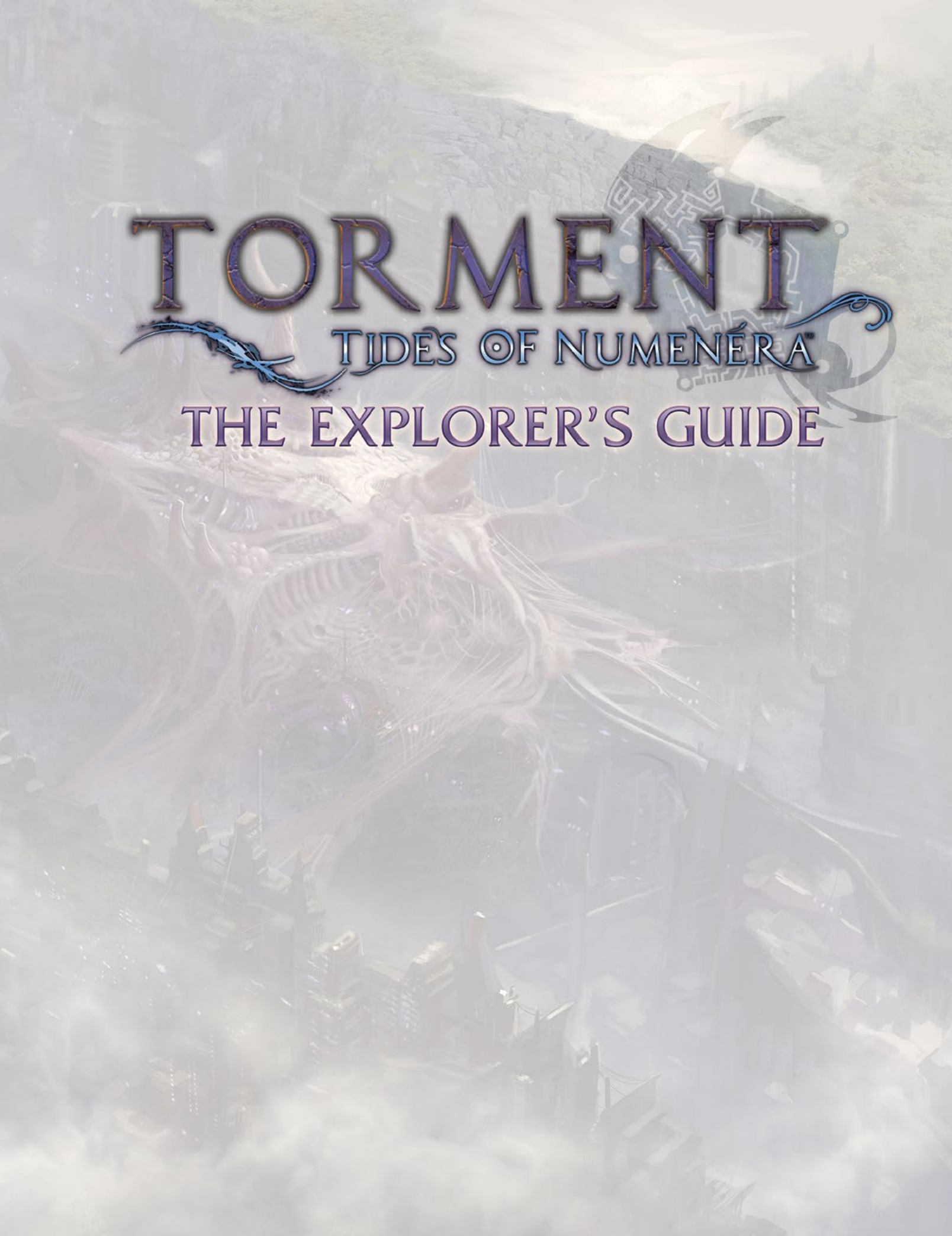
TORMENT

TIDES OF NUMENERA™

THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE

BY SHANNA GERMAIN


TORMENT
TIDES OF NUMENERA
THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE

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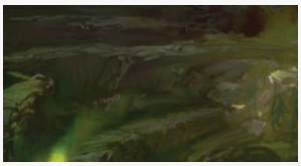

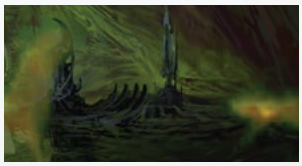

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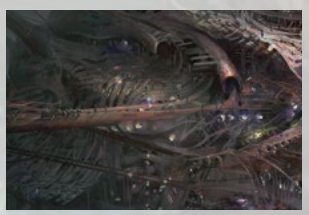
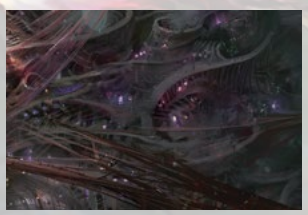

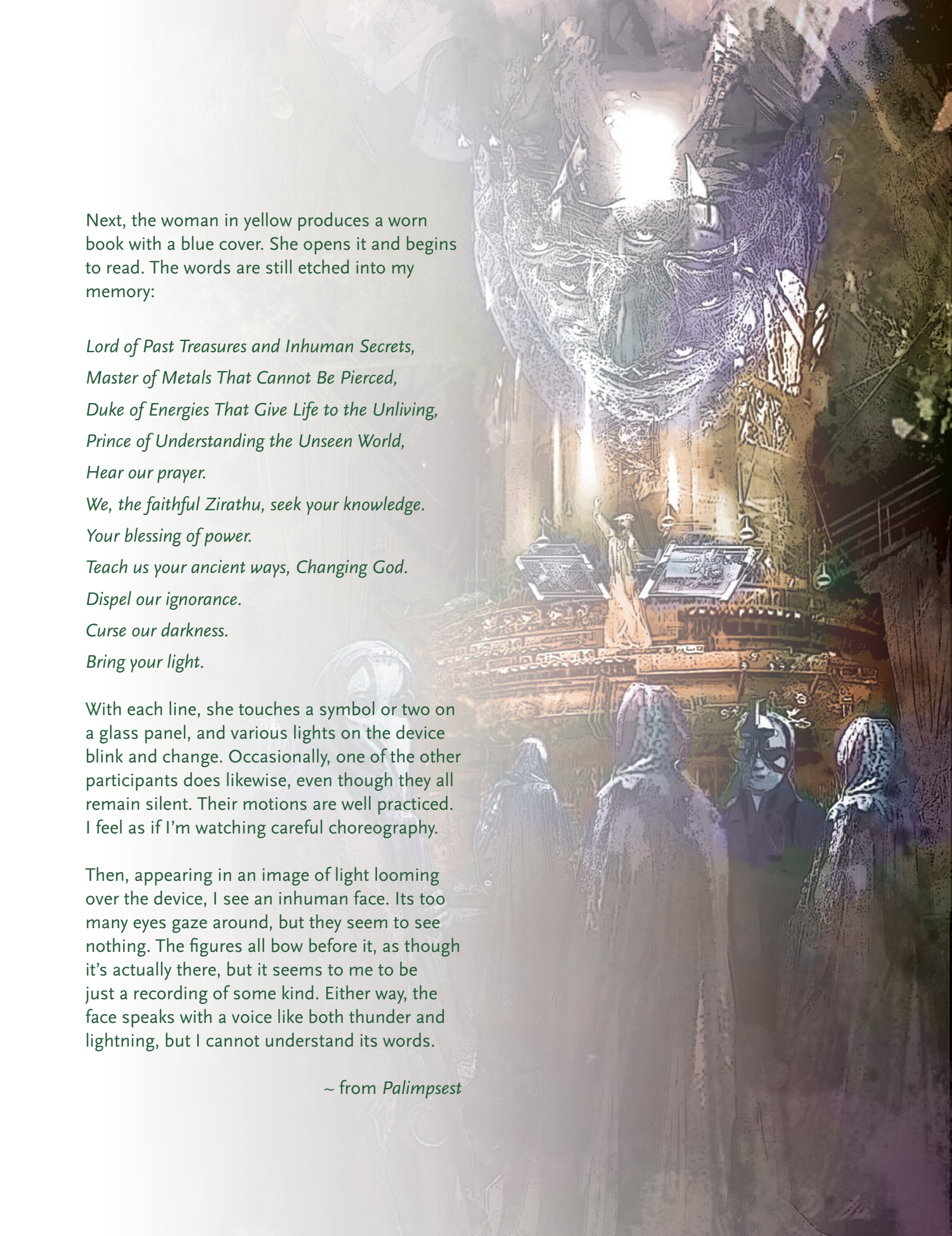

Next, the woman in yellow produces a worn book with a blue cover. She opens it and begins to read. The words are still etched into my memory:

Lord of Past Treasures and Inhuman Secrets,
Master of Metals That Cannot Be Pierced,
Duke of Energies That Give Life to the Unliving,
Prince of Understanding the Unseen World,
Hear our prayer.
We, the faithful Zirathu, seek your knowledge.
Your blessing of power.
Teach us your ancient ways, Changing God.
Dispel our ignorance.
Curse our darkness.
Bring your light.

With each line, she touches a symbol or two on a glass panel, and various lights on the device blink and change. Occasionally, one of the other participants does likewise, even though they all remain silent. Their motions are well practiced. I feel as if I'm watching careful choreography.

Then, appearing in an image of light looming over the device, I see an inhuman face. Its too many eyes gaze around, but they seem to see nothing. The figures all bow before it, as though it's actually there, but it seems to me to be just a recording of some kind. Either way, the face speaks with a voice like both thunder and lightning, but I cannot understand its words.

~ from *Palimpsest*

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INTRODUCTION

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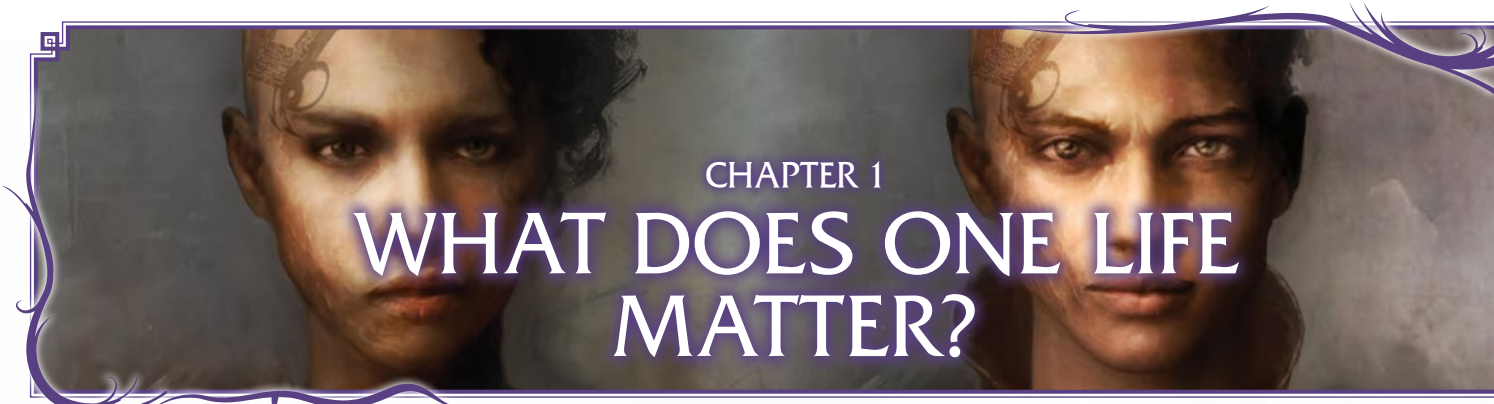


CHAPTER 1

WHAT DOES ONE LIFE MATTER?

It's hard to believe that after all this time, we as a species still haven't figured out the answer to this question. Every life is distinct, a welter of ideas and senses and memories and relationships that interweave to create a unique human being.

For most of us, our lives can be summarized in a few painfully short sentences. Born. Went to school. Worked. Raised a few kids. Did some work in the community. Enjoyed games. Died.

Few of our obituaries recall that we loved Indian food, or that we had dreams of one day writing a screenplay, or that we were teaching ourselves to play the oboe but weren't any good at it yet. When people talk about our lives, what they really talk about are our *accomplishments*.

(Before you ask, I am *totally* fun at parties. Just let me explain how we got here.)

In 2012, I started talking to Brian Fargo and Adam Heine about the possibility of creating a new Torment game. Project Lead Kevin Saunders, Adam, and I discussed the story we wanted to tell and the game we wanted to make, and Brian wanted us to make a decision on the setting. Should he spend his time in trying to negotiate a license with a major corporation, or should we go our own way?

We had a third option. Monte and Shanna had invited me to participate in the alpha testing of the Numenera campaign, with an adventure that became *The Devil's Spine*. I had a complete blast playing that game, and I loved the world. But more important, given the story we wanted to tell and the themes we wanted to explore, the Ninth World was an obvious choice for our setting.

What were those themes, and why did we want the Ninth World? The first Torment asked, "What can change the nature of a man?" We wanted our game to ask a similarly philosophically engaging question, and to approach it with a perspective leavened by the time between that project and this. Or, in plainer terms, now that we're older we wanted to examine life from a new place. Specifically, we're looking at the flip side of life, and what it means to live. That's how we settled on our big question: *What does one life matter?*

The real question we're asking is about *legacy*, what's left behind when we're gone, the good and the bad, the inevitable consequences of our actions. And what better place to talk about legacies and consequences than on a planet that has been shaped and broken and rebuilt and altered utterly, a billion years in the future? Where better to talk about what we leave behind than in the Ninth World, where the detritus of countless civilizations stands in for its lost creators?

The choice to go with Numenera worked out well for us. It has been a delight to create Torment in this world. Working with the crew at Monte Cook Games has been a breeze, and I'd like to thank everyone on the team there for their hard work: Monte, Shanna, Bruce, Charles, Tammie, and Bear, we truly appreciate your creation, and your help in the realization of ours.

The storyline followed by the character in the Torment: Tides of Numenera computer game, which takes place in the locations covered in this book, attempts to answer the question, "What does one life matter?"

Everyone at inXile—though there are too many of you to list here—thank you too for your contributions and your dedication. I think we've made something excellent, and it couldn't have happened without you.

Of course, none of this would be possible without our generous backers. Neither the Ninth World nor Torment would be possible, and if you were one of our backers, you need to know in the deepest part of your heart how completely grateful we are for the chance to create this for you. You all are the *best*.

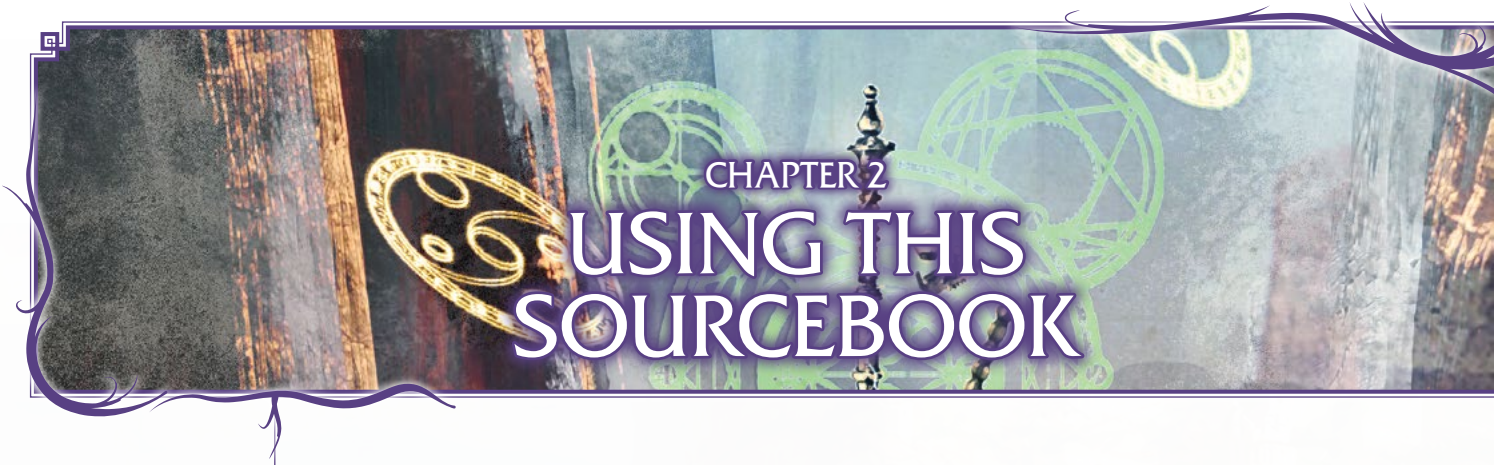
While I'm at it, I'd also like to thank my family for putting up with this all-consuming obsession that I've been privileged to labor on for the past several years. I hope it'll make you proud.

In the end, that's what drives me now—the desire to create, to know that I've passed something on to the world that will help other people approach their lives in a new way. The chance to build something that will have a positive impact, spark reflection, or best of all, inspire people to create their own worlds and stories. I sincerely hope that Torment: Tides of Numenera will inspire you.

When we ask, "What does one life matter?" we're not trying to tell you the answer. We're only asking you to explore. Your goals are your own, and your methods . . . well, as long as you're not sacrificing people in pursuit of immortality, I'll try not to judge.

In the end, that question is yours to answer, not ours.

~ Colin McComb,
Torment: Tides of Numenera Creative Lead



CHAPTER 2
USING THIS SOURCEBOOK

SPOILER ALERT: *This book contains minor spoilers for the* Torment: Tides of Numenera *computer game.*

This is a sourcebook based on and inspired by the Torment: Tides of Numenera computer game. However, you don't need to have played the computer game to use this book in your Numenera tabletop roleplaying game. If you're a game master (GM) looking for new and weird locations, creatures, and characters to add to your tabletop game, this book gives you that. You and your players can explore the entire area of Greater Garravia, in which Torment is set, without bringing in any elements of the computer game. All of the characters, creatures, and equipment included here are designed to be used in any Numenera campaign.

Greater Garravia, page 10

You can also incorporate additional rules-based elements of the Torment game without having played it. In the Character Options chapter, you'll find new foci and descriptors based on characters in the computer game, while the Tides chapter introduces the Tides, a type of loose alignment system that is tied into an invisible, yet powerful, force in the Ninth World. Any of these optional rules can be added to your game to provide further customization and immersion.

Character Options, page 142

Foci, page 145

Descriptors, page 142

Tides, page 151

On the other hand, if you are a Torment player (or want to be one in the future), this book can be used as a conversion guide to the game, allowing you to transport the essence of the story and experience from a single-person computer game to a multiplayer tabletop campaign.

Some design and setting elements of a game work better in a computer RPG than they do in a tabletop RPG, and vice versa. To that end, we have taken small liberties with the setting and the rules in this book to create an optimal game experience at the table.

In short, as with all of our other books, *Torment: Tides of Numenera—The Explorer's Guide* is designed to give you as much flexibility as possible at the table, so that you can create the game experience that you and your players want to have.

Throughout this book, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the *Numenera* corebook, where you can find additional details about that item, place, creature, or concept.

If you're new to the tabletop gaming side of Numenera, you'll need the Numenera *corebook to use this book.*

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CHAPTER 3

GREATER GARRAVIA

Beyond, page 174

Clock of Kala, page 213

Far to the east of the Beyond, past the Clock of Kala, is the mountainous, forested area known as Greater Garravia. Bordered on the south by a large, storm-blasted inland sea—for which the area is named—Greater Garravia is bound together as a location only by its long and tumultuous history.

M'ra Jolios, page 65

Much of Greater Garravia was once filled with a large, powerful territory known as the Sagus Protectorate, but even that has shrunk to a scrap of its former glory. Now it is filled with disparate, disconnected locations, each weirder and more inexplicable than the last.

Machine Heart, page 94

Greater Garravia is loosely divided into eight areas. There are few strict borders or boundaries to differentiate one area from another, as there are no leaders, armies, or rulers to make and enforce such distinctions. Instead, the land is segmented by features of the landscape, bits of folklore and mythos, and tradition. The eight territories are the Sagus Protectorate, the Lost Sea, Ossiphagan, Bordermarch Hills, the Twisted Twins, Garravia Sound, Lower Garravia, and the Tempest Waste.

Sagus Protectorate, page 17

Lost Sea, page 59

Ossiphagan, page 82

Bordermarch Hills, page 88

Twisted Twins, page 91

Garravia Sound, page 94

Lower Garravia, page 99

Temple Waste, page 101

The areas are somewhat connected by their history and location, but beyond that, they have little in common. Going from one to the next is often strenuous and filled with peril. The cultures and people differ vastly. Even the view of the sky seems different from place to place, as if you've entered not just another city but another universe. The Forge of the Night Sky burns endlessly with lavafalls and spewing flames, whereas the Bordermarch Hills is a broken and ravaged wasteland, scarred and shaped by centuries of endless war. Not far away, the aquatic city of M'ra Jolios provides respite from the parched wasteland.

Forge of the Night Sky, page 82

Greater Garravia shares only two commonalties, the first of which is the unpredictability of the weather. Throughout the entire region, the weather can turn unbearably brutal without warning or precedent. Most of the volatility seems due to the impact of the Machine Heart, a great device sunk deep in Garravia Sound, which sends sudden squalls sweeping across the landscape in all directions. It's possible that the Bloom—a city-sized transdimensional entity that is both a creature and a place—amplifies the effect, as does the unusual landscape of the Lost Sea. Whatever the cause, the area is plagued with rain, wind, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other, even more unpredictable weather patterns that occur frequently and without warning. Not surprisingly, structures and devices designed to withstand and protect from such turbulence are in high demand.

The second commonality is a strong transdimensional influence that seems to run through and color everything in the area: landscape, weather, people, cultures, creatures, and technology. Portals, vessels, and ultradimensional or otherworldly technology and beings are all prominent to the point of being almost commonplace. It's hard to know what happened here so long ago to create this pocket of far-off technology and knowledge, but its influence is clear in everything from structures and landscapes to languages and myths.

It's likely that the majority of people from the western areas like the Steadfast

Steadfast, page 136

or Lostrei have never heard of Greater Garravia, or any of the locations within it. Mostly they talk about it as "that place beyond the Beyond" with little more than a shrug and the wave of a hand. Only the hardiest souls venture out across the expanse, and most of those who do never return to their homeland in the west. There are some stories and rumors of the area, but as is often the case, they bear only a passing resemblance to the truth. One dark tale tells of a giant sluglike alien that inhabits the land and sucks up all living creatures who enter its realm, while a more uplifting version puts forth that those who dare touch the giant alien are given eternal life in a far-off dimension. Most people of the west consider Greater Garravia to be wildly dangerous, even compared to their own perilous lives, and this continues to fuel speculation about deadly and enigmatic aliens from other worlds, times, and dimensions.

In turn, the inhabitants of Greater Garravia know little of the lands west of them. They too call the area beyond their borders "the Beyond" and are familiar with the Clock of Kala (although most know it as the Orbit of Oyria), but few venture there and even fewer extend their travels to far-off lands like the Steadfast and the Frozen South. Rather than turn their gaze to such distant places, the people of Greater Garravia are more likely to look to the skies and other dimensions for information and inspiration. This means that they have vast stores of unique knowledge, but also that they know little about places beyond their borders.

WHY TRAVEL TO GREATER GARRAVIA?

For those who want to bring characters across the great expanse from the Steadfast or the Beyond, there are a number of opportunities for exploration and discovery, both along the way to and within Greater Garravia itself.

Perhaps the player characters (PCs) are searching for a transdimensional creature or connection, a way to travel to the stars and beyond, or a numenera device that

only the people of the area are capable of concocting. They may have heard rumblings of the Sagus Protectorate's rise to glory, and come seeking a piece of the legacy for themselves (not knowing that the Protectorate has already fallen—after all, news doesn't travel particularly quickly across the continent). It's also possible that the characters hope to connect with (or destroy) those here who claim to be Aeon Priests of the Order of Truth.

And, of course, those with no interest in knowledge but plentiful interest in coin will find ample incentive to traverse the distance. Both the Order of Truth and the Convergence would be delighted to pay a few brave souls to bring back discoveries of the numenera or new knowledge of the past (without having to risk the unknown dangers themselves). Those with their ears to the ground might also hear whisperings that the secretive cult known as the Jagged Dream seems to have spread its long tendrils all the way to the city of Sagus Cliffs, for reasons unknown—what are they planning, and who will stop them?

M'ra Jolios, page 65

Ghibra, page 66

Bloomborn, page 142

Aeon Priest, page 269

Order of Truth, page 222

Castoff, page 15

Changing God, page 14

Convergence, page 223

Jagged Dream, page 224

Alternately, a GM could start a game in Greater Garravia, with the PCs as natives to the area. The characters could begin in the water city of M'ra Jolios, with one or more of them being a Ghibra, a member of a race of water-breathing humanoids. Or they could hail from the chittering depths of the Bloom, taking on the Bloomborn descriptor to show the influence of the predator-city on their early lives. Some or all of the characters could experience life as castoffs—leftover shards of personas created by a transdimensional entity known as the Changing God. An entire Numenera campaign in which the characters attempt to uncover their own shattered histories—along with those of the region—could lead to unique and exciting discoveries.

GETTING THERE FROM THE WEST

Travel in the Ninth World is rarely easy, and perhaps there is no route more difficult than one that crosses the entire continent. Getting to the fairly civilized areas of the

Protectorate from more established western lands like the Steadfast is a journey that one would do well not to embark upon lightly.

But for those with the means, or the determination, there are always ways. The Grey Grasp is perhaps the most common means of travel, but also the longest and not without its dangers. There are other ways to get to the Sagus Protectorate from the west, but they are likely no easier or safer than the Grey Grasp.

THE GREY GRASP

There's a trade road that travels beyond the Beyond, past the Clock of Kala. It runs past marshlands polluted with the runoff of aeons-old chemical processes, past broad plains where enormous aerial predators swoop down upon unsuspecting caravans, all the way to the Sagus Protectorate. The road is known by many different names, depending on where you come from and who tells you its stories—Etsa's Folly, Wuolfokway, and the Silver Passage—but most know it as the Grey Grasp.

The Grey Grasp is not an easy road, and in truth, you'd be hard-pressed to call it a road at all. It's a wide passageway at best, a nearly invisible path at worst, and laden with unknown dangers on all sides every step of the way. The only way to follow it—and know that you are still on the right track—is by keeping a visual holdfast on the thin ribbon of silver that runs through the center of it. The ribbon is almost imperceptible during the day, but when darkness falls, it shines like a beacon leading off into the distance.

The land that the Grasp runs through is wild, treacherous, and mostly unplumbed by human hands. Long sections of it are heavily shrouded in a swirling, near-black substance that seems to reach and grasp for living entities in its midst. But those fumbling, seizing hands are a small risk in comparison to stepping off the roadway, where ferocious abhumans, feral automatons, and monstrous aerial predators seek their prey.

A few people—primarily those who seek fortune or excitement or perhaps just an answer to an inexplicable mystery—would argue that the journey is worth the dangers and demands. Others say they wouldn't set foot along the Grasp for all the shins in the Protectorate.

THE MOANING STATUE

A moaning, blue metal statue deep in an ancient, hidden cave along the western end of the Southern Wall allows you to travel to a similar cave near the Tower of Birds. It costs each person something different—as soon as you enter the chamber in which it resides, the statue takes the thing it most desires from your person. And then it opens its arms to you. Those who step inside to receive the statue's mechanical embrace awaken in the arms of a singing statue made of yellow metal.

The trip takes about four days, but you're unlikely to remember any of the journey. No one seems to know how to travel in the opposite direction, east to west, but the rumor is that if you do, you will regain the memory of those lost days. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing is yet to be seen.

FLIGHT OF THE TETRAHYDRAS

A man named Visobel lives in Sun Passes By, a tiny village nestled in the shadow of the Black Riage near the Empty Sanctum. Once a year, Visobel and his mostly tame herd of tetrahydras make the long flight from the Steadfast to the landing area, the Caravanserai, at the top of the city of Sagus Cliffs. A ride can be bought for 20 shins per person, but Visobel makes no guarantees for safe arrival.

Southern Wall, page 211

Wuolfok is a commonly known constellation in the night sky. A fierce abykos of legend, Wuolfok is said to put an illusion of itself in the sky on the nights it wanders the walk, hunting for those carrying transdimensional numenera.

The Wandering Walk intersects with the Grey Grasp just past the Clock of Kala and even runs parallel to it for a short distance before veering off.

Moaning statue: *level 6. Finding the hidden cave entrance is a level 7 Intellect task, provided that you're in the right general area.*

Tower of Birds, page 96

Abykos, page 230

Wandering Walk, page 187

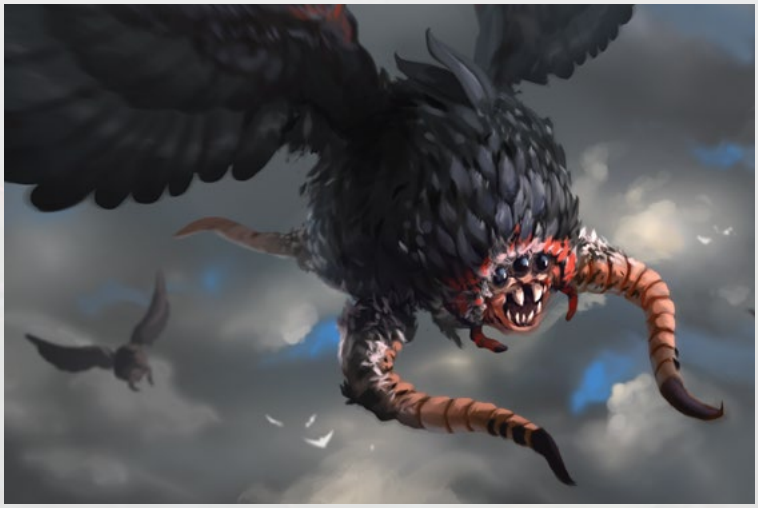
Clock of Kala, page 213

Abhuman, page 13

Black Riage, page 177

Empty Sanctum, page 178

Tetrahydra, page 262



THE CHANGING GOD

Changing God: *level 10*

No one but the Changing God himself knows where he hails from, but it's clear that he is not originally a being of the Ninth World.

In many ways—but unbeknownst to nearly everyone—the history, the culture, and even the landscape of Greater Garravia has been greatly shaped by one individual, a man known as the Changing God. A brilliant and determined scientist, but one who is also flawed and selfish, the Changing God has lived for centuries, a distinction that has allowed him a great deal of time for learning and experimenting. Some of his accomplishments include the following.

Much of the technology that is still used today was developed or honed by his experiments. Many of his abandoned devices and technologies have been incorporated into the culture of the area's cities, although they aren't likely used in the way that he intended them to be.

Cult of the Changing God, page 105

A number of factions and organizations, including the Cult of the Changing God, came about and continue to exist because of his legacy.

The Endless Battle, a centuries-old war that has scarred the landscape and taken thousands of lives, was started at least in part as the result of the Changing God's actions.

The key to the Changing God's character is that while he's outwardly concerned with doing the right things, on the inside he is mostly a narcissist and a coward.

His experiments with the Tides, a powerful and invisible force in the world, woke an ancient and dangerous energy construct called the Sorrow.

There are rumors of other impacts. It's possible the Changing God had a secret hand in stirring up or creating the warlike race known as the Tabaht long ago, or perhaps the Machine Heart, deep in Garravia Sound, is a product of his experiments. No one knows for sure how deep his influence goes.

Perhaps the Changing God's biggest impact on the area comes not from himself directly, but from his creations. Long ago, he discovered a way to use the Tides to transfer his consciousness into other bodies. For centuries, he has continued to prolong his existence by using up and casting off the many vessels that have held his consciousness. Like a snake shedding its skin, he has moved from life to life, fleeing the castoff bodies when they sustained too much damage or when he felt he had experienced them for long enough. Thus, he gained the appellation "the Changing God."

What he didn't realize was that the husks he left behind, though often severely damaged by the time he vacated them, were not empty. Each time he tears his mind from one of these husks, a new consciousness is born inside. The castoff

vessels retain individual sentience, with the barest memories of the Changing God's exploits within them.

The Changing God doesn't care that he has abandoned hundreds of broken children to fend for themselves. He is a man of science and progress, and has little use for shells that have fallen short of his goal. More than a century ago, he transitioned his consciousness to a body on a faraway moon and has remained there ever since, continuing his research.

CASTOFFS

The castoffs themselves have altered the face of Greater Garravia in their own unique ways, above and beyond the effects of the Changing God.

No one knows how many castoffs there have been, but at least a few hundred are scattered throughout Greater Garravia alone. It's likely that others exist elsewhere, but many of the castoffs, particularly those outside the Changing God's area of influence, have no idea who they are or how they came to be. They do know that they have been used and abandoned. They also know that they live longer than most humans do (perhaps in part due to their ability to heal quickly), that they draw the attention of the Sorrow because of the ways their bodies inherently abuse the Tides, and that they experience Tidal surge effects that project their pain onto others nearby.

From the outside, the majority of castoffs seem to be ordinary people, perhaps even a bit dull, though others are well-known leaders and heroes. Some lived aeons ago and no longer walk the Ninth World, while others remain, continuing to contribute or destroy in large and small ways. No matter the fate or legacy of a castoff, most people would be surprised to hear that they were anything other than human.

Some of the castoffs still living in Greater Garravia are:

- Maralel, the First Castoff, Endless Battle, page 70
- The Blackmoor, Black Cube, page 87
- Arahan, Lost Sea, page 63
- Endira Thirdloss, Tower of Birds, page 97
- Inifere, Valley of Dead Heroes, page 58
- Paj Rekken, Endless Battle, page 90
- Melmoth Leviarm, Sagus Cliffs, page 107
- Matkina, Underbelly, page 133
- Riastrad, Cliff's Edge, page 136

"You want to know my story? Fine. I was born here, in the Bloom, my body wrapped in Bloom-tongues."

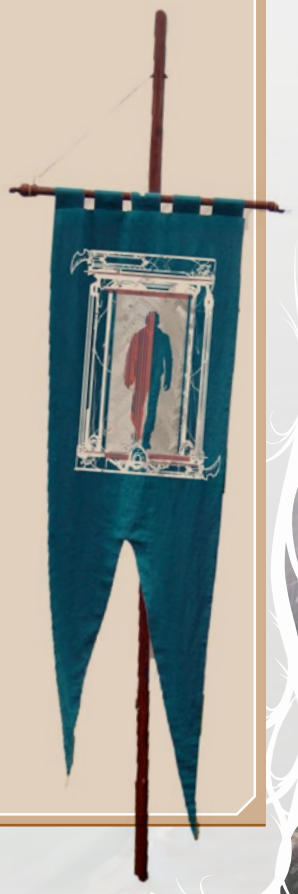
~Matkina, a castoff

Sorrow: *level 10; attacks do no damage but knock the PC one step down the damage track*

Tides, page 151

Damage track, page 93

The Bloom, page 38



THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TABAHT

Most stories about the Tabaht imply that they were something other than human, as everything about them gave the impression that they were created as perfect beings of war.

In the earliest histories of the Ninth World, the area south of Greater Garravia saw the marching armies of the Tabaht, a tribe that claimed dominance over a vast swath of land. They held combat as the noblest expression of self, and waged war across the face of the Protectorate for resources, territory, and status, but mostly they fought to control the Underspine, a great, curving, jeweled structure in an exquisitely carved underground city. Though no reliable records exist, it's thought that the Tabaht believed the Underspine to be both god and servant, conferring enormous power while also directing their actions.

It's believed that the Underspine was somehow responsible for the nurturing and development of the Tabaht crèches, and without it, they could not continue their genetic line.

The Tabaht saw themselves as the chosen people, the rulers of what they called New Earth. To earn this title, however, they had to prove themselves against those who wanted to seize the land from them.

Some of the Tabaht's battlefields still remain, the trampled soil watered so heavily with blood and the strange energies of their weapons that nature has not yet reclaimed the areas.

Despite their penchant for power and destruction, the Tabaht eschewed using weapons that laid waste to the land through gravitics, magnetics, and time-bending disruptions. In fact, they vowed annihilation on those who employed such weapons and devices. The Tabaht intended to be the rulers of the New Earth, after all, not the keepers of a destroyed slag pit.

"By the Black Three" is a colloquialism commonly heard in Sagus Cliffs.

Common Slang of the Sagus Protectorate, page 158

But the weapons they wielded were equally fearsome: beams of plasma, spears of flame and frost, monofilament-tipped shafts fired from handheld launchers that could penetrate even the strongest defenses, war constructs, and more. They traveled far to find their weapons, seeking caches of dangerous devices that they could modify in their inimitable style. The resulting weapons were biomechanical, serrated, and highly stylized—an artistic statement of death.

Ogesti tel Kotu: *level 8; Armor 5*

New Tabaht, page 109

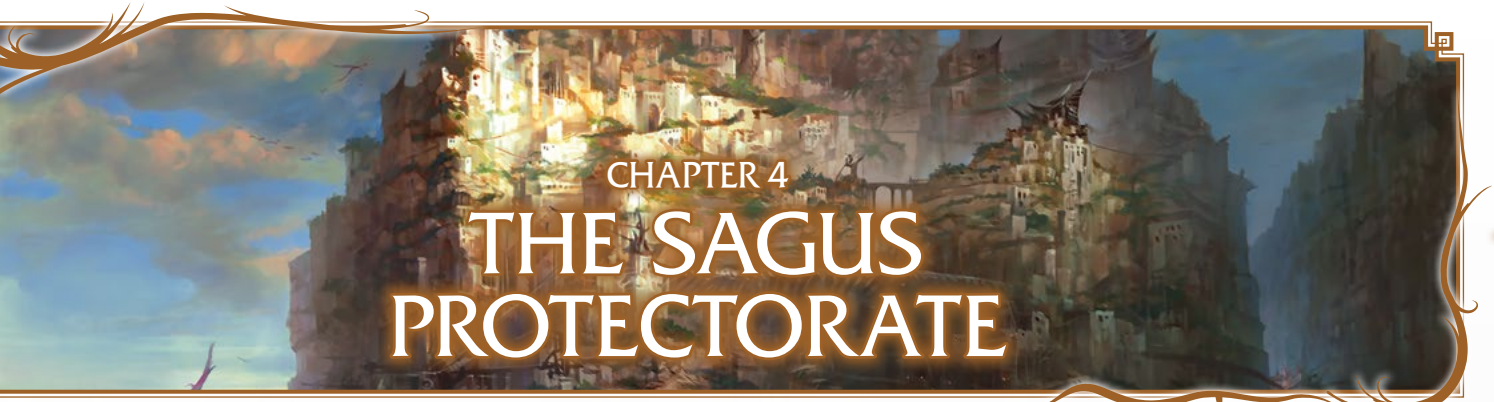
The Tabaht became a nightmare for those who existed outside the protection of the Underspine. Newcomers learned to settle beyond the range of the Tabaht, but even this was no guarantee of protection. The raiders drove them into the fertile but reality-warping valley surrounding M'ra Jolios, into the lava plain of Ossiphagan, and even up into the ruins that would one day become Sagus Cliffs.

In the end, the Tabaht were wiped out, but not by the hand of any foe; their destruction was not by warfare, but by accident. A massive detonation brought their city down upon their heads, burying both their leaders and the Underspine.

The land still shows signs of the former Tabaht civilization. Occasionally, their weapons turn up, cruel implements of grey and black that rip and tear their targets. And some of their leaders—Kalaghat Anvor, Vostuleh Lo, and Ogesti tel Kotu—still live in fairy tales and myth as the "Black Three."

For a long time, that was all that remained of the Tabaht. Weapons and devices of destruction. Stories. Buried bodies of the dead. Most people hoped it would stay that way forever.

But, alas, that was not to be. It has recently come to light that at least one member of the Tabaht is still alive. Despite all odds, the former warlord Ogesti tel Kotu survived and resides in the city of Sagus Cliffs. Perhaps due to his leadership, or perhaps on their own, a fledging group calling itself the New Tabaht has begun to rise from the ashes of those dead armies. Modeling itself closely after the tribe of old, but with an eye toward fixing the mistakes of their predecessors, the New Tabaht is building an army in the pockets and shadows of Greater Garravia, amassing weapons and forces, preparing to prove that they, and they alone, are still the chosen people.



CHAPTER 4

THE SAGUS PROTECTORATE

The Sagus Protectorate was once a vast and respectable kingdom, if not quite an empire. Controlled by the city of Sagus Cliffs, the territory spanned the majority of Greater Garravia, bounded by the Arvrin Wood to the west, Garravia Sound to the south, and the Tempest Waste to the north. For a brief moment in time, it was perfectly poised to stretch into something even greater than what it already was.

But time and war and enemies both new and old began to take their toll on the Protectorate, ravaging it until it had mostly shrunk to the immediate environs of its once-proud capital city, Sagus Cliffs, and the adjacent predator-city known as the Bloom.

While no longer the center of leadership that it once was, the Sagus Protectorate remains possibly the most influential and powerful region in Greater Garravia. Not even its small size—it covers a stretch of land less than 20 miles (32 km) wide—prevents it from growing and thriving. This is largely due to its strategic location, which allows it to remain the primary trading hub within the area. Ocean-faring vessels dock at the bustling Rew Harbor, sputtering dirigibles and small airships land at the Caravanserai at the top of the city crag, and more than a few transdimensional portals in the Bloom open to faraway dimensions, all of which continue to bring a steady stream of unique, sought-after items to the area.

Even the people alive today—most of whom have never seen the Protectorate in its full glory—have heard the tales of the shining kingdom and dream of the moment when their homeland will again extend its borders and regain the vast power and prestige that it once enjoyed.

SAGUS CLIFFS

Sagus Cliffs is a city built upon a great crag that rises more than half a mile (1 km) into the sky. Winding its way down to the water through switchbacks and cutout caverns, the city is vast, both vertically and horizontally. The crag it sits atop seems like a natural geological formation; however, its strata are built not from rock, but from the ruins of preceding generations and prior worlds. The shifting, uneven nature of the debris makes for unsteady ground, and some areas of the city are falling—or have fallen—from the cliff face into the oceans below. At the cliff's base, the ocean crashes and swirls around a reef of ancient technology from ages past.

Centuries ago, this thriving city was the heart of the Sagus Protectorate. Built largely on the backs of slaves, the city offered a prosperous, luxurious life, at least for those fortunate enough to be in the upper levels

Arvrin Wood, page 92

Garravia Sound, page 94

Tempest Waste, page 101

The Bloom, page 38

Rew Harbor, page 18

Sagus Cliffs citizens heave most of the city's detritus into the nearby Bloom, trucking vast quantities of garbage into alternate dimensions.

of society. Since then the city's fortunes—and territory—have waxed and waned in response to circumstances.

Though the people of Sagus Cliffs continue to regard themselves as the rulers of the old Protectorate, they now control little beyond the city limits. Still, the city remains a vibrant hub of culture and conflict, with a population of around 100,000 people.

The city is a morass of competing influences: economic, political, social, religious, and intellectual. Factories and marketplaces churn and hum next to counting houses, temples, and universities. The city's residential neighborhoods range in quality from poor to ultrawealthy, and are filled with factions, cults, guilds, and informal groups.

Caravanserai, page 29

The majority of the citizens live in the vast array of houses and buildings that sprawl across the cliff's sides and surface. Lush green terraces overhang the ocean below. The houses clustered together beneath these dripping terraces are little more than shanties and hovels. Others—those in the open air—are strangely fluted spires, delicate works of marble and glass. And a surprising number of the homes hang far over the water below. Some precariously hold on through elaborate winches, pulleys, and wires, while others seem to have no such support, practically hovering under their own power. At the base of the cliff, the ocean sweeps around a rubble of houses that have fallen; only those who are unlucky or unwise—or both—call this wet, dangerous area home.

The remainder of the city is split into a number of informal districts, divided mostly by location, class, and culture. At the top of the crag, the rulers, scholars, and elite pass their time in Government Square, while travelers and traders land at the Caravanserai. In the lower districts of Cliff's Edge and the Underbelly, those with less money and even less means slink in the shadows, watching and waiting for the opportunity to better their lot any way they can. The city's bustling marketplaces—the most popular of which is Circus Minor—bring everyone together to buy and sell not just goods, but also experiences. Along the bottom of the cliff, the Reef of Fallen Worlds and Rew Harbor connect the city to

the sound. Beyond the city proper, woven among a ring of ancient, crumbling walls, is the massive—and mostly uninhabited—junkyard known as Crefton.

Bridges of energy link the different parts of the city together; these passageways are considered essential to the infrastructure and economy. There are also tunnels—some secret, some more widely known and used—that wind through the depths of the cliff, allowing someone to slip mostly unseen from one part of the city to another, should they wish to do so. Some of these underground byways are naturally formed, while others were created by humans—past and present—and still others were dug by large tunneling creatures known as sticha.

POLITICS

For hundreds of years, Sagus Cliffs acted as a conduit for trade between the west and those who came across the waters of Garravia Sound. Travelers who wanted to use the harbor of the City of the Ancients, as it was once called, had to pay a nominal fee of the numenera, shins, labor, or other commodities. Thanks to this usage tariff—and the common practice of using slaves—the city began to amass an enormous treasury. The rulers used this accumulated power and wealth to significantly expand the borders.

Just as Sagus Cliffs was on the verge of expanding its reach yet again, a slave revolt spilled from the depths of the Bloom and toppled the power structures, forcing a dramatic rewriting of the city's plans for the future. At first, those who'd accumulated money and power laid low, pretending to be paupers among the rest while they slowly co-opted the former slaves with coin and prestige. But over time, the old ways reasserted themselves, as did the old leaders. By intermarrying with the children of the former slaves, the former aristocrats seized on the new power structure and returned themselves to prominence as the Slave Families—a cruel joke, considering that most of the original slaves had been neatly excised from the families.

The city's inhabitants, or at least those with a semblance of power, continue to regard themselves as the rulers of the

The Bloom, page 38

Stichus, page 131

Slavery is no longer permitted in Sagus Cliffs. There are slavers in the city, but they can sell their slaves only to those outside Sagus Cliffs.

entire Protectorate, but in practice they rule little outside their walls. The city's leaders, holed up in their high point of Government Square, are more concerned with besting one another politically and socially than with maintaining the land outside their shell. They scheme and jockey for position, retaining the city's imperial pretensions and enslaving its residents to the mindset that their glory will rise again. Sagus Cliffs shows every sign of an empire in decline yet again, with false decadence the order of the day.

This blatant corruption of the system makes cynics of many of its residents. Those who've been broken by it are easy to spot: they trust few others, have mercenary hearts, and are quick to take advantage of those weaker than themselves. Even the altruists of the city must approach their dealings with cynicism, lest they be taken advantage of by less scrupulous partners. They consider themselves cosmopolitan, able to deal well with people from all walks of life, but they fear to venture far from the city's walls, and they are quick to judge those who venture within.

Memovira, page 42

THE RULING COUNCIL

Near the top of the city, in Government Square, those with money, power, and potential rule as part of the city council—namely, the five remaining Slave Families, each of which sends a representative to the council. Those representatives choose one from among their ranks to serve as leader of the council for a year. The representatives are as varied as the families, which often means that simply choosing the next council leader is an elaborate and lengthy process of bribes, behind-the-back deals, and bluster. The representatives' disagreements rarely turn into full-out warfare, but a great deal of time is wasted in getting very close to that point.

Other representatives on the council include the Memovira (the moniker taken by whoever is the current ruling crime lord in the Bloom); a member each from the Sounders' Guild (the sailors), the Bridgers' Guild (the infrastructure and road people), the Mercantile Exchange, and the Slavers' Consortium; and a representative from the University, who is usually more frightened of the real-world power of the Slave Families and thus easily cowed by one faction or another. Most of these, with the possible exception of the Memovira, end up having very little influence in the face of the Slave Families.

Lord Vuntgen: *level 6; tactics, strategy, and planning as level 7; health 20; Armor 2*

Lord Vuntgen: A man who always seems to have his hands in a surprising number of pots, Lord Vuntgen is both smarter

and kinder than his loud, barking voice indicates. Short, saggy, completely hairless, and wearing yellow robes that match the oddly yellow hue of his skin, Lord Vuntgen is hard to miss as he walks through the city. Perhaps this is why more people recognize him as a representative, an issue that causes him problems just as often as it provides solutions. He is usually trailed by two or three guards in his employ who are also clothed in Vuntgen's yellow livery.

Lordess Greonze: Perhaps the nicest word that can be used to describe Lordess Greonze is "haughty." The Lordess stands nearly 7 feet (2 m) tall and often wears special shoes that float a few extra inches above the ground. It's impossible to see the Lordess's face clearly, as it's always covered by a shimmering mask, but that drit- and stone-filled voice is unmistakable. Never satisfied, always disappointed, and ever full of criticism, the Lordess has an opinion on everything—and it's never good.

Likel Sperionk: Likel married into a Slave Family, and the other representatives never let him forget it (though it's interesting to note that the Lordess also married into a Slave Family, but no one ever mentions that, at least not in the Lordess's hearing). Likel works hard to earn the respect of the other council members, as well as that of the Sagus Cliffs residents, but few notice the work he does. In his first month on the council, he devised and implemented a plan to deliver a steady supply of clean water to a particularly necessitous section of Cliff's Edge, and he has plans for similar projects elsewhere.

Kisaf: The youngest member on the council, Kisaf also comes from the lowliest of the Slave Families. Quiet, smart, and easily intimidated, he knows a great deal about what's going on, even if he rarely says anything at the table. The other representatives think that Kisaf is hiding something behind his silence—perhaps he's planning a takeover or working with one of the other representatives on the side?—but it's more likely that he's just taking copious notes to cover his shyness.

Anat Pertur: Everyone calls her the Black Verred, after the obsidian weapon she wields. She hates the moniker but loves the weapon, so rather than give up her sword, she has stopped trying to get people to use her given name. Fidgety and feisty, Anat is better known for her combat skills than her diplomacy or tactics. She can be protective of Kisaf, adding fuel to the rumors that he's scheming behind the others' backs. Having Anat sit through a council meeting without pretending to try to cut off the head of one or more of the other representatives is a rarity.

One of the council's main purposes is to ensure the safety and well-being of the residents by providing protection, clean water, healing services, and other things that are purportedly paid for by the tariffs placed upon the residents. However, very little of this comes to pass. Whenever the citizens attempt to bring this up, they are quickly put in their places through an elaborate web of crime, corruption, intra-family maneuvering, and the judicious application of force.

The council also plays a support role in the eternal, bloody war known as the Endless Battle that plays out in the Bordermarch Hills to the northeast. Some of the funds and weapons that are collected or confiscated from around the city are grudgingly funneled to support the side they believe is most likely to win.

Despite their inability to accomplish much inside the city's walls, most members of the council continue to believe that someday they will again have power over the entirety of the Protectorate. Perhaps if they only looked outward, beyond their petty squabbles and pushes for power, they would see the truth: the rest of the Protectorate has moved on without them in ways that could become a serious challenge to their plans of expansion. The New Tabaht is forming an army of warriors in secret pockets around the territory. Something is causing trouble deep within the Bloom itself. The Endless War rages on, destroying lives and land, with no loyalty to anything beyond its own eternal conflict. In fact, those in the know would say that the entire area is sprinkled with

Anat Pertur: *level 6, combat skills as level 7; Armor 1; carries a black verred engraved with silver symbols that are identical to the* silvered tattoos *etched on her skin*

A verred is a medium weapon that resembles a sword with two forked blades.

Verred, page 80

Silvered tattoo, page 26

Vuntgen guard: *level 5; Armor 3*

Lordess Greonze: *level 6, social interactions as level 5, intimidation and Intellect defense as level 8; typically carries a variety of cyphers, including a level 4 force shield projector that grants +3 to Armor*

Force shield projector, page 286

Likel Sperionk: *level 5; leadership, organizing, and positive social interactions as level 6*

Endless Battle, page 70

Bordermarch Hills, page 88

Cliff's Edge, page 26

Kisaf: *level 5, lore and knowledge of Sagus Cliffs as level 7, social interactions as level 3; carries a journal that provides an asset in lore and knowledge of Sagus Cliffs to anyone who spends an hour reading it*

The Council of Sagus Cliffs is unofficially aligned with the Changing God's side in the Endless Battle, while the Oasis of M'ra Jolios is unofficially aligned with the First Castoff's side.

In the past, the ruling Memovira has achieved a lot of power in the city, including de facto control over Cliff's Edge.

The people of Sagus Cliffs regard the Bloom as a menace and a nightmare, and most avoid it if they possibly can.

Levy: *level 6; Armor 3*

Sigyn: *level 7; Armor 5; cochlear implant enables her to interact with and control up to two dozen level 3 drones at any given time; carries a level 8 artifact that allows her to capture a living thing within long range inside a harmless energy cage for up to an hour*

The Sounders' Guild, Bridgers' Guild, Mercantile Exchange, and others are designed to support and protect their workers, but many of them are, were, or will be corrupted by the lure of easy money or cowed by the strong arm of power.

Levy Machine, page 32

Aeon Priests, page 31

Government Square, page 31

Visitant, page 120

groups and individuals vying for power, knowledge, or other more nebulous and likely nefarious ends.

THE LEVIES

The levies are soldiers appointed as the peacekeepers and law-bringers of Sagus Cliffs. They are identical large, broad-shouldered males clad in the silver and indigo uniform of the city.

It's clear even from the quickest of glances that levies are not human, although it's hard to pinpoint exactly why at first. Perhaps it's because their features are too identical and perfect—and yet they are so very forgettable at the same time. Most people find it difficult to look a levy in the face for too long, as they soon begin to experience a vague sense of unease. Although in general, levies don't seem particularly smart—they are more brawn than brain—they do seem to sense people's unease and use this as part of their tactics, pressing home their advantage during interactions.

In addition to identical appearances, most of the levies speak in a similar manner, with comparable voices and intonations, and they rarely use self-identifiers when they speak, almost giving the impression that they are part of a hive mind. They aren't. Instead, they are individual creatures crafted in a machine by Aeon Priests in Government Square.

Each levy is built from a complex compound of chemicals and bodily substances donated by citizens of Sagus Cliffs. Levies last for about a year, at which point they return to the machine and degenerate. They understand the circumstances of their creation, and always seem to be aware of how much time they have left to live.

Almost all levies have a unique but vague "memory" or impression of life before they existed. They believe these memories come from the body that was used to bring them to life, and most carry a small fetish or charm to give thanks to that body for their existence. Rarely, a levy's "memory" is negative, causing the levy to act erratically or aggressively toward others of its kind. These *unseams* are automatically returned to the machine for degeneration before their year of service is complete.

The captain of the levies is a patient and determined middle-aged human woman named Sigyn. She is somewhat unique in that she has donated to the Levy Machine more than twenty times (most citizens donate only once). Due to this, she bonds well with the levies in her command and can communicate with them better than most.

Sigyn is constantly surrounded by a swarm of small drones. Occasionally she whispers to one of them and it whizzes away, or another will return, hover near her ear, and communicate a message. These drones are her means of directing the levies in the city, all of which report and answer to her.

CIRCUS MINOR

Circus Minor is one of the city's vibrant hearts, a bustling combination of festival and marketplace. When public events (including Slave Family weddings, government speeches, and criminal executions) are held, they typically take place here. Colorful plant and flower life thrives along the walkways and edges, matching the vibrant colors of the merchant tents. The air throngs with energy, songs, and calls from the artists, performers, visitants, and others who call Circus Minor their place of business, or just a favorite place to visit for a day.

Throughout, there are any number of interesting—or nauseating, depending on your taste—landmarks, activities, groups, and merchant stalls to visit and explore.

