

# SKIN DEEP

AN EPIC MYTHOS ADVENTURE



CTHULHU · MYTHOS · SAGAS

6





# PETERSEN GAMES

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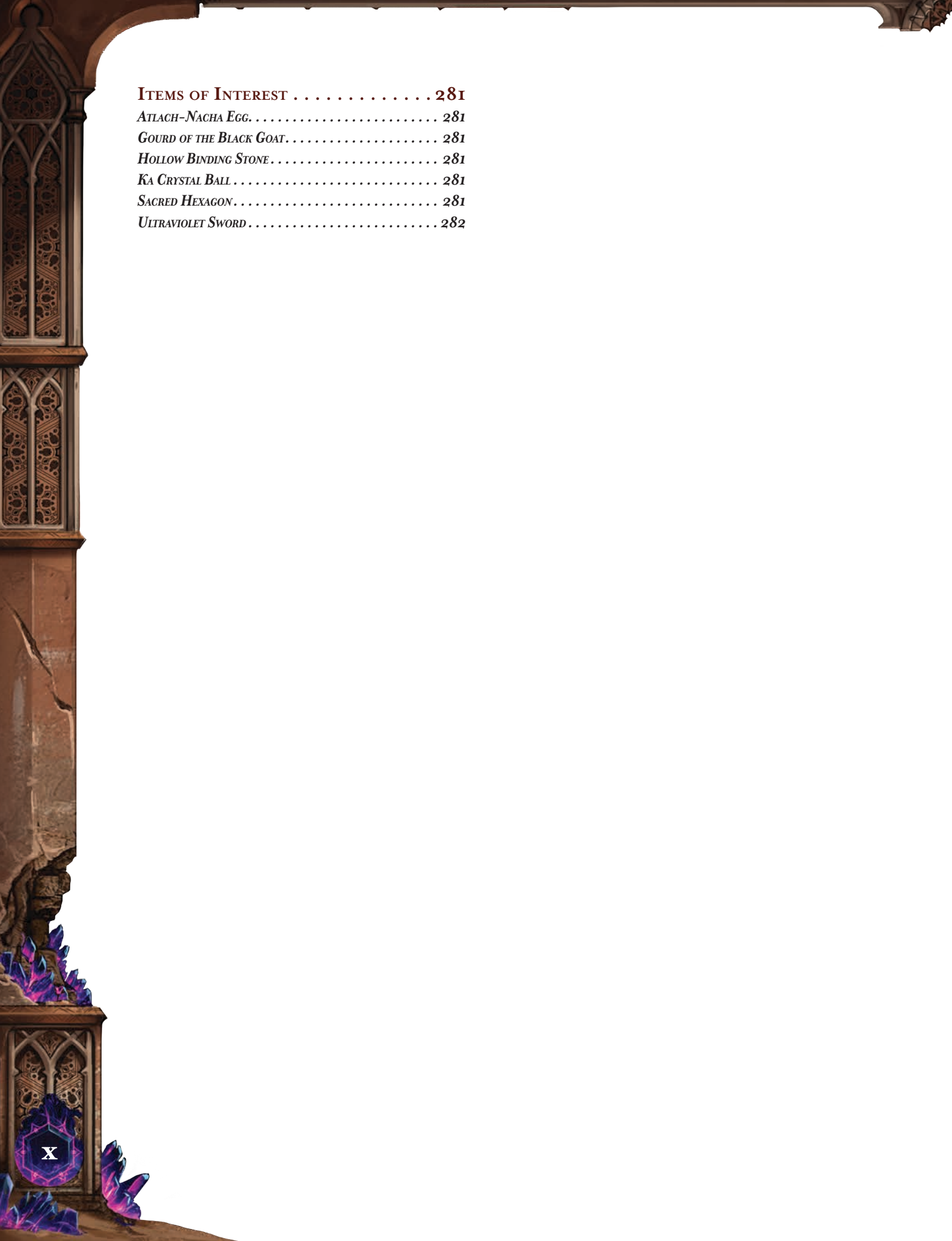
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# SKIN DEEP

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 1st–3rd level*

## INTRO FROM SANDY

In 1957, August Derleth wrote the short-story “The Gable Window,” based on a few sentences by Lovecraft. In it appear entities he names “sand-dwellers.” These gaunt rough-skinned humanoids have rarely shown up elsewhere, possibly because Derleth’s story didn’t present them as terrifying in the same way some Mythos creatures are. In 1980, I included them in my game Call of Cthulhu, but they never made their way into my game Cthulhu Wars.

In essence, I considered the sand-dwellers to be one of the weakest Lovecraftian creations of all time. A savage humanoid from the American Southwest? While I was excited to have a monster who lived in my home stomping grounds, it wasn’t much of a monster. Ghouls have their tunnel system, and interaction with humanity. Deep ones have their hideous hybridization process. And so forth. What do sand-dwellers have going for them?

This campaign was my attempt to address this issue. Since almost nothing has been written about the sand-dwellers, they were a blank slate, just waiting for something interesting to be created. I spent weeks pondering these creatures, and how to bring everything known about them into view. They lived in a part of the world where they’d easily be spotted, so why weren’t they? Why are they so skinny? What is their relationship with the tentacled thing that shows up in “The Gable Window”? What is their purpose, their greater goal?

In the end, I feel confident in my work to transform the sand-dwellers from a scorned minor race into an interesting threat. They are now fearsome whether just a single sand-dweller has infected your town, or if a whole clan shows up. Their relationship with humans is explicated in what I feel is a terrifying, but useful, way.

I look forward to seeing these new, refurbished sand-dwellers in future scenarios both in my own campaigns and those of other people. Let this kick it off!

## USING THIS BOOK

*Skin Deep* is a complete Mythos-inspired fantasy campaign designed to take your player characters from level 1 through level 14. The adventure takes place across fourteen episodes divided among four books. Each chapter should take between 4 and 8 hours to play, depending on your group’s play style.

Before running each adventure, familiarize yourself with the entire chapter. Sidebars, developer’s notes, Sandy’s notes, and appendices at the end of the book

all provide additional context, cues, and information to aid you in running *Skin Deep*.

*Skin Deep* makes extensive use of *Sandy Petersen’s Cthulhu Mythos for Fifth Edition (SPCM)*, and having a copy of that book is essential to running *Skin Deep* Monster stat blocks, the Dread and Insanity mechanics, and the Yog-Sothothery skill from that book are all used in this adventure. The player options presented in *SPCM* are well suited to this setting and can provide additional roleplaying opportunities and evocative details.

Throughout this adventure, references are made to various monsters, NPCs, spells, and magic items. Monster and NPC names appear in bold when referencing statistics or description in another place, while spell and magic item names appear in italics. In both cases, this is a prompt for you to look up the stat blocks in one of three places: the appendices in the back of this book, in *SPCM*, or in the Fifth Edition System Reference Document or the Fifth Edition core books. If the reference is to *SPCM*, it is followed parenthetically by *SPCM* and the page number. If the reference is to one of the appendices, it will be followed parenthetically by “page” and the page number. All other references to monsters, spells, or magic items without such an indication are available in the SRD.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE MYTHOS

At the break of the twentieth century, an unknown American writer named H. P. Lovecraft began writing stories unlike anything ever written before, which would one day be considered some of the most influential horror tales ever told. They were groundbreaking and poignant, and they contained a plethora of unspeakable horrors, alien intelligences, and innovative creatures.

The framework he invented and shared with other authors is commonly referred to as the Cthulhu Cycle, a term coined by August Derleth as a reference to Lovecraft’s seminal work, “The Call of Cthulhu.” Lovecraft himself referred to the shared mythology as Yog-Sothothery. More than a century after his initial story, Lovecraft’s creations are more popular and widely known than ever before, thanks in no small part to tabletop roleplaying games.

Lovecraft’s writing is based primarily on the premise that the cosmos is full of unknowable forces, unthinkable creatures, and alien intelligences to whom humanity is no more important than a gnat. These powers beyond our understanding are nearly omnipotent and omniscient, akin to humanity’s conception

of a god. The servitors of the Great Old Ones, Elder Things, and their ilk have mind-wrenching powers, the support of horrifically reckless cultists, and their own unfathomable agendas.

## KNOW THINE ENEMY

Humanoid enemies are the most common foes in *Skin Deep*, some willingly working to support the sand-dweller's vile machinations and some tricked by sand-dweller impostors. Many humanoid foes are secretly sand-dwellers in disguise, but they rarely differ much from amoral humanoid cultists in how they oppose the PCs' efforts.

### THE SLEEPER

The Sleeper is an epithet for Tsathoggua, a Great Old One who tempts mortals into feeding his cruel gluttony in exchange for magical knowledge about time and space. His servants have established several organizations in the region that might pose problems for the characters. Some can also be helpful, since their humanoid members are often at odds with the sand-dwellers, who want to transform them and enslave their patron.

#### The Opening Eye Society.

In Harge, wizards, warlocks, and sorcerers often belong to a mage's guild called the Opening Eye Society. Its members trade in knowledge of esoteric subjects and the binding of magical creatures—even those with which it is dangerously irresponsible to confer. Only the inner circle realizes the society's magical secrets come from bargains with the Church of the Sleeper and the Great Old One Tsathoggua. Its members are potentially dangerous but can also be convinced to fight against both Tsathoggua and the sand-dwellers.

**The Church of the Sleeper.** In Odram and Tsang, clerics and warlocks often belong to a cult that worships a mysterious demigod called the Sleeper, who supposedly grants knowledge and security to the faithful. They openly donate money or magic items, and sacrifice beasts publicly as part of their rites, making them seem like any other church. In private, they organize the capture and sacrifice of intelligent

victims to Tsathoggua's avatar on the rare occasion it awakens from its long periods of hibernation. When they do, they learn terribly dangerous magical secrets. Recently, the sand-dwellers overran the church, binding the Sleeper's minions to their own goals and killing any cultists who refused to become sand-dwellers.

### THE SAND-DWELLERS

Sand-dwellers are smallish, emaciated humanoids with crusty skin covered with granules. Their heads have grossly expanded sense organs—large eyes and ears, strange noses, and wide mouths. They have huge claws emerging from their shrunk fingers. These features all stem from how they are created.

**Master Manipulators.** A sand-dweller can influence, transform, or replace humanoids in three different ways, depending on the target's level of corruption. Most sand-dwellers have the minds of once-humanoid serial killers, making them terribly cunning, and their mind becomes increasingly inhuman over time. Ultimately, sand-dwellers know humanoid society and are highly skilled at killing people.

#### The Transformation.

Sand-dwellers are not a separate species from humans. They “reproduce” by instilling terrible dreams and visions into selected humans. The human becomes more cunning, more secretive, more psychopathic, and far more dangerous, typically turning into a serial killer. The otherworldly sand-dweller who instigated the visions can also lead the target person (whom the sand-dweller considers its “child”) in certain directions where it can wield power, such as politics, medicine, education, military, or law enforcement. Though often it just generates the killing instinct.

Sand-dwellers can't instigate this process in just anyone; the target must already be evil, or at least lack moral scruples. The sand-dwellers are well aware of this and they try to tempt people into performing vile deeds to make them vulnerable to the reproduction process. Thus, they don't just perform evil deeds like murder alone: they bribe, seduce, or convince allies to perform these acts. Those allies can, later on, become sand-dwellers in turn.





Over time, this process physically transforms the target humanoid internally. Ultimately, the person sheds the outer inch or two of their body like a false skin, releasing the inner sand-dweller. This is why these creatures appear sexless and skinny: they emerge from the inside of a humanoid. Their granular skin causes friction with the outer body, which induces shedding. The sand-dwellers' huge sense organs remain because these organs are not shed with the rest of the head—the original eyes, ears, and nasal cavity remain. Of course, the lost lips, chin, cheeks, and scalp make the organs appear larger than they are. They sometimes also grow somewhat with the sand-dweller's metamorphosis. Once they emerge, sand-dwellers usually eat their former shell and vanish into the wilderness. The reason so many serial killers seem to vanish and are never seen again might be because they undergo this transformation and become sand-dwellers.

**Transcendence.** Once a new sand-dweller emerges from its former skin, it can either remain in the material plane of existence, or it can transcend to the Violet Dimension, or less often the Dreamlands, the Astral Plane, the Abyss, or another plane. It can only make the transfer to another plane once with this innate magic. This means over time, sand-dwellers tend to vanish from the mortal world unless they engineer ways to return. The sand-dwellers live primarily in the Violet Dimension.

**Horrific Impersonators.** Even more hideously, after a sand-dweller has emerged, it can kill a humanoid and hollow its victim out, entering the skin and passing for that humanoid. In this case, the outer shell rots over time, forcing the sand-dweller to discard or eat it. Sand-dwellers can alter their body to fill out the skin properly, which, combined with their high intelligence, means they are usually only discovered as a result of the mysterious disappearances of victims or hastily shed skins.

**Repulsed by Water.** Sand-dwellers find water uncomfortable, as it irritates their skin; they prefer being protected by humanoid fat and tissue or only emerging in sunny weather. Water does not inflict lasting damage on sand-dwellers, but they find it distracting and painful, especially if they expect combat. They can't easily cross rivers and streams, and they typically dwell in desert areas, hence their moniker.

**Bound to Patrons.** Sand-dwellers are a subservient race, always seeking a stronger being, often (not always) a Great Old One or servants of a Great Old One, who will preserve and protect the sand-dwellers. No one can say exactly where the sand-dwellers came from, and the creatures themselves no longer know what dark force created them in the past. Importantly, while their patrons benefit from sand-dweller offerings, the creatures also bind and imprison them, making them vulnerable to being persuaded to turn against the sand-dwellers if set free.

## RAVAZEL THE BUTCHER

Because sand-dwellers are, for the most part, self-aggrandizing psychopaths, it takes a strong personality to organize a large group of them. Ravazel the Butcher is the most powerful and charismatic sand-dweller in this part of the world, and she has whipped thousands of her fellow sand-dwellers into an army to carry out her vision. Once a mortal warlord in the land now called Harge, Ravazel was infamous for sacrificing hundreds of prisoners at a time to placate the Dark Demon and give strength and magic weapons to her and her troops. Her armies ravaged Tsang's southern cities for years until the Elder Wall was built to hedge her out.

## RUNNING SKIN DEEP

This adventure alternates between occult mystery and plot-driven epic struggles against dangerous forces.

**Know Your Players.** Like all adventures with horror elements, this one has a chance of hitting on an element that is uncomfortable for you or one of your players. Remember to confer with your group before you begin about what they are looking for and what they would prefer to avoid. Of particular note, they are likely to encounter incomplete human remains or a similarly disturbing revelation and likely to engage with law enforcement both as investigators and as targets for arrest. If this makes anyone uncomfortable, simply skip ahead to the next part of the scene or replace that element with something else. If details of body horror are spoiling someone's fun, you can replace a shed sand-dweller skin with that character's former clothes ripped apart. If getting arrested hits too close to home, have a friendly NPC warn PCs ahead of a formal arrest attempt so they can go into hiding and plan how to take down the corrupt government that wants to arrest them.

**Roleplaying NPCs.** Roleplaying NPCs is very important, since characters frequently have cause to question the identities and loyalties of the people around them. Most relevant NPCs have listed characteristics just like a PC has, including traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws. Ideals, bonds, and flaws give the NPCs motivations which might inspire them to help or hinder the player characters. Players can better convince NPCs to help them by understanding and focusing on characteristics that align with the PCs' goals: most often this involves appealing to ideals, but possibly PCs might exploit bonds or flaws for a more coercive approach. When an NPC's characteristic causes them to oppose the PCs, the PCs should generally get a chance to guess what characteristic is inspiring the NPC to make their decision, perhaps by studying how the NPC acts with a Wisdom (Insight) check or asking with a Charisma (Persuasion) check. Since this adventure draws its inspirations from a variety of real-world cultures, take a moment to think

about how you want to act out NPCs to make sure you aren't relying on stereotypes like bad accents that can spoil the mood for everyone.

**Disguises and other Mysteries.** For ease of play, it's a good idea to keep track of what your PCs' passive Perception, Investigation, and Insight scores are at the start of each session and whenever they change. This allows you to tell if the character notices nothing unusual without having to alert the player that there might be something to notice. Any time a character interacts with the environment while trying to learn something, you should call for an ability check, but if the character is not actively investigating, it is generally best to quietly compare the PC's passive score to the ability check DC. Even if an ability check DC is given to find a clue, if a player describes their character doing something that would locate the clue, they succeed without a check.

In particular, because sand-dwellers are often encountered disguised with their Wearing a Skin ability, you should consider how often to give characters a chance to notice something is amiss. Generally, characters should only get a new Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check when first interacting in a way that they could notice a subtle imperfection (not a casual interaction or quick glance). If they fail, they should not get another attempt until given a new reason to suspect the disguised creature. To avoid players realizing something their characters shouldn't, you should use the character's passive Investigation or passive Insight unless the character is using an action to intentionally examine the disguised NPC. Note the sand-dweller's Wearing a Skin trait prevents them from being noticed as sand-dwellers or aberrations by spells and features, including Eldritch Sensitivity or Desperate Insight.

**Humanoid Minions.** Humanoids working with the sand-dwellers often don't realize just how depraved and murderous the sand-dwellers are. They typically believe that the sand-dwellers are only going to kill people the humanoid minions hate or fear. Some can't think clearly at all, having been overwhelmed by the sand-dweller's violent psychic influence. Very clever and persuasive characters thus have a chance of convincing humanoid minions to change sides or at least abandon the sand-dwellers.

Humanoid minions without an obvious excuse or cover can generally be persuaded to admit to working for the cult with a successful DC 10 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. Characters who threaten them with legal repercussions aren't very persuasive, receiving disadvantage on this check or outright failing. The cultists typically play dumb if they can, but if not, they rant about how the party has stopped them from providing a great feast that will grant immortality and infamy. They aren't afraid of being held by Harge because they expect the city to fall soon. They are, however, open to the idea they might be betrayed. Convincing them to share what they know requires a successful DC 17 Charisma

(Intimidation or Persuasion) check. They generally only know what their jobs require them to know, but believe it is part of getting their magical reward.

**Defeated Player Characters.** Most of the villains in this adventure are intelligent and concerned with knowing what has been discovered about them, so they typically consider the PCs more useful alive than dead. Unless they have a compelling reason to do otherwise, a villain generally knocks out PCs they reduce to 0 hit points rather than kill them. If the PCs are all defeated, villains take the characters prisoner to interrogate. Prisoners generally have their weapons and other held and carried items (but not armor) taken from them and are tied up for questioning. Even if PCs are intended for eventual execution, they should have opportunities to escape, leading to all sorts of interesting side adventures.

## MILESTONE LEVELING

This campaign is meant to take your players' characters from 1st to 14th level. It is designed so each chapter can be completed within a session and that the entirety of the campaign can be completed in 14 sessions. At the end of each chapter, the PCs automatically progress to the next level. GMs wishing to award XP need to add additional encounters to each adventure in Acts 2, 3, and 4; to expand each chapter, use the encounter tables from *SPCM* 408-417 and/or explore any number of the story seeds presented within the adventures.

## CHARACTER CREATION

When helping players create their characters, you might suggest particular classes, races, backgrounds, and bonds that would fit in well. The options below offer extra ways to tie characters into the campaign.

### CLASSES AND SKILLS

Classes like bard and rogue, particularly with the College of Alien Symbolism (*SPCM* 45) or Researcher roguish archetype (*SPCM* 53), provide numerous opportunities to contribute with ability checks. The Mystery Warrior fighter archetype (*SPCM* 51) is apt for a fighter from Tsang and helps fighters contribute during investigation scenes. The *Elder Sign* divine domain (*SPCM* 45) is liable to be useful and fits easily if the character trained in Tsang (especially the Keepers of Fenkai), who worships an Elder God such as Nodens or Bastet (popular throughout this area), or who has studied Tsang's famous Elder Wall from the Harge side. Characters who can't abide talking might struggle to find things to do at certain points in the campaign, so it's recommended every PC be trained in at least one Charisma-based skill, Insight, or Investigation.

### MYTHOS RACES

Characters with the ghoulish race (*SPCM* 14), especial-



ly with the necrophage monastic tradition (*SPCM* 39), have more ways to investigate. Dreamlands cats are common, but they have a special advantage in urban settings like Tsang and Odran, where they can easily move unnoticed. NPCs are generally aware that some cats are Dreamlands cats, much as most NPCs are aware that some cats are familiars, but a cat can sometimes be mistaken for an ordinary cat. Zoogs might hail from the highland forest in western Harge or inner Tsang, where they oppose human intrusion except under carefully negotiated treaties. Gnorri are a bit far from their traditional coastal homes, and have very little opportunity to swim for most of the adventure, so they might not fit particularly well.

### SUGGESTED BONDS

Players might be better invested in the story if their characters have a personal stake in the matter early on. Consider offering any of the following hooks to your players for their characters. If the character has a background that incorporates elements of the adventure, it's easiest to give them a bond that matches that background element rather than trying to combine a different one.

**Elbaresh's Memory.** You are closely connected to Master Argus Elbaresh, the master smith. He was a former adventurer with a big heart. He looked out not only for his fellow guild members but also for people with nowhere to go, such as political refugees from Tsang. He might be your uncle or mentor, but in any case, he helped you become an independent adult. Now he has been killed in mysterious circumstances, and you have vowed to investigate his murder and, if possible, avenge him. You get inspiration when you take a risk to find out the truth about his death. You also get inspiration when you go out of your way to supply or rescue refugees like he would have wanted you to. This bond is especially appropriate for anyone proficient with artisan's tools as well as any background connected to a guild or a troubled past.

**Horrific Discovery.** You or someone close to you once discovered an empty humanoid skin in a sandy ditch near the border between Harge and Odran. No one knew who it once was or what happened to the rest of the body. You get inspiration when you discover a clue about what could have done it. This bond is especially appropriate for the alienist background (this was a previous unsolved case), the Mythos survivor background (it was found while escaping the danger), the Mythos cultist background (it might be found while leaving the cult), the druid class, the ranger class, or any background associated with travel, rural areas, or the fringes of society.

**Nearly Sacrificed.** You were captured by moon-beasts or scaly sand-dwellers in the desert. They nearly sacrificed you to a formless spawn in a deep underground cave system, but you managed to slip away and eventually got to safety. You get inspiration

whenever you defeat a sand-dweller, formless spawn, or moon-beast. This bond is very apt for anyone with the Mythos survivor background, the Mythos cultist background (perhaps you were given over as a sacrifice when you tried to leave), the druid class, the ranger class, or any background associated with travel, rural areas, or the fringes of society.

**Ominous Dreams.** You've had an unsettling dream over and over again, where you can't see anything through a thick purple haze but can hear a voice begging over and over again. You can't make it all out, but each time you can pick out a few disjointed words like, "Let go! Will die! Stop!" Other nights, you dream of bloated toads that eat whatever else you were dreaming of. You are sure there was more to the dreams you can't remember. You get inspiration when you learn a clue about the entity in the dream or the dream's origin. This bond is especially appropriate for the visionary or acolyte background as well as classes like cleric, monk, paladin, or warlock.

**Rabble-Rouser.** You have seen callous or corrupt government decisions get people you care about hurt or killed. If it was in Harge, you might have pressured Lord Killian's ministers to make things right or stepped into a minor government role yourself to show them how it's done. If it was in Odran, you might have helped people targeted for reprisal by Duke Odran and his lackeys escape to Harge or Tsang. If it was in Tsang, you might have helped fund anti-imperial reformers fighting corruption. Wherever you hail from, you believe in helping people fight bad government. You get inspiration whenever you convince another person or group to support reform efforts, obstruct unjust policy, or fight back against oppression. This bond is especially appropriate for the alienist background, which likely allowed you to see people in need being ignored or mistreated by officials. It is also appropriate for some rogues or paladins, and any background associated with political activity, service to others (as some acolytes perform), or people outside society's mainstream.

**Returned Murderers.** Your friend, mentor, or parent was a guard or alienist in Tsang or Odran who investigated murderers. They discovered a pattern of serial killings that suggested something unnatural was afoot. What others believed to be merely copycats of famous murders from centuries ago, the person you bonded with was certain the original murderer returned after they should rightly have long since died. Others called them a fool and dismissed them, but you intend to prove them right. You get inspiration whenever you take a risk to gather evidence about possible serial killers. This bond is appropriate for an inquisitive rogue, ranger who specializes in tracking, or anyone associated with lore and its attainment.

**Sleeper Apostate.** You once followed the Church of the Sleeper, which has a powerful presence in Tsang and a minor presence in Odran. In the church, you studied alongside people who were recklessly ob-



sessed with gathering magical power and knowledge. In recent months, internal tensions grew as some members disappeared and others became defensive. You have since left the group, either publicly disavowing it or simply drifting quietly away. Perhaps you resent them for fleecing you of money or interesting items, or you realized they were pressuring you to abandon your principles, or you discovered they had gotten themselves involved in dangerous business. You get inspiration whenever you take a risk to learn about a cult or defeat a cult leader. This bond is especially appropriate for the Mythos cultist background, the acolyte background, the cleric, paladin, wizard, or warlock classes, or any background associated with deception or knowledge.

**Strange Urges.** You are a troubled person, perhaps once a criminal, mercenary, guard, or soldier who found excuses to be violent. Recently, you found your temper exceptionally hard to control and dreamed of killing people who annoyed you or who would not be missed. The experience felt like an intrusion into your mind, and you want to know what has been imposing on your thoughts. You get inspiration when you discover a clue about mental manipulation. This bond is especially appropriate for the Mythos cultist or visionary background, the barbarian class, the fighter class, the rogue class, or any background that involves hurting people for a living.

## MYTHOS BACKGROUNDS

Characters with Mythos backgrounds should fit very well into this adventure. Below is advice on touchstones for each of those backgrounds. Some advice touches on special bonds described above.

Characters with the alienist background (*SPCM* 62) or who work as private investigators, mercenaries, soldiers, or guards are well-suited to helping Lord Killian as the adventure begins. An alienist who was once apprenticed to an experienced master investigating serial killings in Tsang or Odran is ideal (and might have the Horrific Discovery or Returned Murderers suggested bond). An alienist who has treated the victims of monsters that appear in this adventure also works well. They might have seen people who unwittingly had their aggression amplified by sand-dwellers. In Act 1, an alienist can contact Mentefzar at the Second Chance Sanitarium on **Temple Street** (page 12) through their professional contacts to get a clue about Mythos influence.

The visionary background (*SPCM* 65) is liable to be helpful in case characters get stuck during an investigation. When mystic forces attempt to contact the players (as a ka does in Act 1), a visionary is the most logical choice. A visionary can create art and show it to Harruk Hua at **Hua's Oddities** (page 18) to retry a failed ability check to understand a Mythos influence.

Characters with the Mythos cultist background (*SPCM* 63) are easiest to accommodate if they belong to the Opening Eye Society (which has danger-

ous connections but hasn't yet been indoctrinated as true cultists) or if they have left the Cult of the Sleeper. For this background's Revelation feature, consider revealing that Tsathoggua's avatar is drawing near in a parallel plane of existence called the Violet Dimension. To accommodate a player invested in using another cult, consider changing the Opening Eye Society (but not the Sleeper Cult) to match the cult the Mythos cultist character came from (Atlach-Nacha, Byatis, Nyarlathotep, Rhan-Tegoth, Tulszcha, and Yog-Sothoth are also suitable patrons of a shady mage's guild).

Characters with the Mythos survivor background (*SPCM* 64) should have contact with at least one of the patron monsters in this adventure. For example, they might have narrowly avoided being sacrificed to formless spawn by a group of moon-beasts and sand-dwellers, learning in the process that the moon-beasts worship Tsathoggua and sand-dwellers avoid water. The character doesn't know all the details about the creatures they survived, just terrified glimpses (probably over a long period of hiding or fleeing) that gave away their resistances and vulnerabilities. Sand-dwellers were only encountered hunting in ambush, with their true selves exposed to the dry sand. Keep in mind that the Desperate Insight feature can't be used to notice disguised sand-dwellers.

## THE SETTING

This adventure takes place in three nations: Harge, Odran (south of Harge), and Tsang (north of Harge). Act 2 takes place largely in the home of the sand-dwellers, the Violet Dimension. The setting is flanked to the west by the Sleeping Mountains and to the east by the sea. The wider world need not come up in this campaign, so as the GM, you should feel free to alter the surrounding terrain to fit these three countries where you like in the world of your choice. Fundamentally, they have only a few elements that are needed for the adventure. Sparsely populated Harge serves as a relatively safe and comfortably independent starting point and is not allied with either Odran or Tsang. Odran is a small but rich nation with decadent and unpopular rulers. Tsang is a large, powerful nation with a history of fending off magical invaders whose bloated government has become disconnected from its people.

### HARGE

The small city-state of Harge occupies rolling hills, fields, and steppes grazed by herds of horses, yaks, and bison. The Sleeping Mountains to the west and the stormy sea to the east hedge it in. The western uplands are swathed in the Zoog Woods, where dangerous creatures lurk in the shade of tall cedars. The Albarian desert encroaches more on Harge's fields every year from the south. Its richer neighbors



Tsang (to the north) and Odran (to the south) tend to dismiss this little territory. Foreigners usually regard Harge as the home of self-sufficient herders, ignorant yokels, and stubborn idealists. Some older people in Tsang and Odran associate Harge with bandits, since Harge was the home of many legendary bandit warlords in centuries past. Harge has no major port because its small stretch of coast is wracked by severe storms much of the year.

### ODRAN

The mercantile duchy of Odran occupies the only safe harbor on the storm-wracked southern coast. It does frequent trade by land and by sea with Tsang and southern nations across the Albarian desert. The nation's feckless and luxury-loving ruler Duke Odran is a playboy in his early 30s. His recent threats of war were a bit of a surprise because the duke never showed ambition for conquest before. He has given only flimsy excuses about Harge inspiring his citizens to unpatriotic behavior and Harge being a threat to his ally Tsang. The commoners of Odran resent their predatory duke and admire the ideals of Harge and the grand achievements of Tsang. The Odranian upper class make their money in trade. They look down on Harge for allowing the city council to choose its ruler and look to Tsang for new fashions, magical breakthroughs, and luxuries to hoard.

### TSANG

The empire of Tsang is a diverse and populous nation with exceptionally well-developed manufacturing and unparalleled schools of magical knowledge. Traders carry their metalwork, books, and staple foods across the world. Its local governments are run by election and its traditionalists pine for the golden age when elections chose the ruling council of Tsang. The ancient Federation of Cities was usurped by a self-declared emperor amid famine and raids from Hargi bandits. Ever since, the Empire of Tsang has presented itself as the great bulwark of civilization, protecting society from the forces of chaos. It is famous for its Elder Wall, which legend says was built to fend off an army of jackals from another plane of existence many centuries ago, led by the legendary first Hargi bandit queen Ravazel.

Tsang has tense relations with its smaller neighbor, Harge. Long ago, Tsang attempted to conquer Harge to "stabilize" it and to prevent occasional raids by Harge nomads looking for food and treasure. Hargi raiders then attacked Tsang with increasing brazenness. More recently, Harge has begun attracting disaffected and politically dissident people leaving Tsang. Tsang and Odran are steady trade partners, mostly trading by sea to avoid the slower trek overland through Harge and Harge's steep tariffs. The people of Odran and Harge tend to have mingled



admiration and resentment toward what they view as Tsang's glamorous and condescending ways.

## THE VIOLET DIMENSION

The Violet Dimension is another plane of existence altogether. It is a reality of superimposed truths. Principal features of the Violet Dimension are vast deserts of violet sand and crystalline forests dotted with occasional alien stone structures. While the sand-dwellers are but one of several dangerous groups here, this is their place of power. Other major inhabitants of the Violet Dimension include the hollow plague and the uskval. The hollow plague are crystalline monsters that spread a curse to transform other intelligent creatures into more of themselves. The uskval are insect-like creatures of great knowledge and reality-twisting power who sell secrets of the multiverse to anyone who pays their strange prices.

## CAMPAIGN SYNOPSIS

### ACT 1: MURDER IN THE DARK

The first clue to the conspiracy is a pair of sudden murders in Harge amid the unexpected threat of war from Odran. As the characters investigate, they discover that strangers from Kulara (in Odran) have secretly infiltrated Harge alongside conjured monsters. In Kulara, the characters discover that the conspiracy has penetrated Odran's government, blinding the people to the scope of the threat until the characters help resist Kulara's tyrannical magistrate.

With the help of a few Kularan citizens and secrets learned from people silenced by the magistrate, they evacuate as many of Kulara's people as possible before their own duke sacrifices them in a terrible sand-dweller ritual. Although the characters might have reduced their numbers, the sand-dweller ritual opens a gate to the Violet Dimension and a whole army invades. The characters must travel through it to close it for good and learn the truth behind the voice that has been urging them on.

### ACT 2: THE VIOLET DIMENSION

Trapped in the Violet Dimension, the characters must travel to find and destroy the keystones that hold the gate open.

The kas, fragments shed from the creation of sand-dwellers, know many things about the sand-dwellers. The characters track several kas across the Violet Dimension to learn about the sand-dwellers' allies, plans, weaknesses, and magic before returning home. Along the way, they encounter an alien civilization that has a tense alliance with the sand-dwellers. In the end, they learn how to reach the sand-dwellers' secretive Sand Citadel, which requires a relic taken to the Material Plane called the *Sacred Hexagon*.

### ACT 3: RISE OF REVOLUTION

When the PCs return, Odran and Harge are wastelands overrun by sand-dwellers, humans infected by sand-dweller urges, humanoids enslaved by sand-dwellers, and the sand-dwellers' patron monsters. They must travel north through the haunted lands to get to the empire of Tsang.

There, the characters need to get themselves and any refugees in their care inside magical wards protecting Tsang. However, even behind Tsang's Elder Wall, not all are safe. As sand-dwellers infiltrate and compromise the government of Tsang, the characters must assist a rebellion to save the world from sabotage within the halls of power. Rallying the people takes the PCs from the Elder Wall to free the crime-riddled magical city of Fenkai and settle infighting among rebels in the fortified metropolis of Anxi.

### ACT 4: HUMANITY BESIEGED

Just as the characters unite the forces of freedom, the evil Emperor Xao launches a surprise attack on Anxi. The characters help the city hold out until reinforcements arrive, but the sand-dwellers' monstrous army seizes on the distraction to breach the Elder Wall. The characters have little time to eliminate the sand-dwellers pulling the strings of the imperial army and unify the surviving mortals to hold Anxi against a horrific monstrous siege spearheaded by the monstrous general holding the *Sacred Hexagon*.

Retrieving the *Sacred Hexagon* finally allows the characters to access the Sand Citadel. While the humans in Anxi prepare for a siege, the characters sabotage the source of the sand-dwellers' awful power. In the Sand Citadel, they free the sand-dwellers' unwilling monstrous patrons and return to fight the final battle on a newly leveled playing field.



# ACT 1: MURDER IN THE DARK

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 1st–3rd level*

## ACT SYNOPSIS

Initially hired to discover the cause of a series of high-profile murders in Harge, the characters soon discover a web of deadly intrigue connecting Harge and Odran. The murderers came from an unearthly tunnel connecting to the border Odranian town of Kulara. Along the way, the PCs get brief psychic hints from a ka, an unearthly presence that wants to help them fight back against the inhuman infiltrators.

In Kulara, the characters identify and warn people of the unseen danger in their midst. While Kulara is also struck by murders, their government hides information and blocks investigations. The magistrate, a party to the conspiracy, must be undermined by freeing those she has had dragged away as conscripts. The characters risk capture as soon as they make waves, but the conscripted people of Kulara can help them escape. Finding and freeing the conscripts is the only way to save the town and learn enough to save Harge from a surprise attack.

The unrest in Kulara does not go unnoticed. Duke Odran sends mercenaries to hold the town and prepare for a profane ritual. The characters must evacuate everyone they can from the town, then find out what they can about the ritual. When a rift opens to the Violet Dimension and a sand-dweller invasion pours forth, they are called to escape through it and destabilize it before sand-dweller patrols can capture them or further reinforcements arrive.

## DREAD AND SAND-DWELLERS

Characters are likely to make at least a couple disturbing discoveries during the adventure, although when they occur depends on how thorough the characters are and their choices in interacting with sand-dwellers. If you use the dread rules (*SPCM* 72), these disturbing discoveries expose the characters to dread. When characters first encounter a humanoid husk hollowed out by a sand-dweller, it is a disturbing discovery (save DC 10). Likewise, when characters realize someone they are interacting with is a sand-dweller for the first time, that is a minor disturbing discovery (save DC 10). If they make the discovery by seeing the sand-dweller emerge from a stolen skin, they have disadvantage on the saving throw.







*Sleeping Mountains*

*Intiri Hills*

*Plains of Zomaltoa*

*Zog Woods*

*Yangan*

*Harge*

*Kulara*

*Albarian Desert*

*Red River*

*Elder Wall*

*Tsang*

*Fenkai*

*Tartbet Hills*

*Zaga Hills*

*Imperial City*

*Odran*

*Anxi*

*Sea of Thar*







## CHAPTER 1: THE SLEEPER'S MINIONS

*A Cthulhu Mythos Adventure for 4 to 5 Characters of 1st level*

### ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Key people in the city of Harge are found murdered. Is there more than one killer? Is it assassins from Odran? A murderous cult? The PCs are tasked by kindly Lord Killian to track down the perpetrators. This chapter plays out like a murder mystery: the player characters must first figure out likely locations for the villains' hideout based on where the killers discarded the corpses. Unless they are very circumspect, they must fight some of the cultists without backup.

The characters have a chance to capture or kill most or all the attackers, including their sand-dweller leader, the Kulara Strangler. In the end, the characters learn that the killers emerged from tunnels dug by a mysterious entity and that dark magic is afoot. If the killers are not locals, where did they come from?

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

A sand-dweller has infiltrated the city of Harge to weaken it ahead of aggression from fellow sand-dwellers pushing Odran toward war. He was

originally the Kulara Strangler—a serial killer of some notoriety in Odran. He also craves recognition for his crimes and attempts to reproduce his pattern from Kulara as precisely as possible.

Before coming to Harge from the nearby Odranian town of Kulara, the Strangler enslaved some ghouls and bound a yothan designer to his service. He also recruited a small group of human murderers of various classes from Kulara, some originally guards and some formerly mages who belonged to the Church of the Sleeper, who are gradually succumbing to his sand-dweller influence. He tempts them with promises that they can become ageless like him by feeding their bloodlust.

As usual, the Kulara Strangler shed a ka when he transformed into a sand-dweller. This ka is now a mere spectral fragment of a mind that calls itself the Strangler's Doubt. The Strangler's Doubt looms in the Violet Dimension parallel to the Strangler, watching the Strangler and attempting to get in his way. Unfortunately, the ka is nearly powerless across the boundaries between planes of existence. All it can do is send fragmentary dreams to anyone near the Strangler.

## THE SLEEPER'S MINIONS



In Harge, the Kulara Strangler targets powerful individuals and has his own favorite methods of killing: exploring a victim's home by delivering something to them as a porter or other servant, allowing him to study their living quarters and schedule, then strangling them when he can next get them alone. When he intends to kill someone or dispose of a body, he uses Harge's storm drains to move unseen.

The Kulara Strangler killed Master Elbaresh in his bedroom above his smithy three days before the characters are recruited. The Strangler left the body in the alley behind Elbaresh's smithy as he made his way back to the storm drain in the alley. The Strangler left his calling card, a chrysanthemum, in the smith's mouth to claim his kill. Elbaresh's friend and neighbor Raya Hua spotted the body later in the morning while throwing some refuse out.

She tried vainly to save her already-dead friend, tossing aside the flower without a second thought. The guard was too distracted by preparations for battle to spare much attention for the crime, until there was another, similar murder.

Last night, the Kulara Strangler struck a second time. He staked out Lady Doloran after delivering a magic item to her from Hua's Oddities. He then watched from an alley as Doloran went to the Opening Eye Society, was rejected from joining by Yarod Zin, and returned. He had previously toyed with Lady Doloran's emotions in the hope of turning her into another sand-dweller. While she did act more belligerently, he wasn't satisfied and figured the murder might later be used by Duke Odran as a further pretense for war. The Strangler entered her room on the second floor of the Odranian Embassy by climbing the wall facing empty buildings, strangled her before she could cry out, and pulled the body out the same way. He emerged from another drain to leave her behind the Fallen Log Tavern on his way back to his hideout in the city's old crypts.

## HARGE

Harge is a minor city-state surrounded by farms and dry hills grazed by herds of goats, cattle, yaks, and bison. Several vassal towns surround it out to the southern desert of Odran and the Elder Wall of Tsang in the north. Its most distinctive structures are the Council Hall, the stadium for horses known as the

Hippodrome, and the series of fine stables ringing the city.

Trouble brews in the city. War looms from the neighboring duchy of Odran, and most of Harge's guards have been called off to garrison frontier fortresses, so few security personnel are left in the interior. Harge is gripped with anxiety over the threat of war. People hoard goods, and prices for food and drink are high. Soldiers drill in the fields around the city.

Popular **Lord Killian** (page 200) rules Harge. He was selected to rule by the city council.

## COUNCIL HALL

Lord Killian holds court in the council hall. Captain Esperia is also frequently here, discussing preparations for war with her lieutenants. Nearby is the city jail, where any captured criminals are kept. Recently, Master Zin has been at court on most days to discuss magical assets that might help Harge deal with the threat of war and recent murders.

## THE FALLEN LOG

This split-log tavern, popular among adventurers' companies as a venue to negotiate work, is a huge wooden structure called the Fallen Log. Its proprietor is an eccentric she-zoog named Bramble. Many zoogs look askance at Bramble for habits such as eating no meat but fish and insects, and hiring a clowder of cats (traditional zoog enemies) to keep the establishment free of mice. Her rates for rooms are the best in town, but some grumble at the pranks she plays on tenants who are rude or don't tip. Experienced adventurers learn to avoid the trick benches that see-saw when she removes a pin, and they don't sign up for jobs she posts offering an even split of a non-existent treasure supposedly hidden in a remote patch of stinging nettles.

Item	Price
Savory forest mead, 1 flagon	2 sp
Savory forest mead, 1 cup	1 sp
Smoked fish meal	1 sp
Snack spider (a favorite for zoogs and Dreamlands cats to chase)	1 cp
Room	1 sp per night
Trapped Vault	1 cp per night

## TEMPLE STREET

One street in Harge's Old City is lined with small stone temples dedicated to a group of popular gods



known as the Great Ones. An ill-kept crypt occupies the rest of the street. The GM should feel free to include temples to deities appropriate to their preferred campaign setting. Popular Great Ones include Zo-Kalar, who protects children and makes for peaceful deaths; Tamash the Protector, who ensures peace; and Nath-Horthath the Two-Faced, who guards against nightmares.

**Temple of Zo-Kalar.** The largest temple belongs to Zo-Kalar, the most prominent Great One in Harge. He is the god of life's beginning and end, protecting children and promising peaceful deaths. His priests run a hospice, bless newborn children, and perform funerals at the graveyard outside of town. They are usually lawful neutral, lawful good, or neutral good.

**Second Chance Sanitarium.** The priests of Nath-Horthath run a sanitarium for those plagued by nightmares or certain forms of supernatural insanity. Anyone who experiences strange dreams can also come to the priests for a consultation to learn what they failed to deduce with ability checks. Mentezfar the Gatekeeper (dwarf **priest**, lawful neutral) freely advises worshipers of Nath-Horthath and alienists but asks a donation of 5 gp for his help otherwise.

**Services.** Priests of the Great Ones (human or dwarf **acolytes** or **priests** of a suitable alignment) offer their spellcasting services freely to those who make an offering in the temple, so long as the offering seems commensurate with their wealth (a few gold pieces for a 1st-level adventurer, or 5 gp for a 2nd- or 3rd-level adventurer). Anyone who makes a sacrifice to protect the dead, dying, or children is rewarded with an *aid* spell.

Item	Price
Holy water	50 gp
Potion of healing	50 gp
Spell scroll, 1st-level	100 gp
Spell scroll, 2nd-level	250 gp

## THE HIPPODROME

Harge's most distinctive feature is a large arena for horse shows, displays of mounted skill, druidic rituals, and fairs to exchange techniques for animal husbandry. The structure is surprisingly light for its size, built mostly of thin wood and leather tarps strengthened by magic. It is decorated with colored flags advertising upcoming events, including horseback acrobatics and races.

Characters can compete in races or acrobatics events if they provide their own steed. A character can win 25 gp in a race by collecting three successful DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks before collecting three failures. If they have two successes, they take second place and win 10 gp. No prize is awarded for lower placement. They can also earn 5 gp by succeeding on a DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, or 2 gp if their result is at least 15. There are

only two openings in each event during Chapter 1 and another two during Chapter 2.

Horse traders from across the region are always to be found here. They can share word of the goings-on in other countries (including the summaries on page 6) and offer the finest steeds for sale. A distinguished trader named Ozveld sells *horseshoes of speed* for 2,000 gp and might offer other items, such as magical saddles.

## HUA'S CURIOSITIES

The Hua family, led by matriarch **Raya Hua** (page 54), runs the only magic item shop in Harge. Other members include her doting husband Harrek Hua and their daughters Velna and Isnel (all half-orc **commoners**). They make regular trips to acquire new wares in their homeland of Tsang, but never spend long away from Harge. In addition to her family, Raya sometimes employs local porters to deliver items for her discreetly. Raya and one of those porters, Alazan, are suspects in the recent murders. Raya thinks Yarod Zin is dangerous and refuses to sell deception- or stealth-enhancing items to anyone who belongs to the Opening Eye Society.

Item	Price
Bag of holding	250 gp
Dust of dryness, 1 pinch	75 gp
Eyes of minute seeing	250 gp
Hat of disguise	350 gp
Goggles of night	450 gp

## THE OPENING EYE SOCIETY

The Opening Eye Society operates as a mage's guild out of one of the oldest buildings in Harge, a low stone tower from before the city reached its modern size. It is not far from the crypt on Temple Street. It has an icon of a half-closed eye in a downward-pointing triangle posted above the door. The society member Dugard of Sybald (dwarf **cult fanatic**, lawful neutral) sells magic items to the general public, but their magic lessons are closed to non-members.

Characters can earn membership by demonstrating an unusual spell to them or donating an unusual magic item. Any spell or item not in the System Reference Document is sufficiently unusual, even if the society already has a copy. Anyone who has openly defied the Church of the Sleeper (for example, someone with the Sleeper Apostate bond, see page 5) is refused membership without explanation. Members can scribe spells into their spellbook from the society's collection or peruse one of the society's Mythos texts. Inducted members can learn *lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106) and most spells not kept secret by other Mythos cults.

The society's leader, Master Zin, often consults on magical matters for Lord Killian's court at the council hall. He is also a person of interest in the recent murders.

# THE SLEEPER'S MINIONS



Item	Price
Acid flask	40 gp
Potion of healing	50 gp
Potion of greater healing	200 gp
Spell scroll of detect magic	25 gp
Spell scroll of identify	50 gp
Spell scroll of sleep (1st level)	50 gp
Wand of magic detection	250 gp
Formless spawn residue	750 gp

## WHERE TO START

This adventure begins with an explanation by Lord Killian. It is up to your players to decide beforehand whether their characters have already formed a party or are meeting one another for the first time. If your players decide their characters meet as strangers, you might start them off by introducing themselves to Lord Killian and each other as the respondents to Captain Esperia's recent call for independent investigators. Preferably, at least one character comes highly recommended as a promising novice alienist, soldier, or other trusted profession, and that PC is seen as the official point of contact for Esperia and Killian (at least at first).

## RECRUITMENT

**Lord Killian** hires the characters to investigate the murders of an ambassador and a guild master. Once the characters are introduced, Lord Killian gives the following explanation. Read or paraphrase the following:

Lord Killian stands and paces as he speaks. "I'll be frank: we have two unsolved murders, and we need them solved quickly, before more people die. The latest victim, Lady Doloran, was the emissary of Duke Odran. With Odran's sudden belligerence these past weeks, failing to solve this murder could be the final spark of open war. Our own guards might be accused of bias, and they are already spread thin on Odran's border. So we turn to you. I implore you to make clear to everyone you are independent investigators seeking the truth above all else. Two prominent people killed in quick succession hardly seems like a coincidence. These might be serial killers or assassins, and must be investigated carefully. Do you understand?"

Lord Killian pauses for a moment to give the PCs a chance to take that in. He can clarify any basic facts that they need to establish, based on the common knowledge at the beginning of the adventure. He then continues with specifications for the task at hand. Read or paraphrase the following:

"Now, I'm not asking you to engage in dashing heroics. Once you know where to find the people responsible, you should report to Captain Espe-

ria." He pauses and nods to the finely armored soldier at the opposite side of the room.

Captain Esperia nods and steps forward to speak. "Right, no getting yourselves killed without getting us up to date. Once you report, I can call back a strike team from the Red River Bridge to help you sweep in. With luck, I can return the warriors to the frontier and have a satisfying explanation of what happened for Duke Odran before he decides how to respond or, gods forbid, strikes at the opening."

Lord Killian chimes in, "As promised, you will receive 50 pieces of gold each for this information, as well as a bounty for each killer you apprehend or kill along the way. I'll leave Captain Esperia to explain the case to you. Thank you for your help." Killian then sweeps out through a back door.

With Lord Killian out of the room, Captain Esperia sizes up each of the PCs in turn. "Do you have experience with investigation?" she asks. Once they have answered, read or paraphrase the following (touching on any background the characters mentioned, such as questioning people suiting the skills of an alienist):

"Now, the case at hand. "Captain Esperia rubs her hands together and frowns. "Master Elbaresh of the smith's guild turned up dead in an alley a block from his shop three mornings ago. The mortician at the Temple of Zo-Kalar tells me he was likely restrained and strangled. This morning, Lady Doloran was found out back of a tavern called the Fallen Log, killed in the same manner. You should go there as soon as you leave here, since the body hasn't been moved yet. Before you go, though, let me brief you here."

Captain Esperia raises three fingers. She counts them off, one-by-one. "I had planned to question Master Yarod Zin, the merchant Raya Hua, and a porter she works with called Alazan the Younger since they met with Master Elbaresh the day before he died. Zin is here now to consult with Lord Killian, so I suggest you speak to him before leaving to check Lady Doloran's body. The other two people of interest can both be found at Hua's Oddities, near where Elbaresh's body was found. You might want to see if any of these three people are connected to Lady Doloran as well."

The captain then gestures with two open palms. She raises one as she says, "The guards found that Master Elbaresh was last seen alive by his apprentice at his smithy, near Hua's Oddities and the alley he was found in. You can go to the smith's guild to speak to the apprentice and get the key to his smithy." She raises the other hand as she says, "Lord Killian also told the Odranian Embassy to expect you to ask about Lady Doloran."

She then sighs and drops her hands. "You got all that? Any questions?"



Captain Esperia can answer the following questions.

- ◇ **Noticed any pattern in the murders?** “Both bodies were found in alleys near the center of Harge’s Old City.”
- ◇ **About Lady Doloran:** “Lady Rekibya Doloran was a fairly new emissary from Odran, sent a few weeks ago after the previous emissary was relieved. Lord Suruss struck one of my guards for no apparent reason, and the diplomats say he quit in embarrassment. Don’t tell anyone I said this, but I wonder if he was covering up for some blackmail, or maybe he was fighting a magical compulsion.”
- ◇ **About Master Elbaresh:** “Argus Elbaresh is—was—a silversmith, a good one, but he’s better known for leading the Smith’s Guild. He was also working with the city’s quartermaster to provide weapons in case war breaks out. We were interested when he said he had a new supplier in Tsang, but we don’t know any more since he died before the meeting.”
- ◇ **Who found the Bodies?** “Master Elbaresh was found by his neighbor, Raya Hua. Lady Doloran was found by a zoog, Bramble, who runs the Fallen Log Inn.”
- ◇ **About Master Zin:** “He runs the Opening Eye Society, a guild for mages. He’s here in the palace right now, if you want to talk to him. Otherwise, you can usually find him at the guild hall when he’s not consulting for the city on magical matters. Master Elbaresh was an initiate of his society.”
- ◇ **About Raya Hua:** “She runs Hua’s Oddities, a family antiquity shop that also carries magic items. She found Elbaresh’s body and knew him.”
- ◇ **About Alazan the Younger:** “Alazan is a porter who makes deliveries for both Hua and Elbaresh. He had easy access to Elbaresh and might have seen something.”
- ◇ **Can We See the Bodies?** “Lady Doloran’s body is still where it was found near the Fallen Log Inn. You should see to it today. Master Elbaresh’s body is in the mortuary of the temple of Zo-Kalar, not far down Temple Street.”
- ◇ **Any witnesses?** “The guards haven’t turned up anyone who so much as saw strangers in the vicinity of the victims. I want to know how the killers moved around the city unnoticed. If you have a

bit of a silver tongue, you might be able to learn something we haven’t by talking to folks in taverns or at the smith’s hall.”

- ◇ **Any suspects?** “At least someone among those who saw the victims last or found the bodies is likely responsible, but the connection and motivations aren’t clear. I think the killers are acting with secret political motivations.”

Once the characters are finished, Captain Esperia gives them a letter of marque, establishing their authority to investigate with full cooperation of Harge’s citizens. The letter allows them to question anyone in the city without fear of the Watch, provided they break no other laws.



## QUESTIONING MASTER ZIN

**Yarod Zin** (page 201) is a master of the Opening Eye Society, the closest thing Harge has to a mage’s guild. He consults on magical matters for Lord Killian’s court, but he’s very secretive. If the PCs are meeting him at the council hall, Captain Esperia introduces Master Zin in a spartan sitting room, or they might be calling upon him at the guild. In either case, he gestures for them to wait while he finishes reading a scroll for a few minutes. Yarod is afraid of threats to his position and refuses to divulge anything said in confidence to Elbaresh.

Master Zin has much to say on the following topics:

- ◇ **Pattern of Murders.** “A series of deaths might be the work of evil spellcasters, but these would not be suitable sacrifices for any rituals I have heard of.”
- ◇ **Lady Doloran.** “She was being considered for induction into our esteemed magical guild, the Opening Eye Society. She applied last night, but we had not yet made our determination.”
- ◇ **The Society’s Test.** “Our practices are of no interest to the uninitiated. Are you skilled in the ways of magic?” If characters impress him by succeeding on a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check or DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, he explains, “Initiates must provide a live sacrifice, generally a donkey or camel, and a spell or magic item. She provided an intriguing teapot she said had been delivered that very day.” He can also be coaxed into explaining with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

- ◇ **Master Elbaresh.** “The smith was an honorable man too worried about his work. We talked little outside of scholarly pursuits.” Characters can tell he is holding something back with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check.
- ◇ **True Conflict with Master Elbaresh.** Zin can be coaxed into explaining himself only with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check. PCs may retry the check if they present evidence Zin is hiding something (such as Raya’s testimony or the letter from Sister Mara). Master Zin doesn’t want to admit it, but if convinced, he relents. “I received an offer to enter an unsavory bargain with Sister Mara, a colleague in the Odranian town of Kulara. Elbaresh read my private correspondence and was... concerned. I promised I had no intention of doing anything untoward and had no further correspondence; he seemed satisfied. Know that I have done nothing wrong and I took no action against him.”
- ◇ **Mara’s Offer.** “Mara offered an easier path to more magic and knowledge. I won’t pretend a scholar of my caliber wouldn’t be tempted by new secrets, but indulging in dark magic is, of course, out of the question for someone of my esteemed station.” (In truth, Zin has already offered smaller sacrifices to Tsathoggua for power, but he has stopped short of murder and has not followed up on Mara’s demand to kill for her.)

**Impression of the Sleeper.** A character with the Eldritch Sensitivity feature senses something unnatural in the council hall. When they dream or create art based on this impression, they glimpse a bloated figure, a little like a crouching, eyeless toad. It is surrounded by humanoid figures wearing horrible leather gloves and masks that resemble human skin. The figures seem to be either dressing or tying up the toad with golden chains.

A character can recognize the toad as a symbol of a Great Old One called Tsathoggua the Sleeper with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check or a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check. If the check exceeds the DC by at least 3, they automatically recognize the chains indicate a magical binding, forcing the toad (or its representatives) to do something. A PC with the Sleeper Apostate bond or a former cultist of Tsathoggua automatically recognizes the image, but does not recognize the magical binding without a check.

## FOLLOWING CLUES

The characters have many choices as to where to investigate. The following are those suggested by Captain Esperia:

- ◇ **A: The Dead Diplomat.** Captain Esperia strongly encourages the characters to see to Lady Doloran’s body quickly, before it is moved. It is in an alley near the Fallen Log tavern.

- ◇ **B: Gathering Information.** Characters can gather information at the Fallen Log tavern as well as in the Smith’s Guild.
- ◇ **C: The Market Alley.** Master Elbaresh’s body was found near Hua’s Oddities, where Raya Hua and Alazan the Younger can be interviewed.
- ◇ **D: The Odranian Embassy.** Lord Killian arranged for the embassy to allow characters to investigate there.
- ◇ **E: The Smith’s Body.** Characters can examine the body of Master Elbaresh at the Temple of Zo-Kalar on Temple Street.

## CLUE A: THE DEAD DIPLOMAT

Lady Doloran’s body has not yet been moved. It was found in an alley a block from the Fallen Log, a popular tavern in the Old City for adventurers and other loners. This site is a half-mile from the Odranian embassy, but only a quarter mile from the alley where the other victim was found.

A small tent conceals the body, guarded by a young human Odranian mercenary **guard** wearing a white cloak over his armor and a tabard depicting a stormcloud (the icon of the Stormtide Company). He doesn’t talk to the PCs when he can avoid it, responding mostly in a series of grunts or monosyllabic answers, but is generally cooperative.

**Ground Clues.** A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Investigation) check can find disturbed clutter in the alley and disturbed grime around the storm drain grate, indicating someone dragged a Medium object (about the size of the body) out of a nearby storm drain. Water in the storm drain prevents further tracking, but characters can learn something inside (see **Storm Drain** on page 21).

**The Witness.** Bramble the zoog found the body while opening in the morning. She is now inside the Fallen Log, taking orders from guests. Bramble offers her special zoog mead (the most expensive in the house) to most patrons, and spiders as snacks for cats (1 cp each). One of the regulars, the dwarf peddler Dugard, was present for last call, but he didn’t see anything when he left, suggesting the body might have arrived later.

### BRAMBLE

**Bramble (zoog trapper, chaotic neutral).**

**Traits** Bramble paces as she talks. She habitually snacks on bugs she carries in a pouch.

**Ideal** Happiness.

**Bond** Bramble is deadly serious about the safety of her employees and guests.

**Flaw** Bramble says whatever she feels without thinking, which resulted in her being driven out of the Zoog Woods.

Bramble has only a few things to say:



- ◇ **Last Night.** “I closed the tavern around midnight, I did. Wasn’t a thing in the alley.”
- ◇ **This Morning.** “There was a rat scurrying about the alley mouth when I unlocked the door this morning. I like my breakfast fresh as can be, so I sneaked up on it. Turns out it was sniffing at a corpse. I made a mention to the guard after I broke my fast.”
- ◇ **Notice Anything Odd?** “I trapped the alleys around here for vermin. A trap near the storm drain got right crushed. If you catch the crusher, I’m pressing charges!”

**The Body.** Characters can see that the body’s neck has scratch marks and heavy bruising. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation or Medicine) check allows a character to recognize the cause of death: strangulation by a creature with humanoid hands, relatively large. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check allows a character to deduce the victim died overnight. Opening the mouth or succeeding on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a flower inside. With a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check characters notice that, like the other corpse, the body is smudged with thick dust on the upper arms under the cloak, and the hem of the cloak is damp with no obvious source nearby. A character can recognize the smell of old funerary shrouds with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check; ghouls have advantage on this check. A character notices this could be a different attacker with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check, because the other body lacked scratch marks and these hand marks are slightly smaller than the hand marks on the other body. If the check result was at least 15, the character realizes that thick gloves on the clawed hands might explain the size discrepancy. There is a key in the body’s belt pouch; PCs who don’t specifically search her pockets can still find it with a successful DC 9 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

**The Flower.** A character who succeeds on a DC 9 Intelligence (Nature) check or who is proficient with herbalism kits identifies the flower as a chrysanthemum. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check can recognize the chrysanthemum in the mouth as a sign of the infamous Kulara Strangler that terrorized a nearby Odranian town fifty years ago. The Strangler mysteriously disappeared after entering an alley with a recent victim’s body. Characters from Odran have advantage on the check.

**The Dust.** If the characters inspect the dust smudged on the victim’s upper arms, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation or Religion) check is enough to deduce that the funerary shrouds it is reminiscent of would only be accessible in an old catacomb or grave. Any character local to the city can tell that the nearest place like that is in the crypts under the Temple of Zo-Kalar on Temple Street.

**Psychic Feast.** A ghoul who uses Psychic Feast on the body after one day passes (12 hours after

being hired) and chooses Arcana, History, Insight, or Yog-Sothothery as their insight can recall the strange urges recorded in the diary (below), and has advantage on any ability check to recognize the effect as magical. Choosing Athletics or Investigation grants a glimpse of the attacker: a cloaked figure too tall to be Hua but could be Zin or Alazan.

### CLUE B: GATHER INFORMATION

Characters can gather gossip about the victims or suspects to learn more. Captain Esperia recommended gathering information at the smith’s guild-hall, where the spare key to the smithy is held, but characters can just as easily gather information at the Opening Eye Society, the Fallen Log, or other places where many people gather. Gathering information is a Charisma (Persuasion) check and takes 1 hour. To get people to talk, the character must buy drinks or food, pay modest bribes, pay for entertainment, or otherwise spend 2d12 sp. Characters learn everything of the DC they meet and lower, and can try again. If the characters try to avoid drawing attention to themselves, they make the check with disadvantage.

If the characters don’t avoid drawing attention, an Odranian **cultist** serving the Kulara Strangler gets wind of their activity by listening to rumors at the Fallen Log tavern and begins to follow them (see the **Followed** encounter on page 21).

The PCs can learn the following depending on the result of their check:

**DC 10.** Smiths who employed Alazan complain that he uncharacteristically forgot several of the orders placed last week.

**DC 12.** Lady Doloran has been asking around for unusual magic items and was always condescending but recently started snapping aggressively at the slightest provocation. She settled on something ordered from a third party through Hua’s Oddities.

**DC 13.** Raya Hua had a fight with Lady Doloran the day before she disappeared.

**DC 14.** Master Elbaresh was always very successful and generous but never seemed to spend as much money as he took in. Some members of the guild wondered at where the extra money went. There were rumors he had family in Tsang, but those who know him well are sure he didn’t.

**DC 15.** Members of the smith’s guild overheard Master Zin having a fight with Master Elbaresh about a week ago. Elbaresh seemed anxious afterward, and Zin left in a hurry.

### CLUE C: THE MARKET ALLEY

Master Elbaresh’s body was discovered in the alley between his smithy and Hua’s Oddities, one of the few establishments in Harge that sells magic items.

**Tracks.** A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) or a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check locates tracks leading to a storm drain at the end of the

alley. Water prevents further tracking, but once the characters have seen both crime scenes, they can determine that the storm drains at each scene are connected with just one turn either by following the drain for a short distance or with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 8 Wisdom (Survival) check.

### THE SILVERSMITHY

The smithy is locked (DC 15 Dexterity [thieves' tools] check to open) and has a sign pointing inquiries to the smith's guildhall. Characters can get the key from the smith's guildhall simply by explaining what they are doing and showing their letter of marque when asked. While there, they can also **Gather Information** (page 17).

There's an open window on the second floor that leads to Elbaresh's bedroom. Climbing the wooden exterior is a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. In the bedroom, folded up under one of the bedposts is a letter. Anyone who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check spots it, as does anyone who moves the bed or succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check to search the room. Reading the smudged message requires a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation) check to make sense of it; on a failed check, they can read only the second half of the message starting at "sacrifices".

*"Y- The Sleeper's chains grow tighter and he grows more ravenous. If you continue making excuses and provide us with sacrifices who will not be missed, you will be among the obstacles removed when we reorder your puny town. -M"*

### HUA'S ODDITIES

This small shop has a large, dimly lit window stenciled with the name: Hua's Oddities. Inside, numerous items sit on display on fine cloth draped over iron furniture. The rooms are separated by colorful curtains and lit by floating, glowing lights of various colors.

The characters can question Raya Hua in her shop, which specializes in art objects and magic items. When they first enter, Raya's half-orc daughter Isval offers to sell them magic items but goes to get her mother either way. **Raya Hua** (page 200) is in the upstairs room where magic items are kept and Alazan

(the **Kulara Strangler** on page 204, in disguise) talks with Harruk Hua about the delivery schedule in the back storage room.

When approached about the investigation, Raya says, "It still seems unreal to me that he's gone. How can I help?"

Raya can answer questions on the following topics:

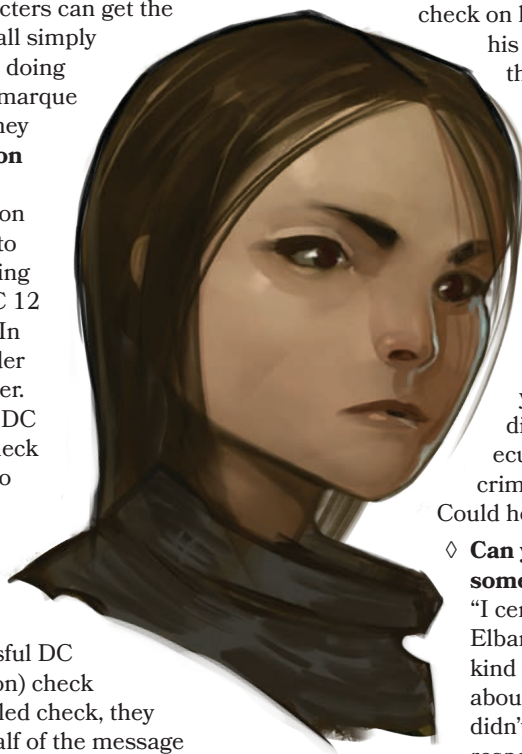
◇ **About Elbaresh.** "He was a good friend, and we sold some of his jewelry."

◇ **About finding the body.** "He was lying prone in the alley when I opened in the morning. I ran to check on him... I removed a flower from his mouth... a chrysanthemum, I think? I thought he was choking. I'm sorry. That wasn't important, was it?" A successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recalls that the flower was the calling card of the famous Kulara Strangler, an unidentified serial killer that menaced a nearby town across the border in Odran territory. The Kulara Strangler hasn't struck in 80 years, so many thought he had died, been imprisoned, been executed for committing some other crime, or moved on to another land. Could he have returned after so long?

◇ **Can you think of any reason someone would hurt Elbaresh?**

"I certainly can! A couple, actually. Elbaresh was going to make some kind of accusation to Lord Killian about Yarod Zin's magical bargain. He didn't want to say anything until Zin responded, but Elbaresh said he had a letter. Myself, I never trusted Zin... But that's not the only person I suspect. Elbaresh also feared assassins from Tsang. Don't ask me how I know because I shouldn't say."

◇ **About the threat from Tsang.** Characters can convince Raya to explain the other threat to Elbaresh with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) and a promise not to name her as a source to Odranian or Tsangese officials. Once mollified, she opens up: "Elbaresh was helping to arrange a deal between Tsangese radical reformers, the Five Towers, and Harge's army through the smith's guild. Those Tsangese supplies could be a major asset to Harge in case Odran attacks. Seems to me the killers might be working on behalf of Emperor Xao or Duke Odran, as he's always looking to get in good with Xao. Both Tsang and Odran might fear a pact between Lord Killian and the Tsang reformers."





- ◇ **What do you have to say about the fight with the diplomat Lady Doloran?** Raya shudders. "Oh, that was because she wanted a love potion, but I don't sell those." A character must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check to notice she is lying from the way her eyes search the room nervously. In truth, she was denying her connection to Emperor Xao's political enemies, and Lady Doloran was threatening to blackmail her. She insists that despite how it might sound, she wasn't willing to stoop to murder.
- ◇ **You seem to be lying. Or Notice anything suspicious about Alazan?** She didn't want to think it meant anything, but if Raya is caught lying or the characters succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, she deflects blame by pointing out, "Well, I didn't want to cause anyone needless trouble, but Alazan has been acting strangely lately. He usually chatters away, but he's been suddenly cold and keeps forgetting things."

**Sign of the Five Towers.** If the characters tell Esperia, Killian, or the Smith's Guild about the sign of the Five Towers, the reformers in Tsang can deliver their supplies to Harge, which ensures Harge's refugees can evacuate to the Zoog Woods safely in Act 3.

## FOLLOWING ALAZAN

**Alazan the Younger** is a porter who delivers purchases for wealthy clients. He made deliveries to both victims. He is terse, tall, and bearded. He wears a light cloak and dusty brown cloths.

**Clues.** Anyone who speaks to Alazan can notice his hands are lightly bruised with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. With the DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check (ghouls and cats have advantage) they can also notice he smells of dust which clings to his legs, and of rainwater dampening his cloak hem. Drawing attention to his activities causes him to become defensive and break off the interaction.

Alazan has answers for any of the following topics. He's a good liar, so a character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check to notice he glances momentarily away when he has to make something up.

- ◇ **Lady Doloran.** "I brought a teapot to the lady at the embassy. Yesterday morning. Cursed at me for being late. I wasn't." He sneers at the memory.
- ◇ **Master Elbaresh.** "Master E got a necklace."
- ◇ **Notice anything unusual?** "Missus Hua had a big fight with the lady that got killed yesterday."
- ◇ **Did you see them after your delivery?** "No." He is lying.

If the characters follow Alazan, they must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check to stay out of sight or a DC 12 Charisma (Deception or Performance) check to seem disinterested in him (which only helps if he doesn't recognize them from previous questioning). If he leaves while or after interacting with them,

he checks his surroundings with an active Wisdom (Perception) check before heading out. If he realizes he is being followed, he attempts to lose the tail in crowds around the Hippodrome. After finishing his last delivery for the day at a manor near the Hippodrome, Alazan heads into the storm drain by the Odranian embassy to get to his next target unseen.

## DREAMS OF DOUBT

When the characters first take a long rest after encountering Alazan (who is truly the Kulara Strangler in disguise), one character has a strange dream. The dream comes from a fragment of the Kulara Strangler, now reduced to a ka, a half-spirit form that calls itself the Strangler's Doubt (encountered in Act 2).

The Strangler's Doubt sends the dream to a receptive character, such as one with the Ominous Dream bond on page 5, the Eldritch Sensitivity background feature, or the Dreamer feat. Other suitable characters are warlocks, clerics, paladins, monks, spellcasters who know divination spells, or Dreamlands cats. If no such sensitive character is available, the Strangler's Doubt is drawn to the character most reminiscent of his old self, such as one with a bad temper, an impoverished past, or proficiency in martial weapons. Read or paraphrase the following:

Violet fog surrounds you. A silhouette drifts weightlessly from the mist, resolving as a tall, thin man with angular, almost artificial features. He seems translucent and faintly luminous. He murmurs, "Please stop him..." He turns and looks away. Another pair of silhouettes forms in the mist but the images remain indistinct, one silhouette quietly approaching another, then lunging forward to begin strangling. The man murmurs, "Shouldn't hurt them... let go... couldn't breathe... knew they were alone... let you in... never thought twice about you..." The new silhouettes fade away, leaving you alone again with the first.

Characters can recognize the figure as a ka with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check. Acolytes of Zo-Kalar or Bastet can also recognize the figure if it is described to them. Showing art based on it to Haruk Hua at Hua's Oddities allows him to recognize it from Odranian art he has sold to collectors in Tsang. A ka is a celestial aspect of a mortal's mind that protects the mortal from mistakes in life and eventually separates from the mortal. Usually it breaks free at death, but someone who transforms into an inhuman monster can shed their ka (or other parts of their mind or soul) while still alive. Since the ka doesn't resemble the dreamer, it is probably a separated ka belonging to someone dead or transformed, looking to protect the dreaming character from its former self's mistakes.

**Glimpses Between Worlds.** If any character travels to the Dreamlands after this point, they glimpse

the same spectral figure watching from a distance for the brief moment they are between worlds. His oversized face is twisted in worry and regret. The Strangler's Doubt can't hold a conversation but can mumble a broken sentence or two as a clue each time to help the characters if they aren't sure what to do next.

## CLUE D: THE ODRANIAN EMBASSY

The Odranian embassy is a small but elegant two-story building of dark wood with silver fixtures. As you approach the elegant iron door, it swings open and a burly dwarf woman in splint mail looks you over. "What do you want?" she scowls.

When presented with the letter, Losolda (see **The Guard**, below) grudgingly lets the PCs in, saying, "Sir Worresh said someone might come. Yer allowed in the lady's chambers but no place else." Sir Worresh is Lady Doloran's elderly assistant, now gone to Odran to arrange her replacement. Losolda is adamant that everywhere else in the embassy is Duke Odran's business and nothing to do with the investigation.

**Near the Embassy.** Lady Doloran's window overlooks the edge of the **Hippodrome** and a lonely side street of modest manor houses. The houses are all locked up and empty, their Odranian and Tsangese owners having departed with their servants and possessions in the previous weeks as political tensions mounted. The area was dark and deserted last night, so nobody can provide testimony about it. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check allows a character to spot handprints in the mud on a storm drain halfway down the lane from the Hippodrome. The hands match the size of the handprints on Lady Doloran's ankles. Water in the storm drain prevents further tracking.

**The Guard.** Losolda (dwarf **guard**, lawful neutral) watches them casually throughout their investigation, but she refuses to give more than simple answers to most questions. She doesn't interfere except to prevent characters removing anything (they can open locks and so on). She gives her name simply as Losolda and refers any further questions about her to the mercenary company she works for, an Odranian company called Stormtide.

Losolda has little to say but responds to the following topics:

- ◇ **About Lady Doloran.** "M'lady was harsh, especially lately. She was difficult to work for, but at least I have a job."
- ◇ **What happened last night?** "The porter from the trinket seller dropped off a package. M'Lady went to the Opening Eye Society, returned in a huff, and retired to her chambers shouting about some 'Zin' being a cheat. She was gone in the morning and the window was open in her chamber."

- ◇ **Did Lady Doloran have any enemies?** "Nobody in Harge is keen on Odranians, given the duke's threatenin' war. M'lady did argue with the trinket seller, Hua but got the item she wanted. Some ring."

**The Diplomat's Chamber.** Lady Doloran's chamber is tidy, with a window overlooking a deserted street leading to the Hippodrome. In her locked desk, she kept paperwork and a journal. The key was in her pocket (see the **A. The Dead Diplomat** on page 16). The lock can be picked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check.

The papers record how she was assigned here recently after her predecessor Lord Suruss caused a terrible scene by striking a guard for no apparent reason. A letter from Lord Suruss's majordomo informs her that Lord Suruss can't answer her letters because he disappeared a week after returning to his estate in Odran.

Lady Doloran's journal records several significant matters: her incredulity at Duke Odran's increasingly preposterous excuses to threaten war, her concern that a revolt might be brewing in Kulara Town near the border with Harge, and troubling emotional urges. She records recurring dreams of strangling Captain Esperia, whom she finds insufferable. She also recounts odd times when it was nearly irresistible to do it for real. She was starting to suspect the strange impulses had something to do with her beginning to work for Duke Odran, given Lord Suruss's inexplicable behavior. Her final entry is a rant over being rejected from the Opening Eye Society after Zin dismissed her offered magic item. Characters who succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana, enchanters get advantage on this check) or DC 13 Wisdom (Insight or Yog-Sothothery) check recognize that the feelings she describes were likely being amplified by a magical compulsion: they come on extremely fast and are rarely proportional or even relevant.

## CLUE E: THE SMITH'S BODY

The victim Elbaresh was a master of the smith's guild. His body was in the alley between his smithy and Hua's Oddities, one of the few establishments in Harge that sells magic items. It is now in the morgue of Zo-Kalar's temple. The characters are greeted here by an **acolyte** named Kaneg. He prepared the body for the upcoming funeral.

**The Body.** The body has bruising on its neck, which Kaneg believes was caused by strangulation. There are also hand-shaped bruises on his ankles and wrists, suggesting but not confirming at least three killers working together. The body's ankles and wrists are lightly bruised and smudged with faint dust noticeable with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine or Perception) check, but the room isn't dusty. If Kaneg is asked about the dust, he frowns and says, "I didn't notice that... it smells just like when we go down to re-consecrate the Old Crypt nearby every year."



**Psychic Feast.** A ghoul who uses Psychic Feast on the body and chooses History as their insight can recall the letter to Lord Killian that Raya Hua has (described in the next encounter). Choosing Athletics or Investigation grants a glimpse of the attacker, a cloaked figure too tall to be Hua but who could be Zin or Alazan. Deception grants a recollection of lying to Raya about buying a magic bottle for Zin's research into occult magic, which he knew she would never approve.

## COMPLICATIONS

As the characters move through the city and uncover clues, the following complications might arise:

- ♦ **Followed** occurs if the PCs give away that they are onto the murderers.
- ♦ **Captain Esperia** answers questions and gives pointers if the PCs return early.
- ♦ **Storm Drain Survey** occurs if the PCs investigate the storm drains.
- ♦ **A Third Murder** occurs if the PCs do not find the killers before the next dawn.
- ♦ **The Ambush** occurs if the PCs are nearby on the night thereafter.
- ♦ **Zin's New Testimony** occurs after Zin is killed and replaced.

## FOLLOWED

Once the characters do something that indicates they are on to the murderers, a group of cultists begins following them. Tip-offs include showing interest in the Kulara Strangler's current disguise or telling anyone about the sewers or grave dirt without convincing the person to keep it a secret.

**Creatures.** After 2 hours (typically the time to get to two different locations), a **cultist**, an **acolyte**, and two **bandits** (all wearing pale robes common among desert travelers) begin following the party while they are in public.

**Development.** Characters can spot someone watching them in public with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check. The cultists wait for a PC to be alone, such as in an alley, before attacking. If captured, they claim to be Odranian citizens and demand to speak to Duke Odran's envoy. They grin smugly, knowing she is dead.

## CHECKING IN WITH CAPTAIN ESPERIA

If the characters return to the council hall without following up on obvious lines of questioning, Esperia reminds them to explore the avenues they have not yet sought out. She asks them to question all witnesses about both dead victims, examining the embassy, smithy, both alleys where the bodies were found, the bodies themselves, and determining a motive for the killings.

## STORM DRAIN SURVEY

The storm drains of Harge run under the main streets of the city. The drains are 10 feet wide, made of arched stone, and damp from lingering rainwater. Characters who look inside the storm drain from any of the previous scenes are unable to track anyone inside any further due to standing water. However, watching the part of the drain between the two alleys where bodies were found between midnight and dawn allows characters to catch the killers as they carry their third victim, the Quartermaster of Harge's armory. The victim is already dead and can be detected by smell with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check at a range of 300 feet (ghouls have advantage on this check). A character can find the connection between the two with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check or a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. If they follow the storm drains near any of the other victims in the Old City, they can smell corpse dust similar to that found on the bodies with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check (ghouls again have advantage on the check). When within 90 feet, they can round a corner to spot the hole in the tunnel wall. Sneaking characters must succeed on a DC 11 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid being noticed.

## A THIRD MURDER

If the characters don't stop the Kulara Strangler by midnight, he strikes again. He kills the quartermaster of Harge's armory, a gnome named Sir Vulkazir Seawall. Vulkazir had a silver earring delivered from Master Elbaresh last week, giving the Kulara Strangler a sufficient glimpse of Vulkazir's home to plan the murder. The body is left outside a storm drain in another alley. Keeping with his previous pattern, the Strangler chooses the nearest alley along the same drain line away from the Old City Crypt, just behind the Council Hall. Nearby buildings are the small Temple of Zo-Kalar and two manor houses. A servant in one manor house and an acolyte making an offering for someone dying in the hospice saw someone slipping into the storm drains.

The characters learn of the new death from a rushing guard, who finds them a couple hours after dawn and takes them to the alley as soon as they are ready. This alley and body have much the same evidence as the **Dead Diplomat** (page 16), except that the ability check DC to notice each clue is 1 lower. No check is required to spot repeated clues already found on Lady Doloran's body.

## THE AMBUSH

If the characters learned enough from their investigations, they might get to the fourth target, Yarod Zin, before the Kulara Strangler does. Watching Yarod Zin or watching, visiting, or joining the Opening Eye Society leaves them close enough to intervene when the attack occurs. He is attacked while heading into the alley.

**Creatures.** The villains include the **Kulara Strangler** (wearing the skin of Alazan the Younger), a **cultist**, and an **acolyte**. Any opponent reduced below 5 hit points flees into the storm drain. The Kulara Strangler carries a *potion of healing*.

**Development.** Yarod Zin (page 201) falls unconscious 2 rounds after combat begins and dies if the characters don't free him within 2 rounds; if freed at 0 hit points, he stabilizes. Once he regains consciousness, he relates that he saw the attackers emerge from the storm drains near the Old City Crypt.

Two town **guards** arrive within 1 minute and offer to escort the characters to **report to Captain Esperia** (page 199) or to deliver a report for them.

### ZIN'S NEW TESTIMONY

If the party doesn't save Yarod Zin, the Kulara Strangler wears Yarod's skin. He discards Alazan's skin in the alley where a beggar finds it the next morning and reports it to the city guard. The Kulara Strangler, wearing Zin's skin, comes to the PCs claiming to have more he needs to tell them. He insists on speaking to a spellcasting character alone since he doesn't want to be outnumbered alone with a mysterious killer on the loose. Characters can sense he is lying with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check. Once alone, the strangler immediately attempts to grapple the spellcaster, then flees out a window if combat turns against him. If the characters won't let him get one of them alone, he accurately describes Alazan attacking Zin as if he were Zin. When he gets to the part where Zin died, he suddenly begins strangling a surprised character with a triumphant shout that signals his allies to burst in and join him. All characters who fail a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check are surprised; if no PC is surprised, the Strangler attacks a spellcaster or, if none is available, the nearest PC.

**Creatures.** The Kulara Strangler (page 204) wears the skin of Yarod Zin. His reinforcements are a **cultist** and an **acolyte**. Any opponent reduced below 5 hit points flees into the sewers. The Kulara Strangler carries a *potion of healing*.

Two town **guards** arrive within 1 minute and offer to escort the characters to **report to Captain Esperia** (next section) or to deliver a report for them.

### REPORT TO CAPTAIN ESPERIA

Once the characters have engaged the killers, they are expected to report to the guards. Captain Esperia explains that reinforcements will be along in 2 hours and asks them to rest and prepare while troops are recalled. Their reward is waiting for them.

**Treasure.** The characters are paid 100 gp each, along with a bonus for each killer captured (50 gp) or killed (25 gp).

**The Next Job.** At this point, Esperia wants to hire the PCs to help the guards going to investigate the tunnel, since their familiarity with the strange case should help them make sense of whatever they find

there. If your game is running out of time, this is a good point to end Chapter 1 while the guards clear the crypt without the PCs. In that case, Captain Esperia reports what the strike team encountered and asks the characters to investigate more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

### STORMING THE DRAIN

After they report on the location of the culprits, Esperia asks the characters to delve into the storm drains accompanied by four **guards** named Omnaz, Farsud, Turotz, and Zidriel (see sidebar). The guards don't like to talk much but are uncomfortable with going into the mysterious tunnel of a murderer.

**Creatures.** Any NPCs other than the Kulara Strangler who fled an earlier scene (such as the **cultists**, **acolytes**, and **bandits** from **Followed, The Ambush** or **Zin's New Testimony**) are hiding in this tunnel near the juncture of pipes between the two crime scenes. They discuss how to get the player characters alone to kill them. If any are here, they are supported by a **moon-beast** (SPCM 348); otherwise, the moon-beast is in the **Defiled Crypt** (the next scene). The moon-beast carries an icon of an eyeless toad. A character recognizes it as a symbol of Tsathoggua with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check. Anyone with the Eldritch Sensitivity feature gets the same sense of Tsathoggua here as they did with Yarod Zin. Anyone with the Desperate Insight feature automatically recognizes the symbol as that of a Great Old One.

**Tracking the Strangler.** Tracing a route between the sites where the bodies were found also leads the group to the intersection. A character can determine where the killer went by succeeding on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check or a DC 11 Wisdom (Survival) check to find dusty tracks on a side tunnel connected to the intersection. The tracks lead to a break in the wall between the storm drain and the catacombs about 50 feet down the tunnel. The drain's wall has been broken open by a fresh tunnel connecting to the nearby catacombs. An acrid stench wafts from the smooth-edged gap.

**Abandoned Skin.** If the Kulara Strangler knows the characters are on to him, he has discarded his previous skin here in the tunnel after impersonating a grizzled old human beggar he found in an alley

### THE GUARD LEADER

**Dame Zidriel** (Human **guard**, lawful good) is the leader of these guards.

**Traits** Zidriel passes time by speculating about horrible dangers that might wait nearby and coming up with improbable ways to fend them off or escape them.

**Ideal** Order.

**Bond** She's protective of her longtime partner Omnaz.

**Flaw** Reckless.



near the Temple of Zo-Kalar. A successful DC 11 Wisdom (Medicine) check or DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check deduces who the skin is from. It is drying like leather on the inside and has a thin layer of flesh within. The flesh is sheared off with perfect smoothness along the entire interior. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check realizes that this is too smooth and seamless to be the result of normal tools or weapons. A successful DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the signs of a teleportation effect replacing or removing the inner flesh and bone. *Detect magic* detects a faint, lingering aura of conjuration. A cat or other creature with a strong sense of smell can smell the sandy, musky smell of a sand-dweller inside the skin. Anyone with the Eldritch Sensitivity feature recognizes the mark of something unnatural here. Anyone with the Desperate Insight feature recognizes the work of an aberration (or sand-dwellers specifically if they survived encountering sand-dwellers).

### THE DEFILED CRYPT

The tunnel connects to the catacombs under Harge near Temple Street. The characters are stopped by three **Mythos ghoul tunnelers** (page 209) named Azvak, Ervoz, and Xanthipa.

The ghouls demand the characters leave before the sand-dwellers get angry and punish them. If the party attempts to talk or otherwise delays leaving, the ghouls hide. The ghouls can be scared into sharing information with the characters with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) check.

The ghouls happily share what they know once the moon-beast and sand-dweller are both defeated. The ghouls can warn the characters about the yothan designer who the moon-beast and sand-dwellers make offerings to. They know the yothan can twist bodies and that it is currently bound in a magical circle. They have been told they will be fed to the yothan if they don't cooperate. A character can also convince the ghouls to help fight back against the yothan designer with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check if they don't have the guards along.

The thick dust leaves tracks readily. A character can track recent movements with a successful DC 9 Wisdom (Survival) check. About half of the crypt's corpses with remaining flesh have been feasted upon by the ghouls.

If befriended, the ghouls can assist with the investigation of any bodies or shed skin that have been dead at least 1 day by using *Psychic Feast*. They know that the Kulara Strangler can change his appearance and that he shed his skin when he does.

### THE IMPOSSIBLE LABYRINTH

At the point where the tunnel intersects with the farthest part of the crypt, it hits upon a series of forks and turns that loop back on themselves in impossible ways. Several forks end in narrow rifts in the ground that emit an acrid stench. Anyone with a passive Investigation or Survival score of 13 or higher must attempt a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1 level of dread as they realize that several of the graves have been violated—broken open and their contents removed. This dread lasts until they next complete a long rest.



## THE SLEEPER'S MINIONS

A character can only navigate the labyrinth with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check, or DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Characters who aren't proficient in any of these skills can't Help with the ability check. The ghouls can Help with the check and sand-dwellers can navigate it without a check. If the characters fail, they accidentally emerge from where they entered after wandering for 10 minutes. If the group succeeds on a DC 10 group Dexterity (Stealth) check, they avoid drawing the yothan's attention.

The only path that isn't a relatively quick dead end passes through a central, circular chamber that is inscribed with eldritch symbols around its perimeter. Any character can recognize that it is designed to keep something in by succeeded on a DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or Intelligence (Arcana) check.

**Creature.** The labyrinth binds a **yothan dimension carver** (page 214), which can't leave or pursue characters. The yothan designer isn't interested in talking or in killing intruders, but it does want to experiment on them, so it attacks and knocks out any creatures it reduces to 0 hit points. It wears a *talisman of restful sleep* (page 217).

### IF THE CHARACTERS LOSE

If the yothan prevails and captures anyone, it gives each creature powerful digging claws and abandons them on the Kulara side of the tunnel, superficially similar to the modified ghouls in the crypt. The creatures awaken with 1 hit point and modified hands after 1 hour. The creatures gain a burrowing speed of 5 feet and a claw unarmed attack that deals 1d4 slashing damage and has the light and finesse properties. It also marks them as inhuman and makes some of the common folk of Kulara uncomfortable with them. A *remove curse* spell reverses this transformation.

## CONCLUSION

Esperia rewards the characters a further 100 gp each for stopping the crimes, including a bonus for each criminal they killed (50 gp) or captured (100 gp). The characters may rest while the city guards further investigate the tunnels.

### EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of Chapter 1, the characters advance to level 2.







## CHAPTER 2: KULARA TOWN

*A Cthulhu Mythos Adventure for 4 to 5 Characters of 2nd level*

### ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The PCs are tasked with following the tunnels, where they encounter sand-dweller slaves (ghouls), sand-dwellers themselves, and the monsters they summoned (if they didn't already defeat said monsters in Act 1). Miles later, they emerge into the town of Kulara, which is part of the rival duchy of Odran. The murderer pushing the nations toward war comes from the nation that is threatening war!

However, the people of Odran are as much victims as the folk of Harge. A string of murders in Kulara has sparked hate and fear. The PCs must alert the town to the threat and expose the villainous conspiracy within their own government.

It is highly likely the Odranians will capture and imprison the PCs at some point, and the PCs will have to arrange a jailbreak. An evil courtier for Duke Odran, Lady Vanessa Petria, has come to town to conscript strong young people for the mercenary companies Duke Odran hired (one reason the people hate the Duke). Even if the PCs avoid capture, their best means of finding out what's going on in the town and rallying the people to oppose their corrupt government is to free the captured conscripts.

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

Kulara is in the grip of a returned serial killer from its past. The Kulara Strangler, never caught but assumed long dead after his murder spree ended 50 years ago, has returned. In truth, the killer was a sand-dweller who fled to the Violet Dimension when he was at risk of being exposed. For decades, he watched Odran for opportunities to inspire copycats to carry on his legacy. While he did spur several murders and create a few sand-dwellers, it wasn't enough to satisfy his need to be emulated. Eventually, he was recruited by Ravazel the sand-dweller warlord. She had grand plans to retake her former empire in Harge but lacked a route to return. She offered rewards to any sand dweller who found a way back.

The recklessly curious Church of the Sleeper growing in Odran eventually provided him the opportunity he needed. The ambitious acolyte Mara wanted to gain not only magical power but also immortality. The Sleeper offered potent magic but no route to immortality. Her studies eventually turned to the Violet Dimension, where she learned of sand-dwellers and their dramatically prolonged lifespan, as well

KULARA TOWN

as how humans might become them. She convinced her Mother Magister, the leader of the local Church of the Sleeper, to help summon the Strangler to learn extradimensional secrets. He was bound for a time in the church while the Sleeper's cultists interrogated him, until Sister Mara asked what it would take for him to make her a sand-dweller.

After 50 years, The Strangler's desire for slaughter had grown and he knew how to open the way for Ravazel's return. When Mara's fellow acolytes refused to join her in becoming sand-dwellers and destroying the region they hoped to rule, she killed them to fuel her own transformation. For a short time, the Kulara Strangler wore the skin of the Mother Magister before moving on to sow chaos in Harge.

Duke Odran connected with the sand-dwellers in his desperate search for entertainment and variety. Encouraged by Sister Mara and the disguised Kulara strangler, Lady Petria, long charged with finding the duke new and more transgressive delights, developed a taste for murder. Duke Odran has given orders to his inner circle to suppress rumors about the mysterious murders, especially any connection between them.

Since the murders began, a Kularan arbiter named **Salzarin** (see page 203) has noticed that investigations into the new murders are perfunctory or nonexistent. Thus, she has begun her own investigation into the murders. She learned by questioning people that several individuals entered the Church of the Sleeper at strange hours and never left. She also discovered that many of the witnesses were conscripted after filing reports and before she had time to question them. She sent a letter to Lord Killian to dissuade him from taking his own aggressive action.

## KULARA TOWN

Kulara is a small border town between Harge and Odran, only a day's travel from Harge City but separated by the Red River. The buildings are mostly single-story, mixing stone and wood. The few wealthy homes and common buildings in the central Walled Town feature towers for observation or announcements. Outside the palisade of the Walled Town, homes and businesses sprawl into the desert away from the central oasis.

The magistrate Vanessa Petria handles Kulara's

local affairs, having ascended to the office around the same time the recent murders began. She took over when a mysterious illness claimed the previous magistrate, Lady Zaden. Unlike her relatively fair predecessor, Petria is notorious for abusing her power. Duke Odran cares only that she keeps him supplied with new diversions and conscripts for his army.

## KULARA CARAVANSERAI

Caravans can set up tents and get supplies for their animals here. Trade has decreased significantly lately due to fears of war, so the only businesses in the roadhouse are Odranian merchants rushing to get home from what might become the front lines, and porters taking supplies to mercenaries Odran has sent to the Red River on Harge's border.

## TEMPLE OF BASTET

Kulara has a small stone temple in the Walled Town dedicated to Bastet. Bastet is a patron of protection, cats, and life. Dozens of free-roaming cats support the few priests. It is a popular spot for weddings, and soldiers and traders often stop to ask for protection before departing Harge.

Nearby are several small wooden chapels to other gods, though none are especially prominent. The GM should feel free to include temples to deities appropriate to their preferred campaign setting or Great Ones like those worshiped on Harge's **Temple Street** (page 12).

**Services. Remedy** (page 203) oversees the temple and interprets Bastet's will but leaves most tasks to the acolytes. Other priestesses of Bastet (usually N or CN human or Dreamlands cat **acolytes** or **priests**) offer their spellcasting services freely to those who make an offering in the chapel, so long as the offering seems commensurate with their wealth (a few gold pieces for a 1st-level adventurer, or 5 gp for a 2nd- or 3rd-level adventurer). Anyone who demonstrates Bastet's virtues is rewarded with an *aid* spell. They can arrange for a visiting priest to cast *remove curse* in a couple days with a 150 gp donation.

Each of the other temples boasts at least one priest of an appropriate alignment for its deity. Each priest offers spellcasting services to worshipers or sells spellcasting in exchange for donations to the temple.





Item	Price
Holy water	50 gp
Potion of healing	50 gp
Spell scroll, 1st-level	100 gp
Spell scroll, 2nd-level	250 gp
Shield inscribed with an <i>Elder Sign</i>	500 gp

## OASIS MARKET

Most of the trade in Kulara takes place in the open-air market near the town's vital watering hole. Traders are careful not to obstruct traffic to the water, since doing so is a grave offense when water is so scarce.

## CAMEL TRADER

This trader named Eissam offers camels as well as the means to support them. Characters who know Thieves' Cant can contact smugglers of his acquaintance (see **Smuggler's Rock**, below), or else stay in his barn to avoid unwanted attention that an inn or boarding house might expose them to.

## LANARA'S FLOWERS

An elderly halfling flower vendor hawks her lilies and roses and the very popular chrysanthemums. If approached, especially if she encounters someone who looks to have money, she comments, "My chrysanthemums are all the rage in the court of Lady Petria. Why, her personal maid came to me last week to buy nearly all I had!" She concludes with a proud nod. She asks 1 gp for the last chrysanthemum, or 1 cp each for lilies or roses.

## STORMTIDE COMPANY RECRUITMENT TENT

A pair of Stormtide Company mercenaries are stationed at a tent near the oasis. They offer a contract to anyone who happens by and looks like they can swing a weapon. The contract includes a signing bonus of 25 gp and a monthly payment of 10 gp for a 3-year term of service; it also specifies a hefty penalty of 75 gp for leaving the contract early.

Every other night, a caravan departs from the nearby oasis at nightfall. It escorts new conscripts, the few willing hires, and food supplies for the mercenary training camp. Anyone who signed up without being conscripted is paid 125 sp (half their bonus) when they report. The other half is to be paid when they finish their training in three weeks.

**Creatures.** The caravan is guarded by eight **bandits** and a **scout**. Conscripts are chained to camels, while anyone who signed willingly is given a camel to ride. The shackles on the chains have worn old locks that can be picked with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. The trek through the desert takes 10 hours and gives 1 level of exhaustion to everyone who accompanies them on foot (including any mounts). The training camp is described on page 35.

## SMUGGLER'S ROCK

A rocky outcropping just outside Kulara, the characters can find Smuggler's Rock if they search for criminal contacts using Thieves' Cant. An old, bearded halfling named Gurafan (halfling **scout**, chaotic neutral) pretends to hunt birds around here, but is, in truth, a smuggler waiting to take travelers or contraband to Harge. He offers advice for 5 gp, including the location of a nearby smuggler's tunnel that connects Smuggler's Rock to an abandoned manor's courtyard garden just inside the Walled Town. He offers a secluded place to stay for 4 gp per person, or 12 gp each if they have guards or mercenaries following after them. The site is a horse trader's barn; the gruff old man who owns it refuses to talk to the characters or give his name, wanting to maintain plausible deniability.

## THE STORMTIDE COMPANY

Odran's army is composed of mercenaries, mostly hired from the callous and cruel Stormtide Company. Even for a mercenary company, Stormtide is a magnet for psychopaths and angry brutes who just want an excuse to hurt people. Its grim reputation has only grown worse in recent weeks, as Odran has granted Sister Mara free rein to make their training more brutal.

The entire Stormtide Company is under long-term contract to the throne of Odran, so they couldn't consider defecting even for a large amount of money from a new client. However, the Stormtide Company has also hired a small group of freelance mercenaries as short-term help during the recent arms build-up, and these mercenaries are more susceptible to bribery.

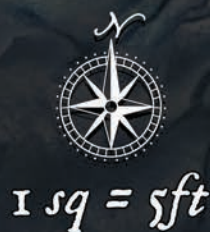
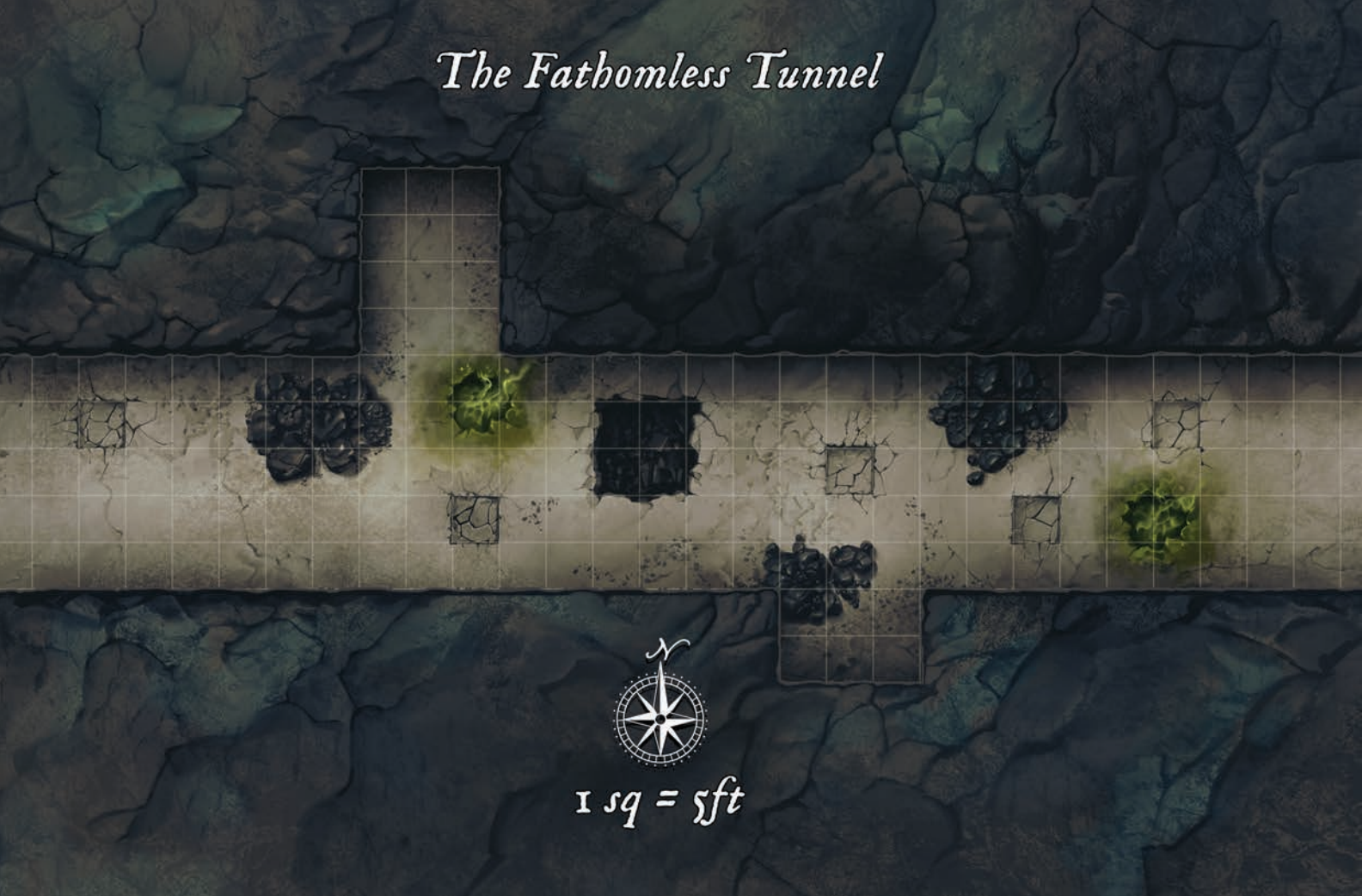
## RECRUITMENT

Lord Killian asks the characters to investigate the tunnels and find out where the killers came from. They are to report back any important intelligence, but since time is short and the tunnel takes a long time to traverse, they should try to gather all they can before reporting back. If the tunnel goes far enough to cross the border with Odran, no troops can go above ground but will escort the party up to that point. Read or paraphrase the following:

"Reports from friendly merchants passing through the border towns of Odran support my guess that the people of Odran want no part in this war. If you encounter Odranian civilians, they might become useful informants or even allies. Just take care not to speak openly about your working for us until you feel you can trust any contacts."

Yarod Zin is present and offers his assessment of the creatures. He thinks that the strange tunnels indicate

# The Fathomless Tunnel



extradimensional summoning. He also acknowledges that moon-beasts and yothans usually serve still stronger creatures, and are likely working with multiple skilled spellcasting humanoids. He recognizes Tsathoggua's involvement and worries about his own safety if the Sleeper's servants aren't stopped. Now that the tunnels seem to lead away from Harge, Master Zin also advises the characters to beware the Church of the Sleeper and learn all they can about its agents if they encounter any more evidence of the Sleeper Cult. Characters can tell he's holding something back (as described on page 16) with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check.

## THE FATHOMLESS TUNNEL

The tunnel is about 2 miles long, with minimal alcoves and side tunnels, inscribed here and there with the symbol of Tsathoggua. The floor is riddled with holes a couple of inches across that emit an acrid stench. The tunnel ends at a circular, crude wooden door fashioned from a broken wall. The entire length of the tunnel is in total darkness and the ceilings vary from 8–10 feet in height. The map can be used for encounters while exploring the tunnels, and for the fight with the formless spawn in Chapter 3.

### A. TUNNEL FLOOR

The floor is rough and dry, strewn with sand and gravel. Characters can move normally on the tunnel floor, though some form of illumination is required for creatures without enhanced vision.

### B. WEAK SPOT

In several sections the floor has been weakened by time and geological shifts, opening narrow cracks that are barely concealed by debris. Characters with a passive Perception of 12 or higher notice these sections, while others require a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check to avoid treading on the weak sections and falling into the crevices. Creatures who fall into the cracks must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d4 bludgeoning damage on a failure and half of that on a successful save.

### C. RUBBLE

Tunnel walls and ceilings have crumbled or partly collapsed in some areas, making these areas into difficult terrain.

### D. ACRID STENCH

The mysterious holes that cover the tunnel floor emit an unpleasant acrid odor, which is usually annoying



but harmless. In a few places, the stench is particularly thick, and anyone who enters these areas must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for one round.

### E. PIT

Some areas have become more unstable than others, opening up larger rubble-filled pits. These pits are obvious and don't require a Perception check to see, but any creature that steps in a pit must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage on a success and half as much on a failure. The pits are 10 feet deep and can be jumped with a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

### F. ALCOVE

An incomplete side tunnel or an old space for storage, this alcove can be an effective hiding place for ambushers. Any creature hiding here cannot be seen by passive Perception, and Perception checks to notice them are made at a -2 penalty.

### G. PARTIALLY-BLOCKED ALCOVE

This alcove is choked with rubble, making it difficult terrain and granting advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks to any creatures concealed there. As with normal alcoves, hidden creatures can't be seen by passive Perception, and checks to notice them are still made at -2.

## CHURCH OF THE SLEEPER

At the far end of the tunnel, the party finds itself in a shuttered Church of the Sleeper.

### OFFERING CHAMBER

They enter through the offering chamber, a dark stone basement with a reeking, acid-stinking vat in the center. In the otherwise empty vat, there is a discarded human skin with brown hair and inside a pale blue robe. There is a small hole at the bottom, like in the tunnel.

Stone stairs lead up to the chapel on the surface floor. The top is an ornate iron door. The door has a lock but is left unlocked now.

**The Skin.** The skin belonged to Qaroz, a human advocate who worked with **Salzarin** (page 203) until a couple weeks ago, when he was killed and replaced by a sand dweller (Barmathian, currently in the next room upstairs). A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check or DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check deduces that the skin is that of a human male of middle age with marks indicating strangulation. It is dried like old leather and has a thin layer of desiccated flesh within. The flesh shows claw and teeth marks along the entire interior. A successful DC

13 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes the marks as matching a sand dweller's. A ghoul using *Psychic Feast* can recall information based on the chosen skill: History recalls Qaroz arguing in a magistrate's court against a young woman being conscripted while Salzarin is at the advocate's side in her iconic silver-and-green dress. Arcana recalls Qaroz being charmed by magical words Lady Petria said to him in a finely appointed bedroom with chrysanthemums on the bedside table.

### FIRST FLOOR

This floor is a chapel with rows of low benches and tables facing an altar near the center of the room. Near the door to the basement is a hearth filled with ashes, with a couple of torn, hand-scrawled fliers littering the ground nearby. In one corner, stairs lead up to a lofted chamber, and a set of double doors on the other side of the altar leads outside. The windows are boarded up, partially obscuring a stylized, half-hidden eye, and the double doors likewise have simple wooden crossbars.

### CHAPEL

Lighting inside the chapel is dim, and the chamber's ceilings are 12 feet high.

### A. STAIRS DOWN

These stairs lead to the church offering chamber.

### B. IRON DOOR

The door at the top of the stairs is unlocked but has a magical alarm that activates if it is opened without saying the passphrase "May the Sleeper be satisfied." A magical alarm alerts cultists in the church, and the door casts *lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106) on a creature touching the door. The trap can be found with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception or Yog-Sothothery) check. It can be disabled by identifying a rune for awakening, and scratching it out with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) or Wisdom (Perception or Yog-Sothothery) check.

