

DE HORRORE COSMICO

SIX SCENARIOS
FOR CTHULHU INVICTUS



WRITTEN BY
STUART BOON, CHAD BOWSER,
PHREDD GROVES, PENELOPE LOVE,
JEFF MOELLER, MARK MORRISON,
AND OSCAR RIOS



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De Horrore Cosmico—Six Adventures for Cthulhu Invictus

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Published in the United States by:

Golden Goblin Press

90-48 210th Street

Queens Village, New York, 11428

ISBN 978-0-9895603-2-0

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



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Clear Credit

Many amazing people rallied to the *De Horrore Cosmico* standard.

Jeffrey Moeller gave us a chilling retelling of “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” with “The Vetting of Marius Asina”. Chad Bowser threatens Rome itself with his take on “The Doom that Came to Sarnath”, in “Doom”. Oscar Rios invites us to explore dark secrets in a new version of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”, with “Murmillo”. Phredd Groves covers a lot of ground with his retelling of both “The Rats in the Walls” and “The Whisperer in Darkness” with his debut scenario “Kith and Kine”. Stuart Boon takes us to the edge of the known world in his version of *At The Mountains of Madness* in “The Devil’s Mouth”. Penelope Love and Mark Morrison present their reimagining of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* with “The Case of Tertius Orestes Sedonius”.

Alberto Guerra supplied our cover and interior illustrations, Stephanie McAlea provided our maps, Mark Shireman produced our player aids, and Badger McInnes undertook layout and design.

Editing was undertaken by Lisa Padol, Oscar Rios, and Jeffrey Moeller, with historical and language consultation from Justin Mansfield.

Dedication

“Friendship improves happiness, and abates misery, by doubling our joys, and dividing our grief”— Marcus Tullius Cicero

I dedicate this book to three of the best friends anyone could ever hope to have, Lisa Padol, Mark Shireman, and Jeffrey Moeller. Producing a book and running a company is a monumental task, one I could not hope to do alone. But a man with friends is never alone, and I have some of the best. Lisa, Mark, and Jeff work tirelessly on behalf of Golden Goblin Press, pushing us to uphold ever higher standards with each project. Without their friendship and dedicated support, I could not continue to do this. They never complain, they are always willing to help, and their warmth and good cheer brighten my mood even in the darkest moments. Therefore, to you three, warrior poets each, my dearest friends, I dedicate this book.

Personal Thanks

I would like to thank the Kickstarter backers of this project. Without your generous support, this book could not have been produced. My thanks to Jason McKittrick of Cryptocurioum, to Joe Broers, to Tom Lynch, and to Mark Morrison of Campaign Coins for joining us on that campaign. I would like to thank the fans of *Cthulhu Invictus* all over the world, especially those who recorded their play sessions and posted them on the internet. Your struggles, sacrifices, and deaths have helped *Cthulhu Invictus* not only survive, but grow. As always, thanks to my wife and family for allowing me to continue these mad adventures.

Last, but hardly least, I would like to extend my deepest and most heartfelt thanks to Chad Bowser, the creator of *Cthulhu Invictus*. When Chad and I were first getting started in this industry, he was the Pompey to my Caesar, ever my friend and always my rival. He inspired me to push harder, reach higher, and pursue seemingly impossible goals. His creation, *Cthulhu Invictus*, remains one of my favorite roleplaying RPG supplements of all time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SOME TIPS FOR PLAYERS AND KEEPERS BY OSCAR RIOS	6
THE VETTING OF MARIUS ASINA BY JEFFREY MOELLER	7
DOOM BY CHAD BOWSER	31
MURMILLO BY OSCAR RIOS	47
KITH AND KINE BY PHREDD GROVES	67
THE DEVIL'S MOUTH BY STUART BOON	86
THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS BY PENELOPE LOVE AND MARK MORRISON . . .	105
PATRONE MI PATRONE BY BOON, GROVES, MOELLER, AND RIOS	129
MAPS AND HANDOUTS BY STEPHANIE MCALEA AND MARK SHIREMAN	146

SOME TIPS FOR PLAYERS AND KEEPERS

ROMAN DISTANCES

The Roman Empire of the Antonine period was vast, roughly five million square kilometers, just under two million square miles. (Today this territory makes up about forty modern nations.) A network of well-maintained roads connected the empire. This allowed news, goods, troops, and sometimes plagues and invaders to travel swiftly. Distances in *De Horrore Cosmico* are listed in Roman Miles or Leagues. A Roman Mile or *Mille Passuum* is the distance of one thousand steps, equaling roughly 1.5 kilometers (of .9 of a mile). The Roman League is one and a half Roman Miles.

ARMOR, WEAPONS, AND UNARMED COMBAT

The weapons and armor available to investigators in *Cthulhu Invictus* can make them quite formidable. However, one cannot simply walk about in armor, brandishing weapons in civilized areas. The empire had serious laws restricting the carrying of weapons; even carrying a dagger was illegal. However, nearly everyone carried a small, concealed blade on their person. Investigators will need to make a successful Conceal check to hide any Short length weapons they carry if searched.

Out in the wilds, especially in the border provinces, things are different. Investigators can more easily carry weapons and wear armor, although this won't guarantee their safety. While armor may protect investigators from blades and clubs, it will not prevent them from being grappled. Grappled victims can be held immobile, knocked off their feet, rendered unconscious, physically injured, or even strangled to death by their attackers, regardless of the armor they wear. Keepers should refer to the rules for Grapple (in the 6th edition *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook) or Fighting: Brawl (in the 7th edition *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook) for specific rules.

KILL IT WITH FIRE

Veteran Mythos investigators quickly learn that many of the horrible creatures they encounter, such as a few found in this very book, are invulnerable to normal attacks. Investigators may seek to learn and use magic, although this is both difficult and prohibited by Roman law. Investigators can try to create or obtain enchanted weapons, although such items are very rare, expensive to purchase, and difficult to produce. An investigator's easiest method for dealing with troublesome beasts is to employ fire (although some creatures are even immune to that). Here are a few quick notes to deal with this.

☞ Contact with a burning torch inflicts 1-2 points of fire damage.

☞ Once ignited, a vial of oil or other accelerant (any flammable substance) inflicts damage for three rounds unless extinguished (e.g., by rolling, smothering the flames with a blanket, or dousing then with water). The damage inflicted from such an attack is 1D6, 1D4, and finally 1D3 points of damage over the three rounds.

☞ A vial of Greek Fire (see page 90 of the *Cthulhu Invictus* rulebook for rules for its creation), once ignited, burns for four rounds and inflicts 1D8, 1D6, 1D4, and 1D3 points of damage over that time. Greek Fire cannot be extinguished, even by complete immersion in water. Keepers should make Greek Fire expensive and difficult to produce. It should be extremely difficult for private citizens to possess or to obtain Greek Fire, because the exact formula is a closely guarded military secret.

Both oil and Greek Fire can be ignited in two ways, by touching a fire to it or by hurling it in a Fire Pot. A Fire Pot is a sealed, easily broken, container with a flammable item (often some cloth soaked in pitch) attached to it. Once the Fire Pot shatters, the flammable item ignites the accelerant. Such items have a very short range (5 yards) and require a successful Throw roll. Fire Pots are risky to employ and transport, due to their fragile and volatile natures. Just how risky is up to the individual Keeper.

Using fire also puts investigators at risk from friendly fire (pun intended). Those in melee combat with a burning adversary must make a Luck check each round. Failing this check means that some of the accelerant has splashed onto them from their opponent, inflicting half of the damage the original target was suffering.

For example, Furius Metella is splashed by Greek Fire, while fighting a burning Dark Young. The Greek Fire was on its second round of burning, set to do 1D6, 1D4, and 1D3 over the next three rounds. The investigator is now on fire and suffers 1D3, 1D2, 1 point of damage for the next three rounds. Metella dives into a nearby pond but finds no relief, as Greek Fire burns even when submerged in water.

BALANCED PARTIES

One of the keys to a successful group of Mythos investigators, regardless of the historical era, is to be comprised of individuals with a wide array of skills. No single individual can be good at everything. A balanced party should include members skilled at combat, social interactions, academic research, and streetwise investigation.

Keepers should encourage players to give some thought to creating a well-balanced team before their characters set out to battle the Mythos in Ancient Rome. Investigators should choose whom they face death beside very carefully. In *Cthulhu Invictus*, a well-balanced party might have a mix of genders and social classes as well.

HISTORICAL ACCURACY IN DE HORRORE COSMICO

While great efforts have been made to portray the Roman Empire during the reign of the Antonines correctly, we acknowledge that inaccuracies remain. Some of these are deliberate, made for the sake of presenting a more exciting and compelling narrative. While this should be obvious, do not view the contents of this book as anything more than fictitious.

THE VETTING OF MARIUS ASINA

BY JEFFREY MOELLER

CONTENT WARNING

Certain aspects of this scenarios deal with sexual assault (sadly, all too common in the Roman era), prostitution (legal and commonplace in the Roman era), and bestiality (off camera). Keepers are encouraged to discuss this with their players before play begins.

HISTORY

“The Vetting of Marius Asina” is an adaptation of the H.P. Lovecraft story “Facts Concerning The Late Arthur Jermyn And His Family”. The story was written in 1920, first published in the March 1921 edition of *The Wolverine* pulp magazine; and later reprinted in the April 1924 issue of *Weird Tales*.

INTRODUCTION

The investigators are put to the task of unraveling the sordid family history of Marius Asina, a local senator in the provincial port city of Massilia (modern day Marseille), in the providence of Gallia Narbonensis. Asina is seeking higher office as the scenario begins, and the investigators are hired by a mysterious patron, through several cut-outs, to vet him: look for secrets that might be used to embarrass or discredit him.

The secret of the Marius family lies in its deceased matriarch, known in the human world as “Julia Aquiliana.” As in the source story, Julia was actually a high priestess of a semi-human race of White Apes, and the family’s children and grandchildren are hybrid creatures, some of whom pass for human with varying degrees of success.

OPAR, CITY-STATE OF THE WHITE APES

Opar is a mythical lost city in the interior of Southern Africa, far, far beyond Roman era exploration or geographic knowledge. It is a remnant of Atlantean civilization, a city of fantastic architecture, redolent with sorcery, jewels and forgotten gods. Opar is populated by a race of proto-humans who are fitfully cross-fertile with both humans and other apes. Here, they will be referred to as the White Apes, or Oparians. The concept of Opar grew from the writings of several pulp-era authors.

OPARIANS

There are only a few hundred White Apes still surviving in their jungle citadel. There is a great deal of sexual dimorphism among the White Apes of Opar, although neither gender would be mistaken for human. The males appear as enormous, vaguely humanoid, white-furred gorillas. Oparian females are more humanoid, and quite shapely in terms of build and secondary sexual characteristics. The females appear as comely, white-furred, somewhat like simian-faced depictions of Amazons from Greek mythology.

Although the Oparians have human-level intelligence, they are quite savage. They have no long term plans for world domination, being content to worship their dark gods in their jungle citadel. They sometimes trade with humans who somehow discover Opar, although most who find their city are rent limb from limb in a fit of rage. However, through careful diplomacy, some who stumble onto Opar may survive to be wed to an Oparian noble, should they show willingness to cross-breed and make sacrifices to the Oparians’ dark gods.



Both sexes are capable of producing viable offspring with humans, as well as other primates. The products of these unions are sometimes stillborn (20%) or horribly deformed (10%), but most do survive. These hybrids appear as ugly, brutish, and unusually hairy humans, and typically possess violent, poorly controlled tempers (usually worse in the males). Rarely (5%), a female hybrid is born with the best sides of her dual heritage, possessing vigor and high intelligence and appearing as an exotically beautiful, if slightly hairy, woman. (One of Asina's daughters, Juliana, fits this mold).

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Twenty-five years ago, an ambitious young man named Marius Asina was captaining a merchant ship across the Erythraean Sea (the Indian Ocean) to seek trade with the kingdom of Tamilakam (known to Romans as Damirica, and located in modern day Southern India). His ship was blown off course, and put ashore for repairs far south of any known area of the African coastline. Always too bold for his own good, Asina and his men explored the area, pushing inland before stumbling upon the city of Opar. Fearless even in the face of seeing some of his crewmen torn apart and sacrificed to eldritch gods by the city's inhabitants, Asina favorably impressed the city's Sorceress Queen. She chose to breed with Asina rather than kill him.

Several years after the birth of their first child, whom Asina nicknamed Flavia ("blonde"), he convinced the Oparian Queen, whom he had taken to calling Julia, to accompany him back to Massilia. Armed with the fabulous wealth of

Opar, Asina had a villa constructed with privacy and security in mind. The architect and certain construction workers met with lethal "accidents" or disappeared mysteriously thereafter, to protect the villa's many secrets. Here Julia remained isolated, protected and pampered by her loving husband.

Their family grew, although several of their hybrid children were stillborn or died in infancy; interspecies breeding can be unpredictable. The only surviving son, Buteo, can pass for human when clothed, but is a savage brute taking after his mother's ancestry. The humanity of two of the three surviving daughters, Flavia and Decima, would not survive much scrutiny. Juliana, the third (middle) daughter, however, easily passes for human and is exotically beautiful, albeit odd looking. "Julia" died giving birth to Decima, and her body is now mummified and entombed beneath the family's villa, her remains watched over by a dark guardian.

THE RISE OF THE HOUSE OF MARIUS

During this time, the family's wealth, power, and influence grew due to its periodic trading expeditions to Opar. The abundant gold, gems, hides, rare woods and spices of Opar are exchanged for mainly human resources (namely, slaves) from the known world, although books and fine wines are also desirable commodities to Oparians.

Asina's small fleet of ships seldom has the same crews for very long. Asina recruits foreign sailors looking for passage south on the outbound voyages, and hires a new crew looking to go to Massilia on the way back. He sails to Egypt, up



THE VETTING OF MARIUS ASINA

the Nile, docks his fleet, and then heads overland to Berenice, picking up ships and changing crews there before heading far south via a second set of ships to Opar. Crew members are discouraged from asking too many questions and are never allowed to look over the charts or maps. Crew members who ask too many questions, are discovered spreading rumors, or learn a bit too much about these expeditions meet unfortunate accidents at sea or end up being handed over to the Oparians for sacrifice. Only a couple of fanatically loyal men, made up of the few survivors of Asina's original trip to Opar, ever make the entire voyage back and forth. Voyages are generally made every two years.

POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS

Marius Asina's interest in higher office is a defensive action. He is trying to ensure the survival of his children in human society, and the more status he has, the better he can protect them. Buteo, the only surviving son, in particular has become increasingly difficult to control. Asina knows that it is only a matter of time before Buteo must either be sent to live permanently in Opar, or he commits a crime from whose consequences Asina's wealth and influence cannot shield him. Juliana, by contrast, is passably human and betrothed to another prominent Massilian Roman family, and Asina wants to ensure her safety. He may be overestimating Juliana's humanity, but it is possible that she will pass well enough to become a proper Roman wife and mother.

Asina himself is the investigators' secret paymaster. He is paying to have his own reputation water-tested, in anticipation of his try at higher office. However, he has no intention of paying the promised reward if the investigators learn his secrets. Should the investigators, or anyone else for that matter, penetrate his villa's catacombs, he'll attempt to assassinate them should they somehow escape.

During play, the investigators will probe into the family's background, sifting through increasingly lurid rumors and increasingly disturbing evidence of past incidents suggesting that the family may not be entirely human. These clues all ultimately lead, as in the source story, to the crypts beneath the Marius' villa.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Marius Asina: Paterfamilias of House Marius.

"Julia Aquiliana": White Ape Sorceress-Queen of Opar, deceased matriarch of House Marius.

Flavia: Eldest daughter of House Marius, deformed hybrid, secret lover of Quintus Certa, can pass as human when clothed.

Buteo: Only surviving son of House Marius, violent gad-about hybrid, passes for human when clothed.

Juliana: Exotically beautiful middle daughter of House Marius, passes easily as human (even naked), psychotically jealous and violent-tempered.

Decima: Youngest and most even-tempered child of House

Marius; does not pass for human under any circumstances.

Showenge (rendered in Latin as Soenge): Human sorceress, citizen of Opar, servant of the Marius Family.

Varius Scaevola: Trusted seaman in service to House Marius, captain of The Spiral.

Cato Pompilis: Trusted seaman in service to House Marius, captain of The White Sun.

Quintus Certa: Juliana's fiancé, Flavia's lover, Buteo's friend, scion of House Certa. Note: although Certa is not a very aristocratic or Roman sounding name, neither is the family. They are of mixed Greek and African origins.

Zoe the She-Wolf: Former favorite prostitute of Buteo, now quite mad.

Unnamed Child: Deceased infant son of Buteo and Zoe the She-Wolf.

Bestio: Two-year-old hybrid Oparian / Chimpanzee, son of Buteo, lives in the Certas' menagerie with his chimpanzee mother.

Lucius Thallus: Roman lawyer who hires the investigators.

Felix: Menagerie keeper for House Certa.

Lucia: Former servant of House Certa, once savaged by Juliana.

Ianos the Elder: Greek scholar, former tutor of Juliana.

Shadrach of Tyre: Architect who vanished after designing the Marius villa.

Jeshua: Architect, son of Shadrach.

Paulius Arbus: Deceased plumber who worked on the drains at the Marius villa.

Melanthios Apollodoros: Wealthy gem merchant, enemy of Marius Buteo.

STARTING THE INVESTIGATION

The investigators are ideally from a region other than Massilia, and possess a reputation for discretion. Ideally, one of them should be an experienced "finder." If they have a patron, the initial contact with Lucius Thallus comes through their patron.

The investigators are hired by one Lucius Thallus, a scribe and lawyer. He is a scrivener of contracts, a keeper of records, and an intermediary, trained in oratory. Lucius is representing a concerned party who wishes to remain anonymous and whose identity he will not reveal. If somehow forced to do so, his contact is another such fellow in Massilia, another intermediary who only knows of another cut-out. Thallus keeps tabs on the investigators for a day or so after they take the assignment, to make certain they are looking into Marius Asina and not trying to identify their anonymous employer. If he suspects they are too focused on discovering their





employer's true identity, Thallus tells them that they are in breach of their agreement and that their services are no longer required.

The investigators are hired to perform a rather common task in Roman power circles: to look for skeletons in Marius Asina's closet. (In this case, there literally is one). Lucius Thallus explains to them everything that is publicly known about Marius Asina (see "Common Knowledge and Rumors About Marius Asina, Provincial Senator of Massilia, as told by Lucius Thallus"), and asks them to dig up any dirt they can find on him and report back. There are many rumors, some of them disturbing, about Marius Asina.

The investigators are given a budget of 2,000 sesterii to travel to Massilia and see what they can discover. If they are able to come up with something *concrete*, irrefutable, and damaging (not just nasty rumors or unprovable stories), they will be given a bonus of 10,000 sesterii. Lucius emphasizes that to get the bonus, the evidence must be the sort that would stand up in court. While vetting a candidate for high office isn't unusual, this is a very large sum of money for such a task. This should pique the investigators' suspicions, as it suggests that the stakes, for someone, are very high.

Lucius Thallus declines to speculate on whether the ultimately interested party is legitimately looking for dirt to use against Asina, or if an ally of Asina (or Asina himself) is "water-testing" his reputation to see how well it withstands scrutiny before formally submitting himself for higher office (The latter is in fact the case).

COMMON KNOWLEDGE AND RUMORS ABOUT MARIUS ASINA, PROVINCIAL SENATOR OF MASSILIA, AS TOLD BY LUCIUS THALLUS

- ☞ Marius Asina is a very wealthy man in his early fifties. He is possibly the wealthiest man in Massilia, although he is not given to ostentatious displays.
- ☞ He and his family live in a rather modest, but well-defended, villa at the outskirts of Massilia.
- ☞ He owns a small fleet of ships based out of Massilia. This fleet is likely too small to have created the wealth that he possesses.
- ☞ He is known for trading slaves to an unknown buyer(s) in return for rare gems, woods, spices, and furs from far off lands. His fleet makes expeditions only every other year or so. Where exactly he goes, and how he gets there, is a closely guarded secret, but he is believed to travel down the Nile and overland to Berenice, and thence south to parts unknown, picking up a second fleet in Berenice.
- ☞ Asina is a native of Rome who moved to Massilia and brought himself up from low origins as an able-bodied seaman in his youth.
- ☞ As a provincial Senator, he is a respected citizen of Massilia, but has little temporal power. Rumor has it that he is seeking to be elevated to the rank of one of three "firsts" of Massilia, which would give him real, temporal power, following a recent death. He and his family are also Roman citizens.
- ☞ He is accounted a skilled mediator and negotiator, and has brought political adversaries together in the past to act in the common good of Massilia.
- ☞ Marius Asina is a widower. His wife, Julia Aquiliana, died about twelve years ago in childbirth. She was a recluse, who always stayed in the family compound due to illness. She is said to have been a noblewoman from the Portus Cale region, brought back to Massilia on one of Marius Asina's voyages.
- ☞ Asina and Julia have four surviving children. There are stories that two other sons died shortly after childbirth. He has an adult son, Buteo (age 20) and three daughters, Flavia (age 22), Juliana (age 16), and Decima (age 12).
- ☞ Juliana is a great beauty and has recently become betrothed to one Quintus Certa, a scion of another wealthy Massilian ship-owning family of mixed Greek-African heritage.
- ☞ Flavia is unmarried, reportedly very homely, and is never seen in public. Most people find it odd that a match has been made for Juliana, her younger sister, before her.
- ☞ Decima is reportedly mentally deficient and never seen in public.
- ☞ The only real blot on the family's honor seems to be Buteo. He is, by all accounts, an over-privileged thug who frequents the taverns and brothels of Massilia. He, along with a group of wealthy young friends (including his sister's fiancé), gets into frequent trouble. Buteo has been accused of committing numerous drunken assaults, frequently destroying property, and raping slaves, prostitutes, and others of low status (of both genders) since the age of twelve. Thus far these have all been private matters, with his father managing to settle the charges out of court.

UNEQUAL JUSTICE, A.K.A. WHAT YOU CAN AND CAN'T GET AWAY WITH AS A RICH KID

Keepers should also understand why Buteo Marius has not been executed by the Roman authorities, despite his many undeniable offenses. He is responsible for numerous bar fights (some causing serious injury), street brawls, malicious damage to private property, rape and other sadistic acts toward slave-caste prostitutes, and miscellaneous other thug-ish behaviors.

Crimes under Roman law subdivide into two categories: public and private. Private crimes are prosecuted, if at all, by the aggrieved parties. Crimes against slaves or damage to other forms of private property are therefore prosecuted, if at all, by the owner. If prosecuted, the complainants must swear out charges in writing, and could be fined themselves if their charges are not upheld. Charges can also only be brought through a Roman citizen, who also had to swear to the charges as a second.

The prospect of fines and / or punishment flowing either way on such cases encourages settlements between the parties. The typical bar fight, slave abuse, or any “he said, she said” matter is, as a result, typically resolved privately through apologies and / or compensation.

Public crimes, by contrast, are prosecuted and punished by the state. These include things like counterfeiting, perju-

ry, adultery, rape of a non-slave, and murder. Lesser public offenses would be punished on “an eye for an eye” basis (*Lex Talionis*) (or flogging). The punishment for more serious things (including the rape of a high status victim, murder, arson, and theft) was death. There was no prison system, with jails only being used to hold someone pending trial or awaiting execution. Trials were dispensed with if the perpetrator was caught red-handed. Members of the senatorial and equestrian classes, however, would generally be exiled for a period of years instead of executed, except for extremely serious crimes (e.g., murder of someone of high status). A Roman citizen could not be flogged, chained, or executed by a provincial court, but Massilia is considered part of Rome for this purpose.

BUTEO'S CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Buteo knows what he can and cannot get away with, given his father's penchant for paying out settlements to aggrieved parties. He is reasonably smart, but prone to fits of uncontrollable, animalistic rage and impulse. So far, he has not done anything that has made him face a state-run prosecution. As long as his father's wealth continues (and there is no reason to believe that it won't), he should be fine until he goes too far. He is not a thief, arsonist, or defrauder, so he will only likely to come to the attention of the public prosecutor if he murders someone or rapes the wrong person. If this seems about to happen, Buteo's wealthy friends try to spirit him off



before things go too far.

Asina knows that Buteo has pushed things about as far as they can go, however. This is the whole reason why Asina is considering a push for higher office, to protect his semi-human offspring. Asina loves his children, and is trying to help them deal with their unique challenges in human society. It is his entire *raison d'être*, and he has spent vast sums of money trying to do so. Asina is insane, and this obsessive delusion is his insanity.

Deep down, Asina knows that Buteo is likely doomed, no matter what he does. He wants to integrate Juliana into mainstream human society and protect her as his primary goal. High political position and status would help ensure this, but first, he needs to test his own reputation through third parties, and then do what he must to seal any holes. Hence his hiring of the investigators, through several cut-outs.

ARRIVING IN MASSILIA

The investigators must travel to Massilia from Rome. This is best accomplished by sea, which takes about seven days in good weather. The client is covering the cost of transit. Since they have a month to report back to Lucius Thallus in Rome, this gives them roughly two weeks to conduct their investigation of Marius Asina.

Once the investigators arrive in Massilia, they are on their own. They have been asked to perform a discrete inquiry, so they are not provided with a guide, letters of introduction, or other visible signs of support. They have a substantial budget, coming out of their 2,000 sesterii base retention, to cover bribes and other expenses. The investigators are expected to act with total autonomy to accomplish their mission. They will likely be conducting interviews, offering bribes, following leads, and generally doing a great deal of leg work.

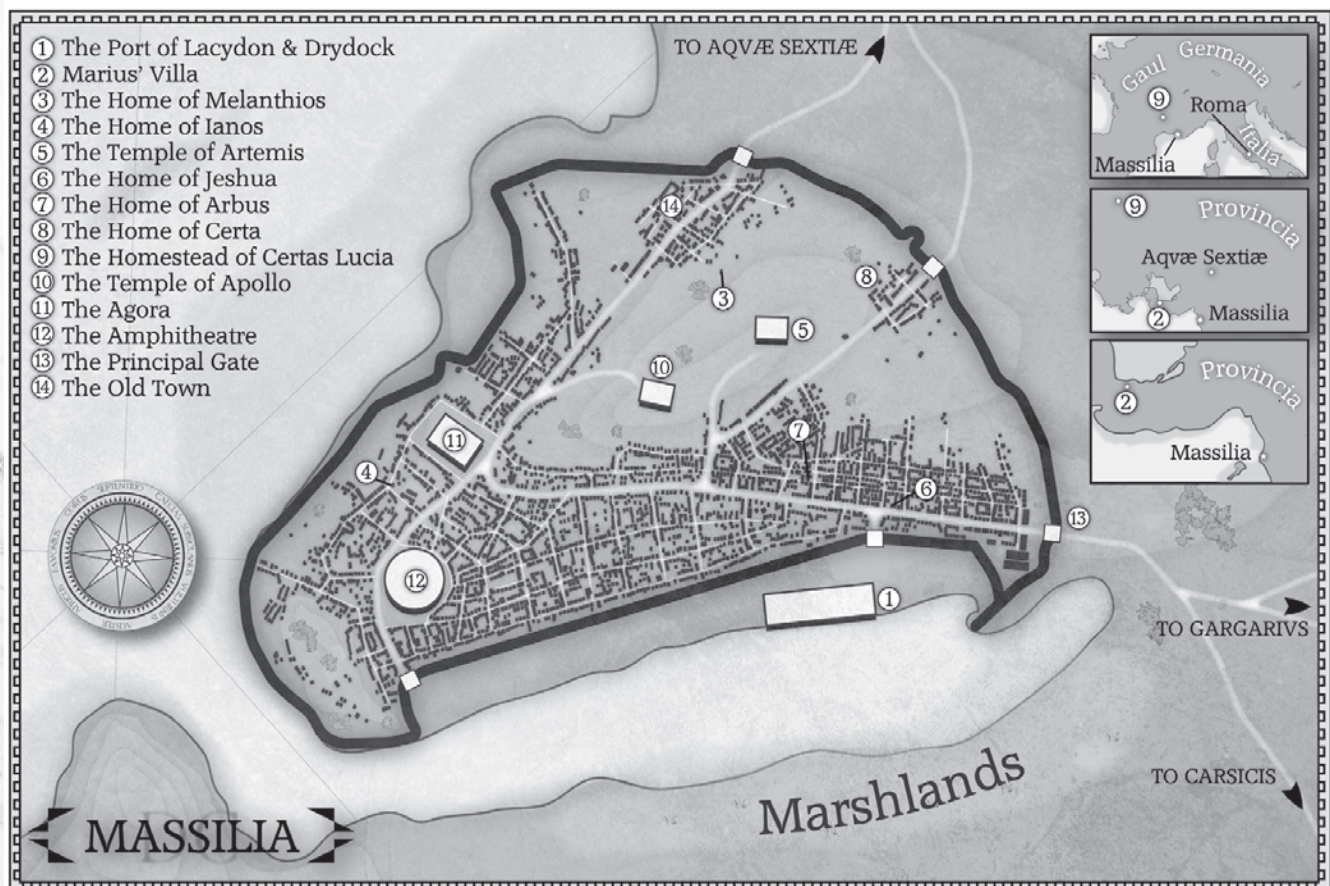
LIKELY LINES OF INVESTIGATION HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED INTO THREE TYPES:

Hearsay and Observation: Commonly available knowledge obtainable through general rumor-mongering or direct observation.

Secrets: Non-public information obtainable through bribes, threats, chicanery, etc.

Exploration: Obtained through actual infiltration into the Marius' villa.

Potential reactions from the members of the Marius family, which will vary depending on the member or the topic poked into, are described separately.



HEARSAY

The investigators can easily confirm the accuracy of the information that they were given by Lucius Thallus (although note that some of it is inaccurate, particularly Decima's allegedly diminished mental capacity). The following additional information can be obtained through the general rumor mill, friendly conversations with locals, and possibly the cost of a drink:

- ✦ Both the Greek and Roman factions in Massilia have a generally favorable opinion of Marius Asina. The Romans like him better, since he is one of them, but the Greeks do not hate him. He is said to be fair in civic matters, a political pragmatist, and he usually avoids making enemies. Some people may express the opinion that he is affirmatively averse to making political enemies.
- ✦ The investigators will not find anyone, at any level of society, who has ever laid eyes upon Asina's late wife, Julia. It is commonly known that she died in childbirth giving birth to his youngest daughter, Decima, about twelve years ago.
- ✦ The Marius family does not typically buy household slaves or hire servants, especially since the death of Julia. The household staff is unusually small for a man of his rumored wealth, perhaps twenty or so.
- ✦ Marius is known for hiring tough Legion veterans as bodyguards. He prefers former auxiliaries trained in the use of the bow.
- ✦ It is said that the household slaves and servants of the House of Marius are all extremely well cared for. No one can recall one ever having left the Marius family's service.
- ✦ People say that Marius Asina does not hire locals as crew for his trading voyages, ever. This has been the case since the first such voyage, when only a couple of crewmen returned with Asina, his new wife, and their eldest daughter Flavia after an absence of about three years. This is a rare sore spot in his local reputation; he is believed to pay his crew handsomely, and more people would like to work on his ships.
- ✦ If the House of Marius is engaged in side businesses, no one knows what they are. He refuses to entertain any sort of business partnership, as well. Details of his trade routes, trading partners, and contacts are closely guarded secrets, as if Asina were a control freak who does not trust anyone to help in his business affairs.
- ✦ The Marius family paid a *very* sizable dowry to the Certa family in anticipation of the upcoming wed-

ABOUT THE CITY OF MASSILIA

Prior to the Roman Civil War (circa 50 B.C.), Massilia was an independent Greek colony and city-state, but allied with Rome. It is a major port, and its population at the time of Caesar and Augustus is estimated to have been on the order of 20,000 people—one of the larger cities in the empire.

Massilia sided with Pompey in the Roman Civil War, but after a naval battle in 49 B.C., lost its independence and was annexed to Rome. It was treated leniently by Caesar, however, and although there is a military garrison and governor, the people generally govern themselves under Roman Senate supervision.

After the Civil War, Romans began moving into and establishing themselves in Massilia, pushing into the territory of the traditionally Greek ruling families. This created a politicized ethnic divide, with a Greek old guard remembering fondly the days of independence and a Roman new guard banding together and often doubting the loyalty of their Greek neighbors to the Empire.

Power follows wealth in Massilia, and the city's economy is driven by the port, although there is some agricultural industry in the hinterlands. It is both a busy fishing port, exporting seafood to Rome, and a busy trading harbor, with materials and slaves from Gaul and points north and east being traded for Roman wine and goods. The wealthy families of Massilia own and operate ships, warehouses, and markets. Often these families also own real estate (rural and urban) and businesses (such as shops, marine supply, food preservation, ship building and repair, and houses of entertainment).

NOTE: The Marius family, as the investigators may learn, does not follow this pattern. Although they are reputedly very wealthy, they own only a couple of ocean-going ships, and their holdings are not diversified into side businesses or real estate. Marius Asina is reputable, but does not have a large patronage network, instead winning favor by sponsoring various public works. Also strange is the fact that Marius Asina himself still leads his own, biennial trading voyages.

ding of Asina's daughter Juliana to their son, Quintus. Estimates on the street range from 10,000 to 100,000 sestertii (the actual amount was a staggering 85,000 sestertii).

Snooping Around the Docks

Presently, there are only two ships in the Marius family's fleet (the White Sun and the Spiral). They are currently hauled out in dry-dock, hidden away and under guard in a warehouse-like building on the waterfront. Investigators managing to get a look at them discover that each is a small, coastwise vessel with both sail and oars, very well made, of unusual design and shallow draft. (Keeper's information: They are akin to Viking longboats, designed with the help of advanced Oparian engineering). They are not designed for ocean exploration, but to stick close to shore and sail inland up rivers. Each has only a modest cargo capacity. The ship taken on the initial voyage was much larger, and had below deck storage, but was sold over a decade ago (whereabouts unknown).





A FEW WORDS ON PROSTITUTION

The investigators will likely talk to several prostitutes during their inquiries, so Keepers should understand the legalities and economics behind the prostitution trade for context.

Prostitution in Roman-era Massilia is legal, regulated, licensed, and tolerated, but not particularly honorable (either on the part of the patrons or the prostitutes). Some prostitutes are self-employed, and these are often better off and have a higher class of clientele. Most, however, work out of brothels or taverns (often barmaids doing double duty) and are overseen by pimps. The former are typically either freeborn or freed women who have fallen into dire financial straits or have managed to elevate themselves out of a brothel (lupanarium, or “den of she-wolves”) through patronage. They can sometimes become quite rich through cultivating wealthy patrons, and can reach a sort of courtesan status. The latter are typically slaves, and their lot is one of trying to survive.

In a busy seaport like Massilia, there are many prostitutes, of all varieties. Many leading families have diversified their business activities and run a profitable prostitution ring or brothel as a side business, either openly or indirectly (by running taverns or other business that tolerate prostitutes).

Roman law treats slaves (including slaves employed as prostitutes) as property. Rape, sadly, against a slave is only a crime if it damages the goods. Even then, it is considered a private legal matter between the owner and the perpetrator.

Snooping Near the Marius Family’s Villa

Investigators casually exploring the area around the Marius family villa, or trying to find other real estate owned by Asina, discover some oddities. First, the villa lies out in the country far away from the shoreline, about four leagues (about five and a half miles or 9 kilometers) north-west of Massilia. This is unusual; although several other Senatorial families have agricultural property inland, most make their homes either near the shore or on high ground above the city. Second, the villa (with appurtenant farmland) is the only piece of real property that the Marius family has, other than the storage house for their ships. That is odd, as wealth in this era is generally held long term as real estate.

Third, the villa is small, isolated, and secure. There are no tenant farmers, and the entire compound is surrounded by a 10’ high stone wall, enclosing a couple of acres of farmland and orchards. All additional land owned by the family stretches along the road and behind their walled villa. This is kept forested, and except for a few grain fields, un-cleared. The estate looks to be self-sufficient for about twenty people. Apart from outbuildings like hay barns, cottages and sheds, there is only one main building, a small but very comfortable and apparently well-tended two-story villa.

Investigators conducting an extended surveillance of

the villa (which requires 2D3 hours) determine there are between six and eight adult servants (male and female) charged with a variety of tasks such as tending the villa, the farm, and surrounding fields. There are also eight adult men (always in pairs or larger groups), armed with bows and long daggers. Investigators making a successful Spot Hidden can determine that these men seem to be in their early 40s and have a military bearing; those making an Empire roll realize that they are from Syria (retired auxiliaries). The investigators will also spot two older men, well dressed and waited on by the staff, who seem to be living there. These are Varius Scaevola and Cato Pompilis, two trusted seamen who are the only remaining survivors from Asina’s original trip to Opar. Today, they captain the family’s Massilia-based trade ships, the White Sun and the Spiral.

Lastly, the investigators may spot (with a successful Luck check) the three members of the Marius family who go out in public: Asina, Buteo, and Juliana. The investigators will not see any other extended relatives. There are no children, no side businesses, no religious shrines, and no ostentatious displays of wealth. Marius Asina is either very humble or very concerned with his privacy. The lack of an extended family clinging to a wealthy paterfamilias is extremely unusual.

Extensive snooping around the villa’s perimeter—needing to go about a quarter of a mile into the forest behind the villa, away from the road—reveals a large and well-designed cistern and aqueduct system. It leads down from a nearby stream to the northwest and feeds into a subterranean plumbing system. To the northeast, feeding into the stream downstream from the intake, is a sewer outflow heading away from the villa. It is narrow and filthy, and stinks, but is big enough for someone to crawl through on his or her belly. For more on where the sewer pipe leads, Keepers should see “The Crypts under the Villa”.

The Back Door

There is a very well hidden tunnel running between the villa’s water inflow and sewage outflow pipes. It leads due north from the villa’s underground level, ultimately exiting in a well hidden and camouflaged hatch a quarter of a mile to the north (detectable only by a critical Spot Hidden success). This is the “back door” that allows the less human members of the Marius family to sneak out and get some air, without being seen. Only Showenge, the Marius family, and Quintus Certa know where this is.

The Marius Family’s Arms

Investigators visiting the estate grounds or either of the family’s ships will see the Marius family’s arms. They are painted on the ships, flying on a pennant above the family’s villa, emblazoned on the livery of the family’s guards, and worn on rings (by the men) or locketts (by the women) of the family. They are a spiral superimposed on a white sun. Investigators making a successful Occult or Cthulhu Mythos roll realize that this symbol is reminiscent of a royal crest of fabled Atlantis. Investigators may also recall that the two ships owned by the Marius family are called the White Sun and the Spiral.

SECRETS

Investigators digging deeper into the secrets about particular family members can gain more embarrassing information. Gaining this information should require the investigators do some snooping, spying, bribing, rolling successful Persuade checks, or other such clandestine activities. Much of this activity, even if it gets back to the Marius family, does not provoke a reaction. There are a few exceptions to this rule of non-reaction, and these, along with the most damaging information, are specified and discussed in their own specific sections.

Secrets About Marius Asina

- ✠ Most people feel that Asina has shown profound grace amidst numerous taxing situations: his wife's untimely death, his wastrel son, and his odd and unmarriageable two daughters.
- ✠ He has done very well managing the pending nuptials of his middle daughter, Juliana, into the Certa family.
- ✠ People predict that Asina will be selected for the open vacancy among the Firsts of the city.
- ✠ He is considered "nouveau riche", given that he earned his wealth through infrequent yet highly lucrative trading voyages. While he claims to travel to the far away kingdom of Tamilakam, most doubt this, as he never returns with silk, incense, or appropriate spices.
- ✠ Where exactly he goes on his voyages is not known, but some claim that he travels far to the south of the known African coastline. Asina does not discuss this, as he wishes to maintain an exclusive trading arrangement.

Secrets about Marius Buteo

- ✠ Buteo is not a popular figure in Massilia. If the investigators quietly ask anyone what the worst thing about the Marius family is, or the biggest obstacle that Asina faces to high office is, the consensus answer is "Buteo." He is a brute, a drunk, and a thug who (thus far) has been successfully bought out of numerous legal troubles by his father. He and his gang, of young, rich toughs (including his best friend and sister's fiancé, Quintus Certa) brawl, drink, and debauch their way across the city on a nightly basis. People are fed up with him, and there are rumors that his next offense will be dealt with harshly (money or no money) by the courts.
- ✠ Buteo and his gang are nightly callers on every type of prostitute across Massilia. Buteo's appetites in particular are insatiable, and he frequents several prostitutes every evening. It is difficult to find one who has *not* had an encounter with Buteo in Massil-

ia. Everyone charges Buteo triple the normal rate because he is rough, often slapping, biting, and pulling hair. Any of the prostitutes can tell the investigators that Buteo insists that they wear a blindfold and face away from him (*more ferarum*, meaning "in the manner of wild beasts"). None of the prostitutes that the investigators can easily find has ever seen Buteo naked, as a result.

- ✠ The investigators might inquire whether there have ever been any illegitimate children conceived by Buteo, given his proclivities. This is a subject that people are very reluctant to talk about. Significant bribes are required, and those who might know (prostitutes and their pimps) are noticeably afraid of Buteo. Investigators who persist in this line of questioning are



Following are some sample NPCs that the investigators can question while researching the Marius Family.

THE GREEKS

- ✠ **Agatha:** A young, beautiful, single woman who runs a clothing store catering to Massilia's elite, and who is on gossiping terms with most of the young, rich women in town.
- ✠ **Eunike:** A plump, middle-aged female surgeon who is reputed to be the best in Massilia at setting bones and stitching up wounds.
- ✠ **Herodion:** A weather-beaten, somewhat corrupt man, a middle-aged customs official at the port, knowledgeable about who owns what in Massilia.
- ✠ **Kyrillos:** An elderly, rail-thin, kind man originally from Athens, who runs a lyceum for wealthy scions of Massilian families.

THE ROMANS

- ✠ **Vibius Petronius:** A young, ambitious Roman man, who has only been in Massilia for a few years; the son of a senator and the public prosecutor for Massilia.
- ✠ **Appius Rulianus:** A short, tough, and grizzled former legionary who has worked as a bouncer for several of the nicer watering holes in town.
- ✠ **Petronia:** A severe, prematurely aged freedwoman who runs a popular mess kitchen near the docks, drawing customers from all walks of life. She hears just about every rumor in town as a result.
- ✠ **Octavia:** A physically fit, fortyish woman, who dresses exquisitely; a former prostitute and dancer who now acts as a procurer (lena) for high-end courtesans on behalf of her clients.



reluctantly told that they should talk to “Zoe.” Zoe left the trade about a year ago, and joined the Temple of Artemis as an acolyte. She was Buteo’s favorite by far, and he flew into a rage when he discovered that she had left her brothel and joined the temple.

- ✦ If the investigators ask if Buteo takes prostitutes anywhere special, or has any (other) unusual kinks, a further modest bribe is required. They learn that he periodically takes those that he is very fond of to the menagerie cages of House Certa.

Secrets about the House Marius Girls: Flavia, Juliana, and Decima

- ✦ Little is known about Flavia (the oldest) and Decima (the youngest), outside of the villa’s servants. They have never been reliably seen in public, and do not socialize. They are said to be unattractive people, with large features, long arms, and powerful builds. They are rumored to dress very modestly. Although most women of their rank receive some education, no tutors or educators have taught either Flavia or Decima. This is a topic of conversation among the (predominantly Greek) educators of the city, especially since Juliana has received an unusually good education. Her tutor was Ianos the Elder, the best available in Massilia. He attests that she was a bright student, but was given to fits of rage and petulance.
- ✦ Juliana is accounted as attractive, if exotic. She is a large, tall woman, again with long arms, naturally white-blond hair and large, expressive eyes. Her figure is very shapely and well-formed. She actively socializes, usually in the company of her father but more recently with her fiancé, Quintus Certa. She is considered bright and well-mannered, and very chaste. Those who know her well mention that she is quick-tempered, however.
- ✦ One story known by a few, and shared with the investigators through critical success on a skill check or a bribe of at least 100 sesterii, describes Juliana’s temper in more graphic detail. A few years ago, Juliana got into a fight at a dinner party with one of Quintus Certa’s household servants, a pretty young girl named Lucia. The servant touched her without permission, while trying to hold her hair back when Juliana was getting sick after too much wine. Juliana flew into a rage and beat the servant to within an inch of her life. Lucia was (supposedly) generously paid off as an apology, and has since married and moved to Raetia. (“Moved to Raetia” is the well-spread lie known to most. A select few know otherwise, as discussed in a separate section discussing Lucia).
- ✦ No one knows who attends to Juliana’s beauty needs. She does not get fitted for dresses, appear at public baths, or have her hair done. Most suspect that she

has a personal body slave living within the family’s villa who tends to such needs.

Secrets about “Julia Aquiliana”, Marius Asina’s Late Wife

- ✦ The investigators can find no one—and that means no one—outside of the Marius family and their very small inner circle (Showenge, Varius Scaevola, and Cato Pompilis), who had ever laid eyes on Julia Aquiliana. She was never seen in public, and her existence is more inferred from the presence of children than the verifiable testimony of anyone who actually knew or saw her.
- ✦ Persons in Massilia actually from Portus Cale, in the province of Gallaecia (western Iberian peninsula) scoff at the idea that she was really from there. None of that region’s nobility has that name, or bears any resemblance to the unusual features of the Marius children.

Secrets about the Marius Household Servants

- ✦ Trying to find someone who knows of a former slave or servant who once worked at the Marius’ villa may turn up a name or two. However, when following up on any of these leads, these people all turn out to be dead. Those who did not die while still working for the Marius family all met with “unfortunate accidents” (lost at sea, killed in a fire, vanished and never found). Investigators should quickly realize that there is an uncomfortable pattern.
- ✦ There are no public records of the current members of the Marius household. This is odd. The house has also manumitted no freedmen or freedwomen (through emancipation of former slaves), which is very odd.
- ✦ Current workers approached in public are taciturn and almost immune to bribery. Speaking with some of them (other than the captains and Showenge), more discretely, is difficult, but not impossible (see “Interviewing the Marius Servants”). Current workers consist of a few older household servants of both genders, but no children; the two ships’ captains, childless bachelors who have been with the Marius Asina for decades (Varius Scaevola and Cato Pompilis) and who live in considerable comfort; and one midwife / body servant (Showenge).
- ✦ Showenge is an elderly sub-Saharan African woman, and a fearsome and fearless shrew. People make warding gestures when her name is brought up, or when she is occasionally seen in the marketplace, as most consider her to be some kind of witch. (Keeper’s information: Showenge is a priestess of the White Apes’ dark Atlantean gods. She was born and raised in Opar, and was the handmaiden of “Julia Aquiliana”).

THE VETTING OF MARIUS ASINA

Secrets about Quintus Certa

- ❧ Quintus Certa is part of Buteo's gang of spoiled brats, running amok through the taverns and brothels of Massilia. He is in line to lead House Certa and a complete, utter, debased pervert (according to both common street rumor and members of his own household).
- ❧ Rumors (obtainable via large bribes to the Certa family's servants) suggest that Quintus Certa has had a tryst with Flavia, his fiancée's sister, despite her reported misshapenness and status as a shut-in.

THE SUBTLE ENEMY, MELANTHIOS APOLLODOROS

When speaking to merchants who have had dealings with Marius Asina, the investigators can dig up some useful bits of information. Asina's business associates, merchants who sell him goods to trade or buy the items with which he returns to port, have a vested interest in staying on Marius' good side. However, he has made a few enemies, or rather, his son Buteo has made a few enemies whom Asina mistakenly believes that he has soothed. Chief among these is Melanthios Apollodoros, a member of the city's Greek elite. With a sizable bribe (200 sesterii) and guarantees of confidentiality, the merchants tell the investigators that this is the man they should be speaking with.

Melanthios has plenty of reasons to hate Buteo. His son, Arion, had his legs broken by Buteo a year earlier in a bar brawl, and his daughter, Ania, was attacked by him in an alley three months later (the proud father refuses to discuss specific details of Ania's ordeal). He settled the claims against Buteo out of court with Asina, as many others have, for a large sum of money. Even then, Melanthios won't speak out against the Marius family without an oath of secrecy and a meeting at least a league outside of Massilia, where no one will overhear or (theoretically) see him meeting with the investigators.

Melanthios does not have a personal axe to grind with Asina, but feels that Buteo is an inhuman fiend who needs to be killed. He thinks that Asina really should disown him, and does not understand why he continues to tolerate Buteo's outrageous behaviors. While he can confirm much of what the investigators may already know, there are a few new bits of information he can offer:

- ❧ Who House Marius trades with is a mystery. Their ships leave with slaves, books, and wine, and bring back untold wealth in gems, rare woods, and exotic pelts. There is almost always near 100% crew turnover between voyages; only Asina and the two old salts that have been with him since his first voyage decades ago ever come back to Massilia. The slaves he acquires for these trips, moreover, are nothing special; he buys the dregs of humanity, not skilled tradesmen nor comely youths.

- ❧ Melanthios is a trader of precious stones. He brokers and distributes some of the gems for House Marius, usually sending them right to Rome or other large cities. He can attest that they are of high quality.

- ❧ A few years ago, he questioned a drunken sailor that had joined one of House Marius' crews on the return leg of his voyage. The man claimed to have joined the crew of The Spiral in Berenice, relieving a crew of Nubian sailors for the return journey overland to the Nile and thence to Massilia. The man said that he had overheard some of the Nubian sailors whisper that they had just returned from somewhere called "Opar", far to the south of Aethiopia. These sailors made superstitious signs to ward off evil spirits after mentioning the name. By the next morning, however, the sailor who had spoken to Melanthios had vanished without a trace.

- ❧ Melanthios made discrete inquiries, but no one had ever heard of such a place as "Opar", nor does it appear on any maps or charts.

If the investigators ask Melanthios why he settled his claims against Buteo out of court with Asina, he tells them that people who make trouble for the Marius family often vanish or are found dead.

Should the investigators be careless, they may be spotted speaking with Melanthios, or might possibly let slip that they met with him. Should this happen and word get back to Buteo, he wreaks a terrible revenge. He ambushes Melanthios, his son Arion, or his daughter Ania outside of their home at twilight and murders them. The body of whatever victim Buteo kills is found rent limb from limb, with their eyes and genitals gouged and bitten, as though the victim had been killed by some sort of powerful animal (SAN loss 0/1d3 for anyone stumbling across the body). It is possible, if investigators are keeping a close eye on Melanthios and his family, that the investigators may interrupt and possibly prevent this attack or quickly stumble upon its aftermath. An investigator making a successful Natural History roll realizes that these injuries are peculiarly consistent with an attack from a large ape.

RESEARCHING MYSTERIOUS OPAR

With the name "Opar" in their possession, the investigators may be able to learn something about that legendary place. Investigators making a successful Cthulhu Mythos or Occult roll recall some of the stories of the lost civilization. Otherwise, one man in Massilia does own an ancient scroll which speaks of fabled Opar, none other than Juliana's old tutor, Ianos the Elder. If questioned about Opar, he offers to sell the investigators the scroll (badly damaged by time and mold) for 250 sesterii. He will not speak of Opar, or even say the name aloud, warning that dark and ancient gods watch over such places. If the investigators make their Cthulhu Mythos or Occult rolls, or obtain the scroll from



Ianos, they receive the information contained in “Summary of Research on the Lost City of Opar”.

SPEAKING WITH ZOE AT THE TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS

The priestesses at the Temple of Artemis are not particularly helpful, at first. It is common knowledge that they take in abused women on occasion, and their unhelpfulness should suggest that this is why they are looking after Zoe the She-Wolf. The priestesses do not even initially admit that any such person is part of their community. The investigators must make a successful Persuade, Fast Talk, or Status roll to be allowed access to Zoe, or resort to some form of skullduggery. Female investigators who seem genuinely concerned for the welfare of others, and anyone willing to make sizable (100 sestertii or more) donations to the temple, should be given bonuses (+5%—+20%) on any skill checks.

Zoe is not well; her mind is broken beyond hope. She spends her time performing simple, repetitive tasks around the temple, while talking and giggling to herself. If the priestesses are being cooperative, they can relate that Zoe came to them, heavily pregnant, about a year ago, asking for sanctuary. She feared for her safety and the safety of her child, as she knew Marius Asina would not approve of her, a mere prostitute, bearing Buteo a child. This struck the priestesses as a bit odd (prostitutes giving birth was hardly uncommon), but Zoe seemed genuinely terrified and in need of help. Soon afterwards, she gave birth to a “deformed” child—ugly, large, and covered in whitish fur. Zoe nearly died from the delivery, but slowly recovered, although she was now completely mad. The priestesses decided that the best thing to do was allow the infant to die of exposure.

After the birth, that odd Nubian woman who works for

the Marius family, Showenge, came asking about Zoe and her baby. They told her most of the truth: Zoe lives and her child was a boy, born terribly deformed and allowed to die. They told her that they had thrown the child’s body into the sea. However, in fact, they buried it in the temple courtyard. The following day, the temple was given a sizable sum of money to provide for Zoe’s care; they assume that it was the Marius family, although it came through an intermediary.

Should the investigators disinter the child’s body, which the priestesses will not allow, barring a mammoth bribe (500 sestertii) or some form of coercion or skullduggery, the results are shocking. The body has been unnaturally slow to decay, but is mostly skeletal. The bones are too thick and heavy; the skull looks more like that of a baboon or other largish ape than a human infant, and white fur continues to cling to withered flesh. SAN loss 0/1.

The Ramblings of Zoe

While Zoe is not capable of having an actual conversation or answer questions, below is a telling selection of her babbling. Zoe says “what”, not “who”, when referring to the baby’s father. The investigators may wonder what she meant by the reference to the baby’s “brother”, unless they visit the Certas’ menagerie at some point and piece it together for themselves.

Zoe The Former She-Wolf Babbles While She Sweeps

The baby [giggles]? You know that he makes everyone wear a blindfold and look away, right? Well, not me, at least not the last time. A woman should know what her baby’s father is, right? [Giggles]. It makes sense now. Perfect sense [giggles]. He still takes care of me, you know. How do you think the priestesses afford to clothe and feed me? No, he still loves me [giggles]. It’s too bad that the baby died; he would have liked to meet his brother.

INTERVIEWING THE MARIUS SERVANTS

The various rank-and-file household servants of the Marius family are an interesting lot. They are all middle aged or older, and unmarried; no children live at the Marius estate. Each is a freedman or woman who has been with the family for decades, kept in good comfort and well-paid. The guards of the household are tough, mustered out Syrian auxiliaries whose children (if any) are grown. None of them know anything about Opar, its inhabitants, or the dark gods worshipped there.

The servants occasionally wander into town for entertainment, to do some shopping, or to visit a temple. (Except for Showenge, they are not cultists). Investigators trying to speak with them discover that these servants think the world of Marius Asina, finding him to be generous and kind. They are not interested in bribes, so getting information out of them is difficult. However, with tact and a successful

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON THE LOST CITY OF OPAR

Opar is rumored to be an ancient city somewhere far in the south of the African continent, a colony of the fallen Empire of Atlantis. Legend has it that Opar is a fabulous city of marble, resplendent with jewels and rich in rare spices and woods. It is said to be populated by intelligent but savage, sorcery-wielding, white-furred ape-men. The Oparians are described as displaying a great deal of sexual dimorphism. The females are more gracile and appear more human, while the males are huge, brutish, and gorilla-like. They are ruled by a Sorceress-Queen, and sacrifice enslaved humans to dark Atlantean gods, chief among them a deity called the Black Toad, Ssathoqua. The city’s symbol is one of legendary Atlantis, a labyrinthine spiral imposed on a white sun.

THE VETTING OF MARIUS ASINA

Persuade check, they might be willing to share some “harmless” gossip:

- ✠ They (privately) think that most of his children are spoiled, violent, over-privileged brats, especially Buteo, who is a brute and a pig.
- ✠ Juliana is the most respectable, and usually decent enough, but has a nasty, violent temper.
- ✠ Flavia is “slow” and “deformed”, always wearing a veil when outside of the family’s second floor private rooms.
- ✠ Decima (the youngest) is “a sweet girl”, friendly and respectful. She is also “deformed”, wears a veil, and is rarely seen outside of the family’s private rooms. They dispute the rumors that she is mentally challenged; she is actually quite bright.
- ✠ No one has left the service of the Marius family in a decade; the pay is that good.
- ✠ No one except Showenge attends to the personal needs of the Marius children.
- ✠ There is a second floor of the villa where the children live, and where no one is allowed to go, other than the family and Showenge.
- ✠ The last servant who entered the second floor by mistake was a housemaid named Sylvia. She was dismissed so quickly that no one had a chance to see her off. She was gone, just like that. (Keeper’s Note: All attempts to locate Sylvia fail, as she never left the estate alive, and her body was absorbed by the Guardian of the Crypt).
- ✠ All of the current staff was brought on right after the villa was constructed, two decades ago.
- ✠ No one ever saw the matriarch of the family; she lived in the family’s private rooms and never came out. Julia was extremely concerned with her privacy, according to Marius Asina.
- ✠ The villa was constructed at a rumored great expense by Shadrach of Tyre, an architect who designed many of the public buildings and monuments in Massilia.

The following gossip is obtained only through coercion, getting a servant very drunk, or making a critical success on a Persuade check:

- ✠ Buteo may have fathered a child a few years ago with his favorite prostitute, Zoe.
- ✠ Quintus Certa, Juliana’s fiancé, has been seen sneaking around the villa at times when Juliana was absent. During one such secret visit, an eavesdropper heard passionate sounds coming from the family’s private chambers. He recognized the voices as belonging to Quintus and the elder Marius daughter, Flavia.

Note: Should Marius Asina learn that of any his servants have shared these two rumors, he is greatly displeased, and

has the offender killed as soon as it can be done without attracting undue attention. This ideally occurs at home, where bodies can be easily disposed of (via the Formless Spawn).

Researching Shadrach of Tyre

The Marius’ villa turns out to have been the famous architect’s last completed project. He disappeared without a trace shortly after its completion. His son, an architect named Jeshua, has a place of business in Massilia. He recalls his father being reluctant to discuss the project, and destroying the plans before vanishing. Jeshua does recall that an unusually large number of stonemasons and plumbers were involved in the construction. He knows little about his father’s work on the Marius Villa, and nothing about the mysterious deaths and disappearances of those who labored on its construction. Nor does he really care to, as Jeshua is more concerned with protecting the present than stirring up the past.

Researching the Builders of the Marius’ Villa

Investigators will be unable to find any of the work crew involved in the villa’s construction. The villa was built around 20 years ago, so this might not seem odd at first. However, should the investigators dig deeper, they turn up reports of family members reporting that their husbands and sons, who had worked at the villa, disappeared shortly after that project.

There is one exception: the Paulius family. They will relay a disturbing story about finding their father Arbus’ body in an alley. He had worked on the cistern and a big system of underground drains at the Marius’ villa. (No drains are obvious from a cursory overview of the villa, but they are there, if the players snoop around in the woods long enough). They remember that he had been paid handsomely for his work, and had always refused to discuss the project. But one night, at a tavern, he had been talking about how demanding the work had been, commenting how his back still hurt from crawling through the pipes, so many years later, to make sure that the baths would drain. That same night, he was found rent limb from limb, with his eyes gouged, his face bitten, and his genitals savaged. Again, an investigator making a successful Natural History roll realizes these injuries are peculiarly consistent with an attack from a large ape. (Arbus Paulius was not initially targeted by Marius Asina during his purge of those who worked on his villa, not out of mercy, but simply out of carelessness. Paulius had fallen through the cracks, until his loose talk in the tavern reminded Asina that he had not snipped off every loose end. It was a mistake that Buteo was more than happy to correct for his father).

Keeper’s Note: Investigators making an Idea roll, or suggesting the matter to Jeshua or another architect, realize that a substantial amount of subterranean construction may have been undertaken at the Marius’ villa, far in excess of its likely needs with regards to plumbing.



SPEAKING WITH QUINTUS CERTA

This young man can best be described as rich, perpetually overdressed, spoiled, self-centered, and smug. While of average intelligence, he is not very focused. He is also a well-known sexual deviant, enjoying as much omnisexual and paraphilic variety as he can arrange without angering his paterfamilias. He hangs out with Buteo (the alpha male of their little circle of punks), very much a follower to his leader. At night, he tends to be out carousing, whoring, and running amok with Buteo and other rich, spoiled brats with poorly developed consciences. He thanks the gods every day that he will inherit a good bit of wealth from his father, as long as he stays out of serious trouble.

Nonetheless, the investigators can strike up a conversation with him. Quintus has nothing but good to say about the Marius family, even Buteo (“he’s just impulsive”). He blames his former house servant for the attack perpetrated on her by Juliana (a ridiculous accusation given the severity of the attack). He denies any and all improprieties, sexual or otherwise, with practiced ease. If the investigators push him too hard, he either tries to walk away, or throws them off of his father’s property with disdain.

Quintus knows some part of the truth. He’s had sex with Flavia, Juliana, and Buteo himself, and so is well aware of their sub-human nature. Rather than be horrified, he finds their sub-humanity incredibly arousing, which is why he is eager to marry Juliana. Truth be told, though, he’d rather marry Flavia, finding the elder sister even more interesting and attractive. However, her reclusive habits make this nearly impossible, and his father (and society) would never stand for it.

Nonetheless, Quintus is easy to rattle. If the investigators are bold and confront him very directly (e.g., “we know that the Marius children are inhuman monsters and you’re having sex with at least two of them”), his bravado shatters and he attempts to flee. His panic might prompt an attack from Buteo and his gang.

If blackmailed, threatened, or beaten, Quintus might (with a possible Fast Talk or Persuade check) tell the investigators everything that he knows. This includes the fact that he has seen three of the Marius children naked, describing them as white-furred, misshapen, and powerfully built, although Juliana is “not too far off”. If under extreme duress (torture, or to save his life), he tells the investigators about the secret tunnel into the Marius villa’s sublevel. If this happens and the Marius family finds out, the time is short until Quintus is rent limb from limb by one of the Marius children, or killed by a creature summoned by Showenge’s dark Oparian sorcery.

The investigators might instead follow Quintus covertly. If they do so long enough and well enough, they will eventually observe him—on a night when Juliana is away from the villa visiting with one of her friends (25% chance)—head toward the villa, only to detour into the woods. There, he has a romantic woodland rendezvous with Flavia. They are quite passionate and rough with another. Note the 0/1D3 SAN

loss for seeing Flavia naked, which does not appear to faze Quintus whatsoever. Investigators see her coming and going through a well-camouflaged hatch in the ground, leading to the tunnel to the villa’s sublevel.

THE CERTAS’ MENAGERIE

In Roman times, keeping a menagerie is an extreme show of wealth. It is a major status symbol and quite unusual for a provincial merchant to have one. Nonetheless, the Certa family, bolstered by its large shipping concerns and diverse holdings, does have a modest one. The menagerie is open to the public during daylight hours, in a park of cages adjacent to the Certa family’s villa, on the shore near the harbor.

The investigators might end up here in several different ways. They may hear from the prostitutes that Buteo brings his preferred partners here, and try to find out why. If they are seeking a local expert on wild animals, people might suggest the Certas’ menagerie keeper, Felix, an elderly but hale servant from North Africa. Investigators might also wish to question Felix about the peculiar injuries suffered by people who ran afoul of the Marius children, as they resemble those inflicted by large apes. Lastly, the Certas’ menagerie is the only place that large apes can be found in Massilia.

Large apes (in this case, chimpanzees) are known of, but extraordinarily rare, in the Roman world. A pair (a male and a female) were brought back from far off Africa by Marius Asina on one of his journeys, several years earlier, and gifted to the Certa family, as an early overture toward a marriage arrangement.

Felix is innocent, but knows some embarrassing and awful things, and he is hard pressed to explain one of them. He does currently have two great apes in the menagerie, an adult female chimpanzee and her deformed, young male offspring. Felix needs only a modest bribe or mild convincing to tell what he knows for a fact, but he is not easily given over to gossip or speculation.

WHAT FELIX KNOWS

- 🦁 Buteo is fond of bringing prostitutes to the menagerie, on occasion, to have sex with them. Felix was told by Quintus Certa to ignore this practice. Buteo used to bring Zoe here quite often.
- 🦁 Buteo is not pleasant to nearly anyone, but Zoe was an exception. He brought her here a couple of times during the day, when she was obviously with child, and seemed genuinely concerned with her well-being.
- 🦁 Felix also had an adult male chimpanzee, until about two years ago. He found it dead outside its cage, looking like it had somehow been in a fight with another chimpanzee (see “The Statement of Felix, Menagerie Keeper for House Certa”).

- ✠ Buteo used to spend hours just staring at the chimpanzees.
- ✠ Buteo still comes by every now and then to spend time watching the remaining chimpanzee and her baby. They seem to like him.
- ✠ Felix was romantically involved with Lucia, the Certa house servant supposedly married off and sent to Raetia after getting in a fight with Juliana. He secretly knows where she is, as he still cares for her. She was horribly injured (although he does not know the particulars), and lives in a house of her own as a freedwoman, about twenty leagues northwest of town. He has tried to visit her, but Lucia refused to see him. After Quintus learned of his visit, Felix was warned not to go out there ever again. Felix is very frustrated by this situation, and can give the investigators directions to Lucia's home.

The Statement of Felix, Menagerie Keeper for House Certa

"What happened to the male chimpanzee? That's a sad story. There's a reason that we don't keep two males in the same cage. They're fine when they're little, and the females aren't too bad, but the grown males are strong and dangerous. They fight over the females, they're territorial, they can rip you limb from limb. They bite at the face and at the genitals. The male, I found him out of his cage one night, dead. Looked like he'd been in a fight with another male; his arms were ripped off and his face and genitals savaged and bitten away. The female had gotten out, too, but she was just up in a tree [points to nearby tree]. Then she had that strange looking, white-furred young one, about as long as you'd think afterwards. Obviously there was another male that got at them, but I haven't been able to figure out where he came from. They're quite rare, and we're the only ones in Massilia to keep such animals. And Pater must be quite a looker . . ."

The Deformed Young Chimpanzee

The young chimpanzee, now about two years old, was conceived on the night that the male chimpanzee was killed. He is disturbing to behold, ugly, deformed, white furred, and more bipedal than one would expect. He is preternaturally intelligent (INT 7) and understands human speech. SAN loss for seeing the baby is 0/1. SAN loss for realizing the likely paternity of the baby (call for an Idea roll if the investigators found the mummy of Zoe's baby or interviewed Zoe, if they cannot piece it together for themselves) is 1/1D3. If the investigators try to communicate with him, the "animal" can nod yes or no to simple questions, and write ten or so words in Latin on the ground using a stick (I am Bestio, Mother, Father, Son, Zoe, Buteo, Marius, Love, or in Latin: Bestio sum, Mamma, Tata, Filius, Zoe, Buteo, Marius, Ama). Additional SAN loss for realizing that the baby possesses a near human intelligence is 1/1d3.

SPEAKING WITH LUCIA, THE HOUSE CERTA SERVANT ATTACKED BY JULIANA



Lucia is now a freedwoman living on a small farm twenty leagues northwest of town. She owns a couple of acres of land and has servants of her own. The investigators might wonder how someone who was a household slave only a couple of years ago is now a freed landowner. The answer is "payoff".

She is reluctant to meet with visitors, and rarely leaves her cottage. Her small household staff cannot offer meaningful resistance to the investigators, but they are loyal and protective of Lucia. Offering a bribe does not work. Lucia is afraid that she is being watched, and briefly speaks with the investigators only if they refuse to leave.

Lucia is horribly disfigured, as Juliana attacked her not with fists, but with teeth and nails, biting off her ears, gouging out one of her eyes, and rending her face. The former slave was given her freedom, by the Certa family, and enough money to buy land, by the Marius family, after the incident. On a Natural World check, or after appropriate research or consultation (including with Felix, the Certas' menagerie keeper), the investigators realize that this is how apes attack their opponents.

SPEAKING WITH SHOWENGE, THE MARIUS FAMILY'S BODY SLAVE

This formidable woman is a tall, thin, wiry, aging sub-Saharan African. If encountered, she is wily, smart, and hostile. She does not give interviews, accept bribes, or volunteer information to investigators. Showenge reports everything that happens directly to Marius Asina.

Anyone who angers her is as likely to be spat at, as paid a visit by Buteo and his crew, or find themselves attacked some night when alone by a summoned Byakhee. Hinting at Cthulhu Mythos knowledge in her presence, particularly pertaining to Opar or the White Apes, produces a momentary look of alarm before she composes herself. Such actions also provoke a deadly response from the Marius family.

As diplomacy is not her strong suit, Marius Asina realizes that Showenge is a potential liability to his political aspirations. If something bad happens to her, Marius Asina reacts only to the extent necessary to avoid looking suspicious. He puts up a fuss and demands appropriate compensation for the loss of a valuable, long-time servant, but that is all. His children would be considerably unhappier about her demise, and responsible parties should expect a violent retaliation from Buteo. A replacement from Opar would then be obtained on the next trading voyage, resulting in over a year of disruption to the Marius family's routine.



THE VILLA OF THE MARIII

The main villa itself is rather unremarkable, apart from being completely surrounded by a ten-foot-high stone wall (some of the gardens, fields, and the back woods are outside of the wall). Marius Asina and Juliana are present at the villa most of the time, although they venture into town under guard fairly regularly. Two guards are on watch at the main door at all times. In the wee hours, when everyone (except for, quite often, Buteo) is home, there are a total of eight guards. Buteo comes home to sleep between bouts of carousing, but otherwise is usually in Massilia. The guards, two ship captains, and farm workers each have nice cottages to the east of the villa, within the walls. The only servants that live within the villa itself are a couple of cooks. Try as they might, investigators will not find servant's quarters for Showenge above ground.

If the investigators enter the villa with some plausible reason, Asina receives them in the triclinium (no one is ever invited upstairs). He is in his early fifties, unmarried, and his manner is cordial, but businesslike. He speaks lower class Latin with a Roman urban accent. He is gregarious and shrewd, but not refined, perhaps making an off color comment or committing a minor etiquette breach for one of his current station. When in doubt, he asks someone to submit their question or request in writing, and he promises to get back to them (Keeper's discretion as to whether he does). Anyone acting rudely, or displaying more than a passing interest in his late wife, family, or business dealings, is escorted out, by armed guards if need be.

One legitimate way that the investigators might find their way into the villa is if Buteo has done someone a grievous

physical injury without serious provocation. If this happens (and it is not unlikely), whichever investigator has the highest Status will be invited to the villa to negotiate a settlement. This distraction might give the others an opportunity to slip away and nose around the villa a little. The two door guards keep an eye on the door and perimeter, not the interior of the villa.

VILLA'S UPPER LEVEL

1. Stairway

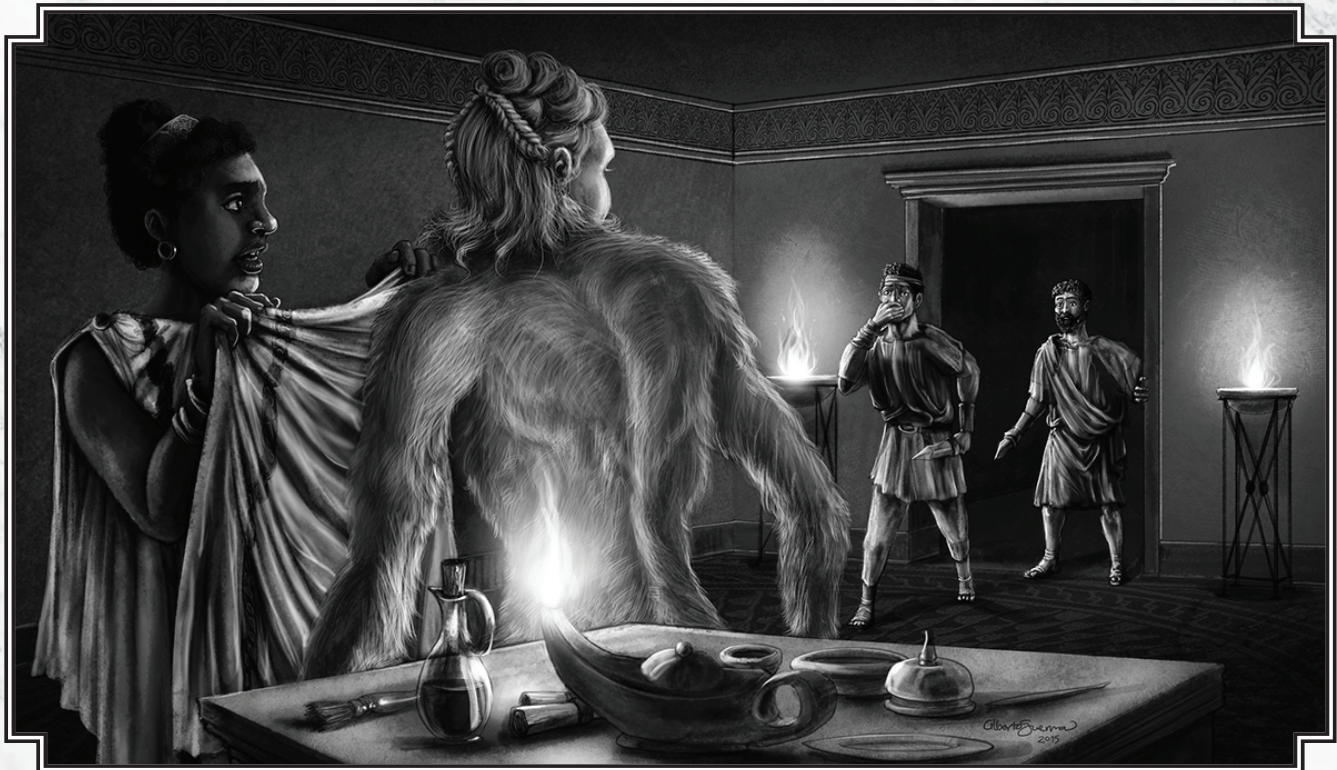
There is usually a guard posted at the foot of the stairway leading up from the kitchen to control access, except at night or when he is temporarily away (to relieve himself, 5% chance). The servants are strictly forbidden to go upstairs. The second floor hallway is rather unremarkable.

2. Asina's Bedchamber

This room is tasteful and the furnishings well-made, but far from ostentatious. It is decorated in a nautical theme, but there is nothing exceptionally valuable here. The desk has some business and government-related documents, but they too are unremarkable. There are no strongboxes, vaults, nautical charts, or other incriminating evidence to be found here.

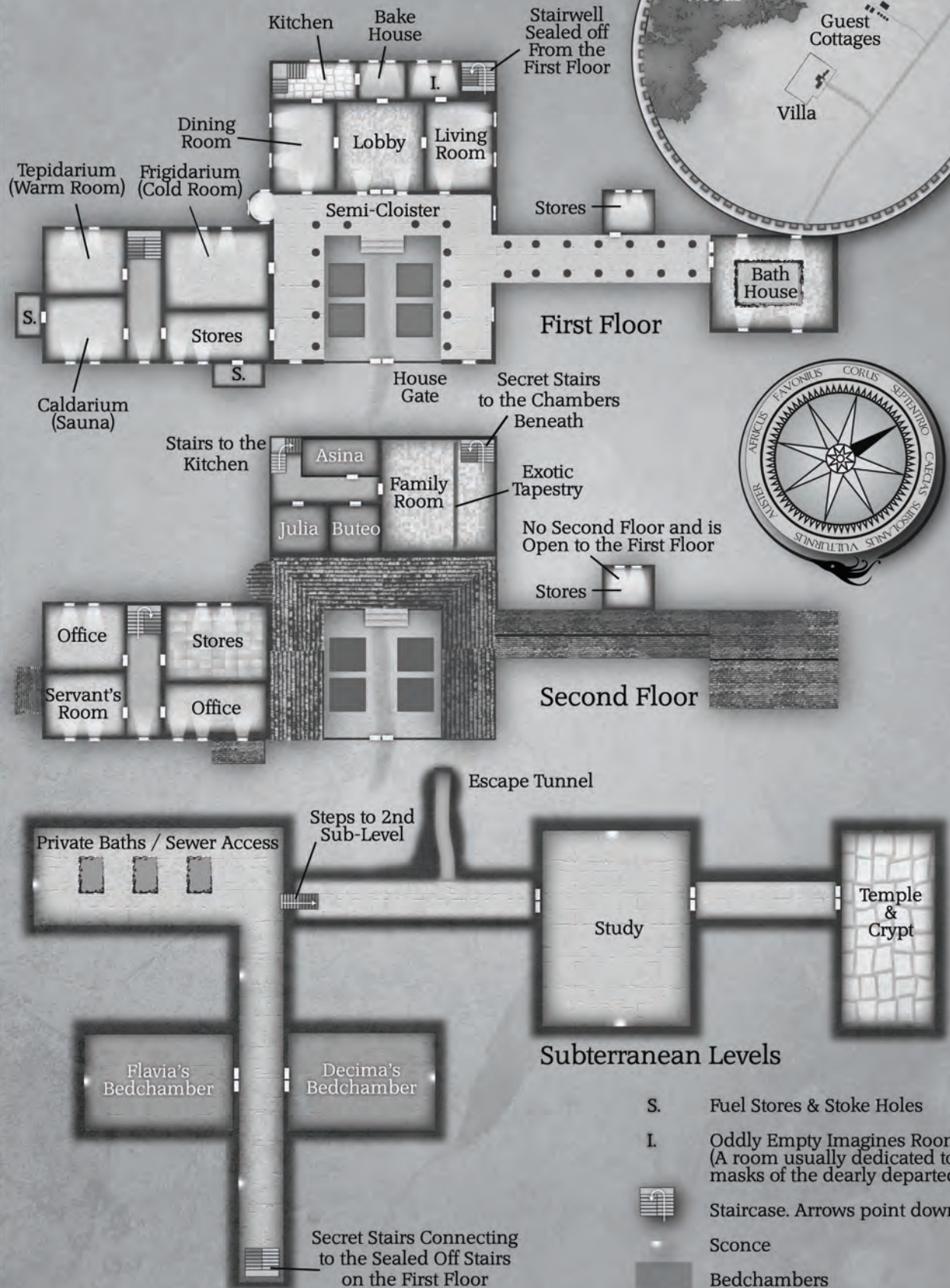
3. Juliana's Bedchamber

The décor here is more consistent with that of a wealthy patrician woman than the rest of the above-ground levels. It is otherwise distressingly unremarkable. Investigators can find fine clothes, perfumes, and about 5,000 sestertii worth of jewelry.



