

An Adventure for Character Levels 6-9

# MYSTARA

Expert Game Adventure

## Lords of the Cruth Lowlands

by Agathokles



# LORDS OF THE CRUTH LOWLANDS

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## Introduction

This module is designed as a sandbox campaign adventure for mid-Expert level characters aiming at obtaining a fief in Karameikos upon reaching name level. To this end, it provides the characters ample opportunities to explore the western reaches of the Grand Duchy, obtain fame and recognition from powerful political players, and finally establish a stronghold. Even for characters who do not wish to become dominion rulers, the module provides a number of adventure hooks and patrons that can be used to drive the plot. This adventure assumes you use "GAZ1: *The Grand Duchy of Karameikos*", and my Karameikos Companion articles. The *Dungeon Master Survival Kit* can also be useful, and is referenced to several times.

## Credits

This campaign aims at covering a large part of Western Karameikos. Thus, I have taken advantage of previous work that provided new locations, items, NPCs and adventure ideas in the area. Here is a (hopefully exhaustive) list.

*The Helmet of Zirchev: Wolven Head* by Ville Ladhe  
*The Turnwood* by Gordon McCormick  
*Koskatep* by Francesco "Sturm" Defferrari  
*Riverfork Keep* and *Fury of the West* NPCs by John W. Biles  
The *Haakenberg* family by Simone "Zendrolion" Neri  
*Petra: Community on the Borderlands* by Sean "Yellowdingo" Meaney  
The Ivanovich family from *Traladara Mini-Gazetteer* by Jennifer Guerra  
Achelos Outlaws and other NPCs inspired by *The Achelos Adventure*, by Patrick Sullivan

## Player Character Hooks

Ideally, the player characters would start the adventure in either Luln, Riverfork Keep or Specularum. Characters that aim at noble titles could, at 6th level or above, have already good contacts with the Karameikan aristocracy. If this is the case, one of their contacts (preferably Lord *Alexius Korrigan*, or else a member of the Karameikos, Penhaligon, or Kelvin families) will tell the characters that they will stand a greater chance of obtaining recognition from the Duke by helping a colonization effort in the Cruth Lowlands. They are directed to contact Lord *Kaerin Penhaligon* in *Nova Achelos*, a new settlement sponsored by the crown near the ruins of the Traladaran city of Achelos. Alternately, the characters could be assigned by Lord Korrigan the task of mapping part of the Cruth Lowlands region, which would lead them, in time, to Nova Achelos.

Clerical characters may instead be assigned by their superiors to the Nova Achelos mission, while military characters starting in Riverfork Keep are temporarily assigned to the Nova Achelos guard detail. Other hooks include Traladaran families that used to hold lands in or near Achelos sending their most promising descendants to reclaim the family lands, as well as rumors about *Iron Ring* or *Sons of Night* presence in the area, should the characters be declared enemies or have an interest in these secret societies.

## Plot Overview

The adventure can then develop in several directions. The basic plot revolves around the consolidation of the *Nova Achelos* settlement. The characters can get jobs in cleaning out monsters from the Riverside Slums district, then to recover specific

items or secure buildings in the Merchant District and Nobles Estates. Finally, they will discover the presence of two necromancers, a Vampire Lord and a Son of Night battling for control of the Graveyard. The characters can then face the Vampire Lord in the River Fort, and finally brave the dangers of the Tomb of Achelos II and deal with a tribe of Ogres to recover the Regalia of Achelos.

From there, the party will find several opportunities that will lead them to explore the upper course of the Achelos river, either looking for new mountain passes into Darokin, new mining sites, or even the secrets of the Sons of Night. Having removed or reduced several of the threats to Nova Achelos, the party will have unwittingly opened the way for a much worse threat, the Hill Giants. It will be up to them to deal with the Giants, and perhaps investigate the ancient dwarven mine of Kurest Hurgon.

Other plotlines deal with the *Turnwood*, a high magic point contended by several powerful creatures, and lead to the *Tomb of Trinkla the Black Seer* in the Blight Swamp to recover the Bell of Chardastes.

Many additional ruins and sites are provided to allow the characters a great deal of flexibility in the choice of their goals -- indeed, as an alternative primary plot, the party could be even hired to map a part of the region, either by Lord Alexius Korrigan in Specularum, or by Lord Kaerin Penhaligon in Nova Achelos. In this case, use the *Turnwood* plotline for an exploration of the Achelos Woods, or the Nova Achelos plotline above for the exploration of the upper course of the Achelos river.

Besides the original concepts listed in the credits, this adventure employs several non-Mystaran modules, including "*Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*", "*King of the Giantdowns*", "*Tomb of Horrors*", and

"*The Forge of Fury*". Feel free to replace these adventures with others having a similar theme. For instance, "*Deep Dwarven Delve*" could replace "*The Forge of Fury*".

## History of the Cruth Lowlands

### The Taymoran Age

**BC 2500** At this time, the major settlement of the Cruth Lowlands is a Giantish fort on the river Magos, part of the borderlands of the Kingdom of *Southern Grondheim*.

The *Taymorans*, a human nation with bronze age technology among stone age Azcans and Nithians, establish bronze age kingdoms south and west of the Grondheim giants. Culturally, the Taymorans are heavily influenced by the priesthood of Nyx, known to them as *Zargos*.

**BC 2400** The Taymorans use their magic and knowledge of metallurgy to establish a number of trade routes to the west (with Azcans and Huleans) and north (to the newly created Antalian holdings in Heldann). In the process, they discover the high magic point of *Nightpeak*, which prompts a tremendous advance in knowledge of necromantic magic. The order of the *Zargosian Sorcerers* is established, and its leader, a powerful necromancer, becomes the first Nosferatu.

**BC 2350:** Taymoran leaders, who are by now mostly priests of Nyx and necromantic wizards, start joining the ranks of the undead, under the tutelage of the original Nosferatu. The *Zargosian Sorcerers* dominate the Taymoran political scene for a while, but soon the Necromancer-Kings become so powerful that they rely less and less on Nyx's priesthood, and more on their own magic.

Taymoran spies and scouts locate more high magic points in the Cruth Lowlands and elsewhere in what is now Karameikos, prompting their kings to set their eyes on that land.

**BC 2250** The *Sheyallia* elves reach Taymor. The local Necromancer Kings offer them the lands to the east of their nation, provided that they help opening new trade routes -- which will also allow access to the high magic points. Elven mercenary companies, armed with Taymoran bronze weaponry, invade the giant-held forests and mountains, chasing the giants from the region.

The Giant King of Southern Grondheim is defeated upon the banks of the Magos river by a combined force of Taymorans and elves, and the fort is destroyed. The surviving Giants entomb their king in a barrow north of the battle site.

**BC 2240** The Turnwood, a high magic point in the forests, becomes the center of magical research and learning on shapechanging and alteration magics.

**BC 2200** The defeated giants (the Fomorians) are finally enslaved by the Taymorans, and forced to build megalithic fortresses and cities, including *Kosmoteiros* and *Magos* in the Cruth Lowlands. *Kosmoteiros*, built over the ruins of Koskatepetl, a pre-cataclysmic Azcan city, becomes a center of learning of the *Zargosian Sorcerers*.

Meanwhile, advances in the Turnwood facilities lead to the creation of the first Taymoran lycanthropes, the werewolves. With the influx of silver from the new trade routes to the north-east, research programs are scaled up to tackle the creation of new species, or at least deep modification of existing ones. The Taymoran Hairless and the Taymoran Hound Lupin breeds are created as the original Lupins fall under the sway of the Necromancer Kings of Taymor.

**BC 2100** The Turnwood discoveries have now reached most of the Taymoran city-states, and various necromancer kings

develop special servant races, like the albarendi and the lycanthropes (they follow one of the beliefs of their patroness, Nyx, who likes creating new races, especially ones accustomed to a night-based activity cycle).

Albarendi were common Taymoran humans bred as albinos by the kings and ending up ostracised by their own people in fear of their link with the undead masters.

Lycanthropes are created by some of the most cruel necromancer kings, desperate to keep their minions subjugated. They devise a magical disease which would impart more bestial aspects onto its victims.

**BC 2000** A number of Necromancer-Kings try to increase their power by shifting their allegiance from Nyx to Thanatos. The effects are devastating, as the war between followers of the two entropic immortal rages for years.

**BC 1978** Kosmoteiros is destroyed in the war between the followers of Thanatos and Nyx. The Zargosian Sorcerers are almost wiped out in the war.

**BC 1850** By this time, Taymor is reduced to a fractured land, both geographically and politically, while the star of the Nithian Kingdom north of the mountains rises.

**BC 1750** Taymor sinks under the waves. The Cruth Lowlands are not submerged, but the earthquakes that destroy Taymor also bring to the collapse of Magos. The Turnwood research facility is hit by a tsunami. It survives mostly unscathed, due to the magic wards and the natural magic of the area, but the few remaining inhabitants are killed. The Cruth Lowlands suffer a major loss of population, with only scattered villages surviving.

The few surviving descendents of the Zargosian Sorcerers regroup into the *Sons of Night*, an informal network of magic users and followers of Nyx.

