

COR4-02



SHEDDING SCALES

A ONE-ROUND D&D®
LIVING GREYHAWK™ CORE ADVENTURE

by Shawn Merwin

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A knightly order dedicated to stopping a nameless evil, a mysterious sect of an ancient Suel goddess, and a diviner charged with undoing a diabolical ritual: these diverse forces struggle to end a threat in the cradle of the former Occluded Empire of the Whispered One. Is the danger confined to a backwater barony on the edge of the Rushmoors, or is something more at stake? A Core scenario for APLs 2-12. Part One of the “Windows to the Serpent’s Soul” series.

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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INTRODUCTION

This is an RPGA® scenario for the Dungeons & Dragons® game. A four-hour time block has been allocated for each round of this scenario, but the actual playing time will be closer to three and a half hours. The rest of the time is spent in preparation before game play, and scoring after the game. The following guidelines are here to help you with the preparation of the game. Read this page carefully so that you know and can communicate to your players the special aspects of playing an RPGA scenario.

PREPARATION

First you should print this scenario. This scenario was created to support double-sided printing, but printing it single sided will work as well. There is enough room along the inside margin to bind the adventure, if you desire.

Read this entire adventure at least once before you run your game. Be sure to familiarize yourself with any special rules, spells, or equipment presented in the adventure. It may help to highlight particularly important passages.

When you run an RPGA D&D adventure we assume that you have access to the following books: the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. We also assume that you have a set of dice (at least one d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20), some scrap paper, a pencil, an RPGA reporting packet, and your sense of fun. It is also a good idea to have a way to track movement during combat. This can be as simple as a pad of graph paper and a pencil, as handy as a vinyl grid map and chits, or as elaborate as resin dungeon walls and miniatures.

Instruct the players either to prepare their characters now, or wait until you read the introduction, depending on the requirements of the scenario as described in the introduction.

Keep in mind that you must have at least four players (not counting the DM), for the game session to be a sanctioned RPGA event. As well, you cannot have more than six players participating in the game.

Once you are ready to play, it is handy to instruct each player to place a nametag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name, race, and gender at the top. This makes it easier for the players (and the DM) to keep track of who is playing which character.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment and weapons their characters are carrying. That said, you as the DM can bar the use of even core rulebooks during certain times of play. For example, the players are not free to consult the *Dungeon Master's Guide* when confronted with a trap or hazard, or the *Monster Manual* when confronted with a monster.

Some of the text in this scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in bold and italic font. It's strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text instead of reading it aloud. Some of this text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

REPORTING

After the players have completed the scenario or the time allotted to run the scenario has run out, the players and DM fill out a reporting form. After the form is filled out it should be given to the senior DM.

LIVING GREYHAWK

This is a LIVING GREYHAWK Adventure. As a LIVING adventure it is expected that players bring their own characters with them.

If players do not have a LIVING GREYHAWK character generated, get a copy of the current LIVING GREYHAWK

character generation guidelines, and a character sheet from your convention coordinator or the RPGA Web site, and then have any players without a character create on. Once all players have a LIVING GREYHAWK character, play can begin.

Along with the other materials that you are

assumed to have in order to run a D&D game, it is also recommended that you have a copy of the LIVING GREYHAWK Gazetteer.

	Mundane Animals Effect on APL	# of Animals			
		1	2	3	4
CR of Animal	1/4 & 1/6	0	0	0	1
	1/3 & 1/2	0	0	1	1
	1	1	1	2	3
	2	2	3	4	5
	3	3	4	5	6
	4	4	6	7	8
	5	5	7	8	9
	6	6	8	9	10
	7	7	9	10	11

LIVING GREYHAWK LEVELS OF PLAY

Because players bring their own characters to LIVING GREYHAWK games, this adventure's challenges are proportioned to the average character level of the PCs participating in the adventure. To determine the Average Party Level (APL):

1. Determine the character level for each of the PCs participating in the adventure.
2. If PCs bring animals that have been trained for combat (most likely being war horses, dogs trained for war), other than those brought by virtue of a class ability (i.e. animal companions, familiars paladin's mounts, etc) use the sidebar chart to determine the number of levels you add to the sum above. Add each character's animals separately. A single PC may only bring four or fewer animals of this type, and animals with different CRs are added separately.
3. Sum the results of 1 and 2, and divide by the number of characters playing in the adventure. Round to the nearest whole number.
4. If you are running a table of six PCs, add one to that average.

By following these four steps, you will have determined the APL. Throughout this adventure, APLs categorize the

level of challenge the PCs will face. APLs are given in even-numbered increments. If the APL of your group falls on an odd number, ask them before the adventure begins whether they would like to play a harder or easier adventure. Based on their choice, use either the higher or the lower adjacent APL.

APL also affects the amount of experience you may gain at the end of the adventure. If your character is three character levels or more either higher or lower than the APL this adventure is being played at, that character will receive only half of the experience points awarded for the adventure. This simulates the fact that either your character was not as challenged as normal, or relied on help by higher-level characters to reach the objectives.

Note: LIVING GREYHAWK adventures are designed for APL 2 and higher. Three or four, or sometimes even five 1st-level characters may find difficulty with the challenges in a LIVING GREYHAWK adventure. If your group is APL 1 there are three things that you can do to help even the score.

1. Attempt to create a table of six 1st-level characters, or try to enlist higher-level characters to play at that table.
2. Advise characters to buy riding dogs to help protect them and fight for them. All riding dogs are considered trained to attack. PCs who want their dogs to attack must succeed at a Handle Animal or Charisma check (DC 10). Failure indicates that the animal will not attack that round. This is a free action (spoken command) that may be attempted each round. If an animal loses half or more hp in a single round it flees, unless another check is successful.

TIME UNITS AND UPKEEP

This is a standard one-round Core adventure set in the Rushmoors. This event costs two Time Units per round. Adventurer's Standard Upkeep costs 12gp per Time Unit. Rich Upkeep costs 50gp per Time Unit. Luxury Upkeep costs 100gp per Time Unit.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Shelspring Barony in Keoland shares its northwest border with the dangerous swamp known as the Rushmoors. Although its geopolitical borders place it in the Gran March, no one truly owns the Rushmoors except the foul creatures that dwell there.

Recently, the Shelspring Barony was granted to Jharmok Redlee Neheli, cousin of Duke Cedrian Neheli of Dorlin, one of the most powerful political figures in the Kingdom of Keoland. Jharmok gained the favor of the Duke by successfully leading Darkwatch patrols along the border of the swamp, protecting the people of the region from the many foul creatures that often emerge. The Darkwatch are an order of knights sworn to protect the citizens of Keoland from undead and other threats from the Rushmoors, particularly the

necromantic threats from cultists of Vecna and their minions.

When Jharmok was given rule of the Barony, his first task was to take a wife. He chose Lobana Pross, the daughter of a wealthy landowner and merchant from Geoff. The Pross family went into hiding when the giants took the country, and they finally escaped to Keoland with most of their wealth intact. Jharmok knew Lobana as a fine woman and devout follower of Lydia; in addition, any of her male children would be in line to inherit a portion of the enormous Pross fortune.

Jharmok, Lobana, and Stoakdor Redlee Neheli—the Baron's brother and a powerful diviner—moved to Shelspring and began to set up the framework of a government. After two years touring and scouting for potential capital locations, they selected a small town near the center of the barony. They began building a keep and changed the town's name to Redlee Manor.

For the groundbreaking of the manor site in CY591, a festival was held to consecrate the ground and celebrate the occasion. An attack by an army of foul creatures from the swamp interrupted the ceremony. Jharmok's troops, along with some adventurers who had been invited to the festival, turned back the creatures. Unfortunately, in the confusion of the battle, Jharmok and Lobana's son, Pross, was snatched up.

When found, the boy was safe and sound—except his eyes had been removed. Only Stoakdor's calming counsel kept his brother from running headlong into the swamp in search the forces behind the attack. Slowly, over the next few days, more and more children throughout the Barony were attacked, suffering Pross's same fate.

Since that time, Jharmok has been nearly mad with grief and plans for revenge. Lobana and her priestesses of Lydia have been caring for the welfare of the children and the barony, and Stoakdor has been using his divinations to find out what is happening to the children, who have not aged a day in the two years since the attack.

Stoakdor has learned, through exploration and divination, that some of the eyes were placed in underground complexes buried far beneath the Rushmoors. These complexes are identical and centuries old. He has his suspicions that they are somehow related to Vecna, but he's not sure how.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Introductions 1a and 1b: A school for bards and scholars has been established at Redlee Manor. Young and talented people from all over the Flanaess are recruited by the Lydian priestesses and instructed in the fields of mathematics, music, magic, storytelling, nature lore, and history. The PCs are hired by the parents of some of these students to escort the children to Redlee Manor from either Greyhawk City or whatever far reaches of the Flanaess the PCs originate. The parents are all devout followers of Lydia, and want their children to get the very best education in the bardic arts. (The hiring can be roleplayed or summarized.)

Introduction 1c: The PCs are introduced to the young humans who they are escorting to the Lydian bardic school.

Introduction 2: If the PCs refuse to help out the Lydians in the previous introductions, they hear rumors of powerful magical relics unearthing themselves in the Rushmoors and are hired to search for them. To avoid the Gran March patrols, they are told to enter the swamp near a town called Redlee Manor in the Shelspring Barony of Keoland.

Encounter 1: On the road to Redlee Manor near the Rushmoors, flying creatures attack the PCs and the small group of children they are escorting/come upon. The monsters attempt to kill the PCs and carry away some of the children. The creatures wear enchanted metal bands that can offer some clues as to their purpose and origin.

Encounter 2: At the manor, the PCs deliver their charges and meet some of the NPCs, including Darkwatch Knight Duriel Potrilliac, Baroness Lobana and Chancellor Stoakdor Redlee Neheli. When he hears about the attack, Stoakdor asks if the PCs wish to undertake an exploratory mission on his behalf. The PCs also meet Pross Redlee Neheli, son of the Baron, whose eyes were taken. The mission entails entering the Rushmoors and exploring one of the structures somehow tied to the forces that stole the eyes. Stoakdor can supply the PCs with a rough map.

Encounter 3: The Rushmoors are inhospitable but traversable. Near the underground complex, PCs come across a lone kobold, Tajlo, alive but very injured. If rescued, he tells the PCs that he was exploring the area around the complex, which is now just a crater. A harpy (and other creatures depending on APL) attacked his group as they were scouting the area. The kobold can give the PCs some very valuable information about the site, and he can also lead the PCs to his kobold village, hidden in the swamp.

Encounter 4: At the kobold village, the PCs have some choices to make. The PCs can purchase goods and rest. They can also learn more about these kobolds, who now follow a powerful kobold who is going to lead them (and all the other kobolds of the Rushmoors) to their destiny. PCs can also learn a bit about the connection to the Land of Black Ice, Oerthmagic, and the Serpent.

Encounters 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d: At the site they were sent to investigate, the PCs find what Tajlo told them is true: the place has been decimated. Further investigation reveals several clues, monstrous vermin, and two traps. The PCs may have foreknowledge of one trap if they went to the kobold village and didn't cause trouble.

Encounter 6: After the PCs investigate the crater, the site's guardians appear. If they rescued Tajlo, the PCs

already know something about the guardians and can take precautions as necessary.

Encounter 7: The PCs can choose to return to the kobold village (or go there for the first time if they proceeded directly to the crater initially). Depending on how well the PCs have treated the kobolds, they may be offered rewards.

Conclusion: Back at Redlee Manor, the PCs can reveal what they have learned to Stoakdor. The clues are reviewed. The stakes are raised as some of the children with missing eyes begin to undergo transformations. All signs point to the eyes having been taken to an unknown location in the Land of Black Ice. (This is confirmed by something the PCs might learn at the kobold village.) The PCs are asked to make a pledge to help discover what is behind this terrible blight on the children.

Note: Some of the NPCs introduced in this adventure play an important role in the next modules, even though they may seem minor at this point. Please be sure to at least mention and describe any NPC named in the adventure that the PCs encounter, even if they seem unimportant. Also, in this adventure and this series the author is experimenting with the idea that each PC's decision impacts the encounters in future modules. To accomplish this, the AR contains questions that need to be answered for each PC. These questions replace a standard Critical Events summary. Make sure to note these questions before play begins so that they can be answered quickly at the end of the session. At the beginning of the next adventure in this series, these questions will be used to determine the adventure flow.

INTRODUCTION 1A: GREYHAWK CITY INTRODUCTION

Note: The roleplaying in this encounter is optional. If you are in a timed gaming environment and are worried about finishing in time, it is suggested that you summarize the introductions and move directly to Encounter 1.

This introduction begins in Greyhawk City.

Autumn in Greyhawk City—even the normally pungent River Quarter has the smell of having been washed by soft breezes. The city has been surprisingly peaceful for the last week.

At the docks, porters are offloading the latest shipments of weapons, gems, spell components, and other items of interest to adventurer. The chaos of merchants, teamsters, carts, caravan guards, sailors, thieves, city watch, and others is enough to make one's head swim.

A deep voice erupts over the general bustle. "Brotherhood scum! Your kind's not welcome here." A burly Olman sailor, backed by a shouting crowd, has pinned a group of red-cloaked figures against a warehouse wall. When one of the figures

attempts to move past the crowd, it is shoved forceful back against the wall. Some of the shouting crowd, wielding clubs and bottles, are moving forward, obviously about to strike the cloaked figures.

