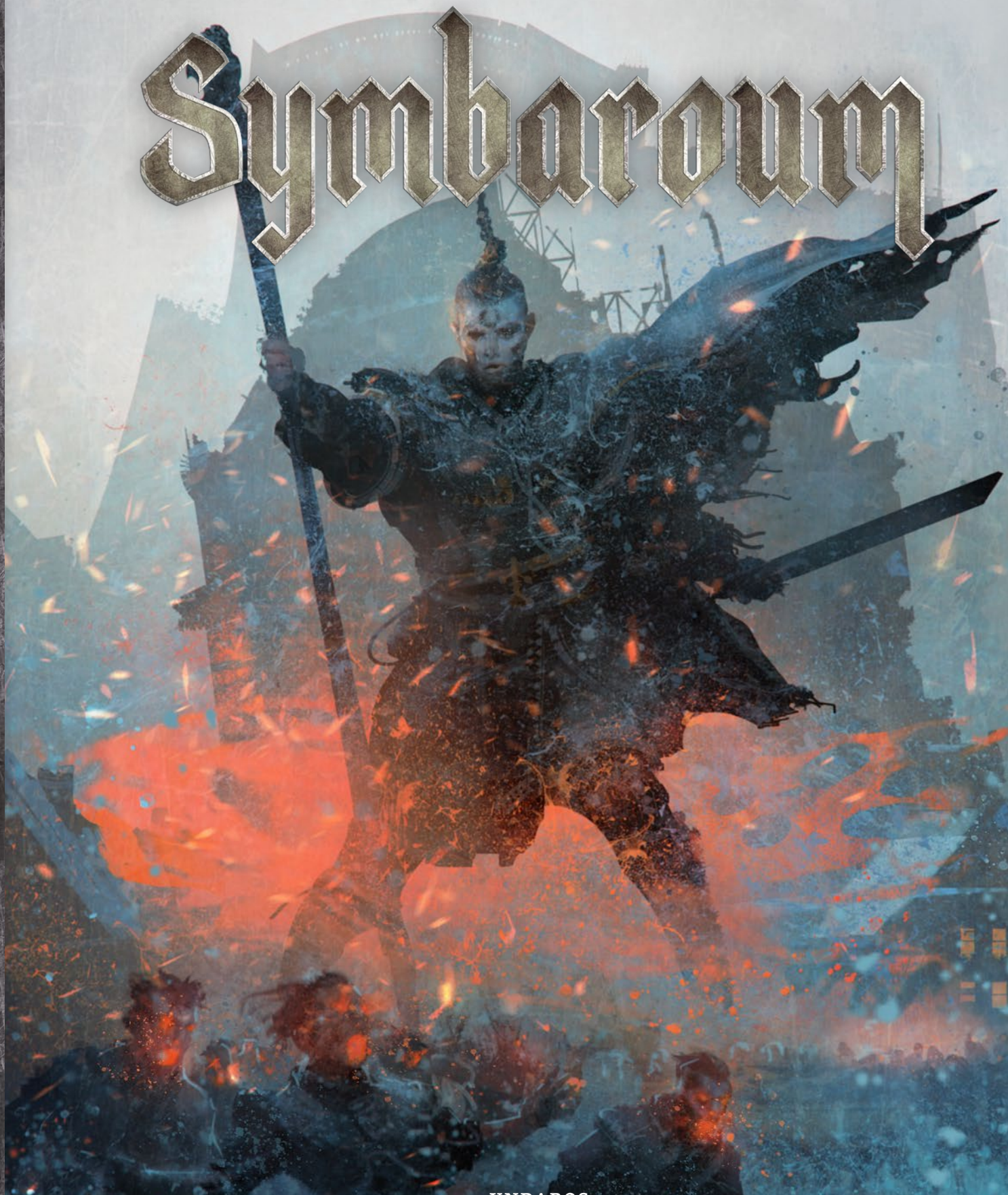
FREE LEAGUE

Symbaroum



YNDAROS

The Darkest Star

THE THIRD EPISODE IN THE CHRONICLE OF THE THRONE OF THORNS

"South fled the trodden and vanquished,
with darkness behind, with warmness and sunlight ahead.

A fortress they raised on the lowlands, a wonder of stones,
on the Guardian's bones, storing the relics of Symbar.

But blighted and torn were their bodies.
The sins of the fathers echoed in flesh,
and darkness devoured them all."

YNDAROS

The Darkest Star

THE THIRD EPISODE IN THE CHRONICLE OF THE THRONE OF THORNS

FREE LEAGUE:

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Symbaroum

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Merrymaking in Yndaros!

OVER THE LAST TWO AND A HALF YEARS, the word *Symbaroum* has gone from being unknown to representing one of the top roleplaying games coming out of Sweden which through a growing number of translations is being warmly embraced by gamers on all inhabited continents. Needless to say, this is what we were hoping for back in 2013, as we sat in the shadow of the Blue Mosque and began conceptualizing the game. But that our hopes would actually be realized... Well, that seemed like too much of a long shot.

Now the time has come to present the third part of the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. After a turbulent and illuminating journey through Davokar, we now look toward Yndaros, the capital city of Ambria – a melting pot of great diversity where all major conflicts plaguing the region come into play. We cannot wait to walk down Korinthia's boulevards, have a kebrog on the Triumph Plaza, and behold the remnants of both Symbaroum and Lindaros, albeit with a nagging fear for our safety. Hopefully, you and thousands of other capable newcomers will soon be joining us, so that we do not stand alone when the conflicts reach their bloody climax...

Happy Gaming!

FREE LEAGUE

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The Sweet Taste of Triumph...

... STILL LINGERS on the lips of the Queen's subjects!

Even though two decades have passed since Korinthia Nightbane's victory over the Dark Lords, its memory lives on through plays and parades, through statues and mosaics, through songs and conversations heard in castles, huts and ragged tents. But the sweetness is not all that has survived the ravages of time. The bitterness is just as evident, especially among those who paid the highest price for the hard-earned victory – those who were worse off even before the enemy came.

Trade continues as the vessels headed for the Islet are boarded – an evening like any other by the harbor of Yndaros.

TO AN OUTSIDE observer, the constant reminders of the olden day's collective success could easily seem like an attempt by the prosperous and the powerful to gloss over the injustices of today. One rarely hears dignitaries or celebrities speak about the present; their focus is always aimed at the glorious past, or an even more glorious future – one where the still festering wounds from the Dark Lords' betrayal have been healed, by the Grace of Prios and the Queen's resolve. Meanwhile, common folk wail, growl, and roar over an almost unbearable present, and many wonder how long it will be before their lamentations grow into a vengeful chorus frothing with fury.

This book expands on the short description of Ambria's capital featured in the *Core Rulebook*, and also offers a glimpse of its surrounding countryside. But the bulk of the text comprises the adventure *The Darkest Star*, part three in the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. As with previous episodes, the book is divided into three sections, beginning with a general introduction to the city, followed by a more in-depth description intended for the Game Master, after which the rest of the book is devoted to the adventure itself.

The opening section is meant for players whose characters have spent at least a week, possibly several years, in Yndaros. What is described will

already be known to most people, and is meant to help the players and their characters solve problems and deal with social challenges without having to rely on the Game Master's guidance. And of course, it does not hurt for the players to know in advance which tavern is their favorite, where they usually buy their armor, and in which parts of town their characters feel most at home.

Bringing these insights to the (gaming) table will make it all the more interesting for the Game Master to use the material in the second section of the book. It presents a large number of truths which run counter to public perception, and could be the basis for both short scenarios and entire campaigns. The Game Master section also includes information on Ambria's noble houses, rules concerning ceremonial magic, and a chapter introducing new rules, artifacts, creatures, and more.

The book concludes with the adventure *The Darkest Star*. Unlike previous parts of the chronicle (and, to an even greater extent, the next one), this adventure is more linear in its design. It will give the player characters reasons to visit the whole of Yndaros, head out on the River Doudram and down into what remains of the once great city state of Lindaros. When the dust has settled, the characters will hopefully have hunted down the person responsible for the worst attack on Korinthia's realm thus far. And perhaps even more importantly: they will most likely know where to find the place which some call *"the Mother of Darkness"* – Symbar.

Reading for Players

The first section of this book, *City of Contrasts*, can be purchased as a standalone eBook from various download sites. The idea is that the Game Master can offer this single section of the book to the gaming group for them to get to know Yndaros just as well as their player characters probably do.

AD SHE NOT BEEN so short on time she would have ordered the coachman to take the long way around, but the sun was already low in the sky, and under no circumstances was she going to miss the party over at Junia's place. All her friends would be there, or rather, all who mattered.

The carriage slowed down as they crossed the Sharp Stream, continuing at a gentle pace past the wooden buildings of East Yndaros. The coachman had been wise enough to choose the northernmost entrance, as far away as possible from the filth of the refugees. Still, she leaned back and kept the curtain closed. The swaying cloth offered a few glimpses of the locals, including a bunch of children lined up along the houses, their hands stretched out. With her grandmother's instructions still ringing in her ears, she sighed and threw them a dozen coins, hoping they would not kill each other over her charity.

When the horses turned onto the Boulevard, after passing through Old Kadizar and the Harbor District, she finally pulled the curtain back and leaned forward. They had to make a few stops on their way to the Temple District. The wedding preparations were well underway: cobblestones were being scrubbed, facades repaired and polished, and Duchess Esmerelda's banner was mounted on some of the buildings. Tomorrow she too would make herself presentable for the ceremony, but that was then. First she would have a magical night in the company of good friends, heightened by the dark intoxication of Krusean Berries, singing their thanks to the highest powers of the Eternal Night.

SECTION 1:

CITY OF CONTRASTS

The heart of Ambria

The Queen's palace is a splendid view, not least when it slowly appears out of the morning mists, backed by the light of dawn.

YNDAROS HAS EVERYTHING. Everything! In Taubio's acclaimed poem Bane of the Night he refers to the city as *"every rainbow's cradle and tomb"* and surely none could have said it better. No matter what desire burns in your flesh, what goals you have in life, what dreamlike visions float before your inner eye – Yndaros is often where the dream is born, where the quest begins, and where it ends. But the analogy fails to capture that this rainbow is not always sparkling with color; its nuances are often matte, and sometimes it is colored in shades of black. In reality, the only thing one can be sure of is that the treasure chest at the end of the rainbow contains nothing but a corpse.

YNDAROS IS A fantastic, vibrant and immensely diverse city with room for anything and anyone. Its hundred thousand residents have little in common, at least in terms of how they live their lives. In the capital of Ambria the obscenely rich can be seen just across the street from destitute children and elders; the spiritually inclined only a room away from the morally indifferent; public officials next door to (and often on friendly terms with) leaders of the city's criminal element.

Newcomers may ask themselves, quite rightly, why the city has not exploded, why the disadvantaged masses do not throw themselves at their lords' throats. Every day, the anger manifests itself in insults and ridicule aimed at the local authorities, and sometimes in large protests and riots. But it

never takes long for order to be restored, with or without involving the City Watch and the Pansars – the agitator who in the morning shouts out his anger from a makeshift podium on the Monger's Square may in the afternoon be clinging to some scaffold at the Temple District. Anyone who has lived in the Queen's city for some time can understand why.

After all, the despised leadership did defeat the Dark Lords. And when the enemy's evil turned Alberetor to ashes, they conquered a new land for their people. Apart from the angry minority who will not be persuaded, everything suggests that Korinthia, the dukes, and the powers that be are doing everything they can to give the Ambrian people a brilliant future. It will be a long and perilous journey, with many lost along the way, but all are welcome and all are needed – Yndaros is the Queen's new battleship with which she will bring safety, peace, and prosperity; something that can only be achieved if her diverse crew row as one, no matter how badly their backs hurt and their palms bleed.

This chapter describes Yndaros as viewed by its residents and frequent visitors. Players whose characters come from the capital, or have lived there for long periods of time, may find the material both useful and entertaining – they will feel more at home in the city and certainly be more self-reliant in situations involving social challenges and general problem-solving. And they will probably need this help, not least when playing the adventure *The Darkest Star*, in which it becomes essential that they are able to understand and navigate Yndaros, the city of contrasts.

First Impressions

THE THINGS GUARANTEED to overwhelm newly arrived visitors are the crowds and the noise. Thistle Hold comes close in terms of the former, at least periodically, but the loudness of Yndaros is truly in a league of its own. The clatter of construction sites is mixed with tramping hooves and boots, the luring calls of vendors, and a cacophony of general chatter.

"You do know that the First Father has moved here, to Yndaros? The sun knights drove him from Templewall; made him flee for his life. They've lost their minds, the templars, no better than the elves, I tell you!"

As soon as the shock wears off and the visitors can make sense of their new experiences, the contrasts become apparent; between new and old, stylish and simple, luxurious and cheap, Ambrian and barbarian. The contrasts can be seen in everything from people and how they dress, to buildings and monuments, to commodities and the songs played on street corners and in taverns. Compared to the human-dominated realm of Alberetor, the diversity is greater still, thanks to the ogres, goblins, elves, and dwarves residing in the capital. Individuals accustomed to other Ambrian cities need days to acclimatize; those who have never known anything but the villages of the countryside may find the impressions downright unbearable.

Another clear difference from the realm's other settlements is the high level of security. The spear-wielding patrols of the City Watch are ever present, often accompanied by one or two younger Pansars; almost all taverns, shops, temples and inns have armed guards posted at the entrance, and it is not at all uncommon for people to move through the city with a bodyguard or two. One soon learns that many of the city's various establishments will not accept customers without memberships, personal recommendations or invitations. These places are usually for the rich and powerful, but not always – there are also bars and taverns for other social classes wishing to maintain an exclusive clientele. Moreover, the watchful mindset reveals itself in the remarkably distrustful atmosphere. A visiting wizard seeking access to the library of the Triplet Towers, or an aristocrat hoping to visit the House of Nobles at the Palace District, may have to navigate a maze of bureaucracy before being allowed to do so. Spies are very much a tangible reality in Yndaros, sent by enemy factions, the local thieves' guild, or foreign powers (usually the City States, the Realm of the Order, or the northern barbarian alliance now known as the Sovereign's Oath).

Furthermore, the people of Yndaros differ from those in other towns in their relation to Prios and the Sun Church. There is at least one temple in each district, and priests are often seen on the street outside, speaking to passersby and administering blessings. Even the common folk tend to wear tokens of their faith and loyalty, usually the symbol of the Setting Sun, as necklaces, cloak-buckles, or ornamental brooches. To defy the church as Father Sarvola does in Thistle Hold would be unthinkable in Queen Korinthia's city, but this may be about to change, and perhaps that is why its priests and theurgs are spending more and more time meeting and speaking to the people.

A couple of months ago, the church instituted an event called the Sun Parade: a radiant celebration of the Sun God's glory, taking place every seventh evening. The march begins at the Cathedral of Martyrs with Father Peonio leading the way, followed by a dozen lantern-carrying younglings, then by the city's theurgs, liturgs, and initiates, as well as the Black Cloaks who are able to participate. The procession grows on its way to the harbor, continues through Old Kadizar, and reaches its full size below the palace gates on the way back – always with thousands of marchers carrying torches and lanterns, the streets lined with spectators. Most welcome the parade as proof of Prios' greatness; a few shake their heads, echoing the rumors currently circulating – rumors of a growing schism within the church, which has already resulted in the Templars' secession and now threatens to subvert the Curia.

But regardless of hostilities, spies and ecclesiastical conflicts, the Queen's battleship stays on course. There may be tears in its sails, cracks in its tiller, and some filth below deck, but nothing Korinthia Nightbane and her capable subjects cannot patch, mend and scrub clean if need be. Yndaros stands firm, literally on the ruins of Lindaros, figuratively on the fallen civilization of Alberetor, and whatever is being whispered, there is no doubt that the ship's captain is steering her people towards a brilliant future.

Memorable Events

IT IS QUITE obvious that the area where Yndaros now stands has been inhabited for centuries. Exactly how long is impossible to say, but no one disputes that there are ruins as old as those from the glory days of Symbaroum. The most obvious example would be the tower-ruin in Old Kadizar, but the remains of other ancient structures were also incorporated into those built by the Lindarians.

Based on what little is left from the time before the rise and fall of Lindaros, one can only speculate about the people who preceded it. Symbarian legends found in Davokar suggest that a master/mistress by the name of Sanator established *"a southern realm, in the shade of the wild mountains,"* but any connection between such a person and the ruins in the area has yet to be confirmed. It is possible that Ordo Magica has unearthed new information during the excavation currently underway below Old Kadizar, but if so, it has not spread to anyone outside the Triplet Towers.

Thus, the songs and legends heard throughout the capital all focus on the period from the fall of Lindaros to the present, which has certainly been eventful enough to offer everything from tragedy and drama to epic tales of glorious triumphs.

THE MASS DEATH OF LINDAROS

Much of today's Yndaros consists of restored and expanded structures from Lindarian times. This is particularly true of the city's largest buildings: the Palace, the Cathedral of Martyrs, the Dome, the Triplet Towers, and the towers at the harbor basin. By analyzing these structures along with finds from various excavations, combined with the clans' stories and a few surviving fragments of text, the scholars of Ordo Magica have gained what they believe is a decent understanding of who the Lindarians were and how they lived.

They worshipped a deity called the Guardian, who gave them the power to influence nature – to control the weather, enrich both water and soil, fatten their cattle, and thereby live in great abundance. It is clear that, eventually, they all perished due to a terrible bleeding disease. Most of today's scholars link the epidemic to the decadent lifestyle, but there are those who disagree. The most widespread interpretation is that the Lindarians' downfall was their punishment for worshipping false gods. While they did cultivate Prios' gifts, they did so by *"planting crops in blackened soil, growing them in darkness, watering them from the spring of the Eternal Night."*

It is said that Ordo Magica has a completely different view on the matter, and according to some of the Sun God's most zealous servants, the Queen shares the Order's belief that the Lindarians merely went a step too far; that they became arrogant and careless. This, in the church's eyes heretical, stance scares a lot of people senseless – not just due to the prospect of another epidemic, but because the revival of old Lindarian practices could mean the finishing blow to the already battered, dying Lawgiver.

KADIZAR SURRENDERS

The surrender of clan Kadizar does not make a very exciting story around the campfire – it was a brief, relatively bloodless, and in most respects unremarkable affair. Sure, there is some talk of the (according to many Ambrians) unreasonably large reward received by Clan Chieftain Manvar for the arrangement, and tales are certainly told about the heroes who died in the Ambrians' initial charge – a defeat, to be sure, but also a decisive display of strength that sent a clear message. But the detail people usually find most interesting is the breakup of the chieftain's family.

Manvar's oldest child, his daughter Maridja, refused to see her father trade away her future position as head of the clan. It is said that, in the heat of the family conflict, she took up arms and crushed her father's nose, causing the disfiguring scar which now runs across his face. Legend also has it that Manvar should have died that day, had his beloved third wife – the beautiful Unraga – not leapt between him and the axe, so that both of their hearts were split in two; literally in Unraga's case, figuratively in Manvar's. Allegedly, the furious daughter then fled the oncoming guard warriors with the bitter words: *"Father, your heart may bleed, but mine you have turned to solid ice; it shall not beat again until yours has shed its final drop."*

What role the chieftain's son, Lothar, played in this drama remains unclear – some stories suggest that he led the warriors whom Maridja escaped, others that he took his sister's side, but was captured and persuaded to bow to the chieftain's will. In any case, there is no doubt that the family relations nowadays are quite frosty: Maridja, better known as the Ice Witch, hides in the Titans with the rest of her robber scum; Lothar makes a sorry figure as the Queen's representative on Karvosti; and the Baron of Grendel keeps a large and well-trained guard, probably to protect himself against his daughter's (and possibly his son's) wrath.

THE QUEEN ARRIVES

Few ever speak of the seven years that passed before Queen Korinthia arrived at her new promised land. Everyone knows it was a dark time – a time of poverty, danger and endless exhaustion; a time of slavers; a time of death. The suffering was of course necessary, inevitable even, and the blame for the misery lies entirely on the moldering shoulders of the Dark Lords. But the Queen's people prefer to remember the victories and triumphs, rather than the necessary evil that occured in between.

It was a beautiful late summer day when Korinthia and her entourage passed the posting at Prios' Pass. After a three-day journey across the rolling gold of the plains, they finally halted their horses just south of today's Temple District. Before riding on to receive the people's ovations, the Queen raised her voice and proclaimed: *"You, fair new home and fortress, shall carry the name of the true hero; your name shall be Yndaros!"*

They say that every cobblestone, facade, and face was impeccably clean that day, and those who were there can attest to the euphoric celebrations which lasted for seven days and seven nights. If it is true that during these days the Queen's agents

"From what I've heard, it would not surprise me if Baron Manvar Grendel is actually in league with his daughter, that Ice Witch woman. I mean, how else could he survive with no one willing to do business with him?"

Statues of Lightbringers can be seen all over town, in this case the warrior monk Olandan.

quelled a handful of assassination attempts (two of them orchestrated by her own subjects), those enjoying the party did not notice it.

THE BLOODBATH

Most of those who leave the dying Alberetor, cross the mountains and gain the Queen's blessing to enter the Promised Land, believe this to be the end of their hardship. That is not always the case. Far from it. Gratitude and subservience usually go a long way in keeping the refugees' frustration in check; sometimes particularly enraged voices must be silenced with alms and a heavy hand. But on a few occasions in the city's twenty-year history, even this was not enough.

It is a well-known fact that enemies of the realm are hiding among the refugees, and that they are the reason why the discontent of the masses sometimes escalates into violence. Whether it was some barbarian scoundrel or an agent of a foreign power who caused the Bloodbath of year 14 is a much debated topic, the most popular suspect being the Realm of the Order, followed by a theory that the refugees were under the spell of a surviving Dark Lord.

It began early one cold winter's morning when a group of disgruntled refugees waited in vain for the breakfast soup they had been promised. In retrospect, it turned out that the cook Varga had overslept and, realizing she was already too late, decided to stay in bed – but her misconduct does not excuse what happened next. The protests grew into a deafening chorus, and when a troop of young Pansars arrived to defuse the situation, some foolish ingrates threw stones at them. Naturally, the victims had no choice but to draw their swords in self-defense. That was the spark that ignited the breaching pot!

By nightfall, the Pansars, supported by the City Watch and a troop of rangers, had been forced to consign almost three thousand refugees to the final rest. But they, too, suffered many casualties, with dozens seriously wounded. In the days that followed, blood was scrubbed off the streets all over East Yndaros, as the Queen vowed both to increase alms for the rest of the winter, and punish the person responsible.

Three days after the Bloodbath, Varga was hanged from a temporary gallows in the middle of the refugee camp. They say the hangman, the guards, and some children were the only ones watching.

THE APOSTLES OF SUPREMACY

Although neither the City Watch, the Key Master, nor any other authority, has confirmed the story, a persistent rumor is circulating in the city regarding a darkness-worshipping death cult, based in an attic in the Temple District, supposedly uncovered in the

spring of year 17. It is not uncommon for members of various factions to be exposed as cultists and face imprisonment or execution, but of course, the situation becomes particularly delicate when it concerns local dignitaries.

In this case, the cult in question was a large group calling itself the Apostles of Supremacy, headed by five prominent nobles. Two of the names most frequently mentioned are Armangai Brigo (Iasogoi's less successful younger brother) and Aldol Attio (the Key Master's oldest son). None of them have been seen in the city since that infamous spring day, and the rumor mill pays little mind to their families' hollow excuses (a trip to Alberetor and a secret mission in a faraway land).

The many stories of the Apostles' deeds are blood-curdling indeed. Among other things, they were said to worship a daemon whose worldly existence was maintained through monthly human sacrifices. The victims were all female, and in return the Apostles gained knowledge which helped them oppose women in positions of power, hopefully restricting their influence. They believed that all women were essentially witches, filled with dark desires and therefore dangerous. If these tales are correct, the Apostles apparently considered the threat so grave that pacts, murder and idolatry seemed like justifiable means...

ALOÉNA'S VISIT

Elves live dangerously in Yndaros. Not that many of its citizens have personally experienced the cruelty and evil attributed to the elves, but virtually everyone agrees that the "pointy-ears" consider humanity their mortal enemy. Sure, some elves present themselves as peaceful, diplomatically inclined individuals, but the overwhelming majority of people believe they can see through that charade – the elves are no more than spies intent on sabotaging the city and gathering information!

Until the summer of year 20, the people of Yndaros felt distanced and relatively safe from the elven menace; it was something that mainly concerned the realm's northern provinces. But then, one sunny summer day, Aloéna arrived in the city. They say that she walked across the surging surface of the river, near Fortress Doudram, without even getting her feet wet, and made her way through the streets and alleys until reaching Envoy Elori's residence down the hill from the palace. The news of a creature of Davokar moving through the city spread like wildfire; its presence sparked fear in the populace, but none could resist the urge to catch a glimpse of the she-giant as she continued unfazed and unhindered through the crowds, who immediately parted before her and closed behind her.

No one knows what was said between Aloéna and Elori, but as the fascination (or "enchantment", as some called it) waned, the suspicion began to grow. The predominant view is that Aloéna is the dark queen of Davokar, that Elori is one of her captains, and that their meeting concerned some sort of scheme against humanity – an attack on Yndaros, perhaps, or even full-scale war. Naturally, no one dares lay a hand on Elori and his aides, as he is clearly on good terms with the Queen of Ambria. But other elves (and changelings who in the haze of intoxication are mistaken for elves) have since become a greater target for Yndarian suspicion, loathing and aggression. The expression *"a dead elf is a good elf"* can be heard in public spaces throughout the city.

THE BETROTHAL

The kingdom of Ambria grows more secure, powerful and beautiful by the day. On the other hand, no one can have failed to notice that recent times have seen a number of distressing incidents – raging abominations in the middle of Thistle Hold; a belligerent barbarian alliance in the north that threatens even the High Chieftain; the Templars' secession from the Curia and rumors of deep schisms within the Sun Church; the deepening conflict between the Queen and the barbarians, which culminated in the siege of Karvosti. Indeed, the region's inhabitants need all the good news they can get.

Lately, a new announcement put smiles on many peoples' faces: the upcoming wedding between Duchess Esmerelda Kohinoor and Thabor of Yedesa, son of High Chieftain Tharaban. Needless to say, not everyone approves of this; there are still many who see barbarians as no better than witches, elves and other agents of the Eternal Night. But the masses trust their Queen; that she knows what it takes to build a safer and stronger Ambria. Besides, the idea of a royal wedding, with all the pomp and pageantry and festivities it entails, is enough to lift the spirits of even the most desperate!

It will be a winter wedding, and preparations have long been underway. Every craftsman in the city is busy making furniture, outfits, princely gifts, or trying out new recipes for everything from Princess Cake and Esmerelda Pie to Thabor's Blackbrew and Tharaban's Party Sausage. And of course the facades along the Queen's Boulevard will need to be refurbished. That many of the capital's liturgs preach about unholy alliances, the inherent darkness of barbarians, and the witches' iron grip on the High Chieftain's soul causes more annoyance than fear.

Rumors

In the margins of this section you will find a series of rumors. These reflect what can be heard in the taverns and markets of Yndaros, often expressed in a whispering tone of voice. Half of them are, in all likelihood, completely made-up, and the other half are surely marked by misinterpretations and exaggerations. But who knows, maybe there are one or more grains of truth to be found among them.

"There is so much nonsense being said about the wedding; according to what I've heard, from a very reliable witness, Esmerelda fell head-over-heels for Thabor the very first time they met, on Karvosti. They really love each other, truly and deeply."

People & Places

A BOOK OF THIS limited size could not possibly cover all establishments and noteworthy characters in Yndaros. And the rapid changes always taking place in the city do not make it any easier – a tavern packed with customers could next month have been turned into a smithy; the temporarily famous captain of the City Watch who wrestled a highly inebriated ogre to the ground is forgotten as soon as the next bar fight begins.

NEVERTHELESS, DESCRIBED BELOW are a number of people and places which most citizens of Yndaros know and have opinions about. Note that in many cases, these have characteristics that make them stand out in one way or another; the reader should not expect the entire city to be equally remarkable – there are plenty of perfectly ordinary shops, taverns, inns and people in the Queen's city.

However, visitors and residents alike are naturally more interested in the extraordinary, and the business owners know it, as do other fame-seeking individuals. Though it does not always succeed, each establishment does its best to carve out a niche that will attract customers and keep them coming back. At the moment, the most popular niche is to specialize in "high quality," be it food, belt buckles or copper cauldrons. But since people have different tastes, these establishments are often precisely the ones which deserve to be described as ordinary.

"You know, my son in Thistle Hold, he wrote that Father Sarvola has gone missing. Perhaps he decided to leave, or maybe the Templars got to him. In any case, he's gone and the Mission House is deserted."

Food & Drink

PERHAPS IT IS their memories and stories of wartime and post-war austerity in Alberetor; perhaps it is their hard labor, or their wish to praise the Sun God by relishing his gifts – whatever the reason, the Yndarians are a voracious, not to say gluttonous, people. Food is constantly being consumed, enjoyed and discussed as passionately as treasure grounds are in Thistle Hold.

Throughout the year there are food vendors on every square and street corner, with their wagons and vending trays full of simple fare such as pies, sausages, kebrogs and bread. The competition is brutal, and those whose reputation exceeds that of their rivals can make a good living from it (like Madame Elinora, who after three years as a street vendor had saved up enough to open a tavern, the Victory Vault, in the Bohemian Quarter).

As for taverns, bars and other establishments, there is something for everyone, regardless of wealth or taste. Classical Ambrian cuisine, rooted in the traditions of Alberetor and inspired by the culinary habits of the nobility, is of course the most prevalent, but many have also developed a taste for the more rustic dishes served among the clans. As night begins to fall, the city is filled with a rich mix of mouthwatering scents, which, if the wind is coming in from the west, makes the people at the refugee camp weep with hunger.

TOWN HALL'S LOFT

On the top floor of the building which is said to have been the town hall of Lindaros lies the tavern known as the Town Hall's Loft. Below the sloping ceiling, the atmosphere is as cozy as it is elegant. The staff serves exclusive food at exclusive prices, allegedly based on recipes by the legendary Royal Chef Eberto. The clientele consists mainly of wealthy merchants and successful artists or artisans; the salon is nice and quiet, as is the balcony, where customers often end up having a drink, to wash down the last of four to twelve courses.

The fact that the owner, Jalio, has trouble attracting nobles to his tavern may seem strange. But there is an explanation – among the highest of the highborn, the Town Hall's Loft has a reputation for encouraging the view that the rightful privileges of the noble blood should be restricted in favor of the populace; that credentials and effort should be valued as highly as lineage. When confronted with such claims, Jalio usually responds with a dismissive snort, followed by silence. Of course, many of his regulars may have controversial opinions on the matter, but that does not necessarily mean that he agrees.

Pork & bean pie	3 shillings
Crayfish pâté	6 shillings
Glass of table ale	5 ortegs
Cup of Argona	2 shillings

THE DAVOKAR FEASTERY

The Davokar Feastery is a tavern located in the city's most affluent district, which is also where most of its customers are based. The menu offers classic Alberian dishes, but all ingredients come directly from either the great forest in the north, or from the Titans. The brawns, pies, pastries and soufflés all have a distinctly wild flavor – familiar and at the same time exotic.

Like Zoltar's Inn, the Feastery is often accused of deceiving customers by serving food that is not what they say it is. And there may actually be more grounds for suspicion in this case. The Feastery's owner, Madelia, is said to have made her fortune by seducing wealthy old men and then blackmailing them for information, dubious favors and money. The origin of this rumor has yet to be determined, as none of the presumed victims have come forth to confirm it. But if it is true, surely it would not be unreasonable to suspect other forms of foul play on her part.

Wild boar stew with beets	1 shilling
Piglet collops	2 shillings
Can of Vesa	5 ortegs
Cup of Blackbrew	2 ortegs

THE CROFT

If the Town Hall's Loft and the Davokar Feastery are described as upscale taverns, the Croft must be placed at the other end of the scale. Located in Old Kadizar, near the gate to the Monger's Square, it is the favorite hangout of Nobleman Dastan. The thief king even has his own table in the dining hall, on a platform one meter above the floor, from which he holds court and addresses "his subjects," spurring them into offering various forms of entertainment (his favorites being Naval Battle and Drunken Peons).

Some say the City Watch always has a number of undercover agents stationed at the tavern, hoping to obtain information regarding impending criminal activity. Other rumors claim that the Royal Sekretorium also has infiltrators hiding among the customers. The supposed reason for this is that Nobleman Dastan is suspected of colluding with agents from the City States and/or the Realm of the Order, or harboring wanted criminals (thieves, murderers, rebels and even surviving Dark Lords) at the tavern – for a price, of course. Regardless of whether these claims are true or not, guests at the Croft would probably be wise to keep their voices down when discussing matters best kept hidden from the authorities.

Porridge of the day	2 ortegs
Today's stew with turnips	5 ortegs
Tankard of Brutebrew	1 orteg
Tankard of Blackbrew	2 ortegs

The symbol of Nobleman Dastan

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FOOD & DRINK

1. Brother Humlu's
2. The Davokar Feastery
3. The Flaming Fist
4. Scratch & Rodent
5. Kumuma's Corner
6. The Mystic's Apprentice
7. Town Hall's Loft
8. The Victory Vault
9. Soup Kitchens
10. The Staff & Tome
11. The Croft
12. Ynedar's Legacy

HOUSING

13. The Bear Trap
14. Kohinoor's
15. The Seeker's Fortune
16. Depth of the Titans
17. The Tower
18. The Howling Wolf
19. The Axe & Cauldron
20. Zoltar's Inn

ENTERTAINMENT

21. Bego's Basement
22. The Dome
23. The Lucky Charm
24. The Islet
25. The Fortune Smithy
26. The Palace Park
27. The Steel Glove
28. Tuvinel's
29. The Savage
30. The Vivisectory
31. The Steam Bath

TRADE

32. Baldan's Gems
33. Boska's Silver
34. Grondel's
35. Iskandro's
36. Master Alinard
37. The Chance
38. Steelwife's Weapons

OTHER

39. Library of Anearia
40. Elori
41. Prison Tower
42. The Legacy Gallery
43. Tannery
44. Nobleman Dastan
45. The Royal Sekretorium
46. Claystone Plant
47. Cathedral of Martyrs
48. The Key Seat
49. Odbolg
50. Ordo Magica
51. Fortress Doudram
52. Pansar Barracks
53. The Triumph Theatre
54. The House of Nobles
55. The Royal Archives
56. Convent School of the Last Light
57. City Watch HQ
58. City Watch Offices

SQUARES

59. Traders' Square
60. Immigrant Square
61. Monger's Square
62. Triumph Plaza
63. The Sharp Stream

THE SCRATCH & RODENT

One of the shabbiest, filthiest, most decrepit buildings in the Laborers' District holds the only goblin-run tavern in Ambria. It is owned by three Karabbadokks named Unkh, Dudo, and Pulsuk, but does not in any way discriminate against other races – all are welcome, and all may eat as much as they like. However, humans are often too blinded by prejudice to even give it a chance, despite the fact that those who do usually contend that the Scratch & Rodent offers better value for money than any other establishment in town. Sure, their ingredients (leeches, insects, mice, moss, fir sprouts and the like) can be a challenge for both stomach and mind, but once accustomed to it, many people attest that they have never felt better than they do after a bit of goblin grub.

Lately, the owners and their establishment have been subjected to continual acts of sabotage. It all started quite harmlessly with someone smearing butter on the outside walls, and then on the benches and other furniture inside, without ever being detected. But more recently this elusive shadow (or shadows) has nailed dead animals to the well-buttered facade, and even tried to set the building on fire. The City Watch shows no interest in the matter, especially as Unkh, Dudo, and Pulsuk keep pretending that nothing has happened. Fortunately, local goblins have formed a small guard and assumed the task of keeping watch outside the Scratch & Rodent, which is why it still attracts customers.

Hubble

Hubble is a goblin delicacy made almost entirely from fermented hops. It is horribly bitter, but also said to have miraculous effects on one's mind, hair growth and virility. Few humans would want more than one glass (or maybe just a half), while goblins can happily consume many liters of it – provided they do not plunge into the Hubble Abyss, of course.

Field mouse on bark bread	2 ortegs
Fish offal soup	4 ortegs
Can of fine water	1 orteg
Mug of Hubble	2 ortegs

Housing

COMPARED TO THISTLE Hold, there are not that many inns and guest houses in the capital. People usually have specific reasons for visiting, often summoned by a certain person or organization who can also provide accommodation. Besides, one can always pitch a tent at the refugee camp; it does come with certain risks, but on the other hand it is completely free and may also include a daily meal of soup and bread.

Another option is to lodge with locals who happen to have a spare bed or two. Those willing to do so need only ask around in taverns, squares or on the street – there is always someone who knows someone who would not mind having guests sleep on the kitchen couch, at a fair price. This also has its risks, especially inside the walls of Old Kadizar, where the thieves guilds are systematically breaking up groups of travelling companions by scattering them across different lodgings, before giving them an unpleasant awakening in the middle of the night.

THE TOWER

The Tower is the largest inn in Yndaros. The building, whose outer walls date from the time of Lindaros, is located in the city center and is almost as tall as the Cathedral of Martyrs, though not as beautiful. The rooms on its nine floors vary greatly in size and quality – from the two dormitories sharing space with the kitchen and dining room on the bottom floor, to the top floor's two luxurious suites. The latter is reached by an elevator which runs up the southern facade; thanks to the wizard Elarea's ingenious design, the power source (an ogre named Bauta) is able to hoist up (or down) one whole family at a time, luggage included.

The Tower is owned and run by the elderly couple Dunia and Safia, who acquired the building in year 9 when Ordo Magica moved its Yndaros chapter into the restored Triplet Towers. The cleaning, cooking, and customer services are managed impeccably by the women's fifteen children, all adopted from penniless families at the refugee camp. The only thing that makes some people consider other housing options are the rumors of items left behind (perhaps deliberately) by the building's previous occupants. Everyone knows that Ordo Magica studies and experiments with hazardous powers, and supposedly, the evil of the Eternal Night can cling to corrupted objects and buildings for a very long time.

KOHINOOR'S

While visiting nobles will sometimes choose one of the Tower's upscale rooms, most prefer the inn

"There are several Iron Pact warbands hiding here in Yndaros. Ten, I bet. Maybe more. I'm sure it was they who set those beasts loose on the Dome last Feast Day! The victims' blood is on their conscience, if they even have such a thing between those pointy ears."

known as Kohinoor's. As its name suggests, the inn was established on the Queen's initiative, after she came to Yndaros and discovered there was no appropriate housing for guests of lesser nobility (the kind which did not own property in the city and could not be accommodated at the palace). Very few can afford to stay at Kohinoor's, and it is unlikely that anyone but a noble would feel at home there. Apparently, Manager Ribaio wants his customers to feel as though they were the personal guests of Queen Korinthia – with all that entails in terms of etiquette, formalities and customs.

Everything that involves the rich and the powerful is subject to gossip and speculation, and Kohinoor's is no exception. It has been called the headquarters of the Apostles of Supremacy, portrayed as a den of fornication and unbridled gluttony, and some say the staff consists almost entirely of spies, paid by various factions or powers. But more than anything, witness accounts from inside the establishment have furthered the rumors of division within, and between, Ambria's noble houses. For even though Kohinoor's can sometimes be a place for more or less secret, romantic fraternization between the realm's most powerful, angry arguments and bloody confrontations seem to be more common.

THE DEPTH OF THE TITANS

Right next to one of the city's smallest sun temples stands the inn called the Depth of the Titans. Previously known as the Crown and Scepter, it used to be one of the most popular inns in Yndaros, at least among those with limited means. But since the change of name and owners, at least half of its beds are usually unoccupied – even though the food and service are the same, and the staff is entirely human, many customers are put off when they learn that the place is now owned by the dwarven family of Valotzar.

The dining hall, however, remains as well-attended as ever. It is one of the Bohemian Quarter's liveliest, most boisterous venues for food, drink, music and song. Its modest stage is graced by hopeful newcomers as well as renowned greats like the bard Taubio and the vocalist Elia Silkensong. Festivities often last into the early morning hours, to the great annoyance of the liturgs next door, who would prefer to greet the radiant face of Prios without having their chants drowned out by *"disgraceful bellowing."*

The owners are never seen at the inn; the only signs of their involvement are the establishment's name, and the Valotzar family rune which can be seen all over the place: on the engraved silver plaque mounted above the entrance, burned into the furniture, and embroidered onto aprons, bed linen and napkins. However, many are convinced that dwarves are hiding in the building, or rather under it – in excavated tunnels and caves, whose entrances have been well-concealed. The wildest rumor speaks of a tunnel system stretching all the way to Küam Zamok; of countless dwarves dwelling beneath the Bohemian Quarter, and the Depth of the Titans being a central location in their invasion plan.

Valotzar's rune

ZOLTAR'S INN

Several of the city's inns are run by barbarians, and specialize in making the people of Davokar feel at home. Down by the harbor is the Bear Trap, by the Monger's Square stands the Axe & Cauldron, and those who would rather experience a more Ambrian conception of barbarian living may check into the Howling Wolf in the district called New Town – a place packed with furs, antlers, hunting trophies, low-priced Brutebrew, and crude wooden furniture.

The place generally considered most genuine is Zoltar's Inn. Housed in a Lindarian ruin, the

Table 1: The cost of lodging in Yndaros

NAME	TYPE	1 NIGHT	1 WEEK	1 MONTH	OWNERSHIP
The Tower	Dorm/Simple room	0,5/1 shilling	2/4 shillings	2 thaler	—
Depth of the Titans	Two or four bed room	1 shillings	3 shillings	15 shillings	—
Zoltar's Inn	Double room	2 shillings	9 shillings	3 thaler	—
The Tower	Suite	1 thaler	4 thaler	—	—
Kohinoor's	Room/Suite	3/5 thaler	12/20 thaler	—	—
Homestay	Local host	0,3–3 shillings	2–15 shillings	1–4 thaler	—
Buy nice	Three rooms by the Cathedral	—	—	—	2000 thaler
Buy ordinary	Three rooms in New Town	—	—	—	600 thaler
Buy simple	One room by Monger's Square	—	—	—	150 thaler

Zoltar's Inn has one of the city's most popular kitchens – especially when Aboar Stew is on the menu.

establishment has no ties to the chieftain of clan Vajvod, other than its decor, which was supposedly made to resemble his windowless residence – the stone fortress of Vojvodar. It is simple and robust, expertly crafted from wood, stone and linen. Cook Aztri's skill is widely recognized, especially when she gets her hands on some delicious aboar or kanaran. This only happens in winter, however, when the meat can be kept cold on the journey along the River Doudram. But whenever a shipment is on its way, the owner, Hadrak, makes sure to spread the word. A day or two later, when there is Aboar Stew or Snake Pie on the menu, long lines form outside the door. A fool's bargain, many say, grunting that said dishes are made from ordinary pigs or eels. But barbarians from Davokar reject these claims; they can definitely taste the difference between real aboar and Ambrian pork!

Entertainment

THE SEVENTH DAY of the week is called Sun Day, but in Yndaros it has become better known as Feast Day. Shortly after Korinthia arrived at her new capital, she declared all work prohibited from lunchtime until Earth Day morning. Feast Day afternoon, evening and night is a time for everyone to remember and pay tribute to the victorious dead – with parades, plays, singing and dancing, gladiatorial games at the Dome, and general festivities.

In between Feast Days, most Yndarians have neither spare time nor energy for much more than eating and sleeping; at most, they might stop to enjoy a group of jesters or actors performing on the streets of the capital or find time for a glass of blackbrew at a tavern, to the tales and tunes of some bard. But there are also those who do have plenty of both time and energy, and who love to boast about their privileged position. Besides, there must be things for visitors to occupy themselves with after dark.

THE ISLET

Every evening, a small armada of boats are rowed, lanterns glowing, toward the Islet and Madam Elindra Aroma's immensely popular establishment. Except in cases of sudden illness or injury, the house is full night after night, and those who make reservations may have to wait a month, if not more, to enjoy the excellent food and high quality entertainment.

A table on the salon floor, in front of the stage, costs three thaler per person. For twice that amount you get a place on the meter-high platform surrounding the floor, complete with your own personal waitress and free access to Ambrian wines. Should that not be enough, a seat in one of the twelve balconies protruding from the walls can be yours for fifteen thaler, but in that case the wait might be even longer as five of them are always reserved for (and prepaid by) special customers – House Kohinoor, Ordo Magica and the dwarves of the Valotzar family, among others.

It is said that many of the decisions affecting everyday life in Ambria are made on the balconies of the Islet's entertainment palace. Furthermore, the Royal Sekretorium is allegedly helping Madam Aroma recruit new staff – to ward off spies, perhaps, or simply because of her distinguished clientele. Whatever the reason may be, one can be quite sure that events on the Islet are crawling with agents of various factions and interests – most sent to gather information, the rest in pursuit of good food and a bit of recreation.

Today's three course menu	1–2 thaler
Pâté tray	5 shillings
Bottle of Southern Slopes (newly made)	4 thaler
Tankard of Kurun's Honor	1 thaler
Tankard of Zarekian Blackbrew	3 shillings

THE DOME

No one knows exactly why the huge arena currently known as the Dome was built – whether the Lindarians used it for spectacles, mass meetings or idolatrous worship is a hot topic among local history enthusiasts. The two colossal statues on each side of the main entrance are assumed to

The Palace Park

On one Feast Day every month, Queen Korinthia opens the gates to her magnificent park. Its sculptures, songbirds and caged beasts attract people from all walks of life, but the most eminent ones always wait until nightfall, when only those with special invitations are welcome.

Exemptions

In addition to the City Watch and other professionals the city cannot do without, many people are exempted from the Feast Day work prohibition. Employers may apply for such an exemption, and if the business they are operating can somehow contribute to the festivities, their application will of course be accepted – whether it be taverns, theater companies, dance troupes, or something of that nature. These regulations are often discussed in Yndaros' eastern districts, especially the arbitrariness regarding which requests are being granted. How Lord Manselm managed to have his claystone workers exempted from the festivities is as mysterious as it is infuriating.

Death Matches

The fights at the Dome usually end at first blood or when one of the gladiators admits defeat, but exceptions are sometimes made. Wild animals such as jakaars, fey beasts, or kotkas rarely leave the arena alive; the same goes for captive barbarians, goblins and ogres who through hostile actions have forfeited their right to live.

Another example is prisoners awaiting the death penalty, who under certain circumstances may try to win their freedom by defeating Ripe, the city's legendary executioner, in single combat (none have yet succeeded). And finally, the gladiators may challenge each other to the death – something that is always arranged and announced far in advance so that prices can be adjusted according to the popularity of the event.

represent different aspects of the Guardian – one looking much like an abomination in its many-armed splendor, the other sweet and childlike. It is of course possible that the people of Lindaros gathered there for the same, varied reasons as the Ambrians now do.

As with many other entertainment facilities, tickets are offered at different prices, in the Dome's case ranging from a few shillings to tens of thaler. Gladiatorial prizefights are arranged every night; the seats are rarely sold out unless one of Ambria's most celebrated fighters happens to need some extra money. Normally, Feast Day is when the biggest events are held, along with reenactments of famous battles or duels. And sometimes the gladiators must give room to other forms of entertainment. The arena is never more popular than when one of the royal art companies appears outside the palace walls – the Ambrian Court Dancers, the Korinthia Choir or the Palace Dramatists.

The notion that visiting the Dome would be dangerous is rejected by almost everyone. Only sixteen times in twenty years has one or more of the wild animals kept below the arena managed to escape and run amok on the bleachers. One could therefore argue that the streets outside the arena are in fact much more dangerous.

Cone of roasted almonds	2 ortegs
Salty-sweet needles	4 ortegs
Cup of Stut (unspecified)	2 ortegs
Cup of the Duke's Relief	3 ortegs

THE LUCKY CHARM

In Ambria there are a number of ways in which people may put themselves at risk in the hope of securing a better future. Those with the conviction and ability to pursue the treasures of Symbaroum head for Kastor or Thistle Hold; the rest must settle for other hazardous ventures. Besides betting on fights at the Dome, one can play dice, cards or board games like Prios' Sun. The most daring (or desperate) people engage in prizefights themselves at places like the Steel Glove, where even losers are paid a small sum as consolation for their broken bones.

The Lucky Charm is known as the top players' favorite venue, but there is also room for ordinary, hardworking gambling enthusiasts who bet parts of their salary hoping to see it multiplied. The lowborn noble Beramei Elderra took over management three years ago, and has since transformed its previously violent atmosphere into an oasis of concentrated stillness, largely thanks to the bouncers Ugla and Bruta. Guests may still disrupt the peace from time to time, but when they do, the ogres are quick to react.

The high rollers occupy the upper floor, while everyone else must stick to the smoke-filled, dimly lit rooms below. Many dream of achieving the same success as young lady Merlinda. The story goes that she walked into the Lucky Charm two years ago with four shillings and sixteen ortegs in her pocket; in six weeks she had won enough money on Prios' Sun to be invited to the high-stakes games upstairs, and only six months later Beramei declared that one of the rooms was at her sole disposal. Even though they are more or less guaranteed to lose, lots of people hope to one day be invited into Lady Sun's private chambers.

Pie of the day	2 shillings
Can of Brutebrew	5 ortegs
Can of Blackbrew (unspecified)	1 shilling
Cup of Urtal	3 shillings

THE STEAM BATH

The pools at the old Lindarian steam bath were originally used to prevent terrible diseases from breaking out among prisoners of war – they were regularly forced, fully clothed, into the lye-laden water. In year 8 Glorea Garal acquired the building in exchange for the piece of mountainous land the Queen had awarded her family, of which she was the only member to survive the war. The transaction also included enough money to renovate the bath house and purchase a loft in the Temple District.

Today the old building is one of the most beautiful in Yndaros, with brilliant white facades, shining

"I know why so many people rise again as undead these days. It's because of the First Father being here; they are simply part of the hordes of the Eternal Night, sent to test him and all of us righteous folk."

domes, and interior walls, floors and ceilings decorated with tasteful mosaics. Men and women bathe in separate areas with hot and cold pools and a number of steam saunas. No goblins or ogres are allowed inside, due to what Glorea calls their *"inherent filthiness,"* but otherwise the bath is open to all. The price depends on what time it is – visits are most expensive in the middle of the day, and cheapest after sundown.

Just over a year ago the owner appointed the changeling Grimorio Abramelin to the position of bath house manager. Many were concerned about whether the well-known former street performer was the right man for the job, but their skepticism appears to be unfounded. Sure, there are still people who whisper rumors that Master Abramelin was once involved in some rather shady business dealings, but overall the establishment seems to run as smoothly as ever.

Bowl of frozen fruit	5 ortegs
Oil-cooked cinnamon bread	2 ortegs
Oil-cooked cinnamon bread (sugar sprinkled)	4 ortegs
Can of wine (unspecified)	15 shillings
Spring water	Free

Trade

KEEN CONSUMERS CAN find just about anything they want in Yndaros. The only things which may not be sold openly are blight-stricken objects or ones that may have corruptive powers – but even those are said to be available for buyers with the right connections and sufficient knowledge of the city. Cons and scams are quite common, mainly aimed at newcomers and visitors; victims reporting such trickery to the City Watch are often met with derisive laughter, unless he or she is of noble birth or has friends in high places.

Most of the city's commerce takes place on the public squares; there people buy and sell everything from raw material, food, and used and refined objects, to elixirs and clothes. Alternatively, Yndarians go directly to the producers and manufacturers, where the risk of being cheated is not as high, and the goods, quantities and sellers can be chosen according to one's budget. There are also shops whose products are made by other people, but these often have a reputation for offering lower-quality goods. The latest example is the jewelry shop called Baldan's Gems which, since being taken over by the dwarven family of Statzak, mostly sells jewelry manufactured by barbarians or amateurs in the countryside – admittedly both beautiful and low-priced, but dismissed as knickknacks by wealthier individuals.

THE CHANCE

Just east of Triumph Plaza lies a shop called the Chance. Its owners, spouses Lyssa and Davido, purchase objects that people have brought with them from Alberetor, and resell them at a substantial profit. Their customers are mainly affluent Ambrians who can afford to pay good money to satisfy their nostalgia and revel in old memories, but even those who go there just to browse, wonder and remember often end up buying something small before they leave – a piece of jewelry, trinkets or perhaps a stone allegedly carved from the wall surrounding House Kohinoor's palace in Kandoria.

Business is so good, in fact, that Davido and Lyssa can afford to employ three scroungers: former army officers whose job is to scour abandoned properties south of the Titans and send whatever they find north with the caravans along the mountain routes. It can be anything from clothes and shoes, to furniture and linen, to jewelry and artworks. The owners then pay Ordo Magica to examine the objects before they are offered for sale, to make sure that they are free from contagions and shadows. The rumor that a set of embroidered bed linens sold at the Chance caused the outbreak of Pale Death last year is therefore, in all likelihood, false.

MASTER ALINARD

Ever since Queen Korinthia's decree to establish a guild system was enacted in year 19, all craftsmen in Yndaros have worked within a strict hierarchy.

Alinard's Products

All kinds of weapons and armor (including alchemical ones) can be ordered at Master Alinard's smithy. Prices are 10% lower than those listed in the *Core Rulebook* and the *Advanced Player's Guide*, and the waiting period is roughly a month plus one week for each quality added. As for mystical qualities, Alinard can craft weapons with the qualities Hypnotic and Breaching (see the New Rules section on page 78).

Each guild has its Grand Master, elected by and from a variable number of Masters, who in turn may promote diligent Novices to Adepts. The Grand Master of every guild – from masons and molders, to blacksmiths and brewers, to tailors, potters and so on – can be found in the capital, while most Masters reside in other towns and villages. After a turbulent beginning, the system is finally starting to work as intended.

However, things are being complicated by a phenomenon best exemplified within the Blacksmiths' Guild: additional masters arriving from other regions. For the last four years Ambrian smiths have had to compete with Master Alinard, who came to Yndaros from the city state of Koral. Additionally, many nobles order their fencing swords from the barbarian blacksmith Master Ranomar of clan Vajvod. The Blacksmiths' Guild's Grand Master, Petrona Steelwife, has not yet found a lawful way of prohibiting either Alinard or Ranomar from using the title of Master; nor has the guild been able to prove that these "outsiders" are spying on behalf of their respective motherlands.

Despite the ongoing smear campaigns (both literal and figurative), it appears that common folk have little interest in Master Alinard's place of birth or Ranomar's barbarian ancestry – they craft first-rate products at relatively low prices, and the week of extra waiting caused by overbooking is something most people can accept. The question is how long Petrona and the Ambrian blacksmiths will put up with the unwanted competition.

ISKANDRO'S

Healing elixirs and other drugs can be found anywhere in Yndaros. Prices vary depending on what part of town one is in, even though the products themselves are the same. Still, they say that pricing is the clearest indicator of a charlatan – a relatively low price in the Temple District should raise suspicion, and a relatively high price in the eastern parts of town could mean that someone is trying to sell you a bottle of dyed syrup or a pound of ground sunflower seeds. No, where alchemical substances are concerned, it is always wise to buy directly from members of the Alchemists' Guild.

With mystical artifacts the situation is different. Ordo Magica has so far kept the secrets of artifact crafting to themselves; those who are not connected to the witches, elves and trolls of Davokar must go to the Southern Tower to purchase lesser artifacts. But there is one exception: the newly opened shop Iskandro's in New Town, which specializes in ritual codices, spell scrolls, and seals for mystical powers as well as rituals.

However, there are speculations that Master Iskandro, once active at Ordo Magica's chapter in Ravenia, is running the shop on secret orders from Grand Master Seldonio, as a test to see how such a business should be managed. After all, how else could Iskandro offer artifacts with the properties of all the mystical powers and rituals included in the Wizardy tradition?

GRONDEL'S MASKS

Have you been invited to some country estate for a masquerade party? Do you desire some of the powers wielded by the barbarian witches? Or do you simply wish to scare a loved one into an early grave? Whatever the reason, Grondel's Masks is the place for you!

The enormous Grondel of clan Godinja is a proficient manufacturer of masks. Moreover, he has a vast network of contacts within Davokar – people who are making masks themselves as well as those peddling the works of others. Sometimes he also purchases objects from adventurers and explorers, only to sell them on at a higher price. His primary interests are authentic witches' masks or facial ornaments infused with mystical powers, but ordinary masks can also be of value, provided that they come with an interesting story. Among other things, he prides himself in having sold the mask of stained glass – a relic from the glory days of Lindaros – which Arch Duchess Esmerelda wore at the New Year's Ball in year 21.

Less flattering is that one of the city's thug gangs, the Brew Vandals, has started wearing masks during their raids. Rumor has it that these were all sold by Grondel and, more disturbingly, *"infused with darkness"* which contributes to the gang's increasingly violent behavior.

"Ever heard of the Suns, the Templar vengeance squads? They've struck again, massacred an entire village of free settlers in Davokar, on Vajvod territory. Apparently they were worshipping the Wildling, openly."

Knowledge & Information

IT HAS BEEN said before and bears repeating: the Queen's capital is where one finds the strongest muscles and sharpest minds in Ambria. It may not always be easy to gain access to the great bastions of learning and wisdom, but with the right contacts (or plenty of well-spent thaler) anyone can tap into the knowledge stored in the Triplet Towers, the Royal Archives and the Convent School of the Last Light.

This is not to say that all information is easily accessible. Each scholarly institution has its restricted sections, or secrets most of their own

staff are unaware of. That goes for previously mentioned examples as well as the archives of the City Watch, the Army, the Royal Sekretorium, and the Anchorage Asylum, to name a few. In order to obtain such classified information, one must resort to much more unscrupulous measures – burglary, infiltration, or gaining some kind of leverage over (and blackmailing) people with the proper clearance. In other words, it cannot be done overnight.

THE LEGACY GALLERY

Down by the harbor stands the five-story building which houses the Legacy Gallery. Connected by a spiral staircase, each floor is filled with objects salvaged from the withered lands of Alberetor. One is dedicated to furniture, another to crafted metal, and the top floor is crammed with screen walls displaying carpets, paintings, and tapestries. On the ground floor is a room with relics relating to the Young Gods, now regarded as heretical idols in the shadow of the Lawgiver. There is also a small stage where skalds and minstrels take turns performing works which were popular in the old homeland.

The largest crowds are usually found on the second floor, engrossed by the exhibition commemorating important events from the Great War. On display are, among other things, the white dress worn by Korinthia as she was rescued by First Father Jeseebegai, and an alleged replica of the Dark Lord's crown. Those with time on their hands may read about other noteworthy happenings – such as the death of King Ynedar, the Battle of Haaras (now known as Black Haaras), and the significance of the so called Exaltation, when Prios was officially recognized as the One god and the Giver of Laws.

THE TORCH

While the Legacy Gallery may be glorifying history, many believe the Torch is wrongfully dragging both the past and the present through the mud of the gutters. The first criers arrived ten years ago – children of modest backgrounds who got up on their distinctive crimson stools and shouted out "news" in East Yndaros. The message remains the same: the rulers are corrupt, the City Watch discriminates against people, other news outlets are spewing false propaganda, and the time has come for people to stand up against injustice!

The Royal Sekretorium is no doubt doing their very best to locate the financier and source of the Torch's lies, but so far without success. And perhaps it does not matter; so long as the target audience struggles to get by and hopes for alms from the larders of the slandered elite, it will take a lot for such a rebellious call to take root. Nevertheless, many cannot help but wonder about the founder of the Torch – what motives such a person might have; how he or she obtains what is clearly secret information, and the means by which he or she manages to avoid getting caught.

Whatever the truth may be, a lot of people still regard the Torch's criers as an indispensable source of knowledge, since they seem to have direct access to otherwise classified information – assuming, of course, that there is some degree of truth in the organization's anti-Ambrian outcries.

ODBOLG

Allegedly even the Queen fears getting on the wrong side of Odbolg. The aged goblin was the right-hand man of Nobleman Dastan, until a couple of years ago when he, for no apparent reason, parted ways with the thief king, and has since become one of the most feared people in Yndaros. They say his network of homeless children and infiltrators have dirt on every person (literally!) in the city, and that he now makes good money selling delicate information to the highest bidder. The expression *"Odbolg sees you!"* is used at all levels of society, as a warning whenever someone is planning to do something dubious or illegal.

Odbolg lives in a loft in Old Kadizar, and has clearly remained on good terms with Nobleman Dastan – due to some kind of leverage, according to some; out of long and faithful friendship, according to others. His home is guarded by a group of well-paid war veterans, and the few occasions when the goblin has been in danger clearly demonstrated that he may also call upon Dastan's people for help. The question is how long this will be enough to protect the old rumormonger. If nothing else, many people would probably be willing to risk their lives to obtain his legendary register of personal information...

THE LIBRARY OF ANEARIA

The institution known as the Library of Anearia was founded more than two centuries ago in Berendoria, Alberetor. Its objective, which was stipulated by the original curator Anearia, is still the same av ever: to create *"a comprehensive archive of everything worth knowing."* It is funded by nobles who would like to boast about their sizable donations to the library. But its main patron, and the manager of its finances, is House Karnak, currently represented by Duke Sesario – the new husband of Queen Mother Abesina and father of Arch Duchess Esmerelda.

"The entire city of Yndaros is undermined by tunnels and caves, that's a fact. Some are ancient, as old as the ruins above ground; others were dug more recently, by dwarves and other criminals. Smuggling tunnels..."

"The saying 'Odbolg sees you!', it's true! Odbolg is a changeling who used to work for Nobleman Dastan, but is now his own master. Commit even the slightest misdemeanor and he'll know, and then, sure as the wind blows, the blackmail begins!"

One might ask how the library managed to move its clearly enormous collection across the Titans. But in all likelihood, the secretive group of librarians who manage the vast stores of knowledge will not answer. Then again, if rumors are true, the transportation would have been quite easy, since almost the entire archive is kept in the Yonderworld, the Spirit World, or some other reality beyond that of humans. If so, the impressive tomes occupying the library's modest three-story building in the Temple District would merely be the snowy tip of a mountain of knowledge.

Becoming a member of the Library of Anearia, and thereby entitled to the librarians' help in seeking answers to one's questions, is something many people are reluctant to do. For it requires more than just a signature in some ledger; a small chunk of one's hair must be submitted for archiving. Once this is done, one is free to pay the nine thaler required to gain insight into things that are, things that were, or things that will be. Whether or not the answers are always accurate is difficult to say, as members are not allowed to pass on their knowledge to others.

Authorities

WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, the most powerful people in Ambria are all gathered in Yndaros – the Queen, the Field Marshal, the Grand Master of Ordo Magica, the Grand Masters of the craftsmen's guilds, and the owners of prominent establishments, to name a few of the most famous ones. In addition, there are numerous informal, yet highly influential individuals in the form of advisers, assistants and agents, not to mention the secretive leaders of various cults and crime syndicates.

Relations between these powerful figures are riddled with conflict; they represent organizations with different interests – often opposing ones, which collide when they are finally acted upon. Just like in Thistle Hold and other Ambrian cities, the arguments are held behind closed doors, sealed so tightly that nothing but vague rumors ever seeps out to the common folk. There are exceptions, but mostly such that concern controversies about the city itself or its surrounding area, and rarely between the top representatives of the groups involved; the people of Yndaros will never witness a public conflict between Korinthia Nightbane and First Father Jeseebegai, but must settle for watching the Key Master quarrel with First Theurg Peonio.

THE KEY MASTER SEAT

Though Yndaros is formally run from the Key Master Seat, it is common knowledge that Herakleo Attio and his colleagues are working in the Queen's shadow – at the end of the day, everything they do requires Korinthia's implicit or explicit approval. It would therefore be unfair to blame the Key Master for the increasingly harsh rhetoric and measures used against displeasing elements.

Herakleo oversees and coordinates the administration at the Key Master Seat, but all major decisions are made in consultation with the leaders of its other branches, or at the top – by the Queen and her council. As First Justice, Father Matheo Brigo has a place on both the city's and the Queen's council; they say that he often sends one of his subordinate Judges to attend the Seat's meetings, but the honorable sun priest must still be described as one of Yndaros' most powerful individuals – especially since he is the one who records and communicates the laws of Prios.

The other council members are Tax Commissioner Eudora Garlaka and Construction Commissioner Jurlio Berakka, both of whom run vast organizations with many branches and sub-departments. The Tax Commissioner is personally responsible for the city's finances, while her underlings manage day-to-day activities such as payments, disbursements, debt collection, audits and so on. Master Jurlio's subordinates are in turn responsible for

Crime & Punishment

Keeping people in prison is both expensive and unsafe, which is why various forms of corporal punishment and humiliation are much more common than incarceration. Disturbers of the peace must often spend a period of time in one of the pillories found on many of the city's squares; repeated offenses will cost you an ear or two, as a permanent sign of shame and guilt. Property crimes or fornication result in a number of lashes, followed by the loss of fingers or a hand, but could ultimately send the inveterate sinner to the gallows. More serious crimes such as murder, treason, heresy and rebellious activities are almost always punished with death.

