running around swinging a scourge is generally going to come across as leaning more toward chaos and evil than law and good.

Now, don't forget that magical items tend to work best in their own plane. A weapon made in Bytopia is not as strong when it's taken to the Gray Waste. Weapons lose +1 from their bonus for every plane they're taken away from their plane of origin (assuming a body travels the quickest route).

Thus, to figure the bonus of a +4 weapon forged in Bytopia, don't follow the Great Ring to the Gray Waste — that's the long way, berk. Instead, go from Bytopia to the Outlands or the Astral (+4 to +3), and from there to the Gray Waste (+3 to +2). Therefore, a +4 weapon in Bytopia becomes a +2 weapon in the Gray Waste (or any of the other Outer Planes that don't adjoin it). The same weapon on the Prime Material would be +2 as well (Bytopia to Astral, Astral to Prime).

The powers inherent in an item do make the transition between planes without losing their abilities; that is, a *vorpai sword* may lose its bonuses, but it can cut a basher's head off quicker than a bubbler can swig an ale. A cutter'd do well to remember this — it could mean the difference between living and daisy-pushing.

Not in the dark now? Then here's the rest of the chant.

TABLE 1: MAGICAL ITEM INVENTORY

WEAPONS	XP	GP VALUE
Planar mancatcher	1,250	12,500
Scourge of lightning	750	7,500
Scythe of flame	1,150	11,500
Scythe of light	1,650	16,500
Scythe of pain	1,350	13,500
Scythe of paralyzation	950	9,500
Sickle of flame	900	9,000
Sickle of light	1,400	14,000
Sickle of pain	1,100	11,000
Sickle of paralyzation	800	8,000

MISCELLANEOUS MAGIC	XP	GP VALUE
Planar wards	2,500	25,000
Seeker stones (pair)	650	6,500
Shifters' manacles	800	8,000

WHERE'
D'YA +HINK
YER G@IN'. BERK?
—HARMONIMUM
PATROL
WITH MANCATCHER,
+@ GI+HYANKI +HIEF

WEAPONS

PLANAR MANCATCHER: The *planar mancatcher* looks a lot like the prime version of the weapon: a long pole with a set of spring-loaded, sharpened jaws at one end. 'Course, the *planar mancatcher* is a +2 weapon made entirely of steel or harder metals and engraved with mystic runes. It was made to catch githyanki, githzerai, and other creatures that can *plane shift* at will. Since it's nearly impossible to hold one of these nasties when they can simply shift away to a more hospitable part of the multiverse, planar mages and other types plagued by plane-shifters finally devised the *planar mancatcher*. These are, of course, very popular with the Harmonium, whose patrols carry them around Sigil, just in case they happen to spy a shifter caught in the cross-trade.

To use the *mancatcher*, all a body needs to do is hit the target (L-, M-, or S-size creatures; bigger ones are just too big to hold, and critters smaller than this range can slip right through). Always treat the target as AC 10, though Dexterity bonuses can modify this. Magical bonuses, armor, and various other magics (excepting *displacement*, which makes a body awful hard to hit) have no effect on Armor Class.

Once the target's caught, the jaws of the *mancatcher* snap tight around it, and the victim loses all shield and Dexterity bonuses to Armor Class. The target also suffers 1d2 points of damage per round it struggles, has a 25% chance of falling to the ground, and — if the attacker is larger or has leverage — can be pushed or pulled around at the controller's fancy. The victim can break free with a successful bend bars/lift gates skill roll, but suffers 1d2 more points of damage in the attempt.

An attempt by the victim to use a *plane shift* of any sort activates another feature of the *mancatcher*: It sends a dose of painful magic coursing through the shifter's body. Every attempt to shift inflicts 1d10 points of damage on the victim. The sod has a 1% chance for every point of this damage of being knocked unconscious by the magical resonance. (The percent chance is cumulative during a single entrapment).

SCOURGE OF LIGHTNING: The *scourge of lightning* is used primarily on the Lower Planes, especially in the Abyss. Its cruel barbs and cutting pain are effective against most any petitioner, and the lightning part is good against leatherheaded berks who just don't get the point the first time. The *scourge* functions as a +2 weapon in the Abyss.