## The Traldar Age

**BC 1500** The Nithian-led *Traldar* people settle along the coast south-east of the Cruth Lowlands. Within 50 years, they expand into the Lowlands, absorbing the remaining Taymorans, or "people of the night". The only legacy of the Taymorans are the Sons of the Night, who survive as a secret society.

**BC 1400** A series of harsh winters, plagues, and attacks from native monsters has destroyed the Nithian aristocracy and turned the Traldar back to the stone age. The *Hutaakans* take over, rebuilding the city of Magos, and constructing Achelos as their capital in the Cruth Lowlands. A leader of the Hutaakans, the *High Priest of Achelos*, takes direct control of the Cruth Lowlands, spreading "new" agricultural and medical techniques that allow a rapid growth of the city. The Achelos Protectorate becomes the most populous Traldar nation, with the Hutaakan leadership still in charge.

Instigated by Pflarr, the Hutaakans create the legend of the "cursed hill" of Koskatop, to keep the Traldar from investigating the ruins of Kosmoteiros.

**BC 1370** The High Priest of Achelos dies and is entombed in a pyramid south-east of the city. Actually, the high priest embarks in the quest for Immortality.

**BC 1000** The Hutaakan priests, warned too late of the impending invasion by their eastern compatriots, retreat frantically from the Cruth Lowlands, which are invested by the Gnoll hordes. Part of the Traldar population flees west through the Hin lands.

A great Traldar healer, *Chardastes*, rises to fame right before the invasion.

Militarily unprepared, the Traldars of the Kingdom of Achelos are butchered. The city of Achelos itself is reduced to ruins. Chardastes is able to reduce the casualties, and becomes the leader of the few surviving Traldars. Actually,

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Chardastes is the High Priest of Achelos, returned through a time travelling device to save his kingdom.

Orcish tribes found the *Kingdom of Othrong* in the territory of the modern Five Shires.

**BC 992** Battle of Volaga River: Halav defeats the Beastman king Flahgr. He dies in the battle, but is raised by Queen Petra.

**BC 980** *Zirchev* settles in the Turnwood, studying polymorphic magic there for a decade. He creates new magical wards to prevent ill-intentioned magic users from exploiting the powers of the high magic point. He also uses the powers of the Turnwood to awaken a group trees, transforming them into Treants.

**BC 950** The last Gnolls are driven away from the Traldar lands, but the Traldar population has dropped to 20% of the pre-war level.

### The Dark Age

**BC 938** Fall of the *Kingdom of Hindon* at the hands of the Orcs.

The Vandar tribes migrate from central Darokin to the Five Shires.

**BC 933** The *Vandars*, northern raiders that had taken part in the Hindon wars, invade the Cruth Lowlands. Due to the massive damages wrought by the Gnolls in that area, they find no opposition. More Vandar tribes will enter the Traldar lands in the following twenty years.

**BC 900** Achelos is partly rebuilt, though it is only a small town by now. Vandar chiefs who have married into the Chardastes dynasty rule the area, with their ancestor divinized as the local patron Hero.

**BC 870** Zirchev becomes Immortal under the patronage of Ilsundal.

**BC 850** Zirchev, now an Immortal, returns to the Turnwood to create the first *Chevall*. Since the Vandar settlement and the

unrest in the Hinhome endangers the Turnwood and its odd inhabitants, Zirchev turns some of his local followers into Werewolves, and entrusts to the the protection of the Achelos woods, as well as his relic, the *Wolven Head*.

**BC 800** The Traldar population rises, and the Traldar mix with the now sedentary Vandars.

Halag is founded around this time by a Vandar tribe.

**BC 743-610** The Time of Heroes in the Hin lands. Many Orc clans leave the Shires and settle in the western Cruth Lowlands. Among them are the *Blackstone Orcs* and the *Jagged Claws*. This forces other, weaker clans such as the Broken Hammers and the Rotting Snakes to resettle further east, between the Magos and Gustos rivers.

**BC 612** *Nob Nar*, a Hin adventurer, kills the Vandar baron *Ulstagh* of Halag.

**BC 609** Hin restoration led by Gunzuth the Clanless is completed.

### The Rise of Traladara

**BC 500** The fusion of Vandars and Traldars has brought to a new people, the *Traladarans*. The Cruth Lowlands, however, keep their own cultural traits -- stronger Vandar traditions, and the re-emerging Sons of Night. The cults of Chardastes and Zirchev are also more common than those of Halav and Petra.

**BC 491** Goblinoid hordes fleeing the Sardal Pass take refuge in the Cruth Mountains, becoming a long-term threat to the Traladarans. The *Greyslayer* orcs and the Cruth Ogres settle in the Cruth Lowlands.

**BC 308** *Trinkla*, a young magician, steals the *Black Opal Eye* from the Isle of Lost Dream while the Seer of Traldar is absent. She flees to the Blight Swamp, seeking the secrets of Zirchev's power, and becomes known as the *Black Seer*.



**BC 282** The Black Seer, in one of her deranged experiments, creates the *Slough of Despair*.

**BC 276** The Black Seer dies, and the Black Opal Eye is entombed with her.

**BC 195-147** Traladaran prince (Ban) *Ithron* unifies the Traladaran clans and takes the title of King of Traladara. His kingdom does not survive him for long.

**BC 4** The Seer of Traldar, *Elyas* recovers the Black Opal Eye from the tomb of Trinkla the Black Seer.

**AC 301-356** *Bogdan Ivanovich*, Ban of Marilenev, claims the title of King of Traladara. He manages to bring under his heel several clans, but the kingdom dissolves at Ivanovich's death.

**AC 327** *Anton Ivanovich*, younger son of King Bogdan, leads an expedition into the Cruth Lowlands. He conquers Achelos, establishing a Banate there. The Ivanoviches bring the Marilenev culture with them, creating some tension with the locals.

**AC 364** Following the death of King Bogdan and Ban Anton, the Cruth natives align with the Hojah clan of Halag. Vlad Artho creates the dominion of *Vidlice*, taking the title of Zhupa. The Ivanoviches remain in control of Achelos.

## The Traladaran Wars

**AC 400** Thyatian missionary clerics reach Marilenev and other major towns in Traladara. Formalization of the *Song of Halav* in a written text ensues.

**AC 410** Merchants from New Alphatia bring lycanthropy and vampirism to Traladara. At the same time, the descendants of the Taymoran Nosferatu resurface. Halag, at this time, is one of the major trade partners of New Alphatia, and suffers from epidemics of both lycanthropy

and vampirism. The Knights of Halav are created to counter these threats.

**AC 412-417** First Traladaran War against the Kingdom of Darokin. A modernization effort leads to adoption of Thyatian customs across most of Traladara, but the western Traladaran nobles, including those of Halag, Achelos and Vidlice, resist such changes.

**AC 444-450** Religious conflicts within the Church of Traladara and political manipulation by the Harbortown envoys lead to the Second Traladaran War, which pits Marilenev against Halag. The western clans, having lost their main trade partner, New Alphatia, to the Silver Purge, are soundly defeated at the Battle of Svoga. The Hojah clan and many of its allies leave Traladara to resettle in the far west. The *Vargos* family takes over the title of Ban of Halag.

As a result of the change in power balance in western Traladara, the Dukes of Achelos are once more on the rise, together with newer families such as those of Koriszegy. The Artho are displaced from Vidlice, which is all but destroyed, and resettle in Halag.

**AC 474-493** Duke *Demara of Halavos* is acknowledged as King of Traladara by the northern barons, leading to the Third and Fourth Traladaran War. Once more, the league of southern lords emerges victorious, weakening Halavos and Halag and strengthening Marilenev.

Achelos remains neutral during the Third war, but joins the *Traladaran League* in the Fourth Traladaran War.

## The Traladaran League

**AC 500-600** Age of the Traladaran League: the creation of a formal alliance of the Traladaran nobles marks an age of peace in Traladara, marred only by the return of lycanthropy and vampirism in the more isolated regions.



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**AC 546** The Stronghollow dwarven clan establishes the mine of Kurest Hurgon in the Black Peaks.

**AC 600** The Traladaran League is finally dissolved due to dissension between the clans and the disappearance of the Darokin threat. The Ban of Halag assumes the title of Duke, following most other Traladaran nobles. This event marks the end of the Marilenev hegemony, and a return to power of the Dukes of Halag. In response, the Duke of Achelos, *Vasil Ivanovich*, assumes the title of King.

### The Vampire Wars

**AC 675** The vampire-king psychosis and the political chaos of Darokin reach Traladara as well. A number of "holy wars", more or less justified, are fought between the Traladaran nobles during the course of the following fifty years, instigated by Orcus in the form of a devil swine.

**AC 700** Battle of Blackflame in the Five Shires. The Orcish horde, defeated, flees into the mountain. The Kingdom of Achelos suffers from Orcish raids for the next decade. Hill Giants become more active during the following years, further distracting Achelos from the Vampire Wars.

**AC 728** An alliance including Marilenev, Vidrin and Selenica defeats the Black Count of the Moor.

**AC 735** *Moir the Pure* and her warriors are killed by Hill Giants at Three Axes Ford while trying to reach the besieged dwarven mine of Kurest Hurgon.