In Yndaros, incarceration is reserved for three kinds of criminals. High-ranking nobles may be allowed to live out their lives behind bars; the same goes for spies and other agents of foreign powers, as they can be pumped for information and used for diplomatic purposes. The third kind is of course those who, in one way or another, have been tainted by corruption, and may therefore be valuable as objects of study for black cloaks and wizards.

sanitation, construction, renovation, roads and parks (including monuments and such).

Persistent rumors suggest that the seasoned Construction Commissioner, Duke Junio's father, who by the end of the war held an equivalent position in Kandoria, is often at odds with the much younger, lowborn, yet completely disrespectful Eudora. Naturally, the issue causing the arguments is whether the Tax Commissioner allocates enough funds for construction and maintenance, which – as Master Jurlio sees it – she does not. And the general population are equally divided. On the Construction Commissioner's side are the people living in the city's eastern districts, with rugged streets, unreliable wells, inadequate drainage systems, and no barrier between them and the diseased and desperate wretches at the refugee camp. Most other citizens would like to stay on the current path, with more money being spent on the City Watch, the prisons, and other security measures.

Some astute observers are sometimes heard wondering whether the need for guards and prisons would not decrease drastically if only the lives of refugees, daythalers and common laborers were made a little bit easier.

THE CITY WATCH

The proud City Watch of Yndaros is led by Commander Alvo Steelneck, a fifty-year-old army veteran who earned his nickname on the exodus across the Titans – he was captured by a group of plunderers who despite repeated attempts failed to decapitate him; a story which many find hard to believe, even though he has the scars to prove it.

Steelneck answers directly to First Justice Matheo Brigo, and has in recent years seen an increase in both budget and personnel. The headquarters lies just downhill from the palace; there are also smaller guard stations in every district, manned by two to seven captains, each commanding between five and fifteen watchmen. The largest station is the one by the Monger's Square, as it is also responsible for patrolling, and answering distress calls from, the refugee camp.

Each guard station can hold a handful of prisoners for short periods of time, either in simple cells or chained to the walls. The headquarters' two-story dungeon has room for a larger number of people, who may be detained for months before they are sentenced (some in the isolation cells on the bottom level, where the blight-stricken and blight-marked are kept). After their sentence has been passed the prisoners are usually taken to the Triumph Plaza for some kind of corporal punishment or public humiliation; less often to the Prison Tower in the Palace District, or to Anchorage Asylum – a sanatorium

The giant executioner Ripe has become the symbol for law and punishment in Yndaros.

run by Ordo Magica on an islet an hour or so west of the city, where slightly blight-marked patients are held, cared for, and studied.

Serious cases of stigmatization are rarely seen in Yndaros, either in jail, on the Triumph Plaza, or at Anchorage Asylum. Instead they are most likely taken to the Twilight Monastery up in the Titans, though some say that they, too, are kept in the city – in secret levels below the City Watch headquarters, the Triplet Towers, the Cathedral of Martyrs, or even the Palace itself.

THE CATHEDRAL OF MARTYRS

The year after Korinthia's arrival to the Promised Land, it was finally ready for inauguration – the Cathedral of the Hallowed Martyrs, better known simply as the Cathedral of Martyrs. It was built on foundations from the time of Lindaros, fitted with the hemispherical copper dome of Prios, and with new exterior ornaments and interior paintings. The atrium, with its balconies, can accommodate more than a thousand worshippers turning their collective gaze to the golden podium where First Theurg Peonio conducts his sermons, in the light which streams through the temple window portraying a triumphant Queen Korinthia on her prancing steed. Along the edges of the hall are towering statues of martyrs and lightbringers, and incense burners emitting the same scent as in the temples of old Alberetor.

In Yndaros, Prios is ever present. His spirit watches over family dinners, court proceedings, business transactions, solemn ceremonies, births and deaths, and the people must all praise *"Prios, the One"* in good times and in bad. The city's residents still live as much in the shadow of war as they do

"Stay away from the wagons picking up daythalers in East Yndaros. At least half of them are kidnapping people, selling them to the barbarians as slaves, or to cultists as human sacrifices. Get up on one of them and you're dead!"

in the radiance of triumph, and none are allowed to forget who brought victory to the Ambrians during the Great War. Guilt, gratitude and duty are recurring themes, preached by the First Theurg as well as his eminent liturgs – the Ambrian people have a long way to go before Prios has regained his strength; darkness must be vanquished, the wilds must be cleansed, and the gifts of the One must be harvested and cultivated. And these themes are undoubtedly being given a more prominent role with each passing year.

For the past two months this development has accelerated even further, due to the First Father's relocation from Templewall to Yndaros. The sun priests' stricter emphasis on duty and guilt, as well as their increased presence on the city's streets and squares, is probably linked to Jeseebegai's arrival and the increased resources and activity of the City Watch. In turn, this development is most likely a reaction to rebellious, or even heretical, tendencies within the church and the realm in general. Citizens are discouraged from placing too much importance on divisions within the church, conflicts between the First Father and the Queen, and a growing, tacit support for the likes of Father Sarvola. But perhaps there is some truth to the claim that the absence of external threats has allowed for potentially serious internal conflicts to grow more and more threatening.

THE TRIPLET TOWERS

Like the nearby Cathedral of Martyrs, Ordo Magica's residence is built on Lindarian foundations – three tall and narrow towers which supposedly served a similar purpose back when they were first constructed. The northern tower is shared by the three schools of the wizardry tradition – the pyromancers at the bottom, the illusionists in the middle, and the mentalists near the top, below the two floors reserved for Grand Master Seldonio and his staff of novices and adepts.

The southern tower is dedicated to alchemy, medicine and, more recently, artifact crafting, while the eastern one houses magistrates and students of the learned disciplines – linguistics, history, culture, art, philosophy and so on. People who once studied or worked at the Triplet Towers claim that Ordo Magica's headquarters is a boiling cauldron of conflict, where infighting over resources, recognition and authority is fierce. One of the most widespread stories is thought to have come from a notary named Tera, and describes the literally murderous planning of a party at the Southern Tower. The story seems to indicate that, within Ordo Magica, friends are always temporary, and only meant to be mobilized in the struggle against a (for the time being) common enemy.

But no matter how bad things might be, many are still attracted by the security which Ordo Magica can provide for its students and members. Admittance does not rely as heavily on contacts, wealth and family as in other organization, but rather on proven skill and diligence. There are countless stories about people of modest background winning great riches and influence thanks to Ordo Magica. But perhaps this is also the very thing which triggers the conflicts – those who achieve success are afraid of losing what they have gained, and will use all their newly acquired power and influence to avoid falling back into the wretchedness from whence they came.

NOBLEMAN DASTAN

The underworld of Yndaros has its kings and queens, just like the ordinary world. And the soon to be sixty-year-old Nobleman Dastan is without doubt the top dog in the unwashed and violent pack. They say that he started his career as an orphan pickpocket in Berendoria, and that, before crossing the mountains, he had dethroned his adoptive father and taken over his growing organization of thieves, charlatans and extortionists. Having arrived in Yndaros, he kept a low profile, while his competitors acted too soon and were weeded out. Once the city had grown large enough to tolerate a certain amount of organized crime (and even appreciate the help in keeping some form of order in the underworld), Dastan emerged from the shadows to conquer Old Kadizar.

But the city continued to grow, and its population is now too large for Dastan to control. Several small-time gangs are supposedly fighting to remain independent from the Thief King – for instance the Band of Brothers which hides among the refugees, and a gang based in the Bohemian Quarter whose members claim to serve someone called the Warlock. And then there are the dwarves.

These well-dressed and courteous individuals may appear to be respectable merchants, but there are many indications (some stronger than others) that they have a lot in common with the thief king of Old Kadizar. One thing that raises suspicion is the brutal gang fighting that occasionally breaks out in the western parts of town; another is that many of the previous owners of dwarven establishments have vanished without a trace, as if swallowed by the earth – living off their riches somewhere far away, say the dwarves; buried or dumped in the River Doudram, say the skeptics. Either way, it is obvious to everyone that at least the families of Valotzar, Alzerek and Baldysik are becoming major players in the city's shadier circles!

Yndarien

QUEEN KORINTHIA'S DUCHY is the most populous in all of Ambria, and also the most densely populated, with approximately one million inhabitants scattered across five counties, eight baronies, and two regions under the direct control of the crown.

THE LUSH, ROLLING landscapes in the shadow of the Titans are divided by the River Veloma and lots of smaller streams and lakes. Well-travelled country roads crisscross through swaying fields of corn, wheat and rapeseed as yellow as the sun. The view is occasionally blocked by apple trees, grapevines or fields overflowing with sunflowers, but is otherwise perfectly clear from on top of the rolling hills.

Indeed, were it not for the predators, plunderers and contagious diseases, Yndarien would probably be the paradise which it is rumored to be. Other well-known, but less talked about cracks in the facade are the many dispossessed refugees struggling to survive, in the villages and areas bordering the mountains, and the hate and fear which still cloud the minds of many inhabitants. The myth may say that the Promised Land has room and shelter for all, but one does not have to be a cynic to understand that such assertions are part of the dream, and have little to do with reality.

This chapter contains brief descriptions of regions which stand out, for one reason or another, and are often discussed in Yndaros – beginning with five counties or baronies, followed by a few natural landscapes. The focus is on the people dominating each respective region and what makes them such a popular topic of conversation, not least in terms of what dangers threaten the population.

"A guy I know said that Captain Kathia will soon have two thousand soldiers in her army of refugees – war veterans, ex-robbers, outcast mystics, mad priests, and so on. The rebellion will begin any day now, I guarantee it!"

Counties & Baronies

TWENTY-TWO YEARS AFTER the Victory, the Ambrian kingdom comprises sixty-five regions, not counting Prios Domain, ruled by the Sun Church. There are also a handful of regions governed by appointed Princes of the Realm, of which Thistle Hold is the largest.

It is said that the Queen and her council divided and distributed the properties of the Promised Lands based on the principle of *"keep your friends close but your enemies closer."* Whether this is true or not, Yndarien is home to several families which throughout history have been accused of treason and rebellious activities. Among their neighbors are many of the noble houses which traditionally are closest to House Kohinoor, such as Herengol and Brigo.

At the moment there are not many open conflicts between noble families, and with a few exceptions, the known ones seem rather minor – presumably because most of the families are still fully focused on establishing and developing their territories. The independent "kingdom" of New Dekanor is one such problem; the intensifying diplomatic dispute between Houses Vereo and Elsbet regarding the mountain area still governed by the crown is another. But given the region's history, and the

YNDARIEN
1. Crown Land
2. Vearra (County)
3. Grendel (Barony)
4. Brigo (County)
5. Dekanor (Barony)
6. Soleij (Barony)
7. Harl (Barony)
8. Meleon (Barony)
9. Attio (Barony)
10. Vereo (Barony)
11. Dresel (Barony)
12. Elsbet (Barony)
13. Crown Land
14. Karella (County)
15 Herengol (County)
KASANDRIEN
16. Crown Land
17. Karnak (Barony)
18. Galeia (Barony)
19. Kalfas (County)
20. Mirelda (Barony)
NARUGOR
21. Crown Land
22. Salamos (Barony)
23. Patio (Barony)
24. Erebus (Barony)
25. Argona (County)
26. Derego (Barony)
27. Elderra (Barony)
28. Gorinder (Barony)
29. Dardall (Barony)
30. Loramon (Barony)
SERAGON
31. Crown Land
32. Odaal (Barony)
33. Kaldel (County)
Sevona
Berenda
NEW BERENDORIA
Mederen
Haraag
Erebus
Elandel
Galaldo
Kurun
Patio
Argona
Salamos
Mirelda
Kalfas
KASANDRIEN
Agrella
Redina
The Kingdom of Ambria
Year 21 after the Victory
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34. Elvelin (Barony)
35. Oralak (Barony)
36. Argom (Barony)
37. Mekele (Barony)

NEW BERETOR
38. Crown Land
39. Nidel (Barony)
40. Ferlas (Barony)
41. Melion (County)
42. Garlaka (Barony)
43. Konlos (Barony)
44. Heranor (Barony)
45. Mirelgos (Barony)
46. Parfas (Barony)
47. Crown Land
48. Starak (Barony)
49. Crown Land
50. Crown Land
51. Crown Land

MERVIDUN
52. Crown Land
53. Kirte (Barony)
54. Iesel (Barony)
55. Arobel (County)
56. Lethona (County)
57 Furia (Barony)
58. Erast (Barony)
59. Crown Land

NEW BERENDORIA
60. Crown Land
61. Crown Land
62. Mederen (Barony)
63. Haraag (Barony)
64. Elandel (Barony)
65. Galaldo (Barony)

nobles' general desire for more, bigger and better, it will probably not be long before new, more grievous conflicts erupt.

Vearra

VEARRA

All Ambrians know that the venerable House Vearra would like to see Korinthia dethroned and replaced by one of their own; they always have, and they always will. Count Demetro is spotted more frequently in Templewall than in the capital, and is apparently on very good terms with the First Father, despite the fact that his cousin Iakobo and his sun knights have seceded from the Curia – most likely due to the Count's well-attested piety and generosity toward the representatives of Prios.

The latter is clearly demonstrated by the cathedral currently being raised near the town of New Vearra. It is being built from scratch and will eventually surpass the Cathedral of Martyrs in both size and grandeur, provided that no future attempt at sabotage succeeds where the previous ones have failed. Whether it is rebels, heretics, the rival House Argona or even the Queen herself who wants the project stopped has yet to be determined, but in some of the more free-spirited taverns in Yndaros, people are taking bets on when and how the structure will be razed.

Brigo

BRIGO

Back in Alberetor, House Brigo was not a very prominent one, but its representatives have long been close to House Kohinoor, and upon their arrival in the Promised Land the Queen awarded the head of their family the title of Count. With its one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, the county of Brigo is the second largest region in Yndarien and has the most arable land in the kingdom due to the tributaries of the river Noora, allegedly combined with some mystical assistance.

Grendel

The Powers of the Moonlight Monolith

Those who visit taverns like the Staff & Tome or the Flaming Fist while the Moonlight Monolith is being discussed can expect a lot of agitated and frightened voices. According to Ordo Magica the crystal is extremely dangerous – so powerful that careless use can cause an explosion drowning large parts of southern Ambria in the darkness of the Eternal Night. That such an artifact may be handled by anyone but Grand Master Seldonio's subordinates is not only a scandal; it could destroy all that has been achieved since the Great War.

For on Count Edogai's land stands the Moonlight Monolith, an enormous crystal cliff with a surface which appears to have been cut and polished into irregular facets. Towering above the plains, a transparent dark blue with streaks of black and gray, it is said to be some kind of mystical power source, or a place where mystical power lines intersect. Whatever the case, it is definitely the source of a deepening conflict.

For the past five years the Count, presumably at his son Iasogoi's request, has provided funds to establish an organization of mystics independent from Ordo Magica. It is called Ordo Ambra, led by a former order member named Mergoi Soleij, and serves mainly to develop practices which will fully shield mystics from the influence of darkness. The Moonlight Monolith is apparently central to their efforts, which is why Master Mergoi and his colleagues are the only ones allowed to examine and use it. Grand Master Seldonio, and the wizards who until five years ago studied the monolith themselves, are currently discussing the issue with the Queen. Rumor has it that the debate is becoming increasingly heated, and that Korinthia keeps referring to the Count's right to decide in the matters pertaining to his domain.

GRENDEL

To most people in Yndaros, the Huldra is more of a fairy tale than an actual threat, but of the Ice Witch they are truly afraid. Her band of plunderers regularly attack caravans, river transports and less fortified villages, and show no mercy to anyone who gets in their way. What is more, everyone is convinced that she has large parts of the refugee camp in her clawed grip, through covert agents hiding among its tents and wagons. Allegedly, the Ice Witch has but one goal: to exact vengeance upon the Ambrian intruders, with sword and fire and witchcraft.

Despite being the Ice Witch's father, Baron Manvar Grendel is as badly affected as everyone else. But that does not stop many Yndarians from accusing him of secretly supporting his daughter, or even hiding her on his estate. There seems to be no evidence, not even any clear indications of this being true. But ever since their elevation to nobility, House Grendel has struggled to earn the Ambrians' trust. Many are boycotting goods produced in the barony, and despite rich soil, they have had difficulties attracting crofters to their lands – they must settle for newly-arrived refugees (who will not stay longer than necessary) and barbarians tempted by the Ambrian lifestyle. Settlers come and go, and the only ones to stay for

Valtar Brigo, King Ynedar's brother-in-arms, has been honored with a statue at the Traders' Square in New Town

a longer period are those of the unruly goblin tribe Lokkmalakk, whose megalomaniacal chieftain, Garulubbulug, has publicly expressed his wish to conquer the region.

ATTIO

Baron Valero and Baroness Herela of Attio, proud parents of Key Master Herakleo, were close to King Ynedar and are equally close to his daughter. Their relationship to each other, however, is anything but close. Gossips claim that a long and grievous quarrel regarding their second son, Serex, has torn them apart – a conflict which over time has had catastrophic consequences.

Rumors have swirled about the Key Master's parents ever since they came to Ambria, but in this case, the reality is much more dramatic. A few months ago the baroness moved all her belongings to the recently restored fortress of Storm's Home near the southern border; she enlisted three hundred highly experienced sellswords of the Free League, and proclaimed half the barony under her rule and protection.

This may all seem mad, or even ridiculous, but no one is laughing (except their son, Serex, who allegedly laughed himself purple when he learned what had happened). Everyone who knows Herela Attio understands that she is dead serious, so it is no wonder that people were quick to submit, and that Count Valero is having intense discussions with the Queen's strategists in the hope of finding a peaceful solution.

SOLEIJ

It was no accident that someone from House Soleij eventually ended up on the Evening Throne in the Sun Church's most hallowed building – the Templewall Cathedral.

Long before the exaltation of Prios, its members worshipped the sun god as the One and publicly denounced the other Young Gods. No matter what positions their family has held –ecclesiastical, worldly or scholarly – they have served their god faithfully and selflessly. And though some conspiracy theorists suspect it was intended as some form of punishment, this is surely why House Soleij was given stewardship over Yndarien's most vulnerable territory.

Dowager Baroness Eudela Soleij, mother of the First Father and of the prominent Master of the Order, Levia, does not shy away from the challenge. The plunderers pillaging the mountain regions, the refugees trying to sneak into Ambria after having been rejected at Prios Pass, even the groups of Dragouls who occasionally stray north through the Titans – they have all had a taste of her brutal methods. Many also believe there is a significant risk that she will turn her icy gaze inwards, towards the heretical neighbor of New Dekanor. Most assume that it was the Dowager Baroness who orchestrated the two known assassination attempts on the self-proclaimed King Mergai, and that she will soon send her troops east, unless Korinthia resolves the situation.

Attio

Soleij

Wilderness

EVEN THOUGH YNDARIEN is quite densely populated, there is ample room for the wild and the savage. Predators, plunderers and others who defy the Queen's order are hiding in vales and copses, in secluded ruins from the times of Lindaros and Symbaroum, or among the inhabitants of smaller settlements.

Living and surviving outside the major cities and villages is surely a challenge. Still, many are evidently willing to pay a high price for the relative freedom offered by the countryside – this is where they feel at home and at ease, even though they must often take up arms to defend homes, family and neighbors.

This section includes a brief and general description of some particularly vulnerable regions, along with examples of the stories being told about the dangers that lie within them. Together these entries will hopefully paint a pretty clear picture of why so many people choose to lead their lives in the capital, despite the crowds, the crime and the poverty.

THE RIVERS

The rivers Doudram, Noora and Veloma are part of the reason why the lands between the Titans and Davokar could be colonized so quickly. People, as well as raw and processed goods, are transported along the wide and gentle waters – most of them passing the cargo docks of Yndaros on their way to their final destination. Pirates are more common up north, but may also be encountered on the rivers of Yndarien, disguised as merchants in distress, or with fast, agile longboats hidden on the shore until their next prey comes sailing by. The most famous of all is the pirate queen Aganda, better known as Captain Hag because of her assumed use of witchcraft to conceal her two-masted vessel – otherwise the rangers would have found her hideout a long time ago.

Many stories tell of water beasts threatening those who travel the rivers. Some creatures are quite small, such as the Drilling Leech, which can attach in heavy clusters to boat hulls and eat

"The Blood-Daughter, the woman in charge of the Sovereign's Oath, she drinks human blood, a jug a day. To stay young, they say. That means she's a witch, doesn't it? Hardly a surprise, if you ask me..."

through the wood in about 24 hours, in order to feast on the crew of the sunken ship. Another example is the Vapaya, which has learned to stalk pirate ships, waiting for someone to fall overboard. Larger marine monsters, like the River Hunter, the Hammer Eel, and the enormous, poisonous toad creature which barbarians call Skullan, are more common in the north, but can all stray as far south as the roots of the Titans.

THE TITANS

Where the rivers have pirates, the Titans have plunderers. The largest and most feared groups are the barbarian bandits of the Ice Witch and the mighty ogre Mound's motley crew of goblins and rage trolls. The former are based in the eastern parts of the mountains, while the latter usually raid farther west. But these are by no means the only ones terrorizing travelers and caravans. Smaller bands of lowlife scum pop up every so often, ready to kill and die to get their hands on the hard-earned possessions of others. Some believe them to be outcast refugees and other unfortunate souls who have been forced into a life of crime just to survive. Such sentimental sob stories do not weaken the resolve of the rangers and the major bandit chiefs. Apparently, newly-emerged groups rarely last more than a month before they are put to the sword.

As for beasts, the mountains are heavily dominated by the Kotka – large cat creatures living in packs which sometimes head down to the plains in search of easy prey. There are plenty of Jakaars as well, sometimes accompanied by a lone hunger wolf. Wilder tales tell of giants, often called Titans, supposedly living in remote ravines or hiding underground. The scholars of Ordo Magica reject the notion of an unknown race of giants, and maintain that the observed creatures on which the stories are based were most likely liege or rage trolls. And the alleged existence of dragons and pack-living manwolves have been dismissed as equally preposterous.

THE HILLS OF GHOSTMOOR

Sandwiched between the baronies of Vereo and Elsbet and the county of Herengol is a hilly province controlled by the crown. Experts have identified two reasons why the Queen chose to pay such a hefty sum to reclaim the region from the widow Glorea Garal: easily accessible mines, and the hills of Ghostmoor.

Regarding the former, nothing in the Promised Land is easily accessible in the literal sense, but according to reports there should be a vast network of tunnels with rich deposits of iron, lead, copper and other valuable minerals. Unfortunately, the same rumors say that predators, bandits and the fact that the mines are connected to the perilous passages of the Underworld, have posed great challenges to the Queen's enterprise and made it a military one more than anything else.

Ghostmoor is the name of the rolling fields of burial mounds resting in the shade of the Titans. Queen Korinthia has granted Ordo Magica the exclusive right to excavate and study the tombs, to uncover the region's history. The man in charge, Master Lasandro, is still not sure about who lies buried there, why they were buried on that particular spot, or whether the tombs have some connection to Symbaroum or Lindaros. But, of course, none of this matters to the plunderers who dare challenge the Ghostmoor guard patrols, hoping to reach the heart of some burial mound before the wizards do.

THE VELOMA VALLEY

The Veloma Valley is the stretch of land where the river flows straight from east to west – from the country road between Prios Pass and Yndaros, to the area where the tributaries of Herengol converge with the main stream. It is a famously scenic place; a popular destination for painters and other artists in search of motifs or inspiration for their masterful works. The grapevines covering the southern slopes are also the basis of the finest wines in Ambria; House Karella, for one, has resumed production of the delicious Southern Slopes, although they still struggle to recreate the deep and dry fruitiness characterizing the barrels produced in Alberetor.

But even the Veloma Valley has its problems. Predators and plunderers rarely roam quite that far to the north, but its sparse population living on solitary farms scattered across the countryside seems to attract other malevolent elements. In the taverns of Yndaros one sometimes hears talk of no less than three blood cults who once held their ceremonies on precisely such farms – one of them led by the fallen Master of the Order Maragandol, found guilty of poisoning three fellow wizards in Agrella. But even more famous is the group of twenty blight-stricken refugees who managed to slip past the ranger patrols and continue all the way to Veloma, where they massacred a family of winemakers and their farmhands, only to take possession of their property. For six months they remained undetected; once found, it took a squad of theurgs, templars and pansars less than a day to purge the area of disease, as well as diseased.

"According to my sources in the army, the main force of the Sovereign's Oath is only a few days from Karvosti. There must be tens of thousands of barbarian warriors, no doubt supported by a whole bunch of witches. Mark my words, war is coming!"

IT WAS NOT EASY for Arvano and his half-brother to get past the crowd gathered in a semicircle in front of the Cathedral of Martyrs, but with the slow movements of the masses they managed to squeeze through, step by step. Just as the last rays of sunshine faded from the winter sky, they finally pushed their way to the front. They had waited a long time to witness the spectacle which their countrymen now associated with the Sun God – a god who once represented love and the spark of life, but had been distorted into something entirely different.

When the double doors of the cathedral slammed open, Arvano gave his brother a slight elbow in the side, followed by a meaningful look. Before them, the apostles of Prios filed out into the darkening evening, carrying golden lanterns on silver staffs, marching as one to the tune of a somber hymn, all dressed in cowls of yellow and red. The half-brother's cheeks were glowing, and it was easy to see why. What transpired before them was even worse than the rumors claimed; the so-called Sun Parade was like a military march, or rather a funeral procession for the supposedly dying Sun God.

Spitting on the ground, Arvano turned his back on the parade and pulled his brother along. They slipped back out and into a narrow alley, where they paused, backs resting against the wall. Before they had time to clear their heads, a shadow fell over the cobblestones – a cloaked figure, standing wide-legged in the alley entrance, soon joined by four similar individuals. A quick glance the other way revealed that they were surrounded.

"The Lawgiver sees you, heretics," hissed a menacing voice from deep within the hood.

How long he lay bleeding on the ground until he was finally wrapped in death's embrace, Arvano could not say...

SECTION 2:

GAME MASTER'S SECTION

An Aching Heart

THOUGH THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN the idea of Yndaros and the reality of its nature can hardly be overstated, the contrast seems to go unnoticed by most of the city's residents and visitors. But if you, dear Game Master, follow our advice and guidelines, the players and their characters will soon be some of the astute few who can see through the lies and distractions, as well as their own misconceptions. This chapter may help you achieve such an effect, as it includes information which is often contrary to widely held beliefs and the dream of the Promised Land's capital city.

BEFORE MOVING ON, we would like to remind you that the following text is primarily meant as inspiration and a kind of basis for understanding what is happening in the various installments of *the Throne of Thorns*. If you and your gaming group have already had adventures in Yndaros, or if you have certain plans for future gaming sessions, it may be wise to adjust characters as well as locations and historical events to suit your unique story of the world of *Symbaroum*. In the adventure *The Darkest Star* we have tried to facilitate that process by occasionally offering various alternatives, but regarding the content below, it is entirely up to each gaming group to decide what must be added, replaced or removed.

That being said, this initial chapter of the Game Master's Section gets to the bottom of many of the matters addressed in the book's opening section. First up are a number of important misconceptions or deliberate falsehoods regarding the history of the Yndaros region. Then we focus on the powerful factions operating in the city, and what has changed in terms of goals, means and relations since the situation was last described in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*. Finally, we introduce more than a dozen adventure seeds, based on (and meant to shed light

on) the truths uncovered earlier in the section. As Game Master you are more than welcome to develop these into full scenarios, or simply use them as inspiration for your own adventures and campaigns.

The section's second chapter presents the noble houses of Ambria and their relations to one another. Naturally, there is not enough room for a full account, but the most important houses and conflicts are addressed, along with historical examples of when said conflicts have surfaced.

Finally, this section concludes with a chapter featuring new rules. Ceremonial magic is given a more thorough set of rules than the one introduced in the adventure The Bell Tolls for Kastor, after which new artifacts, items, creatures and other things relevant to the region or the adventure *The Darkest Star* are described. Hopefully, this will give you and your gaming group the tools you need to stage many intense and entertaining adventures in and around the city of Yndaros – the strong, yet aching heart of the Ambrian kingdom.

Kalthar and Korinthia

FOR THOSE WHO wish to understand the developments in today's Ambria, one historical period is of particular significance. It concerns the two years during which Korinthia was imprisoned at the fortress of the Dark Lord, helpless and alone, deep behind enemy lines. It is one of the most legendary periods in the history of Ambria, not only because it marks the beginning of the end of the Great War, but also because the people involved have never spoken publicly about what actually happened.

Korinthia was captured in an ambush while traveling between two frontline outposts; her entire following was massacred, while she herself was brought to a freezing, underground cell, where she spent almost six months – cold, hungry and alone. But then, everything changed.

One day she was led out of the darkness and up a tower with a view of the darkening lands surrounding Bright Haven, the capital city of Lyastra. With the help of an aged manservant she was able to bathe, eat and rest. A week later the servant introduced himself as Kalthar, Patriarch of the Order of Dakothnic. Slowly Korinthia began to realize that the somber, woeful old man who stood before her was none other than the Dark Lord himself!

Aside from a few periods of prolonged absence, Kalthar visited her almost every day. At first he simply asked questions, about her, her country, and her people. But when she finally started answering him, after a long and grim silence, Kalthar did more and more talking of his own – telling her about the ongoing war, individual battles, acts of heroism and fallen commanders on both sides. The interrogation transitioned into a conversation, and a few months before the war ended, the subject changed considerably. It was as if the Dark Lord could see that the end was nigh, as if he admitted defeat and wished to warn his subjugator so that she would not suffer the same fate.

Without getting into details, he described the reason why the magnificent Lyastra had slowly but inexorably become a realm of blight and death: the insight that corruption does not affect the undead, and the subsequent exploration of a mystical ceremony with the power to reanimate humans while at the same time preserving their memories, senses and mental faculties. The goal was, of course, to gain absolute power over creation; to create a backdoor to pure magic in all its might. The goal was achieved, but the fury of Creation proved all-powerful.

Kalthar was already the symbol of the highest and purest; there was no reason for him to participate in the ceremony. But all his closest subordinates – sixteen Apostles and twenty Judges – were exalted, in the hope of breaking through the barrier which prevented Lyastra from flourishing and growing even richer. But it did not take long before the black hunger of undeath began to cloud the minds of the exalted; they turned on each other, on the laws of Dakothnic, on the Patriarch himself. Hoping to buy enough time to devise a ceremony that could scatter the darkness, Kalthar did the only thing he could to prevent a full-scale civil war – he gave the people a common enemy: Alberetor.

The lesson which the Patriarch wanted to impart on the young queen was very simple: Creation cannot be cheated, nor deceived; it reacts to the violence itself, not to specific methods or strategies. Korinthia listened, but heard something else. What she heard was a loser's attempt to rationalize his failure; a brilliant man's desperate efforts to make sense of his defeat.

The more she listened, the more she grew convinced that Kalthar had gone too far, made mistakes, entrusted vital tasks to the wrong subordinates. And so, when the black cloak Demeon Soleij was ready to finish off the Dark Lord once and for all, it was Korinthia who reacted – she grabbed what was available to her, a brazier of glowing coals, and flung it at the friar's face. Even though she herself

was badly burned by the embers flying through the air, she leapt forward to protect the fallen one.

Kalthar was offered mercy in exchange for his services as the Queen's adviser. He accepted; not because his life was very dear to him, but because he genuinely wanted to do everything he could to make Korinthia Kohinoor understand the indomitable power of Creation. Five people were present when the agreement was made – aside from the Queen and Kalthar, there were also Demeon Soleij, Grand Master Seldonio, and General Beremo Herengol. Officially, the Dark Lord was killed there and then; in reality he was taken to Kandoria, disguised as the leader and choreographer of Bright Haven's dance academy.

Kalthar has been imprisoned ever since; first below the palace in Kandoria, then in a restored cell below the Cathedral of Martyrs in Yndaros. He sees the Queen of Ambria once a week, sometimes more – she in the hope of finding clues to his failure, to identify the line which must never be crossed; he in the hope of curbing her ambitions and making her see reason. It is like a respectful game taken extremely seriously, where both players maintain that the barely noticeable progress they seem to be making is enough to keep trying. To what extent Kalthar's call for caution and moderation has influenced Korinthia's strategies is difficult to say, but her ambition burns bright as ever. With unfaltering determination, she strives toward the same goal the Order of Dakothnic once did: to achieve absolute dominion over Creation – but, of course, without falling victim to its terrible wrath.

Aside from previously mentioned individuals, only three people now living know that the Dark Lord is still alive, imprisoned beneath the Cathedral of the Hallowed Martyrs. One of them is Jurlio Berakka, who was entrusted with the truth during the restoration of what would become the Cathedral of Martyrs; another is the true leader of the eastern dance troupe, Andark Masul. The third person helped create the mystical shield surrounding the cell; his name is Kullinan Furia, and it is he who, at the start of the adventure *The Darkest Star*, transforms the city's increasingly high-spirited wedding fever into a fiery bloodbath.

The story about Korinthia and the Dark Lord is one of the most dire and best kept secrets in the entire kingdom, but there are of course many other mysteries to discover or unravel. Described below are a number of situations which you, the Game Master, are free to expand upon or be inspired by as you create your own adventures in the city of Yndaros or its surrounding region.

THE SINS OF LINDAROS

The mass death of Lindaros struck like a bolt out of the blue, with little time to alert the authorities or the public, or for most to even realize something was wrong. Having learned their lesson from the fall of Symbaroum, the Lindarians enacted strict laws regulating the use of mystical powers and rituals, but the perceived security this brought was merely an illusion.

In the absence of prominent mystics, the alchemists were Lindaros' learned elite, and the branch they cultivated the most was the refinement of crops and livestock. The Lindarians' fields produced amazing harvests, and in their cramped stables the pigs and the cattle were so swollen that, before being slaughtered, they could not even carry their own body weight. The cultivation was governed by rigid safety regulations. However, the latent mutagenic properties of the buttery crop called King's Corn were not detected during the testing phase, which resulted in the legendary bleeder's disease breaking out and obliterating the entire population – except for a few members of the Priesthood of Dakothnic, preaching moderation and temperance, who later found their way south to settle down in Lyastra.

Most of the knowledge amassed by the Lindarian alchemists was lost forever, but about a year ago, a Master of the Order named Marbela made a tremendous discovery during her excavation beneath Old Kadizar. Along with her friend Tinedra, a master alchemist, she managed to decipher the old scroll, and now secret experiments are being conducted on a farm in the Veloma Valley. It concerns an elixir which can supposedly double the muscle growth of domestic pigs; and it works, very much so, but unfortunately at the cost of the animals being thoroughly corrupted when overdosed – something Tinedra did not live long enough to record.

There are several ways in which the player characters could become involved in the story. Perhaps Marbela hires them to hunt down the four monstrous hogs currently on the loose and then cover up the story? Or perhaps the rumor of these raging abominations reaches Yndaros, and some high-ranking member of the Sun Church, the Army or some other faction asks the characters to investigate what caused the outbreak? Either way, use the stats of a Blight Born Aboar (page 228 in the *Core Rulebook*) for the blighted hogs, excluding the *Iron Fist* ability, with *Natural Weapon* (II) and Weapons: Bite 8.

THE FALL OF KADIZAR

Many have asked why Kadizar's chieftain surrendered so quickly; why he went from hard-nosed opposition to total submission in less than a day.

Lindaros and Mystical Power

There was a general ban against performing mystical powers in Lindaros. The only exceptions were a few religious ceremonies, kept alive by the Order of the Guardian, also called the Priesthood of Dakothnic. To all others, the use of mystical powers was punishable by death or, in rare cases, exile

The Collar of Kadradan

The slender copper neck ring, which according to legend belonged to King Kadradan the Third, came into the possession of the Kadizian chieftain almost three centuries ago, after he had executed a grave-robbing clan member. But the neck ring was already known to the Kadizans through cautionary tales about its original owner.

The legend states that a young Kadradan received the artifact from the arch troll Oxuga, in exchange for half his heart. His goal was to remove and replace his father, Kadradan the Second – a tyrant who spread terror and death among the people, but was loved by the kingdom's warriors and aristocracy. The coup succeeded; the prince took his father's place without anyone realizing what had happened. Alas, the new king's shrunken heart only made the hardships worse, and as the difficulties spread to wider circles of the population, he could soon trust no one but the warriors. But when the artifact started to affect the king's mind, he lost their support as well. It is said that he was placed alive inside the magnificent crypt he had already built for his final rest, left to die a lonesome death.

The tale of Kadradan is still being told around campfires in Davokar, often ending with the moral: *"do not strike pacts with the forces of the forest, for they can turn even the noblest intentions into the darkest of deeds."*

The answer is usually that he simply recognized the hopelessness of the situation, or was tempted by the enemy's promises of property and status. But others maintain that a clan chieftain descendant from Davokar would never surrender on such grounds.

The truth is that Manvar died the night before clan Kadiz's surrender, murdered by his children, who refused to see the entire clan annihilated because of their father's senseless resistance. The daughter, Maridja, did not flee up the Titans; instead she took her father's place, using the family heirloom called the Collar of Kadradan – a neck ring which, when touched, lets its master assume the appearance, voice, scent and shadow of another person. It was she who accepted the humiliating defeat, after forcing her brother to join in her scheme.

Ever since, Maridja has made her best efforts to wreak vengeance on the intruders. The Kadizans who were given safe passage from their conquered home have over time been interspersed with Alberian refugees and grown into multiple free settlements, in the eastern valleys of the Titans. Sometimes the shapeshifter Maridja visits the village chieftains in her eagle form, to give orders or advice, or because she was summoned through the ritual *Faraway Writing*. Otherwise they may govern themselves, while she does her best to maintain appearances and keep the barony of Grendel alive – both increasingly difficult tasks.

The fact that Baron Manvar Grendel's looks, clothes and scent have not changed in two decades cannot be concealed, only palliated with the help of a crooked posture and general eccentricity. But even worse, the accelerating insanity which according to legend became the downfall of Kadradan has also affected Maridja. With increasing frequency, and for longer periods of time, she loses herself and falls into the role she has been playing for so long. This is causing a long list of problems: the solidarity between the free settlements and their loyalty to the Ice Witch have started to erode; new-coming Ambrians' view of, and confidence in, House Grendel is deteriorating; and the situation with the goblin despot Garulubbulug is getting completely out of hand.

The matters described above could give rise to a long series of adventures, either in the barony of Grendel or among the free settlements up in the Titans. The player characters could also be involved on a more personal level – perhaps hired by Lothar to assassinate his increasingly erratic father/sister, or paid by Maridja to dispose of some plunderers who have discovered her secret and begun blackmailing her.

THE RESISTANCE GROWS

Anyone looking for a foreign power or dark lord to blame for the Bloodbath will have done so in vain. It had simply gone too far; the number of frozen, starving and disgruntled war veterans was so large that, when the riot was sparked, their desperation could no longer be suppressed. And even though both the Realm of the Order and the City States have agents at the refugee camp, these can only be blamed for a handful of the twenty or so violent incidents which have shaken East Yndaros since year 14.

There is indeed a growing threat in the shadows of the refugee camp, but it has nothing to do with foreign powers or vengeful warlocks. Instead it is the fallen, and severely blight-marked, noble Kathia Melion who is slowly building a network of capable immigrants, which for various reasons have not been able to secure a place in the Promised Land: outcast mystics, scholars, diplomats, priests and, of course, warriors. They all work in utmost secrecy, for the purpose of improving the living conditions of the many tortured souls situated in the capital – by threatening, blackmailing and even murdering people in power, as well as their henchmen.

In the long term, the conspirators are determined to stage a coup d'état; to consign the ruthless, overly ambitious Korinthia (whom they call the Nightpain) to the streets. But until then, two things must be achieved: first, their

militia must be in better shape, physically and mentally; secondly, they must decide what the future government of Ambria should look like. Some advocate a ruling council like the one in the City States, others a spiritual or enlightened leader like in the Realm of the Order, while the majority are content with the current system and have different ideas about which noble house should replace House Kohinoor.

The player characters can start finding out about the conspiracy, for example after being asked by the Sun Church, the Army, the City Watch or the victim's family to track down those responsible for the murder of a noble, who was using refugees (and goblins) as slave labor. More information on Kathia Melion is found on page 135, and no matter how successful their investigations are, the characters should never be allowed to reach her, other than in the form of rumors about and references to "Captain Kathia."

AWAKENINGS

It was not long ago that every single report of someone rising from the dead sent shivers through the entire population of Yndaros; since the city's dying feared being reanimated more than death itself. But in the past few months, their worst terror seems to have dissipated, perhaps because it has become such a common phenomenon, or because the First Father has come to the city and promised to protect the people from darkness. The fact that a new case is reported every ten days, at the very least, can, according to the Sun Church, be explained by Jeseebegai's arrival – the Eternal Night is sending its troops to put Prios' chosen people to the test. And this explanation is not entirely inaccurate...

Yndaros is the place where the cultivation of Creation's awesome power is most palpable, without always being severe enough to spawn corruption or be detected by mystically educated minds. But overall, the violence evokes a response which affects all residents and visitors to some extent – minds darken, destructive feelings are intensified and stomachs ache inexplicably. The First Father's presence puts even more pressure on the servants of Prios, to cultivate and refine Creation to the extreme. They believe that their actions will suppress the darkness, when in fact they are fueling it.

The undead are the clearest sign of the growing darkness, but it can be seen in other ways as well: it has "inexplicably" turned two blight-marked individuals at the refugee camp into abominations; it caused the black dew which one morning covered the moss-laden roofs of Old Kadizar; it has brought about a handful of murders by inspiring the perpetrators to excessive violence. And then there is the phenomenon which the goblin Ulfols discovered less than a month ago.

Ulfols worked as a digger at Master Marbela's excavation beneath Old Kadizar. One day, feeling tired and bored, he decided to do some exploring of his own. After having walked, crawled and squeezed his way through the underground cracks and tunnels, he ended up beneath the refugee camp, facing a chamber so dark it could not be illuminated by his lantern. He reached out and poked the impenetrable darkness with his fingertip, which promptly turned black, the color of freshly-made blackberry jelly. Ulfols licked his finger clean, and was thus chosen by Umbra.

Ever since, the fanatically servile goblin has spent every waking hour feeding his mistress; a mistress who is essentially nothing but a black, ravenous hunger. Ulfols lures other goblins to its chamber, pushes them into the darkness, and waits. After a great deal of screaming and gurgling, there is silence, and shortly thereafter the victim returns into the light – naked, pale, emaciated, with shiny black eyes, ready to serve Umbra's chosen one: Ulfols. Moreover, these creatures are as ravenous as their black mother.

The player characters could be asked to investigate the reason behind the large number of missing goblin diggers, or to look into the rumors circulating in the city's eastern districts – rumors of small, pale, skeletal creatures who have made the nighttime streets their hunting grounds. Unless they investigate the rumors on their own initiative, they could be offered the job by Ordo Magica, the Sun Church or the goblin activist Ulofin.

ARRIVAL OF THE DWARVES

In year 13 of the Ambrian era, the flame of rebellion was ignited in Küam Zamok. After Symbaroum had fallen, and the dwarves were freed from their masters' yoke, a brutal hierarchy formed beneath the mountain.

It is said that the mountain realm's original ruler, Valbazrusik, had to be persuaded into assuming the, for the dwarves, completely foreign role of leader. But his family, and hence the ruling elite, grew larger and more powerful with each generation, and its members gradually stepped into the shoes of their former masters. Before the uprising, the ruling families enjoyed an almost godlike status – they produced nothing themselves, were carried on litters, wearing garbs so delicate that even the slightest touch or wind would ruin them;

The Blackborn

The creatures born in the chamber of Umbra are changed, and thoroughly corrupted. They are like the undead, but with a tremendous hunger and thirst; they must drink their own weight (i.e. *Toughness*) in blood every day to stay alive. Use the stats of a Fortune Hunter (page 215 in the *Core Rulebook*), with the additions of *Undead* (I), *Fleet-footed* and *Shadow Spawn*. They will avoid confrontations against equal or greater opposition, and run away as soon as their black lives are threatened.

all they did was give orders. Perhaps this is why they stood no chance when their subjects finally rose up. Most of them literally failed to see what was coming and were trampled to death, crushed by the flood of rebellion. But some escaped, along with parts of their enormous wealth.

The marginalized families of Voyzek and Krazark traveled north, where each has taken control of their own goblin tribe, previously known as Harakkullu and Goddangaldru – the former on Vajvod territory, the latter far up in the Ravens. In addition, there is a handful of minor families who, like the Merotzaks at Thistle Hold, are hiding in various places throughout Ambria, in fear of being slaughtered by the rebels' Lord Hunters or cut-throats sent by other families. But it is of course the dwarves in Yndaros who are making the most noise, no matter how withdrawn and self-reliant they try to be.

The three families of Valotzar, Alzerek, and Baldysik were the most prominent ones even before the rebellion, and they managed to escape with plenty of both manpower and resources. Although Magnos Baldysik, family patriarch and lord of Küam Zamok, was killed by the rebel leader Ekaderoza, his son Morek got away with his crown and has proclaimed himself King of the Dwarves. He is challenged by Patriarch Artek Valotzar and Matriarch Izobel Alzerek, whose families claim to have historical support for the assertion that their respective leader is closest to the original ruler Valbazrusik, in both blood and esteem. Their younger members often assemble gangs of allies to challenge each other in bloody showdowns on the smaller squares west of the Harbor District, while the elders conduct unscrupulous business dealings to strengthen their family's position as much as possible. So far, the power balance has shifted back and forth with lesser families switching sides (or being forced to), but Artek Valotzar and his family are about to take an unassailable lead – something which could result in full-scale war in the middle of the Queen's capital.

The player characters could be contacted by the withdrawn Morek Baldysik, the King of the Dwarves, either directly or through a prominent member of some faction: something must be done to end the family feud and stop the Valotzars' advancement through the city's business sector. This could entail sabotage, espionage or assassinations – something that would have to take place in absolute secrecy, as the city's human leaders seem to appreciate the order (and tax revenue) generated by the dwarves.

FAITH AND LOVE

Anyone hoping, or actually believing, that Arch Duchess Esmerelda has fallen in love with the High Chieftain's son – unrefined as he is, not to mention scarred and limping from his encounter with a blight-born aboar – must be either soaking wet behind the ears or dangerously romantic. Obviously, there are political reasons for the upcoming wedding.

It has long been clear that the Sovereign's Oath is growing stronger and more aggressive in the north. In response, High Chieftain Tharaban has done his best to make the southern clans realize the gravity of the situation and unite against the approaching threat. It took a long time for him to be heard, especially by Zareks, Vajvods and Varaks, who thought themselves protected by their collaboration with Ambrian interests. But when the engagement between Esmerelda and Thabor was announced they immediately changed their tune; so far, four chieftains have declared themselves ready to submit to Tharaban's rule – Monovar, Zoltar and Didramon, as well as Embersind of clan Odaiova.

Since the people of Godinja and Yedesa have overthrown their chieftains and joined forces with the Sovereign's Oath, the only clans left to persuade are Karohar and Baiaga, and they will remain neutral for some time – because of internal conflicts and difficulties convincing enough members to submit to a High Chieftain allied with the Ambrians.

There are many ways in which the player characters could be drawn into this political game, maybe even before *The Darkest Star* begins. Many will try to sabotage or even attack the wedding – be it agents of the Sovereign's Oath, Ambrian nobles with hatred for barbarians or Queen Korinthia, the Realm of the Order (fearing an alliance between Ambrians and barbarians), or even the Church of Dead Prios. Another possibility is that the characters become involved in the diplomatic mission to convince independent Baiags or aggressive Karits to rally behind Tharaban.

Current Alliances

Immediately after the escape, Artek Valotzar was supported by the families Statzak and Vanoviz; Izobel Alzerek by Obrutz and Kalatra; and Morek Baldysik by Maretko, Skruztsa, and Urbanik. However, the Maretkos and Urbaniks have since abandoned their "king" for the Valotzar family, while recent rumors claim that the Urbaniks are negotiating with Matriarch Izobel, and that the Valotzar family in turn is about to gain the support of Vikotzor Kalatra. Other whispers suggest that the once prominent Rokotzar family, which has so far been in hiding, has returned to Yndaros. If true, this could mean that another major faction is emerging, or that one of the existing ones will grow much more powerful.

Factions

KORINTHIA KOHINOOR, HER dukes, and other adherents have much to boast about – no one can deny that they have achieved great things in the two decades that have passed since the end of the war. Thanks to them, the people of old Alberetor have a new realm to call their own; thanks to their tireless work, the kingdom is growing increasingly productive, well-organized and developed

in terms of settlements and communications. Viewed from the outside, however, one might also think that there is cause for some serious self-examination.

While the realm's organization and infrastructure are improving, its population is seemingly becoming more and more divided. Perhaps it is only natural that the conflicts put aside during the war have resurfaced as people regain a certain degree of security. But the friction could probably also be attributed to the many drastic decisions which have been made in the rush to reestablish a form of order. In any case, there are certainly forces pulling in different directions, and nowhere are they more evident than in Yndaros, the city of contrasts.

On the one hand, the City Watch's stricter approach and the increased presence of the priesthood have made the streets more peaceful, with fewer public brawls, thefts and furious arguments. The upcoming wedding most likely contributes to this change as well, since it has brought Ambrians and barbarians closer together. On the other hand, the peace has come at the expense of darker looks, fewer smiles and greater distrust between people in general. Everyone knows that refugees and daythalers are fed up with their oppressors' ignorance; everyone knows that the Sun God's church is divided and weakened; everyone knows that the crime rate keeps rising, in the shadows, among those who see no other way to secure their survival or make their fortune. What is more, the stories about the Sovereign's Oath are driving a wedge between the Ambrians and barbarians; maybe to such an extent that the positive effects of the upcoming engagement will be completely nullified and turn instead into hostility.

Months and Days of the Week

According to the calendar established with the founding of Ambria, Korinthia's birthday marks the first day of the year, in the middle of summer, and is preceded by a five-day festival called The Scattering of the Eternal Night, commonly referred to as *"the Scattering"* or *"the Night Slaughter."*

Another recent custom is counting weeks and naming days, which was never done in old Alberetor. According to a joint statement from the Queen and the Sun Church, the weeks shall be divided into seven days – the first five being named after the natural resources provided by Prios for humans to manage and cultivate, while the last two are named in honor of the Ambrian people and the giver of their laws. People on the countryside still care very little about weeks and days, although the local liturgs make sure to weave their meaning into sermons and conversations.

The day of the earth (Earth Day)
The day of the water (Water Day)
The day of the wind (Wind Day)
The day of the forest (Forest Day)
The day of the mountains (Mountain Day)
The day of the people (People's Day)
The day of the sun (Feast Day)

The equivalent to months were previously eight in number, not all of them equally long, and named after the folk gods – for example the Earthmother and the Executioner. Since Prios' exaltation to becoming the One, these names have lost relevance. Instead the months are named after twelve Lightbringers – heroes who sacrificed themselves in the Great War. However, this new convention has yet to take root among the populace. Some still refer to Ynedar's Month as the Earthmother's Month, others as the High Summer Month, but to avoid confusion, most people simply call it the First Month. Likewise, Ofelya's Month is also known as the Executioner's Month, the Midwinter Month or the Seventh Month.

Table 2: Months of the Ambrian Calender

ORDER	SEASON	MONTH	YOUNG GOD	ALTERNATIVE
#1	Summer	Ynedar	Earthmother	High Summer Month
#2	Fall	Olandan	Hostess	Harvest Month
#3	Fall	Andonia	Wildling	Wither Month
#4	Fall	Tomol	Pathfinder	Slaughter Month
#5	Winter	Serliela	Pathfinder	Rain Month
#6	Winter	Morangal	Guardian	Darkness Month
#7	Winter	Ofelya	Executioner	Midwinter Month
#8	Spring	Agani	Executioner	Indigent Month
#9	Spring	Elisial	Arch Builder	Thaw Month
#10	Spring	Verion	Lifegiver	Sowing Month
#11	Summer	Konelia	Lifegiver	Blooming Month
#12	Summer	Leandro	Earthmother	Luscious Month

The refugee camp fumes with discontent and despair. Will the City Watch be ready for what is coming?

Writing this book, in the wake of *The Witch Hammer*, we assume that Karvosti was not annexed by Ambria, but that Korinthia left behind troops to defend the cliff (and remind the High Chieftain of what will happen if he displeases the Queen of Ambria). We also assume that roughly three months have passed since the conclusion of *The Witch Hammer*. Should this not correspond with the events that have developed around your gaming table, you will probably need to make certain adjustments, but this is quite normal – any concern about not playing *The Darkest Star* "the right way" is understandable, but not to be taken seriously. The important thing is that you try to incorporate the main elements of the development we believe has occurred following *The Witch Hammer*; not least with respect to what is currently the game world's most significant conflict: the one between north and south.

Since the events of *The Witch Hammer*, another three clans have joined the Sovereign's Oath – Enoai, Godinja, and Tharaban's own clan, Yedesa. Each new integration was prompted in two ways; by propaganda tempting clan members with the promise of a new, supremely powerful Symbaroum, to be led by the exalted Blood-Daughter, and through the use of threats, both from the growing darkness of the forest and the ravenous ambition of the southern invaders. After a period of internal strife, the people (supported by the Sovereign's Oath) rose up against their chieftains and their allies. Karona and Vikomer were killed, while Leonod escaped to find shelter with Tharaban. According to recent reports, the Blood-Daughter has occupied the mighty stone fortress of clan Yedesa, from which she now commands the army marching on Karvosti.

As for the southern alliance, the engagement between Thabor and Esmerelda has, as mentioned previously, resulted in four chieftains swearing allegiance to the High Chieftain and, by extension, Ambria. The clan chieftains, and most of their respective people, are convinced that the future of the clans depends on a close collaboration with the Ambrians, and they believe their High Chieftain when he claims to have assurances from Queen Korinthia that they will be allowed

to retain power and control over their respective territories. A good start, no doubt, but it is not enough; the tireless efforts to win over the Baiags and Karits continue.

This section provides insight into how the region's powerful factions relate to one another and to the central conflict described above. The text focuses on what the leaders seek to achieve, what allies and resources they think they have, and who they consider enemies. This information is obviously central to anyone interested in understanding the background to *The Darkest Star*, but it may (and should) also be taken into consideration when creating homebrew adventures – as a backdrop for, or possibly a direct cause of, what is happening.

HOUSE KOHINOOR

Though circumstances have changed, the Queen's goal remains the same: to incorporate Davokar, with its natural resources and treasures, into an Ambria powerful enough to withstand any outside threat. The High Chieftain and the witches used to be the only, quite manageable, obstacles in her way; the emergence of the Sovereign's Oath has completely changed the game. While the conquests of the northern clans pose great challenges to the Ambrian army, they also paved the way for alliances which (once the Sovereign's Oath has been crushed) are crucial in uniting the entire region under House Kohinoor's banner.

Korinthia knows that the main force of the Sovereign's Oath is approaching Karvosti. At the start of the adventure, an army of almost twenty thousand soldiers is already on its way to intercept the conquerors, along with roughly one third as many barbarian warriors. The Queen has also sent a smaller force of fifteen hundred cavalry (three hundred in full armor) and two hundred mounted archers by boat along the river Elbis. The plan is to disembark and pick up supplies on Zarekian territory, before riding to strike strategic targets farther north.

Apart from the Sovereign's Oath, the First Father and the Curia continue to challenge Korinthia. It is perfectly clear that the First Father must be disposed of, but the question is how, with the church still having a firm grip on large parts of the capital's population. If killed, his martyrdom could make the people even more loyal to the Prios of War; undermining and dethroning him diplomatically is virtually impossible, given the secrets he keeps – not least the knowledge that the Dark Lord still lives, and that the Queen saved his life, blinding (almost killing) Jeseebegai in the process. For now, Korinthia is content with monitoring the Curia's actions, and secretly supporting the faction which stands ready to reform the church, under the leadership of Deseba the Old.

As for Yndaros, the Queen and her closest advisers rarely have time to involve themselves in the minutiae of governance. Korinthia trusts in Father Matheo Brigo's ability to handle bickering refugees, hubristic dwarven patriarchs, and sporadic outbreaks of disease. Furthermore, the Royal Sekretorium has received additional funds to help identify and eliminate agents of hostile factions, internal as well as external. Sure, the city's welfare often keeps her up at night, especially as Father Matheo seems loyal to the First Father, and the beloved Key Master is drinking himself into oblivion, just like his infamous brother. But she and her advisers agree on taking one step at a time, and right now the northern menace requires her undivided attention.

THE VEARRA ALLIANCE

With the rising threat of the northern clans, most of the noble houses have put their political

Karvosti Annexed

Should Ambria have annexed Karvosti in your version of *Symbaroum*'s game world, Tharaban will be situated on clan Odaiova's territory, as the guest of Chieftain Embersind at the settlement by the Arch Bridge. With him are fifty or so members of the Guard of the Slumbering Wrath; those who remained loyal to the High Chieftain instead of returning to their home regions. Other than that, no major adjustments should be necessary.

The Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview

At various download sites you can download a text titled the *Throne of Thorns – Campaign overview*, free of charge. There you can read more about the factions and what happens to them over the years spanning the Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns. It also contains more information on Wyrtha, Wielda and Wratha, the ancient forces which according to elves and barbarians describe the world's most fundamental conflict – the conflict between civilization and nature.

ambitions on hold and rallied behind their Queen. This is especially true of the otherwise power-hungry Count Alkantor Argona, whose estate lies a day's ride south from Thistle Hold and, consequently, the edge of Davokar. He makes sure to tell everyone about the men, horses, and thaler he has provided to defend Ambria against *"the darkness of the forest."*

But there is another group of nobles that view the current disorder in an entirely different light, and that plays a central part in the adventure *The Darkest Star*. The mind and will behind this union, called the Vearra Alliance by its members, is none other than Father Matheo Brigo, First Justice of Ambria. He has long felt a growing contempt for Queen Korinthia and First Father Jeseebegai – he considers them uneducated, spineless miscreants with greater love for power than for both Prios and the Ambrian people.

For nearly a decade, Matheo has secretly plotted to replace the current monarch, considering candidates such as Dukes Alesaro and Ynedar, Count Demetro Vearra, and the previously mentioned Alkantor Argona. When his choice finally fell upon the righteous Count Vearra, it did not take much persuasion. Demetro's cousin, Commander Iakobo Vearra, now First Revenger and head of the Church of Dead Prios, had already made him question whether Jeseebegai was fit to lead the Church of Prios. And, being a Vearra, he had yearned for the throne since he was a child.

Other members of the inner circle are Father Matheo's brother, Count Edogai Brigo, and Anabela Argona, the Priesthood's representative at the Curia. The Count of Brigo's treachery is driven by fear, rather than ambition. He respects and admires his Queen, but has become convinced that her diplomatic approach toward barbarians, witches and elves will be the end of the Promised Land. As for Anabela, she is playing three sides at great personal risk, as explained below in the description of the Reformists. The Vearra Alliances has promised to make her the new First Mother of the Sun Church – a position she plans to immediately renounce in favor of Father Sarvola.

More information about the plans and actions of the Vearra Alliance is found on page 84 under the heading The Conspirators. Note that they regard the emergence of the Sovereign's Oath as a blessing. In fact, they have already established contact with Chieftains Razameaman and Rábaiamon, who in turn appreciate the opportunity to use the Ambrian nobles for their own ends. For the past six months, a group of Sovereign agents has been hiding on Count Demetro's estate; they aid the Vearra Alliance in shadier matters, in exchange for information which is passed on to their leaders in the north – information on the strategies, resources and military maneuvers of both Korinthia and the High Chieftain.

In addition, the Vearra Alliance has, rather easily, persuaded the leaders of ten Ambrian houses to sign a treaty promising to support Count Demetro's claim to the throne, should the childless Queen Korinthia pass away. Among them are the counties Lethona, Karella and Melion, as well as the lesser houses of Erebus and Gorinder. They had hoped to secure at least twice as many signatures before staging the coup, but the engagement between Thabor and Esmerelda forced them to put that plan on hold in favor of more drastic, not to say desperate, measures (see page 84).

THE PRIESTHOOD

It is hardly surprising that First Father Jeseebegai is growing increasingly desperate. The Sun Knights' fall into darkness and secession from the Curia have weakened his position considerably; the arch-heretic Sarvola gathers more and more support, within the church and among Ambrians in general; the Sovereign's Oath and the upcoming wedding makes the High Chieftain and the Huldra seem like allies, rather than enemies. In short: his plan to turn Ambria into a theocracy of the Sun is falling apart.

The Curia still lives and enjoys great support among the populace, especially where it counts: in Yndaros. Jeseebegai's relocation to the capital has meant that he and First Theurg Peonio, together, can tighten their grip on the people of Yndaros. The Sun Parades contribute to that effect, as do the sermons and conversations whose content is now dictated from the Cathedral of Martyrs, blaming the people's every grievance on *"the plague of heresy"* and the nobles' alliances with the forces of the Eternal Night (that is, with barbarians in general and the witches in particular). But deep down, Jeseebegai knows that his progress does not outweigh the setbacks; that he will never regain the authority which, less than a year ago, he felt he possessed. He is losing. Prios will soon suffer the fate which the knights of Dead Prios are already mourning.

For the past two months, the desperation has only increased. In a vain attempt to show initiative where the Queen and the heretics have failed, the Whip of Prios (the Black Cloaks' and hence the Curia's elite witch hunters) has struck more frequently, at targets throughout the realm. Many of the victims were actual cultists and worshippers of darkness, but they have also publicly executed

numerous liturgs and theurgs suspected of collusion with Sarvola and his so-called Reformists. Many praise the enterprise, overlooking the fact that the evidence is not always unequivocal, but even more people are starting to question whether these actions are in line with the Lawgiver's ordinance. And that is precisely what the mother of this desperate plan, Anabela Argona, is anticipating (see below).

In the end, it does not really matter what support the First Father thinks he has; what matters is that it decreases every day, on all fronts. And he can feel it. At the start of *The Darkest Star* he is prepared to make one last, desperate attempt to win the people over, by revealing the truth about what happened when the Queen was freed – he has saved three pieces of coal from the brazier Korinthia hurled at his face, which can be read by politically neutral mystics through the *Tale of Ashes* ritual.

However, he will never put this plan into action before being placed in the dungeons beneath the Queen's palace.

THE REFORMISTS

Even though they both have had to leave Thistle Hold because of the fallen templars' hunt for heretics, Deseba the Old and Father Sarvola are gaining momentum. Hiding in Duke Ynedar's tower in Ravenia, they ride the storm which lashes the First Father's face; they also have Queen Korinthia's implicit support. Their goal, to cast the Prios of War into oblivion in favor of the Sun God's previous incarnation, often called the Lifegiver, Sol, or Sola, draws ever nearer, particularly since Anabela Argona has joined the effort.

As a member of the Curia, Anabela has full insight into Jeseebegai's strategies and can influence his decisions so that the raging wind grows even stronger. Furthermore, she has been invited to join the Vearra Alliance, and accepted their offer to become First Mother of the Sun Church in exchange for House Argona's loyalty to the new royal family. This way, the Reformation will live on even if its current protector, the Queen, were to be removed from power.

Whether it happens after a successful coup or with Korinthia still on the throne, the Reformists' plan is the same: with Jeseebegai out of the way (imprisoned, killed or resigned), Anabela will accept her exaltation, but at the last minute relinquish the Evening Throne to Father Sarvola of House Bargomol – unsullied by the Curia's previous activities and widely recognized as *"a hero with the courage to fight for universal love against the apostles of hate and war."* However, to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome, the Reformists must have the people on their side...

Most of the capital's population still obeys the edicts of the Curia; in other parts of the realm opinion is more evenly divided, though many will not publicly express their sympathies for Sarvola in fear of the Black Cloaks' witch hunters. In other words, the country is not yet ready for the profound change that awaits, which is particularly unfortunate given the growing clouds on the Lawgiver's horizon.

The advance of the Sovereign's Oath may well result in a long war, which could turn the winds of fortune in the Curia's favor – the risk is that the vacillating masses will not dare abandon the Prios of War, as it was he who kept them alive through the Great War. With this comes the risk of a more intense, internal hunt for those who have thus far expressed their sympathies for Sarvola or dared show their reverence for some other member of the Young Gods' pantheon. To make things even worse, it appears that the Queen's enemies are mobilizing; for one, Anabela Argona suspects that there is something going on with the Vearra Alliance, not least because she herself, despite repeated inquiries, has not heard anything from its leader for more than a month.

