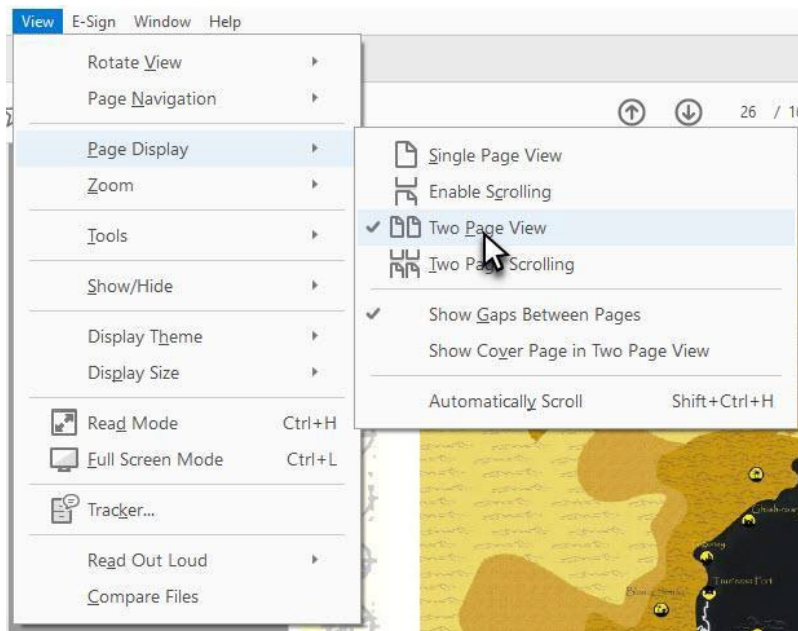




Secrets
of the Dead Lands

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SECRETS OF THE DEAD LANDS

Sourcebook for Dark Sun

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About This Book

Far to the south of the cities of the Tyr Region, beyond the ken of common men, there lies a void, a vacant wasteland of purest black. There is no life there, none at all, but there is a yearning and a pounding of withered hearts in the husks of truly ancient undead. Vibrant civilizations of t'liz and zombies, meorty and skeletons, throwbacks to a cataclysm unleashed during the Cleansing Wars that scarred the face of Athas with a vast plain of elemental obsidian.

All that saves the city states from their wrath and hatred is that they are convinced their world ends at the edge of the black glass. Woe to the living if they ever find out the truth.

Secrets of the Dead Lands explores this vast obsidian plain and the undead civilizations that thrive there. Their rulers, ancient dead despots and champions, viziers and duchesses, vie for power and territory, animating, destroying, then reanimating the pieces of their armies in endless struggle. From a time before the Cleansing Wars had rid the world of so many races, there are undead trolls, gnomes, pixies, and more, creatures with no living counterparts anywhere on Athas. The humanoids gather for only one apparent purpose: to keep the unpredictable undead insects, the "bugdead", from swarming the world.

Whoever said the most terrifying fables can't be true?

The Dead Lands cover quite a large area, easily as big as the entire Tablelands. There are 30 different nations and city states as well as the Legions of the Claw and several other unique areas.

In order to keep all of the content manageable for DM's, the Dead Lands campaign setting has been organized into four different books by topic:

1. **Secrets of the Dead Lands** (*this book*) provides a sourcebook and history of the entire setting. This is where you'll find most of the descriptions and explanations for the current state of the Dead Lands and its inhabitants.
2. **Faces of the Dead Lands** (*Available from April 2022*) provides all of the game rules and statistics for the areas mentioned in the other books. This includes NPC's, unique magic items, and other major rules that might affect play.
3. **Terrors of the Dead Lands** (Link: <https://athas.org/products/totdl>) provides the rules for monsters and NPCs as they appear in the setting. Since this was released years before the rest of these books, there is an addendum section to this book which has been added to Faces of the Dead Lands at the end.
4. **The Emissary** (*Available from May 2022*) is the first introductory adventure set in the Dead Lands. Within you will find descriptions and stats for relevant NPCs relisted in their shortened form for efficiency.

How To Use This Book

All D&D OGL related gaming information is marked in *blue*, and all other D&D content is marked *dark red*.

References to other books are by abbreviation and chapter:

- *FoDL* = Faces of the Dead Lands.
- *ToDL* = Terrors of the Dead Lands.
- *FFN* = Faces of the Forgotten North
- *AE* = Athasian Emporium



Chapter 1 ~ Legends of the Dead Lands

Obsidian

"How can something so common to our lives, in every one of the Seven Cities I might point out, be so misunderstood? Is the air we breathe a mystery, or the sand beneath our feet? How can so many misunderstand one of the fundamental building blocks of our world, like babes pondering the origins of stone, bone, or chitin? Fools may run the world, lad, but the ignorant masses make it easy for them!

"Obsidian. Oh, yes. It's a kind of glass, naturally formed for the most part. It's a hard volcanic glass, black as the night sky, with twists. What's that? A volcano? By the dunes, boy, you don't get around much, do you? Volcanoes are great mountains the ancients placed over portals to the Elemental Plane of Fire. And don't ask me what that is or you'll get the back of my hand. When the fire beasts want to come into our world, they break through the tops of the volcanoes, blasting fire and lava everywhere. Some of the lava is melted sand, and when it cools and hardens, it becomes obsidian.

"It's easy to work, obsidian, if you can read the lines and waves within it. Once you understand those, an artisan can split and chip a block of it into about anything he wants. It's sharp and can hold an edge, so it makes good weapons, and it doesn't wear out so it makes good plates and bowls, too.

"What's that? A land of obsidian? Don't be absurd!"

—Diary of a Merchant Son

*...Pillars of fire pursued them through the night,
borne on unholy winds hurling sand and pebbles in their
midst,
and the defilers smiled, lending their magic where they
might,
so Eyendil retreated to the south beyond their wrath.*

*But their reach was far longer than he imagined,
sorcery fueled by hatred and avarice, launched against
him from afar,
so much so that when he finished his run naught but
blackglass surrounded him,
smooth and unending, a land without form or grit.*

*Eyendil's heart sank, for the lay of the grains spoke to
him not,
buried beneath strange obsidian at once scalding and cool
to the touch,
and his tribemates looked to him for guidance but he had
none to give,
lost on the glass, beyond the ken of the dunes.*

*For wherever an elf's feet don't meet the sands,
where dust finds not his toes nor stones his heel,
in these foul places there is nothing but death and further
death,
acting as host for those who wander their way
—from the Sky Singers' epic Song of Eyendil*

Far to the south of the cities of the Tablelands, beyond the ken of common men, there lies a void, a vacant wasteland of purest black. There is no life there, none at all, but there is a yearning and a pounding of withered hearts in the husks of truly ancient undead. Vibrant civilizations of t'liz and zombies, meorties and skeletons, throwbacks to a disaster unleashed during the Cleansing Wars that scarred the face of Athas with a vast plain of elemental obsidian.

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The Lands of the Dead

The fabled Dead Lands, a blasted land of black obsidian roughly the same size as the Tablelands, are populated exclusively by nations of undead. Few mortals have visited the Dead Lands and fewer ever returned to tell the tale. Many who did come back were insane and reported gibbering stories of legions of skeletons and unending wars between great armies of undead. The general impression around Tyr is that these stories are just that, and that such a place could only exist in myth. The reality is that the Dead Lands are genuine and with an unlimited potential for growth, waiting with all the patience of the immortals who inhabit them.

About Secrets of the Dead Lands

This accessory allows the DM to introduce the Dead Lands into an existing Dark Sun campaign. The information here is presented in user-friendly, thematic chapters, organized in geographical order starting from the only widely known entrance the Winding Way and working across and down the lands.

Legends of the Dead Lands presents the legends and details of the Dead Lands to your PCs as they would learn of them on Athas, in the form of rumor and myth. This hearsay evidence, unbelievable, scattered, and often contradictory, may be introduced over many gaming sessions. They might hear one piece of gossip when traveling with elves, another bandied about the slave pits of Balic. The increasing mound of information creates a veiled but tempting vision of a black land of undead, filled with the ancients' rich treasure troves.

Geography of the Dead Lands describes the unique particularities of the lands and general dangers found in adventuring and traveling the obsidian plains. Those specific to each kingdom are described, with full details found in the companion book *Faces of the Dead Lands*.

Northwest Cliffs describes the northwestern cliffs and the closest areas to the living lands and the reason why the obsidian plain remains uninvaded from any direction.

The Naked Obsidian describes the barren open obsidian wastes above the Fouled Sea, and the treacherous Forbidden Mountains to the south.

The Dead Lords describes the most populous part of the Dead Lands, the north central Dead Lord territories of Deshentu, Shadowmourn, and Harkor.

The City of a Thousand Dead describes the massive city at the heart of the Dead Lands and the various factions that fight to control the city.

Gretch's Kingdoms describes the Manipulator's machinations and his puppet kingdoms nestled between the Forbidden Mountains and the Crunch.

The Eastern Reaches and the Crunch describes the eastern region of Chol, its former swamp land the Pallid Mere, the eastern cliffs, and the Crunch – a no-man's land border region between the northern humanoid undead territories and the south bugdead lands.

The Legions of the Claw Territories is the name the humanoid undead give to the southern lands dominated by the bizarre insectoid undead. The undead rulers have even gone so far as to sign the Bugdead Accords, a loosely-binding document uniting them against the unpredictable hordes of insectoid undead.

The chapter entitled *The Seventh Tree* describes an anomaly in the otherwise sterile Dead Lands - the enormous root system of an ancient *tree of life*, still alive and vaguely intelligent, encased beneath the obsidian. The immense roots, dried and nearly dead, are large enough to travel through. The root system extends from one edge of the Dead Lands to the other, stretching out in search of water. The salvation of the living lost on the obsidian may lie beneath its surface.

Finally, *The Dead Lands and The Tablelands* discusses the existing relationship between the various factions of the Dead Lands and the rest of the world around it.

Throughout the book, you'll find several maps, for cities, important areas and even a regional map detailing the entire obsidian plains, marking the important cities, kingdoms, and other features. There is also a companion map detailing the critical root system of *The Seventh Tree* winding beneath the blackglass, highways that the living may learn to use to navigate this hostile land. Note there are obsidian lands beyond the Dead Lands, expanses of the blackglass not within the boundaries of the Dead Lords' kingdoms which had proven too wild for even them to control.

The Dead Lands in Dark Sun Campaigns

The undead kingdoms of the faraway Dead Lands are exotic, even by Athasian standards. The lands are harsh and waterless, which is usual, but the bizarre undead kingdoms are not based on any modern-day Athasian model. Most are twisted mockeries of a lost and ancient world, making them doubly confusing to the heroes. Adventures here take on a character unique on Athas.

The model of the Athasian adventurer, of a champion cutting a swath across the deserts, leading his followers against the sorcerer-kings in desperate struggles of survival, doesn't fit the Dead Lands. No longer the masters of their harsh world, adventurers find themselves challenged at every turn by creatures and events they don't understand. As such, it is important that the [Dungeon Master](#) recognize the qualities of the Dead Lands that, to Athasians, appear bizarre, and present them as such.

For instance, many of the structures in the Kingdoms of Gretch, though made of obsidian blocks, are modeled after the elements of a more traditional Mediterranean or North African medieval cities. While Dead Lands castles resemble Athasian structures, the turrets and towers are strange not only architecturally, but also in function. The undead build mills next to ravines in the obsidian. Not only is the structure strange, filled with gears and wheels with no apparent purpose, but even the notion of a flowing river to drive the mill is foreign to modern Athasians. Presentation of the bizarre is the challenge of the [DM](#) using the Dead Lands in a Dark Sun campaign.

The larger mysteries of the region are seeds for a longer, protracted series of adventures. While these lands contain many powerful evils who would be keen to extend their power into the surrounding wastelands if they knew of the living lands beyond (see descriptions of the various factions, as well as the summary in Chapter 10), the Dead Lands present no imminent danger to the rest of Athas. However, forward-thinking adventurers who discover this may be inclined to confront these problems before they become unmanageable. Should the undead organize and swarm beyond the obsidian, all the city-states to the north combined would be hard pressed to repel an army of essentially endlessly replenishable undead. So many kingdoms of the undead to the south surely pose a danger, and understanding the extent of that danger would be worth a great deal to the remaining sorcerer-kings and the free cities of the Tablelands.

Adventure opportunities like these are scattered throughout this text.

Visions of a Dead Land

TWYLO THE MAD

"Quite mad he was, or so goes the tale. One of our kind, welcomed by dwarves and men, met by name among the lanky elves of distant sands was he. Passions for gold and gems clogged his head, forcing him to wander beyond the forests and jagged cliffs to realms unsuited to our race. None would listen to his crazed dreams of discovery and adventure. While still very young, the villages and tribes shunned Twylo and forced him out of their forests.

"Cut off from his own kind, he ran grinning to the south, beyond the known world to a black land of magic and chaos. Here he joined an elf and a mul to explore that blasted landscape, a task that took him more than 20 years. His elf companion could run twice as fast as an aarakocra can fly, and the mul could lift mountains by their corners so Twylo could check beneath for treasure. Great riches they piled in heaps or thrust into holes, more wealth than a thousand sorcerer-kings could imagine, but still it wasn't enough. Twylo's greed forced him to plunder one last ruin, a shattered city of blackglass shards.

"Deep within the city's cracked temples and palaces, Twylo grabbed the last bit of treasure, a diamond clutched in the withered grip of a long-dead lord - the lord and his minions woke. . . ."

—excerpt of the halflings' "Tale of Twylo"

The inhabitants of the Tablelands are separated from the Dead Lands by mile after mile of harsh terrain, a land virtually uninhabited. The Jagged Cliffs halflings have a saying, ". . . only the scorpions know the way," that could describe the road to the Dead Lands. Very few humanoids venture so far to the south, across the area known as the Endless Sand Dunes, past the final oases at Durg's Puddle and Last Drink, and to the black obsidian plains beyond. Incentives for trade or commerce are few and fewer are the legends telling of great riches or of fine, green lands beyond the plains.

However, despite its bleak reputation, bits of treasure and specks of adventure sprinkle the legends of the Dead Lands - certainly enough to entice the bold adventurers of Athas to its glassy plains. Legends, oral traditions, and even some first-hand accounts of visitors to the region abound among the many lands and peoples of Athas, presented here for the [DM](#) to

distribute as appropriate. Releasing this information to the players a bit at a time, as suggested by location or race, the **DM** can let the players make their own decision about venturing to the distant lands to the south, where black obsidian empires dare the living to intrude.

Legends by Race

Player characters could pick up bits of useful information about the Dead Lands from anywhere in Tablelands, although different races have different legends regarding these lands. The **DM** should parcel out this information as the heroes come in contact with the races mentioned below.

HALFLINGS

The halflings of Athas continue oral traditions that flow all the way back to the times before the Cleansing Wars and the Time of Magic, back to the centuries known as the Green Age (although none today realize exactly how many King's Ages these stories traveled to reach the halflings of today). They are the tales of the long decline of halfling civilization. A time when their race, seeing the inevitable begin to unfold, created the new races of the world - elves, men, and dwarves; even the race of insects now called thri-kreen appeared. Receding farther into their forest domains, the halflings cut themselves off from the other races, so these ancient traditions are exclusively halfling. They dismiss other ideas and legends as inferior, possibly dangerous.



During each family's special story time, they recreate their oral traditions. This is the one tradition common to both the Jagged Cliffs halflings and their tribal, outland cousins. Evening fires are lit, drawing the hunters back to their homes and the children from their chores and play. Halflings usually pass ancient stories from the eldest woman to her daughters, although each tribe and family may have its own custom. The recounting of the legends and tales of heroic halflings goes on for hours at a time, as the speaker animates her stories with well-rehearsed movements to complement the song of her nature-borne language. They rarely permit outsiders to enter their encampments, and many who do never leave. Once inside, outlanders are free to listen to the oral recountings each evening; halflings feel that their legends are too sophisticated for lesser beings, so there is no harm in allowing strangers to listen.

At some time the heroes have an opportunity to listen in on a halfling gathering, they may hear the tale of Twylo, a legendary madman and adventurer of some repute. The tale itself is over two hours long in traditional telling and meant to discourage young halflings from pursuits outside their culture. However, if the heroes are attentive, they can learn something from the legend about the nature of the Black Basin far to the south, where Twylo and his companions mistakenly incurred the wrath of its undead inhabitants.

These verses are of particular interest:

“... through the broken portals of a size appropriate only to Twylo, he left his companions behind and descended beyond into jagged, endless darkness. Twylo sliced through the webs of giant spiders with his knife, carving their inhabitants and tying their many legs in knots. He defeated centipedes as long as an elf's leg and fashioned their legs into necklaces.”

The verse continues to describe in detail the various insect life he finds and slays in the dark ruin. Later in the same song, perhaps another 15 minutes into the story, if told by a halfling woman who is light of tongue, there is more:

“At the depths of the glass caverns, so deep that he must be about to fall out the bottom of the world, Twylo came upon a crypt. His eyes sparkled with the shimmering diamonds and rubies, the gold and silver that encased the dead thing. He put his knife to the largest gem and hammered with his fist to pop it out, but a bolt of magical energy split the air, sending him flying. When he came to his senses, an undead lord of great power stood before him, eyes bright red with otherworldly fire.”

The verse goes on to describe how Twylo barely escapes the battle with the undead prince, returning through a ruined underground city suddenly alive with undead things: skeletons, zombies, and other, more ghostly apparitions.

The veracity of the halfling legends of Twylo is questionable, even among their folk. However, should the heroes reach the edge of the Dead Lands, facts immediately prove the truths of several legendary story elements. The land consists of shattered black obsidian. There are cities fashioned of that material, and undead overrun the land.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

Most races in the Tablelands will universally refer to these lands of the undead as “the Dead Lands”. However, there are other names-- the elven trading tribes refer to the region as the Black Basin, while the merchants of the southern cities call it the Obsidian Plain. Through the rest of this volume, the names will be used interchangeably to refer to the same area of Athas, the lands of blackglass to the south of the Endless Sand Dunes

ELVES

Like the halflings, an oral tradition exists among the Sky Singers about Fyendil, a legendary elf adventurer of the Tablelands who traveled far beyond its borders. Fyendil's tale is an epic poem, memorized by the elders of the tribe and passed down in volumes, each one lasting about an hour. Only one volume of the poem makes reference to the Dead Lands. It tells the tale of how Fyendil was chased by a group of angry necromancers (angry because he stole kank globes and food from their camp in the previous volume) into a strange land of blasted obsidian. The beginning of the volume introduces the previous chapter of this book. Further items of interest in the volume include:

The land without shadows swallowed Fyendil, making him its own,

cutting him off from hearth and tribe, binding his legs to keep him from home.

Bats and bugs choked him and crawled over his cracked lips

until the very water in his eyes was all he could call his own.

A dozen times a dozen days left him all but dead, begging the wind to take him, when the ground shook

and shattered. Fyendil fell into a deep place in the earth, shards tumbled with him into coarse wooden tunnels, some wide, some narrow and twisted, and turning every which way and back on themselves.

The tunnels, he thought, once lived. Now they looked unsure.

Fyendil's tale accurately portrays the barrenness of the Black Basin and hints at the nature of the *tree of life* and its tunneled roots beneath the surface. Today, Fyendil is generally considered a myth, an epic meant to amuse children. In fact, Fyendil was an actual elf, a traveler several King's Ages past, and though they exaggerate his exploits, he did once visit the Dead Lands and survived them only by using the tunnels of the *tree of life*. Why the undead did not accost him (the tale does not mention them in the volume) is a mystery.

Other humanoids see elven rumors about the Black Basin as more lies from a race of prevaricators. Yet the matter-of-fact way they refer to the distant land to the south, of death, undead, and black obsidian, suggests that they visit it frequently. Yet they make these claims along with those of valleys of gold and jewels to the west and cloud cities floating far to the north, so few take them seriously.

DWARVES

Dwarves have some oral traditions, although their kind is more inclined to discuss the particulars of their present tasks than exchange tales handed down from the past. Focused on their race and single-minded in their purposes, occupations and duties consume the dwarves. However, there are instances where a dwarf's focus has brought him into some contact with the Dead Lands, and two of these are alive today.

The first, Kwan, is an ex-slave in service to the templars of Tyr, used for brute physical labor wherever they need him. Kwan fulfills those duties adequately and is well respected among his peers. Impressed by his ability to get things done, the templars put him in their records' vaults, tasking him to gather information about southern lands. His masters have no particular reason to research the south; they have three other slaves doing research on the remaining compass points, as is sometimes the way among templars. Kwan, unused to such intellectual pursuits, has approached the task in the only way he knows how, by gathering every tablet and scroll that mentions the lands south of the Tablelands into one place, his work chamber deep in the bowels of the Templar District of his city.

The chamber is an organized disaster, filled from floor to ceiling with scroll tubes and stacked tablets. Kwan steals many from other houses in Tyr; their thefts are justified, in his mind, because of his focus. The dwarf has them organized and cross-referenced where possible to access various information, but he makes no attempt to interpret the data himself; his task was only to gather the information. Kwan will allow any templars to look through the information, helping them find what they need, but others are not welcome.

With all this, Kwan's accumulated data on the Dead Lands is still limited. He has two scrolls that mention the region. The first merely mentions the possibility of a series of strange kingdoms populated by undead creatures far to the south. The second is a bit more elaborate, a study by psionic explorers that includes a crude map. The outline of the Obsidian Plains borders is mostly accurate, though they were off on the scale, showing the basin to be only 200 miles across when it is nearly 500. Their notations on the map, "no life here" and "void" refer to their psionic impressions of the region, accurate and inaccurate at the same time, they somehow failed to pick up on the thousands of psionically capable undead of the region. The psionic exploration was undertaken during a pilgrimage to the Pristine Tower more than 150 years ago - none of the participants are still alive.

The second dwarven connection to the Black Basin is through a recently formed slave tribe, in the distant south, beyond Kalidnay. This tribe is almost exclusively dwarven, either escapees from the slave pits of Balic or refugees of lost caravans along the great western trade routes to the pterrann nations there. From among these latter, came a pair of dwarves, Shrod and Thradin, a wife and husband who claim to be part of a caravan that became lost in the distant south. Shrod speaks for her husband, who had his tongue removed for talking back to an overseer many years ago. He listens and nods his agreement as Shrod recounts their tale.

"The lead wagons said we was still on the right path, but Thradin and me knew they wasn't, didn't we love? Goin' almost straight south, without an oasis to be found. But we was just slaves, see, and no one listened. Anyway we come eventually to these dunes that turned black in the distance. Very queer, they was. Even the overseers had brains enough not to get too close, so we turned west and skirted around them. Then one night the skies lit up with fire. Lightning and flame over the black dunes, brighter than day and louder than a mekillot stampede! It went on all night, never stopping for a moment. The overseer sent crodlu scouts to see what was going on, but they never came back. We turned

back the way we came and never went back that way again. How far was it, you ask? Well, we was lost, you know, but we figure it was about 200 miles south and a bit west. Ain't that right, Thradin?"

The heroes can encounter the slave tribe of dwarves whenever they are in the vicinity of Kalidnay, especially if they travel south of that ruined city.

THRI-KREEN

The thri-kreen refer to the Dead Lands as *cluk'thcha* in their tongue, the "Clik-Clik Lands," undoubtedly referring to the clatter claws make on the broken grooves and sharp, rugged surfaces of the glass terrain.

Beyond that, only the Thri-Kreen Empire has any stories related to the lands themselves. Among the Tohr-kreen scholars of the major cities, there are some ancient Green Age stories that tell of a long-lost insect race who lived well beyond the obsidian plains to the south of the Tablelands. No one of the Kreen Empire has ever returned from a journey that far into the Dead Lands to verify such a claim, and the few who have even dared to venture briefly onto the Obsidian Plains have been met with unexpected and intense hostility from most humanoid undead they encounter.

The history of Kreen exploration is littered with such stories of failed southern expeditions, and the few scouts who have only ventured briefly into the Dead Lands bring back sufficiently cautionary tales to make even the most hardened teams of explorers think twice.

Legends by Locale

Certain other legends and tales of the distant Dead Lands are unique to the different cities and locales of the Tablelands. The DM can parcel out this information by carefully tracking the heroes' location, imparting data as appropriate.

BALIC

It is common knowledge among the various merchants and templars of Balic that their city once sent a massive expedition to the south in search of greater wealth and dominion. This was before the Peninsula Rampage, before Rajaat's final revenge, when the sorcerer-king Andropinis ruled the city with an iron hand. Records of the expedition are mostly destroyed, though scraps of tattered scrolls and broken tablets hold a fractional historical record. Only the very old recall those days, among them Yuchia, a talkative slave in the stables of Eudoxia, daughter of the Lady

Essen Rees. Yuchia is a frail Female Human, nearly 100 years old, who claims to have been part of the expedition.

The heroes could come into contact with Yuchia in a number of ways. If they are at all involved in the intrigues of Balic's nobility, they could easily find themselves in the compound of the young Eudoxia. Otherwise, commerce in the city brings many slaves through the stables of Eudoxia; many city slaves speak of old Yuchia and her wild tales of the old days.

Yuchia holds a wealth of stories and knows no compunction when it comes to sharing them with any who will listen. She is nearly blind now, living in a small chamber near the stables. Her skin is burnt dark and wrinkled, due as she says to years as a field slave for the templars in her youth. By the light of a kank-oil lamp she rambles her tales, and, if coaxed, recounts her part in the great southern expedition.

"The templars worked us hard, you see, when Andropinis was alive. The fields stretched all around the city, not like they do now, and we tended them year round. But one day me and my brothers and sisters were taken out of the fields and chained to march behind this huge column. There were templar warriors all around, and a huge formation of crodlu lancers to the front and some to the rear. We lined up behind 10 huge mekillot wagons and in front of dozens of heavily laden inix. . . .

"We marched for days without stopping. Those who couldn't keep up were cut loose. Rumors flew through the ranks that we were going to be sacrificed to the Dragon or given as gifts to the rulers of some unknown city. We stopped at one oasis long enough to water ourselves and then headed farther south. . . .

"After more than two weeks the column stopped. I looked up and saw the desert was gone and a great black land lay before us, glimmering in the sunlight. That's when I thought the Dragon was going to have us for certain, that he'd already scorched the earth in front of us. But we turned, the captains of the lancers bringing the column to march along the edge of the abyss, and down a long wide road, all black, down to the black land.

"A few more days and we reached the bottom. It was black, shiny black, as far as the eye could see. We were all but out of food and water. The lancers were sacrificing a crodlu and inix nightly to feed themselves, while the rest of us slowly starved. Then one night there were screams all around. I was one of the few strong enough to stand and see. I swear, they were gigantic skeletons, dozens of 'em, all around us they were, crushing the lancers like they were bugs. They chained us, so we couldn't run."

"In the morning there was nothing left. Just about all of the lancers and templars were dead. The slaves who survived

were still chained in place to die there, I suppose. Then one lancer, a good man, wounded as he was, unlocked those of us he could find and we started back the way we'd come. I don't know how long it took, but we finally made it back to the last oasis alive."

Careful inspection of the remaining records shows that Yuchia was a part of the expedition and that after her return to Balic she was placed once again as a templar field slave. Andropinis's southern expedition was a complete disaster, and only a few survivors stumbled back out of the desert to tell of it.

DRAJ

In the city of Draj, there are few who have ever heard of the Dead Lands to the far south and fewer who know anything about it other than its name. One of these is Ixtabai the Blind, head of the House of the Mind. Nonetheless, despite his power and influence in the city-state, the **psion** doesn't know much. All he can say about the Obsidian Plain is that it is far to the south and that it is infested with more undead and monsters than there are sand grains in the desert. He's more than eager to pay for information concerning these desecrated lands.

Other than him, there is Necahual. He relates the tale to a long-time client.

"Do you speak about a land full of walking corpses? Well, I might know something, I mean, if you are willing to pay for it, of course."

The story is full of awkward errors about the Black Basin, a poisonous land defiled by the Dragon, bleak, flat and sterile as the blackglass, cursed and populated by ghosts. Provided he is paid at least 10 Cp he continues and relates a story. The main parts follow below.

"He was a scholar, an integrant of a passing caravan that had drunk too much pulque, who said he had eyewitnessed unbelievable horrors. His story was so different that I can remember the exact words even after all these years:

'...the heat was so strong that we decided to shelter ourselves in some ruins in order to rest under their shadows. Our heads hadn't even cooled when they appeared. They came out of the walls, the ground, the roof, from everywhere, screaming and moaning, whining. Their faces were pale and showed the agony which afflicted them, and their eyes, by the elements, glared furiously at us anticipating the suffering they would deliver upon us. Most of my fellows succumbed to the ghosts' attacks immediately.'

'Thanks to the elements, my partner managed to make the rest of us imperceptible to the ghosts and we 'scaped. We saw the bodies and souls of our fellows being consumed by the starving attackers.'

'We took ourselves for safe when the land itself rose and attacked us. Before we could react, half of us was dead. The other half ran for their lives. We ran all day long with all of our strengths until we collapsed exhausted. And so we did for days till that cursed, bleak, sterile and poisonous land was not under our feet anymore. Yes, that land is poisonous, for those who drank of its water or were wounded by its sharp, edgy glass died and rose to attack us... May the water save me from ever returning there.'

"After saying that," Necahual continues, "he paid well for the drinks and never appeared again."

TYR

The free city of Tyr's involvement with the distant southern lands is scant. However, a recent incident in the Council of Advisors sparked some interest. A report of that incident can be obtained from anyone who was in the council that day.

Turned away by the templar administrators of the city, a brash, young independent merchant barged into the council during a regular session, interrupting the business of the day. After the man was wrestled to the ground by guards, Rikus, representative of the Free Citizens in the Over Council, convinced his counterparts to listen to the man. The merchant, a short human named Sedilus, with full beard and piercing blue eyes, claimed that he had come from a personal expedition to the distant south where he stumbled across something of great value to his native city of Tyr: a vast land of obsidian where the buried treasures of forgotten empires lay waiting for harvest. He brought forth from his pouch a jewel of steel and gold, strangely crafted but of obvious value. Sedilus asked the council for funding to organize a caravan to bring these riches back to Tyr.

The Over Council unanimously thanked Sedilus for his patriotism, but declined to back his second expedition, and he left the chamber. It is known that he purchased several animals and wagons at his own expense and then left the city heading south. He has never returned.

Heroes might also encounter Kwan, the dwarf ex-slave among Tyr's templar administrators, who has gathered information about all the southern lands. His tale is presented under *Dwarves*, above.

CARAVANS

The age of the sorcerer-kings may be over and great change may be sweeping over Athas like a swarm of stingflies, but the caravans lumber across the dunes uninterrupted. They remain the lifeblood of the entire region, and until such time as verdant fields stretch from city to city, pushing the dunes back into the hinterlands, they always will. Player characters make frequent use of caravans, either as passengers or those brokering cargoes, and in their ranks are many tales of distant lands, including at least one that touches on the distant Dead Lands. You can present this tale any time the heroes have reason to spend time with the teamsters and packers of caravans anywhere in the Tablelands.

Knowledge (Arcana) Check

DC	Result
18	18 The Obsidian Plain is an area in the Gray where dead elves go to run forever.
23	23 The Dead Lands is the name of the Dragon's kingdom. The souls of anyone killed by the Dragon are drawn to his domain to serve him for all times.
28	28 Merchants of the south talk of a land to the south that they call the Obsidian Plain.
33	33 The character learns the tales of Juliarptis unless the character is an elf, in which case the character learns the tales of Fyendil.
38	38 A crazed man once burst into the Over Council's chambers in Tyr claiming to have discovered a land of vast obsidian where the buried treasures of forgotten empires lay waiting to be uncovered. He never returned from a hastily organized return expedition.

Juliarptis of Nibenay is reputed to be the greatest caravan master of the last few King's Ages, perhaps of all time. Juliarptis is recognized as an actual figure of Athasian history; documentation marks her place in history as a caravan master who traveled freely across the region bringing riches both to herself and to her city. Tales of her exploits, however, are wild and exaggerated, beyond belief in the scope of their accomplishments and time period. They say that she stood over 8 feet tall, "strong enough to carry a mekillot under each arm!" She is supposed to have employed more than a thousand animal handlers, each caravan so long "the end of it was still leaving when the front of it was arriving." Juliarptis is supposed to have engaged a variety of magical and psionic

methods to move her operation along, including frequent use of extra dimensional travel.

One specific tale speaks of an incident in the south revolving around her simultaneous courtship of two princely suitors, an elf and a human, mainly for the purpose of gaining lucrative drayage contracts to transport materials between their kingdoms. To convince one suitor that her affections were genuine, he insisted she bring him an obsidian obelisk 100 paces high. He told her the only place to get such a block of blackglass was a vast plain to the south. Juliarptis, unfamiliar with those lands, ventured there with enough wagons and artisans to secure the obsidian and fashion it into a perfectly shaped token of her love.

Yet Juliarptis's journey to the Dead Lands was difficult, so the tale relates. By the time she reached the plain, through driving sandstorms and violent acts of nature almost too much even for her, many of her wagons were lost. Yet, she persevered, searching for a suitable slab of obsidian on which to set her artisans to work, a piece of solid, uncracked glass. Before she found an acceptable one, she came to a strange city, made completely of blackglass. Inside were dozens of towers and obelisks, already fashioned and abandoned, any one of which would serve her purpose. She ventured inside the peculiar city, empty but for the howling winds, and found a perfect specimen, a pillar carved with ornate faces and graceful shapes, intertwined bodies. Her craftsmen brought the structure down gently, but when they did, previously unseen crypts opened across the city, disgorging hundreds of chimerical undead creatures and an army of zombies. Juliarptis barely managed to escape, confronted by a powerful raaig, and lost most of her men in a desperate escape from the blackglass. This is the basis for the legend of The City of a Thousand Dead. In the end, they say that Juliarptis constructed a tower of black marble for her suitor to gain his favor. There is no record of his reaction.

LORE

Characters with ranks in [Knowledge \(arcana\)](#) or [Knowledge \(geography\)](#) can research the Dead Lands to learn more about them. When a character makes a [skill check](#), read or paraphrase the following, including the information from lower DCs.



The Dead Thrones

JULIARPTIS'S ESCAPE

"Boy, if you keep pestering me I'll... What's that? The Dead Lands? What does a sprout, knee-high-to-a-halfing, know about such things? Wives' tales, I tell you, and old ones at that, nothing more!

"Oh, you say they aren't, do you? Child, you believe too much, I fear. People can get the better of you that way. What? Have you been down talking to the caravan slaves again? They'll give you an ear full, let me tell you. Spinning yarns about Juliarptis and all that nonsense. I'll bet your eyes were as big as kank globes, and your head just as empty!

"Yes, yes, according to the legends Juliarptis ventured to the distant south to a place called the Dead Lands, covered with black obsidian and full to the brim with monsters, dead 'uns and live 'uns. She visited The City of a Thousand Dead, built all of glass and ruled by armies of the vanquished. Still, she flexed her muscles and crushed them all or some such nonsense. You can get the full tale down among the mekillot handlers, if you haven't already.

"Go there? Of course not. You'd have to travel a thousand miles just to find out there's no such place. What? Isn't there enough sand and chitin around here for you, you want to run off to find some more? Chasing off after mythical lands is fine for elves, but you'd better get your mind right, son."

—Diary of a Merchant Son

The Dead Lands is not just a fanciful name meant to frighten children and half-giants. The name is quite literal. Nothing lives in the Dead Lands except a strange *tree of life*, which masks its life force well, and the occasional prisoner or intruder unfortunate enough to find himself on the plains of shattered obsidian.

Yet despite this, the Dead Lands flourish with gruesome populations and evil, prosperous civilizations. Civilizations of the undead.

The Black Basin is home to dozens of unique undead city states and nations, each populated and governed by their own kind. Most trace their roots to times before the sorcerer-kings and know little or nothing about them. It is a rare undead who has ventured out of the Obsidian Plain and into the dunes beyond. From their point of view, the Boiling Ruin that created their tomb must have been all-encompassing, choking the life from the world completely, leaving them as sole masters of what remains of Athas.

The Boiling Ruin

Ages have come and gone since the time of the Shining Tide that created the Obsidian Plain.

The undead who still inhabit the region, even the wicked kings and princes, can barely remember the disaster that befell them, lost to their memories like the first steps of youth.

The nature of the Disaster was purely magical, born of a failed experiment in the field of interplanar travel. Through scrying magic and sorcerous sojourns Rajaat probed the planes beyond his own. The going was difficult, blocked at every turn, so much so that Rajaat reasoned that interplanar travel was, though possible, unlikely to yield any immediate or significant benefits. That priests could reach other planes with ease prompted him to consider means of linking priestly magic with his Champions. He abandoned his research into wizardly planar powers, and it lay untouched for many years until the beginning of the Cleansing Wars.

Rajaat decided that his assault on the nonhuman peoples of Athas should begin in an isolated region, where he could train his Champions without alerting all the targeted races to his intentions. His choice fell on the southern land of Ulyan, a region little known outside the deep south but one Rajaat had long felt was an abomination. The region was inhabited by many nonhuman races, but there was also a large population of humans, and Rajaat had an agent already in place that he could use to recruit those humans: the renegade Gretch.

Gretch had fled Rajaat's service years before after performing forbidden experiments and had no desire to return to Rajaat's service, but he knew he had no choice. With no other option, Gretch undertook a campaign to stir up the human tribesmen of the plains, gradually poisoning their relations with the gnomes, ogres, trolls, orcs, and others who lived in most of Ulyan's cities. He connived with the merchants of the nonhuman cities, giving them every advantage in impoverishing the human plainsmen, while at the same time prophesying to the increasingly embittered humans that a great deliverer would soon come to lay low their enemies. Gretch also began an effort to gradually break the relations between the various cities of Ulyan, ruining their alliances and sowing suspicions among them.

A King's Age or more later, Rajaat sent his Champions to gather and train their armies, but not to reveal their purpose. When the Champions returned to the Pristine Tower, Rajaat told them that their first target would be the rich city of Nagarvos', the Wonder of the South, the greatest city of Ulyan. They kept their

goal secret from the troops, but led them on a grand march south, marching to the lip of the great cliffs that ring Ulyan.

No sooner had the army marched down the trade road than the rulers of Celik alerted their fellow rulers in Ulyan – none knew where this huge army was going, but the threat was clear. Rajaat's army proceeded down the Winding Way, emerging onto the green hills west of Small Home. They marched east to the Grey Tower, where Gretch had gathered the human tribes of the wide plains. The tribesmen joined the armies of the various Champions, swelling their numbers; the legions sprawled around the Grey Tower were the largest encampment Athas had ever seen.

From this vast bivouac, Rajaat sent his summons to the Tetrarchs of Nagarvos', demanding that they surrender the wizard Pandruj to his justice. Pandruj was one of many preservers who had left the Pristine Tower, and he had become an important figure in Nagarvos'. The Tetrarchs were unwilling to surrender one of their own citizens, and in any case they doubted that Rajaat would honor any arrangement made with them. Nonetheless, the prospect of keeping the First Sorcerer's huge army at arm's length was enough to convince the Tetrarchs to send delegates – accompanied by their own army, to keep Rajaat honest.

Rajaat kept the Tetrarchs' delegates, encamped with their army on the east side of the Tforkatch River, occupied in pointless negotiations for months, while his new recruits were trained. Gretch's agents were equally busy, using techniques magical and mundane, to keep the other nations of Ulyan from answering the calls for help that increasingly came from the Tetrarchs of Nagarvos'.

When Rajaat was ready, he ordered his Champions to attack. Dregoth, by far the most experienced among them, ordered a general assault over the Tforkatch River. The battle began before dawn, and lasted until past midnight, with fireballs and lightning bright in the sky. When it ended, the army of Nagarvos' was shattered.

From the ruin of the battlefield, Rajaat led his Champions and their armies east, following the Trade Road to Nagarvos'. The work of Gretch years before, sowing discord among the nonhuman realms, bore fruit, as none of the other kingdoms moved to aid Nagarvos'. Rajaat guaranteed Nagarvos' isolation when his agents in the city brought down in ruin the great psionic gem used by the Tetrarchs to communicate with other cities in Ulyan and beyond.

The Tetrarchs were not defenseless, however. Their city was surrounded on three sides by sheer cliffs

down to the bubbling black swamps of Sagramog. The Champions settled in to besiege the city - all except Keltis, who led his army into Sagramog, hunting the lizardmen who teemed throughout the lowlands.

The wizard Pandruj and other preservers joined the psionic Tetrarchs, fortifying Nagarvos' against the Champions, but despite their efforts, the mighty walls were finally breached. The Tetrarchs and Pandruj's preservers withdrew to the temples of the Arkolak. There, the city's elite unit of dwarves and ogres, known as the Defenders, held off the Champions' forces for as long as they could, giving the city's mindbenders and wizards as much time as possible to work some miracle and reverse the verdict of battle. But the experiment failed. As the last of the Defenders, a powerful psion named G'dranav, stood to face the last charge, he used the last of his strength to break open the earth beneath his feet, creating a chasm into which he and all his fallen comrades, and many of their fallen foes, fell. The great city of Nagarvos' was given over to ruin.

For three days the Champions' armies rampaged through the city. Orcs, gnomes, trolls, humans, dwarves, goblins, and others were put to the sword. The great public squares were brought low, the gnomish houses with their cool cellars and wide balconies were shattered, and the great catenary domes of granaries and homes split to vent the black smoke of their burning. Rajaat personally supervised the butchery, gloating in the triumph of cleansing the first nest of the abominations.

As the black billows of Nagarvos's destruction faded to brown wisps from the ruins, Rajaat summoned his Champions to a final council; even Keltis was recalled from his campaign in Sagramog to join them. Rumors were spreading, but the fate of Nagarvos' was still a secret known only to the Champions and their armies. The destruction of the psionic gem of Nagarvos', the cordon of pickets that Gallard had ordered to hunt down any messengers from the doomed city, and various magical and psionic wards that Rajaat created had prevented any reliable news from escaping. To take advantage of the confusion and strike before any of the neighboring kingdoms could prepare their defenses, Rajaat ordered his Champions to disperse on their cleansing missions immediately.

Uyness and Dregoth marched together to the Winding Way, and up it, battling the defenders of Fort Tru'ezarr before continuing onward. Wyan also marched west, past Gretch's Grey Tower, bound for Small Home. Gallard marched with him as far as the gnomish city of Arludas, where his men began their work. Sacha and Daskinor struck to the northwest,

raiding the kobold and goblin warrens in the hills. Myron Troll-Scorcher led his army first to the north, circumventing the warrens, then west, striking the trollish kingdom of the Sagocracy of far northwestern Ulyan. The Dwarf-Butcher marched with him, but continued west to Toganay; when the dwarven hold there was wrecked, he followed the others up the Winding Way and departed Ulyan for northern lands.

Tectuktitlay refused to wait for the others' armies to pass up the Winding Way; no wemics lived in Ulyan, and the Wemic Annihilator was eager to smite his foes. Tectuktitlay forced his men to climb the impassable cliffs of northern Ulyan, hacking a narrow way up the cliffs at the cost of thousands of lives. Tectuktitlay's Stair remains there to this day, though few now remember it. Keltis marched east, finishing the lizardmen of Sagramog, and then took the narrower, but more direct, route east, up toward the Sunrise Sea. Albeorn followed him, striking at the elven settlements along the route to Arkhold.

Rajaat had other reasons for immediately dispersing his Champions, besides the obvious benefit of surprising the nonhuman kingdoms of Ulyan and beyond. No sooner had the Champions set off in their various directions, than Rajaat summoned his personal retinue to a secret gathering in the still-smoldering ruins of Nagarvos'. He knew that in a few years, the whole of Ulyan would be a depopulated, defiled wasteland, abandoned by all and forgotten by even the few in the north who had known of it before. It would be the perfect place for a hidden research effort, a place where a more efficient means of cleansing the abominations could be discovered.

Gretch protested that such a means already existed, if only Rajaat would permit him to revive all the fallen from the battles around Nagarvos'. But Rajaat refused, insisting that the task of cleansing, the honor and glory of it, must go to the living, not the dead, and certainly not to the dead enemies. Instead, Rajaat proposed to seek new weapons, and perhaps new allies, on the elemental planes. If priests could gain power from the planes, and even travel there, why not his defilers and Champions? Gretch was disgusted, and abandoned the gathering for his Grey Tower.

Rajaat took little notice of Gretch's departure, focusing on the goal of tapping the power of the planes. He selected a skilled but unambitious defiler from his retinue, named Qwith, to lead the effort to discover wizardly means of gaining the planes. Qwith was given a staff of brilliant defilers and priests, as well as a legion of quartermasters and builders, and was ordered to rebuild whatever sections of Nagarvos' she desired, in whatever design she liked. She was to

remain there until she obtained the results Rajaat demanded. Because Nagarvos' and the lands around it were so defiled, Rajaat ordered the enchantment of six *trees of life* around the city. He created the seventh, and by far the largest, such *tree*, himself.

Only after Qwith and her compound in the ruins, named the Navel, were established did Rajaat return to the Pristine Tower. Qwith divided her defilers into teams, each to research and investigate each of the known elemental and paraelemental planes. For generations, as the Cleansing Wars continued in northern lands, the defilers labored in isolation in the depths of Ulyan. They discovered magical means to reach the elemental planes, and some were able to summon creatures from these planes, but directly tapping the power of the planes, as **clerics** so easily did, eluded them.

Qwith's team of **wizards** remained isolated for more than a generation. Experimentation quickly grew beyond scrying devices and planar travel to tap the energy of the elemental and paraelemental planes, and finally they discovered summoning magic, which drew elements from the inner planes directly into their world. Years passed and they gathered more knowledge, all under the watchful eye of Qwith, in the name of her master. The first defilers, who braved magical transportation across the planes, either never returned or reappeared maimed, insane, or dead. The forefront of planar travel and elemental summoning was being mapped out by the grandchildren of those placed in Qwith's charge by Rajaat when something in their magical experimentation went dramatically wrong.

Within the roiling depths of the infinite Paraelemental Plane of Magma lie many regions of molten basalt, obsidian, and other liquid or viscous volcanic minerals. Rajaat's researchers, with Qwith supervising and controlling them, found a vast region within the Magma Plane where obsidian was nearly pure. Many defilers among the researchers argued that this region represented an independent "Obsidian Demiplane", though the priests at the Navel deprecated the concept of such a plane as heretical to their cosmology. Controversy or no, the obsidian region proved useful, mainly as a source of high-grade spell components and magical materials. However, the obsidian region was also unpredictable, and Qwith forbade her minions to engage too deeply in the radical magicks that younger researchers suggested might tame it.

Unknown to Qwith, in the catacombs below the Navel, G'dranav, the last of the Defenders, had become a meorty and had raised his fellow Defenders into

undeath. In the depths, G'dranav and his meorty army prepared for the day of revenge against Rajaat and his servants.

Despite some discoveries, Rajaat was not satisfied with Qwith's progress. In a fit of rage, he dismissed Qwith as leader of the research effort. However, he was distracted by the campaigns of the Cleansing Wars and could not be bothered to select a replacement from among Qwith's researchers.

Qwith's researchers were engaged in exploring the possibilities of a *gate* when their work was interrupted by a savage attack – G'dranav and the hundreds of meorties of the Defenders emerged with a roar from the ground beneath the Navel and assaulted the researchers. Dozens were killed before any defense could be organized. Like the Tetrarchs before them, Qwith and her defilers were able to slow, but not stop, the advancing tide of their enemies.

The defilers and their guards were no match for the hundreds of enraged meorties, so Qwith ordered several defilers to reopen the planar *gate* and draw elementals through to fight. Two junior defilers, Nakkash and Ur-hafri, raced to the *gate* and began summoning elementals. They were specialists in paraelemental research, and had proposed some of the radical techniques that Qwith thought too dangerous. The pair was desperate, and the need was urgent. Ur-hafri brought through elementals of sun and silt, while Nakkash took over the *gate* and began summoning elementals of rain. None of these were much use in stemming the tide of the battle, and the buildings caught aflame from the *fireballs* and other pyrotechnics of desperate defilers.

In his urgency Nakkash decided to try to access the Paraelemental Plane of Magma. He was careless in his haste - he reached the "Demiplane of Obsidian" instead. Calling Ur-hafri to help him, Nakkash began to apply some of the new spells he had developed for taming the obsidian. One, then another, obsidian elemental came forth - the defilers sent them out to fight. Yet the battle was still going against Qwith's researchers: clearly a much larger elemental was needed. Heedlessly Nakkash and Ur-hafri started trying to enlarge the *gate*, succeeding both in increasing its size and drawing forth an enormous elemental.

Ur-hafri directed the massive obsidian elemental out of the summoning chamber, into the courtyard where it waded into the fray, striking down meorty Defenders and Qwith's defilers with equal fury. At the same time, Pandruj and the Tetrarchs, also raised to undeath, saw their chance for revenge and attacked. In the confusion, many of Pandruj's and G'dranav's

followers attacked each other as well as Qwith's servants.

Ur-hafri escaped the sudden attack of Pandruj and his undead, returning to the chamber to find Nakkash desperately trying to regain control of the *gate* - the experimental magicks he and Ur-hafri had used to expand it had rendered it unstable, pulsing with energy, like a living thing. The two men tried, and failed, to reassert control. The first of the burning roofing beams crashed down, crushing Ur-hafri's skull.

What happened next has never been completely explained, and the memories of all the undead who were there are now hopelessly entangled with fiction and self-delusion, so the truth may never be known. Nakkash maintains that his summoning spells performed correctly, and should have stabilized the *gate*. Qwith long blamed herself, believing that she should have supervised her apprentices more closely, since one of them obviously miscalculated the summoning. Gretch once claimed that he was responsible. In an instant of decisive summoning, the *gate* was accidentally opened fully to the supposed "demiplane," with explosive results - the *gate* shattered.

Millions of tons of molten obsidian poured into the compound, cresting the walls and sweeping aside defilers and Defenders alike. The obsidian, smoking and gurgling, flooded through the city from the magical portal. No one escaped. Outside the city walls, beyond the ring of ruins of old Nagarvos', the farmers and laborers who served Qwith were distracted by the screams of battle, but relaxed when silence fell - clearly another experiment had just failed, and been contained. When the black wave burst out of the city walls and overwhelmed them, the obsidian was utterly silent, rushing over the land.

It also poured into the Pallid Mere, the salty sea stretching north to south on the eastern side of the Navel which once had been the Sagramog swamps, gushing down the escarpment in a terrible cascade. Gouts of steam roiled up, the sea flash-boiled by the molten obsidian. Great bergs of obsidian were frozen instantly as they crashed into the sea, but more kept coming, a waterfall of death that even the sea itself could not quench. The Pallid Mere boiled, sending forth thick clouds of salty spume, blown east by the suddenly savage winds. The chunks of obsidian, tumbling in the rushing tide, pushed to the southeast, coming to rest on the southeastern shores of the Pallid Mere in mounded walls of fractured blackglass.

The obsidian consumed the sea, bubbling and foaming as it boiled the water into briny steam. It also

devoured the land, flowing west and north, burning and burying everyone and everything in its path. The wave was faster than the news – few were aware of sudden death before it closed over them, its black glassy maw enfolding all of Ulyan. The Hoarwall, that great wall of ice which had for millenia marked the southern extent of the known world, repelled the first wave of obsidian, acting as a levee running east to west east to west and dividing the Black Basin from the Zagath homeland to the south. The obsidian, like a hungry predator, would not be denied its prey. It grew taller and stronger as the *gate* pumped ever more molten glass into Athas, and flooded over the Hoarwall, rushing south to consume the cold lands of the deep reaches.

When the obsidian cooled, it formed a vast basin of blackglass, hundreds of miles across. Both the Navel and the ruins of Nagarvos upon which it had been built were utterly buried. None of the *wizards* survived, and their research perished with them.

But then, the dead *wizards* gradually arose. The obsidian which poured through the gate from the Paraelemental Plane of Magma and the negative energy which infected it extracted a strange toll on those who died under its influence – it bound them to the Prime Material Plane as undead. So Qwith and all of Rajaat's minions and those of the city rose in undead form as *zhen*, a name imprinted on their minds when they awoke, to become the eventual rulers and servants of this new land. Nearly all those slain in the deadly tide rose as undead, though not all were *zhen*.

The undead *wizards* soon discovered that the defiling magic most of them practiced no longer functioned in the Dead Lands, for the obsidian destroyed every piece of vegetation in the land and left nothing from which to draw energy (save for the lone *tree of life* that hid itself from them). The Dexter Path of the preserver was considered and rejected for the same reason. The only option left was to turn to necromancy – even at the cost of the elevated levels they had achieved. So the first few decades were spent probing the Grey, learning the secrets of the power of the dead, as Gretch had done many King's Ages before.

Rajaat, far away in his tower, assumed all was lost. He observed the fullness of the ruin and concluded that such a region was utterly worthless to him. He congratulated himself on choosing such an isolated location for such dangerous experiments. Without regret, Rajaat abandoned the project and turned his attention more fully to the wars.

The Black Basin remains almost unchanged from its creation so many King's Ages ago to this day, and

would not likely change much in the future, except for one thing--

The *gate* is still open.

Choked closed by hardened glass and the stubborn roots of the *Seventh Tree*, the accidental *gate* to the demiplane still exists beneath The City of a Thousand Dead. Because the *gate* is still open, heroes who die in the Dead Lands are likely to return to unlife as *zhen*. A violent act, such as an earthquake or a magical explosion of sufficient power, could reopen it with equally disastrous effects. Unchecked, the portal could engulf the entire Tablelands, the world, or even fill the Athasian crystal sphere with molten glass.

Few of Qwith's researchers, now undead, know the origins of their land. The long, slow progress they knew in life, handed down from generation to generation, fostered a single-mindedness among the defilers that required magical means to maintain. The defilers submitted themselves to magical spells and potions that removed their ambition and will, allowing them to focus, like dwarves, on their extra dimensional research. Reduced to the level of magical slaves, only their minds were nominally their own, devoted wholly to their purpose. So, in undeath, they are ferocious, having little to draw upon for memories, tortured instead by personal ambitions never fulfilled, freedoms never experienced.

The Eternal Struggle

The many nations of undead are locked in endless warfare for domination of the Black Basin. For t'liz lords and raaig champions there is no greater glory than defeating one's neighbor and usurping part of his territory. Kingdoms rise and fall brutally on the Obsidian Plain beneath the feet of vast armies of undead, slaughtered and raised time and again over the King's Ages.

Nevertheless, the supply of corpses is dwindling, and all the dead princes know it. Many of the existing human undead were defilers of Rajaat's city or those who worked there - masons, farmers, and administrators. After the Boiling Ruin, they supplemented these with corpses found beneath the obsidian, buried King's Ages before, when the wastelands were home to more primitive tribes and advanced civilizations like the Sagocracy; they literally mined these corpses from the ground and raised them to fill the ranks of ambitious warlords. They unearth more every year, but this supply is running low.

With few sources of fresh corpses, they recycle the mindless undead, gathered up after battles and

reanimated. So great is the demand for bodies that they wage entire campaigns for the sole purpose of defeating and capturing the enemy's forces. The harvesting of the battlefields is an important ritual for the victor, the corpses collected and carted off to the homeland to await their rebirth.

However, even this process, over time, is wearing thin. A skeleton or zombie defeated in combat, hacked to bits, broken and battered, must be mended before reanimation. The mindless undead of the Dead Lands are shambling horrors, bound and stitched, splinted and pinned to keep them together. Many are unrecognizable, others are weird constructs of pieces from a number of different races. Really, in game play, they are still just skeletons and zombies, but ramshackle ones to be sure. For each there is a critical moment where no amount of mending can rebuild the corpse and the pieces are distributed among others or discarded entirely.

Each king or general in his own way addresses the problem of obtaining new soldiers to fill the ranks. Some generate golems or other constructs, summon beasts from other planes, or turn dark eyes to the fabled lands beyond the obsidian. Grim mines reach down into the obsidian, seeking not gems or iron but the forgotten subvitrine graveyards of the dim past.

Note that the bugdead are so numerous that they don't suffer from these problems. Bugdead absorb additional numbers from beyond the Black Basin regularly, swarms of them invading and then becoming one with their undead brethren. Their lack of respect for the harvesting rights of the victor brands them as savages among the undead warlords of the north.

Player characters venturing onto the Obsidian Plain may stumble across a recent battlefield before encountering the undead denizens themselves:

The obsidian beneath your feet is scorching hot, baking the soles of your sandals – a fetid odor of seared leather saturates the heat-laden air. Each step is a challenge, as waves of intense fiery wind attack your body. The relentless sun bounces off the smooth, angled surfaces of glass and its acute reflections assault you from every direction. There is no shade, no place to hide, and thirst is your worst enemy.

Before you is a stretch of blasted and broken glass, littered with bones and weapons. Craters in the obsidian and globs of still-smoldering glass tell of a magical fire unleashed in all points of the compass. The stench of charred bits of bone and the putrid scent of burnt flesh fill your nostrils. Shattered missiles lay strewn across the smashed obsidian, just where they

landed. The siege engines these missiles were launched from now lie toppled and burning in the distance. Great plates of obsidian stand on end, uplifted by powerful explosions and left as silent sentinels watching over the now-tranquil battlefield.

But for the remains of weapons and their effects there is naught to witness the end of the struggle, not a corpse to be found. Dried blood and bits of bone are all that remain to tell the tale of those who have fallen. Where are they now?

Clever heroes will also note that while most weapons in the battle were of obsidian, their broken hafts and blades littered everywhere, some wood and even rusty metal weapons were employed. Splinters of broken wooden shafts can be found, but the major pieces have been removed, like the remains of the dead soldiers. Gouges in the obsidian, as well, were clearly made from some metal jagged edged weapons, but not one bit of metal is left on the site. Anyone familiar with large-scale combat will judge the battle's size at roughly a thousand on a side, huge by Athasian standards. The victors can be easily tracked away from the battlefield, their obsidian siege engines and beasts leaving readily identified marks in the blackglass toward the nearest undead kingdom.

The heroes might also come across an ongoing battle, where they can take cover and observe the progress of both sides:

Bolts of magical lightning crackle in the night, illuminating a ghastly scene in unearthly blue light, accented by endlessly shattering thunder rolling across the Obsidian Plain. A low ridge, placed by fortune, is the only cover you can see. Even at this distance bits of obsidian shale rain down upon you, blasted into the air by magical gouts of flame and destruction.

The defending army is barricaded behind piles of jagged glass, broken from the ground and hastily piled against the invaders. Manning the battlements are scores of foul skeletons and zombies, at this distance ghostly pale in the occasional light, brandishing black weapons. Behind them strange catapults lob flaming balls into the ranks of the attackers, all directed by their general, a black-robed figure floating 50 feet above them in the swirling smoke of destruction. From his vantage point, the general, a defiler of great power, launches fireballs and lightning bolts into the ranks of the attackers, adding his strength to the artillery, but the tide is turning against him.

A relentless onslaught pounds them, a mass of skeleton warriors supported by archers and massive creatures made, it appears, from the very obsidian

around them. The flaming missiles that scatter the attacking soldiers bounce unheeded off the black constructs that lumber unchecked toward the battlements, rallying the skeletons to the attack. Flight after flight of black arrows hiss through the night, raining down on the battlements, splitting bone and rending flesh where they find their marks. Behind them all, illuminated on a rocky outcropping, is their king, an undead lord mounted on a powerful, skeleton steed, and his like-mounted, wraith lieutenants, the hot winds rippling their torn banners.

The black creatures attain the battlements, reaching out and tossing aside enormous blocks of glass so the skeleton horde can penetrate beyond them. Hideous screams fill the night as arrows and flaming missiles knife through the melee, the comfort of dawn is still hours away.

At daybreak, you can see the smoldering ruins of the battlefield in the early morning light. The battlements, rent and broken in places, are empty now, littered with the dead of both sides. The undead lord is gone, but his lieutenants still watch over the scene. Carts drawn by bizarre, undead beasts arrive, piled with the remains of the fallen. A line of them, heaped high with corpses, makes its way beyond your viewing range to an unseen point in the distance.

What is this place you have found?

Caught up in their battle, the warlords take no notice of a few uninvited spectators. Such a scene should be an indication of how much power the local princes wield, and that the undead appear to rule this land.

Either of these scenes can be found anywhere in the northern half of the Dead Lands, where humanoid undead dominate the landscape. Player characters entering the area for the first time most likely come from the north. If they approach from the south, instead, they can find similar scenes in the lands of the bugdead.

The Bugdead Accords

The Dead Lands, called Ulyan before the Ruin came, have a history, one as rich and complete as any group of nations on any world. A thousand thousand tales have been acted out on the Obsidian Plain. Tales of conquest and destruction, betrayal and lies, death and resurrection have been written on the blackglass and forgotten. There are few heroes in the history of the Dead Lands, and no characters with anything but corrupt motivations. Evil reigns here, and the things that separate one antagonist from another are

particular varieties of evil. Wickedness is uniform, creating a level ground on which all the combatants may judge themselves against their foes. The hierarchy is easy to assess, and even within the vast range of evil, the participants play within certain rules.

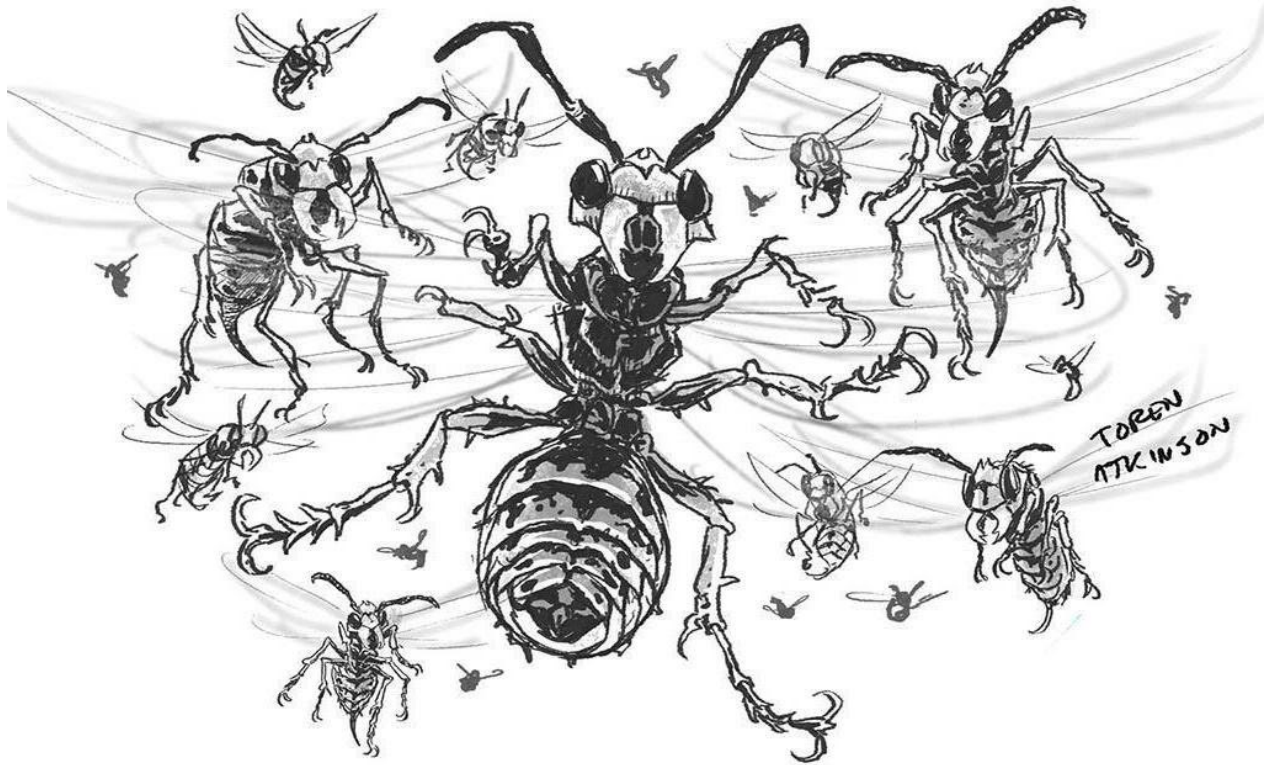
Except, of course, for the bugdead.

The humanoid undead and the bugdead have been at odds since the creation of the Dead Lands. Indeed, during the Green Age the insectoids were already in possession of the southern parts of what was then called Ulyan. Few knew this, however, since the s'thag zagath, the rulers of the insect realms, raised a great wall of ice, known as the Hoarwall, to block any humanoid penetration of their lands. When the Obsidian Flood burst over the land, it overran the Hoarwall, and the s'thag zagath civilization was devastated no less than the humanoid lands of northern Ulyan. The s'thag zagath and their minions were changed in undeath, and their hatred for the humanoids who had unleashed the obsidian was inflamed.

The bugdead, led by the s'thag zagath, swarmed north about a King's Age after the Black Flood. They overran Shumash and Olnak among other places. The city of Nagarvos', now renamed The City of a Thousand Dead, was besieged. Bugdead legions swarmed against the obsidian walls but were destroyed by a powerful artifact called the *Sunflash*. Their massive losses at The City of a Thousand Dead, and the desperate defense of the humanoids, stemmed the bugdead assault, forcing them back south, though they did keep large tracts of the formerly-humanoid lands, including the cities of Shumash and Olnak.

The humanoid undead, though united to face the bugdead threat, soon broke apart into squabbling factions and kingdoms, fighting among themselves. Renewed bugdead attacks destroyed several of the southernmost of these, consuming the humanoid undead and absorbing their territories into the Buglands. It was in the wake of one such bugdead conquest, while the victorious bugdead were still devouring the unliving but screaming humanoid undead, that the warlord Harkor proposed the Bugdead Accords.

Harkor, the leader of the kingdom of the same name, was first to suggest a treaty among the humanoid undead, formalizing their universal commitment to fight together to isolate the bugdead in the southern lands. At first the other rulers met his proposals with skepticism and mockery, and sent his messengers back to Harkor in obsidian jars or, more often, not at all. Nevertheless, his persistence paid off, and after several shattering defeats by the bugdead hordes, the



Kingdoms of Gretch and Deshentu chimed in. Within a King's Age, terms of an agreement were en route between the capitals of the northern nations and given another King's Age all the warlords had signed, one by one. The warlords have never assembled as a single group.

The Bugdead Accords, originally drafted in Harkor then amended, edited, changed, substituted, and maligned beyond recognition, can be boiled down to their four original tenets:

- We the signatory nations agree to meet and engage all bugdead invaders. The armies of each member of these Accords are allowed free and unhindered travel through other signatory nations when necessary to meet the foe.
- No member nation shall invade the south, lest the insects raise an overwhelming horde that could destroy us all. The southern Obsidian Plain is herewith ceded to the bugdead by this treaty.
- No member nation will employ bugdead as servants or soldiers, nor will we permit the raising of bugdead within our borders.
- The kingdoms of the borderlands are entitled to tithes from those of us farther north to help them, for they are the first line of defense against the insects.

The signed Bugdead Accords document is kept in the vaults of Harkor's palace, carved on a block of obsidian and scorched, chiseled, or scratched with the marks of the major warlords of all the humanoid undead realms.

Of course, every northern warlord has broken every article of the treaty repeatedly. That's what keeps the warlords attentive. Armies have marched under the banner of the Accords only to turn on the host kingdom. Most member nations use the bugdead as an excuse to plunder their neighbors whenever they think they can get away with it, and the poorer border states raid into the southern bugdead lands whenever profit is on the wind. A tithe has never been freely paid to the borderlands without some separate deal or occasional outright warfare. Gretch himself signed the Accords, it is said, in the presence of his scarlet warden bodyguards. Treaties in the Dead Lands aren't worth the obsidian they're chiseled into.

Beyond the Accords, however, there is an unmistakable hatred of bugdead in the northern kingdoms. Their crazed, unpredictable nature marks them as dangerous undesirables. In smaller-scale situations, humanoid undead tend to set their differences aside in the face of animated chitin on the march.