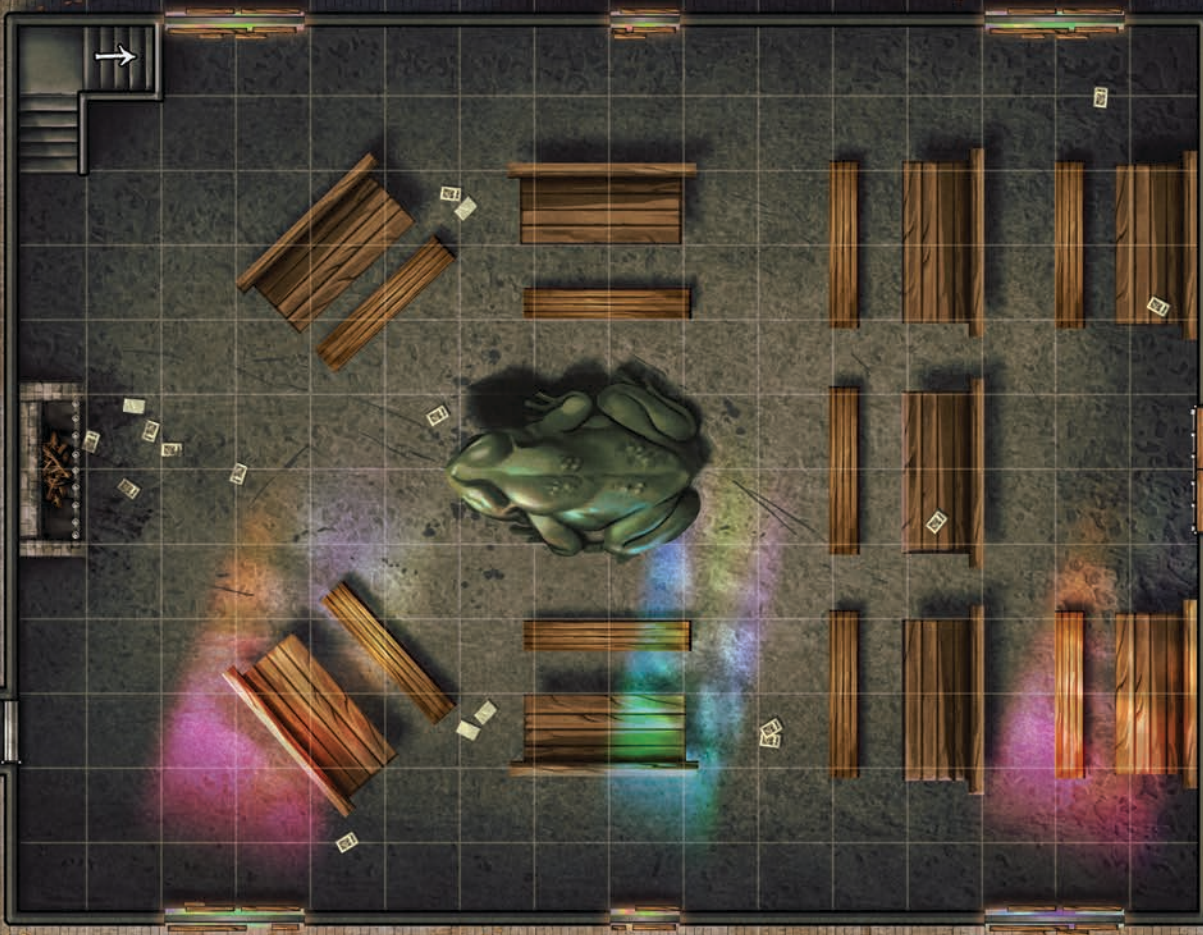
### C. HEARTH

Partially burned fliers litter the floor around the hearth. They beg for information about a vanished human man matching the skin's height, hair color, and clothing. The information is being collected by a Kularan arbiter, Salzarin, who can be found at the local teahouse.



## Church of the Sleeper

1 sq = 5ft



### D. STAIRS UP

These stairs lead to the church's second floor.

### E. BOARDED WINDOWS

These stained-glass windows extend to the ceiling and are partially boarded up, covering old designs depicting a half-open eye. The characters can recognize some iconography from the Opening Eye Society with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) check or if they visited the society during Chapter 1. They can recognize it as associated with Tsathoggua with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check or a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check.

### F. ALTAR

The altar resembles a squat, stylized toad painted with black ink running down from its eyes. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check or a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check recognizes this as a depiction of Tsathoggua.

### G. BENCH AND TABLE

Long benches serve as pews with narrow, 12-inch-wide tables affixed to the floor in front of each. The benches and tables offer partial cover.

### H. DOUBLE DOORS

These doors exit onto the streets of Kulara Town and are barred from the inside. The bar can be removed with an action.

The church is defended by a **sand-dweller strangler** (page 210) named Barmathian and two human **thugs** named Ulzan and Afthar. Unless the characters succeed on a DC 10 group Dexterity (Stealth) check with advantage while on the stairs, the defenders hide behind benches or the altar until a character comes close enough for a surprise attack. The DC of Wisdom (Perception) checks to notice hiding enemies is 13. If the characters surprise them, Ulzan is berating Afthar for not killing a beggar who came asking for alms, since he wouldn't be missed and might have seen inside. The sand dweller only recently emerged from his skin and so simply vanishes to the Violet Dimension if trapped or reduced below 5 hit points. If only one of the humans is left above 0 hit points, they attempt to flee into the streets to get to their allies at the camp outside the city. If captured and convinced to talk with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check, the humans know the following:

- ♦ **Who are you trying to keep out?** "The Watch and snooping locals. Some woman in green, calling herself Salzarin, has been trying to get into the church too."



- ◇ **Who are you working with?** “We were initiates to the Church of the Sleeper, before it shut down. Sister Mara introduced us to the Kulara Strangler, a sand dweller. He promised we could become immortals by doing as he said.”
- ◇ **What was that monster?** “Called itself Barmathian, an acolyte like Sister Mara. Never saw how he came to be some sand-dweller monster. Was a human before, like anybody.”
- ◇ **Where are they now?** “The Mother Magister and Sister Mara shuttered the temple around the same time the tunnel was built and the conscription started in Kulara, weeks ago.” (This was two weeks before the start of Chapter 1.) “Last we heard, Mara was doing something with the Storm-tide mercenary company at their training camp. Out in the desert, I imagine.”

## SECOND FLOOR

The lofted second floor contains two beds and a locked desk. The desk contains a text on Tsathoggua as well as a *spell scroll of charm person* and a *spell scroll of lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106). The text's Aklo portion describes how Tsathoggua can be made pliant with sacrifices of living creatures, especially intelligent ones. Its Common portion discusses the basics of the Violet Dimension, a plane where multiple realities coexist. Written by Sister Mara, it culminates in bragging about how the sand-dwellers who live there know how to perform a feast that offers immortality, infamy, and power, as well as sand-dweller allies.

## OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Describe the characters' first glimpse of Kulara by reading or paraphrasing the following:

The stone church is surrounded by a rambling little desert town, obviously farther from Harge than your walk in the tunnel could account for. Across the street is a small cafe and a worn-down boarding house. Far down the main street, a two-story wooden wall surrounds several fine houses near a green oasis. Green trees shelter a bustling crowd of people and pack animals.

Folk on the busy street assume characters emerging from the dilapidated structure are squatters or otherwise suspicious but not obviously dangerous. Commotion (especially the sound of combat) draws a local arbiter, **Salzarin** (page 57), who has been watching the building for the past several days from the nearby cafe. She works on writing legal appeals for conscripted Odranians while she waits. If it is night, a local dwarf boy she hired named Mandaru is watching instead. Within 5 minutes of the combat, Salzarin moves closer to learn more about what is

going on in the church. Characters can notice her with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check.

If the characters chase a fleeing enemy during the day, the streets outside the church are crowded. The crowd is difficult terrain and provides half cover. Characters can ignore the difficult terrain for the round by succeeding on a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check. Characters can convince the crowd to disperse for up to 60 feet by succeeding on a DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. The crowd also disperses for 30 feet around any character who uses attacks or hostile spells. The crowd moves on initiative count 10. The characters can get the crowd to block a fleeing enemy's escape with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

Combat in the street attracts the militia in 2 minutes looking to make an **Arrest** (page 33). They arrest and hold the player characters regardless of any story told, but Salzarin comes to them in prison to see what they know, as described in **The Curious Arbiter** (page 31).

## REPORTING TO KILLIAN

If the characters return to report to Lord Killian and Captain Esperia, they ask the party to learn what they can from the people of Kulara Town. Lord Killian remembers receiving letters from community leaders in Kulara, including Salzarin and Qaroz, who wanted Killian to know that the people of Kulara do not want war, no matter what Duke Odran claims. If the PCs can find either Salzarin, she might be a useful informant. Captain Esperia suggests reporting the skinned body to the authorities in Kulara as though the victim was a local resident of Kulara or visitor from somewhere other than Harge. She thinks an evil cult is the most likely cause of the trouble, but she worries Kulara's authorities might assume any known agent of Lord Killian is just trying to distract them from the potential war. Lord Killian discourages the characters from talking to the newly arrived Odranian diplomat, Lord Hakzeth. The characters could be identified by Hakzeth as Killian's agents and thus distrusted in Kulara.

## QUESTIONING HAKZETH

If the PCs confront the new Odranian diplomat Lord Hakzeth directly, he has no idea about any tunnel or cult, and declares he will make a report to Odran (which he does, along with his suspicion that the PCs are spies for Lord Killian). He never receives acknowledgment when he sends word of the tunnel; the lack of a reply bothers him, but he does not speak of his concerns unless a character succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

## THE CURIOUS ARBITER

**Salzarin** (page 57), a local arbiter and outspoken community leader, has been staking out the Church of the Sleeper for some time. She has grown suspicious of what is happening there and worries for the fate of the town. When the characters depart from the Church of the Sleeper, she realizes that they likely fought with the cultists holding the church. This makes her willing to risk talking to them in the hope that they are also enemies of the Sleeper. She watches from a small cafe (the Grinning Moon) down the street, partially concealed by a curtain. She pretends to pay attention to papers she is preparing to help conscripts get out of their contracts. Characters can notice her hiding spot with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check.

Salzarin approaches the PCs in a public place, under the assumption that even if they are dangerous, they won't do anything among witnesses. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check can deduce she was following them. She asks them if they have seen a man with brown hair and beard, about six feet tall. He was last seen wearing a blue robe.

**The Matching Skin.** The description matches the remains found in the vat under the **Church of the Sleeper** (page 29), which any character who examined the skin automatically remembers.

Salzarin has answers for the following topics:

- ♦ **Who are you looking for?** "His name is Qaroz and he is a court advocate. He was working with me to fight the recent conscriptions, arguing that the government had no right to demand people sign contracts with mercenary companies. Last week, he suddenly dropped his cases and started helping Lady Petria sue me and other community leaders for defamation. It was like he became a different person. He also stopped wearing the silver spider pin his late mother gave him, which he had never taken off before."
- ♦ **A dead body resembles Qaroz.** Salzarin grimaces and takes a moment to compose herself. "So he is dead. And his body defiled, too? Not him as well..." She looks down and then back at you. "This is finally the chance to get the authorities to take me seriously, though. I must ask you to come with me

to report the body. The Town Watch has started calling me a liar and troublemaker for refusing to stop hounding them over this case." If she sees the body, she examines it and notes, "Just like what he was wearing last... still no sign of his mother's spider pin. I wonder what became of it..."

- ♦ **Lady Petria?** "She's the new magistrate, sent by Duke Odran after the last one died of a sudden illness a little over a month ago."

- ♦ **Church of the Sleeper.** "The acolytes in the temple haven't been seen since Sister Mara closed it two weeks ago."

She counts on her fingers. "One acolyte was the first victim of the strangler. Another abandoned all his possessions when he disappeared from his boarding house in the night. Their leader, the Mother Magister, hasn't been seen since the temple closed. The third acolyte, Sister Mara, closed the temple and became Lady Petria's spiritual advisor after the Mother Magister disappeared."

- ♦ **The Stormtide Company?** "A brutal mercenary company contracted to Duke Odran to recruit troops and fight wars for him since he has no army of his own. Its local leader is Lord Basralfar."

**Salzarin's Request.** After giving the characters a chance to ask questions, Salzarin comes to a conclusion. She recognizes the PCs as effective enemies to whatever dark force was in the Church of the Sleeper and asks for help. Read or paraphrase the following:

"Kulara badly needs help from someone as effective as you. You've obviously just arrived in town, so you might not be aware of the state of things here. The threat of a pointless war has brought a wave of conscriptions. People, mostly the destitute and laborers, have been found strangled in alleys. Please help me unravel what is happening in my town. The murders have gone nearly uninvestigated, and it might be important to learn why the government is covering up the deaths rather than conducting proper investigations. The town would be near the breaking point just from the threat of a wildly unpopular war, but we're also dealing with a new magistrate who seems to see this town as a playground for her cruel amusement. Lady Petria rolled in a few months ago and





has almost anyone who makes trouble for her conscripted for the war effort. Please help me—with Qaroz missing, I'm out of allies to turn to."

Salzarin has advice on the following topics:

- ◇ **How should we investigate the government?** "I suggest you make a new report with the guards without involving me. See who they report to and whether they also scoff at you like they do me. See if you can learn anything more about the new magistrate, Lady Petria. She took office a few months ago, sometime before the murders, and she is incredibly unpopular."
- ◇ **What happened to the previous magistrate?** "A sudden illness took him, a month or so ago." Salzarin has looked into the event but found no evidence of any foul play, such as poisoning.
- ◇ **What leads are there on the murders themselves?** Salzarin drums her fingers on her chin as she thinks. "I helped a witness, a tailor named Esaru, make a report to the Watch, and I know one member of the Watch who was investigating, but both of them were recently conscripted into the Stormtide Company. The watchman's name was Lieutenant Marzelik Jafaq. I don't know what he learned, but it seems the best route to learn more there is to find him wherever the Stormtide Company took him."

## INVESTIGATING KULARA

In a new town with its own connected mysteries, the PCs have many potential routes they can take to learn what is going on and save Kulara from the dark forces encroaching upon it.

## FOLLOWING CLUES

Salzarin suggests the following avenues of investigation:

- ◇ **A: Finding Qaroz.** Characters might have already solved this mystery in the church; if they meet Salzarin before finding the body, she wants them to keep an eye out for Qaroz.
- ◇ **B: Gathering Information.** Characters can gather information at the Grinning Moon café (page 34) or the oasis market (page 27).
- ◇ **C: Warning the Watch.** The Watch's behavior after a new tip might indicate who is obstructing investigations.
- ◇ **D: The Magistrate's Manor.** An investigation of Lady Petria's manor might offer any number of clues as to the government's strange change in policy, given she took over around the time things began to change. The manor stands in the Walled Town not far from the oasis market.

- ◇ **E: Finding the Conscripts.** The fact that people connected to the killings keep getting conscripted is suspicious.

The following complication might arise in between these events:

### ARRESTED

The next time characters are seen in public after drawing government attention, the Town Watch attempts to arrest them on suspicion of sedition and spying for Lord Killian. They might have drawn attention in any of the following ways:

- ◇ fighting in the streets
- ◇ reporting sand-dweller activity to any guard
- ◇ being seen breaking into the magistrate's manor
- ◇ being identified as agents of Lord Killian (whether by Lord Hakzeth or by their own admission)
- ◇ interfering with sand-dwellers (not a problem if they prevented any witnesses from spreading word to Odranian officials, Mara or Petria)
- ◇ interfering with Stormtide Company conscription

**Creatures.** The characters are arrested by a watch lieutenant **scout** named Esrelifa, Lady Petria's **spy** bodyguard Surraliq, and a number of watch **guards** equal to the number of PCs. Like most enemies in this adventure, the Watch attempts to knock characters out rather than kill them.

**Conscripted!** If any of the characters are captured, they are forcibly conscripted to the **Stormtide Outpost** (page 37) and forced to sign a contract of service for minimal pay. Salzarin visits them in prison, where they remain until they cool off. She says:

"Things are getting serious, but I think that being conscripted might actually be an opportunity for you. You aren't the only ones being arrested like this; it seems to be anyone making trouble for Duke Odran's pawns. People are starting to worry about Lady Petria's increasingly paranoid behavior. There's talk about running her out of town, if only she didn't have all these mercenaries around. I worry what she would do then, and what she might have already done to the conscripts. Many conscripts were taken from among the Town Watch and community leaders, making it hard to resist her control. If you can organize the other conscripts and help them escape, they could come back here and give the people a chance to resist Lady Petria's tyranny. Don't worry—I'll find a way to get your equipment to you inside."

If all the characters escape, Salzarin tracks them down and urges them to follow the **Stormtide Company recruiters** (on page 27), with much the same statement as if they were arrested.

## CLUE A: FINDING QAROZ

Qaroz was last seen entering the **Church of the Sleeper** (page 42). In truth, he was hollowed out by a sand-dweller a week ago, and his skin was discarded in the church's basement after it had begun to grow leathery. The replacement happened in the **Magistrate's Manor** (page 34) when he was making an appeal to Lady Petria, and he lost his mother's spider pin in the struggle (it is currently located in the manor's flower room, page 27).

## CLUE B: GATHERING INFORMATION

In Kulara Town, the characters can learn the state of affairs from the people, such as visitors in the Grinning Moon cafe or merchants in the oasis market. A Charisma (Persuasion) check to gather information yields the following results, including all information for lower results:

**DC 5.** The people are anxious over a potential war that Duke Odran is fomenting without any clear reason. He's always been an unambitious playboy, so the recent talk of war seems wildly out of character, even among his supporters. The news of murders of beggars, porters, and other poor and working folk here in Kulara Town terrifies everyone. The victims have all been strangled and found in alleyways in the rich Walled Town.

**DC 8.** The people resent Duke Odran for heavily taxing everyone except his rich allies and not helping the needy. Recently, that resentment has redoubled and mingled with fear as the Duke conscripts young people with no recourse, forcing them to work for almost no pay for the Stormtide Company.

**DC 10.** The recent deaths mimic the pattern of the infamous Kulara Strangler, thought to have fled or died 50 years ago after the original string of murders stopped.

**DC 12.** The Church of the Sleeper shut down two weeks before the murders began, and the high priestess and a couple of acolytes disappeared. It was popular among aspiring mages and socialites. The faithful have a reputation for being greedy and collecting magic items.

**DC 15.** The people murmur about how much better a ruler Lord Killian of nearby Harge is, in large part because he doesn't abuse his people wantonly. Some people discreetly discuss breaking away from Odran and joining Harge but worry that doing so will be all the excuse Duke Odran needs to declare war. Others want Kulara to become a free town with no lord but worry that will bring Odran's hired military strength down upon the lonesome town with no outside support.

## CLUE C: WARNING THE WATCH

Characters who give a tip about Qaroz to the Town Watch without Salzarin are asked if Salzarin the arbiter sent them. In either case, the world-weary **guard**, Sir Narbaz, scoffs and says that Lady Petria has explained already that Qaroz is gone because Duke Odran hired him away last week. The Watch believes the PCs are here in earnest, rather than in league with Salzarin, if they are presented with the evidence of Qaroz's death or if a character succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Upon seeing the horrific skin, the guard struggles to keep his wits. Narbaz bites his lower lip with obvious guilt if he realizes that this was something Salzarin warned about, as he now feels guilty for dismissing her. As they are witnesses, Narbaz asks for the characters' names, professions, and where they are staying in town. After he calms down in, he goes to report to Lady Vanessa.

Characters who were seen in combat on the streets or who are known to be agents of Lord Killian are soon thereafter followed and targeted for **Arrest** (page 33).

## CLUE D: THE MAGISTRATE'S MANOR

The manor's low wall has only one guarded gate. The large manor has two exterior doors (one front, one back) and a tower with a balcony overlooking the Walled Town square and the oasis. Climbing the wall requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. Guards outside have a passive Perception score of 10 (5 to see things at night, due to darkness).

**Guards.** Unless dispatched elsewhere, four mercenary **guards** are stationed at the entrance (2 inside and 2 outside). If they shout for help, another four **guards** arrive after 2 rounds.





## A SUSPICIOUS FOOTMAN

**Zarfang** (human bandit, neutral) is a middle-aged man with a dark complexion and graying beard.

**Traits** Zarfang covers up things he's uncomfortable with by saying, "you wouldn't understand." **Ideal** Prestige. **Bond** Zarfang has a son, Soru, in the Town Watch whom he doesn't want drawn into this. **Flaw** Zarfang is terrified of Lady Petria and Sir Ranakaz but can be convinced to talk about them with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check. Characters who have evidence of unnatural dealings make the check with advantage. If convinced to talk, he demands a promise of clemency and claims he was just following orders. He knows Duke Odran was aware of Petria's crimes and supported her. He won't say anything specific until safely outside of Petria and Odran's reach, whether after she has been removed from power or Zarfang has been escorted to Harge through the tunnel.

**The Manor Proper.** Most of the vast manor is dark. **Lady Vanessa Petria** (page 205) is usually in her chambers on the second floor. She only investigates trouble on the second floor. Her footman Zarfang and her loyal **spy** bodyguard Surrاليق are always within earshot. Lady Vanessa has an office with a desk full of letters, which she rarely uses. The letters include correspondence with Duke Odran and the leaders of the mercenary companies. Duke Odran thanks her for introducing him to the entertainments of blood and expresses how he looks forward to the promised Festival of the Feast.

**Servants.** One maid (human **commoner**) comes and goes once per day for errands. The maid, Carnasa, reveres Petria and says she has every right to do as she wishes as Duke Odran's magistrate. Characters remember that the magistrate's powers are legally limited with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (History) check. Salzarín and any ghoul who used *Psychic Feast* on Qaroz's remains automatically succeed. Carnasa can be convinced to talk with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check, by explaining that Petria legally betrayed her office, or by pointing out evidence of unnatural happenings at the Church of the Sleeper.

The other servant, a human footman named Zarfang, delivers messages to the local mercenary captain, Sir Ranakaz, and a few other local aristocrats who join Petria in her revels. Their revels include dizzying varieties of mind-altering substances, plays, music, and mysterious private liaisons with performers of nebulous repute. Lately, the private liaisons have become more clandestine and included the sounds of violence, with the performers not seen thereafter. The second such performer was later found in an alley strangled, but the servants didn't want to admit the connection.

**The Flower Room.** Zarfang and Carnasa know that Petria has met with aristocratic mercenary Sir

Ranakaz on some of the nights the murders happened. Ranakaz brings a new person with him each time. They return later in the evening with a bound man being led by the guard. They take him into the flower room and he vanishes by morning.

The room has a bouquet of fading chrysanthemums. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check smells death on the bed. A cat or ghoul who has smelled Qaroz's corpse recognizes his odor here, which might mean that this is where he died. Under the bed is a silver clasp that was mentioned on the fliers and was missing from his body; finding it requires a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

**Secret Chamber.** The dried-out empty skin of one of the missing people is preserved, and can be found in a hidden alcove behind a sliding panel in one of the walls of Lady Petria's chamber, which can be discovered with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check or by knocking on the walls. It belonged to the Mother Magister of the Church of the Sleeper, once impersonated by the Kulara Strangler. A ghoul can remember her death by strangulation, much like with Lady Doloran's body in Chapter 1.

## EVIL ENTERTAINMENTS

A character who watches the manor at night can see Sir Ranakaz (human **bandit captain**, chaotic evil) arrive to take Petria out for the evening's entertainment. He promises the night should culminate in "another breathless revel," and Petria agrees it's been too long. If the PCs follow them, they witness Petria and Ranakaz rendezvous with a street performer leaving the Oasis Market, who was told to wait for them in a secluded lane. They pick him up, take him back to the manor, and have him play music for them in the flower room until they grow bored and strangle him.

## CLUE E: FINDING THE CONSCRIPTS

If characters are arrested, the Watch brings them to the Stormtide Outpost whether they want to be members or not (as noted earlier). If characters wish to infiltrate the new mercenaries, Salzarín suggests they can sign up with the Stormtide Company and ask to serve alongside one of the conscripts she knows: a guard, Marzelik Jafaq, who was investigating the murder of a day laborer when he found himself conscripted. The PCs can find the recruiters in the **market square** (page 17); Salzarín suggests they claim to be friends or relatives of Marzelik, as the recruiters won't demand they prove it. She warns them they should be prepared to be imprisoned, since no one has heard from Marzelik or his husband Ishvaldin (a member of the Watch).





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## STORMTIDE OUTPOST

South of Kulara, the Stormtide Company has taken over an abandoned Odranian outpost as a training camp. The outpost is controlled by **Lord Basralfar** (page 205) and **Sister Mara** (page 206). Most of the recruits here are conscripts furious at being forced to sign away their youths for almost no pay. Basralfar is under orders from Duke Odran, his client, to do as Mara asks. She has ordered the mercenaries to punish all transgressions harshly and mete out discipline. The mercenaries execute anyone attempting to flee, forcing the other conscripts to stone the violator to death. Sister Mara watches carefully, using her Cruel Impulse trait to see who among the mercenaries and conscripts has a suitable temperament for becoming sand dwellers.

The guards are a mix of races and rotate with other outposts regularly, including a ghoul who eats the corpses of conscripts who were killed. Most player characters can pretend to be guards by stealing uniforms and keeping to themselves.

### A. ROAD

This dirt road leads back to Kulara. Since the Stormtide Company's arrival, it has mostly been traversed by mercenaries bringing conscripts to the camp.

### B. WATERING HOLE

This shallow depression collects rainwater and provides the camp with its less-than-palatable supply of water. Conscripts are sent here to fill and fetch heavy demijohns of water and mercilessly punished if they don't maintain a grueling pace while doing so.

### C. CLIFF

The outpost sits on a low cliff with a watering hole at the base. The cliff serves as a natural rampart. It can be climbed with a successful DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check.

### D. RAMP

Near the watering hole, a narrow ramp carved into the stone leads up to the top.

### E. BARRACKS

The simple barracks where the conscripts are held are locked at night but open between dawn and dusk. The lock can be opened with keys held by Lord Basralfar or the night guard, or with a successful DC 18 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. The night guard is in a tent during the day. At night, he dozes within line of sight at a nearby fire.

### F. ARMORY

This structure contains both supplies and various

armaments, including demijohns of water and wine, rations, spears, shortswords, and some light armor. It is normally locked (DC 13 Dexterity [thieves' tools] check) and constantly watched by two **guards**.

### G. FIREPIT

A gathering place for the mercenaries, the firepit is lit up with scrap wood and trash on alternate nights. Cooperative conscripts are allowed to attend these gatherings, though they are often bullied by the more experienced veteran mercenaries.

### H. MERCENARY TENTS

The other mercenaries and officers use a dozen small tents. The mercenary tents each include a cot, a spare uniform, and a small chest with a lock that can be opened with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Each lockbox contains one or two of the following: 12 gp, expensive Tsangese candy worth 3 sp, jewelry worth 10 gp, or letters from home (a relative asks the mercenary to come home and expresses alarm at their rudeness and callousness since joining the Stormtide Company). The mercenaries have a variety of appearances, including at least one of each of the player characters' species and build (suitable for impersonation).

### I. TRAINING FIELD

This section of the cliff top has been leveled and raked. It is where the conscripts are put through their brutal daily training regimen, carefully observed by Mara and Basralfar from their nearby quarters.

### J. OFFICER QUARTERS

Lord Basralfar has one set of private quarters, and Mara has the other. Mara's **bat** familiar Dusk sleeps under the eaves during the day.

#### J1. Mara's Quarters

Mara's quarters include her documents of how every mercenary and conscript rates in potential. She doesn't say what the potential is for but comments that highly promising ones demonstrate cruelty and that disappointing ones have defects like mercy and pity. At the end, she tallies her estimated number of successful emergences at the Festival of the Feast: currently, there are forty-two tally marks. If characters look up named NPCs on this list, they can find notes on the following:

- ♦ Sir Ranakaz the mercenary: obviously suitable
- ♦ Esaru the conscripted tailor: promisingly spiteful
- ♦ Marzelik the conscripted watch lieutenant: angry but possibly too disciplined
- ♦ Ishvaldin the conscripted watchman: disappointingly lacking in bloodthirst

#### J2. Basralfar's Quarters

Lord Basralfar's quarters include his coffers with

6,000 sp, fine Odranian date wine worth 10 gp, and his files. On his desk is a new set of orders and an unfinished letter. The orders, from Duke Odran, instruct Lord Basralfar to ready the conscripts as soon as possible to meet the main force of the Stormtide Company in Kulara in two weeks' time for a great feast before deciding the fate of Harge. In Lord Basralfar's unfinished letter, he writes that Sister Mara's techniques might indeed produce coldly efficient killing machines in some cases, but they are strange and seem to undermine morale for the other conscripts. He wants Mara recalled to Kulara so he can resume training troops as he is accustomed to. Contracts for all the mercenaries, including the documents legally binding all the conscripts, are in Basralfar's locked desk (which can be opened with a DC 15 Dexterity [thieves' tools] check). Destroying the contracts allows the conscripts to legally resume their lives.

## GETTING IN

Salzarin and any official can tell the characters that the conscripts were sent to a training camp 20 miles deeper into the desert, where one of the mercenary leaders, Lord Basralfar, is overseeing their training and **Sister Mara** (page 206) is indoctrinating them. Mara closed her Church of the Sleeper after killing off her fellow cultists when they refused to become sand-dwellers. Following the tracks of the caravan takes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check.

**Creatures.** Mara and Lord Basralfar are guarded by two **cultists** and two **bandits** who are tempted by Mara's offer of immortality and infamy through the Festival of the Feast. The conscripts are guarded by a dozen mercenary guards.

### OPTION A: INFILTRATION

Characters who join the company through the recruiters in the oasis market are brought into the camp with a caravan of supplies.

### OPTION B: CAPTURE

Characters arrested in Kulara arrive with the conscripts as well, but they don't retain their equipment. Salzarin sneaks into the encampment around midnight one day after the conscripted characters arrive, leaving them their gear and a note that reads "Good

luck –S". She leaves it on the sill of the barracks window and slips away again.

### OPTION C: STEALTH

Sneaking into the camp requires a successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check during the day to move quickly between the low rock outcroppings and sparse plants. At night, the DC is only 10. Since guards don't expect an approach over the low cliff, if the PCs scale the cliff, the DCs are reduced by 2 to 13 and 8 respectively.

### OPTION D: OPEN APPROACH

Characters who approach openly are told to leave. Convincing the guards to let them in requires a successful DC 13 Charisma check using any appropriate skill, at which point the sentries take them to speak with **Sister Mara** (page 206) while waiting for **Lord Basralfar** (page 205) to be available.

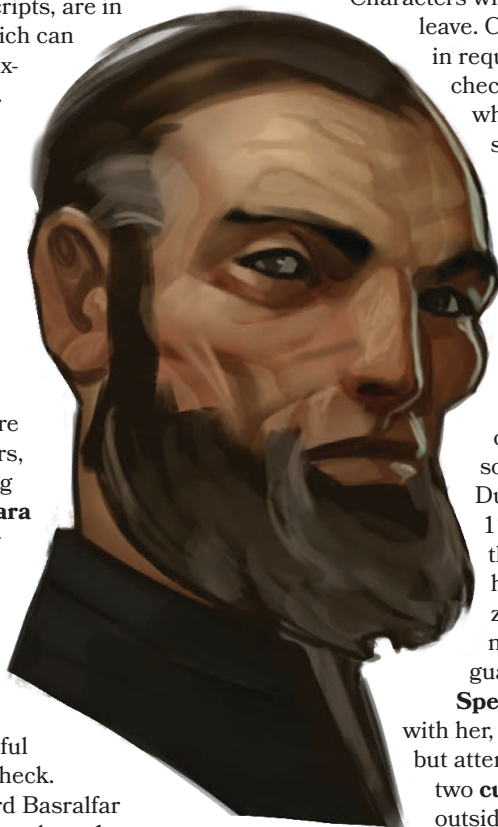
Convincing the guards to bypass Mara and take them directly to Basralfar or a particular conscript despite their direct orders requires a successful ability check. Characters may attempt a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check to pretend to represent someone with higher authority (like Duke Odran or Lady Petria), a DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) check to threaten legal reprisal (the attempt has advantage if they mention Salzarin by name), or a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check to bribe the guards with at least 20 gp.

**Speaking to Mara.** If the PCs speak with her, Sister Mara seems genial enough but attempts to poison the party while her two **cultists** and two **bandits** keep watch outside her quarters. She pretends Duke Odran coerced her into helping with

some shadowy conspiracy she doesn't know much about and asks the characters to help her find out the truth and expose the duke. Each character whose passive Wisdom (Insight) is higher than Mara's Charisma (Deception) check realizes she is anxious about their presence. She asks the characters about magic they know and pumps them for personal details that might be good for blackmail.

Each character who drinks the tea she offers must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw after 1d4 minutes or become poisoned. At the end of the poisoned character's turn each round, they must attempt another Constitution saving throw, taking 1d4 poison damage on a failure or ending the poisoned condition on a success.

In combat, Mara calls for reinforcements from the





cultists and bandits, then rambles about a promise for a feast that will begin a new age for this world while she casts spells. Mara carries a spell *scroll of lethargy of Tsathoggu* (SPCM 106).

**Speaking to Basralfar.** Lord Basralfar has little patience to deal with the PCs but will hear them out. He is bound by a contract to follow orders from Duke Odran and, by extension, Sister Mara and Lady Petria. The characters can convince Basralfar to turn on Mara without breaking the contract with evidence that Sister Mara or Lady Petria isn't humanoid and a successful DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation) check. If they do, Mara and her cultists flee, but the conscripts remain imprisoned.

If the characters prove Duke Odran is associating with practitioners of evil magic, Basralfar can be convinced that keeping his contract with the duke and the Stormtide Company is too great a risk to his own safety and financial future with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check or DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) check. In this case, he frees the conscripts both from their chains and from their contracts. At this point, fearing for his life in Odran and worrying the rest of the Stormtide Company will turn on him, Basralfar seeks asylum in Harge.

### THE ROUTINE

New recruits stop first at the barracks, where they give up any weapons they possess to add to the small supply hut where the company keeps all food, weapons, and other supplies. Lord Basralfar greets them, introducing himself and expressing his high expectations for glory and valor, and reminding them that the company is under long-term contract to Odran. New recruits then remain locked in the barracks to rest for their training, which begins the next day. The barracks contain effects from the 40 recruits, along with empty cots and unclaimed uniforms for another couple dozen.

Other recruits return once the dusk becomes too dark for training. Most of the recruits have similar stories, which they share with a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check: they found themselves chosen for no good reason they can identify. Several feel especially put-upon because they were conscripted shortly after someone they knew died in the recent killings, they reported finding a body, or they saw a fine carriage speeding away near the site of the killings late in the night.

At dawn and dusk, recruits can prepare meals for themselves at fire pits near the supply hut. Recruits train all day, sparring, moving heavy stones back and forth, and racing against each other. The training is particularly brutal and discourages teamwork. When moving stones, for instance, recruits can't stop for long without being hit, and can't help each other without being punished for "wasting time on failures." When sparring, recruits who quit without drawing

## THE VENGEFUL RECRUIT

**Eseru Tailor** (dwarf **commoner**, chaotic evil) is a tough dwarf woman furious at her treatment by the Stormtide Company. Her anger has provided an opportunity for the sand-dwellers to urge her to give in to her darkest impulses.

**Traits** Eseru sneers at any mention of restraint or caution and grins menacingly at the idea of revenge.

**Ideal** Respect. Bond Eseru wants revenge for how she has been treated.

**Flaw** Eseru can rarely resist a chance to indulge in disproportionate retribution.

blood are punished by having everyone throw heavy stones at them. Anyone deemed to be missing on purpose is forced to join the victim. All the while, Mara, wearing a stately silver robe, and Basralfar in a fine dress uniform, watch the recruits to assess their potential and skill. Mara encourages cruelty by discretely urging violence in the drill instructors.

### RALLYING CRY

Characters can convince the conscripts to fight back with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check or by defeating either Basralfar or Mara. It's possible to shout from the cliff edge, since the camp is small, but such distant pleas give the check disadvantage. The PCs gain advantage on this check if they convince the conscripts that their leaders are evil monsters, if they brought militia, if they have trained alongside the conscripts, or if they encourage the troops that they have support to fight back against their mistreatment.

The conscripts fight back against the mercenaries effectively if they are out during the day, picking up rocks and staves and hot pans. If they are in the barracks, they need the door unlocked for them to fight back. If the characters don't fight alongside them, the conscripts and mercenaries both suffer heavy casualties before the last six conscripts surrender, and only Mara's cultists and three mercenaries remain among the guards.

### COMBAT

Large-scale combat should not be run like normal combat, but rather, described as a narrative. In most cases, Lord Basralfar and Sister Mara lead their cultists to attack the characters while the fight rages in the background. About the same number of background characters fall on each side every round.

If the characters brought militia and they attack first, it leads to a stalemate until the conscripts revolt or the PCs defeat one of the mercenary leaders. If the characters convince the conscripts to revolt while the militia engages, the conscripts grab improvised weapons and defeat the mercenaries from behind with few casualties. While fighting, Lord Basralfar, Mara, and her cultists focus on the player characters.

Once the mercenaries suffer heavy losses or lose a leader, any surviving mercenary leaders (and Mara) order a retreat. If Mara is grabbed, she emerges from her skin to escape. If Mara feels cornered, is reduced to 5 or fewer hit points, or otherwise thinks the characters will surely win, she flees to the Violet Dimension, leaving a purple gash in the air that quickly fades. She returns in Chapter 3 at the Festival of the Feast.

## TAKING THE CAMP

When combat is over, the conscripts argue over what to do with surviving mercenaries. Younger Ishvaldin, his middle-aged husband Marzelik (both page 56), and the tailor Eseru emerge as leaders of each camp. Eseru wants to kill them all, hating them for brutalizing the conscripts and forcing them to do cruel things. Marzelik wants to string them up and leave them to die. Ishvaldin wants to drag them back to town in chains. There are ample shackles for this.

The conscripts are all eager for justice and prepare to head home. Ishvaldin is indignant and wants to seek support from Harge. Marzelik is also angry but worried about the risk. He encourages staying put and seeking out a temporary alliance for a free Kulara. Eseru chimes in to support whichever option seems the most recklessly violent.

## CONCLUSION

Even if the characters don't find the orders, the conscripts do. The conscripts are deeply unsettled at the prospect of an entire mercenary army like the one here taking over their hometown and performing a mysterious ritual. Eseru suggests assassinating Lady Petria for her involvement in this affair. Ishvaldin asks the characters to get support from Lord Killian to defend the town. Marzelik wants to show the evidence of what happened here to the watch captains in Kulara and get them to help evacuate the town.

Marzelik noticed the resupply schedule and knows that the characters (and possibly a few conscripts) can return in the guise of a Stormtide supply caravan. The caravan is normally composed of 8 soldiers.

**Dreams of the Violet Doorway.** During every long rest from now until the Festival of the Feast, one or more characters has the following dream. If certain characters received such dreams before (such as part of their backstory), these are the characters who should have this dream.

You dream of cooking meat and screams. Smoke obscures your vision until a shining violet doorway opens before you. The spectral figure, a ka, from the previous vision appears just out of reach beyond the doorway. His faltering voice whispers, "Help you... no time... step through... learn to fight them..." The dream then ends.

Characters can connect the dream to the Violet Dimension with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check. If the check exceeds the DC by 5, they identify the hallmarks of a ritual spell to open an interdimensional gateway featuring fire, food, and intelligent sacrifices.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of Chapter 2, the characters advance to level 3.





## CHAPTER 3: THE FESTIVAL OF THE FEAST

*A Cthulhu Mythos Adventure for 4 to 5 Characters of 3rd level*

### ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Duke Odran calls off his impending attack on Lord Killian so he can redirect his resources to suppress the rebellion the PCs' have fomented. Since the army and soldiers of Odran are mercenaries, they don't care about Odran's injustices, leading to a fight between the Odranian citizens and their town watch versus Odran's Stormtide Company goons. The town can't hold off the goons, and while some of the townsfolk flee into the desert, others stay behind, hoping for mercy.

But mercy is not forthcoming. Once Kulara is captured, the sand-dwellers come out in force, and plan a gigantic feast wherein they will devour and kill everyone in town. The PCs and the remaining townsfolk likely wish to save as many as possible before the awful day. They must raid Kulara, try to rescue captives, and save innocent victims from the sand-dwellers, the murderous agents, lesser monsters, and the sand-dwellers new master.

If the PCs fail to save enough townsfolk (saving them all is very difficult), then the sand-dwellers host their gigantic Festival of the Feast in a hideous ritual.

This ritual transforms every suitable human who participates in the Feast into a sand-dweller a day or two later, shedding their outer flesh to reveal the hideous monster within. Since Odran's army participates, the ritual produces a huge force of armed and armored (and trained) sand-dwellers.

If the PCs save the townsfolk (or all but a handful), the Festival unfolds differently. On the day of the Feast, the evil courtiers and the army officers shed their skins, revealing themselves as sand-dwellers and turn on the troops, who have difficulty defending themselves since they put aside their weapons and armor for the feast. The result is an orgy of destruction and consumption. In addition, a gigantic purple glowing portal opens to another dimension, thanks to the Feast, and sand-dwellers come pouring through. The PCs must go through to close it.

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

Duke Odran has ordered his army of mercenaries from Harge to cement his power and prepare the Festival of the Feast in Kulara. The magical tunnel under the town makes it the ideal site for a grand conjuration.

## THE FESTIVAL OF THE FEAST



If Mara has survived thus far, she reunites with the army and uses it to seek revenge for her defeat. She knows many of the Stormtide Company have the potential to become sand-dwellers, and she intends to turn every soldier into a member of a full-fledged inhuman army through the Festival of the Feast.

## THE SILVER CRESCENT COMPANY

The Silver Crescent Company has arrived to supplement the losses the Stormtide Company suffered during Chapter 2. They operate under a short-term contract to the Stormtide Company rather than to Odran itself, and don't hesitate to abandon the field if they can make more money by leaving (such as if the PCs can bribe them).

The Silver Crescent Company's leader, Sir Iresep (human **veteran**, lawful neutral), lacks Lord Basralfar's thirst for glory. He is utterly calculating and backs out if convinced he is going to lose more than he gains by keeping his contract to the Stormtide Company.

## ONWARD FROM THE CAMP

Characters can proceed from the camp either by returning to Harge directly, which Marzelik admits might be wisest, or by reentering Kulara, as most of the conscripts prefer.

## KILLIAN'S COURT

Characters who report their progress to Lord Killian are rewarded with 200 gp each for undermining Odran's military operation and keeping Harge appraised of useful intelligence.

The people of Kulara (including Marzelik and Salzarin) know defiance of Duke Odran and his minions will put a target on their backs and are willing to ask for support from Lord Killian either directly or through the PCs. Lord Killian is initially willing to send hard-to-trace supplies via secret tunnel, but no troops. Characters can convince him to send a few elite warriors (four **scouts** plus any survivors from the tunnel raid in Act 1) in disguise with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. He is careful not to discuss the matter with Odran's new diplomat present.

Killian finds exciting the possibility that a revolt in Kulara might inspire similar actions across the entire duchy as well as the fact that Kulara might provide a buffer for Harge (and move citizens and troops from Odran's side to Killian's). Suggesting these possibilities provides advantage on ability checks to persuade him.

Lord Killian expects an Odranian counterattack soon and hires the characters to return immediately with the supplies to reinforce Kulara.

## REENTERING KULARA

If the characters are wanted by the authorities, such as if they were conscripted, evaded arrest, or if they openly travel alongside former conscripts, they encounter a group of mercenaries once while passing through town. The PCs can bluff their way past these mercenaries with a successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception) check, gaining advantage on this check if they are in disguise (such as if they wear mercenary uniforms).

**Creatures.** The mercenaries are a number of **bandits** equal to the number of characters. They shout, "You are hereby ordered to stand trial! Don't run!" Characters can evade them in the city streets with a successful DC 10 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to disappear into alleys or crowds, or else individual checks using either Dexterity (Acrobatics) against DC 10 to weave through crowds or Strength (Athletics) against DC 12 to outrun them.

If characters turn themselves in or are arrested, they are **Jailed** (page 43).

## CHURCH OF THE SLEEPER

Until the characters dethrone Lady Petria, the Church of the Sleeper is locked (DC 15 Dexterity [thieves' tools] check to open). A couple days after the characters cleared out the tunnel, a sand-dweller went to check on operations in Harge and found Hargian troops. He fled before the sentries spotted him, and reported that the operation in Harge was spoiled.

The eldritch tunnel below remains quiet, as the formless spawn within is dormant until fed by the mercenary army that is still a few days out when the adventure begins.

**Creatures.** Four Stormtide mercenaries (three young **bandits** and one brawny **thug** lieutenant) are stationed here and ordered to detain anyone who trespasses. They are playing mahjong to kill time and not expecting trouble. They assume anyone in a mercenary uniform has come on legitimate business.

**Development.** If these guards are found missing at the next shift change, the company switches to watching the building from a nearby intersection with a similar group. If the sentries subsequently spot the PCs sniffing around the church, they send mercenaries as described in **Ranakaz's Arrest** (below) to apprehend the party.

## RANAKAZ'S ARREST

If the characters linger long in public in Chapter 3 without rallying a crowd as a distraction, Sir Ranakaz (human **bandit captain**, chaotic evil) leads a team of three **thugs** to capture and interrogate them. The team prefers to knock defeated characters unconscious and take them to the jail (see below).



## JAILED

If the characters are arrested during Chapter 3, they find themselves imprisoned in Kulara's modest jail. **Salzarin** (page 203) comes to them soon thereafter, bribes a guard to give her some privacy, then explains the characters will receive a trial, but probably not a fair one. However, it might still be useful as an opportunity to rally support and undermine Lady Petria's credibility. Salzarin offers to help the characters escape or to defend them at trial but asks that they help her bring down Petria in either case.

### OPTION A: BREAKOUT

If the PCs opt to break out, Salzarin quietly helps them brainstorm plans such as feigning illness so the captain (Hakazan) checks on them, provoking one of the guards known for a bad temper (Lurnar) into getting close enough they can grab the key; bribing a guard (Nazinda) with a gambling problem; or tricking a lonely and bored guard (Pallazat) into letting their guard down in some other way. Salzarin can go and get items the characters request, and she can slip them small items like thieves' tools by hiding them inside of a big bowl of rice and vegetables or the like.

**Creatures.** There are a number of **guards** equal to the number of PCs and one **bandit captain** (a mercenary) minding the jail.

### OPTION B: TRIAL

If they stand trial, Lady Petria puts the PCs through a perfunctory hearing, then conscripts them. The affair draws a huge crowd of interested citizens. An effective enough speech at the trial, which requires a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, convinces the crowd to turn on the magistrate, beginning the events described in **Open Revolt** on page 44. A character can also successfully argue a legal precedent that requires they be freed with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (History) check; they gain advantage on this check if they consulted Salzarin's legal knowledge in planning their defense.

If the characters fail, Marzelik and Ishvaldin rally the revolt anyway, but only with 2 successes between them and they only get the Watch to step aside (rather than help). Regardless, this scene ends with the PCs escaping prison or conscription, but the PCs gain better benefits if they succeed.

## SALZARIN'S PLAN

**Salzarin** (page 203) approaches the characters to take action against Lady Petria's rule as soon as anyone sees them return. If they are disguised, she waits in the cafe watching the Church of the Sleeper (or at any prearranged meeting point).

She explains that the tunnel is being watched, so she offers to let the PCs stay with her. She also asks the characters for help in overthrowing Lady Petria's exploitative rule over Kulara Town. Should anyone tell her of the Festival of the Feast or the arrival of

Odran's armies, she focuses her effort on organizing the people to flee Kulara. If the characters are willing to risk capture on the way out of Kulara, they could go to Lord Killian for assistance. Bringing back the freed conscripts (assuming not many perished in Chapter 2) and convincing the Watch to assist also ensure that the odds of success are good.

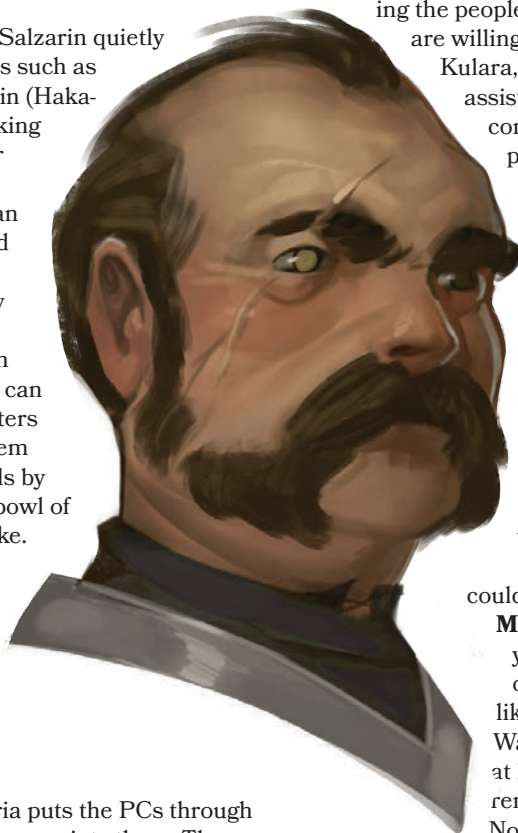
Salzarin says she can easily gather an angry crowd by reminding them of the way people disappear without even acknowledgment, much less an investigation. She encourages the PCs to make all necessary preparations first, though, as once a revolt breaks out, events will move quickly.

Marzelik points out that they could infiltrate the **Magistrate's Manor** (page 34) if they haven't yet gathered enough evidence of Petria's culpability for their liking. Salzarin suggests asking the Watch, who are locals, to help or at least stand aside while the PCs remove Lady Petria from power. Now that **Marzelik** and **Ishvaldin** (page 202) are free, they can use their connections in the Watch to arrange a meeting with Watch Captain Rasmaldia (see below).

### RECRUITING THE WATCH

When the PCs are ready to speak to the Watch, **Marzelik** (page 202) arranges a clandestine meeting outside of town with the Watch Captain Rasmaldia and her four lieutenants (**veterans**), as well as Ishvaldin (there to support his husband). They want the characters to convince the leaders of the Watch to stand aside or perhaps even help fight back against Lady Petria.

Without concrete evidence of her evil plans, the PCs can only get the Watch to stand aside with a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) check. If they can proffer



evidence (such as Mara's letter), the characters can get the Watch to stand aside with a DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation) check, or else convince the Watch to join the fight against Petria with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check. Any plausible lie requires a successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception) check.

Marzelik goes with the Watch after the meeting if they were convinced, or goes to strategize with Salzarin if not. Before leaving, he urges the characters to come to Salzarin to begin the uprising as soon as they're ready. Ishvaldin thanks the characters for their efforts and reminds them to speak to Lord Killian if they haven't yet.

### THE DAY OF UPRISING

With enough motivation, Salzarin believes the people, freed troops, or Town Watch can storm the Stormtide Company armory in the Walled Town to arm the people against the mercenaries. To rally enough people to stand up to Lady Petria, Salzarin asks the characters to talk about what they saw and establish that they can help. Ishvaldin offers to speak in their place if they believe it would be wiser to operate behind the scenes. To keep Lady Petria from leading the mercenaries against the raid, Ishvaldin suggests the characters stealthily capture her right before the rally. Marzelik seems doubtful, and points out that attacking her during the rally would be an excellent way to draw troops away from the armory.

### OPEN REVOLT

If the characters choose to help stir open resistance to Lady Petria, Salzarin leads the characters to the oasis market near Lady Salzarin's towering manor to defy her directly and warn the populace of her evil plans. All freed conscripts join the group, as do any members of the Watch the party convinced to join them. Salzarin begins the speech as planned, then loudly invites the PCs to add their testimony.

Each character can attempt an ability check against DC 15, using one of the following: Charisma (Performance), Charisma (Intimidation), Charisma (Persuasion), Intelligence (History), or Wisdom (Insight). The number of successes determines how much the PCs inspire the crowd. If most of the freed conscripts survived and returned to Kulara, they rally and give the characters 1 automatic success. If the Watch Captains were convinced to oppose Lady Petria, they also rally and give the characters 1 automatic success.

With 1 success, a few dozen upset young adults join. With 2 successes, a few dozen middle-aged parents of conscripts also protest loudly. With 3 successes, some of the Watch and laborers join in. With 4 or more successes, the angry crowd consists of hundreds of people of all walks of life. If the PCs got no successes, the crowd disperses, unconvinced, and

they must fight Petria's mercenaries with no assistance (see **The Revolt Stumbles**, below).

If any character succeeds, the citizens rise up against the corrupt town magistrate, and Lady Petria's mercenaries attempt to disperse them. The mob of citizens throws rocks and debris at the mercenaries, who respond with shoves and kicks. Guards depart from the armory to disperse the crowd, and Lady Petria (if she is still in the manor) comes to her nearby balcony to watch. If the characters had only 1 success and didn't bring freed conscripts or the Watch, the mercenaries quickly surround and suppress the small crowd, which cannot assist the PCs when the mercenaries come to arrest them (see below). If the characters got 4 or more successes, brought all the conscripts, and also recruited the Watch, the united force quickly overwhelms the mercenaries, bypassing the battle with Petria's mercenaries (see **Overwhelming Revolution**, below). Otherwise, the conflict is indecisive, and Petria's mercenaries attack the PCs.

**Creatures.** Unless the mercenaries are immediately overwhelmed (4 or more successes), a team of eight mercenary **guards** led by Lady Petria's **spy** bodyguard Surraliq converges on the PCs to seize them. If the characters didn't convince the Watch to assist, Lieutenant Asrefala (human **scout**, lawful neutral) also comes to arrest them. If the PCs got 2 or 3 successes while rallying the crowd, they help by throwing rocks and debris at the mercenaries, who suffer 1d4 bludgeoning damage (if the PCs got 2 successes) or 1d6 damage (if the PCs got 3 successes) when they start their turn not adjacent to a PC. **Lady Vanessa Petria** (page 205) watches the violence, obviously relishing it, from a balcony on her towering estate. A mercenary **bandit** stands by her side and takes pot shots at anyone who attempts to attack her.

**Development.** When three or fewer mercenaries remain fighting the PCs, the rest flee. Lady Petria flees with them but must depart through the gate of her manor. If the party waits for her, they can capture her easily.

### OVERWHELMING REVOLUTION

If the mercenaries are immediately overwhelmed, Lady Petria sics her personal guard on the PCs in a fighting retreat down the street out of the Walled Town and into the desert to the south.

### THE REVOLT STUMBLES?

If the revolt falters, in addition to fighting Petria's mercenaries (as described above) and potentially facing arrest, the PCs encounter further complications. Marzelik and Ishvaldin are captured while protecting a group of commoners from arrest, but Salzarin slips away. She reaches the PCs and encourages them to sneak into **The Magistrate's Manor** (page 34) and capture Lady Petria to rally a renewed revolt.



## SUDDEN STRIKE

If, rather than rally the crowd, the PCs choose to invade Lady Petria's manor while the crowd draws guards away to the square, they must contend with the guards described in **The Magistrate's Manor** (page 34). Salzarin and Marzelik stir a substantial but not overwhelming crowd on their own, which draws ample guards away.

## THE MANOR EXPOSED

When the mercenaries are driven from the town, the crowd breaks into the magistrate's manor. A human messenger named Zarfang claims he was just following orders but knows that Duke Odran was aware of the magistrate's crimes and supported her. He knows Lady Petria recently received letters instructing the main force of the Stormtide Company to recall to Kulara for a great feast before deciding the fate of Harge. If the PCs didn't find the *Butcher's Conquests* (page 216) in the Church of the Sleeper, the crowd finds it in Lady Petria's office and brings it to them.

## A MOMENT OF FREEDOM

Once the armory is taken and the magistrate overthrown, the crowd drives the remaining mercenaries from the town. Kulara rallies around Salzarin as their interim leader unless the PCs push for another popular choice, such as Lieutenant Marzelik, or take power themselves.

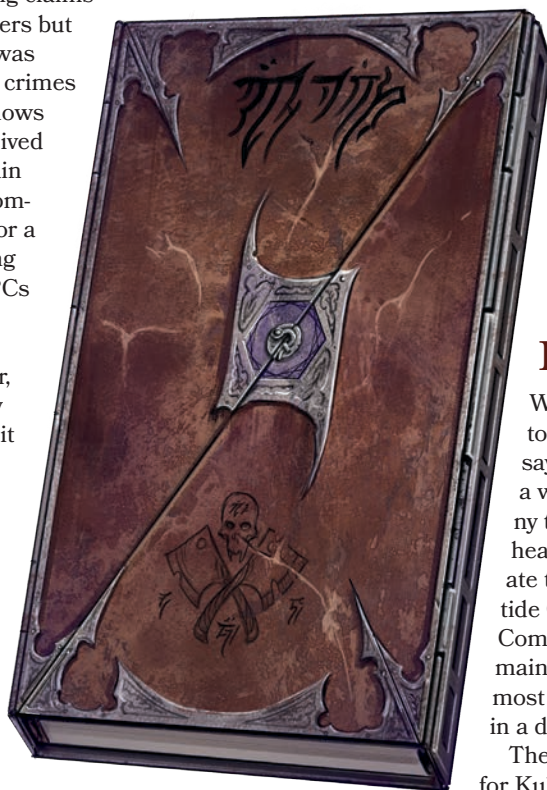
## LADY PETRIA'S FATE

Lady Petria hides an immortal monster under her skin, which hasn't begun to degrade since it is her own original skin. Peeling back her skin can prove it, since she has scales under a thin layer of flesh, but Salzarin won't allow this if asked (she does not condone torture). In the end, characters might expose Petria as a sand-dweller, have her executed for betraying the people under her authority, or exile her.

If Petria is imprisoned after being exposed as a sand-dweller or cultist, she bides her time to see if Odran will rescue her. Most of the people want to

execute her for evil magic, but Ishvaldin asks the characters to convince the crowd to wait and give her a proper trial and, importantly, learn anything she knows about their enemies. Characters can convince the crowd to back down with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation) check. Petria answers some general questions if a character succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) check and offers her a bribe of a magic item.

**Extradimensional Escape.** If Petria faces execution or if someone targets her with *detect thoughts* or similar magic, she suddenly and violently emerges from her skin, then vanishes in a violet flash. She has traveled to the Violet Dimension, which characters can recognize with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check. She returns when the violet portal opens at the Festival of the Feast, eager for revenge on the PCs.



## OVERWHELMING FORCE

Within two days, Ishvaldin comes to the characters in a rush. He says, "A trader from the south saw a whole army of Stormtide Company troops not twenty miles out and headed this way! We need to evacuate the town, and fast!" The Stormtide Company and Silver Crescent Company are massing at Kulara to maintain control and, unbeknownst to most of the mercenaries, to take part in a dark ritual.

The troops' numbers are too large for Kulara to stand, so the Watch (led by Marzelik) and Salzarin urge the

townsfolk to flee to Harge. Given all the recent revelations, three quarters of the town (about 750 people) prepare to flee as refugees. Salzarin asks for help getting the remaining people willing and able to flee.

About 240 people choose to stay and submit to Duke Odran again. Of these, 90 are loyalists who will remain no matter what the PCs say. They refuse to believe the conspiracy extends to their legitimate leader, or they are wary of Lord Killian's intentions.

Of the remainder, about 90 are wealthy or middle-class landowners unwilling to lose their property. The PCs can make three attempts to convince hesitant groups to leave. For every successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) or DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check, 30 of them agree to flee. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to deduce that they are

too distracted by their property and financial security to think clearly about the risk of cult activity. Addressing these concerns gives advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks to convince them. The PCs get one automatic success if they exposed Duke Odran as knowingly supporting cult activity.

Finally, about 60 people are too old or infirm to travel or are caregivers to such people. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) or DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check allows a character to instruct the townsfolk how to provide suitable support for these infirm refugees to flee safely. A DC 13 Intelligence check using herbalist's supplies or a DC 15 Intelligence check using alchemist's supplies is also enough for a character to help the town's few healers provide adequate support.

**Rescued Sacrifices.** If the characters move at least 60 landowners, they avoid being slowed down during the rescue at the oasis market (see page 27). Rescuing the infirm prevents them being slowed down during the rescue at the magistrate's manor (see page 34).

## RECONNAISSANCE

**Ishvaldin** (page 202) asks the characters to help spy on the troops as they move through the desert before they arrive in Kulara. Characters can watch from out of sight with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth). If they fail, they must stop short and hide, or else end up in combat (see **Creatures**, below). If the PCs remain unseen, they observe from afar that most of the Stormtide Company mercenaries are ill-equipped to move overland in the desert.

**Creatures.** A pair of **scouts** from the Silver Crescent Company passes by the PCs' position before heading back to the main force. Hiding PCs can overhear the scouts complaining that this isn't what they expected when the Stormtide Company hired them. They've heard unsettling rumors of kidnapping and dark magic while they passed through Odran and aren't sure they're being paid enough to deal with this.

Characters can approach the Silver Crescent scouts without them fleeing with successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) or Dexterity (Stealth) checks. The scouts are willing to pretend they didn't see anything for a bribe of 50 gp, or a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check or a DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check convinces them to break their contract and leave if the PCs explain Odran's nefarious dealings.

## EVACUATION

Retreating refugees have enough warning to get ahead of the enemy army. The huge caravan includes many people forced to walk alongside overburdened horses, mules, donkeys, camels, and flocks of goats and sheep trailing along in a river of tired, hurried bodies.

When the group reaches Harge's border at the Red River Bridge, they are approached by a large group of guards led by **Dame Zidriel** (page 22) if she still lives. She wants an explanation for the large group but won't stop refugees. She knows of the characters' heroics and respects the letter of authority from Lord Killian.

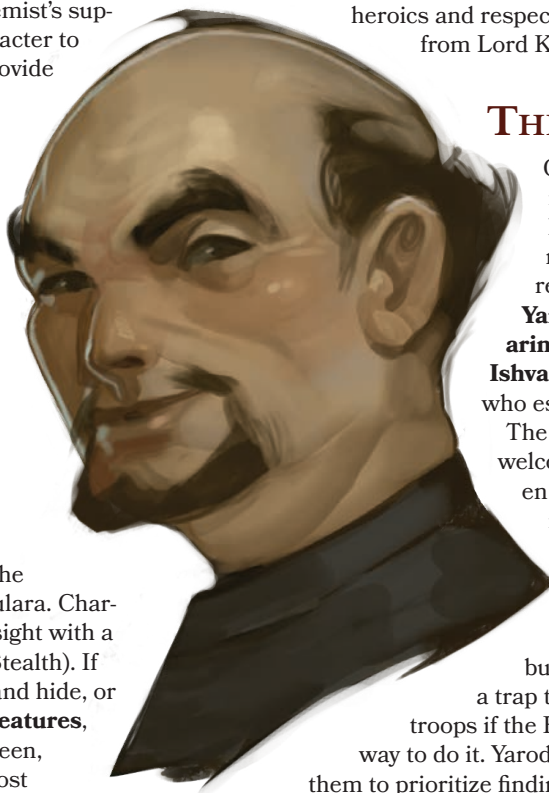
## THE WAR COUNCIL

Once the town is taken and refugees arrive in Harge, **Lord Killian** calls a council meeting to discuss how to respond. **Captain Esperia**, **Yarod Zin**, and any of **Salzarin**, **Marzelik**, **Remedy**, and **Ishvaldin** (see pages 199-203) who escaped are in attendance.

The refugees receive a warm welcome in Harge, especially given that most of the able-bodied are willing to bear arms to help defend Harge from Odran. Killian and Esperia both believe it's not possible to hold the town, but they volunteer to help lay a trap to undermine the massing troops if the PCs come up with a low-risk way to do it. Yarod Zin has convinced all of them to prioritize finding out whatever they can about the ritual. If it calls for sacrifices, rescuing people by whatever means possible is important.

Captain Esperia's scouts and anyone escorting refugees out of Kulara spotted captive Kularans being forced to gather strange desert plants west of town. Rumors from a few smugglers who have sneaked out after the attack suggest that the feast involves a profane sacrifice of many people. The Festival of the Feast will be held on the new moon, which is in 5 days.

Salzarin's contacts among the few refugees still trickling out of Kulara Town report that the mercenaries have imprisoned any remaining townsfolk. Salzarin begs the party to mount a rescue via covert infiltration. If PCs disguise themselves as captive citizens of Kulara, Salzarin can Help characters make Intelligence (disguise kit) checks to disguise themselves as loyalists or indecisive folks that loyalists would believe stayed behind.





Ishvaldin is eager to lead a contingent of the Kulara Watch to help free captured Kularans. Marzelik thinks the loyalists have made their own fate and stays behind to help integrate Kularan refugees into the defense of Harge.

Convincing Lord Killian to commit troops is difficult, since the odds are still not in his favor, but offering the warriors of Kulara as new recruits grants a +2 bonus on the check. Succeeding on a DC 19 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces him to provide a few elite soldiers to help with infiltration. No matter how persuasive the PCs prove, he does not consider sending a whole army, since that would leave the city of Harge too vulnerable.

## DESERT GATHERERS

Captured warriors and other strong captives are made to gather strange herbs in the scrubland not far from the Red River between Kulara and Harge, about a 6-hour trek from either settlement. The area is full of brush, bushes, cacti, and other low plant growth. Characters can locate the large group of gatherers with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check and 1 hour of searching or by searching the scrubland for 8 hours (if the check failed). The tracks indicate about 20 guards and several dozen slow-moving humanoids clumped together (chained captives). Ishvaldin and any Hargi troops offer to distract the guards while the characters sneak in from a different direction.

**Creatures.** The captives scrounge along the ground for small, twisted plants that they gather in little pouches. They continue even after dark, squinting with just candles for light. They are guarded by a **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 212) who consults a book and instructs the captives to search for magical herbs. The whisperer carries a *potion of healing*. It is closely guarded by five bloodthirsty mercenary **cultists** who watch from the shade of a tall spire of rock during the day. The whisperer and its guards engage the player characters, even if there is a distraction.

Unknown to even the guards, two skinless **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 210) also lurk just under the sand nearby. They emerge if anyone runs or if interlopers approach.

Two dozen **bandits** surround the perimeter, tasked with keeping the captive workers from fleeing; this task demands their attention, so they don't immediately converge even if the PCs draw attention with combat (see **Development**, below). If the PCs defeat their leadership (the sand-dwellers and cultists), the bandits flee into the desert rather than fight.

PCs can sneak by with a successful DC 11 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. The DC is only 8 at night, since only the sand-dwellers can see in the dark and others rely on torches to see.

**Development.** If the characters are accompanied by other troops, whether they are Kulara Watch or Hargi scouts, they can occupy the bandits while the characters move in. If the characters don't have a distraction, the cultists and sand-dwellers engage them immediately while the bandits search for other threats. The next round, four **bandits** reinforce the group engaging the PCs while the rest of the bandits are distracted by six captives attempting to flee.

If the PCs urge the captives to flee with a successful DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check, a dozen make a break for it each round, forcing all the bandits to hold the line rather than engage the PCs. If the characters brought both Hargi and



Kulara troops, they defeat the mercenaries with minimal losses after 5 rounds. Otherwise, the fight is more costly, unless the PCs incapacitate at least 5 mercenaries within 5 rounds, in which case morale fails and the bandits flee.

If the PCs look to be in dire straits, half the captives bolt before there's time for the guards to regroup. This forces half the mercenaries engaging the PCs to split off to capture nearby captives, which should give the PCs the breathing room to either rally or escape.

**Treasure.** The whisperer carries an herbalism kit, a *potion of healing*, and a book about herbalism. The prisoners were gathering dustweed, a scraggly yellow flower with magical properties. As explained in the herbalism text carried by the sand-dweller, the flower can be used in creating magic items like *dust of dryness* and a *decanter of endless water*. It can also be used to create an ointment to protect creatures normally vulnerable to water, such as vampires and sand-dwellers. Characters can find and gather or eradicate the remaining dustweed with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check or DC 11 Wisdom check using herbalism tools and 8 hours of effort. There is 500 gp of dustweed left to be found here; sand-dwellers already collected the rest before the characters arrived. Characters can trade the dustweed to the Opening Eye Society for magic items, including ordering a *decanter of endless water* for 350 gp of the herbs. The book itself makes for a suitable offering to win the characters admission to the society.

**Escort to Harge.** Allies ask the PCs to escort escapees to Harge where they can share what they observed with Harge's leaders. Along the way, one mentions a gap in Kulara's inner wall, which might be useful in the PCs' infiltration.

## FINAL PREPARATIONS

If the characters avoid capture during the rescues, Salzarin and Lord Killian ask them to keep an eye on the Festival of the Feast. Sheer numbers make stopping it a long shot. He pays each character a further 200 gp up front to act as Harge's agents at the ceremony.

Salzarin, the smuggler Gurafan, and captive gatherers have noticed a secret passage into Kulara which they can suggest to the PCs: a gap in the town's inner wall. A tunnel from Smuggler's Rock leads to spot not too far from this secret entrance in a manor in the inner town.

**Remedy** (page 203), the senior priestess of Bastet, has come to Killian's court with a vision she believes was sent to her by Bastet. She has been stalking a figure lurking between worlds around Kulara since the PCs arrived, and she finally understands enough to know he wants to help the player characters and through them Kulara. In case the party doesn't speak Cat, she brings her human **acolyte** Braferti to translate.

Remedy explains that she believes the player char-

acters are being watched by a ka trapped in another dimension. She caught glimpses of it around Kulara as she traveled between the waking world and the Dreamlands ever since the player characters arrived in Kulara. She notes that its highly distorted appearance suggests it has long been separated from its former human self and has probably become some kind of monster. The ka seemed drawn to the *Elder Sign* in the temple of Bastet, which is the bane of the Great Old Ones and their servants. With some telepathic probing, she learned that it also opposes the sand-dweller and all servants of the Great Old Ones. It regrets failing to stop its old self from doing terrible things and wants to help fight against what its old self has become. She believes the player characters should find a way to it, which should be behind a "violet door," so that they can learn more from it. To assist them, she offers one of Bastet's holy relics: an *ancient shield of Bastet* (page 217).

By this point, **Yarod Zin** (page 201) is certain a mass summoning or gateway is the ultimate goal of the ritual. He suggests that if the feast calls forth anything or opens a doorway to the Violet Dimension, it can be closed by destroying the two anchors on the other side. Historical records say that Harge's founder, a warlord queen named Ravazel, used something called the Hollow Mother's Well to summon creatures from the Violet Dimension. If they find themselves in the Violet Dimension, the PCs can return through that well even after they close this gate. He agrees that a ka might be a useful source of information there. In addition, while many other creatures of the Violet Dimension are dangerous, he has read that the moth-like uskval might be useful to contact in that strange place. They are said to be sources of knowledge to anyone who makes an offering of magical objects or a captured beast. If Zin is dead (killed by the Strangler, for instance) research or other NPCs may provide the characters with some or all of this information.

As the characters depart, **Captain Esperia** (page 199) informs the party of her back-up plan. If the Feast is some kind of trick, or if the ritual gives their army an overwhelming advantage, then Harge's defenders will retreat to a secret hideout in the Zoog Woods west of Harge. Harge has an ancient bargain of mutual refuge with the zoogs (alongside limited hunting and logging rights), and can hide in the woods from even a determined army. If all goes wrong, the PCs can reunite with the survivors there.

## APPROACHING OCCUPIED KULARA

There are two obvious ways into occupied Kulara despite the overwhelming presence of troops in the outer town and surrounding desert.

**Overland.** The PCs can travel overland and slip in through the tunnel at Smuggler's Rock. If the party



has the Kulara Watch on their side or rescued the group of desert gatherers (see page 47), these allies are willing to run interference to cover for the characters as they approach Smuggler's Rock without being spotted. Without this cover, the trek across the desert draws an attack from two **scouts** mounted on warhorses.

**The Impossible Labyrinth.** Lord Killian is willing to send an escort of three **scouts** through the tunnel but not all the way into Kulara itself. The assistance will prove vital because the sand-dwellers' patron **formless spawn** (SPCM 320) has become active again thanks to offerings from the large group of sand-dwellers that have arrived in Kulara. Characters traveling through the eldritch tunnel draw the creature's attention unless they succeed on a DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. If it detects the characters, the formless spawn oozes out of the vat in the basement of the Church of the Sleeper and attacks the characters in the tunnels (use the tunnel map for combat). If the party defeats it here, it is absent from the oasis market later. The formless spawn isn't interested in fighting to the death, so if reduced below 35 hit points, it oozes down a chute and shows up later in the town square.

## ENTERING THE INNER TOWN

As mentioned by captive gatherers and Salzarin, there is a gap in the town's inner wall. The gap is covered with loosely packed earth, which a creature with a burrow speed can move through in a few rounds or a character with a shovel or axe can dig aside in 1 minute. The small gate into the inner town, opposite the oasis market, has only two bored **guards** watching it. They are far enough from the smuggler's tunnel and gap in the wall to miss the characters, unless they produce a huge amount of noise or otherwise draw attention to themselves. If the party convinced Killian to send a strike team or persuaded Marzelik to lead the Kulara Watch in a raid, the distraction draws these guards away.

**Evacuating Captives.** As each group of captives is freed, they ask for the fastest way out of the town. If sent to the eldritch tunnel, they wait at the entrance for the PCs to come to them, since they don't trust the alien structure. If sent to an entrance, they wait for the PCs to take out the nearest group of guards before they can flee on their own. If sent to the smuggler's tunnel, they see no obvious danger and can escape without assistance.

**Surviving Failure.** If the party is defeated after this point in the adventure, they are captured alive as described in **Captured** (page 51).

## THE GRISLY KITCHEN

The kitchens of the magistrate's sprawling manor near the oasis market hold the remaining captives. The gate is watched by two mercenary **guards** outside and two **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 210) inside the gatehouse. If the characters arranged a distraction, the two guards are also drawn away; otherwise, the guards are restless and interrogate anyone who comes by pretending to be a guard or a cook hoping to enlist. A character must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Deception) check to lie to them and a DC 12 Intelligence check using a disguise kit to fool them. A character who is caught lying but is successfully disguised is treated as a

rule-breaking peer; this can be smoothed over with either a bribe (10 gp) or an explanation for why the character is lying (such as shirking guard duty).

A **moon-beast** (SPCM 347) is in the magistrate's office on the second floor and comes out on the balcony after 1 round if combat arises outdoors. Inside on the ground floor are three **Mythos ghouls** (SPCM 325) overseen by a second **moon-beast** in the kitchens. While the captives cook, the ghouls take turns skinning and butchering the bodies of people who died resisting them. If they hear combat, the ghouls and moon-beast emerge after 4 rounds.

At the rear of the manor, two more **Mythos ghouls** (SPCM 325) watch as captives wash dishes by the well. If they hear combat at the front of the manor, they arrive within 3 rounds.

The neighboring manor is guarded by four **bandits** who come to investigate any sounds of combat after 1 minute. Defeating them makes it trivial to evacuate the second manor of captives.

**Second Shift.** If the characters didn't evacuate most of the landowners before the town was taken (see page 45-6), those folks have been placed in a neighboring manor as a second shift for the kitchen. Once the combat in the magistrate's manor is finished, the captives immediately identify themselves as landowners and promise rewards if the PCs rescue them.

**Treasure.** One moon-beast wears *anklets of dimensions unfathomed* (page 217). If the characters didn't claim Lady Petria's *amethyst bat figurine of wondrous power* (page 217), the other moon-beast has it.



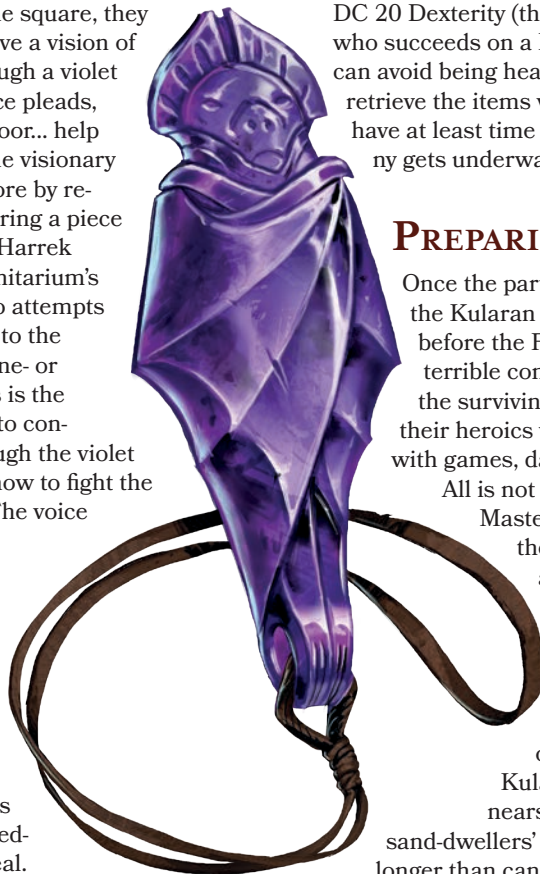
## THE PATRON

The various laborers are building a stone and wood shrine in the town square, surrounded by a vast hexagonal sigil dug into the ground and filled with black tar. Dozens of laborers dig into the ground and erect stone monuments marked with eyeless toads and hexagons. Tables, stools, and benches from around the town have been gathered to prepare for the feast. The weak and sick work here, doing simple and light tasks in preparation for the feast.

When the PCs enter the square, they feel a psychic pull and have a vision of running desperately through a violet gateway. A telepathic voice pleads, "Help you... beyond the door... help me..." A character with the visionary background can learn more by returning to Harge and sharing a piece of inspired artwork with Harrek Hua or consulting the sanitarium's case log. A character who attempts to telepathically respond to the voice receives a cryptic one- or two- word response. This is the Strangler's Doubt trying to convince them to travel through the violet portal so they can learn how to fight the sand-dwellers properly. The voice fades after a few replies.

**Creatures.** Watching over the workers are a **cult fanatic** and three **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 210). Unless it was previously defeated in the tunnel, a **formless spawn** (SPCM 320) hides imperceptibly in the carved-out sigil, waiting for a meal.

The formless spawn is an unreliable defender. It doesn't move until enemies step inside the sigil and either reduce the fanatic to 0 hit points or damage the sigil. The formless spawn doesn't distinguish among humans other than the cult fanatic (who wears a symbol of Tsathoggua). If the PCs don't seem to be a threat, it tries to snack on the nearest sand-dwellers until they desperately rip off their skins to dissuade it. The formless spawn is bound to this town square and the eldritch tunnel below and can't go anywhere else, so it doesn't pursue fleeing characters. PCs recognize that the hexagon symbol limits the formless spawn's movement with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check or DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check. If the formless spawn realizes enemies are attacking it from range to take advantage of its binding, it uses its action to seep into the ground to avoid further damage.



## CAPTURED

If the characters were captured by the troops holding Kulara, they are imprisoned in a jail near the Oasis Market, where they can see the ritual being prepared. Their weapons and bags are stored in the next room over, although they are left their armor.

**Creatures.** Four mercenary **bandits** and a **sand-dweller strangler** (page 210) guard the jail in the building's only exit, but the equipment room is unguarded. The lock can be picked with a successful DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check can avoid being heard while picking the lock and can retrieve the items without drawing attention. They have at least time for a long rest before the ceremony gets underway.

## PREPARING FOR THE FEAST

Once the party succeeds or fails at rescuing the Kularan villagers, they have a respite before the Festival of the Feast reaches its terrible conclusion. If they return to Harge, the surviving Kularans thank the PCs for their heroics with a modest feast, complete with games, dancing, and fine food.

All is not restful, however. Remedy and Master Zin reiterate their warning to the player characters and encourage them to both close the portal and learn more about the entity trying to help them, whose thoughts they have heard periodically.

Ultimately, Lord Killian orders the PCs to return to Kulara as the Festival of the Feast nears its conclusion to ensure that the sand-dwellers' portal doesn't remain open any longer than can be helped.

## THE FESTIVAL OF THE FEAST

The Festival's preparations lead up to a singular day, and how it progresses depends upon how the PCs fared at rescuing captives in Kulara. The PCs arrive just too late to prevent the Festival, but their efforts thus far have had a significant impact on the size and nature of the forces arrayed against them throughout the rest of the campaign.

**0 or 1 Rescued Groups.** If the characters failed to rescue two or more groups of townsfolk, the Festival of the Feast takes place as planned. The mercenaries feast on the ritual food, and the magic ensures each one becomes a sand-dweller within 1d4–1 days.

**2 or 3 Rescued Groups.** If the characters saved two or all three groups, the cultists cull the mercenaries to get enough victims, choosing the ones who seem least loyal and least bloodthirsty. The resulting



army of sand-dwellers is smaller but still dangerous. The PCs don't see the direct consequences of the Feast until Act 3, however, so note the number of rescued groups for later.

### APPROACHING THE FESTIVAL

Characters can approach the site of the Festival from outside Kulara in much the same ways as entering to rescue the captives.

**Escaping Captivity.** If the characters were jailed, the sand-dwellers have rushed to speed up their magical rituals. The guards leave them unattended when it begins. **Remedy** (page 57), who followed them in secret when they failed to return, slips in silently in through a barred window with a set of thieves' tools in her mouth. Escaping the jail after a long rest should put the player characters at the periphery of the oasis market as the ritual is completed.

**The Cautious Approach.** The characters might choose to ignore Lord Killian's orders and wait to close the portal until after the initial wave of attackers has passed through the portal. In that case, they are alerted to a horde of sand-dwellers moving on Harge. Lord Killian plans a fighting retreat to the Zoog Woods west of the city and orders the PCs to close the portal by passing through it as Master Zin suggested. Captain Esperia recommends either slipping through the extradimensional tunnel or going around the invading force.

### THE OASIS MARKET

The streets adjoining the oasis market are cluttered with dozens of long tables packed with Odranian mercenaries. They eat a dark stew and salty-smelling greens, and drink red wine. Along the edges of the oasis market, robed figures and a few skinless sand-dwellers chant. Several tables extend into the square. Concentric hexagonal carvings in the ground filled with a dark oil dominate the market, as well as a few stacked stones at the center of the area inscribed with glowing violet icons resembling eyeless toads.

Characters who understand Aklo hear that the chants implore all the bound and promised masters to lend their power and open the way. The creatures here are highly distracted, so player characters can decide where they want to watch from without risk of discovery as long as they keep to back alleys or rooftops. Soon after the PCs arrive, the ritual reaches its climax, opening a rift to the Violet dimension.

### THE RIFT

As the chanting reaches a crescendo, the ground shudders under Kulara. Thunder splits the air, and then a violet rift dozens of feet across tears open at the center of the oasis market. A continuous

horde of hundreds of sand-dwellers pours out from the square. Hundreds shriek in horror and flee ahead of the sand-dwellers. Nearly a quarter of the folk in the crowd—many hundreds of soldiers—climb from their seats and tear their own skin off like tight clothing, exposing the rough and grainy skin of sand-dwellers underneath. Many mercenaries gasp in shock, unable to react fast enough. A few dozen shout in exultation, raise their weapons, and follow the sand-dwellers. In less than a minute, thousands of sand-dwellers have poured from the gate and streamed steadily out beyond the Kulara oasis, where they fan out around the town's outer fringes.

Anyone who speaks Aklo can tell the chants implore all the bound and promised masters to lend their power and open the way. As the horde pours through, all the characters feel a psychic call. Each must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become stunned by the force of the call for 1 minute. They feel an intense wave of mingled emotions and dozens of jumbled trains of thought, including shock and disgust. As the mob is too large to fight, don't run this scene like a combat with actions tracked by the round. Incapacitated characters can move to avoid being spotted. Above the noise, which stunned characters can only make out when the condition ends, the same voice from the earlier visions begs, "Will help... Come through... Show you... Can't leave..." It emanates from the portal.

The rush of sand-dwellers includes a few other monsters, including moon-beasts, yothans, and strange crystalline quadrupeds that match the description of hollow jackals from the *Butcher's Conquests*. Unless the PCs watch from a location that is very well hidden, they risk brief harassment from the mob of monsters. Characters can slip into an unseen area such as an alley, rooftop, or behind a tarp before being noticed by any creatures with a successful DC 11 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If they fail, two **moon-beasts** (SPCM 348) spot them in time to lob spears at them. The attackers are then pushed onward by the mob of monsters at their back and they don't pursue the player characters.

As the flowing mass begins to taper off and the psychic chaos fades, the portal shudders. At its peak, a squelching, elephant-sized mass of flesh writhes and whistles. Parts of it pop in and out of visibility as it pipes an eerie tune. Beneath it, a sand-dweller wearing crystalline armor and wielding a gleaming falchion of violet energy strides forward. She shouts, "The mortal world at last! A sight I haven't seen since the Hollow Mother's Well was shattered." As her honor guard steps through, she looks up at the floating entity and says, "Patron! Raise the joyous winds! Let the world know that the Butcher Queen will have her due." The wind picks up the piping melody

and then rises to a howling intensity, kicking up a sandstorm. As the Butcher Queen's group marches toward the troops outside town, the square is left all but undefended.

The gate is a colossal rent in the air that can only be perceived or entered from the front. Passing through from any other direction has no effect except to leave characters standing in front of it.

By the time the psychic cacophony dies down, the central square is nearly empty. The mercenaries who didn't panic have marched outside the town center under orders. They assemble on the far side of the oasis. Only three mercenary **guards** still have their wits about them and protect the oasis market, but they might not see the PCs due to the sandstorm. Their commander orders them to prevent the PCs from escaping, so they move around the party (inadvertently leaving the portal undefended). If the characters have not yet freed or defeated the **formless spawn** (SPCM 320) from the tunnel and attempt to cross the square rather than sneak around, it attempts to prevent them from leaving. (It has not healed from any damage previously suffered in this adventure.) Invisible to the PCs, the **Strangler's Doubt** (page 206) watches from the Violet Dimension. He can't act directly, but he can use his Guide Creature reaction to help the characters. Each time he does, the characters hear another psychic call toward the gate: "Run, before it is too late... Beyond your world and into mine..."

If **Lady Petria** (page 205) or **Sister Mara** (page 206) escaped to the Violet Dimension, they are the last of the sand-dwellers to emerge. The returned sand-dwellers hold back as the horde of sand-dwellers spreads out. Both are hungry for revenge on the player characters and search for them.

### SANDSTORM

The sandstorm lightly conceals everything within 50 feet and heavily conceals everything farther than 100 feet. The strong winds give disadvantage to ranged attacks. Creatures who fly treat the wind as difficult terrain and must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check at the end of their turn each round or fall to the ground. PCs who don't cover their mouths must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the start of every turn to avoid coughing that gives away their position and reduces their speed by 10 feet for that round. Creatures that don't breathe or that have a burrow speed automatically succeed.

Characters can sneak around the edge of the oasis market, but if they fail a DC 8 group Dexterity (Stealth) check, they attract the attention of two **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 210).

### STEPPING THROUGH THE GATE

You stumble through the violet portal. You feel as if you are falling through an airless space full of intense and nauseating colors. Time stretches, and you're not sure if you fall for agonizing minutes or disoriented hours before you lose consciousness.

You awaken to the same ka's voice from earlier and see his sharp, sad face looking down at you. "Wake... Do not die..." His hand passes through yours, sending a jolt of intense regret through you, followed by a faint sense of comfortable safety.

You are on a mound of violet sand and jagged shards of crystal. Surrounding you is a forest of towering crystalline trees of many colors. The ones directly overhead have obviously had their branches broken off. The sky beyond resembles cracked glass. A bulbous rock formation pocked with rugged caves rises above the trees and under the violet sun to the west. A pillar of warm gold light flickers erratically to the east. A cool green beacon like a lighthouse rotates regularly over the horizon to the south, reflecting oddly when its light passes through the trees.

The party's passage has short-circuited the portal, causing several hours to pass for them in transit and depositing them some distance from the entry point used by the large horde of sand-dwellers.

Despite how rough the characters feel, they have had time to finish a long rest. Once they are up and alert, the ka approaches them and struggles to explain. "We were a human, once... the Strangler and I. Decades ago... he became a monster... I am his regret... He cast me off... Became relentless..." He drifts upward and gestures toward the golden light to the east. "Please... close the gate for good... undo his crimes... remember my help... and forget him..."

### CONCLUSION

The characters find themselves in a strange plane of existence, and their only friend a creature that has a partial understanding of the situation. Luckily for them, the sand-dwellers have not yet deduced exactly what caused the gate to short out. They have a little time to get their bearings before setting out to defeat the sand-dwellers and get home in Act 2.

### EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of Chapter 3, the characters advance to level 4.



# ACT 2: THE VIOLET DIMENSION

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 4th–6th level*

## ACT SYNOPSIS

When the characters arrive in the Violet Dimension, they follow the voice that called to them, the Strangler's Doubt. He is a ka who exists only to stop the detestable impulses that his sand-dweller represents. Although he is somewhat confused, he can point the PCs toward other ka who know more. Once they have their bearings, the PCs must permanently close the portal behind them by destroying the two keystones anchoring this side of the gate. Then, they must track down other Violet Dimension denizens to find out how to get home.

In this chapter, the PCs make contact with a civilization that has a tense alliance with the sand-dwellers: the uskval of Aumbrask Spire. The uskval are largely pleased with their arrangement with the sand-dwellers, but some are uneasy and the PCs can exploit this rift to their advantage, particularly to learn about the sand-dwellers' strengths and weaknesses. However, the sand-dwellers' plans and the way back to the Material Plane are secrets kept elsewhere. Getting all they need from Aumbrask Spire requires making an effective offering to the uskval: the capture of a powerful creature they can use for their own purposes.

Once they learn what they need to from the uskval, the PCs must venture to the Broken Bastion to discover what the sand-dwellers are planning and escape back to the Material Plane.

Along the way, they encounter a hollow eremite—a fusion of sand-dweller and hollow creature, who commands the sand-dwellers outside the Sand Citadel. This horror serves as the lynchpin in the sand-dwellers' Violet Dimension reinforcements. Killing it will remove an important weapon in their arsenal and allow the PCs to return home using a powerful magical artifact in the creature's possession. This confrontation and its aftermath also reveal important clues about the sand-dweller leader Ravazel's plans, especially in the form of Ravazel's ka, which the hollow eremite holds captive.

## THE VIOLET DIMENSION

The Violet Dimension is a plane of existence separate from the Material Plane. It is a reality of superimposed truths, and many things there are two mutually exclusive things at once. Life here is dualistic and parasitic: very little lives without fundamentally altering something else.

Principal features of the Violet Dimension are vast deserts of violet sand and a sky that alternates between blue at midnight and red at mid-day. Features of the Violet Dimension's terrain reflect features

of the mundane world, though distances aren't reliably the same between parallel sites on the two planes of existence. Crystal formations echo things long-since lost in the Materi-

al Plane. Near the oasis of Kulara stands the Salt Forest, which echoes a floodplain forest that died off in the Material Plane over a thousand years ago. Beyond the Salt Forest lies the salt dunes called the Time-torn Wastes, and beyond that the Stone Sea.

While the Violet Dimension is the sand-dwellers' place of power, they are but one of several dangerous groups that dwell in this terrible place. Other major denizens include uskval. Smaller animal-like creatures skitter through the salt forests and dunes.

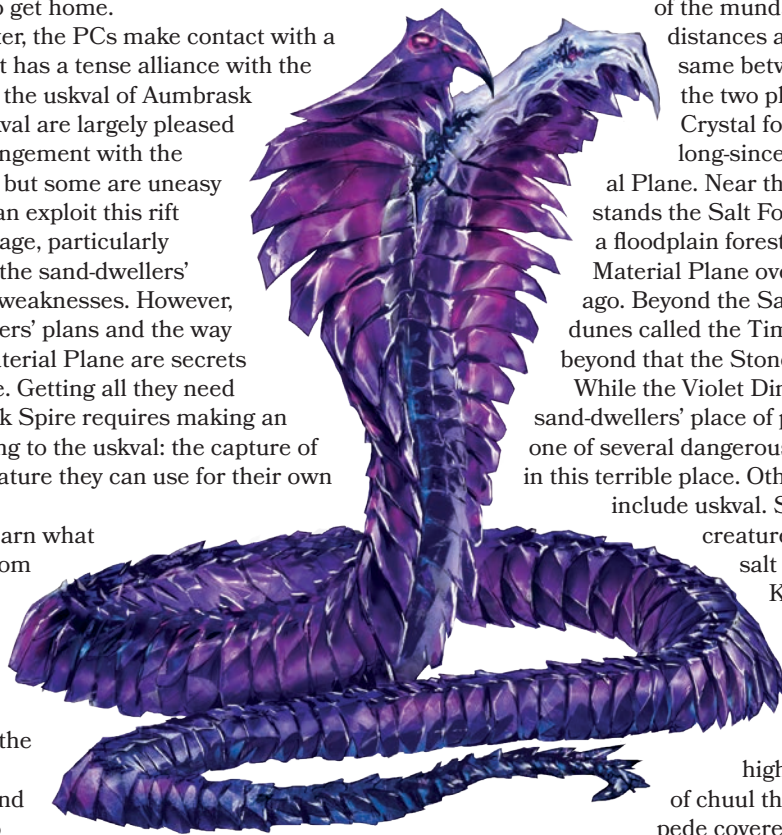
Kas, eremite symbionts, shadows, and the hollow plague are constant threats. Local monsters include a

highly divergent species of chuul that resembles a centipede covered with sharp bundles of antennae. Squat, copper-plated, six-

legged creatures similar to bulettes tunnel through the desert sand. Smaller fauna skitters through the salt forests and dunes.

### A TWOFOLD REALITY

The Violet Dimension is really two realities closely layered atop one another. The layer mortals can readily perceive and interact with seems to have physics much like that of the Material Plane, while the layer beyond, sometimes called the Ultraviolet Dimension, is more like the Ethereal Plane. The primary difference between the two is that much of the







physical material of the Violet Dimension (like the ground and parts of large objects and Violet Dimension creatures) extends across the border between these planes freely. Many of its features and denizens exist in both realities, but material creatures exist in and perceive only the primary Violet Dimension. Creatures and objects that exist in both might appear to violate the laws of physics. For example, a building that has its support beams and walls only in the Ultraviolet Dimension might look like a levitating roof.

Creatures who can see ethereal or invisible things can perceive both layers of the Violet Dimension at once. Creatures can also glimpse both parts simultaneously for a moment when they teleport or travel to another plane of existence like the Dreamlands. When a creature uses the *blink* spell or similar magic, they shift to the ultraviolet layer of the Violet Dimension rather than traveling to the Ethereal Plane. Characters who first glimpse a hazard or other danger this way have made a minor disturbing discovery, requiring a successful DC 10 Wisdom saving throw to avoid gaining 1 level of dread (SPCM 73) that lasts for 1 hour.

## THE HOLLOW PLAGUE

The hollow plague is a collective of hollow creatures like living shells of colorful crystal, such as the hollow

jackals which sand-dwellers like to bind as minions. The hollow plague stalks the wastes for prey to transform into more of themselves. The hollow plague are some of the only creatures the sand-dwellers fear, although the sand-dwellers also greedily bind these creatures when they can manage it.

The progenitor of the plague, the Hollow Mother, was once one of the sand-dwellers' most important allies. She made a pact with Ravazel the Butcher Queen centuries ago, only to find herself betrayed and shattered along with her stronghold. Now, Ravazel has installed a sand-dweller as a replacement: **Garu the Poisoner Prince** (page 220), bound permanently to a hollow eremite symbiont, who now commands the hollow plague from the Broken Bastion of the long-dead Hollow Mother.

## RAVAZEL'S SAND-DWELLERS

The sand-dwellers who have arranged to invade the mortal world en masse follow one of the oldest and cruellest of their number, an ancient warlord queen named Ravazel. Although the sand-dwellers are by no means a unified people, her notorious military achievements and promises of free rein over mortal lands have rallied thousands to her cause. Ravazel is a genius at arranging steady rewards to keep the sand-dwellers under her loyal; although they



are bloodthirsty, sand-dwellers have no concept of self-sacrifice and will flee if they believe they are outmatched.

Ravazel's sand-dweller army operates out of an impregnable fortress called the Sand Citadel. Their greatest assets are the pacts they have forged with a number of otherworldly entities, including the uskval in Aumbrask Spire and the hollow plague. In addition, the sand-dwellers have conjured a number of other allies such as formless spawn, yothans, moon-beasts, and flying polyps.

**Language.** Most sand-dwellers in this group were once humans who spoke Common, so they default to Common when addressing each other. They fall back on Aklo when dealing with creatures who don't speak Common, such as some of their monstrous allies.

### MISTAKEN FOR SAND-DWELLERS

Because sand-dwellers never considered the possibility of mortals rushing through the gate, those the PCs encounter generally assume something else is going on. Most or all of the PCs appear to be creatures that sand-dwellers can steal skins from, so the sand-dwellers who spot them assume at first they are sand-dwellers from the invasion who doubled back after stealing humanoid skins, and presume any non-humanoids with the PCs to be mortal prisoners or slaves. They also don't immediately connect their travel to the magical gate breaking down. Sand-dwellers are liable to be curious and quick to call out questions like, "You! You returned already? Stealing a new human skin was all you wanted and now you're done?" Any character can deduce the sand-dwellers' misunderstanding with a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check.

The PCs can take advantage of this to trick sand-dwellers into giving them information by asking leading questions. Indeed, they can even combine this assumption with sand-dwellers' characteristic shortsightedness to bribe some into looking the other way when they are caught where they shouldn't be. Bribes are a harder sell if the sand-dweller sees the PCs doing things that might cause immediate problems for that sand-dweller, increasing the DC by 5 or more.

Generally, sand-dwellers wise up after seeing or hearing about repeated hints as to the PCs' true nature, such as behaving in selfless ways, attacking sand-dwellers without a clear reason, and friendly or respectful behavior toward creatures who are neither sand-dwellers nor obvious superiors.

### CAPTURE

Once the sand-dwellers realize the PCs are enemies, they generally attempt to capture the characters alive in order to use them as part of a magical ritual. The fact they come from the Material Plane means that they provide a magical link to their home dimension, and so sand-dweller magicians theorize that they can use the PCs as components to reestablish the closed gate.

The sand-dwellers generally throw the PCs into a nearby prison or cave while preparing their magic. The time it takes them to prepare their ritual gives



the party time to rest up and escape. Note that the sand-dwellers' shortsightedness and greed make guards vulnerable to bribery or trickery.

## USKVAL SWARM OF AUMBRASK SPIRE

Among the more numerous intelligent species of this part of the Violet Dimension are the uskval: arthropods that typically take the form of worm-like workers and moth-like seers, both capable of telepathy. Uskval are known for their gathering of magical knowledge, which they sell to anyone who offers suitable payment. This makes them popular creatures to summon from the Violet Dimension and logical allies to sand-dwellers, but their mercenary attitude means that they aren't shy about bargaining with the sand-dwellers' enemies. Their leader, Azmovoth, is called a High Seer. Azmovoth negotiates the highest stakes bargains and offers potent magical boons.

The uskval in this area make their home in a high tower called Aumbrask Spire. Its green beacon is visible only to certain creatures, such as mortal humanoids, kas, and uskval. Sand-dwellers and hollow creatures can't see it. Kas find it especially alluring and are drawn to it like moths to a flame. The uskval collect the hypnotized kas as sources of knowledge and magical energy.

### **Allies to Sand-Dwellers.**

The Aumbrask Spire uskval trade with Ravazel and her sand-dwellers. The sand-dwellers make offerings of rare minerals found digging in the sand, magical knowledge gleaned from other entities, and beasts whose corpses serve as ideal nests and food for the uskval's young. In exchange, the uskval bless the sand-dwellers with magical boons and fine crafted items, which few sand-dwellers have the patience to create. Some uskval rightly distrust the sand-dwellers, but the arrangement has been mutually beneficial.

**Can't Tell Mortals from Sand-Dwellers.** Uskval typically mistake humanoid

PCs for sand-dwellers wearing stolen skins, although a few might simply not know what manner of being they are. Sand-dwellers on the Violet Dimension don't often have access to skins they can wear, so educated uskval assume the PCs recently came from the Material Plane. Since most sand-dwellers the uskval meet are allies to Aumbrask Spire, the uskval are by default peaceful and put away any weapons upon first meeting them.







## CHAPTER 1: BEYOND THE VIOLET PORTAL

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 4th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

In preparation for the Festival of the Feast, sand-dwellers built two keystones that channel Tsathoggua's power and also carved an extradimensional labyrinth in the Salt Forest around the site of the gate that mirrors the tunnel under Kulara. Once they completed their work, the significant majority of the sand-dweller forces under Ravazel the Butcher Queen massed for an invasion.

At the end of Act 1, Ravazel led her troops through the gate alongside several powerful monsters, such as the yothan Commander Zaryoth and flying polyps. Most of the sand-dwellers poured through in gleeful excitement to terrorize Harge, Odran, and the surrounding lands. This adventure assumes the PCs then passed through the violet portal into the sand-dwellers' home plane for any number of reasons: to stem the tide of monsters into Odran by intentionally foiling the portal's magic, in answer to the beckons of the mysterious voice calling to them,

or simply as their only choice to avoid the swarms of sand-dwellers that suddenly surrounded Kulara.

When the PCs passed through the violet gate, the portal shuddered, dimmed, and became unstable. Their travel against the gate's intended direction left it barely functional, and the disruption knocked the PCs out and dropped them in an isolated part of the Salt Forest far enough from the portal and keystones that no one discovered them as they lay senseless. This is where they awakened at the end of the previous adventure.

Most of the sand-dwellers and monsters who have tried to pass through the gate in the hours since then have walked into the rock behind the gate rather than traveled to the Material Plane. Over the same span, numerous ka have emerged around the gate, spawning as many mortal mercenaries transformed into sand-dwellers in Kulara. The sand-dweller troops in the Salt Forest have dispersed to their lodgings in nearby caves while their mages struggle to determine how to restore the gate's functioning.



## CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

The violet portal still tenuously connects the Salt Forest in the Violet Dimension to the Kulara Oasis in the Material Plane. Now in the Violet Dimension, the PCs must close the portal by destroying the two keystones that power it. One keystone is near where they arrived, lost in a maze of crystalline trees; the Strangler's Doubt can lead them to it, or they can find their own way through questioning sand-dwellers.

Disabling the other keystone presents a more daunting task, as it lies far across the treacherous Time-torn Wastes, near the uskval tower of Aumbrask Spire. What's more, the PCs' sabotage of the Salt Forest keystone does not go unnoticed, and the alerted sand-dwellers pursue them relentlessly. As the PCs approach the second keystone in the Dead River, they encounter another ka, this one derived from Sister Mara. This ka, known as Mara's Regret, has key advice to offer, pushing the PCs to get help on their quest from the nearby Aumbrask Spire.

### EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If you want to stretch this adventure out, you can add more days and random encounters to the party's trek across the Time-torn Wastes to Aumbrask Spire.

## THE SALT FOREST

Most of the forest is difficult terrain due to spiny, scratching foliage that readily breaks when creatures move through it. The large crystalline trees can provide cover. The PCs can find a winding path through the forest not far from where they landed. Like the tunnel between Kulara and Harge, the path is a physically impossible snarl that turns back on itself; it should cross over itself but never seems to form physical intersections. Characters who can see invisible objects can see where the paths should intersect.

The Salt Forest extends about 20 miles (usually 8 hours' walk) away from the labyrinthine path that surrounds the keystone, the gate, and the sand-dwellers' caves. Around the forest lie the Time-torn Wastes of salt and sand, which the characters must cross to reach Aumbrask Spire.

### PLAGUE STONES

Some of the crystalline trees in the Salt Forest feature hanging stones that resemble glittering indigo jewels, some singular and others strung together like

beads on a necklace. While beautiful, these stones are dangerously infectious: touching a plague stone exposes creatures to the hollow curse (page 56).

### STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The characters begin this adventure just after picking themselves up from the chaos of passing through a destabilized portal to the Violet Dimension. This assumes they haven't yet departed from the isolated clearing where they awoke at the end of the previous chapter. Note that the party was magically sent over a mile from the Violet Dimension side of the portal due to the magic going haywire as they passed through. Read or paraphrase the following:

You are in a forest of many-colored crystalline trees under a sky that resembles cracked glass. A bulbous rock formation pocked with rugged caves rises above the trees and under the violet sun to the west. A pillar of warm gold light flickers erratically to the east. A cool green beacon like a lighthouse rotates regularly over the horizon to the south, refracting when its light passes through the trees.



The characters are in the presence of a ka, the **Strangler's Doubt** (page 219). Characters automatically recognize him as the same ka that appeared in their dreams, and his voice is the same one they heard near the gate in the Kulara oasis.

The Strangler's Doubt manages cryptic responses to many questions, but he's not well informed.

♦ **What are you?** "A part of the Kulara Strangler... Can't remember who I was before... now I am only doubt and regret..."

♦ **Were sand-dwellers human?** "I killed... liked it... forgot me... no longer me... monster... became a monster... I was lost..."

♦ **Why did you kill?** "Infamy... forever... cruelty... all they remember... all I remember..."

♦ **How did you contact us?** "Strangler was summoned back to Kulara... I heard too... had glimpses and echoes of my old home..."

♦ **How can we close the gate?** "Mar the stone... break the symbols... the gate can't stay open without the keystone..." He leads the PCs to the **salt forest keystone** (page 8).



◇ **How did the sand-dwellers get to the Material Plane previously?** “Spells summoned some... long ago, they had another way... the uskval know... at the green beacon...”

◇ **Is there more than one Kulara Strangler?** “He shed his skin... Strangler stole another... and another... some copied him later...”

◇ **Other Questions** “Others know... go to the beacon... other kas know... mages like moths imprisoned others... Uskval.” He drifts in the direction of the beacon. Characters who consulted the *Butcher's Conquests* or who succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check remember the basics about the uskval described on page 59.

## THE SALT FOREST PATH

Like the tunnel between Kulara and Harge, the path is a snarl that turns back on itself while never physically crossing over or forming intersections. Characters who can see invisible objects can see where the paths should intersect. The path leads west to the portal (**Area A**), then beyond to the sand-dweller caves (**Area B**), as well as east to the keystone (**Area C**). The Strangler's Doubt urges the characters to go east to the Keystone, that they might destroy it.

## THE DRESSING DOWN

When the party traverses either path, they encounter a group of sand-dwellers approaching. The sand-dwellers blame the PCs for the portal's malfunction but assume they are just foolish sand-dwellers who came back after stealing skins, and any non-humanoids are their captives.

**Creatures.** The group is composed of three **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 225) and their leader, a **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 212) named Borosin. He rants in Common, “You fools! Pray that I, the mighty Borosin, let you live after this foul-up. Coming back through the portal wearing skins like that might well be what fouled up its magic! We'll be lucky if we can get the invasion force of hollow jackals through.” He shakes with rage as he gestures. “Get back through the portal! It might—might!—stabilize if you go through it again. If it doesn't, we shall have to perform a new ritual of binding on the keystones!”

### BOROSIN

**Borosin** (sand-dweller whisperer, lawful evil).

**Traits** Borosin thinks he's smarter than everyone else and enjoys hearing himself talk.

**Ideal** Intelligence.

**Bond** Borosin wants to impress Ravazel.

**Flaw** Borosin wants everyone to do as he says so he doesn't have to do anything.

**Investigation.** A character can use Borosin's statements to deduce more about the magic with a

successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check or DC 13 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check. They have advantage on this check if they have read *The Butcher's Conquests* (potentially discovered during Act 1, p. 216). With a success, a character deduces that the portal has become unstable and can be permanently destroyed by breaking or thoroughly defacing both keystones.

Borosin is willing to speak on a few matters but has little patience.

◇ **How does the magic work?** If the characters succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check, Borosin sighs but explains, “The magical paths here and in Kulara connected the two dimensions at this spot. The ritual feast made an anchor on that side, connected to the keystones on this side.” He gestures at the pillar of golden light and toward the green light to the south when he mentions keystones.

◇ **How did the sand-dwellers who traveled to the Material Plane earlier do it?** Borosin grabs his face in frustration. “We wouldn't have bothered with this ritual if we could use the Hollow Mother's Well for everyone! Ever since it broke, we could only use it with mortal skins... and you're the only ones around with those!”

◇ **We can't go yet.** He growls in frustration. “Move with haste or we will rip those skins off you and throw you through separately!”

◇ **Trickery.** Characters can make up a plausible lie to convince Borosin to give them supervised access to the keystones with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana), Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery), or Charisma (Deception) check. For example, they might postulate a magical method of strengthening the keystones on this side. If they do, he agrees to take the characters to the keystone and tells the whisperers there to stand back while they work.