While the Lifegiver's followers keep spreading their revived teachings to the confused people of Ambria, Deseba and Sarvola are holding their breath, waiting, ready to react to whatever comes

Prios versus the Crown

In the months leading up to the wedding and the adventure *The Darkest Star*, the friction between the Sun Church and Ambria's earthly authorities becomes more and more evident. The priests commend the people's hard work and piety, while at the same time blaming *"the earthly rulers"* for weakening Prios, ultimately causing the death of the One. Although they will not risk mentioning the Queen by name, they are not afraid to name dukes as well as counts and barons – everything from diseases, lost outposts and missing expeditions, to rising food prices and reanimated corpses are held as proof that the realm's elite are in league with darkness and heretics.

At the moment, the Queen does not have the time, energy or will to fight the (as she sees it) withering Curia. She gives her representatives clear instructions to ignore the priests, and not comment on their claims or take defensive measures – it would only provoke even greater reactions, maybe even give Jeseebegai what he really wants: a full-scale rebellion.

their way, careful not to reveal their current location to the enemies of the Reformation in general and the knights of Dead Prios in particular.

THE CHURCH OF DEAD PRIOS

Iakobo Vearra and his seconds-in-command, son Ervano and daughter Alisabeta, are no longer acting rationally. The same can be said of the templars who have sworn allegiance to Dead Prios and His call for ruthless, self-sacrificing vengeance. They are absolutely convinced that darkness has already prevailed over the Good; all that remains is to die fighting The Eternal Night. Only then will they have earned their place among the mourners, kneeling by the lifeless dust of Prios.

But they can still discern nuances in the dark, and will not throw away their chance at revenge in open war against the Ambrian people, who are so blinded by darkness that they cannot see the truth. No, the First Revenger and his almost two hundred Enforcers focus primarily on abominations, elves and heretical free settlements, while stealthily assassinating sorcerers and heretics in the civilized regions. In the latter case, the main targets are of course Father Sarvola and First Father Jeseebegai – both of whom are largely responsible for the black veil which has been drawn over humanity's eyes.

The knights of Dead Prios are organized into smaller squads of between five and thirty individuals. These squads are called Suns, and two of the largest ones are led by Ervano and Alisabeta, focused on locating and destroying Iron Pact strongholds in Davokar. Iakobo himself commands a smaller Sun which operates within Ambria's borders and for the past year has been based in (or near) Yndaros, hoping to get to the First Father. However, all Suns have orders to deviate from their main objective whenever they encounter other aspects or representatives of The Eternal Night. Human suspects are usually first examined, in search of evidence or clear marks of corruption; sometimes they are even given a chance to repent before the fire takes them. For other creatures, they make no such considerations.

The faction's friends are as easily identified as its enemies. Normally they distrust anyone who has not sworn to serve the Dead One, but short-term collaborations are possible, should it further their revenge. It should also be said that Duke Sesario, steward of Mervidun and husband of the gravely ill Queen Mother, has found ways to contact the First Revenger, if only to express his secret admiration and respect for the templars' new calling (see below for more details).

THE SOVEREIGN'S OATH

In the wake of the adventure *The Witch Hammer*, the Sovereign's Oath emerged from the shadows, and they have since taken control of another three clans, effectively ruling all clanfolk north of Jerak's famous sinkhole. Sure, there are rebel groups who refuse to join the Blood-Daughter's army, but they are very few, and pose no threat to the formidable forces fighting under the red-stained banner of the Sovereign's Oath.

The seventh incarnation of the Blood-Daughter, merely fifteen years of age (if anyone bothered to count), was raised to be a symbol, not a person. At only two years of age she learned the ways of blood, locked away in a room with starved young hounds; at five she assumed the role of the clan's executioner; and before her tenth birthday she herself implemented the law stating that anyone who touches or speaks to her must die. The only exemption from this rule is her father, Clan Chieftain Razameaman, and it is her sole purpose in life to pursue his dreams and fulfill his wishes.

This makes Razameaman the true leader of the Sovereign's Oath, along with the Lindworm Odralintos and Chieftain Rábaiamon of clan Gaoia. When *The Darkest Star* begins, the three of them have recently left the mighty stone fortress of Clan Yedesa with an army of almost forty thousand barbarian warriors – a force consisting of everything from spear-dancing Goeds and troll-taming Enoais to spider-throwing Gaois. They plan to fight their way through clan Baiaga's divided territory, recruiting new fighters as they go, and are expected to reach Karvosti before long. Reports that a smaller enemy force is heading north to strike at targets behind their main army are completely ignored; all that matters is conquering Karvosti and installing the Blood-Daughter as the ruler of Davokar.

The agents established on enemy territory are mostly working alone, sometimes assisted by barbarian locals with reason to hate the Ambrians. The only real exception is the group working with the Vearra Alliance – a coalition of Ambrian nobles who seems to seriously believe that the Blood-Daughter is interested in a future pact. But for now, the collaboration is useful, as the nobles can provide information on military movements and things of that nature. Furthermore, the nobles sow discord in the enemy's ranks; rumors suggest that they might even be in possession of a mystical weapon powerful enough to destroy the Queen and High Priest of Ambria in a single blow. If the agents of the Sovereign's Oath could help them do so, half the war would already be won.

THE WITCHES

The Huldra Yeleta does not easily give in to despair, but these days she does lie sleepless some nights, consumed by worries. The two main strategies in which she had previously placed her hope – diplomatic efforts to make the Queen of Ambria understand the danger in cultivating and harvesting Davokar, or uniting the clans to drive the southerners from the forest – have both been thwarted by the Sovereign's Oath. Sure, the Blood-Daughter also seems set on uniting the woodland folk, but only as a first step. The *"restored Symbaroum"* which the leader of Sovereign's Oath intends to establish will no doubt be as catastrophically destructive as the Ambrians could ever be.

All Keepers who were on Karvosti during the adventure *The Witch Hammer* are still alive; Amanmaar of Godinja and Yarofal of Yedesa were quick to recognize the danger of the Sovereign's Oath and never returned to their respective clans. But there are only eight of them, or eleven if one includes Yeleta, Gadramon, and Eferneya, so even though a dozen of their apprentices also survived, there is very little they can do on their own. They must rely on alliances, in a time when almost no factions are willing to listen.

The High Chieftain has joined forces with the Queen of Ambria, and none of them is clear-headed enough to see the real danger in battling their northern enemy. There have already been reports of tainted soil and unworldly creatures awaking where smaller clashes have taken place between Sovereign troops and those loyal to the chieftains of Yedesa and Godinja; a battle between two great armies in Karvosti's vicinity could spell the end for the very region which is being contested. Yeleta has not given up. She is still welcome at Tharaban's side and does her best to talk sense into both him and the Queen's emissary.

Along with Gadramon and Eferneya, the Keepers serve as a kind of task force, stationed on Karvosti – whenever Yeleta is reached by troubling dreams or rumors, they are dispatched to combat abominations and lull the darkness back to sleep, usually in groups of three, but sometimes in full force. The only exception is the Vajvod Keeper, Kathman, who is an old friend of Duke Ynedar of New Beretor. About a month ago, the Duke sent Kathman an invitation from Deseba the Old – one of the few Ambrians Yeleta actually respects. What could come from such a meeting is unclear, but the Huldra takes comfort in knowing that at least some influential southerners are willing to collaborate.

THE IRON PACT

The well into which the weepers in the Halls of a Thousand Tears pour their tears is about to overflow. The elves who advocate diplomacy are becoming fewer and increasingly weary, while the aggressive ones grow even more so. Meanwhile, Prince Eneáno drifts further and further into madness. The cohesion of the entire organization is eroding, and all that remains are some twenty groups of ten to sixty members, and about as many individuals who operate alone.

Most of the larger groups focus on defending/monitoring the forest gods who still linger in Davokar, or fighting awakened aspects of the Symbarian darkness, like the witches do. These forces cling to the shred of hope that more and more humans are joining the Iron Pact's cause; they believe that every life is sacred, and will only use force in cases of extreme emergency. But the never-ending struggle makes more and more people blind to what little hope there is, turning them into murderous warbands indiscriminately killing all who threaten, or might one day threaten, to provoke the rage of Wratha. They are not foolish enough to challenge large armies in open warfare, but the Sovereign's Oath has lost vanguards as well as couriers on their way south; even a handful of high-ranking officers have been murdered, sleeping in their tents, in the middle of the main army's camp. And naturally, all Ambrian expeditions, outposts and border settlements are in serious danger.

The elf envoy Elori in Yndaros has lost all contact with Prince Eneáno, and since the Sovereign's Oath emerged on the world stage, Queen Korinthia has not summoned him. Despite small glimmers of hope, like the forthcoming alliance between Ambria and the barbarian High Chieftain, Elori views the current developments with growing dismay. The three summer elves who share his residence are keeping watch over the city, along with a dozen Ironsworn (humans and changelings). But other than hunting down undead and attacking cultist gatherings, there is not much Elori and his companions can do. Perhaps it is time to abandon the Queen and find new allies among the humans; maybe it is time to leave Yndaros and seek out the leaders of the clerical faction who seem to take the warnings of witches and elves seriously?

THE SACRED OF THE OLD BLOOD

The two leaders of the cult of nobles calling itself the Sacred of the Old Blood, Duke Sesario and Duchess Esmerelda, want the same thing as always: to ennoble the already noble blood of

Replacing the dead

If any of the witches mentioned above are dead in the world which has emerged around your particular gaming table, we suggest the following: if Yeleta is dead, Lobaya (of clan Odaiova) has taken her place as Huldra; if it is Eferneya or Gadramon, the Huldra has appointed the apprentice Galya as his or her successor; and deceased Keepers simply cannot be replaced at all.

Summary of the Factions

House Kohinoor
Wants to rule the entire Davokar region, eventually, but currently aims to crush the Sovereign's Oath. They focus their energy on the war in the north, convinced that Ambria's internal unrest can wait.

The Vearra Alliance
Wants to see House Kohinoor and First Father Jeseebegai dethroned in the near future, replaced by Demetro Vearra and Anabela Argona respectively. However, the alliance between the Queen and the High Chieftain has made them consider more urgent, and highly drastic, methods...

The Priesthood
The First Father and his loyal followers are slowly losing hope of turning Ambria into a *"theocracy of the sun,"* which is their long-term goal. But to have the slightest chance of succeeding, they must first sow discord between the Ambrian people and their government, while portraying themselves as champions of the people.

The Reformists
Deseba and Sarvola want to restore the Sun Church to its former state, and reestablish the old interpretation of Prios from before the Great War. But to achieve this, they must first persuade larger parts of the population to abandon the Prios of War, and form stronger alliances with sympathizers from other factions. The time is not yet ripe.

The Church of Dead Prios
All they want is to wreak vengeance upon the slayers of Prios; nothing else matters, since humanity and the world are about to enter The Eternal Night.

The Sovereign's Oath
Wants to reestablish the Symbarian Empire by uniting all barbarian clans under the Blood-Daughter's banner. Their next step is to conquer Karvosti; meanwhile, they are doing their best to divide the Ambrian kingdom and fuel distrust between Ambrians and barbarians in general.

The Witches
Want to make the leaders of the other factions understand the importance of upholding the barbarian taboos, and restore balance between Wyrtha and Wielda. They are also fighting, or lulling to sleep, the darkness which is created or awoken by human activities.

The Iron Pact
The Ironsworn, be they elves or something else, always regard the protection of Creation as their main purpose. But they are divided – some believe diplomacy is the only solution, while more and more claim that the situation is hopeless, and that humanity is a disease which must be eradicated through violent means.

The Sacred of the Old Blood
For now, the cult members are mainly looking for knowledge. They are currently operating in the shadows, but will come to play a larger part in the future, as they set secrecy aside in favor of more expeditious methods.

Table 3: SotOB-members in Yndaros

NAME	POSITION	SPECIALTY	CHARACTER
Balean Heranor	Strategist at the Sekretorium	Infiltration	Power-hungry
Junia Dardall	Young lady-in-waiting	Demonology	Curious
Eralon Starak	Judge	Forgery	Hateful
Aleana Mirelgos	Pansar	Assassination	Servile
Lavendra Gorinder	Palace Manager	Disinformation	Manipulative

Ambria, and bring the undead Queen Mother Abesina back to actual life. The former goal is shared by the twenty or so nobles who, without knowing the identity of one another, have pledged allegiance to the cult. So far, they have worked in the shadows, gathering information and corrupted scrolls, weapons and artifacts. For example, Esmerelda accepted her sister's request to marry the High Chieftain's son in the hope of accessing the dark treasures of Davokar. But the cult leaders' intentions, ambitions and methods are about to change.

Despite their belief that noble blood can never be corrupted, the constant exposure to the darkness and its artifacts has begun to leave its mark. A growing hunger gnaws within them; a hunger for power; for dominance. Sesario has been affected the most; he has found a teacher in the form of the drug-addicted sorcerer Neafera, and spends more and more time imagining his daughter on the throne of Ambria. It would make everything so much simpler – no more secrecy, no more compromises, and enough power to crush anyone standing between him and the ancient knowledge of Davokar. Duchess Esmerelda is also growing impatient and frustrated. The search for a cure is taking too long, and new obstacles are constantly emerging.

During the adventure *The Darkest Star*, Duke Sesario is situated in Mergile, deeply immersed in his studies. Esmerelda, on the other and, takes center stage – at least initially – and may well act as the player characters' quest giver. Five more cult members are also present in Yndaros. They are unaware of each others' existence, but the Archduchess knows them all and may call upon them to carry out various missions (see the heading Spiritualist Wanted on page 143 as an example).

The Order of Succession

Neither Sesario nor Abesina are blood-relatives of House Kohinoor. Abesina is of House Brigo, while her current husband was born Sesario Karnak, which in turn means that Archduchess Esmerelda has no legitimate claim to the Ambrian throne. Instead, it is Duke Alesaro of New Berendoria (Korinthia's uncle) who is next in line, followed by Duke Ynedar of New Beretor (Korinthia's nephew). Only then comes Esmerelda, added to the line of succession to the great displeasure of the monarch's more distant relatives – such as Akman in Thistle Hold and the lady-in-waiting Rilia in Yndaros.

Adventure Seeds

PEOPLE LOOKING FOR (more or less) well-paying missions in Yndaros will probably not be idle for long. The city's many conflicts and tensions manifest themselves in various forms of crime, and the City Watch has neither the time nor the inclination to hunt down every crook in the capital. In many cases, the victims of said crimes want nothing to do with the authorities – for one reason or another – and would rather hire freelance problem-solvers to retrieve stolen goods, avenge acts of violence, or eliminate extortionists. However, such problem-solvers must take great care in choosing their missions; if reckless, or simply unlucky, they could easily end up making enemies in very high places.

But the Queen's capital is more than just shady business deals and violent assaults. There are plenty of rich and prominent individuals in need of protection as well as assistance. They could be merchants, nobles, acclaimed artists and artisans or diplomats from foreign powers and cultures. The player characters could work directly for such a dignitary, or be hired to carry out individual missions through their contacts at the upper levels of the powerful factions. But in that case, too, they should expect that befriending the employer will make them much less popular with that person's enemies.

This section presents roughly a dozen ideas which the Game Master may develop into his or her own adventures in Yndaros and its surrounding area. Most are linked to the people and locations introduced in the book's opening section, while the rest elaborate on particularly important conflicts or hints featured in other *Symbaroum* books. It should also be said that many of them are based on the assumption that the characters have made a name for themselves as competent problem-solvers – in the realm in general, or within one or more factions. Should this not be the case, the characters could be given more personal incentives for getting involved in the stories.

MADELIA'S MADAMS

They say there is no smoke without fire, and this is certainly the case with Madelia – the owner of the Davokar Feastery who rose from the depths of refugee wretchedness to immense opulence in less than a decade. However, her way to the top did not go through noblemen, but through some of the city's richest women.

When the famously wealthy paper patron Obelia, joint owner of Yndaros' papermill along with her husband Erfran, is found strangled in a New Town courtyard, the news spreads with the speed of lightning. At the same time, Baron Dogai Harl's mother disappears from her residence without a trace. The truth is that both women secretly left their homes to attend a nightly meeting with Madelia, to demand that she repay the large sum of thaler she had fleeced from them. Madelia (who suspected something was wrong and ordered two of her bouncers to hide nearby) could not risk being exposed, and had her former lovers strangled. They loaded the Dowager Baroness onto a carriage, but did not have time to take Obelia as well; someone lit an oil lamp, and suddenly light was streaming through a nearby window.

Baron Dogai could be the one who (personally or through some contact within the Army or among the nobles) asks the player characters to investigate his mother's disappearance. Perhaps they will find evidence that she was completely penniless, and that she often socialized with the murdered paper patron? Perhaps talking to the City Watch (who have written it off as a robbery-homicide) or examining the scene of the murder could provide clues which eventually points to Madelia? Then it is all about securing evidence – possibly in the form of a ledger where Madelia records how much she has swindled and from whom, or by squeezing the truth out of one of her guilt-ridden, diary-writing bouncers?

ESCORTS AT THE CROFT

Some acquaintance/contact asks the characters to be his/her escort in a meeting at the Croft. Who this person is, who else will attend the meeting, and why it is held at the Croft of all places, the Game Master must decide based on who the characters are. But as a suggestion, it could be a noble, a City Watch investigator, a Master of the Order or even a sun priest (perhaps a reformist who is meeting a fellow sympathizer and wants to do so in a place where other sun priests would not go).

Arriving at the Croft, there is a lot for the characters to take in. The vigilant observer will notice several individuals who stand out (sober, composed, attentive) and could well be undercover watchmen or other agents of the Queen. These people ignore everything happening around them: the young boy snatching purses/belt bags from those he bumps into; the furious, drunken fist-fight which breaks out between two young men who were cuddling just a moment earlier; the six men who appear to be part of Dastan's crew and drag three adventurous youngsters through the door to the backyard. But worst of all...

Nobleman Dastan sits perched on his dais all night long, watching the bustling tavern with a smug grin, quaffing red wine and chewing on what looks like dried mushrooms. Late at night he lets out a roar; in just a few seconds, the Croft goes completely silent. He stands by the edge of the dais, holding a haggard, middle-aged woman by the arm. As soon as he gets everyone's attention, Dastan raises his voice: *"This one says she's broke, says she can't pay."* A pause for emphasis, before he continues: *"And what do we do with those who cannot pay? We make an example of them."* Then he pushes the woman into the crowd below, screaming: *"Educate the cheapskates and the misers; teach them the cost of living!"*

How the characters will act in this environment is an interesting question. They certainly risk angering Dastan and his people, especially if they try to save the haggard woman from being beaten to death. The Thief King might even put his blade to the throat of the person they are there to protect, if he or she is left unguarded. This could all end very badly, and the characters will probably have to offer Dastan something of great value in order to stay alive.

GRUM'S GOONS

The three owners of the Scratch & Rodent know perfectly well who is behind the attacks on their establishment. But since many of the vandals have eaten their food and drunk their hubble since they were practically baby goblins, they are very reluctant to make a formal complaint.

The truth is that a playmate from their youngling days, the trouble-maker Grum, has come to Yndaros, expelled from his tribe after having accidentally bludgeoned his brother to death. With Nobleman Dastan and the dwarven families as his role models, Grum wants to establish a gang of goblin hooligans in the Ambrian capital, specializing in racketeering and extortion. He has attracted roughly a hundred young brothers and sisters, who see him as their way out of poverty and squalor. Unfortunately, business has not been so good, especially as the pigheaded tavern owners who were to be their main source of income refuse to pay for protection.

Perhaps one of said owners will be beaten within an inch of his life before someone reacts? The characters could get involved on their own

initiative, or on behalf of some eminent regular (for example a wizard or a sun priest). The problem is to get to the root of the problem (Grum); preferably without hurting the young goblins, who will go to great lengths to protect and shelter the scoundrel who may very well be their only chance at a comfortable life. Perhaps the leader of the hooligans is keeping large parts of their profit for himself? Perhaps proof of this, combined with offers of alternative employment, could make the rascals turn against Grum?

MAYHEM AT THE DOME

The aged bandit queen Merandra has gradually been outmaneuvered by Nobleman Dastan and the dwarven families. Her organization is now limited to pickpocketing, petty theft and fraud (activities which previously named competitors rarely concern themselves with), but at least in those fields she is still unrivaled. Or was, until the changeling gutter-mage Grimorio Abramelin decided to give it a serious go.

The player characters are at the Dome to watch a particularly interesting gladiatorial bout, invited by, or hired to escort, some prominent citizen. The arena is almost full; thousands of Yndarians are shouting and cheering, and the lower bleachers are crowded with families whose children have waited weeks to see their favorite gladiator fight. But halfway through the pre-fights, something happens – a pack of angry jakaars emerge unexpectedly from the arena floor. Sinking their fangs into the three goblin warriors who just managed to slay their opponent (a drugged beamon), they are joined by two crazed abroars who immediately storm toward the railing protecting the spectators from the fighters of the Dome. Breaking through, they charge shrieking, frothing and stomping at everyone around.

The player characters are situated higher up on the bleachers, but may of course head down to intervene. Soon even more beasts appear, provoked to aggressive madness (the Game Master decides what kind of resistance best suits the gaming group). With a successful *Vigilant* test in the midst of the mayhem, the characters notice something higher up on the opposite bleacher. Almost everyone is desperately running toward the exits, yet a single man remains seated (Grimorio) between what looks like two bodyguards. Meanwhile, a dozen people dressed in black press their way toward the sitting man, who seems completely unaware that he is being surrounded.

And so, this becomes a chance for the characters to save (and at the same time get acquainted with) Grimorio Abramelin. Perhaps he even hires them to crush Merandra's crime syndicate once and for all, but in that case, he makes sure to portray himself as an innocent victim of extortion, not as a rival criminal.

THE TWIN FIGURINE

The owners of the antique shop the Chance have every reason to be desperate – they recently discovered that one of their figurines (one meter high, made from porous, black sandstone) is crawling with tiny parasites which surface whenever the object is in contact with moisture. Not only that: judging by their effects on the assistant who polished the figurine, the bugs are horribly corrupted. And even worse: the figurine's twin has already been sold!

Perhaps Davido and Lyssa turn to Ordo Magica or the nearest Sun Temple for help, who in turn contacts the player characters. The buyer must be tracked down – he did not state his name, but had a very distinct appearance (the Game Master decides) and claimed to have been selling antiques on the Monger's Square until six months ago. The characters will have to ask around for the right address, where they find the buyer blight-born, feasting on the last of his four domestic dogs.

An investigation of the home reveals that the buyer was named Mandaro and had started a career buying antiques on behalf of rich clients. One of his last orders came from Anogai Dresel (youngest son of Baroness Amelea), who needed a birthday present for his mother, preferably *"an antique statuette for the new steam bath at the family's pleasure palace."*

When the player characters arrive, the party is underway, and the steam room is of course being inaugurated to celebrate the Baroness' birthday. The Game Master decides whether any guests have already been blight-born, and if so, how many. Alternatively, the characters could get there in time to stop the inauguration, and instead face the social challenge of convincing the partygoers that the steam bath is dangerous.

THE BREW VANDALS

Initially, the Brew Vandals were little more than a nuisance, though they occasionally caused some material damage. Since then, their leader (the dockworker Karo) and her gang have evolved in a way which makes people speak their name with genuine fear. Luckily for them, they operate exclusively in the city's eastern districts, where the City Watch is preoccupied with more serious

criminals and disorder at the refugee camp, so they have not yet been the subject of a thorough investigation. But many of the districts' respectable residents have had enough.

The player characters could be hired, directly or through some contact, by a group of laborers and less prominent craftsmen who have pooled all their savings in the hope that it will make a decent reward. Alternatively, an officer of the City Watch could ask the characters for a favor, which, if granted, will one day be repaid in a similar manner, should they find themselves in need of help.

Either way, it soon becomes clear that the Brew Vandals are under Nobleman Dastan's protection. While Karo and her thugs are attracting attention on the Monger's Square, Dastan takes the opportunity to transport smuggled goods through Old Kadizar. The Vandals originally contacted him to request something stronger than ordinary blackbrew, and every month since, he has sold them three barrels of brutebrew seasoned with Krusean berries, more potent than the ordinary barbarian variety, with an added corrupting effect which makes the consumer utterly unafraid and extremely violent.

The Brew Vandals, in their hunt for increasingly extreme highs, are in fact headed toward their own destruction. A handful of them already show marks of corruption, internally called *"party blisters"* in the belief that they are merely signs of too much partying. But for every week that passes, they must drink more and more to satiate their cravings. It will not be long before the drink causes some of them to become thoroughly corrupt...

HURIAN'S URN

About six months ago, the treasure hunter Ogdar returned to Yndaros beside a mule whose saddle bags were full of curiosities and mystical treasures from a ruin on the border between Bright and Dark Davokar. He was tainted by darkness, feverish and confused, but managed to follow the street all the way to the man who funded his expedition: Hurian. As soon as the treasures had been delivered and the additional payment collected, he could contain himself no longer; a can of fine Argona stut at the Victory Vault was all it took – he screamed like a madman, in terror and despair, until the owner knocked him unconscious with her rolling pin.

Ogdar is now locked up at the Anchorage Asylum, since Hurian heard what happened and saw fit to have an intermediary buy him a place there. For a long time he was completely unresponsive, but has recently begun to talk, about things he experienced and the treasures he brought with him from the depths of the forest. The stories were passed on by two caretakers/guards, and many rumors of the expedition now circulate the city's taverns. They tell of magnificent treasures, including an urn whose decor shows the way to Symbar if held in moonlight, and of an unidentified employer in Yndaros.

The player characters could hear the rumors firsthand or through some contact, for example a noble or a wizard of Ordo Magica. If they decide to investigate the matter further, they should first get into Anchorage Asylum for a conversation with Ogdar, either through forced entry or deception (perhaps one of the rumor-mongering caretakers/guards could be of use?). They find the treasure hunter in an unusually lucid, but also quite remorseful state, and learn that his plunder is in Hurian's possession. Should they wish to proceed, the characters must plan and execute a burglary at one of the city's most heavily guarded buildings.

What treasure they find is for the Game Master to decide, but we suggest that the famous urn does not show the way to Symbar, but to some other interesting ruin in the depths of Davokar.

THE CONVENT SCHOOL

A goblin girl is found dead amidst the shrubs enclosing the garden of the Last Light Convent School. The Abbess, Mother Abelena Loramon, believes the Sun Church cannot afford any serious scandals right now and covers up the incident, but the night watchman Berto cannot just stand by and do nothing. He is convinced that the girl was murdered, and wants the perpetrator hunted down and brought to justice.

Berto might approach the player characters personally at some appropriate tavern, but he will more likely have friends/relatives within the City Watch, Ordo Magica or the Army, who in turn know the characters as capable problem-solvers. Berto was immediately ordered to burn the body, but he did not – a closer examination reveals a deep cut on the girl's throat, and her body almost completely drained of blood. In the shrubbery, trampled into the ground, is a cloak buckle shaped like the setting sun of Prios, clearly ripped from its bearer. Given that the Convent School is crammed between other buildings at the Temple District, the murderer is probably part of the staff.

We suggest that the Game Master creates a handful of suitable suspects among the Convent School's teachers and staff. The perpetrator turns

Twilight Tincture

Twilight Tincture is an extract of dried stems and leaves from the extremely rare Twilight Thistle. It temporarily makes an undead body appear alive: the skin regains its color, the body temperature rises, and the breath improves dramatically. For more information, see page 122 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*.

out to be Mother Abelena's grandchild, the seventeen-year-old teacher Evelena, who a few days ago returned from a visit to her parents. She returned undead, however, murdered by plunderers on her way back and spontaneously reanimated the following day. The Abbess was able to procure a small amount of Twilight Tincture from her Black Cloak contacts. If diluted it will last for two weeks, strong enough to conceal the girl's external symptoms, but not enough to quench her thirst for blood. Unless the characters find her, she will soon kill again.

ASBARAST'S CRAWLERS

A seemingly empty two-masted merchant vessel drifts down the river Doudram; the City Watch's boat patrol ties it to an anchor in the rapids east of the Islet and goes aboard. Frenzied screams are soon heard from the ship, and before long it is set ablaze. Two guards throw themselves over the railing, but only one makes it back to the wide-eyed witnesses at the eastern edge of the Islet. His face and hands display terrible acid burns; blind and wailing with agony, he utters a few words before the acid spreads to his tongue and vocal chords: *"The captain's log... Made a stop... Kadel, by the hills."* A witness touches the dead man and suffers the same "acidic" effect, starting on the hand which touched the guard.

What happened was that a group of Sovereign agents managed to fill three urns with the swarming, flesh-eating microorganism known as Asbarast's Crawlers, which more than a thousand years ago wiped out the entire population of Asbarast, a city east of the Ravens (to read more about the creature, see page 78). The meter-high urns were brought by wagon across the mountains, where they were smuggled aboard a merchant ship for safer transport to the agents' hideout in Ambria, among the hills of County Kadel. But when they were offloaded, one of the urns cracked, after which the agents simply pushed the vessel into the river – with a little luck, it would even reach the Queen's city and thus not be entirely wasted.

But the crawlers will not spread very far this time; the reckless witness is knocked unconscious, and no one else touches the corpses. What is left of the bodies after the bugs have devoured their soft tissue is examined on site, first by the City Watch, then by Ordo Magica. The characters could be contacted when it becomes clear that the remains are exuding corruption? In any case, the agent cell can be tracked from the place where the merchant ship had to make a stop; the crew is found murdered and carelessly hidden in a crevice, some with wounds which suggest that they were killed by throwing spiders. The Game Master may decide the size of the cell, depending on what seems most appropriate for the gaming group – whether they are best suited for open combat or stealthy maneuvers. It will of course be most interesting if both options are left open.

THE DEATH WAGON

The rumor that Armangai Brigo was involved with the Apostles of Supremacy is quite true, but that he was captured in the City Watch's raid is merely wishful thinking. The dark-minded noble was warned beforehand by Lugander Galeia (already a close friend of Esmerelda's, though Armangai did not know it) and has since kept a low profile as the manager of an estate on the south-western border of Galeia. There he has continued to cultivate his arts, along with his twenty followers who are all working on the estate. Baron Laguboi, who rarely leaves his townhouse, is not aware of the arrangement and has no reason to suspect anything, since the estate is being run just well enough not to attract attention.

What might be the cultists' demise is their leader's deepening pact with the daemon Rabarakro. The otherworldly creature speaks to Armangai through an ornamented fountain in the cult's underground ritual chamber. Made of limestone, the fountain is roughly the height of a man and about two meters in diameter, with a top shaped like a gaping, horned wolf's head. To maintain the link to the Yonderworld, Rabarakro demands that the blood of a human is poured into the fountain once a day. To that end, the cult sends a wagon to the capital's refugee camp at least twice a month, where the driver lures people with promises of a good life as farmhands on some estate (always a different one).

The characters could be contacted by the City Watch, or some government contact, and asked to investigate the rumors currently circulating among the refugees – rumors of a "Death Wagon" abducting people to a cannibalistic sect, or to a mine where they must toil until they die. Alternatively, some refugees could pool what little money they have to hire a group of competent problem-solvers. Perhaps the wagon can be identified through the driver's tainted shadow, or through witnesses recognizing her as the driver of the wagon which picked up the witness' missing relatives. But it would of course be easiest to blend in among the refugees and become one of those chosen to board the wagon...

Noble Houses

THE REGION SOUTH OF THE TITANS has a long but also obscure history, at least the period before the founding of Alberetor, roughly three hundred and fifty years before year 0 in the Ambrian calendar. There are accounts from the petty kingdoms, people and city states which preceded the Alberians, but the further back in time one goes, the more sporadic and mythical they become. What is known for certain is that Alberetor was founded as a union between the kingdoms of DiVearra, Argonata and Alber, and that over time, more and more chose (or were forced) to join them. Alberetor reached its full size about two hundred years before the Victory.

THE FEUDAL SYSTEM was created as a response to the realm's expansion; the central authority needed vassals in order to develop and maintain control over the domain. At first there were great shifts in status and position among the prominent Houses, especially because of the struggle for the throne between Houses Vearra, Argona and Parfas (from Alber), which made monarchs come and go in rapid succession. The situation slowly stabilized after a popular uprising two hundred and seventy years ago, when House Kohinoor (formerly one of the lesser houses, despite its glorious military history) was installed as the Royal Family. The previous ruling families have staged or planned many coups through the years, but only Duchess Andarea Parfas came close to succeeding – which would cost her relatives dearly in terms of future status and influence.

But history cannot explain much about the Ambria which rose from the ashes of the war-torn Albeteror. Many noble houses were completely wiped out, while others distinguished themselves, positively or negatively, in the war against the Dark Lords. All this was taken into account when Queen Korinthia, along with her advisers and dukes, appointed vassals to help her govern the Promised Land. To clarify the new order even further, the Queen established a number of heraldic principles which all houses must follow when creating their emblems and coats of arms, based on the hierarchy which signifies the nation's distribution of power and responsibility.

As far as political alignments and alliances are concerned, the Queen's new realm is still in flux. The need to focus on (re)building the kingdom, combined with Korinthia's immense popularity, has prevented the representatives of the noble houses from interacting with each other, or even seeing the point in doing so. But the more time passes, the more conflicts have emerged between the vassals, as well as between them and the Crown. Perhaps the coming war against the Sovereign's Oath will mitigate this effect; perhaps it will reopen old wounds instead. Time will tell...

Argona

Arobel

Attio

Brigo

Galaldo

Grendel

Herengol

Kaldel

Kalfas

Karella

Korinthia Kohinoor

Lethona

Melion

Soleij

Vearra

Heraldic Principles

The monarch's and dukes' coats of arms have a single field, with their personal version of their family crests on a golden background. Those of counts and barons have two fields, vertically divided, with their family crests on one side, on a background of their choosing, and their duke's crest on the other. For counts, the field behind the duke's crest is golden yellow; silver white for barons. Princes of the Realm and other free knights may choose whatever coat of arms they like, as long as they do not contain the monarch's or dukes' crests.

KOHINOOR

The Kohinoor family has ruled its people for almost three centuries. Aside from a few minor wars of conquest and some internal unrest caused by dearth, epidemics and rebellious vassals, their reign has been a peaceful time of collaboration, development and growing prosperity, which has given the fine arts room to flourish. This was all upended by the war with their eastern neighbor, but Queen Korinthia did actually emerge from the inferno stronger than ever. However, the question is how hard she can push her people (commoners as well as nobles) with high demands and controversial decisions before their love is muddled by objections; before the support she enjoys turns into open opposition.

Property

House Kohinoor is very wealthy indeed. Rebuilding the Promised Land has not been cheap, but from the dying Alberetor, Korinthia brought with her vast riches confiscated from the estates of extinct noble houses and the treasury of the vanquished enemy. Furthermore, the Crown obtains tax revenue from the other duchies (the only exemption being Prios Domain) in addition to the tithe collected from counts and barons in Yndarien. The Queen and her council still have more than enough money to fund expeditions, infrastructure or wars of conquest.

Prominent Individuals

There is not much to be said about House Kohinoor's prominent members. Many died on the black battlefields of Alberetor, and those who remain are gathered at the royal palace or the stately homes of the dukes. Two members one hears very little about are Korinthia's nearly hundred-year-old aunt Mesmerda, still clear-headed enough to be a cunning adviser, and the explorer calling himself Gorakai the Younger, who is known for having charted the sunken ruins of Clearwell. Gorakai is in fact Korinthia's cousin and son of Duke Alesaro, but has distanced himself from his family after a bloody argument with his father.

Relations

Korinthia has more enemies than she knows. She still has the populace on her side, and enjoys the full support of Counties Herengol, Kalfas, Kaldel, Arobel and Galaldo, as well as ten baronies. But she is unaware of the enemies she has within noble houses such as Brigo, Erebus and Gorinder; the same goes for the declining confidence which is felt within many of the other houses. Moreover, if one takes the Curia, parts of Ordo Magica, the High Chieftain's allies, and the influential trading houses into account, her list of loyal allies seems punier still.

Of course, Korinthia and her council are not completely oblivious to the faltering support, but they also believe that the love of the people is what matters most, and that it can only be maintained and regained through demonstrations of competence. They must win battles, help those in need, and nurture people's dreams of an even brighter future – only in that way can they achieve their goal of building a strong and prosperous Ambria!

VEARRA

The members of House Vearra will never forget their history; how they once took part in the founding of Alberetor, and how their ancestors fought, bled and led their young kingdom to dominance and prosperity. Though they cooperated faithfully in the Great War and during the establishment of the new homeland, none of them question their family's claim to the throne. Now, their prospects seem to be improving. The majority of House Vearra's members are not aware of Count Demetro's plans (see *The Darkest Star*), but they can see the Queen growing weaker, losing more support with each passing day – fewer and fewer defend her against criticism; more and more nod in agreement whenever her competence or friendship with the woodland folk is questioned. Perhaps it is finally time for a new monarch?

Property

As they left for the Promised Land, House Vearra brought with them most of the considerable wealth they had accumulated over the years. The cost of battling the Dark Lords was almost completely offset by the spoils of war, and their new county was mostly built with government funds. Instead, Vearra's coffers have been used to finance outposts and expeditions in the rich woods of Davokar, and establish good relations with the Sun Church and its followers – for example through monthly contributions to the Curia and the building of the new, mighty cathedral near the county's principal town. To sum up: as long as the Count's bookkeepers can successfully withhold large parts of the county's revenue from Korinthia's tax collectors, the members of House Vearra will continue to be very well off.

Prominent Individuals

Aside from Count Demetro, Commander Iakobo, and the latter's children, most members of the

House are found either within Ordo Magica or the Sun Church. People still speak highly of the late Master of the Order and explorer Eulia Vearra, while the Count's sister, Diesla, joined a convent as a young girl and is now one of Brother Eumeno's most trusted advisers. Finally, his niece Lesena should also be mentioned, as she is a well-known figure in Thistle Hold and plays a key role in forming alliances between the noble houses in the norther parts of the realm.

Relations
The members of House Vearra consider themselves on equal footing with the Queen and her family; they do not join alliances – they form and lead them. As mentioned earlier, Count Demetro has already received written support from the leaders of three counties and a handful of baronies (see The Vearra Alliance, page 49). He is not sure how much these treaties can be trusted, but at least it is a good start. His hard and costly work to win the friendship of the weakened First Father appears to have been more or less wasted, apart from giving him a popular reputation as *"the Sun God's champion."* But fortunately, there are others within the Sun Church who (he believes) are willing to support him, including a representative of the odious House Argona. If the inevitable attack on Korinthia and Jeseebegai succeeds (see page 83–85), his path to the throne should be clear.

ARGONA

The pride and ambition which characterize House Vearra are also found among the representatives of Argona; perhaps even more so. The first ruler of Alberetor was Queen Almara, and before House Kohinoor's ascension to the throne another five members of House Argona had been crowned. The greatest of them was the warlord Oragan, under whose reign the kingdom doubled in size and population. The current head of the family, Count Alkantor, is far less impressive, as were many of his predecessors. In fact, House Argona has been in decline for decades, and things did not improve in the Promised Land when their house was allotted an estate in the shadow of Davokar.

Property
In public, the Count boasts far and wide of his enormous wealth, but in truth his family is practically living hand to mouth. Their estates in Alberetor were quickly invaded by dragouls and their masters, who shipped all their riches back to Lyastra before a counteroffensive could be launched. Alkantor spent much of what remained on speeding up the construction of roads and fortifications, hoping that it would one day give his county an advantage over its neighbors. But this did not get him very far. Sure, his county's lands are good enough for growing crops and raising cattle, but in competition with Thistle Hold and Blackmoor, it will never be the commercial hub he once hoped.

Prominent Individuals
Aside from Count Alkantor, who is a respected if not liked person in Thistle Hold, very few members of his house have distinguished themselves in a positive sense. Of his four children, only Suria has attained an important position, as the Queen's Legate in Thistle Hold. But hopefully it is not too late, as his wife recently died in childbirth and her replacement (young Lisel Salamos) will probably give him more children to put his hope in. The Count's sister, Anabela, should also be mentioned, though he himself prefers not to. She has worked her way to a top position within the Sun Church, as the Priesthood's representative in the Curia. But they have long hated each other, and moreover, being at the helm of a sinking ship is hardly an impressive feat.

Relations
All living members of House Argona are very much aware of the cracks in their House's once noble foundations. For now, all they can do is to prepare for the future by conducting themselves in as lordly a manner as possible. Houses Kohinoor and Vearra are, and will always be, their deadly enemies. But if Argona is ever to compete for real power, they must first win the people over to their side. In that respect, the war against the barbarians in the north is a welcome one. Alkantor is doing his best to snap himself and his two sons into shape for the upcoming battle, as they must now live up to the legends of Oragan Argona. If fortune favors them, this could be a new dawn for their noble family, particularly if the other houses should happen to lose a few key members to the axes of the enemy.

PARFAS

The third of Alberetor's founding families now lives an unobtrusive life as House Kohinoor's loyal servants. In the opening phase of the Great War, Duchess Andarea was only centimeters away from killing King Ynedar and, with support from several other houses, winning the throne of Alberetor. But the tip of her knife never reached the monarch's heart; he survived, and took brutal revenge on the leading conspirator. This could have been the end

of her entire house, especially as Andarea's family had no accomplices to share their blame. But in view of the surging war, King Ynedar chose to be merciful. House Parfas lived on, albeit far from the glamour and glitz of their past existence.

Property
The current head of the family, Egoi Parfas, saw most of his properties confiscated after the war, despite the fact that he and his daughters had won many significant victories for their Queen – *"penalties for the sins of their parents,"* it was called. As if that was not enough, having come to the new realm, he was allotted a tiny barony in the barren outback in the east, as vassals of a boy duke named Ynedar. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Baron Egoi – who was only a boy himself when his mother tried to assassinate King Ynedar – feels unjustly treated.

At the moment there is not much he can do about it, but his hatred for House Kohinoor grows stronger with each day he endures in the backwoods he feels banished to. There is almost nothing he would not do, no alliances or pacts he would not authorize, to see Korinthia Nightbane lying in the dirt, with her head at least a meter from her shoulders.

Prominent Individuals
For a house with such a long, glorious history of distinguished commanders and rulers, House Parfas has become rather insignificant. The oldest daughter, Elna, is a colonel in Duke Ynedar's private guard, while the younger, Arlea, is a lady-in-waiting at the royal palace in Yndaros. Both positions can be used to give Egoi the vengeance he so badly desires, but bring little glory to the family name. The same goes for the baron's sister, Peia, who joined a convent at a young age and recently pledged allegiance to the Church of Dead Prios.

Relations
There was a time when House Parfas had plenty of close friends and allies. Many were lost in the Great War, but some still remain – for example Houses Arobel, Galaldo, Salamos, Attio and Karnak. These are now loyal to the Queen, but perhaps some of their members still remember their ancestors' oaths, and might be willing to aid Egoi in his quest for vengeance? That aside, the Baron has not made any great effort to make new friends, either among Ambrians or barbarians.

Other Houses

ASIDE FROM THE plan which the Vearra Alliance is about to execute, there are not many open conflicts between the noble houses or between the royal family and the others. Nor are the kingdom's nobles fragmented into rigid factions, as was the case before the Great War.

Everyone has been too busy developing their allotted region and trying to get along with their new dukes and neighbors, which is why almost all collaborations have concerned individual projects: a local goblin tribe bothering people in several baronies must be driven away, a bridge must be built across a border river, fishing rights in the same river or in a shared lake must be determined. The leaders of ten noble houses have indeed signed the Vearra Alliance's treaty, but if it turns out that Kohinoor is still the strongest, they will break their oaths and accuse Demetro Vearra and his followers of having forged their signatures.

There are of course plenty of personal conflicts between individuals who, for one reason or another, hate other nobles – sometimes as a result of personal grievances, sometimes because the person they hate simply looks a lot like an ancestor who once wronged them. But these rarely reach the same proportions as they did in the relatively safe and stable Alberetor, and never come close to being a threat to the general stability of the realm. And with another major war on its way, most nobles will probably put aside their differences and defend their realm, shoulder to shoulder; maybe not out of love for their Queen and people, but to safeguard their own properties and privileges.

BRIGO
Baron Valtar Brigo fought side by side with King Ynedar during the first half of he Great War, and was later appointed commander of Korinthia's private guard. The bond that was forged between them made House Brigo rise in status and esteem, which became particularly evident when the King took Valtar's sister as his bride. Now they are one of the most powerful families in Ambria, and their representatives are found at the top levels of many Ambrian factions.

Property
The count of Brigo is slowly building his fortune, largely thanks to his county's fertile lands and close proximity to the capital. The famous Moonlight Monolith has not yet contributed to their flourishing fields, but one day it might, when Ordo Ambra has figured out how best to utilize its powers.

The Howling of Damned Gods

The adventure *The Howling of Damned Gods* features an account of the Young Gods and Prios' exaltation as the One. It can be found as an eBook at various digital download sites.

Autumn in the County of Brigo, with the Moonlight Monolith as a prominent feature of the landscape.

Prominent Individuals
Count Edogai's secretive brother, Father Matheo, is without a doubt one of Yndaros' (and therefore Ambria's) most powerful figures; as a member of the Queen's, the city's, and the Cathedral of Martyrs' ruling bodies, Father Matheo knows everything that happens and has a finger in most of it. The Count's son, the explorer Iasogoi, is one of the realm's most popular celebrities, and his mother, the old Countess Alevia, is known for being the only highborn noble who has insisted on staying in Alberetor.

Relations
Since the outbreak of the Great War, House Brigo has drawn ever closer to the royal family and, consequently, other houses close to the Queen, such as Herengol and Kalfas. But Father Matheo's ambitions and Count Edogai's inability to stand up to his brother are about to turn all of this on its head – if all goes according to current plans, their future allies will be named Vearra, Lethona, and Melion.

SOLEIJ

Like House Brigo, Soleij can boast many prominent individuals, even though their house has never had particularly high status. This is of course due to Baroness Eudela's son, Demeon, First Father of the Sun Church. Jeseebegai (and the secret he shares with the Queen) is why their house was allotted much more land than the other baronies, and it is thanks to his connections that the members of his family often reach positions of great power and influence.

Property
The barony of Soleij is larger than most counties. Sure, it is plagued by plunderers, refugees, and the predators of the Titans, but there are also lush croplands in the north. In addition, the snow-white marble being mined in the region's hills is in high demand among the kingdom's elite craftsmen and merchants.

Prominent Individuals
First Father Jeseebegai has already been mentioned, as has the capable Baroness Eudela. Jeseebegai's sister Levia and his cousin Mergoi were both taught by Ordo Magica; the former has remained there as Master of the Order, while the latter is now leader of the newly-formed Ordo Ambra, financed by the Count of Brigo.

Relations
House Soleij has always been closest to the Sun God. What most people do not know is that it was Eudela's father, Baron Edor, who founded the

Houses Melion and Meleon

After a long and painful conflict between the siblings Armendo and Sesaro, the then king of Alberetor, Koriano II, made a drastic decision: he divided the family's lands between the siblings and named Sesaro's new house Melion, which was really an older version of the same name. Sesaro sulked about being deprived of his father's name, but not for long, as a large gold deposit was found on his land. The members of the two houses loathe each other to this day, and their mutual contempt did not exactly mellow when Korinthia awarded Sesaro's descendants a county while House Meleon's proud General Karlogoi had to settle for a barony in the region surrounding the border checkpoint of Prios Pass.

congregation known as the Vestals of Prios, and was also Father Abramar's patron while he was writing the Lightbringer. The House has always been a close ally of the Queen, but her ambiguous stance toward reformists and heretical sun knights could well be the end of that tradition. The same goes for House Vearra, as Jeseebegai suspects that Count Demetro, too, is straying from the path of the righteous. One thing is certain: the Baroness will give her all in the war against the barbarians of the northern dark; what happens next remains to be seen...

HERENGOL

House Herengol has been closely tied to the royal family ever since the uprising which made Kathrona Kohinoor queen. When the old Count died, his daughter Alama became head of the family, while his oldest son, Field Marshal Beremo, assumed the position as supreme commander of the military. Countess Alama has never thought much of Korinthia, but has remained loyal, though not without poisoning her childrens' views on the Queen. What will happen with House Herengol after Alama and Beremo have died is thus highly uncertain.

Property

Herengol is the largest and richest county in Ambria. The fertile valleys of Veloma and Doudram, Lake Ebel, and the ore-filled mountains all help fill the coffers which by the end of the war had almost been emptied. Much of the county's riches has thus far been invested in roads, mines, and fortifications to protect against the beasts and robbers of the mountains, but most of it is now finished, and it is time to enjoy the abundance.

Prominent Individuals

Almost the entirety of House Herengol is involved with the nation's armed forces, in one way or another. But aside from the Field Marshal they mostly occupy less prominent positions. The Countess' son, Elberdo, is a colonel in the Ambrian sapper corps, while his son and daughter serve as field agents of the Royal Sekretorium – Captain Rabelia stationed east of the Ravens, and Captain Ferbian in charge of the recently established Domestic Security Division. Beremo's only son and the Countess' daughter are both situated in Thistle Hold; the former as an adventurous expedition leader, the latter as an agent of Korinthia's uncle, Alesaro (a well-kept family secret).

Relations

House Herengol is loyal to the royal family, though Countess Alama would rather have seen Alesaro on the throne. Because of her undisguised contempt for the current sovereign, her children have never gotten along with Korinthia and are both in collusive contact with Alesaro, ready to aid his rise to power. Until the mother and uncle are dead there is not much they can do, but once the power is theirs, the Queen would do well to watch her back...

ATTIO

House Attio would probably never be mentioned in this context, were it not for a handful of colorful personalities. The heads of their house have always been loyal to House Kohinoor, and the other members seem generally determined to avoid positions of responsibility. Perhaps this is precisely why the outwardly affable and popular Herakleo is secretly drinking himself to death?

Property

The family's barony may be beautiful with its rolling green hills, but though the stretch of land along the Veloma Valley yields good harvests, their lands generate little income. In addition, most of House Attio's coffers were recently spent as the Baroness' payment to the Free League's sellswords. No, House Attio cannot be considered one of Ambria's economic giants, especially after the loans which Baron Valero will have to take out in order to equip his troops for the upcoming war against the Sovereign's Oath.

Prominent Individuals

Aside from the much-discussed Valero and Herela, the beloved drunk of a Key Master, and the constantly intoxicated troublemaker and war hero Serex in Thistle Hold, there is really just one notable person in the family's history. But she is famous in a completely different, overwhelmingly positive way: the Lightbringer Ofelya who was sainted for having died the moment she, filled by the holy light of Prios, burned the gates of the Dark Lords' stronghold to ashes.

Relations

The members of House Attio are so busy with their own problems that they never have time for plots or conspiracies. They are loyal to the Crown, and that is the only alliance they are interested in. The question is how long the Queen will put up with their internal squabbles – there are plenty of other prominent people in Ambria, many of whom deserve to be elevated to nobility...

BERAKKA

At the start of the Great War, Junio was a foot soldier like any other; when it ended he had

risen through the ranks and personally killed a handful of Dark Lords as well as a dozen of their commanders. The key to his success was neither size nor strength, but sheer cunning – something that impressed the Queen and her advisers to such an extent that he, in the absence of reliable relatives, was appointed Duke of Narugor. And he has not let them down; if Korinthia were to name the most dependable duke in Ambria, her finger would be pointed at him.

Property
Except for the region surrounding Kurun, which is under his direct control, Duke Junio's lands are managed by eight barons and one count. And then there is Thistle Hold, crammed between the baronies of Erebus and Derego. The soil is far less fertile than in the southern valleys, and the threats from the forests are greater in numbers and severity than those from the Titans, but even so, the Duke does not complain. And why would he? He makes a good living from the trade in Kurun and tax revenue from his vassals, and besides, amassing wealth was never one of his primary goals in life.

Prominent Individuals
The Duke and his father are basically the only people who are well-known among the general population. The father, Jurlio, showed initiative during the restoration of Lindaros and was eventually given a position at the City Council, as Construction Commissioner. Junio's third son, Davido, is also somewhat distinguished as the Duke's representative in Thistle Hold. Too sickly to become a knight, he does his best to represent his father among the dignitaries gathered in the Hall of Knights.

Relations
It would be no exaggeration to say that Junio Beraka is *"loved by the people, but hated by the nobles."* No matter how justly and graciously he treats his vassals, the nobles will always look down on him and his family of social climbers. This is particularly true of Count Alkantor, who has publicly called him an *"unwashed pig farmer with more filth in his blood than he has on his grubby mitts."* But Duke Junio ignores their jealousy, secure in the knowledge that he has his Queen's love and respect.

MELION

House Melion has built its status and reputation primarily on trade, starting about a hundred years ago when a rich gold deposit was discovered on their lands in Alberetor. One might think that them being allotted a relatively small and vulnerable county in the north was a mark of the Queen's displeasure, but if so, this was rather misguided. In fact, it was precisely that kind of land Count Arnon had wanted. The idea is of course to use the river Doudram to transport the riches harvested from the woods of Davokar to trade centers such as Yndaros, Mergile, Agrella, Kurun, and nearby Ravenia.

Property
Count Arnon has money coming out of his ears, and he grows richer every day the waters of the Doudram carry his ships between the family's outposts in Davokar and the cities in the south. Most of his wealth is used to establish new businesses, but he is also one of Ambria's major moneylenders. Virtually all nobles in New Beretor owe him money, as do many families in the other duchies. Even the Curia borrowed thousands of thaler from the Count of Melion during the construction of Templewall. Rumor has it that the interest alone is enough to finance the county's core businesses, and if this is true, House Melion should soon be the wealthiest in the entire kingdom.

Prominent Individuals
Aside from Count Arnon and his younger brother, Colonel Ralgai of the Royal Sekretorium, the members of House Melion keep a low profile. The Count's daughter, Aelia, oversees the family's trading houses in Yndaros and is famous in certain circles, while his older sister is known in a more specific crowd, namely by the inhabitants of the Refugee Camp – not as a member of House Melion, however, but as the secretive rebel queen Captain Kathia.

Relations
Thanks to their lending activities, the members of House Melion can expect a warm welcome more or less anywhere, and almost always with an exaggerated smile. Should they themselves be in need of information or more concrete assistance, it can usually be ensured with promises of small debts being canceled, interest-free periods, or new loans at favorable rates. Korinthia has recently displayed a certain coldness toward the Count, probably because she envies him or feels threatened by his growing fortune. But none of the house's members are particularly worried – should the Queen become a problem, there are several other candidates who would undoubtedly appreciate their financial aid in overthrowing the monarch...

Ceremonial Magic

CEREMONIAL MAGIC IS the generic term for rituals which must be performed by a group of mystics, and which are powerful enough to permanently alter the local geography and the course of history. They can cause firestorms, earthquakes, insect swarms, diseased winds, volcanic eruptions, devastating tidal waves, and more. But ceremonies are performed at great cost, in the form of both corruption and uncontrollable side-effects. After a series of catastrophic incidents during the Great War, a prohibition was introduced against performing, and passing on knowledge about, ceremonial magic. All violations are considered acts of high treason and, as such, inevitably punished by death.

CEREMONIES ARE INTENDED to be a dramatic tool to be used by *Symbaroum's* Game Masters, not something the player characters can learn or use. Sure, it is theoretically possible for a group of characters to successfully perform a ceremony, either by themselves or with the help of allies. But the basic idea is that mystical ceremonies should be used by hostile factions or groups, and that the characters are tasked with preventing the devastation which will otherwise be afflicted on the world.

Rules for Ceremonies

SINCE CEREMONIES ARE merely intended as dramatic tools for creating exciting stories, they do not need to be regulated in detail. The descriptions below should be viewed as suggestions and guidelines which the Game Master may follow, adjust, or ignore, depending on what best suits his or her story. The most important thing is that the players feel that their characters' choices and actions have a chance to impact the effect of the ceremony – if it is interrupted in time, there is every reason to celebrate; if it takes full effect, it becomes a cause for guilt and soul-searching.

THE PERFORMANCE

To perform a mystical ceremony, one requires written instructions on the procedure and a group of loyal individuals with mystical schooling. One also needs to gather material for the ceremonial circle, establish a mystical link to the place where the ceremony will take effect, and possibly obtain an appropriate sacrifice. In other words, it is something that takes a lot of time and effort.

The ceremonial book: Ceremonies are much too complex for a mystic to memorize in detail; he or she must follow instructions recorded in a tome, on a series of stone tablets, parchment scrolls, or something of that nature. Despite the security regulations, one can expect there to be at least two copies of each ceremonial text, but all of them are most likely hidden and/or guarded. The stealing of

a ceremonial book will hardly go unnoticed, and the victim of such a theft will do just about anything to get it back.

The participants: It takes at least four people to perform a mystical ceremony, but there should preferably be more, to mitigate the corruption suffered by individual participants (see Corruption and ritual sacrifices) and as a precaution in case someone should try to interrupt the ceremony (see Interrupting ceremonies).

One participant is the ceremony's Officiant; that is, the mystic in charge of it all. The Officiant must have attained Master level in a mystical tradition or have the *Ritualist* ability, while the requirements are lower for other participants – they only need novice training in a mystical tradition or the *Ritualist* ability, or possess the *Channeling* ability (the *Advanced Player's Guide*, page 63).

Ceremonial focus: A ceremony takes place in two locations – one where the participants are gathered, and one where the ceremony takes effect. As long as the latter can be seen from the former, no mystical link needs to be established between the two, but if the distance is too great or the view is blocked, the Officiant must prepare a specific ceremonial focus which is placed in advance where the effect is to occur. What kind of object is needed is specified in the description of the respective ceremony.

Finding this hidden ceremonial focus is virtually impossible for an outsider, and is therefore not a viable way to interrupt the ceremony – the area that must be searched is too vast, the object too small, and those who planted it (usually) too calculating. There can be exceptions, however, if the Game Master thinks that it is appropriate and will increase the suspense.

Procedure: Like other rituals, ceremonies are performed in a circle of symbols and mystically charged objects, making it easier to gather and focus the mystical energies of Creation. The Officiant and the participants position themselves along the outer edge of the circle, facing its center and the sacrifice which (if any) has been prepared.

When the preparations have been made and the ceremony begins, the Officiant and the participants drift into a trance and remain completely detached from the world until the ceremony is interrupted or completed. It may therefore be a good idea to hire a guard force to protect the defenseless mystics.

Timescale: Acquiring everything needed for the ceremony can take weeks or years, but when a ceremonial book, ceremonial focus, and other components are in place, it takes between twelve and twenty-four hours to complete the procedure. The final stage, starting with the participants going into a trance, takes at least an hour, but its duration should mainly be determined according to what suits the story (that is: what makes it as dramatic as possible).

CORRUPTION AND SACRIFICES

As a basic rule, the participants of a ceremony collectively suffer 5D6 points of temporary corruption.

The corruption comes into effect immediately after the ceremony is interrupted or completed. If it is not interrupted before reaching its conclusion, each participant also suffers 1 point of permanent corruption.

The temporary corruption is distributed between the participants as evenly as possible, while the excess amount is dealt to the Officiant. For example, if four people perform a ceremony which causes 14 temporary corruption, the Officiant suffers 5 points, and the others 3.

One way to reduce the corruption is to bind a sacrifice to the ceremony – either a living creature or a summoned daemon. In the former case, it could be a human or an animal of at least human size. If the creature has 1 or more in Total corruption, 1D6 is rolled and the outcome is subtracted from the ceremony's corruptive effect; if the creature is completely untainted, 1D8 is rolled instead. In any case, the victim dies when the ceremony concludes or is interrupted at stage 3 or 4 (see Interrupting ceremonies).

If, in the process, the Officiant summons and successfully subdues a daemon (see the *Advanced Player's Guide*, page 94), it can be used to channel part of the corruption into the Yonderworld. It works the same as with living creatures, except that 1D10 is rolled and the daemon is banished instead of being killed.

SIDE EFFECTS FROM CEREMONIES

Ceremonies disrupt the natural order in many far-reaching ways, and have consequences not even the most powerful mystics can foresee. However, all who are powerful enough to use ceremonies know that the channeled power will have some kind of repercussions – something they must take into account when determining whether a ceremony is worth performing at all.

The side-effects are divided into general and specific ones. The general effects can occur irrespective of what ceremony is performed, and are described below; the specific ones are unique to each ceremony and described in conjunction with them. Also note that all side-effects can occur in the

Terms of the Prohibition

In the kingdom of Ambria, only the monarch can grant the right to study the arts of ceremonial magic and pass on such knowledge to someone else; in the latter case, the recipient of said knowledge also requires the monarch's approval. All ceremonial books must be registered and kept in such a way that only their owner can access them, and copying entire or large parts of any such text is a crime equivalent to performing a ceremony. Only the monarch can issue exemptions to the prohibition against ceremonies, and requests for such exemptions are only accepted from the Field Marshal, the Grand Master of Ordo Magica, and the head of the Sun Church.

Names of Known Ceremonies

Future modules from Free League may feature additional ceremonies, but until then, the names below will serve as indicators of things to come

Firestorm
Tidal Wave
Earthquake
Monster Control
Diseased Wind
Lava Lake
Time Shift
Resurrect
Mass Healing

area where the ceremony is performed, where it takes effect, or in both locations. The Game Master decides which side-effects are activated (general and/or specific) depending on what offers the greatest dramatic potential.

Listed below are several examples of general side-effects from ceremonial magic which the Game Master can use directly or as inspiration. The effects are usually permanent, unless the Game Master for one reason or another thinks it more suitable (or interesting) to make them temporary/reversible.

Life Runs Out: No children are born alive in the location, harvests wither for no apparent reason, and the place soon becomes a miniature Alberetor, in all its lifeless desolation. Not even the winds seem to blow in the area; dust stirred by careless feet slowly floats to the ground.

Increased Corruption: The ceremony has woken the vengeful wrath of the area, and the effect die for all actions which give the user temporary corruption is increased by one tier (from 1 to D4, D4 to D6, and so on). If the effect occurs where the ceremony is performed, this applies to the area outside the circle.

Mystical Curse: The area's darkness makes it difficult to muster power for mystical work; each success test for activating a mystical power or ritual gets a second chance to fail. If the effect occurs where the ceremony is performed, this applies to the area outside the circle.

Wave of Corruption: A wave of corruptive energy emanates outward from the place where the ceremony is performed or takes effect. Everyone in the area immediately suffers 2D6 temporary corruption; everyone within a fifty-meter radius is also knocked unconscious unless they pass a *Resolute* test. They remain unconsciousness for one scene. If the effect occurs where the ceremony is performed, this applies to the area outside the circle.

Echo of Corruption: The area's darkness echoes strongly, and all temporary corruption suffered by creatures remains until they have left the affected area.

Corrupting Environment: The place reeks with corruption, and everyone in the area must pass a *Strong* test every hour or suffer 1D4 temporary corruption. The corruption does not leave the afflicted until he or she leaves the area. If the effect occurs where the ceremony is performed, this applies to the area outside the circle.

Death Flees: Undeath, as in the race Undead, is spreading like the plague; the dead will not remain still, and rise with their minds intact.

Unsound Temptation: The area gains the properties of Dark Davokar. If it is in Ambria, creatures which are otherwise found in Bright Davokar may be encountered there; if it is in Bright Davokar, the area turns into an enclave of Dark Davokar in terms of what monsters inhabit the place (see Travel & encounters on page 183 in the *Core Rulebook* to learn what monster can usually be found where).

The Dead Awake: The buried dead claw their way out of their tombs and haunt the place at night (stats like Dragouls, page 230 in the *Core Rulebook*). If any living person stays in the area, they will only survive the night behind reinforced walls and sealed gates.

Corrupted Waters: The area's groundwater becomes a source of corruption; those who drink from it suffer 1D8 temporary corruption with each drink. It is possible to visit the area without being affected, as long as one brings water from somewhere else.

Table 4: The Effect of the Ceremony

STAGE	EFFECT
Stage 1	The ceremony is interrupted, but the place where it is performed suffers one side-effect
Stage 2	The ceremony is interrupted, but the place where it is performed and where it was to take effect each suffer one side-effect (the same or different ones).
Stage 3	The ceremony yields what in the description is called Half Effect; the place where it is performed and where it takes effect each suffer one or two side-effects.
Stage 4	The ceremony yields what in the description is called Full Effect; the place where it is performed and where it takes effect each suffer one to three side-effects

INTERRUPTING CEREMONIES

Now we arrive at the central question: how can the player characters interrupt an ongoing ceremony?

The struggle to interrupt a ceremony should be made into an exciting multistage challenge. The basis of this is that ceremonies have different effects depending on whether or not they are interrupted and, if so, when. Simply put: the faster the characters manage to overcome the obstacles between them and the participants of the ceremony, the weaker its effect becomes. Table 4 can be used as a guideline, where Stage 1 begins as soon as the participants go into a trance and Stage 4 specifies what happens if the characters' efforts are entirely futile.