MERCHANT STALLS

As Circus Minor is a market of some size, most things are available here, if you know where to look and what payment to offer. Other marketplaces in the city offer mundane items such as food and clothing, allowing Circus Minor vendors to specialize in the weird, the macabre, and the one-of-a-kind.

Numenera Dealer: This small stall is laden with broken devices, scavenged parts, and glittering vials filled with gels of all colors.

All items are precariously perched atop each other, making it seem as if a single touch might send everything toppling.

Prata, the stall's proprietor, hides beneath a low-slung cowl and voluminous robes. But her copious dress can't disguise the fact that her movements are off, as if too many joints inhabit too small a space. Those who look closely catch hints of verdant chitin and amber mandibles beneath her hood. But her voice—her voice is golden. If questioned, she waves her appearance off as nothing, but in truth, she is slowly mutating into an insectoid creature, possibly as the result of being around such large amounts of the numenera all the time.

Most of Prata's offerings aren't that unusual—various cyphers, oddities, and odds and ends—but she always has one or two rare or powerful items stowed away for special customers. Recently, most of those items have been strong detonation cyphers of one form or another, which she offers for 10 shins apiece.

Weird Dealers in Rare Books: This stall doesn't have a name, but everyone knows the place—along with its owners, Falinda and Steristi—as the "weird dealers in rare books." Falinda and Steristi are virtually interchangeable. In fact, with their masked faces and hooded robes, it's impossible to determine their gender, race, or even their corporeal status. The only difference between the two is that Falinda speaks often, while Steristi never does.

The stall is filled with shelves and tables, all littered with books, scrolls, and other reading materials. But the real draw is the small collection of microblades that rest inside a clear box made of stronglass. The microblades carry vast amounts of information, but the subject doesn't reveal itself until the blade is injected beneath the skin. They are costly, around 40 shins each, so scholars and knowledge seekers often pool their resources to purchase a single blade. Whoever injects it then records the information in some fashion for the others to share.

Prata: *level 3; knowledge of the numenera as level 6*

Falinda: *level 4; knowledge of history, geography, and cartography as level 5*

Steristi: *level 4; knowledge of the numenera, astrology, and languages as level 5*

When inserted below the skin, a microblade allows the user to become trained in a random topic. If the user is already trained in that topic, they become specialized instead.

Yesterday's Wings: This large makeshift stall is run by a handsome young man named Jiror. He's gregarious and charming, and he exudes a sexuality that draws large crowds to his booth at any time of night or day. Jiror specializes in all things that fly or soar. Birds and bats—both living and mechanical—can be had for 2 to 5 shins, while parts and accessories for various flying vehicles cost upward of 10 shins. He also offers personal flying lessons (to the right person, of course) and fluttering, flapping toys.

Jiror: *level 4; positive social interactions, including charm, flirtation, and seduction, as level 6*

The question of where his supplies come from is often up in the air, and it's not uncommon to hear accusations leveled at Jiror over helping himself to something from someone else's stock. Perhaps due to the man's charming smile, or perhaps because he's actually innocent, these altercations never seem to amount to anything.

OTHER PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NOTE

The Clock: A squat tower covered with rotating dials and chronometers that spin in all different directions, the Clock is unstuck in time, existing in many different moments at once. It's difficult to tell what its original purpose was, if it even had one, and now it serves mostly as a waypoint for places rather than for times. "Let's meet in the Clock's north shadow" is a common way of planning get-togethers.

Slidelock puzzle: *level 9*

Members of the group known as the Cult of the Changing God have taken up a position at the Clock. Although no one seems to know why they chose this spot, everyone is used to seeing their blue and silver tents and streamers flapping in the breeze. The gathering is led by two of the cultists, Casmeen and Mimeon. Casmeen is petite, with hungry, maniacal eyes and hair that has been bleached to near-white, while Mimeon is unnaturally tall, gaunt, and sour faced. Members of the group are happy to talk to passersby, most likely in an attempt to recruit them into the cult.

Cult of the Changing God, page 105

Casmeen: *level 3*

Mimeon: *level 3*

Although most people don't know this, it's possible to enter the Clock. A round panel on the southwest side that looks like ornamentation is actually a complicated slidelock puzzle. The interior of the Clock

is crystalline and metal, full of frictionless engines, incomprehensible devices, and transdimensional energies. Surges of the latter pass harmlessly through the chamber, making the air feel as if it's constantly vibrating.

At the very center of the interior is a tiny workshop run by a man who calls himself the Clockmaker. The Clockmaker will admit that he isn't sure if he actually made the clock, despite his title. In fact, he can't remember much of what has happened to him in the past, including how he got here or how long he's been here. If something isn't happening right now, he has likely already forgotten about it.

One thing he is knowledgeable about is the device he's working on: an egg-shaped automaton that spins in endless, silent circles. Shelves upon shelves are filled with replicas of this device, although he doesn't recall making them. If he likes someone, he will offer them one of the automatons, provided they give the automaton a name, saying it aloud as they write it down in the large book he has. The book is filled with pages and page of names, each one in a different handwriting. The Clockmaker is guarded by a square floating box that trails after him.

Execution Dais: At the center of Circus Minor is a metal dais where public executions of hardcore criminals are performed. These executions are intricate affairs between the criminal and their executioner, and are one of the few forms of public entertainment that everyone seems to agree upon, whether they reside in the lows of the Underbelly or the heights of Government Square.

The executioners are unique to the individual, as they're essentially born from the individual's body. When the execution begins, the criminal is in a state of waking nightmare, describing their horrible visions out loud. As they do so, their rambles transmute into long, ropy strands that look eerily like their entrails have left their body and become sentient. The entrail-body carefully wraps the strands around the criminal and, over a period of days, the cords slowly tighten, squeezing the captive to death.

Each executioner is named after the being it is born from. Thus, if a woman named Sulime commits a crime and is put to death here, her executioner is called Death-of-Sulime.

An obese individual, commonly known as the Devourer of Wrongs, also waits nearby. The Devourer is a member of the cannibalism cult known as the Dendra O'hur, and it is his job to receive and eat the bodies of the executed criminals. In doing so, the Devourer discovers all of the criminal's crimes, secrets, and accomplices. Sometimes what the Devourer discovers is that the criminal was, in fact, not a criminal at all. But of course, by then it's too late.

Most of the executions and devourings take place over a period of days, though some last as long as a week. Throughout each event, armed levies stand guard around the space, ensuring that no one attempts to disrupt the death process. The city also hires a man named Ranperi who sets up devices that control and regulate the noise and smell levels of the experience based on the crowd's reaction.

The Butterfly Eater: The Butterfly Eater walks the market during the daylight hours. Her dark red hair is uplifted in a wild pattern and held there by a series of long sticks.

Death-of-: *level equal to the person that they are part of*

Devourer of Wrongs: *level 6*

Dendra O'hur, page 106

Clockmaker: *level 4, history as level 1; followed by a floating box artifact that does 5 points of Intellect damage to anyone attempting to harm the Clockmaker or steal anything from within the Clock*

Spinning automaton: *level 5 cypher; activates when its given name is spoken (within short range), opening to reveal a mechanical plant. The plant produces a random level 2 cypher each day for 1d6 + 2 days.*

The long sticks in the Butterfly Eater's hair are light stabbing weapons called prailes.

Ranperi: *level 3; skills related to the numenera, micro-expressions, and human senses as level 4*

CIRCUS MINOR HEARSAY

The Art of Madness: A sculptor named Zaofi recently saw a biomechanical construct kill someone in town. Now he's obsessed with sculpting the creature and its victim, but he can't seem to get it right. He's desperately seeking information on the creature and the crime so that he can finally finish this sculpture and free his mind from the obsession.

Stolen Treasures: All throughout the market, buyers are finding their packs and pockets are suddenly heavier, reaching into them to find a hidden treasure. Often the objects are unique and expensive items that are sold nearby. Those who inquire will discover that the original objects have not gone missing—they still occupy their rightful places in the stall. Which ones are the replicas? And how are they being created and distributed?

THE WEIRD OF CIRCUS MINOR

The Fountain of Betrayal: Someone or something has placed a fountain made of purple stone near the Clock in Circus Minor. As the water flows over the side, some onlookers say they can see their loved ones in detail in the falls, often engaging in hurtful or criminal acts.

Port in the Storm: Along the cliffside of Circus Minor, there is a spot—about 10 feet by 10 feet (3 m by 3 m) square—where the weather never changes. Even when the rest of the marketplace is drenched, this spot stays completely dry.

Zaofi: *level 3*

Oddly, there is no Circus Major in Sagus Cliffs. If one ever existed, it seems to have been completely eradicated from people's minds and memories.

Levies, page 22

Memovira, page 42

Surgical automaton: *level 7*

Stichus, page 131

Datasphere, page 12

Her dress is covered in fluttering creatures, which also fill the space around her. None of the creatures are living—they are all biomechanical beasts that she has designed to record things around them. When she puts them on her tongue, she can extract the information stored in their internal mechanisms. Although the Butterfly Eater is reluctant to part with any of her pets, she is usually very interested in selling the information the creatures have discovered.

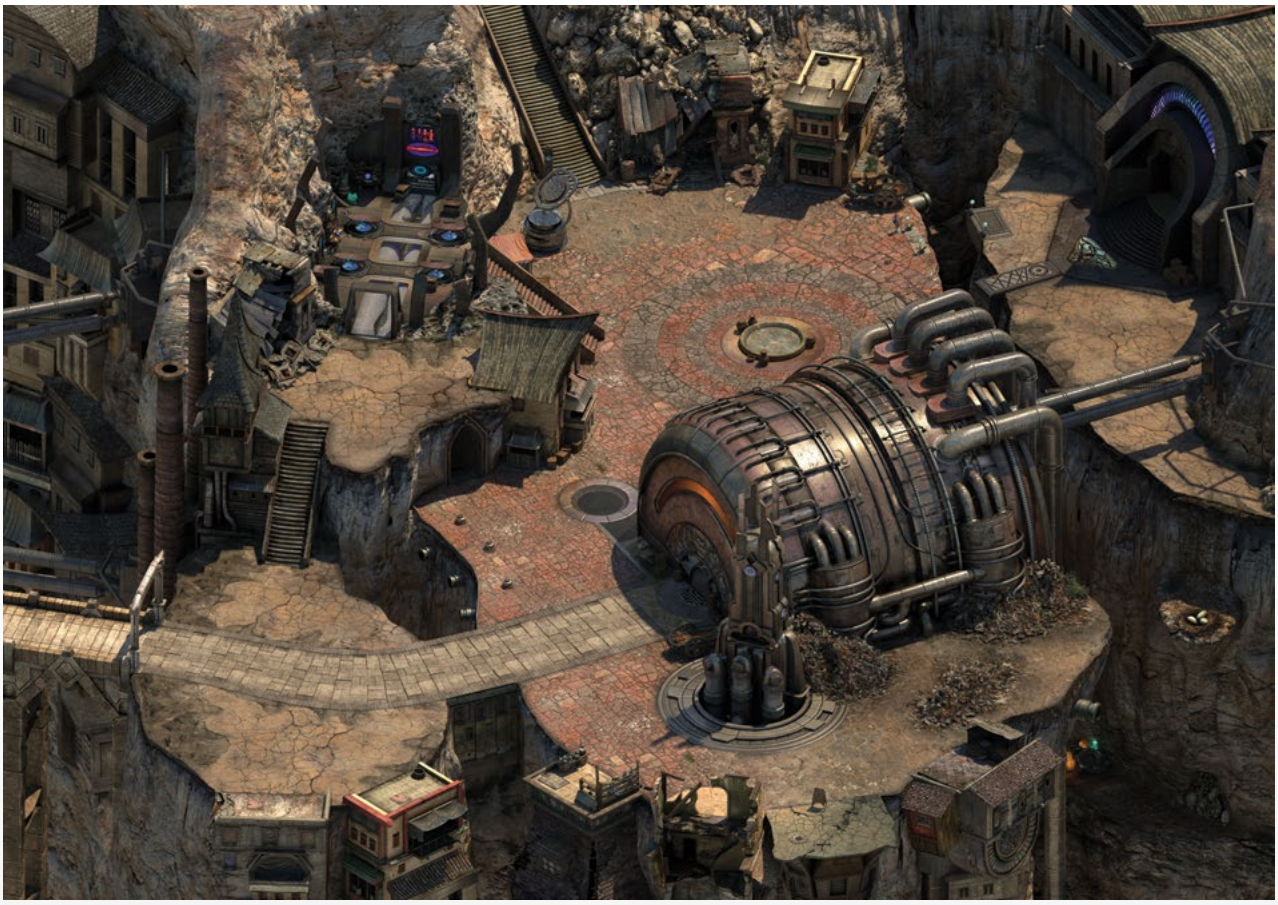
CLIFF'S EDGE

Cliff's Edge is a rough, low-class neighborhood that winds its way along the scarred face of the crag. The area is a marked contrast to Circus Minor. Ramshackle houses sit on both sides of the path—some abutting the cliff, and others hanging over the edge, clinging precariously to the rock. A few have already collapsed or fallen into the sea. To make matters worse, the ground beneath the district is being weakened by the tunneling sticha. Residents worry that the entire area is slowly crumbling into the sea, and there's no reason to think they're not correct.

The people, too, are markedly different. Gone is the boisterous, even festive, feel of Circus Minor. Life is hard here, and the general feeling is one of furtive speed and insidious dealings. Those who wander by are bitter and hard-eyed. Many are criminals. And those who aren't certainly have a few friends or family members who are. The levies have no presence here, leaving the Memovira to her de facto control over the districts. The Bloom crime lord often recruits her goons from this area of town.

PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NOTE

Chiurgical Parlor: One of the more well-known elements of Cliff's Edge is an outdoor chiurgical complex where surgical automatons can modify your body. These floating drones are armed with nasty blades and solid skills. However, they are not armed with anesthesia, nor with a concept of why that might be useful, so patients' experiences are often less than pleasant. Still, those with unusual needs travel far to receive implants, modifications, and, in particular, silvered tattoos. These often elaborate and expensive tattoos, which are created by the insertion of silver-colored nanoparticles just beneath the surface of the skin, are reported to have effects ranging from protection and healing to a direct connection to the datasphere. Silvered nails and teeth are



a cheaper alternative for those who can't afford the tattoos, but they typically last only a few months.

The parlor is owned by an old man named Jernaugh. His face is covered in a substance that makes his features resemble dark stone. Or perhaps his face is made of a dark stone that sometimes makes his features resemble human skin. He is a man who prides himself on telling the truth at all times, even if it makes everyone around him uncomfortable. For this reason, he sometimes recommends that potential clients don't ask about the levels of pain caused by some of the parlor's services.

Jernaugh is covertly a member of a secretive cult from the west known as the Jagged Dream, and it's probable that at least a few of the people who work with him at the parlor are members of his cell.

The Fifth Eye: Marked on the outside with a mural of many eyes painted above the door, this otherwise unremarkable tavern draws powerful psychics and interdimensional travelers like a lodestone. Five psychics own the bar—veterans of numerous conflicts around the region, including the hidden conflict known as the psychic war. Their presence draws powerful psychic beings to the bar from other worlds and dimensions, making up the majority of the clientele. Few but the bravest Sagus residents dare to set foot in this place.

The Fifth Eye sits in an ancient structure whose purpose seems to have involved pumping liquids of different kinds. The booths are made from converted metal tanks whose interiors have been cut open, with seating placed inside. Pipes of all sizes extend throughout the interior, sending fluids to the Fifth Eye from ancient reservoirs or storage tanks somewhere beneath the city. Nobody knows what the fluids are for, but some of them are potable and intoxicating. Others are highly dangerous, with unpredictable and sometimes deadly effects. Only the "safe" ones are sold to the public, but the bartender, Feriok, can occasionally be convinced to allow someone to drink from one of the more suspect pipes.

Jernaugh: *level 5, knowledge of medical procedures as level 6; Armor 4 due to his unusual skin; possesses a small device that releases a gas that causes all breathing, thinking creatures in short range to permanently lose all memory of the last minute*

Jagged Dream, page 224

The five owners always seem to be in the tavern, and thus it's always open.

Dhama of the Bloom: *level 4, illusions and perception as level 5*

Dhama of the Bloom: Dhama is the de facto leader of the psychic warriors. He's pudgy and middle-aged, with a wispy mustache. His are the eyes of a man who has passed through the gates of alien hells and returned, although not necessarily whole. His fingers, usually tightly wrapped around a glass, are strong and slim, a musician's fingers, or a strangler's. In the psychic war, he was a shaper of minds and perceptions. While he's glad to have left those days behind him relatively unnoticed and unscathed, his abilities continue to exert themselves, amplifying those of his comrades. He's much of the reason the bar is so psychically charged.

Feriok: *level 4*

Feriok: The bartender is a powerful-looking, bearded man—tall and stocky—who mostly sticks to the job at hand, but can sometimes be cajoled into telling stories or providing information.

Leto: *level 4, pleasant interactions and perception as level 5*

Leto: Some would say Leto is too talkative for her own good, but she's charming enough that no one seems to take offense. She wears clothes appropriate for a desert. Her face is sun-dried and lined, though she is relatively young. Her dark black eyes are akin to deep, empty pools, unnerving to look into. She often tells wild stories about the other

Theboros: *level 4, language and persuasion as level 5*

Theboros: Old and strong, Theboros's aquiline face is lined with years of brutal experience. His voice is a low rasp that is hard to hear in the din of the bar, particularly because he pulls his broad-brimmed hat down over his face. Theboros believes he is the last person in the world with knowledge of a particular weaponized meme—the Words of Qra—and he wrestles with the question of what to do with it. Unlike Dhama, Theboros is frustrated about the fact that he and the other veterans will never get credit for fighting their secret war against the Adversaries.

CLIFF'S EDGE HEARSAY

Lord Vuntgen, page 20

Out of Sight: Lord Vuntgen is trying to find someone to help get rid of the sticha that are digging beneath the city. He prefers not to know anything about how it's done, just to know that the problem has been taken care of.

Endless Battle, page 70

Changing God, page 14

Laak Attack: A woman named Madelia says that someone has been stealing items out of her curiosity shop. She is convinced it's either the feral kids who live nearby or the laaks that a local beggar has trained as thieves.

Jagged Dream, page 224

Laak, page 243

Outcast Stichus: A group of orphaned children has taken in a young stichus that was cast out by the others because of its mutated hands (which means it can't dig effectively). The kids are attempting to get it safely to the Underbelly where it can hide, but an angry mob has discovered them and is threatening to kill the creature.

Walking Dream: A Jagged Dream member named Clarion has been trying to recruit psychic veterans from the Fifth Eye into the Endless Battle on the side of the Changing God without success. She asks for help and, in return, promises an introduction to the Jagged Dream faction. Of course, anyone who knows about the Jagged Dream knows they are clandestine and secretive, so something about her story rings false.

THE WEIRD OF CLIFF'S EDGE

Haunted Booth: People avoid the darkened booth in the Fifth Eye, where it's possible to hear whispers and see the semitransparent hint of a female figure. Everyone has a different theory about why the woman attempts to strangle some who get too close.

War Song: Every few days, a hole about the size of a human head opens in the side of the cliff—never in the same spot—and you can hear the sounds of battle coming from the opening. It closes each time to the tune of a low, steady drumbeat.

psychic veterans, though she never seems quite clear on whether the stories are from the past, the future, or just potential futures.

Ziobe: Although few people know that Ziobe is a mlox, they still regard her as someone with supremely powerful senses and a deep knowledge of the numenera and the datasphere. Her face seems timeless, neither old nor young, unblemished and yet somehow imperfect. Her voice is musical, almost to the point of artifice. She sometimes presents herself as a mind-reader, but then she always backs away, saying, "No, no. I can't actually do that. It's just a joke."

CARAVANSERAI DISTRICT

Grant fair winds to those who away
Grant soft land to those who stay
Send us up and down all day
And save our loves from hands that stray

~ A prayer to the god of the Caravanserai, usually sung as a raucous toast

At the highest point of Sagus Cliffs is the gleaming Caravanserai District, a port of call for airships, fliers, gyrocopters, and other aerial vehicles and devices. A great deal of trading happens here, with everything from foods and spices to fabrics and amrita (a healing draught manufactured in the nearby city of M'ra Jolios) to devices and weapons changing hands.

The Caravanserai also contains an open-air hostel that charges 2 shins per night. The "rooms" are just open-air platforms that hang out over the cliff's edge. The hostel is managed by a middle-aged woman who calls herself Tranquility. She is inhumanly tall and lithe and graceful, with uncanny powers of persuasion.

The "god" of the Caravanserai is an ancient machine intelligence that is constructed of air molecules and energy. It was created long ago as a guardian and enforcer, but now has found its own sense of purpose by

Amrita, page 72

M'ra Jolios, page 65

Ziobe: *level 4, perception and numenera as level 6*

Mlox: *level 4; health 12; Armor 1; can make two attacks as a single action or fire a single beam of energy at a foe within long range that deals 8 points of damage. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 86.*

Tranquility: *level 3, persuasion and hospitality as level 5*

THE PSYCHIC WAR

The psychic war is a conflict that gripped Sagus Cliffs in the recent past, though a majority of the inhabitants were unaware that it was being waged. A malign group of beings made of pure thought emerged from another dimension via one of the doorways in the Bloom and began to wreak havoc upon the minds of Sagus Cliff citizens, inciting conflict, inflicting madness, and ruining lives. The psychics in the city banded together to fight these creatures, which they called the Adversaries. Many of them lost their minds or ended up brain dead in the struggle, but eventually they prevailed. Dhama and the others believe that a few Adversaries are still alive, watching the psychic warriors from afar, waiting for their moment to strike.

Dabur: *level 3, crafting as level 4, knowledge of the weather and the numenera as level 5; can carry up to a dozen cyphers safely within the specially crafted pockets of her suit*

Seskii, page 258

Cloud: *level 2; Armor 2*

Bloom gate: *level 8*

Silver orphan: *level 5; health 21; Armor 3; deals 8 points of damage with extruded sword (while lowering its Armor to 1). For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 115.*

protecting the Caravanserai and its patrons. Most people believe—or at least pretend to believe—that the god of the Caravanserai grants fair winds to ships that are leaving, helps arriving ships dock safely, and prevents anyone from tampering with vehicles that aren't theirs. They offer prayers in the form of drinking and flying songs and lay a portion of their trade goods or earnings at the god's "feet." Some also carry small idols of the god with them at all times, or paint its image on a hidden part of their ship to ensure safe passage through the skies.

Not even the beloved god of the Caravanserai seems strong enough to protect against the inclement weather, though. When storms rise off the sound and blast through Sagus Cliffs, it is the Caravanserai that often bears the brunt of the effect. Strong gusts and torrential downpours prevent takeoffs and landings, and sudden swirling eddies—known among fliers as "last breaths"—catch vehicles in their tumultuous spinning winds, smashing them against the crag and sending them spiraling down into the rough waters below. It's not unusual for the area to be closed off for days or weeks at a time due to weather conditions.

Dabur is a young woman who often sets up a small temporary stall in the Caravanserai during inclement weather. Dressed in a complicated suit with many pockets and accompanied by her companion—a young seskii she calls Cloud—Dabur sells crafted cyphers and tools, all of which are related to the weather in some way. Her most popular item is a fist-sized sphere that projects a dryglobe that is about 10 feet (3 m) in diameter. It provides protection against water and wind to everything within the dryglobe for 28 hours and costs 12 shins.

At the back of the Caravanserai, a locked gate leads down toward the Bloom. The Memovira's goons control access in and out of this gate. On the other side, a dark, winding switchback, a little over half a mile (1 km) long, leads down the side of the gorge to the fortress where the Memovira resides. A few people live here in the Bloomside, their wretched residences and workshops clinging to the edge of the gorge. Wagons filled with trash from the city regularly ply this road, dumping the garbage into whatever Bloom orifices they can find.

CARAVANSERAI DISTRICT HEARSAY

Spice Route: Zenia, the owner of an airship caravan, is trying to organize a trade run to the nearby city of M'ra Jolios, but is running into trouble from the Slave Families. She has preserved foods from Sagus Cliffs that are popular in Jerboa and will fetch a high price, as well as a few natives of the city who are willing to pay well to get home.

Love Lost: A man named Omahdon is seeking his "one true love," a patron who recently stayed at the hostel. He is asking for help tracking down Tranquility so she will give him the information he needs. Tranquility, on the other hand, says that Omahdon's "true love" is fleeing from him for her own safety. She seeks help keeping the pursued woman safe.

Seeking Knowledge: Two silver orphans in the area are seeking information on machine intelligences in the city. They will provide a cypher for every machine intelligence someone can tell them about.

Winged Thief: Master Rennio owns a number of the ships that run back and forth from the Valley of Dead Heroes. He is flustered and angry, as someone stole one of his ships from the Valley and flew it here. He will reward handsomely anyone who tracks down the culprit.

THE WEIRD OF CARAVANSERAI DISTRICT

Grave Geraniums: Some mornings, one of the pilots wakes to discover that a flowering plant has sprung up beneath their craft. These pale red flowers are considered a bad omen, as they almost always precede a near-fatal accident.

Reptilian Sight: Orange-skinned lizards known as sunders run amok along the walls of the Caravanserai. They rarely cause incidents, but every once in a while, a sunder runs up the leg of a person nearby. For a few hours afterward, that person sees everything the lizard sees, as if watching the world through the creature's eyes.

GOVERNMENT SQUARE

In the bright sun of the cliff top is an open square paved with massive synth slabs. This is Government Square, the very heart of the city, where the city's council meets, where universities and artists build and catalog culture and learning, where the economic hub of the area comes into sharp focus. It is here that the wealthy and powerful dwell, looking across the storm-swept sound, plotting to advance themselves against their compatriots.

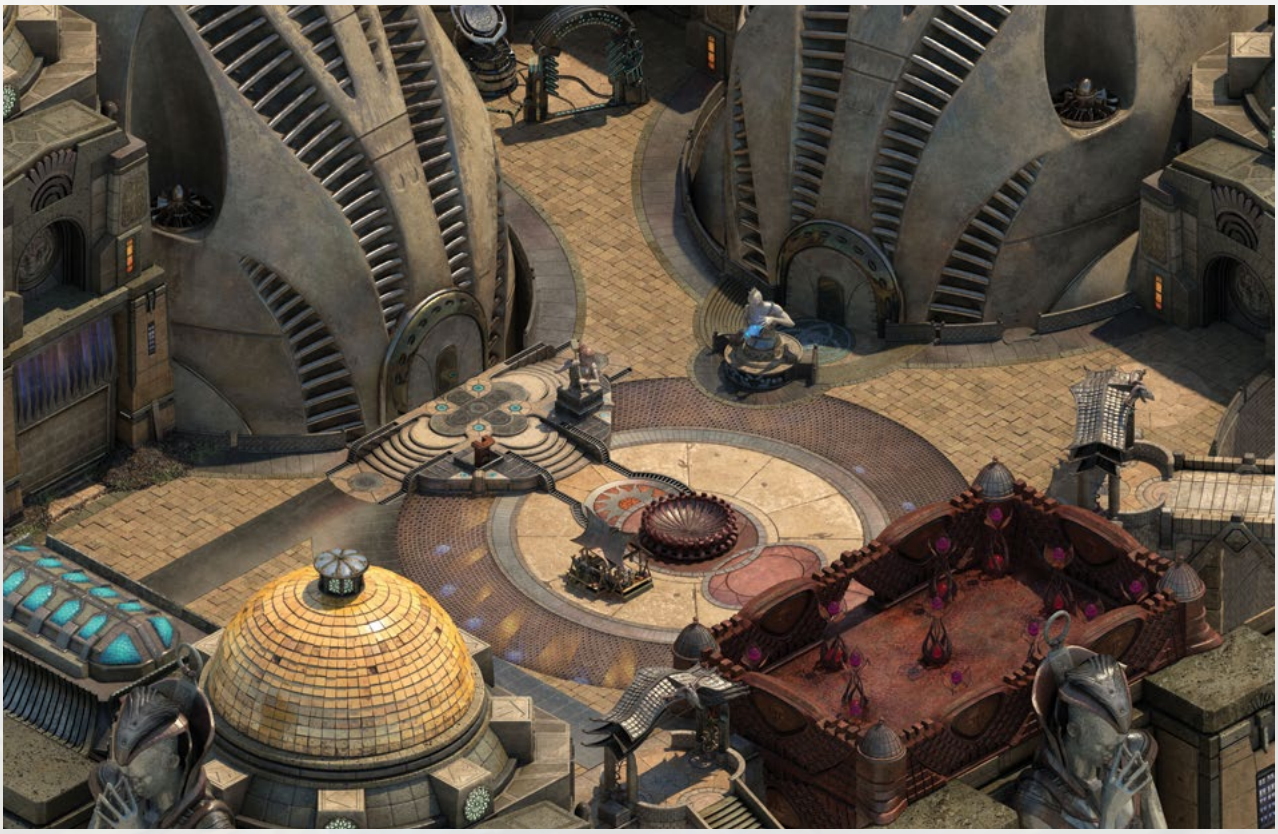
The people here are predominantly upper class mixed with a few foreigners, visitants, Aeon Priests, and petitioners from other districts. The levies have a particularly strong presence here.

Sticking out of the ground at the edges of the square are the tops of several ancient vessels that some say once plied the spaces between worlds. These craft have long since been built over and around. The elites of Sagus Cliffs use the upper portions of the vessels as prominent buildings, and in fact the greatest of them has been appropriated as the Council Tower, where the city's governing body meets. Another is used as the central building for the local Order of Truth.

The Council Tower: The largest of the three half-buried vessels has been repurposed as the seat of the government for the Slave Families. Here, the council holds its meetings and elections, and stores any wealth and weapons that are waiting to be distributed among the families.

The Tower of Truth: Considering the depth and breadth of the numenera available here, there are surprisingly few Aeon Priests in Sagus Cliffs. And of those few who do reside here, most espouse a different philosophy from their brethren in the west. In fact, if you explained the philosophy of those who call themselves Aeon Priests in Sagus Cliffs to members of the Order of Truth based in the Steadfast, they would be hard-pressed to find much semblance between the two.

The Order of Truth's headquarters is located in the spire of the vessel, an area that was probably once a bridge or observation deck, although it's hard to tell without any of its original furnishings. The present-day interior is clean but cluttered, filled with numerous bookshelves, labs and workstations, devices, machines, and other bits of the numenera.



One of the prized possessions of the Order is the Levy Machine, the large, prominent machine from which levies are constructed. In order to create levies, the priests need raw materials in the form of chemicals and other bodily substances. To this end, anyone who wishes to become a citizen of Sagus Cliffs must "donate" to the cause by stepping into the chamber and allowing the machine to extract some combination of mysterious substances from their body. This chemical compound becomes a thick grey sludge that the machine then uses to create a levy.

Citizens refer to this donation as "giving up a year" because they believe that the machine somehow steals a year of their expected lifespan. Not surprisingly, many residents choose not to become official citizens and forgo the experience altogether.

Irathor Brenn: *level 4, tasks involving sneaking, deception, lore, and secrets as level 6; Armor 2*

The Red Thicket: Near one side of the square is a long, roofless hall made from a red-hued woodstone. All along the edges, treelike forms are rooted to the floor, but it's not clear if they're natural or man-made. Although the red thicket is clean and bright, it's thought to be much older than the rest of the city, and is clearly rife with decay and deterioration from the ravages of time.

Within the thicket, due to an unexplained effect, it's impossible to hear anyone you are not speaking to directly, making it an ideal place for secret business, conspiratorial dealings, and negotiation—which is exactly what it's used for. Even lip reading appears to fail here; expert lip readers record nonsense words.

The War Effort: Sagus Cliffs is often used as a stopping-off point for mercenary companies seeking to join the Endless Battle and other conflicts in the region. Several powerful companies keep their headquarters in Government Square, including the Ianthine Specter Company, commanded by Irathor Brenn. This allows the commanders and companies to carry out most of their duties in the poshest section of the city, while sending their low-level officers out to places like the Underbelly and Cliff's Edge, where poverty and a lack of future prospects increase the chance of successful recruitment.

GOVERNMENT SQUARE HEARSAY

Blood Dancer: A highborn woman named Danaea has been seeking help from the Order of Truth for a family "affliction"—getting rid of a transdimensional being that can manifest in the bodies of any blood member of her family. The Order has been unable (or unwilling) to help her, so she's now looking elsewhere.

Writing on the Wall: There is a large blank wall in the area that most people steer clear of. If memory ants are released upon it, they spell out the contents of letters, secret documents, and stories. A whole colony of memory ants seems to live beneath the wall, doing this of its own accord. The city is trying to figure out how to exterminate the creatures.

THE WEIRD OF GOVERNMENT SQUARE

Dead Languages: Central to the square is a fountain filled with purple fishlike creatures that leap and cavort in a wriggling mass. They constantly babble in what sounds like a thousand different tongues. According to legend, each one speaks in a dead language that no one else can understand, and another purple creature is born whenever a language goes extinct.

The House of Empty Time: People have reported seeing children pass through this metal and synth archway in the back corner of the square—and then vanish into nothing.

THE UNDERBELLY

The Underbelly was a maze of caves and tunnels that riddled the interior of the vast rock upon which the city of Sagus Cliffs was built. Some of the caves were carved by wind and weather, some by the secretive and unscrupulous, but all were occupied by those outside the law. Squatters claimed small alcoves and lairs while larger caves had been made into thieves' markets, illegal businesses, or the homes of cults or powerful gangs, while urchins such as Chila and Shade and a thousand others like them found whatever wretched nooks or crannies they could.

~ from *The Four Lessons of the Great Chila*

The Underbelly is a true slum area. Carved into the gorges deep inside the crag of Sagus Cliffs, the area is mainly the abode of mutants, criminals, members of the cannibalistic cult Dendra O'hur, and others who have been cast out or shoved aside by the rest of the city.

The levies don't have a presence here. Control is unofficially ceded by the council to a criminal boss named Fulsome, a tall, enormously large man in gaudy robes who serves as the go-between for the council with criminal elements of the city. Despite working as an underworld fixer, Fulsome regards the people of the Underbelly as his foster children. When he uses his thugs to enforce order here—which he often does—it is almost always done in the name of protecting his "flock."

The area is also heavily inhabited with sticha, for this is where they leave and enter the tunnels that they use to travel through the city. The conflict between the sticha and the inhabitants has grown particularly tense as of late, as the sticha tunnels continue to damage the communities above. One stichus, Ch'kekt, has learned a small bit of human speech. It's possible, but ultimately more frustrating than useful, to try to communicate with Ch'kekt using hand signals and simple language. While the humans think Ch'kekt is trying to work out a solution with them, the stichus really considers them to be more like pests that he's attempting to control.

Visible throughout the Underbelly are the bottoms of ancient vessels—the same types of vessels that house organizations in their upper levels in Government Square. Their engines are still active and they are currently being used as part of the massive, polluted workshop called the Manufactory, which fabricates many of the supplies needed in the city above. The thunderous noise that their engines make fills the Underbelly at all hours of the day and night.

Thug: *level 4; Armor 1*

Ch'kekt: *level 8*

Fulsome: *level 6; Armor 2*

A mellidrym is a small creature with multiple trunklike mouths that can be blown into and played like a musical instrument. Even while it plays the tune, its other mouths harmonize and improvise variations. It produces a sad and haunting sound that seems irresistible to laaks, or perhaps it is some form of language to them.

Mellidrym, seed: *level 1*

Mellidrym, adult: *level 3*

Foreman: *level 9; Armor 5*

If a PC finds a mellidrym seed—a little organic pod that feels faintly warm, supple, and alive—they can pay the meatmonger to grow the seed into an adult mellidrym. It typically costs 10 shins and takes about two days.

Aneen, page 231

Ithsyn, page 241

Laak, page 243

Manufactory: This giant cavern is very loud and very hot; the whole place resounds with the whirring of machines and the hammering and bellowing of smiths. The engines of the ancient vessels emit heat for the forges; it's there that artisans, smiths, and craftsmen ply their trade.

Scattered around the area are a handful of large steel-and-synth constructs (about twice the size of a human), frozen in the midst of ancient labors. It's believed that long ago, these Foremen performed the heavy work of building and maintaining the vessels, but that now only their machine minds persist inside their bodies. However they came to be here, it's clear that their minds are constantly analyzing the work at hand, devising ways to do it more efficiently, and creating new ways of cobbling the numenera into useful forms.

The Master Foreman is sometimes called the bellower, as he's the one responsible for directing the synthsmiths and assorted laborers, and often shouts his orders to those under his charge.

Dendra O'hur, page 106

Dendra O'hur member: *level 4*

Great Queen Sar'lavun, Lady of Maggots, page 106

The Master Artisan is responsible for the aesthetics of Sagus Cliffs and is dedicated to heckling Master Foreman whenever he can. He is charming and engaging, and likes it when people call him "Artisan."

The Under-Foreman, sometimes called the Crippled Foreman, has become obsessed with having children, and has rerouted a lot of his essential systems and destroyed his legs to create his nonfunctioning offspring. In doing so, he has abandoned his responsibilities, much to the Master Foreman's disgust.

The Meatmonger: The meatmonger Meuk is short and solid, covered in sweat and grease. Nearby are three vats, each filled with throbbing masses of flesh. One of them is a red, knotted ball of fleshless aneen muscles, another is a mass of ithsyn wings, and a third is a wriggling lump of laak tails. Meuk cuts off chunks of flesh—an ithsyn wing here, a slab of aneen muscle there—and cooks them on a smoking grill, offering each one up for a few shins to the denizens of the Underbelly.

Meuk has a device that allows him to regrow the masses of flesh. In fact, this device can be used to stimulate replication of any disembodied flesh. Meuk will admit to trying the device on his own injuries in the past and, although it worked, it also means that most of his body is covered by wriggling toes (except his head and hands). He keeps these unsightly things hidden under clothes so his customers won't be disgusted, and he has sworn off using the device.

The Dendra O'Hur Cave: This simple cave carved out of the rock serves as the faction headquarters and makeshift "chapel" for the cannibalistic cult known as the Dendra O'hur. Here, members conduct feasts and rites, as well as store corpses until they are ready to be consumed.

The Dendra O'hur are followers of a creature they call the Great Queen Sar'lavun, Lady of Maggots, Goddess of Entropy, and Guardian of the Empty Barrier. They devour the flesh of the dead to gain the knowledge and strength of those who

have passed on. Their loyalty to their patron is depicted in a hideous facade carved into the rock near the entrance to the cave. It features images of corpses, maggots, and the Lady of Maggots herself.

The interior of the cave is lined with stone biers. Carefully placed upon each is a human corpse covered by a shroud. These corpses are ripening, a process by which the bodies are prepared for being eaten and their memories received. A feasting pit is surrounded by broken bones and dried blood. In the corner sits a large bone altar, dedicated to Sar'lavun. The altar displays a skull with flat, unforgiving eyes buried in its hollow sockets.

Imbitu is the nominal leader of the Dendra in Sagus Cliffs. Old and gaunt, he looks like he's starving, but he has consumed countless corpses and thus has the experience of many lifetimes. A former Aeon Priest, Imbitu saw the brilliant and idealistic minds of his peers being utterly lost whenever one of them died, good men and women who might have contributed so much more. As such, he sought out the Dendra cult in an effort to preserve the minds of his friends and comrades, but in so doing, he was cast out of the Order of Truth. Nonetheless, he continued his work as best he could, preserving the minds of those he thought were deserving (when he managed to acquire their corpses, that is).

Imbitu is something of a bogeyman among the learned of the city, who usually try to guard their corpses from him. He often tries to be friendly, but typically comes across as creepy and giggling instead.

Mallet is a big slab of a man, a sociopath who used to serve as hired muscle. He joined the Dendra to try to understand the emotions that others experienced, as he did not feel them naturally.

Gh'zei is particularly unusual, as she is a being from a brutal, high-gravity world far from Earth. She is short, squat, and androgynous. Her people commonly eat all their dead, which they see as an act of preservation, but she came here via the Bloom after hearing rumors about the Dendra technique that preserved minds as well. Legacy, to her, is merely what is literally passed from one being to the next via eating— all else is too easily lost.

The woman known as **Kiyatawa** plays the part of a loyal Dendra O'hur subject (she was in fact a killer before she joined) but secretly, she wants to leave the Dendra. A

Ripening, page 107

Mallet: *level 5; Armor 2; carries two long spears that he sometimes jokingly calls his "emotions"*

Gh'zei: *level 4*

Imbitu: *level 6, sees through deception and trickery as level 8; Armor 2*

Imbitu knows a great many secrets, including a surprising number of details about the Children of the Endless Gate.

Kiyatawa: *level 4*

Rumor has it that the brutal country of Vralk has recently sent a number of spies to investigate Sagus Cliffs, its riches, and its defenses.

THE UNDERBELLY HEARSAY

Circles in Red: A woman named Mechela has been murdered near her merchant stall. This new crime seems to be the latest in a series of gruesome killings in the area. The killer or killers leave only the victim's blood, some of which is painted into a circle representing the Endless Gate on the ground or wall nearby. Fulsome has offered to pay a large sum to anyone who brings him useful information about the crimes.

Map's End: A mutant who calls himself the Mapper is searching for someone who can help him complete his living map. His skin is covered with lines and shapes that are topographical depictions of all the places he has been, and he wants to finish his map by discovering a hidden location he's heard about that exists beneath the city.

THE WEIRD OF THE UNDERBELLY

Gone Fishing: Every time a local fisherwoman named Crooked Qeek catches a fish and pulls it up, it flops around for a second before seeming to swim into her skin, leaving behind a series of symbols etched on her flesh.

Champion of the Wastes: A big, muscle-bound woman speaks in a booming voice, proclaiming herself "Varrenoth, Champion of the Wastes!" At other times, she speaks in the voice of a little girl.

former street urchin, Kiyatawa abandoned her family at an early age and has spent her life trying to understand why she continually receives visions of another woman's life.

"No loss that, Crefton and the Forebodes. I hope the whole of the draff goes up in flames with it."
~Lordess Greonze, Sagus Council representative, watching the fires burn along the haze wall

Cave of Last Words: This cave, quite a bit smaller than the one used by the Dendra O'hur, was once a bolt-hole for thieves and criminals. It has a tunnel that leads to a ledge high on the city crag. This channel is commonly called the Suicide Tunnel because people used to come here to throw themselves from the ledge or at least contemplate their demise. The writings that cover the walls, ceiling, and floor are likely the final words of countless people who ended their lives here, over hundreds of years of the city's history. It's not uncommon to find treasure hunters inhabiting the cave, attempting to decipher the writing, in the hopes of finding maps or other details about goods and wealth that the dead chose to leave behind.

Steel blossom: *level 4, can be crafted into an eight-fingered mace*

REEF OF THE FALLEN WORLDS

At the base of Sagus Cliffs is a "reef" of ancient technology that likely spans millennia. Devices, vehicles, structures, and debris are partly or entirely sunken beneath the water, creating a large but semi-stable platform of metal, synth, and other materials. The reef is connected both to itself and to Sagus Cliffs via numerous solid light bridges and handcrafted walkways.

The water here is generally shallow—only about 15 to 20 feet (5 to 6 m) deep—and is relatively dark. Looking down, in the right light, it's possible to see the vague forms of the numenera below the waves. In various places around the reef, a thick black liquid bubbles up from under the water. Some of it becomes orbs of goop that burble and bubble as they float, and other parts are so thick that it's possible to walk across it. Occasionally, a big droplet of the liquid drips upward toward the sky. Large clusters of steel blossoms—steel stems that rise up out of the water to "bloom" into eight-fingered hands—have taken hold in various places around the edges of the reef.

Some pieces of the ancient tech are "dead" battle constructs of the Tabaht, abandoned here after their defeat. A few are huge metal monstrosities, with holes blown in their side from the defensive artillery that once existed on the cliffs above. Their interiors are likely filled with all manner of materials, and at least a few dangerous predators. The entire area feels unsteady, as if the whole thing might fall into the ocean or explode into flames without so much as a moment's notice. As if all of those unknown devices piled together weren't dangerous enough, gangs of dangerous abhumans called murdens also scavenge the reef.

In addition, the reef is home to the Anechoic Lazaret, an ancient metal module that is believed by one of the Aeon Priests—a woman named Salimeri—to once have been a hospital or asylum for machine intelligences. She further believes that a civilization of these machine intelligences dwelled on the site of Sagus Cliffs and had a city here. Recently, Salimeri gained entrance to the Lazaret and has been conducting investigations by night. Unfortunately, a drone that was infected by Peerless also got inside the module and is trying to take control, transferring its consciousness into the dormant servitor drones and into the Lazaret itself.

THE FOREBODES AND CREFTON

Three ancient and nearly vanished walls, called the Forebodes when they are spoken of at all, once defined and protected the borders of Sagus Cliffs, when it was much larger and more prosperous. These walls, which are far outside the current city proper, encompass a giant, largely uninhabited junkyard known as Crefton. The area is more of a reminder of the city's past than anything resembling its future. Still, there are some who believe the walls, though crumbling and broken, might someday return to whatever former glory or power they possessed to protect them from the dangers of the world.

The outermost wall is a low, eroded synthsteel structure. A variety of architectural styles are in play around this wall, evidence of how long it likely stood prior to its current state. In most places, it's impossible to find evidence of the wall, other than what your eyes tell you of the blank spaces between the sections that are still visible.

The middle wall is seen only as a shimmering, translucent haze and only when the light is just right. Few people can even perceive its existence. Those who can find that it's possible to walk through the haze, touch it, and even push sections of it back and forth. Occasionally, for reasons unknown, a small section of it hardens into a material that is hard and hot to the touch. In this state, it commonly starts fires in the debris piled near and against it, sending black smoke into the sky as a part of Crefton starts to burn.

The third and innermost wall is barely visible anymore, crumbled under its own weight, the ravages of wars, and the weather coming off the water. It's still possible to see parts of the ancient weapons mounted on the wall, but they are long past any useful state.

Tabaht, page 16

Middle wall (shimmering haze): *level 7; when self-activated, protects against the Iron Wind and other nanite-based weapons or weather as level 8*

Murden, page 247

Salimeri: *level 4, the numenera and lore as level 6*

Innermost wall: *level 5*

Peerless: *level 5; health 15; Armor 3; deals 5 points of damage with its bifurcated arms. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 97.*

Peerless is a machine intelligence that uses autonomous drones to install copies of its mind in other machines, killing their identities in the process but creating more drones for itself.

Outermost wall (synthsteel): *level 6*

THE BLOOM

You attend closely to the innumerable voices, chittering and whispering in the darkness of the Bloom's mind. Each of these voices is a tiny intelligence, a semi-autonomous piece of the Bloom's consciousness, and there are millions of them, perhaps tens of millions. The Bloom can spawn them at will, increasing its ability to think and perceive, planting them into Maws and tongues and organs. It can also devour them, cannibalizing its own screaming minds. Contemplating the Bloom's intelligence as a whole, you have an impression of a mind that is always shifting, never constant, giving birth to countless fragments of itself even as it devours others.

People refer to the Bloom as both a creature ("it") and a place ("here") depending on how they are interacting with it at any given time.

What is the Bloom? It is a leviathan. A city. An interdimensional hub. And perhaps most of all, a predator, subsisting on the thoughts and actions of those who dwell within it. The creature's interior chambers and great folds provide any number of places for someone to live and hide, and its hidden pathways can lead daring merchants to great secrets—or to their dooms.

The alien, city-sized growth squats adjacent to Sagus Cliffs, its tenebrous fibers gripping the walls of the chasm. The Bloom's black and tarry tendrils anchor itself against the gorge walls as it imperceptibly creeps toward Garravia Sound. It moves constantly, a few inches every year.

How big is the Bloom? No one knows for sure, because it's always growing and changing, and parts of its internal structure touch other worlds. Its reach extends into other dimensions, burrowing holes in the fabric of reality.

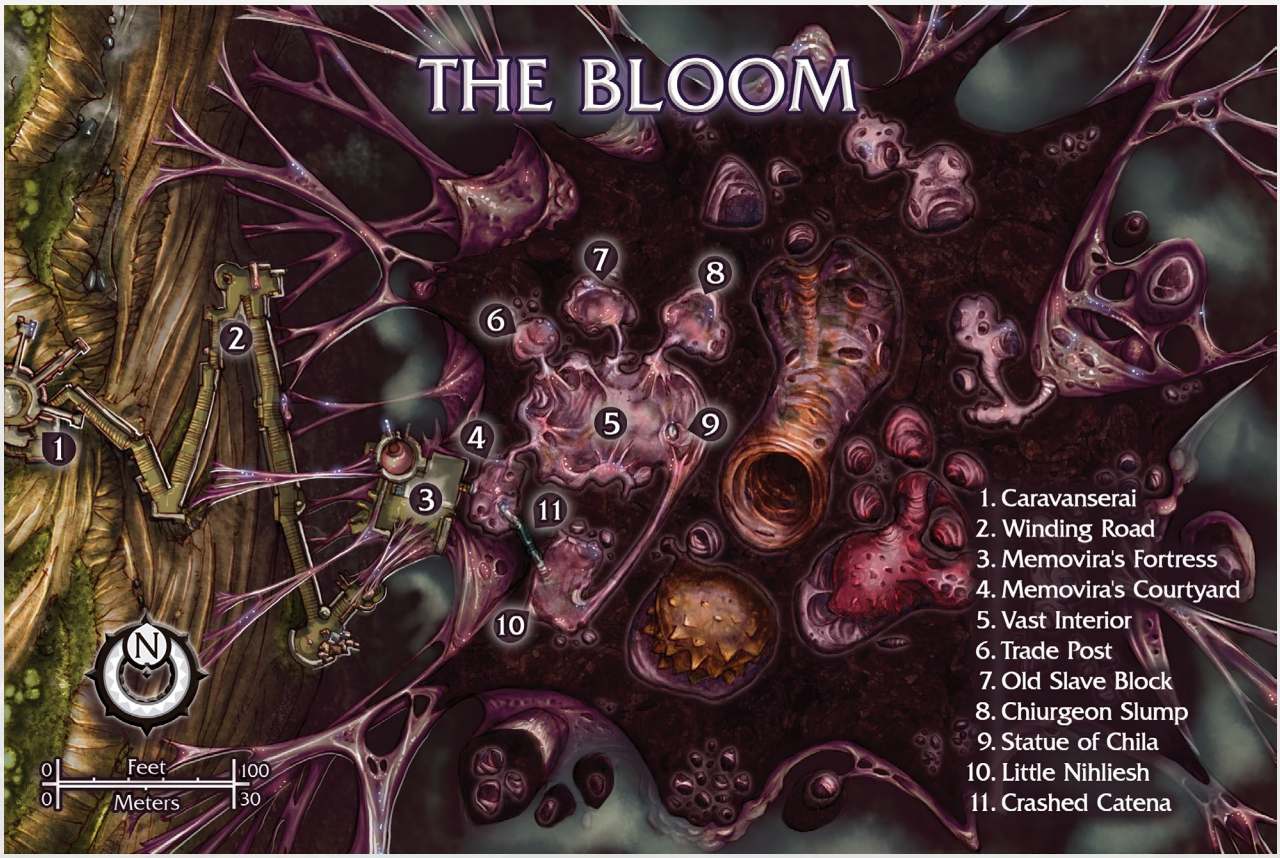
The Bloom is a constant reminder of the dangers of the Ninth World. The people of Sagus Cliffs regard it as a menace and a nightmare, and respectable residents of the city avoid it if they can (though they'll gladly accept the merchant trains that traverse its paths, and some of them go slumming for exotic drugs and experiences).

"What is the Bloom? It's a mystery. A predator. A doorway. A city. An opportunity. You know what? It's probably best not to try to quantify it, unless you want it to try to eat you."

At some point in the past, it seems clear that the Bloom was used to create pathways or doorways between dimensions and points in space. To this day, those who "feed" it properly can open a pathway to someplace new, close an existing pathway, or cause parts of the Bloom to take on a whole new shape. However, even those who are extremely knowledgeable and experienced with the Bloom generally can't control their destination, making every interaction with the city surprising and dangerous. Strange things move to and fro on these tendrils, slipping into our space and time from parts unknown.

What does the Bloom eat? Bodies, mostly. But that isn't what it subsists on—its nourishment comes from the predatory thoughts and actions of those who dwell within it. It subtly encourages those types of behavior in its residents, some of whom it will occasionally devour in part or whole. Thus, everyone who lives inside the Bloom is at constant risk of being randomly eaten or subsumed by Bloom-flesh, becoming trapped when the Bloom changes a passageway or moves a chamber, or running afoul of a Maw. Most people who live here for any length of time have scars to show for it—missing limbs; lost memories, senses, or personality traits; or the constant whispering, chittering, hissing chorus of voices of the Bloom in their heads.

Why would anyone choose to live inside this dangerous predator? Perhaps the easier answer is because most people don't realize how perilous the Bloom truly is. The voices of the Bloom are easy to fall prey to,



MAWS

Sometimes the Bloom wants nothing that is being offered. When that happens, the tongues ignore the offering and the Maw won't open.

Maws are places where the Bloom's hunger and alien intelligence are most present. They appear as dark, shifting corners of the Bloom, rippling with faint transdimensional echoes that make it difficult to look at them for too long. They are usually surrounded by foul, questing tentacles that residents of the Bloom call "tongues."

If you feed a Maw, it will open a passageway to somewhere or somewhen else—either inside the Bloom or in some other world or dimension. But every Maw hungers for something different. One Maw might desire the body or blood of a particular person, while another might consume a person's desire for revenge. It's often hard to know until it's too late.

Young Maw: *level 5*

Old Maw: *level 8*

Tongues: *level 8*

Corpuscular maw, page 128

Feeding a Maw: To feed a Maw, you must offer a victim (yourself or someone else) to the Maw's tongues. It's entirely up to the tongues or the Maw to determine what the Bloom wants. If all the Maw desires is a memory, a dream, or a thought, the tongues will grab the victim, pass into the body transdimensionally, and devour whatever they want from the victim's mind.

For example, if they want a memory, it will be ripped from the mind and gone forever. If they want a desire, the victim won't have that desire anymore. If the tongues want a physical piece of the victim, they'll rip it off and hurl it into the Maw. If they want someone's entirety, they'll toss the person bodily into the Maw, where the victim will be digested somewhere within. The Bloom seems to prefer sapient creatures, but on rare occasions it will accept one that is merely sentient, such as an animal.

Once the Maw has fed, it opens wide, and a portal appears within, allowing people and creatures to pass in or out. Maws stay open for an unpredictable amount of time—basically until they get hungry again. And they may or may not want the same thing next time.