Developments: There are nine cloaked figures: three are human size, and the other six are smaller. A Spot check (DC 10) reveals that at least two of the cloaked figures are adult humans (one male and one female), pale faces framed by long, reddish-blond hair. One of smaller figures is a human child (7 years old) with Suel features. An Appraise or Profession/Craft: Tailor or similar skill check (DC 15) shows that the silken cloaks are worth at least 10 times a normal high-quality cloak.

If the PCs do nothing to interrupt this, the crowd assaults the red-robed figures, doing a bit of harm to the adults and a couple of the children before the Greyhawk watch shows up to break it up. In this case, the red-cloaked figures refuse help and limp off to the Clerkgard section of Greyhawk, where they enter a small temple to Lydia to get healing before leaving for their homes. The PCs can easily follow them. If they neither help the red-robed Lydian worshippers nor follow them, the PCs later hear a rumor in a bar or on the street that the local temple to Lydia is looking for adventurers, but the person who tells them this does not know why. They can then go to the temple of Lydia.

If the PCs choose to interrupt the assault, they have several avenues for defusing the tensions. The leader of the crowd is the Olman human named Ixoketl. He is a former slave of the Scarlet Brotherhood and completely hates his former captors. He has mistaken the red robes and Suel heritage of the worshippers of Lydia for his former masters. It is easier to intimidate or bluff him (DC 10 + APL) than it is to be diplomatic with him (DC 20 + APL) because of his hatred of the Scarlet Brotherhood. The PCs have 4 rounds after initial contact to deal with him before the violence starts. If they can otherwise neutralize Ixoketl (*charm* spells, *fascinate*, or other similar methods), the crowd disperses. Any physical assault on him by a well-armed party, or any obvious violent magical assault, also disperses the crowd. If physical or magical violence is used against the crowd or Ixoketl, the Greyhawk watch starts to take the offending PC into custody. Let them sweat it out a bit before the Lydian worshippers come forward and explain how the offending PC was defending them. If any PC is foolish enough to attack the Greyhawk City watch, the adventure is over for that PC.

If the PCs assist the Lydian worshippers, the PCs are thanked and asked to come to the Temple of Lydia in the Clerkgard district.

Adjust the boxed text below depending on whether the PCs prevented the Lydians from being assaulted, tried to help but failed, followed them back to the temple, or found out about them in some other way.

The Temple of Lydia is a small building tucked away in a dark corner of Clerkgard. The building itself is painted all the colors of the rainbow.

Inside, a young woman in colorful robes listens to the tale of what has happened in the River Quarter. With a concerned look, she instructs the red-cloaked humans to go into the back room and wait for her. She then turns her lovely face toward you, her pale blue eyes scanning you quickly.

The PCs can converse with the priestess of Lydia and learn the following information:

- The priestess thanks the PCs profusely for rescuing the members of her congregation. Her name is Juspina, and she is the high priestess at this temple.
- The red-cloaked humans are worshippers of Lydia. They were returning from a learning tour of the shores of the Nyr Dyv, studying aquatic flora and fauna. The red robes signify they were on a learning expedition. A successful Knowledge (religion) check (DC 20) confirms this to be true.
- Juspina is looking for someone to escort a group of seven students to a newly founded, Lydian-sponsored bardic school in the Barony of Shelspring in the Kingdom of Keoland. The Baroness of Shelspring sponsors the school, and one of the principal instructors is the renowned Lydian bard Karianna Dromika.
- One of the rules of the bardic school is that the students must travel via non-magical means to reach the school. This is considered part of the exposure to the world that Lydians strive for in learning.
- The students attending the school are sons and daughters of prominent citizens of the city. They are willing to pay a small fee for the escort of their children safely to the Shelspring Barony. The Temple of Lydia would also be in the debt of the PCs.
- The entourage leaves in three days. In addition to the seven children, a priestess of Lydia travels with the group. This priestess makes all the traveling arrangements: booking passage, negotiating places to stay, purchasing rations and meals, etc.
- Everything within reason is paid for on the trip: food, lodging, passage, rented mounts if needed, etc. In addition, the PCs will be paid 100 gold pieces each upon safe arrival at Redlee Manor.
- The people of Keoland are very superstitious. Even saying the name "Vecna" out loud is likely to get a person imprisoned or even killed.

Note: If any PC in the party detects as evil, the priestess does not hire the party. If a paladin or good cleric vouches for the evil-seeming PC she reluctantly changes her mind, and hires the PCs. If a PC detects as evil and no one can or will vouch for him or her, then the PCs must begin the adventure by the hook in Encounter 2.

INTRODUCTION 1B: REGIONAL INTRODUCTION

Note: The roleplaying in this encounter is optional. If you are in a timed gaming environment and are worried about finishing in time, it is suggested that you summarize this introduction and move to Encounter 1.

This introduction can be used to add a bit of roleplaying flavor to the adventure by placing the action in the home region of the PCs. This does not affect the outcome or basic structure of the adventure. It simply allows you some leeway in bringing the PCs into the adventure in a realistic way for their characters.

In the most metropolitan city of your region, a small group of Suel worshippers of Lydia have decided to send their children to a newly formed bardic school in Keoland's Shelspring Barony. A renowned bard/cleric of Lydia named Karianna Dromika has decided to settle down and instruct young Lydians in a variety of skills and knowledge.

The action of the introduction should be taken from Introduction 1a. Adjust the descriptions to match the setting of the region in which you have chosen to begin the adventure. The conflict should still involve the followers of Lydia being mistaken for some evil group, giving the PCs an opportunity to come to their aid. Create your own encounter to match the flavor of your region, using Introduction 1A as a guideline. Since no rewards are given for the encounter, it should not pose a real threat to the PCs, although they do not need to know that.

INTRODUCTION 1C: THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

Note: This introduction is actually a continuation of either Introduction 1a or 1b. If you use Introduction 1A or 1B, this encounter introduces the PCs to the young Suel humans and the priestess who are traveling to the Lydian bardic school in Keoland's Shelspring Barony.

This encounter takes place in a small temple or shrine to Lydia. Depending on the introduction you choose to employ, the temple is located either in Greyhawk City or in the largest city of the PCs' home region.

If the PCs agree to act as escorts for the Lydian students making the trek to the Shelspring Barony, Juspina is very pleased. She asks the PCs to return the following morning to meet the students and the priestess who is going to be acting as a chaperone.

When the PCs arrive the next morning, they meet the children, the parents of the children, and the priests. Ianta is the only child without parents. You can make up personalities for the parents, and if you want some roleplaying fun, have the parents "interview" the PCs, questioning their backgrounds, personal habits, hygiene, etc. Get creative: "Excuse me Mr. Barbarian. If you could

be a type of bird, what bird would you want to be?" You get the idea.

The children remain silent unless spoken to. Once the trip starts, however, their personalities start to show:

- Averinthea Hoyle – Female, age 12. A bossy know-it-all. She only speaks to correct people or tell them how to do things correctly. She does, however, know more than some sages.
- Padder Hoyle – Male, age 10. Averinthea's younger brother. Having been corrected and cowed by his sister his entire life, he is rejecting the world of knowledge. He likes to throw rocks and hit things. He is easily impressed with the fighters of the group and throws rocks at the mages and bards when they aren't looking.
- Weda Lins – Female, age 8. Weda talks nonstop. Every thought and observation that crosses her mind gets verbalized, including the most insulting ones. She even talks in her sleep.
- Verncent Welcer III – Male, age 14. A bully of the first order, he detects as evil (lawful evil) with a dim aura if anyone checks. He enjoys using his physical strength to torment and intimidate others, and if he cannot do that, he tries to blackmail them. He's not above blackmailing the PCs if he gets some information to use against them.
- Ianta – Female, age 10. The only non-Suel, she appears to be of Flan descent. She is an orphan raised by the Lydians. She only speaks when spoken to, and she is quiet and withdrawn. She is a first-level sorcerer, although she is still coming to terms with her powers.
- Zove Trilliander – Female, age 13. She is a good kid, but she tends to make up stories about herself to impress others. She has just enough knowledge so she can bluff all but an expert into believing her.
- Lyndol Sprague – Male, age 7. Very obedient and responsive to authority. He is the main victim of Verncent's bullying, although all the children suffer it. Lyndol looks to the most charismatic of the male PCs as a role model and starts to imitate him in his actions and habits.

Lydian Priestess Geraa Guyler – She is calm and efficient in her duties; however, she is not good with children and stays as far away from them as she can without neglecting her duties. In other words, the kids will try to spend a good deal of time with the PCs.

INTRODUCTION 2: ALTERNATIVE INTRODUCTION

Note: The roleplaying in this encounter is optional. If you are in a timed gaming environment and are worried about finishing in time, it is suggested that you summarize this introduction and move to the Encounter 1. This introduction is offered if the PCs refuse to accept

the first hook and do not assist the Lydians. This introduction should appeal to the more mercenary brand of PC. Do not run this introduction if the PCs have agreed to escort the children.

This introduction is offered as an alternative to the other two introductions. If the players refuse to help the Lydians, they are later walking through a city (either Greyhawk City or a regional city, as the judge chooses). Ahead of them, they see a heavily armored human gesticulating and talking to a halfling dressed in a traveler's outfit.

"I'll do a great deal for your gold, Bylareith. But I ain't going there. I know what's there, and that ain't something reasonable folk mess with." With that, the heavily armored human walks away.

The halfling frowns a bit, as if deep in thought. He holds this pose for several seconds, and then he turns and walks toward a local inn.

The PCs can follow the halfling to the inn and speak to him about his mission, or they may wish to question the human. The human is a warrior/adventurer of mixed Oeridian/Flan descent named Vriin. He can offer the following information:

- Vriin knows Bylareith is a relic collector. The little halfling often hires adventurers to go into very dangerous places looking for treasures.
- Vriin has completed several missions for Bylareith, and the collector pays well, although the missions are often the death of the adventurer who undertakes them.
- Bylareith wants Vriin to go into the Rushmoors looking for some artifacts, but Vriin spent some time in northwestern Keoland and has heard that terrible magicks are located there.
- Vriin once saw a man killed in that area of Keoland for simply saying the name "Vecna" out loud.

The halfling Bylareith goes into the closest inn and sits down with a mug of ale. If the PCs approach him, he is friendly and offers to buy them a round. The PCs can learn the following from him:

- He is a collector and broker of ancient artifacts and relics. He is currently looking for a group of seasoned adventurers to go into the Rushmoors in the Sheldomar Valley to search for some valuable items.
- According to the rumors he has heard, items long buried in the moors are now coming to the surface, possibly due to a recent earthquake in the area.
- He is willing to pay the PCs 200 gold coins each if they can locate any of the artifacts there. Specifically, he is looking for items made from blue-black stone.
- If the PCs undertake this mission, they should enter the swamp from the south. The best place

to enter seems to be a town called Redlee Manor in Keoland's Shelspring Barony. Approaching from other directions means dealing with Gran March patrols or giants in Geoff.

- If they find any of the artifacts, the PCs should return to this inn and wait for him to meet up with them.

◆ **Bylareith:** Male halfling Exp6.

If the PCs detect for evil on Bylareith, he does radiate a dim (neutral) evil. Although the PCs won't know this, the halfling is only interested in money and power, and he is willing to send people to their doom in order to get it. Bylareith is not a nice person, although he acts the part of a concerned patron in order to gain the trust of prospective adventurers.

Note: If the PCs enter the main action of the adventure via this introduction, move next to Encounter 1: Menace from Above. The PCs should come across the group of children and Geraa without guards. The PCs have time to interact with the Lydians before the flying creatures attack. Geraa and the children will then ask the PCs to escort them the rest of the way to Redlee Manor.

ENCOUNTER 1: MENACE FROM ABOVE

Note: If you have skipped the introductions to save time, please be sure to properly summarize to the PCs how they got here. Note that if any of the PCs radiate evil and cannot be vouched for by a paladin or good priest, they *must* enter the adventure through Introduction 2. Assume the PCs come across the children while traveling. Also, certain NPCs become important in later modules in the series. Even giving the PCs a little time to interact with the NPCs, particularly the children, adds to the gaming experience in this mod, as well as in the later ones in the series.

Your travels are finally nearing their end. Redlee Manor is only a day's travel away, and the last stretch lies along a well-traveled minor road skirting the edge of the Rushmoors. Geraa has called for a break so the children can study some of the swamp flora that grows here. Verncent is trying to force Lyndol into eating some particular vulgar looking mushrooms, the same kind of mushroom that Padder is throwing at the horses. His sister Averinthea is scolding him, and Weda is off to the other side of the road talking to someone—probably herself. Ianta has picked some purple flowers and is examining them, and Zove is telling you [choose one PC at random] that her great-grandfather was a famous adventurer who was the first person to meet the mushroom men of the Vast Swamp.

Ask the PCs what they are doing and where they are. All of the PCs can have rented mounts if they choose, and the children and their gear are riding on one of two wagons, pulled by two horses each. (The PCs can drive the wagons, or if they chose not to, then Geraa and one of the children can.) After they have arranged themselves,

the PCs can easily spot the creatures flying toward them from the swamp. The creatures are 400 feet away when spotted, and the creatures know exactly where the children are. If familiars, animal companions, or other airborne reconnaissance is being used, this distance is increased to 600 feet. The PCs should have a round or more to prepare based on these distances. Due to the wagon speeds, the creatures cannot be outrun, but PCs can certainly come up with other inventive ways to escape or fight. If the PCs put the children under the carts, the creatures must turn over the carts to get the children, taking the creatures two full rounds at APL 2-4, or require one full-round action at APLs 6+. This could slow down the creatures and allow PCs to fend them off. After or during the battle, Geraa can cast two *cure light wounds* spells, three *cure minor wounds* spells, and has a +7 Heal check modifier if needed to bind wounds or deal with poison.