**Treasure.** Borosin carries a leather bag containing the following: a *potion of climbing*, a *potion of superior healing*, a *spell scroll of mirror image*, a spell component pouch, and alchemical salts worth 100 gp which can be traded in Aumbrask Spire or any city.

## A. THE PORTAL CLEARING

A clearing of violet sand opens amid the crystalline trees. A bulbous rock formation pocked with jagged caves rises above the trees and under the violet sun to the west. A pillar of warm gold light flickers erratically to the east. A cool green beacon like a lighthouse rotates regularly over the horizon to the south. Repetitive pleas and groans assault your heads like intrusive thoughts, surging in time with a writhing mass of pale shapes filling the air in the clearing. The shapes in the cloud form a ragged caricature of a humanoid. They flutter about as if blown by a strong, swirling

wind. There is no breeze, though the characters' thoughts race away from them like a windstorm. A large rock formation at the center of the area has a wide cleft about the same width as the violet portal, and a faint flicker of purple and gold shines around its edges.

The tree line ends 150 feet from the gate. Trails cleared of trees lead to the west and east. With a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check, a PC understands that the party members' passage has caused the portal to short circuit, stranding them here but also preventing many sand-dwellers or other creatures from pouring through.

**Creatures.** The area swarms with dozens of fresh **kas** (page 228), created by the Festival of the Feast. They don't yet understand what has become of them and can't do much more than wail inarticulately, let alone help the PCs; on its turn, a ka lashes out violently at the nearest creature that isn't a ka.

Four skinless **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 225) led by a **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 225) linger here to collect ritual supplies for the Sand Citadel. They weren't expecting the swarm of kas and are busy fighting them off when the PCs appear. Several dozen other sand-dwellers fled to the western caves to wait for the ka to disperse and the gate to reactivate. The sand-dwellers here brush off attempts to interact until the ka begin to disperse after about another hour.

**A Storm of Regrets.** A character exposed to the kas' psychic wailing (which extends for 90 feet from the gate) must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, gaining 1 level of dread (*SPCM* 72) on a failed save, or 2 levels if they fail by 5 or more; the dread ends after 1 hour. If your game doesn't use dread, have each character attempt a saving throw against a ka's Glare of Judgment with disadvantage. The swarm is centered on the portal, so frightened characters can't approach it.

Characters can recognize the voices of people they saw transformed by the Festival with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) or DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check. They can deduce that these are psychically derived from those people with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check.

**The Destabilized Portal.** Creatures who attempt to pass through the flickering portal find it usually doesn't work. The PCs, having already passed through the portal in the wrong direction, can't pass through it again. It doesn't react to them, and they pass through and hit the shallow depression in the rock face behind it.

## B. SAND-DWELLER CAVES

The high rock formation west of the gate is home to the modest sand-dweller force that didn't immediately rush through the violet portal into Kulara. Unless the characters drove off the **Strangler's Doubt** (page 219), he does his best to discourage them from ap-

proaching this area. "There are many sand-dwellers... Needless danger... Turn back..."

**Creatures.** Several dozen sand-dwellers fled here to wait for the swarming ka around the gate to disperse, most of them going deep into the caves to be safe. At any given time, one **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 225) and five **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 225) rest near the opening of a cave. If characters approach the cave before attacking the keystone, the whisperer (named Zarang) approaches them to interrogate them as described in the encounter **The Dressing Down** (page 57).

**Development.** If combat breaks out and any sand-dwellers die, the survivors call for help. Two **sand-dweller stranglers** and another **sand-dweller whisperer** arrive to assist after 4 rounds.

## C. THE SALT FOREST KEYSTONE

The forest of crystal trees opens on a 100-foot-wide hexagonal pit. It shimmers with golden light that rises high into the broken-glass sky. At the bottom, motes of golden light dance around seven stone markers: one at each corner and one at the center. A faint acrid stench mingles with the smell of salt and sand. The center is a simple arch of two tall stone slabs capped by a third one. Each of the other six is a differently incomplete version of the same arch, missing one or two of the stone slabs but standing despite the lack of support. Two capstones at opposite corners of the pit project from a single support in a way that should obviously topple over but doesn't; a third capstone at another corner hangs in midair.

The keystone where the characters can break the gate is a glowing, 100-foot-wide hexagonal pit. The pit's walls are 60-foot-high steep slopes. The bottom of the pit is a hexagon 60 feet across. The stones that make up the arches are all 10 feet long and 5 feet wide, and thus can provide cover or greater cover to combatants. (The layout is very similar to the Dead River keystone on page 66.)

**A Ka's Plea.** If he is with them, the Strangler's Doubt (page 219) begs the player characters, "Destroy! Deface! Close it!" If they express concern about ruining the way home, he reassures them by saying, "You don't need this opening... Is another way back... They know at the beacon..." He gestures to the green light in the south. "Sand-dwellers can't leave... You can leave... Break it!"

**The Pit.** There is no obvious route down the steep slope of the pit walls, which show no footprints. Anyone who succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check notices disturbed dirt near the base of the wall directly below them and beside a nearby crystal tree. It is a sand-dweller's tunnel in the crusty, salty sand. Characters can climb down with a DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check; if their result is 3 or less, they fall to the bottom (60 feet down). Characters with a burrowing speed can climb



down the tunnel at twice their burrowing speed or half their walking speed, whichever is higher.

Climbing openly down the pit wall requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. A result of 5 or less causes the character to roll to the bottom. Characters can also stumble down the steep wall at full walking speed but must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or trip and roll the rest of the way down the pit wall after moving their speed. Anyone who rolls down the pit lands prone and takes 1 slashing damage per 10 feet rolled from shards of crystal in the sand.

**Creatures.** In the midst of the confusion, only two **sand-dweller whisperers** (page 225) remained to tend the site, with the rest having left to get rid of the ka around the gate. Like Borosin in the **Dressing Down** (above), the senior whisperer Axanom assumes the PCs are sand-dwellers. Axanom carries a *wand of magic missiles*, which he uses in combat.

**The Keystone.** Once characters examine the stones up close, they can see that the 10-foot-tall stones are inscribed with an eyeless toad (the symbol of Tsathoggua). The symbols weep a sticky black acid. Each of the three-stone arches at the corners has one missing component. The missing components are essentially gaps in the air, though the stones remain held in midair as if the missing stones were present. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check deduces that all the missing stones are present but either invisible or in a parallel reality.

### AXANOM

**Axanom** (sand-dweller whisperer, chaotic evil).

**Traits** Axanom has a smooth manner of speech, promising vague rewards to anyone who might help him.

**Ideal** Wealth.

**Bond** Axanom wants to learn dark secrets of the multiverse.

**Flaw** Axanom fears being seen as incompetent more than he worries about his self-preservation.

**Development.** Once a sand-dweller cries out in alarm or the keystone is damaged and begins to flicker more drastically, it attracts other sand-dwellers to assist. Two **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 225) emerge from the woods to the north after 5 rounds, and again after 1 minute. After 10 minutes, dust starts to rise from the direction of the sand-dweller caves as dozens of sand-dwellers rush to defend the keystone. Characters can hear the hollering of bloodthirsty sand-dwellers coming in large numbers soon thereafter.



If present, the Strangler's Doubt urges the PCs to flee southward into the Salt Forest (see page 56) as soon as the keystone is disabled.

**Treasure.** The senior sand-dweller Axanom carries a *wand of magic missiles*. The other whisperer carries a bag containing a spell component pouch and three yellow diamonds each worth 100 gp. Flanking the keystone are two statuettes of Tsathoggua carved from granite worth 100 gp each.

### TSATHOGGUA'S KEYSTONE

*Magical Trap*

The keystone has AC 15, 75 hit points, vulnerability to cold and magical bludgeoning damage, resistance to acid and non-magical slashing damage, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Creatures can





learn the stone's magical properties with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check as an action.

The keystone has several defenses that it uses in response to taking damage, as described below. When it reaches the specified threshold, it immediately inflicts the listed amount of damage and imposes the listed effect. If they understand the magic or are instructed by someone who does (such as a sand-dweller whisperer), a PC can disable the next defense by gently scratching out certain parts of the inscription with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check.

When the keystone is first damaged, it and the creature that damaged it flicker out of phase. Creatures that teleport in the pit or cast the spell *see invisibility* also experience this effect as long as the keystone functions. The flickering creature can glimpse the unseen stones as well as Tsathoggua wrapped in golden chains. They take 3d6 psychic damage and are exposed to Tsathoggua's unnamable doom—they must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or gain 2 levels of dread (or are magically frightened for 1 hour, if your game doesn't use dread). The dread's level is reduced by 1 every 24 hours that elapse.

When the keystone is reduced below 50 hit points, it and the creature that damaged it flicker out of phase for a longer period. The attacking creature

takes 3d4 + 3 force damage and must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or it is teleported 30 feet directly away and trapped in a partially phased state for 1 minute or until the stone is destroyed. While partially phased, all the creature's speeds are reduced by 10 feet and the creature has disadvantage on attack rolls, but it also gains resistance to non-magical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage. The Violet Dimension seems faint and misty to them, except for the shining green beacon of Aumbrask Spire to the south and a second gleaming keystone at the base of the lighthouse.

When the keystone is reduced below 25 hit points, it erupts in a spray of acid. Creatures within 5 feet of the stone must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d10 acid damage. The ground around the stone dissolves, creating a 5-foot-deep pit. Creatures that fail the saving throw fall prone as the ground vanishes beneath them; creatures that succeed can spend their reaction to step aside to an unoccupied space within 10 feet.

When the keystone is reduced to 0 hit points, it is destroyed in a spray of acid and golden conjuration magic. Creatures within 10 feet of the stone must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d4 acid damage. All the standing stones collapse and go dark as they lose the connection to the distant support stones. Creatures standing within 5 feet



of the collapsing stones must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d8 bludgeoning damage and be restrained by the stone until freed with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check as an action.

### FLEEING THROUGH THE FOREST

Once the keystone is destroyed, the Strangler's Doubt attempts to lead characters to the gleaming green beacon of Aumbrask Spire to the south. The incorporeal ka has little appreciation for the physical limitations of the crystal forest, drifting straight through dense clusters of crystals. The PCs can keep up only if one of the characters makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check to find a clearer parallel route, or if the PCs make a successful DC 10 Dexterity group (Acrobatics) check to squirm through the crystals. Whether the party succeeds or fails overall, each character who fails the Dexterity (Acrobatics) check breaks several crystals and takes 1d6 slashing damage. If the characters lose track of the Strangler's Doubt, they can catch sight of him again when they reach the Time-torn Wastes.

Sand-dwellers begin searching for the player characters once they find the keystone damaged. The group has a Wisdom (Survival) score of 13, which is high enough to follow the characters unless they get a higher Wisdom (Survival) check result to hide their tracks or they travel in a way that leaves no tracks (such as flying or climbing through the crystalline trees, or through the use of a *pass without trace* spell). The DC of a group Dexterity (Stealth) checks to evade the pursuers in the crystalline trees is 12.

### CAMPING

Once they have put a few hours of distance behind them, the characters can rest in the Salt Forest without being disturbed. If they successfully follow him, the Strangler's Doubt leads the characters to a relatively safe campsite far from sand-dweller eyes near the southern edge of the Salt Forest; they can also locate this campsite with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Survival) check. If all else fails, they find the campsite automatically, but each PC gains 1 level of exhaustion from the ordeal.

The campsite is a small cave full of phosphorescent fungus that burbles with a saltwater river. The entrance is buried under felled crystalline trees (from when the path was cleared).

**Foul Water.** The few natural water sources in the forest are very salty and impossible to drink without *purify food and drink* or similar measures. Characters can rig up a water catching system with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check or a DC 13 Intelligence (alchemist's supplies or weaver's tools) check. Trapped animals (see below) also have enough liquid in their bodies to satisfy thirst for a day.

**Finding Food.** Characters can find food with a suc-

cessful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival or Yog-Sothothery) check. There are glittering, gem-like berries on some of the salt-crystal trees, and it's also possible to hunt or trap the small animal-like creatures in the forest. Some are saltfruit, which humanoids can tolerate but makes them poisoned for 10 minutes and provides no sustenance. A character can trap sufficient bats with a successful DC 11 Intelligence check using artisan's tools or a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check. If the result of a foraging ability check is 10 or less, the characters mistakenly conclude that certain gem-like berries are safe to eat when in truth they are plague stones (see page 56).

**Parasites at Camp.** If the characters don't use tents, they attract five transparent **stirges** after 1 hour encamped. The glassy stirges have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks except in the hour after feeding on blood (which sloshes visibly in their stomachs). If the characters have any light sources, they attract two **shadows** that attack along with the stirges or just before dawn if the stirges don't attack.

### DREAMLANDS TRAVEL FOR COMMUNICATION

Characters can travel to the Dreamlands even from the Violet Dimension using all the typical methods, such as being a Dreamlands cat, knowing the spell *dream guide*, or having the Dreamer feat. Their bodies remain in the Violet Dimension, however. This opens the possibility of corresponding with people back in the Material Plane who are also capable of such travel. Most NPCs can't be usefully contacted this way because their dream selves can't share memories with their waking selves, but there are exceptions.

The easiest NPC to reach this way is Remedy, the Dreamlands cat priest of Bastet from Kulara who has taken refuge in Harge (see Act 1). If they seek her out, she shares that most of the people in Harge evacuated to the Zoog Woods and are planning to move from there north to seek refuge in Tsang. She encourages the characters to learn what they can about the sand-dwellers and their weaknesses and magic from any ka they can find.

### THE TIME-TORN WASTES

Beyond the Salt Forest to the north are the Time-torn Wastes of deep red and violet sand stretching in all other directions. The dunes form elaborate spiraling shapes that unravel and reform as you walk across them. On the horizon to the south, you can make out a spinning green beacon. Just before it rises a shimmering golden pillar of light and a low maze of rock formations just visible when the shifting dunes leave a low enough gap.

The slopes of the dunes are difficult terrain, but the troughs between them are not. The following encounters occur as the player characters cross the desert.

### SAND-DWELLER PURSUIT

Once the characters travel 1 hour out, they are spotted by roving sand-dwellers who lurk at the edge of the forest behind them. The distant sand-dwellers give chase, but the PCs can get away if they keep up their pace. The band catches up only if the party stops to rest for an hour or longer (such as if they take a short rest) or if they move slower than 25 feet per round (such as dwarves wearing armor do).

**Creatures.** The band tracking the PCs consists of a **sand-dweller strangler** (page 225) and two **hollow jackals** (page 231). The sand-dweller has a **bat** familiar that uses its altitude to keep an eye on the party over intervening salt dunes. Although the jackals could catch up alone, the sand-dweller doesn't want them to go uncontrolled and is also unwilling to ride them for fear of the hollow curse.

### ROTTEN SALTSAPES

The sands are crisscrossed with vast sheets of crystalline salt. Most are solid enough, but some crumble when stepped on. Patches of rotten saltscapes hook creatures' feet, producing difficult terrain. Characters can detect the rotten salt before stepping on it with a passive Wisdom (Survival) score of at least 13. They can move quickly across the rotten salt without breaking it with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check; if their result is 10 to 14, they move 5 feet normally before encountering difficult terrain.

Some patches of rotten salt cover quicksand. Each patch of quicksand is a 10-foot-radius circle. A creature that breaks through the rotten salt sinks 2 feet into the quicksand and becomes restrained (escape DC 10 + 1 per foot the creature has sunk in the quicksand). At the end of each of its turns, the creature takes 1d8 necrotic damage and gains 1 level of exhaustion as the sand draws moisture out of its body and it sinks another foot into the quicksand. It also sinks another 1 foot whenever it uses the Attack, Dodge, or Hide action or fails an ability check to escape.

Exhaustion from the quicksand is from dehydration, so the creature must drink water to recover. A creature with a swimming speed or burrowing speed has advantage on checks made to escape the sand.

A creature with a burrowing speed that sinks to the 9-foot-deep bottom of the quicksand can burrow to escape.

### TIME-TEARING STORM

The characters smell something very nostalgic as a time-tearing storm rolls across the sands. If the Strangler's Doubt is with the party, he wavers suddenly like a flag caught in a strong wind. After a moment, the wind blows the ka away at incredible speed to the south, toward the green beacon. An oncoming storm is visible to the north, looking like a wall of jagged-edged kaleidoscopic mist.

Where the storm passes, about one out of every

four sand dunes are replaced with small ponds with a few crystalline trees around each one, about 20 feet lower than the dune that was there previously. The pond is brackish and unsuitable to drink. Each pond reverts to a sand dune after 24 hours.

Creatures who enter the mist must attempt a DC 13 Charisma saving throw. On a successful save, they remain where they were and are unchanged, but the terrain around them changes into a pond, which leaves them hanging in midair. They take

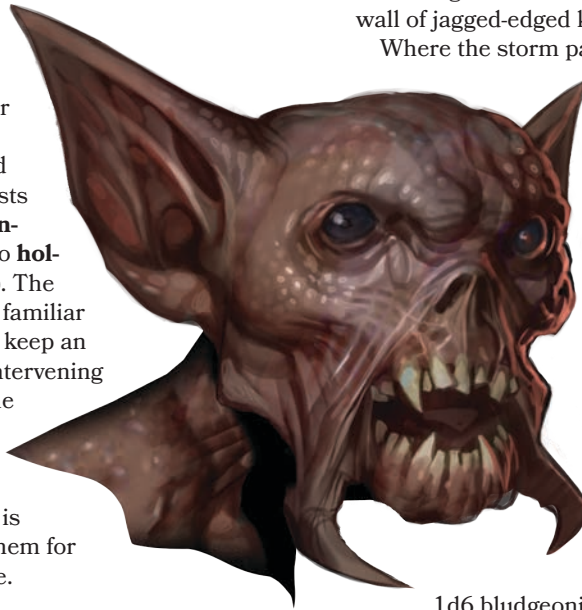
1d6 bludgeoning damage from the 20 ft. fall into the brackish water. On a failed save, they are briefly superimposed with another version of themselves from a parallel timeline, then they subsume their double, and the character is teleported to the far edge of the mist about 1,200 feet away. This effect alters the character: one random feature of their appearance changes, such as hair color or height, while their highest ability score is reduced by 2 and their lowest ability score is increased by 2. The effect lasts until undone by an uskval seer or removed by a *dispel magic* or *remove curse* spell.

Once the storm passes, separated characters can see each other atop sand dunes and hear each other calling. The Strangler's Doubt can be encountered later in the Library of Murmurs in Aumbrask Spire. Characters who sleep in the desert after being separated from the Strangler's Doubt have dreams of the Strangler's Doubt calling to them for help from inside the green beacon.

### FIGMENT HUNTERS

As the characters near the southern edge of the desert, read or paraphrase the following:

Here, the dunes give way to salt flats and scattered pillars of violet sandstone. The green beacon grows larger to the south, and just before





it is a wide river with an island in the center. From among the pillars in that direction races two crystalline quadrupeds the size of horses. They kick up sand as they move, and ahead of them a translucent woman with exaggerated human features darts through the air. She scowls back at them, and lunges ahead again by passing through a solid pillar, but she will soon be forced into the open desert. She obviously won't remain ahead of them for long.

**Creatures.** The creatures are two **hollow jackals** (page 231) chasing after a ka called **Mara's Disgust** (page 219). Characters with a passive Investigation score of 11 or higher recognize Mara's Disgust as having features reminiscent of Sister Mara, if more exaggerated. If the **Strangler's Doubt** (page 219) is still with the characters (such as if he hid from the time-tearing storm inside a *rope trick* spell), he gasps and drifts behind them. He says, "Those things trap us... take us... feed on us... horrible..."

**Development.** Mara's Disgust is too slow to keep ahead of the jackals for long. The jackals can interact with her despite her intangible form, and they attempt to drag her back the way they came. If the characters rescue Mara's Disgust, the next section describes her reaction. If the characters fail, they can still continue on to the **Dead River Keystone** (page 64).

## RESCUED KA

If the characters save Mara's Disgust, read or paraphrase the following:

The woman drifts to you, glancing around distractedly before squinting at each of you in turn. She says, "You look familiar... and you do not act like sand-dwellers." She grips her head, obviously struggling to think. "You... have been interfering with the sand-dwellers! You thwarted Mara, or rather, that thing that is left of her! I have no power anymore, but you... you could break the keystone and slow their invasion! I can help you do it. All I ask is discretion... when this is over, and you return home, tell people Mara helped you... in the end. My thoughts are... muddled sometimes, but I will tell what I remember."

If Sister Mara still lives, Mara's Disgust also insists that they find and kill her as soon as they return to the Material Plane.

Mara's Disgust can offer cryptic answers to the following prompts.

- ◇ **What were those things?** "Hollow jackals, monstrosities born from a contagious curse. They grow in numbers by cursing creatures. They grow in cunning by capturing kas."
- ◇ **Why did the hollow jackals want you?** "The hollow jackals hunger for minds. Capturing me would

help strengthen their telepathic network. Their plague could grow even more in number and they could remain connected to each other with me forced to guide them."

- ◇ **How do we leave the Violet Dimension?** "The Strangler said mortals can return home through the Mother's Well... The uskval know... in the tower..." She gestures to the green beacon.
  - ◇ **The Green Beacon?** "The sand-dwellers call it Aumbrask Spire. Uskval, insectoid sages and builders, call it home. The light is hypnotic... hard to look away..." She shields her eyes with her hand and moves to keep a pillar between her and the green light. "It lures kas to it, and the uskval capture them. Uskval trade in knowledge... perhaps we are another source of secrets to them. Even before she..." The ka shudders and makes an exaggerated expression of disgust. "Before she transformed, Mara bought secrets from them... sand-dweller weaknesses... magic spells..."
  - ◇ **What were Mara's Plans?** "War to pay for foolish bargains! Wasted potential and fear and blood! An invasion led by Queen Ravazel to sweep away all in her path and capture people as servants to offer her new monstrous allies ..."
  - ◇ **Kulara.** "Ignorant! Mara could have taught them... even led them... but they had no respect for knowledge and magic."
  - ◇ **Mara's Actions or Motives?** "Mara wanted to be a leader... an elder... a court wizard leading Odran to rival even imperial Tsang... but... the prospect of eternal power was so tempting... Reckless! Disgusting! Should have burned the book... Never spoken to the sand-dwellers..."
  - ◇ **The Gate.** If the Keystone is intact: "The Keystone... Strangler told Mara they needed a keystone to open a door... The Keystone keeps it open for invasion and reinforcements... Break it... More dwellers will come soon with mighty allies..." She points out the little glowing island in river near the green beacon.
  - ◇ **Leave Violet Dimension.** "Sand-dwellers had another way, centuries ago... the Hollow Mother's Well was an open path between worlds... Ask the uskval. They are traders... collectors of knowledge... They trade with anyone, sand-dwellers and others..."
  - ◇ **What is the Keystone?** "The stone arch channels the power of the Sleeper... It is here, but not here... it was built to open the gate, and the gate can't stay open if it is defaced or broken." She points out the nearby keystone in the river.
  - ◇ **The Butcher's Conquests.** "Should have burned it!" If it's visible, she hisses and swipes at it, though she causes it no actual damage.
  - ◇ **How can you help?** "I can accompany you and guide your hand if you wish."
- After Mara's Disgust is satisfied the characters know

what they need to, she leads them to the Dead River Keystone (below). If the characters agree to spread word of her help in Mara's name, Mara's Disgust accompanies them to the Dead River Keystone. She grimly vows to fight alongside them if they offer to spread blatant lies to make Mara seem like a hero in death; she then enters combat herself on their behalf against the Keystone.

## THE DEAD RIVER KEYSTONE

A vast, briny river separates the desert from a dense field of soaring stone formations and, beyond that, the green glow of the towering beacon. The river is very low, surrounded on both sides by steep cliffs. In the middle of the river is an island as high as the far bank. The island is dominated by set of flickering standing stones and a small cave. The 10-foot-tall standing stones form a hexagonal pattern, and the unsteady light emanates from symbols carved into them.

The river is 160 feet wide, though the distance to the little island where the arch of the second Keystone stands is only 50 feet. The island is roughly circular and 60 feet across. A small cave occupies half of the island and the other half is a 60-foot-wide set of hexagonal arches just like those around the **Salt Forest Keystone** (page 58).

Each side of the river is a slick, salt-crusted cliff. The cliff adjoining the desert is 30 feet high; the others are 20 feet high. Climbing the walls of the cliff requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. A character with a result of 5 or lower falls in the water, suffering 1d6 bludgeoning damage if the character fell at least 20 feet.

**Crossing the River.** A spindly stone bridge connects the far (south) side of the island to the opposite shore. Most of the bridge exists in a separate dimension; the portion that the PCs can walk on is only a few inches wide. Crossing the bridge requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check each round. About a half mile to the east, just visible, another spindly bridge crosses the entire river. Characters find it easy to swim in the river. The salt buoys them, so they can swim without a Strength (Athletics) check. The current carries each swimmer 20 feet downriver at the end of their turn.

**Creatures.** When at least two characters come within 20 feet from the far cliff, two **swarms of bats** emerge from the island cave and swoop down to feed on the PCs. If the characters destroyed the first Keystone already, the sand-dwellers here have received a messenger bat warning them to be on the lookout, giving any checks made to trick them disadvantage. Two sand-dwellers defend the Keystone, each riding a **giant bat**: one is a **sand-dweller binder** (page 226) and the other is a **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 225). The binder taunts the characters. Unless the

characters have made clear they aren't sand-dwellers, the whisperer demands, "Explain your betrayal of the Dread Queen! Where is the profit in closing the gate?"

If the characters agreed to her condition, **Mara's Disgust** (page 219) accompanies them to the river. She keeps her distance but spends her reactions to help them during the encounter. She enters combat to attack in melee only if the characters agreed to spread blatant lies making a hero out of the dead Sister Mara.

**Tsathoggua's Keystone.** The Keystone on the island is much like the first one (page 59), but rather than making this Keystone obvious when it turns the world murky, it emphasizes only the tower (and the Salt Forest Keystone, if it has not yet been destroyed). Embedded in the Keystone is a *resonant athame* (page 241). Removing the dagger causes the keystone's magic to deactivate until it is replaced, making it safe to destroy.

**Treasure.** The cave contains a carved granite statuette of Tsathoggua worth 100 gp and a bag of diamond dust worth 2,500 gp. The *resonant athame* in the Keystone has lost much of its magic to fuel the magic gateway, but as noted in its description it can be reactivated by placing it in the Hollow Mother's Well (in Chapter 3).

## LIGHTHOUSE IN THE STONE SEA

Before you, countless pillars of stone rise between 5 and 10 feet in height and crowd close together. A few arch together to form small chambers or niches. Those nearest you are crowded with spear-shaped plants like red succulents. The rock formations beyond a few dozen feet are lower, spreading to the horizon in a labyrinthine series of shallow chasms. A half-mile away, a small plateau rises above the maze of stone pillars and narrow chasms. Resembling an inverted conical lighthouse, a tower rises many hundreds of feet into the air above it. The structure seems to hang in mid-air, connected to the ground only by a narrow ramp. Many apertures mark the tower from its lowest point up to the shining green beacon at its top. Creatures vaguely resembling human-sized moths flit in and out and dart about high overhead. Below the ramp, a colorful display of torches and glass hangs motionless in mid-air around a bustling crowd of the moth creatures and large, worm-like entities.

The red plants are full of water, which characters can notice if they inspect the plants or if they have a passive Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Investigation) score of at least 10.

Near the bridge is a ferry attended by a worm-like **uskval worker** (page 233) named Varsakus. As soon



as Varsakus gets a good look at the characters, they approach and telepathically offer, "If you wish to cross the Stone Sea here, my ferry is available first thing in the morning. You can rest while I prepare." The beaked, worm-like creature appraises them head to toe before continuing. If the characters look hungry or dehydrated, Varsakus points out the red plants. "These are full of fresh water, if you want to keep your skins from drying out." Either way, they then say, "It's rare to get visitors who have recently been to the Material Plane. Anything from there would easily pay for the trip." Even something as little as a knife or paper satisfies Varsakus. The ferry can sail upon an unseen ultraviolet sea over the maze of stones. To the uskval and other Violet Dimension creatures, it is like water, but to a mortal it seems to be just a thin, greenish mist.

A few kas and moth-like uskval seers flutter many hundreds of feet in the sky, drawn toward the spinning green lighthouse just beyond the stones. Strange tentacled creatures loom among the stones, swimming up briefly through the clear air and then darting down again upon unseen prey below. These beasts aren't likely to fight player characters, but if necessary, use the statistics of an **octopus** with a flying speed of 30 feet.

If characters defeated the hollow jackals but lost track of Mara's Disgust, such as if she retreated from combat at the Dead River Keystone, she waits for them here. This close to the beacon, the ka struggles to pay attention to what PCs say because the green beacon is hypnotic. She believes the characters need to go there to talk to the uskval and the captured ka. They know much about the sand-dwellers and their goals. The uskval are collectors of knowledge and are likely to know more about the Hollow Mother's Well or some other way back to the Material Plane. She refuses to approach any closer to the tower for fear of being captured by uskval seers, but she remains nearby and rejoins characters whenever they leave the tower.

## VARSAKUS

**Varsakus** (uskval worker [page 233], neutral).

**Traits** Varsakus has a dry, slow manner of talking.

**Ideal** Bounty.

**Bond** Varsakus wants to find a large, powerful beast to infest with their eggs so the colony can grow strong.

**Flaw** Varsakus is slothful, but must eat, and so lackadaisically fishes for crab-like creatures that scuttle in the chasms below. The PCs' appearances intrigue the uskval, but they assume the characters are sand-dwellers wearing skins. Infighting isn't uncommon among the evil sand-dwellers, so Varsakus chalks it up to some petty feud that isn't their problem. They don't wish to travel until they finish a long rest.

## CONCLUSION

The characters likely need to rest either on the ferry or after crossing the river. Varsakus or Mara's Disgust can point them to a comfortable little alcove at the level of the mist, a short walk away from the boat.

Once they get a clear look at the tower, PCs can retry any failed ability check to recall information about Aumbrask Spire from earlier. Varsakus can also explain all the information starting on page 224 about sand-dwellers, uskval, and the hollow plague.

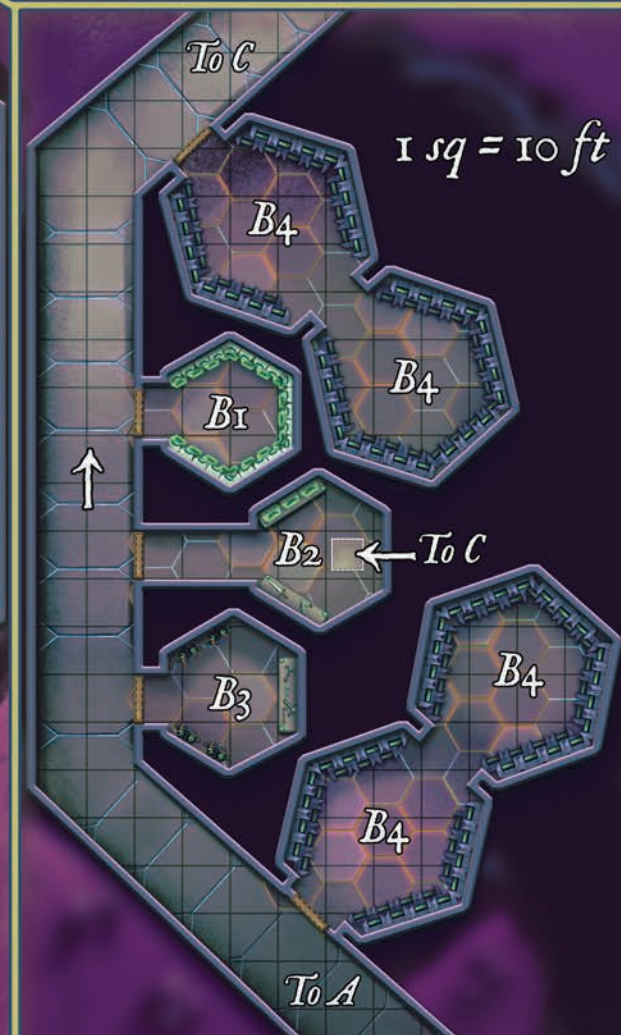
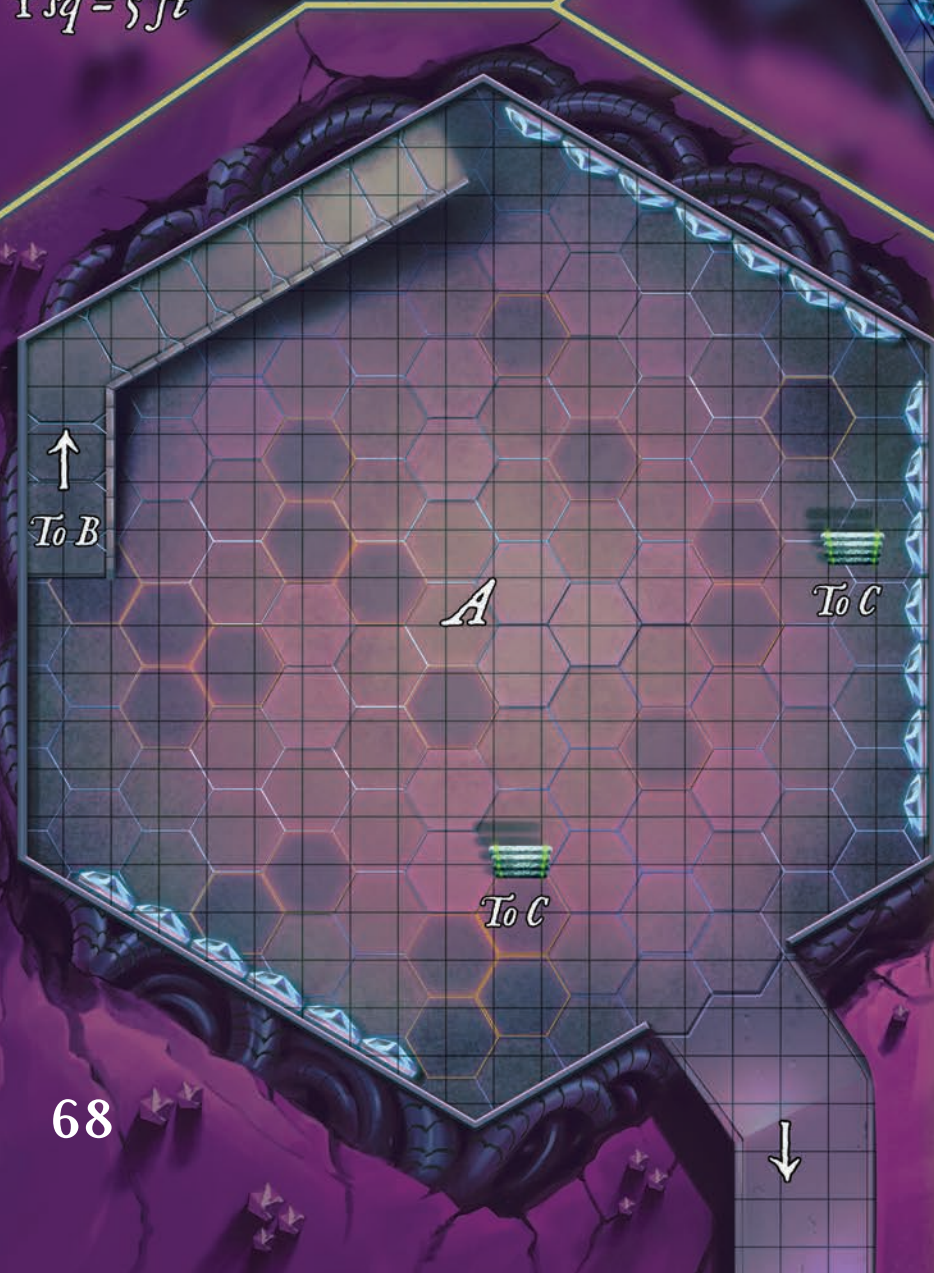
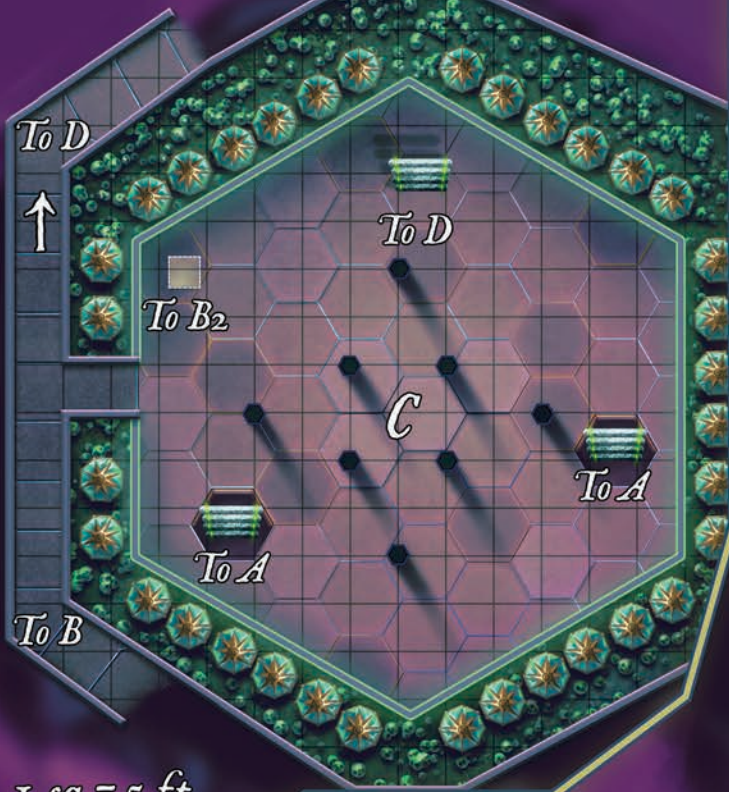
## VISIONARY ELDRITCH SENSITIVITY

Anyone with the Eldritch Sensitivity feature of the Visionary background dreams of Tulzscha's Finger surrounded by dancing moth-like uskval and sand-dwellers. Characters with the visionary background can show their art to uskval seers in the Bazaar of Visions to retry a failed ability check to learn about eldritch forces.

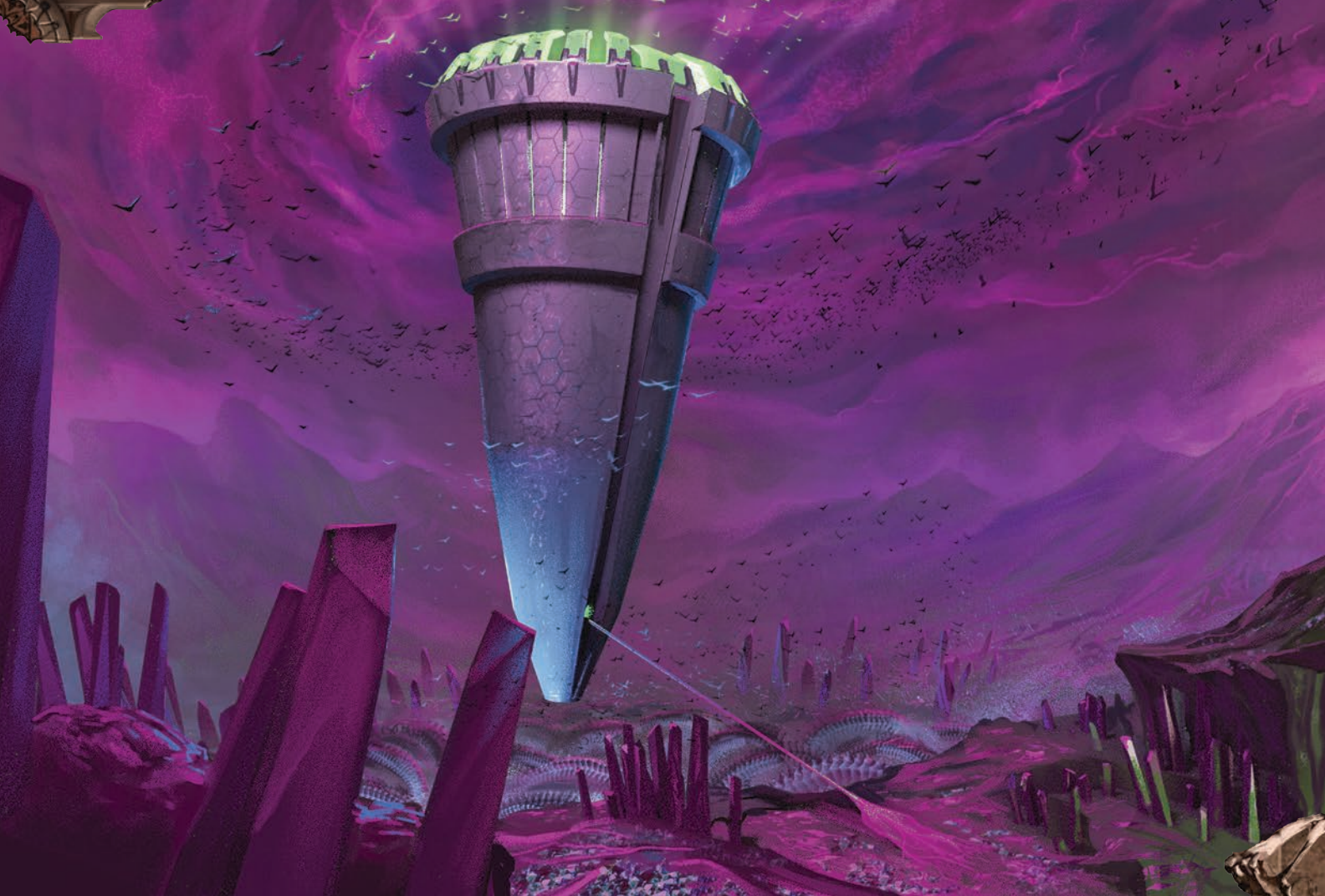
## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of Chapter 1, the characters advance to level 5.









## CHAPTER 2: AUMBRASK SPIRE

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 5th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

Although the sand-dwellers have bound some hollow jackals and other hollow creatures to their service, the hollow plague remains a rampant danger across a vast region of the Violet Dimension. The sand-dwellers' use of such dangerous creatures is one of the chief reasons that the uskval remain wary of them even while accepting their tribute.

Not long before the PCs arrived, an uskval scout named Gormothoz led a small team of loyal uskval in an attempt to kill the hollow eremite that allows the sand-dwellers to control a large number of hollow jackals. They attacked its lair, a ruin called the Broken Bastion, but could not open the magical entrance; most of his allies perished and Gormothoz retreated. When he returned home to Aumbrask Spire, Gormothoz found himself arrested and thrown in a cell near the Hall of Dancing Mists. There he waits for someone to help him finish his task. His friend Skendam wants to assist him but fears the consequences of acting openly.

### CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

The characters meet the uskval, one of the sand-dwellers' more standoffish allies. Their home, Aumbrask Spire, attracts many of the ka derived from humans who became sand-dwellers. An uskval apprentice mage named **Skendam** (page 223) was scouting for kas to capture when he happened to spot the PCs as they attacked the Dead River Keystone, and he wants to know more about them. The adventure begins with him approaching them, either to stop them moving away from the spire or to welcome them as they approach it on their own.

Skendam leads the characters to the Library of Murmurs, where Gormothoz and the kas are held. They can question the imprisoned creatures either by earning the permission of the librarian or by sneaking in. Gormothoz then offers to help them further thwart Ravazel's plans and access a way back to the Material Plane, both of which require them to enter the Broken Bastion. Gormothoz and Skendam know that they will need the *mirror of manifold reflections*

to get inside. The only way to sway the High Seer away from loyalty to Ravazel is with a better offer—or, more precisely, offering—and Gormothoz has just the offering in mind.

The characters can help Gormothoz escape or act on his advice to find and bring back the ideal offering: a legendary monster known as a blood captor. Once secured, the PCs acquire magical boons, including the mirror.

If the PCs get side-tracked, Mara's Disgust can advise them on how to get on track to get access to the Broken Bastion, kill sand-dweller leaders, and return home.

### EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If you want to spend more time on this adventure, you can add more days and random encounters to the party's trek to the Crystal Mangrove using the table on page 242.

## AUMBRASK SPIRE

The uskval's outpost of Aumbrask Spire is a beacon for lost uskval as well as kas. Sand-dwellers and the hollow plague can't see Aumbrask Spire's beacon, but it is bright as day to any ka or mortal. It serves as a major point of trade between the uskval and their sand-dweller allies, and stands just far enough from the Sand Citadel to maintain some independence. While the uskval don't fully trust the sand-dwellers, they rely on the treacherous creatures for a steady stream of useful materials, captured creatures, and insights into other planes of existence.

Aumbrask Spire also functions as a military fortification used to keep an eye on the movements of the hollow plague. Uskval scouts fly over the surrounding region to monitor the movement of uncontrolled hollow jackals. They also gather local beasts for food and acquire crystal formations for use as raw materials.

Currently, the Aumbrask uskval are in a festive mood. They are preparing for the Great Implanting, when they will lay many eggs to begin the next generation of uskval. Queen Ravazel recently gave a number of very promising beasts to the uskval as an offering before her invasion began. These beasts are now imprisoned high in the tower as the uskval prepare to slaughter them and implant eggs in their bodies.

**Sand-Dwellers in Aumbrask Spire.** Sand-dwellers normally visit Aumbrask Spire to make offerings to their monstrous allies. A few also linger to trade in the Bazaar of Visions. Typical sand-dweller offerings are unusual minerals found while burrowing, and captured creatures (most often bulettes and chuuls) that the uskval use as food for their larval young.

**The Tower.** Aumbrask Spire is over 1,000 feet tall, capped by a broad lighthouse beacon about 100 feet across and gradually tapering down to a point

about 100 feet above the ground. Its walls are built from hexagonal blocks of blue and green fibrous material. These ultraviolet structures are solid to the sand-dwellers, uskval, and hollow creatures, but mortals can't touch or even see them. A narrow staircase of stone rises from the edge of the plateau to allow access to the tower's offering chamber.

### VISITOR CELLS

Just between the great offering chamber of Aumbrask Spire is a hall lined by a dozen small hexagonal cells. Visitors are offered the use of these cells as long as they make any purchase in the Bazaar of Visions. Each one has a mound of soft sand and a flask of salt water for the use of sand-dwellers who come to make offerings to the High Seer. Other amenities are available for trade in the Bazaar of Visions.

### BAZAAR OF VISIONS

The ground level of the tower is a seemingly open-air bazaar. Called the Bazaar of Visions for the magical visions that inspire much of its wares, this place offers skilled uskval seers a chance to trade in magical knowledge and magic items. Green-flame torches illuminate colorful pavillions, and colored glass windows depict stylized images of sand-dwellers delivering captured monsters to the Uskval High Seers. The fixtures hang from invisible posts and unseen walls. These fixtures are solid and visible to the uskval and sand-dwellers but not to mortals.

**Forms of Payment.** Notably, the uskval don't trade in coins. However, they are eager to accept art objects, gems, alchemical supplies such as dustweed, and spell components. They also barter for magic items of the same rarity. They accept one permanent item to pay for two single-use items of the same rarity or four single-use items of the same rarity to pay for a permanent item of that rarity. They also accept a single-use item to pay for an item of a lower rarity. If characters come up short, the seers assume that the characters are sand-dwellers wearing fresh skins from the Material Plane and offer to trade for their skins. Since such skins can be used as spell components and are very hard to find in the Violet Dimension, they offer the player characters credit equivalent to a single-use uncommon item (about 150 gp) for each skin they trade.

**Inventory.** Magic items the uskval sell are crafted from Violet Dimension materials such as green crystal and spongy fibrous paper. Characters can trade for a few days' worth of bat meat, pure water, edible gemberries, or saltfruit (which those not native to the dimension find inedible) in exchange for almost any mundane item crafted primarily of leather or wood (which uskval consider tough but tasty). In addition, they can buy the following magic items.



Item	Price
<i>Potion of healing</i>	50 gp in goods or a common item
<i>Potion of healing, greater</i>	200 gp in goods or a single-use uncommon item
<i>Spell scroll of rope trick</i>	150 gp in goods or a single-use uncommon item
<i>Spell scroll of quantum cocoon (page 240)</i>	350 gp in goods or two single-use uncommon items
<i>Cloak of protection</i>	500 gp in goods or a permanent uncommon item
<i>Efficient quiver</i>	250 gp in goods or two single-use uncommon items
<i>Immovable rod</i>	250 gp in goods or two single-use uncommon items
<i>Javelin of lightning</i>	750 gp in goods or a permanent uncommon item

### SAND-DWELLER WITCH

A **sand-dweller binder** (page 226) named Kamarza peddles her magical wares in one corner of the Bazaar of Visions. She attempts to learn what the characters are seeking, since they show signs of having been to the Material Plane. Kamarza is no servant of Ravazel's, so she has no interest in fighting Ravazel's enemies (such as the PCs).

**Trade.** If the characters haggle with her, Kamarza offers them a sand-dweller *binding stone* (page 240). She also points out that they can find hollow creatures to bind at the Broken Bastion. The hollow eremite now constantly spawns new offspring.

**The Mortal World.** Kamarza has visited the dreams of Harge and Kulara and gleefully reports that much death has swept those lands. Characters can hire her to relay a message to the Dreamlands cat Remedy (Act 1) by paying her with any magic item. In reply, Remedy asks the characters to find whatever resources they can for fighting the sand-dwellers and return as soon as possible. She also shares the location that the refugees from Harge have retreated to in the hilly Zoog Woods of western Harge.

**Combat.** If the characters attack Kamarza or she attacks them (perhaps for stealing from her), she flees upon being reduced to 10 or fewer hit points. If she escapes, she travels to the Broken Bastion and sells her knowledge of the party to Ravazel's sand-dweller minions. The characters can then encounter her there in the shrine of Nyarlathotep.

### KAMARZA

**Kamarza** (**sand-dweller binder** [page 52], lawful evil).

**Traits** Kamarza cackles to herself over any little thing.

**Ideal** Wealth.

**Bond** Kamarza dreams of discovering a way to pass as human permanently, which she suspects can be accomplished using a ka as a ritual sacrifice.

**Flaw** Kamarza is easily distracted by hard-to-get items.

Item	Price
<i>Potion of growth</i>	150 gp
<i>Spell scroll of charm person</i>	50 gp
<i>Spell scroll of invisibility</i>	150 gp
<i>Spell scroll of see invisibility</i>	150 gp
<i>Spell scroll of bind hollow creature (page 239)</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Spell scroll of lure hollow creature (page 239)</i>	150 gp
<i>Hollow binding stone (page 240)</i>	500 gp

### HALL OF DANCING MISTS

Beyond the housing cells at the center of the tower is an ultraviolet sphere several hundred feet across. It is filled with swirling prismatic mists that lightly obscure things 20 feet away and heavily obscure anything 50 feet away. Glowing stones of various colors float in the mists to provide lighting even at night. Several niches provide space for uskval to rest. A ramp leads down to the larval cells (**Area C**). The only way directly up to the Temple of the Green Flame is through a large circular hole in the floor with no easy way up for creatures that cannot fly or levitate. Flightless creatures can navigate upward by climbing out one of several gaps in the hall's outer wall. From there, they can climb the exterior with a successful DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check to reach the small windows in the Temple of the Green Flame.

**Creatures.** Dozens of uskval seers dance across the upper reaches and transparent, curving outer walls of the sphere. The only sounds are an eerie humming and the crackling of full-body sign language conveying words in the uskval tongue, so translation magic such as *comprehend languages* enables the PCs to understand it. Any friendly uskval nearby can also easily translate.

**The Dances.** The principal subject of the dance is celebrating the upcoming Great Implanting. The Great Implanting is a festive occasion when members of the colony gather to implant the eggs of their larval young into suitable corpses. They are excited to have good stock animals this time, thanks to sand-dweller offerings. It is the finest set of livestock in decades, except for the last blood captor that was used over a century ago.

Other dancers tell stories, give directions to places of interest, and provide strategic reports about the movements of sand-dwellers, the hollow plague, and

other creatures. They also report the sudden darkening of the magical keystones (though they remain unaware of the cause) and the distant sighting of a legendary blood captor far off in the Stone Sea.

### TEMPLE OF THE GREEN FLAME

The uskval have a long tradition of studying the secrets of the Outer God Tulzscha. Although some adhere to the Cult of the Green Flame (SPCM 154), most uskval view the Outer God's aspect as a useful asset rather than a god to worship. The temple is a bowl of green-and-violet crystals suspended high up on the tower, just below the beacon at the top. A circular hole allows flying or climbing uskval to descend to the Hall of Dancing Mists. Another in the center of the chamber's ceiling, directly above the largest brazier, leads up to the beacon.

**Rotting Flame Braziers.** The temple is illuminated by permanent flames that emit a sickly green light. The flame is magical and can't spread to other objects. Its light reveals the transience of material objects and creatures, causing them to seem to rapidly rot or crumble over and over. This revelation is spoiled in any area where brighter light overwhelms the flame's light, such as direct sunlight.

The light makes it much easier to see the truth. Disguised and hidden creatures and objects are more obvious when seen in the green light, as the elements of the disguise and cover seem to rot away or seem obviously fake compared to the aging underlying features, whether the disguise is magical or not. Viewers that use an action to make an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check in an area including the green light gain advantage on checks to see through disguises and to spot hidden creatures and objects (including traps). A viewer who discovers a creature or object this way can see its true appearance.

**Creatures.** The temple is attended by three **uskval mages** (page 237). At any given time, two are engaged in ritual dance in front of the braziers while one stares into a flame, waiting for a prophetic glimpse of another time or place (which rarely comes). The one that is staring is usually surprised if trouble arises.

**Treasure.** The uskval keep the *mirror of manifold reflections* (page 240) in an elegantly detailed bottle on a raised dais. The container is spherical to mortal

creature, but any Violet Dimension creature can reach inside extradimensionally. Smashing the bottle reveals the mirror. Tricking the mages into displaying the mirror requires a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check.

### AUMBRASK SPIRE BEACON

The peak of Aumbrask Spire is a rotating green beacon protected from the elements by thick walls of transparent crystal. There are three small glass doors leading to a balcony outside. Its light comes from the Temple of the Green Flame, directly below, via a large hole in the floor. The light is reflected by large mirrors that move around the chamber on arms and gears made from a fibrous white material.

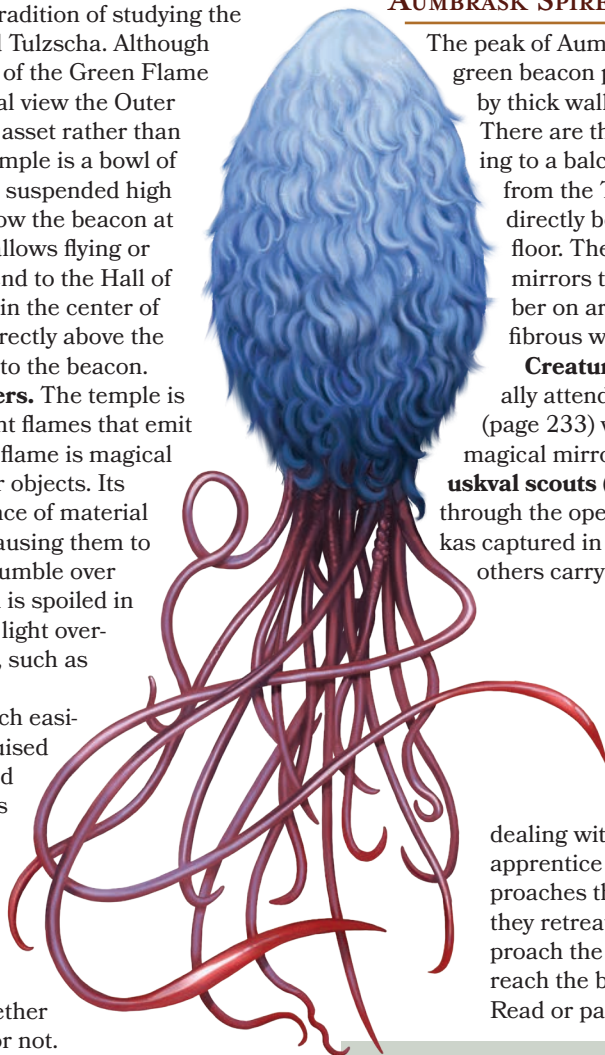
**Creatures.** The spire beacon is usually attended by three **uskval workers** (page 233) who clean and adjust the magical mirrors. At any given time, 1d4+1 **uskval scouts** (page 235) move in or out through the open doors. Some return with kas captured in magical blue nets, while others carry harvested herbs or small captured beasts.

### STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The characters should start this adventure after dealing with the Keystones. The uskval apprentice **Skendam** (page 223) approaches them as they leave the spire if they retreat from the tower. If they approach the tower, he waits for them to reach the base, then approaches them. Read or paraphrase the following:

A human-size, moth-like creature flits down toward you from the direction of the green beacon. It has four reptilian arms and four matching legs, and its head is dominated by four bug eyes above a long snout. It wears a strange iron crown set with turquoise. It raises its four hands in a gesture of peace, and says in a buzzing voice, "I come in peace, and I know something you can profit from. You look new to this plane of existence and interested in causing trouble for Queen Ravazel's sand-dwellers. I know another who opposes the same sand-dwellers you are fighting."

Skendam assumes the characters are sand-dwellers and takes the Dodge action in case they are hostile at first. He is persistent in trying to convince them to talk to him. Once they agree to hear him out, he continues.





"Thank you. My name is Skendam and I am but a scholar. My friend, an uskval scout named Gormothoz, needs help. Battle and intrigue are no place for me, and I admit I do not know you, but you can clearly take care of yourselves! You and he can help each other. You can find him in the Bazaar of Visions here." He points at the base of the green-lit tower.

Skendam is prepared to discuss the following topics.

- ◆ **Why was Gormothoz imprisoned?** "My friend distrusted Ravazel's plans to use the hollow plague as soldiers, so he took a team of scouts loyal to him to break their hold on the hollow creatures. He attempted to slip into the Broken Bastion, where a hybrid sand-dweller monster controls them. But his team was defeated and he was forced to flee before finding the hidden way inside. When he returned here, he was imprisoned at the request of Ravazel. She is, of course, a favored vassal to the High Seer."
- ◆ **How did the sand-dwellers who traveled to the Material Plane earlier do it?** "The sand-dwellers once used the Hollow Mother's Well to travel to the mortal world. Since it was shattered on the mortal side, it can no longer bring Violet Dimension creatures to the Material Plane." He raises his four arms up to gesticulate animatedly as he continues, "Interestingly, some uskval scholars hypothesize it could still return mortals here on the Violet Dimension back to where they came from..." He lowers his arms. "Ah, but that's not relevant at the moment, is it?"
- ◆ **Why should we trust you?** "I risk the same fate as Gormothoz by fraternizing with someone who opposes Ravazel."
- ◆ **Why do you capture kas?** "Kas might be nuisances to sand-dwellers, but they have proven to be a valuable source of information to us. We gather them into our Library of Murmurs, underneath the spire. You can trade for access to the library if you wish to learn from them. Valorax the librarian favors magic items and information about the Material Plane."
- ◆ **Do you know how to thwart the sand-dwellers?** "If you wish to foul up the sand-dweller's plans, you have every reason to talk to Gormothoz. The sand-dwellers' greatest strength is their powerful bound servitors. Gormothoz wants to break their hold on one of their most numerous populations of servitors, the hollow plague. I don't know the details of his plan, but it had to do with sneaking into the hollow plague's nest, the Broken Bastion."

If the characters are accompanied by Mara's Disgust, Skendam takes an interest in her presence. Kas and sand-dwellers are natural enemies, after all, which suggests that either the PCs are very unusual sand-dwellers or they are not sand-dwellers at all.

This gives the PCs disadvantage on attempts to convince Skendam they are sand-dwellers, though the uskval doesn't much care either way.

## THE KA'S GAMBIT

If the characters refused the offer from Mara's Disgust and avoided meeting Skendam earlier, Mara's Disgust is captured by Skendam for his collection of kas. She convinces Skendam to go find them after he imprisons and questions her. She knows that the fact that they aren't sand-dwellers will be too much for him to resist investigating.

## ENTERING AUMBRASK SPIRE

A small plateau rises above the maze of stone pillars and narrow chasms. Resembling an inverted conical lighthouse, a tower rises many hundreds of feet into the air above the plateau. The structure seems to hang in mid-air, connected to the ground only by a narrow ramp. Many apertures mark the tower from its lowest point up to the shining green beacon at its top. Creatures vaguely resembling human-sized moths flit in and out. Below the ramp, a colorful display of torches and glass hovers in mid-air around a bustling crowd of the same creatures and large, worm-like entities.

As the characters approach, they draw some attention from a pair of uskval scouts, but the scouts don't approach if the characters are accompanied by Skendam. With Skendam along, they can move freely. Skendam explains the basic features of the tower (as described starting on page 70) as they approach, pointing at each level with his many hands.

If the characters are unaccompanied, the senior guard, Plorvolusc, approaches. She asks the characters whether they have an offering to declare or if they are here for the Bazaar. Since uskval are allies of the sand-dwellers, they expect an offering from each sand-dweller band that enters their territory. If the characters don't name a fitting offering such as a captive monster, Plorvolusc admonishes them, "Sand-dwellers must patronize the Bazaar of Visions if they don't have any appropriate offerings. Go this way and then take the next ramp down." She points the characters up the ramp, by which they can reach the second ramp down into the bazaar.

### PLORVOLUSC

**Plorvolusc** (uskval scout [page 235], lawful neutral).

**Traits** Plorvolusc's telepathy is short and direct. She keeps a claw on her weapon but doesn't draw it unless attacked.

**Ideal** Efficiency.

**Bond** The colony.

**Flaw** Plorvolusc is impatient.

## A. OFFERING CHAMBER

At the top of the stairs is a grand, open ceremonial chamber where the sand-dwellers make offerings to the High Seer to secure the blessings of the uskval. Galleries of carved crystal hang from the roof for viewing offerings. There are two ladders that lead upward (rungs hanging in midair).

**Creatures.** The area is attended by six **uskval workers** (page 233) overseen by an **uskval mage** (page 237). In case of an alarm, they demand all non-uskval step aside and not interfere as they secure the area.

**Frescoes.** The walls are lined with stylized depictions of the uskval's history. Uskval seers fly across the land, caging the Violet Dimension's strange creatures and gathering crystals. Uskval seers with swords and whips kill packs of hollow jackals, bring down huge crustaceans, and tame furry blue squid-like creatures amid billowing clouds of a color the mortal PCs struggle to perceive. Uskval leaders appear near the top of the fresco, each wearing elaborate decorations on their backs (gleaming spines of turquoise and amber). The far side of the fresco shows the construction of the tower, where worm-like worker uskval wearing copper cloaks spin honeycombs of silk (the same material from which the whole tower is built). In the lower center are smaller images of sand-dwellers reaching toward a glowing green mirror. A creature can learn about the uskval's interests and history by studying them with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check or by copying them with a successful DC 10 Intelligence check using painter's supplies. A successful check yields all the information listed at the beginning of this chapter about Aumbrask Spire. They identify the creatures depicted as ideal offerings to the uskval.

**Skendam's Directions.** If the characters follow Skendam, he offers to take them to the Library of Murmurs, where he is an apprentice. They might learn something from the records there, and they can shop in the Bazaar of Visions if they wish. He doesn't want to take them directly to Gormothoz for fear of being connected to any attempt to free his friend.

### SKENDAM'S APPEAL

If the characters avoided meeting **Skendam** (page 223) earlier or refused his offer but then enter Aumbrask Spire, Skendam comes to find them again after

their first interaction or when they go to leave. He renews his offer with a bribe: he will give them free access to the Library of Murmurs if they help Gormothoz. If they wish to go there, he leads them there first, passing directly through the Bazaar of Visions (see page 70).

## B. ARMORY AND BARRACKS

Above the offering chamber are six chambers where the uskval warriors and scouts sleep and maintain their weapons. One is an armory, one is storage, one is a guard post, and four are barracks.

### B1. ARMORY

The armory is cluttered and organized into fibrous cells that resemble oversized, pale green honeycombs. Much of the armory's equipment consists of old or damaged items waiting to be repaired. The weapons consist of a dozen hardened glass blades similar to various types of swords, as well as eight strange crossbows made of green spun fibers not unlike the walls of Aumbrask Spire. There are also three shields of the same material. There are six sets of leather armor, but they are designed for the long bodies of uskval workers and are only suitable as barding for horses or unconventional armor for gnorri or other, similarly long-bodied creatures.

### B2. GUARD POSTS

A hatch off the main ramp leads to a guard post directly beneath the larva cells. It is unoccupied right now, as the festivities have drawn the usual occupants up to the Hall of Dancing Mists. Inside there is a closed hatch leading up. Another just above the offering chamber contains murder holes for use on anyone who attempts a sneak attack under the guise of making an offering.

### B3. STORAGE

The storage contains many of the copper-thread cloaks favored by uskval workers. There are also miner's tools and mason's tools. Most of the spare equipment is damaged old worker's gear.

### B4. BARRACKS

The barracks provide extremely cramped sleeping arrangements in shallow alcoves lining the walls. At any given time, one of the barracks is occupied by a dozen uskval of various types.

## C. LIVESTOCK PENS

Near the center of the spire is a chamber lined with pods. Many smaller pods contain corpses of squid-





like creatures with blue fur, within which uskval eggs and larva incubate. The room has several support pillars which are decorated with coppery tapestries depicting scenes of uskval conquering alien beasts, like those depicted on the wall of the offering chamber. There is a large entrance off the main ramp circling the tower, as well as a ladder upward to a hatch in the ceiling like the one in the offering chamber. The hatch connects to the Library of Murmurs (**Area D**). Interspersed with the larva cells are crystal and bronze livestock pens. The doors of the pens are transparent and intricate like snowflakes, with air holes around the edges.

**Livestock Pens.** Each pen contains an imprisoned creature that will be killed to feed uskval larvae. It currently contains Violet Dimension creatures similar to **bulettes** and three **chuuls**. Each cell can be rolled aside by removing two crystal rods, one on each side of the cell's opening. A character can deduce the operation of the door with a successful DC 9 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

**Other Creatures.** Four **uskval workers** (page 233) tend the larva cells, feeding the larvae dead little spidery creatures to keep them healthy and strong before the Great Implanting occurs.

**Hidden Door.** There is a discreet hatch in the floor covered by a hanging tapestry. Characters can find it with the advice of Gormothoz or a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check, or they can peak behind the tapestry. It leads down into an empty guard chamber (**Area B1**), via another levitating set of ladder rungs.

**Development.** If he is escorting the characters, **Skendam** (page 223) stops here. He telepathically explains, "We have nearly reached Gormothoz's cell. I can't interact with him directly without drawing attention, so I will have to part ways with you after showing you inside. I encourage you not to linger up close to Gormothoz's cell but remember that the other uskval can't overhear if you respond mentally to Gormothoz's telepathy. I will let him know you are with me." He flies to the top of the ladder leading into the next room and gestures for the characters to follow him.

## D. LIBRARY OF MURMURS

Emerging from the circular opening in the floor puts you in what is obviously a strange library. Nearby stand rows upon rows of racks, each containing numerous scrolls made of a pale green fibrous material that resembles cobwebs. Beyond them, the ceiling glows with a faint yellow light that seems to emanate from many faceted sources. An elevated area at the far end of the library displays a barred cell containing a worm-like uskval worker.

The ramp continues around the outside of the library with no doors or access. The only way into or out of

the library is via the ladder from the larva cells below.

**Creatures.** The Library of Murmurs is guarded by two **uskval scouts** (page 235) and an **uskval mage** (page 237) named Valorax (see sidebar). The scouts are charged with guarding Gormothoz, whose cell overlooks the ramp up to the Hall of Dancing Mists. The scouts are bored with the task now that Gormothoz has been held here for public shaming for a few days, so they linger at the library entrance in order to watch other uskval and host creatures down in the host cells below. Because they are distracted, their passive Perception scores are reduced to 9.

**Investigation.** The librarian Valorax greets anyone who enters the library. Valorax is Skendam's master, so if Skendam accompanies the characters, he introduces them and then Valorax sends him away to trap more kas. Valorax is eager to trade with the PCs for esoteric knowledge, especially about the Material Plane, which the uskval consider a strange and exotic place; Valorex particularly loves the metals of the Material Plane, and any metal baubles the PCs offer greatly delight the mage. Valorax also gladly bargains for knowledge of any humanoid language other than Common or Elvish as well as cultural practices. In exchange for any of these things, Valorax shares some basic information about how the sand-dwellers manifest from the Material Plane. Giving him enough details requires at least 1 hour of conversation and a successful DC 14 Intelligence (History or Religion) check. If the characters wish to go home, he suggests finding the Hollow Mother's Well. He believes it is located with the Broken Bastion, where the sand-dwellers are working on building an army of hollow creatures.

### VALORAX

**Valorax** (uskval mage [page 237], neutral)

**Traits** Valorax loves to theorize about the possible implications of anything the characters tell him about the Material Plane, and his theories are usually wildly inaccurate.

**Ideal Knowledge.**

**Bond** Valorax dreams of discovering a way to draw magical power from the Material Plane.

**Flaw** Valorax is too trusting.

### KA ARCHIVE

Deeper in the library, dozens of human-sized crystals each contain a bound ka. Most of the kas are comatose due to how long they have been separated from their mortal selves and how thoroughly forgotten their mortal lives are. Such a ka has degraded so far that it isn't even a severed section of a mind so much as a few fragments of emotion. However, when the characters enter line of sight, a few of the captured kas writhe, thrash, and mumble. It's hard to follow the jumble of words, but repeated themes are guilt, resentment, and shame.

Unless the PCs prevented his capture, the **Stran-**

**gler's Doubt** (page 219) is imprisoned here. He eagerly answers questions. In addition, three other ka murmur clues to the activities and weaknesses of the sand dwellers.

Characters can piece together useful bits of information from listening to any other ka and prodding them with questions. The characters can attempt up to three DC 15 ability checks to question them. They can use Wisdom (Insight), Charisma (Persuasion), or Intelligence (Investigation). Each success prompts one of the following responses.

**Hathera.** "Hathera didn't suspect it was a sand-dweller under the skin... thought passing by the Elder Sign meant it was human..." with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check or a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check, characters can recall the *Elder Sign* defends against the servants of Outer Gods and Great Old Ones. Characters can also attempt a DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check to remember it as the holy symbol of the Elder Gods, who were enemies to the Great Old Ones. Bastet is the most prominent local god associated with the *Elder Sign*. Characters that read the *Butcher's Conquests* (page 216) remember that this sign is inscribed along the length of the Elder Wall that surrounds Tsang. Although players might deduce it on their own from these clues, a character who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana, Investigation, or Religion) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check learns that sand dwellers wearing stolen skins can ignore protections against aberrations and the servants of Great Old Ones.

**Garu.** "Garu will be remembered as the Poisoner Prince forever now. Even if he turns other generals to evil or replaces them with sand-dwellers, his legacy is fixed as the emperor's son who couldn't be bothered to stop distributing tainted food after it killed hundreds of people. He thought their madness amusing!" A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check notes that sand-dwellers must be moving among powerful people in Tsang; Prince Garu is one of the many current imperial princes responsible for administering part of the Imperial capital city.

**Lady Petria.** One ka looks just like Lady Petria (page 205). She mumbles, "The sand-dweller recoiled from the fresh water. It was in obvious pain. And now she will be just the same once she sheds her human skin and exposes the new sand dweller underneath." She can, with a little prodding, recount much of how she became a sand-dweller as she indulged in increasingly cruel entertainments at the encouragement of the Mother Magister and Sister Mara.

### TRADING FOR MAGICAL SECRETS

Characters who impress Valorax can trade with him for a *spell scroll of conjure ka* (page 239). He asks for a single-use uncommon magic item or alchemical supplies worth 150 gp. The PCs can only summon ka that they have agreed to help with the spell. If they

befriended the **Strangler's Doubt** (page 219), Skend-am gives them a sculpted stone image of him, which allows them to summon him. If anyone befriended **Mara's Disgust** (page 219), they can summon her by crafting a likeness of her.

Valorax can be convinced to free a friendly ka (normally, only the Strangler's Doubt qualifies) with either a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 19 Charisma (Intimidation) check or with a bribe of 200 gp or any uncommon magic item. A ka needn't be freed to be conjured. The crystal can also be attacked and destroyed (AC 15, 25 hp, vulnerability to thunder damage, resistance to acid, necrotic, and slashing damage, immunity to poison and psychic damage) or opened with a *dispel magic* spell, but any vandalism draws the attention of the guards.

### TRAITOR'S PRISON

Beyond the rows of ka crystals is a prison normally used for bound summoned creatures, but has been converted to hold an uskval. The prison overlooks the ramp up to the Hall of Dancing Mists. It contains **Gormothoz** (page 222). He can't escape because of the prison's unseen extradimensional walls that hedge in both aspects of his extradimensional body (worm-like worker and moth-like seer) at once and the set of *ultraviolet manacles* (page 241) that prevent him from teleporting. Read or paraphrase the following:

The ramp up to a circular aperture in the ceiling is lined with three barred cells. At the top of the ramp are two winged uskval, who stand at either side and gaze up into the room beyond. Two of the nearby cells are empty; the center cell contains a worm-like creature with multiple claws locked into a set of manacles. When it sees you, it presses its beak against the wall, the flickering image of another form superimposed over it. The other form, resembling the flying uskval outside, has two of its arms held in the manacles. Its other two hands grasp onto crystalline bars that are only visible through this flickering glimpse. It telepathically reaches out to you. "You are... not like anything I have seen before. You must be the ones Skend-am saw. What drives you to oppose Ravazel's sand-dwellers?"

In all likelihood, Skend-am has already summarized roughly what he knows about the characters to Gormothoz. Once he understands the characters' motives, Gormothoz makes a bid for help: "I know how you can win a great magical boon from the High Seer, one that will help you discover disguised enemy sand-dwellers and that can get you inside one of their strongholds. The High Seer just needs the right offering, and I know where to find it. All I ask is that you use it to finish what I failed to do: break in and kill the eremite that allows Ravazel to control the hollow plague. Her army of hollow monsters must be



undermined before she can send them to the Material Plane to spread their curse and multiply. She could become unstoppable!”

In any case, Gormothoz eagerly converses and looks for any means of convincing the characters to help. He has responses to the following topics and steers his responses toward encouraging the characters to help him secure his freedom and destroy the hollow eremite.

- ◇ **Why are you here?** “I did what seemed necessary to defend Aumbrask Spire. Ravazel’s army of hollow jackals is a threat, even if she is ostensibly our ally. She can’t be trusted to control them well, especially not as she conquers new territory where she might turn many more creatures into hollow jackals. She is not of the colony, and the High Seer is foolish to expect loyalty from her. The High Seer did not understand the danger she represents. He had me thrown in this cell as a punishment for acting against Ravazel.”
- ◇ **What is the magical boon?** “The boon is a sacred magic item called the *mirror of manifold reflections*, created long ago by a seer who gazed upon an Outer God called Tulszcha. Its light transcends time, which can expose disguised creatures by showing other appearances. It can also show a location as it was in another time, which you can use to enter the Broken Bastion through an old entrance that is now collapsed.”
- ◇ **What is the Hollow Eremite?** “The hollow eremite is a symbiotic monster composed of a sand-dweller and a huge, hollow symbiont creature. It spawns new hollow creatures, and it allows Ravazel to exert direct control over a large number of hollow creatures.”
- ◇ **How can we help?** “Free me! Either ask for my freedom as a boon from the High Seer or sneak me out. The High Seer has imprisoned me only because of an offering from Ravazel’s minions, so he might agree to free me if you give him a better offering. Otherwise, I think I could hide myself well enough if you could get me out of these manacles and acquire a disguise for me from a storage cell. I could even go with you to help secure the offering.”
- ◇ **Jailbreak.** “There are spare worker’s cloaks in the storage room two levels down, just above the offering chamber. If you steal one and hide it nearby, then free me as a group of workers depart the festival above us, I can disguise myself and get out of the tower before they realize what has happened. I will likely need a distraction to open the cell and get away unseen, however.” He gives them directions to the storage room (**Area B2**).
- ◇ **How might we cause a distraction?** “We aren’t far from the livestock pens and from the Hall of Dancing Mists. Causing a commotion in either place might draw enough attention away for a quick escape.”
- ◇ **Where is the Broken Bastion (or the Hollow Mother’s Well)?** “The Broken Bastion is a few days’ travel from here and not far from the Sand Citadel. I know where it is, but the entrances can only be opened with magic. The only way I know of is the sacred *mirror of manifold reflections*, but when I returned for it, they imprisoned me.” Gormothoz crouches low in an uskval expression of indignation.
- ◇ **How can you help us oppose the sand-dwellers?** “Ravazel is a cunning warlord, but her real power lies in her many magical allies. The High Seer likes to imagine we are her allies, but she has many masters, and I doubt she has any allegiance to us or any of them. Stopping her plans will eventually require stripping away the boons of her allies. The hollow eremite is the only significant ally I know how to attack, but I believe her main stronghold, the Sand Citadel, protects other weaknesses.”
- ◇ **The Sand Citadel?** “It is where Ravazel and her sand-dwellers perform rituals to get boons from many summoned entities. Defeating her for good will eventually require finding a way inside the Sand Citadel as well, but it has much more potent protections on it than the Broken Bastion. It appears to be completely impregnable and isn’t even open to her minions now that she has left it. The sand-dwellers say that even they can’t open it without the *Sacred Hexagon*.”
- ◇ **The Sacred Hexagon?** “I am unfamiliar with it, but I have overheard sand-dwellers refer to it like a magical key Ravazel used to seal the Sand Citadel.”
- ◇ **What is the Offering?** Gormothoz won’t answer unless the characters agree to use it to kill the hollow eremite. Once they do, he explains, “All that the High Seer seems interested in now is beasts for the Great Implanting. You see, we need large, intact animal corpses as nests and food for our young to mature, and powerful ones make our young stronger. I know where a blood captor has recently moved not far from here, and the animal would be the mightiest game for the Great Implanting seen in generations.” Gormothoz offers to provide the characters with a small boat to travel on the Stone Sea if they break him out. If the characters don’t offer to help Gormothoz escape, he instead gives them directions they can follow to the hidden mangrove where the creature lairs. It is a little over two days’ travel from Aumbrask Spire by boat.
- ◇ **We have misgivings about the Great Implanting.** Gormothoz tilts his head sideways for a long moment before saying, “You are not like any sand-dwellers I have encountered. You understand hunting, yes? The only way for our young to thrive is for someone to hunt and feed them a beast like

this. This one could sustain an entire generation by its death, and they will forget about all the other offering animals from Ravazel they planned to slaughter.”

- ◇ **We would rather take the mirror than trade for it.** Gormothoz cradles his face in his claws. “You favor difficult skies. You might manage to steal it if you convince the seers in the Temple of the Green Flame that you wish to learn the mysteries of Tulzscha. I cannot help you unless you free me first, but I could create a diversion suitable to keep them from capturing you there.”

**Freeing Gormothoz.** Since they exist in a parallel version of the prison, the cell’s bars aren’t visible to the PCs unless they can see invisibility because the bars exist in a parallel version of the prison. Mortals can’t directly interact with the bars of the cell. Although characters can’t pick the lock, they can open Gormothoz’s manacles, which allows him to slip out on his own. Alternatively, they can slip him thieves’ tools with a successful DC 11 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check and talk him through picking the lock on his cell with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (thieves’ tools) check using thieves’ tools.

If freed, Gormothoz bolts for the ladder down. His guards attempt to capture him and anyone they noticed helping him. To facilitate capture and questioning, they attempt to knock out characters with melee attacks.

**The Larva Cells.** Once Gormothoz reaches the larva cells (Area B, above), he hides from patrols behind the huge woven metal tapestries. It takes him three rounds to slip across the prison to a closed hatch downward that will lead him out of sight. The uskval workers tending the cells notice him after 2 rounds unless the characters distract them with a DC 13 ability check. Any skill or tool can be used for this if the PCs provide a good explanation of how they distract the guards.

**Disguise in Hiding.** The hatch in the larva cells leads down into an empty guard post that also has a hatch that opens onto the ramp leading down into the barracks hall. (The usual guards here have been drawn away by celebrations in the Hall of Dancing Mists.) If the PCs don’t distract the guards and they saw where Gormothoz went, he bolts into the halls. The halls in the barracks are mostly deserted during the day, while the uskval are out working, celebrating, and trading. The hall leads to a safer destination: a storage cell near the ramp down to the offering chamber.

Once out of sight, Gormothoz disguises himself with a spare laborer’s cloak. Characters can help make the disguise more convincing with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (disguise kit) check or by casting a suitable illusion or transmutation spell. If they don’t, Gormothoz is too afraid to move about the tower until the characters have their offering for the High Seer. He waits a few minutes for a crowd of

workers to pass by on the way down into the offering chamber and out to gather plants on the shore of the Stone Sea.

### CAPTURED?

If the uskval capture the PCs, they imprison them in the Library of Murmurs to be studied; they strip the PCs of any magic items but leave their mundane equipment alone. The uskval dump the PCs unceremoniously into a *magic circle*, which prevents them from reaching or moving across it or targeting anything outside it. Since the celebration of the Great Implanting has distracted most of the uskval, only **Skendam** (page 223) guards them, along with a number of **uskval scouts** (page 235) equal to the number of captured PCs. Skendam telepathically encourages the PCs to do what they can to help Gormothoz and reminds them of Gormothoz’s idea to offer a blood captor to bribe their way out of trouble with the High Seer. Skendam says he will help them get away but insists that they help Gormothoz in exchange.

Once the PCs have time to rest, Skendam telepathically warns them to get ready to run while he prepares a distraction. He lies to the scouts that he is about to perform an alchemical experiment, which fills the library with a blast of foul-smelling smoke that heavily obscures the space. He then quietly scatters some dust over the *magic circle* (suppressing its effect) and telepathically tells the PCs to flee outside into the crags under the Stone Sea, where they can make their way to the lair of the blood captor. Down the ladder in the larval cells, a crowd of workers is celebrating an implanting. They don’t see it as their job to stop runaway escapees, and indeed they shy away from the characters. This leaves the PCs a clear route down to the offering chamber, where they can head outside. Once characters are under the mists of the Stone Sea, the guards can’t get at them easily since the mists are like water to them (but not to the mortal characters).

### GATHERING INFORMATION

If the characters refuse to deal with Gormothoz, they can still learn about the blood captor by gathering information at the Bazaar of Visions and succeeding on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a failed check, an uskval offers to sell the information in exchange for either an uncommon magic item or 200 gp in trade goods. Skendam and Mara’s Disgust can both suggest this course of action.

In addition, any character who gathers information learns basic information about the Aumbrask Spire (page 70) and any of the following rumors that they meet or exceed the DC for:

**DC 10.** The sand-dwellers’ base is an impregnable fortress called the Sand Citadel, said to contain Ravazel’s most closely guarded secrets. It is closed even to sand-dwellers while she is away.



**DC 11.** Rumor has it that some sand-dwellers had been waiting for Ravazel to leave in order to overthrow her base here and destroy the keystones that kept open the portal she would need to return (this is a false rumor misunderstanding the PCs' actions in Chapter 1).

**DC 12.** The sand-dwellers control a hive of hollow creatures in a place called the Broken Bastion not far from the Sand Citadel.

**DC 14.** Rumor has it the scout Gormothoz tried to steal the *mirror of manifold reflections* in order to betray the High Seer for some selfish purpose (this is a false rumor).

**DC 15.** The Broken Bastion is said to contain a disused route to the Material Plane.

**DC 16.** Only an artifact known as the *Sacred Hexagon* can open the Sand Citadel, and it was taken by the invading army to the mortal world.

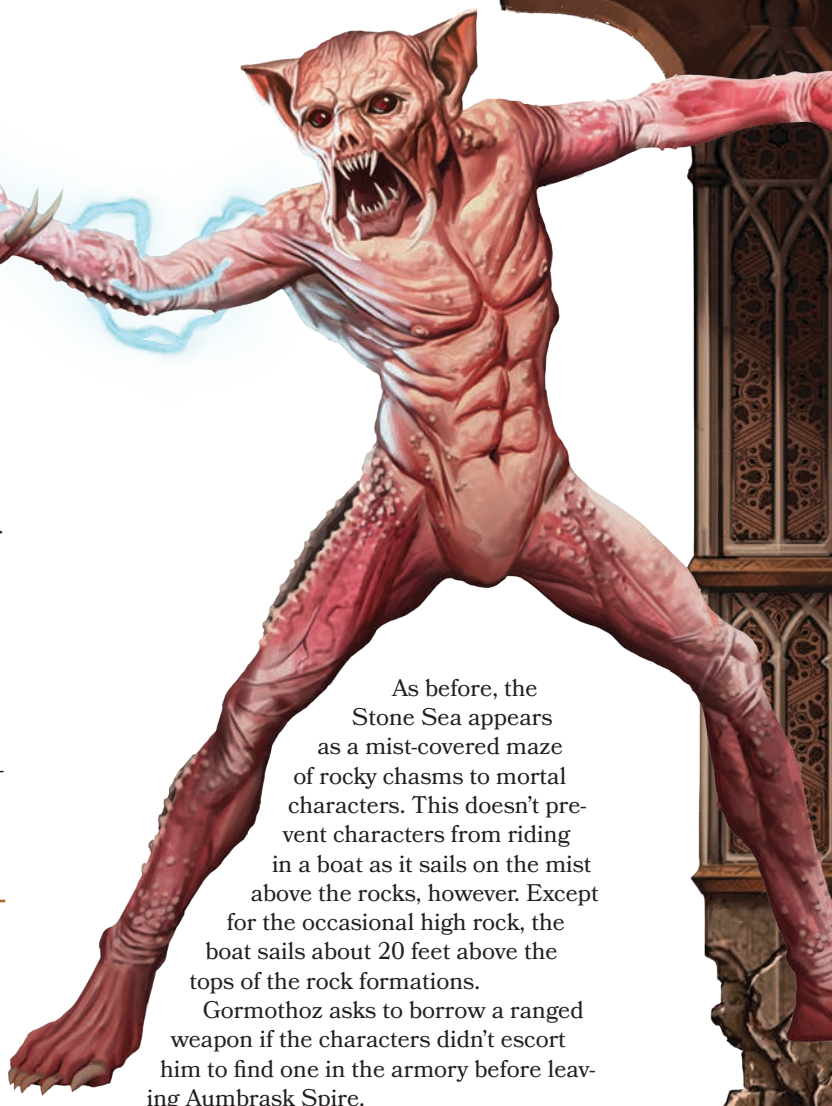
### STEAL THE MIRROR?

Characters who strongly oppose hunting or who badly distrust the uskval might choose not to bargain with them. If they choose to steal the mirror, they must bypass the Hall of Dancing Mists above **Area D** and enter the Temple of the Green Flame (page 72). Once the party has the mirror, they can escape through the Hall of Dancing Mists to the route for freeing Gormothoz. As long as they created a diversion or freed Gormothoz so he could create a diversion, they meet no resistance in the Hall of Dancing Mists. Otherwise, they are opposed by three **uskval scouts** (page 235) as soon as an alarm is raised about the mirror.

Successfully stealing the mirror allows the characters to bypass the rest of this chapter. The characters have what they need to enter the Broken Bastion and have no further reason to remain in Aumbrask Spire. However, they are left with limited options to make purchases or rest safely. They begin Chapter 3 in the Stone Sea.

## SAILING THE STONE SEA

The trek to the hidden mangrove is 60 miles, which the party can comfortably cover in 2 days by boat. If he is free, Gormothoz provides a small boat for characters to sail across the Stone Sea. If he is unable, they can purchase a boat from Varsakus (page 67) or in the Bazaar of Visions (page 70) for 100 gp in trade goods. An uskval boat has a speed of 2 miles per hour, or 20 feet per round. Varsakus will accompany them to pilot the boat in exchange for a further 25 gp in trade goods.



As before, the Stone Sea appears as a mist-covered maze of rocky chasms to mortal characters. This doesn't prevent characters from riding in a boat as it sails on the mist above the rocks, however. Except for the occasional high rock, the boat sails about 20 feet above the tops of the rock formations.

Gormothoz asks to borrow a ranged weapon if the characters didn't escort him to find one in the armory before leaving Aumbrask Spire.

**Foraging.** It's fairly easy for travelers on the stone sea to find food in the form of octopus-like animals and water in the form of little pools of water in the deepest crags between the rocks.

### EAGER SYMBIONT

The characters encounter trouble as they sail through a narrow strait 50 feet across between islands. Low, 10-foot-high cliffs loom overhead, cluttered with densely clustered crystal trees. Climbing the cliffs requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

**Creatures.** A wild **eremite symbiont** (SPCM 310) hides among the trees and soars down to grab an interesting character as they pass by. It is attracted by any intact humanoids, especially spellcasters. It attempts to carry off a character who can cast spells. If present, Gormothoz notes that these creatures aren't usually so interested in sand-dwellers.

It drags away any captured character, flying over a patch of rotten saltscape (page 64) to reach its nest suspended in the branches of four connected crystalline trees. Characters who break through the saltscape into the quicksand attract the interest of a bush, blue-furred **chuul** that has burrowed in the ground 160 feet away.

## THE HIDDEN MANGROVE

The blood captor's lair is a crystal mangrove forest. Like the rest of the Stone Sea, the floor of the mangrove is a maze of narrow, winding crevasses 3 to 6 feet wide and 6 to 10 feet deep. Barely visible violet mist extends up to 10 feet above the crevasses. Like around Aumbrask Spire, Violet Dimension creatures and objects can gain a flying speed equal to half their land speed here or equal to their swimming speed. It is essentially water to creatures that can interact with the ultraviolet portion of the Violet Dimension. The trees here rise 50 feet above the crevasse-riddled floor, with branches that spread out 50 feet from the trunk. Climbing the trees requires a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. Characters can balance on the branches with a successful DC 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

If he accompanied the party, **Gormothoz** (page 222) encourages the characters to set up ranged attack positions in the trees. He uses his own musk as a lure, knowing that the blood captor likes to eat uskval.

**Creature.** The **blood captor** (page 238) uses the crevasses to sneak up on the PCs at its first opportunity. It lurks in the shadow of the chasms until it's ready to strike, surprising any character with a Wisdom (Perception) of 13 or less. The blood captor targets Gormothoz first, then turns to attack the rest of the characters as soon as they prove to be more dangerous. It uses the crevasses and huge trees as cover against ranged attacks and attempts to drag smaller creatures deeper in the crevasses.

The blood captor fights to the death to defend its territory..

## RETURN TO AUMBRASK SPIRE

Once it is dead or unconscious, the blood captor's natural buoyancy makes it easy to drag back to Aumbrask Spire. It can be pulled along by its tentacles and it never even touches the ground. Characters dragging it must be cautious, however. Unless they succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to wrap its tentacle in leather or thick cloth, they are exposed to the venomous stinging hairs every hour they drag it.

In addition, the huge creature's mass can draw the attention of opportunistic monsters who might want to prey on the vulnerable sky squid. If the characters haven't had an adequate challenge to earn their next level, the return trip to Aumbrask Spire is a good time to roll for a random encounter (see **Stone Sea Encounters** on page 242).

## OFFERING TO THE HIGH SEER

The High Seer stands among a dozen seer uskval, their wings fanned out behind them as they watch from the high balcony. On the walls on either side, coarse silk tapestries and frescoes depict the glories of their people, taming and imprisoning the alien creatures of the Violet Dimension. Flanking the entrance to the hall, dozens of copper-wearing uskval worker worms click their claws together and watch you. Unique among the bejeweled uskval high overhead, the High Seer wears a grand crown-like decoration on their back resembling arm-length porcupine spines of turquoise and amethyst. The many uskval seers' wings whirl in eerie harmony. The High Seer gestures for you to approach the offering dais far below their crystalline balcony.

When the characters offer High Seer Azmovoth the blood captor, she rewards them with many gifts. She always offers the *mirror of manifold reflections* (page 240) and an indestructible pot that functions as a *bag of holding* and contains four *potions of healing*, diamonds worth 2,000 gp, and alchemical supplies worth 2,500 gp.

If the PCs make a good impression, either by avoiding any previous trouble in Aumbrask Spire or by succeeding on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, each PC also gets their choice of one further boon from the following list:

- ♦ A berry that functions as a *potion of mind reading*
- ♦ Any character can receive a magical procedure that grants them advantage on saving throws and ability checks against illusions. Once they have used it seven times, it is exhausted.
- ♦ A spellcaster can instead opt to receive tutelage to learn one cantrip from any spell list or any spell of a level they can cast from their own spell list; the spell doesn't count against a limited number of spells known or require scribing into a spellbook.
- ♦ Removal of a curse.
- ♦ A *spell scroll of quantum cocoon* (page 66) that functions as if cast using a 3rd-level spell slot.
- ♦ Any character can request to see an intact ka from the Library of Murmurs.
- ♦ Any character can request to end Gormothoz's punishment. If two characters choose this option, he can resume his station as a scout of the tower. In gratitude, he promises to accompany them anywhere on the Violet Dimension.

If characters ask to be sent to the Material Plane, the High Seer grudgingly admits that they she has no such magic available. The mages here lack *banishment* or other suitable spells. However, she advises characters that there is said to be a magic circle once used by sand-dwellers deep in the Broken Bastion, near the Sand Citadel.



## AZMOVOTH

**Azmovoth** (uskval mage [page 237], neutral evil)

**Traits** Azmovoth preens her metallic decorations to punctuate her statements. She understates any mistake or problem.

**Ideal** Wealth.

**Bond** Azmovoth wants to collect more clients for her colony than ever before.

**Flaw** Azmovoth's smug sense of superiority prevents her from realizing when she is in danger.

## CONCLUSION

The chapter ends when the party concludes their business in Aumbrask Spire, probably by making an offering to the High Seer but possibly by stealing the *mirror of manifold reflections*.

Once the characters have made their offering to the High Seer, they are welcomed to stay in one of several visitor cells available in Aumbrask Spire (page 70). Gormothoz quietly slinks into the party's quarters

after the PCs are settled in, and doesn't leave until the party is ready to embark for the Broken Bastion. He encourages characters to spend any trade goods they received from the High Seer, since there are many fine magic items for sale in the Bazaar of Visions. They might also be able to learn more about the sand-dwellers and the Broken Bastion there (see Gathering Information, on page 78).

Alternatively, if the party successfully stole the *mirror of manifold reflections* they end the chapter as soon as they escape into the Stone Sea. There, they can easily lose any pursuers among the dense rock formations and the mists that uskval can't breathe. Gormothoz, wearing a cloak to hide his appearance, sails overhead and calls out to them telepathically within an hour. He directs them to an island where they can meet out of sight of the spire and rest before heading to the Broken Bastion.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of Chapter 2, the characters advance to level 6.



AUMBRASK SPIRE



*B*



*D*



*M*

*N*

*L*

*J*

*K*

*H*



1 sq = 10 ft

*A*

To I



*G*

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## CHAPTER 3: THE BROKEN BASTION

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 6th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, Ravazel's sand-dwellers had a powerful ally known only as the Hollow Mother. She was the source of the hollow curse and thus creator of the plague of hollow creatures that even back then troubled the Violet Dimension. The Hollow Mother was one of Ravazel's first great allies and a fellow worshiper of Nyarlathotep, and it was her brood that allowed Ravazel to nearly conquer Tsang long ago (as described in Act 1).

When the hollow creatures proved insufficient and Ravazel was forced to flee to the Violet Dimension in defeat, Ravazel had her sand-dweller magicians experiment with ways to control the hollow plague directly. Eventually, they devised a hybrid creature called a hollow eremite: part hollow creature and part sand-dweller. With the Hollow Mother no longer necessary, Ravazel betrayed, killed, and replaced her with a series of hollow eremites.

The newest hollow eremite is **Garu the Poisoner Prince** (page 220), who was given this power as a

reward for successfully infiltrating the highest levels of the Tsangese government. He doesn't know the present state of his operation, but before he fled to the Violet Dimension, he had nearly completed the process of transforming at least two of Tsang's council of generals into new sand-dwellers. Now Garu controls the Broken Bastion, home of the hollow plague, where he creates more hollow creatures for Ravazel.

Before Ravazel led her army to the Material Plane, she had Garu send most of her hollow creature minions to travel overland to the Salt Forest, where they currently wait for the portal sealed by the heroes to be reopened. Their absence leaves the Broken Bastion with few defenders.

Ravazel's great fortress, the Sand Citadel, likewise stands relatively vulnerable, though it needs few defenders. Ravazel sealed its doors with a legendary magic item called the *Sacred Hexagon*, making the place impregnable to any force that is not similarly potent, then gave the item to her yothan ally Commander Zaryoth, who traveled with her to the mortal world.

## THE BROKEN BASTION





By now, word of the characters' deeds has spread to many of Ravazel's sand-dweller minions. Unless the characters took exceptional measures to ensure their anonymity (such as illusion magic, masterful disguises, or killing all sand-dweller witnesses), any encountered sand-dwellers are generally quite suspicious or outright hostile. Even if no one knows the PCs are from the Material Plane, their reputation brands them rebels, making sand-dwellers treat anyone they do not know with wariness.

## CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

With the *mirror of manifold reflections* secured, the PCs are ready to find out more about their enemies and return home. To do that, they must trek to the Broken Bastion, facing many dangers in the desert or the Stone Sea (depending on the risks that they would rather face).

Entering the Broken Bastion requires getting past the scant defenders lurking around the nearby Sand Citadel and then using the *mirror of manifold reflections* to bypass its magical defenses. Once inside, the characters must sneak or fight their way to the heart of the Broken Bastion. Along the way, they can find many magical treasures of the sand-dwellers and free one more, especially knowledgeable ka originally derived from the sand-dweller leader herself, Queen Ravazel. Finally, opening the way home requires facing the hollow eremite that controls the hollow creatures that infest the Broken Bastion and serve the sand-dwellers.

## POSING AS SAND-DWELLERS

By now, word has almost certainly spread of the party's deeds; thus, the sand-dwellers of the Citadel do not readily mistake the PCs for typical sand-dwellers. Depending on the characters' actions, they might be mistaken for rogue sand-dwellers wearing skins that are hard to come by in the Violet Dimension. Unless they use magic such as *disguise self* or a *hat of disguise* to appear as skinless sand-dwellers, sand-dwellers immediately suspect the PCs and attack if the PCs don't talk fast.

Characters can talk their way out of confrontations with plausible lies, such as pretending to be messengers sent from Ravazel's army on the Material Plane. Even then, the Charisma (Deception) check to convince anyone of such a claim is at least 15, if not higher, such as if the PCs ask for accommodations or access to highly secure areas. Characters get advantage on such checks if they can offer supporting evidence of their identity, such as naming leaders of the forces (including Commander Zaryoth or Queen Ravazel) or successfully disguising at least one member of the party as a skinless sand-dweller.

## EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If you want to spend more time on this adventure, you can add more days and random encounters to the party's trek to the Broken Bastion.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Once the characters have finished resting and making use of their boons from the uskval (if any), **Gor-mothoz** (page 222) comes to them to help plan their trek to the Broken Bastion. If they did not betray him, he plans to accompany them as far as the Broken Bastion but part ways before the characters enter. If



they neglected to free Gormothoz, **Skendam** (page 48) comes to offer advice, but he does not accompany the party.

Reaching the Broken Bastion requires crossing the Stone Sea or traveling over the Time-torn Wastes. Gormothoz suggests avoiding the Sand Citadel itself, since it is the sand-dweller's stronghold. Scouts in the Hall of Dancing Mists have recently reported that the sand-dwellers are much reduced in number since their army left to invade the Material Plane, but a dangerous number remain in the region. (Note that the scouts are liable to remember Gormothoz's previous antagonism and express disdain for his advice.)

Gormothoz favors a seafaring trip on the Stone Sea as the better route. Even though larger and more dangerous monsters lurk in the Stone Sea, they don't attack often. The group is unlikely to encounter hollow creatures or sand-dwellers there, making it easily the fastest route.

### ROUTE A: ACROSS THE STONE SEA

Sailing the Stone Sea is similar to the trek to the Crystal Mangrove (page 80) but follows a different route.

The trip is about 120 miles (3 days at the typical boat speed of 2 miles per hour). The following encounter occurs as the characters travel across the Stone Sea.

#### PROTO-SHOGGOTH AMBUSH

This encounter occurs where the boat passes over a very broad large rock formation just under the surface of the mists, about 40 miles and 1 day into the trip.

**Creatures.** A **proto-shoggoth** (SPCM 372) lurks in the high rock outcropping just below the surface of the Stone Sea. It hides in a crevasse within the rock, striking the boat as it passes overhead. Characters can spot it lurking with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Characters can steer aside with a successful DC 15 Wisdom check using water vehicles.

**Hull Damage.** The boat's hull has AC 15 and 50 hit points, so the passengers are in serious danger of falling to the rocks 15 feet below. If the hull is damaged, the boat's speed is reduced by 10 feet. The hull can be repaired with a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using weaver's tools or carpenter's tools or use of the *mending* spell (each application restores 1-4 hit points to the hull).

#### LANDING AT THE SAND CITADEL

The short stretch of Stone Sea near the Sand Citadel is marked by a salty river of conventional water not unlike the one near Aumbrask Spire. There is an abandoned and ruined uskval boat here, but there is no sign of the passenger (an unlucky fisher who ended up transformed into a hollow serpent).

### ROUTE B: ACROSS THE TIME-TORN WASTES

The Time-torn Wastes (see page 11) route has more hazards, but each one is less dangerous than those on the Stone Sea. The trek is 100 miles, which typically takes 5 days at a normal pace (4 days at a fast pace, or 7 days at a slow pace). The following encounters occur as the characters cross the Time-torn Wastes:

#### TIME-TEARING STORM

The characters are caught up in another time-tearing storm (page 64). If it overtakes the characters, it leaves behind climbing salt crystals that attempt to cover any creature that touches them. The affected area is a 100-foot-long ovoid patch centered on the party, which is eventually filled with a dense tangle like a thicket of bushes. Any character who touches the patch must make a DC 13 Strength or Dexterity saving throw (character's choice) or they take 3d6 necrotic damage and are grabbed by the salt crystals (escape DC 13).

**Creatures.** As soon as the storm passes, three **hollow jackals** (page 231) charge through the area in pursuit of kas carried high in the storm's winds. The PCs can't reach the kas themselves. The hollow jackals, hungry for anything with a soul, fight to the death.

#### SAND SHARK

About halfway across the desert, the characters draw the attention of a prowling **bulette**. It attempts to sneak up on them under the sand, but characters can notice the disturbed sand when it is still 60 feet away if their passive Perception scores are at least 12. The creature has a broad, shark-like tail and six legs.

#### SAND-DWELLER HUNTERS

As they cross the open desert, the PCs encounter a sand-dweller hunting party in the middle of stalking some alvoxen, a kind of umber hulk native to the Violet Dimension.

**Creatures.** The patrol consists of a **sand-dweller binder** (page 226), a **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 225), a **sand-dweller strangler** (page 225), and two **swarms of bats**. Disguises don't stop them: the hunting party has heard of a renegade group of sand-dwellers recently come from the Material Plane, so they quickly identify the PCs as potential threats and attack immediately.

**Development.** If combat breaks out, one **umber hulk** takes an interest and watches over a dune about 120 feet away from the battle. It can be prodded into approaching with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check or DC 19 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. The sight of their quarry in the open distracts about half of the hunting party, who try to slay the creature before it flees. The sand-dwellers and umber

hulk both flee by burrowing into the sand when reduced below one-quarter their hit point maximum.

## THE SAND CITADEL

Red and purple sand blows across a salt-encrusted playa as far as the eye can see. About a quarter mile away at the center of the flats, a hexagonal fortress of sandstone streaked red and white looms atop a low plateau. The walls are inscribed with towering magical symbols. Facing the west is a mammoth stone door with a hexagonal pattern carved into it. At the lip of the plateau is another arch over a ramp leading down to ground level, where another arch marks the bottom of the ramp.

The Sand Citadel overlooks a natural harbor on this part of the Stone Sea.

**Symbols.** The magical symbols on the walls are abjurations that protect the structure from all mortal magic as well as damage from nonmagical sources. These effects can be identified with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, though the DC is 12 to know this is abjuration magic.

The Sand Citadel proves to be impregnable without the key (the *Sacred Hexagon*). However, the characters can get the sigil sequence for the teleportation circle at the foot of the winding ramp that leads up the cliff side, which allows them to return if they can find a way to cast *plane shift*.

**Creatures.** The plateau is patrolled by a **sand-dweller binder** (page 226) named Marzok and a **yothan warrior** (SPCM 401). By the time the characters arrive, word has spread of their assault on the Keystones. The arches at the top and the bottom of the ramp are angles suitable for an Angled Entry.

The characters can avoid drawing attention by succeeding on a group DC 11 Charisma (Deception) check to act as if they belong or a group DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check to remain unseen by flitting between the occasional patches of alien plant cover.

If the PCs get his attention, Marzok flags them down. “Hail, you wretches!” he shouts in Common. When he sees their humanoid appearances, Marzok views the PCs as troublesome oddities, but he also wants their skins as rare prizes from the mortal world. Luckily, since the PCs were likely mistaken for sand-dwellers, Marzok talks first, asking, “What are you doing running around the Violet Dimension in skins like those?” He suspects them of some kind of betrayal but cares little about misbehavior that doesn’t inconvenience him personally.

### MARZOK

**Marzok** (**sand-dweller binder** [page 226], lawful evil).

**Traits** Marzok leers at humanoid skin like a rare treasure.

**Ideal** Wealth.

**Bond** Marzok wants to impress Commander Zaryoth and rise in station.

**Flaw** Marzok is greedy and easily bribed.

**Bribery.** Marzok offers to let the PCs go on their way in exchange for a skin, a bribe worth at least 200 gp, or any uncommon magic item. He can be haggled down to 100 gp or a common magic item with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. Once bribed, Marzok leaves and pretends he never saw anyone. His yothan companion watches the characters from a distance, but views them as harmless curiosities unless they attack.

**Trickery.** If characters pretend to be sand-dweller messengers from Queen Ravazel or the invasion force more generally, Marzok is incredulous, saying, “They sent you lot back to the Sand Citadel? Commander Zaryoth knows nobody’s getting in or out without the *Sacred Hexagon*.” Fooling him requires a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check. If fooled, he assumes the PCs know how to get into the Broken Bastion. Tricking him into saying the password (“downfall” in Aklo) has a DC of 19.

## THE BROKEN BASTION

The Broken Bastion looks unassuming on the surface. Now, all that remains of its once-impressive facade is a jagged, cracked-apart curtain wall around a three-terraced ziggurat. The top two terraces were blown apart by magic centuries ago and never rebuilt.

**Allies.** Any allied creatures traveling with the party (such as Gormothoz or any ka) believe that entering the Broken Bastion presents a new level of danger. An ally already willing to fight alongside the characters offers to create a distraction to help the party get inside, but does not enter the fortress without a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check; each ally requires a separate check.

**Features.** Doors in the area are circular crystalline portals that roll along a track in the floor around a central stone spoke. They lock by means of a complex latch, though most are unlocked. All but a few spaces are dimly lit by glowing crystalline moths the size of coins that dance along the ceilings. They slowly approach and climb on any creatures that rest anywhere in the Broken Bastion. They use little brush-like forelegs to clean the creature they investigate.

Fibrous, coral-like plants have overrun several portions of the fortress, and in turn the hollow curse has transformed about half of those into crystalline pillars. Cursed plants have gem-like berries that expose creatures to the hollow curse.



