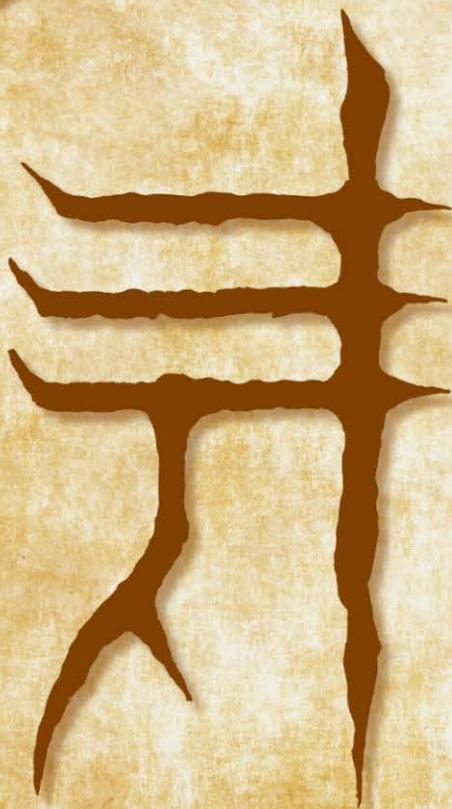


CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

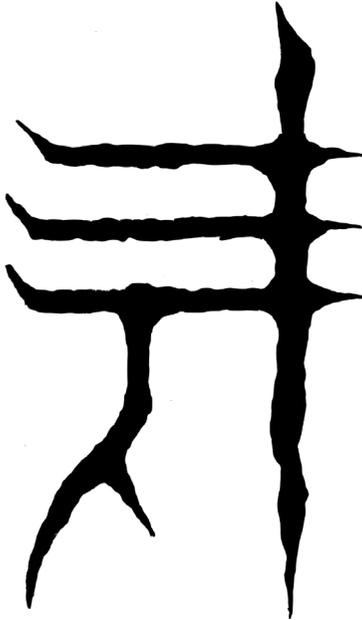
WELL OF SHADOWS



AN ADVENTURE GAMEBOOK FROM THE
CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

WAYNE F DEPSLEY

WELL OF SHADOWS



Written and Illustrated by
Wayne Densley 2016

Also available from the Chronicles of Arborell



At the time of release of this Well of Shadows edition the following titles were also available from Arborell.com. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and more information on each can be found at the Chronicle's download page.



The Windhammer Core Gamebook (PDF and HTML editions)
 The Windhammer Enhanced Combat System
 Shards of Moonlight Gamebook (PDF and HTML editions)
 A Murder of Crows online Gamebook
 Torchlight - Quest for the Orncryst
 Torchlight Text Editions - Quest for the Orncryst
 Well of Shadows Gamebook (PDF and HTML editions)
 The Complete Blood and Iron (HTML and PDF editions)
 The Chronicles Micro-Gamebooks Series
 The Dark Water Omnibus (PDF edition)
 Legends of the Deep Guild (PDF edition)
 Song of the Dromannion (HTML and PDF editions)
 The Inquisitors Lament (PDF edition)
 Honour Amongst Thieves (PDF edition)
 First Book of Haer'al (PDF and RTF editions)
 The Mythology of the Oera'dim (PDF edition)
 The Book of Scars (HTML and PDF editions)
 The Atlas of Arborell
 The Sorrows of Gedhru and Aume
 The Hammer and the Darkness
 Ghered who found Purpose
 Hamulkuk and the Moon Dragons
 The Lexicon of Arborell
 Warriors of the March

All these titles and much more can be found at

www.arborell.com



Copyright Notice

This book and its associated documents and illustrations are the intellectual property of the author, Wayne F. Densley and all moral rights are asserted. Any questions regarding the sale, licensing, publication or presentation of this book in any form can be forwarded through the email address provided at arborell.com.

Cover Design by Wayne Densley, 2016
Cover textures provided by myfreetextures.com with thanks.
Cover font, Mason, licensed from Emigre Inc.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Overview	5
Object of the Game	5
Game Setup	5
Notes on Mapping	6
Character Generation	7
Character Attributes	7
Combat Value	8
Character Talents	8
Equipment	11
Carry Limits	12
Other Information on Character Sheet	12
Endurance Points	13
Quest Notes	13
Talismans Found	13
Items Found	13
Rations	14
Nahla Bread	14
Torches	15
Chosen Sharyah	16
Flash Charges	18
Code Words	18
Encounter Rolls	18
Search Rolls / Search List	19
Using the WECS	22
Combat Resolution	23
Critical Hit Rules	24
Testing Attributes	25
Playing Well of Shadows	25
Sections 1 – 100	27
Encounter List	170
Map of Allas'nerig and its Environs	179
Notes	180
The Way to Allas'nerig	181
Hamulkuk and the Moon Dragons	183
Character Status Sheet	215
Combat Record Sheet	216
Map Sheet	217

Overview

The Well of Shadows is a solitaire gamebook adventure that documents the discovery by the Deep Guild of Das Vallendor of the location of the Orncryst. This gamebook is a companion to the Quest for the Orncryst gamebook adventure and a part of the larger Chronicles of Arborell gamebook series. Within these pages can be found the complete rule system, all necessary section references, all player sheets, a map and travel guide to the environs of Allas'nerig and a complete copy of Hamulkuk and the Moon Dragons, a mythology of the ancient Oera'dim. To play the Well of Shadows you should read the directions and rules that follow, print the appropriate player sheets, generate a character and then begin at section 1. May Glory and Renown follow all who attempt to find the Well of Shadows.

Object of the Game

For generations the Brethren of the Deep Guild have been aware of the existence of a great talisman of the Ancient World known as the Orncryst. Many have hunted it in the dark places of the world but this powerful conduit of EarthMagic has remained an elusive legend to all who have pursued it. Over those long years most have given up the hunt, more disposed to easier and far less dangerous treasures, but not you.

It is the Year of Settlement 445, a time when the concerns of the World Above are not yours to ponder. You are a Dungeon Crawler, your vocation that of the Deep Guild, charged with the task of finding artifacts for those who seek them, but who dare not go find them for themselves.

Long has been the search and fruitless the leads you have followed, but in your endeavours you have discovered the existence of another great artefact, a Well of Shadows that may hold the key to your search. You cannot uncover exactly what the Well might be, but it is said that any Seeker standing before its waters will be given the answer to one question, no matter its nature. All that is asked by the Well for this boon is something of equal value in return.

The task before you is to ask this Well the whereabouts of the Orncryst. It is recorded in the Great Library at Das Vallendor that the Well can be found in the dark recesses of the ruins of Allas'nerig, but

where it is located within those vast ruins has remained a secret known only to a chosen few. This is your mission. The location of the Orncryst will be found if you can locate the Well of Shadows. To succeed you need only survive all that will stand in your way.

Game Setup

Almost everything you need to play this adventure is provided within these pages, but before starting play you will need to organise the following items.

- A printed character sheet,
- A printed combat record sheet,
- a printed map sheet for mapping your progress,
- a pen or pencil,
- 2 six-sided dice.

Please note that the Well of Shadows rule system requires the use of two six-sided die. It is a convention within this gamebook that these dice are referred to as 2d6.

Notes on Mapping Your Progress

It is important to state that mapping your progress within the ruins of Allas'nerig is not fundamental to success in this game. At the minimum all that is required is a piece of paper and a pen, although a map sheet has been provided for this purpose. How you map your progress is yours to determine though at a minimum it may be prudent to map the proving ground maze that confronts you in the course of this adventure. To have a clear path through this maze will assist the player in any further attempt they might make to find the Well of Shadows. Additional information can be included as you see fit.



Character Generation

The Well of Shadows gamebook requires that you spend a small amount of time considering the attributes of the character that you will be playing in this adventure. In this game you are a member of the Deep Guild, known to all of the Four Nations as a Dungeon Crawler, a delver of the dark, unknown places of the world. It is your calling that you expend your life far below ground, searching ancient ruins and confronting the ever-present dangers of the creatures that reside there.

It will suffice to say that you are a man, and that in your life you have found no place that can be called home. Your life is the Deep Guild and all else you may need to know can be found as you progress through the adventures that make up this gamebook series.

You will find a character sheet provided at the end of this gamebook. It is upon this sheet that you can record your character's attributes, his strengths and weaknesses, and keep record of equipment taken and artifacts found on your journey. A separate combat record sheet in the same format is also provided so that a record can be kept of the encounters you will have within the subterranean ruins of Allas'nerig. Most important to your preparation for this quest is the consideration of your character attributes, and it is with these that we must begin.

Character Attributes

At the top of the character sheet you will find a list of five character attributes; strength, agility, endurance, luck and intuition. Your character has fifty character points that you can distribute between these five attributes. You will notice that each attribute has a range of numbers given in brackets next to them. This is the minimum and maximum limits for points that can be ascribed to each. For example, the strength attribute allows for a minimum amount of 5 and a maximum of 11 character points. How strong you wish your character to be will be determined by the number of points you give him within this attribute. All fifty points must be used, and they must be spread within the limits given for each attribute. Distribute these points carefully for it is not only strength and endurance that will see you through to this adventure's end.

Combat Value (CV)

Your character's combat value (CV) is one of his most important attributes. This value is determined by adding together the strength and agility values you have given to your character. This is known as your Combat Value sub-total. This sub-total can then be increased by obtaining armour and other items of equipment, or as a consequence of taking certain talents as your own. The adding of this sub-total and any equipment or talent bonuses gives the total combat value for your character.

As an example, if you have given 8 characters points to your strength attribute and 5 to your agility, and have chosen to equip yourself with leather armour your combat value will be $8 + 5 + 2 = 15$. Be mindful though that wearing armour comes with a loss of agility that can affect your character's ability to pass certain tests that may be asked of you in this adventure. This penalty does not reduce your combat value, only your ability to pass some agility tests.

At this point you need not determine your armour or equipment as these will be acquired later in this guide.

Character Talents

Once you have determined your character's attributes and combat value sub-total, you may also provide your character with specific talents. These talents enhance certain aspects of your character's ability to survive the ruins of Allas'nerig and should be chosen carefully. If you wish to do so, you may choose two of the following ten talents. Write these talents into your character sheet and include in the notes section the specific rules of their use.

1) Strong Back

A player with the talent of Strong Back may disregard all carry limitations. You may carry as many rations as you wish, and as many items of equipment or found objects as you think you need. Once you have exceeded the normal carry limits a penalty of -1 to agility and combat value applies however. An additional bonus to the Strong Back talent is the ability to automatically pass all strength tests that will save you from falling to your death. Experience has shown that this is a handy talent indeed.

2) Heroic Confidence

How many times has a supremely confident fighter entered combat only to find his opponent more than a match for him? If you choose the talent of Heroic Confidence you will obtain the advantage of +1 to your Combat Value purely due to your faith in your own abilities. This advantage lapses in each combat you begin when you lose your first combat round. At this time your CV will return to its normal level.

3) Back to the Wall

A character who possesses the Back to the Wall talent may increase their CV by +2 points during any combat where they are cornered. Such circumstances can include dead-ends, narrow mountain tracks or cliff-edges.

4) Beast Slayer

If you choose the Beast Slayer talent you will have a +1 increase to your CV when fighting all creatures that are not Dreyadim. Note that this talent cannot be chosen if you have elected to use a dagger as your primary weapon, or intend to choose either the Dreyadim Bane or Weaponmastery talents as well.

5) Dreyadim Bane

A player who possesses the Dreyadim Bane talent will enjoy a +2 increase to CV during all combats with these spectral creatures. The cost of this advantage is the physical fatigue that will follow such a combat. A -1 to your strength attribute applies once combat is ended until you have the opportunity to eat. This reduction will apply every time you complete a combat with a Dreyadim. The Dreyadim Bane cannot be chosen if you intend to choose either the Beast Slayer or Weaponmastery talents as well.

6) Leap of Fate

The Leap of Fate talent allows a player to re-roll three unsuccessful jumping attempts. This talent only applies to attribute tests that require agility rolls.

7) Skin of the Teeth

Choosing the Skin of the Teeth talent provides a character with the ability to survive a reduction of Endurance Points to zero or less. This

talent allows a player to survive one extra combat round after being reduced to 0 endurance points during a fight. If an opponent can be defeated within that last desperate round the player will survive, and be given 1 endurance point to continue their quest.

8) Shadar in the Making

A Shadar in the Making exhibits unusual affinity to the magic of all Talismans. This ability allows a player to re-roll 2 failed intuition tests in the course of any single mission played.

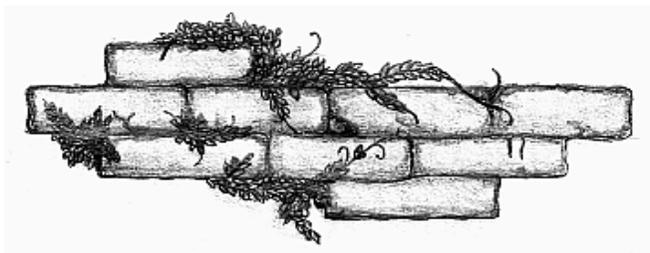
9) Weaponmastery

A player who chooses weaponmastery will have a +1 increase to Combat Value for the length of their quest, but are limited in that until finding the Well of Shadows they can only use the weapon they start their adventure with. If at any time a weapon is lost or changed, their combat value must be reduced to normal levels. Note: This talent cannot be chosen if you are intending to choose either the Beast Slayer talent or Dreya'dim Bane.

10) Blessed by Providence

If the talent Blessed by Providence is chosen, a player may re-roll any two failed luck tests in any single quest mission. This talent cannot be chosen if you intend to choose the Leap of Fate talent as well. Only one of these may be chosen in any single quest mission.

When you have chosen your character talents, and recorded their details on your character sheet, you must next consider the equipment you wish to take with you.



Equipment

A further fifty character points can also be used to equip your character with the items you believe will be needed on your quest. It is important to note that the ruins of Arborell are the domain of many creatures, all who will not suffer your presence quietly. For reasons that are well known to the Deep Guild there are also many traps and devices that have been laid within these ruins that have proven just as deadly. Choose your equipment carefully.



The equipment items available are:

Weapons: (at least one must be selected)

Dagger	Causes only one point of damage	Cost: 5 points
Short Sword	All round weapon	Cost: 10 points
Long Sword	All round weapon, adds +1 to CV	Cost: 12 points
Short Spear	Has some advantages	Cost: 12 points
Axe	Has advantages against many adversaries.	Cost: 15 points
Warhammer	Excellent weapon, adds +1 to CV	Cost: 25 points

Armour: (not essential but only one may be chosen)

Padded Armour	adds +1 to CV	Cost: 10 points
Leather Armour	adds +2 to CV, -1 to agility	Cost: 15 points
Light Chain-mail	adds +3 to combat value, -2 to agility tests	Cost: 20 points

Note: Minus penalties on armour items only apply to agility tests, not combat rolls.



Miscellaneous items: (as many can be acquired as can be paid for)

Flash Charges (max 2)	When used will blind adversary for 2 combat rounds. -8 to foe's CV	Cost: 8 points
Rope and Grapple	Useful item	Cost: 5 points
Shovel	Useful item	Cost: 5 points
Torches	(First 3 torches are free) each extra	Cost: 4 points
Rations (max 6)	+4 to endurance when eaten	Cost: 3 points
Nahla bread	+2 to endurance when eaten	Cost: 2 points

Note: Many of these items have specific rules that apply to them. These rules are given in the text at the time that they are being used.

Carry limits

Apart from players who choose the Strong Back character talent there are limitations to how much can be carried during a quest. You may equip yourself with as much weaponry, armour or equipment as you can afford with your 50 point allocation, but you can only hold up to six additional items that might be found within the ruins themselves. It will be up to yourself to hold or drop items if you reach this carry limit.

There are a few exceptions to this general rule. All talismans found are counted as a single item no matter how many you hold, and any Nahla bread found can be disregarded altogether. All carry limits do not apply to players who have chosen the Strong Back talent. Such a choice allows you to hold as many items as you find.

Other Information on your character sheet

Once you have determined character attributes and equipment this information should be recorded on your character sheet. The remainder of your character sheet records a range of additional information important to the progress of your quest. The following notes outline how each remaining section should be used.

Endurance points

Endurance points are the measure of how healthy your character remains as you progress through this adventure. When you have determined how many character points you wish to ascribe to this attribute it must be recorded on your character sheet. Because endurance points vary greatly as you play, a section has been provided specifically to record the ebb and flow of your character's health. It is important to note that although your endurance points will go up and down over time they must never exceed their initial value. They will however, decrease as you are injured in combat, or fall victim to the many traps and devices that litter the ancient ruins you will be travelling through. If your endurance points fall to zero you will have died and you must then look to another attempt to finish your quest.

Quest Notes

The Well of Shadows gamebook incorporates a single quest adventure that has specific objectives, directions and outcomes. A section of the character sheet has been provided to keep an accurate note of what your quest entails and what you must do to achieve its end. You will find when you read the section references that you will also discover other information of value to your quest. Such information can be recorded here.

Talismans found

The ruins of Arborell provide fertile ground within which can be found many artifacts and talismans created by the Ancients. Any of these items found should be recorded here. If you are lucky enough to find one of these powerful talismans there is information provided for each that should be read before continuing play. It is important to note that any talismans found can be kept by the player and used in any subsequent quest in the Torchlight game series. It has been the experience of the Brethren that they are worth keeping.

Items found

Apart from the talismans mentioned above there are many other items that can be found within the dim corridors you will explore.

Discarded equipment, stale food, old weapons and armour, all can be found and made use of if you so wish. When an item is found you will also find information relating to how it can be used, and the advantages it may provide. At any time however, you can choose not to take an item, or if you wish discard an item of your own. When this happens you need only record the change on your character sheet.

It is important to restate that a limit has been set on how many additional items a character may carry. After using your 50 points to purchase equipment you may only carry 6 further items that might be found on your quest. As mentioned before, this limitation does not apply if you have chosen the Strong Back talent.



Rations

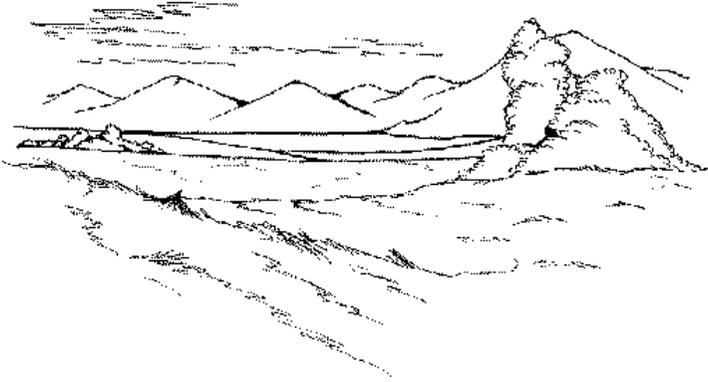
Rations form the staple diet of a Dungeon Crawler on a quest. Each ration that you have in your possession can be eaten at any time except during combat. To eat a ration will return four points to your endurance level. It is wise to take as many rations as you can afford into a quest, but only up to a maximum of six.

Nahla Bread

Nahla Bread is the essential backup food for any traveller journeying within the wilds of Arborell. Light and nutritious, it provides a quick and effective meal for anybody who finds themselves far from habitation and fresh foods. Most Dungeon Crawlers always take a supply of Nahla Bread with them whenever they are at work. Each piece will restore two endurance points when eaten, and because of its light weight has no limit to how much can be carried.

Torches

The one essential tool for any Dungeon Crawler is their torch. Without light a man deep within the earth falls victim very quickly to the predators that can be found there. A good supply of torches is mandatory for a player who finds all his torches extinguished will die. It is the policy of the Deep Guild, and a rule of this game that a minimum of 3 torches must be taken on any quest. Three torches can be added to your equipment without cost to your 50 equipment points but if you wish to purchase any more they will require the use of points to acquire.



Chosen Sharyah

It has been the result of long years scavenging below ground that all Brethren of the Deep Guild accumulate artefacts that become important aids in their work. The Sharyah of the Ancient World are rare talismans that can be found in only the oldest of ruins, and in your long career you have found many of them. Three of these items you have kept, the rest you have delivered to the Guild for either sale or research. For this adventure you have decided to take one of your personal Sharyah with you. The full potential of these talismans is a mystery to most men, but it is known that they provide advantages over many of the creatures that reside below ground and because of this have proved of great value.

You may choose one of the following three Sharyah types to take with you:

Lightstone (Sharyah'ka)

The Sharyah'ka is the most common of the Sharyah talismans left by the ancient Trell'sara. Used in past millennia to light the way for their slaves, Lightstones are invaluable tools for the Brethren of the Deep Guild. Inexhaustible under all conditions they provide light to those who know how to use them, but unlike other Sharyah do not require an intuition test to activate, and will provide light upon utterance of their name alone.

A player who possesses a Lightstone will find that many creatures of the deep ruins will retreat from its illumination. This is especially so for the spectres of the Dreya'dim Swarm. Rules regarding how the Sharyah'ka can be used during these encounters can be found from the information given as a part of each creature's encounter information. Please note that a Lightstone is generally too hot to hold whilst activated. It is general practice amongst the Brethren to lash the talisman to an exhausted torch. In the course of your game you will find that even if you are using one of these stones the text may refer to your illumination as a torch because of this.



Shieldstone (Sharyah'durien)

The Shieldstones of the Trell'sara were created to protect slaves whilst working under hazardous conditions. It is recorded in the mythology of the Hordim that the Trell cared nothing for their creations, but could not abide the delays that came from having to retrain skilled miners and engineers. To protect their most valued assets the Ancients devised the magic of the Sharyah'durien, its purpose to provide an impenetrable barrier between their workers and the hazardous conditions they were forced to endure.

In these modern times a full knowledge of the workings of the Shieldstone is unknown, however a measure of protection can be found in uttering the stone's name and testing your intuition attribute. If you are successful the Sharyah will activate and provide protection from any threat that confronts you. If you are unsuccessful then the talisman cannot be used in that particular setting. Please note that a Shieldstone can only be activated twice in the course of any quest. It is best that it is used sparingly.

Like all the Sharyah there are many creatures that have an aversion to the power of the Shieldstone. If you encounter such a creature the information given with the creature's encounter information will show how you can use the talisman to your advantage. The use of the stone to dispel the aggression of some creatures is not counted as an activation, and in this context can be used as many times as the circumstances warrant.

Forcestone (Sharyah'ahrel)

It is recorded within the writings of the Trell that the Sharyah'ahrel were created for the Jotun, their enslaved miners and engineers. Used within the ancient delvings of the world before the arrival of Men, they were designed as tools to clear fallen stone, and gouge the deep trenches required for foundations and mining operations. It is not known as to the full power of these talismans for no living man has ever seen one being used, but long experience has shown that a Forcestone will use whatever power is necessary to move whatever may be placed before it. In this a Dungeon Crawler must exercise care. A Sharyah'ahrel can cause great damage if used improperly.

A player who has possession of a Forcestone may use it to clear passageways of debris and rockfalls, and sweep away some forms of

gas that can be encountered in many of the ruins of Arborell. Follow the instructions given carefully if you would make use of this Sharyah.

A Note on the use of Sharyah

Some special rules do apply to the use of these items that should be remembered. The most important is that you can only hold one of each type at any one time. For reasons known only to the Ancients themselves Sharyah become highly unstable when held too close to another of the same kind and this rule cannot be disregarded. If you find a Sharyah of the same type as one you already have in your possession you must leave that chamber immediately. To tarry too long will lead to a quick and unfortunate end. It should be noted that a high intuition attribute can be very useful if you wish to harness the power of these devices.

Flash Charges

These devices are the most sophisticated tools used by the Deep Guild. Each is an apple-sized explosive canister designed to blind or stun a larger adversary. When used a flash charge will blind or stun an adversary for two combat rounds, and reduce your opponent's combat value by 8 points over that period. Such devices have saved many Dungeon Crawlers from a grisly end, and to have a few in your possession is a prudent move indeed.

Codewords

Any codewords uncovered in the course of this adventure should be recorded in the Codewords section of your character sheet. These codewords are important to the successful completion of your quest and should be noted for future reference.

Encounter Rolls

Within this gamebook adventure there are a number of circumstances where you will be required to defend yourself against a range of creatures and wraiths. There are two ways in which these

Encounters are presented. The first is set encounters that have been written into the game sections, the second are Encounter Rolls where the creature you confront must be determined by a random Encounter Roll.

Many of the sections within this adventure will direct the player to make an Encounter Roll. This requires rolling 2d6 and matching the number rolled to an Encounter List that has been provided at the end of this gamebook. When required make the roll and determine the creature that you will be confronting. Creature information is provided within the Encounter List as well as a series of section numbers that describe all combat outcomes.

Search Rolls

There will be times in the course of this adventure when a player will be given the choice of searching a room or passage. If you choose to do so you will be instructed to conduct a Search Roll. Roll 2d6 and match the number thrown against the Search list provided below. Any item you find can be recorded on your character sheet but be wary of searching these dark places. It is possible that you may uncover far more than you expect.



Search List

2. Nothing

Quietly and thoroughly you search but find nothing of value to your quest. With no further need to remain here you look instead to where you should go next. Return to the section that initiated this search and continue with your hunt for the Well of Shadows.

3. Helmet

You have found an old helmet and it appears serviceable. Such armour items are heavy, and although it will give you a further 1 point bonus to your combat value it will detract 2 points from your agility during agility tests. If you wish to keep this item record it on your character sheet and continue.

4. Leg Greave

Although not the standard equipment of a modern Dungeon Crawler, leg greaves when found can be a useful addition to your armour. If you have uncovered such an item it will have little value on its own, but if you find a second, and decide to use them, your combat value can be increased by one further point with no penalty to agility. If you wish to keep this item record it on your character sheet and continue.

5. Axe

An axe is a devastating weapon in the hands of one trained to use it. To find one in these dark chambers can be of great value, especially if you have previously chosen to use another weapon. This axe may be taken as an additional weapon, or can replace whatever weapon you may already possess. If you already possess an axe there is no extra value in keeping this one and it should be discarded. If you wish to keep this item record it on your character sheet and continue.

6. Nothing

In the gloom and shadows you search but are unsuccessful. With nothing of value to be found here you look instead to what you should do next. Return to the section that initiated this search and continue with your hunt for the Well of Shadows.

7. Shovel

If you do not already possess a shovel you might consider taking this one. There are times when a shovel can prove very useful, especially in the clearing of rubble or forcing a way through blocked passages. If you already possess a shovel there will be no additional advantage to keeping this one. If however, you do wish to keep this item, record it on your character sheet and continue.

8. Rope and Grapple (10 metres)

You have found ten metres of rope in good condition and an attached iron grapple. If you already have rope in your possession there will be little advantage in keeping this length, but if you do not currently have any it may be worthwhile to do so. If you wish to keep these items record them on your character sheet and continue.

9. Ration pack

You have found a discarded ration pack, and it appears to have been without an owner for some time. You have heard of many instances where properly prepared rations have lasted decades in the dry environments of these old ruins. If you are lucky this one may still remain palatable. Carefully you remove its wrappings and smell it.

Test your luck attribute. If you are lucky the ration is still edible and you can place it in your pack. If you are unlucky the ration is unusable and should be thrown away. If the ration is usable, and you already have the maximum six rations in your pack, you have the option of eating it immediately. Otherwise it must be thrown away as well. With this in mind decide what you should do and then return to your journey.

10. Torch

The most essential item of any Dungeon Crawler is their torch. Without light you will perish quickly in the deep ruins, and it is essential that you have a good supply of torches at hand. The torch you have found is old and partially consumed but it will do. If you wish to keep this item record it on your character sheet and continue.

11. Stale Nahla Bread

Nahla bread is the mainstay of any traveller in Arborell. Made from the spicy fruit of the Nahla tree, this bread can fortify and energise anyone who eats it. In most cases Nahla bread is stored in

small metal containers and can last months before going stale. Stale Nahla bread will add 1 point to the endurance level of a player who eats it. If you wish to keep this item record it on your character sheet and continue.

12. Flash Charge

You have found a flash charge and it appears to be in working order. These devices are one of the more sophisticated tools used by the Deep Guild and they are not usually to be found discarded. This is a lucky find indeed. When used a flash charge will blind or stun an adversary for two combat rounds, and reduce your opponent's combat value by 8 points over that period. Such devices have saved many Dungeon Crawlers from a grisly end, and to have an extra one in your possession can only be an advantage. If you wish to keep this item record it on your character sheet and continue.

Using the Windhammer Enhanced Combat System

The WECS combat system can be used with this adventure, its advanced combat system compatible with the Well of Shadows. As is the case with all encounters the standard combat system described below takes precedence over the WECS if the combat has been given any special rules or objectives.



Combat Resolution

There will be many times in the progress of your game where you will be required to roll dice to determine an Encounter, and confront creatures who wish to do you harm. In the ancient ruins of Arborell these creatures are your main nemesis, and you will be forced to defend yourself against them. Combat is resolved in the following two stage process:

Stage one: Determine if you need to fight.

Determine if the creature has any creature aversions. You will notice that much of the Encounter information given during play will list a creature's aversion to certain talismans. If a creature has an aversion to a particular Sharyah, and you have one in your possession, test your intuition attribute before combat. If you are successful the creature cannot stand the proximity of the talisman and will retreat from its potency. If this is the case you may continue on and disregard the Encounter. If you fail the test you must fight the creature and the following rules regarding combat resolution apply. Go to stage two of combat resolution if this occurs.

Please note that it is not mandatory to use a talisman if you have one in your possession. You have the choice to attack an opposing combatant if you so wish. If you do not have one of the talismans listed, then you have no choice but to fight.

Stage two: Kill it.

If you must fight the following rules apply;

- Record the combat value and endurance points of your opponent in one of the boxes provided on the combat resolution sheet. Take note of any special rules listed on the creature's encounter information. Adjust either your combat value, or the combat value of your opponent, according to that information.
- Roll 2d6 and add your combat value to what you have thrown. This is your combat strength for the round.
- Throw 2d6 and add the number rolled to your opponent's combat value. This is your adversary's combat strength for the round.

- Compare both combat strengths. The higher combat strength wins the round and an amount of endurance points must then be taken from the loser's total endurance points. If the winner of the round has a combat strength four or more points higher than his opponent then he has struck a heavy blow and four endurance points must be taken. If the winner of the round wins by three points or less, he has struck a minor blow and only one endurance point need be deducted from the loser's endurance points.
- Repeat this combat process until either yourself or your opponent's endurance points fall to zero. At that time the combat has been resolved and one of you will be dead.

It must be stated that combats may be fought that require special rules, or additional bonuses or deductions from your combat value. Any combats that are modified in this way will have full instructions given at the appropriate section reference within the text.

The Critical Hit Rule

A Critical Hit rule applies for a player who throws a double-six during any combat round. This throw instantly kills your opponent regardless of their remaining endurance level. This rule is limited only to foes with a combat value of 19 or less and does not apply to opponent combat rolls.



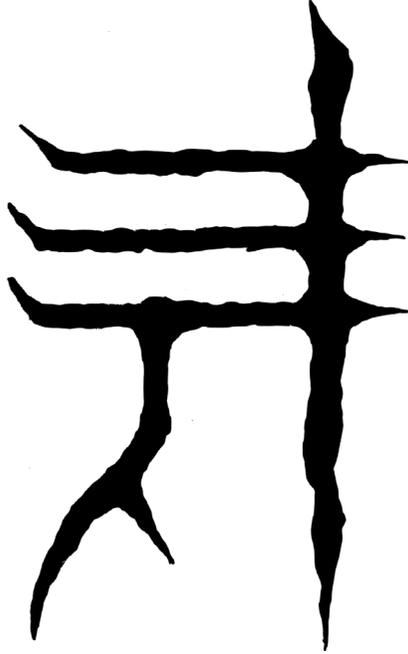
Testing Your Character's Attributes

There will be times during your quest that you will be asked to test one of your character attributes. Whether it be your strength, agility, intuition or just pure luck you will be required to roll dice against them to determine success or failure in a particular activity. It is a straightforward test. If you are required to test against your strength for example, you will be required to roll two dice and then compare the number against your strength attribute. If the number you have rolled is the same or less than your strength points then you have passed the test and can proceed according to the directions given. If you roll higher than your strength points you will have failed the test and another set of directions will be given.

All other attributes except endurance can be tested and apart from your strength attribute all other attributes are tested with a single die.

Playing Well of Shadows

Section 1 of this adventure is where you begin, and everything you will encounter from that point on will be determined by the choices you make, and the dice rolls that will generate other aspects of the game outside of your control. Playing the Well of Shadows gamebook is straightforward, all the information you need provided within the text as you progress. Good Luck.



Sections



1

The Ruins of Allas'nerig

It is a saying oft repeated amongst the Brethren of the Deep Guild that it is the small things that kill. Whether it be a clue missed, a crucial piece of equipment misplaced or that furtive noise in the shadows that goes unnoticed, it is always the minutiae of a Dungeon Crawler's existence that governs success or failure, and inevitably life and death as well.

As you look at the vast temple-dome of Allas'nerig you cannot help but review all that you have done to get here, and wonder on what you might have missed that could lead to your own unlooked-for doom. Standing beneath the wide sweeping arches that reach over the entrance to the temple-dome you take an audit of your equipment and re-check your research notes. If you have done your preparation well then what you seek lies within this part of the ruins. If you are wrong and it does not reside here, then you have wasted more than ten years of your life, searching the dark places of Arborell for something that you cannot be sure even exists.

Carefully you tether your Eqkril and consider the weather that now storms across the plains. Beneath the arches you have shelter, but out beyond the stone buttresses the world has disappeared beneath a roiling mist of thrashing winds and drenching rain. Indeed, the rest of Allas'nerig has been lost to the mists and rain, the great spires and platforms comprising the vast stone complex that surrounds the main temple-dome veiled now within the tempest. As you watch the storm unleash itself you wonder what unnatural confluence of weather might have caused such an unseasonal downpour. What you can be absolutely sure of however, is that the rain complicates everything.

Since leaving the spine of the Coldarai Mountains in the east the rain had been relentless, a smothering deluge that had left the usually dry plains between the Coldarai and Westreach Mountains a patchwork of shallow lakes and treacherous bogs. Your Eqkril had carried you effortlessly through these dangers, but as you watch the storm you know that the real threat now grows in the depths of the

ruin itself. In this sustained downpour it is certain that the waters will have soaked through the sandy earth and found their way into the labyrinths below. Even as you prepare your equipment you can imagine the corridors filling with water, chambers flooding and stone walls buckling under the immense pressure of the saturated earth above. If you had any allusions of an easy crawl through the ruins this weather had certainly put paid to them.

Looking out over the rain-drenched plains you shake your head. The dangers posed by the rain are real enough, though this alone would never stop you from trying. To find the Orncryst of the Trell'sara had been your mission since you first joined the Guild, and although many of your Brethren had tried and failed to locate the ancient jewelled axe, you had never given up the search. For both yourself and the Guild it is an object of unequalled value.

More than its value or its reputed beauty however, the Orncryst existed in legend as both a symbol and conduit of power, an artefact of a time so distant that it seemed impossible that it might still survive. Within its white stonewood and gold form lay concrete proof of the truth of the mythology of the Hordim and a tangible link to the unrestrained power of EarthMagic. It was rumoured that Kings were prepared to pay anything for it and because of this the Guild had spent vast sums to find it. Until now it had remained undiscovered.

And for you that was simply not good enough. Since joining the Guild there had been a subtle but insistent voice that had settled in your thoughts, never letting you forget that somewhere out in the world it lay waiting. For too long the Orncryst had been a personal obsession and for just as long you had been frustrated in the search, following leads that went nowhere or researching ancient scrolls that ultimately gave no satisfaction. All had seemed lost until a chance encounter at the Guild Library in Das Vallendor.

It had been no more than a comment made between two scholars in the library's Reading Room. One had made mention of a lost book and the other had said they should ask the Well of Shadows for its whereabouts. Both had laughed and moved on, but that short discourse had left you with the kernel of an idea, and that idea had grown quickly into the task that now lay waiting before you.

It is a fact that there are many different types of wells that can be found in the world. Most are no more than holes dug into the earth for the purpose of drawing water, but there are others such as the vast *neyus* of the Oera'dim in the north, constructed for a great purpose

and still a mystery to the knowledge of Men. Different again are the Wells of Infinite Possibility, strange artefacts that can show a traveller all the possible outcomes of his travels and from which a knowledgeable Being might divine his own future. These Wells were rare indeed and most no longer perform their ancient function, but of all these conduits of EarthMagic the Well of Shadows was the most unusual. Unlike all others this Well could answer a single question asked of it, though in return it must be offered something of equal value. In your thoughts there came a strong sense that the Well of Shadows might just show you the way to the Orncrust.

For two months you lived in the Library finding what you needed to pinpoint the location of the Well. In the long history of the Guild it had only been sighted once and that discovery had led to the loss of most of the expedition sent to find it. It was a truth that the Guild Keepers had decided it to be too dangerous and had buried its location in the vast archives of the Library. It had not, however, been buried deep enough, and when found your course was set.

From somewhere out in the mists a blast of lightning draws you from your thoughts and back to your preparation. Your Eqkril seems skittish so you give the large reptile a few moments of attention, rubbing its broad back and ensuring the tethers that hold it are secure. As you quiet the beast you consider how far you have come and how fortuitous it was that the Guild Station at Baalmak still had one of the colourful reptiles available. Unlike the Eqkril that can be found in the north of the world the Southern Banded Eqkril are sturdy and compliant mounts, capable of long travel over the dry plains and equally sure-footed on mountainous terrain. It is said that an Eqkril can climb almost vertical slopes and with the Coldarai Mountains between Das Vallendor and Allas'nerig it had proved a boon to have one available.

With the rain pounding upon the stone overhead you finish your preparation and then bid your mount goodbye. Before you the entrance to the temple-dome stands dark but impressive, a wide reaching series of stone arches emblazoned with an intertwined tangle of vine and thorn, all of which seem impossibly clean-cut and pristine considering their vast age. You consider the carved threshold for a short time, but there seems little reason to delay so you light one of your torches and then move into the darkness. It comes as no surprise that the first thing you hear reaching out from the shadows ahead is the gurgle of running water.

Your task now lays before you. Somewhere within the ruin of Allas'nerig lies the Well of Shadows and it is your mission to find it. Turn to section 42.

Note: If you would like a fuller explanation of the creation of the Orncryst and its purpose in the world of Arborell the mythology of Hamulkuk and the Moon Dragons has been provided at the end of this adventure. In this mythology you will discover the true nature of the Dragonclaw and come to understand the terrible power it is capable of wielding in the hands of those that know how to use it.



2

With water now flowing all the faster about your feet you prepare to make the jump. First goes your lighted torch, carefully thrown so that it will not extinguish, then you throw your loose equipment across to the other side and then heave your pack. In a flurry of damp dust your backpack slides to a halt, and for a moment you take the time to collect your resolve. In your mind you try to remember how many times you have had to make such a jump. As you begin to run for the gap you smile and make a mental note that next time you must remember to bring a rope.

Beneath your feet water slaps against hard stone as you run, your focus on the timing of the jump as you quickly make up the distance to the rift's edge. With all the strength you can muster you leap outwards, sailing across the gaping crack and landing heavily on the other side. In a further cloud of heavy dust you come to rest, a wide mark left upon the stone in your wake as you also slide to a halt.

Regaining your feet you brush yourself down and collect your equipment. On the other side of the rift the chamber is mostly dry, only a fine mist rising from the depths of the gap, and as you clean layers of dust from your long-coat you turn your attention to the south exit. It is large and impressive and definitely the way you wish to go.

The southern exit awaits. Turn to section 59.

3

In the quiet of the chamber you stand silent. There is something here, you are sure of it, and hidden within the gloom you can sense the first murmurings of a shifting discontent that is quickly growing into anger. Taking your weapon in hand you search the flickering shadows about you, but it is only when you look upwards that you see tangible evidence of what it is you have disturbed. In the air above the shadows are thick with small, moving points of light, and immediately you recognise the danger. You have found yourself beneath a Needle Fly swarm and given the chance you know they will kill you.

For a moment you hesitate. Very few who encounter such swarms survive to tell the tale and in this empty chamber you have no chance of escape. You will fight and you must survive. In a descending cloud the huge insects arc towards you, their multitude a dark shadow that quickly encircles your position. The first of the Flies fall easily, the rest pull back and begin to test what defences you can bring to the fight. A dozen more of the flighted predators hit the ground before the first of their number strikes home, a long needle-like proboscis stabbing into the back of your leg. Immediately you feel the toxin go to work, the muscle in your calf going numb. Staggering back you feel your leg beginning to fail, and with the limb unable to support your weight you have no option but to place your back against the nearest wall.

Still upright you fight back, swinging your weapon in a wide arc that brings down more of the Flies as they swarm about you. Undeterred the insects press their attack and it is not long before one of the diminutive foes stabs you in the right shoulder. In a clatter your weapon falls to ground and with only the one working arm you use your torch to keep the Flies at bay. In a spray of incandescent light the Flies erupt in flames, each receiving the same treatment when they venture too close.

For a time you hold your own, but it is a fight that you cannot win. Again and again the Needle Flies press their advantage of numbers, stabbing at your remaining arm and torso until your torch drops also to the ground. In its flickering light you attempt to retrieve your weapon but you cannot move, the insects' venom coursing through your system and quickly shutting down all your bodily functions.

Unable to move or speak you can do little more than wait, and the end comes quickly. From out of the shadows hundreds of the Flies descend upon you, stabbing at your remains repeatedly until you are

dead. In this life your quest is over. Perhaps upon your next attempt you will find better luck.

THE END

4

With an increasing velocity the waters rush about the cistern. From above a deluge of water falls upon you as you are dragged along, caught within the relentless power of the rotating fluid. In the cold and dark you struggle for air, your heavy clothing dragging you down as you circle the cistern's wide circumference. From out of the darkness the collapsed landing looms before you and with nothing to lose you lunge from the water, kicking with your feet as you grab at the stone with both hands. In that instant you despair that you might fail, but Providence is with you and you take a firm hold upon the stonework, pulling yourself upwards and out of the water.

Threshing at the water with your feet you haul yourself out of the vortex and struggle back onto the dry stone under the archway. Breathing heavily from the exertion you roll onto your back and thank the Fates that you have survived. About you the waters continue to swell and before you can fully recover the water rises to a point where the annexe itself begins to flood.

Taking your pack and torch in hand you make for the stairs and ascend the stairway a few dozen steps. Exhausted and chilled by the close call you sit upon the stairs and give yourself the time you need to recover properly. In your mind you know that you are lucky to be alive. The Ancients built the cistern for purposes no doubt wholly related to the sustainability of Allas'nerig in a dry and harsh environment. The Hordim however, had modified the vast water tank to act as a dead-fall, to pitch unsuspecting warriors or perhaps prisoners to a certain death. Your only luck lay in the fact that the cistern had begun to fill and that had been your salvation. Next time you think, you will not be so curious.

When you feel better able to move on you shoulder your pack and light another torch. Your previous burns too low and you discard it upon the stairs. (Reduce the number of torches on your record sheet by one.) In the light of your new illumination you begin the long climb back into the proving grounds.

And it proves to be a long climb. Already exhausted from your

close call, and still cold and wet from the experience you find the steps an onerous climb. By the time you return to the maze it has taken more than an hour to ascend from the cistern and find a dry footing. When you do finally make your way back to the head of the stairs you can do little but collapse onto the floor, and although you try to remain awake the fatigue you feel is relentless, its leaden grasp inescapable as you fall quickly into sleep.

When you awaken there comes first a sensation of aching limbs, and then the realisation of how exposed you have been. Struggling to your feet you pick up your flickering torch and survey the chamber before you. The room is empty, the dusty floor unmarked by anything other than your own footfalls. Shaking your head at the thought that you have slept in the midst of such a maze you can only thank the Fates that you were not taken by a predator, or some other denizen of these deep ruins. It is a mistake that could only be expected of a novice but thankfully one that seems to have garnered no harm. Sitting back against hard stone you ponder what you should do next. Food seems the most obvious answer and you search your pack for something to eat. As you do so you look to the exits and consider also which way you should now go.

Both the western and northern exits are open and available to use. If you wish to go west turn to section 15. If you would rather take the northern exit turn to section 65. If you wish to eat either a ration or Nahla bread here add two additional points to your endurance level to account for the sleep before you continue.

5

With all your equipment secured to your person you bear your weight upon the first of the chains nearest to you. Immediately there is a cascade of rust flakes that rain down from the rusting metal above, but the chain holds securely and using it you swing out into the chain-field. One by one you swing and grab the next chain, transferring your weight then releasing the previous chain to fall back into place. It proves a laborious process and one that could only be accomplished with the rests provided by the thin cross-bars fitted to some of the chains. It is however, an exercise that eventually puts you at the edge of the chain-field once again and at the threshold of your chosen exit.

Jumping from the last chain you take a moment to brush down the remnants of a torrent of rust-flakes from your hair and shoulders and then look to where you must now go.

If you have chosen the northern exit turn to section 12. If you believe the eastern exit is the better option turn to section 65. If it appears the western exit will bring you closer to the end of this maze turn to section 20. Before moving on however, take 2 points from your endurance level to account for the exertion needed to successfully cross the chain-field. Do not allow such a reduction to kill you though. If taking two points will bring your endurance to zero take only enough to leave one point behind. Getting through this room took a lot from you but it has not been enough to kill you.

6

You can see the water growing in strength on the other side of the gap and you know you will have only one chance at making it across. This time however, you cannot throw your pack or your torch first. The water will sweep them away and you cannot afford to lose any of your equipment. Instead you tighten the pack about your shoulders and jam the torch into the top of its partially open fastenings. With everything prepared you attempt the leap.

