

SECOND EDITION

PATHFINDER®

Strength of Thousands

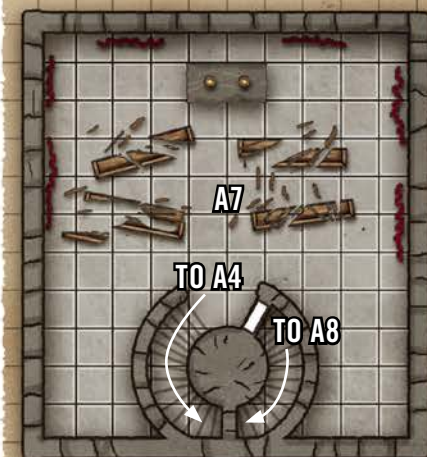
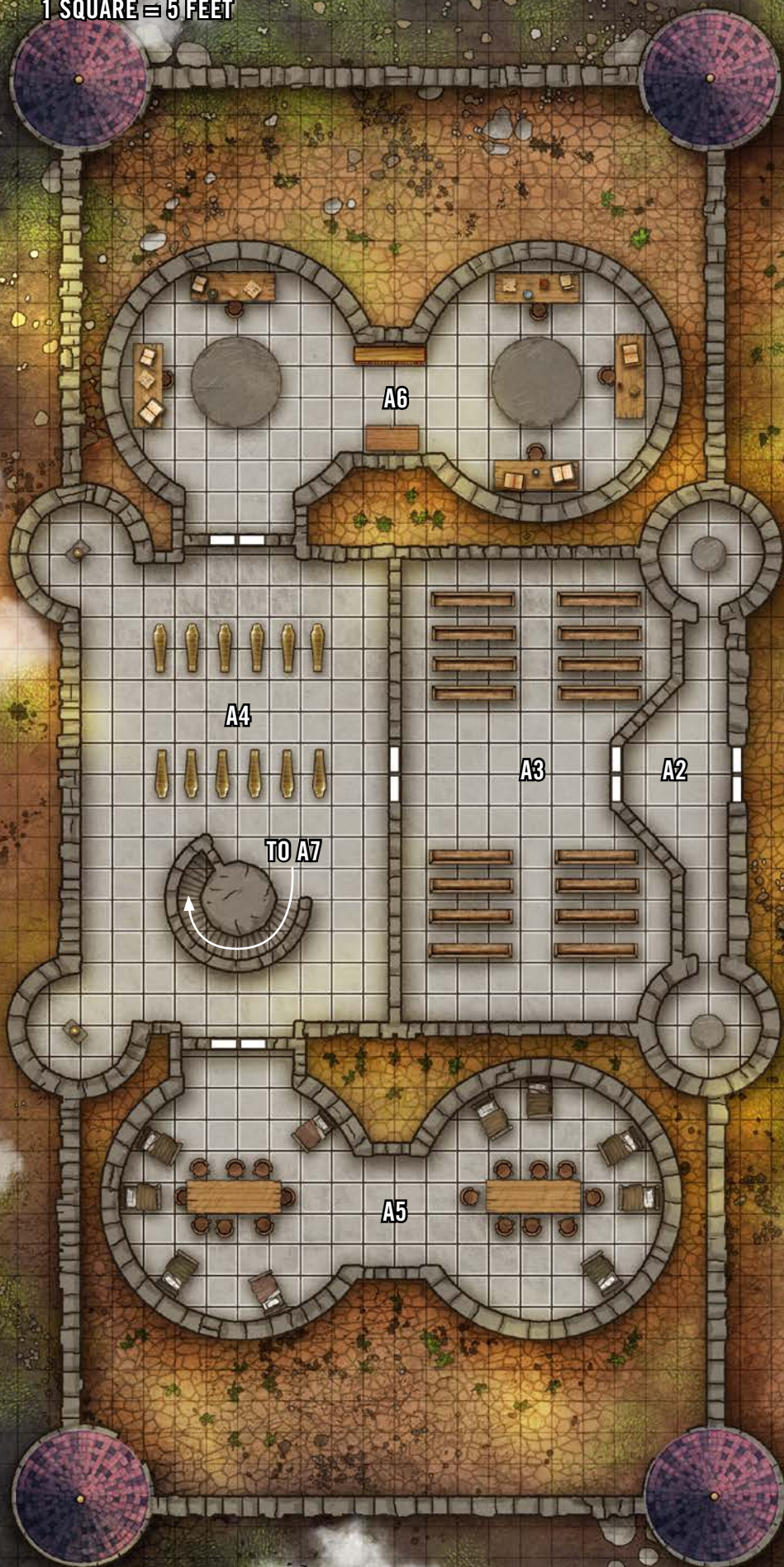
ADVENTURE PATH

DOORWAY TO THE RED STAR

By Michael Sayre

CATHEDRAL OF NOTHINGNESS

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



PATHFINDER

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DOORWAY TO THE RED STAR

Chapter 1: Pranksters and Preparations.....4

In this fifth installment of the Strength of Thousands Adventure Path, the heroes prepare for their expedition to the plaza of the Doorway to the Red Star during another semester at school. At the end of the semester, the expedition sets off.

Chapter 2: Beyond the Door34

After negotiating with the Iobane who guard the plaza, and cleaning up the undead remnants of an ancient cult known as the Throat-of-Nothingness, the heroes pass through the doorway and emerge in the Hall of Reason on Akiton. In the Hall of Reason, the heroes discover that the Contemplatives of Ashok are besieged by extraplanar invaders, forcing the heroes to aid the Contemplatives before they can move forward.

Chapter 3: Thousands and Thousands54

With the Hall of Reason secured, the heroes are directed to the Akitonian town of Seldo, where they can secure the technology needed to board the King of Biting Ants' airship, the *Mandibles of Fate*, but only by dealing with two bickering criminals. The heroes then race across the Akitonian wastes on their newly acquired sand racers in pursuit of the *Mandibles of Fate*, dodging or battling deadly creatures and traps along the way. Finally, the heroes board the airship, where they must first free Old-Mage Jatembe and then face the King of Biting Ants in this adventure's ultimate battle.

SOUL CAGES

Starting with the lich Dwandek in this adventure, we're making a long-overdue terminology change. The use of the word "phylactery" as the item in which a lich stores their soul is both inaccurate and inappropriate given the evil nature of lichs and the word's connotation with real-world religious practices. Instead, lichs in Pathfinder Second Edition store their souls in objects called *soul cages*—an act that lichs see as an ultimate act of defiance against the cycle of life and death. Lichs consider their souls not as things to cherish, but as weaknesses that, once locked away in a cage, allow for eternal undeath.

Apart from this change in name, the mechanics for how lichs function remain unaltered.

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ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"Doorway to the Red Star" is designed for four characters.

- 15** The heroes begin this adventure at 15th level.
- 16** The heroes should be 16th level when they pass through the Doorway to the Red Star.
- 17** The heroes should be 17th level when they begin their race across Akiton toward the *Mandibles of Fate*.

The heroes should reach 18th level by the end of the adventure.

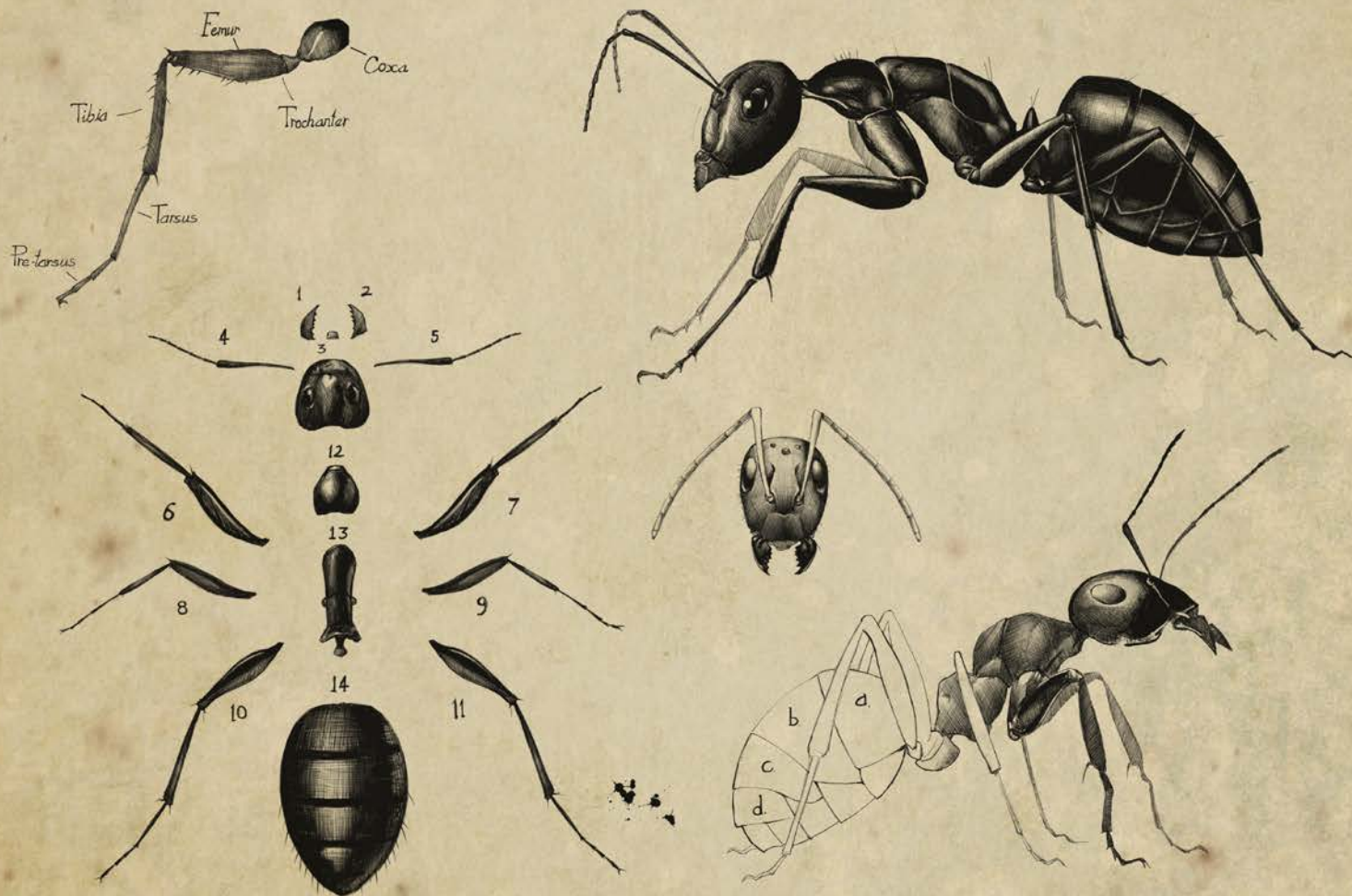


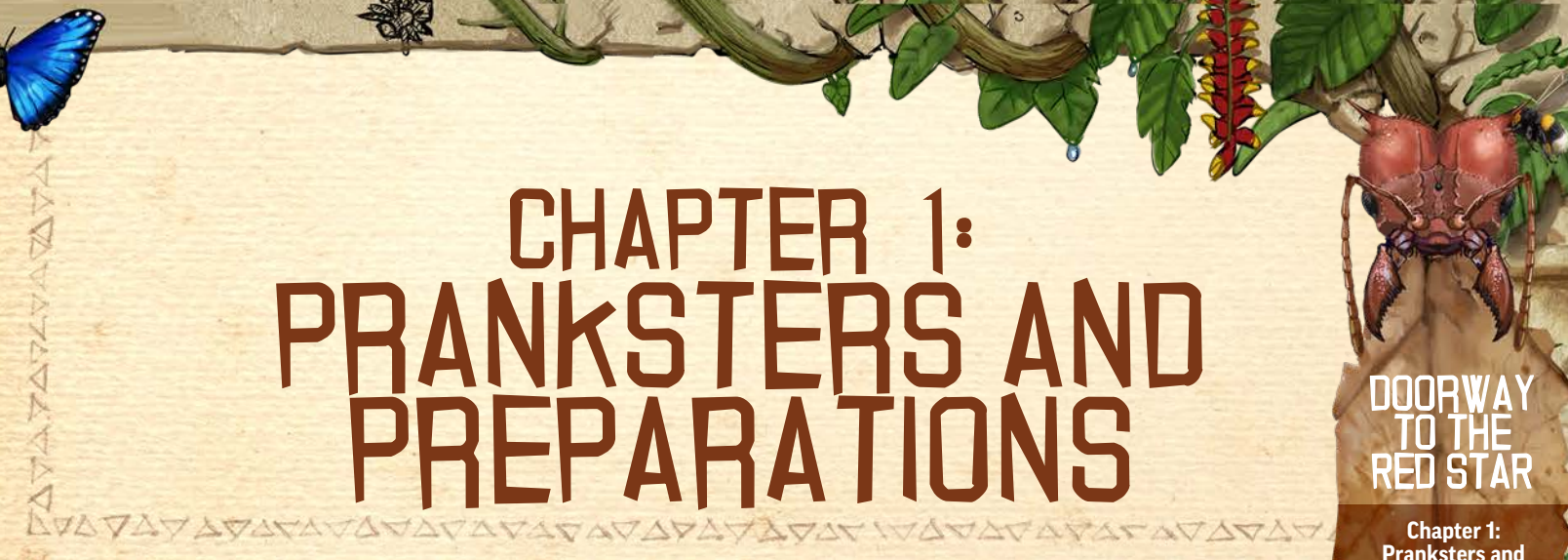
Is annihilation the ultimate goal? The fools in the Throat-of-Nothingness think so. To hear them preach their grim words, "entropy is the end state, and nothingness all the universe promises." But they don't live up to their own words. Their leaders have embraced undeath, as though to prove the truth of their philosophy, but the most cunning among them seek another state of being as far removed from undeath as they now stand from the living. It's another progression to them, and not a progression toward nonexistence. They are as much liars as they are buffoons.

I have seen a better, clearer vision of their path. Not a path that pays lip service to esoteric concepts like oblivion, but a path that seizes immortality just as effectively as undeath. Lichdom is too simple. I can do better.

Marvel at the insignificant ant, for instance; a creature that is singly so preposterously weak that its death is no more significant than the fall of a leaf or the whisper of the breeze it drifted down on. If the Throat-of-Nothingness truly seeks nothingness, it would do good to look at the ant. Yet one ant is part of a great hive, and together the hive can claim undisputed mastery over their domain, strip flesh to bone, and raise mighty earthworks.

It is within the ants, not the void, that true power lies.





CHAPTER 1: PRANKSTERS AND PREPARATIONS

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In the previous adventure, the heroes befriended the ancient arboreal Dimari-Diji, who informed them that Old-Mage Jatembe was currently on Akiton, beyond the Doorway to the Red Star. The arboreal believes that Jatembe would be eager to meet them and idly observes that it's been longer than expected since Jatembe has returned to Golarion—perhaps something serious has taken his attention and he needs assistance. While this assessment isn't likely to send the heroes racing to Akiton, it should pique their curiosity; their impetus to meet the legendary founder of the Magaambya should nonetheless spur them to action. Even if the heroes are eager to immediately travel to the Doorway to the Red Star, two things stand in the way of such a swift development.

First, there's the matter of the heroes' responsibilities as teachers at the Magaambya. A new academic semester is about to begin, and they are expected to teach at the school for these 3 months.

More significantly, even a cursory look into the school's records about Akiton and the Doorway to the Red Star reveals that the portal doesn't always function. It can offer transport between Golarion and Akiton only when the two planets are in a proper alignment, which occurs only a couple of times each year. This alignment is based on a complex combination of the two planets' physical locations in the solar system, the ebb and rise of regional magical energies around both sides of the portal, and other occult factors. As it works out, the next window for using the Doorway to the Red Star opens not long after the upcoming semester ends, giving the heroes not only time to meet their responsibilities, but to organize a new expedition to the infamous ruins.

A New Semester

The new academic semester plays out in downtime mode. During this semester, the players have significant freedom to decide how to spend their time and efforts, in addition to preparing for their expedition to the Doorway to the Red Star. They might even choose to put off the expedition even longer. This downtime can become monotonous if you simply have the players roll checks until they've completed all the research activities. Make sure the players know that their characters have other opportunities during this time, such as Crafting new weapons or equipment, Earning Income, or Learning a Spell. Keep in mind, however, they can't increase their branch levels using the academic downtime system while teaching, as this requires Practical Research in the field—another thing that should encourage them to prepare to visit the Doorway to the Red Star sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 1 SYNOPSIS

In this chapter, the heroes learn more about Akiton and the Doorway to the Red Star, but they must first tend to their duties as teachers. They also can aid their fellow teachers in some important tasks. Once they set off to the Doorway to the Red Star, they find it is guarded by the lobane, an ancient order of protectors that struggles against undead forces within the ruined complex around the portal. Vanquishing the undead earns the heroes the right to use the Doorway to the Red Star and visit Akiton.

CHAPTER 1 TREASURE

The permanent and consumable items available as treasure in Chapter 1 are as follows.

- +2 weapon potency rune
- boots of speed
- demilich eye gem (maze)
- demilich eye gem (polar ray)
- diadem of intellect
- gorget of the primal roar
- greater clandestine cloak
- greater striking rune
- *Grimoire of Unknown Necessities* (page 77)
- hawk boat feather token (page 14)
- orange prism aeon stone
- ring of wizardry type IV
- Spellcutter (page 76)
- wand of inexhaustible cynicism (*Secrets of Magic* 111)
- Wyrms Drinker (page 75)

To keep the game flowing at an enjoyable pace while still allowing time for roleplay and creative problem-solving, run the 3 months of downtime in 2-week increments. The heroes should engage in the research below, and after each 2-week increment, run one of the events detailed starting on page 8. These events can be played in any order, and the heroes aren't required (or even expected) to complete all of them. Since each encounter features a key member of the Magaambya's faculty, you might ask the players which faculty member they'd like to check in with

between weeks, using their answers to determine which event takes place.

PREPARATORY RESEARCH

During the 3-month semester of downtime, the heroes can spend a 2-week increment researching one of several topics in preparation for their expedition to the Doorway to the Red Star. If the heroes don't come up with the idea of researching one of the following topics on their own, you can have an NPC the group's fond of suggest it.

Once the heroes start to prepare for the expedition to the Doorway to the Red Star, word spreads quickly. Some of the heroes' allies approach them with questions and offers of advice; this adventure assumes that the primary source of information and assistance comes from **Ahassunu** (N female iruxi diplomat 12). At the very least, the heroes should learn from Ahassunu that, as the legends state, the doorway itself becomes active only a few times a year, and that the heroes should pinpoint when the next predicted activation period will be.

Beyond this, Ahassunu can offer the heroes a few more places to start their research. She points out that the area around the Doorway is currently under the protection of dedicated guards called the Iobane, and to reach the doorway in the first place, the heroes need the support of those Zenj magi. Preparing a proper gift for them would be a step in the right direction—since they're a culture of warriors and spellcasters, gifts of magic staves or magic weapons are a good idea.

Ahassunu warns, though, that recently, for reasons on which no one is quite clear, the Iobane have taken a dim view of the Magaambya, which may complicate attempts to reestablish diplomatic relations with the Iobane. If the heroes manage to do so, they'll not only secure access to the Doorway to the Red Star, but rebuild a damaged relationship in the process.

The following research topics use the research rules starting on page 154 of the *Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide*.

DOORWAY TO THE RED STAR

Maximum RP 2

Research Checks DC 34 Academia Lore or Library Lore, DC 36 Religion

1 Research Point The area around the Doorway to the Red Star has been a source of conflict during many ages and generations. Whether it is something tied to the history or magic of the doorway—



or simple coincidence—is unclear, but evil threats inevitably arise, and only the intervention of heroes like the Ten Magic Warriors ever marks a return to peace in the area. The last great evil to lay claim to the doorway was a nihilistic cult known as the Throat-of-Nothingness. Little is known of the cult, for its members share their religious beliefs only with converts. Since conversion typically involves transformation into an undead creature, few spies have been successful in infiltrating their ranks and returning. This research confirms that the doorway can open only once or twice each year (during which time, it remains potentially active for about a month), but also that it hasn't been opened in decades. The next window of potential activity is not long after this new semester is scheduled to end.

- 2 Research Points** Before the lobane defeated most of its members and trapped the remaining members inside the cult's cathedral, the Throat-of-Nothingness gained and held control of the Doorway to the Red Star for several years. During this time, the cathedral became a recruitment center, drawing those who sought nothingness and held entropy supreme. Those who passed the cult's tests and impressed its leaders were transformed into undead, and the rarest and most honored of these converts are said to have passed through the Doorway to the Red Star. Given that none of the cult's leaders are known to have ever passed through the Doorway, it's unclear if this honor was truly what it was presented to be, or merely a cruel and sinister trick to rid the cult of threats to its leadership's supremacy. In any event, while the cult still controls the Cathedral of Nothingness itself, it hasn't been active in the surrounding region for years.

THE IOBANE

Maximum RP 2

Research Checks DC 25 Academia Lore or Library Lore, DC 27 Arcana

- 1 Research Point** The lobane are a sect of Zenj magi who can trace their lineage back to the Ten Magic Warriors who, alongside Jatembe, fought against the King of Biting Ants and other threats to Golarion. They place significant value on items once owned by any of the Ten Magic Warriors, or items that present additional information about these fabled warriors.
- 2 Research Points** The lobane currently guarding the plaza around the Doorway to the Red Star are led by Warder-Chief Mpondo, who has a well-known reputation for being stern but fair. Those who seek to study or pass through the Doorway to the Red Star are wise to respect Warder-Chief Mpondo by using his full title when addressing him and avoiding speaking ill of any of the Zenj.

INTERPLANETARY TELEPORTATION

Teleport, when heightened to 9th level, allows for interplanetary travel. It's unlikely that 15th-level characters have access to a 9th-level *teleport* spell, but that doesn't mean players who know of this option won't try to gain access to such magic. If you're comfortable with letting them circumvent the Doorway to the Red Star and use *teleport* heightened to 9th level to travel to Akiton instead, you'll want to design replacement encounters for those that would have taken place in the Cathedral of Nothingness and the Hall of Reason, perhaps covering the heroes' adventures on Akiton as they navigate from their landing spot (which should be 100 miles off target from their goal) to track down clues that eventually lead them to seek the town of Seldo.

Once the heroes reach 17th level at the end of the adventure, though, allowing them to use a 9th-level *teleport* spell to come and go between Akiton and Golarion is a great way for the heroes to feel like they've grown more powerful, with the ability to travel between planets now something that's completely under their own control!

KING OF BITING ANTS

Maximum RP 2

Research Checks DC 32 Academia Lore or Library Lore, DC 34 Occultism

- 1 Research Point** The King of Biting Ants was an ancient sorcerer whose body was said to comprise countless poisonous ants. His evil magics threatened the peace and freedom of the people of the Mwangi Expanse until Jatembe and the Ten Magic Warriors defeated him at his stronghold, the Doorway to the Red Star, thousands of years ago.
- 2 Research Points** Many stories claim that Jatembe destroyed the King of Biting Ants. Others indicate that he drove the vile sorcerer back through the Doorway to the Red Star. The truth might be a mixture of the tales. Documents attributed to the first descendants of the Ten Magic Warriors refer to the "infinite eggs" that granted the King of Biting Ants a strange form of immortality even in the face of utter destruction. What these infinite eggs truly were, and whether they survived the King of Biting Ants' defeat at Jatembe's hands, remains unknown.

XP Award: When the heroes fully research one of the three topics presented here, grant them 30 XP (to a maximum award of 90 XP if they fully research all three topics).

DOORWAY TO THE RED STAR

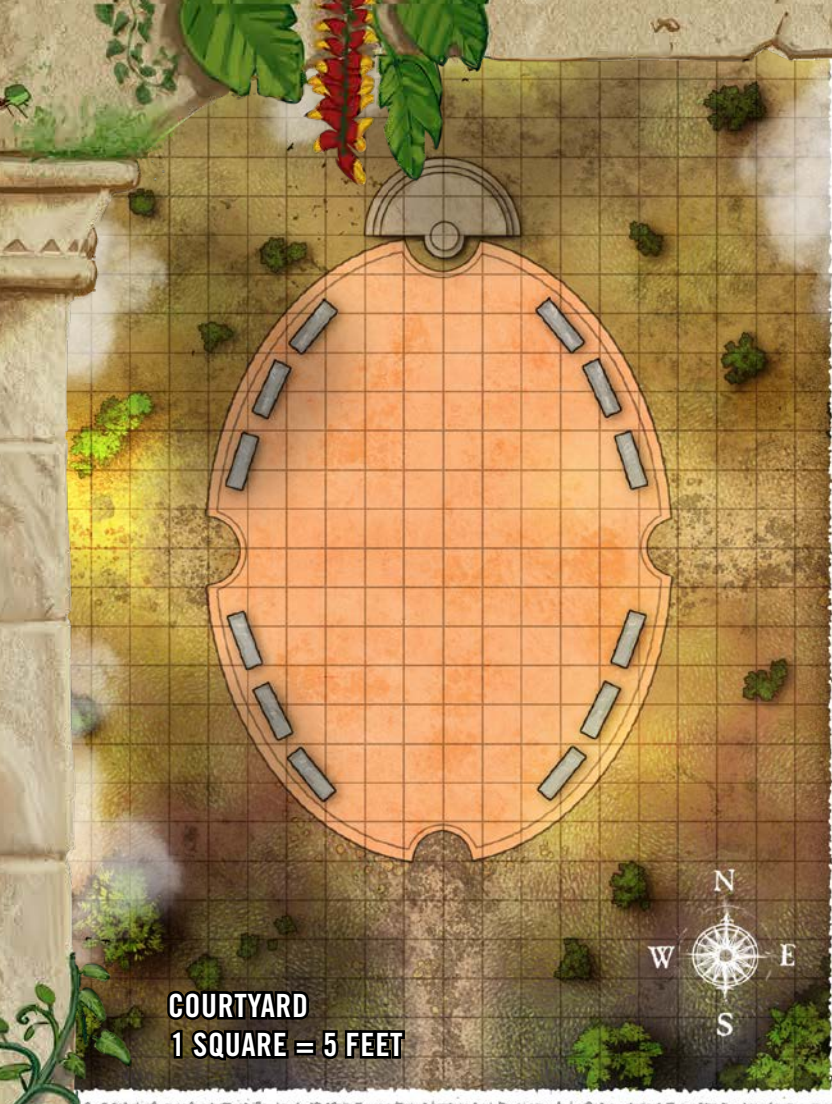
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EVENT 1: A DIPLOMATIC DILEMMA

LOW 15

As a specialist in the field of diplomatic history and relations, Ahassunu often represents the Magaambya's interests in sensitive negotiations with powerful visitors or foreign diplomats. She is currently involved in one such negotiation with a sovereign dragon named Raido-Kan. The dragon has come to the Magaambya seeking the return of a treasure that he claims was stolen from him by a group of adventurers, and which he believes was ultimately sold to the Magaambya. The treasure is a portion of a bejeweled scepter, broken at both ends but still stunning in its artistry and worth a small fortune alone for the precious gems that adorn it. Raido-Kan has traveled to the Magaambya from the distant continent of Tian Xia in search of this shattered scepter and insists he won't leave without it.

The details of Raido-Kan's claim are mostly accurate. A group of adventurers did infiltrate the dragon's lair and steal the broken scepter from Raido-Kan's hoard, but they didn't sell it to the Magaambya, they handed it over to them. Unbeknownst to Raido-Kan, the Magaambya contracted and funded the theft in the first place!

Before it shattered, this scepter was a dangerous artifact known as the *Soulkeeping Scepter*, a weapon that could consign mortal souls to unwarranted eternal punishment in the afterlife. For centuries, the Magaambya kept the *Soulkeeping Scepter* under lock and key to keep it from falling into the wrong hands. One day, after an attempt to destroy the artifact only partially succeeded—the *Soulkeeping Scepter* split into three fragments and each section was hurled away across the world to parts unknown.

When the Magaambya discovered that the central fragment of the *Soulkeeping Scepter* had come into Raido-Kan's possession, they hired a group of adventurers to retrieve it, as even shattered into three parts, the school remains concerned about the harm the artifact could cause if someone were able to repair it. Raido-Kan knows the truth of the *Soulkeeping Scepter*'s dangerous abilities, and even shares the Magaambya's concern, but he has a very different idea of who should watch after the artifact. He believes that the central section fell into his care for a reason, and he is the chosen guardian of the fragment. Ahassunu relays this information to the heroes, and requests their assistance in negotiating with Raido-Kan.

The Negotiation: Ahassunu arranges a meeting with Raido-Kan in one of the Magaambya's courtyards during the early evening. The courtyard is well-lit, but more importantly, it is unoccupied and magically reinforced with spells designed to prevent magical experiments from causing unintended damage. Use the map on this page for this encounter.

Raido-Kan presents a tricky situation. The dragon is not evil, and his claim to the scepter fragment is not entirely illegitimate. However, he is a proud and arrogant creature, and Ahassunu worries that the dragon might not be up to the task of preventing a group of evildoers from stealing the scepter fragment if one were ever to invade his lair. Given that the scepters has already been stolen from him once, the Magaambya has decided that Raido-Kan isn't capable of keeping the scepter fragment safe. Ahassunu holds out hope that the dragon can be reasoned with.

Ahassunu has already laid much of the groundwork for these negotiations and stands ready to assist the heroes. Her help grants the heroes a +1 circumstance bonus on checks made to Make an Impression on Raido-Kan or make a Request of the dragon.

In addition to being arrogant and proud, Raido-Kan is impatient at times. He starts the negotiations with an indifferent attitude toward the heroes. Every 5 minutes the negotiation continues, his attitude decreases one step toward hostile. He must be made friendly or helpful before the heroes can attempt to Request



that the *Soulkeeping Scepter* remain in Magaambyan custody. If at any point during the negotiation the heroes tell him outright that there's no way that the Magaambya intends on returning the fragment to him, he becomes hostile immediately.

Attempts to Make an Impression to improve Raido-Kan's attitude require a successful DC 36 Diplomacy check. Requests for his understanding require a successful DC 36 Diplomacy check. Should the heroes go against Ahassunu's advice and try to Coerce Raido-Kan into leaving without the scepter fragment, these attempts require a DC 41 Intimidation check, but require a critical success to convince him to leave (a regular success has no result, but doesn't immediately degrade the dragon's attitude).

Creature: Raido-Kan attacks out of frustration and anger if his attitude becomes hostile. In such a case, Ahassunu retreats to call for backup in case the dragon escapes or defeats the heroes. Raido-Kan fights ferociously in combat, but if reduced to fewer than 50 HP, he spews frustrated insults at the heroes as he flees the battle to nurse his wounds. Whether or not he returns at a later date to attempt other methods at retrieving the scepter fragment is left to you.

RAIDO-KAN

CREATURE 16

Male elite adult sovereign dragon (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 36, 82)

Initiative Perception +31

Treasure: If the heroes successfully convince Raido-Kan to leave without resorting to violence, Ahassunu thanks them profusely for their assistance and awards them with a *gorget of the primal roar*. While this isn't a particularly impressive piece of magical equipment for a 15th-level party, this particular gorget has one unique thing going for it: the Magaambya can trace ownership of the gorget back to Carmine Jaws, one of Jatembe's Ten Magic Warriors, and as such, it functions well as a gift for the Iobane guardians of the Doorway to the Red Star (page 19). Ahassunu provides a copy of the Magaambya's records pertaining to the gorget as well, telling the heroes that their feats of diplomacy were worthy of someone trained by Jatembe himself.

If the heroes are forced into battle against Raido-Kan, Ahassunu is still impressed with their accomplishment and grateful for their assistance, but can't help but be disappointed that the heroes couldn't find another way to resolve the situation.

XP Award: If the heroes manage to achieve a peaceful solution to this diplomatic problem, grant them 80 XP as if they had defeated Raido-Kan in combat.

EVENT 2: DISRUPTIVE ADMIRERS

Izem Mezitani (NG male aasimar human archaeologist 14) specializes in exploration and archaeology but is an expert in many fields. A somewhat controversial figure, Izem has nearly as many doctorates from prestigious universities as he has outstanding arrest warrants from places as far as Corentyn and Thronestep. If the heroes



Raido-Kan

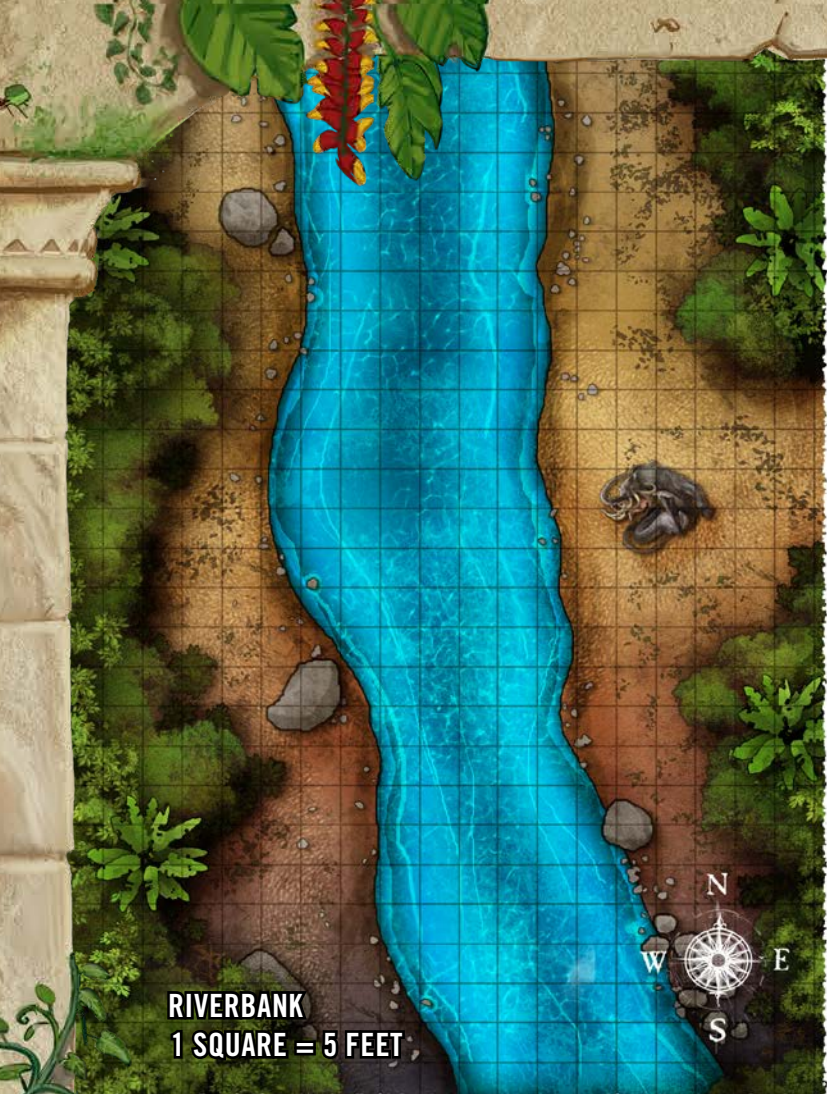
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haven't already invited him on the expedition, he's very likely to bring up the possibility of joining them as soon as he runs into them. He doesn't intend to get in the heroes' way; he has some independent research he wants to undertake in the ruined complex around the Doorway to the Red Star.

But joining the heroes on their expedition isn't the only thing on Izem's mind. Izem is certain that someone has been following him since the group's return from Mzali in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #172: Secrets of the Temple-City*. He believes that whoever it is has also been sneaking into his home while he's not there and rifling through his things. He's worried it might be a bounty hunter or assassin, and hopes to enlist the heroes in helping him determine the invader's identity—and perhaps dissuading them from their mission, if Izem's suspicions are correct.

Izem's plan is straightforward: while he's teaching his next class, he'd like the heroes to hide in his apartment and wait for a few hours see if anyone enters. If someone shows up, Izem wants the heroes to confront them, determine what they're after, and find out what it will take to get them to leave Izem alone.

Creatures: If the heroes agree to assist Izem with his plan, he shows them to his home. Spacious and nearly palatial, Izem's apartment has plentiful side rooms and receiving areas where the heroes can lie in wait undetected. Give the heroes some time to choose hiding spots, or perhaps set up alarms or traps.

The heroes won't need to wait long before they have proof of Izem's fears, but they might not expect the truth when it flutters in, glittering and giggling.

Among Izem's countless admirers is a small group of pixies that has been stalking him for months. Lately, these six admirers have been sneaking into his home to frolic and play among his belongings. If the heroes merely watch, the pixies fool around for about an hour before making a half-hearted attempt (poorly) to restore the room to its previous state to cover their tracks before they flutter away.

If the heroes confront the pixies, the fey drop to their knees in terror and shame. They know who the heroes are, and they're mortified both that they've been caught and that their secret admiration for Izem might now come out. The pixies fly away if the heroes attack, fleeing the school forever (and thus solving Izem's latest problem), but a more kindhearted group of heroes might try to work out a more amicable approach. This encounter is meant to give the heroes a chance for some fun roleplaying, after all, not a fight!

PIXIES (6)

CREATURE 4

Pathfinder Bestiary 309

Initiative Perception +12

Aftermath: Izem is at first shocked by the heroes report, and then ultimately amused once they inform him of the nature of his intruders. If the heroes frightened the pixies off, Izem thanks the heroes but is a bit disappointed that he wasn't able to meet his admirers. If the heroes managed to convince the pixies to meet Izem, though, the flamboyant archaeologist and the pixies begin what could become a new story in the man's colorful reputation, with the pixies becoming regular fixtures at his lectures.

XP Award: If the heroes manage to roleplay a way to solve this problem without killing or scaring the pixies off, grant them 30 XP.

EVENT 3: AN IMPROMPTU FIELD TRIP LOW 15

Koride Ulawa (CN female human naturalist 16) has made a study of the interactions between insects and various magical influences on different ecologies. She's well-known for mixing this highly specialized field of study with one of her hobbies, amateur forensics, and occasionally gives fascinating lectures on subjects such



as determining the time since a creature's demise based on maggot growth on its corpse, or detailing what kinds of insects might be used to destroy evidence of murder.

Koride reaches out to the heroes because she is looking for chaperones to accompany her entomology class on an impromptu and potentially risky field trip to observe her theories in the field, but on a much grander scale than the norm. She's heard that an immense jungle monster—a grootslang—recently perished along the bank of a minor river not far from Nantambu. Koride also hopes to mount a short expedition to the grootslang's body to study the behavior of some oversized insects as they feed on the supernatural creature's flesh.

River Journey: Koride leads the heroes and her class up a narrow, winding river into the jungle, just a few miles from the outskirts of Nantambu. The dense undergrowth and large trees make movement difficult, and all squares of land in the area are difficult terrain for Medium or smaller creatures, so Koride has arranged for a barge for transport. The trip up the river has almost a celebratory atmosphere as the students enjoy the fresh air and change of scenery.

As the barge draws near to the destination, the sickly scent of decaying flesh and the telltale sound of buzzing insects grows more apparent, and then, after a tight turn in the river, the grootslang carcass comes into view. The monster lies on the riverbank, 60 feet of decaying flesh swarming with giant flies. The sight of dozens of pony-sized flies (and an equal number of oversized maggots) crawling over the carcass fills Koride with delight, but the reality of that much decay catches the students by surprise, and their excitement about the field trip quickly diminishes.

As the class gets to work observing the body, the heroes are free to help make observations if they wish. With a successful DC 32 Academia Lore or Nature check, they can provide some helpful insight into the nature of the scene and earn an approving nod from Koride. About 20 minutes into the examination of the scene, however, a thunderous trumpeting roar and a surge of water from upstream brings the trip to a sudden halt: a living grootslang has arrived on the scene, hoping to find and claim any treasures its dead rival might have.

Use the Riverbank map on page 10 for this encounter.

Creature: The living grootslang bellows as it rises from the river, claiming the remains and ordering everyone to bow before it. Should the heroes do so, the grootslang chortles in delight as it starts to eat students, cackling about its good fortune to have simpleminded prey.

It's much more likely that Koride and the students panic and scatter into the jungle or attempt to flee

downriver on the boat, leaving the heroes to face the jealous monster alone.

GROOTSLANG

CREATURE 16

Lost Omens The Mwangi Expanse 298

Initiative Perception +28

EVENT 4: ASSISTANT SUMMONER DUTY

Lesedi (CG female elf summoner 13) specializes in extraplanar creatures and portals. She can be a great aid to heroes hoping to study or learn more about the Doorway to the Red Star, as portals to strange or dangerous areas are her specialty, but her knowledge of Akiton is limited. She opines that space travel would have been a superior method to reach the Red Planet had the nascent spacefaring technology of the nation of Lirgen not been destroyed a century ago by the Eye of Abendego.

Yet Lesedi has use for the heroes, even if she can't provide them much aid in their upcoming expedition. Lesedi asks the heroes to act as assistants in her advanced summoning class. For this lesson, Lesedi hopes to show the class a conjuration ritual in progress, including its results. Since she can't fit an entire day's worth of a *planar binding* or a similar ritual in a single class session, though, she asks the heroes to come to Tireless Hall and start the ritual early, behind a curtain on the lecture hall's stage. Her plan is to start the class when the heroes have an hour left in the 8 hours needed to perform the ritual, spend 45 minutes of the class summarizing the ritual's procedure, and then part the curtain (which is treated with sound-baffling magic so her lecture doesn't interfere with the heroes' ritual work) to allow the class to watch the final 15 minutes of the ritual being performed by the heroes.

Lesedi's plan is to have the heroes use *planar binding* to conjure a lillend azata, and then request the azata to perform a short concert of haunting Elysian music. She can teach the ritual to the heroes if needed (and approaches them with plenty of time before the day of her class to do so). She provides the cost for the ritual out of her class's budget. She doesn't expect the heroes to take the extra time to craft a warding diagram, as she assumes that asking a task of a friendly lillend won't require resorting to such extremes.

On the day of the class, when the curtain rises during the final moments of the heroes' ritual casting, they all attempt their secondary and then their primary checks to cast the ritual. If they're successful and the lillend appears, the azata is amused at why they've been called, but they're nonetheless delighted to be on stage. The heroes need to Request the impromptu concert from the lillend with a successful DC 26 Diplomacy

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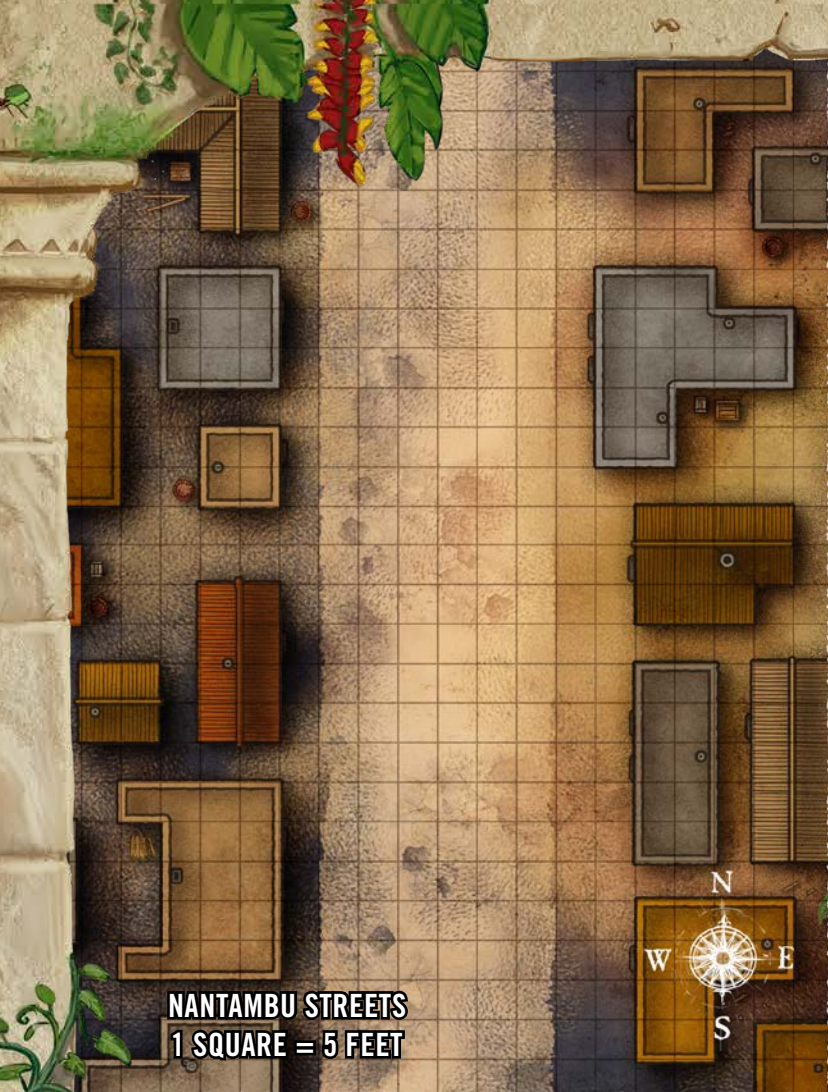
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check. The lillend agrees to the concert without asking for additional promises or rewards if a hero succeeds at this check. If the heroes fail to Request the concert (but do not critically fail), the lillend playfully dares the heroes to perform as their opening act. If a hero then succeeds at a DC 34 Performance check, the azata claps their hands in delight, thanks the hero for the show, and performs for the class. On a critical failure to Request the performance, the lillend mocks the heroes (and by extension, the class and its teacher) for not deserving to witness such beauty before returning to Elysium.