**Defenders.** The eremite controls the hollow creatures that patrol the fortress. Hollow creatures change levels in the Broken Bastion quickly by locking the hollow cleft in their bodies around a pillar of stone and sliding up or down. The hollow eremite becomes aware any time a hollow creature enters combat or is destroyed but doesn't get sensory information or detailed reports. He at first assumes that the sand-dwellers have made a game of destroying a hollow creature for sport but orders two **hollow jackals** (page 56) to search for the source of the disturbance just in case. They make a circuit of the structure every 10 minutes. After that pair is dispatched, he concludes there is danger and sends a team of three **hollow cobras** (page 58) to patrol the halls and a pack of three **hollow jackals** (page 56) to check the unoccupied rooms via the pillars.

**Looping Halls.** The long, turning hall around the lower levels of the Broken Bastion are part of a single extradimensional space. What appears to be two halls with four turns actually overlap each other in space; a character who goes all the way around the hall emerges at the matching point in the other hall, and must go all the way around the second hall to find themselves back where they started. A character unaware that this is an unusual space would expect to be back where they started after four right turns (or four left turns), but would actually have to continue for a total of eight right turns (or eight left turns) to get back where they started. This looping is visible, if disorienting, with *see invisibility* or similar magic.

### THE HOLLOW EREMITES LAIR

The Broken Bastion is the lair of a legendary creature called a hollow eremite. The presence of the unnatural creature warps the region surrounding its lair, creating the following effects.

- ◇ Plants within 500 feet are splotched with dark purple crystal. Some gem-like berries grow that deliver the hollow curse (page 230).
- ◇ Creatures that take a long rest within 1 mile see their dreams in a murky and changing light, as though viewed through dark crystal.

### A. THE COLLAPSED DOME

The jagged wall surrounding the Broken Bastion is all that's left of a transparent dome that once covered it completely. Collapsed into the top of the Broken Bastion is a lens over 60 feet across. Its fragmented parts cast beams of multicolored light all over the interior.

Most of the area within the dome's walls is covered in small, translucent boulders of broken glass and crystal. This is difficult terrain with small gaps where the rubble grows sparse enough for easy movement. A narrow path cleared of rubble leads between the ziggurat's remaining entrance and the gap in the dome near the Sand Citadel.

**Creatures.** Two **hollow jackals** (page 231) and a **hollow cobra** (page 232) patrol the area, turning over stones as they apparently search for something. The PCs can avoid them by passing through the field while the creatures are on the opposite side of the ziggurat, requiring a successful DC 10 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the PCs take note of the creatures' route, requiring a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, they observe that every 20 rounds, the sentry creatures make a complete circuit, leaving a 3-round period during the cycle that they can't see any given part of the field because it is on the opposite side of the ziggurat. If the PCs pass through during that window, they gain advantage on the Dexterity (Stealth) check, as the creatures can only detect them by sound.

**Hazard.** At initiative count 20 each round, a beam of magical light from the fallen lens strikes a randomly chosen creature within the collapsed dome but outside the ziggurat. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be teleported backward 10 feet (in the direction it most recently moved from). If the creature is not native to the Violet Dimension, it also takes 2d6 radiant damage on a failed save.

**Entrances.** Gormothoz strongly encourages the characters to enter through the destroyed **Old Offering Chamber (Area B)** atop the ziggurat's crushed stairs, which he knows contains a pit leading deeper. He believes this way will avoid the numerous defenders he faced trying to get the main entrance to open. Only the *mirror of manifold reflections* or a time-tearing storm (page 64) can render the offering chamber accessible.

Anyone other than a hollow creature entering through the main entrance must speak the password ("downfall" in Aklo, a closely guarded secret). The entrance lies at the far end of the cleared path through the debris. The 15-foot-tall circular door appears in the previously seamless stone and rolls aside when the Aklo password is spoken.

### B. THE OLD OFFERING CHAMBER

The offering chamber is currently caved in by the fallen lens, but it can be temporarily restored by the *mirror of manifold reflections*. When reverted, this is a tall chamber with a 5-foot-radius circular pit in the center. A thick branch like blue-gray coral grows up to the lip of the pit from below. The pit leads down into the **Overgrown Chamber** (below).

### C. OVERGROWN CHAMBER

This chamber is full of blue-gray fibrous plant growths resembling coral. Some grow to the top of the 15-foot ceiling, extending through an opening to the roof; this opening is partially obscured by the mirror and the rest covered by stone rubble. Using the *mirror of manifold reflections* to clear the top of the stairs (as Gormothoz suggested) opens the way.

Characters can climb down with a successful DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check.

**Plant Pods.** The plants' pods are full of water, which characters can recognize with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check. Drinking the water from the pods removes one level of the exhaustion and restores 1d12 hit points. In addition, the creature can see invisible things for 1 hour.

**Circle against Sand-Dwellers.** Directly beneath the pit is a *magic circle* that sand-dwellers can't pass through (unless they are wearing skins from mortal creatures). The Hollow Mother's servants created this circle both to prevent sand-dwellers from going deeper into the ziggurat and to imprison sand-dweller prisoners so that they could be transformed into more hollow jackals. Characters can recognize the *magic circle* and its properties with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check.

#### D. TEMPLE OF THE CRAWLING CHAOS

Ravazel converted this chamber into a temple to Nyarlathotep. Due to the unique *hallow* effect (see below), kas cannot enter the room.

The chamber is dark, as the glowing insects that appear in most chambers avoid this one. The walls are carved with reliefs of a vaguely porcine humanoid offering weapons and armor to a sand-dweller. An inscription in Aklo reads "The Crawling Chaos collects on all debts in one form or another." Small idols of a tentacle-headed humanoid appear on a slab of granite near the center of the room that serves as an altar. A five-pointed star 10 feet across is carved into the floor adjacent to the altar. Characters who see the epithet and symbols can recall basic information about Nyarlathotep with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check or DC 10 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check.

**Creatures.** A **hollow jackal** (page 232) lies motionless in a corner, but it stirs if called upon by a sand-dweller. A **sand-dweller binder** (page 226) named Fiskonel scratches away at a slate with chalk, contemplating new types of magic. If the characters chased off Kamarza from the Bazaar of Visions (page 18), she is here discussing magical theory with Fiskonel.

**Magic Circle.** The star is a *magic circle* attuned to creatures not native to the Violet Dimension. In addition to protecting creatures within from such creatures outside the star, it also protects creatures outside from such creatures held within.

**Hallowed.** The entire room is under a special *hallow* spell, which allows all creatures within to communicate even if they don't share a language. Also, the spell hedges out any ka, who cannot enter the chamber.

**Treasure.** A small crystalline vase is behind the altar. It contains a large volume of sap weighing 3 pounds. The vase of sap functions like a *potion of flying* when applied to the skin. It can be poured over

a character's head as an action or applied carefully with 1 minute of effort. If poured over a creature, the effect lasts 10 minutes before drying and flaking off; if applied carefully, the effect instead lasts 4 hours.

#### E. THE MAIN ENTRANCE

This broad open chamber has a circular seam in the exterior wall when the magical entrance is closed. Stalls line one side of the room. A few contain green sacks. A large door leads west to **Area F**. There is a crystal pillar in the southeast corner of this room leading down to **Area H**.

**Creatures.** Sand-dwellers normally enter through this magical side door near the cleared path. Characters entering here meet substantial resistance. At any given time, ten **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 225) and four **sand-dweller whisperers** (page 225) keep guard here. When left to their own devices, the sand-dwellers here argue about if Ravazel closed the gate intentionally and is trying to hoard the Material Plane's riches and victims.

**Magical Door.** The door appears and rolls aside when activated. In addition to speaking the password, it can be opened from the inside by pressing a hand to its center. **The magical passageway it opens bypasses the looping hallway that seems to go along that wall, since the hallway is an extradimensional space.**

**Treasure.** There are five green sacks containing mineral alchemical ingredients that the sand-dwellers have begun gathering for their next offering to Aumbrask Spire. The ingredients together are worth 1,000 gp.

#### F. BARRACKS

The barracks are composed of dozens of crude cots and piles of soft sand. There is a crystal pillar in the northwest corner of this room leading down to area K.

**Creatures.** At any given time, 1d4 + 3 **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 225) and a **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 225) are resting here. They are fond of arguing over who the PCs are; they have heard reports of any contact the PCs had with sand-dwellers, so if anyone listens in on this conversation (such as through the door connected to the prison) they can learn what the sand-dwellers know and suspect.

**Development.** Combat in this room draws reinforcements from the nearby main entrance. After 3 rounds, four additional sand-dweller stranglers appear. After another 3 rounds, two additional sand-dweller whisperers appear. The others stay at the main entrance in case the sounds of combat are part of a ruse to draw them away.

**Treasure.** The fortress keeps a stockpile of 30 crystalline javelins here, generally to be used only against flying foes like uskval. Buried in five of the piles of sand are pouches of minor treasures that sand-dwellers have hoarded. One pouch contains three small diamonds worth 50 gp, while each of the other four contains 2d10 gp.



## G. PRISON

This chamber is ringed in cells with rolling crystal doors. Two tables dominate the center of the room, one covered in torture implements marked with traces of grainy blood. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check recognizes it as the blood of a sand-dweller (which the characters have almost certainly seen by now from combat). One large door leads to the surrounding tunnel, while the other large door goes into the highly defended main entrance. The doors are partly translucent, allowing creatures to see through them if they stand adjacent to the door and peer in as a free interaction with an object on their turn (or the Use an Object action).

Of the smaller cell doors, only one is locked. The doors can be locked or unlocked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. The key is in the possession of Pangzo the jailer, who kills time arguing in the **Main Entrance** (see above) just outside the prison.

**Prisoner.** One locked cell contains a **sand-dweller strangler** (page 225) prisoner named Jerilan. He has nearly succumbed to the hollow curse and grown delirious from blood loss. If disturbed, he mumbles, "The real power is in the Sand Citadel... Can't be opened without the *Sacred Hexagon*... Taken through the portal..."

**Vacant Cells.** Characters can rest inside the vacant cells without being disturbed as long as no alarm has been raised.

## H. THE OIL BATHS

This room has a stench like metal and bile. Gray oil stands in elevated reservoirs in this chamber. There are four Large reservoirs and one Huge one. Crystal pipes slowly drip more oil from the ceiling and a similar pipe in the floor collects some that seeps out of the reservoirs.

**Creatures.** Four **hollow jackals** (page 231) sleep inside the Large reservoirs. They don't notice intruders unless touched or harmed. If attacked, the creatures emerge immediately to fight. The emerged creatures contain large volumes of the oil in their hollow recesses, which gives them vulnerability to fire damage and creates slippery difficult terrain in every space they leave. If exposed to fire, the oil ignites for 1d4 minutes. Each creature that starts its turn on the burning oil takes 1d6 fire damage and must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or catch fire.

A creature immersed in the oil or imprisoned by the hollow creatures becomes slippery and must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. Every 10 minutes, the creature attempts another save to end the poisoned condition, though this does not clean the creature of the oil. While slippery, they have advantage on saving throws and ability checks to avoid or escape being grappled. The oil dries after 1 hour and can be washed off earlier with water, though this does not on its own end the poisoned condition.



## I. STATUARY CAVERN

The main underground entrance to the fortress, this natural cavern is full of dozens of statues of sand-dwellers and moon-beasts in battle poses. The exterior entrance is barricaded with huge blocks of stone. A creature who examines the statues can deduce with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check that they are creatures that were petrified in combat centuries ago. (They were killed by a spell from the Hollow Mother during her final stand.) This area is usually unoccupied, but sand-dwellers come and go occasionally to burrow for offerings in the attached mines.

**Stolen Spines.** A fallen and broken sand-dweller statue almost completely buries two snapped-off spines of amber encrusted with turquoise. Characters can notice it with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check or Intelligence (Investigation) check. The spines are each worth 500 gp as trade goods. If Gormothoz is with the party, he comments that they look like they were broken off a High Seer's grand crown, like the one Aumbrask Spire's High Seer wore on his back. Any character also recognizes the similarity if they succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check. If returned to Aumbrask Spire, the spines are enough to win a single boon from the High Seer or trade in the bazaar. The spines can be used to reactivate the **Broken Archive** (below). A creature who touches any of the statues must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or partially petrify: their speed is reduced by 10 feet and their feet (or similar extremities) turn to stone. The effect can be removed with *remove curse* or *dispel magic* (DC 15) and fades on its own if the affected creature completes a rest.



## J. BROKEN ARCHIVE

This chamber is dominated by a broken statue of an uskval High Seer with only two jeweled spines (unlike the more traditional number of four). Any character who has seen the High Seer (likely at the end of the previous chapter) notices the similarity; any who succeeds on a DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices the discrepant number of decorative spines. The sculpture constantly weeps a slippery gray fluid from the broken spines that covers the floor and runs into a thin stream down a fissure in the floor near the entrance. It has a metallic stench.

**Creatures.** Six hungry **swarms of bats** attack anyone who enters the area. Four of the swarms resemble black glass due to their infection with the hollow curse. The others avoid coming within 10 feet of the infected ones.

**Oil.** Characters who step on the oil must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone and slip along the floor to the opposite side of the room. A fallen creature becomes slippery for 1 hour or until the oil is washed off with water. While slippery, they have advantage on saving throws and ability checks to avoid or escape being grappled. If exposed to fire, the oil ignites for 1d4 minutes. Each creature that starts its turn on the burning oil takes 1d6 fire damage and must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or catch fire.

**Development.** Replacing the broken spines reactivates the broken archive. Each character within 30 feet when it is replaced feels a telepathic surge of gratitude and regains 4d4 + 4 hit points. Until affected creatures next finish a long rest, they are immune to the hollow curse.

If reactivated, the archive can recall a few cryptic pieces of information. It communicates telepathically. The first thing it says is, "Archives damaged and incomplete."

To most questions, it reports "Record missing." It projects telepathic glimpses of the following:

- ◇ The huge, spider-like Hollow Mother acted as benefactor to the sand-dwellers for a long time. They made her offerings in exchange for magical gifts and the service of some of her hollow jackals.
- ◇ A recent record indicates a human leader named Ravazel took control of the local sand-dweller bands and led the offerings to the Hollow Mother. She visited repeatedly from the Material Plane through the Hollow Mother's Well, deeper in this structure.
- ◇ Not long after that, Ravazel returned as a sand-dweller at the head of an army, including sand-dwellers and a variety of conjured monsters, such as flying polyps and yothans. They fought through the bastion to the Hollow Mother, who died by Ravazel's blade.

## K. LABORATORY

This room has three low tables around the perimeter and a very large central table over 5 feet tall. Jumbles of crystal flasks and ceramic pots are piled beneath them and on top. There is a crystal pillar in the north-west corner of this room leading up to area F.

**Creatures.** Garu's three **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 225) apprentices are here, working on Garu's experiments with enchantment and abjuration. They aren't open to talking and insist intruders are not to be in this sensitive area. They immediately recognize the party as enemies and attack, unless the PCs take pains to disguise themselves.

**Treasure.** The laboratory contains 1,800 gp in alchemist's supplies and 1,200 gp in herbalist's sup-



plies, as well as a crystal flask with a freshly brewed *potion of greater healing*. Three flasks are alchemist's fire, five are acid, and six are basic poison.

## L. EXTRACTION CHAMBER

The largest chamber is dominated by a series of clicking and chugging crystalline pipes carrying a gray oil. About 50 feet below the upper entrance, many of the pipes converge on a bulbous structure that constantly thrums. A crystal lever protrudes from it. This chamber is lined with flat stone platforms at various elevations. The bottom of the shaft is 100 feet below the entrance, though it bends and descends far out of sight beyond that.

**Moving Platforms.** The stone platforms descend or ascend along invisible rails whenever characters turn a corner, to allow access to different stretches of the strange crystal pipes. There is another archway leading into the Hollow Mother's Grave 100 feet down.

**Extractor.** The structure at the center of the chamber pumps the strange oil from deep underground. Flipping the switch reverses the pump and causes oil to drain out of the reservoirs throughout the Broken Bastion but provokes the nearby hollow creatures.

**Creatures.** Two **hollow cobras** (page 232) cling to the pipes and move along them, almost like mono-rails. Among the pipes lurk two **swarms of bats**. They ignore the characters unless the party has destroyed hollow creatures inside the fortress or if they interfere with the extractor or pipes.

## M. THE HOLLOW MOTHER'S GRAVE

The west wall of the chamber is dominated by a 10-foot-tall green crystal. Within the crystal, a spectral woman with exaggerated muscles and peering eyes hangs suspended. When you enter, a telepathic message resonates in your mind, "Whoever you are, help me! I know much... Free me, and I will guide you."

At the heart of the Broken Bastion is the former seat of the Hollow Mother, who fell when Ravazel conquered her lair and magically bound the hollow plague. It has now become the laboratory of Garu the Poisoner Prince, though he is usually in his lair.

**Hollow Mother's Husk.** The blasted husk of the Hollow Mother remains fused to the walls and floor of this vast chamber. There are broken shards driven into the wall in a radial pattern and dark crystal spreads outward from each of them. A character that starts their turn prone or restrained on the remains is exposed to the hollow curse (page 230).

**Pile of Scrolls.** There is a table heaped with papers woven from thick uskval fibers. On top is a letter addressed to Garu, the Poisoner Prince, claiming that there have not yet been reports from Tsang's Imperial City; they will use magic to verify progress once in the Material Plane. A finely wrought scroll

case to one side contains a *spell scroll of remove curse*.

Another scroll describes plans for magically enslaving the Aumbrask Spire uskval after Tsang is secured. Ravazel intends to summon large numbers of uskval to the Material Plane, where they will be weakened, and bind them there. Delivering this to Aumbrask Spire or handing it off to Gormothoz allows him to regain his position of prestige and end his punishment, if the PCs have not done so already.

**Ravazel's Indignation.** The huge green crystal holds an ancient ka called **Ravazel's Indignation** (page 218). She calls out telepathically to characters who enter the chamber, saying, "Your minds are not shaped like those of sand-dwellers... if you are an enemy of Ravazel or her pawn Garu, I can help you. Free me before Garu comes for you!" She doesn't make conversation until she is freed, but if the party asks quick questions while working on breaking the crystal, she makes brief replies (see below). Garu can't hear these telepathic messages or any mental replies the characters make to the ka.

**Development.** Due to his connection to Ravazel's Indignation, **Garu the Poisoner Prince** (page 220) is automatically alerted of intruders in the chamber. He casts *resistance* on himself and then uses his lair powers to emerge in this room 3 rounds after the party accesses this chamber, regardless of where he was in the Broken Bastion.

## PSYCHIC CONDUIT CRYSTAL

*Magic trap*

A creature that touches or strikes the crystal must make a successful DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be overwhelmed with psychic feedback. They become magically charmed by the crystal for 1 round and take 3d6 psychic damage on a failed save, or are not charmed and take half damage on a successful one.

The crystal can be attacked and destroyed (AC 15, 25 hp, vulnerability to thunder damage, resistance to acid, necrotic, and slashing damage, immunity to poison and psychic damage). When the crystal is destroyed, it explodes in a flash of green light and the **ka** floats free. She accompanies them and helps them in combat with the Guide Creature reaction as long as they remain in the Violet Dimension.

## QUESTIONING RAVAZEL'S INDIGNATION

Once Ravazel's Indignation is freed and Garu is defeated, read or paraphrase the following:

The ka that was trapped drifts toward you. "I was once a part of Ravazel, centuries ago; you might call me her Indignation. I am cursed to watch impotently as she destroys my legacy and turns Harge into a wasteland. You must return to the Material Plane to stop her, and you can use the Hollow Mother's Well to get there." She drifts

toward a shattered circular depression in the floor at one end of the chamber. "When you arrive, you should make for Tsang. That empire's Elder Wall was once the only true barrier to Ravazel's hordes, and now history repeats itself as Ravazel once more invades the region. You must gather allies in Tsang to have any hope of fighting back. Beyond that, my knowledge is yours. What can I tell you?"

Ravazel's Indignation can answer on the following topics.

◆ **Why are you more lucid than the others?** "My fame, I think. As I am remembered, so I can remember."

◆ **Why are you here?** She makes a disgusted face and says, "I was captured by uskval hunters and given to Ravazel as a boon. It seems that her hollow creatures are easier to control when a ka such as myself is used as a psychic conduit."

◆ **How can we leave?** "With the eremite dead, the hollow plague will run rampant and you might escape in the chaos. Better to return to your home world. The Hollow Mother's Well should send you back, since that is your home. It once formed a bridge for anyone to travel between worlds, but now it can only banish visitors back to the Material Plane." She gestures to the aperture inside the inner chamber.

◆ **What about Harge and Odran?** "Ravazel will have already conquered Harge and Odran, enslaving some humans and preparing the rest as sacrifices to her alien allies."

◆ **How can we defeat Ravazel?** "Ravazel relies on borrowed power and bound servants. She guards the secrets of her bargains and binding rituals in her Sand Citadel, which can only be entered with a key called the *Sacred Hexagon*. If you can enter and break the source of her power, I believe she and her sand-dwellers can finally be defeated for good."

◆ **What are Ravazel's plans?** "She can't stand that she failed to conquer Tsang. She will try again now that she has a new army. The people of those lands will be taken captive as servants and sacrifices to bring her even more magical power from her alien allies. Beware, for she is cunning and not simply a brute. Her viceroy Garu gloated that he was among sand-dwellers she sent to infiltrate the government of Tsang, and that they will soon control it too."

◆ **Can you help us directly?** "I am ka. I am trapped in this dimension. Some uskval magic might let me briefly answer a summons, if you know the spell. Otherwise, I can only offer advice." If the characters know the spell *conjure ka* (page 239), she agrees to be summoned with it. To cast the spell, they must carry an image of her, and there is a cameo of Ravazel as a triumphant warrior queen here in Garu's hoard, which is a suitable material component for the spell.

When the characters are ready to leave, Ravazel's Indignation makes a point to explain how to defeat Ravazel (above) if the party didn't ask. She then straightens herself sternly and makes a parting request: "If you succeed, I insist that you deny the sand-dweller queen the satisfaction of being remembered as she is; let people remember her only as a faceless monster, and say Ravazel died the mortal founder of Harge."

## N. GARU'S LAIR

This hemispherical chamber is lined with niches and recesses. Some contain glass pots. Others hold thick, spongy scrolls. To one side of the room is a crystal pipe churning with gray oil that seeps down into a low vat full of more of the bubbling oil. It has a noxious metallic odor. At the far end of the chamber is a bell-shaped depression in the glassy floor. It is etched with elaborate patterns, which are marred by several fine cracks.

What was once the Hollow Mother's treasury has now become the lair of **Garu the Poisoner Prince** (page 220). If the party reaches him without alerting him to their presence by destroying hollow creatures, they find him resting in his oil vat. The oil repairs his eremite mount and makes it easier for him to commune with the rest of the hollow plague. If roused, he reviews scrolls of intelligence briefings and magical research. A few hours each day, he departs his lair to check in on his assistants performing his experiments in the **magical laboratory (Area K)**.

When attacked, Garu likes to drag grappled characters into his oil bath and leave them there. He prefers not to fight in this confined space and moves out into the **Hollow Mother's Grave** (above) to move more freely.

**Oil.** A creature immersed in the oil or imprisoned by the hollow creatures becomes slippery and must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. Every 10 minutes, the creature attempts another save to end the poisoned condition, though this does not clean the creature of the oil. While slippery, they have advantage on saving throws and ability checks to avoid or escape being grappled. Moving out of the oil vat requires a successful DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check or the character slips back in and wastes 10 feet of movement. The oil dries after 1 hour and can be washed off earlier with water, though this does not on its own end the poisoned condition.

**Garu's Treasures.** Garu hoards a fire opal pendant on a platinum chain (worth 5,500 gp), an ancient silver Hargi cameo depicting Queen Ravazel as the mortal bandit queen (worth 300 gp), three gold statuettes of Nyarlathotep's various forms (a slim woman holding a fan over her face, a faceless angular man, and a faceless sphinx, each worth 1,500 gp), and an ivory game board with jade pieces (worth 2,000 gp).



The cameo is a suitable material component for the *conjure ka* spell (page 239) once Ravazel's Indignation is freed (see above).

**The Hollow Mother's Well.** This bell-shaped pit has a cracked crystalline overhang a little like the leaf of a pitcher plant. The sand-dwellers have thus far failed to reactivate the full power of the maw since it was nearly destroyed in Ravazel's fight with the Hollow Mother, but it still has great power. Touching the *resonant athame* (page 241) to it reactivates the Well partially and restores the full power of the magic dagger. The Hollow Mother's Well can also be opened temporarily with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check or DC 14 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check to deduce the proper incantation from the runes.

The reactivated well glows with a sputtering blue light and emits a howling noise like a rising wind. Both gradually grow in intensity over 1 minute (drawing the attention of Garu if he has not yet been defeated). At the end of that time, it returns all nearby creatures to their home dimensions. Nearby bat swarms and all PCs who came through the gate at the start of the adventure are banished to the Material Plane.

**Development.** When Garu dies, Ravazel's Indignation calls out to the PCs again if she hasn't yet been freed. She says, "You would stop Ravazel and her army, yes? Free me, and I can help!"

### CHAOS IN THE BROKEN BASTION

Killing Garu the eremite breaks the sand-dwellers' control over much of the hollow plague. A few sand-dwellers have spells or magic items that allow them to retain control over individual hollow creatures, but Ravazel's hollow army is lost to her for as long as she is occupied attacking the Material Plane.

Hollow creatures attack sand-dwellers they stumble upon throughout the Broken Bastion, which creates confusion the player characters can exploit if they wish to explore it further before returning to the Material Plane. However, it also means they can no longer avoid conflict with any hollow creatures by pretending to be sand-dwellers.

### BACK TO THE WORLD

Characters can return to the world by opening the Hollow Mother's Well, or by banishing themselves with the *dimensional athame*. If they prefer to leave under their own power and intend to learn banishment when they level up, any long rest after Garu is defeated is an appropriate time for them to reach level 7. The characters should ultimately find their way home with the knowledge that they can discover and exploit the sand-dwellers' weaknesses if they can find the *Sacred Hexagon*.

## ASHES OF KULARA

Dry winds howl through a burned-out husk of a town that once was Kulara. The square around you remains carved with an intricate hexagon pattern and a stone arch, but it is littered with scattered skeletons and broken debris. The surrounding buildings and the town's wooden palisade are badly damaged and many are partially collapsed. Only the oasis looks much like it did when you left Kulara.

The characters find themselves in the ashes of Kulara Town, among numerous long-dead corpses nearly buried in sand and dried out in the sun and wind. Within a few minutes of the characters arrival, two human women approach, one obviously hurt (Kahari) and the other helping her (Zetena). With a loud whisper, Zetena hisses, "She's bleeding! Please don't run!" They have seen sand-dwellers hollow out a corpse and alter themselves to fit under the skin almost seamlessly, so they are highly suspect of those who appear to be humanoids, but Zetena feels she must take a chance on trusting them given the Kahari's condition.

**The Injured Escapee.** Kahari has been bitten by a yothan and is at 0 hit points but tenuously stable. Any magical healing or a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check helps her enough condition to walk slowly on her own. Zetena thanks the characters. Kahari says, "You should come with us. We have a safer place to rest."

### ZETENA

**Zetena** (human **commoner**, chaotic neutral).

**Traits** Zetena refuses to speak above a whisper and glances around constantly.

**Ideal** Joy.

**Bond** Zetena will do anything to keep Kahari safe.

**Flaw** Zetena doesn't trust anyone but Kahari anymore.

### KAHARI

**Kahari** (human **commoner**, chaotic good).

**Traits** Kahari uses as few words as possible and never takes her eyes off strangers.

**Ideal** Freedom.

**Bond** Kahari wants to help prevent others from being captured but knows she isn't equipped to do it herself.

**Flaw** Kahari takes foolish risks to learn more about what's happened in Kulara.

## THE OASIS

The oasis is several hundred feet from the oasis square where the violet portal opened during the Festival of the Feast, just within visual range. Zetena leads the characters to a little mud hut at the oasis that wasn't there before.

Once safely in their home, Zetena and Kahari are open to talking and offer a place to rest. They insist on speaking in a whisper, however, since sometimes the pool attracts curious yothans. They are recently escaped refugees from ranches on the border between Harge and Odran. The PCs can also ask the pair questions, which they will answer to the best of their abilities. Zetena talks to let Kahari conserve her strength.

◇ **What happened in Odran?** "Those creatures... sand-dwellers I think they're called... swarmed through the region, overrunning the ranch we lived on at the border. We didn't have a chance. Some were killed, some fled into the desert. Others, like us, they put to work. The whole region, even the city of Odran, is under the sand-dwellers' control now. Them and their other... creatures."

◇ **What other creatures were there?** "The sand-dwellers made us work clearing rubble and demolishing buildings and set these fat toad-like creatures to guard us. There were stranger things, too... great, bloated balloons of flesh the size of elephants."

◇ **Where are the mercenaries?** "They're gone. They all marched into the desert just before the sand-dwellers arrived. I don't know where they are now."

◇ **Are all the sand-dwellers still in Odran?** "No, I don't think so. Most of them headed out into the desert. Some spread out into Odran, but the rest... They were marching north, toward Harge. Perhaps the mercenaries died or were captured or betrayed us and are with them now. I can't say."

## CONCLUSION

With a safe place to take a long rest, the PCs can get their bearings and prepare for their journey to the Elder Wall.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of *Chapter 3*, the characters advance to level 7.





# ACT 3: RISE OF REVOLUTION

A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 7th–10th level

## ACT SYNOPSIS

Having completed their excursion and found a way home, the characters find themselves back in ruins of Kulara in the Material Plane. Next, they must journey north across Harge, where they can rescue refugees hiding from the sand-dwellers and seek refuge beyond in Tsang.

The characters must brave the Elder Wall on the border of Tsang, whose garrison has been undermined by sand-dwellers, leading to a desperate fight on the Elder Wall itself. Saving the wall earns the PCs the trust of Colonel Jenu, master of the wall's primary crossing, but it draws an assassination attempt from Emperor Xao's personal troops. The brazen attack on the wall's saviors inspires Jenu and his troops to join a long-simmering rebellion against Xao. The rebels in Yangan are quick to provide their support and reach out to other cities.

While the resistance movement already has a foothold in two other major cities, it is in danger of sand-dweller infiltration. The rebels ask the PCs to hunt down any other sand-dweller impostors ahead of recruitment efforts.

One target city is Fenkai, where one of the magical guilds that rules the city has fallen to sand-dwellers. The PCs must keep the other guilds united and defeat the hidden danger in their midst.

The other city is Anxi, the Threefold City, whose three grand districts are at risk of tearing themselves apart if the sand-dweller sabotage isn't stopped. The PCs must discover how reawakened horrors deep in the city's mines connect to strange changes in the upper-class district's leader and rumors of danger in the docks district.

## PROVING INNOCENCE

At many points in this adventure, the PCs might need to prove that they aren't sand-dweller impostors. In addition to obvious proof, an NPC can be convinced with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. The letter from Harge's government gives advantage on Charisma checks to persuade zoogs, citizens of Harge, and Colonel Jenu. Acts showing trust, kindness, or charity also grant advantage on the Charisma check, and you should consider allowing characters to try again after a failure when they make a significant gesture. An NPC only accepts the *mirror of manifold reflections* as proof if they are given a thorough demonstration of its functioning on disguised and undisguised creatures or if they are a spellcaster and are given a convincing explanation of the mirror's magical properties with

a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check.

## EXPOSING SAND-DWELLERS

Although the characters almost certainly have the *mirror of manifold reflections* (see Act 2) to expose sand-dwellers, going about proving their guilt to others is another matter. Others can be convinced of the mirror's function much as when the characters use it to prove their innocence.

A character can attempt a DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Strength (Athletics) check to pull the skin off a sand-dweller that is incapacitated, grappled, restrained, unaware of the character, or unaware the character is hostile. The character's attempt has advantage if they would have advantage on melee weapon attack rolls against the sand-dweller (such as if the creature is restrained or prone). If the sand-dweller's passive Perception score is above 20 and it isn't incapacitated, use that as the DC instead. If the sand-dweller is in combat, the attempt is only possible if the character is hidden from the sand-dweller or invisible to it. The character can try again if they fail.

A character studying an empty sand-dweller skin who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check gains advantage on attempts to pull the skin off a sand-dweller.

A few select spells interact with sand-dwellers wearing skins differently than true humanoids, usually treating the skin as a worn object. For instance, the spell *telekinesis* can remove a sand-dweller's worn skin if its Strength saving throw fails. If a sand-dweller wearing a skin other than its original humanoid skin is polymorphed and then the polymorph spell or effect ends, the sand-dweller returns to its natural form rather than the shape it had used to fit inside the skin. As a result, the skin it was wearing falls off when the *polymorph* ends. *Sequester* or *disintegrate* cast on a sand-dweller wearing a skin targets the skin first and not the sand-dweller. As an exception to this pattern, however, the sand-dweller's worn skin is immune to the *light* cantrip, which has no effect on the skin if it is being worn. Whether a sand-dweller wears a skin or not, the *banishment* spell sends it to the Violet Dimension permanently, provided the caster concentrates for the full duration. A character can deduce each of these interactions with a successful DC 19 Intelligence (Arcana) check or DC 17 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check.

## GATHERING RESISTANCE

Over the course of this chapter, the PCs can accumulate many different resources and mobilize many allies to fight against the sand-dweller invasion. The resistance that they have organized against the sand-dwellers is represented by resistance points. Resistance points determine how effective the military forces of humanity are against the military forces of the sand-dwellers and their pawns. They will be used in Act 4.

You should track these secretly at first, but once the characters begin collaborating with other organized opponents of the sand-dwellers, you can inform them of their resistance point total to help them understand how much progress they have made. Suitable moments are when they make contact with the refugees in the Zoog Woods, when they earn the trust of Colonel Jenu in the Reverent Empress's Gate, and when consulting with Mother Lien in Fenkai or Zanlan Mithrawen in Anxi.

### PAST ACTIONS

The characters can begin Act 3 with the following resistance points based on their previous actions in Act 1 of *Skin Deep*:

- ◇ 2 resistance points for introducing Lord Killian or Captain Esperia to the Alliance of the Five Towers through Raya Hua in Chapter 1.
- ◇ 3 resistance points for each group of Kularan townsfolk they rescued in Chapter 3 (maximum 9 for all three groups).

### ACT 3

The list below summarizes all methods of gaining resistance points in Act 3; each opportunity is also mentioned in the body of the adventure as it comes up.

#### HARGE

Characters can earn or lose the following resistance points during Chapter 1:

- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for rescuing Hargi refugees from the ruins of Harge.
- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for improving Captain Esperia's relationship with the zoogs.
- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for freeing bandits from sand-dweller corruption and convincing them to fight against the sand-dwellers.
- ◇ Lose 1 resistance point if Captain Ibzu's soldiers had to sacrifice themselves to escort the party inside the Reverent Empress's Gate.

#### REVERENT EMPRESS'S GATE AND YANGAN

Characters can earn or lose the following resistance points during Chapter 2:

- ◇ Gain 8 resistance points for successfully defending the Reverent Empress's Gates.
- ◇ Lose 6 points if the Reverent Empress's Gate is overrun. Gain 2 resistance points for retrieving the *landscape of the syzygy* for Dean Zong.
- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for convincing the governor to support the Five Towers (see page 120-1), or 3 points if he also withholds supplies from the Imperial City.
- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for convincing the people of Yangan to rally behind the Five Towers

#### FENKAI

Characters can earn the following resistance points while dispatched to Fenkai:

- ◇ Gain 2 resistance points for retrieving the scrolls stolen from the Keepers' Guild archives.
- ◇ Gain 2 resistance points for defeating Father Zarthu, or 4 resistance points for taking him alive for questioning.
- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for giving the *ring of Eibon* to Patriarch Cryzonesth, or 2 points for giving it to Dean Zong.
- ◇ Gain up to 3 additional resistance points for rallying supporters in Fenkai (if the PCs went to Fenkai first).

#### ANXI

Track resistance points earned in Anxi separately from the rest. Characters can earn the following resistance points while dispatched to Anxi:

- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for satisfying Lord Ho's demand without ending the emotional urging.
- ◇ Gain 2 resistance points from calming him without removing the emotional influence.
- ◇ Gain 3 resistance points for freeing him from the magical effect.
- ◇ Lose 2 resistance points for killing Lord Ho.
- ◇ Gain 2 resistance points for convincing Governor Izonda to stop the sand-dweller rumormongers in the Sea City, and 2 points for confining them to their ships.
- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for retrieving historical treasures from the tomb and handing them over to the Triumvirate.
- ◇ Gain 1 resistance point for defeating Commander Buransu before he enters the Shattered Well.
- ◇ Gain 3 resistance points for defeating Kowavan the swarm lich, reduced to 1 if he fled rather than dying.
- ◇ Gain up to 3 resistance points for allying supporters in Anxi (if the PCs went to Anxi first)





## CHAPTER 1: NORTHWARD HO!

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 7th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

Long ago, the lands that are now Harge, Odran, and Tsang were invaded by an army of hollow jackals led by Ravazel the Butcher Queen and other sand-dwellers. Tsangese mages and priests of Bastet conjured a magical wall now known as the Elder Wall to stop the army. This bulwark allowed the forces of humanity to defeat Ravazel, and they forced her to retreat to the Violet Dimension.

In the wake of the invasion at the end of Act 1, Ravazel and her sand-dwellers have overrun Odran and much of Harge, thanks in part to sabotage by Duke Odran himself. The treacherous duke ordered Odran's troops away from the cities even as he knew the sand-dweller forces from Kulara would soon be rushing toward them. Out in the desert, Odran's troops suffered a major disadvantage against burrowed sand-dweller ambushes. With their defenders scattered, the towns and the city of Odran itself were quickly conquered.

Some Odranians managed to flee by ship, into the Sleeping Mountains to the west, or into Harge. The sand-dwellers quickly killed any humans willing to fight them and enslaved the rest of the Odranians. They are using the slaves to build ritual spaces suitable for summoning new allied monsters, mostly moon-beasts, formless spawn, and yothans. Most dramatically, conjured flying polyps now pummel the region with relentless sandstorms to spread the desert sands and prevent rain in Harge.

The city of Harge has fallen. Lord Killian led most of the people there into the Zoog Woods to regroup, after which they trekked north to the Elder Wall of Tsang. Captain Esperia remained behind to gather remaining refugees in the Zoog Woods and organize guerrilla strikes against the sand-dwellers.

The number of people the PCs rescued in Act 1 determines how many people of Harge survived. About half of Harge's 8,000 urban residents escaped, plus a number depending on how many Kulara groups the PCs rescued. You should adjust these outcomes to suit the group's preferred tone and which NPCs the

NORTHWARD HO!

players most responded to—the unseen death of a beloved NPC might be unsatisfying to many players. Generally, you should choose NPCs the players showed less interest in being killed first or who would make good sense to be dead given previous events in your campaign.

- ◇ 4 groups rescued: All known NPCs survived. A few guards and several straggler townsfolk died or were captured from Harge city, along with many people outside the city.
- ◇ 3 groups rescued: Dame Zidriel (Act 1 Chapter 1) died valiantly during the retreat from Harge, along with many guards and townsfolk.
- ◇ 2 groups rescued: Harrek Hua (Act 1 Chapter 1) died fending off attacks on the refugees' retreat into the woods.
- ◇ 1 group rescued: Salzarin the arbitor (Act 1 appendix) died creating a distraction for the group as they entered the Reverent Empress's Gate.
- ◇ 0 groups rescued: The refugee caravan was overrun en route to Tsang, and half of the people of Harge and Kulara died, including Salzarin and Master Zin; the only characters who survived known to the heroes are Remedy, the cat cleric of Bastet; Lord Killian; Captain Esperia; and the trader Raya Hua and her daughters.



## CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

This adventure highlights survival and exploration as the PCs learn what has become of the lands they left behind during Act 2. First, the PCs have to make their way past desert monsters to cross the Odranian border with Harge. The sand-dwellers are particularly thick here because they are most comfortable in the desert.

When the party reaches Harge, it is mostly inhabited by influenced humans, a few sand-dwellers, refugees, and plenty of bound monsters. There are more monsters and fewer sand-dwellers in central Harge because the sand-dwellers are mustering forces to attack Tsang. The characters can find Captain Esperia and some other survivors in the Zoog Woods not far from Harge City.

The only hope for help lies in Tsang and its famous Elder Wall, so the characters need to get themselves and any refugees in their care north as quickly and carefully as possible. Eventually the PCs

make it to the Reverent Empress's Gate, where they can cross the border into Tsang. At the border there are camps of monsters in the distance, all readying for the invasion.

## EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If you want to immerse the players more thoroughly in the experience of surviving a monster-ravaged wasteland, add more random encounters to the party's trek across Harge using the appropriate random encounter table (page 259). You might check for random encounters every 8 hours by rolling a d20 and choosing an encounter on a result of 18–20.

## THE RUINS OF KULARA

Kulara consists of empty stone buildings surrounded by wooden skeletons of burned-out houses. The town obviously suffered a serious fire, and there is no sign of any living inhabitants aside from the two in the oasis. All the useful and valuable items were either smashed or stolen by greedy sand-dwellers. Sandstorms have already begun to bury some of the dilapidated buildings, and drifting sands reveal dried corpses.

Nearly all the mundane humanoids remaining in Kulara were killed when the ritual completed and the sand-dwellers poured forth. The sand-dwellers spread out north to take Harge and south to solidify control of Odran, and neither group has returned. Eventually, a few refugees who escaped sand-dweller slave camps took refuge in the empty buildings, but they avoid the PCs. The chapel of Bastet was a target of especially thorough vandalism. Every holy symbol, icon, and *Elder Sign* in the stone structure has been carefully defaced.

## HARGE OVERRUN

Supernatural sandstorms blown by the sand-dwellers' new flying polyp allies ravage Harge. In the short time the heroes have been gone, sand has already begun to accumulate in Harge's pasture. The sands of Odran have crossed the Red River and now extend dozens of miles north to Harge City.

## THE ELDER WALL OF TSANG

When the Elder Wall's power to hedge out alien monsters went unneeded for centuries, the grand structure fell into disrepair. It was long neglected as a useless relic until a century ago during the reign of Emperor Xao's great-grandmother, the Reverent Empress. She had the wall restored as a part of her initiative to buoy Tsang's national spirit by revitaliz-



ing Tsangese art and architecture. The current Xao honors his matriarch's memory only in his obsession with the occult. Although the troops on the wall are passably equipped and the wall was maintained within the past couple decades, Tsang's army never truly expected they would need to fight off a magical invasion again. They take comfort in the legends of the past as proof that they will remain protected and effective but are nonetheless demoralized by the horrors they can see just south of the wall.

### THE REVERENT EMPRESS'S GATE

The primary point of access into Harge, and thus the site that adventurers must travel to, is the Reverent Empress's Gate toward the western end of the wall. Colonel Jenu manages the Reverent Empress's Gate and the surrounding span of the Elder Wall; such characters as Raya Hua, Lord Killian, and Captain Esperia know him as a good leader.

## SANDSTORMS

The sand-dwellers' flying polyp allies constantly churn the air in Harge. They use their weather control powers to blow desert sand from southern Odran north across Harge to make it more comfortable for the sand-dwellers. Anywhere the PCs go in Odran and Harge, they encounter a sandstorm for 1d4 hours every other day.

Any characters outside when a sandstorm arises can see the sandstorm approaching with a **flying polyp** (SPCM 318) with one Multi-Dimensional Body bobbing on the wind when it is over half a mile away. The monster is too far away to be fought during these sightings but rolls along with the storm front for a minute or two, popping in and out of visibility, before silently teleporting away shortly before the storm overtakes the party.

A sandstorm lightly conceals things within 50 feet and heavily conceals things farther than 100 feet. The strong winds give disadvantage to ranged attacks. Creatures who fly but can't hover treat the wind as difficult terrain and must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check at the end of their turn each round or fall to the ground. Creatures that can hover treat the wind as difficult terrain but have no risk of falling. Creatures that start their turn in the sandstorm must either cover their mouths or must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or have their speed reduced by 10 feet until the start of their next turn; creatures who fail this save also cough loudly during their turn, potentially spoiling attempts at stealth or otherwise drawing attention. Creatures that don't breathe or have a burrowing speed automatically succeed.

Characters traveling overland in a sandstorm risk getting lost and damaging their lungs. Check for the storm slowing their progress every hour. To protect their lungs, characters can cover their mouths with cloth; if the players don't think of it, a character can

succeed on a DC 8 Wisdom (Survival) check to come up with this solution. Characters who don't cover their mouths must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour or gain one level of exhaustion. The thick foliage of the Zoog Woods protect against the brunt of the storms, so creatures in the relative safety of the woods must only make a single check per sandstorm to avoid exhaustion, and aren't at further risk of getting lost due to the sandstorm.

To keep from being lost in the open hills and fields during a sandstorm, the navigator makes a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check when they first encounter the sandstorm to avoid getting turned around in the thick sand. On a failed check, the group goes off course and travels an hour in the wrong direction. They can retry a failed check and return to their point of deviation with a successful check. The DC drops to 7 after the sandstorm clears up.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The party begins this adventure having just returned from the Violet Dimension, likely in the company of the refugees Zetena and Kahari in the ruins of Kulara. Their hut is hidden amid the foliage in Kulara's oasis, a place that the sand-dwellers tend to avoid. As soon as the party has finished their long rest, Zetena and Kahari leave to gather food and water. Kahari returns first, eager to ask them about what has happened before they must set out. She says, "Now you've had a rest, what's your story?" She eagerly asks brief follow-up questions, then says, "There should be enough water here for you to make it to Harge or the Zoog Woods, whichever you intend to pass through.

Kahari has responses to the following.

- ◇ **Where should we go?** "I'd go cross the Elder Wall. Said to be magic—no monsters on the other side. Main way in's a big gate north on the Foothill Road." She points northeast, in the direction of one of the roads leading away from the oasis. "Followin' the road will be fastest, but sand-dwellers might spot ye. The Zoog Woods run its length, and ye might go unseen there if ye don' mind goin' slow, but it's supposed to be cursed with monsters or somethin'."
- ◇ **We intend to stay awhile.** "Sorry, but ye need to go. Zetena says a group's too much of a risk of discovery."
- ◇ **Come with us?** She clutches at her arm and looks away. "I would but... Zetena won' go. I can' leave her."

**Development.** If the characters wait for Zetena, she hands them each a day's rations gathered from the ruins and says, "Thank you again, but now you should be off quickly. Monsters can come by at any time, and the sooner you go the less risk you'll draw them here." Zetena can be convinced to travel

with the group with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) check. Recounting the party's exploits in a convincing enough manner to get her to fully trust them from that evidence requires a successful DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check.

## ZETENA

**Zetena** (human **commoner**, chaotic neutral).

**Traits** Zetena refuses to speak above a whisper and glances around constantly.

**Ideal** Joy.

**Bond** Zetena will do anything to keep Kahari safe.

**Flaw** Zetena doesn't trust anyone but Kahari anymore.

## KAHARI

**Kahari** (human **commoner**, chaotic good).

**Traits** Kahari uses as few words as possible and never takes her eyes off strangers.

**Ideal** Freedom.

**Bond** Kahari wants to help prevent others from being captured but knows she isn't equipped to do it herself.

**Flaw** Kahari takes foolish risks to learn more about what's happened.

## LEAVING KULARA

When the party leaves the hut, they are in Kulara's oasis. The road to the northwest leads to the Red River and the Foothill Road. If they left immediately, the oasis is empty.

**Sleepy Yothans.** If the party lingered after Zetena urged them to go, some yothan allies of the sand-dwellers have come to the oasis. Resting nearly submerged in the water are two **yothan designers** (SPCM 401). The Wisdom (Perception) DC to spot the yothans is 13. They are sleeping, so they don't benefit from their Keen Sight and have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks. A successful DC 9 group Dexterity (Stealth) avoids waking them.

**Navigating to Tsang.** Characters know that the fastest way to Tsang is north through Harge, by way of Harge city, to the fortified entrance called the Reverent Empress's Gate. The most direct route is the Foothill Road, which runs north from Harge along the edge of the mountain foothills covered by the Zoog Woods.

There are two routes from Kulara to Harge: taking the eldritch tunnel under the Church of the Sleeper or crossing the Red River. Taking the tunnel shaves 17 miles off the trip but might be dangerous if the party never defeated the formless spawn in Act 1.

### ROUTE A. CHURCH OF THE SLEEPER

The Church of the Sleeper remains intact aside from minor fire damage to the roof. The interior contains

five dried-out human skins (not of anyone the characters recognize). The eldritch tunnel beneath it is open.

**Creature.** If the characters did not destroy the **formless spawn** (SPCM 321) in **Act 1 Chapter 3**, it continues to defend the tunnel (though it can't go beyond the church basement or Harge catacombs). The party can avoid it if they succeed on a DC 11 group Dexterity (Stealth) check.

## DESPERATE INSIGHT AND ELDRITCH SENSITIVITY

Characters with the Desperate Insight or Eldritch Sensitivity background features find constant signs of otherworldly influences everywhere they go in Odran and along the road north.

### ROUTE B. ACROSS THE RED RIVER

Crossing from Odran into Kulara by conventional means requires crossing the Red River, which is 16 miles from Kulara (and another 11 miles from Harge). Both banks of the wide river are green with shrubbery and grass. The river itself is about 150 feet across and the current is strong, with frequent rocks. Swimming requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check each round to avoid being pushed underwater. Anyone swimming is pulled 30 feet east each round. A character who fails twice in a row hits a rock, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage, and they can use their reaction to grab on. A character who fails a third time or who falls unconscious washes onto the southern shore.

The only bridge across the Red River sits on the main road between Kulara and Harge. It is a low, wide wooden bridge. The worn earthen road is largely blown over with drifting sand, making it no easier to traverse than the surrounding sand.

**Creatures.** The ambushers are four **sand-dwellers stranglers** (page 249), a **sand-dweller binder** (page 251), and a **sand-dweller slasher** (page 252). Although they hate the river's fresh water, they know it is sure to attract desperate humans. They wait, burrowed just under the sand 60 feet in front of the bridge to head off creatures attempting to cross. Generally, characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 14 or lower are surprised by the ambushers who emerge from the sand all around the party. During the first round of combat, one strangler makes a signal by blowing on a large horn. If they hear anyone trying to swim, they emerge and split up to try to capture the creature as they cross.

**Pursuit.** After 5 rounds of combat or of swimming across the river, a rising cloud of dust to the southeast makes clear that the characters are not far from more sand-dwellers attracted by the commotion. They can escape pursuit with effort, including a successful DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check to pull ahead or Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide. If they have mounts, they can spur their mounts ahead



with a successful DC 11 group Charisma (Animal Handling) check. If they fail, another group of 10 **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) riding **axe beaks** catches up with them after 1 minute. Since the sand-dwellers control the axe beaks, the axe beaks don't attack unless they are attacked first. The axe beaks can wade across the river, but if they do the sand-dwellers get wet and have disadvantage for 4 rounds as they dry. Each axe beak flees when its sand-dweller rider is slain.

**Beyond the Bridge.** As they move beyond the bridge, the party can see the ruins of Harge city in the distance.

## HARGE CITY RUINS

Read or paraphrase the following when the party approaches within visual range of Harge:

The city of Harge smolders in several places, and even from a distance its extensive damage is obvious. The south-facing city wall has collapsed on one side, its stone foundation undermined from below. Many stone buildings are cracked and broken open. Many wooden structures are scorched and collapsed.

Characters who come overland arrive in **South Harge** (below). Characters who come via the eldritch tunnel in Kulara arrive in the **Temple Street catacombs** (next section). The city is occupied by a skeleton crew of sand-dwellers and their moon-beast allies, whom the party is likely to encounter only once or twice unless they spend more than a day in the city.

### BYPASSING THE CITY

Travelers coming from the south can avoid the city ruins by going around to the west into the **Zoog Woods** (page 103) or east across the open plains to the **Foothill Road** (page 106).

### SOUTH HARGE

The southern stretch of Harge is largely empty. Sand-dwellers don't expect trouble from this direction, and they have had the longest to clear it out. Characters can rest in ruins here without being disturbed, but there's not much useful left in the burned-out buildings either. Continuing into Harge takes characters to the **Old City** (page 102).

### TEMPLE STREET CATACOMBS

The tunnel connecting the Temple Street catacombs to Kulara remains intact. The catacombs are greatly disheveled. Numerous bodies are scattered on the stone floor, their bones showing teeth marks. Heading up the stairs leads to **Temple Street** (below).

**Creatures.** The catacombs are inhabited by ghouls, no longer dissuaded by humans since all have been driven out. There are at least two **crypt**



**lurkers** (SPCM 325).

One named Garulen is open to talking if characters approach without weapons drawn or succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

If any ghouls from Act 1 Chapter 1 survived, they are also here. Unless the PCs secured their freedom, the ghouls are initially hostile to them, and the Charisma check DC to keep them from attacking is 15. If characters secured their freedom, the ghouls are friendly.

The ghouls know that there's a small contingent of sand-dwellers and moon-beasts in the city, as well as zoogs scavenging from the ruins. If the PCs ask about any other threats in the area and succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check, the ghouls also mention that something is hiding in the "old split-log" (the Fallen Log inn, page 102).

### GARULEN

**Garulen** (ghoul **crypt lurker**, chaotic evil).

**Traits** Garulen uses big words and talks down to anyone who seems uneducated.

**Ideal** Tradition.

**Bond** Garulen wishes to learn history that has been forgotten.

**Flaw** Garulen is too curious for his own safety.

## TEMPLE STREET

Read or paraphrase the following when the party approaches within visual range of Harge:

Many of the stone buildings along Temple Street have at least one collapsed wall, as if the area was hit by an earthquake. Thin plumes of smoke rise in the sky in all directions. To the south, a section of the city wall has collapsed. Every decoration outside every temple is smashed or defaced. The few wooden chapels are blackened husks.

**Investigating the Temples.** The temple of Zo-Kalar, adjacent to the catacombs, has a substantial sand dune beginning to form at a hole in the wall. The inner part of the sand has the words “Fallen Log” written in large letters. A character can find cat paw prints in the sand with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Investigation) check. The temples have been looted of non-sacred valuables. The intruders, other than the ghouls, avoid this area superstitiously.

## OLD CITY

The fine town houses and stone structures surrounding Temple Street have been ransacked and burned. The Opening Eye Society obviously exploded from within, as there are pieces of the tower lodged in all the surrounding buildings. All that remains where that tower once stood is a ring of scorched foundation stones.

**Creatures.** As the characters move through the Old City beyond Temple Street, they pass a team of four **zoog trappers** (SPCM 403) led by a **grove keeper** (SPCM 403) named Tail-Taker. The zoogs are sneaking through the ruins, hunting for shiny baubles, fine woodwork, and other items to take back to their forest. Characters can spot them with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. The zoogs are defensive and quick to attack humanoids who notice them, and don’t identify themselves as subjects of Lord Killian. Characters can deduce that the zoogs are waiting for the characters to say something specific with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check. If the zoogs are seriously injured and can’t get away, they attempt to bribe the characters with information: they promise to tell the characters where to find other humans if the party lets them live. A zoog who is defeated or who realizes the characters are human is cautious with their words but can explain that people from the city took refuge in the woods and that some cats have congregated in the split-log tavern.

**Treasure.** Tail-taker has looted a fine wooden statue of a dancing woman (worth 25 gp), three silver rings set with topaz (each worth 75 gp), and a *greater potion of healing*.

## TAIL-TAKER

**Tail-Taker** (zoog grove keeper, chaotic neutral).

**Traits** Tail-Taker likes to study wooden items and muses over where the wood might have originated.

**Ideal** Intelligence.

**Bond** Tail-Taker wants to show up humans and sand-dwellers alike, as she resents them for intruding upon her forest.

**Flaw** Tail-Taker distrusts cats and anyone allied with them.

## THE FALLEN LOG

The only building that remains inhabited by the citizens of Harge is the Fallen Log inn at the edge of the Old City. The zoog proprietor Bramble has partially collapsed the surrounding buildings and blocked the main entrance with a fallen wall to dissuade nosy sand-dwellers. Characters can tell that the Fallen Log is surprisingly intact given the damage to the surrounding buildings with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check and can hear low voices inside with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

**Traps.** Bramble rigged up the side entrance with a concussion trap.

## CONCUSSION TRAP

### *Mechanical Trap*

Beams and rubble are precariously balanced to swing into the head of a creature that triggers the trap.

With a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character can spot the dangerously loose log. A search of the floor accompanied by a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals teetering rubble that would dislodge the log if moved. The same check made while inspecting the ceiling notes the log’s poor support. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the log prevents the trap from activating, but the character must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity check to avoid triggering the trap in the process.

A Medium or larger creature that enters this trap’s 5-foot-square area must attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 6d6 bludgeoning damage and rolling a Constitution saving throw on a failed Dexterity save, or taking half as much damage and not needing another save on a successful Dexterity save. If the bludgeoning damage is entirely negated or the creature has no brain, the Constitution save automatically succeeds. Otherwise, the creature falls unconscious on a failed save, or becomes stunned for 1 round on a successful one. A creature knocked unconscious must make a new Constitution save at the end of each of its turns, regaining consciousness on a success.

**Creatures.** Bramble has offered refuge to a dozen of the **cats** from Kulara’s temple of Bastet. The cat



priest **Remedy** (see page 243) is among them. Remedy's **acolyte** Braferti keeps to one corner unless needed. Braferti defers to Remedy and primarily speaks if Remedy needs translation for party members who don't speak Cat. In addition, six local human **commoners** have stumbled in over the past few days as they escaped from other hiding places. The most outspoken of the humans is a cobbler named Salthusius. The emergent leader of the little band of survivors is Bramble (**commoner**). She waits until the characters have dealt with the trap before climbing a beam overhead and shouting down to them, "Hey! You was here about a murder, eh? Is that really you? No sand-monsters under your skin? Prove it." She insists that the PCs prove they aren't sand-dwellers before entering the establishment. If not satisfied, she drops heavy items on them from the rafters but flees if attacked. If Remedy had any magical contact from PCs since they went to the Violet Dimension, she believes them and convinces Bramble to trust them.

**Development.** Once convinced the characters are mortals, Bramble says, "The Fallen Log is still open for business, but some of my guests are restless and eager to get out of town. If you're heading to the woods..." She spits. "They'd likely appreciate you taking them along." Bramble will not leave her tavern unless it is discovered and destroyed by sand-dwellers.

Characters can safely rest here without being disturbed. Bramble insists on charging her usual rates for services and rooms (see Act 1).

Salthusius offers to reward the characters with 3 days' food and 50 gp if they escort the refugees to reunite with Hargi soldiers in the Zoog Woods. The refugees flee from combat. They leave the party when they reach the refugee camp in the Zoog Woods or if the characters head to the open road.

Before the characters leave, Remedy approaches with Braferti in tow and makes them an offer:

"My acolyte and I would accompany you to Tsang. You can enter via the Reverent Empress's Gate in the Elder Wall, and together we can warn the people of all we have learned about this enemy."

Remedy is a **priest** (see page 243) and Braferti is an **acolyte**, but they avoid danger in combat. They cast what spells are relevant from a distance. They leave the party when they reach the Reverent Empress's Gate.

## LEAVING HARGE

The following encounter happens as the party leaves Harge, whether west toward the **Zoog Woods** (page 103) or north toward the **Hippodrome** (next section).

**Creatures.** A moon-priest of Nyarlathotep (SPCM 348) leads a patrol of three **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) through the streets at a casual pace, looking for human refugees to capture and interesting items to steal. They are greedy and overcon-

fident but flee if three of them are killed. Characters can avoid their notice with a successful DC 11 group Dexterity (Stealth) check.

**Treasure.** The moon-priest carries a *wand of web* and wears a silver holy symbol of Nyarlathotep. Each sand-dweller carries a bag, one with 46 gp, one with 38 gp, and one with 70 pp.

## SALTHUSIUS

**Salthusius** (human **commoner**, neutral good) ended up stranded in the ruins of Harge along with the other refugees after they thought to hunker down in their homes and were forced to flee invading sand-dwellers.

**Traits** When unsure how to act, Salthusius reverts to talking to people like customers: overly chipper and accommodating.

**Ideal** Comfort.

**Bond** Salthusius built his business up himself and hates to leave it.

**Flaw** Salthusius overlooks the risks and downsides of his actions.

## BRAMBLE

**Bramble** (**zoog trapper**, chaotic neutral) isn't interested in going anywhere. She has proven she can evade sand-dwellers here. Although warned in time to flee Harge with most of the citizens, Bramble chose to stay because she remains estranged from the zoogs of the Zoog Woods.

**Traits** Bramble paces as she talks. She habitually snacks on bugs she carries in a pouch.

**Ideal** Aspiration.

**Bond** Bramble is deadly serious about the safety of her employees and guests.

**Flaw** Bramble says whatever she feels without thinking, which resulted in her being driven out of the Zoog Woods.

## THE HIPPODROME

At the north edge of Harge's Old City, the open streets and plaza around the Hippodrome are strewn with broken wagons and barrels. To get to the Reverent Empress's Gate from the north edge of the city, the characters can either take the **Foothill Road** (page 106) north or cut through the thick **Zoog Woods** (page 103) along a parallel route.

**Investigation.** Characters who search the Hippodrome for 1d4 hours and succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check can find 5 sets of fine studded leather barding as well as 10 days of trail rations hidden under slashed tents and broken crates in what was once a grand market before the city was overrun.

## ZOOG WOODS

The Zoog Woods are enchanted and home to a variety of magical creatures aside from the zoogs. Most

of the trees are cedars and aspen. Birds chirp and leaves rustle in the distance at all hours of the day and night. The wind plays occasional melodies on the tree boughs almost like a lyre. The brush and uneven ground make most of the forest difficult terrain.

**Illumination.** During the day, the thick canopy casts most of the forest floor in dim light. At night, much of the forest remains dimly lit thanks to a scattering of glowing mushrooms.

**The Song of the Wood.** A magical music like pan pipes plays through the Zoog Woods during storms (including magical sandstorms). Humanoids who have never lived in the woods, or have lived there for less than a month must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw when a storm begins or become incapacitated until the storm ends or until they take damage or witness an ally take damage.

## EVACUATION ROUTE

The retreating people of Harge were in a large enough group that their trail of trampled and broken plants is obvious and easy to follow along the evacuation route. Characters following this route pass several dead bodies in the outer edges of the forest: an owlbear fallen on two clawed humanoid skeletons, a dead unicorn with its horn sawed off, and a burned-out treant fallen near a rotting dinosaur-like yothan.

**Traps.** To fend off the rapacious hordes of sand-dwellers, the Zoog Woods have been outfitted with even more traps than usual for a forest under zoog protection. To make it to the clearing where the refugees are hidden, the characters must make it past three deviously placed traps around the way up the rise to the refugees' clearing.

- ◇ First, a **poisoned hidden spiked pit** has been dug at the base of the only path up a steep ridge.
- ◇ Second, a **rolling sphere** has been concealed in the brush at the top of the path.
- ◇ Third, a pinning deadfall trap (below) has been rigged just beyond the rolling sphere toward the refugee camp.

## PINNING DEADFALL TRAP

### Mechanical Trap

A hunk of dead tree trunk dangles precariously overhead, disguised as just another tree in the canopy. It jiggles loose and falls when a creature triggers the trap.

With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character can spot the looming deadfall as different from the other trees. A search of the ground accompanied by a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers that a seemingly ordinary vine is nearly taut. This is a ruse; the true trigger is a vine a few feet farther that requires a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find. The same check made while inspecting the canopy notes

a taut vine obscured in the foliage leading down from the deadfall. Carefully severing the true vine with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using any cutting tool prevents the trap from activating, as does carefully stepping over the correct vine.

Any creature that enters this trap's 10-foot-square area must attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 6d6 bludgeoning damage and becoming prone and restrained on a failed Dexterity save, or taking half as much damage and moving to the nearest open space on a successful one. A restrained creature can be freed with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check as an action. The deadfall can be attacked and destroyed (AC 15, 25 hp, vulnerability to fire damage, resistance to bludgeoning damage, immunity to poison and psychic damage).

**Creatures.** Two **grove keepers** (SPCM 403) and two **zoog trappers** (SPCM 403) keep watch over the traps. The zoogs ambush the characters after they trigger a trap or when they approach within 300 feet of the refugee camp. They can be evaded with a successful DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. Characters who announce they are working with Lord Killian are warned to stop by the leader, Knotwood. He demands they prove they aren't sand-dwellers.

## KNOTWOOD

**Knotwood** (zoog grove keeper, lawful neutral).

**Traits** Knotwood strokes his paws with his facial tentacles when he's concerned or thinking.

**Ideal** Stability.

**Bond** Knotwood takes the treaty with Harge very seriously, but he resents how it is being carried out and wants the humans gone.

**Flaw** Knotwood hates being told what to do so much he does the opposite out of spite.

## THE REFUGEE CAMP

The refugee camp is in a clearing adjacent to a zoog village. There are many tents and simple wooden lean-tos. The zoogs dwell in the hollows of dozens of gnarly old trees.

The zoogs of the wood have a longstanding contract with the council of Harge: humans of Harge give offerings of gems and minor magic items every year at the end of summer in exchange for a promise of protection (and limited logging rights). In return, the zoogs won't hurt any Harge citizen who enters the woods but will actively protect them from danger (until now, simply the hazards of the woods). Lord Killian invoked this treaty to lead his refugees into the forest.

**Hargi Refugees.** While most of Harge's people have since evacuated to Tsang with Lord Killian, some linger here under the protection of **Captain Esperia** (Act 1, page 199) and a small contingent of her city guards. They engage in guerrilla warfare against the sand-dwellers.



When she first sees the characters, Captain Esperia raises a hand and glares sternly. She demands, “Prove that you have not been replaced by sand-dwellers! Each of you, tell me something impostors wouldn’t know.”

If the characters don’t present compelling proof, they can still persuade her to believe them by succeeding on either a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check or a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check. If they fail, Esperia insists they leave but can’t bring herself to kill them for fear that she might be wrong about them being impostors.

Once she is satisfied, Esperia breathes an obvious sigh of relief and grins. She says, “I’m delighted you survived. Many did not. Lord Killian will want to speak with you as soon as possible. You can find him with most of the Hargi refugees in Tsang.”

She can answer any questions the characters have about the fate of Harge as mentioned in the **Chapter Background** (page 97), and she also wants to hear what happened to them (she last saw them before they disappeared into the Violet Dimension at the end of Act 1). She offers specific replies on the following topics:

- ◇ **Come with us to Tsang.** “I can’t. I know this region far better than our enemies. Our raids are a good opportunity to monitor the enemy and keep them from consolidating their resources.”
- ◇ **We’ll stay and help you.** “We already have too many people here.” She gestures at the zoogs glaring from the surrounding trees. “You can do more good by getting to Tsang as fast as possible and assisting Lord Killian and Colonel Jenu. You’re the only ones who’ve faced these creatures at length and succeeded, and they will need all the help they can get for their next move.”
- ◇ **The zoogs are getting upset by your presence.** She shakes her head. “They are annoyed, but they will keep up their end of the treaty. It’s an unfortunate necessity that we impose on our zoog allies as much as we can for now.”
- ◇ **Perhaps you could accommodate the zoogs better?** Captain Esperia can be convinced to take any of the following actions to reduce the bother for the zoogs, with the listed DC for ability checks to persuade her: make longer, more aggressive raids outside the woods (DC 17) or send some refugees with the PCs to Tsang (DC 13).



When the characters are finished, Esperia says, “You should head north along the Foothill Road to the Reverent Empress’s Gate. You can cross the Elder Wall into Tsang there, and Lord Killian can vouch for you to the guards. You should ask for Colonel Jenu by name at the gate. He has a reputation as a just leader. When there was famine in Harge, he was generous with those who sought relief at his gate.”

**Development.** Before leaving, the party can rest for a few days and potentially acquire alchemical items or magic items from zoog traders. The refugees can also serve as a source of new characters or services the PCs need.

**Items.** The zoogs have the following items for sale. If the party convinced Captain Esperia to accommodate the zoogs better, they give the party a 30% discount in thanks.

Item	Price
Antitoxin	50 gp
Basic poison	75 gp
<i>Dust of disappearance</i>	450 gp
<i>Potion of Healing</i>	50 gp
<i>Potion of Greater Healing</i>	200 gp
<i>Potion of Stone Giant Strength</i>	1,000 gp

## RESISTANCE POINTS

Delivering refugees here from the ruins of Harge earns 1 resistance point.

Improving Captain Esperia’s relationship with the zoogs also earns 1 resistance point.

## TRAVEL NORTH

Whether the party spends time in the Zoog Woods, Harge City, or avoids both, they must travel due north through Harge to reach the Reverent Empress’s Gate and enter Tsang. They can travel openly along the road to move quickly at greater risk, or they can travel under the cover of trees in the Zoog Woods at less risk but at the cost of speed.

The trip from southern Harge to the Reverent Empress’s Gate is 141 miles. This equates to about 5 days of travel overland at a fast pace of 30 miles per day, 7 days at a medium pace, and 9 days at a slow pace. The party can save at least 1 day by performing a forced march or securing horses. Going through the woods means contending with difficult terrain that doubles the travel time for the portion of the trek spent in the foliage.

## OPTION A. TRAVELING THROUGH THE FOREST

The Zoog Woods has the features described on page 103. Characters can find shortcuts through the difficult terrain in the woods with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check and can encourage steeds

to avoid the roughest patches with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. A success with either check improves their pace and allows the whole group to hustle 1 hour each day without gaining a level of exhaustion.

### OPTION B. TRAVELING THE FOOTHILL ROAD

The open road is the fastest route directly to Tsang, but it's exposed. The road has a few stretches of flat stone paving, but most of it is a mix of well-worn dirt and gravel. To the west crests the high branches of the Zoog Woods, varying from a few feet to a quarter mile away from the road. To the east roll gentle hills and the occasional copse of scraggly trees.

**Sustenance.** Finding water during the trek is a DC 8 Wisdom (Survival) check. Generally, there is a small water source within 1 hour of any given point. Unless they roll at least DC 15, the water is mildly infectious and characters must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain the poisoned condition for 8 hours. They can attempt a new save at the end of every hour to remove the condition.

**Encounters.** Characters experience the following encounters as they travel on the road. Resting in sight of the road risks an encounter overnight unless characters find careful cover such as a ghoulish digging the party a deep burrow behind brush. A successful DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check also allows the party to effectively make use of nearby brush to camouflage a campsite. Some encounters occur only if the characters are in the open, while others occur only if the characters stick to the woods.

### BURNED WAGON (OPEN)

Not far along the road north from Harge city sits a burned-out husk of a wagon with two horse skeletons still harnessed to it. The bits of dried meat and marks in the bones indicate being eaten by large teeth. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check allows a character to note that nearby tracks match the feet of a yothan and the yothan's prints lead north along the road.

### ZOOG TRAPS (WOODS)

Scattered along the edges of the Zoog Woods are several broken pits near a low cliff which is only passable by heading out onto the road or by ascending a low pass. Each pit contains dried sand-dweller bodies. The pass is a 10-foot-wide natural ramp that rises 30 feet. Each character can climb the cliff face with a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check. One open pit partially obstructs the base of the ramp but there is a 5-foot-wide ledge around it. This pit also contains the corpses of a horse and heavily armored male human rider impaled together.

**Creatures.** Two **Mythos ghaists** (SPCM 323) are inside the pit, feeding on the bodies.

They climb the spikes to attack if they are disturbed.

**Trap.** There are three more **hidden spiked pit traps** spread evenly around the pit. One is part of the ramp to the west, and another is south, just before the open pit with the horse corpse. The third is just beyond the pit to the north. The lower pit is poorly hidden, and the DC to find it is merely 10. The higher pit on the ramp is cleverly disguised with a thin layer of magically sculpted rock, and the DC to find it is 20. The higher ramp can be avoided only by hopping 5 feet past the lip of the adjacent open pit.

**Treasure.** The impaled rider carries a gleaming *+1 longsword* strapped to his back. He carries a pouch of 120 gp.

### WILD HORSES (OPEN)

As the party makes its way north from Harge city, either across the plains or on the Foothill Road, they encounter creatures in a little gully between low hills. Long grasses grow here that lightly obscure small creatures.

**Creatures.** Six unattended **horses** roam the plains looking for thick grass to forage. The horses





are skittish but also hungry, making them indifferent to humanoids and beasts that aren't predators. Characters can approach the horses with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Animal Handling) or DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check. Roping a horse for use requires either winning a Strength (Athletics) contest with the horse or a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. The horses escaped without their riders from sand-dweller attackers (which characters can learn by questioning them with the *Speak with Animals* spell).

**Development.** The horses are being hunted by a **yothan designer** (SPCM 401) and a **yothan warrior** (SPCM 401) interested in capturing them to experiment upon them. Unless the PCs take special care not to attract attention, the yothans discover them and wait for an advantageous moment to strike.

**Treasure.** Half of the horses have saddles, and one has a pack saddle. The pack saddle includes a bag of 40 gp, a full waterskin, 12 days of trail rations, and a dozen hard candies. Offering a candy to any horse gives advantage on the ability check to interact with them. The yothan warrior wears armor that can be repurposed as splint horse barding. The yothan designer wears an oversize silver diadem with a hexagonal amber set in the front (worth 500 gp) and has an herbalism kit in a satchel.

## THE HIGHWAYMEN (BOTH ROUTES)

There is a tight bend where the characters must pass between a few rugged hills. One side, up a 20-foot-high steep slope, is overgrown with trees, while the other side has just a few scraggly bushes. The slope is so steep it requires either a successful DC 6 Strength (Athletics) check to climb or a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to walk up.

**Creatures.** The characters are attacked by four **bandits** led by a **bandit captain**, a **sand-dweller strangler** (page 249) disguised as a bandit captain (with the same actions until revealed as a sand-dweller), and a **gladiator** named Khansken. They hide in the overhanging edge of the Zoog Woods and attack travelers or groups they overhear moving parallel to the road through the woods. The gladiator and bandit captain swing down on ropes to engage in melee while the bandits fire crossbows from the overhang. They fear the sand-dwellers but aren't afraid to prey on humans and have had their emotions dramatically twisted by those same sand-dwellers. The bandits have become supernaturally bloodthirsty. They can be scared into fleeing or surrendering with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation) check. This ability check is made with advantage once the group has lost at least two of the bandit captains and/or Khansken, or if the bandits see one of their captains is a sand-dweller.

**Development.** Anyone who talks to the bandits can tell they are being magically influenced with a suc-

cessful DC 11 Wisdom (Insight) check, as they cut off mid-sentence to make unprovoked, barely coherent threats. A *detect magic* spell, *identify*, Eldritch Sensitivity, and similar features detect an unnatural aura of enchantment on them. The influence can be ended with *dispel magic* or fades on its own after a long rest once the sand-dweller strangler among them is eliminated. If freed of the magical influence, they can be convinced to fight on the side of humanity rather than fleeing with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

### KHANSKEN

**Khansken** (human **gladiator**, chaotic neutral) wears blood-spattered armor and has two large scars on his face.

**Traits** Khansken threatens and blusters as long as he's under sand-dweller influence. Even after, Khansken steers the conversation to boasting and avoids admitting mistakes.

**Ideal** Strength.

**Bond** Khansken views himself as better than monsters, and realizing he has nearly become one shakes him into trying to do better.

**Flaw** Khansken is good at ignoring the consequences of his actions.

### RESISTANCE POINTS

Freeing Khansken and his fellows from sand-dweller influence and convincing them to fight for humanity earns 1 resistance point.

## THE STREAM (BOTH ROUTES)

On the Foothill Road, a 10-foot-wide wooden bridge crosses the 40-foot-wide stream. In the Zoog Woods, a fallen tree crosses the stream. Crossing the stream in the woods requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid falling. Someone who falls can grab onto the log with a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw and can either climb back up or be pulled up with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

**Creatures.** This stretch of the stream is watched by eight **nightgaunts** (SPCM 350). If the characters have no NPCs along, the nightgaunts try to pick up the party members to drop in the midst of zoog traps at the nearest edge of the Zoog Woods. If the characters are in a larger group, the nightgaunts instead target weak-looking creatures it would be amusing to strand. They target merchants, traders, or other allies to carry off without attempting to damage anyone else.



## APPROACHING THE WALL

After a couple more days of travel, the party reaches the Reverent Empress's Gate. Read or paraphrase the following:

As you cross a hill, you find yourself overlooking the windy plains on the border between Harge and Tsang. The border is marked by the tall stone Elder Wall that stretches up into the wooded mountains to the west and far across the plains to the horizon in the east. Less than a mile east of the road and extending to the horizon along the wall are armies of monsters, keeping a distance of many hundreds of feet from the wall. Crowds of humanoid figures mill about indistinctly, but even at this distance you can make out the towering, dinosaur-like yothans and roiling black ooze monsters. Bulbous tentacled creatures waft in the air high above them, and in the distance, they are obscured by a swirling sandstorm. Symbols glow with a faint light all along the wall's length near the horde. Directly ahead of you, about a quarter mile along the road, is a fortress set into the wall with a high gate and a towering keep within. The trees of the forest grow close to the road within a few hundred feet of the fortress.

Any NPC present encourages the party to approach under the cover of trees (see below). Every minute or two, a ballista bolt flies from the wall to just shy of the monster army or from the monster army to land just shy of the wall.

**Sandstorm.** The wall is an important target to the flying polyps, so sandstorms strike the immediate area within 1 mile of the wall for most of the daylight hours. Generally, any break in the storm lasts only 10



minutes before the wall of wind-carried sand comes roaring back for 2 hours.

### COVER OF THE WOODS

The Zoog Woods provide cover to approach unseen within 300 feet the Elder Wall.

**Traps.** Zoogs have placed additional traps here to deter sand-dwellers who have repeatedly tried to build siege engines and magical altars from the trees. There are two more **hidden spiked pit traps** spread evenly around. In addition, there are two **pinning deadfall traps** (page 104) placed to hit creatures avoiding the pits.

**Creatures.** The traps are tended by a **grove keeper** (SPCM 403) named Whistlebough and two **zoog trappers** (SPCM 403). If the characters are accompanied by Captain Esperia, the zoogs approach to warn them about the trap placement.

### APPROACHING THE GATE

The open space within 600 feet of the gate is when the characters might face violent resistance. The ground is littered with broken arrows and bolts as well as the bodies of fallen sand-dwellers and a few humanoid soldiers.

#### WHISTLEBOUGH

**Whistlebough** (zoog **grove keeper**, chaotic evil).

**Traits** Whistlebough is condescending to humans but greedily eyes their treasures.

**Ideal** Wealth.

**Bond** Whistlebough hopes to amass the greatest collection of treasures in the Zoog Woods, especially to outdo Tail-Taker (who now scavenges from the ruins of Harge).

**Flaw** Whistlebough is easily distracted by laughing at others' misfortune.

**Creatures.** Monsters pace just out of range of the wall's archers. The nearest group are six **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) riding **axe beaks**. Any bandits or other combatants accompanying the characters will fight the sand-dwellers only if encouraged with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check; otherwise, they bolt for the gate.

A **flying polyp** (SPCM 318) with only one Multi-Dimensional Body drifts lazily just beyond the 600-foot-long range of the Tsangese longbows about a quarter mile away. If it sees characters moving toward the gate, it teleports to within 30 feet of them and attempts to grab them with tentacles. The characters can flee from the polyp, since it can't follow them into the gate. NPCs encourage them to flee rather than fight. If they attack it or lure it closer to the wall than it was before, they draw the attention of guards on the Elder Wall. The guards have been waiting for an opportunity to attack the polyp, which is too smart to simply lunge within range of their ranged attacks. Each round, guards on the wall fire longbows at the

polyp; 2d4 arrows hit it for 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage (reduced by half due to resistance) each round on initiative count 10. The polyp flees when reduced to 35 hit points or fewer.

**Reinforcements.** About a quarter mile away, another group of a dozen sand-dwellers sulk on foot, shout obscenities, and work on building a low structure behind a sod barricade; they are too far to reach the party if they rush for the gate, but if the party wastes more than 2 minutes these twelve **sand-dweller stranglers** can close the distance.

**The Gatekeepers.** Soldiers who see the PCs approach train crossbows on them but don't attack immediately. They shout, "Who goes there?" **Captain Ibzu (knight)** is on duty and takes over the conversation within 1 round. She says, "I'm in command here. What reason do we have to believe you're not some kind of monster?"

Characters can talk their way in by mentioning Lord Killian or Colonel Jenu, or succeeding on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If Remedy is present, she perches on the speaking character to give advantage on the Charisma check and silently cast the *guidance* spell on them. The guards are also more willing to believe the group if they are pursued by monsters, giving a +4 bonus on the check. Lord Killian spoke to Jenu when his refugees arrived, so the guards have been briefed to expect a group working for him.

If the PCs fail to convince the guards to open the gate, Captain Ibzu shouts, "If you're really an enemy to these monsters, prove it by fighting them!" Once the PCs have killed or incapacitated a flying polyp or as many sand-dwellers as there are PCs, the guards are convinced.

**Entering the Gate.** Once the guards are convinced to let the PCs in, the gate loudly grinds open at initiative count 5 (losing all ties). Captain Ibzu shouts, "Hurry inside! Most of these things can't pass the gate!" The enemies can't pass through the opening and can't use magic to affect anyone inside either. Once the last of the party enters the gate, it grinds shut again on initiative count 5 (losing ties).

**Defeated?** If the characters are overwhelmed, Lord Killian arrives after hearing the commotion. He shouts, "Wait! They have important intelligence! You must get them inside immediately!" Captain Ibzu responds, "New orders from the colonel—go get them!"

At that, a team of 20 guards bolts outside on horseback and drags the PCs inside just as more monsters move toward the gate. Most of their number dies defending the heroes, but they do get the PCs in.

#### RESISTANCE POINTS

Delivering refugees here from the ruins of Harge earns 1 resistance point.

The party loses 1 resistance point if Captain Ibzu's soldiers had to sacrifice themselves to escort the party inside the Reverent Empress's Gate.

## CONCLUSION

The characters are given quarters to rest in for the night. The spare quarters for the characters are three officers' quarters overlooking the surrounding city of Yangan. Each room has two comfortable sleeping mats, two small chests for personal effects, a desk with writing supplies, and a door with a simple lock. If they are still deemed suspicious, all their weapons and magic items are taken from them, and they are locked in their quarters with the promise they will have a chance to talk to the commanding officer the next day.

Captain Ibzu is too curious about them to resist engaging in conversation if they want to. She neither trusts nor distrusts them, despite what she has heard about skin-stealing sand-dwellers. Captain Ibzu has specific answers regarding the following topics:

- ◇ **Tsang's leaders have been infiltrated by sand-dwellers!** She scowls. "What a notion! The Imperial city is far north of here, and they can't pass through the wall." She frowns. "Might explain the lack of supplies... and no reinforcements..."
- ◇ **What's the condition of the wall?** "We seem safe. For now, at least."
- ◇ **How are the troops?** "We're fine. Completely fine." To anyone with a passive Insight score of at least 10, she is obviously steeling herself.

**Accompanying Refugees.** Anyone traveling with the PCs is likewise given comfortable places to stay. Once the party is freed, these NPCs are also free to go. Most of them join the other refugees in Yangan. The exceptions are Remedy and Braferti, who remain in the Chapel of Bastet in the Reverent Empress's Gate (see next chapter).

### EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of Chapter 1, the characters advance to level 8.





## CHAPTER 2: THE REVERENT EMPRESS'S GATE

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 8th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

Sand-dwellers have been busily infiltrating Tsang's capital city, but their efforts on the border have been less successful. Their main tangible effect on the frontier has been to limit the supplies and reinforcements sent to the wall.

In Yangan, like some other peripheral cities of the empire, a movement of dissenters has been growing. Called the Alliance of the Five Towers, this group has been organized by a mix of community members, guildmasters, beleaguered soldiers, and sympathetic financial backers. Some alliance members prefer to focus their efforts on dramatic reforms, but recent events are pushing them toward their own military cooperation and possibly open rebellion.

Lord Killian and most of the refugees from Harge and Kulara arrived at the Reverent Empress's Gate at least a week before the PCs did. Lord Killian made a strong impression on Colonel Jenu and encouraged him to be wary of infiltration, and also warned him

that the PCs might arrive at some point. If the party introduced Lord Killian to the Alliance of the Five Towers through Master Elbaresh or Raya Hua in Act 1, Lord Killian already had a relationship by the time the refugees arrived in Tsang. Otherwise, Lord Killian first learned of it through Raya Hua after the refugees arrived, and she needed to reach out to them to help secure supplies and housing for the refugees.

### CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

The characters have a brief respite now that they are in the Reverent Empress's Gate and protected by the Elder Wall. However, their debriefing with Colonel Jenu is interrupted by the discovery of something strange going on in the fortress. Colonel Jenu brings the characters along, and they quickly discover that a substantial contingent of troops has been replaced by a number of sand-dwellers!

While Jenu rallies his remaining troops, the party must stop the intruders from destroying the *Elder*

## THE REVERENT EMPRESS'S GATE

*Signs* that allow the Elder Wall to keep Tsang safe. The clash culminates in a pitched battle atop the wall with a monstrous horde barely kept at bay.

Once the wall is secured, Jenu rewards the characters at a grand celebration and invites them to help him inform an Imperial messenger who will come to take his report in a few days. In the meantime, they can reunite with friends from Harge and meet a new potential ally in the leader of a Tsangese mage's guild. This is an opportunity for a proper rest and downtime.

Finally, the characters meet with Jenu's messenger, who has taken something the guild wants back. When they confront the messenger, Jenu and the characters are suddenly targeted for arrest and execution. Imperial guards clash with Jenu's loyal troops as the party resists arrest. This is the final straw that forces Jenu to admit that the Imperial government is too dangerous to trust, and that the Five Towers must be ready to rebel openly. And he needs the PCs to be his trusted sand-dweller experts as he expands his alliance.

## THE EMPIRE OF TSANG

Tsang is a vast, powerful, and diverse nation. Each city prides itself on its cultural differences from its neighbors while still supporting each other under a unified central government. Although the land is prosperous and the people have better education than in nearby nations, most of Tsang's people remain poor and have little opportunity for social mobility. The large professional military and other government service provide the only notable methods of rising in station. Social stagnation, gross nepotism, and incompetent responses to famine have stockpiled growing unrest in the nation for decades, and the current crisis presents a match to the powder stores.

Historically, Tsang was a federated democracy with representatives from its many cities voting on major decisions. This long-ago era is the subject of a great deal of nostalgia for many educated people, who view it as a lost golden age. The ruling Xao dynasty has been in power for hundreds of years. Emperor Xao is an unpopular leader who neglects his people for his hobbies. In fact, the ancient and respected city of Yangan has already begun to talk openly of revolt.

## THE REVERENT EMPRESS'S GATE

The Reverent Empress's Gate is truly a fortress built around a three-layer gate. It is surrounded by walls marked with the *Elder Sign* in all directions and is built into the longer Elder Wall. Within the fortress is a tall inner keep, several barracks, and a few storehouses.

The south wall of the fortress is part of the Elder Wall. The center of the south wall is broken by a huge

double gate, so that anyone entering is vulnerable to murder holes above before passing through an inner gate into the fortress. There is a third major gate in the center of the north wall, which can only be opened from outside. The east, west, and north walls of the fortress are taller than the south wall and designed to be defended from the outside (from the surrounding city of Yangan), so that if the Reverent Empress's Gate is overrun, it can still hold out to defend Tsang.

### CHAPEL OF BASTET

The patron of the *Elder Signs* that protect the wall is Bastet, and so there is always a priest of hers present. Characters can receive healing services here in exchange for donations based on their ability to pay. Accomplished adventurers such as them are expected to make a very generous offering of 20 gp unless they are affiliated with Bastet (as acolytes, clerics, or paladins). They also receive free healing if they escorted Remedy from Harge or if the party prevented the sand-dwellers from destroying any *Elder Signs* after the first during an attack on the wall. Characters can also buy the following magic items:

Item	Price
Holy water	50 gp
Potion of healing	50 gp
<i>Potion of greater healing</i>	200 gp
Spell scroll, 1st-level (bless or shield of faith, or others with 1 day notice)	100 gp
<i>Spell scroll</i> , 2nd-level ( <i>aid</i> , or another with 3 days' notice)	250 gp

### THE QUARTERMASTER

Once the characters are freed, Captain Ibzu or Colonel Jenu explains that the characters are welcome to trade for what few spare supplies are to be had at the discretion of the dwarf quartermaster, Adnonel of Clan Ironvein. The aging quartermaster complains loudly that the Emperor must be completely out of touch if he sent no more supplies. He can sell the party most common equipment, but at first he can spare only 20 pieces of each type of ammunition or 4 of any thrown weapon. If asked about magic items, he points the characters to the Veilparter Academy in Yangan (next section).

#### QUARTERMASTER ADNONEL IRONVEIN

**Quartermaster Adnonel Ironvein** (dwarf guard, lawful good) is elderly and wears comfortable robes.

**Traits** Adnonel is very helpful but complains about inefficiencies in the government or military the entire time he helps.

**Ideal** Responsibility.

**Bond** Adnonel feels very paternalistic toward the troops he supplies.

**Flaw** Adnonel rarely thinks before he speaks.

## THE REVERENT EMPRESS'S GATE



## YANGAN

In addition to supporting the Reverent Empress's Gate, the small city called Yangan serves as a trade hub for the ranches of northern Harge and the farms of southern Tsang. Yangan bustles with cattle, yaks, horses, and wagons of rice and greens. The Leather District creates leather armor, saddles, and other leather goods. The Hill Quarter, nearest the Reverent Empress's Gate, is home to officers, military families, and laborers who support the fortress. Outside of town are sprawling farms, ranches, and tanneries that reek of alchemical reagents.

Yangan's people are beleaguered and anxious with the sudden wave of monsters, and there is tension between the locals and refugees who have flooded in from Harge. The locals are especially nostalgic for the old republic that once held power, and openly criticize the emperor for neglecting the border at a critical time. They largely admire Colonel Jenu for holding the Reverent Empress's Gate despite present dangers and a lack of resources.

As a border city, Yangan is home to very diverse population. Many people are immigrants from Harge and Odran, or descended from immigrants. Although the population is predominantly human, there are also appreciable numbers of dwarves, halflings, and zoogs.

### ELDRITCH SENSITIVITY AND ALIENIST CONTACTS

A character with the Eldritch Sensitivity background feature can take their art to Dean Zong at the Veilparter Academy. She can help them determine its meaning based on her occult scholarship and contacts in the art world.

A character with the Alienist Contacts background feature can consult with the Temple of Bastet in the Reverent Empress's Gate to learn about otherworldly incidents similar to those the character is investigating.

### VEILPARTER ACADEMY

The Veilparter Academy is a three-story wooden manor house that has been converted into a magical school. It offers limited training here as a satellite of the College of Veils in Fenkai (described in more detail on page 129).

**Admission.** Spellcasters can join by paying 200 gp in admission fees; in exchange, they can access a library containing all common spells of up to 5th level and illusion and conjuration spells of up to 7th level.

**Services and Items.** The academy also offers spellcasting services and magic items useful to spellcasters. Characters can buy the following magic items from them. They only have one copy of each item but can scribe 1st and 2nd level scrolls in a few days.

Spell Service	Price
Teleportation circle	500 gp
Teach a sigil sequence for Fenkai, Anxi, or Harge city	1,000 gp

Item	Price
Cloak of elvenkind	500 gp
Wand of the war mage +1	600 gp
Spell scroll, 1st level illusion or conjuration	100 gp
Spell scroll, 2nd level illusion or conjuration	250 gp
Spell scroll of major illusion	500 gp
Spell scroll of dimension door	1,000 gp

**A Familiar Face.** As long as he survived Act 1, Yarod Zin has joined the Veilparter Academy and is the novice responsible for selling magic items to those few visitors who can afford them. He greets the characters with a look of surprise and says, "Finally! You've been gone quite some time, you know." He is impatient in answering any questions they have, preferring to press them for information on the magic and monstrous minions used by the sand-dwellers. He is proud to flaunt his new connections at the magic school, and he gives the characters a 25% discount on purchases here. He avoids admitting that he has been required to join as a lowly novice, and is suitably embarrassed if anyone brings it up or one of his superiors calls him by his rank.

### HARGI REFUGEE CAMP

Most of the people of Harge who escaped the sand-dweller invasion have set up camp in Yangan. Several hundred have rented rooms or begged for space in stables or storage buildings. The rest, several thousand, have been given tents by Colonel Jenu and Governor Doanyi of Yangan. Refugees from Kulara continued on eastward to Anxi, where there is a large population of Odranian expatriates. The Hua family is also absent, having gone to stay with a cousin in Fenkai.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

After the party has had time to rest properly, **Colonel Jenu** (page 244) and Lord Killian come to their quarters. Read or paraphrase the following:

The door to your quarters opens, revealing an armored guard. She steps aside to allow Lord Killian of Harge to enter, followed soon after by an officer in a fine uniform. Lord Killian looks exhausted, but he brightens at seeing you. He says, "I hope you were able to rest. This is Colonel Jenu, in command of the Reverent Empress's Gate and a friend to the people of Harge." The colonel has a graying mustache and bushy eyebrows that move rapidly as he scans the room and inspects each of you in turn. He bows curtly and waits for you to speak.



If the party lent Captain Ibzu the *mirror of manifold reflections* (or it was confiscated from them), Colonel Jenu returns it as he greets the party and is satisfied that they are who they appear to be in the mirror. Even if the characters haven't yet proven their identities, Jenu views them as a potentially vital source of intelligence, and the characters can convince Jenu that they are trustworthy with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, by listing off strategic or tactical vulnerabilities of the sand-dwellers learned in previous acts or by demonstrating the usefulness of the *mirror of manifold reflections*. They get advantage on their check if they refer to Lord Killian's letter of marque or the Alliance of the Five Towers.

Colonel Jenu answers questions to the best of his ability, but he only has time to respond a few times before the conversation is interrupted. The interruption can also come partway through a long response by a PC. Jenu has specific answers on the following topics:

- ◊ **Tsang's leaders have been infiltrated by sand-dwellers!** Jenu frowns intensely and crosses his arms. "That is a grave claim. What proof do you have of this?" He listens seriously, but the characters are interrupted before they can make a thorough case.
- ◊ **This is what we learned from Garu/Ravazel's Indignation.** Jenu's eyes narrow and he gestures

broadly. "This concerns me. I must admit it could explain the strange lack of support I have received. Despite the wall being under attacks not seen since the era of legend, our supplies are redirected to the Imperial City. No reinforcements." He drums his fingers on his desk for a moment. "I will ensure my officers watch carefully for signs of infiltration. I will summon an Imperial Messenger I trust at once to make sure the emperor knows."

- ◊ **What's the condition of the wall?** "The wall is impregnable to otherworldly monsters and magic, luckily, but we fear that their continued presence at the wall means that they believe they can find a way in. I can't be sure they're wrong."
- ◊ **How are your troops?** Jenu sighs and turns to look out a window across the fort. "Frankly, morale is low. We have been spread thin for lack of equipment and reinforcements. Even our food stocks are being redirected to the Imperial City without explanation. We are equipped for fending off raiders from the mountains, not an army of monsters!"
- ◊ **Alliance of the Five Towers** "Did Master Elbaresh discuss this with you? His last letter said he was unsure who to trust with our weapons business."

Once the characters are comfortable conversing with Colonel Jenu, read the following as the meeting is abruptly interrupted.



As Colonel Jenu raises a finger and prepares to continue, the door bursts open. He turns to see Captain Ibzu. She stands at attention and says, "Sorry to interrupt, sir! Your orders were that we should come directly to you with anything that seemed supernatural or suspicious, and... well, we found something we think you need to see." Colonel Jenu turns to you. "My apologies, but this must take my attention. Please accompany us, as your insights are likely to be relevant."

Captain Ibzu (**knight**) leads the group out of the keep. She calls five **guards** to escort the group and leads them to the skin.

### A. THE SKIN

The characters are escorted into an alley adjacent to the Green Battalion barracks. There is an empty, dried-up human skin inside a set of ruined hide armor pinned to the ground by a bloody dagger. It has broken glass embedded in it and is smeared heavily with dirt. Characters can deduce with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check that the glass originates from a broken window on the second story of the barracks, suggesting the skin and the dagger came through the window and fell to the street. By this point, the characters should automatically recognize this as a shed skin that a sand-dweller was wearing. The Green Battalion hasn't been responding to his commands.

The escort doesn't know what this means, but any NPC allies on hand do: the Green Battalion has doubtless been infected or replaced by the sand-dwellers' evil. If the characters ask to investigate, Lord Killian goes on to warn Colonel Jenu, who rushes to the Green Battalion's barracks, asking for help from the PCs, as the resident sand-dweller experts.

### B. GREEN BATTALION BARRACKS

The barracks is a two-story building that is broken into numerous rooms of several bunks. Three soldiers stand outside the entrance (see *Creatures*, below) to prevent anyone from getting inside. A few rooms near the ground-floor entrance are officer's quarters. Each room is lit by one or two high windows. A single spiral staircase connects the two floors. There are numerous lamps to light the interior, but none are lit. The interior stinks of blood and death.

**Creatures.** The sand-dwellers left behind a **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 250) dressed as an officer and two **sand-dweller slashers** (page 252) disguised as armored soldiers to get rid of anyone who gets too nosy. The whisperer wears a breastplate (AC 16) and the slashers wear splint mail (AC 17). They argue quietly about whether this is a safe and easy job worth sacrificing the glory of bringing down the Elder Wall themselves. The whisperer does the

talking, pretending to be performing an inspection and respectfully asking the group to return after today's guard shift ends. Characters can see through the ruse with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to piece together flaws in their performance, a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check to pick up on their deception, or a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot or smell (cats or ghouls get advantage on this check) the suspicious state of the interior of the barracks when the guards emerge or if the PCs get inside somehow.

**Investigation.** No other troops are here—they're all up on the wall. But there is a huge hole in the ground in a rear room and lots of blood and mounds of discarded human skins in every room. Blood stains almost every one of the hundreds of mats. Fading auras of illusion, evocation, and enchantment blanket the place from the *darkness*, *silence*, and *sleep* spells that the sand-dwellers used to prevent the troops from realizing what was happening.

All signs point to the truth: the sand-dwellers burrowed into the barracks, bypassing the wall's *Elder Sign* defenses by wearing the human skins, then killed the Green Battalion's soldiers while they slept and donned the soldiers' skins. The Green Battalion is now a regiment of sand-dwellers!

If the PCs don't connect the dots themselves, any character can also deduce the recent events with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check, realize that the blood is from hollowing out fresh bodies here with a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check, and realize with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check that the tunnel would allow skin-wearing sand-dwellers to bypass the wall's wards. Characters can realize that the *Elder Signs* on the wall are vulnerable to concerted damage with a similar check.

When Jenu realizes this, he rushes out to rally his troops. He shouts, "Everyone else, get up to the wall and be ready to fight. But try not to reveal that we're onto them until reinforcements arrive!" Seeing the PCs are experts with these creatures, the guards defer to them. Captain Ibzu turns and says, "If they're pretending to be Green Battalion, you might want to wear their armor. Look like you belong." She points out a few fallen against a wall near the front of the barracks. She offers to come with them along with her retinue of four **guards** after posting the fifth to watch the pit.

**Dread.** The sheer scale of this horrific crime is a moderate disturbing discovery (*SPCM* 73). It causes two levels of dread in each character unless they succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. The dread decreases when the character finishes a long rest.

**Treasure.** Characters can pick up four Green Battalion helmets and/or sets of splintmail armor of the same colors and style, and the whisperer wears a *ring of burrowing* (page 258).

### C. ASCENDING THE WALL

Outside, another sandstorm rages to the south, stopping cleanly at the wall as if there were a window in the way. The nearest way up the wall is a set of stairs alongside the Green Barracks.

**Creatures.** The staircase is guarded by a retinue of impostor Green Battalion guards who are suspicious of anyone who didn't arrive with their group for today's guard shift. They are sand-dwellers with the following statistics: two **sand-dweller whisperers** (page 250) wearing the skins and gear of **thugs**, and three **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) wearing the skins and gear of **guards**.

The impostors approach if they see the characters. Characters can avoid notice with a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check. They have advantage if Captain Ibzu distracts the impostors during their attempt. Her guards aren't comfortable trying to sneak, but they are willing to speak to and distract the guards. Scaling the 40-foot inside of the wall requires a DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check.

When the impostors demand the PCs explain themselves, shouts rise from humans farther along the wall before the characters can respond. The shouts say, "There's something flying in there! Enemies massing!" Under the sound of the warning cries, Captain Ibzu discreetly offers to distract the impostors while the PCs sneak past. Characters can talk their way past with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check or a DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) check. Characters with a Green Battalion helm have advantage on their Deception check. Even on a success, the impostors turn and insist Captain Ibzu and her soldiers go and get a superior officer if they want to perform an inspection at this time, since no distraction can be afforded in the midst of unknown enemy action. Characters can tell the impostors are lying with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check.

If combat breaks out and the PCs aren't successfully hidden, Captain Ibzu tells them, "Hurry up! Get moving while we handle these impostors." One Tsangese guard drops every round. Every other round, one of the sand-dweller guards also dies. After 6 rounds, the guards have defeated everyone and are no longer distracted.

The real troops announce they will go and warn the apparently genuine troops to the west and east. Their cries of alarm suggest that an attack is imminent but not underway and they aren't impostors. They are unwilling to climb the wall before Colonel Jenu arrives, in case it would give away that they are

on to the enemy's deception, but they don't object if the PCs want to try infiltrating quietly.

**Treasure.** The officer carries a balled-up scrap of parchment simple instruction in Aklo: "Draw no attention until the siege patrons are in position." The two whisperers each carry a *potion of greater healing*. Captain Ibzu has her guards search the bodies if the PCs don't.

### D. ATOP THE ELDER WALL

The Elder Wall is 40 feet wide and 70 feet tall here. The exterior is marked by regular battlements. This close, characters can make out looming shapes in the thick sandstorm. The sound of combat on the stairs was covered by the noise beyond the wall and cries from human guards farther along the wall, so impostors atop the wall aren't automatically alerted to the PCs.

If the PCs are quick and quiet, they can move about the wall before combat begins. They can convincingly dress as Green Battalion troops by wearing armor taken from the barracks or stair guards. This requires a successful DC 15 group Charisma (Deception) or DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check; each character must choose one of those two to contribute to the group check. The roar of the sandstorm means characters won't be overheard if they make reasonable attempts to stay quiet or whisper.

With a success, they have up to 1 minute to move about the wall and study their enemies. They can overhear sand-dweller impostors murmuring to each other, "The time is nearly here! Ready the chains!" Gangs of three attend to each of the ballistas, which are held in place with heavy chains.

If the group check fails, the sand-dwellers grow suspicious and move to interrogate and apprehend the characters while still pretending to be soldiers.

**Creatures.** A group of five **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) wearing human skin and ring mail (AC 14), and holding short swords surround the party. They are led by a **sand-dweller binder** (page 251), also wearing human skin, who says, "I'm the captain here. Identify yourselves!" Characters can talk their way past with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception) or DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. If they don't respond satisfactorily, the sand-dwellers attempt to grab them with unarmed attacks that deal 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage instead of the usual slashing damage. If convinced the PCs are fellow sand-dwellers, the sand-dweller guards remind them, "The spawn and polyps are arriving now. We attack when they are in position!"

After 1 minute, Colonel Jenu's reinforcements are spotted by the catapult teams. They shout, "Human





reinforcements! Human troops!" The sand-dwellers attack for fear of losing their opening. As soon as combat begins, the binder produces a *spell scroll of disintegrate* and casts it on the *Elder Sign* 100 feet east of the PCs. Destroying one sign isn't enough to break the Elder Wall's magic, but it does allow enemy magic to reach 15 feet onto the wall, and the howling sandstorm visibly advances 15 feet.

### RUNNING A LARGE BATTLE

With so many participants, this is likely too large a combat to roll attacks and narrate actions for every single combatant. For any individuals that aren't currently directly engaging the PCs, simply describe the general behavior of the group they belong to. The perimeter Green Battalion impostors in the distance in both directions attack the rest of the wall's guards. Many rip off their skins to fight more effectively as sand-dwellers (they're more agile this way and can Multiattack with their claws), while others retain the skins along with the immunity to the *Elder Sign*.

Sand-dwellers and human reinforcements brawl to the west and east along the wall, well outside of range of immediately harming the PCs. The real wall guards and Jenu's troops are fully occupying the far-off groups of sand-dwellers. However, the group here at the center of the Green Battalion's assigned area are only fighting at the fringes. A group of a dozen sand-dwellers runs to defend the nearby stairs up the wall from the battalion of real guards led by Colonel Jenu, who will soon climb them. Impostors away from the stairs are able to focus on their plan to destroy the *Elder Signs*.

One catapult is on an elevated platform near the PCs and the other two are spaced 90 feet apart down the wall to the east.

The groups that the PCs might engage individually are the rear guard at the stairs (see **Jenu's Reinforcements**, below), the group converging on them (see **Creatures**, above), and the catapult teams (see below). Whichever group they engage tears off their skins and moves to surround the PCs if aware of their presence. Otherwise, they move to the base of the nearest catapult platform.

**Catapult Teams.** Three groups of three skin-wearing sand-dwellers each simultaneously pull chains off a catapult. The catapult teams are each composed of three **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) appearing as human soldiers wielding greataxes. The catapult teams act on initiative count 12 to progress their plan as described here. Removing the chains from the catapults takes 3 rounds. They then carry the chains down to the forward battlements on the 4th round and anchor them to the battlements on the 5th round. On the 6th round, two sand-dwellers descend each chain along the face of the Elder Wall while one sand-dweller defends each chain at the top of the wall.

The leader at the center catapult, a sand-dweller **blessed berserker** (SPCM 404), doffs the shoes

from his armor to reveal *slippers of spider climbing* and simply walks down the wall as the others climb. Each then takes 10 rounds loudly chipping with axes to destroy the signs. The chains can be released with six interactions (so a character can make two interactions in a round with the Use an Object action). The chains can be attacked (AC 19, 25 hp, resistance to acid and fire damage, immunity to poison and psychic damage), conduct lightning damage to creatures climbing on them, and take full damage when included in the area of lightning damage.

**Jenu's Reinforcements.** Jenu's reinforcements move on initiative count 10 once they defeat the stair guard. The length of time this takes depends on whether the characters eliminated the stair guards earlier. Without the stair guard, Jenu's soldiers break through the stairs after 4 rounds or as soon as the characters kill their sand-dweller attackers. Without the stair guard weakened, Colonel Jenu's troops take 1 minute to surmount the stairs. The rear guard on the wall stairs is composed of eight **sand-dweller stranglers** wearing human skins and ring mail (AC 14) plus an **urbane magician** (SPCM 406) under the influence of sand-dwellers; these creatures don't fight individually unless the PCs engage them. Their purpose is to protect the urbane magician while she does her work (see the combat breakdown by rounds, below). Otherwise, Jenu's troops reach the rear guard after 2 rounds, then eliminate two stranglers per round until one or none remains and they break through. Unless the PCs intercede, the urbane magician escapes.

As soon as Jenu's troops break through the sand-dweller lines, **Colonel Jenu** (page 244) races to survey the damage. He shouts, "The *Elder Signs*! They're climbing down the wall to the signs! The wall's magic could fail if the signs are destroyed!" Jenu's troops then engage any remaining sand-dwellers, killing 1d4 sand-dweller stranglers each round on initiative count 10.

### FACE OF THE ELDER WALL

Meanwhile, outside the wall, a force of monsters grows bigger and bigger, ready to break through the wall section once the sand-dwellers have completed their task.

Unless it was defeated in Chapter 1, the **flying polyp** with one Multi-Dimensional Body (SPCM 317) has returned without healing. It sends catastrophic winds at the wall. Seething along the ground in the distance are formless spawn, sand-dwellers, and other monsters. Importantly, the monsters can't touch, attack, or include in the area of spells any creature in contact with the Elder Wall. Among monsters in the army outside the wall, only the flying polyp usefully engages them, and even it is limited to casting magic over the outermost portion of the wall.