The *scourge of lightning* is a small whip, about 4 feet from the tip of the business end to the handle. The handle is 1 foot long, leaving 3 feet of pain for anyone on the wrong side of the *scourge*. The length of the whip is studded with small metal barbs, sharp enough to pierce flesh and small enough to grab armor or clothes that get in the way. Unless the clothes are tough leather, the *scourge* shreds them after a mere two rounds. Leather takes an additional round. The *scourge* inflicts 1d4 points of damage a round.

Its main value, however, does not lie in this pain, but in the ability of the wielder to release electricity through the metal barbs. When the user desires, the *scourge* begins sparking and flaring. A sod hit by the weapon in this state sustains damage as from a regular *scourge*, as well as an additional 2d8 points of electrical damage (save vs. spell for half damage). The electrical attack can be activated any time by a tanar'ri of at least

5 HD. Anyone else can call the electricity only five times a day.

SICKLES AND SCYTHES

Most city folks don't know the difference between a sickle and a scythe. They figure that both have curved blades, and both are used for farming, and therefore both are the same. Well, it ain't true.

Sickles are small, one-handed jobs. They have a curved blade about a foot long, sharp only on the inside of the curve (the concave side). This blade is attached to a short handle (usually 6 inches to 1 foot). They're easily hidden, or at least easily carried when tucked into a belt. They're farming implements, sure, but they're not designed for large-scale sweeping; they're designed for cutting handfuls of plant stalks, not swathes of greenery. They obviously cause less damage than scythes.

Scythes, on the other hand, are big, two-handed tools, long blades attached to curved wooden handles. The handle has a peg for a hand-grip to help a body wielding a scythe make broad, sweeping cuts. It takes some practice to get the motion right for cutting lots of plants, and even more practice to learn how to use a scythe effectively against some berk. The blade is usually 3 1/2 to 4 feet long and sharp, like the sickle, only on the inner curve.

And here's the real difference:

TABLE 2: SICKLES AND SCYTHES

WEAPON	COST	WEIGHT	SIZE	TYPE	SPEED	DAMAGE (S-M/L)
Sickle	6 sp	3	S	S	4	1d4+1/1d4
Scythe	5 gp	8	M	P/S	8	1d6+1/1d8

Magical scythes (and sickles) are common on the Outer Planes — and not just the evil ones. Since they're tools as well as weapons, a number of folks on the Upper Planes value their use. On the other hand, since they look wicked (as in daunting) and can inflict some serious damage if used correctly, they're a favorite weapon on the Lower Planes. Given these weapons' differing planes of origin, it makes sense that different scythes have different powers. A body usually doesn't have a problem finding sickles with the same powers as the scythes presented here.

SCYTHE OF FLAME: There's some confusion as to whether this item originated in the Upper Planes or the Lower Planes. Whatever the case, denizens of both see some value in this weapon, for each has champions who use the weapon indiscriminately. However, the bloods know this much: The *scythe of flame* is a weapon of +3 enchantment on any plane. When the command word is spoken, the *scythe's* blade flares up in a bright flame. This flame is real — it illuminates as well as a good strong torch and can set fire to any flammable material. The *scythe* inflicts 1d6 more points of damage to any

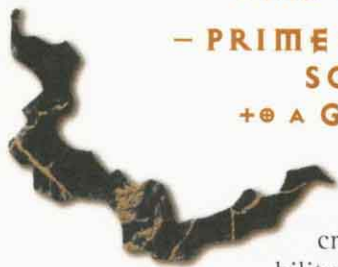


PIKE IT, SOD!

— PRIME WITH

SCYTHE OF FLAME

+ A GELUGON BAAEZU



creature with a special vulnerability to flame. The flare lasts until the command word is spoken again, or until three hours have passed.

SCYTHE OF LIGHT: Made in Mount Celestia, the *scythe of light* is more than just a formidable hand-to-hand weapon. It's also extremely valuable against the undead and as a light source. On its home plane, it functions as a +4 weapon.