The Game Master should set up a series of obstacles for the player characters, and decide on how many turns or scenes they have to overcome them before the ceremony advances to the next stage. These obstacles could include...

... sneaking past or eliminating enemy sentries
... navigating through an underground maze
... picking or breaking through a locked door
... figuring out the password to a door sealed by mystical powers
... getting past/through/across physical obstacles
... getting past or disarming traps
... neutralizing the ceremony's guard force (one or more waves/lines of defense)

In the end, there is really just one way to stop an ongoing ceremony: the player characters must kill the Officiant or break the concentration of enough participating mystics before the ceremony is completed. As mentioned earlier, it takes at least one Officiant and three participants to successfully perform a ceremony; fewer than that and it is immediately interrupted.

Ordinary participants lose their concentration, and therefore their role in the ceremony, if they are wounded and subsequently fail a *[Resolute –Damage]* test (let the players roll). The Officiant, however, is in such a deep trance that damage cannot break his/her concentration; the person must be killed (reach 0 *Toughness*) to collapse. This interrupts the ceremony regardless of how many participants are left standing.

Ceremonies

THOUGH FAR FROM all stories of ceremonial magic are true, this type of powerful ritual exist within all established traditions. It is well known among mystics that ceremonies were used on both sides in the Great War; the Dark Lords used them frequently, and both wizards and theurgs retaliated in kind. In Ambria, the knowledge is kept alive by a few select theurgs and Masters of the Order, who also serve as guardians of the remaining ceremonial books. The knowledge is shared by their apprentices as well, but other than that, there are very few people who know the secrets of ceremonial magic.

The only real exception is a handful of centuries old wizards, such as Grand Master Seldonio, Elionara Yellow-cat, and Kullinan Furia. These have retained their knowledge since before the prohibition was imposed, but their books were confiscated and probably destroyed, or registered and protected by some guardian. The greatest of these guardians are the stormweaver Variol and Farvano Kaldel in Agrella, and Leona Galaldo in Yndaros.

Described below are three ceremonies which the Game Master is welcome to use, either directly or as inspiration for his/her own creations. Note that the descriptions have deliberately been left somewhat vague, so that the Game Master will be free to portray the effect in a way which suits his or her style of drama.

STARFALL

Tradition: Wizardry
The Officiant calls blazing rocks from the sky and steers them toward a specific area. People who are not directly hit may be killed by the shock wave or other side-effects that follow the boulders.
Ceremonial focus: A meteorite fragment, at least the size of a fist.
Half effect: A scattered shower of ten smaller rocks rain over the affected area. A tenth of all creatures present at the time perish from direct hits or the fiery area effect; the rest have a chance to survive. Characters (and important Non-Player Characters) situated in the area may roll a *Quick* test – if it fails, they are killed instantly; if it succeeds, they take 2D6 points of crushing damage (armor protects as usual).
Full effect: A boulder the size of an ogre and a large number of smaller rocks crash into the center of the affected area. Nearby buildings are razed, damaged, or set on fire, and half of all creatures in the area perish immediately. Player characters (and important Non-Player Characters) situated there may roll a *[Quick –5]* test – if it fails, they are killed instantly; if it succeeds, they take 2D6 points of crushing damage (armor protects as usual).

Fire elemental, additions:

MANNER
Fanatical

WEAPONS
Smoldering fists 3+2 (burning)

ARMOR
+3 Flaming Aura, takes no damage from fire or mystical powers manifested in the form of fire

SHADOW
Fiercely yellow-white, like the hottest part of a burning pyre (corruption: 0)

Unique side-effect: The impact of the crashing rocks agitates the elemental forces and gives rise to fire spirits who immediately try to possess surviving creatures in the area. The living must pass a *Resolute* test, or their bodies are taken over by destructive fire elementals. These creatures assume the attributes of their hosts, with the additions stated to the left, and they attack every potentially flammable object around – buildings, plants, and creatures wearing clothes. If the host body is knocked unconscious or hit by a water cascade (at least five liters in one turn), the spirit is banished and ceases to exist; the same happens if the host body dies.

INSECT SWARM

Tradition: Witchcraft

The Officiant attracts all flying insects within a day's march and gathers them in a seething cloud over the place where the ceremony is performed. The energies corrupt the winged creatures, and diseases carried by a few of them spread to them all. The enormous swarm which is finally directed at the defenseless victims in the target area is dangerous enough in itself, with their poison stingers and thousands of ravenous jaws, but it also spreads corruption as well as deadly diseases.

Ceremonial focus: A gem the size of a human eye, cut to resemble the compound eye of a fly.

Half effect: Half the swarm is scattered on its way to the targeted area, where it then splits into several smaller swarms. Present creatures may try to fight each individual swarm, but all who face them in melee combat suffer 1D4 temporary corruption and run a 50% risk of being infected with the Pale Death (see *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, page 65) or some other life-threatening malady. Furthermore, the corruptive effect makes 1D6 victims blight born, while the highly contagious disease takes hold in the affected area.

Full effect: The entire swarm reaches its target, buzzing and clacking as it attacks all living creatures. The only way to stay alive is to hide in a place with thick walls/doors and not even the slightest crack or air intake. Characters (and important Non-Player Characters) present in the affected area may roll a *[Cunning –5]* test to protect themselves; if the test fails the swarm tears the flesh from their bones, and if it succeeds they are still attacked by the swarm, but for a shorter period of time, suffering 1D6 damage, 1D4 temporary corruption, and a 50% risk of being infected by some life-threatening malady.

Unique side-effect: The swarm is split but remains in the area as colonies of winged abominations. All living creatures moving through the terrain must pass a *Discreet* test once a day or attract 1D4 swarms with the stats specified below.

CORRUPTED INSECT SWARM			
Race	Abomination (Winged Creatures)		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Corrupting Attack* (I), *Piercing Attack* (II), *Swarm* (III), *Wings (II)*		
Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	None		
Weapons Accurate	Stinger 0 (piercing 5) and 1D4 temporary corruption, 50% chance to infect melee opponents with a life-threatening illness		
Armor	A quarter of damage, according to *Swarm* III		
Defense	+5		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Shadow	Glossy darkish green, like the head of a blowfly (thoroughly corrupt)		
Tactics: The swarm acts entirely on instinct and attacks its enemies until they die or the swarm is destroyed.			

MASS RESURRECTION

Tradition: Sorcery

Dark mystics have always preferred undead slaves over living followers, whose loyalty may falter and whose bodies need feeding. The Mass Resurrection ceremony focuses its energies on whole battlefields for the purpose of raising, in one swoop, an army of dragouls, bound to the Officiant's will – which is partly why it has become customary to gather and burn the dead after each battle.

Ceremonial focus: A sacrifice in the form of a cultural being, whose heart is slowly incinerated in the process.

Half effect: All corpses on the battlefield are reanimated (stats like a Dragoul, page 230 in the *Core Rulebook*), but the Officiant only controls half of them and must direct them in battle against the others. When the dust has settled, the army is only a third of what it could have been – probably not large enough to achieve the goal of the ceremony (see below).

Full effect: The Officiant reanimates and takes control of all corpses on the battlefield, creating an army large enough to achieve the goal of the ceremony. This could include storming a fortress, destroying a village, defending the mystic's own stronghold, or facing another hostile force on the battlefield.

Unique side-effect: None, but the side-effects Death Flees and the Dead Awake are quite common.

The Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview

The barbarian legend to the right gives voice to an allegory describing the basic design of the world. The verse is included in a document entitled *The Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview*, which can be found at various download sites.

THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and at the dawn of days was Wyrtha, the power that creates.
Where Nothing had reigned supreme, Wyrhta gave life to All;
shaped here and there, spawned now and then,
formed the one and in chorus the other.
And where attraction arose,
the wild thrived and multiplied...

... but out of the untamed Wielda appeared, the power that rules:
the power of willful violence, that bends here and there,
that curves now and then according to ideals and cravings;
that harvests the one and rejects the other.
With time, Wielda's appetite grew,
and the birth was inevitable...

... because violence begets hate begets Wratha, the power that reacts.
Born of Wielda's hunger for Wyrhta's design, Wratha is everywhere and nowhere,
always close where mother meets mother,
always mounting in strength with the force of the violence.
The arrival of the black fruit is fated,
as inescapable as terrible...

... and it happens, has happened, will happen again,
that Wratha grows boundless, furious, blind in her hunger.
It happens that the blackness grows flesh and spirit and the sharpest of claws,
that the fruit sheds seeds that poison the first,
in the aim to suppress the second.
Then dies All..."

New Mechanics

THIS CHAPTER PRESENTS a number of new rules relevant to the adventure *The Darkest Star* or to the region described in the book. It introduces new traits and creatures, but also some mystical artifacts which the player characters might encounter on their adventure. The chapter is divided into three sections: New rules, Artifacts, and Miscellaneous which is where the new creatures are found.

New Rules

THREE ABILITIES, A couple of new traits, and a new mystical ritual are introduced in light of the adventure in this book. These can of course be used in other ways as well, to create new monsters and develop the player characters.

CORRUPTION SENSITIVE,

MONSTROUS TRAIT

The creature is blessed with a sensory organ through which it can detect nearby outbreaks of corruption. This ability most likely emerged as a warning system, but many witch hunters would probably give their left eye for the advantage such a sense would confer in the hunt for heretics and cultists.

I **Action:** Reaction. With a successful *Vigilant* test the creature can detect nearby outbreaks of corruption (roughly five hundred meters in all directions, if more exact distances are called for). Minor outbreaks (1 point of temporary corruption) cannot be detected; at 2 points, *Vigilant* is modified with –5; at 3 points with ±0; at 4 points or more with +5. If the test succeeds, the creature senses the outbreak and the general direction in which it occurred.

II **Action:** Reaction. As I, but can pinpoint exactly where the outbreak occurred, thanks to residual energies.

III **Action:** Reaction. As II, but the creature can also track the source of the outbreak for one day, through the ethereal tracks it leaves behind.

RAMPAGE,

MONSTROUS TRAIT

The creature can use its body mass to crush, or at least push away, enemies in its path. The trait does not protect against Free Attacks caused by Long weapons or movements past prepared enemies.

Rampage requires at least the corresponding level of the *Robust* trait.

I **Action:** Movement. Everyone standing in the creature's path during the movement must pass a *[Strong←Strong]* test or take 2 damage (*Armor* protects as usual) and be knocked down. The *Robust* trait adds +2 damage per level (+2, +4, +6), and the same bonus to *Strong*, both when using and trying to defend against *Rampage*. As soon as a victim passes its test, the crushing rampage stops. Enemies with the *Acrobatics* ability can choose to defend with *[Quick←Strong]* and thereby dodge, but if so, a successful test will not stop the *Rampage*.

II **Action:** Movement. As I, but deals 3 damage.

III **Action:** Movement. As I, but deals 4 damage.

DIMENSION WALK, RITUAL

Tradition: Sorcery

It is said that knowledge of this ritual was first given to pact-making mystics from daemons who themselves could not, or did not want to, travel through the space between worlds. And it seems plausible, considering how dangerous it is for humans to visit the Yonderworld, even when they know what to expect...

As usual, the ritual takes an hour to perform, but to do so successfully the mystic must either have visited the destination or possess an object taken from there. In the latter case, it could be an urn of dust or a more personal gift from an allied daemon. As for the former, one can for example use the mystical power *Teleport* to identify a (for the moment) safe landing site.

The ritual must be repeated when the mystic (and the up to *[Resolute/2]* individuals who can be brought along on the journey) wants to return. In other words, the travelers are stuck in the Yonderworld for at least an hour, which explains why so few dimension walkers ever return. In the Yonderworld much can happen in the time it takes to perform a ritual; the Game Master decides what the player characters are faced with, or makes a roll on Table 5 every half hour.

ARMOR WRESTLING, ABILITY

The player character is trained in using his/her armor to maximum effect. The ability can only be used with at least medium armor, but can be very effective, not least against armored opponents and when the user moves through the midst of a battle.

Novice **Action:** Movement. Wearing at least medium armor, the character has +1D6 in *Armor* against all enemy hits during the movement.

Adept **Action:** Active. Roll an attack test to grab and restrain an enemy until failing a *[Strong←Strong]* test. Each turn after the first, an attack with a Short weapon can be made; while restrained the enemy may only defend, and if hit *Armor* is ignored.

Master **Action:** Active. Roll an attack test to grab and with a following *[Strong←Strong]* test throw an enemy to the ground; the character lands on top (1D6 crushing damage, ignoring *Armor*). The character may then restrain and attack as on Adept level, aside from the enemy not being able to defend during the first turn after the throw.

TWO-HANDED FINESSE, ABILITY

Most people fighting with a two-handed weapon rely on its considerable weight, but there are also those who cultivate the ability to wield huge two-handed swords with great finesse. Those who possess this ability belong to that category, and can use the length of the weapon to combat all sorts of opponents.

Novice **Action:** Passive. In the hands of the novice, two-handed swords gain the quality Long and can therefore be used with the *Polearm Mastery* ability.

Adept **Action:** Reaction. After one successful *Defense* per turn, pass a *[Strong←Strong]* test to push enemies out of melee combat with the sword. The enemy takes 1D6 damage, is pushed back a couple of meters, and must once again face the quality Long.

Table 5: Events in the Yonderworld

1D8	EVENT	DESCRIPTION
1–2	Nothing dramatic happens	–
3	A crack in the ground spews corruption	Everyone present suffers 1 temporary corruption per turn until they have made a double movement in any direction
4	Black, corrupting rain	Everyone whose skin is exposed to the rain suffers 1 temporary corruption per turn. The rain lasts 2D6 turns
5	An explosive outbreak of corruption	Everyone present takes 1D8 damage (armor protects) and gains 1D8 temporary corruption
6	A pack of daemons arrive	PC number of bestial daemons (stats like a Blight Born Elk, page 226 in the *Core Rulebook*) attack
7	A hunting Daemon Prince	A mighty daemon (stats like a Primal Blight Beast, page 228 in the *Core Rulebook*) makes the characters its prey
8	Roll twice on the table	The events occur simultaneously or fifteen minutes apart, depending on the Game Master's wishes

Master **Action:** Active. The master's flowing strikes count as a chain of attacks against enemies within melee distance – if an enemy is hit, an attack is made against the next one, and so on until an attack fails.

WHIP FIGHTER, ABILITY

It is not uncommon for witch hunters and black cloaks to fight with a sword in one hand and a whip in the other. This is an effective and deadly combination; in the hands of someone with the proper training, it can even bring down well-armored opponents.

Novice **Action:** Active. Attack with a whip in one hand and a one-handed weapon in the other. If the whip attack hits, the character gets a Free Attack with the one-handed weapon, regardless of whether or not the whip deals damage.

Adept **Action:** Active. As Novice, but the whip hinders the enemy's movements so that the Free Attack hits automatically.

Master **Action:** Active. As Adept, but the whip fighter pulls the enemy toward himself/herself so that the Free Attack also deals +1D6 damage.

MYSTICAL RESISTANCE, MONSTROUS TRAIT

The creature has a natural resistance against the effects of mystical powers. Basically, it is more difficult to harm or affect by mystical means, and on higher levels there is also a risk that the energies directed against it are reflected to hit someone else.

I **Action:** Passive. All who try to affect or harm the creature with mystical powers must roll the success test twice and pass both times in order for the power to take effect.

II **Action:** Passive. As I, but if the success test fails, the power is redirected towards a randomly selected target within sight of the creature. Aside from the attacking mystic suffering from any temporary corruption, the reflected power works as if the creature knew it and had used it against the randomly selected target.

III **Action:** Passive. As II, but the resilient creature has such control that it may choose which target the power is reflected towards.

PIERCING ATTACK, MONSTROUS TRAIT

The attack deals no normal damage. Instead, the damage value determines whether the attack manages to pierce the victim's *Armor*. If the armor value is equal to or higher than the damage value, the attack fails; if the armor value is lower, the victim suffers an effect such as poison or corruption, depending on what other traits the creature has.

I **Action:** Passive. The attack has a damage value of 4.

II **Action:** Passive. The attack has a damage value of 5.

III **Action:** Passive. The attack has a damage value of 6

Artifacts

ALL ARTIFACTS DESCRIBED in this section can be encountered during the adventure *The Darkest Star*. With the exception of items carried by important Non-Player Characters, the artifacts which the characters do not find or for some reason choose to ignore may very well be used in other, homebrew adventures.

LYRA'S LANTERN

The artifact which in Lyastra was known as Lyra's Lantern was allowed to be brought by Kalthar from his chamber in the Dark Lords' fortress. He knows that it came with his order, the Priesthood of Dakothnic, on their flight from Lindaros, but that is all he knows about its origin. What matters to him is that it gave him comfort during the darkening and fall of his homeland, and that it continued to do so during his imprisonment.

The blessed lantern emits a warm, comfortable and never-ending shine, and has the following powers:

Lyra's Lantern

Sanctifying Aura: All abominations and blight-marked creatures experience a strong sense of discomfort when the lantern is near (within two movement actions). They get two chances to fail all success tests, and if the outcome of any success test is 20, they spend the next turn regurgitating the darkness which fills them (only reactions are possible).

Action: Passive

Corruption: –

Banish Spirits: Having bound oneself to the lantern, one may use its power to banish spirits from a certain location. The spirit must be within one movement action from the lantern, and if a *[Resolute←Resolute]* test succeeds, the spirit must flee the scene or (if it cannot flee) stay completely inactive. Every hour after the first, a test is made against the spirit's *Resolute* to determine whether it can muster the courage to return.

Action: Free

Corruption: 1D6

ALALAROG'S RING OF FORESIGHT

Many old barbarian legends, including a popular verse supposedly written by Aroaleta, tell of the warrior Alalarog's unfailing ability to foresee the movements of beasts and human opponents. Some say he was chosen by the gods, sent to protect his people from the predatory forces of the forest; others that his ability was the result of mystical powers cast at the time of his birth. But the truth is written on the simple ring of gold which he wore in his right ear lobe.

He and his friends stole the earring from a group of grave robbers whom they attacked on their way home from a Symbarian crypt. There was a bloody fight over the valuable object, and soon Alalarog was the only one alive, tormented by anguish after having killed his friends, and determined to atone for his crimes through good deeds.

Premonition: In melee combat, the artifact's master can activate the power of premonition and thus get two chances to pass a *Defense* test. It must be activated before the *Defense* test is rolled.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D4

Foresee Gaps: This power allows the master to sense where gaps will emerge in the enemy's armor. The power is activated before an attack test with a melee or ranged weapon, after which the attack test is rolled with a –3 modifier. If it succeeds, the master hits the gap and the enemy's *Armor* is ignored, as long as it is not of the natural or mystical variety.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D4

ELASATH'S DRAGONSLAYER

In the early years of Symbaroum, when dragons still hunted its people and livestock, King Eoran-Ald Ornon ordered his mystics to forge a weapon worthy of his greatest dragonslayer, Elasath. The warrior princess gratefully accepted the gift and went to work. Some tales claim that she killed twenty-seven grown dragons before falling victim to the fire of Fofar the Destroyer. No one remembers, or cares, how many of her fellow hunters were also killed.

Elasath's Dragonslayer is a spear with the qualities Balanced, Blood-letting, Deep Impact, and Long, as well as the mystical quality Bane Weapon (reptiles). In addition, the following powers can be activated:

Shatter Armor: When attacking a reptile, the artifact's master can choose to strike with the flat side of the spearhead and (if it hits) produce a shock wave which ripples through the victim's scaled skin. The attack does not deal any damage, but causes most of the scales to fall off. The scales will eventually grow back, but for one month, the creature's natural *Armor* is reduced to 1.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1D4

Break the Serpent's Charm: As a free action, the master can brandish the spear in a way that generates an awful, jarring sound. The noise instantly cancels the paralysis which comes from the monstrous trait *Enthrall*, and affects everyone who hears it. However, nothing stops the freed individuals from being enthralled all over again.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D4

LORAVANA'S THROWING SHIELD

One of the most storied heroes of early Symbaroum is the warrior Loravana, commander of Queen Serala-Han Urel's armed forces. Under her leadership, the Queen's petty kingdom in the north seized more and more land, which is why some legends name her the true mother of the unified Symbaroum. If this is true, it would also explain why her legendary shield remained in the hands of the Symbarian emperors.

Shield Throw: If the person bound to Loravana's throwing shield also has the *Steel Throw* ability, the artifact can be flung as a throwing weapon for 1D8 damage. It then automatically returns to its master's arm and may be used to parry attacks immediately after the throw.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1

Power Bash: If the shield's master has the *Shield Fighter* ability at Adept level or higher, he or she can put more force into each shield bash. A power bash increases the maneuver's damage to 1D8 and adds +5 to *Strong* in any attempt at knocking down the enemy.
Action: Reaction
Corruption: 1D4

GORVADAN'S MIND RING

This might be the same ring which in the time of Symbaroum belonged to the feared assassin, and notorious debaucher, Gorvadan – he who was allegedly able to lure in his victims and conduct his business without them making so much as a sound. Whatever the case may be, the ring can be very useful in social contexts, or when its master becomes involved in a hard-pressed situation.

Telepathy: The master of the ring can transmit a short message to an individual he or she has seen in the immediate area – ten words at the most, sent to someone within a hundred meters, would be our recommendation if the exact details become

relevant. The message appears as a thought in the recipient's mind, and consequently the sender cannot be identified through language, voice or other characteristics. In negotiations, the use of Telepathy adds +2 to all *Persuasive* tests.
Action: Active
Corruption: 1

Confine: If the artifact's master has the mystical power *Confusion*, the power's energies can be enhanced so that no success test is needed. Thus, the victim becomes completely incapacitated for as long as the master keeps the power activated.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D6 per turn

Bargalvax' Staff Head

BARGALVAX' STAFF HEAD

During his travels in northern Davokar, Kullinan Furia spoke to many peculiar individuals. One of them was Bargalvax, living in a cave by the foot of the volcano called Eulia's Fire Mountain by Ambrian scholars. In exchange for a bundle of snow white hair strands and four happy childhood memories, the mystic was allowed to pose five questions, but when the queries were shown to be about the nature of corruption, the ancient troll mother just had to lie – the answers she had could not be given to a man with such hunger in his eyes.

Since Bargalvax never receives gifts without offering something true in return, she decided to end the meeting by giving him one of the many pendants she wore during her forth dormancy, without knowing or caring about what it actually was or where it came from. Later, when Kullinan had time to study the gift, he was most impressed.

Implanting: The master of the artifact may, in advance, implant three mystical powers into the staff head, in a procedure which takes one hour to complete. These powers may then be activated as a Free Action, instead of an Active one, but only one per turn and for a significant cost in corruption. The powers are not consumed by the activation, but can be used again the following turn. A new implanting is not needed until the master wishes to replace any of the stored powers.
Action: Free
Corruption: 1D6

Miscellaneous

SLEEP DEPRIVATION, OPTIONAL RULE

As an optional rule for gaming groups whose characters think they can go on forever without rest, we suggest the following rule:

Player characters have no problem staying active for twenty-four consecutive hours, as long as they remember to eat and drink. Then they need eight hours of sleep to recover before facing the challenges of the next twenty-four-hour period. If a player character fails to give his or her body and spirit enough rest, the following applies until they catch up on their sleep:

The player character...
... may not benefit from any natural healing
... gets two chances to fail all success tests
... suffers a catastrophic failure if the outcome of a success test is 20. The Game Master determines the nature of the failure depending on what the test is supposed to achieve, but in any case, the player character or one ally is mortally wounded (i.e. reaches 0 *Toughness*).

HYPNOTIC, MYSTICAL QUALITY

The melee weapon is covered with engraved runes which, when the weapon is swung, can have a hypnotizing effect on a melee opponent. Whenever the attack succeeds with a difference of 5 or more, the opponent is denied his/her next Combat Action. Movements and reactions are still possible.

BREACHING, MYSTICAL QUALITY

The clanging sound emitted when a Breaching melee weapon hits metal contains weakening harmonies which gradually destroy armor or shields. The *Armor* value of a piece of armor is decreased by 1 for every hit, while a shield has a 25% chance of being rendered unusable with every successful *Defense* [1–5 on 1D20].

ASBARAST'S CRAWLERS, CREATURE

A disharmonic, flowing wheezing

Asbarast's Crawlers are a strange form of primal blight beast that can lay dormant for hundreds of years, only to become active once warm-blooded prey comes close. They are not closely studied by Ambrian loremasters, but according to myth they are somehow connected to the enormous stone ships stranded in the ashen deserts east of the Ravens. Irrespective of their origins, they are fearsome foes, especially if let loose in densely populated areas, where the swarms can move from victim to victim with great speed and leave people and livestock dying from poison in their wake.

Race	Abomination
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Corrupting Attack* (I), *Piercing Attack* (III), *Poisonous* (III), *Swarm* (III)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)	
Abilities	None
Boons	*Fleet-footed*
Weapons Accurate	Mandibles 0 (piercing 6)
Armor	Quarter of damage according to *Swarm* III
Defense	–5
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Shadow	Surging purple black (thoroughly corrupt)
Tactics: The Crawlers have no tactics but sweep from one warm-blooded target to the next, once the first has been poisoned. When all enemies are dead, the feast begins.	

DARKLING, CREATURE

There are beings in the Davokar region which almost never leave the woods and thus are seldom seen on Ambrian soil. One of these is the creature that in ancient barbarian legends is called the Darkling, or sometimes Nightling.

They are an intelligent race which has existed since long before humans came wandering across the Ravens. It appears they have never been dominant, never sought conquest and barely left any trace of their existence in the form of buildings or writing.

The few accounts that speak of these creatures are consistent on a couple of issues. Darklings do not seem to discriminate between cultural beings and the beasts of the wilds, meaning that humans, elves and trolls are counted among their prey. Aside from this, their most prominent feature is their resistance to mystical influence – a characteristic that some witches claim has to do with them, from tradition and necessity, living in total harmony with Wyrtha, without trying to cultivate, refine or manipulate nature.

The darklings are genuine hunter-gatherers, and their hunting takes place in both the woods and the Underworld. They use simple weapons, such as bows, spears and traps, often without metal, giving them the quality Blunt. However, the leaders sometimes have tips of bog iron and they tend to be closely bound to Wyrtha, adjusting their stats as follows: *Mystical Resistance* (III), *Leader* (II), Spear 5 (long), Bow 5.

Race	Cultural Being
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Bushcraft*, *Mystical Resistance* (II), *Regeneration* (I)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 11 (–1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 13 (–3)	
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (novice), *Marksman* (adept), *Sixth Sense* (master), *Polearm Mastery* (novice)
Weapons Vigilant/ Accurate	Bow 4 (blunt), Spear 4 (blunt, long)
Armor	None (regenerates 2 *Toughness* per turn, except unholy damage)
Defense	–5
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Shadow	Shimmering dark green, like damp moss on a stump in the moonlight (corruption: 0)
Tactics: The darklings fight unhindered by darkness and hunt in groups, commanded by a strong leader. Aside from defending the leader, they aim for the target he or she has appointed. If the opposition seems tough the leader may give the order to retreat.	

LAST NIGHT'S SNOW had already turned into a soggy slush as Evelia and her mother approached the Cathedral of Hallowed Martyrs. But wet shoes and cold feet did not matter on a day like this, when she would finally get to see both the Queen and the Sunshine Duchess, and maybe even the groom in all his (as mother called it) savage charm.

Evelia squeezed her mother's hand with her left and clutched her wedding gift just as tightly with her right. She had stitched it all by herself – a small tapestry with congratulations to the wedding couple, decorated with several hearts and with the sun of Prios shining over their radiant future. She felt a little nervous as they reached the open space in front of the cathedral; it was already filled with people, row after row. But her mother assured her that everything would be all right, that the faithful followers of the Lawgiver would never stop a little girl from presenting her gift.

And sure enough: a timid *"excuse me"* or a tap on the shoulder was all that was needed for Evelia and her mother to make their way through the crowd. Everyone was cheerful and excited, smiling brightly in spite of their frosty cheeks and freezing fingers. Evelia had never been happier, standing in the front row, looking up at the mighty Cathedral of Martyrs and the brightening morning sky.

Her smile faded a little as she noticed something strange in the heavens. Less than two heartbeats later, her happiest moment had turned into a fiery nightmare...

SECTION 3:

THE DARKEST STAR

Introduction

THE QUEEN'S CAPITAL IS PREPARING for a wedding feast. The boulevard facades are being polished, cobblestones scrubbed, and the kingdom's most prominent individuals – except for those affected by the imminent war – are arriving in the city. The Sunshine Duchess getting married, and thereby consolidating Ambria's alliance with the barbarian High Chieftain, is everyone's concern. Some are jubilant, others horrified, while the vast majority consider the event a necessary one and thank their queen for her efforts to secure the future of the realm.

THE PREPARATIONS THEMSELVES are particularly welcome as they take people's minds off the dark clouds amassing in Prios' sky – the belligerent clans of the north, the crumbling Sun Church, the slow-growing misery of winter. It is still possible to ignore these troubling circumstances, but not for long: the festivities which are meant to unite, strengthen, and encourage the populace will instead bring the hostilities to light.

Three days before the wedding, the Cathedral of Martyrs is hit by a meteor swarm, causing death and destruction on a massive scale. It soon turns out that a wedding rehearsal was underway inside the temple, and that several of its main actors can be counted among the victims. This becomes the prelude of the adventure *The Darkest Star*; an adventure in which the player characters must operate in a city on the brink of collapse, in a country on the brink of domestic rebellion as well as war against the armies of the Sovereign's Oath.

The Darkest Star is a standalone adventure in the sense that it can be played with completely different characters than those who went through the previous parts of *The Throne of Thorns – Wrath of the Warden* and *The Witch Hammer*. Nevertheless, there are links to earlier installments, in the form of themes and specific non-player characters which will probably be more compelling if at least one player character remains from *The Witch Hammer's* treasure hunt. As it turns out, the search for the mastermind behind the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs overlaps with the treasure hunt that began on Karvosti – the hunt for an accurate map to the heart of Davokar; to the Mother of all Darkness. To Symbar.

The adventure comprises five chapters, the first of which presents the background and course of the narrative, as well as the characters' entrance and role in the story. It also describes a series of events which develops independently of the characters' actions, but will come to affect any investigation in (and around) the city.

Next up are the three acts of the adventure, each in a dedicated chapter – one that focuses on the prelude and the characters' initial investigations, a second that describes three separate yet interlinked main trails through the story, and a third which culminates in a fateful battle in the Yonderworld.

The final chapter of this section contains handouts and player maps, but also some suggestions on what could happen in the wake of the adventure and what the characters might do before embarking on the fourth part of the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. Those who survive *The Darkest Star* will do so with fairly exact knowledge of where to look for the legendary throne of the last Symbarian emperor.

Background

THE MAN BEHIND the incident which starts off this adventure is an individual that the characters (or at least the players) very well may have met before – namely the Master of the Order Kullinan Furia, who had a small role in the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*. This section describes him (his history, goals and plans), and also the group of nobles and barbarians who Kullinan manipulates, and who initially will be suspected of having orchestrated the attack against the Cathedral of Martyrs.

KULLINAN FURIA

House Furia was massacred down to all but one man almost three centuries ago, in the popular uprising that made Kathrona Kohinoor the monarch of Alberetor. The sole survivor was the mystic Kullinan, who at the time (along with current Grand Master Seldonio) belonged to a group that had started to question the religiously based mystical practices and later came to found Ordo Magica. But Kullinan was always the odd one out, unwilling to engage in politics and other power plays; he has lived his life according to the principle *"insight before intervention, knowledge before know-how"* – not that he believes knowledge has any intrinsic value, but he maintains that there must be people who develop knowledge without regard for its practical utility.

The event that first made him lose his way occurred a few years after his arrival in Ambria. The sun priests had failed to cure the Queen Mother Abesina. Kullinan himself was also powerless before the symptoms of undeath, but he left Mergile with one important insight: there was a clear link between Abesina's condition and that which characterized the disciples and slaves of the Dark Lords.

The prevailing theories of that time suggested that undeath was caused by corruption, or by excessive exposure to the powers of corruption, but Kullinan (true to form) developed a counter theory: corruption does not give rise to the undead condition; on the contrary, it is the unnatural condition of the undead that breeds corruptive energies. The more he theorized about this insight, the more convinced he became of its potential – if corruption is not destructive in itself, if it is actually a product of the death and distortion of Creation, then its tremendous powers could be tamed without risk to one's body and soul, just like any other form of mystical energy.

Kullinan has spent more than a decade theorizing and experimenting to prove his hypothesis. He has personally visited numerous corrupted environments; spoken to witches, elves, and trolls; exposed himself to the darkness again and again. But instead of finding answers, his body and spirit have been marked. The result has been that his fascination, conviction, and desperation have all grown stronger and stronger with every failure and obstacle he has faced. And there have been many, many obstacles.

In his darkened soul, Kullinan has become increasingly adamant in his belief that the pursuit of knowledge is value neutral, and the stronger his passion grows, the more intense becomes his loathing for all those who do not understand the importance of his endeavor. He has attempted to tap into the vast knowledge stored in the High Chieftain's stronghold, the witches' dwellings on Karvosti, the libraries of the Twilight Friars and the Curia, and the royal archives in Yndaros. However, every time, some arrogant fool has gotten in his way – Yeleta, Tharaban, Eumenos, Korinthia, and ever-cursed Seldonio. He managed to get inside most collections anyway, but could not study them in peace and achieved little. It was only when he persuaded four adepts from Yndaros to join his

Timeline – Important Events

–3 months
Kullinan contacts the adepts and visits Artel Vereo.

–2.5 months
The Queen announces the imminent wedding

–2 months
Kullinan contacts and starts subverting the Vearra Alliance.

–1 month
Elmendra enters the Yonderworld

Kullinan Deceased?

Should Kullinan Furia no longer be alive in the world that that has emerged around your particular gaming table, he could be replaced by some other master of Ordo Magica – preferably one of those mentioned in the *Core Rulebook* (Elionara Yellow-cat or Variol). Another just as appealing option is of course to let Kullinan return from the dead. In that case, he must have access to the miraculous infusion called Twilight Tincture (see page 123 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*) to interact with the Vearra Alliance and other important actors.

quest that his luck finally changed. One of them granted him access to the Artifact Collection of the Triplet Towers.

Among other things, there was a collection of items found during the excavations beneath Old Kadizar which had yet to be analyzed by Master Marbela and her aides. One of them was a tapestry decorated with late Symbarian symbols. The text described a funeral march where the remains of the last Symbarian emperor were carried *"from the resting place at the roots of the Throne of Thorns, to the Guardian's crypt in the city of Lindaros."*

The plan which then took shape cannot be understood unless Kullinan's darkened soul, desperation, and growing hatred of Ambria's authorities are taken into account. His ultimate goal is to locate Symbar, as he is convinced that many of the answers he seeks can be found there. But he is no necromancer, so in order to communicate with the long-dead emperor he needs help, and not just from any semi-educated sorcerer...

STARFALL

Kullinan was himself involved in escorting Kalthar, the Dark Lord, to Yndaros and imprisoning him beneath the Cathedral of Martyrs, and had already considered freeing him in order to draw upon his insights into the powers of corruption. He decided against it, as it was clearly an impossible endeavor, but after many sleepless nights of meditation a plan began to form – a plan which, if successful, would serve three important purposes and also yield a desirable side-effect.

He had performed the mystical ceremony Starfall on a few occasions, and taught it to a number of adepts back when such knowledge was not forbidden by the excessively controlling authorities. According to his calculations, an impact on the Cathedral of Martyrs could blast open a path to the Dark Lord's mystically protected prison, without killing him in the process. With the crestfallen and no doubt vengeful Kalthar freed and brought to safety by Kullinan's adepts, two important interim goals could be achieved: Kullinan would gain access to (or forcefully obtain) the man's profound insights, as well as his help in questioning the last ruler of Symbar.

Thirdly, he assumed that the destruction caused by the Starfall ceremony would plunge the capital into complete chaos, making it much easier for him to act without risk of discovery – to make his way beneath Yndaros, find the Guardian's Crypt, and perform the necessary rituals with the Dark Lord's assistance.

The plan seemed perfectly feasible; even if it failed, the attack would at least deal a severe and deadly blow to many of the fools who had previously stood in his way. But he could not shake off his growing trepidation over the possibility that he might be found out and stopped before achieving his goal. He needed a scapegoat – someone who (at least initially) could deflect any suspicion away from him. And he also needed help in performing the ceremony.

Considering who would most likely be killed by the impact of the meteors, it did not take long for Kullinan to identify, and soon dupe, the perfect group of scapegoats.

THE CONSPIRATORS

That House Vearra would be conspiring against the Queen was only to be expected, but Kullinan was pleasantly surprised by how far Count Demetro and his confederates had come. The old mystic contacted the Count roughly two months ago, shortly after Korinthia had announced her alliance with the High Chieftain and the wedding which is meant to formalize the agreement. He claimed that he wanted to put an end to the *"alliance with the dark creatures of the forest"* and was willing to help House Vearra dethrone the *"dark-minded Queen."*

It took a few weeks before the Vearra Alliance dared to trust Kullinan, but soon enough he was given a seat at the table. He led them to believe that an alliance between Korinthia and the High Chieftain would ruin their chance of ever toppling her; shortly thereafter, they all agreed that the wedding had to be stopped. Kullinan gave this insight a few days to sink in before presenting his radical proposition – to save Ambria and its people by resurrecting the ceremonial magic the Queen had so strictly forbidden.

The Vearra Alliance's members had their doubts about the proposal, not just because of the death and devastation the ceremony would cause (despite the mystic's mendacious assurances that

its effect could be limited), but also because they, like Kullinan, feared that their involvement in the attack would become known. However, the solution to this dilemma was found on the Count's estate in Vearra, in the form of agents of the Sovereign's Oath. The plan was to involve them in crushing the abhorrent alliance, and then drive them off, as if they were the sole perpetrators of the attack (and the murder of Ambrian dignitaries). Razameaman and Rábaiamon, who oppose all mystical powers, did not want the agents to participate. But then the Blood Daughter herself heard of the proposal. She loved it.

Anabela Argona has been kept out of the plan at Kullinan's request, since he feared that her love for the Cathedral of Martyrs might sway her conviction. But Demetro Vearra, Edogai Brigo, and the leader of the agent cell – a barbarian warrior named Morea – have all learned the *Channeling* ability. Father Matheo will not be participating in the ceremony, but has detailed knowledge of the wedding preparations and has been able to identify the perfect time for an attack – at sunrise, three days before the big day, when the First Father summons the bride, groom, Grand Master, Queen, and a number of other dignitaries to go through and rehears the details.

Everyone involved is nervous, even Kullinan, and all but him have secret doubts about whether they should really go through with the plan. But since the end is so desirable, they are constantly trying to put their doubts, and that of their accomplices, to rest. When all is said and done, it seems that Kullinan is their only hope of preventing Queen Korinthia Nightbane from growing too strong to ever be dethroned.

The Structure of the Adventure

COMPARED TO PREVIOUS adventures in the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*, *The Darkest Star* is more linear, with scenes that will most likely play out in a predetermined order. Exceptions are found in Act II, where the three main routes can be followed in any order and therefore affect the player characters' path to the final scene. But other than that, the characters will probably be following the clues which emerge over the course of the adventure. In a sense, this makes things easier for the Game Master, as the characters' actions become easier to predict. Instead, the challenge becomes to make the players feel in control; to let them make up their own minds (as far as possible) about what decisions the clues should lead to.

Though it is probably not necessary at this stage, we would like to repeat how important it is that the players are relatively free to govern the actions of their characters – *The Darkest Star* is a tabletop role-playing adventure, not a computer game, and the sense of freedom is central in making the experience the best it can be. As Game Master it is crucial to keep up with the characters, to turn all ideas (both clever and foolish ones) into interesting challenges, and to gently steer them back on course if they become sidetracked by all the intrigues. The best way to do this is of course to let them be in contact with a quest giver/mentor who, without being dictatorial, can help them analyze clues and draw conclusions from the knowledge acquired.

Below is a summary of the adventure's three acts, focusing on major events and important turning points in the story. The players' ideas and decisions will probably cause your story to depart somewhat from this outline, but hopefully the overview we present will still be helpful in planning and staging the adventure.

ACT I: FIRE OVER YNDAROS

When the adventure begins, the player characters are conveniently situated near the Cathedral of Martyrs, possibly meeting with someone who could have information about the underground ruins from the days of Lindaros. Someone close by cries out, looking up, pointing at the sky. The characters have barely raised their eyes before the flaming meteors come crashing down. The person they were talking to shrieks that Queen Korinthia is in there, in the cathedral!

If they rush to the meteor site, they will face a number of challenges: they will witness the death of Grand Master Seldonio, pull a badly injured Esmerelda from the crumbling wreckage of the cathedral, and do battle with fire-possessed citizens as well as sword-wielding giants. They may of course choose to stay out of it, but either way, a high-ranking representative of some faction will give them the mission and mandate to investigate the disaster zone (possible alongside ill-tempered representatives of other individuals or organizations).

Their investigation will identify three main trails: they can try to track down the prisoner who has clearly escaped or been taken from a cell beneath the cathedral; they can investigate why the Vearra family crest is found on items carried by two of the victims; and they can dig

The Advanced Player's Guide

When designing *The Darkest Star*, we have assumed that gaming groups have access to, and are using, the *Symbaroum Advanced Player's Guide*. If not, the Game Master has to make certain adjustments to the NPC stat blocks – a simple task, even if some NPCs may lose some of their special style.

deeper into the question about what kind of magic was used in the attack, and who could have performed it.

Subsequent meetings and interviews with witnesses, victims and contacts (if any) give rise to a couple of side quests which, while interesting, prove to be completely unrelated to the central questions of the adventure: who caused the starfall, and why?

ACT II: FALLEN STARS

The second act describes three main trails to be investigated. The player characters may tackle them in any sequence, but the order will to some extent affect who they meet and what information they obtain.

One of these trails involves identifying who was being kept prisoner beneath the cathedral, as the extraction of (or attack on) said individual could very well be one of the reasons for the starfall. The characters will follow the trail on a hunt through the city's underworld, encountering dwarves and hardened criminals, to a New Town cellar where the Dark Lord Kalthar is held captive by Kullinan's underlings – two of his adepts and a group of dwarves from the Vanoviz family.

A second trail leads the player characters to the lordly estate of House Vearra. The place is black with corruption, blight-born humans and animals scattered all over the area, but there are also potential allies to be found – people who could assist the characters in their search for the ceremonial site and clues that could move the investigation forward.

Finally, there is the option of delving into the immensely powerful, and equally strange, magic that was used to crush the cathedral and, by extension, identifying who could have the ability to use it. Initially, this becomes a matter of searching through archives and speaking with a number of people scattered across the chaotic city. Their search eventually leads them to a lonely vessel on the river Doudram, where important answers can be found.

By combining the information from these three trails, the player characters can reach conclusions which mark the beginning of the adventure's third and final act. At this time they should have identified their main enemy, Kullinan Furia – powerful, merciless and sick from corruption. It should also be clear that he is out to find Symbar, and that the path to it can be found in something called the Guardian's Crypt, probably hidden somewhere among the underground remains of Lindaros.

ACT III: SYMBAR'S TOMB

Based on the information that the characters have gained, the first question of the final act should be where to find the Guardian's Crypt.

If they have access to the stone tablet from the witches' reliquary on Karvosti, the clues they have gathered during this adventure can help them pinpoint almost exactly where this crypt is located. In addition, there are three people who possess valuable information about the matter: the Master of the Order Marbela, the dwarven patriarch Artek Valotzar, and the bathhouse manager (and criminal) Grimorio Abramelin. They all have different ideas on where the crypt is located and how to best get there. Hence, depending on who the characters trust, their road ahead will be more or less challenging.

Whatever else happens, they must sooner or later enter the occupied and violently hostile Old Kadizar (see Kingdom of Thieves, on page 93). A heavily intoxicated Nobleman Dastan has declared the city block to be an independent kingdom, and does his best to keep his enemies at bay long enough for him to find a way to escape the Queen's justice.

After some skillful sneaking, diplomatic ingenuity or frantic fighting, the characters enter the Underworld through Ordo Magica's excavations, after which they must try to locate the crypt where the remains of Symbar's last emperor are kept. There is no coffin, no monument; only the shrunken head of Emperor Symbar on a simple semi-column. From previous information, they have hopefully recognized the need to bring a powerful spiritualist (possibly the Dark Lord himself) along. If so, he or she soon realizes that the skull is in fact a gateway to the Yonderworld.

The final scene takes place on the stone ship which, at the Emperor's funeral ceremony, carried his living spirit out onto the sea of eternity. More specifically, it was set to run aground in an ashen desert of the Yonderworld. Waiting there are Kullinan Furia, the ship's daemonic helmsman, and the fortune hunter Elmendra who has been stranded there for a few months.

With cunning, diplomacy, and well-chosen battles, the characters can gain time to study the three-dimensional map of the Symbarian empire, which through triangulation can point out the location of the city of Symbar.

Then, all that remains is to return to Ambria, survive the storm which still rages in the capital, and wait for spring to come. The preparations for the race to the black heart of Davokar can begin, and it soon becomes clear that the characters are not alone on the starting line...

Table 6: Adventure Timeline

The following timeline is intended for gaming groups who are used to having the actions of their characters steered by quest givers, and shows a possible order in which the scenes of the adventure may take place.

As for quest givers, Duchess Esmerelda would probably be the most obvious choice, at least initially. But whether it is she, some representative of a faction, or the Dark Lord himself who becomes the player characters' guide is impossible to know. The important thing is that the players and their characters are allowed to make their own decisions about who they trust to guide them.

Whoever it is should be available in Yndaros, so that the player characters can seek this person out for advice and help in analyzing clues. Should the Game Master at some point want to "force" the players to handle a situation or two on their own, it is of course possible for the quest giver to be unavailable or out on some urgent business.

1
Game opening. Ends with the meteors crashing into the cathedral.

2-5
Chaos around the crater. The characters encounter enemies, aid Seldonio, rescue Esmerelda, and more.

6-7
Conversation with Esmerelda and initial investigation of the cathedral, followed by meetings with the people present.

8
The quest-giver advises the characters to pursue the prisoner, and so they go to Fina's Bakery.

9-10
Meeting with Grimorio Abramelin followed by the robbing and burning of Nobleman Dastan's storage building.

11-13
PC enter Plob 17, go down to the vault, and fight adept wizards and dwarven thugs.

14-16
Interrogation with guard, after which the Dark Lord is relocated and hidden through mystical means before finally answering questions.

17-18
The characters go to the Temple District, talk to people outside the Vearra residence, and are granted an audience with the Countess.

19-22
Journey to Vearra's estate, to encounter allies, abominations, and people with information. Ends with an investigation of the Cottage.

23
Journey back to Yndaros in search of Kullinan. Begins with inquiries about "Artel".

24-27
Meetings with Farvano Kadel and Kathia Melion, followed by an attempt to identify "Artel's" alias and whereabouts.

28-29
The characters board The Alenora, get an opportunity to question Artel Vereo, and can draw conclusions which lead to Act III.

30-31
A number of people can help the characters find "the Guardian's crypt," and they might want to bring a Spiritualist along as well.

32-33
The characters find a way into Old Kadizar and down into the Underworld through Ordo Magica's excavation.

34-35
The journey through the tunnels involves an encounter with Grum and ends with an investigation of the Guardian's crypt.

36
The ritual Dimension Walk is performed and ends with a desperate attempt to defend the ritualist before entering the Yonderworld.

37
PC are exposed to corruption and run inside the funeral ship, where Elmendra awaits.

38-39
Examination of the funeral ship, while Kullinan contacts one of the characters telepathically. Leads to fight against the deamons who are soon reinforced by Kullinan and his flaming servants.

40+
Examination of the aftercastle, followed by the journey back to Yndaros and the adventure aftermath – dealing with the Dark Lord and Kullinan Furia, and maybe meeting with Queen Korinthia.

The Player Characters

IN WRITING THIS adventure, we assume that the players are using the same characters who experienced the *Wrath of the Warden* and *The Witch Hammer*, or other characters of similar capacity. But that is the only assumption we make: what factions they are part of or prefer working with, their moral leanings, what goals they have (individually and as a group), and what powers and abilities they possess should not matter.

The considerable freedom given to the players could of course lead to more work for the Game Master, since it is up to him/her to ensure that all player characters have a reason to engage in the adventure's intrigues. Listed below is a series of suggested incentives which the Game Master may use to invest the players and their characters in the story, but first some clarifications regarding the premise on which the adventure *The Darkest Star* was based:

- The player characters should have earned roughly 180 *Experience* points (adding to the starter level) from previous adventures and spent at least 120–150 of these on abilities/boons which increase their combat proficiency.
- At least one character (or some closely acquainted contact in Yndaros) has the *Loremaster* ability at master level.
- At least one of the characters is known (in name and appearance) as a bold and capable problem solver among the leaders of at least one of the Ambrian factions.

If *The Darkest Star* is played with entirely new characters, we suggest that they receive about 100 extra *Experience*, and that they are advised to use them to become an effective combat unit. It would also be good if they are given backstories that make it easy to involve them in the adventure – they could be connected to one of the major Ambrian factions, to Duchess Esmerelda, or simply have friends/acquaintances/relatives who are killed in the initial attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs.

THE SEARCH FOR SYMBAR

Gaming groups whose player characters have lived through the events of *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer* and have access to the information inscribed on the stone tablet in the witches' reliquary can use it as an entry point into this adventure (see page 143 in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*). In that case, they, or the person helping them, have recently been able to decipher enough of it to discern the following:

- When Lindaros had grown strong and powerful, a military force was sent back to the *"crushed heart of the empire"* to retrieve the remains of *"the Guardian's Favored, the lord of lords."*
- The symbol known to represent "Symbar" seems to be referring to the emperor as well as the place from which his remains were taken – as if the city and the person were both named Symbar.
- The remains, and the belongings/treasures which had been buried with them, were brought to *"the people's new home"* (presumably Lindaros) to be *"sent out on the Sea of Eternity."*

This information is enough to lead the player characters to the capital, but once they have arrived they will probably need help locating the remains. Perhaps Ordo Magica or some other faction has already found, excavated, and started to examine the emperor's tomb, without knowing what they are dealing with? Perhaps the crooks of Yndaros stumbled upon the crypt while digging secure smuggling routes beneath the city?

With this starting point, it seems plausible for the player characters to be meeting with someone who might know a thing or two about the underground remnants of Lindaros when the starfall hits the Cathedral of Martyrs (see Game Opening, page 96). However, this person cannot offer any specifics, only that *"the entire city is standing on Lindarian ruins, and the subterranean structures probably extend beyond the current borders of Yndaros."* The person maintains that they will have to seek out someone *"far up the food chain"* to gain more detailed knowledge on the subject.

After the opening scene outside the collapsing cathedral, the player characters can encounter several individuals who fit this description – such as Duchess Esmerelda, First Theurg Peonio, Commander Alvo Steelneck of the City Watch, or the elf Elori. For various reasons, they are all unwilling to trust the Queen's agents, or those of other factions, and can help the player characters map the roots of Yndaros if they in return can find out a) who was behind the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs, and b) what the culprit wishes to accomplish.

The Game Master must choose an appropriate quest giver depending on who the player characters are and what they have become known for, but whoever it is, the meeting with Esmerelda (see page 102) can be used as inspiration for the agreement.

SOMEONE ELSE HAS THE TABLET

If the player characters have not experienced *The Witch Hammer*, or never managed to get inside the witches' reliquary, the stone tablet could have ended up with someone else. The knowledge of this amazing discovery may have been shared with an entire faction, but it may also have been an individual member of a faction who obtained the information and wants to keep his/her colleagues in the dark.

In any case, the player characters could be entrusted with the task of following the clues presented in the section above, in exchange for some irresistible reward – such as a place in the quest giver's upcoming expedition to the heart of Davokar. If so, the guidelines in the previous section still apply, with the addition that they must keep their true employer secret from Esmerelda, Alvo Steelneck, and everyone else they encounter over the course of the adventure.

FOR QUEEN AND COUNTRY

Player characters who for one reason or another are willing to fight for their Queen and country will hardly need any persuasion to dig deeper into the background of the attack. They could do so on their own initiative (selflessly or in hope of future rewards), or at someone else's request. The Queen will not be available in the days following the attack on the cathedral, but there are of course other representatives who would love to see the reason and person behind the starfall brought to light.

MOVING UP THE LADDER

Player characters who are, or wish to be, members of organizations such as Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, or the Ambrian army, could take on the challenge in the hope of furthering their careers. Finding out who was responsible for the attack, and ideally apprehending the culprit, would probably open many doors for the characters.

Alternatively, someone within the organization could give the characters a direct order. Refusing the order would be a sure way of losing the organization's trust; accepting and completing the mission could be exactly what is needed to advance up the hierarchy!

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

If none of the incentives above are deemed strong enough, it might be time to get personal.

Perhaps a dear friend or relative of a player character was killed in the starfall? It could be someone who worked at the Cathedral of Martyrs or in some adjacent building, or someone who fell victim to the fire-possessed in the wake of the attack. But at this stage it is also possible that the player characters have advanced far up some faction's hierarchy and forged close relationships with people like Seldonio, Thabor and/or Esmerelda.

Events in the City

THE METEORS RAINING down on the Cathedral of Martyrs will naturally have a substantial and long-lasting impact on life in Yndaros. In the short term, the city's terrified inhabitants will succumb to hateful suspicion and put self-preservation before both reason and sentiment. Some manage to stay calm and take the opportunity to conduct illegal operations, hoping that the law enforcement will be too busy to notice or do anything about it.

On the day of the attack, and the day after, the entire city is basically at a standstill. People are staying indoors, preferably underground if they have access to a cellar. But when no more rocks come falling from the sky, life slowly returns to something like normal, albeit with the restrictions that come with a state of emergency (see below). People are going back to work and gathering in public spaces, to discuss what happened or distance themselves from the misery and the memories. The Game Master can expect the atmosphere of the entire adventure to be marked by suspicion, fear and a general distrust of strangers.

The events and developments described below can be used as is, or as inspiration for showing the players how Yndaros reacts to the attack. The player characters can experience several of them first-hand as they move around the city, or hear of them from tavern workers, city watchmen, or their own contacts within the various factions. And then there are of course the town criers whose job it is to announce the most important news of the day; examples of these announcements might look as follows, usually beginning with *"Extra, extra!"*

> *"Yndaros in a state of emergency; curfew in force between midnight and the fifth glass of the morning; all violations to be punished severely."*

"Greater powers for the City Watch; individual watchmen must be obeyed; the state of emergency grants them impunity for actions performed in the line of duty."

"The elves' Legation attacked; several dead; Envoy Elori missing; Black Cloaks responsible; witnesses accuse the Whip of Prios."

"Mystics slain by the giants of Lindaros; one healer, three seers, and one wizard; the City Watch refuses to intervene."

"Zoltar's Inn and the Depth of the Titans in flames; all guests cut down before the fire; perpetrators still unknown, but presumed to be troubled citizens."

"The First Father arrested, involved in unsanctioned attacks; brought to the palace dungeons to await the Queen's judgement."

"Nobleman Dastan declares Old Kadizar an independent kingdom of thieves; gates are shut, and all passage forbidden pending negotiations with our Queen and protector."

STATE OF EMERGENCY

Father Matheo Brigo was supposed to observe the ceremony on Vearra's estate (partly so that he would not have to witness the suffering in the immediate aftermath of the attack), but he changed his mind at the last minute and remained in Yndaros. After the starfall he was surprised when the Queen entrusted him with the welfare of the city, instead of some high-ranking member of the army or the Royal Sekretorium – apparently she had more trust in him, and wanted someone who could coordinate the efforts of different groups while she preoccupied herself with the crisis in the north.

In this new capacity, his first move is to declare a state of emergency, calling in the fifteen hundred soldiers of the Army Reserve and recruiting roughly five hundred retired war veterans to reinforce the City Watch. He also gives the watchmen full authority to deal with *"rebellious element"* as they see fit, along with impunity for any actions taken to enforce the state of emergency and the curfew which is in effect from midnight to five o'clock in the morning.

The player characters will feel the effects of this, as all their nocturnal activities must be conducted in secrecy. They may also fall victim to the arbitrary interventions of newly recruited and less scrupulous city watchmen. The risk is particularly great if they are carrying visible and clearly valuable weapons, which may very well be *"confiscated"* for the purpose of *"maintaining order."* The decision cannot be contested, and refusal to surrender the item will most likely lead to a skirmish which by extension makes them wanted for *"rebellious activities"* and *"crimes against the Queen."* Perhaps it all ends with the player characters having to steal back the item when an opportunity arises...

Another measure that might affect the player characters is Father Matheo's decision to round up and interrogate everyone who was seen near the cathedral before and after the attack. This operation begins one day after the starfall, and the interrogations are conducted by the Royal Sekretorium. Matheo's undisclosed ulterior motive is to find out if someone knows about the Vearra Alliance, so if the player characters mention a visit to Vearra's estate or similar, they will soon find themselves in big trouble – Father Matheo issues a death warrant (without charge) and orders both the City Watch and the Royal Sekretorium to execute it as soon as they encounter these *"enemies of the Queen."*

Watchman

"Do as I say, now!"

After Father Matheo has called in the reserve and recruited war veterans, the City Watch of Yndaros is quite a motley crew. When he also grants them greater authority and impunity for actions taken in the line of duty, many of the less scrupulous recruits take the opportunity to exercise their new and much-desired power.

Manner	Excessively proud
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	*Contacts* (City Watch or the Ambrian Army)
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Man-at-arms* (adept), *Recovery* (novice), *Shield Fighter* (novice)
Weapons Accurate	Sword 5
Armor	Chainmail 4
Defense	–3 (shield)
Toughness	13 **Pain threshold** 7
Equipment	Flask of liquor (for the nerves), 1D6 shillings

Shadow	Scratched and dented copper (corruption: 0)

Tactics: Knowing that they act with the power and authority of the Queen, it takes a lot before the watchmen resort to violence – why put oneself in danger when one can simply threaten with incarceration and follow up with threats of nationwide arrest orders if the "miscreants" are causing trouble? When combat situations do arise, they blow their whistles and do their best to survive until reinforcements arrive.

THE FIRST FATHER'S DOWNFALL

In *The Darkest Star*, the reformation of the Sun Church which Father Sarvola and Deseba the Old have long been preparing (with the Queen's secret support) will finally commence. The First Father's downfall begins when Anabela Argona urges him to act more decisively in combating supposed enemies of the Sun; or more specifically, to have the Whip of Prios crack down on suspected heretics in the capital.

Their first victims are the Iron Pact agent Elori and his aides; Elori himself manages to escape, but four younger elves are killed, and the murderers make no secret of who they are. Next up are the theurg Ladisa and liturg Arieno, and their families, who Jeseebegai suspects (quite rightly) of supporting the reformists. Algon, the self-appointed sun priest known in the refugee camp as Little Sarvola, is also killed – burned in the *"holy fire of Prios."*

A few days after the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs, Anabela Argona informs the Queen that the First Father has lost his mind; that he is using the Whip of Prios to systematically murder anyone who displeases him. Korinthia acts swiftly and decisively according to a long-planned strategy: she declares the Curia dissolved, has the First Father arrested along with every sun priest in the city (including Anabela and other reformists), and summons the head of the Twilight Friars to an emergency meeting in the capital. Player characters could be arrested as well, if the Game Master so desires, provided that they have close ties to the Cathedral of Martyrs or the convent school. In such a case, it will take contacts, diplomacy and a silver tongue to free those imprisoned.

As news of the First Father's arrest spreads through the city, pious citizens rally on the Triumph Plaza to protest, but barely a thousand show up. Many are too afraid to go out, at least for the purpose of opposing an already uneasy City Watch whose members can do whatever they want without being punished. Furthermore, a false rumor started by the Royal Sekretorium and the Sun Church reformists is circulating among the populace – namely, that the First Father through his actions has fallen from grace; otherwise Prios would obviously have protected the cathedral from the fire which fell from His sky. Some go one step further, claiming that the meteor was sent by the Sun God himself, as a sign of dissatisfaction with his earthly representatives.

The crisis within the Sun Church will not be resolved until after the adventure, when the Queen is able to pass sentence on the people involved. When she does, several members of the Whip of Prios are condemned to death, while Jeseebegai, Peonio, and a few complicit nobles are sentenced to life imprisonment in the Palace District Prison Tower. Read more about this development on page 163, under the heading The Sun Church.

THE GIANTS OF LINDAROS

The enormous man-creatures which appear after the starfall were created centuries ago by the powerful Morphantics of Symbaroum – mystics with the ambition and ability to manipulate life itself according to their will. In this case, they made themselves a mighty guard force that was able to detect outbreaks of corruption, whether large or small, from afar.

The giants were created in Symbar in the dying days of the empire, when the rulers had accepted that their corruption-generating practices were tearing the world apart and responded by introducing a general prohibition against such activities. After the final battle of Symbar, the giants followed the refugees south, where they eventually resumed their duties in the dawning city state of Lindaros – except for their leader, Ripe, who fell in battle against a primal blight beast and was buried, assumed dead. Much later, when Lindaros fell and there was no one left to protect, the guardians fell into hibernation, lying on stony benches in their underground chamber. There they remained for hundreds of years.

The Game Master Rolls Dice

The *Symbaroum* rules system is supposed to put the characters' fate in the hands of the players. But sometimes there may be dramatic reasons for the Game Master to take control of the dice, and the *Corruption Sensitive* trait may be such an exception – in terms of the test that determines whether a corruption outbreak is detected, as well as the one determining how long it takes for the giants to arrive?

Ripe was woken by the group of Ambrian plunderers who first discovered (but never returned from) Symbar. The fight against the primal blight beast had cost him his ability to perceive corruption, but at the same time made him more independent from the directives under which he was created. And the bond with his brothers was still there; he could feel them calling, wanting him to join them. It is now ten years since he came to Yndaros. All this time he has felt the bond with his brothers, but been unable to find them, causing him to assume that he feels drawn to the place of their death. That is why he remains in the city, serving his new Queen to the best of his abilities.

Kullinan's starfall opens a crevice that leads to the brothers' chamber; woken from their slumber, they make their way toward the surface, where they immediately get back to work – identifying and eliminating sources of corruption. With the brothers now awake, Ripe can sense exactly where they are; he rushes to the scene and is able to bring their ruthless slaughter to a halt, if only for a time. After this, he never returns to the Queen, but gathers his brothers to fulfill their age-old duties together. They spread throughout the city, Ripe accompanied by one of his corruption-sensitive brothers, to seek out and destroy all creatures whose actions give rise to corruption.

It does not take long before the first healers and mystics are killed. The Pansar General Jomilio goes to speak with the executioners, then relays what was said to the Queen. Korinthia and her advisers decide to leave Ripe and his brothers alone for now, until the situation in the capital stabilizes and the army can mobilize a force strong enough to face them. In the meantime, their actions will probably do more good than harm...

The new monstrous trait *Corruption Sensitive* is described on page 74, which also specifies what risks the player characters expose themselves to every time their actions give rise to corruption. If they are detected, the giant knows that corruption has been generated, and where, but not exactly by whom (although they will usually slay most of the people in the area, just to be sure).

It takes 1D4 minutes for the first of the scattered brothers to arrive, and then another minute for a second to show up; the other giants will not be able to join them until the battle is over and the characters are either dead or have managed to escape. The 1D4 roll is immediately followed by a 1D8 – an outcome of 8 means that, in one of the cases (the Game Master decides which) it is Ripe and his follower who come running.

Giant

Ripe and his brothers are all about two and a half meters tall and built like liege trolls. The rituals that gave them life also left them completely hairless, with albino skin, and unable to reproduce. Instead, they (except Ripe) are all filled with a burning sense of loyalty and blessed, or possibly cursed, with a very long lifespan.

Ripe has the same stats as his brothers, but without the *Corruption Sensitive* trait, and with the addition of *Leader* (master).

Manner	Clumsy, arrogant		
Race	Cultural being		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Corruption Sensitive* (II), *Long-lived*, *Robust* (II)		
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 17 (–7), **Vigilant** 13 (–3)			
Abilities	*Exceptionally Strong* (adept), *Feat of Strength* (novice), *Iron Fist* (master), *Man-at-arms* (master), *Medicus* (novice), *Recovery* (master), *Steadfast* (master), *Two-handed Force* (adept)		
Burden	*Code of Honor*		
Weapons Strong	Massive two-handed sword 13 (precise, unwieldy, massive*), alternatively 11 and ignores *Armor*.		
Armor	Studded leather cuirass 4 (reinforced), +3 (*Robust*)		
Defense	+6		
Toughness	22	**Pain threshold**	8
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Iron gray (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: The giants never hesitate to battle corruption and its sources. First they target mystics, then anyone who carries magical weapons, and then the toughest-looking enemies in descending order. They use their ability to recover whenever it is needed, though such situations do not arise very often...