THE VETTING OF MARIUS ASINA

THE VILLA OF MARIUS ASINA





4. Buteo's Bedchamber

The décor here is likewise more consistent with that of a wealthy patrician man than much of the rest of the above-ground levels. It is otherwise distressingly unremarkable. Investigators can find fine clothes and jewelry, as well as a nice bed, but otherwise, there is little here. No business documents, scrolls, writing desk, evidence of sophistication, or evidence of higher learning can be found. Buteo lives from moment to moment. It may smell slightly of sour wine or vomit, but only if the household staff has not been diligent in their morning scrubbing.

5. Family Room (Antechamber)

This unusual room might start to arouse the investigator's suspicions. They might assume that this door leads to quarters for the other two, more reclusive daughters. However, it is a sitting room, with many windows and thick Grecian curtains. It is quite different from the rest of the above-ground villa, being rather palatial with its fine marble, statuary, and rare woods. There is a chance that Showenge, Flavia, or Decima are sunning themselves or relaxing here (20% for each). Behind one of the curtains in the northwest corner is a narrow, spiral stairway, leading down (easily found, +20% modifier, with a Spot Hidden check).

6. Stairway

A narrow, spiral stairway leads down 30 feet, without an outlet on the ground floor.

BENEATH THE VILLA

The stairs from #5 open onto a subterranean palace. It is imperial in grandeur, a stark contrast to the relative modesty of the levels above. Statuary, Atlantean motifs, and ostentatious displays of wealth abound. The walls, floor and ceiling are studded with polished bronze insets to reflect the light from a copious number of oil lamps, so the entire complex (saving #12) is fairly well lit. Note that any sort of open combat on this level can be heard throughout it.

This level is inhabited by Showenge, Flavia, and Decima. The latter two are usually present, leaving through the secret tunnel / back door occasionally, to spend time in the woods and hills behind the villa. No guards or servants other than Showenge are ever found down here. The more human-appearing family members do come down sometimes to socialize, but typically, family meetings are held in the antechamber above (#5).

7. Flavia's Bedchamber

The décor of this bedroom is ridiculous in its gaudy display of wealth. A search of her room reveals little sophistication. Flavia is not that bright and uninvolved in the family's business or political

dealings. However, a successful Spot Hidden roll uncovers, concealed under her pillow, a tear-stained collection of love letters between her and Quintus Certa—her sister's fiancé. These are all at once X-rated, extremely graphic, longing, passionate, and conspiratorial. There is no doubt that Quintus would rather be with Flavia, and they seem to be in the early stages of conspiring to eliminate Juliana after the wedding. A sample appears as Vetting Papers #1.

If found here, which is likely (75%), Flavia will be trouncing around naked. Her appearance is startling. As there is a great deal of sexual dimorphism in Oparians, including hybrids, Flavia looks part human, part fantasy princess, and part unusually gracile, white-furred (where humans would normally have body hair) gorilla.

Flavia's response to encountering anyone who doesn't belong here is immediate, lethal, and unrelentingly violent. She either dies, is rendered incapacitated, or flees if badly hurt before the fight is over.

Vetting Papers #1

QUINTUS TO HIS MOST BELOVED
FLAVIA, MANY, MANY GREETINGS.

MOST DESIRED FLAVIA, I LONG FOR
YOUR TOUCH, YOUR SMELL. EVERY
DAY APART FROM YOU IS LONG.

PERHAPS WE CAN MEET AGAIN IN THE
FOREST BEHIND THE VILLA AT THE
NEXT FULL MOON. OUR CHILDREN
WILL BREED TRUE, THE BEST OF BOTH
WORLDS, AND AS YOU KNOW,
PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.

PLEASE BE STRONG, WE WILL BE
TOGETHER SOON ENOUGH ONCE THE
WEDDING IS WED AND REMOVED.

FLAVIAE.

8. Decima's Bedchamber

Decima's bedchamber is far less ostentatious than Flavia's. The décor looks as if a young girl lives here, with toys strewn about and the like. If Decima is found here, which is very likely (90%), the investigators discover a twelve year old girl who is both mentally and emotionally sound. While she may be sheltered for someone her age (at twelve, most young women of her status are already preparing for marriage), she is not a simpleton as some rumors suggested. Physically, however, she looks like her mother at age 12: a cross between a fairy tale princess and a gracile, white-furred ape. There is no mistaking Decima, physically speaking, for anything other than sub-human.

Decima is terrified to see armed intruders in the house, and her reactions to them are very human. She runs away screaming. She cries, pleading for the investigators not to hurt her, while calling to her nanny (Showenge), siblings, and/or "tata" to save her. She does not attack, but if forced to defend herself, she fights savagely. Fighting is her last resort, however, more an instinctual reaction than a conscious one. She can be cowed, intimidated, and led away at sword point, although she soils herself out of fear should this happen.

Investigators making a successful Fast Talk or Persuade check can calm Decima down enough to speak with her. Decima can also be forcefully interrogated, offering any information she possesses out of fear for her safety. She has been fully educated about her heritage, her family's history, and all aspect of the Oparian culture. Decima even knows where Opar is on a map.

9. Baths

These are likely the finest baths the investigators have ever seen. They have hot and cold sections, hypocaust heating, and gilded fixtures, and are tiled with mosaics representing ocean scenes and Atlantean motifs. Water comes in via the buried aqueduct in the northwest corner of the estate, through an intake not passable by humans. Wastewater drains out through a buried pipe in the northeast corner with an operable drain; this also services the privies in the ladies' bedchambers and the study. This sewage outlet is big enough for humans to crawl through. After about a quarter of a mile it reaches the only passable exit, the drainage hatch in these baths. If the investigators did not discover the secret access tunnel, this is an alternate, although disgusting, way that the investigators can gain enter into the sublevel.

10. Back Door/Escape Tunnel

This obvious tunnel leads a quarter of a mile north to a ladder and well-concealed hatch, opening in the woods north of the villa. It is frequently used by the sisters to get fresh air and sunshine, and in in Flavia's case, for the occasional secret rendezvous.

11. Study

This chamber down a flight of stairs is simultaneously a triclinium (dining room), small library, and Showenge's living quarters. Showenge is here more often than not (65%), and

her reaction to being surprised by intruders is to fight to the death, no quarter sought or received. If she has time, she may attempt to summon extra-dimensional reinforcements or fall back to the crypt to call upon its Guardian for help.

Showenge is in charge of the education of the Marius children (with Juliana receiving extra education from a human tutor). Here can be found a collection of scrolls and texts in Latin, Greek, and Oparian (and sometimes, in simultaneous translation between the three languages) on a variety of mundane subjects, as well as a few on more arcane topics. They are a treasure trove of information on Opar. A brief review of this collection (which requires 2 hours) is sufficient to grant skill checks in Occult, Navigation, Other Language (Oparian), and Other Kingdom (Opar).

Showenge's personal grimoire is among her personal effects. It requires a successful Read Oparian roll to understand, and its title translates to *Devotions to The Black Toad*. It requires 1 week to skim /10 weeks to study; grants +4% /+8% to Cthulhu Mythos, and has the following spells potentially available: Augur, Enthrall Victim, Evil Eye, Heal, Contact The Black Toad Ssathoqua (Tsathoggua), Contact Taker of Sacrifices (Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua), and Summon / Bind Wings in the Night (Byakhee).

12. Crypt

The approach to this room is unlit. An odd, unsettling smell wafts into the hallway; perfumes mixed with an underlying foulness. The doors at the end of the hall are stout, metal-banded, and barred from the outside. Set into the doors are hundreds of silver coins depicting famous rulers of the Roman Empire. Investigators making an Occult check recognize this as a ward against the dead, although normally only a few coins are used. The coins form the emblem of the Oparian Royal Family, an Atlantean labyrinth or spiral.

Inside, the darkened chamber is obviously a temple of some sort. Hideous basalt statues of strange, toad-like beings and other, less identifiable things (SAN loss 0/1D2) line the walls. On the right side of the temple are a number of wooden chests. One contains a number of nautical charts which, in the hands of a skilled navigator, might lead to Opar. Clearly, however, they map the eastern coast of Africa far further south than any other contemporarily available set of charts. There are also records of the trade with Opar, detailed accountings of wine, books, and "sacrifices" (slaves) being traded for gems, gold, rare woods, and exotic animal pelts. Lying in several of the larger chests can be found a massive fortune in gold, gems, rare woods, and fine pelts (worth roughly one million sestertii).

Censers, an ornate wooden sarcophagus, and a human-sized, sacrificial altar are in the middle of the room. The altar of carved basalt is covered in suspiciously dark stains (SAN loss 0/1). Lying before the altar is a sarcophagus, its lid skillfully depicting a beautiful, nude, white haired-woman. Inside the sarcophagus is the mummy of something slightly different, however. A shriveled, desiccated, white-furred, yet obviously female, humanoid ape-thing, dressed in silks and finely woven garments of chainmail over her bosom and loins (the classic chainmail bikini) lies within, her arms



DE HORRORE COSMICO



crossed in repose. The mummy wears the Marius family arms, carved into a massive moonstone, as a pendant around her neck. There is no mistaking her for human, nor can the family resemblance between her and the Marius children be denied. SAN loss 1/1D3.

Hidden in the deep shadows of the temple, opposite from the collection of chests, lurks an amorphous blob of living darkness. This creature, the Guardian of the Crypt, has been tasked by The Black Toad Ssathoqua to defend the honor of the sorceress-queen of Opar and her descendants for all time. Decima, with a rather childlike view of the thing, calls it "Inky".

Guardian of the Crypt (Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua)

STR 17 CON 11 SIZ 23 INT 13 POW 11
DEX 19 Move 12 HP 17

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Attacks: Whip 90%, damage 1D6+db or Grapple, range is 23 yards.

Tentacle 60%, damage 1D6+db or Grapple, range is 23 yards.
May use tentacle attacks vs. 1D3 opponents each round.

Bludgeon 20%, damage 2D6+db

Bite 30%, swallows victim. Victim takes 1 point of progressively increasing damage thereafter until dead. Victim is helpless while being digested, but the Guardian cannot move until its victim is dead without disgorging the victim. It can swallow up to its own SIZ in total victims.

Defenses: Physical attacks, even enchanted ones, are useless. Fire, chemicals, or non-physical magical attacks work normally.

Skills: Lurk Motionless and Unnoticed in the Deep Shadows 90%;

Succumb to Pleas For Mercy 0%; Listen to Decima 50%.

Sanity Loss: 1/1D10 for seeing a Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua.

The Guardian lurks in the shadows until it is commanded to attack (by any member of the Marius family or Showenge), forced to defend itself, or the investigators trigger it to defend the crypt. Triggering it to defend the crypt can happen in a variety of ways:

☞ It attacks anyone unaccompanied by a member of the Marius family or Showenge. If the investigators have a hostage, they are unmolested unless, and until, the hostage leaves the room.

☞ If anyone not wearing the Marius family arms, possibly on a signet ring or locket, disturbs the mummy of Julia Aquiliana or attempts to remove anything (such as charts, records, or treasure) from the crypt (accompanied or not).

Once active, it goes on a killing spree. It may allow some to flee in terror, as it has been instructed that there are guards in the house above to handle security there. It hesitates to directly attack anyone in close proximity to one of the Marius family, but Showenge is expendable. It gives chase as far as the public areas of the villa and about fifty yards beyond the escape tunnel into the surrounding woods.

Decima is not afraid of the Guardian, can command it (although it does not always listen to her), and will shout encouragement as it thrashes investigators who have abused her.



CONFLICT AND REACTION FROM THE HOUSE OF MARIUS

Marius Asina and Juliana know that the investigators are performing a “water test” on the family’s reputation. Their plan is a success if the investigators uncover no concrete proof of anything, returning with wild, unprovable rumors and stories that no one will believe are anything than clumsy slander, or with what is already out there about Buteo. No other members of the family or household are aware of this. Reactions to the investigators’ snooping need to be gauged and segregated accordingly.

Buteo and Flavia have poor impulse control. They will try to kill the investigators over the slightest provocation. If either sibling finds out that anyone is poking into their private life (such as investigating an affair with your sister’s fiancé, or fathering children with both humans and chimpanzees) they will seek them out with murder on their minds. Whether someone dies in the ensuing fight or fights is up to the Keeper; a severely wounded animal will try to run away.

However, Asina and Juliana will put up with most sorts of intrusions without a violent retaliation. Organized, family-wide responses will only come in a few situations, such as:

The Angry Young Man

They know that Buteo has engaged in disreputable conduct, and unearthing most sorts of embarrassing information about him won’t faze them. Buteo is ultimately disposable, with regret. They both know that it is only a matter of time until he does something money cannot solve, and that he might be killed at any time. If this happens, they try using their money to recover his body, for the dual purpose of giving him a decent burial and preventing it from being paraded around as evidence. Buteo has a prompt date with the funeral pyre if killed. If he does something that money cannot solve and survives, then he is shipped off to Opar.

Kidnapping

The abduction or capture one of the more inhuman members of the family (Flavia or especially Decima) is the main thing that will prompt Marius Asina to declare war on the investigators. This is especially true if they seem intent on using the captives as some kind of “proof.” This provokes an out and out attack by Marius Asina. The law may side with the House of Marius if Asina can do damage control and spin the situation in his favor, before the investigators reveal his daughters’ inhuman appearance.

Trespassing

If the investigators are caught in the sub-level of the Marius’ villa, they will be killed if at all possible. All means at the

Marius’ disposal, including summoned monsters if Showenge is still in play, will be utilized to accomplish this.

Saying Too Much

Investigators openly hinting at Cthulhu Mythos knowledge to a member of the family in an effort to provoke a response may get more than they bargained for. The more thoughtful members of the family then likely try to eliminate the investigators.

The Grandchildren

Should word get back to Asina that the investigators believe that Buteo is responsible for fathering offspring both with humans and animals, a serious line has been crossed. Asina tries to have not only the investigators killed via any means available, but his son Buteo as well. Such an indiscretion cannot go unpunished, and a hard choice has to be made.

The Affair

If Juliana finds out, from a credible source, that Quintus Certa has been dallying with her older sister, she will kill him (and possibly her sister as well) with her bare hands and teeth, ripping off his face and savaging his genitals. Should this happen, Marius Asina’s political ambitions are over. Juliana’s guilt will be obvious in light of her prior violent outbursts. SAN loss is 1/1d6 if the investigators actually see Juliana rip Quintus apart, which the Keeper should arrange for if at all possible.

THE MAIN PLAYERS

MARIUS ASINA, Paterfamilias of House Marius, Age 52

STR 13 CON 13 SIZ 14 INT 16 POW 15
DEX 13 APP 13 EDU 13 SAN 0 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Accounting 40%, Bargain 60%, Civics 70%, Cthulhu Mythos 25%, Dodge 50%, Empire 40%, Fast Talk 40%, Insight 60%, Navigate 75%, Occult 20%, Other Kingdom (Opar) 10%, Own Language (Latin) 70%, Other Language (Greek) 40%, Other Language (Opar) 10%, Persuade 75%, Pilot Boat 75%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 80%, Swim 55%, Write Latin 70%.

Weapons: Large Knife, 70%; 1d6; impales; short length; 20 HP.

Armor: none.

About Asina: Asina is not a totally bad person; he might actually do a lot of civic good if he achieves higher office. He just fell in love with a pseudo-human Atlantean sorceress-queen, who happened to worship dark, evil gods and propitiate them with human sacrifice, and had a bunch of kids with her. He is determined to do what he can for them. He is planning to betray the investigators if they unearth something really awful, true, but his plans are human.



DE HORRORE COSMICO



MARIUS BUTEO, Only Surviving Son of House Marius, Age 20

STR 19 CON 15 SIZ 18 INT 12 POW 12
DEX 13 APP 07 EDU 08 SAN 0 HP 17

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Skills: Climb 99%, Cthulhu Mythos 25%, Dodge 50%, Insight 30%, Listen 50%, Natural World 50%, Occult 20%, Other Kingdom (Opar) 10%, Own Language (Latin) 70%, Other Language (Greek) 40%, Other Language (Opar) 10%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 40%, Track 50%, Write Latin 70%, Write Oparian 10%.

Weapons: Savage Clawing, Rending and Biting 80%, 1D6 +db.

Armor: 1 point of hide and fur.

Sanity Loss: See Following.

About Buteo: Even naked, Buteo is not so obviously inhuman that people should assume that there is a supernatural explanation. He appears apish, with abundant white body hair in normally covered places. His teeth are pointy and simian. He may be the ugliest, most simian-looking human that the investigators have ever seen. But he goes to lengths to hide it. Keepers have the option of imposing a 0/1 SAN (0/1D3 if nude) check for seeing Buteo. Seeing him lose control of his temper and ravage some with tooth and claw should definitely cost 1/1D6 SAN.

Buteo is what he is: a brute, in the mold of the highly sexually dimorphic Oparians. He will likely get himself killed sooner or later, even if he survives the scenario. But Buteo is not a completely unfeeling monster. He is loyal and protective of his immediate family, cares about his surviving child and mourns the one who died. Buteo even has some semblance of legitimate feeling for Zoe.

JULIANA, Favored Middle Daughter of House Marius, Age 16

STR 15 CON 15 SIZ 15 INT 12 POW 18
DEX 15 APP 14 EDU 12 SAN 0 HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Bargain 40%, Civics 40%, Climb 99%, Cthulhu Mythos 25%, Dodge 50%, Insight 40%, Listen 50%, Natural World 50%, Occult 20%, Other Kingdom (Opar) 10%, Own Language (Latin) 70%, Other Language (Greek) 40%, Other Language (Opar) 10%, Persuade 50%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 50%, Write Latin 70%, Write Greek 40%, Write Oparian 10%.

Weapons: Savage Clawing, Rending and Biting 80%, 1D6 +db.

Armor: none.

Sanity Loss: See Following.

About Juliana: Juliana is human on the outside, and possessed of social graces, but both scheming and brutal on the inside. Even nude, Juliana appears to be human, albeit exotic looking. However, her temperament is more Oparian, and if she loses her temper, investigators must make a 1/1D6 SAN check as she makes savage rending and biting attacks. She can usually keep her temper under control, although she is prone to jealous, often violent, impulses.

FLAVIA, Eldest Child of House Marius, Age 22

STR 15 CON 15 SIZ 13 INT 09 POW 16
DEX 15 APP 03 EDU 08 SAN 0 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Climb 99%, Cthulhu Mythos 25%, Dodge 50%, Listen 50%, Natural World 50%, Occult 20%, Other Kingdom (Opar) 10%, Own Language (Latin) 70%, Other Language (Greek) 40%, Other Language (Opar) 10%, Sneak 65%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 30%, Write Latin 70%, Write Oparian 10%.

Weapons: Savage Clawing, Rending and Biting 80%, 1D6 +db.

Armor: 1 point of hide and fur.

Sanity Loss: See Following.

About Flavia: Like her brother, even naked, Flavia is not so obviously inhuman that people should look to the supernatural for an explanation. She is apish, with copious, thick white body hair in places where humans would normally have it. Her teeth are pointy and simian. She might be the ugliest, most simian-looking woman that the investigators have ever seen. She goes to lengths to hide her startling appearance, however. Keepers have the option of imposing a 0/1 SAN (0/1D3 if nude) check for seeing Flavia. Investigators seeing her bestially ravage someone with tooth and claw should lose 1/1D6 SAN.

DECIMA, Youngest Child of House Marius, Age 12

STR 13 CON 15 SIZ 12 INT 13 POW 18
DEX 13 APP N/A EDU 08 SAN 40 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Climb 99%, Cthulhu Mythos 25%, Dodge 50%, Listen 50%, Occult 40%, Other Kingdom (Opar) 10%, Own Language (Latin) 60%, Other Language (Greek) 30%, Other Language (Opar) 10%, Science (Astrology) 40%, Science (Augury) 50%, Science (Philosophy/Religion) 40%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 30%, Write Greek 30%, Write Latin 60%, Write Oparian 10%.

Weapons: Savage Clawing, Rending and Biting 80%, 1d6 +db.

Armor: 1 point of hide and fur.

Spells: Augur, Heal, Contact The Black Toad Ssathogua (Tsathogua), Contact Taker of Sacrifices (Formless Spawn of Tsathogua).

Sanity Loss: 0/1d3. Obviously inhuman, even clothed. She is immune to further SAN losses from other Oparians or from Formless Spawn of Tsathogua.

About Decima: Decima is obviously inhuman yet completely innocent. She is, mentally and emotionally, a friendly, bright, young (possibly naive) girl. Physically, she takes after her mother more than any other of the Marius children, yet in her disposition she is most like her father (only more benevolent). Keepers should take care in portraying her sympathetically, so that exactly what to do with her should be a major source of debate among the investigators. Like her mother, she is undergoing training in the worship of dark Atlantean gods and Mythos sorcery, but she is not yet beyond hope and could be a useful ally for the investigators.

SHOWENGE, Midwife and Servant of the Sorceress-Queens of Opar, Age 64

STR 13 CON 13 SIZ 10 INT 18 POW 18
DEX 13 APP 08 EDU 14 SAN 0 HP 12

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos 35%, Fast Talk 35%, First Aid 70%, Insight 50%, Library Use 20%, Listen 50%, Medicine 50%, Natural World 50%, Occult 50%, Other Kingdom (Massilia) 50%, Own Kingdom (Opar) 60%, Own Language (Opar) 70%, Other

THE VETTING OF MARIUS ASINA

Language (Latin) 50%, Other Language (Greek) 50%, Science (Astrology) 50%, Science (Augury) 50%, Science (Philosophy/Religion) 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 20%, Write Greek 50%, Write Latin 50%, Write Oparian 70%.

Weapons: Large (enchanted) Knife; 70%; 1D6; impales; short length; 20 HP.

Armor: none.

Spells: Augur, Enthrall Victim, Evil Eye, Heal, Contact the Black Toad Ssathogua (Tsathoggua), Contact Taker of Sacrifices (Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua), Summon/Bind Wings in the Night (Byakhee).

About Showenge: Showenge was brought as a handmaiden and midwife to serve the Sorceress-Queen when she came to Massilia. She now serves as handmaiden to the Marius children; she is the one who helps with their clothes and hygiene, sees them naked, and cares for their medical needs. She is also an acolyte in the worship of dark Atlantean gods and in charge (to the extent that anyone can be) of what lurks in the Sorceress-Queen's crypt below the Marius villa.

QUINTUS CERTA, Spoiled Fiancé of Juliana, Age 20

STR 13 CON 14 SIZ 14 INT 11 POW 11
DEX 12 APP 12 EDU 08 SAN 20 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Be Superficially Charming 60%, Civics 50%, Cthulhu Mythos 05%, Dodge 50%, Insight 30%, Listen 50%, Natural World 40%, Own Kingdom (Massilia) 50%, Own Language (Latin) 70%, Other Language (Greek) 40%, Sneak 40%, Spot Hidden 40%, Status 50%, Write Greek 40%, Write Latin 70%.

Weapons: Big Knife, 35%, 1D6 +db (only fights if given no other choice).

Armor: none.

Indefinite Insanity: Wide-ranging paraphilia compulsions.

BUTEO'S SYCOPHANTS, Young Urban Spoiled Brats (x4)

	Avulus	Brutus	Caius	Drusus
STR	14	15	16	13
CON	12	14	17	14
SIZ	12	14	17	13
INT	12	11	11	12
POW	11	10	09	11
DEX	16	12	08	12
APP	12	13	12	12
EDU	08	08	08	08
SAN	45	40	35	50
HP	12	14	17	14
DB	+1D4	+1D4	+1D6	+1D4

Weapons: Big Knife Attack (Avulus, Brutus, Drusus), 55%, 1d6 +db.
Big Club Attack (Caius), 50%, 1d8 +db.

Armor: none.

Skills: Dodge 50%, Spot Hidden 50%.

Guards of House Marius, Retired Auxiliaries (x8)

STR 15 CON 15 SIZ 13 INT 12 POW 12
DEX 13 APP 11 EDU 06 SAN 60 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 50%, Insight 30%, Listen 50%, Own Language (Latin) 50%, Other Language (Greek) 30%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 35%, Tactics 40%, Track 30%.

Weapons: Gladius, 50%, 1d6+1+db, HP 20, medium length, impales and parries.
Bow, 50%, 1d8, base range 60, impales.

Armor: Leather and rings, AP 5

Medium shield, 50%, HP 25, deflects missiles

AFTERMATH AND OVERVIEW OF LIKELY EVENTS

The investigators are promised a large sum of cash to perform this vetting, with the promise of a great deal more if they come up with something damning and irrefutable. If they fail to get anything really incriminating (or choose not to reveal the horrible things that they discover), they may get a small honorarium (their actual outlay plus 700 sestertii per investigator) for trying.

If they learn about Quintus' affair with Flavia and bring the news discreetly to Marius Asina, he tries to keep things quiet, bribing or attempting to kill the investigators, depending on the circumstances. Similarly, he tries to hush up any atrocities committed by Buteo, but he is prepared to exile his son to Opar or murder him outright (likely with poison) if that is the surest way to protect the family.

If the investigators take no action, Juliana eventually marries Quintus Certa. Her genetic contribution persists in the Certa family's gene pool for a very long time. This proves embarrassing, with varying degrees of atavism in their descendants, and with some—especially the male descendants—committing acts of savage brutality. Quintus finds that, politically and socially, he cannot afford to murder Juliana in favor of her sister. When Flavia angrily pushes for resolution, Quintus poisons her and destroys all evidence of their relationship.

However, if Asina learns that the investigators have discovered any of the really awful things about House Marius, he shows no mercy (and has no intention of paying that extra reward promised by Lucius Thallus). He may pretend to be willing to make a deal, but he has no intention of keeping his end of the bargain.

Hard evidence that will ruin House Marius includes:

- ☛ Capturing and exposing either of the more inhuman daughters.
- ☛ Capturing and exposing Buteo's half-chimpanzee son Bestio.
- ☛ Proving that Buteo has fathered children with both humans (the skeleton of Buteo's child with Zoe) and non-humans (Bestio). (Note that Zoe is insane and cannot give testimony, while the priestesses won't give meaningful testimony, except under duress. But, Bestio and the skeleton are hard evidence. Buteo's body, whether dead or alive, is not in itself hard enough proof, as he is more human in appearance than either Flavia or Decima. However, the family resemblance to his children cannot be explained away.)
- ☛ Capturing and exposing the mummy of Asina's late wife.



DE HORRORE COSMICO



If hard evidence is leveled against House Marius, then Asina tries to kill the investigators, using all resources at his disposal. He destroys all evidence other than his children, burns down his villa, and goes into hiding while he wages war against them. While specific details are never released publicly, he is ruined with little chance of regaining his former station.

There is another way to ruin House Marius: destroy the family from inside, by turning its members against each other through discovering and publicizing the love triangle.

If the investigators unearth and publicize the love triangle between Flavia, Quintus Certa, and Juliana, the scandal quickly destroys Asina's political ambitions. Should Julia learn of the affair between her sister and fiancé, either publicly or privately, her reaction is one of violent outrage. Quintus and perhaps Flavia are killed by Juliana; Juliana is then executed or exiled (50% / 50% chance).

Telling the Certa paterfamilias about the love triangle leads to the same result. Certa family members confront Quintus and Juliana, and they issue a lecture on how upper class Romans need to keep these things out of the public ear. ("The ugly, slow sister, Quintus? Really?") Juliana then loses her temper, killing her fiancé and / or sister.

Either way, the investigators will not need to worry about Asina coming after them for publicizing the love triangle. They still will not get paid the bonus, although they (or their patron) may be able to sue the lawyer who hired them for breach of contract. Bringing a lawsuit will trigger an offer of settlement, either a small honorarium (their expenses plus 700 sestertii each) or an unspecified future favor. Any lawyer will advise the investigators to settle, as Lucius Thallus has a reputation as one of the best orators in Italia. Should investigators refuse

the settlement, they end up losing the lawsuit and making an enemy of Lucius Thallus (-10% to Status).

If Decima survives in the custody of the investigators, and her father is killed or forced into hiding, the investigators will need to make provisions for her. She could be adopted by Lucius Thallus or a willing family, possibly one living somewhere remote where her appearance wouldn't attract fatal attention. The girl could also be adopted by an investigator, as the children of defeated enemies were sometimes raised by victorious Romans. Decima might also join Zoe as a ward of the Temple of Artemis. Less compassionate investigators could solve the problem quickly and fatally, or even make a few coins by selling her as an oddity to collectors.

SANITY AWARDS

Catalyzing a scandal that brings

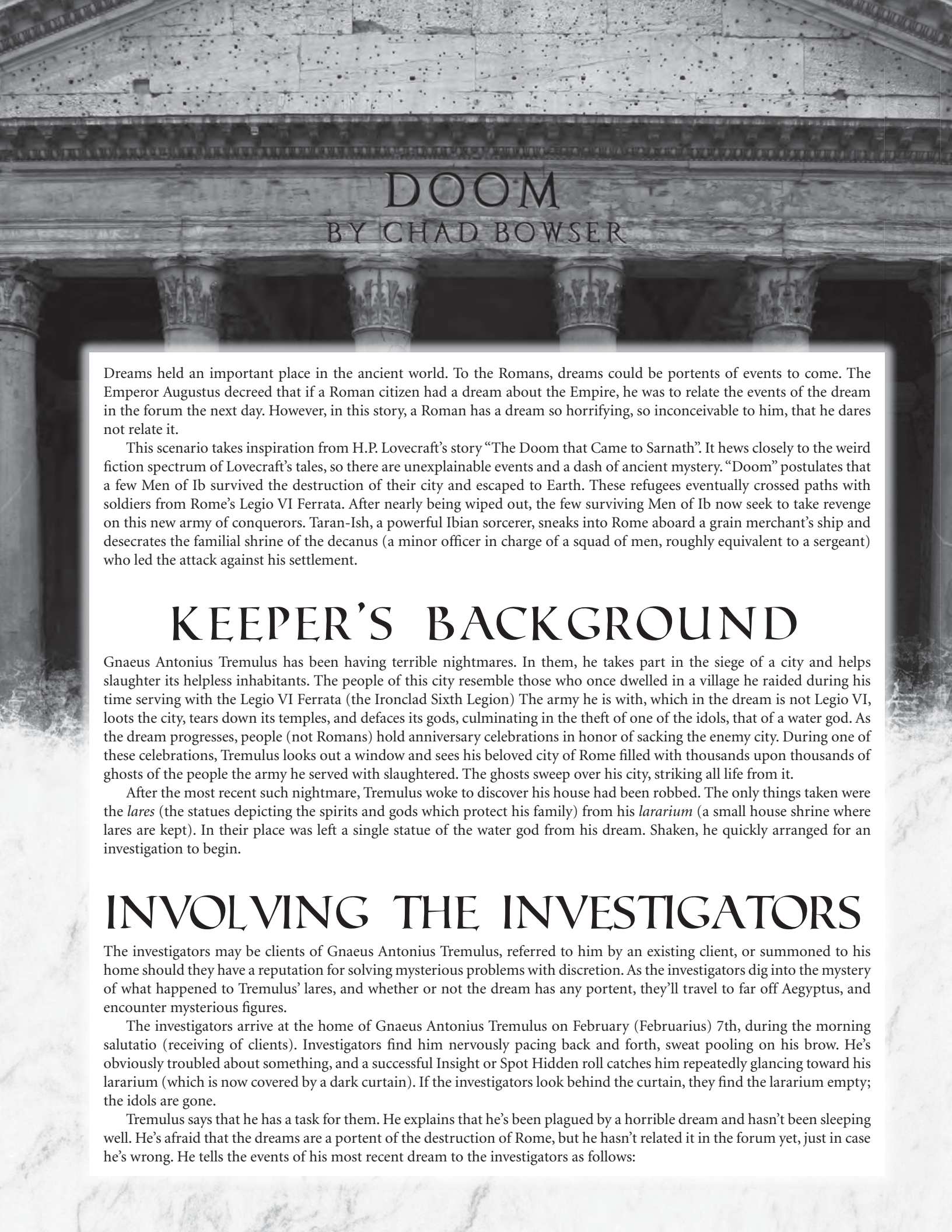
down the Marius family +1D6 SAN

Slaying the Guardian of the Crypt1D10 SAN

Slaying Showenge, acolyte of Ssathoqua +1D4 SAN

Achieving a humanitarian solution

to the problem of Decima+1D6 SAN



DOOM

BY CHAD BOWSER

Dreams held an important place in the ancient world. To the Romans, dreams could be portents of events to come. The Emperor Augustus decreed that if a Roman citizen had a dream about the Empire, he was to relate the events of the dream in the forum the next day. However, in this story, a Roman has a dream so horrifying, so inconceivable to him, that he dares not relate it.

This scenario takes inspiration from H.P. Lovecraft's story "The Doom that Came to Sarnath". It hews closely to the weird fiction spectrum of Lovecraft's tales, so there are unexplainable events and a dash of ancient mystery. "Doom" postulates that a few Men of Ib survived the destruction of their city and escaped to Earth. These refugees eventually crossed paths with soldiers from Rome's Legio VI Ferrata. After nearly being wiped out, the few surviving Men of Ib now seek to take revenge on this new army of conquerors. Taran-Ish, a powerful Ibian sorcerer, sneaks into Rome aboard a grain merchant's ship and desecrates the familial shrine of the decanus (a minor officer in charge of a squad of men, roughly equivalent to a sergeant) who led the attack against his settlement.

KEEPER'S BACKGROUND

Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus has been having terrible nightmares. In them, he takes part in the siege of a city and helps slaughter its helpless inhabitants. The people of this city resemble those who once dwelled in a village he raided during his time serving with the Legio VI Ferrata (the Ironclad Sixth Legion). The army he is with, which in the dream is not Legio VI, loots the city, tears down its temples, and defaces its gods, culminating in the theft of one of the idols, that of a water god. As the dream progresses, people (not Romans) hold anniversary celebrations in honor of sacking the enemy city. During one of these celebrations, Tremulus looks out a window and sees his beloved city of Rome filled with thousands upon thousands of ghosts of the people the army he served with slaughtered. The ghosts sweep over his city, striking all life from it.

After the most recent such nightmare, Tremulus woke to discover his house had been robbed. The only things taken were the *lares* (the statues depicting the spirits and gods which protect his family) from his *lararium* (a small house shrine where lares are kept). In their place was left a single statue of the water god from his dream. Shaken, he quickly arranged for an investigation to begin.

INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

The investigators may be clients of Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus, referred to him by an existing client, or summoned to his home should they have a reputation for solving mysterious problems with discretion. As the investigators dig into the mystery of what happened to Tremulus' lares, and whether or not the dream has any portent, they'll travel to far off Aegyptus, and encounter mysterious figures.

The investigators arrive at the home of Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus on February (Februarius) 7th, during the morning salutatio (receiving of clients). Investigators find him nervously pacing back and forth, sweat pooling on his brow. He's obviously troubled about something, and a successful Insight or Spot Hidden roll catches him repeatedly glancing toward his lararium (which is now covered by a dark curtain). If the investigators look behind the curtain, they find the lararium empty; the idols are gone.

Tremulus says that he has a task for them. He explains that he's been plagued by a horrible dream and hasn't been sleeping well. He's afraid that the dreams are a portent of the destruction of Rome, but he hasn't related it in the forum yet, just in case he's wrong. He tells the events of his most recent dream to the investigators as follows:

THE NIGHTMARE OF ANTONIUS TREMULUS

"I march along shores of a vast, mist-shrouded lake with my cohort, as we come upon the repulsive, white-walled city of Ib. These people, with their green skin, bulging eyes, pouting lips, and voiceless throats, built their city of moonstone. The mist rises thick, and crocodiles and ibises can be seen just off the shores. The fat, full moon hangs low, reflected brightly in the still water.

"We take the city quickly, slaughtering all those who won't flee. We set their temples to the torch and desecrate the idols of their gods. Their priest, Taran-Ish, dies beneath our blades. Somebody picks up a statue of one of their gods, an eight-legged water lizard, and takes it away with him.

"As we march from the ruins of the city, the normally still lake ripples.

"Each year, on the anniversary of the destruction of the city, we hold a feast in honor of the victory. Each year, the water in the lake ripples. On the 1,000 year anniversary of the sacking, the festivities are greater than ever. Rome is at the height of its power. The meats are plentiful, the wine flows, and the pleasures are ripe! The salii carry the ancilia around the city in celebration. But suddenly, the sky grows dark. Outside the windows, we can't see our city. We see the faces of those we slaughtered all those years ago. They float there silently, piled atop one another, staring with their bulging eyes. We scream and flee the city. When we return, our city is in ruins, and those who couldn't flee are dead upon the ground."

The Timing of the Dreams

One of the most important clues in the dream is vision of the salii, marching around the city bearing the twelve sacred ancilia. The salii are twelve patrician youths who dress up like archaic warriors and carry the shield of Mars and its eleven replicas around the city in a ritual to protect Rome's armies. This only happens once a year in Rome, on March 23rd. If there is any prophetic truth to this dream, which there is, this gives the investigators a target date to worry about and about 45 days to do something. A fair bit of this time will be taken up with sailing to Alexandria and journeying down the Nile, however.

The Horror Left Behind

After Tremulus recounts his dream, he reaches into the folds of his toga and pulls out a small statue, about one foot long. It depicts a hideous eight-legged lizard with spines down its back and a beard comprised of thick, ropy tendrils. Anyone seeing the statue suffers a 0/1 SAN loss. The patron explains that he found this statue, a match for the one in his dreams, in his lararium this morning. His *lares*, *penates*, and *genius* were gone, stolen, and he has no idea where they are.

THE MISSION

Tremulus exhorts the investigators to track down the thief and recover his property. More importantly, he asks them to find out if the dreams represent a real threat to either himself or Rome itself. Tremulus stresses the need for discretion and



WHY DOESN'T TREMULUS RECOUNT HIS DREAM?

Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus is legally required to recount his dream of Rome's destruction. However, he wants to learn what he can first, so as to better protect Rome should the premonitions ring true. He is arrogant enough to think that he knows what's best for Rome, and a little nervous about making such a major claim without some means to help forestall what's coming. The investigators may realize this with a successful Insight roll. If directly confronted about this obligation, Tremulus becomes uneasy, evasive and quickly changes the subject. (He suspects that he may be partly responsible for what is now happening.)

If the investigators recount any dreams that they're having, Roman officials take them seriously and increase the number of vigiles patrolling the city. If the investigators report Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus for not recounting his dream, he is immediately arrested. The investigators, even though they did the right thing, lose 20 Status, to a minimum of 01%, for being associated with such a dire portent and possibly betraying a patron.

promises to reward them handsomely for resolving this crisis (4,000 sestertii, and taking the investigators on as clients if he is not already their patron). The investigators have a few clues to get started, mainly in the details of the dream and clues left in the home of Antonius Tremulus.

QUESTIONING ANTONIUS TREMULUS

Tremulus can tell the investigators some information about both the dream and himself:

- ✠ He's had the dream every full moon for about five months.
- ✠ The dream has grown progressively longer each time, adding more elements.
- ✠ In the first dream, he just marched along the shores, the white walls looming ahead.
- ✠ By the second dream, there was fierce fighting.
- ✠ It was only with this last dream that the city of Rome appeared, his lares were stolen, and he found the statue in their place.
- ✠ He has no idea why he's been receiving these dreams. (This is a lie, detectable with a successful Insight check).

If asked about his past, Tremulus will admit that, in his youth, he served in the legions. He explains that he served as a Decanus in the VI Ferrata and was stationed in the East. He claims it was a fairly uneventful term of service, but his words seem very unconvincing, and he does not make eye contact when saying so. If pressed for more information about his military service, he relates his story (see "Sins of the Past").

CLUES IN THE VILLA OF HOUSE ANTONIUS

Tremulus gives the investigators free reign to search his home for clues. The lararium looks untouched, but close examination turns up a few coarse threads from a frayed sack and some bits of vegetable matter (identifiable as grain with a successful Natural History roll or consultation with anyone knowledgeable with agriculture).

If they investigators begin to question the household staff, they learn that a slave, a young woman name Clodia, has also been missing since last night. Clodia is currently hiding in a storage closet (*cellula*), but she is easily located if a search of the villa is conducted. She seems very afraid, and denies any wrongdoing. She cannot offer any explanation as to why she is hiding, and is initially reluctant to answer the investigators' questions.

Questioning Clodia

A successful Insight or Persuade roll causes Clodia to relax and begin talking. She'll admit to walking the house late at night waiting for her lover, a fellow slave named Dovinus who is owned by a neighboring household. She saw a man in a grey cloak and carrying a burlap sack climbing over the wall. At first, she thought it was her lover and approached him. When the torchlight caught the man, and she saw he had a strange greenish tint to his skin. She gasped, and he grabbed her. He had thick lips, large eyes, and made not a sound. Clodia wrestled away from him and immediately fled into the *cellula*, where she's hidden since.

Investigators may notice fragments of plant matter sticking to Clodia's thick curls. If examined the investigators discover that these are also bits of grain, the same as that which can be found around the lararium. She remembers the "man" dropped a wax writing table that was tucked inside of his clothing, and that the sack he carried had an emblem painted on it. She describes the emblem as a pyramid with three wheat stalks inside of it; investigators making a Know roll can identify it as belonging to a brand called Pharaoh's Best (see "The Marketplace").

If Tremulus learns of this, he becomes furious at Clodia. He screams at her for not raising an alarm and allowing his lararium to be desecrated. She begs for forgiveness, claiming to have been so afraid, but he silences her with a hard slap. The enraged Tremulus threatens to sell her to a salt mine, brothel, or simply kill her with his bare hands as he calls for a whip. Investigators can defuse this situation with a successful Fast Talk or Persuade roll, thereby saving Clodia from a terrible fate and preventing Tremulus from taking an action that he would later deeply regret.



The Mysterious Idol

The idol is a very detailed carving, about a foot in length and six inches high, depicting a lizard with spines along its back and a thick beard of ropy tentacles. It looks to be made of marble. Even a successful Natural World roll can't place what kind of lizard is depicted. A successful Cthulhu Mythos roll tells investigators that this likely depicts one of the Titan-like dark gods known as the Great Old Ones. A critical success on this roll allows the investigators to identify the entity as Bokrug.

Antonius Tremulus suggests the investigator contact a client of his, Gaius Plinius Secundus Felix, a descendant of the famous historian Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (Pliny the Younger). This scholar is in Rome promoting his family's encyclopedia, *Naturalis Historia*. If anyone in the empire can provide information about this strange creature, Tremulus says, Plinius Secundus Felix is that man. Tremulus quickly dictates a letter of introduction to Plinius Secundus Felix, marks it with his official seal, and hands it to the investigators.

A VISIT TO GAIUS PLINIUS SECUNDUS FELIX ("PLINY")

If the investigators decide to visit Pliny (a fictitious descendant of Pliny the Younger), they'll find him in his family's villa just north of Rome. He's a short, pleasant man late in his late 50s, still active and vibrant. Once the investigators present the letter to one of Pliny's slaves, the author will receive the investigators in the tablinum (the house's home office, located beside the main entrance).

If shown the statue, Pliny is visibly unsettled. He'll tentatively try to touch it two or three times before pulling his hands back to

SINS OF THE PAST

In the years 115–117 (about 25 years ago), a major revolt raged in the province of Judea. A particularly violent and deadly band of rebels made a pact with a mysterious sorcerer. In exchange for a fortune in gold and silver coins, the rebels were granted certain enchantments to aid their forces in battle. Protected by powerful magic, these rebels proved to be a nightmare for the Roman legions trying to subdue them. To deal with this threat, the Romans sent a small detachment of men from Legio VI Ferrata on a secret mission to find and destroy this hired magus.

The soldiers tracked the magus deep into the province of Aegyptus, where they discovered a village hidden in the wilderness. The village was populated by green-skinned mutes possessing fleshy lips and bulbous eyes. A battle ensued, which ended with the legionaries victorious. The village was looted and burned to the ground, and its people put to the sword.

After this battle, the sorceries protecting the rebels in Judea dissipated. This proved to be the turning point in the conflict, and the revolt quickly lost momentum and was finally put down. (Keeper's Information: For the Romans, the raid into Aegyptus hunting down the rebel's magus and the strange people they encountered there slowly faded from memory. However, the handful of Ibian survivors never forgot and never forgave. One swore an oath to avenge his people on the Romans, a Ibian wizard named Taran-Ish).

Two men living in Rome fought in the battle in Aegyptus, so many years ago. One was Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus himself, and the other was Kaeso Fabius Dama. Both men have very different memories of that day and the reasons the battle took place.

The Events as Recounted by Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus

The battles in Judea were going poorly. The enemy troops were able to shatter our cohorts. Our swords and spears frequently bounced off of seemingly unarmored men. After a particularly brutal night, I was taken aside and given a special mission. Our legion's scholars had found the source of our foes' power. They were being supported by a race of men from beyond the River Styx, the lands where our dead go and our dreams emanate. I scoffed, but the serious looks of everyone in the tent quieted me down. I was to take a hand-picked force of men, track down the rebels' new allies, and destroy them.

We tracked the magus assisting our enemies to a village in the wilds of Aegyptus, southwest of Alexandria. It was populated by loathsome, sub-human mutes known as Ibians. They drew their power from an idol to their dark god, brought here from their homeland across the River Styx. The battle was hard fought, but as their idol fell and the air crackled with lightning, I knew we would prevail. Their dark magic could not stand against our steel and training, but our victory was hard won. Of the twenty men in our unit, only two survived, myself and Kaeso Fabius Dama. But Dama's mind was shattered by the horrors of the battle.

CONFLICTING STORIES?

Dama never knew the full reasons for the mission; he was just a soldier following orders. He claims they were in the area looting tombs, got spotted doing so, and then destroyed a village to silence witnesses and cover up with incident. Tremulus claims that they were in the area to destroy the allies of their enemies in Judea, and that the looting which took place was incidental to their mission. This incident, a distant memory to both men, is recalled very differently by the two men, who are both speaking the truth according to their perspective.

If Tremulus is confronted with the information from Dama, he confirms that the villagers were slaughtered. He believes to this day that this was necessary action to end the crisis in Judea. He will say the Ibians brought this on themselves for aiding the enemies of Rome. He has no remorse over the killings. It was just his job.

Tremulus claims that Dama's memory is twisted, as he'd gone mad after the battle. In truth, both men's memories are not entirely clear on the events of that day. It is only when pointed out by the investigators that Tremulus slowly realizes that the people in his dream look much like the loathsome villagers that they slaughtered so many years ago. As for Dama's claims of wholesale looting, these are true, although Tremulus has little memory of it.

his lap. If asked if he can identify it, the scholar leads the investigators to his library where he pulls a scroll down off the shelf, entitled *Portentosa Historia*.

PORTENTOSA HISTORIA

In Latin, by Pliny the Elder, c. 77 CE. This sheaf of scrolls comprises Pliny the Elder's follow-up to *Naturalis Historia*. It contains everything that Pliny the Elder considered too outré or bizarre to include in his original work. It's rumored to have been destroyed by Pliny the Younger, obeying instructions to do so laid out in the will of Pliny the Elder, who died off the coast of Herculaneum during the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E.

Sanity Loss 1D3/1D6; Cthulhu Mythos +5%; Natural World +5%; 12 weeks to study and comprehend. Spells: None

He flips through the sheaves until he finds a drawing that almost matches the statue exactly. The nearby text explains that this represents Bokrug, a deity worshiped in Aegyptus during the short reign of Qakare Ibi (in Latin translated as

Cacheres Ibi), thousands of years ago. Bokrug, a water lizard demigod, demanded regular human sacrifice, and was said to reside under the still waters of a now moonless lake.

Pliny knows nothing of Qakare Ibi, but suggests the investigators head to the Library of the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill to consult a copy of *Travels* by Scylax of Caryanda. He tells them that the librarians will never admit that they have the book, so they'll have to find it on their own, somewhere in the Greek section.

THE LIBRARY OF THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO

To reach the library, one has to walk up 72 steps to a large pair of double doors. Upon opening the doors, the first thing to catch the viewer's eye is the 20' high statue of Apollo at the far end, gazing imperiously upon the room. The walls are covered from floor to ceiling in niches. Each niche contains between twelve and eighteen scrolls arranged in three rows one stacked on top of the other. There are movable podiums, allowing for librarians to reach the upper niches to retrieve books for readers.

The library is divided into two sections, one for Latin



POWERS OF THE STATUE

This small idol is linked to a much larger one standing in the center of the Men of Ib's temple in Aegyptus. It serves as a conduit for transferring the power of the Great Old One, Bokrug. This smaller idol cannot be destroyed so long as the larger idol remains intact. If the smaller idol is discarded, it somehow reappears among the possessions of the individual cursed by the Men of Ib (currently Gaius Antonius Tremulus), within 24 hours. The only way to rid oneself permanently of the idol, remove its invulnerability to damage, and dispel any curses conveyed by it, is to both slay the wizard who laid the curse and destroy the main idol at the center of the Ibian Temple of Bokrug in Aegyptus.

The statue of Bokrug isn't harmless. It sends visions of the future to whoever has come in contact with the statue. The nightmares that Tremulus experienced before last night have all been the product of Taran-Ish casting the Nightmare spell. However, once the Ibian wizard placed the small statue of Bokrug in Tremulus' lararium the Roman was effectively cursed. 24 hours after a person touches the statue, even in passing, he starts to receive visions. However, he doesn't realize that he's experiencing a vision and can act as he wants, even pursuing the investigation further. If it's easier on the Keeper, all the characters can share one vision.

Those visions typically take the form of a ghostly version of the statue, approximately 10' high at the shoulder, rampaging through Rome. Buildings are knocked down, and people trampled underfoot. During the earliest visions, the buildings that are destroyed are unimportant. As the visions progress, fixtures of Roman society such as the forum, the Ara Pacis, Augustus' Mausoleum, Baths of Agrippa, and the Pantheon are destroyed by the creature. In the final vision, all of Rome is laid to waste.

Men of Ib, with their fleshy lips and bulging eyes, are always lurking nearby in the visions. An investigator who has the vision notices that they stare at the investigator, as if he or she is really there. Investigators who experience these visions lose 1/1D6 Sanity Points.

Within 10 hours of a vision, investigators who had the vision either see the ruins of a demolished building or hear that a building mysteriously fell down. Anyone experiencing the vision come partially to life loses another 1D3/1D6 SAN. If the investigators inquire about a collapsed building or investigate it themselves with a Science (Engineering) check, there's no obvious reason why the building collapsed.

The Keeper should use these visions as a pacing mechanism. If the Keeper wants a fast-paced game where the investigators have to race from place to place, the visions should come fast and furious, and the Keeper should ramp up the destruction quickly. On the other hand, a slower paced game can be achieved by carefully doling out the visions and carnage.

While these visions aren't dreams and can happen at any time of the day or night, the investigators might feel compelled to report them. A successful Civics roll means that the investigators know they should report the visions. Not to do so means exile if discovered, but doing so causes the investigator to be temporarily detained for questioning by state augurs, priests, and officials (1 day / 1D3+1 days if they fail a Luck Check).

writings and one for Greek writings. Between the two sections is a large open area, with tables and benches for reading. Readers are expected to submit their request for a scroll to a librarian and then take a seat. The librarian will retrieve the book and bring it to the reader.

Pliny is correct about one thing: the librarians won't admit to having Scylax of Caryanda's *Travels*. Strangely enough, those making Insight rolls find the librarians are being truthful in their claims; they honestly don't think that they do. Sure, they've heard of Scylax, but none of the librarians recall having a copy of his works.. The librarians and their guards are unwilling to let the investigators poke around the niches on their own. If the investigators mention the name Qakare Ibi, the librarians look a little surprised. That particular king is little known outside of a select few. One such expert is an Assyrian named Shamshi-Adad, who is a librarian in Alexandria. Another who used to talk about the old kings is an Aegyptian named Nephotes. He lives somewhere in the Subura, (the city's roughest slum neighborhood), but the librarians haven't seen him in a year or more. If the investigators ask around, one of the librarians remembers that Nephotes lives near the Boar Fountain.

The investigators will need access to the library when as few as people as possible are around. When nightfall comes, most of the people in the library file out. Most of the librarians leave as well. Three guards and two librarians remain in the temple overnight. If the investigators manage to get their hands on a copy of Scylax's *Travels*, they can read about the author's short time among the Ibians.

Finding the book requires a Library Use roll and a Stealth check with a +20% bonus (due to the guards' laxness). Investigators discovered and detained by the guards are searched, as they're suspected of being thieves. Investigators making a successful Fast Talk or Persuade check to the guards are escorted out without a report being made. Those found with library property on their persons, who resisted the guards, or who shed blood in the temple, are handed over to the *vigiles* for arrest.

SITES TO SEE AND DESTROY IN ROME

Keepers can consult these tables for locations to destroy. The Keeper can either choose an item from this list (moving from lower to higher) or roll randomly (if Keepers wish to be particularly brutal). The first table is the location. The second table is how Bokrug destroys the building in a dream. The third table is what happens to the building in the waking world (once temples start being destroyed, panic begins spreading through the city).

TABLE 1: WHERE

- 1: A tenement in the Subura
- 2: A block of merchant shops
- 3: An urban villa
- 4: Small shrine
- 5: Temple of Mars Ultor
- 6: Circus Maximus
- 7: Temple of Augustus
- 8: Pantheon
- 9: Wealthy villa on the Palatine
- 10: Imperial Residence

TABLE 2: BY BOKRUG

- 1: Crushed underfoot
- 2: Swiped away by Bokrug's tail
- 3: Crushed in Bokrug's mouth
- 4: Swarmed by Men of Ib, and all inhabitants devoured
- 5: A gout of fire explodes from the ground and consumes the building
- 6: It disappears
- 7: Submerged under a wall of water
- 8: Collapses when Bokrug stomps the ground
- 9: Rocks fall from the sky to crush it
- 10: A massive tower falls on it

TABLE 3: IN THE WAKING WORLD

- 1: Fire consumes it
- 2: It collapses from poor construction
- 3: An earthquake brings it down
- 4: A riot destroys it
- 5: A neighboring building collapses on to it
- 6: An aqueduct floods, wiping out the foundation
- 7: Sinkhole swallows it
- 8: Mudslide swallows it
- 9: High winds topple it
- 10: Bokrug appears and destroys it

RESEARCHING ANTONIUS TREMULUS' MILITARY SERVICE

If the investigators look into the military history of the Legio VI Ferrata, they can find numerous former members of that legion. This is easily done, either by consulting public records or starting up a friendly conversation or two at any of the veteran friendly taverns in Rome. Most remember Antonius Tremulus as a decent leader and a strong soldier. They'd fight beside him again if the Empire called.

If the investigators mention the name Kaeso Fabius Dama, they learn that the retired soldier not only still lives, but makes his home in Rome. Investigators willing to spend 1D2 days running down leads eventually locate Fabius Dama in a run-down tavern in a *Subura* called the Hara. While no longer insane, he is now a drunken hedonist.

Dama can be plied with drink or other pleasures to tell his version of that strange raid in Aegyptus (see below). For a few sestertii (50 or more), Dama can even be hired to join the investigators. Despite his nearly constant state of inebriation and middle years, the retired legionary can still wield a mean gladius. More importantly, he can guide the party to the site of that battle, so many years ago.

These Are The Words Of Kaeso Fabius Dama

Under the orders of Gaius Licinius Mucianus, the vexillatio (a temporary detachment of soldiers) left Judea under the cover of darkness. We were tasked with sneaking into Aegyptus and

ROLEPLAYING THE MEN OF IB

The Men of Ib can be tricky for a Keeper to roleplay. On the one hand, they are almost a force of nature, spreading havoc and destruction throughout Rome. On the other hand, though, they might very well be the last of their race and therefore can be a sympathetic foe.

Taran-Ish, the sorcerer and leader of the Ibians, wants to see Rome burn, just as the soldiers of Legio VI Ferrata burned his settlement. The fact that the Ibians attacked first, by assisting Rome's enemies, is lost on him. He's out for blood, and plans to get it. However, if cornered or in a tough spot, Taran-Ish might try to negotiate telepathically (1/1d4 SAN to have someone suddenly flooding your mind with images of what he wants). Perhaps he's already destroyed enough of the city, and will settle for retirement in the desert as a lone wanderer (he won't reveal that there are other Men of Ib still living in a village in Aegyptus). Perhaps he'll try to crush the investigators where they stand. It's up to individual Keepers and the specific type of enemy they need for the story.

sacking tombs to raise money for the war effort. We marched on a small pyramid in one of the regions where the old kings were buried.

We proceeded along the Nile, but were spotted by a young boy who fled toward his village. The decanus gave the order to pursue the boy, but the boy got to the village before we could



catch him.

The villagers were a strange lot. Under the flickering torch-light, we saw that they had bulging eyes and fleshy lips. The sight of them enraged our decanus, sickened him. He ordered the vexillatio to put the village to the torch and slaughter every living creature.

Worst of all, though, was that none of them made so much as a whimper whilst we ran them through. The decanus personally smashed their crocodile idol with his shovel, and the fight went out of them after that. Who was the decanus? Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus.

Where was the village? About a day's march south of Alexandria on the west bank of the Nile. We dug up tombs here and there, filling a few chests with a small fortune in gold, precious stones, and what have you. Made our generals a nice pile of coin, I figure.

FINDING THE SCHOLAR NEPHOTES

Tracking down Nephotes isn't easy. He lives in the dankest, darkest part of the Subura. Criminal collegia prowl the shadows, looking for easy marks. Anyone looking like they can't handle themselves in a fight is liable to be attacked, or at least threatened.

The Boar Fountain, unsurprisingly carved to look like a

TRAVELS

In Greek, by Scylax of Caryanda, c. 550 BCE. This is a very rare sheaf of scrolls. Only two copies are known to exist. One is in possession of the Custus Notitiae in Alexandria; the other is hidden in the Library of the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill. Neither is easy to get. Scylax, a 6th century geographer, wandered the known world writing down much of what he saw. He saw many things man was not meant to see. His book includes information on the brief foray of some surviving Men of Ib into ancient Egypt during the First Intermediate Period.

Scylax was so disgusted by what he wrote that he cursed the book. Those who read so much as a single passage must attempt a POW x1 check. If they fail, they forget where they saw the book. They remember its contents, but not where they found the information. The test must be made each time a passage is read.

Sanity Loss 1D6/1D8; Cthulhu Mythos +8%; Occult +5%; 14 weeks to study and comprehend. Spells: Contact Bokrug, Summon Being of Ib

Doom Papers #1

I WAS IN ALEXANDRIA MEETING WITH THE GREAT UBAR AND HIS COMPANION NEPHOTES WHEN THEY TOLD ME OF QAKARE IBI, A MOST INTERESTING ANCIENT KING. HE AND HIS PEOPLE BORE NO SIMILARITY TO THE PEOPLE OF AEGYPTUS. NOT ONLY DID THEY THEMSELVES APPEAR OUT OF THE MIST ONE DAY, BUT THEIR WHOLE CITY OF STONE DID AS WELL. FASCINATED, I DECIDED TO SEEK OUT THE RUINS OF THEIR CITY. ACCORDING TO THE TWO MEN, THE CITY LAY TO THE SOUTH, ON THE WEST BANK OF THE NILE. I WILL MAKE THAT MY NEXT STOP.

MUCH TO MY SURPRISE, THE CITY WAS NOT IN RUINS. IT TOOK SEARCHING TO FIND, NESTLED BEHIND A FAIR DISTANCE FROM THE NILE. BUILT UPON THE SHORES OF A SMALL, MIST-SHROUDED LAKE, THE PEOPLE STILL THRIVED, ALTHOUGH TO USE THE WORD CITY

IS A BIT DISINGENUOUS, AS THERE ARE MAYBE TWENTY FAMILIES HERE. DESPITE THEIR DEFORMITIES, THEY SEEMED INTELLIGENT. UNABLE TO SPEAK, THEY WRITE.

THEY'VE INVITED ME TO ONE OF THEIR FEASTS. IT IS TRULY A SIGHT TO BEHOLD. THOUSANDS MORE OF THEM APPEAR FROM THE MISTS, AS DOES A MASSIVE LIZARD. I SEE THE DESTRUCTION OF A CITY LIKE THIS ONE, ONLY MUCH LARGER. I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF SORCERY THIS IS! THESE PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE DANGEROUS THAN I EVER IMAGINED.

I WOKE UP THIS MORNING AT THE BASE OF A STATUE. ONE THAT LOOKS JUST LIKE THE LIZARD CONJURED BY THEIR SORCERERS! I HAD TO FEEL MY WAY OUT THROUGH THE COLD, DAMP DARKNESS. WHEN I REACHED THE SUN, I RAN FOR THE NILE.

boar, stopped working a long time ago. The basin is filled with years of dust and trash. The boar itself has been covered in graffiti proclaiming, "Titus Pullo Conquered Gaul," "I am not a hero – Q.A.L.," "Beware Gaius Mons," and "May the waters of the Tiber run red!" The residents are suspicious of outsiders, so getting more information on Nephotes' actual residence will require Persuade rolls, bribes, or some brutality.

Nephotes lives in a one-room basement *habitation*. Numerous arcane symbols cover the unlocked door and frame. An Occult roll reveals that these sigils are supposed to levy a curse on the uninvited, but normally curses like this are hidden so that no one knows they're present. If an investigator enters the room uninvited, then he must succeed at a POW x3 roll or suffer a curse. Roll 1d6 on the nearby table, Nephotes' Curses, to find out what happens to the investigator. The only way to avoid the curses is to be invited in by Nephotes, which probably isn't going to happen, or succeed at a second Occult check. Success means that these wards can probably be avoided by finding another magician to provide the investigators with charms. These charms can be bought from various street magicians who offer them for 5 sestertii apiece. They aren't 100% effective, but they allow an investigator to roll POW x5 when entering the house.

The room is filled with scrolls, books, and sundry magical items such as moly, silphium, beans, *mola salsa* (soul cakes—baked good used to appease the spirits of the dead), and dried animal parts. Blank lead plates for curse tablets are stacked in one corner. A large stone statue of an Ibis-headed man stands in another corner. If an investigator is Egyptian or succeeds at an Occult roll at +50%, he recognized the being as Thoth, God of Wisdom. There are no Mythos tomes

NEPHOTES' CURSES

1D6 roll Curse

- 1: Strange muscle twitches, -10% to combat skills for 24 hours
- 2: Horrible body odor, -20% to interpersonal skills for 24 hours
- 3: Blinded for 24 hours
- 4: Rendered mute for 24 hours
- 5: Rendered deaf for 24 hours.
- 6: All hair falls out over the course of the next 24 hours.

in the collection.

A thorough search of the papers, taking 5 hours, turns up the Scroll of Qakare Ibi, describing certain events which took place nearly 2100 years ago, written in Hieratic (Ancient Egyptian). The investigators can also find 1d4 spells scribbled in Greek or Hieratic in various places. Choose from Apportion Ka, Bat Form, Blight Crop, Bring Haboob, Chant of Thoth, Enthrall Victim, Parting Sands, Speak True Name, and Summon Child of the Sphinx (No Binding component).



A Meeting with Nephotes

The dried body of Nephotes reclines on a bench in the far corner of the room, buried under old scrolls. Uncovering the body reveals the desiccated corpse of an ancient looking Egyptian. A successful First Aid or Medicine roll reveals the man is very dead. However, the character has to lean in close to perform the check. As they do, the man lunges for them, emitting a bestial roar and spewing sand from his mouth. A successful Dodge roll is necessary to avoid the sand or be blinded for 1d4 rounds.

If the body is ignored, Nephotes will rise to attack after the investigators have been in his house for one hour. A powerful sorcerer, Nephotes will be difficult to defeat. Once he takes a point of damage, the statue of Thoth awakens to defend its master. In a flash of light, the statue is now flesh, manifesting as an Ibis headed Child of the Sphinx.

However, if the investigators quickly explain to Nephotes that they're seeking information on Qakare Ibi, the Men of Ib, or even just describe the strange man, or apologize for their intrusion, he will cease attacking. He'll ask them to slowly explain everything they know and likely give them the scroll of Qakare Ibi. Nephotes despises Qakari Ibi for what

transpired centuries ago and wants his revenge, but can't enter Aegyptus because of the curse. Nephotes confirms that their enemy is probably Taran-Ish (the Ibi's true name), a powerful sorcerer. Taran-Ish can only be truly killed if his name is magically invoked whilst being struck, which requires a spell, Speak True Name. Nephotes can teach the investigators the spell, or it can be found written on a scroll in his room.

THE MARKETPLACE

Based on Clodia's information, the investigators might head to the marketplace to talk to the grain merchants, especially those who import the Pharaoh's Best brand. However, there are numerous grain merchants and more than one marketplace in Rome; finding the correct ones takes investigators 1D12 man-hours of searching (unless they have some connection to grain merchants, importers from Aegyptus, or members of the Guild of Bakers). Eventually, however, the investigators get a lead.

An importer named Phraoths tells the investigators that

Doom Papers #2

In tumultuous times, a stranger walked from the desert in the direction of Sakkara, the great necropolis. This man was unlike others; his staring eyes and fleshy lips reminded some of the ancient Khemites. He didn't speak, whether by choice or nature, we know not and he never gave any his name. When he chose to communicate, he did so through writing. It is said that he wrote in a language of strange, dark symbols and the ink on the papyrus turned to Hieratic on its own. He was accompanied by a similar man, a countryman of his wearing the robes and headgear of a priest, whom the nameless man referred to as Taran-Ish. The

nameless man possessed sorcerous ways, able to lay waste to a wall by waving his hand or to strangle a man merely by closing his fist, and his priest seemed to be his chronicler and advisor.

The Nameless Man told the story of his people, persecuted and nearly destroyed in a faraway land. He and a few others escaped, and later the vengeful dead of his kind visited doom upon their foes when it was least expected.

The unnamed man threw down the mighty sorcerers Nephotes and Uhar, casting them from the land, cursing them never to return. The people proclaimed him pharaoh and

gave him the name Qakare son of Ib. His reign was short, merely four years, two months, one day. When he died, it is said that his body disappeared in a mist. A temple to him was built in Sakkara on the spot where he appeared, with the usual protections.

His advisor disappeared into the desert north of Sakkara, never to be seen again.

NEW SPELL: SPEAK TRUE NAME

Some creatures, especially powerful sorcerers, are in grave danger if their true name is spoken in conjunction with certain spells. Should a caster can learn the true name of a chosen target, it can be used it against him with this spell. When the target's true name is spoken via this spell, all magical defenses of the target are temporarily dispelled, rendering the target vulnerable for 3 rounds. After that time, the spell must be recast. This spell requires 3 magic points and 1 SAN to cast. If the caster doesn't have the target's exact true name (e.g., the caster is mistaken and speaks an incorrect true name), the caster suffers 1d6 SAN loss as backlash.

he saw another trader, Boc, talking to a strange looking man in a grey cloak in Ostia. Boc is one of several traders hauling shipments for Pharaoh's Best. If asked more about the strange man, Phraothes says that he had large eyes and greenish lips, and seemed to be a mute (he was communicating with a wax tablet).

OSTIA

Rome's port is a bustling town of its own. It's about 30 kilometers from Rome, but a wagon can be hired for two sestertii to make the trip in a few hours. Warehouses line the waterfront, and ships bob on the waves. Boc can easily be found here at his stall, selling off the extra cargo from his recent voyage (see "Talking with Boc the Merchant").

Investigators may question those frequenting Ostia's docks about someone fitting the unusual description of the man they seek. Finding someone who saw the Man of Ib merely requires a successful Luck check, as he stuck in many peoples' memories. However, investigators who fail this Luck Check gain the attention of some unsavory characters (see "Dockside Assault").

To gain useful information, investigators must make a successful Persuade or Fast Talk roll on any of the numerous deckhands or dock workers in the area. If successful, the men reveal that the strange looking cloaked man went up to most ships earlier today, scribbling out questions on a wax tablet. He was trying to book passage on any ship bound for Aegyptus. They say that a Syrian captain named Bardol agreed to take the greenish-skinned man. His ship, called the Kestrel (Latin: Cenchris), left for Alexandria this morning.

Dockside Assault

However, if any investigator failed their Luck check while canvassing the docks for witnesses, they are met by a group of rough looking men. These men say that the greenish, bug-eyed man hasn't left Ostia yet, but is in fact hiding in an abandoned warehouse nearby. For twenty sestertii they'll happily lead the investigators to him, and for fifty even help them "do whatever you are planning to do to him when you get him".

Unfortunately, this is both a lie and a trap. The Man of Ib paid these thugs to keep an eye out for anyone asking about him. If they spot people nosing around, they're to attack them. There are a number of thugs equal to the number of player characters, plus one. If the thugs get the investigators off the main streets, they attack, beating them unconscious and robbing them of everything they carry (including their footwear).

Speaking with Boc the Trader

Boc is surly and portly, preferring to let intermediaries handle most of his duties. However, successful Fast Talk or Persuade rolls, perhaps aided by bribery, can get the characters in to see him, especially if they pose as agents of interested grain buyers. He spends his time in the shadows of a portico behind his grain stall, chatting with his four armed guards. As the investigators near the booth, they notice that the young men selling the grain aren't trying very hard. Most of Boc's grain is sold via contract (with Pharaoh's Best) long before he arrives in Rome; he just sells the extra grain that he skims off of his contract deliveries.

Boc is leery of telling the investigators about the Man of Ib who booked transport. Because of his armed guards, Boc isn't too concerned with physical threats as long as his guards are close by. Bribes, however, quickly win Boc over. He's not fond of the Man of Ib, whose name he never learned, but the man paid him two aurei to bring him from Alexandria to Rome. Boc couldn't refuse money like that. The man repulses Boc with his huge eyes, greenish skin, and inability to talk. Whenever the "odd looking, green-skinned foreigner" wanted to communicate anything, he'd scribble it on a wax tablet.

The last time he saw the man depends on how quickly the investigators get to Boc. The man from Ib tried to leave Ostia the morning after he desecrated the lararium. He first approached Boc in Ostia, demanding to be taken back to Alexandria. Boc laughed at him; he wasn't setting sail until he sold all his grain. The last thing Boc saw was the man scribbling notes to other captains. If the investigators talk to Boc later rather than sooner, Boc will tell them how many days ago he last saw the man. That's the same day the man booked passage back to Alexandria on another ship.

BOOKING PASSAGE TO AEGYPTUS

Unless someone is fabulously wealthy, hiring a private ship or purchasing one to cross the Mediterranean isn't possible. The most likely way of traveling between Rome and Alexandria would be booking passage on a merchant vessel. The investigators can easily accomplish this, but they're at the mercy of the captain's schedule. A direct trip can be completed in fifteen days if the weather is good, but the only direct ship leaves in two days. A substantial bribe of 50 denarii or more can convince a captain to go directly to Alexandria. Alternatively, the investigators can steal a ship of their own.



Voyage of the Kestrel

The Syrian captain Bardol set sail a few hours after the Man of Ib, Taran-Ish, approached him. Exactly when that is in relation to the investigation depends on how quickly the investigators get to Ostia. The route of his ship, The Kestrel, is well-known. He sails from Ostia to Sicily and then on to Alexandria, the trip usually taking 15 days. The Kestrel was very heavily laden with cargo, riding very low in the waves.



SAILING TO ALEXANDRIA

How soon the investigators reach Alexandria depends on what day they leave Ostia, whether they are traveling directly there, and how aggressively their captain (or themselves if they are sailing their own vessel) wishes to sail. At the start of the investigation, Taran-Ish has already left Ostia onboard the Kestrel, giving the Man of Ib at least a full day's (and likely longer) head start.

Unless the investigators arrange for a captain to leave immediately (see "Booking Passage to Aegyptus") they are stranded in Ostia for 2 days before they can depart. Standard passage has between Ostia and Alexandria takes 17–19 days (1D3+15 days), as their ship puts in at another port along the way. If the investigation have arranged for a ship to take them directly to Alexandria, they arrive in 15 days.

Lastly, if the investigators convince or pay the captain to push his ship and crew to their limits, tacking hard and running the risk of snapping rigging, they might shave off a couple of days. Arranging this requires a successful Fast Talk or Persuade combined with a payment of an additional 250 sesterii, but shortens the passage time down to 13 days. If the investigators attempt this while piloting their own boat, they need a successful Boating roll and a successful Navigate roll to achieve this shortened crossing time. However, their trip is extended a full day for each failed roll.

Depending on when the investigators reach Alexandria, they may arrive shortly after Taran-Ish does, or possibly even before he does (see "Dockside Ambush, Revisited"). There is even a chance the investigators ship may overtake the Kestrel on the open seas, should they be set to both arrive on the same day. In this case, the investigators have the option of possibly intercepting the Kestrel to confront Taran-Ish before he ever reaches the shores of Aegyptus (see "A Battle At Sea").

A BATTLE AT SEA

Should the investigators be set to arrive in Alexandria on the same day as the Kestrel, there is a chance that their ship might be close enough to the Kestrel to spot it. The investigator with the lowest Luck should attempt a Luck roll at some point on the day before they are due to reach port. If successful, one of the investigators catches a glimpse of Bardol's ship on the horizon. Investigators can then attempt another Boating roll to catch up, but if the roll fails, the ship's rigging snaps and they lose several hours. If they are not piloting the ship

themselves, convincing the captain to do so requires a successful Fast Talk or Persuade roll, and perhaps an additional payment of 200 sesterii (Keeper's discretion).

If the investigators do catch up to the Kestrel, its captain, Bardol, will think that the ship pursuing him belongs to pirates. He'll order his men to repulse the other ship with arrows. Any NPC crew on the investigators' ship immediately responds in kind. Claims that the investigators aren't pirates go unheeded, as most pirates claim not to be pirates. Investigator may be able to stop this needless combat, if they make a successful Persuade or Fast Talk roll on Bardol, as well as, perhaps, offer him a bribe. However, this requires them to shouting to him across the water and over the din of combat. If successful, Captain Bardol allows the investigators to board his vessel and tells them he has the strange man on board, who is sulking below deck.

Taran-Ish will try to fight off any attackers. However, the moment that the odds seem against him, the sorcerer uses his magic to create a hole in the Kestrel's hull. As water rushes through the hole, Taran-Ish swims out and vanishes below the waves. Men of Ib are excellent swimmers, and Taran-Ish easily reaches shore. However, if slain before he has a chance to escape, then the Man of Ib casts the spell to open a hole in the hull with his dying breath.

The lares of Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus can be found in a bag beside the hammock Taran-Ish was using. It remains here whether the wizard flees into the ocean or is slain before he escapes.

Whatever the outcome of the encounter with Taran-Ish, the Kestrel rapidly sinks. This may also capsize the investigators' vessel, should they be lashed together. The sailors of both vessels and the investigators must work fast to evacuate the Kestrel and cut her loose. Investigators who were battling below decks when this happens must dodge iron ingots, tumbling amphorae of wine, and the gushing ocean water to escape, taking 1D4 points of damage in the process.

DOCKSIDE AMBUSH, REVISITED

Should the investigators arrive in Alexandria before Taran-Ish and the Kestrel, they may attempt to ambush the wizard as soon as he leaves the ship. Investigators can find out whether or not the Kestrel has arrived yet simply by asking any of the dock workers or sailors found along Alexandria's port facilities. Investigators setting a careful watch can spot the vessel as it is putting into port and docking.

As soon as the Kestrel is moored, the Man of Ib disembarks and quickly moves through Alexandria, making for the open desert. He is very cautious, looking to see if he is being followed as he moves quickly through the streets, and taking a zigzag route to throw off anyone trailing him. Investigators have a good chance of killing the wizard by exploiting the element of surprise in a well-executed ambush. At the first hint of trouble, he casts Mist of Ib so he can escape under its cover. However, if Taran-Ish feels that he has a chance of killing one or more of his attackers in the confusion, he lingers in the mists to cast further spells before attempting to flee.



THE RUINED VILLAGE

Taran-Ish's village is about a half-day's barge ride down the Nile, which can be purchased for 5 sesterii. After exiting the barge, the investigators must follow one of several old trails leading inland to find the village, which is about three Roman leagues from the Nile. Investigators who made a successful Tracking roll, received detailed directions from Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus, or are being led by Kaeso Fabius Dama, easily locate the village.