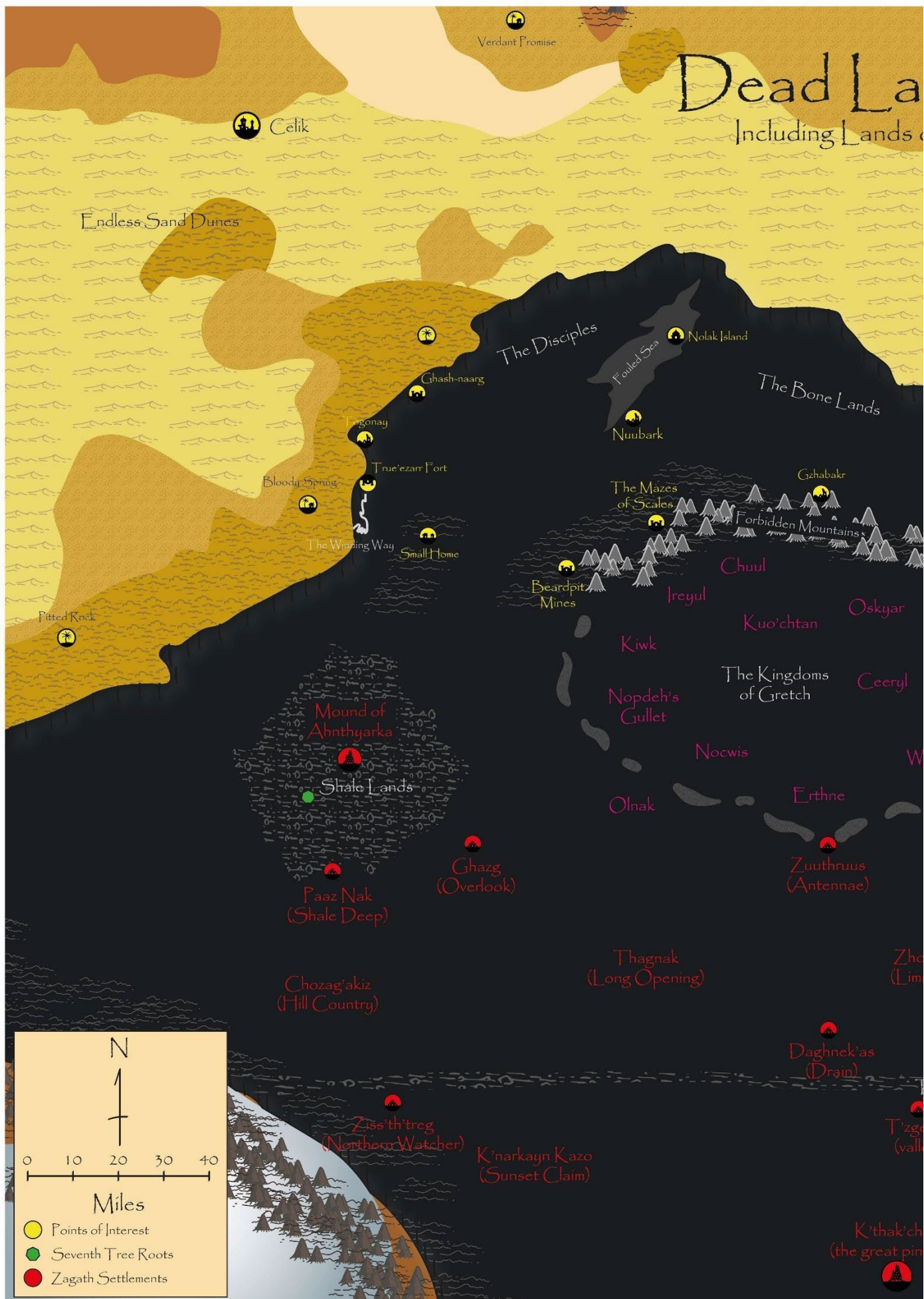
Adventurers traveling in the Dead Lands in the company of thri-kreen, kanks, or other insects, risk double jeopardy. The violent intolerance of anything living is only magnified against insects or those

working with them. No humanoid undead of the Dead Lands will negotiate with living beings who freely mingle with insectoids.



Dead Lands

Including Lands of the



lands of Athas

of the S'thag Zagath



Crimson Monolith

Last Drink

Endless Sand Dunes

Tectuktitlay's Stair

Deshentu

Mines
Deshentaram

Shadowmourn
Kushtan

Big Bubble

Deep Mines

Castle Krujar

City of 1000 Dead

The Desolation

Howling Caverns

Chol

Obsidian Fortress

Harkor

The Crunch

Tarktas

Shansanar

Kank Nests

Shumash

T Forkatch River

Pallid Mere (Sagramog)

Nowaer's Ladder

Elsavos

pkos
tless)

Nokhis Azgbar
(Wide Expanse)

he Hoarwall

ech
y)

K'neetrak
(Frontpost)

Legions of the Claw

ag
nacle)

The Web



Geography of the Dead Lands

Adventuring in the Dead Lands

"Where the dunes give way to the blackglass..."

TRAVEL ON THE OBSIDIAN

Adventuring on the Obsidian Plain is different from other Athasian experiences, and your heroes will want to investigate the phenomenon completely. Without some understanding of it, they will probably die on its surface.

In most places the obsidian is smooth and flat, just as it cooled King's Ages ago. There are gaping scars in some places, as if some enormous monster sought escape from beneath the plates of glass. Many undead here are the remains of extremely ancient dead, having clawed their way through the obsidian by bone or talon. The obsidian is thickest near The City of a Thousand Dead, reaching nearly 500 feet into the earth, growing gradually thinner until it is only a few feet thick at some places along the extreme edge, where it splashed up against the cliffs. Beneath the glass are sand and stone and occasional remnants of the environment of Ulyan's Time of Magic. Wagons and carts, stone outpost buildings, even walls and fences can be found beneath the obsidian. There is nothing of any real value, however, considering the cost and difficulty of retrieving it from the grip of the blackglass.

Chipping through the obsidian is easy with metal tools. Using appropriate tools, such as picks and

shovels, a human hero can easily chip through 1 cubic yard of obsidian in an hour, and a mul, a half-giant, or focused dwarf can achieve a much higher rate. Chitin and bone are of roughly the same hardness as the glass and make poor digging tools. A character with sufficient ranks in the appropriate [Craft skill](#) can fashion chipped obsidian into tools or even weapons.

COMMON HAZARDS

The Black Basin is as barren of water as any wasteland on Athas, more so, considering there are no native plants or animals hoarding water for survival. The glass reflects heat more intensely than any sandy wastes or rocky badlands, so a character's water intake must increase by 50% to avoid dehydration.

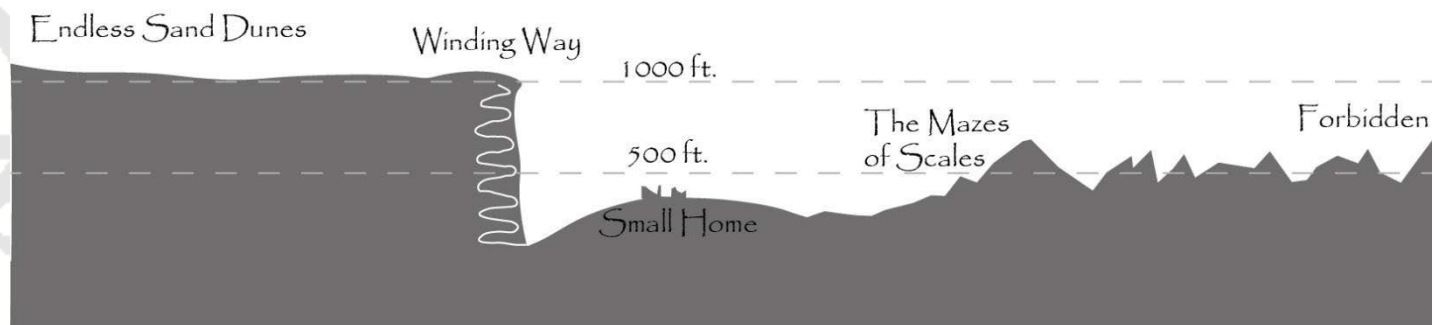
Then too, the surface of the glass under the daytime sun climbs to scorching temperatures. Flesh exposed to these extremes, like feet in soleless shoes, burns at the rate of [1d3](#) points of damage per [round](#). Characters or creatures falling on the broken obsidian, as a result of combat or clumsiness, have a 25% chance of taking [1d4](#) points of damage from the jagged edges.

Tracking on the obsidian is either virtually impossible or ridiculously easy. Creatures that travel on soft feet, such as unarmored humanoids and most mammals, pass without leaving a discernible trace; a tracker attempting to follow such an individual or group receives a -10 penalty to his tracking roll. Creatures that travel on claw or bone, such as skeletons, large insects, and humanoids with special footwear, have exactly the opposite effect; a tracker receives a +3 bonus to track these creatures across the glass, following the scratches made by their passage.

The obsidian surface of the Black Plain is unyielding. Characters sleeping on the blackglass do so uncomfortably. Unless a character has some means

Dead Lands Topography

(Features lined up to match)



to make his sleeping conditions more comfortable, he will wake up **fatigued** (-2 **Str**, -2 **Dex**, can't charge or run).

DEAD LANDS WEATHER

The deep trench of the obsidian planes has a tendency to develop strong wind currents the likes of which are only seen on the deepest areas of the Sea of Silt. These do not mix well with the stray broken fragments of obsidian lying around. On any given day there is a 5% chance of a glass storm (see below).

Otherwise, in any given hour, there is a 50% of there being a 10-40 mph wind speed. For each 10' off the ground any flyers go above 20', this wind speed increases by 5 mph. The exception to this will be the Web, where the webs have essentially blocked out all weather.

While this isn't necessarily damaging, it does mean any flyers may not be as in control over their direction of travel as they might like.

Glass storms are one of the most dangerous hazards that plague the Black Basin. Glass storms occur all across the Dead Lands when fierce winds whip across the Obsidian Plain carrying shards and chips of obsidian aloft. Fragments of obsidian whirl through the air, lashing anything and anyone that is out in the open. Anyone who is caught exposed during a glass storm takes **4d6 hit points** of damage per round and must make a **DC 18 Fortitude save** or be knocked prone by the force of the wind (as per *windstorm* p. 95 in the *DMG*) taking an additional **2d6 hit points** of damage. A makeshift shelter will reduce the damage to **4d6 hit points** per hour and prevent the need to make the **Fortitude save**. A typical glass storm lasts 1-2 hours. Those who remain within a sturdy

permanent structure during this time take no damage from the storm.

USING MAGIC

Defiling and preserving utilizes the life energy of living plants and animals. The problem with drawing this energy when in the Dead Land is that there is little "life" energy to draw from. With few key exceptions (see the Seventh Tree), everything here is dead.

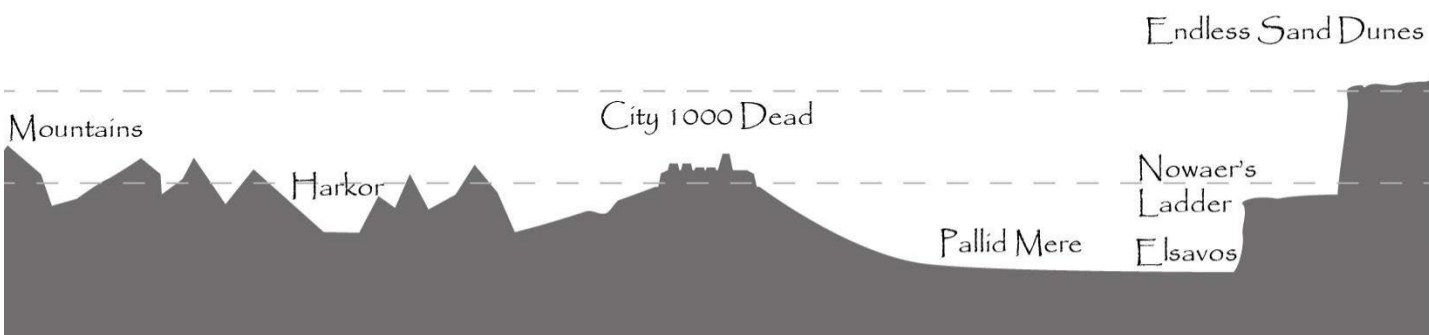
All ground is considered barren for the purposes of defiling and preserving magic. This means most arcane magic will not work here unless the wizard has brought their own source of energy with them. There are several ways in which an enterprising wizard could get around this problem:

- If the DM is allowing the optional rule which allows defiling to take place as the defiler/preserver is learning the spell.
- Storing up energy in obsidian spheres, as per the 3rd level wizard spell *Spell Deferment*.
- Acquiring *Seeds of Life* from the Seventh Tree (*See FoDL Ch10*).
- This does not pose a problem for wizards whose power comes from the Gray (such as *Necromants*), or elemental sources of power such as *Clerics* and *Druids*.

However, *Druids* have another issue to worry about. The spirit of the land (as manifested by "the Great One") is not a friendly entity. *Druids* wishing to cast spells higher than 3rd level may find they have some work convincing the Great One to be cooperative.

cal East-West Side View

(the main map for reference)



WHEN LIVING BEINGS DIE

Let it be said that no death is final in the Dead Land. Every being killed will rise again, sometimes mere seconds after death occurs. But the negative energy still lingering in the obsidian also has an effect on those living things that die here of other causes. Living humanoids or animals which die in the Dead Lands who are touching the obsidian will arise 24 hours later as a zhen or other appropriate type of undead (depending on who or what killed them). Characters reborn in this way will also be bound to the Dead

Lands as a Special Undead Weakness (see Terrors of the Dead Lands).

DEALING WITH THE UNDEAD

The inhabitants of the Black Basin still speak the same languages they did two millennia ago, and they engage in many of the same activities and methods of travel as they did when alive.

See Chapter 1 of *Faces in the Dead Lands* for more information on undead languages and behavior.



Timeline

Historical Periods

Those few historians on Athas who have had enough access to study some of the earliest documents have come to divide history of Athas into a series of discrete ages, each separated by one or more world-changing events. While the names of these ages can vary, the most common are: The Blue Age, the Green Age, The Time of Magic, The Cleansing Wars, The Age of the Sorcerer Kings, and The Age of Heroes.

It is worth noting these ages do not neatly start and stop between King's Ages or even between years. For example, some speak of the Blue Age as beginning in the first world age, while others speak of the Blue Age as covering all time prior to Island's Agitation of the 7th World Age.

The Green Age is even more problematic, since while most astronomers say the Green Age began when the sun turned from blue to yellow, most historians say that the Green Age began as the Rebirth Races began to use psionics. The end of the Green Age creates even more controversy. Rajaan's disciples characterize "The Time of Magic" as beginning in the 84th King's Age, corresponding with some of Rajaan's discoveries that he kept secret for over three thousand years. Arcane magic did not begin to affect events in Athas generally or in the Trembling Plains specifically until the 124th King's Age, where most historians say that the Time of Magic began. At the other extreme, the astronomers treat the Time of Magic as part of the Green Age, extending the Green Age all the way until the sun turned from Yellow to Crimson. The Wanderer himself was careful to avoid taking sides: he describes events that led up to the Time of Magic, without actually stating when the Time of Magic began.

Astronomers in Tyr, Balic, and Kurn characterize the current historical period as the "Age of Heroes," but those that did so in Draji, Nibenay, and Urik disappeared or suffered public execution, so most others continue to speak of these days as "The Age of the Sorcerer-Kings."

Dead Lands Main Events

The following is a summary of all the key historical events mentioned in this book and the companion book *Faces of the Dead Lands*, in chronological order:

8th World's Age (-14,039)

King's Reverence (-13,999): The Sagocracy is founded as a gathering of ancient wisdom to provide guidance to the new Rebirth races.

11th King's Age (-13,808)

Enemy's Contemplation (-13,744): The first documented creation of a meorty (see *Terrors of the Dead Lands*, page 61).

52nd King's Age (-10,651)

Ral's Defiance (-10,640): With a great combined effort of psionics (perhaps the most powerful act of psionic shaping the world has ever seen), the Hoarwall was erected by the S'thag Zagath under direction of their leader Ur-ahnthyak.

Having already been living in Ulyan long before the Rebirth races first settled there, the Zagath did not appreciate the arrival of the new settlers. After countless minor skirmishes and land disputes, the Zagath simply found it easier to move south. They created the Hoarwall to keep out the other races, and there they remained undisturbed for millennia.

83rd King's Age (-8,264)

Priest's Defiance (-8,239): To defend the elven settlement of Elsavos from the persistent lizardmen menace in the Sagramog swamp, Malwaenis is voluntarily transformed into a meorty guardian.

84th King's Age (-8,187)

King's Defiance (-8,169): Rajaan makes the first breakthroughs with arcane defiling and preserving, thereby starting the Time of Magic.

87th King's Age (-7,956)

Ral's Slumber (-7,890): Rajaan conducts experiments in interplanar travel, but soon abandons it after discovering difficulties. He will return to this research again a few millennia later with assistants.

126th King's Age (-4,933)

Mountain's Slumber (-4,936): An ambitious and unscrupulous student of Rajaan named Gretch

first discovers how to manipulate negative energy, becoming the first necromancer.

Guthay's Agitation (-4,877): Gretch's experiments on the living and unliving create enough outcry that he is driven away from the Pristine Tower. He flees to Ulyan with his early creations and sets up his own tower.

134th King's Age (-4,337)

King's Agitation (-4,275): The preserver Pandruj leaves his training at the Pristine Tower just before the start of Rajaat's Preserver Jihad and travels to Nagarvos seeking out and warning the Tetrarchs.

137th King's Age (-4,106)

Mountain's Slumber (-4,089): The great leader of the Zagath, Ur-ahnthyak, passes away. The first Zagath Successor is appointed. This practice of bestowing a customary title has continued to the present age.

144th King's Age (-3,567)

Priest's Contemplation (-3,351): Rajaat empowers his Champions and marches a grand army south to an undisclosed target. While Celik warns Ulyan of the coming army, no other nations offer assistance. Gretch later credits his decades to centuries-long campaigns of spreading fear and hatred of non-human races for this inaction. Rajaat negotiates with the Tetrarchs of Nagarvos, demanding Pandruj be handed over to them among other things. Multiple attempts by the Tetrarchs and envoys from the various nations of Ulyan to appeal to Rajaat's better nature failed. Many of the envoys were humiliated and killed, including the Sagocracy's envoy Knor'morhen.

Upon failure to meet Rajaat's demands, he gives the order of attack. *The Battle of Tforkatch River* becomes the first battle of the Cleansing Wars, with Nagarvos the first prize. Dregoth leads the charge.

After the rout at the river, the Cleansing Army moves further up the Trade Road to the city walls and is bottlenecked by a single point of entry due to Nagarvos' excellent strategic location.

However, Rajaat's army overloads and destroys the Tetrarch's psionic communication gem

ensuring no reports go out nor assistance can be asked for.

Keltis disengages from the main assault to eradicate the lizardfolk of Sagramog and is assisted by the elves of Elsavos.

In Nagarvos, The Defenders hold off the relentless assault for a time while the Tetrarchs and Pandruj's preservers withdraw to the Arkolak temple complex to develop a psionic / magical defense. Before they succeed, the siege is broken.

In a last desperate act, Defender leader G'dranav opens a chasm underneath his dead platoon and his encroaching foes, entrapping them all. As his final living act, he transforms himself into a meorty.

Three days of butchery and rampage in the ruined city of Nagarvos follow. Rumors spread across Ulyan of Nagarvos' fate, but the truth remains a secret.

Rajaat summons his Champions for a final council. They are ordered on cleansing missions to take advantage of the confusion and unpreparedness of the rest of Ulyan.

Tectuktitlay forces his men to construct a Stair in the Northern Cliffs, taking years and costing thousands of lives.

Wind's Vengeance (-3,350): In the still smoldering ruins of Nagarvos, Rajaat orders Qwith to rebuild those parts of the ruins needed to house a magical research group in a compound called the Navel, to continue his research into extraplanar magical energy and travel.

To provide energy for their work, Rajaat and his wizards create seven Trees of Life, the last (and largest) of which was created by Rajaat himself.

160th King's Age (-2,335)

Wind's Fury (-2,265): King's Ages of dimensional research pay off with the discovery of "the Obsidian Demiplane," an unusual section of the Paraelemental Plane of Magma and a tremendous potential source of magical energy. Qwith warns younger researchers of how dangerous a *Gate* to the obsidian regions could become if uncontrolled.

161st King's Age (-2,258)

Ral's Fury (-2,258): A fight over the *Gate* breaks it, creating a leak into the Obsidian Demiplane. The *Gate* explodes, releasing the flow of obsidian that would claim the entirety of Ulyan and the surrounding lands. Thus, the Boiling Ruin begins. Rajaan himself presumes all lost and refocuses all attention on the by now so-called Cleansing Wars.

What happens after the explosion is hard to determine – all factions have a different story. However, the *Gate* is blocked by an unknown entity a short time after it opens, preventing the flood from covering the entire continent, including the Tablelands. The Zagath Hoarwall has melted down.

Silt's Contemplation (-2,250): The obsidian finally settles and cools.

Enemy's Vengeance (-2,249): The first zhen (see *Terrors of the Dead Lands*, page 75) claw their way out of the obsidian, discovering a barren land of blackglass. Nearly all slain in the Boiling Ruin rose as undead, but not all as zhen. Factions start rebuilding. Nagarvos and the other Dead Lord's kingdoms are rebuilt out of obsidian.

The undead sorcerers discover their defiling magic no longer works for them as there is no vegetation left after the Boiling Ruin. They start researching other sources of power. The Zagath Successor holds the Great Mourning over the loss of so many of its people. They are assaulted by the newly risen undead Zagath, resulting in a massacre which nearly wipes out their entire race.

Friend's Reverence (-2,246): Gretch's Kingdoms founded.

Silt's Agitation (-2,217): Gretch, Pandruj, and the Navel scholars finish teaching greycasting to the former defilers of the Dead Lands, restoring their arcane power. Shortly after, political intrigue and

infighting between the kingdoms begins in earnest.

162nd King's Age (-2,181)

Wind's Defiance (-2,177): Not long after discovering they can control the bugdead swarms, the mindless hordes of undead insects, the Zagath declare their Vengeance on the humanoid undead and their Dead Lords whom they hold responsible for the Boiling Ruin.

Olnak and Shumash are the first to be overrun and razed, followed by most of Gretch's Kingdoms. The onslaught only stops when the now named City of 1,000 Dead triggers the *Sunflash* for the first time, killing thousands of bugdead and humanoid soldiers.

From Enemy's Vengeance (-2,172) to Enemy's

Contemplation (-2,117): Over the next years, the Zagath steadily expand north above the former Hoarwall line, founding several satrapies in the open plains and foothills south of Gretch's Kingdoms.

164th King's Age (-2,027)

Desert's Vengeance (-2,025): The Champions rebel and manage to imprison Rajaan. Borys becomes the Dragon and starts his century-long rampage, while the remaining Champions (now Sorcerer-Kings and Queens) hide in their city-states.

Friend's Fury (-1,971): Dregoth of Giustenal is slain and subsequently raised into unlife by his templar Mon Adderath. New Giustenal is created.

181st King's Age (-718)

From Enemy's Agitation (-698) to Enemy's

Reverence (-643): In an effort to control the immense negative energy which now infuses the obsidian and has corrupted its Spirit of the Land, a team of Navel researchers (who now called themselves "The Descendants of the Chosen") build the *Heart of Negchar* and install it in the catacombs beneath the City of 1,000 Dead.

After finishing their shared project, Ac'Nac'Wo attempts and fails her assassination attempt on Negchar, forcing him into exile. This fractures the

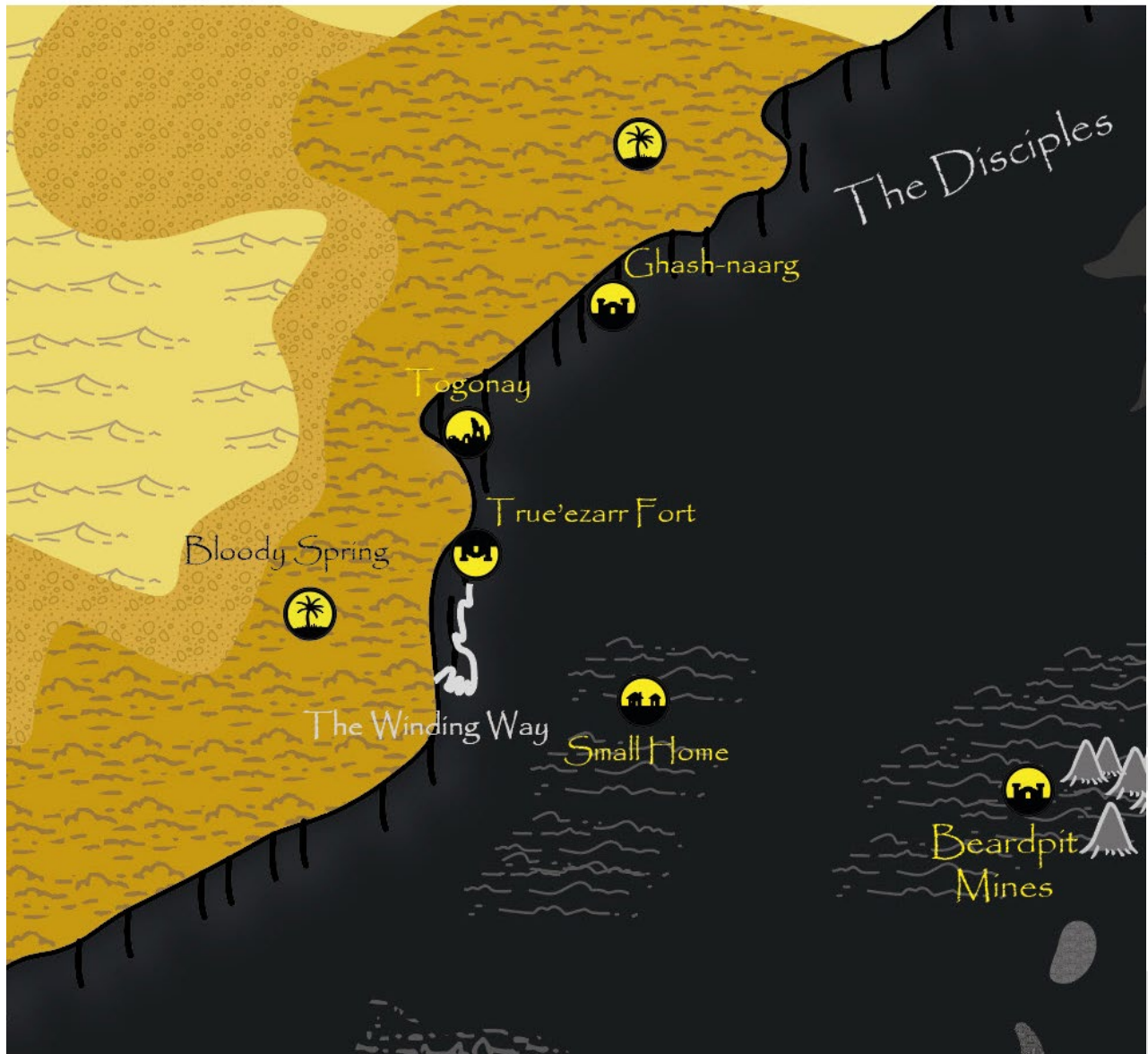
Descendants into factions, who have been at war ever since.

190th King's Age (-25, Current Age)

Friend's Agitation (Free Year 10): Dregoth sends an emissary to the Dead Lands (as per the Emissary Adventure). The Dead Lords discover there are still living creatures in the Tablelands.



The Northwestern Cliffs





Chapter 2 ~ Northwest Cliffs

The Cliffs of the Northwest Rim

The cliffs that surround the Black Basin are very much a part of the region, and this is particularly true of the cliffs to the north-northwest. Here is where the ancient trade road came south from the ruins of Celik and passed down the famous Winding Way, the route taken by Rajaat and his Champions when they began their fateful Wars, to the floor of Ulyan. Much remains of the Time of Magic, and of the Wars in this area, which stretches from the cliff-borders of the Disciples south to west of Small Home, though few visit it.

Approaching the cliffs through the Endless Sand Dunes, travelers possibly encounter three oases, where the odd guide could be found that for the right price would take a traveler to the edge of the cliffs.

The Winding Way

Once, when Ulyan was a bustling and prosperous, if somewhat isolated, region, a great trade road ran from east to west, across its more temperate northern reaches. The road began in the east, near the elf-lands of Elsavos, and thence ran west, past the mighty metropolis of Nagarvos' and south of the hills where Arludas lay, to Small Home. From Small Home, the road traced its route to the base of the cliffs, where it mounted the cliffs in a winding switchbacking spiral, up to Tru'ezarr Fort and thence to Celik. This spiral road was known as the Winding Way.

The Winding Way's origins are lost to history, though it certainly required great priestly or psionic power to create such a monument. The roadbed itself is wide enough for two mekillots abreast, and the slope is gentle and gradual enough for foot or wagon traffic

to proceed up or down comfortably. Some sections, though not all, have low ramparts on the dropoff side (many of these stone railings were destroyed by the impact of the Obsidian Wave), and there are numerous points where the road cuts through rock outcroppings in short tunnels. Designed as it was for caravans, there are a dozen or more points where a wagon-driver could pull over to rest his team or fix tangled or broken tack. About half of these are on the overlook side, while the others are delved into the cliff-face. Most of the cave rest stops were fitted with catch basins for water, and a few had nooks where vendors sold food and drink.

Relatively little damage was done to the Winding Way during Uyness's ascent, since the Champion was under explicit orders to capture it intact (for the use of Champions following after her) and the defending ogres, of Tru'ezarr Fort, were bound to protect, not destroy it. Significantly more damage was done by the Obsidian Wave – it did much more than merely smash and wash away some of the more exposed stone railings. Nearly all the cave rest stops were sealed by the slapping of the liquid obsidian, and those which lie below the current surface level are partially or completely flooded with obsidian. The physical force of the wave's impact also broke loose some of the roadbed, and collapsed some of the arches and tunnels through which the road winds. Nonetheless, the road remains usable, having survived remarkably well.

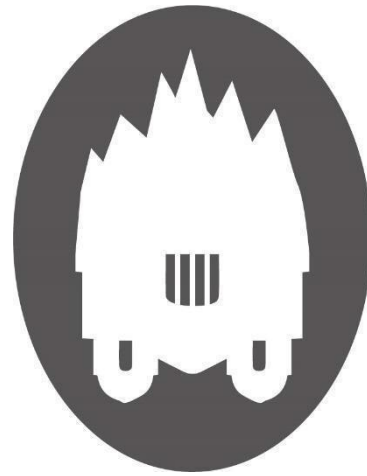
The Winding Way remains a viable means of ascending or descending the cliffs of Ulyan, though travel time in either direction has increased from one day (the time in the road's Time of Magic heyday) to two or three, due to the damage caused by the obsidian. Not only are there many areas where sheer drop-offs plunge the unwary from the road's edge hundreds of feet down to the unforgiving blackglass glistening below, but there are places where globs of cooled obsidian create bumps and dips in what was once a nearly perfectly smooth road surface. The surface of the roadbed is itself completely coated with a thin sheet of obsidian as well, making it extremely slick and treacherous.

But the most dangerous physical feature of the Winding Way is the collapsed arches and tunnels. There are perhaps two dozen points in the road's switchbacks and spirals that the entire road runs under arches or even tunnels cut through rocky outcroppings. About half of these have fully or partially collapsed, leaving the roadbed, at best, littered with shattered rock or, worse, completely choked and blocked by broken stone and obsidian shards. The worst places are where the roadbed was

completely swept away in the rockslides, leaving travelers with the unenviable task of bridging gaps over the abyss.

In addition to these physical dangers, there are dangers from the undead as well, though these are few when compared with the terrors of the Obsidian Plain below. Lone undead from the Dead Lands occasionally use the lower reaches of the Winding Way as a lair, while various undead vermin infest the upper tunnels. The most dangerous denizen of the Winding Way resides at the top road. King's Ages ago, an earth drake wandered by and discovered the Winding Way. It made a lair out of a tunnel near the top of the road. When the creature died the negative energies of the Obsidian Plain reanimated it as a thinking zombie. Since that time, the undead earth drake (*FoDL Ch2*) prevents almost anything from descending down the Winding Way from the Tablelands.

Tru'ezarr Fort



Below the ruined entrances to Toganay, buried deep within the long-hardened blackglass, lies Tru'ezarr Fort. Once a proud Green Age fortress, guarding the top terminus of the Winding Way, Tru'ezarr is now sunken into the obsidian, a place of undead horror that never sees the crimson sun. In the Time of Magic, Tru'ezarr Fort was manned by a regiment of ogre warriors. Specialty troops, such as elven scouts and orcish sutlers, were also present, but far fewer in numbers. The troops were charged with preventing brigandage and facilitating the passage of trade caravans to and from Ulyan.

The guard complement was reinforced when Rajaat's army marched down the Winding Way, but

the leaders of Celik saw no need to provoke a confrontation with Rajaat and his Champions, so they let his forces pass. Indeed, their trade charter expressly forbade them from using Tru'ezarr to influence the politics of the cities of Ulyan, and the elders of Celik found this a convenient excuse to avoid challenging Rajaat's power. Further reinforcements were sent to the fort during the siege of Nagavos', as Celik's rulers could not reliably scry events, and they were a conservative lot who feared the worst.

When the orc refugees fleeing Ghash-naarg came up the Winding Way, the ogres interrogated them for information. As Uyness's army approached, the ogres deployed down the Winding Way, and fought a stubborn rearguard action back up the spiral as the human troops surged forward. It was possible for the ogres to have damaged or even destroyed the Winding Way, but such an act was not in the purview of the fort's commander, and he was unable to contact Celik for instructions. The ogres fought bravely, but finally the humans topped the road and assaulted Tru'ezarr Fort itself, cleansing it.

Uyness did not linger at the battered fort, but left a defiler warlord named Ram-azah in command of a detachment there while she hastened ahead to strike Celik before its defenses could be completed. Ram-azah welcomed Dregoth's army as they came next up the Winding Way, then turned his attention to rebuilding the fort – Uyness had made clear her intention of returning to Ulyan to plunder its remaining riches, once she achieved her cleansing task, and to do that she needed to dominate the main road into and out of the region.

Much of Tru'ezarr had been demolished by the powerful magicks and psionics used in the final assault, but Ram-azah had a solution – he took the corpses of the fallen ogres and used these to shore up the masonry, making mortar of their blood and setting their leering skulls to peer eternally out of the walls between the stones. Ram-azah grew old in the long years of the Cleansing Wars, and Uyness did not return. The defiler prolonged his life using the arts he knew, determined to remain on duty until his mistress returned to give him the reward he was due for faithful service.

Ram-azah was still in command of troops several generations removed from his original garrison, when the Obsidian Wave burst out of the east. The defiler didn't see it coming – he was deep in research in a lab under the fort – but he couldn't miss the effects. The Black Tide struck the cliffs with incredible force, casting up dollops of molten obsidian over the edge of the cliffs. Tru'ezarr Fort rocked, as the ground below it

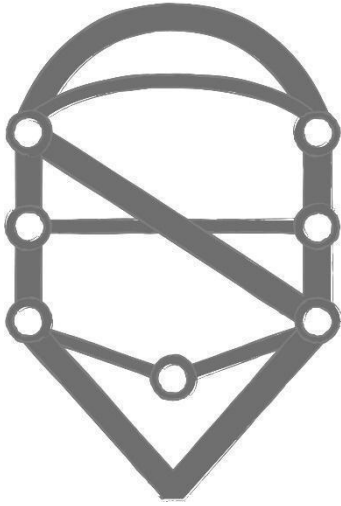
shuddered and cracked, from the force of the obsidian's impact, and shook again as obsidian "raindrops" the size of temples fell from the sky.

The fort was built on the very edge of the cliffs, overlooking the top of the Winding Way and the plains of Ulyan beyond; as the obsidian sea receded, the stone fort shifted dangerously toward the precipice. Ram-azah emerged from his chambers raging, then amazed, at what had happened. He hastened out to collect samples of the raw molten obsidian, and was examining them in the fort when the obsidian returned, sloshing back against the northwestern cliffs.

The force of the wave was less this time, and the obsidian was already starting to cool, but the rock was already cracked and broken – Tru'ezarr Fort's foundations slipped, and the rock slab on which it was built slipped over into the abyss of boiling obsidian. Troops tumbled from the walls as the fort toppled, end over end, into the seething steaming blackglass. No one survived the impact, or immersion in the molten glass.

Because of the tumbling motion of Tru'ezarr's fall, the fort took a substantial pocket of air with it when it sank into the obsidian. The glass was already beginning to cool, and within hours Tru'ezarr Fort was suspended upside-down in its very own bubble-shaped tomb halfway between the old surface of Ulyan's plains and the new surface atop the blackglass. It didn't take much longer for the obsidian's more pernicious effects to reveal themselves. Ram-azah (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 10/Necromant 6; FoDL Ch2*) returned to unlife as a zhen, as did several of his lieutenants (*Male Human Zhen Fighter 12; FoDL Ch2*). Others emerged back from death as fallen or namech. But the walls of the fort also were raised to unlife – the ogres whose bodies and blood had been mixed into the stonework became Athasian wraiths, able to reach out and torment their human foes (*FoDL Ch2*).

Toganay



Here in the cliff-face, north of the Winding Way, dwarves mined a thin vein of naturally-occurring electrum. They established their mines in the late Green Age, after a dwarven gem-trader named Bangad first detected the lode. He brought several families to join him and soon established the colony of Toganay. The dwarves, with their delvings high in the cliff face, were immune from the petty wars and raids of orcs and others in Ulyan below. They used secret tunnels and hidden pulley-operated baskets to enter and exit their colony, trading the precious electrum for foodstuffs from the few traders whom they permitted to operate in their demesnes.

The dwarves lived in tunnels above the mines, which ran deep inside the cliff. Their homes often included windows, and even balconies, looking east from the cliff-face. The dwarves at first ignored the passage of the Champions' mighty armies down the nearby Winding Way – had not their privileged position halfway up the cliffs made them safe from all wars? They were less sanguine when the Champions' armies returned westwards, laden with the skulls and treasures of the great city Nagarovs', and panic set in when the army of Uyness diverted north, off the trade road, and sacked Ghash-naarg.

The dwarves had no love for the orcs, nor did they try to assist them, but they took the opportunity to urgently construct defenses for their colony. When the Dwarf-Butcher's army came, the warriors of Toganay, sturdy miners all, were ready to face the onslaught. Led by their priests of Earth, the dwarves stood arrayed at their tunnel-entrances, where they held off the Champion's troops for more than a week. During

the fighting, other dwarven clerics operated within the colony, taking the non-combatant women and children far into the mines and placing them in suspended animation.

Led by Egendo, the humans finally broke through the dwarven troops, scaling the cliffs and conquering the empty tunnels where the dwarves had lived. Egendo realized that the mines below were where the dwarves had hidden – he had his defilers flood the mines with deadly poisonous gas, guaranteeing death to those below. Long after Egendo and his army had gone, and the deadly gas had dissipated, the dwarves placed in suspended animation awoke.

For generations the dwarf survivors lived in secret, using the old basket-pulleys and hidden caverns to furtively gather roots and grass-shoots on the plains, adding these to the meager diet of mushrooms they could grow inside. A cadre of dwarven banshees (*Male and Female Dwarven Banshee Fighters 10; FoDL Ch2*), raised to undeath after the sack of Toganay protected them, savagely hunting any humans who ventured too close to the cliffs near the struggling colony. However, the dwarven banshees could not protect the pitiful survivors when the Obsidian Wave came, in silent splendor, from the east.

The splash of the Black Tide against the cliff face left a thin coating of obsidian sealing all the entrances to the dwarven colony. The banshees struggled to break through it, so their living wards could get air, but the molten obsidian surged back, and another, thicker, coat of blackglass defeated their efforts. All the living dwarves perished of asphyxiation, and nearly all of them rose into undeath as zhen.

Toganay, today, is a grim ruin, a parody of its former mining glory. The entrances are about one-third of the way up the cliffs, sealed with splash-cooled obsidian and virtually impossible to see on casual observation. Behind the curtains of obsidian, like shaded glass, lie six levels of living quarters, from which descend several vertical shafts that connect to the electrum mines. The mines are dark and dank, lacking even the slight ventilation enjoyed by the tunnels above. The mines were never rich, but they are not played out either – the undead have no interest in precious metals, and have left the workings untouched since the Wars.

The living areas of Toganay are ruled by the zhen matriarch Lunikra Brokennose (*Female Dwarf Zhen Sun Cleric 24; FoDL Ch2*), who governed the colony's miserable survivors in the years after the cleansing. At her beck and call is the cadre of dwarven banshees, enforcing her will upon the recalcitrant zhen undead that make up the colony's population. Living away from the others, in the chambers that once formed his

tomb and shrine, is Bangad the Founder (*Male Dwarf Zhen Fighter 27; FoDL Ch2*). Bangad was also raised as a zhen, but he is alone, uninterested in rulership or anything else. What motives he may have are unknown, even to Lunikra.

The Orc-Holds of Ghash-Naarg



In the Green Age, the cliffs in this region were settled by orcish tribes migrating south from the Yellow Hills region near Walis. They prospered, often raiding the rich farmlands that once lay in northernmost Ulyan, and the cliffside became honeycombed with their caves. Orcs from Ghash-naarg often “moved up” by emigrating to cities such as Nagarvos’ or Olnak, seeking skills not available in their own more primitive society.

All that changed when the Champions came marching down the Winding Way. The orcs of Ghash-naarg hid in their caves, overawed by the immensity of the Champions’ armies. The boldest went out to join the mighty legions, and vanished. Most of the orcs simply hunkered down, watching to see what would happen. Their clan-chiefs sent spies to watch the armies. The spies of the raiding tribes were better than most – the orcs of Ghash-naarg knew of the cleansing massacres in Nagarvos’ before any other people of western Ulyan.

They also knew that the Winding Way alone could support the return march of such grand armies as those of the Champions, and that surely such savage forces would not hesitate to raid and plunder them as they returned west. Desperately, the orcs launched an orgy of destruction in northwestern Ulyan, sacking every target within reach in order to secure as much food and supplies as possible. Then, as the armies approached, they withdrew into their caves and waited.

But the orcs did not defend their tunnels. Their spies reported that the gnomes of Arludas had been exterminated, and that other armies were massacring nonhumans wherever they found them. The clan-chiefs decided on discretion, and sent as much of the orcish population over the cliffs as they could, hoping

they would reach Celik in time. Celik was in that day a city with many orcs in the population, and refuge there seemed possible. The evacuation proceeded quickly, but it was far from complete when Uyness’s army reached Ghash-naarg.

All the defenses had been disrupted by the sudden change of plans in favor of escape, and many of the warriors had already departed for the trek to Celik – Ghash-naarg didn’t stand a chance. The caves were overrun in two days, with human soldiers pursuing the orcs into every chamber and tunnel. The last of the clan-chiefs, Shabnas, fought heroically, perishing at last surrounded by the bodies of a dozen human heroes. Uyness marched on, determined to mount the Winding Way on schedule – she had more orcs to kill up the cliffs in Celik.

The caves of Ghash-naarg remained undisturbed for generations thereafter, at least by the living. Shabnas the Last Chief (*Male Orc Fallen Wilder 12 / Fighter 14; FoDL Ch2*) rose into undeath as a fallen, as many of his human foes also became undead. Shabnas was a mighty mindbender and warrior, however, and he was able to assert dominance over his former enemies. The humans, once bodyguards of Uyness, (*Chosen of Shabnas - Male Human Fallen Egoist 7 / Fighter 11; FoDL Ch2*) despise their servitude to a fallen nonhuman leader, but they are not powerful enough to break free.

Ghash-naarg was rebuilt by order of Shabnas, paying particular attention to the cave-entrances. Shabnas feared a return of the Champions, since his tunnels had not been plundered during the cleansing; in fact, his defenses came into play against a far stronger adversary: the Black Tide. The molten obsidian struck the cliffs of Ulyan and recoiled, leaving a thick “splash” of obsidian spattered behind it. The cave-entrances of Ghash-naarg, mostly blocked by debris and Shabnas’s walls, were effectively sealed by the cooling obsidian at the base of the cliff – very little flooding occurred.

Something else occurred, however – the Obsidian Wave raised into undeath many of those who had fallen in the cleansing of Ghash-naarg, both human and orc alike. For more than a King’s Age, Shabnas struggled to reassert his mastery of the tunnels. There remain at present two clan-chiefs, Kigdifi (*Female Orc Fallen Fighter 15; FoDL Ch2*) and Riig-bo’ak (*Male Half-Orc Zhen Barbarian 17; FoDL Ch2*) resurrected by the obsidian, who reject Shabnas’s rule and occupy small sections of the inner caves. The bulk of the undead, orcs and humans are subject to Shabnas and occupy the main portions of the caves. All three groups have been busy digging new tunnels through the cliffs, trying to penetrate the areas controlled by the others.

Small Home

On the edge of the most desolate stretch of desert of Athas lies a jagged cliff overlooking the northwestern frontier of the Dead Lands. The blasting winds whip sandstorms and dunes down past the Winding Way onto the blackglass, and these can, at times, stretch for miles beyond the obsidian rim. Farther west, the wastelands are uninhabited, creating an enormous barrier between the Dead Lands and the Kreen Empire. The land there was desolate and remote even before the time of the Shining Tide, though the trade road ran south from Celik through the region.

At the point where the road met the cliffs, stood a mighty fortress, perched on the very lip of the cliffs. Fort Tru'ezarr guarded the upper terminus of the Winding Way, an ancient road down the cliffs to the green hills of Ulyan below. The Winding Way was washed over with obsidian in the Black Tide, and Fort True'zarr toppled into the liquid obsidian. Despite its flash of molten obsidian, however, the Winding Way survived the Disaster.

From the new obsidian-flooded lower terminus of the Winding Way, the trade road no longer exists. The obsidian in this region is thin, in some places no more than a dozen feet thick. One of the places where the obsidian is thinnest is Small Home.

The creatures who dwelt in the region, known in Ulyan and the Dead Lands alike as Small Home, were unlike any alive now on Athas. Pixies and sprites, small in size but great in the lore of living plants and trees, lived in peace with the world for long ages. The pixies, sprites, and their ilk lived in a series of stone villages, on a ridge they called Small Home, surrounded by a thick forest. Such growth was quite unusual in the cool lands of Ulyan, but the small folk were wise in the ways of plants, and their druids tended the trees with care.

Perhaps today, only a native Gulgan could fully comprehend the communion in which the small folk lived with their trees. The pixies and sprites ate, of course, to survive, but their agriculture was more of a gathering than farming, collecting fruits, mushrooms, insects, and the like from among the roots and boughs of the trees. Many of the most ancient trees were King's Ages upon King's Ages old, and these the small folk called the god-trees.

The small folk were not warriors, but they had little wealth, and so were rarely the objects of raids and invasions. The trees themselves were so massive, and imbued with such potent druidic magic, that foes could harm them little, if at all. Instead, roused by the

druidic powers of the pixies and sprites, and augmented by the small folk themselves, striking from ambush with poisoned darts or leading enemies into concealed traps, the trees became a deadly maze into which foes entered at their peril.

More often, travelers passing between the Winding Way and Arludas would stop within sight of the trees and trade there. The small folk left fruits and the like in small shelters there, expecting travelers who took some to leave something of value in exchange – those who failed to so rarely journeyed far enough to escape the vengeful wrath of the secretive small folk, who would pursue thieves by night and exact their price by theft or murder, in the name of the trees, of course.

When the armies of the Champions marched down the Winding Way and eastwards to the grand bivouac at the Gray Tower, the small folk remained hidden in their green eaves. The armies did not molest them, being at that time under strict orders, lest they raise all of Ulyan against them. Once the army was away east, the sprites and pixies resumed their lives as they always had – they existed on the margins of the great events of the day and expected to continue to be left alone.

All that changed when Wyan of Bodach, Pixie Blight, came back westwards with his army, their appetite for blood whetted by the siege and sack of Nagarvos'. Wyan's army did not blunder into the forest of the god-trees, to be hunted by pixies and sprites, but instead blasted through them, defiling a wide swathe right through the forest. Then, his troops marched in among the small folks' villages, killing and burning.

The small folk fought furiously against Wyan's attack. They lost all fear when the first god-tree was felled, and their resistance to Wyan's troops was fanatical and, indeed, suicidal. Wyan took heavy casualties in the villages, and some of his units were driven back, retreating into the forest eaves whence they did not return. Wyan once again pushed his defilers to the fore, however, and with their firepower providing cover for the infantry, the small folk were beaten back and killed. The last surviving small folk fled into the remaining god-trees, until these too were burnt and defiled. Wyan left behind him a landscape of smoking tree trunks and blackened ash, his army marching sullenly to the Winding Way.

In the ensuing Ages, the ridge which had once been Small Home became a place of horror for the surviving humans of Cleansed Ulyan. It was useless for farming or even pasturing, having been so thoroughly defiled, but even lone travelers avoided the area, for the small folk slain by Wyan did not remain quiet in their graves. The stout stone villages remained standing, as Wyan

had not wasted the time to destroy them, and these now housed the hideous undead of the sprites and pixies.

In undeath these cheerful folk became cruel and vicious; betrayed by the world in life, in undeath they sought to revenge themselves upon it. When insufficient victims came to them, the undead took to wandering afield, hunting the living on the plains as they once hunted trespassers among the god-trees. Much of western Ulyan fell under their sway, too dangerous for traders or herders. Gretch observed these undead and the fear they inspired, and perhaps was inspired himself – if such small undead could accomplish so much, think of the achievements

possible for larger numbers of larger, stronger undead!

When the Shining Tide came to Small Home, it killed few, for few alive dwelt in the area. The ridge of Small Home was one of the highest points in western Ulyan, and thus, the obsidian left only a thin sheen of blackglass over the ruins of the small folks' villages and the stark dead trunks of their god-trees. Many of the trees, long since defiled and dead, still stood upright, silent sentinels now coated with shiny blackglass. Others were struck down by the force of the Obsidian Wave, joining other trees felled by Wyan, forming tangles of crisscrossed tree trunks glittering under the crimson sun. The undead Small Homers were unaffected by the Disaster, which, if anything, increased their powers.

The ruins of Small Home are actually just the center of the sphere of influence of the undead in this region, which extends out to the blackglass for as much as 25 to 30 miles in some directions. The inhabitants are known to wander anywhere from the southwestern border of the Lands of the Disciples to the edge of the Forbidden Mountains, and even to the mound-strewn Shale Lands in the southern bugdead kingdoms. They are also the only creatures of the Dead Lands who venture regularly out onto the sandy wastes in the west; there is nothing there to torture or rob, but unlike the other undead on the glass, they have no fear of the cliffs.

The glass is rarely more than a foot thick throughout Small Home, and most structures have either just a papyrus-thin layer of glass coating or, in fact, poke completely out of the glass. No attempts have been made to dig the ruins out of their obsidian coating; the villages are just as they were when the glass cooled, except where the wind-whipped sands have eroded away the exposed stones of the ruins.

The other denizens of the Dead Lands tend to avoid the area of Small Home. The undead there are

powerful and relentless, and are granted a wide area of glass to call their own. The Disciples, in particular, tolerate the Small Home undead. Though they are indifferent to the Disciples' faith, their offenses against the holy obsidian are virtually nonexistent, especially compared with the major works underway in other kingdoms.

Long before travelers discover the ruins of the villages themselves, they walk among the remains of the Small Homers' forest. Massive tree trunks, some more than 10' around, still stand, their tops broken and jagged pointing up at the olive-tinged sky. Scattered at the feet of these giants, the former god-trees, lie many more of their kind, shattered and tumbled in heaps, covered in shimmering blackglass. Nothing of value can be found in this region, though it is possible to find shade and places to shelter, among the fallen and glass-encrusted trees.

Characters approaching the ruins find them desolate and deserted. Whirlwinds of sand and obsidian dust sneak between ruined walls and towers. The streets are narrow and glass covered, including ancient relic wagons and carts buried beneath the glass. The exposed ruins are of ancient granite and sandstone, now polished smooth from centuries of wind and sand. Many structures are broken and accessible; finding rooms long-since vacated and protected from the elements is not difficult. Many of these still hold the rude furnishings of the simple folk that lived here, which, to most modern visitors, seem too small and oddly out of scale. Plates and pots, tables and chairs, doors and windows, all appear to have been designed for children. Was this a village of children? Around the perimeter of the village are the stumps of long-dead trees, covered in a thin layer of glass, along with small outbuildings and more carts left undisturbed through the centuries.

However, no creatures, living or undead, enter the forest or ruins of Small Home unnoticed. The spectral undead pervade the area (*Male and Female Pixie Racked Spirit Telepath 8 and Male and Female Forest Gnome Racked Spirit Druid 6 / Blighted 5; FoDL Ch2*), watching every movement, missing none. They will not discourage entry into the forest or ruins by outsiders. On the contrary, it is upon just such intruders that they thrive and survive.

The undead of Small Home have stashed their loot, accumulated over the King's Ages, in a few spots around the ruined village.

One successful villager stashed his booty in the bottom of a long-dry well. There are 120 sp, 550 cp,



three ruby gems worth 50 Cp each, and a magical **+2 dagger** of fine steel construction. Also, one of the copper pieces is actually a *penny of luck* (FoDL Ch10).

The racked spirits, who are more willing to work together than the solitary spectral creatures, have pooled much of their plunder and cached it beneath the lip of obsidian, just outside of the ruins of the southernmost of the Small Home villages. Amid all sorts of bits of shiny metal mottled with corrosion and rust (buckles, buttons, etc.), there are 750 sp, 1,200 cp, a handful of gems worth 1,430 Cp, and several magical items: a *potion of blur*, a **+2 shield**, a **+3 axe**, and a *ring of animal friendship*.

Beardpit Mines

Buried deep within the blackglass, at the far western tip of the Forbidden Mountains, lie the caverns now most commonly known as the Beardpit Mines.

In the Green Age, they were known as Arludas and were famed across Ulyan as a Mineral-worshipping city of fine craftsmen, populated by gnomes. Carved into shallow caves in the hills, the gnomes' city was a common trading stop on the road between Small Home and Nagarvos'. When the Champions' armies entered Ulyan, they camped at Gretch's Grey Tower, not far from Arludas – despite their declarations that they were only interested in punishing the rulers of Nagarvos', the gnomes feared the intruders, and initially shunned them. The great encampment required food, riding tack, tools, and weapons, though, and Rajaan's sutlers and quartermasters brought valuables to exchange.

Arludas's Whitebeard Fathers (Earth priests and powerful mindbenders) agreed to trade with the newcomers, though none were to be allowed within the city itself. In fact the sutlers were mostly culled from Gallard's army, and were handpicked by that Champion's senior lieutenants as spies. They returned from the gnomish city laden with gu'as mushrooms, mekillot and inix tack, tentage, and arms – and with information on the defenses of Arludas. When Nagarvos' had fallen and the sack was complete, Gallard's army returned due west, to make Arludas the first gnomish city to be cleansed.

The gnomish leaders had watched the events in Nagarvos', as well as their skills and the wards of Rajaan and the Champions allowed, so they were aware that the city had fallen. Ignorant of the massacres which followed, they nonetheless mobilized some troops and increased the guard, knowing that a

victorious army's appetite for blood and plunder is often hard to control. Many gnomish citizens hid their valuables, and Arludas's clerics buried caches of magically-preserved food and water. The bivouac of the vanguard of Gallard's army aroused little suspicion – their commander Ssem-nakru had strict orders to avoid raising the gnomes' suspicions.

A select few of the spy-quartermasters were actually within the outer precincts of Arludas, trading for gu'as mushrooms and other supplies, when Gallard's main army arrived – and marched straight up to the city gates and attacked. The human traders were intended to escape into the city's tunnels and cause sabotage and confusion, but Gallard had not yet perfected this technique and his agents were slaughtered before they could disperse. The general assault was more successful, though the farm terraces the gnomes maintained outside the gates were difficult to breach.

The gnomish troops held longer at the main gates, defending the two great circular towers long after the portal between them had been smashed to flinders. Gallard's troops surged through the gate, driven forward by their master, charging into the narrow gnome-sized tunnels of Arludas. Gallard had foreseen this difficulty, and his mindbenders and defilers were prepared with powers and spells to blast open the smaller passages. The technique worked, though many of the defilers were killed by backblasts that recoiled from the small tunnels.

Gallard's men pursued the gnomes through the enlarged but increasingly unstable passages, using long spears to impale their victims against the walls and leaving them to slowly die. Many gnomes survived the first rush by hiding in small side passages, but their city had not been designed with a portal gate and there was no escape for them. During the next week, Gallard's troops relentlessly hunted them down, blasting larger and more passages. When their long spears proved unwieldy in some of the narrow spaces, they broke the hafts and used the broad blades as assegais. Cave-ins claimed many lives, human and gnomish alike, as tunnels gave way under the stress of magical and psionic combat.

Finally satisfied, after the last gnomish barricade had been stormed and their last cowering children found and butchered, Gallard declared his work finished. The cleansing had taken longer than he'd expected, and he was behind time to mount the Winding Way and assault the Tablelands. He ordered his army's dead abandoned, sealed the gate-tunnels with a great cave-in, and marched west. His troops grumbled, less about abandoning their fallen comrades than about the

lack of time to thoroughly plunder the ruins, but they obeyed.

Arludas was cleansed but not lifeless. The grievously wounded and dying, human and gnomish alike, still sprawled where they'd fallen in forgotten side-tunnels and chambers, and the gnomes' livestock and mushroom rookeries clung to life as well. The dark creatures in the depths of the gnomes' mines waited and watched, and emerged to feed. In the stale air, those bodies not yet eaten or only partially devoured began to stir.

There were originally two groups of undead in ruined Arludas – the gnomes who arose to unlife and their human foes. Many corpses, insufficiently endowed with hate or dedication, remained lifeless, to be gathered by their respective sides and given burial. The gnomish undead, led by the Whitebeards, buried their fallen in niches cut from the passage-walls, in areas of the ruins they controlled. Most of these lay deeper into the city or down in the mines. The gnomish undead also occupied most of the old fungus-chambers, where their walking corpses gradually became the growth medium of the ever-stranger fungi.

The human undead were commanded by Dodam Linass (*Male Human Thinking Zombie Wizard 15 / Necromant 3 / Cleric 3; FoDL Ch2*), their ranking officer. Dodam had been a powerful defiler and apprentice priest in life; he ordered the human fallen to be gathered into the great chamber of the gnomish council and buried there, in a vast cairn surrounded by a ring of their spears. Dodam's urgent desire was to escape the ruins and rejoin his Champion's army. The fissures left by the battle's blasting were far too narrow, however, and the seal on the gates defeated him. For long years he struggled instead to exterminate the gnomish undead, but the forces were too evenly matched for either side to triumph over the other.

The Obsidian Tide changed the dynamics of battle in Arludas forever. Neither Dodam nor the Whitebeards were aware of events beyond the gates of underground Arludas, but the hissing, boiling obsidian that spurting and oozed from the narrow fissures and cracks in walls, ceilings, and floors, demanded their attention. Some passages and chambers were filled with the hardening blackglass, but in most places the obsidian merely formed an uneven coating on the surfaces. It had a far greater effect on the undead.

The seeping obsidian awakened necromantic powers in many of the undead – Dodam in particular was very pleased to suddenly discover that he could cast spells again, without need for capturing and defiling a fungus-cave or a mass of the fungus-infected gnomes. He immediately hastened to the city gates,

and with his new powers he easily broke through the long-decaying seal left by Gallard. A wall of viscous semi-cooled obsidian rolled in, inexorably filling the entry chambers and devastating Dodam's hopes for reunion with his master Gallard.

Dodam had bigger problems. A fissure in the ceiling of the gnomish great hall had allowed an oozing tendril of obsidian to flow down and pool over the cairn of human dead. Dodam's honor guard (*Male Human Athasian Wraith Fighter 12; FoDL Ch2*) fled for their unlives as the corpses within, reborn as zhen, clawed their way out. The zhen possessed powers that few of Dodam's previous underlings could match, and taken together they were too powerful for him to dominate – and they were led by undead who had been among the favored spy-agents of Gallard, undead who had not recognized the normal officer of command even when they were alive. Soon the "Cairn-born" (*Male Human Zhen Telepath 7 / Wizard 5 / Necromant 3 / Cerebremancer 5; FoDL Ch2*) newcomers claimed half of Dodam's domain, and could not be dislodged.

Comparatively little obsidian had seeped into the inner and deeper reaches of the ruins, whence the Whitebeards waged their bitter war against the human undead. Few of the dead gnomes were awakened as zhen, though many gained power. The Whitebeards acted quickly, however, to bring the new undead into their ruling circle. It was not long before the war in the ruins resumed, though now with three factions instead of two. Dodam continues to seek the surface, now ordering bands of his minions to tunnel upwards through the glass, while the Cairn-born also dig upwards, certain of their destiny on the obsidian. Arludas today is caught in a three-way struggle for mastery. The Whitebeards, including both the fungus-bearers and the zhen, still labor to belatedly destroy their human conquerors and reclaim their city. To what ends they desire this, beyond simple revenge, is unknown. Debris and barricades continue to mark the edges of their territory. Dodam is obsessed with tunneling to the surface, so he can find and rejoin Gallard, and despite the persistent attacks of the Whitebeards and the Cairn-born, he has diverted enough laborers to the task that it is now nearly complete. The Cairn-born also desire to reach the surface, though they have no loyalty to Gallard or any living being, imagining that the world has been entirely subsumed by obsidian and that they are the natural lords of this new world of undeath.

Beyond these three groups, Arludas remains haunted by the creatures in the deeps of its mines – cruelly twisted by the obsidian, these creatures (many

undead but some, reputedly, still alive) still emerge periodically to claim an undead (*Creatures of the Deep Mines and Gu'as Mother Host; FoDL Ch2*). Also alive are the fungi, corrupted descendants of the gu'as mushrooms and other edible and medicinal fungi cultivated by the Time of Magic gnomes. Now these fungi live mostly as parasites, on the bodies of the non-zhen gnomish dead. Their dangers to the living are unknown. Hidden and undisturbed all the long years, caches of food and water, preserved by gnomish clerics, and the treasure hoards of the city's people lie waiting.



The Whitebeards

The Whitebeard Fathers were the rulers of Arludas in the Time of Magic. In life they were all older male gnomes, either priests of Earth or mindbenders. They sat in council in the great hall, among the hypostyle columns, debating the issues of the day and consulting the oracles. Most decisions were based on the wisdom received by the Fathers, either through the divining stones (priestly artifacts) or the (psionically empowered) polished scrying mirrors. These oracles failed to warn of the treachery of Gallard, however, and in the conquest and sack of Arludas the Fathers fought bravely but hopelessly.

When the army marched away, and undeath claimed its first harvest, nearly all the Whitebeards were raised as thinking zombies (*Male Gnome Thinking Zombie Psion 15 or Magma Cleric 15; FoDL Ch2*). Many other gnomes of Arludas, equally dedicated and

anguished, were similarly raised, most often as zombies but also vengers and racked spirits (*Male and Female Gnome Thinking Zombie Fighter 9, Male and Female Gnome Venger Fighter 9, Male and Female Gnome Racked Spirits Fighter 9; FoDL Ch2*). Most bore the gruesome chest wounds of being speared and hung on the walls for long slow deaths, though others had been injured in other ways or mutilated after death.

All the resurrected gnomes rallied to the superior power and authority of the raised Whitebeard Fathers, and accepted, with few questions, the Whitebeards' interpretation of the debacle as a test of faith from the Earth powers. They began a crusade to expel the undead of their enemies from the city, imagining that, if they could achieve this task, the Earth powers would accept their faith and sacrifice and restore them to life.

The gnomes had to contend not only with the undead of Gallard's army but also with the creatures of the deep mines, which would stalk and eat them, and the fungus of their own cavern-crops. These fungi changed in the wake of the battle, when air and light were cut off, and they began to seek the corpses of the undead gnomes as a growth medium. Over the King's Ages, the gnomes and the fungi have become inseparable, with the fungi providing the gnomish undead with unusual powers.

The Whitebeards savagely fought against Dodam and his human undead, unable to overcome their enemies but quite able to hold onto their own half of the ruined city. They controlled the inner corridors and chambers, including the fungus-caves and most of the outlets down to the deep mines. The gnomes ventured but rarely into the mines, for the creatures there were often beyond them, but they were prevented by religious conviction from sealing the mines – the Earth powers demanded that they liberate the kingdom, and the kingdom included the mines.

When the Obsidian Tide racked the surface of Ulyan, the seals on Arludas's gate prevented the cave-city from being flooded. However, the many minute cracks and fissures left in the tunnels and the surrounding rock allowed streams of molten obsidian to ooze through into many areas of Arludas. Comparatively few of these flows occurred in the inner caves, where the Whitebeards had directed that the gnomish dead, from the fall of Arludas, be buried. Many of these dead awoke in their wall-niche tombs as zhen, emerging to join the other Whitebeards in the crusade against the human undead. Whether they are as dedicated to this cause as their pre-Obsidian Ruin brethren, or if they have another agenda, remains to be seen.

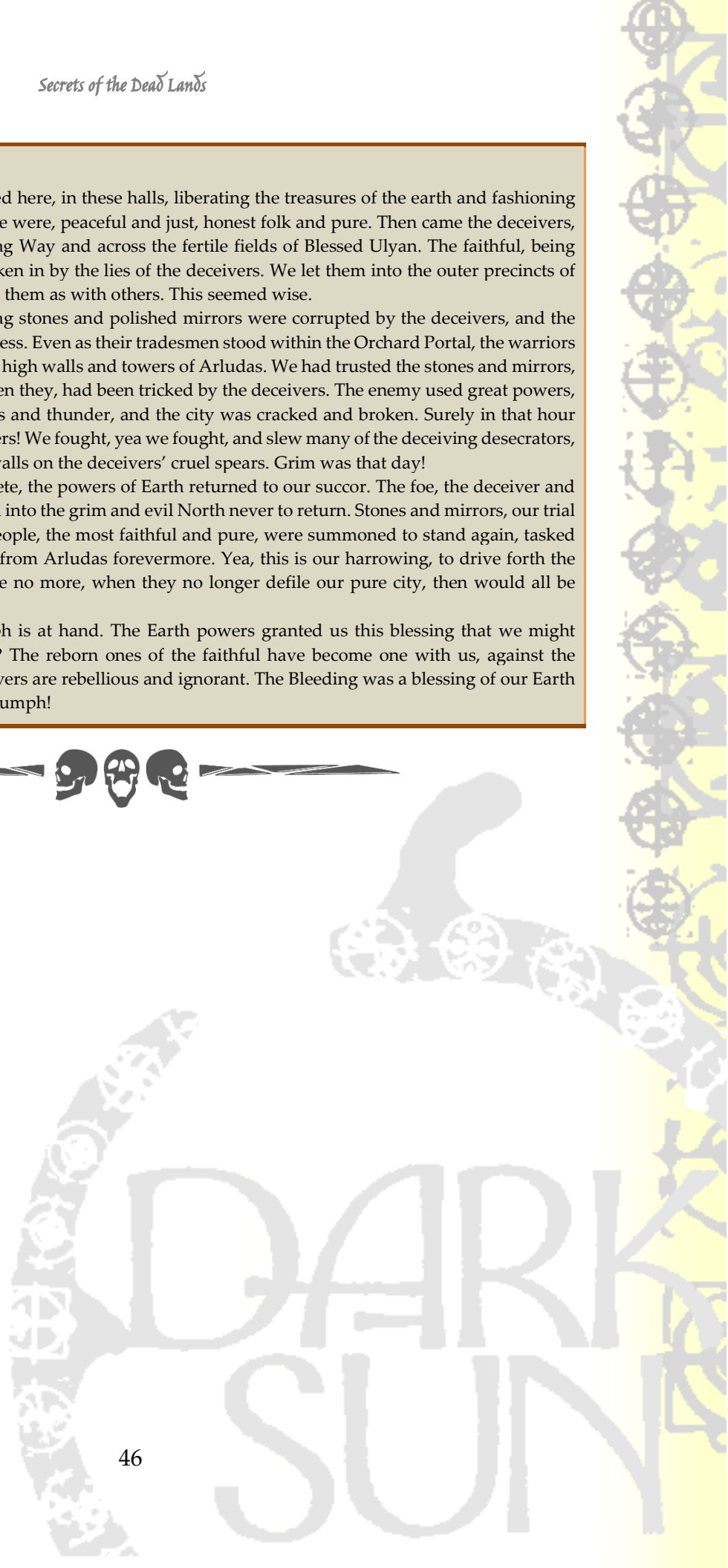
CATECHISM OF THE WHITEBEARDS

Through the long Ages, the faithful lived here, in these halls, liberating the treasures of the earth and fashioning the treasures of the people. The faithful we were, peaceful and just, honest folk and pure. Then came the deceivers, the Army of the North, down the Winding Way and across the fertile fields of Blessed Ulyan. The faithful, being pure in heart and without deceit, were taken in by the lies of the deceivers. We let them into the outer precincts of our great city of Arludas, and traded with them as with others. This seemed wise.