On this side of the rift the ground is mostly dry and you run with all the speed you can muster, closing the distance to the edge before leaping out into space. Rapidly you sail over the rift but even as you leap you know you have mistimed your last step. In a jarring impact you hit the lip of the chasm and hang there precariously, desperately trying to find a hand or foot hold that will give you the purchase you need to haul yourself out of the rift and back onto hard stone.

No amount of strength or agility can help you though. The waters now rush over the edge of the rift in a constant fall that leaves the stone slick and a torrent of muddy water slapping at your mouth and eyes. Without a chance to gain a proper foothold it is only a matter of time before you cannot maintain the grip you have. It is then that you fall outwards into the chasm, a sheet of water sliding in after you as you drop to a silent doom. In this life your quest is over. It must now be to another life that you will have to look for greater success and better luck.

THE END

7

Into the darkness you advance, stepping over an open threshold into a room that lies completely in deep shadow. Unlike some of the other rooms in this maze this one has been fitted with a wooden roof and in consequence is light-less, the air stale and smelling heavily of mould and rank water. Within this chamber you move carefully. Playing your torch before you there at first seems little of consequence here, but a closer look shows that three of the walls carry the remains of large iron rings hammered securely into metal fixtures, the remnants of restraints probably used to chain animals within the chamber. Both the animals and the restraints have long since perished and you must admit that you are happy they are gone.

As you survey the room's western wall you notice also a series of alcoves cut into the stone. There are four lined along the wall and each is as dark as a pit. These alcoves appear to have been dug out at the time of the room's construction but nothing about them gives any clue as to their purpose.

In the total silence you stand for a moment and listen intently. The sounds of the storm beyond the temple-dome have receded completely and as you search the silence you hear only the subtle sounds of dripping water in the distance. You are about to move on when another noise takes your notice. It is soft and furtive in the shadows although you cannot be sure from whence it came.

Note this section number on your character sheet and then conduct an Encounter Roll. There may be something here in the room with you and you should consult the Encounter List to find out what it might be. If there is indeed something in this chamber conduct the encounter according to the information provided. If you survive the combat return to this section to continue your mission.

If you are successful then you have three doors available. Exits can be found in the northern, eastern and southern walls. If you possess the codeword "emru" then you may choose any of these exits to leave this chamber. If you do not have this codeword then only the northern and eastern exits are unlocked. To take the northern exit turn to section 87. If you would rather take the eastern exit turn to section 20. If the southern exit appears the better option turn to section 73.



8

Carefully you move further into the chamber and survey what you have found. The room is large, appointed with a series of annexes inset into the stone in the northern wall. All around you the walls are covered in the same deeply carved bass relief as you have found elsewhere in the temple, but unlike most of the other carvings these murals depict a huge hall, itself covered in ancient worked stone but also depicting an enormous stone tree. You know this in the Guild as a Taalestry, a chamber delved for the purpose of raising a Taal, a shrine to the Silvan Tree and one of the most remarkable things that a Man of Arborell could ever see. If there is a Taalestry within these ruins then it will definitely be close to wherever the Well of Shadows resides. Artefacts of great power can generally be found within proximity of the EarthMagic that powers them, and in the gloom you look all the closer at what clues the murals might provide for you.

It is as you peruse the intricate carvings that you notice a further sign that another Brother has found his way into your ruins. In one of the annexes the dusted floor has been disturbed, as if someone has been kneeling upon the ground and brushing down a section of the murals found within. The carved stone that has taken the Brother's attention seems innocuous enough, no more than a depiction of labourers throwing stone into a deep hole, but as you turn back towards the main chamber you see something that takes your breath away.

All about you the walls begin to move, though it is not the structure of the chamber that changes but the pictures on the walls themselves. As if moving in a pool of liquid stone the walls bring forth a vision of a great procession, one that starts at the entrance to the temple-dome and then progresses along a vast corridor deep into the earth. In the face of this vision you stand silent, watching as a prodigious line of robed forms array themselves along the walls, they also witness to a march of priests as they walk out into the Taalestry in all its great glory.

Carefully you focus your attention on the priests as they begin their rituals. You know little of the ways of the Ancients but if the Well is close the moving stone might provide some insight as to its location. Focused on the Taal you cannot see anything specific but as the ceremony is finishing a small light, flickering and indistinct, plays itself upon the walls at the left of the Taalestry. It is as if someone has opened a door and light has shone briefly from beyond its threshold.

You see the light but cannot identify where it has come from, and before you can gain another visual clue the images change, this time forming into a mountainous landscape that you do recognise. It is the high summits of Laman'thel and the famous Sky-Gate that extends from its rocky flank. Again the images change, this time displaying a succession of unrelated landscapes, and you come to realise that for now the walls will provide no further clues.

The chamber has no other exits that you can see so you turn to go. As you begin to make for the exit and the main hall in the east you see a pile of crates thrown into the corner. They are supply crates of a type not used by the Guild and all are covered in layers of dust.

If you wish you can take the time to search these crates and determine if there is anything of value within. If you decide to do this make a Search Roll and consult the Search List to see what you have found. Whether you take the time to hunt through these crates or not is your choice to make. Your only option once this is done is to return to the main hall and find another way further into the temple.

From what you have seen you are sure there must be a Taaelestry deeper within the ruin, and with this in mind you retrace your steps to the large hall. There you see two exits that may take you further into the ruins, one in the eastern wall, the other in the south.

If you wish to take the southern exit turn to section 26. If you have not already done so and the eastern exit seems a better option turn to section 13.

9

In a heartbeat the chamber explodes, a raging wall of fire engulfing the room and blasting out the walls on all sides. Before you can move the detonation engulfs your body, and in that last moment you think that this is indeed how you will find your end. Providence however, proves to be on your side this day.

Hanging by an iron chain at your chest your Shieldstone bursts into life, a wall of blue light encompassing your body as the explosion rages about you. Within the sphere of energy you are thrown backwards, its coruscating form a tightly focused barrier that protects you from the worst of the blast. It cannot however, protect you from what is about to come.

As quickly as the Sharyah erupts it dissipates, leaving you prostrate upon the ground at the far end of the chamber. At all sides the room

is on fire, wooden supports and mud-bricks burning as the maze itself starts to collapse. Whatever the purpose of the gas-trap you can be sure that this was not the intention of its creators. Something had gone wrong in the long years of its neglect and your torch's bright flame had been all that was needed to ignite a devastating blast.

Checking yourself for injury you stagger for the southern exit. None of the other doors remain clear and with nowhere else you can go you stumble through its dark opening and fall onto the hard stone beyond. Looking about you smile, no longer are there the constraining walls of the proving grounds to contend with, instead there is a long sloping hall before you, and when you regain your feet you move down its incline until you are safe from the growing devastation.

At your back the maze collapses, its unstable brickwork falling apart within a conflagration that spreads quickly through the entire proving-ground. As you watch small explosions light up the shadows, throwing stone and twisted metal in blossoming flowers of fire and smoke. It is a relentless assault that leaves nothing of the Hordims' work untouched. The larger temple seems to be in no danger but the poor construction of the maze falls easy victim to the flames, and it is only a matter of minutes before there is nothing left but smoking ruin. For a time you watch the destruction then turn away and look instead to the dark hall.

You have survived the maze and found a way into the remainder of the temple-dome's ruins. The remainder of your quest lies waiting within the darkness ahead. Turn to section 75.

10

You hear the Shambler long before you see it. From somewhere in the passages and chambers about you the unmistakable sound of a dead man walking filters through the air. It is the curious shift and drag of feet on cold stone that alerts you to its presence, though for a time you cannot tell from which direction it might be coming.

Quietly you wait, holding your torch high to illuminate as much of the space around you as you can. When the wretched creature does appear it emerges from the shadows at your shoulder, a rotting remnant of a man that once must have delved these ruins himself, only to end up a permanent reminder of how dangerous that vocation can sometimes prove to be.

For a moment you watch the Shambler move, and in your survey you realise that this will be a much tougher opponent than most of his type. In life this Shambler would have been a man of stature and strength, his remains still a good forearm's length taller than yourself. As you take a firmer hold on your weapon you know what you must do. You would hope that in the same circumstance another Brother might do the same for you.

And in this task you do not wait for the Shambler to come to you. As it staggers onward you run at it, jumping at the last to kick it squarely in the chest. Caught off balance by the blow the Shambler falls backwards, hitting the ground as you carry on forward, warhammer raised high. One blow crushes the Shambler's left arm but the creature does not falter. With a sweep of its huge remaining fist the dead man strikes back, punching you in the leg and toppling you sideways. Before you can recover your feet it kicks out, hitting you a glancing blow across the shoulder, narrowly missing your head and neck.

Stunned by the attack you regain your weapon and run forward. The Shambler has found its feet as well, and as you close the short distance that separates you, the creature picks up a large piece of crumbling stone and hurls it in your direction. The aim is not good but the result proves effective. The stone hits ground, shattering into pieces that spray across the hard floor towards you. For a moment you hesitate, a cloud of broken rock sending dust and grit through the chamber in a roiling cloud that obscures the creature's movement as it once again attacks.

In that moment you stand your ground and strike out into the dust-fog. Immediately you feel the blunt edges of your weapon strike home and realising how close the Shambler is, you strike again and again. When the dust settles the dead man lies on the flagstones, deep wounds to its arm and legs but for all its injury still a threat.

As it once again attempts to rise you act with deadly purpose, crushing the Shambler's remaining limbs before smashing in its head. Only when this is done does the creature lay still. Breathing heavily you stand back and consider the things that a Dungeon Crawler must do to survive the ruins of Arborell. It is a moment in which you reaffirm the thought that no amount of experience can dull the horror of it.

In the gloom you retrieve your torch and wonder at how long the man had existed in these halls. A quick search of its clothing reveals

very little about who the Shambler may once have been, but of one thing you can be sure. The tattoos on his right arm mark him as a Brother of the Guild although you can remember none being recorded as lost in Allas'nerig. You decide it is a mystery you will take back with you to Das Vallendor for further investigation.

When you have assured yourself that the Shambler is no longer a threat you pick up your equipment and look to what you should do next.

Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and consider your next move.



11

With one hand grasping at the jutting stone you search with the other for a further purchase that will allow you to find a way out of the chasm. Carefully you test the fractured rock and crumbling earth and find little that can hold your weight, but there are ways that a Brother can make the climb if they have both strength and skill at their command. Still hanging from the stone you drive your other fist into the fractured wall and twist your hand until it squeezes tight between two pieces of buried stone. With this hold you dig your feet into the wall and bear your weight upwards. When you have gained a small distance you withdraw your hand and punch it again into the crumbling wall. Again you find a hold that you think will bear your weight but this time you are wrong.

Close against the wall you struggle to get the purchase you need to make the remaining distance out of the rift. Your hold seems firm but as you bear weight upon it the edges of the rift give way, your feet slipping away as the broken stone collapses beneath you. For a moment you maintain your grip upon the crumbling wall but it is not enough. With earth and dark water showering over you your hold fails and you fall outwards and down into the rift.

In this life your quest is over, your need to find the location of the Orncryst a goal that must now be left to another life and better luck.

THE END

12

With your torch held high you move into this chamber, taking to the steps and finding the floor at their end covered ankle-deep in a dark, fast-moving slide of water. From the doorway at your back a steady stream of liquid cascades down into the chamber and then flows swiftly into a large circular hole in the centre of the room. Moving over to this curious aperture you peer into its depths. It is only a metre in diameter and with the water spilling over its edges it is difficult to determine what might have been its original purpose. What you discover however, is that it is very deep, the water falling out into its dark recesses and then disappearing completely.

About you the room is larger than you might have expected, being some fifteen metres square and consisting of four high walls and no roof. As you look overhead you can see the ceiling of another enormous chamber rising in a series of buttressed arches into darkness above and this only confirms your belief that you are in a maze, and in all probability a deadly one at that.

With your torch flickering in the half-light you search the confines of the room and find nothing except four doorways, one in each of the east, west and south walls and the northern archway through which you entered. To find your way out of this maze you will have to take one of these exits.

These are four ways out of this chamber and you must choose one of them. If you have the codeword “emru” recorded on your status sheet you may take any of these exits. If you do not have this codeword then only the eastern and northern exit will be unlocked and available to access. If you can take the western exit turn to section 55. If you are able to move south turn to section 68. If you decide that the eastern exit is your best option turn to section 93. If you are not happy with any of these options and would rather turn north, back towards the entry to the proving grounds, turn to section 30.

13

The eastern exit seems the best option but as you stand at the edges of the rift you have the practical difficulty of getting to the other side. For a moment you walk the lip of the chasm and find a point at its southern reach that is no more than three metres in width. A clean jump will see you across, however the water now flows all the faster

across the stones at your feet and as you consider what you should do you can hear the rumble of the storm echoing all the louder from the north. It will not be long before the waters that now stream about your ankles become a far more dangerous flood.

If you wish to attempt a jump across the rift turn to section 57. If however, you have a rope and grapple and would rather swing across the gap turn to section 32. If it all seems too dangerous at this time and you decide to make for the western archway instead turn to section 48.

14

There are many creatures that can be encountered in the ruins of Arborell but only one exhibits the cunning intelligence of the Shondalak. As you stand within this quiet chamber you know that somewhere ahead one of these beasts also stands quietly, watching and waiting for you to move closer. There is no sound, nor furtive shadow upon cold stone that tells you this. It is the smell alone that finds its way to you, and it is an odour that once encountered is very difficult to forget.

Like rotting meat left in the heat of high summer the Shondalak reeks of the remnants of kills long consumed that matt its thick body hair, both blood and flesh festering against the sweating hide of a creature that cares only for the challenge of the hunt. Upon the languid air currents that run through the ruins you can smell it keenly and it is enough for you to take action.

Dropping your pack and torch you take up your weapon and shout out into the darkness. The Shondalak is an ambush predator and you cannot afford to give it any advantage. From the shadows you hear the first growls of a hunter that realises it can no longer wait for its prey, and almost before you have a chance to prepare the bear-like creature charges at you.

As black as the darkness it emerges from the Shondalak rushes your position. It is a huge beast that carries armoured plates about its shoulders and neck, and as it charges you decide there can be no advantage in waiting for it to reach you. Raising your weapon you run also, straight at the beast with your weapon glimmering in the dim light. In a clash of flesh and iron you meet the Shondalak in the centre of the chamber and the battle commences.

Without pause you strike at the creature, cutting across its chest and neck. Its armour deflects the blow against its neck but the edges of your weapon find hair and muscle in a long rending tear across its upper torso. In a gout of purplish blood the wound opens and the Shondalak recoils, but only for a moment. Punching out with a balled fist the monster hits you squarely in the chest, sending you sliding back across the stone floor and into a pile of broken stone and grit. In a cloud of grime you regain your feet, only to find the huge animal bearing down upon you once again.

Again you swing your weapon, this time purposed to keep the Shondalak at bay as you try and find your breath. The punch has winded you and the roiling dust does nothing to help. Within this cloud you see the creature rise up before you, huge extended claws ready to rake down and tear the life from your body. To do so however, the animal has left its lower torso open to attack and it is an opportunity you take without hesitation. Punching out with your weapon you stab at the Shondalak, driving hard iron as far as you can into the animal's stomach. With an agonised growl the Shondalak staggers backwards, a flood of dark blood flowing across the stone as you press your attack.

In a wide arc you swing your weapon again, cutting deep into the animal's arm then again into its leg. On one knee the Shondalak shudders with the pain of its injuries, but it is not yet done. As you advance again the creature strikes out with its uninjured arm, long claws cutting through the air. One of the claws digs deep into your forearm, blood flowing from the tear as you bring your weapon down upon the Shondalak's exposed head. Only then does the animal topple sideways and lay still.

As blood pools across the stone floor you sit back against the nearest wall and tend your wounds. In the dark you bind your arm and then test for damage about your chest. You find all the ribs on your left side painful to the touch but nothing seems broken, and when you have given yourself a short time to recover you stand once again.

The Shondalak is dead though you cannot know if more of the creatures reside within these ruins. Taking up your equipment you must now move on. Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and continue with your quest.

15

What you find as you step through this doorway is a room that seems completely bare, though as you look more carefully you see a number of metal fittings bolted into the stone floor. They are spread across the floor in a series of oblong-shaped patterns and appear to be fixtures upon which either machinery or possibly tables were affixed. Whatever may have resided here has long since been taken away but the fittings remain intact and for a moment you consider what might have once been placed here.

In truth you are glad that whatever resided here has gone. You are well and truly tired of the maze and you take it as a sign that you may soon be out of these proving grounds. To be sure that nothing is hidden here you do a search of the borders of the room, looking for any sign that traps may still be found. What you find is both curious and annoying.

At the north-western corner of the chamber you discover the stone and brick cleaned away, as if someone has been wiping at the dust, looking for something at the edges where floor meets wall. It takes only a few moments to find what was being looked for. It is a small piece of brick that, when depressed, opens a narrow aperture in the wall. This secret place is empty, but again scuff marks about its edges show that something long and narrow has been removed.

With no idea what might have been found you stand and look around the chamber. Someone has definitely been here recently, probably within the last few days, and you cannot doubt it was one of the Brethren. Someone else is here and they are working the ruins for a purpose that has not been sanctioned by the Guild.

This discovery leaves you more than a little annoyed. For years you have been searching for the Orncryst and in that time you have never had one of the Brethren try and pre-empt a delve. You resolve once again to give whoever it is a piece of your mind when you find them. For the moment however, you must move on and complete your mission.

This chamber has three exits that can be taken. These doorways rest in the western, eastern and southern walls. If you possess the codeword "emru" you may take any of these doors. If you do not possess this codeword only the western door stands unlocked. To take the western door turn to section 31. To move south turn to section 18. To go east turn to section 97.

16

There is an understanding amongst the Brethren of the Deep Guild that a Dungeon Crawler's best defence is the gut feeling that tells him when something is wrong. As you stand within the shadows of this ruin and look about this desolate chamber you know that in the gloom before you something is watching, and as you raise your torch to get a better view that gut feeling is telling you to get ready. It is a feeling that proves once again altogether correct.

From the shadows ahead a huge Mantis Beast lumbers forward, the enormous insect-like monster scrabbling upon long and impossibly thin legs towards you, its grasping forearms coiled and ready to take a hold upon your flesh. For just a heartbeat you hesitate as you size up what now confronts you, the Mantis a vision of armoured and ruthless efficiency that stares blankly at you through large, compound eyes. Your hesitation however, lasts only long enough for you to jam your torch into a crack in the floor and take up your weapon. This beast is going to require both hands.

Amongst the flickering shadows you swing at the monster, your weapon flashing in the indeterminate light, its arc cutting a glimmering trail between yourself and the Mantis. Coming to a halt the insect reaches out with its spiked forearms, trying to gain a hold upon its prey and finding only air as you sidestep the attempt and come down hard upon its right forearm with the blunt edge of your weapon. With a crack the arm fractures, the limb's exoskeleton splitting along its length, a green oozing fluid splashing about upon the cold stone as the Mantis recoils in pain.

Not to be denied its meal the creature recovers and scurries towards you once again. This time however, you do not wait for the insect to strike. Running at the monstrous beast you lash out again, crushing its injured arm before landing a solid blow against the Mantis' jawline. Clicking with frustration the Mantis retreats but you do not give it a moment to regroup. Chasing the insect as it withdraws you hit it again and again, snapping legs and breaking armoured plates until you finally bring it down.

Without hesitation you muster all the strength you have and swing your weapon one last time, its metal edges cleaving through the monster's upper thorax and crushing its internal organs. In a shuddering spasm the Mantis dies and once again you are left alone to the darkness and solitude of your mission. Breathing heavily from the exertion you look at the enormous insect and wonder at how it

could possibly grow to such a size. All of four metres from head to tail the Mantis is a remarkable foe and for a time you study it carefully before returning to your equipment. As you turn from the beast you know all too well that where you find one of these insects you will also find others, and it proves a sobering thought.

The battle has been won but the quest remains. Return to the section that initiated this encounter and continue with your mission.

16a

Bracing yourself against the lip of the shaft you take up the weight upon the rope and begin to pull. Sulman's body dangles from the rope like an anchor and it is a laborious lift, the thin climbing rope designed more for the use of a rappel harness than the application of brute strength. Hand over hand you drag the body up and after an exhausting pull you see Sulman's head appear against the smooth stone facing.

Carefully you swing around on your stomach and grab Bhet under the shoulder, then drag him bodily from the shaft and lay him out upon the cold flagstones. It becomes apparent immediately why he was so heavy. Attached to his climbing harness is a tough leather bag, filled with Azuril and weighing at least as much as a small cannonball. Quickly you put the bag aside, and search Bhet's body for any marks or injury. You find nothing, however the man's remains have all the signs of severe starvation and dehydration.

From the contents of the bag you know that Bhet found what he was looking for, and in finding his prize tried to climb out of the tailings dump. Something however, had caught him up on the ascent and to find out why you carefully check his harness. To do so requires removing it from his remains and with your nose filled with the stench of death you begin to unclip his webbing. As you pull the harnessing away from his body you discover exactly what has happened.

On his ascent Sulman had attempted to also lift his bag of metal with him rather than attach it to the base of his rope and pull it up after his climb. The weight of the bag had proved too great for a man of small build and at the middle of his climb he must have tired and taken rest. Dangling half way up the shaft he found a need to adjust the weight of his load and in doing so did not notice a small piece of his clothing slip into the metal loop of his rappel device. The smooth metal mechanism shaped as a double loop drew the cloth into its

workings as he pulled upwards, and then jammed tightly within. Dragged down by the weight of the Azuril the rappel device locked up and no amount of work could unjam it.

Quickly you check his hands and find them blistered and torn. The man must have spent all his energy trying to remove the jam, but even in his desperation would not let his bag of metal fall so that he might have a better chance at saving himself. Caught upon the rope he died alone in the shaft, slowly dying of thirst with no hope of help.

Carefully you lay his arms about his chest and wonder what you should do with the body. The Guild will want to know of his fate and although you cannot take it out of the ruins yourself there are protocols for how to treat remains when found. Quietly you go about the business of preparing Sulman Bhet's body, but as you arrange his feet you notice from the corner of your eye a movement that immediately puts you on edge.

Standing away from the body you focus your attention upon his hand. The remains are still until you see the movement again. With a flicker that might go otherwise unnoticed a finger tremors slightly, then another. Slight and imperceptible but movement nonetheless. Rubbing your face you pick up your weapon and watch for one more fleeting movement that might confirm your fears. Again it comes as a insubstantial tremor, but this time from the man's foot.

Standing further back you consider what you should do. All men who venture below ground can meet an unwelcome end and in that demise find a peaceful rest in the deep ruins. Others however, and especially those who spend a great deal of time near sources of EarthMagic, can be delivered an altogether different fate. For such Men death is not their end. Caught within the grip of whatever residual magic might have been encountered in their lives they do not find a peaceful repose, becoming instead roaming corpses that only find a true death when they have completely decayed and fallen apart.

The process of becoming a Shambler is a long one, but when complete leaves the man as a mindless killer that can do great damage to any unsuspecting Brother delving the ruins of the world. Watching the remains of Sulman Bhet you know that you have no choice here. To prevent the body from becoming a danger to others it must be disposed of properly, and as you do not have sufficient wood in this great hall to burn the body there can be only one other recourse.

Taking up your weapon you strike at Bhet's remains, severing his arms and legs and removing his head. When the bloody job is done you push the pieces into the tailings dump, there to find whatever rest they can in the cavern below. For a moment longer you consider the fate that has befallen your fellow Guildsman and then turn away from the shaft.

There is nothing further that can be done here so you collect your equipment and move on. If you have not already done so write the name "Bhet" into the Quest Notes section of your character sheet and the word "emru" into your Codewords section if you do not already have it. When this is done turn to section 82.

17

You make for the right-hand archway and move into its darkened interior without hesitation. What you find within is a complete contrast to the finely constructed hall that you have left behind. Within this corridor there has been given no attention to artifice or cunning. Instead what you find is a roughly worked passageway, faced in a patchwork of broken stone tiling and a crudely made red brick. It appears stable enough, so you move further south along its reach, finding at its end another archway and what appears to be a large chamber beyond.

For a moment you wait, searching the darkness for any sign that danger might lay in the shadows. What you hear however, is the muffled sound of running water, not in the chamber ahead but somewhere close. With nowhere else to go you move forward through this southern exit and into the chamber beyond...

Turn to section 55.

18

It is said amongst the Brethren that good luck comes fleetingly, and always with a cost. As you wait quietly at this threshold and peer intently into an all-embracing darkness ahead you wonder if good luck will indeed be yours on this mission. The maze has been both dangerous and fatiguing and as you reach into this new chamber with your torch you see that others have not found good luck here either.

Upon the floor lies a number of skeletons, long left of their flesh and now no more than distorted piles of bone and rusting armour. The look of death is not unknown to you but the reasons for it are always of great interest if you wish to avoid the same fate yourself. Surveying the chamber as best you can you find your answer in a multitude of small pipes extending from the walls, all narrow in width and as innocuous as plumbing, but deadly in function nonetheless.

As far as you can tell the room has been fashioned as a dart-trap, a chamber when triggered, that propels large numbers of poison dart across its length and breadth. Only one hit is required to kill and from the decaying remains you have found here very effective indeed. Throwing dust out into the room shows that there are no light beams to activate the dart-trap so its trigger must rely on pressure-plates in the floor. If you are to cross this space you will have to avoid the metal plates for even the slightest of touches will set the trap off.

The trap however, is one easily avoided. Although the Hordim built dart-traps to kill they always leave a narrow corridor about the edges of the walls free so that the pipes can be easily reloaded with fresh darts. You need only keep to the walls themselves and you should be able to reach any of the doors that you choose to use.

A quick look shows you that there are doors in three of the walls here. Two of them will bring you closer to finding a way out of the maze, one will not.

By keeping to the edges of the chamber this dart-trap will not hinder your progress. There are doors in the northern, southern and western walls. If you possess the codeword “emru” all three doors are unlocked and available to use. If you do not possess this codeword only the western door is unlocked. To take the western door turn to section 88. If you can go north and wish to do so turn to section 15. If you are able to go south and see this as your best option turn to section 31a.

19

When the Molgoth attacks it falls upon you like a shadow descending out of a starless sky. You do not see it, or sense its presence until the tell-tale whoosh of its wings alerts you to the danger, but years of experience in the deep ruins of the world has given you the knowledge to know exactly what you must do to survive.

Before the huge bat-like monster can come to ground you pull your

Sharyah'ka from its cloth wrappings and say its name loudly. In the cold damp air the talisman's response is immediate and overwhelming. From within the silver-encased gem a bright light bursts forth, an actinic and brilliant conflagration of magical power that fills every corner of the chamber before focusing upon the Molgoth on its descent. Caught within the talisman's blinding radiance it recoils, surging wings dragging it back up into the high vaults overhead and as far from the light as it can find its way.

It is a frantic and clumsy ascent, the monstrous creature disoriented by the blinding light and affronted by the proximity of raw EarthMagic. You watch its desperation in retreat as it disappears from view, the brilliant light following it out of sight before withdrawing and keeping station in the air above you.

From overhead you can hear the great winged beast shifting within its lair, a piercing screech of frustration enough for you to know that you will get no further trouble from this particular Molgoth. After deactivating the Sharyah you place it back in its wrappings and look to your next move.

This Molgoth will trouble you no further. Return to the section that initiated this encounter and continue with your mission.

20

Leaving the other chamber behind you move quickly into this new room and come to a halt. Playing your torch about the air before you, you find this space to be completely empty, bare of furnishings or device and swept clean by some unseen mechanism. For a moment you pause, unsure as to the purpose of such a chamber in a Hordim proving ground. It is only when you look with greater focus at the floor that you discover a series of concentric circles etched into the stone about you. There are no glyphs or pictograms, only the perfectly drawn arcs that provide no clue to their ancient purpose.

The chamber stands silent and empty. There is nothing here so you look instead for the exits. There are two ways out of this room. One exit resides in the western wall, the other in the eastern wall.

If you wish to take the western exit turn to section 7. If you would rather take the eastern exit turn to section 68.

21

The deep ruins of the world hold many dangers, some of which are well known to the citizens of the Four Nations. Stories have been told of these perils and legends have been built on the exploits of the Brethren of the Deep Guild in their quest for treasure and glory. One danger however, that is never spoken of and which remains unknown to those who live comfortably in the world above are the Dreya'dim. You know their name, for they can be found in legends as old as the Hordim themselves, but where they come from, and by what mechanism they arrive in the world, is a mystery that has plagued the Guild since the first Dungeon Crawlers ventured from Das Vallendor.

These spectral remains of Hordim, somehow lost to a mindless existence in a shadowed realm, take on corporeal form when encountered in the deep ruins, and as you stand in this lonely chamber you can feel the presence of one very close. There is no smell, nor furtive movement that tells you this. You feel instead a palpable sense of malice, of something waiting that hates all life and in this world affronts the senses of the living like a poison. Taking up your weapon you drop your pack and search the shadows. There is something here, you can feel it.

And you are right. From the shadows ahead the gloom coalesces, a dark form emerging from nothingness that firms into the shape of a horribly grotesque Morg. Nothing special to look at in life, this Dreya'dim Morg is an emaciated and gangled being, its features twisted and bent by the EarthMagic that has brought it into the world. Taking a firmer hold upon your weapon you study it closely. It is a product of magic that you do not understand and as you watch it move you can see that it is in fact neither fully corporeal nor fully spectral. It is a Being caught between two different existences, one of shadow and one of life, and as you watch it gives you pause to wonder if it can truly be killed. What you do know however, is that these creatures are small and extraordinarily fast, and as you hesitate the Dreya'dim acts.

With frightening speed the Morg runs at you, a long thin knife glinting wickedly in its skeletal hand. Against the attack you stand your ground. You know you have no hope of matching the creature's speed, but you have size and strength on your side and you use these advantages to their fullest. In a heartbeat the Morg is upon you, its knife slicing the air as it attempts to find flesh. Against this assault you block the attack, and with the Dreya'dim now within reach you

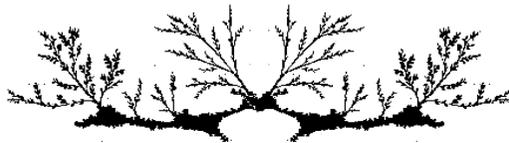
punch out with your free hand, collecting it in the chest. Caught squarely by the blow the Morg flies backwards and rolls across the stone floor, but then slides back to its feet.

Winded but undeterred the Dreya'dim steadies itself and runs at you again. This time however, the spectral creature tries something new. Running straight at you the creature slashes the air with its knife. In response you raise your weapon to block the blow but find instead the attack no more than a feint, the Morg instead falling to its knees and sliding along the cold stone flags. With your lower torso exposed the creature thrusts upwards with its blade. Instinctively you grab for the knife with your free hand and push it to the side, then kick out with your leg, hitting the Morg firmly in the midriff and again sending it spinning across the floor.

Without pause the diminutive foe regains its feet and closes upon you once again, its knife cutting down upon your chest. Pain erupts in a long line of oozing blood, your clothes torn by the slicing blade but the knife's edge does not catch deep enough to do major damage. You curse at the Morg and in response swing your weapon in a wide arc, striking the Dreya'dim a solid blow across the upper torso. In a gout of dark blood a deep gash opens in its chest and as it staggers back you strike again, bringing your weapon down upon its head in a devastating blow that tears deep into its skull. With a tremoring lurch the Morg collapses, falling to ground and laying still.

Quickly you take up your torch and apply its flames to the Dreya'dim's remains. You have heard that such creatures can return from death if not burnt immediately but there proves no need to put the Morg to the flame. As you watch the Morg falls apart, its energy washing away as its mortal remains disappear. It takes only a few minutes for the dead Hordim to completely degrade, its corporeal form vanishing as ash into the shadows. In the quiet that follows you take up your pack and thank Providence that you have survived.

The Morg will bother you no longer. Return to the section that initiated this encounter and consider what you should do next.



22

In a wave of fleeting shadows the Reaver rushes towards you. The monster is ravenous and you can see in its blind race to kill that it is half mad with starvation. In the face of this hunger-fuelled malice you take a firmer grip upon your weapon and size up the beast's possible weak points. It takes only a heartbeat to recognise that it has precious few of them. Through the stone beneath your feet you can feel the tremors of its approach and with nowhere to run you stand your ground and wait.

In a clash of chitin and iron you come together in battle. With one enormous swing of its pincer the Reaver tries to throw you to the side, but you dodge the blow and reply with a hard strike to its arm. The impact glances off its armoured skin and the monster presses its advantage, using its bulk to slam into you, throwing you back onto the unforgiving stone. Quickly you regain your feet and swing again as it advances upon you, this time hitting hard against its first foreleg. The blow cuts deep and the Reaver recoils, but only for a second. Swinging its other pincer it hits you cleanly in the side, again throwing you to the ground. This time however, the beast rushes forward and drives down with the hard edge of its left pincer, pinning you to the stone before lifting you into the air.

Luckily it is not flesh it has purchase upon, your clothing caught instead upon a series of minor spikes that line its left pincer jaw. With one solid swing you smash through its left arm and in a tumble yourself and its pincer fall to ground. Tearing your clothing from the monster's severed limb you turn and find the Reaver staggering sideways, large spatters of oozing blood splashing upon the cold flagstones.

With the advantage now yours you run at the monster, its vulnerable eyes open to an attack from its left side. The Reaver will not however, give up its life so easily. Striking again you attempt to deliver a lethal blow but the monster reacts, swiping at you with its remaining pincer as it swings its whole body around to gain a better position to attack. Hit by the blow you stagger backwards but recover your balance only to find the scorpion-like monster rushing at you. Before you can brace yourself the Reaver lunges with its pincer and in that moment you see an opportunity.

Using the hard edge of your weapon you deflect the monster's attack and step inside its long reach. With only a heartbeat available you bring your weapon down upon the Reaver's arm, crushing the

limb then thrusting the point of your weapon forward, deep into its eye sockets and thence into its brain. In a shuddering recoil the Reaver rears up then staggers backwards, swaying to the left as it trips over its own legs before falling to the ground. There it lays still.

In the quiet that follows you catch your breath and retrieve your weapon. The Reaver proved itself a formidable opponent but thankfully one that was not beyond your skill. After thanking Providence for your survival you leave its lifeless body in the hall and move southwards, following the long reach of the procession-way as it slopes ever deeper into hard bedrock. It is a monumental corridor and quickly you confirm your initial assessment that it must travel for some way into the earth. Hours pass as you move down its length, the dark tapestry of its night-time scenes covering every metre of its surface as you carefully make your way forward.

Within this remarkable corridor you need no illumination. The walls and ceiling exhibit a night-time scene but the dim gleam of moonlight provides enough of a light source to allow you the unusual circumstance of travelling deep underground without the need of either torch or Sharyah. In truth you find the forest that surrounds you a mesmerising experience. A Dungeon Crawler spends most of his time either below ground, or travelling the long distances that lay between the ruins of Arborell and the Guild's main headquarters in Das Vallendor. By definition it is a lonely existence and one that requires great care when travelling, especially at night. To be able to journey for such a distance below ground, and to be able to do so in a forest setting with such ease is a novelty that takes some time to get used to.

There comes a time however, when the way ahead changes. Within the corridor you are ensconced within a forest scene that stretches out before you, but as you travel you begin to see a difference in the way ahead. Rather than a continuation of the forest landscape there arises a wide arch-shaped threshold, beyond which you see instead a vision, though distant, of great mountains and a clouded sky. It is a curious vision that grows as you approach the archway, and when you finally reach the end of the hall's long progress you must once again come to a standstill and wonder at what you have found.

Before you there arises another vast chamber but this one is on a scale that is truly breathtaking. Cut into the deep stone as a long, oblong-shaped hall set beneath a gargantuan elongated dome, this huge open space reaches southwards for at least a thousand metres.

Rising above you on both sides for a further two hundred metres are enormous buttressed walls acting as the seat for a seamless vaulted dome that caps the chamber high overhead.

Along both sides of this space run two lines of immensely tall statues, each a representation of a robed warrior-priest and all holding black crystal weapons in hand. You can see also that there resides at your right and left shoulders in the distant walls a number of doors, and before you a large crack in the flooring that could easily swallow any of the statues that stand so proudly here.

The floor itself is a wonder, its length and breadth carved with the symbolism of the mythology of the Ancients. Most recognisable lies the twin sun and moon glyphs at the chamber's centre, surrounded by the spreading branches of the Silvan Tree, all founded upon the waved symbol of the eternal power of the River of Life, the Shan'duil. Deeply etched into the stone these huge pictographs are themselves outlined in Gold and Azuril, a wealth of precious metals that reflects with a glimmering radiance the grey-tinged light that glows from above.

The reason for the chamber however, stands at its southern end. There you see a wide stepped platform in shining black basalt, and upon it the largest stone tree you could ever have imagined. Pure white, it rises from the platform for more than a hundred metres in a spreading reach of thick limbs and smaller tributary branches. In perfect detail it is a leaf-less representation of the Silvan Tree on a scale that seems almost impossible to reconcile.

Struck by the immensity of what you have discovered it takes a few moments to register also the unusual character of the chamber itself. The walls and domed ceiling are all carved with a landscape of high mountains that extends around the entire length of the hall. In the dim light that gleams from the dome you see a wide vista of the highest of mountain ranges, cold peaks capped with snow and within their immovable presence the sense of strong winds blowing across ancient stone shoulders.

Just as the forest scene at night seemed so real, here in this great hall you are transported into the massifs of a vast mountain range and before their majesty you are immediately struck with an overwhelming sense of unimportance and humility. Just as quickly you realise that this is exactly what the Beings that artificed this hall intended.

Indeed you have found the Taalestry, the hall that holds the shrine to the Silvan Tree and which is the centre of all the ancient ruins of

Arborell. It is somewhere here that you will find the Well of Shadows and as you look around you come to the realisation that there is more than one place to look.

The Taalestry provides many avenues to search for the chamber that holds the Well of Shadows. Doors can be found in the east and west walls at this end of the chamber and you notice also that the lines of statues stand a short distance apart from the walls themselves, creating narrow corridors behind that could easily disguise any number of other exits. The Taal itself and the enormous carved Silvan Tree at the southern end of the Taalestry may also provide opportunity. To begin looking you need only decide where you want to go.

If you would go south and have a closer look at the Taal turn to section 27. If you would rather venture eastwards and have a look at the doors resident in that far wall turn to section 40. If you believe it might be more advantageous to go west and investigate the doors there turn to section 54. If you think that the space obscured behind the line of statues to the east may prove helpful turn to section 72. If however, you feel that the line of statues near the western wall may hide greater secrets turn to section 84.

22a

In this battle you have no time to waste. The effects of the flashcharge can only be temporary and you must take as much advantage of the creature's blindness as you can. Rushing forward you swing at the beast, smashing down upon its left pincer, then running to the side of the beast as it swings wildly with its arms to defend itself. With its side open to attack you bring your weapon down hard upon its rear leg and crush the limb into uselessness. Stung by the assault the monster limps sideways and then recovers its footing, using its tail to sweep the floor about it, and forcing you to retreat as the Reaver tries to strike out repeatedly at its invisible opponent.

Avoiding the armour-plated tail you run again at its right side, bringing hard metal down upon its carapace and crushing the joint that supports one of the Reaver's legs. Staggering again, the monster flails its arms and legs, blindly trying to land a blow but hitting nothing except empty air. In the face of this defence you move

carefully, trying to find an opportunity to strike at the Reaver's eye cluster. It is there that the monster's greatest vulnerability lies and when such an opening arises you rush between its pincers and strike, bringing your weapon down upon its tentacled eyes.

The Reaver reacts with devastating speed, avoiding the blow and rearing backwards, swiping sideways with its pincer. Caught by the blow you tumble out of the way, narrowly avoiding the monster's tail as it slams it down only a metre from your head.

Quickly you regain your feet and swing again as it advances upon you, this time hitting hard against its first foreleg. The blow cuts deep and the Reaver recoils, but only for a second. You can see in the Reaver's reaction that it is starting to regain its senses and before you can strike again the creature attacks. Swinging its other pincer it hits you cleanly in the side, again throwing you to the ground. This time however, the beast rushes forward and drives down with the hard edge of its left pincer, pinning you to the stone before lifting you into the air.

Luckily it is not flesh it has purchase upon, your clothing caught instead upon a series of minor spikes that line its left pincer jaw. With one solid swing you smash through its left arm and in a tumble yourself and its pincer fall to ground. Tearing your clothing from the monster's severed limb you turn and find the Reaver staggering sideways, large spatters of oozing blood splashing upon the cold flagstones.

With the advantage now yours you run at the monster, its vulnerable eyes now open to an attack from its left side. The Reaver will not however, give up its life so easily. Striking out again you attempt to deliver a lethal blow but the monster reacts, swiping at you with its remaining pincer as it swings its whole body around to gain a better position to attack. Hit by the blow you stagger backwards but recover your balance only to find the scorpion-like monster rushing at you. Before you can brace yourself the Reaver lunges with its pincer and in that moment you see an opportunity.

Using your weapon you deflect the monster's attack and step inside its long reach. With only a heartbeat available you bring your weapon down upon the Reaver's arm, crushing the limb then thrusting the point of your weapon forward, deep into its eye sockets and thence into its brain. In a shuddering recoil the Reaver rears up then staggers backwards, swaying to the left as it trips over its own legs before falling to the ground. There it lays still.

In the quiet that follows you catch your breath and retrieve your weapon. The Reaver proved itself a formidable opponent but thankfully one that was not beyond your skill. After thanking Providence for your survival you leave its lifeless body in the hall and move southwards, following the long reach of the procession-way as it slopes ever deeper into hard bedrock. It is a monumental corridor and quickly you confirm your initial assessment that it must travel for some way into the earth. Hours pass as you move down its length, the dark tapestry of its night-time scenes covering every metre of its surface as you carefully make your way forward.



Within this remarkable corridor you need no illumination. The walls and ceiling exhibit a night-time scene but the dim gleam of moonlight provides enough of a light source to allow you the unusual circumstance of travelling deep underground without the need of either torch or Sharyah. In truth you find the forest that surrounds you a mesmerising experience. A Dungeon Crawler spends most of his time below ground, or travelling the long distances that lay between the ruins of Arborell and the Guild's headquarters in Das Vallendor. By definition it is a lonely existence and one that requires great care when travelling, especially at night. To be able to journey for such a distance below ground, and to be able to do so in a forest setting with such ease is a novelty that takes some time to wear off.

There comes a time however, when the way ahead changes. Within the corridor you are ensconced within a forest scene that stretches out before you, but as you travel you begin to see a difference in the way ahead. Rather than a continuation of the forest landscape there grows a wide arch-shaped threshold, beyond which you see a vision, though distant, of great mountains and a clouded sky. It is a curious vision that grows as you approach the threshold and when you finally reach the end of the hall's long progress you must once again come to a standstill and wonder at what you have found.

Before you there arises another vast chamber but this one is on a scale that is truly breathtaking. Cut into the deep stone as a long, oblong-shaped hall set beneath a gargantuan elongated dome, this

huge open space reaches southwards for at least a thousand metres. Rising above you on both sides for a further two hundred metres are enormous buttressed walls acting as the seat for a seamless vaulted dome that caps the chamber high overhead.

Along both sides of this space run two lines of immensely tall statues, each a representation of a robed warrior-priest and all holding black crystal weapons in hand. You can see also that there resides at your right and left shoulders in the distant walls a number of doors, and before you a large crack in the floor that could easily swallow any of the statues that stand so proudly here.

The floor itself is a wonder, its length and breadth carved with the symbolism of the mythology of the Ancients. Most recognisable lies the twin sun and moon glyphs at the chamber's centre, surrounded by the spreading branches of the Silvan Tree, all founded upon the waved symbol of the eternal power of the River of Life, the Shan'duil. Deeply etched into the stone these huge pictographs are themselves outlined in Gold and Azuril, a wealth of precious metals that reflects with a glimmering radiance the grey-tinged light that glows from above.

The reason for the chamber however, stands at its southern end. There you see a wide stepped platform in shining black basalt and upon it the largest stone tree you could ever have imagined. Pure white, it rises from the platform for more than a hundred metres in a spreading reach of thick limbs and smaller tributary branches. In perfect detail it is a leaf-less representation of the Silvan Tree on a scale that seems almost impossible to reconcile.

Struck by the immensity of what you have discovered it takes a few moments to register also the unusual character of the chamber itself. The walls and domed ceiling are all carved with a landscape of high mountains that extends around the entire length of the hall. In the dim light that gleams from the dome you see a wide vista of the highest of mountain ranges, cold peaks capped with snow and within their immovable presence the sense of strong winds blowing across ancient stone shoulders.

Just as the forest scene at night seemed so real, here in this great hall you are transported into the massifs of a vast mountain range and before their majesty you are immediately struck with an overwhelming sense of unimportance and humility. Just as quickly you realise that this is exactly what the Beings that artificed this hall intended.

Indeed you have found the Taalestry, the hall that holds the shrine

to the Silvan Tree and which is the centre of all the ancient ruins of Arborell. If your research proves correct it is somewhere here that you will find the Well of Shadows and as you look around you come to the realisation that there is more than one place to look.

The Taalestry provides many avenues to look for the chamber that holds the Well of Shadows. Doors can be found in the east and west walls at this end of the chamber and you notice also that the lines of statues stand a short distance apart from the walls themselves, creating narrow corridors behind that could easily disguise any number of other exits. The Taal itself and the enormous carved Silvan Tree at the southern end of the Taalestry may also provide opportunity. To begin looking you need only decide where you want to go.