The village is ramshackle. Stone walls have fallen and been replaced by mud-brick. The town looks deserted. Investigators making a successful Listen check can hear scraping and scrabbling coming from the well. Investigators who look into the well find a ladder built into the inside of the well, and can barely make out a shadowy shape disappearing into the darkness. Searching the village also reveals the ladder, but takes longer, and investigators won't see the shape disappearing. This ladder leads to the restored Temple of Bokrug, where the few remaining Men of Ib now dwell.

THE TEMPLE OF BOKRUG

At the bottom of the well, a damp passage leads north and opens into a large cavern shrouded in mist (raised via the Mists of Ib spell). At the center of the cavern is a massive statue, identical to the small one that was placed in the patron's lararium. Investigators who had visions realize that this is a statue of the same creature that they saw destroying Rome. Ten Men of Ib are gathered around it, bowing.

If the investigators charge in, one of the Men of Ib begins gesticulating toward the statue. Once this happens, the mists within the cavern suddenly thicken and limit visibly to about three feet, although the Men of Ib are unaffected by this. If Taran-Ish still lives, he is the one motioning towards the statue, and if he has been slain, Keepers should replace him with another Man of Ib sorcerer with identical stats. The remaining Men of Ib rush the investigators, attempting to grapple them in order to protect their sorcerer and the statue of Bokrug.

The Ibian wizard is awakening the statue by infusing it with the power of Bokrug. The statue begins to glow, thrumming rhythmically with power, and a foul, marshy stench begins to fill the air. The process takes 6 rounds, and can only be broken by Taran-Ish's (or the replacement Ibian Magus') death. Unless this is stopped, the Great Old One Bokrug manifests.

THE ARRIVAL OF BOKRUG

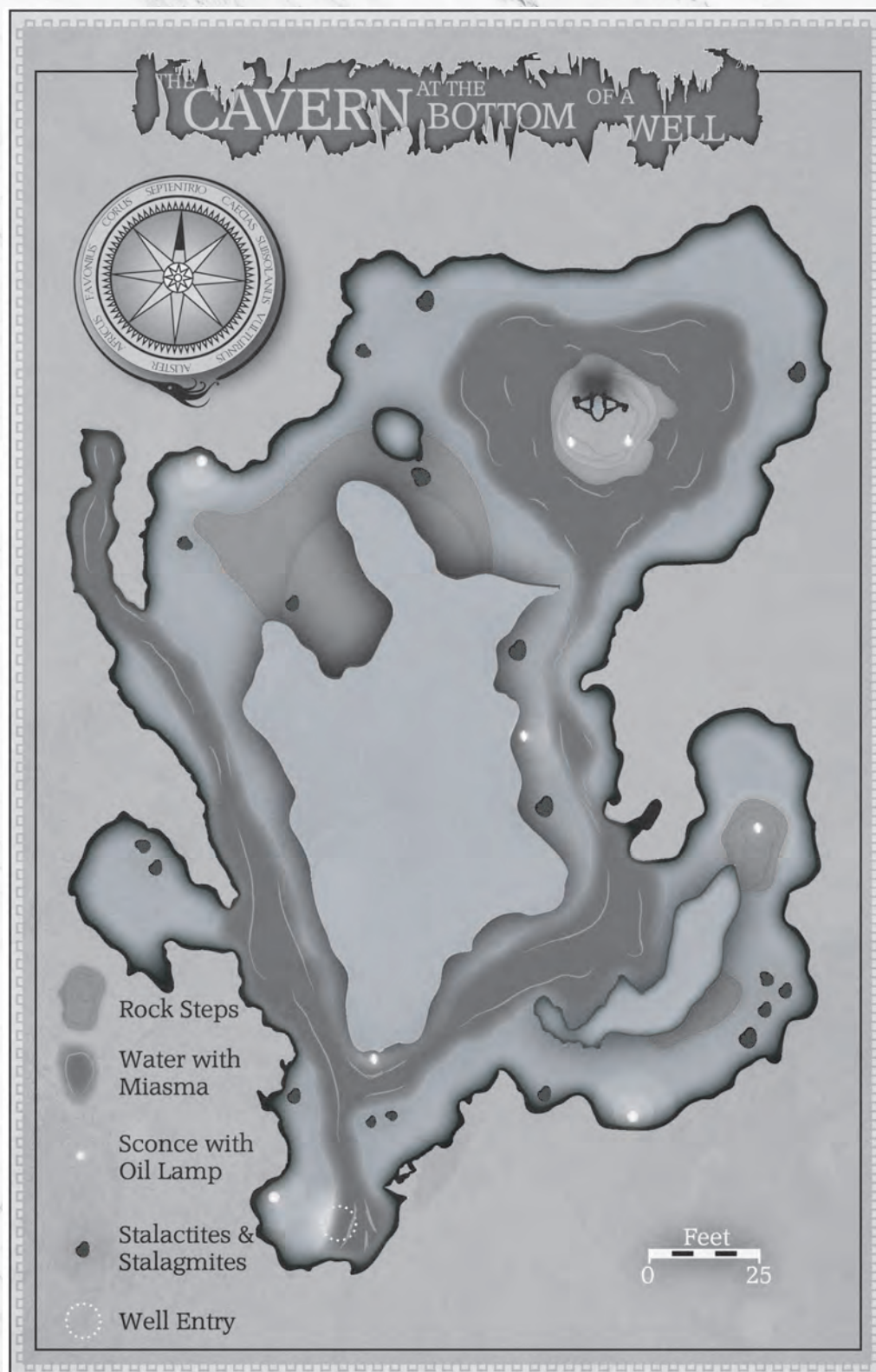
Should Bokrug manifest, the statue cracks apart like an eggshell, and a twelve-foot-long lizard with metallic scales, bright yellow eyes, and a beard of writhing tentacles comes forth. The creature is covered in dripping slime, as if newly born. It quickly shakes off the slime with a roar. Anyone viewing Bokrug must make a Sanity check for 0/1D8.

The Great Old One is a fearsome opponent, its powerful attacks and thick armor likely more than any group of investigators can handle. It moves to kill everything that is not a Man of Ib within the temple. Bokrug lashes out with its fearsome tail while attempting to bite, and then swallow, any investigators within reach. The Great Old One will not pursue investigators should they flee the temple and reach the surface. However, investigators who manage to escape Bokrug and reach the ruined village face a different peril.

The Ghosts of Ib

One of Bokrug's abilities is to raise the Ghosts of Ib, which it does as soon as it appears in this world. Investigators now find the village filled with the ghosts of the Men of Ib, 85 in all, slain by the legionaries of Legio VI Ferrata. Investigators seeing the Ghosts of Ib must make a Sanity check for 1/1D8 points, as the spirits surge forward with outstretched arms. Against this spectral host, the only hope is to flee. The ghostly horde vanishes should Bokrug's physical avatar be destroyed, which is unlikely, but possible.

The Ghosts of Ib cannot leave the ruins of the village.



Investigators may realize this, or Keepers may give them an Idea roll, as no ghosts appear beyond the village's crumbling village boundary wall or chase them beyond this point. Reaching this point for investigators in full flight requires three rounds. Every round, whether the investigators fight or flee, each investigator will be attacked by three Ghosts of Ib.

Attacks are resolved by a POW vs. POW contest. Each ghost has 12 POW. Investigators who win this contest see the

spirit they are fighting dispelled, although there are dozens more waiting to take its place. Investigators who lose one of these contests are drained of 1D3 POW. Investigators fully drained of POW fall dead. Worse, their spirit is now forever bound to the ruined village, just like the slain Men of Ib. While it might be amusing to visit them at some point in the future, and ghostly investigators can still participate (somewhat) in events that occur within the boundaries of the village, they are beyond all hope of rescue.

DESTROYING THE IDOL OF BOKRUG

If the ritual to summon the Great Old One is stopped and the Men of Ib are defeated, all that remains is to destroy the Temple's idol. Without defenders, the idol is easily toppled over and smashed. Investigators spending 3 rounds battering it or inflicting 20 HP of damage to it (whichever comes first) destroy the Idol of Bokrug and dispel its powers. The smaller idol placed on the lararium of Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus loses all of its magical powers. It can now be destroyed or discarded, and most importantly no longer serves as an anchor point for Taran-Ish's curse. The visions stop, the nightmares cease, and the unusual disasters plaguing Rome come to an end.

REWARDS

If the investigators are successful, then they are rewarded by Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus. He pays them 4,000 sesterii for ending the curse and another 1,000 if they successfully return his stolen lares. If they are not already clients of his, he offers them his continued patronage. Even if they respectfully refuse his offer, they have gained a powerful friend in Rome, as Antonius Tremulus remains eternally grateful for their heroic efforts.

SANITY AWARDS AND PENALTIES

If the investigators defeat Taran-Ish, destroy the idol of Bokrug, and save Rome: gain 1D8 Sanity Points.

For failing to stop Taran-Ish and watching as the mightiest city on Earth crumble before them: lose 1D20 Points.

NPCS

GNAEUS ANTONIUS TREMULUS, Age 53, Cursed Equestrian

STR 10 CON 13 SIZ 14 INT 14 POW 10
DEX 12 APP 13 EDU 15 SAN 50 HP 14

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Accounting 50%, Bargain 67%, Civics 65%, Empire 55%, Insight 60%, Listen 45%, Occult 30%, Other Language (Aramaic)

ic) 55%, Other Language (Greek) 43%, Own Language (Latin) 75%, Spot Hidden 43%, Status 75%, Write (Aramaic) 30%, Write (Greek) 20%, Write (Latin) 50%.

Weapons: Dagger 25%, damage 1D4.

Description: Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus' family gets its money from textile imports and exports. Generally a kind and likeable man, Tremulus has a dark past. During his term of military service, he was a decanus in VI Ferrata. He served bravely in Judea. His life changed one night when he was ordered to lead a vexillatio into Aegyptus.

GUARDS, THUGS, AND OTHER MARTIAL CHARACTERS

STR 15 CON 15 SIZ 12 INT 13 POW 13
DEX 14 APP 13 EDU 12 SAN 65 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Climb 45%, Dodge 40%, Jump 50%, Spot Hidden 50%

Weapons: Gladius 50%, damage 1D6+1 + db

Pilum 50%, damage 1D8 + db

Armor: 2 point leather.

BOC, age 45, Merchant

STR 16 CON 14 SIZ 17 INT 14 POW 14
DEX 12 APP 11 EDU 15 SAN 70 HP 16

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Accounting 60%, Bargain 67%, Fast Talk 55%, Insight 60%, Listen 45%, Other Language (Latin) 75%, Other Language (Greek) 83%, Own Language (Egyptian) 85%, Spot Hidden 43%, Status 55%, Write (Latin) 50%, Write (Greek) 80%, Write (Demotic Egyptian) 60%

Weapons: Dagger 45%, damage 1D4

Description: Boc is a successful merchant who buys grains from suppliers in Aegyptus and sells it in Rome. He's arrogant and not well liked by other merchants. He talks down to anyone he views as his inferior, but is very polite to potential customers. He's also responsible for bringing the Man of Ib into Rome, but not out of any nefarious intent. The man offered him two aurei to bring him from Alexandria to Rome. He wasn't going to say no when money like that was on the table.

KAESO FABIUS DAMA, age 48, drunken and haunted veteran of Legio VI Ferrata

STR 15 CON 12 SIZ 12 INT 13 POW 8
DEX 11 APP 13 EDU 8 SAN 40 HP 12

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: Gladius 50%, damage 1D6+db; Spear 50%, damage 1D8+1+db

Armor: 5 (poorly maintained and rusty lorica segmentata + large shield).

NEPHOTES, age don't ask, Ren-Hekau

STR 20 CON 15 SIZ 13 INT 18 POW 30*
DEX 8 APP 3 EDU 15 SAN 40 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos 50%, Move Silently 50%, Occult 99%, Read/Write Hieratic 80%, Read/Write Greek 70%, Read/Write Latin 60%, Spot Hidden 45%

Weapons: Dagger 50% damage 1d4+2

Fist/Punch 70%, damage 1D6+db



Armor: 2-point desiccated skin. Impaling weapons do no damage.
Spells: Apportion Ka, Bat Form, Blight Crop, Bring Haboob, Chan of Thoth, Enthral Victim, Parting Sands, Sekhmenkenhep' Words, Speak True Name, Summon Child of the Sphinx
Sanity Loss: 1/1D8 Sanity points to encounter Nephtes

Description: Nephotes is a Ren-Hekau (a magus who specializes in the knowing and learning of True Names), and a priest of Thoth. He lived in Aegyptus around 2300 B.C.E. and was exiled by Qakare Ibi in 2170 B.C.E. for daring to oppose the strange pharaoh's reign. He despises all Men of Ib for what happened to him and wants revenge, but the curse keeps him from achieving it personally.

Sanity Loss: 0/1D8 Sanity points to see this Child of the Sphinx.

Sanity Loss: 0/1d6 Sanity points to see a man of Ib.

Damage Bonus: none.

*Taran-Ish regenerates 1D6 HP a round unless the spell Speak True Name is used against him. Once that spell wears off, Taran-Ish begins regenerating HP again.

Sanity Loss: 0/1D8 Sanity points to see Bokrug.

MURMILLO

BY OSCAR RIOS

KEEPER'S INFORMATION

This investigation centers on a mysterious gladiator school, or Ludus, called Ludus Murmuis. The location of the school is known to only a handful of people, and everything about it is cloaked in secrecy. Ludus Murmuis produces only a single type of gladiator: the Murmillo, or "Fish Man". These gladiators are powerfully built, going into battle armed with a gladius and a large rectangular curved shield. They wear armor on their sword arm, a greave (armored shin guard) on their lead leg and large full helmets which completely hide their features. A Murmillo's helmet often has crests and fins, like a fish, which gives this type of gladiator its name.

The gladiators produced by Ludus Murmuis are the finest Murmillones in the Empire. They always portray a villain in the theater of the arena circuit, and they always take the same name, Magnus Murma (plural: Magni Murmae). They pretend to be the same man, even though there are multiple Magni Murmae fighting across the empire at the same time, and records show the first one fighting more than seventy years ago. Any true fan of gladiatorial games has heard of Magnus Murma and is likely to have seen "him" fight. A Thracian, Provocator, or Retiarius gladiator knows they've achieved real fame once they are scheduled to fight Magnus Murma, and such matches become legendary among the fans.

The trouble begins when a wealthy young patrician named Tiberius Velius Surus attempts to follow his dream. His greatest desire in life is to become a gladiator, yet doing so would mean throwing away his social status and disgracing his family. Twice he has become an auctoratus (a free man who volunteers to become a gladiator) to a gladiatorial Ludus in and around his home city (see "Possible Starting Points"). Both times his father, Manius Velius Tadius, has purchased his son's contract and had him expelled from the Ludus. Tadius has forbidden his son from ever doing this again, and gone to a great amount of trouble to conceal these incidents from his family's political enemies.

Surus realized there might be one Ludus that his father's influence would not reach, the mysterious Ludus Murmuis. If he could somehow join that school, he might finally be free to pursue his goal of becoming a gladiator. After much persistence, a great deal of money, and a bit of luck (likely bad luck), Velius Surus got his wish. He learned that Ludus Murmuis was located in the province of Sicilia (the island of Sicily), just outside of the port city of Drepanum, on the island's western coast. Surus made an escape from his family's estate for a third time in yet another attempt to follow his dream of becoming a gladiator. He booked passage to Drepanum on a ship called *Triton's Bride*, traveling with a few slaves as bodyguards, and located the mysterious Ludus Murmuis.

The Ludus' owner, a patrician named Sextus Nestorius Cenaesus, was shocked by Velius Surus' arrival and upset that he had somehow discovered their school's location. Nestorius Cenaesus pretended to accept him into the Ludus as a student, but once the gates were shut, the Ludus' men attacked Surus' entourage. Half of the intruders were killed outright, those foolish enough to resist. The others, including Surus, were captured for use as religious sacrifices, breeding stock, or live opponents for the student gladiators. Nestorius Cenaesus has no intention of training the foolish young man as a Murmillo, as they only train those who are already connected to their Ludus by blood. It was decided that Surus would serve the Ludus in another, more horrific fashion.

THE SHADOW OVER DREPANUM

Ludus Murmuis is a front for a small, but very successful, cult venerating Hydra. They are in league with a colony of Deep Ones living off the coast of Drepanum. The school is built over a cavern system which has subterranean tunnels leading to the seashore. These passages allow Deep Ones to visit the Ludus easily and undetected. The Deep Ones supply the school with gold, in return for having access to breeding stock supplied by their human allies. Midwives are also provided for the Deep



Ones, and females come here to deliver their hybrid, human seeming children.

Children produced by these unions are placed with local families across Drepanum and eventually become clients of the House of Nestorius. Many become successful fishermen, working on one of the several dozen fishing vessels that Cenaeus owns. Others become merchants or fishmongers, as House Nestorius also controls these industries in Drepanum. Some of these children grow up to work at Ludus Murmuis, and a select few of these are trained to become gladiators, eventually taking up the mantle of a Magnus Murma. Very few of these hybrids know about their dark heritage, as most are only told the truth once they begin to show signs of The Change and begin having dreams calling them to the sea.

Once the hybrids start to become full Deep Ones, they are educated by the Sect of Murma (which is what the local worshippers of Hydra call themselves). They are hidden away within the caves below the Ludus, where many of them were conceived and born. There, they learn about their true nature. They meet their Deep One parent and learn Deep One sign language, while the cult cares for them during the final stages of their transformation. Once their metamorphosis is complete, the new Deep Ones begin a second life beneath the sea, joining the colony off the coast of Drepanum. They will later return to the Ludus to periodically breed with (willing or captive) human beings. This has gone on for many generations now, starting with the great-grandfather of Cenaeus, Aulus Nestorius Probus, who was more famously known as the original Magnus Murma.

AT THE LUDUS TODAY

Both Sextus Nestorius Cenaeus, the school's owner, and Morova Amazonia, the school's public manager, are untainted human beings. They both know the school's full secrets, and have taken all three oaths of service to the Deep Ones. Each has mated with Deep Ones and produced several hybrid children. Nestorius Cenaeus acknowledges none of his hybrid offspring, although he has made sure that they are all very well provided for. All six have been placed with good families, trained for lucrative employment (if male) or married to successful local husbands (if female). Morova is currently pregnant, about four months on, with her fourth child. Her other three hybrid children all live and work at Ludus Murmuis with her. Her only son, an adolescent, is in training and shaping up to be a very promising Murmillo.

Currently, Tiberius Velius Surus is a prisoner of the Ludus and the Sect of Murma. His lot is now to couple with fertile Deep One females visiting the school's breeding chamber. Mercifully, the horrors of all he has experienced have shattered the young man's sanity. The young man now believes that he is now a famous, yet retired, gladiator working at Ludus Murmuis after a long and glorious career. The Deep One females he couples with are, in his twisted perception, beautiful and adoring fans. In his madness, he is happy, and everyone in the Ludus humors his fantasy. Surus is now the most popular and prolific male breeder, due to his youth, enthusiasm, and good looks, and usually attended by a trio of eager Deep One females.

THE INVESTIGATORS' MISSION

The investigators are tasked with tracking down Tiberius Velius Surus (see “Possible Starting Points”). They will learn that he travelled to the city of Drepanum, on the western coast of the province of Sicilia. Once there, they must find the Ludus Murmilius, meet with its owners, and possibly attempt to rescue the boy. This will prove to be quite a perilous proposition, as the Ludus is defended by well-armed guards and a handful of skillfully trained Murmillo gladiators, and can quickly be reinforced by Deep Ones. Should the Ludus be greatly threatened, the Deep Ones can also summon a powerful minion to their service: a shoggoth which they’ve enslaved lurks just off shore. A rescue will be further complicated by the fact that the deluded Velius Surus has no desire to leave Ludus Murmilius. The insane young patrician physically resists any attempts to remove him from the Ludus. In his mind, this is now his home and he is living out his deepest, lifelong dream.

POSSIBLE STARTING POINTS

This investigation begins at the home of Manius Velius Tasius, the father of the missing (and now imprisoned and insane) Tiberius Velius Surus. The estate can be placed in any port city with access to Mare Nostrum (the Mediterranean Sea), depending on what best fits the individual Keeper’s campaign. A few examples of where House Velius can be placed are as follows:

- I: Cemenelum, in the province of Gallia Narbonensis (Gaul, modern day Nice in France)
- II: Capua, in the province of Italia (Modern day Capua, Italy)
- III: Barcino, in the province of Hispania (Modern day Barcelona, Spain)
- IV: Patrae, in the province of Achaea (Modern day Patras, Western Greece)
- V: Saldae, in the province of Africa Proconsularis (Modern day Bejaia, Algeria)

INVESTIGATORS' HOOKS

Investigators can be hired by Manius Velius Tasius, the father of Tiberius Velius Surus, (see “A Meeting with Manius Velius Tasius”). The most likely way for this to happen is a referral from one of the investigators’ existing patrons, seeking to

repay a favor owed to Velius Tasius. The investigators could be friends of the young man, and take it upon themselves to “save him from himself”. Lastly, Velius Surus might simply owe the investigators, or a criminal collegium that the investigators are employed by, a great sum of money. The young patrician could have borrowed the money to use for bribes, information, and transportation during his quest and escape from his family’s estate. The young man must, in that case be located in order to collect the debt (plus interest).

A MEETING WITH MANIUS VELIUS TASIUS

During the morning receiving line of clients, the investigators are hurried to the front of the line, cutting in front of those possessing much higher status. This applies whether they are clients of Velius Tasius, sent to see him by their patron, or simply answering his summons to be given an assignment; meeting with the investigators is his top priority for the day. If the investigators inform Bassus, Velius Tasius’ personal slave, that they are here attempting to collect debts which Surus owes to a criminal collegium, they are likewise rushed to the front of the line.

The patrician begins by saying all details of this conversation are to be held in the strictest confidence. He stresses that they are not to be discussed with anyone else, ever, unless it is directly connected to achieving their mission of bringing Surus home. Before he says more, he demands an oath, upon their own ancestors, for their secrecy before he continues. Unless all the investigators give this oath, he tells them nothing, immediately and angrily dismissing them, and the scenario ends before it ever truly begins. Upon receiving their oath, he relates the following information:

- ✦ His nineteen year old son, Tiberius Velius Surus, has run away from home.
- ✦ The boy’s mother died giving birth to him, and without Vipsania (his mother) there to raise him, he seems to have grown up to be a complete fool, who’s determined to ruin his family’s hard won reputation. Investigators can make an Insight roll; with success the investigators realizes that Tasius still grieves for Vipsania, and blames Surus for her death.
- ✦ The boy (he seldom uses his name) has run away twice and become an auctoratus (signed away his freedom) to join a gladiatorial Ludus. Velius Tasius says, “Both times I have managed to buy out his contract, and pay for the silence of the school’s owners, before anyone found out.”
- ✦ “The devious brat has now managed to escape a third time, with a few of the household slaves about a week ago. My area contacts have not been able to locate him, so it is likely that he’s managed to leave the city.”
- ✦ “I want you to find him and bring him back home. I will pay each of you two thousand sestertii for the discrete return of the boy.” He will also supply the in-



DE HORRORE COSMICO

investigators with ten thousand sesterii, to cover their travel expenses, possible bribes, and to purchase his son's contract from any Ludus to which Velius Surus might have sold himself. Velius Tasius says, "The fool's done that sort of thing twice before, and I am fairly certain that he's managed to do it again".

Two Leads

To move forward the investigators will need the names of the two gladiatorial Ludus which Surus previously joined. These are names Ludus Gloriosus, owned by Didius Strabo (a dead end), and Ludus Caesonius, owned by Caeso Marinus (an actual lead). Both schools are located just outside of Rome (or whichever city the scenario begins in), and are easily reached on foot, horseback or cart. Keepers should wait to see if the investigators request these names, which can be provided by Bassus, the personal slave of Velius Tasius (who acts like his personal secretary).

Final Instructions

Velius Tasius explains that he is leaving for Greece with one of his daughters and her husband with the next tide, and won't return for about three weeks. They are instructed not to return to his home, unless they have Surus in tow. If they need further instruction, information, or funds, they should send a messenger to arrange a meeting, but are told that they should try to avoid doing so. If they do request a meeting, Bassus, who's running the household until his master's return, arranges to meet the investigators at a random bath-house or landmark, to answer their questions as best he can.

MANIUS VELIUS TASIUS

This wealthy patrician of about seventy years of age once served in the Roman navy, where he distinguished himself. Upon his retirement, he started a construction company and began investing in other smaller businesses. With a good head for commerce and a ruthless nature, he quickly turned these modest beginnings into a vast fortune, and now owns controlling interests in dozens of diverse enterprises. Managing these companies takes up much of his day, leaving him little time for his family. Many who knew him during his youth say that the death of his wife changed him, and since that time, his only true passion has been business and investing. He has four children. Two are daughters who are married, and one is a son who is currently serving in the Roman navy. His youngest child, and the only one who was still living with him, is Surus.

OPTIONAL MISSION I, The Contingency Plan

If one of the investigators strikes Velius Tasius as tough, ruthless, or mercenary, Keepers can have the patrician ask him

or her to remain a moment, "to discuss a separate matter". After the other investigators have gone and they are alone he tells the investigator, "Surus has disobeyed me one too many times, and seems determined to drag this family's good name through the scum of the arena. If my son has joined a gladiatorial Ludus and his contract cannot be broken, I want steps taken to ensure he never disgraces this family again. I hear accidents happen in such schools all the time, and many students do not survive the training. The fool might also resist your efforts to bring him home. If he cannot or will not return home, then it is best that he be nowhere at all. Do we have an understanding?"

If the investigator agrees to this, basically agreeing to arrange for or see to Surus' death if he cannot be brought home, then Velius Tasius hands the investigator three aurei (gold coins worth 100 sesterii each) one at a time saying, "This is for the deed, this is for your silence, and this is to cover any additional expenses that you might incur. You'll get a similar amount upon your return, once the deed is done."

OPTIONAL MISSION II, The Counter Offer

As Tasius is leaving shortly with his daughter and her husband, they are both in the home when the investigators are hired. Before the investigators leave, they are approached by a tall, well-dressed patrician woman in her mid-twenties, who bears a striking resemblance to Velius Tasius. She is the younger of Tasius' two daughters. She introduces herself as Tasia Vispella and invites an investigator or two to speak with her in the gardens. Her first choice would be any female investigators, her second the more educated and / or cultured sort.

Tasia gets right to the point, whispering to the investigators so she won't be overheard by her father's slaves or servants. She explains that she knows her brother must have snuck out again to join a gladiator school, as he isn't home and her father was evasive on just where he was. Tasia fears what her father will do to Surus once he is returned home, and rightly guesses that the investigators are here to track him down. She says, "My brother is a foolish little turtle, but he is my baby brother. I don't want my father hurting him, or crippling him so that he's unable to run off again. When you find him, bring him to my home. We have an estate four leagues west of Aleria, on the island of Corsica."

She then takes off a necklace of amber stones (worth 800 sesterii) and gives it to the investigators. Tasia says, "You'll be similarly rewarded upon the safe delivery of my brother. Don't worry about my father; I'll explain everything, and he's never been able to refuse me. I'll make sure that Surus is well cared for and prevented from embarrassing anyone again. He'll hardly be the first person exiled to Corsica. Besides, I've a few unmarried friends who'll help him forget all about becoming a gladiator." Investigators making an Insight roll find Tasia Vispella to be completely genuine in both her concern for her brother and her offer.

Keeper's Note: Corsica has a history of being a place to which political prisoners are exiled.

PART ONE: TRAIL OF THE DREAMER

LUDUS GLORIOSUS, OWNED BY DIDIUS STRABO (A DEAD END)

This gladiatorial school is a medium sized facility, which turns out dozens of new gladiators a year and maintains a stable of nearly fifty fully trained fighting men. The school has a good reputation and has produced some champions over the years, but they are best known for training groups of prisoners for mass combats in the arena.

Investigators visiting the school don't make much progress, as the staff there is too busy to answer many questions. They say "No, Velius Surus isn't here. He's been banned from visiting the Ludus." And, "No, we don't know where he is." If the investigators persist, they can meet with the Lanista (school manager), Plautius Aspernis, and, if they really push, the owner of the Ludus, a patrician named Didius Strabo.

Both men tell the investigators the same thing: Surus is not enrolled in Ludus Gloriosus, and they have no idea where he is. Plautius Aspernis adds that the boy's father saved his life by removing him, saying that Surus was too frail and foolish to survive long as a Gladiator. Didius Strabo mentions that Velius Surus tried to befriend him after the incident, sending him gifts and invitations for meetings, but he refused the offers. "His father made it abundantly clear that he wanted Surus to have nothing to do with gladiators, the Ludus, or anything else connected with the arena. I have no wish to make an enemy of Velius Tasius."

LUDUS CAESONIUS, OWNED BY CAESO MARINUS

This gladiator school rarely produces real champions, but its gladiators often do quite well. They are a smaller school, with about twenty men on their rosters. They do a good business, selling about half of their students to another Ludus or to private owners; the rest join the school's fighting roster. Other schools usually purchase away their best prospects; the modern equivalent would be a farm team for larger and better-funded organizations.

The school's Lanista is a man named Sentius Cordus. He won't answer any of the investigator's questions concerning anything to do with Velius Surus, as he's been paid not to. Sentius suggests that the investigators speak with the school's

owner, Caeso Marinus. This is the extent of cooperation that the investigators can expect from Sentius, who is at this point rather annoyed with the whole Velius Surus mess.

Investigators attempting to meet with Caeso Marinus must concoct a method for doing so. He is home until about two hours after dawn, then at the school until twilight. His home and the school are both well-guarded. Access to Marinus is controlled by his personal slave, Libo. Libo is an older, bald man who's been a slave his entire life. Getting past Libo requires a successful Fast Talk or Persuade check. Failing that, a discretely offered bribe of at least 5 denarii (fifty sesterii) will also work. Those trying to force their way past him find that two trained gladiators, Helvis and Momus, are always within earshot and ready to defend Caeso Marinus at a moment's notice.

HELVIS AND MOMUS, Age 30s, Gladiators of Ludus Caeso

STR 14	CON 14	SIZ 14	INT 10	POW 12
DEX 14	APP 11	EDU 13	SAN 45	HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 50%, Insight 45%, Spot Hidden 45%.

Weapons: Gladius 60%, damage 1D6+1+db

Fist 60% damage 1D3+db

Grapple 40%, damage special

Kick 25%, damage 1D6+db

Armor: 4 points of Hard Leather Armor.

CAESO MARINUS, Age late 30s, Owner of Ludus Caesonius

STR 11	CON 11	SIZ 10	INT 13	POW 13
DEX 12	APP 12	EDU 15	SAN 65	HP 11

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Accounting 50%, Bargain 50%, Insight 50%, Persuade 50%, Status 40%.

Weapons: Small Knife 30% 1D4+db

Armor: none.

Once the investigators have access to Caeso Marinus, their manner sets the tone of the meeting. He is a reasonable man, but has a quick temper when he feels that he's being treated without the proper respect. Investigators stepping over the line with him may find themselves on the receiving end of a severe beating from Helvis and Momus. Bribe efforts also don't sit well with Caeso Marinus, as he has enough wealth to feel insulted by this. Flattery or an apology work to smooth things over; otherwise, he remains mildly hostile towards the investigators while still answering their questions. Investigators dealing respectfully and honestly with him do best. He remembers Tiberius Velius Surus and how his father purchased his contract to get him out of Ludus Caesonius. Marinus considered the matter a grave misunderstanding, and kept the situation secret so that Surus wasn't branded an Infamis.

If the investigators ask him when the last time he saw Surus was, he tells them that they met a month ago, at the newly restored baths of Titus. Young Surus told him that his father was allowing him to become a promoter and organizer of gladiatorial games. Marinus was happy to hear this, as the boy seemed determined to somehow become involved in the



business of gladiators. He wrote a letter of introduction for Surus to a promoter that he knows, named Spurius Flavius Agrippa. Marinus says that Surus kept asking if Flavius had contacts to Ludus Murmuis, and only wanted to apprentice to a promoter who knew how to reach them.

If the investigators are fans of gladiatorial games, then they know the following common facts about Ludus Murmuis. Marinus can provide investigators with both the commonly known facts, as well as a number of inside-the-industry secondary facts.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE LUDUS MURMUIS

- ✦ Ludus Murmuis is unusual because it only produces a single type of gladiator, the Murmillo.
- ✦ They produce some of the finest Murmillones ever to fight in the arena.
- ✦ The Murmillones of the Ludus Murmuis all pretend to be the SAME person, a formidable villain known as Magnus Murma.
- ✦ When one Magnus Murma dies in the arena, another takes his place, usually said to be his son or a resurrected Magnus Murma, created by powers of Pluto.
- ✦ There is usually a number of Magni Murmae touring the empire at one time.
- ✦ Only the most popular gladiators are ever matched against one. To fight a Magnus Murma means that you've reached the upper level of stardom.

LESS WELL-KNOWN/INSIDER INFORMATION ABOUT THE LUDUS MURMUIS

- ✦ The location of Ludus Murmuis is a closely guarded secret.
- ✦ The Murmillones from this school are never sold or freed.
- ✦ A Magnus Murma always travels with a manager and physician from the school.
- ✦ Magni Murmae never remove their costumes in public.
- ✦ Magni Murmae never entertain fans or socialize outside of the arena.
- ✦ If a Magnus Murma is killed, his remains are handled by his manager and never by the arena officials, a very

unusual stipulation in their contracts. Each Magnus Murma travels with his own Dis Pater and Mercury, costumed officials who verify a gladiator's death and remove him from the field.

Marinus explains that he discussed the school with Surus, and didn't think much of the matter at the time. If the investigators tell him that the young man has vanished, he'll suspect that Surus might be trying to reach Ludus Murmuis. Since the Ludus is so hard to find, he thinks that Surus might try to enroll there, in the hope his father's agents won't be able to locate him.

He explains that his friend Flavius Agrippa has managed to have several Magni Murmae appear in local games, so he must, therefore, know how to get in contact with the Ludus. He can arrange a private meeting with Flavius Agrippa for the investigators, as a favor to the house of Velius, should the investigators put in a good word for him with Manius Velius Tadius. Without this go-between, the investigators must find their own way to meet with Flavius Agrippa, which might prove difficult.

SPURIUS FLAVIUS AGRIPPA, ORGANIZER OF LOCAL ARENA GAMES

This well off, powerful, and ruthless man is a third generation promoter of gladiatorial games. He's grown up around gladiators his entire life, and owns a half dozen as a personal security force. Flavius Agrippa organizes games about three times a year, putting on quality local shows for wealthy patrons. Currently he doesn't have a contract, so he is enjoying some time off outside of the city in his country villa, about five Roman leagues (about seven miles or 10.5 km) north of Rome (or outside of whichever city the scenario begins in).

The villa of Flavius Agrippa lies at the center of a medium sized estate surrounded by orchards of various fruit bearing trees. Investigators attempting to visit here without a letter of introduction are turned away on the road by a pair of guards. The guards will deliver messages to their master, but not let anyone in, as he comes here not to be disturbed. They have strict orders not to let anyone past, and so are immune to bribery attempts, Fast Talk, or Persuade rolls. Investigators can try to Sneak or force their way past them, at their own risk. If the investigators request a meeting through the guards, a reply comes in about three hours, and they are allowed to venture up to the villa to meet with Flavius Agrippa. Investigators showing a letter of introduction from Caeso Marinus are allowed to approach the main house without delay.

Guards at the Estate of Spurius Flavius Agrippa, Age 20s

STR 14	CON 14	SIZ 12	INT 10	POW 12
DEX 14	APP 09	EDU 11	SAN 40	HP 13

Damage Bonus: +1D4

MURMILLO

Skills: Dodge 40%, Insight 35%, Listen 40%, Spot Hidden 45%.

Weapons: Long Spear 50%, damage 1D10+db

Large Knife 45%, damage 1D6+db

Grapple 40%, damage special

Armor: 3 points of hard leather w/ metal helmet.

Investigators fighting or sneaking onto the estate must be clever to gain access to Flavius Agrippa. Those making an appointment or having a letter of introduction meet with Agrippa in the gardens. He is there with his wife and son, overseeing a group of gardeners. Agrippa greets the investigators in a friendly manner, as his profession dictates good relations with prospective clients. As soon as the investigators mention the name Tiberius Velius Surus, he becomes animated, asking if they are agents of the house of Velius and if Manius Velius Tasius has made a final decision about organizing a day of games. This is sure to confuse the investigators who likely ask him to explain. The promoter then relates the following:

A CONVERSATION WITH FLAVIUS AGRIPPA

- ☛ Young Velius Surus visited with him several weeks ago with a letter of introduction from Caeso Marinus.
- ☛ Surus told him that he represented the House of Velius on behalf of his father, the Pater Familias.
- ☛ He explained that his father wished to sponsor a day of gladiatorial games, and wanted Surus to help organize it. Agrippa says that young Surus had a wax tablet with questions, and took many notes.
- ☛ Surus explained that his father's biggest wish for these games was having a Magnus Murma appear, and asked for assurances that Agrippa could arrange that.
- ☛ Agrippa then explained that he had good relations with an agent of Ludus Murmius, and could get in contact with him.
- ☛ Agrippa confesses that he knows where Ludus Murmius is located, and says that he mentioned this to Velus Surus in confidence, in order to convince the House of Velus that he could procure the desired gladiator.
- ☛ Agrippa becomes angry if he learns that he was lied to by Surus, asking the investigators to arrange a meeting with Manius Velius Tasius to discuss the matter.
- ☛ He explains that he has already spent a great deal of time laying the groundwork for a possible day of games for the House of Velius.

Agrippa wants compensation and an assurance that Surus will be punished by his family. Should investigators agree with him, he calms down. If the investigators explain that the boy has run off and they are tracking him down, Agrippa realizes where he must be heading. He explains that the location of the Ludus Murmius came up in a conversation he had with Surus. If the investigators agreed to petition Velius Tasius for remuneration of a portion of his expenses, or if they offer to pay Agrippa 3,000 sestertii from the funds provided by Velius Tasius for bribes, he tells them where to find the Ludus Murmius. If they haven't done either, Agrippa is still angry, and the investigators only get this information with a successful Persuade or Fast Talk roll with a -15% penalty.

Flavius Agrippa explains to investigators that knowledge of where Ludus Murmius is located is very sensitive, and that sharing the information with any of his competitors would damage the relationship. This is an implied threat, and if the investigators don't realize what he is implying, he makes the threat clear.

The location of the Ludus Murmius is in the port city of Drepanum, on the west coast of the province of Sicilia (the island of Sicily).



PART TWO: LUDUS MURMIUS

The investigation can start anywhere in the Empire, but eventually moves to the province of Sicilia. This means an ocean voyage, and investigators can easily book passage on a trade ship from any Mediterranean port, as Sicilia is a major exporter of grain. Getting a ship that actually lands in Drepanum is a bit trickier. Unless the investigators make a critical success on a Persuade roll or a Luck Roll, or pay double the normal amount, the ship that they hire simply won't land there. If asked why, captains will say that Drepanum conducts very little trade, so it is an unprofitable destination. Investigators landing elsewhere in Sicilia must then travel overland to the island's west coast.

While the ocean voyage and the ship the investigators sail on aren't important, here are three ships and their captains for Keepers and investigators to choose from.

AVAILABLE SHIPS

Name	Type	Cargo	Captain
<i>Aurora</i>	Merchant	empty	Captain Linos (Greek)
<i>Sirus</i>	Merchant	hauling fabric	Captain Fadius Cornix (Roman)
<i>Cithara</i>	Merchant	hauling pottery	Captain Hilario (Iberian / Spain)

Arriving in Sicilia: any location other than Drepanum

Investigators arriving in Sicilia somewhere other than Drepanum land at either Lilybaeum or Panormus. While they must then travel overland, delaying their arrival and incurring additional expenses, investigators proceeding this way are actually more fortunate. They can question the citizens of these cities about Drepanum and its people, learning that they are friendly and prosperous, although something of homebodies. They may even learn (with a successful Luck roll) that a strange illness affects some of the city's residence (see "Ocean Pox"). Investigators traveling overland can also enter Drepanum undetected by the Sect of Murma.

ARRIVING IN SICILIA: LANDING IN DREPANUM

A secret cult (see "The Sect of Murma") has a strong presence on the docks of Drepanum. About 50% of all fishermen here work for Sextus Nestorius Cenaeus, the owner of Ludus Murmius. Of these men, about a third are Deep One hybrids who can trace their birth to unions in the caves below the school. Everyone working for Cenaeus has been told to be on the lookout for "trouble-makers" asking about a missing rich man named Surus. Each investigator arriving in port here has

a 30% of being spotted by members of the sect, increasing to 75% if they start asking questions around the docks.

ABOUT DREPANUM

Drepanum is a quiet, comfortable place where the people are generally happy and friendly. The locals are wary of strangers and seldom travel far from their homes, but no more so than most people living in the province. This large town is quite prosperous for one whose economy seems to be centered on fishing. Even accounting for the almost unnaturally productive fishing grounds, the people live more comfortably than they should. The fine houses, paved streets, flowing fountains, and lively marketplace suggest more of a tourist resort than a fishing village. Much of the economy is bolstered by the strange coins of white gold, in which many of the families of Drepanum often trade.

OCEAN POX

Most locals realize that many of their neighbors, and possibly themselves personally, develop some rather strange physical traits as they enter their middle years. Certain individuals develop widely set unblinking eyes, large thick lips, and a thinning of the hair. Their skin becomes oily, and they begin to give off an odd odor, like low tide. Eventually, they physically deteriorate until they become infirm, whereupon they are cared for by the local temple (see "The Sect of Murma"). Many of those suffering from this condition come from very prosperous families, so those afflicted are not ostracized in



any way. Many who develop this are condition are fishermen, so the locals call this mysterious ailment “Ocean Pox”. The locals know that it is not contagious, and not fatal for many years, so there is little fear of the illness

Ocean Pox is, of course, the Change: a metamorphosis from Human to Deep One form which every Deep One Hybrid undergoes. However, most (70%) of those who suffer from Ocean Pox have no idea what is going on, nor any clue about their non-human ancestry. They are educated about their true nature and heritage by the Sect of Murma, but only after they become infirm. In a hospice run by the Sect and supported by House Nestorius, those suffering through the final stages of Ocean Pox are believed to be cared for during their final days, “as they pass from this into the next, everlasting life.”

THE SECT OF MURMA

The Deep Ones have done a very good job of remaining hidden, while integrating themselves into the daily life and apparent normalcy of Drepanum. They do not have a formal temple (although they do have a secret one). Worshipers gather ad hoc at any of the seventeen small shrines scattered about the community. Their operations are well funded with regular influxes of Deep One gold, as well as the income raised both through Ludus Murmius and the town’s fishing enterprises. The cult operates quietly, carefully and slowly, using money rather than violence to solve most problems. However, they will use violence if such drastic measures are sure to solve problems without creating new ones.

Outwardly, the Sect of Murma claims to be dedicated to a lost goddess, once worshipped on these shores. She is said to be the lover of Neptune, a goddess of the changing tides and the bounty of the sea, caring for the sick and rewarding her faithful with everlasting life. Strangely, while most people of Drepanum make offerings to the goddess “Murma”, the sect has no holy days and conducts no services. Most outsiders view the Sect as little more than another Eastern-style mystery cult. However, as the Sect of Murma seems harmless, pays its taxes and is generous with its wealth, no one really pays it much mind.

FINDING THE LUDUS MURMIUS

Investigators asking locals for directions to Ludus Murmius, or the area’s gladiator school, are met with looks of confusion and suspicion. Those living in Drepanum know that outsiders who have business with Ludus Murmius, usually promoters, trainers, or slave traders, are typically met by agents from the school as they land at the docks. Those rare visitors who arrive unexpectedly with business at the Ludus always already know where it is located. Locals are, therefore, uneasy giving directions to the school, so investigators must make a successful Fast Talk roll in order to learn the location of Ludus Murmius. However, every investigator asking for directions must also make a halved Luck roll (whether they are given directions or not). Should any of them fail, a messenger is

sent up to the Ludus, far quicker than investigators can travel there. By the time that the investigators arrive at the school, its owner, Sextus Nestorius Cenaesus, is well forewarned of their coming.

TALKING TO LOCALS

The people of Drepanum do not realize that anything is amiss in their community. They have long accepted the “reality” of Ocean Pox sometimes afflicting their friends and neighbors, and treat those with it no differently than they did before. They don’t suspect anything sinister, because the Sect of Murma does a good job of operating discreetly. The Sect doesn’t openly worship its dark deity, and its dealings with the Deep Ones are conducted underground (literally: see “The Temple of Murma”). The sect is generous, and has a steady supply of pale gold coins which they use judiciously to ease any suspicions. Those who sometime vanish are criminals or slaves, with the Ludus being a perfect cover for troubling events. However, investigators making a successful Persuade roll at –10% manage to get a local to speak about some of the odd things in the community, relating 1D4 of the following facts:



Information about the Sect of Murma

- ❧ Nestorius Cenaesus controls much of the city’s wealth, his family having done so for several generations.
- ❧ House Nestorius owns many fishing boats, and most fishermen are clients of Cenaesus.
- ❧ Ludus Murmius accounts for as much as a third of the local economy.
- ❧ House Nestorius mints gold coins which are used locally. (Keeper’s Information: this is quite suspicious. No record of any concession from Rome to do so can be found, and should the appropriate authorities in Rome learn of this practice, it would be considered a serious public crime. Yet the locally based authorities seem unperturbed).
- ❧ The gold coins distributed by House Nestorius have a lovely white luster.
- ❧ Ludus Murmius places orphaned children with local families. They pay these families a gold coin per season (per child) to help raise these children. No one is sure how long ago this started, but it was at least two or three generations ago.
- ❧ House Nestorius is very generous to the people of Drepanum. It feeds the poor, funds public works, and creates jobs, and is the primary patron of a large segment of the local population.
- ❧ Legends say that there are mines under Ludus Murmius, tunneled out of natural sea caves, which is where House Nestorius obtains the pale gold used in its minted coins.

 House Nestorius cares for the sick, particularly those who contract Ocean Pox. It fully funds the hospice run by the Sect of Murma, where the afflicted live out their final days in comfort. No one is quite sure where it is; some think that it is on an island, some on board a ship, and some on the banks of the Hypsas River.

A VISIT TO LUDUS MURMIUS

This walled gladiator school overlooks some of the best real estate in the area, sitting atop a seaside cliff with a spectacular view of the ocean. Ludus Murmius is small as such facilities go, but very secure, with tall walls, thick gates, and ample guards. Investigators who have visited such places before (such as Ludus Gloriosus and/or Ludus Caesonium) notice something different about Ludus Murmius' layout, with a successful Idea check. While the security at a typical gladiator school is designed to keep people in (as gladiators are typically slaves), the layout of Ludus Murmius seems designed to keep people out. There is but a single main gate which is always guarded, day and night. Visitors are escorted about, and not allowed to wander off under any circumstances. Anyone found wandering about unescorted is dealt with harshly, possibly fatally.

Inside, the school is well appointed with the finest amenities, and is likely one of the finest such facilities in the entire Roman Empire. There are unusually comfortable quarters for the gladiators, trainers, staff, slaves, and servants. The Ludus has a well-stocked kitchen, its own well and sanitation system, and an excellent hospital and bath house. There is also a large crypt where the ashes of its former students are stored. The training grounds are actually a small scale performance arena, complete with cages for prisoners and seating for about one hundred spectators. Unlike most gladiator schools, the owner of Ludus Murmius makes his home, a modest but lovely villa surrounded by gardens, within the school's walls.

Secret Passages

There is a secret passage in the back wall of the Ludus, but it is always locked from the inside. There is also an underground passage up to the Ludus from a system of caves which open on the seashore. Both of these passages are heavily guarded.

FAMILIA GLADITORIA (THE GLADIATOR FAMILY OF LUDUS MURMIUS)

Currently there are three active Murma Magnus gladiator teams, each consisting of a fully trained gladiator, his personal physician, his manager, and support staff (including a Dis Pater and a Mercury to spirit his body away should the

worst occur). These teams live here while they wait to be hired for their next appearance. At the moment, there are also six students living here, in various stages of their training. The facility employs a dozen guards, all of whom received gladiatorial training; these are mostly former students who received injuries during their training which kept them from being able to meet the school's high standards.

The school also houses a general staff of about fifty, including trainers, physicians, armorers, doctors, accountants, costumers, clerks, cooks, maids, and a masseuse. Everyone working and training here is a local. Each was born and raised in Drepanum, growing up dreaming of gaining a position in the Ludus Murmius family. They are incredibly loyal to the school. Investigators making a successful Idea roll notice that about two thirds of the staff and all of the students show some signs of the early stages of Ocean Pox.

Three notable members of this Familia Gladitoria are the owner of Ludus Murmius, Sextus Nestorius Ceneaus; its Lanista (manager), Morova Amazonia; and Doctor (lead trainer), Enico Victorius. Nestorius Ceneaus is a wealthy patrician whose family has owned Ludus Murmius, along with much of Drepanum, for six generations. Morova Amazonia and Enico Victorius are not native to the area. Their faces and names may be known to the investigators, however, especially if they are fans of gladiatorial games (-40% on a Know check, -5% if a fan of the games). They are both retired champion gladiators who seemed to vanish from public life (Morova ten years ago, Enico six). In fact, most people think that they are both dead (a rumor intentionally spread by the Ludus). Neither Ceneaus, Amazonia, nor Victorius show any sign of the mysterious affliction, as they are all untainted human beings.

Keeper's Note: Morova and Enico are retired champion of the Retiarius and Thracian gladiator styles, respectively; these are types who are often the opponents of Murmillo gladiators.

MURMA MAGNUS (Murmillo Gladiator x3), Age 20s

STR 16 CON 16 SIZ 15 INT 10 POW 12
DEX 16 APP 04 EDU 16 SAN 65 HP 16

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 50%, Insight 40%, Sneak 40%.

Weapons: Gladius 75% damage 1D6+1+db

Fist/Punch 65%, damage 1D3+db

Kick 35%, damage 1D6+db

Armor: 4 points: High crested full helmet, belt (cinctus), left leg wrappings (fascia), linen arm guard (manica) and right leg shin guard (ocrea).

Large, rectangular, curved shield (30 points, 50% parry)

TRAINEE GLADIATORS (Murmillo x6), Age teens

STR 16 CON 14 SIZ 12 INT 10 POW 12
DEX 14 APP 09 EDU 11 SAN 40 HP 13

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 40%, Insight 25%, Sneak 25%.

Weapons: Gladius 55% 1D6+1,

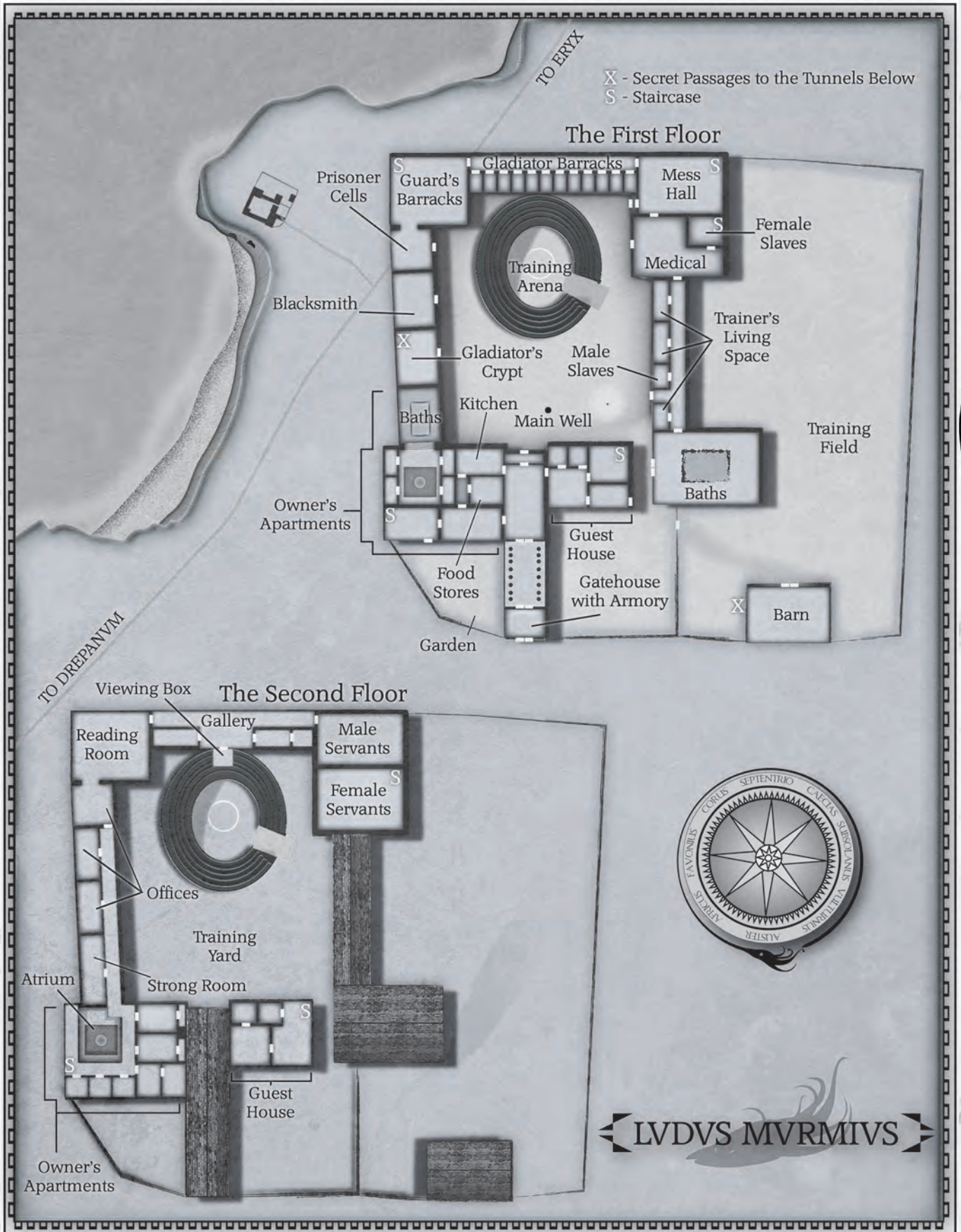
Fist/Punch 60%, damage 1D3+db

Kick 25%, damage 1D6+db

Armor: 4 points: High crested full helmet, belt (cintus), left leg wrappings (fascia), linen arm guard (manica) and right leg shin guard (ocrea).

Large rectangular curved shield (30 points, 50% parry)

MURMILLO



DE HORRORE COSMICO

Guards of the Ludus Murmius (x12), Age 30s

STR 14 CON 14 SIZ 13 INT 10 POW 12
DEX 11 APP 09 EDU 12 SAN 40 HP 13

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 50%, Insight 45%, Listen 45%, Sneak 40%. Spot Hidden 45%.

Weapons: Long Spear 50%, damage 1D10+db
Large Knife 45%, damage 1D6+db
Grapple 40%, damage special

Armor: 3 points: Hard leather with metal helmet.

SEXTUS NESTORIUS CENAEUS, Owner of Ludus Murmius, Age 44

STR 11 CON 13 SIZ 13 INT 15 POW 14
DEX 12 APP 13 EDU 16 SAN 0 HP 12

Damage Bonus: none

Skills: Accounting 60%, Bargain 55%, Dodge 60%, Hide 40%, Insight 55%, Listen 50%, Persuade 50%, Sneak 45%, Status 40%.

Weapons: Small Knife 50%, damage 1D4+db
Grapple 45%, damage special

Armor: none.

Spells: Contact Deep One, Breath of the Deep, Evil Eye.

Description: An intelligent and charming businessman who works hard to seem less capable than he actually is, thereby luring others into underestimating him. He has taken to wearing a neatly trimmed beard, now that it's back in style. He is fit, but not muscular, and only trained to defend himself if necessary. He is secretly a devotee of the Sect of Murma and able to cast a few spells should the need arise.

MOROVA AMAZONIA, Lanista of Ludus Murmius (retired Gladiatrix—Retiaria), Age 36

STR 14 CON 14 SIZ 16 INT 10 POW 12
DEX 11 APP 13 EDU 12 SAN 0 HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 60%, Insight 45%, Sneak 40%. Spot Hidden 45%.

Weapons: Trident 70%, damage 1D6+db

Sica 70%, damage 1D4+db

Fist 65%, damage 1D3+db

Grapple 35%, damage special

Kick 35%, damage 1D6+db

Net 70%, HP 5. On a successful hit, the target is ensnared and must spend the next round cutting himself free. Trying to use any edged weapon other than a small knife halves the attack roll against the net. Removing the net without damaging it requires three rounds. While she does not carry a net and trident with her on her daily errands, they are in her quarters if she is alerted to trouble in time to retrieve them.

Armor: 3 points: Padded Chainmail Arm Guard (worn on non-trident arm, 50% parry).

Description: This exceedingly tall woman was wildly popular in the arena, known for her striking good looks and fearsome battle cries. While her looks are fading, she is still a beauty, and has lost none of her skill with the net and her trademark four pronged trident (fuscum). Despite being in the middle months of her sixth pregnancy, Morova remains quite active in the running of Ludus Murmius.

ENICO VICTORIUS, "Doctor" of Ludus Murmius (retired Gladiator—Thracian), Age 35

STR 14 CON 17 SIZ 14 INT 09 POW 11
DEX 15 APP 14 EDU 14 SAN 0 HP 16

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 50%, Insight 45%, Sneak 40%, Spot Hidden 45%.

Weapons: Large Sica 70%, damage 1D6+db

Fist/Punch 65%, damage 1D3+db

Grapple 35%, damage special

Kick 35%, damage 1D6+db

Armor: 3 points: Thracian Armor (Leather sword arm guard, both legs padded and greaves) and a helmet (wide brim, full face visor decorated with feathers).

Small Shield (20 Points, 50% parry)

Description: This champion gladiator, from Hispania Tarraconensis (northern Spain) begin his career as a condemned criminal, but earned his freedom after racking up more than sixteen victories. He was known for his incredible stamina, rugged good looks, and gory showmanship. His manner is that of a caged animal, saying little, sharp eyed and coiled to strike at any moment. His title of "Doctor" refers to his status as head trainer; he is not a medic.

A MEETING WITH SEXTUS NESTORIUS CENAEUS

Investigators may try to question the owner of Ludus Murmius while searching for Velius Surus. Ceneaus allows them inside Ludus Murmius to meet with them, and size them up, as he attempts to determine their intentions. Both Morova Amazonia and Enico Victorius are beside him during this meeting, to protect him and, hopefully, to intimidate the investigators so that they don't start any trouble. Ceneaus begins the meeting warmly enough, serving wine, cheese, bread, and fruit to the investigators as introductions are made and pleasantries exchanged.

If investigators ask about Velius Surus, the trio steadfastly declares that no such person has ever visited Ludus Murmius and denies having any knowledge as to his whereabouts. Ceneaus graciously offers to make inquiries across Drepanum to see if any of his many clients might have seen someone matching the boy's description. Ceneaus asks the investigators to convey his sympathies to the missing man's family, stating that he too is a father and can only imagine how difficult this must be. The patrician is a very skilled liar, although Morova and Enico are far less convincing.

In return, Ceneaus asks the investigators not to reveal the location of the Ludus. He explains that the mystery surrounding the school is a powerful promotional tool. The whole Magna Murma mystique, he says, started several generations ago and quickly became something of a staple in the gladiatorial circuit. If the investigators agree to keep the secret, Ceneaus offers them (nay, insists on them "enjoying") the use of a villa, complete with a staff of a dozen slaves and its fully stocked kitchen, for the duration of their stay in Drepanum (a limit of 10 days). He explains that the villa is maintained for visiting businessmen, and no one is expected to arrive for some time. If the investigators



don't agree to keep the location of the Ludus Murmilius a secret, they are unlikely to ever leave the school alive.

Nestorius Cenaeus then says he is very sorry that they apparently came all this way for nothing. To make up for this, he insists they remain at the school for a special treat (no penalty or reprisal should they respectfully refuse). He explains that one of his students is about to graduate and begin performing, should he pass his final exam. Cenaeus invites the investigators to witness "the birth of a new Magnus Murma".

THE MATCH

If the investigators agree to remain for the student's final trials, they are led to the Ludus' training arena. Once they are seated, in the mockup of what would be the senator's box, a fully armored Murmillo gladiator, wearing the trappings of a Magnus Murma, takes the sands. As Cenaeus chit-chats about the costume ("each Magnus Murma's armor, weapons, and shield are unique you know...") and the gladiator ("just sixteen years old and ready to take on all comers..."), the school's entire staff (except for the guards currently on duty) fill the stands to watch. Soon, half a dozen armed men enter the arena, armed with a variety of weapons and ill-fitting armor. Cenaeus explains the men are thieves and bandits, condemned by the local prefect and purchased by him for training purposes.

The match begins with all the standard pomp and formality. One after another, the condemned prisoners square off against the young gladiator. The matches become more difficult as the Murmillo slowly begins to tire. Morova explains that stamina is important to a Murmillo, due to the weight of his kit. Yet, one by one, the gladiator dispatches all six men, getting only a few nicks and bruises. The prisoners all fall to

well-placed sword wounds, which cripple four of them and instantly kill two others. Cenaeus complains that the instant kills are sloppy and not very entertaining, but Enico defends the student saying "He's young; he'll learn. He's probably nervous." This match is intended to intimidate the investigators by giving them a display of the forces Nestorius Cenaeus has at his disposal.

FAREWELL

After the match Cenaeus explains that he must return to work and excuses himself. He assigns a trusted servant, a local woman with Ocean Pox named Docia, to guide them to his guest villa in Drepanum if they've accepted the offer. Morova, escorted by two Magni Murmae, walk them all out. As the investigators leave she places four coins (gold aurei, worth 100 sestertii each) in each of the investigator's hands. She explains, "A gift from the Familia Gladitoria and house Nestorius. It's some spending money during your stay, a boon for our local merchants. My masters' apologies that you did not find the man you're looking for." If the investigators look over the coins, they notice the gold has a strange, pale luster that they've never seen before.

If the investigators have at any time explained their honest reason for looking for Surus, Morova Amazonia makes an additional statement. "Do you think that boy's father really wants him found? If he enrolled at a Ludus somewhere, he's an Infamis now, a disgrace to himself and his family. Even if you did find him and drag him home, what then? He'd either escape again or be forced to live while denied his dream. It's better for everyone if you just tell this poor man's family that he's dead." Her statement is likely more direct than her employer would approve of.



PART THREE: RESOLUTION

After visiting Ludus Murmius and meeting with Nestorius Cenaeus and his staff, investigators should realize that the Ludus is hiding something. Investigators making a successful Insight roll may determine someone lied when claiming to know nothing about Velius Surus. The investigators then have a choice to make:

-  Do they attempt to break into the Ludus Murmius to search for Surus (see “Getting into Ludus Murmius”)?
 -  Do they report back to Manius Velius Tasius (and possibly Tasia Vispella) that they couldn’t locate Surus?
- Keeper’s Note:** Should this happen, the scenario ends.



THE GUEST VILLA

The guest villa provided by Nestorius Cenaeus is a spacious and luxurious, complete with its own bath and gardens. The villa is located close to the docks, being just far enough away to minimize the scent of the fishmongers while offering a lovely view of the bay. A dozen freedmen and slaves of House Nestorius staff the villa, waiting on all guests hand and foot.

THE STAFF

Many are skilled entertainers, performing songs, poems, and even plays for the investigators. The kitchen staff is excellent, offering to lay out sumptuous feasts featuring local favorites (mostly seafood dishes). A few of the more comely staff members are skilled courtesans (of both genders) who flirt and make attempts at seduction. Most of the staff is young (late teens to early twenties), but sharp eyed investigators can detect just the slightest hint of Ocean Pox in about half of them.

While friendly and eager to please, the servants are supremely loyal to House Nestorius. They attempt to eavesdrop on all conversations occurring within the villa (Listen 65%, reduced to 35%, if investigators take precautions against being overheard). They then report whatever they overhear to their master, especially the investigators’ plans. This might be used by the investigators to create distractions or disseminate misinformation.

FRIENDLY, HELPFUL DOCIA

This older woman (thirty-seven) with Ocean Pox is one of the most loyal servants of House Nestorius. She is assigned to help the investors during their time in Drepanum. She’ll check in on them several times a day, whether they are staying at her master’s guest villa or not. Two days after the meeting with Nestorius Cenaeus, she delivers the news that her master’s investigation has turned up nothing regarding the whereabouts of Velius Surus. She also informs them that her master’s personal ship, Derceto’s Kiss, will be ready to return them to their port of choice (within Mare Nostrum aka the Mediterranean

Sea) with the next morning’s tide. (On an Occult or other appropriate roll, the investigators realize that Derceto is a Syrian goddess of the sea, occasionally depicted as half woman, half fish).

Docia is also a member of the Sect of Murma, knowing all the dark secrets of Drepanum. Docia sees nothing wrong with what happens here and is a bit naive. She knows that Surus is alive and, in her mind, doing quite well as a guest/stud service in the Temple of Murma. In fact, her elder sister, now a fully changed Deep One, has become one of Surus’ three brides. Fortunately for the investigators, Docia’s not the sharpest knife in the drawer. The last thing Docia wants is conflict or violence, so she places a wax tablet (Murmillo Papers #1) somewhere the investigators are sure to find it, shortly after delivering the message from Nestorius Cenaeus.

If caught or questioned, Docia does not speak, even if tortured. Her loyalty to her master and faith in her goddess is simply too strong. She will, however, beg for mercy and only calls for help or defends herself if given no other alternative. Docia dies without regret, protecting (on her second chance) the secrets of her master, her town, and her people.

DOCIA, Servant of House Nestorius and Priestess of the Sect of Murma, Age 37

STR 09	CON 12	SIZ 08	INT 09	POW 14
DEX 11	APP 07	EDU 06	SAN 30	HP 10

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Conceal 55%, Hide 40%, Insight 35%, Listen 65%, Persuade 50%, Sneak 45%.

Weapons: Small Knife 50%, damage 1D4+db

Armor: none.

Spells: Breath of the Deep, Contact Deep One, Contact Murma (Hydra), Command Shark, Cure / Cause Blindness.

GOONS

If the investigators do not leave Drepanum after being offered passage on Derceto’s Kiss, they may discover, with a successful Spot Hidden roll, that they are now being followed by different people. Half a dozen rough looking men follow them around town, keeping a discrete distance and making no move to approach them. They all have the strange features common to those suffering from Ocean Pox (the taint of the Deep Ones). These men all work for Nestorius Cenaeus, and are following the investigators to make sure they aren’t still looking for Surus.

If confronted, these men play dumb, deny any wrongdoing, and only enter combat to defend themselves. Investigators can evade these men by making a successful Hide or Sneak roll. If the investigators split up, the men break up into two groups of three men each, but won’t split up into groups smaller than three. If the men learn that the investigators are still looking for Surus, they tell Cenaeus. They’ll then pick a fight with the investigators, and try to beat them up to “persuade” them to abandon their quest and leave Drepanum.

GOONS, Hired by Nestorius Cenaeus (x6), Age 30s

STR 14	CON 13	SIZ 12	INT 08	POW 11
DEX 12	APP 07	EDU 06	SAN 50	HP 13

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Listen 45%, Sneak 40%, Spot Hidden 50%, Track 40%.

Weapons: Fist/Punch 65%, damage 1D3+db

Kick 45%, damage 1D6+db

Grapple 40%, damage special

Large Knife 45% 1D6+db (only used if investigators escalate the violence)

Armor: 3 points, Soft Leather aprons.

GETTING INTO LUDUS MURMIUS

Investigators attempting to search the Ludus must do so covertly. The school doesn't allow guests to move about unescorted, nor do they accept outside recruits. Keepers should allow investigators to plan out and execute a break-in to the Ludus Murmilius. There are several ways that investigators might do this:

Hide in a delivery shipment: The school gets many deliveries of food, wine, and various other goods. The investigators might attempt to hide inside such a shipment, or even deliver some goods themselves (while avoiding those that they have already met). The school gets so many deliveries that it routinely accepts them without checking. This Trojan Horse approach can work well.

The Sewers: The school has a modern sanitation link to the sewer system of Drepanum. Investigators ob-

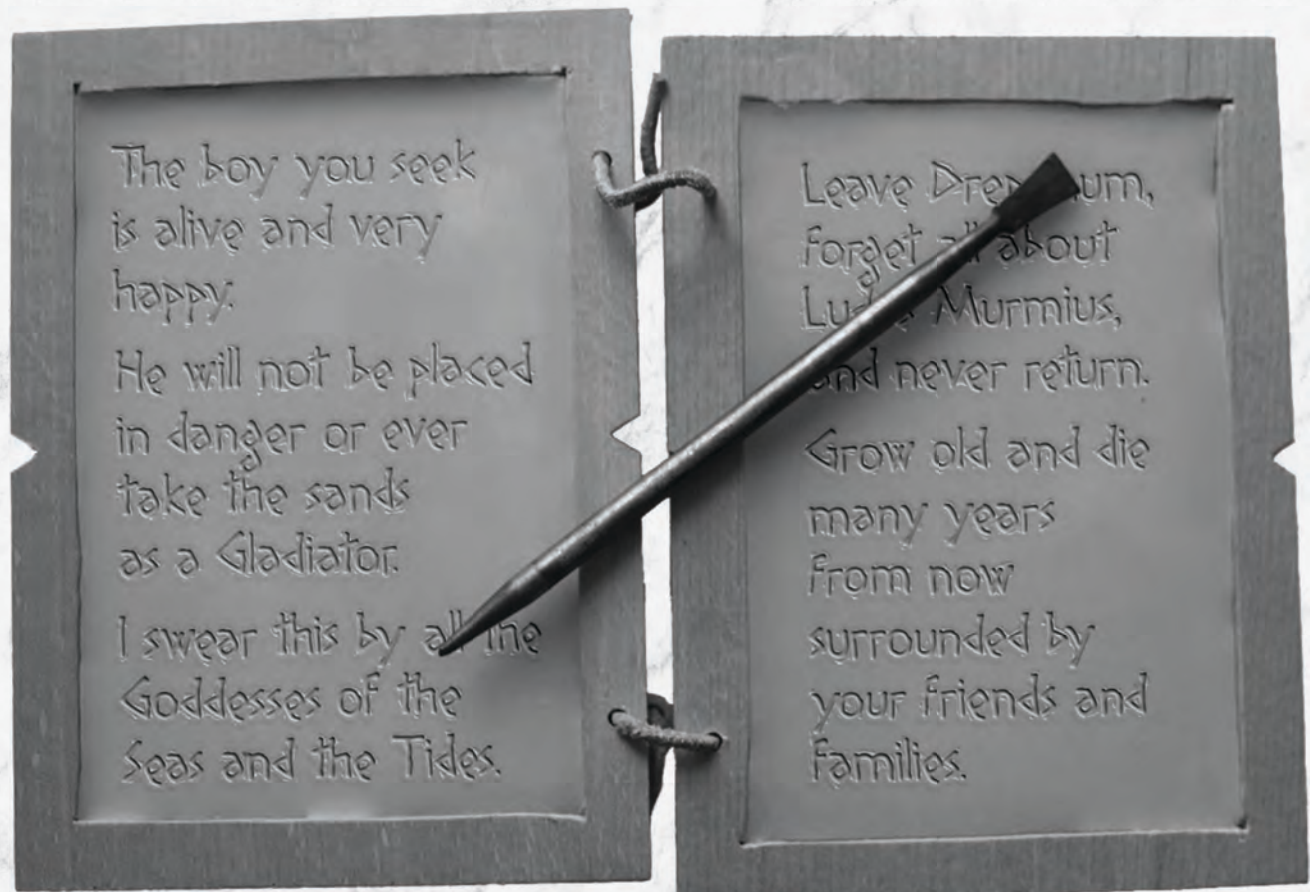
taining maps of the sewer system and gaining access to the sewers may attempt use this route to travel under the Ludus. The trip takes a full hour of crawling through filth, and each investigator suffers 1 HP of damage from muscle strains, cuts, and bruises. Once there, they must then make a STR x2 roll or resort to metalworking tools to force open the grate leading into the Ludus. Entry cannot be made this way for any investigator over SIZ 12 (which investigators won't realize until they reach the grate).

Over the Walls: This rather direct method requires each investigator to make a successful Sneak, Climb, and then a second Sneak check to accomplish this. If even one investigator fails, there is a 40% chance that an alarm is sounded, causing the entire school to mobilize to defend itself from attack.

The Back Door: The Ludus has a secret escape door in its eastern wall which faces the cliff side and overlooks the sea. To discover this door, investigators must attempt to walk the perimeter of the wall unnoticed, which requires a successful Sneak check. Investigators must then make a successful Spot Hidden check while searching the eastern section of the wall to detect the concealed door. It must be forced open from the outside, which requires a STR vs. STR 25 roll on the resistance table. The sturdy, reinforced door can also be battered down; this is no mean task, as it has 100



Murmillio Papers #1



hit points. This door leads to a passage linking both the Ludus Murmuis and The Temple of Murma.

The Rumored Sea Caves: Investigators who learn the rumor about the secret gold mines of house Nestorius might go looking for these sea caves. If investigators travel down to the rocky shoreline directly below the Ludus, they may be able to find the entrance. At the bottom of these 150-foot tall cliffs under the Ludus, investigators making a successful Spot Hidden roll find the entrance to a system of caves. However, this area is guarded night and day, as it serves as the main entrance to the Temple of Murma.

THE TEMPLE OF MURMA



The temple complex occupies a series of excavated chambers and natural caves within the cliffs below the Ludus Murmuis. It is the nerve center for Human / Deep One interaction in Drepanum, an embassy where both races can meet while keeping their activities secret. Should the temple be successfully penetrated by outsiders and the offenders escape the area, the Deep Ones withdraw from Drepanum. The temple and the Ludus Murmuis are hastily evacuated, as the risk of discovery is what the Sect of Murma fears above all else. (This is hardly the only such place within the Roman Empire.) There are three likely ways into the temple:

The Top Entrance: This is located inside the main crypt of the gladiator cemetery within Ludus Murmuis. Investigators may suspect this location is more than it

seems, as guards are always stationed here, an odd place to post security. Inside the crypt, the investigators find a collection of over a hundred niches containing the urns and ashes of the dead. At the far end of the chamber is the statue of a man and a beautiful mermaid passionately coupling. This is a shrine to Hydra, or as she is referred to locally, Mother Murma. Investigators making a successful Spot Hidden roll discover a secret door, triggered open by pressing on the mermaid's lips. The door opens onto a downward leading stairway.

The Emergency Entrance: This secret passage in the eastern wall opens into a small chamber. This room has a trapdoor with an iron-runged ladder leading upwards, and a sloping passage leading west. The trapdoor opens next to the Ludus' dairy barn, emerging underneath a huge pile of cow dung. The sloping passage leads to a sturdy reinforced door, which can be opened by a successful Repair / Devise or a STR vs. STR 16 check, or battered down by inflicting 30 HP worth of damage. The door opens onto the stairwell, traveling up to the mausoleum and downward to the temple.

The Lower Entrance: This way into the temple is found on the seashore, at the base of the cliffs below Ludus Murmuis. The mouth of the sea cave is well hidden, by cunningly placed rocks and a camouflaged net made of seaweed. Investigators must make a successful Spot Hidden roll to find it. However, before the investigators can search for the entryway, they must circumvent or overcome the guardians. Two teams of guards stand watch over this entrance, one during the day and the other at night.



Lower Entrance Guards, Day

By day, the area around the sea cave's entrance is watched over by a pair of ugly old fishermen, Quarto and Hirus, and their equally ugly wives, sisters Fadilla and Familla. They live here in a modest cottage made of driftwood and a seaweed thatch roof. They are stunted Deep Ones, hybrids who, for some reason, never completed their transformation. The four are horribly deformed; misshapen combinations of human, frog, and fish. Investigators viewing them must make a Sanity check for 0/1D2.

The guards warn trespassers that the area is private property, and that they should keep their distance, as the four are diseased, going so far as to wear bells to warn people to against coming too close. This, of course, is only a ruse. They are not much of a threat and can barely defend themselves. However, each carries a seashell horn which they can blow to summon reinforcements. Investigators must sneak past these guardians or dispatch / incapacitate them before they can sound the alarm (see "Lower Entrance Guards, Night").

STUNTED HYBRIDS, Daytime guards of the Lower Entrance (x4), Age 60s

STR 08 CON 06 SIZ 11 INT 12 POW 12
DEX 07 APP N/A EDU 06 SAN 0 HP 9

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Blow Seashell Horn 80%, Dodge 30%, Fast Talk 50%, Insight 40%, Listen 35%, Spot Hidden 40%.

Weapons: Fist/Punch 35%, damage 1D3

Armor: 1 point: thick, calloused, rubbery skin.

Lower Entrance Guards, Night (Or As Summoned Reinforcements)

By night, 2D4 Deep Ones patrol the area around the lower entrance, near the cottage of the stunted hybrids. They are attracted by any form of illumination on the shoreline at night (by contrast, the hybrids never move about after dark). These creatures attack anyone they see whom they do not recognize, viewing them as a possible threat to the temple and the stunted hybrids (of whom they are protective). Deep Ones are always lurking in this area, arriving in 2D4 rounds if the one of the stunted hybrids blows his seashell horn.

THE DEEP ONES (2D4, 40% chance of being a Magnus Murma Deep One)

STR 14 CON 11 SIZ 16 INT 13 POW 11
DEX 11 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: Claws 25%, damage 1D6+db

Armor: 1 point of skin and scales.