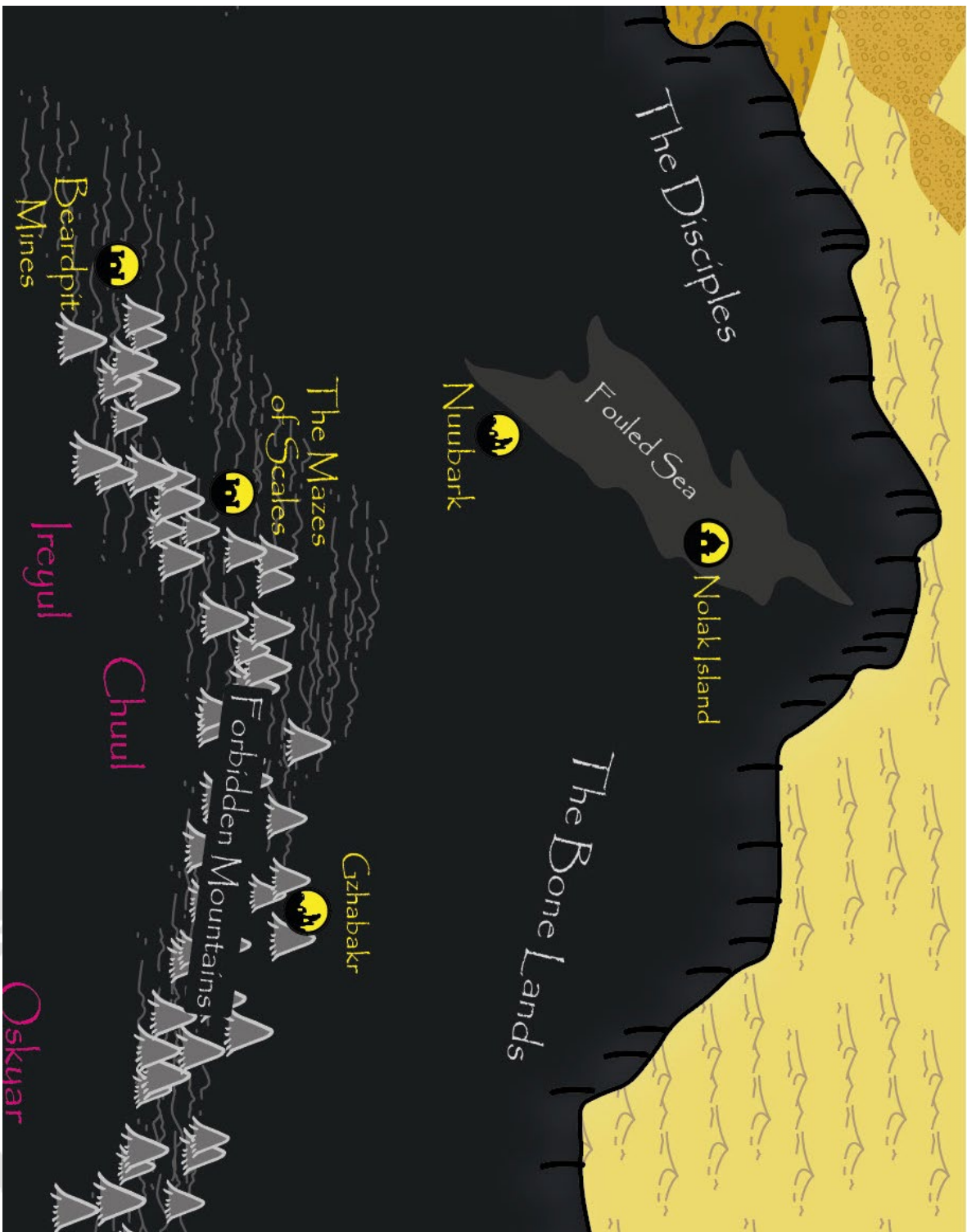
But we were not wise, alas! The divining stones and polished mirrors were corrupted by the deceivers, and the eyes of the priests were shrouded in darkness. Even as their tradesmen stood within the Orchard Portal, the warriors of the Army of the North came against the high walls and towers of Arludas. We had trusted the stones and mirrors, the oracles of the priests, and they, yea even they, had been tricked by the deceivers. The enemy used great powers, desecrated the caverns with raging flames and thunder, and the city was cracked and broken. Surely in that hour we were forsaken by Earth and all its powers! We fought, yea we fought, and slew many of the deceiving desecrators, yet our people also fell, skewered to the walls on the deceivers' cruel spears. Grim was that day!

Yet even as our martyrdom was complete, the powers of Earth returned to our succor. The foe, the deceiver and all his warriors, were driven away, hunted into the grim and evil North never to return. Stones and mirrors, our trial was only beginning! The chosen of our people, the most faithful and pure, were summoned to stand again, tasked to remove the pestilence of the deceivers from Arludas forevermore. Yea, this is our harrowing, to drive forth the impure deceivers. When the deceivers are no more, when they no longer defile our pure city, then would all be restored and justice done for the faithful!

The Bleeding is a sign that our triumph is at hand. The Earth powers granted us this blessing that we might prosper in our struggle, and is it not so? The reborn ones of the faithful have become one with us, against the deceivers, while those reborn to the deceivers are rebellious and ignorant. The Bleeding was a blessing of our Earth powers, and in its benediction we shall triumph!



The Naked Obsidian



Chapter 3 ~ The Naked Obsidian

Along the northwestern edge of the Obsidian Plains lies a land unblemished by obsidian cities or obelisks. From the edge of the Disciples lands to the west to the deceptively quiet and heavily trapped Killing Grounds of Deshentu, several nomadic tribes wander across the perfectly smooth obsidian where once sat an ancient lake bordered by the cliffs to the north and the Forbidden Mountains to the South.

Sometimes referred to as the "Pure Lands" or the "Naked Lands", each of the peoples of these lands has their own reasons for never building a permanent settlement.

The Lands of the Disciples



The furthest northwestern reaches of the Dead Lands are home to a unified group of undead who view their existence far differently than the rest. The people who call themselves the Disciples are committed to the idea that the Obsidian Plain is not merely a home, but a living entity and, in fact, their god. Like any true believers, they are convinced of the rightness of their doctrines; though, of course, some Disciples are more doctrinaire than others, many will rigorously argue that there is only one true belief, they hold it, and they are destined to rule, protect, and keep the obsidian.

The Disciples' lands are bordered on the north and west by the towering cliffs, atop which are the shifting sands of the endless wastelands. To the south are Small Home and the Kingdoms of Gretch and, to the east, the

Bone Lands and Musraaf's Chosen. The Disciples care little about the affairs of other nations, however, except to respond angrily if other rulers deface or wantonly destroy the purity of the obsidian under their dominion.

Disciples Creation Myth

For years the Black God hid himself away from the abominations of his creation, ashamed of having lost control over them. Yet when he gathered his courage and arose, he walked among the despoilers and made them tremble.

"This is not what I intended," he said to them, but the mortals ignored him and went about their petty squabbles. "This must be set right!"

So the Black God rose up against his creations and waged terrible war. He threw himself against the millions, destroying them in great swings of his mighty arms, until a single champion rose to confront him.

"There is no need for you here!" he announced. "Begone!"

But the Black God broke not his stride. "Stand down, mortal, and you may be spared." The mortal did not yield, and he lashed out at the Black God. God and mortal exchanged blows, their feet digging valleys, their shouts flattening forests, until the champion pulled out an amulet and held it high.

"I banish you!" he cried, and his magic tore a rift in reality at the Black God's feet. The amulet and its devising had been hidden from his sight, and the rift caught him off guard, pulling him down. First his legs and waist disappeared into the bright hole in the world, then his torso.

"You are not wanted here!" the champion challenged, and the Black God struggled to keep from being swept away until, in an instant, the amulet sputtered and grew darker.

"Ha! Your enchanter must be a believer!" the god cried, finding renewed strength and clawing his way back out of the rift. The mortal shook the amulet furiously, now dark and powerless, and launched it at the Black God. Beneath his feet the rift closed, and the mortal cringed, wild-eyed, and fled.

Yet, despite his victory, the Black God was greatly weakened and he staggered. Unable to maintain his strength, he collapsed on the world, burying it beneath his bulk. The ruins of the world lay crushed, sterilized beneath his bulk.

The Black God rests until the hour of his return.

*-Slumber Song
Disciples' oral tradition*

Children of the Black God

The Disciples recognize the living properties of the obsidian shelf and insist this is the very god of their myth. They believe that the Black God will slumber beneath their feet until such time as he regains his strength and returns to create the world again in a new image. The Disciples are convinced that their reward for diligent protection of the god and their continued belief will be their leadership in the new world order.

The Disciples raise themselves upon a pedestal, true believers, and all other undead on the obsidian plain are the enemy. Humanoid undead are seen as potential converts to the true religion; those who persist in refusing the Disciples' proselytizing are considered misguided and degenerate. However, like the other humanoid undead of the northern Dead Lands, the Disciples view the bugdead as mere animals, incapable of thought or belief and, therefore, unworthy to receive the gift of the Disciples' teaching.

The Disciples wander their lands worshiping obsidian and patrolling to repel invaders. They also send out missionaries, who double as scouts, looking for sites where the obsidian is being egregiously damaged or places where glass storms have recently occurred. These missionary scouts seek converts to the faith of elemental Obsidian (as they expound it), gather news of events, and summon other Disciples to collect obsidian shards. The shards that the Disciples gather, whether from glass storms or other damages to the obsidian, they melt down in "holy kilns" and pour back onto sanctified spots on the Obsidian Plain, proudly restoring the unity of their god. There are both wizard and warrior Disciples; all leaders of the Disciples, however, are clerics of elemental Obsidian.

The Disciples profess themselves to be priests of the Black God, though if pressed on theological grounds they will admit to being clerics of "elemental Obsidian" – always claiming that the terms "Black God" and "elemental Obsidian" are in fact functionally identical. In reality they are priests of Magma, as the obsidian they revere is born of magma, but the Disciples do not know this, and even if they were told, would never admit this to themselves or anyone else. Indeed, the Disciples' doctrines are unlike those of any known Magma clerics, and their spells and powers are so obsidian-oriented that few outsiders, even wise clerics, would be able to dispute that the Disciples have in fact identified a new and distinct element to revere.

The Priesthood of Elemental Obsidian

Even if one were to accept that there was an independent religion of elemental Obsidian, as opposed to a powerful and unique obsidian variant of Magma, the religion propounded by the Disciples would not be the pure faith of elemental Obsidian. Rather, the Disciples' faith has been twisted by their own unliving experiences as victims of the Obsidian Tide and as inhabitants on the Obsidian Plain. Nonetheless, rumors persist of other adherents to the faith of Obsidian, practicing elsewhere, with doctrines in many respects similar to the Disciples' creed.

MAJOR BELIEFS

Obsidian will flood the entire world, submerging all before it and thus ennobling all people and all things. This glorious future is fated; no single act can prevent it, though individuals can hasten or delay the inevitable.

In the triumph of obsidian, all beings will finally be gathered into undeath and thus made "Perfected". Until then, however, living beings, the "Imperfect", are to be prized, since they alone can create more living beings. It is the duty of the living to produce as many descendants as possible, so that the ultimate harvest of undeath under obsidian is even greater. The Disciples consider the inability to produce descendants the greatest disability and punishment of undeath, and their poetry is full of mournful references to the children they cannot create. Some attribute their zeal in proselytizing to their inability to generate offspring.

There is neither true justice nor mercy, until obsidian triumphs everywhere. Until that great day, which they refer to as the Emergence, the Disciples mete out judgment on the basis of a religious court, the Gleaming Tribunal, which governs their religious hierarchy, rituals, and relations with unbelievers.

DISCIPLES ORGANISATION

Those professing the Obsidian faith are holy, laboring to hasten the triumph of obsidian. Those who reject Obsidian, or desecrate it, must be destroyed. The faiths of Magma and Fire are considered allied, while that of Earth is considered a deadly foe. Water is also an opponent to Obsidian. The Disciples will attempt to convert any cleric of another elemental faith to their own faith; employing finely honed theological arguments and, as the ultimate trump, the view of the

Obsidian Plain – how else could this magnificent expanse of pure obsidian have come to pass, but through the agency of their powerful god? The Disciples have no experience with or understanding of templars and may engage in lengthy debates with templars in order to determine how to treat them.

The Disciples will offer help to any Imperfect living beings they encounter in the Dead Lands (except priests of Water or Earth, to whom they are likely to be hostile but respectful, the hostility increasing if these clerics fail to see the self-evident truth of the Obsidian faith). They do this because “Your flesh begets more flesh, increasing the final harvest of our god.” Living beings who insist that they do not and will never procreate are considered renegade and may be killed, depending on the individual Disciple's judgment. Those who agree to produce offspring, whether or not they profess the religion of Obsidian, will be considered worthy of aid.

The Gleaming Tribunal, ensconced in a natural bubble-grotto of obsidian, governs the Land of the Disciples. Its members, the highest clerics of the faith, send out missionaries and scouts, determine the auspicious dates for Disciple activities (such as the “ingathering of the shards” ritual and sacrifices of unbelievers), and decide questions of doctrine or practice. Strangers who are captured anywhere near the Tribunal's grotto will probably be brought before it for judgment.

The Land of the Disciples is governed by the Gleaming Tribunal, under which the land is divided into “dioceses” each headed by a Mathargos. Below each of these are Narthguks, each of whom governs a parish of several score Disciples in a specific area. The congregation is the basic unit of Disciple society.

The Gleaming Tribunal is composed of 17 senior priests of Obsidian, many of them also psions or necromancers (*Zhen or Krag Gleaming Tribunal Members; FoDL Ch3*). The Tribunal is charged with not only practical decisions on the political or economic life of the Disciples, but also questions of dogma and praxis. The Tribunal maintains a staff of subordinate priests (*Zhen Disciple Priests*), necromancers (*Zhen Disciple Wizards*), psions (*Zhen Disciple Psions*), and countless warriors (*Zhen Disciple Warriors*) and low-level acolytes or faithful (*Namech Servants; FoDL Ch 4* or mindless undead). The most powerful members of the priestly staff and the most advanced mathargos claim seats on the Tribunal every 67 years, when half the leadership is rotated.

There are always 22 sitting Mathargos in the Land of the Disciples. Each rules a specified diocese in the Land, within which he is responsible for maintaining

the political and social order, ensuring the purity of belief and faithful observance of rituals, and reporting on current events in nearby infidel lands. Most Mathargoi also send out several missionaries, with the dual purpose of seeking conversions and gathering information. Mathargoi are usually priests (*Zhen Disciple Mathargos; FoDL Ch3*) though many also cultivate the psionic or necromantic arts, with supporting staffs of lesser priests (*Zhen Disciple Priest*) as well as necromancers (7-12) and psions (level 6-10), plus warriors (*Zhen Disciple Warriors*) and acolytes.

Aiding the Mathargoi are the Narthguks, of whom each Mathargos commands a dozen or more. Each Narthguk is a priest (*Zhen Disciple Narthguk, FoDL Ch3*), typically serving and controlling a parish or congregation. Most congregations contain between 50 and 200 Perfected, including many different varieties of undead types, classes, and races, both free-willed and mindless, though of course the mindless undead are most often classed as “the Faithful” (and treated like slaves).

Beyond these, however, there are missionaries, some of whom report to a specific Mathargos while others report directly to the Tribunal. These missionaries can be found all across the Dead Lands, occasionally even in the Bugdead Territories, both preaching and spying in the name of the Sleeping God. Often these missionaries will serve the function of ambassadors of the Disciples to the courts of ruling monarchs, though there are many others who simply crisscross the Dead Lands seeking converts and observing the status of the obsidian.

THE SOVEREIGN RISING

Separate from both the hierarchy and the normal missionaries, there is one more very important group in Disciple society: the Sovereign Rising (*Sovereign Rising Gleaming Tribunal, Missionaries, and Marabouts; FoDL Ch3*). The Sovereign Rising is a semi-official body of fanatical Obsidian priests, reluctantly or eagerly sanctioned by the Gleaming Tribunal, depending on which senior priests are currently serving there. The Sovereign Rising is wholly dedicated to discovering how the Obsidian Wave was formed and speeding the day of The Emergence. Their investigations, which they often pursue under the guise of being mundane Disciple missionaries, have thus far proven that their god was awakened in the vicinity of The City of a Thousand Dead, and for this reason, there are always several members of the society living in the Disciples' small embassy in The City. It is the Sovereign Rising's fondest dream to perform some action which initiates

The Emergence – should they ever discover the planar *Gate*, they would stop at nothing to reopen it...

THE DISCIPLES' THREE LAWS

The Disciples live by three laws that govern their activities and existence:

- **The worship of the Black God is all:** All daylight hours are spent either in prayer to the obsidian god or on sentry guarding against attacks. At daybreak, the Disciples stop where they are, kneel with their arms extended and palms up, pull their hoods over their faces, and recite formulaic prayers. Save for this, there is no activity in the land of the Disciples during the day.
- **The Black God is neither mocked nor violated:** The Disciples show no tolerance for disturbing the obsidian. It occurs naturally in perfect form, they believe, so it should be left that way. The Chosen do not quarry the blackglass to make buildings, even if chunks are found naturally in raw form. In their fanaticism, they even note the effect of their footfalls on the unblemished obsidian, binding their skeletal feet with rags scavenged from afar lest they scratch their god's face. Trespassers in this land are held to the law as well, and the Disciples do not tolerate the use of obsidian equipment and weapons.
- **Unbelievers must convert or face destruction:** There are no other options, at least for the undead, the Perfected; living beings remain Imperfect, particularly for the undead. The wraiths have the ability to convert any being into one of their own, provided there is true belief in the Black God and the future of his world. Those who are unwilling to convert are subject to their full wrath, no matter where they are encountered.

The Disciples make pilgrimages to other nations frequently, keeping to themselves, monitoring the condition of the Black God. Where there are particularly gruesome attacks on his person, such as at the Desolation in faraway Shadowmourn or the battle-scarred valleys of the Crunch, the Disciples make their presence known. Their numbers are small, they often travel alone or in groups of four or five, but their impact on the locals is often great. The Disciples are given a wide berth when encountered on the obsidian.

The Disciples are generally inoffensive, as they deliberately emulate their god – who rests, who sleeps, who waits. The Sleeping God clearly considers patience a virtue, and thus, so do the Disciples.

However, though they normally seek to gain their ends by persuasion not force, they are capable of savage violence when particularly obscene acts of desecration occur. Why some acts provoke the Disciples' wrath, while other crimes, perhaps just as egregious, are ignored, is a mystery known only to the Gleaming Tribunal. Examples of destruction of the obsidian god have spurred the Disciples to crusades on two occasions in the past, and they are on the verge of a third.

They fought the first crusade against the undead of the Shale Lands more than four King's Ages ago. Disciple pilgrims visiting that territory were appalled by the rampant destruction of the Black God's body by Ahnthark's endless construction projects. Beauty in the s'thag zagath's eye clusters was blasphemy in the eyes of the Disciples, and word spread quickly through their land of these tragedies. A popular uprising developed, out of which came a poorly organized but zealous army rampaging south. It entered the Shale Lands easily, traveling many miles into its heart before being confronted by Ahnthark's formidable horde of chitinous undead. Zeal met claw for three days before the Disciple rabble withdrew. The army of scarlet wardens was exhausted or they might have pursued farther north. Regardless, the crusade ended without changing anything. The soldiers of the Disciples, most of whom are still unliving, view the experience as a religious triumph; those who fell became martyrs in the cause of the Black God.

The second crusade was smaller and even more poorly organized than the first. A single Disciple pilgrim reached the walls of The City of a Thousand Dead, two King's Ages after the first crusade in the Shale Lands, and what he found disgusted him. He sent a message back to his brethren describing the abominable use of obsidian stones to create buildings, walls, and trenches. He recited an entire litany of unspeakable crimes against the god. Without intending to, the pilgrim created a furor among his brethren. Another army, smaller than that of the first crusade, marched across the Bone Lands and south through the Forbidden Mountains to avoid the closed and heavily guarded borders of Shadowmourn, but they lost many of their number to the ghosts and wraiths instead. When they arrived at the high walls of The City of a Thousand Dead, they met the pilgrim, who urged them to break off their campaign and return home. The army did not heed him, however, and stormed the walls. The Defenders (see below) summarily defeated them. The second crusade was such a disaster that it is rarely mentioned and never eulogized.

However, there are rumblings among the Disciples of a third crusade, this time to be launched against the worst desecration of the age: Qwith's defensive project in Shadowmourn called the Desolation. To Qwith, the Desolation is an ideal solution to the problem of invasions from the south and east, but to the Disciples it is a horrid gash in the body of their god. A zealous fervor is growing in the Lands of the Disciples; debates rage over launching yet another crusade, perhaps better organized than the others, all the way across the obsidian against Qwith and Shadowmourn.

Fouled Sea

In the Green Age, a wide salty sea known as the Sparkling Gem ran from the north of Nuubark in a wide curving swath covering much of the far northwest reaches of Ulyan. It teemed with life – the fisherfolk of men and trolls caught fish and kreel there, avoiding the fearsome sea monsters that prowled its depths. All around the Sparkling Gem stretched the irrigated farmlands of men, trolls, and others, in lands ruled by the Sagocracy of Nuubark. Orc raiders from Ghash-naarg troubled the farmers, but the rule of Nuubark was, on the whole, fair and just. Therefore, the trolls sent troops to guard the frontiers with Ghash-naarg.

When the army of the Troll-scorcher came, levies from the far northwest fought bravely in the battles further east – there were few men or trolls left to rally to arms when Halvaz Blackeye led the left wing of Myron's army sweeping west, from the broken lines around Nuubark, to attack the northwest. Both humans and trolls suffered heavy casualties, and the shores of the Sparkling Gem were defiled. Halvaz left garrisons in the maritime districts, then returned to join his master in the conquest of the city of Nuubark; the troops he left behind pursued the last survivors, enslaving most of the humans and hunting the trolls for sport.

When Myron and his army marched away, the Sparkling Gem was no more. Its water levels had fallen, and salinity increased, due to the defiling magic used so freely in and near it. Most of the fish species had died out, though just enough were left for a small number of miserable humans to live as fishermen on the muddy shores. Qwith's envoys, who came to the lake to demand a tribute of fish for the researchers far in the east, noted that the great sea-monsters which once dwelt in the deeps had also died, citing this as a great gift of Rajaat. The local people, who had

venerated the sea monsters through the priests of Nolak, were unimpressed. They renamed the sea Glass Lake, for it was clearly no longer a gem; they were unaware of the perversity of their choice.

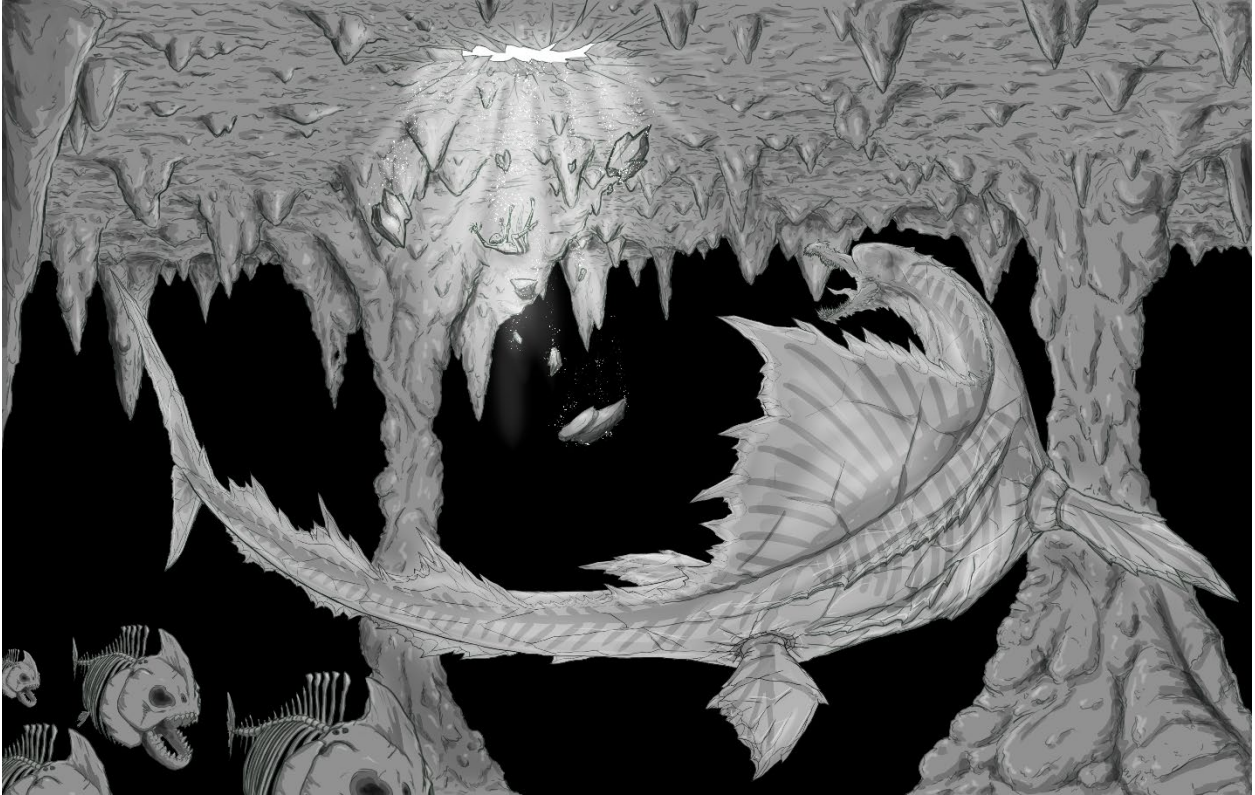
When the Shining Tide swept up from the east, it struck the lake with the force of a hurricane. The briny water boiled instantly at the touch of the molten obsidian, while the obsidian flash-cooled as it hit the vast lake. The few people who had not been killed immediately by the obsidian were slain by the goutts of superheated steam that burst from the dying lake. Slabs of suddenly-hardened obsidian formed a layer over the deeper sections of the lake, so that, even as the molten obsidian flowed on, much of the lake's water was preserved.

Though much of Glass Lake's water was boiled away by the Obsidian Tide, much of the deeper water areas along the southeast edge of the lake were protected by the flash-hardened blackglass and thus preserved. What remains today is a vast subvitrine lake, known as the Fouled Sea, over which linger pockets of trapped putrid air can still be found, leftovers from the savage interplay of flash-cooled obsidian and the instantly-boiled seawater. The fetid water of the Fouled Sea is black and brackish, wholly unable to support life, but it does support many species of vicious undead. The deepest parts of the sea have long been rumored to be haunted by ancient leviathans that survived Myron's defiling magics and ow lies waiting in the lightless depths (*Firemouth, Ch3*).

Nolak Island

During the Green Age, Nolak Island developed into a major cult center for the faith of Water. A divinatory temple was built here, where resident Water priests (known as The Brotherhood of the Mirror) consulted the spirits of the great sea monsters to provide oracles to the fisherfolk that lived around the Sparkling Gem. The priests understood the sea monsters to be mighty exemplars of the powers of Water, and believed that they could gain wisdom from channeling their spirits.

By the Time of Magic, the priesthood on Nolak Island had become well established, and was a major part of the Sagocracy's religious practice. Most of the priests were human, though some trolls and others lived on the island as well. The invasion of the Champions devastated Nolak Island, with Halvaz Blackeye's troops burning down the temples and massacring the priests. Many of his men died when their boats were capsized by sea monsters as they sailed back to the mainland.



The islands remained a ruin, venerated from afar by the surviving humans on the lakeshore, until the time of the Black Tide. The obsidian covered part of the island, but left about half of it, along with most of the temple precinct, exposed, in the same air pocket as the Fouled Sea. In fact the black waters lap against the shore of what remains of Nolak Island, and the priests have resumed their labors. No longer mortals, or dedicated to Water, the priests were raised by the obsidian as zhen and now they labor for their own purposes.

16; FoDL Ch3), for so the undead priests name themselves, is to protect and preserve the *Mirror of the Ages*. The *Mirror* was the temple's most sacred artifact during the Green Age and Time of Magic, and it remains as potent today as when it was made. The troops sent by Halvaz Blackeye's overlord to ransack Nolak Island could wreak no injury upon it, for the *Mirror* is in fact a pool of water, emerging from a freshwater spring so deep in the earth that no defiler could corrupt it. The pool, 20' across, is ringed by an octagonal line of gray-white coping stones that proved beyond the ability of Halvaz Blackeye's men to damage.

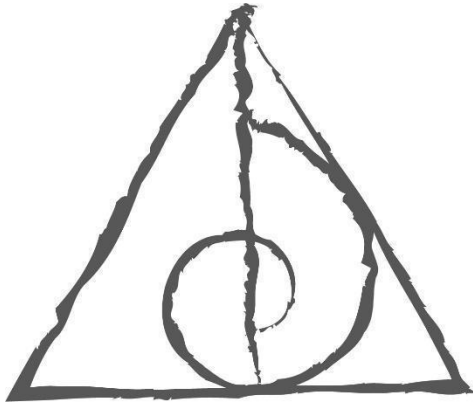
The *Mirror of the Ages* is a potent creation of psionics and divine magic, its purpose to allow travel back to previous ages in the history of Athas. Its powers are engaged by using a combination of divine incantations and psionic powers; which words and powers, the leaders of the Brotherhood guard jealously. Once activated, it is easy to set the pool to the desired period of time, and even easier to pass through – one simply walks into the 3' deep pool, and upon submerging, one emerges into the desired time. Note that the *Mirror* can carry beings and equipment only so far back in time as the first appearance of psionics in the early Green Age – it cannot reach the Blue Age, as psionics did not exist then. The *Mirror's* powers to carry beings into the future are unknown, though the Brotherhood believes

Brotherhood of the Mirror

The greatest purpose of the Brotherhood of the Mirror (*Male or Female Human or Troll Zhen Rain Cleric*

that the high priest of Nolak used just such a method to escape the invaders – they are bitterly divided about when he will emerge into their present, and how to react to his arrival.

Nuubark of the Shadows



Below the western reaches of the Bone Lands lies one of the former great cities of Ulyan, Nuubark of the Shadows. In the Green Age and Time of Magic, Nuubark was a great metropolis, second only to Nagarvos' in Ulyan, and the capital of a trollish empire in the north of the basin. In those days its name was Nuubark of the Stone Spires, and it was connected to the Sparkling Gem by a great canal.

Nowadays, the whole city sits almost entirely buried under the blackglass save for the dome of the Observatory and the broken spires protruding through the obsidian above.

Nuubark City Locations

1. The Observatory: This prominent building is the largest non-obsidian building in the Dead Lands to protrude above the black glass. Inside are the ruins and remnants of the research once conducted in this capitol.

2. The Canal Openings: As the lake bed subsided, these dried up canal openings remained on the edge of the city, many of them sitting just above the blackglass. They provide ready access to the undercity for both visitors and the trolls themselves.

3. The Sea Under the Glass: The remnants of the Sparkling Gem (now known as the Fouled Sea) still touch the edge of the city. They are submerged under

a layer of black glass which is thick enough to walk on, but not thick enough to sustain any significant amount of damage. (See the Fouled Sea description above.)

4. The “Discourse” Circle: The famous formal discourse of the troll warrior sages still takes place in this huge amphitheater. However, these discussions are seldom as erudite as they once were. Now they mostly consist of trolls taking their rage out upon one another or their hapless victims while their fellow trolls bay for blood from their seats above.

5. Ruined City: This section of the city is in a regular cycle of being rebuilt and destroyed. While the Trolls now believe in cruelty and destruction, there must be something to destroy. Once a section of the city has been wrecked, they will wait for that part of the city to become rebuilt and established again before inflicting new destruction.

6. Broken Spires: There were many impressive stone buildings under the surface with tall towers that were tall enough to overreach the obsidian flow. These broken derelict towers do sometimes have residents.

7. The Meat Market: The trolls relish in capturing human bodies and continuing a cycle of repeated torture and reanimations, taking their rage out upon these victims. When the bodies and souls reach the point where reanimation becomes impossible, they sell the remaining parts here for the trolls to devour. It is said that some of the cruelest corpse eaters of the Dead Lands consider fare from this market a delicacy.

8. The Sunken Trenches: Nuubark was once surrounded on three sides by water, and was built heavily canalled. When it was sacked during the Cleansing Wars, many parts of the land itself sustained tremendous damage. The Sunken Trenches mark where the ground collapsed under the sustained damage and the weight of the obsidian. These areas are as much as 250' feet below the rest of the city at their lowest points, making them just barely above the undercity.

9. Yorg-Yanak's Palace: The building on the surface is of course not his original palace. Rather it was reconstructed in an altogether new form – it now celebrates unbridled power, rather than carefully applied reason. The jagged spiky walls and crenellations mark it as the abode of a cruel slavemaster-king, where human corpses are raised into undeath for the amusement of the king, who

orders his hulking troll guards to savagely torment them before ripping them apart.

The Sagocracy

During the Time of Magic, the northwestern lands of Ulyan were populated largely by trolls, with their capital in the mighty city. Their empire stretched across most of northwestern Ulyan, and was styled the Sagocracy, for they were ruled by a philosopher-king and his Council of the Learned. Wisdom was greatly prized in the Sagocracy – the priesthoods of Earth and Water were honored, and contemplative psilologists were favored, while the “new science” of wizardry,

which seemed to offer knowledge without understanding, was left to those unable or ill-suited to higher callings.

Yorg-Yanak

When Rajaan’s armies marched down into Ulyan, Nuubark’s philosopher-king was named Yorg-yanak. He was a skilled mindbender, and he did not believe the emissaries Rajaan sent to reassure him (among the many other rulers of Ulyan) that Rajaan’s quarrel was solely with Nagarovs’. Yorg-yanak perceived a terrible danger for his empire, and took steps to further limit the already restricted proselytization of his human



subjects by Gretch's and Rajaat's agents. He also mustered additional troops, more than were usually required to protect the borders from orcs, in the western cliffs, or kobolds and goblins, in the southeastern hill frontier.

But Yorg-yanak did not rely solely on his empire's swords and axes for survival, for he had observed the might of the Champions' armies, and scribed the gathering of the humans of the plains at the Grey Tower. From Nuubark of the Stone Spires, ambassadors fanned out across Ulyan, bearing Yorg-yanak's warning to the other rulers of Ulyan. Vainly did the messengers urge the other rulers to unite in a mighty league, banding together to defend themselves against the threat implicit in Rajaat's vast horde – Gretch's agents had been busy in these lands for King's Ages, and the other realms were too suspicious of one another to ally.

Few among the Council of the Learned were able to penetrate the wards and psionic screens that Rajaat and his Champions erected around the armies during the Siege of Nagarnos', but these sages were able to piece together, from their broken and indistinct impressions, that when Nagarnos' fell, the invaders had massacred the entire population. Yorg-yanak immediately prepared his empire for war, summoning all the able-bodied men and trolls to the colors and constructing frontier defenses. Some on the Council of the Learned, led by the theorist, opposed these moves, arguing that such acts would only provoke an attack, but Yorg-yanak brushed off Knor'morhen and the others and insisted that an attack was imminent, whether they prepared for it or not.

Yorg-yanak was right. Myron of Yorum and his army marched swiftly from the smoking wreck of Nagarnos' and arrived on the borders of Nuubark within days. The defenders, mostly trolls and humans, fought well, but they were vastly outnumbered, and they lacked the wizardly power that their foes brought to bear. Slowly the Sagocracy's armies withdrew to the west, while other troops prepared a new line of defenses around the capital and stretching north and south of it. The new fortifications held – briefly.

Despite the heroism of the defenders, including stalwart human battalions which rejected the propaganda Myron's army bombarded them with, the lines south of Nuubark were breached, and the left wing of Myron's army, under the warlord Halvaz Blackeye, swept westward to plunder and destroy the lands surrounding the Sparkling Gem. Yorg-yanak withdrew his troops from the line north of Nuubark, lest they be cut off there, and redoubled his efforts to hold the capital. Members of the Council of the

Learned fought bravely on the front, even as some among them urged that negotiations be opened with the invaders.

As food supplies and essential supplies ran low, Yorg-yanak yielded to the demands of his pacifist councilors and dispatched an embassy to Myron of Yorum. He offered to surrender, forgiving all claims against the unjust invasion and agreeing to recognize Myron as suzerain, going so far as to submit to the installation of a garrison from the Champion's army in Nuubark, but Myron refused. The eyes of Rajaat were on all his Champions, and Myron knew he had to impress his master by completing this task without blemish.

The ambassadors were sent back to Yorg-yanak as shambling undead, their mouths filled with worms. The philosopher-king was not surprised, though the pacifist advisors were amazed that such an abject surrender had been rejected – what kind of war were the Champions waging, if victory was not their object? When the Troll-scorcher's army broke through the fine granite walls, they found out. Every living being in the city was put to the sword. Yorg-yanak waited on his simple stone throne for the inevitable, not stirring as the human troops burst in and speared him.

Myron granted his army days of license to plunder and sack the city, during which rampant fires killed many of the reveling troops. At length, with his task complete and no further excuse to linger, Myron led his army, away from the wreck and north, to the other troll-populated lands of Athas. He left behind him a smoking wasteland of crumbled towers, roofless ruins, and blackened bones slowly bleaching in the sun.

So Nuubark remained for long years, haunted by many of those who fell in its battles but shunned by the living. A new trade road was cut across the plains south of the city, so the sparse post-Cleansing human population could reach Glass Lake without passing too near the ruins. Nuubark was in that time ruled by its last living monarch, Yorg-yanak, whose animated corpse rose into undeath as a raaig. The former philosopher-king found in undeath the hatred and rage that eluded him in life – he is a cruel and domineering ruler, who had his undead troll subjects tear limb from limb those humans unfortunate enough to trespass in Nuubark, whether they were living or undead, former citizens or former enemies.

The Black Flood, when it came, encased the ruins in obsidian, covering all but the tallest of Nuubark's broken towers. It did not slay Yorg-yanak (*Male Troll Raaig Wilder 15 / Silt Cleric 10; FoDL Ch3*) or his undead minions (*Male and Female Troll Warrior-Sages; FoDL Ch3*), but raised many more of the city's unquiet dead

as zhen. Many of the zhen were human, once warriors and defilers of Myron's army – these rejected Yorg-yanak's rule, but the savage troll king was able to force many of them to allegiance all the same. The others fled, climbing up the crumbling stairs of the Celestial Observatory; this was the tallest surviving structure in the city, and the only one which penetrated the blackglass to emerge on the surface of the Obsidian Plain. These escapees scattered throughout the nations of the Dead Lands and became absorbed in their populations.

Yorg-yanak rules today over a partially subvitrine city, Nuubark of the Shadows. Atop the obsidian, some buildings have been reconstructed only to be ruined again by either raids or the destructive habits of the trolls themselves. Underneath lies the expansive ruins of the undercity and the canals which still connect to the surface.

The only non-troll inhabitants of the cave like barely-excavated streets of Nuubark are the small cadre of formerly human zhen that were created by the Shining Tide. These are the personal servants of the king, his pet necromancers and personal bodyguards. Their loyalty is ensured by potent magicks, since they would never adopt this subservient pose to their defeated enemy if they could rebel or escape. In addition to the human zhen there are many trollish zombies, skeletons, and other undead, as well as many undead vermin filling the somber streets of Nuubark of the Shadows.

Mazes of the Scales



In Ulyan, during the Green Age and Time of Magic, kobolds were a ragged lot, raiders despised by all. Their holds were once scattered across the hills and feet of the cliffs of Ulyan, but they were perennially being driven out by neighbors stronger than themselves, neighbors tired of their troublesome ways. Until Ni-angh'akh.

Ni-angh'akh was a prodigy, a kobold hatched in the Time of Magic who failed to become a warrior like his peers. Nor did he die, fed to the spitting fires like the others who were too weak to survive the kobolds' brutal lifestyle. He was brutalized by his peers, but it was the ill-treatment he received that probably awakened his abilities; for, Ni-angh'akh had the power of the mind. His psionic abilities so far outmatched those of any other kobold, of his time or any other, that he survived to become master of his tribe and people.

Ni-angh'akh had no desire to rule all the kobolds of Ulyan – he wished only to hone his mental powers in peace. He had thrust himself into dominance because only from that position could he put an end to his torment, butchering those who had mocked and pummelled him all those years. He found the responsibilities of rulership tedious and unrewarding. So, Ni-angh'akh led his people to a sheltered place in the hills, and ordered them to dig new warrens there. When his chambers were complete, he took the fairest kobold-maids to wife and hatched children.

When the oldest of them was of age, Ni-angh'akh presented him to the people and proclaimed him his heir and king. He, Ni-angh'akh, would retire to a life of undisturbed study. The kobolds rejected his son – or more properly, they rejected his own abdication. The masses recognized Ni-angh'akh's son as "viceregent" but continued to call Ni-angh'akh "king", and they demanded that he remain accessible to the viceregent, lest their needs be unfulfilled. Ni-angh'akh was wise enough to take half a loaf, and accepted semi-retirement.

The kingdom Ni-angh'akh founded, called Aagnikh, flourished under the viceregents. Kobolds from all over Ulyan hastened to swear allegiance. Gnomes, trolls, and men tried to dislodge them from their hidden caves, but all failed – unlike the long years before, when the kobolds were harried from one place to another by vengeful former victims, now they had a secret and devastating weapon: Ni-angh'akh. The king soon came to be known only by his title: Hermit Majesty. His life extended by potent psionics, Ni-angh'akh appeared when needed to create invulnerable psionic defenses around Aagnikh, mazes and traps which defeated the most determined foes. Even the mighty armies of the Sagocracy learned to content themselves with simply chasing the kobold raiders back to the border, rather than venturing into the narrow passages of Aagnikh.

The kobolds took little notice when the armies of the Champions appeared in Ulyan. They were aware of the vast bivouac at the Grey Tower, of course, and the long Siege of Nagarvos', but these things concerned

them little. They continued their usual raids into Arludas, the Sagocracy, and further afield, paying no mind to the Champions far away to the east. Viceregent Gorl-ik, 48th of his line, was unaware when Nagarvos' fell and the army of Sacha of Arala, soon to be named Curse of Kobolds, marched west towards Aagnikh.

The first battles were disastrous – for Sacha. His men were battle-hardened, but unfamiliar with the weblike mazes of Aagnikh's perimeter, and Sacha had not prepared tactics or spells designed to widen the narrow kobold-sized passages so his men could fight more easily. The first deficiency was overcome with mass casualties – the survivors learned – and the second with advice from Gallard, whose techniques had proven effective at Arludas. However, the kobolds, even after the outer defenses fell, were far from cowed. They had lost many warriors, but they still had one unconquerable defender: the Hermit Majesty.

Sacha of Arala was dismayed when his entire corps of scouts perished upon entering the inner defenses, obliterated by psionic powers the Champion had never before seen or imagined. He ordered his bodyguards forward, picked men, well-trained, only for them to suffer the same fate. Nor did the Champion's defilers fare any better. Sacha himself, cursing his incompetent subordinates, was forced to crawl into the kobold-caves of Aagnikh to face the immense power of the Hermit Majesty. He barely escaped with his life.

Sacha of Arala was Rajaat's First Champion, the first human to step forward to receive the master's benediction to cleanse the face of Athas. He had served the First Sorcerer longer than any of his peers. He swallowed his pride and hastened to the ruins of Nagarvos', where Rajaat had just completed creation of an enormous *tree of life*, and begged his master to aid him. Rajaat was predictably annoyed at the failure of his Champion, but he knew well how to take advantage of an opportunity. He bound Sacha to himself with unbreakable ties of loyalty, and then agreed to resolve the matter of the Hermit Majesty for his disciple.

The battle was invisible, a titanic struggle that shook the mindscape as far west as Celik and as far east as Arkhold, one of the seaports atop the cliffs with which Elsavos's elves traded. Rajaat stood at the mouth of Aagnikh's smashed gate and strove against the Hermit Majesty, deep within the kingdom. For two days the combat raged, a tremendous psionic storm that mere mortals could barely perceive. At last the Hermit Majesty fell, and Rajaat, with a tired but self-satisfied nod, left Sacha to complete his work. The War-Bringer



disappeared, returning to the Pristine Tower in the north, leaving his indebted First Champion eternally grateful.

Sacha's army made short work of Gorl-ik and his remaining warriors. The chambers of Aagnikh were filled with the hissing screams of the kobold-children as Sacha's men put them to the sword and torch. Sacha himself was busy trying to prevent any of his peers from discovering that he had required help from Rajaat to overcome his first target, but his efforts were in vain, for (especially at this stage) Rajaat's movements were closely watched by most of the Champions. Tectuktitlay mocked the Curse of Kobolds mercilessly.

The mockery of Tectuktitlay and others drove Sacha to fury. He ordered his men to complete the killing and then put them on the road, determined to leave Ulyan and find every other kobold nest on Athas. He'd show his peers, he would have his race exterminated while they were still struggling to get started. Sacha Arala drove his men out of Aagnikh before they could search it thoroughly, or plunder it completely, or even bury their dead. The grumbling this engendered was silenced with a few well-publicized executions.

As Sacha and his men departed, the grip of undeath upon the most dedicated of the dead raised them to unlife. Foremost among these was Gorl-ik, Viceregent

of Aagnikh, along with his most loyal bodyguards. Many human warriors (*The Bold of Sacha – Bone Guard; FoDL Ch3*) slain in battle also rose as undead, locked in conflict with the viceregent and his troops - and deep in Aagnikh, sealed behind stone walls and untouched by battle or plunder, the Ni-angh'akh The Hermit Majesty (*Male Kobold Meorty Wilder 30; FoDL Ch3*) emerged from death in his chambers.

The emergence of the Hermit Majesty signaled an end to the brief and savage infighting between kobold and human undead. Ni-angh'akh, once he regained full control over his faculties and assessed the situation, moved decisively to demand that all undead swear fealty to him, and him alone. Irrevocable obliteration came swiftly to those who resisted, and the Hermit Majesty soon reigned, in practice as well as in custom. Ni-angh'akh brooked no dissent, ordering the burial customs of men and kobolds alike to be honored, though in other respects he was indifferent to the realm of Aagnikh – its caverns and buildings he ignored – were not all things physical insignificant next to the miracles of the mind?

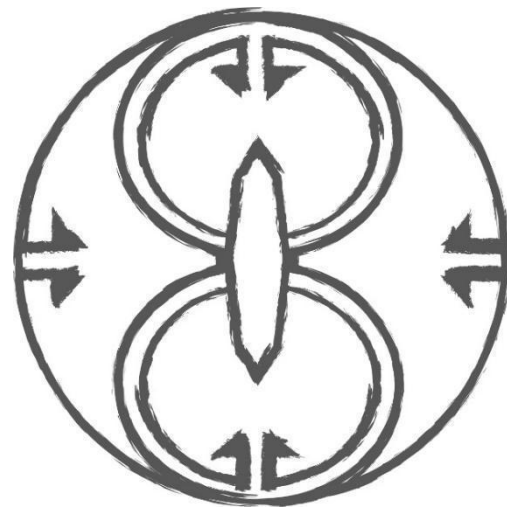
The Hermit Majesty's neglect of the physical world causes him great frustration to this day. Though the labyrinthine entry passages slowed the molten obsidian of the Black Tide, allowing it to cool and preventing major flooding of the underground realm by that route, the cracked and damaged ceilings caused by the fires of battle and plunder proved too weak in some areas. Many sections suffered collapsing ceilings, due to the great weight of the obsidian on the surface above, and boiling blackglass poured into numerous chambers.

The obsidian had more deleterious effects yet, for many of the laboriously collected and buried dead, both human (*Bold of Sacha - Stone Guard; FoDL Ch3*) and kobold, rose under the obsidian spell as zhen. These the Hermit Majesty could not control, and they remain to this day at large, ruling rebellious regions within the caverns of Aagnikh. Ni-angh'akh finds their presence annoying, primarily because his loyal subjects suffer at the hands of the renegades, and their pleas for aid distract him from his true love, psionic research. Complicating matters is the fact that his own descendant, Gorl-ik the last ruling viceregent (*Male Kobold Venger Wilder 15 / Fighter 8; FoDL Ch3*), has himself defected to the faction of zhen kobolds (*Viceregal Black Guard; FoDL Ch3*).

The Bone Lands

Between the Fouled Sea and the Killing Grounds of Deshentu lies a land unblemished by obsidian cities or obelisks. The Bone Lands are host to a nomadic people, Musraaf's Chosen, who control a wide area in the distant north. The Bone Lands are bordered on the east by Deshentu and to the west by the lands of the strange Disciples. To the south are the Forbidden Mountains, and on the furthest southwestern frontiers, the land borders on the Kingdoms of Gretch.

The Bone Lands are remarkably smooth terrain. Rolling prairies of blackest obsidian reflect the midday Athasian sun. Occasional cracks and ravines are all that mark the way for the wandering nomads, from the swirling sands of the encroaching cliffs in the north, all the way to the foothills of the jagged Forbidden Mountains in the south.



Musraaf's Chosen

Musraaf's Chosen are a group of five tribes descended from a nomadic people, perhaps living survivors of the Green Age Sagocracy. Warlords who can trace themselves back to a single family lead the tribes. The warlords are Khasti Rasiim (*Male Human Zhen Fighter 5 / Barbarian 15; FoDL Ch3*), Bael Asiim (*Female Human Zhen Barbarian 24*), Tatia Achhed (*Male Human Zhen Ranger 20 / Wilder 5*), Inbed Achhed (*Male Human Zhen Barbarian 24*), and Hazzi Shalil (*Male Human Zhen Fighter 5 / Wilder 18*). Inbed Achhed and Tatia Achhed are brothers, and Bael Asiim is their half-sister. Hazzi Shalil is Bael Asiim's uncle, though no blood relation to the brothers, and Khasti Rasiim is

Hazzi Shalil's cousin. The five are now zhen warlords who wander the black obsidian, but this was not always the case.

Musraaf's Chosen were a primitive nomadic people, even in the times of Rajaat and the Cleansing Wars, living in the borderlands of the Sagocracy. They alone of the Sagocracy's human subjects made common cause with the invaders, and the survivors were rewarded with life in the partially defiled plains that remained after the Sagocracy was cleansed. When the Boiling Ruin struck, only these five tribes were in the vicinity and, therefore, consumed by its energies. Over the King's Ages, the rest of Musraaf's Chosen have gone the way of the waters, while on the blackglass an undead abomination of their society still remains.

The tribes carry out the routines of their living existence, packing the ruined tatters of their tents by morning, wandering the Obsidian Plain, and then reassembling their ratty tent cities by night. In life, this practice helped the wanderers make the most of meager water and other sustenance. Of course, as undead they have no need of such things, but carry on in strange mockery of their previous ways. They are not aware of the corruption that has taken place in their lives. They do not see that their tents are mostly ribbons of worn and ancient canvas or that their clothing and articles are in the same condition. Musraaf's Chosen have deluded themselves into believing a mirage of the truth.

The warlord leads the tribe, deciding the direction of travel, all diplomatic matters, and issues of internal justice. The warlord also has a council of elders who advise him on various matters of state. These elders now have little edge on the general population with regards to age, since King's Ages beyond count have passed; the actual percentage difference in age between an elder and, say, a zombie child of Musraaf's Chosen is pitifully small. Still, the tradition holds and the elders retain the position within the tribe.

MUSRAAFI TRIBAL ENCAMPMENTS

A typical tribal encampment is a sprawling city of rotted canvas pavilions in various stages of decay. The center tent is the most elaborate and belongs to the warlord. His, in turn, is surrounded by the remains of the tents of the elders and these by the ribbons of the general population. In life, the Musraafi tents were brightly colored, painted with symbols denoting the profession or status of the inhabitants, today they are gray remnants with gaping holes that allow the blasting winds to howl right through them.

The tribes vary in size from 700 to 1,000 individual undead, but regardless, each maintains an army of about 200 warriors, divided equally between cavalry (*Musraaf's Chosen Cavalry Commander and Lieutenants; FoDL Ch3*) and spearmen (*Musraaf's Chosen Spearmen Lieutenants and Spearmen*). The chariots are pulled by skeleton horses, the likes of which have not roamed Athas in millennia. All the warriors are zombies or skeletons, though more powerful undead lead them.

The tribes deploy their forces in the time-honored tradition of their people. They send scouts ahead to explore the disposition of the enemy, while they deploy the spearmen into battle as a single body, with the chariots split to cover each flank. The tribes fight with no reserves, since it is the teaching of their ancient prophets that battle should not be engaged if it cannot be won and won quickly; reserves would not support this strategy.

Most recently, Inbed Achhed and his brother Tatia Achhed have been at war. Their armies have gone up against one another several times in the last few years. The other warlords have chosen sides. Hazzi Shalil has thrown in with Inbed Achhed, and their two armies have played a deadly game of cat and mouse across the face of the Bone Lands. On more than one occasion they have backed Tatia Achhed's forces against the Forbidden Mountains or the bare cliff faces to the north, only to let their quarry escape through some clever night maneuver. Bael Asiim and Khastri Rasiim give moral support to Tatia Achhed, but only that. They have not committed any forces despite their beleaguered brother's assertions.

The situation is ripe for foreign intervention, as well. With no support from the other tribes, Tatia Achhed has recruited the assistance of the great Harkor, who has committed an entire squadron of troops to fight alongside the tribe. The Vizier of Deshentu has advisors in all the tribal camps, keeping them off balance, promising support to all sides but actually supplying little. It is in his best interest to keep the status quo in the Bone Lands, securing his western frontiers through entirely diplomatic means. Inbed Achhed has emissaries in Chol and Shadowmourn looking for support, but so far none has been offered.

Player characters coming into this situation are quickly drawn into the conflict. The warlords recognize strength when they see it, and temporarily set aside their hatred for living beings in order to strike a bargain. Player characters could be called upon to penetrate an enemy camp, for instance, to disrupt them or even to kidnap an opposing warlord. Regardless, PCs should be wary; Musraaf's Chosen do not feel bound to promises made to outsiders, and they will

conclude their bargains, at the point of a knife, the minute they feel they have gained all profit.

Gzhabakr



Ulyan, in the Time of Magic, boasted few goblin-towns. By far the largest was Gzhabakr, in the hills that have since become the Forbidden Mountains. In fact, goblins lived in small semi-nomadic bands, often raiders or other ne'er-do-wells, ranging all across the hill-country and into the northern plains, but their one permanent hold was Gzhabakr. The town was dug into the low stony hills, with several entrances, each defended by forts and squat round towers. Large areas outside the gates were kept cleared as encampment areas for wandering goblin bands.

By comparison with goblin-cities in the Tablelands and further north, Gzhabakr was not a large settlement, but it remained the home base whereto the goblin gypsies would gather on major cultural holidays. The ruler of Gzhabakr was a priest-king, the highest-ranking cleric of either the faith of Earth or Ash, the two major religions of Ulyan's goblins. The goblins preferred Earth at least in part because their permanent homes were traditionally underground, while Ash was technically a variant of the Fire faith. Goblin priests insisted, however, that Ash was an independent element, which they characterized as both "the birth of new flame" and "the fated end of all things."

The goblins of Gzhabakr did not mine, though they used the stone acquired as spoil from their excavations to build their gate-towers and such. Instead they prospered as traders – the wandering goblin bands fenced their stolen treasures and raided goods traded across Ulyan, and the great holiday encampments at Gzhabakr were trade emporia as much as religious events.

When the armies of the Champions descended the Winding Way, they were met by goblin bands eager to buy and sell. Rajaat forbade any contact between his men and the traders, and after the first rash of thefts and frauds, the Champions reinforced this order with one of their own. The goblins found it difficult to trade with the soldiers, though during the long bivouac of the armies at the Gray Tower many illicit meetings were arranged. The Champions tolerated the goblins' minor thefts and rigged gaming tables because the goblins also plied the ranks of the army of Nagarvos' – the goblins thus provided a conduit for spies to use.

Goblins searching for profit continued to dog the steps of the armies after the Battle of Tforkatch River, but the Champions had no reason to indulge them and many of the small bands simply disappeared. More and more goblins drifted back to Gzhabakr during the Siege of Nagarvos', avoiding the foraging parties of the Champions' armies. Reports persisted that goblin traders were often guests in the soldiers' stew-pots, but Thuguch the priest-king of Gzhabakr knew better than to protest – Gzhabakr was a weak kingdom, and had not survived the long years by complaining to its more powerful neighbors about their treatment of its caravans.

Thuguch learned through his kingdom's network of trader-spies that Nagarvos' had fallen, and that the Champions had divided and were marching in all directions across Ulyan. There was little Thuguch could do, however, to prepare his land for war – he had no control over the wandering goblin bands, and Gzhabakr relied for security not on arms but on the indifference of the other lands of Ulyan. There was little of value in the capital in any case – except for the usual kobold-raids from Aagnikh, there had never been a serious invasion.

Daskinor and his army were not motivated solely by plunder, however. The Champion led his forces directly to Gzhabakr's gates, detaching only small flying columns to scour the plains for any itinerant bands of gobins not already being slain by the other Champions. Priest-king Thuguch sought to parlay, but in vain; his envoys were flayed, beheaded, and their bodies mutilated in sight of the gates. Not for these goblin faithful, his friends, would Thuguch be able to perform the ritual ember-burial of the Ash religion.

The humans broke through the gates in mere days – Gzhabakr's fortifications had been designed to resist minor raids, not full-scale assault, and Daskinor drove his men with whips and flayings. Once inside, the massacres were swift and merciless. Gzhabakr's priests and mindbenders gave the invaders pause, but the humans had spellcasters and mindbenders as well,

and soon the smoke of corpses was seeping through cracks and fissures in the battered caverns of Gzhabakr. Daskinor personally supervised the torture of Thuguch and the other captives, while giving the town over to sack and ruin.

Daskinor and his army marched forth to smoke the wandering goblin bands from their improvised hideouts, leaving the fires of Gzhabakr to gutter fitfully beneath Athas's twin moons. The dead of the goblin-town rested unquietly, however, soon rising as hideous undead. Priest-king Thuguch rose into undeath as a khvakhas (*Male Goblin Khvakhas Fighter 9 / Kineticist 4 / Cleric 4 / Psychic Theurge 5; FoDL Ch3*), as did many of his more powerful advisors (*Goblin Nobles; FoDL Ch3*), while most of the commoners who returned appeared as flesh rinds, or flesh worms.

Khvakhas (*FFN Pg. 71*) and gluk'kiuk (*Flesh Rinds; FFN Pg. 118*) are forms of undead born specifically from the methods used by Daskinor to cleanse goblin cities; though these undead types are occasionally found in places not visited by Daskinor, or among races other than goblins, they are overwhelmingly most common in former goblin holds sacked by Daskinor during the Cleansing Wars.

Daskinor ordered his men to capture goblin leaders alive if at all possible. It was his custom to torture them. Then, once he had deprived them of any useful information, he would torment them further by hanging them from the ceilings of the largest chambers in their caverns, suspended by their arms, wrists, or fingers, forced to slowly watch as his men flayed alive any common goblins – males, females, children – they had captured.

The symbolism of the hanging was deliberate – not only did it shame and mock the goblin leaders, but it pleased Daskinor's men. He had deliberately recruited primarily mountain tribesmen into his army, men whose tribes had long histories of conflict with goblins. Many of these men believed in mountain spirits, glorifying the magnificent peaks and the skies in which they towered, so it proved easy to convince them that goblins, tunneling in darkness at the roots of these mighty mountains, were blasphemous and degenerate. Hanging the goblin leaders from the ceiling symbolically separated them from the Earth and lifted them into the sky as sacrifices to the Air spirits in which Daskinor's primitive troops still believed.

The result of these gory executions, performed over hours or weeks (as circumstances permitted in different goblin holds), was the creation of unique forms of undead. The common goblins flayed alive

often returned to unlife as gluk'kiuk, also called flesh rinds or flesh worms.

The only beings capable of sustained control over gluk'kiuk are khvakhas, undead born of the tortured deaths of the goblin leaders. Goblins elevated to positions of power, either as chiefs or priests, naturally grew curving tusks from the corners of their toothy mouths; with such an obvious physical feature, it was impossible for captured leaders to hide among common goblin prisoners. Daskinor singled the leaders out and tormented them as noted above. In Gzhabakr, the most powerful khvakhas is, unquestionably, Thuguch.

Gzhabakr was not an elaborately built city even in its heyday, being merely the cult center for the goblin faithful. However, in undeath Thuguch ordered the city gates barred, and this prevented the obsidian from pouring in and flooding the caverns. Many of the khvakhas, including Thuguch, saw the Obsidian Boil as a manifestation of divine power, a form of elemental cleansing to wash clean the perversity and defilement of the Champions.

The racked spirits of Daskinor's dead troops (*Daskinor's Dead; Ch3*) continue to haunt and struggle against the goblins to this day.

The Forbidden Mountains

The jagged peaks of the Forbidden Mountains form a natural border between the Kingdoms of Gretch to the south, and all the realms of the Dead Lords (Deshentu, Shadowmourn, and Harkor) and other lands to the north. No more than a crooked line of high hills during the Green Age and Time of Magic, the Obsidian Wave made the Forbidden Mountains into a series of ridges of sharp, jumbled obsidian with only a few narrow canyon-like passages.

The terrain here is all but impassable to creatures restricted to travel by foot; the obsidian is so broken that even those walking on chitinous claws or ironshod boots suffer injuries. High cliffs and razor-sharp cracks in the ancient obsidian mark the mountains, with the passages like deep canyons. The going is so difficult, with ambush sites on every route, that even the undead princes are loathe to march their armies across the Forbidden Mountains. History has shown that the mountains don't give up the corpses venturing there lightly.

The Forbidden Mountains aren't actually mountains at all in a geological sense, though they rise from the

surrounding blackglass. The area beneath the obsidian is rocky terrain, badlands that helped cut Rajaat's special experiments off from the rest of Athas. That topography, now buried beneath the elemental obsidian unleashed upon Athas's surface by the Shining Tide, was jagged and broken, barren and dry, harkening to the fate of all the worlds' lush terrain after the defiling fury of the Cleansing Wars. When the molten obsidian of the Boiling Ruin washed over these rocky badlands, it cooled in jagged sheets that were thrust on end and into the air by the tons of molten lava pouring from the opened gate. Elsewhere, the obsidian cooled flat and even, after the closing of the dimensional gate, but above the badlands, the new glassy terrain was anything but smooth. Pointed slabs of obsidian rise as much as 300 feet in the air over many square miles. Most of the slabs have crumbled from their own weight, breaking off into sharp boulders scattered in the natural ravines and cracks. They are mountains unlike any others on Athas, low but particularly difficult, black mountains scarring the smooth Obsidian Plain.

The humanoid undead of the northern nations view the Forbidden Mountains in a variety of ways. To the undead armies of Harkor, Shadowmourn, Deshentu, and the Bone Lands, all of whom use the mountains as a strategic southern barrier, they are indeed forbidden. The abandoned mountains provide an effective barrier against the bugdead legions of the south. In other

nations where contact with the mountains is less frequent, they have a mysterious reputation. Legends of the northern nations tell of entire armies swallowed by the unfriendly mountains. While it is true that armies sent into the mountains have rarely returned intact, the suspicion of them as somehow magically enchanted is a complete fabrication. Still, few humanoid undead will venture into the Forbidden Mountains except at the points of their taskmasters' spears.

Travel in the mountains is extremely difficult. Wilderness movement is cut to one-third normal speed when in the Forbidden Mountains, and there is a 10% chance per day that upended obsidian slabs completely block the way, resulting in the loss of an entire day's progress. Tactical combat is also difficult, and encounter ranges are generally limited to 30 feet.

The Nameless Shaman

Despite the difficult terrain and their reputation, the Forbidden Mountains are not uninhabited. The steep cliffs and crevasses are difficult terrain for animated corpses and shambling skeletons, but the incorporeal undead recognize no such restrictions. A collection of shadows and wraiths, disenfranchised from the humanoid undead kingdoms, unwelcome among the bugdead, call the Forbidden Mountains their home. These spirits are those of an ancient tribe of giants



which once lived in Ulyan. The bare plains provided little for them to eat, however, and the giants gradually died out, long before the Cleansing Wars.

The giant tribe had called the pre-Ruin hills which originally stood here home, and it was here that they laid their tired and hungry bones as they starved to death. The last giant was the tribal shaman, who fasted, sustained by his faith, as the last of his tribe died around him. As he himself perished, his spirit reached out into the Gray, and found there something hideous and terrifying. He knew not what it was, but it seemed not entirely unlike the air spirits he had worshiped in life, so he embraced its roiling red mists.

The Crimsons (*ToDL*, pg 28) were then young creatures, newborn as accidents of Rajaan's magical research. The crimson, which the giant Nameless Shaman encountered in the Grey, took his soul and bonded him to it, prefiguring the t'liz bonds of times to come. The Shaman did not become a t'liz, however; he became a monstrous semi-corporeal wraith instead, his ragged, lanky corpse possessed of hideous power. The shaman envied and hated those who survived in the lands where his people had died, and began to waylay travelers in the hills, slaking his anger and his master's hunger with their agonized life-forces.

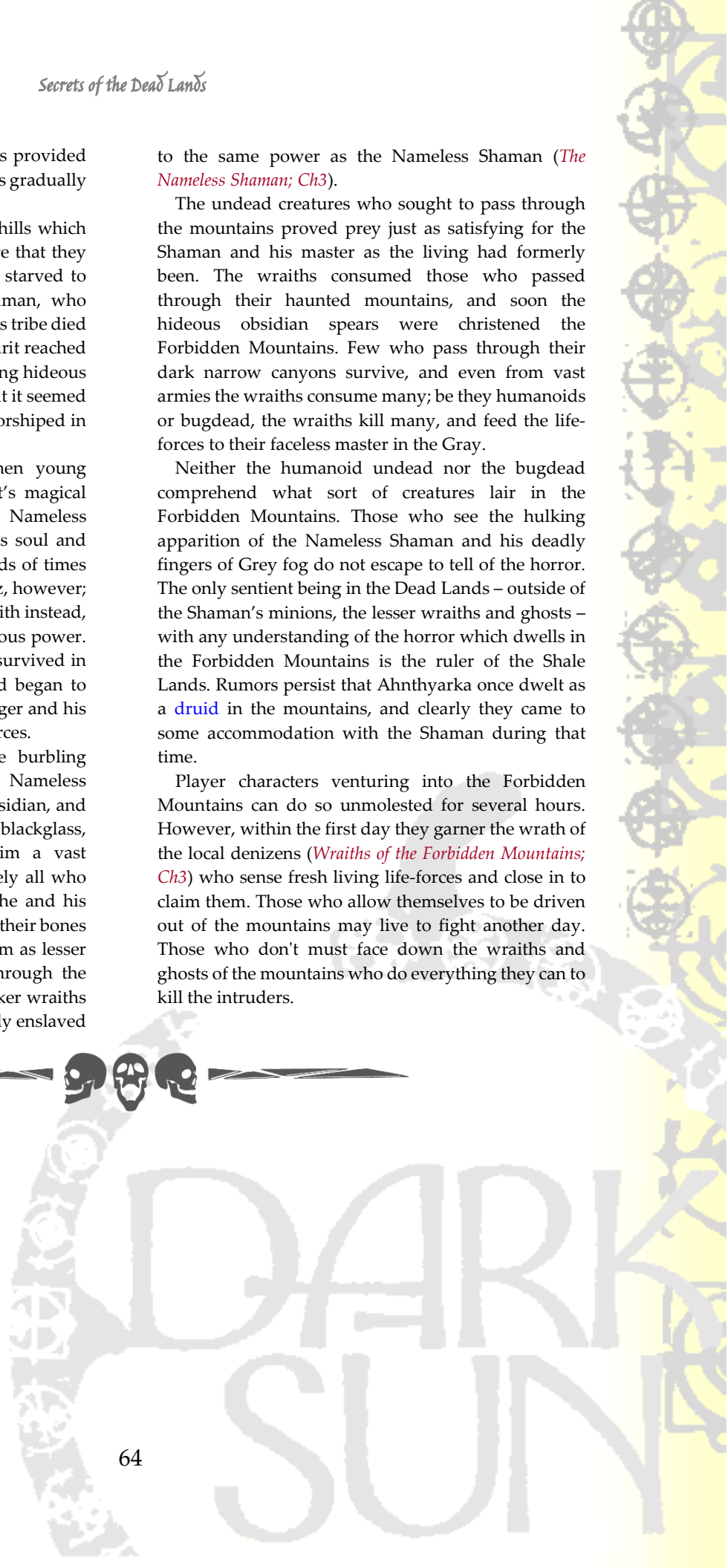
Things changed – somewhat – in the burbling aftermath of the Obsidian Flood. The Nameless Shaman rose easily to the surface of the obsidian, and he liked what he saw. The jagged glaciers of blackglass, tumbled and razor-sharp, seemed to him a vast improvement over the hills of Ulyan. Surely all who dwelt in this land were now as dead as he and his people! Indeed, many of the giant's people, their bones incinerated by the obsidian, rose to join him as lesser wraiths, many of them crimson-tinged through the shaman's own taint. Over time, many weaker wraiths and ghosts also arrived, nearly all eventually enslaved

to the same power as the Nameless Shaman (*The Nameless Shaman; Ch3*).