If you would go south and have a closer look at the Taal turn to section 27. If you would rather venture eastwards and have a look at the doors resident in that far wall turn to section 40. If you believe it might be more advantageous to go west and investigate the doors there turn to section 54. If you think that the space obscured by the line of statues in the east may prove helpful turn to section 72. If however, you feel that the line of statues near the western wall may hide greater secrets turn to section 84.



23

You have decided to go west but the rift stands once again between you and your objective. If you have a rope still hanging from the roof turn to section 34. If you do not have a way across already in place there is now no time to do so. To get across you must jump, and you must do it quickly. If this is your only course test your Agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 44. If you fail this test turn to section 6. You can of course, choose instead to head south and if this seems a better option turn to section 59.

23a

The pits prove challenging but they are not barriers beyond your skill. Standing on the far side you look down the corridor and see in the distance an arch that serves as a threshold leading into a substantial chamber beyond. From the archway you can see a shimmering light reflecting off the walls that sends a curious play of shadows along the passageway and back towards you. If this is indeed the sanctum of the Well of Shadows then your quest may soon be complete.

Taking your weapon in hand you move quickly but cautiously down the passage. As you approach the chamber there wafts upon the air an unexpected combination of odours, of damp grass and if you remember your mountain flowers, white *heidiils*. It is a scent that should be foreign to a deep ruin and as you near the arch there arises the distinct feeling of a wet spray upon your face, not unlike what you might find at the foot of a great waterfall or cascade. Undeterred you continue your advance and when you cross the threshold into the chamber beyond your world changes.

In the instant that you pass through the archway the chamber before you dissolves away. For only a heartbeat you catch a glimpse of the chamber itself before it is gone in a blinding arc of light. Large and circular in form you can gather only the barest of images of the room but it is enough to discern its contents. At its centre there stands a singularly common-looking well, a circular hole in the floor surrounded by a low stone wall and of all things a bucket leaning against its lip. Upon the walls there are a series of carved panels, each depicting a water scene, mostly waterfalls and long stepped cascades but also including vistas of quiet lakes and rushing rivers. It is all captured in that first fleeting moment and then is gone.

Before you can draw your next breath the chamber disappears, replaced by a white void and a nothingness within which you begin to fall. Gripping your weapon tightly to your chest you are helpless to do anything but surrender to a great force that takes hold of your body and throws you forward. Accelerating into the void the nothingness is replaced by a rushing wind wrapped within a blinding white light that brooks no resistance as you are sent spinning over and over. Gasping for air and totally disoriented the chaotic journey lasts but a few heartbeats before you are dumped abruptly back into the real world. In a tangle of limbs and equipment you come to ground, sliding across a wet grassy verge before coming to rest against a hard

cliff-face and piles of fallen rock.

Lying on the ground you do not move, nor do you open your eyes. Caught completely by surprise you cannot fathom what has just happened but you feel immediately an overwhelming vertigo that causes you to grab at the grasses under your hands to find some sense of stability. Until the swirling dizziness passes you can do nothing but lay upon the ground and battle the relentless spinning. It takes time and when you finally recover your senses enough to open your eyes you find everything has changed.

The grass beneath you is wet and as you raise your head you begin to gain a better appreciation of where you have landed. All about you there comes the sound of a rumbling thunder and within its overbearing presence you can feel the wind and the warmth of sunlight upon your face. Overhead the sky is crystal blue and as you raise your head the sound of crashing waters becomes far clearer. Sitting up you finally understand what has happened.

Before you spreads the vista of a great series of waterfalls and cascades, all falling off a high plateau a few hundred metres ahead. You are sitting on a grassy landing no more than fifteen metres wide and as you crawl forward and peer over its edge you draw back when you find an abyssal drop confronting you. Somehow you have been transported half way up the side of a great mountain, the vista before you no illusion.

Looking around you find your equipment scattered across the grasses. Quickly you retrieve your weapon and what you can find of your gear. Most has slid off the edge of the cliff and has been lost to the fall beyond, but as you survey the triangular shaped area of ground you realise the loss of your possessions is the least of your problems. Carefully you search the edges of the landing and find no way down nor any way up. Shear cliffs back the grassy verge and fall away from its edges. For whatever the intent or purpose of your delivery you are trapped here.

Under a warm summer sun you put down your weapon and find a place to sit upon a smooth stone. Strangely you do recognise where you are, though there are things about the landscape before you that are somehow different. This is indeed the Faels, a famous landmark of northern Kalborea and one frequented by both the curious and the foolhardy who might wish to test their skills against the powerful rapids below. Until now you had never seen the Faels yourself but you do know that what you see here is far more powerful and far larger

than what you have heard of. Seven great falls should flow off the adjacent plateau but you can count at least sixteen here. It is a difference that has you wondering where you really are.

For a time you wait and consider what you should do. If this is indeed the Faels thundering before you then you have somehow been transported from the southern reaches of the lands of Men to the farthest borders of Kalborea in the north. Six hundred leagues now stand between you and your home in Das Vallendor and even if you can find a way off this grassy prison it would take months to find your way back. Climbing up or down the cliff-face is a possibility but one you do not relish. You do not have the proper equipment for such a climb and to do so without the right gear would provide a less than even chance of success.

As you ponder your options there comes from the cliff-face at your right shoulder a sound that brings your hand immediately to your weapon. The fall of a few small stones gives away a movement upon the far edge of the landing and as you turn there comes into your view a sight that leaves you cold. Climbing laboriously into view is an Eqkril, but not one as docile as the mount you have left at Allas'nerig. This is a northern mountain variant, three times the size and with no love of Men except for the meat that can be stripped from their bones. When it sees you it hisses its recognition, its tongue flicking quickly as it samples the air for your scent.

Before this emerging threat you stand your ground and prepare yourself. The Eqkril is coloured slate-grey to blend with its mountain home but what you notice immediately as you survey your opponent is the blue gleaming tinge to its eyes. Such a colouration is not natural and you recognise it for what it is immediately. This creature has been summoned here by someone in possession of a Callingstone and as you wait for the lizard to climb over the cliff's edge you search the surrounding terrain. Somewhere amongst the cragged peaks about you is this creature's Master, watching and waiting for the outcome of the fight to come. It is indeed a confrontation you cannot avoid. You have nowhere to run and the Mountain Eqkril is a predator that will not leave an easy meal unmolested.

If you are to survive you must kill this beast. The Mountain Eqkril has a combat value of 19 and an endurance of 23. For the duration of this combat you may add +2 to your combat value if you have as your weapon an axe, scimitar or warhammer. Previous encounters with

these predators has proven these weapons to be most effective and if you have one in your possession it will be of advantage to use it. If you possess the Back to the Wall talent this circumstance qualifies as a dead-end and you may add an additional +2 to your combat value. If you are successful in this encounter turn to section 100. If you find this adversary too powerful and it is you that falls turn to section 47.

24

Carefully you play your torch ahead of you, searching the shadows for any sign of danger. What you find brings you to a halt, and gives you reason to pause and consider your next move. At all sides the walls of the chamber are covered in Oer'daaki roots, a deep lattice of entwined tendrils and vine growths that move slowly but with purpose in the shadows. If you disturb the growth you know the plant will attack you.

Thankfully the floor about you is mostly clear, only a few long tendrils criss-crossing the floor. If you are lucky you will be able to step over these limbs and get out of the way before the Oer'daaki can sense that you were ever here. It is a hope the Fates decide you have not earned.

With weapon in hand you step carefully across the roots, some of which are as thick as your forearm. In the cool air you make little sound but luck is not yours on this day. As you step forward one of the tendrils moves, its long reach whipping across the floor and striking a glancing blow upon your booted ankle. It is all the Oer'daaki needs.

Instantly roots lunge from the walls, the plant attempting by sheer number to lay one of its prehensile tendrils about you. It is a blind attempt, many of the roots falling to ground in other parts of the chamber but some hit close and one finds its mark, coiling instinctively about your leg. Immediately you feel the pressure build as the plant tries to crush what it has found. Just as quickly however, you react, striking down upon the root and severing it from its source. It is an injury that sends the Oer'daaki into a frenzy.

At all sides dozens of roots fall from the walls, rolling out across the floor into a mat of grey-green vegetation, each whipping from side to side as they attempt to get a purchase upon your flesh. Another hits home, grasping at your shoulder and again you strike it down. This root however, is thicker than the last and takes a number of blows to

cut through. Upon the last stroke more of the roots take hold and it is then that you decide enough is enough.

Freeing yourself from the roots you go on the offensive. Where you find the tendrils you cut and hack away, indiscriminately severing anything you can reach. It is a tactic well-known to the Brothers of the Deep Guild and in this instance is one that saves your life.

With each cut the Oer'daaki withdraws, each wound sending a palpable shudder through the entire plant. You know that if you can cause enough damage the plant will desist, shutting its roots down so that it can no longer feel the pain of its injuries. It is a tactic that eventually leaves the Oer'daaki silent and unmoving, and one that gives you enough time to find a way beyond its reach. When the killer plant is finally quiescent you move on, knowing that it will take some months before the roots in the chamber will heal enough to become active once again.

You have survived your encounter with this deadly plant. Return to the section where this combat was initiated and continue with your quest.

25

For all Dungeon Crawlers there are certain smells that immediately put them on edge. One is the unmistakable scent of death, another the earthy odour of water saturating a tunnel's walls just before it collapses in on itself. To recognise these scents quickly becomes an essential part of the knowledge base of a Brother, their ability to identify and instinctively react to the textures of these odours and fumes fundamental to their survival. As you stand at the threshold of the chamber before you there is a hint of something on the air and it gives you reason to pause.

Not unlike the smell of Nahla blossoms it gives a sweet tinge to the air that marks it as foreign to the usual stale odours you might encounter here. From the doorway you inhale deeper and find no effect upon you, except perhaps a slight breathlessness that dissipates quickly. It is a curious thing and experience tells you that you should not enter. You must however, check the room for any other exits before deciding whether to go inside. There is no point in risking anything here if the room proves to be a dead-end anyway.

Carefully you reach into the room with your torch, you intention to light the chamber and determine if there is any way through. What

happens next comes as a considerable surprise.

The instant your torch's flame reaches into the room the entire roof ignites, its yellowed flame a spreading conflagration burning its way across the simple wooden ceiling overhead. Immediately you recognise what has been laid here. It is a gas trap but one unlike anything you have seen, and as you step back from the threshold burning gases start to erupt from ducts hidden within the brick walls. In turn these fires set the air itself alight within the chamber and before you can react the entire room detonates in a devastating explosion...

Such explosions deep underground require either good luck or powerful magic to survive. If you have a Shieldstone in your possession turn to section 9. If you do not have this talisman you will have to rely on luck alone. Test your Luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 51. If your luck deserts you turn to section 67.

26

For a moment you consider what you should do. The southern exit seems the most obvious direction to find the deeper halls of the ruin but as you stand at the edge of the rift you can see a number of practical difficulties in doing so. The split in the stone is wide, and as far as you can tell extremely deep. All about you water is on the move, cascading into the rift with an ever increasing volume. The only consolation is that the other side of the rift remains dry, all the water flooding the chamber pouring in from the entranceway to the north. If you can get across the gap the chamber on the other side will be an easier way forward, and this gives you hope that the temple-dome may not be as flooded as you might have thought. You must however, get across the gap to find out.

With water pouring over its cold surface the stone about you is both slippery and unstable. If you have a rope and grapple you can use them to swing across the rift and gain the other side. If you have these items of equipment in your possession and wish to use them turn to section 96. If you have previously crossed this chasm using a rope and grapple and it still hangs from the roof turn to section 35.

If you do not have a rope and grapple then the only option is to jump the gap. At its narrowest point the crack is about three metres

in width and a good clean jump will see you to the other side. Test your agility. If you are successful turn to section 2. If you are not successful with this test turn to section 81.

27

Of all the objects that reside in this grand chamber the Taal is the most provocative. Enormous in scope the Tree upon its stepped platform is an extraordinary sight to behold, and one that you know you must investigate further.

Moving southwards you feel the presence of the great Tree grow as its branches reach high overhead, extending in enormous arcs across the carved sky overhead and spreading wide shadows across the stone floor around you. It is curious you think as you walk towards the great Taal that this enormous chamber and all that it contains has not been properly documented by the Guild. Such a find should have been researched, described fully in the literature of the Guild and become well-known to the Brethren. Yet in your research you found little description of the Taalestry nor for that matter any of the other wonders you have found here. It is an omission that should be redressed and you make a mental note to provide a full report to the Guild Library and the Academy of Antiquities in Das Vallendor upon your return.

Cautiously you advance upon the Taal. The shrine to the Silvan Tree dwarfs your approach, and as you move forward it occurs to you that all the things you have seen were artificed for a purpose, one that required work on a scale so vast that it must have taken centuries to properly complete. You know from your research of the Ancients that time had little consequence for them, their great ruins extensive complexes that in some cases spread over huge areas of ground. Why they did so was a mystery that the scholars of Men had not yet uncovered, but as you approach the great Tree a thought enters your mind and it gives you reason to halt.

Like a fleeting vision there comes to you an image, one that is foreign to your own thoughts but one that strikes you as if it is a memory of a long forgotten past. In this great chamber you see a Host of Beings, robed in a similar manner to the huge statues about you and all giving supplication to the Taal before you. In this vision you see no faces, only a congregation of thousands of brightly coloured green and sky-blue robes, and all kneel as one before the

Taal. It is a sight of great devotion but there is no worship here. With the fleeting scene there comes an overwhelming wave of emotion and it is one of joy.

In a moment of revelation you recognise what the Temple of Allas'nerig was built for. These great halls with their wondrous landscapes and almost supernatural carvings were in fact a celebration of creation and all that had sprung from it. It was in fact a peoples' attempt to give thanks for the world that they found themselves within, and a visible contract with the Silvan Tree of their determination to preserve its wonders. Without any doubt you realise that this was their commitment to the Silvan Tree, expressed in stone to last for all the ages of the world.

Overwhelmed by the power of the emotion that floods your thoughts you remain still, using your weapon to find your balance as you feel a palpable energy wash through your body, wrapping itself about your person before dissipating away into the air above you. When it is done you take a deep breath and collect your own thoughts. You know this was not a memory of your own. In your own mind you are certain the vision was given to you for a purpose, and while it remains fresh in your thoughts you work to remember as much of it as possible. Like everything else you have found here it is an experience that must be reported.

Turning to look again at the Taal you see the long staircase that reaches to the top level of the stepped platforms, and it is only then that you notice the small statues that stand one at each side of the stairway's lowest level. They are not dissimilar to the vast statues that line the chamber but these sport iron weapons and stand immobile, at attention as if they are on guard. For a moment you stand and wonder if they are Sentinels. It is when their eyes suddenly glow blue beneath heavy cowls that you know this is exactly what they are.

In a creaking movement that quickly becomes a fluid rush the two Sentinels charge towards you. Each holds an iron scimitar and both will not stop in their attack until you are dead. For a moment you consider if you should run, but the chamber is wide and long and they would certainly run you down before you could find safety. With no other option you stand your ground and wait for them to close upon you.

The Sentinels each have a CV of 18 and an endurance of 3. Their endurance level is low due to the immense periods of time that these

automatons have stood guard, their crystalline structure now degraded and brittle. Unlike Temple Guardians that roam the halls of ancient ruins at will Sentinels remain stationary, their prime motivation the security of something hidden close at hand. It has been the experience of the Guild that Sentinels possess the same characteristics as Temple Guardians but do not move from the proximity of their charge. They can be as brittle as Guardians but are slightly stronger, however a solid hit will usually bring one down.

A player using a warhammer as primary weapon may increase their combat value by +3 for the duration of this combat. Sentinels are particularly susceptible to hammer blows and come apart easily if struck solidly. Their weapons however, are as lethal as they look and will inflict damage according to the combat rules.

You must fight these Sentinels in turn. If you are successful and survive this combat turn to section 49. If you find these mindless guards too strong and it is you that falls turn instead to section 64.

28

You need three codewords but you do not have them all. On a chance that what you have might suffice you intone them loudly before the door, but it is not enough. The door remains silent, the words etched across its carved face quietly ebbing away as quickly as the echoes of your voice. In your mind you know that the Well of Shadows resides on the other side of this door, and you know with equal surety that the remaining words you need can be found somewhere within this great Taalestry. It is the way of such puzzles that the answers can usually be found close at hand, though cunningly disguised or sometimes hidden openly in plain sight. If you are to face the Well you must find the remaining words and that means you will have to return to the open floor of the Taalestry and search them out.

Turning on your heel you retrace your steps northwards through the ornate water carvings and from there back out into the main chamber. Somewhere within this immense chamber the remaining Words will be found and you can go no further until you have them.

Turn to section 36 and decide where you should now search. Before you turn to this section write the number 70 into the Notes section of your character sheet. When you have found the remaining codewords

you need, and can once again stand before the door to intone them, turn to the section number you have just recorded. This will place you back before this door and you can continue with your quest.

29

The chamber is a remarkable space but there is nothing further that you can do here. After shouldering your pack you retrace your steps westwards, back to the main hall and the gathering flood of water that cascades over the western edges of the rift. To the north the storm is a thundering deluge and you know that your mission could easily come to a halt if the water that now flows into the rift finds another way further into the ruins. You resolve that you must move with greater haste.

There are two exits in this hall that may take you further into the ruins. The western archway lies dark within the shadows, the southern exit a larger and more plausible way forward. The way south is easier and drier, the way west another possibility if you have not yet gone that way. To go west however will require crossing the rift once again. If you believe it best to go south turn to section 59. If you would rather go west turn to section 23.

30

With water cascading down into the chamber you decide it is better to find your way back to the entry to the proving ground and find another way. There is a chance that the other archway may lead to a drier way forward and you decide to test that chance. Quickly you take to the steps and make your way out of the northern exit, following the narrow passageway northwards back to the Processional Hall and the entrance to the proving ground.

As before you stand with two archways that lead into the maze but only one left to take. Without hesitation you move towards the western arch.

Turn to section 17.



31

Without looking back you step across a dust-covered threshold into a room littered with piles of debris; mostly broken brickwork and mounds of coarsely woven sacks, some of which are filled with rubbish, rusted tools, weaponry, and what looks like old clothing. It is a curious thing to find such a collection of detritus so far underground, but as you survey the room you realise that there was indeed a purpose here. The piles of bricks prove to be the remains of an attempt to bring down the northern wall of the chamber, one that was stymied by the discovery of a harder stone wall behind. To add to this mystery you also find a jumble of bowls and bedding frames. As you look at the odd collection of dusty artifacts you consider a possible reason for their disposal but it brings with it only further questions.

At some point in the past a group of men must have spent time here, digging away at the wall of the chamber with a purpose that you cannot yet fathom. You are sure that it was men, for the construction of the collapsible bedding frames is of a common style seen all over Kalborea. The only clue to what they were actually looking for makes less sense. Around the edges of the collapsed brickwork you find the torn remains of a thick parchment, but there is nothing upon it that gives any hint as to what its purpose might have been. In the end you resolve that what they were doing must remain a mystery. It is time for you to move on.

The chamber has two exits, one in the eastern wall and another in the southern wall. Before leaving you can conduct a Search Roll and see if there is anything of value discarded amongst these mounds of rubbish. If you do consult your Search List to find out what you have found. Both exits are open so you may choose whichever one you think will bring you closer to the end of this maze. To go south turn to section 88. To go east turn to section 15.

31a

The southern door opens and immediately there comes a strong gust of clear air. Stepping through the open archway you take a deep breath and look out into the corridor ahead. For a moment you pause to straighten up and thank the Fates, for ahead of you is not another brick-walled room but a vast hall, reaching out into shadows before

you. Taking a few steps forward you look back at the great wall built by the Hordim and decide that if there is another way out of the temple-dome you will use it. You do not wish to negotiate this proving ground again unless you have absolutely no choice.

For a moment you check your equipment and look to the way ahead. In the gloom you consider your next move but then are startled by a monstrous growl that emerges from out of the maze at your back. Echoing of the walls it is the guttural protestation of an enormous creature, one that you must have missed somewhere within the maze but had most certainly been waiting for you. Shouldering your pack you search the shadows for a time, but whatever made the noise is not close. You think that you have had enough of such places and move on.

Turn to section 75.

32

For a moment you consider the roof overhead. To use a rope and grapple requires a purchase point in the curving vault above and there is an extension of stone in the intricately carved roof that will serve the purpose. Quickly you find your grapple and tie your rope to its fastening, then judge the distance to the abutment of stone and the weight of the metal grapple as you swing it out over the rift.

Most Dungeon Crawlers will tell you that a small collapsible grapple is an essential tool for any Brother to take into the deep ruins of the world, but it can also be said that it is not an easy one to master. Finding a secure purchase that will take the weight of man and equipment requires knowledge and experience, and the capacity to swing the grapple where it must go a skill that takes considerable practice. As you swing the grapple up into the vault overhead you are glad that you are alone, for it takes some time to get it right.

Over and over you swing the grapple out and then up into the vaulted stone, attempting to gain a hold on the roof that will prove secure. Each time the grapple falls, and with each attempt the water about your ankles grows deeper and more energetic in its flow. Eventually however, you find the purchase you require and pull hard upon the rope. Satisfied that it will hold your weight you throw your equipment across and then swing over yourself.

For all the difficulty in seating the grapple the traverse proves straightforward and in one even arc you make the other side of the

crack. Once upon drier ground you retrieve your equipment and then look to where you should now go.

The eastern exit waits close at your right shoulder. Turn to section 38 after you have reclaimed all your equipment. Note: You have the choice here of either leaving the rope and grapple in place, ready for your return, or taking it down in case you need it again. If you decide to leave it here record this on your character sheet in the notes section and remove it from your equipment list.

33

Out of the shadows the Shambler advances towards you, its dead eyes staring blankly as it shuffles awkwardly in your direction. For a moment you wait, watching the creature approach. In the gloom it is a ragged corpse, hardly identifiable as the remnants of a once living man, but even in its decaying state it remains far more dangerous than most of the denizens found in these deep places. For all intents the Shambler is already dead, animated by the residual energies of EarthMagic and damned to an endless, restless march that can end only when it falls apart and finally lies still. You think as you wait that to give it rest is a blessing you would hope others might bestow on yourself under the same circumstances.

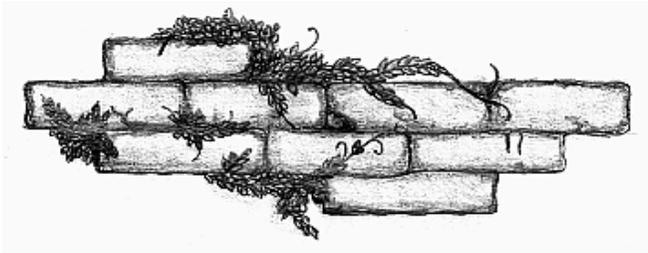
Before this foe you do not give ground. The creature has only its hands and teeth with which to do harm but its body is its greatest strength. No amount of superficial injury will bring it down. Only the severing of its limbs and the removal of its head will see it stop its assault, and in the dark chamber you take to the task with a grim determination.

Quickly you strike at the Shambler, your warhammer's blunt edge crushing down upon the creature's flesh. At the first impact the dead man staggers back and in that moment of imbalance you swing the hammer again., hitting him squarely in the shoulder. It does not halt the Shambler's attack. In return the creature lunges forward, its hands grasping at your arm as it sinks its teeth deep into your elbow. Cursing, you hit the Shambler in the head with your fist then push it away, but it keeps coming at you, only a low moan wheezing between its dry lips any indication that it is anything other than dead flesh. Again you strike out and this time your weapon finds its mark upon the side of the creature's neck. Jerking sideways the dead man falls

and as it tries to regain its feet you hit it repeatedly, crushing its arms and head until nothing remains but a oozing mess upon the hard stone floor. Only then does the Shambler stop, its last movements a few twitching fingers grasping at the air before all is quiet.

In the gloom you struggle to catch your breath. In the past you have had to kill a number of these creatures but no amount of experience can lessen the horror of it. Once you have found your breath you take a few moments to clean your warhammer then look to where you should now go.

Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and continue with your quest.



34

The rope still hangs from its purchase in the roof above and it takes only a moment to regain possession of it. The other side of the gap is awash with water and you cannot throw your equipment across first. The flooding waters now flows with such power that they could easily sweep anything loose back into the rift and you cannot afford such a loss. Instead you tighten your pack all the firmer to your shoulders and then jam your torch into its upper fastenings. When you are ready you test the grapple's grasp upon the stone above then make the swing, again arcing over the wide rift and landing smoothly on the other side. Thankful that you have made it across the chasm without mishap you take your torch in hand and move on.

(At this point you can leave the rope and grapple in place or take it with you. If you take it with you record its return on your equipment list.)

The exit opens only some fifteen metres from where you now stand. It is a dark, shadowed way forward but one that requires exploration. Leaving the chasm behind you move westwards, through the archway

and then along another corridor. It extends for only a short distance before terminating at another threshold and a large chamber beyond. From its entry you can sense that there is a considerable space to be found here, but before you can discover anything more there comes a furtive scraping noise from within. Something resides within the darkness and it is waiting for you.

Record the number of this section on your character sheet then make an Encounter Roll. With this number turn to the Encounter list at the back of this gamebook and conduct the encounter according to the circumstances provided. If you are successful and survive what lies within turn to section 8. If it is you who dies then the Encounter List will tell you what you should do.

35

You find the grapple still in place and firm in its purchase upon the stone vault overhead. Taking up the rope you use it to swing across the chasm and in one smooth arc make the other side. It is not a moment too soon. From out of the north the sounds of the storm increase measurably and with the echoing deluge comes a rising tide that floods the chamber, pouring into the rift in a continuous sheet of dark water.

On the eastern side of the rift the waters have made no mark but you do not know how deep the chasm might be, or whether the water that falls so effortlessly into its depths has anywhere to drain. There is a hope that the remainder of the ruin might remain dry but if this gaping crack fills then the temple-dome could easily become a death trap. There seems little reason to linger within this chamber any longer and you turn southwards.

If you wish to leave the rope and grapple here do so. If you would rather take it with you record its return on your character sheet before continuing. In either case turn to section 59 to continue with your mission.

36

Standing within the vast open space of the Taalestry you consider what you should do next. The chamber is large and there is much that can be explored. If you have not already done so the following options

are available.

If you would go south and have a closer look at the Taal itself turn to section 27. If you would rather venture eastwards and have a look at the doors resident in that far wall turn to section 40. If you believe it might be more advantageous to go west and investigate the doors there turn to section 54. If you think that the space obscured by the line of statues in the east may prove helpful turn to section 72. If however, you feel that the line of statues near the western wall may hide greater secrets turn to section 84.

37

There is something in the chamber with you, and as you search the shadows for some clue as to its nature you hear the muffled scrape of chitin against stone. The sound is unmistakable, like a piece of soft wood being dragged across brickwork and you recognise it immediately. It is an Arachnari, and it is close. Carefully you place your torch onto the ground and drop your pack. There is little that you can do but take your weapon in hand and prepare yourself for the battle to come.

The Arachnari remains hidden, but only for a moment. Advancing upon eight powerful limbs the spider-monster purposefully surveys the chamber and your position in it. These predators know no fear, and go about the business of death with a cool efficiency that leaves you with little room for error. Grasping the haft of your weapon all the tighter you wait for its inevitable charge. It comes in a heaving rush.

Upon the smooth stone the Arachnari moves with surprising speed, its large abdomen sliding upon the floor as it charges your position. As black as night and covered in a dense matt of brittle hairs, it shimmers in the torchlight, its bulk overwhelming in the confines of this ruin. You know from the shared experience of the Guild that these monsters have only a few vulnerable points, namely its eyes, the joints at its thorax and abdomen, and a thin section of exoskeleton just beneath its mandibles. A blow to any of these points will injure, anywhere else finds only thick exoskeleton and a very angry Arachnari.

Shared experience also tells you that these monsters are not highly intelligent and a favoured tactic within the Guild is to attack first before the creature can take any hold upon you. This you take to

heart. Before the spider can reach out, you charge it instead, wielding your weapon in a wide arc and bringing it down upon the monster's head. In a gushing blossom of green ooze one of its eyes explodes, its head badly cut by the strike.

Recoiling from the blow the Arachnari shakes its head, its body quivering with the pain of its injury. In that moment of hesitation you rush forward again and strike again at the monster. This time you aim for the joint between its head and thorax but are not as successful. With a dull thud the edge of your weapon glances off its back and in retaliation the Arachnari lunges forward, sweeping out with its front leg, hitting you squarely upon the left knee and knocking you to the ground.

Rolling back to your feet you are barely able to raise your weapon before the monstrous spider is upon you. With its full weight it crashes into you, knocking you again onto your back. Before you can move the Arachnari grabs at your chest with its front legs and starts to lift you off the stone floor. It is a mistake the Arachnari will never be allowed to make again.

With weapon in hand you thrust upwards, piercing the monster's vulnerable plating beneath its mouth and driving cold steel deep into its brain. In a shuddering convulsion the Arachnari topples sideways and in a tangle of trembling limbs you push yourself as far from it as the chamber will allow. Struggling for breath you pull your weapon close and wait as the Arachnari dies. Thankfully it does not take long.

When the chamber is once again still you gather up your equipment and then stand over the huge Arachnari. In death it is as intimidating as in life, and although this monster proved wanting you can be sure that where you find one Arachnari there can also be found many more.

This Arachnari will not bother you any more but you will need to be on the lookout for more of these monsters. If you do encounter any more of the Arachnari increase your combat value by +2 for the duration of that combat to account for the experience gained against this opponent. Once you have made a note of this, return to the section that initiated this encounter and continue with your mission.



37a

The gem is a prize that cannot be left behind and one you have no intention of abandoning. In truth you can think of a dozen buyers who would pay considerable coin to possess it, and with only a cautionary look about the chamber you move forward. Into the dark cell you advance, your torch held high as you make your way towards the statue. It is only when you reach the centre of the room that you come to a halt. There is something about the statue that does not feel right and immediately your senses go on alert, a gut feeling telling you that everything here is not as it seems.

Carefully you stoop and pick up a handful of dust from the floor at your feet and throw it out in a wide arc in front of you. Instantly the air is filled with a series of thin lines of light, each a glistening tracery of dust that slowly settles back onto the floor. Once again you bend to pick up another handful of dust and it is as you scrape the floor that you feel the edges of a metal pressure-plate set into the stone beneath your feet. Your left foot rests upon it and it is then that you realise you have walked into a trap.

Throwing more dust into the air behind you confirms your worst fears. The entire room is now criss-crossed in a complex spider's web of impossibly thin beams of light, dull in colour but there nonetheless. If you move and touch one of these beams you are sure that a trap will be triggered, though you cannot see what mode of device you have walked into. What you do see is that the shimmering lines of light are not overly concentrated behind you, they seem to have been focused mostly upon the security of the statue and this gives you reason to hope. There is a chance that you might be able to avoid the lines of light and back out of the room without triggering whatever trap resides here. If you are right it will require only a careful retreat and a measure of luck to find a way out.

With no way of being able to reach the gem you determine that you must save yourself and get out of the room before the trap is activated. Carefully you take your pack from your back and lay it across the pressure-plate at your feet. It is heavy and should keep the plate depressed. You cannot be sure that removing your foot from the plate won't activate the trap as well so there is no option to do otherwise. With only your weapon strapped to your back you turn about and carefully lift your foot off the floor.

For a moment you wait, fully expecting some devastating blow or lethal blade to end your life but in the silence nothing happens. At the

very least you have the freedom to try and make it out of this chamber. Between you and the door there is a distance of less than nine metres, but the way is transected by a number of thin lights of light that you cannot touch. With only your weapon still in hand you begin a careful return to the doorway and the safer chamber beyond.

Test your Luck, Agility and Intuition attributes. If you succeed in all these tests then you make it to the doorway and the chamber beyond. There you can decide if you wish to take either the northern exit (section 87), or the eastern exit (section 20) to continue your quest. You have survived the trap but in the process have lost everything except your weapon, your chosen Sharyah, one torch and any personal armour you may have been wearing. Record these losses by removing everything else from your character sheet before you continue. If you fail any one of these tests then you must instead turn to section 46a.

38

East is your chosen goal and you make for the archway. What you find beyond its dark threshold is a long corridor, one that extends for some distance further eastwards. For a moment you pause beneath the arch and listen intently for some hint of what might lay ahead, but all you can hear is the rush and gurgle of the waters behind you. If there is any danger to be found ahead you will have to go and find it.

Carefully you move forward, the passage reaching out into the hard stone. Upon all its surfaces the corridor is decorated with the same finely carved murals as the main hall, and as your light flickers into the shadows you begin to see the most unusual of effects playing upon the walls. At first you pay it little heed, but as you move further down the passage you begin to see movement at the corner of your eye. Within the shadows cast upon the walls by your torch there comes a striking illusion of motion in the carvings about you. The stone itself remains immutable but the shadows caught upon the etched stone give a striking impression of animals and birds moving within a long representation of a great forest. As furtive shades they are no more than an impression of creatures finding their way through the forest around you, indeed in the light cast by your torch it almost feels as if they are following your advance in particular. It is both intriguing and also disconcerting. Before you are finished your progress through the passage you have an indefinable feeling that you are being

watched.

When you find the corridor's end you pass through another archway into a large and impressive chamber. Square in plan, but with the far eastern wall a wide curved surface, it is also covered in the same intricate carvings you have found elsewhere in Allas'nerig. Here the murals extend over all the chamber's surfaces and continue the theme found in the passageway outside. In the light of your torch you see a great forest extending in all directions about you, the carved surfaces presenting an unnerving perspective of a reality somehow captured in hard stone.

For a time you consider the time and skill required to artifice such a marvel but as you stand in the centre of the hall you notice that there is more to this room than just exceptional stone-mastery. Far from the main hall this chamber reverberates to the sounds of the distant flowing water, though with that distance it has become muted, more the softer murmur of a flowing creek than a rushing flood, and filled with these sounds the chamber comes alive.

In a flowing movement you see a wind blowing through the canopy of the forest overhead. Solid stone bends and strains to the effects of a breeze that you cannot feel, but which flows through the stone overhead as easily as wind through leaves. In the under-storey smaller trees and low bushes sway to the same imperative, animals and birds somehow moving within undergrowth that should have no life or motion.

Within this forest tapestry you stand for some time, watching a cycle of life open up before you as days come and go and moonlight streams through bough and leaf. Only when you pull yourself away from the vision in moving stone can you turn back to the exit, and in doing so find two further things just as intriguing.

The first is a section of the wall near the archway that has been altered. The exquisite stone carving has been hacked away, leaving a square of rough cut stone and an iron plaque screwed into its surface. The plaque itself has a long vertical slit moulded into its centre, serving as a guide for a metal lever that can be moved up or down. As you find it the lever is in the "up" position.

You do not need any time to determine what the lever is for as you have seen such devices before. It is Hordim-made and it can only mean one thing. The ruin that you have entered must have once been a proving ground for warriors and that means that the temple-dome has been altered, provided with traps, mazes and populated with wild

creatures to test the skills and courage of young Oera'dim warriors wishing to prove their mettle.

For a moment you step back and shake your head. There had been no mention of this in the notes left with the Guild Library and with this discovery the whole nature of your mission into the temple-dome must now change. Ahead you will not only find the dangers inherent within an ancient ruin, collapsing in upon itself with age and neglect, but also the lethal devices and traps laid down by the Hordim for purposes that have long been lost to history. All in all your day just got a lot harder.

The second thing you find is a pile of discarded clothing and old equipment left by treasure-seekers in times past and now covered in a thick layer of dust and desiccated insect husks. Carefully you pull the upper layer of clothing away, waving away a cloud of grit as you uncover a tangle of broken metal and rotting fabric. What you also find is a word scratched into the stone beneath the iron plaque. It is in the Elder Tongue of the ancients and it reads as “emru”.

There is nothing else to be found in this chamber but there are two decisions you need to make here. The first relates to the lever. The Guild understands that such devices have two purposes; one to activate the traps that will be found further within the ruin, the other to open most of the doors that would allow free movement for the creatures placed by the Hordim to test their warriors. You have a choice here and it is a hard one to make.

You can leave the lever as it is, or you can depress it to activate the proving grounds. If you leave the lever as it is, you will not have to worry about traps within the ruin but most doors you encounter will be locked. If however, you depress the lever and activate the proving ground you will have to deal with all that the Hordim have placed within the temple-dome, but have free access to the entire ruin. Make a choice now as to what you wish to do. If you decide to depress the lever write the word “emru” into the Codewords section of your character sheet. If you decide to leave the lever alone write nothing on your character sheet.

There is also an opportunity to search through the discarded equipment and clothing. If this is something you wish to do make a Search roll and consult the Search List to see what you have found. If you do not wish to spend the time doing this then it is time to move on.

Whatever your choices, when you have determined what you wish to do within this chamber there is nothing more that can be done here. You can return to the main hall by turning to section 29.

39

With all your equipment secured to your person you bear your weight upon the first of the chains. Immediately there is a cascade of rust flakes that rain down from the ancient metal above, but the chain holds secure and using it you swing out into the chain-field. One by one you swing and then grab the next chain, transferring your weight before releasing the previous chain to fall back into place as you move forward.

It is a laborious and fatiguing process that brings you closer to your chosen exit, though its reliance on strength over technique taxes all the physical power and agility you can bring to the task. Carefully you move onwards but it is only a matter of time before you make a mistake that has lethal consequences.

With arms that are aching for rest you take a moment to pause upon one of the cross-bars. In truth you do not believe that even a Hresh warrior could successfully traverse the chain-field without using the resting points, and you take the time to loosen your arm muscles and choose which of the chains ahead you will take next. When you are sure you have the strength to continue you reach out for the next chain but narrowly misjudge the distance you require to gain a firm hold, missing the chain and instead grabbing awkwardly for the chain you are hanging from to regain your balance. In a violent jerk you overbalance on the cross-bar and your hand slips, tearing skin and flesh upon the chain's rusted surface. Cursing your luck you wipe the blood from your injured hand on your pant's leg and try again. This time you reach the chain and grab a tight hold, but as you draw the chain towards you it slides out of your grasp, wet with blood and too slippery to hold fast. Again you over-balance but this time you find no good purchase and fall forwards, your grip failing as you drop down onto the hard stone floor beneath you.

Spread-eagled on the floor you do not move, your hope that you have fallen onto a part of the chamber that will hold your weight. It is a hope that quickly dissolves in a splintering crash as the stone beneath you subsides. With all need for caution thrown to the winds you roll sideways as an enormous crack opens up, quickly spreading

across the length of the chamber's flooring, collapsing pit-traps with its advance until the entire chamber begins to fall apart. In a choking cloud of dust and crushing stone you fall with the floor into a deep pit beneath and are lost within an avalanche of stone, red brick and centuries of dust and debris.

In this life your quest is over. It must now be to a latter life that you will need to look for better luck and greater success.

THE END

40

Within the grandeur of the Taalestry you move quickly, making for the eastern doors. In the dim light that glimmers from the immense domed ceiling you can make out three doorways, clustered closely together at the northern quarter of that wall. About you the vast mountain panorama remains still, the walls a marvel of precisely carved stone and unfathomable skill. What you notice as you walk however, is that not everything within the chamber remains still or silent.

When you are no more than half way to the eastern doors you come to a halt when you hear a sharp click echo through the hall. It is no more than the tumble of dislodged stone falling to ground, but it gives you reason to pause and stare with greater focus upon the statues that line the long reach of the Taalestry. In the half-light you see one of the great monoliths move, ever so imperceptibly but move nonetheless. As the hand of a precision clock might move about its face you see one of the arms of the great statues rise slightly, its position change just enough that you can see the difference in its posture. This is something you did not expect.

It is known by some amongst the Brethren of a curious device built into many of the temples of the Ancients. Although there can be found in the world many statues that move of their own volition, and of those some that are truly dangerous, there are others that are purely mechanical in nature, fulfilling a function commenced in the dark recesses of history and still going about their purpose in these modern times. If you are correct these two lines of immense statues are actually the physical representation of a timing device, triggered millennia ago and slowly counting down to some point of importance in the future.

In the hall you stand and wait. If this is one of those devices it should click again within the next few minutes and like clockwork you see the next statue move, again the slight rising of an arm the only clue that something incredible is going on. Again you wait and again the next statue's arm elevates slightly. Shaking your head you look at the other side of the hall and realise that there is a deeper significance to the statues raised here. On both sides there are eleven of their number, the same as the number of Colossi that can be found upon the Plains of Adamant to the far north-east of Arborell, and of those that can be found upon the grasslands of N'sara only a short distance to the east of Allas'nerig itself. It is rumoured amongst the scholars of the Guild that these timing devices are counting down to an event of great moment, one that will result in the activation of the Colossi. Why is a question that remains unanswered. What the scholars of the Guild can say however, is that the way the statues move indicates that they will meet their last stroke in a little over five hundred years. Time enough you think, for it to be no concern of yours.

You watch the statues for only a short time longer then return to your investigation of the eastern doorways. When you reach their ornate arches you find that two of their number have collapsed and only one remains stable. This central doorway is no more than the threshold to a dark corridor that leads directly into the east. Listening carefully you can hear the drip of water and the subtle movement of stone coming from the passageway.

If you wish to investigate this corridor turn to section 66a. If you believe that there might be better places to look, or you have the name "Bhet" written into the Quest Notes section of your character sheet turn instead to section 36.

41

You hear the Shambler long before you see it. From somewhere in the passages and chambers about you the unmistakable sound of a dead man walking filters through the air. It is the curious shift and drag of feet on cold stone that alerts you to its presence, though for a time you cannot tell from which direction it might be coming.

Quietly you wait, holding your torch high to illuminate as much of the space around you as you can. When the wretched creature does appear it emerges from the shadows at your shoulder, a rotting remnant of a man that once must have delved these ruins himself,

only to end up a permanent reminder of how dangerous that vocation can sometimes prove to be.

For a moment you watch the Shambler move, and in your survey you realise that this will be a much tougher opponent than most of his type. In life this Shambler would have been a man of stature and strength, his remains still a good forearm's length taller than yourself. As you take a firmer hold on your weapon you know what you must do. You would hope that in the same circumstance another Brother might do the same for you.

And in this gruesome task you do not wait for the Shambler to come to you. As it staggers onward you run at it, jumping at the last to kick it squarely in the chest. Caught off balance by the blow the Shambler falls backwards, hitting the ground as you carry on forward, weapon raised high. One blow renders the Shambler's left arm unusable but the creature does not falter. With a sweep of its huge remaining fist the dead man strikes back, punching you in the leg and toppling you sideways. Before you can recover your feet it kicks out, hitting you a glancing blow across the shoulder that narrowly misses your head and neck but sends you sliding across the hard floor of the chamber.

Stunned by the attack you regain your weapon and run forward only to find the Shambler has also found its feet. Before you can strike again the dead man punches out, hitting you in the head and knocking you backwards. Disoriented by the blow you stagger to your feet and swing your weapon in a wide arc. The Shambler retreats but only for a heartbeat. Again it attacks, throwing all its weight into a mindless rush designed to knock you off your feet. This further assault you sidestep and as the dead man stumbles past you bring your weapon down upon its back. It is not enough to stop the Shambler.

Turning to face you once again the creature lunges forward. You hit it again but its momentum pulls it within arm's reach and it is then that it grabs at you, encircling your neck within its enormous fist. Instinctively you strike out to free yourself but the Shambler shifts its position and then bears down with its fingers upon your neck. In a strangled heartbeat your neck breaks, your body a lifeless rag-doll that it shakes from side to side before throwing to ground. In this life your quest is over. You must now look to the next for better luck and greater success.

THE END

42

Quickly you make your way into the ruins. Ahead reaches a long hallway, angled in a shallow, sloping decline that follows a path directly south into the interior of the temple-dome. When you have passed beyond its threshold you proceed southwards for only a few dozen metres before you must come to a halt. The hard stone beneath your feet is awash with an ankle-deep flow of water pouring in from the storm outside, but it is something else that gives you reason to pause. Against the eastern wall of the corridor there stands a pile of equipment stacked upon a small plinth and you recognise its origin immediately. It is all guild-made and only recently rested here.

Moving towards the gear you thrust your torch into a wall-bracket and consider what you have found. What you see is all the equipment and supplies required by a Brother of the Guild to travel the wild-lands. In a series of neatly folded covers there resides a tent, cooking equipment, wet weather gear and a multi-purpose harness carried by most Brothers in case they find a mount worthy of use. What you do not find is any of the gear a Dungeon Crawler might take into a ruin and it leaves you in no doubt that another of the Brethren is already somewhere within the temple-dome.

Taking your torch from its hold you replace the equipment as you found it. No Brother steals from another but you are not happy with what you have discovered. All of the Brethren register their missions with the Guild's Administrative Office and yours had been given special sanction due to its objectives. With that sanction you should have received sole occupancy of the ruin until your return to Das Vallendor, but someone had chosen to ignore the rules of the Guild and make their way here before you. If nothing else such an act is considered rude, and you resolve to give the offender a piece of your mind if you find him within the temple-dome.

Leaving the equipment behind you turn to the south and move on. Ahead the hall reaches down into bedrock and you follow it until you come to a further threshold and a large chamber beyond. Playing your torch before you its flickering illumination uncovers a huge space, one of walls covered in ancient carvings and a high fan-vaulted ceiling that reaches to a peak overhead. At each corner of the chamber stands a tall, robed figure, artificed in black stone and each possessing a corroded metal sword. For a moment you look at the statues but they seem harmless, so you step out into the open space and consider with greater clarity what you have found here.

On all sides the chamber is covered in richly carved bass-relief murals. Each wall depicts a forest scene and each is a remarkable representation of the world as it used to be. Overhead the roof arches in a series of complex vaults to a high pinnacle, and within each of the roof segments you see different denizens of the world above, cloud and moon cut cleanly between representations of dragons and other flying creatures.