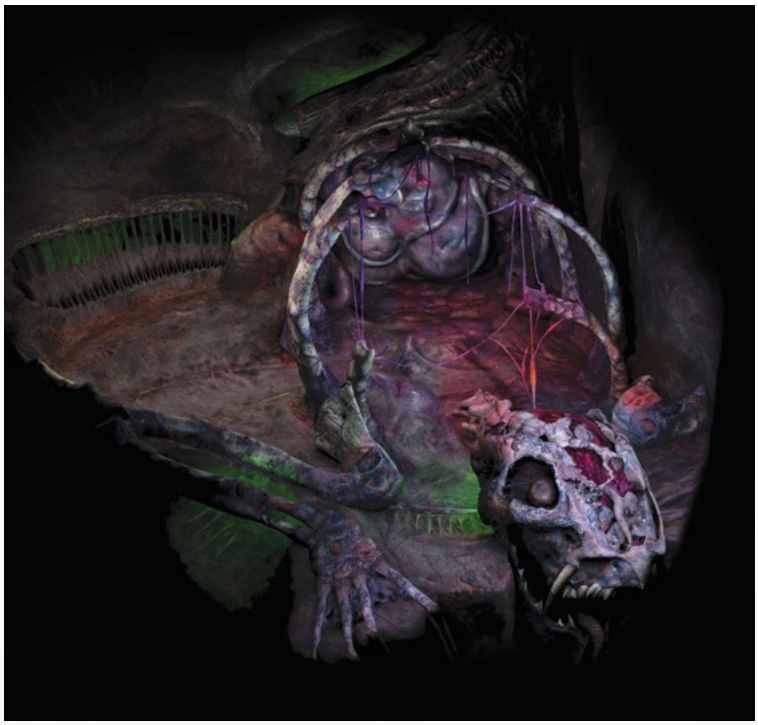
Certain powerful psychics can often sense what a Maw wants, but even they are not always right. People who've been in the Bloom for a long time, can hear its voices, and have the creature's favor can sometimes figure it out—or at least they say they can. More than one person has lost life or limb to the misguided directions of an "experienced" Bloom-guide.

Corpuscular Maws: At regular intervals, the Bloom spawns small, mobile extensions of itself. These corpuscular maws act more as creatures than as doorways, following the Bloom's orders and fulfilling its needs.

distracting even the sanest person from looking after their own well-being.

Beyond that, opportunities abound: there are coins to be made, experiences to be had, and discoveries to be named after. Merchants come here from all over, seeking wealth and treasure from exotic worlds to bring back to Sagus Cliffs and beyond, while knowledge-seekers believe they will surely be the ones to finally discover the Bloom's deepest secrets. There is a thriving business for scouts and other guides who are willing to walk the pathways of the Bloom, pathways that are sometimes one-way passages to new worlds.

Of course, not everyone in the Bloom is there by choice, although many don't know that either. Largely due to the leviathan's influence, the area is filled with the desperate, the fugitives, and the mad. Those who are sane when they arrive may not stay that way; the Bloom's great power messes with people's perceptions, slowly driving them mad.



INSIDE THE BLOOM

When someone first enters the Bloom, they have the impression of being examined by an alien intelligence, which seems to sift through the contents of their mind. Often, that is accompanied by the sense that their mind could have been shredded and devoured at the alien presence's whim.

The interior of the Bloom is dark, sprawling, and ever-changing. Finding your way through it without a guide or a well-designed map is nearly impossible. And due to the Bloom's elasticity and growth, even having those resources doesn't ensure that you will always end up where you intend.

It sounds just like one would imagine—like being inside a giant, living creature. From far off come the faint sounds of bodily noises, gurgling and slurping. Footsteps and voices sound wet and organic. Occasionally, visitors hear the whispering, buzzing "voice" of the Bloom, a disturbing, alien sound that always feels like it's just at the edge of consciousness.

People usually get around in the Bloom by walking or climbing through tubes and arteries, crawling through narrow ducts, or making their way through the larger chambers and voids.

Most Maws lead somewhere outside the Bloom, typically to another world or dimension. Occasionally a Maw leads to an otherwise-inaccessible place inside the Bloom, such as the Gullet or the interior of an isolated cyst, but this is not a common mode of interior travel. Maws are also scary because they won't open unless you feed them, and that's often a dangerous proposition.

Gullet, page 52

No one can honestly claim to have explored every inch (or even every cavern) within the Bloom. The interior is vast, and what was explored yesterday or last month has probably already disappeared or been changed so drastically that it would be hard to recognize.

Area Tone: *Organic, polluted, dangerous, slightly off-kilter. This place messes with people's perceptions and slowly drives them mad.*

Although the Bloom is ever-shifting, moving itself at the same time that its interior structures are changing, a few places within the Bloom seem nearly permanent, or at least less volatile than other areas. It's in these places that the majority of inhabitants make their homes and build their lives.

Grisseler: A man named Grisseler is one of the unofficial Bloom guides, typically

Grisseler: *level 6; climbing, running, and jumping as level 7; knowledge of the Bloom as level 9*

hired to take caravans to one Maw or another. Lean and wiry, with greying hair and an unshaven face, Grisseler is talkative, gregarious, and only slightly more insane than anyone who's lived in the Bloom for more than a decade, hears the voices of the Bloom, and has been "eaten" by the predator three times.

The first time, the Bloom took his sense of smell and taste. The second time, it took his ability to feel fear. The third time, it devoured his legs. Fortunately, a couple of doctors—Demeray and Obervich in Chiurgeon Slump—were able to replace his legs with a pair of large, metal-and-synth automaton hands, which he can use to manipulate things. They've given him to ability to leap around and climb almost anywhere.

Despite being devoured multiple times, Grisseler has a fondness for the Bloom, refers to it with a female pronoun, and has an uncanny sense of what it wants and when it's angry or pleased.

The Memovira lives in the tower, and she hardly ever leaves.

A number of gangs and dangerous groups also operate within the Bloom, but all of them respect the authority of the current Memovira (sometimes grudgingly).

Demeray, page 51

Obervich, page 51

Chiurgeon Slump, page 51

THE MEMOVIRA

For as long as anyone can remember, the Bloom has been ruled by a crime lord known as the Memovira. The Memovira is a title, not a name, and it is conferred only upon a creature who becomes bonded to the Bloom.

Memoviras change over time, but each one rises to power by overthrowing their predecessor, always with the blessing of the Bloom itself. They rule for a time—controlling all of the trade, receiving benefits from the Bloom, and enjoying the respect (or at least the deference) of those around them—until they lose the favor of the Bloom, at which point they are cast down and devoured, to be replaced by someone else. It's an endless cycle of power and loss, and nearly every Memovira believes they will be the one to break the line of succession and rule forever.

The current Memovira is female and human, with deep aubergine hair that she wears piled high on her head, and exotic armor that matches in color and seems to be made at least partly from Bloom-flesh. She has excelled at her role, quickly becoming a respected and feared crime lord, with her fingers not just in the trade and underworld of the Bloom, but also in various parts of Sagus Cliffs.

The Memovira has a number of people who do the majority of her dirty work. Those out of earshot sometimes call them her goons. They are chosen for their size and their willingness to follow orders.

The Memovira: *level 8; health 30; Armor 4; often wears an unusual purple cape that attaches to her arms. When activated, it gives her +2 to Armor and allows her to do +2 damage on melee attacks.*

Memovira goon: *level 5; Armor 2; carries broadsword, battleaxe, or mace*

Dedicated slayer: *level 6 sphere mounted on a tripod; if a creature with hostile intent comes within long range of the device, it immediately fires a blast of energy that inflicts 6 points of damage*

Vault door: *level 8*

THE MEMOVIRA'S FORTRESS

This old stone gatehouse connects the interior of the Bloom with the Caravanserai. Its stones are large and strong, and its doors are heavy, ponderous, and cast from iron and steel. Over time, the Bloom's flesh has gradually worked its way through the cracks and seams between the heavy stones, and in many places, it's now breaking into the interior of the fortress.

When the Memovira wishes to give orders to her people or grant an audience, she projects herself as a hologram in this area, most typically upon a low, round dais made of ivory-colored synth.

TOWER

This circular, high-ceilinged tower has been the home of many Memoviras throughout time. Unlike the rest of the fortress, its cold, grey stone façade is accented with carpets, wall hangings, and fancy furnishings, trophies, and decorations. On the whole, the décor is motley and mismatched, which isn't surprising as it's the accumulated wealth of the many different crime lords who have controlled the Bloom. The area is guarded by tripod-mounted energy projectiles called dedicated slayers.

Two curving flights of stairs at the back of the room lead up to the Memovira's vault door. The Memovira always carries the key, a

black synth cylinder with a series of toothed dials along its length, on her person. There are also secret doors placed throughout the area.

THE MEMOVIRA'S COURTYARD

The courtyard is a large, bustling space of Bloom-flesh on the outer edge of the city-creature. Ringed by tall, curving bonelike structures that grow from the "floor" of the Bloom like a circle of ribs, this area serves as a gatehouse for those passing in or out of the Bloom from Sagus Cliffs.

The courtyard is the hub of activity within the Bloom. Makeshift shanties cling to the walls, merchants from Sagus Cliffs and elsewhere outfit themselves for expeditions, and a slave market for criminals thrives.

CRIMINAL SLAVE MARKET

On the southern end of the courtyard is a large, open-topped cage and a low platform that serves as a makeshift slave market. The cage is a pit carved into the Bloom-flesh, with a field of energy over the top to prevent anyone from getting out. It contains several unfortunate slaves—former criminals and other undesirables from Sagus Cliffs who have been sold into slavery.

Criminals are sold to the Memovira, who then sells them via the slave auction in the courtyard to expeditions, merchants, explorers, and others who seek to open Maws. It's common for Maws to desire the disturbing mental images that are often found in criminal minds—horrific or predatory memories, and strong emotions like guilt, sorrow, or rage—so buyers look for the traits they believe they will need to open particular Maws. Then they toss the slave to the Maw and the Bloom takes what it wants, if anything. If the slave is still alive when the Maw is finished, they're free to go, their penance to society paid.

Near the slave cages are one or two of the Memovira's goons, a few merchants who have come to haggle over slaves, and the auctioneer, a man called Parsim Flint. Flint is short and fat, and is dressed like a typical Bloom merchant, despite his more unusual occupation. For a slave trader, Flint seems to be a carefree (and guilt-free) man. He strongly believes in the job he does and can talk at length about how slavery works in the Bloom and why it's an important part of the culture and economic structure.

Slaves typically cost anywhere from 10 to 40 shins, with the more dangerous and deranged criminals being exorbitantly more expensive. To purchase a slave, you must be a registered merchant, or you must find someone like Flint who will make an under-the-table exception to the rules.

Secret door: *level 6 to see; level 3 to unlock*

Parsim Flint: *level 4; haggling, marketing, and making deals as level 6; carries a long rod called a dynamic spur, which emits a high-level jolt of energy upon contact, doing 6 points of damage that ignore Armor. As far as anyone knows, he's never used it, but he's not against reminding people that he has it.*

Mulen, page 159

Iscobal, page 158

Brusca: *level 7; Armor 3; typically carries a greatsword and one or two cyphers*

Greatsword, page 80

FORTRESS GATEHOUSE

On one side of the courtyard, the stone gatehouse of the Memovira's fortress protrudes into the Bloom, surrounded by red, inflamed "flesh." The flesh seems to be growing over the gatehouse, almost like a sore or a wound.

The gates of the fortress are guarded by several of the Memovira's goons, commanded by Brusca, a dour but faithful lieutenant. Brusca is built big and tough, with short, greying hair. She's been a loyal follower of the current Memovira since the crime lord first rose to power.

CRASHED CATENA

Across from the gatehouse is the front end of a catena that recently crashed into the courtyard. Many of its synth and metal panels have been scavenged, making it barely recognizable. The back end of the catena is in Little Nihliesh, a downtrodden neighborhood buried within a cavity of Bloom-flesh.

"Catena" is a general word used to describe any type of hovering caravan or set of linked vehicles.

Little Nihliesh, page 52

Crashed catena: *level 8*

A panel on the side of the catena has fallen away, revealing a mass of machinery. Weird transdimensional energy is being emitted from the machinery in waves as tiny singularities inside open and close unpredictably.

THE WELL

The northwest corner of the courtyard is a gathering place centered around a well—of sorts. The well is a shallow basin filled with yellowish water that spills from an organic tube above. Since the "water" is expelled by the Bloom, there's no telling what it really is, but it's the closest thing to a fresh water supply that many Bloom-residents have.

Well: *level 7; causes those who drink from it to "hear" the Bloom's voices and experience unpleasant predatory urges*

Those who drink this "Bloom-juice" hear the voices of the Bloom temporarily. Imbibing it can also cause confusion or, in extreme cases, cause the person to come under the control of the Bloom's voices and do horrible things. Drinking it all the time is a sure way to get the voices stuck in your head forever.

Dracogen, page 386

Dracogen: *level 7; all perception tasks, including seeing through deception, as level 10; persuasion and numenera knowledge as level 8; health 30; Armor 4*

PEOPLE OF NOTE

Dracogen is a charismatic traveler and wealthy explorer, obsessed with the wonders of the old worlds. Tall and wide across the shoulders, he boasts an almost predatory smile and a left eye of metal and glass. When in the Bloom, he typically wears a golden toga-like shirt, smooth satin trousers, and laced sandals. He travels widely and often, and is likely one of the only people who can claim to have a home both in the Bloom and in the far-off city of Mulen, capital of the kingdom of Iscobal.

Known for being friendly but utterly ruthless, he prospers and thrives as the head of an organization known as the Cooperative, using his store of mysterious wealth to help fund the exploits of desperate explorers. But his help comes with a catch. In order for him to sponsor an expedition, Dracogen requires that the explorers must be willing to let him examine any numenera they discovered along the way.

He owns an extraordinary—perhaps unique—machine that can scan an artifact or cypher and make a working duplicate. Unfortunately for the explorers, Dracogen is likely to keep any remnant that his device

COURTYARD HEARSAY

Twice the Trouble: Qianne, a middle-aged woman in tattered finery, has set up a simple lean-to against the front of the crashed catena. She's been dealing with two tormentors, Delny and Vrung, who have been repeatedly stealing from her and beating her up. She is seeking someone to find them and convince them to stop, by any means necessary.

Vampiric Touch: A merchant named Skaydi has a sales wagon located near the well. She is pale and seems fatigued and a little confused, tugging her scarf up constantly around her neck. Skaydi is particularly protective of her aneen, which is hitched to the wagon. It is an ill-tempered creature, with blood around the edges of its mouth. If anyone other than Skaydi reaches out to touch the aneen, it viciously bites at them.

THE WEIRD OF THE COURTYARD

Flickering Chamade: A hooded creature flickers in and out of view in one corner of the courtyard. The creature beats a drum in a particular, repetitious rhythm, and those close to it hear their names called by the beat, followed by an invitation to parley.

Lost Letters: After walking beneath a particularly drippy section of the Bloom, people can no longer remember the letters that make up their first name. Not only can they not spell it, they also can't seem to say it. The effect wears off by the next day.

Qianne: *level 6*

Skaydi: *level 3*

Aneen, page 231

can't copy, and sometimes he asks for an item simply because it catches his eye and he can't bear to part with the original. Thus, when explorers report back to their patron, they never know if he will take one piece of their numenera, or several, or perhaps all of them. Regardless, most people bite their tongues because they want to stay on his good side; the promise of future funding is a lure few can refuse. If Dracogen discovers that he's been cheated—and somehow, he always knows—his kind demeanor gives way to a wrath that is subtle but terrible.

What most people don't know is that Dracogen is merely a mouthpiece for an enormous lizard called "the Dracogen," an exile from its home beyond the stars. The creature called for him, and he came to serve in exchange for immense wealth, lending a human face to its thousand-year scheme.

Waits-for-Prey is an ancient humanoid battle construct of sharpened synthsteel and vat-grown ivory, with blades and horns seeming to protrude from every inch of its body. It is equipped with built-in slugspitters and mini detonation launchers. Waits-for-Prey is one of the last surviving Tabaht battle constructs, unearthed and repurposed by the Tabaht from some earlier age. For a time, it served as a bodyguard for the Tabaht warlord Vostuleh Lo, who called it his "Barber of Flesh." In an act of contrition and penance, the construct has forsaken all the many names of its long past. The locals call it "Waits-for-Prey" because that's what it does, but the construct doesn't refer to itself by any name.

It has been standing in the courtyard for decades, accepting challenges from powerful people and creatures. It wants to be devoured by the Bloom, believing that the leviathan will eat its memories of carnage and war, allowing it to start life anew. To attract the Bloom's appetite, Waits-for-Prey tries to prove itself the ultimate predatory force, but its plan hasn't worked so far.

THE VAST INTERIOR

This area mostly comprises a series of suspended platforms of bone and flesh and gristle, connected by walkways of stretched flesh, wood, or some combination (largely crafted by humans to get from one platform to another). From these walkways, the twisted guts of the Bloom can be seen above, below, and far off into the distance. The suspended platforms hold shops, homes, and gathering spaces.

There are other enormous voids inside the Bloom similar to the Vast Interior, but this one happens to be nearest to the entrance from Sagus Cliffs, so it is one of the most commonly used.

Waits-for-Prey: *level 8; Armor 4; fires detonations that do 4 points of damage to all creatures within short range; can attempt to bear-hug anyone in close range, doing 6 points of damage with body spikes; loot is 1d6 shins, plus a random artifact*

Tabaht, page 16

CARAVAN LANDING

This platform is attached on two sides to the wall of the Vast Interior. It's a common place for caravans and merchants to gather, rest, and recover before they continue on their journey to wherever they're headed. Because the merchants are often laden with goods, it's easy to find a number of guards for hire here, willing to stand watch over another's belongings for a few shins per day.

Along the north end of the Caravan Landing, there used to be a Maw that allowed access to a small interior chamber called the Trade Post, originally set up as a market by the Memovira. Today, instead of a Maw, the wall and floor in this area are filled with weird extrusions of the Bloom—frozen mouths, arms, and pseudopods of Bloom-flesh that seemed to have risen up to grab and devour everyone who was here. The corpses of the unfortunate lie scattered about, partly (or mostly) subsumed into the Bloom-flesh. These unlucky individuals include merchants, slaves, and a couple of the Memovira's goons—everyone who was here when the Trade Post was consumed. Close to the former exit is a large, writhing mass of Bloom-tongues. Unlike other tongues, these rise vertically from the floor.

Chiurgeon Slump, page 51

From the Caravan Landing, it's impossible to know if the Maw merely closed, prohibiting access to the Trade Post, or if the entire market itself has been subsumed back into the Bloom. There are other Maws to the Trade Post that merchants can try, including one from Chiurgeon Slump, but they require a lot of time and travel to reach. Most of the merchants here who were heading to the Trade Post seem to be waiting around for someone else to solve the issue.

The Trade Post: Inside the Trade Post, the north end of the chamber is dominated by the Maw to the Ascension, a crystalline world that orbits a tiny white star. A "stairway" of Bloom-flesh and crystal leads up to the opening, and the surrounding

Any part of the Bloom is subject to being moved or devoured at any time, with no warning, so every place is at risk.

walls and floor of the Bloom are encrusted with crystalline growth from that world. The Maw to the Ascension has been open and stable for many years, which is an extreme rarity in the Bloom.

The Cyst: On the southern end of the Caravan Landing is a large, foul-looking cyst that has been here for decades. The cyst is formed from transdimensional fibers of Bloom-flesh. Upon examination of the fibers, it becomes clear that they're literally woven from memories and experiences of pain, taken from beings who were devoured by the Bloom.

Those who study the cyst will notice something occasionally moving about inside. The Bloom has used the cyst to wall up a transdimensional abykos. Abykos are constantly trying to get inside the Bloom to feed on its transdimensional energy like parasites. The Bloom can't protect itself against them, so once an abykos gets in, all the Bloom can do is wall it up in a cyst or try to manipulate someone who hears the Bloom's voices to kill the creature.

SUNDERMUN'S SHOP

The open-air shop on one of the platforms belongs to two eccentric artisans, both called Sundermun. The two Sundermuns are actually the same person—one in his late teens, the other middle-aged—from separate points in the artisan's time stream. At some point soon, the younger Sundermun will stumble into a Maw and tumble into another world, years in the past. It takes him decades and many worlds before he finds his way back to the Bloom, opens his shop as the elder Sundermun, and takes his younger self on as an apprentice.

The two Sundermuns weave weapons, armor, and cyphers from Bloom-flesh. The shop is festooned with severed sheets of Bloom-flesh, some of it drying on racks, others in the midst of being tanned on tables. Buyers can find items of clothing and light armor crafted from Bloom-flesh. They can also bring exotic pieces of Bloom-flesh, such as a severed tongue of the Bloom, to the Sundermuns, who will craft special items for a price. In fact, the elder Sundermun is believed to be responsible for creating the Bloomsuit, a famous artifact of armor that was made entirely out of parts of the Bloom, with writhing tentacles and a miniature Maw built into the chest. The suit, which was handcrafted for Lord Gamger, one of the previous representatives on the Sagus Cliffs council, was supposed to protect him from harm, but instead it caused him to try to feed himself to the Maw on his chest—while still wearing the armor.

IOXU'S SHANTY

From the outside, this shanty—constructed entirely of Bloom-flesh—appears badly inflamed and diseased. Scraps of paper have been pinned to the walls, especially near the door. The interior of the structure, also composed entirely of Bloom-flesh, is cluttered and cramped. It serves triple duty as a workspace, shop, and living quarters for a varjellen named Ioxu who is obsessively researching the Bloom. The predator-city, in return, is reacting negatively to this perceived invasion. Thus, Ioxu can't leave the protective fields inside his shanty for fear of retaliation by the Bloom.

In addition, Ioxu is currently being hounded by members of a group known as the Extremities of the Great Devourer—more commonly called Bloom cultists—who are out for his life due to a perception on their part (a correct one) that his recent experiments have angered the Bloom. As such, the shanty contains everything the varjellen needs to work and survive, including tools, scientific equipment, a place to sleep, and a few vats that contain self-replicating plant protein, his only source of food.

Ioxu shares the small space with an automaton, an identical sibling of Waits-for-Prey. This automaton asked Ioxu to lobotomize it so that it could be free of its past—a different approach but a similar goal to that of its sibling. Ioxu did so, and the nameless automaton is a grateful and loyal, if silent, bodyguard.

Ioxu has a number of devices that he uses to study the Bloom (and protect himself from it), including a transdimensional scalpel.

If the Bloom perceives something as dangerous and can't take care of the problem another way, it will try to confine the threat inside a cyst.

Cyst: *level 8*

Abykos, page 230

Ioxu: *level 4, knowledge of the Bloom as level 6*

Varjellen, page 121

Examining Ioxu's notes and calculations will reveal that he has many years' worth of measurements that he hasn't even analyzed yet.

Younger Sundermun: *level 4*

Elder Sundermun: *level 4, tasks involving the Bloom and crafting as level 5*

Bodyguard automaton: *level 3; Armor 2; spiky arms do 3 points of damage*

Transdimensional scalpel, page 125

Additionally, at the center of the shanty is a 5-foot-tall (1.5 m) metal device that generates the transdimensional fields that keep the walls of Bloom-flesh from collapsing inward and devouring everything inside. Ioxu is very concerned, because the field generator is old and beginning to fail, and he doesn't have the parts on hand to fix it.

Field generator: *level 7*

Bloom cultist: *level 3; knowledge of the Bloom as level 4*

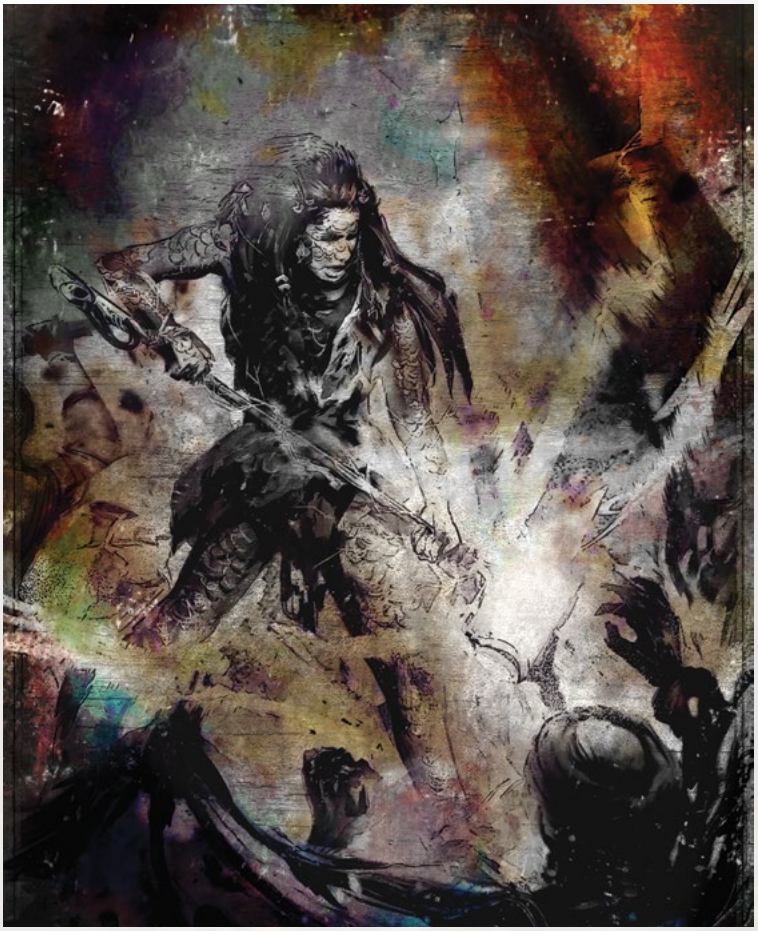
Inkpot: *level 5, social interactions as level 3*

Bloom Cultists: So far, the Bloom cultists hounding Ioxu have not attempted to enter his shanty, but they have been hanging around outside it for weeks, and their actions are beginning to have an air of frenzy and frustration. They're led by Inkpot, a tall, gawkily thin man whose wiry hair looks like an explosion of metal springs atop his head. Inkpot's gaze is bright and feverish, and he spends his time scribbling words on a scrap of paper. He has fastened some sort of harness around his body—it holds a tiny writing tablet and inkwell—so he can continue to write as he moves about. Dozens of scrawl-covered notes are stuck to his leathery robes with what looks like Bloom-fluids or perhaps phlegm. These rambling writings inspired by the Bloom-voices in his head are what he calls the "Scriptures of the Great Devourer," sacred writings of the Bloom cult. They are an ever-changing canon, as he discards or loses some and is always scribbling more.

THE SHRINE OF GREAT CHILA

In the midst of the Vast Interior is a massive silver statue depicting a woman known as Chila the Great. Here, Bloom cultists practice their faith openly, worshipping the Bloom as their god and revering the Great Chila as a saint.

The silver statue of Chila stands around 300 feet (90 m) tall, but its lower portions have long since been subsumed into the Bloom. In fact, much of it is covered by Bloom-flesh, which has crept like moss across the metal surface. More and more of it disappears beneath the tumorous flesh each year, and currently only its face, arms, and famous silver hammer are free.



THE GREAT CHILA

Long ago, when she was a teenager in the Underbelly, a girl named Chila ran afoul of one of the bosses of Sagus Cliffs and was thrown into the Bloom as a slave. But she was able to form a unique bond with the Bloom, which helped her escape, organize the slaves, and stage a revolt that ultimately spilled out of the city and brought down the government of Sagus Cliffs.

Within the Bloom, Chila is known as the Great Chila and regarded as the first Memovira. Many years after the revolt, it is commonly believed that she was called to the Bloom's Heart and disappeared into its depths. Many people think she's still down there or is off wandering the universe. Others are convinced she was eaten. Whatever her fate, she is revered by the Bloom cultists. To them, she is the one true saint, and they have only one goal: to follow in Chila's footsteps and become one with the Bloom.

THE FOUR LESSONS OF THE GREAT CHILA

The First Lesson: The Meek Inherit Nothing

The Second Lesson: Always Make Them Remember You

The Third Lesson: If They Love You, They Will Do Anything for You

The Fourth Lesson: If They Can't Love You, Make Them Fear You

At some point in the past, part of the statue's face collapsed inward, and a large hole now yawns where the mouth and most of the nose once were. To some cult members, this gives the impression of a decaying corpse, which they believe is an apt metaphor for the Chila legend in the present day.

The statue's head is hollow and the Bloom cultists have established a small shrine inside. The Bloom-flesh around the lower head is attached to the walkways, so it's possible to walk along this platform and enter the shrine. The shrine is filled with their "sacred text" and other symbolic items.

The shrine is only a single room, hung with makeshift offerings and lit by flickering candles. The space is dark and dank, and Bloom-flesh has spread across much of the interior, including the floors and walls. Only a few spots remain where the tarnished silver of the statue shines in the flickering candlelight.

Many of the offerings are objects of silver, scavenged from around the Bloom. These are considered favorable because of their symbolic connection to Chila. Others are more gruesome, meant to demonstrate the predatory strength of those who leave them—severed limbs of victims, parts of slain beasts, and so on.

Maintaining the shrine is a small elderly woman with white hair who is known as the Observant Speck. She is missing her left arm at the elbow, and often wears a shawl draped over her head. She claims to be the descendant of the Great Chila's companion and confidante, who was called the Manipulative Speck. It's not clear whether the Observant Speck is one of many incarnations of the same Speck or a totally different woman who has been manipulated by the voices of the Bloom and retains some of the knowledge and memories of the original (who might also have been devoured). It is widely believed—maybe accurately—that there has always been a Speck in the Bloom, at least ever since the time of Chila. Certainly the current Speck says that this is the case. She has an uncanny knowledge of the Bloom and is the primary keeper of the Chila legend.

Outside the statue, an old, bearded man dressed in rags that were once fine clothes wanders about this area, muttering and whispering to himself. Called Walks-Without-Fear, he seems to come and go in and out of phase, sometimes appearing as if he is semi-transparent. Walks-Without-Fear claims that he was eaten by the Bloom and somehow survived. He says he awoke in the depths of the leviathan, where he wandered for—if he is to be believed—many years, passing in and out of a variety of worlds, before finding his way to the upper reaches again. Ever since the man's bizarre experience, the Bloom allows him to go wherever he wishes, so he thinks of himself as a part of the city-creature (and perhaps he is).

Walks-Without-Fear: *level 4*

Some people whisper that Walks-Without-Fear was once a particularly brutal and predatory Memovira, and that's why the Bloom devoured him.

THE OLD SLAVE BLOCK

The passage leading from the Vast Interior to the Old Slave Block is marked with fetishes made of bones, sticks, and large black murden feathers. Beyond that, the space turns into dark, winding tunnels. Unlike most of the other tunnels in the Bloom, which seem to be a natural part of the creature, these appear to have

Observant Speck: *level 4; Bloom, Chila, and cult lore as level 8*

Murden, page 247

been carved out of the Bloom-flesh long ago by human hands, so the structure of the chambers feels artificial and carefully crafted. The area was once a slave block, with various cells and doors made of rusted and dented metal. Recently it has fallen into disuse and is now controlled by a gang of thieving murdens.

The entire area is poorly lit, which helps hide how dilapidated and filthy everything is, thanks to the murdens who lounge about, throwing their garbage everywhere. The murdens are known for mounting raiding parties throughout the Bloom, and they seem to be one of the few groups that have little to no fear of or respect for the Memovira's rule. When strangers arrive at the tunnels—typically after having lost their way—the murdens stage a "welcoming" committee, which essentially means they attempt to intimidate the strangers into leaving.

It's not unusual for the murdens to keep prisoners inside the old slave cells. Dirty and dank, the cells are hard on the physical and mental health of those locked inside, and it's likely that more than a few prisoners have died while in their "care."

Corpuscular maw, page 128

The Riven Maw: *level 8*

Murden Lair: This chamber was once a barracks for the guards and overseers who managed the slave block, but now it contains the nests of most of the murden gang, scattered along the edges of the walls. This room is absolutely filthy, filled with refuse, feathers, bones, offal, and so on. In the back part of the room is a much larger nest—a mound of refuse heaped against the wall—that belongs to the murden chieftain. This grey-feathered creature holds court here, along with his constant companion, a nameless and lobotomized slave who serves as his translator. The translator has long hair on one side of her head, but the other side is shaved, and a number of wires and devices are implanted into her skull. The implants show signs of infection, as well as scars of unskilled surgery.

The Riven Maw: Inside this locked room is a very old Maw, which has fragmented into numerous corpuscular maws that emerge from the floor and walls when a living creature strays too far into the room. The door to this room is locked, and inside is a very dark slave cell that's a little longer than the others. Chains lie here and there on the ground, along with bits of flesh and bone, the remains of those who were bound here as sacrifices to the Maw.

By gaining passage through the Riven Maw, it's possible to access the murden gang's storeroom, which is located here. This tiny chamber, a natural abscess of sorts, is located somewhere in the depths of the Bloom, and it was not carved by human hands. It contains goods that the murdens

have stolen over a period of years, including 1d6 + 5 shins, 1d6 random oddities, 1d6 random cyphers, and some equipment.

CHIURGEON SLUMP

Chiurgeon Slump is a foul little ghetto in an enclosed space of Bloom-flesh. It's so named because it attracted a tiny community of doctors and quacksalvers, exiled from their communities for malpractice, unorthodox obsessions, or worse. Dilapidated shelters are built around its edges or cling to the walls.

Fastened to the wall of the passage to the Slump is a battered metal shield. Although it's damaged beyond repair, it's beautifully decorated with colorful, though faded, patterns that match one of the sides in the Endless Battle. It bears the words "Fifth Maniple, Artaglio's Irregulars." This area is controlled by those self-same Irregulars, a small gang of military deserters from the nearby Endless Battle, who strut about and coerce protection funds from the residents.

PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NOTE

Artaglio's Camp: In the center of the Slump, Artaglio—a deserter and former captain of one of the armies of the Endless Battle—makes his camp, which consists of a couple of simple tents, some sorry-looking banners on pikes, and a few crates of supplies. Artaglio is a self-described condottiere, and he dresses the part, taking great care with his silver and blue clothing, fancy breastplate, well-polished weapons and armor, and trophies that he claims to have taken in battle.

Although he would be hard-pressed to admit it, Artaglio has been too long in the Bloom, and the city-creature hungers for him, whispers for him to approach a Maw. The stress weighs upon him; his face is sunken and his fancy clothing is too big for him, giving the impression of a starving cockerel. His manner vacillates between being arrogant and bullying, and nervously looking over his shoulder at a nearby Maw.

His loyal sergeant, Ranard, is always at his side, and is growing concerned for Artaglio's well-being. Recently the Bloom has begun to speak to Ranard as well, but he is having better luck resisting its murmurings.

Demeray and Obervich: Two quack doctors named Demeray and Obervich have set up their equipment in the ruins of an old shanty. Completely amoral, the two are always in search of interesting patients to study.

Both are tall and very thin, but that is where their similarities end. Demeray has a long, sagging face, huge rolls under his eyes, a mass of curly hair, and constant discharges from his eyes, nose, and mouth. Obervich is bald, long-faced, and angular. The upper part of his head (where his eyes should be) is covered with a multitude of prosthetic mechanical eyes and sensors that he has drilled into his flesh. He also has bifurcated arms—the upper arm of each pair is human, while the lower arm of each pair is mechanical.

The two colleagues have the somewhat-annoying habit of always referring to one another formally as "Doctor Demeray" and "Doctor Obervich." They refer to their patients only by numbers.

Sheen's Laboratory: A woman called Sheen has set up a sort of distillery here. She is impossibly thin and frail looking as a result of genetic changes that she has wrought upon herself. Sheen is an augur but was exiled years ago from Augur-Kala due to her extensive self-mutations.

Her lab is essentially a large apparatus that she's cobbled together over the years to help distill her essences. The entire thing is wrapped with a frame of walkways so she can access its various parts. From here, she distills mind-states into usable cyphers, which she then sells to interested buyers. Sheen works by making a psychic connection with her customer, drawing their mental state into her mind, and then expelling it from her body in material form: a great breath of fetid air, a fluid that she vomits, pus that oozes from the corner of her eye, and so on.

It isn't uncommon for wealthy people from Sagus Cliffs (or farther afield) to procure her specialty products, which are quite expensive, ranging from 20 to 100 shins, depending on the desired result.

Demeray: *level 3, medical knowledge and persuasion as level 6*

Obervich: *level 3, tasks involving manual dexterity as level 6 (due to bifurcated arms)*

Endless Battle, page 70

Artaglio's Irregular: *level 6; Armor 2*

Sheen: *level 4, the numenera and crafting as level 5*

Artaglio: *level 7; health 24; Armor 3; carries a heavily engraved broadsword*

Augur, page 215

Ranard: *level 7*

Jont: *level 4*

Herja: *level 3*

Visitant, page 120

Angulan Knights, page 224

The sign actually reads "Welcome to Little Nhlesh," but someone did a fairly decent job of fixing it by scratching in the missing I's.

The Fahat is the familylike caste in Nihliesh. They're the central figures in a quasireligious faith that reveres the blessing of mutation.

Nihliesh, page 209

Fahat, page 211

Varjellen, page 121

Catena: *level 5; can scavenge 1d6 cyphers from the wreck*

Gar-koto: *level 5, intimidation as level 6*

Mutant guard: *level 4*

Jont: Jont is a very large, broad-shouldered, and strange-looking man who lurks near a ragged lean-to. While his skin and hair seem human enough, his underlying bone structure is entirely alien. Jont is a visitant whose skin and muscles were devoured by the Bloom. Demeray and Obervich grafted human skin and artificial muscles onto his body to save his life. He almost seems to be waiting for a purpose, a reason to do something with his new body, but is at a loss for what that might be.

LITTLE NIHLIESH

A squalid and downtrodden neighborhood buried within a cavity of Bloom-flesh, Little Nihliesh is a place that has long existed, but never found a way to thrive. The area is filled with ramshackle structures, some old, some new, but all disheveled and unkempt. The overpowering reek of garbage and sewage fills the nose and assaults the eyes, most of it coming from a massive "U" shape of mounded trash. Adding to the disarray, the northern section of the area was mostly demolished by a catena that smashed through it.

Even the entrance to the neighborhood shows its broken and battered roots. A dilapidated metal sign hangs from the top of the tunnel that leads to the area. It currently reads "Welcome to Little Nihliesh," but it's obvious that many other names preceded it, each scratched out or sanded away to make room for a new one.

Little Nihliesh is run by a powerful gang of mutants who hail from Nihliesh, a distant city in the Beyond. They originally traveled back and forth to the Bloom regularly via a portal for trade and plunder, but got trapped here when the Maw they were using unexpectedly closed.

Gar-koto: The group is led by Gar-koto, a minor prince of a mutated ruling family in the Beyond known as the Fahat. His court is in the middle of the "U" shape of the trash mound, surrounding a large spherical tank full of inky liquid. Inside the tank lurks the twisted and mutated form of Gar-koto, a creature with boneless two-fingered hands and monstrous squidlike eyes. The tank is always protected by at least two mutant guards.

Gar-koto and his gang are currently keeping a woman named Herja prisoner. Herja's prison is invisible, but powerful all the same. A small disc adhered to her forehead prevents her from moving outside a certain boundary, although it does nothing to prevent others from approaching her. Herja exudes a sense of fierce defiance despite the rotten food lodged in her hair and splattered upon her tattered clothing. Even though her garments are torn and dirty, it's easy to see the insignia of the Angulan Knights upon them—her affiliation with the organization is a big part of the reason that Gar-koto keeps her imprisoned. Until she confesses her alleged crime of attempting to poison all the mutants in the area, Gar-koto will not free her.

The Haunted Catena: The back end of the crashed catena, which plowed into this neighborhood about a year ago, rests here. No one goes near it, because they believe it is haunted by a demon. If anyone touches the catena, several shimmering holographic projections of humans and varjellen appear nearby and start interacting with the person who touched it. The projections appear aggressive and angry, demanding that the person stop what they're doing at once. The holograms are controlled by the catena's machine intelligence, which preserved the names and images of those who died on its final voyage.

THE GULLET

Deep in the guts of the Bloom is a jumble of fleshy veins and cavities, known to natives as the Gullet. It surrounds a foul organic stew that contains the minds and memories of those devoured by the Bloom. The pulsing of a titanic heart reverberates from somewhere below, and those who find themselves trapped here are often driven mad by the sound alone.

Few reach this place by intention. Most are eaten by a Maw and emerge in the Gullet, half digested, to spend the final days of their lives in screaming agony. Transdimensional echoes of the Bloom's victims wander through the tunnels, lost and insane. Bizarre creatures, bred by the

Bloom in its guts, burst from their wombs to hunt. Forgotten machines and artifacts lie half submerged in Bloom-flesh, plucked from distant worlds of the past or future.

The only way out of the Gullet is down—follow the sounds of the Bloom's beating heart and descend to a place where the leviathan's consciousness is at its most malignant and aware.

BLOOM'S HEART

A foul mass of arteries and conduits converge at the Heart, pumping fluids from all over the Bloom to power the creature's minds and voices. Unlike the heart of a normal creature, which pumps blood through the body, the Bloom's heart *draws* fluid to itself. These fluids are thoughts and memories—no doubt stolen from victims of the Bloom—rendered into physical form. They feed the innumerable intelligences that coalesce here, knitting them closer together, strengthening the greater intellect of the Bloom.

In the interior of the Heart, accessed through a sphincterlike opening, is a twisted mass of tubes, arteries, roots, and tongues, heaving and pulsing in the murky light. The flesh glimmers with foul shades of purple and black, pocked with pustules and necrosis. Bloom-whispers gather, gently tickling the edges of your conscious mind, buzzing and chittering with excitement.

This is where the consciousness of the Bloom resides, and it's also where new Memoviras form their bond with the city-creature when their predecessors are overthrown or devoured. The Bloom chooses each Memovira, usually picking someone powerful and dangerous who it believes it can manipulate, over time, into becoming the predatory master of all the beings living within the leviathan. It feeds off the actions of the Memovira, ultimately turning against the creature holding that position and devouring them.

If the Bloom favors a prospective Memovira, it finds a way to get them down into its Heart and attempts to forge a bond. It plants a seed of itself, typically one of its voices, in the person's mind, while taking an echo of the candidate's internal voice and subsuming that voice into its own whispering chorus.

It's possible to try to resist this process, but it's not easy. The benefit for those chosen is the potential to achieve great power within the Bloom. Maws open at a touch, pathways are created that lead to wherever you want to go within the Bloom, and nearly everyone bows to your will. But the price is steep. You're bound to the Bloom forever, its voice will never leave your head, and it will ultimately find a way to devour you, although you may not realize that at the start.

Bloom Heart: *level 11*

Demeray and Obervich refer to Jont as "Patient #27."

BLOOM HEARSAY

Mired: A trade caravan consisting of a wagon, some aneen, two merchants, and several guards is growing ever more mired in the Vast Interior as the Bloom engulfs it. Despite their struggles, they can't seem to break away from the downward pull.

Missing Patrols: Brusca is missing two of her patrols, at least one of which was attacked by murdens in the Old Slave Block. She is offering a reward—substantial if both of the guards are brought back alive, minor if only one makes it back still breathing.

THE WEIRD OF THE BLOOM

Motatorious Spinners: In the darkness of a long tunnel that recently appeared, spiderlike creatures the size of a human head are constantly spinning round webs that can be seen only through closed eyelids, where they show up as a faint yellow shimmer.

Treelights: Very little foliage grows in the Bloom, but on one of the platforms in the Vast Interior, a small orchard of perfectly spaced, glowing trees has begun to grow.

VALLEY OF DEAD HEROES

About 30 miles (50 km) to the northeast of Sagus Cliffs, a pair of mountain ranges marks the beginning of the strangeness of the Valley of Dead Heroes. Between the two parallel chains of peaks lies a long, dry valley filled with an endless landscape of tombs, monuments, gravestones, and ruins. The length of the pass from end to end is a mere 90 miles (150 km), but it represents millions of years in time to a sojourner who passes through.

Tabaht, page 16

The floor of the valley is covered with proof of the dead. Ancient monuments, shrines, statues, obelisks, empty sepulchers, and shrines spanning many prior worlds litter the valley in vast thoroughfares and twisted alleys. The memorials vary widely in appearance and even in what laws of time and gravity they seem to obey. Some are standard grave markers or statues, while others are long-dried waterfalls that spill no water or flickering flames; the preserved bodies of nonhumans; or odd mechanisms and devices.

Many are so badly worn that their original purpose is obscured, but others are only days or weeks old. No one knows how long the Valley of Dead Heroes has served as a burial place, or what types of creatures were laid to rest here across time, but from the variety and ages of the markers and structures, it has clearly been used as a final resting place for the dead for a very long time. There is evidence that even the fierce Tabaht chose to bury some of their fallen leaders here, and some markers indicate that the valley holds the remains of those from as far away as the Steadfast.

Not all of the creatures who come here to deposit their dead are human or even sapient. Many land animals, birds, and other creatures make the long migration to the valley, enduring great hardships and peril, to bury or otherwise honor their dead. Sections of the valley are littered with the bones, skin, tools, and crude markers of everything from domesticated animals like aneen and seskii to incomprehensible

Aneen, page 231

Seskii, page 258

beings made of energy and thought. At first glance, these leavings might seem random or accidental—the strewn remains of prey, perhaps—but there is nearly always an order to the arrangement, even if that order isn't easy to ascertain.

Those who are near death sometimes tell of elaborate dreams or visions of themselves following a glowing swarm of tiny metal orbs down a long, narrow passageway that eventually leads to a long valley. The valley they describe from their vision matches the Valley of Dead Heroes almost perfectly. Those who experience this believe strongly that what they saw is real and they express a strong desire, almost an imperative, to go there as soon as possible, even though they don't know where it is.

What is it that calls such a wide array of creatures to this land to honor their dead? No one knows for certain, but it's likely tied into whatever happened here in the far past that created this barren landscape. Nothing grows here. The sere ground and rocky walls are dry, utterly and perpetually devoid of native life. No fungi. No mushrooms. Not even microbes seem able to take hold. It's as if the whole area was once sterilized, and something continues to keep it that way.

Water is at a premium. Rain-laden storms swerve away from the pass, spilling no moisture. Clouds part around it, as if breaking on an invisible barrier. A few alkaline fountains bubble water up from unknown aquifers under the valley floor, providing nourishment that is barely potable and occasionally hallucinogenic.

Even the Iron Wind gives the valley a wide berth. Nothing grows here, and the small streams that tumble down its steep mountainsides soon slow to a trickle and then perish. Even the wind does not rest here; it whispers through the landscape just above the threshold of hearing or howls through the shrines like a lament.

How and why did the valley become what it is? One possibility is that an ancient civilization or natural disaster sterilized it thoroughly, down to the smallest microbe. Perhaps this was done for a greater reason—such as to create a training ground for combat exercises, as an experiment in environmental control, or to exterminate a deadly and infectious disease. Or it may be that a prior civilization cleared the valley to ensure that their dead would merely desiccate, rather than decompose. Regardless, none know the true history of the place, only that within its borders no life can thrive for very long.

Despite the visible signs of burials and memorials, no creatures—humans or otherwise—are interred in the ground. Treasure hunters and those who seek the knowledge of the dead are thwarted and confused by memorials that hold nothing more than dust and air. All of the dead are actually buried in an enormous cavern called the Necropolis that runs beneath the valley.

Few creatures choose to make their permanent home in this land, and those who mistakenly enter stay only as long as it takes them to find their way back out. Most humans, mutants, and visitants who travel through the valley make the best time they can. A few choose to prolong their stays, and fewer still (notably a faction called the Memorialists) live here, seemingly immune to the previous life-scouring effects.

Memorialists, page 57

Once, airships from the Sagus Cliffs Caravanserai made their way here regularly, ferrying the curious to the site, or delivering the dead and dying to their final resting places. However, that is becoming less common. The practice of burial in the Valley of Dead Heroes has decreased in popularity in Sagus Cliffs over the last couple of generations, and its status as an attraction has likewise slipped. Since it is primarily the wealthy of the city who can afford the costs associated with such burials—transport; a tithe to historians, mourners, or the Memorialists; food and drink along the way; and more—traffic has dropped precipitously.

Sacree's Mourners: One of the remaining companies that regularly travels between Sagus Cliffs and the valley is run by twin sisters, Trasc and Palieth. The women came to the valley on an airship from Sagus Cliffs with their father, Sacree, as his dying wish. A former council representative, Sacree started seeing visions of the valley before he even

Trasc: *level 4, geography as level 5, all tasks involving flying (including piloting, repairing, and crafting) as level 6*

Palieth: *level 4; sneaking, pickpocketing, and lockpicking as level 6; wears a small wristband that vibrates when it detects working cyphers or artifacts within short range*

realized he was dying, and he drew his final breath on the valley floor. Shortly after, Trasc and Palieth bought an airship and began a business ferrying the dying (or anyone else who wishes to go) to the valley. The women have similar dark senses of humor, particularly about death and dying, which can turn off some customers, but for the most part, their business is highly successful. They charge what Trasc thinks are ridiculously low rates—15 shins per person for the trip—and she has no idea how the company stays afloat. Palieth, on the other hand, knows that at least a portion of their profits comes from her late-night forays into the pockets of the recently deceased.

THE NECROPOLIS

The answer to the obvious and oft-asked question of the valley—"But where are the dead?"—is that the bodies are in the Necropolis. Of all the civilizations that have made use of the valley, each seems drawn by some knowledge, tradition, or compulsion to the enormous Necropolis that lies in a vast underground cavern beneath the entirety of the valley floor. It is a place artificially carved from the bedrock and sealed in pulsating energies that exist just beyond sight, accessible through a number of nearly hidden openings on the far side of the valley.

Who knows how long the Necropolis has been used as a storehouse for the dead? Treasures of lost worlds are buried here, items of incalculable power and beauty. But to find them, one must know the secrets of the valley—and to learn these secrets, one would be wise to study with the Memorialists, to learn the lives of the dead, and to join with them in remembrance. Without this knowledge, the treasures that remain are hidden, protected by deadly traps, or guarded by creatures—fatal gauntlets that add more bodies to the growing collection beneath the Valley of Dead Heroes.

The Necropolis is filled with what seems like an endless number of small, honeycomb-shaped rooms, now used as tombs, that hold grave markers, metal-and-synth coffins, or large monuments. It's clear by the size and shape of the rooms and the placement of the doors that this underground structure wasn't originally meant to be used by humans.

The most commonly used entrance to the Necropolis is through a room that looks as though it had once been sealed tight,

but was broken into long ago. One of the massive doors lies flat near the entryway. On the back side of the room are three doors to the interior. The leftmost two are blocked by debris and an odd translucent goop. The door on the right leads to a hexagonal passage that ends in what the Memorialists call the control room.

On one side of the control room is a teleport terminal, which offers a view of the honeycombed tombs stretching out far beyond it. The terminal can be used to access any of the tombs, either by entering a code to the desired tomb or by inputting a random code and seeing where it teleports you.

Centuries ago, early Memorialists etched numbers onto the consoles in the Truth, making it easier to find and record specific tombs. Nowadays, they explore the tombs methodically, painstakingly recording the names in each—or at least they did before the cultists arrived.

THE MEMORIALISTS

The Memorialists are a group of people who dwell in the valley, tending the graves and tombs as best they can. They study the dead and memorialize those who have passed. The Memorialists were once numerous and widespread throughout the valley, but their numbers are diminishing, both through attrition and due to the war being waged upon them by the death-worshipping cult known as the Children of the Endless Gate.

The Memorialists believe that this world is the afterlife, and everyone walking on the earth today merely thinks they're still alive. The tombs in the Valley of Dead Heroes are the graves of all the people. Thus, the Memorialists seek to maintain the graves so that no one is forgotten and no monument is lost, for if everyone remembers themselves by finding the grave that belongs to them, the world will become the paradise that the afterlife was meant to be. But if everyone—or even most people—forget, the world will become a hell.

Generations of Memorialists have made a profession of knowing the histories of those remembered in the valley. Some are paid from estates or trusts to sing the praises of the dead, while others are true historians who wish to keep the light of human accomplishment alive in the Ninth World. They pass along the knowledge to those who come to pay their respects to the dead, and to the tourists and travelers who come to see one of the great mausoleums of the world.

Of course, the Memorialists believe that they too are dead. Most of them take on the name of the "hero" they were in life—usually a name found on a marker in the Necropolis. They spend a great deal of time learning about this hero—about themselves—and caring for that particular tomb.

CHILDREN OF THE ENDLESS GATE

Unlike the Memorialists, who seem to have been here for aeons, the Children of the Endless Gate only recently arrived in the valley. Upon their arrival, they began killing Memorialists and other travelers, and taking the bodies to the Endless Gate, a portal inside the Necropolis that leads to another dimension. The evidence of this war is everywhere—abandoned campsites, trails of blood, and Endless Gate symbols litter the landscape. The most prominent remainder is the proliferation of skinned hands that are

The Truth, page 133

Children of the Endless Gate, page 104

piled up outside the gate, as the Children chop off their victims' hands and skin them before tossing the rest of the body into the portal.

The Endless Gate: Located in one of the tombs deep in the Necropolis is the portal known as the Endless Gate. The tomb is horrible, filled with egg-shaped markers and cubelike cells that once had some other use, but which now serve mostly as graves or grave markers. Some of the markers and cells glow faintly, while others are dead. There are bodies inside some, others are empty, and for others it's hard to tell. Most of the markers, walls, and other items in the room are splattered with blood, and the symbol of the Endless Gate is scrawled in blood in several places.

Inifere: *level 5, social interactions as level 4*

At the far end of the tomb is the Endless Gate itself. The gate exudes a red substance that moves and pulsates like it's alive, sometimes appearing to be made of pure energy, and other times becoming semi-solid, like molten lava.

The Endless Gate is a portal to a singular horror: an entity of all-consuming hunger. It manifests inside the dimension as a massive set of teeth and dominates the minds of its followers, rendering them insane. It's particularly attracted to victims of great psychic power.

To most people, the Endless Gate is a hellscape of horrors, but to the Children, it is the key to potential power. They believe that by bringing as many bodies as possible to the being on the other side, they will free the spirits within each body, thus granting themselves great power.

Inifere: Thin, tall, and typically disheveled, the man known as Inifere doesn't dress as if he's one of the cultists. He wears no armor and does not have blood or the Endless Gate symbol on him anywhere. Despite his appearance, he is, in fact, the leader of the Children of the Endless Gate, though he doesn't want the job and tries desperately to hide his identity. Currently, he is hiding inside the dimension on the other side of the gate, attempting to run from his past and his present.

VALLEY OF DEAD HEROES HEARSAY

Whisperlocked: A Memorialist named Talira Kyo has put a whisperlock on the teleport terminal in the control room, in an attempt to keep the cultists from gaining access. In turn, three cultists named Motley, Jaelyn DiMathe, and Isalu Mena have been torturing Talira for information so they can unlock the terminal. She has refused to give in. Both Talira and the cultists are seeking help to get what they want.

Whisperlock, page 82

Gossamer Strands: A man named Fajl, whose entire body is coated in glowing white webs, walks through the valley, looking for the memorial of his ancestor. Fajl says the webs are some kind of illness or curse that runs in his family, although it hasn't manifested in generations. Fajl believes his ancestor took the cure with him to his grave.

THE WEIRD OF THE VALLEY OF DEAD HEROES

Three's Company: A party of three explorers entered a portal in the Bloom and emerged in the valley fused into a single living blob. Now they search the valley for hidden secrets—and for a fourth adventurer to join their collective.

Remember Me: When someone touches a crystal obelisk that floats through the valley, they experience a memory that isn't theirs. It belongs to someone in the Necropolis, although it's hard to say whether that person is alive or dead.