One other item of interest: when Ianta's turn in the initiative order comes around, she moves to the closest PC (or to the PC who has been kindest to her on the trip), and she casts *protection from evil* on him. If given another round, she follows that up by casting *mage armor* on him. Note that Ianta doesn't know the details of either spell, so she may be casting it on a person with armor already, but she is just trying to help. At low APLs this might be important, however. This may startle the PC; in fact, the PC may think he is being attacked. If the PC inquires as to the girl's demeanor as she approaches with outstretched hand, give that PC a Sense Motive check (DC 10). A successful check shows the PC she has a look of concern on her face.

☛ **Ianta:** Female human (Flan) Sor1; hp 4; Spells Known (5/4; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0—[*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *mending*, *resistance*]; 1st—[*mage armor*, *protection from evil*]

Creatures: An as yet unknown force in this adventure series has sent the flying creatures. In fact, that force is currently controlling the creatures through the magic of the silver bands the creatures wear.

APL 2 (EL 4)

☛ **Hippogriffs** (2): hp 25; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 4 (EL 6)

☛ **Griffons** (2): hp 59; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 6 (EL 8)

☛ **Wyverns** (2): hp 59; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 8 (EL 10)

☛ **Advanced Wyverns** (2): hp 108; see Appendix 1.

APL 10 (EL 12)

☛ **Advanced Wyverns** (4): hp 108; see Appendix 1.

APL 12 (EL 14)

☛ **Advanced Wyverns** (8): hp 108; see Appendix 1.

Tactics: Half of the creatures at each APL attack the PCs directly, and the other half attempt to snatch up one child each. The first child targeted is Ianta, the second child Verncent, and (at APL 12) choose other children at random. The creatures trying to grab the children do not use smart tactics. They fly in a straight line to the child at full speed, taking attacks of opportunity or flying into flanked positions if that's what gets them to a child. Once they have a child, they turn and fly straight away as a double move, again taking attacks of opportunity if applicable. The other creatures stay and fight to cover the retreat.

Note: Even though the hippogriffs and griffons do not have the improved grab ability, they have been trained to grab children if they hit with a melee touch attack—trying to hit AC 10. This attack does no damage to the child, but the child is in the grasp of the beast if an opposed grapple check succeeds (child is +0 on this check). Then beast can then fly away and the child will not get any more opposed grapple checks.

Developments: If any of the children are snatched up, the creature flies at double speed deep into the Rushmoors. Any PC with the means to fly can pursue but must be able to fly at a speed at least equal to the doubled flying speed of the creature and must be able to fly for four continuous hours. If any of the PCs are able to follow the flying creatures, the creature finally gives up its escape attempt, places the child safely on the ground, turns back, and attacks the pursuing PCs. Under no circumstances do the creatures take the children back to their destination if there is any chance the location can be learned. And under no circumstances does the creature harm a child.

If the PCs are unable to pursue the fleeing creature and the captured child, they may try to scry or use other divinations to learn that the child is alive and being taken deep into the swamp. After four hours, however, divinations fail, as the area where the child is taken blocks any divining attempts. The stolen children reappear at the end of the adventure if they are lost.

Treasure: Any of the slain creatures can be searched, and each of them is wearing a silver band bolted around a leg. Casting *detect magic* on the band can reveal strong divination and enchantment magic. Essentially, these bands allow the person who created the bands to see through the eyes of the creature, as well as plant suggestions in their minds. After 10 hours, however, the magic of the bands fade, leaving a plain silver band worth a small amount of gold.

Treasure: The bands of made of silver. Although the magic fades after a few hours, the silver of the bands is still somewhat valuable and Stoakdor buys any or all bands the PCs retrieve.

All APLs – L: 0 gp; C: 100 gp; M: 0 gp

ENCOUNTER 2: REDLEE MANOR

Note: This encounter plays out very differently depending on whether any of the children are snatched away or not. The read-aloud text and demeanor of the NPCs presented below assume all the children made it safely. If any children were taken or somehow killed, the NPCs act much more fretful, terrified, angry, or sad.

Redlee Manor is a very small town, but foundations and frames for more buildings surround a completed interior village. Sitting atop a hill to the east of the village is an impressive keep. From the size and construction, it looks as though it could easily hold the entire population of the town four times over and withstand a siege for weeks if necessary.

The Lydian bardic school is located within the keep itself. The entourage is welcomed into the keep's courtyard by the guards stationed at the front gates. The guards all wear heavy armor and shields emblazoned with a unique coat of arms: a pair of owl wings flanking an upright longsword. A Knowledge (History, Nobility, or Local) or Bardic Knowledge check (DC 15) reveals this is the coat of arms of the Knights of the Malagari, known to the general populace as the Darkwatch.

Within the keep, most of the people are either connected to the Darkwatch (dressed in dark colors) or they are female followers of Lydia (wearing brightly colored robes and clothing, even multicolored garb in some instances). Many of these females also wear a holy symbol: a fist grasping a rainbow-colored shaft of light. A Knowledge: Religion check (DC 15) reveals that this is very similar to the holy symbol of Lydia, but it is altered slightly: the normal holy symbol of Lydia has a multi-colored shaft of light spraying forth from an opened palm.

Guards escort the entourage to the front of the manor house. A woman emerges from the manor house entrance and approaches the entourage, embracing Geraa as they trade some hushed words. A look of worry crosses her face, but then she smiles and turns to the children, welcoming them to Redlee Manor.

Geraa and the children enter the building, and the woman walks to your party. She wears one of the holy symbols that are omnipresent around Redlee Manor. She is not attractive, but neither is she unpleasant. She has a kind, pale face framed by red hair, as well as a stout, sturdy frame.

"I am Baroness Lobana. On behalf of my husband, Baron Jharmok Redlee Neheli, I welcome you to Redlee Manor, and I thank you for all you have done for Geraa and the children. [If any of the children were taken, she mentions that the PCs should not blame themselves.] Please make yourselves at home here, and you are welcome to rest and prepare for your journey if you are leaving tomorrow. I'm sure the Chancellor will have some questions for you about this terrible attack. I have sent for someone to escort you into the keep, where you will find refreshments and peace until the Chancellor is free to speak with you. May Lydia bless you for your bravery."

If the PCs have gotten all the children safely to Redlee Manor, they receive the Blessing of the Church of Lydia (see AR for details). The blessing can't be used until the adventure has concluded. If any children were taken and not recovered alive, PCs do not receive the blessing.

Lobana waits to see if the PCs have any questions, then she leaves. Any questions about the attacks she leaves for Stoakdor to answer. Then she excuses herself. A few minutes later, a dark-haired man, scarred and heavily muscled, approaches them from inside the keep. He introduces himself as Duriel Potrilliac, a Darkwatch knight in service of the Baron. He has been asked by the Baroness to escort the PCs into the keep.

The interior of the keep is functional and well built but not ornate. Duriel leads the PCs through the keep and past a variety of activities: Darkwatch meetings, prayer vigils to Lydia, children being instructed in history and music, food preparation, etc. Finally, the PCs are shown into a two-room suite. Each room contains two cots; a table with four plain but sturdy chairs; bread, cheese, fruit, and drinking water on the table; a basin containing warm water; and pegs to hang clothing. The PCs have 20 minutes to eat and freshen up before a knock on the door announces the arrival of Chancellor Stoakdor Redlee Neheli, who asks permission to enter.

A middle-aged man in plain gray robes smiles at each of you as he enters the room, but the smile cannot hide obvious tension and hours of lost sleep. The man is certainly pure Suel: his long reddish hair is tied back into a loose ponytail and his pale skin hasn't seen the sun for many months.

When he speaks, his voice is neither soft nor harsh. He simply sounds tired. "Good day to you. I am Stoakdor Redlee Neheli, brother of the Baron and Chancellor of the Shelspring. Lobana has told me of your travels along the swamp and the attack that occurred there. Would you be so kind as to recount the attack for me?"

Stoakdor listens intently, asking questions if the PCs leave anything out. If the PCs fail to mention or show him the silver bands that the creatures were wearing, he asks specifically if the creatures were wearing anything unusual. He has seen creatures from the swamp before wearing similar pieces of precious metal or jewelry. After Stoakdor has questioned the PCs, he allows them to ask him questions in return, but not before he has questioned them completely.

When the PCs start to question Stoakdor, there is another knock on the door, this one barely audible. A soft, cautious voice says, "Uncle? Uncle, are you there?"

Stoakdor asks the person to enter. In walks a young human boy, probably 5 years of age. His eyelids are closed and sunken as if no eyes rest behind them. Behind him is a priestess of Lydia, silent but watchful.

Stoakdor smiles another weary smile and says, "Pross, I am here. Sit with me while I talk to these brave adventurers. We will attend to your lessons when I am finished." He dismisses the priestess with a nod.

The PCs can ask questions and learn the following bits of information from Stoakdor. (Also feel free to review DM Notes 1 in Appendix 2 for more information on the Shelspring Barony that is not relevant to this adventure, but may be of interest to players who value history.)

- Over a year ago, during a festival to celebrate the groundbreaking of the keep, creatures from the swamp attacked. Kobolds, crocodiles, and other creatures are a constant nuisance, but these creatures were much more loathsome: undead, magical beasts, aberrations, and the like.
- The creatures were defeated and chased away; however, they were able to snatch up some children, including Pross. (Pross sits quietly and does not betray any emotions when he hears this.)
- The children were all recovered, but their eyes had been removed and taken. (Pross nods his head.)
- Over the next few weeks, children from throughout the Shelspring disappeared and received the same horrible treatment. They were all brought to the keep to be cared for by the priests of Lydia. [There are 39 children in all.]
- Stoakdor used divination magic in an attempt to figure out what had happened. At first, all his efforts were for naught. Finally, he was able to scry into a place where one set of eyes had been taken. It was some sort of underground complex, ancient and highly magical. Over the next few months, Stoakdor was able to ascertain the location of several of these chambers, identical right down to the patterns of the stones that made the chambers.
- Stoakdor employed several groups of adventurers and Darkwatch units to attempt to infiltrate these chambers. Most perished, the rest returned unsuccessfully, but one group was able to reclaim the eyes of a young girl.
- He worked with the young girl and the priestesses of Lydia to restore her sight and examine possible motives for the theft of the eyes. He believes that the eyes were, and still are, being used in some sort of ritual to siphon the life force from the children and use it for some foul purpose. The girl's sight was returned and she appears to be healthy and normal.
- None of the children whose eyes were stolen have aged since their eyes were taken. Pross is seven years old, although he appears to be five. Not even their hair or fingernails have grown. Pross holds up his hands so the PCs can see.
- Since the area is the former domain of the Whispered One (he will not say Vecna) and ancient Flan writings were found in these underground complexes, Stoakdor believes this whole ordeal may be something to do with that foul power.
- Although the Baron wishes to send his Darkwatch troops into the Rushmoors, political tensions between Keoland and the Gran March do

not allow this. The Gran March technically owns the Rushmoors, so Gran March troops can go into the place to deal with threats. They never patrol the border with Keoland, however. This means that evil can fester there, invading Keoland at will, while Keoland cannot strike back with equal force.

If Pross is questioned, he bravely answers to the best of his ability. Stoakdor allows him to be questioned briefly, but he doesn't let it go on too long, and he doesn't allow the PCs to be disrespectful or mean to the boy. Pross can relay the following information:

- He remembers he was having fun at the groundbreaking festival, but then fog covered everything. He heard his mother calling to him, and he moved toward her voice. When he thought he had found her, a horrible creature that looked like a bird and a woman (a harpy) grabbed him.
- After that, he only remembers hearing people calling for him in the fog, but he couldn't see. A voice kept whispering repeatedly in his head: "You should be honored to feed the Serpent." The other children all heard the same voice saying the same thing, and they still do occasionally have bad dreams and hear voices saying things about The Serpent.

After the conversation has ended, Stoakdor makes an offer to the PCs. He is getting strong responses to divinations he has been doing on one of these underground chambers. He hopes the PCs will travel into the Rushmoors to this location, map it, and see if they can recover another set of eyes.

Stoakdor can supply the PCs with a rough map of the area (see Player Handout 1). He cannot offer any gold for the successful completion of the mission. However, both the Lydians and the Redlee Neheli family are indebted to friends they can count on. If the PCs talk about teleporting into the swamp, Stoakdor warns them that this is dangerous. Magic doesn't always work as normal within the swamp, and the swamp is forever changing even its physicality.

Treasure: For performing the task of escorting the children to Redlee Manor, the PCs are given 100 gp each by Lobana, as promised. If the PCs got into the adventure through Introduction 2, then they do not receive this money, although they still receive the Blessing of the Church of Lydia if they saved the children in Encounter 1.

All APLs – C: 100 gp (only if the PCs entered the mod through Introduction 1A or 1B)

ENCOUNTER 3: TAJLO

Note: At higher APLs, the PCs may have a variety of ways to get directly to the site without actually walking through the swamp. If they are able to do so and they ignore Stoakdor's warning, let them. If they do something such as *teleport*, then they simply miss this encounter on the way there (and miss the information Tajlo can give them, as well as all the access to the kobold

village), but they can still find him after they explore the crater. If they fly or use similar magic, they can still spot Tajlo from their vantage in the sky. If they find other innovative ways to move through the swamp, use your best judgment to decide whether or not they would see Tajlo.