It is what you find on the floor ahead however, that brings you to a halt. The chamber is roughly square in plan but from its north-east corner to its south-west there has opened a wide rift, a split in the stone that is both wide and deep. Carefully you move to its edges and see that it is indeed very deep. About you the water that has found its way into the ruin spills across the floor, cascading over the rift's cragged lip before disappearing in a showering spray into its depths.

Looking about you see that there are three exits from the chamber, a small archway that opens in the western wall, another similar archway beyond the rift in the eastern wall and a larger exit also beyond the rift in the south. If you are to move forward it will have to be through one of these arches.

If you wish to take the western exit turn to section 48. If you believe it will be better to venture east, turn to section 13. If the south exit seems the best option turn to section 26.

43

When the Molgoth attacks it falls upon you like a shadow descending out of a starless sky. You do not see it, or sense its presence until the tell-tale whoosh of its wings alerts you to the danger, but years of experience in the world has given you the knowledge you need to survive its attack.

Before the huge bat-like monster can come to ground you retreat from the centre of the chamber and find a position against the nearest wall. In enclosed spaces the Molgoth is an ungainly predator, one that shies from flying too close to hard stone, instead preferring to come to ground and attack its prey with its razor-sharp teeth and long, curving claws. It is a behaviour that you have used to your advantage before, but one that requires you give the monster no ability to restrict your movement.

With a shuddering impact the Molgoth lands upon the floor before

you. Immediately it extends its leathery wings to try and fence you into a space that will allow it to draw you closer. Just as quickly you leave the wall, running out onto open ground and cutting down upon the Molgoth's wing with your weapon. The blow is ineffective, just grazing the monster's long-boned arm before hitting ground, but it is enough for the Molgoth to retract its wings before advancing towards you. This time it keeps its wings safe, instead extending its long arms and sharp claws to take a hold upon your flesh. You do not feel obliged to give it the opportunity.

Again you strike out with your weapon, its edges cutting deep into the predator's reaching arm as it grasps for your shoulder. In a shower of blood the limb collapses, the huge beast shuddering with the pain of its injury. Enraged it strikes back, its uninjured arm grabbing at your neck but succeeding only in raking its clawed hand down your chest and side, cutting at your leather jerkin but not causing injury in the attempt. You push the arm aside and cut down with your weapon, another long gash opening in the creature's chest as you then thrust forward with your fists, propelling the Molgoth backwards.

Caught off balance the monster bat stumbles upon its stunted legs and in that moment you strike. Swinging down with all the strength you have you drive your weapon into the monster's chest, piercing its tough hide and tearing through its vital organs. Blood gouts upon the floor, welling from the Molgoth's chest and spraying over yourself and drenching the cold stone about you. Mortally wounded the monster staggers backwards and then topples to the ground, its life spent.

In the quiet that follows you wipe the creature's blood from your face and kick it to make sure it is truly dead. When you have satisfied yourself that the predator is no longer a threat you set to cleaning yourself and your equipment. The Molgoth has made quite a mess and it takes time to remove its mark from your clothing.

When you are done you shoulder your pack and look to where you should now go.

The Molgoth is dead but you cannot be sure that there are not more of the creatures lurking in these ruins. Return to the section that initiated this encounter then continue with your quest.



44

You can see the water growing in strength on the other side of the gap and you know you will have only one chance at making it across. This time however, you cannot throw your pack or your torch first. The force of the water will sweep them into the rift and you cannot afford to lose any of your equipment. Instead you tighten the pack about your shoulders and jam the torch into the top of its partially open fastenings. With everything prepared you attempt the leap.

On this side of the rift the ground is mostly dry and you run with all the speed you can muster, closing the distance to the edge before leaping out into space. Rapidly you sail over the rift and land in a shower of water on the other side, your momentum sending you sliding across the slick stone before coming to a complete stop. Thankful that you have made the leap without mishap you take your torch in hand and move on.

The exit opens only some fifteen metres from where you now stand. It is a dark, shadowed way forward but one that requires exploration. Leaving the chasm behind you move westwards, through the archway and then along another corridor. It extends for only a short distance before terminating at another threshold and a large chamber beyond. From its entry you can sense that there is a considerable space to be found here, but before you can discover anything more there comes a furtive scraping from within. Something resides within the darkness and it is waiting for you.

Record the number of this section on your character sheet then make an Encounter Roll. With this number turn to the Encounter list at the back of this gamebook and conduct the encounter according to the circumstances provided. If you are successful and survive what lies within turn to section 8. If it is you who dies then the Encounter List will tell you what you should do.

45

Taking the southern exit puts you at the top of a set of stairs that descend for a short distance into darkness. Taking your torch in hand you follow the steps, descending for about twenty metres before terminating at a small, square landing. The stone slab is itself the start of a further set of stairs that run from its eastern edge then descend again into darkness. For a moment you hesitate, but the

walls and fixtures here are definitely part of the old ruins and this gives you hope that you may have found a way out of the proving grounds. It is enough reason to take to the stairs and continue down into the shadows.

This stairway proves to have a far greater reach and it takes some time to find its end. When you do reach the last of its steps you discover a small annexe cut into the stone and another landing, but this one juts out into a large open space with no further way forward. From this space echoes the splashing rumble of falling waters and unsure of what might lay ahead you take off your pack and place it on the stairs. With weapon in hand you move out onto the landing and to your surprise your torch illuminates a most unusual chamber.

Before you spreads the interior of a tall circular structure, not unlike a cistern but on a scale far greater than any simple water-tank you have ever seen before. Looking out you estimate it is more than twenty metres in diameter, reaching upwards for as far as your torchlight can uncover, and one that you sense extends for an equal distance beneath you. At all sides and upon three separate levels a series of stone pipes protrude from its curved walls, and from these outlets a torrent of water pours in a rushing arc, falling into a deep pool before you. The waters of this pool swirl at the walls just below the level of the landing, and the water is rising fast.

A quick survey of the chamber shows no other exits. You have found here a dead-end but one that possesses more than a few surprises of its own. Cursing at the time you have wasted you start to turn for the stairs to begin the long ascent back to the maze. What you see as you turn however, is a curious movement in the water that had escaped your attention before. Stooping down you place a few fingers into the dark liquid that now gurgles just beneath the landing and realise that the vast body of water is actually moving in a circular pattern, swirling about the edges of the chamber as a vortex might upon the open sea.

Quickly you stand and wipe the water from your fingers then look out over the extent of the chamber. Sure enough the waters at its edges are slightly higher than the water at its centre and this can only mean that somewhere below a vent or some other outlet is draining the contents of the chamber into an even deeper catchment.

It is a curious thing that gives you reason to pause, and as you watch the water swirling with an ever-increasing velocity you can imagine a great hole in the base of the cistern, sucking the waters

down and causing the entire fluid body to begin rotating upon itself. As you stand and watch this remarkable display you begin to notice also the first hint of the walls glimmering with a dull fluorescence. It is no more than the faintest of green tinges against the stone but before you go you set your torch upon the stairs and return to the landing. Intrigued by what you might find without your torch's flickering light you return to the jutting stone slab and step out to its furthest edge.

About you the walls begin to glow, the vast circular cistern glimmering with a green light that intensifies as you wait, washing up the sides of the curving walls and extending deep into the waters below. It is a remarkable vision and one that you have only a moment to consider for there is a danger here, one that has been waiting centuries to fulfil its lethal purpose.

Standing at the end of the landing you do not hear the faint click against the backdrop of the rushing waters. You know only of its effect as the entire length of the stone landing tips violently forward, pitching you headlong into the rushing waters. For a heartbeat the shock of immersion in chilled water numbs your thoughts but you come to the surface of the pool choking and gagging for air, already struggling to swim with the rotating waters towards the cistern's slick stone walls.

In this vortex of rushing water you can feel a great pressure sucking at your legs, trying to pull you towards the centre of the pool. Against this you swim for the walls, your only chance that the force of the water will push you around the edges of the chamber and back towards the landing. In the dim light you can see that the landing has completely collapsed but a small section is still firmly attached to the open archway and this must be your salvation. If you can get a hand upon the stone you may be able to pull yourself out of the water. If not the cold liquid will sap your strength and you will drown, pulled down into the cistern's churning waters and lost forever.

Test your Luck attribute. If you are lucky the waters take you back to the landing and a chance of salvation. If this is to be your fate turn to section 4. If you are unsuccessful in this test then another fate awaits you and you must turn to section 69.



46

Carefully you play your torch ahead of you, searching the shadows for any sign of danger. What you find brings you to a halt, and gives you reason to pause and consider your next move. At all sides the walls of the chamber are covered in Oer'daaki roots, a deep lattice of entwined tendrils and vine growths that move slowly but with purpose in the shadows. If you disturb the growth you know the plant will attack you.

Thankfully the floor about you is mostly clear, only a few long tendrils criss-crossing the floor. If you are lucky you will be able to step over these limbs and get through the chamber before the Oer'daaki can sense you where ever here. It is a hope the Fates decide you have not earned.

With weapon in hand you step carefully across the roots, some of which are as thick as your forearm. In the cool air you make little sound but luck is not yours on this day. As you step forward one of the tendrils moves, its long reach whipping across the floor and striking a glancing blow upon your booted ankle. It is all the Oer'daaki needs.

Instantly roots lunge from the walls, the plant attempting by sheer number to lay one of its prehensile tendrils about you. It is a blind attempt, many of the roots falling to ground in other parts of the chamber but some hit close and one finds its mark, coiling instinctively about your leg. Immediately you feel the pressure build as the plant tries to crush what it has found. Just as quickly however, you react, striking down upon the root with your axe and severing it from its source. It is an injury that sends the Oer'daaki into a frenzy.

At all sides dozens of roots fall from the walls, rolling out across the floor into a mat of grey-green vegetation, each whipping from side to side as they attempt to get a purchase upon your flesh. Another hits home, grasping at your shoulder and again you strike it down. This root however, is thicker than the last and takes a number of blows to cut through. Upon the last stroke more of the roots take hold and it is then that you decide enough is enough.

Freeing yourself from the roots you go on the offensive. Where you find the tendrils you cut and hack away, your axe a tool made for the job, indiscriminately severing anything you can reach. It is a tactic well-known to the Brothers of the Deep Guild and in this instance is one that saves your life.

With each cut the Oer'daaki withdraws, each wound sending a

palpable shudder through the entire plant. You know that if you can cause enough damage the plant will desist, shutting its roots down so that it can no longer feel the pain of its injuries. About you the Oer'daaki shivers with the rage and frustration of its inability to gain a hold upon you, and with every passing heartbeat another of its roots is cut away.

It is a tactic that eventually leaves the Oer'daaki silent and unmoving, and one that gives you enough time to find a way beyond its reach. When the killer plant is finally quiescent you move on, knowing that it will take some months before the roots in the chamber will heal enough to become active once again.

You have survived this encounter. Return to the section where this combat was initiated and continue with your quest.

46a

It is only a short distance but one fraught with danger. Carefully you move forward, avoiding each of the thin shimmering lines of light as you attempt to gain the doorway. It proves to be a difficult and exhausting challenge. Each step forward comes with a need to throw dust ahead of you, outlining the beams of light before beginning a process of judging how you can move, and where you must place your feet and hands. Stepping over some beams is enough, others require more agility, but each you cannot afford to touch. Ultimately the process becomes a puzzle that slowly exhausts you, and it is only a matter of time before you make a mistake.

That mistake comes when you are still more than three metres from the doorway. On your knees and attempting to carefully arch between two converging beams you forget for a moment the placement of your left foot. Trying to balance you move it instinctively and momentarily cut one of the beams close to the ground. It is all the trap needs.

In an instant the tracery of light disappears, the chamber suddenly gripped by a vibration that rocks the tiled walls. From the walls at your left and right shoulders a multitude of thin metal pipes cut through the loose brickwork and far below you can sense a great pressure rushing up towards you. In the few heartbeats it takes for you to regain your feet the device triggers, and even as you run for the door you know you do not have time to reach safety.

Propelled upon an explosive detonation of compressed gases the

pipes let loose a hail of heavy metal darts that cut through the air like razors. In their hundreds they shoot across the room, hitting hard stone and splintering into a haze of razor-sharp shrapnel. Caught within this torrent of flying metal you are cut down, dozens of darts piercing your body before the shrapnel-cloud finishes the job. Torn and mutilated by the storm of metal you fall, dead before you hit the ground, your body a shredded travesty of hanging flesh and splintered bone. In this life your mission is over. It must now be to another life that you should look for better luck and greater success.

THE END

47

The Eqkril lumbers over the lip of the cliff-face and crowds the eastern edge of the landing. The monstrous lizard is enormous and for just a moment it pauses, licking its teeth and sizing up what it assumes will be its next meal. For your part you stand your ground and ready yourself for the fight to come.

It is the Eqkril that moves first, charging at you before again coming to a halt only a few metres from your position. It is trying to intimidate you and is doing a good job of it but you do not back off and instead strike out with your weapon, swinging it in a tight arc to keep the beast at arm's length. The Eqkril knows it has the advantage and in the confined area of the landing rushes forward, using its bulk to force you back against the cliff-face then snapping forward with its razor-sharp teeth. Against this attack you jam your weapon into the monster's lower jaw, drawing blood and forcing it to recoil. It is only a short reprieve before the Eqkril rushes you again but this time it veers sideways then swings its long armoured tail, sweeping the ground and hitting you squarely across the legs.

Pain lances up your legs as one of the limbs breaks, sending you toppling sideways. Regaining your feet you try to steady yourself against the cliffs but there is little that you can now do. The enormous lizard senses that you are injured and rushes forward again, this time grabbing at your clothing with its jaws and throwing you to the ground. With one last desperate thrust of your weapon you hit the Eqkril in the side, again drawing blood. The beast has however, had enough. With one further sweep of its tail it hits you in the side and catapults you off the edge of the cliff. In that moment you know that

this is the end, your fate residing far below upon unforgiving stone. The Eqkril however, is well pleased. Slowly it drags itself to the cliff's edge and then begins the cautious descent to its meal.

In this life your quest is over. You have come far but it must now be to a latter life that you will need to look for greater success.

THE END

48

Leaving the rift behind you move westwards, through the archway and then along another corridor. It extends for only a short distance before you encounter another threshold and a large chamber beyond. From its entry you can sense that it is a large space but before you can discover anything more there comes a noise from within. Something resides within the darkness ahead and it is waiting for you.

Record the number of this section on your character sheet then make an Encounter Roll. With this number turn to the Encounter list at the back of this gamebook and conduct the encounter according to the circumstances provided. If you are successful and survive what lies within turn to section 8. If it is you who dies then the Encounter List will tell you what you should do.

49

From the stone beneath your feet you can feel the approach of the Sentinels as a growing tremor, one that shakes the ground with every approaching stride. From a distance the automatons seem manageable adversaries but as they rush towards you they grow in size, and it is only when they are no more than a stone's throw from your position that you realise the danger they bring with them. Each of the statues is easily twice your size, the length of their iron swords as great as your own height, and in those blue, gleaming eyes you can see nothing but a ruthless determination to do their duty and kill you.

Again you consider the possibility of flight, but they are too close to now avoid. The first comes at you with sword raised, a great arcing strike its first attack. Before this assault you can do little except dodge the blow and then run between the two huge statues. Each tries to swing at you but in their haste succeed only in narrowly missing each

other in the attempt. Against this attack you duck and then weave in behind the second Sentinel, striking at its leg and succeeding in breaking a large piece of black glass-like stone out of its thigh. Turning on its heel the automaton is not fazed. Immediately it attacks again, swinging low with its sword and turning the blade as its arcs towards you. Unable to dodge the flat edge of the weapon it strikes you in the side, sweeping you off your feet and sending you and your weapon sliding across the smooth stone.

Instantly the first of the Sentinels is on top of you, straddling your body and thrusting down with its sword. The rusting point strikes stone, a shower of sparks blossoming up from the impact as you roll to your left side to avoid the attack. In that next instant you roll onto your back and kick up with both legs, hitting the Sentinel in the knee and breaking the leg at the joint. Teetering sideways the statue tries to regain its balance but falls heavily onto the stone floor, its body erupting in a crashing explosion of crystalline fragments and roiling blue energy.

In response the remaining Sentinel rushes at you, its blue eyes shining in the half-light of the Taalestry like malevolent beacons. Again it swings and you deflect the blade down in a clanging impact against the cold stone floor. Before the automaton can raise its sword you bring your weapon down upon its arm, smashing it into pieces at the shoulder. In a further clattering collapse the sword falls amongst a pile of fracturing crystal. Without sword the automaton bends to retrieve its weapon with its other hand and it is then that you end the fight. With one swing you bring your weapon down upon the Sentinels back, smashing into its brittle torso and cracking the statue cleanly in two. In pieces the automaton collapses heavily onto the floor and shatters in a spreading wave of small glass-like fragments.

For a time you stand your ground, fully expecting the statues to reconstitute and continue the fight. Thankfully this does not happen and when you are sure that the Sentinels are indeed inactive you relax and put down your weapon. In the quiet after the battle you pick up a piece of the fractured crystal and take a closer look. It appears as clear as river water but has a clouded tinge that almost looks like smoke. The piece is warm and you can feel a residual energy running through your fingers as you handle it.

Putting the stone down you take the time to rest. Within the great hall you catch your breath then look towards the Taal. The Sentinels were placed to protect something important and it seems only fair that

now you have defeated them that you should go and see what it might be. With weapon in hand you walk south, making for the great stairway and the base of the Silvan Tree.

With the great Tree looming overhead you head southwards. The Taal is a stepped platform on three levels, the upper-most level a broad flat expanse of black stone upon which rests the enormous Silvan Tree. Pure white and glistening in the half-light as if it has energy coruscating through its massive trunk and limbs it is an enormous edifice, one whose height is further exaggerated by the platform upon which it stands. When you reach the base of the stairs you find a series of steps leading upwards, cut into the three levels to provide a single, straight staircase to the uppermost platform and the base of the Tree.

The steps prove an easy climb, the pitch and depth of each well-suited to human legs. As you ascend you find that the nature of the chamber about you changes, and it is only when you reach the top that you can see the full measure of what the Ancients have built here.

Standing at the base of the Tree you look northwards, towards the entrance through which you found this chamber and upon a great carved mural that extends across the entire northern wall. From the floor below you had taken little heed of what was presented on the wall behind you, the Taal and its guard of enormous statues taking all your attention. What you find as you look over the northern wall is something altogether unexpected.

Across the great expanse of carved stone is a vast landscape, a depiction of all the lands of Arborell as if one was standing on the highest peak of the Great Rift Mountains and looking south upon Kalborea and the homelands of the NomDruse. In one enormous panorama you can see the foothills of the Rift, the wildlands of Northern Kalborea in wondrous detail and beyond them the great plains and forests of Kalborea itself. In the distance you see also the Waters of Elesmenedene and further south the dry lands of the Durn upon the horizon.

Encompassed within this huge mural there spreads a vision of the world as it stood in ancient times, unmolested by the activities of Men nor the rampant malice of the Oera'dim that preceded them. It is a wonder that holds your attention fast, your eyes scanning the great landscape as you try and identify the landforms and features so well known to you in these modern times. Such is its draw that you do not at first notice the figure moving towards you. When you do it jolts you

back from your thoughts and brings your hand swiftly to your weapon.

It is not that the figure moves with malicious haste. From out of the mural itself you see a robed figure climbing up the foothills of the Rift towards you. At least that is how it seems, but as the figure grows in size you see the illusion pass somehow from the mural and onto the stairway below you. As it does so it sheds its stone-like colouring and instead melds into a figure of pure white, its face and robes a gleaming brightness that moves with a fluid grace towards you. You stand before this apparition dumbfounded, though not because of the manner of its emergence into the world but because of what it looks like. It is a woman, and one of exquisite beauty.

When it comes to a stop the spectral figure stands no more than five metres from your position.

“Brother,” it says quietly. “How is it that you come to this place?”

You look at the apparition but do not answer. Instead you ask a question of your own.

“I would ask instead Milady, the same of you.”

The gleaming figure spreads her arms and looks about her person as if it is the first time she has seen herself.

“Your mind tells me Brother, that this is the least threatening of forms that I might take to speak with you. Different Beings see me in their own way and it suits my purpose that you are not threatened.”

“And what is your purpose here?” you ask.

“I am a messenger, Brother. One who does the will of the Powers of this world, and one that has been tasked with delivering a message to you.”

“Me?” You say incredulously. “What would the Powers of the World want with me?”

The woman stays silent for a moment. It is as if she is conversing with someone not present and in the brief pause you look upon her countenance. Never have you seen such fine features, nor flawless beauty. If she is a product of your own thoughts you think, you must admit to yourself that you have remarkably good taste indeed. When she speaks again you are wholly prepared to listen.

“The Powers of our world wish you success in your endeavour to find the *neyus'dreyelim*, the Well of Shadows. It serves the purposes of Balance and Creation that you recover the Orncryst and deliver it into the hands of Men. In this quest it is their wish that I give you guidance.”

For a moment the apparition pauses then continues.

“The Well of Shadows can give you the location of the Orncryst but you must find it first. It lies close enough that a proper search of this chamber will uncover it, however it has three locks upon its door that bar any entry to its sanctum.”

“And what of these locks, spirit. Where do I find the keys?”

The spectral figure smiles and waves her arm about the chamber. “They are here Brother. You need only find them. In this place your entry to the Well is not governed by keys of metal but by the earning of the right to pass over its threshold. The three locks will open upon the utterance of the right Words of power. This will prove to the Well that you have indeed earned the right to stand before it and ask for your boon. If you have earned that right you will know the Words to utter when you are asked.”

For a moment you consider what the apparition has said though at this time it seems of little help.

“If the Powers of the world are so eager to help,” you say, “would it not be quicker to show me the way to the Well and give me the words I need to enter? Surely this would be a more effective way to obtain the information I need.”

The woman smiles again then answers. “It is not for the Powers of the World to make your life easier, Dungeon Crawler. You are a scholarly Man. You know the words implicit in the Doctrine of Araheal that bound the LoreMasters of the Dwarvendim to the service of the River of Life. What does the Oath from that Doctrine prescribe in its first tenet?”

Caught off guard you have to think, for it has been a while since you have read the Guild Library's copy.

“Nothing given that is not Earned. Nothing shared that has not first been Learned.” you intone. You can see where the apparition is going with its logic although you cannot say you appreciate it.

The glowing figure nods and points to the base of the Silvan Tree. There you see a single word carved into the platform in the script of the Ancients. It reads as *eshalon* and is the Haer'al word for Truth.

“This is one of the three Words you need to cross the threshold into the presence of the *neyus'dreyelim*. Find the others and what you seek will be yours. Remember though Brother, that the Well requires a gift and regardless of what you might offer it will ask for what it wants. Give it what it requires or your quest here will have been in vain.”

With these words the apparition fades away as smoke might be carried upon a strong wind, and before you can ask another question you find yourself once again alone in the Taalestry.

“Well,” you say quietly to yourself. “If I’d known anyone’d be watching I would have worn a cleaner shirt.”

After a quick search of the platform that provides no clue to what the Sentinels might have been guarding you take to the stairs and return to the floor of the chamber. The Well is somewhere close and now you are sure that it can be found. You must however, find it.

Record the word “eshalon” into the Codewords section of your character sheet then turn to section 36. Other avenues remain open to search in this vast chamber and one of them will lead to the Well of Shadows.

50

It is a jump worthy of any Brother of the Guild but one that the flooding waters seek actively to foil. Even as you leap you can feel the slick surface of the stone beneath you slowing your run, turning one of your ankles as you jump out across the gaping chasm. It is enough to bring you undone.

In a jarring impact you hit the edges of the rift, showering earth and broken stone down into its dark depths. Desperately you grab for a hold but find only smooth stone, your weight pulling you backwards over the edge and down into the chasm. With hope failing you try again to grab for a firm handhold and find one upon a piece of stone jutting from the wall of the rift. Hanging from this bare purchase you dig your feet into the crumbling wall and take a few deep breaths. You have slid over three metres into the rift and it will take both strength and agility to climb out of this dark hole. Indeed you will need both in good measure if you are to survive.

Test both your Strength and Agility attributes. If you are successful in both tests turn to section 80. If you fail either of these tests turn to section 11. Please note that if you have the Strong Back talent neither of these tests need be taken and you can turn automatically to section 80.



51

In a heartbeat the chamber explodes outwards, its violence concentrated within the confines of the room, then focused out upon its walls and ceiling before venting through the open doorway. In the face of this devastating blast you try and jump sideways, out of the doorway and into what you hope is safety behind the high brick walls of the maze. It is a hope that disappears as quickly as the wall itself.

Scrambling away from the source of the explosion you see through a fog of smoke and dust that all the exits have collapsed except for the southern doorway. With no air to breathe here you stagger for the open exit as another tumultuous detonation rips through the gas room, throwing the walls outwards and covering the stone floor with an avalanche of broken brick and smoking wood. Only with a heartbeat of time left to you do you make the threshold and run out into a large chamber beyond. You do not stop running and it is not a moment too soon.

Somewhere within the roiling smoke and flames the fires reach a bubbling reservoir of flammable liquid. In that instant the entire maze erupts in a fire-ball of blossoming flame, stone and burning brick thrown in wide arcs across the different chambers, starting new fires and lighting the darkness in a staccato series of blasts and low thunder.

Although the destruction of the maze is total the larger temple that surrounds it seems to be in no danger. The poor construction of the maze falls easy victim to the flames, and it is only a matter of minutes before there is nothing left but smoking ruin. For a time you watch the ongoing destruction but then turn away and look instead to the chamber you now find yourself in. In the light of the fires the space you have run into is in reality a wide, long hall, sloping at a shallow incline into darkness towards the south.

Thankful that you have found your way out of the proving ground you stand for a moment and take stock of your situation. It is only then that you feel the wetness of blood upon your side and the sting of a deep gash from shrapnel no doubt thrown up by the explosions. Carefully you inspect the wound and bind it with torn strips of cloth. It is a wound that will require tending but any further care must wait until you have finished your mission. When you are done you look to the south and the wide reach of the hallway ahead.

You have survived the proving ground and found a way into the

remainder of the temple-dome's ruins but it has come at a cost. Deduct four points from your endurance level to account for your injuries and reduce your overall combat value by one point for the duration of the quest. When you have accounted for these changes on your character sheet the remainder of your journey lies waiting within the darkness ahead. Turn to section 75 and see where it takes you.

52

With one hand grasping at the jutting piece of stone you search with the other for a further purchase that will allow you to find a way out of the chasm. Carefully you test the stone and earth and find little that can hold your weight, but there are ways that a Brother can make the climb if they have both strength and skill at their command. Still hanging from the stone you drive your other fist into the fractured wall and twist your hand until it squeezes tight between two pieces of rock. With this hold you dig your feet into the wall and bear your weight upwards. When you have gained a small distance you withdraw your hand and push it again into a fissure between large stones further up the crumbling wall. Again you find a hold that you think will bear your weight and again you dig your feet into the wall.

It is a laborious and physically taxing process but one that ultimately finds you hauling yourself over the edge of the rift and out onto drier and harder ground. Lying face-up upon the stone floor you try and regain your breath, your arms leaden from the exertion of the climb. As you lay there you can hear the water pouring into the gap and it comes as a blunt reminder of how close you came to meeting a similar end.

When you have recovered enough you retrieve your pack and torch and look to the southern exit. In the shadows it opens as a large archway, the threshold to a long hallway beyond.

Turn to section 59.

53

In the quiet of the chamber you stand silent. There is something here, you are sure of it, and hidden within the gloom you can sense the first murmurings of a shifting discontent that is quickly growing into anger. Taking your weapon in hand you search the flickering shadows about you but it is only when you look upwards that you see

tangible evidence of what it is you have disturbed. In the air above the shadows are thick with small, moving points of light, and immediately you recognise the danger. You have found yourself beneath a Needle Fly swarm and given the chance they will kill you.

For a moment you hesitate. These swarms usually number in their hundreds, and few who confront them live to tell the tale, but in this instance you have an advantage and it is one you are fully prepared to exercise. As the Flies concentrate overhead you pull your Lightstone from its wrappings and prepare to use it. If you remember rightly the talisman should give you the edge you need.

Carefully you take up your Light Stone and hold it before you as a wave of the lethal insects arcs down upon your position. There is nothing you can do but whisper the talisman's name and wait. In a heartbeat the Sharyah'ka responds, a sphere of brilliant white light erupting from the silver-encased gem which then leaps upwards, its energy expanding outwards towards the Flies. Instantly the swarm breaks, the sphere of light forcing its energy into every corner of the chamber. Before this power the Needle Flies retreat, the light a blinding beacon that forces them into the surrounding passageways and chambers. Before the Sharyah is done the swarm lies stunned, hundreds of the fist-sized insects scrambling into whatever cover they can find from the actinic light. It will be some time before this swarm will hunt again.

You deactivate the Sharyah and let your eyes once again adjust to the returning gloom. For a moment you wait but the chamber is now empty. After re-adjusting your pack you look to what lies before you and decide what you should do next.

Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and decide where you will now go.

54

Turning to the western wall of the Taalestry you see a large, open archway. In the gloom of the chamber the exit is pitch-black, its threshold reaching westwards as a long corridor that disappears into shadows. This is the way you will go. Making for the dark archway you consider if this might be the true way to the Well but as you approach there grows a measure of unease within you. It is no more than a feeling in your gut that something ahead is wrong but as you

get closer the sensation is replaced by the fleeting perception that a great evil once passed this way and in doing so left a part of itself in its wake. You can feel it upon the stone about you as a lingering shadow of malice that festers in the gloom like a bad memory. However, as quickly as you feel this presence it passes and is then gone.

When you reach the arch you find it similar to most other thresholds you have found in these ruins. Intricately carved as a flowing tangle of vine and leaf it is artificed in black crystal and capped with an ornate keystone depicting a dragon's head. The head you think, might have been added after the construction of the chamber but the effect is just as striking as what it must have replaced. What you discover as you survey the arch is a small cross scratched into its elaborate stonework and a series of markings, roughly etched into its edges that read as *:nemes meshu:*

Standing in the half-light of the Taalestry you do not attempt to translate what the words mean. You have left your First Book of Haer'al back with your Eqkriil and any discovery of their meaning will have to wait. What you feel however, as you survey the possibilities of the dark passage that lies beyond is a return of that feeling of malice, one that grows uncomfortably more insistent as you peer into the corridor. Your gut tells you that there is something within, and you must decide whether there is any good reason to discover what it might be.

If you wish to take the passage and head westwards turn to section 79. If you would choose to listen instead to the gut feeling that says there is nothing good to be found here, then you should not enter. If this is your choice you can return to the open spaces of the chamber and choose another way by turning to section 36.

55

Carefully you move forward, crossing a threshold into another chamber of similar size. This room is dry but there is a musty, stale smell hanging on the air and as you play your torch before you it becomes quickly apparent why. Across the floor is scattered the bones and desiccated remains of a number of Men, Hordim and a selection of smaller animals. Long dead and now no more than dried husks they are all incomplete, many with legs missing or seemingly cut in

half by some unknown assailant. Quickly you search the borders of the chamber but can find no danger here. It is only when you walk out into the centre of the space, and in the process disturb the dust about your feet, that you realise the deadly danger you have stumbled into.

In the darkness you pause for a moment. Glimmering in the fine mist of dust throw up by your movement you can see a web of thin blue lines of light cutting across the room. One of these traces of shimmering light has been cut by your leg, and you know the moment you move a trap will trigger. Carefully you look about the room but can see no visible evidence of what type of trap you will spring. It is only as you look along the floor that you see the tell-tale indentations of an Iron Claw trap surrounding you.

Of all the traps built into the ruins of the ancient world, the most gruesome and efficient is the Iron Claw. Consisting of two curving pieces of razor-sharp iron the trap springs from the floor, its deadly purpose to sever a creature's body from its legs. For a Dungeon Crawler such a trap is almost always lethal.

Unlike all other devices that can be found in the underworld of Arborell there is no escape from the Iron Claw. To move your leg away from the tracery of blue light will mean an instant death, the trap mechanism so powerful that it will strike, and then retract before your legless body has time to hit the floor. Your only hope is that the mechanism beneath you is so old that it will not function.

Without breaking contact with the blue beam you study the circular indentation in the floor. It is a complete circle inscribed into the stone, but one that looks like it has indeed suffered damage in the long years of its operation. The workings of the Iron Claw require that the curving blades are free to spring from their seating and cross around their intended victim in a scissor-like movement. As you follow the line of the circle you can see a number of points where the stone flags that line the chamber have been moved and your only real hope is that this will jam the mechanism and see you safely on your way. It is no more than a matter of luck whether you are about to live or die.

If you possess the codeword "emru" throw 2d6. If you roll anything other than a double number the trap does not work. If this is the case your life has been spared, and the remainder of your quest awaits you. The chamber has three exits, one in the eastern wall, another in the west and another in the north. If you wish to now go west turn to

section 87. If you see greater merit in finding a way eastwards turn to section 12. If north seems the best option turn to section 92.

If however, you throw any double number the trap still operates and will do so with a lethal efficiency. If this is the case then the only sound that will be heard in the dark passages of Allas'nerig will be the few screams you will make before you die. If this doom befalls you then it will be to another life that you must now look for a better chance at success.

If you do not possess the codeword “emru” then the trap has not been activated and you can move freely from this chamber without fear of injury. Only one door however, remains unlocked to you and that stands in the western wall of this room. In this case you have no other options and must go west. Turn to section 87.

56

Quickly you take your rope and grapple and swing the small four-pronged hook up into the carved ceiling overhead. It takes a few attempts but in short order you have a secure purchase upon a piece of curving stone above. After testing that the grapple is indeed secure you step back and then swing out across the pits.

The ceiling above you is high and you make it across all three of the gaps without incident. It is a curious thing but as you swung over the pits you are sure you see a faint glimmer of blue deep within the pits themselves. It is however, something that you have no capacity to investigate so you recover your grapple and turn to the corridor ahead.

Turn to section 23a.

57

It is not an impossible jump but with water flowing about your feet it will not be an easy one either. Without hesitation you throw your pack over the gap and then carefully lob your torch onto the drier ground beyond. When you are sure that its flame has survived the impact you take a moment to better judge the distance across the rift and then take a few steps backwards. When you are ready you begin to run, bringing to the jump all the speed that you can muster.

Quickly you close the distance to the gaping crack in the earth and then leap outwards, your life now dependant on good judgement and strong legs.

Test your Agility attribute. If you are successful with this test turn to section 77. If you fail this test turn to section 50.

58

It is a truth of your profession that no Brother can ignore the clues that Fate puts before them. You have heard a sound in the shadows and you must determine its source. Quickly you move around the statue and make for the rear of the Taal platform. In keeping with the scale of the Taalestry the platform is immense, more than sixty metres on a side and at least twenty metres tall, rising from the floor of the chamber in three stepped levels to the base of the Silvan Tree itself. Completely black and with a wide staircase at its northern face it is a product of a level of skill in the working of stone that is unknown to Men. In the gloom of its enormous shadow you search the rear of the platform and in the stone floor at the centre of its southern spread you find what you are looking for.

Cut into the floor behind the Taal is a large circular hole roughly six metres in diameter. Such holes are common to Taalestries all over Arborell. It is generally accepted that these tailing pits were used by the Ancients to dispose of unwanted stone and other masonry offcuts when it was impractical to convey them to the surface for disposal. These pits usually were no more than shafts cut into a lower natural cave or chamber below, where refuse created by the construction of the Taalestry could be easily thrown. From this pit you see a rope, attached to a stone ring at the base of the platform and which then runs down into the shaft itself. The rope is taut and obvious holding a considerable weight.

Carefully you move to the edge of the pit. What you find laying upon the stone is a small pile of personal belongings and tucked under a matchbox you find a piece of creased paper. Opening the paper you discover a hand-drawn map of the Taalestry and scratched over its surface a list of words. They appear to have been pressed into the map as they were written onto another sheet resting on top of it. The words are no more than crease-lines but as you hold them up to the light you can make out at least one. It is the word, "emru".

Placing the paper back with the other items you look down into the shaft.

The lip of the tailings dump is capped with smooth stone and it proves an easy matter to lay down upon the edge of the hole and peer down into its dark recesses. The rope runs straight down and as you peer into the gloom you feel against your face the tepid waft of a slight breeze. The warmth of the air is surprising, but there is something else carried on the current of air and it gives you reason to stand and move away from the edges of the pit. It is the smell of death.

When you have recovered from your surprise you venture back to the edge and peer down into the shadows. It is at the greatest extent of your vision that you see something dangling from the rope, and it is not long before you recognise that it is a body, attached by a climbing harness but limp and unresponsive. The body wears a distinctive red cap and you recognise it immediately for there is only one person that it could be.

“Sulman Bhet!” you whisper loudly down into the shaft. There comes no response, only the languid swing of the rope as it moves within the shallow breeze.

“Damn it,” you swear as you try and gain the man's attention. It is a pointless attempt however. The smell emanating from the pit tells you all you need to know.

Grabbing at the rope you test the weight it holds. In truth Sulman Bhet is a small man, a Brother of the Guild but one possessing a greater notoriety than most. In this dark place you can see what he was doing and it fits well with his usual methods. The man was a scavenger, finding his living in the pursuit of precious metals, and the easiest place to find them is in the tailings dumps of ruins such as these. The Ancients did not place the same value on gold, silver or Azuril as do Men. For them the metals had decorative value only and in the construction of their temples discarded significant quantities into holes such as the one you now peer into. Bhet found what he was looking for here but for some reason died upon the rope below. The only question that now must be answered is what you are going to do with the body.

If you wish to attempt to pull the body out of the shaft test your Strength attribute. If you are successful in this test or you have the Strong Back talent turn to section 16a. If you fail this test the body

proves too heavy and there is nothing you can do but cut the rope and let the man's remains fall into the tailings dump below. At the very least he will rest with the precious metals he coveted so greatly. If this is to be his fate turn to section 82.

If you believe there is no point in retrieving the body and would rather leave Sulman Bhet where he now hangs turn to section 82 and continue with your quest. In either case write the name "Bhet" into the Quest Notes section of your character sheet and if you have not already done so write the word "emru" into your codewords section before continuing.

59

It takes no more than a few moments to find yourself at the threshold to the southern archway. Standing in the shadows you pause, listening for any sign of movement in the hall beyond. You sense immediately that the corridor before you is in fact a vast space, one that echoes to the raging storm at your back and one that extends for a considerable distance into the south.

Carefully you play your torch before you, its light unable to reach every corner of the great corridor as it reaches out into the distance. What you do see is a high barrel-vaulted roof and a series of immense buttresses of stone, reaching up from the floor as tree-trunks might in a great forest before spreading in an intertwined series of arches to form a huge vaulted ceiling overhead. Each of these buttresses is followed by another in a long procession that extends along both sides of the hall and far beyond the scope of your illumination. With the sounds of thunder and flooding rain at your back you move out into its enormous expanse.

Such Processional Halls you have seen before but this one awes you with its overwhelming size and artifice. From a distance each up-thrust of stone that supports the roof appears as a great pillar, however a closer inspection shows a highly detailed surface texture, one that plays with any light thrown upon it to give a remarkable impression of living bark. Between each of these pillars there has been carved a wall panel, also intricately worked and overwhelmingly large, each an unnervingly realistic representation of a moment in the ancient history of the world. These great panels tell a story and it is one for which you have only the barest of useful knowledge, but you do recognise some of the events depicted and they give you reason to pause and wonder at the time and skill given to their creation.

In this cathedral of legend and dreams you move carefully, aware that even great beauty can hide the worst of dangers. At a half-run you follow the centre of the hall, giving yourself enough distance from any ambush that might arise out of the shadows. What you find however, is that this hall has many exits along its length, all of which have been collapsed in upon themselves. At some point in the long history of the temple-dome rough hands have spent time working at each of the corridors leading from the hall, pulling down the keystones and leaving their archways in ruins. Without any obvious reason the entire hall had been closed off, and as you run you wonder what such vandalism might mean for you.

It is an uneventful journey that takes you along the entire length of the hall without alarm, but as you reach its end you must come to a halt and curse instead at what you have found. Before you the remarkable artifice of the hall has been truncated by a crudely erected stone wall more than twenty metres high. The barrier extends across the entire length of the hall and has two archways built into its structure, roughly ten metres apart at its centre. Above both of the archways has been carved a series of words, written in the Elder Tongue and well known to all Dungeon Crawlers:

:nethirim a' honorum:

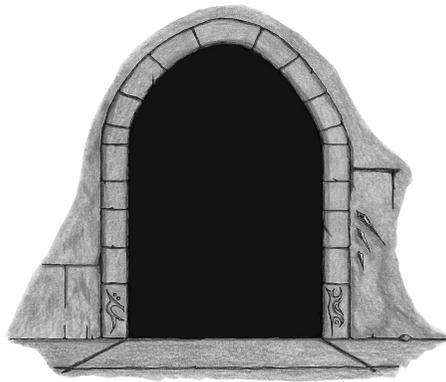
In the common languages of Men this declaration has only one meaning: “Blood and Honour”, and it is the sign that what stands before you is the remains of a Hordim proving ground for young warriors. Such grounds are a collection of different challenges, some easy, some lethal, but each designed to test a different aspect of the skills and courage required of a warrior as they strive to prove themselves worthy of battle. In this modern world these proving grounds are dangerous and unpredictable barriers, constructed centuries before the arrival of men in the world and extremely difficult to negotiate without injury.

A survey of the wall gives no way over. It is too high and its surface too unstable to risk climbing, and as you look up at the vaulted roof overhead you can see signs that the immense hall itself once opened into a much wider chamber beyond. It would seem that the Hordim have walled off the large chamber beyond and then built their proving ground into the resulting enclosed space. If this is true then what you encounter beyond these arches will be a maze, a series of cells or

rooms each with some challenge within, but also with a choice of doors that will lead to either another cell in the maze, or a dead-end from which you will have to retreat and find another way. Each door that you encounter will be activated by a touch-plate buried in the floor, the only clue that it is unlocked being the slightly raised stone across its threshold. Step upon this touch-plate and the door will open, and once you have passed through the door will close behind. You have heard of these mazes and the advice you have been given by more experienced Brethren is to ensure you keep a map of your progress. These can be survived but only if you keep your wits about you.

For a moment you consider whether it is worth going forward, but your mission is too important and you discard the notion as quickly as it enters your thoughts. There are two archways before you and you must choose one of them.

If you decide to take the eastern archway to the left turn to section 99. If the western exit at the right seems a better option turn to section 17.



60

You know as soon as your foot leaves the ground that you have misjudged the distance. In a bone-jarring crash you hit the edge of the pit and feel yourself sliding backwards, your weight dragging you into the abyss. Taking hold of a smooth piece of the crystalline carving near the lip you try and drag yourself out, brute strength the only answer you have against the relentless pull of gravity. For a

moment there is hope, the smooth stone holding your weight as you struggle to find a way out of the hole. It is unfortunately a hope that quickly disappears.

Hanging upon the smooth edges of the pit you grasp for any handhold that will keep you from the depths below. The carved stone however, has been fashioned only to mimic flowing water and it provides no sure purchase. As you watch your handhold slides away beneath you and before you can pull yourself out your grip fails. In a silent rush you fall away from the edge of the pit and disappear into the abyss, darkness quickly embracing your body as you surrender to the inexorable power of gravity.

In this life your quest is over. You have come far but it must now be to a latter life that you will have to look for better luck and greater success.

THE END

61

Out of the shadows the Shambler advances towards you, its dead eyes staring blankly as it shuffles awkwardly in your direction. For a moment you wait, watching the creature approach. In the gloom it is a ragged corpse, hardly identifiable as the remnants of a once living man, but even in its decaying state it remains far more dangerous than most of the denizens found in these deep places. For all intents the Shambler is already dead, animated by the residual energies of EarthMagic and damned to an endless, restless march that can end only when it falls apart and finally lies still. You think as you wait that to give it rest is a blessing you would hope others might bestow on yourself under the same circumstances.

Before this foe you do not give ground. The creature has only its hands and teeth with which to do harm but its body is its greatest strength. No amount of superficial injury will bring it down. Only the severing of its limbs and the removal of its head will see it stop its assault, and in the dark chamber you go to the task with a grim determination.

Quickly you strike at the Shambler, its flesh cutting away under the force of the blows you strike against it. In return the creature lunges, its hands grasping at you arm as it sinks its teeth into your elbow. Cursing at the pain you push the corpse away but it keeps coming at

you, only a low moan wheezing from its lips any indication that it is anything but dead flesh. Again you strike out and this time your weapon finds its mark upon the side of the creature's neck. Jerking sideways the dead man falls and as it tries to regain its feet you hit it repeatedly, cutting away its arms before severing its head. Only then does the Shambler stop, its last movements a few twitching fingers clawing at the stone floor before all is quiet.

In the gloom you struggle to catch your breath. In the past you have had to kill a number of these creatures but no amount of experience can lessen the horror of it. Once you have found your breath you take a few moments to clean your weapon then look to where you should now go.

Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and continue with your quest.



62

Trapped at the end of the stone platform you have little room to move, but you stand your ground against the QuagWyrms and strike out with your weapon. The Wyrms are hungry and attack repeatedly, reaching at you with their mouths, lunging forward in an attempt to bite down on flesh and drag you deep into their home. Against this assault you use your weapon to its best advantage, breaking teeth and thrusting its hard metal at the monster's eyes and exposed throat. With each successful hit the Wyrms retreats but then renews its attack, its hunger numbing it to any measure of pain or fear.

