

THE MOTES OF ETERNITY

AN ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

Eons ago, a cruel and wretched world was ploughed under by the gods. A million years later, Seree wizards discovered it, and finding it had no use, gave it as a parting gift to a **guardian** of theirs that had completed its servitude. The **guardian Nulga** took its thousand motes of magical power and breathed life into tiny beings. It hoped to steer them toward peaceful and enlightened lives in the dense, primordial jungle. Unfortunately, eons of erosion have cut through the volcanic pumice, exposing the temple of **Dendra**.

THE JUNGLE RIVER

This warm, muddy river flows through the jungles of the volcanic **plateau** before tumbling down the waterfall. It continues on for many miles through its steep-sided gorge as the plateau level drops. Every few miles, roll d6 for an encounter, as well as its intensity - 1-2: mere evidence; 3-4: nearby; 5-6: close encounter.

d6	River Encounter
1	d12 Crocodiles
2	Floating Atrocity
3	d6 Motes fishing
4	Swarm of fever flies
5	Enlightened Motes
6	The Shatterwisp

TEMPLE OF DENDRA

The complex has been entombed in hardened lava for more than a million years. Every hour, there is a 10% chance a party of d8 **Enlightened Motes** arrives by river, entering via the waterfall-side gate.

DENDRA AVERTED

An 80' tall statue of a hairless woman protrudes from the eroding pumice. Though it never moves, it always faces away from the viewer's position, regardless of where they stand.

PYRAMID OF DENDRA

A solid pyramid of white granite blocks. The archway opens into the first chamber, where dozens of plain, ceramic urns line the walls. They hold only dust. If any **enlightened motes** are present, an inner archway leads on into the **graven chamber**.

ARTIFICIAL EROSION

Every few hours, the bizarre **shatterwisp** can be felt very strongly in the temple. The rocks of the place begin to vibrate, while grit, and occasionally larger pieces, tumble from the pumice walls. This is the cause of the erosion.

THE MOTES

Nulga created bodies for his Motes from lemurs and reptiles, choosing the human form of his former Seree masters. They retain a smallish stature and a slight scaliness with patches of soft fur. They are long-lived, but sterile, and their numbers have dwindled to a few hundred. Finding most of **Nulga's** teachings abstract and impractical, many have left the immediate area to make their own way. Only those who inhabit this stretch of river remain loyal to **Nulga** (or to Dendra). They wield obsidian-tipped spears and knives.

THE ENLIGHTENED

Using obsidian mirrors, the Motes glimpsed the statue's face and entered the pyramid. Swayed by Dendra within, they now carry out her **atrocities**.