Sanity Loss: 0/1D6 Sanity points to see a Deep One.

Magnus Deep Ones

A few of the Deep Ones found guarding the Lower Entrance once trained at the Ludus Murmuis, and performed as Magna Murma while they were human. Eventually these gladiators underwent their transformation, becoming full Deep Ones. Even though they are no longer human, they retain many of their fighting skills. These creatures are physically more

powerful than others of their kind, and typically wield large shields in combat. Investigators realizing that the creatures were once Magnus Murma gladiators must make an additional Sanity Check for 1/1D3.

MAGNUS MURMA DEEP ONES (40% chance for every Deep One Encountered)

STR 17 CON 15 SIZ 18 INT 14 POW 12
DEX 11 HP 17

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Weapons: Claw (50%, 1d6+db)

Armor: 2 points of skin and scales.

Large rectangular curved shield (30 points, 50% parry)

Sanity Loss: 0/1D6 Sanity points to see a Magnus Murma Deep One, plus an additional 1/1D3 if viewers realize they were once gladiators.

The Last Ditch Reinforcement

If the Deep Ones guarding the lower entrance feel over-matched, they can attempt to summon a Shoggoth from the depths to defend the temple. Summoning this Shoggoth requires one of the Deep Ones to snap off a seashell pendant (they each wear one for such emergencies) and then hurl it into the sea, an act requiring two combat rounds. Investigators may well surmise that allowing a fleeing Deep One to hurl a glowing seashell into the ocean cannot be in their best interest. Unless the shell is hurled into the ocean, it has no effect. If one of these shells strikes the surface of the ocean, the Shoggoth arrives within 1D4 rounds to kill everything that isn't a Deep One that it finds in the area.



THE SHOGGOTH, Guardian of the Temple of Murma

STR 63 CON 42 SIZ 84 INT 7 POW 10
DEX 4 HP 63

Damage Bonus: +8D6

Weapons: Crush 70%, damage is db

Armor: none, but:

- fire and electrical attacks only do half damage;
- physical weapons do only 1 point of damage, impaling or not;
- a shoggoth regenerates 2 hit points per round.

Spells: none.

Sanity Loss: 1D6/1D20 Sanity points to see a Shoggoth.

The Sea Cave

This small sea cave contains a deep pool of tidal water. In the rear wall of this chamber is a secret door made of a huge coral slab mounted on a swinging latch hinge. Finding this door and its opening mechanism requires a successful Spot Hidden check. Beyond this door is a staircase leading upwards into the cliffs, which links with the staircase leading down from the Ludus Murmuis. Both of these stairways lead to the temple gates.

The Temple Gates

Both staircases lead to a chamber, whose main feature is a pair of massive bronze doors set into an archway. The archway is decorated with carvings of twin mermaids. The one on the left is lovely and traditional, while the other seems monstrous and terrifying. The monstrous one possesses

DE HORRORE COSMICO

a fish's head, and hands with both webbing and claws on a scaled torso which descends into perfectly human hips, legs and feet. The doors slide open smoothly on oiled hinges.

THE TEMPLE OF MURMA

In this secure complex, humans and Deep Ones mingle freely. Most of the hybrid children are both conceived and born here. Aged hybrids undergoing the painful final stages of their transformation are cared for here (this being the mysterious hospice). Deep Ones present their human comrades gifts of gold, which are then minted into coins, here. Lastly, human sacrifices are made to Murma upon her bloodstained altar. This temple has operated for more than a century now, and has never been violated by infidels. Should the sanctity of the temple ever be violated, the offenders will pay for such insult with their lives.

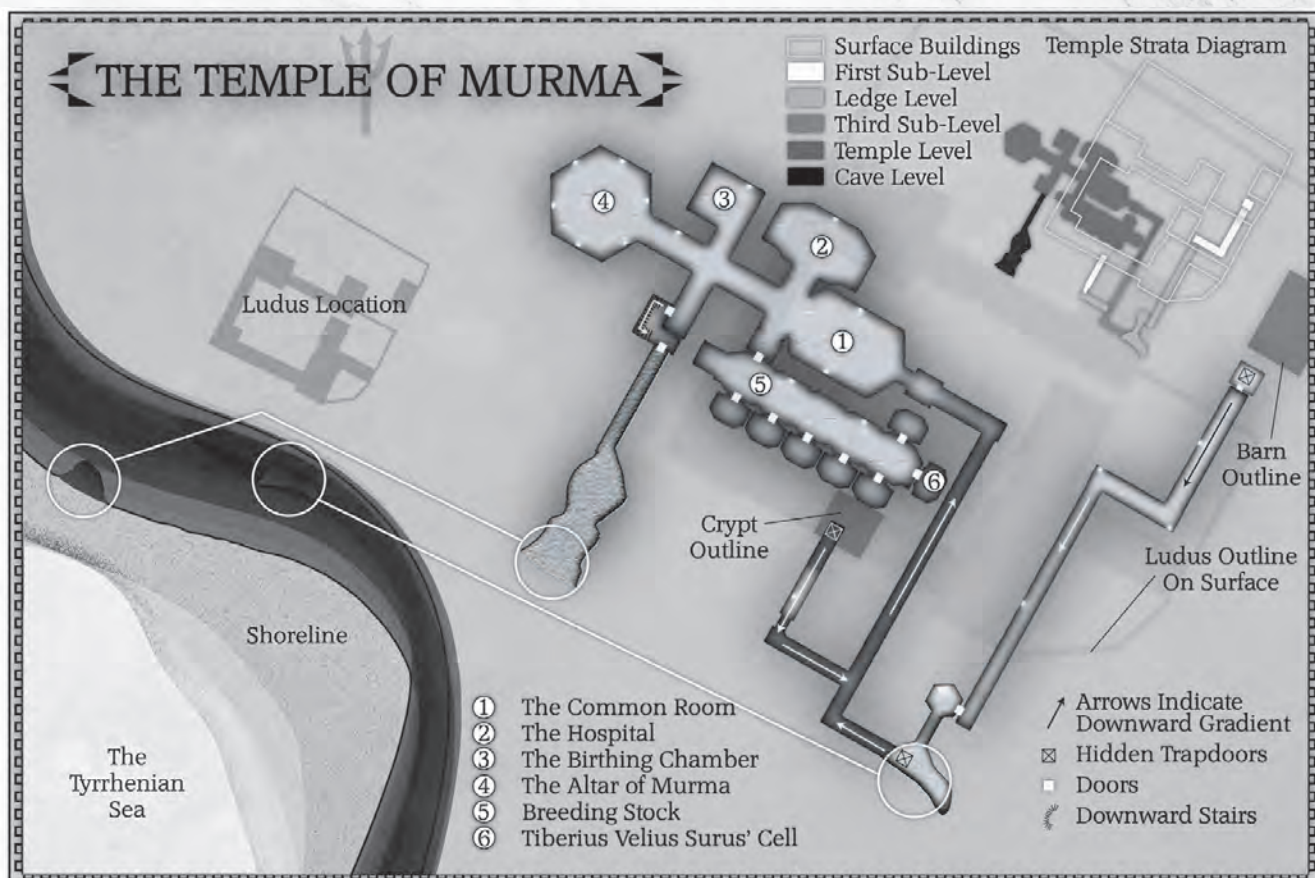
LAYOUT

- 1: The Common Room:** This large area holds places to sit and talk, share meals, socialize, and relax. Both Deep Ones and humans meet here regularly, and at any time, 1D4 humans / hybrids and 1D3 Deep Ones can be found here. There is a 50% chance that any humans / hybrids encountered here are guards, gladiator students, or gladiators (1, 2, or 3 respectively on a 1D3). These men have their weapons and armor close at hand. Any Deep Ones encountered here have a 1 in 4 chance of being a Magnus Murma Deep One.

- 2: The Hospice (Hospital):** This room cares for hybrids during the final stages of their transformation into full Deep Ones. At any time, there will be 1D4 human/hybrid caretakers caring for 2D8 transforming hybrids. Those experiencing this advanced stage of their metamorphosis are nearly crippled with pain, and loathsome to behold. Seeing one requires an investigators make a Sanity check for 1/1D3. No one encountered here has any combat skills, and if threatened, they scream for help and / or beg for mercy.

- 3: The Birthing Chamber:** This is where hybrid midwives tend to Deep One mothers as they deliver their children. Infants are then cared for here for a few days, until they're strong enough to be placed with local families. At any time, 2D6 infants and 2-5 (1D4+1) midwives can be found here. Also here is a human woman, recovering from recent childbirth, suckling her newborn son. Her name is Vechtiburga, a Germanic slave and prisoner of the cult. Vechtiburga speaks only her native tongue (Germanic) and is still quite weak. In the bed beside her is a Deep One mother, in the final stages a difficult labor. If interrupted the midwives scream and try to block the investigators from interfering, begging "Please, let us finish. We'll lose them both if you stop us now. The child is innocent." Seeing this costs the investigators 1/1D3 sanity points.

- 4: The Altar of Murma:** This chamber is decorated





with beautiful, yet disturbing items of Deep One art: statues, oil lamps, and offering bowls of pale Deep One Gold with aquatic motifs. The walls are painted with a seascape fresco of a sunken city and a huge, tentacle-winged dragon sleeping atop a huge stone slab (Cthulhu). The floor is covered with a vast and colorful mosaic depicting Deep Ones and Humans joining in fellowship, as a massive mermaid goddess gathers them all up in her arms. A massive statue of this same goddess, standing fully twenty feet tall and made of fine marble, dominates the far wall. Before this statue is a cut slab of coral, four feet wide, seven feet long, and stained with the blood of hundreds of human sacrifices. At any time, 2D6 humans / hybrids and 2D4 Deep Ones can be found worshipping in this chamber. Any worshippers found here have a 30% chance of knowing 1D4 of the following spells: Dominate, Evil Eye, Implant Fear, Breath of the Deep.

5&6: The Breeding Stock: There are seven cells here, overseen at all times by a hybrid jailor (a retired Magnus Murma). All of the prisoners here are young, fertile, untainted humans. Cells one, two, and three each contain a single female prisoner. Cell number four holds a pair of young men. Cell number five, a larger and more comfortable cell filled with extra food, comfortable beds, and games, contains four pregnant women. Cell number six is empty (reserved for captured investigators). The seventh and final cell (equal in size to cell five) contains a single male prisoner, currently “entertaining” a trio of Deep One women. This is Tiberius Velius Surus.

A Dream Realized in Madness

Velius Surus is alive, physically healthy, and apparently happy in his delusion. He is also completely insane, lost in a delusion in which he is a famous gladiator. In Surus’ warped reality, the trio of female Deep Ones are his adoring, insatiable fans. Velius Surus won’t willingly leave his cell (“home”). Investigators must subdue Surus and forcibly remove him from the temple complex. Luckily, Surus is unarmed, as his captors worried that he might hurt himself. Unfortunately, his Deep Ones brides fight viciously to retain such a willing breeding partner. These female Deep Ones have the same statistics as regular Deep Ones, but have no possibility of being Magnus Murma Deep Ones.

TIBERIUS VELIUS SURUS, Insane Wannabe Gladiator, Age 19

STR 14	CON 13	SIZ 14	INT 09	POW 10
DEX 13	APP 13	EDU 10	SAN 15	HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 35%, Martial Arts—Unexpectedly Fights With the Strength of Twenty Men 30%

Weapons: Fist/Punch 55%, damage 1D3+db
Grapple 40%, damage special

Armor: none.

Indefinite Insanity: Delusional Psychosis

Optional Final Battle

If the investigators penetrate the Temple of Murma and enter the altar chamber, they have desecrated the holy chamber. At some point in the near or immediate future, they will suffer the consequences of this act. When the investigators are near the

DE HORRORE COSMICO

ocean (a difficult thing to avoid on an island), a twenty-foot tall Deep One emerges from the sea and attempts to destroy them. This is the Great Old One Hydra, the Goddess of the Deep Ones, coming to claim vengeance for the desecration of her sacred temple. The goddess fights until the investigators are all dead, they escape, or she herself is reduced to 25 HP or less.

If investigators leave the temple via the lower entrance, which opens onto the seashore, this attack can happen at that moment. The attack could occur when the investigators are onboard a ship many miles from land, possibly transporting Surus back home. It may take place many years from now, when the investigators have all but forgotten about Ludus Murmius and the temple they desecrated. It may never happen, as it is a completely optional encounter.

HYDRA (a.k.a. Mother Murma)

STR 52 CON 50 SIZ 60 INT 20 POW 30
DEX 20 Move 10 HP 55

Damage Bonus: +6D6

Weapons: Claw 80%, damage 1D6+db

Armor: 6-point skin.

Spells: Knows all spells to summon / bind the lesser servitor races of the Mythos.

Sanity Loss: 1/1D10 Sanity Points to see Hydra.

Escaping Sicilia

If the investigators have entered and escaped the Temple of Murma, they should leave Drepanum immediately and Sicilia shortly thereafter. The Sect of Murma is so stunned by the investigators' actions that it takes them several days to regain their footing and begin looking for the investigators. By then the investigators should, if they are wise, be very far away.

THE FATE OF DREPANUM

If the investigators have violated the Temple of Murma, everything changes. Ludus Murmius, The Sect of Murma, and House Nestorius abandon the area, relocating somewhere on the shores of Numidia (current day Algeria and part of Tunisia). The blow to the local economy is devastating, and within ten years, the once prosperous town is little more than a decrepit, mostly vacant slum. Those suffering from Ocean Pox undergo their change without care or guidance; most kill themselves when the pain and the dreams become too great. A few get through it, maturing into their Deep One forms to follow their dreams and the call of the sea to join their brothers in sisters in the dark depths. They may or may not be steps ahead of an expeditionary force directly from Rome, intent on prosecuting the capital offense of counterfeiting, if the investigators have brought their gold coins to the attention of the right prosecutor. It is possible that a sort of punitive raid occurs, with or without investigator involvement.

THE FATE OF TIBERIUS VELIUS SURUS

Saving Surus is quite a challenge for investigators. Some groups may not find him, or give up the search after judging

the odds of his survival are simply too slim. Reporting back to his father, Manius Velius Tadius, or possibly his sister, Tasia Vispella, that Surus cannot be located does satisfy them. Both are saddened and mourn, with Tadius being a bit relieved that at least it is finally over. This outcome is also true if the investigators are responsible for the death of Velius Surus.

If investigators rescue Surus, they find him insane. He shifts between babbling, crying, and laughing; to his delusion of being a gladiator; to being completely catatonic for hours on end. If investigators return the wayward Surus to his father, the boy never regains his sanity. Within a month, Manius Velius Tadius murders his son, smothering him with a pillow.

Newsreaders announce that Tiberius Velius Surus died in his sleep from an unknown malady contracted while traveling abroad. The family is saddened, but somewhat comforted, that the obsessed young man is finally at peace. Mostly, they are relieved that his rash actions did not disgrace the good name of House Velius. Tasia Vispella may suspect dark actions by her father, but says nothing. Shortly after Surus' cremation, the two become estranged and never speak again. This tragedy may require the investigators make a Sanity Check for 0/1D3 points (Keepers should determine this by how each investigator feels upon hearing the news).

The only hope for Tiberius Velius Surus' recovery is if the investigators take him to his sister's estate on the Island of Corsica. Upon seeing her face and hearing her voice (calling him a foolish turtle), Surus becomes a bit lucid. He embraces her and cries, uncontrollably, for several hours before falling into a deep sleep. Upon awakening, he is confused as to where he is or how he got to his sister's home. Mercifully, Velius Surus' mind has chosen to protect him from his ordeal, giving him amnesia. He loses the memory of everything which has happened over the last two years, shortly before he ran away and joined Ludus Gloriosus. Surus remains in Corsica, building a new life there. He loses all interests in gladiatorial games, marries, and becomes a respectable Roman patrician...

But all that changes eight years later, when three children arrive in Aleria looking for their father. They travel alone, paying their way with strange coins of pale gold, and bear an undeniable resemblance to Tiberius Velius Surus.

SANITY AWARDS

For Finding Tiberius Velius Surus +1D3 SAN
For rescuing Tiberius Velius Surus
from the Sect of Murma +1D3 SAN
Should Tiberius Velius Surus ever
regain his sanity +1D3 SAN
For saving anyone else from
the Sect of Murma +1 SAN
For defeating the Deep Ones +1D6 SAN
For defeating the Shoggoth +1D20 SAN
For defeating Hydra (Mother Murma) +1D10 SAN
For causing the Ludus Murmius and
the Sect of Murma to flee Drepanum +1D8 SAN

KITH AND KINE

BY PHREDD GROVES

KEEPER'S INFORMATION

A conflict is brewing in the wild hills of southwestern Britannia. The heretofore docile Norduvices are discontent. Rumors abound that they may launch an assault against Roman holdings and allies.

Their discontent is the result of a Mi-Go conspiracy. The Mi-Go's target is an ore rich region, currently being mined by the Empire and under the control of the Autirellauni tribe, a Roman ally and vassal.

The current chief of the Autirellauni is a Roman citizen and Equestrian, brought into the tribe by adoption and marriage. He is Titus Flavius Nectoprastus; as procurator of mines for the southwest, he controls the lead and silver mines that lie within Autirellaunian territory, managing them to his adopted tribe's benefit.

Before the arrival of Nectoprastus, the mines had been under the domain of the military. But the area has been peaceful for decades now, and the legion occupying and operating the mines was redeployed to the north. This change from military to civilian control was the catalyst that prompted the Mi-Go to start plotting. The situation is now ripe for manipulation. All that they need is the right lever.

And the Autirellauni elite have a dark secret that the Mi-Go are leveraging to the hilt. They are a cannibal cult. Beneath their ancient demesne, now the seat of a lavish Roman villa, human cattle are bred and slaughtered to set the villa's table. This is a centuries-old practice, the subject of fearful whispers among the Autirellauni's neighbors.

The Autirellauni's livestock are the descendants of Norduvician tribesmen, captured centuries ago. The attack of the Autirellauni that netted these captives was the culmination of a long simmering feud. It left the Norduvices reeling and signaled the end of their regional power and influence. Today, they are regarded as a backwards collection of inbred hill folk.

The Mi-Go have agents and spies throughout the region. This includes a spy within the household of Titus Flavius Nectoprastus. Their mole within the villa did not take long to discover the unspeakable husbandry that lurked below its foundations. Nor did she fail to note the uncanny resemblance of these human cattle to the Norduvices. Armed with this intelligence, the Mi-Go have begun to position the Norduvices as a pawn in their gambit to unseat the Autirellauni.

Posing as the Norduvices' god, Eephus, a Mi-Go handler has begun to amplify the tales of years gone by. Once the purview of toothless grandmothers giving children a fright, the old stories are now told in the light of day by grown men. More and more tribe members are making their way to an ancient long-barrow, the audience chamber of the false god. From there, they make efforts to arm themselves and plan a day of reckoning.

As the Norduvices gather their meager strength, "Eephus" makes its own preparations. Once it judges that the Norduvices' cohort has waxed as full as it can get, it shall send it forth in an attempt to raze the villa of the Autirellauni. When that moment comes, it shall also muster other Mi-go in the area, who will invisibly accompany the raiders in the dead of night. Thus augmented, the poorly trained rabble should actually be able overcome their otherwise superior target.

Once the carnage is over, the dreadful nature of the Autirellauni will stand revealed. It should then be a simple matter to put one of the Mi-Go's human allies in charge of mining activities in the region. Rome will be content to receive its lead and silver, while the Mi-Go will have direct access to the more exotic lodes that they covet.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Titus Flavius Nectoprastus, Leader of the Autirellauni Tribe, Cultist of Magna Mater

Isias, Slave of House Flavius / Spy for the Norduvices

Dwywyd, Wife of Nectoprastus, Cultist priestess of Magna Mater

Vannus, Father of Dwywyd, former leader of Autirellauni Tribe, Cultist of Magna Mater

Comux, Leader of the Norduvices resistance, speaker for Eephus

Eephus, God of the Norduvices, disguised Mi-Go

Daermox, Keeper of the Autirellauni Herd, Cannibal Cultist of Magna Mater

Eburo, Verno, and Deruo, Dark Young of Shub-Niggurauth

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

There have been rumors of unrest rising out of southwestern Britannia, specifically from the territory of the Autirellauni, Roman allies since the Claudian invasion. Their current chief is the current administrator of the lead and silver mines within their territory. Titus Flavius Nectoprastus, the aforementioned chief, is a native Briton, a Roman citizen and an Equestrian. Furthermore, he is a well-connected friend and/or client of the investigators' patron.

The trouble seems to involve a bevy of itinerants that have taken up residence in Autirellauni territory near an ancient barrow, and who have formed a cult that centers on it. There are reports that they have started arming themselves and that they have connections to the Norduvices, a poorly regarded tribe known to have a grudge against the Autirellauni.

With the Legions engaged in pacifying the north and northwest of Britannia, though, a Norduvices assault in Autirellauni territory could prove to be disruptive, especially if they target Nectoprastus' mining operation.

With this in mind, the investigators are instructed by their patron to: make their way to Fons Argenti, the villa of Titus Flavius Nectoprastus; investigate these rumors; and quell any uprising before it begins. They are to introduce themselves to Nectoprastus (a letter of introduction is provided), and then proceed to discover the truth of the matter and guarantee the peace. This is meant to be a diplomatic mission to defuse tensions, so the investigators are warned to tread lightly. They are reminded that political missteps dealing with the tribes in Britannia have sometimes had apocalyptic consequences (such as Boudicca's uprising of 60–61).

The seriousness of this matter is highlighted by the provision of a diploma granting the investigators right of the *cursus publicus*, the post system usually reserved to the Emperor's agents. The investigators will have access to lodging and fresh horses on their journey. This is a valuable boon, not to be taken lightly.

CURSUS PUBLICUS

Integral to the roads of Rome, and strung along them at intervals of a day's ride, stables and lodgings are kept at the ready for agents of the Emperor. Credentialed agents can thus be provided fresh horses, a hearty meal, and a warm bed

at day's end. These privileges are often abused, despite Imperial efforts to police the system. The question of whether the investigators' privilege is legitimate or not is up to the Keeper, based on inclination and the circumstances of the investigators' patronage.

THE JOURNEY TO FONS ARGENTI

Investigators could be assigned to this mission from anywhere in the Empire, but the need for speed and simple practicality discounts origins from the eastern portion of the Empire. A departure from a location within Britannia itself seems most likely, although dispatch from Gaul or Iberia would not be out of the question.

The most likely departure points are Londinium, Aquae Sulis, or Durnovaria (modern day London, Bath, and Dorchester respectively). The investigators must pass through one of the latter two to reach Fons Argenti.

The journey will be uneventful, although the investigators may marvel at the luxury provided by their access to the *cursus publicus*.

DAY ONE

The final leg of their journey takes them along a minor road leading into the hills of the Autirellauni's territory, and away from the main thoroughfare that runs between Aquae Sulis and Durnovaria. The road grows steep and less cared for as it winds up a deep combe, before cresting the hill system that hosts the lead and silver mines of the region.

The investigators discover a shattered landscape as they continue their progress. Beyond the dregs of well-hewn forest lies a region crisscrossed with hand-excavated trenches chasing veins of galena (silver-laced lead ore). Piles of spent ore dot the landscape, dumped in place after smelting has extracted what metal can be wrung out. Smelting furnaces billow black smoke into the sky, while laborers hack at the live ends of veins, or lug ore to the nearest furnace. Streams are diverted through wooden troughs to wash the ore. The open trenches run up hills and down valleys. Investigators are likely to become lost in the smoke and rubble. A successful Navigate roll is required to avoid disorientation amidst the mounds of tailings, the sluices, and by-roads.

Fortunately for the investigators, they stick out like a sore thumb to the miners. They are not left adrift for long. Eventually, the foreman of the mines will come to check on them. With their bona fides (the diploma for the *cursus publicus* and their letter of introduction to Titus Flavius Nectoprastus) established, they will be made welcome and escorted to the slight road that leads to Fons Argenti, just a few miles away.



THE VILLA FONSI ARGENTI

The forests that lie between the mines and Fons Argenti have not been denuded like those ravaged to provide charcoal for the mines. They seem untouched, vibrant, and thick with vegetation. It is difficult to see far in any direction, except when the road edges a cliff-side to the north.

Keen-eyed investigators may study the lowland landscape revealed at these junctures. Smoke rises from an encampment several miles away beside a long, low hill. Those local to the region may attempt a Knowledge roll to identify the hill as a long-barrow. These barrows are said to be ancient tombs and are fairly common in the southwest. Most Britons that live near such a barrow will claim an ancestral connection to it.

The road slopes gently upward through the deep forest, until it suddenly opens up to reveal a series of field systems, ringing a large earthwork nearly 400 feet across. The grassy banks of the earthwork rise up some twenty feet above ground level. A thirty-foot gap splits the southeastern quadrant, allowing the road to penetrate the interior. As the investigators approach this enclosure, a ditch is revealed, twenty feet wide and just as deep. It surrounds the entirety of the works. A wooden bridge spans the ditch at the gap.

Any investigators familiar with agricultural practice, and who ask about the fields surrounding the earthworks, will note that they are planted with root crops, mostly coarse vegetables deemed fit only for livestock. A few droves of pigs can also be seen rooting around near the edges of the forest,

although investigators succeeding on a Natural World roll realize that there are notably far fewer swine than the extent of the fields could support.

On entering the enclosure, the investigators will discover a surprisingly contemporary and stylish Roman villa with various outbuildings (stables, storage) nestled up to the earthen banks looming over the interior. The reddish plaster of the villa contrasts with the wild green foliage that dominates the slopes of the ring mound, a compelling sight. The villa is of recent construction and well cared for.

After a long, hard day of travel, the villa looks warm and inviting. A plume of smoke rises up from the furnace within, promising a hot bath and food once formal introductions are made.

MADE WELCOME

The head household slave, Isias, will greet the investigators. She will invite them inside, while their (or rather, the Emperor's) horses are stabled, groomed, and fed. Baggage is whisked away to the guest rooms. While Isias speaks Latin fluently and seems conversant in Brythonic (the local form of Celtic spoken in the region), the rest of the household slaves only speak a Punic dialect, indicating a North African origin. It seems that the villa's master has imported his slaves from afar, at great expense.

Isias will keep a close eye on the investigators during their stay, especially if they seem inclined to start exploring its less wholesome parts. She will always be nearby, as befits the role of the head household slave, responsible for the comfort of the villa's guests.



She will actively warn investigators not to enter the villa's west wing, if they make any obvious or clandestine move in that direction. Initially, she'll play the panicked slave, fearing punishment for the investigators' indiscretions. If they are adamant, however, she will leave them to their fate with a muttered warning that they're throwing their lives away.

Horses and baggage dealt with, Isias will escort the investigators into the villa's vast reception room to await the pleasure of their host. They will be served wine as they wait, but will barely be able to take a sip before their host makes his entrance. While not having expected visitors, Nectoprastus is an old hand at playing the conscientious and gracious host. He knows that his guests will be tired and dirty from the road, so he keeps the formalities that stand between them and a chance to bathe, eat, and sleep to a minimum, although he is quite curious, though, about what brings these visitors to his doorstep. Fortunately, it should not take long for the investigators to offer their letter of introduction, apprising Nectoprastus of the assistance that has been sent his way.

Said assistance is not actually welcome, however. Nectoprastus is well aware of the Norduvices' encampment, and has his own plans in place to deal with it. The new moon comes two nights hence. At that time, the Autirellauni shall summon their allies forth from the depths of the forest, three Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, childhood "friends" of Nectoprastus' wife, Dwywyd. Nectoprastus intends to launch an assault upon the encampment, capturing many of its occupants for breeding stock and killing the rest. He is sadly not aware that the burgeoning cult of Eephus has its own patron in the form of the Mi-Go.

But now that the investigators are here, Nectoprastus intends to take advantage of their presence. It would be an insult to the investigators' patron to send them away, and such an act would also attract further unwanted attention. So he will let them "broker a peace".

He will feign ignorance of the Norduvices' grievance, portraying himself as an outsider unfamiliar with the feuds and grudges between the locals of the region. He will insist the long-barrow occupation consists of Norduvician outcasts, i.e. the dregs of the dregs. They hope to badger a hand-out from their wealthier neighbors, by making some noise and bringing up old enmities. His adopted father, Vannus, might be able to shed more light on the bad blood between the two tribes, but Nectoprastus suspects that it's just that someone's great-great-grandfather stole someone else's great-great-grandfather's cow.

Nectoprastus expects that their solution will ultimately involve a donative on behalf of their patron, causing the band of mendicants down in the valley to disperse long enough to satisfy his unwanted guests. Once they've been profusely lauded for their help and sent on their way, the hunt can commence. And with the encampment dispersed, it can be done with even less attention and fanfare than the planned frontal assault on the encampment. So much the better!

The party of investigators will have arrived around dusk, slightly late for the evening meal. In fact, it is likely that their host had been called from his table by their arrival. After greeting them and discussing the reasons for their visit brief-

ly, he will dismiss them, so they may bathe and change out of their soiled travel clothes. Afterwards, they will be welcome to dine with him and his family before retiring for the night.

Isias will escort the investigators to the guest wing. She will show them the baths and leave them there to clean up after their journey.

AN EVENING MEAL

After bathing and changing into clean clothes, the investigators will be taken to the large dining room at the back of the villa and into the company of Nectoprastus, Dwywyd, and Vannus.

There will be no signs that a meal had been interrupted by the investigators' arrival. This is not just the action of a skillful host. The meal that had been served would have horrified the guests, as the roast being served was clearly human in origin. If one of the investigators manages to case the villa during bath time, they may see the kitchen staff clearing a pile of covered dishes from the dining room.

The meal served is no less horrifying. The meats on offer have the same origin, but they have been re-contextualized. The roast has been shredded, and is served as a hearty stew with bread. It's a simple meal, but it should bring comfort to the haggard, road-weary investigators. Casual observation identifies the meat as pork, and the stew's gravy and the ample *garum* (fish sauce) served with it are more than enough to mask any hints otherwise. Perhaps an investigator already familiar with cannibal cuisine would recognize the flavor. Unless the investigators have been given some reason for suspicion by events or experience, however, they should have no suspicion about what has actually been served to them.

Nectoprastus and his family will do their best to be good hosts, chatting and submitting gracefully to questions about the Norduvices' situation. They'll comfortably lie through their teeth when it suits them, making the nascent uprising sound like a pathetic shakedown for alms. They'll also reinforce any misimpressions that the investigators disclose. If the investigators are looking for signs that the Norduvices rebels might be cultists with dark connections, they'll be served up lots of confirmation while staying at Fons Argenti.

Vannus will dominate any such conversations, spinning wild stories about the Norduvices, most of them humorous yet tinged with ominous overtones.

After the meal ends, the investigators will be led back to their chambers to repair for the night.

THE VILLA AT NIGHT

Should suspicious investigators wish to explore the villa in the dark of night (and Isias fails to dissuade them), they may find themselves frustrated. While they'll have the run of the east wing—which includes guests' and servants' quarters, baths, latrines, furnaces, and a courtyard garden—they will discover that the west wing seems to be under watch by the kitchen staff. They don't stand in the open like posted guards, but are instead lurking in shadowed corners, vigilant. If investigators are seen creeping towards the west wing, the night guardians will make themselves known apologetically, as if they came



upon the investigators by happenstance while performing a late night chore in service of the villa's hospitality. They will firmly guide investigators to the latrines, as they clearly must have gotten lost in the night.

Attempts to talk the night guardians out of escorting the guests back get short shrift from cultists tasked specifically keeping investigators away. If the investigators get pushy about it, they will quickly discover just how thin the veneer of subservience and courtesy really is when they are frog marched back to their rooms.

Of course, if the investigators are noticed skulking about, it will be reported back to the lord of the villa. He will keep this information firmly in mind in all future dealings with the investigator(s) in question. Nectoprastus may decide that the investigators must be eliminated, but doing so would have to be done carefully so as not to implicate the Autirellauni.

DAY TWO

THE NORDUVICIAN ENCAMPMENT

The following day, the villa's staff expects the investigators to make their way down to the Norduvices' occupation of the long-barrow. They are served a hot breakfast of porridge, and their horses are available shortly after dawn.

Reaching the Encampment

While the long-barrow is visible down below from the cliffs north of the villa, getting there by foot or on horseback is another matter entirely. There are no roads that lead there, and the scanty trail that does run several miles eastward before it descends another densely forested combe and turns back to the west. These woods are dark and gloomy, pressing down upon the investigators' spirits as they travel.

The journey will take up the better part of a day, so any visitors to the encampment will likely be required to camp themselves.

THE ENCAMPMENT

The encampment consists of a couple dozen improvised tents surrounding the barrow's entrance. The woods had heavily encroached upon the structure of the long-barrow over the years, but the band of cultists have been busily clearing the forest away from the barrow itself, cutting down trees, carefully clearing out stumps and even re-excavating the old ditches that surround the barrow. Smoke rises cheerily from campfires, while a recently recruited carpenter has begun converting the felled trees into lumber, in anticipation of more permanent structures.

Men and women clear brush, while others train with their limited arsenal. They range in age from early teens to late fifties and are, by Roman standards, dirty and uncouth rustics. The men are unshaven, sporting wild beards and long

hair. A majority of the occupiers share a striking resemblance to each other, with watery blue eyes, blond hair, and similar faces. These are the Norduvices, who dominate the cult of Eephus and the encampment. The cult has attracted some vagabonds and outcasts from elsewhere, but most of the cultists are Norduvices.

INTRODUCTIONS

The investigators' arrival will cause a great buzz within the camp, and they will quickly be escorted to the tent of Comux, camp leader and anointed speaker for Eephus.

If they are not representing themselves as Autirellauni partisans, Comux will welcome the investigators heartily. He will order a meal prepared and guide them into his tent, a large second-hand Legionary model smelling of must and mended dozens of times. Inside, logs serve as furniture, while the only bed visible is a few sheepskins on the ground. Comux will eagerly explain how Eephus the Mighty has returned from exile to exact his vengeance on the Norduvices. The day of reckoning is nearly at hand! If asked, Comux will be coy about exactly what that means, changing the subject. The investigators have been granted a great boon, an audience with Eephus himself! The great deity will explain everything.

Camp chatter may be more revealing. A successful Listen roll (+15% to anyone who understands Brythonic) will catch several references to, "the child snatchers" and "forest demons". If any of the cultists are explicitly questioned away from Comux, they will happily tell the tale as it has been passed down. While Comux is around, he'll cut the conversation short and turn attention back towards him. He's not hiding anything; he just likes hearing himself talk.

The Norduvices' defining legend has been eroded by generations of telling and re-telling. Long, long ago, the Autirellauni—a twisted tribe worshipping vile gods of the wild forest—attacked the once proud Norduvices, overcoming them with dark magicks. In those days, stealing cattle from one's neighbors was *de rigueur*, and the Norduvices had recently absconded with Autirellauni cattle. In response, the Autirellauni made the forest rise-up against the Norduvices, invading their fields and destroying their homes. All of their children were taken. Their bodies were never found. Adults were run through by roots and branches. The few survivors fled or had been left for dead. The tribe never fully recovered, its best and brightest having been killed and the rest scattered and forced to wander as refugees.

Meeting Eephus

If the investigators are found to be agreeable, Comux will drop everything and take them to the barrow entrance. In his mind, the sooner they enter the barrow, the better. Should the investigators resist his urgings, he will become quite vexed. However, as Comux opens his mouth to order the investigators seized, he will cock his head like a confused dog then back down in a sulk. Eephus, having heard the commotion indirectly (via the Contact Human spell), will order Comux to comply with the investigators' wishes.

The Mi-Go posing as Eephus does wish to meet and





mesmerize the investigators, but sees no reason to antagonize potential allies. Comux will not be permitted to compel the investigators, but he will do his best to persuade them (reiterating the past sins against his people, proclaiming the greatness of Eephus, or offering Rome favorable terms when *his* people finally reclaim *their* lands), even if it literally takes all night.

Intransigent investigators are free to leave the camp at any time they choose. They'll be considered unwelcome outsiders and treated rather coldly thereafter, but will otherwise be allowed to leave unmolested.

THE LONG-BARROW

The barrow occupies a slight rise in the forested landscape, although this is difficult to perceive through the dense vegetation that surrounds it. It is a large earthwork, running 200 feet from north to south along the spine of the ridge with a width of 80 feet at its widest. The crest of the barrow is 15 feet above the ground. Due to the hard work of the cult, it has been cleared of trees and shrubs. Shallow pits indicate where stumps have been burnt out, and now much of the barrow is exposed rock and soil. Despite all of this effort, the dense and looming forest that surrounds it seems ready to overwhelm the barrow, the instant that the axes and hoes are put down.

The barrow entrance sits between two massive stones at its north end. It is inset from the end of the barrow, with the shoulders of the barrow looming up to the left and right. All along the northern exterior, stuck between stones or in depressions, are offerings to Eephus. These consist of sea-shells, wildflowers, colored ribbons, iron nails, and crudely wrought

fired clay figurines wielding some sort of sword or lance.

The doorway into the barrow is short and narrow, requiring anyone over SIZ 9 to crouch. The passage within is only slightly more spacious, widening out to three feet, but the ceiling remains low all the way through. It is dark and cramped.

The investigators, entering under the auspices of the encampment, are not permitted to bring any lamps or torches within the barrow. During the day, a bit of light falls into the front chamber, but the rear chambers are nearly lightless.

The Ancestors

There are two sets of chambers to the left and right of the main corridor. The first pair is filled from top to bottom with leg bones (femurs). It is difficult to make them out in the gloom, but anyone brushing up against them in the tight quarters will be in for a shock.

The next set of chambers is filled with skulls to the right and arm bones (humeri) to the left. They are packed just as firmly and extensively as those previous.

The Immanence of Eephus

A sham Eephus holds court within the rear chamber of the barrow, obscured by darkness. Clinging to the ceiling, the Mi-Go pretender manipulates an effigy improvised from a skull and bones harvested from the outer chambers.

Two radium disks have been inset in the orbits of the skull, producing an eerie blue glow. Mi-Go holographic engraving on these disks produces a convincing illusion that they are human-like eyes. With no other visual cues in the

pitch darkness, it is difficult to look away from the false gaze of the false god.

The rest of the effigy is made up of femurs and humeri strung together with the shell of a plundered bronze breastplate. In light of day, the manikin would look ridiculous, but inside the inner chamber, the hints of arms and legs made by the sound of the bones rustling are most effective.

The chamber is just as cramped and close as the rest of the barrow. Investigators could easily reach up and touch the fungal Eephus, but the Mi-Go can phase itself in and out of this reality, allowing hands to pass through it, unaware.

No sounds from the outside world seem to penetrate the chamber. There is only the clicking of bones and the deep, disturbing harmonics of a background hum that Eephus generates as part of its mesmerism. Its voice ebbs and flows from this curtain of sound.

The disturbing buzzing of Eephus' voice fills the chamber, coming from nowhere and everywhere at once. Once any of its followers that escorted the investigators into the barrow have been dismissed, the interrogation can begin. "Who are you?" "Why are you here?" "Are you allies of Nectoprastus?"

All through this barrage, Eephus will be using its uncanny voice and the radium disks in the casting of its Contact Human and Mi-Go Hypnosis Spells (see pages 228 and 239 of the *6th edition Call of Cthulhu* rulebook). This allows Eephus to establish a foothold in the investigator's minds, allowing it to speak with them telepathically in the future. It will also allow Eephus to make Insight checks going forward to assess whether the investigators' claims match up with their intentions.

If Eephus concludes that the investigators are wholly committed allies of Nectoprastus, it will summon its followers and have the investigators thrown out of the camp. Otherwise, it will attempt to enlist them as pawns in its campaign to unseat the Autirellauni.

To that end, Eephus will attempt to show, rather than tell, the investigators just what the Autirellauni are. It will affirm the tales that the Norduvices tell about the raids they suffered generations ago, but will not elaborate beyond that. Instead, it will make the investigators an offer. It says:

"You must learn for yourselves just what these Autirellauni are. If you are willing, return to the villa and tell Nectoprastus that you have convinced the rabble down here to disperse. I'll make sure that they do. Bide your time. When you see a flower that matches this one —"

Eephus tosses a wildflower into the face of one of the investigators and says, "—follow where the flowers lead."

With that, Eephus will dismiss them. As they shuffle out, Eephus will offer one last piece of advice: "You may find it better to go hungry than to sup at Nectoprastus' table." The investigators must then shuffle back out of the dark chamber and emerge, blinking, into the relative brightness of dusk.

The proffered flower cannot be examined within the barrow. Once the investigators are back out in the sunlight, they can see it is a striking pink, similar to a daisy. With a successful Natural World roll, observant investigators recall seeing these growing from the exposed rocks of the hills in this region. Anyone looking for them after the fact will easily

note them growing along the trail as it begins to pass out of thecombe.

Should the investigators attempt to assault Eephus, it will simply drop its puppet and fly, dematerialized, through the rocks of the barrow and off into the sky. It will telepathically command its followers to kill the blasphemers, leaving the investigators facing the unenviable prospect of fighting their way out of the cramped confines of the barrow chamber. Only one investigator can exit the barrow at a time. This allows three opponents to block them in and attack them while they try to break out of the bottle neck. This one investigator must fight their way out of the barrow before the next investigator can join the battle.

DAY THREE (NEW MOON)

FLOWERS IN THE VILLA

Should the investigators accept Eephus' proposal, they can return to the villa in peace the following morning. If they rise at the crack of dawn, they will arrive late in the afternoon.

The adherents of Eephus will break camp shortly after the investigators leave, slipping into the woods by ones and twos. This is just a show. Eephus has ordered its followers to rally at a predetermined location in the hills above. From there, they shall assault the villa once the order is given. The Mi-Go coordinates this infiltration from pre-established scouting posts, minimizing the odds of detection.

On their return to villa, Nectoprastus will again receive the investigators in the reception room. He will outwardly accept whatever he is told about the parlay with the Norduvices. If the news is ostensibly good, he will make a great show of gratitude, inviting them to a banquet the following evening. He will then brusquely excuse himself, claiming he must, at once, write a letter of thanks to the investigators' patron.

Isias will collect them and escort them back to their chambers. There, she will serve them fish and bread that, she says, "I prepared myself."

Investigators may also bathe, should they so desire, before retiring. In any case, the first of the investigators to retire for the night will discover one of the pink wildflowers has been placed on their bed (as with all the investigators' beds).

Exiting their chambers, investigators will note the columns of the peristyle have been festooned with pink blooms leading off to the right. Reaching the end of the columns, a single flower can be seen resting on the floor just outside the doorway leading to the furnace room.

Isias waits for them within. Dropping her feigned Greek accent for her native Brythonic one, she tells them, "I serve Eephus. If you wish to learn the secrets of this house, follow



me.” With that, she leads them outside through the service door. She points to two lanterns, sitting by the door, saying, “Take those, but light them only when needed.”

DOWN INTO THE GROTTO

Isias will guide the investigators east from the villa, scrambling up and over earthwork and down into the ditch on the other side. In the ditch, she leads them around to the west side of the structure where she has stashed a ladder. Climbing up into the fields, she makes her way to the covered silage shaft, removing the cover and pointing downward into the dark, says, “Go, see for yourselves what the Autirellauni are.” She will not accompany the investigators any further.

If, at any time, the investigators balk at Isias’ instructions, she will try only briefly to persuade them otherwise. However, Eephus will interrupt. Speaking to all of the investigators that it successfully hypnotized, it will do its best to persuade the investigators to continue. Should Eephus fail, Isias will abandon the investigators and flee the villa on the assumption that her cover is blown. Otherwise, the investigators can descend into the darkness to discover the Autirellauni’s damning secret.

On this particular night, the caves have been left untended, at least at first. Believing the Norduvices will be dispersed in a matter of hours, the Autirellauni are acting quickly to stamp them out.

Shortly after the investigators have discovered the Au-

tirellauni’s secret (see “Human Cattle”), they will need to make a Listen roll to make out the sound of voices above their lowing. Some Autirellauni are descending the stairs from the villa, having a conversation. The investigators will have just enough warning to extinguish their lanterns and hide before their hosts notice the light.

Shortly thereafter, the glow of lanterns announces the coming of the Autirellauni to the stables. It is a large group, consisting of Daermox, all six of his men, Nectoprastus, Dwywyd, and Vannus. As they make their way through the caves, they discuss which of the stock are the most expendable.

The cultists are picking three of their cattle to sacrifice in order to summon the Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath that lurk in the nearby forests. This night is the first of the new moon, a pre-requisite for the ritual’s success. The chosen cattle will be taken to the Sacred Grove. Dwywyd will also cast the Power Drain spell on three of the other cattle, giving her a massive Magic Point pool (18 + 3D6 MP) to draw from, anticipating a final battle against the upstart Norduvices.

If the investigators hide successfully, the cultists will come and go relatively quickly, exiting the grotto after no more than 30 minutes. In this case, they will make their way out to the Sacred Grove and begin summoning the Dark Young. (See “Shadowing the Cult of Magna Mater” and “Eburo, Verno, Deruo”).

If the investigators are detected, they may be able to flee, if they don’t hesitate. Otherwise, they could end up fighting for their lives in the caverns below the villa.



HUMAN CATTLE

Exploring the caverns beneath Fons Argenti will eventually lead investigators to the stalls where the Autirellauni keep their herd. Whether they have found clues about the truth of this place and pieced them together or not, they will ultimately have to face the reality of what is living down in the darkness.

Every effort is made to keep the livestock healthy, but their condition is nonetheless horrifying. They have been domesticated by years of careful breeding with two goals in mind: docility and maximizing the meat harvested at slaughter. While they are still recognizably human, they present a disturbing appearance.

Entering a stall, the investigators will find a figure chained to the wall, naked and roughly shaved. The unfortunate cow will stare at the investigators with clear blue eyes, showing no sign of fear, rising up into an awkward crouch. The muscles of its thighs, back and chest are large out of all proportion to the rest of its body, making it impossible to stand fully upright. If the investigators make no violent gestures, the occupant of the stable will begin grunting hopefully, in anticipation of feeding time.

Extended observation or efforts at interaction will reveal that grunting is all that this wretch can manage, as it has no tongue. The tongues of yearlings are removed every spring. Also, the unfortunate clearly has no thumbs, as they too are bobbed at the age of one.

If no feed is offered, the creature will crawl towards the investigators and flop onto its back in front of them, making a high pitched bark that is clearly friendly. Much like a cat or dog, this poor thing is inviting the investigators to pet it or perhaps begging for treats. This sound will trigger a mass of similar ululations from the surrounding stalls. This can be heard clearly anywhere in the cavern, but it is not an unusual event. If the investigators cover is still intact, this will not be a cause for alarm or even interest to the cattle tenders.

There are a dozen females of breeding age. They will all be found either suckling an infant or visibly pregnant. The infants have not yet had their tongues clipped, nor their thumbs bobbed.

Witnessing all this should be a stunning revelation to the investigators, even if they are aware of the Autirellauni's tastes in meat. Encountering these domesticated humans and realizing the full horror of this herd costs investigators 1D4/1D10 Sanity.

EEPHUS CHECKS IN

As the Autirellauni begin to make their way back up to the villa, the investigators will be able to emerge from their hiding place. At that point, Eephus will contact the investigators via the Contact Human spell. It expects that they have discovered the fate of the Norduvices taken generations ago. Now, what are they going to do about it?

Eephus does not expect the investigators to help with the coming attack on the villa. It simply wants the investigators to bear witness to the horrors that they've seen, and to impugn the honor of the Autirellauni among the Roman

bureaucracy.

However, the investigators' close encounter with the cultists will trouble Eephus. It doesn't know just what the upcoming sacrifice is for, but it bodes ill. Eephus will ask the investigators to follow the cultists in order to spoil any sort of blood sacrifice. It will also update Isias about this. She can catch up to the investigators as the Keeper sees fit, at a dramatically appropriate time.

SHADOWING THE CULT OF MAGNA MATER

The party will only be a few minutes behind the cultists if they choose to shadow them.

If they attempt to follow them up the villa stairs, the lead investigator must attempt a Sneak roll. The result of failure is an ambush in the cold storage cave by Daermox's men. Isias will come to the investigators' aid in this case after the third round of combat, if need be. This delay will prevent investigators from seeing the cultists enter the forest path to the grove. However, a Tracking, Listen, or Spot Hidden roll can set them right, or they can attempt to wrest the information from one of their vanquished foes.

Should they chose to race back up the silage shaft and run back to the villa, each investigator will have to make a CON x 4 roll to successfully climb the ladder at speed and reach the villa in time to see Nectoprastus and his party disappearing into the woods. The path to the sacred grove will thereby be revealed, but investigators will have to choose whether to follow immediately or wait for their comrades who failed the roll (a delay of 1D4 combat rounds).

Eburo, Verno, Deruo

In the Sacred Grove, Dwywyd will begin the summoning spell first. It involves blood-letting and chanting in an in-human language. The spell does not take long to complete, just 5 minutes. If the investigators pursued the cultists via the villa stairs and escaped detection, they can easily interrupt the ritual before it is completed, although this will lead to a pitched battle in the grove. Investigators who made their CON rolls climbing up the silage shaft can also interfere in a timely fashion, if they didn't wait for stragglers.

If the investigators are delayed at all, however, one of them must make a Luck roll. This will determine when they reach the grove and how far along the cultists are summoning their Dark Young allies. On a successful roll, they will arrive just as Dwywyd completes her spell, summoning Eburo. On a failure, they arrive one round before Vannus completes his spell, summoning Verno. In the event of a critical failure, they will arrive two rounds before the completion of Nectoprastus' spell, summoning Deruo.

Eephus monitors their progress throughout the pursuit. It did not know the location of the Sacred Grove, but Isias and the investigators will be able to guide it. It will send its Mi-Go comrades to assist, although it will take them several minutes to arrive, appearing in the third round of combat and acting on the fourth.



VILLA LAYOUT

Portico

The main entrance to the villa proper is a huge, roofed portico. The columns that line the entrance are somewhat unusual, having been carved to resemble young oak trees rather than conform to staid classical styles.

Reception Room

This is where the investigators are received by Titus Flavius Nectoprastus. The room is quite spare at the time of the investigators' arrival. There is a couch at the far side of the room from the doors, upon which Nectoprastus will recline once he arrives. There is no other furniture in the room, which is dominated by a large floor mosaic depicting Cybele, seated as Magna Mater in a chariot, with lions at her flanks, while surrounded by a copse of wildly overgrown oak trees casting shadows that obscure her face.

The Great Mother also appears in the form of small statuettes seated in niches along the walls. They are in various styles and some seem to be quite old. Nectoprastus has made an effort to collect representations of Cybele from every corner of the Empire. All of the statuettes have had the face broken or worn off, however (Spot Hidden to notice).

The cult of Cybele in this day and age is completely non-controversial, and Nectoprastus' choice to have his audience chamber make such prominent tribute signals, on the surface, that he's just another provincial trying too hard to mark his status as a Roman's Roman.

A successful Empire or Occult roll will allow an investigator to note that Cybele is not generally associated with oak trees, and while she is often depicted as veiled, her face is not completely missing. Typically pine trees are cut down and brought into her temple for various rites on specific holy days. However, Roman religious practices these days tend to be syncretic, embracing and extending local customs and integrating them into those of the Empire. A nearby and salient example is the cult of Sulis Minerva just up the road at Aquae Sulis.

Guest Rooms

In the eastern wing are four large and well-appointed sleeping chambers for guests of the villa. They are all quite spacious and can each accommodate up to four in comfort.

Servants Room

Just adjacent to the last of the guest rooms is the servants' sleeping chamber. Normally, they all have their own bed. But when guests visit, the beds are moved into the guest rooms, and the servants sleep on the floor.

Furnace

The villa is kept comfortably warm in the winter months by a vent system that moves hot air from the furnace beneath the floors (hypocaust). For any poor or rustic investigator not experienced with the lifestyles of Rome's elite, the warm

floors throughout the villa will be a miraculous revelation in luxury and comfort. The furnaces also heat the baths.

Slaves tend the furnaces day and night during the winter months, keeping the fires well-tended. The furnace burns coal, as the local mines import a great deal of it for use in smelting. There is a large coal bin next to a door leading outside. Just outside is a large pile of coal.

Baths

The baths at Fons Argenti may not compare to the spring-fed wonders of Aquae Sulis, but they delight the eyes and skin of weary travellers. The basins are cut from silver-blue marble that was imported from north Italia at great expense.

The baths are supplied from a cold spring, so both the hot and cold baths can be at the ready on short notice. The baths have pipes that tap a spring-fed reservoir. Dirty bathwater and other waste are then washed down into the underground stream that the spring has carved through the local limestone. The stream runs north below the earthworks and downwards, shooting out from the middle of the cliff face above which the villa perches.

The mosaics of the baths are similar to those of the reception room, but feature only the trees and not Cybele herself. They give the impression that one is bathing in the middle of the local forest, as care has been taken to depict the types of trees that make up the surrounding forests, with a special emphasis on yews, alders, and oaks.

Latrines

The latrines consist of a bench that runs around the two exterior walls of the room. The top of the bench is made of finished oak, with holes of the appropriate size cut out every few feet. There are no dividers between the seats. Waste is disposed of by running water diverted from the spring, which then rejoins the stream via a sluice that feeds back into it downstream of any intakes.

Peristyle

The final feature of the east wing is the large, open-air atrium that lies between the audience chamber and the wing. The columns lining it match those of the portico. Much of the atrium is given over to local flowers cultivated by Vannus, which bloom with bright color in spring. A corner is reserved for a kitchen garden with herbs and small batches of dainty vegetables.

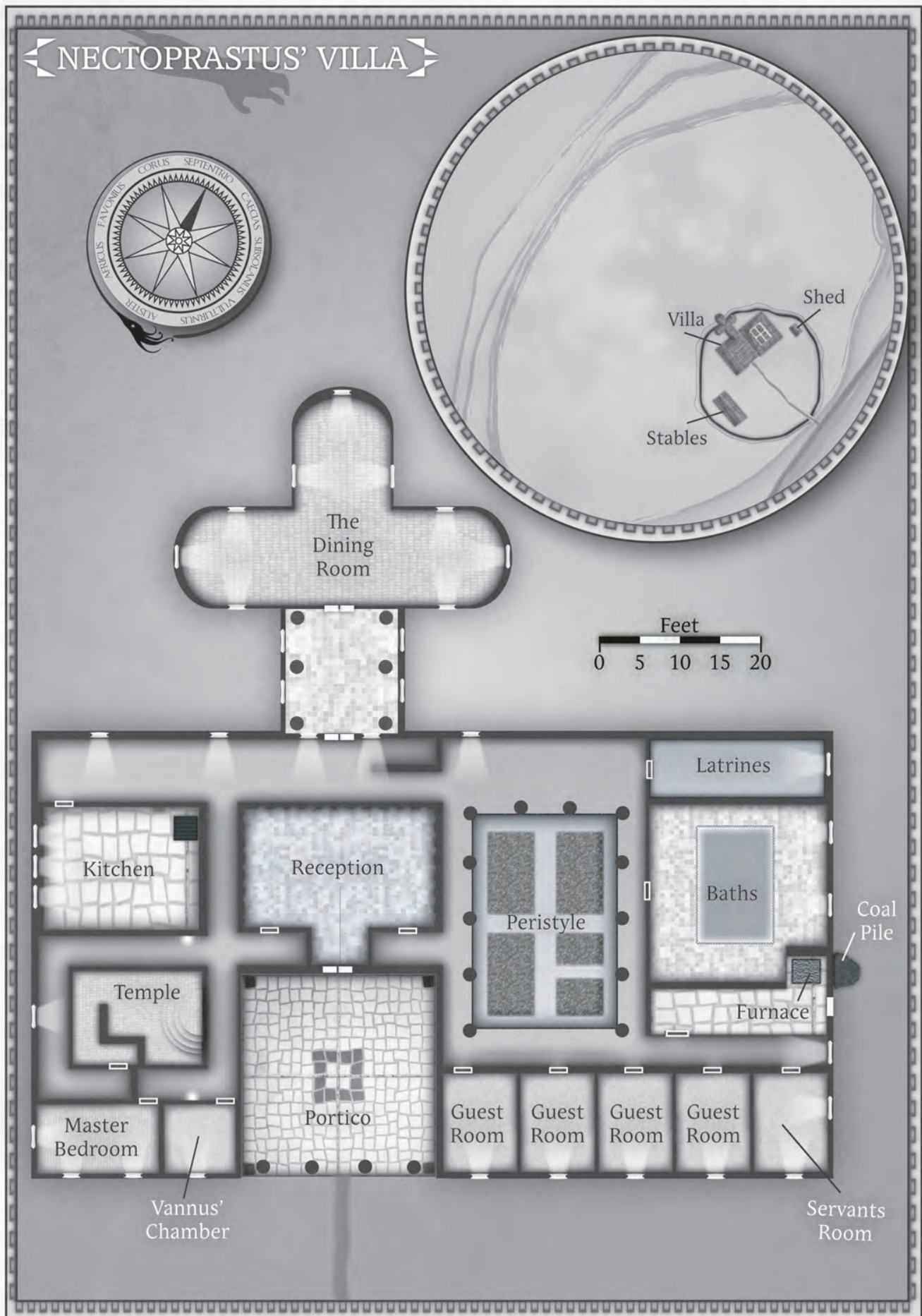
The Dining Room

The dining room is the jewel of Fons Argenti. The central floor hosts a mosaic of finest quality and detail. It depicts the Cyclops Polyphemus, tending his sheep in the valley below the cave he calls home. The cave itself is depicted in the background of the scene with small figures—Odysseus and his crew—entering while Polyphemus' back is turned.

To complement the central mosaic, there are depictions painted upon the plaster walls of Polyphemus' parents, Poseidon and the sea nymph Thoösa. These are somewhat ambiguous, as the kelp fronds around Thoösa's seat could easily



KITH AND KINE



be reinterpreted as a thicket of trees, recalling the depiction of Cybele in the audience chamber.

The mosaic and fresco artists were masters of deliberate ambiguity. A disinterested glance at the mosaic will only reveal a pastoral scene depicting a shepherd and his flock in a hilly landscape that reflects the local geography. Noting that the main figure is a Cyclops requires a thorough scrutiny of the piece. An investigator with an Art skill that specializes in the visual will pick up on this easily, though.

Should Polyphemus be recognized, those who make a Know roll will recall the infamy of Polyphemus' depiction in the Odyssey. On returning from a day of shepherding his flock, he found Odysseus and his men within his cave. Polyphemus trapped them inside by rolling a massive stone over the cave exit. He then killed and ate two of Odysseus' crew. This is not a tale suggestive of hospitality!

The dining room itself is divided into three apses. Each accommodates three couches, upon which the scions of the house and their guests may take their meals. The dining couches are another of Nectoprastus' indulgences, as they have been upholstered with the skins of exotic creatures from the far reaches of the empire and beyond, such as tigers and zebras. Nectoprastus' own divan is covered in a fine and supple leather that he has had dyed bright red. If asked, he will tell his guests that he sourced the leather while in Italy arranging for the marble baths he had imported. In truth, the source is much closer to home. It is leather from skins harvested from the Autirellauni's herd below. A close inspection of this couch and a successful Natural World roll will indicate that the leather is unusual and not from the likes of cows or sheep. Only investigators who have had previous direct experience with leather made from human skin can more directly source it.

The Kitchen

The kitchen is exclusive domain of those Autirellauni that participate in the rituals of their cult, feasting upon the human cattle raised in the caves below the villa.

Nothing appears untoward upon a cursory inspection. The typical necessities of a large and functional kitchen are all here, ovens and the various pots and utensils needed to cook and serve meals. Bread is in the wood-fired oven most of the time, and the kitchen is pleasantly busy when meals are being prepared. But investigators who make a successful Natural World roll while investigating the kitchen will take note of the unusual makeup of the cuts for roasts and stews. They seem disturbingly human. Any combat veterans notice this easily while making any serious inspection of the kitchens.

There is also a great deal of food stored here. Flours for baking as well as dozens of large wine jars, sourced from all over the empire, can be found. Nectoprastus is quite the epicure.

There is a trap door in the northeast corner of the kitchen, which covers a narrow wooden stairway leading down into a cave used for cold storage. From there, tunnels lead down to the cavern complex where the Autirellauni tend their herd.

The Temple

Also off-limits to outsiders, this is Dwywyd's personal temple to her Magna Mater, Shub-Niggurath. The temple is constructed without a roof. Within grows a gnarled and menacing oak tree that seems to be clutching the walls of the villa like a clinging vine. Apparently ancient, this tree was actually just a sapling from the cult's sacred grove when it was planted during the villa's construction. Dwywyd has perversely tended it and forced its swift growth by means of spell-craft. The interior of the temple smells strongly of damp wood and animal musk.

Sitting within a niche on the main trunk is a statuette carved from jet. It is a depiction of Shub-Niggurath as the Magna Mater, a humanoid figure with cloven hooves and a very inhuman face. There is something supernaturally, disturbingly alluring to it; it requires a conscious effort to pry one's gaze away. Beholding the statuette costs 1/1d6 Sanity. Before the niche, the oaken roots have been coaxed into the shape of an altar. It is stained darkly, and encrusted with dried blood.

Vannus' Chamber

The retired chieftain has his own room in the west wing of the villa, a spartan space containing a bed, a chest, and little else. In one corner of the room is a niche that holds an intact figurine of Shub-Niggurath, carved from local stone. It is not as detailed as the figurine that Dwywyd keeps in the temple, but is disturbing nonetheless, with its suggestion of an inappropriately wide mouth and cloven hooves on the seated figure. Inspecting it costs 0/1 Sanity.

Master Bedroom

The room that Nectoprastus and Dwywyd share is far more opulent and cluttered than that of Vannus. Two desks are stuffed with their correspondence with the outside world. The desk chairs and a divan are upholstered in the same red-dyed leather as Nectoprastus' couch in the dining room. The bed is large and covered in cured sheep pelts.

OUTBUILDINGS

Stables

One of the few outbuildings that lie within the earthworks, the stable houses Nectoprastus' horses, as well as those of any guests of the villa during their visit.

Storage Shed

There is little of interest here. Tools for maintaining the villa and its gardens can be found, as well as some furniture that is not currently in use.



OUTSIDE THE EARTHWORKS

The Fields

Should the investigators end up searching the fields surrounding the villa, they can find an entrance into the cave systems below. It lies in the western fields and requires a successful Spot Hidden roll to detect. The entrance lies in a depression, and is obscured by crop growth. At harvest time, this entrance is used to shovel the vegetables down to the storage silos where winter fodder is kept.

The Sacred Grove

East of the villa complex lies a pathway through the forest, leading to the sacred grove of the Autirellauni. The grove sits a little over a mile from the forest's edge.

The grove is circled by huge yews with thick, gnarled trunks. In the middle of the grove stands a single, massive, stag-headed oak tree. This tree is the source of the 'sapling' oak planted in Dwywyd's villa temple. Like its spawn there, it features a niche with a small statuette representing Shub-Niggurath. Here, though, centuries of exposure have rendered it nigh unrecognizable. It is covered in a coat of green moss, beneath which is an eroded stone carving of indeterminate origin. Before the niche rests an altar similar to the one found in the villa temple, but worn with centuries of use. The bark is gone, and blood has stained the living wood nearly black.

Touching the moss-covered Shub-Niggurath effigy will have a shocking effect. It is redolent with power and memory of centuries of worship. Any investigator that comes in physical contact with it will be subjected to a vision of Shub-Niggurath manifesting herself in this grove to accept the sacrifices offered her. The vision will cost the viewer 1D8/1D20 Sanity.

BENEATH FONS ARGENTI

COLD STORAGE

Opening the trap door in the villa's kitchen reveals a stairway leading down into darkness. These stairs seem to be of the same handiwork and vintage as of the villa itself. They lead downwards for about 30 feet through a well-dressed stone passage before reaching a 30' x 30' cave that serves as butchery, saltery, and cold storage for the villa. Its depth and dankness keep the space consistently cool, even in summer. It is an ideal place to store and cure meat.

The room is dominated by a butchering platform carved from the living rock of the cave. Knives, saws, and other butchering implements are hung carefully on hooks mounted on the cave wall within handy reach. The tools are well cared for and cleaned after use. Even though the platform appears to be cleaned regularly and thoroughly, the table and

the surrounding floor are still dark with blood.

Several large barrels of salt take up much of the other side of the cave. If these are probed, investigators will discover that several haunches of human meat have been placed within, layered in the salt to cure. Nearby shelves hold dozens of previously cured, obviously once human, "hams".

The floor of the cave has been flattened and tiled, with a slight incline towards another small underground stream. Buckets and brooms leaning against the wall indicate that the butchery is frequently washed down with stream water. This is how the offal and other unwanted waste from butchering is removed.

Anyone making a successful Spot Hidden roll, or deliberately searching the stream, will discover, though, that refuse does not always make its way out. A severed human hand is snagged between two rocks in the stream. The hand is unusual, though. It is thumbless, with a light scar where the thumb should be.

If the investigators have not already determined that the villa's kitchen is preparing and serving human meat, the cuts stored here should make that clear. Combat veterans will be able to make the connection easily, and anyone else can make a Natural World roll. Finding the discarded hand should remove all doubt.

Making the connection and realizing that humans are being butchered, cooked and served at the villa will cost 1/1d6 Sanity. Should the investigators realize that they, themselves, may have been served such meats, they will incur an additional penalty of 1/2D4 Sanity.

There are five olive oil lanterns hanging on hooks next to the stairs that lead up to the villa's kitchen. Next to the lanterns are a ladle and a small copper funnel that fits the lanterns' oil receptacle. Just below them is a large jar of oil.

A final and unusual feature of the storage cave is a large stone altar that sits in the middle of the room. The stone here is of a different makeup than that of the cave itself, and it has clearly been hewn into shape, albeit a very long time ago. The altar stone has a thick patina of smoke, lime, and mold. Anyone passing near it and making a successful Listen or Spot Hidden roll notes a draft blowing outward from it. An investigator can make a Repair/Devise roll (each attempt takes 1D10 minutes) to discover that the altar is really a trap door. Due to a counterweight device, the altar swings upwards easily when pushed on the right spot. Another set of stairs lead down into darkness. These stairs have been cut from the ancient stone of the hills, and are much older than the stairs leading down into the butchery. The centers of the steps are heavily worn from untold years of use.

THE DEEP GROTTTO

The cave system within which the Autirellauni raise and breed their human cattle consists primarily of a massive grotto some 400 yards long and up to 140 yards wide. Centuries of improvements have made the process easier and more efficient. Paths have been leveled; buildings and silos have been erected; and entrances have been improved upon.



DE HORRORE COSMICO



❖ BENEATH THE VILLA ❖

Getting In and Out

The Autirellauni maintain three entrances into the caverns. One is a stairway leading down from the cold storage room of Fons Argenti (previously a temple). This stairway was excavated from below, a massive undertaking on the part of the cult.

The other frequently used entrance is a sinkhole that lies in the fields west of the villa. This was originally a natural swallet that drained into the caves. It has been altered over the years to serve the Autirellauni's purposes. It is usually capped with a stone cover, as it is now a shaft that plunges over 150 feet down to the grotto floor. The shaft is used to transfer harvested crops down to the silos below. There is a wooden ladder mounted on one wall of the shaft.

The swallet that shaped the harvest shaft continues down to the base of the cliff face. Beyond widening some choke points to allow passage without crawling, this passage has not been worked upon. This path is quite slippery, as a small streamlet still runs down through it. On reaching the bottom, investigators must wade through a 3' deep stream that is the convergence of the drainage from the limestone hills above. The exit is also fitted with a new iron portcullis that Nectoprastus had installed at the same time he built the villa. The portcullis has a STR of 60 and a solid steel lock mechanism. Nectoprastus and Daermox have keys, both kept on their person. The lock can be picked with a successful Repair/Devise roll if appropriate tools are available. A slender knife of 3 inches or longer should be enough.

Illumination

Navigation through the cave system is complicated by the limited amount of illumination available. The cave tenders use olive oil lanterns and lamps to light their way. The lanterns are large and somewhat heavy, but throw light out to a range of 40 feet. Starting with a full receptacle, a lantern can burn continuously for up to six hours. The small, handheld clay lamps, used domestically in the villa, only throw light out to 30 feet and last up to three hours. They are also more difficult to carry while moving through the caves, as they don't have a handle and are not protected from drafts.

The limits imposed by lantern light in the caves will impose a -15% penalty on skills that rely on sight, such as Spot Hidden, Navigate, and Track. Those carrying lanterns or lamps while attempting to move through the caves in areas that have not been paved or leveled will also suffer a similar penalty on any DEX based skills, such as Climb, Dodge, and Jump.

Furthermore, carrying illumination through the main cave grotto makes stealth nearly impossible. Lanterns and lamps can be seen easily from one end of the cave to the other. Even when hiding behind boulders or buildings, the light reflected on cave ceilings and walls is noticeable. Anyone attempting to Hide or Sneak with a lit lamp or uncovered lantern suffers a -50% penalty.

Conversely, going without light confers an advantage in this situation. Anyone attempting to hide in the caves under cover of darkness will gain a +35% bonus. Those trying to Sneak only get a bonus if they are experienced enough with

the cave layout to navigate it in the dark (i.e., the cultists), in which case, they receive a +10% bonus.

The grotto area is also conducive to conducting sound. Listen rolls receive a +10% bonus.

Darkness

Should the investigators find themselves in the caves without recourse to illumination, they will have an incredibly difficult time maneuvering. They are likely to lose their orientation, suffering a -25% Navigation penalty. This can be disastrous, as reaching a specific destination (such as an exit) in the cave without light requires a successful Navigation roll (or a Critical Success on Navigation, if their score fell below zero due to penalties). Investigators can roll a Navigation check once every four hours. They will suffer a sense of dread and foreboding, requiring a Sanity check with a cost of 1/1d4 Sanity for every four hours spent lost in these dark caverns.

Entering the Grotto

Entering the vast darkness of the grotto, investigators will feel their hearts jumping up into their throats. The sheer size of the space overwhelms any illumination that the investigators might have, with the ceiling anywhere from 60 to 100 feet above their head and the details of the cave difficult to make out until the investigators are right on top of things. A disturbing lowing sound can be heard from some far corner of the cave.

Paths are laid out through the cave from each established entrance to all of the husbandry stations. These paths are clear of rock and have been smoothed out by years of use. However, the rest of the cave remains untouched, with inclines, wet patches and boulders of various sizes. Any off-path movement will be slow going (1/2 normal walking speed at best) and require careful attention to prevent slips and falls.



THE UNDERGROUND FARM

The Thatched Hut

This is an old structure, built in a style that is no longer known to the sunlit world above. Built centuries ago, it has been carefully maintained since. This is not out of reverence, but simple practicality. It currently serves as the night shift quarters for Daermox's tenders. At night, two of the tenders can usually be found here, sleeping.

The hut contains little of interest. There are two make-shift beds of timber, lined with sheepskins; a table and chairs; a jar of wine; and an unlit olive oil lamp.

The Grotto Stream

Just as the villa relies on a diverted stream for its water supply, so does the subterranean farm that feeds it. This is a larger stream, nearly 20 feet from bank to bank. Its course runs from south to north across the grotto and exits via a sinkhole. The captive herd is watered from the stream and

DE HORRORE COSMICO

their waste is cleared out into it.

A wooden bridge crosses the stream along the path from the stalls to the thatched hut.

The Slaughterhouse

Near the stream is a structure of more recent vintage than the thatched hut. It's built from cave stone, but has been set with mortar and covered in red plaster. In the light of day, it would not look out of place as an outbuilding for the villa above. The floor is tiled and has a slight incline to the doorway, from whence a stone sluiceway empties into the stream. This is where cattle are slaughtered. Inside, there are hefty rafters that run across the top of the structure. Hooked chains hang from them. The floors, despite being cleaned after use, are stained brown with blood.

The Stalls

This is where the unfortunate descendants of the captured Norduvices are kept. For generations they have known nothing but darkness, existing only as food animals to serve the Autirellauni's dread appetite.

The stalls themselves are of Roman-style construction, like the slaughterhouse. Each stall is large enough to accommodate two adults, although they generally only house one adult or one adult and one child. They are all cleaned on a daily basis and have clean hay lining their floors.

Nectoprastus has even gone so far as to invest in a furnace and hypocausts under the floor to protect his herd from the dank of the cave. Each stall also features sturdy chains bolted solidly into the back wall. The chains end in leather-lined

iron collars. There are three chains per stall, and every individual kept here is collared. The collars are kept fastened with a nutted bolt. (See "Human Cattle" for a description of the stalls' occupants).

Silos

Near the ladder and shaft that lead up to the fields outside the villa are several large stone bins used for silage. It was a good harvest this year. The silos are nearly overflowing with the same coarse vegetables that are growing above for the final crop of autumn.

CONCLUSION

The most straightforward conclusion to the scenario is a battle in the Sacred Grove, with investigators allied with the Mi-Go. The investigators should be able to finish off the Autirellauni and any Dark Young summoned with Mi-Go assistance. With the cult leaders defeated, Eephus will send his followers out to take possession of Fons Argenti at dawn the next day. They will give no quarter to any Autirellauni who have not already fled, especially after discovering that the fate of their cousins in the caves below. Having achieved its goals, the Mi-Go cabal will retreat into the background, pulling strings from a safe distance. Their cronies will no doubt end up in control once the dust settles. The investigators will be left with the unappetizing prospect of explaining to their patron what happened once they return from Fons Argenti.

The responsibility for the human cattle will fall to the



Norduvices. Whether they will be cared for until they die of natural causes or granted mercy killings becomes a matter of hot debate.

Reckless investigators may provoke retaliation from Nectoprastus and his family before their chance to meet Eephus, in which case Isias can help the investigators escape and continue their inquiries. In this case, Dwywyd will be hunting them with three Dark Young in tow once the new moon rises.

Eliminating any of Nectoprastus, Dwywyd or Vannus after their secret has been revealed will net investigators 1d4 Sanity each. Contributing to the fall of Fons Argenti will gain an additional 1d4 Sanity. There are no Sanity rewards for dealing with the pitiable cattle found down in the caves, as their existence is a shame and a horror no matter the outcome.

THE CAST OF KITH AND KINE

TITUS FLAVIUS NECTOPRASTUS

STR 12 CON 13 SIZ 11 INT 17 POW 14
DEX 14 APP 16 EDU 16 SAN 0 HP 12

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Small Knife 50%, 1D4+db

Skills: Accounting 45%, Art (Mosaic) 45%, Bargain 66%, Civics 75%, Climb 55%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Dodge 28%, Empire 66%, Fast Talk 45%, Insight 75%, Jump 45%, Library Use 35%, Listen 35%, Natural World 45%, Occult 35%, Speak Latin 75%, Speak Brythonic 70%, Speak Greek 55%, Persuade 40%, Ride 25%, Spot Hidden 55%, Status 65%, Write Latin 75%, Write Greek 55%

Spells: Summon/Bind Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath

Description: As a minor son of a minor tribe in Roman Britain, Nectoprastus embodied the changes around him, as tribal identification faded and Romanization waxed. Born in the first century as Rome consolidated its hold on Britain, he was tutored in Latin, Greek, and the mores of the Empire by a family slave and built a civil service career in Celtic Gaul. This service led to his gaining Roman citizenship late in the reign of Vespasian.

With his connections, relative wealth, and Roman citizenship, he made an attractive marriage prospect. This is what brought him into the fold of the Autirellauni. After gaining citizenship, he sought to find a good marriage that would add to his prestige and wealth. He would not have chosen to return to Britain, but he learned that the wealthy head of the Autirellauni sought an heir via marriage to his only child. The tribe had a horrible reputation amongst their neighbors, but had influence in Londinium. Also, the Autirellauni's traditional territory encompassed critical mining resources.

Vannus, chief of the Autirellauni, found Nectoprastus to be an ideal prospective heir. Not only was he well connected within the Empire; he was smart and devious, and displayed the

potential for deep cruelty that the heir to the tribe required. It was not long before off-hand comments and insinuations gave way to a tour of the caverns within which the elites of the Autirellauni practiced their terrible husbandry. Nectoprastus became an initiate into the mysteries of their cult.

Just weeks later, Nectoprastus married Dwywyd and was adopted by Vannus as his son. Five years on, Nectoprastus ascended to the chieftdom. Vannus then retired, happy to see his patrimony in such good hands.

Under the new chief, the cult of Shub-Niggurath moved above-ground. It is hidden in plain sight as a cult of the Roman goddess, Cybele, also known as Magna Mater (the Great Mother). Nectoprastus also improved the tribe's prospects by taking on the management of the local mines, as the Empire made efforts to decentralize its bureaucracy.

In the years since his ascension, Nectoprastus has delved deeper and deeper into depravity and cruelty. Simultaneously, he has become an expert at hiding this side of himself from his peers in Roman society. His reputation in Londinium is impeccable. Those who have made the sojourn to his villa find his hospitality second to none. It is, perhaps, best that none of his guests suspect what sweetmeats are served to them during their visits.

While nominally the high priest of the cult of Shub-Niggurath/Cybele, Nectoprastus defers to his wife in cultish matters. Despite his deep investment in the cult and its food-ways, he is essentially what he presents himself to be—a wealthy chief and Roman citizen, skilled in the world of business and the social niceties of Roman society. Beneath those trappings of respectability, however, lurks a ruthless and rapacious fiend with an iron will and piercing intellect.