**AC 783** *Castle Koriszegy* is struck by a curse that destroys the entire clan, except for the Count, who becomes a mad vampire. The territory around the castle quickly becomes a wilderness, as the local Traladarans flee to Halag or Achelos.

**AC 813** The mythical Sword of Halav is last seen in the hands of the Duke of

Halag, *Uidar the Quick* during the hunt for the Beast of Radlebb Woods. The Duke, wounded, is forced to retreat.

**AC 821** Duke Uidar Vargos mysteriously vanishes during a hunt in the eastern Cruth Lowlands. His companions are found dead, killed by Ogres, but there is no trace of the valiant Duke.

### The Thyatian Conquest

**AC 900** The Emperor of Thyatis, Gabrionius IV, sends his legions in Traladara, and installs a governor in Marilenev, which is renamed Specularum. Garrisons are sent to the borderlands, with the goal of setting up spearheads for a campaign against the Darokinian successor states. Imperial Legate *Flavian Osteropulos* sends an entire legion under Legion Legate *Alharbius* to occupy western Traladara. The Thyatian legionnaires, helped by Glantrian mercenaries led by *Jan Vandevic*, easily defeat in a field battle the army of Duke *Ivan Vargos* of Halag, killing the Duke and many of his followers.

Tribune *Rosentus* is set as Lieutenant Governor of Halag, while Legate Alharbius marches north towards Achelos. Contrary to Duke Vargos, King *Achelos II Ivanovich* does not face the Thyatian legion in open battle, relying instead on the difficult terrain to slow down the Thyatians and target them with countless ambushes. The hit and run tactics of the Achelos army delay the invading army for almost a year, until Alharbius orders his troop into a forced march into the enemy territory towards the Traladaran capitol. The Thyatians carry with them the materials needed to set up a siege -- thus giving origin to the legend of Alharbius creating a siege wall all around Achelos by magic in a single night.

After a long siege, and the death of King Achelos II, Alharbius' troops take the city. There are very few survivors. The supporters of Achelos II outside the city, however, continue their guerrilla war for

years, leading to the progressive depopulation of the area.

Later in the same year, Tribune Rosentus leads a small expedition in the Blight Swamp, but only few of his men ever return.

**AC 905** Surviving members of the *Ivanovich* family settle near the ruins of Vidlice.

**AC 908** Oleg and Zlatan Ivanovich, with the help of the dwarf Onyx Ironhand and the halfling Meza Oakbridge (actually, the Gold Dragon Azem in disguise), venture into the Blight Swamp and slay the Great Black Dragon *Acramar*.

**AC 910** Taking advantage of the distraction provided by the turmoil in the human lands, gold dragon queen *Azem* challenges and binds *Vulomar*, the new black dragon ruler of the Blight Swamp -- an offspring of the previous ruler, *Acramar*.

**AC 920** *Onyx Ironhand*, now the master smith of Highforge, forges Bedlam's Hammer from the remains of an earth elemental, using the hide of *Acramar* to give grip on the mithril haft.

**AC 940** Cronak Onyxwarf Ironhand is slain by giants at Three Axes Ford while trying to reach *Kurest Hurgon*.

**AC 944** *Battle of Fire Rock*: Orcish armies gathering north of Wereskalot are scattered by a Hin surprise attack. Many Orcs flee into the Province of Traladara, prompting the new Governor General, Stefan Karameikos II (uncle of the current Duke, and at that time heir to the Duchy of Machetos) to order the construction of the Riverfork Keep over the ruins of Vidlice.

**AC 948** Stefan Karameikos II is recalled to Machetos to succeed to his father, Duke *Boris Karameikos*. This causes a delay in

the completion of the fortification of Riverfork Keep.

**AC 950** By this time, the northern part of the Cruth Lowlands is fully in the hands of the Orcs. Achelos is completely abandoned, with the surviving Traladarans moving south to the safer bay of Halag, or even to Specularum.

**AC 952** Green dragon siblings *Krolovaash* and *Ahkriin* arrive in the Cruth Lowlands, establishing their lairs in the region.

**AC 967** Taking advantage of the increased protection given by the Riverfork Keep, the Radu family establishes the *Radu Quarry* on river Magos. *Vucevo* grows from a single homestead to a small village.

**AC 969** Red dragon *Ulnag* challenges and binds Ahkriin, creating the first embryo of his kingdom, *Ulnagaar*.

### The Grand Duchy of Karameikos

**AC 970** *Stefan Karameikos III* trades the Duchy of Machetos to Emperor Thincol for the Grand Duchy of Traladara and independence.

**AC 971** *Ludwig von Hendricks*, the theatrical and bloodthirsty cousin of Duke Stefan, "conquers" Halag, renaming it the "Black Eagle Barony".

**AC 982** *Lotharius Haakenberg*, an enterprising Hattian veteran of Stefan's infantry stationed at Riverfork retires from the army and builds the Haakenberg homestead.

**AC 984** The dwarves of *Kurest Hurgon* attempt another sortie from their mine. They manage to capture some much needed deer, and to collect assorted herbs and plants, but are spotted by hill giants. Most dwarves manage to flee back into the mine, but a few are captured.

**AC 989** Many Traladarans from Halag flee to the Five Shires. Baron Ludwig von Hendriks sends his troops in the Shires,

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but the Black Eagle is rebuffed by Hin militia.

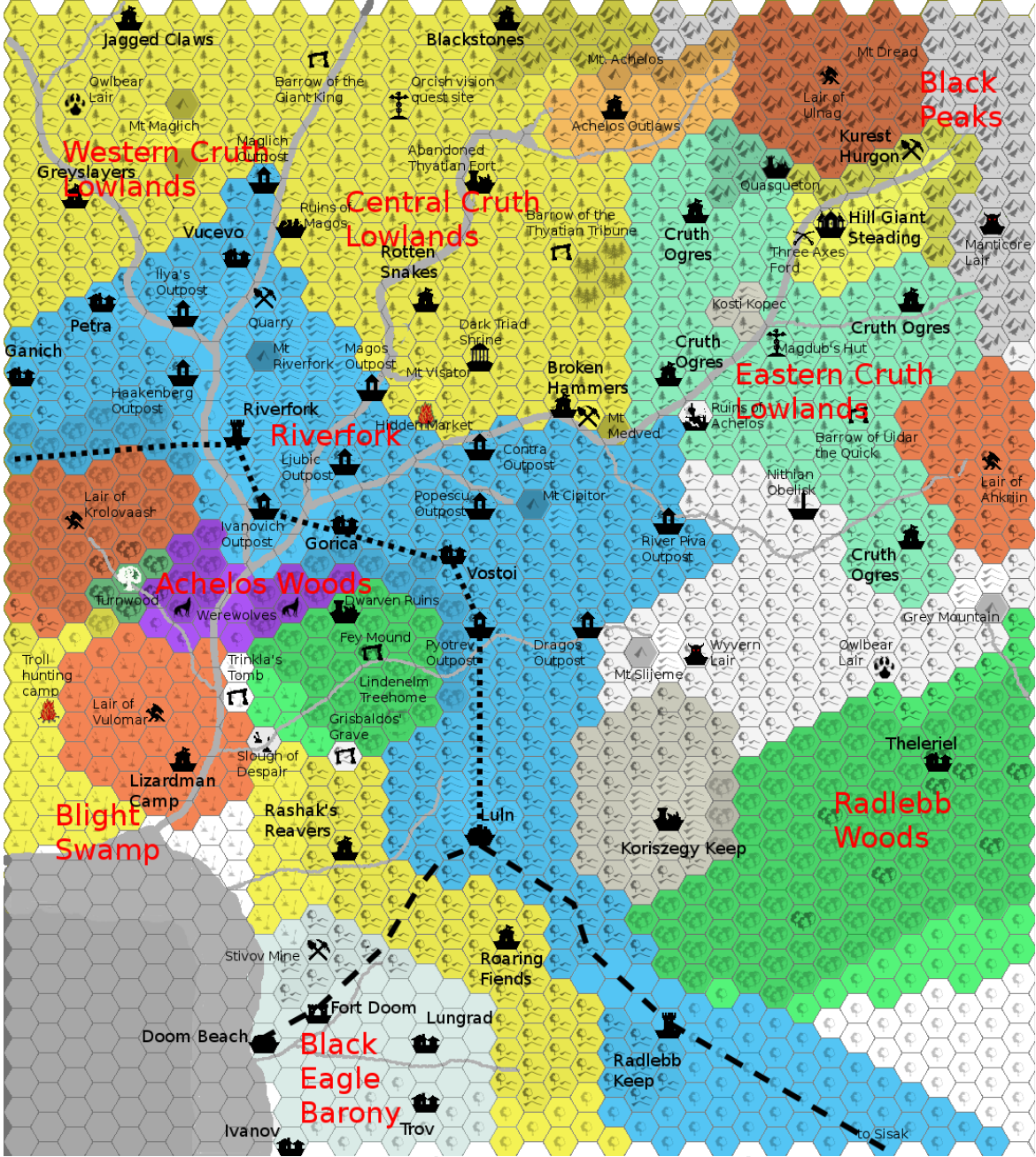
**AC 990-991** Ludwig von Hendriks sends two military expeditions against the Hin, but fails in both attempts.