The Rushmoors are inhospitable but traversable without the need for a watercraft if the PCs follow the map that Stoakdor gives them. At Stoakdor's behest, Duriel gives them the supplies they need to travel safely, as well as some rations and clean water. Horses and other land-based mounts, however, do not fare well in the muck. The PCs are told this as they prepare to enter the swamp. If anyone still attempts to take a land-based mount into the swamp without protection, have Duriel warn that PC again. He tells them that even the specially trained Darkwatch cavaliers are not skilled enough to take horses into the Rushmoors. Being taken into the swamp has destroyed many a good mount. If anyone is still foolish enough to take a mount into the swamp, the mount breaks a leg within the first hour of the journey. If it is a certed mount that walks on the ground, the PC loses it (unless special healing spells of 5th level or higher—*regeneration*, *heal*, and so on—are cast on it within an hour of the accident). If it is a paladin's bonded mount or a cohort, the paladin can make arrangements to get it back to Redlee Manor, where the mount can rest and recover.

The PCs see a variety of flora and fauna as they progress through the Rushmoors: the only real threat that the PCs see are crocodiles. These creatures do not attack, however, unless the PCs go out searching for trouble. The crocodiles are simply traveling in the distance. If the PCs do go out into the swamp and attack the crocs, use the stats for crocs or giant crocs from the *Monster Manual*.

To get to the spot where Stoakdor wants them to investigate, the PCs must travel for 28 hours if they walk (40 miles into the swamp). This takes into account some spots of very slow passage through some swampland with deep mud.

When the PCs are only two hours from the site, they come across the following scene:

Ahead of you, sticking up out of the ground is a small mud-covered rock formation. After a moment, this formation moves slightly, letting out a high-pitched moan, and then slumps back down into the mud.

If the PCs approach, read them this description:

On the ground is a small form, even smaller than a gnome. The creature has a dog-like face, and two small horns protrude from its forehead. Several cuts are obvious on the creature's face and torso, although the mud has apparently stopped the bleeding. The creature is breathing, but its eyes are closed.

The creature is a kobold named Tajlo. A successful Heal check (DC 10) reveals talons have made his wounds. He is an unusual little fellow, the member of a local kobold

tribe called the Tallbane. He is actually a paladin dedicated to the protection of his tribe, although he doesn't have a true understanding of his powers or where they come from. He is serious, speaking frequently of duty and honor and obligation to protect his tribe from evil that plagues it. PCs should get the idea that Tajlo is not a typical kobold. More about him and his relationship to the Tallbane tribe is detailed in the next encounter.

☛ **Tajlo:** Male kobold Pal2.

At the time the PCs find Tajlo, he is stable but unconscious at -1 hp. Any healing at all brings him back to consciousness. When healed, Tajlo opens his eyes but remains calm and makes no sudden moves. He first detects evil on the PCs. If any of them radiate evil, he attempts to converse with those PCs first specifically to get an idea of who they are. If none of the PCs detect as evil, Tajlo relaxes and thanks the PCs for saving him. Once he knows that most of the PCs are not evil, he is forthcoming with his information.

Tajlo first speaks in the high-pitched, yapping Draconic of kobolds. If no PCs speak Draconic, Tajlo can also speak in rudimentary Common. Although his voice is that of a kobold, his manner is not: he is calm, serene, honorable, and helpful.

- His name is Tajlo and he belongs to a tribe of kobolds called the Tallbane who live in the southeastern portion of the Rushmoors.
- There are many kobold tribes that lair in the Rushmoors. For several years, the tribes warred with one another over the resources. Then, approximately 15 years ago, a powerful kobold appeared, killed the chieftain, claimed rulership, placed a lieutenant in charge, and left. Before leaving, he decreed that the kobold tribes would no longer fight one another, instead turning their attentions to attacking the surrounding areas inhabited by other humanoids. He did the same with many of the other tribes.
- The kobold leader who took control of the tribe goes by the name Yolopo. He returns to the tribe a couple times each year, bringing humanoid slaves and strange blue-black artifacts. These artifacts are worshiped as divine gifts.
- The kobold young, before reaching adulthood, are required to spend several weeks meditating in an enclosed chamber with an artifact. Also, some kobold eggs are placed around these artifacts before they hatch. The kobolds that hatch from these eggs are growing to be more powerful, intelligent, and vital than regular kobolds.
- Yolopo often takes the strongest kobolds from the tribe with him to serve him and perform special tasks. These kobolds never return. This is considered a great honor.
- Very recently, within the last two years, Yolopo has ordered the kobold tribes of the Rushmoors to cease attacking other humanoids. Instead, he has ordered them to search the swamp within their tribal borders for special underground chambers.

- Since the kobolds began their searches, they have been warring with all manner of magical beasts.
- Evil humans wearing symbols of a hand clutching an eye recently (a week ago) attacked Tajlo's tribe. Swamp creatures assisted these humans—the creatures seemed to be controlled by the humans through some magic. Many kobold warriors were killed in the attack, as were some of the humans, but the attack was finally repelled.
- Tajlo, with a group of kobold rangers, was investigating one of these underground chambers yesterday when they were attacked by [creatures based on APL—see Encounter Six]. The kobolds were all killed except for Tajlo, who was able to crawl away unnoticed. (The characters can learn that a harpy was one of the creatures, that she cast spells at higher APLs, etc. This helps PCs prepare for the battle if they are diplomatic enough to get Tajlo to speak to them.)
- The complex was destroyed by something powerful before they arrived, probably an earthquake: it was nothing more than a rubble-filled crater, although there were some intact structures within the crater.
- If the PCs vow that they are enemies of the kobolds' enemies, Tajlo can lead them to the hidden village of his tribe where they can rest and learn more about the underground complexes. Tajlo knows of a kobold that once entered one of them.

Note: How the PCs treat Tajlo has an enormous impact on the future events in this series. If they treat him poorly (or don't save him at all), they lose a potential ally down the road. If they treat him with kindness and respect, he is an asset in later adventures. The best-case scenario would be a priest or paladin PC working to convert Tajlo to their cause. Tajlo is a paladin looking for a god (although he doesn't know this), and he will be very receptive to a deity that embodies Law, Good, and/or Protection.

ENCOUNTER 4: KOBOLD DESTINY

Note: The PCs are not able to find this village without the help of Tajlo. If they ignore him, kill him, or alienate him, he won't bring them here. Evil and non-evil inhabitants comprise the kobold village equally. There are even a handful of good-aligned kobolds. In fact, the village is currently home to mostly non-combatant females and children. The tribal leader, Vogg, is lawful evil, however. How the PCs treat the village leader and the kobold village as a whole has an impact on later encounters in this adventure, as well as encounters in later modules in the series.

If the PCs choose to go with Tajlo back to his village, he leads them through dense swampland. He is careful to

warn the PCs to step exactly where he steps, as the kobolds have placed all manner of deadly traps around their village. If PC rogues make a Search check (DC 25) (if they say they are actively searching as they move), they see at least a dozen traps, ranging from pits to snares to poisoned daggers rigged to bent saplings. A Survival (DC 20) or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 15) alerts a PC that some nearby plants are not native to the region: there are edible plants being cultivated while other poisonous ones are placed here to discourage predators.

Once the PCs arrive at the village, read the following:

The village is little more than several holes in the ground, in addition to a few domesticated animals held in a pen. Closer examination shows more signs of habitation: kobold tracks, places for cooking fires, tools for farming and building, weapons, and pottery. After a few moments pass, kobold heads pop out of the holes. A larger kobold, wielding daggers in each hand, comes out of one of the larger holes, shouting in anger.

This kobold is Vogg, the leader of this village and lieutenant of Yolopo. He is very upset that Tajlo has brought these humans back to the village. He and Tajlo have a heated discussion in Draconic, with Vogg calling Tajlo a fool, and Tajlo replying that the PCs saved his life and are also enemies of the humans who attacked the village. The argument goes back and forth for a few seconds—Tajlo explains that his scouting party was ambushed and destroyed at the underground complex. While playing out this scene, be aware that Vogg does not like or trust Tajlo. He calls Tajlo many disparaging kobold names, roughly translating to the likes of “Tall-lover,” “nice guy,” and “he who is not devious enough.” Finally Vogg addresses the party directly in halted, yapping Common:

“You stay here, but you stay away from Vogg. You stay with silly fool Tajlo. If you look at magic place that we and pathetic humans both search for, then you come back and you tell what you see, you make Vogg happy.”

Note: The PCs are allowed to stay in the village as the guests of Tajlo. This should be portrayed as a tense and awkward situation. Vogg would just as soon kill the PCs as not, but he doesn't have the resources to do so. Tajlo is treated with a mixture of respect and derision by the other kobolds: they think he is a fool for his beliefs, but they rely on him too much as a protector to mock him openly. Tajlo stays with the PCs at all times unless the PCs do something to distract the kobold. If they do anything to disturb the kobolds, such as attack, steal, destroy eggs, and so forth, Tajlo orders them to leave the village. He does this with great sadness; however, as he likes the PCs and realizes they saved his life. If the PCs do attack, the kobolds flee, since most of their warriors were decimated in the attack by the Vecna cultists.

The PCs have a variety of actions they can take in the Tallbane kobold village:

- Talk to the village shaman, Wubik: Before the coming of Yolopo and his lieutenant Vogg, the

former tribal leader listened to the advice of the village shaman, a cleric of Kurtulmak named Wubik. His influence in the village was lost when Yolopo took over. Now the cleric is old, bitter, and suffering from a blinding disease. He spends most of his time sulking in his underground home, rebuking the kobolds for placing their trust in Vogg and his master. He is highly unpleasant even to the people he likes, and he doesn't like the PCs at all. Vogg and the rest of the kobolds essentially ignore the old kobold, waiting for him to die. They don't mistreat him blatantly because they don't want to offend their god.

Play Wubik as the proverbial angry old kobold. Everything is going to Hades in a hand basket according to Wubik: the youth have no respect anymore, the swamp smells worse than it used to, kobolds used to have to walk uphill both ways to raid human settlements, and they were thankful.

In order to get Wubik to give any useful information, the PCs have to use Diplomacy [DC 20 + (APL x 2)] or cure Wubik of his blindness. This can be done with an appropriate spell (*remove blindness*, *remove disease*, *heal*, etc.) or with a Heal check [DC 20 + APL]. The former helps him instantly, while the latter takes 24 hours, so the PCs must come back if they want to hear what he has to say. This is what Wubik can tell the PCs:

--Yolopo and Vogg are not from any tribe near the Rushmoors nor are the kobolds whom they have brought in over the years to act as warriors and improve the "breeding stock" of the tribe.

--The old ways of the Tallbane tribe were the ways of divine power and teachings of Kurtulmak. The new leader and his followers rely on arcane magic. This is magic of a variety Wubik has never seen—more potent than anything he has experience in his long kobold life. This magic springs from a source as old as the land itself. The tribe once had a captured human slave who used a strange phrase to describe this magic: *ur-Flan* or *Oerthmagic*.

--The current members of the Tallbane tribe worship certain magical artifacts more than their god. They risk angering Kurtulmak by doing this, yet they do so anyway.

B. Purchase items: The kobolds have come across and/or made a few items that they cannot use, don't want, or need the gold for. (Yolopo makes them pay a gold tribute to him, although the PCs have no way to know this.) One of the kobolds, Ujilo, is the keeper of the items, and she offers the PCs the chance to buy these items. Play her as a very possessive keeper who is only parting with her "treasures" because Vogg told her she must. Note that the PCs can only buy these while at the kobold village and while in good standing there. If they attack the village, or if they wait until the end of the adventure when they are back at Redlee Manor, then they cannot buy the items. If the PCs attack the kobold village, the items remain hidden and cannot be found. The items are

Bracers of Armor +2, 6 Potions of Neutralize Poison, Wand of Burning Hands, +2 Leather Armor, and a +1 Sling of Distance (see AR for more details on these items).

C. Talk to the bugbear slaves: Yolopo occasionally brings with him slaves that the kobolds use for labor and, in desperate times, food. These two particular slaves come from the Land of Black Ice. The bugbears have a blackish-blue skin color, coming from a legendary tribe in the northern reaches. A successful Bardic Knowledge (DC 25) or Knowledge: Geography (DC 20) check reveals the origin of the two bugbears. The bugbears speak only Goblin.

The bugbears can tell the players a bit of information about their home and the war between the bugbears and the kobolds there. They only give this information if the PCs promise to free them. This can be done in several ways:

Pick the lock on manacles: Open Locks (DC 20)

Break manacles: break (DC 26), hardness 10, hp 10

Steal key from the keeper: Sleight of Hand (DC 20)

The slavekeeper is a kobold named Hugog. He is one of the few of Yolopo's warriors who survived the attack of the Vecna cultist. He is openly hostile to the PCs and Tajlo throughout the adventure, even if they become heroes to the kobolds. The PCs should be able to assist the bugbears without being caught if they are not blatant about it. If the PCs are caught trying to pick Hugog's pocket of the key or assisting the bugbears in escaping, however, they are considered enemies of the kobolds and get no more help from them. They are kicked out of the village and not allowed to return without a fight. Tajlo does not attack them in this case, but neither does he help them anymore.

The bugbears can tell the PCs the following info:

- They are from a land of frozen ice far to the north. The bugbears survive by hunting the animals that forage on the terribly sparse vegetation of the land. The main enemies of the bugbears used to be the ice trolls. However, kobolds recently have come out of the forest [the Burneal Forest] to the south of the bugbears' lands and attacked the bugbears. Not only are these kobolds numerous, they are much more powerful than the standard kobolds the bugbears are used to.