XP Award: If the heroes manage to conjure a lillend and convince them to play for the class, award the heroes 60 XP. If they do so, but only by offering a suitable Performance to open for the lillend, reduce this award to 30 XP.

EVENT 5: NANTAMBU NOODLES

LOW 15

Mafika Ayuwari (NG male human martial artist 17) is an expert in self-defense, as exemplified by his unique style that combines martial arts with primal and arcane magic. Mafika is also known to most of the Magaambya's students as "The Rainbow Noodle

Teacher," thanks to his side business selling noodles from a rainbow-painted ramen cart on the weekends. He picked up the recipe in Goka during his time in the Ruby Phoenix Tournament, as the cosmopolitan city features wide ranges of delicious food from across Tian Xia.

This ramen cart is the reason that Mafika reaches out to the heroes during this semester. Toward the middle of the semester, the ramen cart goes missing. This already happened only a few weeks ago, as the result of a prank by soon-to-be graduating students, and his ramen cart was recovered. Since he assumes this second disappearance is due to a similar reason (perhaps by the same students repeating their prior hijinks), Mafika would rather not get official channels involved—he doesn't want promising students' futures ruined by expulsion. If asked about the first time his cart disappeared, he sighs and explains that a group of conversants magically transported it atop a bell tower in Nantambu, for which the entire group was given academic probation and threatened with immediate expulsion for any further trouble. Mafika doesn't want to see any of the students expelled (he refuses to name them, but they're described in **Event 8: Pranksters in Peril** on page 16) for giving in to what he calls "youthful exuberance." He does, however, want his ramen cart back, and he hopes that since the heroes are fellow faculty members with a reputation for problem-solving, they might be able to help him out.

The Search: Prankster students aren't to blame for Mafika's missing cart this time; the cart has been stolen by a small clan of gimmerlings, malevolent fey who make their homes in the hidden shadows of alleys and drainage systems. Prone to mischief, theft, and sabotage, these fey watched the previous theft and admired how the students pulled off the cart's transportation to the bell tower, but their cruel natures kept them from interpreting the prankster student's motivations. They saw one way where they could improve on the prank: with violence.

Ever since the students' prank, the gimmerlings have worked to create two replicas of Mafika's ramen cart, using them to perfect the deadly alchemical trap they intended to rig onto the real cart. Once the trap was perfected, the gimmerlings stole Mafika's cart, rigged it with the trap, and then—to make things even more "fun"—hid it and the other two false carts throughout Nantambu. All three carts are rigged with deadly explosives; the gimmerlings aren't particularly concerned with loss of life or destruction of property, and in fact find it hilarious to watch people who expect to obtain delicious noodles get blown to pieces instead.



As a result, and unknown to the heroes, they are on something of a countdown to find these carts before lives are lost. The date on which Mafika first asks the heroes to help him track down his cart is day 1. Every third day thereafter (day 4, day 7, and day 10), one of the remaining carts explodes, killing and injuring several bystanders.

A hero can spend a day of downtime Searching for the missing ramen cart either by attempting a DC 36 Perception check to scour the city, or by attempting a DC 32 Diplomacy Check to Gather Information in the form of sightings and clues from the populace. On a success, the hero finds one of the carts, while on a critical success, the hero finds up to two of the remaining carts. Note that while this time is mostly spent looking for a dangerous hazard, you should also use it to help bring the city of Nantambu to life, giving the heroes more opportunities to explore and interact with locals. You might decide to have the heroes receive clues from NPCs they met in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #170: Spoken on the Song Wind*, such as Amaechi the friendly potter, Bamidele the outspoken merchant, or Oba Eze the cantankerous animal vendor.

You can use the Nantambu Streets map on page 12 for these encounters.

Hazard: When the heroes find the first rigged ramen cart, they might not think to check it for traps and could well detonate it themselves. They're fortunate enough that the location isn't particularly crowded, and the heroes are the only ones caught in the blast. Enough of the cart remains that when Mafika becomes involved, he can identify it as a fake cart. He worries that there might be more fake noodle-cart bombs out there, waiting to kill, and his own beloved cart could be among them! If a hero spends a day spreading word of the danger through Nantambu, they can attempt a DC 30 Diplomacy check to do so. On a success, the next day that a cart would normally explode is pushed back by a day (pushed back by 2 days on a critical success). If the hero has the Nantambu chime-ringer archetype (presented in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #170: Spoken on the Song Wind*), add 2 additional days to this delay.

RIGGED RAMEN CART

HAZARD 15

ALCHEMICAL MECHANICAL TRAP

Stealth DC 35 (expert)

Description A seemingly innocent ramen cart is rigged to detonate if moved from its current location.

Disable Thievery DC 40 (master) to disable the detonation trigger

AC 34; **Fort** +29, **Ref** +23

Hardness 25, **HP** 90 (BT 45); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Death by Noodle ➤ **Trigger** The cart is moved, damaged, or physically searched; **Effect** The cart explodes in a 40-foot radius, dealing 10d6 fire damage and 10d6 piercing damage to all creatures within the area (DC 36 basic Reflex save). Creatures who fail their save against this effect are also covered in "noodles" of tar and other sticky alchemical substances that make the creature clumsy 2 until they spend at least an hour scrubbing the noodles off.

Creatures: The third cart the heroes discover is Mafika's actual ramen cart. Once the heroes disarm the trap or trigger it, the frustrated gimmerlings emerge from hiding to attack the heroes, shrieking and yelling at them for ruining all their fun. The gimmerlings fight until only one is left standing, at which point the survivor surrenders and begs to be let go, promising to leave Nantambu forever. The heroes can learn from interrogating a gimmerling that no more noodle bombs have been placed, or at your option, can search their bodies to find scribbled blueprints for the bombs that indicate that only three were built.

GIMMERLINGS (4)

CREATURE 12

Pathfinder Bestiary 177

Initiative Perception +21

Treasure: If the heroes return to Mafika with his cart intact, the teacher thanks them profusely and rewards them with a promise that they can always eat free at his cart whenever they wish. Given the knowledge that dangerous fey turned his cart into a bomb, he makes sure to secure his cart better in the future. If the heroes successfully disabled or destroyed all the rigged carts, Mafika is grateful for their efforts to protect his customers and his good name, and literally gives them the *boots of speed* off his feet.

XP Award: If the heroes managed to prevent any civilian casualties, award them an additional 30 XP.

EVENT 6: POLLEN FOR PAINTINGS

LOW 15

Nhyira (NG genderfluid elf historian 11) is a theater aficionado whose academic specialty is the study of history through analysis of period art. This specialty is also what causes Nhyira to seek out the heroes during their first-semester studies and preparations.

Nhyira has been asked to verify the authenticity of several paintings recently acquired by the Magaambya before they are displayed in the academy's halls, but a pair of paintings prove a peculiar puzzle. In 4518 AR, the artist Nuorim Bej'ktal finished his final work, *A Symphony of Loss in Infinite Color*. The painting used magically treated pigments to create a vibrant

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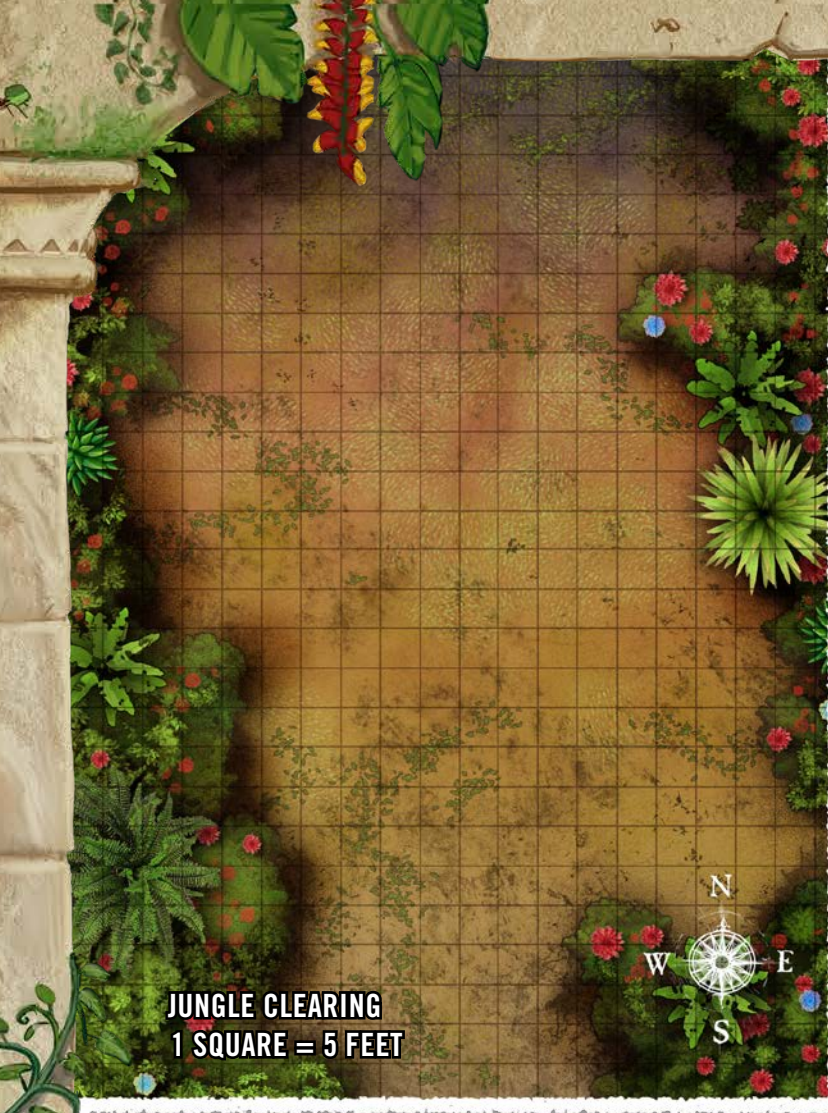
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JUNGLE CLEARING
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

image that would not fade with the passage of time—the artist died a week after completing it, and the painting has come to be regarded as his masterpiece.

Nhyira's problem is that the school has acquired two paintings that both appear to be *A Symphony of Loss in Infinite Color*. She has performed a variety of divinations as well as mundane tests to determine which painting is fake and which real, but thus far, none of the tests have been able to distinguish the true painting from the forgery. Though Nhyira has begun to consider more drastic measures, such as making an incision in the painting beneath the edge of the frame to check for pigment composition or evidence of tampering, she has one last hope to find the truth of the painting without damaging it: an obscure treatment involving the sprinkling of a specific rare powder over the painting itself should cause the real painting's colors to momentarily shimmer with light.

The problem is that this powder requires the pollen of a plant called a viper vine to craft, and supplies of the stuff are always prohibitively limited.

Pollen Extraction: Nhyira has everything she requires to create the forgery-detecting powder except

for viper vine pollen, but she knows where a grove of viper vines can be found. When she contacts the heroes for help and informs them of the situation, she suggests a viper vine grove an hour or so east of Nantambu. The dangerous plants grow back annually despite the city's attempts to cull them. This year's viper vine pruning has yet to occur, so the heroes should be able to find the resources they need and serve the city in the process.

Nhyira provides the heroes with alchemical tools required to harvest viper vine pollen and explains how to perform the delicate harvest which requires a successful DC 33 Crafting or Nature check and 10 minutes of work, as described on page 287 of *Pathfinder Bestiary 2*. She needs at least two doses to test both paintings. If the heroes fail to secure two doses, they must search the jungle for more viper vines; how long this takes and whether they run into other local dangers is left to you to decide.

Use the Jungle Clearing map on this page for this encounter.

Creatures: The viper vines require a lot of sustenance to grow and eagerly attack any source of fresh meat that enters their grove. The viper vines are voracious carnivores and a hazard to the area, but the heroes nevertheless might want to avoid killing them outright. They can harvest pollen from an unconscious viper vine as easily as a dead one.

VIPER VINE (3)

CREATURE 13

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 287

Initiative Stealth +24

Treasure: When the heroes return with the pollen, Nhyira is quickly able to determine which painting is the real *A Symphony of Loss in Infinite Color*, as the true painting leaps to life in a complex display of dancing lights. Thrilled with the discovery and the fact that the heroes helped her avoid damaging a priceless work of art, Nhyira promises to immortalize the heroes in a splendid portrait of their entire group. Nhyira has the heroes pose while she makes a variety of sketches and notes. Nhyira tells the heroes to return at the end of the semester to collect the finished painting, which is a work of art worth 3,000 gp if the heroes are willing to sell it.

EVENT 7: FIRST FLIGHT

Tahenkot (NG female human defender 11) is a razor-tongued teacher considered to be perhaps the most proficient master of magical flight in the entire academy, having achieved peak performance with all manners of airborne travel from simple *fly* spells to



a variety of winged polymorph forms. As a result, it comes as no surprise to people who already know Takenkot that her request is directly related to her most recent aerial innovation.

Tahenkot has assembled a still-unnamed sailing ship magically modified to serve as a small airship. She plans to show it off during her next lecture with a test flight, but the students originally tapped to serve as her crew have earned academic probation after a senior prank that apparently left a certain teacher's noodle cart perched atop a certain bell tower. Takenkot cannot be seen rewarding such misbehavior with rare and wondrous opportunities, such as the prestige that comes with taking her airship for its first flight, but this leaves her with only one student from her entire crew: Haibram Thodja. The heroes almost certainly remember the dwarf daredevil from their early days at the Magaambya. Haibram is determined to make the attempt even if he must go it alone—a certain path to failure—so Takenkot turns to her peers for assistance in pulling off the ship's test flight.

The test flight consists of three phases: takeoff, flight, and landing, with each phase of the test flight requiring the heroes to attempt a series of skill checks to earn Victory Points (*Gamemastery Guide* 148) called Flight Points to determine the overall success of the venture. The airship's Flight Points begin at 0 and accumulate throughout the three phases of the flight. During each phase, each hero must attempt one skill check of their choice, based on those required by the phase, to accrue Flight Points for the airship. The heroes gain 1 Flight Point for each success, 2 Flight Points for each critical success, and lose 1 Flight Point for each critical failure. Haibram acts as the captain—he doesn't attempt checks himself, but he informs the heroes regarding what checks are needed for each phase. The different checks are meant to give the players options, and performing every type of check isn't required; for example, during the takeoff phase, all of the heroes could opt to attempt Perception checks.

If at any point during Flight or Landing the heroes drop to 0 Flight Points, the airship immediately crashes. Everyone on board takes 10d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 30 basic Reflex save); Haibram survives the crash but is both physically and emotionally injured by the failed test flight.

TEST FLIGHT

Takeoff Haibram directs the heroes to secure

loose objects, to help stabilize the ship, and to keep its magical energies focused on lifting off the ground.

Checks DC 32 Driving Lore or Engineering Lore (to help stabilize the ship); DC 34 Athletics (to secure loose objects and handle other unexpected physical tasks as needed); DC 36 Perception (to watch for potential problems)

Flight Haibram directs the heroes to keep watch for potential dangers, to aid in trimming sails and magical rudders to keep the ship on course, and to continue focusing its magical energies on providing thrust.

Checks DC 32 Acrobatics or Driving Lore (to move quickly and efficiently through the rigging to trim sails and adjust rudders); DC 34 Arcana or Nature (to



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moderate the magical engines' thrust to run smoothly in flight); DC 36 Perception (to keep watch for hazards and obstacles)

Landing Haibram directs the heroes to plot the safest route to the landing pad and to set the ship down safely.

Checks DC 32 Crafting (to quickly make repairs, tighten knots, and otherwise quickly fix minor problems and damage to the airship that accrued during the flight); DC 34 Arcana or Nature (to keep the magical engines thrusting smoothly to allow a soft landing); DC 36 Perception or Driving Lore (to navigate the ship to its intended landing place)

Determining Success: As long as the heroes complete the Landing phase without dropping to 0 Flight Points, they successfully perform the test flight.

If the heroes earned 10 or fewer Flight Points, Takenkot is thankful for the aid in keeping the ship in the air and for giving her the chance to see the very real flaws in her plans. She has identified specific places where she knows she must improve.

If the heroes earned 11 or more Flight Points, Takenkot is elated and proclaims the test flight a great success—there's still much work to do, but she's delighted with her progress so far.

Treasure: As long as the heroes successfully perform the flight, regardless of their total number of Flight Points, Takenkot provides them with another of her prototypes: a *hawk boat feather token*. This unique magical prototype is identical to a *swan boat feather token*, except for the fact that the ship also has a 60-foot fly speed. While this is far too slow to catch up to the *Mandibles of Fate* during the vehicle chase in Chapter 3, it may be useful when the heroes are boarding the airship or evacuating it at the end of the adventure. The heroes can also attempt to reverse engineer the formula for the *hawk boat feather token*, though doing so requires a DC 42 Crafting check and failure results in the token's accidental activation and inability to acquire the formula.

If the heroes managed to earn at least 11 Flight Points during the encounter, Takenkot also gives them the honor of deciding what to name her prototype airship.

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP if they earn 10 or fewer Flight Points, and 80 XP if they earn 11 or more Flight Points.

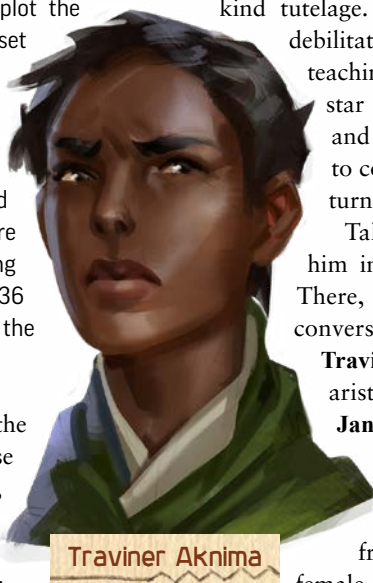
EVENT 8: PRANKSTERS IN PERIL

Takulu Ot (LG male human teacher 4) is a favorite of many incoming students who benefited from his kind tutelage. His kindness, in fact, is at times debilitating, as his need to help causes his teaching to suffer. Lately, the plight of four star students has been gnawing at him, and after admitting that he was unable to come up with a solution to help them, turns to the heroes for help.

Takulu requests for the heroes to meet him in his office in the Heron Archives. There, he asks for assistance with four conversants: the handsome but impatient **Traviner Aknima** (N male human aristocrat 8), the clever but shy **Nahajiri Jan** (CG female human architect 7), the resourceful and upbeat **Blain Jorlson** (CN male human explorer 6), and the oft-bewildered but friendly **Burni Banderwood** (NG female gnome illusionist 7). Of the four,

Traviner is more or less the leader. He's a charismatic young man and heir to a mercantile empire in Thuvia, sent to the Magaambya for an education as part of a family tradition stretching back generations. The others gather around Traviner for a variety of reasons. The students have done quite well in their classes and the group has built a respectable reputation, though the last 6 months have proven trying as the talented young students have begun to chafe at the rules of the academy as they prepare to return to the wider world. Recently, they've been pursuing what can be charitably categorized as "extracurricular activities." Their most recent escapade involved leveraging Nahajiri's architectural engineering expertise with Burni's cloaking illusions to put Mafika's ramen cart atop the bell tower. All four students are now on academic probation as punishment, and Takulu hopes to keep them on the right track until they graduate as lore-speakers. To this end, Takulu hopes that the heroes can assist him in straightening out the young troublemakers while inspiring them to more noble endeavors. Takulu has arranged a special seminar with the four students. He invites the heroes as guest speakers to share stories of their own adventures.

During the seminar, each hero has an opportunity to tell a story or give a lecture based on their own experiences to influence the students, after which they must attempt a DC 36 check with an associated skill of their choice. The skill the hero attempts should be reflective of the nature of the tale itself. If the story the hero tells focuses on a lack of concern for



others or encourages a disregard for consequences, increase the DC to 38. If the lesson focuses on taking responsibility for actions or for others, decrease the DC to 34.

Each hero can tell only one story, and thus attempt only one skill check, to earn Victory Points (*Gamemastery Guide* 148) called Lesson Points. Each successful check earns 1 Lesson Point. A critical success earns 2 Lesson Points, while a critical failure deducts 1 Lesson Point. To convince the students to be responsible and refocus on their studies, the heroes must earn at least 3 Lesson Points overall.

Treasure: If the heroes successfully convince the students to behave, Takulu Ot is thrilled and presents the heroes with a rare gift: a collection of essays originally recorded during the time of the Ten Magic Warriors that includes stories of the warriors' accomplishments and journeys. Any character who reads these essays over two weeks of downtime gains a permanent +1 circumstance bonus to Recall Knowledge checks related to the Ten Magic Warriors or their enemies (such as the Throat-of-Nothingness cult or the King of Biting Ants.) While this book was never owned by one of the Ten Magic Warriors, it's well-researched and engagingly written, making it an excellent gift to offer to the Iobane.

XP Award: If the heroes successfully convince the students, award them 60 XP.

EVENT 9: RUNELORD RAINBOW

Zuma (CN male half-orc conspiracy theorist 9) is one of the more eccentric teachers at the Magaambya. While his knowledge related to recognizing and defeating harmful magics is significant, and his mastery of abjurations is unquestioned, Zuma's reputation has always suffered as a result of how he seems to buy in to every wild conspiracy theory he hears—or invents, for that matter.

It's one of these conspiracy theories that compels Zuma to seek out the heroes this semester. While out wandering the hinterlands of Nantambu, he came upon a glorious sight: a rainbow rising from a clear sky above an idyllic stream. Having just finished studying a brand new treatise on New Thassilon (which theorized that the various prismatic-themed spells were first invented by the runelords) and the ancient magical traditions being revitalized there, Zuma is completely convinced that the rainbow was an omen that one of the runelords who recently attempted to rise from slumber far north in Varisia is attempting to return from death to seize control of the Magaambya's lore. Certain that this omen carries with it implications of great change (and possibly utter doom), Zuma recruits

LEARNING TO DRIVE

If you intend to use **Event 7: First Flight**, consider having Takenkot approach the heroes near the start of the adventure to try to recruit their aid in the upcoming test flight. If the heroes are interested, she notes that skill at piloting this airship utilizes skill at driving rather than sailing, and skill in driving will be of great use. She offers to subsidize any hero who wishes to work on honing this skill. With this offer, any player can spend downtime to retrain a skill to increase their proficiency in Driving Lore (see Retraining, *Core Rulebook* 481) without having to pay money for the training.

Of course, a player who takes advantage of this also sets their character up for an advantage later in this adventure, when they find themselves faced with the task of racing magic vehicles across the crimson deserts of Akiton.

the heroes to assist him in a grand divination ritual to reveal the identity of this potential threat.

The ritual Zuma intends to cast is an experimental modification that Zuma's been developing for years. The ritual attempts to secure an audience with powerful forces to get answers to lingering questions. Zuma's never managed to make it work. He hopes that having the heroes act as secondary casters will provide a breakthrough.

The Ritual: The ritual itself is intended to function something like a combination of *commune* and *call spirit*. Zuma arranges the seating for the heroes around a prepared ritual circle according to the talents at which they are best. Each hero serves as a secondary caster for the ritual while Zuma serves as the primary caster. The following skills can be used to assist in this ritual: Arcana, Diplomacy, Occultism, Religion, or Society, all with a DC of 34 (alternatively, a hero can use a relevant Lore skill, such as Divination Lore, with a DC of only 30). While normally the result of the primary caster's skill check determines a ritual's success, in this case, Zuma's experimental ritual depends on the heroes' roles as secondary casters.

To determine the ritual's outcome, each of the heroes' rolls during the ritual earns Victory Points (*Gamemastery Guide* 148) called Ritual Points. A critical success gives 2 Ritual Points, 1 Ritual Point for a success, and -1 Ritual Point for a critical failure. If the heroes earn at least 3 Ritual points, Zuma's ritual is a success.

Success: If the ritual is successful, a glimmering pane of hazy energy appears floating in the air for a moment, at first showing only a charcoal black surface before

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revealing the image of a regal woman with long, dark hair wearing a scarlet dress chased in silver filigree. She sits at an elegant work desk and appears to be in the midst of crafting a magical polearm. After a moment, the woman notices the scrying pane and looks directly through it to address Zuma and the heroes.

"Why, hello! You must be from... the Magaambya? I see. I've been waiting for someone from such a powerful organization to contact me—I would have reached out myself, were I not attending to so many matters here at home. Please tell whomever is in charge down there that

my emissary should arrive within the week. I'm sure we'll have much of mutual interest to discuss.

"And in the future, please announce yourself before sending scrying magic into my personal chambers. I'm sure neither of us want any misunderstandings to mar our relationship before it even has a chance to properly begin."

As she finishes her statement, she gestures with a quick flick of her wrist, and the ritual scrying pane fractures into a thousand tiny slivers before fading away entirely.

A hero who succeeds at a DC 35 Arcana or DC 25 Society check recognizes the woman as none other than Queen Sorshen of New Thassilon. Zuma looks at the heroes with a mix of surprise and horror on his face once he learns this from them. "Queen Sorshen! One of the longest-lived wizards in the history of Thassilon? Yet she greeted us so calmly! And was the omen I saw warning of her, or someone close to her, hiding in her shadow? This changes everything!" With that, Zuma scurries from the room to pursue this latest development.

Failure: If the ritual fails, the scrying pane appears but reveals only an unbroken field of charcoal black. Zuma thanks the heroes for their assistance before returning to his studies, muttering half-finished thoughts about "amplifying the ward negations" and "increasing range by narrowing focus." In time, a new conspiracy theory demands his attention, and the mysterious riverside rainbow is soon forgotten.

Repercussions: While the rainbow that Zuma spotted at the river was nothing more than a meteorological oddity, the experimental ritual the heroes helped him cast did indeed put them in contact with Queen Sorshen. Whether or not she actually sends an emissary to the Magaambya (and who or what this emissary is) is left to you to decide, but it's just as likely she forgets her promise, relegating this thread to a nerve-wracking loose end for the heroes to ponder. If you want, you can use this brief contact with one of Golarion's most powerful spellcasters as a safeguard for the party. At any point hereafter in this Adventure Path, should the heroes find themselves in a no-win situation, perhaps a manifestation of a shimmering rainbow touches down from a clear sky to aid the party, allowing them to continue their journey. After all, Queen Sorshen learned that powerful adventurers have a knack for taking down runelords,



Sorshen



and she is known to take note of those in Golarion who become particularly powerful. The more of these powerful adventurers she can keep as potential allies the better.

XP Award: If the ritual was successful, grant the heroes 60 XP.

Planning the Expedition

Once the academic semester is complete, the heroes can make their expedition to the Plaza of the Door, the site of the Doorway to the Red Star and the center of some of the Mwangi Expanse's oldest ruins.

By default, the adventurous teacher Izem, Tahenkot, and the four prankster conversants Traviner, Nahajiri, Blain, and Burni accompany the heroes on the expedition. The conversants are looking for an exciting way to round out their education before graduating, and they share the mundane duties of setting up camps, collecting and preparing food, and recording the events of the journey. The heroes can take anyone else along on this expedition they wish, including other allied teachers and students they've gotten to know, or they can make the journey alone.

Plaza of the Door

More than 400 miles northeast of Nantambu, beyond Lake Ocota, the plaza surrounding the Doorway to the Red Star is one of the oldest consistently occupied territories in the Mwangi Expanse. The journey to the plaza requires several hundred miles' travel up the Vanji River, across the western reaches of Lake Ocota, and up further into the northern jungles of the Mwangi Expanse; such a journey shouldn't be particularly dangerous to a group of 15th-level heroes. That said, you should feel free to add some encounters along the way for the heroes to navigate if you like. This adventure largely skips over the expedition itself, assuming the heroes and their companions make it to the Plaza of the Door without significant incident.

As the party arrives at the storied site, read or paraphrase the following.

The last of the concealing underbrush and thick foliage obscuring the expedition's path falls away, and with it, the last barrier concealing the destination. A ring of mysterious, humming red stones encircles an otherwise empty courtyard. Around the courtyard stand ancient cathedrals of diverse design, their walls bearing the religious symbols of gods and other stranger symbology. This row of structures further encloses the area, though the passage to the inner courtyard is clear. The smells of wet earth, torn leaves, and decaying flesh mingle on a warm

breeze—a breeze that also carries the faintest whispers of distant conversation.

Soon after the party arrives at the Plaza of the Door, a long, piercing note blown on a distant horn fills the air before the heroes can enter. An instant later, five magical portals open between the expedition party and the plaza.

A powerfully built man with an obviously magical falchion strapped across his back emerges from the centermost portal. He also carries a brace of spears and an intricately designed lacquered buckler. Raising a fist above his head, the man waits as four other Iobane magi emerge from the other four doorways to his left and right. Once these soldiers fall into formation and the five magical doors wink out of existence, the man turns back to address the heroes, introducing himself as Warder-Chief Mpondo, leader of the Iobane and guardian of the Doorway to the Red Star.

Mpondo is initially suspicious of the heroes and their expedition, since the last time the Iobane entertained a visitor from the Magaambya, it was Koride—a teacher whose visit ended when she absconded with a rare artifact guarded by the magi. This *Vesicant Egg*, is associated with the King of Biting Ants, a potent artifact left behind after his defeat at the hands of Jatembe.

After Mpondo introduces himself, he expects an introduction from the heroes. First impressions are, of course, important, and at this point, Mpondo and the Iobane have an unfriendly attitude toward the party. During their introductions, allow any hero who wishes to attempt a DC 37 Diplomacy check to Make an Impression on Mpondo to improve this initial attitude.

To continue with their quest to contact Jatembe, the heroes must either find a way to negotiate with Mpondo and the Iobane, or use a combination of stealth and violence to secure access to the Doorway to the Red Star.

THE IOBANE

The Iobane is a powerful organization, backed by millennia of magical tradition, and its stewardship of the Doorway to the Red Star is a sacred trust that it takes very seriously. The heroes must earn the trust of the magi and their leader, Warder-Chief Mpondo, to gain access to the portal.

First, the heroes must improve Mpondo's attitude to at least friendly, and then perform an act that proves their trustworthiness and good intentions. Even if the heroes critically failed their check to Make an Impression on Mpondo when they first met him (see above) and made

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him hostile, the warder-chief still invites the heroes to speak with him. In such a case, he doubles the number of Iobane magi (page 21) guarding him from four to eight before proceeding with the meeting.

While the heroes speak with Mpondo, he asks their other expedition members to make camp just outside the plaza. Several excellent clearings along the perimeter make for great choices for campsites, as the Iobane's reputation keeps the region relatively safe from jungle threats.

The magi don't initiate combat with the heroes or their expedition, but they also stay alert for anyone

sneaking toward the plaza. In the event that the magi detect a member of the delegation attempting to sneak into the plaza, they immediately blow their signal horns. A group of four magi led by Mpondo converge immediately using teleportation magic and demand the intruders retreat to the expedition camp.

Creatures: The Iobane maintains an entire community near to the plaza, with scores of its fellows to call on if the heroes attempt to fight their way through. While the magi avoid lethal tactics at first and attempt to take their target into custody, they respond to resistance or violence with lethal force. This adventure assumes that the heroes opt for diplomacy rather than violence, but you can use the following stats if things take a turn for the worse.

MPONDO

CREATURE 15

UNIQUE LN MEDIUM HUMAN HUMANOID

Male human guardian

Perception +26; Iobane vision

Languages Common, Draconic, Necril

Skills Arcana +29, Athletics +28, Diplomacy +23, Religion +24, Stealth +27

Str +5, **Dex** +2, **Con** +2, **Int** +6, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +0

Items high-grade black dragonhide buckler (Hardness 5, HP 20, BT 10, immune to acid), chain shirt, +2 *greater striking bastard sword*, signal horn, +2 *striking spear*

AC 37; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +23, **Will** +27

HP 285

Attack of Opportunity ↻

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ *bastard sword* +30 (magical, two-hand d12), **Damage** 3d8+13 slashing

Melee ♦ *spear* +30 (magical), **Damage** 2d6+13 piercing

Ranged ♦ *spear* +27 (magical, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+13 piercing

Arcane Prepared Spells DC 37, attack +28; **8th** *maze*, *polar ray*; **7th** *dimensional lock*, *spell turning*; **4th** *dimension door*, *true strike*; **Cantrips (8th)** *chill touch*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *electric arc*, *produce flame*

Magus Conflux Spells 2 Focus Points; **8th** *dimensional assault* (Pathfinder Secrets of Magic 140), *hasted assault* (Secrets of Magic 140)

Rituals *rite of the Red Star* (see page 77)

Iobane Vision (fortune) Warder-Chief Mpondo can see invisible creatures and objects as though they are concealed. When he Seeks or Senses Motive, he can roll twice and take the higher result.

Spellstrike ♦♦ **Frequency** Until recharged; **Effect** Warder-Chief Mpondo Casts a Spell that takes 1 or 2 actions to cast and requires a spell attack roll. The effects of the spell do not occur immediately but



Mpondo

are imbued into the attack instead. Mpondo makes a melee Strike. The spell is coupled with the attack, using the attack roll result to determine the effects of both the Strike and the spell. This counts as two attacks for Mpondo's multiple attack penalty, but don't apply the penalty until after he has completed the Spellstrike.

After Mpondo uses Spellstrike, he can't do so again until he recharges his Spellstrike as a single action, which has the concentrate trait. Mpondo also recharges his Spellstrike when he casts a conflux spell.

IOBANE MAGI (4)

CREATURE 13

LN MEDIUM HUMAN HUMANOID

Human magus

Perception +23; lobane vision

Languages Common, Draconic

Skills Arcana +26, Athletics +26, Stealth +23

Str +5, **Dex** +2, **Con** +3, **Int** +5, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +0

Items high-grade black dragonhide buckler (Hardness 5, HP 20, BT 10, immune to acid), +1 resilient chain shirt, signal horn, +1 striking spear

AC 33; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +23, **Will** +24

HP 235

Attack of Opportunity ↻

Shield Block ↻

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ *spear* +27 (magical), **Damage** 2d6+9 piercing

Ranged ♦ *spear* +24 (magical, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+9 piercing

Arcane Prepared Spells DC 33, attack +25; **7th** *dimensional lock*, *prismatic spray*; **6th** *chain lightning*, *disintegrate*; **4th** *dimension door*, *true strike*; **Cantrips (7th)** *chill touch*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *electric arc*, *produce flame*

Magus Conflux Spells 2 Focus Points; **7th** *dimensional assault* (*Secrets of Magic* 140)

lobane Vision (fortune) As Warder-Chief Mpondo.

Spear Dance ♦♦ The lobane magus makes three spear Strikes, each with a range of 10 feet.

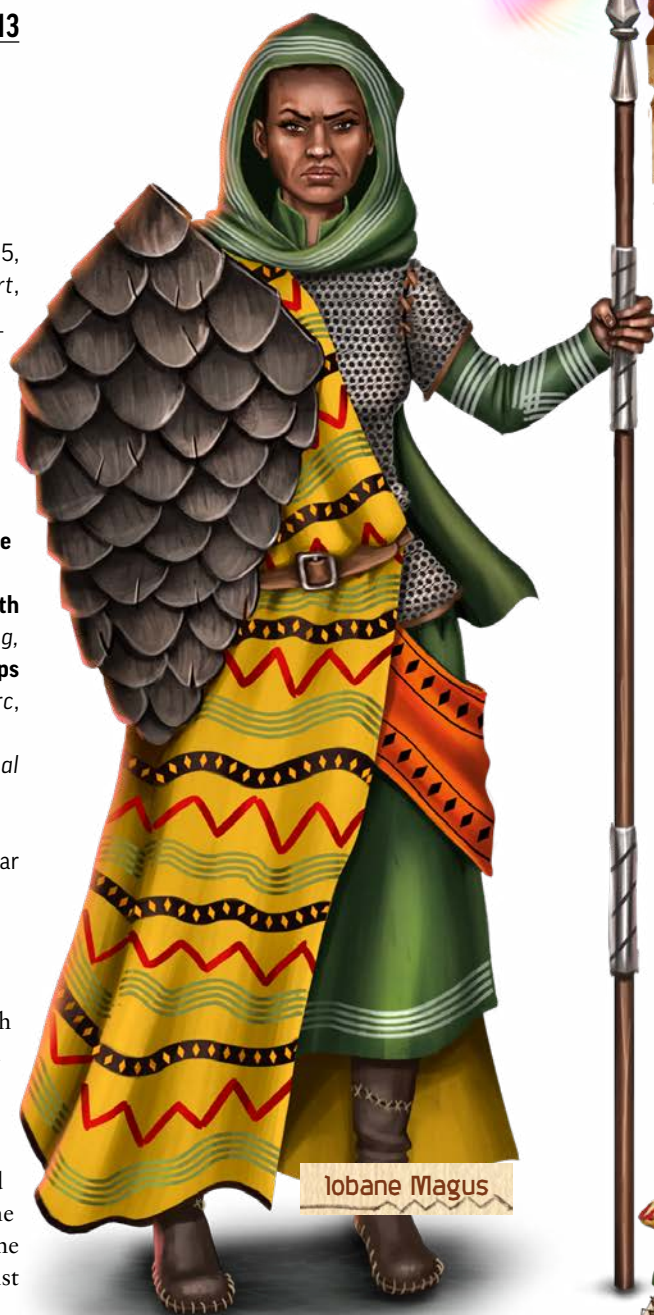
Spellstrike ♦♦ As Warder-Chief Mpondo.

PEACE TALKS

Mpondo is patient but exacting in his meetings with the heroes, and he is more than willing to spend days or even weeks in discussions with them as long as the heroes remain patient in turn. Not every hero must attend these peace talks, and those whose aren't as skilled in Diplomacy can spend this time pursuing other downtime activities in the expedition camp, such as Practical Research in the region (page 22). The expedition makes camp just outside the plaza.

During their time at the plaza, the heroes and their delegation have time to pursue Downtime activities such as Crafting, Practical Research, or engaging with the warder-chief to attempt to Make an Impression on him and improve their standing. Avoid letting the downtime here last for too long; if the heroes don't seem motivated to engage with Mpondo, have the warder-chief approach them instead.

Taking time to negotiate with Mpondo is a delicate process, as he



Iobane Magus

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and the Iobane must be vigilant against dangers not only from the Doorway to the Red Star itself, but from those who would use false pretenses or feigned friendship to gain access to the Doorway for nefarious purposes. Once each day as a downtime activity the heroes can attempt to Make an Impression on Mpondo to improve his attitude that takes 8 hours. Critical failures that eventually result in making him hostile don't force him to attack, but they do encourage Mpondo to increase the number of Iobane magi (page 21) he has at his side, as detailed above.

Once Mpondo's attitude toward the heroes is indifferent, they can offer him a gift to further improve his disposition. The warder-chief and his magi are not easily impressed, however, and only a gift of significant import will do. The *gorget of the primal roar* the heroes may have obtained from Ahassunu (page 9) or the collection of essays they were given by Takulu (page 17) both make excellent gifts, as well as any other magical item or treasure that has deep cultural significance to the traditions of the Ten Magic Warriors that the heroes may have discovered in previous adventures (such as the *leopard's armor* from *Pathfinder Adventure Path #170: Spoken on the Song Wind*). Mpondo is astounded by a sufficient gift, and all subsequent checks made to Make an Impression gain a +2 circumstance bonus. This circumstance bonus stacks with multiple gifts, each increasing the bonus by one to a maximum circumstance bonus of +8 for four gifts.

Once Mpondo's attitude toward the heroes is friendly or helpful, he trusts them enough to permit them and their expedition access to the Plaza of the Door. This access to the Plaza of the Door allows the heroes to perform Practical Research in the area (see below). Mpondo won't allow anyone from the expedition to approach the Doorway to the Red Star itself without being accompanied by himself and four Iobane magi. He and the Iobane continue to watch the heroes and other expedition members, but the magi won't interfere with their work.

XP Award: Once the heroes shift Mpondo's attitude to friendly or better, award them 80 XP.

PRACTICAL RESEARCH AT THE DOORWAY

DOWNTIME

Requirements You are a lore-speaker and have earned the trust of the Iobane, who have granted you unrestricted access to the Doorway of the Red Star.

You explore the ruins surrounding the Doorway to the Red Star, avoiding areas of significant danger, focusing instead on carvings, statues, and architecture found in the safer, more accessible locations of the site. Choose either your

primary or secondary branch, and attempt a skill check against a standard DC of the branch's level. You can use Occultism or one of the branch's associated skills for this check. This activity takes 1 week.

Critical Success You make a remarkable discovery that astounds the Iobane: additional evidence of the presence of the Ten Magic Warriors in the region! Increase Mpondo's attitude by one step, and increase the branch level of the branch you chose by 2.

Success You uncover additional evidence of the Ten Magic Warriors and their battle against the King of Biting Ants. Increase the branch level of the branch you chose by 1.

Failure Your efforts uncover nothing significant. Your branch level remains the same.

Critical Failure You've accidentally damaged or otherwise disrespected an important element of the site's legacy, and the Iobane have noticed. You must spend the next week of downtime repairing the damage done and can't perform practical research.

MPONDO'S REQUEST

Shortly after the heroes improve Mpondo's attitude to friendly or better, or after they've spent a month near the plaza without causing conflicts or inciting violence (whichever comes first), Mpondo approaches them with an offer to join him in a friendly conversation about the true dangers in the region, and to explore how the heroes' goals and the interests of the Iobane might intersect. The warder-chief leads the heroes to a building in the plaza that serves as a barracks for on-duty magi. There, Mpondo provides the heroes with food and drink before settling in to talk with them.

Mpondo explains to the heroes that, millennia ago, Jatembe battled the King of Biting Ants at the Doorway to the Red Star before driving the vile sorcerer through and presumably destroying him. However, not all traces of the King of the Biting Ants were fully expunged—over time, fragments of the King slowly coalesced into an acid-seeping artifact the Iobane named the *Vesicant Egg*. The Iobane guarded both the artifact and the Doorway, though their long-standing relationship with the Magaambya caused them to drop their guard a few years ago when a lore-speaker named Koride Ulawa came from the Magaambya to research the Doorway to the Red Star. Up to that point, the Iobane and the Magaambya had a long-standing alliance, the latter even sending promising new students to study at the plaza. Yet the trust extended to Koride was quickly betrayed. The lore-speaker disappeared shortly thereafter, along with the *Vesicant Egg*.

The theft of the *Vesicant Egg* is foremost on Mpondo's mind as he speaks with the heroes, and he admits to them that the primary reason he hesitated



to grant them access to the site is due to this betrayal the Iobane experienced the last time a member of the Magaambya visited the plaza.