**AC 992** Duke Stefan orders Baron Von Hendricks to put an end to his war with the Five Shires.

**AC 996** The Moulder dwarf *Fjalarr* establishes a forge under the lair of the Broken Hammer Orcs. He strikes a deal with Orcs to provide ores needed for his work.

**AC 998** Grand Darker *Anna Exoter* ("Nox Aeterna") leads a fraternity of experienced Sons of Night ("Darkers") into the dungeons beneath Kosti Kopec, recovering ancient artifacts and setting her base there.

**AC 1000** Vulomar's eldest son leaves the Blight Swamp and breaches into Kurest Hurgon from a submerged entrance in the Achelos river.



## Atlas of the Lowlands

The Cruth Lowlands region is a sparsely settled borderland, with a total of circa 2000 humans (and demihumans) living in the area, most of them in the Riverfork area between the Achelos Woods and the Lowlands proper.

### Settlements and Lairs

The main human settlements are the villages of Ganich, Petra, Vucevo, Gorica and Vostoi, as well as the Riverfork Keep. These village total no more than 350 civilian inhabitants, since most of the human population is spread among a number of large outposts and fortified farms. The larger outposts (depicted on the area map) have usually no more than 20 inhabitants each, while the smaller ones (circa two in each hex in the areas controlled by humans) only hold an enlarged family of 7 to 12 people. Descriptions of Gorica and Petra can be found in "*River of Blood*" and in "*Petra: Community on the Borderlands*"<sup>1</sup> respectively. Riverfork Keep and the surrounding village are described in "*Riverfork Keep*"<sup>2</sup>.

### Goblinoid Tribes

There are several goblinoid tribes in the region. Orcs dominate the western and central Cruth Lowlands, while Ogres hold the eastern Lowlands. Some Hobgoblins and Gnolls from the southern Black Eagle Barony, the Roaring Fiends and Rashak's Reavers, have been attempting an expansion towards Luln and the Achelos river.

Orc tribes include the Jagged Claws, Rotten Snakes, Greyslayers, Blackstones, Broken Hammers. See "*Goblinoid Tribes of Karameikos*" for more details<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pandius.com/petra.com.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pandius.com/rfrkkeep.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pandius.com/karagobl.html>

### Monster Lairs

Many monsters hunt the Cruth Lowlands. There is a Large Black Dragon (with a small number of Small Black followers) in the Blight Swamp, a Small Green in the Achelos Woods, and a Small Red who is almost ready to become Large in the Black Peaks. The first two are vassals of Azemur, while the latter is independent of the major draconic kingdom, and is king of a small territory encompassing the Black Peaks. He's an offspring of the Red Dragon of the Wufwolde hills.

*Lizardmen* are present in the Blight Swamp. These small tribes are controlled by the Black Dragon Vulomar. Only the largest tribe has a permanent settlement, marked on the map.

*Trolls* are also found in the Blight Swamp (occasionally, they stray also into the Riverfork Woods). A frequently used hunting camp is marked on the map, but these Trolls are generally nomadic. They hunt the lizardmen as well as anything else that lives in the swamp, but greatly fear the black dragons.

*Owlbears* are solitary monsters that can roam quite a bit in search of food or in the mating season, but go into a slumber during winter. Together with *Manticores* and *Wyverns*, Owlbears are among the most dangerous predators of the Cruth Lowlands.

### Sites and Landmarks

#### Barrow of Uidar the Quick

This is the tomb of Uidar the Quick<sup>4</sup>, Duke of Halag, who once wielded the Sword of Halav and faced the Beast of Radlebb in combat. He died suddenly during a hunting trip, and was temporarily buried in an old giantish barrow. However, his companions fell victims to a Ogre ambush on the return trip, and never reached Halag to report his death. Search parties found the

<sup>4</sup> Uidar the Quick first appeared in the "DM's Survival Kit".

dead companions, but not Uidar himself, leading to the legend of his mysterious disappearance.

### Barrow of the Thyatian Tribune

A Thyatian officer was buried here after dying in a skirmish against Achelos holdouts in 900 AC. The barrow, however, is much older, dating back to the age when the Giants ruled this area. The Thyatians merely re-used it as a practical solution for burying the dead officer.

### Abandoned Thyatian Fort

This wooden fort was part of the early attempts by Thyatian governors of Traladara to colonize the Cruth Lowlands. Such attempts were soon suspended, as the Thyatian government preferred leaving the Cruth Lowlands to the Orcs, and paying the goblinoids to harass their enemies in the Five Shires, rather than having to share a border with the troublesome Hin.

The fort itself is a small affair, and mostly ruined, but resourceful characters willing to make themselves into a local power could try and hold it against the nearby Orcish tribes. The fort could otherwise be used as a temporary base by bandits, such as the Achelos Outlaws, or small monster bands.

### Three Axes Ford

Mentioned in the legend of Moira the Pure<sup>5</sup>, the Three Axes Ford is the site of the battle that saw the end of that Traladaran saint at the hands of Hill Giants (now residing in the *Steading*). *Kurest Hurgon* is the dwarven mine that Moira and her warriors were attempting to reach when they were ambushed by the Hill Giants.

<sup>5</sup> Moira the Pure and Three Axes Ford are originally found in the "DM's Survival Kit".

### Grisbaldos' Tomb and the Slough of Despair<sup>6</sup>

Grisbaldos was a Thyatian legionnaire in Tribune Rosentos' unit during the Thyatian occupation. Rosentos organized an expedition to the Blight Swamp, but perished there with most of his soldiers. Grisbaldos, a Centurion, was among the first to die, even before the troop entered the swamp itself. He was buried under a mound of stones, which stands to this day as a landmark in the area. His ghost haunts the area, seeking revenge for his death.

The Slough of Despair is a magical effect that saps the will, especially in Lawful aligned beings. It is an effect of Trinkla's use of the Black Opal Eye --- the Black Seer's experiments with the powers of the Eye unbalanced the forces of magic in the area, and Trinkla relocated farther into the Blight Swamp.

### Tomb of Trinkla the Black Seer

Trinkla was an early Traladaran sorceress. She stole the Black Opal Eye from its rightful bearer, the Seer of the Lake of Lost Dreams, and fled to the western swamps, starting a career of experimentation into the darkest sides of arcane Divination, Summoning and Necromancy. Her experiments disrupted heavily the ecosystem of the swamp, filling it with dark predators such as the *serpentweed*, as well as dark magic points such as the Slough of Despair. The swamp thus gained its moniker of "Blight Swamp", and Trinkla became the "Black Seer".

Refusing death, Trinkla had a great mausoleum dug into an hill by slave labor and magic, protected it with traps and magical guardians, and secluded herself therein with a great store of magic items, texts, and artifacts (including the Black Opal Eye), studying the way to become a Lich. Most people assumed she had died

<sup>6</sup> Both Grisbaldos' Tomb and the Slough of Despair are originally found in "The Treasure of the Hideous One".

and had been buried there, however, as Trinkla did not fully succeed at her task, and never emerged as a Lich. But neither she failed --- her undead spirit is still locked into the tomb, draining the energies needed to activate from her cache of magical items, and still seeks to become a true Lich. She was once on the verge of success, but then the Thyatian wizard Elyas braved the dangers of the tomb and stole back the Black Opal Eye, becoming the new Seer of the Lake of Lost Dreams. Recently, cultists of Orcus plotted to send the Bell of Chardastes, a minor artifact that could ruin their plans in Achelos, into Trinkla's Tomb. There, the undead Seer is siphoning the energy of the Bell to replenish her own strength, and might emerge as a full Lich in the near future, unless the Bell is recovered.

### **Dwarven Ruins in the Achelos Woods**

These ruined underground passages were once part of the border fortifications of Loktal Ironshield's kingdom. They were abandoned after the fall of the Glittering Land. The topmost tunnels are still passable, and are sometimes used as temporary refuge by passing bands of goblinoids, or by human bandits, since their position makes them easy to defend and hard to locate.

The lower passages are blocked and have all but collapsed. Perhaps excavations could lead to intact caverns, and even to more ancient ruins of the Taymoran times.

### **The Fey Mound and the Lindenelm Clanhome**

This mound is the entrance to the dwelling of a small faeries court, led by Sidhe Princess *Fionnchaomh* (Sidhe Rogue 8, C). Nixies make up a large part of her court, and reside in the river. Their speaker is *Mavka* (Nixie 5, C), an elder nixie who lives in the small lake near the Fey Mound itself. Other members of the court include a number of Woodrakes, Sidhe, and a few Leprechaun craftsmen. The faeries of the Achelos Woods are much more isolationists

and radical than those of Alfheim or the Southern Radlebb Woods, and have (and desire) no contact with humans.