DWYWYD

STR 08 CON 12 SIZ 10 INT 18 POW 18
DEX 12 APP 11 EDU 20 SAN 0 HP 11

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: none.

Skills: "Animal" Handling 35%, Civics 25%, Climb 45%, Cthulhu Mythos 33%, Dodge 30%, Empire 30%, Fast Talk 35%, First Aid 50%, Hide 66%, Insight 25%, Jump 35%, Library Use 75%, Listen 50%, Medicine 50%, Natural World 66%, Navigate 35%, Occult 55%, Speak Latin 55%, Speak Brythonic 95%, Speak Greek 45%, Sneak 45%, Spot Hidden 66%, Status 60%, Write Latin 55%, Write Greek 45%

Spells: Call Shub-Niggurath, Create Curse Tablet (Cthulhu Invictus, p. 96), Deflect Harm, Power Drain, Stop Heart, Summon/Bind Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, Wrack

Description: Dwywyd is the most powerful member of the cult. Her father, Vannus, procured tutors for her at an early age, despite the difficulty of keeping them on once they learned they had been hired to teach his daughter, rather than a son. She is literate in both Greek and Latin, and maintains a far-flung correspondence with like-minded devotees of the unspeakable throughout the known world. She has also mastered the oral history of her own tribe and its dark legacy. This combination has produced a powerful sorcerer who knows the ins and outs of the local landscape like the back of her hand.

Of the three cult leaders, Dwywyd is the least respectful



DE HORRORE COSMICO

of Rome's stature and influence. Her first inclination with outsiders is to add them to the pot. However, as long as Nectoprastus and Vannus believe that the investigators can be beguiled or recruited, she will play along, pretending to be nothing more than a stolid Roman wife, deferring to her husband in everything.

Contrary to this outward show, however, Dwywyd is as much a mentor to Nectoprastus as she is his wife. She is the one who did the patient work of ensuring that he was a good match for her family and its traditions. She is the one who brought him down to the grotto and showed him their cattle. She taught him the rituals and ways of the cult. Those that discount her will likely find themselves unpleasantly surprised.

VANNUS

STR 14 CON 18 SIZ 15 INT 13 POW 12
DEX 11 APP 10 EDU 13 SAN 0 HP 17

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: Axe 55%, damage 1D6+1+db

Skills: "Animal" Handling 66%, Bargain 55%, Civics 25%, Climb 55%, Conceal 35%, Cthulhu Mythos 05%, Dodge 22%, Empire 45%, Fast Talk 75%, Insight 45%, Listen 55%, Natural World 35%, Occult 25%, Speak Latin 45%, Speak Brythonic 65%, Repair/Devise 60%, Ride 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 60%, Tactics 25%

Spells: Call Shub-Niggurath, Summon/Bind Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, Wrack

Description: Vannus is nothing if not avuncular. While he has certainly developed a casual cruelty towards his cattle and to any he considers his inferior, that cruelty has never been infused with malice. He may be a cannibal cultist, but he is also a loving father and high priest emeritus. The latter distinction places him well outside the norms of traditional Roman culture, wherein a paterfamilias would remain firmly in control of his household up until his literal last breath. Romans will no doubt find his retirement shocking and even scandalous. Vannus would find such reactions hilarious. He has found a worthy heir, secured his patrimony, and can now enjoy his dotage.

While illiterate, Vannus has a vast memory and knows centuries of his cult's and tribe's history through songs, poems, and stories. He also knows a handful of spells that were handed down orally from generation to generation. Compared to his daughter, he's not much of a spell-smith, but he knows enough to pose a threat to anyone he deems an enemy.

DAERMOM

STR 16 CON 14 SIZ 09 INT 12 POW 10
DEX 14 APP 08 EDU 13 SAN 0 HP 12

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: Fist/Punch 75%, damage 1D3 + db

Grapple 60%, damage special

Kick 45%, damage 1D6 + db

Small Knife 50%, damage 1D4 + db

Long Sword 45%, damage 1D8 + db

Skills: "Animal" Handling 80%, Bargain 25%, Climb 75%, Conceal 45%, Dodge 35%, Hide 60%, Insight 35%, Jump 75%, Listen 66%, Natural World 35%, Navigate Caves 75%, Speak Latin 15%, Speak Brythonic 75%, Repair/Devise 50%, Ride 35%, Sneak 55%, Spot Hidden 60%, Tactics 25%, Track 60%

Description: Daermom is the warden of the caves and the cult's herd. He is a man of few words and has little interest in outsiders, as long as they don't pose a threat. He treats the human cattle he husbands with great care, not out of any sense of kindness but because healthy cattle are productive cattle. Any attempt to invade or escape the caves will have to go through him and his subordinates. They may not be highly trained combatants, but they know the caves well and will use that to their advantage.

Daermom oversees six herdsman. Use the stats below for them, as well as for the kitchen staff of the villa, who also number six. Daermom's men share his skills.

Daermom's Herdsmen

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
STR	10	15	10	16	13	11
CON	09	08	10	17	16	11
SIZ	11	13	08	08	07	13
INT	13	09	09	07	10	17
POW	10	08	08	06	06	12
DEX	14	11	10	09	07	07
HP	10	11	09	13	12	12
DB	+0	+1D4	+0	+0	+0	+0

Weapons: Axe 50%, damage 1d6 + 1 + db
Short Sword 55%, damage 1d6 + db

ISIAS

STR 10 CON 12 SIZ 12 INT 11 POW 15
DEX 12 APP 09 EDU 17 SAN 71 HP 12

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Small Knife 60%, damage 1D4 + db

Skills: Bargain 35%, Conceal 75%, Cthulhu Mythos 02%, Fast Talk 80%, First Aid 55%, Hide 66%, Insight 70%, Listen 60%, Medicine 35%, Natural World 55%, Occult 15%, Speak Latin 55%, Speak Brythonic 80%, Speak Greek 20%, Speak Punic 70%, Persuade 30%, Potions 60%, Repair/Devise 30%, Ride 25%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 60%, Status 01%, Track 45%

Description: Isias is the head household slave at Fons Argenti, but she is also a spy. The Mi-Go that devised the cult of Eephus have been subverting the Autirellauni for years. Isias was planted within the retinue of Nectoprastus, as he assembled a crew of domestics to serve him once construction of his villa was completed. The formation of the Eephus cult is a direct result of the intelligence Isias has provided them.

She knows what lies beneath the villa and the source of the household's meat. Many of her fellow slaves have suspicions, but any that are not wise enough to turn a blind eye to the unsavory business meet a savory fate (as a main course).

Outwardly, Isias appears to be from elsewhere in the Empire. She has black hair, olive skin, and dark eyes. However, her appearance is the result of alterations performed on her by the Mi-Go. She is actually a member of the Norduvices. She has taken a Greek name and affects a Greek accent in her Latin and Brythonic. With the latter, she also conceals her fluency behind deliberately stilted syntax. Note her low skill in actually speaking Greek; this is a clue that investigators who speak the language to her may pick up on.

Her true name is Eisu, which she will share with the investigators if they earn her trust.



COMUX

STR 17 CON 12 SIZ 15 INT 12 POW 15
DEX 05 APP 11 EDU 10 SAN 59 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: Club 45%, damage 1D6 + db

Skills: Bargain 15%, Craft (Foraging) 50%, First Aid 40%, Insight 35%, Listen 50%, Natural World 25%, Navigate 20%, Occult 35%, Speak Latin 10%, Speak Brythonic 60%, Persuade 55%, Repair/Devise 50%, Spot Hidden 66%, Status 10%

Description: The Mi-Go began looking for human agents in the region a decade ago. Using their masquerade as Eephus, they reached out to Comux when he was a youth. Using their ability to mesmerize humans and then maintain contact with them through psychic channels, they convinced him that he had been chosen by the Gods to return his tribe to glory. The Mi-Go have recruited others in the same fashion, but Comux stands out for his fanaticism and determination.

Alone, those traits would not be enough, especially as Comux is not socially adept. However, he has the advantage that his god has a physical presence and grants audiences from within a holy site. In the guise of Eephus, Comux's Mi-Go handler has been building him up for weeks now, and around the encampment his words are considered sacred pronouncements. He's become the perfect puppet for the Mi-Go.

At the camp with Comux are a dozen devotees of Eephus, who have been trained in combat to some degree. They will be the ones expected to assault the villa (with covert backup from the Mi-Go).

Devotees of Eephus

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12
STR	11	11	13	09	13	15	08	16	08	13	12	15
CON	14	14	13	11	08	09	12	10	10	17	12	03
SIZ	14	14	11	15	12	12	12	11	09	11	16	17
INT	10	09	10	11	08	07	12	09	11	15	11	14
POW	12	09	04	08	07	13	13	11	9	12	10	09
DEX	12	09	13	11	10	15	09	07	12	15	11	12
HP	14	14	12	13	10	11	12	11	10	14	14	10
DB	+1D4+1D4	+0	+0	+1D4+1D4	+0	+1D4	+0	+0	+1D4+1D4	+0	+1D4+1D4	
SAN	50	35	20	30	35	55	55	45	35	50	40	35

Weapons: Club 40%, damage 1D6 + db

Knife 50%, damage 1D4 + db

Sword 35%, damage 1D6 + db

Armor: None

EEPHUS, Deific Mi-Go Impostor

STR 16 CON 17 SIZ 10 INT 17 POW 17
DEX 20 Move 7 (9 flying) HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapon: Electric Gun 66%, damage 1D10

Nippers 30%, damage 1D6 + grapple

Skills: Civics 25%, Dodge 66%, Empire 75%, Insight 65%*, Listen 66%, Speak Latin 85%, Speak Brythonic 85%, Persuade 45%, Spot Hidden 50%, Write Latin 85%

* Requires successful Mi-Go Hypnosis on subject first.

Spells: Contact Human, Dread Curse of Azathoth, Mi-Go Hypnosis

Armor: None

Sanity Cost: 0/1D6

Description: The Mi-Go posing as Eephus is using its status

as a god to control and manipulate local humans, as part of a scheme to eliminate the tribe currently in control of the local mining operations in the region. In addition to its human cronies, it maintains contact with six Mi-Go scouts who are prepared to support the planned assault on Fons Argenti. They are aware of the possibility that they will face Dark Young in combat and have prepared for that eventuality. Three of Eephus' comrades are armed with flechette guns that use a Bose-Einstein condensate as ammunition. These weapons do full damage to Dark Young.

Eephus' Mi-Go Companions

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
STR	13	11	09	04	10	08
CON	10	11	17	15	09	09
SIZ	10	13	05	12	08	07
INT	16	12	16	13	13	18
POW	10	09	13	14	12	09
DEX	15	19	19	15	16	13
HP	10	12	11	14	09	08
DB	+0	+0	-1D4	-1D4	+0	-1D4

Move: 7 (9 flying)

Weapons: Electric Gun 66%, damage 1D10

BEC Flechette Gun 66%, damage 2D4 + 1;

Nippers 30%, damage 1d6 + grapple

Armor: Mi-Go Bio Armor – 8 points of protection

Sanity Cost: 0/1D6

Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath

	Verno (Alder)	Eburo (Yew)	Deruo (Oak)
STR	46	41	43
CON	16	15	19
SIZ	40	47	41
INT	12	18	08
POW	14	19	19
DEX	17	15	13
HP	28	31	30

Move: 8

Damage Bonus: +4D6

Weapons: Tentacle 80%, db + STR Drain; Trample 40%, 2d6 + db

Armor: Hand to Hand weapons do normal damage. Most projectile weapons do 1 point of damage. Attacks dependent on heat, blast, corrosion, electrical charge, or poisoning have no effect.

Skills: Sneak 60%, Hide in Woods 80%, Track 60%

Spells: Alter Weather, Bless Crop, Wrack. Although Dwywyd and the Autirellauni have a long established relationship with these creatures, they must still be summoned individually by spell. Dwywyd, Vannus, and Nectoprastus must each cast the Summoning spell on the first night of the new moon in order to summon all three. Each will sacrifice one of the Autirellauni's cattle as part of the ritual.

Sanity Cost: 1D3/1D10

Description: The Dark Young are quite fond of Dwywyd, especially Eburo. Should they witness her death, they will stop whatever they are doing in order to chase down and destroy her killer(s). Should the responsible parties escape, that will be the end of it as far as Verno and Deruo are concerned. However, Eburo will make an effort to track down Dwywyd's killers and hunt them relentlessly, even leaving its home forest to continue the hunt.



THE DEVIL'S MOUTH

BY STUART BOON

In this scenario, inspired by H. P. Lovecraft's *The Mountains of Madness*, our adventurers visit the edge of the known world and face alien horrors older than mankind. The frozen wastes of Antarctica are replaced by the savage barbarian lands of Caledonia.

KEEPER'S INFORMATION

Since Agricola's first invasion of Caledonia in 79 B.C.E., the harshness of these lands and her strange people have kept the Romans from advancing far beyond Hadrian's Wall (and possibly the Antonine Wall). Most who have ventured north of these Roman-held lands have not returned. Blame for this often falls on the highly aggressive, tattooed Picts in the west and north. Few, if any, Romans are aware of the much greater dangers that lie in the fierce Highlands of northern Caledonia, preying equally on Picts and Romans with alien indifference.

Caledonia has long been home to creatures and races that arrived millennia ago from worlds and dimensions unknown. The Picts and earlier settlers of the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages learned to avoid conflict with these dangerous beings or, in some cases, chose to worship them. Serpent people, Mi-go, Elder Things, Dark Ones, and other Mythos races have settled in and warred over Caledonia in the past (see *Cubicle 7's Shadows Over Scotland* for further details). Over time, however, the power and presence of these Mythos threats has waned significantly.

Yet, such beings are still encountered from time to time, in certain places. One such place is a cavern system on the north side of Ben Nevis, Caledonia's largest mountain. For centuries, Pict hunters and explorers who entered these dark caverns never returned. Among the Pictish tribes, the tunnel into the mountain was renamed the "Devil's Throat," and men now shun the area. The cave has been taboo for as long as anyone can remember. The lands of the Vacomagi lie in the shadow of Ben Nevis.

Decimus Vatinius Calvus, an intrepid diplomat of considerable renown, is unaware of any such history, nor would he heed any fanciful warning. Calvus is an eminently capable and, perhaps overly, confident envoy for Rome. He has made a name for himself by negotiating treaties with numerous chieftains and kings in Hispania, Germania, and Britannia, allowing Rome to pursue her imperial interests in those regions in relative peace. His successes have brought him great acclaim and made him rich beyond most men's dreams.

Calvus is driven not by wealth, however, but by desire for influence and power. His need to satisfy this desire has led him to live much of his life on the edge of empire and in the company of less "civilized" men. Trading the comforts and entertainments of empire for the wilds of the Caledonian Highlands, Calvus now seeks to parlay with the Pictish chieftain Collos, son of Vergis. Collos is the leader of the Vacomagi, one of the largest tribes of Picts in northwest Caledonia, and well respected among his people. His mission is to convince Collos to become a client king of Rome. As incentives, Calvus brings with him not only gold and silver, but also promises of trade and military alliance with Rome. Collos would become the northernmost client king of Rome in Caledonia.

The expedition requires a considerable investment in men, horses, and supplies. Calvus has amassed a small force of twenty-six men, including himself, but not including the investigators, to take with him across the Caledonian forests and further north into the mountains.

Calvus is aware of potential threats from bandits and Pictish tribes hostile to both Rome and the Vacomagi. Three-quarters of the expedition is made up of mercenaries from all over the Roman Empire. Although they are led by a few select veterans, most of them are young and have seen few battles.

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

Little do the investigators realize as they move steadily closer to the Caledonian Highlands that the fortunes of all of the men in the expedition are about to change—for the worse. When they arrive at their destination, the village of Tuesis, they find a scene of destruction. Collos' people here have been almost completely wiped out. The few survivors who witnessed the devastation blame it on a group of "savage Lugi dogs" aided by "winged devils". The Lugi are a degenerate Pictish tribe, long rumored to practice black rites and magic. They are, or rather were, ancestral enemies of the Vacomagi, who most thought died out a generation ago. Calvus learns that Collos, the chieftain of the Vacomagi, was captured by these other Picts and taken off toward the mountains.

The abduction of Collos and the attack on his tribe presents Calvus with a number of acute problems. First, and most obviously, negotiations with the Picts—the sole reason for this diplomatic mission—cannot begin without the Pictish leader being present. Second, for Rome to have any chance of securing a greater foothold in Caledonia, she must not appear weak. Helping the Vacomagi now will help win the Empire confidence among the Picts. Third, the financial losses and damage to Calvus' reputation for failing in such an expensive and high profile mission would surely signal the end of his career. With these points in mind, Calvus shifts his efforts towards rescuing Collos and aiding his people.

FROM COMPLICATIONS TO CRISIS

Events prove far more complex and dangerous than the diplomat suspects. Shortly after arriving at the ruined village of the Vacomagi, Calvus and several of his men suffer the same fate as Collos. While searching for the Pictish chieftain, the diplomat's scouting party is ambushed on the southern side of Ben Nevis. The few who survive this attack are taken prisoner by the Pict raiders and their alien allies, and then dragged into the Devil's Mouth. The investigators must now attempt to rescue both the captured Romans and Picts, or return to Britannia in disgrace.

THE STAR PEOPLE AND THEIR SINISTER PLOT

The creatures described as star people by one of the villagers are in fact a group of seven Elder Thing scientists, powerful and highly intelligent adversaries. The creatures have carefully manipulated a group of Pictish cultists into helping them revive a long lost, Elder Thing city lying beneath the mountain roots of Ben Nevis. They recently rediscovered the lost Caledonian city while travelling to Antarctica using the Great White Space, a unique form of Elder Thing transport (see page 177 of the

6th edition *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook for more information).

The first phase of their plan entails creating shoggoth servants using the dormant facilities present in the ancient city. When the shoggoths are created, the Elder Things plan to use them to rebuild their city and re-establish their power in the region. However, with their very limited resources, this requires a considerable amount of raw organic and genetic material. The Elder Things are using the small band of Pict outlaws, the survivors of the tribe of the Lugi, to acquire this material from the surrounding area.

Collos and a number of his tribe, along with Calvus and his few surviving men, have been taken down into the dormant Elder Thing city. Here, they will ultimately become biomass for the creation of shoggoths. The capture of Calvus and his scouting party provides the Elder Things with all the organic material they require. It is only a matter of hours before they can create the first wave of shoggoths, unless the investigators can stop or circumvent the Elder Things' plans.

The Elder Things have promised Vuradech, leader of the Lugi, powerful magic and a place in the new order in return for their help in securing the organic material they need. In truth, the Elder Things have no intention of honoring their promise. They intend either to use the cultists as supplemental genetic biomass, or murder them outright, once the first of the shoggoths has been created.

THE LUGI AND THEIR TENUOUS POSITION

The savage Pict warriors serving the Elder Things are the few remaining members of the tribe of the Lugi. The Lugi were much despised by their neighbors due to their worship of dark gods (such as the Great Old Ones Kassogtha, Pharol, and Rhan-Tegoth), use of black magic, and kidnapping and sacrificing youths from other tribes. Over the years, the Lugi were hunted mercilessly by their neighbors, forced into hiding, and driven to the point of extinction. Today, the Lugi are led by Vuradech, a seer and sorcerer of considerable power.

While travelling in the Dreamlands, Vuradech came upon a group of Elder Thing scientists, and an extraordinary partnership developed. In exchange for his tribe's aid, Vuradech was told the location of the lost city and invited there by his new allies. Here, in the depths beneath Ben Nevis, the Lugi found refuge and witnessed firsthand the city's extraordinary potential. In exchange for knowledge, sanctuary, and power, Vuradech and his tribe carry out the Elder Things' instructions. Through brute force, eldritch magic, and/or self-sacrifice, the Lugi will, unless stopped or convinced otherwise, provide the elder things with the organic biomass they require to create their shoggoth servants.

Though mad and highly unstable, Vuradech is highly intelligent. He may, should the Keeper desire it, already suspect that the Lugi will be betrayed once they have served their usefulness. He realizes his people lack the strength to defeat the Elder Things, and that if they attempt to break their alliance, they will surely be slain. In this case, the motivations and re-



action of the Vuradech and the Lugi towards the investigators may change (see “Friend or Foe”).

The Enslaved Horrors

The short-term goal of the Elder Things is to create a batch of four shoggoths. Through assisting the Elder Things, Vuradech has learned how to operate the alien machinery that is required to create the shoggoths. If Vuradech manages to free the Lugi from the Elder Things’ service, with or without the investigators’ aid, he’ll attempt to remain in the alien city and finish creating the shoggoths.

However, the Pict sorcerer does not possess the skill, knowledge, or power to effectively control a single shoggoth, much less a group of them. If he tries, the creatures resist his control and run amok, quickly killing Vuradech and the entire Lugi tribe, and then killing anyone else in the underground city. If the investigators allow this to happen, the four free-willed shoggoths effectively bring the scenario to a quick and deadly close. Luckily for the rest of Caledonia, once the shoggoths have killed everyone in the alien city, they choose to remain there, lurking in the dark until disturbed.

A Common Enemy

The Lugi can serve solely as an ally of the Elder Things or betray them to join with the investigators. This “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” sub-plot can be played out to great dramatic effect. The possibility of this alliance can be revealed as the Keeper chooses (a number of options are provided as they occur). Will the investigators ally themselves with the cultists, for a time, to defeat the Elder Things? Once the Elder Things are defeated, Vuradech and the Lugi betray the investigators. It is their intention to remain in the alien city and finish creating the shoggoths to enslave them as unstoppable guardians of their new realm.

INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

As per Decimus Vatinius Calvus’ requirements, investigators joining this expedition should be physically fit and able to endure the rigors of traveling through the wilds. He wants people who are skilled at arms to defend the camp and caravan, as well as those able to track, hunt or fish, navigate, ride, drive wagons, or tend to beasts of burden. He greatly desires those who have studied the language and customs of the Picts, as the team currently has only has a single translator. Investigators with high status could be friends of Vatinius Calvus, or politically well-connected enough to be sent by Quintus Lollius Urbicus, the Governor of Britannia between 139 and 142 A.D., as independent observers to the negotiations. Investigators who are active duty soldiers (legionaries or auxiliaries) might be sent along as well, as an honor guard representing the Empire.

STARTING THE INVESTIGATION

Keepers can start the investigation in many ways. Investigators can join the expedition at Cataractonium as it sets out North for the Hadrian Wall and beyond. Keepers can start the scenario much earlier, helping Calvus form the expedition as he travels from Lundinium to Cataractonium, or even much earlier should investigators need to travel to Britannia from elsewhere in the Empire. Lastly, they can start the scenario *in medias res* with the investigators travelling through the ancient Caledonian forest somewhere between Tulla and Loch Ba. This is the default assumption in the section “Investigators’ Introduction”.

A Few Words of Pictish

During the journey, the investigators overhear Mamilius Lentulus teaching some guards a few words and phrases of Pictish. Lentulus learned the tongue from his nursemaid Ula, a slave that his family owned. If asked, he will teach the investigators a little Pictish if they make it worth his while. For a handful coins, a daily share of their rations, or some fresh caught game or fish, he’ll given them fireside lessons

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ROMAN EXPEDITION

Decimus Vatinius Calvus, Influential Roman Diplomat

Mamilius Lentulus, Calvus’ Personal Advisor / Translator

Aufidius Nerva, Expedition Physician

Dentatus, Calvus’ Personal Bodyguard

Longus, Expedition Mercenary Chief

Strabo, Expedition Caravaneer

PICTS (VACOMAGI)

Collos, son of Vergis, Chieftain / Prospective Roman client king / Captive

Cena, Female / Adult / Survivor / mother of Brigantos

Brigantos, Male / Child / Survivor / son of Cena

Kessa, Female / Child / Survivor / Orphan

Maire, Female / Youth / Captive / daughter of Cena

PICTS (LUGI)

Vuradech, Chieftain / Cultist / Sorcerer

Drest, Warrior / Cultist

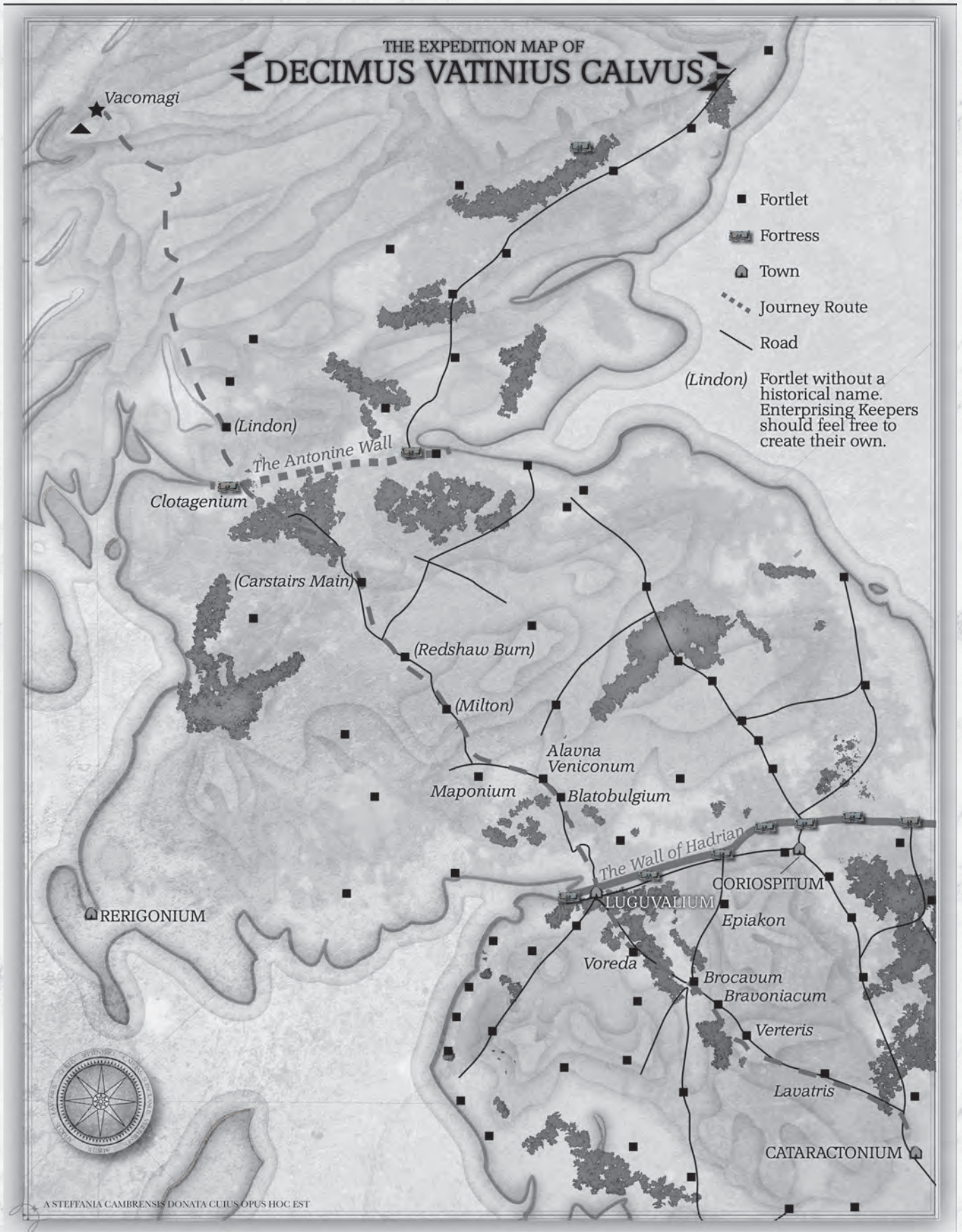
Dunna, Warrior / Cultist

PICTS (TRIBELESS)

Silla, Hedge witch



THE DEVIL'S MOUTH



in Pictish language and culture for a couple of hours each night. If the investigators agree to this, by the time they reach the River Nevis, they gain their INT x3 in Other Language: Pictish, and INT x2 in Other Kingdom: Caledonia.

THE ROUTE

The trip to Ben Nevis takes the investigators far north into Caledonia. The distance from Cataractonium to the Vacomagian settlement is nearly 150 Roman leagues (or 276 miles). If Keepers run this scenario later than 142 A.D., the investigators will cross the Antonine Wall. This new northern border of the empire, a turf fortified wall, is under construction between 142 A.D. and 154 A.D. The wall is manned for only eight years, and is abandoned in 162 A.D., with the border once again reverting to Hadrian's Wall.

The diplomatic caravan stops at eleven pre-established resupply points, placed about two days travel apart. These resupply points are either settlements of Picts friendly to Rome, or camps established by Calvus' men in the weeks before his expedition leaves Cataractonium. This allows Calvus to travel quickly, camping out in the open every other night, between reaching resupply points. However, the last leg of this journey, from the northern most supply camp to the village of Tuesis in the territory of the Vacomagi, requires four days of travel. Despite these logistical preparations, the trip is still long, grueling, and dangerous, taking anywhere the caravan anywhere from 26–31 days (25+1D4).

THE JOURNEY

Travel through the Caledonian forests is anything but easy. The land is crosscut with deep gorges, raging rivers, and smaller streams that require careful navigation. The undergrowth is particularly tough, with nettles, brambles, and intertwining branches creating walls and large patches of course, thorny vegetation. The trees themselves are a mixture of birch, larch, oak, and pine, and the bark and branches of most are covered in thick green moss.

The weather is highly variable. One moment, sun is streaming through the patchwork canopy of green leaves above, and the next, rain starts pouring down, soaking the spongy forest floor in minutes. Between cutting through dense thickets of brambles and helping carriages over rough terrain, the work is grueling.

Encounters with wildlife in the forest are common; encounters with Picts or other humans are considerably rarer. Keepers may set any number of encounters during this journey, such as defending the camp from predators (such as wolves and brown bears), hunting game (such as elk, wild boar, and wild oxen), or fighting off attacks from bands of Pictish raiders or bandits. Keepers should also try to build tension by highlighting the isolation of the Romans and the strangeness of the Caledonian forest. To the average Roman citizen, travelling into Caledonia is like travelling into another world, an untamed savage land beyond the edge of civilization.

INVESTIGATORS' INTRODUCTION

To the north, the Caledonian Highlands begin rising up several hundred feet to Rannoch Moor, and become increasingly mountainous. The expedition's destination, the River Nevis at the foot of the mountain Ben Nevis, is a little over a week away. The expedition has been fortunate so far: although the weather has been uniformly wet and rainy, game has been plentiful, each camp has gone up easily, and everyone feels cautiously optimistic. All of that is about to change.

The investigators are marching in a thin column through the dense Caledonian forest after leaving the northernmost re-supply camp. The horses of Calvus and his entourage (Lentulus, Dentatus, Nerva, and Longus) are ahead, crunching through the underbrush and carving a route through the tall trees. The investigators busy themselves on the march, hacking at the undergrowth and cutting a path for the horses behind them pulling the small carriage filled with supplies. The men have been marching from sunrise to sunset for weeks now.

Calvus himself does not fraternize with those in his employ, leaving that duty to Lentulus, Nerva, and Longus. His evenings are spent in his tent alone or with Dentatus and Lentulus attending him. Unless the investigators are of high status (50% or more), are government officials, or are friends of Calvus, they have very few personal interactions with him during their travels.

After a hard day of travel and establishing the evening camp, the investigators are left to their own devices. Most nights, men end up around the campfire, listening to the caravaner Strabo tell tales of far off lands and make jokes at the expense of the savages he's encountered along the way. There is some friendly gambling by those not on watches, while others hunt, fish, or set snares to supplement the supplies with fresh meat.

THE FOREST CAMP

Midway between the last resupply camp and the Nevis Range, the forest begins thinning out, and more mountainous terrain can be seen to the north. That afternoon, one of the advance scouts brings down a wild boar. That night, the beast is roasted over a fire and the caravan is treated to a rare feast.

POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS

Wolves: *Malleus Monstrorum*, page 273

Brown Bears: *Malleus Monstrorum*, page 262

Elk: *Malleus Monstrorum*, page 268 (Use Moose stats)

Wild Boar: *Malleus Monstrorum*, page 263

Wild Ox (Urus): *Malleus Monstrorum*, page 263–264 (use Water Buffalo stats)

THE DEVIL'S MOUTH

Aufidius Nerva, the expedition's physician, comes around mid-meal and checks over everyone for wounds or illness. Strabo moves about camp, inspecting everyone's weapons, armor, and clothing for signs of poor maintenance. In all the weeks of the journey, this is the first time such inspections have happened. If either Nerva or Strabo is questioned about this, they explain that the caravan should reach its final destination in the next few days.

Calvus breaks his isolation to join in the feast of wild boar, doubling the evening's wine ration, which brings a cheer from everyone, and addressing the expedition. He explains that their final destination is a settlement on the bank of a great river, called "Nevis" by the savage Picts, and that the negotiations are set to begin immediately upon their arrival. They are to present the gifts from Rome with as much pageantry as they can muster. He stresses the importance of this mission, saying that reaching an agreement with the Pictish King Collos, son of Vergis, would make the Vacomagi clients of Rome. Should they fail to reach such an agreement, the entire expedition will have been for nothing.

Fireside Tales

As the feast concludes, wolves can be heard howling quite close to camp. As the firelight casts eerie shadows over the camp, Strabo recounts several tale of horror from the various lands he's traveled. This time, Mamilius Lentulus joins in, speaking of a legend he was told of this region as a child.

Lentulus speaks of a terrible tribe of Picts who made a pact with a dark wolf god to gain power over all other men. The people of the tribe became the Cu Sith, a race who is

neither men nor beasts, but both, being gifted with the ability to transform into wolves at will. He says that in the dark of night, packs of Cu Sith will pick off large groups of travelers one by one.

After Lentulus finishes his story, Strabo claims to have seen such a creature himself. He speaks of being part of a caravan intent on trading with a Pictish clan known for their metalwork. He says he was lucky to escape with his life as the caravan was waylaid in the dark. Strabo swears to have seen a man turn into a wolf before his very eyes. A successful Insight roll determines that both Lentulus and Strabo truly believe the Cu Sith are more than just a legend.

Keepers Note: The mysterious Cu Sith are real (see page 111 of the *Cthulhu Invictus* rulebook). However, they do not appear in the scenario, unless individual Keepers wish to include them. They are included here as a red herring.

A CURIOUS DISCOVERY

Just before dusk the following day, the Roman march is halted suddenly when the mercenary chief, Longus, makes a gruesome discovery. Atop a small hillock to the right of their path, the investigators see the mangled and stripped bodies of three humans—one clearly that of a child. The state of the bodies and the significant decay costs 0/1 Sanity to view.

A male, a female, and a child's skeleton are virtually stripped of flesh, appearing to have been ravaged by some beast, likely wolves. The skulls are cracked, and the level of decay makes it difficult to determine how long the three were dead; however, a successful Medicine roll reveals they died



about a week ago. Strangely, the feet of all three corpses are missing.

Investigators making a successful Spot Hidden roll quickly locate the corpses' missing feet and an additional corpse. The naked and mutilated body of a teenage boy hangs upside-down twenty feet above the investigators. It is partially obscured by an oak branch high above. His feet are ensnared in an unusual rope knot tied around the ankle and the sole of the foot. The corpse hangs from its right foot only, as his left has rotted off and hangs in the rope knot beside the rotting feet of the three skeletons found below.

The state of the adolescent's dead body is highly disturbing. His flesh and muscle appear to have been carefully, almost professionally, cleaved from his bone. Little sinew is left behind and loose, rotting skin remains only on his face, hands, and feet. The chest cavity and abdomen are empty, and no internal organs remain within the white ribcage.

The body looks not so much murdered as disassembled (in fact, the useful biomass has been excised for use by the Elder Things). If the body can be inspected more closely (for example, if they release the body or climb up to it), investigators familiar with human anatomy or butchery realize an extraordinary level of skill was involved. Keepers may require another 0/1 point Sanity loss for closely examining the boy.

A successful Track roll reveals a trail of human tracks leading north from the site, heading in the same direction as the Roman expedition. A critical Track success also reveals a more curious, repeating depression that co-mingles with the human tracks. These are vaguely duck shaped, but larger and harder, like hooves, beside curved tracks like the passage of a large serpent. The strange curving tracks (which belong to an Elder Thing), defy identification.

TUESIS, HEAD VILLAGE OF THE VACOMAGI

For two days' travel after the grisly discovery in the forest, the terrain has become ever more mountainous. Tall trees are now found only in the valleys or glens between peaks. In higher elevations or on the vast, mossy moors, forests are replaced by low-lying shrubs and fields of purple heather. Eventually, the expedition arrives on the banks of the River Nevis, just 15 leagues south of their final destination.

The river here is swollen with the recent rains, and runs too fast to ford manageably with horse or carriage. With only an hour of sunlight left, Calvus orders the party north, travelling in parallel with the raging river. A sense of urgency and optimism washes through the expedition: the end is finally in sight.

Less than half an hour later, as the sun dips low beneath the western hills, the Romans spy a large settlement a half-mile ahead. Spread over a considerable distance, the Pictish village consists primarily of low, thatched huts with walls of piled stone and small, fenced enclosures built alongside them. Near the village's center, a few larger halls are supported by

vast hewn beams of pine, birch, and oak. While the Vacomagi have several such villages across this region, Tuesis is where their chieftain, Collos, son of Vergis, resides.

As the investigators near the small village, call for a Spot Hidden roll. Successes allow them to pick out a number of bodies lying motionless outside the huts and in the fields surrounding the village. In the dwindling light and through a light rain, not a single soul can be seen moving about the village. No cooking fires are lit, no smoke rises from the houses, and a large murder of crows moves boldly through the quiet settlement. A little over a quarter-mile from the village, Calvus orders the expedition to stop. This was not the greeting that he was expecting, and the investigators can see the diplomat quickly confer with his advisors.

SEARCHING THE RUINS

After a moment, Calvus orders that torches be lit and the expedition (including the investigators) to spread out to look for survivors and clues to what sort of disaster took place here. The entire company, apart from Calvus and his advisors, fans out from the path and slowly begins combing the fields until everyone enters into the village. It will not be long before the investigators come across their first corpse, then their second, third, and so on. The same skilled "butchering" that they encountered in the forest has been applied here, but on a terrifying scale. In all the bodies of nearly six hundred Vacomagi, men, women, and children, are located. The enormity of the crime and butchery requires that even the most hardened of investigators must make a 1/1d6 Sanity Check.

Looking at the human dead, it appears as though the bulk of muscle and flesh has been almost surgically removed. Numerous sheep and a few large Highland cattle in the enclosures have been vivisected. The hairy hide of the huge cattle has been cut in an almost perfect line across the stomach and then pulled back to the spine. Each leg and the animal's throat has similarly been cut and pulled away so that the muscle could be cleaved cleanly from the bone. As with the humans, the internal organs are completely missing.

Any investigators with more than 40% in Craft: Cooking, Medicine, or experience with either taxidermy or butchery who examine the human or animal corpses notice something even more unnerving. They realize that the incisions on the bodies are extraordinarily precise and would require the keenest of blade and steadiest of hands to achieve. Keepers may wish to impose another 0/1 Sanity loss for such a realization. The men searching begin whispering about theories about rival tribes of cannibal Picts or the mysterious shape changing Cu Sith, and the investigators may infer an otherworldly significance or create a suitably horrific justification of their own.

FINDING SURVIVORS

As the Roman expedition slowly gathers in the centre of Tuesis, the look on every face is grim. It appears as though not a single Pict has been left alive. As the last of the sunlight fades and stars appear in the evening sky above, Calvus orders that each of the huts and halls be searched. He gives



THE DEVIL'S MOUTH



strict instructions that any surviving Vacomagi be aided, but detained, and tells them that if they are attacked, they are to take prisoners at all costs.

“We need answers to this,” he explains, “We don’t want to end up being blamed for it.”

The investigators are sent northeast of Tuesis in the direction of the river. A search of these stone huts reveals that nothing of value has been stolen or removed. Investigators can appropriate a number of workable daggers, dirks, and axes, and a small horde of dried foodstuffs and water skins, in addition to a small amount of Pictish silver. Strabo chides anyone removing items from homes, remarking that the gods design special tortures for those who disturb the dead.

After searching four or five huts, the investigators discover one whose door and windows are not only barred shut, but barricaded as well. Investigators making a successful Listen roll can hear several people inside trying to remain quiet and avoid detection, unsure of the Romans’ intentions. Should the investigators decide not to force the simple wooden door (STR vs. STR 10 on the resistance table) those inside will remain silent. If investigators call out to the people within, in Pict, claiming to be here to help, they can make a Persuade roll. If successful, the survivors slowly emerge.

If the investigators enter the hut by force, they find a terrified Vacomagian woman, wielding a small, finely made dagger, defending two even more terrified children. She threatens the intruders, in Pictish, and demands that they leave her home in peace.

Having effectively locked themselves in a small hut near the northern edge of the village, these three are the only survivors of the attack present in Tuesis. They are Cena,

her son Brigantos (age 8), and a girl named Kessa (age 6), who belongs to another family. In order to communicate usefully with Cena, the investigators must make a successful Persuade roll (and may have done so to coax the Picts out of the hut) and Other Language: Pictish. Neither Cena nor the children speak Latin or any other foreign tongue, so any conversation must be in Pictish. Even then, communication with the traumatized villagers will be basic at best. If none of the investigators manage to communicate with them, they might try non-verbal communication to assure the villagers that they mean them no harm. If the investigators cannot communicate in Pictish, Keepers should have Mamilius Lentulus, the expedition’s translator, step in to question them.

The Survivors’ Tale

Cena and Brigantos returned home to Tuesis this afternoon, travelling from the village of Da-Bhra to the west. They discovered the devastation for themselves then. Her husband, eldest son, and daughter are all missing. She found Kessa hidden under a hay pile while looking for survivors. Her plan was to hide here until dawn and then make for Da-Bhra (a neighboring Vacomagian village), where she has family. Cena and Brigantos know nothing of the attack and abductions; she claims that there are too few bodies and that many villagers must have been carried off. Neither she nor Brigantos know any possible reason for such treachery and murder, saying that the Vacomagi have no powerful enemies and Collos, their chieftain, is a just and wise ruler.

Cena is aware that Collos intended to parlay with the Romans and she entreats them to find her family and their missing chieftain. She says she knows that Collos and many



of those missing still live, although she won't say how. Investigators making a successful Insight roll notice two things; she is speaking what she believes to be the truth and she keeps glancing nervously at Kessa.

The Story of Kessa

The small Pictish girl Kessa proves far more difficult to converse with. She is only six years old, and is in a state of profound shock. Unlike Cena and Brigantos, Kessa witnessed the attack. A fire, a warm meal, and other reassurances help to give Kessa some comfort. If investigators show a willingness to work with Kessa, she eventually rewards them with some valuable, if cryptic, information.

Once calm enough to talk, Kessa reveals that the attack took place at night while everyone was sleeping. A large host of marauders set upon the sleeping villagers. There was no alarm and no warning. Most of the marauders were Picts, covered in paint or tattoos, but with them were a number of "star men." Kessa does not have the vocabulary to effectively describe the Elder Things that she saw. If pressed, she will just shout "star men" louder. She saw the star men pick up villagers and hurl them about as if they were dolls. Her mother hid her under the hay and told her not to come out until she came for her. Kessa says she saw the marauders and "star men" carry off many people who were still alive, but hurt or sleeping. She heard the screams continue, mostly from the direction of the river, until she fell asleep. Then Brigantos's mother woke Kessa up and said to come with her.

Cena interrupts saying that Kessa may be terrified, but she is not simple or mad. She says both she and Brigantos have seen strange tracks in the mud, and that something strange and unnatural has been within Tuesis. Cena says that Silla, the hedge witch, may know more about these demons. She says that Silla lives about two leagues to the east, among the tall pines.

CAMPING AND TRACKING IN TUESIS

As full night falls, Calvus orders that camp be made on the northern side of the village, a short distance from the stony banks of the Nevis. Investigators notice that the river can easily be forded here. During their search and setting up camp, the investigators notice three predominant paths within and through the village: one leading towards the river ford, one leading west, and one leading northeast. The track to the west is easily the largest and most oft trodden, leading to the village of Da-Bhra. However, the path to the river's edge appears to have been used most recently, showing considerable foot and horse traffic. A successful Spot Hidden or Track roll within the village or near the banks of the Nevis reveals more of the strange star-like depressions in the soft earth. The shape is vague but has five rough, elongated points extending from a central hub; the hub is large enough that two men can stand easily within it. Any attempt to follow these tracks fails, as the Elder Things travel over distance by flying.

THE NEW MISSION

The day begins with a light rain and turns stormier as the afternoon goes on. After breakfast, Calvus calls the expedition together. He explains that the situation presents an opportunity to show the Picts that the friends of Rome won't be abandoned. By helping the Vacomagi now, in their hour of need, the Picts will see the honor, compassion, and might of Rome.

Calvus orders the expedition to split up. He sends a few men to escort Cena, Brigantos, and Kessa to the village of Da-Bhra. Strabo and three mercenaries remain at the camp to protect the carriage and supplies. The rest of the men he breaks into scouting parties to search for Collos and the missing Vacomagian villagers. He personally leads the largest such group northeast. He assigns the investigators a special task, to go speak with this Silla, the hedge witch.

"See what she knows about those odd tracks," he says, explaining, "I'd like to know more about what we're up against."

Lastly, no matter what anyone should discover, all groups are to return to camp before sundown.

THE HEDGE WITCH

Following the directions of Cena, the investigators come upon a large copse of tall Scots pines on the southern slope of Ben Nevis. A thin, worn path winds its way up to the copse through a thick meadow of purple heather. Once in the copse, the forest floor is covered in dry pine needles which crackle underfoot as the investigators make their way forward. The trunks of the ancient pines ooze thick, golden sap that smells strongly and sticks to the investigator's clothing and footwear. A short way up the hill, an obvious cave opening lies unobstructed, with a faint wisp of smoke billowing out lazily.

Inside the cave, the investigators find a diminutive woman of nearly 50 years. This is Silla, the local hedge witch or wise woman. She is fluent in Pictish and, to a much lesser degree, Latin (20%). Silla is both healer and mystic, well known to the Vacomagi, and treated with equal parts respect and derision. Her communion with "spirits" and use of folk magic necessitate her living apart from the superstitious Picts. For more than 20 years, she has subsisted in the forest, performing folk magic and healing for the Vacomagi in return for food, clothing, and other goods.

Silla's hair is white and unkempt, her skin mottled and weathered, and her clothing a collection of rags and animal skins. Despite this, she is not unattractive and has striking, light hazel eyes. She kneels beside a small fire, fighting to keep it alight, feeding it a collection of small branches whilst trying to keep a thin shawl wrapped around her. She is wary of the investigators as they approach.

As their eyes become accustomed to the dim light, the investigators see that the walls of her cave are painted with strange symbols and shapes cast in reddish-brown. A number of them are obvious (e.g. moon, sun, man, deer, etc.), while others are more mysterious. She welcomes the investigators to her home, introduces herself, and asks who they are and why they have come. If any of the Romans are hurt, Silla



THE DEVIL'S MOUTH

can heal them (i.e. perform general First Aid) in exchange for some form of payment. She values metal highest of all. Before Silla offers advice or counsel, she demands a tribute, traditionally a gift of food or clothing (e.g.: “I could use a cloak on a cold, rainy day such as this...”).

Silla is aware of the attack on Tuesis and has prayed that the gods accept the souls of those who died in the night. She is unaware that some villagers were abducted, but can offer some insight into this. Two days past, she watched a party of Pictish warriors ride past, heading east and skirting the steeper slopes of the mountain. They were strangers, but she recognized them as Lugi, a degenerate tribe that many thought was extinct. They were led by a man called Drest, a murderer and an outcast from the Vacomagi. She has heard rumors of the last of the Lugi falling together under the leadership of a charismatic shaman of the Lugi, but she knows no more than this.

In reference to the attack on Tuesis, or any mention of Kessa’s “star men,” she nods nervously, declaring that she saw “them” and points to a strange shape on the cave wall. The hand-drawn pictogram features a stylized five-pointed star over a cylinder or barrel shape. She says these creatures are an ancient and once mighty race, wise and cold, masters of powerful sorceries and builders of forbidden cities. Silla believed that these beings passed into history before man first came into this world. She also says that the high reaches of Ben Nevis are taboo, because this is where the star devils once dwelt. Their lair is said to lie at the bottom of a deep cavern called “The Devil’s Mouth.”

Silla says she was unsure if what she saw was real, until now, because she sometimes sees spirits and has visions. But

after speaking to the investigators, she is now sure that she saw two of these strange “demons” in the distance down toward Tuesis the night before the attack. An Insight roll reveals that Silla is genuinely frightened. She says with some trepidation that she saw one fly northeast on the night of the attack.

Silla incants “words of power” over them before the investigators leave. In truth, she does this to anyone visiting her cave in an attempt to insure return visits, and the words themselves are nothing more than theatrical gibberish.

RETURNING TO THE TUESIS CAMP

As evening arrives, the weather lets up, and a blood-red sunset sees the investigators back to the Tuesis camp. The investigators should be able to return to camp long before sundown. An hour later, the two men who escorted the survivors to the neighboring village of Da-Bhra also return. The investigators, Strabo, and five other rank and file men sit around a campfire having their evening meal, waiting for Calvus and the other teams to return.

Two hours past sundown, the sounds of horse hooves can be heard on the opposite side of the riverbank, followed by the splashing of water. Everyone in the camp rises to welcome Calvus and his returning team, but an entirely different vision greets them. A lone horse gallops into the camp, its eyes wild, its mouth frothing, and its coat covered in caked, dried blood. A successful Ride or Natural World roll is required to bring the horse to heel and allow investigators to examine it. The animal has a strange series of puncture-wounds on



its left haunch, forming an inverted arrow or chevron. It is a very peculiar wound and unlike anything that anyone in camp has ever seen.

The blood covering the horse is notable for the sheer volume of it. The amount of blood and its pattern makes little sense considering the size and location of the wound. This is because much of the blood staining its coat is not its own, but rather the blood of other men or mounts which has sprayed over it before the beast's escape (investigators can realize this with a successful Idea roll). Little more can be determined beyond that. Strabo identifies the mount as Merula, a mare which was part of Calvus' party. No other horses or men arrive at camp. In the dark of night, backtracking the horse's route is impossible, so any action must wait until sunrise.

DESERTION OR MURDER

As the tension builds, the remaining members of the expedition might consider leaving Calvus to his fate and returning to Britannia with the gifts. Strabo informs everyone that, upon crossing back into Roman lands, they would have to explain the situation and their actions to the authorities. Given Calvus' standing in society, it is likely they would end up either charged with desertion, or accused of his murder outright. To avoid this, they must find their employer or, at the least, determine the nature of his death and return with evidence that clears them of any wrongdoing. Keepers should make things difficult for investigators who ignore such warnings, imposing Status penalties for their dishonorable actions, official inquests, and possible legal charges of criminal misconduct.

The Trail Up Ben Nevis

Should investigators decide to search for Calvus once the sun is up, backtracking the horse's route is not difficult at all. The galloping mare cut a deep trail, following the same path as Calvus' search party did the day before, granting investigators a +40% to Track rolls. Should investigators fail this roll, it takes them an additional half day to follow the trail, eventually picking it up again. Strabo elects to stay behind with the remaining mercenaries to protect the camp and begin the arduous task of burying the dead of Tuesis.

Merula's tracks lead clearly to a pass between two peaks, high up into the snow covered slopes of Ben Nevis. Eventually, the tracks end at a blood stained bend in the trail, at about 3,500 feet in elevation. The narrow pass seems like a perfect ambush point, and it is clear that a large battle took place here about a day ago; copious amounts of blood stain the snows red.

All the bodies (eighteen men and seventeen horses) have been dragged off, but the tracks are quite clear. The trail leads another 800 feet up, before ending at a large cavern opening, the fabled Devil's Mouth, near the summit. The

difficult journey from Tuesis to the Devil's Mouth takes the investigators about six hours on foot.

INTO THE DEVIL'S MOUTH

The cave mouth yawns open on the side of a granite cliff-face above the pass. At its opening, the cave's roof is over 30 feet high, but quickly descends to an average height of 10-15 feet after about 50 feet. The sickly-sweet reek of decaying flesh exudes powerfully from the cave. Just inside the cave, concealed in the shadows about thirty feet from the opening, the investigators find a grisly sight.

Here lie the remains of Dentatus, Nerva, Longus, seven of the other missing men, and the corpses of five horses in a veritable lake of dried, freezing, and congealed blood. The men and horses have been dissected and butchered in exactly the same manner as those encountered in and around Tuesis. Keepers may wish to require a 1/1D3 Sanity loss for investigators discovering their slain and butchered companions. A successful Spot Hidden or Track roll reveals tracks in the dried blood heading deeper into the cave.

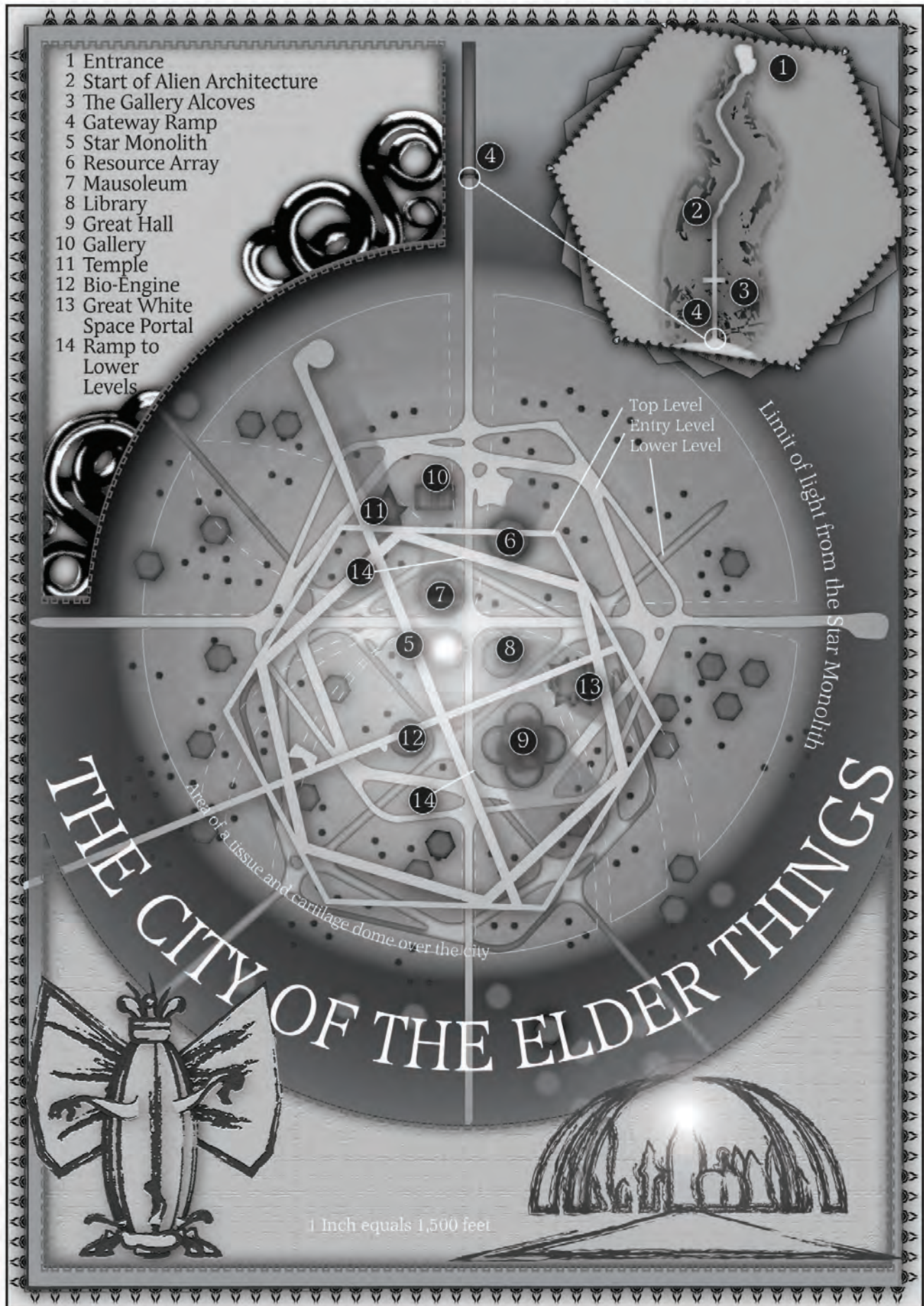
Beyond this point, the passage is engulfed in gloomy darkness, and investigators will require a light source to continue safely. Luckily for the investigators, the Lugi keep a supply of torches here. Two dozen torches (sulfur mixed with lime) are stored in a sturdy wicker chest here. Each should supply illumination for about two hours.

THE LONG DESCENT

For the first 250 feet, the passage continues downward at a roughly 5 degree angle. The floor is weathered and worn, and investigators must be careful not to trip on the uneven stone, loose rocks, and debris. The walls and ceiling are similarly rough and uneven. The deeper in the investigators travel, the drier the atmosphere becomes.

After the first 250 feet, something remarkable happens: the irregular floor and uneven walls suddenly become perfectly smooth and regular. The angle down also steepens to 10 degrees. The investigators' flickering torchlight reflects off the polished stone surfaces. This increases the effectiveness of the torches considerably, but also creates a disorienting, kaleidoscopic effect. From this point on, the walls of the passages are seamless, perfectly smooth, and corridors are uniformly 10 feet wide and 12 feet tall. Investigator succeeding in a Science: Metallurgy roll can determine that the workmanship here is likely beyond any known human technique. Religious or superstitious investigators might suspect the gods themselves created this passage, or believe that it leads to the some version of the Underworld.

THE DEVIL'S MOUTH



The Passage's Effects

As investigators travel into these alien depths, they begin to feel uneasy, becoming increasingly disoriented and disconnected from the real world. This is caused by the alien architecture, the dizzying effect of the torchlight upon the polished stones, the preternatural silence, and the crushing depths of the subterranean environment. Keepers should have the investigators lose 0/1 Sanity.

THE TRAIL

Along the downward passage, the investigators may detect, if looking, signs of recent passage. Droplets of blood, puddles of recently melted snow, a soiled boot print, or muddy Elder Thing tracks can be found here and there along the downward slope. At some point, Keepers should have the investigators make a Spot Hidden roll. Those successful catch a glint of metal in the torchlight. It comes from a small silver object on lying face down on the passage floor. Inspection reveals it to be one of Calvus' finely tooled brooches, this one having an equestrian design (100 sestertii value).

THE ALCOVES

After some distance, the passage suddenly levels out and two alcoves, 12 feet square, branch off from the central passage. Each alcove is banded with a mural, over a foot high, that runs at a height of six feet around both alcoves. Anyone viewing the murals notes their utterly alien design. They are not so much painted as somehow inlaid into the stone. The murals glow with an ethereal, mercurial ghost-light, and exhibit a holographic or three-dimensional quality.

The artwork is of otherworldly origin and features few human figures. Instead, it depicts impossible winged figures with barrel-like bodies and star-shaped heads, with tentacles where hands and feet should be

The murals tell the stories of the Elder Things, showing their arrival on Earth from the depths of space and their construction of the glorious city beneath the Nevis range. The murals go on to show the Elder Things' successful creation of a Great White Space portal, and a spectacular military victory over a nearby Mi-Go colony. Mixed here and there with the Elder Things, building their city and fighting their battles, are depictions of massive formless creatures covered with eyes and mouths, their shoggoth slaves.

The nature of the alien art, along with its utterly bewildering figures and shapes, makes it very difficult for the investigators to comprehend. However, with careful study (requiring an hour's worth of examination) and a successful INT x 2 check, investigators can determine the core facts: these strange "gods" came from the sky, built a city under the mountain, warred against other alien gods, and kept titan-like monsters as slaves. Successfully studying both of these murals grants the investigators +3% Cthulhu Mythos, and costs them 1/1D4 Sanity points.

Beyond the alcoves, the passage returns to its 10 degree angle and descends. Eventually, it opens into a vast open cavern, deep in the earth, containing the Elder Things' city. The

distance between the basket of torches and the open cavern below typically takes 2 hours to travel. This means that a single torch is required for the trip, unless the mural is carefully studied (which requires an hour). Investigators without a large enough supply of torches may find themselves trapped far under the mountain in the pitch dark, which may prompt Keepers to have them lose 0/1 Sanity.

THE ELDER THINGS' CITY

Deep underground, the passage curves smoothly away into the darkness leaving the investigators on a 20 foot high ramp descending into an immense, incalculable cavern. As investigators stand atop the ramp, the size and scale of the Elder Things' city is hinted at by the light from the nearby Star Monolith, the shifting light emitted from the Temple, and the luminous vapors rising from the Bio-Engine. This illumination hints at the reflective sides and curves of strange, non-Euclidean shapes and cyclopean structures. The otherworldliness of the place is immediately obvious and inescapable.

Investigators seeing the city should make a 1/1D4 Sanity Check. They may comprehend what they are seeing as the Underworld (e.g.: Hades, Orcus, or Inferi) domains of cthonic gods (e.g.: Hades, Pluto, Orcus, Dis Pater, etc.), rather than

KEEPER'S NOTE: EXPANDING UPON THE CITY

The Elder Things' city is unmentionably old, and the potential for storytelling is almost limitless, far beyond what can be detailed within a single scenario. Keepers are encouraged to supplement the information here with their own details, descriptions, and narratives: putting more flesh on the skeleton. Only a couple of the buildings are central to the action, and description of the city is limited to ten structures.

Keepers may expand on the story being told, and introduce chilling red herrings and intriguing diversions from the main plot. They may also expand the city or give life to other areas within the larger cavern. For example, historically, the cavern once had a northern entrance running opposite the one the investigators arrive through. A single structure explored in detail could become a scenario on its own. Investigators could discover a museum or archive that—should its contents be deciphered—exposes them to terrible vistas of the unimaginable. They might re-awaken Elder Thing technologies, offering investigators the chance to visit other locations or dimensions (via Gates), such as Antarctica, the Great Library of Celaeno, or various regions of the Dreamlands. Keepers are encouraged to explore this alien "sandbox" to create unique, unnerving, and unforgettable experiences for investigators and players alike.



THE DEVIL'S MOUTH

a place built by alien beings (unless they studied the murals). If the investigators continue down the ramp, they discover that the entire cavern floor—or at least as much of it as they can see—has been leveled and smoothed to nearly the consistency of glass.

EXPLORING THE CITY: OVERVIEW

Exploring the Elder Things' city is both a physical and mental challenge to the Investigators. The city's alien architecture and layout makes navigation difficult and disorienting. The bewildering contents and artifacts found inside each of the Elder Things' buildings present the investigators with sanity-testing puzzle after puzzle. For each building explored by the investigators, Keepers should have them lose 0/1 point of Sanity.

Keepers should decide whether there is a time constraint is placed upon the investigators, before Collos, Calvus, and the other prisoners are killed, or the investigators have free reign to explore the whole of the city. To tighten up the action, Keepers can restrict access to most of the city's structures. Areas vital to resolving the scenario are the Temple and the Bio-Engine.

RAMPS, BRIDGES, AND PITS

Ramps and bridges, each a minimum of 12 feet wide, connect many of the buildings in the city. None of these have railings, and all are made of smooth, often glassy, stone. Investigators should take care not to fall, particularly as some of the bridges are over a hundred feet in the air. The smoothed cavern floor has a number of large, decagonal (10-sided) pits. These pits are ten feet in diameter, smooth sided, and drilled down hundreds of feet (1D3+1 x 100 feet). Their purpose or function can only be guessed at, but anyone falling into such a pit is most likely lost.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE CITY

In order to find Calvus and the surviving missing members of his expedition, the investigators must visit the Temple. To locate Collos, son of Vergis, and the three dozen surviving missing Vacomagian, villagers the investigators must visit the Bio-Engine. Both these areas are occupied and guarded by both Lugi and Elder Things. In addition to these encounters, the city is patrolled by the Drest, outlaw warrior of the Vacomagi, and Dunna, warrior of the Lugi, in the company of two Elder Things. An encounter with this patrol likely takes place near the Great Hall, but may take place anywhere Keepers desire, for greatest dramatic effect.

FRIEND OR FOE

As discussed in "The Lugi and their Tenuous Position," Vuradech and the Lugi have begun to suspect that their usefulness to the Elder Things is coming to an end. When this happens, they expect, correctly, that their alien allies will betray them. Vuradech is currently considering the following choices:

-  Accept their fate, revel in their glorious self-sacrifice, and willingly give their lives for their alien masters.
-  Rebel against the Elder Things (with or without help) and attempt to claim the city and nearly created shoggoths for themselves.
-  Rebel against the Elder Things (with or without help) and attempt to destroy the shoggoths and what they can of the city.
-  Flee the Elder Thing city (with or without help).

A potential exists for an alliance between the investigators and the Lugi. Acting out of a sense of self-interest and possibly survival, Vuradech may attempt to parley an alliance with the investigators (for a time) to free his tribe from their servitude to the Elder Things. Such a parlay could come in a number of ways:

-  Suspecting or realizing their own imminent demise, the Lugi turn against the Elder Things mid-battle, siding with the investigators to the surprise of all.
-  Should the investigators be captured by the Elder Things, a very real possibility, Vuradech and the Lugi might offer to release them in exchange for their help against the Elder Things.
-  Vuradech might approach the investigators holding a statue of Concord, invoking the sacred right to parlay and offering an alliance with his tribe against the Elder Things. Investigators seeing Vuradech carrying such an icon understand that he is seeking parlay and to attack him is a dire sacrilege.

CITY STRUCTURES

Star Monolith (inaccessible)

A five-sided, white monolith rising 250-feet at an angle of 87.5 degrees. The last five feet of the structure emit spectral phosphorescence that sheds a wraith-like light on nearby structures. The monolith has no entrances or windows of any kind, and appears to be solid. Anyone touching the monolith will find that a glowing impression of his or her hand (or finger, foot, etc.) lingers for more than a second after contact before slowly fading.

Resource Array

The entire surface of this 225-foot high structure is covered with carved out, irregularly placed bays, forming a honeycomb pattern. Most bays are about 25 feet square; others are half that size, forming a disconcerting hive.



DE HORRORE COSMICO

Most of the smaller bays occupy the lower levels, and several dozen are reachable by investigators. Keepers should feel free to fill these bays with mysterious items that the investigators will, at best, barely understand. Such items may be so old that they crumble when touched or appear brand new, but prove nearly unusable by human hands, and may either be threatening (exploding, poisonous, or electrifying) or beneficial objects (healing, light sources, or sustenance).

Mausoleum

This colossal, pyramid-like structure can be accessed through one of three large oval entrances (one per side) measuring eight feet wide and a dozen feet tall. A spiral ramp in the center of the structure leads upward to fifteen different levels of diminishing area. Surfaces within the building are glossy black, obscuring most features, especially in dim light. Those specifically examining the interior walls or making a successful Spot Hidden roll note a singular, repeating pattern recessed into the walls, a strangely angular, five-pointed star. Each of these stars marks the tomb of a deceased Elder Thing, with the city's founders entombed in the highest levels. The tombs themselves are inaccessible.

Hive

This huge, 12-sided structure ascends to the roof of the cavern, where it vanishes into darkness. The exterior wall of the building is made of a translucent, quartz-like stone. Within can be seen a labyrinth of twisting spiral passages, linking hundreds of immense chambers. The structure has a dozen large rooms accessible by long ramps. Investigators can real-

ize, with an examination and a successful Idea roll, that this structure is the major residential hub of the Elder Things.

Library

This is a largely cylindrical structure that bulges outward at 100 feet high, where it connects to two ramps, and finishes in a twisted spiral 250 feet above that. Accessing the library from ground level, investigators will find themselves standing on the lip of a circular precipice. The actual floor of the library lies 125 feet below, and the interior is made up of a series of five, broad interior pillars 375 feet tall.

As with other structures in the city, a series of smooth, dizzying ramps lead upward and downward, accessing all levels of the library. The library contains endlessly varied media on hundreds of recessed shelves, encircling the pillars and the building itself. These are recorded in Elder Thing pictographs and cannot be deciphered by the investigators (unless they somehow learn to read such texts).

Great Hall

Forming a huge trapezoid hundreds of feet high and over 1000 feet wide at its widest point, the Great Hall is one of the largest structures in the city. At ground level, it may be accessed through many great, trapezoidal doors along the structure's three narrow walls. Above ground level, it may be accessed via a broad bridge from the Gallery that connects to a wide balcony, 120 feet above the Hall floor.

The greatest attraction in the Great Hall is the stellar map stretching a thousand feet wide and three hundred feet high on the Hall's widest wall. Only students of Astronomy note with little difficulty that the stellar map contains a great



THE DEVIL'S MOUTH

many stars unobservable from Earth (by the naked human eye). The artistry of the map is astonishing.

The map itself appears oddly three-dimensional and “orients” itself according to the viewer’s position. This is true even when there are multiple viewers. The effect is disconcerting and disorienting to human eyes, and those gazing at the map find themselves surprisingly dizzy. To Roman eyes, this effect is nothing short of magical, and Keepers might wish to force a 0/1 Sanity point loss.

There is no ornamentation on the narrowest wall opposite the star map. The two side walls contain huge glowing murals similar to, but immensely larger than, those found in the passage alcoves above the city. The stories told by these murals are varied, and investigators cannot comprehend their messages. However, studying them requires the investigators to make a 1/1D3 Sanity check.

Battle in the Great Hall: As the investigators make their way through the Great Hall, have them make a Listen roll. A success indicates that they hear Drest, Dunna, and two Elder Things attempting to surprise them, allowing the investigators to turn the tables and ambush their attackers. A failure indicates that the investigators are indeed surprised.

Gallery

One of the shorter buildings in the city, each of the six sides of this structure rises up to only 125 feet. A single, huge portal (50 feet wide and 15 feet tall) dominates each facet of the structure. Over the top of the Gallery, a luminous vapor is visible, rising up gently over a great circular structure—the Bio-Engine—in the distance. This strange, luminous vapor lights the area with a faint white-green light.

Each of the six interior walls of the gallery is covered in the same glowing murals found in the passage alcove and elsewhere in the city. The murals tell tales of scientific exploits and the mastery of the Elder Things over life itself. Some panels suggest that humans are the result of Elder Things’ experimentation (which might have the investigators viewing them as “gods”). One series of great panels depicts the creation of monstrous slaves which possessed protean qualities, allowing them to take any shape. Investigators making a study of these murals, which takes about a half hour, gain +2% Cthulhu Mythos, and must make a Sanity check for 1/1D4 points.

Temple

The Temple is the only accessible structure in the city that does not have a roof. At the four corners stand star monoliths that angle into the centre of the Temple at a 25 degree angle, ending in points 50 feet from one another. In the center of the chamber is a collection of clear crystals of varying size. Inscribed into the floor surrounding the crystals is a star pentacle used for rituals.

The smallest shards are no more than a foot or two high, but most average three to six feet in length. Five titanic crystals, each between 40 to 60 feet in length, dominate the center of the collection. Each of the crystals glows with a shifting, inner luminance bright enough to dimly illuminate the immediate area.

The crystals are, in fact, containers for magic points. The largest can hold hundreds of magic points, while the smallest might only hold four or five points. The more magic points stored within a crystal, the colder it becomes. Any investigator approaching the crystals finds that the ambient temperature to be steadily dropping. The five huge crystals are covered in a thin frost.

The Roman diplomat Calvus, along with Lentulus and the six remaining Romans guards, are currently unconscious and lying on the floor before the crystals. Several cultists, one for every investigator, kneel around the pentacle intoning an arcane incantation. Above the cultists, two Elder Things stand inside the star carving. Their thin upper tentacles move in strange patterns over the prone bodies of the Romans. The ritual, transferring the victims’ magic points into the city’s crystal store, is coming to a head. The cultists chant faster and faster as the Elder Things’ tentacles dancing ever more quickly.

To save Calvus and the others, the investigators must interrupt this ritual. In a matter of moments, the transfer steals all of the captives’ magic points and POW permanently, leaving Calvus and the other Romans mindless simpletons. The drained victims will then be led to the Bio-Engine, where their bodies will feed the growing proto-shoggoths.

Statistics for both Pictish cultists and Elder Things are provided. The Elder Things and cultists stop short of killing the investigators if possible. They would prefer to subdue them for use in the same Magic Point and POW draining ritual they are currently performing.

If rescued, Calvus and the other Roman captives can be awakened with a successful First Aid roll. They will need to be calmed and oriented, as their last memories are of fighting the cultists and Elder Things in the passage above. Calvus relates that one of the cultists—the leader—was more fierce and intelligent, and that the others called him “Vuradech.” He wore a large gold necklace bearing the head of a wolf.

Once again, Calvus finds himself in a dilemma: he will want to leave the subterranean city immediately, but he still needs to find Collos. If the investigators have already freed Collos, Calvus insists that they protect the chieftain and flee immediately; otherwise, he wants to find Collos. But, if they have made a bargain with the Pictish cultists, Calvus instructs them to dispatch the remaining Elder Things with the Picts’ help.

Bio-Engine

Looking vaguely like a cooling tower for a modern nuclear power plant, the Bio-Engine is the largest structure in the city by volume, although other structures are much taller. The Bio-Engine can only be accessed through a long tunnel that opens into its vast interior. When the city is fully powered, this tunnel performs a series of security and screening functions, but currently, these functions are dormant.

The interior forms one gigantic space, an inner circle nearly 1,200 feet in diameter. A thin ring of odd-angled boxes, platforms, and strange curves, some bearing glossy, black hemispheres, encircles the inner space. Within the circle, 25 platforms (50 feet in diameter and 4 feet high)



spread out evenly. The seven platforms nearest the entrance tunnel are in use, and nearby is an Elder Thing and the Pictish cult leader Vuradech, clearly distinguishable by his large, gold, wolf-head necklace.

A short distance away, each gagged and securely bound, are three dozen Picts. These are the surviving captives taken from Tuesis (including Cena's daughter, Maire). While most of the prisoners are injured and terrified, none seem to be seriously hurt or currently insane. One captive is in chains (10 HP to break), secured to a wall, and standing upright overlooking the other captives. This man, badly beaten but with eyes that remain defiant, is Collos, chieftain of the Vacomagi.

On the seven active platforms are huge transparent cylinders containing iridescent black "liquids" that seems to writhe of their own will. As the investigators watch, the monstrous protoplasms in the cylinders reach out to the walls of their transparent prisons with horrible, extruded limbs, and tentacles. Great glistening maws and luminous shapes reminiscent of green eyes form, are reconstituted, and reform across the protean, night-black shapes as they twist against the confines of the clear cylinders. Investigators viewing this must make a SAN roll for 1D6/1D20.

Investigators who studied the murals in the Gallery realize that these terrible shapes are the protean slaves of the Elder Things. Unless the Keeper chooses otherwise, the half-formed shoggoths will remain confined within the cylinders. The captives are being absorbed by the growing shoggoths, one by one, as Collos is forced to watch. The Elder Thing uses the machinery here to teleport the bound captives into the bio-engine vault.

If the investigators seek to kill Vuradech, they find that the Pictish cult leader proves a significant opponent, perhaps only slightly less dangerous than an Elder Thing. Consumed with their task, however, neither Vuradech nor the Elder Thing scientist immediately notices the investigators (unless they make considerable noise upon arrival), providing them an opportunity to surprise both.

Great White Space Portal

Easily the widest structure in the city, this pyramidal, four-pointed star dwarfs nearby structures. Only four access points exist, at the innermost angles of the star. The 300 foot high building is constructed of white stone. The interior is covered in thousands of cones and spikes, all pointing to a glowing portal at the very center of the structure.

This portal accesses the Great White Space, an outer dimension used by the Elder Things to travel throughout the universe. Just how the Space works is unknown to all but the Elder Things. They navigate the strange white dimension to traverse light years of distance. Viewed through the open portal, the Great White Space appears as nothing but a uniform white glow.

Any investigators fully entering the Space—stepping in so as to break contact with normal space, having no limbs or body parts extending outside the White Space—will find themselves disconnected from normal space. They are effectively lost from Earth and immersed in an alien transport

conduit. Where they end up, or whether they ever manage to exit the Great White Space at all, is a matter for the Keeper to decide.

If the Elder Things find themselves in real danger (for example, if the Picts and Romans join together and / or half of their number are killed) they likely fly to the Portal to make their escape, at least for the time being.

THE LONG ASCENT

How the investigators depart the Elder Things' city depends on many factors. They might return to the surface in leisurely victory, leading numerous freed captives, hopefully including Calvus and / or Collos. Their departure could be a harrowing chase up the long ascending passage, pursued by howling, murderous cultists and their inhuman Elder Thing allies.

Finally, if the Keepers wish to end the scenario with a nod to H. P. Lovecraft's *At The Mountains Of Madness*, the investigators might find themselves chased to the surface by one of the newly created shoggoths. Should the investigators find such an eldritch abomination chasing them, they must make a SAN roll for viewing the creature. Any failures, even catastrophic ones, simply speed up their terrified ascent, as their overriding instinct will be to escape. The shoggoth does not pursue them further than the Devil's Mouth, either recalled by the Elder Things (who don't wish to risk losing control of their slaves due to their distance) or by its own fear of the outside world (this is the first time the creature has ever seen the open sky, after all).