Mpondo tells the heroes that he believes the undying will of the King of Biting Ants almost certainly lives on within the egg and may have even taken possession of Koride. If the heroes hope to stop the King of Biting Ants' machinations and perhaps even save their fellow Magaambyans, they must gather artifacts of power suited to challenging the King of Biting Ants' ancient sorcery, and, more importantly, seek the wisdom of Jatembe to learn the secrets of defeating the ageless evil.

The first step to achieving this goal lies within the Cathedral of Nothingness. Mpondo explains that a sinister cult named the Throat-of-Nothingness has claimed several relics of the Ten Magic Warriors over the years and now hoards them within the cathedral, gathering strength before the next battle against Mpondo and the Iobane's magi. Mpondo offers the heroes a deal: if they enter the Cathedral of Nothingness and defeat the lich Dwandek and his servitors, Mpondo is prepared to grant the heroes full access to the Doorway to the Red Star and even help them pass through it so that they can seek out Jatembe for help. In addition, any treasures the heroes recover from the cathedral are theirs to keep. Mpondo can see no better place for these ancient items than in the hands of new heroes.

Mpondo points out that the time for an attack on the cult is ripe and thinks that a small group of clever infiltrators would be able to slip into the cathedral and quietly take out Dwandek and his lieutenants before they can replenish their forces. In a recent battle against the Iobane, the Throat-of-Nothingness lost many of its numbers, but as has played out so many times before, the cult's leaders and more powerful forces manage to retreat into the cathedral to recover and regroup. The Iobane have as yet been successful in any attempt to deal lasting damage to the cult.

If the heroes agree to the task, Mpondo provides them with some additional information. First, he informs them that the only passage into the cathedral is through the front doors, which are guarded by a pair of demiliches. The Iobane's divinations and spies have revealed to them that the demiliches always ask a series of questions of anyone seeking entrance to the cathedral, and that they attack anyone who answers the questions incorrectly. While Mpondo does not know all the questions or their answers, he can prepare the heroes with some insights based on two commonly posed questions that might satisfy the undead's expectations.

Mpondo tells the heroes that the demiliches also demand a sacrifice of each person who seeks entry to

REVELATIONS OF BETRAYAL

The revelation that one of their own, the lore-speaker Koride, is responsible for the theft of the *Vesicant Egg* is likely to compel some players to immediately return to the Magaambya to confront her (or at least ask where the artifact is). By having Mpondo express his suspicions that Koride may have been corrupted by the King of Biting Ants and, if so, that Jatembe is the one who would have the best information needed to rescue Koride, you can hopefully keep the players focused on the goal in Akiton.

This can also serve as a natural stepping stone as the heroes proceed to the Cathedral of Nothingness. Within the cathedral are several relics seized by the cult over the last several centuries but originally belonging to the Ten Magic Warriors. Claiming these relics can be a chance for the heroes to begin proving themselves as successors to the legacy of Jatembe's old allies. Mpondo is quick to point out that if the heroes cannot defeat Dwandek and his cult, they stand no chance against the King of Biting Ants, assuming they can convince the Magaambya to sanction an investigation into Koride to begin with. The best move forward for the heroes at this point is to claim the powerful artifacts from within the Cathedral of Nothingness and use those relics to secure an audience with Jatembe on the other side of the Doorway to the Red Star.

If the heroes do return to the Magaambya to confront Koride, they learn that she has uncharacteristically gone missing. Attempts to locate her have thus far failed. More about what Koride is up to can be found in the next adventure.



the cathedral. The exact nature of this sacrifice varies, but the most important element seems to be that it must be something the individual truly values, such as a powerful piece of magical equipment, or even a piece of their own body, such as an eye or limb. He also provides answers to any questions the heroes might have, including the following.

"Who is the rightful ruler of the plaza and the surrounding lands?" The undead expect visitors to know that the lich Dwandek leads the cult.

"What do you desire?" Any response tied to the cult's nihilistic embrace of nothingness or that cites something like "the end of all existence" appeals to the demiliches.

Final Advice: An insufficient sacrifice is sure to anger the demiliches and convince them that even if the heroes truly seek membership within the cult,

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their spirits are too weak to embrace nothingness. Fighting the demiliches is a dangerous option, and Mpondo is hesitant to recommend this as a tactic, but he won't try to stop them if the heroes feel up to the task.

Mpondo encourages the heroes to prepare themselves to assault the cathedral, and to inform their companions from the Magaambya about their plans in case anything goes awry. The warder-chief believes that the heroes' best chance for success is to pursue a subtle infiltration of the Cathedral of Nothingness, and he recommends that they avoid confrontation as much as possible until they've had a chance to scout out the cult's forces. Of greatest import is discovering Dwandek's *soul cage*, which Mpondo is confident must be hidden somewhere within the cathedral. As such, he discourages any ideas about sending Iobane warriors or other members of the Magaambya into the cathedral except as a last resort, at least until the heroes have located and destroyed the lich's *soul cage*. If you wish, and if you think the heroes could use the help, Mpondo is willing to accompany the heroes into the cathedral (see below); if he does so, he adopts a disguise so that he will not be recognized by the cultists.

The Cathedral of Nothingness

The Throat-of-Nothingness cult built the Cathedral of Nothingness in centuries past, and it stands out from the other ruins in the plaza like a lone tombstone.

The cathedral consists of a large central structure flanked by two pairs of domes to the north and south. A huge double door allows access to the interior, but no other exits are available. The domes flanking the cathedral are 30 feet high, and the central cathedral is 60 feet high. A tower rises from the back part of the cathedral to a height of 90 feet, while four spires at the cathedral's four corners reach a height of 120 feet. Inside, ritual braziers and decorative magical runes provide dim light throughout the building unless specifically noted otherwise. The 2-foot-thick stone walls are magically enhanced to be as hard as adamantine. Doors are made of stone and are kept unlocked; the cultists have long relied on their fearsome reputation and deadly guardians to keep intruders out and have grown arrogant.

The whole complex is surrounded by a 20-foot-high stone wall, but the courtyards within are barren and empty—the cult has little use for this area and long ago removed all doors that once provided access to these now-abandoned parts of the cathedral grounds.

The map of the Cathedral of Nothingness appears on the inside front cover of this adventure.

A1. DOORWAY TO THE RED STAR

A ring of six crimson monoliths, not quite stone yet not quite crystal, rise from the plaza stones here as if they formed naturally in ages past. Each stone emits a faint red glow. While weeds grow profusely through paving stone cracks elsewhere in the ruins, within the ring itself, the stones are barren. Only a light dusting of red sand lies atop these ruined blocks.

This circle of glowing standing stones is the Doorway to the Red Star. The magical portal remains inactive at this moment—see Opening the Doorway on page 35 for how the heroes can eventually activate it. The six monoliths defy geologic identification, and a successful DC 30 Arcana or Nature check to Identify Magic in the area confirms that the ring is some sort of powerful but inactive magical portal.

Curiously, the monolithic stones (which are artifacts) cannot be carved or damaged, as many frustrated would-be researchers and vandals have found over the years. The stones are also magnetic, and anyone who comes within 5 feet of one of these stones while carrying ferrous metal objects can feel the magnetic tug of the stones. Those wearing armor made of ferrous metal treat the areas adjacent to and within the stones as difficult terrain. A ferrous metal object placed against one of the stones clings to it (including a suit of armor worn by a character) and can be pulled away using an Interact Action to succeed at a DC 15 Athletics check.

A2. ENTRYWAY

MODERATE 15

This twenty-foot-wide entry hall narrows into ten-foot-wide alcoves to the north and south, where archways open into the two eastern spires.

Creatures: In each of the two alcoves sits a gem-encrusted skull. One of the skulls has sapphires that emit a cold blue in its eye sockets. The other skull's eye sockets contain rubies that burn with a fierce crimson gleam.

These two skulls are actually the undead Muradner and Sprithe, a pair of Throat-of-Nothingness cultists who became lichs long ago. Though they served Dwandek as acolytes for centuries, a failed coup against their leader resulted in the destruction of their *soul cages*. The leaders allowed them to exist but never restore their *soul cages*, and over more centuries, the two have atrophied into their current state as demiliches.

Each demilich has used their staff gems ability to absorb the powers of a *major staff of necromancy*



(Core Rulebook 594). They also cast *spell turning* on themselves and renew it every time the spell expires, so it's always in effect regardless of when the heroes encounter Muradner and Sprithe.

Over the years, their personalities have become warped by boredom, shame, undeath, and constant frustration with each other. Muradner sees himself as the more sensible and grounded of the pair, and also the more powerful. Sprithe thinks Muradner is stuffy and pompous, and enjoys getting up to antics that frustrate the more-serious demilich, such as informing visitors to the cathedral that one of the demiliches always lies and the other always tells the truth. (This is not true, and Muradner's exasperated insistence that Sprithe is lying often convinces such visitors that Muradner is the liar.)

As the more lucid of the pair, Muradner recalls his former role as a leader of the Throat-of-Nothingness and ensures that no one passes through the entryway without confirming their allegiance to the cult, probing entrants with questions about the cult's philosophies and history. During such interrogations, Sprithe distracts the entrants with irreverent and nonsensical questions, which is often just as effective at helping the demiliches perform their duties. As long as Sprithe yammers away nearby, anyone attempting to talk their way into the cathedral takes a -2 circumstance penalty to any checks to Coerce, Lie, or Make an Impression on the demiliches. Despite their conflicting personalities, Muradner and Sprithe have bonded over the centuries and swiftly move to the other's defense if either of them is attacked.

Before the demiliches deign to allow heroes to pass through the entryway, they demand the heroes submit to the "test for the faithful." The demiliches ask the following five questions of the heroes, expecting the entire party to agree upon and provide a single reply.

What do you desire? Any answer that closely approximates "the end of all things" is accepted.

Who is the priest that rules these lands? The answer the demiliches are looking for is "Dwandek."

What sacrifice do you bring to show your worth? There's no single right answer here, though each hero must provide their response. Any magic item of 13th level or higher is accepted by the demiliches as a sacrifice. They also accept the heroes sacrificing an eye, a hand, a foot, or a tongue (see sidebar for further details). If a hero offers any other part of their body, Sprithe replies that the Throat-of-Nothingness appreciates their enthusiasm but the demiliches must accept only one of the approved sacrifices. The demiliches then clarify what body parts make an acceptable sacrifice.

SACRIFICE

The demiliches who guard the entryway to the Cathedral of Nothingness demand a sacrifice from all who enter. While offers of treasure can work to appease these monsters, and combat always remains an option for parties that don't want to sacrifice anything, the option of giving up a part of the body exists. The offer and acceptance of this sacrifice inside the Cathedral of Nothingness constitutes a powerful vow, and if the sacrificed body part is restored while the undead remain in power within the cathedral, the two demiliches sense the restoration. They immediately move to seek out and destroy the one who dared try to cheat the sacrifice. The effects of sacrificing a given body part are as follows:

Eye: You take a -1 circumstance penalty to ranged attack rolls and a -2 circumstance penalty to Perception checks for 1 week. You then take a -1 circumstance penalty to Perception checks thereafter.

Foot: You take a -10-foot circumstance penalty to your Speed for 1 week and a -5-foot circumstance penalty to your Speed thereafter.

Hand: You cannot wield two-handed weapons and do not have an off hand.

Tongue: You cannot speak intelligible language or cast spells with a verbal component for 1 week. After that, you adapt to supplement your spells with clapping or humming, and can replace a verbal component with a somatic one as long as you have a free hand.



What is strongest? The answer the demiliches are looking for is "entropy," though a clever hero who names either of the demiliches will trigger an argument between the two that ends with them conceding that the answer was reasonable and presenting the hero with the next question.

What do you need? The answer the demiliches are looking for is "nothing," though they accept minor variations on this answer, including "the power to bring about nothingness," "the strength to eradicate all who stand in the way of entropy," and similar responses. A clever hero might be able to Lie or Coerce the demiliches into accepting a different answer, though doing so requires a successful DC 36 Deception or Intimidation check.

At the end of this test, if the heroes have answered all five questions to Muradner and Sprithe's satisfaction, the demiliches grow silent, a bit baffled that finally someone they don't know has answered their questions properly. A few moments later, they wordlessly retreat



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to their alcoves. Any further attempt to interact with them enrages them and drives them to attack.

If the heroes haven't answered all five questions to the demiliches' satisfaction (including if the heroes fail to come to unified answers for any of the questions), or if at any point the heroes make their goal to harm the cult apparent, the demiliches shriek in rage and attack. Sprithe unleashes a *cloudkill* spell from his staff gems, and Muradner casts *wail of the banshee*. The demiliches generally unleash their most powerful spells during a fight, though the two have known each other for a millennium and generally coordinate their tactics, avoid casting the same spell as their counterpart, and use spells like *blindness* to confound their enemies. Despite their warped and unstable minds, the demiliches are still highly skilled and intelligent creatures who have slain countless Iobane magi over the centuries; they don't cast their spells or use their abilities wastefully or unwisely.

MURADNER AND SPRITHE

CREATURE 15

Demiliches (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 222)

Initiative Deception +26

Treasure: Destroying the demiliches yields a pair of *demilich eye gems* (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 223)—one of *maze* and one of *polar ray*. A successful DC 36 Perception check made while Searching either alcove reveals a hidden compartment (once they find at least one, the heroes can automatically spot the other in the opposite alcove). Each compartment contains a demilich's tattered old cult garb, along with a *type IV ring of wizardry* in one alcove and a jeweled ring worth 800 gp in the other.

A crumpled piece of paper in one of the ruined robe's pockets contains a strange sequence of numbers starting at 1 and increasing at staggered intervals (1, 3, 6, 8, and so on); these are the instructions for the safe sequence of steps to traverse the stairwell in area A4 without triggering the flensing chute trap (page 29), but the paper contains no clue or context as to its purpose.

XP Award: If the heroes satisfy the demiliches during the test of the faithful, grant them 80 XP.

A3. CHOIR

MODERATE 15

This fifty-five-foot-high chamber contains banks of ancient benches that stretch to the north and south, leaving a clear walkway between the large stone doors to the east and west. Glimmering braziers and glowing runes fill the room, and eerie shadows dance and weave across the walls. A human corpse clad in red and black lies slumped by the wall just north of the doors to the west, clutching a bone staff wrapped in colorful ribbons.

Heavy beams in the chamber cast dark and distorted shadows against the ceiling of this room. Other, more ominous shadows lurk amid the benches and alcoves. As the heroes step into the choir, the eerie sound of discordant singing coming from the benches starts to manifest, but until the room is more thoroughly explored, the sound is merely unnerving, not actually dangerous.

Creature: Only a few months before the heroes arrived, a Chelaxian scholar named Tollvych met his demise in this chamber. The man first became intrigued by the Doorway to the Red Star after he came into the possession of an ancient magical staff called *Wyrms Drinker* that a team of Thrune agents stole from the Mwangi Expanse years before. Tollvych determined that *Wyrms Drinker's* powers had gone inert, but that if he could return it to "the site of its greatest triumph," the powerful device would reactivate. After determining this site to be the Doorway to the Red Star, Tollvych made the journey. He opted for stealth and trickery (tactics that allowed him to sneak past the Iobane and even to avoid a confrontation with the demiliches in area A1) but his luck ran out upon reaching this chamber, when he fell victim to the entropy choir (see Hazard).

Tollvych lingers on, though, in the form of a ghost. As soon as anyone steps into this room, the ghost rises from his mortal remains, calling out to the heroes to "hold fast, lest you join me in this torment!" As a ghost, he resembles his appearance in life: a handsome man clad in red and black robes. Yet as he moves, it becomes obvious that his bones have been broken in dozens of places, and his limbs, neck, and torso bend in unsettling and gruesome ways.

Tollvych remains cruel and loyal to Asmodeus in death, yet he harbors no ill-will toward the heroes—provided they agree to help him. Whether they seek to speak to him from the edge of the room, or after they approach and have to endure and deal with the haunt, his request remains the same: he wants only to move on to the afterlife, but the overwhelming ennui that infuses the Cathedral of Nothingness prevents him from doing so. He never got the chance to explore deeper into the cathedral, but in undeath he can sense the general direction of the heart of this place's tedium, something he can describe to the heroes only as a "pulsing drone of unlife above." He can indicate the general direction in which the heroes must travel to confront this source but doesn't know what it is. (What he's sensing, of course, is the lich Dwandek in area A8.)

Tollvych has little interest in fighting the heroes unless they provoke him. If he notices any attempt to take his belongings, he shrieks "Still mine!" and

moves to intercept the thief, attacking if they don't immediately back away from his treasures.

If the heroes destroy Dwandek (even if only temporarily, before destroying his *soul cage* as well), the cathedral's hold over Tollvych's soul loosens; the next time the heroes enter this room (or 24 hours later), his ghost rises one last time from his remains with a sigh, and then moves into the afterlife. If Tollvych's soul is freed, the treasures found among his remains are safe to claim.

TOLLVYCH

CREATURE 15

UNIQUE LE MEDIUM GHOST INCORPOREAL SPIRIT UNDEAD

Male human ghost (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 166)

Perception +26; darkvision

Languages Common, Infernal, Taldane

Skills Academia Lore +27, Arcana +29, Intimidation +27, Stealth +29

Str -5, **Dex** +4, **Con** +0, **Int** +6, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +6

AC 33; **Fort** +21, **Ref** +25, **Will** +28

HP 200 (negative healing, rejuvenation); **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, precision, unconscious; **Resistances** all damage 15 (except force, *ghost touch*, or positive; double resistance vs. non-magical)

Speed fly 25 feet

Melee ♦ ghostly hand +28 (agile, finesse, magical), **Damage** 3d12+10 negative

Arcane Innate Spells DC 36, attack +28;

8th *dispel magic*, *phantasmal killer*;

7th *duplicate foe*; **6th** *chain lightning*, *disintegrate*; **5th** *cone of cold*, *hallucination*;

4th *nightmare*, *suggestion*; **3rd** *blindness*, *nondetection*; **2nd** *telekinetic maneuver* (×2); **1st**

ray of enfeeblement (×3); **Cantrips (8th)** *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

Bone-Shattering Cry ♦♦ (divine, evocation, sonic) Tollvych cries out in pain as his body twists and grinds into horrific, distorted shapes. All creatures within a 30-foot emanation take 16d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 36 basic Reflex save) as the sound of the Bone-Shattering Cry shakes and shatters their own bones. Tollvych can't use Bone-Shattering Cry for 1d4 rounds.

Frightful Moan ♦♦ (auditory, divine, emotion, enchantment, fear, mental) Tollvych laments his fate, forcing each living creature within 30 feet to attempt a DC 36 Will save. On a failure, a creature becomes frightened 2 (or frightened 3 on a critical failure). On a success, a creature is temporarily immune to Tollvych's frightful moan for 1 minute.

Hazard: Once the domain of a talented elven bard and devoted cultist named Ntanja, this chamber has become infused with the sinister choir and destructive resonances that remain after so many years spent singing the praises of entropy. Ntanja and her singers continue here in the form of shadowy figures that float amid the room's benches, and the presence of anything alive in the chamber draws their wrath. If the heroes trigger this haunt before speaking to Tollvych, the ghost does nothing but watch in despair and sympathy as the heroes face the hazard. The haunt has no power to harm Tollvych any longer, yet he remembers all too well the pain of succumbing to it.



Tollvych

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This entropy choir uses Performance rather than Stealth to determine initiative. This hazard can be perceived automatically, and attacks against it can target any of the shadows that occupy the same squares as the benches (these shadowy figures do not change position).

ENTROPY CHOIR

HAZARD 15

UNIQUE COMPLEX HAUNT

Performance +33 (master); creatures in the area automatically notice the eerily swaying shadows

Description A choir of ghostly shadows fill the benches in this room, chanting a haunting and unearthly melody.

Disable Religion DC 40 (master) to exorcise the spirits and break the power binding them into a single entity, or Performance 35 (expert) to counter the choir and nullify the destructive elements of its song

AC 36; **Fort** +23; **Ref** +25, **Will** +29

Hardness 24; **HP** 90 (BT 45); **Immunities** critical hits, negative, object immunities, precision damage;

Weaknesses positive 15

Call to Nothingness ⤵ (auditory, divine, enchantment, mental, sonic) **Trigger** A living creature moves more than 10 feet into area **A3**; **Effect** The eerie call of the entropy choir saps the will of living creatures. A living creature who fails a DC 36 Will save becomes slowed 1 as long as they remain in area **A3**. The entropy choir then rolls initiative.

Routine (3 actions; auditory, divine, evocation, sonic) The choir continues to sing its grim dirge every round until it is disabled or destroyed. If there are any non-slowed living creatures in area **A3** when its turn starts, it first uses Call to Nothingness as a single action. It uses its remaining actions (or all three actions if there are slowed living creatures in the room already) to focus soul-shattering choruses onto individual targets. The choir can target any living creature in area **A3** with an action, but never more than once per round per creature. It prefers to attack slowed creatures over all others, but it targets non-slowed creatures if they're the only viable targets. A targeted creature must attempt a DC 36 Fortitude save.

Critical Success The target is unaffected.

Success The target takes 5d6 sonic damage.

Failure The target takes 10d6 sonic damage.

Critical Failure The target takes 15d6 sonic damage and increases their drained condition by 1, to a maximum of drained 4.

Reset The entropy choir resets automatically after 24 hours, even if it has been disabled or destroyed. It fades away forever once Dwandek and other members of the cult to which it sings its praises are destroyed.

Treasure: In addition to *Wyrms Drinker*, which is still clutched in the broken hands of Tollvych's remains

(and ironically awoken from its torpor to be once again fully active less than a day before Tollvych's death), Tollvych's body still wears his black and red *greater clandestine cloak*.

A4. CRYPT

TRIVIAL 15

This high chamber contains several stone sarcophagi in various stages of disrepair. Candles flicker atop stone altars in circular chambers to the northwest and southwest, while a flight of stairs winds up along a stone pillar to the south.

This stairwell leads up to area **A7**. The altars in the circular side rooms both stand at the base of another pair of spires like those in area **A2**. A successful DC 25 Religion check to Recall Knowledge while studying either altar reveals that they aren't devoted to any one specific deity or pantheon, but instead to the concept of nothingness itself.

The candles in these side chambers burn constantly, and their magical nature causes all of area **A4** to be filled with dim light, spreading to all corners of the room. The candles relight in 1 round if blown out, but they are easy to destroy. Until all the candles in both side rooms are destroyed, they attempt to counteract any light effect that is cast or brought into the room (counteract +31) and continue to attempt to counteract remaining light effects at the start of each round thereafter.

Creatures: The powerful mohrg Taon (area **A7**) has slain many of the Iobane's warriors over the centuries, claiming them as his undead spawn. As years have turned to decades, and decades into centuries since the unfortunate souls' transformations, these spawn have evolved into beings more powerful than the average mohrg, though Taon has retained his influence over them. Although they are Taon's spawn, these mohrgs are much more closely affiliated with the Throat-of-Nothingness and are all members of the cult. The spawn lurk within this chamber, contemplating emptiness, and are ready to fight any intruders foolish enough to encroach upon cult territory. The heroes might be able to trick these spawn into thinking they belong here, but the ruse isn't likely to last for long once the spawn realize the heroes are attacking other inhabitants of the cathedral.

SPAWN OF TAON (8)

CREATURE 11

RARE CE MEDIUM UNDEAD

Variant mohrg spawn (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 172)

Perception +21; darkvision

Languages Common, Necril

Skills Acrobatics +20, Athletics +24, Intimidation +22, Society +19, Stealth +22

Str +7, **Dex** +5, **Con** +5, **Int** +1, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +5

AC 30; **Fort** +22, **Ref** +22, **Will** +19

HP 175, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, unconscious; **Resistances** piercing 12, slashing 6

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ claw +24, **Damage** 2d12+13 slashing plus Grab

Melee ♦ tongue +24 (agile), **Effect** paralysis

Paralysis (occult, incapacitation, necromancy) A living creature hit by a mohrg's tongue Strike must succeed at a DC 30 Fortitude save or become paralyzed. The creature can attempt a new save at the end of each of its turns. The DC cumulatively decreases by 1 on each attempt.

Hazard: The stairs to area A7 have been rigged to collapse into a twisting downward spiral when stepped on out of sequence. This order can be detected with a DC 35 Perception check or DC 30 Engineering Lore check, but it is also written on the crumpled piece of paper concealed in area A2. Triggering this trap turns the stairwell into a twisting chute that deposits the heroes back into area A4, slashing at them with razor-sharp blades as they tumble downward. The mohrgs here know the staircase is dangerous and that there's some specific way to safely traverse it, but as they never need to go that way, they don't know the proper order.

FLENSING CHUTE

HAZARD 12

UNCOMMON MECHANICAL TRAP

Stealth DC 35 (master)

Description The stairs collapse into a downward spiral.

Disable Thievery DC 35 (master) to decouple several mechanisms barely accessible through gaps between the shifting risers, or Perception DC 38 to note which stairs have slightly different wear patterns to know which ones are safe to step on

Change to Chute ↻ **Trigger** A Small or larger creature approaches within 20 feet of the top of the stairs; **Reaction** The stair risers shift downward, forming a steep ramp while exposing lines of razor-sharp blades. All creatures on the stairs must succeed at a DC 32 Reflex save or tumble down the chute, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage, 4d12+26 slashing damage, and landing prone in area A4.

Reset The flensing chute resets automatically.

A5. EMPTY CULTIST CHAMBERS

This pair of large, domed chambers is connected by a twenty-foot-wide hallway. Stiff-looking beds line the walls of both chambers, surrounding a few chairs and tables.

This room once served as quarters for the bulk of the cultists who dwelt in the cathedral, where they lived in a communal area with no privacy and no concession toward personal expression. With the Iobane's recent defeat of the cult, though, this room has been left empty and barren. Currently, no lower-ranking members of the Throat-of-Nothingness remain.

A6. EXPLORATION OF EMPTINESS MODERATE 15

This pair of large domed chambers is connected by a twenty-foot wide hallway. Several workbenches, bookshelves, and desks line the walls of both chambers, while at the center of each stands a long table surrounded by chairs. Books and notes are scattered haphazardly about the room.

These chambers served the Throat-of-Nothingness as workshops and laboratories, a place for the cultists to explore the concept of nothingness and the meaning of emptiness. With the defeat of the cult's lower-ranking members, the experiments here have gone unattended. A character who takes several minutes looking through the books, notes, and materials here, and succeeds at a DC 30 Occultism or Religion check, can confirm that the experiments conducted here were principally focused on the theoretical idea of "undeath beyond undeath." The theory suggests that if an undead creature were starved of the needs and urges that keeps it bound to this world long enough, it might transform into something even more removed from the cycle of life. None of the research done in this workshop made much progress toward this concept. In fact, the research strongly suggests that all that lies beyond undeath is nothingness, as the soul itself is finally freed to move to the Boneyard. This result disturbed and frightened these cultists, who were hoping for an end to the cycle of consciousness.

Creatures: The cultists often invited sinister and eldritch beings to aid them in their studies, and a quelaunt still works here. The aberration has welcomed the peace and solitude granted it by the defeat of so many of the cultists, and it has continued to conduct the group's latest experiment on a pair of trapped and muzzled vrykolakas ancients. The cult hoped that by starving the vrykolakas vampires of the blood and breath they hungered for, they could trigger a theoretical transition into the "undeath beyond undeath." Of course the experiment hasn't succeeded, but the tests did have a curious side effect: these two vrykolakas ancients now treat this chamber as their burial site, almost as if their first symbolic death from starvation reset their spiritual links to their prior lives.

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The quelaunt is particularly intrigued by this discovery and has been working for months on solving the problem, but has made little progress. It remains patient and methodical in its work, but the arrival of the heroes gives it a chance to expand the experiment.

When it notices the heroes, it sees them as valuable research components, regardless of any ruse they're pursuing. The quelaunt muses to them via telepathy, "Ah, blood and breath. Let us witness whether infusion of need into the dead might affect this lasting privation." It then releases the two vrykolakas ancients from their muzzles, each as a single Interact action. The vampires, now nearly feral with hunger, lunge forth to attack the heroes at once. The quelaunt stands back, watching idly but taking care to stay out of the vrykolakas ancients' pestilential auras if it can. It doesn't enter the fight unless it's attacked or if the two vampires are destroyed. If the heroes destroy the vampires the quelaunt speaks again, saying, "A pity, but an opportunity for new exploration." It then attacks the heroes, intending to capture them and use their remains to explore the transition of life into undeath.



Vrykolakas Ancient

QUELAUNT

CREATURE 15

Pathfinder Bestiary 273

Initiative Perception +29

VRYKOLAKAS ANCIENT (2)

CREATURE 13

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 277

Initiative Perception +23

Muzzled The vrykolakas ancient can't use its fangs Strike or Steal Breath until its muzzle is removed, either by the quelaunt or by succeeding at a DC 35 Athletics check as an Interact action.

A7. INNER SANCTUM

MODERATE 15

A winding flight of stairs is to the south in this room, next to a stout stone door, its face carved with complex runes. A squat, plain stone altar is against the far wall of the room opposite the stairs, and the shattered remains of several benches lie scattered across the floor.

Creatures: The powerful mohrg Taon now occupies this room, along with his undead mount, Sparkeater. In life, Taon was unaffiliated with the Throat-of-Nothingness but was nevertheless a

ferocious enemy of the Iobane, and his raids from atop his young blue dragon mount were devastating. When the Iobane finally defeated Taon, he and his dragon plummeted from the sky to crash into the plaza right in front of the entrance to the Cathedral

of Nothingness, whereupon a slew of cultists swarmed out to claim the remains.

Originally, they'd hoped to transform the two into powerful undead allies.

They animated Sparkeater's young soul as a variant ravener husk.

Taon's transformation was even more successful, turning him into a very powerful mohrg.

While the transformation left Sparkeater with only a fragment of

his previous intellect and personality, the undead dragon remains loyal to Taon. Dwandek has yet to give Taon

or his mount a chance to lash out at the Iobane, as he's waiting for the right chance to

capitalize on the potential psychological effect of a feared foe returning from the dead in an even more

powerful state. Dwandek has already given the mohrg *Spellcutter* (page 76), a magical sword once

owned by the Ten Magic Warriors, as further insult to the Iobane. At your option, if the heroes fail to

defeat the pair here or retreat to the plaza before facing this pair, Taon and Sparkeater might emerge

from the cathedral to launch an attack on the Iobane that the heroes must help the magi stop.

If encountered here, Taon is likely to attack, even if the heroes are masquerading as cultists—Taon has no love for the cult or its machinations. While riding Sparkeater, Taon must spend an action each round to

retain his perch on the powerful undead or fall prone to the ground next to it, though Sparkeater is not

inconvenienced at all by bearing a rider. *Spellcutter* is ineffective against living targets, so Taon tries to save

a reaction to activate *Spellcutter* when faced with enemy spellcasters. He otherwise favors his claw and

tongue attacks in combat.

If reduced to fewer than 60 Hit Points, if Sparkeater is slain, or if the heroes convince Taon

that they're in the cathedral only to vanquish the cult, Taon tries to bargain for his escape. He offers the heroes information on Dwandek, and even offers

Spellcutter to demonstrate that his intention to negotiate is genuine. Taon can reveal to the heroes

that Dwandek keeps his soul within a page of his magical grimoire—a key bit of information that the

heroes need to permanently defeat the lich. While Taon is true to his word about leaving the region if

the heroes make a deal with him, letting the mohrg go free might impair the heroes' relationship with the Iobane. If Mpondo is accompanying the heroes when they make a deal with Taon, the warder-chief makes his disapproval clear and departs to warn the other Iobane of the threat that has been released.

TAON

CREATURE 15

UNIQUE CE MEDIUM UNDEAD

Male variant mohrg (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 172)

Perception +25; darkvision

Languages Common, Necril

Skills Acrobatics +26, Athletics +29, Intimidation +29, Society +22, Stealth +28

Str +6, **Dex** +5, **Con** +4, **Int** +1, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +6

Items Spellcutter

AC 38; **Fort** +28, **Ref** +26, **Will** +23

HP 230, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison; **Resistances** piercing 15, slashing 10

Attack of Opportunity 2

Mohrg Spawn (occult, necromancy) A living creature slain by a mohrg that had a lower level than the mohrg rises as a mohrg spawn (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 172) after 1d4 rounds, on its turn. This mohrg spawn is under the command of the mohrg that created it. If the creator of the mohrg spawn is destroyed, the mohrg spawn is destroyed as well, immediately collapsing into a pile of decayed flesh and bones.

Speed 50 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ claw +29, **Damage** 3d12+14 slashing plus Grab

Melee ♦ tongue +29 (agile, reach 10 feet), **Effect** paralysis

Melee ♦ Spellcutter +31 (magical, versatile P), **Damage** 3d8+14 slashing (cannot damage living creatures)

Cruel Reactions Taon gains an extra reaction each round that can be used only to make an Attack of Opportunity.

Paralysis (occult, incapacitation, necromancy) A living creature hit by Taon's tongue Strike must succeed at a DC 36 Fortitude save or become paralyzed. The creature can attempt a new save at the end of each of its turns, and the DC cumulatively decreases by 1 on each attempt.

SPARKEATER

CREATURE 14

UNIQUE CE LARGE DRAGON UNDEAD

Variant ravener husk (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 224)

Initiative Perception +26

Failed Ravener Sparkeater has the same statistics as a normal ravener husk but is Large instead of Gargantuan. His melee Strikes have a reach of only 5 feet, and he lacks the Ravenous Repast ability, as he was never a ravener in the first place.

Hazard: A deadly trap protects the door that opens into the stairs leading up to area A8. During

his travels into the Astral Plane and realms beyond, Dwandek discovered a small pocket of self-sustaining horror—a pocket plane formed from nightmares. Anyone other than the lich who opens either door into the stairwell (the one leading to area A7 or the one to area A8) runs the risk of being cast into this deathly dream trap and subjected to its horrors.

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Taon

DEATHLY DREAM

HAZARD 15

RARE MAGICAL TRAP

Stealth DC 38 (master)

Description Sinister runes adorn the doorway, opening a portal to a realm of nightmares if anyone other than Dwandek opens the door.

Disable Thievery DC 40 (master) to seal the rift using materials strongly grounded to the Material Plane, or *dispel magic* (7th-level, counteract DC 33) to counteract the portal.

AC 34; **Fort** +29, **Ref** +23

Hardness 24; **HP** 96 (BT 48); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Drawn to Nightmare ☞ (arcane, conjuration, teleportation);

Trigger A creature other than Dwandek opens the door;

Effect The triggering creature is drawn into a pocket plane of pure nightmare (DC 38 Will save to resist). Each round at the start of their turn, the creature takes 4d8 mental damage as they are assaulted by otherworldly visions, and must succeed at a new Will save against the original DC to be ejected from the pocket plane and deposited in the center of area **A5**.

Reset The deathly dream trap resets automatically as long as it hasn't been disabled or destroyed. Each time it resets, the tiny pocket plane of nightmare it sends its victim into resets as well, so no two victims will ever share the same deathly dream.

XP Award: If the heroes negotiate with Taon, award them XP as though they defeated him and Sparkeater in combat.

A8. DWANDEK'S ARCANUM

SEVERE 15

Bookshelves stretch from floor to ceiling around this expansive room, but the chamber's only other furnishings are worktables cluttered with parchments, books, and tools for magical research.

This room serves Dwandek as a lair and laboratory. Unless the heroes have taken extraordinary precautions at stealth, Dwandek is aware of their presence and prepares his room accordingly. In any event, he knows the heroes are enemies of the cult he's painstakingly fostered over many years.

Hazard: Dwandek has set up a *darkside mirror* hazard to foil intruders, positioning it between the two worktables, facing the room's door to trap creatures entering his sanctum. If the heroes have made it this far without alerting Dwandek to their presence, the mirror is instead behind the staircase, facing outward to trap anyone who might skulk around the back side of the staircase.

DARKSIDE MIRROR

HAZARD 14

Pathfinder Core Rulebook 528

Stealth +24 (master) to notice it isn't a regular mirror

Creature: Dwandek attacks intruders at once, focusing on spells that trap his foes or turn their power against them, such as *duplicate foe* or *dominate*. If he is alerted to trouble before combat, he casts *false life*, *fly*, and *resist energy* (fire) on himself, and carries his *wand of inexhaustible cynicism* (*Secrets of Magic* 111) in one hand. If reduced to 135 or fewer Hit Points, Dwandek uses *vampiric exsanguination* or *vampiric maiden* to harm his opponents and fortify himself with temporary Hit Points. He fights until destroyed, trusting that the heroes won't discover his *soul cage*.

DWANDEK

CREATURE 17

UNIQUE NE MEDIUM UNDEAD

Male human lich necromancer (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 220)

Perception +31; darkvision

Languages Common, Necril, Undercommon

Skills Arcana +33, Crafting +31, Deception +27, Intimidation +29, Occultism +33, Religion +29

Str +0, **Dex** +5, **Con** +6, **Int** +8, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +4

Void Shroud (aura, death, necromancy) 30 feet. As lich, but DC 35.

Items *diadem of intellect*, *wand of inexhaustible cynicism*^{SOM}

AC 40; **Fort** +31, **Ref** +27, **Will** +30

HP 270 (negative healing, rejuvenation); **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, unconscious; **Resistances** arcane spell damage 5, cold 20, physical 15 (except magic bludgeoning)

Counterspell ☞ **Trigger** A creature casts a spell Dwandek has prepared; **Effect** As lich.

Resist Arcane Magic ☞; **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger** Dwandek attempts a save against an arcane spell but hasn't rolled yet; **Effect** Dwandek automatically succeeds at his save against the triggering spell.

Speed 25 feet, fly 25 feet

Melee ♦ hand +32 (finesse, magical), **Damage** 5d8 negative plus paralyzing touch

Arcane Prepared Spells DC 39, attack +29; **9th** *massacre*, *power word kill*, *telepathic demand*; **8th** *horrid wilting* (×2), *maze*, *prismatic wall*; **7th** *duplicate foe*, *eclipse burst* (×2), *mask of terror*; **6th** *chain lightning*, *dominate*, *vampiric exsanguination* (×2); **5th** *cloudkill*, *cone of cold* (×2), *wall of ice*; **4th** *fly*, *phantasmal killer*, *vampiric maiden* (×2); *Advanced Player's Guide* 227); **3rd** *blindness*, *locate*, *magic missile*, *vampiric touch*; **2nd** *false life*, *mirror image*, *resist energy*, *see invisibility*; **1st** *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement* (×2), *true strike*; **Cantrips** (9th) *detect magic*, *mage hand*, *message*, *ray of frost*, *shield*

Drain Soul Cage ♦ **Frequency** once per day; **Effect**

Dwandek taps into his *soul cage*'s power to cast any arcane spell up to 9th level, even if the spell being cast is not one of his prepared spells. The lich's *soul cage* doesn't need to be present for the lich to use this ability.

Paralyzing Touch (arcane, curse, incapacitation, necromancy)
As lich, but DC 38.

Unflinching Spellcasting If a reaction would disrupt Dwandek's spellcasting action, Dwandek attempts a DC 12 flat check. On a success, the action isn't disrupted.

The Soul Cage: Once Dwandek is defeated, his soul retreats into his *soul cage*, a single page he bound into the *Grimoire of Unknown Necessities* (page 77) on a worktable here. To destroy Dwandek, the heroes must also destroy his *soul cage*. A character who critically succeeds at Identifying Magic on the *Grimoire of Unknown Necessities* realizes that one of the pages near the end has been cleverly added. (If the heroes learned from Taon that Dwandek keeps his *soul cage* in this book, they automatically locate the *soul cage* in the book when they attempt to Identify its Magic and get anything other than a critical failure on that check.) This page, which bears what appears to be nothing more than a detailed illustration of a nameless graveyard, is in fact Dwandek's *soul cage*. Despite appearing to be a piece of paper, this page is just as difficult to destroy as any *soul cage* (Hardness 9 and 36 HP).

If the heroes don't discover the *soul cage* but keep the book, there's a chance for them to discover the properties of that strange page simply through daily use: each time a character Activates the grimoire, roll a secret DC 18 flat check. On a success, the hero realizes that there's something strange with that page, whereupon a successful DC 34 check to Identify Magic on that page is enough to learn the truth.

Once the page is isolated, it can be removed and destroyed normally without harming the grimoire, but destroying the entire book also destroys the *soul cage*. If the *soul cage* or the entire grimoire is not successfully destroyed within 24 hours, Dwandek's soul reforms within 100 yards of the page, and his primary goal becomes reclaiming the grimoire and escaping. He knows his lair in the Cathedral of Nothingness has been compromised, so he flees the area entirely to begin his schemes anew elsewhere.

Treasure: In addition to the *Grimoire of Unknown Necessities* and the gear Dwandek carries, his lair contains a variety of other magical treasures: two +2 *weapon potency runes* and two *greater striking runes* prepared to adorn the armaments of new undead minions, and an *orange prism aeon stone* that Dwandek has been studying. There are also 8,500 gp worth of rare spell components and minor magical knickknacks scattered about the room.

XP Award: If the heroes destroy Dwandek's *soul cage*, grant them 80 XP.