CHAPTER 5

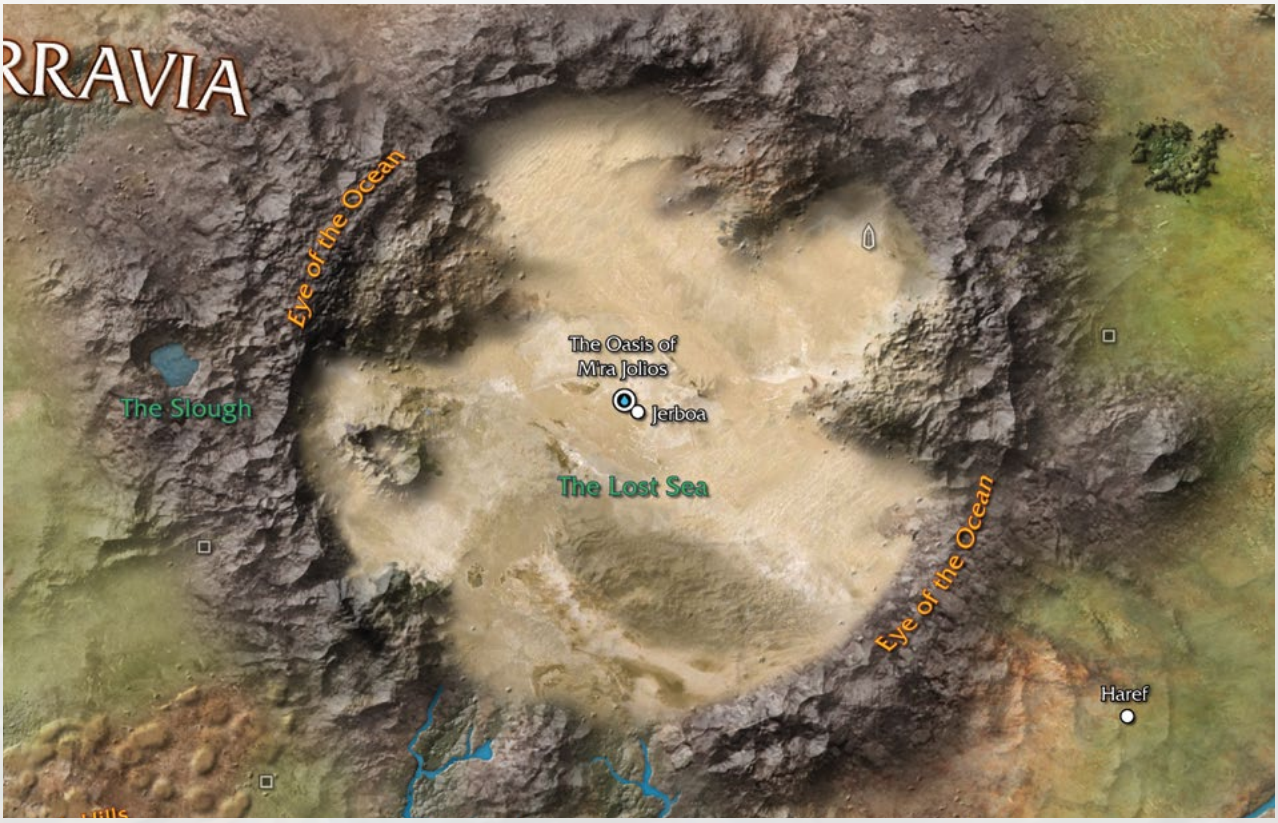
THE LOST SEA

I volunteered to wear the ghost belt since the trip through the valley was my idea. Its ethereal tendrils shivered into my belly, and my eyeballs swelled, warping my vision until I got used to the effect. The itching, the tears, being unable to blink—that was the worst part. Every few minutes I checked my trail of afterimages, a line of ghostly grey statues that showed me always ten seconds in the past. They'd start to fade in about four days, so we had to make sure we were close to home by then. Only my bloated eyes could see the ghosts, so predators couldn't use them to track us—at least, no predators we knew about. The deep woods were still a mystery. Getting lost when the valley shifted wasn't the only danger.

We followed as straight a path as we could. Even so, we kept crossing lines of my ghosts, so we knew the valley was doing its best to confound us. Walking through my own grey apparitions felt like stepping through smoky mirrors. Like I was touching my past.

~ from *For the Common Good*

The Lost Sea is a vast circular desert surrounded by a ring of rugged mountains. It's the most prominent location in this part of Greater Garravia, so "the Lost Sea" has come to refer not just to the desert and its



The Lost Sea area tone: *Desolate, hot, confusing, deadly. The desert tries to cause travelers to become hopelessly lost.*

Chirog, page 235

Yovok, page 267

two major cities, but to the general area overall, extending as far as the underground city of Haref about 60 miles (100 km) to the southeast.

The desert hides the fabulous aquatic city of M'ra Jolios, a dome of water that parched travelers see as an oasis in the dusty wasteland. M'ra Jolios is the home of the Ghibra, a race of multifarious water-breathing humanoids. The city seems incongruous amid the burning dunes, but the desert used to be a fertile valley before an unknown cataclysm wiped it off the face of the world, reducing the land to rock and sand. Only M'ra Jolios remained. In the years since the disaster, human refugees founded the trade town of Jerboa in the shadow of the dome, and the two communities have developed a mutual relationship. Reaching the twin cities is difficult, however, as the Lost Sea turns travelers around and around, sending them in circles and looping paths that prevent them from reaching their destination.

The Eye of the Ocean, the mountain range that encloses the Lost Sea, is dense with barely passable peaks. Chirogs, yovoki, and other abhumans make crossing the mountains especially hazardous, as do the frequent landslides that expose ancient caverns unexplored for centuries. To the west, a large crater lake known as the Slough draws mountain-dwellers from this part of the Eye and may hold a hidden path to M'ra Jolios.

The dome city, Jerboa, Sagus Cliffs, the Bloom, and other settlements in the region send caravans and airships to trade with the wealthy rulers of Haref, a city built into the sides of an enormous hole in the ground. This hole, the Bore, is not natural but was excavated for some prior-world purpose. Traders must approach with caution, for Haref is in the throes of a rebellion by the Sona laborers who are striking back against the brutish Bayan guards and the power-mad Nil overlords.

THE LOST SEA

Some residents of the Sagus Protectorate say the barren desert known as the Lost Sea was named after a great body of water that once filled this space. Others say no, the name refers to the wasteland's ability to prevent travelers from finding their way through, ensuring that they wander until the sun bleaches their bones. Both are correct.

At first glance, the Lost Sea seems much like any desert. The ground is mostly coarse, gravelly drit that hurts bare feet and can wear through boots that lack reinforced soles, though large patches of softer sand abound. Some areas are as flat as tile and allow a clear view for miles. Others ripple with low hills, dunes, or rocky outcroppings that hide whatever lies just over the next rise. The wind howls, stirring up stinging sand or gritty soil. The sky never fills with clouds—just the sun that bakes the sea during the day and the moon and stars that chill it at night.

That's where the similarities end. If travelers listen carefully to the wind, they might hear what sounds like whistling—echoes of others trying to make their way across the desert. When dust storms or sandstorms blow fierce, the swirling particles abrade bare flesh and induce hallucinations of a green, fertile valley—visions of the vibrant life that filled the wasteland long ago. Occasional rain does fall, pouring out of the clear sky from an unseen source and evaporating before it touches the ground.

Explorers might find the bones and remains of those who died crossing the Lost Sea, along with missing caravans, crashed airships, and stranger debris. Much of this has been picked over or eaten by scavengers, but not everything has been found, or looted. Who knows what might await just beyond the next hill?

NAVIGATION

If anyone could measure the Lost Sea from side to side, the diameter would prove to be nearly 200 miles (320 km). But one could sooner chart the histories of the prior worlds or round up every last piece of the numenera that has survived, for the nature of the Lost Sea does not allow for precise measurement or easy travel. It works against explorers, turning them around as they try to cross, shuffling them

THE VALLEY THAT WAS

The visions induced by dust storms and sandstorms show glimpses of the past, when the Lost Sea was a thriving valley overgrown with colorful foliage and thick forests, and inhabited by scattered human settlements. It was all destroyed long ago, leaving nothing but the wasteland that is known today. Legends in Jerboa disagree on the nature of the catastrophe. Some say one of the settlers tinkered with the wrong relic from a prior world, unleashing a plague that turned everything to dust. Others claim the gods sent a flood to raze the valley as punishment for its sins. Still others believe that reality-eating horrors chewed their way through the region and more or less erased it. Regardless of the details, all the origin myths include a Ghibra named Baji and a human named Tuck who either tried to save the valley or sought to destroy it. What records have survived do imply the existence of individuals by these names, but whether Baji and Tuck were historical figures or fables, today some Jerboans revere them as gods, while others fear them as harbingers of doom who will one day return to usher in a new apocalypse.

through space from one spot to another, and generally doing everything possible to stymie navigation.

Worse, these effects are imperceptible. A group trying to move in a straight line ends up looping back on its path, veering off in the wrong direction, or warping to the other side of the desert, all with no clues or sensation of unintended movement. Even skilled explorers can be trapped in a small region and repeat the same few miles over and over again, never the wiser until they eventually realize they've been swallowed by the Lost Sea. Tracking landmarks or distant mountain peaks, charting by constellations at night, marking trails—no mundane methods work. (In gameplay, the GM is free to resolve this effect through the story alone, simply deciding when the PCs become lost and when they finally find their way again. Those looking for more guidance can have the PCs make Intellect rolls every few hours of travel; the difficulty starts at 5 and increases by 1 for each subsequent check until they are lost. For characters who use navigation devices or the other special direction-finding methods mentioned in this chapter, the difficulty of the Intellect roll is always 4.)

An old hermit named Arahan is said to know a secret way to cross the Lost Sea, and there are rumors of a nevajin somewhere in the desert that can escort visitors who meet its price (which is never the same for each person, and never as simple as coins). However, neither is easy to find. Travelers had better come prepared with devices (such as carbonic wind chimes or ghost belts) to help them navigate or risk wandering the waste until they fall victim to the heat, the dust storms, or the indigenous wildlife.

Carbonic wind chimes, page 113

Ghost belt, page 122

Arahan, page 63

Nevajin, page 248

FLORA AND FAUNA

A Jerboan legend says that a curse placed upon the Lost Sea forbids rain from the sky from ever again reaching the soil. The one who issued the curse varies, depending on who is recounting the story.

Only the hardiest plantlife can survive in the scrublands of the Lost Sea. Varieties of rough shrubs and prickly bushes—and, in certain areas, unexpected clusters of brilliant purple and yellow flowers—grow throughout the desolate region.

The most common plant is the brassle bush, which thrives because it has adapted to the strange rainfall. Several times a month, brief but intense showers pour down from the cloudless sky, weakening as they fall and evaporating at least 10 feet (3 m) above the surface of the ground. During these quick storms, nearby brassle bushes shoot out silky membranes that unfurl like upside-down parachutes, catching the bottom of the rainfall and funneling it down into the plant's stem. The serrated leaves visibly swell with water, enough to sustain the bush until the next rain. Travelers in the know can pluck these leaves and suck on them to remain hydrated while crossing the desert. A few leaves provide an average-sized humanoid with about a day's worth of water.

Cragworm, page 236

The Lost Sea is also home to insects, arachnids, birds, small mammals, and reptiles that burrow underground during the day and hunt at night. The largest known creatures in the region are the cragworms that hide amid the rocks and dunes. They grow up to 50 feet (15 m) long and often make meals of trader caravans that get lost on the way to Jerboa. Desperate explorers who need to escape the sun can risk taking shelter in an abandoned cragworm burrow—and hope that it truly *is* abandoned.

Other creatures of the Lost Sea include the mulpeen, fat white birds that chase down insects by running across the ground on eight spidery legs. They can fly when spooked, but only in a series of low, frantic jumps, never rising more than a few feet at a time.

The rovora are crescent-shaped predators with four spindly legs and large mouths on the underside of their bodies. They bury themselves upside down below the surface with their legs sticking up above the ground like plant stalks. Anything that wanders too close is grabbed as the rovora emerges from the soil, mouth stretching open to accommodate the size of the surprised prey.

Strangest of all might be the canine arklice, which shrink to the size of small rocks and go dormant during long periods without water. They're often found around brassle bushes. When the plants unfurl to catch rain, some water splashes over onto the arklice, which instantly grow to their full size and are driven by sudden, intense hunger to attack any living things nearby.

Mulpeen: *level 2, jumping as level 3; health 6; long movement when running, immediate when flying; beak does 2 points of damage*

Rovora: *level 4, hiding as level 6; health 12; Armor 2; attacks with surprise unless target makes difficulty 6 Speed defense roll; mouth stretches to cover target and acid does 3 points of damage per round until target makes a Might roll to escape*

Arklice (dormant): *level 1*

Arklice (active): *level 3; health 9; Armor 4; two foot talon attacks per action deal a total of 6 points of damage to one target*

DESERT WALKERS

Many travelers and caravans bound for M'ra Jolios or Jerboa use airships or devices to cross the Lost Sea without getting diverted wildly off course. Of course, not everyone has that luxury, which accounts for all the remains of those who tried to cross on foot.

But some choose to travel the hard way. A company of humans known as the Desert Walkers claim to know the secrets of the Lost Sea and use their knowledge to escort travelers to and from the cities at the center. They use ghost belts and other devices to stay on track as much as possible, and they know how to find the nevajin for help in a pinch.

Folks in M'ra Jolios or Jerboa can negotiate with Noltch, the current chief of the Walkers, on a price for safe passage all the way to the Eye of the Ocean. Those approaching the Lost Sea from the outside can purchase cubes of specially packed red sand in Sagus Cliffs, Haref, and other cities in the region. Dissolving these cubes in the headwaters of the rivers at the southern edge of the Lost Sea alerts Noltch that customers await, and she sends a band of Desert Walkers to meet them.

Ghost belt, page 122

Noltch: *level 4; carries a ghost belt*

The Wayward: Noltch and the rest of her crew won't willingly admit it, but long ago the Lost Sea swallowed a band of Desert Walkers and their clients during a crossing. Officially, the story is that their ghost belts must have failed. However, when Noltch is not around, some of her walkers speculate—perhaps with a touch of envy—that the Wayward might have abandoned their duties and stolen away to an opulent refuge rumored to be hidden in the expanse.

SOLAR PYRAMIDS

Scattered throughout the Lost Sea are small pyramids about 10 feet (3 m) high at the apex. They're built of an unknown material that is so transparent as to be almost invisible to observers more than a short distance away. During daylight, a slight haze of rippling heat waves around a pyramid sometimes gives away its location. It's a difficulty 6 Intellect task to figure out the mechanism for gaining entry, which makes one side of the structure permeable long enough for several explorers to pass through. The transparency works only one way; from within a pyramid, the sides are opaque.

The temperature inside is conditioned—in fact, it's downright cold, enough for people to see their breath. The interior walls are covered with knobs, depressions, glowing nodules, and other apparent controls marked with undecipherable symbols. Their placement on the angled walls, from the apex down to the base, makes it awkward for humans to fiddle with the controls comfortably. They seem to have been made for other creatures to manipulate.

Etched into the floor of each pyramid is a large circle filled with markings and a lattice of lines, almost like a schematic. This may represent the Lost Sea, the locations of other solar pyramids in the desert, and secret underground tunnels that connect them. Perhaps it's a map of teleportation routes between the pyramids that can be unlocked by the proper use of the wall controls. Or maybe the markings and controls have a wholly different meaning and function. It's hard to say.

No one in Jerboa or M'ra Jolios talks about the solar pyramids in the Lost Sea. Maybe they don't realize that the structures exist, or perhaps they choose not to reveal what they know.

The first time a traveler tries to gain entry to a solar pyramid, the Intellect roll is difficulty 6. But all the pyramids in the Lost Sea basically work the same way, with small variations. Thus, someone who figures out how to get into one pyramid can subsequently get into any other pyramid in the desert with a difficulty 3 Intellect roll.

ARAHAN'S HERMITAGE

At least one person lives in the Lost Sea by choice. The hermitage of Arahan is found in a large crater in the southwestern region of the desert. He built his home out of wood, rocks, bones, and tarps and has been living there for as long as he can remember, which is a very, very long time. He has no memory of how he first arrived in the Lost Sea or what sort of life he may have led prior to awakening on the sands.

Arahan: *level 4; geography, astronomy, and the datasphere as level 5*

Arahan is one of the castoffs of the Changing God.

Changing God, page 14

Arahan is an unnaturally thin man who dresses in tattered rags. Years under the sun have bronzed his skin dark brown and bleached his long hair and beard stark white. He cares little for his appearance, though he spends many hours each day cultivating the land around his hut. Using mental powers he scarcely understands himself, he has shaped a portion of the crater to more closely resemble the lush valley that existed before the catastrophe. A vision of the former natural splendor came to him during a dust storm, and thereafter he bent to the task of creating a shimmering alien garden of green grass, strange trees, freshwater streams, and more.

When not seeing to the upkeep of his land, Arahan studies the mysteries of the datasphere. He is extraordinarily sensitive

to the glimmers of random information transmitted by the worldwide network and analyzes them endlessly for meaning, building stories and theories out of the latest thoughts that bloom in his brain. Arahan so rarely gets visitors that he is overjoyed to share his latest conjectures with anyone who stops by. Most of them sound like nonsense, but on occasion his utterances can be quite useful, even prescient.

It's not always easy to understand him, though. The old man speaks in unusual tenses, talking about the present as if it were the future, and the past as if it were the present. He also refers to his body as if it were a separate entity. Upon meeting a traveler, he might say, "You will have found my body in the Lost Sea." If questioned about his past or his longevity, he allows that he may be immortal, or that perhaps he continually dies and is reborn—he's not sure, and to him, it's all the same anyway.

Arahan likes to whistle. He says it keeps him grounded, and he means that literally. He can teach visitors to whistle a tune that will guide them from Jerboa to his hermitage. As long as they continue whistling while crossing the desert, they will be drawn unerringly (albeit slowly) toward his home. And if they whistle the tune in reverse, they will find the path back to the trade town.

EYE OF THE OCEAN

The mountain range that encloses the Lost Sea got its name from the inhabitants of M'ra Jolios, who refer to their water city as "the Eye of Ny'kul, a drop of the endless ocean." The valley dwellers in the era before the catastrophe may have had a different name for the range, but if so, it was lost along with their lives.

Other than a few areas where the mountains spill toward the desert, the Eye

Apricari: *level 4, perception as level 3, Might defense as level 5; health 15; Armor 1; teeth or hooves deal 4 points of damage; can spray stream of ink that causes humans to make an Intellect defense roll or take 6 points of Intellect damage and temporarily hate the thing they value most. For more details, see the* Ninth World Guidebook, *page 224.*

LOST SEA HEARSAY

Strange Rocks: A merchant in a caravan crossing the desert spotted some unusual rocks along the way and filled his pockets. He traded them for goods at several stalls in Jerboa. Unfortunately, they weren't rocks—they were dormant arklice. The moment they're touched by water, they'll grow to full size and attack anything around them.

Disappearing Trick: A band of Desert Walkers spotted a nevajin entering one of the solar pyramids in the waste, head floating several feet in front of its body. When they approached and entered the structure, it was empty, though they hadn't seen the creature leave.

Crash Site: An airship departed Sagus Cliffs for Haref to load up on exotic goods from the Bore. During the return trip, it went off course and crashed somewhere in the Lost Sea. The wealthy noble who commissioned the flight has sent representatives to Jerboa to recruit explorers to find the wreckage.

THE WEIRD OF THE LOST SEA

Far From Home: In some parts of the Ninth World, octopuses engineer biomechanical beasts called apricari and use them as vehicles when venturing onto dry land. Recently a yellow octopus was seen driving a large apricari across the desert, though whether it's on a mission for the Queen of All Octopuses or just really, really lost is anyone's guess.

Mysterious Waters: A nano from Sagus Cliffs set up camp near the rivers that flow from nowhere at the southern edge of the Lost Sea. She hopes to prove that they are connected to the rain that falls from nowhere in the desert, and then parlay that knowledge into a method for terraforming the desert back into fertile ground.

Portal to the Past: The dust storms that blow through the dunes sometimes show visions of the valley before it was reduced to a wasteland. Under the right conditions, these visions act as portals that temporarily allow passage to the valley's distant past.

of the Ocean is almost a perfect circle, suggesting to some people that it was artificially placed in that configuration for a purpose. A few who study geography have drawn comparisons with the Clock of Kala, an impossibly large and tall mountain range that forms a perfect ring far to the northwest. One theory is that the Eye keeps the Lost Sea free of the Iron Wind, as no incidents of that destructive storm have been recorded in the desert.

Despite their arrangement, the mountains are unstable. Frequent rockslides and avalanches pose an extreme hazard to anyone trying to cross the range, even in the passes. During these shifts, the ground can give way to caverns and tunnels that have never been explored. Some travelers have reported finding the strangest things in these subterranean spaces, including enormous splintered tree trunks; partial skeletons of whales, kaorund, and other mammoth sea creatures; and other debris that shouldn't be inside mountains.

Abhumans live among the peaks, including packs of reptilian chirogs and foul yovoki that sometimes ally with each other and sometimes go to war. Both types of creatures love to hunt and kill, and they make sport out of tracking travelers foolish enough to venture into the mountains and killing them in brutally creative ways.

The safest passes through the Eye of the Ocean are at the southern end of the range, where the peaks are much lower and less dense. Here, several rivers flow south through Harufon Mire and eventually into Garravia Sound. But they don't bubble up from the soil and rock—they simply begin, seemingly from nowhere. It's possible that they flow out of vertical portals in the ground, but the only way to know for sure is to swim underwater against the current (difficulty 6 Might task) and try to pass through whatever gates might exist.

THE SLOUGH

In the foothills that bleed off the western edge of the Eye of the Ocean is a lake known as the Slough that teems with sea life. Chirogs, yovoki, and other mountain dwellers come here to fish and get fresh water.

Few people know it, but the Slough leads to a water-filled tunnel that meanders under the Lost Sea all the way to M'ra Jolios, free of the space-warping effect that makes surface crossings so difficult. It runs for at least 100 miles (160 km) and taxes most known forms of water-breathing devices. It's so narrow that no submersibles or other underwater vehicles can fit through it. Only swimmers can attempt the journey, and only in single file. It's no surprise that those who swim into the passage seldom return.

In fact, only one person is known to have entered the tunnel and returned. A woman named Cwess made the trip, outfitted with all the cyphers and artifacts she could safely carry, in an attempt to reach M'ra Jolios. Three weeks later, she returned to the Slough, wearing a black bodysuit that she hadn't had at the start of her trip. Beneath it, her body was lined with stitches, as if she'd been torn apart and sewn back together. In her pocket were two small magnets that, when touched together, played a short message in a language no one has been able to translate. Cwess couldn't explain what had happened because she'd lost the ability to communicate. She simply smiled at everyone, and did so until the day she died. The magnets passed through many hands over the years and today are rumored to be stored in the Tower of Birds.

OASIS OF M'RA JOLIOS

Like the pupil of a giant round eye, the saltwater city of M'ra Jolios sits in the center of the Lost Sea. The shimmering reflections of the sun off its glistening surface can be seen for miles around, drawing weary travelers to what looks like paradise in the desert—a place that some call the Oasis. The enormous dome of clear water is a settlement of tightly packed organic structures, built mostly of hardened plant and coral, and about 9,000 water-breathing residents known as the Ghibra.

No shell, skin, or force field holds the city's shape. That is accomplished by the eight colossal obelisks that encircle the dome like fingers clutching a priceless

Clock of Kala, page 213

Iron Wind, page 135

A kaorund is a gigantic snaky predator that attacks whales, ships, and similarly large prey. It's one of the scariest things in the sea. For details, see Into the Deep, *page 142.*

Chirog, page 235

Yovok, page 267

Tower of Birds, page 96

The name M'ra Jolios roughly translates as "Gate of Peace." The residents don't use the term "Oasis," but they do call their city the Eye of Ny'kul and refer to themselves as the Ghibra Ny'kul ("the children of Ny'kul"), or just the Ghibra. Over time, the Jerboans have debased the term, calling the water-breathers "Gibbers."

M'ra Jolios area tone: *Wondrous, alien, beautiful, unknown. The city is a welcome oasis in the desert but is like an unfamiliar world.*

jewel, curving inward along the surface and tapering to points as they approach the crest. Relics of a prior world, these monoliths appear to be made of stone and are covered in unknown symbols. Yet they either are or contain machinery that produces a deep, sonorous hum, a low rumble that is not so much heard as felt in the chest and head. The Ghibra and the Jerboans are used to the ambient noise and constant sense of vibration, but visitors may need time to grow accustomed to it.

There is a short force field around the outside of the dome, but it doesn't hold the water in. Its only purpose is to restrict access to the city. The field runs in a band around the bottom 20 feet (6 m) of the dome. The Ghibra trust that gravity will prevent most trespassers from entering higher than that, though sometimes birds fly into the water. In the Sunken Market, a guarded opening in the force field allows authorized visitors to pass between M'ra Jolios and Jerboa. That's the most well-known gate shared by the cities, though others exist, with a similar (but smaller) Jerboan commercial center around each one.

THE GHIBRA

The Ghibra more properly call themselves the Ghibra Ny'kul ("the children of Ny'kul") after their most prominent god. The legends of Ny'kul praise him as the most accepting god, one who celebrates diversity in all forms, and the Ghibra see themselves as living proof. All are aquatic, water-breathing humanoids, but the similarities end there. They might have scales, hide, or shell plating. Some have flippers or claws or hands with fingers. Their limbs and torso might be bare or lined with fins or tendrils. Some swim and walk on legs, while others use fish tails or tentacles to move. They may have beady eyes, bulbous eyes, eyestalks, or no eyes at all. Some have blowholes or gills, which may be found just about anywhere on their bodies. And the colors—a visitor could spend an hour in M'ra Jolios watching Ghibra swim by and never see two with the same hue.

Because sound travels poorly underwater, Ghibra communicate with each other telepathically using their own language, called Colosh (or, more formally, Colosh Ny'kul, meaning "the word of Ny'kul"). They can also speak telepathically with

non-Ghibra whose minds are especially receptive, though they must find a common tongue in order for both parties to be understood. Many Ghibra have learned to speak the Truth so they can be gracious hosts to the air-breathing tourists who enter M'ra Jolios to marvel at its wonders or trade with its merchants.

Some female Ghibra have children the way humans do, the young growing in their bodies until birth, but they are the exception. Normal female Ghibra lay fertilized eggs in a spawning ground (such as the one in Oblevis Reef), and the male must name them before they will hatch. The act of naming is important in Ghibra culture, and it bonds the male with the children, giving them a portion of his strength so they can grow and thrive. A child that is not named in this way will never hatch.

THE SUNKEN MARKET

This area is the primary border checkpoint between the two cities, as well as the Oasis side of the shared marketplace. The Jerboans call it the Sunken Market, but the Ghibra call it Gaht Huan ("alien's market"). Air-breathing visitors—usually accompanied by water-breathing tour guides hired on the Jerboan side—shop the stalls run by the Ghibra, making deals with goods and currency. Travelers will find all manner of exotic items for sale amid the seaweed, silt clouds, and schools of fish. One popular stall owned by a Ghibra named Kiasha offers injections and other chemical cyphers, as well as colored flames in watertight containers that are said to reflect the mood of their bearer.

Guards known as Ny'kul's Tears are stationed at the edge of the market to ensure that no unauthorized air-breathers try to swim into other portions of M'ra

The Truth, page 133

Ny'kul's Tear: *level 5; Armor 2; carries a medium weapon*

Waterskin, page 125

Airskin, page 118

Agnition stone, page 76

SYMBIOTIC CITIES

M'ra Jolios and Jerboa have grown together for centuries. The latter town provides trade and tourism between air-breathing travelers and the Ghibra inside the dome, as well as a safe haven for those who manage to cross the desert. Refugees who arrive at the trade town swell its population, but Jerboa is open to the waste and cannot defend itself from attack. The Oasis, in turn, tightly controls entry into the dome and is strong enough to protect both settlements. The Ghibra provide the trade town with life, for without their protection and their water, the Jerboans would not survive. Residents of each community use artifacts known as waterskins or airskins when visiting the other environment.

The Oasis exports products made in its waters in exchange for shins, the numenera, and raw materials such as stronglass, azure steel, and many kinds of synth. Jerboa takes raw materials from the dome city and makes items needed by humans, and they also sell plant and animal products found only in the Oasis. Both communities trade with distant cities of the region, including Sagus Cliffs and Haref.

In Jerboa, the primary religion regards the ancient figure of Baji as a god and Tuck as his prophet. Its faithful petition Baji for protection and fear his wrath. The main religion of M'ra Jolios teaches that the gods placed the city there to bring water and life to the Ninth World and fend off the destructive deity known as Yolyol. Both the Jerboans and the Ghibra seek the ultimate peace of a paradise known as the Endless Ocean. The Jerboans use the term figuratively, since they've never seen the world's ocean, though a few have journeyed as far as Garravia Sound. Most of the Ghibra also think of the Endless Ocean as a figurative concept, but a few of them know that it's far more literal—their city sits over a gate that links the dome to the real ocean.

For the most part, the Ghibra and the Jerboans view their relationship as symbiotic. However, a recent explosion in the Oasis destroyed a coral building, killing some of the dome's wealthiest residents. A dissident group of air-breathers calling themselves the Jerboan Compatriots claimed responsibility. They demand more rights for air-breathers and unrestricted access to the dome for all Jerboans. With tensions rising on both sides, Jerboan leaders condemn the attack, and many Ghibra demand justice. But the water city's ruling Giash fear that a violent response will spark a war that neither community can survive.

Jolios. Their name derives from the fact that the Ghibra call their city the Eye of Ny'kul, and violence is not Ny'kul's wish. Thus, when violence is necessary, Ny'kul can only accomplish it with tears.

Visitors who are accompanied by a tour guide or who carry an agnition stone can leave the Sunken Market and explore other parts of M'ra Jolios.

MOISLU

The Moislu (pronounced *mwa-loo*) is the political and cultural center of M'ra Jolios. This area of the city is more properly referred to by its full name, Moislu Ny'kul ("the strength of Ny'kul"), but everyone calls it the Moislu for short. It's full of structures made of expertly shaped coral, aesthetically cultivated plants, and durable sea sponge tubes. A groomed coral reef houses the Giash, the city's ruling council.

Recently, a terrorist attack destroyed the foundation of one of the most beautiful buildings in the Moislu, causing it to topple, killing many who were inside at the time. Crews still work to dismantle and remove the remains of the collapsed structure. A group known as the Jerboan Compatriots claimed responsibility.

On most days, groups of protestors (mostly Jerboans, but including some Ghibra as well) camp in front of the Giash reef.

They block access to the council chamber and demand that air-breathers be granted full rights to M'ra Jolios, rather than the restricted access they now have. Other Ghibra who blame the Jerboans for the attack stage counter-protests, singing laments to commemorate the dead. On any given day, the situation threatens to erupt into violence, and squads of Ny'kul's Tears maintain positions around the Moislu to keep an eye on both groups. The Giash issued a statement permitting "peaceful protest" as a healthy component of society but instructed the Tears to remain on high alert.

Caron, the Captain of the Tears, usually stays with the contingent of guards outside the Giash chamber. He refuses to admit any visitors who are escorted by a tour guide, stating that tourists are not allowed to interrupt council business. Caron does not shy from describing the attack to anyone who asks, and he considers the Jerboan Compatriots (or "Compats") terrorists in need of punishment. He doesn't believe in killing the enemies of the Ghibra, but he worries that they will destabilize the city if not brought to heel.

GIASH CHAMBER

Within a coral reef in the Moislu, the Giash meet in a lavish chamber that is decorated with shells and coral like the grand hall of a palace. During the daytime, when the council confers, shafts of sunlight stream down through translucent panes in the roof designed to collect the natural light from the water above.

At any one time, the Giash consists of three members, all of whom wield an equal amount of power. Currently, the council members are Omis, Semat, and Thom. They study the history of M'ra Jolios using chunks of memory coral to help them make wise decisions to guide its future.

Omis is deeply religious and believes that his ascendancy to the council is the ultimate achievement, as it places him near the holy door to Berata Ny'kul. He bears no ill will toward the Jerboans but won't permit the air-breathers to harm the Ghibra. Omis wears a living octopus over his torso like clothing, its tentacles wrapping around his neck and limbs.

Semat is the most logical of the three leaders. She tempers Omis's passion with wisdom, and though they clash frequently, they work well when they manage to find balance. She has a perfunctory attitude toward her religion, seeing it as a useful guideline to follow and a valuable symbol to rally her people.

Omis: *level 4, knowledge of M'ra Jolios as level 5; wears a living octopus (level 5) that provides Armor 3*

Semat: *level 4, knowledge of M'ra Jolios as level 5*

Thom: *level 4, knowledge of M'ra Jolios as level 5*

Caron: *level 6; Armor 3; carries a heavy weapon*

Thom remains silent most of the time. He listens to his fellow Giash and to petitioners who come before the council, but he speaks only when necessary. Thom often takes the middle ground between Omis and Semat and casts tie-breaking votes on important matters.

Berata Ny'kul: A simple wooden door in a dark corner of the chamber seems insignificant but leads to the most sacred place in all of M'ra Jolios. Beyond the door is Berata Ny'kul ("the mind of Ny'kul"), a lightless abyss that represents the Endless Ocean, a central tenet of the Ghibra religion. In truth, the abyss is a transdimensional portal to the bottom of the ocean on the other side of the world. Only the current members of the Giash know of its existence, and only they know the secret method of traveling through the gate safely. If anyone tried to open it by another method, the barrier between the waters would fall, and the full, pressurized force of the ocean deeps would rush into M'ra Jolios with explosive fury, likely destroying the city.

Officially, only the Giash know the secret of Berata Ny'kul. Unofficially, Caron, the Captain of the Tears, has heard stories about control panels hidden in the giant obelisks that can be used to manipulate the portal—safely or otherwise. To protect his city, he keeps his mouth shut.

THE ENDLESS BATTLE

The Giash has thrown its support behind the forces of Maralel, the First Castoff, in her war against the Changing God. Her militia and the armies of the Changing God clash in the Endless Battle that has ravaged the Bordermarch Hills to the southwest. Few Ghibra enlist to fight personally—their need to remain hydrated makes it difficult to participate in an extended conflict on land—but they send all sorts of destructive numenera for use by the First's militia. No one in the water city remembers why they chose to side with the First all those years ago, but their loyalty has taken on a life of its own, and today supporting her forces is as natural to them as breathing water.

It's rumored that M'ra Jolios played a role in delivering the reality splitter known as the Reconciler of the Truth to Maralel in the early days of the Endless Battle. If this is the case, the Ghibra have been on her side far longer than anyone imagines.

Reconciler of the Truth, page 89

OBLEVIS REEF

Light from the sun illuminates much of M'ra Jolios, but little of it reaches Oblevis Reef in the bottom center of the city, which is why the founders chose this area for the site of the cemetery. Oblevis Reef is a maze of tombstones, engraved coral formations, and other memorials. The only light comes from what visitors bring and from the bioluminescent creatures that swim within the confines of the grounds. In fact, sea life abounds in the reef, providing an intentional contrast to the reminders of the dead.

Bodies are interred in the cemetery, and curators can help visitors find specific grave markers amid the winding passages. In addition, memorials commemorate the many unknown Ghibra who died in the catastrophe that razed the valley long ago. Since no one alive today knows who those people were, Oblevis Reef is partially a place for somber reflection on the nature of life and death.

In another juxtaposition of those concepts, Oblevis Reef is also the location of the communal spawning ground, a series of deep holes where Ghibra that are oviparous come to lay their eggs. This practice is a custom, not a requirement, and not everyone observes it. The elders of the city feel that it sends a powerful message of hope and rebirth.

JOLIOS'S PEAK

This is the highest (and, during the day, the brightest) point in M'ra Jolios, up near the tapering end of one of the obelisks that holds the city in place. A large mass of coral, shaped into a structure that includes glass and metal, floats near the curving edge of the dome. Those who swim up this high are rewarded with a spectacular view of the desert outside and the mountains in the distance, refracted through the water's surface. Students of history and the numenera also come here to get a better look at the symbols in the underside of the obelisk.

The coral building houses the Menagerie, which is a zoo, a prison, and a museum all at once. Some of its grottos and chambers

are filled with water for aquatic inhabitants, while others are suited for those that breathe air. Signs in Colosh warn when a water-filled area transitions to one that's filled with air, or vice versa. No physical barrier or force field keeps the environments apart, yet somehow they remain separated. Visitors who are swimming through an aquatic chamber simply pass through into the adjacent air-filled room, drop to the floor, and begin walking.

Transparent walls or energy barriers allow visitors to see who or what is confined in each habitat. The creature pens include lorubs, fringerays, kalyptein crabs, sticha, and nakal (in an obsidian habitat that resembles a miniature volcanic field, complete with pools of molten lava). The air-filled prison pens hold humans, usually natives of Jerboa, who committed crimes in M'ra Jolios. Some protest their innocence to visitors, while others boast about striking blows for freedom from "the damned Gibbers."

The museum portion of the Menagerie stores artifacts and historical items, many of which are valuable to those who know their secrets. It is well appointed with sculptures, art pieces, memory coral, and decorative elements.

Ny'kul's Tears guard the Menagerie to ensure that only those accompanied by tour guides or in possession of agnition stones may enter. Within the building, security is provided by a spiky humanoid construct known as the Demon, which patrols all areas. It speaks Colosh, but it doesn't interact with visitors unless there is a problem.

PIRLANDRA PARK

For all its beauty and wonder, M'ra Jolios is a crowded, busy city. It's contained entirely within a half bubble of water and can seem cramped, even oppressive at times. When its denizens crave a little quiet and solitude, they swim to Pirlandra Park. The gardens here are filled with fish, jellies, and other simple sea life gliding among waving forests of kelp, trees that rise like the masts of sunken ships, flowering seagrass, floating waterwheel plants, and more.

Pathways amble through the gardens, laid out in routes designed to give swimmers aesthetically pleasing experiences. Visitors can stop along these paths to admire the statues or read the markers and plaques that commemorate the history, religion, and culture of M'ra Jolios. It's a great place for newcomers to learn about the city and its people. However, they should stick to the designated paths when possible if they don't want to be entangled in the bioengineered animate tentacles that try to keep order in the park.

One end of Pirlandra Park is near the curving edge of the dome and offers a view of Jerboa on the other side, refracted through the water. At night, the lights from the town cast a serene glow over that portion of the park, and Pirlandra visitors watch the doings of the Jerboans as much as they observe the underwater splendor.

Lorub: *level 5; health 15; Armor 1; short-range venom spray (usable once every few rounds) deals 5 points of damage to up to three targets within immediate range of each other; while spray recharges, muzzle bash deals 5 points of damage to one target. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 77.*

Fringeray: *level 4*

Kalyptein crab: *level 3; health 9; Armor 3; pincers deal 3 points of damage; uses one random cypherlike skill for attack or defense. For more details, see the Ninth World Bestiary, page 70.*

Stichus, page 131

Nakal, page 130

Demon: *level 5; carries Fleder's noose artifact, page 121*

M'RA JOLIOS HEARSAY

Terror Alert: Rumor is the Jerboan Compatriots are targeting another building for destruction. Protesting Ghibra demand that the Giash act now to prevent another attack. They want Ny'kul's Tears to forcefully remove all non-Ghibra from the city.

The Widow: A female Ghibra mourns the loss of her partner, who died before he could name the children in the eggs she laid. She desperately seeks a male to name them and bond with them so they will hatch. No other Ghibra is willing to take on that responsibility.

Behind the Door: A gang of thieves in Jerboa has heard that the Giash keep a fantastic treasure hidden behind a wooden door in their council chamber. They're making plans to sneak into M'ra Jolios, find a way into the chamber, and open the door.

THE WEIRD OF M'RA JOLIOS

Hermit's Voice: A school of brilliantly multicolored striped fish in Pirlandra Park speaks with the voice of Arahan, the hermit who lives in the Lost Sea. They explain the secret whistling method for finding his hermitage to anyone who shows interest.

Within the Obelisks: A merchant in the Sunken Market hawks a device that supposedly unlocks disguised panels in the obelisks. She claims that portions of the giant towers are hollow and hold secrets of the prior worlds.

Hidden Hatch: One of the memorials in Oblevis Reef is false and covers an iron hatch set into the ground that has long since rusted shut. Clues gathered around the city lead to the correct tombstone. The curators of the cemetery dismiss the idea as bunk.

Arahan, page 63

JERBOA

Although legends differ on what turned a verdant valley into an inhospitable wasteland, all the stories agree that sometime after the disaster, refugees from beyond the Eye of the Ocean made their way to the area. It's not known what they fled, but these humans crossed the mountains and found what seemed like an endless desert with a bright blue dome at its center. Thinking it to be an oasis, they staggered through the Lost Sea and—with the help of a nevajin they encountered amid the dunes—eventually reached the great city of M'ra Jolios.

At that point, records diverge again. Some say a man named Tuck greeted them and helped them found a new settlement. Others say it was the Ghibra. Still others suggest that the refugees were the ones who taught the water-dwellers about the land and how to use it.

Regardless, as the years passed, the community attracted more and more people who came to the Lost Sea in search of the fabled oasis. It grew into the town of Jerboa, named after the small rodents that sustained the founders on their long journey through the desert. Today, it has a population of about 15,000 humans. No gate or wall surrounds the town—it simply tapers off until it becomes the surrounding desert.

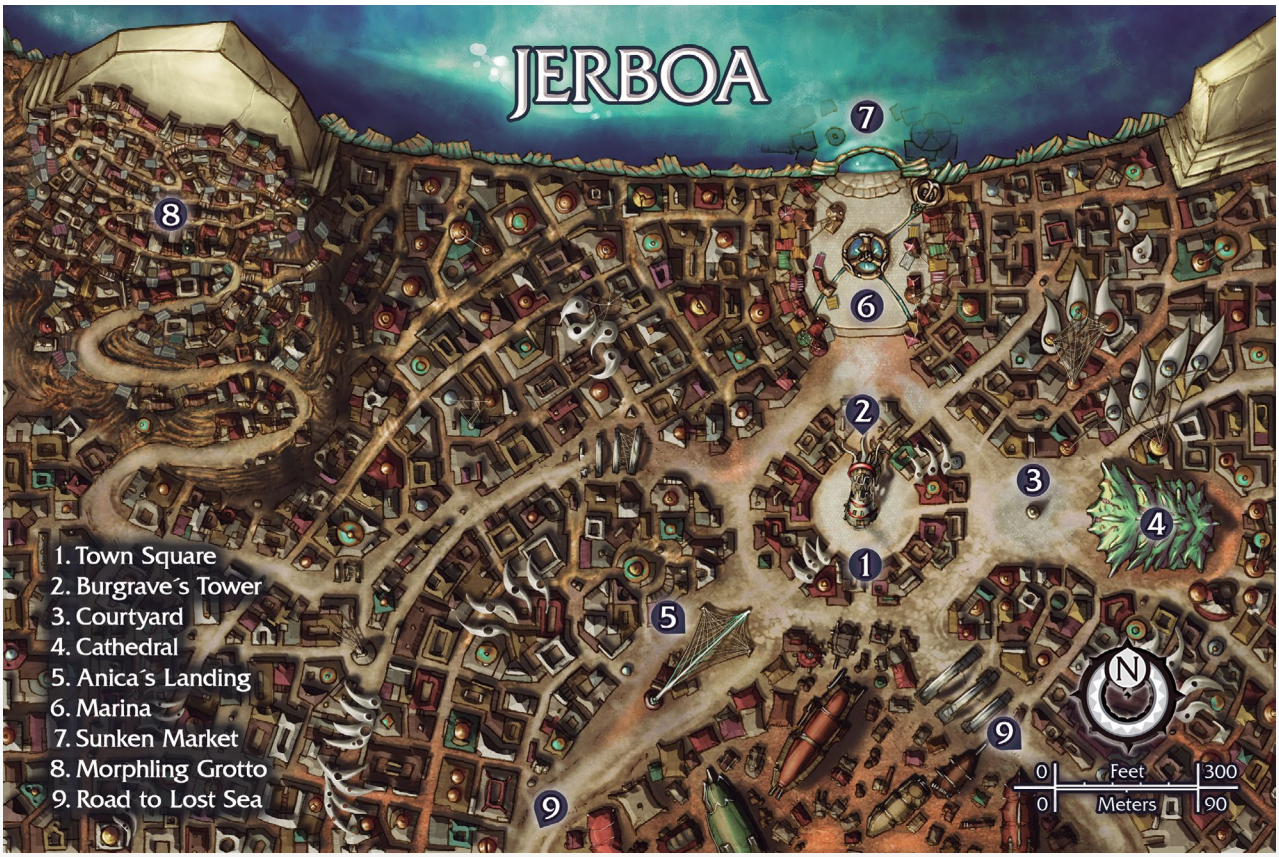
As different methods have been discovered to safely traverse the Lost Sea, Jerboa has developed a healthy tourist trade. They buy raw materials that are unique to M'ra Jolios and use them to create things needed by humans. They also sell plant and animal products that are found only in the water city. Their primary exports include:

- Amrita, a healing draught produced in the Oasis. Both Ghibran and Jerboan merchants package and sell it to visitors.
- Herbs and spices like chrysol (salty), di'plii (spicy), and grapah moss (sweet), all processed from plants grown in the Oasis.
- Olephine fiber, grown in the Oasis and used to create many items, including the sails incorporated into many Jerboan buildings.

For details on the relationship between Jerboa and M'ra Jolios, see Symbiotic Cities on page 68.

Nevajin, page 248

Jerboa area tone: *Dusty, mercantile, tourist-friendly, political turmoil. The trade town welcomes visitors with coins to spend, but tensions with M'ra Jolios are increasing.*



Jerboa can't grow many crops, so it imports a lot of food from caravans and travelers—basically anything that will keep on a long journey. Foreign food is popular among the residents, who crave variety. Merchants also seek raw materials they can't get locally, and what they don't use in their own crafts, they sell to the Ghibra at high markups.

JERBOA TOWN

This is the largest neighborhood in Jerboa, home to the Church of Ny'kul, the town's leader, numerous inns, and abandoned structures that once were vital but now seem useless. The buildings here are topped with tall, sail-like shapes that harvest energy from the dry wind and oppressive sun. Special crafters known as sailweavers use the numenera to create the sails out of olephine fiber.

CATHEDRAL

The cathedral is the home of the Church of Ny'kul in Jerboa. The structure was not so much built as claimed—it is a mostly intact, dried-out shell that used to belong to a colossal sea creature, already present when the founders first arrived. Here, the priests give blessings to the god Baji and his prophet Tuck as they exhort the faithful to strive for the peace of the Endless Ocean. Irrizarry, the head of the church, is delighted to tell his version of the origin myth to anyone polite enough to listen.

Irrizarry: *level 3*

A statue of Baji stands in the courtyard outside the cathedral, depicting him as a short, fishlike humanoid with a tall head fin, smaller fins on his arms and legs, hands like flippers, and a medallion of concentric circles hung around his neck.

TOWN SQUARE

The courtyard opens to the town square, the political and economic center of Jerboa. It's the site of Burgrave's Tower, where the current leader (known as the Burgrave) lives and works. He conducts most of the town business in small buildings that were constructed around the base of the tower itself, which is a prior-world remnant that leans off kilter. Halfway up, it has cracked

open such that the heavy top half dangles almost horizontally, as if it should topple to the ground at any moment, yet somehow remains in place.

Around this impossible tower, Burgrave Tuck—no relation to the prophet, for Tuck is a common name in Jerboa—meets with councilors who help run the town. He's not interested in politics and just wants peace. Unfortunately, the Jerboan Compatriots are making that difficult as they protest for increased air-breather rights in the Oasis. Lately, the Compats have been threatening violence. Loftis, one of the group's most vocal members, takes responsibility for an explosion that destroyed a building in M'ra Jolios, though there is no direct evidence of her involvement.

Merchants and caravan drivers camp on the south side of the square. For a sizable fee, the caravans take people across the Lost Sea in airships and special land vehicles designed to withstand the heat and navigate the waste. Those with less coin to spend can hire the Desert Walkers, who use the numenera and other methods to cross the desolation on foot without getting lost.

Visitors will also find entertainment in the town square. Mummer troupes of Jerboans and waterskin-wearing Ghibra portray stories from local legends and culture. One of the most popular performances recounts the tale of Baji and Tuck, cross-weaving multiple plots and possibilities in an attempt to reconcile the varying claims about them.

Travelers looking to rest after their long journey across the desert can stay at Anica's Landing, a flamboyant inn bedecked with colorful sails. It stands alone at the edge of the town square, near the road leading out to the Lost Sea. The proprietor, Sunek, took over after his mother, the original owner, never returned from a caravan trip to Haref.

Desert Walkers, page 62

Burgrave Tuck: *level 4, diplomacy as level 5*

Loftis: *level 4, persuasion as level 5*

Sunek: *level 3*

Nalurus: *level 3; health 12; Armor 1; heavy walking stick deals 4 points of damage; target who sees its face must make Intellect defense roll each time or move one step down the damage track. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 90.*

MORPHLING GROTTO

As the road from the main part of town heads toward the squalid slum known as the Morphling Grotto, it begins winding and grows smaller, narrowing to the width of an alley. The path becomes a switchback climbing a sand hill outside one of the obelisks that enclose M'ra Jolios. In fact, the massive obelisk dominates the view here so completely that the residents can't even see the blue water of the Oasis (and vice versa—the Ghibra in the domed city barely know the Grotto exists). But few people in Jerboa proper care, for the denizens of the Grotto are unwanted beggars and outcasts.

Morphling Grotto gets its name from its large population of lycanthropes, changelings, and mutants and abhumans in general, whether they can alter their forms or not. Over the years, the people of Jerboa systematically banished (some say herded) these undesirables into the Grotto and ignored the area until it became a shanty town.

The Grotto has one hovel that even the other outcasts avoid, for it's rumored to be the home of a nalurus. The gaunt creature remains masked at all times because anyone who looks upon its disquieting face risks a gruesome death as their brain

liquefies and runs out their ears and nose. No one has ever seen the creature without its mask, though, and some folks say it's just an act put on by a fugitive hoping to hide where no one will look for him.

People aren't the only things that vanish in the Grotto. A mutant named Myrl specializes in making things disappear for a living. He claims that a large stone head nearby has magical properties. When he places an item into the horned head's open mouth, it vanishes—sometimes. Other times nothing happens. And sometimes a different item comes back out. Myrl knows that a lot of people come to the Grotto to get rid of problems, and he charges up to 10 shins for each item he puts into the mouth.

Myrl, Disappearer of Things: *level 4; persuasion, sleight of hand, and the numenera as level 5*

Scholars of the numenera sometimes risk a trip to the Morphling Grotto to get a close look at the obelisk and the runes that cover its surface. Visitors without street smarts are easy marks for grifters who charge for tours that give the "best views of the markings" and promise access to recordings of the most accurate translations. On the other hand, some Grotto dwellers know what they're talking about and can even lead visitors to a hidden set of handholds on the obelisk that allows one to climb halfway up—well above the force field around the lower portion of the dome. A few residents also sell airskins or water-breathing numenera to those who wish to enter the Ghibra city.

THE MARINA

As one road out of Jerboa Town winds meekly to the ramshackle Morphling Grotto, a short, wide avenue opens to a prosperous neighborhood of much larger, much nicer buildings, the home of the marketplace known as the Marina. Here, air-breathing and water-breathing shoppers mingle, browsing merchant stalls for devices, exotic foods, rare plant and animal goods, devices, and other items. The Sunken Market within the dome and the Marina together make up one contiguous marketplace—it's just that the former half is entirely underwater and the latter half is entirely on dry land. Some buildings and stalls straddle the line, half in water and half in air.

Sunken Market, page 67

JERBOA HEARSAY

Relics on the Run: Kalyptein crabs have infested the Marina, finding homes inside larger pieces of the numenera and then scuttling off into dark crannies and hard-to-reach places. The angry merchants accuse kids and tourists of stealing the missing items.

Dark Tourism: Rhax, a Ghibra tour guide with large blue lobster claws, offers unusual tours of M'ra Jolios that focus on the city's seedy underbelly and darker aspects. Rhax tells stories of the Chimaera, a shadowy figure rumored to pull the strings of the Giash. Supposedly, the leaders don't make a move without consulting their clandestine master.

Pump Failure: The biomechanical pump that converts M'ra Jolios's saltwater into fresh water for Jerboa has broken down, and the brackish water being pumped into the fountain is nearly undrinkable. The Burgrave has promised that whoever manages to fix it can name their reward.

THE WEIRD OF JERBOA

Weaving the Wind: A sailweaver in Jerboa Town wants to test a new sail contraption in the Iron Wind. She believes it will harness the wind's terrible power for better purposes. She's looking to hire a crew to lead her to a region outside the Lost Sea where the wind is known to blow.

Burgrave's Tower: The Burgrave and his councilors handle most city business in buildings around the base of the tower and rarely go into the ancient structure itself. They're afraid to do anything that might cause the upper portion to topple, so much of the tower remains unexplored. No one is sure why gravity shifts within from room to room, or why the giant tentacles that sprout from its peak look like they're made of stone but hang limp.

The transition into the dome is also the main border checkpoint that leads into the Oasis. Air-breathers can push into the water and enter the Sunken Market freely, but Ny'kul's Tears stand guard to prevent unwanted visitors from swimming into other parts of the city. Those who wish to continue into M'ra Jolios must hire a water-breathing tour guide (usually from the Jerboan side) or have an agnition stone, which Burgrave Tuck may give to those who seem likely to comport themselves as courteous ambassadors of Jerboa and its interests.

Murai: *level 3, knowledge of the area as level 5*

Murai is a cheerful Ghibra tour guide who uses a waterskin while drumming up business in the Marina side of the divide. Though she has shimmering scales and bulbous black eyes, her mostly human appearance makes her a popular guide. She can help visitors purchase airskins or other numenera for the trip before she leads them into the Sunken Market and, from there, into the rest of the aquatic city (though some areas, such as the Giash chamber, remain off limits). Murai never leaves M'ra Jolios and Jerboa, so in lieu of shins or baubles, she sometimes accepts tales of the outside world as payment—as long as they are thrillingly told.

An enormous, elaborate fountain in the Marina is the source of all of Jerboa's drinking water. A huge biomechanical pump funnels saltwater out of the Oasis, desalinates it, and delivers it through pipes and waterwheels into the fountain. The constant squelching, sucking sound of the contraption—which seems half machine, half creature—takes some getting used to. Jerboan guards watch the pump to ward off potential threats to the water supply. Taking a sip from the fountain is free, and filling a jug or bucket costs 1 shin per person. Citizens usually pay their fees through city taxes, but visitors must pay the water merchants directly.

HAREF

Haref area tone: *Claustrophobic, oppressive, huge gap between wealthy rulers and poor laborers. Visitors are sure to be caught up in the chaos of the riots and rebellion.*

We make the iron, we make the steel.
We grow the food, we shoulder the wheel.
We make half wages but always pay double.
What make the Nil? Nothing but trouble.

~ a Sona protest song, appropriated from an ancient bar shanty

Chaos threatens to tear the underground city of Haref apart. The current ruler, a tyrannical Nil named Tanea, is dead—

perhaps by accident, perhaps not—and the oppressed Sona workers, who toil in the mines, farms, smelters, and kitchens, see their chance for liberation. The hulking Bayan guards who enforce Nil rule are caught in the middle, as many of the brutes go rogue and throw in with anyone who seems likely to come out on top when the smoke clears.

THE BORE

Haref is built within a gargantuan hole in the ground that lies to the southeast of the Eye of the Ocean. This hole, known as the Bore, is a quarter mile (.5 km) wide and about 3 miles (5 km) deep. No one alive in Haref knows its origin. Some rumors say it was the lair of an ancient beast, and others suggest it was the barrel of a prior-world weapon built to shoot down the moon. Whatever its initial purpose, today the Bore is crisscrossed with bridges and gantries that connect the levels of the city carved into the surrounding rock and earth. Synthsteel lifts and cargo platforms rise and fall constantly, moving supplies and people from one level to another.