SOVEREIGN'S OATH TAKES ACTION

If the Game Master so desires, the Sovereign agents in the capital could take the opportunity to exacerbate the chaos even further. If so, they focus on widening the rift between various factions and peoples, primarily by striking at the weaker/non-Ambrian party – they set fire to barbarian and dwarven-owned establishments, attack buildings

SOVEREIGN GROUP LEADER			
Manner	Sternly suspicious		
Race	Human (Barbarian)		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Bushcraft*		
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 13 (–3), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*Axe Artist* (master), *Leader* (novice), *Man-at-arms* (master), *Rune Tattoo* (master), *Shield Fighter* (adept), *Tactician* (master)		
Weapons Cunning	Axe 7 or two attacks 6/4, +2 with active *Rune Tattoo*		
Armor	Leather 3 (+2 with *Rune Tattoo*)		
Defense	–1 (shield)		
Toughness	10	**Pain threshold**	5
Equipment	Leather pouch with 1D6 rough rubies (worth 50 thaler each)		
Shadow	Pale green with black spots, like a patch of moldy old grass (corruption: 2)		
Tactics: The experienced Sovereign warrior leads his fighters into battle, but chooses his opponents carefully, knowing that the other warriors need their leader alive.			

SOVEREIGN AGENTS			
Manner	Quiet, grim		
Race	Human (Barbarian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Bushcraft*		
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 9 (+1), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Axe Artist* (master), *Man-at-arms* (adept), *Rune Tattoo* (adept), *Shield Fighter* (novice), *Steel Throw* (novice)		
Weapons Accurate	Axe 7 (or two attacks 6/4); 2 throwing axes 4		
Armor	Leather 3 (+2 with *Rune Tattoo*)		
Defense	–3 (shield)		
Toughness	13	**Pain Threshold**	7
Equipment	None		
Shadow	A bright shade of reddish brown, like an autumn bog (corruption: 1)		
Tactics: When entering battle, or moving toward a new target, the Sovereign Agents begin by hurling a throwing axe at the enemy. Then they set upon the enemy with their axes – usually stunning them and following up with a powerful blow.			

The symbol of the Sovereign's Oath, in one of its versions.

where goblins and refugees huddle in terror, and destroy soup kitchens and infirmaries in the poorest parts of the city.

Should the player characters witness any of these cases and choose to intervene, they will undoubtedly be able to identify any fallen adversaries as Sovereign agents, not least thanks to the symbol tattooed on the inside of their wrists – a sovereign crown wreathed or surrounded with thorns. The Game Master must adjust the size and strength of the agent cell according to the numbers and capacity of the player characters, but can also use the stats below as a reference point. The Sovereign warriors operating behind enemy lines are members of clan Saar-Kahn, and should not be taken lightly...

KINGDOM OF THIEVES

A bit into the adventure, Nobleman Dastan has a crazy idea. It all starts after two days of constant partying at the Croft. In a fit of drunken hubris, someone questions the thief king's status. Dastan replies that he *"owns Yndaros."* The debate continues, and ends with the uncrowned ruler of Old Kadizar actually proclaiming himself king of the district. And he does not stop there – within a few hours, all City Watchmen in the area are either killed or imprisoned, the gates are sealed, and a declaration of independence (misspelled and wine-stained) is sent by courier to the Queen's palace.

Nobleman Dastan eventually passes out from exhaustion, vaguely aware that he has done something stupid. More stupid than usual. He wakes up the following day, afraid to open his eyes, convinced that there is nothing to be seen but the inside of a death cell. But he is still at the Croft, on the floor, his head resting in the same vomit he threw up before falling asleep.

It soon becomes clear that the city authorities could not care less about his little game, probably because they have more pressing matters to attend to. Dastan realizes that his days are numbered, that he will hang as soon as the Queen's lackeys find time to arrange the spectacle. This insight immediately spurs him to action: he will use the time he has left to become a king that will never be forgotten!

After a hefty drink of liquid courage, he gets to work. He postulates Dastan's Dictate: a list of obligations that his subjects must fulfill in order to stay alive (note that the last paragraph is added after Dastan's first lunch as king). He then sees to it that all blacksmiths inside the wall start crafting

arrows, crossbow bolts, and throwing spears, and orders the tanners to prepare pots of acid to be hurled at oncoming enemies. He also digs up a handful of *"prisoners of war"* among the inhabitants hiding in cellars and attics – including the proprietor of the claystone plant, Lord Manselm, and some lowborn nobles who were visiting the district when the gates were sealed. Dastan will certainly not give up his kingdom (or his life) without a fight! This becomes a problem for the player characters at the end of the adventure, when they must head down into the ruin complexes beneath King Dastan's tyrannical mini-realm. You can read more about this on page 145, under the heading Old Kadizar.

Scheming in Yndaros

IF YOUR GAMING group has previously been using the rules for scheming presented in the adventure *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*, here is a table of the capital's most important factions and representatives. The table constitutes a kind of fundamental playing field for social relations in the city, and for the players these relations may become a tactical game, where negotiation scenes can determine whether their characters succeed or fail.

That being said, this element of scheming is purely supplemental and can easily be removed. Gaming groups who prefer a simpler game can treat the factions as quest givers or opponents, without complicated nuances or rules regarding their reactions to the characters' deeds. In that case, the Game Master decides what is reasonable from the faction's point of view or, when in doubt, lets *Persuasive* tests settle the matter.

Those who want to make full use of the intrigues can find comprehensive rules, as well as a glossary, on pages 58–60 in *Karvosti – The Witch Hammer*.

On Scheming

The basic mechanic in all social interactions is based on a *Persuasive* test, typically modified by the target's *Resolute*. Adding to this are modifications related to factions and a Status which the characters can build during their adventures. Also, *Persuasive* may often be swapped for some other attribute, since the different factions celebrate and are attracted to different qualities in those they meet.

Table 7: Main NPCs of the Adventure

NAME	FACTION	IMPRESSED BY	LIKES	DISLIKES
Alvo Steelneck	City Watch	*Resolute*	Ambrians, Nobles	Barbarians, Blight-marked, Ironsworn
Artek Valotzar	Valotzar family	*Cunning*	–	Witches, Worshippers of Prios, Nobles
Elori	Iron Pact	–	Witches, Ironsworn	Blight-marked
Esmerelda	House Kohinoor/Sacred of the Old Blood	*Strong*	Nobles, Heretics	Everyone else
Delia Vearra	–	*Cunning*	Nobles, Worshippers of Prios	Ordo Magica, Non-humans, Witches, Heretics, Ironsworn
Father Peonio	Priesthood	*Resolute*	Ambrians, Worshippers of Prios	Barbarians, Witches, Heretics, Ironsworn
Farvano Kadel	Ordo Magica	*Cunning*	Cats	–
Grimorio Abramelin	–	*Discreet*	–	Non-humans, blight-marked
Nobleman Dastan	–	–	–	Ordo Magica, Worshippers of Prios, Nobles
Kathia Melion	–	*Strong*	Ambrians	Nobles
Livia Arobel	House Kohinoor	*Strong*	Ambrians	Heretics
Marbela	Ordo Magica	*Vigilant*	Explorers	–
Mirelba	Witches	*Resolute*	Barbarians, Witches	Ordo Magica, blight-marked

You will love and respect King Dastan more than yourself and your relatives

You will give King Dastan all valuables, weapons, and delicacies in your possession

You will obey and fight for King Dastan, or die like a cur

You will fire at all enemies of King Dastan who come within range from the borders of his realm

You will lose a hand the first time you violate King Dastan's Dictate; you will die if you do it again!

You will always kneel, and move on your knees, in the presence of King Dastan

ACT 1:

Fire over Yndaros

THE FIRST ACT OF THE ADVENTURE begins on an early winter morning when the player characters happens to have business near the Temple District, and ends when they have gathered enough clues to pursue those responsible for the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs. Before embarking on Act II, they will face challenges that require strength as well as cunning and vigilance – all in a place that is like an open, bleeding wound in the supposedly invulnerable capital city of Queen Korinthia.

Game Opening

IT IS A beautiful winter morning. A thin layer of snow has fallen during the night, covering the streets and rooftops of Yndaros like a sparkling blanket that is already starting to melt. Provided that the characters have experienced the events of *The Witch Hammer*, they will have made contact with someone they think has detailed knowledge about the Lindarian ruins hiding beneath the city streets. This person's only demand was payment of 10 thaler, and that the meeting would be held at the Victory Vault tavern, famous for its exquisite pastries and private dining halls superbly overlooking the city's nicer, south-eastern district. The characters cannot but admire the glittering view, though they did of course let their guest have the best seat.

When the guest has devoured enough pastries to feed one of the smaller orphanages at the refugee camp, the interview can begin. It is immediately apparent that this person cannot take the characters to the tomb they seek; he/she is too poorly informed to understand what place they speak of. What the guest has to say can be summarized as follows:

- For the Lindarians, underground construction was apparently as natural as raising structures on the surface – as a result, Yndaros rests upon a subterranean maze of ruins, many of which are both grand and well-preserved.
- Ordo Magica is currently conducting two major excavations: one beneath Old Kadizar and one on the fields just south of the palace. Rumor has it that another excavation is also underway in the Palace District itself, but this is not something the contact can confirm.
- In addition, there are several people digging on their own initiative, often starting out

Alternative Meeting

Depending on who the player characters are, what they wish to accomplish, and what they have done in the past, the meeting at the Victory Vault could be about more or less anything. The same goes for their specific guest – it could be an old acquaintance or an entirely new contact whom they think can be of help, or who wants to offer them a mission of some kind. The Game Master decides.

in their cellars. Some do so in the hope of finding valuable objects, while others just want more space or seek to satisfy their curiosity.
- And then there are the smuggling routes – criminals use these passageways through the ruins of Lindaros to avoid having to transport sensitive goods (or people) right in front of the City Watch. Some say that the smuggling tunnels extend like a vast spider web, probably starting at the cargo docks.

The guest is just about to conclude his account by suggesting a number of people who may be able to provide more detailed answers to the characters' questions, but before he/she can say more than *"Master Marb...,"* the guest twitches and goes silent. Peering through the panorama window, towards the sky, he/she gapes in horror.

Player characters who pass a *Quick* test turn their heads just in time to see the burning meteors come crashing down toward the dome and roof of the Cathedral of Martyrs; the others only see a blinding light before the shock wave hits – windows shatter, ears are deafened, and the characters are all thrown from their chairs (*Robust* ogres and trolls exempted). Everyone suffers 1D4 damage (ignoring *Armor*).

Their guest leaps to his/her feet, bleeding from the nose and blinking to regain his/her sight. He/she shrieks: *"The Queen! Korinthia! The Queen!"* After the characters have calmed the guest down, the situation is explained to them – wedding rehearsals are being held this morning, and the Queen, the bride and groom, and many other powerful individuals are said to be present.

If the player characters hesitate, the guest asks: *"What are you waiting for? If Korinthia Nightbane is there, if she has survived and you manage to save her, you will surely be given a detailed map of underground Yndaros!"*

The Player Characters Hang Back

If the characters do not go to the crash site, they will miss out on the challenges described under the heading Chaos Around the Crater, but it is still possible for them to be among the first to search the area more thoroughly. Several leaders of the city's local factions (such as Ordo Magica, the Sun Church, the Army/City Watch) want to know how things look and what has happened, and do not trust the Queen's investigators, nor anyone else's, to be objective/truthful in their conclusions. The characters could be hired as someone's eyes and ears around the crater (possibly in exchange for some future information regarding the underground ruins of Lindaros): if so, they receive a letter which the city's law enforcement representatives will respect.

Chaos Around the Crater

HEADING TO THE crater, the player characters must push or zigzag their way through the hordes of people that come running in the opposite direction. Nobody answers if spoken to, and if the characters grab someone for questioning, the reply will mostly consist of terrified babble. They also pass a patrol of five city watchmen being scolded by their commanding officer; they refuse the order to move toward the crash site, shaking their heads with fear in their eyes.

The closer they get, the fewer people they encounter. Single or groups of guards and bold private citizens have stopped at varying distances from the crater, clearly afraid to go any further. Perhaps they are dismayed by the screams coming from the crash site – cries of pain, mixed with roars of belligerent excitement and howling laughter?

The player characters will come to face four main challenges once they arrive at the scene, before the dust finally settles and they may investigate the crash site and its ruin. These are addressed below, following an overview description of the situation.

OVERVIEW

Approaching the crater, the player characters will notice the ceremony's side-effects – the unique side-effect that puts creatures in the area at risk of being possessed by fire spirits, and in addition the effect called Increased Corruption. The latter is described on page 70 and can be noticed with a successful *Vigilant* test combined with the *Witchsight* ability; the effect is permanent and will forever affect an area whose radius stretches from the cathedral to the border of the Artisan District.

Most of the cathedral walls are still standing, and the sturdy facade around the main entrance is almost unscathed, but the roof is smashed and the large copper dome has been hurled into a nearby building. Many other buildings in the vicinity have been hit by smaller rocks which, along with the shock wave, mean that an area of approximately two hundred meters in diameter now consists of mostly razed structures. The air is thick with dust, the ground covered with rubble and dead bodies, and

Grand Master Seldonio's final moment. Killed by a newly awakened giant from Lindaros, because of what might best be described as a mistake.

in many places one can see fires blazing. Strangely enough, some of the fires seem to be moving through the fog of dust...

THE HUNGERING FIRE

As soon as the characters enter the thickest part of the fog, where the devastation is most severe, they all see ten or so raging flames coming toward them like a group of huge fireflies. Those who pass a *Vigilant* test quickly realize that these are in fact attacking entities; all others are *Surprised* during the first turn of combat.

A successful *Cunning* test with the *Beast Lore* ability (novice) provides information on how the fire spirit can be fought (see page 71–72).

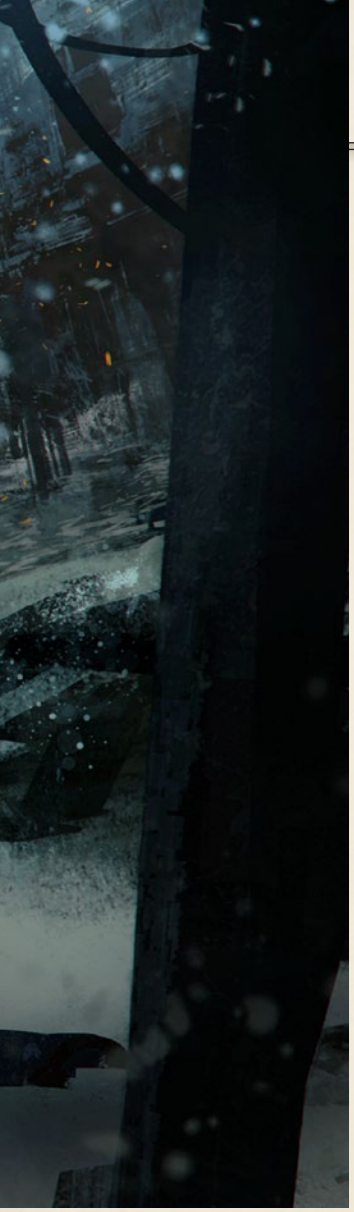
The fire possessed are everywhere around the cathedral, in the form of humans and urban animals (horses, dogs, and small birds). But they are moving outwards, toward the rest of the city, to attack humans and animals and set buildings ablaze. After the initial battle, the characters find themselves (with a few exceptions) behind the spreading wave of fire possessed. But the City Watch and other capable inhabitants have no choice but to fight them, which explains why the player characters for quite some time must deal with the area's challenges on their own.

THOSE IN DISTRESS

The dust and smoke are soon scattered by the morning breeze. A couple of player characters (the Game Master decides) simultaneously discover two critical emergencies – one near the ruined cathedral, another on the outer edge of the crater, both of them roughly fifty meters away.

The latter case concerns a group of foolish ten-year-old children who have been drawn to the site. They stare wide-eyed at the devastation and seem not to notice the threat which is rapidly approaching: two fire possessed horses thundering toward them, from the opposite direction to where the player characters are.

Closer to the area's center, two figures are seen fighting in the fog, one much taller than the other.



FIRE POSSESSED HUMAN			
Manner	Fanatical		
Race	Human/Elemental		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Contacts* (varies)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)			
Abilities	None		
Weapons Accurate	Smoldering fists 3+2 (burning)		
Armor	+3 Flaming aura, takes no damage from fire or mystical powers that manifest themselves in the form of fire		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	10	**Pain threshold**	5
Equipment	None		
Shadow	A furious, yellowish white, like the hottest part of a blazing pyre (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: The fire possessed are driven onward by their burning souls. Their only desire is to set their surroundings on fire.			

FIRE POSSESSED HORSE/OX			
Manner	Snorting eagerly		
Race	Beast/Elemental		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Armored* (I), *Robust* (III)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 11 (–1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)			
Abilities	None		
Weapons Accurate	Hooves/feet 6+2 (burning)		
Armor	Tough skin 2+3 for flaming aura, takes no damage from fire or mystical powers that manifest themselves in the form of fire		
Defense	–3		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	None		
Shadow	A furious, yellowish-white, like the hottest part of a blazing pyre (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: The fire possessed are driven onward by their burning souls. Their only desire is to set their surroundings on fire.			

If the characters have met or seen Seldonio before, they will recognize the smaller figure; otherwise a successful *Cunning* test is required to identify the man – it is the Grand Master! As for the larger figure, it must be at least two heads taller than an average-sized human. The giant seems to be winning; it raises its mighty two-handed sword for a killing blow (stats for the giant warrior are found on page 92).

The characters must make a quick decision. They have four turns before the children are attacked and Seldonio is killed, and it will take two turns to reach those in distress. In other words, they do not have time for more than ten seconds of discussion before their chance of rescuing someone is lost. One strategy could be to have someone rush to scare the children away while the others stop the giant from dealing the killing blow. In that case, they will of course have to deal with the flaming horses, but perhaps the fiery beasts can be enticed (unwillingly) to help the characters fight Seldonio's opponent? As usual: let the players take initiatives and reward all good ideas.

If the characters split up or choose to focus on Seldonio, the old man turns out to be dying from injuries caused by the starfall and stab wounds from his opponent. He cannot be healed, but manages to wheeze a few last words before closing his eyes forever:

"The prisoner, you must... lord, he is free. You... The eternal night, night, ni–" His eyes close, but open once more ten heartbeats later: *"Artel, it was Artel. His revenge."* His face is contorted with sorrow and his dying eyes fill with tears. *"Promise me, find them, stop them. Promise!"* A pause for confirmation, and then he dies. *"My fault. My... faaault..."*

The prisoner Seldonio is talking about is of course the Dark Lord, and as for the name Artel, he is simply mistaken – he assumes that it really is the Artel who Seldonio helped sentence for war crimes after the Great War who has come to seek revenge on him and Korinthia by attacking the Cathedral of Martyrs. This Artel appears later in the adventure and is described in detail on page 140.

CRIES FOR HELP

Someone is heard crying for help from inside the razed cathedral. It sounds like a young woman, and judging by the accent she is of noble birth. The player characters must decide if they wish (or dare) to attempt a rescue operation into the collapsing building.

As mentioned earlier, the facade around the magnificent main entrance is almost unscathed, but one of its double doors has been blasted from its hinges

and now covers much of the stairs. From the doorway, the characters can see that parts of the ceiling and its arches still remain, although stone blocks of various sizes are constantly falling down. The furnishings are utterly destroyed, either hit in the attack or smashed by the two giant chandeliers that crashed to the floor. The screams are coming from deeper inside, near the sun podium, seventy meters from the opening.

Characters moving around inside the ruin must roll two *Quick* tests on their way to the person in need, as parts of the ceiling collapse over their heads. If the tests succeed, they notice the danger in time to jump out of the way; if they fail, the characters are hit and take 1D10 damage (*Armor* protects).

We recommend that they roll one of these tests before reaching the crater, and the other after passing it. The crater is located in the middle of the sun aisle, roughly twenty meters in diameter and almost as wide as the light yard (the main hall of the cathedral). The meteorite itself is the size of a troll's head, smoldering visibly at the bottom. The light from above also allows whoever looks down to detect openings in the sides of the crater, leading into what must have been catacombs or underground halls. A successful *Vigilant* test reveals a faint light coming from one of the openings. For more on the crater, see page 104.

As they approach the sun podium, the first corpses come into sight, only partially buried under the rubble. These are well-dressed people; that much is evident at first glance. If the characters stop to examine them, see the Ruin's Interior on page 103. In that case, they should also roll an additional *Quick* test (as described above) for each body they choose to study more closely.

Following the screams, they finally find a woman in her twenties lying below the far edge of the sun podium. She is bleeding from her head, pale as a ghost, and worse still: one of her legs has been crushed and trapped by a falling rock. Provided that at least one of the characters is Ambrian, they immediately recognize her: the Sunshine Duchess Esmerelda, the Queen's sister.

Freeing her from the rock requires some form of lever (such as parts of broken benches or chandeliers), a combined *Strong* value of at least 20, and that all player characters involved in the effort pass a test against their own *Strong* during the same turn. If they succeed on their first attempt, it turns out that Esmerelda's leg can actually be saved; if one or more attempts fail so that the rock falls back on her leg, it will have to be amputated. Hardly something the player characters would want on their resume...

No *Quick* tests are needed on the way back. But they are leaping from one problem to another; as soon as they pass through the main gate, a new situation awaits them...

THE FIGHT AGAINST THE GIANTS

Two more of Ripe's brothers have made their way to the surface. They have a brief look around, but do not get far before Pansar Captain Livia Arobel and her troops arrive. The Captain acts as expected, rushing toward the threatening giants in a thundering charge, convinced that they were somehow involved in the attack. Sluggish, and irritated by the area's increased corruption, the brothers fight back without hesitation.

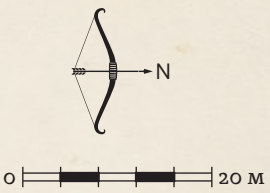
If some player characters chose to wait outside the ruin while the others investigated the screams, the incident above could occur as the group is on its way to reunite on the stairs of the cathedral; perhaps those waiting outside become aware of the situation while the others are on their way back? In any case, the six Pansars are facing a tough challenge and would certainly appreciate the characters' assistance. This becomes particularly evident just after the fight has begun, as one of Livia's soldiers is killed instantly and [PC] number of fire possessed humans charge toward the Pansars from behind!

The player characters may of course do as they please, but if the Duchess is with them, she will implore them to *"help those poor souls."* However, she grabs the person who carried her out of the wreckage: *"You're staying here; you are my hero and protector, are you not?"* Note that this is all an act on her part, intended to create a bond between her and the player characters (read more below under the heading In the Duchess' Service).

Regardless of whether the characters take on any of the giant warriors or defend the Pansars against the fire possessed, the battle only lasts two turns before it is interrupted. A thunderous roar rises over the crash site, in the deep voice of a troll. Most people cannot make out any words at all, but the Symbarian word for "Stop!" or "Halt!" can be recognized by a *Loremaster* (master). The sound makes the giants twitch.

A second shout, this time in broken Ambrian, causes the Pansars to react: *"Lower weapons!"* Ripe, the Eternal Executioner of Yndaros, emerges through a drift of fog and smoke. Unless the player characters defy his order, the battle stops; if they persist in fighting, the brothers will defend themselves while Livia repeats Ripe's order.

Any remaining fire possessed spin around, laughing, rushing ravenously toward the newcomer; it takes Ripe a couple of turns to neutralize them with his bare hands. He then walks up to the others, nods to the giant warriors and turns to Livia Arobel, saying: *"Leave to me. They brothers. Not fight."*



THE CATHEDRAL

1. The Crater
2. Esmerelda
3. Seldonio
4. Curious children
5. Fissure
6. Lugander
7. The dead mystics

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Suitable payment

If the characters are looking for information about *"the Guardian's Favored"* (see page 88), Esmerelda can offer to arrange a meeting with Master Marbela or one of her colleagues, and order them to respond truthfully to all their questions. Otherwise she can agree to more or less anything that is in her power to provide – thaler, items, information, or tutoring in specific subjects. She cannot grant them lands or titles, but can promise to discuss the matter with her sister and propose that they be made Princes of the Realm with authority over a tract of land in Kasandrien, as a reward for their heroic efforts.

And so, a soothing calm sweeps over the disaster zone. A couple of watchmen squads and additional soldiers arrive over the course of the day; the Pansar captain assumes command, ordering incoming reinforcements to form a perimeter around the crash site and stay clear of the ruins. The player characters may try to gather their thoughts and consider what to do next. If Esmerelda is with them, she has a proposal on this matter...

Initial Investigations

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER the player characters have been at the crash site for a while or arrive later, along with or commissioned by some influential contact, the area is surrounded by city watchmen, reinforced by Pansars. The big difference is that, in the former case, they will have almost an hour to investigate the ruin themselves, while in the latter they must share space with the City Watch investigators and a group of black cloaks.

There are plenty of discoveries to be made among the ruins; some that can lead them on the right track, others that will later prove to be dead ends.

IN THE DUCHESS' SERVICE

If the player characters helped rescue Esmerelda, she could very well become their initial quest giver. Deep down she is furious – not that she was particularly eager to get married, but because someone tried to kill her. The fact that she has no idea who is responsible makes it even worse. Considering that her sister and First Father Jeseebegai were supposed to attend the rehearsal, there is reason to suspect at least a handful of groups and individuals; furthermore, the late cancellation, the situation in the realm, and Esmerelda's strained – to put it mildly – relationship with her sister and the First Father make these two potential suspects as well. In short: Esmerelda has no idea who can, and cannot, be trusted.

In front of the obviously courageous player characters, she acts needy and distressed. She calls them *"her heroes,"* and if they have already made a name for themselves through past exploits, she claims to be impressed by their tremendous feats. Finally, she asks them to be her personal, well-paid agents, since she trusts neither the *"fools of the City Watch"* nor the *"ambitious nobles of the Royal Sekretorium, whose conclusions are always influenced by politics and self-interest."*

If the player characters accept her offer (or decline but claim to have their own reasons for investigating the matter), Esmerelda has the following to say:

The amiable Duchess conceals an abyss behind her crooked smile and sparkling eyes.

- She was at the cathedral to rehears her upcoming wedding.
- The event was supposed to be conducted by the First Father, but her sister called Jeseebegai and First Theurg Peonio to an emergency meeting at the palace. Consequently, the Queen was not present, though she was meant to be.
- The rehearsal was instead held by an ordinary liturg. She does not remember his name, but he was apparently in charge of the practical arrangements.
- Other participants were her husband-to-be, Thabor; her and Thabor's bodyguards (four honor guards); and Grand Master Seldonio who, along with Korinthia and the First Father, was supposed to participate as a ceremonial witness.
- There were also a couple of low-ranking priests, as well as the Cathedral Manager and his two aides. Exactly what roles they would play in the wedding are unclear to her, but she assumes that they were to assist the liturg with the practical arrangements.

She cannot recall anything suspicious happening during the rehearsal, and remembers nothing of the attack itself, other than the bang, the light, the pain and terror. She ends the conversation with a teary-eyed plea: *"Please, I beg you; help me figure out what happened. You saved my life, but someone tried to kill me. Someone who killed my future husband and ruined what would have been the most important day of my life. Please, find out why I fell victim to such a fate."*

THE RUIN'S INTERIOR

If the characters head back inside the cathedral, they should probably begin by assessing the risk of collapse. With a successful *Vigilant* test, they can identify five large, damaged areas in the ceiling which look particularly dangerous. These can be neutralized with crossbow bolts or arrows, or simply by throwing stones. Otherwise the Game Master must decide when it is time for a randomly selected player to roll a *Quick* test as described earlier.

Except for the crater from the largest meteor, all there is to investigate are a dozen dead bodies. Esmerelda mentioned twelve people (herself excluded); a quick survey of the area reveals that there are exactly twelve corpses scattered across the light yard – all of them thrown into the walls from where they stood as the meteor struck. But since Seldonio died outside the ruined cathedral, the Duchess must have forgotten or failed to mention someone.

Liturg Omgald, who was appointed to oversee the wedding arrangements, lies dead near the sun podium, along with his two younger assistants and the chieftain's son, Thabor, all but buried under the rubble. The four honor guards were flung toward the long sides of the light yard, Esmerelda's to the south and Thabor's to the north, while what are probably the Cathedral Manager and his aides can be found north-east of the crater, also along the long side. The corpse which does not fit into the Duchess' account is a man in his late twenties who some player characters might actually recognize: it is Lugander Galeia (see below).

SCAPEGOATS TO BLAME

Kullinan Furia's four adepts were in the area as the meteor stuck, all of them with jobs to do. First, they went down through the crater to overpower the dazed prisoner, after which two of them immediately brought the Dark Lord to the bakery in the Bohemian Quarter where a group of dwarves from the Vanoviz family were waiting to escort them to the next hideout. The other two stayed behind to plant a couple of leads with the intention of casting suspicion on House Vearra.

If the characters decide to examine all the bodies, they will eventually find the liturg's female assistant. Those who approach her may roll a *Vigilant* test; if it succeeds, the character in question notices that something seems odd: the way in which the rubble covers the body and the distribution of dust on her clothes suggest that the woman was moved after she was buried. A subsequent *Cunning* test with the *Medicus* ability reveals severe blunt force trauma to the top of her head, which indicates that she probably died in the initial collapse. This, in turn, means that someone may have interfered with the woman's remains.

Characters who examine the body more closely discover, without need for success tests, the two objects that were planted by Kullinan's adepts. Inside the clear blue blessed robe, the woman is carrying a long, thin dagger with an ornamented handle, and hidden in one of her boots is a leather pouch containing four shiny gold coins.

The coins bear no mint marks whatsoever; a successful *Loremaster* test suggests that they are probably worth about 30 silver thaler a piece. But even more interesting is the dagger's ornamentation – the button on its hilt is decorated with a golden bird of prey which seems to be diving, mounted on a polished sanguine stone. All nobles and people with the *Loremaster* ability recognize the hawk as the Vearra family sigil.

THE ASSASSIN

Another interesting discovery can be made by examining one of the Cathedral Manager's two aides. With a successful *[Vigilant –3]* test the character finds an Assassin's Blade hidden between the man's shoulder blades and a garrote sewn into the left arm of his coat.

This is actually an assassin named Rabio, summoned from Kurun for a hit on the High Chieftain's son. The contract was issued at Nobleman Dastan's place as soon as the wedding was announced, and the person who issued it was none other than First Father Jeseebegai. More information about the arrangement and what happens if the characters try to track down the assassin's employer can be found on page 107, under the heading The Sun's Instrument.

LUGANDER GALEIA

When he was told about the wedding plans, Lugander was beside himself with jealousy, despite his beloved Esmerelda's assurances that it was merely a matter of politics. He promised to stay on Karvosti, but when he heard rumors of the wedding rehearsal, Lugander tricked a young Sun Church initiate to smuggle him into the city and hide him inside the Cathedral of Martyrs, up on one of the balconies near the main entrance. All he hoped for was to see his beloved; instead he came face to face with death.

Characters who have spent a longer period of time on Karvosti will hardly have failed to notice Lugander's presence; they may even know him by name. Otherwise it takes a successful *Cunning* test by a noble or someone with the *Loremaster* ability to identify the body of Lugander Galeia – son of the social climber Laguboi who (rumor has it) bought his knighthood as recently as in the final stages of the Great War.

A successful *Vigilant* test aimed at the body leads to the conclusion that Lugander must have been situated on a gallery or balcony, since his body is less buried by rubble than the others. What happens if the characters decide to dig deeper into the noble's inexplicable presence is described on page 109, under the heading The Lovesick.

THE CRATER

The fact that subterranean Yndaros is undermined by cavities caused the meteor to leave a crater that is much deeper than its width would suggest. The rock, still smoldering, is located almost twenty meters below the surface.

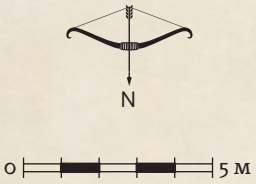
The sunlight streaming down from above is enough to reveal a multitude of partially collapsed openings in the sides of the crater, but it takes a successful *Vigilant* test to detect the faint light coming from one of them. The two large, uppermost openings are actually part of the same storage space, where the priests kept some of the scriptures they brought with them from Alberetor (mostly old accounting documents and other administrative material). The openings further down are dead ends, once part of the Lindarians' underground network of tunnels and cellars.

The really interesting opening is found roughly five meters down, and the entrance is almost entirely free of rubble and debris (since Kullinan's adepts went that way to fetch the Dark Lord). This is where the light is coming from, and as soon as the player characters set foot in the opening, a *Vigilant* test is rolled. Those who succeed can feel chills all over their skin, as if the air is somehow charged with power; if they also have the *Witchsight* ability or are schooled in a mystical tradition, the feeling is more specific: powerful protective mystical energies have recently been dispelled from the area, probably as the meteor destroyed parts of the protective rituals' physical components (mystical runes or charged artifacts).

They have reached the dungeon where Kalthar, better known as the Dark Lord, spent many long years in captivity. What remains after the starfall is a corridor with three doors – one straight ahead, one on the long side to the right, and one to the left. The latter two are shut, while the one straight ahead is wide open, letting out the light. There used to be a fourth room where Kalthar kept some of the items and scriptures he had been allowed to bring with him from his fortress or that had been given to him over the years. But the meteorite blasted straight through that chamber, destroying everything in its path.

Bed chamber

Behind the first door to the left is a cozy bedroom. The bed is big and its pillows soft; clean linens and nightgowns are stored in a beautiful bureau of black-stained oak; three ten-liter jars of fresh water



THE PRISON

1. The Crater
2. Bed chamber
3. Studio
4. Meeting room
5. Guard room

are standing next to a commode with an enameled basin and a gold-mounted mirror. There are two paintings hanging on the wall – a half-length portrait of a middle-aged woman whose jewelry is as extravagant as her dress (Kalthar's wife who died before Lyastra started to darken), and a view of a rural homestead in a sun-drenched farmland under a clear, late summer sky (Kalthar's childhood home). Both were painted from memory by the Dark Lord during his time in captivity.

The only thing of interest is a tiny piece of jewelry next to the oil lamp on the bedside table. The blackened silver object depicts a tubby woman surrounded by a radiant halo. With a successful *Cunning* test by someone with the *Loremaster* ability, the symbol is identified as a representation of Lyra – the Prios-like sun goddess worshipped in the land of the Dark Lords before its darkening.

Studio

There is not much to see in this room, other than a chandelier in the ceiling, an easel, and a desk cluttered with pots of paint, brushes, and various painting tools. Pigment powders, oil, other items for creating paint are found in the desk drawers, and there are twenty or so frames and rolls of canvas leaning against the far wall.

There are no finished paintings in the studio, only a few vague sketches of people and buildings which Kalthar remembers from the time before the darkness. He has burned all his finished works, except those hanging in the bed chamber and the meeting room.

Meeting room

The largest chamber of the dungeon is furnished with a dining table, a larder well-stocked with necessities and various delicacies, a hearth, and a nook with two luxurious, though somewhat worn armchairs where Kalthar used to sit with his only visitor and conversation partner: Korinthia. The light emanates from an orb of glass or crystal standing on a tripod on the dining table, and is clearly of mystical origin (see Lyra's Lantern on page 76).

This room also contains the dungeon's door to the outside world: a robust, iron-clad gate with three locks, protected by mystical runes which prevent anyone but Korinthia or the two Pansar prison guards from opening it – which is done by touching the locks while focusing on three different power words. The entire complex used to be surrounded by a powerful mystical ward that would destroy all living creatures (except for those previously mentioned) who tried to enter or exit the dungeon, but it has now been dispelled by the starfall.

On the wall there is, among other things, a facial portrait of a young, dark-haired, radiant woman with a strange expression on her face – her mouth flashes a dazzling smile, but the eyes show nothing but defiance. A successful *Cunning* test points out certain similarities with Duchess Esmerelda, though it is not her (but a depiction of Korinthia as Kalthar remembers her from the time when their roles were reversed and she was his prisoner).

THE DEAD MYSTICS

Kullinan has actually just made a single miscalculation with regards to the attack: the two adepts who stayed behind to plant false evidence were attacked and killed by fire possessed on their way from the cathedral. Their burned bodies can be found outside the ruin, roughly a hundred meters to the north toward the river. They are dressed as ordinary townsfolk, but stand out by lying on top of the rubble (having clearly been killed after the starfall) and, on closer inspection, by wearing the medallions of Ordo Magica (adept) in chains around their necks.

One of them carries a rolled-up letter in a belt bag underneath his scorched clothes – a clue which Kullinan did not expect to be found, but which will partly strengthen the suspicion against House Vearra. The note reads:

Secure prisoner together
M and L, directly to Barlak with prisoner
S and F, cover/plant tracks
Fina's bakery (cellar entrance)
Follow B's directions to hideout
Wait no more than four glasses
If A does not show, leave city with prisoner

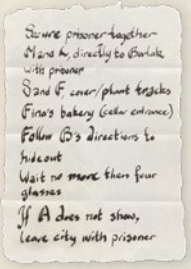
A successful *Cunning* test with the *Loremaster* ability aimed at the letter reveals that the crumpled paper is of high quality; a single sheet probably costs more than most Ambrians make in a week.

A successful *Vigilant* test aimed at the letter reveals a watermark: a diving bird of prey (hawk) inside a shield-shaped frame. Anyone with noble blood or the *Loremaster* ability recognizes the sigil of House Vearra.

THE BROTHERS' CHAMBER

Several smaller sinkholes have opened in the area surrounding the crash site; most of them are too narrow for a person to get through, and lead to empty cellars or tunnels from the time of Lindaros. But the meteor also created a larger, deeper fissure south of the cathedral ruin – one that opened a passage between the surface

Lyra



The note is available as a handout on page 166.

and the underground chamber where Ripe's brothers have rested for roughly two centuries.

As soon as they are joined by Ripe, the giant warriors will gather around the fissure and remain there until all living brothers have assembled. They then stay a while longer, conversing in their late-Symbarian dialect, discussing their plans for the future. Almost the entire day has passed before a decision is made: they will resume their duties, this time to help the human queen and her subjects keep the city free from darkness. But before spreading out across the various districts of Yndaros, the giants spend a few hours filling in the fissure with rocks and boulders found around the ruins.

The characters might suspect that the giants are doing this to prevent the humans from reaching their chamber; perhaps they think the chamber is a place of hidden treasure which, if it can be salvaged, would be well worth the effort. But in that case, they will be sorely disappointed – the giants are doing this to help, so that no one will fall into the abyss.

Should it become relevant, it takes a full 24 hours for ten people to clear enough of the fissure for them to reach the chamber; also, note that the forces of law and order will try to stop any activities that might provoke the giants.

PEOPLE IN THE AREA

Depending on when the player characters conduct their investigation of the crash site, there is a chance that they will run into some of the city's most prominent figures. Unless they rush straight to the cathedral, these people are already on site when the player characters arrive; otherwise they arrive one by one, as soon as they have made their way through the crowd and the fire possessed creatures attacking everything in their path.

Below are some brief notes about what various individuals have to say about the incident, and what kind of questions they might be willing/able to answer. Other people could also show up, if the Game Master so desires, depending on what types of contacts the player characters have (or have not) made in the past. The idea is that these individuals might become the characters' quest givers if Esmerelda does not seem like an appropriate choice; everyone can gain information about the ruins of Lindaros (or offer other kinds of rewards) if the characters agree to investigate a) what really happened, b) who is responsible, and c) what this person wishes to achieve with the attack.

Captain Livia

Pansar Captain Livia Arobel is one of the first to arrive. After the short clash with Ripe's brothers, she remains on site and takes command of the watchmen who are making their way to the crash site. If the characters are accompanied by Esmerelda, she will leave them alone; if they are alone she will give them a choice: join the growing perimeter set up by the City Watch, or leave the area immediately. Good arguments and a successful *[Persuasive –1]* test – or a letter from some faction leader – are required in order to persuade her to let them investigate the ruin.

She has neither the time nor the inclination for idle talk, especially as she has not a single answer to offer. In short, she is utterly clueless about what is going on – something that makes her testier and more dictatorial than usual.

Elori

The Elven envoy in the city, the tall and serious autumn elf Elori, is also quick to arrive. He moves across the rooftops and helps drive off the fire spirits, preferably without killing the possessed. When the Pansars arrive at the scene, he takes a few steps back, and remains near one of the partially razed houses in the outer area of the crash site, watching the destruction with a dark look on his face.

The player characters may very well walk up to him, during or after their initial investigations. Depending on what questions they ask, Elori has the following to say:

- It would take exceptionally powerful magic to tear the sky asunder, and more powerful still to direct its fragments toward a specific target.
- Such extraordinary magic torments creation, provoking its wrath and vengeance. It can be seen at the crash site (the side-effect Increased Corruption); it is probably even worse at the place where the assailants performed their destructive deed.
- The power required to achieve the effect and endure the consequences can hardly be carried by a single soul, unless it is of an eternal or already corrupted nature. (He knows nothing about the humans' mystical ceremonies).
- There is also another reason for his concerned expression: this incident will surely lead to further violence directed at groups which are being portrayed as enemies of the Ambrian realm – barbarians in general, the witches in particular, and not least the elves of Davokar.

If he has seen the player characters enter the ruin, he asks them to share their observations, but he has no further comments to contribute – only silence and grim-faced nods.

Peonio
The First Father and his right-hand man, First Theurg Peonio, were in the Palace District at the time of the starfall, but were of course quickly informed of what had happened. The interrogation they were being subjected to (regarding their role in the Whip of Prios' murders of alleged heretics) was immediately canceled, but before Korinthia left the meeting, Jeseebegai persuaded her to have a troop of Pansars escort him and Peonio to the Cathedral of Martyrs. However, her counter-proposal meant that the First Father must stay behind in the palace, under supervision.

Father Peonio arrives roughly half an hour after the attack, escorted by twenty Pansars, along with four young theurgs who guarded the First Father on his way to the meeting with the Queen. Once on site, he first remains at a safe distance from the ruin, watching with great concern. The player characters could either approach him then, or at a later time, as he heads inside the razed cathedral. But it takes someone with contacts within the Sun Church, or characters who are well-known (in a positive sense) among the followers of Prios, for Peonio to spare a moment for conversation.

Peonio can offer the following information:

- He cannot imagine that any devotee of Prios could have committed such an act. No, the perpetrator must be a barbarian or an elf; it is most likely the damned Sovereign's Oath who is trying to divide its enemy – the Ambrian people.
- It is true that the Queen, the First Father and himself were supposed to be at the cathedral when the meteor struck, but Korinthia Nightbane brought them in for questioning at the Palace. He cannot, and will not, discuss the purpose of the interrogation.
- If he is already familiar with the characters or their past deeds, he may take them aside and ask them to be his personal investigators/problem solvers. He does not trust anyone, not even Jeseebegai, but would very much like to know exactly what has happened.

Alvo Steelneck
It takes almost an hour for the commander of the City Watch, Alvo Steelneck, to make his way to the heart of the disaster zone. Having done so, he assumes command: no one who does not have the expressed or written permission of the proper authorities may step inside the iron perimeter which the City Watch and the Pansars have formed around the cathedral. *"The proper authorities"* are such that normally have the right to influence the City Watch's daily operations – nobles in positions of leadership and the heads of the Sun Church, Ordo Magica, and the Ambrian armed forces.

Alvo will not answer any questions, but if the characters stay in the area after he has arrived, they will instead be called in for a lengthy interrogation: who are they, what is their purpose in this part of town, and what have they managed to find out?

Whatever answers they give, the player characters are ordered to stay out of it; from now on, the investigation is handled by the local and royal law enforcement. But he may reconsider this if the characters offer him their services (for example in exchange for information about the ruins of Lindaros); he is convinced that the investigation will end up on the table of the Royal Sekretorium, which in turn means that political scheming and self-interest risk getting in the way of the truth. And Alvo wants to know what is really going on!

The Queen is Informed

If the characters report what they have learned about the First Father's contract killing to the authorities, the details will soon reach the Royal Sekretorium, and then the Queen herself. She is looking for anything that can be used against Jeseebegai, and immediately has some of her best agents investigate the whole affair. These agents could, if the Game Master so desires, uncover other pieces of evidence, or at least clear indications of the First Father's involvement; if so, once he has been arrested (see page 91), Jeseebegai is also accused of having *"ordered the assassination of important members of the Queen's inner circle."*

Dead Ends

EXACTLY WHAT THE player characters get up to after their investigation of the crash site is not easy to say. The most obvious clues are certainly pointing to House Vearra and the abducted prisoner, but there are other factors that may cast suspicion on the Sovereign's Oath, the Iron Pact, Ordo Magica, and many others. As always, the Game Master must be ready to improvise and turn the characters' initiatives into interesting challenges.

Below are two subplots that deserve some extra attention. Here too, the Game Master is tasked with developing the side quests whenever necessary, in terms of locations, individuals, and specific events.

THE SUN'S INSTRUMENT

One of Cathedral Manager Ansgalo's aides is in fact an assassin named Rabio, who on two previous occasions has been summoned to Yndaros to take on particularly delicate cases; cases requiring infiltration which were therefore unsuitable for Nobleman Dastan's local hatchet men.

Through Father Peonio, or perhaps one of the people accompanying him, the characters could get in contact with Ansgalo's third subordinate. She lives with her parents east of the Monger's Square and had no involvement with the wedding. From her, the characters could in turn find out that the man they are investigating called himself Gundo,

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ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

1. The Victory Vault
2. Maral's parents
3. Boska's Silver
4. The Croft
5. The Seeker's Fortune
6. Laguboi Galeia
7. Fina's Bakery
8. The Steam Bath
9. Artek Valotzar
10. Depth of the Titans
11. Sesario Street 17
12. Plob 17
13. Vearra's residence
14. The Legacy Gallery
15. Farvano Kaldel
16. Immigrant Square
17. Maltos the Sun Priest
18. Kathia's Grove
19. The Davokar Feastery
20. Kohinoor's
21. The Royal Sekretorium
22. Alenora

Targeted by the Cultists

Should Esmerelda and Sesario come to view the player characters as potential threats, this will soon become painfully evident. The leader of the noble cult sends word to all his followers, for instance the Prince in Thistle Hold and Aleana Mirelgos in Yndaros, describing the characters as *"the enemies of the Old Blood."* The cultists will then try to kill them, through various methods, but always in a way that conceals their involvement. This could include hiring assassins who attack from a distance, bribing cooks to poison the characters' food, paying bands of thugs or robbers to stage an ambush, or using their own powers of sorcery to achieve the same result. The Game Master can use the attempted murders as a way of spicing up other adventures, or to create standalone scenarios of his/her own.

and that he was hired only three weeks ago; he was competent and diligent, but also quietly eccentric. According to their colleague (who for some reason had followed Gundo after work), he was lodging with a silversmith in the Bohemian Quarter.

The barbarian silversmith, Boska, does not mind the player characters searching the attic where Gundo/Rubio had his bed and belongings. Except for more assassination tools, there is not much to go on until someone passes a *[Vigilant –5]* test: the nails in one of the wall boards display tiny marks and scratches, indicating that they have recently been pulled out and hammered back in. Hidden behind is a pouch containing an advance payment of fifty thaler, along with a rolled-up contract, sealed with wax, stamped with a symbol that is well-known throughout Yndaros – Nobleman Dastan's grinning skull with two curved daggers stabbed through the cranium.

The contract holder has the right to demand payment for the liquidation of Thabor, son of the barbarian High Chieftain and the betrothed of Duchess Esmerelda. It will only be disbursed if the mission is completed before the wedding; proof of the target's death and the contract holder's contribution to this effect are also required. The reward is 200 thaler in the form of a writ of debt, issued by the client's intermediary (Dastan).

The next step is to seek out the thief king of Old Kadizar. He can be found in his private chamber at the Croft, in a tense meeting with the upstart Grimorio Abramelin (or some other criminal). The player characters must be extremely clear about why they have come if Dastan's blackbrew-guzzling goons are to bother their employer; it may also take a certain degree of physical coercion. Finally, after quite a bit of hassle, Dastan agrees to see one of the characters, but no mystic, and all weapons must first be surrendered.

Dastan initially claims not to know what the player character is talking about. Should the character present or refer to the contract, the thief king will demand to see it or the meeting is over. When/if the document is handed over, he throws it straight into his flaming hearth. Grinning, he asks how much the character is willing to pay for information about the client; he will not accept anything less than a hundred thaler and says nothing until the money, or an object of equal value, is on his desk. When/if that happens, he has the following to say:

- The contract was issued roughly two months ago by First Theurg Peonio, who implied that the First Father approved of or even initiated the agreement.
- This is not the first time he has acted as an intermediary in the less public affairs of the Sun Church.
- Peonio visited the Croft in person, disguised of course, and dictated the terms of the contract.
- What the player character does with this information is up to him/her, but Dastan will never repeat it, no matter who asks – especially since there is no evidence of any such agreement.
- He says that the character will gain a mortal enemy if he/she chooses to confront Peonio with the information, and also stresses that such foolishness would most likely result in a contract being placed on that character's head...

And with this meeting, the characters have reached the end of the road. It should be clear that this story is separate from the starfall and that, due to the lack of evidence, further investigations will not get them very far. They must simply be satisfied with having investigated the matter to the best of their ability, and quickly focus on other possible leads.

THE LOVESICK

When the player characters find Lugander – obviously the dead person who Esmerelda failed to mention as she listed the people present – their first impulse might be to ask the Duchess about it. When she sees him and/or hears his name, she twitches (noticeable with a successful *[Vigilant –5]* test), but quickly regains her composure. If the characters know his name, Esmerelda says that she recognizes it, yet claims never to have met him. Further questions/pressure will only make her irritated.

The thing that can take them forward is a key with an attached number badge that can be found in one of the inside pockets of the dead man's fur-trimmed barbarian coat; on the back of the number badge is the letter X, carved into the wood. The characters can ask around at other inns to learn that the key goes to one of the rooms at the Seeker's Fortune – a crummy tavern in eastern Yndaros with a few beds for rent. And sure enough, the owner Faram and his regulars at the Seeker's Fortune have a lot to say about the colorful young man:

- He called himself Gander and arrived almost ten days ago.
- He had a taste for brutebrew as well as other strong spirits, often drinking himself into a stupor or picking fights with other guests.

- But he could also be entertaining. One night he got absolutely wasted and started pontificating about his secret and highly carnal relations with the Queen; he even claimed to be secretly engaged with his *"black queen"*; he called himself *"the prince of darkness"* and said that he would soon be exalted as king, then emperor; all while alternately sobbing, roaring, and singing wistful love songs.

Faram will gladly let the characters have a closer look at the room which Gander rented. Aside from a copper goblet and something that may be recognized as dried blood (a successful *Cunning* test with the *Medicus* or *Beast Lore* ability), there is a crumpled sheet of paper behind the stove, as if someone had meant to burn it but missed the opening.

The letter can be found as a handout on page 170 and ends abruptly, as if the writer was dissatisfied with something and decided to burn it. Note that Lugander never mentioned Esmerelda's name; he might just as well have been talking about Korinthia or someone else altogether. It is therefore not unreasonable to conclude that Lugander had gone mad with unrequited love, probably for one of the sisters, and that he went to the Cathedral of Martyrs in the hope of meeting, or just to watch the object of his love from afar. But there is a way to learn more about the dark-minded lover...

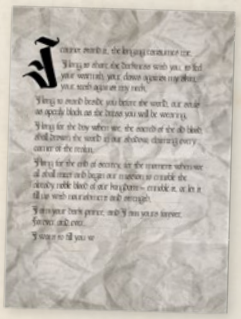
The business man, and now baron, Laguboi Galeia lives in the enclosed part of the Temple District. His grand residence, designed to resemble the house he was forced to abandon in the Alberian capital of Kandoria, is set on a walled lot and guarded by a group of capable bodyguards. If the player characters are to have any chance of meeting him, they must accuse his son of crimes so terrible that his heart skips a few beats out of fatherly guilt. For example, the allegation that Lugander participated in the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs will probably suffice.

Laguboi receives them in the parlor on the top floor, in a tremendous hall with two ornamented fireplaces dominating the short ends. The only furniture is a seating set with a low marble table in the middle of the hall, surrounded by candelabra the height of a grown man. The baron has a lot to say:

- His son is a deeply troubled young man. A few years ago, he fell out of favor with the Queen because he was spending too much time with the Duchess of Kasandrien – something that was highly inappropriate for such a lowborn person.
- Lugander loved Esmerelda, but as far as the Baron knows, they were no more than friends. However, his son changed radically during that time, possibly because of his association with the Duchess, but more likely through his desperate search for mystical means of having his love reciprocated.
- He became crueler and increasingly consumed by darkness, saying that he despised his low birth; that he deserved better; that he would prove that his blood was so noble that it could never be tainted or corrupted.
- The Baron did not object when Korinthia proposed that his son should be sent away from Yndaros, to serve as an assistant at the Legation on Karvosti. He does not know how Esmerelda felt about it, but can only assume that she was relieved.
- Since that decision was made, they have only spoken on one occasion, and it ended with an argument that Laguboi will never forget: his son renounced his inheritance and claimed to be part of a larger, nobler family which he called the Sacred of the Old Blood.
- The Baron concludes: *"No matter how depraved my son had become, no matter what he may have learned during his years on Karvosti, he would never take part in an attack that could endanger Duchess Esmerelda: she was his world."*
- And he ends with some well-meaning advice: *"Forget about Lugander, never mention his name, especially not to Esmerelda or anyone who has her or the Queen's ear. Your answers will be met with silence and, at worst, you risk making enemies of the most powerful people in Ambria."*

Once again, it is clear that this trail will not lead them any closer to having their questions about the starfall answered. What the player characters do next is up to them. If the Game Master so wishes, a successful *Cunning* test with the *Loremaster* ability could lead to the conclusion that Baron Laguboi is probably right. If they still confront Esmerelda with the crumpled letter, or ask her about the Sacred of the Old Blood, they will find themselves in a real pickle. Esmerelda dismisses Lugander as a lovesick moron who seemed amusing at first, but soon turned nasty and troublesome. However, at the earliest opportunity she will discuss the player characters with her father, who decides that they must be silenced, and soon.

We would suggest that this plot is put on hold until the adventure *The Darkest Star* has come to an end, after which the Game Master must decide what happens when the player characters are targeted by the cultists of the Sacred of the Old Blood.



The letter can be found as a handout on page 170.

ACT 2:

Fallen Stars

THE SECTIONS OF ACT II are titled The Dark Lord, The Traitors of House Vearra, and the Trail of the Ceremony. The first two begin directly after certain clues have been found inside or around the cathedral ruin; the last one will probably not become relevant until the characters have investigated House Vearra's estate or spoken to Kalthar. It should also be said that the three parts are quite different in character – one focusing on combat, another on problem-solving, and the third on social challenges. Our hope is that all characters will get a chance to play a key role in one of them!

THE ORDER IN which the characters follow up on said clues may affect the development of the adventure – for example, starting with the Vearra storyline could give Kullinan time to meet and speak with the Dark Lord before the characters do. But thanks to mistakes made by Kullinan, the player characters' discoveries should lead to the following insights, in roughly the following order:

The person who orchestrated the attacks...
... is seeking in-depth knowledge about the nature of corruption, and seems to believe that the current understanding is incorrect/misleading.
... implies that he must communicate with the spirit of a long dead ruler.
... calls himself Artel, and is probably the supposedly deceased "Artel the Vile" who committed war crimes during the Great War.
... is interested in the fortune hunter Elmendra.
... has marked a number of locations on a map of Yndaros, which turn out to be entrances into underground Lindaros.
... committed his war crime during the Battle of Haaras, when he performed the same ceremony that struck the Cathedral of Martyrs, so poorly that many of the attending nobles were turned into abominations.
... is in fact the aged Order Master Kullinan Furia.

These insights can be summarized by the player characters themselves or with the help of their quest giver (if they have one): Kullinan Furia wants to go down to the ruins of Lindaros, to find the body/spirit of an ancient "ruler" who can give him directions to Symbar. This leads the player characters (possibly back) to the question that opens act III – where can they find the remains of this "ruler"?

The Dark Lord

AT THE START of the adventure, Kullinan is at House Vearra's estate. Meanwhile, his adepts are tasked with bringing the Dark Lord from the dungeon and keeping him hidden until their master arrives, hopefully a couple of hours later. The hideout where Kalthar is eventually taken is a cellar vault beneath

New Town, which can be accessed through the many ground level tunnels running through the densely populated district. The player characters must locate the cellar, interrogate any surviving guards, and decide what to do with the leader of the enemy who laid waste to Alberetor.

The idea is that this hunt should be conducted at a high pace, spurred by the time limit specified in the dead adept's notes. On occasions when the characters are faced with a crucial choice, or awaiting a meeting with some source of information, the Game Master can emphasize this by letting the harbor bell ring (every full and half hour) or having someone offer them food while mentioning that it is almost time for *"a morning brew"* or *"lunch."*

FINA'S BAKERY

The first stop will probably be Fina's Bakery in the Bohemian Quarter, since this place was pointed out in the letter the player characters found in the dead adept's belt bag. The small shop faces a busy road, and in the back is a courtyard – this is where they can find the entrance to the basement mentioned in the letter.

The Storage Room

Through the windows on the ground floor, the characters can see at least five people moving around inside the bakery, their sweaty faces white with flour. They must pass a *Discreet* test not to be detected, both when sneaking up to the basement entrance and when breaking through the locked door.

Behind the door is a room full of ingredients (sacks of flour and sugar, barrels of fresh water, jugs of milk, bags of herbs and spices, and so on). They can all see footprints on the dusty floor, so many that the number of individuals cannot be determined. But if someone explicitly says that he/she conducts a thorough search of the space, an interesting discovery is made: a successful *Vigilant* test reveals that someone has recently huddled behind a stack of flour bags – tracks suggest that someone has stood there on his or her knees; someone who also left behind a crocheted potholder whose topside, unlike the floor, is completely clean.

Buhuluk

The player characters have no problem getting hold of the little spy; none of the bakery's employees are willing to put up a fight or oppose them in any way. For instance, should they hold up the potholder, four fingers will soon be pointing at the same person: their goblin helper, Buhuluk. He is terrified at first, then weeps with relief when it turns out that the characters only want to ask him some questions.

- He went down to get a bag of flour when the backdoor burst open and two of *"the owner's henchmen"* stepped inside.
- Utterly terrified of the owner, Buhuluk dived down behind the flour bags.
- The owner is a dwarf, but neither Buhuluk nor anyone else who works at the bakery knows his name or which family he belongs to.
- It was not long before more company arrived. He did not see anything, but he heard them.
- They talked about hiding a prisoner, and which route to take to *"Plob 17."* Buhuluk has no idea what Plob 17 is, but it was mentioned several times.
- They also mentioned the Steam Bath by the harbor. Perhaps they are connected?

Note that the Steam Bath was mentioned because the Vanoviz family is currently in conflict with Grimorio Abramelin; the discussion concerned how to bring the prisoner to New Town without running into his minions. Also note that, if any of the player characters is of dwarven descent, it only takes a successful *Cunning* test for that person to figure out what a "Plob" is, without any knowledge about the numbering.

THE STEAM BATH

Buhuluk's talk about the Steam Bath leads to a dead end, but it could be an interesting and (in time) rewarding one – even if Grimorio Abramelin is not prepared to help them right away, a relationship with him may prove useful in both the short and the long term.

Bathhouse guests

Ten or so members of Grimorio's criminal organization, the Shamans, are always there, dressed as the bathhouse staff – scrubbing floors, attending to guests, shoveling coal into the boilers, and serving refreshments or stronger stimulants of both a legal and illegal nature.

The entrance fee is one (1) thaler during the day, two shillings at night, and five ortegs during the last hour before midnight (remember that goblins and ogres are banned!). Before they are allowed inside the bathhouse itself, everyone must change into a simple, white loincloth provided by the staff. Once inside, the player characters must be fairly well-known, or carry a letter from some prominent figure, to be granted a meeting with the manager

Kullinan's Adventures

Exactly what Kullinan does while being pursued by the player characters is irrelevant to the adventure, unless the Game Master wishes otherwise. What is clear is that, having returned from House Vearra's estate, he devotes himself to two main tasks: investigating various entrances to underground Lindaros, and trying to find a suitable Spiritualist after the characters have freed Kalthar. How he gets to the Guardian's Crypt is not set in stone, but we suggest that he goes down through an opening at the Refugee Camp or the Dome, and makes his way north through the Underworld (possibly guided by his Spiritualist).

The former street magician has become The Warlock – the future crime lord of Yndaros.

without complications. A well-placed bribe of ten thaler will also do the trick, as will fighting their way inside (although it will probably make Grimorio even less talkative than usual).

Grimorio

The manager can usually be found in his private bath salon, which also serves as his office – complete with a steaming hot pool, a desk nook, and four divans where he receives his guests. Regardless of how the player characters got there, Grimorio says that he neither wants to nor has to answer their questions; if they show him a letter from someone important, he just snorts and points out that he could have a better forgery made within a quarter glass.

However, if the characters ask him about Plob 17, he will make them an offer: *"You look capable; I could use your help with a small job, something my... employees have a hard time handling, well-known as they are by appearance and manners..."* In short: if they grant him a favor, he agrees to answer one (1) question. The favor is to attack one of Nobleman Dastan's storehouses, bring back a small wooden crate containing eight doses of Transforming Draught, and burn the rest (preferably the entire building).

Provided that the characters carry out this favor (see below), or find something else which the Game Master deems of equal value to the bathhouse manager, Grimorio will answer one question. If they start by asking why the dwarves were talking about the Steam Bath, he gives them a disappointed look and asks if that is really what they want to know. If they persist, they too will be disappointed: *"I have no idea, but maybe they belong to one of the dwarven families who I and my employees have had a bit of a quarrel with; maybe they were discussing how to avoid running into us?"* And so, the meeting is over.

If they ask him about *"Plob 17,"* however, he can tell them the following:

- "Plob" is what the dwarves call the tunnels (or roofed alleys) running through the buildings, thus linking the streets, in New Town.
- It was the dwarves who numbered the Plobs, in the order in which they were built.
- He unrolls a map of Yndaros on his desk and points out where the player characters can find number 17.

Grimorio's shamans

"Oh, what is that behind your ear, a dagger!?"

During his years as a street magician, Grimorio came to know almost the entire Yndaros underworld, so when he decided to change careers he knew exactly who to recruit. When they are not working at the Steam Bath, or running errands that require their discretion, they are easy to spot – young women and men in studded leather armor, worn under wide cloaks that are black on the outside and crimson on the inside. And they carry long, broad-bladed daggers as naturally as they wear their gleeful smiles.

Manner	Teases playfully		
Race	Changeling or Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Contacts* (the underworld) *or Shapeshifter* (I)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Discreet** 13 (–3), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (adept), *Knife Play* (adept), *Poisoner* (novice), *Rapid Reflexes* (novice), *Twin Attack* (novice)		
Weapons Quick	2 daggers 3 (+ poison, 3 for 3 turns), 3 attacks at the same target each turn		
Armor	Studded leather 3 (reinforced)		
Defense	–6		
Toughness	10	**Pain threshold**	5
Equipment	1D4 doses moderate poison, assassin's blade hidden at the lower back, 1D4 thaler		

Shadow	Glossy dark brown, like freshly polished bronze (corruption: 0)

Tactics: The shamans dance in and out of melee combat, delivering swift attacks, starting with lightly armored opponents. Should the situation seem tricky, they have Grimorio's permission to flee, regardless of who or how many of them are left behind.

In Service of the Shamans

From a spy inside Nobleman Dastan's organization, Grimorio has learned that the thief king recently received a package from the north, containing drugs and medicine which because of their corrupting side-effects are blacklisted in Ambria. These are currently being stored down at the harbor, in a small warehouse marked with Dastan's grinning skull.

There are quite a lot of people in the area, but they are easily distracted. A sizable fire or a thundering brawl on the dock ought to do it, and should be easy for the player characters to arrange.

The building consists of a single room and has two doors, as well as a hatch in the roof. There is a guard posted outside each door, and another three playing dice inside the building (stats as Dastan's thugs below). Their orders are to keep the merchandise safe until the thief king has had a chance to inspect it, and they are more afraid of disappointing the boss than they are of fighting the characters.

Provided that the characters create some kind of diversion and prevent the guards from screaming for help, this should not be a problem. However, they must make sure to cover their faces; if any of Dastan's thugs survives and knows who attacked the storehouse, they will probably have a very persistent arch enemy on their heels...

Dastan's Thugs

"Me, cowardly? No, smart!"

Nobleman Dastan has educated his thugs according to his own characteristic morals – everything is allowed, as long as it leads to victory and Dastan getting richer in the process. His group of minions includes men and women, young and old, but they have all taken their leader's principles to heart and proven themselves competent as well as loyal. Most of them dress like any other inhabitant of Old Kadizar, but they are easily recognized by their haughty posture and their two curved stilettos.