They tolerate the presence of the *Lindenelm* elf clan, with whom they deal through Woodrake changelings. The Lindenelm is a small but ancient elven clan, which has been living in the Near Achelos Woods for centuries, essentially undetected by the Traladarans. The Lindenelm elves are the last remains of the mercenary clans that stuck with the Taymoran Necromancer Kings after the civil war erupted in that empire. The upper ranks of those mercenaries, who had earlier helped the Taymorans in their wars with the Giants, had mixed fully with the decadent Taymor society, adopting the worship of Nyx. Their long lives helped them fit well with the Nosferatu, of course. Many of those leaders, however, committed heinous crimes during the Taymoran age, such as allowing or even taking part in the magical experiments on the Albarendi elves. When the Taymoran empire collapsed, this elven ruling class was overthrown. The Lindenelm ancestors, while not involved in the worst excesses, were still ostracized by the Vyalia, and forced to flee the eastern forests. They settled in the Achelos Woods, but their population never grew to a significant extent -- the clan nowadays has less than 50 members. Due to the small size of the clan, and their inability to deal with either the Vyalia or the Callarii (who are aware of the Lindenelm clan's past), junior members of this clan often travel extensively, under assumed identities, to lands where their clan history is not known, to find brides (and thus avoid inbreeding). Some of them, however, decide to leave their dark history behind themselves and never come back to the Clanhome.

The Lindenelm elves have, obviously, no relic. However, in their long history, they have collected both a large selection of spells dealing with darkness, and a number of magical items, including *Comet's Edge*, a powerful polearm of unknown origin, which was found on the



corpse of a fallen Traladaran adventurer. The elves recognized the powerful magic aura of the weapon, but do not use it, as they favor bows and spears.

### **Orcish vision quest site**

This site is a place of religious significance for the nearby Orcish tribes -- encounters with Orc shamans and warriors are more frequent here. The vision quest site might be used by people of other races, provided they know the rituals and have the stomach for them.

Performing the exhausting ritual dances and sacrifices required by the shamanic Orc religion leads to prophetic visions. It is also the place where Orc Shamans and Wicca come to perform the ceremonies that enable them to increase their magical prowess.

### **The Nithian Obelisk and the Tomb of Chardastes**

The *Nithian Obelisk* is an old Nithian ruin from the times of the Traldar migration. It is the only visible remains of an ancient Nithian (and later Hutaakan) settlement. The mortal body of Chardastes was buried here, in a pyramid originally built for the Hutaakan High Priest of Achelos, the original mortal identity of Chardastes himself. The pyramid, nowadays, is completely buried under a small hill.

### **Barrow of the Giant King**

More than three millennia ago, an ancient race of Giants (perhaps the last legacy of the Bromdignag) ruled what is now Karameikos. Their kingdoms across Brun had been weakened, but toppled, by the rise of Blackmoor and the Great Rain of Fire. However, soon a new threat arose, as the human nation of Taymora amassed great amounts of arcane knowledge. The Taymoran magicians discovered that the Giant kingdom included several points where the flow of magic was much stronger than the usual, allowing certain magics to be wielded with increased power and effect.

The Taymorans coveted greatly this power, which the Giants did not seem able to or interested in using. By 2400 BC, the Taymorans had expanded further north and west around the borders of the Giantish kingdom. There, they discovered *Nightpeak*, a site high in the mountains of the modern Five Shires, where necromantic magic was greatly increased. Many Taymorans revered Nyx, the Immortal patron of the night and the undead, and craved to extend their lifespan through magic. The power of the Nightpeak allowed them to make their dream true, transforming powerful wizards into the first Necromancer-Kings of Taymora. With the power of undeath at their disposal, and the availability of mercenary armies in the form of the Sheyallia elves, which arrived by 2250 BC on the western borders of the Taymoran lands, the Necromancer-Kings turned once more their eyes to the rich magics of the Giant kingdom. One of the turning points in the war was a battle fought in the Western Cruth Lowlands, where the Taymoran armies and their elven allies brought down a mighty Giant King, and obtained control of the Turnwood, another high magic point which allowed them a tremendous increase in magic research in shapechanging, leading to the creation of Taymoran Lycanthropy in 2100 BC.

The defeated Giant King was entombed in a great barrow, which rests (almost) undisturbed to this day.

### **Steading of the Hill Giant Chief and Dwarves of Kurest Hurgon**

More than two centuries ago, the hill giants created a permanent settlement in the Cruth region, cutting the communications between *Kurest Hurgon*, a dwarven mine in the Black Peaks, and the *Kingdom of Achelos*, the primary Traladaran dominion in the Cruth Lowlands. Traladaran warriors and adventurers led by the Vampire Wars veteran *Moirra the Pure*, a priestess of Petra, attempted to breach the siege and

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reach the dwarves. However, they were ambushed by the giants -- who had been warned by the Cruth Ogres of the Traladarans' arrival -- while crossing the Achelos river at Three Axes Ford. The giants, who had positioned themselves on the mountain spur overlooking the ford, easily crushed the Traladarans by tossing large boulders from their vantage position. However, dealing with the dwarves was not as easy. The miners simply closed the doors of their mine and retreated deep into the mountain, where the larger giants could not follow them. The dwarves can support themselves (and even raise animals) for extended periods on a diet of underground fungi. The dwarves periodically sent scouts to the surface, but never managed to get through the ford and contact other settlements. Recently, they have been besieged by other enemies able to deal with the tunnels (goblinoids and/or other monsters). Thus, they have tried a sortie, where a few dwarves were captured by the giants.

### The Turnwood

This high magic point is a nexus for shapechanging and transformation magics. Here, spells that alter the shape of beings and items are easier to cast and research (x2 duration and 1/2 research time).

More than three millennia ago, the Taymorans created their brand of lycanthropy here, in an attempt to create the ultimate soldiers for their slave armies. The Taymorans built here a secret, extensive research facility, complete with wizard towers, observatories, alchemical laboratories, medical rooms, dungeons, containment rooms, wards, traps and assorted defenses. Later on, the Traldar wizard Zirchev also conducted research in the Turnwood.

Their powerful magics still protect the facility, though the intense magical field of the Turnwood have induced changes almost everywhere, making part of the wards into semi-sentient forces, still bound to parts of the construction. The wooden towers have been infused with new life, growing into fantastic trees.

The Turnwood also enhances the transformation power of any lycanthrope (a +2 bonus to *Transformation*, and the ability to act as one level higher for lycanthropes below NM level), so the werewolf clans of the Achelos Woods occupy part of the structure, in a delicate power balance with the other inhabitants --- a group of Treants (ancient trees made sentient by the Turnwood magic and Zirchev's power) led by a lone Actaeon, a powerful Wereboar wizard, and the young but ambitious Green Dragon *Krolovaash*, a vassal of Azem who covets the shapechanging powers of the gold dragons.

### Kosti Kopec

A strangely shaped hill can be found on the upper course of the Achelos river. Tall, whitish rocks raise from the flanks and top of the hill, looking like bones in the light of the moon. These rocks give the hill its Traladaran name, meaning "Bone Hill", but the area has a much longer history.

It was inhabited as early as before the Great Rain of Fire, when it was a large mining town in the Azcan empire, under the name of *Koskatepetl*, "Gem of the Mountains". Back in the Azcans' time, there was, deep under the city and its mining tunnels, a shrine to Ixion, protected by priests who, according to the local lore, were not human, and guarded an ancient, dangerous secret.

With the rise of Blackmoorian technology, the rulers of Koskatepetl grew to desire the knowledge held by the priests of Ixion, who chose to seal the entrance of the shrine with a terrible earthquake, shattering the city. After the disaster, the Koskatepetl was all but abandoned and became infested with monsters.

After the Great Rain of Fire, the raising Taymoran civilization reached the area, and built a Temple of Nyx over the ruins of Koskatepetl. The temple soon enough attracted pilgrims and colonists, but not too many, because its true purpose had to remain secret. The Immortal patroness of the Night found it amusing and fitting that her temple was built over a place once

sacred to the Lord of the Light, and she chose the city to hide a very powerful artifact, a constellation map whose purpose was to slowly absorb magical power and bring eternal night to the world. In the Taymoran language, the city was named *Kosmoteiros*, "Signs of the Universe".

When the war between followers of Nyx and Thanatos was at its height, a powerful army in service of the Dark Lord conquered the city with the ultimate goal of stealing the artifact. To prevent it, the priests of Nyx destroyed the temple, opening a chasm to the depths of the earth. The struggle for the artifact would have continued, but the destruction of Taymor also destroyed any memory of the city and its secret. The People of the Night, survivors of Taymor, and later the Traldars and Hutaakans considered the place cursed, naming it *Koskatep* in the Hutaakan language.

But, obviously, Nyx and Thanatos have not forgotten, and neither has Ixion. Many times during the centuries the three Immortals have sent priests and adventurers to Koskatep, to retrieve the artifact or prevent others from recovering it or, in the case of Ixion, to protect even more ancient secrets.

However, in 998 AC the Sons of Night established a stronghold among the ruins, manned by a fraternity of Darkers in control of the entire sect in Karamaikos, under the leadership of *Anna Exoter*. The Darkers have recovered the artifact of Nyx, and collected a large amount of arcane lore and magical items. However, they are still unable to use the artifact itself.

The Darkers are served by all manners of undead, both intelligent and mindless, and use constructs and traps to guarantee the security of their vaults from both adventurers and monsters.