Dwandek

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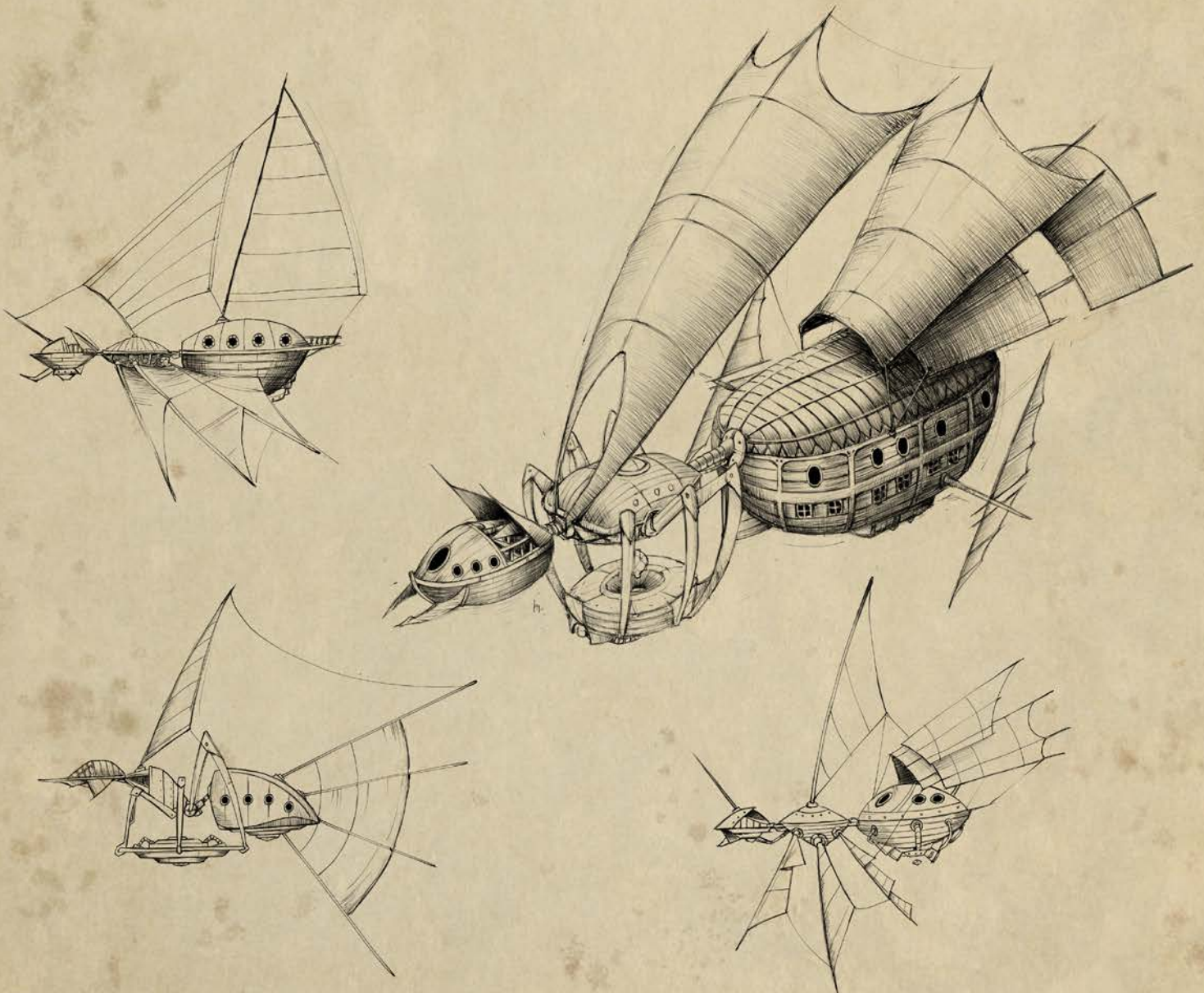
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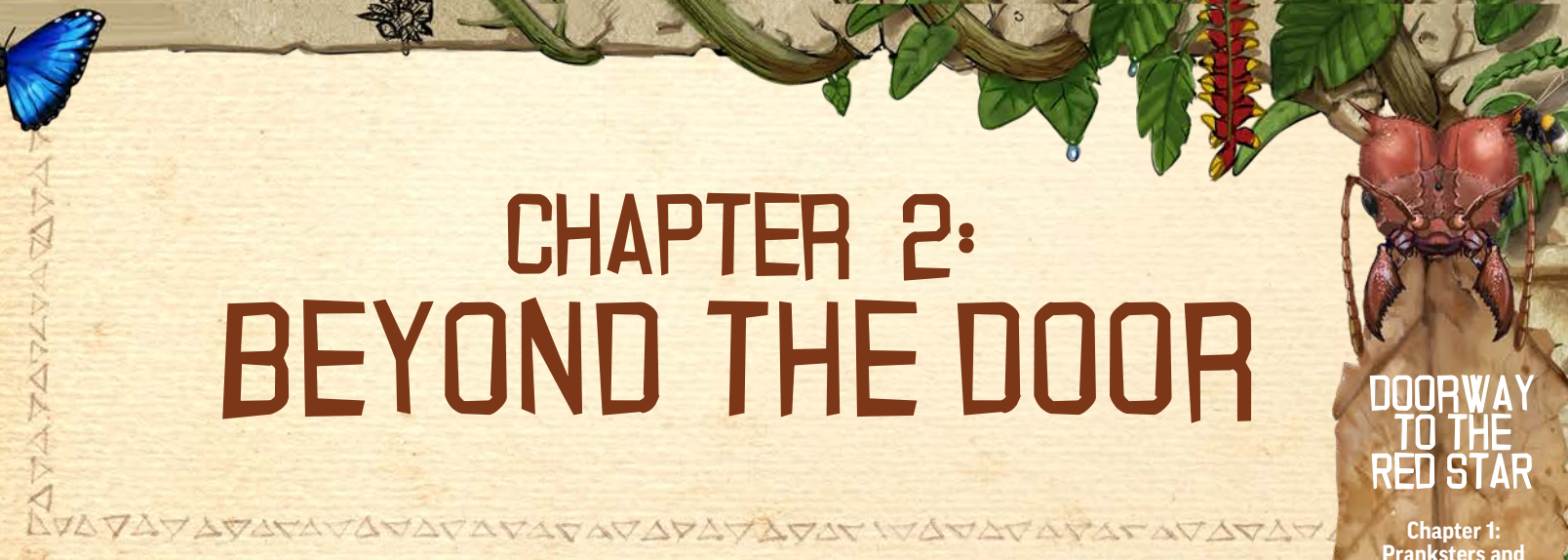
Could I return to Golarion, the world from which Old-Mage Jatembe has banished me? Yes, perhaps. He was clever in that he sent me not to another plane, but to another world. A planar jaunt is easier, ironically, than interplanetary travel. The gleaming light of Golarion hangs in the sky of this red world, taunting me each night with both its presence and its distance.

But it is not yet time to return. I was weakened by our struggle, cast down in my power. But it is the nature of the hive to rebuild its strength, as I am rebuilding the strength of my hive by my will alone.

I took strange knowledge from the Contemplatives of Ashok, whose intellectual naval-gazing reminds me so much of the Throat-of-Nothingness cultists that I wonder whether the Doorway does more than transfer beings, but also high-minded, faux intellectualism.

After due consideration, I feel the most valuable thing I liberated from the scholars' clutches is a schematic for a flying ship. Of course, the vision for the ship is too limited, but my goals always exceed the limited intellects around me. With judicious application of enchantments, I can compel the technologically sophisticated natives of this world to build me a much greater ship—one that I can use to dominate Akiron as I nearly conquered Golarion.





CHAPTER 2: BEYOND THE DOOR

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Once the heroes defeat Dwandek, they have proven themselves to Warder-Chief Mpondo and the rest of the Iobane. The heroes and their expedition are allowed remain in the area as long as they wish. With the Throat-of-Nothingness broken and the Iobane no longer forced to keep watch on the Cathedral of Nothingness, no further threats distract them here for the remainder of the adventure. In time, the Iobane intend to reclaim the cathedral, but for now, all attention swiftly becomes focused on the heroes and their plan to open the Doorway to the Red Star.

The actual Doorway to the Red Star consists of a ring of crimson stone menhirs that stand not far from the entrance to the cathedral (see area **A1** on page 24). Mpondo and the Iobane know the ritual required to activate the Doorway, as well as the schedule on which it can be opened, but have never dared perform the ritual. They see themselves as the guardians of this side of the portal; the other side isn't within their charge.

If the heroes have secured Mpondo's trust and defeated the lich Dwandek, the Iobane are more than willing to allow the heroes access to the Doorway and assist with activating it. It's not worth coding the period of activity for the Doorway to a specific date unless you really want to force the heroes to follow a strict schedule in completing Chapter 1. Instead, soon after they emerge victorious from the Cathedral of Nothingness, Mpondo informs the heroes that for the next month, the Doorway can be opened with the ritual he knows.

Opening the Doorway

Mpondo can guide the heroes through the necessary attunement process. This requires the heroes to spend a day within 100 feet of the Doorway itself. This time need not be spent in meditation (or in any other specific activity), but stepping further away even for a single round disrupts the attunement and forces that character to start the daylong process over. Once attuned, a character can use the Doorway to the Red Star at any time during that period of activity—in this case, within the next month. During this time, Mpondo teaches the heroes the *rite of the Red Star* ritual (page 77). If, for whatever reason, Mpondo isn't available to teach it to the heroes, they can discover the ritual themselves by spending 2 weeks of downtime researching the Doorway and succeeding at a DC 40 Arcana or Occultism check. Alternately, you can allow them to discover the ritual among Dwandek's research notes in area **A8**.

Once the heroes are attuned and ready to open the portal, Mpondo instructs them to stand within the ring of stones at area **A1**. He warns them that since the portal remained closed for so long, there's a possibility that

CHAPTER 2 SYNOPSIS

The heroes arrive on Akiton and should notice the thin air and light gravity right away (page 69).

After aiding the enigmatic Contemplatives of Ashok, whose investigations into the history of the King of Biting Ants drew hostile intruders, the heroes reach the grimy and sprawling city of Seldo. They can find hints that Jatembe is the King's prisoner on his giant fortress-airship and arrange for vehicles to catch it.

CHAPTER 2 TREASURE

The permanent and consumable items available as treasure in Chapter 2 are as follows.

- +1 resilient chainmail
- +1 resilient leather armor
- +2 greater striking crossbow
- +2 greater striking shobhad longrifle (page 78)
- +2 greater striking vorpal greatsword
- +2 resilient leather armor
- +2 striking greatsword
- +2 striking handwraps of mighty blows
- decanter of endless water
- disintegration bolt
- gold nodule aeon stone
- greater choker of elocution
- hemlock
- major staff of impossible visions (Advanced Player's Guide 263)
- major thunderstone
- necklace of fireballs type VII
- wand of magnificent mansion



something might be lurking in the “in between”—be it a potentially deadly outflow of trapped magical energy or even some sort of dangerous monster. He’d rather not risk his own magi in this rite, but if the heroes press, he agrees to have four Iobane magi nearby in case they are needed.

It’s assumed that the heroes work together to perform the *rite of the Red Star*; if they aren’t confident in their ability to lead the ritual, Mpondo can serve as the primary caster.

After the heroes pass through the Doorway to the Red Star, they emerge into an underground chamber: area **B1** of the Hall of Reason.

XP Award: Grant the heroes 80 XP for successfully opening the Doorway to the Red Star; do not grant XP for any bythos aeons that they accidentally draw in as the result of a critical failure.

Hall of Reason

The Doorway to the Red Star and its companion structure on Akiton, the Hall of Reason, were built ages ago by an enigmatic society known as the Contemplatives of Ashok. Their presence on Golarion

has long since dwindled, but they remain active on Akiton. In fact, a certain sect of contemplatives delved too deeply into research involving time and temporal effects recently, and these residents of the Hall of Reason are now besieged by all manner of planar creatures. The King of Biting Ants also played a hand in drawing this unusual array of beings into a concentrated assault against the contemplatives, hoping to prevent passage through the Doorway to the Red Star from either side until his plans to fully reconstitute his physical form and return to Golarion are complete.

After the initial attack from so many different places, times, and foes, the contemplatives retreated deep into the Hall of Reason and have taken shelter in area **B1**, the chamber of meditation. By bending time and space around the chamber and throughout the halls, they’ve slowed their enemies’ advance, but these defenses can’t last forever. When the heroes arrive, the contemplatives have already begun debating a retreat through the Doorway to Golarion. They believe that if they can safely escape to the nearby planet, they can collapse the Doorway behind



them and create a new sanctuary to hide them from their unexpected adversaries before the creatures can track them down again.

HALL OF REASON FEATURES

The Hall of Reason is largely unlit; the contemplatives simply use their occult powers to provide light when necessary but otherwise don't bother with permanent lighting fixtures. The exceptions to this are in the Gardens of Enlightenment (area **B5**), which are brightly lit by magical fountains and floating motes of magical light. The walls and ceiling of the Hall of Reason are made of red stone, also shaped by magic. The vaulted ceilings are 20 feet high, while the hallways are broad and open to accommodate the contemplatives' fragile bodies and telekinetic movement.

Use the map on page 36 for encounters in the Hall of Reason.

B1. THE CHAMBER OF MEDITATION SEVERE 16

Read or paraphrase the following as the heroes step through the Doorway to the Red Star.

As the magical light fades and the sensation of sublime disorientation from the powerful teleportation recedes, a large room comes into view. This broad, octagonal chamber is shaped from red stone, the walls of which betray no joints or seams save for on the floor in the center of the room, where a complex ring of runes glows with soft red radiance. Large, overstuffed cushions are arranged neatly alongside small tables. The walls are lined with shelves and bookcases, including some that have been shaped directly into the stone, and each seems to contain a veritable treasure trove of ancient scrolls and texts.

The portal created by the Doorway to the Red Star only grants one-way access, and when the heroes appear here, they do so with a rippling of red energy, as if appearing from the air itself. Should the heroes wish to return to Golarion, they can perform the *rite of the Red Star* anywhere in this chamber—if the ritual is a success, a new (and also one-way) portal opens in the middle of the room. Any who step through it emerge back on Golarion within the ring of stones of the Doorway to the Red Star.

Creatures: When heroes materialize in the center of the chamber of meditation, they surprise the few Contemplatives of Ashok who survived the attack and managed to make their way to this room. Though the heroes' arrival is unexpected, the contemplatives are quick to adapt, and swiftly realize that their presence might signal new possibilities and a chance to reclaim the Hall of Reason.

Eight contemplatives, one of whom is a powerful contemplative meditant named Fourteen Curiosities, sought shelter here while their leader, a contemplative mentor named An End to Rumors, chose to become the focus of the protective wards throughout the Hall and stayed behind in area **B5** to buy the others time to flee. After bolstering this chamber's defenses, the contemplatives have been debating for days as to whether they should mount a rescue attempt to save An End to Rumors or flee to Golarion.

When the contemplatives notice the heroes, Fourteen Curiosities approaches while the others hang back. All eight contemplatives quickly adopt what they hope to be nonthreatening stances as the meditant greets the heroes by apologizing about not being able to extend them "proper hospitality," noting that they have come to the Hall of Reason at an inconvenient time. The contemplative then asks the heroes why they have come to Akiton. If the heroes ask about Old-Mage Jatembe, Fourteen Curiosities admits they know of this man, but only by name and legend; they can't help the heroes further but are quick to point out that their leader, An End to Rumors, likely could.

Once the heroes have a chance to talk with the contemplatives, or if they try to leave the chamber to proceed onward to the rest of Akiton, Fourteen Curiosities informs them that they will not easily be able to leave this room, except back to Golarion through the Doorway to the Red Star. The meditant explains that the Hall of Reason has been besieged by extraplanar entities that have taken their leader prisoner, all as a result of their studies into the Dimension of Time and its influence on the Material Plane. Fourteen Curiosities notes the composition of the attacking entities is unusually diverse, implying that an external force may have worked to organize multiple non-coordinated but simultaneous invasions of the Hall of Reason.

In any event, Fourteen Curiosities explains to the heroes that their leader, An End to Rumors, drew upon their collective magic to warp space and time throughout the Hall of Reason, preventing the invading extraplanar entities from reaching the chamber of meditation. The meditant then proposes a deal: if the heroes, who appear much more combat capable than the contemplatives, agree to defeat the invading force, the contemplatives will slowly remove the wards keeping the invaders in check. Doing so will enable the heroes to access to the rest of the Hall of Reason room by room, and reach both An End to Rumors and the exit to Akiton eventually. This should help prevent the heroes from being overwhelmed by the invading forces, assuming the party attacks quickly enough that

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CONTEMPLATIVE WARDS

As long as at the contemplatives in area **B1** continue to maintain their focus, the walls and doors of the Hall of Reason remain warded with shimmering fields of energy. As the heroes defeat foes, the contemplatives remove door wards to allow progress through the halls, but won't remove the overward until all foes are defeated.

Door Ward: The doors between areas shimmer with red energy. These fields function as opaque *walls of force* heightened to 8th level, so each door ward has AC 10, Hardness 50, and 60 Hit Points. A door ward's hit points replenish fully at the end of a round, even if destroyed. Once a door ward is removed, it cannot be reinstated, and passage through the door is unimpeded. A door ward can be dispelled (9th level, counteract DC 36).

Overward: The overward has no visual presence, but can be felt as a barely audible hum in multiple octaves that seems to fluctuate in pitch while somehow remaining the same (as the hum has a temporal, as well as an audible, nature). As long as the overward persists, all areas within the Hall of Reason attempt to counteract teleportation effects (other than the *rite of the Red Star*) and planar travel into or out of the area (counteract check +30), but the overward does not interfere with attempts to summon a creature into the area. The overward can be dispelled only after all door wards are removed (9th level, counteract DC 38).



the invaders don't figure out how to collapse the wards upon the doorways first.

If the heroes agree to undertake the contemplatives' mission, the contemplatives join together in a moment of meditation that causes the air to hum with their collective occult power. A moment later, one of their number informs the heroes that the wards protecting the doorway in this room have been removed. They hope the hall beyond remains empty of foes (they are, alas, wrong), but from there, the heroes can make their way through the Hall of Reason. As they clear each area of enemy forces, the contemplatives psychically monitoring their progress remove the protective wards preventing passage between each area.

Creatures: If the heroes instead attack the contemplatives, they do their best to defeat the heroes by capturing rather than killing them. If they can do so, they attempt again to recruit the heroes' aid. Otherwise, they fight to the death. If even one of the contemplatives is slain, though, the wards holding back

the invaders fail, and the heroes soon find themselves facing wave after wave of extraplanar threat as the other monsters move in to attempt to take this room, one after the other.

FOURTEEN CURIOSITIES

CREATURE 15

Agender contemplative meditant (page 80)

Initiative Dimension of Time Lore +31

CONTEMPLATIVES (7)

CREATURE 2

Page 80

Initiative Perception +8

B2. MAIN PASSAGEWAY

MODERATE 16

Two doors line the red stone walls of this fifteen-foot-wide hallway.

Creatures A pair of planar time guardians known as bythos aeons occupy this hall. They've been spending the past several hours studying the contemplatives' wards, more intrigued by the mechanism of the magic than feeling a need to destroy it, but they shift their attention to attack the heroes as soon as they notice them. In their strange envisioning communication, the aeons share with each other—and telepathically with the heroes—the thought, "Are these intruders already destroyed? We shall ensure it." The aeons fight until destroyed.

BYTHOS AEONS (2)

CREATURE 16

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 10

Initiative Perception +30

B3. EXCRETORIUM

MODERATE 16

A curving alcove in the opposite wall of this room frames a wide bench. To the left and right, four smaller benches fitted with holes occupy alcoves. Above each smaller bench, a length of metal chain with a stone handle dangling at the end extends downward from the ceiling.

Even a being who is 90 percent mental energy is still 10 percent biological. This chamber is set aside for the contemplatives to perform their necessary functions and ablutions. Normally, pulling one of the metal chains causes a vacuum "whoosh" to sound through the room, as a torrent of water is released from a channel just beneath the bench seats, but as long as the overward remains in place, pulling a chain has no effect. A PC who succeeds at a DC 30 Engineering Lore check to Recall Knowledge is able to identify this device as a lavatory designed to flush excrement from the building to some external depository.



Creatures: A hatred siktempora occupies this room, having fallen into a torpor-like state as the overward suffusing the area has clouded its consciousness. The presence of the heroes draws it out of this fugue, giving it something new to focus its hatred upon.

HATRED SIKTEMPORA

CREATURE 18

Pathfinder Bestiary 3 235

Initiative Perception +33

Treasure: A contemplative meditant was ambushed and slain by the hatred siktempora when the Hall of Reason was invaded. When the siktempora realized it was trapped here, it took out much of its hateful frustration on its surroundings, smashing benches and throwing splintered fragments around the room. The creature's *major staff of impossible visions* (*Advanced Player's Guide* 263) rolled into a channel on the floor and thus avoided the siktempora's wrath.

B4. STORAGE CHAMBER

A single door on cleverly disguised hinges provides entrance to this room. The red stone walls are lined with numerous shelves, all carved directly into the wall's surface. Each shelf contains a variety of items, from obviously mundane brooms and dustpans to unusual meditation devices that induce painful headaches if examined for more than a few moments.

Treasure: This room is used to store various reliquaries, meditation aids, and janitorial equipment. No creatures are present, as the invaders didn't spot anything of interest. A hero who Searches this room and succeeds at a DC 30 Perception check finds a discarded *wand of magnificent mansion*.

B5. GARDENS OF ENLIGHTENMENT MODERATE 16

A winding path makes its languid way through this large, vegetation-filled chamber; most of the plants have been recently trampled. The crystalline music of a thousand silver bells echoes softly through this room, though no sources of sound are visible. A pair of fountains filled with clear water sparkle in alcoves along one wall, while hundreds of tiny motes of softly pulsing light drift idly about on the air.

A successful DC 30 Perception check makes it apparent that the small, glowing motes floating around the room are the source of the sound. While it's unlikely to factor in the initial encounter here, the calming presence of this sound grants a +2 circumstance bonus on all skill checks made to cast rituals in this area.

A character who succeeds at a DC 35 Arcana or Occultism check to Identify Magic on the glowing

motes discovers something astounding: these floating specks of light are in fact magical storage devices, memories the contemplatives have given independence to drift and waft on their own. In a way, the hundreds of little motes of light are analogous to books, making this entire chamber an immense library. A creature with telepathy can access and peruse these motes as easily as another might research topics from a large collection of books. Creatures without this ability can still access the information, but only by focusing and concentrating their thoughts; even then, the process is slow. Taking the library analogy a step further, creatures without telepathy are akin to those consulting a library in darkness, with only a single guttering candle.

Further complicating the issue is the unfortunate fact that the attack on the Hall of Reason by creatures from beyond this dimension have distorted and scattered these memory motes, similar to how a hurricane might blast and devastate a library's contents once a wall and roof have been blown away. It will take the contemplatives many years to restore the Gardens of Enlightenment to their previous working order.

Creatures: While the two bythos aeons located in area B2 are, in theory, the commanders of the aeons who invaded the Hall of Reason, they've left three marut aeons here to watch over the entity they believe instigated the temporal distortions in the Hall of Reason: the contemplative mentor An End to Rumors. As long as the overward remains in effect, this powerful contemplative remains in an impenetrable bubble of force just outside time and space, still visible in the middle of the gardens as a ghostly version of himself inside a sphere of energy.

The three marut aeons stand sentinel near the trapped contemplative, ready to apprehend them the instant their protections should cease. When the heroes enter the garden from the main passageway, the maruts shift their focus and attack at once, fighting to the death.

MARUT AEONS (3)

CREATURE 15

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 10

Initiative Perception +26

AN END TO RUMORS

CREATURE 18

Male contemplative mentor (page 81)

Initiative Dimension of Time Lore +35

Treasure: Each marut wears metal armbands made from the rare skymetal orichalcum said to have time-bending properties. Collectively, the armbands provide the equivalent of an orichalcum ingot.

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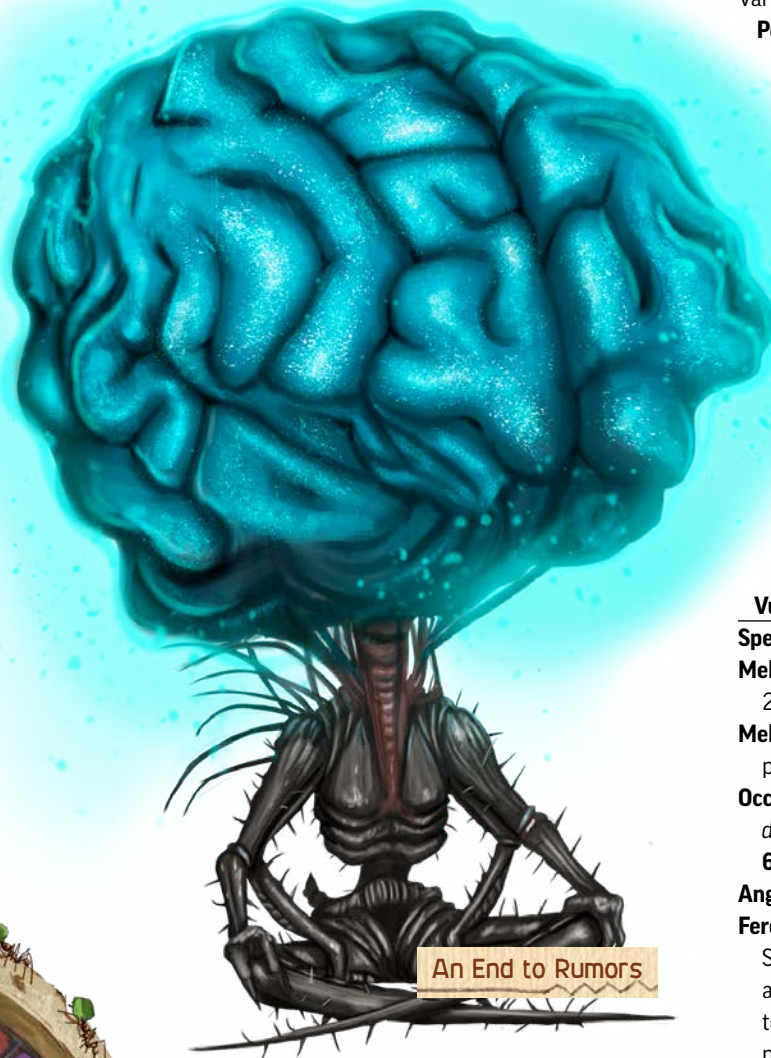
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B6. ENTRYWAY

Once the overward is removed, the view from the open doors in this entryway gives the heroes their first glimpse of the alien planet to which they have traveled. It's night when the heroes arrive, with the stars visible in the sky above. A PC who succeeds at a DC 25 Perception check picks out a strange blue star in the sky: Golarion. A few stone steps lead down from the door to the rocky red soil of the desert itself. About 50 feet from the entrance, a line of stones, each 4 feet high and spaced 20 feet apart with faintly glowing blue tips, leads down the rocky slope into the distance. The stones lead to what appear to be the glimmering lights of a distant town.



EVENT: RAVAGER OUT OF TIME MODERATE 16

Once the heroes defeat the final foes facing them in the Hall of Reason, the contemplatives sense the danger has passed and, with a collective telepathic sigh of relief, they lower all remaining door wards and the overward.

Creature: Unfortunately, one final foe has been lingering just outside time and space, and as soon as the wards come down, it spews through an angle in the wall in a cloud of oily black smoke: a monster out of time itself. This creature is a three-headed monstrosity known as a ravager of Tindalos, and it is eager to punish those who have been meddling with time. It manifests in the same room the heroes occupy when the wards drop and attacks immediately. The ravager of Tindalos fights to the death.

RAVAGER OF TINDALOS CREATURE 18

RARE NE LARGE ABERRATION TIME

Variant hound of Tindalos (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 146)

Perception +31; greater darkvision, *true seeing*

Languages Aklo

Skills Acrobatics +35, Athletics +32, Occultism +35, Stealth +35, Survival +31 (+35 to Track)

Str +6, **Dex** +9, **Con** +6, **Int** +6, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +5

AC 43; **Fort** +30, **Ref** +33, **Will** +31

HP 250; **Immunities** controlled, emotion;

Resistances mental 20, poison 20, physical 20

Otherworldly Mind (mental) Whenever a creature targets the ravager of Tindalos with a mental effect, that creature takes 9d6 mental damage (DC 40 basic Will save). On a critical failure, it also becomes confused for 1 minute.

Ripping Gaze (aura, evocation, occult, visual) 60 feet. As hound of Tindalos, but DC 37 and 9d6 damage.

Vulnerable to Curved Space As hound of Tindalos.

Speed 30 feet, fly 30 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +34 (magic), **Damage** 3d10+14 piercing plus 2d6 mental

Melee ♦ claw +34 (agile, magic), **Damage** 3d8+14 slashing plus 2d6 mental

Occult Innate Spells DC 40, attack +32; **8th** *discern location*, *dimensional anchor*, *disappearance* (self only); **7th** *haste*; **6th** *slow*; **Constant (9th)** *true seeing*

Angled Entry ♦ As hound of Tindalos.

Ferocious Bites ♦♦ The ravager of Tindalos makes three Strikes with its jaws attack. Each Strike must be against a different opponent within its reach. Each attack counts toward the ravager's multiple attack penalty, but does not increase its penalty until it has made all the attacks.

PEACE RETURNS

Once the heroes have cleared out the invaders and defeated the ravager of Tindalos, the Contemplatives of Ashok are much more receptive and helpful. They agree to help the heroes by attempting to divine the location of Old-Mage Jatembe, as well as offering to teach the heroes some of their unusual magic. They can teach the heroes *return to essence* and *temporal ward* (a much less powerful version of the wards they used to protect the Hall of Reason); both of these spells are detailed on pages 77–78.

It's likely that the heroes may feel pressured to pursue their search for Old-Mage Jatembe and might be hesitant about spending even a day or two to learn new spells. An End to Rumors understands this need to get to the search and is willing to answer as many questions as they can. Their answers to likely questions are summarized below; adjust and adapt these as you see fit to reply to the heroes' queries.

The most important thing to impart to the heroes during this conversation is that the nearby town of Seldo is the most logical place to go next to learn more about current events.

What do you know about Old-Mage Jatembe? “He first came to our attention with his enemy known as the King of Biting Ants, when their battle spilled through to this world from yours. We initially built the link between our worlds to study Golarion, and to share our history and lore with your world many thousands of years ago. But we abandoned that project when we learned that others on your planet used the Doorway's teachings to explore self-destructive pursuits. They dedicated themselves to oblivion and destruction, and we could not support those goals. For several long years after, the Doorway lay dormant, until Jatembe used the Doorway in an attempt to destroy the King of Biting Ants. In the aftermath of that clash, Jatembe spoke to my own ancestors, then caretakers of this very hall, and apologized for the aftermath of the battle. He promised that should the King of Biting Ants rise again, we had but to contact him and he would come to our aid. It would be millennia until we had the need to do so.”

Why did you need to call for Jatembe's help? “As Jatembe had warned us, the King of Biting Ants returned. It had been many years, more for your planet than ours, of course, yet we had not forgotten Jatembe's promise. The King of Biting Ants had never died, but had fled into the

desert sands to the east—where it took him centuries to rebuild his body and then centuries more to rebuild his base of power. When he did, he emerged from the desert in command of a flying ship with a crew of mutated formians and a necromantic siege weapon capable of enslaving souls pulled from the living. As the King of Biting Ants swept over the planet, we sent out the call and Jatembe answered. He confronted the King of Biting Ants in the deep desert in a battle that took a month to resolve and resulted in a vast glass-lined crater in the dust. This time, Jatembe did not win. The King of Biting Ants has since increased his attacks across Akiton, and we haven't heard from Jatembe since.”

When did this happen? “Years on Akiton are longer than you are used to, but by Golarion reckoning, this battle took place around 250 years ago.”

What happened to Jatembe? “We know only that he never contacted us again, and that our own attempts to find him failed. Certainly, with news that the King of Biting Ants has turned to even greater depredations, we redoubled these attempts—all to no avail.”

Can you help us find Jatembe? “Unfortunately, the damages we have suffered from the recent attack on the Hall of Reason destroyed most of our resources and cost us several of our most experienced researchers—

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Ravager of Tindalos



those who haven't been killed outright have been pulled away elsewhere in time, and we must focus on recovering them if we can. In short, we must rebuild. If you seek Jatembe, confronting his old enemy is your best chance to learn more. The King of Biting Ants has rebuilt and expanded his flying ship, the *Mandibles of Fate*, but we are unsure of where he might be at this time. I suggest visiting the nearby town of Seldo, as the *Mandibles of Fate* resupplies there from time to time."

What happened here? Why did these creatures attack? "Part of the blame falls on us, for we had been researching the nature of time itself. The greatest thing we've learned is to take greater care in the future while performing these experiments. The trigger, I fear, was when we attempted to peer back into time itself to learn what happened to Jatembe and to spy upon the King of Biting Ants, to learn more of what his current plans are. We learned nothing, but the attack occurred moments after this failed attempt. I can only infer one thing from this: the attack was triggered in retaliation by the King of Biting Ants himself, who did not want his secrets known. We know not how."

What can you tell us of Seldo? "Not much, for we have never had need to visit the town, despite its proximity. We do know that its rule recently fell to one of the town's crime lords, a ysoki named Skartitch. She is certainly one who knows more details about the *Mandibles of Fate*, and the alliance between the King of Biting Ants and Seldo. She would make a logical point of contact—if you can arrange a meeting with her in the first place."

The heroes are welcome to stay in the Hall of Reason as long as they wish, but eventually, they must continue their quest by moving on to Seldo. As the heroes prepare for their journey, the contemplatives warn them that Akiton is a harsh and unforgiving planet, and they should prepare for its dangers. They can give the heroes more contextual information about the inhabitants of Seldo as well. See the article about Akiton and Seldo that begins on page 69 for more details.

Treasure: As the heroes prepare for their journey to Seldo, *An End to Rumors* takes them aside to offer them one final bit of assistance. They note that the people of Akiton do not all share the contemplatives' mastery of language, and that very few of those on Seldo will understand languages spoken on Golarion. Here, the most common trade tongue is known as Akitonian, a language spoken across the entire planet. Other regional languages exist as well, of course, but without magic the heroes will likely find it close to impossible to communicate with anyone in Seldo. To aid them in this endeavor, *An End to Rumors* offers

the party a *greater choker of elocution* that gives knowledge of Akitonian, Aklo, and Shobhad, and enough *gold nodule aeon stones* that grant Akitonian to supply the other members of the party. They do not expect these items to be returned; these, along with any items the heroes might have recovered during their earlier exploration of the Hall of Reason, are theirs to keep.

XP Award: Once the heroes bring peace back to the Hall of Reason by destroying the invaders, grant them a 120 XP story award.

EXPEDITION: AKITON!

While this adventure assumes the heroes don't bring their students and other expedition members through the Doorway to the Red Star, they might bring the expedition through the portal once they open it. If they do so, the contemplatives explain the danger and suggest sending the expedition back while the Hall of Reason remains unsafe, inviting them to return later.

If the heroes bring their expedition through the portal, the contemplatives are eager to host their alien visitors, as they have as much to learn from those from Golarion as the students do of Akiton. The Hall of Reason can serve as a safe place for the expedition to stay for the remainder of the adventure. If the expedition doesn't have enough food or other supplies, *An End to Reason* can open the portal to Golarion using the *rite of the Red Star* so that the expedition can return to resupply. Note that once the Doorway to the Red Star's active phase passes after a month (Golarion time), the expedition must wait 1d4+4 more Golarion months before the Doorway can be activated again. The contemplatives understand this period and can ensure that the expedition gets home before this window closes if needed, but if the expedition remains on Akiton, the heroes might need to organize shipments of supplies from Seldo or potentially even relocate their expedition to that city. Feel free to expand upon the story as you see fit in such a case, but the long-term results of the expedition spending almost a year on an alien planet are beyond the scope of this adventure.

Whether or not the heroes bring their expedition through, they can spend their downtime in the Gardens of Enlightenment to perform some Practical Research, as follows.

PRACTICAL RESEARCH IN THE HALL OF REASON

DOWNTIME

Requirements You are a lore-speaker and the Hall of Reason has been made safe to explore.



You explore the memory motes of the Gardens of Enlightenment in the Hall of Reason, studying the complex memories of an ancient alien society. Choose either your primary or secondary branch, and attempt a skill check against a very hard DC of the branch's level (the higher DC is a result of the memory archive being in such a damaged and disorganized state). You can use Occultism or one of the branch's associated skills for this check. If you do not possess telepathy, this research is much more difficult, and you reduce your result by one degree of success. This activity takes 1 week.

Critical Success You stumble across fragments of previous visits to the Hall of Reason by Jatembe himself, in addition to making several discoveries about the history of the Doorway to the Red Star, and other times and places where the people of Akiton and Golarion have crossed paths. You gain Akitonian as a bonus language, and increase the branch level of the branch you chose by 2.

Success You learn more about the relationship between Akiton and Golarion, primarily focused on the link between the two worlds at the Doorway to the Red Star. Increase the branch level you chose by 1.

Failure Your efforts uncover nothing significant. Your branch level remains the same.

Critical Failure Your mind spiraled into a fugue state chasing dead-end memories and damaged intelligence. You can't perform this activity again for 1 week, and become drained 2 by the experience.

ROAD TO SELDO

MODERATE 16

Akiton is a dangerous planet, and even a relatively well-traveled path can harbor terrible dangers. The path that connects the entrance of the Hall of Reason to the larger roads servicing Seldo is a mile long, and the trip to Seldo after reaching the main road is a few miles further—long enough for the heroes to have an encounter with some Akitonian wildlife along the way.

Creatures: The path leading down to the red stone road to Seldo winds between several dunes of red sand. One of these hides a massive creature known as a great gritcrawler. The patient ambush predator is ready to leap from its dune to attack the heroes, and uses Stealth for its initiative as a result. This otherworldly variant of the creature known on Golarion as a duneshaker solifugid is a bloodred and orange monstrosity the size of a whale. It retreats into the desert if reduced to 50 or fewer Hit Points.

GREAT GRITCRAWLER

CREATURE 18

Variant duneshaker solifugid (*Pathfinder Bestiary 2* 246)

Initiative Stealth +37

Treasure: When the gritcrawler is slain, heroes who search the sandy dune in which it lay hidden find the remains of several other travelers who fared much more poorly against the sand-dwelling monstrosity. Though most of the creature's victims have been too thoroughly devoured to leave much of use or interest behind, the heroes can recover a *decanter of endless water* and two major thunderstones.

Seldo

The town of Seldo may be small in size, but it is a bustling economic hub of great import along several overland trade routes. Primarily a ratfolk (or ysoki, as they are commonly known on Akiton) settlement, it also serves as home to ikeshti mercenaries, shobhad scouts and snipers, formian drones sent to trade for supplies, carmine-hued humans mostly relegated to the town's outskirts, and other wanderers or visitors. Seldo is no safe haven for the unwary; the foolish and the weak can find themselves robbed or taken prisoner for a variety of grim purposes before they even realize they're in danger.

Seldo welcomes all travelers, but when the heroes arrive, the ysoki guards at the city gate are likely to stop them with questions—in particular, to ask what they are. Humans dwell on Akiton, but on this planet their skin tones are generally shades of crimson or scarlet. Other ancestries common to Golarion, including dwarves, elves, halflings, gnomes, and goblins, are all but unknown on the planet. While some travelers, explorers, and scholars may know of these alien life forms, most of those in Seldo—the guards at the city gate included—have never seen one of these alien creatures before. Fortunately for the heroes, the people of Seldo are accustomed to rubbing shoulders with a wide variety of people on the city streets, so the heroes don't have too much trouble. Nevertheless, the heroes' first interaction with Seldo's guards should remind them that they are very far from home. As long as the heroes aren't overly aggressive or obnoxious, they'll be allowed into the city—perhaps with a comment from one of the ysoki reminding them to stay out of trouble: "It'll be no problem tracking you lot down if it comes to that!"

When the heroes begin to explore, they'll face no shortage of ysoki "tour guides" and eager pickpockets waiting to greet them. Some offer directions or services in exchange for coin, food, or water, while others simply attempt to help themselves to the heroes' supply of the same.

Encourage the players to take care of any shopping they might be interested in doing now; depending on how events with Skartitch play out once they visit

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her, the heroes might leave Seldo in a hurry. This could be their last chance to resupply before the end of the adventure.

No map of the sprawling, grimy city of Seldo is provided, as most of the action in the city takes place in and around Skartitch's Cantina, but any hero who spends at least a few hours in Seldo automatically learns about the three districts that comprise the city: the Residential district, the Trade district, and the Industrial district. More information about Seldo can be found starting on page 72.

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

Once the heroes are in Seldo, they'll find plenty of places to rest, recover, and relax as needed. This might be an alien planet, but the people of Seldo still need inns and taverns! Eventually, the heroes should begin seeking clues for where to track down Jatembe or the King of Biting Ants. Each attempt to Gather Information in Seldo takes half a day.

Should the heroes ask around about Jatembe, they'll quickly learn that most of Seldo's citizens have never heard the name. A successful DC 35 Diplomacy check to Gather Information is required to get even a glimmer of recognition, and even then, the person the hero is speaking with says only something akin to, "Jatembe... wasn't he an ancient wizard or something from another world? I can't quite remember the old story myself." A critical success at Gathering Information about Jatembe gives a bit more, but nothing the heroes didn't already know: they learn that Jatembe was the one who defeated the King of Biting Ants ages ago. A nervously added whisper of, "Too bad he's not still around to do it again," might intrigue the heroes, but the person they're speaking to knows no more and quickly scurries off.

Attempts to Gather Information about the King of Biting Ants present an entirely different complication. This name is recognized by everyone in Seldo, and a successful DC 15 check is all that's needed to confirm that the King of Biting Ants has visited the city many times over the past few years, although none claim to have actually seen the infamous sorcerer. Instead, they speak of his flying fortress-ship, the *Mandibles of Fate*, and of how the massive airship's thunderous visits to the city's central plaza throw everything into chaos for a few weeks. The ship hasn't visited Seldo in many months, and no one the heroes talk to seems eager for its next visit, even as they're sure it's only a matter of time before it returns. The more the heroes ask about the King of Biting Ants, the more those they speak to grow close-lipped and nervous, and eventually someone suggests that the heroes seek out

"Boss Skartitch at her cantina," since she's the one who gave the *Mandibles of Fate* permission to use Seldo as a periodic supply stop on its unknown journeys across Akiton. Further research on the King of Biting Ants is possible, but time-consuming; see Researching the Enemy below.

No rolls are necessary for the heroes to learn that Skartitch is the current leader of Seldo, or to be given directions to her cantina, but most people the heroes speak to warn them to watch themselves around her and be respectful. Fear of their leader is prevalent in Seldo as well, although it should be apparent that the public fear of the King of Biting Ants is greater.

RESEARCHING THE ENEMY

If the heroes wish to spend more time investigating the King of Biting Ants or his airship, the *Mandibles of Fate*, they'll need to do so with a combination of tact, diplomacy, and subtle interrogation of the locals. Such research takes more time than merely Gathering Information, but the results can significantly help to prepare the heroes for the dangers that await them at the end of this adventure.

Researching the enemy in this manner uses the Research rules beginning on page 154 of the *Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide*. Each Research check made by interviewing citizens of Seldo takes 4 hours of work (a combination of observation, conversation, and civic participation).

These investigations aren't location-specific, but instead depend on which of the city's three districts the heroes focus their efforts. You should feel free to describe an appropriate location for the district, such as a dingy repair shop, a public park filled with tough weeds, or a bustling marketplace with colorful stalls of strange goods.

RESEARCHING THE ENEMY

Industrial District A smoky, gritty, filthy section of city focused on the refining of thasteron, workshops and crafting, waste disposal, and many now-emptied boneyards; **Maximum RP 5**

Research Checks DC 33 Intimidation, DC 35 Crafting, or DC 37 Deception or Diplomacy

Residential District A densely packed series of neighborhoods with numerous local markets and sprawling apartment complexes built atop each other, interspersed with urban parks struggling for space and abandoned or incomplete structures; **Maximum RP 5**

Research Checks DC 33 Diplomacy, or DC 35 Society, or DC 37 Deception or Intimidation

Trade District A vibrant, bustling, and colorful district with numerous shops, marketplaces, and taverns,



interspersed with the towers of several of the city's most influential citizens; **Maximum RP 5**

Research Checks DC 33 Deception; DC 35 Thievery; or DC 37 Diplomacy or Intimidation

3 Research Points The 400-foot-long airship *Mandibles of Fate* has been visiting Seldo twice an Akitonian year on average (this roughly equates to once a Golarion year) to receive tribute from the city in return for leaving Seldo largely alone. This tribute consists normally of food, repair supplies, and fuel, but also includes stranger demands like magical equipment and, on the most recent visit a few months ago, 20 wagonloads of bones that Seldo had to harvest from its cemeteries.

6 Research Points Merchants and refugees from other cities across this region of Akiton report that the *Mandibles of Fate*'s visits to other locations tend to be more devastating, with mutant formians swarming down from the airship to loot towns and take prisoners.

9 Research Points Recently, rumors abound that the *Mandibles of Fate* has been outfitted with a weapon capable of ripping ghosts right out of living bodies, leaving behind mindless undead shells after siphoning the souls into the ship above. No one in Seldo can claim to have actually seen this in action—perhaps because the city has its special deal with the King of Biting Ants.

12 Research Points The King of Biting Ants has been defeated before, but keeps coming back. This time, the man who defeated him previously, Old-Mage Jatembe, is nowhere to be found. Word has it that the atrocities the King is visiting upon so many Akitonian cities is little more than a devastating rehearsal, and that he plans to magically transport the ship to the planet of Golarion, his home world, to rebuild his empire there once he's satisfied the ship and its nightmarish weaponry are fully functional.

15 Research Points Of those living prisoners taken aboard the *Mandibles of Fate*, very few are ever seen again, but rumors of a hiveless formian who escaped the ship a year ago when it was in Seldo suggest that the entire lower deck of the ship's stern serves as some sort of prison. This escaped formian was held in the main cargo bay, along with all the other prisoners, but caught a glimpse of the magical cell in the back of the ship one day when the King of Biting Ants himself went there. As far as the hiveless formian could tell, the only occupant of that huge cell was a single old man with dark brown skin. The formian went missing a week after he escaped, as did most of those who were spreading this particular rumor, but a few people in Seldo remember and still wonder who might be kept in the *Mandibles of Fate*'s guts.