D. Talk to the kobold who explored an underground chamber: Tajlo can take the PCs to meet the only kobold to date that has found an underground complex, explored it, and survived. Tajlo warns the PCs that this kobold, Lruit, hasn't quite been the same since he returned. He won't elaborate.

Entering the underground room where Lruit stays, the PCs see that the room is completely dark. If they bring any light into the room, Lruit hisses at them and tell the PCs to dim the light. Lruit himself

is a sickly, pale kobold, looking like not much more than a corpse. A Heal check reveals nothing, since his condition was caused by magic. A Knowledge: Arcana check (DC 22) reveals that necromantic magic was certainly involved in his condition. Lruit's mental condition has deteriorated as well. Nothing apart from a *wish* or *miracle* can help him now. Although mostly insane from the magic that assaulted him in the complex, Lruit can tell the PCs a few things if they deal with him gently and diplomatically:

- The Serpent is the one who crippled him. (He cannot elaborate on who or what the Serpent is, because he only hears the word in his mind.)
- The underground complex he investigated contained many corpses, and some of them were moving. He also saw a blue-black pedestal in one of the rooms, and on the pedestal was a pair of eyes. (This is not the same complex the PCs have been sent to investigate, but all of them appear to be identical.)
- All of the rooms contained strange writing carved into the wall. He couldn't read the writing, but he thinks the writing must have had magical power. After just a few minutes in the complex, he felt weakened.
- He barely escaped several traps, and one in particular killed all his fellow explorers. A bolt of lightning streaked down a passage when one of his peers entered a chamber at the end of a long hallway.

E. Look at remnants of the attack on the village: Cultists of Vecna, trying to gain access to the artifact held by this tribe, attacked the village a few days ago. Several kobold warriors fell to the combined forces of the cultists and some swamp creatures that the cultists were controlling using the same magical bands that the PCs found on the creatures that attacked while escorting the young Lydians. The kobolds were able to repel the invaders in the end, killing several of the attackers. If the PCs inquire about the attack, Tajlo offers to let them see some of the things gathered after the attack:

- The corpses of the Vecna cultists and their enthralled creatures (two wyverns and three hippogriffs) are being kept so that the kobolds can show them to Yolopo when he returns (no one knows when this will be).
- Casting *Speak with Dead* on any of the Vecna worshippers reveals a few vague but helpful details: the cultists are from all over Oerth, brought here by their leader to search for "scales of the Serpent" and draw power

from the "holy sites of the Whispered One." These men have never seen their leader, as he is always obscured by mist when in their presence.

- The enchanted bands have been left on the creatures. They are identical in appearance and enchantment to the ones found on the creatures in Encounter 1. There are five of them, but the kobolds will not part with them.
- Casting divinations or scrying on any of the dead creatures or the bands won't reveal anything important.

F. The artifact: If the PCs ask to see the artifact, Tajlo tells them that he can show them, but they must *not* touch it. Bad things happen to anyone or anything that touches the artifact. He warns them repeatedly and vociferously about this.

Once the PCs promise not to touch the artifact, Tajlo leads them into a large circular underground chamber. At the present time, there are 16 kobold eggs in the chamber absorbing the power of the artifact. If the PCs do anything to disturb or destroy the eggs, they are considered enemies of the kobolds.

The artifact is made of a deep blue-black substance that the PCs do not recognize. This particular piece is a long, thin cylindrical shard—three feet tall and two inches in diameter. It does not detect as evil. Anyone casting *detect magic* or other divination-type magic on it must make a Will save (DC 25) or be knocked unconscious for 2d20 minutes. Even if the save is successful, no information can be gleaned about it. Any spells cast on the artifact fail as if absorbed by it.

Touching the artifact requires a Fort save (DC 20 + APL). For every round that a PC touches the artifact, she must make another save. Those who fail the save become a Thrall of the Serpent. This has no obvious immediate effects, but mark on the AR that this character is a Thrall of the Serpent.

Under no circumstances can the artifact be moved, touched, enspelled, or affected in any way. Not even magic as powerful as *wish* or *miracle* can affect this artifact.

G. Get some rest: If the PCs need rest, Tajlo offers to guard them while they rest in his barracks. They are safe if they accept his offer.

After the PCs have had a chance to interact with the kobolds and do whatever they want to do in the village, Vogg returns to them with a proposal:

Vogg think you help can Vogg, and Vogg help you. You go to the place where humans search, and you search. You look for black-blue magic thing, like our magic gift. You tell Vogg what you see, and Vogg let you spend time with magic gift. You become very strong and smart.

If the PCs don't come to the village until after they search the crater, Vogg makes the same offer: they can absorb the power of the artifact if they give him information on what they found in the crater. See Encounter Seven and the AR for details on absorbing the artifact's power.

ENCOUNTER 5: SWAMP CRATER

Note: There are four distinct sub-encounters within this encounter: each is tied to a particular location within the crater. See the Crater Map in Appendix 3 for details. Note that the images on the map are not to scale. They simply represent where the areas of interest are located.]

The crater itself is a rough oval (200 feet wide and 600 feet long), approximately 100 feet deep, with a ledge 50 feet deep located in the northwest portion of the crater. Anyone with Knowledge (engineering) can make a (DC 15) check. A successful check reveals that a combination of explosions plus an earthquake created this crater. *Detect magic* reveals overwhelming evocation magic. Looking into the crater reveals that this area used to hold an underground complex with several levels. Stonework, once probably well crafted but now in ruins, lies in piles at the bottom of the crater.

At APLs 2-6, the crater's collapse left evenly spaced shifts and ridges in the sides so that it is easy to walk down without having to make a Climb check. At APLs 8+, the walls of the crater are sheer, so that a (DC 20) Climb check (or other means) is necessary to move into and out of the crater.

Sub-Encounter A – The Ledge

The ledge is located in the northwest section on the crater (drawn with a pink line on the map). On the ledge, the PCs see large boulders that have obviously arranged in a wedge shape against the crater wall (with the thick end of the wedge against the cliff wall). The boulders are arranged this way as part of a trap, and beneath them is treasure.

Trap: The boulders are arranged so that they appear stable to the untrained eye, but once anyone starts to move them, they cascade down and crush anyone standing in front of them—this effects the squares in front of the blocks only. A successful Search check (or a Knowledge [engineering] check can be substituted) locates the trap and shows several ways to avoid the trap: a successful Disable Device check, springing the trap with no one standing in front of the boulders, and other more ingenious solutions are possible.

PL 2 and 4 (EL 3)

✦ **Crushing Boulder Trap:** CR 3; mechanical; touch trigger; DC 15 Reflex save avoids (3d6); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20).

APL 6 and 8 (EL 4)

✦ **Crushing Boulder Trap:** CR 4; mechanical; touch trigger; DC 18 Reflex save avoids (4d6); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20).

APL 10 and 12 (EL 5)

✦ **Crushing Boulder Trap:** CR 5; mechanical; touch trigger; DC 21 Reflex save avoids (5d6); Search (DC 22); Disable Device (DC 25).

Treasure: Buried carefully beneath the boulders is a canvas tarp. Wrapped in the tarp is a circular stone slab, about 2 feet in diameter and weighing 80 pounds. Etched into the top of the slab is a carving showing ten daggers in a circular pattern, blades facing outward like the petals of a flower. The stone is the same blue-black substance of the artifact at the kobold village. Touching the slab causes no ill effects, but the stone does radiate faint evil and necromantic magic if detected for. No checks can tell the PCs what the symbol carved into the slab represents.

Sub-Encounter B – The Bodies

At the bottom of the southern end of the crater lie four armor-clad bodies. The centipedes hiding in the walls of the crater have chewed on the bodies; however, much of this damage has been hidden by the armor. Ten rounds after the first PC gets within 20 feet of the bodies, the centipedes emerge from large cracks and fissures in the south wall of the crater to attack. A Listen check (DC 5 + 1 per 5 feet from the south wall) gives away the centipedes' approach 3 rounds before they actually arrive.

Creatures: Monstrous centipedes lived very near the complex when it was still intact. The explosions and the earthquake that destroyed the complex disturbed their lair, allowing them to move into the crater and attack the Vecna cultists who were searching there.

APL 2 (EL 3)

✦ **Medium Monstrous Centipedes** (4): hp 4; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 4 (EL 4)

✦ **Large Monstrous Centipedes** (4): hp 13; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 6 (EL 6)

✦ **Large Monstrous Centipedes** (6): hp 13; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 8 (EL 8)

✦ **Huge Monstrous Centipedes** (7): hp 33; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 10 (EL 10)

✦ **Gargantuan Monstrous Centipedes** (4): hp 66; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 12 (EL 12)

➤ **Colossal Monstrous Centipedes** (4): hp 132; see *Monster Manual*.

Tactics: The centipedes are simply very hungry, and they have no intelligent tactics to speak of, except attack the closest thing. At APLs 10 and 12, the centipedes keep attacking a character that is down, because it knows instinctively that its poison incapacitates but doesn't kill. Even if the PCs are invisible, hiding, or sneaking, the centipedes still show up even if they don't know the PCs are there—they are hungry.

Treasure: The armor and weapons on the bodies have been damaged beyond repair. There is no treasure on the bodies at APL 8+. At APL 2-6 the dead bodies carry a small fortune in diamonds.

APL 2: L: 0 gp; C: 300 gp; M: 0 gp

APL 4: L: 0 gp; C: 400 gp; M: 0 gp

APL 6: L: 0 gp; C: 500 gp; M: 0 gp

Sub-Encounter C – The Chamber Entrance

In the northeast section of the crater, a partially intact chamber stands. The entrance to hallway that apparently leads into this chamber is peeking out from beneath some rubble. The passage slopes downward beneath the crater at a slight angle. The passage is 110 feet long from the opening to where it meets the intact chamber.

Ancient Flan writing carved into the walls on either side of the passageway leads to the chamber. The writing is identical on each side of the passage, and anyone reading the entire text must walk up the passage to do so, ending at the entrance to the chamber:

THE SERPENT winds through all things, into death and out of life. Those who ride THE SERPENT control death and life. THE SERPENT rewards those who find focus in its worship. Never will THE SERPENT be destroyed, and never will the disciples of THE SERPENT be destroyed. THE SERPENT thirsts for the lifeblood of others. Those who harvest it will gain the favor of THE SERPENT. THE SERPENT provides majesty and fell power to those who dedicate their souls. Behold the glory bestowed on THE SERPENT'S minion.

Trap: Both sets of writing stop at a symbol above the door into the chamber. The symbol is a trap that affects anyone stepping within 15 feet of the entry and doesn't say "I beg the Serpent's leave for passage." A 5-foot wide lightning bolt shoots out of the symbol and zips up the hallway 80 feet before ending. The trap resets itself after one hour.

APL 2 (EL 3)

⚡ **Lightning Bolt Trap:** CR 3; magic; proximity trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*lightning bolt*, fifth-level wizard, 3d6 electricity, DC 14 Reflex half damage; Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20).

APL 4 and 6 (EL 4)

⚡ **Lightning Bolt Trap:** CR 4; magic; proximity trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*lightning bolt*, fifth-level

wizard, 5d6 electricity, DC 16 Reflex half damage; Search (DC 24); Disable Device (DC 24).

APL 8 and 10 (EL 5)

⚡ **Lightning Bolt Trap:** CR 5; magic; proximity trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*lightning bolt*, seventh-level wizard, 7d6 electricity, DC 18 Reflex half damage; Search (DC 28); Disable Device (DC 28).

APL 12 (EL 6)

⚡ **Lightning Bolt Trap:** CR 6; magic; proximity trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*lightning bolt*, tenth-level wizard, 10d6 electricity, DC 20 Reflex half damage; Search (DC 28); Disable Device (DC 28).

Sub-Encounter D – The Partially Intact Chamber

Note: Normally, simply being in this room would result in possible level draining from the PCs. However, the destruction of the complex weakened the magic guarding this chamber. Casting *detect magic* in the chamber shows a very faint necromancy aura, and the doorway portal shows faint transmutation.

There is no door to the chamber from the passage, only a doorway arch. The chamber itself is 40 foot square. A bit of the stonework has started to collapse. The passage comes into chamber from the west wall, and on the east wall is another doorway, although it is filled in with solid black stone. Ancient Flan writing adorns the edges of the far doorway:

The SERPENT's power resides in all of Oerth. The black cold of the north ripples with the SERPENT's Oerthmagic.

This doorway used to be a gate that linked this place to a similar underground complex in the Land of Black Ice. The earthquake and explosions damaged the doorway, and the gate no longer works, nor can it be made to work.

ENCOUNTER 6: THE CRATER GUARDIANS

Note: The guardians of the crater are magically linked to the underground complex and now the crater. As soon as any PC comes within 100 feet of the crater, the guardians are alerted. Since the guardians have set up a secret hideaway a half-mile from the crater itself, the PCs get the chance to completely explore the crater. As the PCs are leaving the crater area, the guardians attack. At APLs 2-6, the creatures simply attack. At APLs 8+, the guardians try to set up some sort of ambush, hoping to catch the PCs when they are divided, or as they are coming out of the crater one by one. Also, if the PCs didn't find Tajlo on their way to the crater, they can find him during this battle or as they track the creatures back to their hideaway.

Creatures: After the PCs investigate the crater, the guardians of the site show up. The PCs may already know

something about the guardians if they rescued Tajlo, so they can take precautions as necessary.