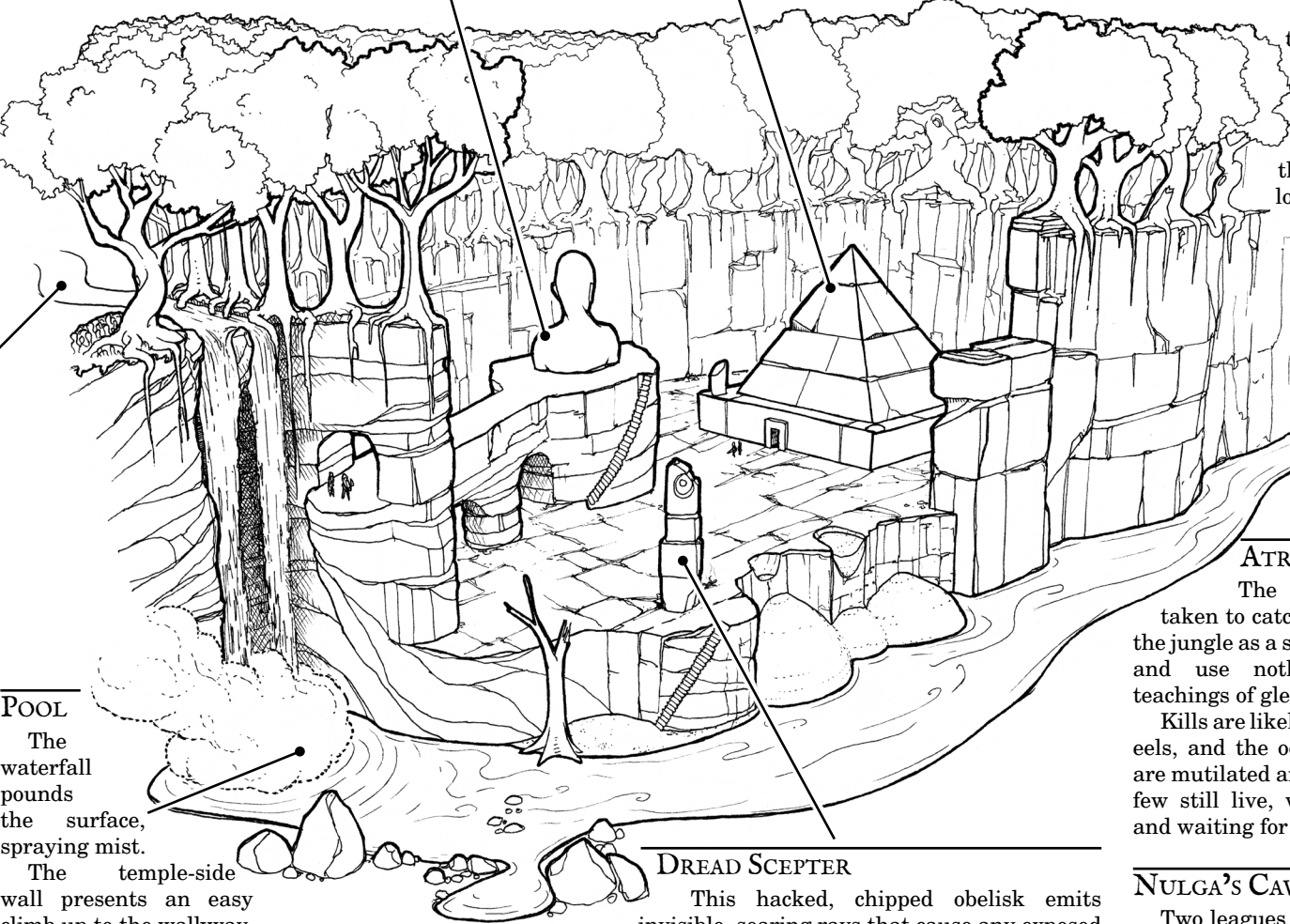
ATROCITIES

The Enlightened Motes have taken to catching and killing animals of the jungle as a sacred rite. They eat nothing and use nothing, following Dendra's teachings of gleeful death. Kills are likely to be crocodiles, fat umber eels, and the occasional **Void Gull**. They are mutilated and impaled. An unfortunate few still live, wedged in the underbrush and waiting for death.

NULGA'S CAVE

Two leagues downriver, cut into a rocky embankment, is the cave of the **Nulga**.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES



POOL

The waterfall pounds the surface, spraying mist.

The temple-side wall presents an easy climb up to the walkway.

Four giant crocodiles lurk in the shallows. They will not bother boats, but aggressively attack waders or swimmers.

DREAD SCEPTER

This hacked, chipped obelisk emits invisible, searing rays that cause any exposed skin to burn and blister painfully. It has no spiritual significance—its energies were easily tolerated by its builders, who used it to kill insects.

THE GUARDIAN NULGA

The Seree placed their *spell engines* in the care of magical, living guardians. Created from mundane animals (reptiles were favored for their uncanny stillness), guardians were enhanced with a regimen of powdered gemstone and protective rituals. Long exposure to the intense magical environment of the *spell engine* caused them to grow in size and raw magical potency, while centuries of conversation and meditation granted them wisdom.

MOTE-FATHER

Nulga was once a humble snapping turtle, but is now twelve paces long, six paces high, and weighs as much as five elephants. Nulga created the Motes with the intention of building a gentle community to guide and watch over. Few Motes now come to visit him, and he is alarmed by the tales his followers bring. He spends his days partially submerged in his grotto, straining at the breeze for clues about what has happened to his beloved children. He has a large cache of food—gifts from loyal Motes—tied into in three longboats brightly painted with scenes from the jungle.