XP Award: Each time the heroes achieve a new threshold of information from this topic, award them

30 XP, for a total of 150 XP if they learn everything there is to discover in Seldo.

MEETING SKARTITCH

Skartitch Chip-Tooth considers herself a businesswoman of the highest order and takes great pride in her property. The cantina that serves as Skartitch's base of operations was once the stronghold of a rival gang comprised primarily of shobhads, the Dust Knuckles. Through a combination of political maneuvering, bribery, and rumor-mongering, Skartitch managed to politically isolate the Dust Knuckles, taking over their trade and protection rackets until she was finally able to provoke their leader into challenging her to a duel. Per the agreed terms, the winner of the duel would become the supreme crime lord of Seldo with rights to tribute for all crime performed within the town's borders and final say over deciding who was a viable target for criminal activity and who would remain protected.

On the day of the duel, Skartitch waited until the terms of engagement had been confirmed and then promptly shot her rival with a *disintegration bolt*, reducing him to just another pile of Akitonian dust. This display of brutal efficiency impressed the Dust Knuckles, who promptly swore allegiance to Skartitch and who now serve as her most powerful enforcers.

Skartitch hires only the most charismatic people as waitstaff to work in her cantina. On the opposite side of the building, she employs the most skilled mechanics to maintain her small fleet of sand racers (page 79). Her line cook, a massive shobhad who goes by the nickname "Cookie," also maintains a small stable of khefaks, unusual arthropods whose secretions are the key ingredient in the combustive fuel known as thasteron (page 77), and whose meat serves as the main ingredient in Cookie's famous "bang burgers." While Cookie is known to tell customers that they're called bang burgers because of their explosively delicious flavor, customers who overhear such remarks are prone to mumble in response, "And because one out of ten of them explode in your guts."

Skartitch spends most of her time in the cantina's main room (area C1), slowly sipping a drink and watching her employees with a critical eye. When the heroes first enter the cantina, the crime lord appraises them with a glance and decides that they're too much trouble to risk a fight with, but maybe exactly the right amount of trouble to point at some of her other problems. It's only a few moments before a lumbering shobhad enforcer approaches the heroes with a grunt, and then indicates with a double-armed gesture that they are to join Skartitch in her booth.

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Skartitch welcomes the heroes to her establishment and indicates that they can order whatever drink and food they wish, though the cantina's fare might be a little rough for delicate offworlders. Once food and drink have arrived, she asks the heroes their business in Seldo. A pair of shobhad enforcers never drifts far from the booth, just in case things turn unpleasant.

Before she'll answer any questions the heroes might have, Skartitch wants to know who they are and what's brought them here. She's immediately fascinated about them being aliens from Golarion—she insists she's always wanted to visit the planet. Use this chance to give the heroes an opportunity both to talk about their previous accomplishments but also to describe their favorite parts of their home world. Skartitch's penchant for framing questions in ways that make her sound like she has ulterior motives might give the heroes pause (for example, rather than ask "So what's the Magaambya like?" she might ask "Has anyone ever robbed the Magaambya? What was the most expensive thing they made off with?"), with the implication being she's fishing for potential new jobs. In fact, Skartitch has no real urge to visit another planet. She's simply lying out of casual habit to make conversation.

Below are some questions the heroes might ask Skartitch once the conversation is ready to move on, along with her responses.

We hear you run things in Seldo, is that true? "I don't know about being in charge, really. I'm just a businesswoman with a vested interest in my community. I make sure the wheels keep turning, the children are fed, and people are safe in their homes at night. I'm more of a philanthropist than anything, once you think about it."

What can you tell us about the King of Biting Ants or his airship, the Mandibles of Fate? The first time the heroes mention either the King or his ship, allow them a DC 41 Perception check to Sense Motive. A successful check is enough for a hero to catch a fleeting crack in Skartitch's facade—a twinge of nervous fear, or perhaps even shame. She covers it up quickly enough to answer. "I only met the King of Biting Ants once, when he first came to Seldo some years back in that glorious atrocity of an airship. I'm not eager to meet him again, and that was part of the agreement we settled on. He can dock his ship above Seldo when he passes by, and we send up supplies and help secure specialized requests as needed. He's promised to leave the town alone. Based on what I've heard from other cities around the world, I'd say we made the right choice."

What sort of supplies does the Mandibles of Fate stock up on? "Mostly what you'd expect: food,

medical supplies, repair materials, and thasteron, but there are other requests as well. Stuff you might expect a spellcaster to need—magical supplies, mostly—but other things from time to time. Last time, he asked for 20 wagons filled with bones. Gave us a week to gather them. Fortunately, Seldo's been around for a while, and we have a fair number of boneyards to harvest from. Hopefully next time he won't need more. We're down to the ones we're still using, for the most part!" she adds with a strained chuckle.

Why not call these "supplies" what they are—tribute? Questions like this (which imply Skartitch is subservient to the King of Biting Ants) annoy Skartitch, and she tends to answer them shortly and with snark. For example, she might answer a question like this by saying, "Call it what you will, but Seldo hasn't suffered from these visits. Can't say the same of other towns."

What have you heard about what the Mandibles of Fate is doing elsewhere? Skartitch shrugs, as if to say she hasn't looked into the topic much, but the heroes again have a chance to Sense Motive to notice her flinch, this time with a Perception DC of 39. On a successful check, she talks about rumors of devastating attacks on smaller towns, raids on formian hivelands, and reports of using entire settlements to test out some sort of weapon that, rumors hold, can rip souls right out of the flesh and enslave them forever. She shrugs again, saying, "Truth or exaggeration, I'd rather not find out."

You flinched when we mentioned the King of Biting Ants/the Mandibles of Fate—why is that? Skartitch regards the heroes a moment, calibrating how much she can trust them, and then sighs and says, "You'll know why if you ever meet him. He's not... the most pleasant person to talk to. Or look at. Or be around. Maybe I'll tell you more if you do a favor for me..."

When is the Mandibles of Fate due for its next visit? How can we reach the airship? Skartitch has suspected (and secretly hoped all along) that the heroes are here to confront the King of Biting Ants, but she's wary about their capabilities and their true motives. She pauses a moment before answering any questions like these, mulling things over, and then says, "They aren't on a schedule. We usually learn of their approach when someone spots the ship approaching over the horizon, but so far we haven't had more than two visits a year. The last one was relatively recent, so I wouldn't expect them back anytime soon. But... I think I know where the ship might be now, and how someone might be able to reach it before it moves on. I might be able to help you—if you're willing to do me a favor first, of course."

We're looking for info on Old-Mage Jatembe; anything you can tell us? "Not much more than well-traveled folks as yourselves have likely already heard, but I might know a thing or two you don't know. That sort of information isn't free, mind you, but if you do me a favor, I might be able to let it slip."

What kind of favor are we talking about? Multiple topics can trigger Skartitch's comment about having more information in exchange for a favor. If the heroes ask about this, she says, "I assume that you're a capable group. You managed to make it here from another planet, after all. But I don't know you. I need proof that you can be trusted, and proof that you can deliver on tough jobs, before I say much more."

Skartitch's Request

Moderate 16

Before Skartitch puts herself and her city in potential peril by helping the heroes confront the King of Biting Ants, she wants to be sure that they can be trusted and that they're capable. She has a job in mind already, one that's grown increasingly in need of a resolution in the past few days. When the heroes ask for more information about the favor, she replies as follows.

"If you're going to catch the Mandibles of Fate, you need something fast that'll let you catch it, but also something maneuverable enough that you'll be able to navigate patches of rough terrain. I think sand racers would do the trick. I've got enough for the lot of you, but I've also got a problem. A former employee has been causing me a lot of grief, and he thinks these sand racers are his. He's demanded them as payment, and I'm not interested in caving to those demands. I need you to head out to his camp, just outside of town, and do whatever you can to convince him that he doesn't want these sand racers after all. I fear he won't be interested in talking, alas, so when it comes to violence, I trust you'll be up to the task as well."

Skartitch goes on to tell the heroes that this man is someone she once employed to handle "unpleasant situations from pleasant distances"—a shobhad sniper named Tan-Takneh. She pays close attention to the heroes' reaction to the above speech, and if they seem undisturbed by the prospect of violence, she confirms to them that she wants Tan-Takneh killed. If, on the other hand, she suspects the heroes might balk at what she's asking, she makes sure to portray Tan-Takneh as a murderer and a monster, a "necessary evil" she had been forced to work with, before she gets down to the actual assassination request. If the heroes decide not to do the favor, Skartitch simply shrugs. "My mistake—I had thought you all were no strangers to killing. Be on your way then."

If the heroes agree to do the job for the ysoki, she informs them that Tan-Takneh has set up a camp on the outskirts of town, where three large boulders come together in a rough natural pyramid. How the heroes accomplish the mission she leaves to them, but she assures them that as long as they bring no harm to Seldo itself, they need not fear legal retaliation. "After all, I'm the one issuing the order, and everyone in Seldo respects me, so it's all perfectly legitimate, yes?"

If the heroes decline to work with Skartitch, either because they don't trust her or because they aren't willing to sign on as assassins, Skartitch lets them leave unopposed and maintains her friendly demeanor. On the inside, she's more than disappointed—she's wary.

Creatures: Soon after the heroes leave, Skartitch indicates to her two enforcers to follow the heroes quietly, and if they look like they're going to betray her, to kill them. You can use this attack at any time it livens up the situation, as the enforcers are quick to assume treachery and are eager for violence. Too proud to admit defeat, they don't surrender.

SHOBHAD ENFORCERS (2)

CREATURE 16

Page 88

Initiative Perception +29

An Alternate Offer

Skartitch isn't the only powerful local in Seldo keeping an eye on the heroes in the cantina. Tan-Takneh has agents everywhere, including in the cantina itself. His favored agents are those who are invisible in society, rather than anyone of stature. In this case, if the heroes turn down Skartitch's offer, one of these agents makes contact with the heroes soon after they leave the cantina to make a counteroffer. This agent is a hiveless formian worker (page 82) who, as soon as the heroes are out of sight of the cantina, makes himself known to them by stepping out of the crowd and addressing them in Akitonian.

The formian congratulates the heroes on their wise decision to turn Skartitch down. He then warns them that doing so probably got them onto her troublemakers list, and that they should seek out Tan-Takneh at his camp to see if he can give them a counteroffer. Tan-Takneh makes sure to keep all of his agents regularly paid for their loyalty, so the formian doesn't expect anything from the heroes (although he accepts any offer of thanks or treasure eagerly). He doesn't accompany the heroes to speak to Tan-Takneh, and rather than risk being spotted talking to them for too long, scurries back into the crowd upon delivering his advice.

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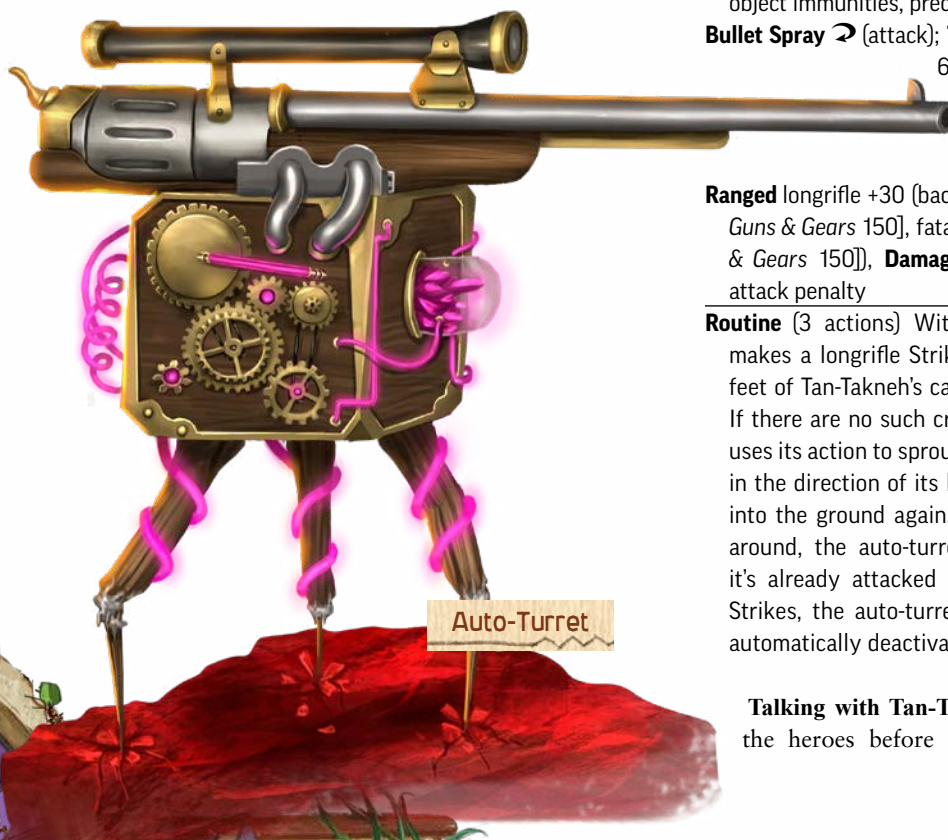
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TAN-TAKNEH'S CAMP
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



Auto-Turret

TAN-TAKNEH'S CAMP

SEVERE 16

Tan-Takneh's campsite is located about a quarter mile outside Seldo, set in an area where three large boulders rise from the sands to form a natural shelter against wind. The shobhad sniper is alone, but his campsite is protected by a pair of cleverly constructed magical auto-turrets incorporating shobhad longrifles (page 78). The shobhad sniper himself is awake when the heroes approach unless they come to the camp very late at night. If he notices the heroes approaching his camp, he calls out to them as detailed below.

Use the map on this page for this encounter.

Hazards: Even if Tan-Takneh doesn't notice the heroes, his auto-turrets likely do. The sound of gunfire from either or both auto-turrets draws the shobhad's attention at once.

AUTO-TURRETS (2)

HAZARD 15

UNCOMMON COMPLEX MAGICAL TRAP

Stealth +33 (expert); darkvision

Description A mounted gun equipped with a magical targeting system and integrated ammo supply.

Disable Thievery DC 35 (master) to disconnect the turret from its ammo supply system, or Arcana DC 35 (master) to neutralize the magical targeting system. Tan-Takneh can also deactivate one or both auto-turrets remotely with a special command word.

AC 37; **Fort** +29, **Ref** +27

Hardness 24; **HP** 100 (BT 50); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Bullet Spray ↻ (attack); **Trigger** A creature comes within 60 feet of Tan-Takneh's campsite; **Effect** The turret attacks the triggering creature with a longrifle Strike.

Ranged longrifle +30 (backstabber, concussive [*Pathfinder Guns & Gears* 150], fatal d12, kickback [*Pathfinder Guns & Gears* 150]), **Damage** 4d8+18 piercing; no multiple attack penalty

Routine (3 actions) With each action, the auto-turret makes a longrifle Strike against a creature within 60 feet of Tan-Takneh's campsite (other than Tan-Takneh). If there are no such creatures, the auto-turret instead uses its action to sprout mechanical legs, totter 20 feet in the direction of its last target, and then plant itself into the ground again. Programmed to spread its fire around, the auto-turret doesn't attack any creature it's already attacked in the round. After making 15 Strikes, the auto-turret depletes its ammunition and automatically deactivates.

Talking with Tan-Takneh: If Tan-Takneh notices the heroes before the traps go off, he quickly

climbers up one of the three boulders, atop each of which he's erected a small stack of stones to serve as cover. He then cries out, "That's far enough!" in Akitonian, repeated only once more if the heroes don't immediately stop.

Tan-Takneh is quick to let the heroes know that, if they're working for Skartitch, they've chosen the wrong side. He asks them to keep their hands where he can see them and then to step forward toward his camp to parley. He keeps them in the sights of his rifle, and then orders them to stop when they're 30 feet from the camp.

Tan-Takneh explains that he worked for Skartitch for several years, at first as a guard and then increasingly as sniper support for several of her riskier business ventures. When she failed to honor a promise to supply Tan-Takneh and his family (who still live nomadic lives in the nearby hinterlands) with a fair share of the sand racers he recently helped her to acquire, Tan-Takneh decided his honor wouldn't allow him to work for her any longer. He further explains that, with the sand racers, his family could relocate quickly and safely, far from the increasing dangers in this region—particularly those presented by the formians of the *Mandibles of Fate*. Now that Skartitch has gone back on her promise to give Tan-Takneh half of the vehicles (her counteroffer of one racer was insulting at best), the sniper cut ties with her and has been trying to make up his mind regarding next steps.

The heroes' arrival helps him make a decision, and he offers them a deal: if they help him take his vengeance against Skartitch, either by luring the ysoki from her cantina and into the empty lot near her establishment or by attacking the ratfolk gangster directly, there's more than enough sand racers for the both of them. If he thinks it'll help, he doesn't hesitate to point out that, under Skartitch's rule, Seldo has become an increasingly awful place to live for anyone who doesn't join her gang, and that taking her out is a step toward getting Seldo back on track as a legitimate settlement rather than continuing as a crime lord's playground.

If the heroes agree to work with Tan-Takneh, he's eager to get started immediately, suggesting that the heroes move in to infiltrate the cantina while he takes up position on a nearby rooftop to prevent

reinforcements from being able to replenish the defenses once the alarm is raised, and to pick off any guards (or Skartitch herself) who escape the cantina.

Tan-Takneh doesn't suggest it, but if the heroes bring up the idea of renegotiating with Skartitch, Tan-Takneh expresses his doubt about the likelihood of such a situation but is willing to make the attempt. He agrees to return to the cantina with the heroes to meet with Skartitch, but only if they promise to have his back if the negotiation break down and, as he fears, combat breaks out instead.

Attacking Tan-Takneh:

If the heroes choose to remain loyal to an agreement with Skartitch and attack, Tan-Takneh fights furiously, maintaining his position atop a boulder for height advantage as long as it makes sense, or trying to trick the heroes into entering the area of effect of his auto-turrets.

He fights until reduced to 75 Hit Points or less before surrendering, at which point he tries to get the heroes to listen to reason by explaining his situation, potentially recruiting them as detailed above, but promising his magical shobhad longrifle as a reward for their aid.



Tan-Takneh

TAN-TAKNEH

CREATURE 17

CN male shobhad sniper (page 89)

Initiative Perception +30

XP Award: If the heroes deal peaceably with Tan-Takneh, award them 120 XP.

Skartitch's Cantina

The cantina itself is a busy place, but once the heroes travel beyond its front room, they'll find the place to be well-defended indeed.

C1. MAIN ROOM

TRIVIAL 16

Though the sight of a dozen different ancestries crowded in a bustling bar is a remarkable spectacle in its own right, the thing most people who visit Skartitch's cantina remember most vividly when asked about it later is the smell. A massive, four-armed cook busily prepares food in the kitchen visible through a large, open space in the wall above a steel countertop. Every so often, the enormous chef cries out an indecipherable word or phrase and sends a dish spinning across the countertop, where it is promptly scooped up by a ysoki server who whisks it to the appropriate patron.

DOORWAY TO THE RED STAR

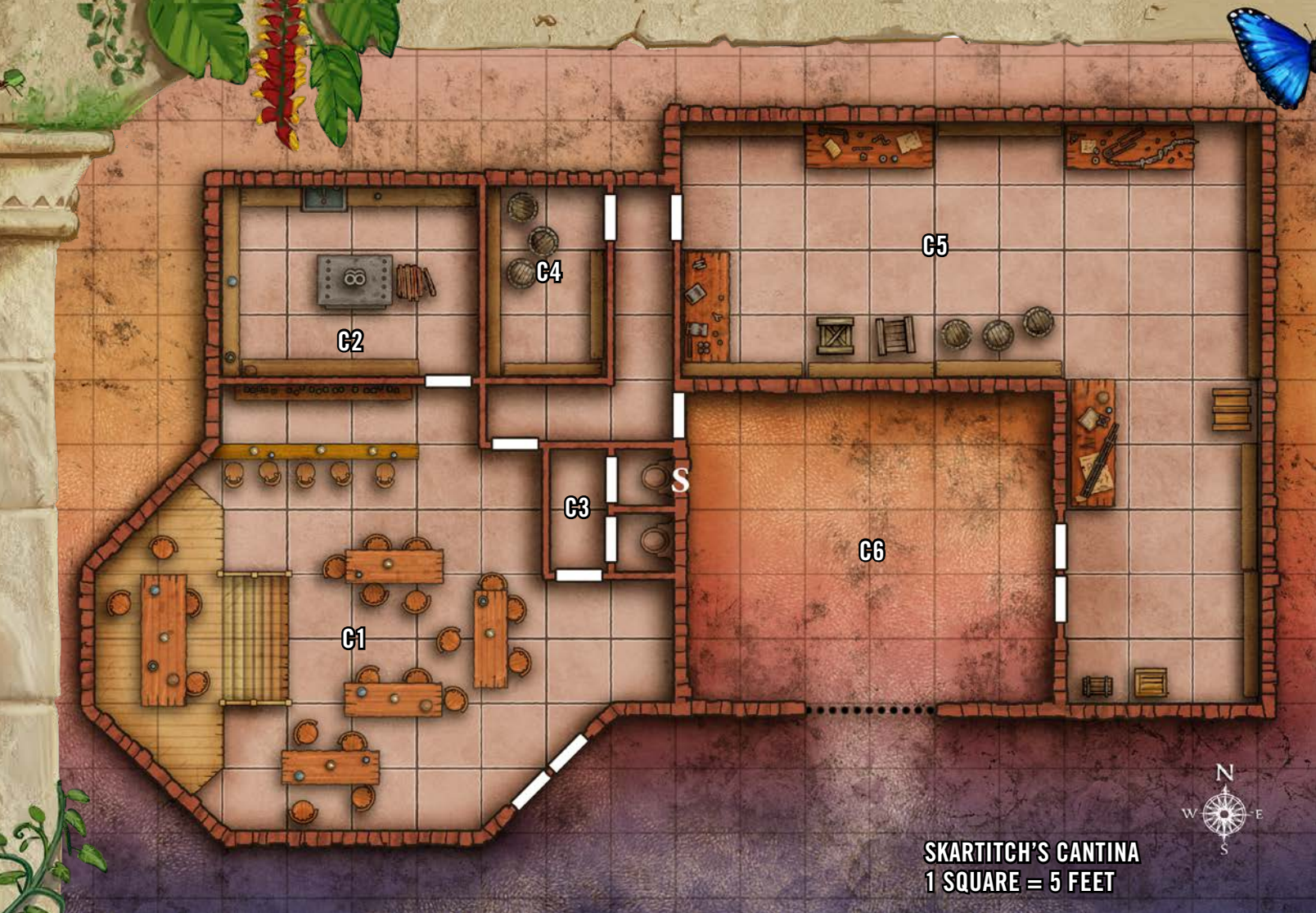
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Creature: It is in this room that the heroes have their initial meeting with Skartitch (see Meeting Skartitch on page 45). If they've come to fight her, she stands her ground in this room, expecting her patrons to come to her aid. She's visibly shocked when none of them do, as they prefer to see how this sudden encounter shakes out. If reduced to fewer than 150 Hit Points, Skartitch begins a fighting retreat through her cantina, retreating to other areas to get help.

SKARTITCH CHIP-TOOTH

CREATURE 16

UNIQUE LE SMALL HUMANOID RATFOLK

Female ratfolk crime lord (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 277)

Perception +28; low-light vision

Languages Akitonian, Shobhad

Skills Acrobatics +29, Athletics +26, Deception +31, Diplomacy +29, Engineering Lore +27, Intimidation +31, Occultism +25, Society +27, Stealth +29, Thievery +31, Underworld Lore +29

Str +2, **Dex** +5, **Con** +2, **Int** +3, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +5

Items +2 greater striking crossbow (10 bolts), +2 striking handwraps of mighty blows, +2 resilient leather armor, disintegration bolt (3)

AC 39; **Fort** +26, **Ref** +29, **Will** +26

HP 290

Nimble Dodge ➤ **Requirement** Skartitch can't use this reaction while encumbered; **Trigger** Skartitch is hit or critically hit by an attack made by a creature she can see; **Effect** Skartitch gains a +2 circumstance bonus to her Armor Class against the triggering attack.

Speed 25 feet, burrow 15 feet

Melee ♦ fangs +31 (agile, finesse, magical, unarmed), **Damage** 2d6+13 piercing

Ranged ♦ crossbow +31 (magical, range increment 120 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 3d8+8 piercing

Cunning Discernment ♦ Skartitch attempts a Recall Knowledge check against an opponent using the standard DC for a creature of that level. On a success, that opponent is flat-footed against Skartitch's attacks until the start of her next turn; on a critical success, the opponent is flat-footed against Skartitch's attacks for 1 minute.

Deadly Deception ♦♦ Skartitch attempts a Deception check to Feint against an opponent she can see. On a success, Skartitch can immediately Strike with one unarmed attack and one ranged weapon attack against

the target. The ranged attack does not trigger reactions from the target of the Feint. Both of these attacks count toward her multiple attack penalty, but do not apply the penalty until both attacks are completed.

Sneak Attack Skartitch deals an extra 4d6 precision damage to flat-footed creatures.

C2. KITCHEN

TRIVIAL 16

A large vat simmers with heat in this room. Bubbling pots of water, and sizzling pans of eggs, meat, and less discernable substances add to the cloud of sounds and smells suffusing the area.

The kitchen of Skartitch's cantina is a bustling room from which gouts of smoke, steam, and savory smells emerge at all hours of the day and night. The room is also much warmer than the rest of the cantina, as there's something warm always simmering on Cookie's stove.

Among the hanging pans is a battered iron key that opens the storage closet (area C4). Skartitch keeps it here because the kitchen is almost never unoccupied.

Creatures: The primary occupant of the cantina's kitchen is a hulking shobhad named Cookie. When the heroes enter the kitchen, Cookie is at the line of stovetops, busily stirring, frying, and tasting food from a dozen dishes at once, his four heavily muscled arms working in a flurry of coordinated activity fit to impress even the most dedicated virtuoso.

If combat breaks out in the cantina, Cookie drops a heavy metal divider down to block his window and counter, separating him from the rest of the area unless approached through the door. While Cookie tries to stay out of violent conflicts, he defends his kitchen furiously from intruders. In addition to his normal stats as a shobhad enforcer, Cookie can use his thasteron-powered stove to take an additional action in combat as detailed below.

COOKIE

CREATURE 16

Male shobhad enforcer (page 88)

Initiative Perception +29

Thasteron Blast ♦♦ (magical) **Requirement**

Cookie is within 10 feet of his stove; **Effect** Cookie adjusts dials, levers, and vents on his stove, causing a gout of searing blue fire to lance out at a single creature in area

C2. The targeted creature takes 17d6 fire damage (DC 37 basic Reflex save). Cookie can't use Thasteron

Blast for 1d4 rounds as the stove must rebuild its heat and pressure.

C3. LAVATORY

Two alcoves sit against the eastern wall, each containing a ceramic seat atop a chute. Scribbles in strange, alien languages adorn the walls, and an indescribable stench fills the air. Opposite the enclosed ceramic devices, a pair of twisted metal pipes with textured knobs hang over a long trough with a hole that opens into a pipe running into the floor.

During business hours, the lavatory of Skartitch's cantina serves two purposes: the obvious one of providing a place for customers to handle their necessary business, and a concealed location for conducting transactions that Skartitch prefers not to be public knowledge.



Skartitch Chip-Tooth

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The northern stall has a hidden door behind the ceramic seat that can be quickly opened and then closed by anyone who knows the location of the hidden latch (a hero Searching this area spots it with a successful DC 30 Perception check). Typically used for the sale of small arms, drugs, or expensive imports whose value might attract unwanted attention, this secret escape route opens into the empty lot next to the building in area C6.

While the lavatory is typically utilized only by cantina patrons, it's also a shortcut for the hired muscle Skartitch has waiting in the empty lot next to her establishment. These enforcers ostensibly act as valets (despite the fact that Skartitch owns most of the vehicles in Seldo and doesn't mind taking any vehicle she likes), but they respond to sounds of trouble by passing through this secret door as described in area C6.

C4. WEAPON STORAGE

Skartitch keeps this room locked at all times, with the key hanging in the kitchen (area C2) where Cookie can keep an eye on it. Opening the reinforced lock on this door requires five successful DC 35 Thievery checks to Pick a Lock. Alternatively, a hero can Force it Open with a successful DC 40 Athletics check.

This storeroom's walls are packed floor to ceiling with racks of weapons.

Treasure: This room contains several mundane weapons, but the heroes are likely much more interested in the magical items kept here: two +2 *greater striking shobhad longrifles*, a +2 *greater striking vorpal greatsword*, a *necklace of fireballs type VII*, and a leather pouch containing 2 doses of hemlock to take care of troublesome customers.

C5. GARAGE

MODERATE 16

The vaguely organic tang of oil wars with the sharp, ozone smell of worked metal in this large, L-shaped room. No windows pierce the room's walls, though whirring devices in the ceiling above move the acrid air in fitful breezes. Several oblong devices with seats reminiscent of horse saddles fill the room. One of the devices sits on a raised pair of red stone sawhorses with a metal plate removed from its side. Inside, a variety of tubes and metallic wires tangle in an indecipherable maze of connections.

This garage contains Skartitch's collection of eight sand racers, as well as the necessary devices to repair, maintain, and refuel them.

Creatures: Several ysoki mechanics work here maintaining the sand racers, and a pair of thasteron khefaks are kept in a small enclosure in the corner of the garage that's been treated to block their radioactive auras. The group is protected by a pair of shobhad enforcers at all times. If combat breaks out, the ysoki cower behind the sand racers while the enforcers attempt to deal with the intruders.

SHOBHAD ENFORCERS (2)

CREATURE 16

Page 88

Initiative Perception +29

YSOKI MECHANICS (5)

CREATURE 4

Ratfolk grenadiers (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 277)

Initiative Perception +10

THASTERON KHEFAKS (2)

CREATURE 4

Page 87

Initiative Perception +9

C6. EMPTY LOT

MODERATE 16

This large, empty lot is surrounded by a fifteen-foot-tall fence of interlocking steel cables. The top of the fence is lined with coils of razor-sharp wire to deter climbing, while a rolling section of fence sits on a fixed rail, ready to be quickly opened or closed.

The fence is relatively easy to scale, requiring only a successful DC 25 Athletics check to Climb, but safely navigating the coils of razor-sharp wire at the top is trickier. A character who moves over the top of the fence takes 4d6 slashing damage (DC 25 basic Reflex save). A character who takes any slashing damage from the wire also takes 1d6 bleed damage.

The fence can be electrified with the flip of a switch on the inside of the lot. A successful DC 35 Perception check allows someone to notice the faint hum from the electrified fence before they touch it, but a creature touching the electrified fence takes 4d6 electricity damage and 1d6 persistent electricity damage. The fence deals this damage to a creature only once per round, but if the creature remains in contact with the fence, it takes this damage at the start of its turn.

The secret door from the lavatory connects to the building's exterior wall. It's just as difficult to spot from this side, requiring a successful DC 30 Perception check to notice.

Creatures: A pair of shobhad enforcers is always on duty here, ready to defend Skartitch from attack



or to chase down anyone who incurs the ysoki crime lord's wrath. If anyone enters the empty lot from the lavatory (area C3) without having previously received Skartitch's permission, or if the shobhads hear combat from inside the main room (area C1), they quickly close the gate and hit the switch to electrify the fence. If there's no obvious trouble here, they make their way through the secret door to the lavatory and into the main room to lend aid; doing so takes them 2 rounds. These enforcers have already planned to escape Seldo if things go badly, so they're not as loyal to Skartitch as she believes. If either enforcer is reduced to fewer than 100 Hit Points, both enforcers flee the city and don't return.

SHOBHAD ENFORCERS (2)

CREATURE 16

Page 88

Initiative Perception +29

REPERCUSSIONS

The heroes' interactions with Skartitch and Tan-Takneh throughout this chapter can play out in a number of ways, but in the end, one of three results are likely to be reached.

Working for Skartitch: If the heroes defeat Tan-Takneh at Skartitch's request, they can return to her cantina to collect their payment. The ysoki crime boss is true to her word, providing each of the heroes with a sand racer. She also gives them all of the information presented on page 44 under Researching the Enemy, with one significant addition: she confirms that the description of the mysterious man locked in the brig of the *Mandibles of Fate* matches historical descriptions of Old-Mage Jatembe. She even goes above and beyond her original promise, loading the storage compartments of each bike with a full 2 weeks of rations and fuel, as well as repair kits and essential replacement parts in case the bikes are damaged. She also offers the heroes one of the items in her weapons storage (area C4) as thanks for a job well done.

Working for Tan-Takneh: If the heroes instead opt to side with the shobhad sniper, he is good on his offer to let the heroes take the sand racers they need. He also doesn't care what the heroes take from the cantina. Like Skartitch, Tan-Takneh can discover and communicate everything the heroes could have discovered while Researching the Enemy. Tan-Takneh doesn't have any interest in filling the power vacuum left in Seldo by Skartitch's death, but the long-term repercussions on Seldo's leadership and society are beyond the scope of this adventure.

Negotiating a Truce: If the heroes manage to convince Tan-Takneh to try resolving his differences with Skartitch peacefully, they find that Skartitch is actually quite willing to negotiate with the shobhad; Tan-Takneh is a powerful and deadly foe, likely more than a match for Skartitch in a fair fight—and also, much like Skartitch, clever enough to avoid a fair fight in favor of a sneak attack.

Given the chance to explain her actions, Skartitch reveals that once she had the sand racers in her garage, she realized that the vehicles would be useful in expanding her influence beyond the town of Seldo. She had intended to haggle with Tan-Takneh to renegotiate their agreement, but when she lowballed her first offer (of one sand racer) and he stormed off in a rage, she assumed he'd always had betrayal on his mind.

During the negotiations, the heroes can attempt a DC 38 Diplomacy check to convince Skartitch to return to the original terms and allow Tan-Takneh to take the sand racers she'd originally promised, but as a result, she won't have enough remaining to loan to each of the heroes; the heroes must double up on the sand racers, as Skartitch can offer only half as many sand racers as there are heroes (rounding up).

If the heroes point out that these sand racers could be temporary loans—that Tan-Takneh could simply borrow the sand racers for as long as it takes to move his people to safety—the heroes can attempt a DC 34 Diplomacy check to get Skartitch to agree. However, they must also succeed at a second DC 34 Diplomacy check to get Tan-Takneh to agree as well. If only one agrees to this compromise, there is no deal. This process takes two days, but the heroes can end up with one sand racer each.

An attempt to negotiate takes 1 hour. The heroes can make multiple attempts, but each time they do so, the DC increases by 2. If a hero rolls a critical failure on this check, an unintended gaffe or other turn of phrase angers both sides, and Skartitch and Tan-Takneh draw their weapons and start a fight. The heroes can jump in and support whichever party they prefer.

If the heroes manage to negotiate a truce, Skartitch and Tan-Takneh can both provide any information the heroes haven't learned from Researching the Enemy, as detailed above.

XP Award: If the heroes manage to secure a peaceful solution to the problem, grant them XP as if they'd defeated both Tan-Takneh and Skartitch in combat.

If the heroes secure access to their own sand racers without fighting any enforcers in Skartitch's cantina, award them an additional 120 XP.

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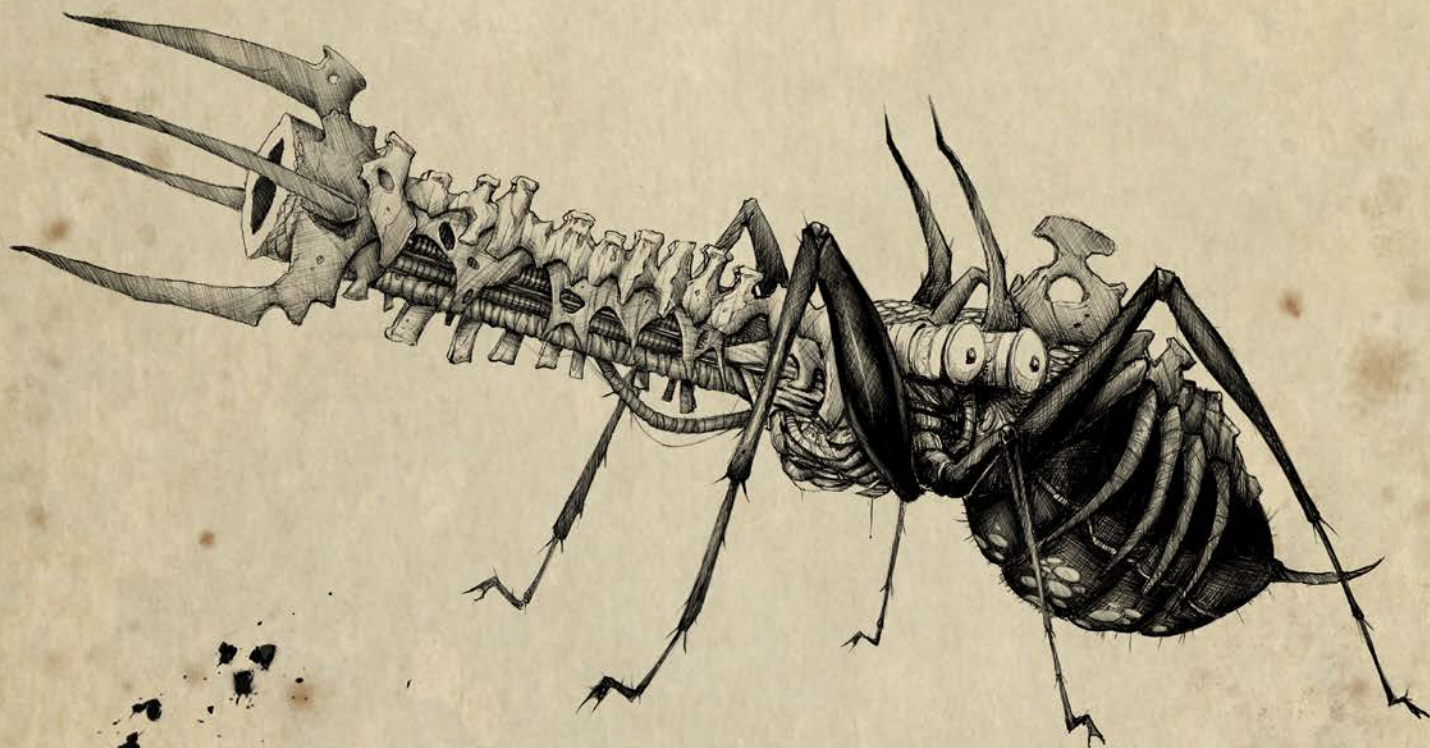
I knew that delaying my return to Golarion would be wise, but I did not see how until recently. I have carefully watched the growth of the Mwangi from afar, like looking upon a garden sown by a hated neighbor. I shall poison its verdant bounty when I return. But how, I asked myself—and at last I have earned my own answer.

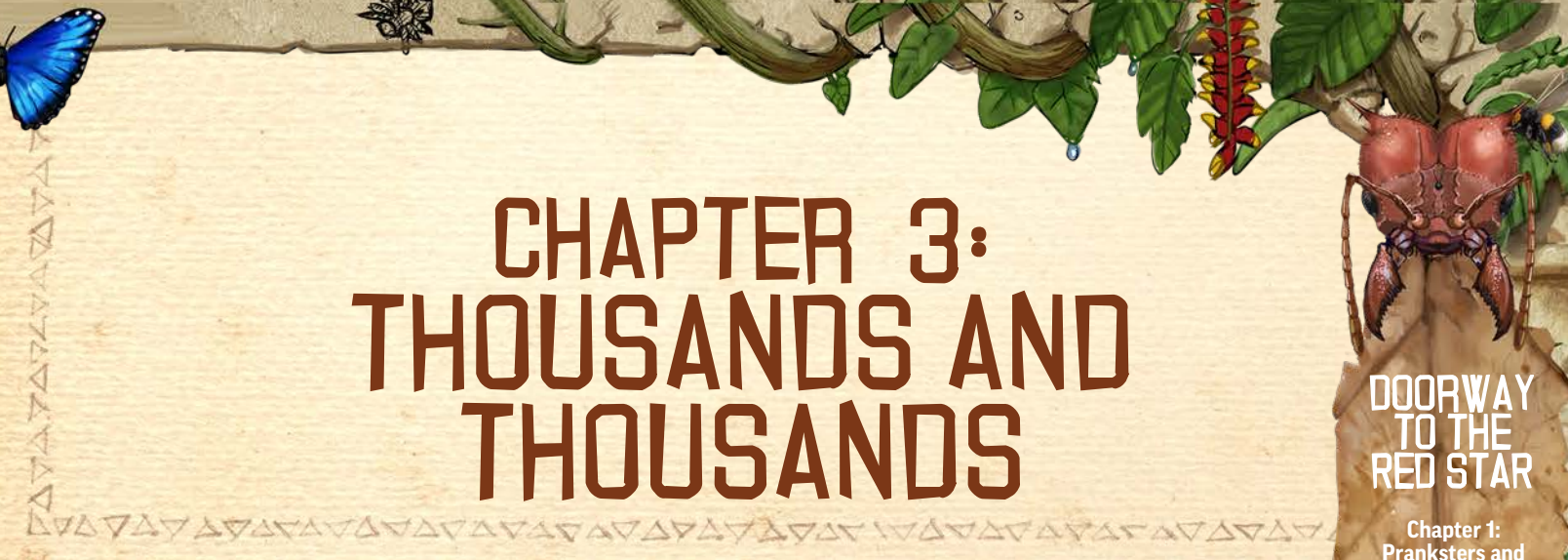
Combining Akítonian technology with my own prodigious sorcery, I've created a devastating weapon to pull souls from living bodies and store them as components of a fearsome, loyal creature. Surely, no one knows more than I how tiny parts can create a better whole.

Though my invention may be impressive, my goals are grander still. Stripping souls one at a time is far, far too slow. I am ageless, but I nevertheless have goals to complete. I need to expand the power to strip out souls from an entire community—such as from the Magaambya or even all of Nantambu. I already have the magic in place to bring my beloved ship from Akíton to Golarion, I just need to perfect my superweapon.

As though to confirm the nearness of my goals, I have heard that Old-Mage Jatembe now walks the red sands of Akíton, seeking me out. Me? He would try to stop me? Can he not know the years I have spent preparing to pit my magic against his once again?

This time I shall not be foiled and cast away. This time, I shall be victorious! I will capture the old wizard and place him within the cell I've prepared to contain him. He shall be forced to witness my triumphant return to Golarion, and the destruction of all he has built there!





CHAPTER 3: THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS

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Once the heroes have secured sand racers, they're that much closer to their goal—contacting Jatembe aboard the *Mandibles of Fate*, the King of Biting Ants's airship. If the heroes remain allies with Skartitch or Tan-Takneh, either can direct the heroes to the reach of desert wastelands where the *Mandibles of Fate* was last seen, but they remind the heroes that the airship is fast and catching it will take many days. Rather than present a large overland map of desert wasteland and have the heroes meticulously explore the wilds, this section leans into the idea of a fast, reckless chase.

Race Into Destiny

The race into the desert plays out over the course of several days through four different regions of Akitonian wasteland, each of which comes with its own challenges and perils. Each Akiton Pursuit downtime activity takes a minimum of one day and determines the duration and dangers the heroes face in one of the four sections. Rules for using vehicles in combat appear in the *Gamemastery Guide*, starting on page 174.

The sand racers carry two weeks of food and fuel. If the heroes roll well on their Akiton Pursuit checks, they should reach the *Mandibles of Fate* with days to spare, but bad luck might see the heroes running out of food or fuel before reaching their goal. In such an event, spells like *teleport* can save the heroes, allowing them to quickly resupply back in Seldo. Without such magic, the amount of distance, time, and peril the heroes must face on a potentially long trudge back to civilization is left to you to determine, but consider having the *Mandibles of Fate* find the heroes rather than the other way around (see the When the Tables Turn sidebar on page 55).

RUNNING THE RACE

When you start a racing encounter, read or paraphrase that encounter's read-aloud text entry to let the players know what sorts of perils they'll likely face. Each of these encounters features four options for a racing check—describe to the players what each of these are, along with the DCs for each, so they know how difficult their options are, then have each player attempt that check. Note that during any one racing encounter, the heroes can only earn a maximum of 8 Racing Points.