Magical blasts of wind bounce off and can't pass the magical boundary but can hit anyone scaling the wall or firing over the edge to fight the climbing

sand-dwellers. Knowing this limitation, the flying polyp will often ready a spell to cast *wind wall* when a creature comes within 10 feet of the wall's edge or attempts to fire a ranged weapon through the sandstorm.

The sand-dwellers break a given sign after a total of 20 actions are spent that sign. Each sign broken causes the wards on the south face of the fortress to fall back by another 15 feet. Once a fourth sign is broken (allowing the sandstorm to cross the full 60-foot width of the Elder Wall here), the ward fails on the whole southern wall as described in **The Gate Falls** (below).

#### ROUND 1

The **urbane magician** in the rear guard casts *wall of fire* in front of any defenders on the stairs. A magically amplified voice echoes across the wall, audible despite the muted howl of the wind against the Elder Wall. The same, unmistakable voice from the Festival of the Feast says, "Quake in fear, warriors of Tsang! Your doom has come, and her name is Ravazel the Butcher!"

#### ROUND 2

The **urbane magician** produces another *spell scroll of disintegrate* and destroys the *Elder Sign* nearest the PCs, causing the sandstorm to advance another 15 feet.

Jenu's reinforcements reach the stairs. The first line hesitates well ahead at the *wall of fire*, recoiling from the nearly invisible waves of painful heat. One soldier tries rushing quickly through and only a pile of burned bones and armor emerges on the far side. Gasps rise up, and a commander shouts, "Stay back while the fire burns! Spears ready!" As soon as the fire is gone, they clash with the defenders.

#### ROUND 3

The catapult gangs pull the chains down to the battlements. Two **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) arrive from the east to engage the PCs. The stair guard pours boiling oil down on Jenu's reinforcements on the stairs. If the *wall of fire* remains, Jenu's troops throw spears over it and kill one sand-dweller at the stairs; otherwise, they rush through and kill two sand-dwellers with melee attacks.

#### ROUND 4

The catapult gangs brace the chains against the battlements. The **blessed berserker** removes his boots to reveal *slippers of spider climbing* and simply walks down the wall to begin attacking the *Elder Sign* below him. Ravazel's voice says, "Your petty gods won't be able to help you once their signs are cut from the wall. The victory your ancestors stole from me will be mine at last!" If the *wall of fire* remains, the rest of the stair guards move back out of spear range.

#### ROUND 5

Two sand-dwellers descend each chain carrying vials of acid.

#### ROUND 6

Two **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249) arrive from the west to engage the PCs.

#### ROUND 7

Ravazel's voice says, "We are relentless and unending. More will come once the Hollow Mother's Well is remade!"

#### ROUND 8

If the characters didn't soften up the stair guard, Jenu's reinforcements break through as soon as the *wall of fire* is gone.

#### ROUND 9

A **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 250) arrives from the east to engage the PCs.

#### ROUND 10

Ravazel's voice says, "Not long now! Lay down your weapons, and some of you will be spared. Your strength will make you useful servants to our great patrons; only the weak and useless are needed as sacrifices."

#### ROUND 12

A **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 251) arrives from the west to engage the PCs.

#### ROUND 13

Ravazel's voice says, "No! Stop your foolish struggling! You never had a chance to begin with. Even your own emperor knows your efforts are pointless."

#### ROUND 15

The remaining *Elder Signs* are destroyed at this point if the characters didn't stop or slow all the groups (see below). If enemies are still active, their work is postponed proportional to how many actions the characters have prevented and they can still succeed if they aren't stopped.

#### THE GATE FALLS?

If a total of four or more *Elder Signs* are smashed (including the first at the start of the encounter), the Elder Wall's wards fail on the entire south-facing wall of the Reverent Empress's Gate. The sandstorm sweeps, weaker but persistent, across the fortress but stops within the fortress's inner walls. Colonel Jenu orders a retreat to the Tsang edge of the fortress, which is designed to be defended from outside the fortress as a fail-safe. Formless spawn become battering rams on the south face of the wall, and this section crumbles within 1 minute. The



army suffers terrible losses but manages to hold the rear Tsang-facing wall of the fortress. When the sand-dwellers realize that the inner wall of the fortress can be used as a kill zone from inside, their army falls back and bides its time until Act 4.

### RESISTANCE POINTS

Protecting the Elder Wall earns 8 resistance points; if the Reverent Empress's Gate is lost, the PCs gain only 2 resistance points instead.

## CELEBRATION

As long as the Reverent Empress's Gate stands, there is a raucous celebration to thank the PCs. If it fell, instead Colonel Jenu sends a runner to ask them to meet him in an office in the Ministry, where he talks with them personally instead (and there is no celebration); go to **The Debriefing**, below.

When the characters reach the parade ground for the celebration, read or paraphrase the following:

Colonel Jenu stands on a stage before the assembly of troops and townsfolk, obviously readying for music and food. The colonel gives you a wan smile and gestures for you to join him onstage. He says, "Thank you again for your help, heroes. You could have tried to flee and save yourselves, but you fought for everyone here." He continues with a grandiloquent speech for several minutes, which holds the crowd's rapt attention. He concludes with, "This war against monsters is not over, but this battle was a victory for all of us!" Shouts of exuberance rise from the crowd, and music signals the start of festivities. As an aside, Jenu whispers, "Please meet me in my office at noon. I have something for you, and we still have much to discuss."

The celebration begins with music, much food and drink, some rowdy fun, and even a few fireworks. Paper lanterns are lit in the city outside the fortress.

There are many Hargi refugees in Yangan, and some of them join in the festivities. Lord Killian finds the PCs to congratulate them. He encourages them to enjoy the festivities and save any talk of tactics for tomorrow. Anyone the characters remember interacting with in Harge or Kulara might be here, provided they survived (see page 97-8 for help determining which NPCs survived, based on how effective the heroes were in saving captives from Kulara).

From conversations with the crowd, the party can learn all the descriptions about Yangan and the areas around the Reverent Empress's Gate starting on page 111.

## THE DEBRIEFING

Captain Ibzu comes to escort the characters to Colonel Jenu's office late the next morning. The office is halfway up the central keep in the Reverent Empress's Gate. Ibzu shows them inside before departing. Read or paraphrase the following:

Colonel Jenu stands in one corner of his office when you are shown in. Behind Jenu's desk sits a heavy-set woman wearing an ornate silk gown. Jenu says, "Thank you for coming." He turns and gestures to the woman as he continues, "Dean Zong is here all the way from the College of Veils in Fenkai to help me prevent this infiltration from happening again. She is one of the most eminent scholars of magic in all of Tsang." Zong takes a polite little bow and says, "Ah, the heroes of the hour!" she grins expectantly.

Once the characters introduce themselves, Zong says, "You must tell me every detail of your adventures." She notices Jenu's stern look and continues, "For my research, you know. Any detail might be important to understanding the enemy's magical techniques!"

Jenu strokes his chin, and his serious expression grows more and more grave at each mention of sand-dwellers' abilities. Zong expects a detailed summary of the sand-dwellers' allies and methods. She relishes moments of danger or drama, and if your players enjoy recounting their exploits, this is a fine opportunity to let them monologue with an eager audience.

Players will likely remember at least some of the important points Zong is looking to learn. If the PC learned it but the player simply forgot, you should remind them. They should certainly know the following without any special effort.

- ◇ The sand-dwellers are connected to another plane of existence called the Violet Dimension, where they amassed the army currently invading the world.
- ◇ Sand-dwellers can replace humans by hollowing out their bodies and wearing the empty skin.
- ◇ The sand-dwellers use a large variety of monster allies that are bound to serve them using magic. The characters might recall tactical details about any of the following: ghouls, moon-beasts, night-gaunts, hollow jackals, hollow cobras, formless spawn, yothans, flying polyps.
- ◇ The sand-dwellers are led by an ancient Hargi warlord named Ravazel. She is intent on conquering Tsang and has already sent minions to infiltrate the Tsangese government's highest leaders.
- ◇ A sand-dweller can influence the emotions of a humanoid to make them more violent and cruel.

- ◊ A sand-dweller can transform a humanoid into a sand-dweller by prolonged emotional manipulation. The new sand-dweller can then travel to the Violet Dimension.
- ◊ Wearing a skin allows sand-dwellers to fool magical effects into treating them as humanoids.

In addition, the party might also remember the following or deduce it upon reflecting back on their previous adventures. Any character can attempt an ability check to deduce the following information if they did not already learn it. They might use Intelligence (Investigation), Intelligence (Arcana), Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery), or Intelligence (Religion).

- ◊ **DC 13.** Sand-dwellers can't stand fresh water touching their exposed skin.
- ◊ **DC 15.** The secret to the sand-dwellers' magical influence over their monster allies lies in their great fortress, the Sand Citadel near the Broken Bastion on the Violet Dimension.

Once the characters have reviewed the above points, read or paraphrase the following:

Colonel Jenu frowns and says, "Seeing how easily those sand-dwellers moved about... it could have been disastrous. I have issued orders along the Elder Wall to check for infiltrators, but it won't work forever. We need resources and reinforcements soon. I sent word to the Imperial City to request a trusted messenger speak with me. She should arrive in five days. In the meantime, please make yourself comfortable in the area."

Jenu has answers to the following questions:

- ◊ **What should we do now?** "Take a little downtime. Rest, use the amenities of Yangan, reconnect with your Hargi friends, or help Dean Zong with her investigation."
- ◊ **How can we help with the investigation?** Dean Zong takes the lead, explaining, "I can always use another reader experienced in arcana or research to assist me."
- ◊ **What if the government is compromised?** "I hate to consider it, but we would at the least want to start stockpiling our own supplies rather than following the current order where most of our farm goods and supplies are diverted to the Imperial City."

**Treasure.** Before the characters leave, Colonel Jenu grants them a reward: an *adamantine breastplate*, and 500 gp each.

## AWAITING THE MESSENGER

Colonel Jenu sends a message the next day explaining that the Imperial Messenger is currently on a mission, but she should arrive in about a week. The characters can rest or perform other downtime activities while they wait. They can also meet up with any refugees from Harge and Kulara who are currently in Yangan (page 113).

## THE FIVE TOWERS

On the day after the attack, Lord Killian invites the characters to meet him at a manor house in Yangan. Read or paraphrase the following:

Lord Killian is accompanied by a tall woman wearing yellow silks. The woman has elaborately styled hair with white streaks that contrast with her dark skin. Lord Killian says, "This is Minister Sziran of the Farmer's Guild. She is a leader of the Alliance of the Five Towers, and it seems she was a friend of the late Master Elbareh."

She says, "This emperor was never a good one, and our political alliance has long expected a hard fight to reform imperial law and policy. In light of skin-stealing impostors, we must prepare for the worst. I would like you to help us coax the military quartermaster or governor to divert supplies from the Imperial City to ensure we aren't left without necessities on the front lines of this sudden war. Can you help us?"

Sziran can answer questions on the following topics.

- ◊ **Why are the supplies being diverted to the Imperial City now?** "We don't know. The orders came straight from Emperor Xao a few weeks before the invasion of Odran and Harge. No explanation was given."
- ◊ **Where would the supplies normally be sent?** "They would be purchased by various merchants and sold across the Elder Wall, to towns in Tsang and Harge." Lord Killian chimes in, "Now, many of those Hargi buyers are refugees here in Yangan and unsure where their next meal is coming from. Keeping supplies here could feed them."
- ◊ **What can you tell us about the governor?** "Governor Doanyi values tradition and fairness, but he is a politician at heart. He needs persuading to take a stand with any risk, and indeed the support he has offered the Alliance of the Five Towers has been largely symbolic."
- ◊ **What about the quartermaster?** "A caring sort who likes to keep things moving," says Sziran. Lord Killian says, "Quartermaster Adnonel has been very generous to us, but his supplies are now growing thin for lack of resupply."





When the meeting concludes, Sziran points the characters to the Imperial Ministry in Yangan, where the governor can be found, and the quartermaster's office at the north of the Reverent Empress's Gate. The characters have the following options for their downtime in addition to the usual options.

## GOVERNOR DOANYI

**Governor Doanyi** (human **noble**, lawful neutral) is imperial governor of Yangan and begrudging associate of the Alliance of the Five Towers. He likes the group's ideals of reviving the ancient republic but is afraid of the risks in trying to change a government. He wears ornate but ill-fitting leather armor over purple silk. His dark beard is neatly trimmed.

**Traits** Doanyi squares his shoulders and frowns as he talks. He is quick to condescend and tell people how they're wrong.

**Ideal** Tradition.

**Bond** Doanyi feels a great deal of pressure to deserve this office he got as a political favor and which he feels unqualified for.

**Flaw** Doanyi is terrified of surprise attacks and doesn't want to take any unnecessary risks.

## MINISTER SZIRAN

**Minister Sziran** (human **spy**, neutral good) is leader of the Farmer's Guild and local organizer of the Alliance of the Five Towers.

**Traits** Sziran speaks slowly and precisely to ensure she is understood.

**Ideal** Kindness.

**Bond** Sziran knows life is hard for the commoners of Tsang and will do whatever she can to lighten their burdens.

**Flaw** Sziran doesn't always think through the downsides of her ambitions.

## OPTION A: CHANGING THE GOVERNOR'S MIND

If the PCs ask Governor Doanyi to give supplies to them or to the refugees directly, which would (in his opinion) defy an Imperial mandate, he scowls. "I am entrusted with the protection of Emperor Xao's subjects, not whatever beggars come to the Reverent Empress's Gate. If your people need supplies, they should find work to buy them."

With a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, characters can convince Governor Doanyi to look the other way regarding what happens to a shipment of food bound for the Imperial City that will be unguarded on a certain night. If they fail, he demands a bribe of 500 gp.

Persuading Doanyi to take direct action and withhold resources from the Imperial City requires two successful DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) checks, one to make a good impression so he'll

even listen to them and one to convince him to agree to a specific plan. Arguments based on certain facts might allow checks using other skills, such as pointing out legal technicalities with Intelligence (History). Compelling arguments grant advantage on the check, while undeniably good points automatically succeed.

## OPTION B: RALLYING THE LOCALS

Characters can find locals willing to help by asking around with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Minister Sziran arranges for orderly donations of food and other necessary supplies to the Alliance of the Five Towers as well as needy refugees.

Alternatively, a character using the *mirror of manifold reflections* can spend five days clearing all the refugees of being imposters, convincing Yangan's leaders they are trustworthy. This gives advantage on any attempt to rally the locals since it makes the refugees less mysterious and makes them seem less potentially dangerous.

## OPTION C: RECRUITING FOR THE ARMY

**Quartermaster Adnonel** (page 112) is pleased to see anyone thinking on the problem of supplying the city, but he shakes his head at the suggestion he could directly divert supplies. "This is a military. Without a legitimate reason, any fancy logistics I manage will be undone by someone else down the line who gets wind of it, not to mention prompting an investigation into my office for corruption. Now, I have noticed that we can get proper supplies for new recruits. If you could come up with some recruits, I think I could use that to pull some strings."

Characters can convince the refugee soldiers to join Jenu's troops with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. They can access enough food to support the rest of the refugees this way, and the gesture reduces tension between the refugees and citizens.

## RESISTANCE POINTS

Each successful activity from the above earns 1 resistance point, to a maximum of 4. If a character convinced the governor to divert supplies from the Imperial City, that is worth an extra 2 resistance points.

## IMPOSTOR

Any sand-dweller remaining in the Reverent Empress's Gate uses this lull to come after the PCs. They have identified the party as a significant threat to the sand-dweller operations and seek an opportunity to eliminate them. Generally, this sand-dweller is one who accompanied or followed the party into the Reverent Empress's Gate undetected. You should tailor this encounter to the tastes of your players. Some players prefer not to be separated, while others enjoy

the dramatic irony of watching one party member briefly contend with a challenge. See below for some ideas.

**Location.** If your group is in a good place to split up, such as if you take a session break during this downtime and can easily play with just one player, the sand-dweller might reasonably seek an opportunity to get a target alone (perhaps when they are on their way to or from visiting an NPC refugee from Harge or Kulara). For maximum fright, you could have the PC find the shed skin of the sand-dweller's initial disguise, and potentially interrupt the sand-dweller in the process of hollowing out a fresh skin of another refugee NPC (provided your group is comfortable with that kind of body horror). Of course, it would be no fun to force such an encounter if the players wouldn't be up for it or if the group takes reasonable precautions against it (such as carefully sticking together or secluding themselves). As a fallback, the disguised sand-dweller asks to accompany the party to their meeting, knowing that the messenger is likely to attempt to arrest them. The impostor sides with the arresting guards when combat breaks out.

**Creature.** The impostor is a **sand-dweller slasher** (page 252) who wears the skin of a refugee from Harge or Kulara. To maximize dramatic surprise, pick an NPC that has been around before but not one the players are especially familiar with.



## THE IMPERIAL MESSENGER ARRIVES

Dean Zong rushes to the party's quarters on the fifth afternoon, her skirts ruffled and her eyes wide. As soon as they answer their door, she bursts in and says, "I am robbed! Imperial Guard troops dared to enter the restricted gallery of my Veilparter Academy and confiscated important texts and works of art. You must help me get them back!"

The dean has specific responses to the following:

◇ **How can we find them? or How can we help?**

She sighs. "Ah, I am getting ahead of myself." She puts up her hands and visibly calms herself before she continues, "I learned of this affront on my way to tell you something. Colonel Jenu sends word that he invites you to attend his meeting with the Imperial Messenger Varayuan at dusk. They will

be on the overlook inspecting damage to the fortifications. She will investigate Tsang's government for infiltration and will want to interview you. Her guards are the ones who robbed me." The dean glances around and then leans forward to whisper conspiratorially, "One guard has carried a few stolen scroll cases since they left. Perhaps you can get them back for me while you are nearby?"

◇ **What exactly was taken?** "Scrolls in a large cylindrical case, including a magical painting called the *landscape of the syzygy*. The landscape is vital for my research into extradimensional connections and summoning, you know!" She can describe the basic properties of the item (page 258).

◇ **How do you suggest we retrieve it?** "As we explain in our performance classes, an audience's attention will only be in one place at a time. One of you could hold their attention while another slips the scrolls out of the cases. The more you can retrieve, the better, but most important is the large painting, which will surely be on top."

◇ **Why should we help you?** She makes an exaggerated show of looking offended as she says, "Are we not already collaborators? I and my institution could be valuable allies to you in your future struggles if you help me now. I will ensure that our magical resources are made available to you going forward if you return the *Landscape of the Syzygy*."

◇ **Why come to us? or Why not ask Colonel Jenu to help?** "Colonel Jenu is a trustworthy sort, and he likes you, but he doesn't like to break the rules if he doesn't have to, and he is currently occupied." If pressed, she grudgingly elaborates, saying "Some of these texts are technically banned, and he might not help me get them back." She grins mischievously. "Better to apologize if he finds out rather than fail to ask your help retrieving them, I think."

◇ **Why were they confiscated?** "Old-fashioned, overcautious sensibilities." She waves a hand dismissively. "In the old days, subjects that were hard for the common folk to understand were deemed dangerous and subject to imperial censorship. But those old laws haven't been enforced since the reign of the Reverent Empress a hundred years ago!"

◇ **Is that the only reason?** "Well, some of the underlying principles might be rather advanced for a general readership. Certainly, we only allow qualified researchers to study them. Students wouldn't be ready for these matters and might hurt them-



selves... or unleash something uncontrollable..." She frowns and glances aside. "But that's beside the point: this is a valuable asset to my academy, and I need it back."

- ◇ **That's not our problem.** "Ignoring your allies is no way to build a strong alliance!" she huffs indignantly.

Zong makes sure to give her response for "how can we find them?" (above) even if the party does not ask. The meeting is in 2 hours, giving the party a little time to plan and prepare.

## E. TREASON ON HIGH GROUND

The Imperial Messenger Varayuan comes to inspect the Reverent Empress's Gate and the damage from the attack. She makes time to meet the characters and Colonel Jenu just below a siege weapon platform where they can overlook the wall. When the characters arrive at the meeting, read or paraphrase the following:

You meet Colonel Jenu at a rooftop observation platform. He stands near a ballista tower and surveys the marred and blood-stained Elder Wall not far to the south. The platform rises just a few feet above the level of the main wall and is connected by a higher curtain wall to the west. The crenelations on the upper wall face the observation platform. Colonel Jenu is joined by a woman wearing a dark blue silk dress that contrasts with her pale complexion and flatters her long, dark hair. Colonel Jenu waves you over when he sees you. No other guards patrol the upper wall.

The characters might take a moment to size up Varayuan. When they approach, she politely greets each character in turn, as Colonel Jenu introduces them. Secretly, her motive here is to stall the PCs and Jenu while the Imperial Guard moves into position to arrest them in 1 minute (see the encounter **Imperial Arrest**, below). With a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check, characters can tell she is deathly nervous but hiding her tensed posture well. She makes polite inquiries into the basic details of the characters' claims and vaguely agrees with any concerns, but a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals she is not listening closely to the answers and keeps glancing at the west approach like she's expecting something. Pointing out something is suspicious prompts Jenu to respond, "What's wrong, old friend? You know you can trust me." She simply murmurs, "I'm sorry. It's classified." A character can convince her to really listen with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. If they succeed, she walks to the stairs and says, "You know I can't protect you from treason," and the Imperial Guard arrives after 1 round. If they fail, she continues stalling until the Imperial Guard arrives.

## IMPERIAL ARREST

Emperor Xao's Imperial Guard interrupts Colonel Jenu's meeting with the Imperial Messenger Varayuan. Read or paraphrase the following:

### VARAYUAN

**Varayuan** (human **noble**, lawful neutral)

**Traits** Varayuan is friendly and apologizes emphatically for any perceived mistake or inconvenience.

**Ideal** Responsibility.

**Bond** Varayuan feels she owes everything to the Empire.

**Flaw** Varayuan feels powerless to defy the law, even an unjust one.

Six warriors all in dark leather armor climb onto the overlooking wall and approach the stairs to your meeting place and Colonel Jenu. Each draws a weapon. Varayuan proclaims, "Colonel Jenu, you are hereby under arrest for treason, by order of Emperor Xao. Soldiers, seize him and kill any who oppose you!" Colonel Jenu turns to glare at Varayuan. He says, "You've betrayed Tsang! Do you even know the emperor has been replaced?" Varayuan frowns and replies, "It's out of my hands, old friend."

**Creatures.** The enemies—one **assassin**, a **sand-dweller binder** (page 251) masquerading as a quiet general, three **spies**, and a **knight** (who is carrying the stolen scroll cases, see **Treasure**, below)—take advantage of the relative isolation of the siege weapon platform to attempt to kill the PCs and arrest Colonel Jenu. Colonel Jenu (page 244) fights alongside the PCs. Varayuan (a **noble**) flees to a larger group of Imperial Guard escorts by climbing up the stairs onto the wall, obstructing troops from coming to reinforce either side. The enemy combatants fight to the death except for the knight, who attempts to flee with her scroll case if the majority of the troops are slain or she is reduced below 30 hit points. She pushes Varayuan off the stairs if she is still in the way. The sand-dweller is careful not to reveal itself to his soldiers, since they aren't aware of its nature and might kill it.

**Development.** Once defeated, it turns out that another officer under Varayuan is also a sand-dweller in disguise. Colonel Jenu cuts the skin of the guard's face to prove it and asks the characters to help him carry the guard onto the wall into sight of the larger group to prove to the guards that they were serving under a monster.

**Treasure.** The knight carries a large scroll case containing the *landscape of the syzygy* (page 258) and two smaller cases containing two halves of the *Book of Dzyan* (SPCM 133). If the party returns one or two scroll cases to Dean Zong, she rewards them

with 600 gp. If they return all the items to Dean Zong, she rewards them with 1,200 gp.

The assassin carries a scroll alleging various fabricated crimes against Tsang, including espionage, sabotage of the Elder Wall, and conspiracy to commit regicide with traitors called the Alliance of the Five Towers. The numerous crimes justify orders that the PCs all be summarily executed and Jenu be arrested immediately. A character can find flaws in the dense legalese with a DC 13 Intelligence (History) check suitable to convince Varayuan and any other Imperial Guard soldiers present that the charges are fabricated.

### RESISTANCE POINTS

Returning the *Landscape of the Syzygy* to Dean Zong earns 2 resistance points and convinces her to commit the College of Veils more directly to the fight in Act 4.

### QUESTIONING VARAYUAN

Assuming she survived the encounter, Colonel Jenu has **Varayuan** (above) arrested and locked in a high room in Yangan's Imperial Ministry. In the aftermath, Jenu explains, "We have captured Varayuan. She refuses to talk, but you are welcome to question her if you wish."

Varayuan sits forlornly and looks out her small window. She won't speak unless persuaded with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check (success previously still applies). She is prepared to speak on the following subjects:

- ♦ **Why the betrayal?** "It's all there in the document. Conspiracy, inciting rebellion, undermining the wall. The soldiers all talk about how they saw their fellow troops attacking the wall. Some said they were monsters, but that's just the sort of rumor that would be good for covering it all."
- ♦ **There is a rebellion.** "No! I knew Jenu was unhappy, but I never imagined..." She gasps and looks away again.
- ♦ **Show her proof of the sand-dweller infiltration.** She claps her hands over her mouth. She murmurs, "What have I done?" She becomes cooperative thereafter.
- ♦ **Any change in the Emperor?** "He was always distant and distracted by his magical studies. Lately, he seems harsher, more impatient... crueler." She frowns and looks out the window.
- ♦ **Who has access to the Emperor?** "He's kept to himself more than usual, so mostly his servants, but he still has regular meetings with the council of generals."
- ♦ **The Capital.** "The Imperial Guard has been placed on high alert. Movement into and within the Imperial City is highly scrutinized, and you have been accused of being deadly enemies of the state. You should stay far away."

Once the party is satisfied, Jenu asks them to meet with him and the other local members of the Five Towers.

### COUNCIL OF REBELS

When the PCs arrive to the meeting with Jenu, the governor, and other members of the Five Towers, read or paraphrase the following:

Colonel Jenu waits in a chamber with a soaring ceiling supported by intricately carved wooden pillars. Before him sits a low, wide table covered in little wooden figures of soldiers, towers, and forts. Beside him are Minister Sziran and Governor Doanyi, his eyes nervously wide. "Thank you for your help, warriors. You have earned a great deal of trust very quickly, so I must confide that we face the prospect of an imperial government controlled by sand-dwellers. It is time we equip ourselves to not only defend the wall without Imperial support but potentially to oppose the Emperor openly."

Governor Doanyi shudders. "How can you talk of open rebellion like this? The Emperor did not attack the wall or anyone but the colonel here. Er, and you all, I suppose." He gestures absently at you, then looks back at his peers. "Why shouldn't I report you at once?"

The characters have a chance to interject at this tense moment. Any reasonable point about the infiltration or what they learned from Garu the Poisoner Prince mollifies the governor, as does a successful DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation) or DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. If they don't, Colonel Jenu takes a step toward the governor and says, "Think carefully about this. These creatures can wear human skins as flawless disguises, including the inquisitors you saw with your own eyes. The emperor might even be dead already." In either case, read or paraphrase the following:

The governor narrows his eyes, then sighs and nods in defeat. "Of course, you're right." He looks down and rubs his eyes. "Would that this weren't happening now, during my tenure."

Minister Sziran turns to face your group. "There are already growing movements of dissent in the cities of Fenkai and Anxi we can draw upon, but we need help vetting them for infiltration. You have dealt with sand-dweller infiltrators more than anyone. Will you help us? We will offer you material support and answer any questions you have, of course."

The PCs, still the sand-dweller experts, have become by necessity trusted advisors to the Five Towers. Jenu can't withdraw his armies from the wall, because they are needed to hold back the sand-dweller forces.



To gather troops for the rebellion, the PCs must travel to the important cities of Tsang and vet the already-growing movement for self-rule against the Emperor.

Although it will be difficult, Jenu and Sziran believe a rebellion is possible because the cruel Emperor Xao is notoriously unpopular and his governors have long been quietly discussing how to rule despite the emperor's bad policies and negligence. Of course, open rebellion is a big step, but the whole nation might fall if Xao is actually collaborating with the murderous sand-dwellers.

The revolution already has three major foothold cities to draw into an uprising: Yangan, Fenkai, and Anxi. Jenu thinks that the Imperial City of Tsang is doubtless firmly under the thumb of the sand-dweller impersonators given that its security is entirely under the imperial guard who just attacked. He says, "We will send you reports on Fenkai and Anxi in a matter of days. You should decide which to visit first based on what we can tell you. When you are ready, Dean Zong can teleport you between these cities."

**Treasure.** The Alliance of the Five Towers provides each character with the following:

- ◇ A disguise kit
- ◇ Two sets of clothing, allowing PCs who use them to appear as laborers, soldiers, artisans, merchants
- ◇ If the PCs secured Governor Doanyi's cooperation with successful social skill checks, he can provide one noble's outfit with accessories (worth 50 gp total from Yangan) and apparel suitable to allow one character to pass as a Golden Scale mercenary mage or guard (their company is based in Fenkai, but they are used by many rich clients throughout Tsang and Odran)
- ◇ One mundane set of armor of any kind, of the colors and style of an Imperial soldier
- ◇ The option to acquire a *+1 weapon* or *+1 shield* for 250 gp (reassigned from an Elder Wall lieutenant)

## CONCLUSION

Characters can spend downtime as they prepare for the next adventures and again in between visiting the two cities. If they didn't complete any of the special activities earlier in this chapter (page 121), they can retry them during subsequent downtime. You might give Jenu's reports to the players to read over and think about between play sessions.

About one week probably fits best between this chapter and the next, but you might want to prolong this time if the players want to spend time roleplaying with the rebels. They might organize more support for the movement or help better settle the refugees. During this time, people start to flock to the banner of the Five Towers.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of Chapter 2, the characters advance to level 9.

## CHOOSING THE NEXT ADVENTURE

The party has a choice as to which of the next two chapters to do first. After the first break, they receive the following report and are asked to choose which city they would like to visit. Dean Zong provides teleportation to each destination as part of her work with the Five Towers.

### REPORT ON FENKAI

The Five Towers report the following to the PCs:

- ◇ The description of Fenkai on page 128.
- ◇ Fenkai's four Eldritch Guilds are potentially very valuable allies despite their fondness for dangerous magic and underhanded dealings. At least three of them are believed willing to cooperate, provided that the Five Towers promises to protect them from sand-dweller interference. They are the Keeper's Guild, House Cryzonesh, the Disciples of the Sleeper, and the Keeper's Guild.
- ◇ House Cryzonesh is a mercenary company owned by a dragonborn family known for their sorcerers. They are under contract with Emperor Xao to protect his interests in Fenkai, so the city rarely has any Imperial Guard in it. House Cryzonesh lost several teams contracted to Duke Odran after the sand-dweller invasion, which seems to be making them act more cautiously.
- ◇ The College of Veils teaches illusion and the conjuring of beings from beyond the mortal world. The College's Dean Zong has already begun working with the Five Towers.
- ◇ The Disciples of the Sleeper are likely connected to the Church of the Sleeper in Kulara. Since Lord Killian reported the Sleeper's followers were compromised by sand-dwellers, the Alliance recommends approaching them cautiously. They have scheduled a religious retreat for all their clergy, which might be an attempt by the sand-dwellers to convert a large number of them at once to sand-dweller infiltration. If the PCs can arrange a safe way to do so, Dean Zong wants to question their leaders to see if they know anything about the sand-dwellers' magic. Likewise, she would like the PCs to report any unique magic items for her to examine.
- ◇ The Keeper's Guild is known for its protective magic and speaking with the dead. It was originally founded by the mages who created the Elder Wall. Dean Zong believes that scrolls that can repair the damage to the Elder Wall can be found in their largest, oldest library.

## REPORT ON ANXI

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The Five Towers report the following to the PCs:

- ◇ The description of Anxi on page 138.
- ◇ Of Anxi's three rulers, two are already interested in supporting the Elder Wall against the wishes of Emperor Xao. These are Lord Ho of the High City, a reform-minded aristocrat, and Minister Zerelda the Axebreaker of the Deep City, a former adventurer. The remaining ruler, Governor Izonda, seems to believe propaganda against the Alliance of the Five Towers, if she hasn't already been replaced by a sand-dweller. You must meet with her at the Gnorri Embassy to prove the truth to her and quell her suspicions about the Alliance of the Five Towers.
- ◇ Dean Zong believes that there are ruins somewhere in Anxi that can be used to return to the Violet Dimension to undermine the sand-dwellers' magic. However, the documents she needs to figure out where they are were all requisitioned by someone in the Imperial City weeks ago. She suggests keeping an eye out for agents of the Emperor in search of the same thing for their own purposes. She hopes the PCs find it and report it to her for study.





## CHAPTER 3 OR 4: FENKAI UNDERMINED

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 9th or 10th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

The Disciples of the Sleeper, a religious organization in Fenkai that revered magic and attracted power-hungry mages, has for years gleaned magical secrets by sacrificing first animals and then captive criminals or others who would not be missed. Each time, they used their magical statue of Tsathoggua to learn occult secrets in reward for their sacrifices. The ritual went awry when they opened a rift to contact Tsathoggua not long before the start of Act 1.

They discovered that their patron had been imprisoned by sand-dwellers in the Violet Dimension. Rather than hearing Tsathoggua, they heard the call of Queen Ravazel, who promised them the opportunity to rule alongside her after she conquered the lands of mortals. She also used her power of emotional urging on the most bloodthirsty, including the leader, Father Zarthu. The wards around Tsang prevented Zarthu from summoning Ravazel, but it didn't stop her from gradually turning him into another sand-dweller.

Zarthu began making more and more sacrifices, not just to draw Tsathoggua's power but to enjoy the act himself. Ravazel's offer of becoming sand-dwell-

ers was just as appealing as Tsathoggua's for some of the disciples, but others resisted. Several, like Brother Vowern, were rich and comfortable, and had no interest in bloody conquest or ruin. A week ago, Zarthu announced a retreat for all disciples to spend a week in meditation together without contact outside the church. He took the opportunity to determine which of the disciples were useful and which might betray him. He has worked to transform the pliable cultists, and imprisoned the rest as victims to fuel the transformation of those loyal to him. The Disciples of the Sleeper are now largely sand-dwellers in Ravazel's thrall.

The mood in Fenkai is tense: the Sleepers are a major faction and they have suddenly gone silent. Another, the Keepers' Guild, has recently been attacked from underground.

The rebels in Fenkai are organized by Mother Lien, who has been hiring and equipping mercenary soldiers quietly for months. She draws support from the poor laborers and assistants who feel exploited by the Eldritch Guilds.

## CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

In this chapter, the PCs should first investigate the ruins of the Keeper's Guild archive. There, the party discovers that the ruins have been undermined by magic and monsters, who arrived through a tunnel that leads to the Sleeper's Cenobium. By now it is obvious that the Disciples of the Sleeper are up to something, and Mother Lien wants the impartial (and potentially expendable) PCs to prove to the Eldritch Guilds that the enemies are sand-dwellers and that they can be defeated.

Cryzonesh opens the tunnel by casting *passwall*, allowing the party to enter the Sleeper's Cenobium. He goes to retrieve his son, then asks the party to steal Father Zarthu's famous *ring of Eibon* for him. In exchange, he offers them his *goldfire tongue* (page 258).

This is the best place in the region to buy magic items, which characters might wish to do during the adventure or before leaving for the next one.

### EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If your players enjoy investigation and intrigue, you can extend this chapter by having Mother Lien ask them to help investigate whether members of the College of Veils who had contact with the Church of the Sleeper were replaced by sand-dwellers or to vet mercenaries in her employ who previously had contracts with the compromised Imperial Guard.

## FENKAI

Fenkai, called the City of Eldritch Guilds, is a cosmopolitan hub of magical learning, industry, and traditional religious practices. Major districts are the Scroll Quarter, the Crucible District, the Saffron Quarter, and the Temple District. The Scroll Quarter is home to a variety of schools and artist colonies, including the College of Veils, as well as upper-class residences. The smoky Crucible District contains refineries, armories, smithies, slums, and the fortress of House Cryzonesh. The bustling Saffron Quarter is the site of several major markets and is inhabited mostly by traders and travelers, who stay at the quarter's inns. The beautiful Temple District houses many otherwise rare religious communities, including the Keeper's Guild, the Disciples of the Sleeper, and other transplants from afar. It is surrounded by a wall inscribed with *Elder Signs*, much like the Elder Wall.

Notorious for corruption, Fenkai is ruled by a council unwilling or unable to make any decision without the direction of the four Eldritch Guilds that run the city's famed trade in magic items and fine manufacturing. Each guild is believed to have bribed or otherwise secured the loyalty of one councilor.

It's an open secret that most guilds flaunt imperial laws against dangerous magic. Those laws haven't been enforced much since the reign of the Reverent

Empress many decades ago when the Eldritch Guilds helped restore the Elder Wall and rescued the Xao dynasty from bankruptcy. The Xao family has long left enforcement of their laws to contracted teams from one local mercenary guild, House Cryzonesh.

### ELDRITCH SENSITIVITY AND ALIENIST CONTACTS

A character with the Eldritch Sensitivity background feature can take their art to Dean Zong at the College of Veils.

A character with the Alienist Contacts background feature can consult with the Keeper's Guild to learn about otherworldly incidents similar to those the character is investigating.

### THE DISCIPLES OF THE SLEEPER

Librarians, ascetics, and experimenters belong to the Disciples of the Sleeper. They study a mysterious entity known as the Sleeper, which they make elaborate sacrifices to in order to unlock secrets of transmutation and divination. The Disciples control a large complex in the Temple District a few streets over from the Keepers' Guild.

### THE HOUSE CRYZONESH

The House, a mix between a noble house and a mercenary company, calls upon the power of a gold dragon bloodline, wielding incredible powers of transmutation and evocation. They also manufacture magic weapons for Tsang's nobles and elite soldiers. They are under contract with Emperor Xao to protect his interests in Fenkai but accept bribes from other guilds to ignore their transgressions. Patriarch Cryzonesh decided to adopt a defensive strategy after losing several teams contracted to Duke Odran during the recent sand-dweller invasion.

Members of the House of Golden Scales tend to be sorcerers with the blood of dragons, deep ones, or Shub-Niggurath. Many are golden dragonborn or humans, and a few are half-dragons. There are rumors that their ancestry includes far stranger things.

Characters can buy the following magic items from the House of Golden Scales:

Item	Price
<i>Amulet of health</i>	5,000 gp
<i>Potion of healing</i>	50 gp
<i>Potion of greater healing</i>	200 gp
<i>Potion of superior healing</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Ring of resistance</i> (cold)	500 gp
<i>Necklace of fireballs</i> (4 beads)	400 gp
<i>Spell scroll of alter self</i>	150 gp
<i>Weapon, +1</i>	500 gp

**A Familiar Face.** Raya Hua (see page 200) and her daughters escaped Harge and came to the House of Golden Scales to stay with her **half-dragon fighter** cousin, Zapham Eldonel. If her husband Harrek Hua



(half-orc **commoner**) survived, he is with them. If the party is seen around the House of Golden Scales, Raya hears about it and comes to find them before they leave. She asks them for news about the invasion and thanks them for their service against the sand-dwellers at the Reverent Empress's Gate. Raya continues her business with a few of her most valuable items.

If the party was friendly to her during Act 1, she is willing to take a chance to protect them. She says, "My cousin mentioned something you should know if you are doing business here. The patriarch uses tricks and curses to ensure people do as he wishes, so you should be cautious of any gift he gives you."

### RAYA'S CURIOSITIES

Raya still has the following items to sell or trade:

Item	Price
<i>Boots of levitation</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Decanter of endless water</i>	250 gp
<i>Stone of good luck</i>	500 gp

### THE COLLEGE OF VEILS

The College of Veils is a large complex inhabited by dozens of aspiring bards and wizards. Part artist colony and part wizard's school, the College of Veils specializes in the secrets of astronomy, cosmic alignments, and negotiation with magical creatures. Many members are bards, warlocks, conjurers, or illusionists. They sell their services as entertainers and astrologers of the highest order.

The College of Veils knows many forms of occult art, science, and ritual. In addition, characters can buy the following magic items from them.

Item	Price
<i>Cloak of displacement</i>	5,000 gp
<i>Marvelous pigments</i> (1 pot)	1,500 gp
<i>Pipes of haunting</i>	350 gp
<i>Rod of the pact keeper +2</i>	5,000 gp
<i>Spell scroll</i> , 1st-level ritual spell	50 gp
<i>Spell scroll</i> , 2nd-level ritual spell	150 gp
<i>Spell scroll</i> , 3rd-level ritual spell	400 gp
<i>Spell scroll of dimension door</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Spell scroll of teleportation circle</i>	2,500 gp

### THE KEEPERS' GUILD

The Keepers' Guild is a group of mostly human abjurers and necromancers but also a number of ghouls, Dreamlands cats, and dwarves. The Keepers are infamous for learning the secrets of the living from bound dead creatures and using the informa-

tion to extort people for power and profit. If magical experimentation gets out of control anywhere in Fenkai, it is the Keepers who contain it. In the process, they often extort the victims to pay for the rescue, but they still uphold their duty to prevent danger from spreading to the rest of Fenkai. They also manufacture magic shields and occasionally other protective items, sold to Tsang's government and other factions.

Although the Keepers ostensibly serve the cat-goddess Bastet, their traditions have all but abandoned her as a spiritual patron. Instead, they see her as something of a mascot. Their depictions of her are styled very differently from those in Harge and Odran: a tiger-headed woman with a shield and a crossbow.

The Keepers' Guild is currently recovering from a disaster: their archives collapsed into a sinkhole a few days ago. Work crews sent to salvage texts and clear the rubble have disappeared.

Characters can buy the following magic items from the guild:

Item	Price
<i>Ring of protection</i>	5,000 gp
<i>Shield</i> , +1	500 gp
<i>Spell scroll of speak with dead</i>	400 gp
<i>Spell scroll of magic circle</i>	400 gp
<i>Spell scroll of private sanctum</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Spell scroll of remortification</i> (SPCM 111)	1,500 gp

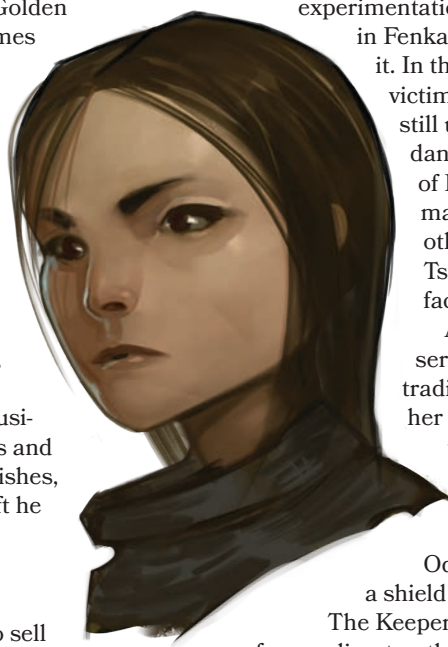
### LIEN ESTATE

If the characters need somewhere to rest in Fenkai, Mother Lien offers her home just outside the Saffron Quarter, which is also the local base for the Five Towers. A mulberry orchard hems the Lien estate, wherein dozens of young people in armor run military drills. About half of them are human of various ethnicities and half are gold dragonborn. They are mercenaries, Mother Lien explains—hired to provide security. She offers the PCs an elegant tea service when welcoming them to the estate and gives each character a room. There are few servants, but the paper walls make privacy unreliable at best.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Dean Zong casts *teleportation circle* for the party. She reminds them of her findings from her report.

Read or paraphrase the following when the characters teleport to the College of Veils:









As you step through the glowing circle prepared for you in Yangan's Veilparter Academy, you are enveloped in a green light. The light fades immediately, and you find yourself in a similar glowing circle in a large courtyard within a four-story wooden complex. Tiered balconies surround the courtyard, largely obscured by dozens of fine curtains with images of planets, stars, fantastical landscapes, and battle scenes. A few young adults in fine robes hurry along the balconies with only casual glances at your sudden arrival. To the north, a large set of doors leads into a four-story wooden building. To the south, a tall arch stands open to the bustling city beyond. To the east, a broad theater projects into the space with its large doors flung open.

Dean Zong says, "I must tend to other duties, but Mother Lien is expecting you." She points you to a broad, low building that projects partly into the courtyard and then turns to head into the main building. "You can find me here if you have need of me."

The Five Towers leader in Fenkai, **Mother Lien** (page 245), waits in the theater, where she sits at a low table and sips tea. She watches the end of a pantomime play while waiting. She gestures for the party to wait for it to end and is friendlier if they are patient. If they are not, she becomes cross and says, "I have waited months to have my revenge on Xao. If you can't wait a few minutes, I worry your impatience will get us all killed."

Mother Lien leads the party into a quiet side room and explains, "Colonel Jenu's letters speak well of you, so I'll trust you to pick things up quickly. I believe I am close to persuading the Eldritch Guilds to defy Xao, but we have a new problem. A disaster has struck the Keepers' Guild, and it has all the hallmarks of sand-dweller activity. I sent mercenaries hired from House Cryzonesh to investigate, and they haven't returned. Now that you're here, I want you to follow up on it. Hopefully, your experience dealing with Ravazel's minions will help you fare better."

Mother Lien has specific responses to the following topics.

- ◇ **What happened?** "A sinkhole recently opened under the Keeper's Guild archives. They lost a few members and lost more trying to go through the rubble."
- ◇ **Where should we start?** "Go to the Keeper's Guild. Their leader, the Venerable Keeper, will see you. Find out what you can about the disaster while you find out about those *Elder Sign* scrolls Dean Zong wanted. Might be clues in the rubble or a witness."
- ◇ **Can we trust the guilds?** "I'm no fool. The Eldritch Guilds are notoriously corrupt, but they realize our failure would doom everyone—including them. If we can't expose and defeat the sand-dwellers, the guilds might choose the coward's option of digging into their respective strongholds and leav-

ing the rest of us to fend for ourselves. We need to expose sand-dweller operatives to convince the guilds we are worthwhile allies."

- ◇ **The Disciples of the Sleeper are obviously connected.** "Can't say it would surprise me. Always been the foulest of a foul bunch. Much too eager to handle executions ostensibly so no one else would have to dirty their hands. They've shown no willingness to talk to anyone during their ongoing retreat, though, so I suggest gathering intelligence from the other guilds before confronting them. We need some more direct proof before Cryzonesh or the Keepers will want to act openly against them."

Mother Lien has horses waiting outside the college's gate, which she provides to take the party to the Keeper's Guild immediately. The ride takes them past the Crucible District's many smithies and metalworks and by the squat, brick fortress of House Cryzonesh. Lien points it out to them. Soon, the party arrives in the Temple District at the **Keeper's Guildhouse** (below).

### CONDITIONAL ENCOUNTER:

#### IMPERIAL ASSASSINS

If Fenkai is the second city the party visits, two **assassins** who serve Emperor Xao strike the PCs if the PCs are noticed in Fenkai while in public or if they accidentally escort a sand-dweller outside the Keeper's Guild or Sleeper's Cenobium (most likely Third Keeper Vorel or an imprisoned new sand-dweller). Although the assassins are loyal to the emperor, if held at bay they can be talked down with evidence of the Emperor's inhuman and cataclysmic goals and a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If persuaded, the assassins depart to remove their families from the Imperial City.

## THE KEEPER'S GUILDHOUSE

When the characters arrive at the Keeper's Guild, read or paraphrase the following:

The Keeper's Guild is a stately old wooden temple complex of three connected buildings, each five stories tall. A blue-robed acolyte wearing a flat hat leads you through a series of halls populated by young initiates talking in small groups. Eventually, you reach a locked door, which he unlocks and opens. The next room is an antechamber with an elaborate statue of a tiger-headed woman in armor holding a crossbow and a spear. To one side stands a tall, elderly human in blue robes with many tassels and a matching hat. She is reading a scroll. "Venerable Keeper," says the acolyte with a deep bow, "Your guests."

The Venerable Keeper looks down at your group, then waves the acolyte away. She begins, "Ah, the warriors who defended the Elder Signs on the wall. I trust Lien told you of the collapse that buried or destroyed many of our records?"

The Venerable Keeper has specific responses on the following topics:

- ◇ **Do you know who is responsible?** She frowns indignantly. “Not yet, but I must admit the strange behavior of our neighbors, the Disciples of the Sleeper, seems suspicious.”
- ◇ **What have you learned so far?** “We believe magic was involved. There was briefly an aura of transmutation over the area.”
- ◇ **Who disappeared?** She thinks for a moment. “Four initiates. I hope you find them alive and soon, or we’ll undoubtedly be sued by their families.”
- ◇ **Were there any witnesses?** Not precisely. Third Keeper Vorel was supposed to be monitoring the second group in case they disappeared like the last one, but she stepped away, and when she returned, they were gone. She’s in her quarters nearby if you wish to speak with her.”

When the characters are done, she says, “If that is quite enough, please take your time to inspect the area.” The characters are given free access to the **Fallen Library (Area B)**.

### VENERABLE KEEPER AYATA

**Venerable Keeper Ayata** (human **mage**, chaotic neutral) tall, elderly woman with elaborate blue and gold silk robes.

**Traits** The Venerable Keeper is high and mighty and put off by informality.

**Ideal** Knowledge.

**Bond** Ayata has a long-running rivalry with Patriarch Cryzonesth, who uses his Imperial contracts to learn things she has no access to.

**Flaw** The Venerable Keeper doesn’t deal well with feeling not in control.

### REPORT TO THE VENERABLE KEEPER

Once the party finishes their investigation of the collapse and they return to the Venerable Keeper, she is eager for their report. She has specific responses to the following:

- ◇ **The Sleeper’s minions are here or The magic was an earthquake targeting an area already undermined.** “I suspected those Sleepers were dangerous! You must infiltrate the area you have uncovered here. If you find your path obstructed, I must grudgingly admit House Cryzonesth might be able to help you move it.”
- ◇ **You have a sand-dweller impostor.** “Explain how you can tell.” Once the matter is explained, the Venerable Keeper frowns but promises that the intruder will be dealt with appropriately.
- ◇ **We didn’t find much.** “Perhaps House Cryzonesth is hiding something on behalf of their past Impe-

rial government contracts. I suggest you have a word with their patriarch, since your Alliance of the Five Towers already has an arrangement with him.”

- ◇ **We found very few intact documents.** “If this was a planned attack, perhaps it was a cover to steal texts dangerous to the attackers?”

Once the characters have made their report, the Venerable Keeper asks them to investigate the Sleeper’s Cenobium, home of the Sleeper’s disciples. Although close by, they might be dangerous, so that should be saved for after any other intelligence has been gathered.

### A. THE ACOLYTE WITNESS

Third Keeper Vorel is in her quarters. The room is simple, with just a sleeping mat, a small chest for personal effects, and a low writing desk near a window.

**Questioning Vorel.** Secretly, Vorel is a **sand-dweller binder** (page 251) wearing the skin of a half-elf mage. She pretends to feel horrible for stepping away long enough for something to happen to the acolytes, staring downward and keeping her responses half-hearted. She recalls the acolytes said something dissolved many of the texts. She stepped away only 30 seconds then heard a yelp and came back to find all three acolytes gone. The sand-dweller is a skilled liar, but characters can tell she is lying with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check. If they confront her, she attempts to flee, either into the Sleeper’s Cenobium or into the city where she can wait for an opportunity to replace a minor NPC known to the PCs (such as Raya Hua at House Cryzonesth).

**Recruiting Vorel.** The party might mistakenly invite Vorel to join their ranks if they haven’t realized what she is. The false Vorel eagerly joins the Alliance of the Five Towers if offered the opportunity, calling it a chance to redeem herself for her mistakes. She doesn’t offer to join the investigation but agrees if asked and betrays and attacks the party when they next enter a significant combat. If she is recruited to the Five Towers but not the investigation, she joins Dean Zong in her research and bides her time. If the party has not yet attracted assassins when she goes to Dean Zong, she alerts the assassins (page 131) and accompanies the attack on the party. If the assassins are already defeated when she joins Dean Zong, she accompanies the dean until the leaders of the Five Towers are attacked in Act 4, at which time she suddenly turns on the party.

### B. THE FALLEN LIBRARY

The door beyond the area where the characters met with the Venerable Keeper leads to a hallway that suddenly falls away to a 15-foot drop into a jumble of fallen timbers, stone, and scattered paper debris. Books and broken bookcases peek out from a maze of fallen slabs from the stone and wood roof. Most



of the texts have been ruined or badly damaged by horrible-smelling acid. If characters work on assessing or clearing the books without anyone from the school monitoring them, they are attacked within 10 minutes by the creatures in the sewers (**Area D**).

**Salvaged Texts.** Characters can salvage magical texts from the library, including a single *spell scroll of Elder Sign* (SPCM 102), Book One of the *Cryptical Books of Hsan* (SPCM 134), and a copy of the *Butcher's Conquests* (page 216).

**Undermining.** Characters surveying the damage up close can deduce that this collapse was the result of a spell with a 100-foot radius with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, DC 15 Intelligence check using mason's tools, or DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check. A DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check deduces the use of the *earthquake* spell. This earthquake was caused by magic to take advantage of intentional undermining. The collapsed area has an acid-carved tunnel leading into the sewers. It can be found with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to smell the acid, a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check, or by removing the rubble in the opposite side of the area (perhaps with the *mirror of manifold reflections*).

## C. SEWERS

The undermining tunnel connects to the sewers via a narrow channel about 20 feet long. A character can see far enough to use *dimension door* to teleport beyond the pipe. Beyond the pipe is a simple sewer tunnel that continues for 200 feet north before reaching another 20-foot pipe connected to the cellar under the Sleeper's Cenobium (area H). The ledges of the sewers are slippery, so anyone who Dashes on them must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone after moving half their speed. The water is 3 feet deep, making it difficult terrain to walk in. It then terminates in a restricted channel too small for a humanoid to pass through.

**Creatures.** In the sewers, the characters encounter two **formless spawn** (SPCM 320). The route they took to arrive here requires passing through a 20-foot-long water pipe that is 6 inches across. Characters can teleport beyond with *dimension door* or use *gaseous form* to follow their trail. Otherwise, they can investigate aboveground in the **Sleeper's Cenobium** (below). This part of the sewers connects to the Cenobium's cellar (**Area H**).

## HOUSE CRYZONESH

House Cryzonesth is a squat and sturdy compound. Its thick stone walls are decorated with broad, gilded reliefs. Each relief depicts sinuous gold dragons or armored dragonborn warriors slaying beasts and scattering human warriors.

Patriarch Cryzonesth meets the party in a smoky parlor. He is jovial and respectful but firm in his positions. He has responses on the following topics.

- ◇ **Help us investigate the Disciples of the Sleepers.** "Although it is true we are already on Mother Lien's payroll, a term of our contract is remaining neutral in any direct uprising. Fighting a previously steady client is bad for business, after all. We can send transmuters to assist where they won't be seen, but we can't reasonably act openly."
- ◇ **We need help entering the tunnel under the Keeper's Guild.** "That is just the sort of task we are paid to address. I will see to a mage opening your way tomorrow first thing. A simple spell should be able to part the stone for you. If it is true you are entering the Sleepers' Cenobium and they have become our enemies, I do hope we will be appropriately remembered when it is time to split the spoils. Father Zarthu was known to have a very special ring, and I would be greatly interested in acquiring it should he be deposed."
- ◇ **Odran betrayed you by summoning sand-dwellers, and Xao will betray you the same way.** Patriarch Cryzonesth's eyes glow a pale red. "They have earned a painful death. I want you to ensure these foul beasts don't do the same thing to us."

**Treasure.** To protect them in the Sleeper's Cenobium, Patriarch Cryzonesth has one of his nieces present the *goldflame tongue* (page 258) to the party. It is usually cursed to ensure cooperation with Cryzonesth's wishes, but he gives an ordinary version with no curse if the party reminds him of what happened to in Odran since his thirst for revenge outweighs his greed.

### PATRIARCH CRYZONESH JARIT THE RESPLENDENT

**Patriarch Cryzonesth Jarit the Resplendent** (gold dragonborn **witch of the woods** [SPCM 407], chaotic neutral) proudly keeps his scales polished bright and wears imported breastplate.

**Traits** Cryzonesth is gregarious and likes to blow smoke rings to punctuate his speech.

**Ideal** Professionalism.

**Bond** Cryzonesth wants to one-up the magical achievements of the Disciples' Father Zarthu.

**Flaw** Cryzonesth hates committing to one side, instead going out of his way to try to get money from all sides of a conflict even if doing so is dangerous.

## THE SLEEPER'S CENOBIUM

The Sleeper's Cenobium is a grim stone structure with several sweeping minarets, but most of its structure is confined below ground. Its architecture features many reliefs of toads and half-lidded eyes.

If the characters enter the Cenobium of the Sleeper openly, they are invited to a chapel to meet with the High Priest, at which point they are attacked.

If the characters enter covertly, the obvious entrances are the Feast Hall and underground tunnels from the Keeper's Guild's collapsed library.

**Creatures.** The Sleeper's Cenobium is patrolled every hour by a team of two **sand-dweller binders** (page 251) and a **formless spawn** (SPCM 320). They don't check dead-end rooms unless they suspect intruders.

## D. FEAST HALL

The foyer is dimly lit by flickering torches. It connects directly to a grand feast hall which is often used on holy days to host public feasts as means of recruitment. The feast hall shows signs of recent use in discarded bones and dirty dishes piled on the ends of tables nearest the grand altar. The altar is marked with a highly stylized symbol of Tsathoggua, resembling a frog swimming among inky tadpoles.

## E. HALL STAIRS

The old stairs leading down into the basement squeak giving disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

**Creatures.** The guard is a gruff **sand-dweller slasher** (page 252). Characters can talk their way past him in disguise with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Deception) check. Enemies will check for disguises, however, and generally attempt Intelligence (Investigation) checks to see through an illusion spell or contest an Intelligence (disguise kit) check. The robes of an acolyte of the Sleeper make a suitable disguise.

## F. CHAPEL

The chapel is a sweeping room lined with pillars depicting toads in various poses. A dark, stained-glass window depicts a huge, fat toad swallowing a hollow jackal.

**Creatures.** The sand-dwellers overrun the chapel. Most of their numbers come by here regularly to beg Tsathoggua for more gifts. At any given time, there are five **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 249), a **sand-dweller slasher** (page 252), and a **sand-dweller binder** (page 251). They all wear the skins and robes of human acolytes of the Sleeper.

## G. LOWER HALL

The basement has a front hall with guards and a back hall for servants that is unoccupied at night. The **cellar** (Area H) and **Father Zarthu's quarters** (Area I) are both locked. The Dexterity (thieves' tools) check DC for each is 20.

## H. CELLAR

The cellar connects to a long pipe that leads to the tunnel under the **Fallen Library** (Area C). The earth cellar is connected to the lower hall by a locked wooden door adjacent to the prison. The Dexterity (thieves' tools) check DC is 20.

## I. ZARTHU'S QUARTERS

Father Zarthu's quarters are plush and comfortable, with a soft bed and an elegant chest. The wall opposite the entrance is set with a 5-foot vault door.

**Vault Door.** The vault's combination lock requires a successful DC 22 Dexterity (thieves' tools) or DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check to open. Zarthu knows the combination. The vault door is marked with a nearly invisible *symbol* (discord; check and save DC 16).

**Treasure.** The vault contains ten *spell scrolls of Elder Sign* (SPCM 129) as well as a Tcho-Tcho oculus (human eye; SPCM 129). In addition, it contains the guild's coffers: 16,000 cp, 6,800 sp, 2,000 ep, 2,400 gp, and 350 pp.

## RESISTANCE POINTS

Retrieving the scrolls earns 2 resistance points.

## J. MERCENARIES' QUARTERS

The adjacent quarter is the sleeping area of the disciples' hired muscle. A dozen sleeping mats lie along the western wall with small pots beside each one, and a small chest at its foot. This room is now unused, as the hired creatures were killed by nascent sand-dwellers.

**Creatures.** The occupants avoid this room except to sleep in the mornings.

**Investigation.** There is a bag of 100 pp hidden in a small pot near the mat farthest from the chest. Two message scrolls are in the chest. One scroll is a description of the PCs to watch out for (or a description of their most common disguises). Another is the announcement of the current retreat.

The empty skins of a dozen human and dwarf mercenaries wearing leather armor are hidden under the sleeping mats. This is a moderate disturbing discovery to characters who see them.

## K. PRISON

There are several prisons like this one, each guarded in a similar manner, but the PCs need only pass through this one to get to the Sleeper's Cenobium from the Keeper's Guild. The prison has many barred cells and more barrels, these ones open. They reek of old ale.

**Creatures.** The prison is guarded by one **sand-dweller slasher** (page 252) and three **sand-dweller whisperers** (page 250). One carries a vial of formless spawn residue (SPCM 120). The guards debate in Aklo about the prospects of any prisoners winning at the next feeding time. They think the last two winners are promising and might ascend soon.

**Prisoners.** These cells contain a number of prisoners. They are being starved and dehydrated until they kill each other for food and water so that the desperate murders transform the killers into additional sand-dwellers. There are seven prisoners. Four are **cultists** with 4 levels of exhaustion. The most senior surviving leader of the Disciples is Brother Vowern (see sidebar), who has 2 levels of exhaustion. Brother Vowern has no interest in helping fight the sand-dwellers, but he does share what he



knows about the enemy numbers in the Cenobium and the powers of the hermit. Each prisoner (even sand-dwellers who haven't revealed themselves yet) can be convinced to help with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation) or DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Disguised sand-dwellers who help will later betray the party during the next combat in which they appear vulnerable.

The final two appear to be **cult fanatics** with no exhaustion because they killed others for their food. In truth, only one of them, a child of Hargi immigrants named Alzanian, is magically influenced like the bandits (page 107). The other is secretly an unemerged **sand-dweller binder** (page 251). Characters can notice the two are much calmer and healthier than the others with a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight or Medicine) or Intelligence (Investigation) check or a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. They emerge from their skins if the party frees them during combat. Otherwise, they try to escape with the others.

**Development.** If the sand-dweller escapes, it seeks an opportunity to replace an NPC known to the PCs. It keeps tabs on the characters in a low-key manner until it can join in an attack by sand-dwellers, most likely in Anxi's Triple Tower during Act 4. If multiple sand-dwellers infiltrate the rebels, they are not able to coordinate their infiltration and reveal themselves during different incidents.

### BROTHER VOVERN

**Brother Vovern** (dwarf **mage**, neutral evil) is a long-bearded old man in rich purple robes.

**Traits** Vovern talks down to everyone. He whines and groans at every problem or inconvenience, even if others are far worse off.

**Ideal** Superior Knowledge.

**Bond** He wants to maintain his position and authority.

**Flaw** Vovern can't see his own culpability.

### ALZANIAN

**Alzanian** (human **cult fanatic**, chaotic evil).

**Traits** Alzanian is gregarious and polite.

**Ideal** Freedom.

**Bond** Alzanian idolized Queen Ravazel, the historical figure, as an icon of Harge's strength and independence, and believes joining her is the only alternative to becoming her victim.

**Flaw** Alzanian is a coward.

## L. THE SLEEPER'S SANCTUM

The inner sanctum of the Sleeper has become the base of sand-dweller operations in Fenkai and for their formless spawn patron monsters. A huge, noxious-smelling vat sits in front of the altar. Behind it, in the center of the sanctum, is a Huge statue of Tsathoggua.

**Creatures.** The sanctum is defended by **Father Zarthu** (page 245), two **sand-dweller whisperers** (page 250), and one **formless spawn** (SPCM 320).

Zarthu carries 2 vials of formless spawn residue (SPCM 120) and wears a *ring of Eibon* (SPCM 128). Unless they are targeted, the whisperers spend their action each round to sprinkle acid into the vat. For every three actions spent this way, the statue flares with light and a new **formless spawn** emerges from the vat.

The formless spawn are bound by magic, and they attempt to trick or bribe the PCs into releasing them. They murmur things in Aklo like, "you are of no interest," "your quarrel is with the high priest," and "the traitorous priest has those shiny baubles you mortals like." When the statue is disabled, the formless spawn are free to act as they please, and they slip through cracks deeper underground rather than fighting a battle they have no interest in.

Father Zarthu is no fanatic. He flees to the Violet Dimension if reduced below 20 hit points.

**Statue Effects.** The statue's stomach is an open portal to the Violet Dimension where the Sleeper is currently bound by the sand-dwellers. No creature or object can pass through the portal, but some of Tsathoggua's magic can. Creatures who enter this chamber are exposed to a weaker form of Tsathoggua's Unnamable Doom: they must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1 level of dread (SPCM 71). The dread's level is reduced by 1 every 24 hours that elapse. Worshipers of Tsathoggua (including all creatures normally encountered in this room) that can see his statue benefit from Tsathoggua's Enhance Magic trait, gaining a +1 bonus to their attack rolls and spell save DCs.

**Impulses from Tsathoggua.** Any creature that starts its turn with dread from Tsathoggua's statue feels emotional impulses from the Great Old One: mingled satiety, indignation regarding a betrayal, and hunger, but above all, an urge to stretch long-cramped limbs. The creature must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw, or it must move at least half its speed during its turn. This impulse can be interpreted to mean Tsathoggua is as much a prisoner as a patron with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation), Intelligence (Arcana), or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check.

The urges but not the compulsion recur in the dreams of any creature who has the Desperate Insight or Eldritch Sensitivity features at least once per chapter for the rest of *Skin Deep*.

**Treasure.** Father Zarthu carries 2 vials of formless spawn residue and wears a *ring of Eibon* (SPCM 128). The sanctum contains one *potion of murmurs* (page 258) and the following *spell scrolls*: *congeal formless spawn* (SPCM 97), *clairvoyance*, and *sign of Eibon* (SPCM 113).

**Development.** Turning the *ring of Eibon* over to House Cryzonesh earns the party a 50% discount from them. If they don't do so as soon as they leave the Sleeper's Cenobium, the *goldenfire tongue* (page 258) curses its wielder. Turning the *ring of Eibon* over to Dean Zong earns the party a 50% discount with the College of Veils. Father Zarthu, if captured and

prevented from teleporting to the Violet Dimension, is willing to talk only in exchange for his freedom. He knows that Ravazel has bound Tsathoggua, making him as much prisoner as patron. Tsathoggua's formless spawn and other creatures might become unreliable or even abandon the sand-dwellers if the sand-dwellers' binding could be broken. The binding depends on magic items located in a place called the Sand Citadel, which Father Zarthu knows little else about.

## STATUE OF TSATHOGGUA

### *Magical Trap*

The statue has AC 15, 75 hit points, vulnerability to cold and magical bludgeoning damage, resistance to acid and slashing damage that isn't magical, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. PCs can learn the statue's magical properties with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check as an action. If they understand the magic or are instructed by someone who does (such as a sand-dweller whisperer or priest of Tsathoggua), a character can disable the next defense as an action by succeeding on a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to gently cross out parts of the inscription.

When the statue is first damaged, time stops for it and the creature that damaged it. Until the end of the attacking creature's next turn, the statue can't be targeted or affected by any attack or effect. The creature must succeed on a DC 19 Charisma saving throw or it is paralyzed and immune to all damage, spells, and effects for that round. The time stop can be ended on both the creature and that statue early with a *dispel magic* spell (5th level or DC 15) or a *remove curse* spell.

When the statue is reduced below 50 hit points, it and the creature that damaged it flicker out of phase. The attacking creature takes 3d4 + 3 force damage and must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or be teleported 30 feet directly away and trapped in a partially phased state for 1 minute or until the statue is destroyed. While partially phased, the creature's speeds are all reduced by 10 feet and the creature has disadvantage on attack rolls, but it also gains resistance to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.

When the statue is reduced below 25 hit points and again when reduced to 0 hit points, it erupts in a spray of acid. Creatures within 5 feet of the statue must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d10 acid damage. The stone floor within 5 feet of the statue dissolves, creating a 5-foot-deep, donut-shaped pit. Creatures that fail the saving throw fall prone as the stone floor vanishes beneath them; creatures that succeed can spend their reaction to step aside to an unoccupied space within 10 feet.

## RESISTANCE POINTS

Defeating Father Zarthu earns 2 resistance points, or 4 if he is captured alive for questioning by Dean Zong. She asks to study any magic items he had on him. Turning his *ring of Eibon* over to Patriarch Cryzonesh earns another 1 resistance point. Turning his *ring of Eibon* over to Dean Zong earns another 2 resistance points but triggers the curse on the *goldfire tongue*.

## REWARDS FROM THE GUILD LEADERS

The characters are generally welcome to keep the items in the Sleeper's Cenobium, whether as spoils of battle against the sand-dweller invaders or with the blessing of the surviving disciples. The disciples realize that their patron nearly got them killed and look to the Five Towers for a new purpose.

Once the PCs defeat Father Zarthu, the Venerable Keeper gives them a relic of Bastet that has been nearly forgotten over the years: a *necklace of prayer beads* with one bead each of blessing, curing, favor, and smiting. If no party member can attune to it, she instead offers the PCs a suit of *armor of resistance* (force) of a suitable armor.

## CONCLUSION

Once the guilds' tasks have been dealt with, Mother Lien thanks the characters for their help and assures them she has enough votes to ensure Fenkai backs the Alliance of the Five Towers. All sand-dwellers remaining in the Sleeper's Cenobium are banished or killed by the Keepers' Guild and House Cryzonesh. The Keeper's Guild sends members to shore up the Elder Wall.

At this point, Fenkai becomes a safe place for the characters to rest. The characters also have time to avail themselves of the city's many amenities and magic item dealers. Dean Zong remains available at the College of Veils to teleport them either back to Yangan or onward to Anxi, as they prefer. She is excited to study the statue and other material used by the Disciples of the Sleeper, and already has guesses as to how the sand-dwellers use binding magic items to form magical bargains with their allied monsters.

If the characters have also resolved matters in Anxi, then it is time for them to prepare to for the coming battle with Emperor Xao, but they are interrupted with an emergency from Anxi within a few days. If they have yet to resolve matters in Anxi, the characters have about a week before the Five Towers finishes gathering intelligence and making arrangements for the mission there. This is a suitable time for activities such as those on page 121.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of this chapter, the characters advance to the next level (9 or 10).





## CHAPTER 3 OR 4: THE THREEFOLD CITY

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 9th or 10th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, a dwarf named Kowavan led miners to a rich vein of mithral at the site of what eventually became the Tsangese city of Anxi. Unknown to them, Kowavan was a cultist of Nyarlathotep. He knew that the mine (Silersong Mine) would also serve as a useful place to conjure creatures from the Violet Dimension. Years later, when it was vast enough, he performed vile rites that nearly opened the way for Queen Ravazel to bypass the Elder Wall by connecting the mine to the Hollow Mother's Well.

In the end, Kowavan was caught and killed for betraying Tsang and his body was entombed alongside the shattered well. The Silersong Mine was condemned by the newly formed Triumvirate of Anxi, and all known records of Kowavan and his work were destroyed. A few records were missed, however. They were eventually found by researchers serving Emperor Xao's orders to discover forgotten ancient magic.

Two weeks ago, a naval vessel dispatched from the Imperial City carried a sand-dweller infiltrator

pretending to be Commander Buransu, the ship's second-in-command. As soon as his ship docked, he met with the governor of the Sea City, Izonda, and impressed her with an ambitious proposal that he claimed would solidify her legacy as a governor of Tsang. He carried historical research from the Imperial Academy for Paranormal History that suggested that there was an important dwarven ruin under Anxi called the Crystal Tomb of Kowavan. It should be located somewhere in a vast mine called Silersong Mine, which is connected to Anxi's Deep City.

Because Silersong Mine was condemned by order of the Triumvirate, only the order of the Triumvirate could reopen it. Izonda brought the impostor Buransu to meet with them, and he persuaded them to do so by virtue of the historical significance of the find. While in the meeting, he also altered Lord Ho's emotions, which would later cause him to jeopardize his career and the resistance to Emperor Xao too. With the mine reopened, the sand-dweller organized an expedition to find the Crystal Tomb not long before the PCs arrived in Anxi.

Since the reopening, people have been disappearing there and in nearby mines and ironworks. City guards have been patrolling the mine but have been unable to locate any dangers or the missing miners. Some think those who disappeared ran afoul of forgotten dwarven curses. In truth, the guards eventually found the tomb had been warded to trap hollow creatures inside. However, it didn't obstruct natural creatures like cultists and bats or dangerous servitors of the Elder Gods such as nightgaunts, which lair inside.

## CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

In this chapter, the characters must address problems in all three of Anxi's districts. First, in the High City, they must calm Lord Ho's rage before he exposes the rebellion. He is belligerent and careless with his words, which puts the entire clandestine operation in jeopardy. The truth is that he has been mentally influenced by a sand-dweller and can't be calmed until the psychic influence is removed either by magic or by finding and killing the sand-dweller.

In the Sea City, rumors and propaganda swirl around the rebellion. The PCs must quell the rumors in order to convince Governor Izonda to believe them. Once they do, they will have the support of Anxi's Triumvirate. However, that will do them no good if Anxi is destroyed from below.

Under Anxi, in its Deep City, agents of the Emperor have entered an ancient ruin that holds a way for the sand-dwellers to invade Tsang despite the Elder Wall. Minister Zerelda knows that something below has been awakened and can tell the party about the sudden expedition that the Triumvirate approved. The characters must race the intruders to the extradimensional well under Silversong Mine before it is opened and Anxi is lost. They meet their foes in the Crystal Tomb of Kowavan, which features traps and the magical seal hiding Kowavan's Well.

## EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If your players enjoy a substantial dungeon delve, you can give them more of that experience by adding random rooms to the mine and Forbidden Tomb and occupying them with random encounters (see page 259).

## ANXI

Anxi is actually a complex of three sub-cities, which make their decisions by unanimous vote. The Threefold City is built on the only large harbor along a long stretch of sea cliffs. The Sunset River runs along the south wall of the High City, feeding a waterfall along the south edge of the Sea City. Getting between the districts of Anxi requires climbing long series of stairs or using ingenious lifts powered by huge water wheels in the waterfall.

Anxi is one of the richest cities of Tsang and has long been a rival to the Imperial City on all manner of cultural values. Opposition to the Emperor's excesses is strong here, but the people and their local leaders require persuading to take the step of open rebellion. They have a strong nostalgia for the ancient republic that became the Empire of Tsang centuries ago.

Because Anxi is Tsang's largest port, it has the closest ties to Odran. If any PC had family or friends in Odran at the end of Act 1, those people might have escaped to Anxi by ship.

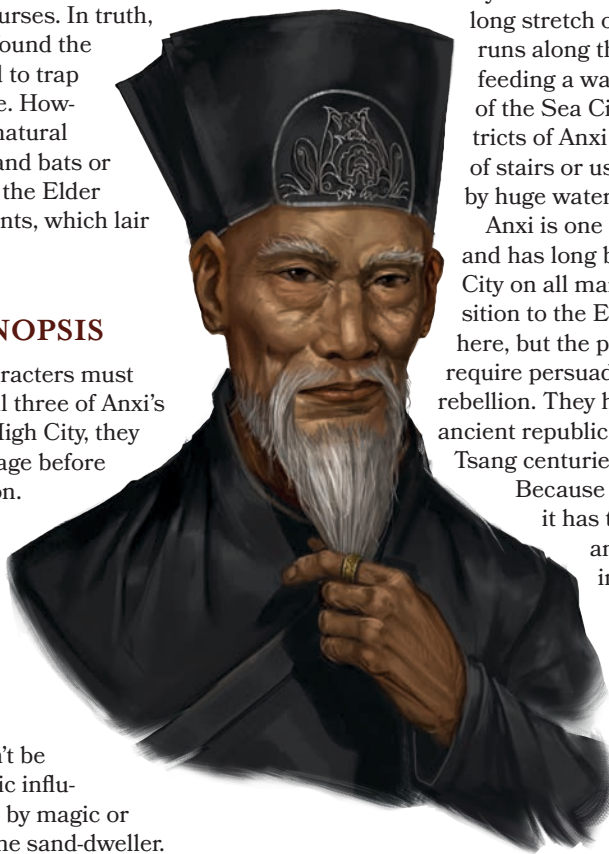
The Five Towers have the following information on the government of Anxi, which is a Triumvirate of the leaders of Anxi's three districts. The Triumvirate must be unanimous in major decisions, such as supporting the

Five Towers, meaning the PCs need to win over the leaders of each of the three districts.

## THE DEEP CITY

The Deep City is a lower-class area of laborers, mines, and refineries. It is carved from pale stone, and many areas of the walls and ceilings have accumulated soot over the years. Much of Tsang's copper and coal comes from this district. It exists almost entirely underground, just above sea level. Society's downtrodden and shunned are also forced to live here, although even their neighbors here tend to look down on them. The population is mostly humans, dwarves, orcs, and half-orcs.

The Deep City's rebels are marginalized minorities sick of being treated as beneath notice of mainstream Tsangese society. They include the miner's guild, sweepers' guild, and metalworkers' guild. The Deep City's loyalists are fervent nationalist laborers who worship the Emperor as a divinely chosen leader for their nation.





## SOOTSTONE MARKET

This large, open market is the main route into the Deep City. It faces the waterfall lift between the High City and Sea City. Folk here spread rumors about the characters' activities and those spread in the Sea City, so characters are liable to overhear awed recounting of their past exploits or absurd slander (if they haven't yet quashed it). Characters can buy just about any kind of adventuring gear or tools here.

## SILVERSONG MINE

The mithral mine was thought to be played out long ago, but it was recently reopened for exploration. Reopening it revealed that it had substantial untapped mithral and silver, raising questions over the real reason the mine was closed. Miners briefly resumed working the mine after it was found to be stable, but it has been closed again very recently. Some miners have been disappearing.

## THE SEA CITY

The Sea City is a mixed-class district built around Anxi's harbor. Its structures are mostly wood and lack the ostentatious style of the High City. The Sea City has a substantial trade with nearby gnorri settlements.

The Sea City's rebels mostly belong to the largest artisan's guild, although there are also popular artists, performers, and smugglers among them. Zanlan Mithrawen, contact for the Five Towers in Anxi, is based in the Sea City. Loyalists are merchants and artisans who are afraid that upheaval and dissent will be bad for business.

## GNORRI EMBASSY

A spiraling structure of smooth stone rises from the harbor near Anxi's outer lighthouse and breakwall. It has substantial air pockets below the waterline and pools of salt water for gnorri even in the upper levels.

Characters can buy the following items from gnorri traders here. They can also pay 400 gp for an alchemical procedure that will give them gills and the ability to breathe water as well as air. Once the Sea City propaganda has been quelled, the gnorri agree to assist the Five Towers, and the PCs can then purchase potions from them at a 25% discount.

The gnorri traders sell the following potions:

Item	Price
<i>Potion of healing</i>	50 gp
<i>Potion of water breathing</i>	100 gp
<i>Potion of greater healing</i>	200 gp
<i>Potion of growth</i>	200 gp
<i>Potion of stone giant strength</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Potion of superior healing</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Potion of supreme healing</i>	10,000 gp

## THE HIGH CITY

Anxi's High City is a place of wonder and magic, inhabited by many of the wealthiest people in Tsang. Its buildings are mostly tall structures of pale stone, many connected to each other by wooden or stone walkways. The streets are broad and well kept but often cast in shadow by the tall structures in all directions. In addition to the usual traffic at ground level, including rickshaws and palanquins, occasionally mages or pegasus riders dart directly between the high towers.

Dissidents in the High City are mostly students, disillusioned naval retirees, idealistic landowners who want to shape a new government, and patrons of the arts. Loyalists include wealthy landowners and financially comfortable merchants.

## SOARING KIRIN TEAHOUSE

The Soaring Kirin is frequented by the upper middle class, students from wealthy families, and patrons of the arts. There is a lunar harvest festival coming up, so fine seasonal moon cakes are offered to all guests.

Item	Price
Tea	1 sp
Sake	2 sp
Moon cake	1 sp

## TOWER OF TAPESTRIES

The Tower of Tapestries is a satellite campus of the College of Veils. As its name suggests, it is hung with countless tapestries depicting the plots of famous plays, historical battles, and novels. The resident bards and wizards offer spellcasting services and magic items useful to spellcasters. In addition, they also offer suites of rooms ensorcelled to provide sights, sounds, and smells of distant destinations. Characters can freely make use of those rooms, courtesy of Dean Zong. Characters can also buy the following services and magic items from the bards:

Service	Price
1st-level spell	25 gp
2nd-level spell	75 gp
3rd-level spell	200 gp

Item	Price
<i>Staff of healing</i>	5,000 gp
<i>Wand of the war mage +1</i>	600 gp
<i>Winged boots</i>	750 gp

## TRIPLE TOWER

The Triple Tower serves as Anxi's seat of government, where the Triumvirate meets and the city bureaucracy is housed. It is also a grand and ancient fortification, the tallest and sturdiest redoubt in case of siege. After the characters first meet Lord Ho, they can meet with him thereafter in an audience chamber in the Triple Tower.

**Sky Bridge.** The Triple Tower is connected to the Tower of Tapestries by a sky bridge 120 feet above the main thoroughfare that cuts through the High City. A teleportation circle in a small pavilion marks the center of the walkway.

**Cliff Stair.** A dizzyingly tall spiral staircase is cut into the cliffside at the base of the Triple Tower. This is the only way by foot down to the Deep City and Sea City, which must otherwise be accessed by the waterfall lift.

### ELDRITCH SENSITIVITY AND ALIENIST CONTACTS

A character with the Eldritch Sensitivity background feature can learn about their art from Dean Zong at the Tower of Tapestries.

A character with the Alienist Contacts background feature can consult with the Ranorag at the gnorri embassy (page 143) to learn about otherworldly incidents similar to those the character is investigating.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The text below assumes the PCs take Dean Zong up on her offer to teleport them. If the PCs instead approach by land, the dissident smuggler Zanlan Mithrawn meets them at the High City main gate. (Revise the descriptive text as appropriate.)

If the characters come by magic, read or paraphrase the following:

Dean Zong meets you at the Veilparter Academy. Standing before the teleportation circle, she explains, "Listen well to Zanlan, who will be your contact in Anxi. While you are there, I also have an errand for you. My researchers have turned up evidence that a magic portal exists somewhere in Anxi connected to the Violet Dimension. It is likely in the oldest parts of the city. If you can find it, I believe we can use it to attack the sand-dwellers in the seat of their power once we have the key to do so. For now, just locate this ruin. If sand-dwellers are active there, they might be trying to open the portal for their own purposes! Do you understand?"

Dean Zong can answer the following questions.

- ◇ **Where should we look?** "The oldest part of Anxi is the Deep City. Check with Minister Zerelda there for any strange ruins she might know about."
- ◇ **Is the gate defended?** "It would likely be trapped or warded in some manner to keep just anyone from stumbling into it."
- ◇ **What do you know about it?** "There are fragmentary references to some kind of betrayal of Anxi by a dwarf mage named Kowavan, as well as to a well connected to the Violet Dimension. The lack

of clear records is very strange. Some documents I requested from a school in the Imperial City said their records were on indefinite loan to Emperor Xao, so I am concerned our opponents might be one step ahead of us. I also suspect there might have been a formal effort to hide knowledge of this magic. Such a pity how knowledge can be lost out of fear..."

When the party is ready, Zong casts a spell to open the teleportation circle, taking the characters to the Tower of Tapestries in Anxi, connected by bridge with the Triple Tower. Read or paraphrase the following:

After you step through the teleportation circle, you find yourselves on a stone bridge among the white stone towers of Anxi.

You smell salt air. The eastern half of the horizon is swallowed up by the sea, separated from the hilly western land by soaring white cliffs. A waterfall in the distant western hills feeds a river that runs south of Anxi's high city walls and the surrounding sprawl of houses. Within the walls, tall buildings stretch north, south, and west of you. The western end of the bridge you stand on is a whimsically decorated spire draped with silk hangings and tapestries. At the eastern end of the bridge is the tallest tower of them all, a spiraling behemoth at least 150 feet above ground level and abutting the top of the nearest cliff. The ground drops away just beyond the tower, where a third central tower, connected to the other two, is only just visible over the cliff edge. Another hundred feet below the cliff sprawls a district of low, wooden buildings. The wooden district surrounds a harbor sheltered by rock formations and soaring sea cliffs flanking the one the city stands atop.

A thin man nearby coughs, and Dean Zong points you toward him. "Zanlan here will take care of you. If you need somewhere to rest, you are welcome to stay here in the Tower of Tapestries." She gestures to the western tower. She then gestures for you to wait a moment. "Oh, let me make you a little less conspicuous. I know just the illusion. How would you like to look?"

She casts *seeming* on the characters to make them look like whomever they wish; if they need a suggestion, she makes them look like common musicians. Zanlan then rushes them down the Tower of Tapestries and outside to get on their way.

Either way, Zanlan asks the party to hide in a wagon of bottled powders, sloshing alchemical reagents, and stinking bat guano. Zanlan explains the situation in Anxi and drives them across the High City to their first meeting. He summarizes any of the previous reports from the Five Towers that the characters missed and updates them on the latest happenings.

- ◇ Lord Ho of the High City has turned belligerent and openly speaks of rebellion against the em-



peror. While this makes him more likely to help, it might also bring down Imperial hostility before the Five Towers are ready to act. He needs to be convinced to wait for the right moment.

- ◇ Governor Izonda of the Sea City recently received naval ships from the Imperial City.
- ◇ Minister Zerelda of the Deep City reports that there have been miners disappearing in the recently reopened mithral mine. Given the events at the Reverent Empress's Gate, she worries that the miners might have been killed by sand-dweller infiltrators. She postponed her meeting to deal with a strike.

The first meeting is with Lord Ho in an upscale teahouse called the Soaring Kirin. If the party fails a DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check and aren't disguised (DC 13), they are spotted by imperial loyalists who notify the Imperial guard detachment in the Sea City.

### CONDITIONAL ENCOUNTER: IMPERIAL ASSASSINS

If this is the second city the characters visit, two **assassins** who serve Emperor Xao strike the characters if they are noticed in Anxi while in public or if they fail to persuade Governor Izonda. Although loyal to the Emperor, if held at bay the assassins can be talked down with evidence of the Emperor's inhuman and cataclysmic goals and a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If persuaded, the assassins depart to remove their families from the Imperial City.

## STANDOFF IN THE SOARING KIRIN

The High City's Lord Ho awaits the party in an exclusive teahouse, the Soaring Kirin. The Soaring Kirin is an elegant, two-story establishment with private rooms and extensive selections of tea, fine food, and wine. Entrance costs 1 gp but all the fine food and drink is unlimited thereafter.

**Creatures.** A **bat** hangs from an eave, watching the PCs; they can notice it with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. The **swarm lich** (see page 256) is watching Lord Ho through the bat's eyes. It watches through a balcony, just above the entrance to the Soaring Kirin.

### GETTING INSIDE

When the characters enter, Zanlan has a quiet word with a well-dressed young **commoner** woman inside the teahouse. If the party has any visible weapons,

she insists they be left at the door with a **guard**. She leads the group to the second floor to a door just above the entrance guarded by a human **veteran**. Read or paraphrase the following:

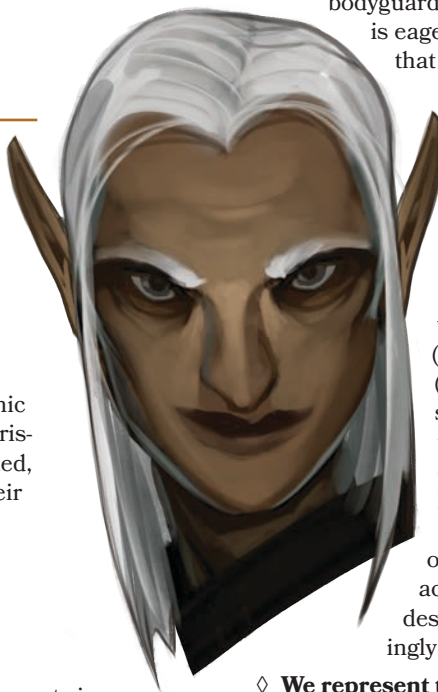
You are led into a private dining room where Lord Ho awaits you. He is an elderly man sipping tea next to a wispy young woman wearing scholar's robes. She glances at you over a small pile of scrolls and ledgers. Zanlan bows deeply and says, "Lord Ho, we are very grateful you have made the time to speak with—"

The man glares up at him and interrupts. "You have certainly taken long enough! These are obviously not the leaders I demanded to see." He gestures at you and then turns to question you. "Who are you, and why do you waste my time?"

**Lord Ho** is accompanied by his scribe and secret bodyguard, **Amiya Yetumi** (see sidebar). He is eager to join the rebellion but insists that he must lead it and they must attack immediately. He demands to know the identities of the rebel leaders and to have them appear in person to prepare a grand revolution immediately. Anyone who interacts with or closely studies Lord Ho can tell he is being magically influenced with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) or DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check. A *detect magic* spell, *identify* spell, Eldritch Sensitivity feature, and similar features detect an aura of enchantment on him.

Lord Ho has specific responses on the following topics. If the characters successfully reason with him despite the magic on him, he grudgingly agrees and dismisses them curtly.

- ◇ **We represent the Five Towers.** "I don't want petty representatives! I already told Zanlan that I will speak with the other organizers at once to lead them in an immediate armed uprising. We have wasted enough time already!"
- ◇ **We will face the Emperor's forces, but we must prepare first.** Characters can convince him to postpone his demands with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check or by recounting stories of reckless and failed uprisings and a successful DC 21 Charisma (Performance) or Intelligence (History) check. On a failure, he says, "A distraction, I'm sure. Possibly even orchestrated by the foul Emperor and his dark magics! If you are not ready to march on the Imperial City, you are traitors to the people and I have little use for you."



- ◇ **The alliance must be led by agreement among the rebels.** Characters can convince him he is being unreasonable with a successful DC 21 Charisma (Persuasion) check or by succeeding on a DC 19 Intelligence (History) or Charisma (Performance) check to recount Tsang's ancient republic's democratic ideals. On a success, Lord Ho frowns and says begrudgingly, "Perhaps I am being... a little hasty. I will consent to a dialogue with your other leaders." Zanlan visibly relaxes and says, "Colonel Jenu will be in touch shortly." On a failure, Lord Ho scoffs. "I am not forming a new government. I simply wish to move this rebellion before Emperor Xao moves to crush us, and your allies are too cowardly to do it!"
- ◇ **Another leader is better qualified.** A character can convince him to accept another leader as more qualified with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check or DC 22 Charisma (Intimidation) check. The alternative must be someone with experience leading in Tsang, such as Colonel Jenu or Zanlan Mithrawn. On a failure, he snarls, "And how can I be sure I can trust them?" The characters can make one further attempt of the same check or a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check to calm his fears. If that check also fails, any other alternative leader suggested has the ability check DC increased by 2.
- ◇ **How can we be sure you aren't a sand-dweller impostor? or We'd like to check for sand-dweller infiltrators here.** His eyes widen and his nose flares with indignant rage. "You dare accuse me of betraying the cause?" Characters using Wisdom (Insight) automatically feel his rage is genuine. The characters can persuade him to allow a test with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If they fail, he refuses, and the offense gives disadvantage to the next ability check to influence him.

**Aggressive Actions.** Tests reveal Lord Ho is what he appears to be. If anyone draws a weapon, casts a spell, or activates a magic item (without permission), Yetumi draws a hidden dagger and puts it to that character's throat in a flash. If it comes to a battle, she has advantage on Initiative checks, and attacks that character first. She listens if Lord Ho calls her off or if the characters persuade her Lord Ho is under a spell with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) or by pointing out evidence found with a successful Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Arcana) check. If they fail, Zanlan intercedes and defuses the situation, but they have disadvantage on ability checks to influence Yetumi until they break the effect on Lord Ho.

**Freeing Lord Ho.** The lingering emotional urging can be ended with either *dispel magic* (5th-level slot or DC 15) or *remove curse*. It also ends if Commander Buransu is killed. He gasps and then sits back, deflated. He recants his desire to lead an immediate insurrection.

**Departing.** Lord Ho's assistant and bodyguard, Yetumi (an **assassin**), catches them as they leave the meeting to apologize on his behalf. Unless they already removed the emotional urging, she asks to speak privately.

Yetumi explains, "This isn't like him. Perhaps someone is pressuring him to behave this way? He has been acting oddly aggressive ever since he met with a navy Captain Buransu and Governor Izonda a few days ago. Buransu wanted permission to reopen the condemned Silversong Mine." She knows the Silversong Mine is an ancient and vast dwarven mine that predates human settlement of Anxi. Yetumi doesn't know why it was opened.

## LORD HO

**Lord Ho** (human **noble**, lawful good) is finely dressed elderly human.

**Traits** Lord Ho rants about the disgraces of Emperor Xao at every opportunity. He also enjoys trading thinly veiled insults with friends as well as enemies.

**Ideal** Tradition.

**Bond** Lord Ho wants to restore the ancient Tsangese republic.

**Flaw** Lord Ho has a fiery temper.

## YETUMI AMIYA

**Yetumi Amiya** (human **assassin**, lawful neutral) wears a simple dress and carries numerous rolled-up legal documents in her ink-stained hands. Although officially she is his personal scribe, she is also secretly his primary bodyguard.

**Traits** Yetumi is polite and demure. If she detects a threat to Lord Ho, though, she leaps into action with incredible speed.

**Ideal** Duty.

**Bond** Yetumi deeply respects Lord Ho's political goals and cares about his success and safety beyond her duty as his secret bodyguard.

**Flaw** Yetumi struggles to trust anyone affiliated with Fenkai or governments outside Tsang.

## RESISTANCE POINTS

Satisfying Lord Ho's demand without ending the emotional urging earns the party 1 resistance point. Calming him without removing the emotional influence instead earns 2 resistance points. Freeing him from the magical effect instead earns 3 resistance points. Killing Lord Ho costs the rebellion 2 resistance points, but Zanlan is still able to convince the High City's replacement to join the rebellion.

## THE NEXT STEP

Once the party is outside, Zanlan invites the party to accompany him to the Sea City to speak with his allies. He takes them, cart and all, down the great lift to the Sea City, where they discuss **Rumors in the**



**Gnorri Embassy** (below). The access to the lift is in the shadow of the Triple Tower. It is a wide market square with many vendors selling a huge variety of wares. The lift is a wide wooden structure driven by a huge wooden waterwheel in the nearby waterfall. The lift takes them past a broad stone staircase descending into the cliffside. This is the entrance of **Sootstone Market** (page 139).

**The Waterfall Lift.** The lift operator is a friendly old man, very proud of the public service he operates. He proudly explains the details of the waterwheel and gears to anyone who expresses interest in it. Characters who take the lift without Zanlan are charged a 2 cp toll per person.

### PURSuing LORD HO'S DEMAND

If the characters contact the other rebel leaders to bring them to Anxi as Lord Ho demanded, they refuse to come, saying they must see to their own preparations. The characters must find some other way to persuade Lord Ho. Dean Zong (at the Tower of Tapestries) and Colonel Jenu agree to meet with and defer to Lord Ho if the characters succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check for each of them but only if they have completed their mission in Fenkai. This satisfies Lord Ho.

## RUMORS IN THE GNORRI EMBASSY

Read or paraphrase the following when the party goes to the Sea City with Zanlan:

In the Sea City docks district, Zanlan takes you over several wooden bridges to a spiraling stone and brick building of no human design. He hops off his wagon and leads you around to a cavernous opening facing the harbor. Gnorri guards there greet him casually and move aside while he greets them with an eager grin. Inside a circular common space, he leads you to a gnorri with four arms and elaborate nets holding various leather packages across her body. "This is Ranorag, a friend and ally. She has a problem she would like your help with."

Ranorag exchanges pleasantries with the PCs, then asks, "Do you have proof you can unmask disguised sand-dwellers?" She is relieved by any proof they offer, raising herself higher on her tail and clenching her fists animatedly. She droops with disappointment if the response is vague or negative.

Ranorag then elaborates. "Propaganda has spread through the Sea City like a plague these past weeks. They say we have been using flesh warping magic to create seditious infiltrators among the guild leaders and Odranian immigrants, not to mention sand-dwellers at the southern border. It has gotten so bad that Governor Izonda is coming to make a formal inquiry."

**A Familiar Face.** Some familiar faces from Act 1

have taken refuge in the Sea City and arrive at the Gnorri Embassy soon afterward when word spreads of the party's arrival (they have friends in the Five Towers thanks to Lord Killian). Appropriate characters are Salzarin, Marzelik, or Ishvaldin (provided they survived); you should choose a character the players enjoyed interacting with. The chosen character arrives just as Ranorag finishes her explanation, greets the PCs excitedly, then grows serious and confirms the gnorri's assessment of the situation. Ranorag says the refugees from Kulara who joined the Odranian neighborhood in Anxi's Sea City have been ill-treated because of the rumors. There have even been a few mob attacks. She asks the PCs, "Please speak to the governor when she arrives. We need to disprove this nonsense now."

**Development.** Governor Izonda arrives in 2 hours, giving the party a little time to prepare and catch up with friends.

### RANORAG

**Ranorag** (gnorri **druid**, neutral).

**Traits** Ranorag is fascinated by ghouls, elves, and other species not commonly seen in the port of Anxi.

**Ideal** Self-Improvement.

**Bond** Ranorag cares deeply for her homeland, and supports Anxi if convinced that it is the best way to defend her home.

**Flaw** Ranorag prefers to flee and hide if threatened.

### GOVERNOR IZONDA'S HEARING

When the time comes for the hearing, read or paraphrase the following:

Governor Izonda rides into the main entrance of the Gnorri Embassy on horseback accompanied by six guards. A murmur runs through the gathered gnorri and Odranians. She never dismounts, instead staying mounted to retain a good view of the area. She clears her throat and then announces, "Your embassy stands here only by the grace of Anxi's Triumvirate. Very severe accusations have been leveled at you, and while we believe you are our friends, we must not ignore that danger closes in on our nation. Does anyone here have information on the matter of the sand-dwellers that might help ensure Anxi's safety?"

Ranorag encourages the PCs to intercede at this point. Any character can persuade her that the rumors are all slander with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check. They have advantage if they point out troubling patterns in the city. They automatically succeed if she is presented with proof of sand-dweller infiltration in the city, such as testimony from Lord Ho after he was freed from emotional urging.

Governor Izonda has specific responses on the following topics:

- ◇ **Haven't the Odranian refugees told you what happened in Odran?** "Most of the Odranian refugees only know sand-dwellers as monsters that appeared suddenly in huge numbers from the desert." She sighs. "Admittedly, some found Duke Odran's behavior suspiciously convenient for the monsters, but even if they had truly convinced him to betray his people to them that says nothing about impostors or any activity here."
- ◇ **Who is Commander Buransu?** "Commander Buransu was reassigned here from the Imperial City two weeks ago. He is now leading an expedition into the Deep City's Silversong Mine to find rumored ruins connected to dwarven heroes who fought Queen Ravazel."
- ◇ **The Imperial forces have been compromised.** Governor Izonda can be convinced to confine the naval ships to dock temporarily without evidence with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 19 Charisma (Intimidation) check, in which case she says, "That is a grave threat if true. I admit caution is the wise approach, and I will order the ships quarantined until all officers have been questioned." If unconvinced, she flatly says, "Our intelligence reports show no support for a sand-dweller infiltration and, frankly, cast doubt on the provenance of claims that sand-dwellers can pass as humans at all."

**Development.** If the party fails to convince Izonda of anything, she leaves in disappointment after saying, "Trading rumors for rumors solves nothing. I ask all visitors and citizens in Anxi to stop persecuting each other and especially to stop with the vigilante violence. There is no place for it in this city."

If the party has any success, the harassment of the gnorri stops getting worse and gradually improves.

Once convinced that the navy or Commander Buransu might be involved in the threat to Anxi, Governor Izonda has her guards fetch copies of the letters and documents Buransu used to make his case to the Triumvirate (described below).

If the party also convinced Governor Izonda to quarantine the sailors, then Ranorag comes to thank them. She offers medical supplies to the Five Towers and gives the PCs a discount at the **Gnorri Embassy** (page 139). In addition, she gives them a reward of 1,000 gp and offers to perform an alchemical treatment for one of them. The treatment, which takes 8 hours, gives the character darkvision with a range of 60 feet if they lack it or increases their existing darkvision's range by 30 feet.

### BURANSU'S RESEARCH

The characters can examine Buransu's letters and notes to determine what he was after. A cursory examination confirms Governor Izonda's summary: the ruins were built to hold the remains of dwarven heroes who defeated Queen Ravazel.

The characters can learn more by succeeding on a DC 13 Intelligence (History or cartographer's

tools) check, a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, or a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check. If they succeed, they realize that many documents were intentionally destroyed and learn the information in the **Chapter Background** (page 137). The records imply the approximate location of the Crystal Tomb of Kowavan deep under the Silversong Mine, hidden beyond the heroes' tomb. The character also learns the route that Buransu intends to take. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check also reveals that a reference to diamonds and copper suggest a style of magical trap that deals lightning damage.

## GOVERNOR UNEZA IZONDA

**Governor Uneza Izonda** (human **veteran**, lawful good) is a middle-aged woman who wears her old dress uniform from before she retired as an admiral. **Traits** Izonda uses as few words as possible.

**Ideal** Duty.

**Bond** Izonda takes great pride in the efficiency of her operations.

**Flaw** Izonda is overconfident; she thinks she can strategize her way out of any problem without outside advice.

## RESISTANCE POINTS

Convincing Governor Izonda to quell the rumors earns 1 resistance points. Convincing her to quarantine the sailors earns an additional 2 resistance points.

## NEXT STEPS

Zanlan catches up with the characters after the dialogue with Governor Izonda. He explains that they have an urgent request from Minister Zerelda, ruler of the Deep City, to help investigate a mysterious terror that has been making people in and near a recently reopened mine disappear. She can brief them in her office overlooking the mines.

## THE DEEP CITY TERROR

**Minister Zerelda** (see sidebar) keeps her offices near a deep pit mine at the center of the Deep City. The entrances to several of the oldest mines are down at the bottom of a long ramp circling the pit, including Silversong Mine and a little-used mine that connects to one of its side shafts. When the party enters, read or paraphrase the following:

Minister Zerelda's office is a little cramped and has a low ceiling by human standards. A middle-aged, dark-skinned dwarf dressed in heavy working leathers writes on a low desk to one side of the room. When she sees you, she grins and rushes over to greet you. She gives a polite bow followed by a vigorous pat on the arm as she says, "Why, you're adventurers if I ever saw any. Glad



to meet you! I'm Zerelda the Axebreaker, but you can just call me Zerelda. I'm minister of the Deep City and I suppose that makes me someone who hires adventurers!" She puts a hand behind her head. "Sorry, I assume you're here about the trouble in the mines?"

Zerelda has specific answers to the following topics:

- ◇ **What happened?** "Five people have disappeared in and around Silversong Mine, mostly from among Hargi, Odranian, and other immigrant miners and ironworkers. Happened right after that Buransu fellow reopened it. We closed the mine again, of course, but it didn't stop. I'm beginning to think miners are sneaking in through a side shaft." City guards have been patrolling the mine but haven't found any dangers or the missing miners. Some think those who disappeared ran afoul of forgotten dwarven curses.
- ◇ **Why bypass a closure for safety?** "The mine has a surprising amount of mithral, and I suppose some think they'll get lucky. Also seems there's rumors going around accusing me of being some kind of shapeshifting traitor, so that might make a few ignore my orders."
- ◇ **Why would anyone link you to a shapeshifting conspiracy?** "I can't say! Seems to be going around about a lot of those Five Towers folks fighting the good fight as well as controversial politicians. Governor Izonda says it's worse in the Sea City."
- ◇ **What do you know about Commander Buransu?** "He came by promising we'd find historical treasures if we reopened this played-out old mine, so we let him go in. Well, the few ancient dwarven records we have show it was tapped out shortly after the time of the invasion of Tsang by Ravazel. Turns out it had lots of mithral left, which sure is odd."
- ◇ **Will you pay us?** "Certainly! Saving lives is worth a great deal; that's a valuable mine going unused. You can expect 6,000 gp from the Deep City coffers if you find the danger and make the mine safe to reopen. If you bring back the missing folks, I'll throw in a treasure from my adventuring days!"

## MINISTER ZERELDA THE AXEBREAKER

**Minister Zerelda the Axebreaker** (dwarf gladiator, lawful good) is middle-aged, dark-skinned, and dressed in heavy working leathers.

**Traits** Zerelda talks quickly and asks rapid-fire clarifying questions.

**Ideal** Unity.

**Bond** Zerelda sees the workers of the Deep City as her family.

**Flaw** Zerelda can't let go of a lost cause.

## MINE ENTRANCE

The mine entrance is at the bottom of the circular pit. The entrance is an ancient stone arch barred by a locked stone door and guarded by two surly dwarves. The characters are allowed to enter once they have Minister Zerelda's permission. They can't enter the mine without authorization or by sneaking in through a side mine broken open by greedy prospectors.

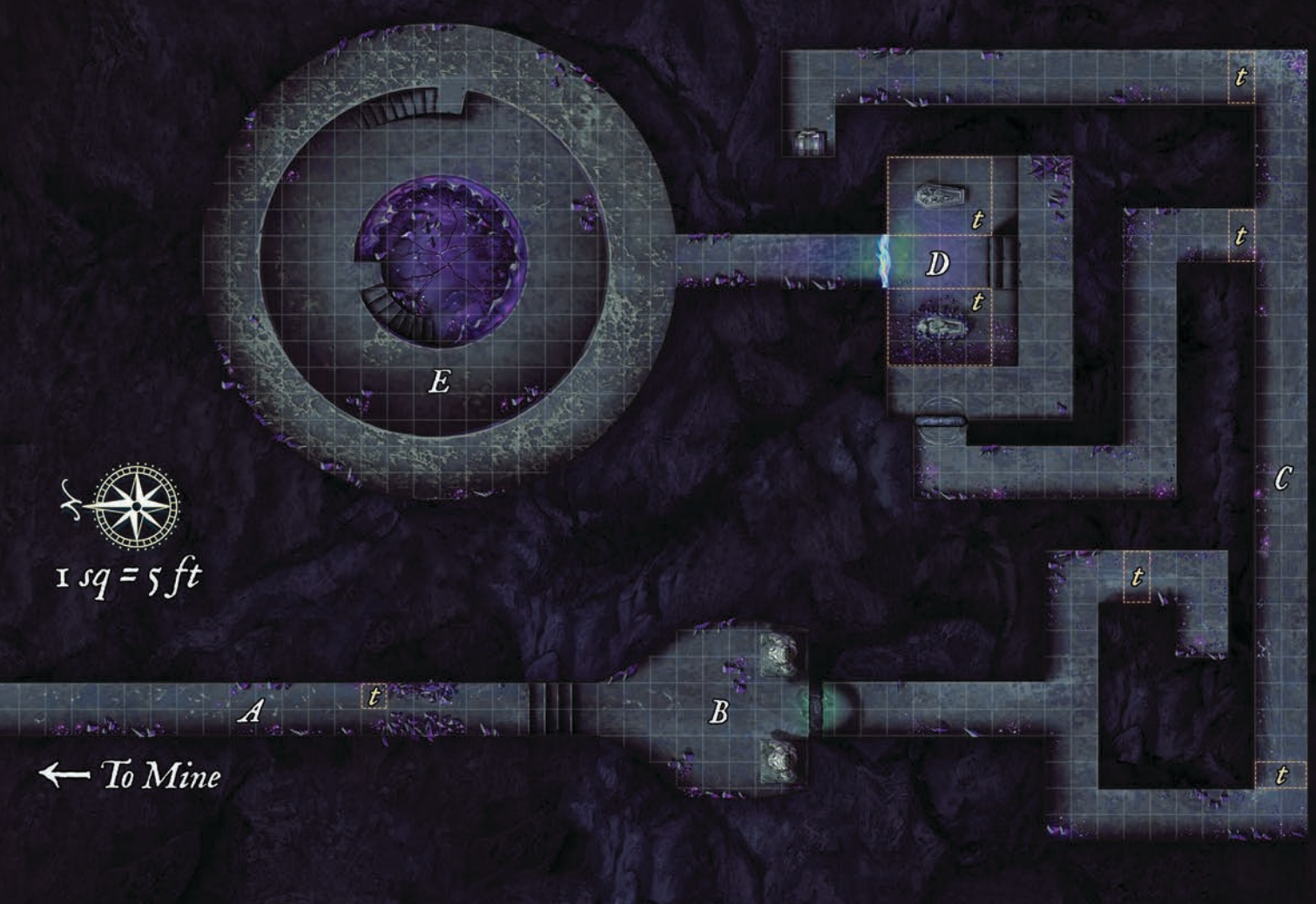
**Investigation.** The characters can follow the trail with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. If they have deduced a route from the documents and maps, they can follow it without getting lost with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check. Success takes the party to the Crystal Tomb after 5 hours of walking through rubble and descending slopes and ladders. Failing either check leaves the party in the side shaft (below) after spending 3 hours lost.