Manner	Carefully assessing
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Contacts* (the underworld)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 15 (–5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 5 (+5), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Backstab* (master), *Cheap Shot* (adept), *Feint* (adept), *Twin Attack* (novice)
Weapons Discreet	Two stilettos 4 (+4 if *Advantage*) and blood-letting 2 each turn, 2 attacks at the same target
Armor	Leather 2
Defense	–4
Toughness	13 **Pain Threshold** 7
Equipment	Brass knuckles, pouch of chewing resin, 1D8 thaler
Shadow	Matte dark yellow, like a dusty copper plate (corruption: 0)

Tactics: The thugs always move in groups of five to six individuals and avoid attacking enemies who are equal or greater in number. Their tactic consists entirely of trying to gain an *Advantage* over one or several enemies at a time, to inflict as much damage as they possibly can. If the numbers are even, they will instead use their cheap shots to drop enemies to the ground and gain an *Advantage* that way.

THE KING OF THE DWARVES

There are other ways to learn what a "Plob" is and where number seventeen can be found. All dwarves in Yndaros know what the term refers to – namely, what are colloquially known as the "underpasses," which interconnect the otherwise isolated cross streets of New Town. Most of them resemble narrow, roofed cobblestone alleys, though some are equipped with twin-gates wide enough that entire carriages can pass through them. The player characters can also go to the City Watch headquarters to learn the meaning of the word, or to one of their contacts if the Game Master deems him or her knowledgeable about dwarven architecture.

Number 17

Having found out what Plob means, the characters must identify the specific underpass which Buhuluk heard about. The people of New Town can tell them about a tunnel adjacent to the address Sesario Street #17, but if they go over there, they risk being drawn into a completely different story (see The Young Lovers below).

In order to find the right place, the player characters must speak with someone who understands the numbering system that was established during the construction and has since been adopted by

Danger Ahead

Note that if the characters activate mystical powers after the midnight following the starfall, any outbreaks of corruption risk being detected by Ripe and his brothers – something that will probably be detrimental, but could also be used to the characters' advantage, for example to keep a group of dwarf thugs busy if the outbreak occurs in the right place...

Blood Coin

When favors are used as currency among the dwarves, those who place themselves in debt are given a red coin the size of a palm. On one side of the coin are two steel-clad fists shaking hands, on the other is a stylized noose. The coin is meant to serve as a reminder of the agreement, but also of what awaits the debtors if they do not honor their part of the contract. When the favor is returned, the coin is as well, and if the owner accepts it the deal is concluded.

Blood coin

smugglers and other crooks. Nobleman Dastan, Grimorio Abramelin, and Merandra may of course be of assistance, but they will all demand payment or a favor in return. Many of their minions are also familiar with the unofficial numbering, but will initially shrug, shake their heads, and refer them to respective leaders (perhaps a generous reward will make them change their minds?).

The same goes for the city's dwarven population – many understand the numbering, but they are not willing and usually not allowed to talk to strangers (that is to say, non-dwarves). But this isolationist law does not apply to the matriarchs and patriarchs of the dwarven families.

Artek Valotzar

It only takes a successful *Cunning* test to remember that Artek Valotzar was in charge of construction in New Town; that is supposedly how he amassed the fortune which made him the most famous dwarf in Yndaros. Rumor also has it that he now owns twenty or so business operations in the city's harbor and artisan districts, and some experts claim that he is the king of all Yndaros-based dwarves.

There are two ways to get in touch with Patriarch Valotzar – visiting his residence in the Temple District, or one of his businesses, such as the inn called the Depths of the Titans. All his subordinates are told to notify him directly whenever some prominent human is trying to contact him; the recipe for his success is based entirely on the exchange of favors between the city's already powerful individuals. But of course, it is crucial that the player characters are considered important enough – either by virtue of their own status and position, or by carrying a letter that bears the sigil of some influential figure.

Less than half an hour after first contact, the characters will find themselves in a bumpy carriage with black jut bags over their heads. Judging by the carriage's movements, they are being taken away from the city along one of the country roads

Artek Valotzar regards himself as the obvious leader and future king of his people.

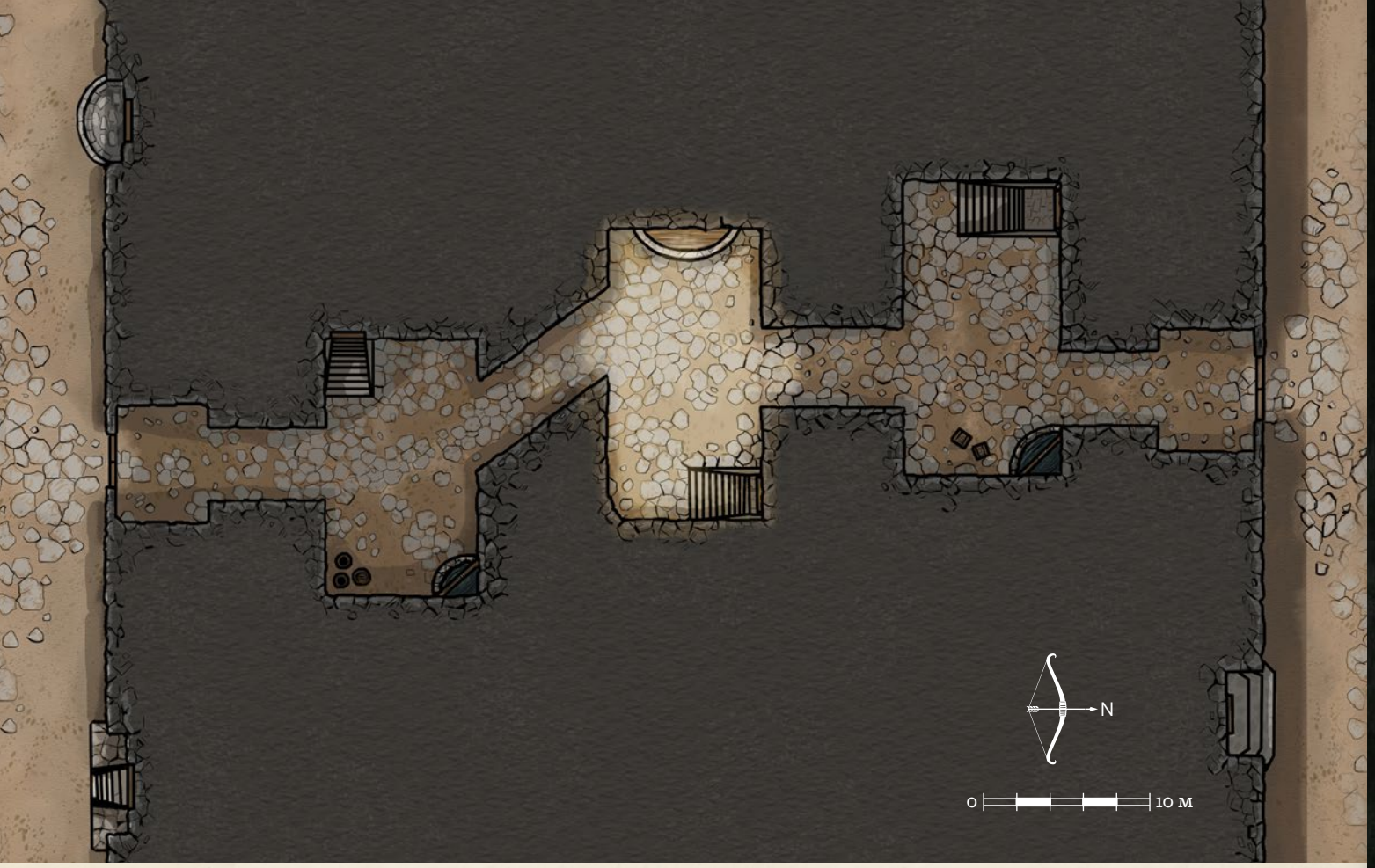
of Yndarien. Shortly after leaving Yndaros, they are told to remove the bags. The carriage's shutters are closed, and in the faint light of a swaying oil lamp they see a well-dressed dwarven gentleman standing on the floor between the bench seats.

Artek is courteous but curt, and clearly thinks that he is better than the player characters. If the characters explain that they are looking for a person who has been abducted or kidnapped by other dwarves, he is happy to help free of charge; not out of kindness, however, but because he will gladly contribute to actions that will adversely affect the other dwarven families in the city. Should they be unwilling to share such information, one of the characters must enter a verbal contract stating that he or she owes Artek Valotzar one unspecified favor; in return, the individual in question is then given a so-called Blood Coin, as a reminder of the agreement.

When the conversation is over, the carriage stops and Artek gets off right there in the Ambrian countryside. The doors slam shut, the driver turns the carriage around, and a quarter hour later the characters are dropped off at the same place where they were picked up.

THE YOUNG LOVERS

The son of Patriarch Magnos Baldysik and the daughter of Matriarch Izobel Alzerek are in love. Their love is obviously forbidden, which is why they must meet in utmost secrecy, often during daytime when it is easier for each to ascribe their absence to work or the supervision of family businesses. They have recently been meeting in an underground chamber which can be accessed from Plob 8 (the one with an entrance on Sesario Street #17). It is decorated like



a luxurious bedroom, where they can also share the fancy meals they bring with them.

Only their closest confidants know about the affair, so if the player characters interrupt there should not be many people standing in their way. There is a single dwarf leaning against the wall just outside the plob's door to the street, and another two inside the tunnel itself, next to the stairs leading down to the basement. These are skilled fighters, young and hardened in battle between the dwarven families of Yndaros (stats as a Dwarf Thug, page 120).

The basement door is locked, but can be kicked down or lockpicked. The latter option requires a successful *Discreet* test so as not to alert the young lovers. Behind the door is a short corridor that leads to a half-open door; a character who passes a *Vigilant* test can hear lustful sounds coming from the other side. The lovers, Morak and Beliza, are alone in there.

How this situation develops is difficult to foresee. Hopefully, the characters will not resort to violence, and perhaps the encounter will lead to the characters gaining leverage over two of the most influential dwarves in the capital!

THE HIDEOUT

The tunnel mentioned by the dwarves at Fina's bakery turns out to be located deep within New Town, near the riverbank. There the player characters will face a series of challenges; if they can overcome all of them, they will learn a great deal about what really happened during the wedding rehearsal. First of all, they must enter Plob 17, preferably without making too much noise; they must then find the right way down, get past a couple of alarm systems, and finally defeat the adepts and dwarf thugs who are guarding the Dark Lord.

Ways inside

Plob 17 is a narrow underpass, but opens into three small courtyards, the middle one being without a roof, like a shaft to the sky. The characters can enter through the doors facing respective cross street or by roping down through the opening in the roof. There are also glass doors leading to

Characters on Standby

If the players in your group decide to have their characters keep Plob 17 under surveillance instead of trying to get inside, they might be waiting a long time, and possibly miss out on important information. To avoid this, the Game Master can (with or without a *Cunning* test) let a participating ritualist or mystic realize that the person they are waiting for might very well have prepared a *Magic Circle* inside the hideout, in which case they risk missing him or her completely.

small half-balconies out in the sunlit shaft; in other words, if the characters can get inside one of these houses (without raising the suspicion of the guards at the entrances of Plob 17), they can reach the tunnel that way as well.

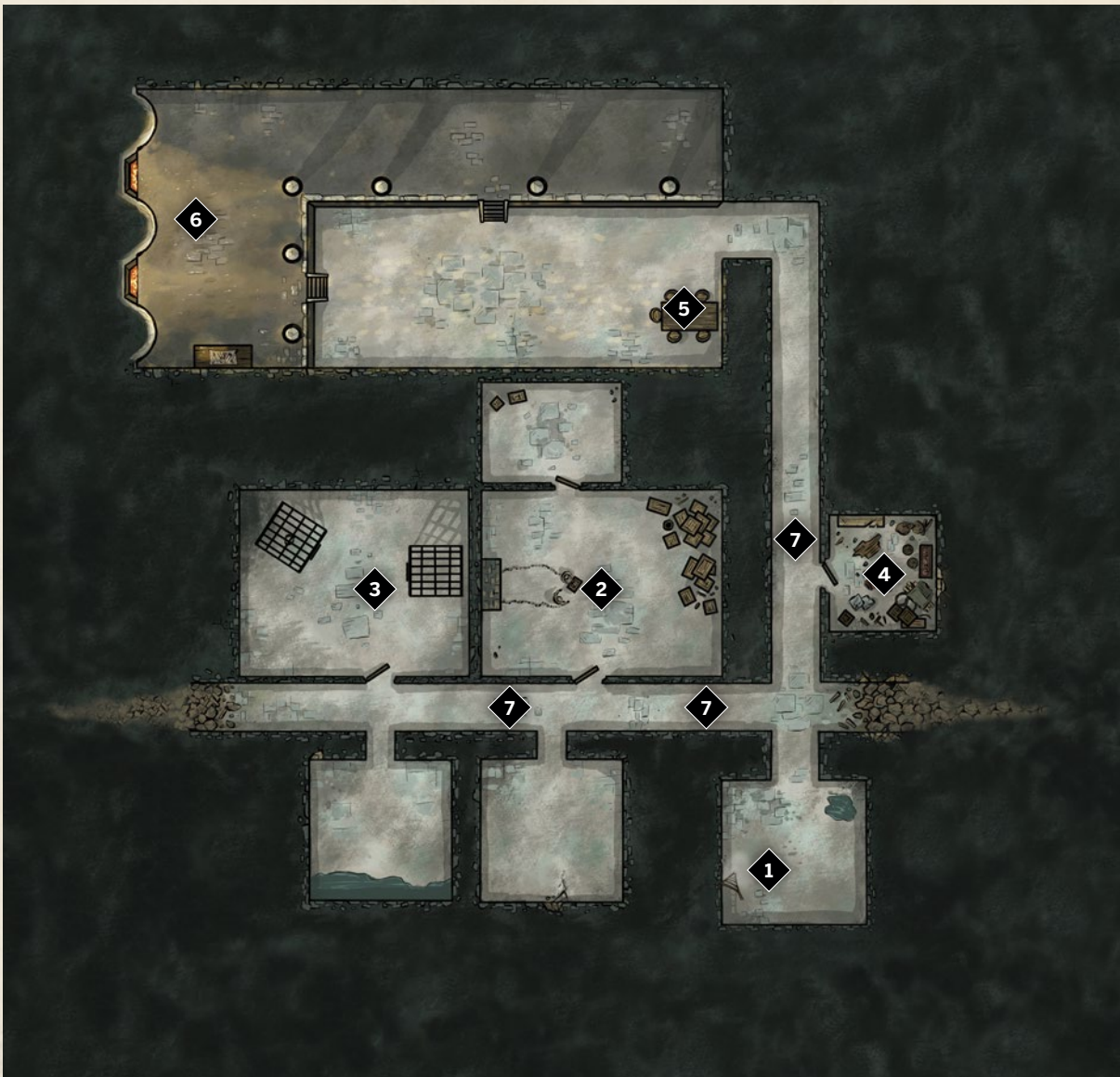
Three of the Vanoviz family's most capable thugs are posted at each entrance, two outside the door and one on the inside (ready to raise the alarm if anything should happen out on the streets). On the roof is another dwarf, who ropes down to the others whenever a threat arises. Inside the plob itself, there are four guards patrolling in pairs.

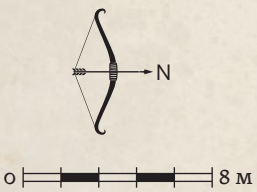
If the characters want to avoid alerting the guards inside the vault, it will take precision and discretion, which probably means that they must find out more about the plob – by using mystical powers (e.g. *Borrow Beast* or *Clairvoyance*), hiring/calling upon mystical assistance, or at least talking to someone from the area who can describe what it looks like on the other side of the doors. As always, the Game Master should reward all good ideas and turn the bad ones into tough challenges.

Passages down

In each of the three courtyards is a stairway leading underground. The one closest to the river is locked from the outside, with a thick iron bar and a massive padlock. The stairs are full of dust and debris that seem to be undisturbed, which should be yet another reason for the player characters to ignore that passage. Inside is a corridor with a handful of openings to both left and right, and muddy water covering the ground. This space was being made into a storage area, but construction was canceled as it turned out to be situated too close to the river.

At the foot of the stairway in the sunlit courtyard is an iron-clad oak door with two lock casings. Behind it is a cellar much like the one described above, but complete with a whitewashed vaulted ceiling and paved floor. In the room immediately to the right are ten wooden crates stacked on top of each other, roughly two meters wide and half as tall and deep. An emblem has been burnt into the rough wood – a grinning skull with two daggers through the cranium; the symbol of Nobleman Dastan.





THE HIDEOUT

1. Rope ladder
2. The Goblins
3. Mesh cages
4. Debris
5. The Adepts
6. Kalthar
7. Tripwires

The Tainted Soil

Those who give the soil in the crates more than just a slight touch can feel a tingling in their skin. If they do not brush themselves off thoroughly, they must roll a *Strong* test every hour; each failure inflicts 1 point of temporary corruption which does not go away until the skin has been scrubbed clean.

This cellar is the first stop on the thief king's smuggling route between the berths of New Town and Old Kadizar. At the moment it will probably be more or less empty, except for the wooden crates (the Game Master decides); they contain tainted soil from a blight-marked part of Davokar – something Ambrian cultists would pay good money for. The blight can be detected with the *Witchsight* ability and a *Vigilant* test, but it is not powerful enough for people to be corrupted just by looking at or slightly touching the content of the crates. If the characters break in and steal something, they better not leave any tracks...

The right passage down is the one farthest from the river. To open the door, the characters must pick two locks and undo the latch on the other side, or break it down with prying tools and repeated kicking. Picking the lock is no problem for someone with lockpicks, but the latch takes more finesse – the player characters will either need some kind of useful mystical power or special tools that allow them to drill a hole in the door and remove the latch. If the door is to be forced open, there is enough room for two people to work together; it is pried open when both characters pass a *Strong* test during the same turn.

Into the vault

Behind the door is a whitewashed corridor with a paved floor and five openings on either side. All side rooms are empty, but in the second innermost room to the left, there is an opening in the wall opposite the entrance: a crack, almost two meters wide at the bottom and narrowing at the top. A few meters in, there is an irregular hole in the ground; a rope ladder hangs over the edge, attached to wedges which have been hammered into the bedrock. And on their way to the opening and the hole, the characters encounter the first alarm system: a silk-thin tripwire which, if touched, releases a bundle of scrap metal hanging in the shaft with the rope ladder. Whoever goes first must pass a *[Vigilant –1]* test to detect and avoid the trap. Otherwise the guards will be ready for them.

The rope ladder leads to a demarcated basement complex from the time of Lindaros, roughly four meters below the surface. Another three tripwire alarms have been set up down here, as marked on the map. The chambers are sometimes used by the Vanoviz family when there is something or someone that must be hidden from the outside world. One of them contains two man-sized mesh cages; one empty, the other occupied by a famished, emaciated dwarf woman who is believed to have disgraced her family (if the characters try to free her, she protests, determined to atone for her errant ways). In another room are two goblin slaves. They are chained to the wall, toiling with drug-induced fervor: polishing the goblets, silverware and ornaments which the Vanoviz family brought with them as they fled Küam Zamok. There are at least a dozen large crates in the room; the goblins seem to have finished half of them.

The vault and the guards

The Dark Lord is held in one of the larger vaults of the complex, guarded by a group of dwarf thugs. If this is the first trail the player characters follow after their investigation of the cathedral, Kullinan's adepts, Melea and Lorenda, are also there.

There is little furniture, other than the stool on which Kalthar is sitting, a table with chairs by the entrance, and a tool bench which reveals the main purpose of the chamber – pliers, struts, forks, knives, clamps and other instruments that might come in handy when dealing with reluctant sources of information. Last but not least, Kullinan has been allowed to prepare a magic circle on the floor, drawn in chalk, as that was all he had time for.

Characters with the *Ritualist* ability or training in a mystical tradition who pass a *Vigilant* test can see that the circle is damaged, as if someone (deliberately or not) has erased a part of its outer circuit; an almost imperceptibly small one, but enough to break the circle. This is of course Kalthar's doing – as the guards shoved him past the circle he pretended to trip, spat on the ground and made a swift swipe with his cloak.

If the characters manage to sneak up on the guards without being detected, the two order adepts will be sitting at the table to the left inside the open doorway (provided that they are at the vault at all). They can hence be taken by surprise; as usual, it requires a successful *[Discreet←Vigilant]* test. The dwarves are in the back with the prisoner – two of them standing next to him, one by the tool bench, the others sitting on the floor a bit farther away. The Game Master ought to adjust the number of dwarves according to the size and fighting capacity of the player group, but they should be at least as many as the characters.

Kalthar accepts his fate and refuses to resort to violence or even to mystically controlling the weak-minded.

KULLINAN'S ADEPTS			
Manner	Pale, shaken		
Race	Human (Ambrian)		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Contacts* (Ordo Magica)		
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*Anathema* (adept), *Bend Will* (adept), *Loremaster* (adept), *Mind Throw* (adept), *Ritualist* (adept: *Break Link, Clairvoyance, Magic Circle*), *Wizardry* (adept)		
Weapons	None		
Armor	Order cloak 2		
Defense	0		
Toughness	10	**Pain threshold**	4
Equipment	Order medallion, Mystical focus (Wizardry), 1D6+2 thaler		
Shadow	Blinding silvery-white with streaks of copper (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: The adepts position themselves behind any allies they might have before casting *Bend Will*, *Mind Throw*, or assisting their friends with *Anathema*. They are not prepared to die in battle, if the outcome clearly favors the enemy.			

DWARF THUG			
Manner	Grim, avoids eye contact		
Race	Dwarf		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Earth Bound*		
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)			
Abilities	*Feat of Strength* (novice), *Iron Fist* (adept), *Natural Warrior* (master), *Recovery* (adept), *Retribution* (novice), *Wrestling* (novice)		
Weapons Strong	Unarmed 8, two attacks at the same target		
Armor	Hardened leather 3 (reinforced)		
Defense	+2		
Toughness	20	**Pain Threshold**	8
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Mottled brown, like damp soil (corruption: 0)		
Tactics: If the dwarves outnumber the enemy, some will use *Wrestling* to grip one or several opponents while the others attack with fists and kicks. If there is time, they will start by trying to curse one enemy each (*Retribution*), otherwise they charge straight into battle.			

Kullinan's adepts

The order adepts Melea and Lorenda wear simple, dark blue order cloaks, and are both schooled in the tradition known as Mentalism. At first they adopt a defiantly arrogant attitude, seemingly convinced that their actions are justified, that the suffering and death of a few are a price that must be paid for humanity to advance and evolve. But deep down, the starfall has seriously shaken their convictions.

Dwarf Thug

The younger, able-bodied dwarves of Yndaros have been trained in unarmed combat since childhood; not to become warriors, but as a part of the physical education of the dwarven elite, meant to give them confidence, authority and a noble posture. This training has had more concrete uses in human society, in the fight against other families and in day-to-day operations. Another advantage of the unarmed techniques is that they make the humans regard dwarves as less of a threat – but they are sorely mistaken...

INTERROGATION

Hopefully, the player characters are wise enough to take at least one of the adepts alive, preferably one of the dwarves as well. If so, they will learn the following:

Kullinan's Adepts

Melea and/or Lorenda struggle to maintain the conviction that their actions are justified by the goals they are striving for – not only the pursuit of knowledge, but the blossoming of humanity that will follow in its wake. But it does not take much to break them; references to hundreds of dead, a blight-stricken capital, and increased hostility between the people of the region are enough to turn their defiance into guilt-ridden angst. When that happens, the characters will acquire the following information:

- Until three months ago, she (or they) was working as a teacher at Ordo Magica, but was also part of a group that met at night to plan an expedition into the depths of Davokar, preferably to the city of Symbar itself if they could find it.
- They used to meet at a tavern called the Mystic's Apprentice in the Temple District, and it was there that their current master found them. He knew a lot about Symbarian history and the dangers of Davokar, and quickly became a frequent guest at their table.
- Once he had gained their trust, he introduced himself as Artel and offered to take them under his wing, as a teacher and guide in their search for the heart of Davokar.
- He did not answer questions about himself or his past, but she and the others assumed that he really was the arch mage who crushed the Dark Lords during the battle of Haaras, but was sentenced to death as the side-effects affected a large number of nobles. Apparently, the sentence was never carried out.
- Artel was often absent for long periods of time, and regarding the events of today, the adepts did not know exactly what he was planning; only that they would gather at a certain place, ready to perform a number of predetermined tasks (see the list on page 105).
- They do not know who the prisoner is, only that he is crucial in their search for Symbar.
- Over the past month, the Master has on several occasions said that they will soon be leaving Ambria; that he will soon know the way to Symbar.

The Dwarves

The dwarves guarding the Dark Lord have little to offer in terms of information. They refuse to talk, and even if they are coerced or subjected to a telepathic interrogation, they can only divulge the following:

- They are part of the proud family of Vanoviz.
- Patriarch Pietero ordered them to meet up with the mystics, take them to the vault, and keep them safe.
- They have no idea who the mystics are, why they need protecting, or who is in their custody.
- The patriarch is probably at his apartment above Fina's Bakery in the Bohemian Quarter.

Player characters trying to seek out the patriarch will not succeed – the luxurious apartment is empty, and it appears that the owner has grabbed a bunch of valuables and left in a hurry. As soon as the meteor struck, Pietero realized that he was involved in something much greater and much more serious than he had imagined. He has gone underground (literally) and will not emerge until the situation has calmed down and he is certain that neither his employer (who called himself Artel), the authorities, nor other dwarven families are out to get him.

KALTHAR'S PLEA

When things have calmed down, the characters will likely shift their focus to the prisoner, who watches them from deep within his hood. He rises on shaky legs, hands tied behind his back. Whatever the characters are saying, he interrupts them: *"What do you want with me?"*

He speaks in a strange dialect, or rather an accent, as if Ambrian is not his mother tongue. A successful *Cunning* test with the *Loremaster* ability reveals that he is probably from Lyastra, the devastated realm of the Dark Lords.

If the characters start interrogating him, he interrupts them once again: *"We can talk, but not here. We must go to a secure location, shielded from eyes, ears, and mystical perception. You and me, no one else. Now!"*

The player characters must smuggle the prisoner somewhere else and protect the place with some kind of ritual (such as *Witch Circle*, *Sanctifying Rite* or *Sanctum*). If they cannot do so themselves, they must get some contact to help them, or possibly purchase a Ritual Codex (see page 126 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*). In any case, they will not get a word out of Kalthar until this is done.

CONVERSING WITH THE DARK LORD

Only when Kalthar feels confident that the place where they have taken him is sufficiently protected from prying eyes is he ready to start answering questions. It will probably not be a very long conversation, but he has nothing to hide – he takes responsibility for all the terrible things that happened because of his crimes against Creation, and can only hope that others will learn from his fateful mistakes. However, he is reluctant to discuss Korinthia or what she has said during their many talks.

Note that if the characters went to Vearra's estate or pursued other side quests before hunting down the prisoner, Kalthar will already have met Kullinan. The star-shaped bullet points below contain information from that conversation and are, in other words, not available if the characters set out on this side quest immediately after their initial investigations at the cathedral.

- His name is Kalthar, but the characters will probably know him better as the Dark Lord, head of the Order of Dakothnic and ultimately responsible for the destruction of Lyastra.
- He got to know Korinthia during her imprisonment; after she was freed, he offered to serve as her adviser and has been locked up ever since, first in Kandoria, then in the cell below the cathedral where he was taken in year 8, according to the new calendar.
- He hopes to stop Korinthia from repeating his own calamitous mistakes; get her to recognize and accept the omnipotence of Creation and learn to live in harmony with its laws.
- He is prepared to help capture the person behind the attack, but in order to do so, they must tell him more about what happened. They must also keep him safe in the meantime, and then return him to his prison cell – he is not done speaking with Korinthia.

If the characters tell him about the starfall and the increased corruption in the city, Kalthar's eyes grow increasingly dark. He shakes his head:

- It is as he feared: the person behind the attack has reawakened ceremonial magic, clearly for the purpose of shattering the protection around his prison, and possibly to kill the Ambrian monarch.
- He can disclose that both sides used ceremonial magic during the Great War, and that it always came with terrible side-effects. That is all he will say about it; knowledge is a weapon that must be handled carefully.
- The characters are clearly looking for a group of humans, at least one of which is a powerful/well-trained mystic. If they mention the clues pointing to House Vearra, he advises them to look into the matter immediately, not least because that particular house has always had its eyes on Korinthia's throne.

★ Kalthar has met his new captor, along with his two flaming servants. He introduced himself as Artel; both the name and the person felt familiar, but he could not remember from where. He was an old man, probably even older than he looked, with a straight back and a fire in his eyes which Kalthar has learned to associate with the Pyromancers of Ordo Magica.

★ They only spoke briefly. Artel explained that he had freed him to gain his help (with force if necessary). He was arrogant, claiming that neither Kalthar nor the mystics of Ambria understood the truth about the power of corruption.

★ He also claimed that together they could find out exactly why the Order of Dakothnic had failed so miserably, and that he could give Kalthar the opportunity to *"speak with one of the most powerful rulers in history."*

★ This is all that was said. Artel left and promised to return the following night/morning (whichever seems appropriate).

The Traitors of House Vearra

THE EVIDENCE POINTING to House Vearra will probably lead the player characters on an excursion to the noble house's estate in the Yndarian countryside. There they encounter a miniature adventure landscape, centered around the place where Kullinan and his accomplices performed their destructive ceremony. A shock wave of corruption has transformed the area into a blighted desert where howling abominations are tearing each other to pieces, but where there is also a lot of important information to uncover.

WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED

The Starfall ceremony was performed on House Vearra's estate in the middle of the night, and took effect the very moment the Cathedral of Martyr was destroyed. The participants were Kullinan Furia, Demetro Vearra, Edogai Brigo, and the Sovereign warrior Morea. A young bull was also bound to the ceremony, to accept part of its corrupting effect.

The Counts had no reason to doubt the plan which they had worked out with Kullinan: once the ceremony had been completed, their bodyguards were to turn their weapons on the Sovereign agent cell and force them to flee; Demetro and his estate guards would then be "imprisoned" in the cellar tunnels beneath the residence, while the ceremonial site was arranged to incriminate the barbarians. A carriage stood ready to take Edogai and Kullinan to the Doudram, where they would board a merchant vessel heading for Brigosburg. But the events took a completely different turn...

Just as the ceremony was about to be completed, Count Brigo cried out and took a step back, out of the circle – he could not go through with it. As a result, the ceremony immediately came into effect; not in full force, but it was enough to produce severe side-effects: namely the ones called Wave of Corruption and Corrupting Environment (see page 70). The former effect was planned by the Officiant (by carefully studying documents from the real Artel's catastrophic performance of the Starfall ceremony during the battle of Haaras; see the The Library heading on page 123), and knocked out almost everyone standing outside the circle. Most of them were severely blight-marked and many instantly turned into abominations, albeit temporarily unconscious ones.

Kullinan burned the barbarian leader Morea to death with a *Brimstone Cascade*, while Count Vearra thrust his sword through the neck of the unconscious Edogai Brigo, furious about his treachery and cowardice.

The Fate of Count Demetro

What the Count does after Kullinan has dropped him off in the middle of the Yndarian countryside is irrelevant to the adventure. Sure, it is possible for a skilled tracker to trace the escape route from the ceremonial circle and follow the carriage tracks westward, but once the player characters have come that far, the fugitive will most likely be far away from there. He can pay or trick the so far unwitting countryfolk to protect him, and it will probably not be long before he lies hidden on some wagon on its way out of Ambria or possibly to the estate of some other noble against whom he has plenty of incriminating leverage.

Kullinan then summoned his flaming servants, Flare and Pyre, and herded Demetro toward the escape route he had prepared; four blight-marked guards who had not been knocked out were ordered to cover their retreat, holding off two surviving barbarian warriors and a howling, blight-born colleague. They fled across a provisional bridge, which was then razed, and continued over the outer wall. There they had to wait for the carriage to arrive, as the driver had been instructed to keep clear until she saw *"a sign in the sky."* Kullinan passed the time by explaining the situation to his scapegoat: the Count was no longer needed, but was given a ride as thanks for services rendered; Demetro would soon be the main suspect of a crime which had caused the death of the Queen and hundreds of Ambrian citizens; he would do well to run, possibly back across the Titans.

When the carriage finally arrived, they set off westward. Demetro was thrown off about half an hour later, after which Kullinan and his servants continued toward the deserted homestead where he initiated the *Seven-league Stride* ritual to get back to Yndaros and the vault beneath Plob 17. But the process was interrupted when the landing site's magic circle turned out to be damaged (see page 119), after which the ritual was renewed, now aimed at another circle known to Kullinan – at the home of one of his adepts, on a farm just west of Beren's Berth.

THE CITY RESIDENCE

No die rolls are required for the characters to know that House Vearra, like many other noble houses, has a home behind the wall surrounding the finest part of the Temple District. If they want to follow up on the leads pointing to the house in question, the city residence may be a good place to start.

Given the current situation, it is not easy for ordinary folk to gain access to the area; the heroic General Seraon Patio, in charge of the area's security, has mustered his entire guard force and posted six-man patrols at regular intervals along the entire wall. If the player characters have a letter from some important individual, they will not face any resistance. If they do not, they can try to convince Seraon of the importance and urgency of their mission (the *Contacts* boon focused on the Ambrian army or similar adds +5 to their chance of success). If they would rather seek other ways across, through or under the wall, the Game Master should turn this into a suitably difficult challenge.

The grand three-story villa is located on an equally magnificent plot of land. The residence's guard force – ten well-trained soldiers commanded by a veteran named Hadar, with stats as a Queen's Ranger/Ranger Captain, page 212 in the *Core Rulebook* – is of course on full alert. They have orders not to let anyone through the man-high fence surrounding the yard. But once again a helpful letter or the right contacts can secure an audience (see more below).

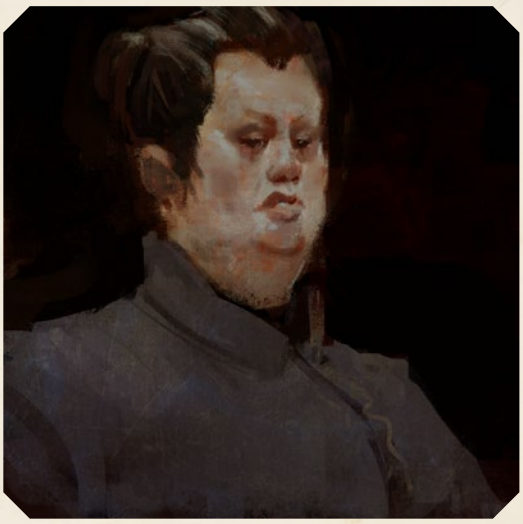
If the characters go directly from their initial investigations to the city residence, neither the Countess nor anyone else will yet have received word from the estate. But if they arrive at a later point, for instance after having followed the prisoner's trail, they encounter a small crowd outside the gate of the fence – twenty people standing around, talking, occasionally throwing an anxious glance at the residence. Provided that the characters are more or less well-mannered, they may have a chat with one of them:

- Her name is Lomunda, and like the rest of the gathering, she is a neighbor and close friend of the Count and Countess.
- Their worries have nothing to do with the Cathedral of Martyrs, but concern a homing pigeon that crashed to its death a couple of hundred meters from there, right in front of two youngsters living in the area. The rumor spread like wildfire:
- She has not seen it, but the pigeon itself was said to be grotesque – with its head feathers replaced by pointy horns, puss-filled boils on its lower body, and eyes as black as tar.
- The message read something like this: *"Help. The estate is under attack. Count Demetro lost in the Eternal Night. Everything is dying."*
- Both the pigeon and the message were handed over to the Countess.

Unless the players can figure this out by themselves, someone with the *Loremaster* ability at master level or training in a mystical tradition can make a *Cunning* test. A successful test hints at the connection between the pigeon's blight-marks and the content of the message on the one hand, and the side-effects around the crash site on the other. Perhaps this is enough to justify a trip to House Vearra's estate? Otherwise a conversation with the Countess can provide further incentives for such an excursion...

AUDIENCE WITH THE COUNTESS

Player characters who themselves have a reputation as daring problem-solvers can convince the guard force's Captain Hadar to convey a message to Countess Delia; the same applies if they should



Delia Vearra has had to suffer much nonsense from her husband over the years, but this is too much.

carry a persuasive letter. What Delia has to say depends on whether or not the homing pigeon has reached her yet, which also affects the manner in which she asks for help. The information below assumes that the pigeon has arrived; if this is not the case, ignore the star-shaped bullet points and rephrase her concluding appeal:

- Her husband sent his family away from the estate over a week ago, saying that they should be in Yndaros preparing the city residence for all the upcoming wedding festivities.
- Count Edogai Brigo arrived on the morning of the day when she and her son Heredo left the estate; he seemed stressed, only greeted them briefly and said that he would see them the day before the great ceremony.
- Lately, her husband has been gloomier and more withdrawn than usual, probably because of the wedding. It is no secret that he, like his ancestors, has always yearned for the throne; Korinthia's alliance with the barbarians may be good for Ambria, but it is not something in which Demetro can rejoice.
- Furthermore, he has often been visited by an unpleasant fellow – aged, imposing, dressed in simple garb but with something wild in his eyes. She has not been allowed to meet him, but assumes that he has spent nights at the estate, maybe even lived there for a while. When asked, Demetro referred to the man as *"his friend and teacher."*

★ Another homing pigeon has arrived; it made it all the way to the villa's dovecote and was less grotesque than the one that crashed (just red-eyed, with deformed legs and talons). Both notes carried the same message: *"The Eternal Night has taken Vearra. Count Demetro is missing, maybe dead. Send soldiers and priests, all of them, now."*

★ The characters may be allowed to examine the pigeons, both the living and the dead one. A successful *Cunning* test with *Beast Lore* or *Loremaster* leads to the conclusion that they are blight-marked; a successful *Vigilant* test with the *Witchsight* ability aimed at the living bird reveals that its shadow is badly tainted.

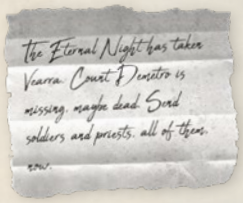
The Countess concludes the conversations with a desperate plea: *"I have sent word to Colonel Esmunda at the Vearra Garrison, asking her to send troops to the estate, but almost the entire garrison has been dispatched north toward Karvosti; the ones who remain have no experience of true evil, true darkness. Please, save my husband. I'll give you anything. Anything!"*

THE JOURNEY TO THE ESTATE

It is roughly fifty kilometers between the capital and the seat of House Vearra, a distance the player characters can cover in about three hours if they push their horses through the sludgy mud. The temperature drops, clouds gather in the sky, and snow begins to fall. When the characters finally reach their destination, a sheet of bright white snow coats the blackened lands of the estate...

Halfway through the journey they start encountering people fleeing from the west – first lone riders, then wagons of farmers and landowners followed by servants (farmhands, housemaids, stable boys, and so on) on foot. The characters may try to question them, but if so, they must be prepared to ride with them for a while, back toward Yndaros; none of them are willing to stop and they are all glancing anxiously back at the place they left behind. The Game Master can draw inspiration from the following quote during encounters with the refugees:

"It was a few hours after dawn; two of our horses had turned into monsters, real monsters. They started attacking the other horses, stomping, biting, tearing them apart. Our homestead borders on the Count's seat; the paddock lies near the border wall. Something happened in there, something terrible; I didn't get a good look before fleeing the place with my family, but it was black in there, the ground and the trees and everything, as if there had been a fire."



The note can be found as a handout on page 166.

When the player characters are closing in on the estate, anyone with the *Witchsight* ability who passes a *Vigilant* test can sense a tinge of corrupting darkness blowing in from the west. A bit further down the road the signs of corruption take physical form – partially blackened pine trees, discolored moss, a pregnant dog lying whimpering on the side of the road as the fetus in her belly has turned into a blight beast.

Just as they are about to rein their mounts and walk up to the wall that marks the border of the estate, they hear the sound of accelerating hoof beats. Soon they can also see where it is coming from. The wall is one and a half meter high, but the creature that comes rushing along the inside, toward the gateless opening in front of the player characters, is an awful lot bigger – it is none other than Heratio, the prized young bull of House Vearra, now blight-born and determined to stomp the life out of anything that breathes and bleeds.

Heratio

The once proud and magnificent young bull Heratio was badly affected by the wave of corruption and has turned into a grotesque version of his former self. He is almost two meters tall, his horns have branched out and grown almost a meter long, and his skin has been torn, covering his blackened fur with puss and blood.

Race	Abomination		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Natural weapon* (III), *Rampage* (III), *Robust* (III)		
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 16 (–6), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Exceptionally Strong* (novice), *Iron Fist* (master)		
Weapons Strong	Horns/hooves 13 (long)		
Armor	Blight-hardened hide 8		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	16	**Pain Threshold**	8
Shadow	Streaky, glossy black, like fur wet with secretion (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: If possible, Heratio begins with a *Rampage*, trying to knock down as many enemies as possible (with *Strong* 22, thanks to *Robust* III). He bellows as he attacks with hooves and horns, and does not stop until either he or the enemy is destroyed.

Corrupting Environment

All who visit the estate must pass a *Strong* test every hour or suffer 1D4 temporary corruption which does not wear off until the visitor has left the area. The effect can be noticed beforehand with the *Witchsight* ability and a successful *Vigilant* test. Otherwise it will become quite evident once the first hour has passed... The environment also has another effect: normally abominations do not attack or otherwise interact with each other; here, the corruption-charged atmosphere spurs them to attack anyone and anything.

Captain Semeon

Becoming blight-born caused the good captain to grow taller as well as wider, so much so that his skin has been torn into large sheets, with white and yellow patches of foaming, fermenting fat tissue in between. His hands have turned into hook-like bone claws and his jaw has dropped to his chest, tearing the corners of his mouth all the way to the ears.

Manner	Whimpers with hunger		
Race	Abomination		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Acidic blood* (I), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Robust* (II)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 15 (–5), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)			
Abilities	*Berserker* (adept), *Natural Warrior* (adept)		
Weapons Accurate	Claws 11		
Armor	*Robust* blight skin 5		
Defense	+8, acidic blood 3 for 3 turns		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Shadow	Utterly corroded copper (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: Semeon has no regard for anything but his own insatiable hunger.

VEARRA'S ESTATE

The vast estate of House Vearra is like a small adventure landscape. Its borders are marked by a man-high stone wall, a small lake, and a creek. There is also a fence surrounding the lands closest to the residence. It is possible to get in and out, but most of the abominations now inhabiting the area are busy fighting each other or razing buildings. And inside the fence, in the ominous dark, are a number of clues which the characters must try to uncover...

Outer wall

The outer stone wall is primarily meant to mark the boundaries of the estate and the status of its owner. Its highest sections reach 1.5 meters and its only opening, in the east, is gateless.

Stables

The Count owns several other properties near his noble seat, with both plantations and cattle. The estate's stables were reserved for the family's horses and those of the honor guard, as well as breeding animals which the stockman takes extra good care of – bulls, hogs, studs, roosters, rams, and so on.

VEARRA'S ESTATE

1. Outer wall
2. Stables
3. Watchtower
4. Fence
5. Honor Guard
6. Servants' Quarters
7. Storage
8. The Little Villa
9. The Residence
10. Garden
11. Cottage
12. Ceremonial Site

Watchtower
At the center of the walled-off area is a fifteen-meter high tower. Its roughly five-meter high base is made from stone and appears to have been constructed in the days of Lindaros, if not earlier. On top of it rests a ten-meter high, newly built wooden structure, whose top platform provides a clear view in all directions. An oil lamp next to the entrance is still burning from the previous night, and there is also light coming from some of the windows.

The player characters can use the tower to get a view of the estate's fenced areas, but in that case, they must first deal with the blight-born Captain Semeon (see below) who was attracted by the light and has just torn a couple of blight-marked guard dogs to shreds.

The Vearran Honor Guard
There is always a thirty-man strong military force stationed on the estate. Individual soldiers are assigned on a three-month rotation basis, each of them chosen from other garrisons in the county, but the three officers are always the same – Guard Colonel Heriela and Captains Semeon and Adorna. Heriela and her family have a house to themselves, while Semeon and Adorna live with the troops in the barracks.

Servants' Quarters
All employees of the estate are housed in this longhouse, which also has room for workshops and a laundry. And in a tower that rises two stories above the roof ridge one finds the estate's dovecote, where the goblin servant Gringa is sitting, trembling with fear (see more under the heading The Survivor on page 131).

Storage
This is where the servants stored everything from food and beverages to worn-out furniture, household goods and textiles. All organic material has been affected by the wave of corruption, which, among other things, means that the collection of fine wine (Vearra's Crown) has turned from a gold mine to a rack of bottled sewage.

The Little Villa
The three-story building known as the Little Villa is as lavish as the residence itself in terms of furnishing and style; it is just not as large. This is where guests of the Count and Countess stay, and it has room for at least two families – visiting servants are of course accommodated elsewhere.

Two surviving, but blight-marked, farmhands have sought refuge in the attic. The player characters can detect them by the sheet they have hung from one of the window apertures, with the word

BLIGHT BORN GUARD DOG			
Race	Abomination		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Corrupting Attack* (I), *Natural Weapon* (I), *Robust* (I)		
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Iron Fist* (novice), *Natural Warrior* (novice)		
Weapons Strong	Bite 8, and 1D4 temporary corruption		
Armor	Wolf skin 2		
Defense	–1		
Toughness	15	**Pain Threshold**	8
Shadow	Brownish black, like the hide of a decaying carcass (thoroughly corrupt)		
Tactics: The scent of living bodies drives the blight beast to attack, its maw foaming with corruption.			

"Hepl" scribbled in bright red, sprawling letters. There are four blight-born guard dogs running around on the floor below, trying to find a way to the warm flesh and blood.

If saved, the boys are forever grateful, but unfortunately they have little information to offer.

- The previous night, all servants were ordered to remain indoors in their quarters.
- Captain Adorna said that whatever happened, no matter what they heard, they must not go outside until the master of the estate said differently.
- One of them claims to have heard some kind of strange song just before dawn, but otherwise everything seemed normal.
- The two boys thought it was all nonsense and decided to disobey their orders; they snuck off to the Little Villa to begin the monthly cleaning of its fourteen fireplaces. At the time they heard nothing but the whispering wind; all was still (the ceremony was at a calmer, chanting stage).
- Suddenly the world shook, as if there was an earthquake, but only for a moment. Both of them were knocked off their feet, and it felt as though their bodies were on fire. They looked at each other – one with blackened, secreting mucosa; the other with his hair falling off in chunks. Terrified, they immediately fled to the attic and pulled the ladder up behind them.

- They have been sitting there ever since. They did not see much, but they could hear – the monster dogs on the floor below, and the screams and roars from outside.
- They glimpsed the *"Count's guest"* (Kullinan) from afar, but know nothing about him, as they only work at the Little Villa – where a group of barbarian warriors have resided instead. All they know is what other servants have told them: that he is *"quiet, haughty, and has scary eyes."*

Note that if the characters go near the Little Villa, there is a good chance that the hunting abominations will sense their presence (Game Master decides). These will then, as abominations do, forget about the farmhands and go berserk on the newly discovered prey.

The Residence
The luxurious residence, more than a hundred meters from end to end and five stories high, is eerily desolate. There are of course lots of valuables in there, but given the corrupting environment, the characters will probably not be staying long enough to look for them. If they do accept this risk, the Game Master must decide what and how much they find.

Garden
The residence's garden, usually in glorious summer bloom, was already withered and leafless when the wave of corruption emanated from the ceremonial circle – now it will never blossom again. Its bare bushes have blackened, the needles of the junipers have dropped to the ground, and the proud stone hawk of the fountain has lost its spread wings.

Cottage
Outside the fence, on the hillside by the lake, lies the Cottage: a small but comfortable cabin that was built for the Countess' elderly mother. She lived her last years there, and after she died two years ago the house stood empty until the Count offered it to his newfound friend, Artel. Read more about the cottage's content on page 132, under the Kullinan's Quarters heading.

POSSIBLE ALLIES

In contrast to the blight-born humans and animals, the adventure landscape also offers possibilities of assistance. Depending on who the player characters are and what they are capable of, the Game Master may introduce the following groups and individuals, or create his/her own potential allies. The player characters can then negotiate with these in order to avoid or overcome enemies and other challenges in the area.

The Soldiers
When the player characters reach the estate, a patrol of five soldiers has already arrived from the New Vearra garrison by the bank of the Doudram River. Their squad leader is Second Lieutenant Radask, whose orders are merely to observe, assess the situation, and report back to the garrison. They carry with them a cage with two pigeons; if these are sent with a call for reinforcements, another twenty soldiers can be there in roughly an hour. That is all they can offer without calling in reserves or requesting additional troops from the army base in the capital.

The Game Master may position the troop anywhere in the landscape, but we suggest that they have gone up the watchtower; if the blight-born Semeon is there, they will have closed and bolted the hatch to the top level. The characters can persuade Radask to create diversions, support them with ranged weapons, or investigate a certain part of the estate (a building or a piece of land). Should the patrol's stats be needed, use Queen's Ranger on page 212 in the *Core Rulebook* but with *Shield Fighter* instead of *Twin Attack*. Their swords then deal 5 damage.

The Farmhand Guard
A group of young and decidedly naive workers from the neighboring farms have misinterpreted the situation as an excellent opportunity to win the favor of their masters and their Count. The ten youngsters (both women and men) are led by a brash stablehand named Lasina; they are strong and fit, but have neither armor nor any real weapons (hatchets, pitchforks and sledgehammers). Anyone who has ever faced an abomination in battle realizes that the bold little group would not stand a chance.

Lasina and her followers are slowly but surely sneaking closer to the residence; the player characters can notice their movements with a successful *Vigilant* test, or Lasina will detect them and get their attention. Wise characters will decline their help and persuade them to flee the area immediately, but they may of course perform roughly the same tasks as the soldiers. Should the player characters put them to use, they will most likely spend the rest of their days with the youngsters' lives on their conscience...

If stats are needed for this confident bunch, use Fortune Hunter on page 214 in the *Core Rulebook*, but without armor and shield.

The Ironsworn
An elven spy named Anea-Li and her two companions (ironsworn changelings) were near the estate when the ceremony was performed. They were

investigating rumors of a Wratha-worshipping cult based somewhere in the Yndarian countryside, but had not yet reached their target as the meteorite fell from the sky and the scout's keen senses (*Witchsight*) detected the wave of corruption emanating from the ceremonial circle.

The three of them will enter the fenced area in order to identify the cause of the outbreak; the player characters could bump into them when entering or leaving a building. How the meeting transpires depends mainly on the player characters; the ironsworn are not hostile and will gladly collaborate in the search for information.

Apart from the addition of *Witchsight* (at novice level), Anea-Li has the same stats as the late summer elf Godrai in the adventure *The Promised Land* (page 255 in the *Core Rulebook*, or page 21 in the PDF-version). For the two changelings, use the stats of a Black Cloak (page 214 in the *Core Rulebook*) with the additions of *Iron Fist* (adept) and Sword 6 for weapons.

The Keeper Miralba

A few days ago, Huldra Yeleta had a dreamsight. She woke soaked in sweat, raving deliriously: *"The plunging hawk, rips stones from the sky, hurls them at the sun below; darkness spreads from the hawk's nest like a fever in the earth, in the flesh of the world."* After meditating on what she had seen and said, she sent the shapeshifting Keeper Miralba south, to the Ambrian county of Vearra.

Miralba was further north when the ceremony was completed, but could sense its side-effects from far away. When the player characters arrive, she circles high above in her eagle form and can be detected with a successful *[Vigilant -3]* test. Her mission is to observe only and then head back to Karvosti, but if/when the player characters find the ceremonial site, she fears that they will take or destroy something she needs to examine more closely.

She approaches by sweeping across the water, lands on its edge and immediately shifts back to human form. She is short and bent, completely naked but for the long, gray-white hair ending at her knees. And she is not very tactful: in broken Ambrian she orders the player characters to back away and not disturb the circle.

If the player characters decide to attack, she will first try to stop them with *Entangling Vines* (without thorns dealing damage); if that does not work, she sinks into *Nature's Embrace* and walks away. Unwilling to risk her life, she will not return, but launches back into the air to monitor the situation from afar.

Should the characters refrain from violence and convince Miralba that they are on the same side, she can help them understand what has happened and answer any questions they may have – for example, she realizes that the ceremony ended prematurely as Count Edogai stepped out of the circle; otherwise the devastation in Yndaros would have been many times worse. You can read more about this conversation on page 133 under the Ceremonial Site heading.

THE BLIGHT-BORN

Regardless of when the characters arrive at the estate, it has been hours since the echoes of the ceremony's crescendo faded away. Almost half of all creatures that were reached by the wave of corruption turned into abominations, and before long only the strongest remained – the bull Heratio, Captain Semeon, the guard dogs at the Little Villa, and two others.

Mug the farm ogre

There were almost thirty people in the servants' longhouse when the side-effects struck, including the enormous farm ogre Mug. Him being blight born meant the end of all the others; with deformed forearms he swept like a scythe through the building's dormitories, dining hall and workshop, slaying the unconscious, the terrified and confused, and other newly awakened abominations before anyone even thought of running.

Mug is still in there, feasting on the remains of his former colleagues, but if the player characters are late to visit the dovecote, he might very well leave the longhouse on the hunt for warmer bodies to devour.

Race	Abomination		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Acidic Blood* (III), *Armored* (II), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Robust* (II)		
Accurate 13 (−3), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 11 (−1), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 15 (−5), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Iron Fist* (master), *Natural Warrior* (adept)		
Weapons Strong	Bone sword arms 18, or two attacks at the same target 16/13		
Armor	Blight skin 8		
Defense	+2		
Toughness	15	**Pain threshold**	8
Shadow	Black with streaks of furious red (thoroughly corrupt)		

Tactics: Mug slaughters!

Pearl the sow

Being blight born turned the already imposing sow Pearl into the pitch-black queen of the estate. She put a swift end to all surviving livestock and mounts (except Heratio who was in the pen and immediately started ravaging the eastern part of the estate).

Now she prowls the area inside the fence, near the residence. The player characters can spot her from the watchtower and hear her multitoned, discordant roars – roars of anger, sorrow and ravenous hunger.

Manner	Lustful		
Race	Abomination		
Resistance	Strong		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Corrupting Attack* (II), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Regeneration* (III), *Robust* (III)		
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 7 (+3), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 13 (−3), **Resolute** 11 (−1), **Strong** 15 (−5), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)			
Abilities	*Feat of Strength* (master), *Iron Fist* (adept)		
Weapons Strong	Tusks 10, 1D6 temporary corruption		
Armor	Hog skin 8, regenerates 4 *Toughness* each turn		
Defense	+1		
Toughness	20	**Pain threshold**	8
Shadow	Black moss bleeding deep purple streaks of corruption (thoroughly corrupt)		
Tactics: The blight born sow snorts with longing for warm meat, and will pursue it at the earliest opportunity.			

The victims

The abominations have left traces of destruction all over the place, in the form of torn bodies and razed sculptures, monuments and smaller buildings. Characters who take the time to study these can obtain some information as they go along. The *Loremaster* ability or a successful *[Cunning –5]* test is all it takes to identify these signs. We suggest that they appear in the following order:

- Two blight-marked women seemingly stomped to death. They wear Ambrian clothes but have the symbol of the Sovereign's Oath tattooed on the inside of their wrists.
- An army coat lying on the ground, soaked in blood and partially shredded as if by knives. House Vearra's crest can be seen on its collar, and below it is all that remains of its former owner – his severed head.
- A blight born human, mauled to death, wearing an army coat with an emblem – the crest of House Brigo.

Gringa has dealt with human nobles all her life; a few blight-stricken birds shouldn't be a problem!

THE SURVIVOR

The chambermaid Gringa escaped the fate of being blight born, but watched two of her colleagues being transformed. Instead of running past them toward the main exit, she fled upstairs, to the dovecote. She managed to grab a hammer from a tool bench, which came in handy as she discovered that most of the pigeons had become abominations as well.

Having killed or driven off the blight born birds, she remained up there, listening to the slaughter unfolding down below. But when the hysteria started to wear off, it occurred to her that she could send for help. Gringa wrote four identical notes and picked out four of the least blight-marked pigeons – two of them conditioned to return to the city residence, the other two to the garrison at New Vearra.

She has so far avoided detection, but grows increasingly desperate. Since the first four pigeons were dispatched she has been examining the remaining ones in search of more birds that might be up to the task. Once the player characters have arrived at the estate, they can notice one of Gringa's attempts to contact the outside world – perhaps after making their way up the watchtower, or in the attic of the Little Villa after rescuing the farmhands. With a successful *Vigilant* test, they notice a bird taking off from the tower of the servants' longhouse. Frenetically flapping its wings, it launches into the sky at tremendous speed, only to stop abruptly and drop to the ground.

There are two ways to reach the dovecote. If the characters enter the servants' longhouse through the front doors, they will encounter the ogre Mug; perhaps they notice the danger in time and manage to lure him away, for instance with the help of some allied group or individual? Another option is to climb the building's facade onto the roof, and head for the dovecote from there. This option requires a *[Discreet –1]* test; if it fails, the now restless ogre monstrosity is lured out of the building.

If the player characters manage to get up and convince the terrified goblin that they are there to help, Gringa bursts into tears. It takes a while before she can speak, but if they promise to bring her to safety she is happy to help. Besides what the farmhands at the Little Villa can also tell about the past 24 hours (see page 132), Gringa has the following to add:

- She works at the residence as a chambermaid, not for the Count, but for his guests. Her job is to help them dress, do their hair, and make sure that they are comfortable.
- She has recently been attending to Count Edogai Brigo – usually a very pleasant man, but lately quite upset and irritable.
- Normally she sleeps in the servants' quarters in the residence's basement, but since the Countess was sent to the city, all servants have had to sleep in the longhouse.
- There has been plenty of nighttime activity up there; the Counts have been preparing something, maybe together with the guest at the cottage and possibly the barbarians who Count Demetro has kept hidden in the Little Villa for more than six moons (an open secret among the servants).
- Curious as she is, she has tried to figure out what is going on, but the Counts and their guests have been careful not to discuss it in the presence of the servants, and she has not found anything written down, either in Demetro's or Edogai's chambers.
- Maybe the guest at the cottage, Artel, has left something behind? Gringa can tell them how to get there.
- Oh, and she noticed someone on the beach last night as she was leaving the residence. It was dark outside, and she was far away, but she is pretty sure that it was Artel – easily recognized by his unkempt mop of white hair.

Kullinan's letter can be found as a handout on page 166.

KULLINAN'S QUARTERS

The cottage which the family built to avoid Countess Dalia's mean and ungracious mother, the widow baroness Gendla Gorinder, looks like a miniature version of a noble's residence. It has a porch facing the lake, with a roof supported by beautifully carved pillars, and the front door is a double gate crowned by the crest of House Vearra: the diving hawk.

Inside there is only a single room, six meters wide and four meters deep, with impressive headroom. A luxurious bed is placed behind a partition to the left of the equally magnificent fireplace; at the foot of the bed is a wardrobe, a bureau and a long bench with a mirror and washbasin. Directly to the right from the entrance is a dining room suite with seating for four, and beyond it stand two armchairs against a wall of empty bookshelves.

Kullinan has of course made sure to cover his tracks, but with his mind occupied by the upcoming ceremony, the many details of his grand plan and his feverish dreams of the future, there are a couple of details he has missed.

The letter to mother

Kullinan has spent much of his time at the cottage with a pen in his hand. Unable to sleep, he has written, sketched, scribbled and composed; the results have been everything from *"Things to remember for the journey to Symbar,"* to a recipe for *"That game pâté Seldonio served,"* to a bulleted list of things to do after finally having mastered the power of corruption. He has also penned letters to Queen Korinthia, Seldonio and lots of other people who popped into his head. One such letter was spared the flames – Kullinan threw it casually into the fireplace and did not see it being caught by the hot air, soaring up the chimney and landing on a ledge by the mantelpiece.

Characters who expressly state that they search the fireplace and also pass a *Vigilant* test can glimpse a corner of the scorched sheet of paper on the edge of the ledge. The letter is damaged by the heat, grayish but fully readable:

Dear mother,
You always said that the world would be a better place without humans. If you could see me now you'd be nodding contentedly. You would snort when I admitted to being surprised by how I've been treated. Perhaps you were also right in that they don't want to be saved, that the more powerful they are, the less help they are willing to accept. Nevertheless, dear mother, I shall keep going. I shall save all who can be saved.

I'm beginning to understand the Power which the frightened and the powerful refuse to touch – it is not corrupting, only an expression of corruption. But there is more to learn. Soon I will meet someone with deep insight into the nature of Creation, then an ancient ruler, after which I am going on a journey. I'm sure you have

heard about that fortune seeker, the one they call the Senseless who everyone is now looking for, high and low, to learn what she knows. And here I am, in possession of actual knowledge, stolen from under their noses. I, not they, will be the one to find her and that which she seeks.

That is all, dear mother, your son wi... (here the letter becomes too damaged to read)

If the characters have experienced the events of *The Witch Hammer*, it only takes a *Cunning* test to remember that Elmendra was called "the Senseless"; otherwise the person rolling the test will also need the *Loremaster* ability or some suitable boon (such as *Storyteller* or *Musician*).

The Map

A successful *Cunning* test leads to the realization that the jakaar pelt in front of the fireplace seems out of place; it lies too far out from the mantelpiece, and too far to the right. If a character says that he/she examines the pelt, that person will notice that something has been scribbled on the underside. Kullinan was writing poetry in front of the fire when he suddenly decided to map all known passageways to the ruins of Lindaros; he did not bother getting up to fetch a new sheet of paper, which is why he simply turned the pelt upside down.

The map he sketched is available as a handout at the end of this book. Someone who has been in Yndaros for long periods of time can with a successful *Cunning* test conclude that its lines represent the roads and squares of the capital. But the X:s are not as easy to understand; it requires a person with great knowledge of the city's underworld – either someone engaged in smuggling (such as Nobleman Dastan or Grimorio Abramelin), or someone working to prevent such activities (a member of the City Watch or the Royal Sekretorium).

Actually, the map only reveals one thing: that "Artel" was interested in passageways to the ruins of Lindaros. However, it may of course be useful to the player characters as well, when they eventually want to head down into underground Yndaros.

THE CEREMONIAL SITE

The ceremony was performed on the rocky shore of the lake – the cold and the extra effort was a price worth paying for the chance to actually see the celestial rocks fall over Yndaros.

A remarkably intricate ceremonial circle, almost eight meters in diameter, has been drawn on the rock in red, black and white crayon; residues of hardened wax also reveal that twelve candles were lit at irregular places in the pattern. Someone with the *Ritualist* ability or training in the tradition in question can recognize many of the symbols from various *Wizardry* rituals, but in a different (successful *Cunning* with *Loremaster*: older) style, and the structure of the pattern does not seem familiar.

Investigations

At the center of the circle lies a dead young bull, still chained to a massive metal ring which has been drilled into the rock. Those who examine the carcass and have either *Medicus* or *Beast Lore* may roll a *Cunning* test to draw the following conclusions: the bull exhibits no external injuries; it seems to have died quite suddenly, probably from heart failure.

Around it lie several dead bodies, nine to be exact. On closer inspection these turn out to belong to three factions – four have the tattoo of the Sovereign's Oath on the inside of their wrists, two are wearing coats with the Brigo family crest, two have the symbol of House Vearra displayed on their tabards and shields. The ninth body (Edogai Brigo) stands out, due to the exclusive fur-trimmed coat with buckles of pure gold, the jeweled rings on his fingers, and the ornamented sword at his side.

An analysis of the various causes of death suggests that most were killed by massive claws, bites from bestial jaws or brutal blunt-force trauma – likely caused by one or more abominations. Two display deep stab wounds with burnt edges (killed by the flaming servants), the man with the golden buckles has had a sword thrust through his neck and one of the barbarians (Morea) was burned to death (by Kullinan's *Brimstone Cascade*). One can also note that everyone but the burned woman displays blight marks – glowing or bloody eyeballs, crater-like rashes, boils in the mouth, or similar.

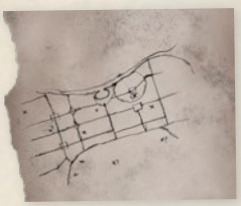
Mirelba

If the Game Master finds it appropriate, the Keeper Mirelba of clan Zarek can choose to reveal her presence to the characters, in order to stop them from walking all over and possibly destroying potential evidence which she is to report to the Huldra. Should the player characters manage to convince her that they are happy to collaborate with the barbarians and their witches, she will relax and agree to investigate and analyze the findings together.