By invoking the proper command word (inscribed into the gold-tinged blade itself), the wielder can turn undead as a 7th-level cleric; a body can use this power three times a day. Likewise, by speaking the command word inlaid into the handle, the wielder causes the *scythe of light* to produce a bright sphere (equivalent in size to a *continual light* spell) for up to an hour. This power also can be invoked three times a day. The wielder can dispel the sphere at any time, but any use at all counts against the daily limit.

SCYTHE OF PAIN: The *scythe of pain* is used almost exclusively by the baatezu to force order upon the petitioners unlucky enough to fall into their clutches. Only baatezu of 6 HD or more carry these scythes, so it's a cinch any other berks who carry one will be marked for death by the first baatezu that spy them.

The scythe is a +3 weapon in Baator. And if that ain't enough, it also has the ability to *cause pain* in those it damages. When the pain-causing ability is activated, those hit by the *scythe* must save vs. spell or suffer an unbearable rush of agony through their bodies. The influence of this pain reduces Dexterity effectively by 3 points, Armor Class by 2 grades, and applies a -4 penalty to attack and damage rolls. The effect lasts 1d6 rounds.

SCYTHE OF PARALYZATION: The *scythe of paralyzation* originates on the Outlands, where it is available to anyone with enough jink. This +2 weapon has the added benefit of rendering its victims immobile. All the wielder needs to do to activate this power is speak the name of the weapon, usually written along the wooden handle itself or along the pegs on the handle. When the *paralyzation* ability is active, anyone the weapon hits must save vs. paralyzation or be unable to move for the next 2d4 rounds. Users can activate this power 1d10 times a day, but here's the dark of it: They won't know how many charges are left until they're gone.

MISCELLANEOUS MAGIC

PLANAR WARDS: *Planar wards* are the expensive (and rare) version of the 4th-level priest spell, *surelock*, described in the *Tome of Magic* rulebook. These *wards* generally last a lot longer and cover more area than the spell. Plus, they have a couple extra features.

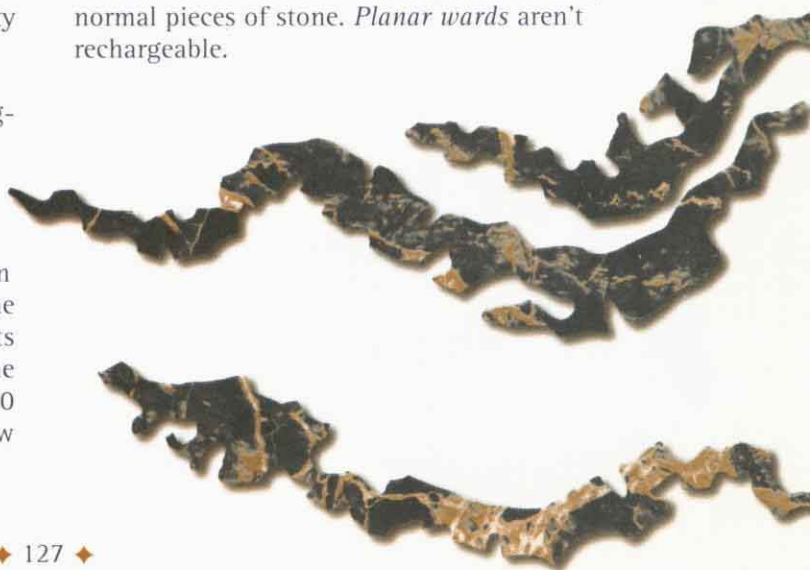
Planar wards come in sets of four or more (up to eight) and must be used together. The chant is that these carved blocks of marblelike white stone come from the destroyed portals of Sigil. Most bloods scoff at this, since portals come in all shapes, sizes, and materials. Still, more than one cutter has shown the wards are proof against portals.

Each block is carved with two numbers. The first tells the user where in the sequence of *wards* to activate it, and the second denotes how many blocks are in the set. Each block only works with the other blocks of its set — *planar wards* go inert if a body attempts to use them with another set.