It is a fight that can continue for only a short time. Caught at the end of the platform you cannot manoeuvre enough to press home an attack and you pay dearly for this tactical limitation. Quickly the creature wears you down, testing your defences until it finds a gap and then strikes. In one powerful lunge the QuagWyrms snaps at your arm and finds a purchase on upon your flesh. Held firmly you try and loosen its hold but it proves impossible. Before you can brace yourself the monster lifts you from the platform and throws you out into the

mud pool. In a thrash of water you disappear out of sight, your life lost in the depths of a QuagWyrms' lair. In this life your quest is over. It must now be to a latter life that will have to look for better luck and greater success.

THE END

63

In a wave of fleeting shadows the Reaver rushes towards you. The monster is ravenous and you can see in its blind race to kill that it is half mad with its starvation. In the face of this hunger-fuelled malice you take a firmer grip upon your weapon and size up the Reaver's possible weak points. It takes only a heartbeat to recognise that it has precious few of them. Through the stone beneath your feet you can feel the tremors of its passage and with nowhere to run you stand your ground and wait.

In a clash of chitin and iron you come together in battle. With one enormous swing of its pincer the Reaver tries to throw you to the side, but you dodge the blow and reply with a hard strike to its arm. The impact glances off its armoured skin and the monster presses its advantage, using its bulk to slam into you, throwing you back onto the unforgiving stone. Quickly you regain your feet and swing again as it advances upon you, this time hitting hard against its first foreleg. The blow cuts deep and the Reaver recoils, but only for a second. Swinging its other pincer it hits you cleanly in the side, again throwing you to the ground. This time however, the beast rushes forward and drives down with the hard edge of its left pincer, pinning you to the stone before lifting you into the air.

Luckily it is not flesh it has purchase upon, your clothing caught instead upon a series of minor spikes that line its left pincer jaw. With one solid swing you smash through its arm and yourself and its pincer fall to ground. Tearing your clothing from the monster's severed limb you turn and find the Reaver staggering sideways, large spatters of oozing blood splashing upon the cold flagstones.

Thinking that the advantage has turned in your favour you run at the monster, its vulnerable eyes now open to any strike from its left side. With weapon raised to deliver the blow you rush the injured creature and it is then that the tide turns. From overhead you sense something descending upon you, but before you can react you feel a bone-splintering impact as the Reaver's armour-plated tail smashes

into your shoulder. Staggering backwards you grab at the wound and feel bone move beneath your skin. The damage is serious but you can still hold your weapon and with no way that you can outrun the Reaver you turn to face your foe.

The Reaver however, has no intention of fighting any longer. With its remaining pincer open it lunges forward and grabs you across your shoulder, tearing through flesh and bone and rending the life from your body. In this life your quest is over. In another you will no doubt find better luck and greater success.

THE END

63a

In this battle you have no time to waste. The effects of the flashcharge can only be temporary and you must take as much advantage of the creature's blindness as you can. Rushing forward you swing at the beast, smashing down upon its left pincer, then running to the side of the beast as it swings wildly with its arms to defend itself. Its side open to attack you bring your weapon down hard onto its rear leg and crush the limb into uselessness. Stung by the assault the monster limps sideways and then recovers its footing, using its tail to sweep the floor about it, and forcing you to retreat as the Reaver tries to strike out repeatedly at its unseen opponent.

Avoiding the armour-plated tail you run again at its right side, bringing hard metal down upon its carapace and crushing the joint that supports one of the Reaver's legs. Staggering again, the monster flails its arms and legs, blindly trying to land a blow but hitting nothing except empty air. In the face of this defence you move carefully, trying to find an opportunity to strike at the Reaver's eye cluster. It is there that the monster's greatest vulnerability lies and when such an opening arises you rush between its pincers and strike, bringing your weapon down upon its tentacled eyes.

The Reaver reacts with devastating speed, avoiding the blow and rearing backwards, swiping sideways with its pincer. Caught by the blow you tumble out of the way, narrowly avoiding the monster's tail as it slams it down only a metre from your head. Quickly you regain your feet and swing again as it advances upon you, this time hitting hard against its first foreleg. The blow cuts deep and the Reaver recoils, but only for a second. You can see in the Reaver's reaction that it is starting to regain its senses and before you can strike again the

creature attacks. Swinging its other pincer it hits you cleanly in the side, again throwing you to the ground. This time however, the beast can see you and rushes forward, driving down with the hard edge of its left pincer, pinning you to the stone before lifting you into the air.

Luckily it is not flesh it has purchase upon, your clothing caught instead upon a series of minor spikes that line its left pincer jaw. With one solid swing you smash through its arm and yourself and its pincer fall to ground. Tearing your clothing from the monster's severed limb you turn and find the Reaver staggering sideways, large spatters of oozing blood splashing upon the cold flagstones.

Thinking that the advantage has turned in your favour you run at the monster, its vulnerable eyes now open to any strike from its left side. With weapon raised to deliver the blow you rush the injured creature and it is then that the tide turns. From overhead you sense something descending upon you, but before you can react there comes a bone-splintering impact as the Reaver's armoured-plated tail smashes into your shoulder. Staggering backwards you grab at your shoulder and feel bone move beneath your skin. The damage is serious but you can still hold your weapon and with no way that you can outrun the Reaver you turn to face your foe.

The Reaver however, has no intention of fighting any longer. With its remaining pincer open it lunges forward and grabs you across your shoulder, tearing through flesh and bone and rending the life from your body. In this life your quest is over. In another you will no doubt find better luck and greater success.

THE END

64

From the stone beneath your feet you can feel the approach of the Sentinels as a growing tremor, one that shakes the ground with every approaching stride. From a distance the automatons seem manageable adversaries but as they rush towards you they grow in size, and it is only when they are no more than a stone's throw from your position that you realise the danger they bring with them. Each of the statues is easily twice your size, the length of their iron swords as great as your own height, and in those blue, gleaming eyes you can see nothing but a cold determination to do their duty and kill you.

Again you consider the possibility of flight, but they are too close to now avoid. The first comes at you with sword raised, a great arcing

strike its first attack. Before this assault you can do little except dodge the blow and then run between the two huge statues. Each tries to swing at you but in their haste succeed only in narrowly missing each other in the attempt. Against this attack you duck and then weave in behind the second Sentinel, striking at its leg and succeeding in breaking a large piece of black glass-like stone out of its thigh. Turning on its heel the automaton is not fazed. Immediately it attacks again, swinging low with its sword but turning the blade as its arcs towards you. Unable to dodge the flat edge of the weapon it strikes you in the side, sweeping you off your feet and sending you and your weapon sliding across the smooth stone.

Instantly the first of the Sentinels is on top of you, straddling your body and thrusting down with its sword. The rusting point strikes stone, a shower of sparks blossoming up from the impact as you roll to your left side to avoid the attack. In that next instant you roll onto your back and kick up with both legs, hitting the Sentinel in the knee and breaking the leg at the joint. Teetering sideways the statue tries to regain its balance but falls heavily onto the stone floor, its body erupting in a crashing explosion of crystalline fragments and roiling blue energy.

Staggering to your feet you retrieve your weapon as the remaining Sentinel closes upon you. Through gritted teeth you can feel the pain of broken ribs with each breath you take, and there is no way that you can now outrun the automaton. Standing your ground you deflect one blow then strike out yourself. The Sentinel does not defend itself and another piece of stone flies through the air, but it takes the damage for a purpose. Unguarded on your left side the Sentinel rushes forward, hitting you squarely in the upper torso and throwing you backwards onto the floor. Before you can regain your feet the automaton lunges forward, driving its sword deep into your chest. In a gout of blood the Sentinel withdraws its blade and then calmly begins to walk back to the base of the Taal.

Its job is done. Lying on the floor of the Taalestry you can feel your life slipping away, the wound in your chest a mortal injury that will see you leave this world within minutes. Looking up at the carved sky overhead you wait for the inevitable and notice on the cusp of your last breath that you can see clouds moving.

In this life your quest is over. In another you may find better luck.

THE END

65

Breathing heavily you wait at the threshold to this dark room and play your torch ahead of you. The room appears bare but you take a moment to catch your breath and consider what you have found. The chamber appears to be of a similar size to all the others that have been constructed within the maze but you cannot be sure that its sparse and apparently dry interior does not hold some hidden danger.

Carefully you place a boot over the threshold and then stand wholly within its dark recesses. For a short time you listen but hear nothing except the silence of the deep ruins and the faint clinking of metal coming from the western exit to the chamber. In the end you can fathom no danger here so you move further into the interior of the room and consider your next move.

There are two exits from this chamber, one in the southern wall and another in the western wall. Both doors are open and available to venture through. If you wish you can eat a meal or Nahla Bread here before moving on. To take the southern exit turn to section 97. To take the western exit turn to section 68.

66

In the quiet of the chamber you stand silent. There is something here, you are sure of it, and hidden within the gloom you can sense the first murmurings of a shifting discontent that is quickly growing into anger. Taking your weapon in hand you search the flickering shadows about you but it is only when you look upwards that you see tangible evidence of what it is you have disturbed. In the air above the shadows are thick with small, moving points of light, and immediately you recognise the danger. You have found yourself beneath a Needle Fly swarm and given the chance they will kill you.

For a moment you hesitate. Very few who encounter such swarms survive to tell the tale and in this empty chamber you have no chance of escape. You will fight and you must survive.

In a descending cloud the huge insects arc towards you, their multitude a dark shadow that quickly encircles your position. The first of the Flies fall easily, the rest pull back and begin to test what defences you can bring to the fight. A dozen more of the flighted predators hit the ground before the first of their number strikes home, a long needle-like proboscis stabbing into the back of your leg.

Immediately you feel the toxin go to work, the muscle in your calf going numb. It is not enough however to bring you down.

With your weapon swinging in wide arcs you attack the swarm, not allowing the Flies to find another easy purchase in your flesh. It is a tactic that works, the insects too large to manoeuvre effectively within the confines of the chamber. Again you are stabbed but you kill the Fly before it can deliver its poison, and with torch in one hand and weapon in the other you assault the swarm.

Before you are finished the floor about you is littered with the burnt, severed or crushed remains of dozens of the insects, and when the Needle Flies finally retreat you do not let them rest easily, chasing them out of the chamber and keeping them from returning with your flaming torch. In the end they leave you alone.

Breathing heavily in the cold air you wait for another attack but it does not come. The poison in your leg has left you nauseated but its effects will not be permanent. Carefully you retrieve your equipment and look to what else you must do here.

Return to the section that initiated this encounter and consider what you should do next.

66a

The dark passage beckons and you take to it quickly. Beyond the threshold the corridor extends eastwards, its width and lack of decoration a sure sign that once it served a purely utilitarian purpose. Both the walls and barrel-vaulted ceiling are bare of any adornment and apart from a curious yellowish glow that lights your way, there is nothing that gives a hint as to its ancient function. The walls are interesting in one respect, however. They are polished stone, the entire way forward a gleaming piece of worked granite, carefully cut and polished to a smoothness that leaves a ghostly double reflection of your movement along the corridor as you advance.

When you reach its end the passage opens into a small room no bigger than six metres on a side. About all its walls there stands a series of inset stone alcoves and upon the floor at its centre a delicately carved symbol of the Ancients' mythology, similar to the vast carving laid into the floor of the Taalestry. Like its much larger counterpart it is also inlaid in Gold and Azuril, and depicts both the twin suns and moons of Arborell embraced within the branches of the Silvan Tree and the surging waters of the Shan'duil.

For a short time you study the carving. It is a curious thing that no two of these symbols are ever exactly alike, each upon close examination proving subtly different, and mostly in how the Silvan Tree is depicted. Most of your fellow Brethren put this discrepancy down to the great expanses of time that must have passed between the building of each of the temple-cities, but you have always wondered if there is not a greater mystery here, one too subtle for Men to yet fathom.

It is however, a mystery that you have no time to ponder, for as you turn to leave the chamber you find a further riddle that must be solved. Within the alcove nearest the door you discover a pile of equipment, new and not yet dusted by time or neglect. Shaking your head you pull it all out onto the floor and find most of the gear a Dungeon Crawler would take with him into a ruin. What you do not find though, is any climbing tack. Whoever left the equipment here did so for safe keeping whilst they attempted a climb somewhere else in the ruins.

Quickly you search the gear and stand up when you find a name scrawled upon the flap of a small satchel. It is a name you know; "Sulman Bhet."

"The little toad." you whisper under your breath. "I wonder what his game is here."

The name is indeed familiar. Unlike other Dungeon Crawlers who earn their living finding artifacts for clients willing to pay, Sulman instead earns his keep stripping valuable metals and jewels from the ruins themselves. From your own encounters with him you know his greatest interest lies with Azuril, the blue gleaming metal highly prized by jewel-smiths, and particularly valued by the Merchant Guilds of the Faeyen as a medium of exchange. If this is indeed who cohabits this ruin then you will have to tread with greater care. Such a man is more Outlaw than Brother and because of it follows few of the accepted tenets of your vocation. If you find him you resolve to give him a firm lesson in good manners and the rules of the Guild.

With less care than you gave his other gear you pile what you have found into a corner and open the satchel. Inside is a selection of pens and a pad of paper. There is nothing on the pad but a few words in the Elder Tongue and they are blurred by sweat and the unsteady hand that scribed them. You can however, make out two of them. One is the word for truth; "eshalon", the other is the Haer'al word for open; "emru". It seems strange that Bhet should have need to record

these words, but in case they might prove useful you record them yourself then place the leather bag with the rest of his belongings.

After a quick survey of the rest of the alcoves you find nothing of further interest. Turning about you leave the chamber and head west, back towards the Taalestry. Unfortunately you have found nothing here that furthers your quest to find the Well of Shadows but you have at least identified the errant Brother as Sulman Bhet. From previous encounters with the man you can only imagine what mischief he may be getting into to.

If you do not already possess these codewords record the words you have found onto the codeword section of your character sheet. When this is done turn to section 36.

67

In a heartbeat the chamber explodes outwards, its violence concentrated within the confines of the room, and then focused out upon its walls and ceiling before venting through the open doorway. In the face of this devastating blast you try and jump sideways, out of the doorway and into what you hope is safety behind the high brick walls of the maze. It is a hope that disappears as quickly as the wall itself.

Before you can move the flames reach a reservoir of bubbling liquid and in that moment your fate is sealed. In a rushing detonation the room explodes, its walls falling outwards as other concussions tear the maze apart, throwing fire and shattered brick all over the surrounding chambers.

Caught within this hailstorm of falling brickwork and flame you have no escape. With your ears ringing from the blasts you struggle for breath, the smoke and dust a disorienting fog that keeps you on the ground gasping for air. When the wall at your side collapses it brings with it the remainder of the chamber, tonnes of debris crashing down onto hard stone. Unable to avoid the avalanche you are crushed beneath a torrent of broken brick and smoking wood.

In this life your quest is over. In the next you may find better fortune and greater success.

THE END

Advancing through the doorway brings you into a chamber that immediately gives you cause to suck in your breath and come to a halt. Before you the central floor of the chamber has fallen away, what once must have been a pit-trap now collapsed and no more than a gaping hole in the floor. What gives you reason to pause however, is a forest of hanging chains that extent from the roof high above to just above floor level. Each chain is no more than a metre apart from the next and all form an incongruous curtain of heavy iron that must have held some lethal purpose in years gone by. As you survey the room you see also that the iron chains are arrayed across the entire length and breadth of the chamber, and that the floor is cut across its entire surface by a series of square and oblong shaped slabs of stone. These can only be pit-traps that have not yet been triggered.

For a short time you study what you have found and realise that this room is in itself a puzzle, one where a warrior would have been required to determine the safe areas of the floor to walk upon and to use the chains to swing across those areas that were potentially dangerous. As you look further you can also see a number of fractures in the floor, a sure sign that the excavation work done by the Hordim to install the traps has also weakened the underlying structure of the chamber.

The fact that one of the pits has collapsed in upon itself complicates this chamber for yourself. You cannot be absolutely sure that any of the pits will not open up under you, or that the floor itself is stable enough to walk upon. If you are to find a way through you will need to use the chains and swing from one to the next until you have made it to the other side. The only consolation you can see is that about every fifth chain has been fitted with a small cross bar that a warrior might use to place his feet on to rest.

To cross this chamber will require all the agility you can muster and whether you have previously activated the proving ground or not will not matter here. The floor itself has fractured and the only way you can ensure that it will not collapse further will be to use the chains to get across.

There are three exits from this chamber, one each in the north, west and eastern walls. If you possess the codeword “emru” all of these exits are open and available to you. If you do not have this codeword

only the western and eastern doorways are unlocked and available.

To cross the chamber you must use the chains, and you estimate there are at least five chains with cross-bars that you can rest upon no matter which exit you choose to make for. To make the crossing test your Agility attribute five times. If you are successful on any one test, roll for the next test until you have successfully crossed the room and made your way to the threshold of the next chamber. If with any of these Agility tests you fail then you must take a Strength test to save yourself from hitting the floor. If you succeed with the Strength test carry on with the next Agility test. If you fail the Strength test then you have been unable to use the chains well enough to keep off the floor. If this proves to be the case turn to section 39. If however, you successfully cross the floor turn to section 5.

69

With an increasing velocity the waters rush about the cistern, the raging current smashing you against the slick stone walls as you ride its terrible power. From above a deluge of water falls upon you as you are dragged along, caught within the relentless flow of the rotating fluid and with only one chance to survive. From out of the darkness the collapsed landing looms before you and with nothing to lose you lunge from the water, kicking with your feet as you grab for the stone with both hands.

For just a moment you find a purchase upon the landing, but just as quickly that contact is torn from you, the vortex dragging you bodily under the stone slab and drawing you further towards the centre of the raging waters. Again you try to swim for the outer edges of the cistern but there is something that now grips at your legs, an inexorable suction that draws you down, willing you to give up so that it might take you into its depths.

Against this relentless force you struggle to gain ground. The chilled water and the continuous fight to remain afloat prove however, to be formidable enemies and ultimately ones that give no mercy. It is only a matter of time before the vortex has its way, dragging you into its cold embrace and then pulling you down to an unwelcome and unlooked-for doom. In this life your mission is over. You must now look to another for better luck and greater success.

THE END

70

Standing before the great door you intone the three Words that will let you pass beyond its threshold. At first nothing happens, your hope that your quest is near its end falling away with each second of silence, but then you feel a rising vibration that trembles up through your boots. In a gout of dust and falling webs ancient gears shudder into action, the stone slab lifting slowly into the archway above. When the air clears there stands a long wide corridor, its entire length a continuation of the unusual flowing water-carving that covers the floor behind you; both walls and roof overhead a swirling representation of water in rapid motion.

Carefully you move forward and find quickly no need for a torch as the walls themselves glow with a gleaming blue light that coruscates through the azure crystal like a heartbeat. Within this light you follow the passageway until you come upon an unexpected barrier. Before you the floor ahead is cut cleanly by three wide gaps, each two metres in width and each separated by a narrow platform of solid ground. At the edges of the pits the flowing carved crystal drops away as flooding water might flow over the lip of the pits before disappearing into darkness below.

With some caution you peer over the edge of the first gap and see it reach downwards into an abyss so deep that you can see no end to it. Drawing back from the pit you consider the challenge these closely arrayed holes present. Usually a gap or rift of only two metres would provide no barrier but the way the three pits have been arranged means that the first jump will be easy, the remaining two far more difficult. You know however, that you must pass beyond them if you are to find the Well of Shadows.

You have only two options available to make it past these three gaps in the passageway. The first is to try and jump each of them in turn. The second is to use a rope and grapple if you have one and swing across. The roof above provides many anchor points so this is a viable and probably safer alternative to jumping. If you have a rope and grapple and wish to use them turn to section 56. If you do not have this equipment and must jump across instead turn to section 95.



The deep ruins of the world hold many dangers, some of which are well known to the citizens of the Four Nations. Stories have been told of these perils, and legends have been built on the exploits of the Brethren of the Deep Guild as they overcome those dangers in their quest for treasure and glory. One danger however, that is never spoken of and which remains unknown to those who live comfortably in the world above are the Dreya'dim. You know their name, for they can be found in legends as old as the Hordim themselves, but where they come from, and by what mechanism they arrive in the world, is a mystery to the Brethren that has plagued their vocation since the first Dungeon Crawlers ventured from Das Vallendor.

These spectral remains of Hordim, somehow lost to a mindless existence in a shadowed realm, take on corporeal form when encountered in the deep ruins, and as you stand in this lonely chamber you can feel the presence of one very close. There is no smell, nor furtive movement that tells you this. You feel instead a palpable sense of malice, of something waiting that hates all life and in this world affronts the senses of the living like a poison. Taking up your weapon you drop your pack and search the shadows. There is something here, you can feel it.

And you are right. From the shadows ahead the gloom coalesces, a dark form emerging from nothingness that firms into the shape of a horribly grotesque Morg. Nothing special to look at in life, this Dreya'dim Morg is an emaciated and gangled being, its features twisted and bent by the EarthMagic that has brought it into the world. Taking a firmer hold upon your weapon you study it closely. It is a product of magic that you do not understand and as you watch it move you can see that it is in fact neither fully corporeal nor fully spectral. It is a Being caught between two different existences, one of shadow and one of life, and as you watch it gives you pause to wonder if it can truly be killed. What you do know however, is that these creatures are small and extraordinarily fast, and as you hesitate the Dreya'dim acts.

With frightening speed the Morg runs at you, a long thin knife glinting wickedly in its skeletal hand. Against the attack you stand your ground. You know you have no hope of matching the creature's speed, but you have size and strength on your side and you use these advantages to their fullest. In a heartbeat the Morg is upon you, its blade slicing the air as it attempts to find flesh.

In response you block the strike and punch out with your free hand, hitting the Morg squarely in the chest and sending him spinning bodily across the floor and into a pile of broken stone. In a cloud of grit the creature rolls to its feet and shakes its head. It has not been harmed by the blow, and as you raise your weapon it charges once again.

In this dark chamber the Morg closes upon you, flicking its knife from side to side as it tests your speed and skill. Jumping at the last the creature drives its blade down, attempting to pierce your chest. You block the blow but the Morg is swift, another cut slicing a long wound down your arm. Before the spectral creature has hit the ground it lashes out again, a deep cut opening in your lower leg.

Swearing at the Morg you strike out with your weapon, and this time your foe is not quick enough. In a screaming rage the creature twists, a long gash oozing blood from the blow as it spins across the floor before turning once again towards you. The look on the Dreya'dim's face is one of pain and hatred, and before you can press your attack the Morg leaps forward.

Through the air the diminutive creature rises towards you. With knife raised high the Morg looks to bring its blade down upon your neck and you set yourself to parry the blow. It is not the Hordim's intention however. Hitting the ground a body length before you, the Morg instead drops to its knees and uses its momentum to skid along the smooth stone floor. At the last it falls onto its back and as it slides under your reach jabs upwards with its knife. The keen edges of its blade finds a purchase deep in your thigh, cutting blood vessels and muscle before being torn out by the Morg as it rolls out of the way behind you.

Grabbing at your leg you can feel the blood draining from you, a grey haze spreading across your vision as you attempt to quell the bleeding. For its part the Morg stands back, sure in its knowledge that it has delivered a mortal blow. Dropping to one knee you fight the vertigo that it steadily overwhelming you, and before you can bring proper pressure to the wound you fall sideways, the blood loss too great. In an expanding pool of your own blood you lay still. In this life your quest is over. In another life you may find better luck.

THE END



As you look along the line of huge statues to the east it appears that there is space behind them and the possibility that other exits yet unseen may reside there. Starting forward you move towards the huge statues, and it is when you are the greater part of the way there that you see the first, faint glint of something metallic resting in the area behind. It is no more than a fleeting reflection but it catches your eye and you instinctively place a hand on the hilt of your weapon.

Moving quickly to the eastern wall you discover that the statues are indeed set about twenty metres from the wall itself, and with their great size form a long corridor that runs along the eastern wall towards the south. Within this shadowed area there is little to see but the great reach of the chamber extending out before you. What has glinted in the shadows is a curiosity that bears investigation however, and you move quickly down the rear of the great line of statues, searching the hard stone for any clue as to what might have caused the unexpected glimmer.

A little over half way down the length of the chamber you find what you are looking for. Resting against the edge of one of the statue's enormous feet is a scimitar, Hordim-made and still in reasonable condition. It appears to have been placed carefully, as if someone has put it down in a moment of rest and then forgotten to retrieve it when they moved on. Picking it up you find it to be a particularly fine weapon, engraved with the sigils of one of the Hordim Kraals and inlaid along its polished iron blade with thin lines of Azuril and silver. It does not appear to be a weapon that would easily be forgotten, and judging by its clean condition could only have been misplaced within the last few days.

You study the scimitar for a short time then look further to the south. Within the shadows you see the vague outline of a door, one not readily visible from the entrance to the Taalestry and ornately bordered within a dark obsidian archway at the hall's southern corner. Looking around you can see no sign of the owner of the scimitar so you continue southwards towards the far doorway.

(If you wish to keep the scimitar record its acquisition on your character sheet. If you wish to use it now as your primary weapon it possesses the same attributes as a Long Sword and if necessary your character sheet should be adjusted to reflect this.)

Upon the clear ground it does not take long for you to reach the shadowed archway. The arch is a remarkable piece of carved

obsidian, framing a heavy oak door and possessed of a huge iron lock at its centre, one whose keyhole is set within a heavy, though rusting escutcheon. Your heart pounds faster in your chest as you take a closer look. It is a substantial door and if the Well of Shadows lies beyond your quest may well soon be complete. When you touch the surface of the door however, your brow creases in confusion. The oak has none of the tactile warmth of the familiar wood and when you tap it with the knuckles of your right hand you hear no evidence of any space beyond its ornate threshold.

It takes only a few moments to realise that the door is in fact counterfeit, artificed from the stone and inlaid with metal to simulate the iron lock, hinges and escutcheon. Carefully you search the archway that encompasses the door in the hope that it might possess secret locks, or some other form of device that might allow you to pass through. You take your time, testing each part of the ornate arch but must admit defeat when you find nothing but cold stone and rusting iron. With all the evidence suggesting that this is no exit at all you stand and consider instead what its purpose might actually be.

It is a question that provides no clue or logic in its consideration. Unless you touch it the door passes as a perfect replica, precise in every detail and given as much attention to its design and artifice as the real thing. You can see that it had been wrought at the same time as the construction of the Taalestry around it but there is nothing, neither script cut into its surface or symbols, that might provide an answer. As you pause in the cool shadows you realise quickly that its purpose is a question that will have to remain unresolved, and with no joy to be found you look instead for other ways forward.

At your right shoulder the vast booted heel of a statue stands as imposing as a two-storey house, and as you look around its monolithic presence you see that the platform upon which the great stone Silvan Tree rests is also set apart from the southern wall. Like the statues the immense platform has a gap of around twenty metres between itself and the wall. What might reside there is cloaked in dark shadow but from what you can see there is nothing of interest. Looking back up the row of statues there seems little that might further your cause, however as you stand in the shadows, completely dwarfed by the enormous statues and the even greater bulk of the Silvan Tree, you hear a noise.

Within the vastness of the hall it is no more than a creaking whisper in the darkness, though you recognise immediately what it is.

It is the utterance of a rope under stress, holding a weight that bears down as a great load upon its fibres. You have heard such a sound before many times and in the confines of the hall you pause and listen keenly. Looking about you can see no obvious source and for a short time you survey the upper levels of the hall, but no further sound emanates from the shadows. As you stand and listen you can only wonder on its cause.

If you wish to search the area surrounding the Taal for the source of the noise turn to section 58. If you would rather return to the main area of the Taalestry and look instead to searching elsewhere turn to section 82.

73

The southern doorway seems your best option and you move quickly forward. Upon the threshold you peer into the chamber beyond and raise your torch to better survey what lies within. What you find is another square space and a tall statue standing silently at its far end. The room is bare but for the statue, and as far as you can see has no other exits except the doorway you now stand within. It is a dead-end, but there is something here that captures your attention nonetheless.

Looking to the far end of the room you focus with greater interest upon the statue. It stands tall in the shadows, a carved image of a robed priest, worked in black obsidian as you would find most that inhabit the deep ruins of the world. This one however, holds one arm forward and in its upturned hand cradles an enormous gem. Even in the dim illumination thrown by your torch the large green crystal glistens and shines like an evening star. By any measure it would be worth more than a lifetime's income, and it waits unguarded in this chamber for someone to claim it.

If you would like to enter the chamber and take the gem for yourself turn to section 37a. If you can see no purpose in doing so then you have no choice but to turn about and choose another doorway in the chamber behind you. If this is your choice you turn about and look instead to either the northern or eastern exits. If you choose the eastern exit turn to section 20. If the northern exit seems a better option turn to section 87.

East is your chosen goal and you make for the archway. What you find beyond its dark threshold is a long corridor, one that extends for some distance further eastwards. For a moment you pause beneath the arch and listen intently for some hint of what might lay ahead, but all you can hear is the rush and gurgle of the waters behind you. If there is any danger to be found ahead you will have to go and find it.

Carefully you move forward, the passage reaching out into the hard stone. Upon all its surfaces the corridor is decorated with the same finely carved murals as the main hall, and as your light flickers into the shadows ahead you begin to see the most unusual of effects playing upon the walls. At first you pay it little heed, but as you move further down the passage you begin to see movement at the corner of your eye. Within the shadows cast upon the walls by your torch there comes a striking illusion of motion in the carvings about you. The stone itself remains immutable but the shadows caught upon the etched stone give a striking impression of animals and birds moving within a long representation of a great forest. As furtive shades they are no more than an impression of creatures finding their way through the forest around you, indeed in the light cast by your torch it almost feels as if they are following your advance in particular. It is both intriguing and quietly disconcerting. Such is the power of the illusion that before you are finished your progress through the passage you have an indefinable feeling that you are being watched.

When you find the corridor's end you pass through another archway into a large and impressive chamber. Square in plan, but with the far eastern wall a wide curved surface, it is also covered in the same intricate carvings you have found elsewhere in Allas'nerig. Here the murals extend over all the chamber's surfaces and continue the theme found in the passageway outside. In the light of your torch you see a great forest extending in all directions about you, the carved surfaces presenting an unnerving perspective of a reality somehow captured in hard stone.

For a time you consider the time and skill required to artifice such a marvel but as you stand in the centre of the hall you notice that there is more to this room than just exceptional stone-mastery. Far from the main hall this chamber reverberates to the sounds of the distant flowing water but with that distance it comes muted, more the softer murmur of a flowing creek than a rushing flood, and filled with these sounds the chamber comes alive.

In a flowing movement you see a wind blowing through the canopy of the forest overhead. Solid stone bends and strains to the effects of a breeze that you cannot feel, but which flows through the stone overhead as easily as wind through leaves. In the under-storey smaller trees and low bushes sway to the same imperative, animals and birds somehow moving within undergrowth that should have no life or motion.

Within this forest tapestry you stand for some time, watching a cycle of life open up before you as suns rise and fall upon the canopy and moonlight streams upon bough and leaf. It is a grand moving tableau that captures your thoughts, and it is only when you deliberately shake your head and pull yourself away from the vision that you are able to turn back towards the exit. There you find two further things just as intriguing.

The first is a section of the wall near the archway that has been altered. The exquisite stone carving has been hacked away, leaving a square of rough cut stone and an iron plaque screwed into its surface. The plaque itself has a long slit moulded into its centre, serving as a guide for a metal lever that can be moved up or down. As you find it the lever is in the "up" position.

You do not need any time to determine what the lever is for as you have seen such devices before. It is Hordim-made and it can only mean one thing. The ruin that you have entered was once a proving ground for warriors and that means that the temple-dome has been altered, provided with traps, mazes and populated with wild creatures to test the skills and courage of young Oera'dim wishing to prove their mettle.

For a moment you step back and shake your head. There had been no mention of this in the notes left with the Guild Library and with this discovery the whole nature of your mission into the temple-dome must now change. Ahead you will not only find the dangers inherent within an ancient ruin, collapsing in upon itself with age and neglect, but also the lethal devices and traps laid down by the Hordim for purposes that have long been lost to history. All in all your day just got a lot harder.

The second thing you find is a pile of discarded clothing and old equipment left by treasure-seekers in times past and now covered in a thick layer of dust and desiccated insect husks. Carefully you pull the upper layer of clothing away, waving away a cloud of grit as you uncover a tangle of broken metal and rotting fabric. What you also

find is a word scratched into the stone beneath the iron plaque. It is in the Elder Tongue of the ancients and it reads as “emru”.

There is nothing else to be found in this chamber but there are two decisions you need to make. The first relates to the lever. The Guild understands that such devices have two purposes; one to activate the traps that will be found further within the ruin, the other to open most of the doors that would allow free movement for the creatures placed by the Hordim to test their warriors. You have a choice here and it is a hard one to make.

You can leave the lever as it is, or you can depress it to activate the proving grounds. If you leave the lever as it is, you will not have to worry about traps within the ruin but most doors you encounter will be locked and impassable. If however, you depress the lever and activate the proving ground you will have to deal with all that the Hordim have placed within the temple-dome, but also have free access to the entire ruin. Make a choice now as to what you wish to do. If you decide to depress the lever write the word “emru” into the Codewords section of your character sheet. If you decide to leave the lever alone write nothing on your character sheet.

There is also an opportunity to search through the discarded equipment and clothing. If this is something you wish to do make a Search roll and consult the Search List to see what you have found. If you do not wish to spend the time doing this then it is time to move on.

Whatever your choices, when you have determined what you wish to do within this chamber there is nothing more for you here. You can return to the main hall by turning to section 29.

75

Turning your back on the maze you look out towards the hall ahead and find it as impressive as any other chamber you have found in Allas'nerig. Reaching into the south, the hall is a long sloping procession-way, angled at a shallow incline that descends out of sight into darkness and shadows. For a moment you pause and consider what you have found. Unlike the chambers you have encountered before this hall is substantially different in structure. Rather than the intricately carved panels that you have previously seen the surfaces here are devoid of decoration, the floor and ceiling faced in finely

joined grey stone, the walls bare but covered in a black crystalline material that extends along the entire length of the corridor. Overhead the ceiling is a shallow, curving barrel-vault that gives the hall more the dimensions of a mine than an important processional way.

As you look about there is little that piques your curiosity but much that begs explanation. The black crystalline walls are as smooth as glass and this you find out of character with the rest of the ruins. The floors and ceiling appear seamless, a flowing expanse of polished grey stone that exhibits no exits, vents or other openings. Apart from the inevitable detritus left by time and neglect there is nothing here, and as you consider how far the hall must run into the south you can only wonder at the immensity of what you have found. It feels as if this hall could extend for kilometres and within this enormous space you do not tarry long. Everything you know about the building practices of the Ancients tells you that the Well of Shadows must be somewhere ahead and with this hope in mind you move forward, heading southwards.

It is no more than a few hundred metres into your journey that your torch begins to sputter. Cursing softly under your breath you attempt to keep it alight and at the same time reach into your pack for another. It is a clumsy move that causes you to drop the old torch and in a shower of sparks it goes out, rolling across the floor before coming to a halt against the carcass of a dead rodent. Cursing a bit louder you drop to one knee and then take a deep breath before taking a new torch in hand. In the total darkness you search for your flint and continue the process of getting the new torch lighted. It is not a difficult task to complete in the dark, indeed it is something you have had to do on more than one occasion, but as your eyes become accustomed to the sudden gloom you begin to see something miraculous, and it gives you reason to pause.

Slowly at first, but with a growing intensity the walls and ceiling around you come alive. Across the wide barrel vault above the stone darkens and over its surface you begin to see stars shining as bright points of light, the night sky itself depicted in a stunning panorama that stretches for as far as you can see. In tandem with this apparition at your sides the walls change, the black crystal surfaces glowing as if they have been lit from behind, and in those walls you begin to see the outlines of trees, and of creatures moving within them.

Leaving your torch for a moment you stand and look about. As the

illusion grows you start to sense the smells and ambience of a great forest, and then there comes a breath of wind upon your face that rustles through the trees about you, bending undergrowth and moving as unseen hands through the tree-tops. Before you can pull your eyes away the vista completes itself, vast overhanging boughs spreading across the vault above, casting shadows of moonlight across the floor before you. It is a wondrous sight, a representation of a forest at night so real it is only the hard stone beneath your feet that belies the illusion. Caught within its spell you stand and wonder, but in the half-light you also sense that there is more here than mere illusion.

Slowly you reach for your weapon and concentrate not on the marvellous panorama but the sounds instead of something moving in the darkness ahead. Quickly you recognise the furtive scraping of a large creature skittering across hard stone. Almost at the same time you see only forty metres ahead a shadow, highlighted in lines of shimmering moonlight and moving directly towards you. The shape is easy to recognise. It is a Reaver.

The Reaver is one of the most widespread predatory creatures in Arborell. Found from the cold wastes of the north to the temple complexes of the Durn in the south it is a frequent foe for Dungeon Crawlers. These scorpion-like predators prefer the easy meal that comes from carrion or the infirm, but will fight if the need requires it. Most grow to more than 6 metres in length, though the juvenile that now approaches is only four metres in length but every bit as ferocious. Unlike scorpions however, they do not possess a flexible tail and stinger. Instead their tails are weighted with outgrowths of heavy bone that are rarely used in combat.

The warhammer is the preferred weapon for combat against a Reaver. (If you are using such a weapon increase your combat value by +2 for the duration of this combat.) The creature's hard exoskeleton has only one real weakness, that being a soft area around its tentacled eyes between its pincer arms. A strike crushing these eyes renders the beast unconscious and it can then be easily dispatched. Any throw of a double-six during combat will have achieved this aim and victory will be yours to enjoy.

This monster has a combat value of 17, an endurance level of 20 and no aversions to any Sharyah you may now possess. If you have a flashcharge and would like to use it on this creature turn to section 90. If you do not have a flashcharge, or you would prefer not to use it at

this time, the monster must be fought with weapon alone. Resolve this combat before moving on. If you are successful turn to section 22. If you find the Reaver too powerful and it is you who falls turn to section 63.

76

Trapped at the far edge of the platform you have little room to move but you stand your ground and face the QuagWyrms. It is a monster of considerable size and it looms over you, its shadow grotesque and distorted against the far wall of the chamber. In the confines of the chamber the monster squeals at you, its outrage at your intrusion into its lair exceeded only by its overwhelming hunger. Desperate in its starvation it lunges forward again and again, the QuagWyrms' gaping mouths snapping as it strives to find a grip upon your flesh. Against this sustained attack you strike back, using your weapon to its best advantage, breaking teeth and cutting at the creature's mouth and exposed throat. One particular blow cuts deep into the Wyrms' neck and in pain it recoils, bleeding profusely but still undeterred.

For a short time the battle continues, the Wyrms striking out, your weapon sweeping in wide arcs as you attempt to keep it at a distance. All the while the monster tests your defences and when it finds a weak point it lunges out, mouth wide as it tries to take a hold of your arm. Instinctively you sense what the beast is doing and rather than deflect the attack you lunge forward with your weapon, thrusting its metal edges deep into the monster's mouth. In a spasm of pain the Wyrms trembles, hard metal spearing into its brain and delivering it a mortal blow.

In a startled recoil the QuagWyrms falls backwards, its head shaking and snapping as it collapses into its muddy home. Before the monster hits the surface of the water it is dead, its body disappearing out of sight.

You do not stay to enjoy your victory. With the platform now clear you run for the only exit and cross back into the other chamber, falling over the threshold in your rush to escape the monster's lair and crashing head-first into a rapidly rising tide of chilled water. Gasping for breath you find your feet and get your bearings. The chamber is now knee deep in water and rising quickly. At the centre of the room the circular aperture has disappeared within a spiralling vortex and you can feel its pull dragging at your legs. It is time to get out.

Three exits now stand available for you to leave the room. If you have the codeword “emru” written on your character sheet then the western and southern doors and the northern archway are unlocked and available for you to exit. If you do not possess this codeword then only the northern archway remains available to exit. To take the northern exit turn to section 30. To make your way westwards turn to section 55. If you can take the southern door and decide to do so turn to section 68.

77

Beneath your feet water slaps against hard stone as you run, your focus on the timing of the jump as you quickly make up the distance to the rift's edge. With all the strength you can bring to the task you leap outwards, sailing across the gaping crack and landing heavily on the other side, your feet slipping from beneath you. In a cloud of heavy dust you come to rest, a wide mark left upon the stone in your wake as you slide to a halt.

For a moment you remain on your back, staring up at the vaulted roof overhead and reminding yourself once again of the reasons why you chose this vocation. It occurs to you that jumping across such chasms is an activity that will one day bring you to an unlooked for doom. You decide that next time you will bring a rope and grapple.

Regaining your feet you brush yourself down and collect your equipment. On the other side of the rift the chamber is mostly dry, only a fine mist rising from the depths of the gap to dampen its edges, and as you clean layers of dust from your long-coat you turn your attention to the eastern exit.

The eastern exit awaits. Turn to section 38.

78

In the quiet of the chamber you stand silent. There is something here, you are sure of it, and hidden within the gloom you can sense the first murmurings of a shifting discontent that is quickly growing into anger. Taking your weapon in hand you search the flickering shadows about you but it is only when you look upwards that you see tangible evidence of what it is you have disturbed. In the air above the shadows are thick with small, moving points of light, and you

quickly recognise the danger. You have found yourself beneath a Needle Fly swarm and given the chance they will kill you.

For a moment you hesitate. These swarms usually number in their hundreds, and few who confront them live to tell the tale, but in this instance you have an advantage and it is one you are fully prepared to exercise. As the Flies concentrate overhead you pull your Sharyah from its wrappings and prepare to use it. If you remember rightly the talisman should give you the edge you need.

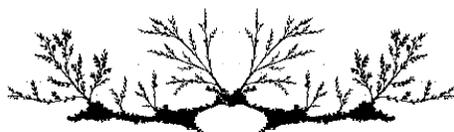
Carefully you take up your talisman and hold it before you as a wave of the lethal insects arcs down upon your position. There is nothing you can do but whisper its name and wait.

Instantly the Sharyah responds, a wall of blue shimmering energy erupting from the gem as it builds a wide curving shield between yourself and the swarm. Against this glimmering wall the insects break, the energy a barrier they cannot cross. But these insects are not so easily defeated. Unable to reach your position they swirl about the chamber, testing the energy wall for any sign of weakness. Against this the talisman responds further, extending the wall to encompass you completely then increasing its power output until the energy field shines a bright blue in the darkness. Before this new threat the Flies retreat, repelled by the proximity of the Sharyah's energy, scattering into the surrounding chambers as the shining power permeates the stone of the ruin itself.

For a moment you watch the talisman do its work, the Needle Flies retreating out of sight, running before a pursuing wall of energy that follows them until they are no longer a threat.

When you are sure the Flies have gone you deactivate the Sharyah and let your eyes once again adjust to the returning gloom. For a moment you wait but the chamber is now empty. After re-adjusting your pack you look to what lies before you and decide what you should do next.

Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and decide where you will now go.



The archway is the entrance to a long hallway beyond and with a need to find the Well of Shadows you take it without hesitation. The passage is an extensive thoroughfare, wide and tall it reaches into the stone as a corridor with high walls and a series of fan-vaulted segments that make up an ornate and richly carved ceiling. It is very much a product of the builders that delved these great ruins and in its splendour you move quickly westwards.

What you find at its end is a circular chamber with a high domed roof. The room is bare but for a series of carvings set into the walls as large curving panels, and the presence of a single statue that stands upright at its centre. The statue is covered in a roughly woven tarpaulin and you cannot see exactly what might stand beneath it. Tentatively you walk further into the room and when you are no more than six metres from its side you begin to feel something growing in the air.

It starts as a slight pushing feeling, a sense that somehow the statue wants you to come closer, but quickly you realise that the monolith is actually drawing you to it, and with each step you take the sensation becomes far more powerful. Coming to a halt you fight the urge to get closer. There is something very familiar about this potent compulsion and almost too late you recognise what it is you have found. Beneath the cloth covering is a Dark Obelisk and you have no need to uncover the stone to confirm what it is.

Immediately you draw back, but as you do so you see a deep blue glow shine through the dusty and tattered tarpaulin, and strengthened within this growing aura the stone begins its lethal work upon your body. You are close enough that the Obelisk has activated and now that it knows of your presence it will not let you go willingly.

In this dark place an overwhelming feeling of fatigue grips your body. The Obelisk wishes the life energy that sustains your existence and by some design of ancient magic has the means to take it from you. With every passing second your life-force feeds the magical device, making it stronger and giving it a greater capacity to kill. In the shadowed chamber you can feel spectral tendrils gripping at your arms and legs, serving as conduits for a powerful energy that burrows its way into your being, stripping the life from you in an inexorable process that will continue as long as you are close. Your only chance for survival is to get out of the chamber as quickly as you can.

Turning about you take one step for the exit and find your legs

giving way beneath you. Dropping to one knee you try and clear your head, then drag yourself on hands and knees towards the door. With every leaden movement of an arm or leg you can feel the Obelisk concentrating its power upon you, straining to consume your life-force before you can escape. It is a laborious task that drags every gram of strength from you. Hand over hand you crawl for the exit and it is only as you finally cross over the threshold that the Dark Obelisk's hold upon you lessens. In the half-light of the corridor you drag yourself up against a wall and try and recover.

Throw one dice and take the number rolled from your endurance points. If the number taken reduces your endurance to zero then you may have escaped the Dark Obelisk but its lingering effects have killed you. If this is the case your quest is over and you will need to look to a latter life to find greater success.

If however, you have survived your encounter with the Dark Obelisk there will be on-going consequences that will affect your mission in Allas'nerig. If you have the Strong Back talent it must now be removed from your Chosen Talents list. For the duration of the mission you must also take a reduction in combat value of -1. The effects of the Dark Obelisk linger but will reduce over time. It may however, take months before you will once again feel properly fit.