THE END OF ALLIANCE

If the investigators allied with the Lugi and managed to escape with the alliance still intact, the whole thing falls apart once they reach the surface. The investigators might already have a plan to capture or kill Vuradech and his cultists on the surface, but even if they do not, they find themselves having to fight for their lives one last time.

Having succeeded in surviving the encounter with the Elder Things, Vuradech immediately ends the alliance and orders his men to kill the Romans and any surviving Vacomagi (especially Collos). His hastily-conceived plan is to loot the bodies of the dead Romans, and then return to the ruins of Tuesis to do some more looting before moving on.



CONCLUSION: SANITY AND OTHER REWARDS

The act of returning into sunlight from the dark subterranean world of the Elder Things immediately grants the survivors 1D6 points of Sanity; however, one point should be removed from this total for every investigator who died below or was left behind. Any ending that sees the investigators return to the surface having rescued both Calvus and Collos should be considered a great success and be rewarded with an additional 1D6 Sanity points. 1D3 Sanity points should be rewarded if only one of the two is returned alive.

If the investigators managed to defeat or capture Vuradech and/or the majority of the Pictish cultists, Keepers may wish to reward the characters with 1D4 points of Sanity. If the investigators succeeded in killing more than half of the Elder Things, the investigators should receive a further award of 1D4 points of Sanity. Their experiences in the Devil's Mouth will leave each of them plagued with nightmares of the terrible creatures and their Cyclopean city.

Should Calvus survive, he is very grateful to the investigators. Should the investigators follow him back to Eb-oracum or even further on to Rome, Calvus rewards each investigator with 1000 sestertii.

Should the investigators ever decide to return to the Devil's Mouth, perhaps intending to destroy the entrance to the Elder Things' city and rid themselves of their nightmares, they find that a cave-in has filled in the back half of the cavern and rendered all passage impossible. However, Keepers have the option of disregarding this and allowing their investigators further adventures, and likely perils, in the Elder Thing city.

NPCS

DECIMUS VATINIUS CALVUS, age 44, Diplomat

STR 10 CON 09 SIZ 10 INT 17 POW 17
DEX 11 APP 12 EDU 12 SAN 71 HP 10

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Accounting 64%, Art (Sculpture) 22%, Bargain 85%, Civics 55%, Climb 28%, Empire 56%, Fast Talk 22%, Insight 66%, Jump 28%, Latin 80%, Library Use 37%, Listen 34%, Natural World 18%, Other Kingdoms (Caledonia) 09%, Other Kingdoms (Germania) 19%, Other Kingdoms (Hispania) 27%, Other Languages (Brythonic) 11%, Other Languages (Greek) 45%, Other Languages (Germanic) 21%, Own Kingdom 47%, Ride 62%, Persuade 78%, Spot Hidden 42%, Status 60%, Tactics 25%

Weapons: Fist / Punch 48%, damage 1D3 + db
Short Sword 56%, damage 1D6

Description: Calvus is a clean-shaven, greying man with sharp blue eyes and high cheekbones. His physique is lean and athletic. His skin is weathered, and he has the overall appearance of a traveller, but a wealthy traveller. The quality of his jewellery and his clothing suggests his status; his posture and his language confirm it. Calvus is normally distant, overly serious, and business-like, but he is also a master of many masks and can be warm and charming, should it suit his purpose. He possesses a deep and smooth voice, as persuasive as it is commanding.

ELDER THINGS, City-Builders Eons Old

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
STR	38	39	35	38	37	40	40
CON	22	23	21	21	23	23	24
SIZ	28	29	25	28	27	28	29
INT	15	16	18	14	16	15	17
POW	09	11	10	12	08	10	11
DEX	16	17	13	15	19	16	16
HP	25	26	23	25	25	26	27

Move: 8 / 10 flying

Damage Bonus: +3D6

Weapons: Tentacle 40%, damage 1/2 db in constriction

Armor: 7-point skin

Spells: each has INTx3 chance to know 1D4 appropriate spells

Skills: As the Keeper desires

Sanity Loss: 0/1D6 Sanity points to see an Elder Thing

Description: Unless their lives are threatened, the Elder Things will overpower and subdue attackers rather than kill them outright. They will see the Roman investigators, for example, as further organic material useable as fodder for generating more shoggoths. For a detailed description of the Elder Things, see the 6th edition *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook or the *Malleus Monstrorum* supplement.

PICTISH CULTISTS, Insane Servitors

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
STR	12	13	12	12	13	09	10
CON	14	16	11	15	12	16	13
SIZ	11	10	08	11	10	14	13
INT	11	13	10	06	11	08	10
POW	09	10	07	08	08	09	09
DEX	09	14	16	08	10	13	09
HP	13	13	10	13	11	15	13

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Knife 30%, damage 1D4

Fist / Punch, damage 1D3

Grapple, damage special

Skills: Own Language 50%, Spot Hidden 30%, and others as the Keeper desires

Description: The cultists are a rough-looking lot, dressed in furs and animal skins, and decorated with strange tattoos and sparse silver jewelry. Their hair is wild and matted, and their eyes betray their madness. None of them speaks Latin or would choose to talk to Romans, in normal circumstances at least.



DE HORRORE COSMICO

VURADECH, age 39, Pictish Cult Leader

STR 10 CON 09 SIZ 08 INT 16 POW 18
DEX 13 APP 07 EDU 10 SAN 0 HP 9

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Animal Training 25%, Climb 48%, Conceal 11%, Craft (Woodworking) 21%, Cthulhu Mythos 05%, Dodge 29%, First Aid 44%, Hide 30%, Jump 28%, Library Use 57%, Listen 34%, Medicine 09%, Natural World 69%, Occult 42%, Other Language (Latin) 38%, Own Language 89%, Persuade 68%, Potions 77%, Science (Biology) 45%, Science (Mathematics) 58%, Spot Hidden 34%

Weapons: Fist / Punch 41%, damage 1D3 + db

Dirk / Long Dagger 56%, damage 1D4+1+db

Spells: Contact Elder Thing, Dream Vision, Elder Sign, Journey To The Other Side, Shrivelling, Stop Heart, Voorish Sign, Wrack

Description: Vuradech is a short, bent figure with a craggy face and ill look. His thinning, dirty blonde hair is dishevelled and scraggly. His piercing blue eyes are hooded beneath his lined and furrowed brow. He is largely dressed in furs and calf leather and his belt holds numerous small pouches. The golden wolf-head necklace around his neck is his only item of particular value. Vuradech's voice is weedy and thin, but nonetheless powerful.

DREST, age 29, Pictish Warrior and Cultist

STR 16 CON 15 SIZ 15 INT 10 POW 12
DEX 11 APP 10 EDU 05 SAN 0 HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Spot Hidden 42%, and other skills as the Keeper desires

Weapons: Fist / Punch 68%, damage 1D3 + db

Cudgel 55%, damage 1D6

Description: Drest is a tall, bulky man with thick light-brown hair and a dramatic red beard. He has a large, bulbous nose set between his hazel eyes. His right cheek is tattooed in thick curving lines, as is much of his torso. Drest likes to taunt his prey and use his booming voice to cow opponents.

DUNNA, age 31, Pictish Warrior and Cultist

STR 18 CON 14 SIZ 18 INT 09 POW 10
DEX 10 APP 12 EDU 06 SAN 0 HP 16

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Skills: Spot Hidden 40%, and other skills as the Keeper desires

Weapons: Fist / Punch 60%, damage 1D3 + db

Long Bow 56%, damage 1D6

Description: Dunna is an imposing figure, nearly 7 feet in height and broad shouldered. His long hair is a dark brown, and covers much of his brow, shadowing his bright brown eyes. His beard is matted and unkempt, and nearly touches his chest.

Average Pictish Raiders / Bandits

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
STR	12	13	12	13	12	12
CON	14	13	11	15	12	13
SIZ	11	10	12	11	10	11
INT	11	13	10	11	08	10
POW	09	10	08	08	09	09
DEX	09	14	16	10	13	09
HP	13	12	12	13	11	12

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Knife 30%, damage 1D4

Club 50%, damage 1D6

Spear 40%, damage 1D6

Fist / Punch, damage 1D3

Grapple, damage special

Skills: Own Language 50%, Spot Hidden 30



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

BY PENELOPE LOVE AND MARK MORRISON

The scenario is based on *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* by H. P. Lovecraft.

KEEPER'S INFORMATION

A young patrician, Tertius Orestius Sedonius, has dislodged a rather lively skeleton from his family tree. History records that two centuries ago, his ancestor, Appius Orestius Mordanticus, was a supporter of the Gracchi brothers, idealistic proponents of land reform in Republican times. Mordanticus died in 121 B.C.E., purged along with thousands of other Gracchi supporters. Mordanticus had planned to use the Gracchi to gain the support of the plebs, seize power in Rome, and become king. However, his plans were discovered, and Consul Lucius Opimius had him executed with the full support of an outraged Senate. (See "The Gracchi" for additional historical details regarding these idealistic and ill-fated brothers.)

Unfortunately, while studying ancient Greek texts in Athens years earlier, Mordanticus had learned ways to revive the dead through the use of certain "Essential Saltes." He refined his experiments at his family's country estate in Tusculum. As the time of his execution approached, he projected a call forward through time, so that a descendant would one day hear the call and revive him.

Sedonius heard the call, and revived Mordanticus. Mordanticus then killed Sedonius, concealed the murder, and took his place due to Mordanticus' uncanny resemblance to Sedonius. However, differences in personality and mental state, as well as a claim of "complete amnesia," have caused Sedonius' father, Quintus Orestius Turpilianus, to think that his son has gone mad.

At Turpilianus' insistence, Mordanticus (posing as Sedonius) retired to the family's country villa to "recuperate". There, he has unearthed his old temple and laboratory. He has also revived Sedonius, and now tortures him to learn the details of the young man's life in order to perfect his ongoing deception. He keeps Sedonius' slave Erasmus a prisoner, using him to check on Sedonius' information. Once master and slave are no longer useful, they will be dispatched.

Mordanticus (posing as Sedonius) plans to reassure Orestius Turpilianus that he has fully recovered. Once welcomed back home, he intends to murder Turpilianus, assume control of the household, and resume his interrupted path to power.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Quintus Orestius Turpilianus: Paterfamilias of House Orestius

Tertius Orestius Sedonius: Son of Turpilianus/prisoner

Appius Orestius Mordanticus: Resurrected Republican-Era Ancestor

Vibius: Trusted slave of House Orestius

Drusilla (of House Fadius): Fiancée of Orestius Sedonius

Claudia (of House Fadius): Mother of Drusilla

Porcius: Leper and witness, living in the tombs

Erasmus: Slave of Orestius Sedonius/prisoner

Mummio: Reanimated slave of Orestius Mordanticus/prisoner

Lucius Opimius: Reanimated Republican Consul/prisoner

Servius: Slave overseer for House Orestius

Germanicus, Taurus, and Cerberus: Reanimated gladiators/bodyguards of Mordanticus

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

Quintus Orestius Turpilianus is a wealthy patrician. One of his household slaves delivers a message to the investigator with the highest Status or Medicine. The message asks the recipient to visit Orestius during the *salutation* at his villa on the Esquiline Hill. The investigator has been recommended to Turpilianus as discreet and intelligent, and may bring trusted friends.

Civic or Empire skill rolls identify the Orestius as a wealthy patrician family. The paterfamilias is Quintus Orestius Turpilianus. His wife, Livia, died two years ago, and he has not remarried. His son is named Tertius Orestius Sedonius, and Sedonius is betrothed to Drusilla, a daughter of the House of Fadius. Those making a critical success on their skill rolls have heard rumors that Sedonius has not been seen in public for a month, and is supposed to be ill.

THE ORESTIUS VILLA

The Esquiline Hill used to be a cemetery for the lower classes; however, the rich have since appropriated it for themselves. Orestius' house is built on the bones of the poor. It is a formidable building, presenting a high blank wall to the street. Within the villa is a series of lofty halls, with mosaics on the floor, and scenes of country life painted on the walls. The furniture is expensive, and the statues are magnificent. On stating their business to the guards at the door, the investigators are ushered into the *ala* to wait for Turpilianus.

Waiting in the Ala

A crowd of clients waits in the *ala*, supervised by Vibius, Quintus' steward. Vibius is a tall, elderly, ascetic Greek slave with a shaved head, who treads a fine line between obsequious and condescending. The investigators need to jog Vibius' memory by showing him the letter. Otherwise, he assumes that they are new clients and puts them at the end of the queue.

Successful Listen rolls pick up the following:

- ☛ Turpilianus' son, Sedonius, is unwell and resting at the family's country estate.
- ☛ The family's tomb has been vandalized, part of a recent spate of outrages along the Appian Way.

QUINTUS ORESTIUS TURPILIANUS

Turpilianus meets the investigators in the Atrium. He is in his late sixties, a strong and powerful figure, tall and wide, bald, shrewd, and brusque with underlings. The *imago*, the wax funerary masks of his ancestors, stare balefully down at the plebeian interlopers. A successful Spot Hidden notes that there is a gap in the ranks of wax masks. Any query about a missing mask is referred to Vibius.

- ☛ Turpilianus tells the investigators that Sedonius was "unwell" for a while, then had a fit in the Atrium one morning about two months ago, after which it became clear that Sedonius had lost his memory.
- ☛ When Sedonius did not recover his memory after a month, he was sent to the family's country villa in Tusculum to recuperate, accompanied by his slave Erasmus.
- ☛ Turpilianus has received a letter from Sedonius which respectfully requests that Sedonius be permitted to return to Rome, as he is now restored to full health thanks to the wisdom of his father. Turpilianus would like an independent assessment of Sedonius'

TIMELINE

From birth: Tertius Orestius Sedonius is controlled by the Call Descendant spell, and is compelled to study the life of Appius Orestius Mordanticus.

125 A.D.: Sedonius travels to Athens for a year on the trail of Mordanticus, who was in Athens in 120 B.C.E.

126 A.D.: Sedonius returns to Rome and continues his studies, fully enchanted by the Call Descendant spell. He has no real will of his own.

127 A.D.: Winter: Sedonius breaks into the family tomb, removes Mordanticus' remains, and turns them into Essential Saltes.

Three months ago: Sedonius revives his ancestor, Appius Orestius Mordanticus. Mordanticus lives for a time in the tomb, vampirically attacking people at night.

Two months ago: After an argument with his horrified descendant, Mordanticus kills Sedonius, hiding his body in Mordanticus' own coffin. Mordanticus takes on Sedonius' identity, but is thought to be mad. He revives his loyal gladiators and quarters them in the tomb, as the vampiric attacks continue.

One month ago, Spring: Family doctors suggest that Sedonius rest in the country. He travels to Tusculum, collecting the real Sedonius' corpse en route. Vampiric attacks along the Appian Way cease.

Present: Mordanticus, posing as Sedonius, "recovers" at Tusculum. He resurrects and tortures the real Sedonius for information.



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

health first, and proposes sending the investigators to Tusculum to assess Sedonius and make a report.

There are also some other awkward matters that need to be smoothed over, and he would appreciate the investigator's discreet help before they leave Rome:

☞ Sedonius is betrothed to Fadia Drusilla. The engagement is of long standing—contracted when both were children. The House of Fadius has gotten wind of the gossip that Sedonius might be permanently “unwell,” and are threatening to call off the betrothal. Turpilianus would appreciate the investigators dropping by to discreetly reassure the Fadius family that all will be well, and he gives them a letter of introduction.

☞ The family tomb was vandalized a month or so ago. The trouble seems to have subsided, but he asks the investigators to visit the tomb on their way to Tusculum to see if any further vandalism has occurred.

At the end of the interview, Turpilianus gives the investigators a ring with his seal and a letter for Sedonius. The seal ensures the cooperation of Manius, the steward of the estate at Tusculum. Possession of the seal identifies the investigators as clients of House Orestius, acting directly for the clan's paterfamilias. The letter instructs Sedonius to cooperate with the investigators, who will report back to Turpilianus. Quintus Orestius Turpilianus promises to pay the investigators handsomely, and confer the inestimable privilege of his patronage once they make a faithful report. He then dismisses them to Vibius for any further details.

TALKING TO VIBIUS ABOUT SEDONIUS

☞ Sedonius is a dreamer with ambitions to write a family history, although he obeyed his father's wishes to study law.

☞ Sedonius' private studies focused on an ancestor named Appius Orestius Mordanticus. An Empire check recalls that Orestius Mordanticus was a supporter of the Gracchi brothers in the Republican era (see “The Gracchi”).

☞ Sedonius was sent to Athens by his late mother Livia two years ago, to study rhetoric.

☞ On his return to Rome three months ago, Sedonius was out late for many nights. His father dismisses these late nights as the sowing of wild oats.

☞ Two months ago, Sedonius returned home one morning, visibly unsteady. As he entered the Atrium he caught hold of the *imago* (the funerary mask) of Mordanticus, and dashed it to the ground. He then started laughing hysterically and would not stop. The mask was shattered, and the pieces are now in storage.

☞ Sedonius has complete amnesia about his life before that fateful morning.

☞ Sedonius used to be very sweet tempered, but since the incident, he has become prone to fits of violent rage, even beating his faithful slave Erasmus.

☞ His tastes and literary style also changed markedly. Just before he left for the country, he hurled a scroll of Ovid's poems across the room and called the author “a filthy pornographer,” even though Ovid had been a favorite before.

☞ Doctors have found no injuries that might explain this change in nature.

THE FAMILY TOMB

Turpilianus is outraged by the damage, commenting on the lack of respect shown to noble families in modern Rome. Vibius supplies the details, as usual:

☞ The family tomb on the Appian Way has been vandalized, twice.

☞ The tomb was first vandalized about three months ago. Remains of a fire, food, and bedding were found within. A stone sarcophagus lid was broken and the bones within stolen. The sarcophagus has since been repaired, the mess cleaned up, and a stout lock put on the door.

☞ The second episode of vandalism was one month ago. The same sarcophagus was broken, and men had been living in the tomb.

☞ Vibius dismisses the occupants as squatters. There are many poor people who have nowhere to live but the tombs.

☞ If the investigators ask, the broken sarcophagus and stolen bones were those of an ancestor, Appius Orestius Mordanticus.

☞ An successful Occult roll informs investigators that the remains may have been stolen for black magic purposes.

☞ Vibius is happy to loan the key to the investigator with the highest Status or Medicine.

Mordanticus' imago

The broken imago of Mordanticus is stored in a chest in the *tablinum*. If reassembled, its resemblance to Sedonius is uncanny, although the investigators won't realize this until they meet him.

SEDONIUS' CHAMBERS

Sedonius has a spacious bed chamber and *tablinum*. Most of his papers and scrolls are gone. Vibius explains Sedonius took all his personal belongings with him to Tusculum.



- ✦ A successful Spot Hidden reveals the remains of circular chalk marks on the floor. They could be occult in nature, but not enough remains to detect any details.
- ✦ A second Spot Hidden roll unearths a page of Sedonius' Orestius family history, written in his own hand, under the bed. It is dusty, and has clearly lain there for several months. Sedonius' style is gossipy. He apes Plutarch's style without being nearly as good. His handwriting has rounded strokes and loops. A successful Insight roll suggests he is of a dreamy and indecisive character.
- ✦ Vibius explains that, for his history, Sedonius writes the first draft and Erasmus then makes a fair copy. For correspondence, Erasmus writes to Sedonius' dictation. He confirms the handwriting on the page as that of Sedonius.

Sedonius' Letters

Vibius has the letters Sedonius wrote from Athens two years ago, as well as his most recent letter to his father from Tusculum, requesting he be allowed to return to Rome. He shows them all to the investigators on request.

- ✦ A successful Spot Hidden roll confirms that the manner of the Tusculum letter is very different from that of the Athens letters and the history.
- ✦ The Athens letters are written by Erasmus, in a neat, square, light hand that doesn't waste a drop of ink. Insight indicates that although it is Erasmus' writing, the voice is that of Sedonius, gossipy and indirect. The filial expressions of affection are sincere.
- ✦ The letter from the Tusculum is terse and direct, seeming to bark orders from the page. The style is softened only by professions of filial gratitude, which

are formal and ceremonious. The letters are thickly inked and so fiercely dug in on the down swings that the quill occasionally pierced the paper. Insight recognizes these as signs of a strong, forceful personality.

RESEARCHING APPIUS ORESTES MORDANTICUS

There are many good public and private libraries in Rome, from bathhouse collections up to the glorious Imperial Temples to Wisdom in the major fora. The first time that the investigators make a successful Library Use roll in one of the major libraries, a retired librarian expresses interest in their line of research. The investigators have been fortunate enough to meet Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, a famous historian noted for his landmark work *Twelve Caesars*. Suetonius has a capacious memory and a racy style. This amiable and elderly equestrian turns out to know all about Appius Orestius Mordanticus, saying, "There are some wild stories about him!" (see "Suetonius on Orestius Mordanticus").

Investigators are also able to glean this information by other means with their own Library Use rolls, but Keepers have the option of presenting it through a meeting with one of the greatest historians of the age.

Researching Opimius

Investigators may wish to follow up with further research on the consul Lucius Opimius, particularly after visiting the tomb (see "The Opimius Family Tomb"). Information on him is readily available (see "Research into Lucius Opimius").

THE HOUSE OF FADIUS' VILLA

The Fadius villa is on the Esquiline Hill near the Orestius villa and similar in style. Investigators need a letter of introduction from House Orestius to gain admittance.

DRUSILLA AND CLAUDIA

The ranking women of the household meet with the investigators. Drusilla is a modest, sweet, and delightfully naive 16-year-old who is escorted at all times by her domineering mother Claudia.

- ✦ Drusilla misses Sedonius as he has not visited her in three months. He was so lovely and charming, and he had a nervous twitch in his left eye that was just so adorable.
- ✦ Why, he hasn't sent one letter since he went to Tusculum, and he wrote such long lovely ones from Greece.

THE GRACCHI

Two centuries ago, in the age of the Republic, the idealistic Gracchi brothers, Tiberius and Gaius, attempted an ambitious system of land reform. The bulk of Roman agricultural land was then in the hands of the patrician class and land speculators. This left the peasants hungry, landless, and congregating in Rome, where they relied on public hand-outs. The populist older brother, Tiberius, appealed to the plebs and managed to pass some of his reforms. However, as this involved returning patrician lands to the peasants, such measures were never popular in the Senate. Goaded to violence by Tiberius' extremes, the Senators ganged together and clubbed Tiberius and some 300 of his supporters to death. The younger, more pragmatic, Gaius managed to continue the progress of reforms until twelve years later, when the Senate revolted again. Led by the consul, Lucius Opimius, the Senators killed Gaius and some of his 3,000 supporters. After that, the debate over land reform came to an abrupt end.

THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

She can show them the letters if they like. Learned investigators recognize all the best bits as borrowed from Ovid.

- ☛ She gives the investigators a trinket to give to Sedonius, a little golden brooch of a cat with ruby eyes.
- ☛ Claudia eyes the investigators with condescension and strongly suggests that they make sure that Sedonius writes a long thank you letter.
- ☛ Claudia's basilisk gaze makes her disapproval for Sedonius quite clear.
- ☛ The investigators should be able to reassure Claudia sufficiently, so that she is willing to hold off on a final decision on the betrothal until after their report on Sedonius' health is made.

RESEARCH INTO LUCIUS OPIMIUS

Lucius Opimius was the Roman consul who declared the state of emergency which gave the Senate the pretext to move against the Gracchi brothers and their supporters. He established the tribunal which condemned three thousand supporters of Gaius Gracchus to death. After Opimius dealt with the Gracchi, his career was cut short. He was censured for misconduct in another tribunal five years later. Humiliated, he went into exile in Dyrrhachium, where he later died. His heirs brought his body back to Rome for burial. Because the body had to travel a long way, the bowels and organs were removed and the corpse salted to preserve it.

THE APPIAN WAY

The Appian Way is lined with the tombs of the honored Roman dead. Thieves and prostitutes ply their trades here, while vagrants and outcasts, landless peasants, penniless foreigners, the sick, and the old, all seek shelter here. The Orestius family tomb is an hour's walk from the city walls. Beside the tomb of House Orestius is that of House Pettilius, while across from both lies the tomb of House Opimius.

Investigators who ask around Rome about the tombs hear some gossip. Someone is robbing the ancient tombs of the Appian Way, despoiling the ashes and old bones of those buried within. The violated ghosts reportedly thirst for blood and attack travelers near the Esquiline Gate.

THE OPIMIUS FAMILY TOMB

The tomb is in ruins, as the Opimius family has died out and there is no one to care for it. Earth is piled over a round stone building, and atop it grows a thicket of wild roses and violets, all that remains of a once well-tended garden. Investigators searching the thicket find the much decomposed corpse of a luckless vagrant. Investigators making a successful Medicine role judge the corpse to be several months old, and that broken bones in the neck point to a likely cause of death. Anyone other than a physician examining the corpse must make a CON x5 roll (or begin retching from the stench) and a 1/1D3 Sanity Check.

A portico entrance leads into the hill. The door is ajar. Inside is a mess. Sarcophagi have been ransacked, and cinerary urns smashed. Trampled ashes cover the floor and walls. The stone sarcophagus of Lucius Opimius, Consul of

SUETONIUS ON APPIUS ORESTIUS MORDANTICUS

Appius Orestius Mordanticus was a brilliant prosecutor, a cruel and intelligent man, and a patron of many famous gladiators. He was also rumored to practice black magic. Mordanticus was a surprising supporter of the Gracchi brothers, being a landowner of a vast agricultural estate in Tusculum that the proposed land reforms would break up and give to the plebeians.

It is likely that Mordanticus had no real interest in land reform, but was using the issue to garner support with the plebs in order to seize power in Rome, the same path to power followed by Julius Caesar. Mordanticus kept his plans secret, but the consul Lucius Opimius intercepted one of Mordanticus' slaves, Mummio, carrying a message from Mordanticus to Gaius. Mummio confessed his master's involvement under torture.

At his trial, Mordanticus cursed Mummio the slave for his treachery. He threatened Lucius Opimius with vengeance, even after death. As a result, Mordanticus was charged with black magic, as well as treason, and thrown off the Tarpeian Rock. Due to the many contributions of his family to the Republic (or perhaps simple bribery), Opimius made the unusual concession of returning Mordanticus' body to his family for burial in the family tomb.

Mummio died as a result of his torture. One of Mordanticus' last acts was to provide funds for the slave's cremation and internment with the freedmen in the Orestius family tomb, surprising evidence that despite his infamy, Mordanticus' sense of duty as a Roman prevailed.



DE HORRORE COSMICO

Rome, has been overturned. This deliberate act must have taken tremendous strength to accomplish. Weirdly, no bones or identifiable human remains can be found amid the destruction. A bust of Lucius Opimius that was displayed above his sarcophagus has been smashed; however, a recognizable portion of his face remains. Investigators making a successful Track roll realize that four men were involved in the vandalism of the tomb.

Investigators can see that “HOWL IN HELL, LUCIUS” has been written in the human ashes plastering the walls.

THE TOMB OF HOUSE PETTILIUS

This tomb neighboring that of House Orestius is a well-kept mound planted with shrubs and flowers. A spout is set in the side of the hill, to feed offerings of milk and wine to the dead who are buried in the mound. A grape arbor shelters a semi-circular bench intended for visitors to the tomb.

Porcius the Leper

Porcius has lived in this arbor for as long as he can remember. He putters around the mound all day, tending the violets and roses. He is an old bald man clad in rags, his skin silver with leprosy. He is quite mad, believing himself to be dead like those below, only he's still walking. He likes to bury himself in the earth and unearth himself at awkward moments. He calls to the family below, “Curia, are you sleeping sweetly? Dives, is your bed warm?”

Porcius is difficult to talk with, as he speaks of himself as

dead. Questions about the Orestius family tomb snap him back to the present:

- ✚ Porcius saw a man fighting with himself at the Orestius family tomb.
- ✚ If questioned, Porcius repeats that he saw a man fighting himself, and is annoyed to have to repeat it (In fact, he saw Mordanticus murdering Sedonius).
- ✚ The man dragged himself back into the tomb. Porcius has not seen him (or them?) together again.

THE TOMB OF HOUSE ORESTIUS

A wall surrounds this is a large round, domed, handsome, stone building. The tomb stands in its own garden, laid out with paths, benches, and a small fountain, which has its own cistern.

The Urns

Niches filled with cinerary urns line the outside wall of the tomb. These are the urns of the family's loyal freedmen and slaves. Careful examination reveals that three niches in the middle of the wall, and a fourth at its base, are empty. Three niches have plaques honoring the merits of the man whose ashes once dwelt there, while the fourth has a simple, small inscription.



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

Three Honored Missing Urns

Urn One: My name is Germanicus. With bare hands I tore men apart in the arena. All praise to my patron Appius Orestius Mordanticus. All who oppose him die.

Urn Two: My name is Taurus. Women called me the Bull. I fought in the arena. Appius Orestius Mordanticus owned me. All hail the Orestius.

Urn Three: My name is Cerberus. Ladies loved my trident. I fought in the arena for Appius Orestius Mordanticus. I served him well.

The last missing urn, in a much less prominent place, has a simple inscription reading “MUMMIO, SLAVE OF MORDANTICUS”

Inside the Tomb

The door has been twice repaired, and each time more stoutly locked. If the investigators don't have the key from Vibius, they must force it (STR 20), or make a successful Repair/Devise roll to pick the lock. Within, stone sarcophagi line the walls, and niches hold cinerary urns containing ashes. The stink of rotten flesh hangs heavy in the air. Investigators see the remains of a fire pit, which was maintained for many nights, although not for several months. Near the fire, investigators can see that scuffed-out chalk marks on the floor once formed a circle.

One sarcophagus bears the name Appius Orestius Mordanticus. Its lid has clearly been recently repaired. The investigators must exert their combined Strength against STR 40 to open the heavy lid. The sarcophagus is empty, the body stolen. Inside, investigators can find a man-sized pool of dried blood. This bloodstain is certainly not centuries old; a successful Medicine roll determines the stain is about two months old (caused when the body of Sedonius was briefly hidden here after his murder).

TUSCULUM

The family's country estate is in Tusculum, twenty-five kilometers from Rome. Tusculum is a thriving agricultural town with its own theater, surrounded by the country estates of the wealthy. It is an easy journey, within a day's travel by horse or cart on a branch road from the Via Latina. Travel by foot takes two days, and involves an overnight stay in a dubious inn.

The townsfolk seem wary. Everyone closes up shop and bars their doors as soon as dusk approaches. The farm slaves are herded into stoutly locked and fortified barns, with guard dogs chained to the doors. Those inquiring about this find out that slaves have been disappearing, at a rate of around two or three per week for the last month. The local opinion is that someone is stealing farm hands for quick resale during the heavy work of the spring sowing.

Everyone in Tusculum can point out the way to the Orestius family's country estate, an hour's walk outside of town. It spreads over the rich slopes of the Tusculan Hill, with a superb view of the Roman countryside and a distant view of Rome herself. A Civics roll reveals that the local magistrates

are all clients of the Orestius family; thus, any attempt to act against the family in Tusculum is unlikely to succeed.

Asking Locals About Sedonius

If investigators ask the locals about Orestius Sedonius, they find that he is not well liked. Locals say he is very different from the sweet tempered young lad he once was. He now has a foul temper, and his new bodyguards are brutes.

Asking Locals About Mordanticus

If investigators ask about Mordanticus, they learn he is the local bogeyman. Legends of his violent temper linger, as do rumors that he practiced black rites of magic. Erring children and slaves are still warned, “Old Mordanticus will get you!” Locals can add that the villa of Mordanticus' time burned down around the time of his death. The family relocated the new villa to a better location, and erected farm buildings where the old house once stood.

THE ORESTIUS ESTATE

The estate has two sets of buildings, the sophisticated Villa Urbana, where the family resides, and the Villa Rustica, a rude complex of fortified buildings where the farm managers live and the slaves and livestock are kept.

The approach to the family estate is through rich olive groves, orchards, and vineyards. The grain fields are ploughed by slaves and ox teams. Pavo the overseer strides about supervising, whipping slaves who are working too slowly for his liking.

Pavo

Pavo is compact and powerful. He is a slave himself, and so a doubly brutal overseer. He is tired and surly after living in a barn for a month and patrolling at night, yet he is still unable to stop the theft of his farm hands. He hates Sedonius' new bodyguards, who have been no help. They do nothing but lounge around, and bully Pavo and the other slaves.

Pavo is uncouth, but polite to patricians. Once he sees Quintus' seal, he directs the investigators to the Villa Urbana.

THE VILLA URBANA

The Villa Urbana is a white building with a red roof. Two short wings are at either end. A shady pillared portico extends the length of the house between the two wings. The villa is surrounded by a low wall and an enchanting garden of fruit trees, trellised vines, flowers, and ornamental vegetables.

Within, the style is deliberately rustic, but the kind of rustic that only a lot of money can buy. An amusing mosaic of a guard dog covers the floor of the atrium. Frescoes of gardens and country vistas adorn every wall. An interior courtyard shelters a private garden and bathing pool adorned with statues and pillars. Upon the investigators' arrival, the house steward is quickly summoned.



MANIUS

Manius, the freedman steward of the estate, is hard at work on the accounts and has a careworn expression. He is a small, ugly, but competent man who is delighted to greet any servant or ally of the family. He orders the slaves to prepare rooms, wine, and food. If asked why he seems troubled, Manius has a long list of worries that he is willing to share.

Talking to Manius

- ☛ Sedonius has been spending his days in the Villa Rustica. Manius regards this as unsuitable for a scion of the Orestius, but he is the master in his father's absence. Sedonius returns to the Villa Urbana only to bathe, eat, and sleep.
- ☛ Sedonius used to be a kindly soul, but now has developed a temper.
- ☛ Sedonius has hired three thugs as bodyguards. Does he not trust his own slaves?
- ☛ Manius has seen Sedonius' slave Erasmus only once or twice—both times in the upper windows of the Villa Rustica.
- ☛ Manius offers to send a message to Sedonius to return to the house to greet his visitors.
- ☛ Manius is drafting a letter to Master Turpilianus regarding the spate of slave thefts. Two or three farm hands have gone missing every few days for about a month. He and Pavo lock everyone up at night and patrol the estate after dark. They have bought more guard dogs. Yet the pilfering of the farm slaves continues (Investigators may make the connection that one slave is going missing per night, from the estate and Tusculum itself).

THE VILLA RUSTICA

Sedonius spends his days at the Villa Rustica. He has taken over two buildings, the North House and South House, which were once part of the slave quarters. The slaves who lived here were thrown out of their quarters, and are currently living in several of the estate's barns.

The North and South Houses

These two stone buildings, former slave quarters, are two stories each, and linked by a covered portico. The walls are thick and solid, and the windows are barred.

During the day, *Sedonius* is in his underground study below the North Building, deep in his ghoulish researches. His bodyguards lounge around the verandah between the two buildings and stop anyone from entering. They wear their armor, and their weapons are close at hand in the North Building. A pale, miserable looking face peeps from an upper window of the North Building. This is Erasmus.

The Three Bodyguards

Germanicus, Cerberus, and Taurus are enormous, intimidating men. The three men are family gladiators from Mordanticus' time. He took their ashes from their cinerary urns, turned them into Essential Saltes, and reanimated the men. These simple, brutal souls found no horror in being revived. They enjoyed drinking, feasting and killing until they died. Now they drink and feast and kill again. They worship Mordanticus as a god, have inhuman strength and toughness, and take a masochistic pleasure in injuries and even death. The divine Mordanticus has promised that if they die in his service, he will revive them again. Germanicus is the trio's spokesman. If asked their names, or introduced by *Sedonius*, they freely give their actual names. Should anyone point out they share the names of gladiators who once served House Orestius centuries ago, they simply smirk and claim it's a coincidence (detectable as a lie with a successful Insight roll).

The men radiate not only the normal menace of a complete thug, but a supernatural menace caused by their return from the dead. An aura of fear clings to them, but cannot be explained by any rational means. Natural World rolls suggest that their eyes have an unnatural, predatory light, and their skin seems too pale and too loose, as if not sufficiently pinned to the bone beneath.

The bodyguards will show some measure of restraint towards the investigators. If pushed too far (which isn't very far at all), they will attack, but limit themselves to non-lethal methods (such as wrestling, kicks, or bare handed punches). They take any unconscious investigators to *Sedonius*, for him to decide their ultimate fate. If investigators draw any sort of a weapon against them, however, the bodyguards quickly turn murderous and try to kill anyone standing against them.

The bodyguards are absent from their post during the midday and evening meals. During this time they may steal a slave or traveler for sacrifice, alternating between Tusculum and the family estate. They tie such unfortunates up in the South Building.

Asking for Sedonius

If shown Turpilianus' seal and the letter, Taurus goes inside to fetch *Sedonius*, while Germanicus and Cerberus keep the investigators from entering the North Building. The bodyguards will not harm the investigators unless provoked, especially if they know that *Sedonius* is relying on their good report to advance his scheme. However, they will intimidate

MORDANTICUS AS SEDONIUS

Mordanticus is impersonating Sedonius. The true Sedonius is dead, except when he is resurrected for torture and interrogation. However, to help prevent the Keeper from accidentally saying "Mordanticus" when describing him, the text refers to the character as "*Sedonius*", in italics.

◀ The North and South House of the Villa Rustica ▶

0 50 100 150 200 250

Feet



Study

Lab.

Dock

The Altar Hall

T Trapdoor

S Staircase

◇ Door

● Support Pillar

■ Carnal Pit

— Ladders

▬ Sacrificial Table

— Standing Stones

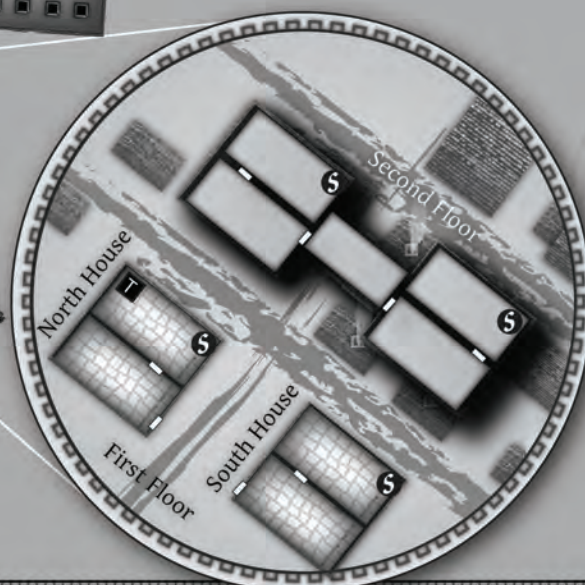
⚓ Boat

S Secret Door

★ Stairs & Tunnel
(from North House
Trapdoor)

Villa Urbana

Villa Rustica





the visitors (looming over them, roughly bumping into them as if by accident, lurching forward in a mock attack to get them to flinch) for their own amusement.

MEETING SEDONIUS

It takes *Sedonius* a long time to arrive on the verandah of the Villa Rustica, even longer if summoned to the Villa Urbana. When *Sedonius* finally arrives, he carries with him a sweet spicy scent. A successful Natural World rolls identify the scent as myrrh, used in embalming the dead. This scent is found nowhere else around the entire estate. *Sedonius* is a slim, handsome youth with dark hair.

Investigators looking him over notice no eye-twitches or signs of mental instability. If the investigators have reassembled and examined Mordanticus' imago, then they notice the uncanny likeness to his "departed ancestor". *Sedonius* gives off the same aura of fear as his bodyguards. His handsome face is cadaverous, and his skin cool and slack. He'll allow himself to be examined by a physician, and investigators making a successful Medicine or First Aid roll note that his pulse is faint and irregular, an unhealthy symptom.

Talking with *Sedonius*

If at the Villa Rustica, Cerberus brings out the chairs and table from the North Building to hold this meeting under the portico. Taurus supplies a basket of figs and grapes while Germanicus stands, arms folded, behind his master. If this meeting happens at the Villa Urbana, it takes place in the gardens.

- ☞ *Sedonius* asks brusquely after his father's health, reads the letter, scowls, and casts it aside.
- ☞ *Sedonius* then puts up with the investigators as best he can, as he hopes they will make a good report. A successful Insight roll makes the investigators aware that they need to tread carefully. If goaded, he has an explosive temper.
- ☞ He answers most questions about his past accurately and without hesitation; exceptions follow. A successful Insight roll suggests that his answers are without feeling, as though he has memorized them rather than actually experienced them.
- ☞ He expresses cynical amusement at some questions. In these moments, a successful Insight roll suggests *Sedonius* seems much older than his actual years.
- ☞ If given the cat brooch from Drusilla, he eyes it blankly and needs to be prompted as to his fiancée's name. He then gives an almost senile leer and lip smack, completely out of keeping with his youth and says, "I must marry soon. I need descendants."
- ☞ *Sedonius* tries to smooth away any bad impressions. He writes a letter to his father (and his fiancée, but only if they insist) and plays the proper host for the rest of the visit.

THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

MEETING ERASMUS

The investigators may ask to see Erasmus. If they do, Germanicus brings him out from the North Building, but only if *Sedonius* is present. Erasmus is a slender man in his mid-thirties, with a gentle scholarly face and large eyes. He is dressed in rags. His back and shoulders bear the marks of recent, savage beatings. He seems cowed and terrified. A successful Insight roll confirms that he is on the edge of hysteria.

- ❧ Erasmus says that *Sedonius* has completely recovered, praise the gods, and he should be restored to his rightful place at his father's side.
- ❧ If the investigators ask to speak to Erasmus alone, *Sedonius* dismisses the suggestion. He orders Erasmus returned to his room (in the North Building).
- ❧ At some point in the meeting Erasmus snaps and hysterically throws himself to the feet of the nearest investigator begging to be returned to Rome and Master Turpilianus. He is quickly hauled away by two bodyguards. As he is dragged away he screams. "That is not *Sedonius*. That is not my master!"
- ❧ If Investigators remind *Sedonius*, using Civics, that Seneca forbade the inhumane treatment of slaves, the man seems shocked. A successful Insight roll realizes that *Sedonius* hasn't heard of these reforms (as they occurred after Mordanticus' death).

WHAT SEDONIUS DOES NEXT

The new *Sedonius* hopes that he can convince the investigators of his sanity, and secure a good report to Orestius Turpilianus. He cannot openly act against the investigators, as their disappearance will be noted. However, he knows that they also cannot openly act against him without legal repercussions. He returns with the investigators to the Villa Urbana to bathe, eat a lavish evening meal, and see them to their rooms for the evening. While he does retire to his own chamber, he decamps back to the Villa Rustica as soon as he thinks that the investigators are asleep.

Sedonius remains on the estate and continues his experiments as best he can. If he believes the investigators are unlikely to speak well of him, or if he knows that they have discovered his laboratory, then he flees. He tries to slip away to Rome at the first opportunity via the boat on the river, drugging them if he must (see "The Opimian Vintage"). For *Sedonius*' future plans, see "Return to Rome".

If the investigators decide to return to Rome without uncovering anything incriminating (or rather, without anyone realizing that they've uncovered incriminating evidence), *Sedonius* wishes them a courteous farewell, then heads back to Rome at their heels.

The Opimian Vintage

Sedonius acts if he decides that the investigators are suspicious, or that he can't win them around. During the evening meal, he offers them a rare drink: wine fortified with the congealed remnants of a some of ancient Falernian wine known as the Opimian vintage. This was bottled in the Year of the Consulship of Opimius and Allobrogicus, 633 *ab Urbe condita*, from vines grown on Mt. Falernus between Latium and Campania. Alert investigators may realize that the wine was produced in the year of Orestius Mordanticus' death. If informed of this interesting fact, *Sedonius* politely marvels at the coincidence.

This superb wine is drugged with a diluted dose of henbane. This won't kill the investigators, as it has been made with only half a leaf, but they must match their CON against POT 15 or be overpowered with sleepiness and stagger off drowsily to bed. Stricken investigators have a bizarre night of vivid hallucinogenic dreams, and intense sensations of flight. Any investigator who fumbles the roll also forgets all events of the last 1D6 days.

Sedonius happily drinks the wine himself, as he has taken henbane as part of mystic rituals in Athens and is immune to low doses. Investigators who suspect poison can analyze wine or symptoms using a Potions or Medicine, and prescribe the antidote: mulberry leaves boiled in vinegar. These ingredients can be found in the kitchen and garden. Stricken investigators cannot be revived until morning, by which time *Sedonius* has a good head start on his way back to Rome. See the "Return to Rome" section.

THE NORTH BUILDING

Listen rolls while stamping on the ground around the North Building detect that the ground beneath is hollow. When the bodyguards are absent during the day, the door is locked from the outside. Investigators can break down the door (STR 20), make a successful Repair/Devise roll (to pick the lock), or make a successful Climb roll to get in through the roof. At night, the door is barred from the inside (STR 40).

There are two rooms on each floor above the ground, with a door between them. The earthen floors are covered with excrement, filthy hay, bones, and decayed food.

Ground Floor, Front Room

There is a brazier in the center of the room, with a folding chair and a table with writing implements. Benches line the walls. The bodyguard's weapons are stowed here. There is a stash of unlit torches in one corner. At night, the door to the back room is locked from the inside.

Ground Floor, Back Room

Stairs lead up to the second floor. During the day, a successful Spot Hidden roll allows investigators to locate a loose flagstone under the filthy hay. This stone is actually a hidden trapdoor, covering a set of descending stairs. At night, the trapdoor is open. Beneath the trapdoor, steps lead down into



darkness. The stench of rot and damp, and the spicy odor of myrrh, well up from the depths (see “Beneath the Villa Rustica”).

Second Floor, Back Room

The stairs lead up to here from below. The room is bare. The door between the front and back room is locked when the bodyguards are out.

Second Floor, Front Room

Erasmus is kept here. He is free during the day, but he is bound at night or when his guards are absent. If he hears (his Listen score is 25%) the investigators break in, he shouts for help.

A Private Talk With Erasmus

- ☞ Erasmus tells the investigators that he has been interrogated extensively by *Sedonius* over the last month. All the questions were about *Sedonius*’ own life, as though he were unfamiliar with it.
- ☞ *Sedonius* had an interest in Mordanticus and visited the family tomb a number of times last winter. Erasmus never accompanied *Sedonius* inside the tomb.
- ☞ *Sedonius* had become very secretive before his madness descended. He is now not the same man. He is possessed or mad. Whatever he is, he is no longer *Sedonius*.

Erasmus is desperate to escape. If allowed to, he flees, and becomes a runaway slave. Investigators making a Know roll realize that his first-hand account could be crucial in any case against *Sedonius*, and so might want to keep him at hand.

THE SOUTH BUILDING

The door to the South Building is locked. The investigators can break in, as per the North Building. Within, the rooms are bare, and the floor plan is identical to that of the North Building. In the afternoon, if investigators make a Luck roll, they find a tied and gagged slave on the second floor, awaiting delivery to the laboratory. If they fail the Luck roll, today’s sacrifice has not yet been found, and the building is empty.

If ungagged, the slave begs for help and says that three big men seized him from the fields, tied him up and left him here. This identifies the bodyguards as the slave stealers. If investigators confront *Sedonius* about the kidnapping, he laughs it off as a prank and promises to scold his bodyguards (although a successful Civics roll allows the investigators to realize no actual public crime has been committed, only, at most, a private offense against another’s property).

The Barns

Behind the two buildings is a courtyard surrounded by barns, fish pools, a mule-drawn millstone, grape-and-oil pressing rooms, a fermenting yard, and a threshing floor. The stink of manure is everywhere.

One of the barns has been fortified recently. It’s been

converted into a makeshift barracks, as the estate’s slaves are secured here overnight. Six huge guard dogs are chained to this barn during the day, and three at night. The dogs howl at the sight or smell of the bodyguards (or *Sedonius*, although he tries to avoid them) and charge forward to throw themselves savagely to the limit of their chains. The dogs hate the reanimated dead.

THE CLIFF/LABORATORY BACK DOOR

Beyond the Villa Rustica is a cliff overlooking a river. At the base of the cliff, hidden in a crevice, is a fortified door. It leads to the underground laboratory. A boat waits on the bank beside the secret entrance. The river winds through the hills towards Rome. Investigators can only find this entrance if they thoroughly explore the estate beyond the farm buildings, specifically stating they travel down to the area at the base of the cliff along the river. If the investigators enter the door, the Keeper needs to determine where *Sedonius* and the bodyguards are at the time. See the section “Beneath the Villa Rustica”, below.

Breaking and Entering

During the day or evening, the Villa Rustica can only be entered without opposition during meal times when *Sedonius* and the bodyguards are all absent, or if the investigators have devised some cunning scheme to ensure their absence.

After dark, it is easy to sneak out of the Villa Urbana. Those checking on *Sedonius*’ bedroom after they’ve supposedly gone to bed discover that their host has disappeared from his bedchamber. Pavo’s guards and dogs patrol the estate at night, and Luck or Sneak rolls are required to avoid being pursued. If caught a Status roll is required to convince Pavo that the investigators are not slave-stealers.

BENEATH THE VILLA RUSTICA

The stairs from the North Building lead to a long hall tunneled out of the earth and vaulted in stone. The structure below ground is much older than the buildings above. The chamber predates Mordanticus’ time, possibly even the time of Rome herself.

Sedonius and the Bodyguards

The Keeper should determine if *Sedonius* or the bodyguards are inside the temple when the investigators enter.

- ☞ During the midday and evening meals, the laboratory is empty.
- ☞ The bodyguards are here at night, worshipping at the altar. They are engrossed in their prayers and offerings, allowing the investigators to evade detection with a successful Sneak roll. If intruders are detected, the three men attack without mercy or hesitation.



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

☛ *Sedonius* is here at all hours, except at meal times. He will be in the study, perhaps torturing the real *Sedonius*, 70% of the time. If he has already left for Rome, one of the bodyguards remains to watch over the place.

THE ALTAR HALL

This chamber is hall is tall and wide. The floor of this chamber is covered with hundreds of evenly spaced, open pits (see “The Awful Pits”). Wide paths cross the chamber, leading to other areas of the complex and the center of the hall. In the center of the chamber sits a large black stone slab, surrounded by a circle of nine standing stones. The standing stones are covered in moss and weathered carvings too faint to be made out. These stones clearly once stood in the open air. Beside the table is an altar, a square black stone with a carved bowl at its base. The stone is carved with likeness of men, but their proportions are wrong, their limbs distorted. Dried blood stains the altar surface as well as the length of the blood channel leading to its bowl. A long ladder lies on the floor near the altar.

A charnel smell clings to every surface, overlaid by the faint, sickly spicy scent of myrrh. Those making successful Listen rolls detect a constant, slippery thumping sound that resonates around the hall coming from the open pits.

THE AWFUL PITS

Each pit is a cylindrical well, twenty-five feet deep and five feet in diameter. The pits are open and uncovered, and a menace if investigators start running around in the dark. Greek letters are engraved in the stone of each lip, designating a number. When a pit is approached, the charnel smell intensifies and the thumping, slithering, scraping sound is louder. Each pit seems to be occupied, but it is dark, so the investigators can hear what lies below but not see it. If they wish to see it, they need to drop or lower a light, but doing so provokes an outburst of inhuman shrieking, wailing, and whining.

The Charnel Things

At the bottom of each pit is a Charnel Thing. It attempts to seize and devour any light source brought within reach. Even a brief glimpse of a Charnel Thing is sufficient to cost 1/1D6 Sanity. The Charnel Things resemble naked men, but are wrong in ways that cannot be countenanced by anything sane or human. Their limbs are too long, their faces too slack, their bodies elongated and distorted. They leap with inhuman speed and strength, as if to grasp the onlookers and pull them down into the pit.

Any outburst from the investigators after sighting a Charnel Thing provokes an unexpected response. A voice cries from one of the pits. “Oh gods, help me! Help me if you are true Romans of the Republic!” Ignoring the desperate plea costs 0/1 SAN. Investigators responding to these cries encounter Mummio, the slave.



MUMMIO THE SLAVE

Within this pit is a short, solid, skinny Greek slave wearing rags. He can be dimly glimpsed at the bottom of the pit. The captive is disfigured with the scars and bruises of terrible torture. This is Mummio, the slave who betrayed Mordanticus to Lucius Opimius. He has been revived and tortured—revenge is the real reason why Mordanticus made provision for Mummio's ashes as his last act before his execution.

The captive begs the investigators to help him. He believes that he has been held in the dark for days, half-starved and dying of thirst. He gives his name as Mummio, slave of Appius Orestius Mordanticus.

Mummio believes it is the year of the consulship of Opimius and Allobrogicus (Empire or Civics: at the height of the Republic). He explains that he was being tortured by the State for evidence, collapsed unconscious, and was returned to his master, Mordanticus, who is now punishing him for his betrayal. His accounting of time is flawed; he's been returned to Essential Saltes and revived for further torture many times.

Insight determines that his sanity hangs by a thread. He does not believe tales of Emperors and Imperial Rome, and attempts to convince Mummio of the truth push him over the edge of sanity.

If freed, the slave's troubles are far from over. Mummio must drink blood within 1D20 hours or he will descend into cannibalistic madness. The Keeper may prefer to choose the moment of sudden bloodlust rather than rely on the die roll, especially if he is left alone with one other person.

If he sees *Sedonius*, he roars "Mordanticus!" and attacks him in a frenzy. Anyone who attempts to halt this attack must match STR against STR 20, double Mummio's normal STR 10.

Lucius the Charnel Thing

Lucius is the consul who condemned Appius. He has been revived for torture, but his body was not intact when turned into Essential Saltes. He is now a Charnel Thing, imprisoned in the pits. The investigators may seek out this pit when they see the catalog in the study. The Thing has a dreadful resemblance to the bust in the Opimius tomb. Seeing the Thing That Was Lucius costs 1/1D4 Sanity points.

The Sacrifice at the Altar

If the bodyguards are present in the Altar Hall, they are intent on human sacrifice (possibly of Erasmus) and cannibal rites at the altar. At the climax of the sacrifice, the bodyguards lower the ladder into 1D3+1 pits, and Charnel Things rush out. The Charnel Things devour the sacrifice, before the bodyguards herd them back into their pits. Sanity loss to witness the sacrifice is 1/1D4 SAN, and even hearing it costs 0/1 SAN. The investigators can Sneak or Hide past this grisly sight if they have the stomach.

If the investigators are discovered, the bodyguards and any free Charnel Things attack. The bodyguards can raise reinforcements by sending the ladder into the pits. The noise from such a disturbance alerts *Sedonius* if he is present. He returns the real Sedonius to Essential Saltes (see spell

description for "Dragon's Head Descending"; it takes little time), escapes out the cliff-side secret entrance, and flees for Rome.

Investigators who reach the surface through the trapdoor to the North Building can call for help. Pavo, his guards, and the dogs arrive within 1D6 rounds. The dogs attack the bodyguards with savage fury.

THE LABORATORY

This is one long room, split in half by an open archway. The Laboratory is built to mimic a sepulchral chamber. The sweet, spicy scent of myrrh is overwhelming. Two walls here are covered with inscriptions, neatly chiseled into the stone (see "Inscriptions on the Walls").

The south wall has shelves containing rows of cinerary urns, narrow Grecian vases with long necks. There are seventy in all. This wall is labeled "Materials" (*materia*). The urns contain the Essential Saltes of the graves that Mordanticus looted in his former life (see "The Urns and Their Contents").

The north wall contains racks of Phalerons, wide-bellied Grecian funerary vases. This wall is labeled "Guards" (*custodes*). There are fifteen in total. These contain the Essential Saltes of humans who have willingly thrown in their lot with Mordanticus, or of monsters. The Phalerons might contain mummified sphinxes, ghouls, and nightgaunts, at the Keeper's pleasure. Statistics for two such creatures, a basilisk and a harpy, are included at the end of the scenario.

The Poisons

Several shelves contain alchemical apparatus. Fresh henbane leaves are stored in an urn, and three doses of full strength henbane poison sit on the shelf (POT 10). If Sedonius/Mordanticus has already left for Rome, a successful Spot Hidden roll reveals a circle in the dust of the shelf, where a fourth henbane potion once sat.

LETTERS ON THE EAST WALL - DRAGON'S HEAD ASCENDING

Y'AI 'NG'NGAH,
YOG-SOTHOTH
H'EE-L'GEB
F'AI THRODOG
UAAAH!

LETTERS ON THE WEST WALL - DRAGON'S HEAD DESCENDING

OGTHROD AI'F
GEB'L-EE'H
YOG-SOTHOTH
'NGAH'NG AI'Y
ZHRO!



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

A Potions or Medicine roll identifies the potions as henbane. Henbane, either fresh or prepared as a potion, is a deadly poison, causing amnesia and resulting in nausea and vomiting, then death, within a few hours of ingestion. Only one leaf is required to poison a man.

If *Sedonius* is present in the complex, then the investigators may hear the screams of the real *Sedonius* from the study.

The Urns and their Contents

All seventy urns are numbered with Roman numerals. Their contents are all the same: a handful of dust in hues of shimmering grey, blue, and pink. The dust has the peculiar property of cohesiveness; that is, it stays together. Investigators who handle the dust have no residue on their hands, and if poured onto the floor the dust in each urn pools together. Dust piles from different urns do not mingle even if mixed, but separately, cleanly, as if each particle of dust knows and clings to its other. The dust in each urn is in fact the Essential Saltes of a human or monster, and can be resurrected via the Dragon's Head Ascending spell if removed from the urn.

Inscriptions on the Walls

The eastern and western walls are inscribed with large letters, graven in the stone. These are the ritual chants of spells, the east wall being Dragon's Head Ascending, and the western being Dragon's Head Descending. For more information, see "Keeper's Note: Reanimating the Dead".

The words of the Dragon's Head Ascending inscription have a strange hypnotic quality. Anyone who reads them will unconsciously try to speak the words aloud, attempting to pronounce the alien syllables. An INT x 3 roll must be made for the investigator to realize what they are doing and halt the recitation. Words recited in the laboratory echo into the study. If the real *Sedonius* is not currently animated and being tortured, then his Essential Saltes are in the kylix in the study. A complete recitation of Dragon's Head Ascending means that the spell automatically works, causing the investigators to hear a human voice call out from the Study, rising in anguish (see "Reanimating Tertius Orestius Sedonius").

THE STUDY

This room is lined with shelves of scrolls, a long table, a chair and writing desk. In the center of the study is a torture rack and implements. An empty cinerary urn sits nearby, with the Roman numeral LXXXVI (96) on the side. Before the rack is a circle etched in the stone floor with a kylix (a shallow, wide cup or dish), containing a fine, bluish dust. If *Sedonius*

Hail Brother Nine,

My dear friend, how wonderful to hear from you after all these years. I did not expect that your research into the Spheres would succeed. I doubted your ability to call on a Descendant to summon you back into Time, and yet here you stand.

I am not surprised you had to kill the weak-minded whelp before he betrayed you. Rome has so degenerated that even your seed could not escape corruption. Was it such a good idea to Salt him? You need his memories, yet he will always be a weak link. I counsel you to return him to Saltes and not call him up again. You must marry to restore the line. I am sure you will keep your wife properly in check and not allow her the license that these modern sluts assume.

Things go well for me in Athens. Praise to the Visitation as people are not so apt now to notice those Out of Time as I am. Thanks to the wars of your Emperor, I have got some choice specimens from the Tin Isles, but there was one that almost took my face off. It came from a barrow but was not human. If all goes well in the autumn, I will send you the Nazarene as you request, but do not send him back spoiled as you have done with my specimens in the past.

I have written to Three to tell him of your return. Things do not go so well for him in Egypt. The new prefect is very meddlesome and inquires into the disappearances. I am sure that you will manage things much better at your end. If Three writes that he will send you what he found under the Ziggurat of Ur, do not answer, as it does not heed even him and has eyes in its palms.

Yours in scholarship,
Seven

Tertius Orestius Sedonius Papers #1

has been reanimated the kylix is empty and overturned, the bluish dust is missing and he will be found here, naked and disoriented (see "Reanimating Sedonius").

A chair and desk are set beside the rack. Upon it are ink, quills, and writing implements, and several wax tablets for quick notes. A letter in Greek, in an unknown hand, lies on the table (see *Tertius Orestius Sedonius Papers #1*).

Upon the long work table is a single massive scroll, partially laid out for review. This is a list of names and their corresponding numbers, a record of what each carnal pit and cinerary urn contains (see "The Catalog of Mordanticus").

The Catalog of Mordanticus

An ancient scroll consisting of two lists of numbered names. It is brittle with age and great care must be taken in handling it. This is the catalog to the cinerary urns and the Awful Pits. It is a list of several hundred names, each annotated with a Roman numeral, and many also have a Greek numeral. The



DE HORRORE COSMICO

Roman numbers list cinerary urns while the Greek numbers identify awful pits. Most of the names are in very old ink, faded and browned, dating from Mordanticus' time.

Successful Civics or Empire rolls allow investigators to realize the names are a roll call of great consuls, scholars and famous generals. Anyone who has been buried or cremated in Rome in the time of the Republic could be included. Investigators who make this connection realize that most of the Charnel Things have been mindlessly leaping and whining and slithering in the Awful Pits since Mordanticus' time (0/1 SAN to contemplate).

Upon the scroll (see Tertius Orestius Sedonius Papers #2) are six recent entries with Roman numerals, two of which also have Greek numbers. These are in a different ink, but in the same hand as before. If those urns in the Laboratory are inspected, all of them are empty. Urn number LXXXXVI (96), belonging to Sedonius, is in the study and the salts are in the kylix. If those Awful Pits are visited, those pits hold Mummio (75) and Lucius Opimius (51) (see "Mummio the Slave" and "Lucius the Charnel Thing").

ITEMS OF NOTE ON THE SHELVES

A search of the shelves uncovers two recently used scrolls (free of dust). One seems centuries old and is the Journal of Mordanticus. The other seems fairly new, and is A History of House Orestius, by Orestius Sedonius (with annotations by Orestius Mordanticus).

The Journal of Appius Orestius Mordanticus

In Greek (cyphered, see below), by Orestius Mordanticus, 112 B.C.E.

This is a crisply written litany of his research, written in shorthand in a secret code based on Greek. Deciphered (which requires an INT x1 roll, by someone with a Language: Greek score of at least 50%), it tells of his search to cheat death. It explains how to create and store Essential Saltes. *Sanity Loss 1D4/1D10; Cthulhu Mythos +8%; average 8 weeks to study and comprehend.* **Spells:** Call Descendant, Call Yog-Sothoth, Resurrection (see "Keeper's Note: Reanimating the Dead"), Summon Ancestor, Summon/Bind Fire Vampire.

The History of House Orestius

Lying forgotten on a bottom shelf is the unfinished history by the real Sedonius, in his hand-

writing. A few underlines and marginalia of correction are written in a new bold hand (that of Mordanticus), details that would only be known to an eyewitness. All of the added details are cruel ones, e.g., "That young fool Tiberius screamed like a woman as the Senators bashed his brains out."

THE SECRET DOOR

This door, hidden behind some weighted shelves, can be detected with a successful Spot Hidden roll. A Natural World roll also notes the direction of a draft. The door leads to a tunnel that slopes steeply upwards to the cliff-side secret entrance (See "The Back Door"), and a boat moored by the river. This is *Sedonius'* escape route.

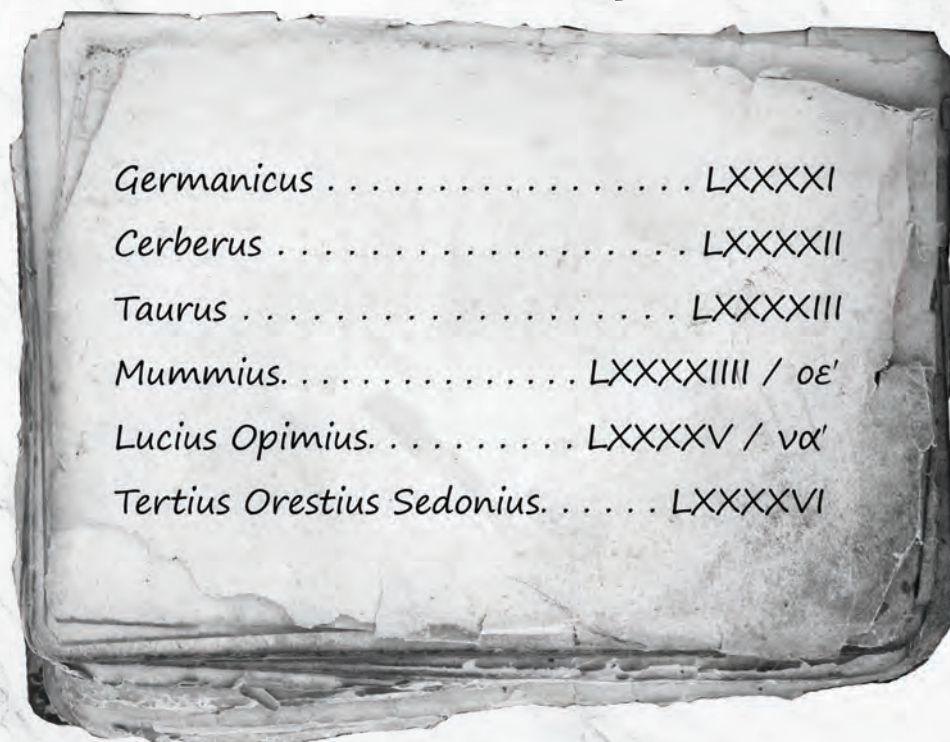
CONFRONTING SEDONIUS IN HIS STUDY

If confronted, *Sedonius* is lucid and cool. He talks to buy time so that his bodyguards can come to his aid. He attempts to sway the investigators to his side, promising them wealth and power when he becomes the new Emperor.

Sedonius tries to argue that the investigators are like him. He tells them, "We know that the so-called normal world is a mere rotten skin over a corpse; the Abyss below is riddled with ancient secrets. A brave and strong soul can grasp for high stakes, seize power, and cheat death. I have done so, and I can help you do the same."

He'll confess to killing Sedonius because the boy quailed at his plan. Sedonius, he'll explain, was a coward and a fool, an unfit descendant. The investigators on the other hand are

Tertius Orestius Sedonius Papers #2



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

cool, brave, resourceful, and intelligent—perfect Romans. Investigators making an Insight roll realize that he is lying, and intends to betray them at the earliest opportunity.

If these efforts at parlay fail, his bodyguards fail to save him, or if he is directly attacked, *Sedonius* lunges for a “*cus-todes*” urn. He smashes it to release the Essential Saltes, and quickly chants the Dragon Head’s Ascending spell to revive

a monstrous guardian to attack them. The two phalerons within easy reach contain the Saltes of a basilisk and a harpy (see pages 105 and 115 of the *Cthulhu Invictus* rulebook; the stats are included at the end of this scenario).

KEEPER’S NOTE: REANIMATING THE DEAD

6th Edition *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook condenses all of the knowledge about how to revive the dead under one spell, Resurrection. Resurrection guides the sorcerer to create and store Essential Saltes, and incorporates Dragon’s Head Ascending and Descending. The Dragon’s Head spells are dealt with separately, so that the investigators can use them.

First the body, bones, or ashes of the dead are reduced to Essential Saltes. Once stored as Saltes, an entity can be both reanimated and reduced to Saltes again (and again) by use of the Dragon’s Head, Ascending and Descending. Saltes are stored in urns which shield them against the Dragon’s Head Ascending spell.

Once revived, sentient entities must be fed blood within 1D20 hours, and further drink the equivalent of a human body’s worth (5 to 7 liters) within a three month period. Otherwise, they descend into a vampiric, cannibalistic frenzy. If they are unable or unwilling to get blood, they soon die.

NEW SPELLS

CALL DESCENDANT

Range: N/A **Duration:** Until a target is found **Cost:** 1 POW **Sanity:** 1D6 **Resistance:** No

This spell takes 10 hours to cast and sends the sorcerer’s will forward in time to settle on a weak-willed descendant with an uncanny resemblance to the sorcerer. Thenceforth, such descendants are shells, existing only to research the ways and means to Summon Ancestor, and will do all in their power to do so. Only death will halt their efforts. The descendants rationalize their activities as research or scholarly interest, but they go well beyond any rational efforts, attempting to revive the dead. Their purpose fulfilled, this weak link is soon dispatched, and the ancestor takes their place.

SUMMON ANCESTOR

Range: N/A **Duration:** 3D4 months **Cost:** 5 POW **Sanity:** 1D6 **Resistance:** < No

This spell is only cast by those under the influence of Call Descendant. It consists of complex preparatory rituals that take many months. They can give no rational explanation of why they are engaging in these acts, although they cling to the idea that the rituals are simply theoretical research. The spell requires the bones or ashes of the ancestor, loud chanting, the burning of incense, and elaborate markings on the floor. The descendants cannot see that there is any harm in their efforts, but if others become suspicious or alarmed, they will continue in secret.

DRAGON’S HEAD ASCENDING

Range: N/A **Duration:** Instantaneous **Cost:** 1 POW **Sanity:** 1D4 **Resistance:** No

Essential Saltes are animated by reciting the Dragon’s Head Ascending spell, which takes but a single round. If the Dragon’s Head Ascending spell succeeds, the chosen entity is revived. A dense cloud of thick, greenish black vapor billows up from the Essential Saltes and consolidates into the naked form of the entity. As the entity appears, it writhes and screams in agony. It is elongated and distorted as if on the rack, before painfully snapping back into its normal shape. It costs 1/1D6 Sanity to see this happen to a sentient being.

If the body was intact, the deceased is revived with intelligence intact—and has 1D20 hours to start being fed blood, or the unfortunate reanimate will degenerate and ultimately die.

Reviving an incomplete body, however, results in a deranged and deformed cannibal. It thirsts for blood and hungers for flesh, but does not need to eat or drink to survive. It can be killed in all the conventional ways, but can only be permanently destroyed by fire (if the ashes are dispersed) or acid.

DRAGON’S HEAD DESCENDING

Range: N/A **Duration:** Instantaneous **Cost:** 1 MP **Sanity:** Special **Resistance:** No

Casting time: 3 rounds

To reduce a reanimated entity again to Essential Saltes, the Dragon’s Head Descending spell is recited. The body first smokes, then distorts, expands, and becomes grotesque and engorged in an agonizing process, until it explodes outwards in a pelting hail. Strangely, considering the violence of their dispersal, the Saltes pool together and can be poured into a container without the loss of even one grain.

It costs 1/1D3 Sanity to view the transformation of a living being to Saltes, unless it is a monster, in which case characters gain the appropriate Sanity for killing the monster.



REANIMATING SEDONIUS

The investigators may revive the real Sedonius, by accident or design, if his Essential Salts are in the kylix and the Dragon's Head Ascending spell is cast. It begins with a billow of purplish smoke rising from the ashes. Then limbs appear, contorted and too far apart. The limbs rush together and a human face appears, distended out of all shape, mouth agape. A naked human form twists and coalesces together then collapses onto the circle. The resemblance between Sedonius and Mordanticus is uncanny, except that Sedonius has a very bad twitch in his left eye. Sanity loss to witness this is 1/1D6 SAN.

The real Sedonius is sane, but only just barely, after having been murdered, resurrected, tortured, and imprisoned, over and over. He knows that Mordanticus is impersonating him and has been interrogating him to learn his personal history. However, he also knows that he will be executed for practicing black magic if others learn what he has been doing. He is in a quandary.

Resurrected, Sedonius is in the same terrible state as Mummio. He must drink blood within 1D20 hours of resurrection; otherwise, he will die or descend into a cannibalistic, vampiric madness. If Sedonius survives Tusculum, see the "Return to Rome" section for his fate. If the real Sedonius sees the fake *Sedonius*, he attacks him in a frenzy. Anyone who attempts to halt him must successfully oppose STR 32, double Sedonius' normal STR of 16.

TUSCULUM CONCLUSION

Investigators may be lucky or skillful enough to end Mordanticus' return to power in Tusculum. Mordanticus can be killed, but if so, his body must then be destroyed in such a way that no trace of his corpse remains (dissolved in acid, cremated and the ashes dispersed). Otherwise there is always the possibility he may one day return. Investigators who recite the Dragon's Head Descending chant can return Mordanticus and his reanimated creations to dust. Just what the investigators do about the Charnel Things in the Awful Pits, the vast collection of Essential Salts, and the entrances to the underground complex is completely up to them.

RETURN TO ROME

If the investigators have not defeated *Sedonius* and his ghoulish bodyguards at Tusculum, they need to deal with them back in to Rome. For his part, if given the chance, *Sedonius* hurries to Rome to poison Quintus Orestius Turpilianus, claim his inheritance, and marry Drusilla as quickly as possible. There are a number of options to follow.

☞ The investigators report to Quintus Orestius Turpilianus. This is dealt with in the "Returning to House Orestius" section.

☞ Mordanticus can be killed or reduced to dust with the Dragon's Head Descending spell. Investigators need to find a way to do this secretly, or they will be accused of murder. A Civics roll reminds investigators they must not use spells in public; otherwise they will be accused of black magic and sentenced to death.

☞ They can contest Mordanticus in the law courts. This option is explored in "Using the Law".

RETURNING TO HOUSE ORESTIUS

If the investigators are quick or lucky, they return to Rome and reach Quintus Orestius Turpilianus before *Sedonius* does. The investigators can convince Turpilianus that his son Sedonius is permanently mad with both a successful Persuade and Medicine roll. If they tell the truth, the investigators will be dismissed as insane.

They may concoct a reasonable story, such as claiming that Mordanticus is a fraud and a look-alike, who murdered the real Sedonius in order to poison Turpilianus and inherit control over House Orestius. Turpilianus will believe such a plausible story with a successful Fast Talk or Persuade roll. However, investigators failing in such an attempt enrage Turpilianus, who accuses them of slandering his son and has them thrown out.

If the investigators succeed in turning Turpilianus against *Sedonius*, his "son" is thrown into the State Prison, the Tullianum, as a fraud pending trial.

MORDANTICUS REACHES ROME FIRST

Once *Sedonius* realizes that his underground complex has been discovered, or becomes certain that the investigators will not give a favorable report to Orestius Turpilianus, he hurries to Rome. If he has less than a two-day head start, the investigators will arrive after he does, but before he has had a chance to kill Turpilianus.

If they try to convince Turpilianus that *Sedonius* is an impostor, *Sedonius* vigorously defends himself as soon as he is able. *Sedonius* accuses the investigators of being frauds, trying to discredit him and embarrass House Orestius. This will come down to a duel of wits between the investigators and *Sedonius* to see who can convince Quintus Orestius Turpilianus they are the ones telling the truth. The investigators must make a successful Persuade roll and produce at



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

least one other witness, either Erasmus or the real Sedonius.

❧ **If the Investigators Succeed:** Mordanticus (or whoever the impostor is) is thrown into the State Prison, the Tullianum, as a fraud pending trial.

❧ **If the Investigators Fail:** Mordanticus is welcomed back as the true scion of House Orestius. The investigators, and possibly the real Sedonius (having been declared an impostor) and thrown into the Tullianum. The fate of investigators imprisoned with a rapidly deteriorating Sedonius (who thirsts for blood) may prove interesting. Mordanticus then poisons Quintus Orestius Turpilianus, becomes *Paterfamilias* of the house, and marries Drusilla as soon as possible, a horrible prospect.

If *Sedonius* has more than a two days' head start on the investigators, he will have time to poison Turpilianus with henbane before they can stop him. Turpilianus falls ill and dies within hours. His cause of death is attributed to a virulent form of the same illness that afflicted his son with amnesia some months earlier.

In this case, the investigators encounter his funeral procession at the Esquiline Gate. This begins the Nine Days of Sorrow before Mordanticus steps into his inheritance. Mordanticus cannot marry or act openly against the investigators during this period of mourning. However, his bodyguards will stalk the investigators through the streets of Rome. Any dead bodyguards are brought to Rome by their surviving comrades and revived by Mordanticus, if possible.

THE FUNERAL

The funeral is held the day after Orestius Turpilianus' death. It is a splendid, traditional affair, filled with music, dancers, mimes, and a procession of imagines from all the patrician families before the coffin. Several hundred mourners follow behind the casket. *Orestius Sedonius* leads the procession with Drusilla, eyes downcast, by his side. Turpilianus' body is interred in the family tomb after a ceremony in which *Sedonius* extols his father's virtues, sacrifices a pig, and offers wine and milk to the deceased.

USING THE LAW

The investigators can attempt to use the law against Mordanticus. There are four charges that could be leveled against him: parricide, black magic, fraud (being an impostor), and violating graves. The public prosecutor will consider these charges, as they are all public offenses, but will decline to get involved in a high-stakes contest such as this, leaving any Roman citizens among the investigators to press the charges themselves. (Note that, as such, if they lose, they too could be subjected to fines or other sanctions by the court). Status and presenting an irrefutable case are the keys here; if the evidence is ambiguous or unconvincing, the court will err on the side of caution and fail to convict. Winning the support of a wealthy patron, such as Lady Claudia of House Fadius (which requires a successful *Persuade* roll), assists their

cause. The person with the highest Status, either investigator or patron, must succeed in a Status check or the case will not come to trial in the first place. If it does, objective evidence that cannot be denied or explained away becomes key.

Once the case is brought into court, any obviously insane claims (e.g., that Mordanticus is the ancestor of Sedonius, brought back from the grave and now impersonating him) will not only be dismissed, but laughed out of court and color any other claims the investigators may present. Another Status check will be required in order to proceed, if such claims are not left on the courthouse steps. Investigators must stick to arguments which not only can be proven, but which will be believed.