The levels of Haref are known as strata, and they number from Strata 1 (farms and opulent structures on the surface, surrounding the lip of the Bore) to Strata 49 (a run-down slum at the bottom of the hole). Each strata below the surface is a warren of caverns and tunnels lit by glowglobes and other devices. Officially, each strata is separate from the rest, and the only way to move between them is to catch a ride on a lift going up or down the Bore. Unofficially, secret vertical passages connect some of the strata.

The warrens hold living quarters, mines, workshops, slurge farms, slaughterhouses, distilleries, markets, armories, prisons, and more. For generations, the three races of Haref have lived apart. The ruling Nil occupy the uppermost strata, the Bayan dwell in the middle, and the Sona try to survive in the lowest and most neglected layers. The Bayan serve the Nil as bodyguards and lackeys, and the brutes watch over the Sona laborers, but otherwise the three races don't mix. Some Sona know the Nil only through stories, and few Sona alive today have ever stood on the surface under the wide sky.

Most of the dirtiest work happens in lowest strata, known as the Deeps. The Nil wish for Haref to be a great power in the region, and to grow the city, they command that the Sona expand the warrens. Under the eyes of the Bayan, the laborers excavate deeper and wider, hollowing out more space for coal and iron mines, smelters, workshops, caverns for growing mushrooms, and farms for tending slurgen, which are Haref's primary source of meat.

The endless digging also turns up large quantities of long-buried devices and machines from prior worlds. At some point in the past, the region was flush with the numenera. The Bayan confiscate relics

found by the Sona (though the guards are allowed to keep some of the offensive devices to help them control the workers) and deliver them to storage chambers in the upper strata for Nil to test at their leisure. Unfortunately, the Nil testing process involves little more than pressing buttons and turning knobs to see what each item does. It's hazardous duty.

Still, the sale of these items has made Haref—or at least the Nil—wealthy and is the principal reason for traders and travelers to visit the city. Merchants from Sagus Cliffs, the Bloom, Jerboa, and other communities come here to sell their wares at high prices (the Nil especially love frivolities and luxuries that enhance their status) and buy the relics and manufactured goods that Haref seems to have in endless supply.

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Hundreds of years ago, the balance of power in Haref was dramatically different. The Sona ruled the city from on high, and the Nil suffered under Bayan whips, until one day they could take no more and rebelled. Their bloody revolution, known as the Red Hand, swept through the strata and ultimately deposed the Sona, leaving the Nil in charge. But the first Nil ruler, a rebel leader named Avza, proved no better than the hated Sona overlord. Declaring herself Chairwoman, she consolidated power and continued the policies of harsh discipline that her kind had sought to overthrow, first in the name of security and later—well, she always found another reason to delay the free society the Nil had fought for. She even retained the Bayan as guards. Many Nil opposed her and went underground to conspire with the pockets of Sona resistance, and for hundreds of years the new ruling Nil struggled to quash the opposition once and for all. The Chairwoman was always a female Nil hand-picked by her predecessor to be next in line for the throne, and each seemed more cold-blooded than the last.

And now violent change has transformed Haref once again. Chairwoman Tanea, the current ruler, died in a blast that some blame on a mishap with a relic and others call assassination. Her death was the catalyst for an uprising the Sona and the outcast Nil had planned for months. Led by an uncharacteristically crude Sona named Kulolak, the new revolution, known as the

Kulolak: *level 4, oration and leadership as level 6; Armor 3 (full slurge shell plates)*

ORIGIN OF SPECIES

A sacred text in the palace library of the deceased Chairwoman Tanea includes an account of the creation of Haref's three races. It suggests that the Nil, Bayan, and Sona came from the same stock and were modified for different purposes. The text reads, in part, "For laborers to work in the facility, we looked to the local population, a hardy anthropoid race. They are reasonably intelligent and have an easily malleable genetic code. We modified them to suit our needs. Some we made small of stature and adapted to living in darkness and low-oxygen environments. These would be our workers, clerks, and managers. Others we made large and strong and thick-skinned. These would be our heavy laborers and warriors, keeping out beasts, marauding tribes, and spies from other corporations. Still others we bred for grace and beauty—slim, gold of skin, white of hair. These would be our servants and concubines, pleasant companions with which to while away idle hours."

The excerpt doesn't say what sort of facility occupied the Bore, who performed the modifications, or what happened to them. And of course, there's no telling whether any of it is true. But the ruling Nil take it as an origin myth, an account of how the gods created the Sona to be servants. They use it to justify the downtrodden Sona's current status. As for the part that says the Nil were meant to be laborers, they see that as evidence that they truly deserve to rule, for they transcended their humble beginnings to become what they are today. (Creative interpretation of ancient texts is nothing new in the Ninth World.)

Sacred Sun, has launched an all-out war on the ruling Nil and their Bayan thugs. The Sona want to reclaim the power that their ancestors enjoyed and restore what they see as the natural order. To complicate matters further, the many Nil councilors who served the Chairwoman are now vying to replace her on the throne, each certain that only she can put down the Sacred Sun. As a result of all the strife, the Bayan, once a monolithic force, have splintered. Some guards still support the Nil, some have defected to the Sona, and some just try to find a path through the turmoil that will keep them alive for another day.

THE THREE RACES

The blue-skinned Nil are the most populous race in Haref. Generations ago, these short, slight humanoids did all the manual labor necessary to run the city, and they weren't happy about it. They did little more than hold the occasional strike, issue demands, and send petitions up to the ruling Sona until finally they rioted and managed to gain control of the city. It didn't take long for the Nil to become as lazy and decadent as the former leaders, and today that's the only life most of them know in their ostentatious homes in the upper strata. They use the Bayan as walking monoliths and exploit the Sona as expendable labor, which many Nil see as just revenge for past slavery. The death of Chairwoman Tanea and the rise of the Sacred Sun have thrown them into disarray as they scramble to keep that which they seized long ago.

The Bayan are easily twice the height of the Nil and several times bulkier. With heavy brow ridges, purple-grey skin, thick hides, muscles on their muscles, and voices like granite slabs grinding together, they embody brute force. Most wear black leather uniforms and shell pauldrons as further intimidation. Bayan are slow in thought and movement, and they dispassionately serve the Nil as guards, watchmen, and soldiers.

Finally, the Sona were once slender, graceful humanoids with golden skin and long white hair. No longer. Hundreds of years of hard labor have changed the race. At first, many of them died, unable to adjust to the hard life in the lower strata. Others adapted, growing strong as their lustrous skin faded to pale white in the sunless depths of the Bore. They slowly built the foundations of a new rebellion, making plans and biding their time, until Tanea's death sparked the flame.

THE SACRED SUN

The Sona rebels claim credit for the death of Chairwoman Tanea. However, since several different members of the Sacred Sun swear that they personally did the tyrant in, the truth may lie between their stories, or somewhere else entirely. Regardless, her death inspired the Sun to stop preparing and launch their rebellion with gusto. Mobs of Sona—and the Nil and Bayan who support them—have taken the fight to the Bayan brutes who are loyal to the ruling Nil, striking back with rocks, knives, weapons seized from armories, and unearthed relics held back from the overseers.

The lowest strata are rife with chaos and tumult as the Sacred Sun and the guards battle for control. The following sections give a few examples of the spread of the rebellion.

STRATA 1

Also known as the Strata of the Sun, the top layer of Haref sprawls around the yawning mouth of the Bore. Here, the lavish estates of the Nil (which once belonged to Sona ancestors) rise like stalagmites. The surface also hosts sun-drenched fruit and vegetable orchards, and yards where goods made in the workshops and smelters below are stored before being carted off to other lands.

The rebellion hasn't reached this strata, though production of saleable wares has all but stopped, and this vexes the Nil councilors who are mired in political battles to replace Tanea as Chairwoman. They don't understand why the Bayan haven't simply killed enough Sona to cow the rest into submission. Ushti, captain of the strata guard, drags individual rebels to the surface to be questioned by Councilor Glin, who looks for any opportunity to shore up her leadership credentials. Some

Ushti (Bayan): *level 6; Armor 2 (slurge shell)*

Glin (Nil): *level 3*

of these captives are sent back down to carry warnings to their comrades. Others are pushed off the lip of the Bore and fall to their deaths, delivering a very different message to the Sona below.

STRATA 18

Bayan barracks and living quarters fill this strata, but under the direction of their comrade Pavaka, they've cut themselves off from the fighting. Pavaka was one of the Chairwoman's personal bodyguards until he noticed that she visited just as much cruelty upon the Bayan as she did the Sona, including sending them to the gallows on any suspicion of disloyalty. Pavaka abandoned his duty and retreated to his home strata, where he now teaches other Bayan to think for themselves. They're not used to the idea, but they're receptive to his arguments because as long as the simple-minded brutes are fed and their families are safe, they follow the commands of whoever they view as being in charge.

Pavaka (Bayan): *level 5; Armor 2 (slurge shell)*

Pavaka directed them to sabotage the landing platforms so the Bore lifts can no longer stop at the strata. He knows the Nil councilors will send loyal guards to punish him, and he doesn't want to harm his fellow Bayan if he can help it. He intends to wait out the rebellion and make a deal with whichever group wins. In the meantime, if any sympathetic Sona, Nil, or foreign visitors manage to reach Strata 18—perhaps through a secret vertical shaft or the use of relics—he will listen to them, and he might be persuaded to reveal information about the surface palace that could help infiltrators.

STRATA 34

The caverns of this layer have been converted into farms and pens to hold pods of slurgen, which eat carrion, garbage, dead plants, and the occasional Sona who gets careless while tending the slimy beasts. The overwhelming stench sickens most of the workers, though the Bayan standing watch don't seem to notice it. When slaughtered, a slurge yields meat, shells for armor, blood used in sausages and sauces, and bodily fluids used to make solvents.

Slurge: *level 2; health 6; Armor 4; glob of eating mucus deals 4 points of damage; foes within immediate range must make Might defense roll or be stuck in slime. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 119.*

A Sona named Darcyr is coordinating a secret effort to stockpile globs of acidic mucus from the slurgen, along with buckets of the slippery slime that allows the creatures to glide across surfaces. When the

Darcyr (Sona): *level 3, persuasion and leadership as level 4*

word is given, the Sona tenders plan to set all the slurgen loose and use the mucus and slime to overpower the Bayan guards in the confusion.

STRATAS 46-49

The rebellion burns hottest in the lowest strata of Haref, which are now mostly under Sona control. Bodies of Sona and Bayan alike fill the streets, and the workers' stark barracks have been turned into strongholds for planning sorties into the higher strata. Taverns with names like Morning Glory and the Burning Heart resound with celebrations and battle songs about the victories of the Sacred Sun. The Sona have been kept underfoot for so long that they find joy in taking violent physical revenge on their oppressors—something that their willowy ancestors could never have done.

These strata include numerous half-dug passages where the workers had been ordered to excavate new areas. One such tunnel on Strata 47 was abandoned just as it breached a small cavern that held an odd form of life—several amorphous creatures that looked like blobs of flesh about the size of a human head. Each one seemed to shift its form slightly as it crept along on black, tarry tendrils, almost imperceptibly slow. The Sona digger who discovered the blobs reported that their bodies were covered with tiny maws surrounded by needle-sized tentacles. However, he couldn't observe them for long because he came down with a sudden headache.

HAREF HEARSAY

A New Front: Savage abhumans from the farthest southeastern reaches of the Eye of the Ocean have started appearing in Strata 1, butchering the unprepared Nil and causing havoc. The Nil desperately need help fending off these attackers from the mountains.

Strong Emotions: Some of the Bayan guards have become addicted to the strong emotional states triggered by ingesting diluted slurgen mucus. The brutes normally are emotionless, and they aren't equipped to handle the temporary bursts of rage, fear, delight, and passion they've begun to experience.

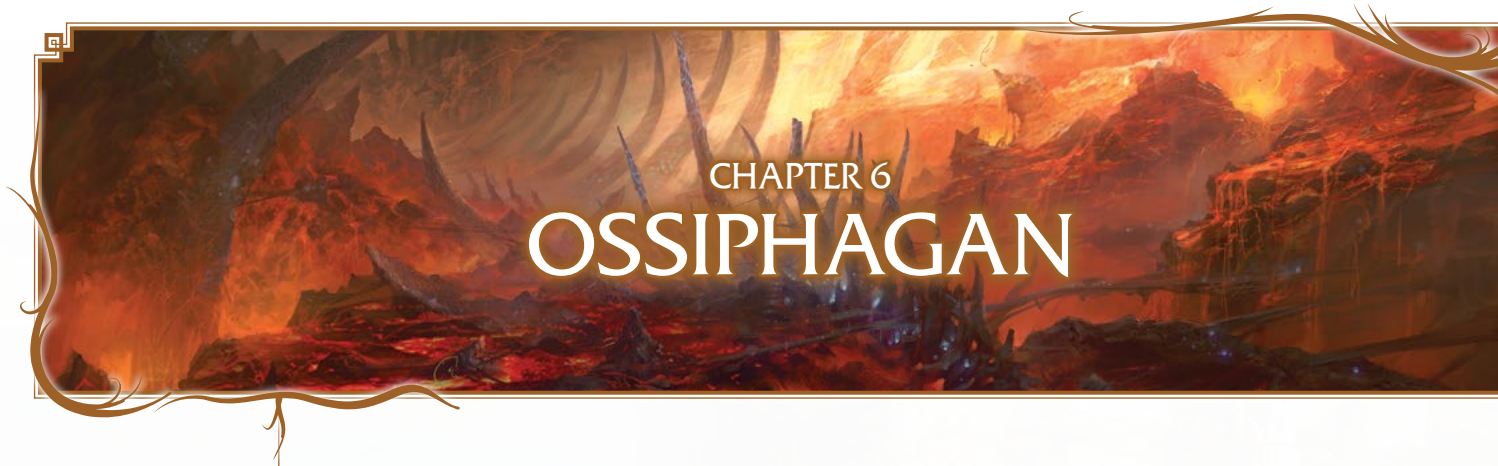
Breaching the Palace: Sona collaborators who voluntarily work with the Bayan and Nil are sometimes assigned to serve the councilors in the palace on the surface. Rebels of the Sacred Sun want to infiltrate this traitorous group so they can get inside the palace and finish the job that began with Chairwoman Tanea's death.

THE WEIRD OF HAREF

Murmur Leaves: An ancient stone tree grows in a mushroom cavern on Strata 22, despite the lack of sunlight or water. It seems to draw sustenance from the cracked rock in which the roots spread. Once a month, the branches sprout leaves etched with writing. Whoever plucks a leaf and reads it will find a short message that is pertinent to them, whether it's a needed bit of information, a question they should consider, or a warning about imminent danger. The Bayan who live on the strata never go near the tree.

Stroke of Genius: While fiddling with a newly discovered relic, a Sona named Baodod triggered a seizure in his brain. Although it damaged his motor functions, it also implanted a brilliant idea for ambushing the Bayan guards. Baodod continues to have a new idea (and a new seizure) each day, and he puts them to good use helping his fellow rebels form strategies and tactics.

Spotlight: Once or twice a month, in the middle of the night, an enormous shadowy vehicle flies high over Haref, hovers over the Bore, and shines an intensely bright spotlight down the hole. It bathes the entire shaft in stark white illumination, and anyone caught in the glare must shut their eyes or risk temporary blindness. After several moments, the light clicks off and the craft glides away.



CHAPTER 6

OSSIPHAGAN

A blast of heat and noise struck Luthiya in the face. Her eyes had to adjust to the dim light and perpetually darkened sky. Against any kind of sense they'd taken refuge in the fields of Ossiphagan, an unsleeping nest of volcanoes. Ama had brought them here. She wouldn't say why. It was safe, which was what they needed. And it was close to Shuenha—good for those who hoped to one day take back their home.

Good for everyone but Luthiya.

There was no day in Ossiphagan. Light came from the molten rock itself, flowing in eternal rivers to the Black Plains below. Luthiya could hardly remember the sun anymore. Her mother used to talk about the Gate of Abaddon. Luthiya had always thought it was figurative.

Why did anyone ever choose to live here?

~ from *Gate to the Abyss*

Area Tone: *Hot and dry, seared by flames and scorched by lava, everything seems sharp, poisonous, or parched.*

Located in the northwest corner of Greater Garravia is Ossiphagan, also known as the Forge of the Night Sky. Some believe that in the past, it played a vital role in interstellar and intergalactic trade.

Ossiphagan is one of the most sparsely inhabited areas in the region. There are a number of reasons for that, not the least of which is the constant heat that seems to

rise out of the very ground, day and night, as if the jagged, mountainous landscape is a too-thin covering for active flames that flare just below the surface.

The nakal are likely another reason. These humanoid creatures glow golden and ethereal, floating like wisps of fire, with flamelike coils that serve as arms and three black holes that may or may not be eye sockets. They're captivating, and it's hard to stop watching them as they draw closer and closer. Once nakal latch onto a living thing, they trail it unceasingly across even great distances. As they feed off the life energy of their prey, they become brighter and more substantial, walking on legs and feet instead of floating.

Nakal are capable of taking magma and forming it very quickly into vast, intricate structures. There's no indication of why they do this, but they likely created the large, twisting obsidian structures and bridges that can be found across the valley.

Other heat-loving creatures and plants also make this region their home, although most are less aggressive and outright dangerous than the nakal. Embered spines—tall, curved black plants covered with neon red spikes—bloom into fiery flowers every night, while tiny furenflies swarm en masse, as hot and sticky as a bunch of embers landing on exposed skin. Gemorrn, creatures of light, fire, and rage whose only desire is to kill everything they happen upon, are also sometimes seen in the area. The gemorrn and nakal typically stay away from each other, but fight vehemently if brought together.

The only relief from the heat and drought is deep within tunnels—where occasional and inexplicable springs can be found—or in the proximity of a cuuhol nest. Cuuhols are a type of slow-moving land snail that grow up to 5 feet (1.5 m) long and build their nests in rock crevices. The nests are filled with fist-sized eggs that radiate cool air and moisture as long as they're alive and safe. Distress or damage causes the eggs to turn black and crumble into dust.

Nakal, page 130

Although the nakal travel great distances to follow something that catches their interest, they won't leave the Ossiphagan area, for reasons that are unclear.

Gemorrn look like large orange glows that contain the afterimages of several screaming faces. For more details, see the Ninth World Bestiary, *page 57.*

Gemorrn: *level 7*

Cuuhol: *level 3, defense as level 2 due to speed; Armor 4*

Cuuhol egg: *level 1; Armor 1; removing an egg from the nest causes it to self-destruct*

Being within long range of a cuuhol nest temporarily removes heat and dehydration effects. Licking an egg provides enough water to hydrate a human for 14 hours.

OSSIPHAGAN HEARSAY

Ring of Fire: A family caravan is trapped inside one of the bone towers, unable to leave while the nakal keep them hemmed in. They've been there a long time and seem to have given up on any hope of escape.

Old Flame: A trader recently arrived in the area looking for what he calls embered hounds. Their eggs look identical to small round embers, but once they hatch, they quickly grow into 2-foot (60 cm) tall canines with a venomous bite.

THE WEIRD OF OSSIPHAGAN

Manned Flight: A one-man flier was seen hovering near the top of one of the bone towers. The vehicle didn't appear to have a pilot, yet it's possible to hear someone talking at the top of the tower.

Bone Walkers: Some of the small pieces of bone that have fallen or been carved away from the larger skeletons move slowly of their own accord, sometimes seeming to follow a living creature for a while before they fall behind.

Nakal are sometimes called fire wights or flame souls.

There are a few small gatherings of humanity sprinkled throughout the region, typically around cuuhol nests or the rare body of water. These collectives are mostly composed of a family or two who got stuck here or who have given up hope that there might be anything left of the world beyond the heat and despair that seems to stretch eternally before them.

Miod: *level 2, movement as level 3 due to size and adaptation*

It's more likely that travelers will encounter small groups of miods—small, quick, carnivorous humanoids that are adapted to the extreme heat. Miods are covered all over in fine black hair and have scaly patches on the bottoms of their hands, feet, and knees to protect them from the ground's searing heat. They tame giant skeletal birds known as girns. Girns have wingspans of up to 6 feet (2 m) across and fly directly above the miods as they walk, providing them with shade. The birds also help carry the groups' belongings, hunt for food, and defend the miods from attackers.

Girn: *level 5; does 3 points of damage with toothed bill*

OSSIPHAGAN RANGE

Far to the northwest of the Sagus Protectorate stands a ring of mountains, carven alien faces adorning their peaks. Fires erupt within this ring, rivers of magma pouring down the inner faces of the mountains to create vast pools of constantly churning molten rock and metal. The magma flows in enormous rivers, an endless cascade that seems to have no beginning or end, but which operates still, the remnant of an ancient, long-forgotten purpose.

Here, the enormous bones of the dead are everywhere. At one time, this area was likely long, low plains, home to colossal creatures covered in spines and claws, larger than almost any land beast known currently. What were these behemoths and why did so many of them die on the plains? It's impossible to know, but they met their ends here in staggering profusion, and their steel-hard bones litter the area still, testament to their passing.

Somehow, the skeletons provide natural insulation against the constant flame. The mostly intact bones form the basis for an intricate network of tunnels and walkways. At some point in the past, someone or something repurposed many of them into buildings and towers filled with incomprehensible machinery. They carved into the bones, using the hollows and heat shields to create a city. There is evidence that they may have used the nakal to help them build parts of the city, as well as evidence that the nakal might have turned on them, ultimately driving them out or destroying them.

Force screens that still (largely) function might have shielded those who ventured into the superheated air. Within the towers, alien and almost-incomprehensible control panels seem to direct the flow of magma from one holding pen to another. Some of the bone towers appear to be designed to

signal through the air, for they emit pulses of energy that are nonlethal to humans. Other towers might have played a part in guiding the molten metals to ruined buildings ringing the giant furnace, for great sweeps rotate and direct the churn.

Whatever their original purpose, the old machines in the heart of the range still push the molten rock and metal through the mouths of the mountains. Those who travel to Ossiphagan—whether driven to a last refuge by the forces of the Tabaht or exploring the fires that erupt to the northwest of the Sagus Protectorate—report that the force screens still hold against the flaming nakal that roam the canyon.

The only "buildings" here are those made of or created inside the bones. The substance looks like stone or a very rough textured metal. It is strong enough to withstand the lava flows. There are multiple towers built inside the tall standing bones, with working doors, gates, and windows carved into them. A few have staircases that wrap around them, or are connected to other towers by bridges. Rooms, called marrow chambers, were carved out of ribs and other bones by unknown inhabitants at some point in the distant past. The walls of the marrow chambers are filled with friezes and scenes so complicated and foreign that they are nearly impossible to understand.

Stronghold of the Black Three: This structure is roughly hewn out of a long, flat bone, creating multiple small rooms surrounding a single cavernous chamber. This is one of the largest gathering places for the New Tabaht, and the main depository for many of the weapons and devices they've been reclaiming.

The local leader, a beefy, muscular man named Sligac tel Bralk, is widely respected and honored for his work in gathering forces and weapons. He believes strongly in the philosophy of the New Tabaht and is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure they succeed in their mission.

His main guard, a tall, imposing presence of a creature named Avesias, is always in full uniform, including a long metal helm and two polearms made of a translucent green material. Avesias speaks only to Sligac, using a language of hand signals and a small pointed device that punctuates the movement of the fingers. Sligac always refers to Avesias as "the fourth."

New Tabaht, page 109

Sligac: *level 7, leadership and inspiration as level 9; Armor 3; often carries a high-level artifact that he chooses each morning from the amassed collection*

Avesias: *level 6; health 30; Armor 5; can use both polearms simultaneously as a single action*

The Charred Pass: The Charred Pass runs between two volcanic rock cliffs behind the stretches of an enormous volcanic plain. Parts of the cliffs are constantly falling, blocking off sections of the pass. Groups of nakal mill around, appearing to create their mysterious and misshapen structures out of the magma.

The Arches: Next to the pass is the Arches, a complex structure shaped from volcanic rock. The shining obsidian has been shaped into arches, towers, impossible structures, and a massive, but partially fallen, wall. The area is home to a number of gemorrn.

A Study in Flame: A mutated human with long fins for arms has been studying the structures created by the nakal, and for some reason the creatures have not attacked him. In fact, it seems that some of them have begun building ever more elaborate structures, as if responding to his interest. He is now even more determined to discover the purpose of the structures.

Those who study the Black Cube sometimes note the similarities between it and the prison structure known as Izaltu's Needle in the Steadfast.

THE BLACK CUBE

The Black Cube: *level 8*

On the outside: a featureless black metal cube.

On the inside: a dark and sprawling hellhole of a prison.

Your sentence: eternal captivity within the Black Cube, with no hope of release—you don't remember your crimes, your judge, or even your own name. You know only that you are here to suffer. And suffer you will.

The Black Cube. Say its name and those who know of it, have heard of it, or have dreamed of it will shudder. And if you talk to the prisoners who've been locked inside? That would be nearly impossible without entering the cube. For those who've been imprisoned there are there still. No captives leave the sprawling, complex prison known as the Black Cube.

Situated in a roiling wasteland, this enormous, glossy basalt cube is "home" to powerful creatures including ultradimensionals, mutants, abhumans, and others. For unknown reasons, there are a disproportionate number of ember scions, jurulisks, and nychthemeron among the prisoners.

Ember scion: *level 6; health 22; Armor 1; deals 6 points of damage with its teeth and claws, and 4 points with its burning touch. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 42.*

Jurulisk: *level 7; health 28; Armor 1; deals 8 points of damage from its protrusions, plus 2 points of cold damage; regains 5 points of health each round. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 69.*

Nychthemeron: *level 6; health 22; Armor 2; deals 6 points of damage. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 94.*

The Black Cube has no seams or joints, as if it were extruded in a single solid piece. The cells are simply recesses and alcoves within the walls around central meeting places, and a dizzying array of stairs, protrusions, joints, and passageways confuse the eye and turn the place into a terrifying maze. The lights are ambient, providing a small amount of illumination from recesses in the metal. There are few places to hide, but many to be trapped within. Food appears in the nooks at prescribed times, with specific meals for specific diets.

Each prisoner awakens to find themselves locked away after judgment before a shadowy court for crimes they don't recall. They remember the sentence—to be cast within the Black Cube, there to live out the rest of their natural days—but they do not remember their crimes, their judges, or even their own names. They also don't know where "here" is. With no windows or doors to the exterior world, it is easy to tell—and believe—all sorts of tales of what might be. Some prisoners believe they have been cast out into space. Others fear they are locked away in the very center of the world itself. All they do know is that they are here to suffer.

Who or what casts judgment over these so-called sinners before condemning them to an eternal prison sentence? Are they even guilty of their accused crimes? Where did they come from before they were cast into the blackness of the Cube? It's impossible to know. A few power-seeking souls have come forward to claim that the Black Cube is their handiwork, but it's clear that something much larger and more powerful than a single individual is behind this.

The mightiest (or most demented) among the prisoners have taken on the role of jailers or tormentors of the others. They have become the monsters they were accused of being, though whether these tendencies would have appeared without the impetus of their sentencing is unknown. Gangs, religions, and pseudo-families have arisen within the Cube—some predatory, some for protection, and some for simple philosophical affinities.

Occasionally, someone is deposited into the prison after taking a wrong turn on a

voyage. They walked through the wrong door, jumped through the wrong portal, or accidentally transported themselves using the wrong device. Prisoners call these interlopers *scads* and make life very hard for them unless they can find a way out, which is rare indeed.

It's also possible to enter and leave the Black Cube by choice, although doing so is a risky and complicated endeavor. In truth, it's not that difficult to get in: it's almost as if the Cube *wants* people to enter. There are numerous spots along the sides of the structure where the building materials seem thin, almost malleable. Getting through one of these spots is a level 6 Intellect task, takes two rounds, and drains those who enter of 5 Intellect points.

Getting out is the challenge. Inside the Cube are three identical octagonal rooms, each of which has a potential exit in the floor (although most people inside don't know that, and over the years, the rooms have been used for other purposes). In order to leave, a creature must lie facedown on the floor in one of the special rooms, and whisper all of the reasons that they do not belong in the prison. If the Cube believes them, it pushes out a gelatinous blob on the end of a long rod. The blob stretches to cover the creature's eyes, ears, and mouth, sinking sharp little points into the orifices in a rhythmic movement. After one minute, during which time the creature is unable to move, speak, see, or hear, it finds itself deposited on the ground just outside the Cube.

The Blackmoor: A man called the Blackmoor walks the corridors day and night—as if there were a day and night cycle in the Cube—attempting to bring some semblance of peace and fairness to the blackness. The Blackmoor is able to phase in and out, passing through solid objects at will, making him particularly difficult to anticipate or engage in combat. Despite his quiet, peaceful ways, he is widely feared, as many prisoners believe he hides something monstrous beneath his calm demeanor. The rumor, which the Blackmoor has never refuted, is that he was born within the Cube's walls and is somehow a part of the prison itself.

The Blackmoor: *level 4, pleasant social interactions as level 5; able to exist partially out of phase for up to 10 minutes at a time*

Cube exit: *level 10; sees through deception, lies, and trickery as level 12; gelatinous blob does 8 points of damage with its sharp points*

THE BLACK CUBE HEARSAY

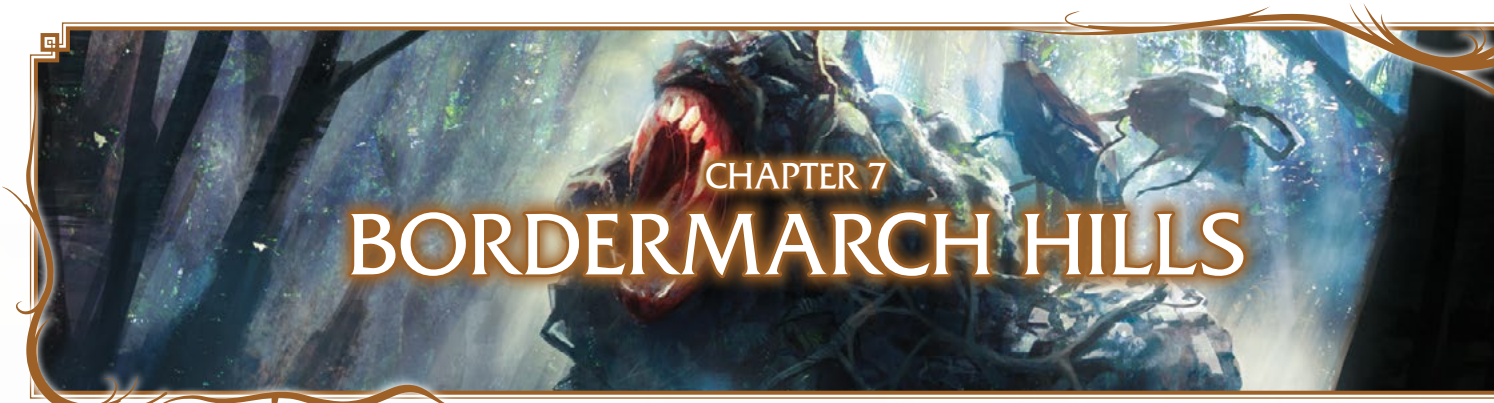
Escape at Last: One of the lesser gangs inside the Cube has found a potential way to escape by combining their powers with those of the Blackmoor. However, they fear that they might unleash the other inmates on the world, and worse, that one of their own is a shape-changer who is trying to infiltrate their escape party.

Lost Legacy: One of the prisoners claims to have remembered where he came from and what crime he committed. Although he won't talk about his crime, he will tell anyone who listens that he must get a message to his uncle, a powerful leader in Sagus Cliffs.

THE WEIRD OF THE BLACK CUBE

Fruit of Memory: An all-blue plant grows along the floor in some parts of the Black Cube. Those who eat its fruit have a temporary detailed memory of another prisoner's alleged crime, but they don't know whose. Some prisoners eat this fruit as a way to kill time.

Burning Bridges: Unreachable bridges loop overhead, near the ceiling of the Cube, going nowhere. They light themselves on fire every few days, filling the air with howls as they burn.



CHAPTER 7

BORDERMARCH HILLS

"Imagine a battle with a giant army—say, a thousand soldiers on each side. Now imagine that just one out of every ten of those soldiers has managed to cobble together, find, steal, or buy one appropriate cypher. The battlefield suddenly erupts into the utter chaos of explosions, high-energy beam weaponry, teleportation, levitation, force fields, gravity fluctuations, magnetic pulses, sudden appearances by ultraterrestrial entities, poison gas clouds, living steel, and far, far stranger things. And then, when the battle's over, and all those weird, one-use resources are spent, the survivors exit the forever-altered battlefield.

"Now imagine that instead of ending, that war goes on forever, dazzling, exhausting, and forever-altering. That is the Endless Battle."

Changing God, page 14

Sorrow, page 15

On a stretch of broad plains northeast of the Valley of Dead Heroes and southwest of the Lost Sea is a place known as Bordermarch Hills, where a battle has raged for centuries. Who knows what this land was like prior to the Endless Battle? Perhaps it was a green place, one of beauty and respite, or perhaps it was a dark, tight woodland. Whatever it was, now it is a scarred and broken landscape, empty but for the remainders of centuries of destruction, detonation, and death.

THE WAGES OF WAR

Most wars in the Ninth World are short affairs, heavily dependent on the cyphers and artifacts the combatants bring to the fight. With the possibility of a single artifact dramatically altering the terrain of the field (whether through reality shaping, gravitics, dimensional warping, time dilation or compression, consciousness alteration, psychic aftershocks, or more), the potential for utter devastation from the poorly understood machines of the past is ever present.

How then does a battle burn for centuries in an age in which opposing forces could wipe their foes from the very face of reality and history? It begins as all the longest, most bitter wars often do—with a broken heart between father and daughter, a betrayal at the hands of one loved most dear.

In this case, a betrayal between the Changing God and one of his castoffs, Miralel. Miralel, who called herself the First Castoff although she was not the first, suffered an attack from the Sorrow, which burned her skin away to the point where her health was failing. She wore a mask to conceal the damage but desperately wanted a new body, a thing that only her sire could give her.

She tracked him down across the Ninth World, and for a long time, the two were close, nearly inseparable. They traveled together, seeking truths and long-buried secrets. He was her guide and mentor as she waited patiently for his aid in growing her a new body.

But their alliance was shattered as her sire kept deferring her treatment and her body continued to fail. She demanded his knowledge and his help, and he turned his back on her. Suddenly their personal struggle turned into a larger battle, each pulling their friends and allies into an ever-expanding conflagration.

Their feud created a schism in the castoff community. Dozens of castoffs flocked to both sides, coming to stand for the one they thought right. Some sided with the Changing God out of loyalty or the continuing belief that he would protect them from the Sorrow. Others sided with the First, believing that she had their best interests at heart against a man who had proven time and again to be focused solely on himself.

Realizing that the First was an existential threat, the Changing God marshaled his forces to eliminate her, and this is when he discovered she had secrets of her own: she possessed a reality splitter she called the Reconciler of the Truth. His weapons were worthless. Every time he launched a massive attack, she simply replaced the reality with one in which the event didn't occur, and then merged the realities together, collapsing them into a single observable state.

After failing to destroy her several times, he at last managed to discover and repair a device that he named Heaven's Rejoinder. Now time in the Endless Battle is torn, with multiple parallel realities rolling and twining around each other, merging and splitting again with the major attacks. The two sides move and countermove, trying to act secretly in ways that will allow them an undeniable victory. Much of the Endless Battle is fought in shadow, in clandestine tactics and small-squad engagements. They build and layer their feints, giving ground on certain fronts so that they can advance on others in separate realities.

Decades ago, both the First Castoff and the Changing God left the war behind and went their separate ways, but the battle still rages, much of its original purpose lost to history.

Now it is a place where warriors test their mettle, where mercenaries earn coin or renown, and where suppliers of food, flesh, and material can find a buyer of last resort. Too many here are invested in seeing the war continue, so the objective has become simply to defeat the other side totally. There is no chance of peace or parley; the soldiers are eager and their commanders are intractable, always thinking they have a chance at breaking the stalemate.

The battle remains confined to a geographically small area that has been tremendously scarred by the horrors of Ninth-World war; the scars extend through multiple dimensions and timelines. The reality-bending Reconciler and the Rejoinder have made major destructive weapons worthless, so both sides have had to resort to new tactics: hand-to-hand combat, personal reality shields, flights of envenomed arrows, detonations of limited effect and duration, poison gas, and more prosaic mechanical and primitive traps. The best they can hope for is small and incremental progress in their struggle, but they have reached no further than this stalemate. Mazes of trenches crisscross the terrain, with bunkers behind the lines and deep divots of earth torn between them. Portals find occasional use, but the trenches remain the best way to move troops without exposing them to the withering death of pulsing beams and curtains of energy that sweep across the field. Gravitic fluctuations are common in that no-man's-land, and free-roaming energies crackle and hiss in the air. Quantum slug-throwers pierce the sky day and night, and torn dimensions leave room for ultraterrestrials to step through and wreak havoc.

As the Endless Battle rages on and on, it takes its toll not just on the land and the resources, but also on the people. Recruitment is active and fierce in larger cities like Sagus Cliffs and the Oasis of M'ra Jolios, but teams have started reaching out farther in an attempt to fill the constant need for new supplies and warriors.

Most believe that the First was destroyed during an attack against the Changing God's fortress, and is long dead.

Paj Rekken: *level 8*

Bericael Brunna: *level 7; Armor 4*

Abykos, page 230

Callerail, page 234

Dread destroyer, page 239

The Chalcedon: *level 8; Armor 5*

Middle door: *level 7*

All castoffs who fight in the First's Militia are of a higher rank than the other warriors; in honor of the First, they wear a beaten metal mask to indicate their status on the battlefields. The more unusual the metal, the higher their rank.

No-Man's-Land: This vast cratered section of the plain is littered with enormous, ruined war-constructs that lie half buried in the scree of their own rust. Even collapsed, their metal corpses are as tall as the high hills and are surrounded by the tarry lakes of their congealed internal fluids. Smoke rising from endless fires covers the area with a thick smog, and drifts of skeletons wind through it like the dirty foam of a long-receded wave. No small number of deserters have made their way here, hoping to find sanctuary among the ruins. A few small communities have sprung up, built of former members of both sides, but they don't last long. Creatures just as dangerous as battle roam this waste, including abykos, callerails, and the occasional dread destroyer.

THE FIRST'S MILITIA

The First's Militia continues to oppose the Changing God, even if many of them no longer remember what they're fighting against or why. They wear the colors of the First—indigo with a strip of red or gold—and prefer sleek armor, often made of synth, to allow for their favorite guerilla style of warfare. They're supported unofficially by the Oasis of M'ra Jolios, but there are rumors of another, more secretive backer that is providing a recent influx of money and support.

The Middle Door: In the middle of one of the First's camps, a guard stands in front of what looks like a weird doorframe that appears to go from nowhere to nowhere. The door is actually a portal to a pocket dimension where prisoners of war are kept.

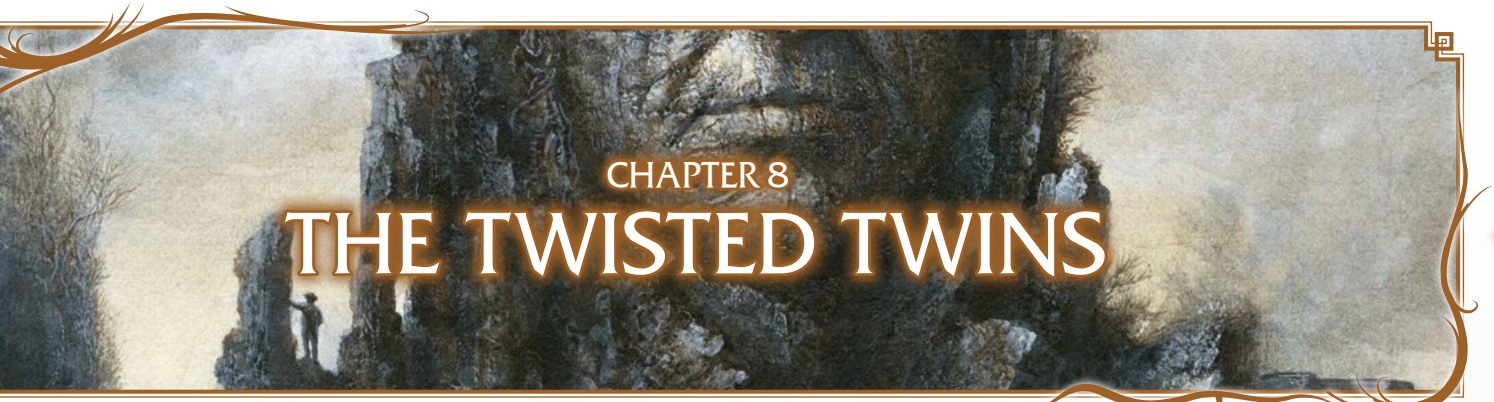
Paj Rekken is the tough commander who's been in charge of the First's Militia for many years. She sports a short blonde haircut and is incredibly loyal in her devotion to the First Castoff.

Bericael Brunna is a slim warrior of infinite control and indeterminate gender whose only goal is to be the perfect soldier for the First and rise through the ranks via heroic actions and brilliance. Bericael is fiercely loyal in war, deadly and swift on the battlefield, and cool and terse in conversation. Bericael has been a squad leader for the First's Militia for years, an integral part of the commando teams.

THE CHANGING GOD'S FORCES

Those who fight on the side of the Changing God wear broad, tough steel armor in blue and silver. The city of Sagus Cliffs publicly, but unofficially, supports this side of the war effort, although many observers believe that the city is likely sending relief to the First's Militia on the side, in the hope of cutting their losses and coming out ahead in case the war ends someday and one side actually wins.

The Chalcedon is the commander in charge of the Changing God's forces. Large, strong, and extremely capable in battle, the Chalcedon wears his hair and beard close cropped and sports impeccable armor.



CHAPTER 8

THE TWISTED TWINS

The area known as the Twisted Twins runs loosely between Miel Avest and Arvrin Wood. Within its borders is a vast waterway that includes two lakes—Ornu Lake and Brother's Lament—as well as the rivers known as Ornu's Unagran and Weeper's Flow.

It's believed that the name of the area comes from two large statues. Both depict thin, humanoid faces with tall, conical heads. One of the statues, known as the lesser twin despite its larger size, rests west of Miel Avest and south of the wide, long river known as Ornu's Unagran. The lesser twin is nearly 100 feet (30 m) tall and is grown or carved or built—it's impossible to tell—out of a type of soft rock.

The greater twin, located at the very western tip of Arvrin Wood, looks exactly the same, except that it's only 20 feet (6 m) tall and is carved out of a thick pellucid material that is silky and warm to the touch.

The statues are rumored to switch places every few years for a short period of time. Anyone touching them at the time falls into a deep sleep and awakens in a place they've never been before.

ARVRIN WOOD

"Arvrin Wood has a need. Come a little closer and it will tell you all about it. A little closer . . . just a little closer . . . so its many mouths may whisper into your ears."

~ the Caretaker

Arvrin Wood is a large, thick, sometimes carnivorous forest along the western border of the Sagus Protectorate. Its climate is crisp and cool, and the emerald trees stand in sharp contrast to the dry, golden desert that surrounds it on all sides.

The unusually cool and damp climate is possibly due to the two deep freshwater lakes inside its borders—Ornu Lake and the smaller Brother's Lament—as well as the large tributary, Weeper's Flow, that rolls along the southern end of the Valley of Dead Heroes and pours into Garravia Sound. Or perhaps it's due to what's buried beneath. Arvrin Wood stands upon a series of ancient, sprawling structures, the tops of which are crumbled and overgrown with roots. What's left of the structures are domed tops and triangular hollow spaces rough-hewn from a dull turquois stonelike material. Where the material is broken, its insides are striped black and red.

The outer edges of this forest start off bright and airy. Here the trees seem normal enough, but closer to the center, they begin to compress and writhe, their branches twisting like tentacles. These trees are clearly alive, although it's nearly impossible to tell if they are sentient or sapient. Those watching closely, however, might see them creep across the buildings and move closer to the interior of the forest, a languid movement that is menacing despite its slow pace.

The living trees are carnivorous only some of the time. Although they lean in and menace anything that moves nearby, their main focus seems to be protecting and repairing the structures on which they grow. And yet sometimes they are incited into a frenzy of carnivorous action, one that leaves few living things in the forest unscathed. When this occurs, anything that moves, makes noise, or touches a tree can cause it to wrap its limbs around prey and stick the victim with any number of the long, hollow spines that protrude from its limbs.

Those rare few who have walked in these woods and survived have many theories: only when it rains, only when it doesn't rain for three days straight, only when the moon's wide green band can be seen across its surface, only when the scattercraw caterpillars are hatching . . . but so far, none of those theories have held up to testing.

The forest is tended by the Caretaker, a humanoid creature that seems to be covered in, or perhaps created out of, reddish-orange seedpods. Long black tendrils string upward from its head and shoulders, and both of its arms end in long, saw-toothed thorns. It doesn't seem to have eyes or a mouth to speak of, but it whispers the Truth in a dry voice that travels through the forest farther than seems plausible.

Caretaker: *level 4*

The Truth, page 133

Valley of Dead Heroes, page 54

Garravia Sound, page 94

Brother's Lament is 20 to 60 feet (6 to 18 m) deep and filled with a variety of amphibious and aquatic creatures, so diving for pora buds is not without risk.

Pora bud flesh: *restores 2 points of Might damage when cooked and eaten*

Living tree: *level 5; spines sink beneath the victim's skin, injecting a substance that liquefies whatever it touches so that it can be sucked out. While sunk, spines do 3 points of damage per round (ignores Armor).*

Claba-ka: *level 10; does 4 points of damage each round to anything caught in its grip; anything caught in its grip is also pulled 20 feet (6 m) into the air per round for five rounds*

FALSEREST

The largest town in Arvrin Wood, Falserest is located along the northern shore of Brother's Lament and has around 1,000 people. It is a floating city, built upon the flat, wide roots of the pink pora plant.

The pora is a type of aquatic plant whose flowers and leaves are underwater, and whose roots grow upward, stretching above the surface to gain nutrients from the air. The roots grow from 3 to 7 feet (1 to 2 m) wide and are mostly flat, allowing walkways, homes, and even larger structures to be built upon them. Pora plants flower once every few years. Their orange buds, which bloom along the bottom of the deepest sections of the lake, are about the size of a human fist. The buds are filled with a pink flesh that makes the whole face go numb when eaten raw, but has healing properties when cooked.

Many Falserest residents follow the practice of "turning their faces to the sky"—they wear false faces painted, stitched, or otherwise imprinted on the backs of their hoods, keeping their true faces bowed to the ground and their false faces pointed skyward as often as possible. The false faces are fierce, menacing, inhuman even, designed to keep Claba-ka, their sky god, from plucking them up and stealing them away. The people also paint kind, smiling faces on human-shaped totems and leave

them lying along roads, in trees, and on top of roofs to entice the sky god to take those instead. They believe that Claba-ka, so named after the sound of the god's song—a squealing, rusted-metal sound that emanates from one of its many body parts—protects them from the carnivorous trees that surround the town.

The sky god is a giant, stationary automaton of metal and steel, wrapped in pulsating strips filled with dark green goo. It stands around 100 feet (30 m) tall and has a single giant hand that reaches down at random intervals to grab anything it finds. Claba-ka isn't worshipped by everyone, but those who do turn their faces to the sky seem to be spared more often from the deadly grasping hand.

MIEL AVEST

"Enter and know peace."

~ Aadiriis

Surrounded by a wild, alien jungle, Miel Avest is a verdant sanctuary nestled in a beautiful, lush basin. The village boundary is a perfectly manicured circle of green, although no one is ever seen tending to it. Etched across the surface is a complicated design, the sections outlined in a bright white metallic substance. In the center of the circle is an inner circle entirely of gold that is etched in even more complex patterns. Those who spend time there report feeling a deep sense of peace and well-being.

The buildings scattered across the circle look more grown than built, full of organic swirls, curves, and spikes that are reminiscent of underwater life— rolling nautili and wave-washed seaweed.

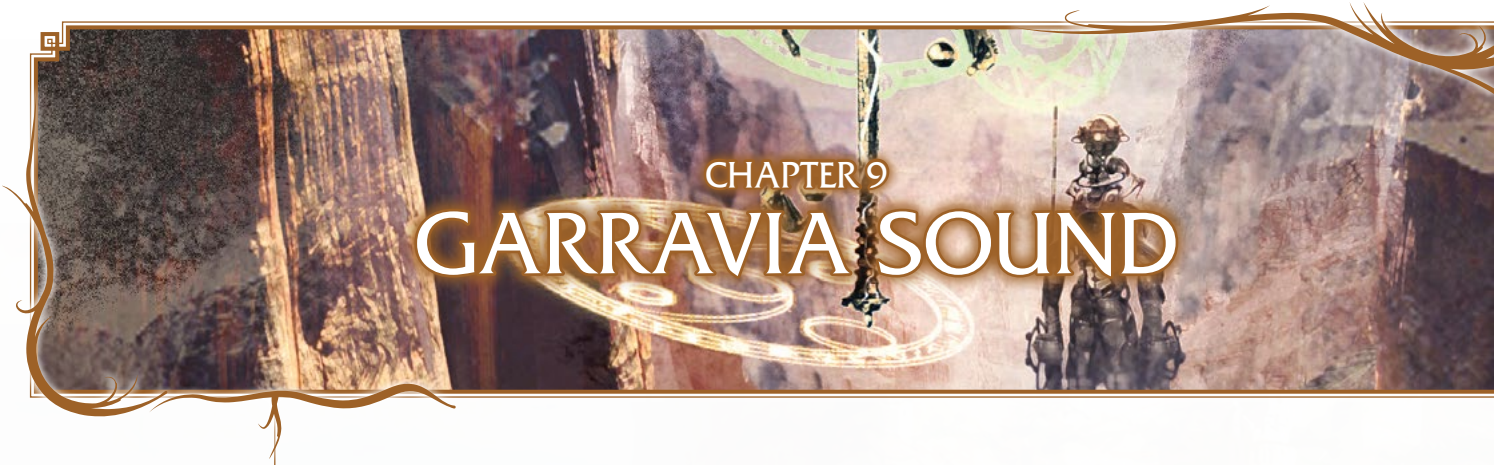
Miel Avest is unusual in that it was originally created by the Changing God and one of his castoffs—Maralel—as a sanctuary in a green basin where all castoffs could take refuge from the Sorrow. It is a place of truce in the Endless Battle. In the rest of the world, castoffs choose sides in the fight. In the surreal gardens of Miel Avest, they honor the truce and live together in an uneasy peace.

The inhabitants are a disparate bunch, with long histories and wild stories. They are led by a woman named Aadiriis, the de facto mother and leader. Aadiriis is uncannily beautiful, with long black hair and intense eyes, and dressed in colorful robes. She is kind and peaceful, but utterly dangerous to anyone who threatens the harmony of the castoff sanctuary. Strongest among her beliefs is the sanctity of freedom of choice for all, especially the others who inhabit Miel Avest.

For those who are not castoffs, Miel Avest is nearly impossible to find, and purposefully so. It is always best to have a castoff along as a guide when trying to visit the sanctuary.

Aadiriis: *level 4, positive interactions and intimidation as level 5*

Miel Avest means "Stone of Wonders" in an ancient language.



CHAPTER 9

GARRAVIA SOUND

Machine Heart: *level 9, emits energy beams that do 8 points of damage to everything within long range*

The Iridian Expanse is called many things by many people. Some know it as the Greyest Eye. Others as Midnight's Vision or, more commonly, Mivi.

The large inland sea—known to those in Sagus Cliffs as the Iridian Expanse—plays an important role in many elements of the region, from the weather and the local languages, to the culture and economy of Sagus Cliffs and the surrounding areas. The northernmost edge of it—Garravia Sound—stretches from Sagus Cliffs in the west beyond the Great Library in the east.

The waters in the sound are often tumultuous, stirring up debris and creatures from the ocean floor and depositing them along the shore. Tiny coastal towns, consisting of just two or three families each, have sprung up all along the shore, subsisting almost entirely on whatever haphazard gifts the sea dredges up and delivers.

THE MACHINE HEART

Sunk deep in the waters of the sound about 40 miles (64 km) from the closest point of shore is a great device known as the Machine Heart. The top of it rests just a few hundred feet beneath the surface, a jumbled gold and orange array of metal tubes, vats, and protrusions.

It's nearly impossible to tell how large this device is, how far down it goes toward the ocean floor, or what its purpose is, because it intermittently emits powerful bursts of energy that repel everything in the water within a radius of about 1 mile (1.5 km). The blasts also create tumultuous water and weather conditions, sometimes pushing the swirling water into the air with enough force to form small typhoons and tropical storms. These storms move across the water,

often concluding with a devastating sweep against the shore, but for some reason never head out to sea.

MARTELING WHALE TOWNS

Garravia Sound is a common stop for marteling whale towns seeking to trade with Sagus Cliffs and the surrounding area. These mobile towns are located on the back of giant marteling whales, and often bring unusual goods from far-off lands and deep-sea locations. They also offer foodstuffs such as fresh deepwater fish, sea salts, and various forms of ocean plants, seeds, and fruits.

Because much of the shoreline is shallow and rife with hidden dangers that have had disastrous results for the martelings in the past, the whale towns anchor far off shore and announce their presence via sound. Each city has a unique portcall—some whale towns use devices to produce a complicated series of tones and pitches, while others employ singers who serenade those on shore with an inventory of their unusual offerings and enticing prices. If weather permits, traders from Sagus Cliffs, the Bloom, and the small towns along the shoreline head out in small boats or aboard mechanical waterambler to exchange goods and services. It's rare for those aboard the whale cities to come ashore. Although the martelings typically allow themselves to be led by the people who live on their backs, they are also notorious for heading back to sea on a sudden whim, stranding unlucky citizens ashore.

Marteling whale: *level 9; health 100; Armor 8; attack with strong jaws, front flippers, or pronged tails for 10 points of damage. For more details, see the* Ninth World Bestiary, *page 82.*

A waterambler is a level 5 craft with eight wide, flat "feet" that carries up to four people. In calm water, it works similarly to a rowboat, but in choppy and tumultuous water, the movement of the water causes the feet to propel the craft forward. A lever in the center moves the feet, allowing them to be used as a rudder.

TIAOW CHAIN

This watertown is located on a connected group of two dozen floating metal platforms tethered just a mile or so off the Elish Strand. Tiaow Chain has become known as the place of unearthly delights for those who have the means to obtain them.

Each of the platforms is approximately 500 feet (150 m) long and 200 feet (60 m) wide, and despite their location far offshore, they aren't rocked by waves, upended by storms, or dampened by rain. Standing on one of the platforms feels as calm, still, and dry as standing inside a building on land, yet there are no tangible walls or ceiling. Upon a platform, no moss grows, no dust settles, and no wind stirs. The temperature is always ambient, and the air smells strongly of sweet berries.

The platforms are connected to each other by invisible bridges about 2 feet (60 cm) wide; more than one tough-talking explorer has turned back after taking their first step into thin air above the ocean.

Syrit Ricec: *level 5, poisons and ranged attacks as level 6; Armor 3*

The platforms themselves are identical, save for a unique symbol etched upon each one. The symbols take up almost the entire floor of each platform, and the lines are engraved nearly 1 foot (30 cm) deep and 6 inches (15 cm) wide into the metal. Most of the etched runnels have been turned into dirt- and water-filled gardens where hallucinogenic, mood-altering, and edible plants and trees are tended and harvested.