If you have survived this encounter the Well of Shadows cannot be found here. After you have had time to regain some of your strength you should return to the main Taalestry. There you can choose another way by turning to section 36. If you have not already done so you can also investigate the rest of the western wall to the south by turning to section 84.

80

With one hand grasping at the jutting piece of stone you search with the other for a further purchase that will allow you to find a way out of the chasm. Carefully you test the crumbling stone and desiccated earth and find little that can hold your weight, but there are ways that a Brother can make the climb if they have both strength and skill at their command. Still hanging from the stone you drive your other fist into the fractured wall and twist your hand until it squeezes tight between two pieces of rock. With this hold you dig your feet into the wall and bear your weight upwards. When you have gained a small distance you withdraw your hand and push it

again into a fissure between large stones further up the crumbling wall. Again you find a hold that you think will bear your weight and again you dig your feet into the wall.

It is a laborious and physically taxing process but one that ultimately finds you hauling yourself over the edge of the rift and out onto drier and harder ground. Lying face-up upon the stone floor you try and regain your breath, your arms leaden from the exertion of the climb. As you lay there you can hear the water pouring into the gap and you consider how close you came to meeting a similar fate.

When you have recovered enough you retrieve your pack and torch and look to the eastern exit. In the shadows it opens as an ornate archway, the threshold to a darker hallway beyond.

Turn to section 38.

81

With the waters now slipping with greater speed about your ankles you search the length of the rift for its narrowest point. You find it at the southern end of the chasm's length and it proves a worthy jump. At around three metres across the leap will need to be clean and well-timed, however it is a distance that you have cleared before. Taking your pack from your shoulders you throw it across to the other side then carefully lob your torch onto the drier ground beyond. In a shower of tinder-sparks the torch comes to ground but it remains alight and that is all you need.

Taking a number of steps back you judge the distance you must run and then make for the gap with all the speed you can muster. Quickly you close the distance then leap up and outwards, your arms and legs flailing as you try and maintain your balance. It is a jump worthy of any Brother of the Guild but one that the flooding waters seek to foil. Even as you leap you can feel the slick surface of the stone beneath you slowing your run, turning one of your ankles as you jump out across the gaping chasm. It is enough to bring you undone.

In a jarring impact you hit the edges of the rift, showering earth and broken stone down into its dark depths. Desperately you grab for a hold but find only smooth stone, your weight pulling you over the edge and down into the chasm. With hope failing you try again to grab for a firm handhold and find one upon a piece of stone jutting from the wall of the rift. Hanging from this bare purchase you dig your feet into the crumbling wall and take a few deep breaths. You

have slid over three metres into the rift and it will take both strength and agility to climb out of this dark hole. Indeed you will need both in good measure if you are to survive.

Test both your Strength and Agility attributes. If you are successful in both tests turn to section 52. If you fail either of these tests turn to section 11. Please note that if you have the Strong Back talent neither of these tests need be taken and you can turn automatically to section 52.

82

There seems no good reason to delay your return to the open spaces of the Taalestry. Turning back towards the northern end of the chamber you pass between the great statues and the Taal platform itself, before moving out onto open ground and then on towards the central floor of the hall. Standing between the two lines of towering statues and the even greater over-reaching immensity of the Silvan Tree's great branches you cannot help but feel somewhat subdued. Looking overhead the stone boughs appear to be hanging in mid air, reaching out from the Tree's immense trunk in an impossible curving span of finely carved tributary branches. Against the background of the mountainous landscape and the gleaming carved sky above the Tree's gigantic scale serves only to humble, and in its presence you feel the true power of the ancient craft that had been able to create such a remarkable edifice.

It is however, only one aspect of this enormous chamber that you can explore. Standing in the centre of the Taalestry you look at the other possible places to search and consider what you should do next.

Turn to section 36.

83

Carefully you play your torch ahead of you, searching the shadows for any sign of danger. What you find brings you to a halt, and gives you reason to pause and consider your next move. At all sides the walls of the chamber are covered in Oer'daaki roots, a deep lattice of entwined tendrils and vine growths that move slowly but with purpose in the shadows. If you disturb the growth you know the plant will attack you.

Thankfully the floor about you is mostly clear, only a few long

tendrils criss-crossing the floor. If you are lucky you will be able to step over these limbs and get out of the way before the Oer'daaki can sense that you were ever here. It is a hope the Fates decide you have not earned.

With weapon in hand you step carefully across the roots, some of which are as thick as your forearm. In the cool air you make little sound but luck is not yours on this day. As you step forward one of the tendrils moves, its long reach whipping across the floor and striking a glancing blow upon your booted ankle. It is all the Oer'daaki needs.

Instantly roots lunge from the walls, the plant attempting by sheer number to lay one of its prehensile tendrils about you. It is a blind attempt, many of the roots falling to ground in other parts of the chamber but some hit close and one finds its mark, coiling instinctively about your leg. Immediately you feel the pressure build as the plant tries to crush what it has found. Just as quickly however, you react, striking down upon the root with your axe and severing it from its source. It is an injury that sends the Oer'daaki into a frenzy.

At all sides dozens of roots fall from the walls, rolling out across the floor into a mat of grey-green vegetation, each whipping from side to side as they attempt to get a purchase upon your flesh. Another hits home, grasping at your shoulder and again you strike it down. This root however, is thicker than the last and takes a number of blows to cut through. For a moment your focus lies with cutting through the tendril and it is then that the Oer'daaki gains the advantage.

From all sides new roots fling themselves from the walls. At least a dozen strike the ground close to your position and before you can avoid its grasp one ropes itself about your chest. Caught in its grip you attempt to sever the root but another finds a hold upon your arm. You try to twist away from its deadly embrace and instead find the Oer'daaki clinging all the tighter. Before you can extricate yourself both of the prehensile tendrils crush down upon your body, bones breaking under the pressure brought to bear by the killer plant. In desperation you hack at the roots but find no relief as more of the tendrils fall upon you. Before the plant is done you are completely engulfed in the Oer'daaki's grasp, your life crushed from you. In this life your quest is over. In another you may find better luck and greater success.

THE END

84

From where you stand you can see the long line of statues proceeding down the length of the western wall of the Taalestry. Of greater interest than the immense statues themselves is the wide area of floor-space they obscure into the south. Each of the enormous monoliths stands twenty metres from the wall of the chamber, and with their great bulk hide a substantial avenue of ground that lies behind them. It takes only a few moments to see that the southern end of this avenue is fundamentally different from the rest of the Taalestry.

Quickly you make for the first of the great statues and use its enormous booted foot as a point of concealment as you peer down into the shadows. On one side stands the enormous walls of the chamber, reaching hundreds of metres to the domed roof overhead. On the other rest the eleven statues that make up the silent parade of stone that effectively conceals this part of the Taalestry from the main hall. Looking down into the gloom you can make out three doors at the far southern end of the western wall. They stand as one larger central door accompanied on either side by a smaller exit. All appear closed though you cannot be sure of this until you can get closer.

Between yourself and the doors there stands however, a curious and unexpected barrier. The doors are framed within arches of pure black crystal, but flowing from them is a frozen wave of blue stone, pouring out as an undulating flow of rushing water. Carved from a material that looks like foaming liquid the crystal spreads from the door as a rushing cascade that crashes up against the edges of the nearest statues then spreads outwards to cover almost a third of the floor before you. It is as if a great quantity of water had been released through the doors and then somehow frozen in a timeless display of stone. It is a truth to say that any purpose you can think for it escapes you.

Surveying the undulating barrier you see within its crashing waves and flooding waters a path not unlike a simple maze. The path runs around and between the larger flows of blue crystal and with the doors at the southern end your objective you take to its convoluted trail. It proves to be a straightforward exercise, only one path the true way through the puzzle to the large ornate thresholds at its end. It takes only a matter of a few minutes to stand before them.

For a moment you consider the three doors. The black crystal archways are ornately carved and from their borders flows the curious

stone cascade, but as you survey each of the exits carefully you come to realise that the two smaller exits are both counterfeit. Superbly carved they prove to be no more than facades upon which any rap of a fist is returned with only a dull thud.

The larger of the exits however, is far more interesting though it may prove as impassable as its smaller brothers. The door is made of a single slab of black crystal, inlaid with gold and Azuril and carved in bass relief with the sigils and motifs of the Three Powers of the World. Carefully you touch its smooth face and find it vibrating as if a great noise buffets it from the other side. What you do not find however, is any latch or device that might open it. A careful inspection of its borders provides no secret panels nor hidden mechanisms and as you stand back you get a distinct and growing feeling that the door itself is waiting for something.

In the cool silence you wait, then decide the best approach might be a direct one. Standing before the door you rap against its cold stone three times. In response the door remains quiet then you begin to see a line of symbols emerging across the black crystal. Etched in gleaming blue light the symbols coalesce quickly into a short sentence, one given in English, the common tongue of Kalborea.

Three Words gain access here. Utter them but once.

Taken aback by the words you take a moment to study them with greater care. Generally access to great treasures are not so straightforward in their unlocking and you look instead for any riddle or trick that might hide within the message. They seem however, to be what they are, and when you are sure of this you turn your thoughts instead to what three words of power might indeed open this great door. It is then that you remember the words you have recorded from your mission and hope that they might indeed be the keys needed here.

If you have three codewords written into the Codewords section of your character sheet turn to section 70. If you do not have three words in this section turn to section 28.



85

When the Molgoth attacks it falls upon you like a shadow descending out of a starless sky. You do not see it, nor sense its presence until the tell-tale whoosh of its leathery wings alerts you to the danger, but years of experience have given you the knowledge you need to survive its attack.

Before the huge bat-like monster can come to ground you retreat from the centre of the chamber and find a position against the nearest wall. In enclosed spaces the Molgoth is an ungainly predator, one that shies from flying too close to hard stone, preferring instead to come to ground and bring down its prey with razor-sharp teeth and long, curving claws. It is a behaviour that you can use to your advantage but one that requires you give the monster no ability to restrict your movement.

With a shuddering impact the Molgoth lands upon the floor before you. Immediately it extends its leathery wings to try and fence you into a space that will allow it to draw you closer. Just as quickly you leave the wall, running out onto open ground and slicing down upon the Molgoth's wing with your weapon. You miss the target but have the desired effect nonetheless.

Retreating from your attack the Molgoth jumps backwards, keeping its extended wings at a distance and instead it hesitates, judging the size of the room and how it might back you into a corner. You use the pause to attack again and run forward, your weapon slicing through the air as you attempt to cut again at its wing. The Molgoth does not wait for the blow. As you run forward it sweeps its other wing in a wide arc, hitting you behind the knees and lifting you bodily from the floor. With a sickening impact you hit ground, the back of your head slapping hard against solid stone. For just a moment you lose your senses, a ringing nausea setting upon you as you try and raise your head, and in that short heartbeat the Molgoth attacks. Raising its clawed fists high it brings them down upon you, cutting deep into your chest and tearing the life from you.

In this cold chamber you die, your quest to discover the whereabouts of the Orncryst unresolved. It must now be to a latter life that you will have to look for better luck and greater success.

THE END

86

You hear the Shambler long before you see it. From somewhere in the passages and chambers about you the unmistakable sound of a dead man walking filters through the air. It is the curious shift and drag of feet on cold stone that alerts you to its presence, but for a time you cannot tell from which direction it might be coming.

Quietly you wait, holding your torch high to illuminate as much of the space around you as you can. When the wretched creature does appear it emerges from the shadows at your shoulder, a rotting remnant of a man that once must have delved these ruins himself, only to end up a permanent reminder of how dangerous that vocation can prove to be.

For a moment you watch the Shambler move, and in your survey you realise that this will be a much tougher opponent than most of his type. In life this Shambler would have been a man of stature and strength, his remains still a good forearm's length taller than yourself. As you take a firmer hold on your weapon you know what you must do. You would hope that in the same circumstance another Brother might do the same for you.

You do not wait for the Shambler to come to you. As it staggers onward you run at it, jumping at the last to kick it squarely in the chest. Caught off balance by the blow the Shambler falls backwards, hitting the ground as you carry on forward, weapon raised high. One blow cleanly severs the Shambler's left arm but the creature does not falter. With a sweep of its huge remaining fist the dead man strikes back, punching you in the leg and toppling you sideways. Before you can recover your feet it kicks out, hitting you a glancing blow across the shoulder, narrowly missing your head and neck.

Stunned by the attack you regain your weapon and run forward. The Shambler has found its feet as well, and as you close the short distance that separates you, the creature picks up a large piece of crumbling stone and hurls it in your direction. The aim is not good but the result proves effective. The stone hits ground, shattering into pieces that spray across the hard floor towards you. For a moment you hesitate, a cloud of broken rock sending dust and grit through the chamber in a roiling cloud that obscures the creature's movement as it once again attacks.

In that moment you stand your ground and strike out into the dust-fog. Immediately you feel the hard edges of your weapon strike home and realising how close the Shambler is, you strike again and again.

When the dust settles the dead man lies on the flagstones, deep wounds to its arm and legs but for all its injury still a threat.

As it once again attempts to rise you act with deadly purpose, cleanly severing the Shambler's remaining limbs before cutting off its head. Only when this is done does the creature lay still. In the gloom you retrieve your torch and wonder at how long the man had existed in these halls. A quick search of its clothing reveals very little about who the Shambler may once have been, but of one thing you can be sure. The tattoos on his right arm mark him as a Brother of the Deep Guild although you can remember none being lost in Allas'nerig. You decide it is a mystery you will take back with you to Das Vallendor for further investigation.

When you have assured yourself that the Shambler is no longer a threat you pick up your equipment and look to what you should do next.

Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and consider your next move.



87

Making your way through the open doorway finds you in another square chamber, but one fundamentally different from any you have found in this maze before. Roughly the same size as all the others you have passed through this one has been further bisected by a series of brick arches that effectively divide the room into four equal parts. A quick survey of each shows them to be empty, though one of the quartered cells is stacked with piles of broken masonry and old statuary. It is something that you give little heed until you notice polished metal glinting in the light of your torch. Digging away at the edges of the pile uncovers part of a ring-mail shirt and then a silver buckle. There is a chance that within this pile greater treasures might be found.

(If you want to search this mound of broken stone conduct a Search

Roll and consult the Search List to determine what you have uncovered. If you find something that you wish to keep record it on your character sheet before continuing.)

Once you have finished with your search you turn back to the confines of the room and consider what you should now do. There are two exits here and both appear unlocked. One opens in the southern wall of the room, the other in the eastern wall.

If you have not already done so you can make your way south by turning to section 7. If you have not previously used the eastern doorway and wish to go that way, you can do so by turning to section 55.

88

Ahead lies another chamber and you cross into its dark recesses quickly. What you find is another square room, bare of any furnishings or fittings except for a single statue that stands in the south-western corner. The chamber is the same as most of the others you have negotiated in your path through the maze, being constructed of the same red brick and in this case possessing a doorway in the centre of each wall. Carefully you test the ground about you for hidden traps and throw dust to assure yourself that no lethal surprises might be triggered by your movement here. You find nothing, and in the silence look instead to the only thing of interest remaining in the room.

The statue is a tall figure, dressed in a robe and whose face is obscured by a hood that covers all of its shoulders and head. It is a glorious piece of stone-work, carved from a black crystalline rock and artficed with a cunning that gives it an uncanny sense of movement and purpose. Covered in a grey dust the statue does seem out of place in such an empty chamber. You know that many of these carved priests have a deadly purpose and to be sure that this one is indeed just a statue you test its crystalline surface with a small stone. If this is a Sentinel any contact will bring it to life, and as you watch the stone bounce off its slick robes without effect you relax, as certain as you can be that there is no danger here. The statue though, is unusual. Unlike others you have seen this one stands with one arm raised, pointing towards the door in the south wall.

Looking around you see doors in each of the walls. All appear unlocked, though none give any hint as to what might lay beyond

their thresholds. Curiously you see a small cross etched into the keystone of the western door though there is nothing else in the room that provides any clue as to its meaning.

There are doors in the north, south, east and west walls. All are open and all are available to use. To go north turn to section 31. To go south turn to section 31a. If you believe west is the best option turn to section 25. If however, east beckons, turn to section 18.

89

There is something in the chamber with you, and as you search the shadows for some clue as to its nature you hear the muffled scrape of chitin against stone. The sound is unmistakable, like a piece of soft wood being dragged across brickwork and you recognise it immediately. It is an Arachnari, and it is close. Carefully you place your torch onto the ground and drop your pack. There is little that you can do but take your weapon in hand and prepare yourself for the battle to come.

The Arachnari remains hidden, but only for a moment. Advancing upon eight powerful limbs the spider-like monster purposefully surveys the chamber and your position in it. These predators know no fear, and go about the business of death with a cool efficiency that leaves you with little room for error. Grasping the haft of your weapon all the tighter you wait for its inevitable charge. It comes in a heaving rush.

Upon the smooth stone the Arachnari moves with surprising speed, its large abdomen sliding upon the floor as it charges your position. As black as night and covered in a dense matt of brittle hairs, it shimmers in the torchlight, its bulk overwhelming in the confines of this ruin. You know from the shared experience of the Guild that these monsters have only a few vulnerable points, namely its eyes, the joints at its thorax and abdomen, and a thin section of exoskeleton just beneath its mandibles. A blow to any of these points will injure, anywhere else finds only thick exoskeleton and a very angry Arachnari.

Shared experience also tells you that these monsters are not highly intelligent and a favoured tactic within the Guild is to attack first before the creature can take any hold upon you. This you take to heart. Before the spider can reach out, you charge it instead, wielding

your weapon in a wide arc and bringing it down upon the monster's head. In a gushing blossom of green ooze one of its eyes explodes, its head badly cut by the strike.

Recoiling from the blow the Arachnari shakes its head, its body quivering with the pain of its injury. In that moment of hesitation you rush forward again and strike again at the monster. This time you aim for the joint between its head and thorax but are not as successful. With a dull thud the edge of your weapon glances off its back and in retaliation the Arachnari lunges forward, sweeping out with its front leg, hitting you squarely upon the left knee and knocking you to the ground.

Rolling back to your feet you are barely able to raise your weapon before the monstrous spider is upon you. With its full weight it crashes into you, knocking you again onto your back, your head smacking against the hard stone as you fall. Before you can move the Arachnari grabs at your chest with its front legs and starts to lift you off the stone floor.

Striking out with your weapon you hit the spider across the mandibles, breaking one of its feeding jaws and causing the monster to drop you heavily back onto the floor. Rolling away, you regain your feet but your head swims with a vertigo that gives you little chance to recover. Again the Arachnari charges, this time pushing you bodily against a near wall, crushing the breath from you with the force of it. Winded you struggle for air but as the spider tries to take a firm hold upon you, you thrust out with your weapon, slicing along the ridge of the Arachnari's head. Two more of its eyes collapse and in the flood of pain that follows the monster crashes forward, the entire weight of its enormous abdomen slamming into you, crushing bone and flesh.

When the spider retreats you fall lifeless to the floor, your existence spent, your quest over. In this life you have been outmatched by the size and power of the Arachnari. In the next you will need to find better luck and greater success.

THE END



90

Through lines of moonlight and shadow the Reaver rushes towards you. In the gloom it is an intimidating foe and with no time to light your torch you instead reach for your flashcharge. Your hand closes around cold iron and in one swift motion you pull it from its fastening and depress the trigger at the top of the spherical device. With the monster bearing down you judge your release and lob the charge.

Incredibly the Reaver sees the flashcharge arching towards and reacts, grabbing at it with its right pincer. The monster tries but cannot catch the small metallic device and you have timed the throw well. In a clatter the charge lands on the stone before the beast then slides beneath its bulk. It is only then that it detonates.

In a blinding explosion the flashcharge does its work. Completely engulfed in a shockwave of light and expanding gases the Reaver disappears, the hall itself shaking to the devastating detonation. For your part you cover your ears and turn away from the blast, the blinding flash as bright as the sun in the confines of the hall. It is a blast designed to deafen and to blind, not to destroy and it does its job well.

With ringing ears you turn towards the beast and find it staggering upon legs that have lost all strength. Without vision it is a creature frantic, and as it lumbers forward you prepare yourself for the battle to come. One thing you know for certain, the effects of the charge are only temporary and because of this you cannot wait for the Reaver to come to you.

Your use of the flashcharge gives you a temporary advantage over your foe. For the first three combat rounds the Reaver must take a -8 reduction to its combat value. After this period it will recover its senses and will be just as formidable as ever. If you did not previously record it this monster has a combat value of 17, an endurance level of 20 and no aversions to any Sharyah you may now possess. Complete this combat before moving on. If you are successful turn to section 22a. If it is you who is defeated turn to section 63a.



91

There are many creatures that can be encountered in the ruins of Arborell but only one exhibits the cunning intelligence of the Shondalak. As you stand within this quiet chamber you know that somewhere ahead one of these beasts also stands quietly, watching and waiting for you to move closer. There is no sound, nor furtive shadow upon cold stone that tells you this. It is the smell alone that finds its way to you, and it is an odour that once encountered is very difficult to forget.

Like rotting meat left in the heat of high summer the Shondalak reeks of the remnants of kills long consumed that matt its thick body hair, both blood and flesh festering against the sweating hide of a creature that cares little for anything other than the challenge of the hunt. Upon the languid air currents that run through the ruins you can smell it keenly and it is enough for you to take action.

Dropping your pack and torch you take up your weapon and shout out into the darkness. The Shondalak is an ambush predator and you cannot afford to give it any advantage. From the shadows you hear the first growls of a hunter that realises it can no longer wait for its prey, and almost before you have a chance to prepare the bear-like creature charges at you.

As black as the darkness it emerges from the Shondalak rushes your position. It is a huge beast that carries armoured plates about its shoulders and neck, and as it charges you decide there can be no advantage in waiting for it to reach you. Raising your weapon you run also, straight at the beast with your weapon glimmering in the dim light. In a clash of flesh and iron you meet the Shondalak in the centre of the chamber and the battle commences.

Without pause you strike at the creature, cutting across its chest and neck. Its armour deflects the blow against its neck but the edges of your weapon find hair and muscle in a long rending tear across its upper torso. In a gout of purplish blood the wound opens and the Shondalak recoils, but only for a moment. Hitting out with a balled fist the monster punches you squarely in the chest, sending you sliding back across the stone floor and into a pile of broken stone and grit. In a cloud of grime you regain your feet, only to find the huge animal bearing down upon you once again.

Staggering to your feet you swing out with your weapon, keeping the creature at bay as you try and recover your breath. The punch has winded you and the roiling cloud of grit does not help. Labouring for

breath you retreat from the Shondalak but it gives you no opportunity to recover. In desperation you strike at the animal again, cutting deeply into its arm, however the blow serves only to enrage the Shondalak further. With claws extended the predator swings its arms in a wide raking arc that cuts across your chest and stomach, tearing through clothing and equipment and finding flesh, bone and blood.

Badly wounded you stagger against a near wall and raise your weapon again. In this cold place you know you cannot find help for your injuries and instead you run at the Shondalak, your purpose to do whatever damage you can to the beast before you die. With all the strength that remains you thrust your weapon forward, burying it deeply in the animal's lower torso. The Shondalak growls with pain but brings a balled fist down upon the back of your neck. In the dark chamber the walls echo to the snap as your spine breaks, and the thud as your lifeless body hits the ground.

In this life your quest is over. It must now be to a latter life that you will have to look for better luck and greater success.

THE END



92

Your first encounter with a trap in this proving ground leaves you willing to consider the possibility that there might be other ways into the deep ruin that you have not yet discovered. Ways perhaps, that are less dangerous. Turning on your heel you make for the northern exit and find the arch sealed shut behind a slab of solid stone. Carefully you check its edges, looking for any type of lock or touch plate that might open it but you find nothing. Somehow your entry into this chamber has triggered a lock-down and any way of returning to the Processional Hall has been cut off behind a massive stone door that you cannot possibly move.

Looking around you see the door in the eastern wall and make for it instead. The door remains unlocked but before you step upon its touch-plate you see condensation seeping around its lower edges.

The door is cold and there is a chance that the chamber beyond has begun to fill with water. Of this however, you cannot be absolutely sure .

If you wish to take the eastern exit turn to section 12. If you believe the western door provides greater promise turn to section 87.

93

Carefully you leave the flooded chamber behind and cross through into the room beyond. What you find is another space roughly the same size as the one you have just left, but what you discover here is a long platform of stone about a metre in width, extending along the entire length of the chamber's western wall, the remaining area within the room a flooded pool that provides no other exits. At first it appears that you have found a dead-end and a completely flooded one at that.

The water however, intrigues you. More a slurry of earth and dark liquid it quivers as if something trembles subtly beneath, setting its viscous surface to lap softly against the walls of the chamber. Only when you look closer at the walls and see the same slurry dried in long lines across their red brick do you realise that there is more here than just mud. It is a realisation that comes altogether too late.

In a violent spray the water erupts, an enormous eel-like creature thrusting towards you, its mouth a gaping maw lined with razor-sharp teeth. In a desperate attempt to avoid its attack you jump to the right and run along the length of the stone platform. It gives you just enough time to pull your weapon from its fastenings and prepare for the battle to come but in the process cuts you off from any quick exit from the chamber.

You have come face to face with a QuagWorm and it will not let you go whilst it lives. The monster has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 9 and must be killed before you can leave this chamber. Conduct this combat according to the combat rules. If you survive this encounter turn to section 76. If the QuagWorm proves too powerful and it is you that succumbs turn to section 62.



Out of the shadows the Shambler advances towards you, its dead eyes staring blankly as it shuffles awkwardly in your direction. For a moment you wait, watching the creature approach. In the gloom it is a ragged corpse, hardly identifiable as the remnants of a once living man, but even in its decaying state it remains far more dangerous than most of the denizens found in these deep places. For all intents the Shambler is already dead, animated by the residual energies of EarthMagic and damned to an endless, restless march that can end only when it falls apart and finally lies still. You think as you wait that to give it rest is a blessing you would hope others might bestow on yourself under the same circumstances.

Before this foe you do not give ground. The creature has only its hands and teeth with which to do harm but its body is its greatest strength. No amount of superficial injury will bring it down. Only the severing of its limbs and the removal of its head will see it stop its assault, and in the dark chamber you go to the task with a grim determination.

Quickly you strike at the Shambler, its flesh cutting away under the force of the blows you strike against it. In return the creature lunges, its hands grasping at your arm as it sinks its teeth into your elbow. You push it away but it keeps coming at you, only a low moan wheezing from its lips any indication that it is anything but dead flesh. Again you strike out and this time your weapon finds its mark upon the side of the creature's neck. Against this blow the Shambler staggers sideways, before dropping to its knees. Seeing an opportunity to end the combat you advance upon it, weapon held high, ready to strike at the dead man's head.

It is then that the Shambler lunges. Balanced upon its haunches it leaps at you, throwing all its weight at your chest. Caught unprepared the creature hits you squarely in the shoulder, throwing you backwards and laying you out on the hard stone floor. About you the chamber echoes to a sickening thud as your head hits bare rock, and in those few seconds of swirling vertigo and pain the Shambler sets its teeth into your neck. In one tearing bite the man severs the artery in your neck and in that moment you know that you cannot survive it. Pushing at the Shambler you throw it backwards but you do not have time to stand before blood loss turns everything about you a fading grey.

Staggering to your feet you search the chamber for any possible

avenue of escape but it is too late, the Shambler already moving with purpose towards you. Holding your throat you try and remain conscious, however there is nothing you can do. In this dark place you fall and lay still.

In this life your quest is over. In the next you will no doubt find better luck and greater success.

THE END

95

Three pits lay as a barrier before you and each must be jumped if you are to continue to the sanctum of the Well of Shadows. To cross these pits and find firm ground beyond you must test your agility three times, once for each pit. If you are successful in these three tests you have made it across and can continue on with your quest by turning to section 23a. If you fail any of these Agility tests that particular jump has been unsuccessful and you find yourself struggling to find a hold upon the smooth crystal edges of the hole, your weight pulling you down to an unwelcome doom within the abyss below. If this happens test your Strength attribute. If you are successful you pull yourself out of the hole and can continue on. Once all three pits have been crossed to may turn to section 23a. If you are unsuccessful with this test, or any further Strength test, then another fate awaits you and it can be discovered by turning to section 60.

96

For a moment you consider the roof overhead. To use a rope and grapple requires a purchase point in the curving vault above and there is an extension of stone in the intricately carved roof that will serve the purpose. Quickly you find your grapple and tie your rope to its fastening, judging the distance to the abutment of stone and guiding the metal grapple in its arc as you swing it out over the rift.

Most Dungeon Crawlers will tell you that a small collapsible grapple is an essential tool for any Brother to take into the deep ruins of the world, but it can also be said that it is not an easy one to master. Finding a secure purchase that will take the weight of both man and equipment requires knowledge and experience, and the capacity to swing the grapple where it must go a skill that takes considerable

practice. As you swing the grapple up into the vault overhead you are glad that you are alone, for it takes some time to get it right.

Over and over you swing the grapple out and then up into the vaulted stone, attempting to gain a hold on the roof that will prove secure. Each time the grapple falls, and with each attempt the water about your ankles grows deeper and faster in its flow. Eventually however, you find the purchase you require and pull hard upon the rope. Satisfied that it will hold your weight you throw your equipment across and then swing over yourself.

For all the difficulty in seating the grapple the traverse proves straightforward and in one even arc you make the other side of the crack. Once upon drier ground you retrieve your equipment and then look to where you should now go.

From this side of the rift you now have two options as to where you might go. The southern exit is the larger and can be entered by turning to section 59. The eastern exit is also now available, and if you have not previously done so can be entered by turning to section 74. You also have the choice here of either leaving the rope and grapple in place, ready for your return, or taking it down in case you need it again. If you decide to leave it here record this on your character sheet in the notes section and remove it from your equipment list.

97

Carefully you move into this new chamber and come to a halt. The room is bare, but the eastern wall is adorned with a large carved relief that covers the entire surface. A quick survey shows that it is an original mural relief, left uncovered from the main chamber and not bricked over when the Hordim constructed the maze within. Its exquisite carving portrays the Well of Shadows within a small circular room and it is so precise you feel you could walk directly into it. For a moment you look at the carved mural and wonder at its detail, however you have to admit that it is not exactly what you expected. In all truth it appears to be similar to any water well you might find in the world, but the chamber within which it resides is spectacular. Of what you can see the walls of the well's chamber are adorned in a flowing mural of a vast waterfall system, and even in the silence of the maze you can almost hear the low rumble of rushing waters building about you.

Although you have never been there you recognise the series of cascades and spills as a landmark of Northern Kalborea known as the Faels. Much legend is centred about these impressive falls and you have seen a number of drawings of them in your long years of research. Why they might be represented here you do not know, but as you look closer at the carving itself you begin to see a familiar pattern emerging within the falling waters. It is a pattern that you recognise as words of the Elder Tongue and as you identify each you scrawl them in the dust at your feet. When you think you have found them all you stand back and look at what you have discovered. The words lay upon the ground thus:

:ve'feor a' alle mar'shuil cem y'nethul:

For a moment you ponder what they mean. The message has been cunningly concealed within the waters of the Faels in the ancient language of Haer'al, and it is a language for which you have only a limited vocabulary. The first word definitely means “offer” and the last you think translates as “given”. What lies between you cannot divine. It seems however, that the concealment of such a message must be of importance in some way to the purpose of the Well of Shadows. What that purpose might be you cannot tell, but you decide to commit the words to memory anyway and then turn to the exits that can be found within the chamber. There are three, one in the northern wall, one in the western wall and another in the southern wall.

Write the codeword “ve'feor” into the codewords section of your character sheet before you consider which of the doors you should take. All three exits are unlocked and all are available to leave this chamber. You note in your consideration of the different doors that the southern door has a small cross scratched into its keystone. It does appear that it was worked into the stone some time ago.

If you wish to go north turn to section 65. If you wish to go west turn to section 15. If you see greater opportunity in going south turn to section 45. Before doing so however, take the time to write the words you have discovered, “ve'feor a' alle mar'shuil cem y'nethul” onto the notes section of your character sheet. They may prove of value later.

There is an understanding amongst the Brethren of the Deep Guild that a Dungeon Crawler's best defence is the gut feeling that tells him when something is wrong. As you stand within the shadows of this ruin and look about this desolate chamber you know that in the gloom before you something is watching, and as you raise your torch to get a better view that gut feeling is telling you to get ready. It is a feeling that proves once again altogether correct.

From the shadows ahead a huge Mantis Beast lumbers forward, the enormous insect-like monster scrabbling upon long and impossibly thin legs towards you, its grasping forearms coiled and ready to take a hold upon your flesh. For just a heartbeat you hesitate as you size up what now confronts you, the Mantis a vision of armoured and ruthless efficiency that stares blankly at you through large, compound eyes. Your hesitation however, lasts only long enough for you to jam your torch into a crack in the floor and take up your weapon. This beast is going to require both hands.

Amongst the flickering shadows you swing at the monster, your weapon flashing in the indeterminate light, its arc cutting a glimmering trail between yourself and the Mantis. Coming to a halt the insect rears upon its remaining legs, reaching out towards you with its spiked forearms, trying to gain a purchase upon flesh. Instinctively you sidestep the strike and return the favour, slicing down upon the Mantis' thorax, cutting through its retracted wing and deep into its vital organs.

With a shudder the monster staggers sideways, its forearms flailing wildly in its agonies. You strike out again but do not appreciate the reach the Mantis can muster and you feel the sting of its jagged forearm raking down your side. Immediately your clothes run sodden with blood and for a moment you retreat, pulling your shirt tightly about you in an attempt to stem the flow. In the gloom you cannot see how badly you have been injured though there is little time to do anything about it even if you could.

Smelling the blood the Mantis advances, a green oozing liquid trailing it upon the cold stones as it moves purposefully towards you. With nowhere to go you stand your ground and swing your weapon with all the strength left to you. Against its armoured body you hear a sickening thud and see again a spray of thick liquid, but it is not enough to stop the advance of the monstrous insect.

Shrugging aside your attack the Mantis rears again and then slices

down with its lethal forearms, a long, razor-sharp spike digging deep into your shoulder as another hits you in the side. Mortally wounded you struggle to free yourself from the creature but there is little you can do. Before you can escape the insect raises you from the ground and bites deeply into your neck. In a gushing spray blood spatters about the chamber and you feel yourself drifting into a darkness from which you will not return. In this life your quest is over, the Mantis too powerful a foe to overcome. It must now be to a latter life that you will have to look for better luck and greater success.

THE END

99

The left archway seems as good an option as any other and with your weapon in hand you move carefully through its dark opening. What you find beyond is a short corridor that extends into the south, roughly faced in a mixture of broken stone and a crude red brick, and possessing in its walls a multitude of fractures from which trickles a steady stream of muddied water. For a moment you hesitate, listening to the stone about you for any sign that it might be unstable. What you hear instead is the unmistakable sound of water collecting somewhere ahead and the increasing possibility that the rains may have found their way into the deep ruin after all.

With torch held high you move forward and find another archway, this one being the threshold to a large shadowed chamber beyond. Carefully you peer through this new arch and find a roughly square chamber more than fifteen metres on a side. At your feet water flows freely through the open archway, cascading down a short set of stairs before collecting ankle deep in a rapidly rising pool of dark liquid. At the centre of this pool you can see water draining away through a circular hole in the floor.

If you wish to enter this chamber turn to section 12. If you believe there may be greater value in retracing your steps and trying the right archway instead, turn to section 17. If this is your choice it takes only a few minutes to return northwards and stand before the western archway.



100

The Well of Shadows

The Eqkril lumbers over the lip of the cliff-face and then crowds the eastern edge of the landing. The monstrous lizard is enormous and for just a moment it pauses, licking its teeth and sizing up what it assumes will be its next meal. For your part you stand your ground and ready yourself for the fight to come.

It is the Eqkril that moves first, charging at you in a murderous rush before coming to a halt only a few metres from where you stand. It is trying to intimidate you and it is succeeding, but there is nowhere you can go so you take a firmer grip upon your weapon and strike out yourself, swinging it in a tight arc to keep the beast at arm's length. The Eqkril knows it has the advantage and in the confined area of the landing rushes forward again, using its bulk to try and force you back against the cliff-face. It is a test of strength that you cannot win and it pushes you backwards towards the cliff. Using all the strength you can muster you are able to keep the monster's head from your chest but you hit the solid stone with a bone-jarring thud, the lizard retreating to free itself of your grasp before snapping at you repeatedly with its razor-sharp teeth.

Against this attack you thrust your weapon into the monster's lower jaw, drawing blood and forcing it to recoil. It is only a short reprieve before the Eqkril rushes you again but this time it veers sideways as it swings its long armoured tail, sweeping the ground towards you. To avoid the attack you jump, its thick tail scraping across the sole of your boots as you vault over the animal. Landing on the other side of its enormous body you see an opportunity and bring your weapon down upon its exposed flesh. Hard iron bites deep, a wide gash appearing down the side of the Eqkril, blood spilling from the wound, flooding the grass with a viscous green fluid. Recoiling in pain the lizard sidesteps your next blow and backs away, hissing its contempt as it bends its body in an attempt at containing the seeping injury.

In this moment of hesitation you act, rushing the beast and bringing your weapon down hard upon its neck. Again you strike home, the Eqkril cut deeply, its life-blood gushing from torn flesh. Sensing that victory may well be yours you advance again upon the creature, your intent to finish the battle as cleanly as you can. The Eqkril however, has other ideas.

Before you raise your weapon again the giant lizard lunges

forward, swiping at you with a razor-sharp claw. This strike you retreat from, its talons raking the air in front of you. In that moment the lizard turns its head away, again sweeping its tail through the air, and this time it takes you by surprise. In a sickening impact the armoured end of the Eqkril slams into your chest, throwing you to the ground and spinning you towards the cliff's edge. It is only the presence of mind that has saved you many times in the past that keeps you from disaster. Before you can topple to an unwelcome doom you dig your weapon's hilt into the wet earth and come to a sliding halt.

The Eqkril sees its chance and lumbers after you but it has been badly injured and can only hope to push you off the cliff. You see its intent and stand firm before it. When the lizard is within range you raise your weapon and smash it down upon the creature's head, burying metal deep within the Eqkril's brain. In a shuddering spasm the beast slumps to ground and then slides on wet grass over the lip of the cliff, falling out of sight into the chasm far below.

Jumping out of the way you watch as the enormous animal disappears and then clamber to the edge of the landing. Beneath you there is no sign of the Eqkril or your weapon for that matter, and it is as you stand that you feel a pressure like strong arms squeezing your ribcage. The monster's tail has caught you squarely across your chest and as you struggle for breath you attempt to ascertain the damage. Wincing in pain you can feel at least one broken rib and a cracked collar-bone for good measure, however there is no blood and for that you thank the Fates.

With a dull ache spreading across your upper body you get awkwardly to your feet and look out upon the mountains around you. Whatever the purpose for calling the lizard its Master must still be out there watching.

"Come on then," you yell hoarsely out towards the Faels, "Your lizard wasn't up for it so what's next?"

In response you hear only the thunder of the falls and the first hints of a rising wind against the mountain-sides around you. There is however, a change in the air and it causes you to turn on your heel, back towards the rockface behind you. What you find is a surprise to say the least.

Standing inset into the stone cliff is an archway, carved in black crystal and burning with a blue aura that crackles and spits with power. Before this apparition you stand hesitant. You can feel its

energy lifting the hairs on your arms and in the air itself there arises a palpable presence of EarthMagic raw and unfettered. You have no doubt that there is something truly powerful here, and as you consider whether you should enter a dozen possible ways that you might die flicker through your thoughts.

It is a moment of indecision that does not last long however. You have nowhere to go and with your ribs lancing pain through your body you approach the archway and step over its threshold. What you find in the shadows beyond is a long corridor, and sensing that your quest may soon be over you follow it deep into the stone of the mountain.

In the cool half-light of the passageway you do not need a torch. The walls are fashioned with a slick, black stone that shimmers with a soft yellowish light and in that low illumination you can see well enough to move forward. The corridor is narrow and possesses a simple vaulted ceiling that rises high overhead. All the surfaces here are made of the same dark material and in the confines of the passageway you are glad that there is a light available for you to find your way.

With your chest aching you stumble along the passageway, using the smooth walls to keep yourself upright as you make for its end. Placing one hand upon the wall you see your image mirrored upon the polished stone and for a moment you ponder the state of the person you see reflected there. Battered and beaten you look a sight, your right arm hanging at your side as you wonder on what might be the ultimate cost of your mission. It is in that moment of personal reflection however, that you see something else.

Encased within the stone is a figure, probably a Hresh but submerged so far into what you now realise is a clear crystalline material that the Hordim is no more than a blur in the distance. Placing your face against the glass-like stone you look deeper and it is then that you see a multitude of warriors, all somehow embraced within the stone and all posed as if they are struggling against some powerful wind. All are however, frozen in place, their struggle a tableau of physical exertion and torment.

It is a curious and surprising discovery and something you find replicated all along both sides of the passageway. It is not however, only Hresh you find within the stone. Along its length you discover dozens of giant Jotun, hundreds of Hresh and Mutan and twice as many again of emaciated Morg. In their multitude they are captured

within the crystalline walls and in their struggle are facing down the reach of the passage as if they are trying to make for its end.

Moving carefully along you wonder at the purpose of their entombment. You cannot tell if they are real Hordim or just carved representations somehow placed within. It is a scenario that appears to have no true purpose but as you peer into the dark crystal walls you draw a sharp breath when see one of the figures move.

It is no more than a slight movement of a foot but it is enough to bring you to a halt and peer all the keener into the shadowed walls. Sure enough it happens again but this time by one of the other Hordim in the macabre parade. Before you can turn your eyes aside you see those small imperceptible movements amongst all the figures within and it is then that you realise that all the Hordim are alive.

Drawing back from the wall you cannot see how it might be so. They pose no threat as they are wholly enclosed within the stone but in the gloom of the passageway you suddenly feel very exposed. There is a great power at work here and you do not understand its purpose. You resolve to find the *neyus'dreyelim* and then leave this place as quickly as you can.

The corridor extends for some distance, and when you find its end you emerge into a circular chamber that is not unfamiliar for you have seen it before. In the centre of the room is a very ordinary looking well, constructed of stone and formed to match the shape of the chamber itself. The walls surrounding the well are carved with images of water scenes of which great falls and wild rivers dominate the landscapes, and overhead there is an intricate representation of a forest canopy covering a high domed roof. In all its detail this is the sanctum of the Well of Shadows as you found it upon the walls of the Hordim proving ground and in that brief flickering moment before you were transported to the Faels. What rests in the air above the well however, is not so ordinary.

Floating in the air above the stone well is a sphere of dark fluid, as wide as the well beneath it and veiled within a swirling fog of rushing shadows. For a moment you stand transfixed. You recognise immediately the shadows for they are Dreyadim and in the world of Arborell there can be found nothing more mysterious. Although you know little of their nature it is rumoured that they are Pain Shadows, the remnants of Hordim that have been deemed unfit to find peace in the Afterlife and have been doomed to an eternal existence as servants of the Dark Tree, the Dreya. You have heard also that the

very proximity of such a wraith can draw the life itself from a man and in the face of such danger you quietly retreat.

Carefully you begin to step backwards from the chamber. About the dark sphere the shadows circle in a tight orbit, a multitude of Dreyadim forming a cloak of swirling mist that exudes a tangible presence of malice. It is strange however, for you do not sense that malice directed at yourself. It is as if it is simply what the Pain Shadows are.

Before you can retreat fully from the chamber a voice whispers out of the sphere and it holds you firmly at the threshold.

“You stand before the *neyus'dreyelim*, Brother of the Deep Guild. What is it you seek here that you cannot find in the World Outside?”

Standing straighter you answer the voice. “I come seeking knowledge that I believe only you can give. I come with a wish to know the whereabouts of the Orncryst of the Trell'sara.”

For a moment the voice is silent, then it answers. “What you ask is indeed a worthy question Brother, one for which I do have the answer. What is it that you would barter for this great boon?”

And that was the problem. Most of your equipment had been lost upon the landing outside and you have nothing of value that you can give. Then you remember the talisman at your neck.

“I would barter a Sharyah of the Ancient World for the answers I seek.”

The sphere quivers slightly as if it has been disturbed by an unseen hand then begins to spin, accelerating upon its axis.

“The Sharyah you offer is unequal to the prize requested. Do you have anything else?”

You stand before the Well of Shadows and raise your arms as far as the pain will allow. “I have nothing more. My worth is what you see.”

About you the chamber darkens as the sphere rises upon its misty shadows and moves forward towards your position. There is an aura of power radiating from it that causes you to turn your head aside for fear of its wrath.

“Would you give your life for the knowledge you seek, Brother?”

You turn towards the black orb and shake your head. “No, for I see no purpose in securing knowledge only to die before it can be tested.”

“Then you give me no choice Brother. The Three Powers require that I give you the answer you seek but I must have my payment or your boon will prove meaningless.”

The shadowed sphere pulls back and from its veiled surface a

dozen Dreyadim detach from the roiling mist. Each stands as tall as yourself but they are no more than smoke, twisting in place as you wait for the death that you are sure they must deliver upon you. To your surprise it does not come.

Instead most of the wraiths withdraw, only one of the twisting forms remaining before you. The sphere again draws close, its wild energy crackling in the stale atmosphere of the chamber. Before you can react the wraith rushes at you, its diaphanous mist enveloping your body before disappearing within you.

“What have you done?” you cry out. “Get that thing out of me!”

The sphere does not answer immediately, instead it returns to its position above the well. “Do not be alarmed, Brother. The Dreyadim has no mind of its own nor does it harbour malicious intent towards you. It has a mission to perform and the cost of the answer I shall give you is that you shall carry it into the World Outside.”