Mordanticus is a lucid opponent who digs out the investigators' insane claims or dubious backgrounds so that he can heap scorn on them. The investigators must first present their argument, and then defend it in open court.

Presenting The Charge of Parricide

This extremely serious charge would lead to a sensational case that would enthrall all Rome, even the Emperor himself. Investigators should only attempt it if they have solid evidence, wealthy backers, and a flair for the dramatic. Investigators need at least three things to successfully argue their claim: the henbane itself, a convincing argument explaining a plot against Turpilianus' life, and either the real Sedonius or Erasmus as a witness.

If found guilty, Mordanticus is sentenced to being beaten with blood-colored sticks, then sewn up in a sack with a dog, a rooster, a viper, and a monkey, before being thrown in the deep sea. Ironically, Mordanticus is not actually guilty of such a charge, as he is not actually Sedonius, but he cannot admit that without admitting that he is an impostor, and as noted below, he does not react calmly to defeat.

Presenting The Charge of Black Magic (*Magia*)

Roman law takes a very dim view of magic. Using magic with the intent of injuring a citizen is punishable by death, as is the possession of texts or scrolls of magic (with such items being burned in public). The testimony of either Sedonius or Erasmus could be used to present this charge. Better yet, the investigators can produce magical scrolls written in the accused's own hand (see "Presenting The Charge of Fraud") with *The Journal of Appius Orestius Mordanticus* being damning evidence. The authorities will also need an attested sample of *Sedonius*' recent handwriting. This will engender confusion, particularly if older samples are also introduced into evidence. If found guilty, Mordanticus is sentenced to death by strangulation. People of high status were sometimes able to obtain a lesser sentence of exile instead, but as noted in "Determining the Winner", Mordanticus does not react calmly to defeat.

Presenting The Charge of Violating Graves (*Violatio Sepulcri*)

Desecrating graves is a criminal act punishable by death or banishment. Investigators should easily be able to produce



eyewitness accounts of Mordanticus being seen near the tombs of House Orestius during the spate of vandalism. However, to get the case to truly stick, the investigators need to produce Porcius the Leper as a witness. This association reduces the investigators' Status by 10%. If found guilty, Mordanticus is sentenced to death by strangulation. People of high status were sometimes able to obtain a lesser sentence of exile instead, but as already noted, Mordanticus does not react calmly to defeat.

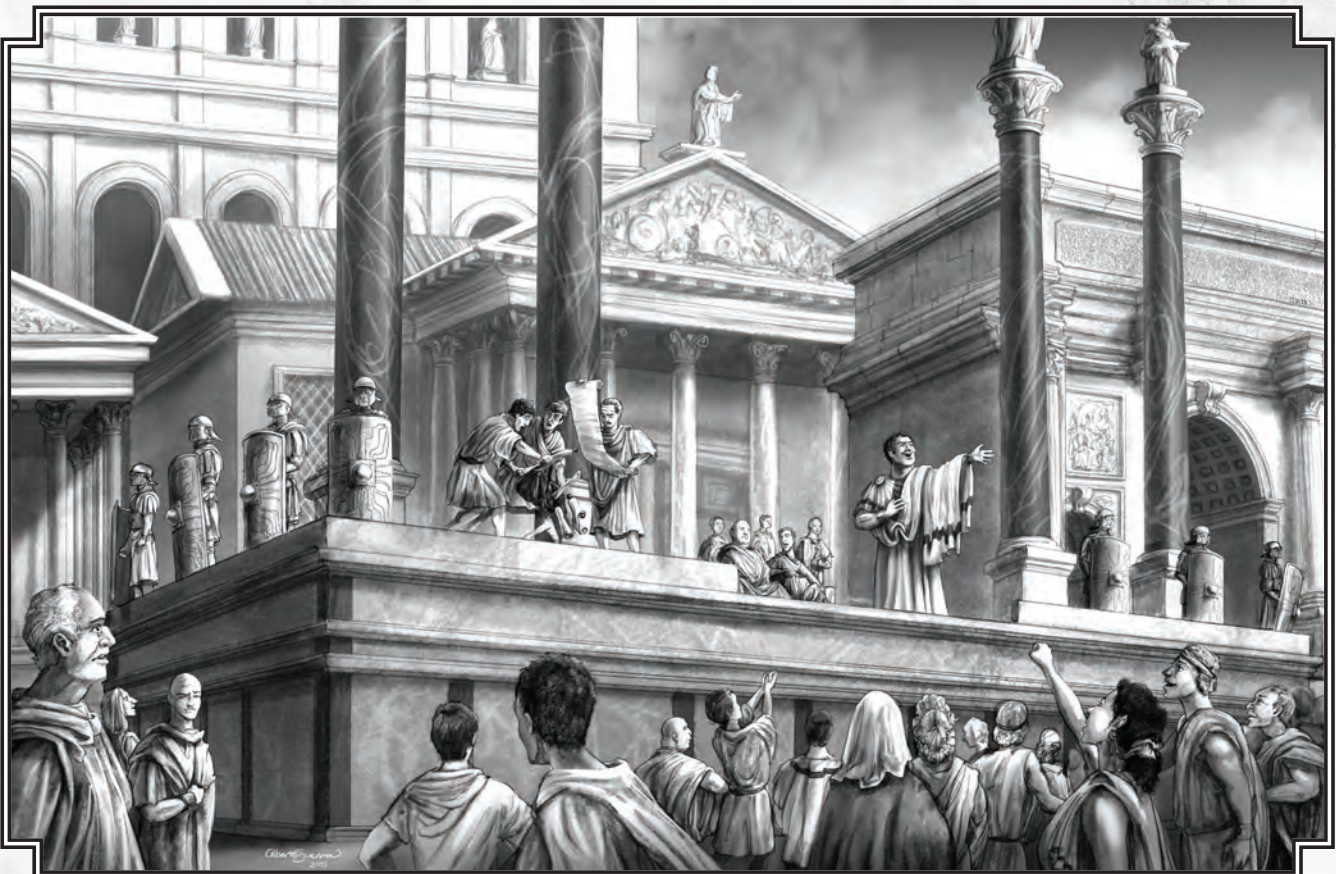
Presenting The Charge of Fraud

Trying to prove that the accused is not actually Tertius Orestius Sedonius, as he claims, may be difficult. Even with Sedonius and/or Erasmus as witnesses, it is still a matter of one person's word over another. Proof of identity is required. This can only be done by presenting handwriting samples of the accused (Mordanticus) alongside those confirmed to be from the actual Sedonius. Samples of Sedonius' writing can be found in his letters to Drusilla and the paper under his bed in Rome. Samples of Mordanticus' writing are found throughout his laboratory, especially in *The Journal of Appius Orestius Mordanticus*. Samples from both men appear side by side in *The History of House Orestius*. Current writing samples of the accused are easily obtained by the courts for comparison. If found guilty, Mordanticus is sentenced to *Damnatio Ad Bestias* (Condemnation to the Beasts), being tied to a post and mauled to death by wild animals, although again, this lesser charge could possibly be connived and / or bribed into a sentence of exile instead, were Mordanticus able to remain calm.

DETERMINING THE WINNER

A single investigator must present the case, making a Persuade, a Civics, and a Status roll while Mordanticus does the same. The side with the most successes wins the case. If both sides win an equal number, the outcome is decided by which litigator (or supporting patron) has the highest Status score. Keepers may allow the investigators to hire an advocate (professional lawyer) or jurisconsult (legal scholar), who is likely much more skilled at such matters than they are (Persuade 15% + 3D20%; Civics: 10% + 3D20%; Status: 15% + 3D20%). Doing would be expensive (1D10 x 100 sestertii) but could be vital to winning the case.

If the investigators succeed: As the judge pronounces the accused guilty, Mordanticus flies into a rage rather than present arguments in mitigation of sentencing. He curses the judge and the investigators, saying that he will have vengeance upon them. He screams, "If not on you, then upon your descendants, for I am beyond death and time! I will resurrect corpses and inflict tortures without measure!" At this point, the judge orders his guards to beat Mordanticus senseless. After Mordanticus is rendered unconscious, the judge commands that the accused be bound, gagged, and thrown into the Tullianum to await punishment. The Orestius estate is forfeited to the Emperor, unless the real Sedonius is present. This may not be the end for Mordanticus, should any of



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

his bodyguards remain at large (see “The Escape of Mordanticus”).

- ☛ **If the investigators fail:** Mordanticus is formally and legally recognized as Tertius Orestius Sedonius. The investigators have a vindictive and wealthy enemy in Rome.

THE PRISON ESCAPE

These events could occur if Mordanticus and / or the investigators have been thrown into the Tullianum.

- ☛ **If the investigators are themselves in prison:** Should the investigators arrive after Mordanticus and fail to convince Orestius Turpilianus that Mordanticus is actually an impostor, they find themselves locked in the Tullianum. They are quickly convicted of fraud and slander by a well-bribed judge who is uninterested in hearing their defense. They are sentenced to five years hard labor in a marble quarry in Luna (northern Italia), which amounts to a death sentence. However, kind-hearted Keepers may allow their investigators to live to fight another day. (See “The Great Escape”).
- ☛ **If Mordanticus is in prison awaiting execution:** If his bodyguards are still alive, they stage a rescue mission (see “The Escape of Mordanticus”). If they are not, Mordanticus remains in his cell, bound and gagged, until his execution two dawns hence.

THE TULLIANUM

The *Tullianum* is below the *Tabularium*, the records office off the *Forum Romanum*. It is a two story building with a portico façade. A steep set of steps, the Gemonian Stairs, leads from the records office to the prison, which consists of two chambers, the *Carcer* and the Tullianum. There is no exit from the prison except the Gemonian Stairs.

The *Carcer* is the upper chamber, the place of execution. It has a locked grate that opens into the *Cloaca Maxima*, Rome’s main sewer, for ease of disposing of the dead.

The Tullianum is the deepest chamber, reached by a circular hole in the floor of the *Carcer*. The Tullianum is the State prison, where condemned prisoners are held for a day or so prior to execution or other imposition of sentence. It is not a place of long term imprisonment. It consists of one, irregularly paved, circular room, a former cistern. It contains a spring, and so is permanently damp. Prisoners are lowered down by rope from the *Carcer*.

The Great Escape (Optional)

This takes place after the investigators have been transported north from Rome towards the city of Luna. About a day south of Luna, the caravan transporting the prisoners comes under attack. In the confusion, one of the raiders frees the investi-

gators and leads them quickly into the mountains. Keepers may allow the investigators to escape with ease, or have them forced to fight their way free of surrounding guards.

Once safely away, the raider leads them to a hidden cave, containing food, clothing, weapons, and a box of 100 sester-tii. He then hands them a wax tablet, saying “Lady Claudia of House Fadius hopes that you remember, and repay, this act.” The wax tablet contains a quote attributed to the famous Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus: “He that fights and runs away, May turn and fight another day. But he that is in battle slain, Will never rise to fight again”.

THE ESCAPE OF MORDANTICUS

The bodyguards communicate with Mordanticus by tapping on the wall of the Tullianum. They drive a horde of Charnel Things through the *Cloaca Maxima*, and break into the upper room of the *Carcer* from the sewer. They then use the Charnel Things to claw open the grating, overwhelm the guards, and free their master. They escape down the sewer by boat, and into the Tiber, unless stopped by the investigators. If the investigators are present during the assault, possibly standing guard over Mordanticus before his execution, they can prevent his escape by:

- ☛ **Killing all surviving bodyguards:** Without their direction, the Charnel Things will retreat back into the darkness and relative safety of the sewers.
- ☛ **Killing one Charnel Thing for each investigator present:** With the ranks of the assault force thinned, the guards manage to restore order. Squads of reinforcements arrive and retake the cell block. The bodyguards are killed or captured in the melee.
- ☛ **Killing Mordanticus (in a lasting way) before he can be rescued:** With their target eliminated, the bodyguards no longer have a reason to attack. They attempt to fall back, but the unexpected setback throws off their plans. Reinforcements arrive before they can escape, and the bodyguards are killed or captured. The remaining Charnel Things escape into the sewers.

THE FATE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

Very successful investigators may manage to rescue Sedonius from his captivity and return him alive to Rome. However, his resurrection comes with a dreadful side effect—the need to ingest blood. Unless Sedonius feeds upon blood within 1D20 hours, his body deteriorates and dies. Also, he must ingest a human body’s worth of blood within three months or be driven insane, becoming a vampiric cannibal. While



DE HORRORE COSMICO

Mordanticus and his bodyguards exclusively ingested human blood, this is not a requirement, and the fresh blood of any animal will do. If the investigators assist Sedonius in managing this situation, his physical condition eventually returns to normal.

CONCLUSION

If either Turpilianus or Sedonius survives as the paterfamilias of House Orestius, and Mordanticus and his bodyguards are destroyed, the investigators are given a generous reward for their heroic efforts. They are offered a small villa outside of Cortona (a city in central Italia) or its monetary equivalent (about 12,000 sestertii).

SANITY REWARDS

Returning Sedonius, Mummio, and the Charnel Things to dust, or dispatching them . . . +1D6 SAN
Destroying the bodyguards permanently +1D6 SAN
Destroying Mordanticus permanently +1D10 SAN

NPCS

QUINTUS ORESTIUS TURPILIANUS, Age 67, Patrician and Senator

STR 10	CON 13	SIZ 16	INT 17	POW 14
DEX 14	APP 15	EDU 16	SAN 70	HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: Dagger 50%, damage 1D4+db

Languages: Latin 99%, Greek 50%.

Skills: Accounting 50%, Civics 50%, Empire 80%, Insight 80%, Library Use 30%, Natural World 40%, Order Vibius 100%, Persuade 80%, Status 90%

VIBIUS, Age 60, Trusted Household Slave

STR 11	CON 11	SIZ 13	INT 17	POW 10
DEX 11	APP 12	EDU 12	SAN 50	HP 12

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Dagger 50%, damage 1D4

Languages: Latin 95%, Greek 99%.

Skills: Accounting 90%, Bargain 50%, Civics 50%, Empire 40%, Insight 50%, Library Use 60%, Natural World 30%, Obey Orestius Family 100%, Persuade 40%, Status 30%, Stealth 30%, Write Latin 80%, Write Greek 90%.

PORCIUS THE LEPER

STR 09	CON 03	SIZ 11	INT 10	POW 09
DEX 11	APP 03	EDU 03	SAN 40	HP 7

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Dagger 50%, damage 1D4

Languages: Latin 99%, Greek 50%.

Skills: Gibber 50%, Bargain 50%, Hide 50%, Jump 50%, Natural World 30%, Occult 10%, Persuade 80%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 0%.

Indefinite Insanity: Delusional Psychosis (Believes That He Is Dead)

APPIUS ORESTIUS MORDANTICUS Age 227, Revivified Patrician Ancestor

STR 16	CON 14	SIZ 16	INT 17	POW 20
DEX 16	APP 15	EDU 25	SAN 0	HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4.

Weapons: Dagger 50%, damage 1D4

Parry (Table/Chair), 60%.

Languages: Latin 99%, Greek 75%.

Skills: Accounting 50%, Civics 50%, Cthulhu Mythos 30%, Empire 20%, Insight 80%, Library Use 30%, Natural World 40%, Persuade 80%, Potions 80%, Republic 80%, Repair/Devise 50%, Status 90%, Write Latin 80%, Write Greek 80%.

Spells: Call Descendant, Dragon's Head Ascending and Descending, Resurrection, Summon/Bind Fire Vampire, Call Yog-Sothoth.

ERASMUS, Age 31, Slave

STR 10	CON 09	SIZ 13	INT 17	POW 11
DEX 11	APP 12	EDU 12	SAN 10	HP 11

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1D3

Languages: Latin 95%, Greek 99%.

Skills: Accounting 90%, Bargain 50%, Civics 50%, Empire 40%, Insight 50%, Library Use 60%, Natural World 30%, Persuade 40%, Status 30%, Stealth 30%, Write Latin 80%, Write Greek 90%.

MUMMIO, Age 31, Reanimated Slave

STR 10	CON 09	SIZ 10	INT 15	POW 10
DEX 12	APP 05	EDU 15	SAN 2	HP 10

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1D3

Bite: 30%, damage 1D6 plus automatic worry (only once he is insane)

Languages: Latin 95%, Greek 99%.

Skills: Insight 50%, Natural World 30%, Republic 40%, Write Latin 80%, Write Greek 90%.

LUCIUS OPIMIUS, Age 270, Reanimated Republican Consul, Charnel Leaping Thing

STR 16	CON 15	SIZ 15	INT 05	POW 0
DEX 16	APP 03	EDU 0	SAN 0	HP 15

Move: 9 leaping

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: Claws 30%, damage 1D6+db

Bite 30%, plus automatic worry (1D4 per round)

Armor: none

Skills: Climb 80%, Eat 90%, Jump 75%, Listen 70%.

Sanity Loss: 0/1D6 to see the Thing that was Lucius.

MANIUS, Age 42, Country Villa Steward

STR 11	CON 11	SIZ 14	INT 13	POW 10
DEX 11	APP 08	EDU 12	SAN 50	HP 13

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Dagger 50%, damage 1D4

Languages: Latin 95%, Greek 99%.

Skills: Accounting 70%, Bargain 50%, Civics 30%, Empire 20%, Insight 50%, Natural World 50%, Obey Orestius Family 100%, Persuade 40%, Status 20%, Write Latin 50%.

PAVO, Age 37, Slave Overseer

STR 16	CON 16	SIZ 16	INT 10	POW 14
DEX 14	APP 10	EDU 03	SAN 65	HP 16

Damage Bonus: +1D4.



THE CASE OF TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS

Weapons: Club 60%, damage 1D6+db

Grapple 50%. If the Grapple succeeds Pavo throws his opponent to the ground in the next round and uses his whip or club to subdue him.

Whip 60%, damage 1 (+1D4 only if Pavo is angry or attacked)

Languages: Latin 60%.

Skills: Bargain 50%, Listen 50%, Ride 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 30%, Throw 60%, Track 50%.

GUARDS, Slaves of the Orestius Estate

These guards are loyal to Pavo, but if they find themselves being badly beaten they will drop their clubs and run.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
STR	13	11	12	13	14	15
CON	14	15	16	13	15	12
SIZ	15	14	13	12	11	13
INT	10	11	12	13	11	10
POW	11	10	09	08	11	10
DEX	11	14	10	13	11	12
HP	15	15	15	13	13	13

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Armor: 1-point leather

Weapons: Club 50%, damage 1D6+db

Languages: Latin 60%.

Skills: Listen 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 10%, Throw 60%, Track 45%.

GUARD DOGS of the Orestius Estate

All six dogs are chained to the barn during the day. Three remain there on guard at night, and the other three join the patrols. They are released once the handler has their quarry in sight. They hate Mordanticus, Sedonius, Mummio, and the bodyguards, and attack them on sight.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
STR	10	09	09	09	10	09
CON	08	09	10	10	08	09
SIZ	08	08	08	08	08	08
INT	02	03	04	05	01	02
POW	10	10	10	10	10	10
DEX	11	14	10	13	11	12
HP	8	9	9	9	8	9

Damage Bonus: none.

Move 12

Weapons: Bite 45%, damage 1D6+db

Knock down: Successful on a STR roll with a bite the next round. If the dog has just been unchained or unleashed, momentum adds +2 to its Strength.

Armor: 1-point hide

Skills: Dodge 40%, Listen 40%, Track 80%.

GERMANICUS, Age 229, Reanimated Gladiator

STR 20	CON 19	SIZ 19	INT 09	POW 12
DEX 15	APP 10	EDU 0	SAN 0	HP 19

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Armor: 3-point Thracian

Weapons: Cestus 70%, damage 1D6+db

Bite 95%, damage 1D3+db

Grapple 75%. When Germanicus grapples an opponent he bites them on the next round, then throws them to the ground.

Head Butt, 60%, damage 1D4+1D6

Languages: Germanic 50%, Latin 30%.

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Dodge 80%, Empire 0%, Jump 50%, Listen 50%, Intimidate 100%, Natural World 70%, Navigate

50%, Occult 30%, Pilot Boat 50%, Repair/Devise 30%, Republic 30%, Ride 70%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 50%, Tactics 50%, Throw 50%, Track 50%.

TAURUS, Age 222, Reanimated Gladiator

STR 18	CON 18	SIZ 18	INT 09	POW 12
DEX 13	APP 08	EDU 0	SAN 0	HP 18

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Armor: 3-point Thracian

Weapons: Fist/Punch 60%, damage 1D3+db

Grapple 70%. Used after a successful disarming of his opponent to knock them down and capture them for sacrifice.

Knife (Large) 70%, damage 1D6+db

Sword (Gladius) 75%, damage 1D6+1+db (2 attacks per round, 1 in each hand)

Taurus first attempts to disarm his opponent. A successful hit with both swords means his opponent must use a shield or Dodge a blow, or his weapon is twisted from his hold.

Languages: Latin 50%.

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Dodge 80%, Empire 0%, Jump 50%, Intimidate 100%, Occult 30%, Repair/Devise 30%, Republic 30%, Ride 70%, Spot Hidden 50%, Status 30%, Throw 50%, Track 50%.

CERBERUS, Age 219, Reanimated Gladiator

STR 18	CON 17	SIZ 17	INT 08	POW 10
DEX 12	APP 06	EDU 0	SAN 0	HP 17

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Armor: 3-point Thracian

Weapons: Bite 95% (only when netted), damage 1D3+db

Fist/Punch 60%, damage 1D3+db

Trident 75%, damage 1D6+db

Net 75%. A successful cast entangles his opponent's weapon or shield. His opponent must Dodge to avoid it, otherwise shield or weapon is entangled and useless. Cerberus follows up by netting the opponent, biting them, then finishing them off with the trident.

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Dodge 60%, Empire 0%, Jump 40%, Intimidate 100%, Occult 25%, Repair/Devise 30%, Republic 30%, Ride 70%, Spot Hidden 40%, Status 30%, Throw 50%.

TERTIUS ORESTIUS SEDONIUS, Age 27, Son of Turpil-ianus

STR 16	CON 14	SIZ 16	INT 17	POW 20
DEX 16	APP 15	EDU 25	SAN 5	HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4.

Weapons: Dagger 50%, damage 1D4+db

Languages: Latin 99%, Greek 50%.

Skills: Accounting 50%, Civics 50%, Cthulhu Mythos 5%, Empire 60%, Insight 80%, Library Use 30%, Natural World 40%, Persuade 80%, Status 90%, Write Latin 80%, Write Greek 80%.

CHARNEL LEAPING THINGS, Leprous Horde

The Charnel Things resemble naked men, but are wrong in ways that cannot be countenanced by anything sane or human. Their limbs are too long, their faces too slack, their bodies elongated and distorted.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
STR	16	17	18	15	15	13
CON	10	11	12	13	14	15
SIZ	13	14	12	11	10	15
INT	02	03	04	05	01	02



DE HORRORE COSMICO

POW 0 0 0 0 0 0
DEX 13 14 15 16 18 17
HP 12 13 12 12 12 15

Move 9 leaping

Av. Damage Bonus: +1D4.

Weapons: Claws 30%, damage 1D6+db

Bite 30%, 1D6 + automatic worry (1D4 per round)

Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 80%, Eat 90%, Jump 75%, Listen 70%.

Sanity Loss: 1/1D6 to see a Charnel Thing.

BASILISK, King of Serpents

STR 10 CON 13 SIZ 16 INT 10 POW 10
DEX 11 Move 4 HP 12

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Gaze 45%, success at POW vs. POW roll on the Resistance Table kills the victim outright

Venomous Bite 38%, damage 1D4 + POT 24 poison

Armor: 2 points of scaly skin.

Sanity Loss: 0 /1 Sanity loss to see a basilisk.

HARPY, Evil Spirit of the Wind

STR 10 CON 13 SIZ 13 INT 10 POW 10
DEX 11 Move 6 / 11 flying HP 13

Damage Bonus: none.

Weapons: Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1D3

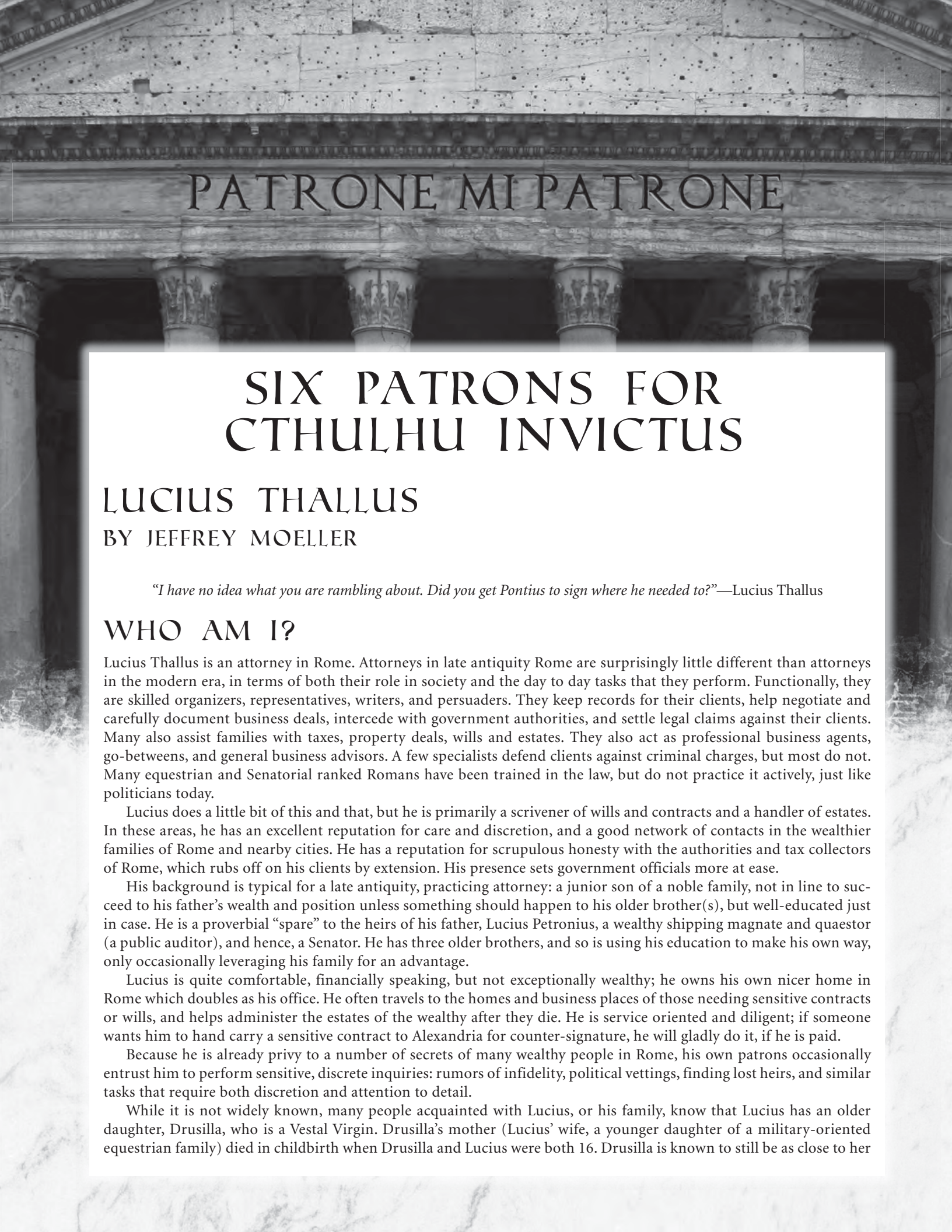
Claws 50%, damage 1D6

Wing Buffet 75%, damage 1D6

Armor: 2 points of skin and feathers.

Sanity Loss: 1 / 1D6 Sanity loss to see a harpy.





PATRONE MI PATRONE

SIX PATRONS FOR CTHULHU INVICTUS

LUCIUS THALLUS

BY JEFFREY MOELLER

"I have no idea what you are rambling about. Did you get Pontius to sign where he needed to?"—Lucius Thallus

WHO AM I?

Lucius Thallus is an attorney in Rome. Attorneys in late antiquity Rome are surprisingly little different than attorneys in the modern era, in terms of both their role in society and the day to day tasks that they perform. Functionally, they are skilled organizers, representatives, writers, and persuaders. They keep records for their clients, help negotiate and carefully document business deals, intercede with government authorities, and settle legal claims against their clients. Many also assist families with taxes, property deals, wills and estates. They also act as professional business agents, go-betweens, and general business advisors. A few specialists defend clients against criminal charges, but most do not. Many equestrian and Senatorial ranked Romans have been trained in the law, but do not practice it actively, just like politicians today.

Lucius does a little bit of this and that, but he is primarily a scrivener of wills and contracts and a handler of estates. In these areas, he has an excellent reputation for care and discretion, and a good network of contacts in the wealthier families of Rome and nearby cities. He has a reputation for scrupulous honesty with the authorities and tax collectors of Rome, which rubs off on his clients by extension. His presence sets government officials more at ease.

His background is typical for a late antiquity, practicing attorney: a junior son of a noble family, not in line to succeed to his father's wealth and position unless something should happen to his older brother(s), but well-educated just in case. He is a proverbial "spare" to the heirs of his father, Lucius Petronius, a wealthy shipping magnate and quaestor (a public auditor), and hence, a Senator. He has three older brothers, and so is using his education to make his own way, only occasionally leveraging his family for an advantage.

Lucius is quite comfortable, financially speaking, but not exceptionally wealthy; he owns his own nicer home in Rome which doubles as his office. He often travels to the homes and business places of those needing sensitive contracts or wills, and helps administer the estates of the wealthy after they die. He is service oriented and diligent; if someone wants him to hand carry a sensitive contract to Alexandria for counter-signature, he will gladly do it, if he is paid.

Because he is already privy to a number of secrets of many wealthy people in Rome, his own patrons occasionally entrust him to perform sensitive, discrete inquiries: rumors of infidelity, political vettings, finding lost heirs, and similar tasks that require both discretion and attention to detail.

While it is not widely known, many people acquainted with Lucius, or his family, know that Lucius has an older daughter, Drusilla, who is a Vestal Virgin. Drusilla's mother (Lucius' wife, a younger daughter of a military-oriented equestrian family) died in childbirth when Drusilla and Lucius were both 16. Drusilla is known to still be as close to her

father as her duties will allow. Since the Temple of Vesta is the official depository for Roman wills, his good relations with the Temple help his reputation and provide referrals for his career.

GOALS, PLANS, AND SECRETS

Lucius does have an overdeveloped sense of honor and a well-developed sense of duty, and holds grudges against people who impugn his integrity. His goals were to lead an honorable life, make a good living, and enjoy himself. He had few secrets until his daughter became a full initiate into the mysteries of Vesta ten years ago. Since then, he has some new goals and a significant secret.

Naturally enough, when wealthy men and women died, people asked the Virgins for a referral to a lawyer to help them with the administration and distribution of their estates. And naturally enough, Lucius would be a name readily at hand: competent, discrete, and a friend of the Temple. So it was not all that surprising when Drusilla asked him to meet her at the doorway of the Temple to become acquainted with a new client, who had recently been left a "significant inheritance." However, he was to come alone; that part was a bit unusual.

Lucius was surprised by the third person who joined him and his daughter in the dead of night: the Christian Bishop of Rome. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) this position was held by St. Anicetus (until 168 A.D.), St. Soter (until 174 A.D.), and St. Eleuterus. It is interesting to note, in passing, that there is no historically recorded basis for the occasional assumption of martyrdom of these three early Church fathers.

Whichever date you set your game in during the Antonine period, the third person was whichever Pope had just been elevated. He was told to come to the Temple of Vesta to receive a will left by the prior Pope (at a pagan temple? Most unusual). At that point, Drusilla revealed that she had been left a legacy as well by a recently departed Vestal Virgin, and that many men and women have played their roles since the days of Arax, court sorcerer to the mad Emperor Caligula.

Drusilla revealed to the two others that there were things from long ago, mostly forgotten but known to a few, that lurked at the edges of civilization, and that would destroy it if they could. These included things from nightmares given life, ancient gods of evil that still lived, and madmen that used working sorcery for their own ends. Back to the days of the scholarly Emperor Claudius, who found Arax's diary and grimoire after Arax's strange disappearance, one man had watched society for their signs, and

quietly maneuvered to check them. One Vestal Virgin had always been entrusted with sharing this knowledge, so that she could arrange to pass it on; the Virgins' sacred flame played a greater role in safeguarding man than most knew. And since the days of Claudius, they had risked including a trusted third, one who could arrange inquiries and move resources around without drawing attention to the Temple, the throne, or the involvement of the mistrusted Christian community. At Claudius' death, he had entrusted the chief role to the Bishop of Rome, and it had passed from Pope to Pope ever since.

Lucius Thallus would be paid for his services, of course, but he needed to understand what he was dealing with, and they needed to be sure that he could fully grasp the importance of his role. Accordingly, he was permitted to study the Second Scroll of Arax, and was shown a certain prisoner, kept eternally in a vault beneath the Temple of Vesta without need for food or water. The sight of the prisoner left him unable to sleep for a week.

The cabal's association with one another is a carefully guarded secret. Lucius never reaches out to the Christian

THE FIRST AND SECOND SCROLLS OF ARAX

The First Scroll of Arax is nothing less than a copy of the *Book of Eibon*, translated into Latin by Arax, court sorcerer to Caligula who disappeared without a trace on the day of Caligula's assassination. This extremely dangerous tome predates the Faber translation, and is both more and less inclusive. *SAN loss is 1D4/2D4; +10% to Cthulhu Mythos and a further +10% to Dream Lore; 36 weeks to study and comprehend.* Spells: Call/Dismiss The Bringer of Winter (Rlim Slaiorth), Bring Forth the Taker of Sacrifices (Contact Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua), Implore the Black Toad for Favor (Contact Tsathoggua), Make Way to Cyrkanosh (Create Gate to Saturn), Create Mist of Releh, Deflect Harm, Eibon's Wheel of Mist, Enchant Brazier, Enchant Knife, Levitate, Shriveling, Voorish Sign, Wither Limb.

The Second Scroll of Arax is a running compendium of notes, reports, rumors, and research that have been conducted since the days of Arax by those who have held it. Among the matters discussed are: the true way in which Caligula died (assassinated by a horde of angry cats); a warning to never eat a cat; discussions of the differences between types of dreams and how to tell which are real; the details of battles against certain ancient demons around the Empire; investigations into certain stepped pyramids around the Danube; and conflicts with cults worshipping the minor god Summanus, Tyrian worshippers of Melqart, Lord of the City, and heretical followers of a misinterpretation of the Magna Mater who believed in literal rebirth through self-sacrifice. *SAN loss is 1d4/2d4; +5% to Cthulhu Mythos and a further +10% to Dream Lore; 12 weeks to study and comprehend.* Spells: Create Sign of Ancient Hyperborea (Elder Sign), Eibon's Wheel of Mist, Enchant Knife.

The first scroll is in the possession of the current Pope, while Drusilla has custody of the second. Lucius has never seen the First Scroll of Arax, but knows that one of his co-conspirators has it, as they have, on occasion, given out copies of some of its wisdom to others, or circuitously left information for his various hirelings.



community, nor does he intercede on their behalf. He communicates only with Drusilla, who only receives incoming, coded communications through several cutouts from the Pope. If a matter requiring attention comes to either of their notice, Drusilla gives a very vague reference or introduction to Lucius, and does not expect anything more of him than to carefully move some resources in that direction. They do not act as the “cavalry”, although Christians often seem disposed, for some reason, to quietly aid those on missions from Lucius. More direct or focused action would risk their security and ongoing good works.

Lucius never openly betrays that he knows anything of the hidden world, not even to save the lives of operatives, but he may slyly arrange for operatives to find something they need in terms of protective magic or ancient lore if he learns that they are in trouble. If he does, it will be through numerous cutouts, emanating from Drusilla or the Christians.

LOCATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

Lucius is now in his early forties, and has never remarried. He has an adopted son of Germanic origin, Lothar (20), whom he freed from slavery while traveling in Augusta Treverorum; and an adopted daughter, Berta (18), Lothar’s cousin by blood (not adoption). He has educated both of them (in conventional subjects) and they assist him with his scrivening and business. He also has a concubine, a freedwoman of British origin, Andraste (25), and a young daughter with her, Lucia (5). Rumors that Andraste is some sort of Druidic wise woman are unsubstantiated.

His house is a nice one, though not ostentatious, located on the second floor of a two-story building. It has plumbing, and has a small, walled courtyard/garden at the main entrance at the back. He owns the entire building, including a first floor is a taberna/restaurant catering to better off Romans, commonly known as “Thallus’ Place”, and a couple of other shops and rooms to let. He will meet clients either at the taberna (in a closed off room) or upstairs in his office.

As a lawyer with a wealthy clientele, however, Lucius spends a lot of time at the Forum and at various baths schmoozing, and giving (in his taberna or upstairs for special clients) or partaking in dinner parties.

Lucius does have a small country villa rustica, under self-sufficient management of about ten freedmen and women, on the south end of the island of Malta, with an attendant olive grove, vineyard, and winery. He does not talk about it publicly, and never invites clients there. He rarely goes there himself, but he has been known to use it as a safe house for operatives who have brought heat down upon themselves. This part of Malta has layers upon layers of past urban settlements dating back into the early Bronze Age, many of which are mysterious to this day. Ruins and buried chambers await exploration. Drusilla suggested (strongly) that he buy it, and (strangely, given the things that his operatives have stuck their noses into), no one has ever bothered anyone hiding there.

CLIENTS AND TASKS

Lucius acts as an intermediary for others, and needs “finders” on a regular basis. All of his assignments are made to sound as mundane as possible. Sometimes they are: find this heir, deliver this legacy safely, or find out what happened to this trading expedition that a client had backed financially. Occasionally, he needs bodyguards when he travels on mundane business.

If he gets word from Drusilla, through her contacts, of something weird going on somewhere, he waits to move until he can concoct a good, mundane reason to move investigators there, arranges to drop a hint once they arrive, and lets nature take its course. Sometimes, if things are urgent, he concocts a package that has to be delivered to a Temple of Vesta or a Christian dignitary who lives very nearby, and has them drop a hint during delivery. He tries to maintain a wide network of clients, both in the sense of those he works for and those who work for him, and not use the same people for the weird stuff too often.

Lucius always denies having any idea about any supernatural elements that investigators might encounter when working for him, cutting off contact if they do not play along with his plausible deniability.

LUCIUS THALLUS, Age 42

STR 12	CON 13	SIZ 14	INT 16	POW 16
DEX 12	APP 13	EDU 12	SAN 74	HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Bargain 60%, Civics 80%, Cthulhu Mythos 05%, Dodge 50%, Empire 50%, Insight 50%, Library Use 20%, Listen 50%, Natural World 60%, Occult 40%, Own Kingdom (Rome) 80%, Own Language (Latin) 90%, Other Language (Greek) 50%, Other Language (Germanic) 40%, Other Language (Briton Celtic) 40%, Other Kingdom (Malta) 20%, Other Kingdom (Augusta Treverorum) 20%, Other Kingdom (Britannia) 20%, Persuade 60%, Sneak 40%, Spot Hidden 40%, Status 60%, Swim 25%, Write Language (Greek) 50%, Write Language (Latin) 90%.

Weapons: Pugio 55%, damage 1D6 +db (Enchanted)

Spells: Create Sign of Ancient Hyperborea (Elder Sign), Eibon’s Wheel of Mist, Enchant Knife.



GENERAL MARCUS CORNELIUS NASICA

BY OSCAR RIOS

"Did I ever tell you about how I earned the Ancient and Unadorned Spear? Well, we had just crossed the Danube on our way to take Sarmizegethusa, the capital of Dacia. I was with the 2nd Traiana back then, just a young Centurion with something to prove. So, it was just before dawn..."

— General Marcus Cornelius Nasica

WHO AM I?

General Marcus Cornelius Nasica is an older man of seventy-three winters. For a man his age, he is fit, spry, and keen. He keeps his hair short and is clean shaven, while dressing modestly for one of his rank. Cornelius Nasica is a proud man, an old warrior who rose through the ranks, winning many military awards and citations, during his forty-three year career.

He wields vast wealth and political influence, especially within the legions. His household is filled with retired veterans, many of whom served under him at one time or another. His wife, Alexina, died seven years ago. His children, four daughters, are all married to senior military officers, and six of his grandsons are actively serving in military posts today. The eldest, Cornelius Eonus, is currently a Legate serving with the 14th Gemina Martia Victrix legion stationed in Germania. Legate Cornilius Eonus is currently named as the general's heir.

General Cornelius, as most call him, has been retired for ten years now, a fact he would change if he could. He often says he would re-enlist as a Legate if he could and most soldiers would gladly serve under "the old man", a term they use with affection. He enjoys surrounding himself with military men (both actively serving and retired), trading old war stories, and remembering the glories of his past.

GOALS, PLANS, AND SECRETS

Cornelius Nasica carved out his destiny in the armor of a Roman soldier. While of equestrian rank as a young man, his house had an old name, but little in the way of wealth or influence. At the age of twenty, he joined the newly forming 2nd Traiana Legion, raised by Trajan while preparing for an invasion of Dacia. Commissioned as a Centurion, he distinguished himself early on as a brave, bold, competent soldier, a good leader with a keen head for tactics. He was a soldier's commander, a man who led by example and won the respect of his men. He not only served beside them, but did everything possible to ensure the quality of their training and equipment, their safety while on campaign, and a fair share

of any plunder the legions received. Marcus Cornelius Nasica is much beloved by his men, even those who served with him briefly, some almost three decades ago. The old man is a holder of the Spear, the Torque and Amulae, three Gold Crowns, the Crown of Valor, and the Civic Crown. A young Cornelius Nasica is actually depicted on Trajan's triumphal column being presented with the Spear.

These awards and his stunning military service gained him many powerful friends and allies, who rewarded him handsomely for his service, loyalty, and counsel. Promotions and the occasional military crises had him transferred from one legion to another often, allowing him to amass a network of connections across the empire. In his long career, Marcus Cornelius Nasica fought in the 2nd Dacian War, served with Trajan in Arabia, fought against the Partians, was stationed in Britannia shortly after the mysterious incident involving the vanished 9th Legion, and commanded the 11th Claudia Legion during the 2nd Jewish War. He was forced to retire after being injured by enemy slingers in the Caucasus while on campaign against the Alans in 135 A.D., at the age of sixty three.

In between the battles, Cornelius Nasica found a little time for a life outside of the military. He married well, to the daughter of one of his commanders, but actually spent very little time at their home. Luckily Alexiana had a head for business and investments, transforming his occasional gifts and rewards into a formidable financial base. She also bore him many children, conceived during his occasional leaves and visits, although only four daughters survived to adulthood.

When Cornelius Nasica finally came home for good, he found his children had married and left to live with their husbands. For the first time in their lives, Cornelius Nasica and his wife had time to themselves. They traveled some, entertained friends, and formed a deep bond in the twilight of their lives. Tragically Alexiana passed away just three years after his retirement. Nasica tried to cope with the loss by surrounding himself with military types, comforted by the camaraderie and familiarity of such men.

Today, Cornelius Nasica tries to stay busy. He writes many letters to the men who served under him, many of whom are now retired and living on land granted to them in return for their military service. Such retirement land grants are often located in the empire's hot spots, where it is thought that large numbers of retired soldiers living in the region will have a stabilizing effect. What this means is that Nasica has close friends living in some of the most dangerous places in the empire, such as the Parthian border, Germania, and northern Britain. The Old Man receives requests for assistance from them every so often, which he makes every effort to send.

What most people do not know is that, ten years ago, while fighting the barbarian Alans, the General suffered a stroke. Possibly triggered by the sling stone strike, the stroke nearly killed him, and left him very weak on one side, but did not affect his mental faculties. He received the best care possible and was rushed home. Over the next year, his wife cared for him, helping him rebuild his strength and recover. While today some weakness and numbness remains, very



little trace of his handicap is visible. It was during this year of rehabilitation that Nasica truly fell in love with his wife, making her loss just two years later all the more tragic.

While he does have several daughters, none of them have much to do with him. This is by design. The girls grew up without their father home, watching their mother wait and worry for months at a time. They grew to resent their father, who they feel loved his soldiers more than them or their mother. This resentment grew deeper when their father arranged marriages for them to rising military officers, dooming them to similar lonely lives as their mother had lived. They watched their sons groomed for military life and pressured into joining the legions. Two of his four daughters have already lost sons in battle, and one has been made a widow. There is no malice in Cornelius Nasica's actions, and he feels he has done what is best for them and their children.

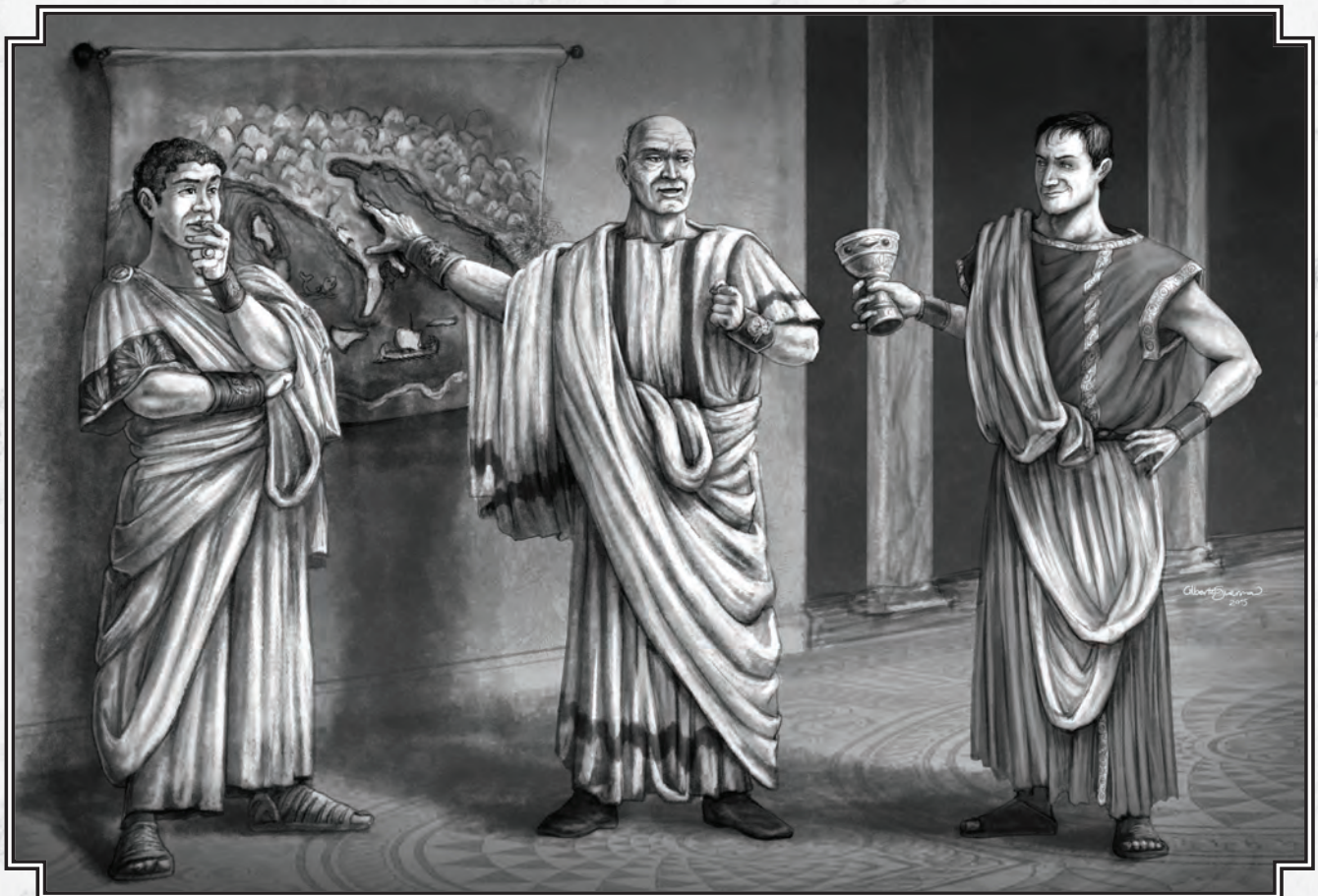
His grandson, Publius Cornelius Eonus, doesn't share the feelings of his widowed mother and spiteful aunts. He is cut from the same cloth as his prestigious grandfather and is genuinely gratefully for his help and guidance. Eonus visits his grandfather as often as he can, and is also well liked by his men. Many have taken to calling him, "The Old Man's Young Man", meant as a high compliment, which both Nasica and Eonus find very amusing.

While Nasica has many friends, he is still gripped with loneliness, due to the loss of his wife and the estrangement of his daughters. His growing fondness for Eonus seems to be slowly filling this void. However, an unseen threat shadows the young Legate, the same which claimed the life of his grandmother, Alexiana.

Cornelius Nasica does not know that his wife was, in fact, murdered. He awoke beside her cold body one morning, and their physician said she had passed of natural causes, peacefully in her sleep. In truth, she was the victim of a deliberate, sorcerous attack.

After their defeat, many Alans were taken as slaves by the victorious Romans. One was a woman named Kohinoor, the wife of the slinger who nearly killed the general in battle. Kohinoor was a magi, a witch in the service to Kar'Tesh the Dark (the Alani name for Pazzuzu, an avatar of the Outer God Nyarlathotep). She ensorcelled his sling stones. After her husband nearly killed General Cornelius Nasica, he was captured and brutally tortured to death by the general's enraged men. Kohinoor was captured trying to rescue him, beaten, and sold to slave traders.

Three years later, she found herself in Rome, sold to a fullery to wash the clothes of Romans by tramping about in vats of urine. She learned that the general her husband had nearly killed, whose men captured her and tortured her husband to death, lived in Rome. Calling upon her dark magic, she beseeched Kar'Tesh for revenge, calling upon the god to take that which Nasica loved most dearly. The next morning Alexiana was dead. Recently, Kohinoor has learned that the general has a grandson he is very fond of. The next time young Eonus visits Rome, she plans to call upon Kar'Tesh to end his life as well.



LOCATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

General Cornelius Nasica lives in Rome, in a well-appointed villa not far from the forum. He does own property in Dacia and Britannia, but he seldom travels there. His household is run much like a military camp, staffed by many retired soldiers, their wives, and their children. They are incredibly fond of and loyal to the old man. His chief secretary and head of his household staff is a veteran named Priscus, whom Nasica refers to as his prefect.

HIS CLIENTS

An investigator who served or currently serves in the legions is likely to become a client of Marcus Cornelius Nasica. Likewise, an investigator who is a widow or child of one of his fallen soldiers might also become a client of The Old Man. Investigators failing a Luck roll when visiting General Nasica to collect their daily donative are drawn into a long, convoluted war story. This traps the investigator there for 1-2 hours. Investigators making a critical success on their Luck roll are invited to dine with the General that evening, where they endure the same war story, but get a fine meal to go with it.

The Old Man may send the investigators to assist any of his retired soldiers who have written to him for aid. He has mentored many officers and commanders in the Roman legions, some of whom write to him for advice or assistance when their soldiers encounter things they cannot defeat, or even comprehend. The investigators may also be sent to assist these military commanders as "Special Envoys of General Marcus Cornelius Nasica". Investigators armed with the general's seal and letters of introduction are typically treated with the utmost respect and consideration by standing soldiers across the empire, although this won't protect them if they are caught committing a crime.

On a personal note, General Cornelius Nasica may simply ask the investigators to deliver letters and possibly gifts to his daughters and grandchildren, who are all living in military posts on the border provinces. While doing so, they are instructed to extend his family the same consideration as they would him, meaning they may be drawn into an investigation by these households as well. Lastly, should anything happen to his children or grandchildren, the Old Man will go to any lengths to both protect and avenge them. If his grandson Eonus should fall victim to a sorcerous attack, Nasica may order his clients to seek out whoever is responsible. If he learns that the Alani witch Kohinoor is responsible, and was responsible for the death of his beloved Alexiana, he will order her captured and brought to him. This is to ensure that that her death takes twice as long and is three times as brutal as that suffered by her husband.

GENERAL MARCUS CORNELIUS NASICA, Age 73

STR 07 CON 09 SIZ 15 INT 15 POW 17
DEX 10 APP 12 EDU 20 SAN 65 HP 12

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Accounting 65%, Art (Storytelling) 60%, Civics 80%, Climb 47%, Craft (Carpentry) 45%, Cthulhu Mythos 05%, Dodge 45%, Empire 80%, First Aid 65%, Insight 70%, Listen 40%, Medicine 30%, Natural World 50%, Navigate 70%, Other Language (Aramaic) 50%, Other Language (Brythonic) 45%, Other Language (Greek) 75%, Other Language (Parthian) 60%, Other Kingdom (Parthia) 55%, Own Kingdom (Rome) 85%, Own Language (Latin) 95%, Persuade 50%, Repair/Devise 40%, Shield Parry 60%, Spot Hidden 60%, Status 80%, Tactics 75%, Write Language (Latin) 70%.

Weapons: Pugio 55%, damage 1D4+db
Spatha 70%, damage 1D8+db
Gladius 80%, damage 1D6+1+db
Pilum 45%, damage 1D8+db



DECIMUS VATINIUS CALVUS

BY STUART BOON

"What matters but Rome and Empire? My own interests?

I have none, Senator Clavius. I live comfortably, I have a beautiful wife, and more wealth than most men deserve. What should I want that I do not possess? No, I am content to serve Rome. While Rome sleeps this night, I leave for Britannia. Not for personal interest, Senator, but for Empire, because Rome wills it."

—Decimus Vatinius Calvus

WHO AM I?

Decimus Vatinius Calvus is a diplomat based in Rome but operating throughout the Roman Empire. Born into a rich mercantile family in Capua, young Vatinus Calvus was the only surviving child of eight children born to Titus Ligus and Merulia Calvia. His father was the eldest of four brothers and de facto head of the Calvus trading company; his mother was the youngest of five and of noble birth, but married for love (a match that was deemed a poor one by her parents, but nonetheless successful). His parents heaped love and attention on young Vatinus Calvus, and these early years would be the happiest of his life. Acknowledged early on for his quick wit and his social prowess, Vatinus Calvus proved exceptional for an only child, able to easily and effectively insinuate him-



self into any social group, whether his presence was welcome or not.

This skill did not go unnoticed by his father or his mother, but while Ligus saw only potential in Vatinus Calvus' ability to work and manipulate a crowd, his mother saw something more menacing, something desperate and unseemly. Merulia did her best to change this worrisome behavior, keeping Vatinus Calvus close to her and showering him with kindness. It was a kindness Vatinus Calvus would never repay.

Before his 12th birthday, the family's fortunes changed for the better when the company was able to capitalize on lucrative trade routes in Gallia and Hispania. While his uncles, aunts, and cousins spread out to secure markets among the provinces, Vatinus Calvus and his parents relocated to new headquarters in Rome.

Coming into manhood in Rome, Vatinus Calvus was exposed to all that Rome had to offer: luxuries and promises, depravities and horrors. Even as a young man, Vatinus Calvus was drawn to the opportunities in both the good and the bad, differentiating little between the two if it served his ends. It was a heady time for him, spoilt only by a growing animosity between him and his father. Ligus was keen for Vatinus Calvus to start taking a role in the family business, but his son cared little for commerce or familial interests, and saw more expedient ways to achieve wealth and power. Regardless, Vatinus Calvus played along for a number of years, at the behest of his mother.

Behind closed doors, however, Vatinus Calvus was taking part in every form of debauchery that he could find. He thought little of his own reputation and even less of his family's. By seventeen, he had gambling debts that could not be ignored, he had fallen out with a number of high profile groups (on both sides of the law), and he had fathered two illegitimate children, both to slaves who bore more than just a passing resemblance to his mother. Despite her own disgust, Merulia pleaded for leniency on Vatinus Calvus' behalf, but his father would have none of it.

Cut off from the family coffers, Vatinus Calvus was sent to live with his uncle Caeso in Lugdunum (Lyon), arriving with a communiqué from his father. Caeso was quick to put Vatinus Calvus to work. Having developed—indeed, cultivated some might say—a reputation for being self-important and troublesome, the young man did not respond as Caeso expected. The petulance, insolence, and narcissism that Caeso had been warned of, did not transpire. Instead, Vatinus Calvus appeared repentant, willing to accept responsibility for his actions, and, above all else, dutiful and hardworking. Over the next two winters, he gave every impression of having learned his lesson.

It was a consummate act by an increasingly capable actor. Vatinus Calvus did everything that his uncle asked of him, while calculating the revenges he would enact upon the old man, upon his father, upon the world. He jumped at every opportunity to serve, bowed his head at every admonishment, laughed at every joke, and flattered his master at every turn. It took surprisingly little time for his performance to have the desired effect. Caeso soon relaxed his guard and Vatinus Calvus, playing to his strengths, quickly gained the

old man's confidence and eventually his trust.

It was a turning point in Vatinus Calvus' life, whereupon he realized the power of duplicity and influence. It was a realization that would go on to shape his adult life. Still having no taste for trade, Vatinus Calvus turned his back on the family business and devised a means of assuring his own fortune and, more importantly for him, creating his own legacy. He gave up the petty revenges he'd dreamt up in his uncle's loft and focused on one driving ambition: to amass wealth and power beyond anything his father might ever aspire to. And, he would do anything to get it.

Over the following twenty years, Vatinus Calvus used his particular talents to serve—and simultaneously influence—a number of important power brokers. Keeping largely to the provinces, he moved up first from scribe to advisor, then from envoy to diplomat. In the shadows, he calculated every move, offered his services to lords, kings, and queens where it benefitted him most, and carefully set up pawns of his own. His reputation in Gallia, Hispania, Germania, and Dacia grew apace and, with it, his power and pride. In the end, Vatinus Calvus would say, he did not come to Rome, but Rome came to him.

GOALS, PLANS, AND SECRETS

Decimus Vatinus Calvus is now a diplomat of considerable renown in Rome and throughout the Empire. His influence is far greater than most know and Vatinus Calvus actively works to ensure this is the case. He is, in many ways, an extraordinarily private man. He has proven himself an eminently capable diplomat, most recently by establishing treaties with numerous lesser kings, chieftains, and tribal nobility in Hispania, Germania, and Britannia. Through his influence and careful negotiation—often to his financial or personal benefit—Rome can pursue her imperial interests in those regions in relative peace. His successes have brought him great acclaim, secured his marriage to a beautiful and powerful woman, and made him rich both in land and in coin. On the face of it, he has everything a Roman man could want.

And absolutely none of it matters. Fame, love, and wealth have left Vatinus Calvus empty. Even having achieved his revenge and watched his father's mercantile business crumble proved meaningless and hollow. Vatinus Calvus is driven by need, and daily consumed by his own insatiable hungers. He is singularly possessed by the need for more, where "more" is defined by anything that feeds his egocentrism, narcissism, and hedonistic proclivities. Vatinus Calvus does not value what is normal, respected, or good by Roman standards; neither does he seek what criminals or evil men seek. He is infatuated with the "other" and this infatuation has now so infiltrated his being that he finds life and society in Rome unbearable. The acceptable debaucheries of Rome that he once savored in his youth have now lost their taste. He needs more.

No one recognizes this better than Vatinus Calvus' wife, the youthful Dacian beauty Corvina. She watched his infatuation with her wither and die within the first few months



of their marriage seven years ago. She is aware of the endless string of mistresses and whores in Rome and throughout the Empire who have fleetingly satisfied his need for new experience, for what Vatinus Calvus himself has coldly labeled "sweeter meats." Corvina is also aware that each experience leaves Vatinus Calvus empty.

In Roman society, Corvina and Vatinus Calvus keep up appearances, but many have witnessed how the Dacian flower wilts in Vatinus Calvus' company. For his part, Vatinus Calvus believes that he loves Corvina. He would also willingly attest to not valuing love above coin or other rewards—at least, not the love of his wife or that of any living woman. For her part, Corvina is known to have called Vatinus Calvus her "hollow man" and remarked on one occasion that there was no room in Vatinus Calvus' heart for anyone but Vatinus Calvus himself. The couple has no children.

Unknown possibly even to himself, Decimus Vatinus Calvus' twisted appetites and deep-rooted hunger for the other, the novel, and the depraved all stem from one dark secret. Unconsciously (or perhaps not depending on the Keeper's wishes), Vatinus Calvus is plagued by a powerful Oedipus complex: he secretly wants what he can never have, namely, to replace his father in his mother's affections. His inability to possess his mother—who passed away quietly six years ago—has unwittingly led to him try, over and over, to seek to replace her, or to satisfy his unresolved need with wealth, power, and influence. All of it, however, is for naught. Vatinus Calvus is quite beyond help and cannot escape this unspoken doom.

Vatinus Calvus is, however, no fool and is very careful to present an acceptable face or mask in all his endeavors. His less than savory activities and connections are kept well hidden. He has made a career of learning what men want and securing it for them, by whatever means necessary. He uses this same skill to ensure that his needs are met away from prying eyes. To all but his most trusted conspirators, Vatinus Calvus is a honourable man, a good husband, and a cunning and highly effective diplomat. And he will do whatever it takes to maintain his good standing.

Spending more and more time away from Rome, Vatinus Calvus currently serves Rome while secretly seeking out new experiences and more exotic delicacies.

LOCATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

The home of Decimus Vatinus and Corvina Calvus is near the House of the Vestal Virgins in the Forum. It is a modest two-story affair that owes more to its location than its size. Corvina lives in the house alone most days of the year, but has frequent guests. Six servants serve the house, each one a slave acquired or gifted from regions beyond Italia. Vatinus Calvus prefers to be away from home—indeed, he increasingly prefers to be outside Rome—and never brings guests or work home with him. Most of his official business is conducted in Imperial offices or in the back rooms of noble houses.

Outside of Rome, Vatinus Calvus took ownership of his uncle's vineyard and estate near Lugdunum upon Caeso's

death more than 15 years ago. The vineyard's operation and management of the estate has, for generations, been entrusted to the Lascar family, whose current patriarch is Merin Lascar. Vatinus Calvus makes at least one trip annually to Lugdunum to deal with property matters and to collect profits from the vineyard. Vatinus Calvus also maintains a comfortable apartment in Corduba, not far from the Guadalquivir River. The apartment boasts five bedrooms and a private garden, and was gifted to him by an unnamed party upon completion of a particularly profitable negotiation some five years ago. Vatinus Calvus rarely visits Corduba and leaves its management to a former mistress of his, Agrippina Maccius.

Vatinus Calvus' only other property is a palatial villa and stables in Aquilesa on the shores of the Mare Hadriaticum in Dalmatia. Another gift, the villa and its substantial lands were a wedding gift to Corvina and Vatinus Calvus from Corvina's Dacian parents upon the announcement of her pending nuptials seven years ago. Vatinus Calvus does not use the property, where Corvina was born 32 years prior, and refuses to visit it, leaving all decisions regarding the villa to Corvina. Corvina visits the property at least once a year, often joined by her parents or sisters, for periods lasting several weeks to several months. Her family, not Vatinus Calvus, pay for the villa's upkeep, staffing, and the stabling of Corvina's six horses.

Beyond his own properties, Vatinus Calvus is welcome in a great many noble houses throughout the Roman Empire and, on occasion, calls on them (at their convenience, of course). Secretively, Vatinus Calvus is also welcome at a number of unseemly establishments that would make most Romans blush, had they any knowledge of such things. Vatinus Calvus is careful to mask his passage when visiting brothels, criminal organizations, or other unsavory institutions. He takes the same care when visiting any of the varied confidants who share one or more of his troublesome and eccentric tastes.

CLIENTS AND TASKS

Primary among Vatinus Calvus' official clients are the Senators and noble patricians of Rome. Having built up a reputation for dealing with troublesome issues in the provinces, Vatinus Calvus is often sent to advise, intercede, or trade for the benefit of Empire, Rome, or one of its more affluent inhabitants. He is also frequently called upon for his celebrated negotiation skills, which regularly takes him out to the further reaches of the Empire. Unofficially, Vatinus Calvus is similarly called upon to deal with sticky situations and unorthodox requests of a personal nature for a particular clientele. He is prized by a select few (who shall remain nameless) for his discretion and his ability to overcome or circumvent social, political, and religious barriers.

Regardless of the task, his payment varies depending on the client and Vatinus Calvus' own current needs. When working for the Empire, everything is done up front and by the book, but when working for individuals, he often foregoes payment in coin for promises of influence when and



where it is needed, or in return for a future favor. Unless the investigators join Vatinus Calvus on one of his many diplomatic missions, it is likely that they will encounter him while he is engaged in some private affair. One of the diplomat's extraordinary skills is his ability to recognize potential and to seize it. Should the investigators gain renown or be recommended to him, there is a good chance that Vatinus Calvus will find some opportunity to use their talents, provided such inclusion benefits him to an even greater degree.

Vatinus Calvus knows little of the Cthulhu Mythos and certainly not enough to name it as such. He is entirely sceptical of the occult, its "mysteries," and its pantheons of colorful deities. It is likely that he would treat any knowledge of the Mythos with similar incredulity. Interestingly, however, his fraught explorations of the strange and otherworldly have taken him closer than he knows to discovering the truth that lurks in the shadows of Rome and haunts the edges of Empire. For example, his twisted desires have led him to unknowingly have carnal relations with a number of cultists (both male and female), a powerful sorceress of Abhoth, and a female Deep One hybrid.

Vatinus Calvus might act as a powerful contact to investigators, particularly with his links outside Rome. This, however, would require that the investigators possess the requisite wealth or influence to offer as payment, or that they can provide some attractive incentive or opportunity. It is unlikely in the extreme that the investigators would know of Vatinus Calvus' secret activities and/or relationships (unless the Keeper chooses to provide them with some means of discovering these) so they must provide reason enough for Vatinus Calvus to adopt their cause. That said, Vatinus Calvus always has an eye open for opportunity and potential, and he may well take a chance on the investigators if he deems them useful in some regard. He will also dissociate himself from them and their activities should anything surface in a way that impacts him negatively.

As a patron, Vatinus Calvus is useful because of his influence in the further flung regions of the Roman Empire. He could be pulled into existing adventures or new campaigns as a useful and powerful contact, perhaps motivating investigators to get involved in events. Or, he might be an antagonist, particularly if the investigators are intruding in territory or relationships that he deems his own.

DECIMUS VATINIUS CALVUS, Diplomat, Age 44

STR 10 CON 09 SIZ 10 INT 17 POW 17
DEX 11 APP 12 EDU 12 SAN 71 HP 10

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Accounting 64%, Art (Sculpture) 22%, Bargain 85%, Civics 55%, Climb 28%, Empire 56%, Fast Talk 22%, Insight 66%, Jump 28%, Latin 80%, Library Use 37%, Listen 34%, Natural World 18%, Other Kingdoms (Caledonia) 09%, Other Kingdoms (Germania) 19%, Other Kingdoms (Hispania) 27%, Other Languages (Brythonic) 11%, Other Languages (Greek) 45%, Other Languages (Germanic) 21%, Own Kingdom 47%, Ride 62%, Persuade 78%, Spot Hidden 42%, Status 60%, Tactics 25%

Weapons: Fist/Punch 48%, damage 1D3 + db
Short Sword 56%, damage 1D6+db

Description: Vatinus Calvus is a clean-shaven, greying man

with sharp blue eyes and high cheekbones. His physique is lean and athletic. His skin is weathered, and he has the overall appearance of a traveller, but a wealthy traveller. The quality of his jewellery and his clothing suggests his status; his posture and his language confirm it. Calvus is normally distant, overly serious, and business-like, but he is also a master of many masks and can be warm and charming, should it suit his purpose. He possesses a deep and smooth voice, as persuasive as it is commanding.



TITUS LABIENUS LUSCINUS

BY JEFFREY MOELLER

"Mother, please quit interrupting! My new friends here are possessed of a singular understanding of the mysteries of Ba'al Haamon, and they need my help. These blasted, never-ending business deals can wait!"

—Titus Labienus Luscinus.

WHO AM I?

Titus Labienus Luscinus never wanted to be the paterfamilias of an extremely wealthy and powerful Roman family, and he is unusually unhappy about his lot in life. His father, Flavius, was a Senator, an alpha male and go-getter who ambitiously pursued wealth and temporal power. Flavius had five sons, of whom Labienus Luscinus was the youngest.

Flavius is now five years dead, and all of Labienus Luscinus' older brothers have been dead even longer, killed in assassinations, during honorable military service campaigns, or by various accidents and diseases. All of his brothers married, but none had any sons, just a plethora of daughters and widows, all living under what is now technically Labienus Luscinus' roof. As a result, a large business empire, and a lot of scheming relatives have fallen into Labienus Luscinus' disinterested lap.

Labienus Luscinus never married, never left his father's home, and never made much of himself, except in one regard. He's a decent enough poet, a flaky daydreamer, with a knack for writing glowing odes and paeans. His parents leveraged this talent to help their family, generating well-received and well-known glorifications of Emperors,



powerful Senators, and (strategically) anyone who might be interested in doing harm to the family.

For his part, all that Labienus Luscinus wanted to do was read and write about fantastic things and far off places. Modern psychologists would probably classify him as having Asperger's Syndrome: socially awkward but quite intelligent, and with a narrow, but hyper-accentuated, set of interests. His private library, even apart from its more arcane holdings (discussed below), is sizable and allows for +40% to any Occult or Natural History roll if consulted.

Labienus Luscinus has an excellent memory, especially for what he has read, but is poor at reading social cues or realizing when someone is trying to trick him. He is easily bored by most things, yet frenetic about his limited areas of interest. His speech is hurried, he uses big words all the time, and his affect is usually flat, except when talking about what he wants to discuss. He is theoretically attracted to women, but is hopeless with them, and they're generally more time away from his poetry and books than he'd like to spend.

He understands, on an intellectual level, that, given the way that Roman society is structured, he can't live his life the way that he really wants to. He must negotiate business deals, pretend to be interested in politics, go to public dinners (always accompanied by his mother), and not anger his mother too much when she brings by yet another dull rich girl for him to try to get to "know." They're pretty, or smart, or both, but how could they share his life? They just don't get it! Why isn't there anyone out there who wants to talk about the conflation of the Akkadian god Erra with the later Babylonian deity Nergal? Or write another poem counting the stars in the southwestern sky that can be seen at nightfall in winter? Or debate the significance of the added symbols in that new Mithraeum's tauroctony down in the Chaldean neighborhood in Rome? That's what his soulmate should want to do!

Labienus Luscinus understands the role that he must play (if he wants to be able to afford new books), but getting him to do it is like herding cats for his mother, Julia. He fights with Julia and his "handlers" every step of the way in private, and consoles himself for the stress of dealing with strangers by buying every occult book, mysterious scroll, or arcane clay tablet that he can get his hands on. He spends vast sums on his acquisitions, even to the point of hiring finders to travel far and wide to acquire something that he has heard tell of.

He is also happy to talk with anyone about strange gods or new religions, and to join new "secret societies" and mystery religions, virtually sight unseen. People interested in such things are quickly (often, too quickly) befriended, to the chagrin of his mother and handlers. If there is a (legal) cult (in the strict sense of the word), mystery religion, esoteric group of occult poseurs, or society of mystics in Rome, he likely belongs to it, may have given money to it, and perhaps even helped start its local chapter. He belongs, to one degree or another, to literally dozens of such things. And although his understanding of such things is more rote than inspired, he actually does know a good bit of

ritual magic and "things man was not meant to know." Too much knowledge has worn on him gradually, making him increasingly irascible.

His family is, notwithstanding Titus' barely given, grudging interest, wealthy to the point of absurdity, one of the wealthiest in Rome. They have vast real estate holdings, both urban and rural, from rural farmland to coastal dyeshell beds to blocks of urban flats and domus under rental. That its political and economic fortunes have not collapsed under Labienus Luscinus' "watch" is largely attributable to Julia, and an infrastructure of his father's freedmen who have stayed with the family. They provide both strategic direction and day-to-day management of the family's business holdings, all the while quietly discussing among themselves not when, but how, to "solve the problem" of Labienus Luscinus.

Recently, though, Labienus Luscinus claims to have "met a girl." At first, this worried Julia very much, as she thought that Labienus Luscinus might be hallucinating. But, some of the servants have seen a woman slipping in and out of his bedchamber at night as well. Julia does not know whether to be thankful, or if this is another weirdo looking to get her hooks into Labienus Luscinus. Either way, Julia really needs to find out who the mystery woman is.

GOALS, PLANS, AND SECRETS

Labienus Luscinus' goals are few and focused. He wants new books, on weird subjects. He wants to know the "truth" about the universe. He wants to write poetry and daydream, and to do the minimum amount necessary that will get his mother to stop bothering him with "the real world." He will pay good money to get new books, or to learn about new sources of "hidden truth." He has learned a distressing amount about the hidden truths of the universe already, but it has not dissuaded him.

If he could find a girl who did not drive him crazy, and have a son, his mother would get off his back and let him get back to more important things, like the mysteries of the Lakonian shrine and his efforts to catalog all of the plague demons of ancient Mesopotamia. So maybe his new friend, who shares his love for the "truth", will finally get him the peace he seeks.

LOCATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

Labienus Luscinus' villa is a vast, sprawling, extensively gardened affair in Rome, situated on the Caelian Hill. Since Titus rarely leaves his rooms without his mother figuratively dragging him, in all likelihood this is where he will have to be met by investigators. His main room is a vast, meticulously organized library, with thousands of scrolls, wax tablets, clay cylinders, and every other sort of writing comprehensible. He never lends out anything, but will allow people to be his guest for days or weeks at a time if he



TITUS LABIENUS LUSCINUS' CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

While Labienus Luscinus' library is a treasure trove for the esoterically inclined, he has a magically-warded cabinet where he keeps the things that have disturbed his sleep, or that he is afraid might be dangerous.

Labienus Luscinus has the following Mythos tomes, in excellent condition unless otherwise noted: a Latin translation of the *Avesta* (see the *Cthulhu Invictus* sourcebook), a Latin translation of the *Sapientia Magorum* (see the *Cthulhu Invictus* sourcebook), and what is believed to be a fragmentary, mostly burned copy of the *Scroll of Thoth-Amon* (see, again, the *Cthulhu Invictus* sourcebook). He is unwisely trying to reconstruct what he can of this last scroll and translate it from Egyptian into Latin.

Also in his cabinet are the following artifacts:

A goat leather bag, dyed purple, covered with incomprehensible sigils, and closed with triple knotted silver wire: This bag is mentioned in one of the remaining fragments of the *Scroll of Thoth-Amon*, which warns against ever opening a bag meeting this description, lest the "rabisu" be released. ("Rabisu" are Sumerian fever demons that lurk in the shadows of thresholds, and are deterred by salt). He did so anyway, finding a variety of other bags inside, each triple-knotted with a peculiar sort of knot, and made of a variety of materials. He stopped when he reached a small, copper jar about the size of shot glass, with a screwed-on lid; the last bag holding the jar was full of salt. What lies within?

A baked clay cylinder, heavily damaged by fire: Although Labienus Luscinus is not much good with Old Akkadian, he was able to determine that this bears an invocation to Erra, a very old Akkadian god of fire, specifically, fire's aspect as a weapon of war. (The name translates roughly as "scorched earth"). It instructs how to bathe the tablet in the fresh blood of a sworn enemy whom you have sacrificed with your own hand, and then cast it into a bonfire, to "bring Erra against the fields of man". He has not tried it out, but should someone do as instructed, it drains up to a total of 100 POW randomly from all within a mile (including all POW from the user). 10d10 Children of Cthugha then appear and indiscriminately burn everything in a mile's radius to ashes, departing after 1 hour. The cylinder, sadly, neglects to explain its own effects if activated.

A pair of smashed, ancient stone tablets: Covered in nonsense script, there seem to be ten sections to them. The prior owner mysteriously died, seemingly dropped from a great height, when he tried to reassemble the pieces. Labienus Luscinus has wisely decided not to repeat the mistake.

A bag of knucklebones, exactly 100 in number, with Phoenician alphabet characters and/or various pictograms carved in and inked on each side: These ancient and powerful objects are divinatory devices (cleromancy). One rolls them as one would dice, and interprets the result with reference to Chaldean astrological charts. There is a 1 in 100 chance that any use of these items attracts the attention of the White Sybil. They add +20% to the chance of a successful Augury. Distressingly, efforts to catalog the symbols on the bones never come up with the same result twice. Realizing this costs 0/1 SAN.

feels a connection to them.

Julia is Labienus Luscinus' mother. Now pushing sixty and in failing health due to cancer, she is extremely worried about what will happen to her family when she dies. At this point, her primary goals in life are to keep Titus as focused as possible, and find a wife for him who can take her place and put up with his nonsense. She has thought about marrying him off to one of his brother's widows, but she does not trust any of them to do what is necessary in terms of producing a male heir.

The White Sibyl is the "woman" who has recently entered Labienus Luscinus' life, coming and going as she pleases at night, with the servants only getting the briefest glimpse of her. Who or what she is should remain inscrutable, if (as is likely) the investigators eventually "encounter" her. Labienus Luscinus is smitten with her; she is wonderful, and finally, he has found a kindred spirit. If asked her name, she says that the questioner would not believe her, but may call her the "White Sibyl." Why is she interested in Labienus Luscinus? Because he is interested in the "truth." She answers no other questions about her intentions toward him.