## SIDE SHAFT

**Creatures.** About 1,500 feet into the side shaft is a small team of miners. They are three dwarf women, a human man, and a halfling man (**commoners**). The miners prefer to be left alone and give curt answers to any questions in between grunting as they swing pickaxes. They are not permitted to be in the closed mine but believe the deaths were accidents and that this is a chance for them to get rich by taking mithral unnoticed. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check reveals that they saw odd marks on the stone down a certain mineshaft. Pointing out that they aren't supposed to be here makes them anxious enough to give advantage on Charisma checks against them. Following their directions leads the characters to the tracks left by Commander Buransu's expedition (below).

**Development.** When the party leaves, the group of miners are attacked by a flock of ten **nightgaunts** (SPCM 350) before the party is out of earshot (about 200 feet away). Four nightgaunts swoop down and each carries off a miner, while the others go after PCs. The captured miners laugh breathlessly as the nightgaunts tickle them to keep them incapacitated, but their faces are twisted in terror. The nightgaunts aren't out for blood: they merely want to take victims to a dangerous place and watch them try to escape. If the nightgaunts are attacked, they defend themselves but knock out creatures they defeat rather than try to kill them. When the remaining nightgaunts are outnumbered by the PCs, the rest flee to the Crystal Tomb. Their flapping makes enough noise for the party to follow them.

**Kidnapped?** If any characters are carried off or follow the nightgaunts, they end up at the crystal tomb. Even if the nightgaunts are faster, the intense laughter of their victims can be heard at a distance. Kidnapped victims are dropped in the Hall of History between the second and third traps, after which any remaining nightgaunts retreat deeper into the tomb to watch from a distance.



### BURANSU'S TRAIL

The party can spend 1 hour following the directions of the miners to find Buransu's trail deeper in the mine. The characters can follow the trail with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check. If they have deduced a route from the documents and maps, they can follow it without getting lost with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a success, they arrive at the Crystal Tomb after 4 hours. On a failure, they get lost for 2 hours and end up back where they started.

**Mining Mithral.** The party's route takes them by an obvious seam of mithral ore after the first 1d8 hours they travel through the mine. They can extract 1,000 gp worth of ore with 1 hour of work using a war pick or suitable tools; each PC trained in a suitable tool reduces the time required by 10 minutes.

**Resting in the Mine.** If the party spends a prolonged time in the mine, they are harassed by seven more **nightgaunts** every 2d4 hours.

### THE CRYSTAL TOMB

The tomb is located in the deepest part of the mine. The party can find it by following creatures carried off or by finding Buransu's tracks.

**Features.** Doors in the tomb are stone slabs that

pivot and have a central latch. Most are unlocked. Most areas are dark.

Several areas are slick with salt water with seepage from the nearby sea. Creatures that Dash on slick areas must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone, and a creature that falls prone has disadvantage on saving throws against lightning damage until they take fire damage or dry after 1 hour.

### A. THE COLLAPSED ENTRANCE

There is a transition in the nature of the stone near the end of the deepest mineshaft. Pale stone is marked by jagged intrusions of gray-purple crystal, like the crystal growths in the Broken Bastion and other parts of the Violet Dimension. Within a span of a few dozen feet, all the walls are composed of the gray crystal. Even the support beams are made of the same crystal. The tunnel is almost totally blocked around this point by huge fallen chunks of crystal, but a smooth channel large enough for a human to walk through has been carved through them.

A character can recognize this gap is the result of a *stone shape* spell with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Characters can tell that the crystal is faintly magical with a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana), Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery), or



Wisdom (mason's tools) check. The natural stone has been transformed into or replaced by this murky crystal. A *detect magic* spell reveals a faint aura of conjuration magic around the crystal.

**Trap.** Just before the gap in the rock is a **locking pit trap** that is 20 feet deep.

**Creatures.** The pit contains the five missing miners (dwarf and human **commoners**). By now, they are exhausted and badly dehydrated, so the party must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check to hear them if the trap isn't sprung.

## B. ENTRANCE ARCH

Beyond the 10-foot-deep collapse is a tunnel that leads to an open archway. The area is dimly lit by glowing crystalline moths that dance along the ceiling, much like those in the Broken Bastion. It is flanked by two statues of a stylized dwarf woman with a tiger's head wearing splint mail. The archway marks a transition to a narrower tunnel into the tomb. The top of the arch is carved with an *Elder Sign* like those on the Elder Wall.

The sign prevents most Mythos entities including the swarm lich and hollow creatures from leaving the tomb. It does not stop nightgaunts, due to their connection to the Elder Gods.

**Traps.** Both of the statues are **fire-breathing statues**. Their pressure plates are just inside the archway.

## C. HALL OF HISTORY

Winding halls lead to the center of the crypt.

**Inscriptions.** The walls of the crystal tomb hall are covered in Dwarvish runes. They tell the story of Ravazel's invasion, then the Hollow Mother's Well and the defeat of Kowavan from the **Chapter Background** (page 137). They warn that Kowavan must never be disturbed. The inscriptions are illustrated with paintings.

**Creatures.** Two **hollow cobras** (page 247) crawl along the walls, clinging to a shallow stone ledge above the inscriptions in order to move about without triggering the traps. They attack as soon as they notice intruders, but each one flees to the heroes' tomb if reduced below 15 hp. Two more hollow cobras are in the side chambers, one at each of the dead ends. They knock out intruders rather than kill them, hoping to transform them into more hollow creatures.

**Traps.** There are four **poison dart** traps, each one hidden by a dark part of the illustration: the hollow mother's well where an army emerged, a hollow jackal transforming an ancient human hero into another hollow jackal, a hollow cobra turning back as it digs under the Elder Wall, and the dark eyes of a human soldier's helmet.

**Study.** Characters can study the inscription like a Mythos text with ability check DC 17 and save DC 15. To do so, they must be able to read Dwarvish or be assisted by someone who can. Successfully reading the text teaches them how to create a *starstone*

of *Mnar* and how to open the secret passage. The creation process requires the ability to cast spells, the heart of a hollow cobra, an *Elder Sign*, 400 gp in alchemical reagents, and 1 workweek of effort.

**Treasure.** A transcription of the Mythos text can be sold to the Keepers' Guild or College of Veils for 400 gp.

A dead end contains a chest holding ten diamonds (worth 300 gp each) and a *starstone of Mnar* (SPCM 129) once used to defend against the creatures of the Mythos.

## D. THE HEROES' TOMB

A wide staircase leads down into the tomb, where there are two stone coffins carved in the likeness of one dwarf warrior and one human warrior. The coffins of the dead heroes are now composed of a hazy gray crystal like the rest of the tomb, except for gleaming copper filigree along their bases.

**Creatures.** Captain Buransu's team is here. He is a **sand-dweller slasher** (page 252) and he is accompanied by at least one **veteran** and an **urbane magician** (SPCM 406). They are very wet after triggering and disabling an earlier trap. If the characters slew the hollow eremite in Act 2, the intruders had to fight the defenders here. The shattered remains of two hollow cobras are piled in a corner of the coffin along with the bodies of two allies. If the hollow eremite lives, the two **hollow cobras** (page 247) are alive and helpful to Buransu instead, and the team's two **veterans** likewise survive.

The magician and veterans don't know that they are being led by a sand-dweller, but proving as much after combat is over is easy (such as his destruction of the *Elder Sign* or simply removing part of his skin covering). Convincing someone in combat is very difficult (DC 17 Charisma check using any suitable skill) without obvious proof.

**Magical Wall.** The ancient heroes who shattered the Hollow Mother's Well also left a magical seal to prevent sand-dwellers from accessing it. The south wall has a simple inscription over an arch pattern carved in the south wall. It's hard to read but can be clarified by covering it with chalk or spraying it with water. It says, "Heroes in life, bound by love, war-dens in death. Touch the hearts. Touch your heart. Remember that which no sand-dweller knows. Tears open the way or tears close the way." It contains a *glyph of warding* (blast version; spell DC 15) that triggers when it is read. The door only opens for a character who intently feels remorse, pity, or compassion (which sand-dwellers are incapable of) while touching the *Elder Sign*.

**Trap.** There is a shocking coffin trap (see below) built into both coffins.

**Treasure.** The dwarf coffin contains bone dust, an *elemental gem* (yellow diamond), a silver holy symbol of Bastet, and a *belt of dwarvenkind*. The human coffin contains bone dust, a set of *+1 splint mail*, and an elaborate jade necklace worth 250 gp.

If the characters show the armor or belt to any

member of Anxi's Triumvirate, the NPCs expect these historical treasures to be given over for the city's use since they belonged to ancestral heroes of Anxi. Turning over the relics to Anxi inspires some historical pride in the city and improves the population's morale. A Triumvirate member can be convinced to allow the PCs to borrow the items for defending the city with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check and to allow the characters to keep the items as a reward with a second successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Characters who fail and refuse to return the armor or belt make the leaders of Anxi unfriendly but not enough to spoil the collaboration between Anxi and the Five Towers.

## SHOCKING COFFINS

### Magical Trap

Pipes embedded in both coffins pour water into the tomb when a creature comes within 5 feet of either coffin. The trap floods the tomb with electrified water. Invisible creatures don't trigger the trap unless they touch a coffin.

With a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character can spot the gleam of tiny runes etched into grooves in the floor all around both coffins. A search of the coffins accompanied by a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to notice there is a small, damp spigot on the underside of each coffin's lid. A *detect magic* spell reveals an aura of evocation magic on the copper and an aura of divination all around the coffins.

Carefully scratching out the runes in the floor with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check prevents the trap from triggering. Covering the copper filigree with *stone shape* prevents electricity from coursing through the water, and plugging the holes stops the water from pouring out. Each casting of the *stone shape* spell can obstruct both parts of one coffin if the caster is aware of both elements. The electricity can also be stopped with a *dispel magic* spell (5th level or DC 15). The door can be prevented from closing with an iron spike or similar obstacle.

## RESISTANCE POINTS

Defeating Commander Buransu before he enters the Shattered Well earns 1 resistance point.  
Handing the items in the coffins over to the Triumvirate earns 1 resistance point.

When the trap triggers, the stone exit door slams shut. Fresh water gradually floods the tomb from under the lids on the coffins. At initiative count 10 each round, the water rises by 2 feet, and arcs of electricity course through the water. Any creature touching the water must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 3d6 lightning damage and becoming paralyzed for 1 round on a failed Constitution save,

or taking half as much damage and avoiding paralysis on a successful save. The lightning magic is exhausted after 1 minute. Water continues to pour into the room until any door is opened or both of the two spigots are plugged. A character can force the exit door open with a successful DC 21 Strength (Athletics) check.

## E. THE SHATTERED WELL

At the heart of the tomb is its secret treasure: the shattered Hollow Mother's Well. Read or paraphrase the following:

This circular cavern is dominated by a circular pit with two tiers. A ramp leads down from this level to the middle tier and down from there to the pit's fractured bottom. The third tier is full of reeking bat guano. In the center of the pit is a spear embedded deep in the crystal.

**Magical Wards.** This entire chamber is warded by powerful abjuration magic. Conjurings, divinations, the *dream* spell, and the *sending* spell don't function here.

**Ignited Guano.** The highest tier is covered in bat guano. If a spell that deals fire damage includes these spaces, the included area ignites and burns for five minutes. Each creature that starts its turn in a burning space takes 1d6 fire damage.

**Creatures.** The tomb is guarded by Kowavan (a **swarm lich** described on page 256), whose origin is described in the **Chapter Background** (page 137). Kowavan hides on the roof as a dispersed swarm of seemingly ordinary bats. Kowavan watches intruders after they enter to see their purpose and make it easier to escape. After about 4 rounds, his swarm form dives from the ceiling and says with a thousand shrieking voices, "Who are you? This place is closed to my allies, yet you have freed me?" He has the following responses, but he grows tired of talking quickly and leaves after two questions.

- ◇ **Who are you?** "I suppose I am not easy to recognize in this shape. I am Kowavan, the builder of this cosmic well. After they killed me for it, it seems the bats that fed on my body took something of my spirit into them."
- ◇ **How did you do this?** "Ravazel and her patrons showed me things you cannot imagine in my dreams. If you ensure there are no other wards imprisoning me, I might even deign to explain some of them... although I doubt you could understand." He is lying, of course. If Kowavan is freed, he flees immediately and doesn't bother responding to them.
- ◇ **What will you do now?** "My business is my own." He then flies out the exit if he can.
- ◇ **What does Ravazel want?** "Ah, Queen Ravazel. She is a queen among queens, and she will not rest until her power is supreme over all."



Kowavan remains peaceful only if the characters quickly move to break the seal on the entrance and allow him to escape. Otherwise, he leaves after a few interactions.

When he tries to leave, Kowavan is stopped by the *Elder Sign* at the **entrance arch (Area B)**. When that happens, he comes back and attempts to force them to destroy the *Elder Sign* at the entrance. If reduced below 40 hit points, he attempts to flee through the doorway once the party is inside but is stopped at the entrance by the *Elder Sign* there.

**The Shattered Well.** The shattered remains of Kowavan's well define the bottom reaches of this chamber. Although ruined, it continues to let a small portion of the hollow curse slowly corrupt the nearby earth and stone. Someone who studies it at length can tell with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check that sealing it completely requires extraordinary magic such as divine intervention, a *wish* spell, or an artifact (like the *Sacred Hexagon* mentioned in Kowavan's notes, below). A *remove curse* spell will prevent the spread for 1 day. With a little time, Dean Zong can prepare this for striking at the Sand Citadel in Act 4.

**Kowavan's Scribbles.** The tomb's walls are covered in rambling notes scratched into the crystal walls by Kowavan over his centuries of imprisonment. He speculates about the usefulness of night-gaunts and charmed bats to pass through the *Elder Sign* and bring him supplies to repair the Hollow Mother's Well, followed by complaints that the efforts always failed. He also speculates about various other magical connections he might open, but all eventually end with Kowavan concluding he needs an artifact called the *Sacred Hexagon* to open a connection to the binding items held in the Sand Citadel. He needed to contact Queen Ravazel to convince her to send help to free him, but even *sending*s are blocked by the wards on this vault.

In addition, there are extensive magical notes. Characters can study the magical notes like a Mythos text with ability check DC 20 and save DC 15 to learn the spells *contact other plane* and *contrary melody* (SPCM 99).

**Treasure.** Inside the shattered well is the spear used to destroy it, a *Staff of Bastet's Champion* (page 258). The staff is damaged but can be repaired with a *mending* spell or by anyone proficient with blacksmith's tools.

### RESISTANCE POINTS

Defeating Kowavan earns 3 resistance points, reduced by 2 if he fled rather than dying.

## RETURNING TO THE MINISTER

When the party emerges from the mine, Minister Zerelda asks for a blow-by-blow recounting of the adventure. She obviously gets a vicarious thrill from

their exploits, which remind her of the days before she retired. She rewards them with 6,000 gp. If they rescued the miners, she also gives the party a *gem of brightness* that she found in her last adventure.

## CONCLUSION

Once Anxi is secure, the Triumvirate votes in secret to support the Alliance of the Five Towers. The city becomes a safe place for the characters to rest. Dean Zong remains available at the Tower of Tapestries to teleport them either back to Yangan or onward to Fenkai, as they prefer.

If the characters have yet to resolve matters in Fenkai, they have about a week before the Five Towers finishes gathering intelligence and making arrangements for the mission there. This is an opportunity to receive treatment from the gnorri embassy, scribe spells, commission or seek out magic items, or perform other downtime activities such as those listed on page 121.

If the characters have also resolved matters in Fenkai, then they are given a few days to prepare to for the coming battle with Emperor Xao. However, before the characters can help the rebels strike proactively, the Imperial Forces come knocking for them in Act 4!

## COUNTER PROPAGANDA

Even if the characters failed at **Governor Izonda's Hearing** (page 143), they can spend downtime talking in taverns and markets to quell the rumors directly. Each day, any number of characters can each attempt a DC 17 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) or DC 19 Charisma (Intimidation) check. The check is made with advantage if the argument presents compelling proof. If the party succeeds three times before failing three times, they successfully dispel the rumors with the benefits to resistance points and rewards from the gnorri as if they had persuaded Governor Izonda. If the characters fail three times before they succeed three times, they attract an angry mob of three **thugs** and ten **commoners**. Killing anyone in the mob costs Anxi 1 resistance point.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of this chapter, the characters advance to the next level (9 or 10).





# ACT 4: HUMANITY BESIEGED

A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 11th–14th level

## ACT SYNOPSIS

Just as the characters unite the forces of freedom, the evil Emperor Xao launches a surprise attack on Anxi. The characters must fight to save the city, requiring them to fight atop the city walls, coordinating a heroic and all-but-hopeless defense to prevent the well-equipped army from breaching the walls. The characters must help the city hold out against foul magic as the city's defenders contend with a siege.

Reinforcements eventually arrive, but not far behind comes an army of monsters. The characters don't have long before the monsters eradicate both human armies, so the characters must infiltrate the now-divided Imperial army to eliminate the sand-dweller leadership and bring all the humans over to the same side. Then the human armies seek refuge in Anxi while the characters delay Ravazel's vanguard by attacking its yothan commander.

The PCs retrieve the *Sacred Hexagon* to access the Sand Citadel. While the mortals in Anxi dig in for a terrible siege, the party must return to the Violet Dimension to sabotage the source of the sand-dwellers' power. In the Hall of Binding, the PCs learn for certain that many of the captive monsters would rather be free than continue fighting for the sand-dwellers. The PCs can then return to Anxi with many of the sacred binding items.

The PCs and their allies race against time to destroy or co-opt the binding items. Then, with the monstrous army splintered, the sand-dwellers and humans fight on equal terms. Some monsters continue to serve, but many flee and some fight the sand-dwellers—it is a nearly even match. Ultimately, the PCs strike at Ravazel herself and end the threat for good.

## THE TRIPLE TOWER

The command center of Anxi is the soaring Triple Tower, an ancient piece of fortified architecture that has come to symbolize Anxi's storied history and lofty ideals. The Triple Tower also serves as Anxi's seat of government. Importantly in a time of war, this building is the largest and sturdiest defensive structure in Anxi. The broad lower levels can house thousands of refugees in case the city walls are breached. The characters are welcome here at any time to discuss strategy, and they can climb the tower to see the state of the city.

**Combat.** A few times in this adventure, creatures attack the Triple Tower in a bid to eliminate the rebel leadership or their most prized assets. The important rooms for these purposes are described below.

### A. ROOF

The tower's roof has a railing and a steep spiral staircase leading down. Sturdy pillars mark each cardinal direction and anchor the slim iron rails.

**Heightened Magic.** The rooftop of the Triple Tower is infused with magic. Anyone standing on the rooftop has advantage on ability checks to use magic items or as part of casting spells. Creatures suffer disadvantage on saving throw against spells cast from the rooftop.

### B. BALLISTA EMPLACEMENT

An exceptionally large and powerful ballista is stored here, where it can be rotated to hit any location as near as the city's walls, making it a potentially devastating tool against siege machines. The edges of the room have no railings. There are also stacks of huge ballista bolts here for ammunition. A lift allows ammunition to be quickly replaced from far below. It is operated by a hand crank and powered by the same waterwheel that runs the larger lift near the tower's base.

### C. WAR ROOM

The war room is the site of many meetings between city leaders. It features a large table dominated by a local map of Anxi where Governor Izonda likes to place figurines of troops and relevant tactical markers.

### D. ENTRY HALL

The entry hall serves as a point of welcome for dignitaries who travel to Anxi via *teleportation circle*. Its walls are hung with stately paintings of pastoral scenes set in the hills around Anxi. All the fixtures are finely carved stone. Refreshments are served at a few small tables from a kitchen on the next floor down. The tables are usually attended by one or two local **nobles** looking to catch the ear of a city official, but once the siege begins the room is usually vacant, except during brief visits by bards on errands from the Tower of Tapestries.

The gate leading onto the skybridge (**Area E**, below) can be locked from within. A successful DC 25 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check is necessary to pick the lock. The **guard** at the station has the key.

### E. SKYBRIDGE

A skybridge connects the Triple Tower with the Tower of Tapestries. It has delicate iron railings meant to block as little of the view of Anxi's skyline as possible. The center of the bridge is a *teleportation circle*. At the opposite side of the bridge is the Tower of Tapestries, the local campus of the College of Veils.





## RUNNING THE SIEGE OF ANXI

The city of Anxi is heavily fortified and has long distrusted the Tsang government, so they are quick to mobilize to defend the city. Surrounding the city are rolling hills, cliffs, and waterfalls, making it hard for an enemy army to engage at a distance. How effectively Anxi can use this terrain is determined by its troops, equipment, and morale. For ease of play, all these things are abstracted into a single value called **resistance points**. These points will change over the course of play. The Imperial Guard forces have their own pool of points called cohesion points.

For more information about Anxi, see Act 3.

**Resistance Points.** The measure of resources Anxi can muster quickly is determined by the resistance points the party gathered while in Anxi in Act 3. As noted there, the resistance points in Anxi are separate from those collected elsewhere. Although the party gathered resistance points in other areas during Act 3, those points are not included at first. The pool of points outside Anxi represents the strength of reinforcements that are available to come to Anxi's rescue. These remaining resistance points become available once reinforcements arrive in Anxi in Chapter 2 of this act.

Anxi's current condition is determined by the city's

current resistance points, which are depleted over the course of this act. The city starts Chapter 1 of Act 4 with 20 resistance points plus any the characters gained during their adventure in Anxi in Act 3 and the city can gain more with subsequent preparations in Chapter 1. Only add the resistance points gathered in Anxi; the rest of their resistance points from Act 3 are used to determine the strength of the reinforcements that arrive in Chapter 2. Note the reinforcement points are divided in half; half are added in the middle of Chapter 2, and the other half at the end.

When resistance points change, the effect listed describes what happens to the larger siege. These effects gradually unfold in the background over the course of minutes and should not directly impact the PCs.

**Cohesion.** The imperial forces start with 30 cohesion; this scale determines how quickly the forces deplete Anxi's resistance points. At several points, the armies clash and the cost to each army is usually one-tenth the points of the other army (cohesion for the invaders, resistance for the PCs and their allies). At zero cohesion, the imperial forces lose their will to fight. They do not flee, but they no longer attack Anxi and simply blockade the city.



Anxi Condition Resistance Points	Effect
29 or higher	Anxi's troops defend the outlying areas effectively, preventing Imperial troops from settling in.
25 to 28	Tsang forces take Anxi's outlying areas, but its walls hold firm despite attacks.
21 to 24	The docks burn as invaders breach the Sea City. Defenders halt the invaders at the Dark River by destroying the bridges, but the fresh water will not halt the army forever if they can find enough human corpses to protect their sand-dweller numbers from the water.
17 to 20	The Sea City falls. Only the High City and the Sea City outer fortifications hold out. If the gnorri were recruited in Act 3, they rescue many civilians from the Sea City and still harry the flanks of the enemy army.
13 to 16	Invaders overrun the Sea City outer walls and its rampart, and fight along it toward the weak inner gate of the High City.
9 to 12	Tunnels in the Deep City break open as sapping soldiers and mages invade. Miners and deep rangers perish, but people living in the Deep City are evacuating into tents in the High City. Ancient stone doors hold the invaders in check, but it's unclear how long those will hold.
5 to 8	The Deep City falls to sand-dweller undermining, and the majority of its remaining people die or are captured. The Sea City and High City are beleaguered but resist for now.
1 to 4	The High City's walls are breached. The people evacuate into the Triple Tower as defenders make barricades out of fallen monuments and conjured stone to hold back the encroaching troops.
0	Only the Triple Tower holds out, protecting a thousand lucky refugees, elite soldiers, and leaders. The rest of the city has fallen.







## CHAPTER 1: THE IMPERIAL SIEGE

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 11th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

While the characters gather supporters to oppose Emperor Xao, imperial agents and sand-dwellers monitor the rebels. Unless the characters were careful not to be seen or identified acting in support of the alliance, the enemy has even been using *scrying* spells to target Lord Ho, other leaders, and possibly even the PCs, and have thus learned a great deal about them, their activities, and their intentions.

Now that the rebels have begun to organize more brazenly, Emperor Xao and his generals conclude that they must crush the rebels before they gather more support or turn the empire against Xao. In addition, the sand-dwellers among them (Xao and three of his generals) know that Ravazel is readying her army to undermine the Elder Wall again at an opportune moment.

Emperor Xao plans to take the city, flush out the other rebels, and provide a sufficient distraction for Ravazel to breach the Elder Wall. If he can make it inside Anxi, he also wants to reopen Kowavan's Well to reach the Sand Citadel. He knows Ravazel depends

on magic binding items to control her monsters, and he hopes he can seize the items from the Sand Citadel and thereby take her magical power and knowledge for himself.

### CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

The PCs must help defend Anxi, one of the three cities they rallied in Act 3. As the chapter begins, they have a brief window to prepare for the arrival of the upcoming army. Then, they must protect Anxi's leaders from a magical assassination attempt. Soon thereafter, the Imperial army arrives, and the siege begins in earnest.

To conserve resources, Emperor Xao besieges the city from a distance at first, planning to soften up the defenses before a final strike. He uses Mythos magic to assault the city alongside salvos from his army's siege engines. He carefully places his troops at the edge of the effective range until he is ready to undermine the walls with a devastating summoned monster as well as conventional siege towers.

The PCs' efforts determine the course of the siege.

## THE IMPERIAL SIEGE

Successes allow the party to prevent deaths among the people and defenders of Anxi. If they fail, only the city's innermost sanctum holds out long enough for relief to arrive in Chapter 2.

### EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

If you want to spend more time on this adventure to provide a greater challenge and raise tension for the final act, consider extending the siege. Each extra day should generally consist of magical storms and a volley of fighting similar to the encounters presented below. At some point during each day, characters can restore resistance points with preparations and/or foil a raid by saboteurs or strike teams like the flying knights or teleporting killers.

### STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The characters are invited to a meeting with **Zanlan Mithrawen** (page 261) and **Governor Izonda** (page 144). Governor Izonda takes the lead on military strategy, given her years of military experience. If the characters only convinced the governor in Act 3 by the barest amount, she doesn't bother hiding a scowl as they arrive. Read or paraphrase the following:

You are invited to a meeting in the war room of the Triple Tower. A guard escorts you through the tower. When you are shown into the war room, Governor Izonda and Zanlan Mithrawen are waiting for you around a large table featuring a map of Tsang scattered with little tokens. The governor wears fine splint mail in place of her usual dress uniform. She nods and gestures for you to approach the table. "Time is short. Word has come that the emperor has mobilized his personal army. Our contacts in the Imperial Guard inform us that they are moving on Anxi at full speed, with Emperor Xao and his generals leading it. Are you willing to help us stall long enough to expose him, now that he is away from his stronghold in the Imperial City?"

Governor Izonda has specific replies on the following topics:

- ◇ **How long do we have?** "The army will be here by tomorrow, so spend today well."
- ◇ **Maybe this is just a show?/Can we play innocent?** "Emperor Xao is not a subtle or forgiving man. We should be prepared for combat."
- ◇ **What do we know about their capabilities?** "The Imperial Guard is the best-equipped army in the known world, and many are fanatically loyal to the Xao bloodline. In addition, the emperor is a renowned archmage and can call upon his Imperial Academy, where many of the most skilled mages in the world study. The Academy library is where dangerous magic items are taken when they are confiscated, so they might command rare and dangerous spells."

◇ **What is your plan?** "Anxi is a city built long ago for sieges, so we plan to be patient. We hope that acting openly will force Emperor Xao to show his true nature and undermine his own support. Or, on the off chance he is a hoodwinked mortal, he might see what is really going on in Tsang. We will have him at a disadvantage once our Five Tower reinforcements arrive from Fenkai, Yangan, and along the Elder Wall."

◇ **What about our allies?** "Colonel Jenu is already leading reinforcements here, and his subordinate Captain Ibzu is preparing a rear guard with additional troops to follow him. They will take at least three days to get here, however. In the meantime, we must ensure Anxi holds out against all attacks."

◇ **What about the sand-dweller army?** "Colonel Jenu has placed a skeleton crew on the Elder Wall that he hopes will prevent the sand-dwellers from realizing it is poorly defended for the moment. We hope to secure a quick victory once his troops get here so they can return to the wall before the enemy finds a way to exploit the temporary vulnerability. It is not a risk I like taking, strategically, but abandoning Anxi on such short notice could be catastrophic for its people, and Dean Zong believes that the ruins under the city will be the key to finally stopping the monstrous invasion."

◇ **What can we do?** "We have a few ideas I would like you to consider. Time is short, though, so each of you should choose what you think is the most important one to do."

Governor Izonda suggests the following forms of preparation:

- ◇ "Assist Dean Zong with her research on the Crystal Tomb. She believes she can use it to magically protect the city if she can finish her new spell in time. This task is extremely important to eventually getting an advantage over the sand-dwellers, and you are uniquely experienced with sand-dweller magic, so make sure at least one of you assists her."
- ◇ "Support Anxi's security by checking for infiltrators at the Silver Falls Toll House. Innocent travelers could be caught out in a war zone if we don't let them into the city, but at this point it is clear we can't trust that there are not sand-dwellers or mortal Imperial agents among them."
- ◇ "Morale is vital and right now, Anxi is in a precarious state. You could speak to the people to raise their spirits. Tell them of the sand-dwellers' defeats and weaknesses."

Unless the characters are all eager to follow one of Izonda's suggestions, Zanlan pipes in and suggests the following:

- ◇ "The Five Towers have arranged reinforcements



## GOVERNOR UNEZA IZONDA

**Governor Uneza Izonda** (human **veteran**, lawful good) is a middle-aged woman who wears her old dress uniform from before she retired as an admiral.

**Traits** Izonda uses as few words as possible.

**Ideal** Duty.

**Bond** Izonda takes great pride in the efficiency of her operations.

**Flaw** Izonda is overconfident; she thinks she can strategize her way out of any problem without outside advice.

from Fenkai, but Dean Zong can teleport a small number of them here immediately. Perhaps you could teleport to Fenkai and convince your allies there to come directly and help the siege?"

- ◇ "We have the home field advantage. We could make the advantage stronger by placing traps in key positions, like the outer town or the Sunken Port. Help us pick the placements and we can have volunteers digging pits or making other simple preparations."
- ◇ If the propaganda in the Sea City was not quashed (page 149), Zanlan suggests making another attempt to calm the people's fears. See that act for details.

The characters must decide what to do with the limited time before the army is entrenched outside the walls. Each character only has time to perform one of these preparations before the enemy army arrives the next morning.

**Treasure.** General Izonda gives the PCs four *potions of greater healing* and a *potion of hill giant strength* to help them in the coming fights. If the party retrieved any of the historic treasure from the coffins in the Crystal Tomb in Act 3 and handed those items over to the Triumvirate without badly offending her, she returns these items to the party provisionally for as long as they help to defend Anxi.

## DEAN ZONG'S RESEARCH

Read or paraphrase the following when characters go to assist **Dean Zong** (page 261):

Dean Zong awaits you in the library of the Tower of Tapestries. The three-floor room is lined with bookshelves and scroll racks accessed by levitating ladders, and attended by green-robed scholars. Light from the soaring windows is muted by elegantly embroidered curtains. She says, "The most important asset to the coming battle might be the shattered well in the Crystal Tomb of Kowavan. The inscriptions on the walls clearly indicate that the well is connected directly to the Sand Citadel, which is also the source of Ravazel's power and her control over her monsters. As I investigated repairing it as a way to attack the Sand Citadel, I stumbled

on a tantalizing possibility: the prisoner in the tomb thought the Sand Citadel's power could be channeled here, and I believe I have nearly finished devising a spell using those principles to borrow the incredible magical protections of the Sand Citadel. I need assistants to help me prepare the spell's formula in time to help protect the city."

Dean Zong has specific answers on the following topics:

- ◇ **Why is the Sand Citadel important?** "It holds the keys to Ravazel's monstrous army. The tomb inscriptions and some writing I found among the Disciples of the Sleeper both suggest that Ravazel has secured the service of many monsters through magical bargains sealed by special magic items. Those items must be stored in the Sand Citadel, and I think that they will be left vulnerable with most of Ravazel's troops here attacking our world."
- ◇ **Can we use the opened portal to attack the Sand Citadel now?** She sighs. "Not quite yet, I'm afraid. We must still find the *Sacred Hexagon*, which ancient texts call the key to the Sand Citadel. They mention her lending it to favored champions, so we should keep an eye out for clues among her minions."
- ◇ **Who wrote the inscriptions in the Crystal Tomb?** "They were clearly a very powerful spell-caster. The writer seemed concerned with ways to remove the spear embedded in the crystal without being able to directly affect it, so I must assume they were a sand-dweller or stranger entity. Given their advanced understanding of the magic in the well, I suspect it might have been the legendary Kowavan, the dwarf traitor who built the well in the first place."
- ◇ **What will your spell do?** Her eyes gleam with excitement. "I'm not entirely sure! I am certain it will infuse the city walls with powerful abjuration, which should make them harder to damage at least for a time. But we can't be certain until it's finished and cast!"

Each character can attempt a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check to assist with Dean Zong's research. Record the number of successes as well as the result of the highest check, since both affect her casting of the formula spell at the end of this chapter.

**Dread.** Performing this research exposes the characters to dread as if from researching a Mythos text (SPCM 132) with save DC 13. A character can use the *Butcher's Conquests* (page 216) to gain that text's ability check bonus on their check, but if they do, they use the *Butcher's Conquests*'s save DC.

## FENKAI DEPLOYMENT

Calling in support from Fenkai is feasible thanks to the teleportation circles provided by the College of Veils (page 129). Convincing spellcasters from the guilds to come help in this fight requires a successful Charisma (Persuasion) check. The result determines how much assistance the spellcasters offer. If the d20 roll is lower than their resistance points gathered in Fenkai, they can use that number instead of the d20 roll. Summoned support moves resistance points from the reinforcements to Anxi.

**DC 10.** Some apprentices come to provide basic support to Anxi's troops on the walls and to cast spells from the towers. Move 2 resistance points.

**DC 15.** One guild sends elite spellcasters. Move 3 resistance points.

**DC 20.** Two guilds send elite spellcasters. Move 4 resistance points.

**DC 25.** All three surviving guilds send elite spellcasters, including one guild leader that the characters most impressed. They give a rousing speech to the gathered mages, saying that they are makers of history, not just dilettantes or rich dabblers. Move 5 resistance points.

**DC 30.** All three surviving guilds come, as does Brother Vowern (page 135) from the Disciples of the Sleeper.

## COLLEGE OF VEILS SUPPORT

If the College of Veils sends support, it is a band of bards. The bards provide a song of healing that grants an extra d8 of healing during each short rest, 10 castings per day of *cure wounds* that each heal 5 hit points, and a casting of *invisibility* on each hero before any planned action.

## KEEPER'S GUILD SUPPORT

If the Keeper's Guild sends support, it is a band of abjurers. The wizards provide a *private sanctum* to prevent magical meddling and grant each hero *protection from energy* each day before any planned action. Each character can choose the energy they want; if they don't have a preference, the mages choose fire.

## HOUSE CRYZONESH SUPPORT

If House Cryzonesth sends support, it is a band of warmages. The mages cast *enhance ability* on each hero before any planned action. Each character can choose the ability they want; if they don't have a preference, the mages choose the character's highest ability.

## DISCIPLES OF THE SLEEPER SUPPORT

If the Disciples of the Sleeper sends support, it is Brother Vowern. He provides 6 castings per day of *cure wounds* that each heal 5 hit points, and a casting of *aid* that increases current and maximum hit points by 5 for each party member.

## THE OUTER TOWN

Anxi's servants and laborers largely live in low, wooden buildings surrounding the city walls. The residents evacuate into the High City ahead of the attack. Zanlan notes that if the





Outer Town isn't burned or otherwise destroyed, it will serve as cover for approaching infantry.

**Note for Later.** Record the check result; the effects are revealed when the enemy arrives. The higher the result, the better the effect.

### RALLYING THE TROOPS

Characters can attempt to improve the city's morale in a grand gesture or artful speech or by explaining the sand-dwellers' weaknesses to make them seem less dangerous. Each character can attempt an Intelligence (History), Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery), or Charisma (Performance) result to determine how many resistance points Anxi gains. If multiple characters attempt checks using the same skill, use only the highest result.

**DC 17.** 1 resistance point.

**DC 22.** 2 resistance points.

**DC 27.** 3 resistance points.

### SEA CITY RUMORS

If the PCs failed to counter the propaganda in the Sea City (see page 149), they can try again during this time by debunking rumors in public places. As in Act 3, each character quelling the rumors can attempt a DC 17 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) or DC 19 Charisma (Intimidation) check. The check is made with advantage if the argument presents compelling proof. If the party succeeds three times before failing three times, they successfully dispel the rumor, gaining 1 resistance point. If the characters fail three times before they succeed three times, they attract an angry mob of three **thugs** and ten **commoners**. Killing anyone in the mob costs Anxi 1 resistance point.

Should any NPCs from Kulara have survived and met up with the party there, each can Help with one ability check made to correct the public misconceptions.

### SILVER FALLS TOLL HOUSE

The famous Silver Falls overlook Anxi from the main road inland to the Imperial City. It hosts a small garrison and toll house where travelers must pay imperial taxes for leaving Emperor Xao's personal domain.

If the characters go here to watch for advance scouts or spies, they can use the *mirror of manifold reflections* (page 240) or a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check to catch a disguised human **spy** coming ahead of the army. If the characters don't watch this route, the spy is only caught after she successfully hides an alchemical bomb in a contraband storage room.

**Sleep Gas Bomb.** Anyone searching the area after she leaves it can find the bomb with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check to notice its odd placement or a DC 23 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the faint odor of ether around it. The bomb takes effect when the Imperial Guard arrives or if it is touched. A character can disarm it after it is

planted by succeeding on a DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. When it detonates, it releases a plume of transparent purple gas in a 120-foot sphere that rounds corners and dissipates after 1 minute. Anyone who breathes in the area must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or fall asleep for 1 minute or until they take damage.

### THE SUNKEN PORT

The Sunken Port was the original harbor in this area. When a severe earthquake destroyed the natural harbor, an artificial harbor was created at Anxi along with the garrison in the Triple Tower. The Sunken Port remains a secondary port in the unreliable fair weather, as well as a stopping point for storm-damaged ships and small fishing vessels. Before the battle, the residents retreat to the Sea City. If staffed, it provides ready supplies and food for troops stationed there.

Effectively placing traps around the Sunken Port requires an ability check. This can be Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Investigation). The PC might also make a Wisdom or Intelligence check using appropriate tools, such as alchemist's supplies, thieves' tools, or tinker's tools. Suitable traps include attaching alchemist's fire to supply buildings and docks or rigging acid to spray out when ropes are moved.

**Note for Later.** Record the check result; the effects are revealed when the enemy arrives. The higher the result, the better the effect.

**Burning the Sunken Port.** Burning the port prevents the army from using it to launch short-distance raids on the Sea City, reducing Anxi's resistance points by 1 and the invaders' cohesion points by 3.

### CREATIVE PREPARATIONS

If the characters place spells or traps other than the ones suggested above, they can deplete the army's resolve and make the siege less harmful. Each trap depletes 1 cohesion point. Each spell depletes 1 cohesion point from the army for every 10-foot square it affects. Once the army has lost a total of 6 cohesion points to traps and area spells, it takes a more cautious approach and loses no further cohesion points due to traps and spells.

## IMPERIAL ASSASSINATION

**Zanlan Mithrawen** (page 261) comes to the characters after about 8 hours, giving them enough time to complete one of the above preparation tasks. He says, "We need to discuss the upcoming siege. Word has come that Imperial troops have been sighted less than an hour north of the toll house on the western road." He escorts the PCs up the stairs of the Triple Tower near the bridge to the Tower of Tapestries (page 139). The war room is on the next floor up.

**Creatures.** Elite members of the Imperial Guard come through Anxi's *teleportation circle* and attempt

## THE IMPERIAL SIEGE

to slay the city's leaders to sow confusion and win the battle before it even begins. The intruders are two **assassins**, a **cult killer** (SPCM 404), a **sand-dweller pactkeeper** (page 278) wearing a human skin, and a **sand-dweller slasher** (page 276) wearing a human skin. All members can use the cult killer's Angled Entry action, which they use to enter the Triumvirate's war room directly from the teleportation circle. As they climb the stairs near the teleportation circle, the PCs can hear the arriving group in enough time to hurry up and reach the war room before combat begins with a Wisdom (Perception) check of 16 (likely passive Perception). Once the assassins attack, anyone can hear the screams from the war room.

The intruders strike at the war room where Lord Ho (a **noble**) and Governor Izonda (a **veteran**) are meeting, along with Yetumi (Lord Ho's **assassin** bodyguard) and a **guard** determined to defend the governor. The intruders block the doors and prioritize targeting the NPC leaders, hoping to take their heads to prevent them from being resurrected; a blow with a bladed weapon that kills the leader also allows the assassin to claim their head as their free interaction with an object for the turn. They switch to targeting whatever combatant seems most dangerous when the intruders have taken total damage equal to half their pooled hit points or more, or when at least one of them is killed or incapacitated. The NPC leaders attempt to flee; if a city leader is reduced to 0 hit points, they die after 3 rounds (or quicker if the assassins spend time attacking them), but their guards attempt to remove them and can stabilize them by feeding them a *potion of healing* (both Yetumi and the guard have a potion). A PC can stabilize a dying NPC using the usual rules to stabilize a dying character or with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

**Development.** After 3 rounds, Minister Zerelda (a **gladiator**) arrives late to the meeting. She feeds a *potion of healing* to any leaders who are dying, then fights alongside the heroes. After another 3 rounds, four **guards** respond to cries for help.

**Resistance Points.** Anxi loses 1 resistance point for each leader who is injured in the battle (they thereafter bear significant scars), and 2 more for each leader who dies. (Resistance is reduced even if they are later raised from the dead; morale suffers seeing them weakened, and rumors spread that they are impostors.)

**Aftermath.** If Governor Izonda dies, the chain of command overseeing the siege defense and giving the characters their assignments is as follows: Patriarch Cryzonesh (if the party secured his aid and he is present), Minister Zerelda, Lord Ho (if he survived the assassination attempt), Zanlan Mithrawen, then Guard-Captain Oztona (human **knight**, lawful neutral). If any of these characters die, Dean Zong has one of her bards raise them from the dead at the next dawn, though remember that a raised character will be weak and less effective at their tasks (how this manifests is up to the GM's discretion).

A spellcaster PC or the Venerable Keeper of the Keeper's Guild can seal the teleportation circle with a *private sanctum* spell.

Characters have enough time for a short rest before the enemy is in position. (Healing from the short rest might be improved by assistance from the College of Veils, as noted in **Fenkai Deployment** above.)

**Treasure.** One of the assassins wears a *cape of the mountebank*, while the other carries a *potion of invisibility*. When engaged with the PCs, they use these items in a last-ditch attempt to kill their target and escape.

## OVERSEEING THE SIEGE

Governor Izonda asks the characters to defend the Triple Tower in case of an aerial attack, since Emperor Xao is known to command many mages. From there, the characters can see all around Anxi, including many towers topped with catapults. A strong wind blows in from the ocean and the sky is a dreary gray.

### FOGGY ARRIVAL

The first sign of the Imperial Guard's arrival is a sudden chill and a wave of fog rolling quickly in from the north. The strong wind dies down around the fog, leaving an eerie quiet over the countryside. The fog rises up to 100 feet off the ground and only partially rises with the rough hills, so the towers of the High City and the tops of the highest hills around Anxi peek above over it. At the edge of the sea cliffs, it rolls over like a gaseous waterfall.

The fog lightly conceals everything within 50 feet and heavily conceals everything farther than 100 feet. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check allows a character to deduce that this is unnatural weather. The spell is cast with an 8th-level slot.

Soon, masses of Imperial soldiers march in along the low paths between the hills around Anxi. Only the occasional spear, catapult cup, or siege tower is clearly visible above wafting mist.

### NAVAL MOVEMENTS

The troops first clash with Anxi's defenders at the Sunken Port. At the same time, ships sail to the Sunken Port, only the tops of their masts visible over the fog. If the party laid any traps or similar sabotage during their preparations, they trigger now. The effects depend on the result of the recorded ability check.

**DC 10.** 1 cohesion point lost as soldiers spot and disarm the trap, then waste time searching for others.

**DC 15.** 2 cohesion points lost as many soldiers are injured and ships are damaged.

**DC 20.** 3 cohesion points lost as a ship sinks in flames because of the trap or accidents caused by soldiers affected by the traps.



**DC 25.** 4 cohesion points lost as a ship sinks and multiple ships are damaged because of the trap or accidents caused by soldiers affected by the traps.

**DC 30.** 6 cohesion points lost as multiple ships sink in flames because of the trap or accidents caused by soldiers affected by the traps.

**Resistance Points.** Anxi loses 2 resistance points for the attack on this fortification while the Imperial troops lose 1 cohesion point to the defenders unless the port was burned previously, in which case neither side loses points.

## THE ENEMY MARCHES

On the rolling hills surrounding Anxi, the enemy troops dig trenches and lay wicker gabions filled with rocks ahead of them to block arrows and spells. A few moments later, the opposite flank of the Imperial force reaches Silver Falls Toll House.

**Silver Falls Toll House.** If the spy wasn't stopped at the toll house, her bomb causes a plume of purple smoke to explode throughout the building and puff out all the windows and doors. It puts the guards inside to sleep. This provides ample time for the Imperial Guard to occupy the toll house unopposed, capturing or killing all within.

**Resistance Points.** The assault depletes 1 of Anxi's resistance points, or 3 if the bomb detonated. If the bomb was averted, the Imperial army loses 3 cohesion points in the resulting combat.

## OUTER TOWN

Finally, the troops march on the Outer Town. If the party laid traps for them during preparations for the siege, the effects depend on the result of the recorded ability check.

**DC 10.** 1 cohesion point lost as soldiers spot and disarm the trap, then waste time searching for others.

**DC 15.** 2 cohesion points lost as a few soldiers are injured.

**DC 20.** 3 cohesion points lost as many soldiers are injured and Anxi's wall defenders pick off slowed invaders.

**DC 25.** 4 cohesion points lost as collapsing buildings slow the movement of enemy troops and can't be used as cover against Anxi's defenders.

**DC 30.** 5 cohesion points lost as collapsing buildings crush many troops and don't provide cover.

The army takes up a position just beyond the 1,000-foot range of common siege weapons (and most spells and weapons). They immediately begin demolishing buildings in the way of their siege towers and catapults, ransacking houses, and setting up tents in open spaces behind buildings that offer cover relative to Anxi's walls.

**Resistance Points.** The fighting in this area costs Anxi 1 resistance point per 10 cohesion points the enemy army has after the traps are dealt with, and Anxi's defenders deplete 2 of the enemy's cohesion

points. If the buildings were burned or otherwise prevented from providing cover, Anxi's defenders deplete an additional 2 cohesion points.

## WYVERNS ON THE WIND

The magical fog suddenly blows away as the wind returns with a vengeance. Within minutes, the wind is strong and getting stronger. It reaches gale force if the *control weather* spell is not dispelled (DC 18) within the 20 minutes it takes to change. The storm remains in effect for 7 hours before Xao casts his next spell.

The gale gives disadvantage to ranged attack rolls. Creatures who fly treat the wind as difficult terrain. A flying creature who can't hover must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check at the end of their turn each round or fall to the ground. The gale creates dangerous waves that prevent ships leaving or entering Anxi's harbor and raise the DC of Strength (Athletics) checks to swim to 17.

**Resistance Points.** Waves lash the Sea City, costing Anxi 3 resistance points. Anxi only loses these points once. If the rumors in the sea city were quelled in **Act 3**, the gnorri allies along the harbor use their magic to protect the vulnerable parts of the Sea City. The resistance point loss is reduced to 1.

**Creatures.** Once the wind is at full force, a **scout** on the roof (Triple Tower, **Area A**, described on page 151) shouts a warning. "Something with big wings is strafing the siege engine emplacements!" In the distance, two **wyvern-mounted veterans** strike the ballista (**Area B**). Each is under a *freedom of movement* spell, allowing them to ignore the wind even as it foils most ranged weapons aimed at them. They take full advantage of this as they turn to strike the Triple Tower.

**Treasure.** One of the wyvern riders wears a *ring of free action*.

## RAIN OF SORROW

After the sandstorm ends, pitch-black clouds manifest over Anxi's walls. Emperor Xao is about to finish casting *rain of sorrow* (page 280), which badly saps the defenses of the entire city. Within 5 minutes, the ritual is complete and it cloaks the city in magical darkness, then showers the city in acid rain. The storm continues for 8 hours.

**Resistance Points.** Anxi loses 5 resistance points if the rain is not dispelled (DC 19) within 5 points. Anxi only loses these points once. Characters can rush the people of the city to adequate cover by contacting one of the city leaders and succeeding on a DC 19 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check or DC 21 Intelligence (Investigation) check to recognize the danger zones created by the spell and plan how to avoid them. Succeeding on this check reduces the lost resistance points to 3.

## BATTLE IN THE NIGHT

At nightfall, the storm dies down, and in the wake of its howl comes the thunder of crashing ballista bolts, exploding rockets, and crumbling stonework. The clear, moonlit night allows the enemy to take clean shots with their siege weapons while the spellcasters rest. The PCs can rest safely in the Triple Tower, but several parts of the city take a beating.

**Resistance Points.** The enemy depletes 1 resistance point from Anxi per 10 cohesion points they have remaining. Governor Izonda rations the responses of her own siege engines. Two of the Imperial catapults are destroyed in the night unless the party failed to kill the **wyverns on the wind** (page 161), costing the enemies 2 cohesion points.

## NEWS OF THE DEAN'S EXPERIMENT

In the morning after the attack, read or paraphrase the following:

At dawn, Zanlan Mithrawen comes to you and says, "My apologies for the early hour, but I have a report I think you need to hear. Our reinforcements should arrive tonight, and Dean Zong's new spell is ready to protect the city. She has already teleported down into the Crystal Tomb to begin casting it, but it will take some minutes." His face is grim despite the good news. "Unfortunately, my contact in the Imperial camp implied that Xao is not only aware of our incoming allies but also of Dean Zong's experimental spell. I fear he might try something desperate to force a quick victory. To that end, I'd like you to watch over the High City gate."

Zanlan has specific answers on the following topics:

- ♦ **Why that gate?** "If Xao wants his

army inside, he has to go through or break down that gate."

- ♦ **What will the spell do?** "I'm no mage, but she explained it will make the walls nigh impervious... at least long enough to hold out until Jenu gets here."

- ♦ **If her spell is so important, shouldn't we protect her?** "She's deep under the city, so I'm not worried about her. If you are needed urgently, she should be able to come for you or bring you to her. Teleportation effects are a specialty of hers, and she has already

learned to quickly open portals at substantial range using the Shattered Well."

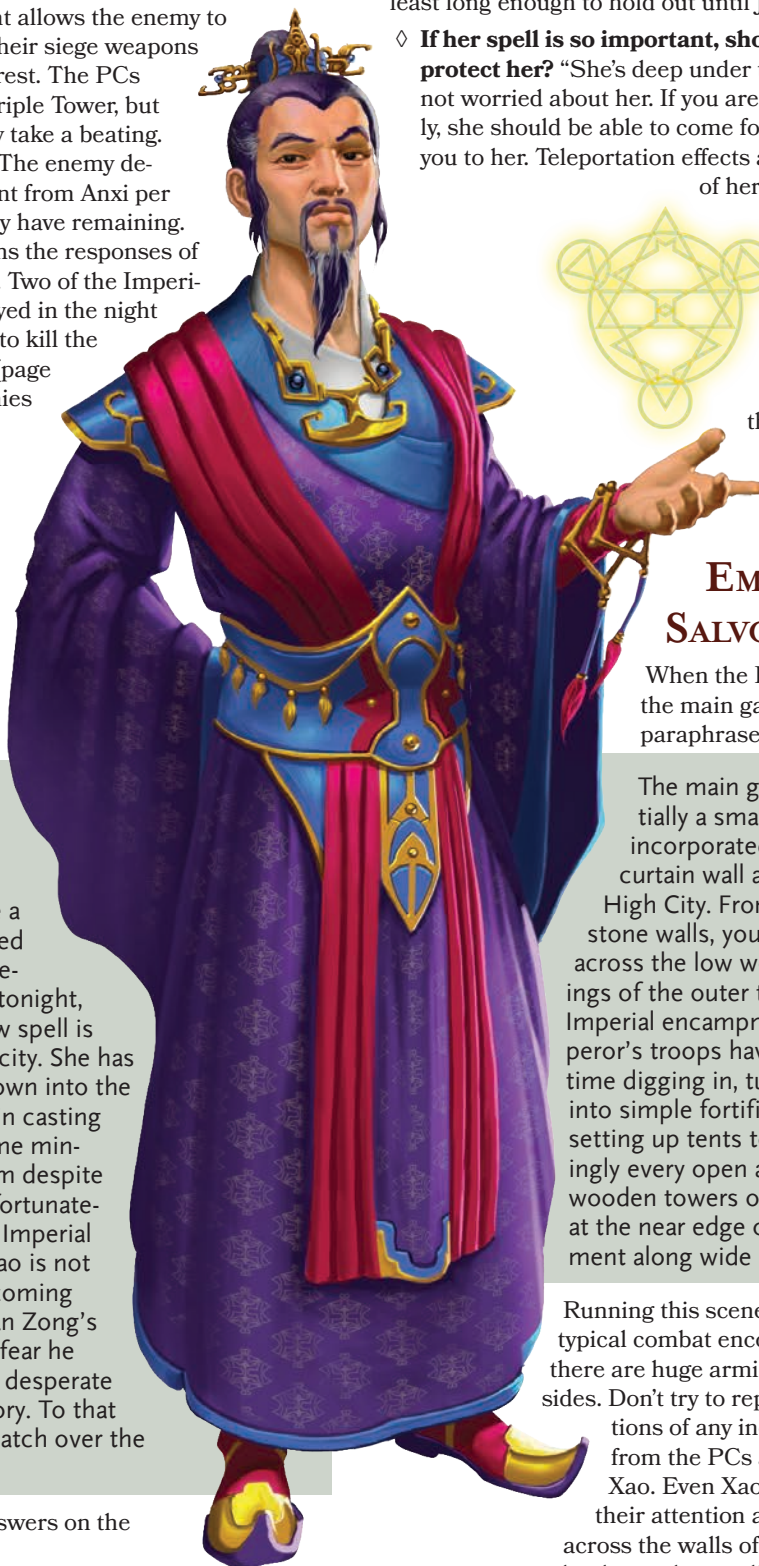


## THE EMPEROR'S SALVO

When the PCs arrive at the main gate, read or paraphrase the following:

The main gate is essentially a small fortress incorporated into the curtain wall around Anxi's High City. From the high stone walls, you can see out across the low wooden buildings of the outer town to the Imperial encampment. The emperor's troops have wasted no time digging in, turning houses into simple fortifications and setting up tents to fill seemingly every open area. Several wooden towers on wheels are at the near edge of the encampment along wide streets.

Running this scene is not like a typical combat encounter because there are huge armies on both sides. Don't try to represent the actions of any individuals aside from the PCs and Emperor Xao. Even Xao's mages divide their attention and magic across the walls of Anxi. If you need to know the condition of groups of enemies, it's safe to assume that the normal





troops each drop to 0 hit points after one attack from high-level heroes.

**Creatures.** **Emperor Xao** (page 266) and a **mage** ally approach to cast spells on the city. In addition, six other **mag**es approach widely spaced sections of wall near siege weapon emplacements, about 300 feet apart. The spellcasters are all difficult to detect, as they are under *greater invisibility* spells cast by other mages and use *potions of flying*. If characters locate and attack them, the whole group retreats to the cover of the army using a *spell scroll of teleport*. If Xao is incapacitated, his *contingency* spell automatically teleports him to the tent of his doctor, who restores his hit points. (Characters will have to wait until Chapter 2 to confront Emperor Xao personally.) Each mage killed reduces the enemy cohesion points by 1.

**Siege Towers.** The forward troops drive six siege towers through the Outer Town toward the High City gate. Each tower bristles with foot soldiers (use the statistics of guards if necessary) and is pushed from behind by eight **axe beaks** each. The towers can be attacked and destroyed (AC 15; damage threshold 10; 100 hp; immunity to poison and psychic damage; vulnerability to fire damage). The wooden structure is flammable, so it burns and takes 10 fire damage each round after being exposed to fire damage that can ignite objects (such as alchemist's fire or a *fireball* spell). Hitting a tower with area effect spells or effects to deal a total of 40 or more damage (assuming failed saving throws) kill enough of the crew to stop the tower and deplete 2 cohesion points from the enemy army. If at least four of the towers are destroyed, Imperial **General Karano** (page 263) calls off the attack to conserve strength for the next battle.

**Drawing Attention.** Casting spells or making ranged attacks from the city walls or arrow slits exposes characters to return fire from the enemy troops. The arrow slits provide three-quarters cover against the volley of arrows. Five arrows target the PCs, each with a +4 to hit and dealing 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage. In addition, the area becomes the focus of attention from one of the enemy mages.

**Allies.** Atop the wall alongside the PCs are hundreds of Anxi soldiers spread along the miles-long High City wall. Every 50 feet is a group of eight Anxi soldiers (**guards**). In the same style as the Elder Wall in Act 3, there is a ballista tower every 100 feet.

### ROUND 1: GATE STRIKE

The emperor casts *nuclear chaos* (SPCM 109) on the High Gate. Carpenters run to patch it, but they are killed by readied *eldritch blasts* from invisible casters hundreds of feet away. The PCs can repair the gates with *fabricate* or similar magic, or they can jury-rig a patch with a successful DC 15 (carpenter's tools) check. Troops at the gate Help. Characters making the attempt are attacked by a volley of two *eldritch blasts* from invisible 9th-level casters this round, although they have half cover.

Anxi immediately loses 4 resistance points, although the party can restore 2 of them by successfully patching the gate.

### ROUND 2: CONFUSION IN THE RANKS

The emperor casts *pipes of madness* (SPCM 110) on a ballista crew 300 feet away from the gate, which causes them to turn and fire into the city immediately and again every 4 rounds, then numbly whistle the tune, which can spread to nearby siege engines. 8 **guards** are affected, with half controlling the engine and half attacking nearby guards. The characters can intervene by dispelling the spell or by incapacitating the crew.

Anxi loses 1 resistance point immediately.

### ROUND 3: FIREBALLS

Emperor Xao's troops begin approaching the city's walls with siege towers. The spellcasters follow up with a volley of *fireballs* that drive the defenders off the walls. The city loses 3 resistance points (1 per *fireball*). A siege tower is eliminated by catapults within Anxi, reducing the enemy's cohesion points by 2.

### ROUND 4: GAS

Xao's mages each cast *cloudkill*. One cloud covers the open gate, which kills many of the gatekeepers, and the others appear on air shafts behind the gate that lead into the Deep City. Down below, the gas forces defenders out of the mines ahead of the next offensive. Anxi loses 2 resistance points per *cloudkill* not countered or prevented on the same turn it was cast, for a maximum loss of 6 resistance points.

### ROUND 5: MADNESS ATTACK

Anxi loses another 1 resistance point per active *cloudkill* spells (maximum 3 points lost). If the siege crew is still under the effect of the *pipes of madness*, they fire on the city now, depleting 1 resistance point through their efforts.

### ROUND 6: WALLS EVACUATED

The defenders have evacuated the area of the gas, preventing further damage but also presenting a vulnerable target to the siege towers. A siege tower is eliminated by catapults within Anxi unless the party failed to fight off the wyvern knights (see the **Wyverns on the Wind**, page 161), reducing the enemy cohesion points by 2.

### ROUND 7: MAGES' RETREAT

Unwilling to risk his life, Xao retreats along with his mages shortly before his *greater invisibility* ends.

### ROUND 8: MADNESS ATTACK

If the siege crew is still under *pipes of madness*, they fire on the city again, depleting 1 resistance point.

## ROUND 9: BATTLE ON THE WALLS

Another siege tower is eliminated by catapults within Anxi unless the party failed to fight off the wyvern knights (see the **Wyverns on the Wind** on page 161) or the party demolished the nearby part of the Outer Town during their preparations. (The destroyed siege tower reduces the enemy cohesion points by 2.) Then, the remaining siege towers bring the fight to the High City walls unless at least five were destroyed. Combat rages on the walls where the towers allow Imperial troops onto them. If Anxi has at least 2 resistance points per surviving siege tower, Anxi's troops hold their positions.

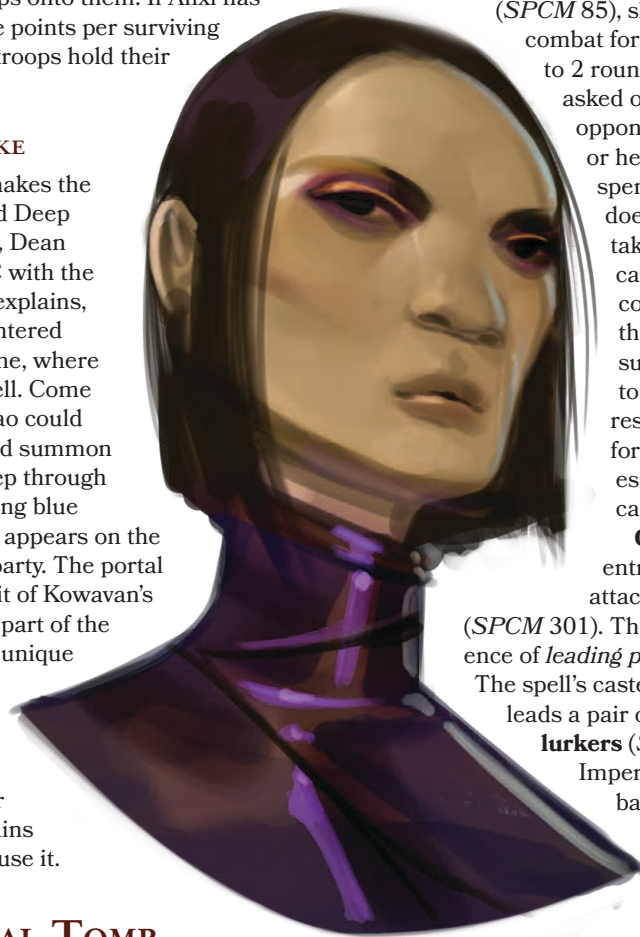
## ROUND 10: QUAKE

A sudden tremor shakes the entire High City and Deep City. Moments later, Dean Zong contacts a PC with the *sending* spell. She explains, "The quake was centered near Silversong Mine, where I am casting my spell. Come secure the tomb! Xao could breach the walls and summon reinforcements! Step through this portal." A glowing blue circular portal then appears on the ground before the party. The portal takes them to the pit of Kowavan's Well in the deepest part of the Crystal Tomb. This unique magical effect is unlocked by her activation of the well's magic. It can't be dispelled or disrupted and remains open until the PCs use it.

## THE CRYSTAL TOMB UNDERMINED

When the characters step through Dean Zong's portal, read or paraphrase the following.

You find yourselves in Kowavan's Well, at the bottom of the circular pit deep under Silversong Mine. A ramp leads up from the fractured bottom where you stand to a middle tier and up from there to the top tier and the exit tunnel to the south. The air has an acrid, smoky stink much fainter than when you were last here. Dean Zong stands nearby, her eyes closed as she chants unintelligible formulas for her spell. The walls of the round cavern above you shudder as the sound of rock grinding on rock comes from outside.



The PCs have arrived in the Crystal Tomb (full description in Act 3) in the **Shattered Well (Area E)**. The guano on the upper level has been burned away. The rest of the tomb has been cleared of monsters by Anxi soldiers and Dean Zong's bards. The tomb's traps have all been triggered or disabled except for the western **fire-breathing statue** trap (**Area B**) and the far eastern **poison dart** trap (**Area C**).

**Allies.** **Dean Zong** (page 261) works to finish her formula to reactivate Kowavan's Well. Since she is in the middle of a time-sensitive formula spell (*SPCM* 85), she can't step away to assist in combat for long. She can pause for up to 2 rounds but does so only if directly asked or if she has line of sight to an opponent. She must then resume or her formula is wasted. Time she spends with the formula paused doesn't count toward the time it takes to finish it, and she can't cast a spell with a duration of concentration without ending the formula. Any character who succeeded on the ability check to assist with Dean Zong's research during the preparation for the siege (page 145) increases the time she can break from casting the formula by 1 round.

**Other Creatures.** The tomb's entrance arch (**Area B**) is under attack by a **dhole hatchling** (*SPCM* 301). The hatchling is under the influence of *leading phantasmagoria* (page 280).

The spell's caster, **Captain Liyo** (page 262) leads a pair of imperial sappers, two **crypt lurkers** (*SPCM* 325) wearing black Imperial Guard armor and carrying barrels of black powder. The sappers have just entered the entrance tunnel (**Area A**).

**Emperor Xao** (page 266) monitors the group with a *project image* spell, allowing him to seem present when his

body is truly up in the center of the army camp. He keeps ahead of the sapper crew (initially at the stairs between **Areas A** and **B**), eagerly hoping to see Kowavan's Well. The sappers keep away from the dhole in case it breaks of Liyo's control, although she uses her reaction every round to keep it moving deeper into the tomb. She doesn't know its layout so just guesses that the hatchling should move in the general direction of the main tunnel. Liyo uses *blink* and *mirror image* to avoid losing concentration on her spell.

The dhole hatchling is dimly aware it is being manipulated by magic but doesn't understand what is happening. If it acts normally, it prioritizes the nearest spellcaster. If there is more than one it can hit with its acid, it does so. The hatchling was conjured



from a distant planet on the same plane of existence, so *banishment* can't send it away permanently.

**Carving New Tunnels.** The dhole hatchling doesn't consider the hard crystal walls a meaningful obstacle and easily drills right through them in its confused state, leaving chunks of crystal on the floor of every chamber it departs. It leaves 7-foot-wide tunnels in the crystal wherever it goes. The first 5 feet of each tunnel is jagged such that any creature that enters the tunnel must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or stop moving and take 1 piercing damage. Until the creature regains at least 1 hit point, its walking speed is reduced by 10 feet. A creature moving through the area at half speed doesn't need to make the saving throw.

**Emperor's Gloating.** Emperor Xao's image is delighted for an opportunity to gloat when he sees the characters. Read or paraphrase the following:

A distinguished-looking short human man with a long beard stands in the dusty tunnel, seeming very out of place in his pristine and luxurious silk robes. When he spots you, he grins cruelly. "Finally, the chance to see you pests crushed! If only I could have the pleasure myself... alas, the pathetic worms in the city haven't been exterminated yet." He raises his voice and orders, "Kill these seditionists for your emperor!"

**Liyo's Defection.** When Captain Liyo enters combat, she says to herself, "How did it come to this?" If she is reduced to 25 or fewer hit points, if Emperor Xao's projection stops monitoring her, or if she is reminded of how thoroughly she is betraying Tsang's people by helping Xao, she drops concentration on the spell and throws up her hands. "I surrender! I have information that can help you! I was just following orders..." If Xao's illusion is still present, he snarls, "Traitor! Kill her!" and the ghouls focus on attacking her. She doesn't participate further in combat except to defend herself from the ghouls and flee from the dhole hatchling.

**Black Powder Barrels.** Each sapper carries a tinderbox and a small black powder barrel. If the barrel catches fire or is lit as an action, it explodes 1 round later in a 30-foot-radius sphere that deals 6d6 fire damage to all creatures and unattended objects that aren't magical.

**Resistance Points.** Anxi loses 2 resistance points from the earthquake as the characters arrive, then another 1 point each round the hatchling burrows in the Crystal Tomb.

**Treasure.** The sappers' barrels can be seized for later use. Captain Liyo carries a *spell scroll of leading phantasmagoria* (page 280). She hands it over when combat ends.

## COLLAPSE

If the hatchling is defeated without paralyzing or otherwise immobilizing it, it thrashes in its death

throes until initiative count 20 of the next round. At that moment, the surrounding tunnels begin to collapse. Loose rubble rains down throughout the complex. A character can avoid being slowed by rubble with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check each round. On the first round of the collapse, a 30-foot radius circle of the roof caves in. Every round after the initial collapse, 60 feet of the tunnel collapses on initiative count 20. The collapse continues as far in as the upper level of Kowavan's Well (but not the middle tier or bottom), and as far out as the tunnel carved by the hatchling to access the tomb entrance.

Any creature in the collapsing area must attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 6d6 bludgeoning damage and becoming prone and restrained on a failed Dexterity save, or taking half as much damage and falling prone in the nearest open space on a successful one. A restrained creature can be freed with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check as an action. A creature with a burrowing speed can burrow freely through the cave-in.

## THE FORMULA COMPLETED

After 10 rounds of casting by Dean Zong, her formula spell is completed. The city walls become indestructible like the Sand Citadel's for at least 12 hours. During this time, Anxi's resistance points can't be reduced. If the tunnel is currently collapsing, the collapse is halted. Creatures can't burrow anywhere in or under Anxi while the city is indestructible, so if the dhole is still active it can't burrow and its death can't trigger a collapse.

Assistance the party gave to Dean Zong while preparing for the siege (page 156) bears fruit now. If any character attempted an ability check to assist with her research, the effect is determined according to the highest DC they meet or exceed below.

**DC 15.** Indestructibility lasts for 24 hours (generally, this is until after Emperor Xao is defeated in the next chapter) and during that time, creatures standing on the city's buildings get a +1 bonus to AC.

**DC 20.** Indestructibility lasts for 36 hours (generally, until the end of **Chapter 2**) and during that time, creatures standing on the city's buildings get a +1 bonus to AC.

**DC 25.** Indestructibility lasts for 48 hours (generally, until the end of **Chapter 3**) and during that time, creatures standing on the city's buildings get a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws.

**DC 30.** Indestructibility lasts for 60 hours (generally, until the binding items are destroyed and the indestructibility spell is dispelled), and during that time, creatures standing on the city's buildings get a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws, and anyone other than Dean Zong or her allies (including the PCs) can't teleport to any location in the city.

### A GLORIOUS DEATH?

If the PCs are killed by the dhole or by the collapse, Dean Zong uses her magic to retrieve their bodies and has a College of Veils bard raise them from the dead (assuming they are willing). Unless she is particularly fond of them (such as if they earned resistance points from doing her a favor), she charges them 500 gp for the spellcasting service in addition to the cost of the spell's material components but is willing to wait to collect until the siege is over. If she is fond of them, she provides this service for free.

### TROUBLE FOR THE DEAN

If Dean Zong's formula is foiled, it takes her another 8 hours to cast it again. If she is killed, she is revived by the College of Veils at dawn with 1 hit point (and then she performs her formula, which she succeeds at despite the -4 penalty to her ability checks due to her recent resurrection).

## CONCLUSION

After the battle, Dean Zong opens a *teleportation circle* to the Triple Tower for the characters and brings Captain Liyo along. If the dean died, a Tower of Tapestries bard arrives to retrieve her body for resurrection and likewise offers a quick way out of the Crystal Tomb.

**Resistance Points.** Anxi loses no further resistance points if Dean Zong's spell succeeded. If the spell failed, it loses 4 more resistance points due to the fighting above ground. The invaders take heavy losses in the fighting along the wall in any case, so they lose another 3 cohesion points from the fighting, which increases to 5 points if Dean Zong's formula is cast. As long as the city still has at least 8 resistance points, the party returns to find that Anxi soldiers and civilians pushed fallen stones into place to bar the gate and burned any remaining Imperial siege towers. Otherwise, the gate fell, and enemies have entered the High City. If the characters fail and Anxi's defenders fall back, Anxi's mages and siege weapons built into the Triple Tower hold the line long enough for the troops to rest and regroup and the first wave of reinforcements to arrive.

**The Defector.** Dean Zong orders Liyo (if she survives) taken into custody by Anxi guards for debriefing. Even if Liyo died, Zong arranges for her to be raised from the dead. She encourages the PCs to go get some well-earned rest, as there is no more that they can personally do until the reinforcements arrive. Even if the collapse closed Kowavan's Well off from conventional travel, Dean Zong can still allow the party to access it using her *teleportation circle* spell. If the party secured aid from House Cryzonesth, one of their mages (or even the patriarch himself) uses *stone shape* to reopen access to Kowavan's Well during the following day.

**Reinforcements.** Colonel Jenu and the first wave

of reinforcements arrives at dusk. Cheers rise from all of Anxi's defenders, celebrating that the siege has shifted in their favor. Jenu's troops take up a rearguard position, pinning Emperor Xao's troops between them and the city. The enemy is thus forced to circle up to protect its flank. With the pressure on the city relaxed, the party can take a well-earned long rest before the rest of the reinforcements arrive the following day. There are little festive gatherings across the secure parts of the city that night, giving the characters time to heal.

### EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of this chapter, the characters advance to 12th level.





## CHAPTER 2: EMPEROR'S FALL

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 12th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

When the characters call for help, Jenu left a skeleton crew on the Elder Wall and led reinforcements from Yangan and Fenkai to rescue Anxi. Alerted by their kin in the Imperial forces, the sand-dwellers at the wall knew to strike immediately with overwhelming force. A new undermining effort was successful with more preparation.

Jenu learned with horror that his rear guard watched the Elder Wall fall, meaning that time is now against the survival of Tsang and perhaps even the wider world. He pushed the main body of the reinforcements to march double-time to Anxi, while sending his cavalry back to perform a deadly game of harrying the monstrous horde to buy time for dealing with Emperor Xao.

### CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

Reinforcements have arrived, but they are stuck outside Anxi with sand-dwellers and monsters pursuing them. The only option left is to dethrone the corrupt

Xao government before the monsters arrive, in order to consolidate the surviving Tsangese forces. Luckily, the leader's horrific actions have inspired a deserter to offer up vital intelligence to help the party reach and expose the sand-dwellers among the Imperial leadership.

The deserter's information combined with the distraction of allied troops outside the city provides a viable route for the party to sneak into Emperor Xao's secure area and discover his true nature and that of his generals. Once the sand-dwellers are exposed or eliminated from the Tsang leadership, the Imperial forces join the rest of Tsang's people against the incoming monster army. From Xao's notes, the party finally knows the location of the *Sacred Hexagon*, which is held by the yothan commander at the forefront of the oncoming monster horde.

To save Colonel Jenu's rear guard and seal the doom of the sand-dwellers, the party must break the enemy army's spearhead and seize the artifact from the enemy commander. The city provides pegasus mounts to help them get in and out quickly, although

the PCs must still fight their way through flying defenders along the way.

## BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs attend a council in the war room. Read or paraphrase the following:

Zanlan Mithrawn calls you to the war room in the Triple Tower. Minister Zerelda, Lord Ho, and Governor Izonda sit behind a long table, each visibly tense. Colonel Jenu stands at the wide map of Anxi and turns to greet you warmly. "It is good to see you still fighting. Now that my troops have the Imperial Guard boxed in, the situation is in our favor." He continues, frowning, "It is not to last, however. Scouts report an army of sand-dwellers and their monsters are closing on Anxi. Captain Ibzu is leading skirmishes to slow their approach, but they will arrive by tomorrow."

Just then, the door opens and Dean Zong steps quickly into the room. She is followed by the Imperial mage you first saw in the recent battle in the Crystal Tomb. The mage is bound in irons. The dean says, "Sorry to interrupt but... I think you want to hear what she has to say." The mage clears her throat, then says, "If you're looking for people who've let themselves act like cruel monsters, I think I know who you should investigate. I've served under the emperor and General Huzi directly, and both have become unsettling in recent weeks."

The defector is an imperial apprentice named Captain Liyo. Zong lets the characters lead her interrogation. Liyo has specific answers to the following topics:

♦ **Sand-dwellers have likely compromised Emperor Xao's government. Do you know anything about them?**

"General Huzi is clearly hiding something. He administers the reports from scouts and diviners, and by now it seems he must have been changing or destroying reports that the lower-ranking officers saw outside his command. Emperor Xao is very suspicious himself... he was always cold, but now he has stooped to outright butchering his own people with his magic. And he has been collecting and studying forbidden texts... the kinds his great-grandmother had banned as tools of Ravazel."

♦ **What do you know about the Imperial plans?**

"Emperor Xao wanted me to secure the interdimensional portal deep under Anxi. He said he had learned how to control creatures summoned through it." Dean Zong excitedly points out the window toward the Imperial army. "This is what I meant! That man knows something about Ravazel's control over her minions. We must see the texts he planned to use."

♦ **What did you believe was the truth of the matter when you were serving Emperor Xao?**

**What is Xao telling his army?** "General Huzi and Emperor Xao claim that the sand-dwellers at the southern border are minor raiders being used as a distraction by seditionists who want to overthrow the lawful government for their own power and wealth." She gestures vaguely. "Maybe you were paying them off, or maybe you just seized on a convenient disaster for Harge. In any case, I'm sure they were hiding things about trouble the sand-dwellers have caused. I had no idea until talking with Dean Zong that they had actually slipped under the Elder Wall."

♦ **How can we get in?** "Can you take off these shackles? I can show you." The leaders defer to the party's judgment. If they release her, Captain Liyo casts a *minor illusion* spell to reproduce a miniature map of the Imperial encampment and draws a course through it in glowing red light. Otherwise, she points at the map of Anxi on the table. "This route should take you around most of the secure areas and patrols." She then points out the locations of the emperor's retinue tents near its center (on her illusion, this causes the tents to light up). "This is the emperor's tent, and nearby are the tents of the generals and the war tent where they plan their actions."

♦ **Can you escort us in yourself? You are ostensibly on their side.** Captain Liyo glances away hesitantly. "I fear returning after this long will only draw undue attention to you. Here is what I know of their positions, though." She can be convinced to escort the party with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. She then disguises herself as a common soldier with *disguise self*.

Unless the characters suggest it first, Colonel Jenu gives the characters a special mission: "We need to expose the sand-dwellers among the Imperial leadership today. I want you to reach Emperor Xao and expose any sand-dwellers, whether they are aides, military leaders, or the emperor himself. The sand-dwellers seem to be rationing their presence, never sending more than a couple at a time with Imperial troops, so I suspect you'll find only a few sand-dwellers."

Characters can also get input from the other Five Tower leaders on the following topics:

♦ **How can we expose the sand-dwellers?** Dean Zong summarizes the methods of exposing sand-dwellers in Act 3: Showing the mirror of manifold reflections (Act 2) to a character only works if they are convinced of how the mirror works. Since the skin is worn closely but not truly attached, it might be able to be pulled off with great skill using Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand). If any party member can cast *telekinesis* or *disintegrate*, that spell can target a sand-dweller's worn skin to expose the monster underneath.



◇ **Can we get any assistance getting inside?** Zanlan suggests, “We have some Imperial armor you could wear and fake your way in like you belong there. Or the dean could just magic you up to look like you’re Imperial troops.” Dean Zong offers, “Or I could just use a little magic to make you look like you’re wearing their armor. My illusion masters can also make you invisible but only if you avoid swinging a weapon or casting spells. Now that Kowavan’s Well is under my control, I can open a portal in the Outer Town and teleport you there. That’s how I brought Colonel Jenu here.”

## ANXI HIGH CITY WALL

Dean Zong and Captain Liyo meet the characters at the High City wall overlooking the enemy encampment. If Liyo didn’t explain the best route in earlier, she does so now. From this vantage point, she can point carefully to different areas of the encampment that the party should seek out or avoid. Read or paraphrase the following:

The dean leans in and whispers conspiratorially, “Captain Liyo and I have been chatting. She mentioned something I suspected as well: Emperor Xao has been collecting rare texts. The especially interesting kinds... the kinds his great-grandmother the Reverent Empress banned. I think he has been reading them, and I need to read them too.” She studies your face a moment before adding, “Not just for my personal research, you know! He—or someone close to him—has clearly been conspiring with sand-dwellers directly, and I’m sure some of their magical secrets are in those texts. We still need to find that Sacred Hexagon if we want to turn the tables on the sand-dwellers.”

## IMPERIAL ENCAMPMENT

The imperial encampment is made up of several distinct regions. Following Liyo’s instructions takes the characters through the encampment perimeter at a place that’s often neglected, by petty officer’s quarters, and then to the war tent where Emperor Xao has his meetings, surrounded by his tent and those of his generals.

**Resistance Points.** If the characters kill any of Xao’s troops, the enemy army loses 1 cohesion point. If they kill any of Xao’s mages, the army loses another point for each of them.

### A. ENCAMPMENT PERIMETER

The perimeter of the camp is marked by overturned carts, smashed windows on homes, burned-out buildings, and piles of junk and refuse. The piles of junk are difficult terrain.

Passing into the enemy encampment without being noticed requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity

(Stealth) check from all party members or a DC 15 Intelligence (disguise kit) check (spare uniforms can be used as a disguise kit for this purpose). An illusion such as *seeming* or *veil* fools the guards if the save DC is 15 or higher. The guards are suspicious of friendly troops appearing from the city’s direction unexplained, though, and preventing them from detaining the party for questioning requires a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check, DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check, or DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check.

**Friendly Fire.** The attacks from allies pose a risk, however. To prevent allies from accidentally attacking them on their way to the front line while disguised, they must all succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid notice or one of them must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Deception) check to signal allies without giving themselves away to the enemy. If the party is attacked, they are each targeted by two arrows with a +4 bonus to hit each dealing 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Creatures.** If intercepted, the PCs face ten **guards**, a **veteran**, and an **urbane magician** (SPCM 406), but the ordinary noise around the camp and the distraction of harrying raids from Jenu’s troops prevents news of the fight from spreading if they prevail within 2 rounds. At this level, characters can knock down common guards with every weapon attack or cantrip, so they can still make their way to the generals’ tent without much trouble.

**Reinforcements.** After 2 rounds of combat anywhere in the encampment, reinforcements head toward their location, although they don’t arrive for another 3 rounds. The reinforcements are two **bandits**, three **veterans**, and a **mage**.

**Pursuit.** If the characters are pursued by enemies through the camp, they can get away once all party members succeed on a Dexterity (Stealth) check.

### OFFICER HOUSING

The officers’ quarters are in occupied houses on a simple, straight street grid.

Passing unnoticed through the officers’ quarters requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check from all party members, a DC 12 Intelligence check using a disguise kit (spare uniforms can be used as a disguise kit for this purpose), or a *veil* spell with save DC 12 or higher.

**Creatures.** If intercepted, the characters face two **spies**, four **veterans**, and an **urbane magician** (SPCM 406), but during the day ordinary noise around the camp and the distraction of harrying raids from Jenu’s troops prevents news of the fight from spreading if they prevail within 2 rounds. At this level, characters can knock down common guards with every weapon attack or cantrip, so they can still make their way to the generals’ tent without much trouble.

**Reinforcements.** After 2 rounds of combat in the officers’ housing, two **spies** emerge from a nearby house and additional reinforcements head toward





the combat, although they don't arrive for another 3 rounds. The additional reinforcements are three **veterans**, an **assassin**, and an **urbane magician** (SPCM 406).

**Pursuit.** If the PCs are pursued by enemies through the camp, they can get away once all party members succeed on a 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check.

### THE RETINUE TENTS

The tents for Xiao and his generals are exactly where Liyo said they would be near the north central area of the Imperial encampment. Their amenities are set up in large, comfortable tents in what had been a town green area. The houses in between the tents and the officers' quarters are kept empty to ensure privacy and security for the Imperial leaders. The leaders spend most of their time planning together in the war tent, but they each sleep in their own tents.

**Creatures.** Each general's tent has a **guard** watching it. The emperor's tent has a **veteran** on guard, and at night there is also a **spy**. The war tent has an **urbane magician** (SPCM 406), four **veterans**, and four **guards** outside it. When the leaders are absent (generally sleeping), the guards and magician are absent.

**Stealth.** Sneaking up to any of the tents requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid notice by everyone. At any given time, about three

people have line of sight to the door of each tent as they go about their business.

**In Disguise.** If characters approach a tent in disguise, they can convincingly claim to be bringing news about the approaching monsters or rebel reinforcements with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception) check. Getting the chance to talk to the occupant, rather than simply passing word off to a servant or guard, requires a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check or DC 19 Charisma (Intimidation) check. A character successfully disguised as a high-ranking officer has advantage on this check.

**Combat.** If combat begins, troops rush to protect the emperor. If Captain Liyo and either Emperor Xiao or General Huzi are present, Liyo casts *telekinesis* and uses it to attempt to remove their human skin until she succeeds. If Xiao believes he is exposed as a traitor or soon to be killed (such as if he is reduced below 16 hit points), he casts *teleport* to flee to the monster army. When Xiao is incapacitated, his *contingency* spell automatically teleports him 500 feet away from the source of damage, generally inside a tent somewhere in the camp. He is recognized and healed back to 18 hit points by whatever character happens to be nearby within 2 rounds, at which point he casts *teleport* from a *spell scroll* to flee to the monster army.

**Reinforcements in the Open.** Combat outdoors in



this area tempts the **sand-dweller slasher** (page 276) wearing the skin of General Huzi to emerge from the meeting tent (or his tent, **A5**, if it is night) after 1 round. He is eager for a chance to kill something slowly, and grins unnervingly. He orders, "Take them alive for... strenuous interrogation." After 2 rounds of combat in the emperor's retinue, reinforcements head toward the combat, although they don't arrive for another 5 rounds. The additional reinforcements are two **bandits**, three **veterans**, and a **mage**.

**Reinforcements to Tents.** Combat inside a tent draws the guards at the two nearest tents to investigate after 2 rounds. The rest of the outdoor guards stay at their posts unless a general emerges to call them. Once they see the combat, they call the reinforcements above.

### A. THE WAR TENT

This large tent has a regional map on a central table. The perimeter of the tent is lined with tables for drinks, scrolls, and other maps.

**Creatures.** Most of the time, the party can find Emperor Xao and his generals meeting at their war tent. **Emperor Xao** (page 266) is a sand-dweller, as are three of his generals, **Wayen**, **Fenzo**, and **Huzi** (page 276; all are **sand-dweller slashers**). The officers and troops around them, including generals **Karono** (page 263) and **Shirez** (**gladiator** with 16 Intelligence), are human however, but they will fight for their Emperor unless it is proven that he is an impostor.

**Stealth.** Sneaking into the tent while invisible requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid notice. There isn't a location suitable for hiding from everyone without being invisible.

**In Disguise.** If characters approach in disguise, they can convincingly claim to be bringing news about the approaching monsters or rebel reinforcements with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception) check. Getting the chance to talk to the generals and emperor, rather than simply passing word off to one of their aides, requires a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check or DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check or disguising themselves as a high-ranking officer with a successful DC 15 Intelligence check using a disguise kit or an illusion spell with at least DC 15.

**Dialogue.** Any claim that there are sand-dwellers infiltrating this group gives one of the human generals, Karono, pause. Characters can convince him of their claims with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the result is at least 21, the guards are also given pause. They wait indecisively rather than carry out any orders from the impostors. Activating the *mirror of manifold reflection* shows something different about Emperor Xao and the sand-dweller generals, which automatically alarms General Karono, but not Shirez or the guards, who don't understand the significance or powers of the

mirror. It gives advantage on the check to persuade the humans, though. Shirez is quiet and passive, deferring to Karono. The sand-dweller generals are not truly generals, so they are uncertain of their words and defer emphatically to Xao.

**Combat.** Combat produces confusion, but the generals order that the intruders be taken alive for questioning. In combat, the humans stand back if the characters present any evidence of the sand-dwellers' inhumanity or if they succeed on a DC 20 Charisma check using any appropriate skill. If she accompanied them, Captain Liyo casts *telekinesis* to remove Emperor Xao's skin until she succeeds. If the characters have exposed the sand-dwellers, General Wayen becomes suspicious. Emperor Xao's three generals are two **sand-dweller slashers** (page 276) and one **sand-dweller whisperer** (page 274), although they are wearing human skins and armor.

### B. THE EMPEROR'S TENT

Emperor Xao's tent has bedding for four people and a large canopy bed which offers him some privacy. It also has several chests containing supplies, magical texts, and clothing.

**Creatures.** Usually, the only occupant is Xao's **urbane magician** (SPCM 406) apprentice. The emperor only comes here after sunset to sleep (and prepare his spells in the morning). When Xao goes to bed, an **assassin** bodyguard stands guard outside his tent and prioritizes interfering with anyone getting into melee with him.

**Treasure.** A chest holds Xao's collection of censored books, including the *Book of Eibon* (SPCM 133) containing *rain of sorrow* (page 280) and *semblance of the key and the gate* (SPCM 112), and the fourth *Cryptical Book of Hsan* (SPCM 134) with expanded discussion of sand-dwellers and dholes. Extra pages have obviously been added to the *Cryptical Book of Hsan*. The author considered stealing and using the *Sacred Hexagon* to usurp control of Ravazel's bound servitors by infiltrating the Sand Citadel once he was trusted enough to access it. However, Ravazel's minions indicated that she entrusted it to a yothan commander named Zaryoth who used flesh-shaping magic to embed it in his body. The author had yet to devise a method to steal it without open combat against Zaryoth. Anyone who reads these added pages (even if they don't successfully research the book) also learns the significance of the *Sacred Hexagon* (page 281). Any high-ranking Tsangese official can recognize the handwriting as belonging to Emperor Xao.

In addition to the usual spells, the *Cryptical Book of Hsan* contains *pipes of madness* (SPCM 110) and *nuclear chaos* (SPCM 109). Anyone who successfully researches it learns the functions of the six binding items in the Sand Citadel and has advantage on any ability check they attempt to help Dean Zong destroy or subvert the items.

### CI-5. GENERALS' TENTS

There are five general's tents. Each one has a fine tea service, table, desk, cushions, and sleeping mats.

**Creatures.** Usually, these tents are empty. Each general rests in his tent when not in the war tent. The human generals are **Karono** (Area C1; page 263) and **Shirez** (a middle-aged **gladiator** with tent C2). The other generals (Wayen in Area C3, Fenzo in Area C4, and Huzi in Area C5) appear as elderly human men but are truly **sand-dweller slashers** (page 276) in disguise. Combat in the tents has similar tactics to the retinue area (above).

**Clue.** General Huzi's lamp contains many scorched fragments of paper. A character examining his table without specifically checking the lamp notices it with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. The only substantial fragment is a line from a report reading "—force of monsters moving rapidly toward Anxi within Elder—" Presenting this scrap to the human generals gives advantage on any ability

check to convince them that General Huzi is lying to them.

**Treasure.** Each general's chest is locked with an excellent lock that requires a successful DC 25 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to unlock. Generals Karono, Shirez, and Huzi each have a standard coffer of 14,000 gp inside their chests. General Fenzo's chest instead has 9,000 gp and loose diamonds worth 5,000 gp. General Wayen's chest instead contains 11,000 gp and bundles of dried dustweed worth 3,000 gp (it is an alchemical reagent useful in making *dust of dryness*).

### CAPTURED?

If the characters are defeated, they are captured alive and held before the council of generals for questioning and their weapons are stored nearby. This gives them the opportunity to make their case to the humans among the generals. The emperor casts *detect thoughts* to question them. During this time, skirmishes

between the Imperial Guard and Jenu's reinforcements deplete

both their numbers. The reinforcements lose 1 resistance point per 10 cohesion points of the Imperial Guard. Then, the Imperial Guard loses 1 cohesion point per 10 resistance points of the reinforcements.

Should the party fail again to convince the generals, Colonel Jenu leads a valiant rescue during the next interrogation session a few hours later. The rescuers fight their way to the tent where the characters are imprisoned.

There, with swords still clanging, Jenu gives an impassioned speech expounding on how many ways Xao has clearly betrayed humanity and appealing to the good natures of each general by name. The human generals pause and agree to hear out what Jenu and the characters have to say. If the players are particularly fond of any other martial or stealthy characters, such as Ishvaldin and Marzelik from Act 1 or Zanlan Mithrawen, they participate in the foray and free the characters. While Jenu talks, one of those three (or another selected by the GM) simply walks up to General Huzi and rips his skin off with a lucky yank. Emperor Xao then teleports away to the enemy encampment and the other skin-dweller generals attempt unsuccessfully to flee.

**Resistance Points.** Jenu's foray causes a full clash between the opposing armies, so both lose points. The Imperial Guard loses 1 cohesion point per 10 points total between Jenu's troops and Anxi's, and



Jenu's troops lose 1 resistance point per 10 points the Imperial Guard had.

### XAO OVERTHROWN

Once the emperor is exposed, the imperial forces rally around the remaining generals, who join the rebels to defend the people of Tsang from the on-rushing monsters. If they capture Xao alive, he can be convinced to tell what he knows with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check and a credible offer to free him. He plans to rejoin the enemy army if freed; a DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check recognizes his insincerity.

**Treasure.** Xao wears a *robe of the archmagi* (evil version), a *ring of regeneration*, and mundane jeweled rings worth 5,000 gp. He also carries a *spell scroll of teleport*. He carries a statuette of himself (the component for his *contingency* spell, worth 1,500 gp).

### REINFORCING ANXI

Once the Imperial leadership is freed of sand-dweller control, the Imperial forces and Jenu's reinforcements retreat into Anxi. If the players were fond of any surviving NPCs from Harge, Kulara, Yangan, or Fenkai, these characters might accompany the reinforcements (for example, Lord Killian, Yarod Zin, Remedy, or the Hua family).

**Resistance Points.** Add half the remaining resistance points from the party's adventures in Chapter 3 to Anxi's resistance points. Also add the remaining Imperial cohesion points to Anxi's resistance points, minus 3 points for the strife between troops who were just hours ago fighting each other.

**Treasure.** The characters are given access to resources from the reinforcements to help in their mission. This always includes two *potions of superior healing* and two *potions of healing* from the reinforcements. The reinforcements also bring a *studded leather armor of resistance* (poison) if they had at least 16 resistance points. If they had at least 24 resistance points, they also bring three pieces of +3 *ammunition*.

In addition, if the characters did not gather Xao's texts from his tent, Captain Liyo or Dean Zong secures them while Anxi is being reinforced.

### REGAINING RESISTANCE POINTS

If the party took less than 2 hours to expose Xao and his generals, they have time to help restore Anxi's defenses in the wake of the siege before the monster army is expected to arrive.

**Care and Triage.** A character can oversee the medical treatment of injured troops with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (herbalism kit or Medicine) check to restore 1 resistance point.

**Mediate.** A character can convince the feuding troops to work together by talking about what they

have in common and succeeding on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 18 Intelligence (History) check. This restores 2 of the lost resistance points.

**Mythos Text Research.** Dean Zong studies texts secured for her by Captain Ibzu. A character can join her in researching the *Book of Eibon*, the *Fourth Cryptical Book of Hsan* (see **Emperor Xao's tent**, previous page), or the *Butcher's Conquests* to help her discover information about the invasion. This follows the normal rules for Mythos text research (SPCM 132-3), but Dean Zong's acolytes provide useful cross-referencing. Each character can roll a d6 and add it to their ability check to research the text. If a character succeeds, they can discover secrets to the sand-dweller magic. Anyone who successfully researches it learns the functions of the six binding items in the Sand Citadel (described on page 86) and has advantage on any ability check they attempt to help Dean Zong destroy or subvert the items.

**Rally.** A character can inspire the troops with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation or Performance) check. This grants 1 resistance point, or 2 points if the result was at least 25.

**Repair.** A character can repair damage to the gates or walls with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (carpenter's tools or mason's tools) check or the *move earth* or *stone shape* spells to restore 1 resistance point.

### THE CAVALRY BRIEFING

Read or paraphrase the following once the characters have had time to rest:

Dean Zong meets you atop a tower at the edge of the High City to discuss her latest finding. The sky is cloudy, but dry and with only a moderate wind. On the horizon, you can see a group of people marching and riding horses in your direction. The dean is accompanied by several pegasi, to whom she is speaking words you can't quite follow. After a snort from the nearest winged horse, she nods sagely and turns to you. "The time has come! We can finally claim the final key we need to strike at the heart of Ravazel's power. I believe the Sacred Hexagon is being carried by the yothan at the head of the incoming enemy army. Colonel Jenu brought some pegasus friends who have agreed to carry you on this vital mission. You should speak with the friendly troops marching here just ahead of the enemy to see if they can tell you more or provide you with a distraction. Oh, it's like something out of an opera!" She grins.

Dean Zong has specific responses on the following subjects:

- ♦ **How do you know about the yothan?** "Emperor Xao's notes mention a yothan commander using the Sacred Hexagon used to access Ravazel's Sand Citadel, and a *sending* I just received from

Captain Ibzu mentioned a yothan leader at the head of the foul monster army."

- ◇ **What is the Sacred Hexagon for?** "The source of Ravazel's power over her monster armies is a collection of binding magic items she keeps locked away in the Violet Dimension, in her Sand Citadel. We can reach the Sand Citadel by traveling through the interdimensional well I reopened recently, but we can't get inside without the *Sacred Hexagon*."

- ◇ **What does the Sacred Hexagon look like?** "It is a carved hexagon of sandstone. Since yothans walk on all fours, I imagine this one is probably wearing it on its body somewhere."

When the characters are ready to go, Dean Zong bids them farewell after saying, "The colonel asked me to convey something... ah, it was 'be quick and don't waste lives.'"

**Creatures.** The characters are each assigned an armored **pegasus** (AC 14) to ride. Each pegasus knows the mission and tries to keep the characters from taking foolish risks.

**Fenkai Deployment.** If the party earned resistance points from any of the guilds in Fenkai and didn't secure their assistance earlier (page 158), the party gains the benefits of those guilds now.

**Treasure.** The city provides a *ring of feather falling*, which is usually worn by the captain of the mounted guard. Dean Zong passes it off to the adventurers for this important mission, "from Minister Zerelda and the city of Anxi" and they do not ask for it back.

### THE AERIAL VIEW

Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs fly toward the monster army:

Below you rushes a column of humanoid troops wearing the colors of the Elder Wall guards. They scramble up steep slopes and through streams, obviously trying to keep ahead of the monstrous horde close behind. Over a low rise,

you can see thousands of running sand-dwellers, saurian yothans wearing armor, skittering arachnid monsters. A few flying polyps float overhead, and elephantine horrors of all description abound. The nearest troops are mounted cavalry. One of them waves you down, and your mounts descend.



Once they descend, the characters are reunited with Captain Ibzu (**knight**) on the battlefield as she commands the battalion's rear guard during their fighting retreat. She points to the head of the enemy formation and says, "The largest creatures seem to congregate around a yothan in shining armor that issues them commands. It is easy to see because it has a stone hexagon embedded in its head. If you kill it while I lead another skirmish, their coordination might break down."

At the sides of the advancing army, Leng spiders and outer abominations can be seen striking at the army's flanks. When Captain Ibzu breaks away to lead the rear cavalry to harry the enemy, the Leng spiders and outer abominations turn their attention to her group.

### BREAKING THE SPEARHEAD

The terrain around Anxi is rugged hills. As the PCs approach the army, monsters fight furiously with Captain Ibzu's cavalry on all sides.

**Creatures.** The defenders the heroes encounter depend upon whether they approach the enemy spearhead formation along the ground or in the air.

- ◇ Characters in the air are met by a **flying polyp** (SPCM 318) with two Multi-Dimensional Bodies. It is controlled by Commander Zaryoth. It attacks when they are within 100 feet of the ground and within 300 feet of Zaryoth.
- ◇ If they approach on the ground, the heroes can get within 600 feet of their target before meeting enemy resistance. A **Leng spider** (SPCM 342) and an **outer abomination** (SPCM 354), both controlled by Commander Zaryoth, attack them.

**Development.** The horde of monsters and sand-dwellers quickly cut down soldiers who come at them. Once the characters engage with Zaryoth's defenders (or bypass them), the monster army begins chewing through the human army's rear guard.



On the eighth round, Captain Ibzu is killed along with the rest of the human rear guard, and the enemy army resumes striking at the flanks of the retreating human army.

**Resistance Points.** Every round from the start of this combat until Zaryoth is defeated, the reinforcements lose 1 resistance point to a maximum of 15 points lost.

### ENGAGING COMMANDER ZARYOTH

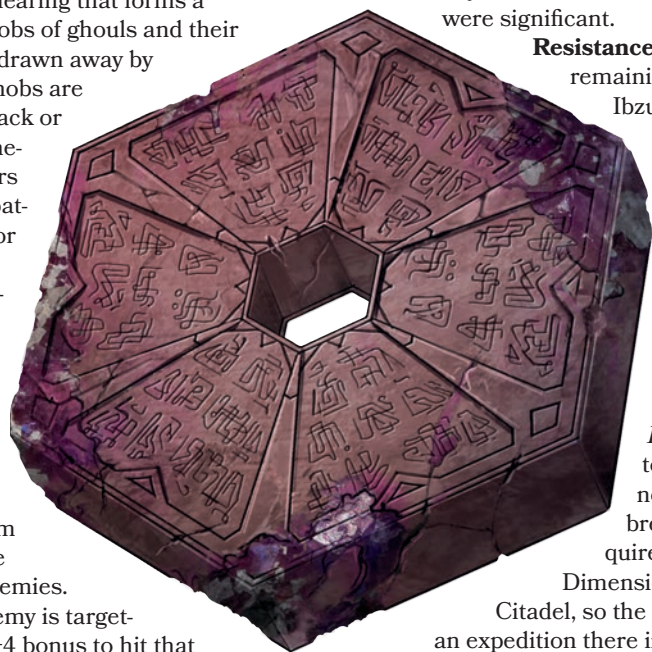
The command area of the army formation is not far from the front. The terrain they are moving over is largely troughs between hills that peak about 100 feet apart. The steep slopes are difficult terrain going upward in a 30-foot-radius circle around the peak of each hill.

**Minions.** Beyond a clearing that forms a 40-foot-radius circle, mobs of ghouls and their sand-dweller allies are drawn away by human troops. These mobs are difficult terrain. Any attack or damaging spell by the heroes automatically clears a 5-foot square of combatants (whether shoving or killing them) to make it normal terrain. The formation stops moving and maintains roughly the same distance around Zaryoth if he stops to engage in combat.

At initiative count 10 each round, arrows from sand-dwellers strike the characters and their enemies. Each character and enemy is targeted by an attack with a +4 bonus to hit that deals 1d8+2 piercing damage on a hit.

**Creatures.** The significant enemies who roll initiative in combat are **Commander Zaryoth** (page 263), a **yothan designer** (SPCM 401), and one elite ally among the following two: if **Emperor Xao** (page 266) lives, he accompanies Zaryoth; otherwise, Zaryoth is accompanied by an **elder thing** (SPCM 307) he controls. Zaryoth remains near a Large ballista at the edge of the surrounding troops, the *Sacred Hexagon* (page 281) embedded in his head, which has many effects on him. The designer is a coward and flees if reduced below half hit points.

**Treasure.** Commander Zaryoth carries the *Sacred Hexagon* (page 281) embedded in his skull. Cutting it out requires a total of three free interactions with an object or Use an Object actions, but it can be freed immediately if the character succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity check using leatherworker's tools or a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check.



### RETREAT

When Zaryoth is defeated or incapacitated, the enemy horde falters, as some of its most potent creatures were under her direct mental control. Several elder things break off with volleys of lightning and fire and turn on the sand-dweller horde. This causes a couple minutes of confused in-fighting.

If the characters neglected to grab the *Sacred Hexagon*, allied cavalry (such as Captain Ibzu's group) recognize it as a potent magic item and divert a squad of cavalry to grab it during the retreat at the cost of 1 resistance point.

Ibzu's cavalry and other troops seize this brief opening to retreat to Anxi. Even with the monsters in disarray, however, the sand-dwellers remained murderously efficient, and the retreating army's losses were significant.

**Resistance Points.** Anxi gains any remaining resistance points for Ibzu's rear guard.

### CONCLUSION

One way or another, the PCs should have retreated inside Anxi's walls with the *Sacred Hexagon*. Dean Zong congratulates the party on retrieving the *Sacred Hexagon* and urges them to go get some rest. The next step of her plan to break Ravazel's power requires venturing to the Violet

Dimension and into the Sand Citadel, so the party should prepare for an expedition there in the morning.

Anxi is recently reinforced and has some limited magical protections thanks to Dean Zong's spell, so the sand-dwellers begin to use spells and siege engines to gradually kill off the wall guards and batter down Anxi's fortifications. Once they begin to take damage, the fortifications won't last more than a few days, and further reinforcements don't seem likely.

**Resistance Points.** Anxi loses 1 resistance point every 2 hours that the siege goes on until the binding items are destroyed in Chapter 4.

### EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of this chapter, the characters advance to 13th level.







## CHAPTER 3: BACK TO THE VIOLET DIMENSION

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 13th level*

### CHAPTER BACKGROUND

The Sand Citadel was originally built by Ravazel the Butcher Queen after she fled from ancient Tsang and destroyed the Hollow Mother. She used the Hollow Plague and other bound monsters as laborers to carve out the massive space.

While the invasion has been underway in earnest, the Sand Citadel has been left mostly untended by the sand-dwellers. Only a few stewards remain. Most of the useful magic items were taken along with the army.

### CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

With the *Sacred Hexagon*, the characters can finally enter the Sand Citadel and attack the source of the sand-dwellers' power. They return to the Violet Dimension, and the *Sacred Hexagon* opens the gate. This adventure mostly consists of exploring the Citadel and fighting the sand-dweller's guardian entities, which are almost all bound monsters in wide variety: gugs, Leng spiders, formless spawn, moon-beasts, and so forth.

By the time the PCs enter the labyrinthine central hall of the Sand Citadel, they are liable to be pursued by an ever-growing, unbeatable force of bound monsters. But any monsters stop cold at the edge of the Hall of Binding within and start to gesture as if to encourage the characters onward!

The Hall of Binding has a huge number of special items ensconced around the edge. The PCs (perhaps encouraged by one of the more lucid bound monsters) by now likely realize that the bound monsters are not the masters of the sand-dwellers, but are, in fact, their prisoners and slaves. The many items here in the Sand Citadel are all binding items that give the sand-dwellers dominion over these captive creatures, forcing the monsters into their service! The PCs can use these binding items to free the monsters, which causes those in the Citadel to depart.

But the PCs still need to save humanity, so they gather up as many of the magic items as they can hold and return to the real dimension.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs begin this chapter in the war room. Read or paraphrase the following:

The war room doesn't fully block out the faint sounds of battle outside. Dean Zong explains, "My research indicates that this Sacred Hexagon should allow you to enter and sabotage the Sand Citadel, the heart of Ravazel's power. I can send you there through the magical portal in the Crystal Tomb. When you get inside, you will need to navigate through the fortress, avoid or defeat any guardians Ravazel left behind, and find where the six binding items are stored. Ravazel and her mages used those items to bind her monster army to her will. The items will be protected, but I'm sure Ravazel will have taken measures to ensure the monsters can't access those items either. You must bring the items here so I can destroy them atop the mage tower. It is the only way to ensure that Ravazel's orders and control over these unpredictable monsters both end immediately."