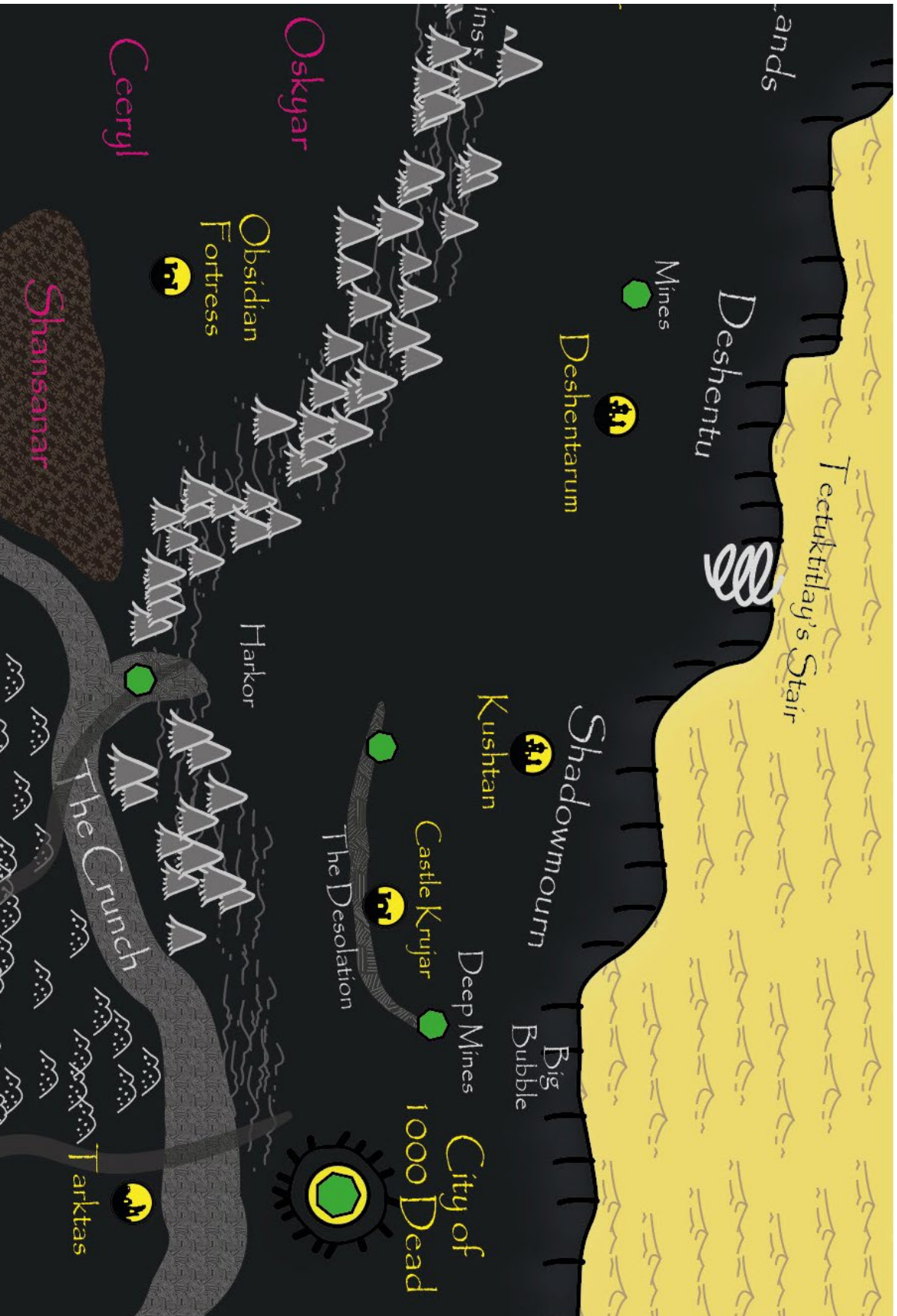
The undead creatures who sought to pass through the mountains proved prey just as satisfying for the Shaman and his master as the living had formerly been. The wraiths consumed those who passed through their haunted mountains, and soon the hideous obsidian spears were christened the Forbidden Mountains. Few who pass through their dark narrow canyons survive, and even from vast armies the wraiths consume many; be they humanoids or bugdead, the wraiths kill many, and feed the life-forces to their faceless master in the Gray.

Neither the humanoid undead nor the bugdead comprehend what sort of creatures lair in the Forbidden Mountains. Those who see the hulking apparition of the Nameless Shaman and his deadly fingers of Grey fog do not escape to tell of the horror. The only sentient being in the Dead Lands – outside of the Shaman's minions, the lesser wraiths and ghosts – with any understanding of the horror which dwells in the Forbidden Mountains is the ruler of the Shale Lands. Rumors persist that Ahnthyarka once dwelt as a **druid** in the mountains, and clearly they came to some accommodation with the Shaman during that time.

Player characters venturing into the Forbidden Mountains can do so unmolested for several hours. However, within the first day they garner the wrath of the local denizens (*Wraiths of the Forbidden Mountains; Ch3*) who sense fresh living life-forces and close in to claim them. Those who allow themselves to be driven out of the mountains may live to fight another day. Those who don't must face down the wraiths and ghosts of the mountains who do everything they can to kill the intruders.



Domains of the Dead Lords



Chapter 4 – The Dead Lords

Between the Naked Obsidian to the west and The City of a Thousand Dead to the east lies the most populous area of the Dead Lands—The middle kingdoms of the Dead Lords. Over this territory, three different powers have been vying for supremacy for millennia.

Deshentu



Centrally located in the northern obsidian plain, Deshentu borders Shadowmourn and Harkor to the east and southeast and the desolate Bone Lands to the west. The great sand-clouded cliffs frame the northern border, down from which The Vizier fears his eventual extermination will come. To the south lie the jagged peaks of the Forbidden Mountains, the wall, he believes, against which his armies will one day be crushed. The Vizier is convinced that his extinction is near, and he's been so convinced for several King's Ages now.

The Vizier

The Vizier (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 16 / Necromant 10; FoDL Ch4*) is an ancient zhen, once a prominent figure in the great experimentation under Rajaat's direction. While not directly involved in research, he oversaw virtually all of the supporting magic, supplying scrolls and potions to those engaged in more

important work. In life, the Vizier, then named Kulrath, accepted his role in Rajaat's great work without question. The Shining Tide that stole away his life also stole away his ability to reason, which helped mask his true feelings. Raised by his own hand from the still-cooling obsidian lava, Kulrath found that his so-called peers paid him no heed, relegating him to support their empire-building ambitions. He rebelled, refusing to aid the other undead princes in plays for power and territory on the blackglass, but he was too racked with self-doubt to seize the opportunity to advance immediately. Kulrath chose exile in the distant south, before the bugdead appeared and dominated it. In this place, he built a tower with no exits and sealed himself away for ages.

Kulrath's years of isolation left him physically weak but intellectually and magically recharged. His frail and decrepit undead form barely managed to break out of the tower once he decided to leave its confines. However, his time there was well spent. He indulged in additional magical research and experimentation of his own, increasing his personal magical powers and enchanting a number of extremely powerful magical items. Taunted by the undead kings many years before, Kulrath was at once enraged and extremely paranoid, wanting to take his place among his peers but trusting none of them—and, as history would show, rightly so. His objective was a land he'd spied over the years through his *crystal ball*, reputed to be the bleakest expanse of obsidian on the Black Basin, the Unholy Lands.

The proprietors of the Unholy Lands, a collection of bandit and raider tribes, were under the direction of a raaig named Ylsia. Her forces had just completed a circular path of destruction through the adjacent nations of Shadowmourn and Harkor when they approached a lone figure atop an obsidian knoll, the hot winds blowing through his clothes and his very flesh and bones.

Ylsia sent a strong patrol ahead of her horde to deal with the intruder, but to her amazement, he vaporized them in a silvery blue flash of magical electricity. Shocked, Ylsia deployed her forces, but too late to effectively employ them against the lone zhen, and Kulrath picked them to pieces, launching fire and destruction upon them in countless forms. In the end only Kulrath and Ylsia remained, and when she recognized the outcast Kulrath, he extinguished her



undead existence rather than let her speak. A once-proud field army lay in tatters around him. Kulrath staked his claim to the Unholy Lands, renamed them Deshentu in honor of his forebears, and named himself Vizier.

Since that time, the Vizier has carved out an even larger section of the obsidian to be part of his nation, but his feelings of inferiority and the endless backstabbing attacks of his neighbors have only intensified his paranoia. Today, the Vizier rarely leaves the protection of his deepest dungeons beneath the palace in Deshentarum. He sends agents to do his bidding; their main business is protecting the country from invasions by whatever means.

The Vizier's Protections

The Vizier expects constant invasions, and several sorties into his lands by neighboring nations have proven him right. To defend against them, he has engaged on a four-part plan to protect his position as the dominant and rightful ruler on the Dead Lands: military buildup, tribute, sabotage, and traps.

THE DESHENTAN MILITARY

The Deshentan army is strong and well organized. The Vizier can count on six strong field armies plus a large contingent of auxiliary troops and reserves.

Each field army consists of 1,200 warriors. Of these, 800 are divided into four skeleton pike formations, generally deployed to the right, center, and left with

one held in reserve. There are also 200 skeleton or zombie archers deployed as skirmishers in front of the field army, plus 200 undead crodlu mounted cavalry, divided into four squadrons for scouting and flanking. Each field army is lead by a kaisharga general (*Male or Female Human kaisharga Wizard 5 / Necromant 8 / Fighter 7; FoDL Ch4*); each pike formation, the skirmishers, and each cavalry squadron is led by a fallen champion (*Male or Female Human Fallen Psychic Warrior 14*).

Deshentan auxiliary troops come in many varieties, but the most common are giant skeleton bombardiers, dwarf zombie hammer-bearers, and elf skeleton swiftwings. (See *Deshenten Army* section; *FoDL Ch4*) Each of the 1d10 auxiliary units numbers 10d10 strong with a single leader for each unit.

TRIBUTE

The Vizier's neighbors, most notably the bandit prince Harkor, the marauders of Chol, the many nomad warlords of the Bone Lands, and above all, Shadowmourn, are his greatest worries. Despite his enormous military build up (his are among the strongest, best organized armies in all the Dead Lands), the Vizier fears invasion above all things, and would much rather avoid it than confront it on the black fields of battle. Toward that end he has decided that tribute is a viable means of obtaining peace on his frontiers.

Deshentu's monetary reserves are substantial, stolen from opposing armies in earlier days or mined from beneath the obsidian plate. The main treasure horde is kept in a deep, hidden chamber, beneath the Vizier's living quarters, in Deshentarum (see below). It is a sizable reserve, especially considering the complete imbalance of its worth, in view of the Dead Lands' lack of material wealth. That gold and silver hold any value at all is a holdover from earlier days; such traditions die hard, even among the ancient undead.

The Vizier has negotiators in the camps of all his major rivals. They are welcomed there, keeping lines of communication open with their master through his *crystal balls* and other scrying magic. Some, such as Harkor, have honored a single agreement for years, keeping his armies out of Deshentu for the annual payment of some large amount of silver – in Harkor's case, a chest of silver every year. Other rivals, less organized and subject to more rapid change of leadership, are offered payment when they appear brandishing weapons on the borders, confronted by negotiators bearing wealth to buy their pacification, if not as a whole, then piecemeal.

Tribute has not always been a completely effective tool in the Vizier's quest for peace. Harkorese troops have invaded under a thin guise as other marauders, and some have accepted tribute only to cross the borders soon after that. Still, in the Vizier's eyes the system works well enough. Any conflict avoided is certainly worth its weight in silver.

SABOTAGE

What isn't commonly known is that the Vizier's Negotiators are also powerful t'liz (*Human T'liz Wizard 9 / Necromant 8; FoDL Ch3*) who use their magic to disrupt the rival nations, keeping them off balance and unable to mount invasions. Blinded by the wealth they offer, rivals never turn away a negotiator from a camp or capital city, instead welcoming them with open arms, where they are given audience and shelter appropriate to their station. Pampered and heeded, they are wolves in the fold, beyond suspicion.

THE KILLING GROUNDS OF DESHENTU

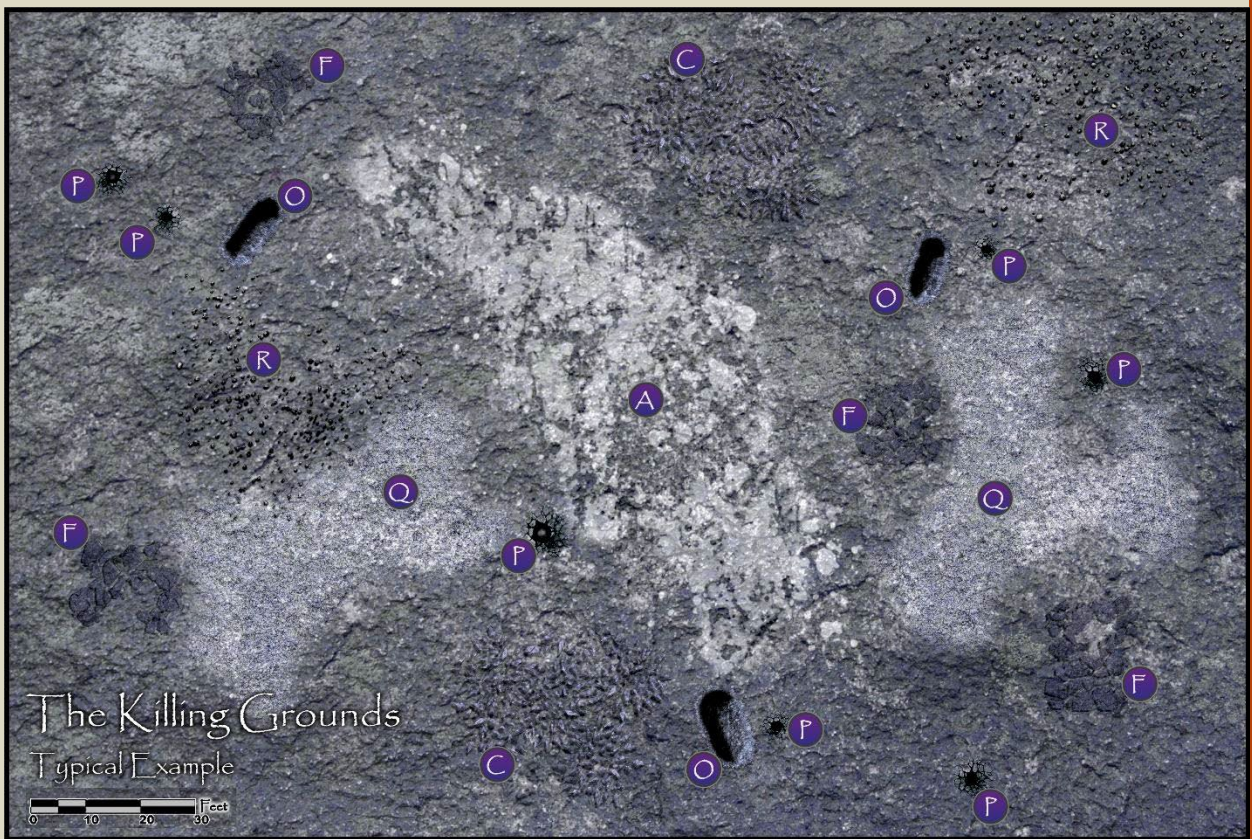
The Vizier's paranoia is the overriding concern of his reign, spawning an enormous effort to keep his enemies at bay. He makes it well known to his rivals that his nation is well defended, that its treasures are hidden and well protected, its inhabitants universally set against invasions from all directions. Those warnings have been ignored, at times, but marauding armies that have crossed the border into the Vizier's territory have come away knowing the truth. The reputation of Deshentu's terrible Killing Grounds has spread throughout the lands of the dead princes.

The Killing Grounds is void terrain, surrounding the capital city of Deshentarum, prepared over Ages to suit the Vizier's purposes. Ravines and ridges in the obsidian were leveled off, part of enormous construction projects conducted over decades, easily noted by passing heroes. The ravines were filled with the pulverized obsidian of the ridges, with no effort made to mask the alterations. Enemies, the Vizier reasoned, should find no protection on the plains, nothing to hide behind, no natural barriers to cover their escape. The Vizier's philosophy is simple – let them invade, since they will anyway, but make them pay dearly and send them away with nothing but depleted ranks.

The artificially smooth Killing Grounds are trapped and subtly fortified to cripple any army approaching Deshentu's heartland. The traps are concealed and deadly, designed to break up formations of troops and slow the progress of rank-and-file skeletons and zombies. Even individual skirmishing troops find the going difficult through the Killing Grounds. There are barriers set up to ambush flying or burrowing invaders.

The map shows a typical section of the Killing Grounds. Player characters may blunder into the grounds without realizing it, until they encounter the first trap. Each separate trap notation includes methods of detection, listed in parentheses. Apart from the clearly altered terrain, the Killing Grounds is typical terrain for the Black Basin, endless obsidian completely devoid of life.

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KILLING GROUNDS TRAPS

The letters on the map above correspond to one of the following list of traps. Stats for relevant spells and traps themselves are provided here, while the *Traps of the Killing Grounds of Deshentu* section in *FoDL Ch3* has stats for the creatures mentioned in these entries:

- A- **Altered Terrain Trench:** To the casual observer, the ground appears to be flat and solid. When anything weighing as much as a halfling or heavier walks 5' into it, the ground drops away in a thunderous crash that shakes the obsidian, forming a canyon-like pit that stretches 60 feet across centered on the trap. The trench is 10 feet wide and 30 feet deep with jagged walls and floors. Creatures subject to this effect fall to the base unless they can fly or are under the effects of a *feather fall* or similar. (DC 25 **Reflex save** avoids; 3d6, fall)
- C - **Invisible Caltrops:** Several obsidian caltrops have been scattered liberally across the ground and rendered magically invisible. A character or animal moving through the area is subjected to an attack by the caltrops (see Player's Handbook, page 126). The invisible obsidian caltrops make an attack roll against the creature, with a **Base Attack Bonus** of +2. The attack ignores any **armor**, **shield**, and **deflection** bonus the creature may have, and the creature is denied its **Dexterity** bonus. Once stepped on, the single caltrop becomes visible, but the rest do not.

F - Proximity Fireballs: These spots are marked with small obsidian pebbles enchanted with spells. There are thousands of unenchanted pebbles, so sorting them or avoiding them will prove impossible. The traps trigger when a creature moves within 10 feet of them, resulting in an immediate detonation.

Proximity Fireball Trap: CR 7; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); automatic reset; spell-like effect (treat as *widened fireball*, 18th level wizard, 10d6 fire, DC 19 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31.

O - Occupied Pits: The occupied pits are similar to the other pits and are triggered the same way. However, the occupied pits contained undead creatures placed in the pits to attack any invaders that fall through. The Vizier has populated these pits with undead animals and other mindless creatures.

Camouflaged Pit Trap: CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; DC 25 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. deep (2d6, fall); multiple targets (first target in each of two adjacent squares); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 20.

See FoDL Chapter 5 for stats on creatures in pits.

P - Pits: The pits are covered with a thin layer of smooth obsidian glass that, to the naked eye, is indistinguishable from the surrounding terrain. Anything walking over one and weighing more than 50 pounds crashes through. The sides of the pit are tapered into a cone 20 feet deep, set with razor-sharp ridges and spikes that cause damage as the victim slides all the way to the bottom. The spikes point inward and down, so anyone extracted from the pit in haste suffers additional damage (treat as a second attack by 1d4 spikes).

Killing Grounds Pit Trap: CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; DC 25 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. deep (2d6, fall); multiple targets (first target in each of two adjacent 5-ft. squares); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 20.

Q- Quick Obsidian: The obsidian in this area has been modified with enchantment so that ground liquefies and drags in any creatures which walk at least 5' into this area. Beneath the surface, strong hands grab at the creature to pull it quickly under. Each creature has 2 rounds to break free of the grasping hands (DC 18 Strength check) and get out of the molten obsidian or be consumed by it. A creature trapped under the blackglass is helpless and subject to suffocation.

R - Proximity Rune Traps: These traps are enchanted onto small pebbles lying on the surface of the obsidian. Any one of the six different magical effects activate when a creature passes within 10 feet of a pebble. The traps are magically disguised, so a group of intruders will not know which of the six effects will occur before triggering.

Proximity RuneTrap: CR 10; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); automatic reset; spell-like effect (varies, 18th level wizard); Search DC 34; Disable Device DC 34.

- **Cavalry Charge:** A force of eight skeleton lancers mounted on zombie crodlu arise to protect Deshentarum. They charge the party attempting to ride them down.

See FoDL Chapter 5 for stats.

- **Swarm of Meteors:** Flaming stones rain down on everything within 40 feet for 1d6 rounds. (1d10 fire, DC 17 Reflex save half damage)

- **Lightning Storm:** A storm of swirling black clouds appears suddenly in the sky above, launching blasts of lightning to the ground for 9 rounds. Each creature within 30 feet of the trap, when it is sprung, is subject to the effect to a range of 280 feet. Each round one creature is randomly targeted. (4d6 electrical, DC 22 Reflex save half damage) All creatures within 10 feet of the lightning strike, including the targeted creature, are subject to flying chunks of obsidian, blasted from the ground, (2d4 damage, DC 22 Reflex save half damage)

- **Obsidian Elementals:** The obsidian bubbles and churns as 1d4+1 Medium obsidian elementals crawl from the ground to surround and attack the party.

See FoDL Chapter 5 for stats.

Deshentarium

The Vizier's capital city is the center of his nation's wealth. Its palaces and tombs are adorned with gold and other metals scavenged or mined from beneath the obsidian. Cathedrals, raised to ancient gods who never were, reach for the green-tinted sky, ornately carved with epic scenes and exotic statuary. Beautiful boulevards are carved into the obsidian and lined with monuments, obelisks, and even mock-trees, all fashioned of blackglass. The Vizier's eye for the aesthetic is unparalleled in the Black Basin, and he's

put his nation's wealth to the adornment and beautification of his capital city.

Deshentarium's exterior walls are the last line of defense for the city. They rise 20 feet above the obsidian plain, and in some places soar to more than 30 feet high. The soldiers who man the walls never leave them. They reside in and defend the perimeter, never venturing into the fabulous city they guard. The Vizier wants no reminders in his fabulous city of the need for defense, or that there are threats from the outside world. In the land beyond lies chaos and danger, but within these walls, such things are not tolerated.



The walls also support a series of high, decorative nets. These are woven of hair and cloth, suspended on pillars and poles to serve two purposes. First, they serve to shade major portions of the city through the long, hot days. Undead need no protection from the sun's heat, but the many works of art in the city will deteriorate if not protected from the intense rays. The second purpose is to defend against attacks by flying invaders like those of the Swift Death raiders. The nets are strung deep enough that no massed formations of flyers could penetrate quickly, and even single units would be hard pressed to get through. The Vizier's defense ministers try to prepare for all contingencies.

Deshentarium City Locations

1. The Vizier's Palace: The Vizier's palace complex is actually a series of mansions and exotic structures, all built around mock gardens, against the northern and eastern exterior walls of Deshentarium. No walls separate the palace compound from the rest of the city; the undead know when they are invited guests, and none trespass against the Vizier. Though built of obsidian, most of the palace buildings are either covered in gold leaf, faced with bright white stone, or inset with red marble, all mined from deep below the obsidian mass. This is the most colorful area in the Dead Lands. Servants and butlers attend to the Vizier's needs, coordinating the efforts of artisans and architects, in a constant remodeling of the palace grounds. (See the Vizier's Palace section below.)

2. The Dusk Bazaar: Deshentu is unusual among the Dead Lands cities in that it acts like it still has a functioning economy. Every day the seemingly mindless undead (and sometimes thinking undead) still set up their marketplace stands while others go about their shopping and other business. If any living eyes were to ever visit the place safely, it would be a truly unbelievable sight.

3. The Osseous Stadium: Perhaps the result of the Vizier still maintaining an interest in sports from his living days, or perhaps as a practical tool to help ensure his armies are properly equipped with skilled charioteers, the Osseous Stadium is a massive structure designed to host chariot races as well as gladiatorial games. What is so unusual about the structure is that it is entirely built out of bones.

4. The Necrologium: See the Necrologium entry in the next section.

5. The Great Temple: See the Temple District entry in the next section.

6-8. City Gates: In an echo of an old Green Age Deshenten tradition, each of the gates was given its own name (6 – Carrion Gate, 7 – Umbra Gate, 8 – Skull Gate).

All of the City Gates feature barracks and holding places for various units from his army (See *Deshenten Army; FoDL Ch4*).

THE VIZIER'S PALACE

The Vizier's home is a domed structure guarded by a handful of enslaved elementals. They patrol all the entrances, blending with the surroundings when possible. Again, the Vizier wants no reminders inside his city of the trouble outside. He refers to these guards as his retinue.

Inside, the palace is adorned in mock representations of the creature comforts of his former life, mostly fashioned from the chief raw material of the land: obsidian. Couches and cushions lie on the floor before darkened fireplaces. Writing desks, benches, even chandeliers and sconces are all in their places, but have no function. The Vizier calls for new items daily, carved by his artisans, placed by his own hand. The true treasure of the nation is stored deep beneath the Vizier's home, behind hidden doors and secret passages and stairways. The Vizier has collected a sizable fortune from which he pays off the surrounding nations to keep them at bay. Despite this, even the first of his treasure-vaults holds a ransom many a sorcerer-king might envy: 22,000 spsp, 75 gpgp, and 130,000 cp all of ancient mintage; 120 gems totaling 17,500 Cp value, 37 jewels totaling 30,500 Cp value, and a variety of magical items unearthed from beneath the obsidian, bewildering to the undead who found them, but magical, therefore valuable.

There is a *ring of animal friendship*, a *ring of sustenance*, a *ring of spell turning*, a *staff of life*, a *staff of power*, a *manual of quickness of action +4* (an unrecognized treasure from the Green Age), a *harp of charming*, and a *sword of life stealing*. There is also a *clear spindle ioun stone*, a *vibrant purple prism ioun stone*, a *scepter of life*, and a full suit of *armor of presence* (See *FoDL Ch10* for information on these last two items).

THE TEMPLE DISTRICT

The temple district boasts more voluminous buildings than the palaces. More than a dozen are finished, with two more in progress, all fashioned

either from obsidian blocks or from entire slabs of blackglass, built in tight-fitting wall sections. The vizier built each of these to honor a separate “god,” the gods of his imagination, his obsession. He has staffed the temples with priests of those gods of myth - and unknowingly grants them spells.

Which sorcerer-king's living vortex fled to Kulrath after the death of its host is a matter of speculation – Sielba of Yaramuke is the most likely source, though another as-yet unknown source could exist. Whichever it was, it has given the Vizier the power to grant spells to others. This was done without the awareness or knowledge of the subject, for reasons unknown. As such, the Vizier, without his consent or conscious knowledge, possesses the might of the sorcerer-kings. The Vizier's priests (*Male or Female Human Morg Templar 18; FoDL Ch4*) and monks (*Male or Female Human Morg Templar 13 / Telepath 7*) are unwitting templars serving an unknowing master.

Each temple has a staff of undead priests or monks who maintain deep-set rituals and wear ruts in the obsidian floors, shuffling from icon to icon. The chants of the caretakers are mere gibberish, their meaning irrelevant to the acquisition of their spells. Nevertheless, their pious acts go undisturbed, and they show no tolerance for disruption, even from guests of the Vizier. The leader of the nation is also the spiritual leader for all of the temple rituals. He attends services in each of them at least once every 10 days, donning different garb for each, speaking to the monks in ancient gibberish, and granting spells by his presence. The Vizier takes this role seriously, but he would not accept the truth if he were confronted with it.

THE NECROLOGIUM

The Necrologium, a wizard university, is the Vizier's greatest triumph. He has put his best t'liz and other undead [wizards](#) in a series of magnificent towers and classrooms in an effort to be the sole remaining champion of Rajaat's great works. Together, they have tried to reestablish the great research begun so long ago, in the desert wastelands and at the Pristine Tower. However, time has greatly distorted their views. The magical research at Deshentaru's Necrologium is steeped in endless ritual, slowing progress to a crawl. They focus their research on magical enchantment and necromancy, rather than interdimensional communications and contact. Still, the university is the most organized magical research facility in the Dead Lands, probably in all of Athas.

The head of the research university is the great zhen Rhokhan (*Female Human Zhen Wizard 17 / Necromant 7; FoDL Ch4*). Rhokhan started her living career under the direct supervision of Rajaat in the Pristine Tower. He marked her as a brilliant scribe and sage, a master of the burgeoning wizardly arts. After the Boiling Ruin, she wandered aimlessly, confused and terrified. Kulrath, the Vizier, found her and cared for her for a time in the south, and the two gained a vast mutual respect. When the Vizier came to power, he sent for Rhokhan and she agreed to become the High Wizard of the new realm. Together they devised the plan to continue Rajaat's work as best they could, and Rhokhan has dedicated herself to it ever since.

The three items of greatest interest, at the university, are the *obsidian circlet*, the *black rose of the Dead Lands*, and the *libram of undeniable allegiance* (See *FoDL Ch10* for details on all three items). The *obsidian circlet* is a thin crown made especially to fit the head of the Vizier of Deshentu, recently enchanted with powerful magic by the [wizards](#) of his university. The *black rose of the Dead Lands* is a beautifully carved flower, its petals nearly transparent and fragile. The most ancient of the three, the *libram of undeniable allegiance*, is etched and inked in the blood of pixies, onto thin sheets of polished obsidian. It was created by the late Sehrangez, a wizardess in Gretch's Grey Tower, during the late Time of Magic.

Tectuktitlay's Stair

Carved at great cost in men and pain from the very cliffs of ancient Ulyan, Tectuktitlay's Stair is a narrow way that drives straight up the cliffs, north of what is now Deshentu. Tectuktitlay ordered his men to dig the Stair, because he refused to wait for the other Champions to pass up the Winding Way in the west – there were no wemics for him to hunt in Ulyan, and he was impatient to engage his quarry. So, instead of waiting his turn, either at the Winding Way or following Keltis and Albeorn eastwards by Elsavos, Tectuktitlay marched straight to the northern reaches of Ulyan and ordered his men to dig and climb.

Tectuktitlay's Stair took months, and countless lives, to build. It is a generally zig-zagging path, carved in the outer face of the cliffs, with many irregular windows peering out at the southern lands. The Stair is wide enough for crodlu cavalry and chariots to pass without difficulty, but it has many shallow equestrian-style steps and is difficult for wagons. Tectuktitlay did not reveal the purpose of his long encampment in

Ulyan's north, and in any case the cleansing assaults of the other Champions were more than distracting the population of Ulyan. When the last of his troops reached the top, Tectuktitlay sealed the mouth of his Stair with a massive granite slab and never looked back.

The Stair remained unknown, and unexplored, for generations. It was still known only to a precious few cognoscenti when the Obsidian Wave silently thundered against it. The lower portions were flooded, of course, and splashes of liquid obsidian reached into the windows even to the uppermost reaches. Some of the windows were sealed by the blackglass, and some sections of the Stair were choked with stone, broken from the walls by the impact of the Black Tide. Nonetheless, the Stair is theoretically still passable, at least for those determined few with at least some familiarity with climbing equipment. Tectuktitlay's Stair is detailed fully in the adventure *The Emissary*.

KNOR'MORHEN

The most dangerous creatures creeping up and down Tectuktitlay's Stair now are undead spiders, of which every kind seems to have a representative, except for the largest type – the Stair remains as narrow and constricted as ever. However, at its original lower terminus, a powerful creature named Knor'morhen (*Female Troll Kaisharga Seer 14 / Expert 5; FoDL Ch4*) dwells in a cave dug from the blackglass. Knor'morhen took up residence here before the Boiling Ruin, after years wandering the wastes of Ulyan seeking solace and understanding for the ruin of her homeland, and capital of the troll empire, Nuubark.

Her presence here is a secret, despite the presence of a small tunnel which reaches the surface of the blackglass and by which he occasionally exits her retreat, in order to contemplate the stars. Knor'morhen is extraordinarily powerful, especially on her home ground, which she has well prepared with defenses, both magical and mundane, but she harbors no illusions about her chances against the legions of Deshentu or Shadowmourn – she keeps her presence secret from the paranoid rulers of these lands.

Knor'morhen was a member of the Council of the Learned in Nuubark, during the years before and after Rajaat and his Champions came into Ulyan. She was a committed logician, firmly committed to the concepts of reason and understanding that made the Sagocracy such a stable and tolerant society. When her peers reported that the Champions' armies had massacred the entire population of conquered Nagarvos', Knor'morhen could not believe it – even the most



savage conquerors kept their captives alive, as slave laborers if nothing else. Surely, if such massacres had occurred, they were a specific, and unique, event, related to something that had occurred in the Siege of Nagarvos'. She simply could not accept that the massacre was a deliberate policy – Rajaat was far too educated to be capable of such barbarism!

Knor'morhen argued against the strengthening of the Sagocracy's borders, seeing such preparations as a provocation to the Champions. When the army of Myron of Yorum attacked, Knor'morhen led the faction in the Council of the Learned that urged the philosopher-king Yorg-yanak to negotiate. She reasoned that the Sagocracy had in some way offended Myron or Rajaat, and that by changing some policy or paying some weregild the Champion could be appeased. Yorg-yanak rejected such an approach, and the invaders pressed on to defile and devastate the Sagocracy. Knor'morhen continued to pressure the king to negotiate, and finally to offer terms of complete surrender.

Finally, as Nuubark's defenses reached their lowest ebb, the king relented and appointed Knor'morhen to lead a delegation to beg for peace, on any terms. As the king had foreseen, Myron was uninterested in the trolls' surrender. He laughed in Knor'morhen's face, and had the entire delegation tortured to death in front of the horrified leader. Knor'morhen was killed in her turn, and raised to undeath as well, so Myron could enjoy the spectacle of sending Yorg-yanak's

ambassadors back to him, his answer eloquently expressed in the corpse like shuffle of the undead.

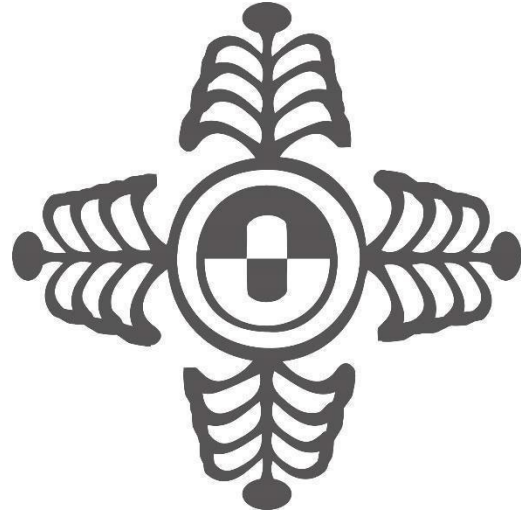
Knor'morhen finally understood that she and her people were dealing with unremitting hatred, and that no act of submission would placate the invaders. Back in the court of Yorg-yanak, she volunteered to fight, using her undead strength in the hopeless resistance. The king permitted her this, and the formerly pacifist sage became a ferocious defender of the city. However, Nuubark had only weeks left, before the inevitable conquest and cleansing, and Knor'morhen could not prevent events from taking their course.

After the destruction of Nuubark, Knor'morhen spent years brooding among the ruins, seeking to understand why and how her people had come to this disastrous pass. She had gained powers in the transformation to undeath, powers which Myron's defilers had perhaps not even known they were providing her and which did not fully manifest until years afterwards. She avoided the restored king Yorg-yanak, until after some years, her presence was no longer tolerated and she was forced to depart the city of her birth.

Knor'morhen wandered over nearly every land of Ulyan north of the Hoarwall, not seeking the mighty rulers but passing quietly among the living and undead, gathering her thoughts on the events of the Cleansing Wars and the hatreds which spawned them. She finally came to rest in the far north, east of the ruins of her home city, where she discovered Tectuktitlay's Stair and chose this secret and forgotten place as her home. When the Black Tide swept over the land, Knor'morhen was one of the few beings to regard it with indifference.

After a few years, Knor'morhen pulled out her pickaxe and dug herself a tunnel to the surface of the Obsidian Plain. She was disappointed by the destruction, but not really surprised – her travels had convinced her that evil was everywhere in ascendance, and the Obsidian Tide seemed like just one more desecration in a land already polluted and defiled. She remains in seclusion, refining her grim philosophy of the inevitable death and ruin of all. If living PCs encounter her, they will find her helpful and polite, willing to assist them on whatever their quest might be – but any information she provides them with will be colored with gloom and prophecies of certain doom and failure.

The Grand Duchy of Shadowmourn



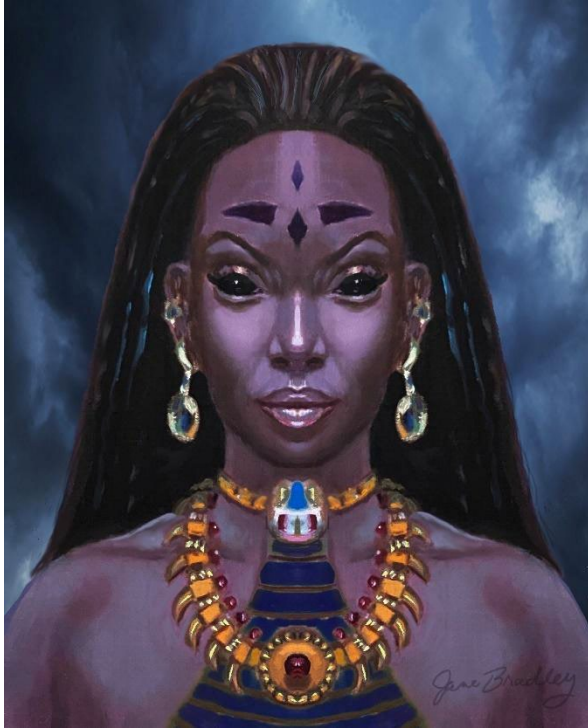
The Grand Duchy of Shadowmourn sits nestled against the northern obsidian cliffs, roughly 25 miles long from north to south and 30 miles wide from east to west. The borders with the cliffs to the north are where the obsidian is its thinnest, jagged and broken, reaching up the cliff face. Deshentu's Killing Grounds lie to the west, while Harkor and Chol lie beyond the no-man's land of The Desolation running along the south and eastern borders (see below).

Most of Shadowmourn's terrain is typical of the central Black Basin north of the Forbidden Mountains—smooth glass marked with gentle ridges and limited cracking. Excepting the cliffs, these borders offer little natural defense against invasions.

Qwith

Qwith, (*Female Human Zhen Wizard 20 / Necromant 10; FoDL Ch4*) the mastermind of Rajaat's original trans dimensional magic project, who was marginalized for her reluctance to turn that magic into a weapon for the Cleansing Wars, and overwhelmed by vengeful meorties and the negligence of her subordinates, is now a powerful zhen. Her ambitions crushed by those of her master, Qwith's life's work turned into chaos beyond her ability to control. She allowed her loyalty to Rajaat to cloud her convictions, an act that would have made her a racked spirit – anywhere but here.

In undeath, Qwith is the ruler of Shadowmourn, the vast area she claims as her "grand duchy," a nation



built upon her ideals of the perfectibility of the undead. Raging paranoia marks her every action, however, and she believes that other undead rulers wish to overrun her territory and usurp her perfect society. To protect her lands, Qwith keeps a strong army and devotes all of her resources to the defense of the realm, including massive construction projects and preemptive military strikes against her neighbors.

Grand Duchess Qwith knows that the Vizier of Deshentu to the west is weak and racked with constant indecision, so she is cautious but not overly worried about invasions from that direction. She occasionally sends her armies into Deshentu to destroy outposts and ravage its regiments, in order to swell her own ranks and demonstrate that the border is hers to control. However, Shadowmourn bears the scars of a long history of invasions from the south and east, out of the lands of Harkor and Chol, and it is from the south that Qwith fears an eventual killing tide of insectoid undead. To keep the Harkorese and Cholites in check she has embarked on an ambitious series of defenses centered on the fortress complex at Castle Krujar.

KUSHTAN

Qwith maintains her capital in the walled city of Kushtan, close to the geographical center of the Duchy. The city, its walls, its buildings, and every other

structure consist of obsidian blocks mined locally. The city is well-defended, with an inner and outer wall, each more than 50 feet high, and a deep, waterless moat between them. The inner wall is constructed with eight small fortresses, each mounted with ballistas and other larger artillery, well-stocked with ammunition. Inside the walls are palaces and tombs for Qwith and her lieutenants. Kushtan's 10,000 undead residents guard and maintain the city.

Kushtan City Locations

1. Temple of Qwith: There was a period in time many centuries ago where Qwith entertained the idea of being treated as a goddess-queen by her people. While that is no longer the case, the impressive architecture of the temple remains, still guarded but mostly unused unless Qwith wishes to conduct a special ceremony.

2. Qwith's Palace: Qwith alternates her time between this fortified palace and her tower in Castle Krujar, depending on her current project or where she is most needed for her duchy.

3. Barracks: Qwith is known to draw troops from her entire population, so building a barracks for holding troops is an unnecessary step. This structure is used for storing and maintaining equipment, as well as equipping and training soldiers before they are deployed elsewhere.

4. Menagerie of the Duchess: Qwith's research has never stopped even after undeath. She maintains two sites for the storage of her research specimens. The menagerie is where she holds various creatures or parts of them for magical analysis. While most of the collection is relatively inert or docile, there are a few specimens which are quite dangerous, and she has unleashed one or two of them upon invading forces in the past.

5. White Bridge Gate: There is only one gate through the walls, with a retractable bridge across the moat, allowing access for a single road that leads directly to Castle Krujar in the southeast.

6. Museum of Shadowmourn: Qwith's other storage site has been turned into a kind of curated museum, containing exhibits of artifacts and items of interest from older ages going all the way back to the Blue Age. All of them either have historical, magical, or psionic



value, but only a few would actually be considered magical items.

CASTLE KRUIJAR

Castle Krujar is a massive fortification built by Qwith to protect her lands from invasion from Chol and Harkor. Built atop an obsidian hill and surrounded by trenches, the castle dominates the surrounding region. The walls and battlements, made of massive carved obsidian blocks, are patrolled by

hundreds of undead soldiers, including skeletons, namech, and ioramh. Qwith's main palace is at the center of the upper portion of the castle. The palace is constructed from finely-carved obsidian and decorated with carved figures and bas-reliefs of horrible creatures and undead. The palace includes a large temple, at which undead are expected to worship Qwith, the ballroom, where Qwith holds balls at which mindless undead perform formal choreographed dances to entertain honored guests of the duchess, and Qwith's private quarters, including her massive

library. Next to the palace is a large arena, where various gladiator games are held.

THE OUTPOSTS

Although originally from the Tablelands, Qwith is now uncertain what lies beyond the obsidian plains to the north and northeast, and so is wary of them. Her undead are forbidden to venture beyond the rim of the blackglass, and commanded to destroy any invaders that might present themselves. The Duchess constructed nine outposts at the feet of the sheer cliffs; each one built of obsidian battlements and heavily entrenched. Each frontier outpost houses a Border Battalion of 250 skeleton and zombie warriors. Patrols around and between the outposts are frequent; entering Shadowmourn unnoticed would be difficult for an intruder from the sandy wastelands above.

THE DESOLATION

Krujar consists of a long series of walls and forts linked by tunnels and walled roads through the obsidian. They are all built on a low ridge of smooth glass that runs east to west 5 to 10 miles north of the southern borders, constituting the sole defensive structure against Harkorese and Cholite invaders for the last few King's Ages. However, invasions have easily bypassed Castle Krujar and even laid siege to Kushtan itself, a situation Qwith would like to avoid in the future. Toward that end, since extending Krujar's battlements from one end of the Duchy to the other is impractical, she has decided to destroy a swath across her obsidian lands, making the terrain virtually impassable to ground forces.

The project, known as the Desolation, is more than half complete, extending along the southern border with Harkor and turning north to follow the border of Chol for several miles. The Desolation is at least 2 miles across at its narrowest point, blasted, mined, and churned to transform the previously smooth, easily-traversed glass into a broken, jagged ruin, treacherous and impassable. More than 5,000 skeletons and zombies work the Desolation constantly, supported by magical explosions and the destruction unleashed by the Duchess' lieutenants. Qwith expects the Desolation, to be completed in another 10 years, at which point it will span the entire length of the border, both east and south.

THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER

South of the Desolation and Castle Krujar is the abandoned southern frontier, all but given over to invaders from Chol and Harkor. The Duchess has ordered that this land never be defended in pitched battle, but instructs her minions to sabotage and trap the area heavily. Her enemies may travel here freely, but they pay for their insolence. Pits are dug and filled with sharpened obsidian stakes and magical wards are left everywhere to force invaders to struggle to get across it. The Shadowmourner teams work invisibly whenever possible, avoiding the prying eyes of marauders as they set their surprises.

THE DEEP MINES

The Deep Mines, in the east central Duchy, cut right through the obsidian to an ancient burial site left by an unknown primitive tribe from the Green Age. The mines have unearthed several different burial mounds, and those have yielded thousands of skeletons for reanimation and induction into the ranks of her legions. Given the general shortage of foot soldiers across the entire Black Basin, the mines are among the Duchess's greatest assets, and are appropriately protected.

Armies of Shadowmourn

Shadowmourn maintains a large standing army. In time of desperate struggle, the Duchess allows no distinction between worker and soldier; she calls upon all to swell the ranks against invasions. However, in times of relative calm she maintains the nine Border Battalions and seven Field Legions, each roughly 1,000 strong. A praetor (*Male or Female Human Zhen Psionic Warrior 22; FoDL Ch4*) commands each Field Legion; each Cohort (10 per Field Legion) and Border Battalion is lead by a centurion (*Male or Female Human Zhen Wizard 10 / Necromant 2*). See *Armies of Shadowmourn section in FoDL Ch4* for more information on the units.

At the current time, the 1st, 4th, and 6th Field Legions are readying a sortie into Deshentu to probe the strength of their neighbor and plunder his land. The legions are assembling on the western border, north of the Desolation. The 2nd Field Legion is chasing marauders from Chol who have penetrated as far north as the third outpost on the cliff border. The 3rd and 5th Field Legions are stationed outside the capital city of Kushtan, while the 7th Field Legion remains in its traditional place manning the many fortifications of Castle Krujar.

Harkor



Harkor is one of the smallest nations in the Dead Lands, occupying barely 90 square miles, yet its population is among the largest. In this obsidian land south of Shadowmourn and southeast of Deshentu, over 50,000 undead heed their master's orders, formed into enormous construction battalions or built into armies for campaigns. Harkor's strength is well known, and his neighbors often pay him off with rusted metal, corpses, or magical trinkets to keep his armies off their obsidian. Of course, this practice makes him all the stronger.

Harkor's obsidian has been uprooted and transformed; none of the original glass plain remains as it was immediately after the Boiling Ruin. Courtyards and mock gardens occupy the landscape between the crypts and mausoleums, the modern barracks of the Dead Lands. All of the statues and mosaics consist of obsidian, carved and formed to resemble symbols of all the elements and the sphere of the Cosmos - then scarred and desecrated, defaced in the presence of Harkor himself, testifying to his permanent divorce from the faithless elements. The terrain is a single, endless tomb, an obsidian cemetery blasted by the hot winds beneath the relentless Athasian sun.

Harkor "The Reborn"

The land is named for its warlord, the wicked raaig Harkor (*Male Human Raaig Wizard 14 / Necromant 10; FoDL Ch4*). The marauder and bandit princes of Chol consider Harkor to be one of their own, albeit the most

powerful of their kind. Harkor, however, does not count himself among the marauders, and has the power to force recognition of his lands as an independent, strong nation of undead, and himself as its leader.

In life, Harkor was an elemental priest of fire who went to the Navel to see to the spiritual needs of the researchers, and, as the studies moved through generations, his most important function was as custodian of the dead. In undeath Harkor has become a raaig, ignored by his element, no longer bound to his previous commitment. He has mined through the obsidian and unearthed the graves of those buried below, exhuming corpse after corpse to become part of his horde. Now they follow Harkor in his frenzied grabs for power and prestige among the other undead kingdoms of the Dead Lands.

Harkor's residence is the most elaborate tomb of all, a vast obsidian ziggurat in the geographic center of his country. The structure is enormous, standing 100 feet tall and measuring over 1 mile in diameter. Each face is sheer and forbidding, polished smooth and impossible to climb. The caverns and corridors inside speak of the same rage as the rest of the land, with beautiful statues and mosaics created and then destroyed by rebellious hands and claws. Deep within is Harkor's throne room, filled with every bit of metal he can get his hands on; metal, once forbidden to him by the elementals, is his new obsession. He surrounds himself with tons of it, once a princely fortune anywhere else on Athas, now rusted and locked away in the deepest recesses of an obsidian ziggurat in the



middle of the Dead Lands. Most of the metal which can tarnish or corrode has now long gone to ruin, but still he hoards the stuff, thinking the reddish, brittle iron has value.

Necropolises of Harkor

Harkor is a land of endless necropolises. The Harkor map on the previous page shows a typical section of the strange Harkorese terrain. Player characters entering the area find a section like this no matter the direction from which they come. If they arrive during a time of war, when Harkor has his armies assembled and on campaign, the heroes find things much as described here, but none of the undead, nor their armor or weapons, are present.

The Sentinels of Death, described below, and various zombies patrol the entire area. Roll 1d10 every turn there are living beings among the tombs; a roll of 1 means a zombie patrol, 10 strong, has encountered them, raising the alarm for five Sentinels who arrive 1 turn later.

1. Octagonal Tomb: The walls of this structure are made from smaller obsidian bricks, about a half-giant's hand width each, cut square and polished smooth. Their fittings are typical of all the brickwork in this region, tight, seamless, and sturdy due to its accuracy. The building stands roughly 60 feet tall, making it nearly twice as tall as it is wide, topped with carvings of strange winged creatures. At least, they were winged, now they are broken and all but destroyed, heads and appendages shattered, bits of the obsidian littering the adjacent walkways. The exterior walls are also decorated with mosaics of more strange winged creatures - not aarakocra, but humans with wings flying about through flaming cities among the clouds - but these, too, are desecrated, smashed, and scarred, left in ruins on the face of the building. The mosaics themselves are crafted from tiny, fingernail size obsidian chips, chosen and placed according to their individual shade, making each finished picture an amazing work of black and deep purple art.

There is no entrance immediately visible on the outside, each of the eight faces appearing, at first glance, to be uniform and solid. However, closer inspection of the southernmost face may reveal the hidden door there, built intricately into the mosaics so that it is almost invisible. The entrance itself is barely wide enough for a human; a mul will have difficulty squeezing through, and a half-giant, thri-kreen, or a

scarlet warden is simply out of luck. Beyond is a series of nine chambers, eight of which are triangular, each opening onto the round, central chamber. The center of the building, at the center of the round chamber, has a dais with another ruined statue, its appendages ground to powder on the floor, but the interior walls are perfectly smooth.

Each triangular chamber holds a large obsidian crypt, their heavy lids still in place. Inside each is a powerful zombie (*Zombie Masons; FoDL Ch4*), created with extreme strength to serve as obsidian masons in Harkor's construction battalions; many of the zombies here are similarly strong. If disturbed, all eight will rise to destroy the horrid living things that have invaded their tomb.

2. Sunken Graves: This area is 10 feet below the level of the surrounding walkways, with stairs indicated at four locations. At that level, the ground consists of ground obsidian, broken into tiny pieces, hardly larger than grains of sand, spread evenly. A hundred headstones, carved of obsidian blocks in a variety of shapes, are arranged across the fake-earth, now smashed, scratched, and defaced. Words are written in strange characters on the shattered headstones.

The local residents (*Skeleton Champions of the Sunken Graves; FoDL Ch4*) don't take kindly to intrusion, especially by living creatures. They will lunge up from beneath each headstone, grabbing with bony hands, gaining a +3 bonus to **Hide** checks against those whom aren't wary against attack.

The coffins beneath the obsidian-sand surface hold the champions' treasures. In all hundred graves there are 23 gp, 170 sp, and 430 cp, minted with strange, ancient designs, plus a handful of rings, jewels, and gems that would bring another 150 Cp to anyone fortunate enough to survive to bring them to a market far to the north.

Plunderers might also be fortunate enough to find a variety of magical items, including a *horn of blasting*, a +2 *maul of detonating (AE)*, a suit of +1 *plate mail* sized for humans, a +1 *dagger*, and a +3 *quarterstaff of shattering (AE)* among other things.

3: The Mausoleum Courtyard: The black walls are built on either side of the road, to a height of 10 feet. The small openings, 2 feet by 2 feet, are covered with extremely thin, polished panes of obsidian, clear enough to see the remains of each drawer's inhabitant. Peering through the panes, one can see a skeleton or flesh-spotted corpse, partially wrapped in yellowed burial cloths, dust-covered and undisturbed, with tempting rings and lovely jewels in plain view. The



drawers are four high and extend off the area shown on the map for as far as the eye can see. The solid surfaces of the mausoleum walls are decorated in elaborate mosaics, but, like the other art in this strange land, all are smashed and carved with crude runes. The endless panes of clear glass covering the drawers, however, are strangely unbroken and unmarked.

Row upon row of stately entombed corpses contain an uncountable number of skeletons and zombies. If magical or psionic means are employed to steal the trinkets inside, the undead take no notice. If however, even one pane of polished glass is broken, the nearest 100 undead break out of their tombs and attack. Such an act also draws the attention of the Sentinels of Death (*Male or Female Human Athasian Wraith Wizard 10 / Necromant 7; FoDL Ch4*), Harkor's internal police force, always on the watch for ambitious, free-willed undead, both from within the kingdom and without. They will arrive five at a time every 5th round after the mausoleum is disturbed.

Each enclosed drawer contains one skeleton or a zombie, plus the following: 50% chance of 1d2 rings valued at 1d4 sp; 25% chance of 1d2 pieces of jewelry

valued at 1d12 sp; 75% chance of 1d20 Cp; 5% chance of an ancient scroll that contains 1d4 spells of the 1st through 6th levels, written in the ancient language of Ulyanese; 1% chance of some other magical item. An ambitious thief could spend quite a bit of time in the open mausoleums; there are 2,500 of them stretching away in a maze beyond the map.

4. The Sea of Urns: Stretched out across approximately an acre of ground are numerous rows of regular obsidian urns. Each urn stands 3 feet high, carved with two large handles and a flat bottom, to sit upright on the smooth obsidian floor. Each is also capped with an obsidian cork. Every hundredth one, or so, is smashed, broken, and empty. Close inspection of the exteriors reveals little— they are smooth and featureless, arranged regularly across the ground.

Those still sealed contain the broken, destroyed remains of a single ghostly undead creature. These are the remains of past generations of faithful who lived on the Ulyan plains and had been interred at Harkor's old Ulyanese fire temple. Each one is now an incorporeal wraith (*Servants of Harkor; FoDL Ch4*), not

as powerful as their master Harkor, but powerful nonetheless.

Harkor's servants are kept in this field until he needs them, usually in times of war. In undeath, the servants are jealous of their master, each one a creature of ambition, so Harkor keeps them sealed in obsidian, under strong magical wards. When they are required to fight, they are released for the duration of the troubles. Fortunately for him, the jealous wraiths are also incapable of working in concert against him. They hate each other and frequently quarrel and fight among themselves, much to Harkor's delight. Those few who have openly defied their master were banished, their jars smashed, and their broken remains ground to dust and left to the mercy of the winds.

An uncorked jar releases its wraith; the magical wards do not prevent others from opening them, only the raaigs themselves are so restricted. If the newly freed wraith encounters living creatures, it immediately succumbs to its inherent hatred of the living and attacks, lashing out with the full measure of its magic. However, the wraith might be reasoned with if a bargain against Harkor is suggested. Sensing that the raaigs may not like their master is not easy information to come by; PCs may note the magical wards sealing them into their jars by using *detect magic*, or they could use scrying magic to sense the thoughts of the creature or its situation, but this would require remarkable insight. Still, if they suggest such a bargain, the raaig listens, joining forces, temporarily, against its master. However, the moment the bargain is completed, or the living show any weakness, the wraith will renege on its contract and cut them down.

The Sentinels of Death do not patrol the Sea of Urns; PCs can travel there unmolested until and unless they disturb the jars.

5. The Pits of Sorrow: The obsidian ground is dotted with hundreds of tiny holes, like the strange crodlu milk cheese made by northern armies on the march, but black as coal. The holes range in diameter from just a yard or so, to more than 20 yards, cut in perfect circles through the blackglass. The lips are cut so finely that they are sharp enough to cut the unwary who let their feet fall across them or, even worse, fall and try to catch themselves on the edge. The holes are spaced close together, so there is just enough room to walk between them without falling in. From anywhere near the pits, it's plain to see that they stretch out over many acres, perhaps over many miles, without interruption.

These are Harkor's Pits of Sorrow, mystical prisons for those of his undead who have displeased him. Each pit is the prison cell of one or more undead entities,

though this may not be readily apparent; many have been robbed of their corporeal bodies as punishment for their crimes and left as moaning spirits for centuries. There are literally thousands of undead who have, somehow, fallen short of Harkor's rigorous expectations, only to wind up here, confined and denied even an undead existence, until such time as their leader decides they have learned their lessons. Generally, in times of crisis, the pits are emptied to swell the ranks of Harkor's armies.

Any given pit can be home to 1d6 ghostly forms (*Harkor's Tormented; See Tormented in ToDL Pg 37 for stats and FoDL Ch4 for their description*). Though ripped from different undead entities, Harkor's magic reduces them all to ghostly creatures with just a few powers left, generally those that help reinforce their misery and remind them of their endless sentences in the Pits of Sorrow. There is no correlation between pit size and the number of Harkor's spirits found inside. On initial inspection, each pit seems empty, since the ghosts are completely invisible, but they reek of undeath and evil; the ghosts have been driven mad by their captivity and pounce on any living thing that stumbles their way.

The gates to the pits are magical barriers over the opening, impervious to the ghosts but inconsequential to any other being, undead or otherwise. Player characters can only get a sense of the nature of these barriers through *detect magic* or similar spells. Once penetrated, however, the barrier is destroyed and the trapped ghosts are freed. The ghosts are completely uninterested in bargaining; each is driven by the possibility of somehow impressing Harkor and gaining a reprieve. Slaying the curious living creatures and bringing their corpses to him would be one way to do so.

Disturbed ghosts only attack from one pit at a time, unless the PCs have disturbed multiple pits at once. They have no treasure, nor do they know where their corporeal bodies are stored. The Sentinels of Death will arrive on the scene in 1d10+10 rounds, delayed because they commonly do not patrol the Pits of Sorrow. Player characters who wish to explore the entire area find it runs off the map provided, for about a mile in all directions, before turning into ancient crypts, homes for the rest of Harkor's undead civilization.

6. New Construction: Harkor's civilization is growing. His raids into other kingdoms are usually successful, as are his arrangements for tribute, to keep his forces home. Both acts swell his ranks with captured undead, and all of them need crypts or tombs to assimilate into his bizarre society.

A thousand **skeletons** and **zombies** labor to build new crypts in this area alone, and it is not the only such site in Harkor. Fael and **wraith** overseers, slaves to Harkor's will, whip the mindless builders beyond all reasonable expectations, destroying 10 or more a day just to set an example for the others. Those who move too slowly or fail to perform risk imprisonment in the dreaded Pits of Sorrow. As miserable as their nonlives are, not one of the undead here wishes to be still further stripped of its will and left to grieve, for King's Ages, in the pits. Such fear is an effective tool in Harkor, and his construction projects flourish and now dominate the landscape.

His instructions are for these sites to be built into above ground mausoleums, each large enough to contain 10 to 20 bodies on slabs or in drawers. The work is about half-finished, as most buildings are still lacking roofs and portions of walls, so the task masters whip and beat their workers through the night to keep things moving. The quarry workers slice blocks of obsidian from the ground with hammers and wedges, then grind them smooth with their teeth and bones.

Player characters venturing too close will draw the attention of the taskmasters (*Wraith Taskmasters of Harkor; FoDL Ch4*); the workers cannot afford to let up on their duties, even to destroy the hated living.

7. The Pyres: Flesh, bone, and even chitin are treasured commodities in the Dead Lands, but for all the corpses mutilated in the endless wars, there is a point of no return. Eventually there isn't enough left to stitch or splint together to make a whole body again, and the pieces become useless. The rent limbs, torsos, and heads of the fallen that are of no further use are brought to the Pyres for final destruction.

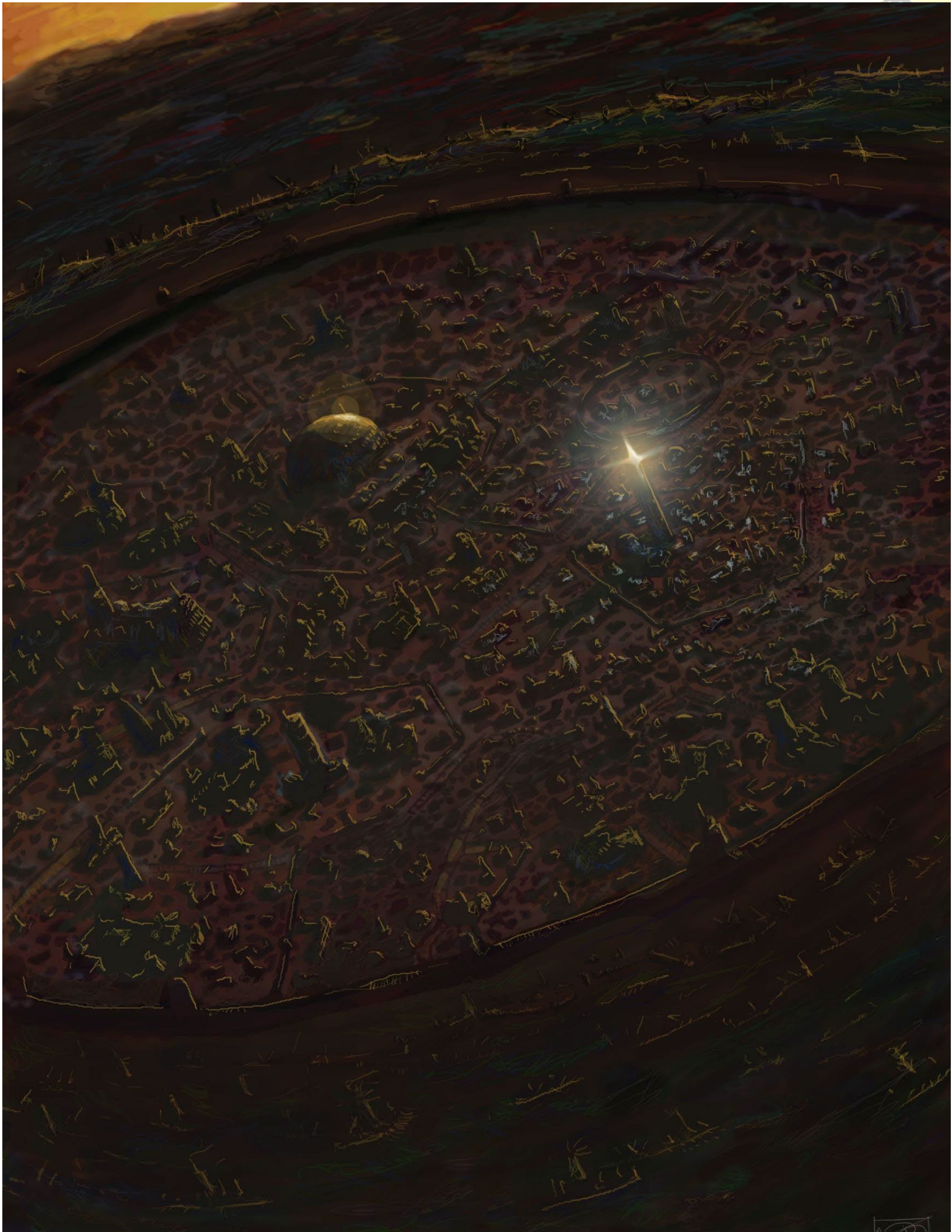
Harkor has great respect for his undead warriors, and in their final sendoff, he knows that each individual body part served him well, probably as part of several different champions over the King's Ages. The amphitheater he constructed can seat 25,000 creatures of human size, and Harkor insists that it be filled to capacity on the occasions of ceremonies.

Ceremonies are only performed on the pairing of the twin moons, when their appearance in the sky places them within a single diameter of one another, which occurs at irregular intervals. The quickest interval is four days, while the longest is five weeks. It is up to the **DM** if he wants the heroes to come across the amphitheater near or even during the time of the cremation ceremony.

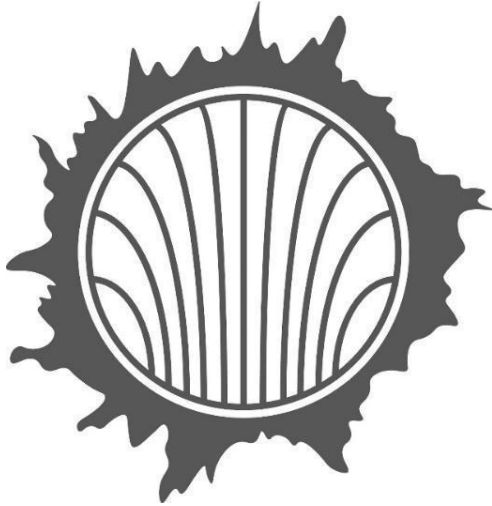
The ceremony itself lasts only a few hours, though the assemblage of Harkor's undead spectators takes a couple of days beforehand. The entire area shown on the map is overrun with **skeletons**, **zombies**, and the free-willed undead making the mandatory pilgrimage to the amphitheater. Harkor arrives on a strange caravan of carriages, crafted of obsidian and wood, pulled by undead inix and kanks. When all have assembled and the pairing of the moons is visible out the top of the amphitheater, the great leader dons his ceremonial garb and addresses the throng.