In exchange for her help, she demands that the characters share any other insights and knowledge they have attained; the more she knows, the more she can tell Yeleta upon her return to Karvosti. This is a perfect opportunity for the Game Master to (through Mirelba) help the players come to the right conclusions regarding the clues which have so far been presented, of course limited by how much the player characters are willing to share.

Stories of Elmendra

Rumors and speculations about the fate of *"Elmendra the Senseless"* are circulating throughout Ambria – not because she herself is particularly special, but because the discovery she claims to have made is one of the most coveted in existence: directions to Symbar. Some say that it is all lies, others that she has organized and set off on a secret expedition. The wildest rumors claim that she has already returned from there; that someone heard about someone who heard that she was spotted everywhere from Kurun to Ravenia, with heavy gold chains around her neck and her fingers covered with gemstone rings.



The map sketch can be found as a handout on page 169.

The Trail of the Ceremony

AS SOON AS the starfall strikes the Cathedral of Martyrs, it should be clear to the player characters that the incident is not a coincidence, that someone is behind the catastrophe, and that mystical powers are involved. This section describes how the characters can acquire more in-depth knowledge about mystical ceremonies in general, as well as the specific ceremony which laid waste to large parts of central Yndaros. If the characters keep following the trail they will eventually learn the true name of the man behind the attack and gain a deep insight into his motive.

INITIAL INSIGHTS

Even though it is little more than twenty years since mystical ceremonies were used in the Great War, they are rarely talked about. Neither theurgs nor wizards mention them in their lectures, and though all initiates and novices have listened to stories about the tremendous power of ceremonies, they have also heard tales of their terrible and unavoidable side-effects. For the vast majority of people, ceremonies are things of the past – a form of magic which will never again be practiced.

To guess that the incident at the cathedral might have been caused by a ceremony, a player character requires at least the adept level of a mystical tradition or the *Loremaster* ability; in addition, the character must pass a *Cunning* test. This also applies to any non-player characters who the player characters ask about the incident, but even if they have reached the right conclusion, they might not want to share it with the player characters (the Game Master decides).

Various names of people and places will emerge as the adventure progresses. The name "Artel" surfaces if the player characters hear the last words of Grand Master Seldonio or, if they do not, during Kalthar's rescue or out on House Vearra's estate. Searching for or asking about the name Artel will hardly be worthwhile, but if one assumes that it refers to a mystic, it becomes much easier.

Such searches may be performed at the palace's Royal Archives, among the tomes of the Last Light Convent School, or in the eastern of Ordo Magica's three towers, but it would actually be sufficient to ask the curator of the Legacy Gallery about a prominent mystic named Artel. Characters who are not the scholarly type may instead ask one of their contacts for help and information. No matter how they go about it, they will eventually gather the following information:

- What is written in the lead paragraph under the Ceremonial Magic heading on page 68 is known to many older mystics, priests and scholars, although they are reluctant to discuss it.
- The name "Artel" brings to mind the prominent Order Master Artel Vereo, later known as Artel the Vile on account of his involvement in the Catastrophe at Haaras.
- The Battle of Haaras resulted in great casualties on both sides, largely due to the actions of Artel the Vile: he took it upon himself to perform a ceremony for the purpose of reducing the enemy's forces before the battle had even begun.
- The ceremony called down a swarm of rocks from the sky, much larger than those that hit the Cathedral of Martyrs. The enemy was decimated, but the Ambrian army suffered the devastating effects as well. It is said that many Ambrians were killed; wilder tales claim that the magic caused an epidemic of severe blight among the people in General Beremo Herengol's army camp.
- The once flourishing trading city of Haaras was completely wiped out and is known to this day as Black Haaras.
- Artel Vereo was sentenced to death for his war crime, despite the fact that he crushed many high-ranking dark lords and large parts of their undead forces.

If the characters ask their contact, or someone working at the archive they are investigating, for more information on ceremonies and/or people capable of performing such magic, that person will mention the name Farvano Kadel – the wizard who now holds the title of Ritual Master; a title which

The Fastest Route

If the players are really clever, or very lucky, they might actually stumble upon a shortcut through the adventure, namely by ignoring both the prisoner and the clues pointing to House Vearra. The trail of the ceremony leads more or less straight from the cathedral to the adventure's third act, as it leads to a meeting with the real Artel Vereo, who in turn can name the true culprit as well as his ultimate goal.

Should your particular characters want to follow this route while you yourself (for the sake of the story) would prefer them to investigate other clues first, you could for instance make one or more of the individuals below much harder or even impossible to encounter immediately after the starfall. The prospect of a few hours' wait will probably be enough for them to turn their eyes toward one of the other trails available.

was previously called Ceremony Master. This man is normally stationed at the order chapter in Agrella, but if the characters ask questions about him at the Triplet Towers, they will learn that he is actually much closer: on a farm just east of Beren's Berth.

FARVANO KALDEL

Many within Ordo Magica are amazed that the otherwise reclusive Ritual Master accepted the invitation to attend the duchess' wedding. Now, of course, he bitterly regrets his decision. He hates all forms of commotion, especially when it involves violence and death. His only comfort is that he does not have to experience the misery up close, since he refused to reside within the city of Yndaros and was hence offered a dwelling on the outskirts of Beren's Berth.

The house he inhabits actually belongs to an order master and alchemist named Everlida; it is a simple home, but newly built and quite functional. Also, Farvano has brought with him seventeen of his cats from the apartment in Agrella, who all contribute to a more congenial atmosphere (even though all of them, except his favorite Seldonio, keep trying to escape whenever a door or window is opened).

Farvano Kadel does not like people, especially those he does not know. Nor does he like talking or answering questions. On the other hand, he is deeply shaken by what has happened, so if the player characters can convince him that they are trying to identify and apprehend the culprits, he reluctantly invites them into his home. And if a player character catches the cat which tries to escape when the front door opens (requires a successful *Quick* test), Farvano will actually be in a fairly good mood – he asks his apprentice to offer them butter cookies with whipped cream and almond flakes.

Farvano has the following to say:

- He can tell them more about how ceremonies are performed, what it takes to stage them, and what side-effects they can cause (see pages 68–70).
- He can offer more information specifically about the starfall ceremony, including its unique side-effect (page 71).
- He claims to have met Artel once, long ago, while visiting Artel's teacher, Farvano's good friend Kullinan Furia. From what he remembers, Artel was a stout and quiet man, observant in an almost unsettling way; but that was ages ago, probably more than half a century...
- He does not know much about Black Haaras, but if asked about it, he responds with a question of his own: *"If you want to know more about that, shouldn't you talk to someone who was there?"*
- If they ask him to name such people, he mentions Beremo Herengol, but stresses that he is probably on his way to Karvosti. After a moment's thought he lights up: *"Kathia Melion! Someone said that she's staying at the refugee camp in Yndaros; apparently, she's one of the people who were affected by Artel's deed, but I'm sure she can talk..."*

KATHIA MELION

Kathia was barely twenty years old when she, as General Beremo Herengol's adjutant, experienced the side-effects of the starfall first hand. The wave of corruption knocked her unconscious, and when she woke up she was deformed in body and soul. Many other nobles suffered the same fate, or worse; the blight born were killed on the spot or fled toward unknown destinations in the black east; many of those who developed stigmas perished, in episodes of severe angst or suicide. But not Kathia, who refused to give in.

You can read more about Kathia and her growing organization on page 44 under the heading the Resistance Grows. If the player characters ask around for *"the leader of the resistance"* among the tents and shacks of the refugee camp, they will probably have little luck, since people are reluctant to sell out their leader. However, if they ask for "Kathia Melion" and make clear that it concerns the Great War, they might very well be successful. Kathia naturally suspects that the fate of the Cathedral of Martyrs is linked to what happened at Black Haaras and, knowing that Artel the Vile is still alive, she has a clear idea of who was behind the starfall.

The gravely blight-marked noble keeps a low profile. Many people have of course seen her and reacted to her appearance, but very few of them know her by name. The player characters must pose their questions to someone in her circle of conspirators, for instance one of the following individuals:

- **The war veteran Engelea** is often sitting with other veterans on what is known as the Immigrant Square. There is always someone who has scraped together enough for a sack of cheap wine and shares it in exchange for some company and a few war stories.
- **The former sun priest Maltos**, who left the church at the end of the Great War, runs a school for the camp's children and is rumored to know everyone living among the tents.
- **The master illusionist Garap** whose severe drinking problem got him kicked out of the Triplet Towers now focuses on spreading joy among the hopeless, while at the same time

keeping an eye out for suitable recruits for Kathia's organization. Perhaps the player characters will catch his attention as they move around the refugee camp?

These people are all willing to pass on a message to Kathia, and if the characters state their errand more or less clearly, the intermediary soon returns with the news that she will see them. They are escorted across the Sharp Stream to a small grove where Kathia is waiting. Before pulling back her hood and showing her face, she asks them to explain themselves: why are they looking for her of all people and what do they want to know? Once satisfied with their answers, she has the following to say:

- She tells them about her experience with the ceremony's side-effects: the unconsciousness, how she woke up utterly misshapen, how the camp was full of corpses and of ravaging abominations fighting each other or massacring other unconscious people.
- She speaks about the fate of the survivors: the nobles who faded away or took their own lives because their disfigurement excluded them from all social life and all prominent positions.
- She also says that the reason she is alive and living in Yndaros is that she seeks the man who caused the catastrophe, Artel the Vile (this is only partially true, as she also wishes to dethrone the royal family).
- She has learned from reliable sources that the death sentence was never carried out; the Queen and her advisers believed that the harm he caused was outweighed by the results he had achieved. Apparently, Artel was himself sick or injured from the corruption.
- Deeply hated among many of the kingdom's noble families, he was instead given a new identity and promised a yearly allowance on the condition that he stayed hidden from the world. Rumors also said that he was soon sent north with the refugee caravans to build a new life for himself in Ambria.
- Since she arrived in Yndaros, Kathia has spoken to three relatively credible witnesses who claim to have spotted Artel Vereo. The most recent observation took place almost a decade ago, but she has no reason to believe that he has gone away or died.
- Her own attempts to discover Artel's current name have not been successful, but perhaps the player characters have contacts or abilities which she does not? Perhaps they will succeed where she has failed?

Kathia does rarely reveal her disfigured features to others, mainly for their sake.

If the player characters ask for advice, she says that some member or members of the realm's law enforcement should have the information they seek; if Artel is still receiving financial assistance to stay hidden, there must be someone making the payments and ensuring that he keeps his part of the agreement. Perhaps that responsibility lies with the Royal Sekretorium, or maybe it has been delegated to Ordo Magica, the City Watch, or Artel's relatives?

ARTEL'S NEW NAME

Artel's new identity is known only to a few people. The Royal Sekretorium has a special department for registering and monitoring the Queen's potentially threatening subjects; the commander of the City Watch is informed and has a group of agents periodically keeping the targeted individuals under surveillance. Korinthia, Beremo Herengol and those involved in pardoning Artel obviously know about his situation, and are aware of his new alias, and the same goes for his closest relatives – the brother Baron Mangai and his family.

The characters must make best use of their contacts and abilities to find out Artel's alias. Described below are three possibly ways forward, but if the players come up with something else, the Game Master must try to keep up and place suitable obstacles in their path.

The Commander

The player characters might already be acquainted with Commander Alvo Steelneck. After a moment's wait outside the City Watch's headquarters they are granted an audience with him; he refuses to share any information about Artel, with the following comment:

"I see what you're getting at, Black Haaras and all that. I can neither confirm nor deny the claim that Artel Vereo is still alive, but let me put it this way: If indeed he is alive, and living in Yndaros, don't you think I would have ascertained his innocence, spoken to the watchmen keeping people like that under surveillance and learned that he cannot possibly be involved?"

Player characters who refuse to take no for an answer can of course ask around for these *"watchmen keeping people like that under surveillance."* There are four of them, all trained within the Queen's Rangers and frequent guests at The Davokar Feastery. The characters could either confront them there or follow one of them as they go their separate ways; in either case, it will take brutal (or mystical) interrogation methods to make them talk.

Questions related to the name "Artel Vereo" will get them nowhere. But if they ask for someone whom Commander Alvo Steelneck has taken a special interest in after the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs, the answer will be Mordol Gaaras. After putting further pressure on the captured guard, they can also learn that the person in question lives on a ship anchored just east of Beren's Berth, out on the river. The ship is named The Alenora after his mother.

Althos Vereo

For the past month or so, one of the suites at the Kohinoor's inn has been occupied by Baron Mangai Vereo's son, Althos. He came to the city as his father's representative in the negotiations over the territory west of his family's lands – a territory currently managed by the Crown, but which both House Vereo and House Elsbet lay claim to. The negotiations came to a standstill due to stubbornness of both parties and the upcoming wedding, but Althos remained in the city to attend the ceremony before resuming the diplomatic efforts.

If one of the player character is a noble or happens to be well connected, or if they carry a relevant letter, the forty-year-old highborn may agree to see them in his three-room suite. He is a skilled diplomat and highly pragmatic, and he is well aware of his outcast uncle's fate – also that he is currently living under the name of Mordol Gaaras, on a leaky vessel named after Althos' grandmother Alenora.

But of course, he will not share this information without something in return. He sees in the characters a chance to gain an advantage in the negotiations over the much-desired mountain land. To learn what he knows, the characters must discreetly steal Ergal Elsbet's seal stamp from his suite at the other end of the same building, and just as discreetly return it shortly thereafter when Althos has done what he needs to do.

We suggest that Ergal has visitors over for lunch or dinner. He and his guests are gathered in the suite's salon, while the seal stamp can be found in the combined study and bedroom. The window on the sixth of seven floors is closed and latched from inside (can be opened with suitable tools and a *Discreet* test). Another option is to disguise themselves as hotel staff providing room service while also claiming to have some errand in the bed chamber. *Cunning* or discretion is of the essence, but the challenge should be suspenseful rather than difficult.

The Sekretorium

The characters might head directly to the Royal Sekretorium. Being allowed into the Palace District requires the proper paperwork, unless one of the characters has the right to enter by virtue of his/her birth or position. Once inside the walls there is nothing stopping them from seeking out the building which the Sekretorium shares with the Keymaster's office.

There are no agents present as the characters arrive, and Ralgai Melion and his staff are engaged elsewhere – meeting with the Queen, interrogating prisoners, and so on. The only person inside is a young clerk named Karion Dresel. He does not personally know who is being watched by the Sekretorium, but knows where the relevant documents are kept. The question is what the characters must do for him to gain access to the filing cabinet.

There are two main approaches: bribing or threatening. If they wish to bribe the clerk, the sum (or value of the object or favor) must be considerable, at least 100 thaler – after all, they are asking him to commit a crime classified as treason. They must also pass a *Persuasive* test, to assure him that there is absolutely no risk of getting caught; they only want to talk to the person they are looking for, and will not reveal Karion's involvement.

The alternative to bribes is a credible threat of a slow, painful death. Convincing Karion of this requires a successful *[Persuasive -3]* test; otherwise he will obstinately refuse to help.

If the bribe or threats are successful, the characters gain access to a bundle of papers stored in a leather tube. The top document contains personal data, alias, housing situation, and the Royal Sekretorium's orders to the City Watch concerning the nature of the surveillance mission. The other papers are surveillance reports, submitted monthly over the past three years. All of them say virtually the same thing: Mordol regularly visits his private balcony at

The Consequences of Threats

Threatening criminals or impoverished citizens is usually not a problem; threatening nobles or public officials will always have consequences. They will not fold so easily, and if they are finally broken, they will certainly use their contacts to make life miserable for whoever threatened them. Moreover, should there be any form of evidence or neutral witnesses to the incident, it is likely that the victim will report the matter to the authorities.

the Islet's pleasure palace; he spends the rest of his time on his boat; otherwise nothing to report.

ALENORA

Artel Vereo, also known as Mordol Gaaras, spends his barren existence on a decrepit boat called The Alenora. He is not poor in a financial sense, not at all, but his existence lacks much of what gives life meaning. He is paralyzed from the neck down, he has no friends or acquaintances, and never leaves his home other than to visit his curtained balcony at the Islet. Sure, he has his goblin servant Uddgol, his harrowed troll apprentice Aldrax, and his faithful pet, the enormous fire salamander Smoldra. And he has food. Good food. In abundance.

The Alenora is anchored out in the channel on the north side of the Doudram River. Smoldra has grown too big for the cabin; she lies on deck instead, coiled around the mast. If the player characters arrive during one of Artel's meals (which is almost all the time), the skipper and Uddgol are sitting at the kitchen table while Aldrax is engaged in the only thing that makes his life bearable – he sits on the floor, reading, in the library below deck.

The challenge of boarding the ship and getting to Artel can be approached in several ways:

Trickery

By rowing toward the stern of the ship, it is of course possible to attract Artel's attention by shouting or whistling. In this case he sends Uddgol to the porthole to see what is going on, whereupon the player characters can try to persuade the terrified wizard to let them board the vessel.

Exactly how the negotiation develops depends on the characters' strategy. It is probably best to tell him the truth – that they suspect him of being involved in the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs and want to give him a chance to explain himself, or to help them catch the real culprit. Artel would like nothing more than to defend himself against such allegations and is willing to let them in, provided that they leave their weapons in the rowboat.

Threats may also work, not least if they threaten to take their suspicions and "evidence" directly to the Queen or the Royal Sekretorium. Artel does not want to get involved; he wants to convince the characters that they are wrong, so that he can quickly be excluded from the investigation.

Entering through a porthole

Player characters wishing to sneak up on Artel (perhaps after scouting the ship and discovering Smoldra on deck) can enter through the stern cabin's two portholes. However, any character with the *Robust* trait will not fit and anyone attempting this must be discreet on their way up along the transom.

As a suggestion, each person would have to pass two *Discreet* tests – first during the climb, then while crawling in through one of the narrow portholes. If both of these are successful, the ship's inhabitants count as surprised during the first turn of the encounter (Aldrax is in the library); if anyone fails the second test the surprise is lost, and should the first test fail, both Aldrax and Uddgol will stand ready to surprise the player characters.

Fighting their way forward

The player characters may be convinced that they are actually about to meet the adventure's "End Boss." If so, it is quite possible that they will simply try to fight their way across the deck. They would first be facing Smoldra, after which Uddgol and Aldrax come running, respectively two and four turns later.

Note that fighting on deck will probably cause quite a bit of noise and risk attracting attention from folks on land as well as from other vessels. Unless the player characters take this into account, by waiting until there are few people around, the Game Master should consider involving one of the City Watch's patrol boats.

In that case it arrives after the battle has ended, and the commanding officer will demand a detailed explanation from the suspected perpetrators and also to speak with the victim (i.e. the ship's owner) in case he would like to press charges. Only with a silver tongue and a letter from someone important (or a reputation as heroes) can they escape arrest!

Uddgol

"Hands off my master!"

Uddgol was orphaned at the age of three when his family was killed by the Ice Witch's robbers in the Titans. Alone, he followed the river Noora until reaching Yndaros, where he spent his first years slaving for petty criminals just to make a living. Six years ago he snuck into Artel's balcony at the Islet with the intention of robbing him, but the sight of the ailing mystic awoke some kind of sympathy within him.

They have been together ever since, and Uddgol is genuinely fond of his employer, who has taught him to control his hot temper and behave in a gentlemanly fashion.

Manner	Protective, irate
Race	Goblin
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Short-lived*, *Survival Instinct* (master)
Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 9 (+1), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)	
Abilities	*Acrobatics* (master), *Berserker* (master), *Iron Fist* (adept)
Boon/burden	*Poison Resilient*, *Pariah*
Weapons Strong	One-handed club 9
Armor	Tunic of order cloth 2 (+2 for *Survival Instinct*)
Defense	–1
Toughness	10 **Pain threshold** 5
Equipment	Training book with large letters, his mother's handkerchief soaked in blood and dirt, 3 shillings
Shadow	Light brown with dark lines, like dried, cracked mud (corruption: 0)
Tactics: Uddgol uses his acrobatic ability and his extra movement action to run around among the enemies and seek *Advantage*. Having positioned himself really well, he strikes hard with two attacks.	

ALDRAX

"It hasn't turned out like I thought it would..."

The troll Aldrax was referred to Artel by Grand Master Seldonio himself after a chance encounter near Serand's Pyramid – Aldrax expressed a wish to learn about the humans' magic, and Seldonio introduced the two in the hope that it would give his miserable colleague some sense of purpose. The troll and his teacher made an oral agreement about exchanging tutoring for day-to-day assistance, but there have not been many (or particularly useful) lessons – mostly a lot of heavy lifting and sweeping and moments of solitude in the somewhat meager library.

Manner	Dead-eyed but loyal
Race	Troll
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Armored* (II), *Regeneration* (II), *Robust* (II)
Accurate 11 (–1), **Cunning** 13 (–3), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 10 (0), **Quick** 7 (+3), **Resolute** 15 (–5), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 5 (+5)	
Abilities	*Brimstone Cascade* (novice), *Combat Hymn* (adept), *Confusion* (adept), *Hammer Rhythm* (master), *Troll Singing* (adept), *Two-handed Force* (adept)
Boon/burden	*Addiction*, *Pariah*

Deadly Breath

The *Deadly Breath* trait is described in detail on page 167 in the *Symbaroum Monster Codex*. Level II means that Smoldra can breathe a continuous stream of fire which deals 6 damage with a successful *[Accurate←Quick]* test, and 3 if the test fails. If the victim takes full damage, the fire is directed toward another target, and so on until the test fails.

Weapons Accurate	Long hammer 8 (bastard weapon, massive, unwieldy)		
Armor	Troll skin 3 (+3 for *Robust*)		
Defense	+3		
Toughness	10	**Pain threshold**	5
Equipment	Box of dream snuff, troll-made mouth harp (worth: 10 thaler), 6 shillings, 2 thaler.		
Shadow	Brownish green, like a half-rotten, moss-covered tree trunk (corruption: 1)		

Tactics: Aldrax usually starts by confusing the largest of the enemies, before singing a *Combat Hymn* and swinging his hammer. That said, he cannot wait to try out the newly acquired human power of *Brimstone Cascade* in actual combat.

Smoldra

Plays with her tongue

The now enormous fire salamander Smoldra has been at her master's side for almost fifty years, ever since Artel followed Kullinan Furia, his teacher at the time, on a study tour to the outermost islands of the Archipelago. Back then she was no bigger than a forearm; now she is almost four meters long from snout to tail. And she is always hungry!

Manner	Curious, voracious		
Race	Beast		
Resistance	Challenging		
Traits	*Armored* (III), *Deadly Breath* (II), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Robust* (III)		
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 11 (–1), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 9 (+1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Man-at-Arms* (novice), *Natural Warrior* (adept)		
Weapons Accurate	2 claws 9/7, and Fire Breath (see text box)		
Armor	Scales 9		
Defense	+5		
Toughness	13	**Pain threshold**	7
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Glowing red, like new-sprung lava (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Smoldra loves to fight, but will only do so to defend herself or her master. Unless she happens to have a really, really bad craving for something tasty...

CONVERSATION WITH ARTEL

Hopefully the characters will finally be able to interrogate Artel, or talk to him under relatively amicable circumstances. The old pyromancy master is paralyzed from the neck down and stands strapped to a kind of cart. Over time he has grown so stupendously obese that the straps keeping him upright are barely visible, and he reeks of something like brimstone (blight mark).

If the characters fought their way there, it takes a good while before he is calm enough to talk; otherwise he is soon ready to defend himself against the accusations he expects the characters to hurl at him:

- *"It wasn't me, I swear! I am injured; I can't perform any ceremonies. And I wouldn't want to either. Look at me! Look! This is all because of that damned Haaras starfall. All of it!"*
- Realizing that he is not being accused of anything, he calms down a bit. After a pause for thought he clears his throat and whispers: *"I know who did it. It was my old master. It was Kullinan. Kullinan Furia."*
- Kullinan visited him about three months ago, seemingly a completely different person – he used to be cold and composed, but was now fuming with hatred and visibly blight-marked. He had tried to conceal the blackened blood vessels on his neck and face with cosmetics, but they could be seen quite clearly once he started to sweat.
- The things he said were stranger still – something about the energies of corruption being an untapped power source that could change everything, end all evil in the world, all wars, famine and death. He concluded with a tirade

which Artel has been thinking about a lot: *"I will find the emperor's tomb in the Guardian's Crypt, and when I return from Symbar, all shall listen and obey."* When asked about the emperor and the Guardian's Crypt he simply responded with a haughty smile.

- The purpose of the visit was apparently to study how the corruption had affected Artel's body, and to retrieve the book *"The Force of Corruption and its Properties"* which Kullinan had given him a long time ago, as a graduation present.
- In retrospect, Artel is certain that the ritual with which Kullinan claimed to examine his body was really used to study his memories, probably those from the Battle of Haaras.
- While on the subject, he makes sure to point out that he is actually a hero; that he should be lauded for his efforts – instead he was condemned and ostracized, only because a few lowborn nobles happened to get in the way as he slew at least half a dozen Dark Lords!
- If the characters ask for more information about the visit, Artel says that it lasted about two hours. Aside from Kullinan heading down to the library to get his book, and that ritualistic examination in the cabin, they mostly just talked; the guest declined all offers of food, refreshments and strong beverages.

THE LIBRARY

Downstairs from the cabin is the cramped chamber that is Artel's library. It contains a great number of strange tomes and scrolls, but what might be of interest to the characters is the thing that is missing.

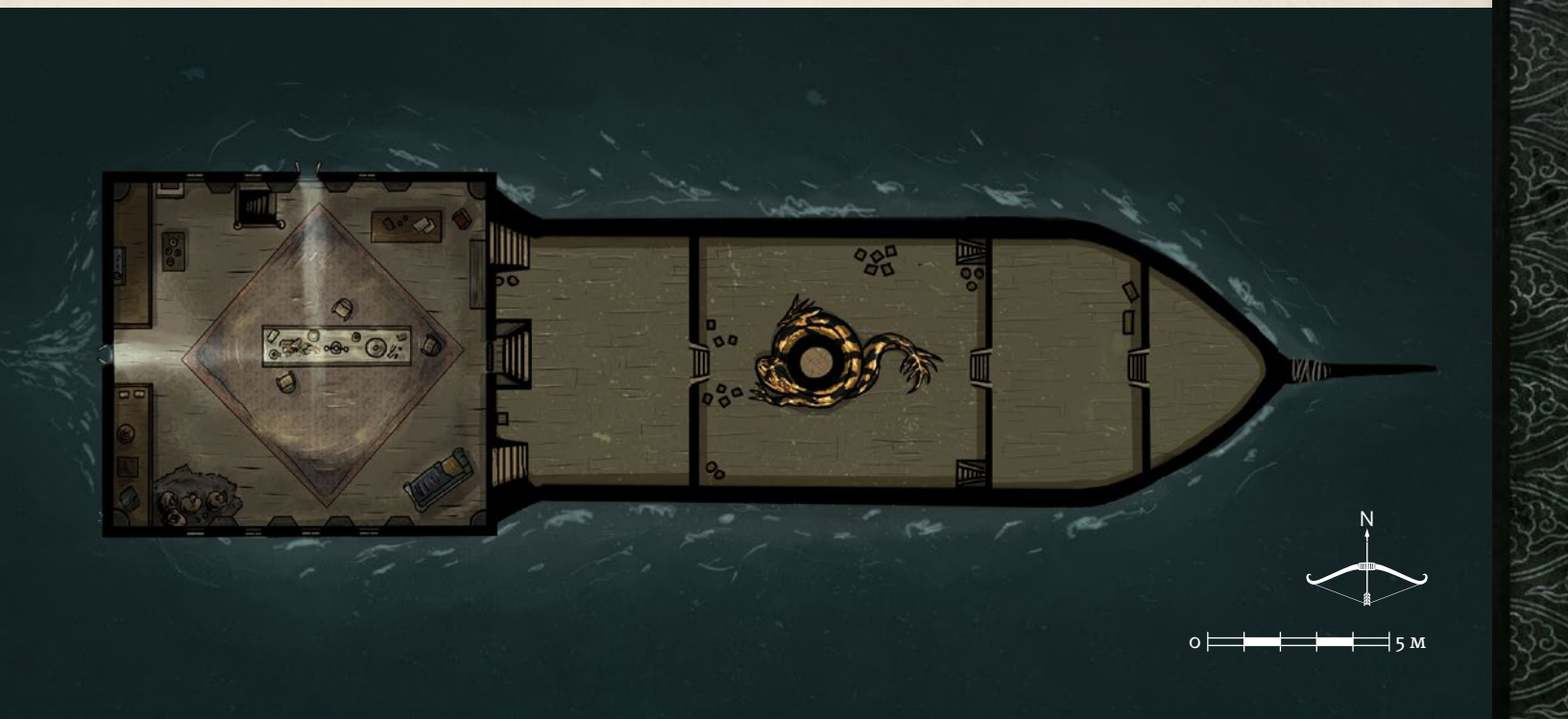
Provided that the characters have behaved themselves fairly well, the skipper will gladly let them have a closer look at his library. But not without him! Together the characters must carry Artel down the stairs and position him so that he can keep an eye on them. The following discoveries can be made:

The Meteorite

There is a small pedestal standing against the wall opposite the stairs. Resting on a velvet pillow under a crystal dome is what looks like an ordinary piece of rock, but Artel claims that it is a meteorite; the sister of the stone he used as a ceremonial focus in Haaras. But on closer inspection (*[Cunning –3]* with the *Loremaster* ability) it turns out to be a stone like any other, which does not even resemble the skystone Kullinan took from there. The reason this was not discovered earlier is that Artel never bothers to go downstairs; he sends Uddgol or Aldrax, who could not care less about what lies on that pillow.

The Ceremony Book

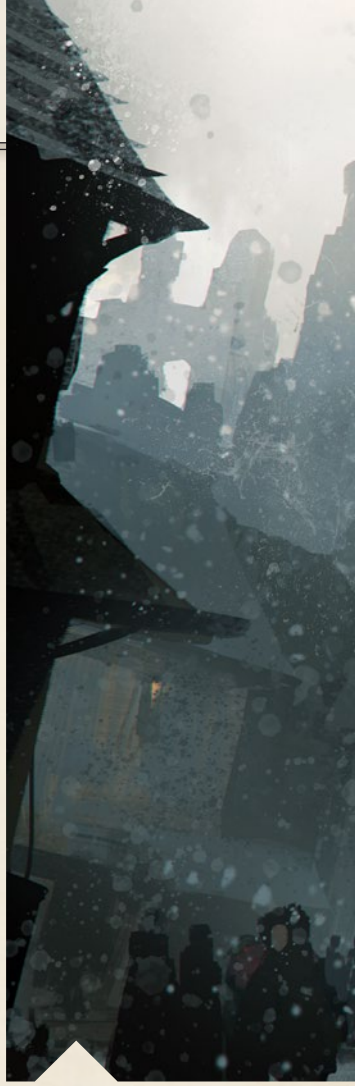
If the characters ask what interest Kullinan might have had in the library, the answer is the tome which Artel used to perform the ceremony at Haaras. There is an empty space where the book should be, which Artel finds both strange and appalling – Kullinan should already own a book describing the starfall. The only reasonable explanation is that his old master wanted to recreate the same exact effect Artel had achieved, side-effects and all.



ACT 3:

Symbar's Tomb

THE CHARACTERS SHOULD HAVE plenty of reasons to keep pursuing Kullinan Furia; which reason is the predominate one depends of course on what their personal goals are: perhaps they want to find the way to Symbar, perhaps they hope to find Elmendra's trail, perhaps they want to be seen as capable problem-solvers in the eyes of their employer or superior, or maybe they simply want to put an end to Kullinan Furia and be praised as heroes of the city and the realm.



The ruin in Old Kadizar is the city's most famous and clear sign of the location's historical links to Symbaroum.

Finding the Tomb

BY NOW IT should be perfectly clear that Kullinan is powerful, ruthless and sick with corruption. The player characters should also have realized that he is trying to locate Symbar, and that the way there appears to go through something called the Guardian's Crypt, probably hidden somewhere among the underground ruins of Lindaros.

Below are some suggestions on people they might ask about the location of the crypt. Note that only one of them knows where to find the right passageway as well as how to get to the crypt itself. But first there is reason to refer back to the stone tablet from Karvosti and address the possible need for a Spiritualist.

THE STONE TABLET

Assuming that the player characters have access to the writing on the stone tablet in the witches' reliquary, the information from previous adventures should reveal that Kullinan Furia seeks the same place and the same tomb as they do. To reiterate, in the past they have gathered the following information:

- When Lindaros had grown strong and powerful, a military force was sent back to the *"crushed heart of the empire"* to retrieve the remains of *"the Guardian's Favored, the lord of lords."*
- The symbol known to represent "Symbar" seems to be referring to the emperor as well as the place from which his remains were taken – as if the city and the person were both named Symbar.
- The remains, and the belongings/treasures which had been buried with them, were brought to *"the people's new home"* (presumably Lindaros) to be *"sent out on the Sea of Eternity."*

The tablet will not help them pinpoint the exact location of the crypt, but thanks to what they learned from Artel, a Master *Loremaster* (a player character or someone else) can decipher a previously incomprehensible series of damaged symbols: they mention *"the Guardian's Crypt"* and that it was *"where the spirit of Symbar was sent to the final rest."*

In order to find the Guardian's Crypt, the player characters must either rely on searching the passageways marked on Kullinan's map (see page 133) or ask someone who is familiar with underground Yndaros.

SPIRITUALIST WANTED

If the player characters have access to the writing on the stone tablet, they should already have considered the possibility of having a spiritualist question the dead ruler; the same thought should have crossed their minds based on information from parts of Act II. Soon it will become clear that what they really need is someone versed in the *Dimensional Stride* ritual, which can be learned by both spiritualists and demonologists.

The player characters can gain access to this skill in a number of ways:

The Dark Lord

Kalthar knows both *Necromancy* and *Dimensional Stride*, but has sworn never to use mystical powers again and must therefore be persuaded to help. The simplest way is to threaten to hand him over to someone other than the Queen, such as the Iron Pact, or the First Father who no doubt would want to expose and kill him in order to repair his reputation among the Ambrian people.

If the player characters swear that they will return him to Korinthia after the job is done, he will agree to follow them to the crypt and speak to the ruler's spirit, but under no circumstances will he aid them in battle against Kullinan or anyone else; he will not even use his powers in self-defense.

Player character

It is not inconceivable that one of the player characters is a ritualist; perhaps that person is trained in the art of *Necromancy*? The *Dimensional Stride* ritual, on the other hand, is introduced in this adventure and must be procured elsewhere, for instance in the form of a ritual codex bought on the black market (see page 126 in the *Advanced Player's Guide*).

To find someone who can sell them a codex containing a sorcery ritual they must turn to their contacts in the underworld. Grimorio Abramelin is a possible option, but player characters with the right contacts or who are themselves trained sorcerers will know of other candidates as well.

Assume that each codex costs 40 thaler on the black market and that the anonymous seller demands a meeting in some dodgy gambling den or tavern.

Marbela's Plan

The Queen, the City Watch, and the army seem to be completely powerless in the face of Nobleman Dastan's idiotic stunt. Marbela's plan is to have her capable expedition guards sabotage one of the gates of Old Kadizar, or possibly a wall section, from the inside. Before heading out, she will write a letter to the Commander of the City Watch, asking him to prepare an invasion, though not to attack until he sees a burning arrow fly over one of the gates or some part of the wall. In other words, with Marbela in tow, the characters can expect a small civil war to break out on the surface once they have gone underground.

Other ritualist

As always, the characters can pay to have someone else perform rituals for them. There are a couple of ritualists within Ordo Magica who have mastered these rituals (for research purposes, of course) and need thaler to finance their projects, pay their adepts, and so on. There are also independent sorcerers, for example among the people at the refugee camp.

Player characters who explain their dilemma to Duchess Esmerelda are up for a surprise: she claims to have a friend who is interested in *"spiritualism and the worlds beyond our own."* She is of course referring to Junia Dardall, though she never mentions her name and certainly not the Sacred of the Old Blood. Even if the characters do not disclose that they are seeking the way to Symbar, Esmerelda will think that the information which Junia helps them obtain might be of use to her and her father.

The friend will be wearing a full robe with a deep hood, her face hidden behind a glazed porcelain mask painted like a smirking ghost with holes for eyes. She knows both *Necromancy* and *Dimensional Stride*.

Whoever this ritualist is, the players must consider what to do with him/her once they return to their home world. If they let him/her live, the person will probably know the way to Symbar; such knowledge will not likely remain unexploited...

ORDER MASTER MARBELA

Characters with a letter from someone important, or contacts to help them get close to her, might have a word with Order Master Marbela – the leader of the excavation currently underway beneath Old Kadizar. She spends most of her time in her office halfway up the easternmost of Ordo Magica's towers; otherwise she is sleeping in her apartment in the western part of the Temple District.

She is sad and downcast after the attack that turned many of her friends into either murder victims or fire possessed lunatics; she is absolutely furious that Nobleman Dastan has isolated Old Kadizar, thereby separating her from the excavation. She answers any questions about underground Yndaros with another question: *"why do you ask; what are you after?"* To loosen her tongue, the player characters must either admit that they are hoping to find accurate directions to Symbar or agree to do her a favor: she can personally take them to the place they seek, on the condition that they also smuggle in two of the guards normally working beneath Old Kadizar.

If the player characters mention Symbar or agree to her terms, Marbela needs roughly half an hour to prepare. She suggests that the characters spend that time finding a way to infiltrate the thief king's realm without being detected.

PATRIARCH VALOTZAR

Regardless of whether the player characters have met him before, the uncrowned king of the dwarves is someone who might know what they are looking for. It is rumored that most dwarves like being underground (which is really just a prejudice based on their origin in Küam Zamok), and with a successful *Cunning* test the player characters can recall that Artek Valotzar has been involved in several of the city's major construction projects.

How they might contact the dwarven patriarch, and how the meeting will transpire, can be read on page 116. Artek never asks what the characters are actually looking for; all he cares about is to dispense a Blood Coin (possibly a second one). But if the characters reveal that they may be close to finding the city of Symbar, he pauses; he agrees to help them on the condition that they take one of his sons along, and that he is given full access to whatever information the characters manage to obtain.

No matter what is agreed, Artek can provide the following information:

- A group of goblins currently working for him as diggers used to do the same at Ordo Magica's excavation. They were thoroughly questioned about what they had seen and heard during their time in Marbela's employ, and their answers were of course relayed to Artek.
- Beneath Old Kadizar, there is something which the goblins heard described as *"catacombs consecrated to the Guardian."*

- To find these catacombs, they should head down through the ruin in Old Kadizar, and then follow the tunnels leading east. Soon they will reach an area where the walls are covered with cracked mosaics, where they should also see a number of stone coffins – the Guardian's Crypt is likely somewhere nearby.

Note that Artek's information is essentially accurate, but that the place described by the goblins is not the same as the Guardian's Crypt. If the characters take the patriarch's advice, they will probably regret it (see the heading Dead Ends on page 150) ...

GRIMORIO

Another person who knows a thing or two about Yndaros' underworld (in two senses) is the manager of the steam bath, Grimorio Abramelin. With Nobleman Dastan having foolishly crowned himself king, he is in a fantastic mood; his greatest competitor just dug his own grave, and soon he will take over as the city's number one crime lord.

If the characters have previously helped him burn down Dastan's warehouse (see page 115) he will gladly answer their questions without demanding anything in return. Otherwise there might be need for a suitable bribe, such as a really fancy wine and a large piece of the ripened sheep cheese which the members of clan Zarek like to have with their excellent blackbrew.

- Two members of Master Marbela's expedition are on his list of informants, paid to pass on information about any discoveries made down in the tunnels.
- In late fall, the two of them were tasked with excavating and clearing out a small vault which has not yet been examined by the scholars, but in her records Marbela listed it as *"the burial vault of the Guardian."*
- Apparently, it does not contain any treasures; *"only an old skull"* the spies said, so Grimorio does not mind letting the characters have a closer look – he is happy to call in one of the two spies to guide them.
- However, given Nobleman Dastan's recent stunt, Grimorio suggests that they go through one of his older smuggling tunnels instead. It stopped being used when whacking and digging could be heard from the other side of the wall; if Marbela's diggers have not yet worked their way into the tunnel, it is only a matter of time. Otherwise the player characters can probably create an opening themselves.
- The tunnel starts in the cellar beneath one of the plobs of New Town, continuing through man-made passages and basement complexes from the days of Lindaros, all the way to Old Kadizar. The spy he summons (a remarkably quiet barbarian named Morgar) can guide them every step of the way.

Should the characters take Grimorio's advice and go through the smuggling tunnel, they will soon be faced with a tricky situation (see the text box above). Note that they can instead ask Morgar to lead them through the passageway in the ruin of Old Kadizar, which of course they can also do if they survive the challenges at the abrupt end of the tunnel and want to try another way in.

The Smuggling Tunnel

Considering that the player characters have a guide to help them, there is probably no need for a detailed description of the old smuggling route between New Town and Old Kadizar, especially as they will not get very far. The tunnel varies greatly in terms of headroom, width, and the appearance of the walls; sometimes it goes through newly dug, narrow passages; sometimes through vast halls of stone which have not been used for hundreds of years; sometimes through natural cracks in the bedrock.

As they reach the area beneath the landing place of the meteorite, the characters enter an old cellar from the days of Lindaros. Where the far wall should be, there is only pitch-black darkness; a roughly five-meter-wide rift between them and the rest of the tunnel, which to make things worse is completely collapsed. Worse still, they are not alone – a group of eight Darklings have emerged from the Underworld. The rift became their way out of a chamber where they had been trapped since a previous collapse; the long climb has made them extra hungry, and if human is the only thing on offer, it will have to do. See page 79 for a description of the new creature Darkling.

Old Kadizar

IT IS NOW a couple of days since the Cathedral of Martyrs was crushed and High Chieftain Tharaban lost his son. During that time Nobleman Dastan has declared himself King of the free realm of Old Kadizar (see page 93 for details).

This section provides an overview of the situation inside the walls, where the player characters will probably have to go. We then present four different ways to enter the walled and heavily guarded thief realm. The characters may of course

THE RUIN

1. Entrances
2. City Watch Office
3. Dormitory
4. Captain's Office
5. Jail Cells
6. The Excavation
7. Down to the Underworld
8. Dastan's Tower

DASTAN'S SELLSWORDS	
Manner	Cocky
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	*Contacts* (the Ambrian army)
Accurate 15 (–5), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 13 (–3), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Man-at-arms* (adept), *Recovery* (novice), *Shield Fighter* (novice)
Weapons Accurate	Sword 5
Armor	Chainmail 4
Defense	–3 (shield)
Toughness	13 **Pain Threshold** 7
Equipment	Jug of liquor (for the nerves), 1D6 shillings
Shadow	Scratched and dented copper (corruption: 0)
Tactics: The sellswords have seen plenty of combat and will not back down from a fight. But they lack finesse, and might well surrender – cursing bitterly – if they believe the opposition to be too great.	

think of some other approach, but in that case, the challenges described below should help the Game Master place suitable obstacles in their path.

OVERVIEW

Behind the wall of Old Kadizar, everyone is on edge. There are almost four thousand people in there, most of them belonging to one of three categories: Residents, Hooligans and Hostages. The latter category consists of individuals who were visiting the district when the gates closed, and who for various reasons are deemed valuable to the enemy outside the wall. These include a handful of lowborn nobles, ten watchmen (including two captains), and some prominent merchants, artists, wizards and liturgs. They are all locked up in the local City Watch jail, housed in the same ruin complex where Nobleman Dastan holds court.

The thief king's core group comprises his fifty or so thugs, backed by a motley crew of war veterans, petty criminals, and roughly a hundred combat-able residents who have all heeded the thief king's call in exchange for promises of financial compensation. Sure, most of the latter will put down their arms

as soon as the enemy breaches the gates, but until then, they are gratefully accepting free food and one shilling a day. The rest of the district's residents are terrified of what will happen next; many with children or elderly relatives to care for have already fled down the river, huddled together on various floating structures. Those who remain know that they are expected to obey Dastan's Dictate and defend the realm when the time comes.

A tense atmosphere looms over the district. The thugs and sellswords are posted along the wall's balustrade or patrolling the streets in groups of six; everyone else stays indoors as much as possible – they are fetching water from the public squares, seeking out the King with recently found valuables, visiting their neighbors in the hope of trading two turnips for one pound of flour. Many are also perched by the windows, which the player characters must keep in mind should they try to sneak through the district.

No matter how the player characters try to enter Old Kadizar, they risk being detected by thugs or sellswords. Stats for the former are found on page 115; as for the latter, the Game Master can use the stats below, just as they are or as a kind of average if a greater variation is desired.

STEALTHY MANEUVERS

It is certainly possible for a smaller group of people to sneak into Old Kadizar, but it takes a great deal of cunning and discretion. Crossing the water would be easiest. There is a guard posted in each of the small towers where the wall meets the bank, but they are mainly on the lookout for boats; they could easily fail to notice a person or two swimming along the bank, sneaking up on them, and silencing them before they sound the alarm.

With this done, the characters must make their way down to the excavation, through the opening at the edge of the ruin which also constitutes King Dastan's palace. The best way to reach it is by moving across the rooftops, since the ground below is frequently patrolled by guards. But when getting close, the roofs become risky, as Dastan has guards peering through the windows of the palace tower.

Exactly how the Game Master turns this into challenges depends on the movements of the player characters, but as a suggestion, they will have to pass one or more of the following tests (possibly modified by relevant Boons):

Vigilant: to detect incoming patrols, residents roaming the streets or watching from their windows, and the guard posts in the tower.

Discreet: to sneak past stationary guard posts, climb without making noise, quietly take out thugs/sellswords, or hide when they are at risk of being discovered (normally not necessary if the threat has been detected with a *Vigilant* test as described above).

CITIZENSHIP

Another option is to offer their services to Nobleman Dastan. If the player characters manage to make up a plausible story about why they want to join Nobleman Dastan's fight for freedom, he is not averse to welcoming them as citizens – on the contrary, he needs every able fighter he can possibly get.

If the characters want to try to talk themselves past the wall, they ought to start at one of the wall's gates. Convincing arguments (and a successful *Persuasive* test) can secure an audience with the king, where they must be very careful not to violate Dastan's Dictate. How their request is received is for the Game Master to decide, on the basis that Dastan is paranoid to strangers but also in need of competent warriors. Perhaps any previous encounters with the newly crowned king of Old Kadizar will also affect the outcome...

NEGOTIATIONS

Yet another possible strategy is to negotiate access to the excavation. However, Dastan is not interested in valuables or money; such things will be of little use to him if he is dead. Depending on how they introduce themselves and what contacts they claim to have, he will demand one of two things: either that they convince the Queen to pardon him, or that they smuggle him out of Old Kadizar and take

Korolak

One of Ripe's brothers ends up inside the wall when the gates are closed. He stands in the middle of the square outside the king's palace ruin, ready to act whenever he senses even the slightest outbreak of corruption. Dastan leaves him alone, afraid to provoke the enormous being which is clearly in some kind of half-hibernating state.

If the player characters ever get a clear view of the square, the presence of Korolak will hardly go unnoticed. By now they may have realized that the giants react to outbreaks of corruption, or maybe they have yet to figure that out. Either way, from where he is standing, the giant might very well detect any outbreaks that occur in the underground complex, so the Game Master must be ready to activate him if the player characters give rise to corruption. How long it takes Korolak to reach them depends on where they are located, but it will probably be between two and five minutes...

him somewhere safe (preferably to his cronies in Kurun). In his desperation, he will let the characters attend their business in the Underworld before fulfilling their part of the agreement: *"But my whole army of loyal subjects will be waiting for you on the surface, so don't try anything funny!"*

If the characters choose this approach, Dastan will soon change his mind – partly because he does not trust them, but also because he is so curious about what the player characters are after. More about this can be read on page 152, under the heading The Crypt.

THE PATH OF VIOLENCE

As always, it is possible for the characters to fight their way to their goal. However, in this case it requires lots of allies who are willing to risk their lives to forestall something that still cannot be avoided, namely the fall of the newly established little realm.

There are two main options to choose from: the characters must either amass an awful lot of thaler to recruit an army of sellswords, or make the commander of the City Watch or some other dignitary see the importance of immediately crushing the insurgency. Sellswords can be recruited in the refugee camp; they are in great need of money, but will demand two thaler each to participate in the attack. Another possibility is to quickly contact the leaders of the local robber gangs and thief syndicates, for instance with the help of Grimorio Abramelin, but then the characters will have to pay twice as much for each sellsword.

Convincing Commander Alvo Steelneck or some contact within the army that swift action must be taken against the insurgents is no easy task. The Queen has made it clear that their primary focus must be to maintain the state of emergency and enforce the curfew; everything else will have to wait until peace has been restored and life in the city returns to normal. But perhaps the player characters can make a case that, in times like these, the Queen's subjects must take matters into their own hands. Korinthia and her advisers are understandably busy with the political and strategic effects of the death of the barbarian prince and the destruction of the cathedral, but they would of course appreciate someone else dealing with the problem in Old Kadizar. And perhaps they have friends/contacts/quest givers in high places who can help persuade the commander in question?

In both of these cases, the characters must take part in storming the district, and then slip away and descend into the Underground. Regardless of whether the attack is led by formal commanders or a group of hastily appointed sellsword captains, they will probably react strongly to reports that some of their "soldiers" have left before the battle is over...

Size of the Army

The exact number of soldiers or sellswords the characters need to assemble is up to the Game Master to decide, based on their choice of strategy. However, they ought to be at least as many as Dastan's force of one hundred and fifty fighters...

The Guardian's Crypt

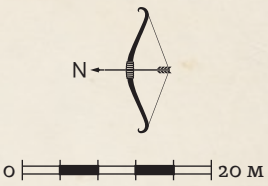
THE GROUND BENEATH Old Kadizar is full of tunnels and chambers, most of them excavated parts of what were once the underground structures of Lindaros. There is a considerable variation in floor level, which is why many tunnels are sloped and sometimes furnished with ladders or stairs. Only the largest tunnels have been provided with lantern holders; the lanterns are out when the characters arrive, but may of course be lit, each one containing enough oil to remain burning for 5+1D4 hours.

Marbela, her four novices, two adepts, and twenty laborers, have excavated and cleared out almost every surface and passageway beneath the district. The hard work of digging out and removing rubble and debris is handled by the laborers, after which the novices take over, using trowels, brushes and bellows to uncover the details of the area. Only when they have finished does Marbela, along with the adepts, step in to examine possible finds and determine what should be transported back to the Triplet Towers for closer inspection.

At the moment the investigations are focused on the chamber next to the Guardian's Crypt, which appears to have been part of the same building. It was clearly an archive of sorts, as the room was found full of old scrolls and engraved copper plates, stored on shelves and in chests. So far, the scholars have only studied and catalogued a fraction of the content, their most interesting finds being records of births and deaths from the period just prior to the fall of the city state. Fortunately for the player characters (and Kullinan), both the laborers and the novices have finished their work in the adjacent room.

THROUGH THE UNDERWORLD

If the player characters are guided by Marbela, Morgar or someone else, they will of course have no trouble finding the right location. Nor is it very hard to move around down there – if they carry torches or light the lanterns in one of the larger tunnels, they may proceed without rolling any tests.



THE EXCAVATION

1. Entrance
2. Grum
3. Catacombs
4. Risk of collapse
5. The stone warrior
6. Archives
7. The Guardian's Crypt
8. Smuggling tunnel

3
6
7
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1
8
4
5

If they come without a guide, they might encounter certain problems in the complex, not least if they take Artek Valotzar's advice and head eastwards. Described below are three dead ends which all pose some kind of challenge. Moreover, if they follow the southward tunnels – not yet cleared out but fully traversable – they might eventually arrive at the chamber described under the Awakenings heading on page 45.

Whether they have a guide or not, there is one challenge they will hardly be able to avoid. The goblin Grum (see page 56) was in Old Kadizar when the gates slammed shut, along with a dozen of his most loyal followers. Egocentric as he is, Grum thought it was because of him that the gates were closed; that Nobleman Dastan regarded him as a growing threat and wanted to get rid of him. In sheer panic he fled underground where he and his thugs have remained ever since, fortifying the large hall where Marbela and her coworkers had established their headquarters.

If the player characters are talking or carrying light sources as they approach the hall, Grum will automatically notice this and have his gang lay an ambush. He is already convinced that the characters are sent by Dastan and that they have come to kill him.

Grum

"You want it all? ALL!? I can give you MORE!"

Grum is getting on in years, but he is still convinced that he is the one who will lift his brothers and sisters out of misery. Goblins who think themselves well off are wrong; Grum knows that humans have it much better, and he would take the bread from their mouths to give to his followers. And to himself, of course. Mostly to himself.

Manner	Defiantly ill-tempered		
Race	Goblin		
Resistance	Ordinary		
Traits	*Short-lived*		
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 15 (–5), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 10 (0), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)			
Abilities	*Dominate* (novice), *Iron Fist* (adept), *Twin Attack* (adept)		
Weapons Persuasive	2 axes 6, two attacks at the same target		
Armor	Crow armor 3 (Cumbersome)		
Defense	0 (dual weapons)		
Toughness	10	**Pain Threshold**	5
Equipment	Two chicken legs wrapped in cloth, Clay pipe and Tobacco, 2 thaler and 4 shillings		
Shadow	Shiny greyish green, like a wet stone covered in algae (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Grum thinks his life is worth much more than that of individual underlings, which is why he prefers to let them take the first hit. Only once he has identified the (in his opinion) weakest opponent does he join the fray. Or not.

Grum's thugs

"Grum is king!"

Grum is followed by a growing group of goblins who agree that the time for goblin justice has come. They are all ragged and malnourished, living only on the hope that Grum instills in them.

Manner	Desperately fearless		
Race	Goblin		
Resistance	Weak		
Traits	*Pariah, Short-lived, Survival Instinct* (I)		
Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 5 (+5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 11 (–1), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)			
Abilities	None		
Weapons Accurate	One-handed weapon 4, throwing weapon 3		
Armor	Light crow armor 2 (cumbersome)		
Defense	+3		
Toughness	11	**Pain Threshold**	6
Equipment	1D6 throwing weapons, chewing tobacco, 1D4–1 ortegs		
Shadow	Various shades of green and brown (corruption: 0)		

Tactics: Grum's minions are willing to die for their king, not that he has been very good to them, but because of what he says they can achieve together.

DEAD ENDS

Characters who follow the tunnels in the wrong direction might run into trouble. The Game Master is of course free to expand the complex even further, and possibly move the rift from the smuggling tunnel mentioned by Grimorio so that there are numerous tunnels to choose from beneath Old Kadizar. That said, it is probably best not to overdo it; the challenges that await the characters once they have found the emperor's

skull and opened the tear to the Yonderworld should be great enough to satisfy most players.

The Catacombs

Marbela's laborers have made the Underworld traversable over quite a long stretch; they have reached all the way to what is clearly a series of catacombs – a straight corridor, intersected by a handful of others with alcoves in the walls. Each alcove contains a magnificent stone coffin, whose lid has been chiseled to depict the deceased in formal attire.

The catacombs are only partially cleared of debris. The white mosaics on the walls are obscured by dust, the ground is full of gravel and larger stones, and many of the coffins have not been fully excavated. Marbela could sense that the energies were unsound and ordered her subordinates to stay away until she had time to investigate properly.

Her senses were correct: due to the growing darkness of the world, the dead have been reanimated, filled with a black and bottomless hunger. They have so far remained still, but if the characters open any of the coffins, dark energy will rouse all the nearby corpses to action. It takes the skeletal undead one turn to break free and crawl out from the darkness of their coffins. They will then close in on the characters.

Risk of collapse

Should the player characters go to the western edge of the complex, there will be a tunnel opening into a hall so large that the light source cannot illuminate the far wall. The ceiling seems to be intact; footprints can be seen in the dust on the floor, but there are no indications that someone has had to dig out or haul anything away from there. A successful *[Vigilant –5]* test reveals what looks like small notches in the stone floor, recently made and roughly two fingers wide.

On Marbela's orders, her diggers assessed the structural integrity of the floor by striking it with a digging bar as they moved forward. Hence, they managed to detect the danger: the ground below is undermined by a sinkhole, and if enough pressure is applied, the floor is likely to collapse. Technically, this means that if characters with a combined *Strong* value of at least forty enter the hall together, the ground will crumble under their feet.

A successful *Vigilant* test followed by a successful *Quick* test allows a character to leap back to safe ground. Those who fail one or both of the tests plunge twelve meters straight down onto a rough stone floor. See rules for Damage from Falling, page 177 in the *Core Rulebook*.

UNDEAD LINDARIAN	
Manner	Hissing with furious hunger
Race	Undead
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Gravely Cold* (I), *Undead* (II)
Accurate 9 (+1), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 13 (–3), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)	
Abilities	*Berserker* (adept), *Iron Fist* (adept)
Burden	*Slow*
Weapons Strong	Claw-like fingers 7
Armor	None
Defense	+5
Toughness	15 **Pain Threshold** –
Equipment	Gems/jewelry worth 1D100 thaler
Shadow	Sickly, pale yellow with black blotches, like rotting skin (thoroughly corrupt)

Tactics: The undead shamble forth on the hunt for warm flesh and fresh blood.

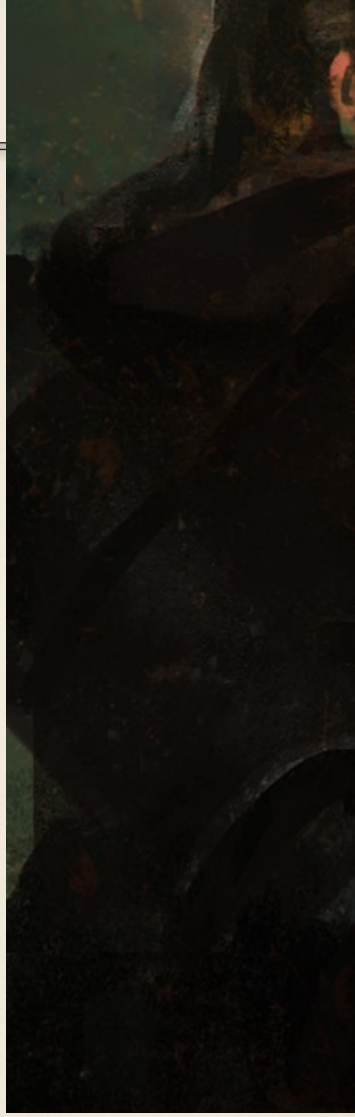
The stone warrior

At the south western end of the complex is a natural, narrowing crevice. The far opening is no more than thirty centimeters wide and therefore impossible for a *Robust* person to get through. Beyond the opening is a larger, partially collapsed chamber, but even before they enter, there are two things which the player characters might notice.

A successful *Vigilant* test with the *Witchsight* ability: The air in the chamber seems to vibrate with heat, or rather with wrath; something in there is radiating immensely powerful and hateful energies.

A successful *Vigilant* test with a light source reaching at least ten meters: Two large blood stains and quite a bit of spatter can be seen on the dusty marble floor, probably no older than a few weeks. If the test succeeds with a difference of three or more, the character also notices parts of a body further in, dressed in simple Ambrian workers' clothes – the person has clearly been cut in half!

In the chamber sits Valandor – a stone warrior so ancient not even he knows where he comes from or how long he has been claiming lives with his axe. Thanks to the massacres he caused in the villages north of the city state, the Lindarians anticipated his imminent arrival and unstoppable



VALANDOR			
Manner	Murderous		
Race	Spirit		
Resistance	Mighty		
Traits	*Spirit Form* (III)		
Accurate 14 (−4), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 5 (+5), **Persuasive** 9 (+1), **Quick** 16 (−6), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 18 (−8), **Vigilant** 10 (0)			
Abilities	*Berserker* (master), *Exceptionally Accurate* (master), *Exceptionally Quick* (master), *Exceptionally Strong* (master), *Iron Fist* (master), *Two-handed Force* (master)		
Weapons Strong	Double-axe of stone 12 (blunt), or 10 and ignoring *Armor*		
Armor	Can only be harmed by mystical powers and magic weapons, which deal half damage		
Defense	−6		
Toughness	18	**Pain Threshold**	–
Equipment	None		
Shadow	Flickering grayish white, like a snowy winter sky (thoroughly corrupt)		
Tactics: Valandor follows his creator's last order: *"Kill all intruders."* Since the creator did not specify any location, he sees everyone as an intruder who must be slain.			

rampage. Instead of sacrificing more lives in battle against the giant, they decided to set a trap; a ten meter deep and (on the surface) twenty meter wide pit was dug in the middle of their largest square. Valandor failed to notice it; he fell into the shaft and remained there as the Lindarians blocked the opening and restored the square to its original state.

If the player characters dare to enter the chamber, they will soon see a huge, roughly cut statue of a warrior, kneeling with his hands stretched out, grasping the shaft of a double-bladed stone axe. Once they come within melee range, Valandor raises his gaze, and a moment later he attacks.

Technically, Valandor is a possessed statue. He cannot be harmed by normal weapons, but is not protected from powers that affect spirits – something the Lindarians could not exploit due to their strict prohibition against the use of magical energies. The best strategy is probably to run; Valandor cannot pass through the crevice and his stone axe cannot do much damage to the bedrock.

THE CRYPT

The Protector's Crypt has lost much of its former glory. Although it is completely intact, the mosaic floor depicting a starry sky has faded and been covered with dust, the arched ceiling's once glittering, crimson vanadinite crystals seem to have lost their luster, and the gold leaf dressing has flaked off the walls.

One wall section is of particular interest – the only section which seems not to have been covered in gold leaf. Someone has already brushed its surface so that the motif of the mosaic is clear: a city on the bank of a river running through an undulating landscape; above the city there is a ship on its way toward a tear in the deep blue, starlit sky; standing in the bow of the ship is a caped figure wearing a golden crown.

At the center of the 8x8 meter large chamber, in-between four smoothly polished basalt pillars, stands a single podium of matte black stone. And on the podium sits the shrunken head of the last Symbarian emperor. No coffin, no other remains, only the withered skull with its parchment-colored skin, sewn-up eyes, and nut-brown queue of hair .

The only full corpse in the chamber is much fresher. It is a woman in her sixties who, judging by her clothes, belongs to one of Davokar's barbarian clans. She is lying close to the southern wall, and a closer inspection reveals that two swords have been thrust through her body – the blades must have been red-hot, as her wounds seem scorched around the edges and have left no blood.

There are also other clear signs of someone having recently been in the chamber. With a successful *Vigilant* test, the footprints in the dust can reveal that four different people have moved around in there. Even more apparent is the ritual circle which someone has painted on the floor around the podium, though initially it is hard to spot its black lines against the dark blue mosaic. A successful

Old Aldrun

With the Dark Lord having disappeared from Plob 17, Kullinan was forced to find himself another spiritualist. After a frustrating search he finally found her among the refugees. Her name was Aldrun – a witch trained in the dark arts of sorcery who had recently been banished from Karohar and chosen to settle in the refugee camp. When the employer realized that what he really needed was a Demonologist or a ritual codex (he chose the latter, in two copies), he ordered his flaming servant to dispose of her. By then, she practically welcomed the sweet release of death...

Cunning test with the *Ritualist* ability, or training in the *Sorcery* tradition, suggests that someone has used the ritual *Dimensional Stride*.

Furthermore, a successful *Vigilant* test aimed at the circle reveals that there used to be another ritual circle in the same place, but that someone has made an effort to erase it. All that remain are a few barely discernible lines which clearly do not belong to the more visible pattern. As the Game Master probably realizes, the older circle was drawn by Elmendra and Herangoi on their journey to the Yonderworld. It was the latter who tried to wash away the tracks after he alone had returned to Ambria.

The skull

The player characters will probably want to have a closer look at the skull. A successful *Vigilant* by someone with the *Witchsight* ability, or some mystical power or ritual that affects spirits, reveals that the spirit of the deceased is not bound to the skull; it is somewhere else. The successful test also leads to another insight: the skull is linked to a place in the Yonderworld.

If the players cannot figure it out, a *Cunning* test with the *Loremaster* ability is enough to link the absence of the spirit to the wall mosaics and the ritual circle; if the test fails, some non-player character (if there are any) can step in and help them with the interpretation. In any case, they will eventually reach the conclusion that the skull can be used as a gateway to the place in the Yonderworld to which it is linked.

In other words, the player characters do not need a spiritualist but a mystic who knows the *Dimensional Stride* ritual (see page 143–144 for suggestions on the matter). If the characters have brought Kalthar with them, this is not a problem, but otherwise they might have to leave Old Kadizar until they have gained access to the ritual.

Under attack

We would suggest that the player characters do not get to perform the ritual in peace. Depending on who they have spoken to previously, there are a number of groups who would love to rob them of their clearly important (and no doubt valuable) discovery.