AKITON PURSUIT

DOWNTIME

You do your part to ensure that the day's high-speed search across the wastelands resolve without incident. Choose an option from the current region's Racing checks, or if you're piloting a sand racer, you can instead attempt a Piloting check.

CHAPTER 3 SYNOPSIS

This chapter opens with a pursuit across the desert of Akiton, with the heroes riding sand racers to catch up with the fortress-airship *Mandibles of Fate* as quickly as possible. The journey is perilous, but the greater dangers are on the airship itself. The heroes must deal with the grim formian crew and undying acolytes of the King of Biting Ants.

Old-Mage Jatembe is an apparent captive of the King of Biting Ants. The legendary mage has been subtly working to delay the development of a superweapon the king intends to deploy against Golarion. He wasn't in a good position to end the king's menace—until now. Armed with Jatembe's aid, the heroes can assault the bridge and vanquish one of Jatembe's legendary enemies!

CHAPTER 3 TREASURE

The permanent and consumable items available as treasure in Chapter 3 are as follows.

- +2 striking dueling pistol (*Guns & Gears* 151)
- +2 striking handwraps of mighty blows
- emberheart (*Secrets of Magic* 184)
- greater marvelous medicines
- major alchemist's fire
- major bottled lightning
- major frost vial
- major juggernaut mutagen
- major thunderstone
- wand of manifold missiles (7th)

TROUBLESHOOTING

The *Mandibles of Fate* is a fast-moving ship and never remains in one location for long. This adventure assumes that the heroes use equally swift vehicles to race across the desert in pursuit of the airship, but high-level heroes have a lot of resources to call upon. Spells like *wind walk* can undo the adventure subplot requiring the heroes to secure sand racers, while other parties might decide to wait in ambush for the *Mandibles of Fate*, teleporting onto the ship from afar as soon as they spot it on the horizon. They might even remain in Seldo, waiting for the airship to return for its next round of tributes.

If your players would rather use powerful magic like this to make their way to the final confrontation in this adventure, skipping the scenes featuring Skartitch, Tan-Takneh, and the desert race, let them. Their characters have earned that power, after all, and they should be able to use it as they wish. If the heroes are still 16th level at this point, consider granting them a story award to allow them to level up to 17th just before they take on the dangerous foes that await them on the airship.

If you choose to attempt a Piloting check, use that skill's DC as listed for the sand racer (DC 30 for Driving Lore, DC 35 for Crafting, or DC 36 for Arcana). If you choose to make one of the region's Racing checks, use the listed DC.

Critical Success The party gains 2 Racing Points.

Success The party gains 1 Racing Point.

Critical Failure The party loses 1 Racing Point.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE

Once the heroes have attempted their Akiton Pursuit checks, compare the number of Racing Points the heroes earned for that encounter to the thresholds to determine whether they face combat or damage their vehicles, and how many days it takes them to traverse the region (as they have limited food and fuel). Add the resulting Racing Points to a running total. The total earned throughout all four encounters determines how successfully the heroes approach the *Mandibles of Fate*. As normal, increase the thresholds if you have more heroes. The daily thresholds are 0–3/4–5/6–10 for five heroes and 0–3/4–6/7–12 for six. The final thresholds are 1–11/12–24/25–40 for five and 1–14/15–29/30–48 for six. If the heroes face combat, use the maps on pages 58 and 60 for those encounters.

RED DESERT

MODERATE 17

The swirling sands of the desert seem to buck and writhe

on the horizon, the only sign of the enormous predators that dwell within the dunes. Safely racing through these crimson wastelands requires keen senses to notice approaching dangers, the ability to discern the hunting grounds of these giant creatures, and a knack for knowing what reaches of the desert lie outside the monsters' territory.

RED DESERT

Racing Checks DC 34 Nature, DC 36 Survival, DC 38 Perception, or Piloting (DC 30 Driving Lore, DC 35 Crafting, or DC 36 Arcana)

Fewer than 0 Racing Points It's tough going through the desert as sand constantly clogs the vehicle's intakes, requiring the heroes to stop frequently and clean them. At one point, things get bad enough that one of the heroes' sand racers (chosen randomly) breaks down, its intakes obstructed with sand and grit. Reduce that racer's Hit Points by half, and the racer becomes broken. The heroes are then attacked by a gluttonworm. The trip through the desert takes 5 days to complete.

0–2 Racing Points The desert sand occasionally clogs the sand racer's intakes so that the heroes must stop to clean them. The heroes are attacked by a gluttonworm during one of these breaks. The trip through the desert takes 1d4 days to complete.

3–4 Racing Points The heroes are attacked by a gluttonworm, but otherwise their trip through the desert is uneventful and takes 1 day to complete.

5–8 Racing Points The heroes avoid all contact with gluttonworms and pass through the dangerous portions of the desert in 1 day. Award the heroes 120 XP.

GLUTTONWORM

CREATURE 19

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Initiative Perception +32

SCARLET RIFT

MODERATE 17

The red sands give way to a vast stony escarpment with a jagged rift running its length—an ancient chasm formed long ago. The route ahead follows the southern edge of the rift and requires keen eyesight to spot the numerous smaller fissures that radiate outward, along with knowledge of geology to know how close one can skirt a chasm's edge without causing a sudden rockslide. The region is known to be haunted by deadly four-armed skultakers, so watching for telltale signs of these monsters is important as well.

SCARLET RIFT

Racing Checks DC 34 Religion, DC 36 Nature, DC 38 Perception, or Piloting (DC 30 Driving Lore, DC 35 Crafting, or DC 36 Arcana)

Fewer than 0 Racing Points One of the heroes accidentally

pilots a sand racer into a fissure, causing it to drop 100 feet and take enough damage to become broken (or destroyed if the sand racer was already broken). All heroes on the racer take normal falling damage for this distance. An Akitonian skulltaker (formed into the shape of a shobhad) arrives on the scene to attack. The trip along the Scarlet Rift takes 5 days to complete.

0–2 Racing Points The heroes must take constant detours to move around smaller fissures and are attacked by an Akitonian skulltaker at some point during the journey. The trip along the Scarlet Rift takes 1d4 days to complete.

3–4 Racing Points The heroes are attacked by an Akitonian skulltaker, but otherwise their trip is uneventful and takes 1 day to complete.

5–8 Racing Points The heroes avoid all conflict with undead and make some heart-pounding jumps over smaller rifts! They pass through this portion of the race in 1 day. Award the heroes 120 XP.

AKITONIAN SKULLTAKER CREATURE 19

Elite skulltaker (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6, 300)

Initiative Perception +35

IKESHTI TERRITORY

MODERATE 17

After the dangers of the Scarlet Rift, the terrain switches to rocky desert, a swath of wilderness that features many groves of red cactus-like plants and impressive rock formations. Now and then, small bands of ikeshti peer out of their homes to watch the sand racers speed by. Periodic stops to interact with these reptilian locals to ask directions can reveal shortcuts, as can close observation of the lay of the land.

IKESHTI TERRITORY

Racing Checks DC 34 Diplomacy, DC 36 Perception, DC 38 Intimidation, or Piloting (DC 30 Driving Lore, DC 35 Crafting, or DC 36 Arcana)

Fewer than 0 Racing Points The heroes accidentally ride right into a trap left long ago by ikeshti hunters. Each hero driving a sand racer must attempt a Piloting check. Those who fail crash as they ride into a series of trip lines and hidden trenches. A crash causes both the passengers and the sand racer to take collision damage. The heroes are then attacked by six ancient riveners. The trip through ikeshti territory takes 5 days to complete as the heroes navigate around other potential traps.

0–2 Racing Points The heroes find themselves becoming lost as they move through the confusing terrain, and at one point they're ambushed by a group of six ancient riveners. They pass through ikeshti territory in 1d4 days.

REFUELING COSTS

When the heroes gain their sand racers, the vehicles are fueled for 14 days of use, but if the heroes run into bad luck in the desert and need to refuel, it can be purchased at any level 5 or higher settlement on Akiton. A single day's worth of fuel is 1 bulk and costs 10 gp—relatively minor expenditures for a high-level party, but no amount of money will save you if you're in the middle of the desert with nowhere to buy more fuel! Thasteron fuel is not available for purchase at all on other planets. As it's radioactive, the fuel is volatile and decays over time. Every month, the heroes lose half their remaining unspent fuel.

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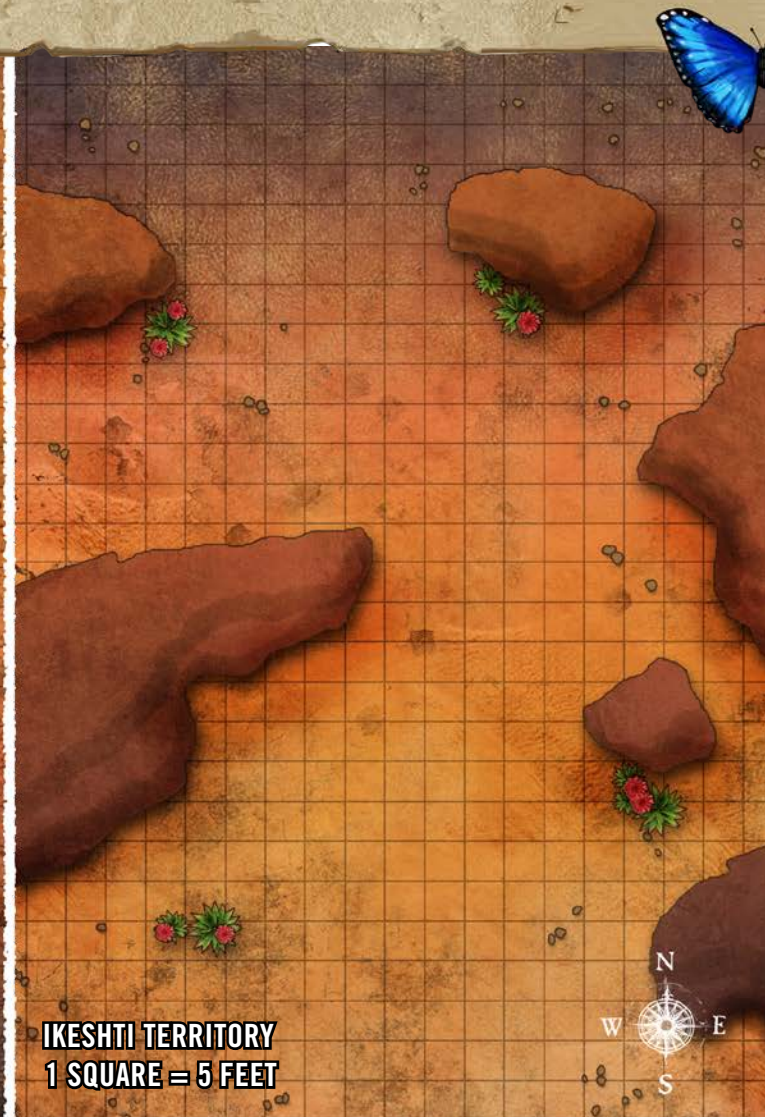
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Akitonian Skulltaker



SCARLET RIFT
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



IKESHTI TERRITORY
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

3-4 Racing Points The heroes are attacked by six ancient riveners, but this doesn't significantly delay their overall progress. It takes 1 day to pass through ikeshti territory.

5-8 Racing Points Luck, good advice from friendly ikeshti, and a few time-saving stunts along the way allow the heroes to avoid combat and pass through ikeshti territory in 1 day. Award the heroes 120 XP.

ANCIENT RIVENERS (6)

Page 86

Initiative Perception +25

CREATURE 14

FORMIAN HIVELANDS

MODERATE 17

The rocky desert continues, as hills of stone, gravel, and hard-packed sand create mounds, plateaus, and towers pocked with entrances and exits. Many of the mounds and embankments writhe with formians who perform various tasks and largely ignore the sand racers, other than to offer the occasional glance from their toil and watch with amusement as the racers pass by. Watching for shortcuts through the maze can save time on the journey, as can keeping track of progress using careful

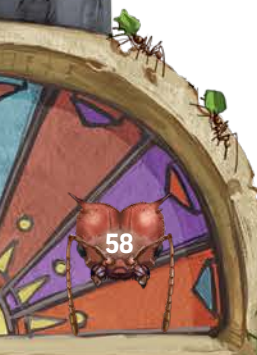
navigational practices, or even observing the way these formians have built their hive homes to take advantage of the landscape.

FORMIAN HIVELANDS

Racing Checks DC 34 Survival, DC 36 Perception, DC 38 Society, or Piloting (DC 30 Driving Lore, DC 35 Crafting, or DC 36 Arcana)

Fewer than 0 Racing Points The heroes have attracted the attention of agents of the King of Biting Ants, and stumble into an ambush set by formian mageslayers. Each hero who is driving a sand racer must attempt a Piloting check as the mageslayers topple several empty hives to trap them in a circle of rubble. On a failed check, the sand racer and its passengers take 18d6 points of bludgeoning damage (DC 38 basic Reflex save). The heroes must then fight the three formian mageslayers. Recovering from the trap and detours the heroes are forced to take results in this part of the race taking 5 days to navigate.

0-2 Racing Points The heroes spend more time avoiding obvious ambushes and dodging toppled hives than making forward progress. At some point, they're faced



with a combat against three formian mageslayers. They eventually pass through the hivelands in 1d4 days.

3-4 Racing Points The heroes are attacked by a group of three formian mageslayers. It takes 1 day to pass through the hivelands.

5-8 Racing Points The heroes have managed to avoid attracting the attention of the King of Biting Ants's minions in the hivelands and avoid all conflict; they navigate the region in 1 day. Award the heroes 120 XP.

FORMIAN MAGESLAYERS (3)

CREATURE 16

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Initiative Perception +33

The Mandibles of Fate

As the heroes complete their high-speed journey across Akiton, they arrive on a wide plateau. An enormous airship crafted from a combination of arcane magic and Akitonian engineering sails through the air along the cliff face with remarkable speed, belching clouds of poisonous green smoke. The heroes have finally caught up to the King of Biting Ants's mobile fortress, the *Mandibles of Fate*!

RACING RESULTS

Once the heroes catch up to the *Mandibles of Fate*, their total number of Racing Points determines how they can board the vessel.

AKITON PURSUIT RESULTS

20-32 Racing Points The heroes arrive unnoticed by the ship's crew just as the *Mandibles of Fate* is drifting along the edge of the plateau. With a final surge of speed, they can ride their sand racers right off the edge of the plateau to land on any upper deck (areas **D1**, **D2**, or **D3**). No Piloting check is required for this feat.

10-19 Racing Points As 20-32 above, but the heroes land on the lightly-guarded main deck (area **D2**).

1-9 Racing Points As 10-19 above, but the crew knows the heroes are coming, and the ship is on high alert.

0 or Fewer Racing Points The crew of the *Mandibles of Fate* are prepared for the heroes. The ship starts on high alert, and the crew is watching for the heroes' approach. The ship does not come near to the edge of the plateau, so the heroes must rely upon flight, teleportation, or other magic if they wish to board the ship. If the heroes

WHEN THE TABLES TURN

If the heroes run out of fuel for their sand racers, the vehicles are destroyed, or they otherwise find themselves unable to reach the *Mandibles of Fate*, rather than force them to make the entire journey back to Seldo to try again, consider having the airship find them instead. In this case, the heroes have no element of surprise, for the King of Biting Ants has learned of their approach and has decided to meet them head on. Treat their initial encounter with the *Mandibles of Fate* as if they earned zero or fewer Racing points, but then proceed with the adventure's climax as normal.

have no method of reaching the ship, or don't attempt to board the ship, a group of four formian mageslayers swoop down to attack the heroes, fighting to capture them alive and place them in the brig. Otherwise, the *Mandibles of Fate* can swiftly outpace the heroes—feel free to have them try again with a new set of racing challenges at this point.

AIRSHIP FEATURES

The *Mandibles of Fate* is built from a combination of magically strengthened steel and a chitinous material

DOORWAY TO THE RED STAR

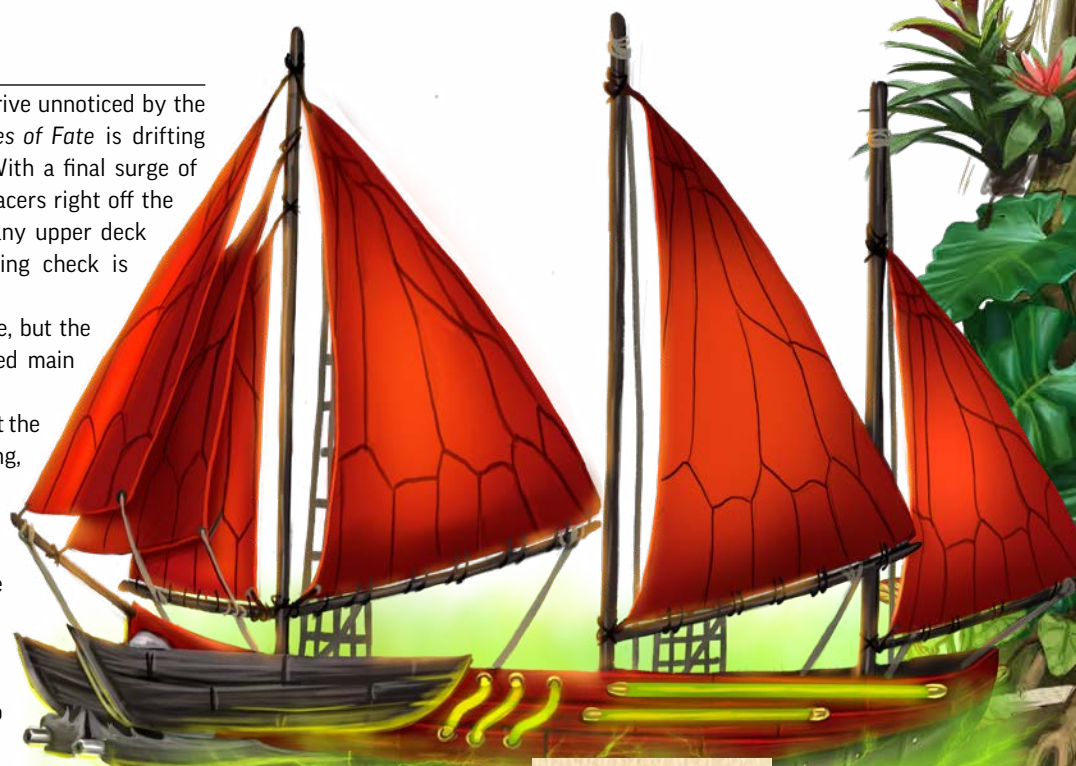
Chapter 1:
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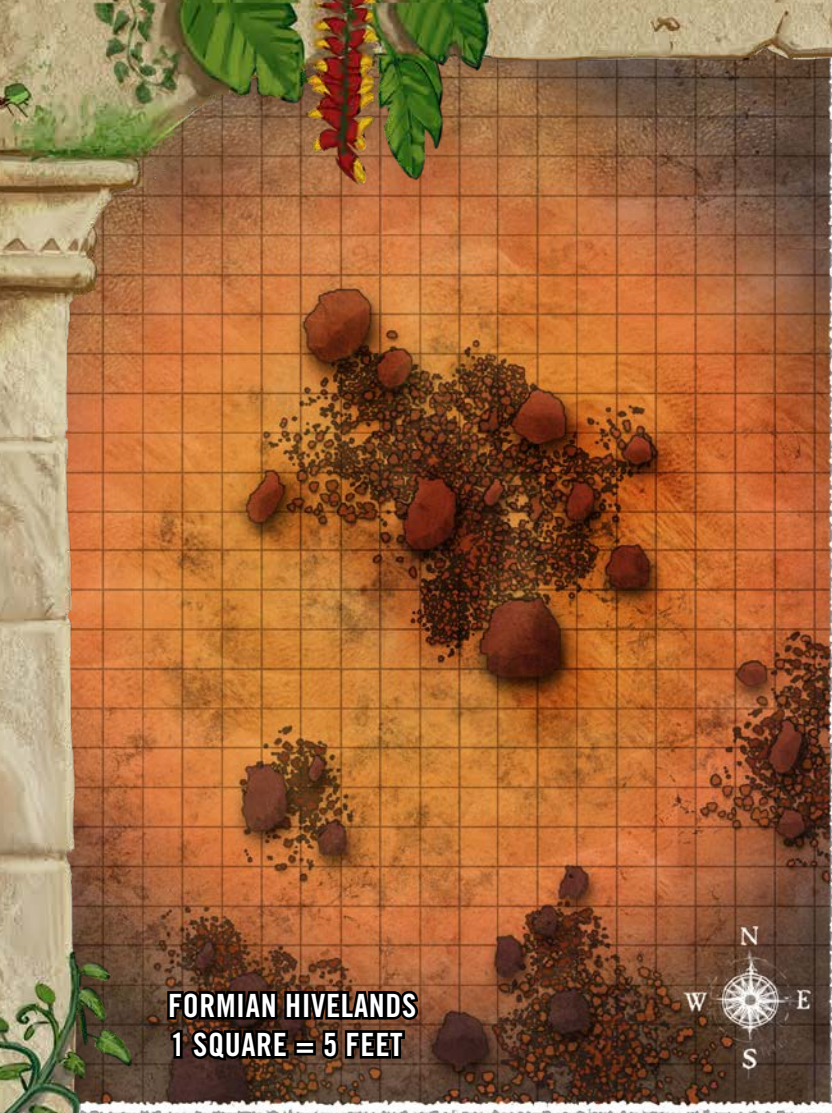
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Mandibles of Fate



FORMIAN HIVELANDS
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

developed from formian bio-matter that has the same strength and consistency as high-grade darkwood. Unless otherwise noted, the entire ship is well lit by the thick tubes of magically hardened glass that carry a glowing green liquid throughout the structure. The glass is 1 inch thick and has the same statistics as mithral. The liquid is a magical combination of thasteron and the protein-rich fluid produced by formian queens to feed their young. This fluid both powers the ship and weakens formians' minds, ensuring they remain under the control of the King of Biting Ants.

The constant rumbling of the *Mandibles of Fate*'s arcane engines causes all auditory-based Perception checks to take a -4 circumstance penalty. Since the formian crew communicates telepathically, the noise doesn't impact their coordination, but it masks the heroes' approach on their sand racers.

High Alert: Formians operate as part of a telepathic hive mind. As soon as any formian on the ship detects the heroes, the ship goes on high alert. The formian queen in the hatchery (area **D7**) starts the maturation process of three new formian mageslayers. After

30 minutes, the mageslayers are ready and begin patrolling the ship, searching each area of the ship carefully (starting with the hatchery and moving backwards through the ship to the quarterdeck). They attack any heroes they find and fight to the death. Regardless of the timing, the mageslayers never enter the brig while the heroes are speaking to Jatembe, as the ancient archwizard's subtle magic quietly redirects the creatures to the next room so that he can finish his conversation with the heroes uninterrupted. If the heroes lay low, the queen produces another trio of mageslayers the next time a formian is attacked. Killing or freeing the queen stops her production of these reinforcements.

The map of the *Mandibles of Fate* appears on the inner back cover of this adventure.

D1. QUARTERDECK

A tubular railing spun from vibrant green metal surrounds the rear deck of the ship, pulsing with emerald light as it circulates a glowing viscous fluid throughout the ship.

Apart from a few scattered crates bearing mundane tributes from settlements the *Mandibles of Fate* terrorized, this rear deck is empty. It makes a good place for the heroes to land unobserved or to hide to avoid discovery.

D2. MAIN DECK

MODERATE 17

The sprawling main deck features several doorways and hatches, as well as a variety of mechanical pulleys and platforms that control the ship's enormous sails.

The ship is virtually indestructible, but still requires a crew to maneuver it and keep it flying.

Creatures: Three formian mageslayers guard this deck zealously, watching over the scuttling efforts of several enslaved formian deckhands. The mageslayers attack as soon as they spot the heroes and fight to the death. The deckhands simply stay out of the way, too dulled by the emanations of the circulating fluid to take an interest in anything beyond their duties.

FORMIAN MAGESLAYERS (3)

CREATURE 16

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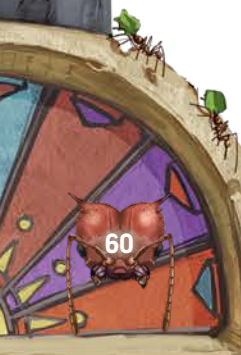
Initiative Perception +30

FORMIAN DECKHANDS (6)

CREATURE 1

Formian workers (page 82)

Initiative Perception +6



D3. FORECASTLE

LOW 17

A smaller secondary mast juts from the front of the ship here, glimmering metallic foresail and spritsail arrayed to help steer the ship with surprising agility for a vehicle of such tremendous size.

A pair of thasteron-fueled escape vessels hang to each side of the ship's bow in case of emergencies. Launching them requires a single Interact action from within or adjacent to the escape vessel, at which point the vessel lurches forward to make a slow spiraling descent to the ground below.

Creatures: A pair of formian mageslayers stand guard here, scanning the horizon in front of the ship. They keep an eye on the terrain ahead and ensure no one tinkers with the escape vessels. They are quick to attack intruders, though they don't leave the forecastle for fear of falling victim to some trick.

FORMIAN MAGESLAYERS (2)

CREATURE 16

Page 82

Initiative Perception +33

D4. LABORATORY

MODERATE 17

A variety of strange arcane devices line the curved walls of this chamber. Observation windows on sealed vats of bubbling liquid reveal horrifically misshapen humanoids within. These, and the other eerie instruments, demonstrate a tableau of twisted experimentation guided by a nightmarish intellect.

The research in this library can give the heroes disturbing insight into the *soulshredder cannons* that the King of Biting Ants has been perfecting, but a careful review takes a full hour. The captive, misshapen humanoids are mere husks, only marginally alive but completely soulless. Notes indicate that their souls were siphoned away by a *soulshredder cannon*, a weapon invented here (but which isn't currently present). When a *soulshredder cannon* is full, the souls it has collected can be extracted as a powerful incorporeal undead entity. Although the weapon works, the King of Biting Ants has been modifying the *soulshredder cannon* to target entire communities, creating spectral monsters from hundreds of souls with each blast. A character who succeeds at a DC 30 Perception check while skimming these notes realizes that for many years research on the improved *soulshredder cannon* kept hitting dead ends, mishaps, and unexplained failures; on a critical success, the hero realizes this is due to years of exceptionally subtle sabotage.

Yet the King of Biting Ants now has two prototypes, which he's been calibrating by testing on smaller Akitonian settlements. The notes also indicate that once the tests are complete and the weapons can depopulate entire cities, he plans to magically transport the *Mandibles of Fate* to Golarion to obliterate of the Mwangi Expanse, starting with the Magaambya.

Creatures: The King of Biting Ants wasn't banished to Akiton alone. Several of his red-robed acolytes arrived with him. The king gifted these acolytes with immortality, and they in turn serve him with utmost devotion. The acolytes cloak themselves in tattered red robes, just like their leader, and wear featureless masks over their faces. They have long trained in a special combat style that mimics the king's swarming bites. They've also equipped themselves with firearms from Akitonian settlements they've raided.

A pair of hyakume research specialists work diligently here to help the King of Biting Ants perfect his soul-draining cannons but consider themselves to be above menial labor. They calmly scribble notes on long paper scrolls. The hyakume guard their reports jealously from all creatures other than the King of Biting Ants; they don't even share with the crimson acolytes, who hardly care so long as their master is pleased.

The crimson acolytes fight intruders to the death, while a hyakume reduced to fewer than 70 Hit Points casts *disappearance* and flees. A fleeing hyakume attempts to escape from the forecastle and depart the ship entirely, concluding that their alliance with the King of Biting Ants no longer serves their interest.

CRIMSON ACOLYTES (4)

CREATURE 13

RARE CE MEDIUM HUMAN HUMANOID

Human devotee

Perception +23

Languages Akitonian, Aklo, Common

Skills Acrobatics +24, Athletics +24, Arcana +22, Stealth +24

Str +5, **Dex** +4, **Con** +0, **Int** +3, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +0

Items +2 striking dueling pistol (10 thasteron rounds; *Guns & Gears* 152), +2 striking handwraps of mighty blows

AC 34; **Fort** +21, **Ref** +25, **Will** +23; evasion

HP 235

Ageless The crimson acolyte doesn't age and doesn't need food or drink to survive.

Evasion When the acolyte rolls a success on a Reflex save, they get a critical success instead.

Guarded Movement The acolyte gains a +4 circumstance bonus to AC against reactions triggered by their movement.

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ fist +27 (agile, magical, unarmed), **Damage** 2d6+11 bludgeoning

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Melee ♦ thousand wounds +27 (backstabber, forceful, magical, unarmed), **Damage** 2d12+11 piercing

Ranged ♦ *dueling pistol* +26 (concealable, concussive, fatal d10, magical, range increment 60 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 2d6+10 piercing

Flurry of Blows ♦ (flourish) **Frequency** once per turn; **Effect** The acolyte makes two unarmed Strikes, or one unarmed Strike and a dueling pistol Strike. If both hit the same creature, combine their damages for the purposes of resistances and weaknesses. The acolyte's multiple attack penalty applies normally to these Strikes.

Thousand Ants Stance ♦ (stance) The acolyte takes the stance of thousand ants, a style mimicking the distracting strikes of a swarm of tiny, vicious creatures. The acolyte can make thousand wounds unarmed attacks. These deal 1d12 piercing damage; are in the brawling group; and have the backstabber, forceful, and unarmed traits. While in this stance, if the acolyte successfully Trips a target, the target is flat-footed until the start of the target's next turn.

Sneak Attack The acolyte deals an extra 2d6 precision damage to flat-footed creatures.

HYAKUME (2)

CREATURE 15

Pathfinder Bestiary 3 139

Initiative Perception +29

Treasure: A hero who Searches the room and succeeds at a DC 36 Crafting check identifies one of the machines as an alchemical dispenser and determines how to operate it. When activated, the dispenser creates one of the following, based on its current setting (it's currently set to produce bottled lightning): major alchemist's fire, major bottled lightning, major frost vial, major thunderstone, or major juggernaut mutagen. The dispenser can be activated up to five times (creating any combinations of these alchemical items) before its internal reservoirs are exhausted.

D5. REJUVENATION CENTER

A magical lock on the door to this room only opens for the King of Biting Ants. A hero who succeeds at a DC 36 Arcana check can trick the door into opening, as can a hero who succeeds at a DC 38 Thievery check to Disable a Device. Failure causes magical backlash that deals 10d6 mental damage (DC 35 basic Will save) to the unlucky character.

An off-tune hum causes a subtle ache in the teeth and bones, and a smell like burnt copper lingers faintly in the air. Four egg-shaped silver capsules are arranged along the side wall, with faint blue and green lights just barely illuminating a metal chair with leather cushions.

The four capsules are rejuvenation devices used to heal wounded guards, stabilize experimental formian variants, and perform other medical functions. Each capsule has thick padding and a small space, allowing a single creature of up to Large size to fit within. Tubes attached to all the capsules disappear into the floor, apparently connected to some other device below.

A single seat within each capsule has a sturdy belt to secure a creature inside.. A hero Investigating a capsule who succeeds at a DC 32 Medicine or related Lore check (such as Engineering Lore) to Recall Knowledge discerns the device's true purpose: these rapid rejuvenation pods accelerate mental and physical recovery through magical and scientific means. When closed with a single creature inside, the capsule fills with magically charged fluid over 1 minute, giving the creature within the benefit of a full night's rest in only 10 minutes (including fully restoring spell slots, Focus Points, and other limited resources). A creature that's been dead for less than 10 minutes, when placed within an activated capsule, is returned to life as though by an 8th-level *raise dead* spell. A creature can benefit from one of these pods once each month.

Treasure: A first aid kit strapped to the wall is a *greater marvelous medicines*.

D6. BRIG

Several cells line the port and starboard walls of this large room. Some of the cells are sealed with bars of iron, others with veils of magical force. Centered in the forward wall, a cell with glistening silver and black metal bars is shrouded by rainbow-colored layers of energy.

The King of Biting Ants retrofitted the brig of the *Mandibles of Fate* for one express purpose: to imprison his enemy Old-Mage Jatembe. Surrounded in alternating bars of mithral and adamantite, each pane a *prismatic wall* sealed in a *wall of force*, and finally, warded with a permanent *dimensional lock* to bar planar travel and teleportation, the cell is inescapable. Or so the King of Biting Ants believes.

Creatures: An old man, his legs crossed and his hands relaxed on his lap, rests within the cell in a meditative pose. The heroes have no problem identifying this man as none other than Old-Mage Jatembe. A closer inspection through the magical windows notes that the man in the brig appears almost dead—he gives few indications of breathing, a pulse, or any sign of life.

Jatembe's body is mostly immobile because his spirit isn't usually within it. Jatembe has, for the past several decades, projected his spirit into the *Mandibles of Fate* itself, quietly and subtly infusing himself into the ship.



As the King of Biting Ants checks on Jatembe's form only now and again to ensure he's still a captive, Jatembe can let his mind wander freely despite his body's imprisonment. Patient and wise, Jatembe knows that if he were to attempt to escape in body, the King of Biting Ants would work harder to recapture him, or worse, take out his anger on innocent people in ways Jatembe might not be able to prevent. By remaining the king's apparent prisoner, Jatembe can freely stall the king's work on perfecting his *soulshredder cannons*. So far, the king hasn't realized that the years of delays and failed experiments have all been the result of Jatembe's subtle spiritual opposition, but Jatembe knows that this tactic is, at best, a delaying one. He's been hoping for someone to come along and defeat the king while Jatembe continues to stymie his progress, but that wait has turned out to be much longer than he anticipated.

The heroes' arrival is the opportunity that patient Jatembe has been preparing for.

When the heroes attempt to enter Jatembe's cell or communicate with the figure inside, he suddenly manifests like a ghost next to them.

"Why waste time trying to talk to a tired old body, eh? He's not here for you; he's there to keep the ants complacent," Jatembe says by way of greeting.

Jatembe's spiritual manifestation may appear as a ghost, but in fact he remains very much alive and his mental projection speaks to the heroes. Jatembe asks the heroes what has brought Magaambyans to the *Mandibles of Fate* and urges them to share everything they've learned. If the heroes express concern about formian patrols or the possibility of the King of Biting Ants detecting their presence on the ship, Old-Mage Jatembe assuages their concerns, saying "Worry not, young heroes. Old I may be and in the heart of our enemy's power I stand, but I've had plenty of time to perfect the diversion of his many thousand prying eyes. He may think this place is my prison, but it's been my sanctuary. He and his minions will not interrupt us. Now, tell me your stories and I will listen."

Give each player an opportunity to recount their character's adventures up to this point. The heroes stand in the presence of the most important person in the history of the Magaambya, but this shouldn't diminish their own accomplishments. If any important facts slip the players' minds at this point (such as if they learned from Warder-Chief Mpondo and the Iobane that Koride Ulawa stole the *Vesicant Egg*), Jatembe might prompt them with a question so they can remember. Once the heroes have finished relaying their tales, Jatembe nods in thought and asks them if they have any questions for him while he considers what they have told him.

Included below are some questions the heroes may have for Jatembe, and his answers. Jatembe doesn't refer to the King of Biting Ants with the title "king," as he insists that a king unworthy of a domain cannot be called such. Instead, he refers to him as "the old bug," "my old foe," or similar.

What is the King of Biting Ants planning? "The same as he has always planned: domination, cruelty, control, and worse. He is nothing if not tenacious, and each time he is slain, he finds a way to come back. His focus is extraordinary, and for many long years he's been working single-mindedly to develop a weapon to convert the people of the Mwangi Expanse—starting with the Magaambya—into his undead slaves. Akiton is his refuge, and he views its people as little more than test subjects. I work to foil his depredations upon them not just for their own sakes, but to delay his plans as best I'm able."

What is this weapon? "He calls it a *soulshredder cannon*, an awful weapon that can rip the soul from a living target and store its wrecked fragments, combining them all together with other victims to transform the host into an undead spirit known as a nemhaith. The determined old bug has been toiling for decades on enhancing the weapon so that it can be used on crowds rather than individuals—allowing it to destroy a community and create an enslaved nemhaith with a single shot—but I have been opposing this progress from within this very ship all along. I thought he didn't suspect my interference, but a short time ago he recognized my influence and worked around it in ways I find harder to deflect. In short, he can complete his plans from many angles while I can only delay him from a few, and his progress is now continuing faster than I can foil him. If he's not stopped soon, he'll complete his weapon and then, I fear, the danger he poses will increase a hundredfold." (Jatembe underestimates the King of Biting Ants a bit, and he doesn't realize that the king suspects Jatembe's subtle sabotage and is working around it.)

Can you leave? "I am a prisoner by choice. While the old bug thinks I am in his sight, I have the freedom to foil him in ways he does not suspect. Sometimes, the best invisibility is to be wholly and persistently visible. It takes effort to remove and then rebuild the wards encaging my physical form, but I have left from time to time, always making sure to return before my old foe knows I've been gone. Otherwise, he will conceal his work from me, and I will not be able to foil his plans."

Can't you just kill the King of Biting Ants? "I could not completely kill him ages ago, and he's better prepared for my tricks now! I again tried to stop him a couple hundred years ago, when I first learned of

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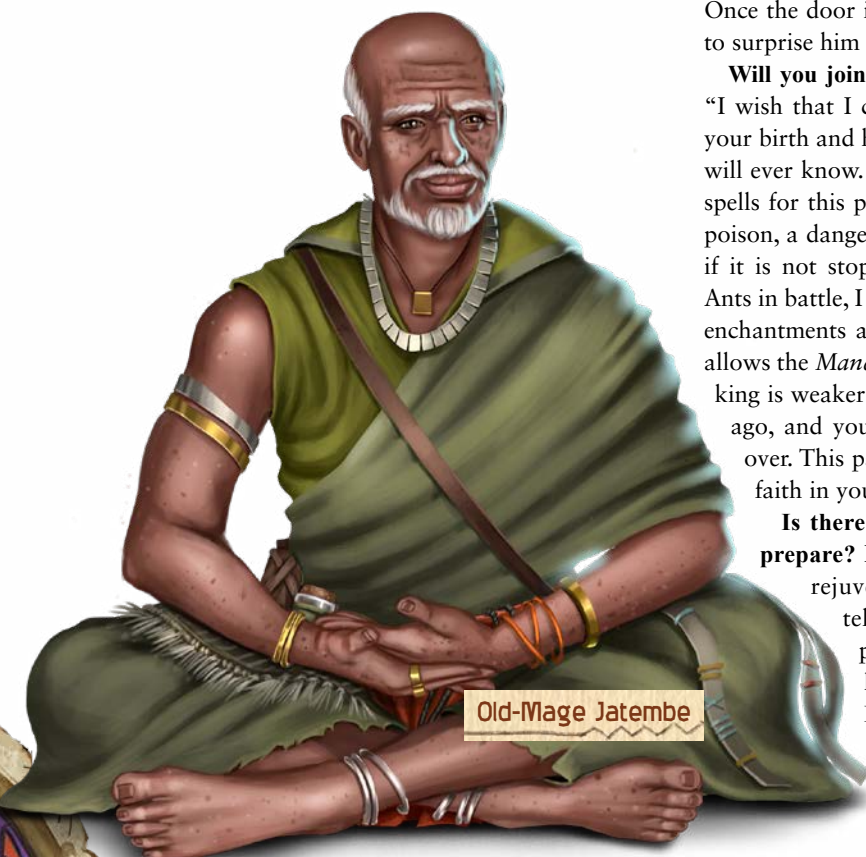
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his plans, but he was ready for me. I let him think he defeated and captured me, for it was not far off the truth. I took away some of his power then, but he's had time to recover much of it. I worry that some aspect of him, some contingency, remains in place back on Golarion. Without knowing fully what that contingency is, his defeat is temporary. He might scuttle into the shadows elsewhere to advance his plans without my knowledge or disruption. I can delay him here, now, but not forever—so I am glad you have come to do what I cannot!”

What is the Vesicant Egg? “Tell me what you know of this thing.” Jatembe suspects that something like the *Vesicant Egg* is key to the King of Biting Ants’s rebirth if he’s defeated here, but he hasn’t been able to discover this contingency while opposing the king’s plans. When the heroes share what they know about the artifact, he realizes that this is the king’s backup plan. Jatembe looks thoughtful and explains, “On one hand, I suspect the artifact is nothing more than it appears: the egg of a particularly large ant. But it likely holds something of an echo, a fragment of his multipartite mind woven into a cocoon of sorts. We should deal with this item once the king is destroyed here to ensure my old foe’s wickedness is ended for good. That particular challenge still lies before us, and it’s a world away. We can face it once the pressing work here is done.”



Old-Mage Jatembe

What do you need us to do? “I have my spirit within this ship, confounding the old bug. But while I do so, I can’t defeat him. I need you to do that, to help the people of Akiton and all those he plans to torment.”

Can the King of Biting Ants truly be destroyed? “Of course! All that lives can die. That old bug is no exception. He can die and be made to stay that way, but it’s a harder task than most. Every single ant that makes up his body can carry his intellect forward, so if he’s defeated, take care to not let a single one escape.” Jatembe presses the heroes to consider how to overcome the King of Biting Ants’s disincorporate ability (which he can describe in detail). Things like the *necklace of fireballs* from Seldo or the alchemical bombs from the laboratory work well for this.

Where is the King of Biting Ants? “When he’s not here taunting my body or in the laboratory growing frustrated, he spends his time on the bridge. I suspect he’s there now, cowering behind his wards.”

How can we get access to the bridge? “The old bug is nothing if not persistent in how he protects his most precious of places. You could simply use magic to remove the wards, but that will take time, luck, and skill, and he will certainly act to restore those wards as quickly as you take them down. Here, though, I can aid you. I can dismantle the wards he has placed on the door into the bridge, but doing so is no small task. Once the door is made mundane, it will be upon you to surprise him at the seat of his power!”

Will you join us to battle the King of Biting Ants? “I wish that I could. I joined this battle long before your birth and have aided you in more ways than you will ever know. But I will not be at your side flinging spells for this particular confrontation. This ship is a poison, a danger to this planet and soon many others if it is not stopped. As you face the King of Biting Ants in battle, I shall use the distraction to unwind the enchantments and disable the arcane machinery that allows the *Mandibles of Fate* to function. Its would-be king is weaker now than when I first faced him long ago, and you have proven yourselves many times over. This particular fight is yours, and I have full faith in your ability to see it through.”

Is there anything else here that can help us prepare? If the heroes have not yet visited the rejuvenation center (area **D5**), Jatembe tells them of its presence and its purpose. He also suggests that the heroes free the formian queen in area **D7** before confronting the King of Biting Ants, explaining that she’s been mentally coerced and should be freed, if possible.



Eventually, once the heroes have asked their questions or once you wish for the scene to move on, Old-Mage Jatembe alerts the heroes that time grows short. The King of Biting Ants is likely preparing another test of his *soulshredder cannon* and must be stopped! The Old-Mage vanishes, but not before wishing the heroes luck and promising to undo the wards on the door to area **D8** when they are ready to face the king there.

D7. HATCHERY

SEVERE 17

Three of this room's walls are covered in masses of countless eggs held in a mesh of glistening organic material. Only the wall toward the bow of the ship remains bare. Here, a single door sits in the wall, its surface shimmering with strange shifting runes that look almost like columns of ants marching in complex patterns.

One part prison and one part nursery, the hatchery is filled with an especially bright glow from the magically powered machinery and tubes of green liquid that stretch throughout the ship. The eggs all resemble tiny versions of the *Vesicant Egg*—this is a coincidence, but might be unnerving to the heroes.

The door to the north is the only entrance into the bridge, and it remains locked by a series of complex wards placed by the King of Biting Ants. Normally, removing these wards would be a difficult and dangerous process for the heroes, but they have an ally ready to do that work for them in Old-Mage Jatembe. If they've already spoken to him in area **D6**, his spirit manifests briefly here to confirm with them that they're ready for the battle beyond the door before causing the ant-like runes to march away in disorganized clumps.