APL 2 (EL 4)

🔥 **Harpy:** hp 31; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 4 (EL 6)

🔥 **Harpy (1):** hp 31; see *Monster Manual*.

🔥 **Minotaur (1):** hp 39; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 6 (EL 8)

🔥 **Harpies (2):** hp 31; see *Monster Manual*.

🔥 **Minotaurs (2):** hp 39; see *Monster Manual*.

APL 8 (EL 10)

🔥 **Rillra, Harpy Sorcerer 4:** hp 57; see Appendix 1.

🔥 **Hukyrl, Minotaur Barbarian 4:** hp 93; see Appendix 1.

APL 10 (EL 12)

🔥 **Rillra, Harpy Sorcerer 6:** hp 65; see Appendix 1.

🔥 **Hukyrl, Minotaur Barbarian 6:** hp 117; see Appendix 1.

APL 12 (EL 14)

🔥 **Rillra, Harpy Sorcerer 8:** hp 71; see Appendix 1.

🔥 **Hukyrl, Minotaur Barbarian 8:** hp 138; see Appendix 1.

Tactics: The harpy (or harpies) use their song and flight abilities to stay away from danger, unless the PCs are doing a great deal of damage from a distance. At higher APLs, the harpy can use her Flyby Attack to cast her touch spells on spellcasters and/or archers without having to risk staying close for multiple attacks from melee fighters. The harpies try to weaken the people who the minotaur is attacking in melee. The minotaur rages and attacks. The creatures have time to buff themselves with their own magical items and spells on their way to the crater from their lair.

Developments: If captured or questioned, the harpy and the minotaur can only say that a human of great power is their master, and he charged them to guard the underground complex. He was the one who caused the earthquake and explosions that made the crater. They don't know why. He leads several other humans who worship some bizarre one-eyed, one-handed god.

Treasure: The creatures carry all of their treasure—the coin value listed below is in gold coins and small gems. A successful bardic knowledge check (DC 28) will reveal that the coins are ancient ones from the land of Blackmoor, which skirts the Land of Black Ice. The currency is actually no longer in use, but it has historical value.

APL 2: L: 0 gp; C: 196 gp; M: 0 gp

APL 4: L: 4 gp; C: 196 gp; M: 0 gp

APL 6: L: 8 gp; C: 196 gp; M: 0 gp

APL 8: L: 34 gp; C: 196 gp; M: +1 large greataxe (195 gp),
potion of aid (25 gp), scroll of color spray (2 gp), scroll of mirror image (13 gp)

APL 10: L: 0 gp; C: 196 gp; M: +1 large greataxe (195 gp),
+1 chain shirt (125 gp); potion of aid (25 gp), scroll of color spray (2 gp),
scroll of displacement (31 gp), scroll of mirror image (13 gp),
wand of ice storm (5 charges) (175 gp)

APL 12: L: 0 gp; C: 196 gp; M: +2 large greataxe (695 gp),
+1 chain shirt of light fortification (375 gp), potion of aid (25 gp),
potion of bull's strength (25 gp), potion of shield of faith +4 (50 gp),
scroll of color spray (2 gp), scroll of cat's grace (13 gp), scroll of
displacement (31 gp), scroll of lesser globe of invulnerability (59 gp),
wand of ice storm (5 charges) (175 gp)

ENCOUNTER 7: RETURN TO THE KOBOLD VILLAGE

Note: The PCs may be returning to the kobold village after checking out the crater. On the other hand, they may be coming here for the first time if they didn't find Tajlo before investigating the crater. If they are coming to the village for the first time in this encounter, see Encounter 4 and give the PCs the chance to meet all of the kobold and bugbear NPCs in that encounter.

The direction of this encounter depends primarily on how much the PCs are willing and able to give Vogg. If they hand over to him the blue-black slab of stone with the strange emblem on it, he is very pleased and rewards them by allowing them to meditate with the artifact. (See the Rewards section and the AR for what this means.) If they tell him about the inscription on the walls of the chamber and translate it for him, he is also pleased and offers the same reward as above.

If the PCs refuse to give him the slab or give him any information, he is very angry. He threatens to kill the PCs if they don't give him the slab or tell him what they learned at the crater site. If the PCs don't show him or tell him about the slab, he has no way of knowing about it. He is not in a position to attack the PCs, as most of his warriors died in the Vecna cultists attack. That doesn't mean he won't try to intimidate them.

Whether the PCs cooperate with Vogg or not, he allows them to rest for a day in the kobold village. If they give him what he asks, they are treated as heroes. If not, they are given a small corner of an underground room to rest.

Spending time with the artifact: Assuming the PCs are in the good graces of Vogg after their visit to the crater, he will allow them to absorb the energy of the artifact. He tells them that they must enter the underground room that houses the blue-black pole, sit in the chamber, and wait for the power of the artifact to affect them. (See Section f of Encounter 4 for details on the artifact and the chamber.) Again the PCs are warned not to touch the artifact.

If the PCs do what they are told and sit in proximity to the artifact without touching it, read the following:

As you sit in the dark, nothing happens for what might be a few minutes or several hours. Suddenly the heat of a thousand volcanoes courses over your body. Rather than burning you, the heat becomes part of you. You see in the darkness your own body, the flesh turning blue and black. Flames of those same colors leap from your skin and lick the air around you. Then the flames ripple off your skin and streak toward your nose,

eyes, mouth, and ears. Rather than choking you, the flames taste sweet, like sugared water on a parched throat.

The PCs must make a Will save (DC 8 + APL). A successful save means the PCs wake up feeling exhausted but more vibrant. They have spent 1 TU down in the chamber, and a random attribute has gained a +1 inherent bonus. If they fail the save, they have spent 2 TUs in the chamber, a random attribute has gained a +1 inherent bonus, and their lowest attribute has suffered a -1 inherent penalty. If any two or more of the lowest attributes are the same, determine randomly which is affected. Do not count bonuses from magical items or effects when figuring which is the lowest attribute. In other words, if a character has an 10 for both Strength and Dexterity, choose randomly which attribute is affected, even if one attribute is higher due to a magical item or spell. Either way, the PCs now have the Stigma of the Serpent. If the PCs have touched the artifact, they still have to spend the TUs (and make the Will save) to go through the ritual, but they receive no attribute benefits or penalties. They are a Thrall of the Serpent, and always shall be. Any creature that undergoes the ritual also suffers from the *dazzled* condition in bright daylight or near the *sunlight* spell for the remained of this adventure and one additional adventure. This duplicates the penalty that kobolds suffer when in daylight. In addition, all attempts to channel positive energy by a PC with the Stigma of the Serpent, including turning undead, suffer a -2 penalty. Any attempts to channel negative energy receive a +2 bonus. (See AR for details.)

If any PCs choose not to enter the artifact chamber and absorb the energy, they can wait in the kobold village, although nothing happens there. PCs entering the chamber while the ritual is in progress see the other PCs sitting on the floor in a trance. Nothing will bring the PCs out of the trance once the ritual has started. After the PCs have spent all the time they want in the kobold village, assuming they are on good terms with Tajlo, they can leave. Tajlo wishes them well on their journeys, and he asks them to come back and visit him if they are ever in the area. He refuses to go back with the PCs since his duty is to protect his tribe.

If at any point the PCs attack the village, destroy kobold eggs, or leave on bad terms with Tajlo in any way, the village is doomed to fall to the forces that seek to steal the artifact. Attacking the village is easy at any APL, and most of the kobolds flee into the moors. A few stand to fight the PCs, but they fall easily. In this case, Tajlo first tries to parlay, then flees with the females and children, bound by duty to protect them.

CONCLUSION: AN OATH

The players can get back to Redlee Manor with no problem. Several possible outcomes and conclusions could occur based on the previous actions of the PCs and results of the encounters. In some cases, the judge will have to use common sense to conclude the adventure

properly if the PCs did something (or failed to do something) that is not accounted for in the adventure.

Assuming the PCs find some clue pointing to the Land of Black Ice, such as the blue-black slab, the bugbear slaves, the defunct portal, this confirms one of Stoakdor's theories about what the eyes are being used for. Read the following:

After you have rested from your travails, regaining your strength and letting the servants of the Redlee family care for you, Stoakdor asks to see you one last time. A servant leads you into his study, where the mage sits behind a large desk carved from mahogany. On his desk is a sphere made of crystal.

"I cannot thank you enough for your bravery. You have succeeded where so many others have failed. I'm beginning to understand that this terrible blight that has cursed are land is not so simple as I had previously imagined. Since your return from the crater, my divinations have pointed me in a new direction. Here, look into this sphere."

Although the image in the sphere is blurry, there is no doubting what you see. It is a landscape, bleak and barren: miles upon miles of blue-black hummocks, large mounds of deathly cold ice. The chill is almost palpable even though you are in a warm, humid keep in Keoland.

"That, no doubt," sighs Stoakdor, "is where our answers lie. Even with my vast resources and knowledge, I know almost nothing of the place. It's more a fable than a destination." Stoakdor stares into the corner of the room for a long, uncomfortable moment. He finally shakes away whatever thought was in his mind and speaks again. "But I shall keep you no longer from your business. I do ask one thing though. I ask you to take an oath. If I ever have need of you again, to pursue the forces behind what has happened to the children, you will come to our aid. Will you so pledge?"

Whether the PCs pledge or not is irrelevant to the adventure, although they have their own values and consciences to contend with. They may have questions for Stoakdor. He answers them to the best of his ability:

What will be done about the kobold village?

"At this time, there is nothing much that can be done. We can report what you have learned to the Gran March authorities, but they have problems of their own, and they are not going to be overly concerned with mere kobolds so far from their border. Maybe if they were giants. . . ."

What is that blue-black slab?

"To the best of my knowledge, the slab is an inactive item of potentially great power. It may have some connection to why the children's eyes were taken. The eyes may activate the item's power, or the item may be used to draw power through the eyes, or perhaps something else entirely. The symbol has no meaning to me at the moment, but I am continuing to research it."

-Who or what is the SERPENT?

Stoakdor hesitates a long time before answering, and then answers only in a whisper.

"I cannot be sure. It may be referring to an ancient and powerful dragon that once called the swamp his home. It may be referring to a long dead warpriest who worshipped a dragon god. Or it may be referring to something even more dark and sinister: a force—no, more than a force—a reality that pre-dates the Oerth itself. That is all I can say."

Are the children going to be safe here?

"At first I thought not. But now I believe that the children—both the Lydian school attendees and the children whose eyes have been taken—are here for a reason. The children who have been assaulted are not in any danger, although they still do not seem to age and their skin has turned a deep, dark blue. We will keep them safe. My brother, the Baron, will use every resource at his disposal to ensure their safety and well being. Or he will die trying."

If any children were taken during Encounter 1, Stoakdor reports the following:

"By the way, [fill in the blank with the name(s) of the missing child(ren)] was found outside the keep early this morning, wandering about in the fog. She [or he or they] could not remember anything of the time after they were taken. She [or he or they] only remembers waking up on the outskirts of town and wandering toward the keep. There is no sign of any damage, although you can be sure I will be keeping a close eye on her [or him or them]."

The PCs may wish to speak to the child, and they are allowed to do so. No magic or divination or examination will find anything abnormal about the child.

OPTIONAL CONCLUSION 2: A SALE

If the PCs entered the adventure through Introduction 2, they may want to return the blue-black slab to Bylareith. He meets them at the agreed-upon location, and pays them 200 gp each. He hurries away once the transaction has been made. He does not answer any questions about where he is going or what he is going to do with the slab. (He is selling it to a broker who then sells it to an unknown buyer, but the PCs have no way of finding this out. Bylareith is smart enough to make the transaction with the PCs in a public place with his own bodyguards and plenty of city guards nearby.

The End

EXPERIENCE POINT SUMMARY

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the experience award. Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each character.

Encounter One

Defeat the wyverns

APL2	120 xp
APL4	180 xp
APL6	240 xp
APL8	300 xp
APL10	360 xp
APL12	420 xp
Special	(-30 xp for each child lost)

Encounter Five

A – Defeat or survive the boulder trap

APL2	90 xp
APL4	90 xp
APL6	120 xp
APL8	120 xp
APL10	150 xp
APL12	150 xp

B – Defeat the centipedes

APL2	90 xp
APL4	120 xp
APL6	180 xp
APL8	240 xp
APL10	300 xp
APL12	360 xp

C-Defeat or survive the lightning trap

APL2	90 xp
APL4	120 xp
APL6	120 xp
APL8	150 xp
APL10	150 xp
APL12	180 xp

Encounter Six

Defeat the guardians

APL2	120 xp
APL4	180 xp
APL6	240 xp
APL8	300 xp
APL10	360 xp
APL12	420 xp

Story Awards

PCs rescue Tajlo:

APL2	30 xp
APL4	60 xp
APL6	90 xp
APL8	120 xp
APL10	150 xp

APL12 180xp

Total Possible Experience:

APL2 450 xp
 APL4 675 xp
 APL6 00 xp
 APL8 1,125 xp
 APL10 1,350 xp
 APL12 1,575 xp

TREASURE SUMMARY

During an adventure, characters encounter treasure, usually finding it in the possession of their foes. Every encounter that features treasure has a "treasure" section within the encounter description, giving information about the loot, coins, and magic items that make up the encounter's treasure.