## Masters & Marauders

This section provides writeups for individual monsters and NPCs from the Cruth Lowlands region. Several NPCs are adapted from the "Riverfork Keep" article to the Classic D&D rules.

### Dragons of the Cruth Lowlands

**Ulnag** is a Small Red Dragon almost ready to ascend to the Large category (14 HD). Ulnag is independent from the two major draconic kingdoms of Karameikos, Azemur and Argosyl, and styles himself dragon-king of Ulnagaar, even though he has only few vassals, among whom Ahkriin. Ulnag is neutral towards all the other dragons of the area, but wary of Azem. Ulnag has a mutual defense agreement with the Hill Giant chief, but is not likely to honor it if the giants appear weaker than their foes.

**Krolovaash** is a Small Green Dragon (10 HD), a son of Argos and a vassal of Azem. He greatly envies the shapechanging powers of Azem and her western Gold Dragon vassals. Thus, he has been studying shapechanging magics. Krolovaash believes that the Turnwood can give him innate shapechanging powers. Krolovaash is on bad terms with both Ahkriin, his foolish hatch-sister, and Vulomar, who appears to be constantly looking for a casus belli, and often sends her followers to provoke him. Krolovaash himself has no followers, but

**Vulomar**, a Large Black Dragon (12+3 HD) is the dragon lady of the Blight Swamp. She was bound to Azem a century ago, during the Thyatian invasion, but greatly resents the interference of the Gold Dragon and her more loyal followers. Azem constantly keeps an eye on her and her small clique of Black followers (three 7 HD small Black Dragons). Vulomar is petty and aggressive. She controls the Lizardmen tribes of the Blight Swamp, to

whom she appears as a god, and is trying to force the local trolls into her service as well.

**Ahkriin** is a Small Green Dragon (8 HD), Krolovaash's hatchmate, and a vassal of Ulnag. Ahkriin is rather foolish, contrary to her brother, and has botched all her attempts at the Ceremony of Sublimation. Emboldened by the knowledge she's Mighty Argos' daughter, Ahkriin has always been overconfident, which has allowed Ulnag to bind her. Ahkriin's pride was very much wounded by the defeat, and reminding her of it or her vassalage will send the dragon in a great rage. She vents her rage on the local Ogres, who steer clear of her lair.

### Religious Leaders

**Fridus, Paulus** (Cleric 5 of Vanya, L), Chaplain of the "Fury of the West" and Vicar of Riverfork, is the highest authority of the Church of Karameikos in the region. Chaplain Fridus is half-Hattian, and is a member of Alfric Oderbry's faction, though not an especially extremist one. He does favor Thyatians over Traladarans, and believes the region needs to be settled and divided into fiefs, assigned to Thyatian nobles. He views Traladaran nobles as potential enemies of the royal family.

**Buqumius, Mahmud** (Cleric 3 of Tarastia, L), Chaplain of the First Company at Riverfork, is Fridus' second in command. A much more laid back individual than his superior, Mahmud has obvious Tel Abkiri ancestry. He is fascinated by the historical figure of General Alharbius, and he likes playing strategy games.

**Dobra, Grygori** (Cleric 3 of Halav, L), village priest of Gorica. Grygori is also the patriarch of the Dobra family, and owns a large farm in Gorica. The village is a quiet place, mostly shielded from goblinoids and

other threats by the Riverfork Keep. Grygori is quite knowledgeable about the area around Gorica and the inhabitants of his village, but that is the limit of his knowledge.

**Kolavich, Anya** (Cleric 3 of Petra, N), Traladaran priestess at Riverfork Keep. Anya and her husband, Fyodor, run the Church of Traladara in the village outside the Keep. Since Riverfork has a larger share of Thyatians than other villages in the area, they have only a small following. Thus, Anya also operates a board and room service within the Church rectory. Anya is especially fond of Hin Yallara and Sheared youths, and does her best to help those people.

**Kolavich, Fyodor** (Cleric 4 of Zirchev, N), Traladaran priest at Riverfork Keep. Fyodor is as much an outdoorsman as he is a priest. He hunts on his own, and offers his services as a guide as well. He is rather companionable, if a bit too fond of boasting about his survival and hunting skills.

**Radu, Gregor** (Cleric 5 of the Church of Traladara, N), village priest of Petra. This priest is distant a relative of the Specularum Radu, but is totally unaware of their dealings. His family moved to western Karameikos right after the arrival of Duke Stefan. His community is besieged by dangers, including bandits and goblinoids, but Gregor does his best to keep it together. He has recently contacted Emil Radu (a third-cousin of his), the manager of the Radu Quarry, to get some help.

**Dimitri Sokolov** (Cleric 7 of the Church of Traladara, L), bishop of Nova Achelos. A newly promoted bishop and a member of an up-and-coming new wave of Traladaran priests, Dimitri believes in cooperation with the Thyatian authorities, but his highly competitive with the Church of Karameikos. He would like to establish a military order for the Church of Traladara,

and feels the success of his mission in Nova Achelos is critical to this end.

## Local Leaders and Outlaws

**"Achelos"** (F10, N), leader of the Achelos Outlaws. This infamous outlaw claims to be the reincarnated Achelos II, or a descendant of the king --- his story is told in many variations across the Cruth Lowlands. Actually, the Achelos Outlaws are little more than a bandit gang that preys on both the Thyatians (stealing and assaulting caravans) and the Traladarans (extorting money as "contributions" to the fight against the Thyatians). The bandit leader, himself, is a powerful and experienced Traladaran warrior and an expert woodsman. He guides his bandits from an hidden encampment in the mountains. When he leads raids (which he does infrequently), he always appears masked with a black bandana covering his lower face and a hood or helmet.

**Andrios, Petr** (Thief 5, N), member of the Achelos Outlaws. Petr is the main agent of the Achelos Outlaws among the trappers on the middle course of the Achelos River. Given a trapper's job leads him to prolonged absences from the Contra Outpost, he has the opportunity to travel on missions for the bandits, relaying information and orders to and from the bandits' encampment.

**Contra, Arkan** (Fighter 4, N) is a veteran of the "Hell's Jailers", as well as the leader of the Achelos river trappers. There is a small community of hunters and trappers on the lower middle course of the Achelos river, between Gorica and Nova Achelos, which has been active for several years now. These trappers are a hardy, independent folk. Many of them have something to hide from their past, and a few are active agents of the Achelos Outlaws. The Contra outpost<sup>7</sup>, while listed as a "large" one, has a small resident

<sup>7</sup> See *River of Blood* for more details.

## Masters & Marauders

population, since most of the trappers spend extensive time out in the wilds.

**Haakenberg, Lotharius** (Fighter 4, L) is the owner of the Haakenberg outpost. A "Fury of the West" veteran and a rich homesteader (as far as things go in this area), Lotharius is slightly over 50 years old, solidly built as one would expect of a Thyatian Legionnaire, though he threw in with Ludwig Von Hendricks when Duke Stephan called him and other nobles to settle his new lands. Lotharius remained with the "Lance of Doom", Von Hendrick's guard, for a very short time, signing in with the "Fury of the West" as soon as the Baron started showing his eccentricity. Haakenberg spent the next 10 years at Riverfork Keep, raising to the rank of Sergeant, then he married and settled down in his own homestead. His connections within the army helped his business start strong, and Lotharius is now one of the richest homesteaders in the Riverfork area, as well as a leader of sorts among the Thyatian settlers. His wife is also from Thyatis -- theirs was an arranged marriage organized for Lotharius by his Thyatian relatives. The Haakenbergs have three children, aged between twelve and sixteen years old. They employ twelve hired hands, including two of Lotharius old squadron mates and their families.

**Ivanovich, Anastasia** (Thief 2, N), matriarch of the Ivanovich clan. Anastasia is a direct descendant of Zlatan Ivanovich, one of the few Traladaran heroes to survive the Thyatian invasion. She is also the widow of a descendant of Zlatan's older brother, Oleg, which is how she came to the role of family head -- a marriage she herself engineered to this end. Anastasia is wise, shrewd and willful, but controlling, and favors her grandsons, Ivan and Tibor, over her granddaughter Natalia. This could lead to internal conflicts in the family, as Natalia shares the same strong character of her grandmother.

**Pyotrev, Ivan** (Fighter 3, N), Logger's Guild representative. Ivan is a senior guild

officer in charge of the Logger's Guild in the Cruth Lowlands. Formerly based in Pyotrev Outpost, Ivan relocated to Nova Achelos very recently to take part to the town reconstruction effort. He and his loggers have been trying to expand into the Near Achelos Woods, meeting strong resistance from lycanthropes and "hostile faeries" (actually, both the Lindenelm elves and the Fey court). Nova Achelos might well be the last ditch for Ivan, before the continued lack of profits for Cruth Lowlands lumberjacks force the Specularum guild leaders to appoint someone else to represent the loggers' interests in the area.