Dean Zong has specific answers to the following questions:

- ◇ **How can we find the treasures?** "They will no doubt be in a heavily guarded chamber. If you encounter many creatures or a barrier designed to hedge out monsters, you are likely headed in the right location."
- ◇ **Can you help us sneak in or disguise us?** "I have a spell that can make you resemble sand-dwellers, if you wish. Beware, it will not hold up to physical inspection." She can cast the *seeming* spell on them before they depart.
- ◇ **How are the treasures protected?** "Each binding item is held in a magic diagram that renders it indestructible. However, if you are bring the item here, I can break the protection and destroy the item." Dean Zong provides instructions sufficient to allow the characters to attempt an ability check to disable the Circles of Indestructibility with advantage.
- ◇ **How can we bring the items back here?** "If you have any spells or items that can banish creatures, you can use them to send yourselves back here. In addition, I believe that one of the binding items, a glittering white mass, has the function of traveling to teleportation circles on any plane of existence. You should study the circle here in the Triple Tower so that you can use the item to return here."
- ◇ **Can we use the binding power of the items for ourselves?** Dean Zong's eyes light up. "That is an excellent question! Once you bring the items to me, I speculate that we might be able to repurpose the control spell used—" Colonel Jenu interrupts, saying, "Seizing control of unknown horrors no mortal was meant to behold sounds... reckless, to

say the least. Please resist the temptation to take these foul powers for yourself." Dean Zong frowns.

- ◇ **Why must we destroy them here?** "Aside from it being impossible in the Sand Citadel, destroying the item improperly will weaken her grasp on the monsters but not fully sever it. Reversing the magic here allows us to ensure Ravazel immediately loses control over all of the monsters, and hopefully they depart instead of risking their skins here out of mere compulsion."

When the party finishes their questions, Colonel Jenu dismisses them by saying, "Thank you again. We can hold out a little while yet, but I implore you to complete your mission as efficiently as you can. The lives of countless people hang in the balance. Meet Dean Zong at the Tower of Tapestries when you are ready for your mission."

**Fenkai Deployment.** If the party has the direct assistance of any Eldritch Guilds from Fenkai (page 128), the spellcasters cast spells on them before they depart on their mission.

## KOWAVAN'S WELL OPENED

To depart, the characters must convene at Kowavan's Well. To access it, Dean Zong teleports the group from the Triple Tower. Read or paraphrase the following:

You and Dean Zong prepare to return to the Violet Dimension in the large underground chamber under Silversong Mine. The two-tiered pit now has a complex, glowing ring of bright violet light at its center. The dean says, "I must admit to a little jealousy at your expedition beyond this universe. Ah, to breathe the air of another world... still, do keep your wits about you. Even if Ravazel took many of her monsters with her, I highly doubt she left her greatest treasures ill defended. Don't get reckless or fight hopeless battles this close to winning the war—I rather don't think I need another tragedy to record for the ages. Are you ready?"

Once the characters are ready, Dean Zong chants in Aklo and the glowing circle in the pit flares a deeper violet. "Step through!" she urges. Stepping through carries the party to the teleportation circle outside the Sand Citadel in the Violet Dimension.

## THE SAND CITADEL

The Sand Citadel is composed of huge chambers. Each has walls of sandstone streaked red and white. The ceilings are generally 90 feet high.

**Doors.** Huge stone doors 15 feet wide and 30 feet tall connect most rooms. They rotate on hinges with 20 pounds of force (which precludes *mage hand* from opening one, but most other options work).

**Illumination.** Most chambers are well-lit by floating orbs near the high ceilings.

## BACK TO THE VIOLET DIMENSION



**Defenders.** Only a skeleton crew of sand-dwellers currently defends this place, believing they can trust in the might of their numerous patrons. If monsters become aware there are dangerous intruders, two **Leng spiders** (SPCM 342) and a **formless spawn** (SPCM 321) begin patrolling the corridors. They attempt to herd opponents toward **Area R**, not using optimal tactics unless opponents take great pains to go the wrong way. None of the bound monsters can leave the Sand Citadel without their binding objects from the Hall of Patronage.

**Deception.** If characters pretend to be sand-dweller messengers from Queen Ravazel or the invasion force more generally, creatures are quick to believe them, assuming they have the *Sacred Hexagon*, don't fail any Charisma (Deception) check contested by their Wisdom (Insight), and don't fit the description from their adventures in Act 2 (such as if they are disguised). Since mortals were reported causing trouble, however, unexpected visitors are always at least inspected enough for each creature to attempt an Intelligence (Investigation) check against their disguise.

## A. THE HEXAGON GATE

When the characters return to the Violet Dimension, they appear before the locked gate of the Sand Citadel. Read or paraphrase the following:

You step through the glow and find yourself on a salt-encrusted playa that shimmers with red and purple sand. Scrub resembling coral grows in the distance. Far to the west, a green mist sits on the horizon. Far to the east, a broken dome of crystal gleams. A low plateau rises before you. A mammoth stone arch east of you frames a broad ramp leading up to the top, where another arch stands. Beyond the upper arch rises a vast hexagonal citadel of sandstone streaked red and white. The towering stone door in the near wall of the citadel has a hexagonal depression at its center. The citadel's walls are inscribed with huge magical symbols.

The Sand Citadel overlooks a natural harbor on this part of the Stone Sea.

**Symbols.** The magical symbols on the walls are abjurations that protect the structure from all mortal magic as well as damage from nonmagical sources. These effects can be identified with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, though the DC is 12 to simply recognize this is abjuration magic.

The Sand Citadel proves to be impregnable without the key (the *Sacred Hexagon*). The teleportation circle at the foot of the winding ramp can be used for a *plane shift* spell from another plane of existence.

**Creatures.** The plateau on which the Sand Citadel stands is patrolled by a **sand-dweller slasher** (page 276), a **sand-dweller binder** (page 275), and two **ythan warriors** (SPCM 401). The patrol comes to

investigate the sound of the teleportation circle being used after 3 rounds. Characters can hear them coming 2 rounds out despite the sound of the wind with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. If they don't spot anyone, the creatures continue their patrol and the characters have time to get inside while their route takes them to the rear of the citadel.

**Conversation.** If the sand-dweller binder Marzok survived Act 2, he is still the sand-dweller binder on duty and might well remember them. If they lied to him before, he has almost certainly found out since then and become highly suspicious of any similar claims.

**A Familiar Face.** If the characters did not restore Gormothoz to uskval society in Act 2, he is camped behind some brush at the edge of the playa near the Stone Sea. He watches for movement around the Sand Citadel, so if the party doesn't rush inside, he can spot them and come meet them. He remembers them vividly and asks after their fortunes and current plan. As long as they kept up their end of any bargain struck, he is open to accompanying them inside. If the party disappointed him, he is still curious and helps with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check or an offer to let him have any rare and special corpses suitable for raising uskval young.

**Opening.** Presenting the *Sacred Hexagon* opens the gate. The 120-foot stone door splits into six pieces that recede into the surrounding stone with a faint grinding noise.

## DETOUR TO AUMBRASK SPIRE

The characters might choose to take a detour to seek supplies or reinforcements among the uskval (described in Act 2) with *teleport* or similar magic. If the characters secured clemency for Gormothoz from the uskval High Seer Azmovoth, they find him there. With the Great Implantation underway, the uskval can't offer much direct assistance, but they can be persuaded to send an **uskval mage** (page 237) to distract the guards outside the Sand Citadel if the party left on very good terms or if they succeed on a DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

## B. THE GRAND HALL

The gate opens into a grand hall. There are two exits left and two exits right from the grand entrance. The hexagon gate grinds shut after 1 minute or as soon as the *Sacred Hexagon* is more than 20 feet away from it.

**Investigation.** Small mounds of sand lie before the doors to the bat cave (**Area D**) and the armory (**Area H**).

**Trap.** The door to the Hollow Pit (**Area C**) is sealed with a *symbol* (death version, save DC 18) and crudely marked in Aklo. The words say, "No entry." The symbol triggers when anyone other than a sand-dweller or a humanoid opens the door. It is







known to all the inhabitants of the Sand Citadel since it was placed to prevent uncontrolled hollow creatures from passing through.

### C. HOLLOW PIT

This vast pit descends hundreds of feet. There are levitating platforms leading in a ring around the chamber. A gray crystalline sac about 10 feet across hangs from glittering threads from the ceiling. A steady trickle of gray oil pours onto it from a small hole above. Spidery growths of similar crystal spread out over all the walls, growing thicker the farther down.

The pit descends 100 feet before continuing down into a bare stone tunnel that terminates in another hexagon gate that requires the *Sacred Hexagon* after 150 feet. Beyond that, it eventually connects to the Broken Bastion (Act 2) after about 1 mile.

**Creatures.** Four **hollow cobras** (page 270) cling to the walls in this room at various heights around the perimeter. They can move along the crystal at their full speed as if it were normal terrain. They defend the mass at the center of the room, which is an undeveloped hollow eremite symbiont.

### D. BAT CAVE

This chamber appears to be a vast natural cavern of the same stone as the Sand Citadel. It is pitch dark and the air is thick with an acrid stench. The floor has many small mounds of dark droppings. There are two doors out on the same side of the cave.

**Creature.** **Bats** squirm and chirp in the darkness above, where they cover much of the ceiling. A dying **yothan designer** (SPCM 401) named Orgozon is chained to the wall, nearly bled out from feeding by all the bats. The Wisdom (Perception) DC to hear her ragged, shallow breaths over the noise is 21. She has 1 hit point and 5 levels of exhaustion due to blood loss. She is delirious and only occasionally coherent. Her shackle can be unlocked with a successful DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check or broken loose with a successful DC 24 Strength check.

**Ignited Guano.** About half of the spaces in this cavern, including all within 20 feet of the walls, are covered in bat guano. If a spell that deals fire damage includes these spaces, the included area ignites and burns for 1d6 rounds. Each creature that starts its turn in a burning space takes 1d6 fire damage.

**Development.** Giving Orgozon at least 4 gallons of water lessens her dehydration and allows her to begin reducing her exhaustion with rest. If rescued and allowed to recover at least 1 level of exhaustion, she offers to pay with knowledge of the sand-dwellers or with a useful modification. She weighs 3,000 pounds, and she is willing to be moved with the *telekinesis* spell. Even if she is too exhausted to move on her own, she can be helped to walk 30 feet with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, up to twice per round. If she is moved, 1d4 **bat swarms** descend every round to feed on her. The bats flee if attacked.

## ORGOZON

**Orgozon** (yothan designer, lawful evil).

**Traits** Orgozon habitually points out an exception to every generalization and a loophole in every promise. She resents being controlled.

**Ideal** Discovery.

**Bond** Orgozon wants to learn arcane secrets and bring them back to her home underground.

**Flaw** Greedy.

**Orgozon's Knowledge.** If healed as she asked, Orgozon is willing to answer the following:

- ◇ **What do you know of the Sand Citadel?** "I was required to modify the sand-dwellers' bound monsters as they desired, so I spent most of my time in the medical laboratory." She points a claw at the door to **Area E**. She summarizes the layout of all rooms up to the summoning chamber (**Area L**) and believes that the open arch in that room leads in the direction of Ravazel's greatest tools.
- ◇ **Why do you work for the sand-dwellers?** "I was a lay priest of Tsathoggua among my people. An omen from the Father of Formless Spawn drew me to this place, and the sand-dwellers told me I could touch his power here. It was true his power was stronger here than anywhere I have ever been... which made me careless. They tricked me into agreeing to a magical *geas* that forced me to serve them."
- ◇ **What would you do if you could leave?** "Return to my calling. My people need my skills as a designer of flesh creatures to keep the cities running well and protected."
- ◇ **Why were you in that situation in the cave?** "I was sentenced to death for finding a loophole in my *geas*. When ordered to heal and question a captured uskval, I carried it near the exit to work on it, and it used its own teleportation magic to leave. I began forcing open the exit to pursue it, as necessary for my order to heal and question it, but Ravazel caught me and sentenced me to die slowly by the hungry bats."

**Orgozon's Surgery.** If she is reduced to 4 or fewer levels of exhaustion, Orgozon can perform a surgery on one PC with 1 hour of effort. The surgery gives the character gecko-like pads and a faint sheen to their skin. The implant allows the character to climb surfaces at their full speed and allows them to attempt an ability check to escape from the restrained or grappled condition as a bonus action.

### E. ALCHEMICAL LABORATORY

This chamber has numerous stone ledges at various heights. Most surfaces are cluttered with clay jars and glass bottles of all sizes. The bottles hold myriad items: knotty masses like roots, pulsing chunks of flesh, scales suspended in gel, and other things. Eight

sets of manacles are attached to the wall; seven are mundane and one is a set of *dimensional shackles*.

**Creatures.** Three **yothan designers** (SPCM 401) prepare experiments in this lab. The subjects are squirming uskval workers (see page 233). The workers are badly mutated by the designers' experiments and are in no condition to fight. They know little about the Sand Citadel but are grateful for any help escaping.



**Treasure.** The characters can gather alchemist's supplies worth 3,700 gp and herbalist's supplies worth 2,100 gp. In addition, there is a *spell scroll of acid blood curse* (SPCM 92) and the *dimensional shackles*.

## F. THE ARCHIVES

The archives are lined with many shelves of stone tablets and thick, spongy scrolls. One shelf holds seven books.

**Creatures.** Two **gugs** (SPCM 332) maintain and defend this chamber. They assume the characters are sand-dwellers wearing skins unless given reason to think otherwise.

**Trap.** The bookshelf that holds Mythos texts is marked with a *symbol* (sleep version). It doesn't affect the gugs or sand-dwellers.

**Research.** The records mostly extol the incredible brutality of famous sand-dwellers and their murderous techniques. The library allows characters to retry

any previously failed Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check and grants a +2 bonus on the check. However, consulting the texts is time-consuming and dangerous if the defenders are alerted to the presence of the characters.

**Treasure.** The library contains duplicates of the *Butcher's Conquests* (see page 216) and the *Book of Eibon* (SPCM 133), an incomplete set of five *Cryptical Books of Hsan* including all except the fourth and fifth books (SPCM 134), a *spell scroll of conjure dream-dwellers* (SPCM 97), and a *spell scroll of planar binding*.

## G. PSYCHIC RELIQUARY

The psychic reliquary is used to capture emotional readings of creatures in other dimensions. It features dozens of crystals in a rainbow of colors ranging from the size of a skull to the size of a carriage. At the center of the room is an elaborate stone table holding aloft a rounded violet and yellow crystal that glows faintly.

**Creatures.** This room is attended by a **sand-dweller binder** (page 275) and a **sand-dweller priest of Tsathoggua** (page 277) who study the crystals for mortals to influence.

**Treasure.** The central table holds a *ka crystal ball* (page 281). It can be pulled loose with a DC 10 Strength (Athletics or mason's tools) check or a DC 13 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check.



## H. ARMORY

The armory is filled with gleaming crystalline spears and swords. Racks of arrows like crystal spines gleam in open jars. The wall holds three bows obviously made from kind of spiny chitin and strung with a thin thread.

**Treasure.** The characters can find one to three of all mundane armor and adventuring equipment here, including three crystalline sets of full plate, half plate, breastplate, and simpler armor. Since they are made of surprisingly sturdy crystal and not metal, they are suitable for druids and are not subject to effects such as the *heat metal* spell. The three longbows and three shortbows on the walls are each made of chitin and strung with Leng spider silk. There are racks and prominent displays for magic items, but they have all been taken for the invasion. These items are each worth twice the usual market price for items of their kind if sold in Anxi.

## L. SPIDER WORKSHOP

This stone chamber is densely strung with spiderwebs, some with strands as thick as a human arm. A high table, its top about shoulder level for a human, holds a single gleaming spine of blue crystal decorated with trailing strands of silk. It gleams far more brightly than the light would explain.

**Creatures.** Two **Leng spiders** (SPCM 342) and two **outer mutant scouts** (SPCM 353) build equipment to restock the sand-dweller armory. They ignore humanoids who enter, assuming them to be sand-dwellers, unless an alarm is raised nearby.

**Treasure.** The spiders have just finished a +2 arrow that appears as a rod of sharpened crystal fletched with scraps of silk. A character can convince them to hand it over with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check.

## J. BARRACKS

This long, winding cavern filled with many mounds of sand.

**Creatures.** The barracks is where the sand-dwellers stow their personal belongings and get a little privacy. Six **sand-dweller whisperers** (page 274) rest here to regain spells and twenty **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 272) sleep mostly buried in the sand. All the whisperers have only cantrips available. They move to mob intruders at first, but once they see how dangerous the intruders are (such as if the PCs kill multiple sand-dwellers in a single round), they flee.

**Investigation.** There are not many footprints leading to the armory (**Area H**) but quite a few leading to the xeric respite (**Area K**).

**Treasure.** Each mound contains the collected treasures of many sand-dwellers. Finding it all within 10 minutes requires a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Otherwise, thoroughly scouring the sand takes 1d4 hours. A failed check turns up 360 gp. A successful check finds an additional 820 gp and two gold rings (each worth 250 gp).

## HOWLER'S CHOSEN

**Howler's Chosen** (moon-vassal, chaotic evil).

**Traits** The Howler's Chosen can't suggest freeing him but tries to talk around this restriction by talking in hypotheticals.

**Ideal** Strength.

**Bond** The Howler's Chosen wants to get revenge on Ravazel and her sand-dwellers.

**Flaw** The Howler's Chosen is easily distracted by tormenting weaker creatures.

## K. XERIC RESPITE

The air in this room stings the nose and eyes, and smells overwhelmingly of salt. Mounds of salt are piled in all corners of this room. Chairs, tables, and divans formed from salt decorate the central areas. Dust devils of pinkish salt constantly form and disperse.

**Desiccation Hazard.** A creature that starts its turn in the room experiences painful desiccation unless it is a construct, undead, an elemental other than a water elemental, or has resistance to necrotic damage. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 3d6 necrotic damage. Sand-dwellers that take a short rest in this room regain all their hit points and remove all levels of exhaustion.

**Creatures.** Twelve **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 272) and four **sand-dweller whisperers** (page 274) lounge all around the chamber. Some are relaxing in mounds of sand and others are on the crystal furniture. All have crystals packed against obvious bite or claw wounds and have only 15 hit points remaining. They don't engage intruders, since they feel vulnerable without their spell slots. Those resting in mounds of salt burrow deeper in the hope of going unnoticed. If characters attack, simply assume all creatures they hit are killed. The rest flee.

**Investigation.** There are many footprints leading to the barracks (**Area J**) but only a few leading to the bat cave (**Area D**).

## L. SUMMONING CHAMBER

The summoning chamber has a number of circles, pentagrams, and hexagons inscribed in the floor for summoning various entities. One corner of the room is a 20-foot statue of Tsathoggua. Another corner has a 20-foot statue of the Howler in Darkness which can be recognized with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) or DC 10 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check. There are four exits from the room. The route to the mirrored maze is an open arch with no door.

**Transdimensional Skylight.** The room is illuminated by a magical skylight that shows the sky on the Material Plane instead of leading outside. Spells can be cast in this chamber as if in the place shown above. Anyone who watches for a time can see the flying polyps around Anxi knocking pegasus-mounted

soldiers from the sky. The ceiling doesn't allow travel to the place it depicts, however.

**Creatures.** The room is maintained by The Howler's Chosen (a **moon-vassal** [SPCM 349] wearing a pointed hat) and a **moon-priest** (SPCM 348) wearing a holy symbol of Nyarlathotep. These moon-beasts are required to fight the characters, but they can resist their control enough for limited communication with the party. The moon-vassal known as the Howler's Chosen begs the characters for help even while sending deadly spells at them. They explain in Aklo, "Identify yourselves! You resemble intruders responsible for the death of Garu the Poisoner Prince, which obligates your capture." Convincing them that the party represents Ravazel requires a successful DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check. If disguised as sand-dwellers, the check has advantage.

The moon-beasts don't want to sacrifice their lives for Ravazel but are magically prevented from explicitly saying what the terms are. They say things like, "The orders we were given are not optional." They know that freeing or destroying Tsathoggua's avatar (**Area Q**) will break the binding. They can also be freed by removing and destroying the *sickle of Nyarlathotep* in the Hall of Binding (**Area R**). They therefore steer any conversation toward getting the party to those locations, such as saying, "You are forbidden to leave this room in that direction," while gesturing animatedly to the open hall that leads to those sensitive areas.

**Summoning Circles.** The circles glow faintly when creatures step into

them. If a creature starts their turn inside one of the summoning circles, the circle starts to glow. Unless the creature is native to the Violet Dimension or bound to serve the sand-dwellers, it must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by the sand-dwellers and their allies.

**Development.** If the moon-beasts fall below 40 hit points or one of them is defeated, the next one to act spends an action to summon allied monsters through the summoning circles and the exits, which begins **the Chase** (see below). Entering either of the side doors also provokes the chase.

**Treasure.** The skylight is an enchanted pane of *Leng glass* (SPCM 126). Anyone who flew above the Sand Citadel recognizes that although the glass seems to be lit by sunlight from outside, it can't truly be because the Sand Citadel has no skylights (or other windows). The glass can be removed without destroying it only with a successful DC 17 Dexterity (glassblower's tools or mason's tools) check or DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check.

## THE CHASE

Six **adolescent dark young of Shub-Niggurath** (SPCM 293) appear in the summoning circles, although they are stunned for 1 round as the magic binds them into service. In addition, creatures might come from the surrounding rooms if they have not already been disposed of: two **gugs** (SPCM 332) from the archives (**Area F**); two **proto-shoggoths** (SPCM 372) from a crack in the wall connected to the nearest vats (**Area N**); and two **outer mutant scouts** (SPCM 353) and a **Leng spider** (SPCM 342) emerge from the spider workshop (**Area L**).

The horde of monsters is clearly beyond the characters' ability to overcome, so they must flee. Apparent exits lead them deeper into the fortress (first the maze, then the treasury, then the pit and the Hall of Binding). The formless spawn move to block side paths rather than intercepting the characters. Characters can recognize the formless spawn are herding them deeper into the sanctum with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check.

The monsters can't help but attempt to capture the characters, however, so they do not give the characters any pause. If the characters spend 3 rounds in the same place, they are attacked and an encounter ensues; the monsters take the PCs captive (see below) if they surrender or are incapacitated (the monsters don't intend to kill them).

## CAPTURED?

Defeated characters are stripped of their weapons and taken to the alchemical chamber (**Area G**) by gugs to be interrogat-





ed by yothans. The weapons are placed in the armory (**Area H**). The yothans are curious and conversational. Like the Howler's Chosen, their words are limited, but they want to leave and want to find an excuse to let the characters escape or leave them alone long enough to escape on their own (the ability check to escape the manacles is DC 20, so a few minutes is enough for almost anyone to slip out).

If the party lingers here long enough for a long rest, the Howler's Chosen (above) orders all the yothans to clean an alchemical residue that has formed in the bat cave (**Area C**) and reminds them that the mirror hall and the areas beyond it are expressly off limits to anyone other than Ravazel and chosen servants.

## M. MIRRORED CRYSTAL MAZE

This room is filled with dozens of panes of mirrored glass from floor to ceiling. The panes sporadically flash with images from disparate landscapes. One pane shows a sprawling city of spiraling black steel, then it ends and a pane nearby flashes with a blue wildfire burning across plains under three red-orange suns. Within three seconds it is an empty mirror again and a nearby pane lights up with cyclopean stone ruins swarming with huge green dragonfly-like creatures.

**Navigating the Maze.** The mirrors make navigating the room quickly difficult. A creature unfamiliar with the room can move through it without wasting movement by succeeding on a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival), DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation), or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. A creature that fails wastes half of its movement each round as it approaches dead ends and must turn around repeatedly.

**Treasure.** The maze's magical walls derive their power from another pane of *Leng glass* (SPCM 126) set in the roof much like in the summoning chamber (**Area L**).

**Creatures.** A **formless spawn** (SPCM 321) emerges from any side door that the party approaches. If unseen, they attempt to shadow characters and cut them off from going the wrong way. They move right at the periphery of attention, so characters only notice them with a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check.

**Throne Room Door.** The only door that formless spawn don't move to block is the door leading into the **Throne Room** (**Area O**, below). The treasury is not locked, but it is protected by a *glyph of warding* (explosive runes version; save DC 15).

## N. VATS

Each vat chamber is dominated by two broad vats that reek of caustic agents, brine, and other odors. Bottles, jars, and vials of chemicals line one side of the chamber.

**Creatures.** The chamber near the summoning chamber contains two **proto-shoggoths** (SPCM 372) and one **formless spawn**. The farther chamber

contains two **formless spawn** (SPCM 320). The formless spawn are generally interested in prodding the characters toward Tsathoggua, so they move to herd the characters away from exits other than the one leading to **Area O**. They don't Multiattack or grapple creatures.

## O. THRONE ROOM

Ravazel's throne is a towering structure grown from a chitinous substance rooted to the floor. It is 20 feet high and has stairs leading up to the seat. There are three exits: the high stone entrance door with a heavy bar beside it (leading to the maze), a metallic hexagonal door to the left of that door, and a stone door to the right inscribed with six *Elder Signs*. The walls are hung with crystalline weapons claimed from defeated uskval.

The entrance door has a large, heavy bar that can be swung into place as an action by any Medium creature or two Small creatures.

**Warded.** Spells of the divination school can't pass through the walls of this room.

**Treasury Door.** The only door that formless spawn don't move to block is the large vault door leading into the Treasury (**Area P**, below). The treasury is locked but can be opened with a successful DC 25 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. It is protected by a *glyph of warding* (explosive runes version; save DC 15) that triggers if someone attempts to open the vault and fails.

## P. TREASURY

The treasury is a lead-lined room with dozens of niches.

**Warded.** Spells of the conjuration, transmutation, and divination schools can't pass through the walls of this room.

**Treasure.** The hoard of the sand-dwellers has been much depleted by the army Ravazel prepared, but characters can still find many potent items here. Most of it is nonmagical: an orrery made of silver with seven different gemstone planets depicting an unfamiliar star system (worth 2,500 gp), a floor-length silver mirror with gold filigree tentacles and eyes (worth 5,000 gp), a golden statuette of a ram-headed man with his arms spread wide (worth 1,000 gp), and ancient Tsangese coins and modern Odranian coins totaling 54,600 gp.

## Q. TSATHOGGUA'S PIT

This spherical room has three small holes in the ceiling. A 15-foot-wide ledge runs along the south half, connecting the east entrance to a southwest-facing door that is marked with six glowing signs. The fall from the ledge is 25 feet. Moving upward along the slope away from the bottom of Tsathoggua's pit is difficult terrain. Even characters frightened of Tsathoggua can move perpendicular to him along the ledge to the Hall of Patronage.

**Hall Door.** The door to the Hall of Binding (**Area R**, below) is locked. It can be forced with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or picked with a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. The door frame is marked with the *Elder Sign* (SPCM 102), so pursuers can't follow the PCs inside.

**Creatures.** The **Avatar of Tsathoggua** (SPCM 259) is bound here. It normally drowns in the center of the pit, but it can move freely around the room and reach up onto the ledge. Creatures are subject to his Unnamable Doom only when at least 5 feet away from the walls (which gives line of sight down to the avatar). It can't move or attack anyone carrying the *Sacred Hexagon* but can freely target anyone else. It is protected by one **formless spawn** (SPCM 320) that lurks on the ceiling until someone tries to move into the room, at which point it drops along the wall to goad them into line of sight with the avatar.

**Warded.** Spells of the conjuration, transmutation, and divination schools can't pass through the walls of this room. The creatures in the Sand Citadel (including Tsathoggua) can neither leave nor enter this room.

**Development.** Freeing the avatar makes all formless spawn serving the sand-dwellers go rogue and frees any yothans to do as they will. Destroying the avatar makes them go dormant and slip away, and likewise frees any yothans.

## R. THE HALL OF BINDING

This vast chamber has numerous alcoves, each inscribed with a different star, circle, or hexagon pattern around a plinth holding a different item. The six largest each have a huge green crystal hanging above them. The center of the sand-dweller's power is the Hall of Binding.

**Warded Area.** Spells of the transmutation and divination schools can't pass through the walls of this room. Attempts to teleport into any location in this room result in teleporting outside the entrance instead unless the origin was also inside the room. In addition, none of the sand-dwellers or their allies can enter this chamber. If any were in pursuit, they wait just beyond the entrance door. Even the smartest bound creatures, if questioned, are limited in the hints they can give. If their minds are probed with a *detect thoughts* spell, however, they know all about how the bindings here work. If the moon-vassal from before still lives, it can also explain the significance of the binding items.

**Circles of Isolated Indestructibility.** Items removed from a circle teleport back to their own designated circles after 1 round unless removed from the Violet Dimension. Characters can study the inscriptions with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or (Arcana) to learn their functioning. There is space where the characters can add to them. They can alter the runes with a successful DC 25 Dexterity (thieves' tools), DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana), or DC

18 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check to disable the teleportation effect. A failure causes psychic feedback that deals 6d8 psychic damage to the creature and 1 level of exhaustion, but only a maximum of 2 levels of exhaustion can be gained in this fashion. There is no limit on the damage dealt, however.

The traps can also be disabled entirely by killing or freeing Tsathoggua's avatar.

**Treasure.** The hall contains a large number of items, including the following:

- ◇ A shoggoth *twsha* (SPCM 130) at the center of a hexagon with six proto-shoggoth *twsha* surrounding it; the six proto-shoggoths are in the Sand Citadel. The shoggoth is on the Material Plane near Anxi.
- ◇ An *Atlach-Nacha egg* (page 281)
- ◇ A *gourd of the Black Goat* (page 281)
- ◇ A *sickle of Nyarlathotep* (SPCM 229)
- ◇ A *hollow binding stone* (page 281)
- ◇ A *flute of the servitors* (SPCM 125)

The magic of the Sand Citadel renders the items indestructible while they are within its walls. Usurping control of an item requires being attuned to the *Sacred Hexagon* and studying the binding item during a short rest, or else a successful DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check, Intelligence (Arcana) check, or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check. The sooner the characters remove the items, the less damage Anxi will suffer.

## CONCLUSION

Characters can safely rest in the Hall of Binding, or they can return to Anxi to rest. The *resonant athame* (see page 241) or a series of *banishment* spells can return characters to Kowavan's Well in Silversong Mine under Anxi. The *Atlach-Nacha egg* or a character's own *plane shift* spell can take them to the teleportation circle in Anxi.

The characters return to find Anxi in dire straits. The current state of the city depends on how many resistance points the city has remaining (see page 153). Monsters of all sorts lurk or fight alongside thousands of sand-dwellers and ghouls. The defending troops have siege engines and mages to help even the odds, but they clearly can't hold out forever. Although the situation is dire in Anxi, Dean Zong offers a *tiny hut* spell for respite and promises that while the city's fate is endangered, it is stable enough for a long rest. She needs that long to determine how to unravel the binding items' magic anyway.

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

At the end of this chapter, the characters advance to 14th level.





## CHAPTER 4: THE REAL MONSTERS

*A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 14th level*

### CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

When the characters return, the people in Anxi are struggling to hold out. Their condition depends in part on how well the characters supported them in Chapters 1 and 2. Most likely, only a few thousand remain. But Dean Zong is able to destroy the enchanted binding items, and as she does the patron monsters free themselves from the sand-dweller servitude and turn on the sand-dwellers.

The remaining battle is the humanoids of Tsang, now allied with some of the monsters, finally defeating the sand-dwellers. The final fight is against Ravazel within her strange walking fortress.

### STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Read or paraphrase the following after the party has had time to rest.

Dean Zong comes to find you in a rush, with bundles of scrolls held in her arms. She explains, “I think I have it! Time might be short, but I realized

that the magic protecting the binding items can be weakened by the Triple Tower itself. There are potent lines of natural magic intersecting here, and the Triple Tower was built to focus them at its tallest point. Join me there as soon as you are ready, and we can destroy them ourselves.” She nearly drops the topmost scroll, then catches it and adjusts the pile. “This should be the thing that tips the scales and brings the battle to an end. I suspect they will put up a nasty fight once they realize what we are doing, but success should give us a decisive victory. Truly something worthy of recording for posterity, even if we all die!”

Dean Zong has specific replies on the following topics:

- ◇ **How can we destroy the items?** “Magic, of course! Magic weapons, powerful spells, that sort of thing. I wouldn’t bother with weaker spells. They seem to be impervious to cantrips. Raw strength or clever tricks with thieves’ tools might work too, but I’m no expert on those.”

## THE REAL MONSTERS

◇ **What will happen when we destroy the items?**

"The magical contract binding the corresponding creatures to Ravazel's will shall break. I can't guarantee that all the monsters can be freed using just these items, but all I've read suggests that the vast majority will stop serving her this way. Depending on their natures, they might flee or even seek revenge on sand-dwellers who pushed them farther than the arrangement was intended to go."

◇ **Can we use the binding items ourselves?**

"Not on a large scale, I'm afraid revising the terms of these items is beyond the little time and information we have. We would need to know the formulas Ravazel used to create the contracts in the first place, and I expect they were at least days in the making, if not weeks or months, and likely cost the lives of intelligent sacrifices. You could perhaps keep one or two of the items and issue new orders to individual monsters with them, but Ravazel could overrule your orders easily." She furrows her brow. "That said, if you want to use the item's other properties and only remove its function as a binding item, curse-breaking magic might do the trick."

**Fenkai Deployment.** If the party has the direct assistance of any Eldritch Guilds from Fenkai (page 128-9), the spellcasters cast on them before they ascend the Triple Tower.

## ATOP THE TRIPLE TOWER

When the party is finished preparing, read or paraphrase the following:

You arrive atop the Triple Tower to find Dean Zong already waiting for you, her dress blowing in the intense wind off the sea. Around you, battle rages in Anxi. Flying polyps and nightgaunts soar over the city. Not far off, a huge six-winged dragon flaps lazily and looks down for straggling people to spear with its dangling tails. Human and dwarf troops in Anxi guard uniforms as well as black and silver Imperial Guard armor fire ballistas and catapults at expansive hordes of sand-dwellers. Human archers wearing the simple gear of the Kulara Town Watch fire volleys at huge spiders and yothans who fling rocks in return. A crab-like thing the size of a small keep clambers slowly along the cliff below, opening a door on its front to disgorge hollow jackals onto the wooden roofs of the Sea City. Hargi soldiers on a parapet below you fire a catapult at it.

You might also describe where the front lines as determined by the number of resistance points that remain (page 153). The rooftop is **Area A** of the Triple Tower, described on page 151.

**Binding Items.** The binding items have the following special rules and functions, including rules

for how much damage they can take before they are destroyed. Holding a binding item increases the range of enchantment spells targeting the matching creatures to 500 feet and gives such targets disadvantage on any saving throw against it.

◇ The shoggoth *twsha* (SPCM 130) can be damaged by any spells of 5th level or higher that damage creatures, treating it as an ooze. The Strength (Athletics) DC to destroy it is 30. Each time it takes damage without being destroyed, the attacker must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or take 5d10 psychic damage.

◇ The *Atlach-Nacha egg* (page 281) binds Leng spiders. Each time it takes damage, the attacker and any creature within 10 feet of them must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d6 poison damage; if the attacker is touching the item when it is destroyed, they are exposed to Atlach-Nacha venom (SPCM 122).

◇ The *gourd of the Black Goat* (page 281) binds dark young of Shub-Niggurath, outer spawn, outer mutants, and outer abominations. Each time it takes damage and is not destroyed, it casts *implant dark young* (SPCM 105; save DC 17) on the source of the damaging effect. When the gourd is destroyed, it shatters and exposes each creature within 10 feet of the attacker to the milk unless they succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw.

◇ The *sickle of Nyarlathotep* (SPCM 229) binds nightgaunts and moon-beasts. Each time it takes damage without being destroyed, the attacker must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or take 4d6 poison damage and contract the sickle's disease.

◇ The *hollow binding stone* (page 281) would normally bind hollow creatures (it is dormant now if the hollow eremite died in Act 2). Each time it takes damage without being destroyed, the attacker must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or take 2d10 psychic damage.

◇ The *flute of the servitors* (SPCM 125) binds flying polyps and yothans. Each time it takes damage, it plays its tune and the duration of the tune's mental effect on the attacker increases to 1 hour. Most of the flying polyps vanish instantly when the flute is destroyed.

Characters can contribute to unbinding the monsters by taking any of the following actions:

◇ Each item can be attacked and destroyed (AC 23; 35 hp; immunity to poison, psychic, and damage from nonmagical attacks and spells of 4th level or lower; resistance to all other damage).

◇ A *remove curse* spell removes the binding function of a magic item, but only if cast with a spell slot of 5th level or higher. Any other property of the magic item remains functional.

◇ A successful *dispel magic* spell (4th-level slot or



DC 14) removes all of a binding item's damage resistances until it is returned to the Sand Citadel.

- ◇ DC 15 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check, or DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to cross out runes and break the bond
- ◇ DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check to destroy a binding item
- ◇ Attempt an ability check specific to the item to issue new commands to the creatures in lieu of Ravazel's commands

**Creatures.** Dean Zong (page 261) assists the characters. She wishes to prove her mettle and doesn't hold back from using her deadliest spells.

**Faltering Protection.**

If Dean Zong's formula is still protecting the city, its magic fades the moment the first binding item is destroyed. The tower shudders slightly and all the light in the place seems to dim for a moment. Dean Zong glances around, eyes wide, and mutters, "It seems we can't rely on the protective magic I borrowed from the Sand Citadel anymore. We must work quickly!"

The suddenly unraveling magic weakens the city's structures enough to cost the city 2 resistance points.

**SAND-DWELLER COUNTERSTRIKE**

Sand-dweller mages notice the interference as soon as the first binding item is broken. Read or paraphrase the following:

A moment after the item breaks, Ravazel's voice echoes from her crawling castle. The crab-like engine's claws have stopped partway through crushing a fortified tower in the Sea City. She says, "What is the meaning of this? Why do they revolt? There is a mage at work. Find them at once!" Flying polyps flit in all directions. Night-gaunts soar in wide formations over the towers of the High City.

Sand-dweller pactkeepers send monsters in all directions, desperately seeking the source of the disruption.

**Creatures.** The strike team is made of a **sand-dweller pactkeeper** (page 278) riding a **dra-**

**conic amalgam** (SPCM 402). If **Emperor Xao** (page 266) still lives, he replaces the pactkeeper in the strike team and uses *teleport* to arrive 1 round after the first binding item is destroyed.

**Hiding.** If the characters took pains to hide their operation, such as by casting *greater invisibility* on those standing on the roof, enemies don't find them immediately. Searching monsters take 2 rounds to find them plus 1 round per 4 points of their highest Charisma (Deception) or Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide their efforts. Otherwise, it takes 2 rounds.

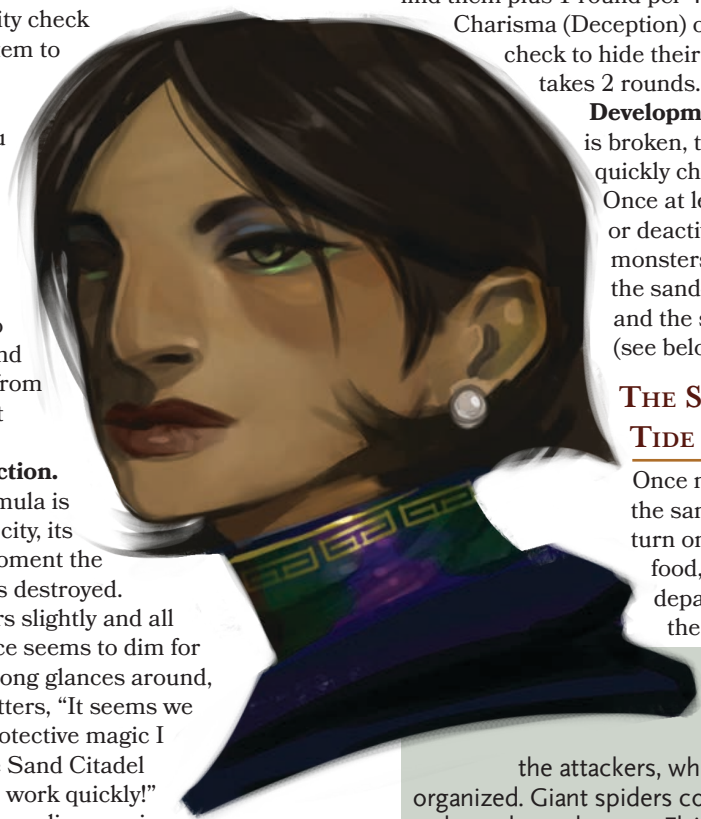
**Development.** Each time an item is broken, the matching monsters quickly change their behavior. Once at least 4 items are broken or deactivated, enough patron monsters are freed that they stop the sand-dweller push forward and the sand-dweller tide breaks (see below).

**THE SAND-DWELLER  
TIDE BREAKS**

Once monsters stop supporting the sand-dweller horde, many turn on them for revenge or food, while others simply depart. Read or paraphrase the following:

The battle very quickly shifts into mass pandemonium among the attackers, while the defenders remain organized. Giant spiders collect sand-dwellers in webs and scuttle away. Flying polyps unleash blasts of wind and then vanish. Formless spawn suddenly break off combat and slink into the darkness. Tree-like monsters with huge tentacles and burbling oozes lash out in all directions, tossing sand-dwellers around like dolls. The humans unleash what remains of their arrows, catapults, and ballistas while the sand-dwellers pummel the walls with sudden urgency. Ravazel's voice rings out, "Cowards and fools! I sacked this city centuries ago and I will not be denied the pleasure now. Their mages in their towers are clearly to blame. Tear them down, starting with the highest one!" To punctuate her command, the crab-like crawler rips a wagon-sized boulder from the cliff face in front of it and throws it against the cliff directly below the Triple Tower. The tower sways dramatically from the impact. Colonel Jenu bolts up the stairs, his eyes wide with uncertainty. He says, "Everyone alright? Did you succeed?"

Jenu waits for a quick report. Once he is clear on the basics, he stares down the cliff face. Jenu says, "The sand-dwellers are faltering, as we hoped."



## INTERACTING WITH MONSTERS

The characters might have interesting interactions with monsters as a result of possessing or destroying sand-dweller binding items. This freedom also applies to appropriate creatures summoned using the *Sacred Hexagon*, allowing the freed creature to automatically succeed on the saving throw to avoid being charmed.

**Dealing with Freed Monsters.** The monsters that have just been freed from sand-dweller control are eager to exercise their new freedom. Some like shoggoths, dark young of Shub-Niggurath, flying polyps, and Leng spiders take the opportunity to get revenge on the sand-dwellers. Others, like the formless spawn, moon-beasts, and yothans make a break for freedom before someone else binds them. Nightgaunts, hollow creatures, and gugs pick fights with whatever is nearby (which might be fellow bound monsters, humanoids, or sand-dwellers). A few, like abyssal custodians and outer abominations, are content to keep the bargain going even without the force of magic.

If the characters encounter a freed creature that is not currently hostile to the sand-dwellers, they can convince it to become hostile to them with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check (provided it can understand them). They can't generally be persuaded to trust or ally with the characters for a prolonged period, but they can be coaxed into focusing their attention on their former captives.

When in doubt, remember that these are Mythos entities that act for their own reasons beyond the understanding of mortal creatures. They should be unpredictable to common human intuition but also obey their own bizarre internal logic; see their entries in the *SPCM*.

**Dealing with Bound Monsters.** The monsters that remain bound can be influenced by the appropriate binding item and a successful ability check either to interact with the monster or to manipulate the item.

- DC 13 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check or DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check as an action to free one monster you can see that is bound by that item.
- DC 18 Charisma (Deception) check, DC 21 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, or DC 23 Charisma (Intimidation) check to trick a monster bound by the item into fleeing.
- DC 18 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check or DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check to command the monster to attack the sand-dwellers.
- DC 21 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check or DC 23 Charisma (Deception) check to trick the bound monster into attacking the sand-dwellers.

Below, the suddenly beleaguered sand-dwellers aim their own siege engines to follow Ravazel's orders, but they struggle to protect them from roving monsters. Jenu continues, "Ravazel's last advantage is that crawling siege castle, and I'm afraid she might kill many of us as long as she lives and it keeps her above the armies. We need to kill her or sabotage the crawler; do it quickly before she brings down this tower! It will be here in minutes, and that's not enough time to evacuate the structure."

He points out the waterwheel-powered lift mechanism used for transport along the waterfall between Anxi's High City and Sea City and says, "That lift looks like it travels right in front of the path it's taking toward us."

**Getting Outside.** Descending the tower is 200 feet of spiral staircases (difficult terrain costing 400 feet of movement, or 7 rounds of Dashing for creatures with speed 30 feet or 8 rounds for a creature with speed 25 feet).

## IN THE STREETS

The lift is a mere 100 feet across a plaza from the Triple Tower. A pond in the center of the plaza features a statue of a legendary warrior who died heroically defending ancient Anxi from one of Ravazel's early raids.

**Allies.** Colonel Jenu shouts down to a team of eight guards at the Triple Tower's entrance, "You're assigned to support the strike team these heroes are leading. Make sure they reach the crawler on the cliff immediately!" The guards quickly form up around the party as they head outside.

**The Plaza.** If Anxi has no resistance points remaining, there is a chaotic battle going on in the plaza just outside the Triple Tower with dozens of monsters and sand-dwellers fighting each other. The statue from the pond is embedded haphazardly in the wall of Triple Tower. The party's guard escorts say, "We'll buy you time. Get to the lift!" They point to the access ramp down the street and rush into battle against the sand-dwellers. No one directly engages the party, but one or two characters are caught in the end of a stray *lightning bolt* spell (save DC 15).

Otherwise, the lead guard, a middle-aged woman, signals to the lift operator when the group emerges outside. "We're going down! Right now!" The lift operator, a young soldier in an Anxi uniform, comes out from underneath a nearby eave and calls the lift up with 1 round of pulling the control lever.

If Anxi has 1 to 4 resistance points remaining, the plaza is crowded with refugees and injured soldiers in make-shift triage areas. Medics go from mat to mat, checking on the injuries, while most of the other people huddle under nearby the eaves of buildings against the dark shadows in the sky.

If Anxi has 5 or more resistance points remaining, just a few soldiers and officials dash across the plaza to deliver orders or do other urgent errands.



**Lift Platform.** If Anxi has no resistance points, the lift is deserted but already on the PCs' level. They can send it down just by pushing the lever. The lever requires constant pressure to keep moving. A guard operates it for the party if they don't wish to.

## THE ABYSSAL CRAWLER

Ravazel's crawler is more an organic siege engine than a creature. It relies on a pilot (usually Ravazel) to move. Individual parts of it can be attacked and destroyed, but the structure is not a suitable target for spells or attacks. Characters can reach the Abyssal crawler with teleportation magic, flight, by climbing along one of its limbs, or by walking on its claw.

**Doors.** Each door is a chitinous valve. Opening one requires running a finger or other living tissue along it. Destroying a door is difficult (AC 21; 50 hp; immunity to poison damage, psychic damage, and damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine; resistance to cold, lightning, and necrotic), and it can only be forced open with a successful DC 23 Strength (Athletics) check. A character can figure out how to release the lock mechanism with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check, or a DC 23 Dexterity (thieves' tools) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check.

**Illumination.** Each chamber is illuminated by a glowing eyeball in the ceiling.

**Defenders.** None of the formerly bound monsters or sand-dwellers are interested in dying on this battlefield. They flee if reduced below half their hit points. Once the party engages in combat in the abyssal crawler for at least 3 rounds, they are noticed by Ravazel. She dispatches a team of sand-dwellers to hunt for them. The team is a **sand-dweller priest of Tsathoggua** (page 277) leading a group of three **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 272). The team arrives 1 minute after it is dispatched. Once the team is defeated, Ravazel grows frantic. She rants, "Not again! I won't be driven back again without having my revenge on Tsang. If I lose everything, you will too!" The crawler picks up speed, crunching its claws into the cliff face with incredible speed to reach the point where it connects with the Triple Tower. The lurching functions as Ravazel's Lurch lair action (page 265).

**Custodian.** Ravazel retains an **abyssal custodian** (SPCM 278), whose charge is the protection and maintenance of the abyssal crawler's systems. Normally, it lairs in the archive (**Area E**). Since the custodian is so large relative to the crawler, it depends on its Create Portal action to move around inside. As long as the crawler exists and Ravazel lives, the custodian will not go beyond the exterior of the crawler. When a part of the crawler is destroyed, it appears through a portal to begin repairs after 1 round. It moves directly to examine the damaged part and ignores creatures nearby. It doesn't begin combat unless attacked or if it personally observes an attack on the crawler. It doesn't



care about creatures who support its opponents; it only targets those who have damaged the crawler or, secondarily, the custodian itself. If the custodian manages to neutralize all such opponents, it turns its attention to repairing the damage and ignores other intruders.

**Ravazel's Rampage.** The crawler moves 30 feet every round across the ground for the first 3 rounds after the party reaches the lift, then climbs 15 feet every round thereafter. As the crawler approaches the tower, Ravazel occasionally pulls stones from the cliff to throw at the cliff below the Triple Tower. It shakes dangerously but doesn't fall just yet. However, if the party takes too long, she can bring the tower down. Ravazel takes about 3 minutes to reach the tower's base at the top of the cliff from the time the party reaches the lift. Rounds in which she attacks with the crawler's claws or uses her Lurch lair action do not count toward this time. In addition, the crawler stops moving when enough of its legs are disabled (noted in the locations where legs can be targeted).

Once the crawler reaches the tower's base, Ravazel begins smashing it apart, depleting 2 resistance points each round. If the Triple Tower has no resistance points remaining, the tower falls and most of the people inside are killed. Dean Zong and other mages save a few small groups with *feather fall* spells, but the casualties are significant and likely several NPCs the characters know such as Governor Izonda or Lord Killian are buried and dead or dying.

## A. SEA CITY LIFT

When the characters ride the lift down to the abyssal crawler, read or paraphrase the following:

Alongside the waterfall, opposite the wooden platform you ride downward, clings a huge crustacean entity similar to a spider or crab with a small keep growing out of its back. It deftly keeps itself level as it digs into the rock, step by step, toward the top. It has huge apertures near its top, from which comes the indignant voice of Ravazel amplified to an incredible volume. She says, "You creatures are bound in my service! Remain in formation and obey me!"

The crawler is 200 feet down the cliff face and 90 feet away along the edge of the Sea City but is clearly making a beeline toward the Triple Tower and will be directly under the lift in 3 rounds.

**Lift.** The lift, powered by the waterfall, takes the characters down the cliff face at a speed of 60 feet per round. It moves at initiative count 10 each round (losing all ties).

**Creatures.** If Anxi's resistance points are 12 or less, a **shoggoth** (SPCM 371) burbles out of the Deep City halfway down the cliff to the crawler. It keeps seeping around directly below the lift, using its piping music to drive soldiers to attack each other. As long as it's freed, the shoggoth prefers to attack sand-dwellers

but doesn't bother silencing its piping for the benefit of others unless convinced with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check or soothed with a successful DC 16 Charisma (dulcimer, flute, horn, or shawm) check. The freed shoggoth climbs onto the crawler and bashes in the door once the lift reaches it, and it flees if reduced to 60 hit points.

Every 3 rounds, a pair of **nightgaunts** (SPCM 350) drop either another two **veterans** or two **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 272) onto the lift. There is an equal chance of either if the *sickle of Nyarlathotep* is destroyed. The nightgaunts ignore creatures on the lift and flee if attacked. Any character carrying a symbol of Bastet or who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (Religion) check can convince the nightgaunts to carry the party to the crawler's landing platform.

**Fortress Leg.** A 60-foot-long leg of the Abyssal crawler extends to within 10 feet of the lift, allowing characters to easily jump to it. Climbing the leg requires a successful DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failure, the character is kicked back onto the platform.

The leg's joints can be attacked and destroyed, severing the leg below the joint (AC 19; damage threshold 10; 100 hp; immunity to poison damage, psychic damage, and damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine; resistance to cold, lightning, and necrotic). A falling leg crushes a small wooden structure on a river dock at the foot of the cliff.

**Fortress Claw.** If any creature attacks the abyssal crawler or if the shoggoth's *twsha* has been destroyed or co-opted, one of its titanic claws sweeps across the lift once every three rounds. A creature standing on the lift must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d6 bludgeoning damage and be knocked 10 feet west and fall prone. A creature who succeeds can choose to cling to the claw as a reaction rather than remain standing. A creature clinging to the claw can climb along it with a successful DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check or balance on it with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. A creature who fails at either check falls prone on the sloped carapace but doesn't fall off.

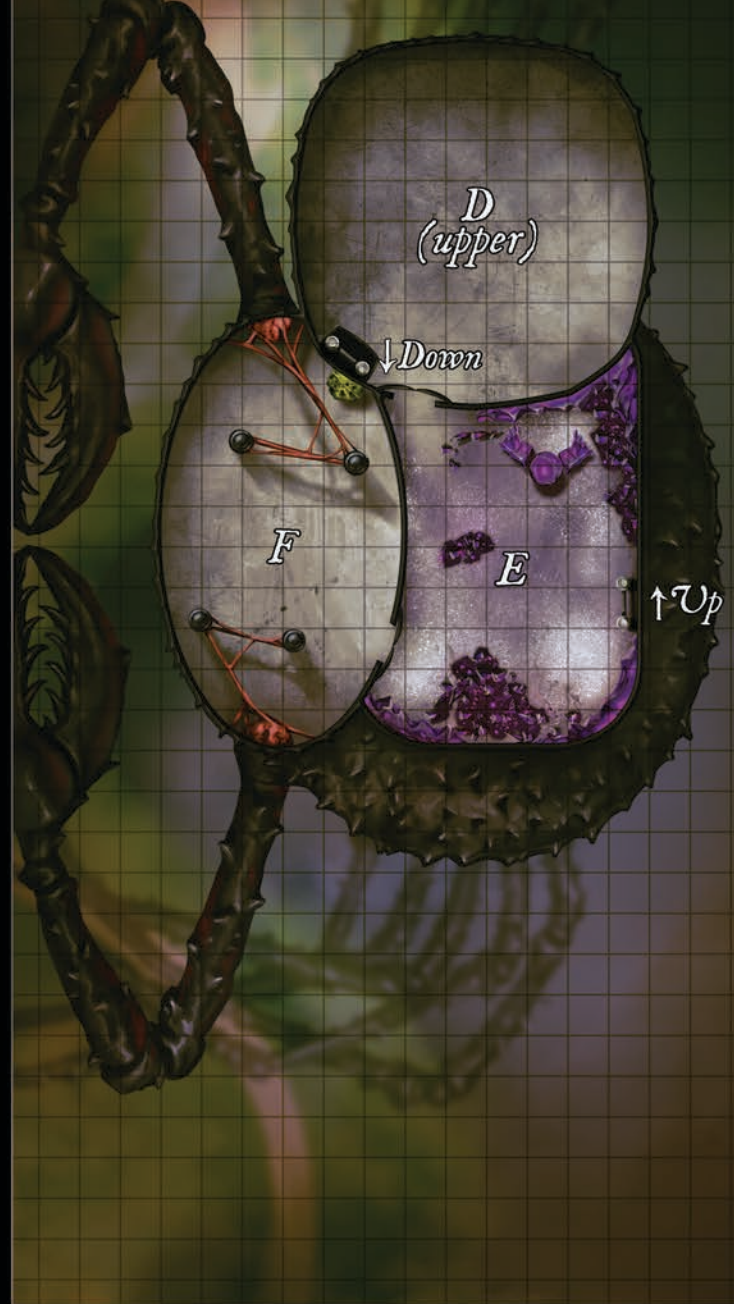
The claw's joints can be attacked and destroyed, severing the leg below the joint (AC 19; damage threshold 10; 100 hp; immunity to poison damage, psychic damage, and damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine; resistance to cold, lightning, and necrotic). A falling claw crushes a dock at the foot of the cliff, sinking halfway into the river at the base of the waterfall.

## B. CRAWLER SHELL

This crawler's dull metallic shell forms a landing platform and collapsible ramp. There is a huge set of closed mandibles forming a doorway. They can be attacked or opened as described above for doorways in the area.

**Creatures.** A **flying polyp** with two Multi-Dimen-







sional Bodies (SPCM 318) floats near the crawler. It was controlled by the *flute of the servitors*. If they do not immediately attack and it's uncontrolled, the PCs can convince it to help break open the door with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. It flees if reduced below half its hit points or if either of its Multi-Dimensional Bodies are destroyed.

**Fortress Claw.** Attacks on the crawler cause it to swing at its attackers with a claw, just like on the lift.

**Development.** Once the characters breach the entrance, Ravazel grows desperate. She rants, "You are gnats! Fleeting pests! Once I wipe the famed champions of Tsang from the planet, I will take my time in purging everyone you have ever known."

### C. TROOP HOLD

The main entrance is a holding vault. There is a door at the rear of the chamber that leads to a large ladder leading up.

**Creatures.** Troops were waiting here to be delivered as part of the siege, but they are in chaos due to the broken binding items. A variety of creatures were within. Now, the surviving creatures are two **adolescent dark young** (SPCM 293), a **proto-shoggoth** (SPCM 372), an **outer abomination** (SPCM 354), two **sand-dweller slashers** (page 276), and a **sand-dweller binder** (page 275). Each one has taken 25 points of damage. The creatures within are engaged in pitched battle with each other. Characters can slip through the room without drawing attention from either side of the combat with a successful DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. If they are noticed, only the binder and outer abomination take interest in them until a fight breaks out.

**Treasure.** The binder carries a *wand of magic missiles*.

### D. HIP CHAMBER

Huge sinews and ten arches formed from long, chitinous poles arch and twist across the pits that make up most of this chamber. A narrow walkway leads across to a ladder on the opposite side, where there is a ladder leading up to another door. The pit is 15 feet deep and has a hard, spiked bottom like a carapace. Treat it as an open **spiked pit** that inflicts damage as noted below.

The joints are connected to the fortress's legs. Each joint in turn lurches upward across the walkway from the pits and folds back down again over the course of each round. The movement corresponds to the swaying of the structure.

**Hazards.** Since the crawler is constantly moving, every joint moves every round, but the pattern is hard to follow. Each creature attempting to cross the walkway must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be hit by the joint and take 3d6 bludgeoning damage. A creature can time their movement to automatically succeed on the saving throw by taking an action to study the timing and succeeding on a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) or DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check. A creature struck by a joint must succeed on a DC 20 Strength

saving throw or fall into the pit and take 1d6 bludgeoning damage plus 2d10 piercing damage from the spikes. The walls of the pit are rough and easy to climb.

Each arch can be attacked (AC 15; damage threshold 7; 75 hp; immunity to poison damage, psychic damage, and damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite; resistance to cold, lightning, and necrotic damage). If five or more arches on one side or if four on each side are destroyed, the crawler can't move.

In addition, if the *Atlach-Nacha egg* has been broken, a **Leng web net** (SPCM 342) has been hung over the door by a **Leng spider** (SPCM 342) that hides in an alcove above the door. It is hunting sand-dwellers for revenge, so it ignores other creatures that don't attack it.

**Reinforcements.** The **abyssal custodian** comes to maintain any part that is damaged (SPCM 278). It can repair a destroyed arch with 1 minute of work.

### E. XERIC RESPITE

This room is full of crystal formations and piles of salt and sand. There are doors on opposite sides of the chamber and a ladder leading up.





**Desiccation Hazard.** A creature that starts its turn in the room experiences painful desiccation unless it is a construct, undead, an elemental other than a water elemental, or has resistance to necrotic damage. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 3d6 necrotic damage; plant creatures and water elementals have disadvantage on this save and take maximum damage. Sand-dwellers that take a short rest in this room regain all their hit points and remove all levels of exhaustion.

**Creatures.** Troops were waiting in here to be delivered as part of the siege, but they are in chaos due to the broken binding items. Most of the sand-dweller troops took refuge here. A **hollow cobra** (page 270), ten **sand-dweller stranglers** (page 272), and a **sand-dweller priest of Tsathoggua** (page 277) are present. A dozen more injured sand-dwellers hide in the sand and flee if attacked. The injured ones have crystals packed against obvious bite or claw wounds and have only 5 hit points remaining each. Those resting in mounds of salt burrow deeper in the hope of going unnoticed.

**Treasure.** The priest wears a *periapt of proof against poison*.

## F. SHOULDER JOINTS

Huge sinews and two joints formed from bowed pillars of rubbery flesh bend from side to side across this chamber, folding one pillar upward at the extreme edge of its movement. There is a hole in the ceiling above the peak of each folded joint. Green fibers grow along the inner edge of both holes and down one wall between them, terminating in a small mushroom-shaped mass at about human eye level.

The joints are connected to the fortress's claws. Whenever the crawler climbs or attacks, the joints fold and lurch upward into the chamber above through the gaps in the ceiling, from the pits and fold back down again in time. The holes connect to Ravazel's throne room above (**Area H**).

**Eavesdropping.** Characters who make a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check (including a passive check) can overhear Ravazel talking to her generals upstairs (in **Area H**) about which creatures they still control, granting the PCs something of a status summary. Lastly, Ravazel fumes, "I may well have to feed the custodian the last of my godflesh to get it to fight." If the PCs linger in this room long enough to hear this statement, they must succeed on a DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid attracting the sand-dwellers' notice.

**Fungal Ganglion.** The mushroom-like throne serves as the interface for assessing the condition of the abyssal crawler, which requires touching it with an open wound or sore. A character can deduce how to control it with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, a DC 22 Intelligence (Nature) check, or a DC 22 Wisdom (Medicine) check. Successfully using it allows the characters to see in all directions outside the crawler for 1 round but alerts Ravazel to their location.

The ganglion can be attacked (AC 15; 35 hp; immunity to poison damage and damage from nonmagical attacks; resistance to cold, lightning, and necrotic damage). If the ganglion is included in the area of a spell or effect that deals damage to creatures, it is also affected. If destroyed, the crawler lurches suddenly as if from Ravazel's lair action (page 264) and any attack by the crawler on the Triple Tower only depletes 1 resistance point rather than 2.

**Dread.** A character who attempts to use the ganglion (successfully or not) must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1 level of dread (*SPCM* 71). The ganglion itself is the source of dread.

**Hazard.** At initiative count 20 each round or when the joint is damaged, each creature more than 5 feet from the walls in the chamber must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be pinched by the joint and take 3d6 bludgeoning damage.

Each joint can be attacked (AC 15; damage threshold 7; 75 hp; immunity to poison damage, psychic damage, and damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite; resistance to cold and lightning damage). If both arches are destroyed, the crawler can't use its claws and can't deplete Anxi's resistance points by attacking the Triple Tower.

**Custodian.** The abyssal custodian maintains the ganglion and the joints. As long as the ganglion has 1 hit point, the custodian can restore 5 hit points to it as an action.

## G. ARCHIVE

This large room contains two shelves of scrolls and a squirming hunk of flesh on a pale stone pedestal. A ladder leads down. The opposite wall is largely covered in a mesh of moldy-looking fibers with an eye embedded in it, except for a gap for the only door. A chest is nestled among the fibers.

**Creatures.** This chamber is the lair of an **abyssal custodian** (*SPCM* 278-9) that serves Ravazel in exchange for the bits of Great Old One flesh she feeds it. The abyssal custodian is bound to the Abyssal Crawler and does not leave. It has no interest in intruders unless Ravazel rouses it by feeding it the rest of her stored Tsathoggua flesh (which is warded so the custodian can't take it). Conversely, if the party feeds the flesh to the custodian, it eats immediately and goes to sleep to digest and grow. If the party damaged any part of the crawler, the custodian is absent dealing with the damaged component.

**Trap.** The pedestal contains a *symbol* (sleep version; save DC 18). Triggering the trap also alerts Ravazel to the party's presence. She sends a sand-dweller to investigate.

**Tsathoggua's Flesh.** The substance on the pillar is a sample of flesh taken from Tsathoggua's avatar to feed the abyssal custodian. If removed or damaged except by Ravazel or the custodian, it turns into a **formless spawn** (*SPCM* 320). The formless spawn remains under Ravazel's control if Tsathoggua's avatar was neither freed nor destroyed in the Sand Cit-

adel; if it is free, it attempts to flee the structure, and attacks only to defend itself or remove an obstacle.

**Treasure.** The texts on the bookshelf include Ravazel's copy of the *Necronomicon* (SPCM 136) and two *spell scrolls* of 3rd-level spells useful for opposing creatures like the player characters. The book contains just about every spell useful for summoning or controlling creatures except for those dedicated to Elder Influences. The scrolls were gathered by Ravazel after she got wind of the characters' actions.

The chest contains a bag of twenty large diamonds (each worth 300 gp), a *+2 longbow*, and a fragment of a huge *Elder Sign* (all taken as trophies when breaching the Elder Wall); a dented shield with the crest of Harge Ravazel took from Captain Esperia (whether she escaped or not is a choice for the GM); and an opal cameo of Ravazel's likeness on a platinum chain (worth 2,500 gp).

## H. RAVAZEL'S THRONE ROOM

This throne room centers on a raised chair flanked by a dozen different weapons. Huge, curling horns reach toward the throne from the side walls, arcing over pits on either side of the room. Huge arches of chitinous matter rise up to the floor level within the pits. Fuzzy coppery tendrils connect all corners of the chamber's ceiling with a central hub that has a vaguely mushroom-like shape directly above the throne. One of those tendrils loops down to enter the helm of the sand-dweller seated on the throne. Ravazel wears gleaming crystalline armor like she had when she first came through the portal from the Violet Dimension in Kulara Town.

The arches are part of the crawler's muscular system connected to its claws. Whenever the crawler climbs or attacks, the arches lurch upward from the pits and fold back down again in time. The pits connect to the shoulder chamber (**Area F**) below.

**Creatures.** Ravazel (page 264), a **sand-dweller binder** (page 275), and two **sand-dweller slashers** (page 276). Ravazel has a long, flexible filament of fungal matter connecting her skull to the throne. As they have been paying attention to reports about the PCs, Ravazel and her binder ally each carry a *spell scroll* of a 5th-level or lower spell particularly useful against the party, such as *counterspell* if they are known for using numerous spells, a damaging spell of a type they aren't known to resist, a *dominate person* spell if one of the PCs has a low Wisdom saving throw, etc. They use these *spell scrolls* in combat.

If Ravazel is reduced below half her hit points or all her minions are killed or incapacitated, she grows desperate and heads into **Area G** to feed the abyssal custodian and rouse it to attack the player characters. If the custodian is absent, Ravazel must spend a lair action while in area G to summon it. Once summoned, the custodian remains a noncombatant unless it is fed. Once fed, the custodian spends its action eating. It then attacks only as long as Ravazel concentrates, as if she were concentrating on a spell.

**Amplifying Horns.** The two horns by the throne can be used to utter words at incredible volume, allowing words to be heard clearly up to a mile away. A Charisma (Intimidation) check using the horn is made with advantage.

**Fungal Ganglion.** The filament connected to Ravazel allows her to control the crawler and use her lair actions. It is long and sturdy enough to stretch anywhere in the abyssal crawler. Anyone who hits Ravazel with a spell attack or weapon attack can choose to deal the damage to the filament instead (AC 20; 35 hp; immunity to poison damage and damage from nonmagical attacks; resistance to cold, lightning, and necrotic damage).

The mushroom-like mass above Ravazel's throne serves as the interface for controlling the movements of the abyssal crawler. A character can deduce how to control the ganglion with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check, a DC 22 Intelligence (Nature) check, or a DC 22 Wisdom (Medicine) check. If the ganglion is included in the area of a spell or effect that deals damage to creatures, it is also affected.

**Dread.** A character who attempts to use the ganglion (successfully or not) must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1 level of dread (SPCM 71). The ganglion itself is the source of dread.

**Reinforcements.** As long as her squad of sand-dwellers hasn't already been dispatched and defeated, reinforcements teleport in to assist Ravazel at initiative count 10 on the third round of combat and every other round thereafter. The first time these reinforcements arrive, a **sand-dweller slasher** teleports into the area within 30 feet of her and rolls initiative normally. On the subsequent round at initiative count 10, and every other round thereafter (sixth round, eighth round, etc), a random monster bursts in from below (see the random summoned monster table for the Sacred Hexagon on page 281).

**Treasure.** Ravazel wields an *ultraviolet greatsword* (page 282) and a *+3 longbow*. In addition, characters can collect any scrolls on her and her binder ally that they didn't use during the combat.

## RAVAZEL'S DOWNFALL

When Ravazel dies or is defeated permanently, or the crawler loses at least ten of its twelve limbs, read or paraphrase the following:

The entire fortress shudders, then every loose thing around drifts up weightlessly. Outside, the city rises up to meet you. There is a deafening crunch and crumbling as stone and chitin plates are thrown free from the walls and ceiling.

Everyone on a surface inside feels weightless for a moment as the abyssal crawler detaches from the cliff and enters free fall. Creatures flying in mid-air take 3d6 bludgeoning damage per 5 feet they are below the ceiling as the ceiling slams into them. Other



creatures take normal falling damage for the height that the crawler reached up the cliff face. The catastrophic impact panics nearly all creatures remaining inside the crawler. They bolt for the exits and attempt to flee the city into the ocean or up the cliffs. The sole exception is the abyssal custodian, which simply begins the slow process of attempting to repair the crawler and ignores all other creatures.

## CONCLUSION

With Ravazel very obviously defeated, the battle turns into a rout by the humans against the surviving sand-dwellers. Some of the surviving unbound monsters return to other dimensions or slither underground. Flying polyps simply vanish. Proto-shoggoths and formless spawn slither down and away. Some disappear between buildings, while others roll into the sea or open mines. In the distance, tree-like dark young flail aimlessly with their tentacles, grabbing whatever humans or sand-dwellers they can catch and consume. Human soldiers fight scattered skirmishes with a few of these creatures; the monsters are potent, but the numbers clearly favor the mortals.

Within a few minutes, the survivors manage to drive off the remaining monsters and kill the straggler sand-dwellers. A cry of victory goes up from the defenders who realize the city is quiet at last. If Anxi has at least 8 resistance points remaining, most of the people survived and there is much celebration in the streets. Many NPCs flock to the surviving heroes to congratulate and thank them. It's best to feature a few individuals the players are most fond of here, especially if the PCs haven't had a chance to interact with them much lately due to the fast pace of the siege.

## EPILOGUE

Even with Ravazel defeated, large swathes of the Empire of Tsang, Harge, and Odran are badly damaged. Most of the three realms have become ghost cities and ruins, haunted by the remaining unbound monsters, leaving only a few scattered remnants of civilization thriving. But at least the sand-dweller threat to the world has been stopped. It is a dark outcome, but the future will be what the survivors make of it.

## CONTINUING THE CAMPAIGN

Should you and the players wish to continue the story of these lands, many threads remain that you might weave into new adventures.

### MONSTER HUNTERS

The leaders of Anxi quickly set their minds on ambitious rebuilding and securing the area. They also need long-term protection to stop the predation of monsters released nearby and potentially hunt

down colonies formed by creatures like Leng spiders (SPCM 341-3), dark young of Shub-Niggurath (SPCM 293-5), yothans (SPCM 400-2), and outer mutants (SPCM 351-3).

### ACROSS THE WASTES

Many survivors, on the other hand, look to the horizon. Lord Killian and many of the refugees from other cities wish to set out, find other survivors (like Captain Esperia and Bramble in Harge), and resettle their various homes. Minister Zerelda wishes to travel to her homeland and see how the dwarves in the Sleeping Mountains fared. Some refugees wish to go with her, expecting the sturdy dwarf holds are more intact than Tsang. Every group would enjoy the party's protection in crossing the monster-haunted lands.

### FORBIDDEN POSSIBILITIES

Dean Zong begins rebuilding the College of Veils in its Tower of Tapestries campus in Anxi. She invites the party to help her explore the knowledge left behind by Ravazel and her minions, repurposing it for the betterment and protection of mortals. Naturally, the leaders of Anxi want to halt her research, but she has become something of a popular figure (though not a hero to the degree of the PCs) and opposing her is politically thorny. On the other hand, she believes she has ideas on how to broker peace with some of the dangerous creatures left lurking near Anxi. How beneficial yet dangerous might it be to make an arrangement with Leng spiders or yothans?

### SAND-DWELLERS GONE TO GROUND

A fair number of the sand-dwellers were not killed or banished despite their catastrophic defeat at Anxi. An ambitious sand-dweller who escaped the party's notice might begin organizing their own infiltration, more slowly and carefully than Ravazel. They listen for news of the characters activities and place agents where the party is unlikely to notice them for long periods of time. Then, when the time is right, they will summon new and more dangerous monsters and go after the heroes directly.

### RAVAZEL'S REVENGE

If Ravazel survived, such as if she was *banished* to the Violet Dimension, the party might hunt her down in another adventure. Alternatively, she might claw her way back to Odran with the assistance of a new patron such as Nyarlathotep in his Shadow Pharaoh aspect, gathering a smaller number of more dangerous bound allies.







# APPENDIX: ACT 1 NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS, MONSTERS, AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

## NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

### THE PEOPLE OF HARGE

Harge's leaders support the PCs throughout Act 1. Even when Killian is holding court, his advisors and lieutenants are given leeway to question his decisions and voice their concerns, so as to catch any mistakes as quickly as possible. They see themselves as something of a family, looking out for the people of Harge.

### CAPTAIN ESPERIA

*"This might be hard to take seriously, but just hear me out..."*

Captain Esperia is competent but has a conspiratorial streak. Some accuse her of being paranoid, yet she is always alert for signs of subterfuge and intrigue. She relishes the chance to work with new people, especially those who are open to seeing the big picture.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Captain Esperia never stops glancing around, even when deep in conversation. She encourages others to share their perspectives and opinions and avoids making firm declarations of the facts unless she has to.

**Ideal** Truth.

**Bond** Captain Esperia was derided as paranoid by her peers and superiors until she saved Killian from assassins no other guards believed existed. Lord Killian believed her warnings and earned her undying loyalty.

**Flaw** Esperia is quick to take offense when anyone questions her judgment.

#### STATISTICS

Human **guard**, lawful good





## LORD KILLIAN

*"I'm an idealist, not an idiot."*

The scion of a long-established family of Harge, Lord Killian was elected as Lord of Harge by the city council. He is uniquely popular in the region, respected by all common people due to his judicial even-handedness and his focus on caring for the poor.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Lord Killian paces when he talks, speaking with a measured gravity. He plays the harp when he's relieved or anxious.

**Ideal** Kindness.

**Bond** Aspires to outdo Odran.

**Flaw** Fears confrontation.

### STATISTICS

Human **noble**, lawful good



## RAYA HUA

*"Have you ever seen a magic bag with this kind of embroidery before?"*

Raya, along with her family, sells art objects and magic items from Tsang in Harge and Odran. She opposes Tsang's decadent and cruel emperor, and quietly supports the Sign of the Five Towers, a group of dissidents and radical reformers in Tsang. One of them is her cousin, whom she hopes to keep safe. She was a close friend to the smith Elbaresh who also worked with the Five Towers, and she hopes to see his killer brought to justice. She and her husband Harrek (half-orc **commoner**) regularly hire Alazan the porter, and they like him well enough. She believes Yarod Zin is reckless and refuses to sell him dangerous magic items that happen into her shop; she also suspects he might have been connected to her friend's death.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Raya talks excitedly about the artistry and history of both objects she sells and items she encounters belonging to other people.

**Ideal** Integrity.

**Bond** Raya hopes to help her daughters become strong and independent.

**Flaw** Raya struggles to ask for or accept help, even if she needs it.

### STATISTICS

Human **commoner**, chaotic good





## YAROD ZIN

*"You know very little of the true nature of the world.  
I can teach you if you are worthy."*

Master Zin is the most reputable mage in Harge, although his mastery of magic is much less than he implies to his followers in the Opening Eye Society and to Lord Killian's court. Secretly, he made deals with the Odranian Church of the Sleeper to unlock what limited magic he has. While he was aware Tsathoggua might well demand human sacrifice eventually, Master Zin long managed to pay for what little he had learned by sacrificing animals and roaming monsters. Yarod Zin resents Raya Hua for refusing to sell him dangerous magic items.

Shortly before the deaths began, Yarod's mentor in the Church of the Sleeper suddenly stopped answering letters and her assistant Sister Mara took over running the church. Mara sent a letter threatening Yarod if he didn't provide human sacrifices, and now Yarod fears for his life. He hides his personal connection to Odran and the Sleeper (for fear of being suspected of collaborating with the Odranians as well as losing his position at court), but if the characters tell the Court of Harge any signs of the Sleeper's servants, he gives a basic outline of Tsathoggua's interests and goals (see page xx) as if it were just some impersonal bit of arcane lore he knows. He also warns them about the formless spawn, yothans, and moon-beasts.

If confronted with his connection to the church (such as via the letter), Zin admits everything and begs for discretion and protection. Nevertheless, he wouldn't confess without coaxing or trusting the

characters not to turn him in for being so involved in Kulara politics. He knows that the Church of the Sleeper in Kulara has inducted one of the magistrate's advisors, Mara, and encourages them to investigate her.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Zin is condescending and verbose. He never uses three words when ten will sound more impressive.

**Ideal** Knowledge.

**Bond** Master Zin is proud of the power he has at Lord Killian's court and in the Opening Eye Society, and will do anything to keep it.

**Flaw** Master Zin has promised to feed Tsathoggua to pay for his unearned magical knowledge.

### STATISTICS

Human **cult fanatic**, neutral evil

## PEOPLE OF KULARA

The people of Kulara struggle under Vanessa Petria's influence. They look to Salzarin to help them endure and resist.



### ISHVALDIN JAFaq

*"Do the best you can with what you have."*

Ishvaldin is a recent recruit to Kulara's Watch and newly married to his older husband Marzelik. Ishvaldin signed on with the Stormtide Company to find and protect Marzelik after he was conscripted.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Ishvaldin has a bright smile and unflappably optimistic disposition.

**Ideal** Truth.

**Bond** Ishvaldin wants to expose whoever is sabotaging his husband Marzelik and the rest of Kulara's Watch.

**Flaw** Ishvaldin is blind to the mistakes made by Marzelik and other members of the Watch.

#### STATISTICS

Human **guard**, lawful good



### LIEUTENANT MARZELIK JAFaq

*"Never let your guard down; that's when you're most vulnerable."*

Marzelik is one of the leaders of Kulara's Watch and husband to Ishvaldin. His most recent case was the murder of a laborer by poisoning. He found a tailor, Esuru, who witnessed the man get into a fine coach. As soon as he reported the witness to Lady Petria, both Marzelik and the tailor were conscripted into the Stormtide Company for Odran's unpopular war effort.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Marzelik grumbles and growls when he is worried about someone, which is often.

**Ideal** Security.

**Bond** Marzelik will do anything to protect Kulara's people, especially his husband Ishvaldin.

**Flaw** Marzelik ignores everything else when Ishvaldin is in danger.

#### STATISTICS

Human **guard**, lawful neutral





## REMEDY

*"May you dance in joy when this is all over."*

Remedy, a tall and slim black cat growing gray with age, is the only full priestess of Bastet in little Kulara. She relies on her human acolytes to help minister to worshipers, many of whom don't speak Cat. As a priestess of joy, she primarily seeks to comfort and distract the community from the cloud of impending war. She sees no purpose to such a conflict and dreads it. Recently, she has received ill omens from Bastet and takes careful note of newcomers in town such as Lady Petria and the player characters. When she ventures to the Dreamlands, she sometimes glimpses a humanoid figure lingering and watching, which she believes to be a ka (page 207).

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Remedy makes jokes out of everything. Since she can only make cat sounds, she must speak through an acolyte interpreter to anyone who doesn't speak Cat or regularly attend her ceremonies.

**Ideal** Joy.

**Bond** Remedy sees her community nearing despair and can't be parted from them while they need her to raise their spirits.

**Flaw** Remedy has a keen eye for necessary actions, including warlike protection and avenging those she protects, but is afraid to act directly. She relies on others to follow her words.

### STATISTICS

Dreamlands cat **priest**, chaotic good



## SALZARIN

*"Doing nothing to help a butterfly in a web is siding with the spider."*

Salzarin is a primly dressed woman with dark skin and graying hair. She is an arbiter, who is hired to settle disputes. She prides herself on never having to involve Duke Odran's infamously corrupt court except to fight his own proclamations. As her community has fallen under the dark shadow of a serial killer without any support from the duke, she thinks it might finally be time for drastic steps.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Salzarin is nosy and irreverent, but eager to help.

**Ideal** Justice.

**Bond** Salzarin wants to find her friend and collaborator Qaroz.

**Flaw** Salzarin was once a tax collector but left the job when her mother died. She's ashamed of her past and avoids talking about herself unless strongly persuaded.

### STATISTICS

Human **spy**, neutral good

## VILLAINS

Kulara struggles under the conspiracy connecting the Kulara Strangler, Petria, Mara, and the Stormtide Company through its contract with Duke Odran. They work together to silence any understanding of the killings in Kulara (propagated by Mara, Petria, and their cultists), either killing anyone who catches on or conscripting them into Lord Basralfar's contingent of the Stormtide Company.

### THE KULARA STRANGLER

*"You have a lovely throat."*

Ever since leaving his mortal skin behind decades ago, the Kulara Strangler has wanted nothing more than to spread the infamy of his crimes and inspire copycat killers. So much has it dominated his mind that he has forgotten his old name and identity. For years, his only option was to reach into the dreams of mortals from the Violet Dimension, but recent events have created the opportunity to revive his legacy more directly. When Mara summoned him and other sand-dwellers back into the mortal world, the sand-dweller warlord Ravazel the Butcher took the opportunity to strike a deal with Duke Odran and sent the Kulara Strangler among the few sand-dwellers to prepare the Festival of the Feast to allow Ravazel and her army to invade en masse.

While in the mortal world, the Kulara Strangler spends all his time in disguise. When the adventure begins, he is disguised as Alazan the Younger, a porter, much like he had been in his mortal life.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** The Kulara Strangler pauses and says, "um" or "uh" in most sentences, as he tries to think how to avoid giving himself away. He changes the topic to food or money if asked about his family or faith.

**Ideal** Strength.

**Bond** The Kulara Strangler spent his mortal life unnoticed except as an object of derision and pity. He is enraged by anyone he perceives as looking down on him, even if they are trying to help him.

**Flaw** The Kulara Strangler is addicted to the terror and infamy inspired by his original killing spree. He wants his killings to be recognized as his work, even if it means giving away the connection between the sand-dwellers and his old life.

#### STATISTICS

**Sand-dweller strangler**, chaotic evil







## LADY VANESSA PETRIA

*"Oh, I didn't see you there."*

Lady Vanessa Petria rules Kulara as her personal playground. She finds new and ever more dangerous experiences to feed her own and Duke Odran's appetites, including connecting him to Sister Mara and the Kulara Strangler. They promised Odran and Petria inhuman delights and all the wealth of Harge if they help orchestrate the Festival of the Feast. Along the way, she has given up her humanity to indulge in cruel and murderous entertainments against Kularan people. Her victims have been conscripts who refused to obey the Stormtide Company.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Petria is sycophantic to anyone with something she wants and wickedly condescending to anyone else. She enjoys watching other people suffer, as well as feeling smarter than everyone else.

**Ideal** Superiority.

**Bond** Petria sees Kulara as her personal playground and brooks no dissent there.

**Flaw** Petria constantly seeks new pleasures at the expense of her own best interests and those of her people.

### STATISTICS

**Sand-dweller whisperer** (page 66) with the appearance and skills of a human **noble**, chaotic evil. Vanessa carries an *amethyst bat figurine of wondrous power* (page 217).



## LORD BASRALFAR

*"These recruits will be the raw materials for a fine army."*

Lord Basralfar is one of the co-owners of the Stormtide Company, who oversees the training of new recruits. He chafes under Sister Mara's orders, interpreting her instructions as a mandate to get the mercenaries and recruits killing as quickly as possible. He has ignored signs of foul magic, but if forced to acknowledge the threat to his company and the rest of the nation posed by the Festival of the Feast and the sand-dwellers, he agrees to break his contract.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Basralfar rubs his hands together when he's excited or nervous, and speaks with a huffy air of superiority.

**Ideal** Glory.

**Bond** Long derided as a glorified weapons-jockey rather than a true warrior, he longs for a war to prove his mettle.

**Flaw** He struggles to acknowledge inconvenient truths.

### STATISTICS

Human **noble**, lawful evil, with 32 hit points and the following actions.

**Multiattack.** Lord Basralfar makes two attacks.

**+1 Rapier.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.



## SISTER MARA

*"Haven't you ever dreamed of being remembered forever?"*

Sister Mara was recently mortal and became a sand-dweller with the willing assistance of the Kulara Strangler. She views the transformation and playing her part in Ravazel's invasion as her route to lasting power. She has enticed several others into her service by talking up whatever version of that truth will interest them, whether that means indulgence for Petria and Odran or infamy for Kulara's criminals and mercenaries.

Sister Mara has a purple-black **bat** familiar, which she calls Dusk and pampers endlessly. When she summoned it from the Violet Dimension, Dusk initially taught Mara methods for summoning sand-dwellers despite her limited magical training, and it now reports Mara's progress and doings to Ravazel the Butcher whenever Mara dismisses it.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Mara likes to ask people about themselves to learn their bonds, flaws, and tactical capabilities.

**Ideal** Power.

**Bond** Mara wants to prove herself superior to everyone who ever defied her.

**Flaw** Mara believes she's too smart to face consequences.

### STATISTICS

**Sand-dweller whisperer** (page 66), neutral evil



## KA

Ka shed by sand-dwellers are normally confined to the Violet Dimension, but the Strangler's Doubt can reach out to sensitive individuals thanks to the summoning of the Kulara Strangler.

## THE STRANGLER'S DOUBT

*"Hurry... They won't wait..."*

This ka was once a part of the Kulara Strangler and deeply regrets what his former self did and continues to do. He appears as a tall, angular man with pale, stylized features and is partially translucent. Out of intense regret, the ka wants anyone who will listen to stop the Kulara Strangler and erase all memory of him. He shares whatever he can remember (which is limited) to achieve this goal.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** The ka utters fragmentary litanies of regrets, starting with recent actions taken against the player characters and the people of Kulara by the sand-dwellers. He feels he should have been stronger than his greed and thirst for fame.

**Ideal** Restraint.

**Bond** The Strangler's Doubt wants to mitigate the Kulara Strangler's worst impulses, protect anyone opposing the Strangler, and aid enemies of the sand-dwellers.

**Flaw** He communicates only in fragments, focusing on regrets and apologies.

### STATISTICS

**Ka**, lawful neutral



## MONSTERS

### KA

A ka is a fragment of a mind that breaks off when a humanoid transforms into a sand-dweller or other inhuman creature. Some might compare it to a superego or conscience. The ka is a psychic agglomeration formed from what a person might have been, mixed with what others thought they should have done. If the mortal had a conscience, sense of obligation, or other restraining thoughts that becoming a sand-dweller excised from their mind, those mental features are preserved in the resulting ka.

After breaking off from a sand-dweller, the ka is left adrift in the Violet Dimension, where monsters prey upon the ka's mental energy. Uskval mages like to collect ka as magical curiosities, which can be used in studying the material plane and binding interdimensional travelers like dimensional shamblers.

**Reunion.** If the ka returns to its former self quickly after the transformation, it can use its influence to protect its old self from destructive urges (such as those sent by the sand-dwellers).

**Dependent on Memories.** Ka depend on mortal memories to maintain their coherence. The longer a ka remains separated from its paired sand-dweller, the more likely it is for the sand-dweller to put its mortal life out of mind, and the likelier the ka's cognitive functions will decline unless bolstered by some outside support. The most common form of support is the memory of other mortals. If other people remember the ka's old self, such as if the person was famous before becoming a sand-dweller, the ka can cling to some awareness of its surroundings.

This pale-yellow spectral figure resembles an angular caricature of a humanoid, with an over-large head and big, expressive eyes.



## KA

Medium celestial, any lawful or good alignment (except lawful evil)

**Armor Class** 11

**Hit Points** 13 (3d8)

**Speed** 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

**Senses** passive Perception 12

**Languages** any languages the original creature knew; telepathy 60 ft.

**Challenge** 1/8 (25 XP)

**Interdimensional Sight.** If it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the ka can see into both of the other planes of existence as well.

**Incorporeal Movement.** The ka can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

### ACTIONS

**Guilty Touch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) psychic damage.

**Glare of Judgment.** The ka glares at a creature it can see within 30 feet. If the creature can see the ka, it must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or gain 2 levels of dread (*SPCM* 72) for 1 minute. (Without the dread rules, use the frightened condition.) A creature

with dread from any ka's Glare of Judgment automatically succeeds. At the end of each of the target creature's turns, if it can no longer see the ka, it attempts a new saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. If the creature takes an action that pleases the ka, the ka can end the condition as a reaction.

**Guiding Possession.** One humanoid the ka can see within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or become charmed by the ka; the ka then disappears, ceasing to exist as a separate entity while possessing a creature. While possessing a humanoid, the ka can't be targeted by any attack, spell, or other effect, except ones that banish celestials or drive out possessing creatures. While guiding a creature, the ka can communicate empathically with the creature, sending it emotional urges to take or avoid actions according to the ka's conscience. The ka can't take any action while possessing a creature except to end the possession as a bonus action or take the Guide Creature reaction.

If the creature would take an action the ka strongly opposes, the guided creature must attempt a DC 10 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, the creature must take a different action (which could also be one the ka opposes). On a success, the ka must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or be ejected from the creature.

The possession lasts until the body drops to 0 hit points, the ka ends it, or the ka is banished or forced out by an effect like the *dispel evil and good* spell. When the possession ends, the ka reappears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the body. The target is immune to this ka's Guiding Possession for 24 hours after succeeding on the saving throw or after the possession ends.

### REACTIONS

**Guide Creature.** When a creature the ka can see makes an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check, the ka causes the creature to roll a d4 and either add or subtract the number from the d20 roll (ka's choice). If the ka isn't possessing the creature, that ka can't influence the target again until the target finishes a long rest.



# MYTHOS GHOUL TUNNELER

These ghouls (SPCM 324) have been enslaved by the sand-dwellers for tunneling services, and the sand-dweller patron has molded them to strengthen their claws for burrowing and grant them a magical power that cuts through planes of existence. This increases their burrowing speed to 20 feet and causes their claw attacks to deal an extra 1d4 acid damage, but makes it hard for them to use tools or weapons.

These emaciated ghouls have canine faces, hooves, and broad, mole-like paws that drip acid.



## MYTHOS GHOUL TUNNELER

*Medium monstrosity, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 14 (leather)

**Hit Points** 19 (3d8 + 6)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 15 ft., climb 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

**Skills** History +3, Investigation +3, Perception +3, Stealth +5

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Ghoul

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Psychic Feast.** The ghoul can feed for 1 minute on a humanoid or monstrosity corpse with flesh at least 24 hours dead to absorb memories. This adds a +1 bonus on a skill of the ghoul's choice that the creature was proficient in. The ghoul can have only one bonus from any given corpse and only three total. A particularly ancient corpse might grant two bonuses (GM's discretion).

**Grave Nose.** The ghoul has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell to notice or recognize corpses, decaying things, meat, and undead creatures.

**Inured to Disease.** The ghoul is immune to nonmagical diseases and has advantage on saving throws against magical diseases.

**Scrounger.** The ghoul has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) and Intelligence (Investigation) to find objects in rubble or undergrowth, buried, or otherwise hidden from view.

### ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage plus 2 (1d4) acid damage.

**Shove Through Space.** *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) force damage and the target teleports 10 feet away from the ghoul.



## SAND-DWELLER

Old stories warn children not to wander into the desert at night, since that is when sand-dwellers go forth from their caves to hunt for victims to devour. Rumors tell how they worship dangerous and mysterious gods in their dark caves, offering bloody sacrifices. They are very skinny human-shaped monsters with scaly skin, no noses or lips, and exposed bones near their joints. Although many scholars of Yog-Sothothery recognize that sand-dwellers hail from the Violet Dimension, few of them are aware of sand-dwellers' true connection to humanity and skill at infiltrating human communities (described on page 2).

**Led by Magicians.** In general, sand-dwellers operate in small bands that stick together only as much as necessary to procure victims and keep their bound patrons under control. Groups are led by the most powerful spellcaster, usually a warlock or cleric, who attends to binding and appeasing eldritch patron monsters for the group. The more powerful the leader's personality and the more brutally dangerous they are, the larger a group of sand-dwellers they can lead and the more terrifying patrons they can summon.

**Cavern Hideouts.** Sand-dwellers often hide in desert caves. The caves can hide their terrible rituals and summoned patron monsters from prying eyes as well as protecting against the rain they hate. These same caves are usually home to colonies of bats, which the sand-dwellers train to serve as familiars, spies, and swarming attack animals.

### WEARING A SKIN

Any sand-dweller not already wearing a human skin can use its claws and teeth to hollow out the corpse of a dead humanoid within 5 feet over the course of 1 minute. Equipment the sand-dweller was carrying or wearing falls to the ground. The humanoid must have been dead for less than 1 day or carefully preserved. The sand-dweller swallows the body's innards and polymorphs its body shape to slip neatly inside the emptied skin. It wears everything the corpse was wearing. The sand-dweller's statistics remain the same, except it has the humanoid type (not aberration). This prevents it being detected or affected by many spells and abilities (such as Eldritch Sensitivity and Desperate Insight).

The sand-dweller reverts to its true form when the skin is removed (requiring at least a DC 15 Athletics check or an opposed grapple check), or if it dies. The skin becomes dry and leathery after 1d10 + 10 days, and cracks apart and falls off after another 2d6 days.

This emaciated humanoid creature has coarse sandy skin and oversized eyes. Its fingers end in white claws.

## SAND-DWELLER STRANGLER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 27 (5d8 + 5)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Str +4, Dex +3

**Skills** Athletics +4, Deception +5, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's

skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, the resultant pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 210).

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The strangler makes two claw attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or become grappled (escape DC 14). Until the grappled condition ends, the creature can't breathe or vocalize until the grappled condition ends. Each creature that ends its turn grappled loses 1d4 hit points.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.





## SAND-DWELLER WHISPERER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 +10)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Wis +1, Cha +4

**Skills** Deception +6, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive in all three planes of existence.

**Spellcasting.** The sand-dweller whisperer is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save

DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The sand-dweller whisperer knows the following warlock spells:

cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast*, *prestidigitation*, *true strike*

1st-2nd level (2 2nd-level spell slots): *lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106), *misty step*, *protection from evil and good*, *spiritual weapon*, *suggestion*

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 210).

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The whisperer makes two claw attacks. It can cast *eldritch blast* in place of each attack.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed at a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.





# YOTHAN DIMENSION CARVER

Some **yothan designers** (SPCM 401) combine their mastery of biology with an understanding of extradimensional geometries. These yothans and the creatures they alter can interact with dimensions beyond the three normally perceptible to mortal creatures.

This dinosaur-like creature has blue pebbly skin and wicked metallic claws. It has a violet third eye grafted onto the center of its forehead.

## YOTHAN DIMENSION CARVER

*Large dragon, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 82 (11d10 + 22)

**Speed** 50 ft., climb 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

**Skills** Arcana +5, Medicine +6, Nature +5, Perception +4

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Yothan

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Interdimensional Sight.** The yothan has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight. It can see ethereal and invisible targets within 30 feet.

**Magic Resistance.** The yothan designer has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** This yothan makes two different attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

**Reshape Flesh.** *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The target magically transforms, gaining either Extradimensional Legs or Twisted Claws (see below) and its current and maximum hit points are reduced by 3 (1d6), to a minimum of 1. At the end of the creature's next turn, it may attempt a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, ending the transformation early with a successful save; if the creature fails the saving throw, the transformation lasts until the target finishes a long rest or the effect is removed by *remove curse* or *dispel magic*.

**Extradimensional Legs** The target's legs (or equivalent for creatures without legs) partially phase into another dimension. The target falls prone and can't stand, but can move at half its speed while prone, and can climb and swim without being further slowed.

**Twisted Claws** The target's hands (or equivalent) twists, making them hard to use. Their unarmed strikes deal 1d4 slashing damage and they have disadvantage on attack rolls with weapons and ability checks using tools.





## SPELLS

### SUMMON SAND-DWELLER

*3rd-level conjuration (formula)*

**Classes:** warlock, wizard

**Casting Time:** 10 minutes (5 phases of 2 minutes when cast as a formula)

**Range:** 30 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (rare salts worth 100 gp, which the spell consumes)

**Formula Ability Checks:** Intelligence (History) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 14, Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 14, Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 14

**Formula Backlash:** 1 level of dread (DC 14) reduced after 24 hours; affected by sand-dweller's Cruel Impulse every round in combat and every time an opportunity to do something cruel arises while the condition lasts

**Formula Failure:** 1 additional level of dread and the sand-dweller automatically succeeds on its Charisma save

**Duration:** Until task is complete, up to 10 days

You summon a sand-dweller strangler (page 210) from the Violet Dimension, which appears in an unoccupied space you can see within range.

The creature disappears when it drops to 0 hit points or when the spell ends.

You compel the sand-dweller to carry out one task of your choice. It generally interprets the wording of your instructions in whatever manner allows it to kill and spread its infamy most effectively. It can simply ignore the task if it succeeds on a Charisma saving throw, which immediately ends the spell and frees the sand-dweller to act as it will. It generally attacks and then seeks out victims to resume a long-dormant spree of serial killing but might have other goals.

Roll initiative for the sand-dweller, which has its own turns. Even if it failed its saving throw, it won't obey specific orders in combat but might choose to act on information you tell it if that helps it more quickly and easily complete the chosen task.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### THE BUTCHER'S CONQUESTS

*Text, uncommon*

**Ability Check:** DC: 18

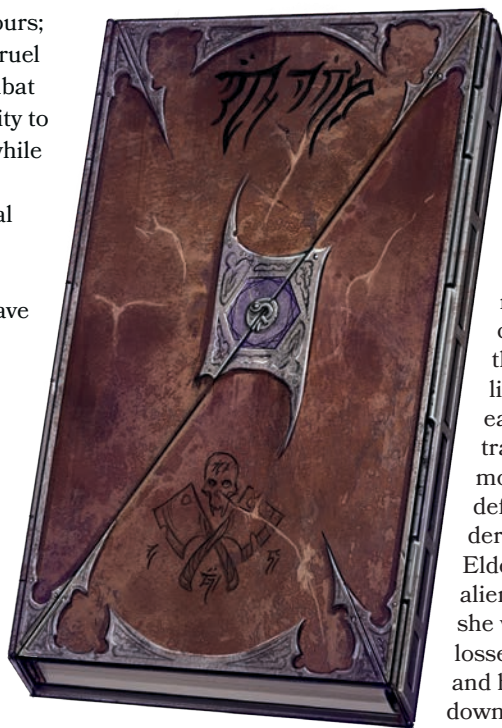
**Ability Checks:** +1 Arcana, +1 History

**Save DC:** 13

This begins as a copy of the inventory made by Ravazel the Butcher Queen's personal scribe, detailing her conquests and the treasures she plundered. Several hundred years ago, the Butcher was a mighty human warlord who controlled much of what is now Harge and plundered the border cities of Tsang. She offered many items and captured foes as sacrifices to the Howler in Darkness, and other treasures were made into potent magic items as a result. The rites of the Howler in Darkness are described, along with some details about this aspect of Nyarlathotep (*SPCM* 235).

The chronicle records how Ravazel became ever more brutal and cruel after scouts spotted sand-dwellers watching from hidden desert caves following their campaigns. A massive sacrifice of hundreds of captured soldiers opened a "well" that brought a horde of crystal-line hounds to serve her, which easily broke enemy lines and even transformed some enemies into more hounds. Eventually, she was defeated when the priests of the Elder Gods helped magically erect the Elder Wall in a matter of weeks. Her alien army could do it no harm, and she was captured despite incredible losses to the Tsangese army when she and her elite troops scaled it to bring down the wall. She disappeared before her execution and was never seen again. With her army broken, the heroic Tsangese warriors found the crystal well her hounds emerged from, shattered it, and buried it.

The second section, by a second unnamed author, describes the Violet Dimension and how to conjure creatures from there. It briefly mentions sand-dwellers, uskval, the Hollow Plague, and ka, allowing characters to automatically recognize and know basic information about all of them. The sand-dwellers are experts at binding other magical beings and use bats as spies and messengers. The Hollow Plague is a cursed band of monsters that transform other creatures into more of the same. The ka are psychic echoes of mortals who have died or been rendered utterly inhuman, formed from conscience, regrets, or





even social expectations. The uskval are insect-like creatures who sell knowledge gathered from magical green beacons to anyone who pays their strange prices. It is annotated by a third author (Sister Mara), lamenting that the “Hollow Mother’s Well” being broken by Tsang’s warriors prevents that route from working for anyone but mortal creatures like bats and humanoid cultists. Later notes explain a way to use Tsathoggua’s servants as anchors for a ritual feast that might open a door and hasten some vague “transcendence.”

A character who successfully researches this text understands that sacrificing humanoids to this ritual would open a gate designed to bring a large number of creatures from the Violet Dimension to the Material Plane and that sending intelligent creatures native to the Material Plane through to the Violet Dimension will destabilize the portal so that it can’t bring large groups as long as the group is there. It will occasionally allow small groups through until it is closed permanently from the other side. The ritual depends on two anchoring structures on the Violet Dimension side which are referred to as keystones. Only by destroying the two keystones on that side can the gate be permanently closed once opened. A group that closes the gate will be trapped in the Violet Dimension but could leave by means of a spell such as *plane shift* or *banishment* cast by another individual, or by finding the mysterious Hollow Mother’s Well.

The third author continues with recent hand-written summaries of various unsolved murders and disappeared killers across the history of Harge, Tsang, and Odran, with the final entry describing the Kulara Strangler. The author speculates in each one whether the killer “transcended as one of the chosen.”

**Spells.** This book contains the following spells: *summon sand-dweller* (page 216) and *consume likeness* (SPCM 98).

**Items.** The book includes instructions on how to open a *gate* to the Violet Dimension, which requires powerful anchors on each side for large openings, and generally a bound entity of great power not from the Violet Dimension.



### AMETHYST BAT FIGURINE OF WONDROUS POWER

*Wondrous item (figurine of wondrous power), uncommon*

This amethyst statuette of a bat can become a bat for up to 1 hour. When the bat attacks a creature or Helps another creature attack a creature, the target’s location becomes obvious (even if it was invisible or Hiding) until that creature next moves or Hides. Once it has been used, the figurine can’t be used again until 3 days have passed. During those 3 days, the creature who last used the figurine gains the flaw “I am willing to hurt others for my own selfish desires.”

### ANCIENT SHIELD OF BASTET

*Shield, uncommon (requires attunement)*

This bronze shield is inscribed with the *Elder Sign* (SPCM 102). You get a +1 bonus to AC and can understand the Cat language while you wield it, even if you are not attuned. If you are attuned, you can use your reaction when a creature would hit a creature within 5 feet of you with an attack roll to give that creature a +3 bonus to AC against that attack, potentially causing the attack to miss; if the attack still hits, you regain your reaction. As an action, you can automatically shove a creature within 5 feet if it is the servitor creature of a Great Old One.

### ANKLETS OF DIMENSIONS UNFATHOMED

*Wondrous item, common*

These silver anklets resemble gleaming broken shackles. As an action, you can step sideways to teleport up to 10 feet to an unoccupied space you can see.

### TALISMAN OF RESTFUL SLEEP

*Wondrous item, common*

This bronze talisman is dominated by a circle split in two. You must sleep for 10 hours to finish a long rest, but the talisman gains 1 charge when you do. The talisman can have only 1 charge. You lose the charge if it is unspent when you remove the talisman. You can spend the charge as an action to roll a die equal to one of your Hit Dice and regain hit points equal to the amount you roll + your Constitution modifier.

## APPENDIX: ACT 2 NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS, MONSTERS, AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

### NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

#### KA

A ka wants to protect the memory of its human self from further horrors and tries primarily to contain or stop its corresponding sand-dweller specifically, and, secondarily, all sand-dwellers in general.



#### RAVAZEL'S INDIGNATION

*"Finally! Do you know how long I've been putting up with this fool?"*

The smartest and best-preserved ka is derived from Ravazel the Butcher Queen. She was already a harshly efficient leader long before she came under the influence of the sand-dwellers. Her ka is indignant that Ravazel became a monster when she could have built a grand empire and ruled over its golden age. Because people still remember Ravazel's leadership from even before she became a sand-dweller, her ka is still communicative.

Ravazel's Indignation is eager to help anyone who opposes Ravazel or sand-dwellers; it boasts an extensive knowledge base about sand-dwellers built over centuries spent avoiding them.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** The ka critiques leadership decisions, especially strategic ones.

**Ideal** Glory.

**Bond** The ka wants to wipe out the memory of Ravazel summoning the hollow jackals to ravage Tsang; instead, it wants Harge to remember Ravazel as a glorious founder.

**Flaw** The ka gets lost in thought whenever referencing Ravazel's history and forgets present concerns until reminded.

#### STATISTICS

**Ka**, lawful neutral





## THE STRANGLER'S DOUBT

*"Hurry... They won't wait..."*

This ka was once a part of the Kulara Strangler and deeply regrets the crimes its former self committed and continues to commit. It appears as a tall, angular, partially translucent humanoid with pale, stylized features. Out of intense regret, the ka wants anyone who will listen to stop the Kulara Strangler and erase all memory of him. The ka shares the little it remembers to achieve this goal.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** The ka utters fragmentary litanies of regret, starting with recent actions the sand-dwellers have taken against the player characters and the people of Kulara. It feels the Kulara Strangler should have been stronger than his greed and thirst for fame.

**Ideal** Restraint.

**Bond** The Strangler's Doubt wants to mitigate the Kulara Strangler's worst impulses and protect anyone opposing the Strangler and other sand-dwellers.

**Flaw** The ka communicates only in fragments, focusing on regrets and apologies.

### STATISTICS

**Ka**, lawful neutral



## MARA'S DISGUST

*"How pathetic... I shouldn't have..."*

Mara's Disgust watches Mara's movements as well as possible through glimpses from the Violet Dimension, mostly of Mara's dreams. It doesn't know of the PCs but is eager to help anyone reverse Mara's crimes. All it asks in return is that characters preserve Kulara's memory of Mara as she was before she fell in with the sand-dwellers: a scholar seeking knowledge.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** The ka spits its disdain for the sand-dwellers and idly wishes Mara had kept her mind intact.

**Ideal** Eternity.

**Bond** Mara's Disgust wants Mara to be remembered for her scholarship, not her crimes.

**Flaw** Mara's Disgust wants to reverse Mara's transformation into a sand-dweller, but doesn't know if such a thing is possible or how it would be done.

### STATISTICS

**Ka**, lawful neutral

## SAND-DWELLERS



### GARU THE HOLLOW EREMIT

*"It's delightful to have a new audience."*

Also called the Poisoner Prince, Garu is a recently ascended sand-dweller who was nearly captured while infiltrating Emperor Xao's inner circle. Garu knows his operation was close to either converting or replacing the emperor before the authorities discovered him. Three of his compatriots have not yet returned to the Violet Dimension, and he assumes they betrayed him and are now going to take the glory for his hard work. He resents being left behind and grills the PCs for information about Tsang to determine what he missed, even during combat.

The hollow eremite has only a limited ability to communicate with the hollow creatures that are part of his epidemic. However, psychically powerful creatures such as ka can serve as beacons to enhance his control and range. He is currently using Ravazel's Indignation for this purpose.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Garu collects things, from different alien minerals to captives he can interrogate and taunt.

**Ideal** Intelligence.

**Bond** Garu resents being forced to flee the imminently successful operation to take control of Tsang and wants to show up his fellow sand-dwellers.

**Flaw** Garu can't resist showing off what he knows, even if it exposes strategically valuable secrets.

#### STATISTICS

A bulbous orb of gray, transparent crystal skitters along on ten spindly legs. Within the crystalline core, a sand-dweller hangs suspended by glittering fibers.