The loot total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if the foes are plundered of all their earthly possessions. Looting the bodies takes at least 10 minutes per every 5 enemies, and if the characters cannot take the time to loot the bodies, they do not gain this gold. If you feel it is reasonable that characters can go back to loot the bodies, and those bodies are there (i.e., not carted off by dungeon scavengers, removed from the scene by the local watch, and so on), characters may return to retrieve loot. If the characters do not loot the body, the gold piece value for the loot is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

The coin total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if they take the coin available. A normal adventuring party can usually gather this wealth in a round or so. If for some reason, they pass up this treasure, the coin total is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

Next, the magic items are listed. Magic item treasure is the hardest to adjudicate, because they are varied and because characters may want to use them during the adventure or the NPCs and monsters may use it during the encounter. Many times characters must cast *identify*, *analyze* *dweomer* or similar spell to determine what the item does and how to activate it. Other times they may attempt to use the item blindly. If the magic item is consumable (a potion, scroll, magic bolts, etc.) and the item is used before the end of the adventure, its total is subtracted from the adventure totals below.

Once you have subtracted the value for unclaimed treasure from each encounter add it up and that is the number of gold pieces a characters total and coin value increase at the end of the adventure. Write the total in the GP Gained field of the adventure certificate. Because this is a Regional scenario, characters may spend additional Time Units to practice professions or create items immediately after the adventure so this total may be modified by other circumstances.

L: Looted gear from enemy
 C: Coin, Gems, Jewelry, and other valuables
 M: Magic Items (sell value)

Encounter One:

All APLs – L: 0 gp; C: 100 gp; M: 0 gp

Encounter Two: (for accepting the escort mission)

All APLs: L: 0 gp; C: 100 gp; M: 0 gp

Encounter Five-A: (if they give the slab to Stoakdor or Bylareith)

All APLs: L: 0 gp; C: 200 gp; M: 0 gp

Encounter Five-B:

APL 2: L: 0 gp; C: 300 gp; M: 0 gp
 APL 4: L: 0 gp; C: 400 gp; M: 0 gp
 APL 6: L: 0 gp; C: 500 gp; M: 0 gp

Encounter Six:

APL 2: L: 0 gp; C: 196 gp; M: 0 gp
 APL 4: L: 4 gp; C: 196 gp; M: 0 gp
 APL 6: L: 8 gp; C: 196 gp; M: 0 gp
 APL 8: L: 34 gp; C: 196 gp; M: +1 large greataxe (195 gp), *potion of aid* (25 gp), *scroll of color spray* (2 gp), *scroll of mirror image* (13 gp)
 APL 10: L: 0 gp; C: 196 gp; M: +1 large greataxe (195 gp), +1 *chain shirt* (125 gp), *potion of aid* (25 gp), *scroll of color spray* (2 gp), *scroll of displacement* (31 gp), *scroll of mirror image* (13 gp), *wand of ice storm* (5 charges) (175 gp)
 APL 12: L: 0 gp; C: 196 gp; M: +2 large greataxe (695 gp), +1 *chain shirt of light fortification* (375 gp), *potion of aid* (25 gp), *potion of bull's strength* (25 gp), *potion of shield of faith* +4 (50 gp), *scroll of color spray* (2 gp), *scroll of cat's grace* (13 gp), *scroll of displacement* (31 gp), *scroll of lesser globe of invulnerability* (59 gp), *wand of ice storm* (5 charges) (175 gp)

Total Possible Treasure

APL 2: 400 gp
 APL 4: 600 gp
 APL 6: 800 gp
 APL 8: 1,250 gp
 APL 10: 2,100 gp
 APL 12: 3,000 gp

ITEMS FOR THE ADVENTURE RECORD

☛ **Blessing of the Church of Lydia** – For delivering the children of the worshippers of Lydia safely to Redlee Manor, the Church of Lydia wants to repay you for your bravery. At the end of any Core adventure, a character with this favor may purchase a *wand of cure light wounds* at standard DMG cost. In addition, a character who dies during a Core adventure may be brought back to Redlee Manor, where that character can receive a *raise dead* or *resurrection* spell at a reduced price (3,500 gp for *raise dead* and 7,000 gp for *resurrection*). The dead character plus one other character at the table must pay 4 extra time units to receive this boon to simulate the transport of the body and the time recovering. The favor is spent if a character is brought back to life.

☛ **Favor of the Redlee Family** – For helping the Redlee family in its war with the evil forces in the Rushmoors, you have received a favor. This favor can be saved, or used up after any Core adventure to receive one (and only one) of the following benefits:

— The *bane*, *frost*, or *spell storing* special quality can be placed on any single weapon as per the DMG. The only types of designated foes you can choose for the *bane* are undead or evil outsider. The cost of adding the special quality is the difference between the current price of the weapon and the price with the special enhancement added. This does not count as access for purposes of MIC.

— The character has access to ONE of the following items at the end of any Core adventure: *phylactery of undead turning*, *lesser strand of prayer beads*, *lesser empower metamagic rod*, or *boots of levitation*. Characters must purchase this item at the normal DMG price. This does not count as access for purposes of MIC.

— Arcane casters may spend 2 extra time units after any Core mod to study with Stoakdor Redlee Neheli. At the end of this time, the caster will receive a +2 competence bonus to one of the following skills: Knowledge (arcana); or Spellcraft when used in relation to the Rushmoors and the surrounding area. Only usable once.

☛ **Thrall of the Serpent** – This character has touched one of the active scales of the Serpent and succumbed to its power. The affects of this will become clear in future modules.

☛ **Stigma of the Serpent** – This character has basked in the power of an active scale of the Serpent and received the Serpent's Stigma. If not also a Thrall of the Serpent, the character has gained a +1 inherent bonus to a random attribute score. It is also possible that the character has received a –1 inherent penalty to his lowest attribute score. In addition, for the next adventure, the character has light sensitivity (as per the Monster Manual) as is dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a daylight spell.

Additionally, any attempts to channel positive energy, including turning undead, are made at a –2 penalty. Attempts to channel negative energy are made at +2.

Roll 1d6 for attribute that receives the +1 inherent bonus (circle result)

- 1 – Strength
- 2 – Dexterity
- 3 – Constitution
- 4 – Intelligence
- 5 – Wisdom
- 6 – Charisma

☛ **Enmity of Bylareith** – For promising to find him a blue-black artifact but then giving it to the Redlees, this PC has earned the ire of the halfling relic collector Bylareith Goldtoes. The affect of this will be revealed in future modules.

APPENDIX 1: NPCS

Encounter One: Menace from Above

APL 8 (EL 10)

☛ **Wyverns (Advanced)**; CR 8; Huge Dragon; HD 9d12+45; hp 108; Init +0; Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (poor); AC 19 (-2 size, +11 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +9/+25; Attack: Sting +16 melee (1d8+8 and poison) or talon +16 melee (3d6+8) or bite +16 melee (3d8+8); Full Attack: Sting +16 melee (1d8+8 and poison) and 2 talons +14 melee (3d6+4) and bite +14 melee (3d8+4) and 2 wings (2d6+2); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA Poison, improved grab; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., immune to sleep.

APL 10 (EL 12)

☛ **Wyverns (Advanced)**; CR 8; Huge Dragon; HD 9d12+45; hp 108; Init +0; Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (poor); AC 19 (-2 size, +11 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +9/+25; Attack: Sting +16 melee (1d8+8 and poison) or talon +16 melee (3d6+8) or bite +16 melee (3d8+8); Full Attack: Sting +16 melee (1d8+8 and poison) and 2 talons +14 melee (3d6+4) and bite +14 melee (3d8+4) and 2 wings (2d6+2); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA Poison, improved grab; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., immune to sleep.

APL 12 (EL 14)

☛ **Wyverns (Advanced)**; CR 8; Huge Dragon; HD 9d12+45; hp 108; Init +0; Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (poor); AC 19 (-2 size, +11 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +9/+25; Attack: Sting +16 melee (1d8+8 and poison) or talon +16 melee (3d6+8) or bite +16 melee (3d8+8); Full Attack: Sting +16 melee (1d8+8 and poison) and 2 talons +14 melee (3d6+4) and bite +14 melee (3d8+4) and 2 wings (2d6+2); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA Poison, improved grab; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., immune to sleep.

Encounter Six: The Crater Guardians

APL 8 (EL 10)

☛ **Rillra**: Female Harpy Sor4; CR 8; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 7d8+4d4+11; hp 57; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 80 ft. (average); AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +9/+9; Attack Club +9 melee (1d6) or ray +13 ranged (per spell); Full Attack Club +9/+4 melee (1d6) and 2 claws +4 melee (1d3); SA Captivating song, spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +3, Ref +8, Will +10; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 18.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +7, Concentration +9, Intimidate +8, Listen +8, Perform (oratory) +6, Spot +4; Dodge, Flyby Attack, Persuasive, Weapon Focus (ray).

Spells Known (6/7/4; base DC = 14 + spell level): 0—*daze*, *detect magic*, *flare*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *ray of frost*; 1st—*burning hands*, *mage armor*, *ray of enfeeblement*; 2nd—*ghoul touch*.

Possessions: club, scroll of color spray, scroll of mirror image, spell component pouch.

☛ **Hukyl**: Male Minotaur Bbn4; CR 8; Large Monstrous Humanoid; HD 6d8+4d12+30; hp 93; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 20 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +4 armor, +5 natural); Base Attack/Grapple

+10/+19; Attack +1 *large greataxe* +16 melee (3d6+8/x3) or gore +15 melee (1d8+5); Full Attack +1 *large greataxe* +16/+11 melee (3d6+8/x3) and gore +11 melee (1d8+5); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA Powerful Charge 4d6+6; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Fast Movement, Rage (2x/day), Natural Cunning, Scent, Trap Sense +1, Uncanny Dodge; SV Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +7; Str 20, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +2, Jump +6, Listen +11, Search +6, Spot +11; Cleave; Great Fortitude, Power Attack, Track.

Possessions: +1 *large greataxe*; masterwork chain shirt; *potion of aid*.

APL 10 (EL 12)

☛ **Rillra**: Female Harpy Sor6; CR 10; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 7d8+6d4+13; hp 65; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 80 ft. (average); AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +10/+10; Attack Club +10 melee (1d6) or ray +14 ranged (per spell); Full Attack Club +10/+5 melee (1d6) and 2 claws +5 melee (1d3); SA Captivating song, spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +11; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 18.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +8, Concentration +11, Intimidate +8, Listen +8, Perform (oratory) +6, Spot +4; Dodge, Flyby Attack, Persuasive, Spell Focus: Necromancy, Weapon Focus (ray).

Spells Known: (6/7/6/4; base DC = 14 + spell level; Necromancy spells DC = 15 + spell level): 0—*daze*, *detect magic*, *flare*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *ray of frost*, *resistance*; 1st—*burning hands*, *mage armor*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*; 2nd—*ghoul touch*, *melf's acid arrow*; 3rd—*vampiric touch*.

Possessions: club, scroll of color spray, scroll of displacement, scroll of mirror image, wand of ice storm (5 charges), spell component pouch.

☛ **Hukyl**: Male Minotaur Bbn6; CR 10; Large Monstrous Humanoid; HD 6d8+6d12+36; hp 117; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 21 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +5 armor, +5 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +12/+21; Attack +1 *large greataxe* +18 melee (3d6+8/x3) or gore +17 melee (1d8+5); Full Attack +1 *large greataxe* +18/+13/+8 melee (3d6+8/x3) and gore +12 melee (1d8+5); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA Powerful Charge 4d6+6; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Fast Movement, Rage (2x/day), Natural Cunning, Scent, Trap Sense +2, Improved Uncanny Dodge; SV Fort +11, Ref +9, Will +8; Str 20, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +2, Jump +6, Listen +13, Search +6, Spot +13; Cleave; Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Power Attack, Track.

Possessions: +1 *large greataxe*; +1 chain shirt; *potion of aid*

APL 12 (EL 14)

☛ **Rillra**: Female Harpy Sor 8; CR 12; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 7d8+8d4+15; hp 71; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 80 ft. (average); AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +11/+11; Attack Club +11 melee (1d6) or ray +15 ranged (per spell); Full Attack Club +11/+6 melee (1d6) and 2 claws +6 melee (1d3); SA Captivating song, spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +12; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 18.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +9, Concentration +12, Intimidate +8, Listen +8, Perform (oratory) +6, Spot +4; Dodge, Greater

Spell Focus: Necromancy, Flyby Attack, Persuasive, Spell Focus: Necromancy, Weapon Focus (ray).

Spells Known (6/7/7/6/4; base DC = 14 + spell level; Necromancy spells DC = 16 + spell level): 0—*dancing lights*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *flare*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *ray of frost*, *resistance*; 1st—*burning hands*, *grease*, *mage armor*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*; 2nd—*ghoul touch*, *melf's acid arrow*, *mirror image*; 3rd—*ray of exhaustion*, *vampiric touch*; 4th—*fear*.

Possessions: club, scroll of color spray, scroll of cat's grace, scroll of displacement, scroll of lesser globe of invulnerability, wand of ice storm (5 charges), spell component pouch.

➤ **Hukyl:** Male Minotaur Bbn 8; CR 12; Large Monstrous Humanoid; HD 6d8+8d12+42; hp 138; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 21 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +5 armor, +5 natural); Base Attack/Grapple +14/+23; Attack +2 *large greataxe* +21 melee (3d6+9/x3) or *gore* +19 melee (1d8+5); Full Attack +2 *large greataxe* +21/+16/+11 melee (3d6+9/x3) and *gore* +14 melee (1d8+5); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA Powerful Charge 4d6+6; SQ Damage Reduction 1/-, Darkvision 60 ft., Fast Movement, Rage (3x/day), Natural Cunning, Scent, Trap Sense +2, Improved Uncanny Dodge; SV Fort +12, Ref +9, Will +8; Str 20, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +2, Jump +6, Listen +15, Search +6, Spot +15; Cleave; Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Power Attack, Track.