“And what if I refuse?” you shout angrily. “What if I wish no part of this abomination?”

The Well of Shadows does not answer you immediately. Instead it draws the remaining Dreyadim within itself and then speaks again.

“Many Beings have stood before me in this sanctum, Brother of the Deep Guild, and all have asked for the same thing. They wish knowledge of secrets that have eluded them in the World Outside. All ask and all pay the same price. In all the millennia of service that I have given to the Three Powers I have never left this chamber yet those that stand in anticipation of the knowledge they seek assume that such knowledge is easily won. It is not.”

“The Dreyadim within you has no need to control your thoughts or actions, nor any malicious requirement to lessen the value of the life you will live from this point forward. It is nothing more than a pair of eyes that will see all that you see, experience all that you experience and discover all that you will discover. Its task until the end of your days will be to report everything to me. It is my duty to draw all that is learned together and maintain that knowledge for the Powers that I serve. You must understand Brother, that my task is not to reside here as a Giver of Knowledge. I am an Inquisitor, my purpose to make sense of all that transpires in the world. In essence Brother, you are now an agent of the Well of Shadows and that is the price you must pay for the knowledge I will give you.”

Aghast at the thought of the Dreyadim residing within you struggle against the hold the voice has over you.

“I want nothing of this. What gives you the right to take so much from any Being?”

The black orb remains on station above the well but you can sense that it cares nothing for your protestations. You sense also that what it has done is not all it is going to do to you.

“Know this, Brother. When you leave this sanctum you will forget all that has transpired here except for the answer to your question and the fact that your barter was accepted. The Dreyadim will remain hidden. All that you will notice of its presence will be an infrequent twinge across your shoulders that will give you no more than passing concern.”

“When you return to the World Outside you will not remember anything but fragments of your journey through the halls of Allas'nerig. The wounds that you have sustained will be healed for you, any memory of the encounters you have had within the confines of the Taalestry erased. When those who wish to know what happened to you in the deep ruins ask, you will shrug your shoulders and claim that a blow to the head has robbed you of your memories. All that will remain will be the knowledge that the Orncryst of the Trell'sara can be found within the third subterranean level of the ruins of Traebor'nar'dorum. It is there Brother, within Traebor's most ancient of temples that the Dragonclaw has been hidden. If truly it is what you seek then it will be there that you will find it.”

You try to protest but the Well gives you no further opportunity. In a blinding flash of light your sojourn within the Well's sanctum ends and all about you falls quickly into darkness.



When you awaken you are lying upon cold stone. About you the floor is wet, the echoing drips of rainwater leaking from overhead a steady rhythm that only serves to reinforce the certainty that you have no idea where you are. With your eyes fixed upon a stone ceiling overhead you dare not move for your head swirls within a relentless vertigo, your senses reeling from some shock that has completely overwhelmed you. You can do nothing but wait for the sensation to

fall away, and when it does it leaves you barely able to raise your head.

Looking up you see that you have fallen within the entrance hall to Allas'nerig and for a moment you cannot remember how you got there. A noise over your left shoulder compels you to lift your head and it is then that you see your Eqkril tied to one of the great arches beyond the Entranceway. Tentatively you move your arms and then rub your eyes. Pulling yourself up you steady yourself and try and remember what has happened, but a sharp pain across your temple gives you good reason to assume that you have struck your head.

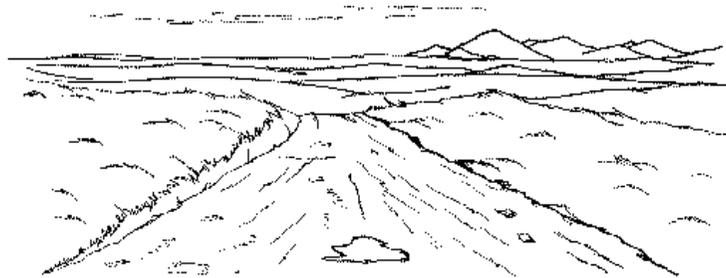
Getting to your feet you look around. Thankfully the rainstorm that had dogged your travels to Allas'nerig has ended and through the arched entrance you can see upon the plains outside pools of standing water, within which there is mirrored a clear reflection of a cloudless morning sky. Stiff and cold you make for your Eqkril and inspect the animal for any injury. Its wait seems to have passed without incident, and thanking Providence that you will not have to walk back to Das Vallendor you prepare to leave.

There is however, much to do and a long way to travel if you are to take the knowledge you have gained back to the Guild. Quickly you discover that you have lost all the equipment you took into the ruins, all that you can find is the travel gear you left with your mount. For a moment you try and remember where you left your weapon but you can only assume that the blow to your head has taken the memory from you. In the quiet of the morning you can see no point in searching for it and instead conduct a quick stock-take of your remaining gear. Carefully you check your food stocks and ensure you have your tent and cooking gear intact. Luckily there are enough rations remaining in the Eqkril's harness bags to make it across the Coldarai to the Guild Outpost at Baalmak. From there you can re-provision for the journey to Das Vallendor.

As you prepare your mount you look back towards the dark interior of the temple-dome and in that moment your thoughts become confused. The darkness brings forth a strange void in your memories as if something important had happened within and the knowledge of it had subsequently been lost to you. It is a disconcerting feeling and no matter the effort you apply to recovering the memory you cannot draw it out. In the end you decide it does not matter, for you know where the Orncryst resides and that is all that remains important.

Determined to begin your quest for the Orncryst as quickly as possible you prepare for your journey back to the Guild and the high walls of Das Vallendor. With all your travel gear securely packed you climb onto the Eqkril. The lizard shifts uneasily beneath you but you do not chastise the beast. As you adjust your seating there comes a sharp pain across your shoulders, one that recedes quickly as an ebbing throb against the side of your neck. Rubbing at the offending muscles you command your mount to rise, and as it finds its feet you resolve that if the ache persists you will have a Healer in Das Vallendor take a look at it.

THE END



Encounter List

To determine what confronts you roll 2d6 then look to the corresponding number listed below.



Please note that each of these creatures can only be encountered once in each attempt at finding the Well of Shadows. If you roll the same number as a previous encounter, roll again until you are confronted by a new opponent. Please note also that flashcharges can be used during any of these encounters, however the use of these explosive devices will not be reflected in the combat descriptions given in the text.



2. No Encounter

You could have sworn that there was something ahead, but no attack comes. In the distance you hear the shifting of stone and the muffled clatter of rocks as they fall from some high place. You can only surmise that it is the falsity of echoes, and the oppressive darkness that has put you on edge. Without any further hesitation you move on...

Return to the section you are currently playing and continue your quest. There is nothing here.

3. Shambler

Combat value: 13
 Endurance: 20
 Aversions: None
 Special rules: +1 to player CV for all attacks with axe.
 Difficulty modifiers: Minor blows that cause only 1 point of damage have no effect on creature EP.

It is not only the spectral remains of the Oera'dim that find themselves drawn to the deep ruins. There have been many Men, including Brethren of the Deep Guild, that have found death in the dark halls of this delving. Unlike the Hordim however, death finds Men who have tarried too long below ground caught within a twilight

world, one where they can only linger in a state of mindless decay. Such Men are known as Shamblers, and have proven just as aggressive as any other denizen of these ruins.

As they are already dead and feel no pain or fatigue, they must literally be cut to pieces before they will end an attack. Because of this, minor wounds have no effect on creature endurance points. Only a blow of 4 endurance points will bring you closer to winning combat. Within the Deep Guild such creatures are considered the hardest to overcome as they take a great deal of energy to subdue.

If you have to fight, you will find Shamblers are a persistent foe and one that you should avoid if you can.

Unfortunately you cannot avoid combat with this Shambler. If you are successful in this confrontation using any weapon other than a warhammer go to section 61. If you use a warhammer to defeat this foe turn to section 33. If it is the Shambler that proves victorious then turn to section 94.

4. Needle Flies

Combat value:	13
Endurance:	14
Aversions:	Lightstone, Shieldstone, Forcestone
Special rules:	-1 to player CV for every combat round lost
Difficulty modifiers:	+1 to creature CV if fought in small rooms and passageways.

In the light of day a traveller of the wilds of Arborell will never encounter Needle Flies, but for those who must delve deep into the ruins of the Ancients these flying predators are a constant threat. Found in swarms of hundreds these fist-sized insects attack any creature unlucky enough to cross their path. Equipped with a long needle-like proboscis they stab at their victims, injecting a quick working toxin that rapidly overwhelms them. If you must fight your way through such a swarm any lost combat round will result in a 1 point reduction in your CV. If you survive the fight the reduction in CV will apply until you can either use a Healing Stick upon yourself or your quest ends.

Needle Flies have aversions to Light, Shield and Force stones. The creature aversion rules apply as usual to Light stones, but if you have a Shield or Force stone you may use it to keep the swarm at bay. If

you have such a talisman in your possession you can attempt to activate it by taking an Intuition test. If you are successful you repel the swarm and find your way out of the room or passage without harm. If you are unsuccessful you will be forced to fight.

If you have a Lightstone and wish to use it against these insects turn to section 53. If you possess either a Shield or Force Stone and have made a successful Intuition test turn to section 78. If you are either unsuccessful in the use of your Sharyah, or you wish to fight the Needle Flies and are victorious turn to section 66. If it is the Needle Flies that overwhelms you however, turn to section 3.

5. No Encounter

You could have sworn that there was something ahead, but no attack comes. In the distance you hear the shifting of stone and the muffled clatter of rocks as they fall from some high place. You can only surmise that it is the falsity of echoes, and the oppressive darkness that has put you on edge. Without any further hesitation you move on...

Return to the section you are currently playing and move on. There is nothing here.

6. Oer'daaki Roots

Combat value:	14
Endurance:	30
Aversions:	None
Special rules:	+3 to all player attacks if using axe
Difficulty modifiers:	Oer'daaki roots only attack if disturbed. See below for special encounter rules

The Oer'daaki are huge vine-like entanglements that spread over wide areas of swampland or deep temple ruins. In taking root they force powerful tendrils deep into the earth, and in doing so sometimes reach hundreds of metres below ground. The roots of the Oer'daaki are strong, prehensile limbs that reach out for any sustenance that might be found in the deep ruins. It is best that they be avoided if possible.

Oer'daaki have no aversions but are particularly susceptible to axe blows. If these roots are encountered they will only attack if

disturbed. If you choose to try and pass beyond their tangle test your Luck attribute first. If you are successful they have not been disturbed and you may continue on your way. If you fail the test the roots will strike out for you, and only a fight will see you free of them.

Test your Luck attribute. If you are lucky you can move beyond the root tangle. Return to the section where this encounter was initiated and consider your options. If you are unlucky then you will have to fight your way through. In this encounter you can choose to fight with an axe if you have one. As per the creature information this will provide a +3 to your CV for the duration of the combat.

If you are victorious in this encounter with any other weapon other than an axe turn to section 24. If you are victorious in this encounter and used as axe turn to section 46. If you find the killer plant too powerful and it is you that fails, turn to section 83.

7. Shambler

Combat value:	15
Endurance:	16
Aversions:	None
Special rules:	+1 to player CV for all attacks with axe.
Difficulty modifiers:	Minor blows that cause only 1 point of damage have no effect on creature EP.

It is not only the spectral remains of the Oera'dim that find themselves drawn to the deep ruins. There have been many Men, including Brethren of the Deep Guild, that have found an unforeseen death in the dark halls of this delving. Unlike the Hordim however, death finds Men who have tarried too long below ground caught within a twilight world, one where they can only linger in a state of mindless decay. Such Men are known as Shamblers, and have proven just as aggressive as any other denizen of these ruins.

As they are already dead and feel no pain or fatigue, they must literally be cut to pieces before they will end an attack. Because of this, minor wounds have no effect on creature endurance points. Only a blow of 4 endurance points will bring you closer to winning combat. Within the Deep Guild such creatures are considered the hardest to overcome as they take a great deal of energy to subdue.

Unfortunately you cannot avoid combat with the Shambler that

now moves towards you. If you are successful in this confrontation using any weapon other than a warhammer go to section 86. If you use a warhammer to defeat this foe turn to section 10. If it is the Shambler that proves victorious then turn to section 41.

8. Mantis Beast

Combat value:	15
Endurance:	18
Aversions:	Callingstone
Special rules:	+1 to player CV if fought with warhammer.
Difficulty modifiers:	None

It is not only the spectral remains of the Oera'dim that find their way into the dark halls of Allas'nerig. Many creatures become lost in the deep ruins, and once there are altered by the proximity of EarthMagic. The Mantis Beast is one such creature. It is believed that these gargantuan insects scavenge the corridors and chambers of ancient ruins, and are not averse to killing anything that may provide a satisfying meal. Most can grow to more than four metres in length and develop an especially colourful, and thick, exoskeleton. The armour plates that can be taken from the body of these creatures are highly prized by the Oera'dim, and are considered valuable as personal adornment.

The Mantis Beast has a striking aversion to the Callingstone. If you have one in your possession and are successful in using it, the Beast will retreat to a distance but then follow you for as long as it remains unmolested. The advantage to having a Mantis Beast in tow is that during the next combat you fight the Mantis will instinctively defend the Callingstone. For the duration of that combat the Player's CV will be increased by 5 points. The Mantis will however, make a hasty retreat after the fight is done, and the insect will not be seen again.

If you do not have a Callingstone you will have no course but to fight the monster. Conduct the contest according to the rules of combat then turn to section 16 if you are successful. If you are not successful and it is the Mantis that prevails turn to section 98.

9. Shondalak

Combat value:	15
Endurance:	15
Aversions:	None
Special rules:	+1 for player CV if fought with spear.
Difficulty modifiers:	None

The Shondalak is the most powerful natural predator that can be encountered in any of the ruins of Arborell. Unlike all other creatures it is immune to the powers of EarthMagic and is a formidable opponent. These creatures are bear-like animals that stand between two to three metres at the shoulder. Possessed of pure black hairy coverings, and remarkably tough armoured shoulders and neck, they attack their prey with a set of long razor-sharp claws that retract into thick muscular paws. It is considered by most that they are also intelligent and highly cunning. More than one of your Brethren has been ambushed by a Shondalak and few have lived to tell the tale.

The Shondalak has no creature aversions but is vulnerable to attacks made with spears.

Conduct this encounter according to the rules of combat. If you are successful and it is the Shondalak that falls turn to section 14. If it is the Shondalak that prevails turn to section 91.

10. Molgoth

Combat value:	16
Endurance:	14
Aversions:	Lightstone
Special rules:	+1 to player CV if fought with spear of any type. +1 to player CV for all attacks with axe.
Difficulty modifiers:	-1 to creature CV if fought in small room or passageway.

The Molgoth is a bat-like monstrosity that finds its home in all the dark places of the world. Most Molgoth found below ground measure a wing-span of less than 6 metres, but there are some that can grow to more than 30 metres. Luckily for you the one you have found is not nearly that big. With a wing-span of 6 metres, and standing 2 metres tall it is a formidable opponent, one that you should consider carefully

before fighting.

As a natural denizen of the deep ruins, the Molgoth has an aversion to Light stones. Properly activated this talisman will send any Molgoth scurrying for its dark lair. The choice is yours however. You may make use of the right Sharyah if you have it, or you can stand your ground and fight.

If you have a Light stone and wish to use it turn to section 19. It requires no intuition test to activate you need only say its name. If you do not have a Light stone you will have no choice but to fight. Conduct the contest according to the combat rules. If you are successful turn to section 43. If it is the Molgoth that prevails turn to section 85.

11. Morg (Dreya'dim Swarm)

Combat value:	13
Endurance:	10
Aversions:	Lightstone
Special rules:	Spirit creature. +1 to player CV if holding a Sharyah of any type
Difficulty modifiers:	Highly aggressive entity. +1 to creature CV if fought in small room or passageway.

In the world above the Morg of the Horde are known for their small, emaciated bodies and their ruthless cruelty. It is said that any creature who strays into their path can look forward to a long, tortured death. In the deep ruins of Arborell it is not the Morg however, but their entrapped spirit forms that will be encountered, and they are every bit as cruel in death as they are in life. Any creature of the Horde that does not find its way to the Underworld is inevitably caught by the power of the Dreya Tree and becomes a Dreya'dim. The Morg of the Dreya'dim Swarm are drawn to the sources of EarthMagic that can be found below ground, and when they are close enough take on a physical form similar to that they have in life, but grotesquely twisted and aggressive in nature. Once seen by a Dreya'dim Morg a player cannot readily escape them.

They are however, vulnerable to all normal weapons, and can be repelled by Lightstones if you have one in your possession. In this dark place the choice is yours. You may attempt to force the Dreya'dim away with a Sharyah if you have one, or stand your ground and fight.

The spectral Morg is a vicious foe even though it may possess neither great stature, nor great strength. If you have a Lightstone in your possession you may use it to repel the Dreya'dim and keep it at bay. In this instance you will not need to activate either Sharyah as the presence of the talisman alone will keep the Morg at a distance. Continue with your mission and try and disregard the creature for it will continue to follow you, but will never get close enough to cause you harm.

If however, you do not wish to have a Dreya'dim Morg following you through the halls of this ruin, or you do not have one of the necessary Sharyah, then you must kill the Morg whilst it remains in its mortal form and send it back to its ancestors. If this is the case conduct the battle according to the rules of combat. If you are successful turn to section 21. If it is the Morg that prevails turn to section 71.

12. Arachnari Scout

Combat value:	17
Endurance:	18
Aversions:	Shieldstone
Special rules:	-1 to player CV if fought with short sword or dagger
Difficulty modifiers:	None

There is nothing more terrifying in the ruins of Arborell than to encounter an Arachnari foraging for food. These powerful spider-like creatures live in vast Hives but regularly leave to search the tunnels and halls for food, whether it be carrion or the living.

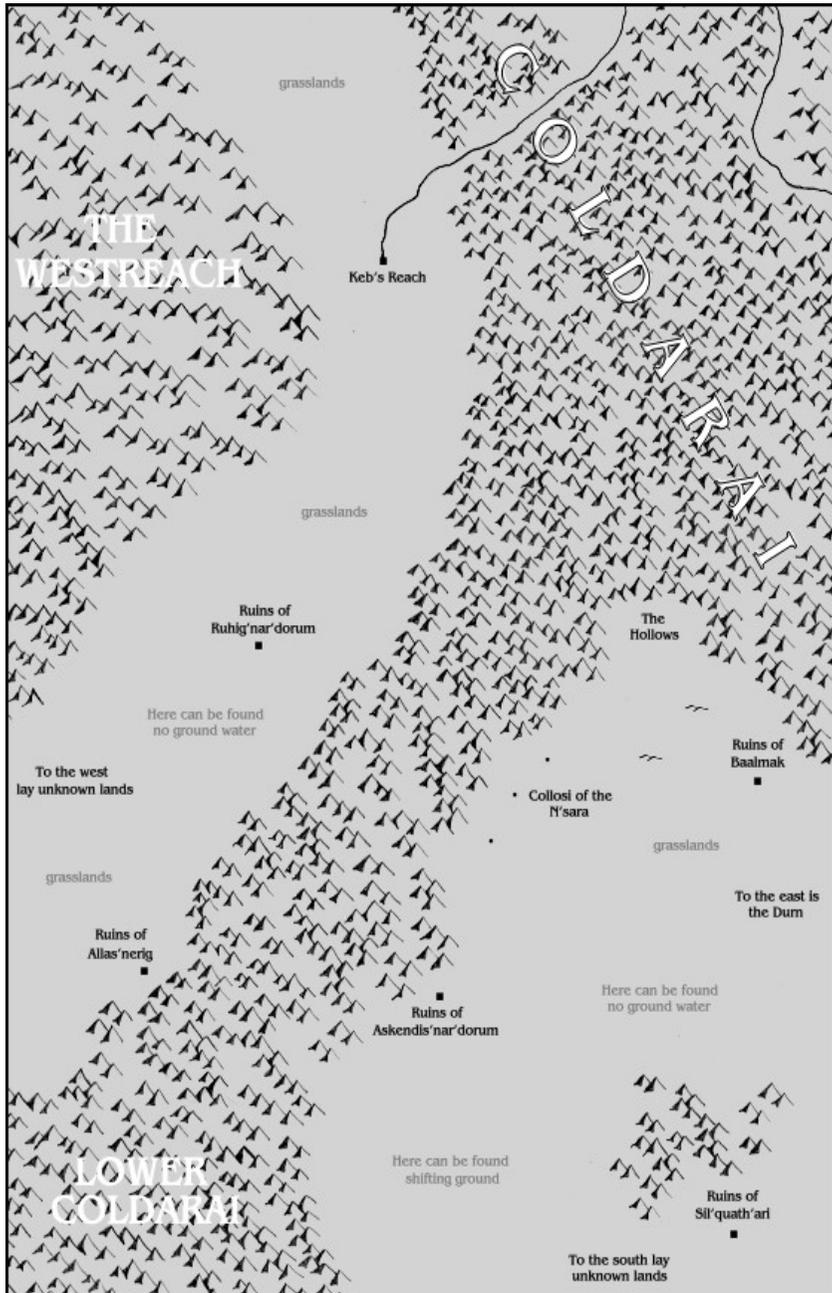
An Arachnari Scout is a difficult adversary at any time. Measuring some 2 metres in length the Arachnari have no fear of the dark, nor any hesitation in attacking any Dungeon Crawler they may find in the deep ruins of Allas'nerig. If possible they are a creature better avoided. Avoiding them can be difficult though, these huge Arachnids guard their territory fiercely and will pursue you whilst you remain within it.

Arachnari have an aversion to Shieldstones and it is an advantage that should be pressed by any Brother of the Guild that might possess one. Before any combat with such an opponent apply the creature aversion rules. If you are lucky the Arachnari will retreat of its own accord. If not you will have to kill it.

If you have a Shieldstone in your possession and wish to use it against the Arachnari make an Intuition test. If you are successful the monster will back out of the chamber and leave you alone. If this is the case return to the section you are playing and continue with your quest.

If you do not have a sharyah'durien or you are too foolish not to use it then you must fight the Arachnari and kill it. Conduct the fight according to combat resolution rules. If you are successful turn to section 37. If it is the Arachnari Scout that prevails then turn to section 89.

A Map of the Environs of the Coldarai
including Allas'nerig



Notes

The Way to Allas'nerig

A text description of the landscape between Das Vallendor and the temple complex of Allas'nerig, and how a traveller might find safe passage between them.

For any traveller wishing to journey the great distance between the port city of Das Vallendor and the temples of Allas'nerig it is important to understand the nature of the landscape that lies between them, and their relative positions upon the larger map of Arborell. It should be noted at the start that both Das Vallendor and Allas'nerig reside at the southern borders of the dominion of Men, and that there is very little that is known of the lands that lay beyond them. What follows here is a description of how a traveller might find a safe passage between them.

It is recorded within the Library of the Administrators Guild that the first settlement at Vallendor began in the Year of Settlement 188. Commenced as a penal colony upon the shores of Elesmenedene it quickly grew into a trading port, and then as a way-station for those travelling into the far southern regions beyond Kalborea. Since those early days Das Vallendor has grown from humble origins into a major trading centre, one that resides upon the north-western edges of the Waters of Elesmenedene, the largest fresh water lake in Arborell and the southern geographical boundary of the Kalborean Union. Beyond this vast inland sea can be found the forests of the Southern Malleron to the south and east, the waterless grass-plains of the Durn further to the south and the Homelands of the NomDruse to the south-east.

The city of Das Vallendor is itself divided into two separate precincts, one a fortified plateau known as the High Roln, the other known as the Lower City. It is within the Lower City that the Guild Houses of the Deep Guild can be found as well as the Great Library and the Tower Keep. For any Dungeon Crawler departing for the wild regions of southern Arborell their journey must begin at the Tower Keep.

It is from the docks connected to the Tower Keep that a traveller will take ship and travel south across Elesmenedene. Two days upon the water will bring a traveller to the southern shores of the lake and to a small Guild outpost set within the forests of the Southern Malleron that crowd the lake's southern and eastern borders. From this outpost a traveller must then journey further south, by foot along

the western edges of the forests and once clear of their shadows turn south-west, paralleling the great curve of the Coldarai mountains and thence directly west to the ruins of Baalmak.

It is at Baalmak that a traveller will find a further outpost of the Guild and the necessary provisions and transport needed to pass westwards into the wildlands. Situated upon the northern edges of the Durn, Baalmak is the last opportunity to take water before crossing the Lower Coldarai Mountains and making thence for Allas'nerig. It is at Baalmak that travellers can obtain Eqkril as mounts and gain any knowledge of dangers that might have arisen upon the trails and slopes of the mountains to the west.

After leaving Baalmak behind a traveller must then turn to the south-west and trek across the grasslands of the western Durn until they find the ancient spires of Askendis'nar'dorum. The ruins of Askendis lay within the shadows of the Lower Coldarai mountains to the west and are an important landmark for anyone wishing to journey further westwards. This ancient city ruin can be used as a resting point before heading directly west towards the foothills of the Lower Coldarai, and thence to the Pass of Sighs. It is this ancient trail that will give a traveller the least dangerous route across the spine of the mountains and onto the grasslands beyond. It is there upon the grasslands of the Ruhig Plains that the ruins of Allas'nerig can be found.

For any traveller who makes the journey to Allas'nerig there will be found a temple complex of enormous size. Made up of more than four hundred structures, spires and deep ruins it is one of the largest complexes that can be delved within reach of the Four Nations. In these modern times it still hides its greatest secrets and remains of considerable interest to the Deep Guild of Das Vallendor.

Hamulkuk and the Moon Dragons

:edda nar hamulkuk a'dehr ell'adrim:



As told by the Living Book at Shalamai to Gremorgan Hedj, Maturi of the Grand Circle and servant to the Silvan Tree.

"It is the imperative of our creation that determines who we are. We kill because it is our purpose. We burn and we destroy because it is our duty, but it is not all that we can be. We are who we are because of the designs of those who made us, but I would say that we are more than the petty objectives of our Masters. We are Hresh'na and in this life we are greater than those that have given us breath. I would say that there are choices that we can make, and a capacity within ourselves to define a destiny of our own."

Attributed to Hamulkuk the Destroyer, First Hresh in the World .

"What is myth? Is it a tale told, once founded in fact but in the telling of countless generations embellished and retold until nothing remains of its truth? Or is it something far more potent, a truth given utterance as a faithful recount of real events and great deeds, which in its telling remains immutable to change, its message too important to alter? I would say that the tale that is about to unfold is the latter. No witnesses survive to lay testament to its truth, no scrolls or temple walls remain that might give its story credence, but it is truth nonetheless. In these words can be found the first history of the Oera'dim in the world, told with each successive generation and committed to the memories of the Living Books for all eternity. Here is the story of Hamulkuk, known also to some as Amakek, the First Hresh to find breath in the world, and the travails of his destruction of the Ell'adrim, who we know in these modern times as the Moon Dragons."

"It is well-known to all Oera'dim that the first few moments of consciousness we experience exist as void and nothingness. In these glimmering heartbeats before our struggling birth within the loose

soils of Gorgoroth, we find ourselves floating within a great darkness, only the sound of a monstrous wind pushing us inexorably towards the World Above and a new life in mortal form. In this short time we are given little but the Code that we must live by, and the assurance that Beings of our own kind are waiting for us somewhere beyond the darkness. It is a time of confusion and fear, but one that passes as we find our way from the borders of Gorgoroth and are met by those who show us our place in the world. It can be said that for Hamulkuk such was not the manner of his emergence.

Manufactured as an artifice of magic he was a Being unique, the first of the Oera'dim and a creature made for a specific purpose. For him life began not in confusion but with the surety that he had a mission, and that until its end his existence would be one of pain and sacrifice. For Hamulkuk there could be no doubt, and those that had made him ensured this would indeed be so.

In those moments of void that should have been his only peace he was instead bombarded with the knowledge of a race that was already ancient before his conception. Designed as a weapon for a war that had already gone on far too long he had been given everything he needed to fight and survive against an enemy that had proven itself doughty and determined. To make him resilient he was given cunning and intelligence. To strike fear into those he would kill he harboured a ferocious brutality, and to ensure his obedience he was bound to a spell of magic that would channel his every thought to the needs of his Masters. In that age of violence he was to be a perfect weapon, a warrior built for a war of extermination.

What Hamulkuk could not know as he lingered in the Great Void, was that his Masters were not perfect, nor all-knowing. For in the time of his creation he was truly the last chance for a race that bordered upon on the edge of destruction, the hubris of their ways having brought them almost to the brink of extinction. For the Trell'sara the power they had coveted for themselves had evaporated in the turmoil of a great war, and if they were to win they needed something more powerful than themselves to finish it. In that time of desperation their answer would be Hamulkuk.

It is a truth of our history that the Trell'sara were created by the Silvan Tree as Guardians, Keepers of the Eternal Forests that had thrived under the stewardship of the Great Tree. It is said that the Trell'sara were formed from the essence of the living leaves of their creator, imbued with a mortal form but given an ageless life span that

could only be cut short through accident or misadventure. More importantly they were created to serve the trees of the world, and to provide assistance to another race of beings we know only as the Forgotten Ones. Who they were is a mystery that provides no answer in these modern times. We do not know who they were, nor where they came from, only that they entered our world from somewhere else and found sanctuary beneath the canopy of the eternal forests. For the Great Tree the new visitors were a revelation, adding their voices and language to the music of the forest, their laughter and joy an accompaniment to the movement of branch and leaf in the wind.

Though great in number they trod the paths of their new home lightly, finding a place within the trees that added beauty and life to the creation tended by the Tree. For a Power that had never known companionship the Forgotten Ones became a balm unsought but welcomed, and in their company an ocean of time passed as the Great Tree's dominion grew in strength and power.

It came to pass that the Great Tree offered a boon to her companions. Beloved by the Silvan Tree for the care the Forgotten Ones had given to her domain, she offered to them the power of EarthMagic, but they refused, their concern that with great power came even greater temptation, and in turn the loss of the peaceful existence that had been theirs for millennia. As a gift the Great Tree instead offered the Trell'sara as reward for their wisdom, to act as servants to the eternal forest and provide all that the Forgotten Ones might wish without the need to wield power themselves. To her new creations the Silvan Tree granted the ability to harness EarthMagic, and the free will to make lives also within the protection of her domain. It proved an act of innocent folly that would bring down the Great Tree and plunge all into war.

Although it is known to all Oera'dim that the Trell'sara were false and treacherous Beings they had not been created so. For the Great Tree her attempt at providing an ease for the burdens of the Forgotten Ones was a gift honestly given and an offering of gratitude. For an age of time the Guardians gave service to the Forgotten Ones but unknown to even the Tree herself they conspired and plotted, their only intent to take dominion of Emur for themselves. It is not known what turned them to deceit and avarice but it is evident that just as the Forgotten Ones feared the corruption of great power so that same power corrupted the Guardians, turning their purpose of service and care into a need for domination and malice. Within an atmosphere of

machination and plotting there came a time when the forest fell silent, an expectation of disaster gripping all that lived beneath the trees.

In the shadowed places of the world the Trell'sara schemed and laboured, their ambition to throw down the Great Tree and destroy her favoured peoples. On a terrible day of betrayal the Trell'sara tricked the Silvan Tree and in a moment of distraction attacked her, hacking down her limbs and severing her from the dark earth that had been her home. In a final humiliation her remains were flung into a deep pit, and to the knowledge of the Trell'sara she was destroyed.

History tells us that the Great Tree survived her ordeal, to grow anew again in the deep reaches of the world, but on that day of reckoning she was broken and diminished, unable to help those that had been her greatest joy. For the Trell'sara it was the beginning of a war that had only one objective, and only one ending.

Before news could spread of the treachery brought to the Great Tree the Trell'sara fell upon the Forgotten Ones. In great number they swarmed into the deep forests and began their murderous attack, their intention to remove the Silvan Tree's beloved companions from the world. What confronted them proved instead that they had actioned a traitorous plan, long in the making but flawed from its inception.

Standing before the Trell'sara as they advanced were not the peaceful people they had expected, soft from long years of safety and comfort and unprepared for war. The Forgotten Ones were a peaceful people but they were not defenceless, and their years in the sanctuary of the Forest had not been spent in quiet indolence. Quickly they organised a defence and the true strength of their host soon became apparent. In their haste to take Emur for themselves the Trell'sara had attacked an enemy prepared for war, and able to marshal far greater numbers than they had expected or could hope to match. The War of Tree and Leaf had begun, and it would not be the easy victory the Guardians had assumed.

From the four corners of the world the Forgotten Ones arose, the power of their multitude growing as they gathered to throw back the assault of a race they had understood to be their friends. Nomadic in nature but ordered in their society they brought together a vast host, well-organised and equipped for war.

Caught in the jaws of a conflict that had quickly turned against them the Trell'sara retreated to the mountains of the west, their plans

of domination and genocide withering before a determined foe that had found even greater strength in their discovery of the fate of the Silvan Tree. Battling for survival the Trel'sara bolstered their mountain territories and looked for a way to escape the folly of their ill conceived aggression. Their answer came in the form of an ambitious Guardian known to his own kind as Aggeron, and to all else as the Darkness.



It is with the ambitions of Aggeron of House Delving that the fortunes of the Trel'sara shifted. As has been said before, the Guardians were of mortal form though gifted with an endless mortality. In those ancient times the Trel'sara had not yet protected themselves behind cloaks of magic and shadow and each was as open to death as any of their enemies. Many of the Trel'sara died in the opening debacle of the war and Aggeron saw no advantage in it. What he proposed instead would be creatures of EarthMagic, created as weapons and used for the glory of the Trel'sara, to fight their war on their behalf. It was an idea that quickly took hold even though their capability to create such weapons had yet to be tested.

As the War of Tree and Leaf ground on, Aggeron and a small cadre of the most knowledgeable of the Guardians retired to the north of the world, to a barren plain bordered on two sides by immense arching spires of stone. In this place, which is known to us as the Horns of Gorgoroth, the Trel'sara began their experiments.

It can be said that the capacity to create life is a gift that should only be given to those who can look down upon a world and judge the consequences of its existence. The Trel'sara were not Beings of such calibre and to them the creations that they brought into the world were no more than tools, to be used for a purpose and then discarded without thought. Long they delved into the mysteries of EarthMagic and in time brought into the world a creature that they called the Gaelwch. Such a beast has long left our world, its spectral form locked away from the memories of our existence in a place that has remained hidden, but in the time of its creation it lived as a manifestation of malice and cruelty that even the Trel'sara could not control. Designed as an elemental beast it gave no service to its creators and instead went upon a rampage of destruction, its only

mission the death of anything that might stand in its way. Many Trell'sara died before they caught and locked it away, its body destroyed but its essence bound to a vault that should never be found. With its demise however, new knowledge came to the Guardians and they used what they had learned to bring a far more vicious manifestation of their hatred into the world.

The first of the Dragons were not the monstrous beasts that we know of today. Smaller and imbued with little intelligence they found no effect on the battlefield. Like their predecessor they proved an uncontrollable part of a war that was quickly being lost, but unlike the Gaelwch the Trell'sara had formulated a Word of Dissolution, a spell of EarthMagic that could stifle and remove the spark of life that gave such creatures their existence. When it was judged that the Dragons held no value to the Guardians they were removed from the world forever, the utterance of the Word leaving nothing in its wake.

In those dark days the Trell'sara laboured on, Aggeron attempting to create a creature that might operate effectively in the face of their enemies yet remain completely under their control. It was only as desperation spread through their ranks that the Darkness found what he believed to be the key to his ultimate weapon.

In a moment of inspiration Aggeron decided to build a monstrous creature, one that might set fear into the hearts of the Forgotten Ones yet still be held within the thrall of its creators. Taking their previous designs to a new expression of malice they built a Great Dragon, more powerful than those that had gone before, who they called the Ell'adrim and whom we know as Moon Dragons, and invested in its substance an addiction to gold in all its forms. As is the way of such things the Ell'adrim were infused with the spirit of the precious metal, immutable and ageless, and utterly unable to live without it. Addicted and needy it would do anything for gold, and the Trell'sara controlled the mining and extraction of the precious metal. If the Dragon wanted gold it would have to do as the Guardians commanded.

The first Ell'adrim proved merciless in the prosecution of its duty. Thrown into battle the Great Beast destroyed its enemies, sending the assembled host of the Forgotten Ones into disarray and confusion. Never had they seen such a creature and in its majestic posture it was a terror that none of the Silvan Tree's folk could stand against. Defeated at the foothills of the western mountains the Forgotten Ones retreated to their forest homes and searched for a viable defence

against this new threat.

Encouraged by their victory the Trell'sara immediately set to the task of building more of the Ell'adrim. In great number the Moon Dragons were created, vast creatures of scale and leathery wings, silver black in countenance, their bodies a shimmering landscape of moonlight incarnate. And as was the way of the Trell'sara none were left idle. Immediately their new charges were sent into the world to hunt and destroy, to root out every vestige of the Forgotten Ones and remove them from existence. It was a dark time of violence and fear but one the Forgotten Ones survived, for in their desperation the Trell'sara had once again failed to stand back and consider the consequences of their ill-thought creation.

They had built the Ell'adrim to win a war but to control them they had addicted them to gold. In their eagerness they had created an army of the creatures and had given no thought on the amount of the scarce metal that would be needed to keep the Moon Dragons satisfied and compliant. It came to pass quickly that the demands of their new weapons had to be left unanswered, and with their inability to find the required metal a terrible vengeance fell upon the Guardians.

From their nests in the far Mountains of Ul'ashma the Ell'adrim marshalled their number and moved upon the Trell'sara themselves. Stronghold after stronghold fell as the Moon Dragons exacted a cruel tribute from every butchered Guardian they could find, despoiling them of their personal jewellery and breaking apart their homes. In the midst of this turmoil the Forgotten Ones saw a chance to end the war quickly and again marched against their enemies. It almost proved the end of the Trell'sara but again it was Aggeron who came to the fore, and it is in the midst of this great furore that Hamulkuk took his first breath.

In truth Aggeron had been dissatisfied with his new creations even at their inception. He foresaw that even though the Ell'adrim were impressive and lethal creatures, they were altogether too big to complete the task of genocide that had always been his overarching objective. He reasoned that for the Trell'sara to have dominion of the world there could be no place in it for even a remnant of the Forgotten Ones. His sole purpose lay in their utter destruction and he knew that the Moon Dragons would turn the tide of battle but they could not win the war. He recognised that his enemy stood their ground as a determined and cunning foe, adept at the ways of the vast Forest and

sure to have many hiding places. The Ell'adrim could keep the Forgotten Ones on the run but it would take an altogether different creation to finish the job. In the darkest recesses of his thoughts Aggeron knew that any new creation would have to be one similar to the enemy they must fight, able to go where the enemy might hide and in the bloody business of extermination harbour no concept of mercy in its prosecution.

And so Aggeron laboured on. When word reached him of the betrayal of the Ell'adrim he brought his new creation into the world and knew without hesitation that he had found his weapon, and that it would be the salvation of his people. For Hamulkuk the trials of his existence were about to begin.



Standing at the borders of Gorgoroth Aggeron looked upon his new creation and was well pleased. Here stood the epitome of his vision, a creature of war, unconstrained by any concept of mercy and one truly obedient to its Master. In the red light of dusk the Hresh'na stood quiet but alert. Roughly the same in size and form as the Forgotten Ones it would soon face, the warrior had been built well muscled and ready for the rigours of its purpose in the world. Aggeron had spent some time in the design of his creation and had ensured that it was in every way physically superior to its enemies. Equipped with perfect night vision, an almost inexhaustible stamina, and skin that changed to match the textures of any environment it might have to fight in, Hamulkuk was built for war and as lethal as any weapon that the Trell'sara could both create and control. To this weapon Aggeron gave but one concession to vanity. Along the length of its arm he artificed a tattoo similar to that of his own house, marking it as his alone. This warrior would be his weapon and no others.

Unlike his previous creations he was not about to trust to Hamulkuk's obedience however. For all the Oera'dim that might follow he had decided that something must bind them to his will, and he had no illusion that they should be obedient to anyone but himself. Upon Hamulkuk he artificed a new spell, a Word of Command that bound the Hresh to whomever might utter the Word upon him. For the First Hresh it was the first word heard as he stepped out into the living world and it stole his free will from him in an instant.

"Do you know who you are?" Aggeron asked as the warrior came before him.

Hamulkuk nodded, a compulsion to do whatever this Being might command undeniable and insistent.

"I am yours to command, Master. Tell me how I must serve."

Aggeron smiled and turned to a number of other Trell'sara that stood close. "Go with these Masters and they shall teach you the ways of war. You are my warrior Hamulkuk, and I have need of you."

The Hresh lowered his head and made for the assembled group. For Aggeron the warrior would be the first of many but it was a weapon unproven, one that needed to be tested. As he watched his creation walk away he already knew how he would measure his new warrior's mettle for in his thoughts there existed only malice and vengeance.

In the days that followed Hamulkuk learned the power of the body he had been given and became familiar with the weapons that would be his to wield. Of those that were placed before him it was the scimitar that found most favour in his hands, and soon it became his only blade, forged in blue steel and honed to an edge that could hew any living thing. For Aggeron, who watched from his pavilion as the warrior was schooled and tested in the arts of his new life, his growing satisfaction was quickly tempered by news arising from the far south and west of the world. Messengers arrived on the fourth day of Hamulkuk's training with dire tidings of battles lost, and the retreat of the Moon Dragons to their nests at Ul'ashma. Although caught off-guard by the first attacks of the Ell'adrim the Forgotten Ones had found a way to repel their assaults, using the deep forest to lay ambush and then meld back into the undergrowth. It was a strategy that quickly disheartened the Moon Dragons, and unwilling to lose more of their number had retired to their nests in the western mountains. Frustrated in their assault they began to fight amongst each other and then accost those of the Trell'sara that still foolishly held any golden metal in their possession. It was a time of devastation and one that suited the personal ambitions of Aggeron perfectly.



From the safety of the borders of Gorgoroth Aggeron sent forth a messenger to the strongholds of his brethren. Salvation would be

theirs he proclaimed, but only at the cost of their own freedom. He would deliver the Guardians from certain destruction and give over to the Trell'sara dominion of the world, but he must be their Dominus and they must obey him. It was a bargain that desperation made easy and the other Trell'sara acceded to his will all too quickly.

With their collective strength now his to command Aggeron began his quest to grind down the Forgotten Ones and remove the threat of the Ell'adrim from the shoulders of the Guardians. The Forgotten Ones were the greater nemesis but they could not be defeated if the Ell'adrim were left to continue their destruction of the Trell'sara strongholds. It would be to the Moon Dragons' lairs that Hamulkuk would be sent first, his success there proof of the First Hresh's effectiveness, and confirmation to all the Guardians that Aggeron was indeed their true Dominus.

With haste he completed Hamulkuk's training and stood proud before the warrior he had brought into the world. Here was the instrument of his ascension to leadership of the Trell'sara but everything depended on the Hresh's effectiveness. Strong and agile his Hresh'na had been imbued with all that was required to prevail as a weapon of war but against the Ell'adrim Aggeron needed one thing more.

Hamulkuk would be his perfect warrior but the Moon Dragons were no simple foes. The Trell'sara had been able to remove their previous creations with the utterance of a Word of Dissolution, and although they had tried, the spell had not worked against the Ell'adrim. The melding of the Dragons' essence with gold at their creation had made them immune to the power of the spell in its uttered form. To destroy the enormous beasts would require a weapon, infused with the Word of Dissolution and wielded by one who could meet them face to face. Such a weapon would have to be created first, and quickly.

With Hamulkuk at his side Aggeron removed himself and his entourage from the barren wastes of Gorgoroth and returned to the western mountains. From the stronghold of Menion'Enath he sent the design for a new weapon to his armourers, and it was not to be a simple artifice. With a haft made from a carved remnant of the Silvan Tree, and barbed with the talon of an Ell'adrim, the Orncryst would be a melding of EarthMagic and the natural power of the Moon Dragons themselves. Forged as a single-bladed axe, and inlaid in gold and precious gems, it was both weapon and jewel, as fine a creation as

anything previously artificed by the Guardians. Upon its polished iron blade Aggeron cut the Word of Dissolution himself and with that done considered the sacrifices that he knew were still to come.

In its physical form the Orncryst was a weapon of great beauty and fine crafting, but not enough to bring down the Moon Dragons alone. With the axe in hand Aggeron gave it to his most trusted assistants and instructed them on its final forging. If it was to kill the Ell'adrim it would have to be plunged into the River of Life itself, and in doing so transform the axe from a weapon of iron and stonewood into the most powerful talisman of EarthMagic ever created.

To touch the Shan'duil however, would be no easy task, and one that no Trell'sara would take upon themselves lightly. Since the bringing down of the Silvan Tree the Guardians had maintained no contact with the River of Life and none could know the punishment that might be visited upon those who might try. In their desperate hours however, there remained enough Guardians of courage to brave the exertions of such a task and without hesitation Aggeron sent them forth.

The tale of the descent of the Eleven Guardians into the Mines of Mourning is a story that requires its own telling. In the long history of that race it is the only tale of bravery and sacrifice that an Oera'dim can recount of the Fallen Masters with wonder and grudging admiration. It is a truth that no Oera'dim can look upon the Shan'duil without suffering complete dissolution and because of this we do not search out the low places of the world, but for the Guardians it was a mission that would take them into the ancient delvings of the Mines of Mourning and ultimately to the root of the world itself. Such a tale must be left for another day, however. Suffice it to say that only one of the Guardians survived to return to the light of day, the Orncryst pulsing with the power needed as act as a physical manifestation of the Word of Dissolution. One touch would be enough to bring down the Ell'adrim, it need only be wielded by a Being brave enough to take it forth and destroy them. In Aggeron's plan that Being would be Hamulkuk.