SPELL GUARDIAN

Nulga has inherited several earth-magic abilities from his exposure to the *spell engine*. He can alter the consistency of rock, softening it to allow him passage, or hardening the soil to iron strength. He can even change the air nearby to an amber-like hardness, though only briefly. Finally, he

d6 Pleateau Jungle Encounter	
1	Sacred Atrocity (ape, boa, or tapir)
2	d8 Mote foragers, collecting fruit. Roll d6 for loyalty; 1-2: Nulga; 3-4: Dendra; 5-6: themselves.
3	The Shatterwisp
4	Void Gull Patrol (d6)
5	A Vexing Bowl
6	The Lacuna *
	* once only, reroll thereafter

can *animate clay* to take the form of living creatures. Having no magical motes left to work with, each power costs a year of his life.

INSIDE THE PYRAMID OF DENDRA

The pyramid contains three chambers, each about ten paces square. The archway to the second chamber only exists if someone within the pyramid has seen the face of Dendra, while the archway to the third chamber only exists if *everyone* has.

GRAVEN CHAMBER

In the center of the second chamber stands the sacrificial slab: a huge block of stained, white granite. Channels along the edges funnel blood down into a collection urn. The slab is chipped and scored by centuries of use.

GRAVEN CHAMBER WALLS

The walls are finely etched from floor to ceiling and reveal that Dendra was a servant of the gods during the forging of the world. Betrayed and ‘damaged’, she realized that the gods’ vision was imperfect, and turned away from them (hence her averted statue). She gathered the first peoples from the forests and caves, and with them built Thiru, the first city—this pyramid stands at its center (though it is buried).

CHAMBER OF DENDRA

Reduced to a fraction of her power, Dendra retains only her intellect and her ability to form a body from the fine gray ash that fills this room. Dendra espouses a doctrine of gleeful death: destroy all forms made by the gods, that new forms may arise. She bears no anger toward the gods, and considers the destruction of Thiru itself to be a sacred act, in accordance with her wisdom. Sitting upon a throne of white granite, she counsils any who will listen about her path: gleeful death, chaotic renewal. Her presence suffuses the entire pyramid; destroying the ash body does nothing. If asked about Nulga, she will point out that he seeks to emulate the ancestral hosts of human communities, but while he still

lives, he never will. Only by dying will he achieve the breadth of vision necessary to be of lasting use to the Motes. She encourages adventurers to hasten his death.

THE JUNGLE PLATEAU

Beyond the river’s vicinity, the sun disappears behind the emerald green canopy. Lemurs chatter, frogs chirp, and brightly colored birds flap between hanging vines. Great, waxy leaves sprinkle raindrops from high above. When adventurers move to a new area of the jungle, roll for a random feature.

d6	Jungle Feature
1	Dense, fruit-laden thicket
2	Rain pond, slowly draining
3	Clearing filled with giant ferns and stinging stinkleaf
4	Rocky outcrop predating the volcanism (50% chance of being taller than the trees)
5	Muddy-banked tributary stream
6	Intense rain for d8 hours

THE LACUNA

This huge, stone sphere is guarded by d20 Void Gulls. A door-sized opening in one side leads into a dark, featureless interior. Once a portal to their emperor’s fortress, it is useless now for lack of a power source. Every month, the gulls lose more of their number to the Enlightened Motes, and they are alert and desperate.

SHATTERWISP & THE VEXING BOWLS

A hissing, whirring sound fills the air. At first distant, it approaches rapidly and soon becomes painfully loud. Metal vibrates, glass shatters, stone crumbles, and water boils in an area about thirty paces across. This effect is produced by Void Gulls humming from within their vexing bowls: six smooth basins cut from the basalt, five paces across, which amplify sound. The gulls constructed them to expose the temple,

having sensed the power within the dread scepter. When it topples, they will attack.

FEVER FLIES

These fat, blue-eyed flies leave tiny, painful bites that impair their victims’ judgment for d12 hours. Possible effects: victims conclude they’re rowing the wrong direction; this boat would be a great way to carry water; a lost loved one is just below the topsoil; someone should probably go and check on the king.