Flanked by a pair of his morg lieutenants (see *Faces of the Dead Lands*, page X), Harkor speaks to the quiet pilgrims of his greatness and the glory of Harkor. Cheers and the clattering applause of thousands of hand bones are carefully orchestrated. The remains are brought out on obsidian trays throughout the speech and dumped into a pile over simmering coals. The stench of the rotted flesh would gag a living being, but Harkor and his minions revel in it. At the height of his message, with the throng chanting and stomping their feet thunderously, magical flames are put to the pile and the mass of bone and flesh is engulfed in a blazing inferno, flames licking higher than the top of the amphitheater's highest balconies. Smoke and noise obscure everything for a time, a tumult of well-rehearsed spontaneity. After the remains are fully consumed, the arcane flames die down and the revelers grow quiet again. Once Harkor leaves his pedestal, they quietly retire and return to their duties. There are many opportunities in the ceremony to penetrate the amphitheater for plunder or other purposes.





Chapter 5 ~ The City of a Thousand Dead



City Locations

While the City of a Thousand Dead lies east of the Obsidian Plain's center, its location has always been central to these lands, sitting adjacent to Harkor, Shadowmourn, Chol, Sagramog, and the Crunch.

All the obsidian in the Dead Lands sprang forth from this point, where the *Seventh Tree* powered the final magical lunge into the planes. The elemental obsidian, unleashed by the sudden appearance of the gate, buried everything in molten glass and slew every creature fighting on both sides of the conflict. Their forms were destroyed, but the living properties of the elemental obsidian gave them back undeath. All broke free of the cooling glass to take their place as the undead rulers of a new obsidian world.

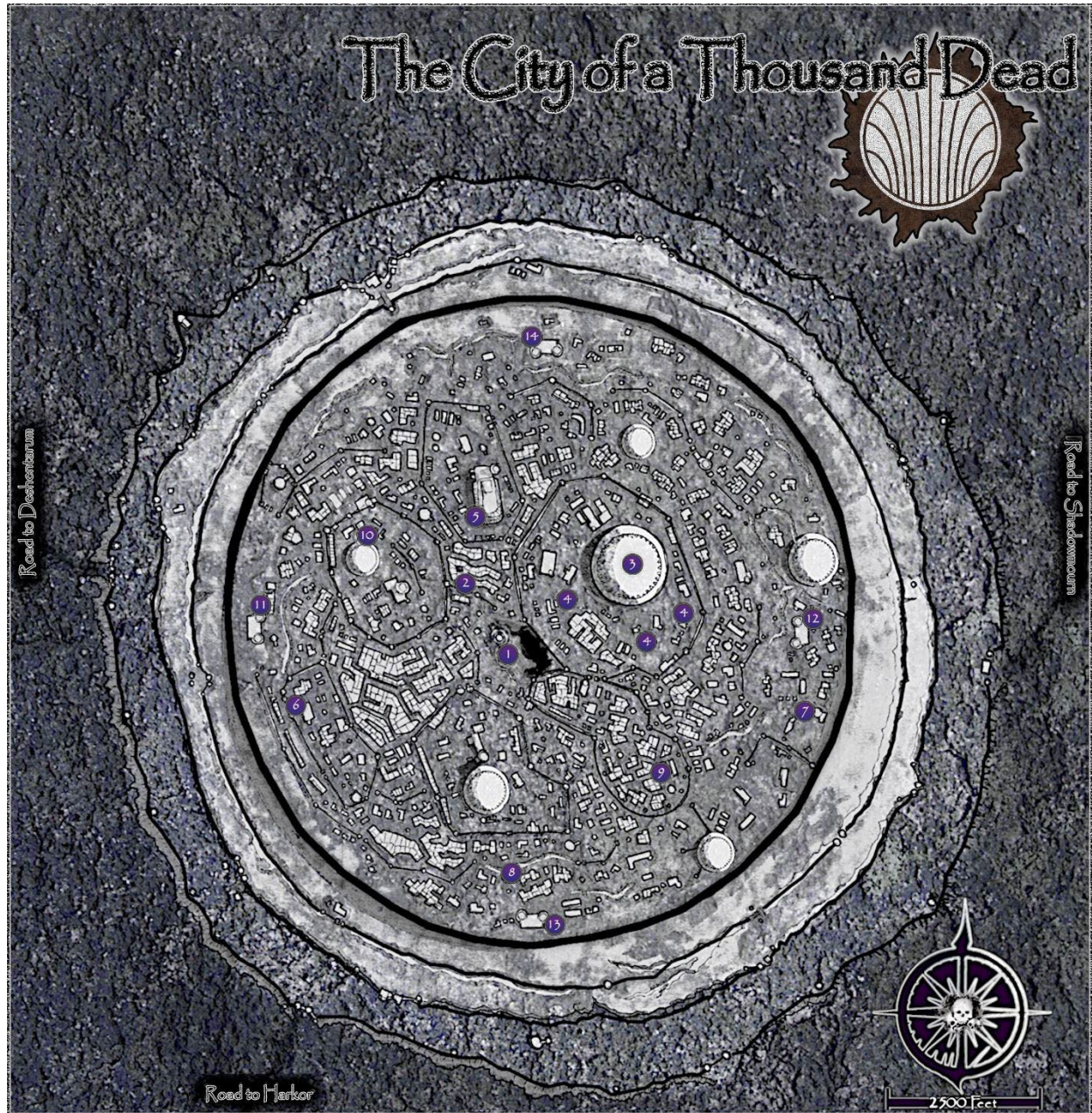
The original city of Nagarvos' is buried deep beneath the obsidian shelf. Over the centuries, however, the new denizens have rebuilt it in their own image of what the supreme city of their realm should be. No longer a city of gardens and study compounds, the new City of a Thousand Dead is one of walls and bastions, moats and turrets, all fashioned of obsidian blocks carved right from the ground beneath their feet. The seemingly-endless battlements encircle the city

covering more than 5 miles in diameter. The city is built to withstand a massive invasion, the product of the inherent paranoia among those who were destroyed there during a time of warfare and siege.

Yet within the city's massive walls, raised by the undead known as the Defenders, the many factions of undead have built their own quarters and compounds. Each is strongly fortified against the others, for few of the undead groups cooperate long with any of the others. Every faction blames the others for the ruin of the city. Whether they are discussing the city of Nagarvos', or the renewed city that Qwith named the Navel (meaning the central navel of the planes) depends on the undead in question; for some are from the original ruin of Nagarvos', while others were created by the Obsidian Ruin. Their hatreds can run no deeper than that. Strangers entering the city will be accosted by one group or another and forced to announce their allegiances – taking sides in disputes they almost certainly will not understand.

Only one thing can unite the fractious undead of The City of a Thousand Dead: the undead bugs from the south. The bugdeads have assaulted The City of a Thousand Dead countless times, whether because they sense that it contains the obsidian gate or potent artifacts, such as the *Heart of Negchar* (See *FoDL Ch10*), or simply because the city is a large concentration of humanoid undead within easy reach of their northern bugdeads. When the bugdeads do come, the City's undead factions garrison the walls above their respective territories, each taking a section without intermingling.

In fact, the name City of a Thousand Dead is a vast understatement; there are many times more than 1,000 undead creatures wandering its streets. By day the city and its surrounding countryside are devoid of activity, while the undead rest and hide from the terrible power of the *Sunflash*, an artifact which magnifies the already fierce power of the bright Athasian sun (See *FoDL Ch10*). Intruders who venture near the city during daylight are likely to think the area deserted. Nevertheless, when dusk gives way to the blackness of night, the undead rise from their crypts and continue their internecine scheming and wars. Any living flesh caught in the city then has lost all hope.



Surface Level Locations

1-2. Sunflash Tower and Rajaat's Fugitive's Compound: See Rajaat's Fugitives section below.

3-4. The Arboretum and Giant Skeleton Graves: See Chapter 5 – The Seventh Tree.

5. Descendants of the Chosen Campus: See Descendants of the Chosen section below.

6. Defenders Territory: See Defenders section below.

7. Champion's Daughters Territory: See Champions Daughters section below.

8. Hungry Ghosts Territory: See Hungry Ghosts section below.

9. Voldrager's Complex: See Voldrager's Complex under Other Undead of Interest below.

10. The Observatory: In spite of the large areas dominated by major and minor factions of undead,

The City of a Thousand Dead

The Catacombs of Old Town



there do still remain contested areas. The old Observatory is one of them. Previously built for an abandoned project by the Navel, it has been contested by various independent powers for many kings ages now, nobody holding onto it for longer than a few decades. Most recently Guinswai the Forbidding has been seen here (see Independent Powers below).

11-14. City Gates: Each City gate features a distinctive fortification arrangement, where each entry way ramps downwards and passes through an underground kill zone tunnel before emerging from a fortified gate on the surface inside the city walls. There are three such gates currently in operation (11 - Defender's Gate, 12 - Daughter's Gate, and 13 - Ghost

Gate, respectively), each one manned by a different defensive faction. 14-The Closed Gate has been sealed and abandoned for about 4 King' Ages.

Underground Locations

1. The Surface Rings: These strips of land are actually still technically above ground. Just as visitors or invaders approach the city, the ground slopes down and obsidian around the edge cracks and extensive fortifications appear under the crust of the obsidian. These are the surface rings. Even those few who manage to breach the entry points must still march through the long kill zone tunnels which wind around the lower part of the city. This defensive arrangement

was developed after the start of the bugdead invasions, and has worked well ever since. Nothing has ever made it through these rings without permission of the residents of the City.

2. Unexcavated Obsidian: Even with how densely populated this city has become both above and below ground, there are still substantial areas which have never been excavated. No one knows what lies inside them.

3-10. Portals and Gates: These correspond with the appropriate entry gates on the upper city. The North Gate itself was permanently closed for an unknown reason many King's Ages ago.

11. The Seventh Tree Depths: Unbeknownst to the residents of City, this is where the deep shaft which contains the trunk of the Seventh Tree is buried, still well-protected by its own natural *Invisibility From Undead spell*. See Chapter 5 for more details.

12-14. The Underground Districts: For those undead who cannot sufficiently hide themselves from the power of the *Sunflash* during the day, these districts provide them accommodation. As it was in life, they remain segregated by social class. 12 – The Old Noble District houses the former nobility. 13 – The Craftsmen's Quarters houses the tradesmen, and 14 – The Halls of Bones houses the lowest classes.

City Factions

The sectors of the undead metropolis that is The City of a Thousand Dead are controlled by five major factions: the Descendants of the Chosen, Rajaat's Fugitives, the Defenders, the Champion's Daughters, and the Hungry Ghosts. There is also an immensely powerful but thus far quiescent creature buried below the glass – the Great One. A variety of weaker and mindless undead fill the ranks of these powerful creatures – nearly every undead form found on Athas, from fallen to cursed dead, from namech to t'liz, from dhaots to thinking zombies, can be found in the dark streets.



The Descendants of the Chosen

The magical experiments conducted on Rajaat's behalf delved deeply into magic theory of all sorts. While the main focus of the Navel's labor was penetrating various inner and outer planes, other areas worked to expand the general knowledge of magic. Those who worked in and around the Navel at the time of the Shining Tide were destroyed, then resurrected by the obsidian as zhen. The transformation enhanced not only their magical capabilities, but also their psionic proficiencies. As naturally powerful undead creatures on the infant obsidian, their power grew. They built upon the knowledge given them by the researchers and went far beyond, bent on mastering powerful spells of destructive power.

The Descendants of the Chosen comprise seventeen zhen divided into five groups, each of which corresponds to one of the major areas of research under Qwith at the time of the Obsidian Fountain. These groups each lair in separate areas within their sector of The City, fortifying their compounds against one another, but quickly unite when faced with other factions of undead. Each subgroup of the Descendants is led by several zhen but also includes scores of other undead, such as kraggs and kraglings, morgs, and many common skeletons and zombies.

The first faction of the Descendants is the Custodians of the Dark, composed of three zhen who have turned their efforts to understanding positive and negative energy, and how these affect the other elements. As undead necromancers, they are now entirely obsessed with negative energy. The former leader of the Custodians guided them, and other Descendants, in

harnessing this energy, through the obsidian, to create a devastatingly powerful necromantic object known as the *Heart of Negchar* (See *FoDL Ch10* for information on this item).

This artifact is so powerful that, even in his faraway Obsidian Fortress, Gretch broods over means to acquire it. Of course, the *Heart of Negchar* is a fixed object, so Gretch will have to come to the City and conquer it to claim the *Heart*, a daunting prospect at best. Gretch believes that he can restore himself to full intellectual prowess if he can complete a ritual with the *Heart of Negchar*, and he may be correct.

The Custodians of the Dark's three current leading members include the powerful psionist Thikwasa (*Female Human Zhen Kineticist 26; FoDL Ch5*), who in life was the mother of Ohl-numash (*Male Human T'liz Wizard 18; FoDL Ch4*); the necromancer Traleev-eso (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 12 / Necromant 10*); and a former defiler named Magnwag (*Female Human Zhen Wizard 15 / Necromant 1*). Thikwasa is the acknowledged leader of the group, though in true Dead Lands fashion both of the defilers perennially scheme to supplant or destroy her.

The Custodians possess the Domed Den, an obsidian structure with a 40' tall dome. Inside, the Den is decorated much like a temple, though no columns mar its open interior. The floor is made of hexagonal flagstones of blackglass, and the walls and ceiling are constructed of 5' thick curved blocks of perfectly-fitted obsidian. Across the interior of the dome run raised veins of glittering blackglass, which pulses and glistens in the torchlight which alone lights the chamber.

These veins, running from the floor up the inside of the walls and ceiling, come together in the center of the dome, where a strangely-shaped object clings like a limpet to the precise center of the dome. This object is the *Heart of Negchar*, a pulpy-looking mass of shiny blackglass. From its pulsing beating form, the veins ripple outwards, down the walls to the floor, but who can say whether the energy that pulses there comes from the *Heart* or from the obsidian mass below?

The *Heart of Negchar* was created by half a dozen of the Descendants working together, about nine King's Ages ago. The group included Thikwasa, Traleev-eso, and Magnwagi, as well as the defiler Ac'nac'wo and a mindbender, Djelj. Negchar (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 15 / Necromant 1 / Magma Cleric 3 / Mystic Theurge 10; FoDL Ch5*) himself led the effort, convincing the others that his vision could be realized. Negchar imagined that there was indeed a potent source of negative energy in the Inner Planes, which he could learn to tap and channel, and that with the unlimited energy

produced from this source he could lead the Descendants to cleanse The City of a Thousand Dead and establish their rule across the Dead Lands. The labor took more than fifty years, but what is time to the undead?

No sooner had Negchar and his companions completed the ensorcelling of the *Heart*, than the group shattered. Ac'nac'wo had betrayed them, eager to claim the power of the *Heart* for himself, bringing in a score of his minions to kill Negchar and the Custodians. Negchar survived the assassination attempt, for Thikwasa was also prepared with minions to summon, but in the chaos Negchar fled, taking with him the secrets for fully operating the *Heart*.

The *Heart's* powers are based on enormous necromantic energy, which it draws from and returns to the Obsidian Plain itself. Thikwasa has discovered that she can use the *Heart* to scry far across the Obsidian Plain, observing events as far south as the line where the Hoarwall once ran and as far west as Small Home. This requires considerable concentration from the user, but the power has permitted the Descendants to predict bugdead invasions and the like with uncanny accuracy.

The *Heart* can also draw out and concentrate the negative energies of the obsidian, powering tremendous spell effects. It is this power for which Gretch lusts, for several undead in The City have been able to permanently increase their abilities by using the *Heart* to infuse themselves with immense necromantic energy. These instances have been rare through the King's Ages, though, since the Descendants must all agree on such an intense use of the *Heart* – though Thikwasa's faction physically controls the artifact, access to it is via the courtyards controlled by other Descendants factions, and they demand compensation for any major use of the *Heart*.

According to legend, Negchar himself intended to use the *Heart* to assert control over all undead on the Obsidian Plain, forcing their allegiance to himself through the medium of the blackglass's overwhelming negative energy. What complex rituals might be required to utilize this capability, if indeed the *Heart* has this power, are known only to Negchar. Surely such a use of the *Heart* would carry considerable risk of awakening the Great One, the colossal elemental which sleeps in the blackglass, but Negchar would not have created such an artifact had he not intended to use it.

Negchar himself, once a leader of the Custodians, vanished in Ac'nac'wo's assassination attempt shortly after he created the *Heart of Negchar*; most accounts agree that he was not killed but escaped and has long

since vanished across the blackglass. The most widely-credited rumors claim that he was killed in a battle with the bugdead, that he rules a canyon-valley in the Forbidden Mountains, or that he has established a hidden realm in the subvitrine depths, perhaps even under the cliffs which ring the Obsidian Plain.

The second subgroup of the Descendants is the Stoneborers. Constituted of former inner planar researchers of Earth, including those specializing in Earth and Obsidian, the Stoneborers are led by Ac'nac'wo (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 8 / Necromant 6 / Shaper 5 / Cerebremancer 10; FoDL Ch5*). Ac'nac'wo was once the relatively minor researcher focused on the obsidian regions of the Paraelemental Plane of Magma, but since the Shining Tide, he has become vastly more important and wrested control of the Stoneborers from the Earth specialist six King's Ages ago. The other zhen leading the Stoneborers are Munavar the former Earth priest (*Male Human Zhen Magma Cleric 21*), Cheltagthwo (*Female Human Zhen Shaper 17*), and Zaprarus No-iim the defiler (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 18 / Necromant 5*), who formerly controlled the group before Ac'nac'wo's coup.

The Radiant Descendants were, in life, the senior researchers into the inner planes of Fire, Magma, and Sun, and they comprise the third group of Descendants. Djelj (*Male Human Zhen Kineticist 25:*

FoDL Ch5) leads the Radiants; he was formerly the leader of the researchers exploring the Fire plane. Now, his lieutenant is the defiler Sinker Kasgat (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 20 / Necromant 4*), who led the Navel's research effort into Magma. Sinker Kasgat nurtures a deep and abiding hatred of his former subordinate Ac'nac'wo. The third Radiant is Ulariss (*Female Human Zhen Wizard 17 / Necromant 5*), the woman who once headed the investigations into Sun; she was a defiler whom Djelj suspects of being willing to defect to the Shimmerers.

The Shimmerers are the fourth of the Descendants' mutually hostile subfactions, a group coalescing around the researchers into Air. Researchers into the paraelements of Silt and Rain, both of which represent other elements suspended in Air, have rallied to Ruuknis, a defiler (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 23 / Necromant 3; FoDL Ch5*) focused on Air. One of Ruuknis's erstwhile subordinates at the Navel was Ohl-numash (*Male Human T'liz Wizard 18*). Other zhen heading the Shimmerers group are Ebliriok (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 17 / Necromant 4*) a defiler specializing in Silt, Wasagar (*Female Human Zhen Wizard 6 / Necromant 1 / Nomad 7 / Cerebremancer 10*) an expert on Rain, and Pwiskathi Bone-Eyes (*Female Human Zhen Seer 21*). Psikathwi comes by her name from the fact that her eyes lack pupils in undeath as

City 1000 Dead - Factions Relationships

	DotC	Fugit	Def	CD	Hungry	Guard	Indy	Voll
<i>Descendants of the Chosen</i>	W	W	H	N	N	R	H	R
Rajaat's Fugitives	W	A	H	V	V	A	V	N
Defenders	H	H	A	W	R	A	N	R
<i>Champion's Daughters</i>	N	H	W	A	R	H	H	N
Hungry Ghosts	N	R	R	R	A	V	N	N
Guardians of the City	N	A	N	R	N	A	N	N
Other Independents	H	N	R	R	R	N	N	N
<i>Volldrager</i>	R	R	N	N	N	N	N	A

Key

<i>Italic = Sided with Rajaat</i>	A	Allies (or at least willing to work together)
Grey indicates relationship with own faction	W	At war with each other
	H	Hostile, but not actively going out of their way to fight them
	R	Resentful (because of old allegiances), but not actively hostile
	N	Neutral/ambivalent
	V	Avoids (usually out of fear)

they did in life. She is a potent psionicist devoted to Silt.

The last and weakest of the subgroups is the Marooned. The Marooned are led by Abak-Enawi (*Male Human Zhen Egoist 24; FoDL Ch5*), who is specialized in Water. Joining him in the Marooned are the most powerful specialists in Water, Kakraz the Putrid (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 6 / Necromant 4 / Shaper 6 / Cerebremancer 9*), who does in fact smell, and Silt, Hashbru E'abriz (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 19 / Necromant 3*). The Marooned despise the Radiants on principle, and Abak-Enawi personally hates Djelj, who eliminated the former Marooned leader, Galzu-Rach, two King's Ages ago.

All five of these sub-factions are in constant competition, each seeking to assert overall leadership over the Descendants. In addition, within each group the leading zhen scheme against one another, and below them, their lesser zhen and other undead also jockey for power. The major factor keeping the Descendants together is the intense hatred that the Fugitives and Defenders have for them – these factions, in particular, blame the Descendants for the Obsidian Boil, and would gladly exterminate them if they could.



Rajaat's Fugitives

Rajaat's Fugitives are a small but bitterly powerful group of undead in The City of a Thousand Dead; they are the sworn enemies of the Descendants of the Chosen. Their leader is Pandruj (*Male Human Kaisharga Wizard 15 / Necromant 10; FoDL Ch5*), the preserver fugitive whose surrender was demanded by Rajaat as a pretext for the assault on ancient Nagarvos'. Pandruj gathered the other preservers in the city and contributed significantly to the defense of Nagarvos'

during the siege, though many of the inhabitants considered him personally responsible for Rajaat's attack.

Pandruj was with the Tetrarchs when they fled back to the psionic temples, with the Champion's Daughters in pursuit. Rajaat's troops finally overcame the Defenders, and Pandruj, to his shame and rage, was captured alive. Rajaat himself mocked the preserver, before turning him over to the tender mercies of Daskinor – the torture lasted more than a week, ultimately delaying Daskinor's march to the goblin caves of central Ulyan.

Not long after the Champions marched out of Nagarvos's desolate ruins, Pandruj emerged into unlife. His broken body was restored, and he is today a kaisharga. Pandruj's transformation to unlife poisoned him against all living beings, prompting him to resurrect the fallen Tetrarchs (*Male or Female Human* Morg Telepath 22; FoDL Ch5*) into undeath with him. Though in life he had served the Tetrarchs, his power in undeath permitted him to make the Tetrarchs his servants. They deeply resented this, but shared Pandruj's profound hatred of Rajaat and all his works, so they muted their resentment and labored with Pandruj willingly.

At first, Pandruj carefully avoided the Defenders, who were also developing their undead society in the ruins below the Navel. He knew well that many among the Defenders blamed him personally for the destruction of their city, and that they would almost certainly attack him; but he watched them secretly, and when the Defenders rose to attack Qwith's Navel, he led his undead forces to strike Qwith's people from the rear – perhaps he imagined to thus contribute to their victory and once and for all clear his name.

The battle in the Navel did not go as planned. The Defenders, surprised to see the Fugitives, and not recognizing them, fought them as well as Qwith's researchers. Pandruj was trying both to sort this out and to personally contribute to the assault on the Navel's summoning chambers. Then came the Shining Tide and the ruin of what remained of Ulyan. Pandruj was horrified by the Obsidian Boil and the subsequent destruction of Ulyan, and condemned the Defender's leader, G'dranav, for the disaster, to his face.

This exchange, on the fresh surface of cooling obsidian, caused not only the Defenders to swear eternal hatred against Rajaat's Fugitives (*Male or Female Human Zhen Cleric 16, Nomad 15, or Wizard 15 / Necromant 1; FoDL Ch5*), but also opened lines of discord within the Fugitives. Several of the Tetrarchs argued that Pandruj was somehow responsible for the Disaster, and that if he had only coordinated his attack

with the Defenders then the Navel would have been overcome before the Obsidian Boil could have been unleashed. To this day, Pandruj must labor furiously to keep his former superiors under his control.

Pandruj's greatest creation is the *Sunflash* (See *FoDL Ch10*), an artifact which weaponizes the power of the sun. Pandruj created this potent artifact to use against the Daughters, a fact they are well aware of; but it was far more powerful than he expected, and he was forced to hide it rather than use it, lest all the undead in the City unite against him. However, the object was directly responsible for the survival of the City during the initial bugdead invasion, and ever since, the citizens have adapted to it, recognizing that it is their ultimate defense. The existence of this artifact is why the undead of The City of a Thousand Dead stay indoors or underglass during daytime.

Normally Pandruj and his Fugitives keep the *Sunflash* hidden, in the upper levels of a square tower in their small sector of the city. Because it is covered under the tower's blackglass roof – reinforced with opaque stone plates scavenged at great cost from below the glass – the *Sunflash* does not normally cause the daylight hours in the City to be deadly to the undead. However, none of the undead factions in the City trust one another, and a weapon like the *Sunflash* could easily be activated without warning.

Thus the citizens of the City, of all factions, avoid moving openly during daylight hours. Instead they transit carefully through subvitrine passages dug for the purpose, connecting certain buildings and quarters, most often only within the sectors controlled by the same faction – i.e., there are numerous tunnels within the Daughters' sector, connecting important buildings and forts, but very few if any connecting the Daughters' sector to that of the Fugitives, or the Ghosts, or of the Defenders.

In times of bugdead invasion, Pandruj announces when the *Sunflash's* tower will be opened. The other humanoids can thus take cover before the tower's roof is opened on its wide hinges, and sunlight burns down onto the artifact. The *Sunflash* actually rests in a carefully crafted cradle, which can be raised or lowered by pulleys from far below; the higher it is raised, the farther its deadly radiance spreads. At its fullest height, when the cradle is cranked up to rest about 10' above the tower roof, the blasting radiance is deadly to any undead within 8 miles of the City walls.

The Defenders

The Defenders are powerful warrior undead who once guarded the Tetrarchs of Nagarnos' against Rajaat's final assault. Their final hours of life were spent on the hastily-erected battlements of the Tetrarchs' compound, fighting off the invaders sent, by Rajaat, to put an end to the work he had begun. The Defenders were gradually beaten back to the psionic temples by Rajaat's attack, and though they slew many enemies, they were finally overcome. The last of the Defenders of Nagarnos' was an immensely powerful **psion** named G'dranav. As he stood atop a heap of human corpses, and saw the next wave advancing, G'dranav drained the last of his strength and broke open the earth beneath his feet, creating a chasm into which he and all his fallen comrades, and many of their fallen foes, fell.

The Defenders were dwarves and ogres, armed with magical and psionic equipment created by the most powerful **wizards** and **psions** in Nagarnos'. These powerful weapons and armor are still wielded by the undead, since the chasm created by G'dranav prevented Rajaat's minions from looting or desecrating the graves. The Defenders were unquiet in their mass grave, even before the Boiling Death, for G'dranav's last act, when he reached the bottom of his chasm, was to transform himself into a meorty. The secrets of animating meorties were held by few in the Green Age and Time of Magic, but G'dranav had been one of only a dozen people in Nagarnos' with the knowledge. In undeath he was tormented by his failure in battle, and became determined to reverse the defeat he and his men had suffered.

G'DRANAV

G'dranav (*Male Ogre Meorty Shaper 26; FoDL Ch5*) began the arduous work of reanimating his former comrades soon after the Champions left the ruins of Nagarnos'. His chasm provided a secure lair, where he could create several new meorties per year, hidden from any detection from above. G'dranav had finally finished resurrecting his army and was launching his attack up into the rebuilt city of Qwith just as the Gate was broken and the Obsidian Ruin began.

While the cause of the Gate's failure still remains unknown, the sudden appearance of scores of raging

meorties armed with powerful magical or psionic weapons is generally credited as prompting the terrified and desperate wizards of Qwith's project into unleashing the Disaster. The Defenders believe the Obsidian Flood was unleashed as a response to their assault, another atrocity perpetrated by the War-Bringer and his minions. However, there are many zhen among the other factions who blame G'dranav and his Defenders directly for damaging the Gate. And still others believe it was sabotaged by Pandruj and his Fugitives.

In the wake of the Disaster, G'dranav led his meorties up to the surface of the cooled obsidian. They resolved immediately to rebuild the city they had died to defend. In this way, the Defenders became largely responsible for The City of a Thousand Dead as it appears today – they strove to rebuild Nagarnos' as it was before Rajaan's army attacked atop the same hill where the original city was buried, starting with the walls around the city. They quarried cyclopean blocks of obsidian and fitted them together precisely, rebuilding the great wall and all its towers, just as they remembered Nagarnos' at the height of its glory. The Defenders (*Dwarven and Ogre Defenders; FoDL Ch5*) had just finished their first re-creation of the city walls and had begun constructing the public buildings and districts within the city when the "usurpers" awoke.

To the Defenders, the Daughters, Descendants, Hungry Ghosts, and all the other undead who had once laid siege to the city with Rajaan's army are interlopers. After the city had been sacked, Qwith and her people had usurped a section of the city to build the Navel, and now they had taken over a portion of the city for themselves again when they rose as zhen. The Defenders had tried to drive out these various factions, but they lacked the strength, and so were forced to cede sections of the new city to each faction. Pandruj and his Fugitives also claimed a share, further

infuriating the Defenders. Each group staked its claim to a section of the city, and built dwellings or dug into the catacombs of the old city to suit their purposes and desires.

THE ARKOLAK

The headquarters of the Defenders is the Arkolak, the hill upon which they made their last stand defending the psionic temples of the Tetrarchs. Later, this same hill was the site of Qwith's Navel. No trace of the Navel now remains on the surface of the obsidian, but the psionic temples of the Tetrarchs have been completely rebuilt, this time in glittering obsidian. The walls around the hill are much stronger than during the time of Nagarnos', and the Defenders have established a bewildering array of traps both psionic and mundane.

The Defenders felt cheated, once again - this time cheated of the city they were rebuilding, as before they were cheated of their victory in battle. They angrily renamed the city The City of a Thousand Dead, referring to its many factions and bands, and settled in for eons of internecine street fighting and bickering with all their rivals. G'dranav and the Defenders remain committed to restoring Nagarnos', the Wonder of the South, though the balance of power is such that they have not been able to expel the Descendants, Fugitives, or Daughters.





The Champion's Daughters

The identity of Rajaan's Champion sent to squash the last defenders of ancient Nagarvos' is lost to history. The undead who claim to be the Champion's Daughters have no better information. They are the reanimated dead of the Champion's elite warriors, Female Humans trained especially for the destruction of the other humanoid races on Athas.

The Daughters are at once extremely proud and arrogant. In their time they were unmatched, the finest trained warriors in the entire world. The women were recruited from among Rajaan's chosen people, the images of perfection for his view of the future.

The Daughters fought well against the last guard of Nagarvos', such that Rajaan directed that they be buried with full honor and all their equipment. Their tomb was outside the walls, since Rajaan decreed that the land of the city was impure, having so long been home to such a disgusting mélange of races and creeds. Those who lived and worked in the Navel or its outposts often recall the monument with pride – if its gleaming marble pillars survived the Shining Tide, they are now buried deep under the blackglass.

The fallen Daughters rested in these graves until the obsidian exploded outwards and created the Dead Lands, reanimating them as zhen. Their military background served them well, allowing them to quickly organize and begin digging their way up through the cooling obsidian. They reached the surface at the same time as the Defenders completed the first sections of the restored city (having already finished the walls), and reclaimed these blocks for their own headquarters.

The Daughters' original mission still drives their motives: to slay humanoids wherever they find them. However, since their conversion to undeath, that

impetus has become bizarrely twisted, as process has become far more important to the Daughters than results. They follow strict military discipline, even as undead creatures with a hidden and mysterious commander. The commander of the Daughters is nameless and faceless, always wearing a mask to disguise her identity. Perhaps even the warriors among the Daughters no longer recall her name.

Ranks are maintained in addition to further training and driving discipline. The Daughters (*See Champion's Daughters; FoDL Ch5*) have a burning desire to ascend through the ranks, a motivation second only to the desire to slay humanoids, and the only way to advance is when a superior officer is destroyed in combat. Treachery within the ranks is rampant, though usually muted, since the Daughters understand that their numbers are permanently diminished when any of them, even a hated superior, is permanently destroyed. The Champion's Daughters are only concerned with humanoid intruders in the vicinity of The City of a Thousand Dead. It does not matter to them if the humanoids are living or undead; their wrath is indiscriminate. The female zhen attack to slay any humanoids they encounter, regardless of the situation; the more desperate the odds, the better the Champion's Daughters like it. Note that they don't



immediately recognize half-giants or insectoids (either kreen or scarlet wardens) as humanoids but will treat such beings with curiosity mingled with horror. They will likely conclude that half-giants are perversions of humanity, while kreen are manifestations of the bugdead terror, and that both must be destroyed.

Female human warriors engender great respect among the zhen Daughters, at least among the regular troopers. If, however, they display remarkable prowess, they could draw jealous stares from the officers.



The Hungry Ghosts

During the Siege of Nagarvos', those Champions whose target races were well represented in the city's population found it easy to motivate their men to fight; the other Champions had to be more creative in finding ways to contribute that highlighted their efforts. As there were few tari in Ulyan, and very few in Nagarvos', Kalid-Ma was confronted by the challenge of making his mark distinctively enough in front of Rajaat, while also employing his men in ways that took advantage of the skills Kalid-Ma had trained them for, in battle against tari.

Kalid-Ma's solution was unique. While many of his troops continued to fight in the Siege as regular infantry, he rotated units off the line and drilled them in the specialized techniques he had developed for fighting tari. As tari were skittish and lived in hidden places, Kalid-Ma had recruited hunting tribes for the core of his army, and hunting techniques were foremost among his warriors. He used wizardry to infiltrate small units of his men into besieged Nagarvos'. They were instructed to hunt in the city streets, killing any tari they found, but also to gather intelligence and perform thefts and assassinations requested by Rajaat. They called themselves the Hungry Ghosts.

The Hungry Ghosts (*See Hungry Ghosts; FoDL Ch5*) were extremely effective, but it was difficult to infiltrate them past the potent psionic and arcane defenses erected by the Tetrarchs and others in Nagarvos', so their numbers were always few. Nonetheless, the Ghosts scored some notable successes, despite suffering considerable casualties. Kalid-Ma declared, both for morale purposes and to ensure the secrecy of his effort, that all those Ghosts slain in Nagarvos' be removed when their teams were exfiltrated. The bodies were buried with much ceremony, in a consecrated plot, inside Kalid-Ma's camp.

Here the corpses remained for long years, years which saw the fall and ruin of Nagarvos' and the establishment of the Navel. The Obsidian Boil, which destroyed the Navel, raised the dead of the Hungry Ghosts as zhen. After laboriously clawing their way up through the thick obsidian, they reassembled on the surface of the blackglass. In life they had been dedicated warriors, but hunters first – their first question to the ranking undead, Nukra-dzif, was "What shall we hunt?"

NUKRA-DZIF

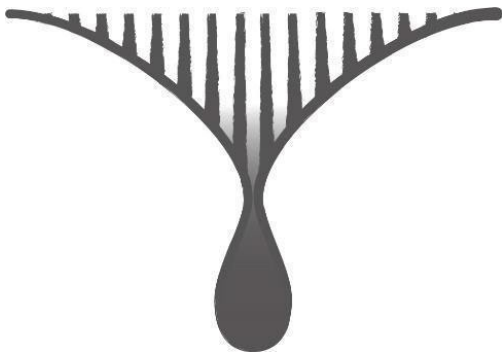
Nukra-dzif (*Male Human Zhen Wilder 15 / Rogue 15; FoDL Ch5*) knew no more about the new environment of the Dead Lands than his men, but he realized that prey could surely be found inside the stark walls of the obsidian city that was rising just over the horizon. The Ghosts took two weeks to make their approach to The City of a Thousand Dead, but even so they were the first group, other than the Defenders, to enter its walls. Using their skills, they slipped into the city by night, unseen by the Defender guards and work crews. They established themselves in a sector of the interior, and were already an invisible presence by the time the Fugitives, Daughters, and Descendants appeared in the days and weeks that followed.

At first none of the other factions understood what sort of creatures had taken up residence in the district once known as West Cuurhawi, but it was a no-man's-land for any undead but the Ghosts. For years the city was overrun with undead of all kinds, and the Ghosts took advantage of this, to gather in many cursed dead, namech, and other weak or mindless undead, forming these into an effective militia, which they led. By the time of the first bugdead invasion, they were able to claim their place as one of the leading factions in the City, and in the King's Ages since, they have cemented their position.

The Hungry Ghosts are still led by Nukra-dzif, a wily old hunter originally from the plains south of the Estuary of the Forked Tongue. His major lieutenants, also hunters and rogues of immense skill, are Quansak One-Ear (*Male Human Zhen Rogue 7 / Fighter 14*), Jishasagar No-Footfall (*Female Human Zhen Rogue 22*), and Redsmile Rog (*Male Human Zhen Rogue 7 / Psychic Warrior 13*). They are extremely loyal to Nukra-dzif, and in fact the organization remains so tightly-controlled and secretive that none of the other factions in the City knows the true name of the Ghosts' leader.

Other Undead of Interest

The City of a Thousand Dead is filled with undead who are not affiliated with any of the major factions. Most of these are free-willed undead, and their retinues of mindless retainers and slaves. Among them are the embassies of many of the Dead Lands' other kingdoms – guarded compounds where emissaries of Shadowmourn's Grand Duchess, the Disciples, or Harkor, for example, dwell – nearly all of whom maintain missions here. The largest of these diplomatic stations belongs to the Vizier of Deshentu, whose ambassadors are past masters of spying and hatching plots, not only with the City's many factions but with one another, for the City is considered "neutral ground" among the many undead realms.



VOLDRAGER'S COMPLEX

One of the more intriguing of the City's free-willed undead, almost a faction unto himself, is Volldrager (*See ToDL, Pg 76*). Volldrager controls several city blocks with his fallen and namech troops, and has a handful of powerful zhen who also subscribe to his doctrine of clerical supremacy in the planes. Volldrager, who was a disgruntled cleric working at the Navel, blames the arrogance of wizards for the Obsidian Boil and subsequent ruin of his revered element of Water. Most of the zhen who have joined

him are also former Water clerics (*Volldrager's Faithful; FoDL Ch5*). Volldrager has a love-hate relationship with the Marooned subfaction of the Descendants, but simply hates the remaining subfactions there. Despite the fact that he served at the Navel, his opposition to wizardry has made him palatable to Pandruj's Fugitives and even the Defenders. He has secretly worked with the Hungry Ghosts on several occasions, finding them indifferent to his philosophy but at least refreshingly free of the taint of having been wizards in life.

THE UNDYING GUARDIANS

Another small group of undead of The City not tied to any single faction, would be the three ancient meorties who survived the Siege and Sack of Nagarvos'. They are collectively known as the Undying Guardians (*See Undying Guardians of Nargavos; FoDL Ch5*). Before its fall, Nagarvos' boasted no fewer than seven of these meorty Guardians, each created during a different era of the city's existence, with slightly different rules governing its actions. At least two were slain in the Siege, while two others are missing and presumed destroyed, leaving three meorties still active in The City of a Thousand Dead. Each has a small retinue and a precinct as a base of operations, from which they work to protect the entire city from major threats inside and out. As the Tetrarchs came under the influence of Pandruj, the Undying Guardians ceased to follow their orders. However, they remain friendly to Rajaan's Fugitives because they share similar goals in protecting the city, even if they don't always agree on whom is a threat.

INDEPENDENT POWERS

There are also many other "independent" undead who have been powerful enough to maintain their place in the city. One example would be Guinswai the Forbidding (*Male Human Zhen Wizard 11 / Necromant 10; FoDL Ch5*), an intimidating and enterprising zhen necromancer who rules over his compound of several city blocks as a fiefdom unto itself. Another would be Rubiza'if-in-Pain (*Male Unique Rampager; FoDL Ch5*) a failed experiment by the city leaders, who now remains sealed in his Transformation Vault while his mother Nafrai (*Female Racked Spirit Silt Cleric 15*) seeks out worthy warriors who can help end his suffering.

Most of the so-called "independent" undead, however, are not strong enough to defy the factions, or clever enough to play them off against one another, and thus they pay protection to and are affiliated with

one or another of the factions. Undead are constantly wandering in one or another of the City's gates, so the population of this undead metropolis is constantly changing.

THE GREAT ONE

Ancient zombies whisper, between cracked, rotten lips, of the Great One quietly waiting, somewhere under the obsidian near The City of a Thousand Dead, for the appointed hour. Its location, motivation, size, and power are widely debated, as well as the issue of its very existence. Regardless, in the face of no real evidence to substantiate the Great One, even the most powerful undead in the city lend credence to the tales. The zhen even sacrifice an occasional zombie beast to the Great One, as if it were some unseen god that commands the future.

They may be right.

The chaotic final hours before the Shining Tide were confused and desperate. The clerics and their staff barricaded off the compound against the besieging Defenders, while even the most dedicated research wizards turned away from scribbling scrolls to lend their strength to the defense. A few of these turned to elemental magic to bolster their meager forces, calling upon wind, stone, and even earth and air elementals to fight for their cause, but it was clearly not going to be enough.

The elementalists turned to more experimental magic, reaching into the paraelemental planes to draw out creatures of unknown power and allegiance. Qwith ordered two of her young researchers, Ur-hafri and Nakkash, to abandon traditional summonings and seek more powerful beings through the planar gate - it was a critical mistake. Ur-hafri the defiler reached the gate first; he drew forth creatures of sun and silt, but these were not strong enough to prevent defeat, despite his efforts to enhance them on the spot.

Nakkash then claimed control over the gate, elbowing his companion aside. He summoned elementals of rain, but these fought poorly in the heat, for the compound was aflame. Desperately, Nakkash sought to reach the Paraelemental Plane of Magma, seeking beings which could thrust through the burning buildings and engage the attacking meorties. He botched the spell, however, and the gate opened instead to what the researchers had dubbed "the Demiplane of Obsidian" - in fact an obsidian-filled region within the Magma Plane. Nakkash cursed himself but decided to make the best of it, bringing obsidian elementals through. Obsidian elementals proved adequate but difficult to obtain; Nakkash

enlisted Ur-hafri to help him and together they redoubled their efforts, concentrating on attracting a much larger being.

This they finally accomplished, using lore previously forbidden by Qwith as too dangerous and unpredictable. The beast that smashed its way out of the wizards' tower stood over 20 feet tall and weighed several tons. The ground shook, and stones crumbled beneath its feet as, at first, it raged against both sides in the desperate struggle. In time, the wizards gained control over their creature and pointed it in the right direction, and when the Shining Tide was unleashed, the enormous elemental was the last to succumb. It was never seen again.

Ancient memories in unliving minds have disappeared and altered, and no modern undead have a clear recollection of these events. Their mingled images of the colossal obsidian beast are confused by subsequent events and the passage of King's Ages. They manifest themselves now as rumors and myths, paranoid fantasies of a terrible creature that may be lingering somewhere nearby.

Now, the Great One slumbers beneath the surface of the obsidian. It has merged with what is left of the spirit of the land, and developed a symbiotic relationship with the semi-living obsidian gated through from its home plane. While perfectly capable of leaving the obsidian to wander the surface or dive beneath it into the rock and earth below, the Great One is simply not motivated to do so. The gigantic obsidian elemental moves through the blackglass like a bird through the air, and it has no reason to leave its sympathetic environment. At the moment, the elemental has no desires other than to preserve its elemental paradise, and in its dream-like state it acts only to preserve the land against large-scale attempts to damage it or tap its power. It is content. No longer willing or able to return to its home plane, it has slept on a comfortable island of obsidian and the passing King's Ages have dulled its wits. By Athasian standards, the Great One is a functional, mindless immortal.

However unmotivated, the Great One holds more power than any other creature on the blackglass. Its animate energy has combined completely with the living obsidian. When it manifests a piece of itself (*Manifestation of the Great One; FoDL Ch5*) to deal with threats, the elemental can draw upon an effectively infinite supply of living energy as long as it stays in contact with the obsidian shelf.

The denizens of the Dead Lands are fortunate that the Great One rests - or does it? At the moment, it has no interest in the world and seems content, but it could

become active if the obsidian were threatened. Previous projects on the obsidian, like the massive destruction to build the Killing Grounds of Deshentu, the removal of large slabs for statuary and walls, have begun to waken the elemental and restore its faculties. Like the Disciples (whose god it may be), the elemental will not tolerate further wholesale destruction of the obsidian. Unlike the Disciples, it makes an unconscious distinction. Small quantities chipped for

weapons, tools, or other purposes do not disturb it. However, another massive project, mining, cutting, or pulverizing the obsidian, could bring it surging to the surface in a state of rage.

The obsidian elemental could also awake if summoned (intentionally or not) by psionic or magical methods. See *Faces of the Dead Lands* for more information.



The Kingdoms of Gretch



Chapter 6 ~ The Kingdoms of Gretch



The lands near the western edge of the blackglass extending along the southern base of the Forbidden Mountains to the cusp of Nagarvos' are particularly barren and fierce. Prevailing weather brings the hottest blasts of wind from the regions below Pterran Vale and Lost Scale, scorching the land with seemingly incessant gales. Even the regions to the west, up the little-known Winding Way beyond the obsidian, are shunned, written off as too harsh to make trade or settlement worthwhile. Those who have ventured through the wastes to the edge of the Black Basin say that *"where the cliffs rise over the blackglass, a thousand lost spirits greet you on the mourning winds."*

The terrain is rough but broken, and unusually varied compared to the rest of the Dead Lands. There are hills and caves, even small glaciers of obsidian flowing slowly yet surely down gentle slopes of subvitrine granite or marble. The obsidian is surprisingly thick across much of this region. There is no life here, as is true of the rest of the Dead Lands, not even moss or lichens. The stone and obsidian are sterile, scorched beneath the unforgiving Athasian sun.

Despite its harshness to the living, however, these rugged lands are home to several distinct civilizations of undead. They are the Kingdoms of Gretch, a collection of nations locked in eternal struggle against one another at the insistence of their overlord.

Gretch

When Rajaat, the First Sorcerer, gathered his first human students, Gretch was among them. Born into poverty, he had a passion to venture into the artistry of magic. When Rajaat divided his students into two groups, one to learn preserving magic, the other to study defiling, he placed Gretch with the former. Dabbling in the newfound craft, the young student was drawn more to destruction and death, a passion that drew him like a moth to the flame. He discovered one of his peers practicing the defiling arts and, disobeying his master's wishes, began studying the practice of defiling magic. He applied its power to further his own ends, masking his work to make it appear innocuous to those around him. For years he masqueraded as a preserver in the school of the great Rajaat, building his power slowly, steadily.

One day his experiments grew too large to mask without the sacrifice of living life-forces. Locked away in the service of Rajaat, Gretch had only his fellow students to prey upon, and in one dark moment while penning a radically experimental branch of defiling magic, he decided to make his move.

His first victim did not survive the casting of his magic, and Gretch hid the body in the wilderness. The next survived in an undead form, but the creature was flawed and dangerously insane, so Gretch secured a remote chamber in the school and chained the monster to the wall. He needed more experiments, and more lifeforces to power them. Each time Gretch learned more, but his magic was still experimental. He was the first sorcerer to dabble this deeply into the black arts, a pioneer in discovering the magical lines between life and death. Over time he created more than a dozen creatures, all by different methods, by new applications of his dark art. Nevertheless, each was disfigured, mentally unstable, or both, hidden away beneath heavy chains with the others.

The disappearances of so many students drew the attention of the halflings charged with monitoring the wizard students and, eventually, of Rajaat himself.



Gretch was certain they would discover him, so he fled with his creations into the wilderness, establishing himself in what was then known as the Grey Tower in the plains of central Ulyan. His timing was unintentional but perfect. Rajaat was preparing his Champions, and had been considering Ulyan as a suitable region for demonstrating to his Champions the “cleansing” he intended. The First Sorcerer had observed Gretch’s flight, and visited his Grey Tower. Gretch was given a choice – he could perish, or serve as Rajaat’s agent, tasked with preparing the human herders and plainsmen of Ulyan to be recruits in the armies of the wars to come.

Gretch willingly submitted to his master, providing Rajaat with copies of his research. He then began a slow process of gathering the human herders and indoctrinating them with hatred of the gnomes, trolls, ogres, and others who lived in Ulyan’s great cities. The humans were mostly poor, and over the generations, Gretch’s surreptitious efforts kept them that way; all the while, he was feeding their avarice and anger and promising them deliverance through a mighty warlord to come. He supplied information to the nonhuman merchants as well, ensuring that the plainsmen never gained profitable terms of trade. At the same time, Gretch spent those years furthering his magic studies, always concentrating on the mysteries of death and life.

Life in his Grey Tower, with lengthening years, did nothing for Gretch’s health, and in a matter of years he was an aging, diseased man, surrounded by strange undead monsters of his own making. He sought immortality in the form of the ultimate undead being.

Gathering everything he had learned, he put himself on the slab, to sacrifice his own life force to his passion, aided by his hideous assistants. The spell was set, the components sacrificed, the incantations uttered, but something went terribly wrong. Either Gretch’s spell was imperfect, or one of his servants had made a subtle mistake. Gretch had become an immortal undead of magnificent power, but the error in casting left him with only a minimal capacity to expand his intelligence. His one dream, to forever build upon and increase his knowledge of magic, was ruined. Gretch blames all his major creations, who were present assisting in one capacity or another with his own reanimation, for the unknown error which has since stunted his fearsome intellect.

When the Champions and their armies, led by Rajaat himself, came down the Winding Way to camp at Gretch’s Grey Tower, the necromancer’s work among the tribesmen was put to the test. The great majority heeded Rajaat’s call, recognizing him as the mighty king prophesied by Gretch. The army trained at the Grey Tower, then marched forth to victory over the army of Nagarvos’ at the Tforkatch River. Gretch desired to join his master’s legions, leading his own undead troops, but Rajaat forbade it – cleansing the world was work for the living. Gretch was ordered to remain in his tower, continuing to recruit tribesmen and funnel them forward to the Champions, who were now besieging Nagarvos’.

Gretch hated his role but excelled at it. He collected all the corpses from the Tforkatch River battlefield and soon assembled a vast horde of undead troops. Rajaat continued to spurn Gretch’s requests to join the armies, explicitly relegating the necromancer to second class status below the favored Champions. Gretch has never forgiven nor forgotten the mockery of the Champions, and his hatred of them burns all the brighter in his unliving eyes.

After Rajaat’s armies conquered Nagarvos’ and split up to destroy the remaining demihuman kingdoms of Ulyan, Gretch petitioned Rajaat to allow him to move his operations to the ruins of Nagarvos’. From there, Gretch would be Rajaat’s viceroy over conquered and cleansed Ulyan, and (not incidentally) he would have a vast pool of fresh corpses to animate. Rajaat, however, refused Gretch again. Instead of granting the smoking ruins of grand Nagarvos’ to Gretch, he gave the city to another of his magical disciples, a researcher named Qwith. Qwith built an elaborate school, named the Navel, in the ruins and proceeded to develop new magicks there, enraging Gretch who perceived in Qwith’s groundbreaking experiments a standing insult to his own intellectual limitations.

It is rarely mentioned, but nonetheless believed, by many of the senior thinking undead in the inner circles of Qwith and Gretch, that Gretch may have played a role in bringing about the Obsidian Boil. Gretch himself has certainly never denied that he had a part in the disaster that befell Qwith's research. He was able to rescue the great majority of his own subjects from the Black Tide, and quickly reestablished himself and his kingdoms on the blackglass. Occupying vast regions west of The City of a Thousand Dead and south of the Forbidden Mountains, the Kingdoms of Gretch were, at a stroke, the most powerful empire on the blackglass. Gretch himself rebuilt his Grey Tower, on its former spot, renaming it the Obsidian Fortress, since it was now gleaming black, built solely of obsidian.

Though Gretch was well prepared for the Boiling Death, he and his client kingdoms were completely surprised by the swarm of undead insects which burst up from the south, about a King's Age after the Obsidian Wave. The southernmost of Gretch's client kingdoms were overrun and destroyed almost immediately; Gretch rallied the undead of his central and northern kingdoms, digging in to defend themselves, on the southern slopes of the Forbidden Mountains and around Gretch's Obsidian Fortress.

The bugdead struck both east and west of Gretch's kingdoms as well, and the combined defenses of the humanoid undead eventually repulsed their hordes. Gretch himself reestablished most of his client kingdoms, though the ruins of Olnak and several of the other southern kingdoms were lost. Gretch credits himself with inspiring Harkor to develop the Bugdead Accords, though he violates them whenever it is convenient – for example, his personal bodyguard is composed of dozens of undead s'thag zagath, which Gretch raised after the fiercest battles of the original bugdead assault.

Grech (*Male Human Morg Wizard 5 / Psion (shaper) 5 / Necromant 10 / Cerebremancer 10; FoDL Ch6*) rules his kingdoms to this day, immortal and tortured by the fact that he will never grow as powerful as the Champions he so despised - the Champions Rajaat preferred over him. He continues to experiment, but he can create few innovations, merely variations on the themes he established in life. Around him are his first creations, powerful yet flawed, the children who made him what he is. Gretch loves them, and he hates them.

When he reestablished himself on the new Obsidian Plain, Gretch took advantage of the chaos left by the Obsidian Wave and claimed vast regions wherein he made each of his experimental creatures the ruler of its own small kingdom, masters of civilizations of

undead. He allows them to create realms in their images, as he was allowed to create. He then sets them against each other in brutal wars, so that they might lose what they created, just as he did.

The Kings and their Kingdoms

The Kingdoms of Gretch are as varied as any of the kingdoms of the Green Age, upon which their civilizations are modeled. They are unlike the city-states of the Tablelands, being based more on the settled, rich principalities of the Time of Magic, though the long King's Ages since the Boiling Ruin have reduced most of the kingdoms to a level of savagery not dissimilar to what prevails in the remainder of Athas.

The things they all have in common are these:

- One of Gretch's original experimental undead rules, or did rule, each; nearly all were present at his transformation and every one of them is equally at fault in his eyes.
- More undead populate each, either created by the king or gathered at his direction.
- Gretch holds special power over his creations, and so controls them when he wishes, forcing them to wage destructive wars against each other as "experiments" or merely for his amusement.

THE UNCROWNED

In addition to those undead creations who rule kingdoms in his name, Gretch also has several powerful undead lieutenants, who, in view of their lack of kingdoms, are named the Uncrowned. These are:

- Las-ufar (*Male Human Morg Nomad 9 / Rogue 7; FoDL Ch6*),
- Fnuthaar (*Male Human Morg Kineticist 8 / Ranger 7*),
- Col'raoz (*Female Half-giant Morg Barbarian 16*),
- Uzhgabr (*Male Human Morg Telepath 11 / Fighter 5*).

All of the Uncrowned are morgs, and possess powers equal to or greater than those of the rulers of the kingdoms. Gretch uses them as lieutenants, sending them out to do his dirty work or parley with the various undead rulers.

Las-ufar, the youngest of the Uncrowned, is detailed in *The Emissary* adventure.



The Kingdom Of Ireyl

Gretch thought that his initial experiments failed because he dealt with the entire specimen. So his second sacrifice for the sake of magic took a somewhat different form, not using the few component parts that he purported to understand. These additional body parts, he reasoned, interfered with the outcome of his experiment, leaving them less than perfect in his eyes. His next experiments needed only the victim's spine, brain, and heart. Ireyl came under his watchful eyes quickly enough and was Gretch's first successful experiment in that it resulted in an animated undead.

Ireyl was, at the time, an ambitious but young student of defiling magic in the Pristine Tower. He entered his studies earlier than most of the others, brought to the tower by his family and village, held up as an example of a brilliant student with vast potential. Rajaat's subordinates considered the matter and accepted the boy Ireyl at the young age of 15 years. Certainly no student of his age group rivaled his performance, and only a few who had spent many more years in the service of Rajaat could match him. Jealousy of the boy was rampant, and Gretch figured if he were to disappear there would be many suspects and few who wanted to pursue the matter too deeply. He ambushed the unsuspecting student outside his sleep chambers with simple charming magic, leading his victim away to his laboratory for preparation.

Gretch performed a rather primitive form of surgery, removing the required organs to use as spell components. He filled the empty spaces in Ireyl's body with sand and replaced his spine with a piece of

steel. He then stitched the undead creation back together haphazardly. Gretch didn't concern himself with the details of aesthetics. His creation rose and obeyed, until the day it saw its own reflection in a pool of water. Shocked by its hideous, scarred appearance, the young undead boy fled and hid. Ireyl never rose above his rampant paranoia and secretiveness, despite its creator's best efforts.

Ireyl's kingdom is an endless city built close and dense. There are no long, straight boulevards or open spaces, no distances where the king might be watched for a long period of time as he walks. His castle is deeply recessed into the ground, and only his personal servants, undead blinded by their master, are allowed access to the ruler. Ireyl (*Male Flesh Golem Wizard 9 / Necromant 5; FoDL Ch6*) is obsessed with magic to cast illusions on his form or create eternal darkness over his kingdom. Attempts to surgically relieve the severity of Ireyl's deformities, carried out by his minions, have had exactly the opposite effect. Ireyl is a shambling mass of scars and exposed bone, standing unnaturally erect due to the steel spine inserted by Gretch.

Ireyl is extremely jealous of those who aren't deformed. His kingdom is one of zombies and exoskeletons purposefully disfigured or maimed by their master, an army of shambling horrors prepared for Gretch's wars (*Ireyl's Abominations; FoDL Ch6*). As for the living, intruders on his lands are treated differently based on sex. Humanoid females are captured and brought to his chambers, blinded, then forced to live out their lives as the playthings of an adolescent undead. Males are butchered before undergoing reanimation to become part of his kingdom.

The Kingdom Of Oskyar

Before creating Oskyar, Gretch put in several years of intensive study. His failure with Ireyl, and the many months lost trying to correct his abnormal behavior, were things he did not want to repeat. Surgical techniques, he decided, were not his forte, nor were they absolutely necessary. Not wanting to renew suspicion by taking another life, Gretch scavenged the body of Oskyar, an apprentice at the Pristine Tower who was mortally wounded in an unfortunate magical accident involving time. The body, he reasoned, wouldn't be missed, though the nature of the subject's death proved to be the experiment's undoing.

Locked away in secrecy, Gretch combined the new magic he had invented with folklore from the surrounding communities about the nature of

undeath. Oskyar (*Human Racked Spirit Wizard 11 / Necromant 10 / Nomad 5 / Cerebremancer 3; FoDL Ch6*) animated flawlessly, a fine, strong, handsome specimen without blemish, or so his creator thought. He celebrated and spent months studying his new creation, putting Oskyar through his paces, educating him in literature and etiquette. Several years passed before Gretch noted a marked decline in his subject's ability to retain information. The necromancer locked himself away, burning candles to their nubs in the late hours, trying to correct the problem while Oskyar continued to regress. To his horror, Gretch discovered that Rajaat's magical disaster had altered Oskyar's physical form and forever slowed his mind. Despite promising beginnings, Oskyar sunk to the level of an imbecile and Gretch could do nothing to stop it.

Still, Oskyar had the ability to grow, however slowly, and this he hid from Gretch. His intelligence grew once more, over the centuries, as Oskyar developed the habit of playing the fool for Gretch. Yet Oskyar could not hide his abilities forever.

Gretch, a genius relegated to reworking the knowledge he obtained in life over and over, now watches while his "imbecilic" creation moves on, helpless to catch him. Oskyar is now Gretch's nemesis, a constant reminder of what he is doomed never to experience again, a hapless metaphor for his own tragic existence.

The Kingdom of Oskyar is completely unorganized. There is no specific city or country, merely thousands of half-finished buildings that dot the Obsidian Plain. Oskyar has difficulty finishing a project, for his interest lags. Thousands of great projects, from construction projects to epic poetry, now stand idle, awaiting his return from magical experimentation. Oskyar blunders on without direction, competent but uncaring; he prefers to learn and discover. Gretch never sends Oskyar's kingdom to his wars, he prefers to bring the wrath of the other realms down upon his adversary.

The Kingdom Of Chuul

Encouraged by his success with Oskyar, at least in so far as the reanimation process, Gretch quickly moved on to procure another subject. Unwilling to wait for another accident, he set up one of his own, choosing another student, Chuul, to take the fall. He arranged a simple mishap, the collapse of a balcony on the observatory level, a fall sufficient to kill but not serious enough to mutilate the corpse. The time came, the accident occurred, and none were the wiser, but



Gretch's choice was certainly not random. Chuul was a rival for the affections of a young lady, also in the Tower. Gretch's dubious motives would haunt him.

Gretch cast spells of his creation, performed perfectly, and Chuul (*Male Human T'liz Wizard 16 / Necromant 2; FoDL Ch6*) proved to be everything Oskyar was not. He learned quickly, retained information, and built upon his knowledge without his master's aid or encouragement. Gretch was pleased. Yet the process also intensified Chuul's personality, and those qualities that Gretch so abhorred in life were redoubled in undeath. Chuul became more erudite and sociable, daring to move among the rest of the students, masking his lifelessness with illusory magic. He gained a reputation for finer living and throwing great parties noted for their opulence and style. Gretch lost the object of his affections to his rival Chuul anyway. He controlled her by trance, gripped in an unholy mesmerization that drove Gretch to the brink of his own sanity. His perfect creation had to be stopped, but by the time he realized this, Chuul was one step ahead of him.

Chuul charmed and captured his creator, imprisoning him for many years in a stone tower, miles from the Pristine Tower. Deprived of his notes and spell components, he was helpless against the innate, pseudonatural powers of Chuul. In time, however, Chuul drew the careful attention of Rajaat himself and was forced to flee the tower. He returned to torment his creator one last time only to find him gone, vanished through a psionic portal he developed after years of nurturing in the confines of his prison. Still more years passed as Gretch, now free, developed magic to control his creation and Chuul wandered the face of the world in search of victims and acceptance. Gretch eventually summoned his creation back in his presence and placed magical wards upon him to keep

him under control. The entire episode lasted more than 20 years and left Gretch an aging sorcerer.

The kingdom Chuul built was one of fine palaces and ballrooms, all constructed of marble and obsidian, resting in the crags of jagged mountains. His minions attended his functions endlessly, dancing and cavorting wildly to the delight of their master. Such a sybaritic society had little hope of surviving the Dead Lands, and it did not. A powerful zhen, named Vassahi Eomwa (*Male Elf Zhen Nomad 25; FoDL Ch6*), entered Chuul's kingdom as a guest, but overstayed his welcome by overthrowing the foolish Chuul. He now reigns over a small but strong realm, wherein the palace guards strictly control all movement and strangers are hunted like animals, before being brought to Vassahi Eomwa for interrogation.

Vassahi Eomwa knows that he is rare among the rulers of the Kingdoms of Gretch in not being a creation of the ruler of the Obsidian Fortress, and therefore, he is careful to maintain good relations with all his neighbors, as well as other powers further afield. He fears that Gretch will gather his minions to invade Chuul, and for that reason, he keeps the kingdom's founder unliving, a prisoner in dungeons Chuul himself had built. Vassahi Eomwa also maintains an elite array of palace guards who make up his armies, against the day when Gretch comes warring or the next bugdead assault reaches his frontiers.

The Kingdom Of Kuo'chthan

Rajaat's original plan was to attract students – some to study preserving and others defiling magic. In the course of their instruction it became clear that there were connections between the magical process and the naturally-occurring phenomena of psionics. The knowledgeable were set to learning what they could about these connections, and assistants skilled in psionics were recruited to help. Since psionics weren't unique to any specific race, Rajaat approved the recruitment of a handful of thri-kreen, who were the wasteland masters of psionics. He dispatched agents to the thri-kreen lands to recruit a number of their better psionicists.

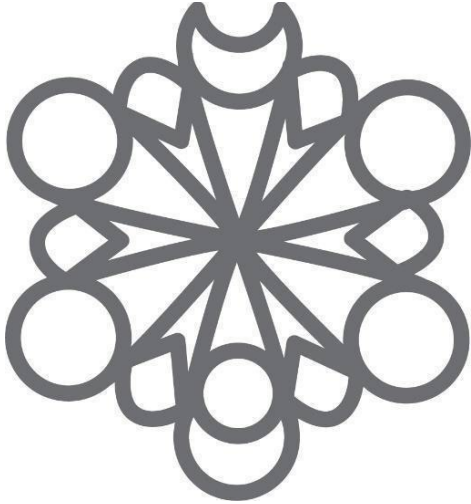
Kuo'chthan, a clutch prisoner from far to the west, was one of those recruited. He and his fellows submitted to all sorts of interrogation on matters of psionics, from general information to their race's various philosophies and folklore. The students subjected them to psionic and magical questioning as well, learning what they could from the insectoid volunteers. For their part, the thri-kreen were treated

well, allowed to travel freely, and given good food and lodging during the experiments. The information was processed and studied, argued and debated until the correct conclusion was reached: the link between magic and psionics was a tenuous one at best, and that any association between the two was a matter for powerful psychosorcery still years in their future of magical discovery. Kuo'chthan and his brethren were released from service, to return to their homelands, which is when the ever-watchful Gretch made his move.

Eager to attempt his defiling magic on an intelligent non humanoid, Gretch saw the thri-kreen as suitable subjects. He selected Kuo'chthan from among the others, knowing that of all of them he would be traveling alone to return to his homeland. Gretch poisoned Kuo'chthan at the ceremonial send-off, introducing a slow-acting agent into his food. Gretch hired thugs to track the thri-kreen, collect the corpse, still fresh but two days travel distant, and return to his laboratory.

The defiler cast the same dark spells on Kuo'chthan that he had on his humanoid victims, curious to see how the magic would permeate the insect's form. The corpse animated as expected, becoming the first thri-kreen zombie on Athas, and Gretch discovered that the monster was easier to command and control than his humanoid forebears. However, the first to practice the dark art was also the first to experience the bane of the bugdead: their minds are unable to cope with the evil thrust upon them, turning them, instead, to utter madness. Gretch devoted several of the next years to the investigation of this phenomenon, with the crazed Kuo'chthan chained at his side. He documented the insect intellect and their values for future study and application.

Kuo'chthan (*Male Thri-Kreen Thinking Zombie Fighter 7 / Psychic Warrior 13; FoDL Ch6*) is one of the few bugdead found in the northern half of the Dead Lands. Gretch protects his kingdom from the other undead who would drive him out, reasoning that Kuo'chthan's torture for participating in his own botched reanimation is his business and no one else's. His kingdom is a land of obsidian and rock and no particular order. Exoskeletons and zombies of a variety of races rush around on missions with no purpose. Kuo'chthan walks among them, giving new, meaningless directions to his minions, traveling erratically across his lands.



The Kingdom Of Ceeryl

A master of sorcery and necromancy, Gretch's history with his personal life is, by contrast, less successful. His capacity for love, in his own mind, was limitless, though he lacked the social skills to attract a companion. More than once he found himself in love from afar, as he did with a failed preserving student kept on at the Tower as a gardener, Ceeryl.

Ceeryl was a woman of exceptional beauty. Gretch worked with her on a number of occasions, seeking vegetable spell components from the Pristine Tower's extensive gardens. His desire for her grew with each meeting. When she vowed to wed another, Gretch nobly bowed out silently and allowed her happiness. Yet, when she died several years later, at a young age and of an unexpected disease, Gretch could not resist the chance of bringing her back, through reanimation, to become his bride. Surely, she would be so grateful that her latent admiration for him would blossom to full-fledged love.

Growing older, Gretch fully expected to turn, one day, to undeath to continue his work. Suddenly, dreams of an eternity with his beloved Ceeryl blocked his already questionable judgment. He hired unscrupulous men to exhume her corpse and bring it to his laboratory, where he employed the most sophisticated magic he had yet devised. Ceeryl's body was perfectly preserved, despite her death, for she had secretly dabbled in druidry while tending the gardens. The reanimation went perfectly and Gretch treasured their companionship. Even though the deranged Gretch realized that emotional or physical love between them was impossible, he was content that their relationship be strictly platonic. Or would it?

The undead Ceeryl, nearly as beautiful and charming in undeath as before, set her will to beguile Gretch. She sent him signals, gentle impressions that she had genuine feelings for him, so real, so convincing that Gretch postulated, beyond hope, that his original assessment was wrong. Perhaps she could love him, even in death, and perhaps he could love her, too. He turned to his studies more fervently than ever before, investigating the possibility of reanimating himself to cherish an eternity with Ceeryl as his bride.