Otherwise, when the heroes attempt to examine or open this door, Jatembe manifests before them from the door's surface, apologizing quickly if he startles the heroes before asking them to pay him a visit in the brig near the stern before proceeding. If the heroes push on, Jatembe simply nods, understanding that some heroes are headstrong and have difficulty asking for help—in this case he wishes the heroes luck before undoing the wards for them.

Creatures: Trapped in this room is a formian queen mentally enslaved by the King of Biting Ants to serve as the source for his mageslayer soldiers. The formian queen is chained in the center of the room, given enough leeway to tend to the egg sacs piled near the walls and arrayed in the vats but unable to move any farther. While she is enslaved by the King of Biting Ants, the formian queen views the heroes as enemies but won't move to attack (or even attempt to

communicate) unless the heroes provoke her to a fight. Two formian mageslayers remain at her side, both to ensure she doesn't escape and to provide additional security for the door to the bridge.

If the heroes can dispel or suppress the 10th-level *dominate* spell that the King of Biting Ants has placed on the formian queen, she orders her two mageslayer guards to stand down. Though they answer to the King of Biting Ants, few formians can resist the direct commands of a queen; the guards obey after exchanging some confused glances with one other.

If the formian queen is freed, she thanks the heroes for saving her and tells them that once she leaves the mageslayers will become disoriented for a time. The heroes can either Request or Coerce her to delay her departure to a time that's convenient for them; otherwise, she teleports away as soon as she's thanked the heroes and provided them the reward (as described in Treasure below).

On the other hand, if the heroes attack the formian queen, she fights to the death, using her hive frenzy ability to empower the mageslayers.

Once the formian queen leaves the *Mandibles of Fate* or dies, all formians on the airship become sickened 2 and slowed 1. These two conditions persist for 24 hours unless removed magically. The King of Biting Ants immediately realizes that his captive queen is now absent, and he prepares for trouble as described in area **D8**.

FORMIAN QUEEN

CREATURE 17

Page 83

Initiative Perception +32

FORMIAN MAGESLAYERS (2)

CREATURE 16

Page 82

Initiative Perception +33

Treasure: Before the queen escapes the ship, she fashions a reward for the heroes who've released her. She quickly molds some of the salubrious organic material into a small, greenish amulet that functions as an *emberheart* (*Secrets of Magic* 184).

XP Award: If the heroes remove the domination and allow the queen to escape, grant them 120 XP.

D8. BRIDGE

EXTREME 17

Strange machines with carapace-like frames line the walls of this room, connected by pulsing tubes that hum and glow with eldritch power. Two elements compete for attention even within this alien tableau. The first element is the ship's helm: a massive affair with a many-spoked

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Akiton the Red

Adventure
Toolbox

THE FINAL BATTLE

If the heroes force their way to the fight against the King of Biting Ants without taking time to explore the airship, they face an extreme encounter. Timing their attack with the defeat or rescue of the formian queen in area **D7**, refreshing their abilities with the rejuvenation capsules in area **D4**, and securing Old-Mage Jatembe's help are all important edges. The encounter becomes far more deadly if the heroes fare poorly with the formian queen or use up too many resources in their attempts to remove the ward over the entrance to area **D8**. Timing their attack on the bridge to coincide with aid from Old-Mage Jatembe and the defeat or rescue of the formian queen, though, reduces this clash to a severe encounter, requiring the King of Biting Ants to call forth the nemhaiths rather than one already being in the room.

wheel made of the same carapace material that frames the room, and a strange lounge where a captain's chair might normally sit in a less unusual vessel. The second are the two immense cannons on either side of the room, their barrels made of immense vertebrae and spiky chitin, their housing of bone and metal slowly pulsing with green light. The faint sound of tortured cries issue from these sinister weapons.

The machinery of this ship is constructed in such a way that only a creature capable of discorporating its body into thousands of parts—such as a worm that walks like the King of Biting Ants—can pilot the *Mandibles of Fate* or use either of the *soulshredder cannons* in this room. This also allows the King of Biting Ants to bring the entire ship and everyone on it with him when he casts *teleport* as a 10th-level spell—which is how he intends to get to Golarion once his *soulshredder cannons* are perfected.

The ship is magically reinforced and impossible to break, but the *soulshredder cannons* consist of more delicate arcane machinery that the king frequently tinkers with. Each cannon has a Hardness of 20 and 150 Hit Points; if broken, a nemhaith drawn from it is permanently slowed 1, and when it's destroyed the nemhaith drawn from it is destroyed (and can't rejuvenate if it's already destroyed). Of course, the cannons are both destroyed if the ship crashes.

Creatures: The King of Biting Ants occupies the bridge, seated at the ship's helm. He's always attended by a trio of devoted acolytes willing to defend him to the death, but if the ship is on alert, he's also attended

by a nemhaith that he's extracted from one of the two *soulshredder cannons*. This nemhaith looks like the distorted shape of a formian, for it was created from souls harvested from one of the formian hivelands in the desert. The King of Biting Ants probably isn't sure who the heroes are, but if he realizes they're from the Magaambya (perhaps by noticing their masks), he sneers and congratulates them on being the first victims of his vengeance against Jatembe's legacy. He taunts them, shouting "You think his ridiculous school has taught you anything about what it means to be powerful? Ha! I will show you the true strength of thousands!"

Although prone to taunting his foes, the King of Biting Ants isn't interested in discussion or negotiation. He attacks the heroes right away and fights until destroyed, confident in his ultimate survival in some form or another (ironically, he doesn't realize that the *Vesicant Egg* on Golarion will not truly restore his form, only carry forward an echo of his psyche).

The King of Biting Ants can extract a nemhaith from a *soulshredder cannon* by taking a three-action Interact action from anywhere in this room and does so on the first round of battle if he hasn't already called one to his side. He extracts a second nemhaith from the other *soulshredder cannon* as soon as the first is destroyed or if he's brought below 200 Hit Points. The nemhaiths are bound to the *soulshredder cannons* and can't leave the room.

The King of Biting Ants uses his most powerful spells to pummel the heroes, mixing in potent physical attacks like his biting embrace. His nemhaiths use *wall of force* to try to divide the battlefield and make it more difficult for the heroes to support each other before moving into close range so that their potent auras can chip away at the heroes' health. The nemhaiths try to isolate targets on either side of the room and stay clear of the King of Biting Ants.

While Old-Mage Jatembe indicated that he won't be able to help the heroes during this fight, that's not quite the case. As the battle rages, he watches from his spiritual position throughout the ship, and is ready to step in and provide assistance if possible. Doing so while he is in a spiritual form is tricky, though, and each time he intervenes he must succeed at a DC 11 flat check. Failure indicates that the *Mandibles of Fate* lashes back against him, preventing him from providing assistance for 1d4 rounds. When Old-Mage Jatembe manifests, he does so as a reaction triggered by something that would kill or otherwise incapacitate a hero. His manifestation prevents that effect from happening, blocking it entirely, but also catches the attention of the King of Biting Ants. The king must succeed at a successful DC 44 Will save or become

frightened 2 by the unexpected sight of his old nemesis, or frightened 4 on a critical failure.

KING OF BITING ANTS

CREATURE 19

Page 90

Initiative Perception +32

CRIMSON ACOLYTES (3)

CREATURE 13

Page 61

Initiative Perception +23

SOULSHREDDED NEMHAITHS (1 OR 2) CREATURE 15

Nemhaith (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 3 185)

Initiative Perception +31

Perilous Defeat: The heroes need only defeat the King of Biting Ants to prevail in this dangerous encounter. Once he is slain, the formians are freed and quickly abandon ship, bringing their queen with them if she hasn't left already. Of more import, though, is that the *Mandibles of Fate* is now without a pilot. The ship lurches under the heroes' feet and seems barely able to stay afloat. This is, in part, the doing of Old-Mage Jatembe. He manifests before the heroes and warns them that they must abandon the ship; he can keep it airborne for only a few more moments, but he intends to crash the vessel into the desert below, destroying both it and the *soulshredder* cannons. If the heroes express concern with what might happen to Jatembe, he gives a sly grin and explains that his cell will, in an ironic twist of fate, protect his body from the crash. The Old-Mage can then simply rejoin with his body and walk free.

Play this climax out with narration. Assume that any workable plan the heroes come up with to escape the ship succeeds. They might retreat to their sand racers and ride them off the deck at the last minute before the ship crashes, or they could gather up and teleport away to safety at the last second. If you must, you can have Jatembe intervene to transport the heroes back to the Hall of Reason via a powerful teleportation effect, but it's more satisfying if the heroes take charge of their own escape and you describe it with appropriately cinematic effect.

Concluding the Adventure

With the King of Biting Ants defeated and Old-Mage Jatembe freed, the heroes have accomplished even greater things than expected when they first came to Akiton.

Jatembe accompanies them back to the Hall of Reason to return through the Doorway of the Red Star (or meets them there, if the heroes have a quicker way to travel). You can roleplay their journey with the venerable wizard, who is as charming as he is insightful, and they might experience other events in Seldo or elsewhere on Akiton during their journey.

There's much to be done, however, and little time to wait. Having heard of the *Vesicant Egg* and suspecting that danger lurks within it, Jatembe is anxious to return to Golarion and learn more about this fragment of the King of Biting Ants's malevolent will. The dramatic effects upon the *Vesicant Egg* due to the king's death on Akiton are detailed in *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #174: *Shadows of the Ancients*.

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Soulshredded Nemhaith





AKITON THE RED



Known on Golarion to poets and stargazers alike as the “Red Planet,” Akiton is the fourth planet from the sun. Its terrain is a mix of massive glaciers and cold deserts that make life cruel and difficult for its inhabitants—and even more so for visitors. Amid the deserts and glaciers, Akiton’s jagged surface is a patchwork of soaring mountains and gaping chasms.

Due to the harsh climate and ferocious beasts, the people of Akiton (collectively known as Akitonians) have developed unique technology to aid in their survival. Many of these innovations involve harnessing the power of the combustible compound thasteron (page 77) and using it to fuel vehicles like the efficient sand racers used to cross the Akitonian deserts (page 78) or the powerful shobhad longrifles (page 78).

Environment

The words that most universally apply to Akiton’s environments are “harsh” and “unforgiving.” The desert sands and glacial fields alike can kill an unprepared traveler in short time. Yet Akiton’s inhabitants are natural survivors, and they often find ways to turn these harsh conditions to their advantage. Glacial settlements often use refrigerators carved into the ice to store food, cool easily overheated engines and mechanical devices, or even as external batteries for cryogenically frozen citizens. In the deserts, shobhad nomads and ysoki travelers often use sand gliders, wheelless carts or rafts with complex sails attached to one or more masts, to stay one step ahead of the deadly sandstorms that scour the planet’s surface. More established and less mobile settlements often feature houses built on rolling foundations tethered to anchors sunk deep beneath the sand, allowing the buildings some ability to move with the shifting sands without suffering structural damage.

The desert sands of the red planet are far from the only environmental feature that have inspired unique adaptations. With the deepest chasms and tallest mountains in the solar system, Akiton is a hotbed

of volcanic activity. Ikeshti brood-minders often establish temporary colonies near volcanic hotspots, taking advantage of geothermic warmth to keep their broods safe through Akiton’s frigid nights. Clever ysoki engineers tap geothermal heat to power home heating devices, ovens, and even networks of metal mesh sunk beneath the desert sands to ward off the planet’s deadly gluttonworms (page 85).

AKITON

ENVIRONMENTAL

Characters who visit Akiton face thin atmosphere, low gravity, and dangerous temperatures. Those native to the planet don’t suffer disadvantages from Akiton’s atmosphere and temperature, but still gain the advantage from the planet’s low gravity.

Atmosphere Akiton has a breathable but thin atmosphere.

Creatures who aren’t acclimated to Akiton’s atmosphere become fatigued after one hour of exposure, unless they have master proficiency in Athletics (in which case they become fatigued after 24 hours of exposure) or legendary proficiency in Athletics (in which case they instantly acclimate and don’t become fatigued). This fatigued condition ends after the character gets a full night’s rest in a familiar atmosphere. Spells like *air bubble*, items like *bottled air*, or other effects at the GM’s discretion delay this fatigue as long as the effects persist.

Gravity Akiton has only a third of the gravity of Golarion.

When a character jumps, they cover triple the normal distance. Characters can carry an amount of Bulk equal to 10 plus their Strength modifier without penalty. Range increments from thrown weapons are tripled, and falling damage is halved.

Temperature Akiton’s temperatures average lower than those on Golarion and can easily reach extreme cold during winter at a pole. In the near-equatorial regions where this adventure takes place, though, temperatures average in the category of severe cold or mild cold in the settlement of Seldo itself. Further rules on temperature are on page 517 of the *Core Rulebook*.

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People of the Red Planet

The most common people of Akiton are insectile formians, red-scaled ikeshti, four-armed shobhads, and rodent-like ysoki. There are many humans, testifying to humanity's adaptability and ubiquity, although the humans of Akiton have very different cultures from those on Golarion. Societies of other creatures can be found elsewhere on Akiton, but these ancestries are the five most populous.

FORMIANS

Formians of Akiton are reminiscent of giant ants with humanoid upper bodies. Individual formians

are born into castes specialized toward particular tasks: workers handle the day-to-day functions of a hive, warriors defend from predators and invaders, and queens are the final decision-makers and the only formians who can reproduce. Other types of formians exist with even more specialized roles, and a queen who finds her hive faced with an unprecedented challenge can birth entirely new castes of formians with unique abilities adapted to the hive's needs and circumstances. Formian mageslayers are an example of such an adaptive evolution—these specialists were trained to fight the King of Biting Ants before being corrupted to serve as his elite guards.

In parts of Akiton where he holds sway, the King of Biting Ants has warped the formians through his control of several conquered hives. In addition to subverting the careful layers of hierarchy formians rely on for efficiency and direction, he has also forced formian queens to create new types of formians. The King cares little about the long-term viability of the hives or newly created castes so long as he has the tools needed to accomplish his goals. This forced evolution often results in deadly mutations and creates formians who rarely outlive whatever task the King of Biting Ants intended them for.

Three types of formians are detailed starting on page 82.

IKESHTI

Ikeshtis are red-scaled reptilian humanoids who live in the deserts and mountains of Akiton. Ikeshti possess a unique life cycle, with their final adult forms typically determined by a variety of environmental factors. Their bodies are extremely reactive to their environments and exhibit rapid physical adaptations to their surroundings. This need for adaptability heavily influences ikeshti culture, and their music, food, art, and other pursuits often disavow tradition in favor of innovation. In particular, ikeshti metallurgists and metalworkers are known for pushing the limits of their craft, developing new techniques and tools at a much faster than many communities on Akiton.

Ikeshti societies tend toward matriarchal leadership, as females are often viewed as providers and leaders, charged with overseeing the overall well-being of ikeshti communities as congregants while male brood-minders focus on the growth and development of children. At a young age, males are educated about child-rearing roles in the community and are expected to conform to a rigid



Ikeshti Brood-Minder



series of behavioral constraints in order to support the brood. This can place an enormous amount of societal pressure on male ikeshitis, including certain expectations of selflessness or sacrifice regarding their own needs when compared to that of the group.

Ikeshti males who exhibit what their elders view as dangerous traits, such as aggression or violent behavior, often find themselves at odds with the societal norms of ikeshiti communities. If they rebel against these constraints, ikeshiti leadership may deem them not only unsuitable for childcare, but too volatile to remain in the settlement. Banished males find themselves alone in a harsh climate, facing dangerous predators or environmental hazards. This heightened demand for survival can supercharge their evolutionary adaptability, and over a few incredible weeks, they quickly develop hardened scales, frames that exhibit hulking musculature, and elongated fangs or claws. This accelerated evolution also impacts their cognitive processes, transforming them into more instinctual creatures who may act primarily in a heightened emotional state—especially driven by the frustration and rage they might carry from earlier stages in their lives.

Two types of ikeshitis are detailed on page 86.

SHOBHADS

Four-armed shobhads are a nomadic species whose oral traditions stretch back thousands of years. While most refuse to stay in one place for long, some find positions of honor for themselves in shared societies and choose to leave their nomadic lives behind. Many shobhads see such individuals as unusual, deviating from tradition but not necessarily lacking in honor. Among the nomad clans, a shobhad's contributions to the community determine their rank and position. Material wealth means very little, and a hunter who owns little beyond a long rifle and sturdy pair of boots is just as likely to be chosen as the speaker for a community as any other individual.

Despite their massive and muscular frames, shobhads can be remarkably delicate and precise with their manual manipulations. What they lack in basic dexterity they tend to make up for in patience and careful deliberation. A sniper will spend hours, even days finding exactly the right position to shoot from, while a craftsman might spend months carefully ensuring that each component of a new invention is implemented exactly right.

Two particularly powerful types of shobhads are detailed starting on page 88.

AKITONIAN TECHNOLOGY

Technology on Akiton has evolved in ways that might seem odd to visitors from other planets. Its harsh environment served as a crucible, spurring any type of innovation that helped its inhabitants to survive on the planet's surface. At the same time, those very same conditions have prevented opportunities for non-essential experimentation and iterative design, making Akiton a technological dichotomy. It's simultaneously much more advanced than the nearest occupied planet but also surprisingly far behind in non-essential technologies. Many settlements seem conspicuously bereft of comforts and conveniences usually seen much earlier in a typical society's technological life cycle.

YSOKI

The ratfolk of Akiton are perhaps the most versatile survivors on the planet. Combining intelligence and adaptability with fur-covered bodies naturally suited to the planet's cold environments, ysoki have spread to virtually every habitable corner of the red planet. In the vast glaciers and ice fields of Akiton, ysoki with thick, gray-blue fur carve settlements and cities into the ice itself, shoring up these gelid warrens with magic and unique technological innovations that help stabilize the ice floes. In the planet's expansive deserts, ysoki with red-brown fur build cities on rolling foundations or even settlements built entirely on thasteron-powered hover platforms, providing protection from both the vicious sandstorms that scour the planet's surface and the deadly predators burrowing just below ground. Even in the civilization centers of other species, ysoki crafters, mechanics, and scouts frequently constitute an essential part of the settlement's population, with their small, agile bodies allowing them to work on a variety of essential systems far more efficiently than their larger or more inflexible allies.

Ysoki typically have the best diplomatic relations with the other groups on Akiton. They have a knack for establishing trust with the normally reserved shobhads, and a shobhad who decides to abandon their nomadic lifestyle and settle down is most likely to do so in a settlement with a significant ysoki population. Many ysoki also easily relate to the insectile formians; whether it's due to ysokis' ancestral experiences living in complex warrens with numerous siblings or some other shared quirk, ysoki communities are more likely to earn formians' trust than most others. Ysoki and ikeshiti relations are often slightly more cautious, but generally not outright hostile.

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Seldo

Seldo is something of an archetypal Akitonian city. It has a diverse populace including humans, ikeshti, shobhads, ysoki, and in happier times, formians from nearby colonies sent to establish trade relationships or explore possible opportunities for expansion. The city is compact in size but densely populated, housing approximately 44,000 individuals. As one of the region's larger trade hubs, Seldo features bustling marketplaces with a diverse selection of wares: magic swords, advanced weaponry using technology not yet discovered on Golarion, thasteron-powered vehicles, and food wrested from the dry terrain by those who know its secrets. Even rare spell scrolls and scholarly journals bartered from other worlds appear in its markets from time to time. Vendors here often boast, "If you can't find what you're looking for here, you're probably on the wrong planet."

SELDO

CE CITY

Bustling trade hub

Government Crime Lord (overlord)

Population 44,140 (45% ysoki, 30% humans, 15% shobhads, 5% ikeshti, 5% other)

Languages Akitonian, Shobhad

Religions none

SETTLEMENT 14

Threats corruption from within, agents of the King of Biting Ants

Trade Hub Seldo's position as an important trade hub makes it possible to purchase items of up to level 17.

"Cookie" (N male shobhad cook 16) respected fixture in Skartitch's cantina

Skartitch Chip-Tooth (LE female ratfolk crime lord 16) ruler of Seldo

Tar-Takneh (CN male shobhad sniper 17) disenfranchised guard

LEADERSHIP

Skartitch Chip-Tooth has been the undisputed leader of Seldo for several years. Rising to power over the corpses of her competitors, Skartitch will do almost anything to advance her own interests. Fortunately for the people of Seldo, the prosperity and well-being of the city is something she sees as being very much in her interest.

Technically, shobhads of Seldo are itinerant workers and not permanent residents—most are nomadic travelers. A notable exception to this is a shobhad who works in the kitchen of Skartitch's cantina, a massive fellow affectionately referred to by most as **Cookie** (page 51). Cookie isn't the shobhad's real name, but it's the only name he ever responds to. Cookie's lived in Seldo for a very long time, and even the oldest living ysoki in town can't remember a time when he didn't work at the cantina. All shobhads of Seldo treat the old cook with an extreme deference and respect that far exceeds his role as a cantina cook.

SOCIETY AND SOCIAL HUBS

Despite the travails and friction between Seldo's diverse residents, the city hosts a bustling nightlife, and its cantinas and restaurants are considered by most to be neutral territory, free (in theory) from violence and outside disputes. Only the most despicable outlaws and violent roustabouts would dare draw weapons inside such locations, though the occasional brawl is expected and allowed. Drawing a weapon during an otherwise "peaceful" tavern brawl is a grave offense.

Carousing at these cantinas is considered a polite introduction to many business deals conducted in the city. After patrons have claimed their glasses and tables, people of all kinds share stories, news, and job opportunities.

Seldo



For a resident of Seldo, such work might involve selling secrets, working as a guide or bodyguard, or offering one's services as an engineer to a property or vehicle owner. It's considered polite to entertain such offers even if you aren't planning on hiring anyone; common wisdom holds that you never know when you might be the one looking for work, and no one ever gave a perfect interview without practice.

Banditry and crime are everyday parts of life in Seldo. It's not uncommon to overhear plans to raid a nearby settlement if one sits at the right table. Community remains strong, though, and Seldo's citizens rarely meddle in the affairs of each other—while a ysoki might suggest a cousin in a nearby town come to Seldo to visit during the time a raid is planned, few would dare reveal the plans of a neighbor in favor of an outside town or settlement.

Religion isn't a particularly significant element for Seldo. The city features no specific temples or shrines, but its citizens are generally welcoming to visiting pilgrims, priests, and other religious travelers. Matters of healing and health are generally tended to by local alchemists, but in times of dire need, there's usually a few visiting divine spellcasters who provide aid.

MARKETPLACES AND GOODS

Seldo's unrivaled markets are equivalent to those of a much larger settlement, and most common items of up to 17th level can be obtained here. The marketplaces of Seldo also have access to a variety of uncommon goods, and you can grant heroes access to unusual weapons, items, or other options. It's possible to buy crafting formulas for any item that's been approved for purchase, though it should be noted from this point on there may be few opportunities for the players to turn these formulas into items.

If you're using *Pathfinder Guns & Gears* in your game, uncommon firearms are also available, including the shobhad longrifle (page 78). Many Akitionian weapons use thasteron firing mechanisms instead of the flintlock and black powder firing mechanisms more common on Golarion and are likely to be constructed from different materials with a different aesthetic and machining style, but their game statistics are unchanged from those in *Guns & Gears*.

The degree to which you want to allow your players to explore the marketplaces of Seldo is up to you. While the heroes are operating on a comparatively tight timetable, the events of Chapter 2 can be safely assumed to stretch for several days or weeks.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Seldo doesn't so much have laws as it has a complex network of agreements and understandings between the many ancestries and families who occupy it. On an individual level, people are expected to look out for themselves. If someone catches a thief in the act of burglarizing a home, the punishment for the act is whatever the owner finds fair. Generally, this involves forced payment or a brief period of indentured servitude but stealing from the wrong person can get a person maimed or even killed, with little opportunity to defend themselves.

Duels are a common method of resolution for conflict. No challenge or declaration of intent is required; if both parties participate in the fight, the matter is considered fair, though not always settled. Murdering a ysoki in Seldo is almost certain to lead to the victim's family seeking aid from Skartitch Chip-Tooth (page 50), the most powerful ysoki in the settlement and a brutal crime lord who united Seldo's fractured gangs under her banner, bringing about a new era of peace. Skartitch's peace was won with blood, and if any of the people who pledged loyalty to her are unduly brought to harm, the crime lord's vengeance is likely to be swift and brutal.

While ysoki and shobhads generally handle matters among themselves, life can be harder for Seldo's other citizens. The ikeshiti population is small and often suffers from bias because of the dangerous riveners who give them a bad name. Shobhad enforcers who earn their titles by defeating a primal rivenner often wear the creature's claws or jaws as jewelry, and it can be difficult to have a balanced social interaction with a person four times your size wearing your cousin's remains as decoration. Still, when an ikeshiti warband brings back the remains of a rivenner they've vanquished themselves, this can boost their reputation with others.

While humans are the second largest community in Seldo, at this particular moment in time they have less political power and influence than even fringe-dwelling ikeshitis. Prior to Skartitch's rise to power, Seldo was a predominantly human settlement with ysoki and other species carving out a living on the fringes of human society. To help secure her position in the city, Skartitch weakened the human government, diverting resources and technology first to her own people and then to her shobhad enforcers and the other gangs who rallied under her banner. Though humans of Seldo aren't exactly second-class citizens, they suffer regular scorn and disrespect. Their time as the rulers is past, and everyone knows it.

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ADVENTURE TOOLBOX

Treasures of the Ten

The following legends tell of weapons once wielded by the Ten Magic Warriors, and include the stories of how these great weapons came to be.

A STAFF OF DRAGONS

Wyrms Drinker is a powerful weapon whose crafting was an act of incredible cruelty by a necromancer named Xurn. Set on conquering the Mwangi Expanse, Xurn hunted down a young gold dragon and slew the creature with his vile magic. He ripped the femur from the dragon's foreleg, then enslaved the corpse as yet another zombie under his control. For years Xurn toiled, layering spell after spell into the femur, carving it with enchanted knives, and anointing it with the blood and skin of chromatic and metallic dragons alike.

Had Xurn completed his grim work, it's likely *Wyrms Drinker* would be even more powerful than it already is, and the Mwangi Expanse might even now be ruled by a necromancer king and his army of undead dragons. But fate is a curious thing, and instead Xurn and his staff were lost to obscurity.

The murder of dragons is an affront to many-kobolds included. The gold-scaled kobold Mirka Manytruths and her tribe, the Sunscales, saw the grand heresy unfolding and took it upon themselves to end the growing darkness spreading through the Expanse by staging a grand ambush. When Xurn traveled in search of one of the last dragons required to complete his sinister item, the Sunscales struck, unleashing barrage after barrage of arrow traps, swinging logs, exploding fruit, and every other device they could think of to destroy the dragons whose bodies had been profaned and whose souls had been enslaved by the necromancer. As Xurn raised his incomplete staff into the air and began to transform into a dragon, Mirka threw herself from a nearby tree, tearing the staff from the wizard's grasp just as her final trap, a deadfall of immense proportions carved from the trunk of a

thousand-year-old tree, obliterated his body. Sadly, the Sunscales were eradicated and Mirka's own neck was broken in her fall after stealing the staff. *Wyrms Drinker* lay forgotten for many years until one of Jatembe's Ten Magic Warriors stumbled across it and ultimately used its power in their final confrontation against the King of Biting Ants. *Wyrms Drinker* remained in the possession of the Magic Warriors for years until it was finally lost. Recently, in an ironic turn of events, a Chelaxian scholar named Tollvyeh has returned the staff to the site of its greatest battle.

WYRM DRINKER

ITEM 17

UNIQUE CONJURATION MAGICAL STAFF

Price 13,000 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk 1

This staff is made from the femur of a gold dragon wrapped in the multicolored scales of every type of chromatic and metallic dragon. When wielding this staff, you gain a +1 circumstance bonus to skill checks to Coerce, Make an Impression, Request, or Lie to dragons and creatures with strong draconic ties (such as kobolds, dragon instinct barbarians, and draconic sorcerers).

Activate ♦♦ command, Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** Attempt a melee Strike with *Wyrms Drinker*. If your target is a dragon or a creature with a strong draconic tie, such as a kobold, and you damage the target, the target is drained 2, or drained 4 on a critical hit.

Activate Cast a Spell; **Effect** You expend a number of charges from the staff to cast a spell from this list.

- **2nd** *illusory creature* (dragons only)
- **4th** *reflective scales* (*Lost Omens Gods & Magic* 109)
- **5th** *summon dragon*
- **6th** *dragon form, summon dragon* (6th)
- **7th** *summon dragon* (7th)

A SWORD FOR HEROES

Forged in ages past, *Spellcutter* has always been a weapon intended to protect the realms of humanity

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Wyrms Drinker

from encroaching evil. This magic sword can't harm living creatures, but it cuts through constructs and undead with remarkable ease. Millennia ago, the people who would one day become the fearsome and magnificent Iobane counted among their number an old smith named Kindiro. When his son Kaldalir turned 14, he approached Kindiro and asked "Father, in all the lands around our kingdom, it is unquestioned that the weapons forged by you are the strongest. Those who wield them become heroes and warriors of renown. Will you make such a weapon for me?"

Kindiro was troubled, for though his son was brave and noble, he wasn't always kind and had a terrible temper. While the thought of a legacy of heroes pleased the smith, he feared what his son might become with a weapon that was too fearsome for one with a violent disposition. Kindiro spent six days and six nights contemplating his son's request before calling the boy back to his side.

"My son," Kindiro said, "is it true you wish for a blade of a hero, and not one of a tyrant or brute?"

"Yes, Father," he replied. "I wish for nothing more."

With a smile, the smith sent the boy away and told him such a wish was within his power and one he was happy to grant. For months Kindiro toiled tirelessly, folding spell after spell of protection into a powerful sword. When the weapon was complete, he called his son back and presented it saying "My boy, you asked me for a sword of heroes and such is what I have created, but you must know: a hero protects and doesn't destroy. This sword is more properly a shield—a shield against cruelty. It can't harm the flesh of the living. Such deeds must be done with your own hands if they are to be done at all. Now go forth, my boy, and show me who you are."

Kaldalir became a hero with *Spellcutter* in his hand, and as he aged he gained a reputation for kindness and patience, preferring to settle matters with words over violence. Eventually, Old-Mage Jatembe sought out the warrior, now a husband with children and grandchildren of his own, and enlisted him in a crusade against a great evil—the King of Biting Ants. When the war was won and both Jatembe and the King of Biting Ants disappeared from the face of Golarion, Kaldalir saw the potential for evil to return through the Doorway to the Red Star and called his family to join him at that fell site. They built their homes there and practiced the techniques of the Ten Magic Warriors, becoming the first of the Iobane.

Though once a weapon wielded against the forces of the King of Biting Ants, *Spellcutter* didn't remain among the Iobane, and through a series of tragedies and misadventures, the blade has languished in the crypts

beneath the Cathedral of Nothingness for centuries, guarded and wielded by the mohrg Taon. In that time, Taon has used the blade's power to secure a position in the Throat-of-Nothingness and to repeatedly thwart spells cast during Iobane attempts to reclaim it.

SPELLCUTTER

ITEM 17

UNIQUE ABJURATION CURSED MAGICAL

Price 15,000 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk 1

The blade of this +2 *greater striking adamantine longsword* seems to absorb light from the air around it, giving the impression the wielder is standing in the shadow of a much larger creature. While *Spellcutter* is a potent weapon for battling undead and constructs, an ancient restriction on the blade prevents it from harming living creatures; attacks against living beings deal no damage. This restriction doesn't apply to dhampirs or creatures with the negative healing ability who are otherwise living; the magic of the blade can't distinguish between such beings and undead.

Activate ⤵ *envision*; **Trigger** You're targeted by a spell while wielding *Spellcutter*; **Effect** *Spellcutter* attempts to absorb the magic of the triggering spell, giving you a +4 status bonus to your AC and saves against the effect.

Activate ⬠ *Interact*; **Effect** Touching *Spellcutter* to any light source of 12th level or lower (including 6th-level spells with the light trait) instantly extinguishes the effect. If the source of the light is a large flame, such as a forest fire or bonfire, it only extinguishes the light source in a 5-foot radius burst from the point of contact.

A TOME OF SECRETS

This magic grimoire contains all of Dwandek's spells (page 32) and functions as the lich's spellbook. Dwandek discovered the *Grimoire of Unknown Necessities* ages ago, and it has been in the lich's possession long enough that he has hidden his *soul cage* within its pages and never allows it to leave the defenses of his sanctum. The grimoire itself, though, long predates Dwandek and has a much more important legacy. All of Jatembe's Ten Magic Warriors reference it in their training. Yet even they weren't the grimoire's first owners, as this ancient book was discovered by Old-Mage Jatembe during his quest to bring magic back into the world, though he never shared with his followers exactly where he discovered the tome. Hints lie within some of the sigils and runes throughout the text that bear a striking resemblance to Thassilonian characters, but the lack of commonly identifiable marks like the seven-pointed sihedron keep the book's legacy obscure. If asked directly about where he found the

Spellcutter

book, Jatembe only smiles and claims not to remember, pointing out he's lived long enough to deserve some forgotten memories.

Additional rules for grimoires appear starting on page 162 of *Pathfinder Secrets of Magic*.

GRIMOIRE OF UNKNOWN NECESSITIES ITEM 16

UNIQUE DIVINATION GRIMOIRE INVESTED MAGICAL

Price 8,000 gp

Bulk L

The cover of this grimoire is bound in a strange crimson, pebbly leather that a DC 40 Occultism check to Recall Knowledge identifies as the hide of a rare monster from the distant plane of Leng. The grimoire's spine is bound in copper and a spiral of shifting runes slowly swirls across its surface.

Activate ◆ envision (arcane, divination); **Frequency** once per day; **Requirement** You're an arcane prepared spellcaster and you have rested but not yet prepared your spells for the day; **Effect** The grimoire provides you with temporary knowledge of a single spell of the highest level you're capable of casting that you don't already have recorded in it or any of your other spellbooks, chosen by the GM based on their knowledge of the adventure to be particularly useful to you during the upcoming day. A strange quirk of the tome prevents the spell's knowledge from ever traveling further than your own mind. The granted spell is not only removed from the tome's pages at the start of the next day, but is also removed from any other scroll, spellbook, or grimoire the granted spell is copied into, as well as any other way it might have been learned or copied.

Contemplative Magic

The contemplatives of Ashok excel in occult magic, particularly spells and rituals that observe and manipulate temporal anomalies or magical portals.

RETURN TO ESSENCE SPELL 7

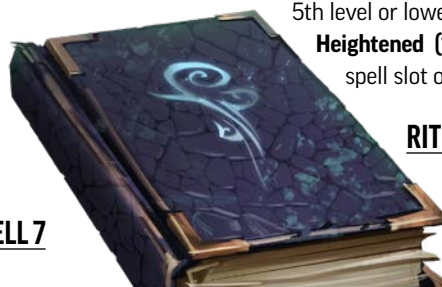
RARE ABJURATION

Traditions arcane, divine, occult

Cast ◆◆ somatic, verbal

Range 120 feet; **Target** one magically sealed or warded doorway or chest

You unravel the magic of a spell that affects a container, door, or lock, converting it into energy you can repurpose to power your own spells. Attempt a counteract check (*Core Rulebook* 458) against the target spell or magical effect that wards or seals a doorway or chest, such as *lock*, or against a spell or effect that deals damage or delivers secondary effects when it's opened, such as *glyph of warding*. If you succeed, you recover its energy, restoring one of your expended spell slots of 3rd level or lower.



Grimoire of Unknown Necessities

THASTERON

This unusual mineral can be found throughout Akiton. While not suitable for crafting items, the shimmering greenish ore that contains thasteron can be refined into a volatile liquid fuel—either through technological methods or, more efficiently, through the use of khefaks (page 87), arthropods who feed on the ore and secrete refined thasteron.

Thasteron can be used to fuel a wide range of devices, ranging from weapons to appliances to vehicles. The fuel is slightly radioactive—not enough to cause immediate harm, but prolonged exposure can cause long-term health concerns for most living creatures.

A significant part of Akiton's economy is based on the mining, refining, and trade of thasteron, but off-planet the liquid is relatively worthless without proper technology to take advantage of it. Prices for raw thasteron aren't included in this adventure as a result. A character foolish enough to ingest thasteron must make a DC 30 Fortitude save or become sickened 3 (and also drained 1 on a critical failure). Thasteron can be used to create alchemical bombs as well—these bombs are identical to alchemist's fire (*Core Rulebook* 545).

Heightened (8th) You can restore an expended spell slot of 4th level or lower.

Heightened (9th) You can restore an expended spell slot of 5th level or lower.

Heightened (10th) You can restore an expended spell slot of 6th level or lower.

RITE OF THE RED STAR RITUAL 8

RARE CONJURATION TELEPORTATION

Cast 1 hour; **Secondary Casters** at least 1 (the maximum is limited only by the physical space within the ring of stones)

Primary Check DC 40 Arcana or Nature (master); **Secondary Checks** DC 35 Arcana, Nature, Occultism, or Religion

Range all casters must be physically located within the stone ring of the Doorway to the Red Star; **Target** Doorway to the Red Star

Duration 10 minutes

You invoke the latent power within the Doorway to the Red Star through repetitive chanting and ritual movements in an attempt to open a portal to the planet Akiton.

Critical Success The plaza hums with magical energy that vibrates bones, causes hair to rise as if in a static field,

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and graces the tongue with flavors both unbearably sweet and terribly foul. The crimson pillars of the Doorway itself begin to smoke, then shimmer with red light, while the air within the ring shifts and ripples as if in the throes of intense heat. A moment later, a portal to Akiton opens at the center of the standing stones. This portal is vertical and semi-circular, with a radius of 30 feet, and is filled with shimmering red energy—it doesn't provide a view of the other side. Any caster who steps through this portal is instantly transported to area **B1** of the Hall of Reason on Akiton.

Success As critical success, but the portal's magic is distressed and unstable. When a caster steps through the portal, they must attempt a DC 36 Fortitude save or become drained 1 from the stress of the magical journey.

Failure The portal fails to open, and all casters must attempt a DC 36 Fortitude save to avoid becoming drained 1 from the backlash of magical energy.

Critical Failure As failure, but the misfire attracts the attention of a bythos aeon (*Bestiary* 2 11) which appears in the area at once and attempts to destroy the stones of the Doorway. After one round of attacks, it realizes the portal is beyond its ability to damage, and attempts to slay those who attempted to activate the portal in the first place.

TEMPORAL WARD

SPELL 6

RARE ABJURATION

Traditions arcane, divine, occult

Cast ◆◆◆ material, somatic, verbal

Range touch; **Targets** 1 container or doorway

Saving Throw Will

Duration 10 minutes

You ward a target doorway or container with a temporal trap that rewinds the personal timeline of creatures trying to open it. A creature attempting to open a warded doorway or container must attempt a Will save with the below results. You can set a password for the ward. Any creature that attempts to open the target container, or to open or pass through the target doorway without speaking the password must attempt a save as normal. The ward vanishes automatically once the spell's duration ends, but can be removed before then as if it were a magical trap, using your spell DC for both the Perception check to notice it and Thievery check to disable it. Both checks require the creature attempting them to have expert proficiency in order to succeed.

You can Dismiss *temporal ward*. The maximum number of *temporal wards* you can have active at a time is equal to your spellcasting ability modifier.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected and opens the doorway or the container as normal.

Success The creature experiences a brief moment of déjà-vu in which they're convinced they already opened the door. They must use an additional action to open the door. If they can't or don't want to do so, the action or activity they used to open the door or container is wasted, and the door or container remains closed.

Failure The creature is thrown briefly backwards in time. The action or activity they used to open the door or container is wasted and they're returned to the position they were located at during the start of their turn. Their turn then ends.

Critical Failure As failure, but the temporal displacement also causes the creature to lose their bearings, making them confused for 1 minute.

Heightened (10th) The *temporal ward* has an unlimited duration, until it is counteracted, Dismissed, or Disarmed.

Akitonian Weapons

SHOBHAD LONGRIFLE

ITEM 1

RARE

Price 20 gp

Damage 1d8 piercing; **Range** 120 feet; **Reload** 1; **Bulk** 1; **Hands** 2; **Group** firearm; **Traits** backstabber, concussive (*Guns & Gears* 150), fatal d12, kickback (*Pathfinder Guns & Gears* 150), volley

The shobhad longrifle is a firearm with a long, rifled barrel. Often mounted with a multi-lensed scope for targeting at an array of ranges and a chambering mechanism that can adjust the speed and penetrating power of each shot, it's the preferred weapon of many shobhad warriors. Shobhad longrifles are equipped with a built-in silencer so they make no more noise than a crossbow when fired. A shobhad longrifle is a martial weapon.

For more information on firearms, see *Pathfinder Guns & Gears*. If you don't wish to include firearms in your Strength of Thousands campaign, simply substitute the longrifles wielded by shobhads in this adventure with composite longbows.

Akitonian Vehicles

The people of Akiton make use of a wide range of unique vehicles, many of which rely on thasteron as a fuel source. The sand racer is particularly favored by the rich and powerful who enjoy using vehicles to not only explore the sandy wastelands of the planet, but to race against other drivers.

At rest, a sand racer appears somewhat like a motorcycle, yet in place of wheels it features a pair of polished crystal plates. Once activated, the racer rises just off the ground with a rumbling roar, hovering in place until its driver leans forward and concentrates on the vehicle's magical engine while pushing down

on pedals with their feet to propel the sand racer forward—traditionally at a dangerous speed with a plume of flaming exhaust spewing out from behind. Although a crystal windscreen affords the driver some protection from wind during travel, those who ride sand racers often wear full helmets or at least goggles to protect their eyes from being scoured by windborne sand. A sand racer can pass over liquid as long as it remains in motion, but once it stops it settles to the ground, sinking if the ground isn't capable of supporting it. Most sand racers are garishly painted or adorned with a tangle of extra cosmetic features, as their owners see them as a representation of their own personality.

Sand racers use thasteron for propulsion, and are vehicles that use a combination of magic and otherworldly technology. As a result, a character can pilot one with knowledge of arcane lore in addition to driving skill or engineering.

Full rules for vehicles and how to read vehicle stat blocks appear in the *Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide* starting on page 174.

SAND RACER

VEHICLE 15

UNCOMMON LARGE MAGICAL

Price 18,500 gp

Space 10 feet long, 5 feet wide, 5 feet high

Crew 1 pilot; **Passengers** 1

Piloting Check Driving Lore (DC 30), Crafting (DC 35), or Arcana (DC 36)

AC 34; **Fort** +24

Hardness 20, **HP** 170 (BT 85); **Immunities** object immunities

Speed 90 feet (thasteron)

Collision 10d6 bludgeoning and 6d6 fire (DC 30)

Burning Exhaust ♦♦ Attempt a two-action Piloting check to Drive the sand racer.

Critical Success The sand racer moves up to its Speed and can turn normally. Choose up to two creatures that the sand racer was adjacent to when it began this movement. Both of those creatures take 6d6 fire damage from the sand racer's burning exhaust (DC 30 basic Reflex save).

Success As critical success, but choose only one creature.

Failure As success, but the creature gains a +4 circumstance bonus to its Reflex save, and the sand racer moves its Speed in a straight line.

Critical Failure You fail to blast any creatures with the burning exhaust. The sand racer moves its Speed in a straight line and becomes uncontrolled.

Exploratory Kit Sand racers were built to aid in long-distance exploration of Akiton's sandy wastelands, and have storage capacity for 14 days of rations for a Medium creature and 14 days of fuel. They also have a small storage compartment in the front designed to store a repair kit and replacement parts for the more delicate pieces of machinery.

Speed Boost ♦ **Frequency** once per 10 minutes; **Effect**

The pilot triggers an injection of thasteron directly into the sand racer's engine to briefly increase its speed. For 1 round the sand racer's Speed becomes 180 feet, all piloting checks with the sand racer gain the reckless trait, and the pilot gains a +2 circumstance to any Acrobatics or piloting checks made to navigate specific challenges, such as those facing the PCs during the Race Into Destiny (page 55). A speed boost is terribly inefficient, and consumes a day's worth of fuel.