Possessions: +2 *large greataxe*; +1 *chain shirt of light fortification*; *potion of aid*, *potion of bull's strength*, *potion of shield of faith* +4

APPENDIX 2: DM NOTES

DM Notes 1 – The Darkwatch and the Shelspring Barony

The Knights of the Malagari, known to the population of Keoland's northwestern provinces as "the Darkwatch," is an organization whose plans and goals are as mysterious as their methods are ruthless. However, the evil they battle may justify the secrecy and ruthlessness.

The organization's earliest roots were with the Knights of the Watch, when those Watchers who fought the evil remnants of Vecna's power in the Rushmoors and adjacent areas banded together as brothers in a fight against an overwhelming and corrupting power. As the power of this evil threatened to overwhelm the knights and those who the knights were charged to protect, the protectors turned to unorthodox and sometimes questionable tactics to stem the tide.

As their superiors questioned their tactics in fighting the evil and turned a deaf ear to the concerns of these knights that their enemy was like nothing ever seen, the Duke of Dorlin, the highest ranking member of Keoland's Neheli family, stepped forward. He offered these beleaguered knights assistance, funds, respect, weapons, and most importantly political clout. These knights, who had fought under the moniker Knights of the Malgari, finally pledged allegiance to the Duke of Dorlin and changed their name to Knights of the Malagari as a show of separation from the Knights of the Watch. While the knights of these two organizations respect each other and cooperate to the best of their abilities in fighting evil, they make no mistake where their political allegiances lie.

The Darkwatch, in its current incarnation, is an entity both loved and feared equally. The common folk of the Neheli lands have seen just enough disturbing occurrences with necromantic magicks that they rejoice to have the Darkwatch protecting them. However, the tactics of the Darkwatch are infamous for being heavy-handed at best and sinister at worst. Seeing on numerous occasions how just a small bit of evil magic can corrupt a person, the Darkwatch do not tolerate necromancy or magic that threatens the peace and prosperity of the land. People who cross the Darkwatch's path sometimes are never heard from again. Sometimes they disappear for years, only to turn up in the place where they disappeared, unable to remember where they were.

The main focus of the Darkwatch, the force that they must be forever vigilant against, is the corruption of nature and magic that was Vecna. Saying Vecna in the presence of a Darkwatch member will get one jailed for life if you are lucky, killed on the spot if you aren't. Even having knowledge of Vecna is a sure sign to Darkwatchers that you are probably heading on a path toward evil.

The Shelspring Barony

Shelspring is a minor barony comprising the northwest corner of the Duchy of Dorlin. The barony shares a border with the March of Mareman and the Barony of Dilwych, and is bordered by the Rushmoors to the north. The Baron of Shelspring and its occupants pledge fealty to the Duke of Dorlin. The land is occupied almost exclusively by humans, although a few races, especially elves, have a small presence in some of the hamlets and small towns. Most of the occupants are farmers, working the land in the name of the Baron in return for food, shelter, and protection. A few master craftsmen and business owners have taken up residence in more densely populated areas. The northern area is predominantly damp marshlands, although farmers are successfully draining some of the soil to create usable farmland. The Sheldomar River here provides some limited water transportation for teamsters and merchants. There is better farming and grazing in the southern portion of the Shelspring Barony.

Before the current Baron was given rule in this area, it was the demesne of Count Orloc. Orloc was the main rival for control of the House Neheli with Cedrian, the Duke of Dorlin. The Count disappeared under mysterious circumstances, and rumors abound. Since the incursion of evil from the Rushmoors worsened after he began his reign, many believed that he was in league with that evil and was seeking Vecna's power himself. Others claim that Duke Cedrian had Orloc assassinated by the Darkwatch. No one will deny, however, that the new Baron, Jharmok Redlee Neheli, is a ruler who shows much more generosity, compassion, and valor than Orloc ever did.

Baron Jharmok Redlee Neheli is a fierce warrior and high-ranking member of the Darkwatch, having led many campaigns against the evil creatures that regularly crawl from the Rushmoors. His success brought great honor to him and his family, so much so that Jharmok was named Baron and placed in charge of the Shelspring. This "honor" was something the warrior neither desired nor accepted with grace. He knows that his cousin, the Duke of Dorlin, expects him to be little more than a buffer between the rest of Dorlin and the evil-infested Rushmoors. While Baron Jharmok is now forced to spend a part of his time in administrative and governing duties, he sometimes gets the chance to patrol the Rushmoors border with his fellow Knights of the Malagari, leaving his brother in charge of the Barony's administration. The Redlee branches of House Neheli are close cousins to the current Duke of Dorlin.

Jharmok's brother, Chancellor Stoakdor Redlee Neheli, has joined his brother in the governance of the barony. While Jharmok is the fighting type, Stoakdor's actions involve patience, wit, and divination magic. Some of the around Keoland delight in spreading

rumors that Stoakdor is plotting to usurp his brother's power through evil magicks. Stoakdor is an ambitious man, and he wants to see the Redlee family gain more power and influence than this one small barony on the edge of a swamp, but he does not intend to step outside the boundaries of the law. If anything suspicious ever did happen to Jharmok or his family, Stoakdor would be suspected of foul play because he does practice magic. Stoakdor is in an odd position, since he is outside (and above) the purview of the Darkwatch on one hand, yet he is still not above their justice if he steps over any lines. He is quick to warn and support anyone who crosses the Darkwatch to the extent of his abilities, but anyone foolish enough to draw the full wrath of the Darkwatch will not find Stoakdor's support.

When Jharmok was named Baron and given Shelspring as his demesne, he was required by the Duke of Dorlin to marry a child of the wealthy mine owner Radison Pross. The Duke knew that by joining the families of Redlee and Pross, he would have both great money and military prowess at his disposal. He also knew that the popular Redlee line of the Neheli family would never challenge his own power after being mixed with the non-Neheli Pross bloodline. Lobana was chosen to betroth Baron Jharmok because, while not the most beautiful of the Pross females, she was the most intelligent and capable of looking out for Pross interests in this marriage/business arrangement. Jharmok trusts her opinion of matters regarding the barony, and she has proven to be a valuable asset. Even more intriguing is her convictions as a priestess of Lydia. While it might seem that the Darkwatch and the teachings of Lydia might be at odds, Jharmok and Lobana have welded a strange alliance between the two. Jharmok has softened the Darkwatch's hard line a bit, believing that educating the population to recognize evil might be a better solution than keeping them in the dark. Lobana's Lydian cult understands that in fighting the evil, knowledge must not simply be dispersed, it must be controlled. The most powerful light is the light that is focused.

DM Notes 2 – Running “Shedding Scales” for Gran March players

As this is a Core adventure, I have tried to make it applicable to as many characters as possible with a variety of plot hooks. Since the Rushmoors are within the geopolitical boundary of the Gran March, however, some special considerations might need to be made for characters from Gran March, particularly members of the Gran March military.

The first plot hook—the escorting of the children to the bardic school, should work for Gran March characters. The second hook—the hiring to find artifacts in the Rushmoors—might not work. Since the motivation to enter the Rushmoors through Keoland for characters using this hook is “to avoid Gran March patrols,” players from the Gran March who might

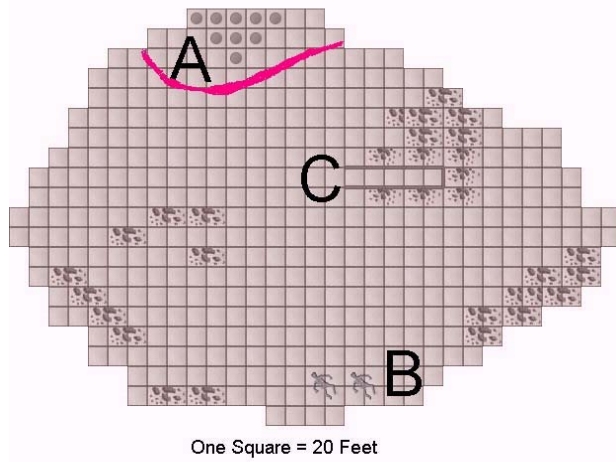
actually be members of those patrols need another hook.

For players who are members of the Gran March military (who are beholden to the Gran March military in some way), I offer the following hook:

Rumors have reached the Gran March that Keoland troops, particularly the Darkwatch, have been entering the Rushmoors and setting up bases. The launching point for these expeditions into Gran March territory is Redlee Manor in the Shelspring Barony. The Gran March leaders need someone to travel to Keoland posing as adventurers and ascertain if these rumors are true, and if they are, learn to what extent the expeditions have been made.

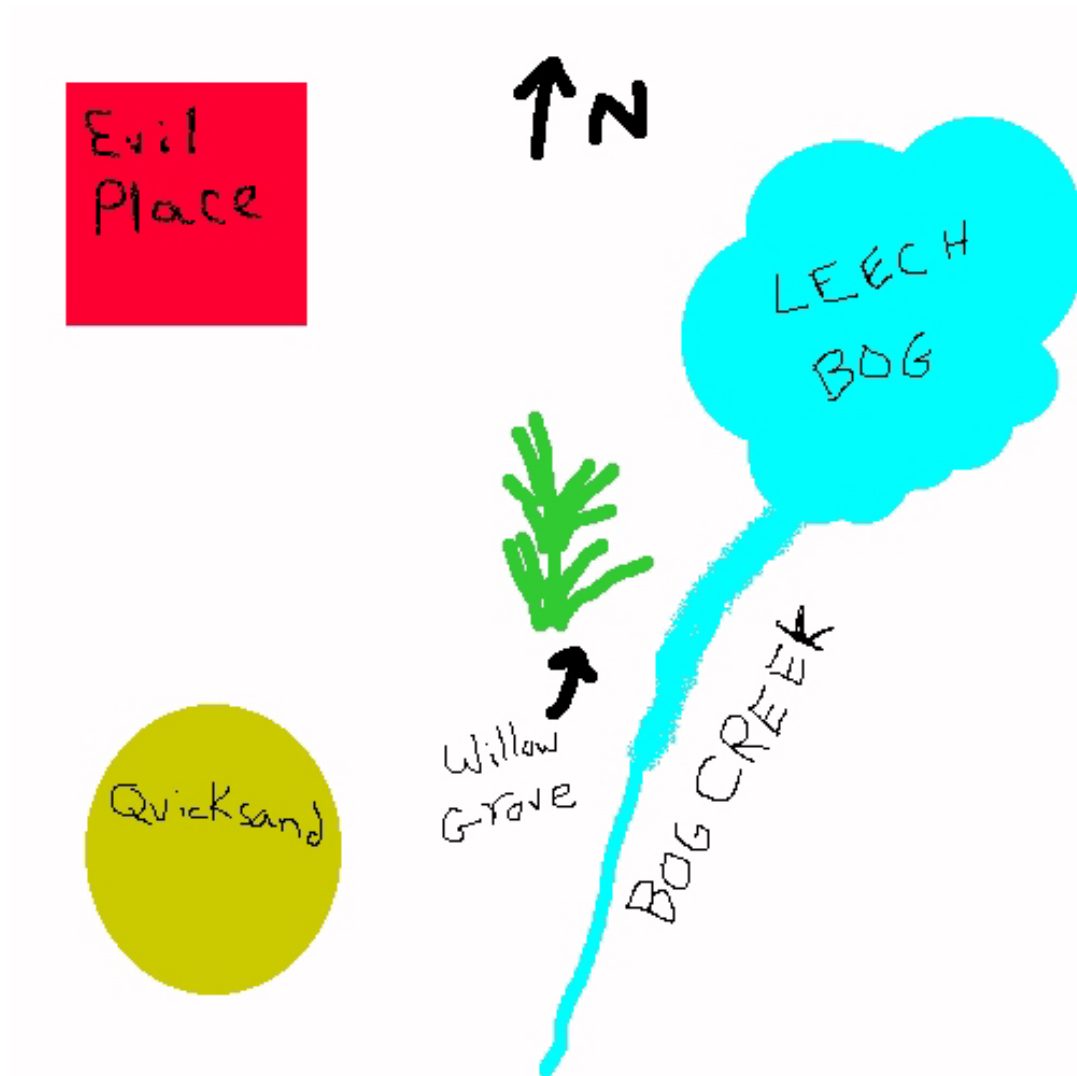
Using this hook, the Gran March PCs will travel to Redlee Manor and encounter the children on their way to the bardic school, be there for Encounter 1, and then they will be in the action of the adventure, but with another purpose as well. The rumors above, it should be said, are false.

APPENDIX 3: CRATER MAP



PLAYER'S HANDOUT 1

Stoakdor's Map



Critical Event Questions:

Please fill out these questions upon completion of this event and turn into the Senior Judge (or HQ) for this event. Thanks.

Did the PCs escort the children to Redlee Manor?

Did the PCs get hired by Bylareith to find the slab?

Were any children taken and not recovered in Encounter 1?

Who?

Did the PCs rescue Tajlo?

Did the PCs end the adventure with Tajlo still a friend?

Is Tajlo still alive?

Did the PCs attack the kobold village?

Did the PCs get kicked out of the kobold village?

Did the PCs heal Wubik?

Did the PCs free the bugbear slaves?

Did the PCs recover the slab?

Who is currently in possession of the slab?

Did the PC take an oath to protect and help the children?