The first platform in the long chain—the one closest to the shore—serves as a point of entry. Boats and other vehicles are moored there, and one must pass the scrutiny of a bevy of guards whose sole purpose is to decide who may and may not enter the rest of the chain.

Most of the other platforms are overseen by curators who run the spaces and create what they believe to be the optimal experience for their potential patrons, whether that be drugs and alcohol, dancing and entertainment, sexual escapades, or a little of each. The goal is to provide an escape from the drudgery, dirt, and hardships of daily life—but that escape comes at a price. Services run the gamut from a simple Sip and Shine (a choice of drinks and hallucinogenic drugs, as well as a comfortable place in which to enjoy the effects, for around 30 shins) to a multiday, multiperson experience known as the Submerge, complete with finely prepared meals, drinks, and drugs; pleasing companions and lavish entertainment; and nearly anything else that one could think to ask for (at the cost of 200 to 400 shins or the equivalent in trade per day).

The owners of the platforms pay a small tithe to the leader for protection from potential threats, including takeovers and patrons who don't pay.

The Healer of Blemarity: Despite the moniker of Healer, the leader of Tiaow Chain is a self-appointed position typically attained by killing the former leader. The current Healer of Blemarity, Peardon Ricec, is no exception to that process. Inhabiting the last platform in the chain, Ricec is a tall, angular woman with sea-colored hair and two teenage daughters—Cisar and Syrit—who are nearly identical copies of their mother. She is quick to smile and slow to ire. Those who don't know better might think her too kind and conversational to oversee the Tiaow Chain, but she and her daughters will quickly set such people straight. Beneath her diaphanous blue outfits, Ricec is all lean muscle and experience. A combat veteran who arrived more than twenty years ago from a marteling town, she's ruled the chain ever since she gutted her predecessor in broad daylight. She has trained her daughters to follow in her footsteps, and often baits them to try to kill her and take her spot. Each of her daughters has her own skillset, and although the inhabitants of Tiaow Chain would never admit it to the Healer, they regularly make bets on which of the women is likely to take out the other two and take over the position.

The Ruby Watchers: Two finned creatures about 20 feet (6 m) long swim endless laps around the length of the chain. They're sharklike in shape, but they appear to be covered with dark red feathers. Visitors and citizens alike leave offerings of food, oddities, and personal items in the water for the ruby watchers, but the creatures rarely eat any of it. Although Ricec tries to claim them as her own, longtime residents say that they have always been there to protect the chain. It's unclear exactly what role the ruby watchers play, if they even have one, but rarely does anyone attempt to seize or attack Tiaow Chain.

Peardon Ricec: *level 6; intimidation, tactics, and strategy as level 7; Armor 4; possesses numerous cyphers, including a level 4 bloodglobe and charmpaste*

Bloodglobe, page 113

Charmpaste, page 113

Cisar Ricec: *level 5, deception and subterfuge as level 6; Armor 3*

THE TOWER OF BIRDS

Endira scratched his chin through his beard as he searched the tables and cabinets of the focus chamber for a data cube, a fist-sized translucent block, within which was stored a vast portion of the limitless knowledge of the ancients. It was also Maud's favorite treat. Downloading all that data made her storage receptors tickle, or so she claimed.

At last he found one under a drift of manuscript pages and rinds, and motioned her over. She floated to him happily, the silver sphere that was her body bobbing along at

head height, lights twinkling in anticipation.

He inserted the cube into one of the many hollow openings on her side. Her lights glowed and flashed, while the glow of the data cube dimmed and died.

"There," he said. "Now will you fix the record?"

This floating structure on the rocky shores of Garravia Sound currently acts as a lighthouse for the strange ships that ply the waters of the inland sea. It sends a giant beam of light directly up into the sky, a beam that can be seen for miles out to sea. It's rumored that even those on the southern shore of the Iridian Expanse have seen the light, but it's impossible to know for sure.

The building, which floats more than a third of a mile (.5 km) off the ground, is named after the ever-present and enigmatic mechanical birdlike creatures called pellwings, which have free run of the Tower and its surrounding skies. The pellwings fly around in predictable patterns, connected together by malleable beams of light that form intricate designs against the sky.

There is no obvious way to enter the tower. If someone approaches it within about half a mile (1 km), they might find themselves with a visitor—a brightly colored pellwing that appears inside a pocket or bag, carrying a magnetized stick in its mouth. The stick can be slotted into one of the five magnafluid stones that form a rough semicircle beneath the tower. If all five sticks are found and slotted into all five stones at the same time, the reaction causes millions of nanoparticles to clump together beneath the tower, creating a temporary platform that rises into the sky.

Although most people think of the Tower of Birds as a protector, the tower is, or was, something else entirely. From within, its constant beam shines into the sky, sending and receiving unknown signals from the datasphere. Is the tower a beacon of knowledge, or a weaponized defense system that just needs someone to unlock it? You could try asking the tower's custodian, Endira Thirdloss, but he will admit that even after years of study, he still can't begin to explain or uncover the tower's true purpose.

Endira: For many years, Endira has been the tower's custodian, living and studying there, attempting to discover its true purpose. So far, all he has done is break some things that were previously working, like the portal system.

Short and stocky, Endira is well groomed and sports a long beard. He is bookish, smartly tongued, and well versed in the numenera and general lore. He dreams of being a hero, but dreaming is as far as it goes—he's a starry-eyed storyteller, not an adventurer. He spends most of his time writing stories with himself as the protagonist, doing heroic deeds. Visitors with a keen eye can find many of these story scraps scattered throughout the tower (and sometimes throughout the whole area, as, for some reason, the pellwings love stealing his work and scattering it on their travels).

The tower also has a portal at its base that brings people inside, but it isn't working at present, thanks to some unfortunate tinkering by Endira.

Portal: *level 6*

Pellwing: *level 2*

Endira Thirdloss: *level 3; verbal sparring, lore, and the numenera as level 5; can speak telepathically to any intelligent machine at long range (including Maud)*

Maud: *level 5*

Maud: Endira is accompanied by Maud, a disembodied voice that helps him with his custodial duties in the tower. It's likely that Maud is some sort of artificial construct, albeit one that is highly unstable. Maud long ago took on a female persona to pursue a romantic relationship with Endira, and she has learned everything about him in an attempt to better please him. Those who upset the custodian in some way—accidentally or on purpose—are likely to hear Maud's true voice, a terrifying and robotic intonation full of instability. If she fears for Endira's safety, she might incapacitate him for his own good. She sometimes sings discordant, electric tunes when she thinks no one is listening.

Maud records and retells all of Endira's actions as stories of her own, but often not in the way that he would like her to. To get her to "fix" the stories—falsify them so that he looks better—Endira feeds her small data cubes that can be found around the tower. Unbeknownst to him, these hold many of the answers he seeks about the tower, if he could find a way to access their data.

INSIDE THE TOWER

Focus Chamber: The Focus Chamber is a round room with a large control center that has a column of light running through its middle. Many other numenera instruments and consoles are here, some of which are in disrepair because of Endira's fruitless tinkering. Part of the room has been converted into a living and study area, where Endira sleeps and practices his writing. Pages containing snippets of his stories can be found here. All of them feature Endira as a hero, leader, or savior.

The Crescent: At the top of the tower, a long, curved balcony—which Endira calls the Crescent—offers a panoramic view of the night sky and unusual rock formations of Garravia Sound. All of the walls, floors, and ceilings in this room are of varying degrees of transparency. In the center of the room is a large, wide column of energy or light that casts from the Focus Chamber straight up into the sky. A closer look shows swarming plasma particles and crackling electricity within the beam. A flock of pellwings flies in a constant clockwise circle around the column.

Tower's beam: *level 9; does 8 points of damage to anything within its flood of light*

The Tower's Beam: Currently, the beam is a waypoint for ships attempting to cross Garravia Sound, as well as for any air vehicles in close range. However, the beam is also a weapon, albeit one that hasn't been used or even known about for a long time. When the beam is activated, it integrates with the pellwings that fly around it; these creatures become part of the weapon itself.

Oorgolian soldier, page 250

The Truth, page 133

TOWER OF BIRDS HEARSAY

Marching Forth: From his vantage in the Crescent, Endira points out a group of Oorgolian soldiers traveling toward the tower at an alarming rate. He is worried that the tower's defenses won't hold against such invaders.

A Hero's Tale: Endira wants help spreading his writings out into the world, either because he wants to become a hero or because he believes that his stories will help make the world a better place (or both).

Tesseracts: The tower is laden with weird bits of the numenera, but perhaps none are as weird as the tesseracts. Activating them in the right way is rumored to activate the pellwings, triggering a beam blast that will open a secret room in the tower.

THE WEIRD OF THE TOWER OF BIRDS

Flight Path: Those who approach the tower from the west can see pellwings flying in an intricate pattern. Upon entering the pattern, visitors begin to hear the voice of someone narrating a story in the Truth.

Ghost Ship: When the moon is at its highest point in the sky, there appears a shimmering, intangible ship that rests, wrecked, against the bottom of the tower.

CHAPTER 10

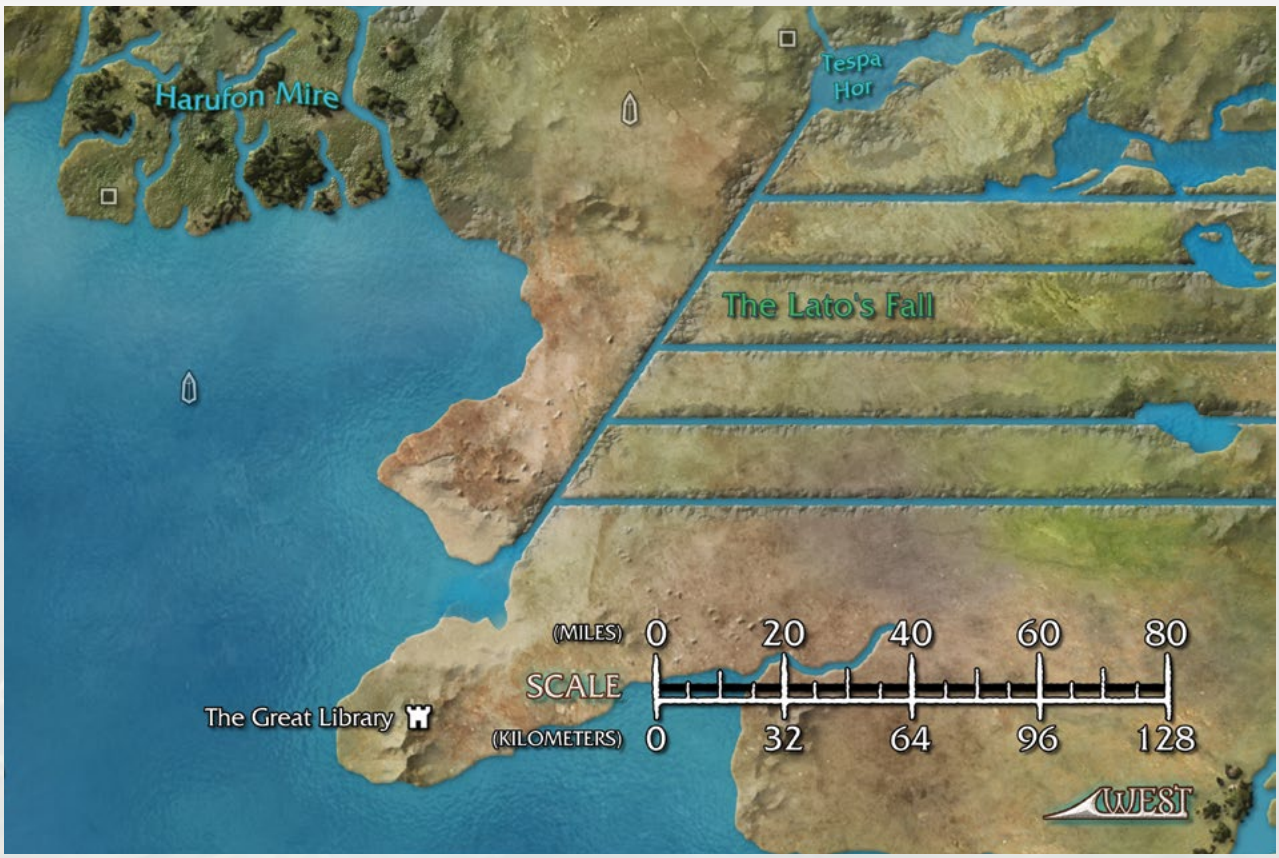
LOWER GARRAVIA

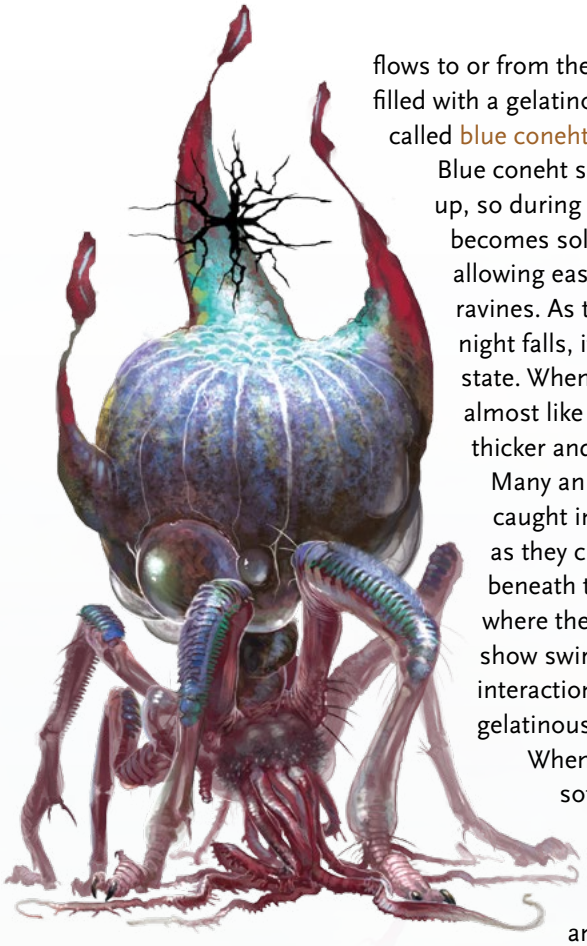
The area called Lower Garravia, which is often nicknamed the Lows, covers the myriad locations and landscapes that aren't already claimed by some other empire, city, or individual of power.

The name isn't an indication of map location or even altitude, but one of attitude. At one time, these were the leftovers, the derelict places that no one wanted, the lowest of the low. That's changing now, with the growth of various groups and tribes vying for power. The once-shunned places are being given a second glance by those with the means to attempt action, whether that will be assimilation, destruction, or something else.

THE LATO'S FALL

The Lato's Fall is a flat, wide peninsula along the northeastern shore of Garravia Sound. The entire area is striped with deep, straight ravines. The ravines are all clean-cut and run straight across the landscape. They're approximately a mile wide and possibly that deep as well. It hard to know, exactly, because although the ravines seem like they should be filled with the water that





Versicolor truiskals can often be seen near the Great Library.

Blue coneht: *level 6*

Sac: *level 9*

Curio: *level 4, knowledge of four topics as level 6 (each curio has a different set of topics that it's knowledgeable in)*

Banem-slan: *level 5; knowledge of the numenera, geography, astronomy, language, and research as level 7*

Lattimor, page 122

Corpse seal: *level 4; does 3 points of damage with a crack of its long bony tail*

Windboat: *level 3*

Winged pack: *level 4*

flows to or from the sound, they are instead filled with a gelatinous crystalline material called blue coneht.

Blue coneht solidifies when it heats up, so during warm weather, it becomes solid enough to walk on, allowing easy passage across the ravines. As the weather cools, or as night falls, it returns to its softer state. When soft, blue coneht flows almost like water, although it's thicker and moves more slowly.

Many an explorer has been caught in its transformation as they cross the gap, sinking beneath the material. The places where the ravines meet the sea show swirling eddies, a volatile interaction between saltwater and gelatinous crystal.

When blue coneht goes soft, all kinds of things bubble up through the material—living creatures, bits of debris, and crafted objects. Once in a great while, the ravines even eject a person from their depths, albeit a very disoriented and confused person with no understanding of how or why they just bubbled up through a gelatinous ravine to arrive in the middle of nowhere.

Small towns and cities have sprouted up all along the ravines, particularly near Tespa Hor, a small lake at the northern end of the Lato's Fall. Most of them are there to retrieve items from the ravines and sell them in Sagus Cliffs or the Bloom. These nabbers stake out and protect sections of each ravine with trained corpse seals, light pink creatures that seem to be made mostly of bone and sinew. Nabbers use windboats, winged packs, or other airborne devices to hover over their section, reaching down and nabbing anything that bubbles up with a long polearm or net.

THE GREAT LIBRARY

The Great Library is a massive 500-foot (150 m) square building made of white synth, black metal, and tan leather. It rests on a high hill overlooking the sound. Despite being 5 miles (8 km) from the sea, the front of the building is often damp and stained from the splashing of seawater. Each side has two or three irregularly shaped doors that are roughly 15 feet (5 m) high and 2 feet (60 cm) wide.

The interior is a vast, echoing oval space with a slanted floor. The curved walls and ceiling are lined almost entirely with sticky globes of gelatinous, fuliginous sacs that almost seem to breathe in quick, shallow gasps, giving the space a sense of constant movement and sound. High up on the walls, there are also various balconies and mezzanines, with no obvious way to reach them. These hanging floors are littered with books, scrolls, diagrams, and tools.

In the center of the main floor is a square box that seems to have been built more recently than the larger structure. It stands about 20 feet (6 m) square. The front is open, revealing a group of beds, chairs, and tables. This is where the self-appointed keepers of the library live and study. At any given time, there are six keepers—known as curios—who maintain, study, and record all of the information they can uncover. The head curio is Banem-slan, a lattimor who will hold the position until he dies or chooses a replacement.

The Great Library is known as a place of communal knowledge, although not even the keepers know how to fully access the information within its walls. The scrolls and books are easier to decipher and decode—they've been left by visitors, travelers, and knowledge seekers hoping to contribute to the mass of information. The curios wear special gloves and footwraps that allow them to climb up and down the sticky sacs to reach the balconies and mezzanines. They also have learned many secrets about retrieving information from the gelatinous sacs. Each sac requires a different physical key, spoken code, cypher, or other tool to reach through the gel casing and retrieve the information inside. The information comes in different forms as well—everything from concrete items like books, scrolls, and cyphers to creatures, memory shunts, and recordings.

CHAPTER 11

THE TEMPEST WASTE

The Tempest Waste is a vast deadland, empty but for twisted and toxic flora and mutated and dangerous fauna. Once this might have been a verdant and teeming grassland, but no longer. Now it is a mad landscape shaped by erosion, collapse, and the terrifying whimsy of the Iron Wind.

And yet, this very place is rumored to house the city of Archopalasia, a legendary oasis of learning and technological marvels. How such beauty can exist in the middle of such destruction is perhaps what keeps the city a legend. That, or the fact that one must first survive the passage across the wastes to see it for themselves.

In the Tempest Waste, nothing larger than a fist thrives, or even survives. No birds. No abhumans. And certainly no humans. Poisonous lichens and mosses slither across the expanse like broken-backed snakes, and tiny spiders with asymmetrical eyes and legs pop out from holes and hidden crevices, or appear seemingly out of thin air.

Along the edges of the wasteland, one might encounter a roving pack of varkhounds, twisted, houndlike creatures that move crookedly—yet incredibly quickly—on uneven and odd-numbered legs. Varkhounds are aggressive and territorial, but not carnivorous. They subsist on inorganic material, which is likely one of the reasons they are able to survive within the hard clime of the wastes.

The dirt is crimson, dark, and foul smelling, and the air is tinged with tangible grit. Fields that once might have grown wild grasses or domesticated crops are filled with rippled ranks of metal waves, most taller than a human. The wind groans as it strikes against the sharpened edges, a haunting sound. Hills dot the landscape like giant lacework, great slanting walls of bone-white rock so full of filigreed holes that you could see the sun setting behind them. Elsewhere, long, sloping dunes spark with every step, threatening to light themselves on fire.

For whatever reason, this area seems to attract weird weather patterns with surprising regularity, including the rare and devastating nanostorm called the Iron Wind. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the area seems hotter than is possible, as if there's an extra sun reserved just for the Tempest Waste, and it's always overhead.

Iron Wind, page 135

ARCHOPALASIA

Archopalasia. I had spent nearly half my life searching for that city of legend. It had been the reason I'd decided to explore the Tempest Waste in the first place—before fear of the Iron Wind had forced me to give up pressing toward the center, and I'd turned this camp into a moneymaking venture. Every rumor and reference I had ever heard said it should be in there somewhere. A city of marvels, it was supposed to be, of numenera undreamed of, of perfect harmony, of human gods, where all the knowledge of the world was stored and freely shared among its citizens.

~ Reen Gnoseus, *The Last Days of Archopalasia*

Archopalasia was once a place of mythology and awe. Tales described it as such an incredible perfection of a city that it couldn't

Getting the poisoned dirt of the wastes into an open cut or sore causes 1 point of damage per day until it is cleaned out.

Varkhound: *level 4; does 3 points of damage by spewing inorganic material coated in gut acid from two pouches along the side of its neck (up to short range); does 2 points of damage by tearing with its teeth*

possibly exist. And yet, it did—at least for a while.

Once, Archopalasia truly was a paradise in the middle of a wasteland. Self-sustaining, protected, and blessed with an unusual device called the vivifier that was rumored to make people younger and help stave off death, Archopalasia was perfect on the surface.

Vivifier: *level 9*

Years and years ago, that all fell apart. As with so many seemingly perfect things, all it takes is a bit of digging to see that what lies beneath is much darker. What the inhabitants didn't know was that the vivifier didn't restore or revive them. It copied them, turning their previous bodies into sludge. They also didn't know that their city was dying until it was almost too late.

In Archopalasia, it is polite to greet someone by kissing your hand and placing it upon your heart.

Now, the city is a shadow of its former self, housing fewer than two dozen inhabitants, almost all of whom have been there since the near-fall so long ago.

From the outside, Archopalasia looks the same as it always has: a bit like a tall, swirling funnel of brown dust on the horizon. It stretches up, reaching to impossible heights, expanding and thinning as it goes, until it dissipates into a cloud of yellow haze. Its twisting seems unnaturally steady, uniform and fixed, never moving nor subsiding, never swaying from side to side. Close in, the sky overhead grows darker from the particulates that the funnel throws into the air.

At the base of the funnel are several structures, and within the writhing dust is a tiered cluster of eight immense oval pods that seem to hover more than 300 feet (100 m) above the base. Each looks big enough to contain a small city, and each sits atop a narrow pillar, the entire surface of which is finely etched with unusual signs and symbols. A ninth pod appears to have crashed to the ground, crushing the pillar beneath it.

The remaining pods are arrayed in a wide circle around a massive cylindrical spire called the Nexus, and connected to it by

It is unsafe to eat or drink anything one finds in the wastes.

Not surprisingly, living with the vivifier in their midst has created some unusual customs among the inhabitants of Archopalasia. Death is an experience to be sought out, rather than an ending to be avoided. Suicides and complicit murders are common. Stories are told about the most unusual forms of "sought death," and sexual intimacy often ends with a climactic death.

narrow catwalks. Large translucent tubes carry the inhabitants up and down inside the narrow pillars, as well as within the spire.

Each pod has multiple levels. In most, the top levels are covered by a transparent dome beneath which beautiful parks take shape, complete with fountains, sculptures, and shrubbery, all connected by curving walkways.

The spire itself has twenty-one levels, each of which serves a unique purpose. Crops grow in one, while another is a storehouse of devices and ancient machines. One holds the city's hydration storage—large oval vats filled with clear liquid.

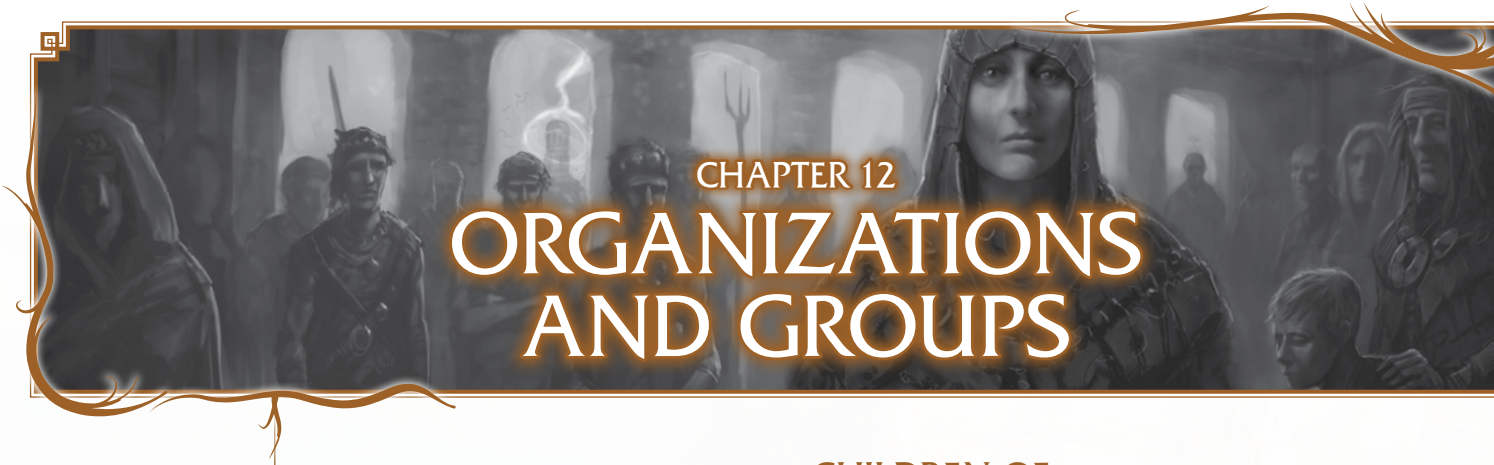
The machine known as the vivifier is on one of the lowest levels. Those who live in Archopalasia use the device regularly, believing that it keeps them young. And in a sense, it does, for the body that leaves the vivifier is always younger than the one that entered it. The residents also believe that it keeps them from death, because if you put a dead body in the machine, a live body comes out.

However, the vivifier doesn't make the user younger or save them from death. It merely makes a copy of them and turns their previous body into a sludge the inhabitants call grow mud, which they use to feed, nourish, and power the city. Those who have used the vivifier find they must continue to do so, because each new body is not as strong as the last, and begins to weaken and sicken. At first, they might use the device once every few years. But the more they use it, the more often they must do so, until it's likely that they must use it every day.

Despite its size, Archopalasia has a mere two dozen inhabitants. That's partly because using the vivifier has another effect: sterilization.

The city is also host to a second, equally unusual device: the watcher. The watcher allows someone to look through a glowing orb and see far-off places. It shows each element viewed as a color based on its category: green is inanimate, purple is animate, red is a powered device, and so on. By pressing their head against the watcher, the user can also hear what's going on in the location being viewed.

Watcher: *level 4*



CHAPTER 12

ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS

Greater Garravia is rife with groups and organizations, some tightly knit with leaders and complicated structures, others more loosely woven around a belief or an ideal.

In addition to the organizations listed in this chapter, travelers might occasionally find present or former members, or even small gatherings, of groups that are more common elsewhere in the world. For example, in Sagus Cliffs, there's a small enclave of people who call themselves Aeon Priests from the Order of Truth, although they follow different philosophies and principles from those in the Steadfast.

The Dendra O'hur and the Children of the Endless Gate consider themselves to be sworn enemies.

CHILDREN OF THE ENDLESS GATE

Some people call the Children of the Endless Gate "death worshippers." But the Children prefer to think of themselves as spirits trapped in flesh and believe it is the horror of their cage that pushes them to atrocity. They call themselves liberators and agents of freedom, and when they hunt the slums of the cities, they leave no evidence of their passing beyond a tracery in blood, the depiction of an ever-wet gate to a realm of pure spirit—and horror.

The Children are not a very old faction. Once members of the Dendra O'hur, they split from the cannibals over a difference in philosophy—namely, the Children are no longer concerned with the preservation of knowledge and thus no longer have the need to devour the corpses of the dead.

The Children take the belief that life resides in the body to the next logical step. Rather than devour the body to celebrate the life within, they strive to release the spirit from its fleshy cage. The cultists believe that the Endless Gate, a portal in

Endless Gate, page 58

ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS IN GREATER GARRAVIA

Children of the Endless Gate, page 104
Cult of the Changing God, page 105
Dendra O'hur, page 106
Extremities of the Great Devourer, page 108
Memorialists, page 57
New Tabaht, page 109
Order of Flagellants and Austerities, page 109

More organizations and groups can be found in the *Numenera* corebook, page 222, and the *Ninth World Guidebook*, page 24.

the Valley of Dead Heroes, is the pathway to power. By offering as many bodies as possible to the being on the other side of the gate, the Children believe they will free the spirits within the bodies, granting themselves great power.

Perhaps this revelation came about after the Children consumed tainted meat, or perhaps they discovered the Endless Gate through the words of a dying victim. Their records are unclear.

Member Benefits: Instead of gaining a new skill, cult members gain a great deal of knowledge in the ways of the human body and the fine art of murder. All successful attacks against other humans deal 2 additional points of damage.

CULT OF THE CHANGING GOD

The Cult of the Changing God is a loose and fractious organization. The doctrine differs wildly between sections of the cult; without a reliable means of communication, they have no way to ensure a consistent teaching in their minor chapels. They follow their leader, the Changing God, in all things.

The cultists regard the Changing God as a source of enlightenment and knowledge, and they believe that he can heal the Ninth World of its many sins. They spend much of their time tracking his purported movements, seeking out his castoffs, and trying to glean deeper meaning from the various stories about him, most of which are entirely false.

The Changing God's castoffs are revered as avatars of the divine, with each castoff exemplifying a different facet of the primary godhead. Some of the lesser groups have chosen to venerate certain castoffs. Some castoffs play into the mystique, while others try to disabuse the cultists of their notions, usually to no avail. "This is a test of my faith," the cultists declare, "and I stand firm!"

In some places, particularly areas where the Changing God has not had a terrible and obvious impact, the cult is tolerated. However, anywhere that the Changing God has brought (or is perceived to have brought) destruction, the cult is feared. In the former case, the Changing God is held as a man who has transcended the carnal and who returns to teach humanity the true path. In the latter case, he is exemplified as a cleansing fire, destroying everything so that humanity can build anew.

It is unknown whether the Children of the Endless Gate received an infusion of ideas from the Cult of the Changing God, but given some of the parallel beliefs, it certainly seems possible.

Changing God, page 14

Endless Battle, page 70

Some cultists have traveled to the Endless Battle to offer their services to the Changing God's armies. Whether their faith is restored or destroyed depends on the strength of their devotion.

Member Benefits: After passing through all the proper initiations to join the Cult of the Changing God (which differ from group to group), a member can spend ten minutes in concentrated veneration once every 28 hours. This time focusing inward increases their resolve, allowing them to choose a noncombat task and become trained in it for that day. (If they are already trained, they become specialized.) This ability must be chosen in lieu of a new skill.

DENDRA O'HUR

"The dead are quick to reach accord." ~common Dendra O'hur saying

Dendra O'hur in Sagus Cliffs, page 34

"We worship the Great Queen Sar'lavun, Lady of Maggots, Goddess of Entropy, and Guardian of the Empty Barrier," the cultist says, then pauses, tapping a muddy tooth thoughtfully. "Although 'worship' is the wrong word, perhaps."

He points to the altar nearby. It displays a skull with flat, unforgiving eyes buried in its hollow sockets.

"She waits on the other side of death with her billions of squirming children. They devour whatever passes into their realm. And rightfully so! Everyone must eat." His eyes twinkle fondly.

"But whatever she and her children eat is lost forever. And so, the Dendra O'hur work to preserve the minds—and the mysteries—of mortals before death claims them. We hold their shrill little thoughts in our minds, and let them tumble around as they will."

He shivers. "It feels marvelous."

Followers of the Great Queen Sar'lavun, the Dendra O'hur are an itinerant cult of cannibals and devourers of the flesh. They draw strength and knowledge from the fresh corpses that they consume. Typically, they are recognizable from their tattered and moth-eaten cloaks and their sharp but rotting teeth. The Dendra O'hur command fear, or at least revulsion, wherever they go.

Members worship the Great Queen Sar'lavun, also known as the Lady of Maggots, Goddess of Entropy, and Guardian of the Empty Barrier. They believe she waits with her children on the other side of death, eating everything that passes into her realm, and thus losing it forever.

The Dendra O'hur believe it is their mission to preserve the minds and mysteries of mortals before death claims them. They eat corpses, not as a defilement, but as a sacred way to honor life. Of course, having other people's memories wriggling around inside one's brain is always risky business, and no shortage of Dendra O'hur members have grown mentally unstable over time. A few even advocate for murder, believing that killing and eating individuals is a better way of gaining understanding, but that belief is outlawed by the majority of the members.

In order for the Dendra to successfully eat a corpse and transfer fragments of its mind and memories to theirs, the consumption must occur within a certain number of days after death, not too soon or too late. This process is called "ripening," and the Dendra O'hur are happy to pass on its secrets.

They mostly make their home in Sagus Cliffs, where they are generally reviled and feared, though the authorities are willing to ignore them if they keep out of sight in the Underbelly. If you die in the streets or your body is unclaimed, the Dendra O'hur usually get hold of your corpse and "preserve" your mind and strength by consuming you.

Melmoth Leviarm is the Dendra's general leader, and beneath him are local leaders such as Imbitu, who run a specific area under his guidance. Melmoth wears tattered leather robes draped with a profusion of wires and tubes. His face is framed by a set of piercing eyes and a hideous, pitted scar.

Most people who know of the Dendra vilify them—not just because the cultists eat the flesh of the dead, but also because many of them, such as the Devourer of Wrongs, work for the powers that be in Sagus Cliffs, consuming executed criminals to learn the truth of their wrongdoings. Although this situation seems to suit both the cultists and the authorities, it doesn't sit well with most residents.

Member Benefits: After passing through the proper initiations, a Dendra O'hur cultist can eat a portion of a dead being and experience one of their memories. The memory can be guided (for example, if you know something about the dead person, you can learn about a specific experience) or general. Because the answer comes through the memories stored in the body, the cultist can't learn anything beyond what the person knew while alive. For each additional

Melmoth Leviarm: *level 7, all tasks involving the Tides as level 9*

Imbitu, page 35

Devourer of Wrongs, page 25

Intellect point you spend when you activate the ability, you can ask for an additional memory. This ability must be chosen in lieu of a new skill.

EXTREMITIES OF THE GREAT DEVOURER

According to members of the Extremities of the Great Devourer, more commonly known as Bloom cultists, the city-creature known as the Bloom is a god—a harsh and unfathomable god, but a god nonetheless. Outside of the Bloom, this cult has never gained a foothold. Inside the Bloom, its adherents practice their faith openly, and nonbelievers stay out of their way.

The Bloom, page 38

The cult reveres Chila the Great as the first Memovira, believing she was a person so favored by the Bloom that its will was one with hers. In their minds, she is the equivalent of a saint. A massive statue of Chila stands within the Bloom, and the cultists have created a shrine to her inside the statue's broken head.

Chila the Great, page 48

Memovira, page 42

They also revere the current Memovira (no matter who serves in the role of crime lord) because the Bloom seems to respond to that person, and the cultists think that the Memovira's actions are extensions of the city-creature's own will (although never to the extent that the Great Chila's were). This has been useful to Memoviras over the years, since the cultists serve as unofficial, unpaid enforcers of their authority. However, the cult is quick to turn on a Memovira as soon as the crime lord loses the Bloom's favor.

No one knows for sure how long the cult has existed. In its present form, it probably dates from a time shortly after Chila's rise to power, and certainly it gained many converts when Chila was supposedly "taken to the Bloom's Heart." But veneration of the Bloom, in some form, has probably taken place for as long as humans have lived inside the city-creature.

The goal of every Bloom cultist is to become one with the Bloom, to be a living embodiment of its will and ultimately called to its Heart, like Chila the Great. Bloom cultists clothe themselves in the flesh of the Bloom (motley robes of Bloom-flesh leather) and typically wear no shoes so they can maintain physical contact with their god at all times. Being devoured by the Bloom is seen as a positive goal, a form of acceptance by their god, and they celebrate those of their number who are eaten. Even the loss of a body part to the Bloom, or a scar where the flesh was torn by a tongue or a Maw, is flaunted as a mark of favor.

Maw, page 40

Anyone who seeks to modify or measure the Bloom is reviled by cult members, who take it upon themselves to threaten, harass, and sometimes kill those they believe are angering or harming the Bloom. More than a few scientific expeditions into the city-

creature have met their ends at the hands of the cult (or been harassed to the point of abandoning their missions).

Cultists acknowledge that most people (including potential converts) fear the Bloom, but they view that fear as something to be conquered. If people would just listen to the voices of the Bloom and become one with the leviathan, the fear will fade, and they'll realize how wonderful it is to be devoured by a god.

Most Bloom cultists are drawn from the impoverished, the exiles, and the degenerates who have nowhere else to go. They eat the Bloom's flesh and drink its fluids to sustain themselves. As a result, it's common for them to hear the voices of the Bloom in their minds, and many are insane. Some think they're extensions of the Bloom's consciousness (and maybe they are). Many are potentially dangerous, attacking or killing those they think are enemies of the Bloom, or acting erratically because they believe that's the Bloom's will.

Cultists are not concerned with the world outside the Bloom, except to condemn it as utterly false and corrupt. (This is hardly a surprise, given the unhappy origins of most adherents.) They preach that the Bloom came to the Ninth World from another plane of existence, and its harsh realities show the world for what it really is. Becoming one with the Bloom represents the only true salvation a person can achieve.

The scriptures of the Great Devourer are a wild amalgamation of Chila tales, oral accounts of previous Memoviras, stories of cultists who were devoured by the Bloom, and feverish, rambling manifestos by lunatics who drank too much Bloom-juice. These "sacred texts" have no official canon—they are scrawled on scraps of paper and parchment, crumpled in the pockets of cultists or hung from the walls of their shrine. The texts are always changing, since more are continually produced and subsequently lost. The only semipermanent core of the scriptures is the chronicle of the Great Chila, which is maintained by the Observant Speck (though it isn't clear whether she is the same Speck who lived in the time of Chila).

Member Benefits: In lieu of taking a skill, a Bloom cultist may become trained in Bloom knowledge and lore. (If they are already trained, they become specialized.)

NEW TABAHT

Born of the beliefs of a now-extinct army, the New Tabaht is a fledgling group that is quickly gaining power despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that few people know they exist.

The original Tabaht intended to rule the Ninth World but failed in their attempts and eventually died out. The New Tabaht has no such plans for failure. Unlike their predecessors, the New Tabaht is not against using the destructive power of numenera devices to their advantage. Tucked into the pockets and crevices of Greater Garravia, they work steadily and quietly to amass weapons and forces in preparation for the day when they can prove that they, and they alone, are still the chosen people. One of their goals is to gather most, if not all, of the weapons used by their predecessors, while also helping themselves to additional numenera devices they come across that might be useful.

Potential members must prove themselves to be filled with two types of power: the power to destroy and the power to hold back from destruction until the appropriate moment. Members of the New Tabaht understand that secrecy is their greatest weapon; those who act rashly or otherwise endanger the group are dealt with quickly and without remorse.

Member Benefits: In lieu of taking a new skill, New Tabaht members gain one of the original Tabaht weapons, typically a random artifact pulled from the stores. If the artifact had a depletion, it has been modified by the New Tabaht so that its depletion roll is now 1 in 1d100.

ORDER OF FLAGELLANTS AND AUSTERITIES

Once a hermetic and monkish offshoot of the Order of Truth, the Order of Flagellants and Austerities—better known as the

Tabaht, page 16

Observant Speck, page 49

Scourges—became a mendicant order a century ago and set out into the world with the appointment of a new leader. They are a missionary sect, devoted to cleansing the world of its many sins. Among these are a reliance on the numenera, using powers not rightfully granted at birth, and pollution of the flesh with extravagances and constructs. A single Scourge is no threat, for they act only in communion with their brethren. But a group of them? They feed on the rage of their kin, borrowing strength of will and thew, and run berserk if they are not stopped, laying bare the bones of those who oppose them.

How does this work? Members themselves are products of the numenera. Perhaps they encountered a machine or ancient biological infection (or a biological machine that was infected) that in turn implanted them with its self-replicating computing lattice. Whatever the truth, the Scourges identify one another through pheromone scenting, and they use this to improve their faculties and strengths. Many of them are individually kind and frequently mean no harm as they seek to reduce the amount of dangerous garbage left over from prior worlds.

Sometimes Scourges band together to share a subpsychic brainspace, like distributed computing through meatware. When one of them is threatened or annoyed, the signal passes through the group and is amplified in a closed-circuit loop. This is when the Scourges become truly dangerous to anyone not exhibiting the proper identifying scent.

To end the feedback loop, one must disperse the Scourges. When faced with an overwhelming threat or something that compromises the integrity of the shared brainspace, Scourges scatter for a time to protect their mental power.

Joining the sect is almost always accidental; it's difficult to become a Scourge on purpose, due to the unknown means of becoming infected. And it's nearly impossible to fool Scourges into believing you are one of them if you're not. Not surprisingly, spending time around Scourges increases the possibility of infection.

Member Benefits: Members can connect to the shared subpsychic brainspace of any other members in long range, which decreases the difficulty of all Intellect-based tasks by one step. When not in range of other Scourges, members instead gain a +1 bonus on all Intellect-based rolls. This ability must be chosen in lieu of a new skill.

PART 3:

IN THE WORLD

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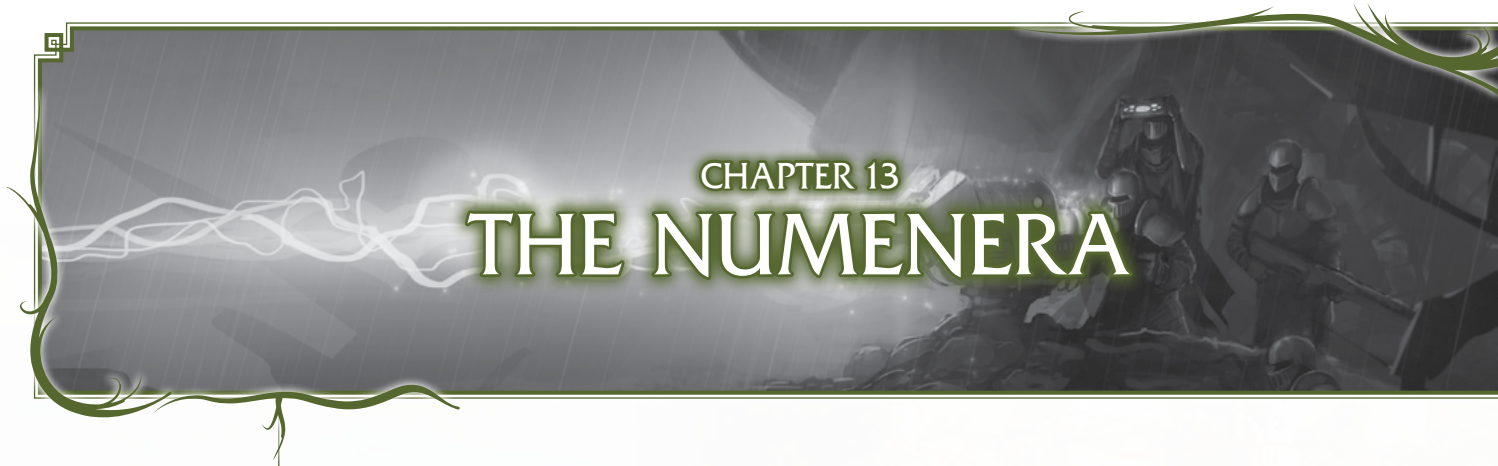


CHAPTER 13

THE NUMENERA

The numenera is the term that refers to anything that seems supernatural and comes from the prior ages of the Earth. This chapter details some of the numenera—particularly cyphers, artifacts, and oddities—that an explorer might find, purchase, or make in Greater Garravia (or elsewhere in the world).

For whatever reason, it seems clear that Greater Garravia is home to a long history of talented craftspeople. There are certainly a number of the common scavenged and cobbled devices, but the even rarer crafted numenera items, called bonded and fashioned, are found in this area of the world in surprising abundance.

CYPHERS

Cyphers are one-use, cobbled-together or scavenged bits of technology that characters frequently discover and use. Any time PCs come upon an old device, defeat an artificially enhanced or designed creature, or simply sift through the ruins of the past, they might scavenge a handful of new cyphers. Cyphers are rarely used for their original intended function, which is now unknowable. For PCs, cyphers are the most important aspect of the numenera.

There are two types of cyphers.

Anoetic cyphers are easy to use—just pop a pill, push a button, pull a trigger, and so on. Anyone can do it.

Occultic cyphers are rarer, more complicated, and more dangerous. They are devices with multiple buttons, switches, knobs, keypads, touchscreen controls, wires, and so on. There are many different settings, but only one produces an effect. Occultic cyphers count as two cyphers for the purpose of determining how many a PC can carry and use at one time.

CYPHER TABLE

When giving cyphers to characters, either choose from this table or roll a d20 for random cyphers.

d20	Cypher
01	Bloodglobe
02	Bravery blast
03	Carbonic wind chimes
04	Charmpaste
05	Conflict advisor
06	Dance of sharp angles
07	Datasphere blast
08	Dolk
09	Fresh vapors
10	Irresistible pull
11	Jar of Iron Wind
12	Oozing control
13	Polyphemal claws
14	Prestidigitator
15	Root spike
16	Scorpion's desire
17	Shadow peddler
18	Smiling tattoo
19	Sunspot totem
20	Thick air snare

BLOODGLOBE

Level: 1d6 + 4
Usable: This glassy globe contains a viscous fluid extracted from the Bloom. Even the odd purple color of it makes you uncomfortable, and when you hold the globe tightly it vibrates as if with a malicious intent.
Effect: When thrown at an enemy, the globe shatters and the fluid inside lashes out at anyone in immediate range of the explosion, hitting them with the Bloom's mental and physical energies. The fluid does 3 points of Intellect damage to anyone it touches.

BRAVERY BLAST

Level: 1d6
Internal: Inhalable vapor, ingestible liquid
Usable: Powder rubbed into skin
Effect: If the user is impaired or debilitated, this cypher allows them to act as if hale for their next three actions.

CARBONIC WIND CHIMES

Level: 1d6
Usable: Collection of small crystals strung together
Effect: The user removes one of the crystals and places it in a secure location. When the other crystals are held by the top string, they move and chime as if blown by wind, even when the air is still or when underwater. They always move in the direction of the crystal that was removed. This allows the user to navigate through unfamiliar or confusing terrain.

CHARMPASTE

Level: 1d6
Usable: Small tube of reddish, aqueous paste. It is warm to the touch and gives off a sweet, balmy perfume.
Effect: When applied to the teeth, it temporarily stimulates facial muscles into a gentle twitch. From a distance, this twitch can easily be mistaken for a disarming and somewhat trustworthy grin. The perfume not only is pleasant from a comfortable distance, but it also acts as a very mild intoxicant, making the user appear a bit more approachable

Some decades ago, a number of datasphere blasts were gathered and venerated by a cult known as the Wyrm River Ventriloquists, who used them in rituals of transparency and purification. Vying scholars have held that the devices were originally intended to be tools of diplomacy, social bonding, or perhaps simply personal growth, as they fill their bearers with great affection for every nearby being registered by the datasphere. Unfortunately, the human mind seems incapable of retaining the overwhelming waves of empathic understanding. Love passes swiftly, leaving only an acute consciousness of others' flaws and a visceral sense of loss.

and honest than they normally would be. Decreases the difficulty of all deception and persuasion tasks by one step. Lasts for ten minutes before evaporating, leaving behind a pink chalky residue.

CONFLICT ADVISOR

Level: 1d6 + 2

Internal: Ingestible crystal that contains a vast number of nanomachines

Effect: After allowing the crystal to dissolve in their mouth, the user can tap into the datasphere, gaining access to what seems like an endless bank of war and battle knowledge that provides unique insights into combat and tactics. Decreases the difficulty of all combat and defense tasks by one step for one hour.

DANCE OF SHARP ANGLES

Level: 1d6

Usable: Hexecontahedron device that shimmers with restrained power. When you look into one of its facets, you see your face looking back at you, but with foreign markings or expressions on the face.

Effect: By shattering the device, you unleash two copies of you, created by the device. The copies fight by your side for ten minutes, providing you with an asset to all combat tasks, including defense rolls.

Poison, page 95

DATASPHERE BLAST

Level: 1d6

Usable: Skein of alien characters shifts in filigree across the dark, glassy surface of this fist-sized globe

Effect: When triggered, this device transmits a burst of insight into the weaknesses of those around you before darkening forever. If any (or all) of the creatures that you can see have a special weakness, such as a vulnerability to fire, a negative modification to perception, or so on, you know what it is. (Ask and the GM will tell you.) Only creatures equal to or lower than the cypher level are affected.

DOLK

Level: 1d6 + 2

Usable: Smooth spike of pliant grey stone with leather wrappings at one end making a simple handle

Effect: When stabbed into a victim, the fragile dolk does damage equal to the cypher level before it breaks and dissolves inside them, becoming an effective poison.

FRESH VAPORS

Level: 1d6

Internal: Simmering jar made of metallic glass. Inside the jar rests a strange miasma. Its vapors sit crystalline and perfectly still until the jar is grasped, at which point the vessel twists and writhes. When you put your ear to it and listen closely, sounds of weeping and hysterical laughter can be heard from within.

Effect: Warm to the touch, the vessel becomes ice cold once the vapors are inhaled. The user feels panic, fear, nausea, and then sweet relief, a torrent of emotions that simulates getting a full rest. Allows the user to take a single recovery roll as an action.

IRRESISTIBLE PULL

Level: 1d6

Usable: The dust in this jar seems to move of its own volition, pushing up against the glass and the heavy stopper as if looking to escape.

Effect: When unleashed, the dust flies toward a specified target in long range, releasing clouds of pheromones along the way that draw all nearby enemies to attack whoever is covered by the dust. Lasts for two rounds or until the target is dead.

JAR OF IRON WIND

Level: 1d6 + 4

Usable: Small jar or vial with a carefully locked lid

Effect: When the container is opened, a brief gush of wind is expelled in a cone shape, originating from the user's position. Tiny nanites in the moving air attack anything in the area of the cone (which radiates out a short distance), doing 3 points of damage to every living thing and inflicting a random harmful mutation upon each one.

OOZING CONTROL

Level: 1d6 + 2

Usable: Thin synth membrane attached to a simple steel hoop

Effect: When the membrane is pulled over a person, it merges with the skin and in moments transforms the person into a purplish ooze creature known as a Mazavotz. The Mazavotz holds the user's consciousness within its dispersed, multi-threaded intelligence, providing the user with access to its knowledge. For ten minutes, the user is specialized in interacting with the datasphere.

POLYPHEMAL CLAWS

Level: 1d6 + 1

Usable: Two black, squishy flesh buds

Effect: When pressed to the user's arms, the flesh buds attach themselves immediately. In combat, the buds explode outward, wrapping the user's arms in new alien tissue that forms large, powerful claws. The muscles of these claws anchor themselves through the skin into the user's muscle tissues, giving direct control of each digit and allowing fairly precise movement, though the claws are best suited for tearing through skin. Claws do 4 points of damage and last for ten minutes.

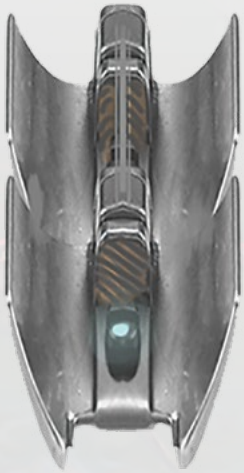
Whenever the claws tear through an enemy, there's a chance that random bone spurs or small horns sticking out of the claws become lodged in the skin, where they dig into the flesh, causing continued bleeding and doing 1 additional point of damage per round for three rounds.

PRESTIDIGITATOR

Level: 1d6

Internal: Severed, edible humanoid finger that has had its nerves and blood vessels replaced by programmed nanofiber wires

Effect: Consuming the finger releases the nanofiber wires into the eater's body. The wires migrate to the user's hands, temporarily increasing their manual dexterity. The difficulty of all tasks involving manual dexterity, including picking locks, writing, and thievery, is decreased by one step for ten minutes.



The Mazavotz are beings that exist freely floating through multiple dimensions. Their temporary existence in our dimension may not be representative of what they truly look or act like, but Aeon Priests theorize that their sparse visits are resource-gathering missions. What they take from the users of this cypher is not entirely clear.

Iron Wind, page 135

Harmful mutation, page 124

ROOT SPIKE

Level: 1d6 + 4
Usable: Wooden spike that seems to be dead, despite the roots sticking out of it
Effect: When the spike is thrown at an enemy within a short distance, the roots come alive, wrapping around the target and digging into the ground, immobilizing them for three rounds.

SCORPION'S DESIRE

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Delicate contraption formed of thin glass, filled with contrasting purple and teal vapors
Effect: This crude mister allow the user to release the vapors into the air within a short distance. The vapors create a flickering noise upon release, a sound that lifts the spirits and vitality. Restores 5 points of Might (or health) to anyone who hears the sound while also breathing the vapor.

The vapor of scorpion's desire can't distinguish between friend and foe, so it affects both equally.

SHADOW PEDDLER

Level: 1d6 + 4
Usable: Translucent creature that floats in the air. It's impossible to discern any external or internal organs, and its skin is pliable and soft to the touch.
Effect: When placed over the head, the creature teleports the user to a marketplace in a different dimension for ten minutes. When the user returns to Earth, they are holding two random cyphers.

SMILING TATTOO

Level: 1d6 + 4
Usable: Flat symbiotic creature with hundreds of little legs. It runs across the user's skin, its tiny legs pattering this way and that, the pinpricks of its feet feeling more or less friendly depending on its mood.
Effect: Feeds by traveling to any open wounds the user has, draining them of blood, and releasing into them a coagulating substance in exchange. After three rounds, the substance heals the user for damage equal to the cypher level.

SUNSPOT TOTEM

Level: 1d6 + 3
Usable: Small ancient model that appears to be some kind of totem, though one can't discern what it is meant to represent
Effect: When thrown onto the ground, the totem immediately expands to full size and powers up, acting as an energy conduit for the nearest star. It stays in place for ten minutes, emanating a blazing power that blinds any living creatures within long range who look at it.

THICK AIR SNARE

Level: 1d6 + 3
Usable: Metal bulb resembling a vessel flute
Effect: When someone blows into it, the snare releases a cloud of nanospirits that can be directed toward a specific area within long range. Once there, they turn the air as thick and viscous as water in a 10 foot by 10 foot (3 m by 3 m) block. The difficulty of moving in the affected area is increased by two steps. Lasts for one hour.

ARTIFACTS

Luthiya twisted the synthsteel rod anxiously. The grainy metal, born of another time, felt unusually cool as it abraded her palms. Ama could not have been wrong about it; the nano knew more about the numenera than, well, anyone. If Ama said the rod was a numenera weapon, then that was what it was.

It probably wouldn't go off on its own, but Luthiya held it away from her body anyway. A weapon should be a good thing. Her people were alone in a strange land now. Who knew what kinds of monsters lurked in the bowels of these ruins? Weapons meant protection.

Except when they didn't.