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Sand Racer





ASHOK

Ashok refers both to an ancient impact crater on Akiton and the state of enlightenment the contemplatives seek to achieve. The exact relation between the crater and this philosophy is unclear, but evidence suggests that the crater's location could possibly be the contemplatives' long-lost ancestral homeland.

Contemplative of Ashok

The ancestors of the Contemplatives of Ashok were humanoids of vast intellect who unlocked occult powers. They deliberately evolved their mental faculties at the expense of their physical forms, and their atrophied bodies dangle beneath giant brains.

CONTEMPLATIVE

Even the average contemplative demonstrates an intellect that far surpasses those of most other beings.

CONTEMPLATIVE

CREATURE 2

UNCOMMON N MEDIUM ABERRATION

Perception +8; darkvision, thoughtsense (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Akitonian; telepathy 30 feet

Skills Arcana +8, Medicine +6, Nature +8, Occultism +10, Society +8

Str -2, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** +4, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +3

Thoughtsense (divination, mental, occult) The contemplative senses all non-mindless creatures at the listed range.

AC 19; **Fort** +4, **Ref** +9, **Will** +10

HP 32; **Weaknesses** physical 2; **Resistances** mental 5

Atrophied A contemplative's limbs are withered and incapable of significant physical exertion. A contemplative can't properly wield a two-handed weapon or object without dedicating its telekinetic powers to supporting the weapon, and even then, it takes a -2 penalty to Strikes with such a weapon. It also can't use its spells or fly as long as it wields a two-handed weapon or object.

Speed 5 feet, fly 25 feet

Melee ♦ claw +7 (finesse), **Damage** 1d6 slashing

Occult Innate Spells DC 18, attack +10; **1st** *magic missile* (×3), *mindlink*; **Cantrips** (1st) *daze*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *read aura*, *telekinetic projectile*

CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITANT

Contemplative meditants focus their meditations and research on the vexing topic of time itself.

CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITANT

CREATURE 15

RARE N MEDIUM ABERRATION

Perception +29; darkvision, thoughtsense 60 feet

Languages Akitonian; telepathy 60 feet, *tongues*

Skills Arcana +31, Deception +27, Dimension of Time Lore +31, Diplomacy +27, Medicine +29, Nature +27, Occultism +33, Society +29

Str -2, **Dex** +6, **Con** +0, **Int** +8, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +4

Temporal Sense A contemplative meditant can always roll Dimension of Time Lore for initiative. When it does, it gains a +2 circumstance bonus to the roll as it acts on flashes of insight harvested from potential futures.

Thoughtsense (divination, mental, occult) As contemplative.

AC 38; **Fort** +21, **Ref** +27, **Will** +29

HP 275; **Weaknesses** physical 10; **Resistances** mental 15

Contemplative

Atrophied As contemplative.

Speed 5 feet, fly 25 feet

Melee ♦ claw +27 (finesse, magical), **Damage** 3d6+4 slashing plus 4d6 mental

Occult Innate Spells DC 39, attack +29; **8th** *dimensional anchor*, *disappearance* (self only), *discern location*; **7th** *haste*, *magic missile* (×3), *return to essence* (page 77), **6th** *sanctuary*, *slow*; **Cantrips (8th)** *daze*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *read aura*, *telekinetic projectile*; **Constant (8th)** *tongues*

Temporal Suppression ♦ (enchantment, mental, occult) **Frequency** once per round; **Effect** The contemplative attempts to hinder a target creature's personal flow of time. The target must be within 60 feet, and once targeted must attempt a DC 36 Will save, becoming slowed 1 on a failure or slowed 2 on a critical failure. Each time an affected creature ends its turn, its slowed value decreases by 1. A creature that critically succeeds on their save against Temporal Suppression is temporarily immune to it for 24 hours.

CONTEMPLATIVE MENTOR

As they near the next phase of their journey through existence, contemplative mentors split their time between unlocking the highest secrets of time and space, and guiding their students and less-talented peers.

CONTEMPLATIVE MENTOR

RARE N MEDIUM ABERRATION

Perception +31; darkvision, thoughtsense 100 feet

Languages Akitonian; telepathy 100 feet, *tongues*

Skills Arcana +35, Deception +32, Dimension of Time Lore +35, Diplomacy +32, Medicine +31, Nature +31, Occultism +37, Society +33

Str -2, **Dex** +6, **Con** +0, **Int** +9, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +6

Temporal Sense As contemplative meditant.

Thoughtsense (divination, mental, occult) As contemplative.

AC 44; **Fort** +24, **Ref** +30, **Will** +33

HP 335; **Weaknesses** physical 10; **Resistances** mental 20

Atrophied As contemplative.

Speed 5 feet, fly 30 feet

Melee ♦ claw +32 (finesse, magical), **Damage** 3d8+6 slashing plus 4d6 mental

Occult Innate Spells DC 43, attack +33; **9th** *foresight*, *magic missile* (×3); **8th** *dimensional anchor*, *disappearance* (self only), *discern location*; **7th** *haste*, *magic missile* (×3), *return to essence* (page 77), *sanctuary*, *slow*; **Cantrips (9th)** *daze*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *read aura*, *telekinetic projectile*; **Constant (9th)** *tongues*

Rituals *rite of the Red Star* (page 77)

Project Calm ♦♦♦ (emotion, enchantment, mental, occult) The contemplative mentor projects a field of perfect calm in a 60-foot emanation. All creatures within the area of effect must succeed at a DC 40 Will save or be unable to take hostile actions for 1 round. After using this ability, the contemplative is drained 1, or increases its drained value by 1 if it was already drained. A contemplative mentor can't use this ability if its drained value is 3 or more.

Temporal Suppression ♦ (enchantment, mental, occult) As contemplative meditant, but DC 40.



DISCIPLES OF TIME

Contemplative meditants and mentors alike are obsessed with the complexities of time, but not in a way that seeks to abuse the knowledge to change the past. Instead, these contemplatives believe that pure thought can be achieved by ascending beyond the physical dimensions into beings composed of time itself. The existence of physical entities from the Dimension of Time, such as hounds of Tindalos and siktemporas, constitutes a vexing paradox to these philosophies. Contemplatives find such creatures to be unpleasant at best and truly abhorrent at worst.

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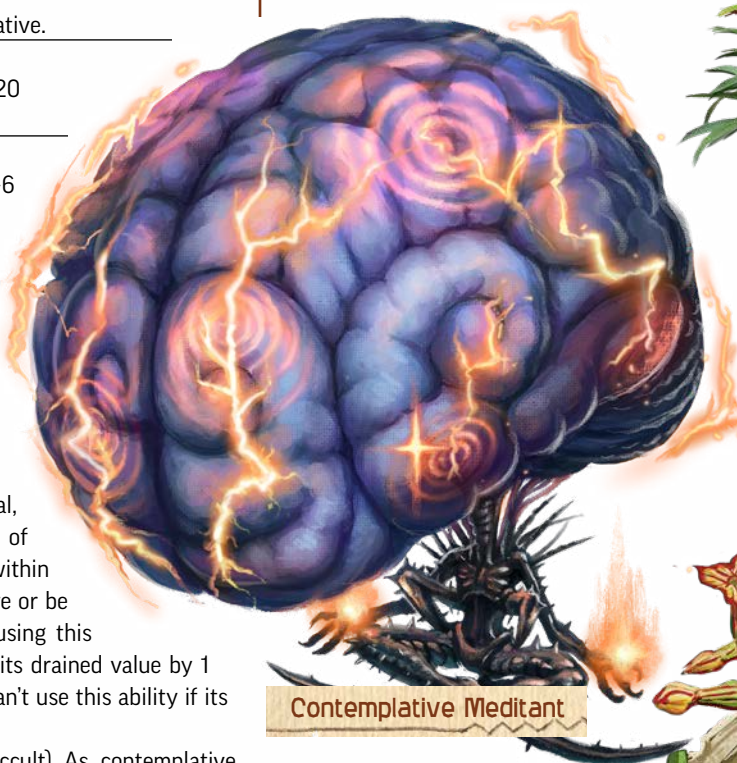
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Contemplative Meditant



FORMIAN CHARACTERISTICS

Formians are insectile creatures with ant-like qualities, typically members of hive minds ruled by queens. Formians have significant genetic diversity, with each type of formian intentionally bred with features and characteristics appropriate to the functions needed by their hive. Formians have their own language based on scent glands and complex clicking sounds created with their mandibles that are difficult for most humanoids to emulate. A non-formian who learns the language can understand it, but without the biological organs to exude the proper pheromones or make the correct clicking sounds, speaking it for such creatures is generally limited to only the most basic of concepts.

Formian

Formians resemble unusually large ants with an insectile humanoid's upper torso. More powerful or influential formians are physically larger; common formian workers are roughly the height of a gnome, while the largest formians, such as taskmasters and queens, rival a giant in size.

Formian society is a strict matriarchy. Though each hive's queen is theoretically independent and her rule absolute, allegiances are common, and less powerful hives often (grudgingly) defer to more powerful matriarchs.

FORMIAN WORKER

By far the most common formian on Akiton, workers are focused and industrious, naturally skilled at manual labor and coordinating with peers.

FORMIAN WORKER

CREATURE 1

LN MEDIUM FORMIAN

Perception +6; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Akitonian, Formian, telepathy 30 feet

Skills Athletics +7, Survival +6

Str +4, **Dex** +1, **Con** +3, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

Hive Mind (divination, primal) Formians operate from a shared hive intelligence that allows them to communicate nearly instantaneously. While within telepathic range of at least one other formian from the same hive mind, a formian worker gains a +2 circumstance bonus to initiative checks, Perception checks, and saving throws against mental effects. If one formian is aware of a combatant, all members of the hive mind within range are aware of it.

AC 16; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +6

HP 20; **Resistances** sonic 2

Able Assistant When using the Aid action to assist another formian from the same hive mind within range of its hive link, if the formian worker rolls a success, they get a critical success instead, and if they roll a critical failure, they get a failure instead.

Speed 30 feet, burrow 5 feet

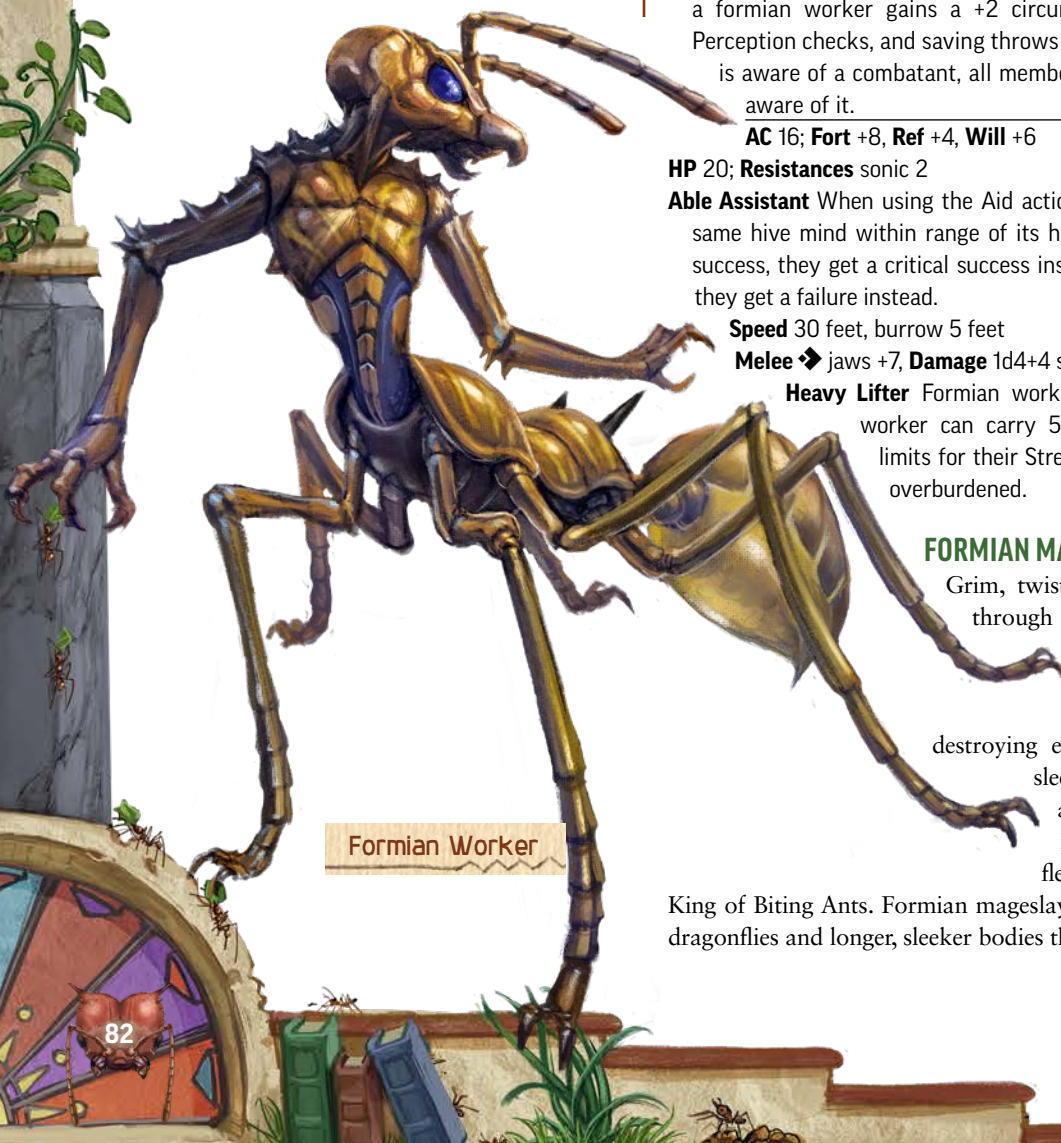
Melee ♦ jaws +7, **Damage** 1d4+4 slashing

Heavy Lifter Formian workers excel at heavy labor. A formian worker can carry 5 additional bulk beyond the normal limits for their Strength before becoming encumbered or overburdened.

FORMIAN MAGESLAYER

Grim, twisted formians forced into existence through the machinations of the King of Biting Ants, formian mageslayers are created for the express purpose of neutralizing and destroying enemy spellcasters. Wired to never sleep, mageslayers are tortured hunters and guardians whose only relief is found in tearing apart the magic and flesh of spellcasters who oppose the

King of Biting Ants. Formian mageslayers have wings resembling those of dragonflies and longer, sleeker bodies than most formians.



FORMIAN MAGESLAYER

CREATURE 16

RARE LN MEDIUM FORMIAN MUTANT

Perception +31; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet, tremorsense 60 feet

Languages Akitonian, Formian, telepathy 120 feet

Skills Acrobatics +28, Arcana +32, Nature +30, Occultism +32, Religion +30, Stealth +28, Survival +28

Str +5, **Dex** +8, **Con** +5, **Int** +9, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +5

Disrupting Aura (abjuration, aura, primal) 30 feet. Formian mageslayers are surrounded by an aura of disruptive energy that disperses magical energy and makes spellcasting difficult for their enemies. Whenever an enemy creature within the aura attempts to Cast a Spell or Activate a magic item, they must roll a DC 5 flat check; on a failed check, the spell or activation is lost and the action is wasted. Free action activations disrupted by this aura can't be attempted again until the start of the activating creature's next turn.

Hive Mind (divination, primal) As formian worker.

AC 38; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +28, **Will** +30

HP 240; **Immunities** sleep; **Resistances** sonic 15, spell resistance

Spell Resistance A formian mageslayer takes 15 fewer damage from any arcane or primal spell that causes damage, and 10 less damage from any divine or occult spell that causes damage.

Shred Spell  (abjuration, primal) **Trigger** A creature within the formian mageslayer's disrupting aura that the formian mageslayer can see succeeds at a DC 5 flat check to Cast the Spell in the aura; **Effect** The mageslayer attempts to unravel the spell's magic and attempts to counteract the spell. They use their Arcana modifier as their counteract modifier with a counteract level of 8. If the formian mageslayer succeeds, they counter the spell and use the dispersed energy to gain a number of temporary Hit Points equal to twice the spell's level for 1 minute. If the formian mageslayer critically fails this counteract check, their disrupting aura deactivates for 1 minute.

Speed 30 feet, fly 30 feet

Melee  claw +32 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 3d10+13 slashing plus 3d6 persistent mental damage and stupefying touch

Ranged  acid spit +32 (range 60 feet), **Damage** 3d6+8 acid plus 3d6 persistent acid damage

Stupefying Touch (abjuration, curse, primal)

A creature damaged by a mageslayer's claw Strike must succeed at a DC 37 Will save. The creature becomes stupefied 2 for 1 round on a failure. On a critical failure, the creature is stupefied 2 for 1 hour.

FORMIAN QUEEN

The formian queen is the center of the formian hive. The queen identifies and attends to the hive's needs, laying egg clusters that vary from a single formian born to a particular task to hundreds of workers at a time. All formians are born with an instinctive deference for the queen that borders on slavish devotion, though this urge can be corrupted, as with the King of Biting Ants' mutant mageslayers.



OTHER FORMIANS

The formians presented here represent only a subset of the total variety of formians that can be encountered. The other most prevalent types consist of formian warriors, who constitute the bulk of a hive's guards; both they and the workers obey the orders and commands of the formian taskmasters. The formian queen herself is often served by formian myrmarches, a sort of aristocratic class in a formian hive.

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Formian Mageslayer



THE HIVELESS

Formians sometimes find themselves without a hive to call home and are forced to endure life in the wilds or among the citizens of a non-formian society. Only the most stubborn, fortunate, or unusually self-aware of these hiveless formians last long without the support of their hive, but those who do often become quite powerful after adapting to unfamiliar cultures or fending for themselves in inhospitable lands.



Formian Queen

FORMIAN QUEEN

CREATURE 17

UNCOMMON LN LARGE FORMIAN

Perception +31; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 60 feet, tremorsense 60 feet

Languages Akitionian, Formian, telepathy 200 feet

Skills Athletics +27, Arcana +30, Diplomacy +33, Intimidation +33, Medicine +31, Nature +31, Society +30

Str +8, **Dex** +5, **Con** +9, **Int** +5, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +8

Hive Mind (divination, primal) As formian worker.

AC 40; **Fort** +34, **Ref** +26, **Will** +31

HP 255; **Resistances** all physical 15, sonic 15

Speed 10 feet

Melee ♦ claw +33 (agile, magic, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 3d12+12 slashing

Primal Innate Spells DC 38, attack +30; **9th** *cone of cold*, *feblemind*; **8th** *disappearance*, *illusory scene*, *repulsion*, *teleport*; **7th** *magic missile* (at will)

Rituals *commune with nature*

Hive Frenzy ♦ (enchantment, mental, primal) **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The formian queen stirs all formians within range of her telepathy into a frenzy. Each affected formian gains the quickened condition for 1 minute, and can use the extra action each round only to Strike or Stride.

Possess Formian ♦ (incapacitation, mental, necromancy, possession, primal) A formian queen transfers her consciousness to the body of any formian within range of her telepathy to whom she has a line of effect. As long as the queen's consciousness is outside her body, her body is unconscious (though she is aware if any damage is dealt to it). An unwilling target can attempt a DC 38 Will saving throw to resist being possessed, but the queen's offspring are part of her hive mind and thus are almost always willing. The queen receives all sensory input from the target creature; she can speak through it, and she can use her own modifier for Intelligence-, Wisdom-, and Charisma-based skill checks. If the target creature is slain or moves to a different plane from the queen's body, the queen returns to her own body immediately and is stunned 1; otherwise, she can return to her own body as a free action, ending the possession effect.

Telepathic Feedback ♦♦ (enchantment, mental, primal) The formian queen unleashes a blast of debilitating telepathic feedback, targeting as many creatures as she wishes within range of her telepathy and to whom she has a line of effect. Targeted creatures must attempt a DC 38 Will save.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected and is temporarily immune to Telepathic Feedback for 24 hours.

Success The creature takes 3d6 mental damage, 1d6 persistent mental damage, and is sickened 1.

Failure The creature takes 6d6 mental damage, 1d6 persistent mental damage, and is sickened 2.

Critical Failure The creature takes 12d6 mental damage, 1d6 persistent mental damage, and is stunned 3. Upon recovering from the stunned condition, the creature becomes sickened 2.

Gluttonworm

Akiton's gluttonworms share many features of Golarion's cave worms, yet these immense predators are their own distinct species. Gluttonworms "swim" through the vast deserts of Akiton, moving almost like whales through the ocean as they forage for their next meals.

GLUTTONWORM

CREATURE 19

UNCOMMON N GARGANTUAN BEAST

Perception +32; darkvision, tremorsense (imprecise) 100 feet

Skills Athletics +37

Str +10, **Dex** +4, **Con** +6, **Int** -4, **Wis** +5, **Cha** -1

AC 41; **Fort** +35, **Ref** +29, **Will** +32

HP 445

Dune Dispersal (aura) 15 feet. Ground in the aura is greater difficult terrain.

Sand Armor (necromancy, primal) A gluttonworm in contact with a significant body of sand, such as a desert or beach, gains fast healing 10. If the gluttonworm is subject to persistent bleed, the flowing blood quickly congeals with the sand covering its body, instantly ending the bleed duration and giving the gluttonworm a +2 circumstance bonus to AC until the end of its next turn.

Inexorable The gluttonworm recovers from the paralyzed, slowed, and stunned conditions at the end of its turn. It's also immune to penalties to its Speeds and the immobilized condition, and it ignores difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain.

Speed 30 feet, burrow 40 feet (in sand or loose soil only)

Melee ♦ jaws +37 (deadly 3d10, reach 20 feet), **Damage** 4d12+18 piercing and Improved Grab

Melee ♦ body +33, **Damage** 4d8+18 bludgeoning

Fast Swallow ⤵ **Trigger** The gluttonworm Grabs a creature, or a creature fails a Reflex save against a Gulping Charge; **Effect** The gluttonworm uses Swallow Whole.

Gulping Charge ♦♦♦ The gluttonworm Strides up to double its Speed and can move through the spaces of Large or smaller creatures, gulping each creature whose space the worm enters and attempting a body Strike against each of them. The gluttonworm can use this Strike on each creature only once in a single use of Gulping Charge. Creatures can attempt a DC 41 basic Reflex save against this damage.

Spew Sandstorm ♦♦♦ (air, earth, evocation, primal) The gluttonworm exhales swirling sand in a 60-foot cone. Creatures in the area must attempt a DC 41 Reflex save. It can't Spew Sandstorm again for 1d4 rounds.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature takes 4d6 slashing damage and 4d6 bludgeoning damage from the scouring sand.

Failure The creature takes 8d6 slashing damage and 8d6 bludgeoning damage from the sand, and is dazzled until the end of its next turn.

Critical Failure The creature takes 12d6 slashing damage and 12d6 bludgeoning damage and is blinded for 1 hour.

Swallow Whole ♦ (attack) Huge, 3d10+17 bludgeoning plus 2d6 slashing, Rupture 36



FOREVER RAVENOUS

A gluttonworm's metabolism is slow; they can go for years or even decades without a filling meal. Most gluttonworms exist in a constant state of ravenous pain as a result, and behave in an incredibly aggressive manner when they encounter anything edible. Most native creatures know to stay well away from the telltale rumbling and shifting dunes that portend a gluttonworm's approach.

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Gluttonworm



IKESHTI CHARACTERISTICS

Ikeshtis are reptilian humanoids with a unique evolutionary lifestyle, from the petite ikeshiti brood-minders who collectively raise their community's young and the congregants who manage the settlement to the hulking riveners whose tormented exile transforms them into near-mindless, violent juggernauts.

Ikeshti

Ikeshtis are reptilian humanoids native to Akiton's wastelands. Smaller than Golarion's iruxi, ikeshitis organize around distinct societal roles.

IKESHTI BROOD-MINDER

Ikeshti young are near-mindless carnivores. They are watched over by brood-minders, male ikeshitis with a talent for influencing the ravenous spawn, who protect the tiny creatures until they grow into responsible adults.

IKESHTI BROOD-MINDER

CREATURE 2

N **SMALL** **HUMANOID** **IKESHTI**

Perception +7

Languages Akitonian, Ikeshti

Skills Athletics +7, Diplomacy +6, Medicine +7, Survival +7 (+9 in deserts)

Str +1, **Dex** +4, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

AC 18; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +10, **Will** +5

HP 30; **Resistances** cold 2, fire 2

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ claw +11 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 1d8+3 slashing

Squirt Blood ♦ **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The ikeshiti squirts blood from one of their eyes at a target within 30 feet. The target must attempt a DC 18 Fortitude save or become sickened 1 (sickened 2 on a critical failure).

ANCIENT RIVENER

Ikeshtis who eschew their society are exiled and quickly devolve into violent creatures known as riveners.

ANCIENT RIVENER

CREATURE 14

CE **LARGE** **HUMANOID** **IKESHTI**

Perception +25

Languages Ikeshti (can speak and understand only simple words)

Skills Athletics +28, Intimidation +22, Stealth +25, Survival +24

Str +8, **Dex** +5, **Con** +5, **Int** -3, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +0

Violent Instincts An ancient rivener attacks the nearest creature when confused instead of any other effect, and ignores magical commands compelling them to do anything other than attack.

AC 35; **Fort** +27, **Ref** +25, **Will** +22

HP 280; **Resistances** cold 15, fire 15, mental 15

Ferocity ⤵

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +29 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d8+14 piercing and 2d8 persistent bleed

Melee ♦ claw +29 (agile), **Damage** 3d8+14 slashing

Slaughter Tackle ♦♦ The ancient rivener Leaps at a target within 30 feet, and then makes one jaws Strike and one claw Strike in any order.

Squirt Blood ♦ As ikeshiti brood-minder.



Ancient Rivener

Khefak

This unusual arthropod resembles an amalgam of a centipede and a crab. Hard-shelled and perfectly suited to life on Akiton, khefaks are so incredibly useful that a visitor to the planet might assume they were custom engineered for their environs. Such visitors would, in fact, be correct. While khefaks can be found naturally on Akiton, a new species has recently gained a foothold on the planet: alchemically engineered khefaks who excrete a refined substance that can be used as fuel to power advanced engines and devices.

KHEFAK SCUTTLE

These small creatures are ubiquitous vermin found across much of Akiton.

KHEFAK SCUTTLE

CREATURE -1

UNCOMMON N SMALL ANIMAL

Perception +4; darkvision, tremorsense (imprecise) 60 feet

Skills Acrobatics +5, Athletics +2, Stealth +5

Str +0, **Dex** +1, **Con** +3, **Int** -5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -3

Consume Objects A khefak can gain nourishment by eating objects with hardness 10 or lower. When attacking an object with its mandibles, it ignores the first 10 points of that object's Hardness.

AC 15; **Fort** +7, **Ref** +5, **Will** +2

HP 7

Speed 20 feet, burrow 5 feet, climb 20 feet

Melee ♦ mandibles +5 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 1d6 piercing

THASTERON KHEFAK

Thasteron khefaks are alchemically enhanced versions of standard khefaks, capable of converting the minerals they eat into thasteron. While thasteron remains highly valuable as fuel and for specialized weapons, finding an experienced thasteron khefak breeder is hard because the creatures become radioactive over time.

THASTERON KHEFAK

CREATURE 3

UNCOMMON N MEDIUM BEAST

Perception +9; darkvision, tremorsense (imprecise) 60 feet

Skills Acrobatics +9, Athletics +10, Stealth +9

Str +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** +3, **Int** -5, **Wis** +2, **Cha** -3

Consume Objects As khefak scuttler.

Radiation Aura (aura, radiation) 10 feet. Thasteron khefaks convert radioactive minerals they eat into thasteron, a combustible fuel (page 77). The more radioactive elements of the material concentrates in their chitin and taints the air around them. A creature who begins their turn within this aura must succeed at a DC 20 Fortitude saving throw or become sickened 1 (sickened 2 on a critical failure).

AC 19; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +7

HP 42; **Immunities** radiation; **Resistances** 5 poison

Speed 20 feet, burrow 5 feet, climb 20 feet

Melee ♦ mandibles +11 (agile), **Damage** 1d8+5 piercing



RADIATION

The radiation that a thasteron khefak emits is unpleasant but hardly fatal. This is not the case with all forms of radiation, many of which can lead to long-lasting agony or death after exposure. Depending on the strength of the radiation and the length of exposure, creatures can become enfeebled, clumsy, or drained. Rumors persist of radiation infused with magic that grants powerful mutations or supernatural abilities. Unfortunately, the kind shed by the humble khefak does little more than make others sick.

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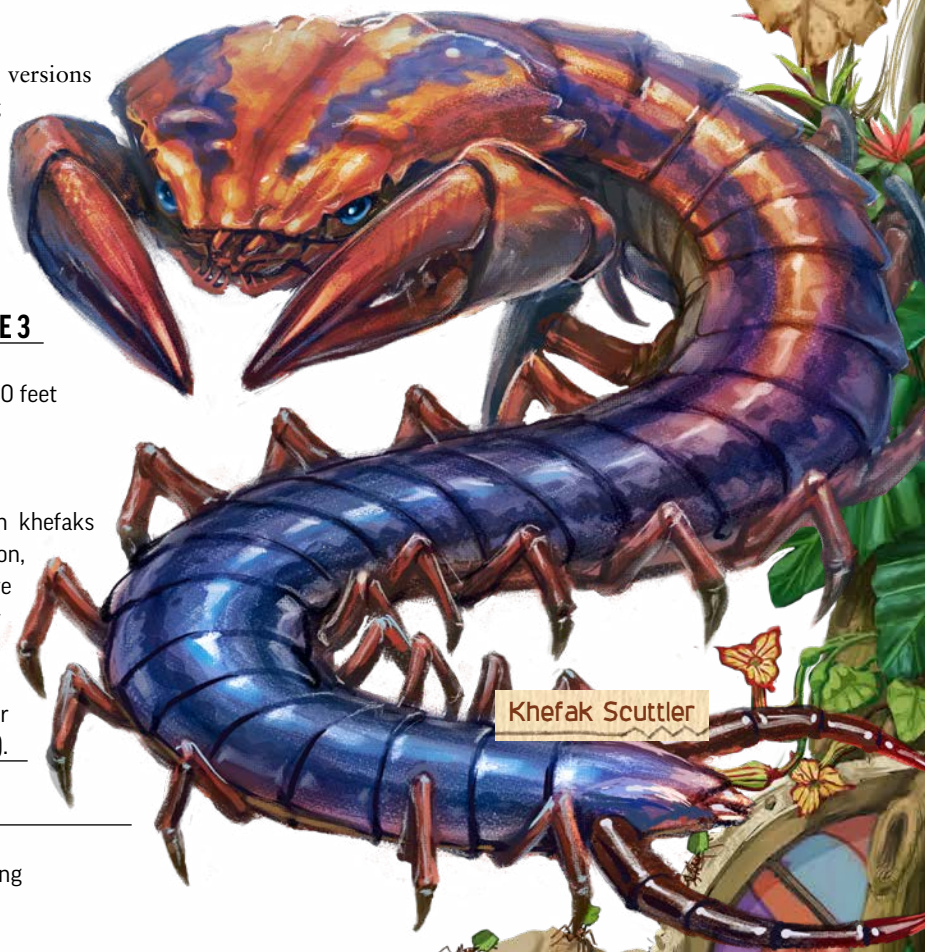
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Khefak Scuttler



THASTERON FIREARMS

Shobhad longrifles are rare, even among shobhads, although they carry these weapons slightly more often than others in Akiton at large.

Shobhad longrifles rely upon an explosive concoction made with a thasteron-based compound rather than gunpowder. Reloads for thasteron firearms are comparable in price to gunpowder-based weapons, but the two types of propulsion are not compatible.

Shobhad

These four-armed humanoid often live as nomads on Akiton. Self-sufficient and able to construct the equipment they need to survive from natural materials, shobhads traditionally avoid large cities and the smaller people of the planet, except to engage in trade. Some shobhads eschew these traditions, finding life in urban centers to be more appealing. Rifts between these shobhads and those who continue to lead nomadic lives in the Akitonian wilderness sometimes lead to clashes when members of the two societies meet.

Shobhads are highly sought after for their martial expertise, unparalleled knowledge of Akiton's wilds, and unbreakable codes of honor. These warriors may operate independently, in their traditional clans, or in modern mercenary companies that blend ancestral traditions with the needs of modern military freelancers.

SHOBHAD ENFORCER

In rough Akitonian cities like Seldo, shobhad bruisers and fist-fighters act as protection for businesses and enforcers for crime bosses. Shobhad enforcers are more rare and far more dangerous. In the wilds of Akiton, shobhad enforcers protect wealthy caravans using combat techniques honed and proven over multiple generations to devastate any creature that might mistake the caravan as an attractive target for a raid. "Enforcer" is a loose translation of a word in the Shobhad language that is only granted to a warrior who has proven themselves in combat against one of the deadly threats of the Akitonian desert, such as gluttonworms or ikeshti riveners. Every enforcer is a battle-tested veteran with the scars to prove their prowess.



Shobhad Enforcer

SHOBHAD ENFORCER

CREATURE 16

UNCOMMON N LARGE HUMANOID

Perception +29; darkvision

Languages Akitonian, Shobhad

Skills Athletics +31, Intimidation +30, Stealth +30, Survival +29

Str +7, **Dex** +4, **Con** +5, **Int** +2, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +4

Four-Armed Shobhad enforcers have four powerful arms.

They can Interact with and manipulate objects or perform combat maneuvers that require a free hand such as grabbing or tripping, even while wielding a two-handed weapon or carrying an object in two hands.

Items +2 *striking greatsword*, +2 *striking handwraps of mighty blows*, +1 *resilient chainmail*

AC 38; **Fort** +31, **Ref** +26, **Will** +27

HP 320

Attack of Opportunity ⤴

Ferocity ⤴

Speed 30 feet

Melee ⬥ *greatsword* +31 (magical, reach 10 feet, versatile P), **Damage** 2d10+15 slashing plus 3d6 additional precision damage

Melee ⬥ *fist* +31 (agile, finesse, magical, nonlethal, reach 10 feet, unarmed), **Damage** 2d4+15 bludgeoning plus 3d6 additional precision damage

Brutal Blows ♦♦ **Requirements** The shobhad enforcer has at least two free hands; **Effect** The shobhad enforcer makes a fist Strike against an adjacent creature. If the Strike hits, the enforcer automatically Grapples its target and makes a second fist Strike with the following success conditions. The second Strike applies the enforcer's multiple attack penalty normally.

Critical Success The target is stunned 1, and stupefied 2 for 1 round.

Success The target is stupefied 1 for 1 round.

SHOBHAD SNIPER

Enemies rarely see a shobhad sniper before the deadly blast of their powerful rifles snatches away the offender's life. Selected from among the most talented enforcers after proving themselves in combat, shobhad snipers learn how to cross the desert sands undetected, combine their powerful ranged weapons with close-combat techniques, and survive Akiton's freezing nights for weeks on end while scouting potential settlements or enemy strongholds.

SHOBHAD SNIPER

CREATURE 17

UNCOMMON N LARGE HUMANOID

Perception +30; darkvision

Languages Akitonian, Shobhad

Skills Athletics +31, Intimidation +30, Stealth +34, Survival +30

Str +6, **Dex** +9, **Con** +5, **Int** +2, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +2

Four-Armed As shobhad enforcer.

Items +2 greater striking shobhad longrifle (page 78), +2 striking handwraps of mighty blows, +1 resilient leather armor

AC 40; **Fort** +28, **Ref** +32, **Will** +26

HP 320

Attack of Opportunity ↻

Ferocity ↻

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ **fist** +31 (agile, finesse, magical, nonlethal, reach 10 feet, unarmed), **Damage** 2d10+14 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ **longrifle** +34 (backstabber, concussive, fatal d12, kickback, volley; range increment 120 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 3d8+9 bludgeoning; this includes the additional damage from kickback

Sniping Shot ♦♦ The shobhad sniper makes a Strike with their longrifle, gaining a +2 circumstance bonus to this Strike's attack roll and ignoring the target's concealment.

Sniper's Devastation ♦♦♦ The shobhad sniper makes a fist Strike against a Medium or smaller creature. If this attack is successful, the shobhad sniper deals no damage, but they immediately Grab and throw their target up to 30 feet in a direction of their choice and then make a ranged Strike with their longrifle against the target, after which the target falls prone in the designated location. As normal, the creature doesn't take any additional falling damage from the throw.



SHOBHAD-NEH

Shobhads refer to their collective culture and society as "shobhad-neh" in much the same way humans might refer to themselves collectively as humanity. Most shobhads aren't nearly as powerful as the two examples presented here—though notable for their size, strength, and four arms, the majority of them are ordinary 4th-level creatures.

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Shobhad Sniper

THE KING OF BITING ANTS

Megalomaniacal Sorcerer

Among the many evil forces that Old-Mage Jatembe faced to bring the world back into light, perhaps none was as insidious as the sorcerer known as the King of Biting Ants. This villain's original name is long lost; indeed, the wicked sorcerer claims it was the first thing he consumed when he transformed within a strange ruin deep in the Mwangi Expanse known today as the Cathedral of Nothingness. The King of Biting Ants sought to grasp power within the ruin, only to become corrupted in mind and transformed in body into a swarm of ants held together only by his prodigious will. In his time with a nihilistic cult, he learned the secret of the nearby Doorway to the Red Star—that it was a gateway to the distant planet of Akiton established by the hyper-intelligent but erratic creatures of that world called the Contemplatives of Ashok—but he wasn't interested in that distant world. Instead, he used the doorway's magic to grant his armies of red-cloaked acolytes immortality and set about conquering the Mwangi Expanse.

Jatembe would not let this evil stand. He traveled to the doorway and fought with the King of Biting Ants, scattering his form and driving him through the doorway along with his ageless acolytes. The King of Biting Ants was banished and his evil quelled—or so Jatembe thought.

A few centuries ago, Jatembe learned that the King of Biting Ants was able to eventually restore some of his power on Akiton and had developed a flying airship bearing a devastating superweapon. Jatembe traveled to Akiton to confront his old foe, but he knew that another victory in combat would be as temporary as his previous one. Instead, he let the King of Biting Ants appear to defeat him, trusting that his foe's arrogance would blind him to Jatembe's plan. Sure enough, the King of Biting Ants captured Jatembe and imprisoned him aboard his fortress-airship, the *Mandibles of Fate*. Jatembe only pretends to be a prisoner; he makes regular trips across the planes, as he did before being captured, and leaves a magical duplicate in his cell when he does. Still, he spends much of his time aboard the *Mandibles of Fate*, infusing its half-living

superstructure with his bodiless spirit. Meanwhile, the King of Biting Ants has greater plans for his superweapon: use it to destroy Jatembe's legacy while making the wizard witness the carnage firsthand.

The superweapon the King of Biting Ants worked so hard to create, the *soulshredder cannon*, is indeed terrifying; it can pull souls from the living and compress them together into formidable (and loyal) nemhaiths. But the insectile sorcerer has greater plans; he wants to expand the power of his superweapon to destroy entire communities, starting with the Magaambya on Golarion. Jatembe has secretly stymied this latest goal, but the King of Biting Ants has proven too tenacious at pursuing his plan of revenge. Indeed, he's finally succeeded in mastering the community-shattering power of his ship-mounted *soulshredder cannons*, and he's just a few test-fires away from returning to Golarion with the *Mandibles of Fate* and a wicked plan for revenge.

CAMPAIGN ROLE

The King of Biting Ants is the heroes' final foe in this adventure. With Jatembe's assistance and their own skills, the heroes have the opportunity to stop the King's current plans and put an end to the wicked sorcerer at last. His psyche survives, in part, within the *Vesicant Egg* at the Magaambya, but ending his efforts on Akiton saves countless lives.

KING OF BITING ANTS

CREATURE 19

UNIQUE LE MEDIUM ABERRATION SWARM

Male worm that walks sorcerer (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 296)

Perception +32; darkvision, tremorsense (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Abyssal, Akitonian, Aklo, Common, Infernal

Skills Acrobatics +36, Arcana +34, Crafting +34, Deception +38, Intimidation +38, Occultism +34, Society +32, Stealth +36

Str +5, **Dex** +9, **Con** +6, **Int** +5, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +9

Items wand of manifold missiles (7th)

AC 44, all-around vision; **Fort** +31, **Ref** +36, **Will** +32

HP 300; **Immunities** disease, paralyzed, poison, precision, swarm mind, unconscious; **Weaknesses** area damage 15, splash damage 15; **Resistances** physical 15

Counterspell ➤ **Trigger** A creature Casts a Spell the King of Biting Ants knows; **Effect** The King of Biting Ants expends a spell slot to counter the triggering creature's casting. The King of Biting Ants loses his spell slot as if he had cast the triggering spell. He then attempts to counteract the triggering spell.

Discorporate When the King of Biting Ants is reduced to 0 HP, he discorporates, and the component ants that make up his body disperse in every direction. If even a single ant escapes, the King of Biting Ants will eventually reform using a process that typically takes 1d10 days. Applying area damage immediately after the King of Biting Ants is killed prevents his return.

Speed 30 feet, climb 20 feet

Melee ♦ tendril +34 (reach 10 feet),

Damage 4d10+15 persistent piercing damage plus swarming bites

Occult Spontaneous Spells DC

44, attack +34; **10th** (2 slots) *time stop*, *visions of danger* (biting ants only); **9th** (3 slots) *foresight*, *wail of the banshee*, *weird*;

8th (4 slots) *disappearance*, *dispel magic*, *maze*, *mind blank*, *prismatic wall*; **7th** (4 slots) *dispel magic*, *phantasmal killer*, *visions of danger* (biting ants only), *warp mind*; **6th**

(4 slots) *dominate*, *paranoia*, *slow*, *teleport*; **5th** (4 slots) *black tentacles*, *mind probe*, *phantom pain*, *subconscious suggestion*; **4th** (4 slots) *dimension door*, *modify memory*, *suggestion*, *veil*; **3rd** (4 slots) *dream message*, *haste*, *hypercognition*, *slow*; **2nd** (4 slots) *comprehend language*, *illusory creature*, *mirror image*, *undetectable alignment*; **1st** (4 slots) *charm*, *illusory disguise*, *mindlink*, *ray of enfeeblement*;

Cantrips (10th) *daze*, *detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *shield*

Squirming Embrace ♦ The King of Biting Ants Strides to a creature, ends his movement sharing a space with it, and deals 3d8 piercing damage and 3d8 poison damage to it (DC 39 basic Reflex save). A creature that fails this save also takes 2d8 persistent piercing damage.

Swarm Shape ♦ (concentrate) The King of Biting Ants collapses into a shapeless swarm of ants. He drops all held, worn, and carried items. While discorporated, The King of Biting Ants can't use attack actions and can't cast spells, but he can move through areas small enough for his individual ants to fit without having to Squeeze. He can use the same action to coalesce back into his normal form.

Swarming Bites While a creature is taking persistent piercing damage from the King of Biting Ants's tendril Strike or Squirming Embrace, or while within a *visions of danger* area that it has not disbelieved, it is also clumsy 1. If the creature attempts a concentrate or manipulate action while affected, it must succeed at a DC 5 flat check or the action is lost; roll the check after spending the action, but before any effects are applied.

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King of Biting Ants

NEXT MONTH

SHADOWS OF THE ANCIENTS

by Saif Ansari

The latent sentience within the *Vesicant Egg* threatens to destroy the Magaambya. The heroes must overcome several trials while shrunk to the size of ants and confront a maggot large enough to crush the school.

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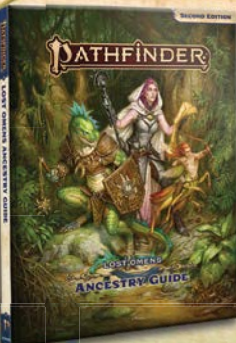
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