**Rucker, Hermann** (Fighter 5, C), Reaver of the Iron Ring. Hermann and his brother (the Rucker in B10 "*Night's Dark Terror*") are Hattian warriors whose father moved to Halag with Baron Von Hendricks. The Rucker brother, rather than join the Lance of Doom, moved into the more lucrative business of slavery by joining the Iron Ring. Both are Reavers, but work in different regions -- Hermann is in charge of keeping contacts with the Orcish tribes of the Cruth Lowlands, while his brother moves slaves from eastern Karameikos to the Black Eagle Barony. Hermann is a frequent presence at the Hidden market, mostly buying slaves from the Orcs, but sometimes also selling merchandise -- usually items plundered during Iron Ring raids that would not be good to have reappear on the black market in Karameikos.

### Officers of the "Fury of the West"

**Avensubaius, Solimanus** (Fighter 6, L), Administrative Lieutenant of the "Fury of the West". A descendant of one of the original Tel Abkiri officers in Legate Alharbius retinue, Solimanus is a lazy and corrupt officer. He takes advantage of Captain Manov's relative inexperience with management to embezzle funds and takes hefty bribes from vendors of provisions, though he is wise enough to leave alone

Lotharius Haakenberg and other well-connected individuals, who could create problems for him.

**Campbell, Angus** (Fighter 5, N), Lieutenant of the Fourth Company. A Glantrian expatriate, Angus has a different fighting style than the typical Thyatian soldier, and is at his best in skirmishes rather than formation combat. This makes him especially valuable for fighting enemies such as goblinoid or bandit gangs, but puts him at odd with more traditionalist officers.

**Manov, Boris** (Fighter 8, L), Captain of Riverfork Keep. Boris Manov is the first Traladaran to hold the rank of Captain at Riverfork Keep, after a string of Thyatis-born officers (mostly of Hattian or Tel Akbiri ancestry). He has also received this commission very recently, after spending several years as a Lieutenant at Rugalov Keep. As such, he is not much trusted by his Lieutenants, except for Lt. Slavosky. Moreover, his administrative staff, led by Lt. Avensubaius is inefficient and corrupt. When the Duke's Seneschal asked for a guard detachment to be sent to support Lord Kaerin, Manov took the occasion to rid himself of Lt. Tintivilus, a chauvinistic Thyatian officer. This has given him some breath, and he's starting to get his garrison back into shape. Manov makes a show of being fair to both Traladarans and Thyatians, and of strictly following the rules, to avoid attracting even more criticism, but is otherwise a reasonable fellow.

**Slavosky, Danislav** (Fighter 5, N), Lieutenant of the Third Company. Capt. Manov main supporter, Lt. Slavosky eschews responsibilities and is content with his current rank. Moreover, he is somewhat boisterous and loud, and strongly favors the Traladarans. Thus, his colleagues do not take him very seriously -- Lt. Tintivilus openly considers him an idiot, and the other officers are somewhat less open, but do not have much higher opinion of Danislav.

**Stronghollow, Bombur Dorficwarf** (Dwarf 5, L), Lieutenant of the First Company. A serious officer with significant seniority in the rank, Bombur is a Stronghollow dwarf who migrated to Karameikos and joined the army somewhat after the Duke took over. He worked steadily through the ranks -- most of the few dwarves in the Karameikan army stop progressing when they get a position in the Duke's Guard, as they are more comfortable as heavy infantrymen, but Bombur accepted a Lieutenant commission, and plans on getting his own command soon. Like most dwarves, he prefers Thyatians to Traladarans, but his doubts on Capt. Manov have more to do with the relative lack of experience of the man. Bombur is considered outgoing for a dwarf, mostly because he takes to human pastimes (he even plays poker) more than other dwarves.

**Tibonerial, Anastasia** (Magic User 6, C), Magist of the "Fury of the West". Anastasia is formally commissioned as an Administrative Lieutenant, though she does not concern herself with provisioning or similar affairs, which fall entirely under the control of Lt. Avensubaius. She acts instead as an advisor to Capt. Manov on magical affairs. She also maintains the magical wards of the Keep. Anastasia is of Thyatian descent, and is generally indifferent towards the Traladarans -- what she is not indifferent to, however, is money. Lt. Tibonerial not only has several shady business activities ongoing in the Cruth Lowlands, but she is also a spy for Baron Von Hendricks. A totally amoral character, Anastasia does whatever she needs to earn her a comfortable lifestyle -- and her standards are rather high in this matter.

**Tintivilus, Marcia** (Fighter 5, L), Lieutenant of the Second Company and commander of the Nova Achelos guard. Marcia has been sent to Nova Achelos because Capt. Manov wanted to get rid of her, and she knows it. She hates the



## Masters & Marauders

Traladarans, including her second-in-command, Sergeant Yaroslavich, and Capt. Manov himself. She is ineffective and constantly complains about everyone. All in all, she is not that nice to have around, except to Lord Kaerin, whom she fancies -- however, Lord Kaerin is happily engaged to Baron Kelvin's sister, and is not at all interested in this unrefined and somewhat unkempt woman, which will make for another disappointment for Marcia.

**Yaroslavich, Teroslav** (Fighter 3, N), Sergeant. A melancholy character with somewhat of a drinking problem, Yaroslavich is an older sergeant. He has been assigned to Lt. Tintivilus' detachment at Nova Achelos, and the two are constantly at odds.

## Merchants

**Gorbag** (Ogre 2, N) is an unusually intelligent Ogre who acts as a middleman between human merchants and Ogre tribes. Gorbag can be used to deal with the Ogres, but will do so on his own terms -- he understands his worth as a middleman, and will make sure he remains a "necessary evil".

**Hallonica, Yakon** (F2/Darokin Merchant 7, L) is House Hallonica representative in western Karamikos. He hopes to establish a power base for his house in the area. Yakon is highly motivated, though he does not care much for the locals -- his goal is to present himself as an effective manager that is able to bring results in short time, regardless of the long-term impact of his decisions, as he plans on moving on to higher positions within the House.

**Karlov, Andrej** (Cleric 4 of Orcus, C) is a peddler who lives in Gorica with his wife Jana Bogdanovich and their daughter Irina. Andrej runs a monthly circuit of the villages on the LuIn—Riverfork route. However, he also does a couple of stops not known to the other villagers — one at the Hidden Market, and the other at a meeting point that changes every month,

where he meets with others who, like him, are secretly followers Dark Triad.

**Mrrakr One-Eye** (Orc 2/Wicca 1, N) is an Orc trader — similar to a human peddler, he travels from one community to the other. His wizardly powers and his status as a trader protect traditionally keep him safe from harm, but Mrrakr always keep a Sleep spell ready for good measure. Mrrakr can identify all Orcish tribes of the Cruth Lowlands, but will request either a magic item (a potion will do), or a new spell (he currently knows Read Magic, Detect Magic and Sleep).

**Franich, Anton** (NM/Merchant 3, L) Darokinian Merchant (see *Riverfork Keep*)

**Radu, Emil** (Thief 7, N) mining entrepreneur (see *The Village of Petra*)

**Redaxe, Konif** (Dwarf 3, L) Brewer (see *Riverfork Keep*)

**Valerianus, Titus** (Thief 5/Fence 3, C) travelling merchant (see *River of Blood*)

## Goblinoid Chieftains

**Bakghat** (Orc 6) is the new Jagged Claws prince, having emerged after months of infighting among the potential heirs of the previous chief, who had been slain in a raid in the Five Shires. Bakghat is a tough and brave warrior, but inexperienced as a leader. He dreams of restoring the ancient kingdom of Othrong, but has to guard against his own underchiefs, who would exploit any perceived weakness in the young prince to further their own ambitions, as well as external enemies who might take advantage of the infighting within the tribe to expand their territory. Bakghat is on relatively friendly terms with both Luzlug and Sorhguul, but despises the vile Greyslayer chief, Kardat Souleater, for his use of cowardly magic.

**Kardat Souleater** (Orc 13/ Wicca 2) is the unchallenged leader of the Greyslayers. A vicious and experienced fighter, this wily Orc exploits any and all advantages he can get -- poison, magic, Ogre mercenaries, anything goes to get

the upper hand against his many enemies. Only the fact that all other tribes would be ready to drop their feuds to fight the Greyslayers over their deep religious differences (the Greyslayers follow Jammudaru) has kept Kardat from uniting the tribes. His current plan is to kill Prince Bakghat and take over the Jagged Claws. Meanwhile, he keeps his Greyslayers busy kidnapping Hin from the nearby Eastshire and selling them as slaves to the Iron Ring.

**Luzlug** (Orc 9) is the chief of the Rotting Snake Orcish tribe. This experienced warrior is skilled with both the mace and the javelin, and is a devout follower of Kaarash. He is also more intelligent than the average Orc, and a good strategist, especially skilled in setting up ambushes and hit and run tactics. Luzlug is looking for any edge that could help him against the Rotting Snakes' longtime enemies, the Blackstone Orcs.

**Magdub** (Ogre 4/Shaman 4 of Terra) is the oldest and wisest Ogre in the Cruth Lowlands. A wise but irritable character, Magdub is not a formal chief among the Ogres -- Cruth Ogres tend to gather in small family groups rather than large tribes -- but is the one Ogre to whom they would go when (and if) they are confronted with enemies or events they cannot handle by just bashing them. In spite of his choleric temperament, Magdub does not believe in solving problems with violence. He does not like when Ogres get involved in other races' plots as mercenaries, but understands that Ogres need to coexist with Orcs and Humans.