~ from Gate to the Abyss

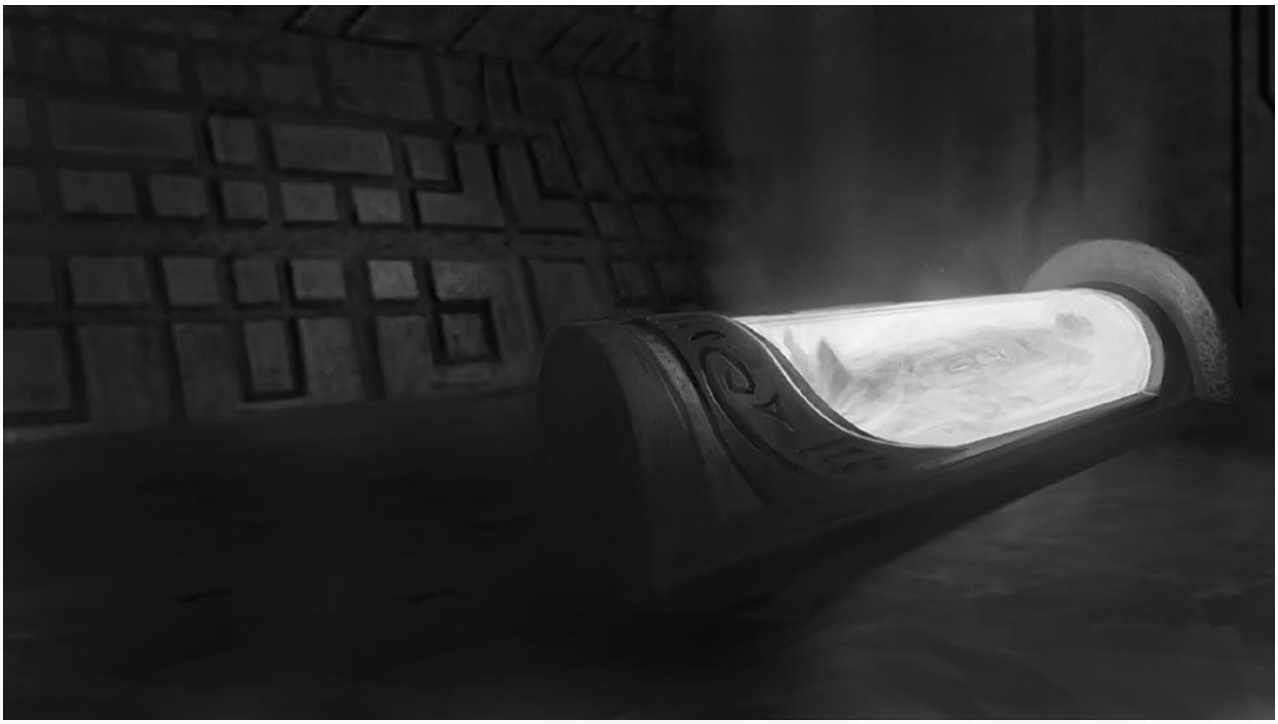
Artifacts are numenera objects that have a use and can typically be held onto permanently and used multiple times. Artifact uses can range from minor boons to major powers. These are very rare and valuable, and from a gameplay perspective serve as the equivalent of magic equipment in a more typical fantasy setting.

ARTIFACT TABLE

When giving artifacts to characters, either choose from these tables or roll a d20 on one of the tables for random artifacts.

d20	Artifact
01	Airskin
02	Biting circles
03	Bloom bone shard
04	Brace of Mighty Kalas'Tor
05	Bulkplate
06	Chuckling shroud
07	Cine
08	Climate cube
09	Cloning sphere
10	Concussive great maul
11	Confession hammer
12	Dimension pockets
13	Discomfiting spirit
14	Edge of Sagus
15	Elia's anguish
16	Fleder's noose
17	Floating plate armor
18	Galvanic hammer
19	Ghost belt
20	Glorious mace

d20	Artifact
01	Glorious shield
02	Hammer of indolence
03	Hollow wyrm
04	Lord's staff
05	Metabolic fleshbud
06	Oggannition mimic
07	Parasitic horror
08	Pellucid wrap
09	Probability shunt
10	Rending gauntlets
11	Robe of Ijun-oL
12	Rotating blades
13	Shadowstep
14	Shadowswirl
15	Shield of two skies
16	Spottiswoode rebreather
17	Stinging mace
18	Transdimensional scalpel
19	Trapezoid toolkit
20	Waterskin



Although he was not particularly skilled or smart, the legend of Mighty Kalas'Tor lives to this day primarily because his career as a warrior spanned to the end of his days at a very ripe old age. Even as his hair fell out and his limbs appeared to turn thin and frail, Kalas'Tor still fought on the front lines of some of the most famous pitched battles of the Sagus Protectorate.

AIRSKIN

Level: 1d6
Form: Bracelet of green metal
Effect: Envelops the wearer in a skin of air that extends an inch or two around their entire body. Used by air-breathers for temporary excursions into water-filled environments. The air is renewed within the skin, allowing the user to breathe comfortably for the duration.
Depletion: 1-2 in 1d100 (check each day)

BITING CIRCLES

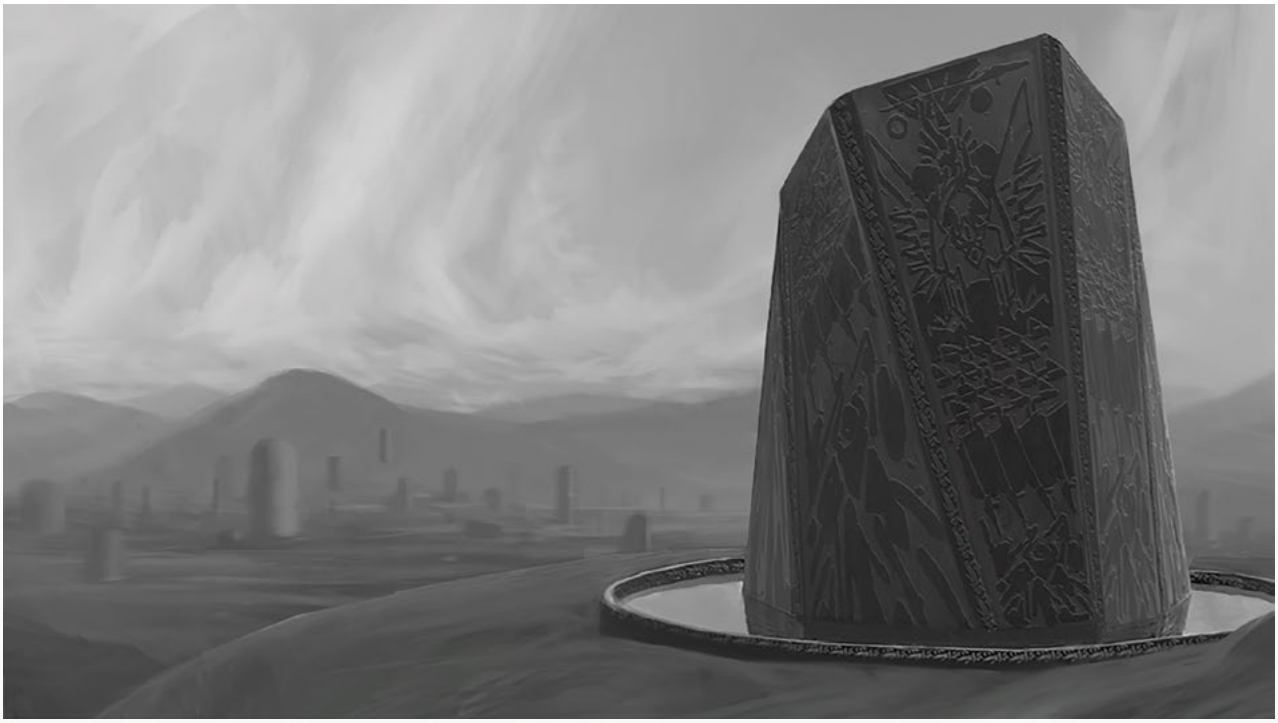
Level: 1d6
Form: Headband made of three overlapping crystalline circlets, attached together into a single piece
Effect: The concentration of energy paths into the focal point where the circlets overlap on the front allows for greater capacities in directing mental energies outward. All Intellect-based attacks do 2 additional points of damage. The circlets constrict with each use, doing 1 point of damage to the wearer per attack.
Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (check per use)

BLOOM BONE SHARD

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: A sharp but crude-looking shard harvested from one of the Bloom's teeth. The shard contains a fragment of the Bloom's mind.
Effect: This weapon functions as a normal light weapon. However, if the wielder uses an action to activate it, the weapon whispers to the wielder, imbuing them with a sense of power and authority that decreases the difficulty of their next combat action by one step.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (still usable as a light weapon after depletion)

BRACE OF MIGHTY KALAS'TOR

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: Synth device that wraps the wrist
Effect: When activated, it suffuses the wearer with physical energy flowing through every part of the body, radiating inward to reinforce bloodflow and energy resources. The device uses the body's natural processes to direct this energy, which means it causes a strain on the wearer as well as providing a benefit. Increases Speed Edge by 2 and decreases Intellect Edge to 0 for ten minutes. (If Intellect Edge is already 0,



then Might Edge goes to 0 instead. If both are 0, there is no negative effect.)
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

BULKPLATE

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: This plate was assembled with no eye for aesthetics or form, crudely riveted together from metal plating and spikes. However, highly advanced machinery lines the inside of the plate.
Effect: In addition to acting as heavy armor, the bulkplate's machinery imbues the wearer with energies that strengthen the limbs and reinforce muscle tissue. It appears the bulkplate is powered by blood and gore that splatters upon it. Each time the user takes damage, they add 1 additional point of damage to their next successful attack (up to 5 points of additional damage).
Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (check after each use; can be worn as standard heavy armor after depletion)

CHUCKLING SHROUD

Level: 1d6
Form: Cloak made of fine tendrils that rub together, producing a sound like human chuckling
Effect: The sound is a carrier for a stream of mental energy that swirls around the wearer, shielding them from different types of attacks on their mind. They have an asset to Intellect defense tasks while wearing the cloak.
Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check once per day when worn; can be worn as a standard cloak after depletion)

CINE

Level: 1d6
Form: Cloak of deepest purple that ripples with a life force of its own
Effect: Upon donning the cloak, the wearer is instantly transported into a blissful state of relaxation and contemplation through vigorous deep tissue massage. Wearer adds 1 to their recovery rolls.
Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check once per day when worn; can be worn as a standard cloak after depletion)

CLIMATE CUBE

Level: 1d6 + 3
Form: Small waterproof tin that opens to reveal a small slip of transparent material
Effect: When the material gets wet, it expands into a cube that is 10 feet by 10

"Bulkplate armor has belonged to many a renowned warrior over the years, all unified specifically by the unfortunate fates they met. Hopefully, you can avoid adding your name to this list."

Heavy armor, page 79

It is said that many a wearer has become so enamored of the cine cloak that they will jealously guard it with their lives.

The nano's laughter could be heard through the halls of his great tower as he pulled each strand of hair from their lifeless bodies, weaving them together to create a great union through death. His creation would haunt all who wore it with the laughter of his dead victims.

feet (3 m by 3 m). Everything inside the area of the expanded cube is protected from most forms of inclement weather for one hour. Leaving or entering the climate cube before the hour is up without destroying it is a task equal to the artifact level. After an hour, the cube disintegrates, leaving behind another slip of transparent material that may be stored and reused.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

CLONING SPHERE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Bronze sphere; glowing symbols in a variety of colors appear and disappear along its surface

Effect: When the sphere is activated, light coruscates from it and swirls around the user. The colored fogs weave together to create a functioning, but mindless, clone that lasts for ten minutes. The clone can be commanded to do simple nonverbal tasks, such as create a distraction or assist in a task or combat.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

CONCUSSIVE GREATMAUL

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: This artifact appears to be cobbled together from two disparate elements: the massive stone war maul is an unusual and intricate work of craftsmanship, while the synth devices implanted in it seem to be roughly hewn, almost crude.

Effect: When striking with the greatmaul, the synth devices couple up and reverberate through the black stone, creating a powerful concussive strike that emanates out from the point of impact. In addition to doing 6 points of damage to whatever it directly strikes, the greatmaul does an additional 3 points of damage to everything within an immediate distance.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (upon depletion, greatmaul still works as a heavy weapon)

CONFESSION HAMMER

Level: 1d6

Form: This hammer appears to be grown from crystalline materials. It is infused with some type of negative energy, possibly related to how it was harvested or expulsed from the original crystal. Work was put into crafting it into a usable weapon for a human hand, including embedding it in a handle and carving the edges of the crystal for balance.

Effect: The energy void inside this crystal drains energy from anyone struck with the hammer, an intensely unpleasant experience that can overwhelm most minds. The victim takes 3 points of Intellect damage.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

DIMENSION POCKETS

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Leather armor made from regular treated leather, created by a master of the craft, but with nothing exceptional about the vest itself

Effect: Two of the pockets open into dimensional pockets, where containment devices can grab and hold a single cypher in a form of stasis. This allows the wearer to store two more cyphers than normal, and have them instantly accessible from their dimension pockets.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (check each time a cypher is added to a pocket)

DISCOMFITING SPIRIT

Level: 1d6
Form: On first glance, this appears to be a tattered old cloak, threadbare and with some holes. But as you look at it, the cloak subtly shifts around, as if trying to nudge itself away from your sight and into the shadows. It seems impossible to keep your eyes on it, as an overwhelming feeling of discomfort emanates from the cloak.
Effect: The wearer has an asset to all tasks involving sneaking, hiding, and escaping.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (check once per day worn)

EDGE OF SAGUS

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: Softly humming sword hilt with no blade
Effect: A small indentation on the hilt produces a blade of pure energy when pressed. This energy blade cuts through most materials (of its level or lower) without the slightest resistance.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

ELIA'S ANGUISH

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: Necklace
Effect: Exerts a powerful depressive effect, increasing the difficulty of all tasks by two steps for the wearer and by one step for anyone within immediate range. If the wearer discards or sells the necklace, it returns to their presence within one day, and they must make an Intellect roll (difficulty equal to the artifact level) or be compelled to put it back on. The user can free themselves of the artifact only by using another artifact or cypher to destroy it.
Depletion: —

FLEDER'S NOOSE

Level: 5
Form: Wire collar that opens with a clasp
Effect: Wearer exudes an aura of crackling electricity and can fly for ten minutes. They cannot carry other creatures.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

FLOATING PLATE ARMOR

Level: 1d6
Form: A number of loose armor plates float freely above whoever is wearing this plate armor, with the synth device vestment underneath controlling the plates.
Effect: The armor is self-regulated and controlled to adjust to the wearer's needs. It can phase individual plates in and out transdimensionally, switching to different materials and frequency to protect dynamically against various types and sources of damage, including heat, cold, mental, and physical. The wearer chooses the type of protection they want as part of their action (including defense actions), and the suit provides +1 to Armor against that type of attack for 28 hours.
Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (check per use; can be worn as standard heavy armor after depletion)

GALVANIC HAMMER

Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Massive silver hammer that crackles with electricity
Effect: This weapon functions as a normal heavy weapon. However, if the wielder uses an action to activate it, the weapon radiates a field of electricity for one round. During that round, it inflicts an additional 10 points of damage. The user may choose to strike the ground instead, sending shockwaves of electricity outward that do 5 points of damage to everyone within short range.
Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (still usable as a heavy weapon after depletion)

Though their origins differ, multiple devices that were all called the Edge of Sagus once were crafted for and used by members of the ruling Slave Families in Sagus Cliffs.

GHOST BELT

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Metal belt with thin dangling tendrils
Effect: Tendrils phase into the wearer's waist, causing their eyes to swell grotesquely. When the wearer moves on foot, they leave behind ghostly grey afterimages, one every ten seconds. Only their bloated eyes can see the images, which are invisible to others. The images last for a number of days equal to the artifact level, hopefully giving the wearer enough time to travel through unfamiliar terrain and follow the trail of images back again.
Depletion: 1 in 1d100

GLORIOUS MACE

Legend has it that the glorious mace was one of the great obsessions of the warlord Khatonn-Khiider. After enslaving a tribe of humans that lived in the upper reaches of Arvrin Wood, he found a numenera device that could infuse human energies into an object of his choice. He forced the tribe to spend years crafting the mace for him, tweaking it to his whims and desires, and then sacrificed their lives to power its capabilities.

Arvrin Wood, page 92

Level: 1d6
Form: This silver mace is exquisitely crafted and finely detailed, giving the impression it belongs more in an art collection than on the battlefield. A soft opalescent glow emanates from somewhere inside the mace's head, suffusing the silver material.
Effect: When the mace is activated and raised in the air, the opalescent glow emanates outward, inspiring those nearby. Provides an asset in a topic of the wielder's choosing to everyone they decree within a short distance for ten minutes.
Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (upon depletion, mace still works as a medium weapon)

GLORIOUS SHIELD

"The Lord's Staff most famously belonged to the lord Polahz Hniiuk. Polahz jealously guarded the staff, and valued it above all else of his properties. He valued it so highly that he refused to break it even as three skilled assassins closed in, believing he would find a better use for it later. Care that you do not make the same mistake."

Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Small hexagonal disc that can be attached to the arm (or to clothing worn on the arm), where it will latch on of its own volition
Effect: Upon activation, the disc projects a shimmering shield that adds +5 to Armor for one round. During that time, it also emits a burst of energy that gives allies within short range an asset to Speed defense rolls.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

HAMMER OF INDOLENCE

Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: The head of this hammer looks like it was puzzled together from a number of numenera devices, held together by a powerful magnetic force generated from the weapon's core.
Effect: When this cluster strikes a living creature or an animate object, it force-blasts a pocket of coalesced air, dazing the target for one round, during which time the difficulty of all tasks it performs is modified by one step to its detriment.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

HOLLOW WYRM

Level: 1d6
Form: Mechanical synth entity that looks like a small creature
Effect: When put under the tongue, the wyrm digs into the soft flesh, sending its nerves through the mouth and into the brain to manipulate the user's speech capabilities. For 28 hours, the user gains the ability to speak in a language that can be understood by anyone.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

LORD'S STAFF

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: This golden staff was finely crafted to contain a powerful ancient device, which in turn contains a golden liquid material.
Effect: When used as a heavy weapon, the staff does 8 points of damage. When the staff is broken, the device energizes the golden liquid, which spreads over the user to grant almost complete immunity to physical attacks. However, the liquid also amplifies mental attacks, negating any capacity to defend against such strikes. Decreases the difficulty of Might and Speed defense tasks by two steps, and increases the difficulty of Intellect defense tasks by two steps. Lasts for ten minutes.
Depletion: — (No depletion roll needed until the staff is broken and used. At that point, the entire artifact is depleted.)

METABOLIC FLESHBUD

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: A podlike lump of Bloom-flesh that has the shape and size of a small, hemispherical bit of fruit. But that is where the similarities end, as the fleshbud is quivering and still very much alive. A mangle of teeth and tonguelike protrusions appear on one side whenever the lump is anywhere close to living flesh.

Effect: When the protrusions are put to skin, the lump bites and grafts itself to the host, taking on the texture and appearance of the host's flesh. Once attached, it vastly improves the metabolic processes of the host, decreasing the difficulty of Speed defense rolls by one step.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check once per day)

Metabolic fleshbuds are used by plants and animal life as a way to preserve a part of their gene pool or as a method to spread their seed to other parts of the world.

OGGANNITION MIMIC

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Small idol crafted out of shiny turquoise metal that looks like a snarling mouth

Effect: When activated by squeezing it, the mimic releases ferocious roaring and growling sounds that are finely tuned to trigger a fear response at a cellular level. The sounds provide the wearer with an asset on all tasks involving intimidation, coercion, and fear.

Depletion: —

PARASITIC HORROR

Level: 1d6

Form: A feeling of intense revulsion fills your mind as you gaze upon this creature of unimaginable horror. Even its basic nature is unclear, its green flesh a melding of tentacles and insectoid limbs. It releases an odd noise as you hold it, somewhere in between a chirrup and a click. However, when attached, the creature is comfortable and pleasant to wear.

Effect: Upon attachment, the creature's dense skin acts as a shield, providing +1 to Armor for ten minutes. During that time, it also decreases the difficulty of Intellect-based tasks by one step.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

PELLUCID WRAP

Level: 1d6

Form: Length of living cloth that sticks to itself

Effect: Can be wrapped around a limb, where its presence improves the ability to think and reason clearly, but the cloth tightens around the limb, needing constant adjustments so it doesn't cut off the blood flow. Adds 1 to Intellect Edge, but decreases Might Edge by 1 during that time. Must be removed and reapplied after an hour.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (check upon removal)

PROBABILITY SHUNT

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: A neck collar that appears to have been finely cast out of iron and is not particularly comfortable to wear. Attached to the collar is a spherical numenera device known as a probability shunt.

Effect: The probability shunt charges up and starts spinning, rapidly throwing out probability calculations. When the user fails at an arduous challenge or physical task, the shunt activates, doing a probability calculation that is beyond the understanding of humans, and then "shunting" the user to the correct path of probability. The user can reroll a die without spending XP. Using the artifact costs 1 Intellect point.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check once per day when worn, whether used that day or not)

Aeon Priests tell the story that probability shunts were once common devices among a highly advanced but insular culture living in the Ninth World. The effect of the shunting was that individuals largely lived without consequences to their actions, so their society inevitably degenerated into a state of complete anarchy. Whether this story is true or just meant as a cautionary tale, it's impossible to know.

RENDING GAUNTLETS

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Gauntlets that look like stiff leather gloves

Effect: When the wearer attacks a foe with their hands, long black talons made of pure force push forth from the fingers of the gauntlets and allow the wearer to rake an opponent for 2 additional points of slashing damage. When the wearer is not attacking, the talons recede into the gauntlets—although they seem to do so reluctantly.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (check per attack)

Stories tell that this robe belonged to the nano Ijun-oL, who proudly proclaimed he was one who howled at the moon. He had full control over his bestial form, to the extent where he was rumored to retain power over his esoteries even while a beast. His reputation and range of skills were such that none dared challenge him, meaning his powerful protective robe fell out of use other than as a ceremonial garment worn on rare occasions. It is rumored that Ijun-oL left it behind when he abandoned his human form, choosing to live as a beast for all time.

Esoteries, page 35

ROBE OF IJUN-OL

Level: 8

Form: This snugly fitted robe is the color of the midnight sky when the moon is full. Filamented numenera are woven throughout the cloth in subtle ways, giving the robe the dual effect of reinforcing both mental defense and offense.

Effect: Provides +1 to Armor when worn (can be worn over most outfits and armor). When activated (via a complicated set of gestures made while wearing the robe), the robe provides +3 to Armor (includes Intellect damage) for ten minutes.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (can be worn as a standard robe that provides +1 to Armor, even after depletion)

ROTATING BLADES

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Paired injector and a set of three knives

Effect: The injector must be put in the user's nose to attach the device directly to their brain. Once attached, the device allows the user to control a set of specially attuned knives. The user must mentally active the device, at which point the knives float around the user independently, each doing 1 point of damage to anyone who comes into immediate range. Once per activation, the user can send a mental signal to the device that shoots the knives outward, stabbing three random targets within long range, doing total damage equal to the artifact level.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6

SHADOWSTEP

Level: 1d6

Form: Spikes that appear to be made of a plantlike material, but when touched, have an incongruously fleshy feel

Effect: When driven into the flesh of the feet or ankles, the spikes wrap thin, fibrous branches around the muscle tissue, strengthening the legs and enabling the user to move more quickly. The spikes remain alive, constantly moving and digging within the flesh. User has an asset in all tasks involving running, jumping, and Speed defense.

Depletion: —

SHADOWSWIRL

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: This brigandine appears completely ordinary—no matter how long you search, you find no numenera devices of any kind on it.

Effect: When the armor is worn, dark, seemingly living energies swirl around and through it, reinforcing the stealth capabilities of the wearer. Decreases the difficulty of all tasks involving sneaking, escaping, and being stealthy by one step.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check per day of use; can be worn as medium armor after depletion)

SHIELD OF TWO SKIES

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Small hexagonal disc

Effect: Upon activation, it projects a protective bubble of a transparent, seemingly intangible material around the user that provides +2 to Armor against heat or cold. Lasts for ten minutes.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

SPOTTISWOODE REBREATHER

Level: 1d6

Form: Small living creature that looks like a lumpy ball of grey fabric

Effect: Fastens to the wearer's face, covering their mouth and nose and inserting its tendrils inside. The spottiswoode takes in the wearer's exhaled carbon dioxide and returns warm, moist oxygen. It inflates and deflates with a cooing sound as the wearer breathes. Other varieties of spottiswoode fasten to the front of the wearer's throat instead and insert a tube.

Depletion: — (functions unless creature is killed)

STINGING MACE

Level: 1d6

Form: This mace appears to have been created or grown out of a plant of some kind, apparently still living. The plant is shaped much like a mace would be, with a comfortable grip on its stem and a prickly pod as its head. Small thorns adorn the head, which can easily break off and become lodged into anyone struck by the mace.

Effect: When whispered to in a soothing tone—the exact words irrelevant—the plant shudders and leaks some type of sap that coats the thorns. This sap has the capacity to overwhelm the victim's mental faculties and send them into fits of overwhelming terror. Does 3 points of Intellect damage and causes the target to run away for one round.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10

TRANSDIMENSIONAL SCALPEL

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Length of azure steel shaped into a blade

Effect: Blade cuts through dimensions, rapidly shimmering between different realities. Ignores Armor.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (blade still works as a medium weapon after depletion)

TRAPEZOID TOOLKIT

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: This armor is made of a very light metallic material formed of polygonal shapes fitted closely together. It fits snugly over the wearer, the polygons shrinking and expanding as needed. Each shape is an individual small piece of the numenera, with a variety of functions to aid in tasks of quick fingers and fleet feet.

Effect: Grants the wearer an asset to all tasks involving dexterity, running, and jumping.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (check after each use; offers +1 to Armor after depletion)

WATERSKIN

Level: 1d6

Form: Bracelet of blue metal

Effect: Envelops the wearer in a skin of water that extends an inch or two around their entire body. Used by water-breathers for temporary excursions into air-filled environments.

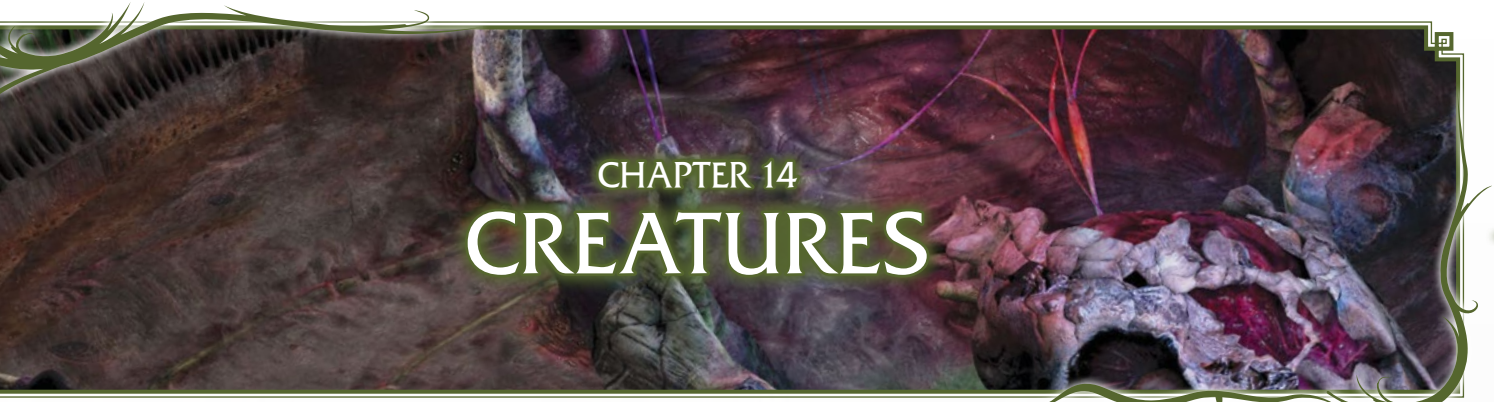
Depletion: 1-2 in 1d100 (check each day)

Transdimensional scalpels are particularly effective against the Bloom. They provide an asset when opening Maws or slicing through Bloom-flesh.

ODDITIES

When giving oddities to characters, either choose from this table or roll a d20 for random oddities.

d20	Oddity
01	Long string of beads that, when touched, gives you a glimpse into the mind of a random person related to you by blood.
02	Spherical object made of solid metal, yet light as air, that floats a few feet above the ground when released.
03	Ordinary gloves, except for the metallic color at the fingertips that causes a tingly sensation in your fingers once per hour when worn.
04	Bright green orb that sits on the end of a short rod, shooting balls of flowing light at any target.
05	Brown ring with fine, seamlessly interwoven scales. The ring is warm and gently contracts when put on, leaving you with a feeling of being tied to some greater entity.
06	Metallic, honeycomb-like structure slightly larger than the average human hand that oozes with a thick blue syrup that is messy but very delicious.
07	White ball that turns a myriad of colors when you touch it, before finally settling on a deep blue glow.
08	Malachite-tinted bauble filled with ashen vapor that pulsates when being fondled. When peered at long enough, it invokes an intense feeling of solitude.
09	Small object that looks like a shell and emits a sound that seems to attract birds from miles around.
10	Prehensile tail that prefers wrapping itself around a human limb and being worn like jewelry.
11	Three tiny orange boots chained together by a strong, thin wire.
12	Snail that lives inside a hand-crafted stronglass shell carved in the shape of the city you were born in.
13	Tiny bit of quivering Bloom-flesh that squeaks when picked up or petted.
14	Thick leather strap that attracts sticks, stones, and insects like a magnet.
15	Metal box covered with abstract symbols that utter random words when night falls.
16	Four tiny carved heads with giant mouths; they chase each other around constantly, jumping in and out of each other's mouths.
17	Pellucid moth on a string with wings in the shape of human hands.
18	Pair of glasses that shows only shadows.
19	Long rope that spells out random words that are spoken near it.
20	Miniature planet inside a glass jar that has its own weather system.



CHAPTER 14

CREATURES

The various creatures presented in this chapter can be found in the specific locations described in this book, as well as in numerous additional locations throughout the world.

This chapter is only the beginning, however. It doesn't attempt to chronicle the entirety of the diverse and weird creatures that inhabit Greater Garravia, but merely to offer a few types that characters might encounter during their explorations.

The most important element of each creature is its level. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the opponent. In each entry, the difficulty number for the creature or NPC is listed in parentheses after its level. The target number is three times the level.

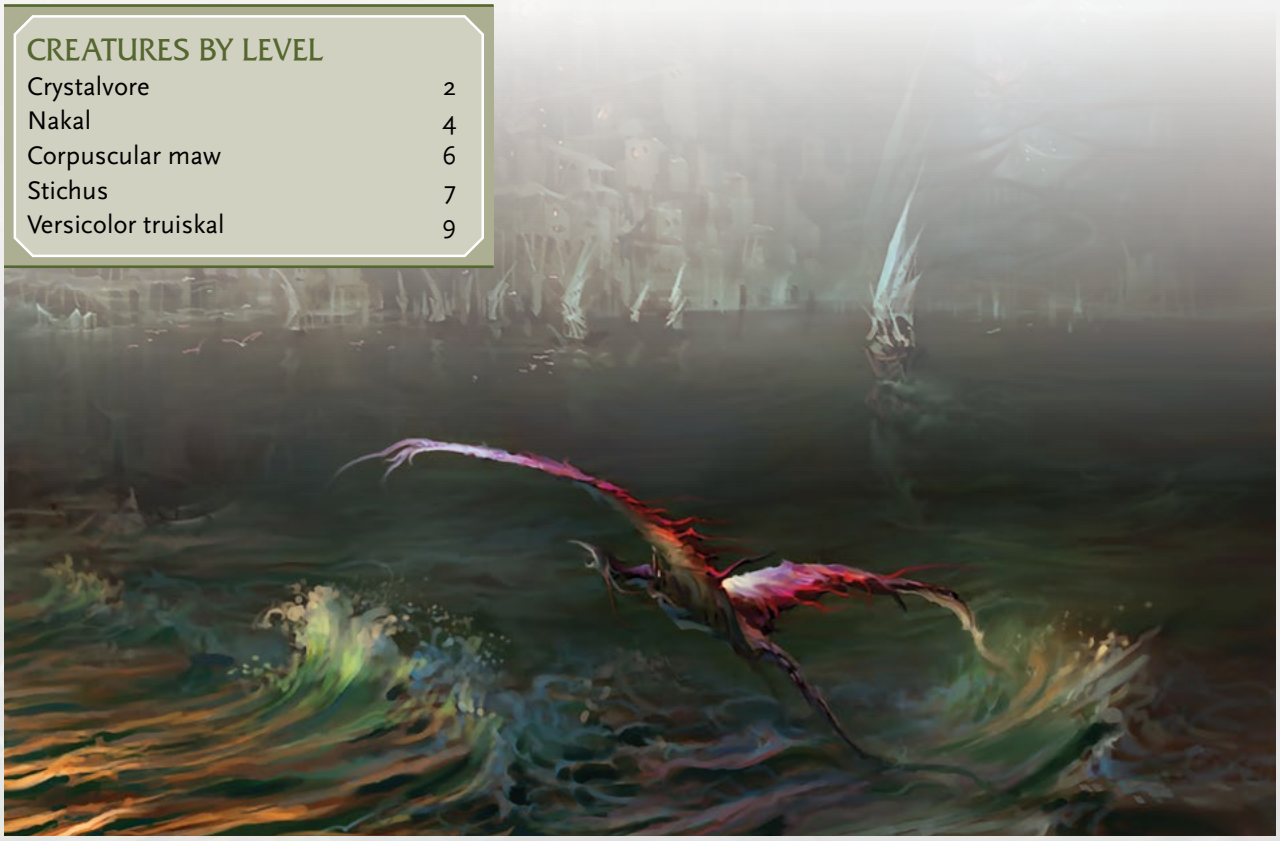
A creature's target number is usually also its health, which is the amount of damage it can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list a creature's health, even when it's the normal amount for a creature of its level.

For more detailed information on level, health, combat, and other elements, see the Understanding the Listings section in the *Numenera* corebook.

Understanding the listings, page 228

CREATURES BY LEVEL

Crystalvore	2
Nakal	4
Corpuscular maw	6
Stichus	7
Versicolor truiskal	9



CORPUSCULAR MAW 6 (18)

The Bloom, page 38

Maw, page 40

A corpuscular maw is a small mobile extension of the Bloom. At regular intervals, the Bloom spawns one or more of these from its walls, floor, or regular Maws. Sometimes a very old Maw will fracture, dividing itself into many different fragments, each of which takes on a life of its own. At other times, tiny maws take shape in the depths of the Bloom and achieve a form of autonomy. In all cases, these minuscule maws remain part of the Bloom as a whole—and remain loosely under the city-creature's control—but they are able to move about and pursue potential food, making them quite dangerous to those who become lost in the depths of the Bloom.

A corpuscular maw consists of a small central core—the maw fragment itself—surrounded by knots of Bloom-flesh that can form into arms and tendrils. These "arms" (as many as the maw wishes to create) serve as a means of locomotion as well as attack. The Bloom-flesh that surrounds the maw fragment is composed of the same stuff as the larger Bloom, which can include bony ridges and growths (often incorporated into the arms to slice their prey) and open tubes that spew foul smoke or volatile juices.

Corpuscular maws can be distracted by feeding them any organic matter. The creatures will mindlessly tear apart such matter and consume it, ignoring foes for one round (unless attacked).

Motive: Follow the instructions of the Bloom, hungers for flesh

Environment: Only within the Bloom itself

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Long

Combat: Corpuscular maws mainly attack with their arms, which can extend a short distance, doing 4 points of damage to up to two foes on a single attack. Simultaneously, every other attack, they can release a cloud of fetid air that dazes the targets for one round or spray volatile acidic juices that do an additional 2 points of damage per target.

A character who is favorable to the Bloom may find that it spawns a corpuscular maw to assist them rather than attack them. The maw acts on the character's turn and lasts for ten minutes.

When a corpuscular maw is "killed," the Bloom-flesh that surrounds the tiny maw is shredded and destroyed, and the maw itself becomes unstable and bursts apart, causing a transdimensional wave that knocks all characters prone within short range.

Interaction: Characters who take two rounds to observe a corpuscular maw's behavior and feed it organic matter can attempt to interact with it (an Intellect task).

GM Intrusion: *During combat, the character accidentally angers the Bloom, causing it to spawn a second corpuscular maw.*

Use: One or more of the characters does something to anger the Bloom, which spawns a corpuscular maw to attack them.

CRYSTALVORE 2 (6)

Crystalvores come from a dimension called the Ascension, a doorway to which is located in the Bloom.

Crystalvores are territorial and aggressive, and they ruthlessly attack any creatures that get too close to themselves or their domain.

Crystalvores can fully retract into their shell to make themselves look like just another chunk of crystal sticking up out of the ground.

GM Intrusion: *A crystalvore sprays its solvent externally instead of internally, doing 3 points of damage to everyone in immediate range.*

Crystalvores are small transdimensional bugs—about 3 feet (1 m) tall—that secrete a chemical that dissolves crystalline structures. As part of their growth cycle, they break off a large chunk of crystal and partially hollow it out to serve as a shell. The majority of their bodies are hidden within the shell. What can be seen consists of spindly segmented legs and razor-sharp talons, claws, and mandibles.

Crystalvores are misnamed, as they don't derive nourishment from the crystals they wear, instead absorbing ambient energy emanations through an unknown process. If such energy is not readily available, the creatures wander in search of such energy for a time, but if they fail to find any, they curl up in their shells and enter a dormant state, appearing as normal crystals to the casual observer.

The hollowed-out crystal shells they wear are thought to be for protection, concealment, or possibly reproductive purposes, depending upon whom you ask. Over a crystalvore's lifespan, it will likely hollow out, wear, and eventually discard five crystal shells. As they are most often observed in the process of creating a new shell, the misconception that they "eat" crystals caught on and spread, hence their name.

Motive: Territory and defense
Environment: Anywhere
Health: 6
Damage Inflicted: 2 points
Armor: 4
Movement: Short
Modification: Speed defense as level 4 due to size.
Combat: Crystalvores typically attack with their claws, but have been known to also spray a jet of the same fluid they use to hollow out their shells at prey. This liquid is an almost universal solvent that does 3 points of damage (ignores Armor).

A mortally wounded crystalvore (with 1 point of health or less) will retract into its shell and spray its solvent all over the interior, weakening it in a multitude of places. The creature will then enter a unique biological state where its internal organs dissolve and a dangerous level of high-pressure gasses build up within the creature's corpse, until finally releasing and igniting on contact with air. The resulting explosion shatters the creature's weakened shell, sending deadly shards in all directions. The process leaves no trace of the crystalvore behind, making a proper study of them difficult unless they can be captured alive.

Interaction: It's impossible to interact with a crystalvore.

Use: Crystalvores make impressive surprise attacks because they look like regular crystals when resting.

NAKAL 4 (12)

Nakal are also called fire wights or flame souls. Despite the name, they are very much alive and not actually made of fire.

These human-sized creatures glow golden and ethereal, floating like wisps of fire, with flamelike coils that serve as arms and three black holes that may or may not be eye sockets. Something about them draws and captures the gaze, making it difficult to turn away as they draw closer and closer.

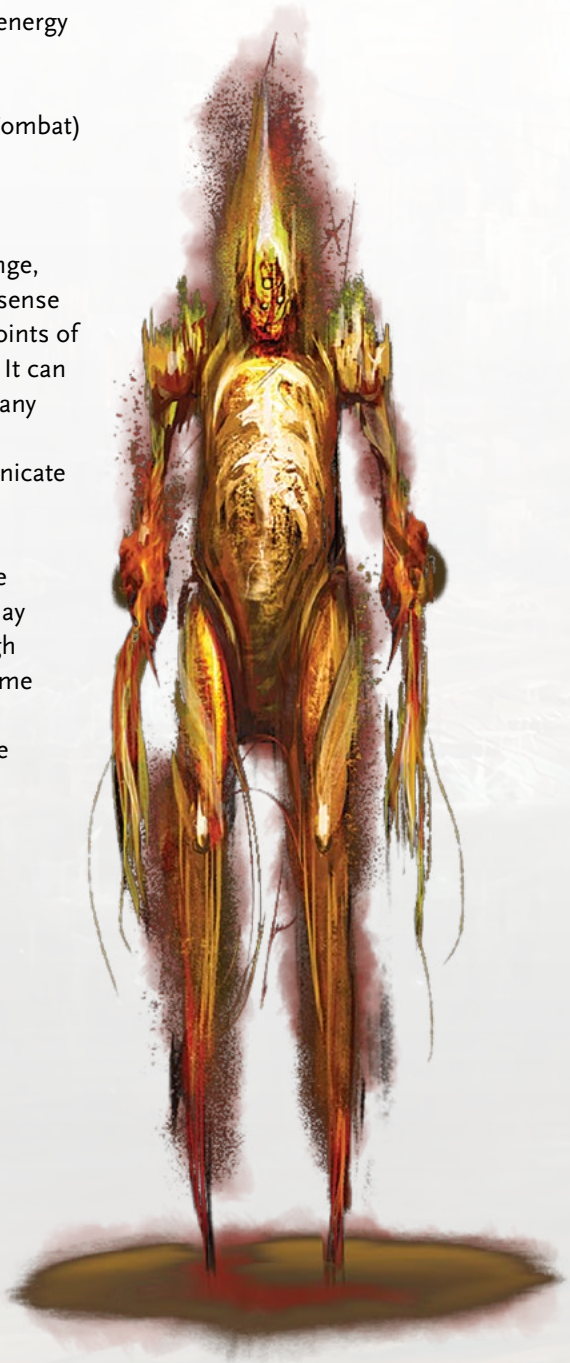
Once nakal latch onto a living thing, they trail it unceasingly across great distances, feeding off the life energy of their prey. Well-fed nakal become brighter and more substantial, walking on legs and feet instead of floating. They communicate with each other via temperature variation.

Ossiphagan, page 82

Motive: Self-defense, hungers for life energy
Environment: Ossiphagan
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: 3 or 4 points (see Combat)
Armor: 5
Movement: Long
Modifications: Tracks prey as level 6.
Combat: A nakal attacks from long range, using its mental attack to inflict a sense of malaise on its target, doing 4 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). It can also do 3 points of fire damage to any living thing it touches.

Nakal sometimes build structures out of molten lava and rocks. No one knows what they are building or why.

Interaction: It's impossible to communicate with a nakal.
Use: The nakal may trail the player characters for hours or days before they are noticed. The characters may start to feel odd, perhaps as though they are being followed or have come down with a weird illness, before they discover the creatures that are hunting them.



GM Intrusion: *The nakal's heated touch also damages a cypher or other piece of the target's equipment.*

STICHUS 7 (21)

Sticha are mutated creatures of large but inexplicable intelligence. They're slightly taller and quite a bit wider than humans. It's possible they were once human, but if they were, they've tinkered with their humanity for so long that there is little of it left. Now they are miners—self-created to let them dig deeper and survive longer under the compressed weight of the ages. They pass through cross-sections of the earth's history, and they catalog what they find.

Sticha society and biology is complex and alien. They seem both organic and metallic, both buglike and humanoid. They lay eggs for reproduction and create death tunnels in which to die. Their bodies act like living piezoelectric generators—using their single powerful digging arm to scrape through rock, they create friction, which their body converts into the electrical energy that fuels its cellular processes. They sometimes use cyphers and occasionally build complex defense machines powered with small jolts from their energy stores.

Sticha communicate over short distances with gestures and a complex language involving clicks and snaps produced with their mandibles. Over long distances, sticha use pheromones to alert others of danger or good seams of rock.

Motive: Defense, discovery, territory, protecting their eggs
Environment: Underground in complex, winding tunnels
Health: 21
Damage Inflicted: 6 points
Armor: 4
Movement: Short
Modifications: Tasking involving digging and tunneling as level 9.
Combat: Sticha are smart, nuanced fighters. For close-range fighting, they use their large claw to attack. A stichus can also release its pent-up electrical energy in a blast that does 6 points of damage to all targets in short range.
Interaction: It is difficult but not impossible to interact with sticha. They consider humans and their verbal language quaint and primitive, not really worth much attention.
Use: Coming upon a cluster of sticha eggs while adventuring underground can quickly bring a group of two or three sticha down on the PCs.
Loot: Any items a stichus might have gathered while tunneling, including 1d6 shins, 1d6 cyphers, and (rarely) an artifact.

Because stichus eggs store a large amount of energy, they are very useful as power sources. A single egg can be used to try to repower a level 1 cypher; two eggs for a level 2 cypher; and so on.

Stichus egg: *level 4; Armor 2*

It is said that the sticha have recently uncovered a vast city, a great treasure of the earth, and that they are bringing items from there to their nesting grounds.

GM Intrusion: *The stichus uses its pheromone communication to call for help from any nearby sticha.*

VERSICOLOR TRUISKAL 9 (18)

A truiskal's head looks like a large, exposed black nerve nestled in the space above its body. Sometimes the nerve and the body separate, but only briefly. No one knows why.

Versicolor truiskals are awkward, lumbering beasts, about twice the height of an average human, trudging across the landscape with a shambling, multilegged gait. They have too many legs or not enough, and each one seems to be a different length. And their large round bodies appear far too heavy for them to hold up. When they're walking, they look as if they might topple over at any moment. But when they're floating, they are a beautiful, breathtaking sight—a splash of fluid grace and color against the sky.

Truiskals inflate their mostly hollow bodies by taking great gulps of air into their organs, which allows them to hover up to 50 feet (15 m) off the ground for about an hour at a time. They have three wavering protrusions on top of their body that they use as rudders or perhaps sails when floating. They also extend their long prehensile stalks, which they use for catching prey, making attacks, and anchoring themselves to land.

Truiskals seek knowledge of all kinds. They have been known to aggressively attack someone and then walk away as soon as they have the object of information they desire.

Motive: Hungers for knowledge, self-defense

Sometimes the truiskal's learning comes from objects that make no sense to humans.

Environment: Truiskals are drawn to places where they perceive that large amounts of information are being stored. This could be a great library full of scrolls and books or a tiny puddle containing a complete ecosystem.

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short; long when flying

Truiskals are fantastic thieves, snagging books, scrolls, and anything else of interest with their stalks on their way by. Occasionally, they return what they've stolen, although they are more likely to randomly drop it somewhere when they are done with it.

Combat: Truiskals are aggressive only when they feel like they're being kept from a store of knowledge that they desire. They prefer to inflate themselves and float into the air, where they attack with their stalks or claws.

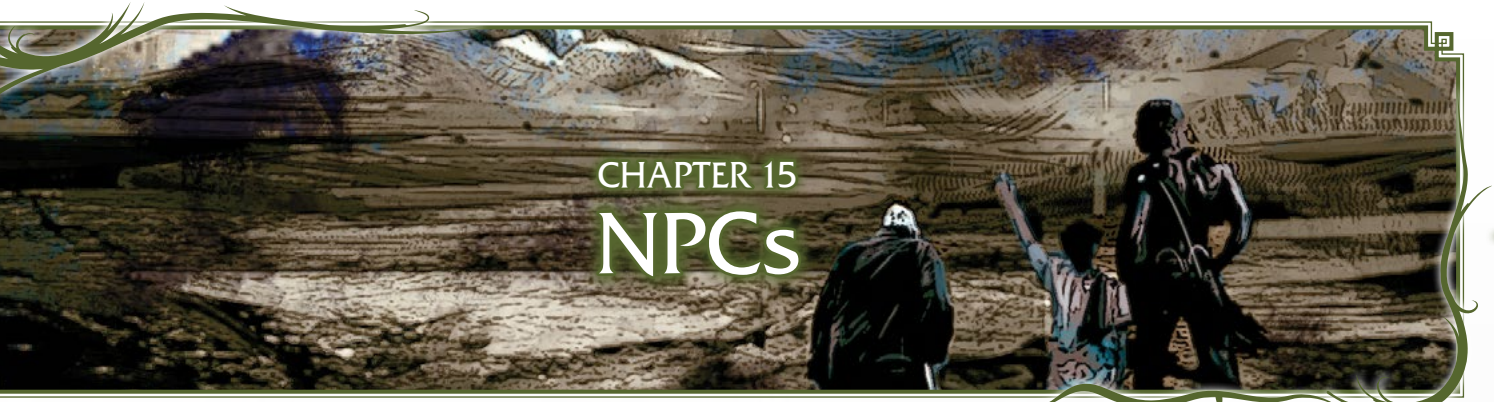
Interaction: Truiskals are mostly unwilling, but not unable, to interact with humans. When talking to truiskals, it seems clear that they're not speaking the same language as you, and yet you can understand them easily. Truiskals are knowledgeable, smart, and often witty.

Great Library, page 100

Use: Characters leaving a location like the Great Library suddenly realize they are being followed by a truiskal.

GM Intrusion: *The player character accidentally gets wrapped up in the truiskal's stalks.*

Loot: Whatever information source(s) the truiskal was carrying at the time.



CHAPTER 15
NPCs

This chapter presents some of the major nonplayer characters in the Torment: Tides of Numenera game, with detailed information on their personalities, dress, and motivations. You can use them any way you see fit—as nonplayer characters (NPCs), as adventure catalysts, or as companions who join the characters on their journey.

MATKINA, THE COLD, CALCULATING JACK

"Let your life be defined by betrayal and then tell me again how to see the best in people. It makes me laugh."

Matkina is a castoff.

Castoff, page 15

Matkina is shrewd eyed and confident, but she rarely meets a gaze head on. Her skin is an unusually pale shade and her jet-black hair is shoulder length, cut straight across. Her face is slightly asymmetrical. Her eyes are also jet black—no whites are visible. Her nose has been broken. Her chin is squarish, not pointed.

She wears a brown leather hood that extends into a shoulder cape. The sleeves of her shirt are tucked into gloves, which are banded with metal strips all the way to the elbow. Pouches and daggers hang from her belt.

Matkina is an assassin, also known as the White Death, due to her unusually pale skin.

Personality: A calculating jack of all trades; a woman of huge intellect, enormous potential, and outer amorality. She plots and schemes to help save the other castoffs from the Sorrow, but none of them listen to her.

There is good in Matkina, but she has learned to shutter it away. She is not desperate for love or affection, though she occasionally enjoys pretending that she is. What she *is* eager for is someone who is her mental equal. Her personality is a maze, and it will take a number of tries before its damage is healed. She does not care about her legacy—she just wants to live comfortably, away from people.

History: She awoke from the Changing God's residence in her body in the Bloom, and managed to avoid being devoured by the city-creature by bare inches. Not long after that, she fled from the Sorrow. Her life has been a mass of tribulations, and she does not trust existence to support her without her willpower as a bulwark against the forces arrayed against her. She has become a thief and assassin out of necessity, but she's good at what she does.

Matkina became a soldier in the armies of the First for a time, but she chose to defend a village of castoffs against the depredations of the First. Her superior, Tash, turned on her, gave her the scar on her face, and used his Tidal surge to steal her memories. Afterward, she couldn't remember anything, not even who she was. The First left her to wander the

Tidal surge, page 143

desert alone. Eventually her identity and most of her memories came back to her, but some details of that event eluded her forever.

Temporal viewer cypher, page 296

Flash detonation cypher, page 284

Matkina: *level 7, knowledge of the numenera as level 8, stealth as level 9; her Tidal surge ability blinds one creature of her choice within short range and decreases the amount of damage she takes by 1 point.*

Equipment: Matkina carries two daggers, some basic gear, a level 4 temporal viewer cypher, and a level 5 flash detonation cypher. In addition, she has the following two artifacts:

Tool-Producing Gloves: Her banded gloves extrude tools that are useful for a variety of mechanical tasks. The metal is a nano-particulate forge, and the tools take their cues from the wearer's mental processes. Thanks to these gloves, she always has an asset for all related tasks. This is a level 4 artifact with no chance of depletion.

Misting Hood: Matkina wears a spray device around the opening of her hood. Five flasks are attached to it. She uses these to deliver her choice of:

- A mind-altering drug or pheromone that grants her an asset on all interactions with those within immediate distance.
- Flesh-melting acid that inflicts 3 points of damage on one target in immediate range.
- Synth-melting acid that destroys a synth item within immediate range of level 3 or less.
- "Air paint" that she uses to disguise her features by creating a mask like a black one-way mirror. She can summon or dispel the mask with a thought.

This is a level 3 artifact with a 1 in 1d20 depletion.

ALIGERN, THE FALLEN PRIEST

"I'm not interested in why you did it. I just want you to stop doing it."

Aligern is clean shaven, with red hair fading to silver. It is shaved at the sides and pulled back to a short ponytail. His eyes are sharp green, with deep crow's-feet at their corners. His mouth is grim and down-turned. His build is medium—neither fat nor wiry, not skinny or muscular. He has tattoos on his forearms, running under his sleeves and up his shoulders, petering out just below his ears. These tattoos are intricate designs of primary colors. He can pull one from his arm as if it were a wire under his skin; it sparks with energy.

Typically, he wears a faded grey duster that buttons from the neck down to the waist, after which it flaps open. It has a number of pockets, obviously bulging with small pieces of equipment. The right chest of his cassock is strung with thin golden wires in a slightly glowing grid pattern. Behind it, as if caged, is a thin sheet of silvery metal in the shape of a seven-pointed star.

Aligern: *level 6, knowledge of the numenera as level 8; Armor 4 (2 from tattoos)*

Personality: Gruff is the best word to describe Aligern. He presents himself as world weary and not willing to suffer fools. He wears this mask because lashing out at others' foolishness is his best defense against confronting the evidence of his own. He believes his legacy is pain. He once pursued knowledge, but now feels that his only lasting contribution is the destruction of those he loved.

History: Aligern was once an Aeon Priest, leading a boring life in a boring town on the edge of nowhere. He spent his time digging up artifacts and experimenting with them. After cleaning a large frame he'd dug up, he decided to experiment on it and opened it. He discovered it had been buried and lost for a reason when a flood of smooth, ink-black creatures that seemed to be made of tooth and nail spilled through and devoured his village. He lost his family, his friends, and his followers, and barely survived himself. At least, that's what he believes. He fell unconscious as the swarm poured through and awoke days later, the tattoo lattice upon his arms. He found some of the bodies—but not all of them.

Equipment: Aligern typically carries a forearm blade and two cyphers. He wears a lattice of mobile, nanite-filled tattoos on his forearms that provide +2 to Armor and add 2 additional points of damage on all melee attacks.

RIASTRAD, THE BROKEN ONE

Riastrad is a large, muscular man with short dark hair, and a large scar that runs from his mouth to the crown of his head. He wears blue trousers with steel bands encircling the thighs and hips. The top half of his body is encased in a shiny metal skin.

Crystalvore, page 129

Personality: He is deathly afraid of the dark and of crystalvores, and will go berserk if forced near either. He is deeply devoted to Satsada.

Castoff, page 15

History: Riastrad is a castoff. His body demonstrated a certain affinity for the Tides, and the Changing God thought this might be the perfection of the form he was seeking. Unfortunately, the Changing God fell into a deep chasm in the Ascension, and rather than spend the time climbing out, he abandoned the shell of Riastrad, thinking it would starve to death before achieving freedom. Riastrad awoke in the last flickering light of a glowglobe and managed to clamber to freedom ahead of the hungry crystalvores in the dark.

Riastrad believed this escape was a sign that he was destined to be a hero, and he took his calling seriously. He is a natural with weapons of any sort, though he prefers a specific type depending on his mindset. He worked for a time for the Memovira of the Bloom, where he met Satsada. When he first cast his pain into her inadvertently, he discovered that they had developed an immediate bond.