She seems to be young, maybe 25, but strikes people as a very old soul. She dresses all in white and occasionally sits, alone with a mammoth, incredibly complex and detailed scroll/star chart, on streets where fortunes are told. Few dare to approach her when she is seen in public; those who do take pains to hide their faces. She is not particularly beautiful, but she often somehow turns up in the bedchambers of people desperate to learn the truth about something, mysterious and impossible to resist, only to vanish before morning. Her Latin is flawless, yet she looks to be Greek, or perhaps from Scythia.

No statistics are provided; those are for foes that can be fought, not those who can vanish unless your eyes are upon her. The truth is fleeting.

Whether she is human, or even something more than a contagious meme, a hallucination, or an avatar of the search for truth, is debatable. She forecasts using astrology based on very advanced (and Mythos informed) star charts, as distasteful as that is to the typical Roman (because this was a foreign, Chaldean, practice, and not the way the state religion (*pietas*) did things). She is cryptic, and every word that comes out of her mouth is couched in sly riddles and innuendo. She never takes any malign or hostile action; she just smiles politely, hints at knowledge that she should not have, perhaps performs an augury, perhaps has sex with you if you are sufficiently "learned about the truth," and then vanishes at her first opportunity.

A few other soothsayers in Rome know of her, and she scares the hell out of them. Someone got a quick, sidelong look at her scroll/star chart, once, and swore that it looked like a Sibylline Book. And



DE HORRORE COSMICO

they know that she has secret friends, in high places who owe her favors, all throughout Rome.

If Labienus Luscinus' trust can be gained, he may admit that the White Sibyl first came into his life when he tried to perform a particularly difficult augury, using a set of knucklebones that he acquired at great expense from a retired legionary who had journeyed in Chaldea.

OTHERS

Labienus Luscinus might be used as a way to introduce investigators into any and every sort of weird sect, secret society, or mystery religion, both Mythos tainted as well as not. He is eagerly friendly to any poet, daydreamer, or occult gonzo who is friendly to him, or who at least sucks up to him. He cares so little for money that he often slips some to "friends" who belong to mystery religions...as long as his mother doesn't find out. Among these "friends" are Tanit, a high priestess of the Magna Mater with a cadre of *gallai* (self-castrated eunuchs); Robi, a purported Zoroastrian fire mage; refugees from Syria devoted to Melkarth, Lord of the City; any number of syncretic Mithraists; and even a few Christians. He is also very good friends with a group of night watchmen down at the Circus Maximus; he sometimes actually leaves the house to sit with them at their fire at night and throw scraps to the cats that take refuge there.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE TRUTH

For those seeking a statement of canon, the White Sibyl can be seen as an avatar of Daoloth. She is a peculiar form of mass insanity that results when someone overuses magic in an effort to predict the future or see patterns in the universe. The veils rend, and stay slightly rent, and the disruption is perceived by humans in the vicinity as something magical, inscrutable, but profound, in a shape they can comprehend. In Rome, that means a particular sage, a very self-possessed, yet unorthodox and slightly dangerous oracle. She is an embodied, fundamental concept, the truth, viewed through a human lens. She is neither malignant nor benevolent; the awful truth simply is what it is. The more you love the quest for knowledge, the more you love her.

give out references to his "friends" (mystics, magi, and other esoteric contacts) for good finders, and make introductions.

More typically, however, Labienus Luscinus hires people to acquire things for him. These tasks often involve travel, often involve danger, and he tends to pay very well, but only for success. He will typically advance travel expenses and 10% of whatever generous price he has in mind, and pay the balance upon delivery of whatever it is he wants. He does not tend to act as an acquisition agent for third parties, however; he collects for himself.

Occasionally, if some of his established hired agents seem like genuinely good people, his mother may try to hire them to "get rid" of some of "bad influences" around him. This may include buying these "parasites" off, discrediting them, or finding evidence of unlawful activity on their parts, so as to separate Labienus Luscinus from their influence. She may even hire them to vet potential spouses.

TITUS LABIENUS LUSCINUS, Age 32

STR 10	CON 13	SIZ 10	INT 16	POW 18
DEX 13	APP 07	EDU 14	SAN 42	HP 12

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Art (Poetry) 60%, Bargain 30%, Civics 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 14%, Empire 40%, Get Duped By Mystic Charlatan 67%, Insight 33%, Library Use 80%, Listen 50%, Natural World 50%, Occult 80%, Own Kingdom (Rome) 50%, Own Language (Latin) 90%, Other Language (Greek) 50%, Other Language (Aramaic) 40%, Other Language (Demotic Egyptian) 40%, Other Language (Old Akkadian) 10%, Persuade 30%, Science (Augury) 50%, Science (Astrology) 50%, Spot Hidden 40%, Status 55%, Write Language (Greek) 50%, Write Language (Latin) 90%, Write Language (Aramaic) 40%, Write Language (Old Akkadian) 10%.

Weapons: Does not carry weapons, and is not any good with them at all.

Spells: Augury, Chant of Thoth, Create Amulet, Create Bulla, Create Curse Tablet, Evil Eye, Beseech Hermes (Contact Nyarlathotep), Summon Wings in the Night (Byakhee) (but not Bind), Baneful Dust of Hermes Trismegistus, Consecrate Temple to Melkarth, Lord of the City (Call Cthugha), Summon Child of Melkarth, (Child of Cthugha) (but not Bind), Charm Lion of the Magna Mater (Charm Animal—Lions Only).



CLIENTS AND TASKS

Labienus Luscinus has connections and "friends" (some more fair weather than others) in every walk of religious life, from the weirdest street preacher, to the priests of Apollo, to fakirs, charlatans, and even a few actual magicians. He will



MAMA NOVIA VITALIA

BY OSCAR RIOS

"I have something special for you to look into. There is a man who owes us some money. It's not due yet, but I am uncomfortable with what he did with it. He purchased a dozen slaves, all youths, and had a physician verify they were all virgins. I've heard rumors he does this twice a year and is mixed up a religious group out of Britannia that worships some lake god or other such nonsense. Find him; tell him that since my money purchased these slaves, I want them. If he argues, break his arm. If he resists, kill him, his people, and burn his house to the ground. I'll pay you twice what he owes me. Just make sure you visit him before the full moon. Am I clear?"

—Mama Novia Vitalia

WHO AM I?

Publicly, Novia Vitalia is one of the most successful freed-women in Rome. She owns interests in dozens of businesses, including owning many apartment buildings across the city. Her husband, once a powerful, somewhat sinister figure connected with the criminal underworld, has not been seen publicly in many years. It is rumored that he's suffered a debilitating illness or injury, and is kept out of sight by his household. Some whisper that the beautiful, charming Novia Vitalia now controls her husband's criminal enterprise, and behind the silk stola and practiced smile hides one of the most dangerous crime lords in the Empire.

It is said that some are born to greatness, while others achieve greatness, while a few have greatness thrust upon them. Mama Novia Vitalia was born Tikva, a third generation Jewish slave living in the city of Emesa, in the province of Syria. When she was twelve, Tikva was auctioned off for a small fortune because of her youth and beauty. Before her delivery to her new master, one of her guards, a retired Roman soldier named Clovius Vulso, stole the beautiful slave girl and fled with her. It was the start of a love affair which continues to this very day.

Life was hard in those early years for the pair, fleeing and hunted across four provinces, fighting for their lives on many occasions. Strangely enough it was Tikva who was responsible for their survival. While Clovius was a deadly fighter and imposing figure, subtlety was an alien concept to the former soldier. He was smart enough to realize that the girl he'd absconded with was much smarter than anyone he'd ever met. The former slave girl, who had by now been renamed Novia Vitalia, had a devious mind and a knack for intrigue. Novia became the silent brains of their partnership and Clovius took on the role of public face and deadly sword arm.

Within seven years of stealing her, Clovius had settled

the matter (with silver, not steel) with her former owner, and married and freed her. Under her guidance, they went from desperate fugitives to a feared ruthless criminal mastermind, and his beautiful, charming wife. Slowly, they built an empire based on moneylending. With Novia being fluent in Hebrew, persuasive, and a Jew, the pair were could act as a go-between for loans between wealthy Jews and desperate Romans. With the deadly and feared Clovius, who was now commanding a large group of men, few ever considered skipping out on their debts and the few who did were made examples of what the consequences of such actions would be.

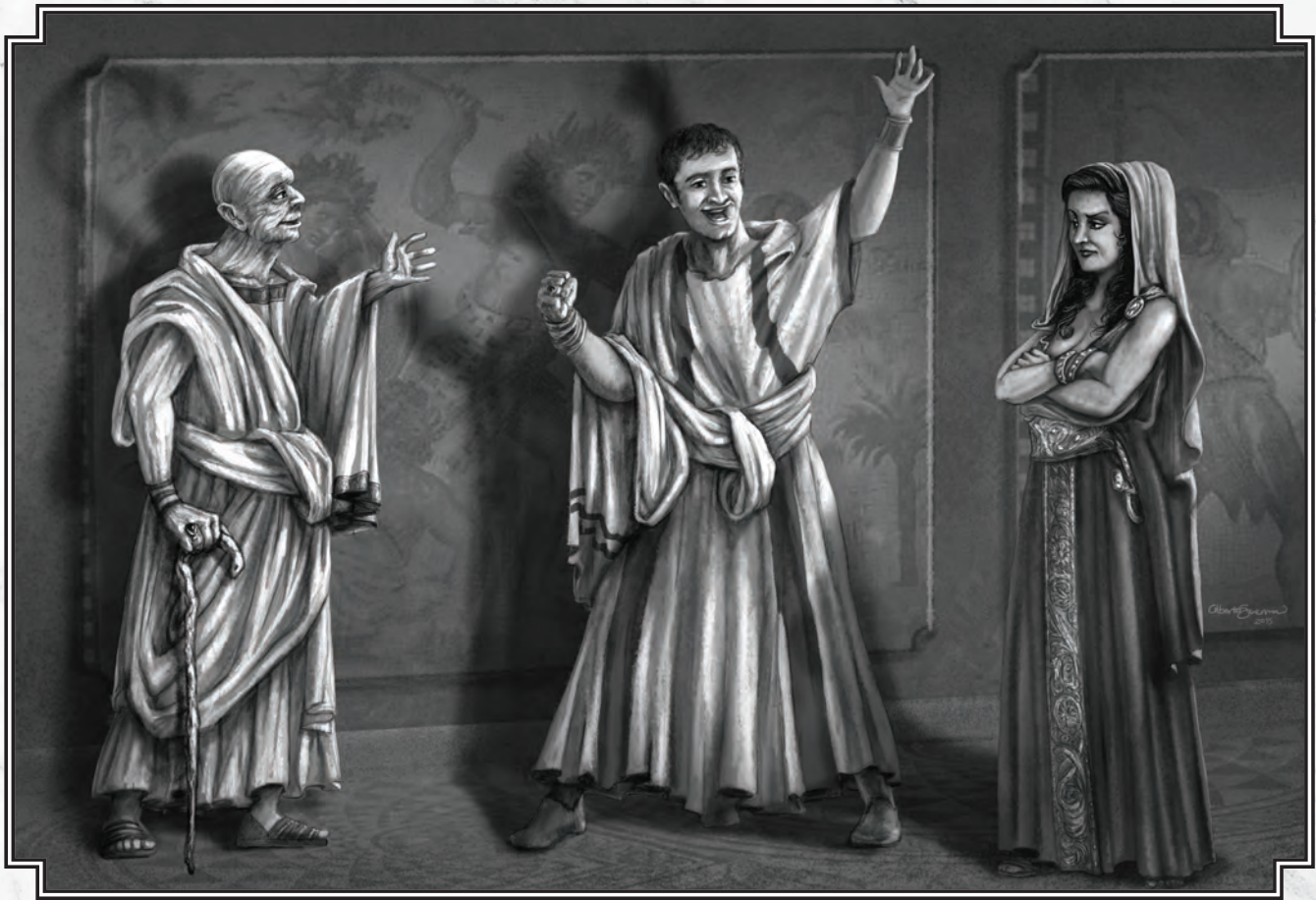
Soon the pair was diversifying their holdings to include both illegal and legal enterprises across the empire. Their wealth and power grew steadily for more than a decade, until one sad day, about three years ago. The pair had invested in a new silver mine in the mountains of Hispania, but the miners had been driven off their claim, terrorized by strange voices whispering in the darkness, and by periodic kidnappings. Clovius took nine of his best men and set out to put a stop to this and protect their investment. A month later, three of the men returned telling stories of flying monsters, magic, and death. They told Novia that her husband had fallen to those Whisperers in the Darkness.

Furious, she ordered the men back to Hispania at once, with orders to recover Clovius' body and punish those responsible for his death. With them she sent thirty others, well-armed and deadly fighters all, mercenaries, retired soldiers, and ex-gladiators. While twenty of these men died or were driven insane, her orders were obeyed. Her men destroyed the creatures, reopened the silver mines, and even took a prisoner, one of the miners who had apparently been working with the creatures the entire time. Most importantly, they brought back what was left of Clovius: his brain in a metal container and some clockwork devices to allow her to talk to him.

All this would have shattered the mind and broken the spirit of most people, but it hardened Novia as fire does steel. She had the traitorous miner tortured, learning all she could from him. She had long conversations with Clovius, now only an immortal brain in a metal container. Novia learned about the Mi-Go, the Great Old Ones, and the Outer Gods. She learned about the veil over mankind's eyes hiding creatures, aliens, and the vile cultists who served them. Novia Vitalia swore an oath upon the one true god of her forefathers that such monsters and their human allies would rue the day they took her husband's mortal life. That day, the Cthulhu Mythos in Ancient Rome gained a powerful, ruthless, and dangerous enemy.

With key lieutenants of Clovius recovering his body and fighting in Hispania against the Mi-Go, Novia had little problem assuming public control over her husband's empire (both criminal and legitimate). Many had long suspected, or were even told by Clovius, that Novia was the true genius behind their success. She added Mama to her title, and insists on being called Mama Novia by everyone in her service (something with most are quite fond of doing). For the past three years, the cover story has been that Clovius still lives,





but was crippled in Hispania while driving bandits away from a silver mine he owned, something very close to the truth. He is now in the care of his wife, who issues his orders and speaks with his voice. Few dared question this and the few who did have been made example of.

GOALS, PLANS, AND SECRETS

Today, Mama Novia Vitalia (currently thirty years old), leads many separate lives. To some, she is a mature, wealthy, and charming Roman woman overseeing her husband's fortunes: managing property, businesses, and offering loans. To others, she is a powerful and dangerous crime lord, quite willing to have people beaten, maimed, or even killed should they refuse to repay a loan. Secretly, she is still a practicing Jew, who attends a synagogue in the Isis et Serapis neighborhood of Rome. She is a major financial supporter of this temple, as well as a friend of Rabbi Yoel, and secretly a student of Rabbi Moab. Lastly, Novia Vitalia has made it her calling to oversee, organize, and finance efforts to oppose the Cthulhu Mythos and its human supporters wherever and whenever they are discovered.

While all four of these roles fill Novia with purpose and occupy her time, she is often bitterly lonely. While she speaks with her husband every day, through the apparatus connected to his Mi-Go brain cylinder, it is hardly full compensation for not having him physically with her. Clovius urges her to move on, have him declared dead, and maybe even remarry,

but she steadfastly refuses. In times of weakness, and at his urging, she goes out to socialize and sometimes takes a lover, but she is typically filled with regret and in a dark mood for weeks afterwards.

While she never had children (she gave birth to a still-born son at age fifteen, nearly died, and never was able to become pregnant again), she does take joy in helping raise and support the children of her lieutenants. Novia pays for these children to be well educated, grants sons interest free loans to start businesses, and invests daughters with sizable dowries to ensure they attract good husbands. These children consider Mama Novia a beloved, benevolent aunt. The wives of her lieutenants sit and knit with Mama Novia once a week, and often confide in her as if she were a wise older sister. Their husbands, Novia Vitalia's most trusted lieutenants, are fiercely devoted to her for this, willing to kill or die for her with little hesitation. Her criminal organization actually has the feeling of a real family.

LOCATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

Novia Vitalia lives in a villa once owned by a Senator who fell out of favor and was exiled. The grounds are protected by a large wall, and the main house is surrounded by an orchard and formal garden. The interior décor is outwardly lavish, to the point of being gaudy, reflective of freedmen who have ended up wealthier than they ever expected. The inner, personal rooms are decorated much more simply, reflecting



the true tastes of those living there. Novia moved into this place three years ago, shortly after her husband's unfortunate incident in Hispania.

Below the villa, hidden behind secret doors, lies a small set of underground chambers. They consist of several cells, a guard room, a store room, an office, and an interrogation (i.e., torture) chamber. Originally built by the Senator for his dealing with his political enemies, these features were key reasons Novia Vitalia purchased the villa. She occasionally makes use of this area should her operatives (see "Clients and Tasks") capture a cultist, evil magus, or even the occasional Mythos entity.

The servants working here are all freedmen, as Novia finds the concept of slavery distasteful. Her staff is made up of the wives and children of her trusted lieutenants, or those who owe her their freedom, their lives, or both. Lastly, her estate is filled, day or night, with strong, powerful-looking men, most of whom are well armed. These men are ever watchful, totally loyal to Mama Novia, and proudly defend her without question. Of these men, her chief lieutenants are Silvus Capito, Gemillus Strichus, Taranus of Eboracum, and Ezra of Joppa. Such security is necessary, as the Mi-Go, their agents, and several other Mythos cults, are actively trying to assassinate her.

CLIENTS AND TASKS

Mama Novia Vitalia is likely to take on clients who are trustworthy fighting men, hardworking freedmen, or slaves trying to borrow money in order to purchase their freedom. She is also likely to take on clients who are Jewish, either openly or secretly (as she is), whispering to them in her native Hebrew and giving them a knowing wink. However, the clients she most values and actively seeks out are those whom she discovers to have encountered and opposed the forces of the Cthulhu Mythos.

MAMA NOVIA VITALIA, a.k.a. Tikva of Emesa, Age 30

STR 11 CON 13 SIZ 09 INT 18 POW 16
DEX 12 APP 15 EDU 14 SAN 60 HP 11

Damage Bonus: none.

Skills: Accounting 80%, Bargain 65%, Civics 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 12%, Conceal 45%, Empire 30%, Fast Talk 70%, Hide 50%, Insight 65%, Library Use 30%, Listen 70%, Occult 20%, Own Language (Hebrew) 85%, Other Language (Latin) 75%, Other Language (Greek) 50%, Persuade 80%, Sneak 60%, Spot Hidden 65%, Status 50%, Tactics 35%, Write Language (Latin) 45%, Write Language (Hebrew) 60%.

Weapons: Fist / Punch 65% damage 1D3

Grapple 40%

Knife 70% damage 1D3

Spells: Bless Blade, Contact Mi-Go, Elder Sign, Voorish Sign

Description: While often surrounded by guards, Mama Novia Vitalia is far from helpless. During her days as a fugitive, Novia was taught to throw a punch, evade a hold, and wield a knife by Clovius. Novia knows a bit of magic, learned from interrogating captured cultists, the examination of their possessions, and the tutelage of Rabbi Moab who is teaching her of Kabbalah. Lastly, she conceals an enchanted dagger and an active Elder Sign upon her person at all times.



VIBIUS PATRUUS LETERENSIS, A.K.A. "UNCLE VIBIUS"

BY PHREDD GROVES

"No, lad! That's too hot. See how the ingot's sparking and the white color? You've burned the steel. No worries, though, that's how you learn. Next time, keep it out of the hottest part of the forge..."

—Uncle Vibius

WHO AM I?

Vibius Patruus Leterensis, known locally as "Uncle Vibius", is a scholar, an engineer, and an expert in metals. He makes his living by taking commissions from the Empire and wealthy merchants with difficult engineering projects. His specialties include bespoke gear mechanisms and easily repeatable techniques for efficient smelting and alloy production.

Occupying a modest domus on the outskirts of the small municipium Aguntum, Uncle Vibius is considered a lovable eccentric by his neighbors. Tall and wiry, he is still vibrant despite appearing to be well into his eighth decade. He's often seen bouncing along mountain trails like a goat, always with a grin and a cheery wave for passersby. Other than his adopted son, Rufus, Uncle Vibius lives alone, having never married.

In fact, gossips in Aguntum speculate that Vibius may be a spado (eunuch), as he is never seen going to public baths, nor has he ever been known to visit a brothel or indulge in any other sort of amorous activity. In as small a town as Aguntum, someone surely would have seen something going on by now, they insist. Others, though, point to the frequent comings and goings of visitors from afar to Domus Patruus, speculating that perhaps among these visitors is the occasional paramour.

GOALS, PLANS AND SECRETS

Uncle Vibius is not human. He is one of the Serpent People, a survivor from the height of Serpentine civilization, more than 200 million years ago during the Permian Era. At that



time, “Vibius” was a potent sorcerer, and it was those skills that allowed him to survive the cataclysmic results of the war between the elder things and their shoggoth chattel. This war precipitated the Permian extinction event, which wiped out 96% of marine life and 70% of terrestrial life due to massive methane eruptions caused by the elder things’ seismic weapons. “Vibius” was caught in one of these seismic attacks and used a powerful stasis spell to defend himself as he was buried alive.

He remained in stasis for millions of years, carried along in a layer of Permian sediment. He was finally released when his body was freed from the roots of the southern Alps in 500 B.C. by erosional processes.

The serpent being found himself in a world where nearly all traces of his civilization had been erased and even the environment, flora, and fauna he had known had changed beyond recognition. Instead of the advanced civilizations of the Permian, the world was occupied by exotic mammals just beginning to develop a basic technological toolkit.

In the first decades of his new life, the being who would come to be called Vibius Patruus Leterensis set out to conquer ape civilization, positioning himself as a deity. However, he soon found that power and mastery over these creatures was entirely unsatisfactory. So, for the next two centuries, he took to a lair hidden high in the alps to live as a hermit, occupying himself with mastering the practice of metallurgy, a science with which he had been entirely unfamiliar before his millions-year hibernation.

Over this time, he engaged in limited trade with local humans to further his studies, becoming familiar with human habits and languages. He also began to develop a fondness for these creatures. This led to him developing a spell that allowed him to take on the appearance of a human (his own independently created version of the Consume Likeness spell). He began to live in human communities, first among the Helvitii and then the Romans after Caesar’s Helvitian campaign in 58 B.C.

At this point, having lived as and among humans for centuries, Uncle Vibius closely guards the secret of his identity. He will not willingly divulge this secret, even to adopted family members. To protect his identity, he has even learned to eat human cuisine, although it took years to overcome the nausea involved in eating the flesh of dead animals (as opposed to live prey, swallowed whole). One telltale sign remains, though. Uncle Vibius, in the guise of a human, has two shadows. One matches his human form, but another, fainter one, reflecting his true form, can be discerned in bright light.

Should someone notice the double shadow, he won’t take drastic action. Rather, he’ll say something along the lines of, “Strange, isn’t it? They say my grandfather on my mother’s side had the same thing. Started shortly after he got kicked in the shin by a satyr, or so the story goes.... Now, what were we talking about?”

Uncle Vibius is now well established as a Roman citizen and has arranged things to allow himself to change identities so that previous identities can age and pass away. To this end, he adopts an heir, who will provide a new identity for him when the time comes. He is patient about this identity switch,

allowing heirs to live a full life and only assuming the new identity when they die of natural causes or misadventure. Uncle Vibius merely ages his current identity and abides. As most humans only live to their 30s or 40s, he has not had to worry about any of his heirs living so long that the elder identity could not be maintained.

Uncle Vibius’ goals follow two paths. One is the acquisition and development of knowledge. In these times, this is primarily about mastering engineering and metal smithing techniques, but Uncle Vibius does maintain an interest in sorcery and an epistolary network of entities like himself, as well as some humans who trade in occult lore (perhaps including Titus Labienus Luscinus).

The other path is to protect any humans Uncle Vibius has developed an affection for. While he tends to shun physical contact with humans, he has developed a deep love for some of them that is usually evidenced by a close working relationship. This is most often developed with adopted heirs who are required to live with their patron and adoptive guardian.

This is not a love of equals, though, but is closer to the love a human might have for an animal companion. Uncle Vibius understands that his human charges will inevitably die after only a brief span of years, yet all these losses cause deep grief. He always hopes his adoptees and other companions can live a peaceful, full, and relatively long life. For this reason, Uncle Vibius frequently participates in far ranging plots and conspiracies with an eye to maintaining the Pax Romana or to quash any threats to humanity in general from any sort of Mythos or occult threat. However, his loyalty is very much to his personal companions over Roman civilization at large when those are in conflict.

LOCATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

Aguntum is a small municipium in the northern Alps near the River Drava, a tributary of the Danube. It is primarily a mining town, which is the reason Uncle Vibius settled here several generations ago. The area provides the resources needed for his metallurgical work and is far enough off the beaten path that Uncle Vibius’ identity can be preserved without undergoing undue scrutiny. The nature of Uncle Vibius’ work does require travel, however, and the serpent being and Rufus can often be found in Rome or at the site of large public works projects across the Empire.

In addition to the domus in Aguntum, Uncle Vibius has holdings in several regions of the empire, maintained under other identities. These are simply precautions should anything occur to unmask or ruin any of the identities used in Aguntum.

Rufus, Uncle Vibius’ adopted son, was brought into the household as a child and has grown up to be a competent scholar in his own right, not only in the ways of metals engineering, but also in the taxonomy of the local flora and fauna. Currently in his early twenties, Rufus acts as secretary to Uncle Vibius and has started to take on some of the duties of running the household. He is, to Uncle Vibius’ relief, a healthy man who seems to have many good years ahead of him.



CLIENTS AND TASKS

Many of Uncle Vibius' clients are specialized craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, whitesmiths (tinsmiths), and surveyors. Others come from marginalized populations around the Empire, as Uncle Vibius is skilled at recognizing capable agents no matter what their circumstances. Furthermore, human social mores are only relevant to Uncle Vibius insofar as they serve his ends. In fact, humans are not his only contacts across the empire, as he has made several allies amongst ghoule communities in several of the larger Roman cities in the west.

Tasks assigned can include acquisition of uncommon or even unique raw materials required for personal or professional projects, and also unique occult items. The latter tend to be dangerous and Uncle Vibius will either destroy them, if possible, or sequester them in the hopes that they will be forgotten. In this, he takes the long view, and frequently makes arrangements years or decades later to destroy textual references to such items, another task that clients may find themselves assigned to.

Clients will often receive gifts from their patron, including masterfully made weapons and small occult consumables (such as sachets of the Baneful Dust of Hermes Trismegistus). The former tend to be given to sentimental favorites, while the latter are usually reserved for only the most dangerous and critical of missions.

VIBIUS PATRUUS LETERENSIS, Age 200+ million years

STR 10 CON 16 SIZ 11 INT 18 POW 18
DEX 12 APP 10/3* EDU 20 SAN N/A HP 14

* As Vibius/As his true self

Damage Bonus: none.

Armor: 1-point scales.

Skills: Bargain 40%, Civics 40%, Climb 60% (claws help), Cthulhu Mythos 50%, Dodge 30%, Empire 80%, First Aid 70%, Insight 90%, Library Use 55%, Listen 35%, Medicine 35%, Natural World 90%, Occult 50%, Other Kingdoms (Germanic Tribes) 35%, Own Language (Serpentine) 100%, Other Language (Latin) 80%, Other Language (Helvitan) 65%, Other Language (Greek) 55%, Other Language (Etruscan) 35%, Potions 55%, Repair 30%, Science (Metallurgy) 75%, Science (Engineering) 50%, Science (Geography) 50%, Science (Mathematics) 80%, Spot Hidden 25%, Smell Hidden 60%, Status 55%, Write (Serpentine) 80%, Write (Latin) 80%, Write (Greek) 55%

Weapon (of last resort): Bite 25%, damage 1d8 + poison (POT equal to CON)

Spells: Baneful Dust of Hermes Trismegistus, Charm Animal, Consume Likeness, Contact Ghoul, Deflect Harm, Chronal Stasis, Vanish

CHRONAL STASIS

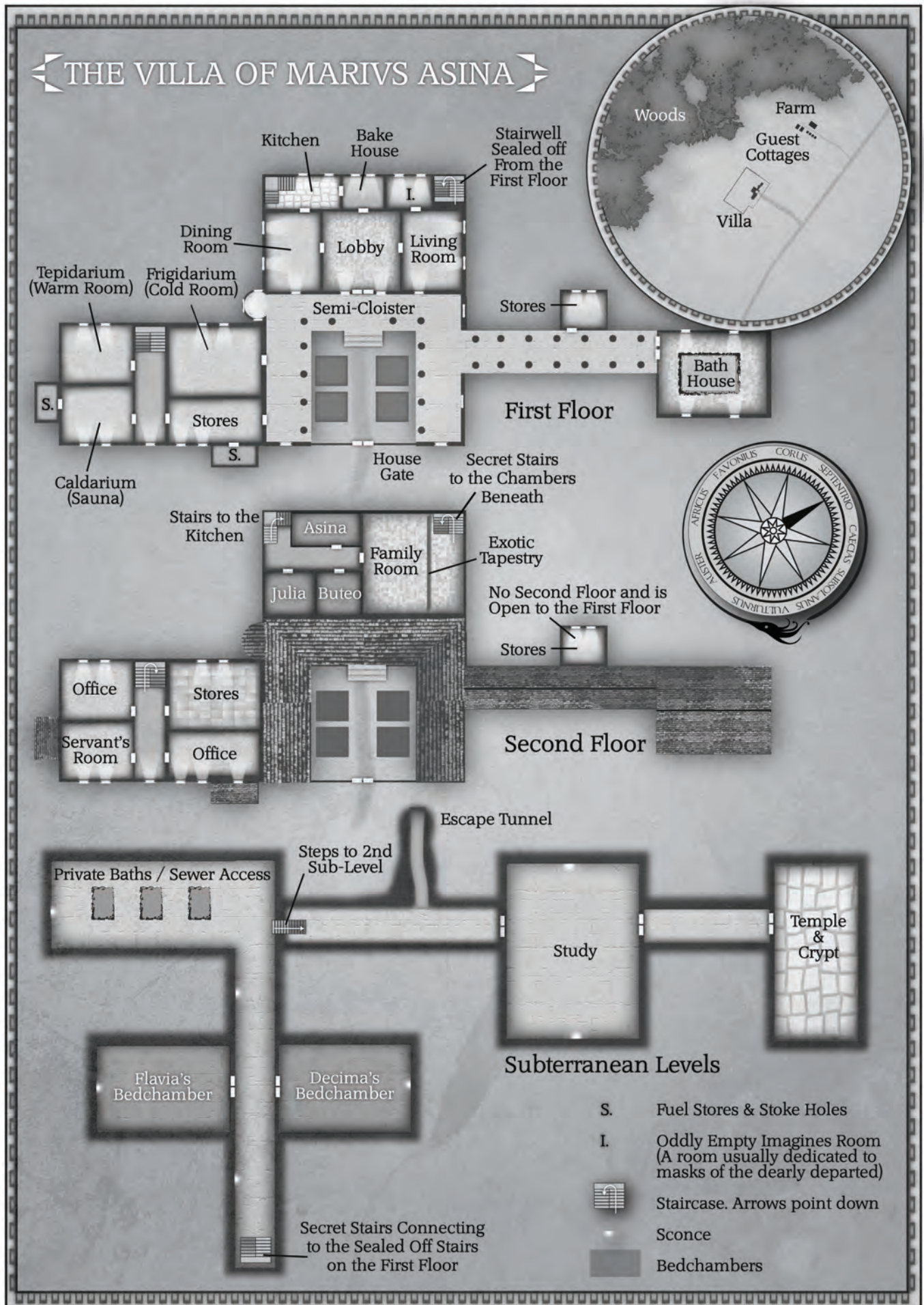
Causes time to stall relative to the caster, making the caster immune to any and all harm or changes while the spell lasts. Casting takes 3 rounds of gestures and vocalization. Casters appear to have become frozen. They will retain mass and can be moved, but no mass or energy can be added or subtracted from them. If the caster is continuously exposed to light and air, the effects of the spell will deactivate abruptly in one to two weeks of time. Otherwise, the stasis will remain in effect indefinitely.



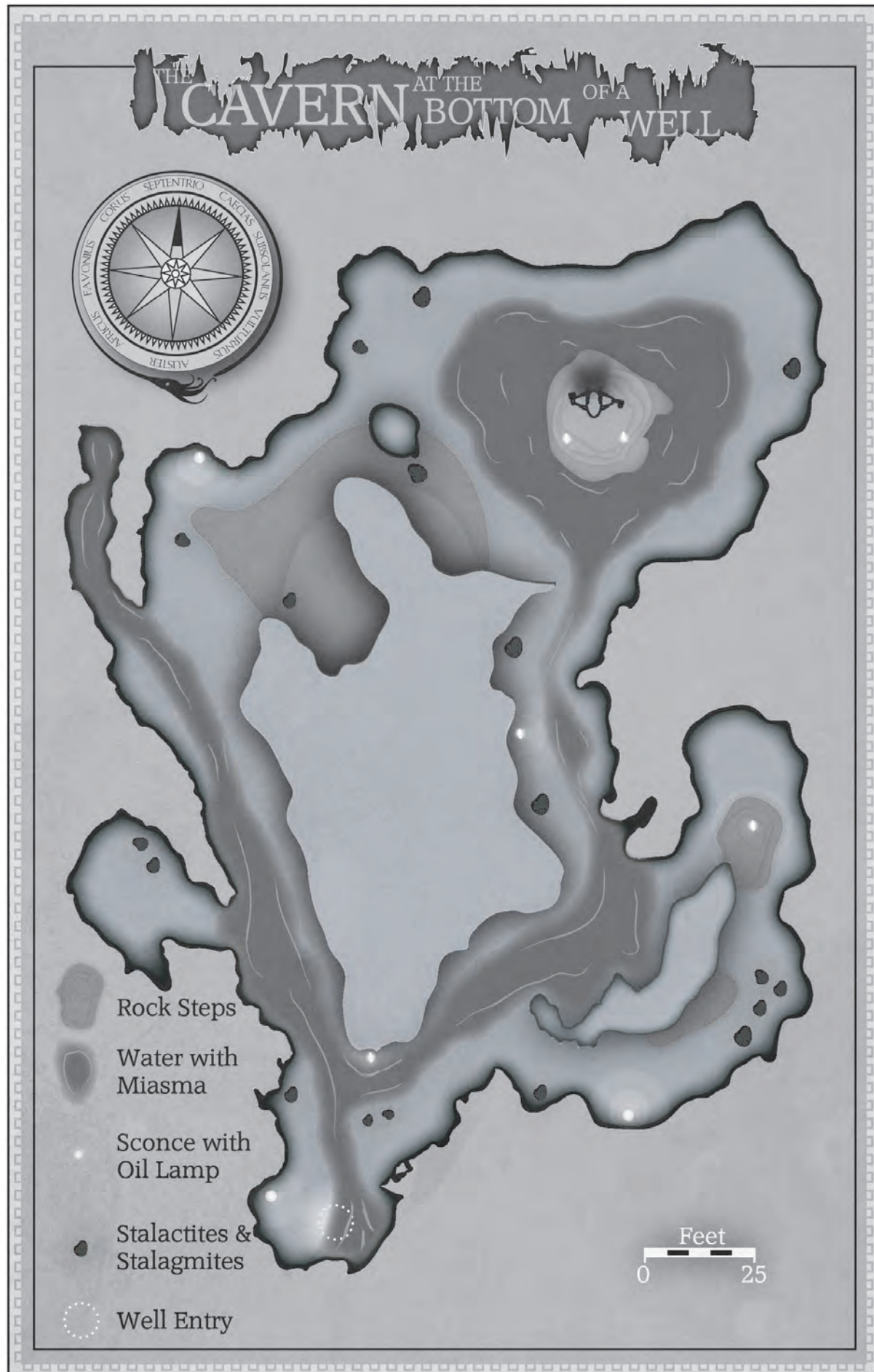
DE HORRORE COSMICO

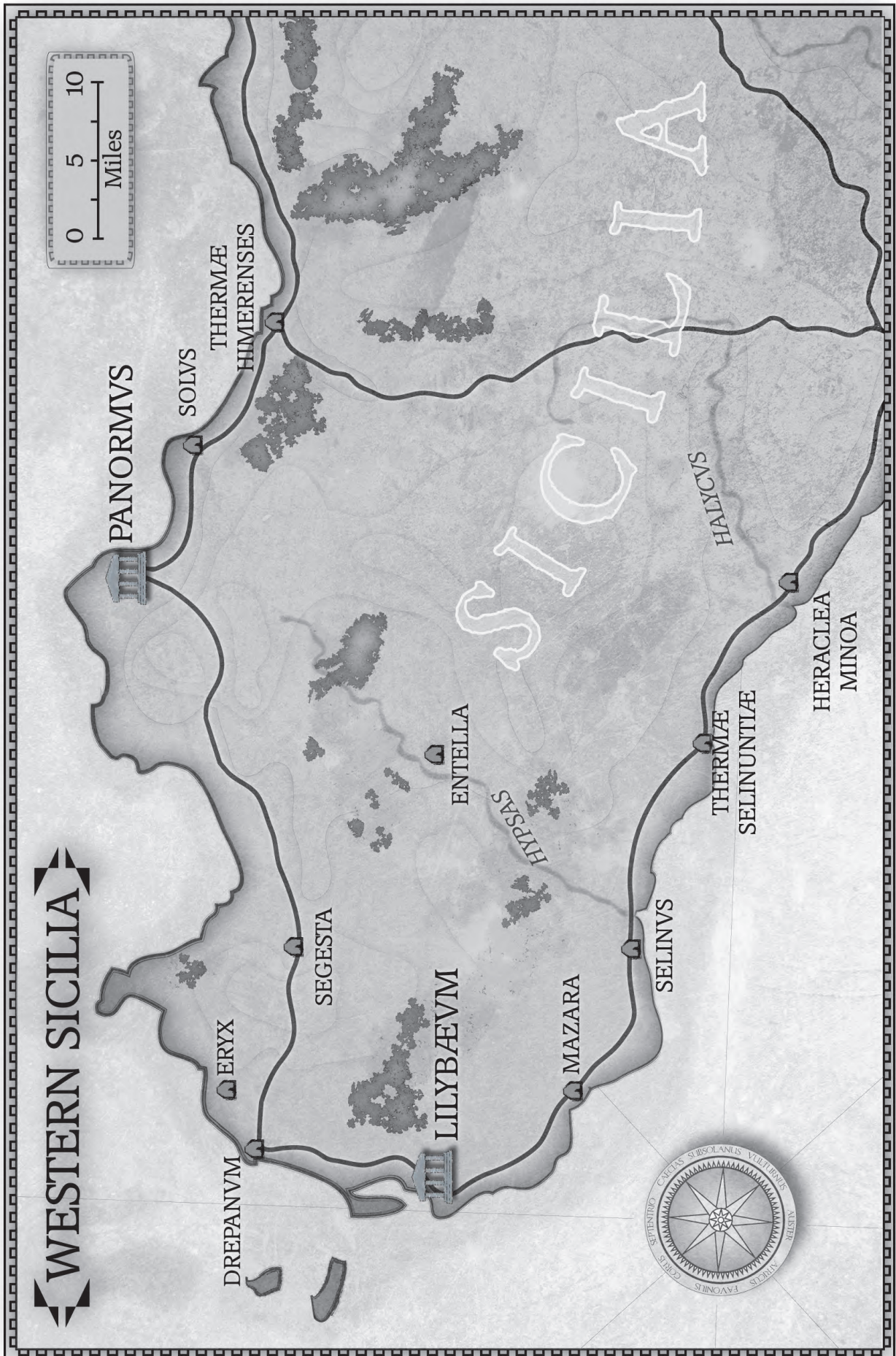


MAPS AND HANDOUTS

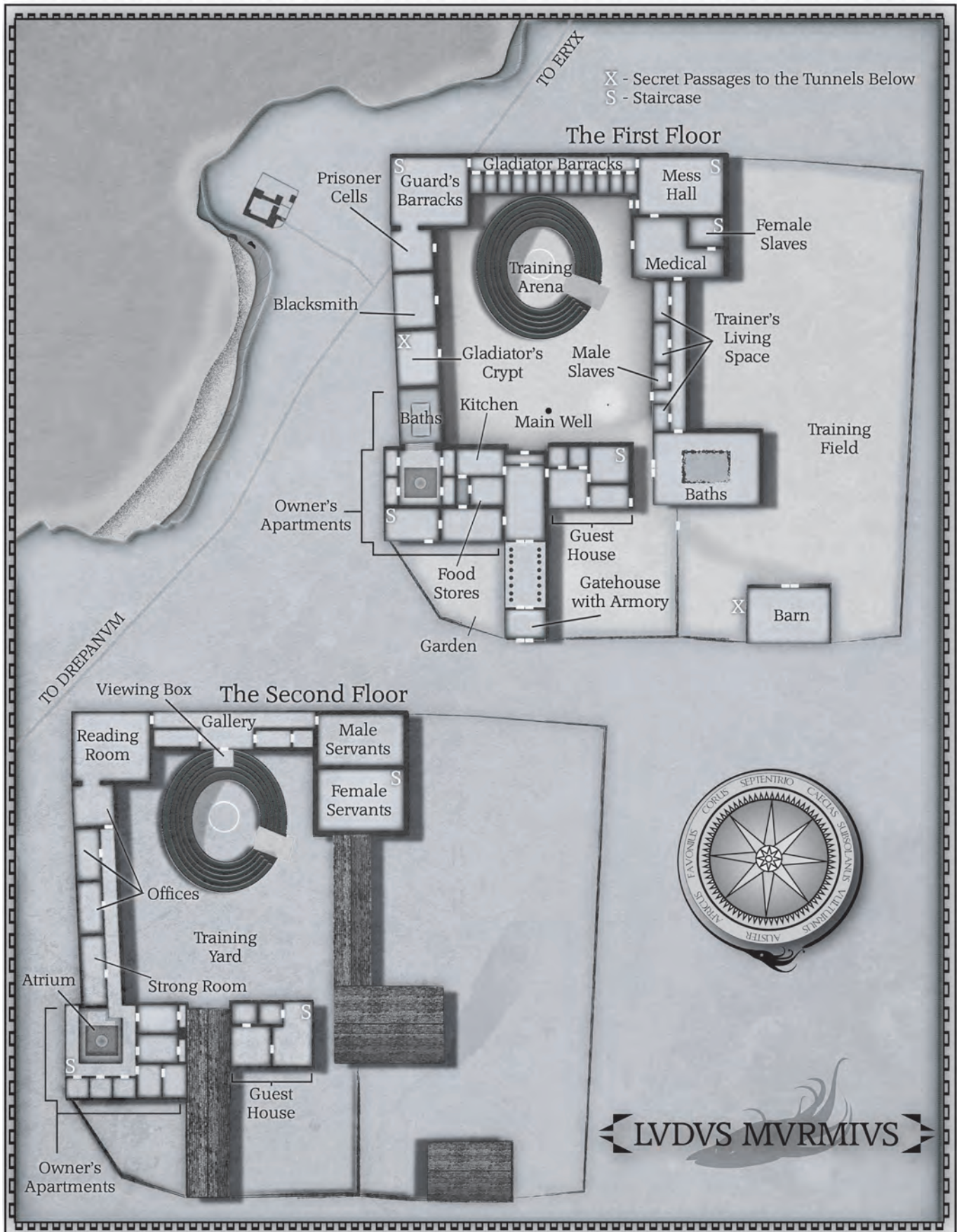


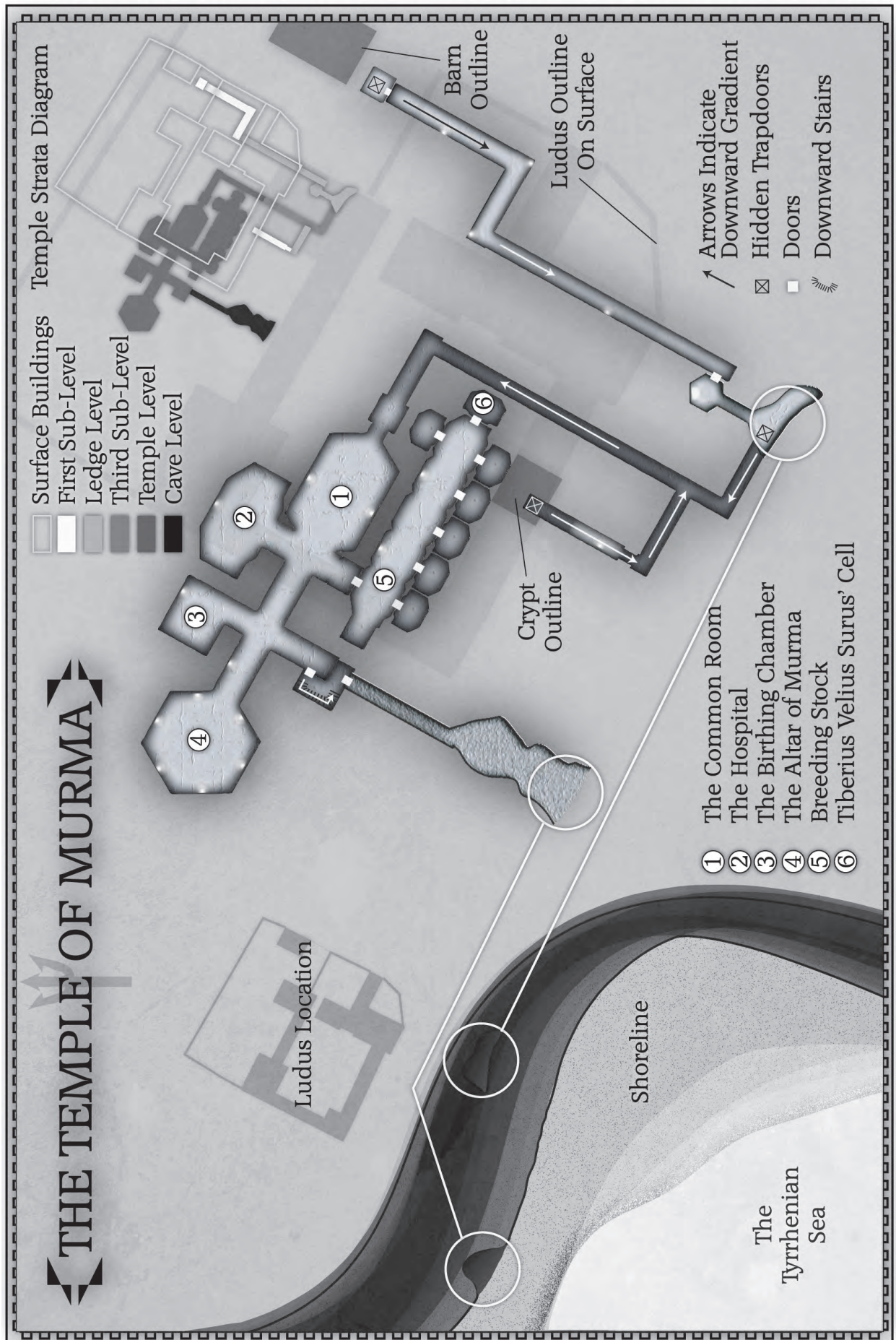
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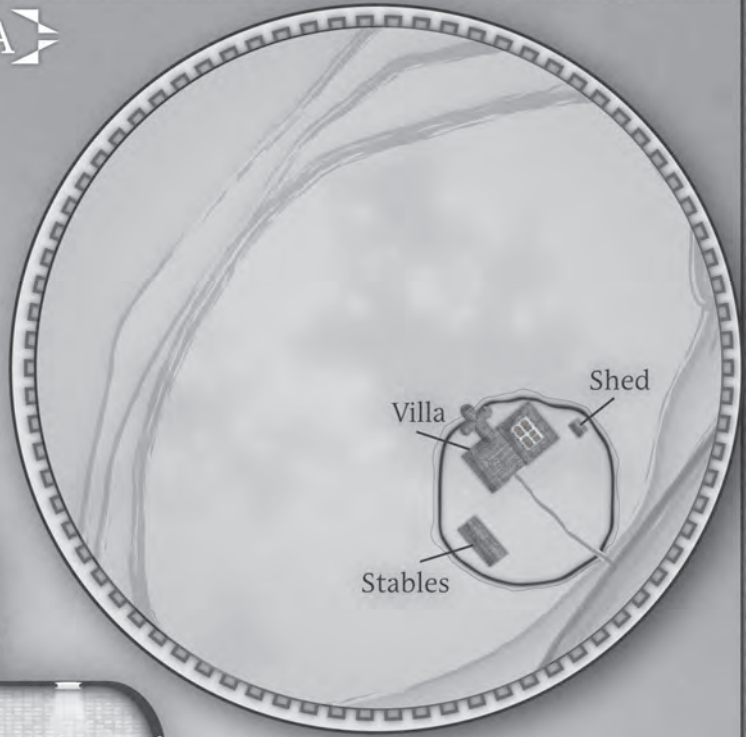
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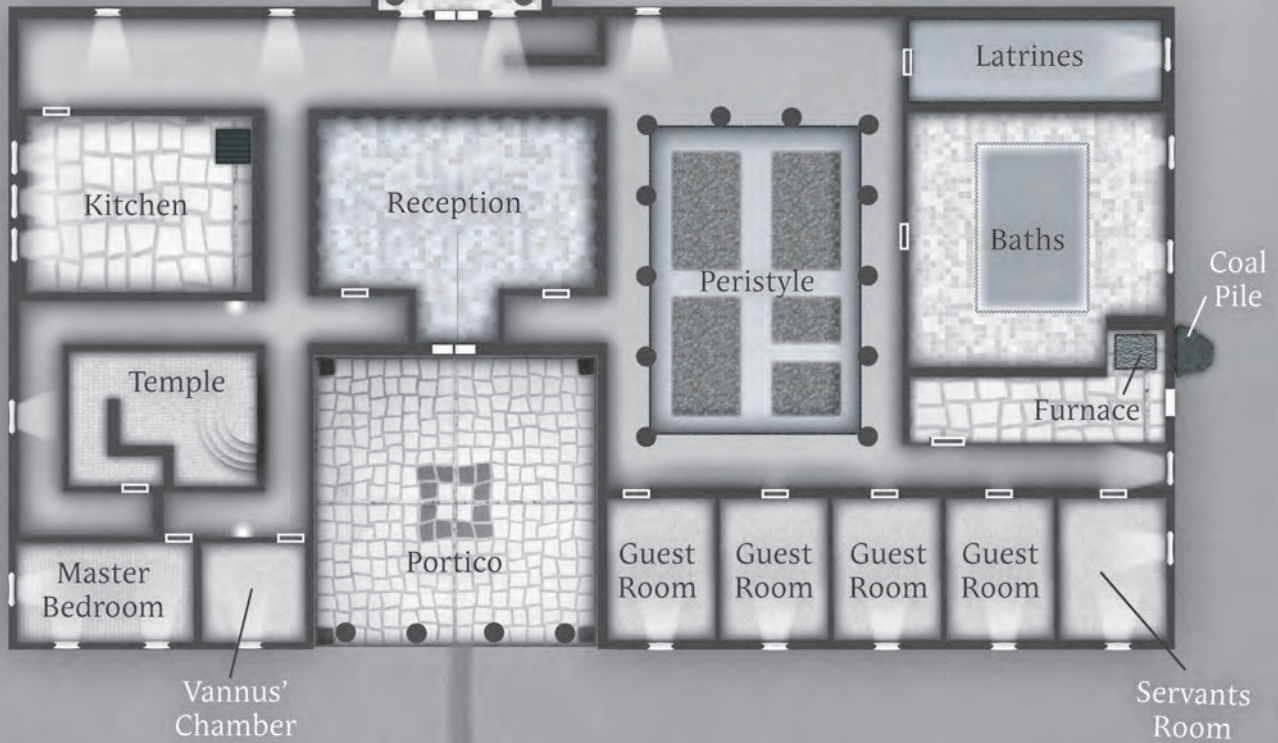


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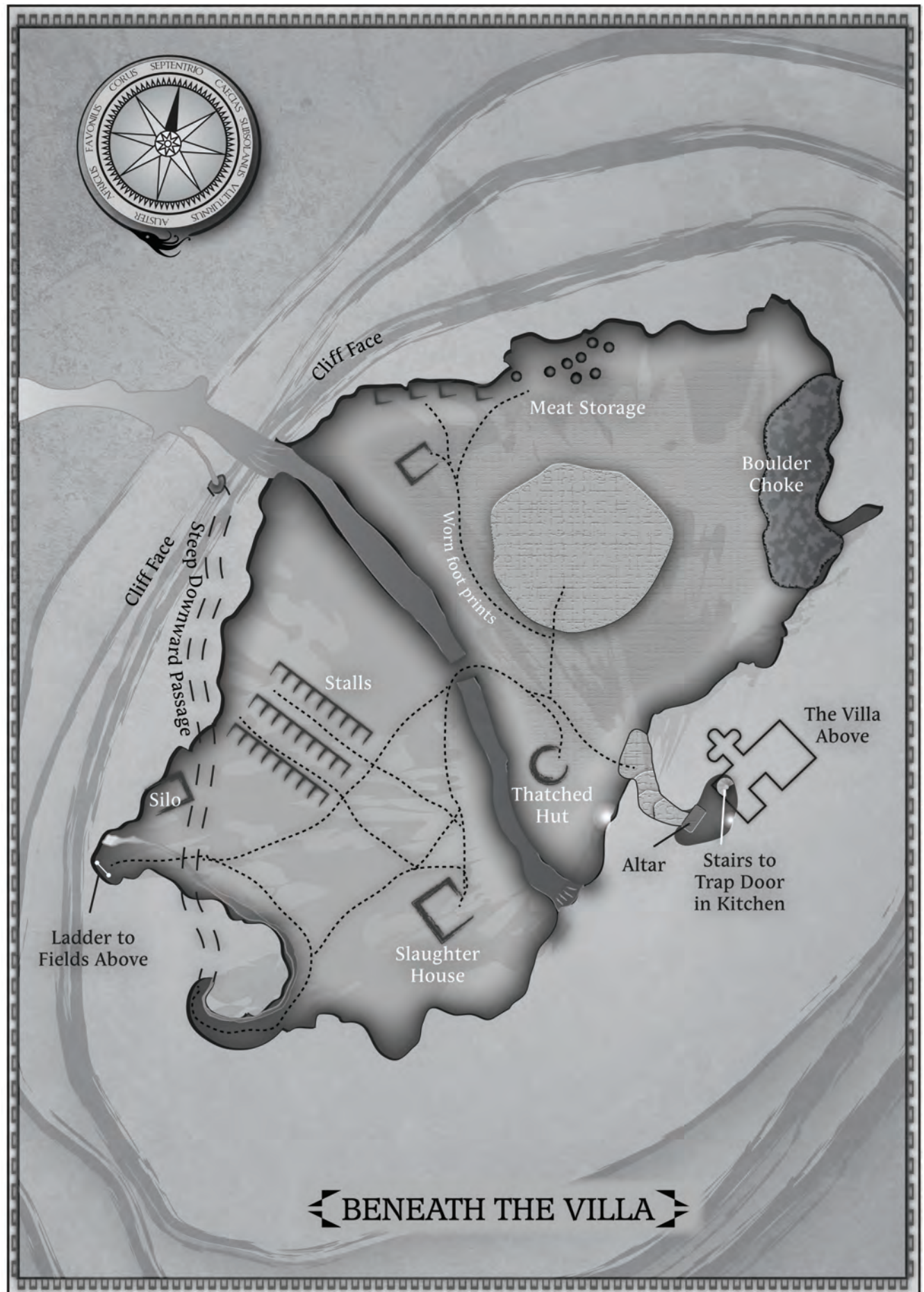
≡ NECTOPRASTUS' VILLA ≡



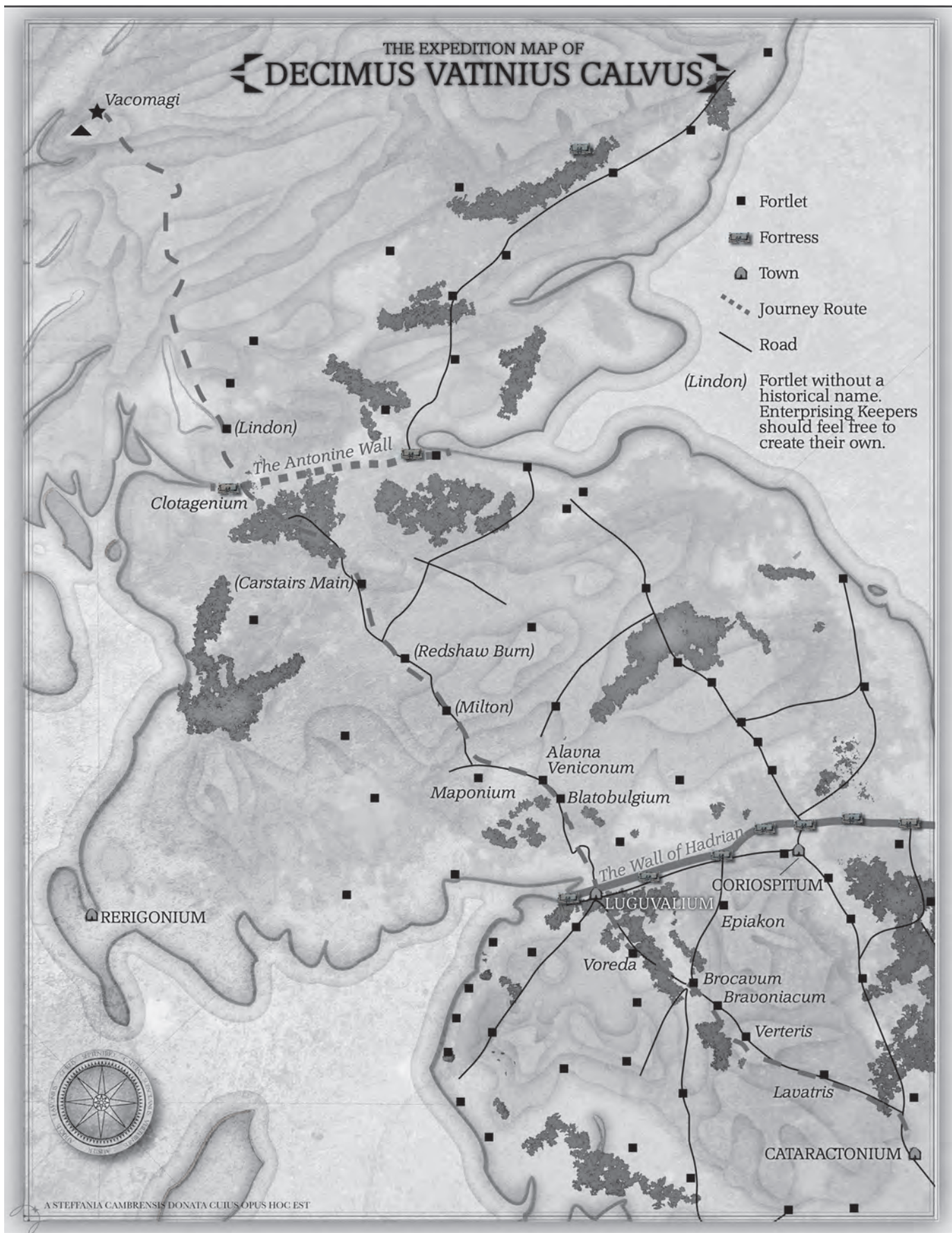
Feet
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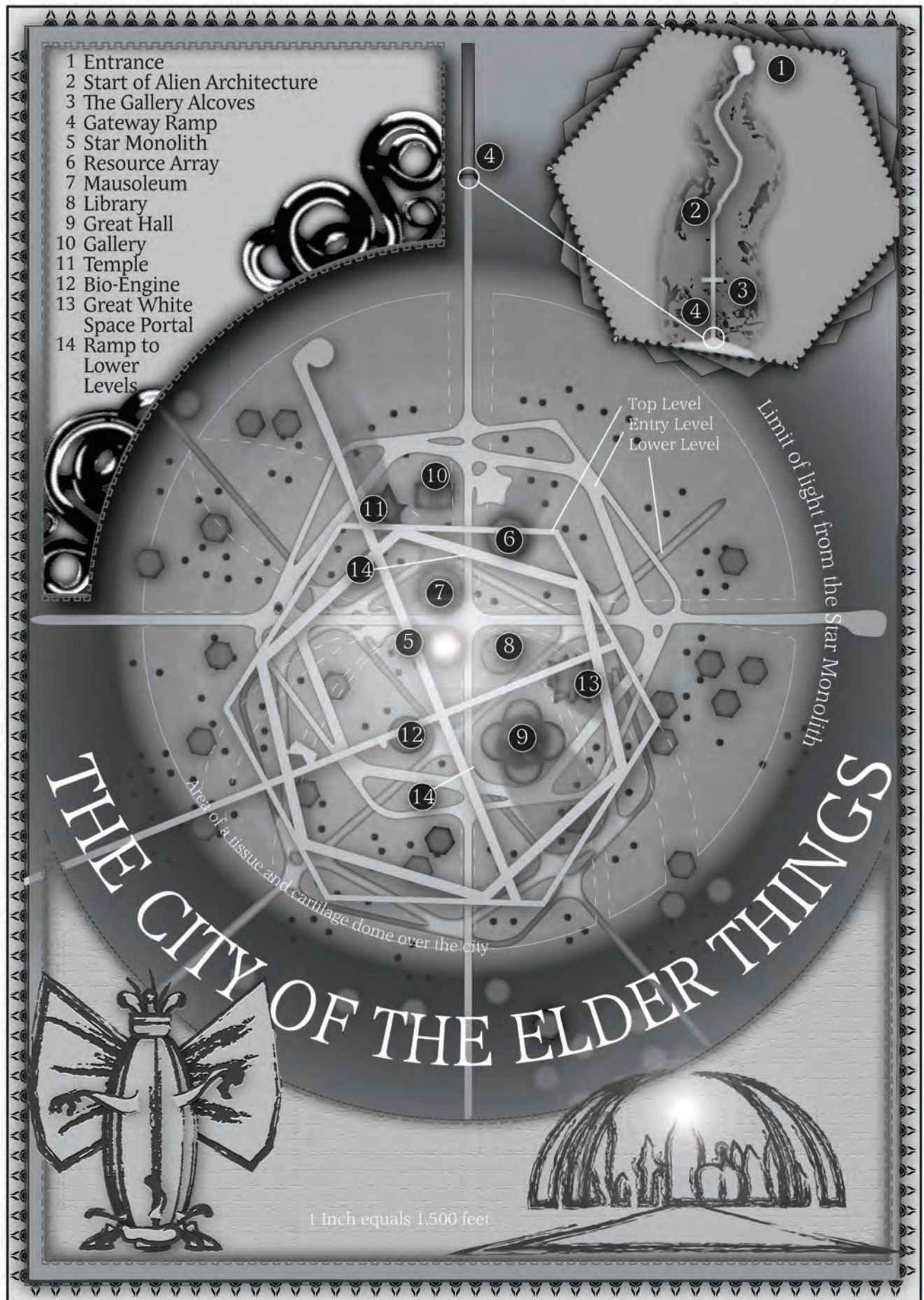
MAPS AND HANDOUTS



DE HORRORE COSMICO



MAPS AND HANDOUTS



◀ The North and South House of the Villa Rustica ▶

0 50 100 150 200 250
Feet



Study
Lab. Dock

The Altar Hall

- T** Trapdoor
- S** Staircase
- ◇ Door
- Support Pillar
- Carnal Pit
- Ladders
- ▬ Sacrificial Table
- Standing Stones
- ⚓ Boat
- S Secret Door
- ★ Stairs & Tunnel
(from North House
Trapdoor)

Villa Urbana

Villa Rustica



QUINTUS TO HIS MOST BELOVED
FLAVIA, MANY, MANY GREETINGS.

MOST DESIRED FLAVIA, I LONG FOR
YOUR TOUCH, YOUR SMELL. EVERY
DAY HEART FROM YOU IS LONGER.

PERHAPS WE CAN MEET AGAIN IN THE
FOREST BEHIND THE VILLA AT THE
NEXT FULL MOON. OUR CHILDREN
WILL BRED TRUE, THE BEST OF BOTH
WORLDS, AND AS YOU KNOW,
PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.

PLEASE BE STRONG, WE WILL BE
TOGETHER SOON ENOUGH ONCE THE
WEDDING IS WED AND REMOVED.

FLAVIA.

I WAS IN ALEXANDRIA MEETING WITH THE GREAT UBAR AND HIS COMPANION NEPHOTES WHEN THEY TOLD ME OF QAKARE IBI, A MOST INTERESTING ANCIENT KING. HE AND HIS PEOPLE BORE NO SIMILARITY TO THE PEOPLE OF AEGYPTUS. NOT ONLY DID THEY THEMSELVES APPEAR OUT OF THE MIST ONE DAY, BUT THEIR WHOLE CITY OF STONE DID AS WELL. FASCINATED, I DECIDED TO SEEK OUT THE RUINS OF THEIR CITY. ACCORDING TO THE TWO MEN, THE CITY LAY TO THE SOUTH, ON THE WEST BANK OF THE NILE. I WILL MAKE THAT MY NEXT STOP.

...

MUCH TO MY SURPRISE, THE CITY WAS NOT IN RUINS. IT TOOK SEARCHING TO FIND, NESTLED BEHIND A FAIR DISTANCE FROM THE NILE. BUILT UPON THE SHORES OF A SMALL, MIST-SHROUDED LAKE, THE PEOPLE STILL THRIVED, ALTHOUGH TO USE THE WORD CITY

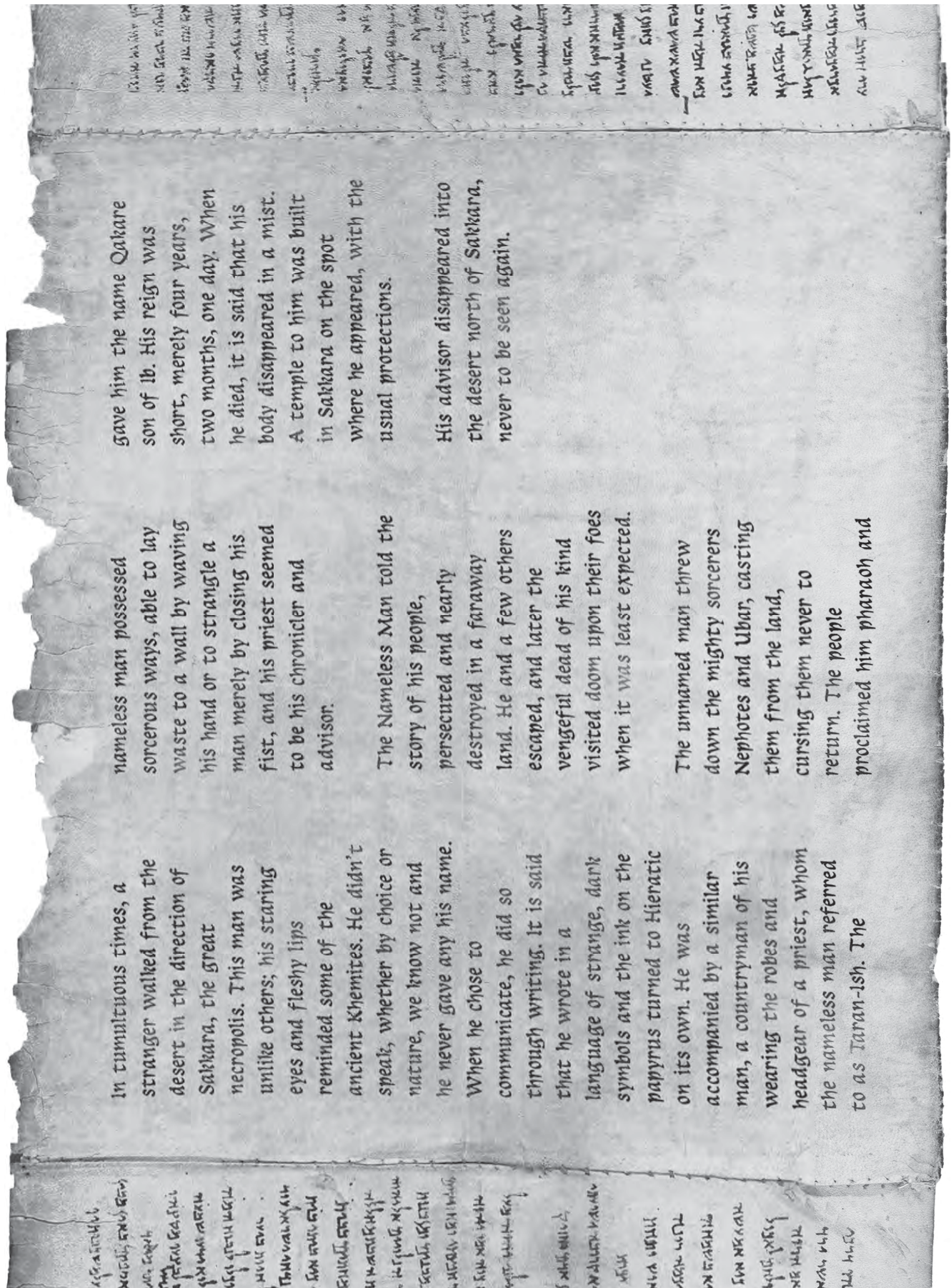
IS A BIT DISINGENUOUS, AS THERE ARE MAYBE TWENTY FAMILIES HERE. DESPITE THEIR DEFORMITIES, THEY SEEMED INTELLIGENT. UNABLE TO SPEAK, THEY WRITE.

...

THEY'VE INVITED ME TO ONE OF THEIR FEASTS. IT IS TRULY A SIGHT TO BEHOLD. THOUSANDS MORE OF THEM APPEAR FROM THE MISTS, AS DOES A MASSIVE LIZARD. I SEE THE DESTRUCTION OF A CITY LIKE THIS ONE, ONLY MUCH LARGER. I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF SORCERY THIS IS! THESE PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE DANGEROUS THAN I EVER IMAGINED.

...

I WOKE UP THIS MORNING AT THE BASE OF A STATUE. ONE THAT LOOKS JUST LIKE THE LIZARD CONJURED BY THEIR SORCERERS! I HAD TO FEEL MY WAY OUT THROUGH THE COLD, DAMP DARKNESS. WHEN I REACHED THE SUN, I RAN FOR THE NILE.



In tumultuous times, a stranger walked from the desert in the direction of Saklara, the great necropolis. This man was unlike others; his staring eyes and fleshy lips reminded some of the ancient Khemites. He didn't speak, whether by choice or nature, we know not and he never gave any his name. When he chose to communicate, he did so through writing. It is said that he wrote in a language of strange, dark symbols and the ink on the papyrus turned to hieratic on its own. He was accompanied by a similar man, a countryman of his wearing the robes and headgear of a priest, whom the nameless man referred to as Taran-lsh. The

nameless man possessed sorcerous ways, able to lay waste to a wall by waving his hand or to strangle a man merely by closing his fist, and his priest seemed to be his chronicler and advisor. The Nameless Man told the story of his people, persecuted and nearly destroyed in a faraway land. He and a few others escaped, and later the vengeful dead of his kind visited doom upon their foes when it was least expected. The unnamed man threw down the mighty sorcerers Nephotes and Ubar, casting them from the land, cursing them never to return. The people proclaimed him pharaoh and

gave him the name Qakare son of Ib. His reign was short, merely four years, two months, one day. When he died, it is said that his body disappeared in a mist. A temple to him was built in Saklara on the spot where he appeared, with the usual protections. His advisor disappeared into the desert north of Saklara, never to be seen again.

The boy you seek
is alive and very
happy.

He will not be placed
in danger or ever
take the sands
as a validator.
I swear this by all the
Godesses of the
seas and the Tides.

Leave Dredgum,
forget all about
Lucius Murrillo,
and never return.
Grow old and die
many years
from now
surrounded by
your friends and
families.

Hail Brother Nine,

My dear friend, how wonderful to hear from you after all these years. I did not expect that your research into the Spheres would succeed. I doubted your ability to call on a Descendant to summon you back into Time, and yet here you stand.

I am not surprised you had to kill the weak-minded whelp before he betrayed you. Rome has so degenerated that even your seed could not escape corruption. Was it such a good idea to Salt him? You need his memories, yet he will always be a weak link. I counsel you to return him to Saltes and not call him up again. You must marry to restore the line. I am sure you will keep your wife properly in check and not allow her the license that these modern sluts assume.

Things go well for me in Athens. Praise to the Visitation as people are not so apt now to notice those Out of Time as I am. Thanks to the wars of your Emperor, I have got some choice specimens from the Tin Isles, but there was one that almost took my face off. It came from a barrow but was not human. If all goes well in the autumn, I will send you the Nazarene as you request, but do not send him back spoiled as you have done with my specimens in the past.

I have written to Three to tell him of your return. Things do not go so well for him in Egypt. The new prefect is very meddlesome and inquires into the disappearances. I am sure that you will manage things much better at your end. If Three writes that he will send you what he found under the Ziggurat of Ur, do not answer, as it does not heed even him and has eyes in its palms.

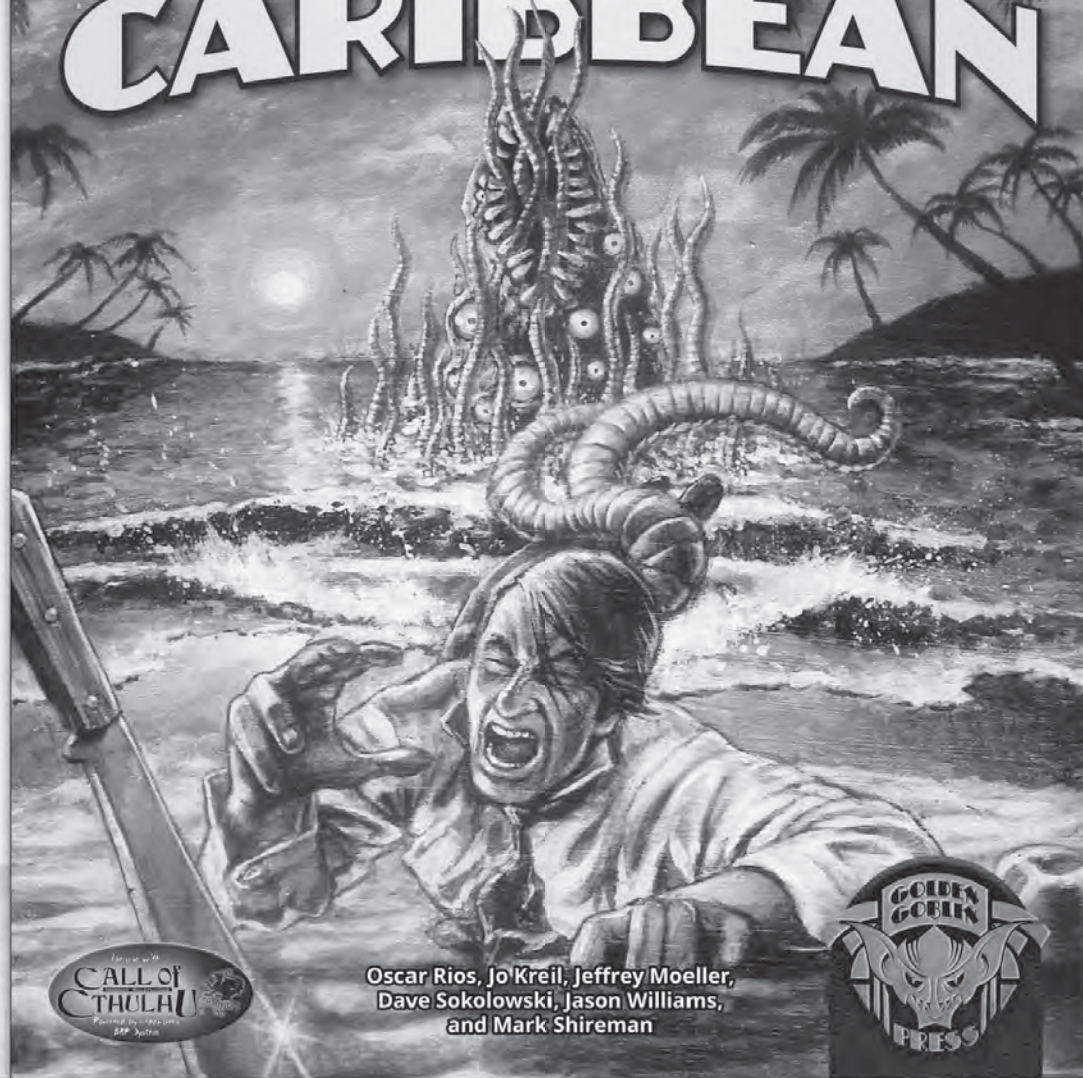
Yours in scholarship,
Seven

Germanicus LXXXXXI
Cerberus LXXXXXII
Taurus LXXXXXIII
Mummius. LXXXXXIII / οε'
Lucius Opimius. LXXXXXV / υα'
Tertius Orestius Sedonius. LXXXXXVI

Tertius Orestius Sedonius Papers #2

GOLDEN GOBLIN PRESS PRESENTS

TALES OF THE CARIBBEAN



Oscar Rios, Jo Kreil, Jeffrey Moeller,
Dave Sokolowski, Jason Williams,
and Mark Shireman



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