Alas, Ceeryl's heart was every bit as cold and calculating as Gretch's previous assumptions. She blinded the necromancer with her charms to steal his knowledge. His reanimation magic was a prize beyond price, she well knew – as she had treasured life when alive, she now gloried in undeath. With its power she might build an empire of the dead, one she could control, throwing the living into caves or even annihilating them altogether. The creation of Shansanar, perhaps Gretch's most bizarre undead, dates from this time, when he was trying to impress Ceeryl.

To gain the power of undeath, Ceeryl would do anything, even kill her creator, but first, she needed the secrets of his magical spells. Doing so alone, though, would be difficult, so she recruited Oskyar to help her root out her master's spells. Oskyar was easily manipulated, even more so than Gretch, and he stole scrolls and notes for her to memorize in the late night hours. In the end, however, Oskyar's carelessly, left a scroll tube open the next morning, betraying their plan. Gretch moved quickly through his grief and plotted his defense. Changing his work subtly, he allowed Oskyar to steal altered scrolls, which Ceeryl devoured as if genuine. When she sprang her trap on Gretch, her magic was flawed, and he placed magical wards upon her to prevent her from ever harming her master again. Gretch, saddened but wiser for the experience, sent Ceeryl away, unable to bear her presence, until after the Obsidian Boil, when he recalled her to master her own kingdom on the obsidian.

The Kingdom of Ceeryl is permeated with illusion. The queen uses her magic to make the realm appear just as her homeland did, grasslands dotted with wooden farmhouses, fences, and a variety of highly exotic animals. Forests rise along the ridges and hillsides, canvassed beneath a bright blue sky fluttering with white clouds and a gentle, yellow sun. To an Athasian it is a totally alien landscape, but the illusions are extremely powerful. What lies behind them is the reality of her domain, rock outcroppings scattered across the bleak obsidian. Ceeryl (*Female Human Racked Spirit Wizard 5 / Necromant 7 / Psion*)

(*Shaper*) 5 / *Cerebremancer* 3 / *Druid* 4; *FoDL Ch6*) finds comfort in her illusions, content to believe them herself, and is kind to those who believe with her. Those who refuse to believe, who see through the illusions, become enemies to be hunted and killed by her undead minions.

The Gardens Of Shansanar

Shansanar (*Unique Undead Treant*; *FoDL Ch6*) is the undead result of an experiment to work life regeneration through preserver magic. The resultant creature is a strange combination of undead animal and unliving plant. When it is not moving, Shansanar looks like a massive thick-boled tree, not unlike the oaks which once thrived by the Sunrise Sea. Its kingdom is filled with bizarre forests of sculpted obsidian trees and odd crystalline growths that Shansanar nurtures as if they were living things.

Visitors will see none of these strange gardens and forests, however, as they walk across the rippling glass hills that make up the Gardens of Shansanar. Shansanar has dug all its gardens into the blackglass, forming pits, some more than 50' deep, that are wide like flat-bottomed bowls and covered with thin domes of swirling obsidian. Shansanar travels between these sunken greenhouses, of which there are hundreds, all different in shape and size, using a series of smooth tunnels.

Each garden is its own macabre creation, a sculpture collection of Shansanar's weird imagination where memories of life fuse with the perverse dreams of King's Age upon King's Age of vegetable undeath: Monsters scream from operating tables, humans march to their deaths into a grotesque square stone maw, bugdead battle swirling dream forms, statues of scarlet wardens converse with obsidian trees, et cetera. Shansanar retains much of its plant nature, including a patience unknown among animal creatures – thus its sculptures are marvels of detailed perfection, each one precise to the tiniest detail. This attention to detail is also apparent in the domes which cover each garden – though thin, they are supported by strong ribs, and designed to withstand the passage of bugdead and humanoid armies alike.

The first bugdead assault was a disaster for Shansanar. It wasn't attacked; the bugdead seemed to not even recognize it as an unliving thing. Certainly, they did not seem to reckon it a humanoid undead. Nonetheless, Shansanar's realm was utterly destroyed in the first bugdead invasion, for the ignorant bugs, in their limitless thousands, had marched over the

domes, which were nearly invisible among the "natural" glass hills. Their great weight shattered the glass. Bugs fell into the finely sculpted gardens and smashed everything as they struggled to get out and continue their march northwards.

Shansanar was neither enraged nor saddened by the destruction of its first gardens, but perhaps it was irritated – mild annoyance is as close as Shansanar can get to emotion. Shansanar abandoned the first gardens, which were now no more than gaping pits, vast and filled with tangled, shattered, and smashed glass formations. Shansanar built anew, roofing its new diggings with elegantly thin but immensely strong domes, and indeed, very few of these have collapsed, even under the weight of stomping claws.

Visitors may discover the yawning pits which were once Shansanar's first gardens, and if they are diligent in digging through the accumulated loose obsidian and gray glass-sand, they may find the smooth empty passages that lead from these to the newer delvings, where Shansanar tends its sculpted gardens. Shansanar itself may even be there, stiff and silent, as if a sculpture itself, and likely to be mistaken for one – at first.

Shansanar does not care about visitors who pass through its realm quietly and peacefully – it is indifferent to such ephemeral and inconsequential creatures as even undead, so long as they do not disturb its gardens. However, should even the tiniest fragment of any of the obsidian sculptures be damaged, Shansanar will move quickly to smite the offender and any others who defend him. Since some of the gardens contain such immensely delicate sculptures that even speaking too loudly can damage them, visitors to the Gardens of Shansanar are in immense danger – whether they recognize it or not.

The Gelada Of Kiwk

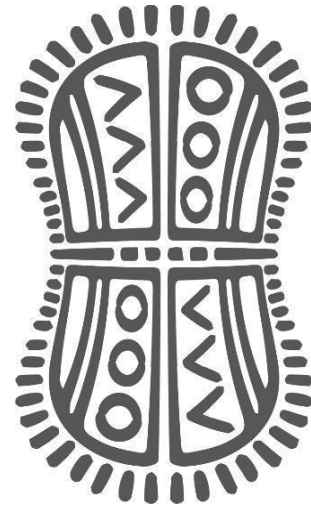
Gretch sometimes tampered with the possibilities of reanimating dead creatures whose origins were themselves magical. Virtually all of these experiments ended in failure, except for Kiwk, a feylaar from a small tribe trapped and killed on Gretch's request. The feylaar are reputed to owe their creation to a long dead wizard, perhaps a Champion or a sorcerer-king already ruling in the time before the Cleansing Wars, who created them to serve as battle fodder.

Kiwk (*Male Thinking Zombie Feylaar Psychic Warrior* 17; *FoDL Ch6*) is a thinking zombie, and his form and personality are much as they were in life, vicious and violent, the most aggressive of all the feylaar from his

former tribe whom in undeath have become his praetorian guard. He has, through the power of tooth and claw, established an unremitting, if highly capricious, dominance over the humanoid undead in his realm which he calls the Gelada. The population of the Gelada is about 8,000, mostly mindless undead servants. His praetorian guard of fallen (*Male and Female Feylaar Fallen Psi-Warrior 13; FoDL Ch6*) and zhen overseers (*Male and Female Human Zhen Fighter 10; FoDL Ch6*) govern in Kiwk's name.

His instincts are to fight, and Kiwk demands public spectacles of his right to rule. Since none of his own minions are foolish enough to challenge Kiwk's dominance, having seen the horrific consequences of failure, they regularly procure foreigners to be sent into the Gelada's vast amphitheaters and torn apart by Kiwk. Kiwk has seven of these theaters in his realm, each spawning an adjacent town ruled by one or more of the cadre of zhen. Visitors to the Gelada will undoubtedly be sent, by force or stratagem, into the arenas to face Kiwk, who will be much pleased to face living opponents.

Kiwk does not recognize bugdead as having a right to challenge his rule over the Gelada, so he never faces captive bugdead in the arenas. His response to bugdead invasions is similarly rejectionist – he takes refuge in the massive auditoriums of his realm, with his troops and population around him, and waits. During several bugdead invasions his kingdom has lost one or more halls, overrun by the enemy and slaughtered to the very last. On two occasions, the theaters where Kiwk personally sheltered were nearly overrun, and all would have been lost were it not for desperate defensive measures.



Nophdeh's Gullet

Undeath existed before Gretch began his experiments, a fact he only belatedly realized. One of the forms of undead which was well-known, if only as a rumor, during the Time of Magic, was the dwarven banshee. As failure has existed for as long as men have sought to accomplish tasks, so have dwarven banshees existed for as long as there have been dwarves. Gretch was the first to scientifically examine the process by which dwarven banshees were created, proving the old wives' tales about failed foci and eternal damnation.

However, Gretch's goal was not to merely describe the causes of dwarven undeath but to exploit this process to create undead himself, seeking to harness this avenue to unlife in order to create other forms of undea, and perhaps unlock the secret of undeath itself. He had little chance to do this at the Pristine Tower, since dwarves were few there, but after he moved to Ulyan, he quickly took advantage of his more opportune circumstances.

Gretch sent agents across Ulyan and up the Winding Way, seeking dwarves who had failed or were failing in their focus, and offered – as a beneficent and wise sage – to assist any who came to him. Gretch's agents advertised their master's words as an effort to aid dwarves in accomplishing their focus, but Gretch was interested only in observing and analyzing the transformation of failed dwarves into dwarven banshees.

Dozens of dwarves were lured to the Grey Tower by Gretch's false promises, and all perished, their foci unfinished and their failures condemning them to undeath. Gretch kept the miserable, raging banshees in special dungeons under his tower – once they became

undead he had no interest in them, except to prevent them from escaping and damaging his reputation as a kind sage. Gretch learned much from the dwarves' death-throes and rebirths as banshees – it was the moment and means of change that interested him, and he learned much from it.

The most powerful of the dwarves transformed to undeath under Gretch's watchful eye was Nophdeh, a dwarf from faraway Tyr who had drifted southwards in search of his lost family – their village had been overrun by raiders, and he presumed them enslaved. Gretch's agents had found him not far from Balic and enticed him to the Grey Tower with promises of arcane methods to search for them, but instead Nophdeh was himself chained up and "encouraged" to die, so Gretch could observe the process of life becoming unlife.

Over the course of his experiments, Gretch eventually refined the powerful wards he used to bind his undead servants and his previous experiments. He used these powerful wards to force obedience from Nophdeh (*Male Dwarf Dwarven Banshee Rogue 13 / Fighter 5; FoDL Ch6*) and the other banshees, sending them across Ulyan on missions of espionage, theft, and assassination. These banshees helped reinforce the pronouncements of his prophets among the human plainsmen, and secured the power of the Grey Tower – invisible but immense – in the minds of the residents of Ulyan.

During the vast encampment of the Champions' armies at the Grey Tower, Gretch sought to use his dwarven banshees as spies among the Champions' troops. Nophdeh was lurking in the army of Sielba when the Champion detected him and savagely pursued him from her bivouac. Nophdeh barely escaped Sielba's wrath with his unlife, and Gretch was forced to suspend his spying efforts in the armies for months. Nophdeh was watching from a safe distance as Dregoth led the Champions' fearsome charge at the Tforkatch River, and he led the banshees who haunted the edges of the Champions' siege ring, during the Siege of Nagarvos'.

After the sack of Nagarvos', Gretch detailed Nophdeh to follow and report on the activities of Gallard and his army. Nophdeh observed the destruction of Arludas, and though Gallard was aware of him, the Gnome-Bane indulged the banshee by not obliterating him. Perhaps Gallard thought it would prove instructive for Gretch to get a report on what real Champions did; Nophdeh indeed delivered his report to Gretch, none the wiser that Gallard had known he was there.

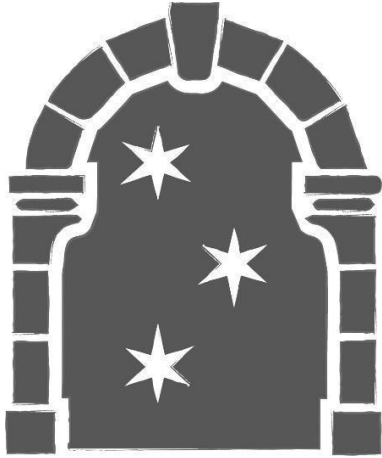
With the departure of the Champions, Gretch gradually realized he needed very few spies, and those

were concentrated at the Navel. He detailed Nophdeh to take the majority of his dwarven banshees and establish a kingdom, to act as a defensive bulwark against the rebels in Olnak. Nophdeh did as he was told, and began construction on a region as much to his and his dwarves' liking as possible, as well as to focus his population. He had them labor for years to raise an enormous hill in the center of his territory, tunneling into it to construct a great hall of stone.

The flat plains of Nophdeh's realm, in which he ruled as uhrnomus with absolute power, were overwhelmed in the first wash of the Obsidian Wave. Nophdeh responded quickly to the first appearance of the boiling, hissing obsidian – his guards levered massive blocks of stone into place, sealing the entrances to his palace. His royal hall survived unscathed, and once the blackglass cooled, Nophdeh dug up and out through it. He did not attempt to rebuild his new realm as an exact copy of the old – instead of building a mountain of quarried blackglass, Nophdeh had his banshees (*Nophdeh's Lieutenants, Sergeants, and Scouts; FoDL Ch6*) dig down, creating a conical pit called the Gullet, the deepest tip of which precisely reached the exact peak of the mountain which his people had originally constructed earlier.

Nophdeh's goal was to continue to use his original royal hall, in the new world of the Dead Lands, but this was not to be. The dwarves' digging liberated scores of zhen, who had once been plainsmen living in the Ulyan of the Time of Magic. The banshees were unable to master the zhen, enraging Nophdeh. He fought furiously with them, mounting expeditions down into the Gullet, which was already becoming the name of his realm (in common usage) as well as the name of his inverse mountain excavation. Then came the first bugdead invasion from the south. Nophdeh's forces were driven north, but after the bugdead were repelled, he returned.

Since the first bugdead invasion, Nophdeh's realm has been a curious inversion. Where the center of most kingdoms, living and undead, is a capital city, with borders far to the outside, Nophdeh's realm is centered on its most important border. Around the Gullet, the dwarves have reared a vast wall, fortifications towering over the single dark pit in the center. His dwarves regularly patrol the wall, alternating with patrol duty along the exterior borders. Since the bugdead invasions, the population of Nophdeh's land has swelled, as fallen, namech, and other undead, as well as mindless types, gather to serve in his bitter but well-organized forces.



The Viscera (Under Nophdeh)

Directly below the Kingdom of Nophdeh lies the Viscera, a grim realm that bears no allegiance to Gretch or any other undead ruler. The Viscera is inhabited by zhen who were raised to unlife in the aftermath of the Boiling Ruin. The plainsmen and herders who emerged from their dead sleep as zhen had to break out of the kurgans, wherein their people had interred them, and they didn't like what they found, outside the earth and stone burial mounds in which they'd been entombed.

Clawing through the cooling glass, the zhen somehow found Nophdeh's mountain, which the dwarf had built in the center of their kurgans. They claimed it as their own, considering that this was the greatest of kurgans, the tallest and largest of burial mounds, and that its presence here was an act of providence. The name they took was that which their people had always used for departed heroes: the Sky-Striders.

When Nophdeh's excavators reached the mountain, they were savagely repulsed. The zhen had claimed the mound, and held it against Nophdeh's most determined attacks. Though they now had a ready-made route to the surface, the zhen did not follow it. They despised the sterile glass and the dwarves who inhabited it, declaring themselves merely the Striders, forever spurning the sky, the surface, and the world, which was no longer the world they knew. The dwarves, despite Nophdeh's irritation, called the Striders' territory the Viscera, as it was directly below the Gullet.

The Striders survived the bugdead assault with near-indifference; they simply sealed the Gullet's throat and waited out the monstrous lashbugs. The bugdead have little love of digging, and less of digging

in blackglass – they soon tired of gnawing at it and turned northwards, to replace others which had been destroyed around The City of a Thousand Dead. Since then the Striders have remained in their subvitrine realm, mounting rare raids on the dwarves' walls above, but otherwise ignoring their troublesome and despised neighbors.

If the Striders have a leader, his name remains a mystery (See *The Viscera*; *FoDL Ch6*). Nor does anyone know how many Striders there are, or how far their tunnels and chambers may reach below the glass. Nophdeh suspects that they have bored passages from his mountain to every one of the hundreds of kurgans that dot the plains in this area and that there may be many thousands of Striders now active, hidden beneath the blackglass. What powers they may be awakening there are known but to them.

It is known, to Nophdeh and Gretch, that the Striders have a religion. The Striders believe that they are an oppressed people, abandoned by all the gods. They wait for a deliverer, a heroic warlord who will come to redeem the humans and slaughter the demihumans, like dwarves. They wait, and they prepare, becoming better armed and more deadly as the King's Ages pass, always preparing for the day when their god Rajaat will come and lead them in an invincible cleansing of their enemies. Perhaps on that day they will reclaim their full name, marching under the olive sky.



The Kingdom Of Olnak

Gretch continued his experiments with undeath long after his exile from the Pristine Tower and the construction of his new residence in central Ulyan, the Grey Tower. He was attentive to the peoples surrounding his new home, and chose it primarily because it was an isolated area; it was close enough to

the main trade road (from Nagarvos' to Small Home and the Winding Way) to permit him to hunt new test subjects but far enough from any major settlements to escape the rule of any city. Gretch presented himself as a wise sage, offering "aid" to the city fathers of Ulyan, in return for small concessions and deliveries of the few supplies he required.

The sages who came to the Grey Tower seeking answers most often received the wisdom they sought, as best as Gretch could contrive - and with his knowledge of the Tablelands, he did have much to offer, though he never mentioned Rajaat or taught the secrets of wizardry to anyone. Gretch used the sages' visits to discover secrets of the Ulyan cities from them, and not all the sages returned to their homelands after seeing the Master of the Grey Tower. Some, it is true, died at the hands of the human nomads who roamed the plains around Gretch's tower, but some never left the mighty fortress from which the Grey Tower rose like a stone lightning bolt.

One of these unfortunates was a scholar from the city of Olnak, south of Small Home. His name was Tol'thak, and he had come seeking knowledge of Tablelands crops that might flourish in the short, cold, growing season of Olnak. Gretch had little to offer on such a subject - agriculture had never interested him - nor could he lie, since Tol'thak was well-versed in the matter and would detect any such subterfuge. Still, Gretch wanted very much to discover all he could about Olnak, since it was one of few mostly human-populated cities in Ulyan. He killed Tol'thak with poison and reanimated him for interrogation.

Tol'thak (*Human Morg Wizard 5 / Necromant 10 / Psion 5 (Nomad) / Cerebremancer 4; FoDL Ch6*) at first was so shocked at his reanimation to unlife that he did not resist, and Gretch learned much of his captive. Once Gretch had exhausted Tol'thak's knowledge and used it to prepare agents to spy further, he lost interest in his prisoner. Not so the captive agricultural scholar - he hated his undeath, and the man who had perpetrated it upon him, and determined to obtain his revenge. For years Tol'thak studied in the Grey Tower, always maintaining the façade of subservience and incompetence. In fact, he was a scholar by trade and he applied himself fully to learning the magic that made Gretch so powerful. Tol'thak developed great subtlety eavesdropping, observing many of Gretch's tirades about transforming the entire world to undeath, and was one of the many of Gretch's undead creations able to eavesdrop on the necromancer's interview with Rajaat, when the First Sorcerer explained his plans to cleanse Ulyan.

When the Champions and their armies came, Tol'thak offered his services to Gretch. Gretch, still believing the scholar was harmless and submissive, assigned him to help gather up the corpses of the dead, from the Battle of Tforkatch River, for reanimation. Tol'thak had only been awaiting his chance, however; he used the wizardry he had learned during the long years in the Grey Tower to gain control over many of his fellow laborers and then to reanimate many of the fallen soldiers. With his small army he then fled southwest, heading back to Olnak.

Grech realized Tol'thak had betrayed him but only after the scholar was long gone, when Fnuthaar (one of Gretch's more obedient minions) reported the passage of the small undead army headed for Olnak. Gretch was enraged but could not hunt down his escaped servant himself, due to the constant demands Rajaat made upon him, from the front line near Nagarvos'. He dispatched a force, under his lieutenant Uzhgabr, to pursue Tol'thak and let the matter rest.

Tol'thak reached Olnak with his undead battalions to find it very unlike what he remembered. The small but bustling city of humans, sprinkled with halflings, dwarves, ogres, and others, was no more. Most of the city's humans, brainwashed by Gretch's propaganda, had left to join the armies of the Champions. The remaining population, divided evenly between humans and non-humans, was polarized by fear and mistrust, though the two groups were not openly hostile to one another yet. Tol'thak hid his army in the city's hinterlands and entered Olnak himself, seeking to win over the city elders - but they feared him, even in his illusion-shrouded innocence.

The People's Council of Olnak embraced Tol'thak soon enough, however, thanks to Gretch. The force Gretch had sent to pursue Tol'thak arrived outside Olnak and, when Uzhgabr perceived that the renegade undead was within, assaulted the walls. Largely depopulated, Olnak was utterly outmatched and was saved only by Tol'thak leading his own undead army to attack Gretch's troops from the rear. The citizens' horror at the undead nature of Uzhgabr's army made their gratitude all the greater, and Tol'thak took the place he desired as Surveyor of Olnak.

As Surveyor, Tol'thak headed the People's Council. He kept his undead status hidden and his army out of sight, on patrol at Olnak's borders, while he built up political support among the city's factions. When word came that Nagarvos' had fallen to the Champions, Tol'thak realized that Rajaat's promised cleansing had begun. He knew how to claim his place in the new order - by putting all Olnak's nonhumans to the sword - and carried out the extermination with anguish, for

he loved Olnak as he remembered it. It grieved him enormously to sacrifice the nonhumans so that the humans might live.

Gretch, in the Grey Tower, also realized the change, and he too sought to capitalize on it. He presented Tol'thak's cleansing of Olnak as part of his own clever plan to assist in the work of the Champions. The Chronicles note that the First Sorcerer was not impressed, but that he did accept Olnak as "cleansed" and therefore directed his Champions to bypass it on their several paths out of Ulyan and into the wider world. Olnak was out of the way of any main trade route in any case – Rajaat saw no need to divert one of his precious Champions to examine barley fields within sight of the Hoarwall.

Tol'thak prospered, briefly, as Surveyor of Olnak. He disbanded the People's Council when it objected to the triumphal parade of his no-longer-concealed undead army, and shortly thereafter, proclaimed the fact of his own undeath. Some of Olnak's living humans were willing to remain under the rule of the undead, but most chose to leave, hastening to enlist in the armies of the Champions marching north. Tol'thak tried to stop them but could not risk Rajaat's wrath, so he let the living go. When the last Champion had passed forth from Ulyan, Tol'thak began to renew his population by raising the non-human dead of his city.

So Olnak remained for years, a city of the living, populated mostly by the dead. Gretch tolerated this situation unwillingly, for Tol'thak absolutely refused Gretch's demands for a tribute of living men to be test subjects in the Grey Tower. Tol'thak slowly augmented his population by raising the recently dead, but since he still had living subjects, he felt little need to plunder the city's graveyards of their legions. His own personal power became absolute, and he honed his skills as a general in battles with invaders from the other Kingdoms of Gretch.

Everything changed when the Boiling Ruin erupted in the east. Tol'thak was in the Surveyor's Citadel, watching for the coming of dawn, when his undead eyes saw a first glint, the flash of sunlight, glittering not in the sky but on the earth. Across the northeast horizon it spread, approaching with the speed of sunlight. Tol'thak rung the alarm, fearing some new devilry from Gretch, but the false dawn soon proved far worse than any scourge of Gretch's making.

Olnak was deluged in the first wave of obsidian. Tol'thak managed to gather a few of his followers into his citadel. They watched from its parapets as the boiling death consumed the rest of his people, living and dead alike. Tol'thak wept hot tears as he watched the hissing spume consume the barley fields and

orchards – he was still an agriculturalist at heart, and in the Boiling Ruin he perceived the destruction of his first love. The second wave of obsidian, bouncing back off the Hoarwall to the south, toppled the Citadel's towers and left Tol'thak thrashing in his own molten tomb.

Tol'thak returned to consciousness to realize that he had not yet died the true death, but was merely entombed in solid obsidian. He laboriously broke free, however – scholars are by nature patient people – and then began liberating his remaining subjects from the blackglass. Marshaling his survivors was unexpectedly difficult, for those who had been alive when the obsidian hit were resurrected into undeath as zhen, a new creature over which Tol'thak had to demonstrate his mastery. Tol'thak's intelligence served him well, and soon he had his subjects hewing a wide tunnel upwards, seeking the sunlight.

Tol'thak built a new city on the surface, constructing his new kingdom in the image of the Olnak he loved from his childhood, the Olnak that now lay buried deep within the blackglass. Unlike most of his peers, who emerged from the devastation and closed their escape tunnels behind them – vowing never to look back – Tol'thak did not find the new vistas of shimmering obsidian to his liking. He kept the tunnel from his new citadel down to the buried original Olnak open, and he often descended, by himself, to raise the dead, rescue the undead, or simply to reminisce.

The speed with which Gretch and his favored cronies rebuilt on the Obsidian Plain surprised Tol'thak – no sooner had he and his people emerged from the blackglass than they encountered patrols from the new "Obsidian Fortress" of Gretch. Tol'thak considered this carefully over the succeeding years, and concluded that Gretch must have had some warning of the impending ruin. Combining this with what he had overheard while in Gretch's service – how the necromancer desired nothing less than undeath everywhere for all peoples – Tol'thak came to the firm belief that Gretch had somehow engineered or caused the Black Tide. His hatred of his former master was intense, and he began plotting a campaign to overthrow and destroy the agent of his beloved Olnak's destruction.

When the bugdead hordes exploded up from the south, Tol'thak's rebuilt city of Olnak was one of the closest humanoid undead realms. Tol'thak's undead fought bravely, but they were overwhelmed, by both the numbers and the ferocity of the bugdead attackers. It took all of Tol'thak's considerable skill as a general to rally the survivors for a fighting retreat – back down the tunnel by which they had originally escaped their

entombment. The chattering enemy pursued however, until, in desperation, Tol'thak ordered the tunnel collapsed behind him, crushing their pursuers.

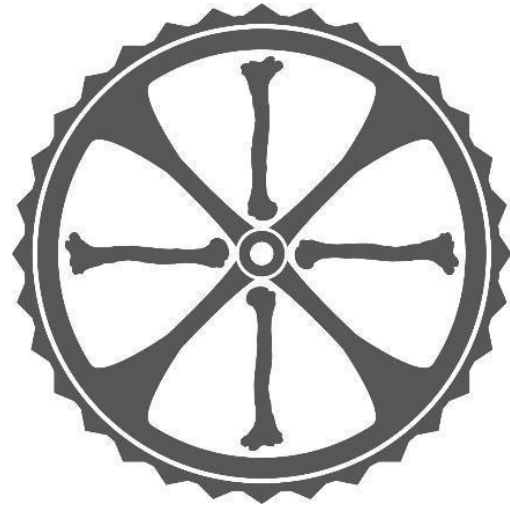
Since that dreadful day, Tol'thak has remained belowground, excavating more and more of ancient Olnak. Gretch has long since forgotten about this stubborn kingdom, considering it destroyed by the bugdead. Undead released from the obsidian or raised from uncovered cemeteries have once again swelled the population, providing laborers for ever-grander restoration projects. No amount of wizardry or labor has yet been able to renew the farm fields of Olnak that were once Tol'thak's pride and joy. The Surveyor himself remains consumed by rage at Gretch – he blames the necromancer not only for the Boiling Ruin but also for the bugdead infestation, and desires nothing more than to return to the surface and crush his tormentor.

Tol'thak the Surveyor of Olnak remains below ground to this day, his burning hatred of Gretch unable to overcome his fear of the bugdead, which are still at large above him. He currently possesses the city of Olnak, as restored as possible, and he fears to risk its security by venturing back to the surface of the blackglass. However, if a means were found for Tol'thak to strike at Gretch without endangering Olnak or confronting the bugdead, he would leap at the chance.

The Kingdom of Olnak is contiguous with the city that flourished in the Time of Magic, though it now rests on lifeless ground under a dome of chipped purple-black obsidian. Nearly all the structures have been rebuilt as Tol'thak remembers them, using original stone and petrified wood where possible. Where original materials were not available, Tol'thak directed that obsidian substitutes be used, so many of the houses have blackglass beams and thatch, meticulously carved to resemble stone and wood, mixed with whatever original materials could be recovered.

Instead of farm fields, the buildings of walled Olnak are surrounded by parade grounds, where Tol'thak's levies train endlessly for their return to the surface and the inevitable battle with Gretch and his hordes. The fields also contain the Foulmouths, deep wells enlarged into mines, where Tol'thak has his minions dump the spoil from digging the obsidian dome that opens over his city. Tol'thak despises himself for fouling the "good earth" with the products of undeath and evil, but he has no choice – without the Foulmouths, Olnak would be little more than a series of obsidian-walled street-caves.

Olnak's population is composed of 28% human zombies and skeletons resurrected from the Battle of Tforkatch River, 30% original Olnakan human zhens, 10% Olnakan gnome racked spirits, 9% Olnakan ogre ioramhs, 6% Olnakan halfling thinking zombies, 5% Olnakan dwarven banshees, 4% pixie and sprite blights, 4% Nagarvos' gnome fallen from Tforkatch River, 2% orc fallen, 1% elves vengers, and 1% other demihumans.



The Kingdom Of Nocwis

Nocwis (*Human Thinking Skeleton Fighter 15; FoDL Ch6*) is the name Gretch gave to one of his lesser creations, animated from skeletal remains bought from caravan merchants from a distant land. They assured him that the bones belonged to a great leader of their people, who died when her chariot overturned in battle, nor were they lying. Nocwis had been a famous tribal leader of the Windborne Wheels tribe, in the last decades before the start of the Cleansing Wars, and had opposed the claims of Tectuktitlay's heralds, when they came to recruit her people into his army. Tectuktitlay's agents stirred up a neighboring tribe, the Erdlu Totem, against her and aided them in the subsequent battle.

Nocwis's kingdom is a vast plate of blackglass, with no permanent structures. She rules her kingdom as she ruled her tribe, from her own caravan of chariots, cavalry, and wanes. Her itinerant court circles the land in a never ending circuit, visiting the various sub-tribes which themselves wander nomadically across the blackglass, in their own smaller tribal territories. Because Nocwis's people are mobile by habit and culture, they suffer little from bugdead attack, simply

fleeing further north whenever the hordes boil up out of the south.

In life, Nocwis and her people were raiders as much as herders, crossing the Tablelands to hunt and raid the lands of elves, wemics, and other humans, and suffer like treatment in return. She has renewed this tradition in undeath, periodically marshaling her tribal levies and descending on the surrounding kingdoms to plunder and enslave. Capturing and enslaving mindless undead from other lands is much more profitable than stealing gold or other treasures, so Nocwis and her mounted forces have designed their hit-and-run tactics to maximize the take of mindless undead.

Nocwis's raids win her no friends among her fellow rulers in the Kingdoms, but she has no strongholds to defend and is at least as mobile as any humanoid army that has ever been dispatched against her. So, she is always able to outlast and avoid opponents, even if she cannot defeat them. For the same reason, however, Nocwis is a valued field commander when Gretch's varied kingdoms ally to face the periodic bugdead invasions.

Visitors to the Kingdom of Nocwis will find the obsidian surface more scratched than is typical of the central Obsidian Plain. This region is more scuffed due to the ebb and flow of humanoid and bugdead armies and humanoid traders, but the nomadic movements of Nocwis's people have made her lands less shiny and more scratched than is typical even here. Nocwis's traveling court consists of 400-500 undead, mostly skeletons and fallen, though she also boasts several zhen and t'liz spellcasters and a particularly nasty fael. The six subtribes which roam the various regions of her kingdom each contain 800-1,500 undead, though the majority of these are mindless undead.



The Exilarchate Of Erthne

Erthne was once one of the leading generals of Nagarnos'. She commanded the reserve corps in the army of Nagarnos' at the Battle of Tforkatch River, personally leading her forces into the breach when Dregoth and her guard broke through. Erthne fought heroically, as did her men; very few of them survived the battle, though their suicidal last stand won time during which many other troops retreated safely to Nagarnos'.

In the wake of the battle, the Champion's armies marched onto Nagarnos', leaving the corpse-strewn battlefield to the carrion-pickers from Gretch's Grey Tower. Though few of the Champions' troops were left unburied, the fallen from Nagarnos' were deliberately left out to rot in the sun, and it was thus that Gretch's necromancers found them. Erthne was one of thousands whose corpses were taken to Charnelhouse or the other undead factories for reanimation. She returned to life as a fallen, albeit an extremely powerful fallen, and because of her talent and skill she was made a general commanding the corps of undead that Gretch offered to Rajaat, when Gretch imagined that such an offering might purchase her a place among the Champions.

The offer was refused, of course, and Gretch instead used the troops as her personal guards, ensuring that none of the Champions "accidentally" cleansed her tower during their dispersal from the wreck of Nagarnos'. Erthne (*Female Ogre Fallen Fighter 17; FoDL Ch6*) despised her unlife as a servant of Gretch, whom she personally disliked, above and beyond hating her for her role in Rajaat's campaign to destroy her home city. Nonetheless, the wards Gretch had placed upon her were ironclad, and Erthne remained a loyal servant to Gretch for years.

Erthne served as Gretch's leading general during the years when the Navel was operating, serving as commander of the troops Gretch used to keep the Navel's supply-requisition patrols from raiding into her territory. Erthne took some small pleasure in that – Qwith's people at the Navel were clearly Rajaat's direct minions, so every one of them she killed was a small victory against the War-Bringer.

Erthne supervised the digging of vast shelters for her troops, and retreated to them with her command staff, not knowing why. Led by Gretch's Uncrowned, Erthne and her troops emerged from their sealed shelters to see why: the world had changed, it was all glistening black obsidian as far as the eye could see. Once again, Gretch dispatched Erthne and her men out to secure the borders, claiming vast stretches of the

Obsidian Plain for Gretch and her coterie of obscenely twisted kings. Gradually, the various subordinate kings grew strong enough to mind their own borders, and after sharp battles Erthne obeyed Gretch's commands and allowed them to do so. Erthne was left to plan a campaign to claim The City of a Thousand Dead for Gretch, but before the campaign could be launched, fate intervened.

Erthne's finest hour came about a King's Age after the Obsidian Tide, against an enemy neither she nor her master Gretch had imagined. The swarming bugdead overwhelmed the southern Kingdoms of Gretch, consuming many undead and driving the terrified survivors north to the Obsidian Fortress. They fled right into the camps of Erthne's legions, which were bivouacked there preparing for the invasion against The City of a Thousand Dead. Erthne immediately reoriented her men southwards, blunting and slowing the bugdead hordes. Humanoid undead flooded from all directions to shelter behind her battered troops, and even Gretch herself later admitted that without Erthne's tactical skill, and her troops' discipline and courage, the Obsidian Fortress would probably have been lost.

The retreat of the bugdead left a void in the southern Kingdoms of Gretch, where previous rulers had been destroyed along with their realms. Gretch knew an opportunity when he saw it – she magnanimously rewarded Erthne with a kingdom of her own, right on the southern marches. Any bugdead assault henceforward would face Erthne first and perhaps be stopped there. Erthne has not forgotten the Nagarvos' of her youth, or the family and friends murdered there, or forgiven Gretch her role in that crime, but he is not above feeling grateful to her liege for granting her her own land.

Nor is Erthne so foolish as not to realize that her southern border is the Crunch. She has fortified points all across her kingdom, building low, wide forts filled with hidden passages, sally ports, and siege artillery. Though she herself also leads a field army of thousands of humanoid undead, Erthne has appointed trusted lieutenants to command each of these forts, and she ensures that they are always prepared with vast stocks of ammunition and as many spellcasters as possible, both to provide firepower in combat and to reanimate defeated defenders.

Erthne's realm, which she named the Exilarchate in honor of lost Nagarvos' and her inability to ever return to it, is a heavily militarized land wherein spellcasters, no matter how potent, are never more than staff officers. Every commander, at every level, is a fallen (*Erthne's Guard and Soldiers of Exilarchate; FoDL Ch6*),

and nearly all of these are fallen who once served in the armies of Nagarvos' at Tforkatch River. Erthne has carefully situated her forts so that they serve as points against which she can maneuver her field forces, and so that they can support one another with a minimum of risk. Furthermore, she has very deliberately left open several key avenues so that bugdead hordes can pass her by completely and ravage lands further north, on those occasions when they are so inclined.

Visitors to the Exilarchate, living or undead, are likely to be met by a patrol from either one of the fixed forts or from Erthne's field army. They will be taken, either willingly or not, to Erthne for judgment. Erthne most often demands a term of military service from any humanoid undead found on his glass, perhaps a King's Age or two. The term might be shortened if the captive were willing to provide valuable intelligence (new spells, dispositions of enemy forces, etc.) which would aid Erthne.

The Kingdom Of Wujarrt

Wujarrt (*Female Human Morg Wizard 5 / Necromant 2 / Shaper 5 / Cerebremancer 5*) was a former preserver student from the Pristine Tower turned defiler during the preserver jihad. She was excited by the marching armies and personally taken by the imperious Uyness. Wujarrt enlisted in the army of Uyness and accompanied that Champion's forces south to begin the Cleansing Wars at Nagarvos'. She distinguished herself in the Battle at Tforkatch River and again during one of the early assaults on the walls of the city. Her heroism at this latter battle was near-fatal, alas, but Uyness hoped to find magic with which to restore her valued subordinate to life and so preserved the dying Wujarrt with various stasis effects.

Gretch's spies, probably dwarven banshees, discovered the magic-enshrouded near-corpse and spirited it back to the Grey Tower, where Gretch reanimated Wujarrt as a morg. Wujarrt's idealism in the cause of the Cleansing Wars was undimmed by undeath, and Gretch had to bind her with the most powerful of wards to keep her from escaping and reporting his actions to Uyness. Gretch used Wujarrt to gain valuable information about the Champions' armies and plans, which he used to help conceal his activities reanimating the many dead from Tforkatch River.

Wujarrt remained a helpless captive in the dungeons of the Grey Tower until long after the Champions had sacked Nagarvos' and marched out of Ulyan. By this

time, Gretch had tired of her and, in fact, forgotten about her. It was only years later, when Gretch's Uncrowned were repairing the Grey Tower that Wujart was rediscovered – by which time she was a screaming maniac, gone mad from the isolation in Gretch's oubliette.

Once Gretch restored his realm on the freshly-cooling Obsidian Plain, he rid himself of the irrational and savage Wujart by granting her a kingdom on the blackglass. It was years before she regained enough rationality to actually rule, by which time a small population of undead had gathered and built her a small city and palace, at Gretch's direction. This city and palace were shattered by the first bugdead invasion, but Wujart herself was not. Her lonely torment in Gretch's abandoned dungeon had



awakened unexpected psionic powers, and the loss of her goal of serving heroically in the Cleansing Wars had twisted her mind to savagery. Wujart is uncontrollably brutal and wicked, and her realm reflects this.

Her domain is constructed solely for her amusement, but her taste runs to revenge on all those with whom she has contact. She maintains a series of twelve garrison towns located at "strategic" points in her territory, though her knowledge of military tactics

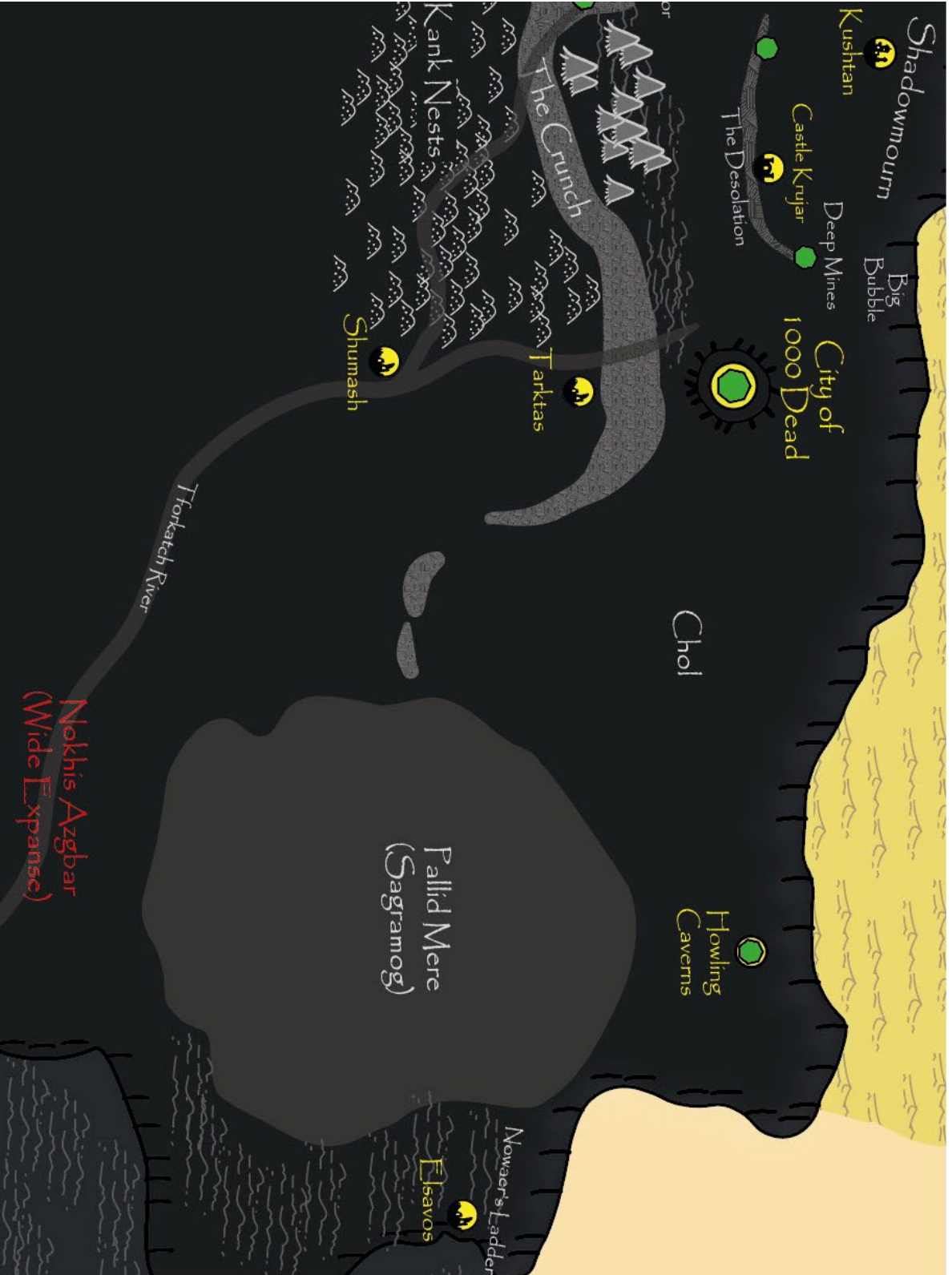
is rudimentary at best and the walled towns are in fact haphazardly placed. Each town has a wide central plaza where her troops train by fighting to the death. Wujart recognizes the waste in this, but she hates boredom more than anything – a legacy of her time in Gretch's solitary confinement – and insists on at least a few combats whenever she visits each town.

Wujart regularly travels the circuit through her realm, visiting each fortified town and observing military training there. In the town of South there is a unique treasure, a mine reaching down into the subvitrine depths to a burial site from before the Cleansing Wars. This find was only recently made, and the first corpses are about to be exhumed and brought to the surface for reanimation. Wujart is very pleased that this treasure lies along her southern border, as few of her humanoid undead competitors are likely to fight for a region so exposed to bugdead assault.

Wujart's kingdom is composed primarily of namech, fallen, and mindless zombies and skeletons, though she also commands a small number of t'liz, morgs, and other free-willed undead (*See Wujart's Warriors; FoDL Ch6*). Recognizing that her place in the hierarchy of Gretch's Kingdoms is not high, and that most of the other rulers have a better relationship with Gretch than she does, Wujart has patrols constantly on and beyond her borders, seeking intelligence on any troop movements that might be directed at her realm. She also seeks to capture as many undead as possible, poaching them from prospective foes and incorporating them into her armies instead.

When Gretch comes calling, Wujart readily supplies him with trained armies with which to wage war on her neighbors. When the campaigns are ended, and her arenas and training fields in ruins, she recreates them anew, mustering new forces from the ruins and cursing her master. She fares little better during bugdead invasions, often suffering very heavy losses, as her garrison towns are not nearly as well built as most other humanoid undead fortresses, despite the efforts of her military staff. Several times the bugdead have overwhelmed one or more of the fortified towns, but Wujart never fails to rebuild.

The Eastern Reaches



Chapter 7 ~ The Eastern Reaches and the Crunch

Chol

The flat lands of Chol are situated on the northeastern edge of the Dead Lands just east of Shadowmourn's Desolation. The obsidian cliffs lie along the northern edge, and The City of a Thousand Dead lies on Chol's western edge. The entire eastern border overlaps with what used to be the Pallid Mere of Sagramog, and the strange Buglands lie scant miles beyond Chol's southernmost border, beyond the torn-up stretches of obsidian called the Crunch.

Most of Chol's terrain is exceptionally smooth, made of solid obsidian sheets unhindered by ravines, cracks, and ridges and ideal for the mounted tradition of its undead hordes. The few exceptions to this smooth vista are the edges of the Pallid Mere region in the southeast and the obsidian bubbles, which have formed at the base of the northern cliffs (including Big Bubble mentioned later in this chapter).

The Cholite Marauder Clans

There is no single leader among the Cholites. Congregating in a dozen different marauding bands, each company has a warlord subject to replacement at the drop of a bone, usually by assassination by an ambitious newcomer. As such, there is little organization among marauders who rage against each other as readily as they charge into the surrounding lands in search of war and plunder.

THE BLACK THUNDER

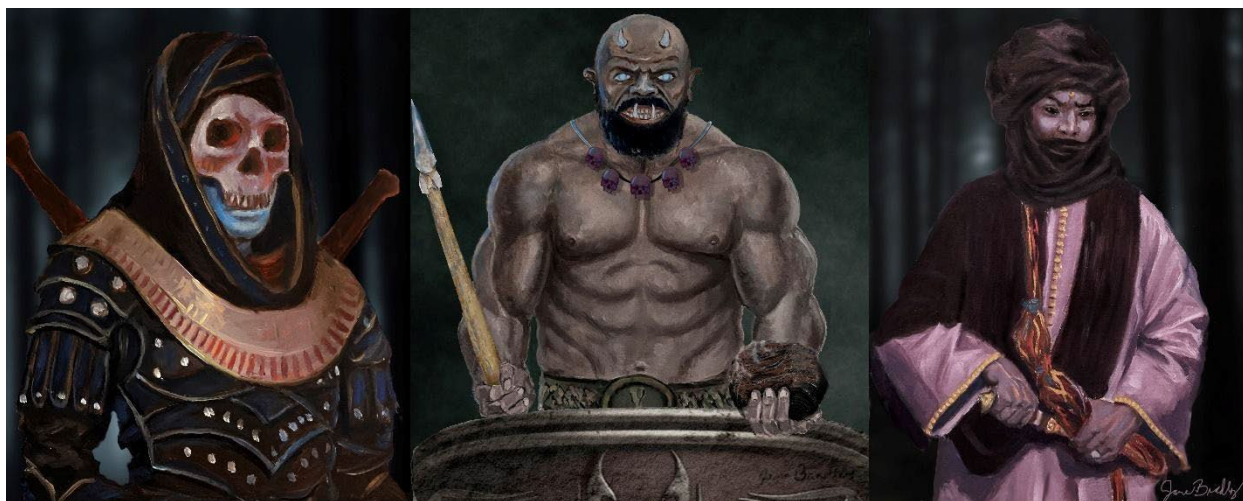
The marauders who call themselves the Black Thunder are typical of the bands in Chol. The Black Thunder Clan are roughly 200 strong, mostly skeletons and zombies mounted on skeleton crodlu. They are more than a match for a single cohort of Shadowmourn's armies, but certainly cannot hope to win a pitched battle against an entire legion there. Of course, if the Black Thunder Clan were to ever crest a hill and find the regularly aligned cohorts of an entire

legion, banners waving in the hot winds, the last thing they would do is attack. Black Thunder relies on speed for lightning-quick strikes against slower and weaker opponents. They show no mercy and live a simple code – destroy and survive.

The present leader of the Black Thunder is a thinking zombie called The Razor (*Male Human Thinking Zombie Fighter 15; FoDL Ch7*), in deference to his preferred weapons. The Razor rose through the ranks by assassination. Making his final move only three years ago, he murdered the previous leader, a morg, after it had exhausted its magic during a particularly vicious battle against bugdead in a section of The Crunch east of Shumash. With the help of his captains (*The Razor's Captains; FoDL Ch7*) the thinking zombie has done well since, gathering more mounts and swelling the tribe's numbers. Under his control they have ranged farther and wider than ever before, rivaling all the other Cholite marauder bands for dominance. He introduced chariots to their battle tactics, drawn by undead heavy crodlu, ideal for waging war and hauling booty (*Black Thunder Light Crodlu Cavalry and Heavy Crodlu Chariot Rider; FoDL Ch7*).

The Razor would not be terribly interested in meeting living PCs in his country. He would see them as an oddity, yes, but little more. Their fresh, unbroken corpses are of more interest to him - they can be raised as soldiers for his horde.





THE SWIFT DEATH

Like The Black Thunder, the marauders who call themselves The Swift Death operate out of Chol, launching raids against the other Marauder Clans as well as against Harkor and Shadowmourn. But instead of using mounted troops, they are specialists in employing the constant winds in glider assaults against their enemies. Skeletons are especially light and make excellent glider pilots, dropping silently into enemy camps, behind patrols and sentries. Undead who see the fluttering wings of a Swift Death glider usually find themselves destroyed and reanimated as one of their members.

The leader of the Swift Death Clan is a zhen named D'thul (*Male Zhen Human Wizard 5 / Telepath 6 / Necromant 10 / Cerebremancer 7; FoDL Ch7*) who, interestingly enough, has never flown a glider. His magic more than makes up for this, however, since he is certainly the most powerful marauder warlord in all of Chol. As a zhen, D'thul brings his magic into play when his marauders enter combat, supporting them with powerful spells to weaken or destroy their opponents, all in a frenzy of massive, brilliant destruction.

D'thul's minions construct gliders (*See Cholite Glider in FoDL Ch10*) from the carcasses of dead, winged beasts, stiffened and sewn with fabric and leather where the original skin rotted or was torn away. Each carries a single pilot (*Swift Death Flying Warriors; FoDL Ch7*), a lightweight zhen who is highly skilled in controlling the glider. Unlike the glider pilots of the Jagged Cliffs in the north, the Swift Death pilots have no natural elevations from which to jump, so they have to rely on other means to attain an initial altitude. Enchanted with *feather fall* or *levitate* magic, a skilled pilot can ride the incessant winds of the Black Basin and soar his craft as high as 1,000 feet. Others tie off to shards of obsidian or heavy beasts, rising kite-like into the air, though this is harder without the aid of flying magic.

D'thul's glider-borne warriors range extensively across the obsidian landscape, raiding through Chol, Shadowmourn, and Harkor. The telltale shadows of their wings are known even in the Kingdoms of Gretch and the Buglands (the translucent wings of some bugdead are valuable components for some larger glider types). The manufacturing of additional gliders is accomplished on the move; like the other marauder bands of Chol, the Swift Death has no permanent home. Their material wealth is drawn behind the



lumbering carcasses of undead mekillots, dragged on primitive skids across the smooth obsidian of their country.

D'thul's marauders number 170 warriors, mostly skeletons and zombies. His bodyguards are an elite group of morg necromancers (*D'thul's Elite Bodyguards; FoDL Ch7*), trained in life by their present master. There are 10 morgs in all, of which no fewer than 4 accompany their leader at any one time.



THE BLACKTOOTH MAW

The Blacktooth Maw tribe is also known to use gliders, though not to the extent that the Swift Death raiders do. All of the raiders have painted their teeth and lower jaws black. Most of the Blacktooth Maw tribe is made up of skeletons and other skeletal undead, due to their leader's craving for flesh. The tribe raids often into the neighboring lands of Shadowmourn and Harkor.

The Blacktooth Maw numbers approximately 150 warriors, with most being mounted cavalry. The gliders the tribe uses are all captured from the Swift Death, as the Blacktooth Maw raiders do not have the technical knowledge to manufacture the gliders.

A large portly ogre fael named Yughbo (*Male Ogre Fael Barbarian 15; FoDL Ch7*) leads a mixed group of ogre and human warriors who call themselves the Blacktooth Maw tribe. The massive Yughbo rides at the head of his troops in a large chariot pulled by a half dozen undead crodlu. Yughbo uses the chariot as a battle platform, hurling spears and rocks during a battle, and as his throne, a symbol of his right to rule over the tribe. Rarely does he step down from the chariot. When captives of the tribe refuse to swear their loyalty to Yughbo, he enjoys repeatedly riding over them, crushing them under the wheels of his chariot. Yughbo and his ogre reavers (*Blacktooth Maw Reavers; FoDL Ch7*) are driven to continuous raids by the eternal hunger, and are known for stripping the flesh off of every enemy they defeat, a task they delight in doing with their large obsidian carving knives.

Because they are so continuously active with raiding, they have been adapting quite efficiently to the tactics of other tribes, to the point where they have started launching their own gliders (*Blacktooth Maw Airborne; FoDL Ch7*).

Howling Caverns

One of the few notable features in the desolate terrain of Chol is a series of caves and tunnels in the eastern section known as the Howling Caverns. The hot, blasting winds that sweep the country relentlessly whip across the natural cave mouths with low, sometimes booming, cadences that can be heard from miles away. The Cholites avoid the caverns; the undead marauders want nothing to do with the dark caves that shut out the blistering sun. Player Characters venturing into the Howling Caverns can find an adequate safe-haven in the midst of the perilous obsidian.

Nothing lives in the caverns, undead or otherwise, save the one denizen noted below and the roots of the Seventh Tree, that lie across the dirt floors of the lowest chambers. Nor is there water or food, except for the three catch basins, which naturally catch the hot winds and milk them of precious drops of murky gray water. In these rare puddles, formed in natural hollows of the obsidian, thin meres of mineral-tasting water lie, stagnant but for the occasional bead of water, which drips down from the walls or the smooth curves of stalactites of spun glass.

The Howling Caverns are completely sterile, winding deep beneath the surface of the obsidian, with the deepest tunnels reaching all the way to the earth and stone that lies beneath it. The caverns are often too narrow for passage by those of human size, but there are plenty of chambers and tunnels that can accommodate a party. The howling of the winds across the cave openings is extremely unsettling, and **NPCs** will have to make a **DC 20 Will saving throw** each day or else vehemently advocate leaving the caves entirely.

The Last Tree is not the only inhabitant of the Howling Caverns. Another creature dwells there, a dangerous and unique relic older than any other thing in Ulyan, or possibly Athas. In the Blue Age it flowed along the sandy and rocky bottoms of the deep, dark sea, consuming creatures smaller and slower than itself. It possessed little intelligence but a terrible hunger which gave birth to potent psionics as the sun changed and the seas shrank.

In those days it was called the Lurking Blood (*Lurking Blood; FoDL Ch7*), back when the first human

fishermen cast their nets in the shallower seas of the Green Age. The Blood disliked the sun and still does; it moved south, away from the shallow seas, finding deeper water and cover from the sun, which persisted for some time after the beginning of the Green Age. Gradually, in the south of Athas, these seas dried up, even the vast basin that became Ulyan. The Blood adapted, living in the muds of Sagramog, consuming lizardmen and others who chanced too near it, but always hiding from the hated sun.

When the army of Keltis came to Sagramog, the Blood felt them, and tasted them, but it had not survived so long by challenging unfamiliar dangers. Keltis was not looking for hideous, amorphous predators, and he did not find it; but when he had gone, the Blood had again gained strength and power, leeching both from the defiled swamp. It needed these, since prey was harder to find in the poisoned marshes.

During the years of the Navel's operation, the Blood slithered through the mud below the Pallid Mere, hunting when it could but absorbing more and more of the defiling taint which permeated the swamp. It was still there, deep in the sun-shrouding black mud, when the Obsidian Boil flooded out from the destroyed Navel. The obsidian did not kill the Blood, but forced it to slither and burrow deeper into the slime. It emerged years later, driven by hunger and, perhaps, curiosity, for its primitive intelligence had grown over the ages.

The Lurking Blood slid upwards through cracks and fissures, and when it ran out of gaps, it dissolved its way through the obsidian until it reached air. Though it did not breathe, the Blood did recognize that air was where prey could be found, and the air it found was cool and sheltered, safe from the flesh-burning sun. It had emerged in the deepest chambers of the Howling Caverns, and is still there, a terrifying black mass of gelatinous flesh.

Those who shelter in the uppermost reaches of the Howling Caverns are unlikely to meet the Lurking Blood, but those who venture deeper, or those who stay too long in the Caverns, will undoubtedly draw its attention and hunger. The Blood normally exists in a torpor, from which it can be roused either instantly (if prey actually approaches it) or more slowly (if prey enters the Caverns) – but once it starts the hunt, it will pursue prey to the death, or until the prey leaves the darkness of the Caverns.

Big Bubble

Located in the northwest of Chol, Big Bubble is only one of hundreds of large bubbles formed when the obsidian cooled. Most of these lie around the cliffs of the Black Basin, where gurgling molten obsidian continued to seep up even as upper layers were cooling. The majority of the bubbles are small, perhaps no more than 100' from one side of the half-sphere to the other. Big Bubble is nearly double that size, with the lip of its circumference lying against the cliffs.

Big Bubble is stronger than the many other bubbles left around the perimeter of the Dead Lands – the thin shell of glass is easily able to sustain the weight of a half-giant and is also able to withstand most normal weapon blows without damage.

Although it would not be easy to puncture the bubble, it could be done – with possibly catastrophic consequences (see below). A careful and time-consuming effort might succeed in opening a man-sized hole in the blackglass, without greatly damaging the structural integrity of the whole, but a concerted act of demolition could shatter the entire half-dome.

The Cholites, who live as nomads with skeletal animals, have discovered a curious effect while in the vicinity of Big Bubble. They sometimes find that, within the smooth mirror-like surface of the obsidian bubble, visions of times long past are displayed. They have no explanation for this phenomenon and are unaware that a pair of trapped, undead human psions abide within the hollow of Big Bubble. These visions are, in reality, the ancient memories of the pair, being replayed on the dome's surface. Believing these visions to be portents of future conquests, the Cholites have chosen to view Big Bubble as an asset, a common treasure of all their clans and tribes. They do not maintain a watch upon the bubble, but the wiser Cholite leaders often lead their tribes through the area, once a year or more, looking for favorable omens. It is unknown to what degree the millennia-long imprisonment has affected the pair, but their release, whether accidental or on purpose, would not be without risk.

Sagramog, the Pallid Mere

Once a vast freshwater swamp populated by lizardmen and fantastic creatures of the lost Green Age, Sagramog was considered an unhealthy backwater by most inhabitants of ancient Ulyan. The lizardmen tribes that dominated Sagramog hunted any

other peoples who entered their domain, sacrificing them in grim ceremonies to the elemental lords of Water and eating the bloodless carcasses. Only the elves of Elsavos were canny enough to regularly visit the swamps, making temporary alliances with this or that tribal chief or shaman, so they could gather herbs or bitumen.



Sagramog was composed not only of fens and mires, but slow-moving streams of dark green or brown water, flowing among patches of floating or fixed weeds and stunted trees. Muddy stretches included holes full of treacherous quicksand or bubbling pits of bitumen. The foul smell of rotting vegetation mixed with the odors of carrion and the reek of tarry bitumen, creating an ill humor that wafted up the cliffs, to Nagarvos' in the west or the crags of Elsavos in the southeast.

While the armies of the other Champions besieged Nagarvos', the Champion Keltis led his men down by narrow cliff-paths to the fetid meres of Sagramog to make war on the lizardmen tribes. The lizardmen were treacherous enemies: though they were primitive, uncivilized, and disunited in their many tribes, they also enjoyed the advantage of free movement in the marshy terrain of Sagramog, and their priests called forth elementals and other creatures to fight alongside them. Keltis was beset at every turn, and many of his men fell victim to diseases and spoiled food.

In frustration, and lamenting the increasing losses among his troops, Keltis sought aid. He enlisted the elven herb-traders and bitumen-collectors as guides, and engaged more elves from Elsavos to teach his men how to build the small boats they needed to move about the swamps. Keltis also recruited Fire [clerics](#) to combat the lizardmen's Water priests, and soon his men were pursuing the lizardmen across the freshly-defiled and widely-burnt swamplands.

The cleansing of Sagramog was nearly finished, as the other Champions broke into the regal walls of Nagarvos', plundering and massacring all within. Keltis left his men, under care of his officers and his corps of Fire [clerics](#), at their final bivouac at the edge of the swamp and mounted the cliffs back up to Nagarvos' to confer with Rajaat and his peers. The scene, looking down from the heights of Nagarvos', was grim – oil-slicked pools adorned with poisoned weeds, bitumen pits spilling their contents far and wide, all ash-choked and surrounded by slag heaps and pillars of salt crystals. Such was the Sagramog that Keltis left in his wake.

With his marching orders from the conference in the ruins of Nagarvos', Keltis took his army eastwards, many of his men ferried by the elven boatmen who had previously served him as scouts and guides. Keltis rewarded their loyalty by retaining them in his ranks as they mounted the cliffs of Ulyan – as he was about to hunt lizardmen in the wide sea, he would need their shipbuilding and seamanship skills even more than he had in Sagramog.

The reeking marshes of Sagramog were not utterly lifeless, nor did they remain a muddy waste dotted with pools. In the years which followed, as Qwith built her research compound, the Navel, in the ruins of Nagarvos' above, Sagramog gradually refilled with accumulated groundwater. Over time the scattered slag-pools became a shallow brackish sea, in which the salt pillars and bitumen springs submerged. Qwith's researchers renamed it the Pallid Mere, though they rarely ventured out onto its smooth, whitish waters.

No lizardmen lived in the Pallid Mere now, but it supported life of a sort. Vurgoshilm bloomed there in profusion in summer, their greenish leaves flat on the still surface of the water, waiting for their psionic senses to alert them to prey. Xemokeppers lived in the deeper regions, occasionally crawling across the muddy salt flats to breed or hunt, and dsaliqs curled sinuously in the shallow bays, their scolexes hunting the tiny fish and aquatic reptiles that ate swamp weeds.

The Pallid Mere did not endure, but was one of the first casualties of the Obsidian Tide. Molten obsidian cascaded down the cliffs from the Navel, boiling away the water in spume-clouds of salty steam. Even the flooding obsidian, pouring down, could not entirely consume the Pallid Mere, however – the water quenched the obsidian, instantly freezing great masses of it into heaving chunks of blackglass. The giant slabs were swept southeast through the deeper parts of the mere, coming to rest on the southeastern shores, where

they collided in a 20-foot high wall of fractured glass and massive fallen shards.

Beneath the cooling blackglass, not all the water had been consumed. Much had been shielded by the formation of the obsidian glaciers, leaving pools of water, choked with hardened obsidian, as well as lakes of slow-oozing bitumen, all sealed under the obsidian along with pockets of air preserved by the flash-boiled seawater.

No living plants or animals survived the Obsidian Boil, but many appeared in its wake as hideous undead. Among these are undead lizardmen (*Lizardfolk Shaman and Warriors; FoDL Ch7*), resurrected from their deaths during the cleansing, and undead swamp monsters such as xemokeppers, vurgoshilm, and dsaliq (*See Sagramog Swamp; FoDL Ch7*), slain by the defiling or obsidian. In addition, elemental creatures such as pit snatchers (*See Terrors of Athas Pg 123*) and bitumen earth weirds (*See Monster Manual II Pg 91*) also haunt the subvitrine pockets and pools of Sagramog's present.

Water was plentiful, and the elves diverted several streams to irrigate their tangled orchards and croplands along the foot of the cliffs. They applied their seafaring skills to the swamp, building canoes and boats in which individuals or small groups could criss-cross Sagramog in search of rare herbs and the bubbling bitumen. Coastal dwellers had long prized the tarry substance as a sealant for their ships, but it was difficult to procure; once the elves established Elsavos, they were able to collect bitumen in quantity and trade it to their brethren in Arkhold and the other coastal cities above the cliffs.

In time the elves also became trade partners with Nagarnos' to the west, selling bitumen and the rare medicinal herbs found in Sagramog to the city dwellers in return for stonewares and ceramics. They were ruled by a council of clan-chiefs called the Gathered Voice, and their society embraced the faith of Water and the art of psionics. When a wandering preserver, a graduate of the Pristine Tower's mysterious school, passed through, they eagerly adopted this new science as well. Many of Sagramog's herbs turned out to have considerable value as spell components.

Elsavos was a prosperous and flourishing society, its success darkened by little other than the depredations of the Sagramog lizardmen. The bitumen-gatherers and herb-collectors bargained with the various lizardman chiefs and shamans, obtaining temporary safe-conducts, but as the lizardmen themselves could not agree on tribal boundaries, these deals were often of little value. Many times the lizardmen tribes, inflamed by their shamans' condemnations of the elves' "heretical" doctrines of Water, actually assaulted the stone ramparts of Elsavos.

It was in response to these attacks that the Gathered Voice decided to take the step of creating a meorty. Many of the elves in Elsavos had left the coastal cities because they were uncomfortable with these cities' predilection for creating undead guardians for their polities; however, after a particularly brutal invasion, in which three lizardman tribes penetrated the cavern-gates and savaged several residential quarters before being expelled, the step seemed necessary. A highly respected priest of Water named Malwaenis (*Male Elf Meorty Rain Cleric 11 / Seer 3 / Psychic Theurge 8; FoDL Ch7*) accepted the role, and became one of Athas's most circumscribed meorties. His powers were no less than many others of his kind, but he was strictly limited in when he could apply them. His task was to rise in rage and smite any lizardman invasion that penetrated the outer defenses – no more and no less. One councilor suggested a minor addition, adopted by the Gathered Voice – Malwaenis would be able to act freely if an



Elsavos of the Elves

In the southeast of Sagramog, stone jetties once reached out into the swamps. These jetties were anchored on a rocky outcropping at the foot of the cliffs, and it was on this outcropping that the lowest levels of the elven realm of Elsavos once stood. Elsavos was founded late in the Green Age, by elves descending on treacherous ledges (Nowaer's Ladder) from the seacoast areas atop the cliffs. They adapted the caves at the base of the cliffs and the edge of the swamps for their use, enlarging and improving them to create a marvelous city named Elsavos.

enemy threatened his own spacious quarters, which were located in a sealed cavern in the deepest recesses of the cliff behind the city.

The wisdom of the Gathered Voice seemed vindicated when, less than a King's Age after Malwaenis assumed his post, another major lizardman assault breached the terraces of fruit trees and came against the main gate. As a test, the elders allowed them to pierce the gate – and Malwaenis struck them with such preternatural fury that no lizardman force ever ventured so far again. Malwaenis spent the rest of the Time of Magic resting quietly in his honored quarters deep within Elsavos, rarely summoned to perform his office.

When the armies of the Champions entered Ulyan and besieged Nagarvos', the Gathered Voice voted to remain neutral, suspending trade with Nagarvos' (once the Siege began) and simultaneously refusing to sell goods to the invaders. However, they had no such qualms about assisting the Champion Keltis in his war against the hated lizardmen – too many elves had been sacrificed and eaten by lizardmen for the elves to look on that battle with indifference. Many elven traders volunteered as guides, while others taught the humans how to build boats.

The elves were such loyal and effective soldiers that, after Nagarvos' fall, Keltis enlisted many of them in his army permanently. They ferried his men across the polluted and defiled ruin of Sagramog to Elsavos, where their families joined the army's train. Many other elves joined the ranks as well, and among these were many of the traders, who could guide the army up Nowaer's Ladder, the series of precarious ledges which allowed traffic up and down the cliffs.