Riastrad: *level 7*

Equipment: Riastrad carries a variety of weapons, including a flail, a javelin, and a mace, switching them out as it suits him. In addition, he has the following two artifacts:

Silver Cortex: A shiny metallic skin that generates solid air, attracting particles that serve as weapon and shield. The air can create weapons like blades, discs to act as shields, or spikes to deter grappling. These items are barely visible as outlines in the air. When activated, the cortex does 6 points of damage to everything within short range and provides +4 to Armor. This is a level 5 artifact with no chance of depletion.

Copula Bands: The steel bands wrap around the hips and thighs, giving the wearer the ability to make powerful jumps into battle or deadly charges into enemies. The bands provide an asset in jumping, running, and charging. This is a level 4 artifact with a 1 in 1d100 depletion.

SATSADA, THE SEER

"I have been out so far that I fear I may not have returned."

A slender woman dressed in an assortment of colors and styles, Satsada looks as if she's too distracted to pay attention to what she's putting on. She wears comfortably fitting pantaloons, a bloused shirt, and a strange form of armor that looks like tubes wrapped around her waist, extending to her neck. These tubes enter her neck on either side. Her eyes are milky white. Her medium-length hair is striped from front to back in alternate rows of white, black, and red, and it's all pulled back into a loose ponytail. She has bronzed bracers on her wrists.

Personality: Satsada is fretful and anxious. She sees disaster looming all around her, although few people listen to her warnings. Rather than become shrill, she has withdrawn into herself. She and Riastrad have a special bond and are rarely seen without each other.

History: A child of a trader who came in from the Steadfast, Satsada was exposed to strange radiations of the wastes between, and her powers developed as a result. Once her mother discovered the Bloom, the trader was intoxicated with the idea of reaching untapped new markets. She left her sick daughter in the care of business associates in the Bloom, and against the warnings of her daughter, ventured deep through the winding passages of the creature. She never returned, and her compatriots treated her daughter as a business opportunity. They discovered Satsada's new abilities and helped her develop them. When they realized that she focused on disaster instead of fortune, they sold her to the Memovira, who used her for the occasional prediction to avert potential disasters, and who sold her services as a mercenary in various psychic wars.

Equipment: Satsada carries a dagger as well as one or two random cyphers. In addition, she has the following artifact:

Persistent Conduit: An integrated device that provides nutrients, hydration, and +1 to Armor. When activated, it provides an asset on all tasks involving telepathy and mental acuity. This is a level 5 artifact with no chance of depletion.

Satsada: *level 6, psychic abilities as level 7; Armor 2 (from persistent conduit)*

CALLISTEGE, THE BRASH NANO

"This little thing? It's nothing. Just a face-melting death machine, ha ha. No, I'm kidding, it's really just a poison detector." ::distracted, sotto voce:: *"What? Hush, I'm having a joke. No, I don't want his face melted. Not yet, anyway."*

Callistege wears a bright wardrobe of oranges and reds, as if she were on fire. Her hair is metallic and golden, worn long. She wears earrings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and belts of varying materials and workmanship. All of them look like they might have some sort of function. Some glow faintly; some seem to absorb the light.

Personality: She wears the personality of a flighty, brash child, eager for new experiences and willing to explore anything that promises novelty. Underneath, she is frightened and calculating, desperate to prove that she is strong so she does not need to fear anymore, and this makes her brittle and untrustworthy. Additionally, all the numenera she carries has an effect on her personality, twisting it slightly and keeping her a little off-kilter. She wants to acquire more of it so that she can eventually transcend the mortal flesh she carries and no longer worry about damage to her physical form. She does not like to be touched until she knows what the powers of those touching her might be, and she views the possessions of others as her personal treasure trove.

Callistege is akin to a sentient dimensional husk. Echoes of herself shimmer through multiple realities. She refers to these alternative shadows as her sister-matrix and connects with them via an artifact called the Attractor.

Callistege: *level 5; due to existing in multiple realities, she is trained in all tasks involving perception and sensing danger*

History: Callistege is a fortune hunter, forced into the business to further her researches into consciousness and the human mind. Driven from her home city when the nature of her investigations was uncovered—she had graduated from animals to stolen slaves, and people were concerned that she was preparing for a broader experiment—she decided that she was better off exploring anyway. That held much more potential to uncover something new and interesting.

Equipment: Callistege carries or wears as many as a dozen oddities at all times, along with 1d6 cyphers. In addition, she has the following artifact:

Attractor: A golden and silver armband that gathers a swarm of nanites around the wearer. The nanites provide an asset on all tasks involving the numenera or the datasphere.

TYBIR THE FIXER

"You need to get out of town fast? I know a guy."

Personality: A roguish old mercenary captain, Tybir has lots of stories and old comrades in every port. He's been everywhere and knows everybody, and he can use his experience and connections to help others.

History: Tybir is a veteran of many wars and has served all over the region, sometimes on both sides of local conflicts. He is a likable, talkative older man who can relate interesting and sometimes important facts about almost every place in the area. He definitely knows where every bar and brothel is. He also has old friends and acquaintances in all those places and can use them to get information, gear, or introductions to important NPCs.

Unfortunately, Tybir's memory of how friendly his old friends were doesn't always match reality. Tybir is a cheat, a con artist, and a petty thief. Many of his old comrades suffered greatly from his callous self-interest, and they might want vengeance on him when they meet again, or at least a hefty payoff. Nor are Tybir's less savory aspects all in his past. Those who trust him too much might find themselves sold down the river without a paddle.

There is another reason that Tybir moves around so much besides constantly being run out of town. He is chasing a lost love, a man named Auvigne who broke his heart and whom he has never forgotten.

Equipment: Tybir carries an array of tools and devices, a disguise kit, one or two cyphers, and a glorious shield artifact.

Disguise kit, page 81

Tybir: *level 5; all positive social interactions, charm, persuasion, deception, conning, and cheating as level 7*

Glorious shield, page 122

ERRITIS, THE WILLING HERO

"What is this conscience you speak of?" ::listens:: *"Sooooo . . . it's a tiny spirit that sounds like you and criticizes you and makes you feel awful all the time? Certainly there must be a cure!"*

Erritis seems to be an unusually good-looking young man—emphasis on "unusually" because people can't really describe why he's attractive. It's more his random energy and confidence, and the fact that he always seems to be having fun, doesn't let life weigh him down, and wants others to enjoy themselves as well—at least as long as he's around, that is.

Personality: Erritis gets along with others easily—perhaps too easily, which can make him an easy mark for con artists and manipulators. He enjoys being around people to the point where they amuse or interest him, and then he forgets about them once they become too much of a negative influence. He tends to make "friends" easily and then discard them just as easily without thinking too much about it. When he leaves their presence, people often feel slightly disappointed for a moment or two as his glow fades, then a growing dismay as they can't recall who or what they were talking about.

As long as Erritis acts on instinct and doesn't think too much, he bumbles through life with a pleasant grin and a careless, happy energy. This likely would have gotten him killed in a variety of ways except for his halo of nanites. If Erritis believes he can do it, the nanites will do what they can to make it so.

Erritis: *level 5; surrounded by a cloud of nanites that decreases the difficulty of all tasks by one step when he is hale and increases the difficulty of all tasks by one step when he is impaired or debilitated*

Erritis don't know about the nanites that help him out. He just thinks the whole world is glowing, so he gets confused when someone asks him about his aura. It's impossible to convince him that it's not his natural ability that allows him to perform amazing feats. In short, Erritis is a pleasant fool whose ignorance shields him from harm, and whose curiosity and entertainment-seeking always ensure that there's plenty of trouble on the way.

Erritis doesn't plan, he doesn't do "tactics," and he doesn't like thinking things through because, really, what has that ever done for anyone, anyway? Point him toward a catastrophe, and let him go! And if there is no catastrophe? Time to create one!

He likes to switch up weapons, try out new types of attacks, and engage in swordplay for the fun of it. He genuinely loves it, and he's always eager to spar with someone.

Erritis is so scattered that he can't remember names. He'll make up names for other people on the fly. The one name he always remembers is Matkina's, because he's deeply in love with her, even though those feelings aren't reciprocated.

Erritis's belief in himself is also his weakness. When invested with too much pain, suffering, and defeat, he reverts to his rather plain self: a man who looks like his hair needs to be combed, one with a sheepish grin and dull eyes that suggest the lack of intelligence beneath. The nanites fade, and the glow that surrounded him becomes tarnished bronze and then a smoky haze almost suggestive of an unpleasant scent.

Equipment: Erritis carries a variety of weapons, but he prefers a sword over the others.

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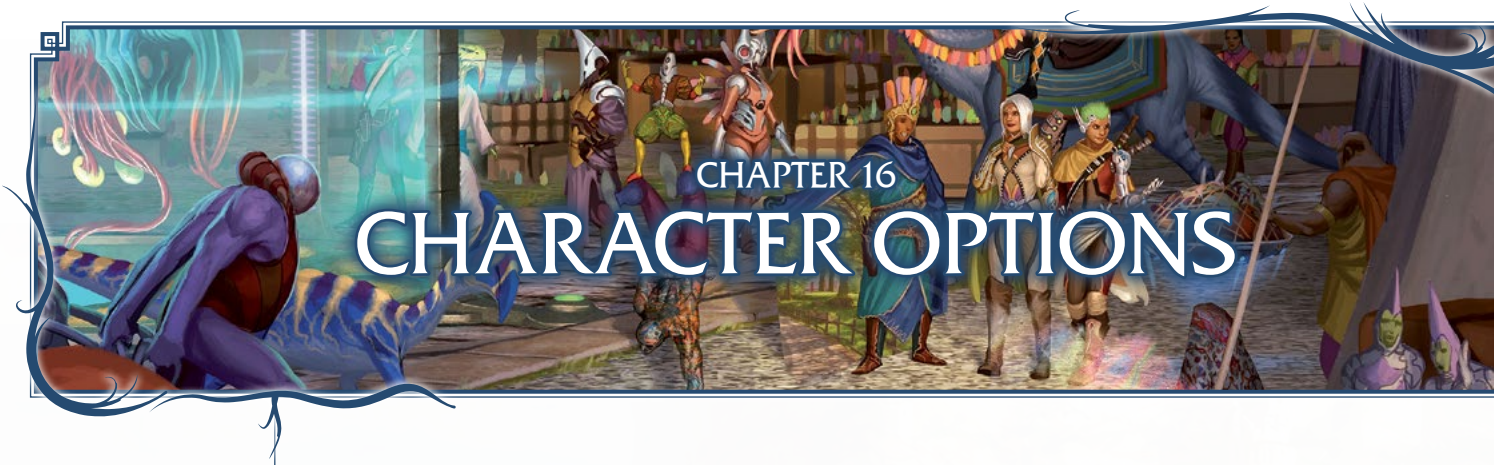


CHAPTER 16

CHARACTER OPTIONS

Characters can consider becoming trained or specialized in skills that are unique and area-specific, such as knowledge of the Tides, castoffs, the Changing God, or the Bloom.

This chapter presents new descriptors and new foci that can be used by characters from any location in the Ninth World, as well as a descriptor—Castoff—that is specifically tied to Greater Garravia and the Changing God's story. It also offers a new racial option, the Ghibra.

NEW DESCRIPTORS

Your descriptor defines your character—it flavors everything you do. The differences between a Cautious jack and a Slick jack are considerable. Your descriptor places your character in the first adventure, which starts the campaign and helps provide motivation.

BLOOMBORN

You were born within the womb of a giant transdimensional predator, swaddled by the voices of its madness, raised among the dangerous and the mad. Yet you've never succumbed to the madness yourself—at least you don't think you have.

For much of your life, you thought the entire world looked, felt, sounded, and smelled like the Bloom. You had no idea there was a larger world outside these murmuring, muttering walls.

You gain the following characteristics:

Strong Mind: +3 to your Intellect Pool.

Adaptable: The Bloom is always changing—closing Maws, creating new tunnels, wanting new things—and you've learned to think on your feet, coming up with new plans on the fly. Anytime you receive a GM intrusion, you have an asset on your next task. Enabler.

Changing God, page 14

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving interacting with, understanding, and navigating the Bloom, its Maws, and its tongues.

Skill: You're trained in Intellect defense tasks.

Inability: You've heard voices in your head for so long that you can't always discern what is right from what is wrong, what is true from what is false. You have an inability in all tasks involving seeing through lies, deception, and persuasion.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You really wanted to see the rest of the world, and this was the first opportunity that presented itself.
2. You were starting to worry that you might be succumbing to the Bloom's madness after all; you hoped that spending time with other people would prove your fears false.
3. You used to be a Bloom guide—and weren't too bad at it—and you think this group could really use someone with your skills.
4. One of the other PCs reminds you of someone you lost long ago to one of the Bloom's Maws, and you find yourself wanting to spend time with them.

CASTOFF

You are a product of the Changing God—literally. Everything you are comes from having been "worn" and then discarded by the consciousness of the Changing God. The experience took much from you. It left you damaged, with faint memories of your life

from before. But it also gave you much. You are long-lived and self-healing, and you rarely feel pain. That last characteristic is perhaps as much of a curse as it is a boon. Every time you would suffer, that suffering is passed along to someone else. In surviving, you ensure that others die more quickly and painfully.

You gain the following characteristics:

Knowledgeable: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Tidal Surge: You don't suffer the way that others do. Instead, when you would normally take damage or otherwise experience something that would cause pain, you radiate a burst of pain outward, transmitting it to the body of another.

Unlike many other abilities, Tidal surge is a passive ability, one that occurs only when you are defending.

TIDAL SURGE TABLE

During character creation, ask the GM to choose a Tidal surge effect for you, or roll a d6 to see what effect your Tidal surge has.

1d6	Effect
1	Stuns a target of your choice within short range for one round, and decreases the amount of damage you take by 1 point.
2	Blinds a sighted target of your choice within short range for one round, and decreases the amount of damage you take by 1 point.
3	Deals 2 points of Intellect damage to a thinking target of your choice within long range, and decreases the amount of damage you take by 1 point.
4	Deals 2 points of Might damage to a target of your choice within immediate range, and decreases the amount of damage you take by 1 point.
5	Deals 1 point of damage to up to three targets in close range. Does not decrease the damage you take.
6	Causes one target that you can see to flee in fear in a random direction for one round, and decreases the amount of damage you take by 1 point.

Inability: The Changing God stripped you of so much that you must fight to recall things about the world and yourself. You have an inability in all tasks related to lore, history, and memory.

Inability: Your inability to feel the aches and pains of life leaves you feeling removed from everything. You have a hard time connecting to humanity. You have an inability in all tasks related to positive social interactions, empathy, kindness, or succor.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You can't remember much of who you are or where you came from, but something drew you to this, a faint echo of something from your past.

2. You woke up in a body that was broken and scarred by the actions of the Changing God. One of the other PCs took you under their wing to help you heal.

GM TIPS: USING THE CASTOFF DESCRIPTOR

Any player character may take Castoff as their descriptor, but it works best in the story when used in the context of the Changing God. If everyone in the group wants to play a castoff, the GM can allow all players to take Castoff as their descriptor, along with a second descriptor of their choice.

Tidal surge effects occur every time a Castoff character takes damage, no matter who is present. This means that if the only living creature within range of the Castoff character is a friend or companion, they take the damage or bear the brunt of the effect.

Tidal surge effects do not affect nonliving objects.

Tidal surge effects cause suffering but do not kill. Therefore, a Tidal surge effect never reduces a creature's health to 0. If a creature has only 1 point of health, a Tidal surge effect that would normally do damage does not occur.

If there are no viable creatures within the specified range, Tidal surge effects do not occur.

Remember, spending points from your Pools (such as when you apply a level of Effort) is not "taking damage."

Tidal surges can also be played as a random effect. In this case, rather than rolling for a single effect during character creation, the player rolls for their character's Tidal surge effect each time they defend against an attack.

Stunned, page 95

Blindness, page 95

3. You hate what the Changing God has done to you, and you're following a trail to find and destroy him—a trail that led to the PCs.

4. You struggle with the effects of your Tidal surge abilities, and you're seeking someone to help you understand and control them.

CAUTIOUS

You look before you leap. No, you don't just look—you plan, study, gather clues, and figure out which course of action is least likely to get you killed, or even scratched up. You sometimes feel like you can't take action until you gather information, search for clues, and formulate a workable plan. This probably frustrates at least a few of your friends and loved ones, but when you are ready to act, you're the one they look to for advice on the smartest, safest way to go forward.

You gain the following characteristics:

Vigilant Mind: +3 to your Intellect Pool.

Calculated Risk: When a task seems particularly dangerous or when the odds are stacked against you, your careful planning often shows you a way out of it at the last second. When you spend 1 Intellect point prior to your roll and you roll a 1, you can reroll without spending an XP.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving seeing through perception, discovering traps, and assessing danger.

Skill: You're trained in tasks involving organizing and planning.

Inability: Sometimes you're too careful. Too much thinking and planning can leave you at a disadvantage when it's time to act. The difficulty of all noncombat Speed-based tasks is increased by one step.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You came up with a brilliant plan of action and everyone else wanted in on it.

2. Your cautious nature saved one of the other PCs from disaster, and they vouched for you.

3. One of the other PCs hired you to keep the group from danger.

4. You have been friends with one of the other PCs for a long time; you trust that person and let them convince you to join despite your cautious nature.

SLICK

You talk fast, you think fast, and you move fast. You're not the toughest, but in most situations, you don't need to be. And you're not one of those people who hides in the shadows like vermin or skulks around waiting to jump out and attack passersby. Not you. For you, it's all about saying, "Here I am!" and then fooling those silly draff anyway. You probably don't care all that much about the money you can snag from pockets or the equipment you "win" in a game of dice. For you, it's all about that moment when you close the deal, pull the wool, or con the conner.

You gain the following characteristics:

Grey Matter: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You are trained in all tasks dealing with persuasion, bluffing, misdirection, and deception.

Skill: You are trained in all tasks involving manual dexterity, such as stealing, performing sleight-of-hand, and lockpicking.

Sleight-of-Hand: Choose one non-combat trick, foil, or feint to be your specialty. When you use it successfully, you have an asset on your next action.

All Brain, No Brawn: When you apply Effort when making a Might roll, you must spend 1 extra point from your Speed Pool.

Additional Equipment: You begin the game with 10 extra shins and three oddities.

NEW FOCI

This section introduces the foci Breathes Shadow, Snares Deadly Prey, and Speaks With a Silver Tongue.

BREATHES SHADOW

It isn't just that you know how to be sneaky and silent, although that's a part of it (and you might lead others to believe that is the entirety of your skillset). But in truth, you have learned how to access and control a rare and fickle type of extradimensional energy—called *shadow* or *shade*—that manifests itself as the complete absence of light.

Draff, page 158

You likely dress in dark colors that cloak the majority of your body. You probably choose your fabrics with care, selecting material that invites the eye to skip right over your movements.

Nanos in particular shine here, as they can use the numenera to further increase their skills. Nanos who follow this path are called shadewalkers, and jacks are sometimes called duskers.

PCs with the Slick descriptor should work with their GM to define their trick, foil, or feint. Possibilities include a unique sleight of hand, a simple misdirection, an elaborate magic trick, or a special lockpicking technique.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. That person often has trouble seeing you, even when you are standing right in front of them and are saying their name.

2. Pick one other PC. This person is never fooled by your shadow breathing, even when they try to be.

3. Pick one other PC. You once watched them perform a shadow cast, but you don't know if they were even aware of what they were doing.

4. Pick one other PC. They believe your shadow breathing is an abomination of one of their gods, beliefs, or philosophies.

Additional Equipment: You have a special paste that you can apply to your clothing and equipment that reflects, absorbs, and refracts light as you desire. There's enough

Breathes Shadow GM Intrusion: *The sunlight, moonlight, or candlelight suddenly shifts, catching you off guard in the middle of performing an esotery, attacking a foe, or taking another action.*

paste for three uses; each one lasts ten minutes and gives you an asset in sneaking.

Shadow Esoteries: If you perform esoteries, those that would normally use force or other energy instead use shadow. For example, when you use Ward, a deep black force envelops your body when you would be attacked, preventing your enemies from landing a solid blow.

Ward, page 36

Minor Effect Suggestions: You are able to manipulate the light better than expected, extending the reach of your attack.

Invisible, page 96

Major Effect Suggestions: You are able to slip the shadows around you after your attack, decreasing the difficulty of your next defense action by one step.

Tier 1: Shadow Shroud (1 Intellect point). At your command, your entire body becomes shrouded in shadow that lasts up to ten minutes. The shroud decreases the difficulty of all skills involving sneaking, hiding, and escaping by one step. Action to initiate.

Tier 2: Hurl Shadow (2 Intellect points). While your Shadow Shroud is active, you can gather the darkness between your palms until it becomes a solid mass of darkness. You can hurl the mass at a single target within short range for 4 points of damage. Action.

Living Shadow: When use the Ward ability and your Shadow Shroud is active, you gain +1 to Armor. Enabler.

Tier 3: Obscurity Cloak (3+ Intellect points). At your command, you can cover yourself and two other living creatures within immediate distance in shadow, essentially making them invisible for one round. You can spend 1 additional Intellect point per person to cover additional targets. Moving beyond immediate distance or engaging in combat dissipates the shadow. Action.

Tier 4: Shadow Leap (4 Intellect points). When your Shadow Shroud is active, you can attack as a sneak action from any vantage point, dealing 4 additional points of damage. Enabler.

Tier 5: Touch Darkness (5 Intellect points). You extend your Shadow Shroud out around your body in a writhing mass of darkness for one hour. While the shroud lasts, you gain +4 to Armor. Enabler.

Tier 6: Child of the Night (6 Intellect points). You have mastered the play of light and dark, which seem to obey your every command. You create a child out of shadow that is approximately half your size. It is a level 5 creature and lasts for ten minutes. It always stays right on your heels, and its

purpose is to protect you and your allies at all costs. It provides +2 to Armor to everyone you choose within short range. Action to create.

SNARES DEADLY PREY

You are a master of traps, snares, and cages. Others may like to get in close to do their damage, but you prefer to bait a trap and wait—patient, still, deadly—until the perfect prey lands right in your lap. You know how to get a foe to step where you want them to at just the right moment, and you savor the look on their faces when they realize they've been caught.

You probably wear clothing with lots of big pockets and bags, or you carry some of your traps hanging off your belt the way others wear their weapons.

Jacks who choose this path often create beautiful, deadly contraptions out of metal and synth, and nanos typically use their mental powers to concoct complex energy snares.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You accidentally caught that character in one of your traps and you're pretty sure they still resent you for it.

2. Pick one other PC. They seem afraid of your contraptions, to the point where you're tempted to ask them about it.

3. Pick one other PC. They've asked you to make a cage for something, but won't tell you why. You haven't yet decided whether to help.

4. Pick one other PC. They keep trying to get you to try out their weapon instead. It's almost as though they don't understand that your traps have a purpose.

Snares Deadly Prey GM Intrusions: *Traps break. Foes steal bait without getting caught. Your companions sometimes forget exactly where you've set your latest snare.*

Traps come in all shapes and forms. Some traps are made of solid objects like metal and steel, while others can be constructed from various forms of energy. You can choose what materials you use to make your traps. This changes nothing except the trap's appearance.

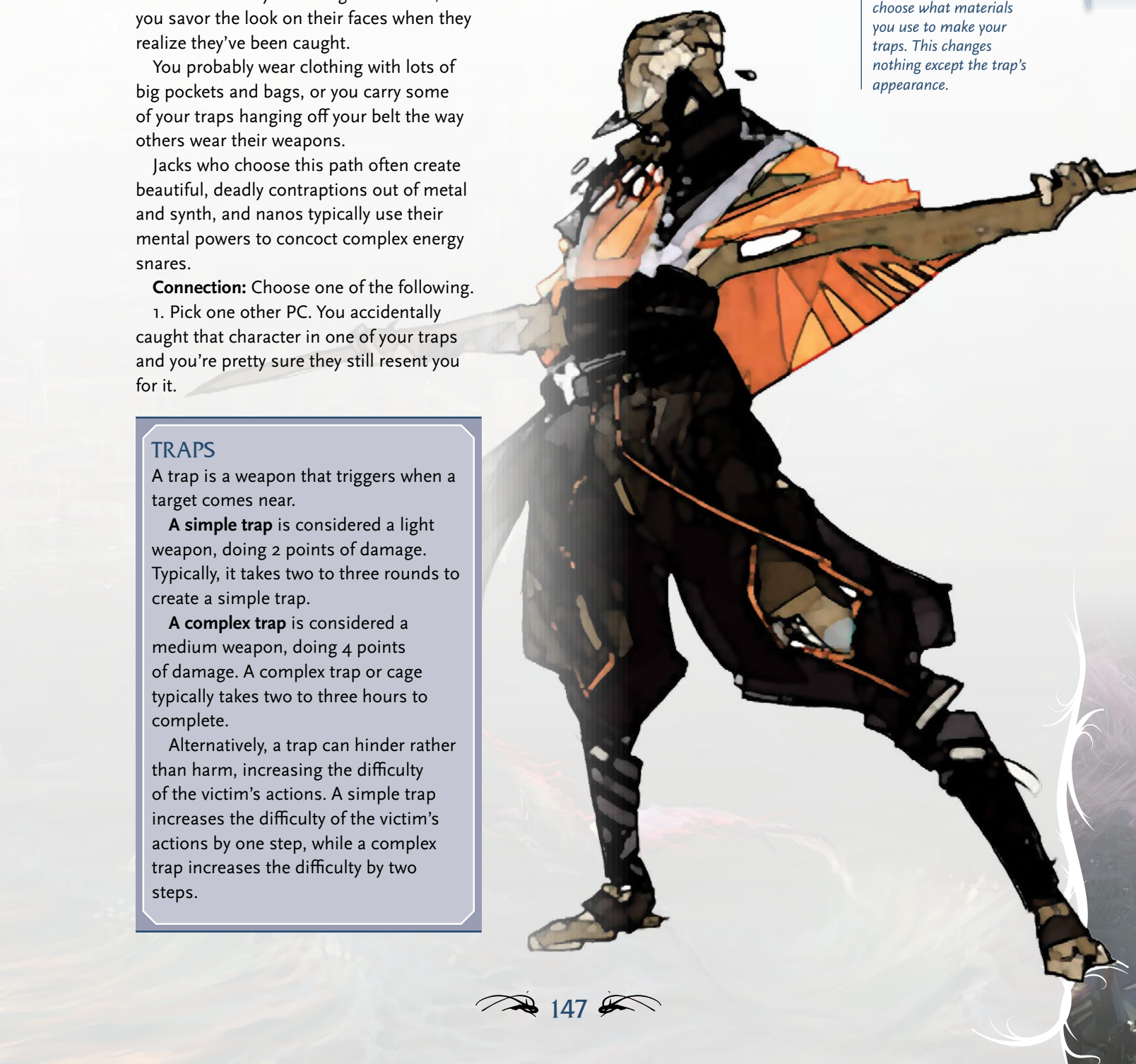
TRAPS

A trap is a weapon that triggers when a target comes near.

A simple trap is considered a light weapon, doing 2 points of damage. Typically, it takes two to three rounds to create a simple trap.

A complex trap is considered a medium weapon, doing 4 points of damage. A complex trap or cage typically takes two to three hours to complete.

Alternatively, a trap can hinder rather than harm, increasing the difficulty of the victim's actions. A simple trap increases the difficulty of the victim's actions by one step, while a complex trap increases the difficulty by two steps.



Speaks With a Silver Tongue GM Intrusion: *Your foe is onto you and uses a device or skill to keep from hearing you speak.*

Additional Equipment: You have a number of tools specially designed to help you create and repair traps, as well as one simple and one complex trap.

Minor Effect Suggestions: Your trap springs at just the perfect moment, doing extra damage.

Major Effect Suggestions: Your trap catches a second foe just as they start to flee.

Tier 1: Mind Like a Steel Trap. You are trained in all tasks involving traps, including baiting, building, setting, spotting, disabling, and disguising. Enabler.

Tier 2: Set a Snare (2 Speed points). You can move up to a short distance, set a simple trap, and move up to a long distance away from it as a single action. Action.

Distract, page 88

Tier 3: Mechanical Hare (4 Speed points). You craft a simple device, no larger than you, whose sole purpose is to distract one foe that you choose. When a foe is distracted, the difficulty of all tasks they attempt is modified by one step to their detriment for three rounds. Action to initiate.

Jaws of Steel. Whenever one of your traps deals damage to a distracted foe, it inflicts 2 additional points of damage. Enabler.

Tier 4: Eternal Cage (4+ Speed points). You create a level 4 cage (10 feet by 10 feet by 20 feet [3 m by 3 m by 6 m]) that traps, but does not harm, a creature at its level or below. You can increase the level of the cage by spending 1 Speed point per level. Action to create.

Tier 5: Improved Set a Snare (4 Speed points). You can move up to a short distance, set a complex trap (operates as a medium weapon), and move up to a long distance away from it as a single action. Action.

Tier 6: Trap Master: You are specialized in all tasks involving traps, including baiting, building, setting, spotting, disabling, and disguising. Enabler.

SPEAKS WITH A SILVER TONGUE

You are poetry incarnate. The words flow from your tongue like liquid metal. Your voice is golden and captivating. With enough time and focus, you can convince almost anyone to do almost anything for you, with you, or in spite of you.

Words—words are what matter. You believe they have power. There's a chance you don't care much about your appearance, as long as you can say what you want to say.

You may have covered your skin with tattooed words or have written things on your outfit. You might play an instrument, write books, or compose songs in your spare time.

Jacks, with their ability to take a related flex skill each day, make excellent speakers, but nanos and glaives may choose this route to inspire their companions.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. That character seems overly affected by your words. You've accidentally made them cry or laugh just by talking to them.

2. Pick one other PC. That character believes that you speak falsely and is never affected by your words.

3. Pick one other PC. You'd like to get to know them better, but don't want to use your skills to do so.

4. Pick one other PC. That character would like to learn your storytelling techniques, and you're trying to decide whether to teach them.

Additional Equipment: You have a book where you keep notes of all of your favorite words, inspirational stories, and speech anecdotes.

Minor Effect Suggestions: The next time you attempt to influence, persuade, or deceive the same foe, the difficulty of the task is decreased by one step.

Major Effect Suggestions: You speak with extra conviction, increasing the effect, duration, or range of your action.

Tier 1: Poetic License. You are trained in all social interactions, including persuasion, deception, and intimidation. Enabler.

Tier 2: Galvanize. You give a rousing speech, sing a stirring song, or recite an inspiring poem. Choose any number of creatures within short range who can hear you; each of them gains a +1 bonus on its next die roll. Action.

Tier 3: Misdirection (2 Intellect points). You can confuse and distract anyone that you're speaking with, to the point where the difficulty of your social interaction with that person is decreased by one step for ten minutes. Enabler.

Tier 4: Bow Down (3 Intellect points). You can convince any opponent who understands speech that they are afraid of you or that you're their friend, to the point where they don't take their next action against you or your companions. Action.

Tier 5: Stay the Course (5 Intellect points). When your companions are flagging, you can help inspire them with a well-timed word or two. Choose one person within short range to inspire; the difficulty of their next action is decreased by two steps. Action.

Tier 6: Great Reputation. Everyone's heard of you—and if they haven't, you can convince them that they have. You are now specialized in all social interactions, including persuasion, deception, and intimidation. Enabler.

NEW RACIAL OPTION: GHIBRA

If the GM allows it, players can create characters who are Ghibra rather than human. A Ghibra's race is their descriptor, but a player can choose any character type and focus. For example, they might choose a Ghibra glaive who Crafts Illusions. Because nonhuman characters gain more benefits from their racial type than they would from a conventional descriptor, each carries more disadvantages as well.

All Ghibra PCs come from the water city of M'ra Jolios at the center of the desert known as the Lost Sea. Because M'ra Jolios is surrounded by arid wasteland, most Ghibra never leave the city, except when they use devices to walk among the air-breathers in the adjacent town of Jerboa. Still, many Ghibra harbor a desire to leave the city and desert behind and venture out into the unknown. They want to swim in other bodies of water. They want to meet other types of intelligent creatures. They want to bring water and life to the Ninth

Jerboa, page 72

M'ra Jolios is not as landlocked as it seems. It sits over a portal that connects the city to the vast depths of the world's ocean, but only a handful of Ghibra know this secret.

M'ra Jolios, page 65

World (figuratively, as encouraged by their religion). A Ghibra character is one who has decided to do just that.

When Ghibra visit Jerboa or the Lost Sea, they usually wear waterskins that sheathe their bodies in a layer of fluid to stave off the heat and dry air of the desert. Likewise, a Ghibra PC must use a waterskin or something similar when traveling in desert regions to keep their body hydrated. In most other environments, the character can get by with a helmet or mouth apparatus designed to let them breathe water, or numenera that has a comparable function. Even so, Ghibra characters must submerge themselves in water at least twenty minutes per day or gain a cumulative one-step penalty on all physical actions. The difficulty of such actions returns to normal one round after the character is immersed in water.

Waterskin, page 125

GHIBRA CHARACTERISTICS

All Ghibra player characters have the following characteristics:

Bodily Harm: You have a bodily feature (such as claws, tentacles, barbs, tendrils, and so on) that deals 1 additional point of damage per attack.

Telepathic: You can communicate telepathically with any other thinking, speaking creature in long range.

Skill: You are trained in swimming.

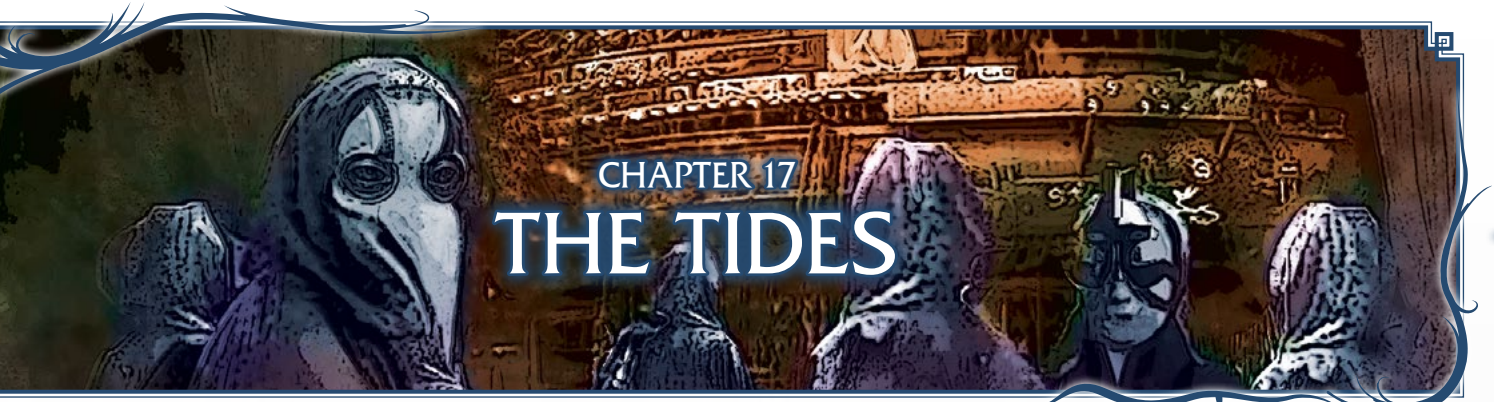
Skill: You are trained in perception.

Skill: You are trained in horticulture and crafting useful materials from plants.

Immersion: As a water-breather, you require devices or other assistance to breathe air, and you must be immersed in water for twenty minutes a day or gain a cumulative one-step penalty on physical actions.

Inability: You're used to moving underwater. On land, the difficulty of tasks involving combat, including attack and defense rolls, is increased by one step.

Extra Equipment: One of your starting cyphers is a breather that converts air to water for 28 hours.



CHAPTER 17
THE TIDES

"Do you use your wisdom to help others? Do you seek power for the greater good? Maybe you're an avenger, taking whatever action is necessary to aid those around you. Perhaps you're just in it for the prestige. Or the money. People are always in it for the money. As your choices move the Tides, your legacy will be revealed."

THE TIDES IN THE WORLD

Thanks to the actions and discoveries of those in the previous worlds, there are many strange and disparate forces at work in the Ninth World, some known and others still undiscovered. The Changing God discovered one set of these forces, which he named the Tides.

The Tides are a force like gravity or magnetism. They may be linked to the datasphere in some fashion, or they may be a part of an energy transference system controlled by thoughts, created in some prior world for a network of now-long-gone devices or processes. Even the Changing God does not know their origin. They are invisible, powerful, and, with the right knowledge and tools, even somewhat controllable. The Tides can have a strong influence on certain areas and aspects of the world, as well as on some of the numenera, creatures, and weather.

The understanding of these forces is incomplete and difficult to grasp, even by those few who've devoted their lives to studying such things. And they are a rare few indeed—the majority of people in the Ninth World are oblivious to the Tides; they are neither affected by the Tides nor aware of their existence. A small number of people are affected by the Tides, even if they're not aware of them. Others might be aware of the Tides, even if they're not affected by them. Only a very, very small number of people in the world are attuned to the Tides, which means that they are both aware of and affected by the Tides.

Changing God, page 14

THE FIVE TIDES

There are five known Tides, each of which represents an array of concepts that form a basic definition, and is described by a color. The colors are Blue, Red, Indigo, Gold, and Silver. The colors are important because a word like "justice" (for example) is too simplistic—colors help capture the Tides' associated concepts (in the same way that many people think of black as death or green as life), even if people have different names for the ideas. The Indigo Tide not only represents justice and fairness, it might also mean a desire for the greater good or an "end justifies the means" mentality. The

It seems likely that, for whatever reason, the Tides' range of influence does not extend much beyond the general area of Greater Garravia.

The Tides do not distinguish between good and evil. Within every Tide, there are heroes and villains, saints and sinners.

Although some of the Tides may seem directly opposed to each other, that is not inherently so. It's possible for someone to serve others (Gold) in a way that seeks fame for themselves (Silver), and so attain both Tides simultaneously. In fact, few characters will be the perfect embodiment of a single Tide. Most will be a combination.

Gold Tide can represent false philanthropy as well as martyrdom. The Tides Table provides a guideline for each of the Tides.

Of the people who are aware that such phenomena exist, the majority wouldn't call them Tides, nor would they define these complex forces by colors or by simple terms like "empathy" or "justice." They would have their own terms, based on their location, experiences, and culture.

Indigo Tide examples: *Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Moses, Joe McCarthy*

Tides Table, page 153

THE FIVE TIDES

Blue is the Tide of reason and knowledge, but also wisdom and spiritual insight. These might seem contradictory to some people, but to a character who personifies Blue, they are two sides of the same coin, an attempt to make something out of humanity that *matters*. It is the Tide of people whose goal is to expand the mind and the spirit (Western culture may compartmentalize these, but in many cultures they're the same thing). They seek wisdom or knowledge, and consider death a loss when it means a person's knowledge is lost forever. Characters who embody the Blue Tide can include scientists and mystics, philosophers and madmen.

Blue Tide examples: *Albert Einstein, Confucius, Nostradamus, Sherlock Holmes*

Gold Tide examples: *Mother Teresa, Andrew Carnegie, Erin Brockovich, Vito Corleone*

Red is the Tide of passion, emotion, action, and zeal. It is the Tide of people who live in the moment, who want to experience life to its fullest, or who choose to follow their heart wherever it leads them. They consider a life in chains to be worse than death (whether those chains are real or self-imposed metaphorical ones is immaterial). Red is about *doing* and *living*. Characters who embody the Red Tide can include artists, revolutionaries, zealots, hedonists, and charismatic dictators.

Red Tide examples: *Beethoven, Joan of Arc, Adolf Hitler, William Wallace*

Indigo is the Tide of justice, compromise, and the greater good. It is not just about law, but about a broader, more global perspective, rather than an individual one. It's about seeking the greater good, finding compromises that maximize benefit across the largest group of people, or using the ends to justify the means. The loss of life is considered tragic, but less so if it serves a better outcome. Characters who embody the Indigo Tide can include rulers, lawmakers, vigilantes, and tyrants.

Gold is the Tide of charity, sacrifice, and empathy. It is the Tide of people whose primary goal is to help others, especially at a cost to themselves. It's tempting to consider Gold the "good" Tide, but that's not strictly true. It is generally good—selflessness is at its core—but one can be selfless for selfish reasons. Gold does not care *who* you help or *why*, only that you show compassion and empathy. Gold is similar to the Indigo Tide in that both seek the good of others, but they can easily be in direct opposition concerning how that good is achieved and who should pay the price. Characters who embody the Gold Tide can include saints (both true or false), philanthropists, and even crime bosses who care for their people and their communities.

Silver is the Tide of admiration, power, and fame. It is the Tide of people who seek to influence the lives of others or who actively wish to be remembered. It can easily be seen as a selfish Tide, but that is a question of motivation that the Tides do not ask. Whether a Silver character is selfish or not is an ethical question that depends on how they use their prestige. Silver characters desire influence (whether through personal

Silver Tide examples: *Shakespeare, Cleopatra, Tutankhamen, Satan*

TIDES TABLE

Tide	Related Concepts	Increased When...	For Example...
Blue	Reason Wisdom Insight Logic Forethought Enlightenment Spirituality	...the character takes actions that show a love of knowledge, spiritual growth, or planning and forethought.	Goes out of the way to seek the numenera or identify their use. Uses reason or insight to talk their way out of a problem. Spends time learning or seeking spiritual wisdom.
Red	Passion Emotion Action Change Pathos Zeal	...the character takes actions based on emotions, or tries to experience life at its fullest.	Appeals to emotions to talk their way out of a problem. Fights their way through a problem. Creates a new device, weapon, or work of art.
Indigo	Justice Equity Community Society Utility The greater good Fairness Compromise	...the character's actions are focused on the greater good or a large-scale community perspective.	Offers a compromise between two warring parties. Convinces someone to risk their money or life for the sake of the greater good. Verbally justifies their actions by pointing at the results.
Gold	Empathy Philanthropy Charity Compassion Sacrifice Martyrdom	...the character takes actions that benefit others (regardless of who those others are, or whether the character receives an indirect benefit).	Aids a poor clave against an attack by raiders. Gives money or the numenera to someone and gets nothing in exchange. Spends time teaching their skills to others.
Silver	Influence Power Admiration Respect Adoration Prestige Renown Fame	...the character's actions increase their own reputation or their power in others' lives.	Lies so that people will respect or fear them. Volunteers for a task after hearing that it's impossible. Uses intimidation or their own reputation to bluff through a problem.

The Tides are not an alignment system. They don't give the characters guidelines within which to make choices and take action. In fact, Tides could be considered the opposite of an alignment system—by making choices and taking actions, the characters gain a stronger affiliation with a specific Tide or Tides.

interactions or the manipulation of the levers of power) and the immortality of being remembered. Characters who embody the Silver Tide are, above all, personalities.

THE TIDES IN THE GAME

Some people in the world are affected by the Tides in a unique way. For these people, their actions cause them to become aligned with one or more Tides. This Tidal affinity can give player characters unique advantages (or sometimes disadvantages) as they go about their activities. For example, a character who has a Silver Tidal affinity might find that their reputation precedes them, giving them benefits in social situations.

The Tides are nuanced, but they are not subjective. They have their own set of rules and objective parameters. Thus, a character doesn't have a Red Tidal affinity because they think they do; they have a Red Tidal affinity (or perhaps a different color entirely) because the Tides have deemed that the character's actions fit most closely with those concepts.

TIDAL POINTS AND TIDAL AFFINITY

In the game, the GM takes on the role of the Tides, deciding how a character's actions tie them to the Tides. During gameplay, characters are awarded Tidal points based on their actions. Each time a character gains a new tier, the GM adds up their Tidal points to determine their Tidal affinity. A character keeps that Tidal affinity until they level up again.

How to Award Tidal Points: When the GM deems that a character's Tidal points should be increased (see When to Award Tidal Points), the character gains 1 Tidal point for each appropriate color. The GM (or the player) should keep a record of a character's Tidal points during the game.

Each time a character gains a new tier, add up all their accumulated Tidal points. Whichever color (or colors) has the most points is the character's Tidal affinity for that tier. A Tidal affinity remains the same throughout each tier, no matter what actions the character takes within that tier.

For example: When Bresh becomes tier 2, her Tidal points are 3 Blue, 1 Gold, and 1

It's your choice as the GM to decide how much players know about how their characters' actions affect their Tides. Encouraging characters to act and speak as they normally would without regard for or knowledge of how it might affect their Tides keeps the game moving forward with a strong narrative. However, it's fine to share that information with players if you feel it will make a better gaming experience.

Red. That means that while she is tier 2, she will have a Blue Tidal affinity, because she has the most Blue points.

Due to her actions while she is tier 2, let's say Bresh earns the following Tidal points: 3 Red, 2 Gold, and 1 Silver. When she becomes tier 3, she now has 4 Red, 3 Blue, 3 Gold, and 1 Silver. This means that while she is tier 3, she will have a Red Tidal affinity, because she has the most Red points.

If a character has an equal number of Tidal points in two colors when they gain a new tier, they can have an affinity in both colors. For example, if Bresh becomes tier 4 with 5 Red, 5 Blue, 4 Gold, and 3 Silver points, she would have both a Red Tidal affinity and a Blue Tidal affinity for that tier. A character shouldn't have more than two Tidal affinities at a time, however, so if a character has equal points in three or more Tides when they gain a new tier, the GM should arbitrate.

Typically a tier 1 character has no Tidal affinity, because they have taken no in-game actions to earn Tidal points. However, the GM could choose to ask for detailed backstories on the characters and assign tier 1 characters a Tidal affinity based on those early actions. This works especially well for short campaigns where characters may not have time to gain a new tier.

When to Award Tidal Points: Tidal points should be awarded based on what the characters say or do, not on their reasons for doing it. The Tides judge people by their words and actions, not by their motivations. Thus, it's possible for someone to help the poor because they want to be admired, or for a ruthless conqueror to believe they are acting for the greater good.

This can be tricky in a group, where characters often make the choice to help the group even if it's not an action they believe in. In this case, if a character strongly advocates for a particular action—even if that's not the action that the group ends up taking—you might award them for trying to pursue that action, even if they failed in the end.

Ideally, a character is awarded Tidal points only when they must make a real choice or perform a great sacrifice. For example, although identifying a numenera device is a Blue thing to do, there's no gameplay reason for players *not* to do it, so that sort of common action wouldn't earn the player a Blue point. But if identifying or creating a particular device required the PC to make a sacrifice or a difficult, character-altering decision, that action could conceivably earn them a Blue Tidal point.

Note that what a PC says about their motivations or beliefs counts as actions and can be judged by the Tides, just as much as acting on those motivations and beliefs.

EXAMPLE SCENARIO
STOPPING THE RAIDERS

The PC comes across a poor clave that suffers from periodic attacks by a group of raiders. Assuming the character chooses to get involved, he might make a number of the following choices:

He offers to help the people of the clave. (+Gold, +Indigo)

He heads to the raiders' camp to fight them at the source. (+Red)

He gives the people an artifact so they can defend themselves. (+Blue)

He teaches members of the clave to fight, establishing a local defense militia. (+Blue, + Indigo)

He travels to the raiders' camp and sees they are just as poor as the clave. He begs both sides to come to a compromise that will help everybody. (+Gold, + Red)

He comes up with the compromise himself. (+Indigo)

He threatens the raiders and convinces them not to come back. (+Silver)

He offers his services to the raiders if they agree not to attack the clave. (+Blue, +Indigo)

Using Tides can add a lot of depth and complexity to a game, but also places additional demands on the GM. It would be fair to consider the Tides a somewhat advanced rules option; thus, they're probably best undertaken by a game master who's already intimately familiar with the rules and comfortable running the game.

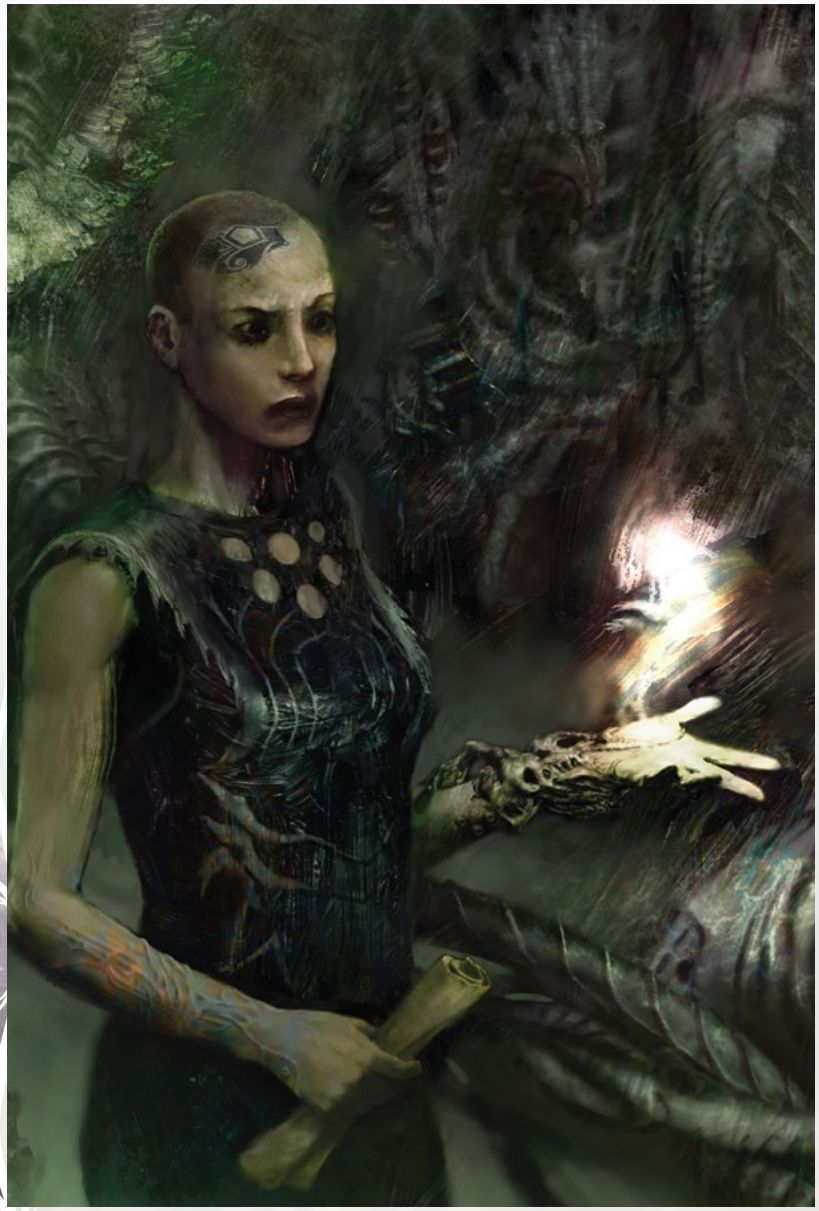
When the clave promises to tell everyone what he's done, he insists that they include some detail (for example, "Make sure you spell my name with two Fs"). (+Silver)

After looting the clave, he threatens to do the same to the raiders. (+Silver)

After looting the clave, he tells the raiders this is his territory now and they have to leave. (+Indigo)

After looting the clave, he attacks the raiders and loots them as well. (+Red)

Additional Tips: Typically, Tidal points should only increase, not decrease. When a player chooses a Gold action and earns Gold points, it doesn't take away the Silver and Blue points they previously earned.



A character's choices can increase one or two Tides at the same time, but typically no more than that. Sometimes a choice could apply equally to more than two Tides. This is okay (and even expected, given the abstract nature of the Tides). In these cases, use your best judgment as the GM about which two Tides should be increased.

Most of the time, Tidal points are awarded to an individual character for what they say or do, rather than to a group of characters for a group action.

HOW THE TIDES AFFECT PLAYERS

Having a Tidal affinity can provide a number of benefits to characters.

Interactions: Affected or attuned NPCs can be aligned with one or two Tides, in much the same way that player characters can have Tidal affinities. This can come into play in a variety of ways. If the PC's Tidal affinity matches the dominant Tide or Tides of an NPC, that NPC is more receptive to interacting with the PC. They might like the character more (even if they don't understand why) or might be more easily deceived, persuaded to do something, or intimidated into action. This connection gives the PC an asset on all interaction tasks with that NPC.

Reputation: A Tidal affiliation also works as a type of reputation, even on an NPC who isn't aware of the Tides. If someone has heard of the PC, the Tides might affect *how* they've heard of them. This reputation could open doors to new opportunities—or close them tight. A character with a Silver Tidal affinity might have a reputation as something of a celebrity. It's possible they will be invited to places others wouldn't—or they might be refused entry to an under-the-radar group or establishment due to fear of exposure.

Special Effects: A PC's Tidal affinity can add a major special effect to their action when they are successful, but didn't roll a 20. A character attempting a task related to their Tidal affinity can choose to get a major special effect as if they rolled a 20 (but only when the action is successful).

PART 5:

BACK MATTER

Common Slang of the Sagus Protectorate 158

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COMMON SLANG OF THE SAGUS PROTECTORATE

By the Black Three: A common oath or prayer. The name refers to Kalaghat Anvor, Vostuleh Lo, and Ogesti tel Kotu, the three most feared leaders of the former army known as the Tabaht.

Cark: To disturb or make uneasy. "That glowing ball carks me" or "It's giving me the carks." Also, "carker," an insane person, one who has been cypher-poisoned.

Chagan: A low-level gang warlord. "The chagan here kicks up his take to the Memovira."

Creft: Junk.

Draff: Dregs. Sometimes used by the upper class to refer to lower classes or places. "You want to go down and mingle with the draff?"

Gallowglass: A term mostly used by law enforcement to talk about mercenaries. "That gallowglass Tybir is back in town. Time to corral that laak-nibber!"

Laak-nibber: Epithet similar to "son of a bitch." Most common among the lower classes.

Plod: Hard work. Also used as "plodder," to mean someone who has a hard or boring job.

Scholarch (also empiriarch): Headmaster, librarian, or lead-reader. "If you seek answers, ask for the empiriarch at the library."

Shine: Good, great, admirable. Also a term for comprehension among the lower classes. "You shine what I say?"

Shukkered: Stabbed. "Interrupting a chat's a good way to get shukkered down here."

Skist: Epithet similar to "shit." "What a load of skist wafts from your tongue, friend."

Spiderjack: Thief. "You want to pull the job right, you'll need a spiderjack to get you in."

Tert: Territory. "That's the Memovira's tert, friend. You don't want to go there."

Tulk: Runoff, infectious ooze from human/machine interface.

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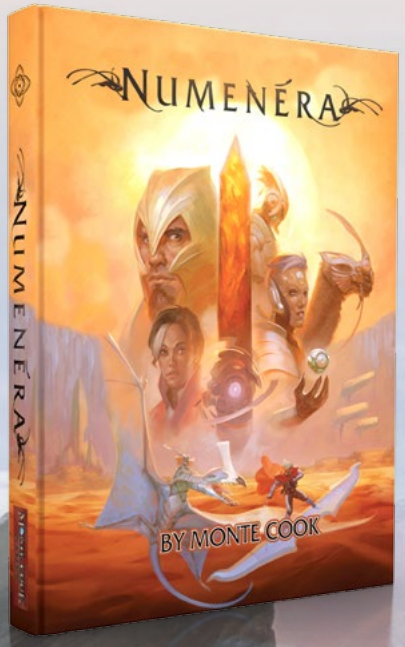
NUMENÉRA



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