Perhaps it is Nobleman Dastan's thugs who come bursting into the chamber? Perhaps Artek

Corruption in the Yonderworld

How much corruption the characters suffer in the dust-filled air of the Yonderworld depends on where they are. The Game Master can adjust the risk of infection according to the characters' corruption thresholds, but we suggest that they suffer 1D6–3 temporary corruption as soon as they enter the world of the daemons. They must then roll again every five turns.

Table 8: Stats for opponents

NPC	DESCRIPTION
Dastan's Thugs	Page 115 in *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*
Grimorio's Shamans	Page 114 in *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*
Dwarven Thug	Page 120 in *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*
City Watchman	Page 90 in *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*
Robber	Page 211 in the *Symbaroum Core Rulebook*
Giant	Page 92 in *Yndaros – The Darkest Star*

Valotzar could not restrain his curiosity, or maybe it was Grimorio Abramelin who offered them advice? Perhaps it is the City Watch or the robber captains who have sent people to hunt down the deserters, or Ripe's brother Korolak who has sensed the potentially corrupting energies of the ritual? The Game Master decides who the attackers are and how many arrive, but the challenge should lead to a dramatic situation rather than mortal danger.

The enemy could arrive just as the ritual is nearing completion. That way, the characters must hold their ground for a certain number of turns, but make sure to be standing inside the circle when the tear to the Yonderworld opens (the ritualist can only keep it open for so long).

Shadows of the Yonderworld

COMPLETING THE RITUAL opens a tear to the ashen deserts of the Yonderworld. The first thing the characters see, maybe fifty meters from the place where they land, is the stern of a huge stone ship. They have found the funeral ship of Emperor Symbar; the vessel which, according to Lindarian belief and tradition, carried his freed spirit out onto the Sea of Eternity.

In the final part of the adventure the player characters will encounter Elmendra as well as Kullinan Furia. And inside the ship are its helmsman and sailors; daemons who have sworn to protect the burial ship against any threat. The location is like a small adventure landscape, and if all goes well, the characters will return with detailed knowledge about the location of the city of Symbar, preferably accompanied by Elmendra and with Kullinan Furia consigned to the final rest. But there are many difficult obstacles standing between the player characters and a favorable outcome.

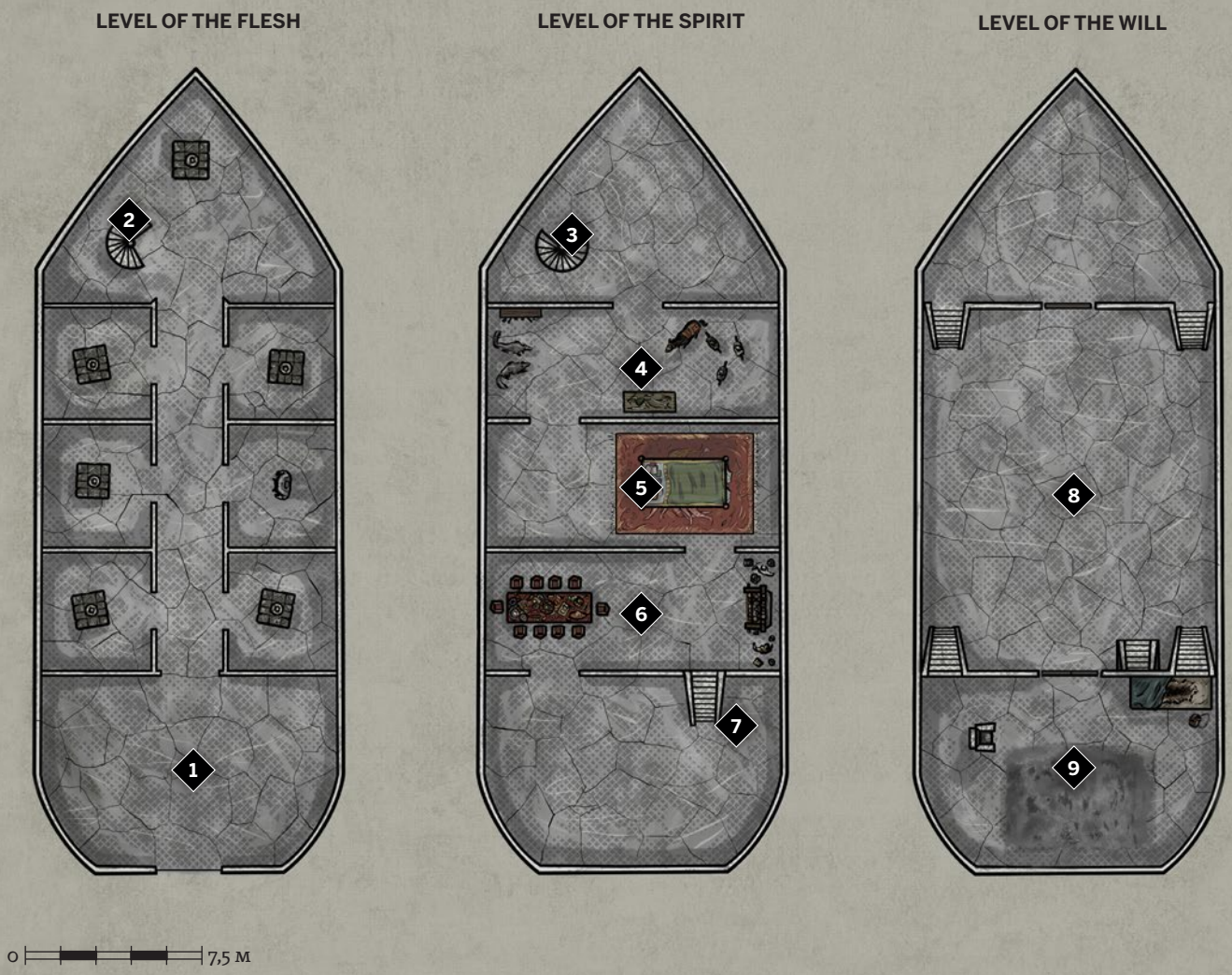
A successful *Vigilant* test with the *Witchsight* ability aimed at the opening in the stern of the stone ship reveals that the air inside seems completely free from corruption, as if the hull wards off the dark powers of its surroundings. And sure enough: as long at the characters are on the levels of the Flesh or the Spirit, or in the aftercastle on the level of the Will, they are completely safe from corruption. However, this is not the case on deck...

THE STONE SHIP

Emperor Symbar's burial ship is made from blocks of gray, speckled, weather-beaten marble, covered with chiseled late-Symbarian symbols describing certain high points in the ruler's history – important victories, lovers, significant buildings constructed, and so on. It is roughly twenty-five meters long and three stories (or decks) high, each story with six meters of headroom, making the ship almost fourteen meters high from bottom to rail and eighteen meters to the roof of the aftercastle. The ship's bottom is completely flat.

The only way in is through the opening in the stern. Flying (for example *Shapeshift* or Transformation Brew) is of course also an option, but then one suffers corruption every five turns as described in the text box Corruption in the Yonderworld. Grappling hooks and such are of no use; as soon as one is attached the runes on the rail start to glow with a heat that burns through rope in one turn and melts metal in three. Once inside the ship, the winds die out and all goes quiet. Two faint but distinct sounds emerge from the silence. One of them seems to be coming from above; a melody played on chimes or bells. The other is the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching from the darkness beyond the corridor opening opposite the entrance.

According to Lindarian tradition, each level is devoted to a certain aspect of the deceased's being: the body, the spirit and the will. The following is an overview of these levels.



THE BURIAL SHIP

1. Entrance Hall
2. Stair Up
3. Stair Down
4. War
5. Love
6. Arts
7. Stair Up
8. Deck
9. Aftercastle

The Level of the Flesh

The bottom deck has seven chambers, in addition to the empty entrance hall. All but one contain meter-high urns on top of podiums resembling the one in the Guardian's Crypt. The urns are covered in bone-white enamel with details of pure gold, and each is marked with a black rune describing its content: glands, liver, lungs, genitals, brain, and – right at the front of the bow – heart. The only exception is the middle chamber to the right, where a man-high, headless statue of stone is wearing the emperor's tattooed and eerily well-preserved skin.

A spiral staircase at the bow leads to the level of the Spirit.

The Level of the Spirit

The second level contains three narrow chambers, filled with items related to the emperor's favorite activities: war, love and art. In the War Chamber, closest to the bow, there are weapons and shields mounted on the walls between tapestries depicting important battles from the emperor's life. It also contains Symbar's warhorse and two hunting wolves, stuffed and preserved in almost perfect condition, and three armor racks – one with a suit of full plate armor, one with a lighter laminated cuirass, and a third with a reinforced silk cuirass. Two other things that might be of interest to the characters are the spear called Elasath's Dragonslayer and Loravana's throwing shield (see page 77 in the artifact section).

The Love Chamber is decorated with fourteen oil paintings of the emperor's most cherished lovers, women and men, all with long hair in various arrangements and fancy garments whose design do not seem to be gender specific. In the middle of the port-side end hangs the largest paintings, depicting Yasmira and Andarfin – the two people who lived with the Emperor until his death. The only furniture in the chamber is a huge, draped, canopy bed standing on a carpet embroidered with three naked, lovemaking, human bodies (Symbar and his two life partners).

As for the Art Chamber, the characters quickly discover that this is where the chiming music is coming from. One of the short sides of the room is dominated by a huge music box, three meters high, made of wood and metal, with several rows

The Treasures of the Stone Ship

Should the players and their characters want to loot the ship, it is of course perfectly possible to do so. Here is a list of valuables that can be brought back to Ambria without too much difficulty.

Paintings: There are a total of 18 oil paintings, most of them portraits of unknown Symbarian nobles. To collectors in Ambria, these are worth 20+1D10 thaler a piece.

Handicrafts: Vases, boxes, candlesticks, cutlery, tablecloths, and so on count as curiosities and are worth 10+1D10 thaler to Ambrian collectors. Player characters who clean out the ship can collect as many as thirty-five objects.

Weapons & armor: All regular items in the War Chamber are mastercrafted with 1D4–1 qualities added to them, although no mystical ones. The Game Master can create a number of specific items beforehand, or use the list on page 117 in the *Advanced Player's Guide* as a random table to determine the qualities of individual items.

Artifacts: The two mystical artifacts on board are described on page 77 in this book.

of different-sized bells. It is playing the Emperor's favorite piece, *"The Ballad of Garavarax and the Elf Princess,"* over and over; one of the sailors is tasked with winding up the spring that drives the mechanism.

In addition, the room contains sculptures, jewelry, vases, paintings and other works of art that appealed to the deceased. But what takes up the most room is a dining table covered in an elaborate cloth, surrounded by twelve chairs. The table is laid for a sumptuous feast – grilled piglet, beets of every color, artful pastries, glass goblets of wine, vesa and mead. The food cannot be eaten, but looks as though it has just been cooked, preserved through a combination of alchemy and mystical powers.

The desolate chamber closest to the stern is empty, save for a stairway to the deck.

The Level of the Will

Up on deck are the helmsman and most of his sailors, probably accompanied by Elmendra and Kullinan Furia. What happens if the player characters manage to get into the captain's cabin, and what awaits them there, is described under the Aftercastle heading.

The encounter with the burial ship's crew is bound to end in one way: combat. The situation will most likely move toward a confrontation between the player characters and Elmendra on one side, and the daemons and Kullinan Furia on the other. Kullinan and Elmendra's views on the situation are described below, as a starting point for the player characters' communications with them.

ELMENDRA

Almost one month ago, the fortune hunter Elmendra arrived in the Yonderworld along with her friend, the spiritualist Herangoi.

They got inside the ship and snuck up through the levels of the Flesh and Spirit, but facing the Helmsman, Elmendra recognized the hopelessness of the situation. She dropped her spear, fell to her knees, and begged for her life. The Helmsman was ready to feast, but the Captain, the spirit of Symbar, wanted differently, bored as he was after centuries of solitude in the stormy desert. He invited the two of them to the aftercastle, where he proposed an agreement: If Elmendra promised to stay on the ship as the Captain's guest, Herangoi would be allowed to go back and cover their tracks on the other side.

They spoke for days, about the world in which Symbar had lived and the world he left behind. Elmendra soon ran out of supplies, but the sailors provided her with slightly corrupted water and raw tainted meat which she was finally able to force down. She had only accepted the agreement to save the life of the friend she had dragged with her to the Yonderworld, but the longer she stayed there and the more she listened to the old emperor's stories about the devastated capital of Symbaroum, the more fascinated she became.

In the hope of gaining the Captain's trust, she pretended to be convinced that the elves and the witches were right, that Symbar is *"the mother of all darkness"* and that no one must ever go there again. She even offered to join the ship's armed forces, but kept hoping that Herangoi would come back to save her.

When Kullinan Furia entered the stone ship (perhaps a few hours before the player characters arrive), the Captain sent Elmendra to receive him – a meeting which is described more thoroughly below. And she is also the one who comes running to greet the player characters as soon as they cross the threshold. She has gray skin and black circles around her eyes, but her puss-colored gaze is sharp, and there is great power in her brimstone-reeking voice. In their conversation, Elmendra has the following to say:

- She officially welcomes them to the burial ship, introduces herself, and asks the player characters to state their names and why they have come.

- If they say that they are hunting Kullinan, she informs them that he is currently on the upper deck, in the aftercastle, talking to Symbar, the last emperor of Symbaroum. If they instead claim to be seeking the way to the city of Symbar, she nods thoughtfully.
- Whatever the case (provided that they do not say or do something really stupid), she decides to take a chance; to dare believe that the player characters can be her way back to Ambria.
- She describes the ship's guard force and explains where the Helmsman and the sailors are most vulnerable (*Beast Lore*), which gives the characters +1D4 damage in the upcoming battle. Finally, she tells them about the three-dimensional map of Symbaroum that is kept in the aftercastle, leaving the characters with a choice:

"You'll never get out of here without a fight; as soon as you initiate a ritual to open the gateway home, the guards will know and attack you. I suggest we slay the guards and the mystic, and go to the heart of Symbaroum together. I'll leave you now, and say that you have been warned and are considering your options; if you're with me, join me on deck. I'm willing to deal the first blow."

Should the player characters ask her if Kullinan was given the same offer, she simply shakes her head: *"I just warned him; he didn't strike me as the reliable type..."* And if they suggest that they should immediately escape together by opening a new tear in the fabric of the world, she shakes her head once again and repeats her warning: *"Initiate a ritual and the guards will attack, and we will have lost the element of surprise."*

Elmendra

"We can help each other, you and I..."

Despite her moniker, Elmendra has never been senseless; thanks to the riches she has accumulated over her career as an explorer, she can easily afford to immerse herself in the hunt for Symbar.

She wears a simple but robust (and probably expensive) wildlife outfit, leaning slightly on the quarterstaff she inherited from her former colleague and teacher, the order master Eulia Vearra. If not for the proud posture, the puss-coated eyes, and the sour stench that surrounds her, she could easily be mistaken for an ordinary fortune hunter.

Manner	Intensely confident
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Contacts* (explorers)
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 10 (0), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 17 (–7)	
Abilities	*Alchemy* (adept), *Beast Lore* (adept: *Abominations*), *Exceptionally Cunning* (adept), *Exceptionally Vigilant* (adept), *Loremaster* (master), *Medicus* (adept), *Sixth Sense* (master), *Tactician* (master), *Twin Attack* (master)
Boons/ Burdens	*Archivist* (III), *Cartographer* (II), *Enduring March*, *Mystical Mark*, *Nightmares*, *Pathfinder*
Weapons Cunning/ Vigilant	Two swords 6/5 (precise, deep impact), two attacks at the same target, and Bow 4
Armor	Leather 3 (reinforced)
Defense	–6
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 4
Equipment	2 doses strong Antidote, 5 Herbal Cures, Field Surgeon's Instrument Kit, Field Library, Cartographer's Instruments, Notebook (including notes on Symbar's position relative to the summit of The Glint in the Ravens), 14 thaler and 12 shillings.
Shadow	Copper with stains of gold, green, and black, like a shield of gilded copper that has flaked off, corroded, and oxidized (corruption: 7)
Tactics: In battle, Elmendra usually stays out of melee combat and lets her bow sing. If capitulation might save her life, she will do that rather than fight to the death. There will always be another chance to fight or talk her way to freedom.	

Elmendra in the Final Battle

If the characters ally themselves with Elmendra, we suggest that she starts by thrusting her swords into the Helmsman's back. Once that happens, one of the players should assume control of the fortune hunter; the players will be rolling the success tests and effect dice, not the Game Master. To make this even easier, the Game Master should have prepared an additional character sheet with Elmendra's stats, converted into a player character...

KULLINAN FURIA

Kullinan's meeting with Elmendra was brief. She greeted him and asked about the purpose of his visit, but instead of answering, the mystic took command of the conversation and turned it into a reverse interrogation, questioning her about the ship's defenses and her time in the Yonderworld. Realizing that he could not defeat the Helmsman and his crew by himself, he quickly decided on another approach...

He did the same thing as Elmendra – walked up on the upper deck, kneeled before the superior power, and ordered his flaming servants to do the same. The Captain's orders came without hesitation; the Helmsman stepped aside to let their new guest through, who in turn left his bodyguards posted outside the door. They spoke briefly, after which he made Emperor Symbar an offer; to use the *Break Link* ritual to sever the bond which binds his spirit to the burial ship, allowing him to finally pass over to the Spirit World and the eternal rest. The emperor accepted the offer with a deep and longing sigh.

By the time the player characters arrive, the ritual has already been performed and the emperor's spirit has fled, but to little effect. Kullinan assumed that the guardians of the ship would leave as soon as their mission had lost its meaning, but they remain on deck, unaware that their captain is gone, clearly bound to defend the ship rather than the spirit. The Emperor stopped the daemons from intervening while the *Break Link* ritual was being performed, but with him gone, any further attempts to escape will undoubtedly draw their attention. Hence, the Helmsman must be defeated; the only question is how.

It is with that question echoing between his ears that Kullinan, peering through the portholes of the aftercastle, sees the player characters arrive. Perhaps he recognizes someone from a previous encounter in Thistle Hold, but whatever the case, he thinks that he will have a better chance of reaching an agreement with them than with Elmendra – who seems determined to prevent anyone from leaving the Yonderworld with knowledge of Symbar's whereabouts.

In the middle of the characters' meeting with Elmendra he uses an artifact called Gorvadan's Mind Ring to send one of them a thought: *"Do not trust the fortune hunter. She is lying, about everything."*

The messages keep coming as the player characters move through the ship, one every minute or so:

- *"Together we can defeat the guardians, you and I."*
- *"Then we go our separate ways, without bloodshed."*
- *"An alliance with me is your only chance to return."*
- *"If you accept, shout 'Starfall' when the guardians are attacked."*

Should the player characters ignore the offer and prefer to join forces with Elmendra, Kullinan will enter the fray on the side of the daemons, but it takes a while before he makes that decision. Since his bodyguards Pyre and Flare only react to the commands of their master, the player characters and their allies have four turns before the guardians of the ship get reinforcements.

Note that if the characters have already encountered Kullinan at some point (for instance during the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*), he will nod with recognition before entering the battle. This might also affect his strategy, if he has insight into the strengths and weakness of each character.

Kullinan Furia

"I speak, you listen. Always."

Kullinan is still wearing order cloaks, preferably brown, or at least neutral in color – glamor and style have never been of interest to him, but it is important to be clean and intact! Like Elmendra, he is gaunt and haggard but gives a powerful impression. He holds his head high with pride, as if to highlight the black blood vessels climbing up his neck.

Manner	Arrogantly unscrupulous
Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	*Contacts* (Ordo Magica)

Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 15 (–5), **Discreet** 10 (0), **Persuasive** 11 (–1), **Quick** 5 (+5), **Resolute** 18 (–8), **Strong** 7 (+3), **Vigilant** 9 (+1)

Telepathic Notes

We suggest that the Game Master prepares a series of notes containing Kullinan's short messages in order to hand them, one at a time, to the player whose character he chooses to contact. It is best if the Game Master refrains from explaining the messages – they simply pop up, just like the thoughts inside the character's head, perhaps within quotation marks as a reasonably clear hint of what it is about...

Abilities	*Anathema* (master), *Brimstone Cascade* (master), *Exceptionally Cunning* (adept), *Exceptionally Resolute* (master), *Flame Wall* (master), *Loremaster* (master), *Recovery* (adept), *Ritualist* (master: *Break Link*, *Clairvoyance*, *Magic Circle*, *Seven-league Stride*, *Soul Stone*, *Tale of Ashes*, *Twin Servants*), *Steadfast* (adept), *Tactician* (novice), *Wizardry* (master)
Weapons	None
Armor	Order cloak 2 (flexible) +3 (protective amulet)
Defense	+5
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 4
Equipment	A Soul Stone, a protective amulet (*Armor* +3, costs 1D6 corruption to activate, active for 1D6 turns), The Eye (a signet ring shaped like the eye of a cat, costs 1 corruption to activate, provides a photographic memory of the specific situation), Bargalvax Staff Head (see page 78).
Shadow	Shimmering silver with growing dark spots (corruption: 12)

Tactics: Kullinan has not reached his venerable age by needlessly placing himself in harm's way. If violence can be avoided it is for the best, but if he has to fight he often starts by shrouding himself in a flaming firewall and then blasts any oncoming enemies with brimstone cascades.

THE HELMSMAN AND THE SAILORS

The ship's daemonic helmsman made a pact with the ceremony master responsible for sending Symbar out on the Sea of Eternity. The creature who previously called himself Omoark promised to steer the ship into the Yonderworld and watch over it for a period of eight hundred and eighty-eight Lindarian years. In return, after all those centuries of service, he would be allowed to roam free in the Lindarians' homeworld for eight hundred and eighty-eight days – something he looks forward to with the utmost longing.

The Helmsman cannot be negotiated with, and there is no point in begging for mercy. But he obeys the commands of Emperor Symbar, which both Elmendra and Kullinan ought to be grateful for. Should the player characters also hope to meet with the captain, they will be sorely disappointed; he has already left the Yonderworld, thanks to Kullinan's performance of the *Break Link* ritual.

The Game Master is free to adjust the daemons' stats and the number of sailors in order to achieve a balanced combat resistance. The aim should of course be to make it difficult, though not impossible, for the characters to emerge triumphant from the battle. And do not forget that the characters suffer corruption every fifth turn while they are on deck – probably resulting in at least temporary blight marks ...

PYRE & FLARE	
Manner	Submissively obedient
Race	Elementals
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	*Contacts* (Ordo Magica)
Accurate 13 (–3), **Cunning** 7 (+3), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 10 (0)	
Abilities	*Bodyguard* (master), *Iron Fist* (master), *Two-handed Force* (adept)
Weapons Strong	Two-handed sword 10 (burning, +2 damage for 2 turns)
Armor	Smoldering and steaming full plate 4 (flexible)
Defense	+1
Toughness	15 **Pain Threshold** 8
Equipment	None
Shadow	Smoldering, like fire reflected in a spotless copper mirror (corruption: 0)

Tactics: Pyre and Flare protect their master by attacking one enemy each with full force. They will also defend Kullinan from all attacks and then make a free attack (damage 8) against any assailant (see the *Bodyguard* ability, master level).

The Helmsman

Symbar's almost three and a half meter tall helmsman and protector is a virtual mountain of fat and muscle, wearing nothing but his thickened, gray-beige skin. His head resembles a human's, but

Kullinan's Stats

The stats indicated here differ somewhat from the Kullinan Furia who can be encountered in the *Wrath of the Warden*. The main reason for this is the advent of the *Advanced Player's Guide*, but it is also about Kullinan Furia having learned a great deal over the course of his long life. If you as Game Master think that there is some additional ability which Kullinan ought to have (for instance to pose an interesting challenge for your particular gaming group), you are certainly free to add a thing or two.

wide-jawed and with a crown of curved, meter-long horns sticking out from his bald scalp. The arms are abnormally long and end in long, thick, curved claws.

Manner	Chuckling arrogantly
Race	Abomination
Resistance	Strong
Traits	*Natural Weapon* (III), *Robust* (III)
Accurate 5 (+5), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 9 (+1), **Persuasive** 7 (+3), **Quick** 13 (–3), **Resolute** 10 (0), **Strong** 15 (–5), **Vigilant** 11 (–1)	
Abilities	*Feat of Strength* (novice), *Iron Fist* (master), *Polearm Mastery* (adept)
Weapons Strong	Claws 14 (long), or 12 with Free Attack.
Armor	Thick daemon skin 4
Defense	+1
Toughness	20 **Pain Threshold** 8
Shadow	Whirling black, like boiling tar (thoroughly corrupt)
Tactics: The Helmsman is set on doing his job and will defend the ship at all cost.	

The Sailors

The helmsman's underlings are a group of winged daemons of a smaller and more bestial variety. They have glossy reptilian skin, bat-like faces, and wings and hind legs like a bird of prey. The arms are short and strong, with claws sharp enough to cut through armor.

Manner	Huddled together
Race	Abomination
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	*Armored* (I), *Natural Weapon* (II), *Wings* (III)
Accurate 10 (0), **Cunning** 10 (0), **Discreet** 13 (–3), **Persuasive** 5 (+5), **Quick** 11 (–1), **Resolute** 7 (+3), **Strong** 9 (+1), **Vigilant** 15 (–5)	
Abilities	None
Weapons Accurate	Claws 4 (short)
Armor	Thick daemon skin 2
Defense	–1
Toughness	10 **Pain Threshold** 5
Shadow	Like an oily black cloud caught in a storm (thoroughly corrupt)
Tactics: The sailors make sweeping attack at anyone threatening their helmsman, preferably those who make ranged attacks. They are not bound to the ship but to the Helmsman, so if he should fall, the sailors will flutter out into the Yonderworld.	

THE AFTERCASTLE

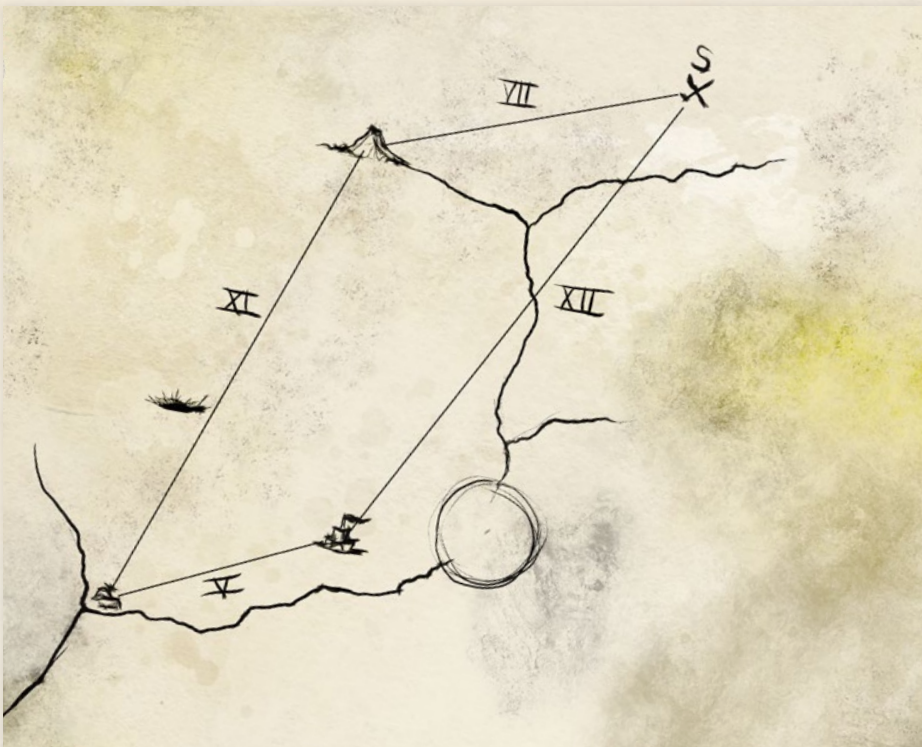
In the otherwise empty aftercastle are three objects worth noting. Directly to the left inside the double doors is where Elmendra rolled out her sleeping pelt and blanket. To the right is the Emperor's stone throne, chiseled so that thick thorns appear to be climbing across its back and armrests. Finally, there is a three-dimensional map of what was once the heart of Emperor Symbar's domain, before Davokar took root and spread across the region.

Grainy light is streaming through the stern portholes, bright enough to give a good view of the map. Karvosti is easy to identify (although the course of the Malgomor River seems somewhat different than it is today); the same goes for the volcano which Ambrian scholars call Eulia's Fire Mountain (after Eulia Vearra) and a number of settlements, including what looks like a walled city, marked with a late-Symbarian rune which the player characters (or one of their followers) can identify: Symbar.

That the map is to scale can be established by someone with the *Cartographer* boon, or someone with the *Loremaster* ability who passes a *Cunning* test – through simple triangulation, the characters should be able to use it to determine the location of Symbar.

As a matter of fact, Kullinan has already made things easier for them; he could not stop himself from making a sketch which is still lying on the flat surface representing Lake Volgoma. The sketch is available as a handout on page 168 and may (after being inspected by the characters) be used to pinpoint more or less exactly where they should start looking for the seat of the last Symbarian emperor.

You can find the map sketch on page 168,



Aftermath

WHATEVER HAPPENS TO THE CHARACTERS in the ashen desert of the Yonderworld, it will probably be some time before they can settle down in a tavern to discuss their experiences. Yndaros is still in a state of emergency, with the Sun Church in utter disarray and at risk of suffering the same fate as the Cathedral of Martyrs. Amidst this seeming chaos, the characters will likely have some loose ends to wrap up.

THIS CHAPTER COVERS what happens between the player characters' return to Ambria and the start of the next episode in the *Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. The most urgent situations or tasks are addressed first, after which we take a look at what will happen to the game world's factions and the player characters in the long term. Should the gaming group agree to retire one or more of their characters, we hope that the contents of this chapter will also serve as inspiration for how to introduce any newcomers to the overarching story of the chronicle.

Back in Yndaros

REGARDLESS OF WHO weaves the *Dimensional Stride* ritual that takes the player characters back to their own world, they do not necessarily have to return to the Guardian's Crypt.

Opening the tear requires an object taken from or linked to a certain place in the home world, and they obviously have plenty of those. Depending on what they carry with them, they might end up in some ally's study, in the room they are renting at some inn, or at the home of one of their parents/friends. Whatever the case, we suggest that they are not presented with yet another difficult challenge, but actually given a chance to breathe and tend to any wounds or blight marks they may have.

But soon they must face reality once again. There are many issues to deal with, or at least discuss. Exactly what the characters decide to do is of course completely up to the players.

THE DARK LORD

If the characters have Kalthar in tow, or in protective custody, they must decide whether to help him, let him go or actually expose him for who he is. If it were up to the Dark Lord, they would find a way to contact Korinthia directly, informing her that her prisoner is safe and that he wishes to return to captivity. In that case, there will probably be a meeting with the Queen and a handful of battle-ready Pansars in some neutral, secluded place in the city – such as her private balcony at the Islet. The player characters are given a chance to tell her about their recent exploits, which will both astonish and impress Korinthia. There will probably be talk of rewards as well, in the form of thaler or even offers of employment (for instance, she is not very impressed with how the agents of the Royal Sekretorium have handled the hunt for the assailants). The Game Master decides based

on who the player characters are, but should be careful not to offer something that would make it difficult for the character to act with a certain degree of independence in the future.

As mentioned earlier, their other options are to leave Kalthar alone or actually expose him in an attempt to bring justice to the tens of thousands of people who perished in the Great War. The Dark Lord is convinced that both of these options will be the death of him, which of course he hopes will matter to the player characters. Should this not be the case, the Game Master must consider what consequences their choice of strategy will have. However, it is clear that they would miss a great opportunity to become acquainted with Queen Korinthia.

KULLINAN FURIA

Whether Kullinan is killed or taken alive (unconscious), the player characters will have successfully identified and put a stop to a lunatic who has committed terrible crimes against the people of Ambria. Presumably, they want this to be known outside their own circle of family and friends.

Their only chance of appearing before the Queen with this news is the one described above. Should they do something else with the prisoner, they will have to recount their achievements to her subordinates instead. These may include Commander Alvo Steelneck, Ralgai Melion of the Royal Sekretorium, or the new Grand Master of Ordo Magica, the Order Master and Mentalist Adelea Arobel, former Chapter Master in Mergile.

The person they talk to, and to whom they potentially turn over Kullinan, will of course present the information and any evidence to the Queen, so the player characters can still expect a handsome payment. Their contact says that Ambria wishes to offer them a reward and that, within certain limits, they may state their requests: it could be thaler, access to a teacher, membership in a faction, or something along those lines.

If Kullinan is delivered alive, his execution will take place on the Triumph Plaza only a few days later.

THE WAY TO SYMBAR

When Kullinan broke the link between the spirit of Emperor Symbar and the stone ship, the one between him and the shrunken skull beneath Old Kadizar disappeared as well – in other words, it is no longer possible to go back to the ship that way. But hopefully this will not matter to the player characters, as they already know where Symbar is.

The question is what they will do with this newfound knowledge. There are many who would pay huge amounts of thaler for accurate directions to the black heart of Davokar, private individuals as well as organizations. Perhaps they even feel obligated to share their knowledge with the leader of the organization to which they belong, or want to do so to move up the ladder. That said, they will most likely keep the information to themselves, but either way it will probably be long before they can start following the trail – as long as winter holds Davokar in its grasp, longer expeditions are a bad idea; the access to natural food is minimal, the nights can be freezing, and the predators are hungrier and more ferocious than usual.

No, even if they are certain that the directions are accurate, all explorers and treasure hunters know that the hunt for Symbar must wait until early summer...

Developments

THE EVENTS OF *The Darkest Star* leave Ambria and its people deeply shaken. Suddenly Yndaros itself seems vulnerable, as even Korinthia Nightbane was close to being killed. The Sun Church and its incarcerated First Father seem unable to offer any comfort, and what is more, a huge, hostile barbarian army is approaching the northern border of the realm. Many are whispering, to themselves or their loved ones, that the Promised Land appears to be on the brink of destruction.

THE QUEEN & AMBRIA

Queen Korinthia is gnashing her teeth with impatience and frustration. Only six months ago everything seemed to be going her way, but now her whole plan is at risk. The only bright spots are the accelerated collapse of the Curia and the hope that the future leaders of the Sun Church will be easier to deal with, but the question is, what good will it do when the people's admiration is beginning to fade, when her own subjects are losing faith in her and her house?

While formulating strategies to make sure that the forces of the Sovereign's Oath will never reach the plains south of Davokar, she intensifies the hunt for Symbaroum's Throne of Thorns. And regardless of whether the decisive information comes from player characters or from someone else (see below), she eventually manages to pick up the trail of the ruined city of Symbar. Like everyone else, she must wait until late summer before it is time to send a group of highly capable agents on

reconnaissance, but this glimmer of hope is lifting her spirits: once Sarkomal's Prophecy has been fulfilled, she will get a chance to regain her people's trust and admiration.

THE SUN CHURCH

In the wake of the adventure, the Sun Church is in a state of serene chaos. The Curia has been dissolved and black cloaks, priests, and theurgs alike are in search of new leadership. Within a month, their eyes have turned to the north and the still missing Father Sarvola; more and more people are embracing his teachings, despite the war that is about to break out just north of the nation's borders. The belief that the starfall over the Cathedral of Martyrs was a sign of discontent from the dying god is gaining ground, and the rumors about Jeseebegai are becoming increasingly wild – some accuse him of being in league with daemonic powers, others claim that the person sitting on the twilight throne was actually the Dark Lord, magically transformed to resemble his alleged killer in order to escape death.

Father Sarvola is in Ravenia along with Deseba the Old, his son Aluin, and now also the elf Elori. They are biding their time, fearful of provoking the already stressed Queen by moving too quickly. Furthermore, Elori has brought information about the way to Symbar, in the hope that Sarvola and Deseba will get there first, and that they will subsequently prove to be the worthy leaders of humanity that he believes them to be. The current plan is to wait for summer, and at the earliest opportunity send a group of loyal and capable followers to the heart of the forest. If the development among the worshippers of Prios continues this way, Father Sarvola will hopefully be able to declare himself the new First Father while sitting on the legendary Throne of Thorns.

THE PEOPLE OF THE FOREST

A week or so after the events of *The Darkest Star*, the armies collide at the foot of Karvosti – confident barbarian warriors under the banner of the Blood Daughter versus Ambrian soldiers joined by the growing forces of the High Chieftain. The battle is bloody and even; the aggressors withdraw as the defenders gather on and around Karvosti to lick their wounds. The winter makes it difficult for both parties to provision their troops, although the Ambrian alliance benefits from its access to the cliff and clan Odaiova's routes to the south.

In the months leading up to the next episode, the war is at a stalemate. Both sides send smaller units to sabotage enemy transports and take out enemy scouts, but no major battles are fought. Clans

Karohar and Baiaga become divided as more and more members choose to join either side, but in numbers so even that it does not tip the power balance one way or the other. The leaders of the Sovereign's Oath are trying to persuade the rebel groups that remain in the northern territories to join them, while waiting to go on the offensive once again, hopefully against an enemy which has then been weakened by internal division and wavering convictions.

What Comes Next?

SINCE IT WILL be some time before the characters can head for Symbar, the question is: what will they do in the meantime? After a section on the distribution of *Experience* in the wake of the adventure, we offer a number of suggestions on possible activities, the last of which concerns something that will probably be quite time-consuming – preparations for the journey.

EXPERIENCE

For each scene that contains at least one challenge, the player characters will have earned one (1) *Experience*. The Game Master has the power to decide what counts as a scene, but the adventure's subheadings or the overview which is found on page 87 would probably be a good basis to build on.

Depending on what happens, each player character should earn between 40 and 50 *Experience* over the course of the adventure. However, the Game Master is free to change this, should they want their characters to progress faster or more slowly than that. If so, this should be discussed in the gaming group beforehand.

PROFESSIONS

In the adventure there are several non-player characters who, under the right circumstances, might be willing to teach a player character or two a so-called profession. Pansar Captain Livia Arobel is one such person, provided that any of the player characters are interested in joining the Queen's guard.

The priest Father Peonio lacks purpose in life, now that his leader is incarcerated and his church is collapsing. Perhaps a student who shares his passion for *Theurgy* could relieve most of his despair? Or maybe the Dark Lord himself realizes that it is time to use his considerable powers to atone for his crimes; he personally will not practice sorcery, but a promising demonology student might convince him to leave his imprisonment under Korinthia and agree to be brought to some other hiding place...

Finally, we should also mention the Ironsworn Elori, in case the characters decide to track him or Sarvola down as described below.

RESTORING ORDER

Yndaros has been plunged into utter chaos, and it gets even worse a few days after the adventure, when it turns out that Father Matheo Brigo also participated in the attack on the Cathedral of Martyrs, the First Father and the Queen! The player characters can become involved in the follow-up in several ways. Lingering groups of Dastan's thugs must be hunted down and taken in, dead or alive; the fugitive Father Matheo must be found and brought to justice (the one he himself established); groups protesting the First Father's arrest and the dissolution of the Curia must be handled as diplomatically as possible.

Then there is of course the work of rebuilding the Cathedral of Martyrs and Old Kadizar, and it is not inconceivable that one or some of the player characters will be entrusted with some important task in this respect. Several prominent representatives of the Ambrian factions (Ordo Magica, the Army, the Priesthood, the Reformist, and so on) have also been killed, either in the attack on the cathedral or in its wake, leading to promotions which in turn can make the player characters eligible for at least some mid-level position. And with positions come responsibilities – challenging duties that can lay the foundation for the creation of adventures.

THE MISSING ONES

Even before the start of this adventure, the player characters can hear the rumor that Father Sarvola has disappeared from the Mission House in Thistle Hold. Perhaps they decide to look for him, or are hired by someone else to do just that. The same goes for the elven emissary Elori, who has not been seen since the attack on his home in Yndaros.

How the search develops and what obstacles the player characters must overcome are for the Game Master to decide, but perhaps they eventually find the man they seek, along with Elori and Deseba the Old. The three of them are at young Duke Ynedar's residence just outside Ravenia. They are accompanied by the Keeper Kathman of clan Vajvod and of course Aluin, Sarvola's son with the forest spirit Ala. The group is biding its time until

they can emerge as the new leaders of the Ambrian people, with or without Queen Korinthia Nightbane. The Game Master must decide whether the player characters become involved in their plots, based on their actions, values and goals. If they do, we suggest that Elori does not know the way to Symbar, and that this information is instead provided by the characters.

ELITE AGENTS

In a time when so much is happening and so much is at stake, all powerful actors will need capable pawns on their side of the board. Perhaps it would suit your group's characters to become such pawns?

For example, leading figures within the Queen's Rangers and the Army need competent people to send on raids against Sovereign outposts and infiltrators. Likewise, other factions are interested in getting rid of the suns of Dead Prios and the faction of the Whip of Prios which is still hunting reformists and other suspected heretics. Perhaps some robber band from the Titans or Davokar decides to take advantage of the chaotic situation, or maybe it is Kathia Melion who gathers her forces in an attempt to storm the palace? There are plenty of fires to put out, and even more crises to defuse before they explode...

SPRING IS COMING

Provided that the player characters survive and do not mess something up completely, they will probably realize that it is almost time for the greatest expedition the world has ever seen. Perhaps this insight is shared by other people, who might have plans of their own, but irrespective of alliances, they must start preparing in time.

Some things can be done even before the next episode of the chronicle arrives. The characters will probably want to get the best wilderness guide they can find; as a suggestion, this individual is out on a mission even though he or she should have returned long ago. Perhaps they want to learn as much as possible about the place they are about to visit? If so, they could be pointed towards a forest ruin where such information may be found. Or maybe they bump into some unfriendly collector of knowledge, who has the audacity to demand a favor in exchange for access to his library. Other quests might include the acquisition of certain items, artifacts, elixirs, or abilities which will improve their chance of surviving the journey to Symbar. And back.

However, the Game Master should know that the player characters are not the only ones planning an expedition to Symbar. Other factions are also in the starting blocks, which they will soon realize when suddenly it turns out that someone else is seeking the same guide, knowledge or artifact they are. The main reason for this is Elmendra's former colleague, the spiritualist Herangoi, who returned to Ambria and soon decided to sell the information he had acquired to several different factions and individuals.

In other words, there will soon be an arms race for – and an actual race to – the place which the witches call the Mother of Darkness. The explorers who make it all the way there will find a slumbering, overgrown ruin area that is slowly coming to life thanks to its new and only inhabitant – Emperor Symbar, who instead of passing over to the Spirit World found himself bound to his ruined seat, deep within the city which is no longer Symbar.

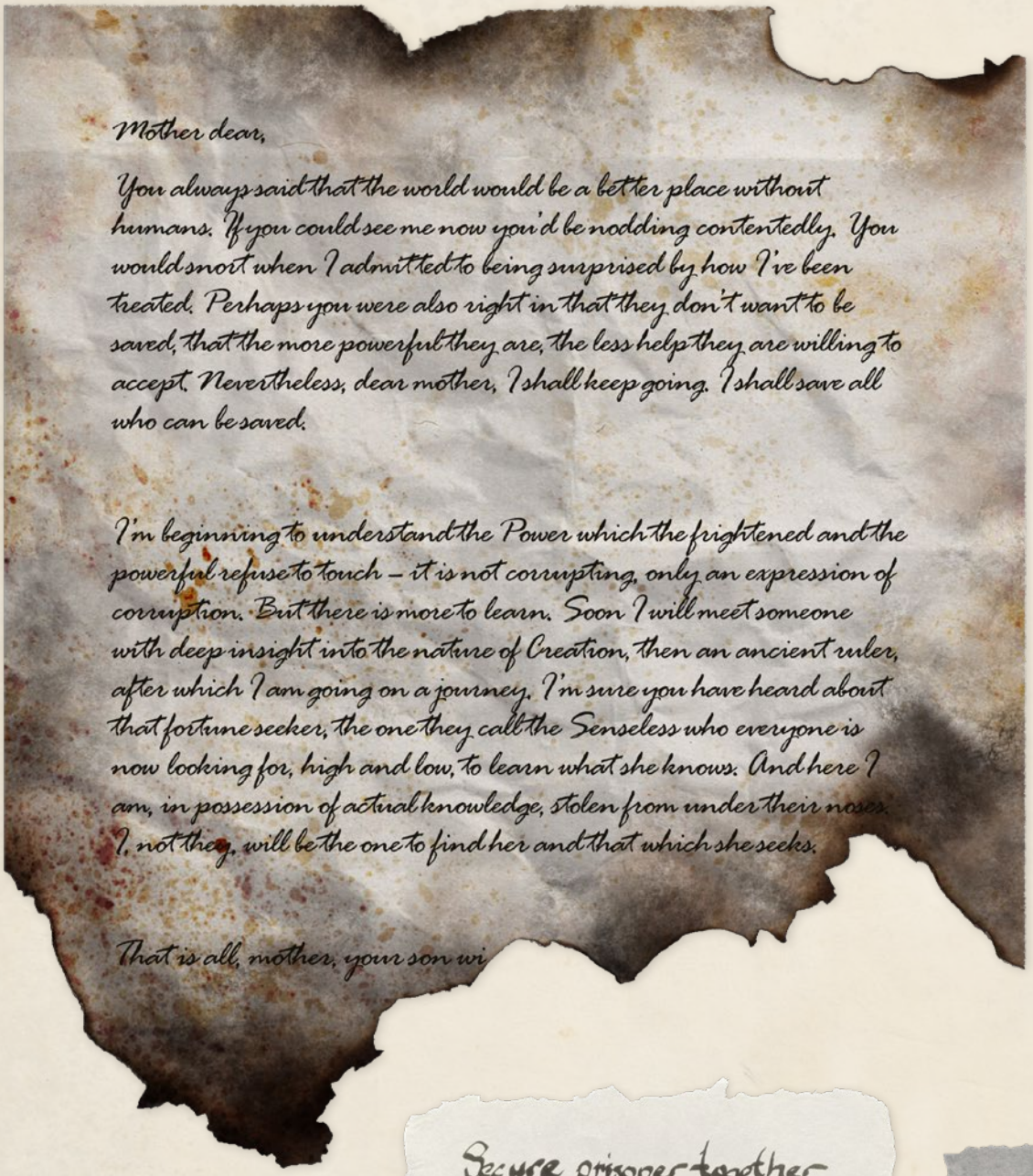
Pansar (profession)

"For Queen and Crown."

Most of the Pansars' three hundred soldiers are descendants of, or closely related to, Ambria's noble houses. There are exceptions, but they are few and always justified by extraordinary feats or sacrifices in service to the realm. Age and gender are irrelevant, but regarding the former it is very rare that someone over forty is allowed to join the guard – when that happens it is always a matter of filling some officer position or an important administrative post.

For younger members of the lesser houses, being chosen by the Pansars is one of the highest honors they can receive. Once accepted, they are met by a pecking order which is largely determined by the worth of their bloodline. That a man or woman of the people would hold a leading position is almost unthinkable, and at the barracks they are the only ones performing duties other than training and drilling, for example instructing newcomers and leading the work at the armory, stable and kitchen. But on guard duty, patrol or in battle, no one discriminates between highborn and commoner – then they are all Pansars, defenders of the Queen and the Ambrian Kingdom, and their enemy's worst nightmare.

- **Important Attributes:** *Persuasive* 11+, *Strong* 13+
- **Suggested Race:** Human (Ambrian)
- **Required Abilities:** *Dominate, Iron Fist* or *Bodyguard, Man-at-Arms, Two-Handed Force*
- **Other requirements:** Ambrian
- **Unique Ability:** *Two-handed Finesse* (see page 75)
- **Suggested Boons:** *Commanding Voice, Enduring March, Enterprise, Heirloom, Privileged, Servant*
- **Suggested Burdens:** *Code of Honor, Protégé*

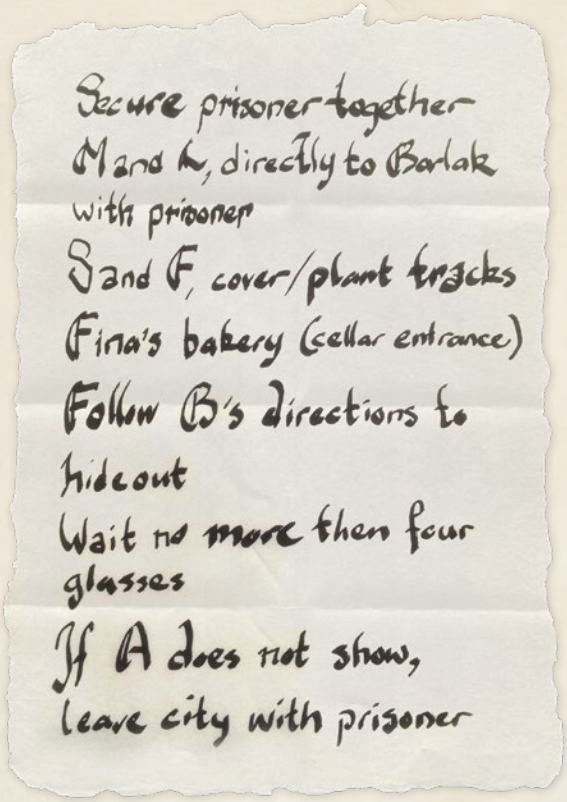


Mother dear,

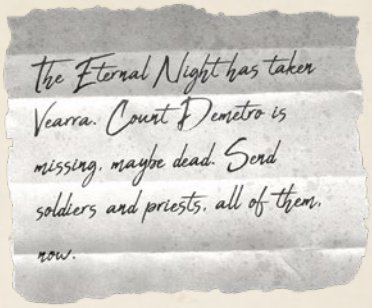
You always said that the world would be a better place without humans. If you could see me now you'd be nodding contentedly. You would snort when I admitted to being surprised by how I've been treated. Perhaps you were also right in that they don't want to be saved, that the more powerful they are, the less help they are willing to accept. Nevertheless, dear mother, I shall keep going. I shall save all who can be saved.

I'm beginning to understand the Power which the frightened and the powerful refuse to touch – it is not corrupting, only an expression of corruption. But there is more to learn. Soon I will meet someone with deep insight into the nature of Creation, then an ancient ruler, after which I am going on a journey. I'm sure you have heard about that fortune seeker, the one they call the Senseless who everyone is now looking for, high and low, to learn what she knows. And here I am, in possession of actual knowledge, stolen from under their noses. I, not they, will be the one to find her and that which she seeks.

That is all, mother, your son wi



Secure prisoner together
M and K, directly to Barlak with prisoner
S and F, cover/plant tracks
Fina's bakery (cellar entrance)
Follow B's directions to hideout
Wait no more then four glasses
If A does not show, leave city with prisoner



The Eternal Night has taken Vearra. Count Demetro is missing, maybe dead. Send soldiers and priests, all of them, now.

Above:
Kullinan's letter to his mother, page 132

To the right:
The Adepts' note, page 105
The homing pigeon's note, page 125

Next page:
Dastan's Dictate, page 93

You will love and respect King Dastan more than yourself and your relatives

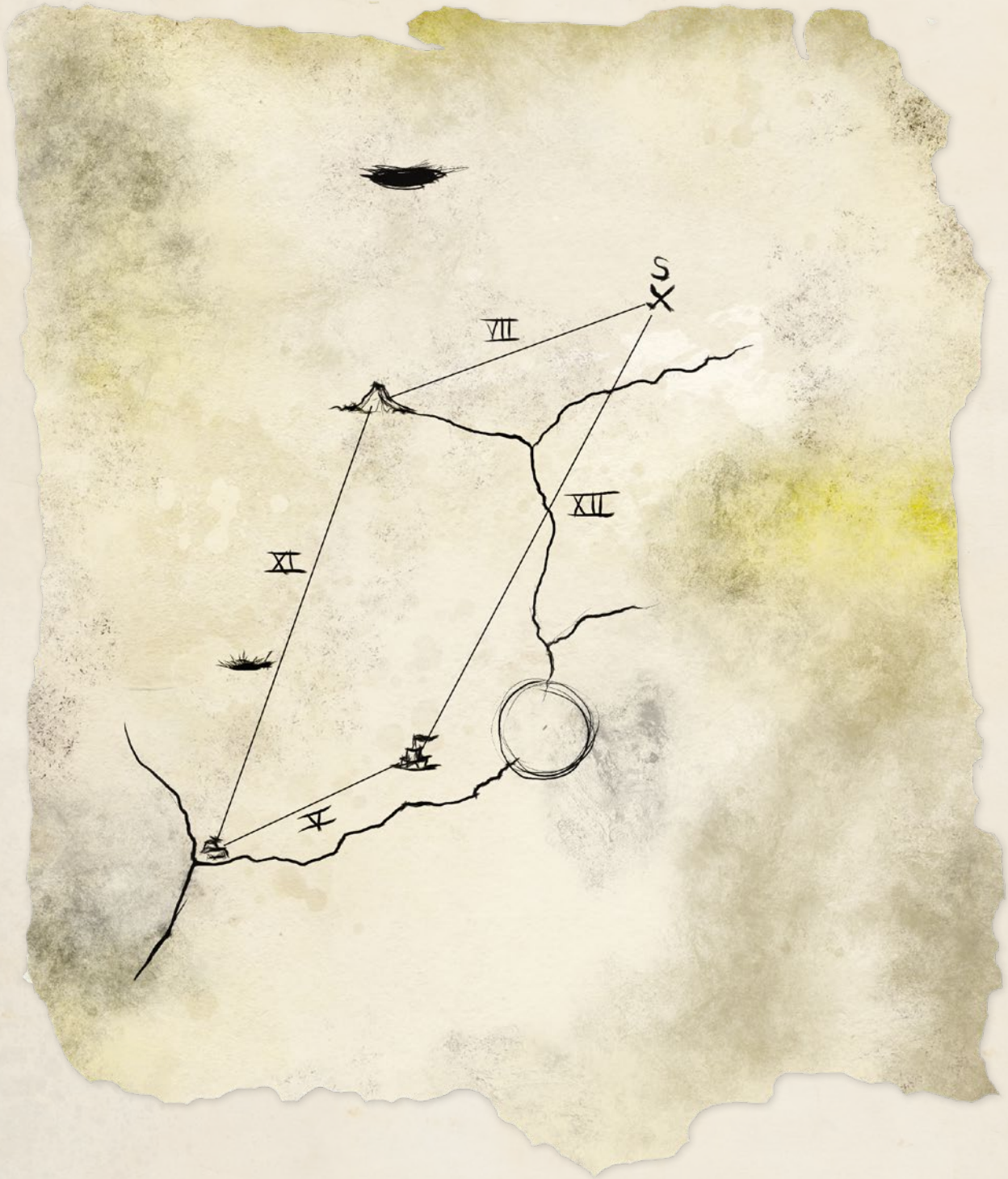
You will give King Dastan all valuables, weapons, and delicacies in your possession

You will obey and fight for King Dastan, or die like a cur

You will fire at all enemies of King Dastan who come within range from the borders of his realm

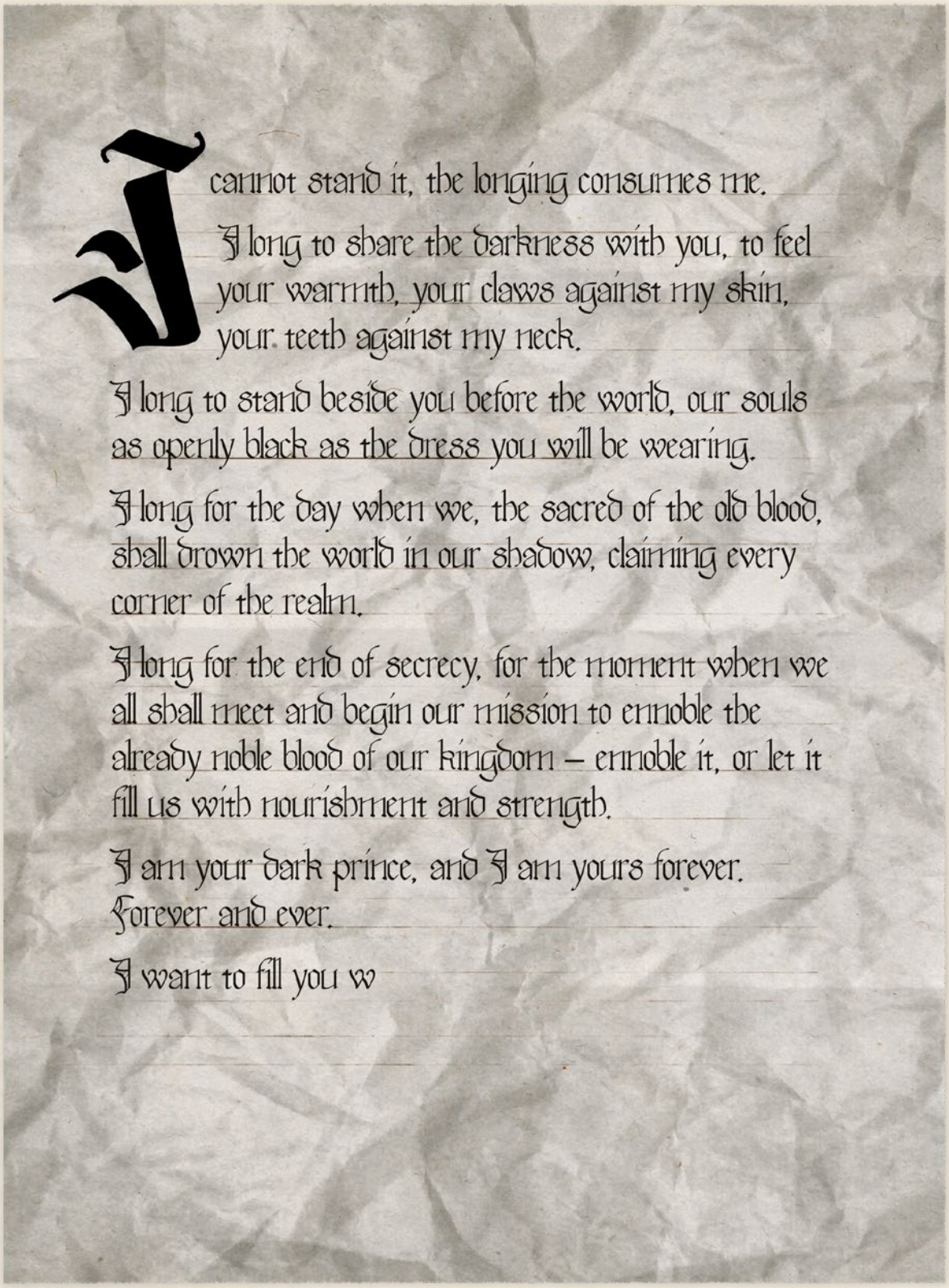
You will lose a hand the first time you violate King Dastan's Dictate; you will die if you do it again!

You will always kneel, and move on your knees, in the presence of King Dastan



Above:
Kullinan's sketch of Symbar's position, page 160

To the right:
Kullinan's map on the jakaar pelt, page 133


I cannot stand it, the longing consumes me.

I long to share the darkness with you, to feel your warmth, your claws against my skin, your teeth against my neck.

I long to stand beside you before the world, our souls as openly black as the dress you will be wearing.

I long for the day when we, the sacred of the old blood, shall drown the world in our shadow, claiming every corner of the realm.

I long for the end of secrecy, for the moment when we all shall meet and begin our mission to ennoble the already noble blood of our kingdom – ennoble it, or let it fill us with nourishment and strength.

I am your dark prince, and I am yours forever. Forever and ever.

I want to fill you w

Lugander's love letter, page 111

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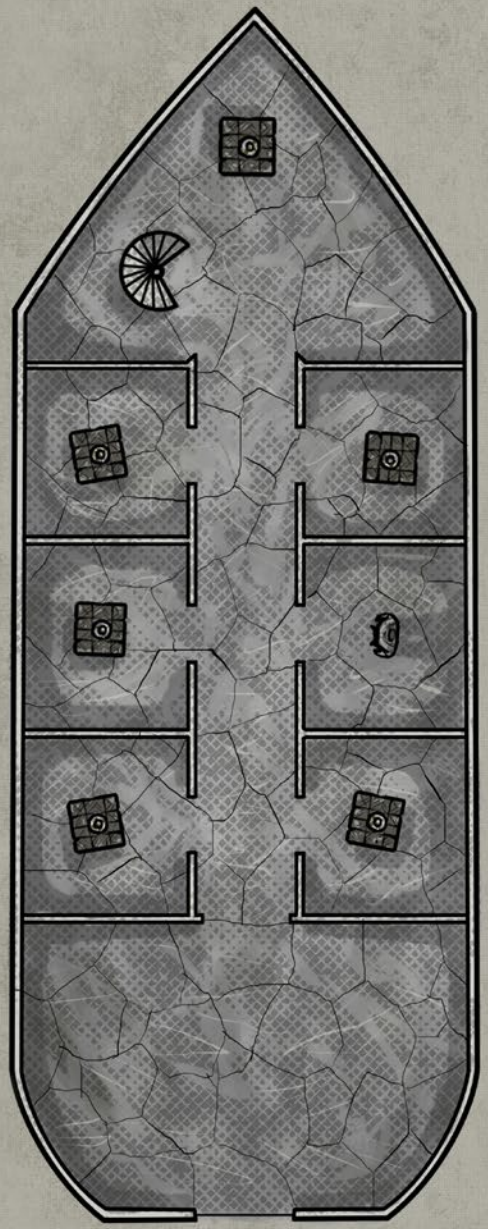

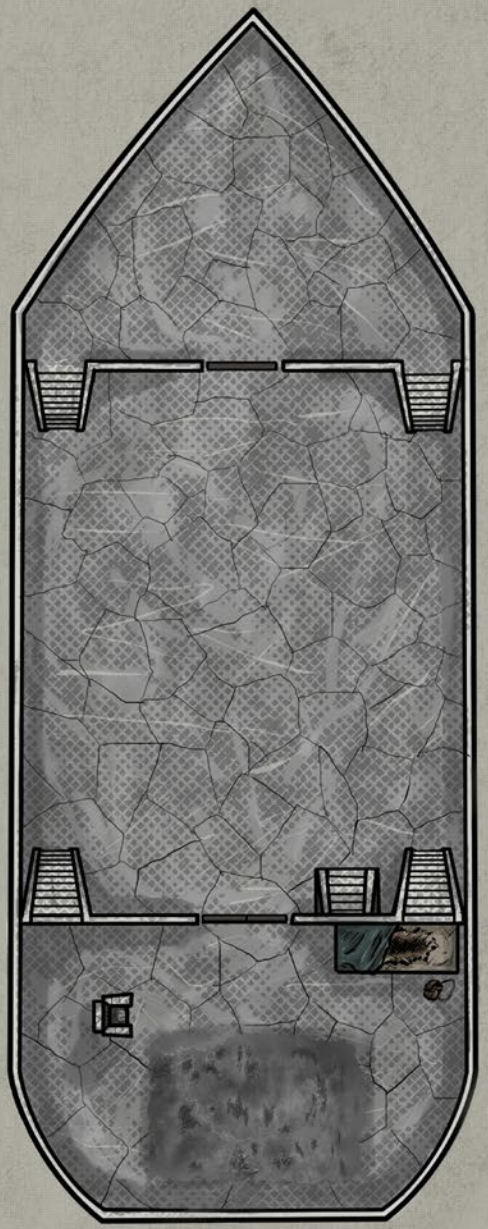

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Heartfelt thanks to the Monarchs!

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The shimmering virgin white snow

that had fallen during the night lay like a covering blanket over Yndaros' filth, but guardsman Elgalo knew what hid underneath. Neither the snow nor all who toiled at scrubbing and decorating the streets in honor of the Duchess' wedding could erase the true rot, no more than they could wash away the shadows.

"My shilling is on the barbarians," his newly recruited colleague Arala muttered.

Elgalo nodded agreement without really agreeing at all. That someone would try to transform the upcoming celebrations into a bloodbath was inevitable, but the candidates were so many he had a hard time picking a favorite – the elves, the refugees and the fallen templars were all equally close to hand.

It felt as if the kingdom held its breath, as if all Ambrians believed that the alliance with the High Chieftain would smother the many fires that flared hotter and hotter among them. He was of a different opinion...

"Or the Dark Lords," Arala continued, "if the rumors are true."

Elgalo made an effort to snort at the idiocy; what came out sounded more like a painful groan. He looked up at the Queen's palace, cleared his throat and forced a scornful smile.

But the good guardsman did not get to express his contempt; he had not even the time to utter a single word, before his world ruptured and all was fire.

A WARM WELCOME TO YNDAROS – the aching heart of the Ambrian realm, and the stage where episode three in the Chronicle of the Throne of Thrones plays out. This book features resources for both players and Game Masters, describing a new setting, introducing new rules and presenting an epic adventure where the players' wits, as well as the characters' abilities, will be pitted against truly daunting challenges.

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Symbaroum

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