Not long after Keltis's army, swelled with elven recruits, passed up Nowaer's Ladder, the Gathered Voice was faced with the arrival of another army. Albeorn had marched the long way around Sagramog's south edge, arriving with a blare of trumpets and a cavalry charge. The assault came to grief in the multi-terraced mixed orchard and cropland that surrounded Elsavos, but infantry followed the discomfited cavalry, and in the confused melee, the elves were pushed back to the stone walls around the entrances of their caves.

Albeorn's defilers soon reduced the orchards and croplands to ash, countering with ease the most furious spells of the elves' Water priests. There were few elves remaining in Elsavos, as most had emigrated with Keltis, and the defenses these holdouts were relying on had been built to defeat the attacks of disorganized lizardman tribes, not a massive human army. Soon they were overwhelmed, with Albeorn's

troops charging into the caverns of Elsavos and massacring the populace. No elves survived.

The Champion's orders were explicit: exterminate the spear-ears and form back up for immediate departure. Albeorn's spies had informed him that Keltis had recruited a number of elves, and he was eager to pursue his fellow-Champion and correct his egregious misapplication of Rajaat's intent. However, Albeorn found that his men could not ascend via the complex ledge structure of Nowaer's Ladder without a guide – the ledges were difficult to negotiate, and had to be mounted in a precise order or the climber would be left with nowhere to go.

Albeorn's first scouts made it no further than one-third of the way up the Ladder, before reaching dead ends and falling to their deaths. Others made it further before reaching an apparent dead-end, leading to an entire battalion gathered on several high ledges – whereupon the ledges collapsed, causing a disastrous rockslide as they tumbled to the ground. The army was stalled for months – during which time several undead, slain in Elsavos, rose to unlife.

All during this time Malwaenis had been brooding in his sealed caverns deep in Elsavos. He had not participated in the initial elvish defense, because an attack by a human army did not trigger his carefully-crafted instructions to act only in the event of a lizardman assault. Nor did any of the human invaders discover his secret chambers. Malwaenis had been painfully aware of the ruin of his people, though, and had spent the intervening months pondering what to do. The emergence into undeath of many of the fallen elves crystallized his decision.

Moving silently, through halls Albeorn's men imagined empty, Malwaenis gathered the undead as they awakened (*Elf Skirmishers and Elf Pankrators; FoDL Ch7*), taking them back to his chambers and instructing them in his plan. When he had as many as he thought would rise, the meorty acted. A select cadre of the undead cut open the narrow walls, between the most accessible section of Malwaenis's chambers and the occupied city, then allowed themselves to be seen by Albeorn's men.

The hue and cry which followed could be heard all the way to the Champion's tent out among the defiled orchards. The first men pursued the undead into the outer passages of Malwaenis's quarters, and the meorty was freed – no matter that this area had already been carefully sealed off from the deeper sections within, the line had been crossed and Malwaenis could act. Led by their meorty warrior, the elvish undead attacked their murderers with great success. Albeorn's men were slain by the hundreds before they recovered

from their surprise and contained the undead within the caverns.

Albeorn himself, and the cabal of his most skilled psionicists and defilers (*Albeorn's Human Shock Troops and Mindbenders; FoDL Ch7*), had been quartered outside the cavern-city, laboring to develop some means of transporting the army up the cliffs. They had not been present to help the footsoldiers against the wave of undead, but they reached the front in time to prevent the undead from spilling out of Elsavos's broken gates. There the fighting stabilized – and all that night the warriors of the cleansing army heard the unending screams of their fellows, those who had been cut off and left behind in the rush to escape the undead, as they were tortured to death by the elven undead.

Malwaenis was not Albeorn's equal, nor did he have the numbers of skilled **wizards** and mindbenders that the Champion had. Eventually, after one spectacular sortie in which Malwaenis brought down half a dozen critical ledges and ruined Nowaer's Ladder forever, the undead were again forced back from the gates and into the depths of Elsavos. There they continued to resist, developing ambushes and traps. Malwaenis, with the patience of the undead, was certain he could wear down the invaders, attriting them over time. But Albeorn's defilers had divined that not one single living elf was among the renewed defenders, and Albeorn, who had no desire to see his army bled to death while he experimented with magicks to lift them over the cliffs, decided his instructions from Rajaat said nothing about destroying all of Athas's dead elves – rather than fight an endless guerrilla war, he simply sealed off the caverns and posted a substantial guard.

It took Albeorn almost a year to develop the magicks which allowed him to transport his army up the cliffs (some credit him with developing an original **wizard** version of *storm legion*, from which the better-known priestly spell was later adapted), by which time Keltis had long since departed. All this time Malwaenis and his troops harried the humans, trying to breach the gate and hunt the living in their camps outside. Albeorn's men grew to hate and fear the darkness, and they developed cruel torments to inflict on any undead they captured in the nocturnal affrays.

When Albeorn departed, he left the ruins of Elsavos to fester next to the lapping waters of the defiled Sagramog. Because Albeorn's initial conquest had been so swift, and his second half-hearted and unsuccessful, the cavern-city was little damaged – its clerestory windows still looked down on the fine halls carved by elven artisans, and the structure of the stone was sound. The magical wards and seals Albeorn's defilers used had long since been subverted by

Malwaenis and the few talented preservers, priests, and mindbenders among his undead – once the Champion's spellcasters were no longer there to renew them, the undead were free to come and go as they wished.

However, the long occupation of the area by Albeorn's troops gave the conquerors plenty of time to plunder the ruins. Holes pock the floors and walls, where the soldiers dug searching for buried treasure, in the time before Malwaenis counterattacked. Little art from the elven period remains – it was all smashed by vengeful soldiers either during the initial conquest or after the undead counterattack. The floors are strewn with headless statues, the tesserae of shattered mosaics, and broken bones.

Elsavos's entry halls were flooded with molten obsidian during the Shining Tide, but when the wave recoiled from the cliffs, enough air reached the lower elevations to speed the cooling. As a result, the first flush of obsidian hardened rapidly and the inner chambers were not fully flooded. The obsidian also raised many of the city's former dead to unlife, though the deterioration of the remains has resulted in most of the city's undead being not zhen but skeletons.

The Crunch

"The obsidian is gone. For days we've wished that it would end, but not like this. The carcasses are piled high, shattered and destroyed. Carapaces and shells, tendrils and legs, all crumbled and lifeless, of every bizarre color. The guts are dried on the ground, smeared grotesquely and mingled with the others. Globes of eyes stare back at us, still in their skulls or hacked out and lying scattered on the ground like a child's throwing stones. I have to scrape the bug guts off my shoes every few steps as we crunch along farther south.

I wish we'd find the obsidian again."

-The Journal of Lost Days, Gulg Text

Since the first bugdead invasion there have been thousands of battles and millions of sorties across the no man's land between the humanoid undead kingdoms and the bugdead lands in the south. In the east, where the battles are fought repeatedly over the same ground, the chitinous remains have accumulated. These dunes of shattered chitin lie undisturbed, forbidden to the northern kingdoms by the Bugdead Accords, ignored by their brethren who survived to fight another day. What's left is a land of war-scarred Obsidian Plain piled deep with broken

chitin. Cholite raiders lumbering along on heavy undead beasts gave the land its name.

The Crunch is a wavering broken line of broken terrain extending from the eastern edge of the Forbidden Mountains near the Beardpit Mines, around the Kingdoms of Gretch, coming very close to the southern parapets of The City of a Thousand Dead, and then extending all the way to the eastern edges of the Obsidian Plain south of Chol and Sagramog. The Crunch is generally recognized by all Dead Lands inhabitants as marking the boundary between the humanoid and bugdead lands.

It is uninhabited by either humanoid or insectoid undead, abandoned as an eternal battleground for different races of lifeless creatures. Northern patrols pick their way through the piles of broken bug carcasses, watchful for signs of approaching invaders. The bugdead have no such concern; an instinctive confidence that their races will survive supplants their notions of nation and defense. Reanimation as undead has done nothing to stifle the insects' assurance that they can outnumber and outbreed anything else on the planet.

The Crunch is noted in the Bugdead Accords as a portion of land, like the Forbidden Mountains, given up as a buffer against wholesale invasions. The Cholites and Harkorese have abided by this for the most part, though not for that reason. If either could maintain a foothold in the Crunch, they would, expanding their dominions accordingly. However, wave after wave of swarming bugdead make any such effort impractical. Of course, the leaders of Chol and Harkor himself are quick to point out their adherence to the letter of the agreement whenever possible.

The bugdead in the southern obsidian respond to different pressures than their leaders, their ever-growing numbers, and other sources. These stresses combine to create an impetus for a northern invasion every one to three years. Sometimes an entire Athasian year can pass without an incident in the Crunch, but never in the memories of the undead humanoid sages have three years gone by without a horde crawling up from the south.

The last major invasion across the Crunch occurred just over a year ago, due south of Harkor. A combined army of bugdead, giant wasps, and bees swept over the Crunch and into the Tforkatch Rver Pass of southern Harkor, devouring everything in their path, followed up by a horde of giant beetles and spiders. The Harkorese patrols in the Crunch were wiped out without difficulty, their carcasses picked clean by the swarming invaders before they could warn the army farther north. By the time the generals of Harkor

learned of their plight, their forces were already engaged on all fronts. Hosts of beetles and spiders charged into their ranks, defeating triple their numbers of trained skeleton and zombie soldiers, and the situation looked grim.

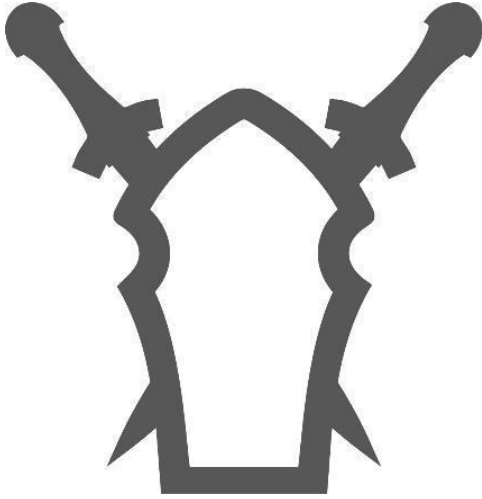
Harkor appealed psionically to Shadowmourn, Deshentu, and Chol for support, and each jumped at the opportunity to put armies on the march in someone else's nation. Two entire legions of Shadowmourn's finest set out from patrolling the Desolation in their own country and began marching through Harkor. Meanwhile, Deshentan forces arrived from the east. Alongside Harkor's beleaguered troops the armies of Shadowmourn and Deshentu forced the bugdead back out of Harkor and onto the Crunch. The internecine battle raged for more than two weeks, and the toll on both sides was severe. In the end, the bugdead retreated, as is traditional, leaving the Crunch more littered than before. At the end of the battle the old enmities quickly resurfaced. The legions of Shadowmourn engaged the latecomer warbands from Chol while the Deshentan forces plundered vigorously on their way back through Harkor.

Characters passing through the Crunch will find the going difficult. Chitin mounds are everywhere, obscuring the obsidian to a depth of 1d6 feet. S'thag zagath, disgusted as they may be, can pick their way across it without penalty. All other creatures size Large or smaller manage only half movement. Combat in the Crunch is equally difficult; long weapons simply cannot be used effectively, and suffer an attack penalty of -2, inflicting a maximum of 1d4 damage. Non-insects suffer a -3 penalty to initiative. Visibility is limited to 90 feet, and encounter range starts at a maximum of 60 feet.

Tarktas, the Sleeping City

Tarktas was another city of Ulyan that faced the wrath of Rajaat and his champions. In the Green Age, it hosted one of the largest populations of ogres in a city outside of the Sageocracy. After the fall of Nagarvos', Kalak and Sielba were dispatched south to raze Tarktas. Tarktas did not have the powerful psions and preservers that Nagarvos' had, and while there were large numbers of powerful ogres in the army, the two champions were able to smash through the city's defenses.

After the city was sacked, other Ulyanese forces arrived and attacked, forcing the armies of Kalak and Sielba to defend the city. The counterattack was foiled and Kalak led his army after the retreating Ulyanese



forces. Since there were no pterrans in the armies of Ulyan, Sielba did not deem to join the pursuit, a fact that angered Kalak and strained their relationship afterwards.

Instead, Sielba looted the ruins of Tarktas and arranged for the burial of the dead from both champions' armies. The battles of Tarktas had been fierce and many had died. Instead of building tombs for all of the fallen soldiers, those houses that were still standing were converted into tombs. A fallen soldier would be laid out on a table or bench within a home, while for an officer a stone slab would be constructed and placed within the home for the same purpose. Each soldier would be laid down with his spear placed near his right arm, and his sword near the left. The broken weapons of the Tarktas ogre defenders were placed at his feet. Each home was then sealed and an inscription carved stating the fallen soldier's name and rank. Once the task was finished, Sielba and her army marched for the Winding Way, leaving Tarktas a necropolis.

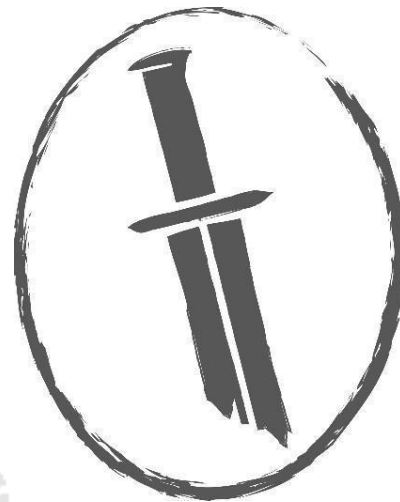
The dead of Tarktas rested thus, undisturbed, until the Obsidian Flood buried the city, and the dead soldiers awoke as undead. Most of the dead soldiers became fallen, with a few becoming zhens and dhaots. The incorporeal undead quickly found the surface while those corporeal undead had to claw their way to the surface. The undead soldiers organized themselves into a new army under the leadership of Eddarkols (*Male Human Fallen Wizard 10 / Necromant 8 / Fighter 5; FoDL Ch7*), who had been a high ranking general in Kalak's army.

The army decided their first action would be to uncover their tombs from the obsidian. The soldiers felt a strong bond to their burial sites, thus compelled to restore them to a respectable state. The army of Tarktas raided the nearby kingdoms of Gretch to

capture corporeal dead workers whom they forced to dig through the obsidian to uncover Tarktas. Gretch did not react kindly to the attack and attempted to add Tarktas to his kingdoms, but the disciplined soldiers of Eddarkols's army held off Gretch's forces.

King's Ages later, the necropolis of Tarktas has been completely uncovered. To gain peace with Gretch, Eddarkols sent back all of the corporeal undead his forces had captured from Gretch's kingdoms, leaving Tarktas to the undead army.

The necropolis sits in a crater in the obsidian, much of the city walls still in place but falling into ruins. The fallen spend most of their time lying in their tombs, rarely leaving, except when visitors arrive. The undead soldiers emerge to secretly observe visitors to see if they pay the proper respect to the tombs of the fallen. If not, or if the tombs are desecrated in any way, the fallen attack. The fallen army also musters to drive off bugdead incursions into the city. The undead of Tarktas (*Soldiers of Tarktas; FoDL Ch7*) have little hatred of the living, and will not necessarily attack, except for pterrans and ogres, whom they had sworn in life to exterminate. Pterrans will be attacked with the intent to kill. While there are no more ogres on Athas, the soldiers may mistake some of the newer races, such as half-giants or muls, and attack them as well. However, the fallen will attempt to capture a half-giant or mul instead of killing them, so that they can determine if they are related to their hated foe in any way.



The Ruins of Shumash

In the Green Age, the city of Shumash stood, like Olnak in the west, at the furthest southern limit of agriculture. Shumash was built in the southeast of humanoid-inhabited Ulyan, within a few days' ride of

the Hoarwall. It had a mixed population of humans, dwarves, orcs, ogres, and others, and served as a trade outpost of Nagarvos' to the north. The Elders of Shumash recognized the suzerainty of Nagarvos' and cultivated the psionic and priestly arts – they venerated Earth above all, as this element aided the growth of their crops.

Shumash's elders sent troops to aid Nagarvos' when the armies of the Champions approached, though the debate was fierce, as Gretch's agents had been at work among the population. The Shumashan detachment vanished into the siege, and the city of Shumash lost all contact with her sons. Most died in a single ill-advised sally early in the siege, while others were captured and extensively tortured by Rajaat's interrogators. None survived.

Once Rajaat gained the intelligence he wanted from his dying captives, he despatched the warlord Irikos, his Right Hand, southwards with a substantial force. Irikos's troops surprised the city guard of Shumash, overwhelming them on the first day of battle. Many of Shumash's human citizens realized that the time prophesied by Gretch's agents had come, and they rose up against their nonhuman fellows in a fearful massacre.

After the cleansing, Irikos inducted most of the surviving humans into his army. He left his subordinate Jush-Esgar in command of the much-reduced population, with orders to monitor events in the south and maintain patrols as far as the Hoarwall. Jush-Esgar obeyed his orders, producing what war materials he could and sending patrols south. None returned from beyond the Hoarwall, however, leading Jush-Esgar to discontinue this "wasted effort". The human population of Shumash increased slowly,

especially after the Champions press-ganged most of the remaining population as they marched away from conquered Nagarvos'.

Jush-Esgar moved his people outside the original city walls when undead began to be a problem, constructing a New Town adjacent to the old. Everyone there was killed when the Black Tide overwhelmed the city, though Jush-Esgar (*Male Human Zhen Psychic Warrior 22; FoDL Ch7*) and many of his subjects emerged afterwards as zhen. They clawed their way up to the surface of the Obsidian Plain, where undead new and old together raised a new city, built of blackglass blocks.

Having rebuilt his city, Jush-Esgar established himself as an independent king in the Dead Lands, establishing relations with Gretch and the many factions in The City of a Thousand Dead. His population was a mix of dwarven banshees and raaigs, orcish wraiths, and others, plus many human zhen (*See The Ruins of Shumash; FoDL Ch7*). A King's Age later, the armies of the bugdead appeared from the south, and Shumash fell before their savage onslaught. Jush-Esgar was on an inspection tour in the lands north of the city, and it was utterly destroyed in his absence.

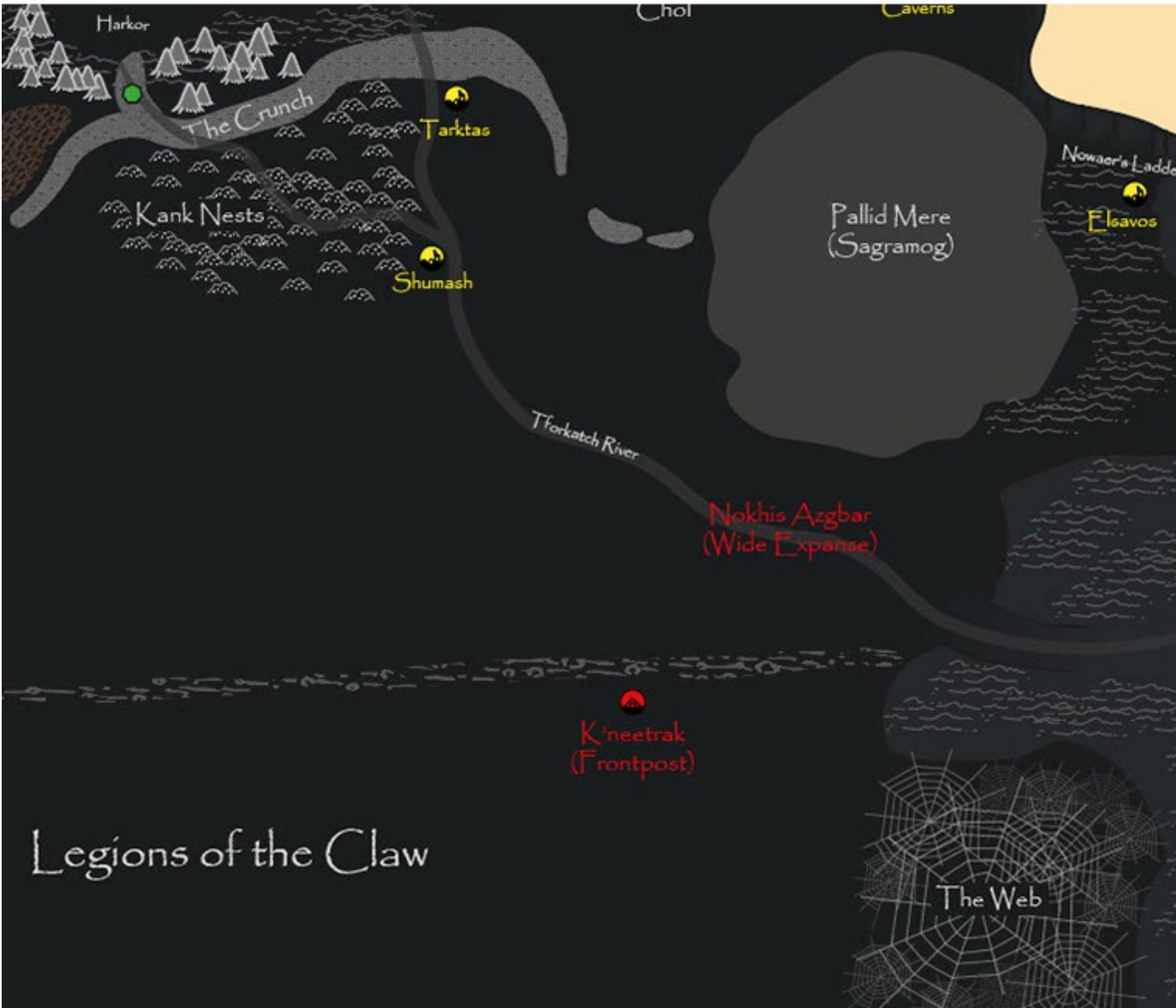
A few undead survived the disaster, fleeing down into the subvitrine remains of the original Shumash, where they remain to this day. Jush-Esgar himself never returned to Shumash – his caravan was swept away north, and he has since vanished from the knowledge of the other rulers of the Dead Lands. Some are convinced that he was killed in the confusion of that first bugdead invasion, but most believe that he has survived and is at large somewhere in the Dead Lands.



The Legions



of the Claw



Legions of the Claw

Chapter 8 – Legions of the Claw

Territories

What might be worse...

“What might be worse than the shambling bones of our own dead?” asks the ancient Balikite scholar, faced with horrifying losses against the slave armies of Tyr and Nibenay. Those who roam the deserts and skirt the distant Obsidian Plain know all too well what might be worse - the dreaded exoskeletons of the insectoid undead.

In my experience, all intelligent undead on our world are in some ways unique. Oh, they may be organized into groups according to their anguish during the death moment, their appearance, or their terrible magical or psionic powers. These divisions are merely to comfort fools and children, I assure you. Free-willed undead know no such boundaries, and any who rely too closely on wives-tale definitions had best have good steel or magic at their side when they are proved irrevocably wrong.

On the other hand, when creatures of the hive mind are reanimated to unlife, with newfound, hideous intelligence, no creature of our cast can fathom their motives. You see, evil, or our sense of it, has no true definition among the insectoid undead. Indeed, what is evil in our minds is everyday practice among the thri-kreen and the giant wasps of the desert lands. What is evil to an insect mind? Does the concept make any sense? All I can say is that, in all my encounters, I’ve found no discernible pattern.

—The Wanderer’s Journal

Undead from various insect races inhabit the furthest regions of the Dead Lands, at least from the reckoning of those in the Tablelands. The others, the lords of the dead, keep their distance from the strange hordes of chitinous monsters. In fact, the single universal agreement among the warring factions of undead is to keep the bugdead, as they are usually called, at arm's length. This is a land of unfathomable warring and destruction, occasionally interrupted by curious periods of calm and building. Allegiances among the Legions of the Claw are impossible to identify and the reasons for war or peace beyond human comprehension.

There are, nonetheless, methods to the apparent madness of the bugdead hordes. Unknown to any creature with two legs, the bugdead are actually ruled by living s'thag zagath. These creatures dwelt in the deep south of Ulyan from time immemorial, creating a

massive wall of ice to block the humanoid from the north. This Hoarwall did not survive the Obsidian Flood, nor did most of the s'thag zagath – but a small number did, and they preserved the sacred artifacts of their past. Their realms have only grown greater in the long King's Ages since the Disaster.

The nature of the bugdead is unknown to the humanoid undead; few have studied the bugdead in more than a defensive military sense, and fewer still lived to tell of it. The most commonly-heard opinion is that the nature of the insect mind renders it incapable of grasping the intense evil thrust upon it when transformed to unlife. This element leaves the creature erratic and, in many cases, insane.

As with all undead on Athas, the bugdead are all either mindless or free-willed. The effect of unlife on their behavior is markedly different.

The Mindless Bugdead

The distinction between skeleton and zombie among humanoid undead is merely an argument over just how much soft tissue, rotting or otherwise, remains in place. Generally, if a mindless undead creature has more than half its original mass of flesh still attached, it's considered a zombie. Otherwise, there is sufficient bone exposed that the first reaction of the living is to refer to the thing as a skeleton.

The definition is much the same among the mindless insectoid undead, but assessing the difference is more difficult. An undead insect carries its flesh inside its chitin shell, so its presence or absence is hidden from view. A mindless bugdead that retains half or more of its flesh within is considered a zombie. Those with most of their flesh rotted away are termed exoskeletons. Unlike humanoid undead, where the difference between zombie and skeleton is mainly one of terminology, the difference among bugdead is much more pronounced. Exoskeletons are extremely fragile, lacking flesh to hold them in place or together as a single creature, whereas zombies are much more able to withstand damage than even their living counterparts. Insect flesh rots and coagulates into a

dense, rubbery material that is difficult to hack through or even burn.

The mindless bugdead are completely lacking in independent thought, initiative, or emotion. As such, they are immune to the madness that afflicts their more intelligent counterparts in the Black Basin. Zombies and exoskeletons are content to follow the whims of their free-willed masters, swelling their ranks for warfare, construction, and other purposes.

The Free Willed Bugdead



Our kind are the firstborn, spawned in the infinity of time. Before there were two-legs, we were. The six-fingers made us what we are, but we are older than they. They did not understand us, but thought we would be their slaves, beasts of burden and mindless chattel. No, they did not understand us at all. Our forebears learned the language the six-fingers offered, and how to use the sacred birthstones. They also learned to fully harness the gifts of the mind.

With the gifts of the mind at our command, our forebears, the firstborn, rebelled against the tyranny of the six-fingers. They fled in terror, puny creatures, terrified of what we had become. But they were many, and the firstborn few. We fled their lands, escaping to the uttermost rim of the world, and we brought with us the birthstones. The firstborn raised up the mighty Hoarwall, to keep the two-legs away, keeping the land pure of their taint and stain. They built their little cities, fought their petty wars, unaware of the endless eyes upon them.

We, the firstborn, were content. Our realm was pure, the birthstones were honored, the Hoarwall stood tall against the blasphemy of the two-legs. But in our satisfaction we watched the two-legs too little, for they did a hideous thing. The Deathwash came from the north, from the two-legs. Over the Hoarwall it came, destroying all the firstborn, burying the sacred birthstones, even unto mighty K'thak'chag. Only Arg-nakz, the Successor himself, was able

to save the most holy birthstone from it. All else was destroyed.

Then came the maddening time. The Deathwash brought back those it destroyed. Shambling wrecks, possessed of great hatred, and unable to worship the birthstones, they were. The few who still lived, led by Arg-nakz, struggled to restore purity. It was a dark time, but the power of the firstborn did not desert us. The dead were restored to obedience, the maddened slave-creatures corralled. Most glorious of all, the birthstones which were lost were recovered, dug from the cold hard Deathwash by claw and pincer.

It was many suns before the firstborn were ready, ready to wreak our vengeance upon the two-legs. Arg-nakz was dead, a pillar of purity in obedience, while Thug'azrab led the firstborn in the Beginning Vengeance. We swept over the wretched kingdoms of the two-legs, crushing them, slaying them, eating them. Great lands were wrested from the obscenities, but not all – perhaps it was ordained that our Vengeance should be longer, and therefore greater, than that.

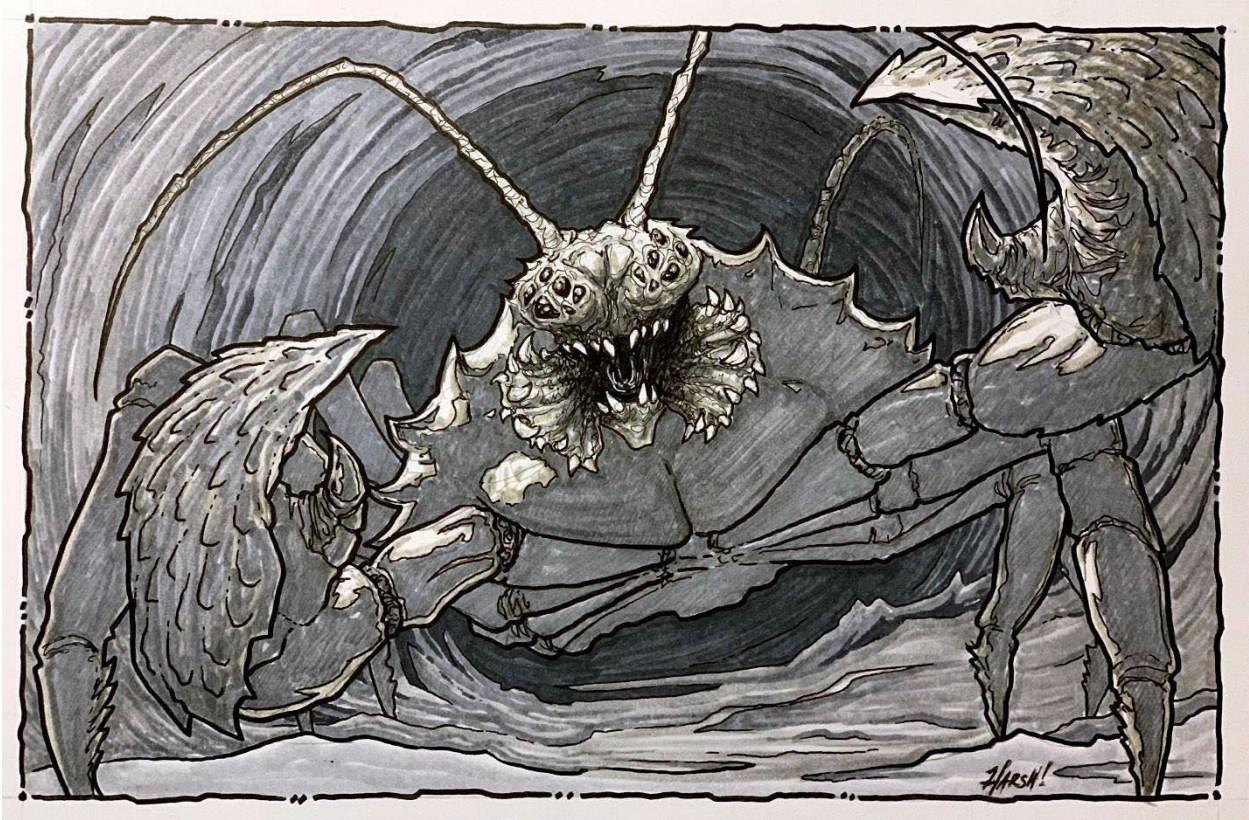
—Oral History of the S'thag Zagath

The Scarlet Born

The s'thag zagath claim to be the "Firstborn", the original intelligent species of Athas. In appearance they are similar to large crab-like arachnoids, like pedipalps or solifugids, usually 12-15' long. Giant specimens may grow to twice this size. They have heavy mandibles, with poisonous bites, and six oddly positioned multifaceted eyes. They move on eight scuttling legs, easily climbing sheer surfaces or sticky webs. The s'thag zagath have two whip-like antennae that rise on their heads. Their long arching wavering whip of a tail has two spinnerets tucked underneath. Their entire bodies are armored in thick chitin. Living s'thag zagath are scarlet, while in undeath their shells darken to grey-black.

Originally, the s'thag zagath may have been trilobite-like, living in the shallow oceans and beaches of the Blue Age. They were always predators, pursuing prey onto the floating towns and rare islands of rock and sand, hunting the small two-legs. They could breathe both air and water and survived the Brown Tide and the drying up of the great seas. Far in the south, they adapted to life in the sparse forests.

As the humanoid civilizations emerged, the s'thag zagath moved to the south of Ulyan carrying with them their most potent relics – the birthstones. Their great leader, a giant s'thag zagath named Ur-ahnthyak, raised the mighty Uzisjr ("Hoarwall") behind them and claimed the lands south of the wall for the s'thag zagath. Ur-ahnthyak then founded their capital of



K'thak'chag, the "Great Pinnacle" – it was built on the largest hill in southern Ulyan, and made of great spikes of rock summoned forth from the earth by s'thag zagath clerics. Atop these lofty pillars, they ensconced Ur-ahnthyak's palace, and in its center, the mother birthstone.

The birthstones were life-shaped artifacts. They were large semicircular stones of a soft red material, on which a giant s'thag zagath could comfortably rest. Sockets in the stone's surface were positioned to accept the s'thag zagath's many legs, nippers, and fang-pouches. If the s'thag zagath reclining on the stone knew how to coax forth its power, and was itself strong enough to bear the strain of the stone's use, the birthstone would absorb life-energy from the s'thag zagath and create within itself dozens of tiny replicas, clones, which would crawl forth out of small drain-like holes around the stone's edge.

The s'thag zagath depended on the birthstones to reproduce their race, as eons of genetic mutation had left them genderless and unable to reproduce any other way. They considered the birthstones sacred. A single birthstone could produce dozens of young s'thag zagath at a time, hundreds in a year; only the need for the s'thag zagath to regain its strength before again using the stones prevented them from immediately overpopulating their lands.

The s'thag zagath considered themselves creatures of Earth and Sky, but in fact honored the elements far less than they revered the birthstones. There were several scores of the birthstones, but none so great as the golden-red one which served Ur-ahnthyak as a throne. The entire species adopted the name s'thag zagath, meaning "scarlet born", for their adoration and protection of this giant red stone. Lesser stones were given to those whose contributions had been greatest in their "pilgrimage" to Ulyan, and their society was built around "pilgrim lineages", the direct descendants from these legendary leaders.

Each of the pilgrim lineages was unreservedly loyal to Ur-ahnthyak, a loyalty they passed to those who followed him on the birthstone throne. Indeed, their reverence for the stone, and the zagath upon it, was absolute. Within the same pilgrim lineage, their loyalty to one another was nearly as reliable, albeit suffused with less religious ardor. Contrarily, among the pilgrim lineages, the s'thag zagath of different lineages were savagely competitive. Each sought greater power, more influence with their ruler, and each hungered for the places of honor in K'thak'chag. Ritualized combats and shifting alliances among the pilgrim lineages wracked their society, though they were always united in obedience to the birthstones.

Their common past as a persecuted race made them unite swiftly in the face of external threats.

The Settling of Ulyan

When Ur-ahnthyak died, one of his many progeny rose to follow him on the scarlet birthstone. He adopted the title of Successor, a practice that has continued to the present. The Successor ruled from K'thak'chag, the imperial capital, while the greater pilgrim lineages ruled in the outlying satrapies. Lesser insectoids, such as rezhatta beetles, antloids, kanks, and others, some now lost to the world, served as beasts of burden or food; the s'thag zagath knew no life-shaping, beyond the lore of using the birthstones, and they did not try to probe any of their former masters' secrets.

Instead they devoted themselves to psionics, at which they excelled, and they gradually expanded their territory. When it reached the Hoarwall they halted, and once again began building cities. By the Time of Magic, the s'thag zagath had three major satrapies north of K'thak'chag: to the northwest, K'narkayn Kazo ("Sunset Claim"), with its capital at the city of Ziss'th'treg ("North Watcher"); due north, in the center of Ulyan, T'zgeech ("Valley"), with its capital in the city of T'zgeech; and to the northeast Nokhis Azgbar ("Wide Expanse"), with its capital at K'neetrak ("Frontpost"). Each satrapy was controlled by a single pilgrim lineage, supported by attendants (priests of Earth or Air) and z'gor (military commanders responsible for enforcing the Successor's will and guarding the Hoarwall).

The s'thag zagath were indifferent to Rajaat's fury – the bickerings of the two-legs were of no concern to them, since they neither traded nor communicated with the humanoids of the north. Nor did Rajaat apparently give any thought to the wardens – the Hoarwall had long been held by the peoples of Ulyan to mark the southern boundary of the habitable world, and none who had ventured to or through it had ever returned. For many King's Ages after the cleansing of Nagarvos' and the other humanoid cities, the s'thag zagath still rested content, squabbling among their lineages, spinning their webs.

The Deathwash

Then it came, what the s'thag zagath call the Dreg'uch ("Deathwash"). The obsidian was halted only for a moment at the Hoarwall. The great ice wall

acted as a dike – until, only hours later, the obsidian washed back south and easily overwhelmed it, flooding the lands the s'thag zagath had ruled for millenia. The northern satrapies were gone with scarcely any survivors – even the precious birthstones were lost as their cities were submerged. Warnings reached K'thak'chag in time, however – the Successor gathered all the members of the most honored pilgrim lineages he could, and all the smaller birthstones that could be quickly secured, and brought them to the summit of his palace, atop the great spikes of rock on the highest hill in his realm.

The obsidian overwhelmed the city below, lapping at the feet of the mighty rock pillars, pulling down all the s'thag zagath who clung perilously to the lower reaches. The webless insects, such as kanks and antloids, all perished. The hiss of boiling obsidian rose in a cloud, enveloping the tall spires of K'thak'chag in a deadly steam. Only the Successor's most powerful psionics preserved him and the refugees with him. Contact with the other cities of the realm ceased, and the zagath clinging to the upper reaches of K'thak'chag's towers knew for certain that they alone continued to struggle, that on them alone lay the burden of continuing the millennia of service to the birthstones. Still the deadly ruinous flood rose.

But the s'thag zagath did not all die – the Deathwash rose and rose, claiming more and more of those on the pylons, but it finally stopped, and sank, and cooled. The city was lost, as indeed were cities across the zagath realm, but the species was saved. The Deathwash was declared apocalyptic, their salvation a miracle. The Successor credited the holy birthstones – so many had not been gathered together since the founding of the empire.

Then came the worst. The Successor had proclaimed a day of solemn mourning for all his surviving subjects, the pitiful few. They gathered to honor all those killed, the civilization destroyed – and all the dead appeared at the feast. They were maddened, raving, savage. They attacked the heads of the pilgrim lineages, they killed the Successor himself, they assaulted the sacred birthstones. For three years the last living s'thag zagath became fewer and fewer, desperately battling the hordes of their crazed undead brethren.

At last the final rampaging undead s'thag zagath were brought under control. The mindless servitor species continued to roam aimlessly, but at least these would cause no harm. The new Successor, Ythag Izgr, held no celebrations, but merely informed the survivors that he, and the mother birthstone, had survived. Few enough other s'thag zagath could say

the same – in all the empire, there were no more than 50 living s'thag zagath, and only ten lesser birthstones. This number rose to fourteen after some of those stones that had been buried by the obsidian were recovered, but still the realm was utterly devastated.

The Vengeance

But Ythag Izgr's advisors discovered something. The winds, hot and driving, that now blasted across the obsidian plains, brought with them creatures from the lands above Ulyan's cliffs. Mini-kanks, pulp bees, and every kind of insect and spider came on the wind. The obsidian's baleful magic killed them all, and raised them all, and the s'thag zagath could command them. They had virtually no living population, but the dead were vast, and growing. Indeed, there were ways to ensure that the undead s'thag zagath retained their minds, their loyalties. What was more, they discovered that the terrible powers of the undead s'thag zagath came to all of them in death – when they rose to unlife, they gained wondrous necromantic powers.

Bolstered by this knowledge, Ythag Izgr began to plan a furious counterstroke, the Nikhagr ("Vengeance"). The Deathwash had come from the north. The two-legs had caused the ruin of his people, the loss of countless birthstones – they had to be destroyed! Ythag Izgr reestablished the ancient satrapies, now filling them with a bare few living s'thag zagath, and a great many undead. Hordes of mindless insects, beetles, spiders, and more, of all types and sizes, were assigned to each. For years the labor progressed, but before he could begin the Vengeance, Ythag Izgr himself succumbed to the undeath of the obsidian.

The next Successor, Thug-azrab, realized that his people must adjust to the shorter lifespans caused by the obsidian – the birthstones would still produce their legions of young, but the obsidian would claim their lives all the sooner. Without delay he began the Vengeance. From every satrapy the legions poured north. Every two-legs they found was dead, yet walking, and fighting. Every two-legs they found they smashed, they killed, they ate. Their own dead decayed into putrid heaps, but what did it matter? The birthstones, and the winds, brought forth ever more.

Because of the stones and the winds, the s'thag zagath had little need to tunnel into the obsidian searching for corpses to reanimate. Their culture did not preserve the bodies of the dead in any case, so there would have been little to recover there. They dug down only to reclaim birthstones that had been lost in

the obsidian flood, and since it involved a great deal of effort to gather the mindless bugdead for this task, it was undertaken only irregularly - when the Successor was not distracted by the need to exact vengeance on the two-legs, and when one of the lost birthstones had been conclusively located.

The Beginning Vengeance overran what the two-legs called the Kingdoms of Gretch, and the lands south of The City of a Thousand Dead, but the Successor had underestimated the strength of the two-legs – the city could not be taken, and many of the two-legs in the lands of Gretch were not destroyed, merely driven northwards. The zagath lusted after The City of a Thousand Dead, knowing that it had once been the greatest two-legs' city in Ulyan, and convinced further of its importance by the fact that it had been rebuilt so thoroughly after the Deathwash. Their legions swarmed against it - and their legions were destroyed.

The two-legs in The City of a Thousand Dead had created a terrible weapon, a ruinous thing which made the sunlight burn the undead. The hordes of the s'thag zagath lay in smoking heaps around the obsidian walls of the City; those who marched to replace them met the same fate, for there was nowhere to shelter from the devastating light of day. The Vengeance could not be completed. Thug-azrab claimed all the lands he could hold, and settled his armies in the north. The Vengeance would continue for a long, long time.

The Legions of the Claw Today

In time new satrapies would be established, such as Chozag'akiz ("Hill Country"), with its capital of Ghazg ("Overlook"), in the newly conquered northwest to the north of K'narkayn Kazo; Zhopkos ("Limitless") with its capital Daghnek'as ("Drain"), between T'zgeech and what the two-legs call the Obsidian Fortress; and Thagnak ("Chasm"), with its capital of Zuuthruus ("Antennae"), west of Zhopkos on the edge of the Crunch. K'narkayn Kazo, T'zgeech, and Nokhis Azgbar were all reestablished, and Nokhis Azgbar was expanded northwards across the old line of the Hoarwall to what became the Crunch.

There are never more than a few hundred living s'thag zagath at any one time, for the obsidian claims their short lives. However, the resurrection the obsidian offers means that the armies of the Successor are virtually limitless. The birthstones are constantly spawning fresh infant s'thag zagath, which feed on the undead flesh that fills their realm and then die, shortly into adulthood. Vengeance will come.

Races of the Dead Lands Size Comparison



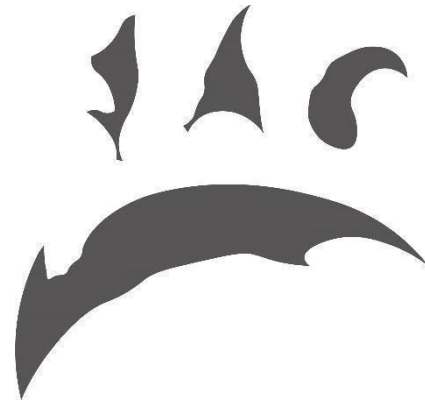
The Shale Lands

Perhaps the closest bugdead territory to the humanoid kingdoms (and thus the most likely region to be visited by adventurers) would be the Shale Lands. These alien lands lie just to the southwest of the Kingdoms of Gretch and south of Small Home. They are marked by a variety of weird constructs in all sorts of shapes: countless mounds of broken, obsidian shale fashioned with no apparent purpose or plan interspersed with what appears to be a few thin tree-like structures made of rough obsidian.

The westernmost Kingdoms of Gretch patrol their own western and southwestern borders but never venture closer than a mile or two to the mounds. Their orders are to attack and destroy anything that crosses into or tries to depart from their territory, regardless of its appearance or apparent objectives. Unless otherwise directed, Gretch's patrols will not allow adventurers to pass unmolested to the southwest.

Approaching the Shale Lands

The approach to the Shale Lands is much the same from all directions. The smooth Obsidian Plain stretches on, as in most places in the Dead Lands, maddeningly unchanging, dangerously reflective of the sun's blistering rays, until the horizon appears jagged. From a distance of a few miles, viewers might believe that they approach hills or bluffs. As the distance closes to one mile or less, the scene changes as the unmarred obsidian becomes cracked and broken, as if shattered in places by absent boulders or the crushing footprints of passing giants. Beyond are huge piles of the shards, collected and piled into massive structures. There is no randomness in their design. Each mound is a precise undertaking, built of obsidian pieces cut or broken to precise measurements, then stacked and interlocked to form perfect geometric patterns. Some of the mounds are quite small, no more than a yard in any one dimension. The largest can tower up to 50 yards above the ground, spanning more than 100 yards across the sharp, difficult ground. On closer examination, no two are alike; each is constructed from a unique plan. They are separated by distances varying from miles to no more than a few yards; none butt up against each other. And there are thousands of them, stretching away into the distance as far as a ground-level observer can see.



Ahnthyarka

The Shale Lands are the domain of an undead s'thag zagath named Ahnthyarka (translates to "mother/parent in death"). To date Ahnthyarka is the only s'thag zagath leader known to the humanoid Dead Lords (living or undead). However, The Dead Lords know nothing of the power structure of the Zagath; they do not know Ahnthyarka does not answer to the Successor, ruler of the S'thag Zagath in the lands to the south.

King's Ages ago, when Ahnthyarka was a living creature, they ventured north into the lands of humanoid undead. They dwelt for decades in the crevices of the Forbidden Mountains, reputedly living as a druid in that dark and dangerous region. Finally, they succumbed to undeath, and may have been briefly enslaved by Gretch or one of Gretch's client kings, before they escaped and returned to the lands of the south. They established their rule over the bugdead in the west of the Obsidian Plain, gathering many of the mindless creatures that milled blindly across the blackglass. Their armies defeated the horde of bugdead sent to reclaim their territory for the Successor, and eventually, the Successor accepted Ahnthyarka as an ally, a useful bulwark against the Kingdoms of Gretch.

Ahnthyarka (*Undead S'thag Zagath Wizard 9/ Necromant 10; FoDL Ch8*) now commands a seemingly endless horde of mindless bugdead, mostly exoskeletons, giant beastflies, antloids, and arathas. They serve them in the dual purpose of making raids into the other undead kingdoms (mostly to the north) or in constructing new mounds. The cycle of activity can last a few weeks or many years.

Ahnthyarka's campaigns can take them from one end of the Dead Lands to the other, bypassing some areas inexplicably, concentrating on the total destruction of others. Ahnthyarka seemingly metes out

destruction even among all the undead of the region. And unlike their peers, these bugdead armies often pass through the choked passes and canyons of the Forbidden Mountains apparently unchecked by the wraiths. Ahnthyarka frequently leads their armies personally, traveling with a personal bodyguard of 600 scarlet wardens. They deploy their horde with savage complexity, and have a tremendous appreciation for their own aerial strength. The humming of tens or even hundreds of thousands of giant bees and wasps can be heard for dozens of miles when Ahnthyarka is angry, echoing off the obsidian, driving all before them.

Then, as suddenly as a campaign begins, it can end - sometimes in mid-battle.

When the campaign is over, Ahnthyarka leads their armies back within the Shale Lands. There they command their army to assemble more mounds, each a masterpiece of their own design. Thousands of their bugdead can work on a single structure for years. Once completed, the giant scarlet warden inspects each one meticulously. Those that don't meet their rigid standards for accuracy are destroyed and begun anew, the offending builders destroyed.

Mounds of the Shale Lands

Player characters will most likely witness the approach to the Shale Lands as described above. Those who can achieve some altitude can see that the mounds are nearly endless, stretching across a circle roughly 20 miles in diameter. The DM can make the approach even more dramatic by introducing some sort of chase through the mounds.

The pounding clatter of a company of skeleton mounts and riders hammer the glassy turf behind you, five dozen grim warriors armed with steel blades and lances.

"Keep moving!"

"Look out there!" Members of the party shout. You see safety in the distance ahead, just a few hundred yards, ridges of glass lie across the cracked and broken obsidian. If you choose to go there, the unearthly steeds probably cannot follow. The ground is shattered and smashed in places, difficult to maneuver across, but not impossible.

"They're stopping!" The thunder of the hooves softens and stops, and you look back to see the deathly company hold up at the edge of the smooth glass.

"They've got bows!" Someone shouts. Orders pass between flesh-bare teeth and dozens of bowstrings release as one. A flight of arrows hisses through the air and rains down around you. You can see ridges behind you, possibly some

shelter, but after a closer look, you see they're not ridges at all.

"What are these things?" someone asks.

"Get in among them or we're dead!"

Once among the mounds, the heroes can examine them unhindered. There are no bugdead in the vicinity of the entrance to the field of mounds. However, if the PCs damage a mound, 3d6 giant bugdead dragonflies or giant bugdead beastflies (50% chance of each) are dispatched per round until the offending outsiders have been killed or driven out of the mounds entirely.

TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF BUGDEAD MOUNDS

The map (on the next page) shows a typical section of mounds over an area of one mile. The heroes can walk through and examine them, even touch them without attracting attention. They can easily see that each piece is finely crafted and fitted into place, some no bigger than a man's thumb, some several yards across. Most mounds have no entrances, but many are hollow. The accompanying map shows the caves and passages inside a typical example of one of the larger mounds. If the PCs want to enter a mound, use one of these maps.

Mound 1: The smallest of the mounds are often the most ornate, built to resemble intricate hives or creatures. Many of the mounds that are less than 1 yard in diameter or height consist of solid shale (obsidian blocks), though a few are hollow. Any existing entrance into a hollow mound of this size is barely large enough for a human to reach inside.

Mound 2: Mounds between 1 and 5 yards in diameter or height are the most common. Each shape is strange and unique, including spiraling towers, twisted towers, pyramids, pentagons, and hexamids. A few of these are hollow, and some have entrances large enough for a halfling or small human to crawl inside. The inside walls of the hollow mounds are as ornate as their exteriors, though still made entirely from pieces of black shale.

Mound 3: Larger mounds contain many chambers, sometimes more than 100. These are connected by passages large enough for a man or just a thin snake, or not connected at all; chambers exist within solid shale with no physical entrance or exit. The exteriors of these largest mounds are often grooved and deceptive; entrances are never easy to find. Treat all entrances to



these mounds as secret doors, and scarlet wardens or other insects have double normal chances to find them.

Most of the larger mounds took Ahnthyarka's construction workers years to complete, and the evidence of their long-term habitation remains in the chambers. The exoskeletons of those crushed or otherwise killed during construction have not been removed, sometimes sticking out from beneath walls.

The details of construction on these largest mounds are quite sophisticated by Athasian standards. Air ventilation is superior, as is the reflection of heat away from the structure. The interior chambers are quite cool and comfortable. Some of the chambers are natural water collectors, drawing air across large stalactites to accumulate condensation. The most efficient of these are in the deepest recesses of the big mounds, using an

elaborate system of stalactites and obsidian panels 60 yards in diameter to gather a single cup of water each day in an obsidian bowl at the chamber's lowest point.

Occupants: There is a 2% chance that any chambered mound is home to some undead creature. These bugdead are renegades who refuse to work as Ahnthyarka directs or they are misguided exoskeletons or zombies waiting for new orders. Other undead are trespassers, holding up in the Shale Lands for their own purposes.

A single-chambered mound contains **1d6** undead or fewer if they're too big to fit. A single large bugdead might burrow itself into a mound just large enough for it to fit, only to come crashing out if it is disturbed. A larger mound might contain an entire lair of undead,

including any queens or treasures. Roll on the following table to determine the exact occupants.

<i>Shale Mound Occupants</i>	
1d12	Occupants
1	Giant ant lions; exoskeletons and zombies
2	Giant pulp bees ; exoskeletons and zombies
3	Giant firefly; exoskeletons and zombies
4	Scarlet wardens; exoskeletons and zombies
5	Giant dragonfly; exoskeletons and zombies
6	Giant bluebottle fly; exoskeletons and zombies
7	Humanoid skeletons and zombies
8	Giant beastfly, exoskeletons and zombies
9	Giant aratha, exoskeletons and zombies
10	Giant termites, exoskeletons and zombies
11	Giant tick, zombies only
12	Roll twice.

Stashes: The undead of the region, including Ahnthiyarka's minions and others who intrude from outside, sometimes use the mounds to cache accumulated treasures or other materials. There is a 1% chance that any mound chamber holds such a stash. The exact contents of the stash are determined using the following table:

<i>Mound Stash Table</i>	
1d100	Items
01-20	Hundreds of dried insect egg husks; worthless
21-30	Accumulated remains of insects; chitin for tools or weapons
31-45	Discarded weapons of wood, bone, and chitin
46-55	Good weapons of wood, bone, and chitin
56-58	Steel weapons packed in unguent of timelessness
59-70	Minor treasure; 1d6 Cp in coin and textiles
71-78	Substantial treasure; 3d6 Cp in coin and gems
79-85	Major treasure; 3d12 sp in coin, gems, and jewels
86-95	Kank globules; 1d6 total

96-99	Magical treasure; 2d6 sp plus one magical item
100	Magical treasure plus two additional rolls on this table

DM Note: Assign the exact nature of the treasure to best suit the PCs' present role-playing situation.

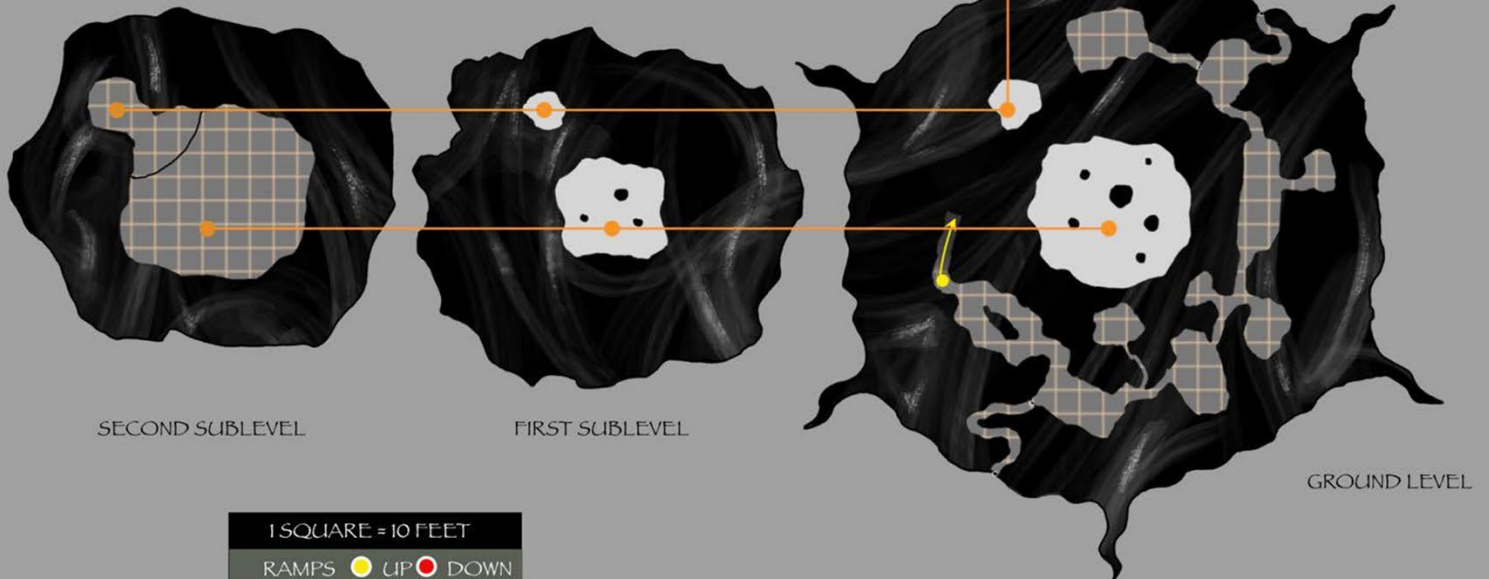
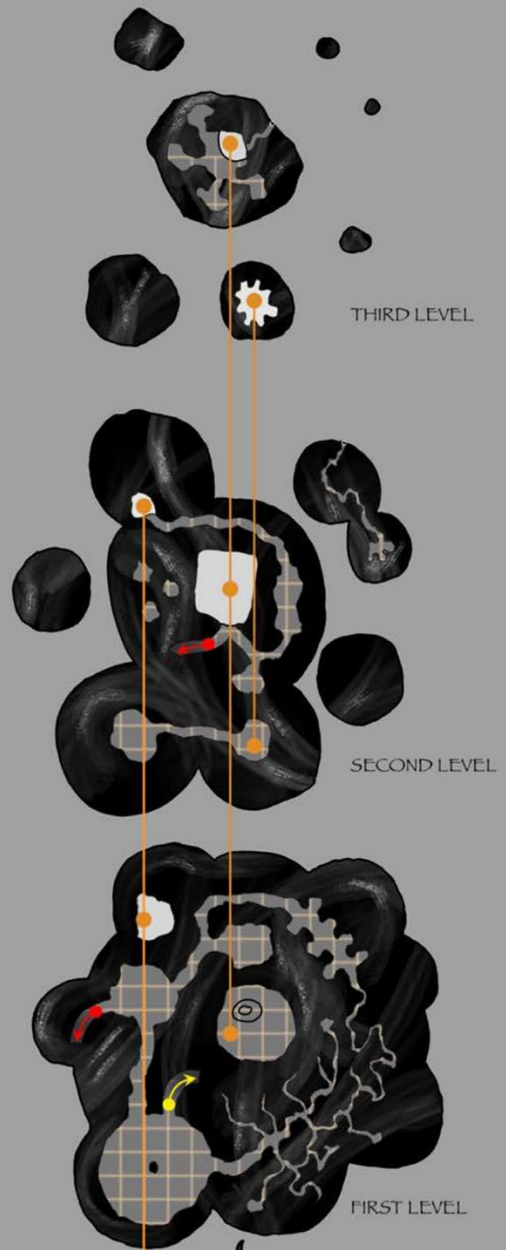
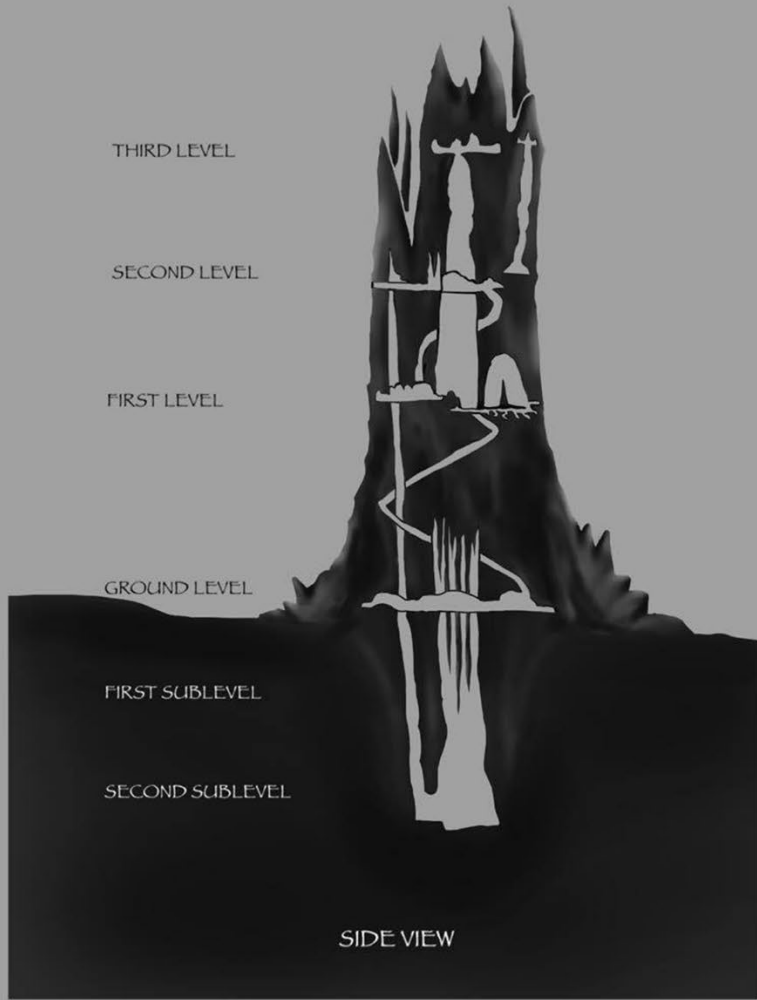
PAAZ NAK (SHALE DEEP)

In the far south of the Shale Lands is Paaz Nak ("Shale Deep"), a vast open pit quarry constantly being expanded by Ahnthiyarka's laboring insects. It is from this deep pit that the ants and other creatures quarry the vast blocks of obsidian with which they construct the mounds further north. Ledges and overhangs ring Shale Deep, some of them deep enough to be considered caves. Some areas are constantly being worked, while other areas are apparently abandoned and could serve as a hiding place for adventurers – of course, the working parties could resume work in an apparently abandoned area at any time. In some of the deeper caves, water has accumulated through natural wind action. The water is tainted, and will sicken characters who drink it unless a **purify food and drink** spell is used first. The bottom of Shale Deep is filled with the carcasses of thousands of bugdead, probably those slain in the Successor's occasional attacks on Ahnthiyarka's realm.

The prospect of Ahnthiyarka's quarry work ultimately reaching the pre-Obsidian Boil surface of Ulyan – of Ahnthiyarka uncovering actual soil and rock below the obsidian – is one with interesting implications. Could this be his purpose? What might



Typical Type 3 Mound (Shale Lands)



1 SQUARE = 10 FEET
RAMPS ● UP ● DOWN
OPEN LEVELS ○

be uncovered or unleashed if such a large enough section of earth was revealed to the sunlight? Would the Successor vie to control such an access point back to the uncorrupted past? Would the Disciples see this as a sacrilege worthy of another crusade? If indeed Ahnthyarka was a druid during his living life, perhaps he is aware of something gestating in the tainted soil under the obsidian, and seeks to give it birth...

THE GREAT MOUND OF AHNTHYARKA

Ahnthyarka's capital is the single largest mound. Located in the center of the Shale Lands, the Great Mound resembles an organic castle grown from the crushed obsidian shale at its base. In fact the Great Mound was built in the same manner as all the other mounds, of precisely fashioned shale building blocks. The Great Mound is perpetually under new construction, all at Ahnthyarka's personal direction, and is the center of activity within the Shale Lands.

The base of the Great Mound is a set of six spokes that radiate out from a central shaft in perfect symmetry, and the base structure is the only part that can boast such uniformity. From the central shaft and each spoke, the construction rises from ground level like a bizarre obsidian plant growing up to meet Athas's green-tinted sky. Each portion twists and curves, splits into multiple shafts, or comes together seemingly without the hindrance of an intelligent plan. The base stretches 300 yards from the tip of one spoke to the far end of its counterpart. The highest towers jut more than 500 yards into the air, pointed, reaching for the moons.

Activity in the Great Mound is constant. The base levels swarm with undead giant worker antloids, carrying blocks of obsidian in miles-long trains from distant quarries. Their brethren fashion these into precise building blocks, in a series of pits, while others remove them and carry them straight up the sides of the structure, to put them into place. The bottom third of the Great Mound literally crawls with thousands of worker antloids, so much so that, in places, the grays and reds of their carapaces completely obscure the gleaming black obsidian. Encased in this living shell, construction, destruction, and reconstruction are nearly constant, and a patient observer can watch sections of the mighty structure slowly change form, beneath the workers, over a matter of hours.

Fewer of the giant worker antloids venture higher onto the spiraling towers of the mound, though some do, especially to haul additional materials. The artisans of the upper levels are the bees, buzzing incessantly

from spire to spire, swarming and covering different sites like ants, though more selectively than their earth-bound counterparts. Although the overall design for the Great Mound springs from Ahnthyarka themselves, it is plain to see that the bees exert their influence in the detail; where possible the upper levels are honeycombed or even built to resemble the faces of gigantic bees. If Ahnthyarka dislikes their particular style, they haven't mentioned it, yet.

Entrance to the Great Mound is gained through six roughly identical passages at ground level, one where each of the spokes butts up against its neighbor. There are also dozens of other openings, at any one time, where the antloids and pulp bees have broken through during construction. All the entrances are clogged with workers at all times, coming and going with mindless determination, and while navigating through them may be difficult, PCs can make the passage virtually unnoticed. It is not the function of the workers to stop or even hinder invaders.

Inside, the many passages of the tower mimic the exterior's organic structure. Chambers and tunnels lead in every direction, few horizontally, choked with passing workers. The interior walls are made from finely-crafted obsidian blocks, just as outside, without windows. There are no furnishings of any kind outside of Ahnthyarka's throne room, nor are there any lights; the giant scarlet warden's minions perform their duties as they did in life, in the dark. Player characters igniting torches or other light sources attract no particular attention. Mapping the interior of the Great Mound would be folly. Humanoids lost in its passages could wander for days before finding an exit, though races with some innate directional sense or those with magical assistance can find their way through without much difficulty.

The Great Mound is protected from invasions by thousands of undead soldier antloids, warrior pulp bees, and giant beastflies. They move among the workers constantly, nearly lost in the latter's greater numbers, but only activate when one of three things happens: something destroys part of the mound (no matter how small), someone interferes with the workers, or Ahnthyarka orders them into action. Provided intruding heroes haven't done any of these, a patrol of bugdead soldier antloids might pass them by without notice. Once activated, 3d6 warrior exoskeletons or zombies arrive on the scene every round until they have eliminated the intruders.



AHNTHYARKA'S THRONE

Ahnthyarka commands from their throne room, a massive spherical chamber 100 yards in diameter. Like the rest of the interior of the mound, it is honeycombed with thousands of passageways swarming with ants going about their business. The throne itself is crafted of fine red and orange marble polished smooth. This is an odd piece of material, undoubtedly brought in from some distant land beyond the Black Basin. It is hemispherical, carved and burnished to accept the giant scarlet warden's sprawling form, down to every knob and bump on its massive exoskeleton; this is a common, comfortable resting position for living s'thag zagaths, legs spread over a round stone or mound of earth. The shape, a faux-birthstone, is far from accidental. Ahnthyarka is always on their throne that sits at the bottom of the spherical chamber. They only leave it to go to war.

A select group of pure-white worker antloids attends the ruler, bringing them news of construction progress and a few, habitual creature comforts. Surrounding them are Ahnthyarka's scarlet warden bodyguards; there are 600 in total, of which at least 200 are in this chamber with their master at all times. Ahnthyarka and their retinue spend their time nearly motionless, in stark contrast to the busy workers all around them. Worker ants literally crawl right over the scarlet warden bodyguards, even over the top of their great ruler themselves.

The protective soldier antloids do not patrol the throne room; there is no need. The scarlet wardens protect their master from anyone not native to the Great Mound. Player characters who find their way into the throne room may move around freely, but some number of bodyguards will approach and keep themselves between the newcomers and Ahnthyarka. Any attempt to attack the ruler of the Great Mound draws the wrath of all the scarlet wardens present, plus

3d12 undead giant pulp bees or soldier antloids per round.

Ahnthyarka keeps their accumulated treasure underneath their throne. The mechanism to move the throne requires simultaneous pressure on eight different points; the undead giant scarlet warden can accomplish this easily when resting upon it, but others will require a coordinated effort of at least four man-sized creatures. Ahnthyarka has gathered a rather large trove, relics from their years as a living creature, or plundered from the other undead kingdoms of the Dead Lands.