# GARU THE HOLLOW EREMIT

*Huge aberration, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 178 (17d12 + 68)

**Speed** 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Wis +9, Cha +6

**Skills** Religion +5, Yog-Sothothery +8

**Damage Vulnerabilities** thunder

**Damage Resistances** acid, necrotic, slashing

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 19 (with advantage from gestalt body)

**Languages** Aklo, Common; telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge** 12 (8,400 XP)

**Bound-Soul Resurrection.** If a spell or effect that targets only a single target reduces the Garu's hit points to 0 or kills it, Garu instead drops to half the hit points he had before the effect (rounded down). If Garu has only 1 hit point remaining or if the spell or effect can affect multiple targets, Bound-Soul Resurrection does not function.

**Gestalt Body.** Garu has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against disease or being blinded, deafened, frightened, possessed, stunned, or knocked unconscious.

**Magical Attacks.** Garu's weapon attacks are magical.

**Magic Resistance.** Garu has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

**Pack Tactics.** Garu has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of his allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

**Spellcasting.** Garu is a 12th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Garu has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *resistance, sacred flame, thaumaturgy, vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *command, detect magic, inflict wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *calm emotions, darkness, zone of truth*

3rd level (3 slots): *clairvoyance, dispel magic, meld into stone*

4th level (3 slots): *Orne's black (SPCM 110), phantasmal killer, stone shape*

5th level (2 slots): *flame strike, insect plague*

6th level (1 slot): *dread curse of Azathoth (SPCM 100)*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Garu makes two attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 15).

**Psychic Siphon.** Each creature grappled by Garu or restrained by his lair actions must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 10 (3d6) psychic damage and gain 1 level of dread that decreases after 1 hour, or half damage and no dread on a success. A creature that already has dread from the psychic siphon doesn't gain more dread but takes maximum psychic damage (18). Garu regains hit points equal to the damage.

## LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Garu can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Garu regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

**Cast a Cantrip.** Garu casts a cantrip.

**Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions).** Garu casts a prepared spell, using a spell slot as normal.

**Detect.** Garu makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

## LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting inside his lair, Garu can invoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), he takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects (he can't choose the same lair action two rounds in a row):

**Clutching Crystal.** Garu chooses a creature he can see that is touching a surface. Purple crystals instantly grow over the creature's legs (or whatever extremities touch the surface). The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity or Strength saving throw (its choice) or it is grappled (escape DC 15) and exposed to the hollow curse (page 56). The crystal can be attacked and destroyed (AC 15, 12 hp, vulnerability to thunder damage, resistance to acid, necrotic, and slashing damage, immunity to poison and psychic damage). The crystal disappears when Garu dies or uses this action again.

**Hollow Spawn.** A swarm of bats materializes at a point Garu can see within 60 feet. The hollow curse makes them resemble fluttering shards of gray glass. Roll initiative for the swarm, which has its own turns.

**Meld into Walls.** Garu enters an adjacent wall or floor in its lair and teleports to an unoccupied space adjacent to another section of floor or wall within 60 feet. Creatures he has grabbed are dragged along unless they succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw.



# USKVAL DISCONTENTS

Two uskval are eager to work with any enemy of Ravazel and her sand-dwellers. One, Gormothoz, is a pariah for his open antagonism, whereas his friend Skendam plays the part of a respectable member of the colony.

## GORMOTHOS

*"You're not like the other sand-dwellers, are you?"*

Gormothoz was an accomplished and respected scout until he recently embarrassed the High Seer by attacking Ravazel's sand-dweller minions, potentially undermining his people's alliance with the sand-dwellers. Because the uskval thrive on the offerings from Ravazel, Gormothoz's actions threaten his role in the uskval swarm. Nonetheless, he believes he did what he had to do and doesn't plan to stop opposing the sand-dwellers.

Gormothoz hates the hollow plague above all else. He wishes for the uskval of the Aumbrask Spire to remain distant allies to the sand-dwellers because he detests the dangerous creatures they keep as bound servants. He's currently bound in the stockades for jeopardizing the alliance with the sand-dwellers when he attacked their pet hollow jackals. He offers to help the player characters if they free him. He can also be freed by order of Azmovoth the High Seer.

Gormothoz is friends with Skendam. They meet when both survey Aumbrask Spire's surroundings from the tower top.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Gormothoz peppers his words with bits of tactical and strategic advice, such as which weapons to keep on hand and which kinds of spells to prepare. When he talks, he holds two claws clasped in front of him and folds two behind his back.

**Ideal** Security: Gormothoz is willing to protect his colony and his friends (such as Skendam) no matter the cost.

**Bond** Gormothoz craves public acknowledgment of his service.

**Flaw** Gormothoz can't lie to save his life.

### STATISTICS

Uskval scout, neutral





# SKENDAM

*"Opportunities like this are rare indeed! If you would only let me take a sample..."*

Skendam is Valorax's assistant and Gormothoz's friend. He is affiliated with the Library of Murmurs, both in his form as a worker and when he briefly takes to the air as a seer. He spends most of his time either capturing fading ka lured to the beacon with a blue silk net or looking after the library.

Skendam is fascinated by the biology of Material Plane creatures. He speculates that he could use mortal beasts as exceptional feed for uskval larvae to help the colony grow. Anyone who can summon animals for him to examine immediately makes him friendly.

## CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Skendam rubs his four claws together when interested or excited. He asks a follow-up question whenever the characters mention the Material Plane.

**Ideal** Knowledge.

**Bond** Skendam trusts and wants to help his friend Gormothoz.

**Flaw** Skendam is a coward, especially when it comes to questioning the High Seer.

## STATISTICS

**Uskval worker**, lawful neutral



## MONSTERS

### SAND-DWELLER

Old stories warn children not to wander into the desert at night, since that is when sand-dwellers go forth from their caves to hunt for victims to devour. Rumors tell how they worship dangerous and mysterious gods in their dark caves, offering bloody sacrifices. They are very skinny human-shaped monsters with scaly skin, no noses or lips, and exposed bones near their joints. Although many scholars of Yog-Sothothery recognize that sand-dwellers hail from the Violet Dimension, few of them are aware of sand-dwellers' true connection to humanity and skill at infiltrating human communities (described on page 2).

**Led by Magicians.** In general, sand-dwellers operate in small bands that stick together only as much as necessary to procure victims and keep their bound patrons under control. Groups are led by the most powerful spellcaster, usually a warlock or cleric, who attends to binding and appeasing eldritch patron monsters for the group. The more powerful the leader's personality and the more brutally dangerous they are, the larger a group of sand-dwellers they can lead and the more terrifying patrons they can summon.

**Cavern Hideouts.** Sand-dwellers often hide in desert caves. The caves can hide their terrible rituals and summoned patron monsters from prying eyes as well as protecting against the rain they hate. These same caves are usually home to colonies of bats, which the sand-dwellers train to serve as familiars, spies, and swarming attack animals.

This emaciated humanoid creature has coarse sandy skin and oversized eyes. Its fingers end in white claws.



### SAND-DWELLER STRANGLER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 27 (5d8 + 5)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	9 (–1)	13 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Str +4, Dex +3

**Skills** Athletics +4, Deception +5, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's

skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, the resultant pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 224).

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The strangler makes two claw attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or become grappled (escape DC 14). Until the grappled condition ends, the creature can't breathe or vocalize until the grappled condition ends. Each creature that ends its turn grappled loses 1d4 hit points.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.



## WEARING A SKIN

Any sand-dweller not already wearing a human skin can use its claws and teeth to hollow out the corpse of a dead humanoid within 5 feet over the course of 1 minute. Equipment the sand-dweller was carrying or wearing falls to the ground. The humanoid must have been dead for less than 1 day or carefully preserved. The sand-dweller swallows the body's innards and polymorphs its body shape to slip neatly inside the emptied skin. It wears everything the corpse was wearing. The sand-dweller's statistics remain the same, except it has the humanoid type (not aberration). This prevents it being detected or affected by many spells and abilities (such as Eldritch Sensitivity and Desperate Insight).

The sand-dweller reverts to its true form when the skin is removed (requiring at least a DC 15 Athletics check or an opposed grapple check), or if it dies. The skin becomes dry and leathery after 1d10 + 10 days, and cracks apart and falls off after another 2d6 days.



## SAND-DWELLER WHISPERER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 + 10)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	9 (–1)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Wis +1, Cha +4

**Skills** Deception +6, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive in all three planes of existence.

**Spellcasting.** The sand-dweller whisperer is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save

DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The sand-dweller whisperer knows the following warlock spells:

cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast*, *prestidigitation*, *true strike*

1st-2nd level (2 2nd-level spell slots): *lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106), *misty step*, *protection from evil and good*, *spiritual weapon*, *suggestion*

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 210).

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The whisperer makes two claw attacks. It can cast *eldritch blast* in place of each attack.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed at a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.



# SAND-DWELLER BINDER

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 38 (7d8 + 7)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+2)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Int +4, Wis +1

**Skills** Arcana +6, Deception +5, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Spellcasting.** The sand-dweller binder is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The sand-dweller binder knows the following wizard spells:

cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *minor illusion*, *shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *expeditious retreat*, *find familiar*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *scorching ray*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *blink*, *lightning bolt*, *magic circle*

4th level (1 slot): *black tentacles*

**Sense Aggression.** While it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet that feel aggressive; this sense extends to nearby creatures in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet dimension, regardless of what plane the sand-dweller itself is in.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while Skin Wearing.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The binder uses Mass Cruel Impulse and makes two attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Mass Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to any number of beasts and humanoids it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions. A creature that succeeds becomes immune to that sand-dweller's Mass Cruel Impulse for 24 hours.





## Ka

A ka is a fragment of a mind that breaks off when a humanoid transforms into a sand-dweller or other inhuman creature. Some might compare it to a superego or conscience. The ka is a psychic agglomeration formed from what a person might have been mixed with what others thought they should have done. If the mortal had a conscience, sense of obligation, or other restraining thoughts that becoming a sand-dweller excised from their mind, those mental features are preserved in the resulting ka.

After breaking off from a sand-dweller, the ka is left adrift in the Violet Dimension, where monsters prey upon the ka's mental energy. Uskval mages like to collect ka as magical curiosities, which can be used in studying the material plane and binding interdimensional travelers like dimensional shamblers.

**Reunion.** If the ka returns to its former self quickly after the transformation, it can use its influence to protect its old self from destructive urges (such as those sent by the sand-dwellers).

**Dependent on Memories.** Kas depend on mortal memories to maintain their coherence. The longer they remain separated from their paired sand-dweller, the more likely it is for the sand-dweller to put their mortal lives out of mind, and the likelier the ka's cognitive functions will decline unless bolstered by some outside support. The most common form of support is the memory of other mortals. As long as other people remember the ka's old self, such as if they were famous historical figures before becoming sand-dwellers, the ka can cling to some awareness of its surroundings.

This pale yellow spectral figure resembles an angular caricature of a humanoid, with an overlarge head and big, expressive eyes.





## KA

Medium celestial, any lawful or good alignment (except lawful evil)

**Armor Class** 11

**Hit Points** 13 (3d8)

**Speed** 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (–5)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	6 (–2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

**Senses** passive Perception 12

**Languages** any languages the original creature knew; telepathy 60 ft.

**Challenge** 1/8 (25 XP)

**Interdimensional Sight.** If it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the ka can see into both of the other planes of existence as well.

**Incorporeal Movement.** The ka can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

### ACTIONS

**Guilty Touch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) psychic damage.

**Glare of Judgment.** The ka glares at a creature it can see within 30 feet. If the creature can see the ka, it must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or gain 2 levels of dread (*SPCM* 72) for 1 minute. (Without the dread rules, use the frightened condition.) A creature

with dread from any ka's Glare of Judgment automatically succeeds. At the end of each of the target creature's turns, if it can no longer see the ka, it attempts a new saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. If the creature takes an action that pleases the ka, the ka can end the condition as a reaction.

**Guiding Possession.** One humanoid the ka can see within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or become charmed by the ka; the ka then disappears, ceasing to exist as a separate entity while possessing a creature. While possessing a humanoid, the ka can't be targeted by any attack, spell, or other effect, except ones that banish celestials or drive out possessing creatures. While guiding a creature, the ka can communicate empathically with the creature, sending it emotional urges to take or avoid actions according to the ka's conscience. The ka can't take any action while possessing a creature except to end the possession as a bonus action or take the Guide Creature reaction.

If the creature would take an action the ka strongly opposes, the guided creature must attempt a DC 10 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, the creature must take a different action (which could also be one the ka opposes). On a success, the ka must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or be ejected from the creature.

The possession lasts until the body drops to 0 hit points, the ka ends it, or the ka is banished or forced out by an effect like the *dispel evil and good* spell. When the possession ends, the ka reappears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the body. The target is immune to this ka's Guiding Possession for 24 hours after succeeding on the saving throw or after the possession ends.

### REACTIONS

**Guide Creature.** When a creature the ka can see makes an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check, the ka causes the creature to roll a d4 and either add or subtract the number from the d20 roll (ka's choice). If the ka isn't possessing the creature, that ka can't influence the target again until the target finishes a long rest.

## THE HOLLOW PLAGUE

The hollow plague is a collection of creatures connected by an ancient curse, scattered across the Violet Dimension in groups known as epidemics. Since their progenitor vanished in time immemorial, most epidemics have become little more than mindless dangers to everything they meet, capturing creatures to which they can spread their curse, and protecting their Hollow Mothers. The Hollow Mothers are the only hollow creatures that retain substantial intelligence and memory, but they are reclusive and poorly understood even by other denizens of the Violet Dimension.

**Shards of a Greater Whole.** All hollow plague creatures are aspects of a greater hive mind, but most can only communicate and understand basic information when conversing with others of their kind. Hollow cobras use certain spiritual entities, such as ka, to improve this psychic connection.

**Dependent on Cosmic Ichor.** Hollow creatures don't need food or water, but they do depend on another substance called cosmic ichor. Cosmic ichor is a magical oil that hollow creatures use to heal from injuries and keep themselves from being overwhelmed by their curse. A hollow creature that goes many weeks without this oil eventually petrifies into an inert crystal formation.

## THE HOLLOW CURSE

### Curse

The curse gives a creature the flaw “I become violently defensive at the slightest provocation” and causes the target's skin near the site of contact to transform into violet crystal that increases its unarmored Armor Class by 1. At the end of each long rest, the creature must make another Constitution saving throw. On a failure, its unarmored Armor Class increases by 1 as the crystal spreads. On a success, its unarmored Armor Class decreases by 1. When its unarmored Armor Class is at least 14 + its Dexterity modifier due to the crystal's spread, the creature dies and its body transforms into a new hollow jackal. When its Armor Class without armor drops to 10 + its Dexterity modifier or lower due to the crystal, the curse ends. The curse can also be ended by *remove curse*.

## HOLLOW JACKALS

Hollow jackals prowl the Violet Dimension, hunting mortals with souls as well as all living creatures. They telepathically alert the rest of their epidemic to dangers and sources of food.

**Ka-Hunters.** Hollow jackals especially love to hunt down ka. A captured ka is taken back to the epidemic's lair, where hollow cobras build a magical prison for it. The magical prison allows the epidemic to use the ka's mental faculties to improve its psychic network—the whole group of hollow creatures becomes more intelligent while it keeps kas imprisoned this way. A captured ka's mental powers might eventually be used up after a period of months or years, depending on its force of will.

This bulky, vaguely canine creature stands on four spindly legs, and its gleaming flesh resembles black and violet crystal. A wide cleft along its back reveals it to be hollow.



## HOLLOW JACKAL

*Medium aberration, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 55 (10d8 + 10)

**Speed** 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

**Damage Vulnerabilities** thunder

**Damage Resistances** acid, slashing

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Aklo

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Pack Tactics.** The hollow jackal has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the jackal's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The hollow jackal makes two attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it is knocked prone.

**Imprison.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature of its size or smaller that is prone or attempting an attack roll. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the creature is imprisoned in the jackal's hollow interior unless the creature succeeds on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. When it becomes imprisoned, the creature must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or contract the hollow curse. While imprisoned, the creature is grappled and restrained (escape DC 12).

## REACTIONS

**Swallow Attacker.** After the hollow jackal is damaged by a melee attack from a creature its size or smaller within 5 feet, it can attempt to imprison the attacker unless the attack exceeded its AC by more than 2 (for example, 18 or higher) or the jackal already has a creature imprisoned (it can only imprison one creature at a time) and the hollow splits apart to allow the attacking creature inside it.





# HOLLOW COBRA

Hollow cobras are burrowing creatures with a skill for sculpting cursed crystal. Although not very smart, hollow cobras can follow orders well enough to gather materials for the hollow eremite's magical work. Most often, their task is to dig out and supply the lair of a Hollow Mother. The most important supply is the elder ichor.

**Crystal Carvers.** The hollow curse can alter terrain as well as creatures. Hollow cobras use this to transform rock into magical crystals that have a variety of uses. The crystal can be used to build defensive structures, create chambers to house captive ka, and fill magical reservoirs which heal damaged hollow creatures.

This serpentine creature with glassy black scales is rent along its entire length, a split-open tube of living crystal. Its head is a wide, grasping aperture like a cross between a cobra's hood and flytrap.



## HOLLOW COBRA

*Large aberration, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d10 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (–1)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

**Damage Vulnerabilities** thunder

**Damage Resistances** acid, slashing

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Aklo

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Damage Transfer.** While enclosing a creature, the hollow cobra takes only half the damage dealt to it (rounded down), and that creature takes the other half.

**Pack Tactics.** The hollow cobra has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the cobra's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The hollow cobra makes two attacks: one with its hood and one with its coils.

**Hood.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13). The cobra may also enclose the target or do so as a free action on its turn so long as the creature is grappled.

**Coils.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

**Enclose.** The hollow cobra wraps its hollow body around a creature grappled by its bite. While enclosing the creature, the hollow cobra can make hood attacks only against the enclosed target and has advantage on the attack roll. The hollow cobra can release the target by spending 5 feet of its movement. A creature, including the target, can take its action to remove the hollow cobra by succeeding on a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check. When it becomes enclosed, the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or contract the hollow curse. While enclosed, the creature is restrained in addition to being grappled.



# USKVAL

Uskval are arthropods with a complex life cycle. Their larvae are implanted into beasts to feed upon until they are large enough to metamorphose into one of two adult forms. Once an uskval larva reaches maturity, it transforms into either a worm-like worker or a butterfly-like seer. Due to their nondeterministic cosmic nature, however, individuals can become parallel versions of themselves, meaning that sometimes another body they could have had temporarily replaces their current body, by means of their Superimpose Self ability.

Seers are usually warriors, scouts, or mages.

**Uskval scouts** patrol far and wide to keep the colony aware of any threats, which they report via a combination of telepathy and a sign language that mortals describe as a dance.

**Uskval mages** read glimpses of cosmic truths from studying magical flames, typically learned from Outer Gods like Tulszcha, study ka for knowledge about the Material Plane, trade with sand-dwellers and other vassals for further magical knowledge, and create magic items for the benefit of the colony. Skilled uskval mages can alter minds and bodies of other creatures to show them how things might have been had their lives gone differently (generally using the *quantum cocoon* spell).

**Uskval workers** usually gather plants and minerals, perform construction, and work cloth, paper, and metal.

## USKVAL WORKER

This wolf-sized arthropod has a fat, worm-like body. Its face is mostly four bug eyes above a large beak. It has two strong but short claws and six stubby legs.



## USKVAL WORKER

*Medium aberration, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 22 (4d8 + 4)

**Speed** 20 ft., climb 20 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** prone

**Senses** passive Perception 10

**Languages** Aklo; telepathy 30 ft.

**Challenge** 1/4 (50 XP)

**Keen Smell.** The uskval worker has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

### ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 12).

**Superimpose Self.** The uskval worker teleports to an unoccupied space it can see within 5 feet and transforms into an uskval seer for 1 minute. In this form, it has the same statistics except that it loses its burrowing speed and gains a flying speed of 30 feet. It can end this transformation as an action.







# USKVAL SCOUT

This human-size moth-like creature has eight reptilian limbs. Its head is dominated by four bug eyes above a long snout. It wields a short blade of gleaming green crystal.

## USKVAL SCOUT

*Medium aberration, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 33 (6d8 + 6)

**Speed** 20 ft., climb 20 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

**Skills** Perception +4, Stealth +4, Survival +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** prone

**Senses** passive Perception 14

**Languages** Aklo; telepathy 30 ft.

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Keen Sight.** The uskval scout has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

**Spectral Attacks.** The uskval scout's attacks count as magical and can hit ethereal creatures normally. When the uskval scout throws a weapon, it returns to their hand at the end of the turn.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The uskval scout makes two attacks.

**Crystal Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Superimpose Self.** The uskval scout teleports to an unoccupied space it can see within 5 feet and transforms into an uskval worker for 1 minute. In this form, it has the same statistics except that it loses its flying speed and gains a burrowing speed of 10 feet. It can end this transformation as an action.





# USKVAL MAGE

This huge creature has a blue-furred, ovoid body with a dozen wafting tentacles. It swims through the air as if underwater.

## USKVAL MAGE

Medium aberration, chaotic neutral

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 40 (9d8)

**Speed** 20 ft., climb 20 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (−1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** prone

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Aklo, Common; telepathy 30 ft.

**Challenge** 3 (750 XP)

**Keen Sight.** The uskval mage has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

**Spellcasting.** The uskval mage is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The uskval mage knows the following druid spells:

cantrips (at will): *mending*, *poison spray*, *resistance*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *gust of wind*, *lesser restoration*

3rd level (2 slots): *call lightning*, *dispel magic*, *quantum cocoon* (page 240)

## ACTIONS

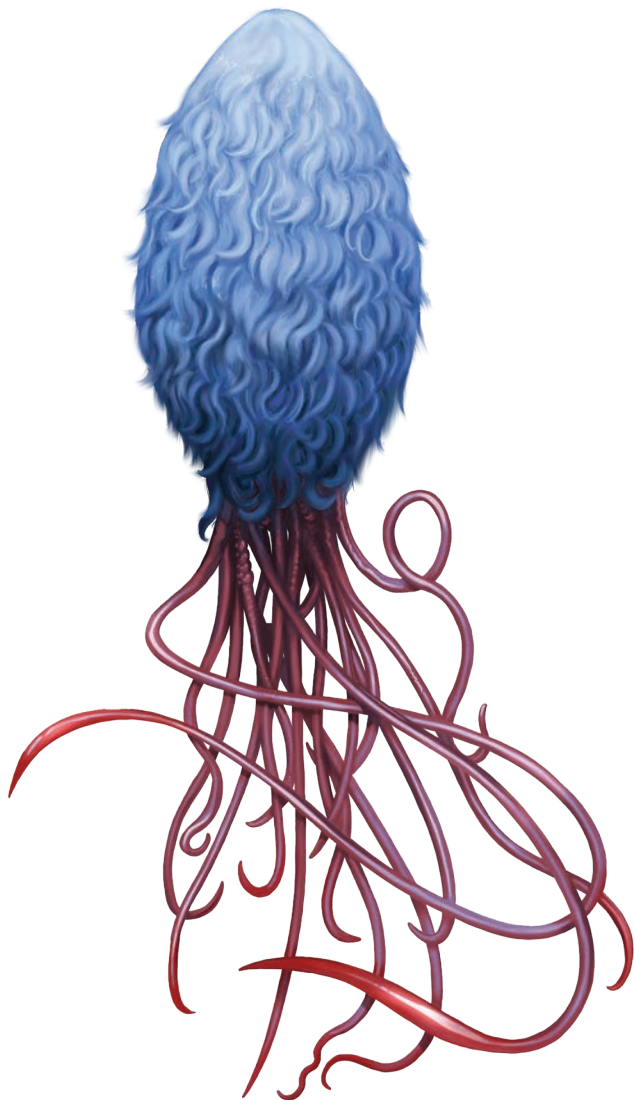
**Crystal Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Superimpose Self.** The uskval mage teleports to an unoccupied space it can see within 5 feet and either transforms into an uskval worker for 1 minute or transforms back. It has the same statistics except that it loses its flying speed and gains a burrowing speed of 10 feet.

## BLOOD CAPTOR

Blood captors are among the deadliest creatures of the Violet Dimension, akin to apex predators but prone to feeding slowly on captured prey like a parasite. The Stone Sea is one of their chief habitats, where they swim on the ultraviolet waters. (To mortal creatures, these waters seem to be thin mists.) Blood captors capture and hold captive smaller creatures, which they slowly bleed to death over the course of days or weeks to sustain themselves. They prefer to knock out prey so that it remains alive to feed them for a longer period.

**Prized by Uskval.** Skilled uskval seers have at times learned to tame blood captors, but it has been a long time since this feat was last accomplished. The body of a slain blood captor makes an ideal incubator for uskval larvae to mature. The resulting uskval take on the blood captor's poisonous blue fur and demonstrate incredible resilience.



## BLOOD CAPTOR

*Huge aberration, unaligned*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 157 (15d12 + 60)

**Speed** 25 ft., climb 25 ft., fly 40 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

**Skills** Stealth +4

**Damage Vulnerabilities** bludgeoning from wind

**Senses** passive Perception 12

**Languages**

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Amphibious.** The blood captor can breathe air and water.

**Poison Barbs.** The blood captor's blue fur conceals barbs that stab into creatures that come into contact with the creature. An attacker who hits the blood captor must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. The poisoned creature must attempt a new saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the condition on a success.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The blood captor makes three attacks: one bite and two with its tentacles.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become diseased. The diseased creature depends on the blood captor to digest food and water; as long as it is more than 30 feet from the blood captor, it can't meet its needs for food and water, no matter how much it eats or drinks. The diseased creature attempts a new Constitution saving throw at the end of every long rest, ending the disease on a successful save.

**Tentacle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 15).

### LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The blood captor can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The blood captor regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

**Drain Fluids (Costs 2 Actions).** One creature grappled by the hollow squid takes 10 (3d6) necrotic damage and the blood captor regains hit points equal to the damage the creature takes.

**Tentacle.** The blood captor makes a tentacle attack.

**Teleport (Costs 2 Actions).** The blood captor teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied location it can see.



## SPELLS

### BIND HOLLOW CREATURE

*4th-level enchantment (formula)*

**Classes:** cleric, warlock

**Casting Time:** 1 minute (5 phases of 2 rounds when cast as a formula)

**Range:** 30 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (a carved hexagonal gemstone worth at least 300 gp, which the spell consumes when the duration ends and only if the spell was successfully cast)

**Formula Ability Checks:** Dexterity (jeweler's tools) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 16 (diagram), Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 16, Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 16

**Formula Backlash:** 4d4 psychic damage

**Formula Failure:** One level of exhaustion and exposed to the hollow curse (page 230)

**Duration:** Until task is completed, up to 24 hours

Any hollow creature summoned by *lure hollow creature* is compelled to remain within range and refrain from attacking anyone casting this spell for 24 hours after arriving.

Upon completion of the spell, you bind a single hollow creature to carry out a single command you explain telepathically unless it succeeds on a Charisma saving throw. If the creature was conjured by another spell, that spell does not end until this spell ends; the duration of that conjuration is extended to match the duration of this spell.

**At Higher Levels.** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th or 7th level, you can bind two hollow creatures. When you cast it using a spell slot of 8th or 9th level, you can bind up to three hollow creatures.

### CONJURE KA

*3rd-level conjuration*

**Classes:** cleric, warlock

**Casting Time:** 10 minutes

**Range:** 30 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (an image of the face of each ka to be summoned, each worth 50 gp)

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 hour

You summon up to four kas from the Violet Dimension that you have previously encountered and communicated with, and have agreed to act as your allies. These kas appear in unoccupied spaces you can see within range. Typically, convincing a ka to answer the summons of this spell requires a DC 15 Charisma check or agreeing to fulfill the ka's specific motivation. The material component might

require them to pose for someone to create an image of them, which requires a DC 10 Dexterity check (painter's supplies, woodcarver's tools, or another sort of artisan's tools) and materials worth 25 gp. You can also use an image someone else created or an image of the mortal creature the ka is derived from. The GM has their statistics.

Roll initiative for the kas, which share one turn. They obey any verbal commands that you issue to them (requiring no action from you), as long as they don't violate their interests. If you don't issue any commands to them, they defend themselves from hostile creatures but otherwise take no actions. The summoned kas disappear when the spell ends or when reduced to 0 hit points.

### LURE HOLLOW CREATURE

*2nd-level conjuration (formula)*

**Classes:** cleric, warlock

**Casting Time:** 10 minutes (5 phases of 2 minutes when cast as a formula)

**Range:** 30 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (a pint of oil and glass stained with a rare violet pigment worth 50 gp), D (hexagon carved with the glass onto a large pane of glass)

**Formula Ability Checks:** Dexterity (glassblower's tools) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 16 (diagram), Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 16, Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 16

**Formula Backlash:** 2d4 psychic damage

**Formula Failure:** One level of exhaustion and exposed to the hollow curse (page 230)

**Duration:** 10 minutes

You call a hollow jackal from the Violet Dimension, which appears in an unoccupied space you can see within range. The GM has its statistics.

The summoned creature disappears when it drops to 0 hit points or when the spell ends.

Roll initiative for the lured creature, which has its own turn. It is hostile to all creatures other than hollow creatures (so it is hostile to you). It uses its action and movement to attack the nearest creature each turn, prioritizing creatures that have harmed it the most. Any hollow creature lured by this spell cannot attack a creature casting *bind hollow creature* until 24 hours after its arrival.

**At Higher Levels.** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, you can call a hollow cobra instead of a hollow jackal. When you cast it using a slot of 5th level or higher, you can lure two hollow jackals. When you cast it using a slot of 6th level or higher, you can lure two hollow cobras. When you cast it using a slot of 8th level or higher, you can lure three hollow jackals. When you cast it with a 9th level slot, you can lure three hollow cobras.

## QUANTUM COCOON

2nd-level transmutation (ritual)

**Classes:** druid, sorcerer, wizard

**Casting Time:** 1 minute

**Range:** Touch

**Components:** V, S, M (a scrap of cocoon and magical reagents worth 50 gp, which you can choose for the spell to consume)

**Duration:** 10 minutes or instantaneous

You wrap a willing or unconscious creature and the material components in a magical cocoon that connects it to numerous parallel realities in which it made different decisions in its life. The creature is petrified within the cocoon for at least 1 round. At the start of your next turn, the creature either chooses to emerge immediately or to remain in the cocoon until it finishes a long rest in order to permanently change itself. As it emerges, the creature can change one result of its past choices from the following list:

- ◊ Reduce the creature's highest ability score by 1 and increase a different ability score by 1.
- ◊ If the creature has a feat, it can lose it to either increase one ability score by 2 or two ability scores by 1 each. This can't increase an ability score above its maximum (usually 20).
- ◊ Change a choice made as part of gaining a feature or trait (such as which secret to gain from the Elder Influence warlock patron).

If the creature finishes a long rest within the cocoon, the material components are consumed and the change lasts indefinitely. (If the creature emerges early and doesn't consume the material components, the change ends when the spell's duration does.)

**At Higher Levels.** If you use a 3rd-level spell slot and consume the material components when you cast *quantum cocoon*, the character can also choose one of the following:

- ◊ Change the character's choice of subclass (such as a Fighter Archetype or Monastic Tradition).
- ◊ Replace a spell known with another spell of the same or lower level from the same class list.
- ◊ Lose proficiency in a tool and gain proficiency in another tool.
- ◊ Lose proficiency in a skill and gain proficiency in another skill.
- ◊ If the character has no feats, either reduce one ability score by 2 or two ability scores by 1 each to gain a feat. (Having the feat prevents the character from using this option again.)
- ◊ If the character has a feat, lose it to gain a different feat.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### MIRROR OF MANIFOLD REFLECTIONS

Wondrous item, rare

This green-tinted mirror has a handle woven of silvery filaments. It glows faintly, as if intensely hot, but is always cold to the touch.

**Reflect Identity.** You activate the mirror by pointing it at a creature and saying the command word as an action. The creature reflected in the mirror appears as a mockery of itself if it is missing a part of its mind or soul. A creature that has sealed away its soul (like a lich) has hollowed-out eyes that glow red, for instance, while a creature that has cast off a part of its identity (as a sand-dweller has cast off its ka) has a portion of its image swallowed by deep shadow. Disguised characters appear how they most often did over the course of the previous year and how they are most likely to look during the future year, which generally means their undisguised appearance. This function does not use charges.

**Reflections Out of Time.** You activate the mirror by pointing it at a point in space within 30 feet and saying the command word as an action. The mirror affects up to a 20-foot square. You can choose either to shunt all difficult terrain in the area to another time for 1 minute or to obstruct the area with difficult terrain from another time for 1 minute. For example, a room might be cluttered with furniture from other arrangements of the room at various times, or it might be cluttered with raw materials from the construction. Using this function takes 1 charge.

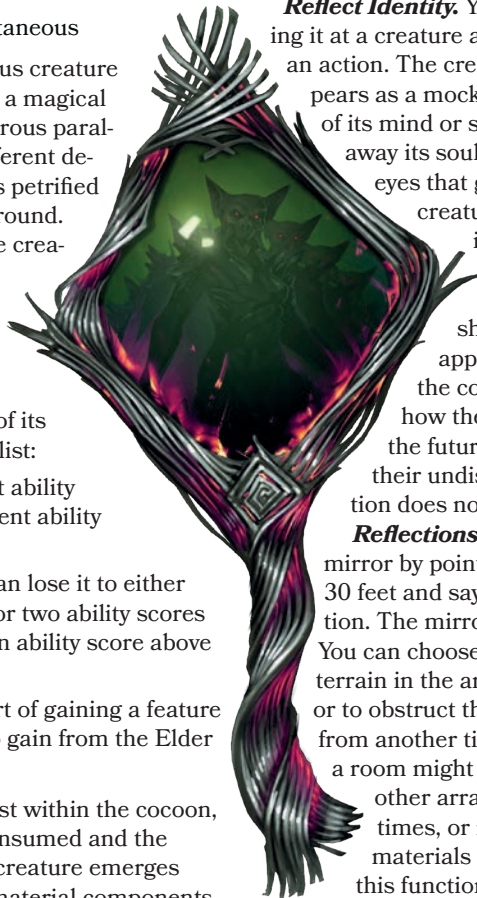
The mirror has three charges. It regains 1d4-1 charges at dawn.

### HOLLOW BINDING STONE

Wondrous item, uncommon

This polished hexagonal stone is inscribed on one side with an icon loosely resembling a throne divided in three and on the other side with a stylized humanoid face. While you hold the stone in one hand and brandish it like a shield, hollow plague creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls to hit you. It has 3 charges. It regains 1d4-1 charges at dawn.

**Whispers in the Night.** The stone draws its magic from a captured ka. The ka whispers to you when you sleep within 10 feet of it, urging you to do what you know you should. Until you next finish a long rest, you gain the ideal "My conscience guides my actions." Sand-dwellers can't hear the ka's whispers. If the stone is broken, the ka within is freed; if you broke the stone, freeing the ka, then the grateful ka





can be summoned thereafter if you know the spell *conjure ka*. (The face on the stone is a suitable likeness to be the spell's material component.)

**Command Hollow Creature.** You can force a hollow creature to attempt a DC 13 Charisma saving throw as an action by spending 1 charge. On a failed save, the creature becomes charmed by you until the next dawn. If, during that time, another creature touches the stone, the charmed condition changes to apply to that creature instead of you (but its end time doesn't change). If the creature is already charmed by you when you spend 1 charge to charm it, a failed save allows you to dictate its actions during its next turn.

### RESONANT ATHAME

*Weapon (dagger), rare (requires attunement)*

This thin magical dagger has a wide hilt and a gleaming violet blade. Attacks with it ignore half cover. If you throw it, it teleports back to your hand instantly after it hits or misses. When you hit with this weapon in melee, it deals an additional 2d6 force damage but you also take 1d6 force damage; the damage to you isn't doubled on a critical hit and can't cause you to lose concentration on a spell.

The athame has 4 charges. It regains 1d4 charges at dawn.

**Spells.** You can slice a gap in the air as a bonus action and spend 1 charge to cast *misty step*. You can also spend 2 charges to cast *magic circle* by tracing the design for 1 minute.

**Banish (Initially Unavailable).** This power can only be activated after the dagger is restored by placing it in an active magical gateway (such as the Hollow Mother's Well). When you hit a creature with the athame, you can spend 3 charges to banish it unless it succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. If the creature is willing or unconscious, you can spend 1 minute tracing its silhouette with the dagger to banish it without attacking it or allowing a saving throw. If it was on its home plane of existence already, it is banished to an empty demiplane. If it was not on its home plane, it is sent to the point it most recently left on its home plane. A wavering violet gap appears in the air where the creature vanished and where it appeared on the plane it was sent to. The rift lasts for 1 minute or until the creature returns. If the creature hasn't returned when the violet rift vanishes, it remains indefinitely banished. If you deal force damage with the athame or spend any charges while the rift remains open, the creature returns from its brief banishment. Unlike the *banishment* spell, the creature is not incapacitated and may take actions as normal; the banished creature can spend an action touching the rift to attempt to pass through it. The creature must attempt a DC 15 Charisma saving throw, taking 2d4 force damage on a failure or taking half damage and passing through the rift on a success.

### ULTRAVIOLET MANACLES

*Wondrous item (manacles), uncommon*

These manacles of lead and iron prevent creatures within from teleporting, changing shape, or becoming ethereal. The manacles are closed with a lock that requires a DC 17 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to open.

On any plane of existence other than the Violet Dimension (or similarly complex planes) the manacles levitate at a set level and can't be moved vertically while attached. They can be moved laterally with no restrictions but can't be moved up or down. The manacles can't change elevation, although they break open (and cease levitating) if more than 4,000 pounds of weight are applied to them. A creature can force the levitating manacles up to 10 feet up or 10 feet down with a successful DC 28 Strength check. A creature suspended in midair must reach a surface to attempt this check.



## RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

### Random Encounters, Salt Forest and Time-torn Wastes

d20	Encounter
1–3	1 <b>bulette</b> with six legs and a shark tail
4–6	1d4 + 2 <b>swarms of bats</b>
7–8	1 <b>sand-dweller whisperer</b> (page 212) commanding 1d4 <b>swarms of bats</b>
9–10	2 <b>hollow jackals</b> (page 231)
11–13	1d10 incoherent <b>kas</b> (page 228)
14–16	1 <b>hollow cobra</b> (page 232) and 1 <b>hollow jackal</b> (page 231)
17–20	1d8 + 2 <b>sand-dweller stranglers</b> (page 225)

### Random Encounters, Stone Sea

d20	Encounter
1–4	1d10 <b>uskval workers</b> (page 233)
5–6	1 <b>shadow</b> following 1d4 + 1 <b>swarms of bats</b>
7–9	2 <b>chuuls</b> with feathery blue tentacles
10–11	2d6 incoherent <b>kas</b> (page 228)
12	A time-tearing storm (page 85) rolls through, leaving clashing icebergs behind it that shatter and melt over the course of 1 hour; sailing characters can aim their boat to avoid it with a successful DC 15 Wisdom check using either the Survival skill or water vehicles
13–14	2 <b>hollow cobras</b> (page 232)
15–17	1d4 + 1 <b>uskval mages</b> (page 237)
18–20	1 <b>sand-dweller whisperer</b> (page 212) and 1 <b>sand dweller binder</b> (page 226)

### Random Encounters, Sand Citadel

d20	Encounter
1–2	1 <b>yothan warrior</b> ( <i>SPCM</i> 401) and 1 <b>sand-dweller whisperer</b> (page 212)
3–4	2 <b>umber hulks</b> each with six spindly legs
5–6	1d4 + 2 <b>swarms of bats</b>
7–9	1d4 + 2 <b>hollow jackals</b> (page 231)
10–12	1d4 + 3 <b>nightgaunts</b> ( <i>SPCM</i> 350) that try to carry characters off to a nearby desert hazard, such as a time-tearing storm or rotten saltscape
13–15	1d6 + 1 <b>hollow cobras</b> (page 232)
16–17	1d4 + 1 <b>uskval mages</b> (page 237)
18–20	2d4 <b>sand-dweller stranglers</b> (page 225) and 1d4 <b>sand-dweller whisperers</b> (page 212)



# APPENDIX: ACT 3 NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS, MONSTERS, AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

## NPCs & SURVIVORS

The survivors of Harge and Kulara are scattered aside from the large group that evacuated with Lord Killian. For the most part they are simply trying to keep their fellow survivors together and safe.



### LORD KILLIAN

*"As long as we still draw breath, there's hope."*

The scion of a long-established family of Harge, Lord Killian was elected as Lord of Harge by the city council. He is uniquely popular in the region, respected by all common people due to his judicial even-handedness and his focus on caring for the poor. After the fall of his nation, he led as many people as he could to safety in Tsang. He avoids dwelling too long on the difficulties currently preventing his return home and instead focuses on securing necessities for his people and supplies for his insurgent army in the Zoog Woods.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Lord Killian paces when he talks, speaking with a measured gravity. He plays the harp when he's relieved or anxious.

**Ideal** Kindness.

**Bond** Lord Killian hopes to keep his people alive and eventually retake their homes.

**Flaw** Lord Killian fears confrontation.

#### STATISTICS

Human **noble**, lawful good



### REMEDY

*"Bastet's protection takes many forms."*

Remedy, a tall and slim black cat growing gray with age, was the only full priestess of Bastet in little Kulara. Now, she attends to a handful of cat survivors hiding in Harge and ministers to a small group of refugees in the Fallen Log tavern. She relies on her human acolyte, Braferti, to help minister to worshippers, many of whom don't speak Cat, though some has spent long enough with her to understand when she speaks to them. As a priestess of joy, Remedy primarily seeks to comfort and distract the community from the cloud of impending war. Although she finds some purpose in protecting the Fallen Log's survivors, Remedy can see that Bramble can keep them just as safe. Remedy's priority is finding a way to look after the rest of Kulara's and Harge's survivors, wherever they have gone.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Remedy makes jokes out of everything. Since she can only make cat sounds, she must speak through an acolyte interpreter to anyone who doesn't speak Cat or regularly attend her ceremonies.

**Ideal** Joy.

**Bond** Remedy misses her community and wishes to return to them if she can find a way.

**Flaw** Remedy has a keen eye for necessary actions, including defensive strategy and avenging those she protects but is afraid to act directly. She relies on others to follow her words.

#### STATISTICS

Dreamlands cat **priest**, chaotic good

## TSANGESE OFFICIALS

The leaders of Tsang are in a politically messy situation with an active invasion at the southern border, two allied nations destroyed, and dire mismanagement from above.



### COLONEL CHI JENU

*"With danger on every front, the only thing to do is to unite and face them one at a time."*

Colonel Jenu has overseen the Reverent Empress's Gate for 20 years and become one of the most popular military leaders of his generation in the process. Under his watch, the wall has been revived as a cultural icon and border raids from mountain bandits have virtually ended.

Jenu has come to feel like he's defending the wall without the support of his emperor or government at a time when it is under a siege unlike anything since the legendary Butcher Queen's War. Although he is a staunch supporter of radical reform in Tsang, he is still cautious about the possibility of acting openly against the emperor. He doesn't want to lead a true rebellion at first, feeling that a military coup would set a terrible precedent that might lead to total dictatorship, but he is by far the most popular choice.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Jenu talks with his hands and has a penchant for grandiloquent speeches.

**Ideal** Liberty.

**Bond** Jenu tries to be a friend to the people under his charge.

**Flaw** Jenu believes in others even when doing so gets him in trouble.

#### STATISTICS

Human **knight**, neutral good



### DEAN FIA ZONG

*"A grand conflict between ancient evil and charismatic underdogs? Thrilling!"*

Dean Zong is a large, middle-aged woman wearing an intricate robe depicting legendary heroes and monsters. She tries to keep her College of Veils apart from political struggles and the cut-throat rivalries of the other magic guilds in Fenkai but realizes that the current situation is an exceptional one requiring exceptional risks.

In addition to being an artist and performer, Zong is an accomplished magical scholar. She likes to get details about encounters with magical beings to learn what their magic can do. As a master conjurer, she especially wishes to know how the sand-dwellers manage to bind their various minions.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Dean Zong has a booming, operatic voice. She throws her arms wide to punctuate emphatic statements, which she makes frequently.

**Ideal** Free expression.

**Bond** Zong will make whatever sacrifices are necessary to preserve her school and students.

**Flaw** Zong sometimes eschews the prudent choice in favor of the one that will make for the best story.

#### STATISTICS

Human **mage**, chaotic neutral





## FATHER ZARTHU

*"Everyone has a price. What is yours?"*

Father Zarthu is a bearded man who favors flowing, boxy robes in traditional black. He sees becoming a sand-dweller as a way to buy immortality from Ravazel. Since he never served Tsathoggua out of faith, a change in allegiance was a minor transition for him. Now he relishes the chance to kill creatures not to please Tsathoggua but for his own amusement.

Zarthu has no interest in fighting to the death. If he feels that he is liable to lose, he switches tactics to bribery. He offers to betray Ravazel in exchange for his freedom, sharing what he knows (page 136) about her and the magic of her Sand Citadel. He also has a wealth of knowledge and power, but the cost of using them is either becoming an evil sand-dweller or making horrific sacrifices to Tsathoggua. If the bribery doesn't work, he simply vanishes in a flash of purple light, teleporting to the Violet Dimension.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Father Zarthu tugs at his beard when he is anxious or thoughtful. He eyes magic items greedily and exclaims when he sees them activated.

**Ideal** Authority.

**Bond** Zarthu wants to keep his authority at any cost.

**Flaw** Zarthu is self-serving to a fault, betraying allies for immediate gain even if it's likely to cause him bigger problems later.

### STATISTICS

**Sand-dweller priest of Tsathoggua** (page 255), chaotic evil



## MOTHER LIEN

*"For me, war has been brewing for a long time. It's now time to deliver overdue justice."*

Mother Lien, whose given name is Mai, is a short, older woman who wears comfortable silk under a ceremonial breastplate. For many months, she has been pouring effort and money into the Five Towers since her daughter Jia—an imperial ranger—was executed by Imperial magistrates on trumped-up charges of sedition after the first sign of strange behavior in the Imperial City. She has been dismissed as a radical and fearful shut-in ever since. She never learned the details of the incident that led to Jia's death. People talked down to Mai Lien as "mother" when she obsessed over her disgraced daughter despite the cost to her business and social status, and alienated her husband and younger daughter, but she embraced the nickname in her daughter's memory. Now rebels in Fenkai look to her for guidance and use the nickname with respect.

Mother Lien is a reliable source of information to the PCs, as she knows or suspects all the information listed about Fenkai and the areas and factions within it described in that chapter. Mai Lien's estranged husband Quenzen is the Imperial Governor Lien of Fenkai. He is an impotent political puppet, however, and does as the guilds wish in order to maintain his comfortable position. Their adult daughter Xaili serves in the Imperial Guard and believes her father's claims that her mother is merely paranoid.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Lien is patient, but when she speaks, she is loud and blunt.

**Ideal** Justice.

**Bond** Lien will avenge her slain daughter Jia at any cost.

**Flaw** Lien has a hard time letting others talk or take the initiative.

### STATISTICS

Human **scout**, chaotic neutral



## ZANLAN MITHRAWEN

*"This is worse, but it's far from the beginning of being exploited and tricked. We can handle this too, as long as we stick together. Got it?"*

Zanlan Mithrawen is a young half-elf with a dark complexion and bleached hair. When in public, he typically wears a drab shirt and broad hat and passes himself off as a poor trader to avoid attention. Zanlan collects funds for the Five Towers by fees for helping Anxi's traders sell their goods through gnorri smugglers.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Zanlan is keenly thoughtful and paraphrases back what others say to him in order to be sure he understood them right.

**Ideal** Truth.

**Bond** Zanlan has many gnorri friends that he feels understand him better than other humanoids do, and he would do anything to protect them.

**Flaw** Zanlan struggles to compromise.

### STATISTICS

Half-elf **spy**, chaotic good

## MONSTERS

### THE HOLLOW PLAGUE

The Hollow Plague is a collection of creatures connected by an ancient curse. They are scattered across the Violet Dimension in groups known as epidemics. Since their progenitor was lost in time immemorial, most epidemics have been nearly animalistic dangers to everything they meet, capturing creatures to transform into more hollow creatures and protecting their Hollow Mothers. The Hollow Mothers are the only hollow creatures that seem to retain substantial intelligence and memory, but they are reclusive and poorly understood even by other denizens of the Violet Dimension.

**Shards of a Greater Whole.** All Hollow Plague creatures are aspects of a greater hive mind, but most can only communicate and understand basic information, even with each other. Certain spiritual entities, such as kas, can be used by hollow cobras to improve this psychic connection.

**Dependent on Cosmic Ichor.** Hollow creatures don't need food or water, but they do depend on another substance called cosmic ichor. Cosmic ichor is a magical oil that allows hollow creatures to heal from injuries and keep themselves from being overwhelmed by their curse. A hollow creature that goes many weeks without this oil eventually petrified into an inert crystal formation.

### THE HOLLOW CURSE

#### Curse

The curse gives creature the flaw "I grow violently defensive at the slightest provocation" and causes the target's skin near the bite to transform into violet crystal that increases its Armor Class without armor by 1. At the end of each long rest, the creature must make another Constitution saving throw. On a failure, its Armor Class without armor increases by 1 as the crystal spreads. On a success, its Armor Class without armor decreases by 1. When its Armor Class without armor is at least 14 + its Dexterity modifier, it dies and its body transforms into a new hollow jackal. When its Armor Class without armor drops to 10 + its Dexterity modifier or lower, the curse ends. The curse can also be ended by *remove curse*.



# HOLLOW COBRAS

Hollow cobras are burrowing creatures with a skill for sculpting cursed crystal. Although not very smart, hollow cobras can also follow orders well enough to gather materials for the hollow eremite's magical work. Most often, their task is to dig out and supply the lair of a Hollow Mother. The most important supply is the elder ichor.

**Crystal Carvers.** The hollow curse can alter terrain as well as creatures. Hollow cobras use it to transform rock into magical crystals that have a wide variety of uses. The crystal can be used to build defensive structures, create chambers to house captive kas, and fill magical reservoirs which heal damaged hollow creatures.

This serpentine creature with glassy black scales is rent along its entire length, a split-open tube of living crystal. Its head is a wide, grasping aperture like a cross between a cobra's hood and flytrap.



## HOLLOW COBRA

*Large aberration, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d10 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

**Damage Vulnerabilities** thunder

**Damage Resistances** acid, slashing

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Aklo

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Damage Transfer.** While enclosing a creature, the hollow cobra takes only half the damage dealt to it (rounded down), and that creature takes the other half.

**Pack Tactics.** The hollow cobra has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the cobra's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The hollow cobra makes two attacks: one with its hood and one with its coils.

**Hood.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13). The cobra may also enclose the target or do so as a free action on its turn so long as the creature is grappled.

**Coils.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

**Enclose.** The hollow cobra wraps its hollow body around a creature grappled by its bite. While enclosing the creature, the hollow cobra can make hood attacks only against the enclosed target and has advantage on the attack roll. The hollow cobra can release the target by spending 5 feet of its movement. A creature, including the target, can take its action to remove the hollow cobra by succeeding on a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check. When it becomes enclosed, the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or contract the hollow curse. While enclosed, the creature is restrained in addition to being grappled.



## SAND-DWELLER

Old stories warn children not to wander into the desert at night, since that is when sand-dwellers go forth from their caves to hunt for victims to devour. Rumors tell how they worship dangerous and mysterious gods in their dark caves, offering bloody sacrifices. They are very skinny human-shaped monsters with scaly skin, no noses or lips, and exposed bones near their joints. Although many scholars of Yog-Sothothery recognize that sand-dwellers hail from the Violet Dimension, few of them are aware of sand-dwellers' true connection to humanity and skill at infiltrating human communities (described on page 2).

**Led by Magicians.** In general, sand-dwellers operate in small bands that stick together only as much as necessary to procure victims and keep their bound patrons under control. Groups are led by the most powerful spellcaster, usually a warlock or cleric, who attends to binding and appeasing eldritch patron monsters for the group. The more powerful the leader's personality and the more brutally dangerous they are, the larger a group of sand-dwellers they can lead and the more terrifying patrons they can summon.

**Cavern Hideouts.** Sand-dwellers often hide in desert caves. The caves can hide their terrible rituals and summoned patron monsters from prying eyes as well as protecting against the rain they hate. These same caves are usually home to colonies of bats, which the sand-dwellers train to serve as familiars, spies, and swarming attack animals.

### WEARING A SKIN

Any sand-dweller not already wearing a human skin can use its claws and teeth to hollow out the corpse of a dead humanoid within 5 feet over the course of 1 minute. Equipment the sand-dweller was carrying or wearing falls to the ground. The humanoid must have been dead for less than 1 day or carefully preserved. The sand-dweller swallows the body's innards and polymorphs its body shape to slip neatly inside the emptied skin. It wears everything the corpse was wearing. The sand-dweller's statistics remain the same, except it has the humanoid type (not aberration). This prevents it being detected or affected by many spells and abilities (such as Eldritch Sensitivity and Desperate Insight).

The sand-dweller reverts to its true form when the skin is removed (requiring at least a DC 15 Athletics check or an opposed grapple check), or if it dies. The skin becomes dry and leathery after 1d10 + 10 days, and cracks apart and falls off after another 2d6 days.

This emaciated humanoid creature has coarse sandy skin and oversized eyes. Its fingers end in white claws.

## SAND-DWELLER STRANGLER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 27 (5d8 + 5)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Str +4, Dex +3

**Skills** Athletics +4, Deception +5, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's

skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, the resultant pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 210).

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The strangler makes two claw attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or become grappled (escape DC 14). Until the grappled condition ends, the creature can't breathe or vocalize until the grappled condition ends. Each creature that ends its turn grappled loses 1d4 hit points.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.









## SAND-DWELLER WHISPERER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 +10)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	9 (–1)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Wis +1, Cha +4

**Skills** Deception +6, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive in all three planes of existence.

**Spellcasting.** The sand-dweller whisperer is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save

DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The sand-dweller whisperer knows the following warlock spells:

cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast*, *prestidigitation*, *true strike*

1st-2nd level (2 2nd-level spell slots): *lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106), *misty step*, *protection from evil and good*, *spiritual weapon*, *suggestion*

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 210).

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The whisperer makes two claw attacks. It can cast *eldritch blast* in place of each attack.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed at a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.





## SAND-DWELLER BINDER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 38 (7d8 + 7)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+2)	15 (+2)	9 (–1)	13 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Int +4, Wis +1

**Skills** Arcana +6, Deception +5, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Spellcasting.** The sand-dweller binder is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The sand-dweller binder knows the following wizard spells:

cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *minor illusion*, *shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *expeditious retreat*, *find familiar*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *scorching ray*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *blink*, *lightning bolt*, *magic circle*

4th level (1 slot): *black tentacles*

**Sense Aggression.** While it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet that feel aggressive; this sense extends to nearby creatures in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet dimension, regardless of what plane the sand-dweller itself is in.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while Skin Wearing.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The binder uses Mass Cruel Impulse and makes two attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Mass Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to any number of beasts and humanoids it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions. A creature that succeeds becomes immune to that sand-dweller's Mass Cruel Impulse for 24 hours.



## SAND-DWELLER SLASHER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 78 (12d8 + 24)

**Speed** 35 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	9 (–1)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Str +6, Con +5, Wis +2

**Skills** Deception +5, Stealth +6

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive on all three planes.

**Sneak Attack (1/Turn).** The slasher deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the slasher that isn't incapacitated and the slasher doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's exposed skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while it Wears Skin.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The slasher makes three melee attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Cruel Step (Recharge 6).** The sand-dweller slasher sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. If the slasher can see an unoccupied space that the target can't see within 60 feet of both it and the target, the slasher can also teleport to that location. In addition, the creature must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). If nothing else, attacking the sand-dweller is always a suitable action. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.









## SAND-DWELLER PRIEST OF TSATHOGGUA

Medium aberration (humanoid while wearing a humanoid skin), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 88 (16d8 + 16) (with *death ward* and 5 temporary hit points from *aid*)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Wis +8, Cha +7

**Skills** Arcana +10, Deception +7, Religion +10

**Damage Resistances** damage from spells, necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 14

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive on all three planes

**Space-Folding Strike (1/Turn).** When the priest makes a weapon attack or casts a spell, they can treat their reach as 5 feet longer or double the range. If an affected attack hits, it deals an additional 1d6 force damage.

**Spellcasting.** The priest of Tsathoggua is a 16th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The priest has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash*, *guidance*, *resistance*, *thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *identify*, *inflict wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid*\*, *augury*, *darkness*, *misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *nondetection*, *spirit guardians*

4th level (2 of 3 slots remaining): *death ward*\*, *dimension door*, *divination*

5th level (2 slots): *contagion*, *legend lore*

6th level (1 slot): *congeal formless spawn* (SPCM 97)

7th level (1 slot): *fire storm*

8th level (1 slot): *earthquake*

\*Already cast and still in effect

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while it is wearing a skin.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The whisperer makes two attacks. It can cast *acid splash* in place of one of these attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.

### REACTIONS

**Vanish into Darkness (1/Short or Long Rest).** When the priest is hit by an attack, it can take the Hide action. If it successfully becomes hidden from the attacker, the attack misses.



## SWARM LICH

When a spellcaster with extremely potent psychic powers dies and the body is consumed by a colony of beasts like bats, rats, or some other vermin that swarm, the departed mind can return and seize control over the beasts. Each contains a fragment of the mage's mind, and in cooperation with the swarm, the creature's will lives on.

Subtly altered by the swarm lich over the generations, the bats that make it up can speak with a high-pitched voiced, and they create an unnerving chorus when they speak or chant. When separated from the whole, the bats can pass for normal creatures, but as a part of an otherworldly entity they are confined by wards such as the *Elder Sign*.

### A SWARM LICH'S LAIR

Swarm lichs only form in places where bats flock, usually caves or dense forests.

### REGIONAL EFFECTS

The region surrounding the swarm lich's lair is warped by its unnatural presence, creating any of the following effects.

- ◇ Bats are more numerous within 6 miles. The swarm lich can use the eyes and ears of any bat in the region as an action.
- ◇ Light sources cast only half the usual radius of light within 300 feet of the swarm lich's lair.

A swarm of bats flocks into a tiny space, clinging to each other in a vaguely humanoid shape. They chitter in an eerie harmony to produce human-like words.



## SWARM LICH

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 104 (16d8 + 32)

**Speed** 30 ft., fly 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Con +6, Wis +7, Cha +9

**Skills** Athletics +5, History +13, Investigation +8, Performance +10, Yog-Sothothery +12

**Condition Immunities** charmed, paralyzed, petrified, stunned

**Senses** blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 12 (advantage with Keen Hearing)

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 16 (15,000 XP)

**Limited Damage Transfer.** While it is grappling a creature, the swarm lich takes only three-quarters the damage dealt to it, and the creature grappled by the lich takes the other quarter.

**Disperse.** The swarm lich can explode into a fluttering swarm or coalesce into a human-like solid form composed of bats clinging together as a bonus action. While coalesced, it moves like a single creature with a humanoid body shape. While dispersed, the swarm can occupy another creature's space, the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny bat, it has immunity to



the grappled, prone, and restrained conditions, and it has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.

**Echolocation.** The lich can't use its blindsight while deafened.

**Keen Hearing.** The lich has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

**Legendary Resistance (3/Day).** If the lich fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

**Spellcasting.** The swarm lich is a 16th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17). The lich knows the following bard spells:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *identify*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *darkness*, *shatter*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *clairvoyance*, *dispel magic*, *glyph of warding*, *sign of Eibon* (SPCM 113)

4th level (3 slots): *compulsion*, *greater invisibility*

5th level (2 slots): *dream*, *enlightenment of the Blind Idiot God* (SPCM 102)

6th level (1 slot): *animate objects*

7th level (1 slot): *contrary melody* (SPCM 99)

8th level (1 slot): *pipes of madness* (SPCM 110)

**Single-Minded Swarm.** The swarm lich can only regain hit points by breeding new bats, which takes 1 week, at which point it regains an amount equal to its current hit point total (minimum 20). When reduced to 0 hit points, the swarm lich transforms into a **swarm of bats**. If left to breed for 1 week, the swarm transforms back into the swarm lich with 22 hit points.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The swarm lich casts a cantrip and makes an attack.

**Bites.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm lich's space. *Hit:* 20 (8d4) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) necrotic damage, or 10 (4d4) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) necrotic damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by the necrotic damage it takes until it finishes a long rest.

**Smother (Coalesced Form Only).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one Medium or smaller creature. *Hit:* The creature is grappled (escape DC 15) and the swarm lich enters its space. Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained, blinded, and at risk of suffocation; the swarm lich shares the target's space; and the lich can't smother another target. In addition, at the start of each of the target's turns, the target takes 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage.

## REACTIONS

**Exploding Escape.** If the swarm lich is grappled; knocked prone; restrained; or dealt bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage; it Disperses just before the damage or effect is applied.

## LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The swarm lich can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The lich regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

**Attack (Costs 2 Actions).** The swarm lich makes one attack.

**Cantrip.** The swarm lich casts a cantrip.

**Fly.** The swarm flies up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks. It can Disperse or coalesce before or after it moves.

**Detect.** The swarm lich makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

## LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting inside its lair, the swarm lich can invoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the lich takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects (it can't choose the same one two rounds in a row):

**Call of Darkness.** Light sources in a 30-foot sphere centered on a point the swarm lich can see are snuffed out. If they are magical, the lair casts *dispel magic* on them (5th level, +5 modifier).

**Nyarlahotep's Helper.** The swarm lich sacrifices 8 hit points to summon a **nightgaunt** (SPCM 350) from the ceiling. Roll initiative for the nightgaunt, which has its own turns. It isn't under the lich's control but attacks the nearest creature each turn. It tries to carry off the first target it can incapacitate, intending to drop it into a trapped area of the tomb.

**Destructive Vibrations.** Sound resonates unnaturally in a 20-foot sphere centered on a point the swarm lich can see until the swarm lich dies or uses this action again. Creatures have vulnerability to necrotic, psychic, and thunder damage while in the area.



## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### LANDSCAPE OF THE SYZGY

*Scroll, very rare*

This painted scroll depicts a beautiful starry sky with an alignment between the rising sun, crescent moon, and an unfamiliar green star. When activated as an action, it replaces a 500-foot cube with an equivalently sized area of another plane of existence, chosen from either the Dreamlands or the Violet Dimension. Each creature in the area can avoid being sent with the terrain with a successful DC 17 Charisma saving throw. The exchanged creatures and terrain return after 1 hour. Even if a transported creature has left the area, it returns to the point it was originally sent from when the scroll was activated.

### POTION OF MURMURS

*Wondrous item, common*

This burbling pitch-black ooze whispers faintly when the glass-stoppered vial is opened. After you drink it as an action, for the next 10 days you occasionally hear snatches of whispers you can't quite make out. Should you hear or see any Aklo words, the whispers translate the words clearly for you. The murmurs also warn you when you fail an ability check, and you can use your reaction to listen closely to their advice and reroll the check. If you roll again and the check fails, you gain the flaw "I allow others to suffer for my own convenience" until you finish a long rest. If you roll again and the check succeeds, the potion's effects end.

### RING OF BURROWING

*Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)*

This ring is made of spiky bone. The wearer gains a burrowing speed of 10 feet. If they already have a burrowing speed, it increases by 10 feet and the wearer can choose to either leave a stable tunnel as wide as their height, or to leave no trace behind them, as seamlessly as a fish swimming through water.

### STAFF OF BASTET'S CHAMPION

*Staff (requires attunement by a spellcaster), rare*

This staff has 10 charges. This magic staff functions as a spear and grants you a +2 bonus to attack rolls and damage with it. Its point is made from adamantine and it ignores the damage threshold for objects.

The staff regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff shatters until it is repaired, lost forever.

**Spells.** While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier: *dispel magic* (3 charges), *aid* (2 charges), or *warding bond* (2 charges).

**Counterspell.** When a spell targets you or a creature within 10 feet of you while you hold the staff, you can expend 3 charges to cast *counterspell*.



### GOLDFIRE TONGUE

*Weapon (sword), rare (requires attunement)*

This magic sword grants you a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage with it. On a hit, it deals an additional 1d6 fire damage, and it glows like a torch until the start of your next turn. While it glows, you and allies in the light have advantage on saving throws against dread and the frightened condition.

**Curse.** The item is cursed, which you can only learn if you betray the wishes of the creature that gave the sword to you. If you are attuned to the item, you are cursed. As long as you remain cursed, you are unwilling to part with the sword, keeping it within reach at all times. You also have disadvantage on attack rolls with weapons other than this one, unless no foe is within 60 feet of you that you can see or hear. Whenever you hit with the sword while the curse is active, you take 1d6 fire damage.





## RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

### RANDOM ENCOUNTERS, HARGE

d20	Encounter
1–3	1d6 + 1 <b>gnolls</b> and 1d4 <b>giant hyenas</b>
4–6	2 <b>rhinoceros</b> being hunted by 1d4 <b>yothan designers</b> (SPCM 401) for experimentation; the animals might mistake rescuers for additional threats
7–9	2 <b>blessed berserkers</b> (SPCM 404) and 1 nascent <b>sand-dweller strangler</b> (page 249) looking for humanoids to rob, kill, or capture for the sand-dwellers
10	1d4 + 4 <b>nightgaunts</b> (SPCM 350) that carry characters in the middle of zoog traps either near the wall or near the refugees, whichever is closer
11–13	2d4 <b>giant vultures</b>
14–16	1d4 + 1 uncontrolled <b>hollow jackals</b> (page 231)
17–20	1 <b>sand-dweller binder</b> (page 251) and 2d4 <b>sand-dweller stranglers</b> (page 249), all riding and controlling <b>axe beaks</b> that flee when damaged without a rider controlling them

### RANDOM ENCOUNTERS, ZOOG WOODS

d20	Encounter
1–3	1 <b>unicorn</b> who distrusts all humanoids as potential sand-dwellers
4–6	1 vengeful <b>treant</b> with substantial burn marks from a sand-dweller attack
7–9	2 <b>blessed berserkers</b> (SPCM 404) and 1 nascent sand-dweller <b>scout</b> looking for humanoids to rob, kill, or capture for the sand-dwellers
10	1 <b>young green dragon</b>
11–13	a poorly hidden (Perception DC 13) <b>hidden spiked pit trap</b> with a much harder to spot one (DC 20) immediately behind it, watched by a <b>grove keeper</b> (SPCM 403) and three <b>giant spiders</b>
14–16	a scarred and mutated <b>chimera</b> with six heads ripping apart the corpse of a yothan designer; it has three legendary actions, each of which can only be used to attack with a different head
17–20	2 <b>sand-dweller whisperers</b> (page 250) and 2d4 <b>sand-dweller stranglers</b> (page 249) struggling to free two of their number from a <b>spiked pit trap</b>

### RANDOM ENCOUNTERS, UNDERCITY

d20	Encounter
1–4	1 <b>sand-dweller binder</b> (page 251) and 1d4 + 4 <b>giant bats</b>
5–7	1d4 <b>sand-dweller whisperers</b> (page 250) and 1 <b>sand-dweller slasher</b> (page 252)
8–10	1d4 <b>ghoul lurkers</b> (SPCM 325) and 1 <b>ghoul whisperer</b> (SPCM 326) with 3 <b>Mythos ghasts</b> (SPCM 323)
11–13	1 <b>proto-shoggoth</b> (SPCM 372)
14–16	2 <b>formless spawn</b> (SPCM 321)
17–20	1 <b>sand-dweller binder</b> (page 251) and 2d4 <b>sand-dweller stranglers</b> (page 249)

# APPENDIX: ACT 4 NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS, MONSTERS, AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

## NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

### RESISTANCE LEADERS

The defenders of the mortal world hail from across Tsang and beyond. They now realize that time is running out and focus on trying to find any route to a quick victory before the monstrous hordes consume their last bastions of safety.



### COLONEL CHI JENU

*"With danger on every front, the only thing to do is to unite and face them one at a time."*

Colonel Jenu has overseen the Reverent Empress's Gate for 20 years and become one of the most popular military leaders of his generation in the process. Under his watch, the wall has been revived as a cultural icon and border raids from mountain bandits have virtually ended.

Jenu has come to feel like he's defending the wall without the support of his emperor or government at a time when it is under siege unlike anything since the legendary Butcher Queen's War. Although he is a staunch supporter of radical reform in Tsang, he is still cautious about the possibility of acting openly against the emperor. He doesn't want to lead a true rebellion at first, feeling that a military coup would set a terrible precedent that might lead to total dictatorship, but he is by far the most popular choice.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Jenu talks with his hands and has a penchant for grandiloquent speeches.

**Ideal** Liberty.

**Bond** Jenu tries to be a friend to the people under his charge.

**Flaw** Jenu believes in others even when doing so gets him in trouble.

### STATISTICS

Human **knight**, neutral good





## DEAN FIA ZONG

*"A grand conflict between ancient evil and charismatic underdogs? Thrilling!"*

Dean Zong is a large, middle-aged woman wearing an intricate robe depicting legendary heroes and monsters. She tries to keep her College of Veils apart from political struggles and the cut-throat rivalries of the other magic guilds in Fenkai but realizes that the current situation is an exceptional one requiring exceptional risks.

In addition to being an artist and performer, Zong is an accomplished magical scholar. She likes to get details about encounters with magical beings to learn what their magic can do. As a master conjurer, she especially wishes to know how the sand-dwellers manage to bind their various minions.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Dean Zong has a booming, operatic voice. She throws her arms wide to punctuate emphatic statements, which she makes frequently.

**Ideal** Free expression.

**Bond** Zong will make whatever sacrifices are necessary to preserve her school and students.

**Flaw** Zong sometimes eschews the prudent choice in favor of the one that will make for the best story.

### STATISTICS

Human **mage**, chaotic neutral



## ZANLAN MITHRAWEN

*"This is worse, but it's far from the beginning of being exploited and tricked. We can handle this too, as long as we stick together. Got it?"*

Zanlan Mithrawen is a young half-elf with a dark complexion and bleached hair. When in public, he typically wears a drab shirt and broad hat and passes himself off as a poor trader to avoid attention. Zanlan collects funds for the Five Towers by fees for helping Anxi's traders sell their goods through gnorri smugglers.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Zanlan is keenly thoughtful, and paraphrases back what others say to him in order to be sure he understood them right.

**Ideal** Truth.

**Bond** Zanlan has many gnorri friends that he feels understand him better than humanoids do, and he would do anything to protect them.

**Flaw** Zanlan struggles to compromise.

### STATISTICS

Half-elf **spy**, chaotic good

## IMPERIAL GUARD

The Imperial forces are prepared for war. They have been told a variety of lies, mostly engineered by General Huzi and Emperor Xao (both secretly sand-dwellers), to make the rebels seem like run-of-the-mill extremist libertines. The other Imperial Guard members are largely unaware that Xao has been studying forbidden magic or breaking the old agreements with Fenkai's Eldritch Guilds. They are also prevented from hearing true reports of any incidents or troop movements along the Elder Wall. Huzi has buried all reports confirming sand-dwellers' ability to wear humanoid skins and only allowed through reports of small mobs of monsters at the border. Major incidents and large armies are minimized and details about them are hidden away.



## CAPTAIN LIYO

*"This has become a grotesque farce. We must end it now."*

Captain Liyo wears her hair just past her chin and has Imperial wizard robes of black and silver. She is increasingly horrified at what she has seen here, her own troops dying to attack accused rebels who haven't acted yet. She has a haunted look about her. Liyo has only ever fought in small, efficient police actions, so she underestimated the true toll of large-scale war.

She admits that Emperor Xao has begun acting increasingly strange. Until this moment, she preferred to believe what she was told by General Huzi. He always reported that the rumors of infiltration didn't pan out, offering as proof the magical protection of the Elder Wall. The strange behavior in the Imperial City was always blamed on infiltration by seditionists. The reports of Lord Ho's rabid incitement only seemed to confirm it. Now, she realizes how suspicious it is that Imperial soldiers stationed to the south have gone silent after their reports indicated nothing amiss... including no mention of the rebels who must have been on the march at that time.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Liyo is stoic and polite except when pushed to her limit. If freed, she loosens up and uses her crude sense of gallows humor to keep others from losing heart.

**Ideal** Loyalty.

**Bond** Liyo can't abide the idea of war forcing her to fight her cousin Uneza Izonda.

**Flaw** Liyo struggles to question authority.

### STATISTICS

Human **mage** (with the following spells prepared), lawful good

Captain Liyo has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *false life*, *mage armor*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *mirror image*, *misty step*, *scorching ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *blink*, *fireball*, *phantom steed*

4th level (3 slots): *confusion*, *fire shield*, *stone shape*

5th level (1 slot): *leading phantasmagoria* (page 280)





## GENERAL KARANO

*"I live to serve the empire and its people."*

Karano is one of two remaining humans among Emperor Xao's generals. He is increasingly upset with the emperor's behavior, but the reports he sees are doctored by General Huzi to hide the true extent of the proof against Emperor Xao. If forced to think through the details, though, he realizes there is something being hidden from him, and Huzi is in the best position to control the flow of information to all the generals.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Karano growls his words, an affectation from his days as a mercenary.

**Ideal** Redemption.

**Bond** Karano left a life as a Fenkaian mercenary decades ago and supports anyone else trying to change their way of doing things.

**Flaw** Karano is disillusioned with military bureaucracy and his emperor but feels that acting against either would be unconscionable treason (unless he is convinced they are not what they appear).

### STATISTICS

Human **knight**, lawful good

## VILLAINS

The sand-dweller leaders act with little or no pretense now. They are focused on gathering long-term supplies of offerings for their monstrous allies and utterly annihilating the remaining human strongholds that represent a threat to their goals.



## COMMANDER ZARYOTH

*"You might be a useful pawn."*

Zaryoth directly controls Ravazel's most rebellious yet useful minions. He also issues orders at the forefront of her army and protects the *Sacred Hexagon*. Zaryoth resents Ravazel but also respects her as a strong and clever leader.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Zaryoth telepathically chastises enemies for fouling up his brilliant plans but compliments them on impressive tactics.

**Ideal** Intelligence.

**Bond** Zaryoth wants to collect the most impressively unusual minions with his Mind Control.

**Flaw** Zaryoth enters a reckless rage if anyone questions his genius.

### STATISTICS

**Yothan commander** (SPCM 402), lawful evil, with the following additional actions.

**Multiattack.** Zaryoth makes either three melee attacks (two claws and a bite) or one ranged attack using either his ballista or the *Sacred Hexagon*. He then uses Mind Control.

**Ballista.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 400/1,600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (5d8 + 1) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw; it takes 22 (4d10) poison damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

## RAVAZEL THE BUTCHER QUEEN

*"I am Ravazel the Butcher! I nearly conquered the world centuries before you were born. Just give up."*

Ravazel is finally getting close to the victory she has dreamed of ever since before she became a sand-dweller. She sees mortals as raw materials, whether for appeasing patrons, bribing allies, or for transforming into more sand-dweller minions.

Before becoming a sand-dweller, Ravazel was a brutal warlord. She killed anyone who threatened her hegemony over the lands that have since become Harge and Odran. Although eventually stopped, she takes great pride in repeatedly sacking the southern cities of the ancient republic of Tsang.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Ravazel loves to rant and list off her achievements in battle.

**Ideal** Strength.

**Bond** Ravazel wants revenge on the entire nation of Tsang, which she views as responsible for her first true defeat.

**Flaw** Ravazel only admits she needs to change her strategy after a devastating defeat.





## RAVAZEL THE BUTCHER QUEEN

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 18 (plate armor)

**Hit Points** 209 (22d8 + 110)

**Speed** 40 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Str +10, Con +10, Wis +7, Cha +9

**Skills** Deception +9, Insight +7, Perception +7

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 17

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 14 (11,500 XP) (15 in her abyssal crawler)

**Cry of Frenzy.** Ravazel can spend a bonus action to inspire her minions to bloodthirsty rage. Each ally within 60 feet who can hear Ravazel can use a reaction to make a melee weapon attack or cast a cantrip.

**Legendary Resistance (1/Day).** If Ravazel would fail a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as she is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, Ravazel can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive in both of the other planes of existence as well.

**Spellcasting.** The Ravazel is a 20th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Ravazel has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *bless*, *command*, *cure wounds*, *protection from evil and good*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid*, *branding smite*, *misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *magic circle*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *death ward*

5th level (2 slots): *dispel evil and good*, *geas*

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings Ravazel's skin. Whenever she touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives her disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of her next turn after the exposure.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Ravazel uses Murderous Impulse or casts a spell of 3rd level or lower. She then makes two melee attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 5) slashing damage.

**Resonant Greatsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (3d4) force damage.

**+3 Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

**Murderous Impulse.** Ravazel clouds the mind of a beast or humanoid she can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or it must spend its reaction to make a weapon attack or cast a cantrip against the nearest creature (Ravazel's choice if there are multiple). A creature that succeeds becomes immune to Ravazel's Murderous Impulse for 24 hours.

### REACTIONS

**Resonant Parry.** When Ravazel would be hit by a spell attack or a melee weapon attack, she blocks the attack with her *ultraviolet greatsword* to add 4 to her AC against the attack. This can cause the attack to miss. If this causes a spell attack to miss, it is reflected on its caster as if Ravazel had cast the spell (requiring her to roll her own spell attack). If this causes a melee weapon attack to miss, the attacker takes 3d4 force damage and is teleported 10 feet away from Ravazel.

### LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting inside the abyssal crawler, Ravazel can control its movement to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), Ravazel takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects (she can't choose the same one two rounds in a row):

♦ **Lurch.** The crawler heaves suddenly, throwing all creatures inside other than Ravazel and flying creatures. Each affected creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage, fall prone, and be thrown either 20 feet in the lateral direction of Ravazel's choice or 10 feet straight up.

♦ **Dimensional Pit.** Ravazel opens a 5-foot-radius circular portal centered on a point on a surface she can see. A creature within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be pulled in. A creature that succeeds and was standing where the portal appeared can move up to 5 feet in any direction. A creature pulled in falls 30 feet to the pit's bottom, regardless of which direction the pit is oriented, takes 3d6 bludgeoning damage, and lands prone. A creature in the pit can climb out with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. The pit closes and ejects everything inside when Ravazel dies or uses this action again.

♦ **Nyarlathep's Helper.** Ravazel slashes her hand and throws the blood against a wall. She loses 10 hit points, and the wall twists to disgorge a **nightgaunt** (SPCM 350). Roll initiative for the nightgaunt, which has its own turns. It isn't under the Ravazel's control but attacks the nearest creature each turn. It tries to carry off the first target it can incapacitate, intending to drop it into a hazardous area.







## EMPEROR XAO

*"You are mere pests to one such as I."*

Emperor Xao was once a callous ruler disinterested in the legal authority and comfort he was born into. The entire Material Plane seemed drab and disinteresting to him in contrast to the rest of the cosmos that exists beyond it. Since before he took the throne two decades ago, he has hungrily dug for all the information he could find to discover more knowledge and magical insight about other dimensions. The temptation of Ravazel proved to be too much for his paltry resolve.

Xao appears a short man wearing resplendent purple and red robes with a mixed gray beard, although under his skin he has become a sand-dweller. Although he has no loyalty to Ravazel, he can't resist

the temptation of her power. He intends to steal her power, usurp the control she has over her bound creatures, and become emperor over entities far beyond the limitations of the mere mortals he takes for granted.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Traits** Emperor Xao enjoys demonstrating his intelligence with long-winded rants. He relishes the chance to try out cruel spells on people.

**Ideal** Discovery.

**Bond** Xao wants to discover the secrets of the multiverse and use them to rule forever alongside Ravazel

**Flaw** Xao can barely imagine there being meaningful consequences for his actions.

### EMPEROR XAO

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 18 (*robe of the archmagi*)

**Hit Points** 153 (18d8 + 72)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Int +7, Wis +7, Cha +8

**Skills** Arcana +8, Deception +8, History +8, Intimidation +8, Persuasion +8, Religion +8, Yog-Sothothery +8

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 13

**Languages** Abyssal, Aklo, Common, Draconic, Elemental, Infernal

**Challenge** 12 (8,900 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, Xao can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, Xao can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive in both of the other planes of existence as well.

**Spellcasting** The Emperor is an 18th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash*, *guidance*, *prestidigitation*, *resistance*

1st level (4 slots): *identify*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *mirror image*, *see invisibility*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *fire shield*, *Sarnath sigil* (SPCM 112)

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill*, *scrying*, *wall of force*

6th level (1 slot): *chain lightning*

7th level (1 slot): *nuclear chaos* (SPCM 109), *teleport*

8th level (1 slot): *control weather*, *pipes of madness* (SPCM 110)

9th level (1 slot): *rain of sorrow* (page 280)

**Robe of the Archmagi.** The Emperor has advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects in addition to bonuses included elsewhere.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while wearing a skin.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Emperor either uses Murderous Impulse or casts a cantrip. He then makes two melee attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Murderous Impulse.** The Emperor clouds the mind of a beast or humanoid he can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or spend its reaction to make an attack or cast a cantrip against the nearest creature (Xao's choice if there are multiple). A creature that succeeds becomes immune to the Emperor's Murderous Impulse for 24 hours.

### REACTIONS

**Cast a Spell.** Emperor Xao can cast *shield* or *counterspell*.

## THE HOLLOW PLAGUE

The Hollow Plague is a collection of creatures connected by an ancient curse. Now, they are scattered across the Violet Dimension in groups known as epidemics. Since their progenitor was lost in time immemorial, most epidemics have been nearly animalistic dangers to everything they meet, capturing creatures to transform into more hollow creatures and protecting their Hollow Mothers. The Hollow Mothers are the only hollow creatures that seem to retain substantial intelligence and memory, but they are reclusive and poorly understood even by other denizens of the Violet Dimension.

**Shards of a Greater Whole.** All Hollow Plague creatures are aspects of a greater hive mind, but most can only communicate and understand basic information with each other. Certain spiritual entities, such as kas, can be used by hollow cobras to improve this psychic connection.

**Dependent on Cosmic Ichor.** Hollow creatures don't need food or water, but they do depend on another substance called cosmic ichor. Cosmic ichor is a magical oil that hollow creatures depend upon to heal from injuries and keep themselves from being overwhelmed by their curse. A hollow creature that goes many weeks without this oil eventually petrified into an inert crystal formation.

## THE HOLLOW CURSE

### Curse

The curse gives creature the flaw "I'm violently defensive at the slightest provocation" and causes the target's skin near the site of contact to transform into violet crystal that increases its Armor Class without armor by 1. At the end of each long rest, the creature must make another Constitution saving throw. On a failure, its Armor Class without armor increases by 1 as the crystal spreads. On a success, its Armor Class without armor decreases by 1. When its Armor Class without armor is at least 14 + its Dexterity modifier, it dies, and its body transforms into a new hollow jackal. When its Armor Class without armor drops to 10 + its Dexterity modifier or lower, the curse ends. The curse can also be ended by *remove curse*.

## HOLLOW JACKALS

Hollow jackals prowl the Violet Dimension, hunting mortals with souls as well as living creatures. They telepathically warn the rest of their epidemic about dangers and sources of food.

**Ka-Hunters.** In addition, hollow jackals hunt down kas. A captured ka is taken back to the epidemic's lair, where hollow cobras build a magical prison for it. The magical prison allows the epidemic to use the ka's mental faculties to improve their psychic network—the whole group of hollow creatures becomes more intelligent while it has kas imprisoned this way. A captured ka's mental powers might eventually be used up after a period of months or years, depending on its force of will.

This bulky, vaguely canine creature stands on four spindly legs, and its gleaming flesh resembles black and violet crystal. A wide cleft along its back reveals it to be hollow.



## HOLLOW JACKAL

*Medium aberration, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 55 (10d8 + 10)

**Speed** 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

**Damage Vulnerabilities** thunder

**Damage Resistances** acid, slashing

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Aklo

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Pack Tactics.** The hollow jackal has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the jackal's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The hollow jackal makes two attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it is knocked prone.

**Imprison.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature of its size or smaller that is prone or attempting an attack roll. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the creature is imprisoned in the jackal's hollow interior unless the creature succeeds on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. When it becomes imprisoned, the creature must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or contract the hollow curse. While imprisoned, the creature is grappled and restrained (escape DC 12).

## REACTIONS

**Swallow Attacker.** After the hollow jackal is damaged by a melee attack from a creature its size or smaller within 5 feet, it can attempt to imprison the attacker unless the attack exceeded its AC by more than 2 (for example, 18 or higher) or the jackal already has a creature imprisoned (it can only imprison one creature at a time) and the hollow splits apart to allow the attacking creature inside it.





# HOLLOW COBRAS

Hollow cobras are burrowing creatures with a skill for sculpting cursed crystal. Although not very smart, hollow cobras can also follow orders well enough to gather materials for the hollow eremite's magical work. Most often, their task is to dig out and supply the lair of a Hollow Mother. The most important supply is the elder ichor.

**Crystal Carvers.** The hollow curse can alter terrain as well as creatures. Hollow cobras use it to transform rock into magical crystals that have a wide variety of uses. The crystal can be used to build defensive structures, create chambers to house captive kas, and fill magical reservoirs which heal damaged hollow creatures.

This serpentine creature with glassy black scales is rent along its entire length, a split-open tube of living crystal. Its head is a wide, grasping aperture like a cross between a cobra's hood and flytrap.

## HOLLOW COBRA

*Large aberration, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d10 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (–1)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

**Damage Vulnerabilities** thunder

**Damage Resistances** acid, slashing

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Aklo

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Damage Transfer.** While enclosing a creature, the hollow cobra takes only half the damage dealt to it (rounded down), and that creature takes the other half.

**Pack Tactics.** The hollow cobra has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the cobra's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The hollow cobra makes two attacks: one with its hood and one with its coils.

**Hood.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13). The cobra may also enclose the target or do so as a free action on its turn so long as the creature is grappled.

**Coils.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

**Enclose.** The hollow cobra wraps its hollow body around a creature grappled by its bite. While enclosing the creature, the hollow cobra can make hood attacks only against the enclosed target and has advantage on the attack roll. The hollow cobra can release the target by spending 5 feet of its movement. A creature, including the target, can take its action to remove the hollow cobra by succeeding on a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check. When it becomes enclosed, the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or contract the hollow curse. While enclosed, the creature is restrained in addition to being grappled.





## SAND-DWELLERS

Old stories warn children not to wander into the desert at night, since that is when sand-dwellers go forth from their caves to hunt for victims to devour. Rumors tell how they worship dangerous and mysterious gods in their dark caves, offering bloody sacrifices. They are very skinny human-shaped monsters with scaly skin, no noses or lips, and exposed bones near their joints. Although many scholars of Yog-Sothothery recognize that sand-dwellers hail from the Violet Dimension, few of them are aware of sand-dwellers' true connection to humanity and skill at infiltrating human communities (described on page 2).

**Led by Magicians.** In general, sand-dwellers operate in small bands that stick together only as much as necessary to procure victims and keep their bound patrons under control. Groups are led by the most powerful spellcaster, usually a warlock or cleric, who attends to binding and appeasing eldritch patron monsters for the group. The more powerful the leader's personality and the more brutally dangerous they are, the larger a group of sand-dwellers they can lead and the more terrifying patrons they can summon.

**Cavern Hideouts.** Sand-dwellers often hide in desert caves. The caves can hide their terrible rituals and summoned patron monsters from prying eyes as well as protecting against the rain they hate. These same caves are usually home to colonies of bats, which the sand-dwellers train to serve as familiars, spies, and swarming attack animals.

## WEARING A SKIN

Any sand-dweller not already wearing a human skin can use its claws and teeth to hollow out the corpse of a dead humanoid within 5 feet over the course of 1 minute. Equipment the sand-dweller was carrying or wearing falls to the ground. The humanoid must have been dead for less than 1 day or carefully preserved. The sand-dweller swallows the body's innards and polymorphs its body shape to slip neatly inside the emptied skin. It wears everything the corpse was wearing. The sand-dweller's statistics remain the same, except it has the humanoid type (not aberration). This prevents it being detected or affected by many spells and abilities (such as Eldritch Sensitivity and Desperate Insight).

The sand-dweller reverts to its true form when the skin is removed (requiring at least a DC 15 Athletics check or an opposed grapple check), or if it dies. The skin becomes dry and leathery after 1d10 + 10 days, and cracks apart and falls off after another 2d6 days.

This emaciated humanoid creature has coarse sandy skin and oversized eyes. Its fingers end in white claws.

## SAND-DWELLER STRANGLER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 27 (5d8 + 5)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Str +4, Dex +3

**Skills** Athletics +4, Deception +5, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's

skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, the resultant pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 210).

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The strangler makes two claw attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or become grappled (escape DC 14). Until the grappled condition ends, the creature can't breathe or vocalize until the grappled condition ends. Each creature that ends its turn grappled loses 1d4 hit points.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.









## SAND-DWELLER WHISPERER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 +10)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	9 (–1)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Wis +1, Cha +4

**Skills** Deception +6, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive in all three planes of existence.

**Spellcasting.** The sand-dweller whisperer is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save

DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The sand-dweller whisperer knows the following warlock spells:

cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast*, *prestidigitation*, *true strike*

1st-2nd level (2 2nd-level spell slots): *lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106), *misty step*, *protection from evil and good*, *spiritual weapon*, *suggestion*

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while Wearing a Skin (see sidebar, page 210).

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The whisperer makes two claw attacks. It can cast *eldritch blast* in place of each attack.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed at a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.





## SAND-DWELLER BINDER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 38 (7d8 + 7)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+2)	15 (+2)	9 (–1)	13 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Int +4, Wis +1

**Skills** Arcana +6, Deception +5, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Spellcasting.** The sand-dweller binder is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The sand-dweller binder knows the following wizard spells:

cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *minor illusion*, *shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *expeditious retreat*, *find familiar*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *scorching ray*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *blink*, *lightning bolt*, *magic circle*

4th level (1 slot): *black tentacles*

**Sense Aggression.** While it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet that feel aggressive; this sense extends to nearby creatures in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet dimension, regardless of what plane the sand-dweller itself is in.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while Skin Wearing.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The binder uses Mass Cruel Impulse and makes two attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Mass Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to any number of beasts and humanoids it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions. A creature that succeeds becomes immune to that sand-dweller's Mass Cruel Impulse for 24 hours.





## SAND-DWELLER SLASHER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 78 (12d8 + 24)

**Speed** 35 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	9 (–1)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Str +6, Con +5, Wis +2

**Skills** Deception +5, Stealth +6

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 9

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive on all three planes.

**Sneak Attack (1/Turn).** The slasher deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the slasher that isn't incapacitated and the slasher doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's exposed skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while it Wears Skin.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The slasher makes three melee attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Cruel Step (Recharge 6).** The sand-dweller slasher sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. If the slasher can see an unoccupied space that the target can't see within 60 feet of both it and the target, the slasher can also teleport to that location. In addition, the creature must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). If nothing else, attacking the sand-dweller is always a suitable action. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.





## SAND-DWELLER PRIEST OF TSATHOGGUA

Medium aberration (humanoid while wearing a humanoid skin), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 88 (16d8 + 16) (with *death ward* and 5 temporary hit points from *aid*)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Wis +8, Cha +7

**Skills** Arcana +10, Deception +7, Religion +10

**Damage Resistances** damage from spells, necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 14

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive on all three planes

**Space-Folding Strike (1/Turn).** When the priest makes a weapon attack or casts a spell, they can treat their reach as 5 feet longer or double the range. If an affected attack hits, it deals an additional 1d6 force damage.

**Spellcasting.** The priest of Tsathoggua is a 16th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The priest has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash*, *guidance*, *resistance*, *thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *identify*, *inflict wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid*\*, *augury*, *darkness*, *misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *nondetection*, *spirit guardians*

4th level (2 of 3 slots remaining): *death ward*\*, *dimension door*, *divination*

5th level (2 slots): *contagion*, *legend lore*

6th level (1 slot): *congeal formless spawn* (SPCM 97)

7th level (1 slot): *fire storm*

8th level (1 slot): *earthquake*

\*Already cast and still in effect

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while it is wearing a skin.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The whisperer makes two attacks. It can cast *acid splash* in place of one of these attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Cruel Impulse.** The sand-dweller sends evil impulses to a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or its next action must be a cruel one that benefits it or that it would enjoy (if possible). Typical actions include stealing or taking a hurtful action in line with an ideal, bond, or flaw. The saving throw might have advantage or disadvantage for especially costly or tempting actions.

## REACTIONS

**Vanish into Darkness (1/Short or Long Rest).** When the priest is hit by an attack, it can take the Hide action. If it successfully becomes hidden from the attacker, the attack misses.



## SAND-DWELLER PACTKEEPER

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 94 (14d8 + 28)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Wis +7, Cha +9

**Skills** Deception +7, Yog-Sothothery +6

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 feet, tremorsense 30 feet, passive Perception 13

**Languages** Aklo, Common

**Challenge** 8 (3,900 XP)

**Emergent Escape.** If wearing a skin, the sand-dweller can shed its skin as a bonus action. If it was grappled or restrained, those conditions end on it.

**Sense Aggression.** As long as it is in the Dreamlands, the Material Plane, or the Violet Dimension, the sand-dweller can sense creatures within 60 feet feeling aggressive on all three planes.

**Pact Magic.** Cantrips (at will): *acid splash*, *eldritch blast* (deals an extra 4 force damage on each hit and pushes the target 10 feet away), *guidance*, *resistance*, *thaumaturgy*

1st-5th level (4 slots): *misty step*, see *invisibility*

6th level (1 slot): *freezing sphere*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death*

**Susceptible to Water.** Fresh water stings the sand-dweller's skin. Whenever the sand-dweller touches fresh water or ice or takes cold damage, pain gives it disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn after the exposure. It loses this trait while it Wears Skin.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The sand-dweller either uses Murderous Impulse or casts a cantrip. It then makes two melee attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Murderous Impulse.** The sand-dweller clouds the mind of a beast or humanoid it can sense within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or it must spend its reaction to make an attack or cast a cantrip against the nearest creature (sand-dweller's choice if there are multiple). A creature that succeeds becomes immune to that sand-dweller's Murderous Impulse for 24 hours.





## SPELLS

### RAIN OF SORROW

*9th-level conjuration (formula)*

**Classes:** cleric, druid, wizard

**Casting Time:** 10 minutes (5 phases of 2 minutes when cast as a formula)

**Range:** 1 mile

**Components:** V, S, M (ash from burning rare spices worth 1,000 gp, which the spell consumes)

**Formula Ability Checks:** Intelligence using alchemist's supplies or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 25, Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 25, Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) DC 25

**Formula Backlash:** 9d4 acid damage

**Formula Failure:** 9d4 psychic damage and permanently blinded

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 8 hours

You create a cloud of writhing darkness in the sky with a diameter of 1 mile centered on a point you can see.

The cloud reduces the lighting level by one step, to a minimum of total darkness.

The cloud rains acid in the area for its duration. Each creature that starts its turn out in the open in the area takes 1d8 acid damage. A creature with cover relative to the sky has the damage reduced in proportion to the amount of cover.

### LEADING PHANTASMAGORIA

*5th-level enchantment*

**Classes:** bard, warlock, wizard

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 90 feet

**Components:** S

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 minute

You cloud the senses of a creature you can see within range. It must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be confused by images that twist its perceptions.

An affected target can't take reactions and must roll a d10 at the start of each of its turns to determine its behavior for the turn. When the creature rolls, you can spend your reaction to roll another d10. You choose which of the two results the creature uses.

d10	Behavior
1	The creature uses all its movement to move erratically in a new direction of the GM's choice. If you spent your reaction, you choose the direction it moves.
2–6	The creature doesn't move or take actions this turn.
7–8	The creature uses its action to make a melee attack against a randomly determined creature within its reach. If you spent your reaction, either you choose any one action for the creature to take against a random valid target for that action or you choose the target of its attack.
9–10	The creature can act and move normally.

At the end of each of its turns, if you did not spend your reaction to roll a d10 for the spell, the creature can attempt a Wisdom saving throw. If it succeeds, the spell ends on it.

**At Higher Levels.** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, you can target an additional creature for each slot level above 5th.



## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### ATLACH-NACHA EGG

*Wondrous item, rare*

This fuzzy white spider egg is the size of a melon and is coated in intricate patterns woven from webs. As an action, you can speak a command word to cause the egg to produce a dose of *Atlach-Nacha venom* (SPCM 122). Also as an action, you can attach the egg to the sill of a door to connect that door to any teleportation circle whose sigil sequence you know, even if the circle is on another plane of existence. Once you use either function, that function can't be used again until the next dawn.

### GOURD OF THE BLACK GOAT

*Wondrous item, very rare*

This large black-green gourd is carved with a glowing red symbol. As an action, you can cause it to produce a dose of *milk of Shub-Nig-gurath* (SPCM 127). Once you do, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

### HOLLOW BINDING STONE

*Wondrous item, uncommon*

This polished hexagonal stone is inscribed on one side with an icon loosely resembling a throne divided in three and on the other side with a stylized humanoid face. While you hold the stone in one hand and brandish it like a shield, Hollow Plague creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls to hit you. It has 3 charges. It regains 1d4 - 1 charges at dawn.

**Whispers in the Night.** The stone draws its magic from a captured ka. The ka whispers to you when you sleep within 10 feet of it, urging you to do what you know you should. Until you next finish a long rest, you gain the ideal "My conscience guides my actions." Sand-dwellers can't hear the ka's whispers. If the stone is broken, the ka within is freed; if you broke the stone, freeing the ka, then the grateful ka can be summoned thereafter if you know the spell *conjure ka*. (The face on the stone is a suitable likeness to be the spell's material component.)

**Command Hollow Creature.** You can force a hollow creature to attempt a DC 13 Charisma saving throw as an action by spending 1 charge. On a failed save, the creature becomes charmed by you until the next dawn. If, during that time, another creature

touches the stone, the charmed condition changes to apply to that creature instead of you (but its end time doesn't change). If the creature is already charmed by you when you spend 1 charge to charm it, a failed save allows you to dictate its actions during its next turn.

### KA CRYSTAL BALL

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This crystal ball isn't truly spherical but rather is a dodecahedron with rounded edges. It swirls with yellow and violet mists. The base has ornate golden legs; the face at the base features a stylized image of a human. While touching it, you can cast the *scrying* spell (save DC 17) with it at will. If you have telepathy or the ability to read creature's thoughts or emotions, you can use those features as if you were at the sensor's location. Spells with those effects can also be used this way.

#### **Whispers in the Night.**

The stone draws its magic from a captured ka. The ka whispers to you when you sleep within 10 feet of it, urging you to do what you know you should. Until you next finish a long rest, you gain the ideal "My conscience guides my actions."

Sand-dwellers can't hear the ka's whispers.

If the crystal ball is broken, the ka within is freed; if you broke the stone, freeing the ka, then the grateful ka can be summoned thereafter if you know the spell *conjure ka*. (The face on the base is a suitable likeness to be the spell's material component.)

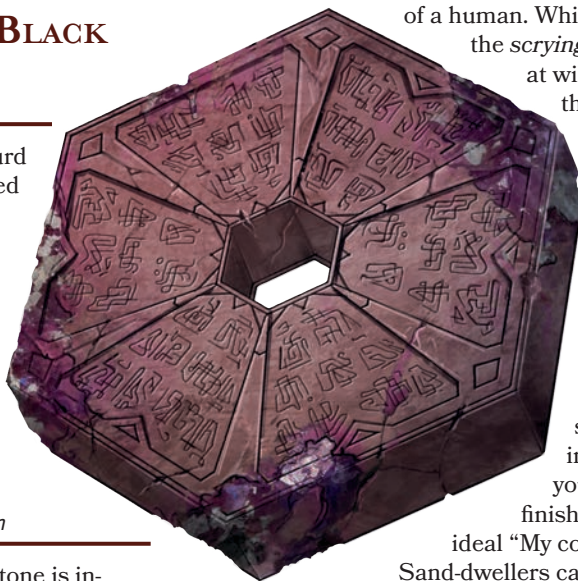
### SACRED HEXAGON

*Wondrous item, artifact (requires attunement)*

The *Sacred Hexagon* is a stone hexagon the size of a human head. It weighs 45 pounds. The *Sacred Hexagon* has 7 charges and regains 1d4 + 3 expended charges daily at dawn. All the magic words to use the hexagon are inscribed on it in Aklo.

**Minor Properties.** In this adventure, the Sacred Hexagon has the following minor properties.

- ♦ **Earthbound.** While you are attuned to the *Sacred Hexagon*, any flying speed you have is reduced by half and whenever you take damage while flying, you must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or fall. Creatures directly above you have advantage on attack rolls against you.



- ◇ **Multiversal Grounding.** While attuned to the *Sacred Hexagon*, you have advantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws.
- ◇ **Resistance.** While attuned to the *Sacred Hexagon*, you have resistance to necrotic damage.
- ◇ **Salinization.** The *Sacred Hexagon* infuses all liquids (including potions) with magical salt if they touch the hexagon or a creature touching it. This prevents them from triggering the sand-dweller's vulnerability and forces other creatures who consume the liquid to succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion.

**Random Properties.** If the Sand Citadel's binding items are destroyed or if the *Sacred Hexagon* is encountered in a context other than this adventure, the artifact changes to have the following random properties:

- ◇ 2 minor beneficial properties
- ◇ 2 minor detrimental properties

**Key to the Sand Citadel.** The *Sacred Hexagon* opens the Sand Citadel when presented to its Hexagon Gate at no charge cost.

**Spells.** You can use an action and expend 1 or more charges to cast one of the following spells (save DC 18) from the hexagon: *private sanctum* (2 charges), *tongues* (1 charge), *wall of stone* (3 charges; functions on crystal or sand as well as stone).

**Sunstroke Lance.** As an action, you make a ranged spell attack with a +10 to hit and a range of 360 feet. A target you hit takes 5d10 radiant damage and is blinded until the end of its next turn. On a critical hit, the blinded condition lasts for 1 minute and the target gains 1 level of exhaustion. This does not cost a charge.

**Sand Citadel Guardian.** You can use an action and spend 1 charge to magically summon a random guardian of the Sand Citadel for 1 hour. The creature appears in an unoccupied space of your choice within 30 feet. The creature summoned is determined randomly by rolling d8 on the following table.

d8	Creature
1	moon-beast (SPCM 348)
2	hollow jackal (page 269)
3	hollow cobra (page 270)
4	formless spawn (SPCM 321)
5	yothan warrior (SPCM 401)
6	gug (SPCM 332)
7	proto-shoggoth (SPCM 372)
8	flying polyp with one Multi-Dimensional Body (SPCM 318)

The GM handles the creature's statistics and rolls initiative for the creature, as it has its own turns. If the creature fails a DC 18 Charisma saving throw, it is

charmed by you for as long as you concentrate (as if concentrating on a spell). If you were given the stone directly by the ruler of the Sand Citadel, the creature automatically fails. If the binding item matching that creature has been destroyed, the creature automatically succeeds (even if you were given the item directly by Ravazel).

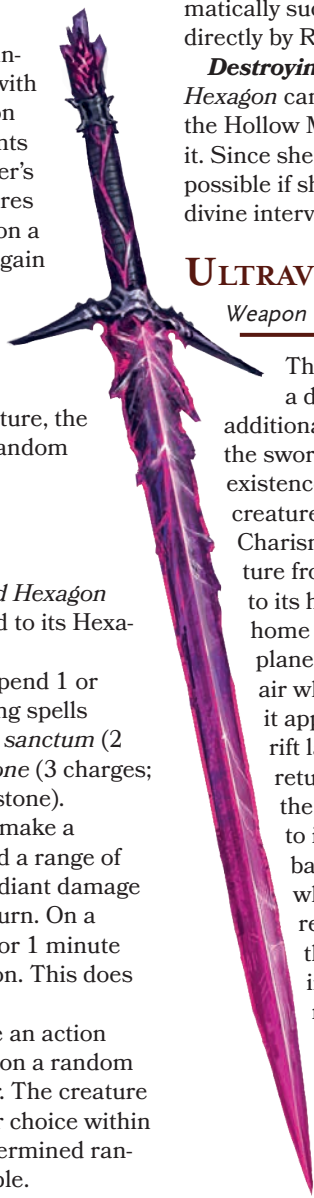
**Destroying the Sacred Hexagon.** The *Sacred Hexagon* can't be damaged but can be destroyed if the Hollow Mother (of the Hollow Plague) swallows it. Since she has been dead for centuries, this is only possible if she is resurrected (generally requiring divine intervention or a *wish* spell).

## ULTRAVIOLET SWORD

*Weapon (any sword), very rare (requires attunement)*

This magic sword's blade is made from a deep violet crystal. On a hit, it deals an additional 3d4 points of force damage. When the sword hits a creature from another plane of existence or you roll a 20 on the die to hit any creature, the target must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or be banished. A creature from another plane of existence returns to its home plane. A creature currently on its home plane is banished to an empty demiplane. A wavering violet gap appears in the air where the creature vanished and where it appeared on the plane it was sent to. The rift lasts for 1 minute or until the creature returns. If the creature hasn't returned when the violet rift vanishes and was banished to its home plane, it remains indefinitely banished. If you banish another creature while the rift remains open, the creature returns from its brief banishment. Unlike the *banishment* spell, the creature is not incapacitated and may take actions as normal; a creature can spend an action touching the rift to attempt to pass through it. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Charisma saving throw, taking 3d4 force damage on a failure or taking half damage and passing through the rift on a success.

**Spells.** You can spend 1 charge to slice a gap in the air and cast *misty step*. The sword has 4 charges. It regains 1d4 charges at dawn.





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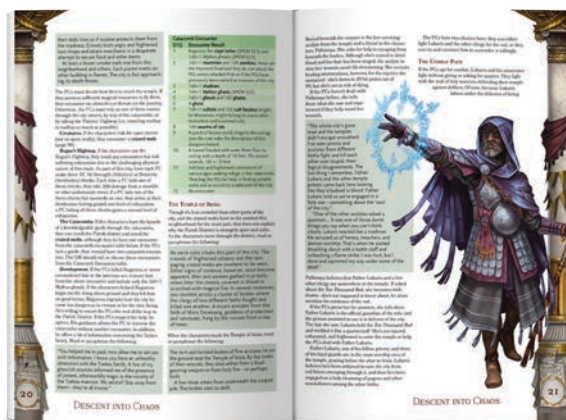


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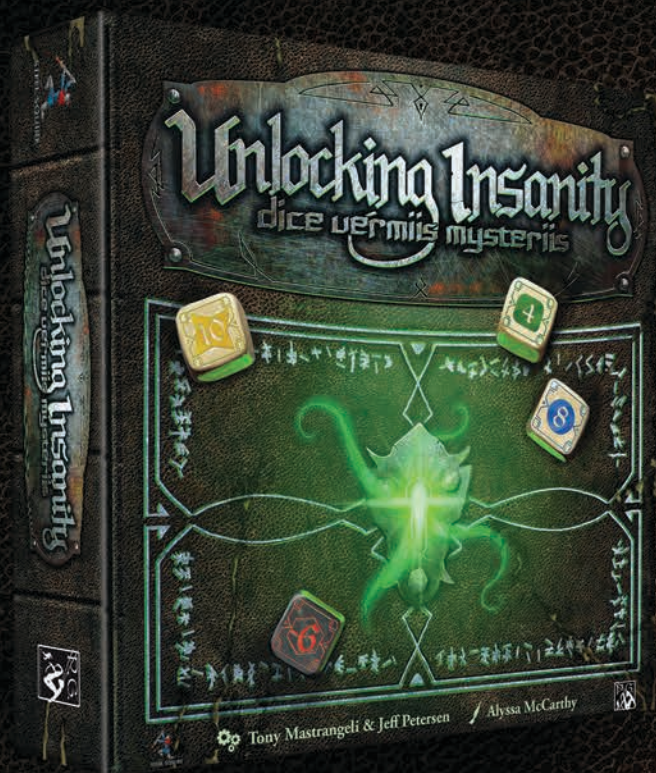
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