When activated in sequence (one command word activates the set), the blocks emanate an invisible wall that prevents portals, gates, or conduits from appearing inside its boundaries. The way the stones are laid determines the shape of the wall; they can be arranged up to 60 yards apart, in any pattern the user desires. The wall extends 60 yards above and below the ground as well.

The wall also provides protection against creatures using any sort of teleportation or plane-shifting magic to enter the area. This includes *teleportation*, *blinking*, *oil of etherealness*, and the like. Folks attempting to enter the warded area can do so physically; spells or shifting abilities take them only as far as the wall. A body using a spell to deliver himself to an exact point within the wards instead pops into existence 60 yards away, suffering no damage — 'cept from whatever arises once he gets there.

Cutters in the warded area can deactivate the *ward*, if they know how. (Usually it takes another command word.) Otherwise, a *ward* lasts 1d4 weeks after activation; when the wall fails, the blocks become just normal pieces of stone. *Planar wards* aren't rechargeable.





SEEKER STONES:

Several planar groups use *seeker stones* to locate friends and companions. These items come in a set of two perfectly clear jade balls. To activate a *seeker stone*, all a body has to do is speak the command words inscribed into the bottom of the matching stone.

Once activated, a *stone* homes in on its match, if it is within 10 miles. A glowing arrow appears in the center of the translucent ball, pointing toward the other *stone* as a compass homes in on magnetic north. The arrow grows fatter and brighter as it's carried closer to its mate. When the matching *stone* is within 5 feet, the arrow abruptly dies – if a berk can't figure out how to find the companion *stone* from here, he doesn't deserve to find it. If the distance between the two increases again before the enchantment is deactivated, the *seeker stone* flares into life again. (Speaking the command words in reverse dispels the power.)

Either *stone* can be activated to seek its mate, though the uses are independent of each other. In other words, both, either, or neither one may be activated at any given time.

Although the *stones* have a range of only 10 miles, the chant whispers of *seeker stones* that can actually span planar boundaries. But don't place too much stock in the rumor, berk: No reliable blood has ever reported seeing a set like this.

⊕+HER W⊕RLDS, ⊕+HER MAGIC

Of course, there's more magic out on the planes than what's listed here. A cutter'd have to be addle-coved to think there's a limit to the ingenuity of planars. And bashers everywhere are all wise to the chant – some cutter or other's got a magical item for every purpose in the multiverse.

There's folks out here who pick up new items for their collections on every ride they take.

Then again, there's folks who understand that, out here, what counts ain't what a body owns. It's what a body knows.

SHIFTERS' MANACLES: Designed along the same lines as the *planar mancatcher*, the *shifters' manacles* prevent whoever's wearing them from *plane shifting* away from their troubles. This item was designed by the Mercykillers, who got tired of seeing folks fly out of their birdcage because they could *shift* at will. Members of the faction vowed to lose no more prisoners and set their mages to work on devising manacles that could hold against any type of plane-shifting magic.

The thing is, the mages had to produce the *manacles* quickly and in bulk, so they didn't have the time to throw in the small details. Therefore, the manacles are big and heavy and do not shrink or expand to fit the being wearing them. Fortunately, the Mercykillers have a lot of these lying around the Prison in Sigil, to fit creatures of almost any size. The metal of the manacles proves resistant to rust and magic, preventing a captive from bursting free of its bonds by either means. The metal is also specially enchanted to resist psionics.

Anytime a body tries to use shifting power while wearing manacles, not only does the power fail to operate, the prisoner suffers 1d10 points of damage, as fiery pain races up and down its nerves. The would-be shifter might even pass out from the pain (a 2% chance for each point of this damage). Unconsciousness lasts 1d3 turns (or, if the creature regenerates hit points, as long as it takes to regain those it lost).



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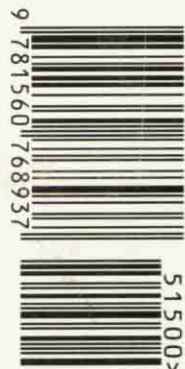
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