It must be said that in that dark and desperate time Hamulkuk was not to go alone. Bound by the Word of Command he would be compelled to fulfil his mission but Aggeron had to be sure that the task would be completed. In the early hours of a cold morning the Dominus gathered those that would travel with his creation and gave Hamulkuk his orders.

"Who are you?" he asked quietly.

"I am Hamulkuk, Master, yours to command unto death."

Aggeron looked to his fellow Guardians then turned to his creation. "You are to leave this place and travel north-west to Ul'ashma. There you will find the caves of the Ell'adrim. Call to them Hamulkuk, compel them forward and as each is drawn to you destroy them. In this your task is clear. Kill all that respond to your call, then return the Orncryst to me. Do you understand?"

Hamulkuk bowed, the Order a clear compulsion now within him. It would be impossible for him to return to his Master without the task being prosecuted to the letter of every word uttered. For Aggeron there could be no doubt that Hamulkuk would do his duty, but to get the Hresh'na to the far mountains he would require protection of his own. Forty Trell'sara would travel with him and in that chill morning they set forth, their goal the far mountains of Ul'ashma and the lairs of the Moon Dragons.

For any Being that has travelled the far marches of the west it is understood that no journey there can be undertaken lightly. Before the company stood the high massifs of the Great Rift, a long jagged line of mountains and high plateaux that spread for hundreds of leagues into the north and west. Beyond those granite borders extended the cold wastes of the north, but at the Rift's shoulder arose the lesser mountains of Ul'ashma and the homes of the Ell'adrim. Deep within those cold peaks a vast complex of caves served as the lairs of the Dragons and they would be the company's objective. North they would travel, traversing a series of passes beyond the Great Rift, then follow the edges of the Massif as it veered westwards to Ul'ashma.

The journey itself would not be their greatest challenge however. Away from the remaining strongholds of the Trell'sara the world was now the domain of the Forgotten Ones and even upon the coldest peaks of the north they maintained a presence, units of Rangers and other frontier forces on guard upon the many passes and trails that crossed the high mountains. If Hamulkuk were to make it alive to Ul'ashma their company would need to escape the attention of their enemies as well as survive the rigours of their passage.

Unknown to the company as it made its way steadily into the north, the Forgotten Ones had already become aware of their journey. Rangers holding vigil in the shadows of Menion'Enath sent word of their passage northwards and soon the company was itself being

stalked, prey to a foe that had no intention of letting the strange party out of the precincts of the cold mountains. As it would come to pass it would only be the immensity of the mountains themselves that would save the company from an early failure.

Along the high trails of the Great Rift Hamulkuk and his Guardians moved quickly. In this endeavour the First Hresh took the lead, his stamina undiminished by the labours required to overcome the steep climbs and narrow mountain paths that directed them inexorably northwards. Determined to make the northern reaches of the Great Rift without detection they struggled on, a series of hidden paths leading them between the summits of Laman'thel and thence into the darker shadows of the Northern Massif beyond.

Days passed beneath clouded skies, the company moving upon high ridges and through deep, misted vales. Within the shadows of the cold mountains they remained unseen, their passage lost to the rugged terrain and the vastness of the Great Rift itself. Wearied by the endless labour of the march the Guardians started to fall behind, and there came a time when Hamulkuk had no option but to stop and wait for them. With stormclouds crowding close the First Hresh waited upon a rise in the trail as his guard made up the distance between them. It was as he paused there that the Rangers of the enemy first made contact, and it was there that Hamulkuk first drew blood.

At the crest of a long track edging a wide plateau of broken stone a small unit of Rangers came upon the company. For both groups it was a surprise, the Rangers unaware of the movement of the Guardians northwards, the Trell'sara yet to discover they were being tracked by other forces that still moved some distance to the south. In the gloom and noise of an overcast evening however, it took less than the drawing of swords for the two groups to come together.

Surprise gave way quickly to the hatred felt between mortal foes and in the melee each took losses quickly. At the centre of the battle stood Hamulkuk, a cloak thrown upon him and protected by a ring of Guardians as they endeavoured to keep his existence secret. The Rangers were the best and most hardened warriors that the enemy had at their disposal and it soon passed that the Guardians began to waver, their numbers being broken before the onslaught of a superior force. In this battle Hamulkuk could not remain quiet and when only a few of his guard remained he had no choice but to fight.

Overhead the encroaching night turned to storm and upon that

desolate trail the First Hresh to draw breath in the world threw away his disguise and joined the battle. Armed with his scimitar Hamulkuk charged into the Rangers and slew the nearest with a single blow. Amongst the combatants he struck out with his blade cutting down another before the nature of the battle changed. In the narrow confines of the path the two sides divided, the remaining Guardians withdrawing behind the Hresh, the Rangers finding a position ahead of the warrior, blocking the way forward. For the Forgotten Ones the sight of Hamulkuk proved a shock that kept them at bay, but only momentarily.

In the fractured light of a monumental barrage of lightning this new Being in the world stood tall and armoured, a creature of war designed for the purpose, its skin shimmering as black as the night that surrounded them. Hesitation however, turned quickly to action. From within their number a voice called clearly and a bow drew back. One word sent an arrow thudding into Hamulkuk's shoulder and in that moment of searing pain the First Hresh became unstoppable.

Pulling the arrow from his shoulder Hamulkuk charged into the Rangers, his scimitar a flickering reflection of light as he hew down his enemies, none able to stand before the ferocity of his anger. Amongst the Forgotten Ones he found his purpose and in a slew of blood and pain came to understand his true nature. In the midst of the struggling crowd he felt a power coursing through his body, a natural need to kill and to destroy expressed in cold and deliberate violence. For all Oera'dim it is the familiar exaltation of combat, that state of focused aggression that allows no recognition of pain or fear, but for the First Hresh it was new and unrestrained. Before Hamulkuk's fury the Rangers had no answer, falling back as he drove them down, his scimitar a razor-sharp scythe that cut through the Rangers like they were reeds upon a river's edge.

In a blustering gale the Rangers died but not all fell to Hamulkuk's sword. Two of their number retreated early in the confrontation and unknown to the remaining company fled southwards as messengers, their tale of death one that would set a vast army against them. If such a pursuit ensued it would only be a matter of time before Hamulkuk himself would fall.



With only four Guardians still remaining to the company Hamulkuk did not wait for the storm to pass. Knowing that it would not be long before the Rangers would be missed he took again to the path and left the remaining Trel'sara behind, desperately trying to keep up with their charge. For Hamulkuk they were no more than a disguise, a device to mask his presence until he had found his way to Ul'ashma and the completion of his Orders. It was not however, beyond his understanding that if the enemy became aware of his existence that they would stop at nothing to put him down. If he was in their position he would do the same and he had no intention of failing his Master.

Upon the high trails Hamulkuk made his way northwards, using the many narrow tracks and footways to navigate a path through the steep mountain vales and around the many obstacles that stood in his way. Even for the First Hresh it proved a hard road forward, the mountains unwilling to allow passage lightly. Upon loose scree slopes and the winding trails of ancient paths he found his own way, though always at the mercy of crashing storms and chilling gales. At many points he almost failed, the terrain a treacherous march of rockfalls, steep ground and lurking predators that proved unforgiving and relentless. In the isolation of this journey Hamulkuk found his mind wandering, giving thought not only to his mission but also to who he was, and what he was doing.

Alone and able to keep his own counsel he tried to make sense of the existence that he had been brought into. He was a weapon, of this he had no doubt, but Aggeron in his haste to produce a Being with the capacity to think had also left him with the need to understand and find worth in what he was doing. His Orders compelled him to kill the Ell'adrim, to take all that would answer his call and send them to Dissolution with the Orncryst. It was simple enough, but as he travelled the lonely trails of the Great Rift he began to feel something else, and it nagged at him as insistently as his Orders.

He was a Being of EarthMagic, created for a purpose but made from the essence of the world itself. As such a Being he was captive to the whims of his creator, and he accepted that as the fate of his existence, but he also felt something else, a deep connection to the mountains he was traversing and to all the natural forces that surrounded him. In the unrestrained power of the storm he had felt a kindred spirit, in the wind and the rain he had found connection and familiarity. In the stone he recognised a brother, and above all else he

could feel the pulse of the Shan'duil, no matter how deep it coursed in the root of the world beneath him.

It was a realisation both disconcerting and enervating. As he struggled upon the loose scree slopes at the base of the northern-most edges of the Rift he came to realise that he may have been made as an instrument of war but he was also a part of the world he now inhabited. Alone in the cold mountains Hamulkuk had come to understand that he was a sentient Being and that his Orders were all that held him in thrall to the Trell'sara. It was a realisation that would trouble him for the remainder of his days.

Many more days passed as he found a way through the high mountains and struggled out of the shadows into the brighter light of the Northern Wastes. Upon the slopes at his back the Guardians struggled to keep up but he had no regard for their labours. In his mind there was only the task, and he had found his minders to be nothing more than a hindrance to his progress. If he was to find the Moon Dragons and destroy them, it would be a task done alone, and without witnesses.

Upon the ragged edges of the Great Rift Hamulkuk looked down upon the cold plains before him and knew that his path would not take him into such desolate climes. Instead he looked to the west, and at the world's horizon he saw instead the spur of a line of mountains known to his Masters as Ul'ashma, the Mountains of the Moons. It would be there that he would find the Ell'adrim, and it would be there that he would kill them.



It is rumoured that in those desperate days when the Trell'sara peered into the shadows of their own destruction that Aggeron grew careless in his haste to create his new weapon. Much thought had been given to the nature of the creature he was building, but in those final days it was only to the physical attributes of his new warrior that he gave weight or time. His warrior would be strong, capable of fighting in any terrain, and give no heed to the onset of any weather. His warrior would have skin that would change colour and texture to match any of its possible surroundings, and be provided with senses far more sensitive and utilitarian than anything the Guardians themselves possessed. Of all these senses it was the sight of the first

Hresh that was given greatest energy, and in his creation Aggeron had provided Hamulkuk with a keenness of vision that was unsurpassed by any living creature, whether in day or moonless night.

To the first Hresh's sentience however, less energy had been devoted. The Guardian's need for an effective weapon to overpower the Forgotten One's on their own ground had lead him to provide his creation with the capacity to reason, but in Hamulkuk's design much had been left unfinished or ill-conceived. It is thought that the Master had used one of his own assistant's minds as the template for his creation, simply taking apart that which he deemed useless and enhancing that which he saw advantageous, building in his arrogance a merciless beast of war. It is a truth that Aggeron could see no purpose in giving his weapon a set of rules to conduct himself by, he saw only a need for obedience and the ruthless prosecution of war. What happened after that came as no concern of his. History tells us that it was an oversight that would one day bring the Darkness himself to his knees.

Now firmly upon the plains Hamulkuk scanned the horizon, his thoughts focused on the task at hand. Ul'ashma lay to the west, the veiled summits of that range hovering within a languid grey haze, but as he considered his best way forward there came the urgent sounds of violence upon the wind at his back. Immediately he recognised the clamour of combat but gave no thought to what he should do, except to ensure that there lay within the clash of metal and screams no danger to his mission.

Scrambling back to a vantage upon the crest of a long slope he saw upon a far ridge the last Guardians of his party, fighting desperately as a large force of Rangers caught them exposed upon the crest. As he watched the last of his guard were cut down, their bodies tumbling as ragged outlines upon the loose slopes, leaving trails of moving dirt as they slid into the darkness below. For Hamulkuk there could be no concern for their demise, nor any need to exact vengeance for their deaths. They were a complication that he could do without and only the small forms of the Forgotten Ones making a line down the slopes provided any need for action. Somehow the Rangers were on his trail, and he could not allow them to catch him.

Quickly he descended onto the hard ground at the base of the mountains and set out across the wide plain at the run. He was a warrior built for endurance and long into the day he ran across the desolate terrain, heading for a high landmark ahead. To his Masters

the tall, broken towers of stone were known simply as The Spires. To Hamulkuk they served as an easily held landmark upon the plains, and he laid his course by their highest point. About him the northern plains spread far and wide, the desolate ground a vista of barren earth broken only by shallow hills and the dark massif of the Great Rift at his left shoulder.

Behind him the Rangers were not giving ground and as his first day on the plains turned to darkness Hamulkuk could not afford to rest. Forging onwards he kept the tall spires before him and by the light of twin moons ran on, the sky above a deep veil of shadowed clouds and bright, flickering stars. With his heart pounding beneath his armour he moved quickly into the north-west.



Only once on that first night did Hamulkuk have reason to pause. In the mid reach of the dark hours there came a sound that brought the Hresh to a sudden halt. From the plains behind him there arose a terrible cacophony, a melee of screams and roaring thunder that began as no more than a whisper against the breeze but which grew in surges into a harsh report of scraping metal and rumbling stone, all entwined with clear cries of pain and torment. Hamulkuk waited as the sounds found strength and then faded into the backdrop of the ever present wind, abandoning the plains once again to the night.

For a time the First Hresh made no further ground, content to stand before the bluster and search for any sign of what might have transpired. Around him the ground lay shadowed in darkness, only the silvered edges of moonlight giving any form to his surroundings. When he was sure that he was once again alone he turned back to the north-west and began to run.

For the remainder of the night he kept up his pace, making for the stone spires but always alert for any danger that might lay hidden on the quiet plains. On a few occasions he passed herds of Yunta Beast heading north towards the Moss Plains, their objective the rich feeding grounds that spread for hundreds of leagues in that direction. Such creatures were of no interest to him however. He had food enough to last and the Yunta were docile creatures even at their most energetic. In darkness he forged ahead and at the first hint of light gleaming against the eastern horizon came to the base of The Spires.

Against the flaring glow of the dawn the Spires grew large upon the plain. At almost three hundred metres tall the three distinct towers of stone stood as impressive monoliths upon the flat ground. From the east they had appeared as made structures, such was the smooth, lean aspect of their reach, but it proved instead upon closer inspection that they rose above the plain as natural upthrusts of stone, somehow forced from the earth below as a bone needle might be forced through hide. At its base the largest of the Spires lay over twenty metres in breadth and as the First Hresh came to a halt at their feet he stood insignificant, looking up at summits that seemed to touch the sky itself.

It struck Hamulkuk as he surveyed his find that these towering pieces of stone might prove a good vantage to test how far the Rangers had come in the night. Carefully he found a foothold against the nearest of the vast monoliths and began to climb.

Against their huge bulk Hamulkuk moved quickly as a dark speck that ascended to a vantage some fifty metres above the plain. The remains of the thin tower reached some hundreds of metres further into the clear sky overhead but it was enough to survey both the plain and the reach of the high mountains to the south. To his surprise he could see nothing of the Forgotten Ones. To the north and west roamed large herds of Yunta Beast, to the south he could see clearly the curving arches of the Alerion Gates and the Shattereen beyond, but to the east there was nothing, no sign of the Rangers nor any evidence of their passing. Overhead there glided the forms of three Kreel flying westwards but upon the barren ground he was alone.

Returning to the hard earth Hamulkuk considered his next move. The disappearance of the Rangers had left him with an open path to the nests of the Ell'adrim, though their sudden retreat from the chase came with concerns of its own. In Hamulkuk's thoughts there grew the possibility that his pursuers might know something he didn't, and as he looked to the west he decided that a change in course might give him an advantage. Rather than head directly from the Spires to the tip of Ul'ashma he would instead travel in a wider arc to the north, passing beyond the Plains of Tor'eth and using the southern edges of the Moss Plains as his guide to the mountains beyond. In this fashion he could approach the Moon Dragons from the east and time his arrival in the mountains themselves to coincide with the first shrouds of night. If there was indeed something ahead to be avoided such a detour might save him any unnecessary danger.

Setting out once again Hamulkuk turned further northwards and as with the previous day struck out at the run. By mid-morning he encountered the first vestiges of the Moss Plains and then veered westwards, following the edges of the Mosses as he put his eye firmly upon the long reach of the Mountains of the Moons. He had covered a considerable distance in his run to the west and Ul'ashma lay clearer, their peaks a saw-tooth silhouette that thrust outwards from the larger mountains of the Great Rift to the south. According to the intelligence collected by his Master the nests of the Ell'adrim were to be found upon the highest summits of Ul'ashma, positioned out of view of the plains themselves. For the First Hresh to call the Ell'adrim he would need to be within sight of the caves but not necessarily close. The call would bring the Moon Dragons forth and he could see value in making them come to him. Hamulkuk had never put eyes upon one of his quarry and he considered it wise to have time to consider what he might be up against.

Running through the thick pads of moss the First Hresh made his way forward, the furthest edge of the mountains ahead his objective. About him the morning slowly unfolded, the still unfamiliar cycle of life in the world something that passed without his notice as he ran. In those long hours he covered a great distance and found the day itself edging towards night as he approached the high summits of Ul'ashma. Behind him there remained no sign of the Rangers that had so doggedly pursued him on the previous day. Ahead there lay the mountains, and a herd of Yunta grazing purposefully upon the mosses. As he approached the huge beasts moved away quickly, clearing a path that gave him a clear line to a saddle between two peaks. It would be his purpose to use the valley that could be found there to find a path into the shadows of the Mountains of the Moons, and then on to the caves of the Ell'adrim. What he could not foresee was the danger waiting patiently for him upon the plains ahead.

As he ran through the grazing Yunta it came to his notice quickly that three of the beasts ahead were not moving. All of their brethren had moved out of his path long before he could come close but these Yunta remained in station, watching him carefully as Hamulkuk made his way forward. Not sure of their intentions the First Hresh slowed his pace and considered more carefully the lay of the ground he stood upon, and the possible avenues of escape if the beasts decided to charge. It became quickly apparent that the Yunta were not going to move, and as he came to a complete halt a feeling of

unease descended upon the entire plain. Something was not right.

Carefully Hamulkuk drew his scimitar and advanced upon the large Yunta. All were at least six times his own size but docile nonetheless, and as he approached them he was expecting nothing more than to usher them away with a wave of his blade and a few coarse shouts. Instead he would find himself fighting for his life.



As Hamulkuk approached the plain fell silent, all the activity of life that he had disregarded on his run suddenly keenly noticeable in its absence. The air itself had come to a halt, and as the First Hresh surveyed the wide plain there came to him a feeling of hidden malice, of something brooding close and watching with undeniable purpose.

Looking around he could see nothing, but as his focus returned to the creatures the nearest of the Yunta shifted uneasily then reared upon its back legs, its forward limbs raking the air as if in great pain or anger. Stepping back Hamulkuk watched as the beast began to distort, its form shivering and contorting as its essence changed, the familiar outline of the Yunta transforming before his eyes into a towering distorted form, something that seemed to mock his own appearance.

In the yellowed glow of dusk the other Yunta began to change also, their bodies coalescing into similar forms, although grotesquely deformed. Hamulkuk immediately recognised the beings that had risen before him. They were of the *dweo'gorga*, shape-shifters and assassins of the lost Daughter-God Shabel. Only in the knowledge given to him did he understand the nature of these beings but one thing he recognised for himself; they were creatures of EarthMagic and in their presence he could feel the power of their forms pulsing in time to the heartbeat of the world far below his feet. He could not help wondering in that moment of confrontation if these creatures had been the cause of the Rangers' disappearance. It was a question that he knew would remain unanswered.

Hamulkuk had nothing to say to the *dweo'gorga*, they were simply in his way and he could not brook any delay. The Shape-shifters needed to be put aside and he moved forward to do so. In that instant all three of the creatures thrust their fists deep into the earth, somehow drawing strength and form from the ground beneath them.

In a rumbling vibration of power the dweo'gorga began to grow and expand, the mocking forms building into towering goliaths that dwarfed the surrounding plain. Hamulkuk did not take a back step as the first swept a long arm towards him.

Striking out with his scimitar the First Hresh had no chance to defend himself from the blow. In a splintering crack the sword shattered and Hamulkuk took the full impact of the monstrous creature's fist upon his right shoulder. Thrown across the mosses it was only the thick pads of vegetation that brought him to a halt, although in an undignified tangle of limbs and equipment. Quickly he regained his feet but his weapon was useless, and without thinking pulled the Orncryst from its sheath. It was an instinctual act that saved his live.

In a concatenation of energy the Orncryst burst into life, the proximity of the shape-shifters a trigger that could not be denied. Crackling with a blue energy that arced out from its shimmering blade Hamulkuk could feel the axe's vitality coursing through his own body, and in that moment of sudden unrestrained power it brought the dweo'gorga to a shuddering halt.

With another mighty swing the nearest dweo'gorga struck out at Hamulkuk but this time the Orncryst cut cleanly, and with its touch Shabel's Assassin staggered backwards, its body dissolving from the wound as smoke might be carried by a gale. Grasping at its arm in a vain attempt to stop its own dissolution the shapeshifter looked in horror to its companions before falling to ground as a contorted heap of earth.

In a blind rage the remaining dweo'gorga rushed Hamulkuk, their intention to crush him beneath massive pounding feet. The First Hresh did not falter, striking out again with the axe and leaving a gaping wound in the leg of the second shape-shifter. Stunned by the blow and unable to fathom the weapon's effect upon itself the dweo'gorga staggered backwards, its legs and body dissolving in gouts of earth as it lost its footing and fell. In those few moments the creature that had lived a thousand millennia crumpled into another giant mound of dirt and was still.

The third creature gave no thought to continuing the assault. Turning on its thick heels it began to run, a panic overwhelming it as it tried to make sense of what had happened to its brethren. For Hamulkuk there could be no survivors, and he threw the axe with all the strength left to him. Arcing through the air the Orncryst sliced

into the back of the fleeing shape-shifter, a scream of pain lost within a detonation of released energy and roiling dust. When the dirt settled to earth there remained nothing but Hamulkuk, and the axe lodged firmly in the cold ground ahead of him.

It is said that from that time forth Hamulkuk and the multitudes of his descendants were favoured by the Powers of the world. In his destruction of the dweo'gorga an ancient score had been settled with Shabel's outcast Assassins and all the Oera'dim that followed were then accepted as part of the natural order. In truth it can be said that the memories of the Powers of the World are long, and just as much in need of vengeance as any other Being.

For those who are familiar with the moss plains the mounds of dirt left behind with the dissolution of the dweo'gorga still remain and are known in these modern times as the Three Assassins. It is said that nothing grows upon their desiccated slopes, and any who might venture upon them will find death quickly. In the aftermath of battle however, the First Hresh gave thought only to retrieving his axe. For Hamulkuk it was time to move on.



With the steaming mounds of the dweo'gorga left behind Hamulkuk ran again for the desolate borders of Ul'ashma. As had been his goal he made a quick passage to the shallow valley that would provide a path into the deeper shadows of the summits beyond. In the fading light of dusk the First Hresh made his way out of the plains and began a struggling ascent into the low valley that would be his way into the mountains.

On both sides the steep slopes of the Mountains of the Moons rose as massive walls of granite, the shadows of night deep and clutching as Hamulkuk found an ancient path that led him through the valley and then up its steep sides onto a small plateau. From this open ground he found a further trail that wound upwards through a series of ascents, each in turn leading him higher into the cold embrace of Ul'ashma. Only when he came upon another small table of open ground did he take time to consider his position. Upon this narrow field of thick grasses and wildflowers he surveyed the valley below and decided to rest.

Hamulkuk sat within the grasses and ate a frugal meal of dried meat. His maker had given him the endurance to outdistance his enemies, and the strength to overwhelm them in great number but he was not indefatigable. After the rigours of his journey he knew he must regain his stamina for the days ahead, and to that end had decided within the night hours that he would not call the Ell'adrim until the bright light of dawn was at hand. Beyond the field of grass rose a further slope, steep and jagged but at its crest there would be a further area of flat ground and a clear view to the nests of the Moon Dragons. It would be upon this higher vantage that the First Hresh would prove himself to his Master.

In the cool night air Hamulkuk took his ease, watching the inexorable turn of the sky overhead as if it was his first vision of the world at rest. Many years from this night he would remark that it was the only night of peace that he had ever known, and as he lay within the long grasses he had time to ponder all that he had experienced in the short weeks of his life. Within a backdrop of cicadas and bird calls he considered the unusual state of a Being such as himself, without experiences yet to call his own but possessed of the knowledge and memories of others, somehow alive and reasoning yet manufactured for a purpose and just as disposable. As a state of being it both insulted and humiliated him, but there was always the compelling push of his Orders that kept him centred only on the task at hand. It was an unsettling state of mind that gave no comfort or peace to his thoughts, yet within that inner conflict he was just as sure that he had the capacity to be far more than just a slave.

As he lay one thought did come to mind and it was insistent. To kill the dweo'gorga had exhilarated him but he had sensed during that confrontation that the creatures were the same as himself, Beings made for a purpose and artificed of EarthMagic. He had felt keenly the power of their existence, but as he had sent each of the Assassins into dissolution there had been a perceptible shift in the balance of the world, a slight shiver in the surging power of the foundations of Emur that gave him cause to wonder at its implications.

He knew that he had not just killed the Shape-shifters, indeed he had utterly removed their essence from existence, the power of the Word of Dissolution nullifying even the spark of EarthMagic that had given them life. It was a power that could also send him into nothingness at the whim of his Master, and it made him mindful of his own mortality, but as the dweo'gorga had died he had felt the

heartbeat of the world lessen, if only as a shiver that passed. He would do his Master's bidding but even in those early days he had reason to pause and consider whether his creators were indeed omnipotent. It was a doubt that remained with Hamulkuk through the long night, and one that would fester in his thoughts for the remainder of his days.

Morning came to the high field accompanied by the calls of Cacklers and Whipbirds. As the suns of Emur struggled from the eastern horizon Hamulkuk readied himself for the day that would end in the destruction of the Ell'adrim and the fulfilment of his Orders. At the edges of the plateau there rose another incline, a solid slope of granite that reached to a crest some two hundred metres above his position. At his campsite he left all his equipment except for the Orncryst. Against the Moon Dragons nothing else would have value so with only the sheathed axe strapped at his back he began the climb that would take him within sight of the nests.

Against the bright reds and yellows of sunrise Hamulkuk laboured upon the cliff face, his form a shadow moving with purpose as he ascended the stone, finding at its summit a narrow sliver of ground upon which to make his call. Upon the slope's upper reach he took the Orncryst and surveyed the surrounding mountains. It did not take long to spy out the lairs of the Ell'adrim cut into the upper slopes of the mountains ahead, but there was much more to see here than just the shadowed caves of his prey alone.

To the south and west Hamulkuk looked out upon the vast reaches of the mountains of the Great Rift. Endless lines of snowed summits marched into the south, with no less a procession of granite peaks extending to the horizon in the west. Far to the west he knew there could be found World's End and the mystery of the Veils, but before him the great mountains stood immense and timeless. Within these mountains he could see the mists of morning not yet touched by the light of the suns, and in the deepest of the shadows lay valleys and plateaux, small pockets of night living still between grey monoliths and bright white snow-caps.

To the north, beyond the lesser range of Ul'ashma lay the vast plains of moss and tundra, the horizon a white line delineating the deadly ice cap of the frozen wastes. To the east more of the plains stood empty and quiet, a morning haze evaporating in the warmth of the rising suns. Standing upon his vantage it seemed that the whole world lay beneath his feet but he knew it not to be so. The world of

his Masters was one far greater than this, even if the breadth of it remained unseen. Turning to the west the First Hresh took the Orncryst and considered how he should begin. The gold inlaid into the haft of the axe would already be stirring the Ell'adrim in their caves but it would be his call that would bring them to him. Across a wide valley he could see the dark entrances to their lairs and in the quiet pause of dawn there came a sound of movement, of great beasts rousing within deep and long forgotten places. With the axe in hand he gave a further moment to consider the vista before him then gave the call.

:commen ell'adrim, a' maad a'du bayor:

In the crisp morning air the call rang clearly, its power growing as it echoed upon the mountainsides. Caught within the constant bluster of the peaks the words wove their magic, taking hold of the wind and forming wide vortices of blue energy that tore through the air and assailed the hard stone of the far mountains. It seemed to Hamulkuk that it was a taunt, a challenge for the Moon Dragons to brave the morning suns, compelling the Ell'adrim to show themselves in the bright light of day. Hamulkuk waited, and in that maiden hour the first of the Moon Dragons came forth to claim the Orncryst as its own.

It is a truth that the Ell'adrim do not enjoy the touch of sunlight. Built as weapons themselves they have always preferred the shades of night to find their enemies, and even in those early times had developed an aversion to the bright light of day. Aggeron in his planning knew this and appreciated also that the Dragons would resist the call at first, but eventually be drawn out of their lairs as the magic woven into the call became stronger. The weakest would arise before the more powerful and this would give his new creation a better chance of disposing of the Ell'adrim one at a time. It was a part of Aggeron's plan that worked to the letter of its conception.

As the rays of morning illuminated the valleys below the first of the Ell'adrim issued forth from its lair. Black as night the Dragon arose from its cold home and thrust itself into the air, great wings smoothly reaching as it gained height before bearing down upon the First Hresh. For Hamulkuk it was a revelation of power, and as he watched the creature climb into the air he felt something reach into his chest and grasp at his beating heart. He could not identify what the sensation was but he felt himself grind his feet deeper into the

hard stone beneath him and take hold of the Orncryst all the firmer.

With a screech that pierced the air like a thunderclap the Moon Dragon brought its wings close about it and dived towards the First Hresh. In a long arcing swoop it brought itself upon him and only as it extended its wings to brake its descent could Hamulkuk appreciate the true size of his adversary. Vast in aspect and equipped with huge raking talons the beast was no simple creation of the Trell'sara; it was a force of nature, a monster born of malice and unbridled need, and as it hovered before him he could see its only focus was the Orncryst.

Unable to land upon the thin shelf of ground that the First Hresh had chosen as his vantage the Dragon pulled back its head and blasted the mountainside with dragonfire. With a high-pitched roar the fire spewed from the Ell'adrim's jaws, dousing the crest of the slope in a burning maelstrom that would surely have consumed Hamulkuk. But it did not.

With the Moon Dragon's approach the Orncryst began to vibrate in the First Hresh's grip, its essence charging with power as the creature bore down upon him. Immediately Hamulkuk could sense the change and as he lifted the axe to challenge the Dragon it burst into life, a sphere of blue energy surrounding him even as the Ell'adrim gutted the mountain about him. Wrapped within the protective shield of energy Hamulkuk remained unscrouged by the conflagration, and when the Dragon moved to undertake another assault he struck out with the axe, attempting to draw in his adversary so that he might deal it the one blow required to put it down.

Unable to harm this unusual challenger with dragonfire the Ell'adrim instead found a purchase on the mountain upon the upper slopes at Hamulkuk's right shoulder. With one giant wing the Dragon endeavoured to push the First Hresh from his footing, but he was able to avoid its blow and strike out himself. Both axe and leathered wing missed by an arm's length but when the Dragon struck out again the Orncryst cut true and deep, tearing at the Ell'adrim's limb and bringing upon the Dragon a cruel and violent demise.

At that first touch the Orncryst exploded into life, a stream of energy arcing towards the huge beast and enveloping it in blue fire. Unlike the dweo'gorga the axe had been designed to destroy the Moon Dragons and Aggeron had created it specifically for that task. Hamulkuk was to discover quickly that his Master did not want the Dragons to die easily, and that with all the malice he could bring to its artifice he had devised his own vengeance for the damage brought by

the Ell'adrim upon his brethren.

Before the First Hresh the Moon Dragon shuddered, his body bound and held to the mountainside by coruscating coils of power. As it struggled against its bindings the magic tightened its hold, squeezing the beast into submission before two tendrils of energy began to tear at the chest of the Dragon, opening a gushing wound as they forced their way to its core. Hamulkuk watched as the magic delved to the essence of the Ell'adrim and when it found the spark of EarthMagic that sustained it they crushed the glimmering shard. In a final shuddering tremor the Dragon fell sideways and rolled down the slope into the valley below.

Hamulkuk watched as the great beast slewed to a halt, its chest torn, its life expended. This was not the dissolution he had witnessed in the death of the dweo'gorga. Shabel's Assassins had simply come apart, the constituents of their existence dissolving in the wind to be dispersed at the pleasure of the breeze. Apart from the surprise of their dissolution they had felt nothing. The death of the Ell'adrim had been designed instead to extract pain, and in doing so his Master had ensured the Dragon would know of its own destruction. In its death Hamulkuk could find no honour, only cruelty and vengeance, and he was to be their harbinger.

Before the First Hresh could spend any further thought on the death of the Dragon another arose from the far mountain. In a screeching dive it also attempted to wrest Hamulkuk from his footing but the Orncryst once again found a purchase in the flesh of its victim. In flight the Moon Dragon fell to earth, its body bound tight within blinding coils of energy, but there was no time to ponder the death of the second. Two more of the great beasts took flight and soon Hamulkuk was in combat, only the sphere of energy protecting him from immolation, his axe a flashing reflection of power as he brought down one Dragon after another. By day's end the valley beneath lay as a grim resting place for more than twenty great beasts, and when no more Ell'adrim answered his call he knew he was done. His Orders had been completed to the letter of their utterance.

Spent by the rigours of the battle the First Hresh made his way back to his camp in the lee of the mountain. In his hand the Orncryst was still, its energy depleted but not yet gone completely. In the darkness he ate quietly then laid within the alpine grasses and pondered the pain and death that he had wrought amongst the Ell'adrim. He knew that his Master would be pleased, but in the

course of his great battle he had felt again the same shiver in the world with the death of each Dragon that he had sensed in the demise of the *dweo'gorga*. With each kill there had come a curious sensation as if the world had moved upon its axis, its balance edged from true with the loss of each of the monstrous creatures. Hamulkuk could not fathom its import but as he lay watching the stars he could feel the change, and the struggles of something far below ground trying to take account of it. In his thoughts he determined that no good had come from the success of his mission.

It was in the early hours before dawn that the last of the *Ell'adrim* fell upon Hamulkuk. The First Hresh lay in slumber, exhausted from the battle of the day, when five of the creatures came to ground surrounding him. Upon the narrow field the Dragons landed in a crashing volley that shattered the hard rock beneath them but they did not advance upon Hamulkuk. Instead they waited, heads bowed.

It is surmised that in their minds the days of the *Ell'adrim* had ended, the loss of their brethren too hard a lesson in who now wielded power in the world. If this one small creature had been able to bring them down then they were prepared to meet the same fate, and see an end to the grinding addiction to gold that had overwhelmed their lives and almost sent them into madness. In truth they had been strong enough to resist the call and remain hidden, unable to do anything but witness the demise of their kind, and ponder what end they could find for themselves. For Hamulkuk, a Being new to the world, there could be no understanding of their sorrow, and as the Moon Dragons waited the First Hresh called out.

"What is it you want here, *Ell'adrim*? Did you not hear the call?"

The largest of the *Ell'adrim* moved forward, its vast wings cloaking the sky about the First Hresh. It did not speak though its thoughts echoed in Hamulkuk's head as a raging waterfall.

"We do not know who you are, but you have the smell of the Master about you. Is it your purpose to slay us all?"

And here for the First Hresh there existed a conundrum. With each death of the *Ell'adrim* he had felt the shift, and with each spark of *EarthMagic* removed from existence the world had turned a whisper further from true. He had no mercy for the Dragons, but he felt at the core of his being that he had damaged something far more important than the completion of his Master's Orders should require. He decided on his own volition that he was not about to make it worse.

The First Hresh looked to the creature and sheathed his axe. "My

Orders are clear Dragon, the Master's own words directing that I should send to dissolution all the Ell'adrim who answered the call. You did not answer so I have no cause to harm you."

The Moon Dragon looked to his brothers then turned back to Hamulkuk. "And what of us then. Will another of your kind find its way here and take the rest of us, or are we to be left alone."

Hamulkuk shook his head and pointed in the direction of Menion'Enath. "The Master will be told that all who answered the call were destroyed, and any who might venture this way will see the evidence of your demise rotting in the far valley. I see no reason for another to come for you unless you make yourself known, and I would counsel against it. The world as you know it is about to change and there will be no peace in it. I tell you Ell'adrim that there is now an imbalance in the world and the consequences of it are unknown to me, or any other Being for that matter."

The Ell'adrim stood quietly for a moment as if communicating with his brothers then brought its head down until it lay eye to eye with the First Hresh. "And what of us I ask again. How are we to live beyond the view of the Master and still feed our need for gold?"

Hamulkuk shrugged and pushed the Dragon's head away from his face. "I do not care what you do. All I know is that you must remain hidden or the fate of your brothers shall be yours to embrace as well. Look to what you have. Twenty Ell'adrim have fallen and their gold must now be yours to find. Raid their troves and hunt out their hiding places. That should keep you busy for some time, but I warn you once again, do not bring notice to yourself or you will die."

Again the Moon Dragons engaged in a silent discussion that left the First Hresh standing in the dark, waiting as the immense creatures debated the nature of their survival. When it came it was brief and without equivocation.

"Until the end of the Masters we shall remain outside of their knowledge. Now we must mourn our brothers and find strength again in our gold."

With that the remaining Ell'adrim bowed low to the First Hresh then rose into the air and made their way into the night. It is told that the Ell'adrim disappeared from the world, only to find notice again in the world when the Trell'sara were themselves on the edge of destruction. It is recorded that on the day of the Great Insurrection the Ell'adrim rose in support of the Oera'dim, their power added to the multitudes of the rebellion. In time their kin found homes

throughout the mountains of the north and to this day can still be found in the far reaches of the world.

In the passage of time Hamulkuk returned to Menion'Enath and found great reward, the spies of Aggeron already reporting on the destruction of the Moon Dragons. With his success came the creation of the Hresh'na and the first Army of the March. In time hundreds of thousands of Hresh found life upon the grounds of Gorgoroth and in their multitude fell upon the Forgotten Ones, destroying those that resisted and scattering the shattered remainder beyond the borders of our existence. In Aggeron's hands the Army of the March proved a brutal and effective weapon, its General Hamulkuk, the First Hresh in the World, leading it to victory over the enemies of its Masters. With their victory secure, the Trell'sara divided up the lands before them and set to the true business of their ambition, dominion and the enjoyment of the fruits of their power. It was in that manner that the world continued for countless millennia, the end of the Trell'sara at the hands of Qirion'Delving the beginning of our mastery in the world.

It is rumoured that Hamulkuk remained in service to the Dominus Aggeron for six hundred years, the age of his life unconstrained by any natural restriction. In their haste the Guardians gave no thought to the length of existence for their weapons, instead concerned only that they obey. It proved in the course of time that death came to the Hresh'na only through the circumstances of violence or misadventure, and in the span of his years Hamulkuk served well. There came a time however, when Aggeron tired of the presence of his General, and his attentions and ambitions settled upon the creation of new creatures that could expand the opulence and wealth of his existence. Hamulkuk was forgotten, but only by the Masters.

Leaving the presence of Aggeron, Hamulkuk faded into the shadows of the New Order, his fate unknown to any who may have sought him. It is unknown as to what became of the First Hresh, only that he came into the knowledge of the Oera'dim once more in the southern reaches of the world before disappearing forever. Where he is, or even if he still finds breath, is one of the mysteries of our kind. Remember though Brothers as you listen to this tale, that we are his descendants and if you wish to know more of the First Hresh you need only look at each other, for We are Him."

THE END

WELL OF SHADOWS

CHARACTER STATUS SHEET

A GAMEBOOK FROM THE CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

STRENGTH (5-11)

AGILITY (1-5)

ENDURANCE (15-35)

INTUITION (1-5)

LUCK (1-5)

50 CHARACTER POINTS MUST BE APPLIED HERE.

<input type="checkbox"/>

SUB-TOTAL

+

EQUIPMENT
BONUS

+

TALENT
BONUS

=

COMBAT
VALUE

50 CHARACTER POINTS MUST BE SPREAD WITHIN THESE FIVE CHARACTER ATTRIBUTES. STRENGTH PLUS AGILITY PLUS ANY EQUIPMENT OR TALENT BONUSES EQUAL YOUR CHARACTER'S COMBAT VALUE (CV)

EP

ENDURANCE

NOTE: YOUR INITIAL ENDURANCE LEVEL CANNOT BE EXCEEDED IN THE COURSE OF YOUR ADVENTURE.

QUEST NOTES

EQUIPMENT

NOTE: AFTER PURCHASING EQUIPMENT AT START OF ADVENTURE A MAXIMUM OF ONLY 6 FURTHER ITEMS CAN BE CARRIED.

CHARACTER TALENTS

CHOSEN SHARYAH

TALISMANS FOUND

NEVER HOLD MORE THAN THREE AT ANY ONE TIME AND NO MORE THAN ONE OF THE SAME TYPE.

RATIONS

TORCHES

NAHLA

NO CARRY LIMIT ON THIS ITEM.

CODEWORDS

WELL OF SHADOWS

COMBAT RECORD SHEET

A GAMEBOOK FROM THE CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

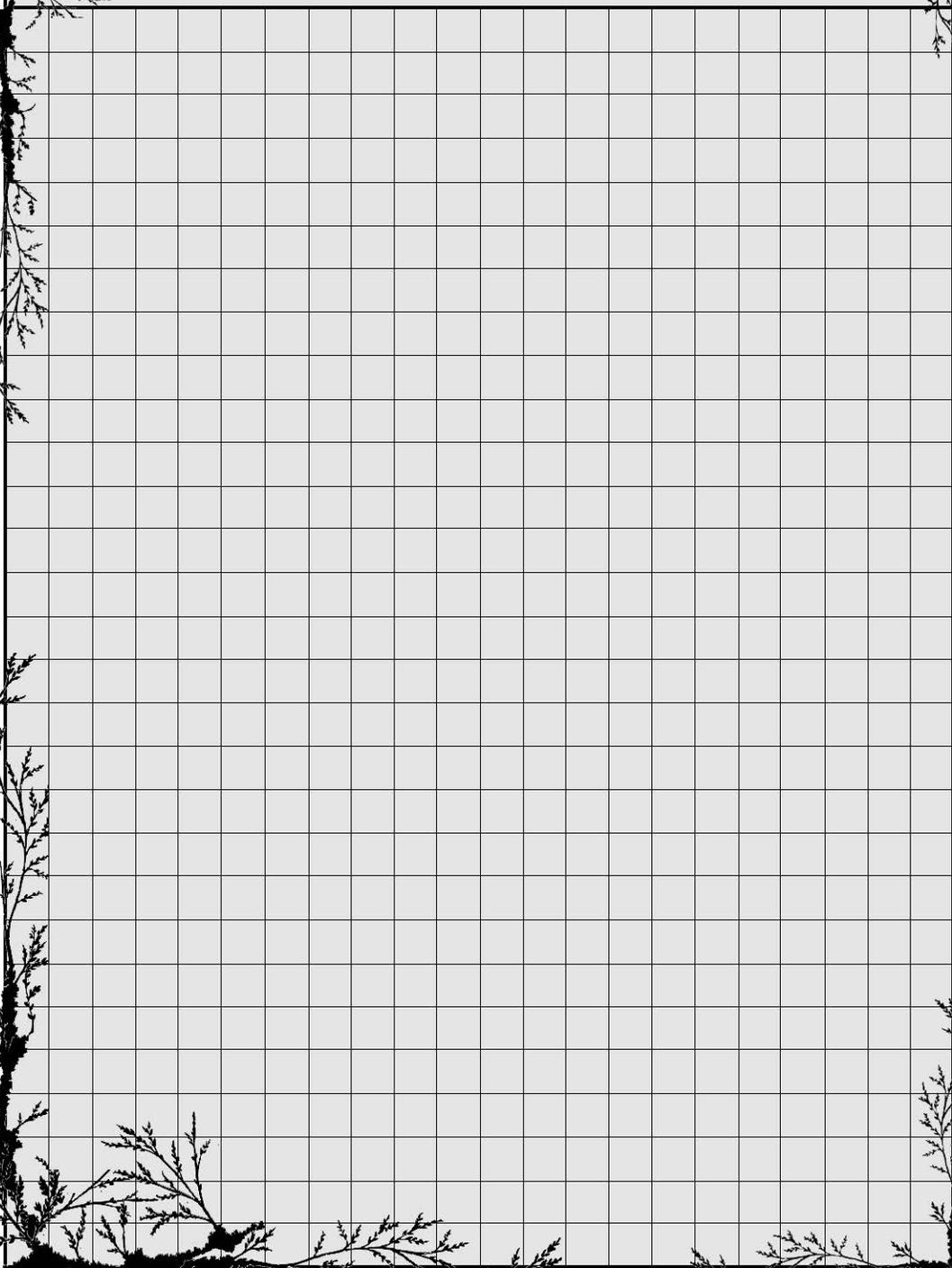
CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
--	----	----	--

WELL OF SHADOWS

MAP SHEET

A GAMEBOOK FROM THE CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL





WELL OF SHADOWS

FOR FOURTEEN LONG YEARS YOU HAVE SEARCHED FOR THE LEGENDARY ORICRYST, A TALISMAN OF THE ANCIENT WORLD AND AN ARTEFACT OF IMMENSE BEAUTY AND POWER.

YOU ARE A BROTHER OF THE DEEP GUILD, A DELVER OF THE RUINS OF THE WORLD AND A MAN WHO HAS NEVER GIVEN UP HOPE THAT THE GREAT AXE DOES INDEED EXIST. IN SEARCH OF THE ORICRYST YOU HAVE FOUND YOUR WAY TO ALLAS'NERIG, A RUIN OF A FORGOTTEN TIME BUT THE HOME OF A POWER THAT MAY KNOW THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE BOON YOU SEEK.

HERE IS THE WELL OF SHADOWS, A PREQUEL GAMEBOOK TO THE TORCHLIGHT ADVENTURE SERIES AND A JOURNEY INTO THE MAGIC AND LEGENDS OF ARBORELL. MAY GLORY AND REPUTATION FOLLOW ALL WHO ENTER HERE.