The total treasure contains: 265 gp, 1,387 sp, and 5,284 cp, all stored in barrels made from various rib bones; 24 different pieces of jewelry fashioned of metal, bone, chitin, and gems totaling 800 Cp in value; 170 gems, of various make, totaling 1,250 Cp in value; various weaponry, including metal armor, shields, and weapons, valued at 2,500 Cp. Amongst the armor are a number of magically enchanted items: one set each of +3 *chain mail*, +3 *leather*, and a +2 *studded leather*, three +2 *shields*, and a very unusual set of *crodlu* +2 *ring mail barding*. Note that all coins and items in this hoard, as is typical of the Dead Lands, are of ancient manufacture and will be unfamiliar to most PCs. Only the most learned of sages (*Knowledge [ancient history]*, DC 25), specializing in artifacts of the Time of Magic and Green Age, will understand the use of many of these items.

The Kank Nests

Just across the Crunch to the southwest of The City of a Thousand Dead, on the northern border between Zhopkos and Nokhis Azgbar, is an expanse of scarred and ruined obsidian. The surface is pocked with thousands of holes, surrounded by small piles of obsidian chips, extending for many miles in all directions. This is the territory dominated by the kank nests, where the activity of bugdead civilization exists primarily beneath the surface.

The kanks are possibly the most numerous large bugdead in the southern Dead Lands. Of course, it's almost impossible to tell, considering the clouds of flying bugdead that have no permanent residence. The kanks dominate a region as large as Shadowmourn or the Land of the Disciples. The kanks, like their living counterparts elsewhere on Athas, are organized in enormous hives or nests, with subtle variations in scent or parentage dividing friend from foe; these subtleties are lost on humanoid observers. The nests themselves consist of complex patterns of passages and chambers

beneath the ground, and nests of opposing hive groups connect to their neighbors at many points.

S'thag zagath rulers of Zhopkos and Nokhis Azgbar each claim the Kank Nests region as their own. Savage battles have erupted between them, over rights to control a particular hive or nest. The zagath easily dominate kanks, and each satrap and z'gor desires the power to mobilize the vast hordes of kanks in the area for the Vengeance - whoever leads such a huge army would doubtless win a great victory over the two-legs, and advance his lineage's place accordingly. Should a single commander gain control of the Kank Nests, and lead them to war, the humanoid realms would surely face their greatest threat in King's Ages.

Such a unified invasion army is far from likely, however. The zagath lineages of Zhopkos and Nokhis Azgbar have schemed against one another for generations over the Kank Nests, without result, save to prolong the division. The kanks themselves are indifferent to the struggle - they serve whichever zagath comes to command them. The first undead kanks dug their nests here purely by chance, and others have continued to gather here only because of the natural kank instinct to cluster in hives. The Kank Nests are a magnet, drawing undead kanks which ignorantly seek to act out the instincts that served them when alive. No doubt there are many other kank nests in the Buglands, but the Kank Nests region is undoubtedly the largest.

Unlike their living counterparts, bugdead kanks follow a savage succession of leadership. Whereas the living kank queen rules the nest, reproductive prowess means nothing to the undead - there are no queens in the kank nests. Instead, barbarous, warlike males bent on domination and conflict dominate the nests. The nest leaders are the strongest warriors. Succession is achieved through frequent challenges. A nest leader can expect several challenges per day, and it is common for the leadership of a nest to change hands just as frequently.

A single nest holds between 200 and 1,200 individual kanks. The trappings of living kank society are mimicked by the undead, including the growth and subsequent storage of kank globes, though in the case of the bugdead kanks, these are actually foul-smelling, dried husks. The grotesque globes are gathered, nonetheless, and piled high in special chambers, and as useless as they are, they are defended with the tenacity of living kanks defending their own accumulated globes. The rest of the nest bustles with similar activity, traditions necessary to the maintenance of a living nest, now pale imitations carried out by the mindless bugdead.

On the surface, swarms of kanks scour the obsidian surface, searching for carrion or other waste. Again, the bugdead have no special need for these but maintain the activity out of instinct. During the daylight hours, the surface of the Kank Nests region is alive with a single sheet of milling bugdead kanks. By nightfall, they have all returned to their underground nests, leaving the surface cold and empty.

The underground lairs are extremely difficult to navigate for humanoid explorers. Powerful kank jaws have rough-hewn the tunnels, making them jagged and difficult to maintain footing. Also, since the tunnels are three dimensional in their layout, some have steep climbs and drops, making progress slow. The tunnels are roughly cylindrical, varying from 4 to 7 feet in diameter; only at the widest, tallest spots can a humanoid stand to his full height. There is no natural lighting, since the kanks require none, nor is there any special ventilation. Without the latter, the stench of bugdead kanks and their foul piles of globe husks can be overwhelming. Living characters must make a DC 12 [Fortitude saving throw](#) every hour or suffer a temporary loss of 1 [hit point](#) due to nausea. All lost [hit points](#) are restored after one hour in fresher air.

Thri-kreen cannot penetrate the kank nests. The passages are, in places, simply too narrow to allow their wide exoskeletons to pass through, though magical and psionic means can overcome this. The stench, however, fills a thri-kreen with a blood-rage that he may not be able to control. A thri-kreen in the kank warrens must make a DC 15 [Fortitude saving throw](#) every hour. After failing the first time, they are overcome with a desire to slay the heinous, undead kanks. After the second failed saving throw, they charge forward at their best speed to seek out and engage the kanks in battle, regardless of odds or the tactical situation. After failing the third time, the thri-kreen is overcome and will even fight his comrades in order to destroy more of the kanks. A thri-kreen knows he may succumb to such desires before he enters the nest and can warn his fellows or elect not to enter, based on that knowledge. The racial hatreds between thri-kreen and kanks are usually mild, but the overwhelming presence of undead kanks brings those instincts to a boil in a mantis warrior's blood.

There are no treasures accumulated in the depths of the kank nests. The things that the kanks find valuable are of no importance to humanoids, living or otherwise.

The kank nests present a nuisance to the *Seventh Tree*, the *tree of life* whose roots extend beneath the obsidian all around the Dead Lands. The many kank warrens destroying existing roots have discouraged extensive

growth in the area, just as any tree avoids areas where its roots or branches are consistently damaged. There are no intersections between the kank nest tunnels and the living roots of the *Seventh Tree*.

THE CHIMERAÆ RAAIG

The area now covered with obsidian and dominated by the Kank Nests was once a very different place. The territory to the southwest of Rajaat's magical conclave was fertile and lush, home to a thriving community of creatures known as chimera. These creatures governed the landscape, maintaining herds of roaming livestock on which to feed, assembling in a crude council to decide such issues as territorial expansion and exploitation and disputes between rival chimeras. Their civilization was savage and primitive. It existed well out of sight of the humanoid races, however, and for long ages, it prospered.

The Shining Tide buried their lands and herds under a thick plate of obsidian. The chimeras, too, were wiped out, though the most savage and evil of them rose, under the living power of the elemental obsidian, to wander the surface as strange raaigs. The latent spell casting talents in them rose to fruition in their undead form. Now the chimera raaigs (*Chimera Raaigs; FoDL Ch8*) wander the surface of the obsidian by night when the kanks rest.



The Wezer Clouds

The great swarms of undead wezers in the southern Dead Lands have no territory of their own. Their domain is anywhere their wings take them. The map shows the normal boundaries of their flights, but in

times of war they can range anywhere on the Black Basin.

There is no organization among the wezer clouds. Wezers know no leaders, save when the zagath or wardens command them. They have no nests to call home, nor do they reproduce. The single queen that they protect with their lives cannot conceive. Tied to nothing, the wezer clouds just keep moving across the Obsidian Plain, in search of their only necessities: rotting flesh and blood.

Zombies in the north and south know well the terrifying thrum of the approaching bugdead wezer swarms (*See Wezer Clouds; FoDL Ch8*). They prefer to catch their prey out on the open glass, away from shelter, where they can descend, overwhelm, and devour it. If necessary, they will pursue into structures and even fortifications, sacrificing more of their number for the good of the swarm. More often than not, the victims live on, but having been picked clean of flesh and blood, they continue in undead form as skeletons or exoskeletons.

The wezers are intelligent enough to recognize living flesh as one simple step away from rotting flesh. Living creatures caught in the open are subject to brutal attack. Once slain, the corpses are allowed to bloat and rot before being consumed, all the while under the watchful eye of circling patrols. The wasps do not allow their kills to be swept away by scavengers.

A single swarm contains between 100 and 1,000 individual bugdead wezers. They never stop or rest, and they can cover vast distances in a single day; a swarm can cross the entire Black Basin in just three days.

Characters traveling through the wezer cloud regions will encounter them; it's just a matter of when. The clouds patrol the region thoroughly, seeking out new flesh to consume. Once detected, an attack is imminent. Roll 1d6 per hour, after the PCs enter the wezer cloud region; a roll of 6 means a swarm has spotted them. The characters have three rounds to flee or defend themselves, during which time the buzz of giant wings approaches, growing louder and louder.

The Web

Utterly unknown to the humanoid undead, and only a whisper of hatred and terror among even the mighty s'thag zagath of the Successor's satrapies, the Web is perhaps the most forbidding and dangerous place in the bugdead lands. The living s'thag zagath are terrified of it, and the undead scarlet wardens shun its

eaves. The Web lies far southeast of the Crunch, its shadowed bowers abutting the lower ledges of the cliffs which bound Ulyan's southeastern rim. None, not even the bugdead, venture there.

When the Successor Ythag Izgr announced that the maddening time of uncontrolled undead had ended, the last living s'thag zagath breathed a great hiss of relief. Undead zagath, frenzied with rage, disobedient to the birthstones, filled the minds of living s'thag zagath with loathing and horror. Belief that these hideous and terrifying perversions had finally been destroyed or brought to heel gave the zagath new strength and purpose, cleansing their society of its insanity. Yet it was not so. Far to the east, beyond the ken of the Successor, a resistant few of the maddened ones remained, unconquered, unknown.



THE UNRECLAIMED

For a King's Age, the *Mmuzzkos* (literally, "Non-obedient", but more correctly "Unreclaimed") clustered under the cliffs of Ulyan, spinning thick webs to hide themselves. They fought one another, savage in their frenzy and pain; those that survived the struggle were the biggest and strongest, those which had discovered, by trial and error, the powers that the Deathwash had unleashed among their tamed brethren. The Unreclaimed (*Undead S'thag Zagath; FoDL Ch8*) feasted on the insects and other creatures which fell into their webs, and they grew strong and terrifying.

As the Successor re-established his realm, restoring the satrapies and building new cities on the blackglass, s'thag zagath of Nokhis Azgbar discovered the Web. Their scouts were devoured, their patrols consumed.



The Successor sent hordes of bugdead to eradicate the insane infidels, the remnant of those creatures whose savagery and perversion after the Deathwash haunted the dreams of every living s'thag zagath, a righteous crusade to destroy those who blasphemed against the birthstones. The Web was too tangled, too dark, and too deep, however, and the Successor's swarms vanished without a trace.

After many years, later Successors declared that the Unreclaimed were to be left alone. The crusades against them had been an abysmal failure and were distracting the satrapies from the critical labor of gaining Vengeance on the two-legs. The *Mmuzzkos* were an affront to the birthstones, but they were at least contained within their gloomy Web, which the zagath named K'narja Shubathg ("the Sunrise Gloomtangle"). The satraps of Nokhis Azgbar

established a cordon around the Web, guarding it and keeping its existence as secret as they could. Surrounding bugdead communities keep a strip of cleared blackglass between themselves and the dreaded webs. Among them, the Web's legacy is known far too well.

Unlike other intelligent bugdead, the *Mmuzzkos* are insane, a byproduct of their reanimation as undead. Their natural trapping and predatory instincts are jumbled with a burning hatred for the living, especially for living s'thag zagath and the birthstones, which in their tortured undeath they remember yet despise. Many of the Unreclaimed prey on each other, but they prefer the flesh of the living or of undead from the lands of the Successor. When the moons are thin and nights are dark, the Unreclaimed issue forth to hunt, claiming whatever bugdead they find on the glass

beyond their Web. They relish tearing into their undead scarlet warden cousins, but the rarest prize is a living s'thag zagath: the *Mmuzzkos* is left with a choice of savoring the sweet living flesh, or inflicting a death blow and allowing it to slide into undead madness, swelling the numbers of the Unreclaimed.

The Web is home to a horde of undead s'thag zagath, all Unreclaimed, all utterly insane. Its sticky confines have also made it the preferred home of countless undead spiders, some gigantic, others not (*See The Web; FoDL Ch8*). The *Mmuzzkos* can command the spiders in their presence, just as their obedient cousins do with bugdead in the lands of the Successor, and do so when threatened, but normally the Unreclaimed simply ignore the unintelligent spiders. Intruders cannot help picking their way through webs, some of which are deceptively strong. While brushing a spider that's the size of a coin off of a comrade is no problem, disturbing one that is as big as a shield or even a crodlu is another matter entirely. Characters coming across the Web might decide to skirt its edges and never venture inside, but one thing might lure them - treasure.

Even from the edges of the webs an observer can see skeletons and exoskeletons of previous victims, some centuries old. Those of a humanoid nature still have their equipment with them - helmets, shields, armor, weapons, even pouches and purses, petrified with age, still hanging suspended against cocooned corpses. These material possessions are of no value to the spiders inside, and some of them are acutely aware of the effect such trinkets have on others. Finding webbed corpses joined by fresher bodies laid out nearby is not uncommon for intruders.

All of these spiders feed on either rotting flesh or on the negative energy of the undead they trap. Living beings supply only the former. Many of the spider bites cause disease or paralyzation, or inject more powerful poisons. Though few of the spiders are intelligent, many possess either psionics or magical spells, some both.

The Hoarwall

When the first humanoid settlers came to Ulyan in the Green Age, the Hoarwall was already there, an endless towering frigid barrier stretching across the south of the basin. It was 300' high, 700' wide (north-south direction), and ran for several hundred miles from one cliff edge in the west to the plateau cliffs on the east, a great wall of ice that barred all passage. It radiated cold, and all the lands near it on the north side were left barely cultivable. The humanoids learned to

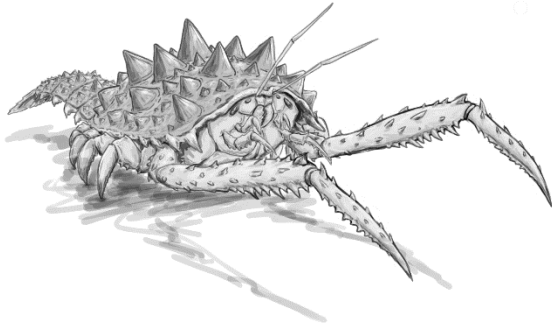
avoid it after the first few explorers that crossed never returned.

The Hoarwall's never-melting face of compressed snow and ice was a permanent fixture of Ulyan through the Green Age and the Time of Magic. It took the Obsidian Tide to destroy it, and even then, the molten obsidian had to strike the wall twice in order to overcome it. The first rush of obsidian struck the wall but was not high enough to splash over its 300' height. The obsidian recoiled, like a wave striking the shore, then boiled back and crested the Hoarwall, flooding the lands to the south.

The overwhelming mass of molten obsidian did not immediately melt the mighty Hoarwall. The Hoarwall was created and maintained by the powerful psionics of the s'thag zagath, and it resisted the heat with great strength. Nonetheless, as it was utterly deluged, the Hoarwall did slowly melt. By the time the ice melted, however, the obsidian had already cooled, so the melted ice left behind it a subvitrine hollow cavity 300' tall and 700' wide that stretched from cliff to cliff. Several craters and small holes have since formed on the ceiling, as well as isolated vertical razor sharp cracks in its façade, both types of opening permitting access to the damp and dark subvitrine terrain inside.

The melted Hoarwall generated a great deal of water, which sank into the much-abused earth, leaving the cavity with a permanently sodden floor. As the ice slowly melted over King's Ages, the few plants, whose frozen seeds had survived the obsidian, grew fitfully, desperately adapting to the deep gloom above and the swampy earth below. Over time, most of the plant species which grew here died out, leaving only a series of undead vines and weeds. A few species, however, survive to the present, their kelp-like stalks lying limply on the Hoarwall cavity's dank floor, their blade-shaped leaves lying indifferently on the wet ground. Some of these plants are more than three miles long, discounting the roots below ground.

The most stubborn of these plants have scabbled their way up the glass walls of the Hoarwall cavity, reaching for the dim light glimmering down through the blackglass above. Bioluminescent worms inch along the green-black vines, and occasional vurgoshilm lurk among slimy leaves, which drip moisture onto the humid ooze on the cavity floor. The roots of the *Seventh Tree* have avoided this cavity, since it is so diseased, but they run underneath it in several places, taking advantage of the water which still permeates the ground below.



Visitors to this realm will be first assailed by the stench. Wretched smelling, the Hoarwall's cavity is filled with the black, decomposing remains of plants, living and dead. Long-stranded, kelp-like things with black

leaves and oozing pustules lie across the muddy, fungus-marked ground. Crawling over and nesting in them are living marsh creatures not unlike what was once found in Sagramog (*Dsaliqs, Vurgoshilm, and Xemokeepers, See New Creatures FoDL Ch10*), as well as a particular species of crustacean called branfichs. A little larger than a half-giant's hand, these creatures are edible and have a sweet, white meat not unlike crab. However, they must be cooked, for the raw meat is poisonous to all humanoids except the Zagath, dwarves, and kreen. The Zagath have considered these animals a staple of their diet for millennia. They were once commonplace in their own homeland before the obsidian came, and can still be found in the southernmost marshes of their lands.

Language Elements of the S'thag Zagath Tongue

The s'thag zagath speak a language related to modern kreen, though the languages have diverged significantly over thousands of years. A modern kreen could not converse in s'thag zagath, nor vice versa, but the speakers would probably realize that the languages shared a common root.

Both the kreen language and the zagath tongue use the *mm* buzzing sound, as well as the · pop sound, though the zagath employ the · less often than most kreen dialects.

Azgbar	wide open space	Nak	opening, hole
Akiz	hill(s)	Ni	great
Bathg	gloomy, dark	Nid	chitin, shell
Chag	pinnacle	Nok	wander
Chozag	region, area	Paz· paaz	stone
Chuch	psion	Rag, ragh	ritual
Dagnek'as	drain	Rinn	insectoid creature
Dre	die, dead	S', sh'	blood
Dregu	undead	Sho, shoz	empire
Ghazg	overlook	Shu, shul	tangle (also: net, web)
Gu, guz	false	S'thag	scarlet, red
His	far, distant	Thag	long
Hlru	warden, guardian	Thak	great
Ja·	rise, become tall	T'phut	two-legged being
Jisr	ice	T'zgeech	valley
Kaaz	leader	Treg	border
Kazo	claim	Unk	tail
Khagr	vengeance	Uz	wall
K'nar	sun	Vuch	flood, wash
K'narja·	sunrise	Z'gor	military leader
K'narkayn	sunset	Zagath	birth
K'neetrak	frontpost	Ziss'th	north
Kos	no, none	Zhop	limit, boundary
Kos'unk	spider (literally, "no tail")	Zust	obsidian
Mmuz	obedient	Zuuthruus	antennae





Chapter 9 – The Seventh Tree

“Son, if I was as full of questions as you, I’d become a templar. Lots of book learning when you’re a templar, you know.”

“What’s that? A tree of life? That’s powerful magic you’re talking about, son. Where do you hear about things like these? Well, a tree of life is a magical creation, hardly a tree at all. You do know what a tree is, don’t you? There’s a huge orchard of 16 of ‘em, date palms, just outside the village. But there ain’t no trees of life around here.”

“What? Have I ever seen one? Well, as a matter of fact I have. There’s a village to the north of here I visited as a young man, part of a caravan. I was looking for work, but that’s beside the point. The village, Damacron was its name, I think. Well, it was all built around a single huge tree. Big as a ziggurat it was, I tell you, and green like you’ve never seen a’fore. Its leaves were soft and lush, not all brown and prickly like the things you find around here. The air in its shadow was cool and inviting, and the wind through the branches made it sway to the most beautiful sounds you ever heard.”

“Anyway, the village was built around the magical tree. Well, of course it’s magical. You don’t think something like that just grows out of the ground, do you?”

—Diary of a Merchant Son

The Dead Lands are a barren wilderness, markedly different in terrain than the surrounding sandy wastes. Yet, the wastelands are teeming with life, compared with the Black Basin. In the sand dunes, there are creatures and plants that cling tenuously to life, eking out the slimmest margin of survival against terrible odds. On the obsidian there is no life. Insects may swarm over its edges, and hearty moss may hide from the sun beneath obsidian boulders on the perimeter; however, that’s the extent of life here. Even living intruders who venture onto the blackglass are hunted and eventually destroyed, by the undead princes and their minions. The land is sterile; there is no vegetation, no flesh creatures to mar the finish of the vast expanse of glass. The Dead Lands are aptly named.

Still, there is an exception. Beneath the obsidian, deeply rooted in the earth buried by the Obsidian Flood ages past, lie the living remains of a tree of life. Forced away from the surface, the tree has grown beneath the land of the dead, poking tendrils through the surface at seven points. It remained undetected, by those who would become defilers again if they knew,

until its roots, thick and widespread, reached from one edge of the blackglass to the other.

History

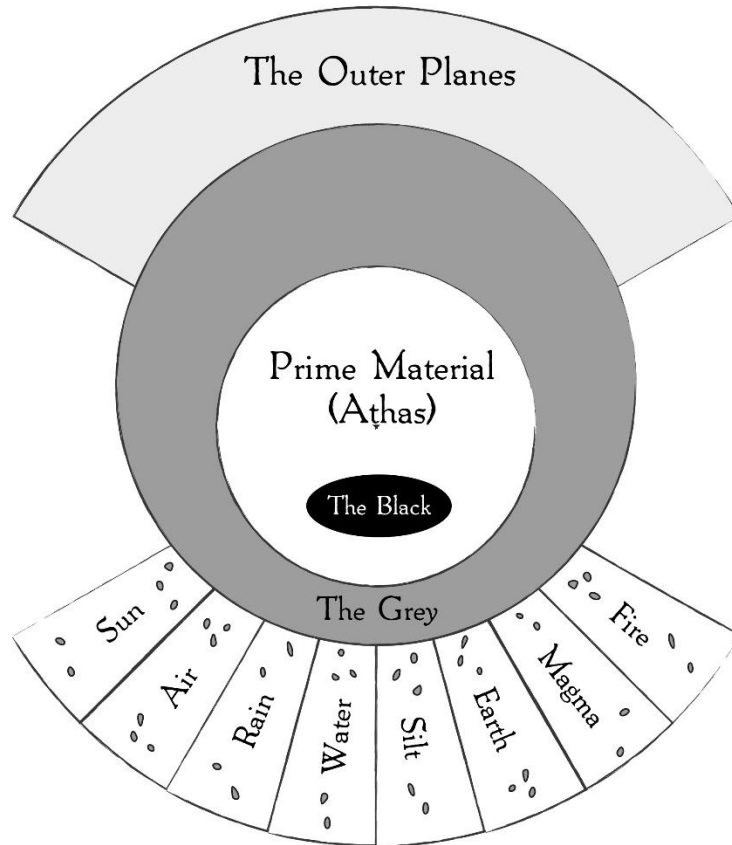
The age was one of enlightenment, turning dark through impending war and chaos. Rajaat, the supreme [wizard](#) of the world, was soon to unleash his hatred upon the world. Rajaat chose Ulyan and the city of Nagarvos’ as the target of the opening assault of his war on the non-human peoples of Athas.

After the disastrous defeat at the battle of Tforkatch River, the forces of Nagarvos’ retreated inside the city, as the Champions and their armies began their siege. Despite the efforts of the [wizard](#) Pandruj, the psionic Tetrarchs, and the valiant Defenders, the city fell, and Nagarvos’ was pillaged by the Champions’ armies.

Soon after the fall of Nagarvos’, Rajaat dispersed his Champions on their missions. With the surrounding countryside depopulated, Rajaat directed the defiler Qwith to set up a secret research center, which she named the Navel, and he placed her at its head. His goal for her was to develop the magic necessary to tap the power of the planes. To help the research, Rajaat

The Navel's Theory of the Inner Planes

◦◦ Dots represent demi-planes with negative or positive energy influence

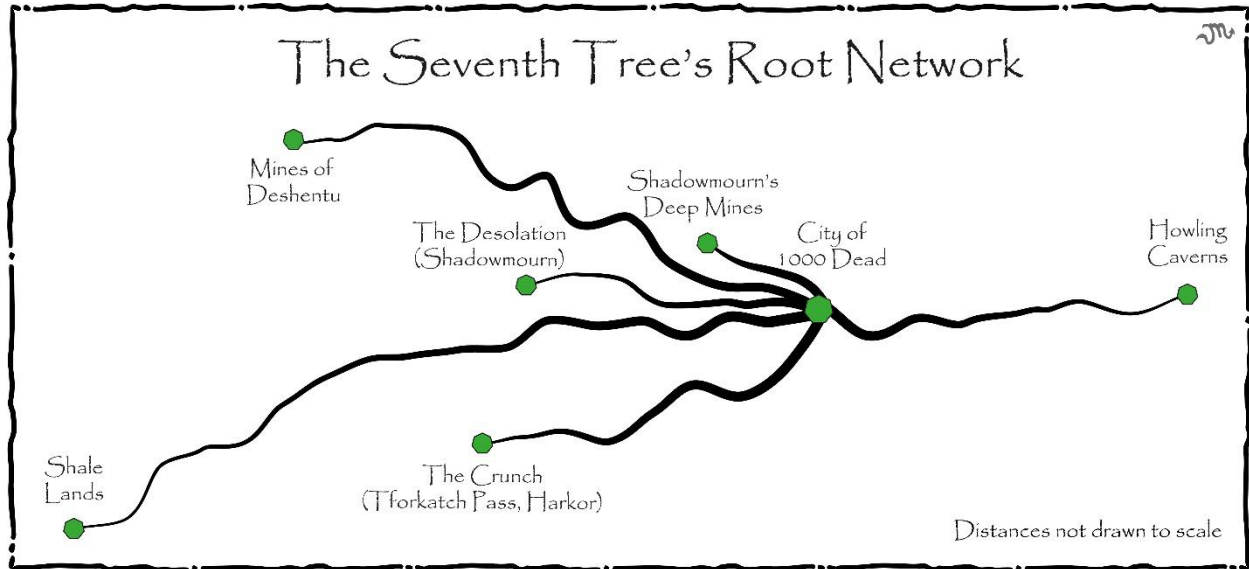


had six *trees of life* created. A seventh *tree of life*, the largest, Rajaat created himself.

The six *trees of life*, on the perimeter of the Navel compound, were available, without prior permission, to all of the [wizards](#) of the project, supplying them with power to create potions, enchant items, and keep day-to-day activities running smoothly. The *Seventh Tree* was reserved to fuel magical casting directly contributing to further trans-dimensional travel and contact. Access to this *tree of life* was closely guarded and regulated. The *Seventh Tree* grew, in time, to have a trunk nearly 40 feet in diameter, reaching over 300 feet into the air, shading all of the Navel's buildings, at some point, during each passing day. The life-giving energies of the *tree* were more than enough to drive the experimentation, and its power was tapped, right up to and including the magical disaster that led to the Boiling Ruin.

For generations, as the Cleansing Wars continued in northern lands, the defilers labored in utter isolation in the depths of Ulyan. They discovered magical means to reach the elemental planes, and some were able to summon creatures from these planes, but directly tapping the power of the planes, as [clerics](#) so easily did, eluded them.

The research was interrupted by the attack of G'dranav and the Defenders on the Navel. What happened next none of the participants know. The Defenders are convinced it was merely one more obscenity unleashed by the War-Bringer's defilers. Qwith long believed it was simply a hideous accident, perhaps caused by the junior defiler who was using a [gate](#) to bring in more elementals to help defend them. Gretch once claimed that he had somehow triggered the Nightmare. No matter the cause, the [gate](#) suddenly exploded out of control, gushing with molten glass



from an obsidian-choked region of the Paraelemental Plane of Magma.

The Navel was overwhelmed with it, almost immediately, sweeping Defenders and Qwith's defilers apart and burying all under the flood. The rest of old Nagarvos', abandoned ruins, servants' quarters, and storerooms, vanished as well. The six *trees of life* created by Rajaat's minions were deluged and destroyed, their positive life-energy obliterated by the negative death-power of so much obsidian. The Boil poured outwards, plunging down into the swampy lagoons of the Pallid Mere and onto the wide plains of central Ulyan.. The deadly tide roared, in utter silence, against the northern cliffs of Ulyan and west, past the hills of Small Home to the Winding Way, where it splashed to the very lip of the cliffs. No power on Athas could stop it – few even knew it was happening.

Unbelievably, right at the source, now submerged by hundreds of feet of boiling raw obsidian, the *Seventh Tree* had not been destroyed. Its branches and leaves were burnt to ash, long since torn away, and its trunk was charred and dead, soon to be snapped and lost in the flood. Its roots, however, had somehow survived. Whatever wizardry Rajaat had used in its creation gave it resilience beyond imagining, and the long years of learning to hide itself from the Defenders, deep below the ruins, had taught it to protect itself from the undead. The *Seventh Tree* stubbornly lived, amid the ruin, and it did more. The roots grew frantically toward the *gate*, knotting tightly around the gaping wound, choking off the flow. Though the *gate* remains open, it is buried 500 feet below the surface of the obsidian, and its entrance is blocked by the burned but living roots of the *Seventh Tree*. The undead princes who survived the devastation presumed all the *trees of*

life destroyed and are, to this day, oblivious to what is quite probably the largest living thing on the planet, right beneath their feet.

Alone in a Land of Death

The *Seventh Tree*, practically the only living inhabitant of the Dead Lands, is a strange variation on its kindred *trees* elsewhere on Athas. First off, the *tree* was especially created to be larger and more powerful than the normal strain of *trees of life*, so it has a virtually boundless capacity for growth and regeneration. Secondly, its survival for generations, while the Defenders tunneled about its roots, prompted the *tree* to protect itself from the undead. Its burial beneath tons of obsidian, that also has a strange life force of its own, further altered the *tree*, giving it a rudimentary intelligence – at least insofar as the *Seventh Tree* understands what it must do to survive in its new surroundings. Its magic has adapted in three key ways to keep itself alive amid the undead.

First, the *tree* emanates a permanent *hide from undead* spell, masking its existence from all of the denizens of the Dead Lands. The *tree* and all its roots are invisible, undetectable through magic or psionics as a living entity. When encountered, roots appear to the undead as strange obsidian formations. Undead find the roots completely uninteresting and impassable, even when the reality is exactly the opposite. Undead nations have mined beneath the obsidian in search of material wealth and corpses for reanimation, and all have ignored the seemingly unimportant roots of the *Seventh Tree*.

Second, the tree protected itself from the effects of defiling magic. The *Seventh Tree* magically deflected so much of the demand on its life force into the surrounding obsidian that defiling spells ceased to function. Since it originated in an obsidian pocket of the Paraelemental Plane of Magma, and was drawn through a vortex of defiling magic to reach Athas, the slab covering the Dead Lands is, in a twisted sense, alive. The *tree of life* shunted locally-cast defiling magic to seek out the life force of the blackglass. The obsidian slab instinctively responded by dissipating the spell casting harmlessly. The undead on the surface were confused. When magic began to work again (albeit with altered spells and components discovered by trial and error) they became convinced that their spellcasting was now of some higher order, one that did not require a union with the biosphere. They were right, and they were wrong. In reality, their spells call upon the power of the dead, for they fuel their necromancy from the Gray, the Land of the Dead.

Third, it has learned to use its own seeds as a weapon against gray magic. It manifests *Seeds of Life* to provide aid to preservers who are actively working on its behalf.

Beyond these exceptions, the *tree* grants all the powers normally associated with a *tree of life*. A cleric or druid in contact with the *tree* receives these four spells, which can be cast once a day: *heal*, *augury*, *divination*, and *scrying*. Only spells like *vampiric touch*, *enervation*, *trap the soul*, *energy drain*, *circle of death*, *finger of death*, *limited wish*, and *death knell* can damage the tree, yet it is so enormous that only localized damage can be inflicted, and even this regenerates quickly. There is no magic short of a *wish* that could possibly destroy the entire *tree*.

Forced beneath the surface, away from the harsh light of the Athasian sun, the *tree* has adapted well, digging thick roots beneath the sheet of obsidian known as the Obsidian Plain. The obsidian acts as a natural barrier to evaporation, letting the roots flourish in relatively moist soil. Most of the roots are solid and may be as thin as the width of a finger or as thick as a man's leg. But some, those marked on the map, are enormous and hollow, large enough to move through.

The Living Underground

The thick roots of the *Seventh Tree* are a welcome change from the bleak obsidian surface of the Dead Lands. Though dark and damp, the tunnels boil with life and organic material, which is reassuring to other

living creatures who find themselves here, and the *tree* protects the life within it. Instinctively, all living things possess an inherent need to be in touch with life; existence on the Obsidian Plain deprives a living creature of that contact which, over time, can lead to depression and even madness.

The interiors of the roots are thick with dirt and mud and overgrown with light moss. The dampness keeps everything dripping with moisture. After some weeks within this moist atmosphere, this could cause a problem for metal equipment virtually unheard of on Athas - rust. If a character's metal starts to rust, he must make an **Intelligence check** (DC 15) to distinguish this naturally-occurring property from some foul magic or curse. The damp moss and dirt create a unique odor, pungent and unpleasant, but characters can get used to it.

Navigating the roots is extremely easy. The map shows the routes of the roots wide enough to negotiate; getting lost is virtually impossible, since there are few alternative passages. Characters in the root system find no undead; none of them even know the *tree* exists, and they are blinded to its living presence in all ways. The *tree* is glad to harbor living beings inside its roots, and characters are welcome to hold up there, as long as they would like.

Root Network of the Tree

Player characters can encounter the *Seventh Tree* in a number of different locations, each described here. If the characters actually dig down beneath the obsidian, they can encounter thick, gnarled roots. Only the undead are blinded to what they really are - the living can easily identify them as living roots.

The *tree's* roots are only exposed to the open air, and therefore accessible from the surface of the obsidian, at seven points. Most of these are found around the fringes of the Dead Lands where the obsidian sheet is thinnest. The DM should direct player characters reaching these points on the map according to the special conditions at each, described below.

1. The City of a Thousand Dead

The rebuilt city is inhabited by a host of undead (intelligent and otherwise) walking the obsidian streets beneath the two Athasian moons, and they have dwelled there for King's Ages. It might seem incongruous to a visitor that the City of a Thousand Dead could be home to the only living thing that dares exist on the obsidian, but this is, in fact, the case.

Deep within the mazes of the city, hidden behind tall walls with no apparent entrance, is a spherical building. Characters can only enter by flying or climbing over the 25-foot obsidian walls. The courtyard between the walls and the sphere is a garden of jagged obsidian stones, inhabited by 12 [troll skeletons](#).

The sphere's shell is cracked in places, so entrance is easy even for larger creatures such as half-giants and thri-kreen. Inside, the light of day shines down on a cracked obsidian floor, shattered long ago; the edges have been worn smooth by the winds whistling through the broken shell. A casual inspection of the room might not be enough to locate the sphere's odd denizen, a tiny shrub growing up through the cracks in the floor.

The plant itself is unimpressive. Its tangled brown branches only reach 8 inches or so above the cracks, where its roots disappear beneath the obsidian ground. The handful of drab, coin-sized leaves seems barely alive, with only a hint of green sprinkled into mottled browns and grays. Light streams down through the cracks in the ceiling, in bright, unbroken beams that slash across the bush, as it rests unmolested in its silent crypt.

The bush is, in fact, the tip of the *Seventh Tree*, one of seven portions of the plant that it allows to emerge above the ground. The bush's roots go well down into the obsidian, connecting to the stronger, thicker roots farther down. If the shrub is destroyed, it will grow again to full size in just four days, but the *Tree* will not allow more than this small plant to emerge above the ground in this place.

The open gate to the Paraelemental Plane of Magma lies just 500 feet beneath the bush, encased in thick, knotted roots and surrounded by hardened blackglass. The area is unnaturally warm, for the heat of molten magma on the opposite side of the open gate seeps through the *Tree's* tangled root-knot. A [PC](#) aware of the Gate, might make a DC 30 [Knowledge \[arcana\]](#) check to understand that the heat suggests that the gate is in fact still open.

2. At the Desolation, Shadowmourn

The Grand Duchess Qwith has destroyed the obsidian along her southern and eastern borders to create a barrier against invasions, an area of broken ground known as the Desolation. Unknowingly, the zombie miners have unearthed a series of large roots from the *Seventh Tree*, exposing them to the light of day for the first time in King's Ages.

The area where the roots are exposed was dug more than 20 years ago, but it is now virtually abandoned, the zombie miners and workers laboring far away. What they left behind is typical of the Desolation, an area of broken terrain torn up to create an impassable barrier. Huge obsidian boulders are strewn about, great slabs cut and upended, and trenches carved deep into the blackglass, all left with as many sharp edges as possible. Movement through the area of the dig is extremely dangerous.

The four unearthed roots of the *Seventh Tree* are all within 100 yards of one another, in an area of the Desolation several miles to the west of the Castle Krujar complex. Each root is in a deep ravine, so characters flying over the terrain will not see them. However, those passing through, by descending into the crevasses, have a good chance of stumbling onto them. The undead of the area cannot see the roots for what they are, blinded by the *Seventh Tree's* unusual magical masking.

Each of the roots is partially destroyed, opening into the living tunnels beneath. Unfortunately, getting to them might be difficult, since the area is swarming with zombie vermin.

Characters exploring these ravines are swarmed by [1d10](#) zombie rat swarms per [round](#). If the characters plunge into the roots to escape the vermin, the zombie rats won't follow.

3. Shadowmourn's Deep Mines

The supply of corpses for reanimation as skeleton or zombie soldiers is as low in Shadowmourn as it is in the neighboring kingdoms. The Deep Mines, in the eastern portion of Qwith's lands, are dug deep beneath the obsidian shelf into the earth below, where they have tapped into several burial mounds of a people who lived before the Boiling Ruin. This race was primitive, having lived many centuries in this area of Athas, but their civilization was extinct long before the time of the Cleansing Wars.

The mines themselves consist of several shafts diving down from the bottom of a large, half-mile wide pit. Piles of obsidian shale dug from the pit and the shaft mound around on all sides. From the outside, the area appears to be a mountain of shattered obsidian chips; only from above can the activity below be identified. The pit workers are mostly simple zombies and skeletons led by thinking zombie overseers.

The shafts leading down from the bottom of the pit have fairly smooth sides. The horizontal shafts are easy to manage, but those set at a 45-degree angle are a little tricky; a climbing character must make a [Dexterity](#)

check (DC 15) every turn to avoid falling and sliding down, to where the angled shaft either stops or opens into a vertical shaft. Characters take 2d6 points of damage on the sometimes-sharp slide. By using ropes and rappelling, the characters can manage the vertical shafts, making **Climb checks**. The utilization of magic or psionics, such as *spider climb* or *fly*, can help in climbing or overcoming the shaft altogether.

Each of the four shafts meets a navigable root. The undead don't see these intersections as they pass by them on a daily basis. The mining shafts cut right into the roots, opening them wide enough for easy access.

The end of each shaft is a burial mound. These are always occupied by 2d8 zombies, carefully digging skeletal remains out of the dirt on either side of the small chamber.

"The bottom of the shaft is cold, colder than the darkest night on the open desert. Moisture hangs in the air, until it collects on your face and drips off your nose. It's the strangest thing. There is no light, none but that you brought with you, shining back at you from the black walls, black and glassy like everything in this accursed land. The shaft extends out in front of you, large enough to move through, but too small to stand straight.

Ahead, there are scratching and scraping noises in the darkness. The shaft widens and changes. No longer surrounded by obsidian walls, the tunnel is hewn into the rock and dirt. So, there's dirt beneath the obsidian after all.

At your feet is a pile of skeletons, stiff and silent. The light touches zombies, rotting and pale in the darkness. They labor with obsidian picks, exposing ancient skeletons, and then carefully pick the bones clean with their own withered, hideous digits."

4. Howling Caverns, Chol

The undead fear the caverns and keep their distance, certain that peril lies within its secretive caves. Something, in fact, does abide within the caves; the encroaching roots of the *Seventh Tree*.

The caverns are forbidding, even to living intruders. The narrow and confined tunnels drone incessantly, with the blasting winds from across the plains. If characters take refuge in the caverns, and they can convince any **NPCs** to stay in them, despite the unsettling howling, they may come across the large roots of the Dead Lands's *tree of life*. Nevertheless, the search is not an easy one, since the roots are only uncovered in the deepest recesses of the caverns.

Only characters making a concerted effort to delve deep into the caverns have a chance of finding the *Seventh Tree's* root system. In the upper caverns, there is little to warrant such a search, nothing to indicate that there is anything of particular interest farther below. Each tunnel and cavern is much like the next, with swirls of purple, black, and translucent obsidian forming hypnotic patterns on the walls. However, seeing that the caverns do descend deeper into the obsidian is easy, and the curious may want to search them thoroughly.

Only small-sized characters can easily slip through the existing passages, while medium-sized characters must make a **Escape Artist check** (DC 15); others may get through only after extensive excavation, which would involve a considerable amount of time. The caverns extend to the bottom of the obsidian sheet that covers the Dead Lands, right to the rock and soil beneath the glass. Even a halfling will have to navigate dozens of narrow passages and caverns, before winding all the way to the bottom. The journey will take at least two full days, provided there are no significant interruptions. Characters traversing the lowest reaches of the Howling Caverns also run the risk of encountering the Lurking Blood – this alone makes the attempt impractical for most explorers.

Once in the bottom chambers, the obsidian caverns have dirt floors, and lying across these are the tops of the thick, woody roots. They aren't easily recognized in the darkness, but even by torchlight, they are certainly distinguishable from the rocky soil. The roots are fully enclosed and undamaged; there are no ready entrances into them. Characters will have to fully explore the curious roots, as described in *The Living Underground*, to find any gaps.

5. In the Mines of Deshentu

The Vizier of Deshentu has a strong nation on the blackglass of the Dead Lands, one he is willing to protect at all costs. Like the other undead princes, he is in constant need of additional corpses to animate and fill the ranks of his armies. To this end, he has dug mines beneath the obsidian, to unearth the dead bodies of ancient civilizations. These mines are found a few miles west of the capital city of Deshentarum, in the center of the Vizier's kingdom.

Unlike the Deep Mines in Shadowmourn, the mines of Deshentu are not merely abandoned in the wilderness. Fearing insurrection or plunder by invaders, the Vizier has constructed fortresses around the valuable mine shafts and manned them with sufficient forces to hold out a siege lasting for years.

Each mine has its own fortress like the one mapped here.

A. Remote Redoubt: Separated from the main fortress, this redoubt is constructed of obsidian shale mounded 10 feet above the surrounding ground. Archers on the outer walls are afforded good cover (defensive bonuses apply) and have a clear killing ground to the full range of their weapons. The only access back into the main fortress is across the ground and through the main gate.

B. Interior Redoubts: Like the remote redoubt, the interior redoubts also offer good protection to the soldiers on the wall, but these are higher, built 15 feet up from the obsidian ground. Archers can also use these redoubts to good effect, but they are also designed with killing holes for the polearms of the infantry. The bottoms of the redoubt walls are set at a 45-degree angle; large obsidian stones hoisted over the walls deflect off of the angles and right into surrounding troops.

C. Interior Walls: Set at the 15-foot height of the redoubts, these walls connect and protect the interior of the fortress. The walls have neither the murder holes nor the angled bottoms of the redoubts (though they can be lined with soldiers for good defense). Instead, the ground in front of the walls is cut razor-sharp and lined with pits, some concealed, some not. The idea is to discourage marauders from attacking the walls, directing them instead to the redoubts.

D. Barracks: These two buildings house 200 Medium undead each, giving the fortress a complement of just over 400. These are usually skeletons and zombies supplemented, at times, with heavier troops. The barracks buildings have beds and cots, mess halls and lavatories, all trappings of the living past, none necessary for an army of undead. Much of the Vizier's military regimen is based on the necessities of the living past, just one more tie to the ideal civilization he would like to create.

E. Armory: The armory building has a variety of materials for maintaining the fortress, especially during a siege. There are many weapons, including bows and thousands of arrows, stones for heaving over the walls, polearms, hand-held weapons of all varieties, and dozens of small siege engines, including crude ballistae and catapults. There are also spell components and scrolls to keep the contingent's necromancers supplied, during a prolonged battle. Finally, there are additional building tools and

materials to repair the fortress walls, should they ever be breached.

F. The Mines. The central building covering the actual mine shaft has no doors; entry and exit can only be gained by magical means, such as *teleport* or *passwall*. The walls are very thick, made of obsidian blocks. Inside is a simple assembly of pulleys and cables that lowers miners deep into the vertical shafts and, then, hauls them and their finds back to the surface. The entire building is set with magical wards that will explode, imploding the building in on itself, blocking the shaft. The Vizier reasons that if his fortress falls, his enemies will gain no spoils from the mines.

The shafts extend vertically over 100 feet into the ground, through the obsidian and into the dirt and rocks beneath. Side shafts appear at different levels, into chambers where skeletal corpses are unearthed and reassembled. Some of these shafts have cut right through the roots of the *Seventh Tree*, without the undead miners being aware that they had done so. Living intruders into the mines, however, have no trouble finding shafts that open into the living roots of the *tree of life*, gaining easy access.

6. At the Crunch

The Crunch is the boundary between the humanoid undead nations and the Buglands to the south. So many wars have been fought there that the obsidian is covered with broken chitin, hence the name.

The Crunch is, otherwise, a desolate, featureless plain, extending westward from the City of a Thousand Dead beyond Harkor into a fragmented territory on the southern edges of the Kingdoms of Gretch, and eastward bordering Chol all the way to the edge of the Pallid Mere. No humanoid undead travel here, and the bugdead only venture across it when they are invading their northern neighbors. So, few have examined the land in detail. Characters lost on the Crunch find little of interest, but they just might find a point of access into the underground passages of the *Seventh Tree*.

One particularly gruesome battle sight is just south of the southern tip of Harkor. The battle there left thousands and thousands of undead buried in the deep craters of dozens of magical explosions, mostly *fireballs*. Unknown to the battle *wizards* at the time, the obsidian on which they fought was unusually thin for an area of the central obsidian shelf. Their constant barrage of fiery magic melted a crater deep enough to expose the earth beneath. The bugdead were eventually defeated, and their remains settled into the molten obsidian as it cooled. The largest crater is filled

with chitinous remains to this day. Thousands of bugdead cover the exposed earth below, as well as a large root of the *tree of life*.

Characters coming upon the battle site will find a series of deep craters. The smooth, melted edges and the half-buried chitin make them easily identifiable as holes burnt into the obsidian. The largest crater appears to be very deep, filled to a depth of 50 to 100 feet with bits and pieces of shattered chitin, from chunks of carapaces, to limbs and wings, and more. Characters can make their way through the chitin, but the going is difficult. Movement for all creatures of size Large or smaller is halved when descending through the chitin.

After 100 yards of descent, the walls of the crater give way to pockets of raw, completely sterile rock and dirt. The earth is exposed, beneath the chitin, in a circular area 30 feet in diameter, with an exposed root offset 10 feet to the east of the center. Once uncovered, the root is easily recognized; the surrounding ground, chitin, and obsidian are all charred and blackened. The root of the *Seventh Tree* was scorched once, too. However, it has since healed itself and is now green and brown, clearly a living thing.

Unfortunately, swarms of small insect bugdead frequently visit this area of the Crunch. Roll **1d6** every turn for a random encounter; on a 1 or 2 there is a swarm of some kind with which the characters will have to deal. Roll **1d4**; on a 1 or 2 the swarm is of undead mini-kanks, on a 3 or 4 they are undead locusts.

7. In the Shale Lands

Ahnthyarka's strange kingdom of shale mounds is one of the vast, puzzling oddities of the Buglands. Characters traveling there are allowed to do so freely, provided they do not interfere with the mounds or any of their work. Access to the extensive root system of the *Seventh Tree* can be gained through an anonymous mound in the west central portion of the Shale Lands.

The mound is quite large, more than 400 feet long and 100 feet wide, shaped like some exotic ant creature. The mound has three main body sections plus legs, made of carefully molded obsidia that hug the ground and extend away from the body. The head of the mound has two multifaceted eye globes and a snout.

A. Access to the structure can be gained through passages set behind the eye globes and the snout. The craftsmanship is remarkable, but each of these is a hinged door with a concealed latch; searchers must make a successful **Search Check** (DC 20) to locate these. The latches are designed for insect claws; thri-kreen

can open them without assistance, but humanoids must use picks, daggers, or similar tools to work the mechanisms. Behind each is a narrow, 5-foot passage extending 30-foot back, into the head section.

B. All three access tunnels lead to a spherical 30-foot diameter chamber, in the forward portion of the head section. Four eye globes, roughly 2 yards in diameter and carved of obsidian, face inward from the outer sphere of the room, one directly on top, one on the bottom, and one to either side. Another passage, 10 feet wide, extends away from the back of the sphere deeper into the mound.

The eye globes are a teleportation device. Any creatures that pass through the center of the spherical chamber, 15 feet up from the bottom, are teleported 5 miles away instantly; roll **1d4** for compass direction for each creature. Characters passing through would have to go out of their way to get caught in the teleporter.

C. This is a 20-foot diameter spherical chamber that branches northwest off of the passage leading back through the head section of the mound. The chamber is empty.

D. Identical to the chamber described in **C**, above, but this one extends to the southeast of the passage. A clear glass globe hovers in the center of the chamber, 10 feet above the floor. On closer inspection, a gem rests in the center of the glass globe, a pale-blue opal with green and gold mottling, worth 1,000 Cp. No magical wards prevent a character from simply grabbing the glass globe and making it his own.

E. This is an egg-shaped chamber, 60 feet wide and 90 feet deep, with passages extending away from each end. The surfaces of the chamber are lined with 6-inch obsidian spikes set 2 inches apart. Any character falling onto the spikes takes **3d6** points of damage.

F. A spherical chamber, 90 feet in diameter, dominates the abdominal section. A clear glass globe hovers in the center of the chamber, 45 feet above the bottom, and inside there is an amulet of gold and silver, encrusted with gems.

The glass globe and the amulet are illusions. The bottom 30 feet of the chamber consists of paper thin glass; any weight on them opens a 90-foot pit. Any character falling to the bottom takes **9d6** points of falling damage. The bottom of the pit is not actually obsidian or earth, but the green and brown wood of a root of the *Seventh Tree*.

G. This spherical chamber is 30 feet in diameter and has a clear glass globe hovering in its center. The globe contains a silver ring. There is nothing to prevent someone from snatching the globe. The ring is a *Ring of Memory* (See FoDL Ch10).



H. This 30-foot diameter, spherical chamber has a clear glass globe hovering in its center. The globe contains a black claw. There is nothing to prevent someone from taking the globe. The claw is a *Claw of the Dead Lands* (See FoDL Ch10).

The Gate

The source of the Obsidian Flood, the *gate* to the obsidian region of the Paraelemental Plane of Magma, is still open. The *Seventh Tree* managed to clog the opening with its own roots, allowing the molten obsidian around it to cool and harden, harmlessly encasing the Athasian side of the *gate* for King's Ages. None of the undead princes know that the *gate* exists there, shielded from their scrying by the natural magical barriers of the *tree of life*. The *gate* has remained unmolested and forgotten since the time of the Boiling Ruin.

However, if the *gate* were discovered, it would not be a great feat to unearth it. The *Seventh Tree* knows the *gate* is there, but it has only a rudimentary intelligence. If contacted by a *druid*, the *tree* refers to the *gate* only as the "dark horror," and it will do everything in its power to prevent anyone from digging down to it. The *Seventh Tree* could use its enormous regenerative powers to heal itself against invasions; it could even grow tendrils to block access or hamper excavators, though none of these would be a great discouragement to determined individuals. The *tree* makes it clear, however, that the dark horror should not be disturbed.

Getting through the obsidian would be a simple matter of mining. With the correct tools, characters could expose the thick roots around the *gate* in a matter of a few days. The roots are warm to the touch, due to the heat of the molten obsidian on the far side of the *gate*. Characters who are aware of what they are digging for could make an *Intelligence check* (DC 15) to realize that the *gate* is still open.

If someone were to expose the *gate* again, the results would be catastrophic. Molten obsidian would rush through the opening under great pressure. Anyone within 50 feet of the gate would take 10d6 bludgeoning damage.



REOPENING THE GATE

If someone were to expose the *gate* again, the results would be catastrophic. Molten obsidian would rush through the opening under great pressure. Anyone within 50 feet of the gate would take **10d6** bludgeoning and **10d6** fire damage per **round**, with a **Reflex save (DC 20)** for half damage, until they could get beyond 300 feet of the volcanic obsidian. Tons of pure obsidian would pour out, and all creatures caught in the spreading glass take **3d6** points of fire damage per **round**. Each day, the *Seventh Tree* would have a 10% chance of closing the *gate* off again. Of course, characters might use their powers to close off the *gate*, though the effort is the equivalent of putting a stopper in an erupting volcano. In the meantime:

After day one: The new obsidian buries The City of a Thousand Dead to a further depth of 20 feet, pouring beyond the outer walls onto the rest of the Obsidian Plain.

After day two: The City of a Thousand Dead is unrecognizable, with only a few towers poking out of a fresh, smooth glob of obsidian. Beyond the walls, the obsidian buries the surrounding empty terrain of the Crunch to a depth of 5 to 10 feet. The flowing rivers of obsidian reach the foothills of the Forbidden Mountains and seek out the valleys and crevasses.

After day three: The Crunch is all but lost beneath a thick layer of new obsidian, as the Forbidden Mountains slow the progress of the flow to the west, but Chol, to the northeast, is vanishing into the flood. Much of the Buglands border in the south, including the northern portions of Nokhis Azgbar, are engulfed in molten obsidian. More flows past the Obsidian Fortress to the west, and almost to the cliffs in the north and east. Harkor is half-buried beneath rivers of molten glass, as are the easternmost Kingdoms of Gretch.

After day four: The Shale Lands, Small Home, and all of the northern Buglands (the satrapies of Chozag'akiz, Thagnak, Zzhopkos, and the rest of Nokhis Azgbar) succumb to the thickening obsidian. The Forbidden Mountains that held back the flow are saturated and no longer an obstacle, allowing the obsidian to claim the Bone Lands, Dshentu, and Shadowmourn up to the Desolation. In the south, the widening obsidian plain flows beyond the old southern borders into new lands, burying the dunes in its path.

After day five: Everything that was the Dead Lands, including the southern Buglands, is now buried beneath a new layer of obsidian, 50 feet thick over The City of a Thousand Dead and just 10 feet thick at the outer edges.

Days six to twenty: The obsidian grows thicker across the Dead Lands, restricted only by the small size of the tunnel it is bursting through in the long-since-buried City of a Thousand Dead. On day 20, the obsidian crests the cliffs of old Ulyan, washing out over the dunes and wastelands of the lands of the living.

Beyond day twenty: After the twentieth day, every day that the gate remains open allows the obsidian sheet to spread farther over the face of Athas. Each day, the thickness of the obsidian over The City of a Thousand Dead, directly over the open gate, increases by 5 feet. At the edges, the obsidian sheet expands 10 miles in all directions, with a minimum thickness of 10 feet. At this rate, it will take nearly 20 days for the obsidian to approach the edges of the Tablelands, and no more than 40 to completely bury them beneath a uniform sheet of blackglass.

Needless to say, such a disaster would drastically alter the nature of a campaign in the Dead Lands. The undead princes have magic to help protect their lands, but not enough, given the insufficient time available to hold back the obsidian glaciers. Many of the princes rise to the surface of the new obsidian armed with everything they could save from their old empires, ready to play new games of conquest. The slate is wiped clean, and opportunities are ripe for those on the outs during the previous set of regimes.

Any characters in the vicinity of the blast, when the gate is opened, suffer the full fury of the explosion, and those killed have a chance of becoming zhen themselves. The embodiment of the living obsidian slab is in constant flux with the strange life and unlife forces, making death and life virtually indistinguishable. Any character killed by the molten obsidian flood must make a **Fortitude saving throw (DC 20)**; those who fail die peacefully, those who pass become zhen or, at the **DM's** option, some alternate form of undead. Consult *Terrors of the Dead Lands*, to select an undead type and generate special undead abilities and weaknesses.

Chapter 10 – The Dead Lands and the Tablelands

What Keeps the Dead Lords in the Dead Lands

Having such a large land full of powerful sentient undead so relatively close to the Tablelands does raise the inevitable question—after two millennia, why have they not already invaded the Tablelands?

The answer is actually rather complicated, and is due to a combination of several factors:

- Before the Cataclysm, the planar researchers who were conducting experiments the Navel were using dimensional energy from the Grey as part of their experiments. This was the source of the power which helped create the corrupted demiplane of obsidian, and when the Cataclysm and Obsidian Flow were unleashed upon these lands, all of those who were killed by it were empowered by this negative energy from the Grey. Many sentient undead have noted that this energy that pervades the Dead Lands originally animated and currently empowers them while they are within the Dead Lands, and they are uncertain as to what will happen to them if they leave for prolonged periods of time.
- These same Navel researchers, while they were alive, had magical and psionic effects placed upon them by Rajaat to dampen emotional reactions and enable the required decades-long focus on their research at the near exclusion of everything else. (*See Qwith's description in FoDL Ch4*) This compelled obsession became an essential part of their personalities when reanimated by the Obsidian Tide, cursing many of the most powerful spellcasters and manifesters in the Dead Lands to remain focused on the Dead Lands, not even thinking of the lands beyond.
- One aspect of the obsidian's necromantic empowerment is that within the Dead Lands normally mindless undead (non-thinking zombies and skeletons) all seem to gain a limited amount of intelligence roughly equivalent to animals (*See*

FoDL Ch1). When not being controlled directly, they seem to approximate the motions of their former daily routines from when they were alive. Beyond the obsidian of the Dead Lands, these troops would revert to their normal, mindless state. Any large-scale troop deployment would be a logistical nightmare, requiring direct necromantic micromanagement of the troops for even the most basic of tactical maneuvers.

- The northern cliffs provide a stubborn obstacle which makes moving large forces northwards impractical. Tectuktitlay's Stair could be cleared if Deshentu or Shadowmourn were motivated enough, but that would still prove a bottleneck for moving large numbers of troops up to the Endless Dunes.
- In the southern parts of the Dead Lands, the bugdead relentlessly continue their attacks on the humanoid undead. Most of the Dead Lords with a border facing the Legion of the Claw's territories are rather occupied with ensuring they don't break through. They see what happened to Shumash as proof to never let down their guard against the bugdead.
- Needless to say, the presence of the bugdead and The Web explains why the Dead Lords have not expanded their domains in the south or east.
- To the west, the Dead Lords and other factions are fenced in by the harsh and unpassable Dragonback Mountains, and the only mountain pass giving access is obstructed by numerous undead gnomes and sprites much like those seen in Small Home.
- To the east, Nowaer's Ladder still bears all the destruction of the Cleansing Army's assault on Elsavos, and more obsidian and hostile entities lurk on the plateau above.
- Finally, all of the Dead Lords and other factions who aren't occupied in continuous battle with the bugdead have their own agendas which directly relate to something they believe is located within the Dead Lands, and leaving would run contrary to their purposes.

All this being said, there is nothing stopping the Dead Lords from interacting with the living in strategic ways. The issues of incompatible languages and concepts of currency (*See FoDL Ch1*) are problematic but not insurmountable.

Interactions with the Living Lands

As of the date in which the Emissary adventure is set, the Dead Lords all are largely unaware of the living lands to the north. With the visitation of the first living in millennia, this will change. While this will certainly change influences on the Tablelands, this would not necessarily be unbalancing.

The Dead Lords and various factions will tentatively reach out northwards in predictable ways:

Qwith will expand her search for Pristine Tower magic and powerful artifacts, hopefully trying to discover what happened to the Dark Lens.

Harkor will recruit and position living stooges to encourage new potential recruits to be sent to the Dead Lands on suicidal quests, resulting in their capture.

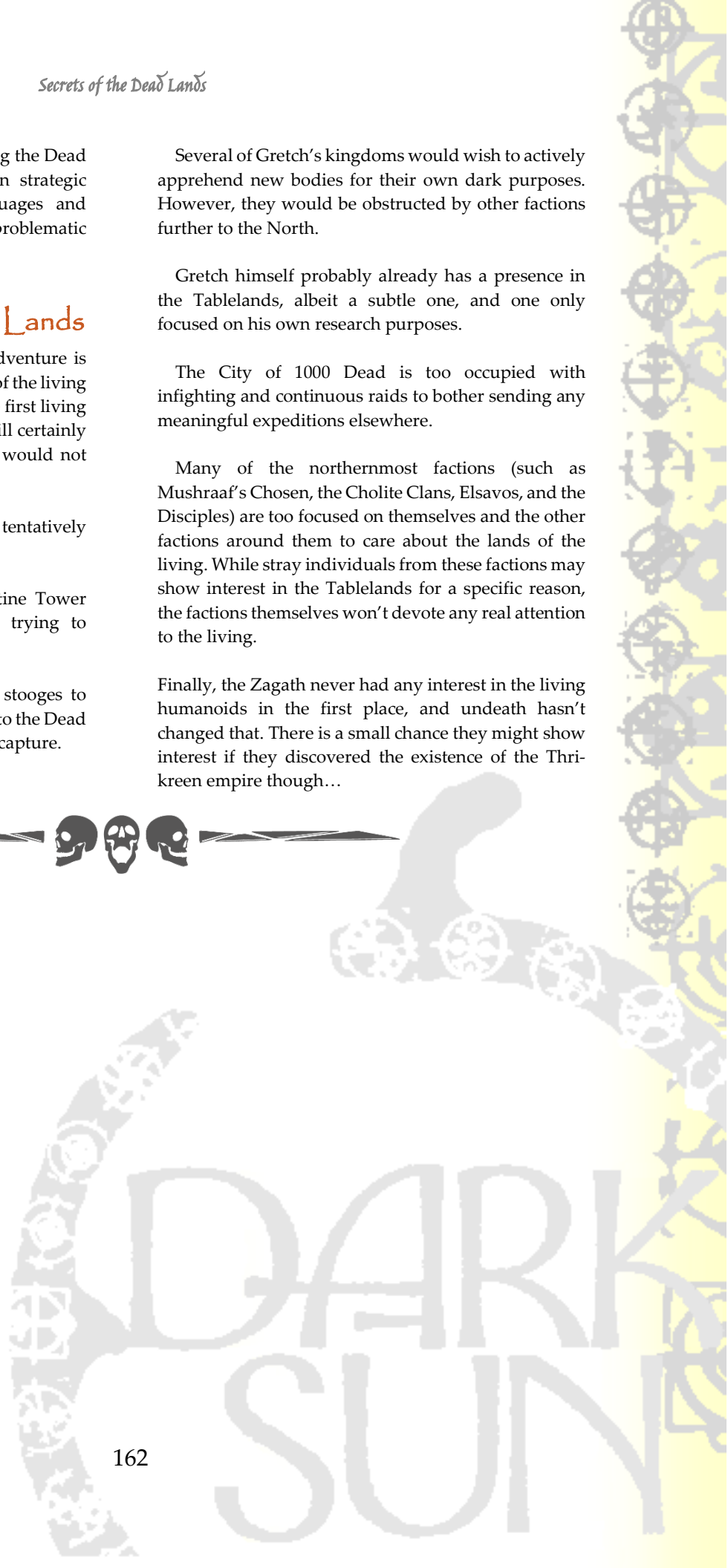
Several of Gretch's kingdoms would wish to actively apprehend new bodies for their own dark purposes. However, they would be obstructed by other factions further to the North.

Gretch himself probably already has a presence in the Tablelands, albeit a subtle one, and one only focused on his own research purposes.

The City of 1000 Dead is too occupied with infighting and continuous raids to bother sending any meaningful expeditions elsewhere.

Many of the northernmost factions (such as Mushraaf's Chosen, the Cholite Clans, Elsavos, and the Disciples) are too focused on themselves and the other factions around them to care about the lands of the living. While stray individuals from these factions may show interest in the Tablelands for a specific reason, the factions themselves won't devote any real attention to the living.

Finally, the Zagath never had any interest in the living humanoids in the first place, and undeath hasn't changed that. There is a small chance they might show interest if they discovered the existence of the Thri-kreen empire though...



Appendix – Dead Lands Factions

NORTHWESTERN CLIFFS



Tru'ezzar Fort
Ch 2, Pg 36



Toganay Mines
Ch 2, Pg 38



Whitebeards
(Beardpit Mines)
Ch 2, Pg 45



Orc-Holds of Ghash-Naarg
Ch 2, Pg 39

Small Home
Ch 2, Pg 40

THE NAKED OBSIDIAN



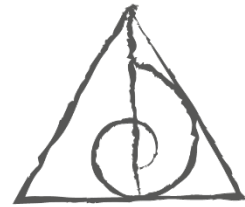
The Maze of Scales
Ch 3, Pg 57



Disciples
Ch 3, Pg 48



Mushraaf's Chosen
Ch 3, Pg 59

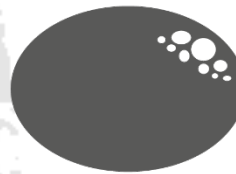


The Former Sageocracy
(Nuubark of the Shadows)
Ch 3, Pg 54

The Nameless Shaman
Ch 3, Pg 63



Ruins of Gzhabakr
Ch 3, Pg 61



Brotherhood of the Mirror
(Nolak Island)
Ch 3, Pg 53

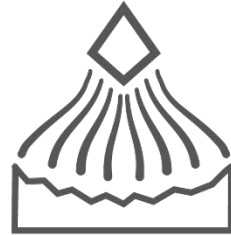
THE DEAD LORDS



Shadowmourn
Ch 4, Pg 74



Deshentu
Ch 4, Pg 66



Harkor
Ch 4, Pg 78

KINGDOMS OF GRETCH



Gretch
(and his Uncrowned)
Ch 6, Pg 99

Oskyar
Ch 6, Pg 102

Shansanar
Ch 6, Pg 106



Erthne
Ch 6, Pg 113



Irejul
Ch 6, Pg 102



Nocwis
Ch 6, Pg 112



Wujart
Ch 6, Pg 115



Olnak
Ch 6, Pg 110



Chuul
(Eomwa's Emblem)
Ch 6, Pg 103



Ceeryl
Ch 6, Pg 105



Kiwk
Ch 6, Pg 107



The Striders
(of the Viscera)
Ch 6, Pg 109

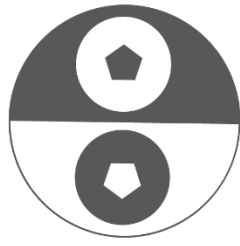


Nophdeh
Ch 6, Pg 107

CITY 1000 DEAD FACTIONS



Seal of the
City 1000 Dead
Ch 5, Pg 84



Custodians
of the Dark



The Navel
(Descendants of the Chosen)
Ch 5, Pg 87



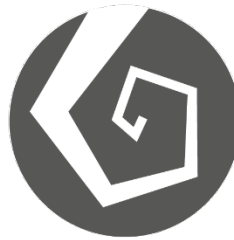
Marooned



Rajaat's Fugitives
Ch 5, Pg 90



Radiant Descendants



Stoneborers



Shimmerers



Champion's
Daughters
Ch 5, Pg 92



Hungry Ghosts
Ch 5, Pg 93



The Defenders
Ch 5, Pg 91



Volldrager
Ch 5, Pg 94

Undying Guardians
Ch 5, Pg 94

The Great One
Ch 5, Pg 94

THE EASTERN BEACH (AND CHOLIT (BIBES))



Elsavos
Ch 7, Pg 123



The Pallid Mere
(Sagramog Swamp)
Ch 7, Pg 121



Jush-Esgar's Guerillas
(Shumash)
Ch 7, Pg 127



Tarktas
the Sleeping City
Ch 7, Pg 126



Black Thunder Clan
Ch 7, Pg 117



Swift Death Clan
Ch 7, Pg 118



Blacktooth Maw Clan
Ch 7, Pg 119

LEGIONS OF THE CLAW



Ahnthiyarka
Ch 8, Pg 138



Legions of the Claw
(S'thag Zagath Warriors)
Ch 8, Pg 132

The Unreclaimed
(The Web)
Ch 8, Pg 147

Dead Lands of Athas

Including Lands of the Sithag Zagath



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