**Okhlag Threefingers** (Orc 4) is the chief of the Broken Hammers, a smaller Orc tribe that occupies a cave on the north banks of the Achelos river. Following the events of *River of Blood*, the Broken Hammers do not have the strength to hold their territories much longer, and will have to align with one of their stronger neighbours -- the Rotting Snakes, most likely.

**Rashak** (Gnoll 10) is a strong-willed and crafty Gnoll. He leads the Rashak's Reavers, a mercenary horde of Orcs and Gnolls. He and his followers are handsomely paid by the Black Eagle to prevent the Traladaran people of the Barony from escaping to Luln. It's not their forte (the Reavers are heavy infantry combatants), but Rashak values Ludwig's goodwill and money, hoping for a greater role when the Black Eagle decides to finally strike at Stefan, and his Gnolls enjoy terrorizing their ancestral enemies, the Traladarans.

**Sorghuul the Slasher** (Orc 11), a veteran warrior, is the leader of the Blackstone Orcs, a powerful tribe that controls rich iron mines under the eastern Cruth Mountains. Sorghuul is a level-headed, rational commander, adhering to the necessary amount of savagery needed to deal with his fellow goblinoids, but following the bravado with strategic thinking and sound business decisions. His tribe has a standing rivalry with the Rotting Snakes, which rarely goes farther than shouting matches and threats -- Sorghuul knows that a war with the Rotting Snakes would close down the trade route to the Hidden Market, the main outlet for the Blackstones' iron ore, as well as their main source of pipeweed and other goods.

**Urgal Redhand** (Hobgoblin 10/ Shaman 4), a fanatic follower of Alphaks, is the chief of the Roaring Fiends. He and his tribe are closely allied with the Black Eagle, which allows them to maintain their presence near the Westron Road in spite of the Karameikan soldiers threaten the hobgoblin, Urgal retreats within the borders of the Black Eagle Barony, where they cannot pursue him. The hobgoblins, of course, are soon back to their camps, from which they raid the Karameikan caravans -- a lucrative business that is making Urgal rich.

## Mages and Adventurers

**Aristaios** (Actaeon 11 HD/Wokan 8, N) is the true ruler of the western Achelos woods. This ancient being was created by Zirchev soon after his ascension to Immortality to lead the Treants of the Achelos Woods and protect the Turnwood high magic point. Aristaios was trained by Zirchev himself in the use of wizardly magic, so his repertoire of spells is actually wider than that of a typical Wokan. Aristaios is a tireless guardian of the woods, but his guardianship is very light-handed. He rarely takes action, usually working indirectly to preserve the balance of power among the various movers and shakers of the forest -- the wereboar wizard, the dragons Krolovaash and Vulomar, and the werewolf clans. He is also an ally of the fey of the eastern forest, though he rarely crosses the river himself.

**Artho, Sergey** (Magic User 9/Wereboar 10, N), locally known as the "Hermit of the Woods" is an old magic user who has been studying the magic of the Turnwood for decades -- he is well over the age of one hundred years, but his life has been extended beyond the limits of normal humans by a combination of his magic and the unnatural vitality conferred by lycanthropy. Sergey is a powerful Wereboar -- he contracted lycanthropy early during his investigation of the Turnwood. He is also a member of the Artho family that once ruled the Riverfork area, though he has lost contact with his family before the Thyatian invasion. Sergey wishes to protect the Turnwood, but also desires its magic, so he could be tempted into dangerous deals that would earn him more knowledge or a greater control of the high magic point. He hates the werewolves and distrusts both dragons, but remains on relatively friendly terms with Aristaios and the Turnwood Treants. Sergey appears as a boisterous, ruby-cheeked Traladaran, with short, bristly brown hair and a large girth. He dresses in

practical but overly large hunting clothes when in human or boar-man form.

**Exoter, Anna** (Magic User 10/Necromancer of the Second Circle, C) is the "Grand Darker" of the Sons of Night fraternity active in the Cruth Lowlands. She is the "primus inter pares" of her fraternity, which is composed of former Darkers from the Black Eagle Barony, LuIn, and other parts of Western Karameikos. This places her at the top of the organization in the area -- there are other Grand Darkers, in Eastern Karameikos, Specularum, and Darokin, as well as a "third level" fraternity of Grand Darkers hidden somewhere, but as far as Western Karameikos is concerned, Anna is the mastermind of the Sons of Night. Her name is the anagram of Nox Aeterna ("eternal night"), a key concept of Nyx theology. While Chaotic, Anna is not especially evil, and is concerned more with prolonging her life beyond death and extending her magical knowledge than with any nefarious plan for world domination. She and her fellow Darkers seek to understand the artifact they have recovered in the ruins of Koskatep, under the Kosti Kopec.

Anna is a middle-aged Traladaran woman, with long, straight gray hair and a pale complexion. She dresses in uncharacteristic dark clothing, with a preference for long gowns. She is a graduate of the Great School of Magic in Glantri, and an affiliate of the Secret Craft of Necromancy.

**Gudenov, Vassili** (Cleric 6 of Alphaks, C), Fire cultist. An evil cultist of Alphaks in Riverfork Keep, Vassili has no contact with the other dark cults -- he is essentially a lone madman who could be dangerous enough, with his magic. However, he is the son of Boris, the miller, a well-to-do man and a community leader in Riverfork, which gives him greater means to pursue his mad goals (see *Riverfork Keep* for more details).

**Molescu, Nicolai** (Magic User 4, N), hermit and alchemist. Nicolai is a former slave of the Iron Ring. He hides in the hills near Gorica to avoid the Iron Ring slave hunters who would bring him back to work as their alchemist in Fort Doom. Nicolai has befriended the Ogre Ongah during their escape from the Black Eagle Barony (see *River of Blood* for more details).

**"Madame Olga"** (Magic User 7, C), Alphatian exile. Posing as a brothel maitresse in Riverfork Keep, Madame Olga is actually a moderately powerful wizard. She actually prefers her current arrangement to her life in Alphatia, and is very careful about her past. Madame Olga, thanks to her profession, is also privy to many secrets about Riverfork Keep, and even more distant areas (see *Riverfork Keep* for more details).

**Master Haxmal** (Magic User 8, C), Iron Ring lesser master. Haxmal is in charge of the Iron Ring operations in the eastern Cruth Lowlands. He is also looking for the Regalia of Achelos as a personal project. If he survives the attack on the Iron Ring enclave, he may come back with a strike force (10 Hounds and three Reavers) to steal or otherwise recover the Regalia. He will select the three Reavers to cover all basic classes (i.e., one Fighter, Thief and Cleric).

**Ongah** (Ogre NM, C). Nicolai Molescu's friend and bodyguard, Ongah was once captured by the Iron Ring and was about to be brainwashed by the slavers to become the first of a new kind of Hounds of the Iron Ring. He is brave but naive and not very intelligent, and defers to Nicolai in most matters.

**Trundlestump, Kara** (Halfling 5, C), known as "Aelfwine" in Riverfork, is a spy from the Five Shire, magically disguised as a elf-blooded human (see *Riverfork Keep* for more details).

**Hammell Ironhand**<sup>8</sup> (Dwarf 7, N), son of Cronak. An adventurer, member of the Chaotic Crusaders of the Cruth Mountains. He wields *Bedlam's Hammer*. The Chaotic Crusaders oppose law (and especially the Duke's rule), but are not otherwise evil, though their methods may cause unwanted troubles to the local population, as their exploits tend to irritate the goblinoids, leading to increases in the number of raids.

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<sup>8</sup> From the Dungeon Master's Survival Kit.

## Magic Items and Artifacts

This section describes several magical items that are linked to the Cruth Lowlands, either because they were created here, or because they can be found in this region.

### Vodjavuk, the Wolven Head<sup>9</sup>

This item, while not actually a helm, is also known as the Helmet of Zirchev. It is a headpiece crafted from the head of a wolf. It was created by a still-mortal Zirchev in the years after the death of Halav, when he retreated to the Turnwood to research polymorphic magic. Zirchev created the item for his werewolf followers, to whom he entrusted the protection of the Turnwood and the prevention of the rising of new Sorcerer-Kings in the style of Taymor. The Vodjavuk is still held by the leader of the Riverfork werewolves to this day.

The headpiece can be worn in place of a helmet. It will replace the helmet of any suit of armour which normally includes one, without penalising the AC. Otherwise, it provides a -1 bonus to AC. Besides, it gives the wearer the ability to speak and write the several languages that were commonly used during the Golden Age of the Traldar: Ancient Traldar, Vyalia Elf, Hutaakan, and Nithian. Since it was created during Zirchev's life, and contains a power related to Nithia, if the Vodjavuk is ever taken to Surra-Man-Raa or within the radius of the artefact buried under the city, it will instantly disintegrate, obliterated by the Immortal magic that prevents the knowledge of Nithia from re-emerging in the modern era.

<sup>9</sup> Original design by Ville Ladhe.

The wearer of the Wolven Head can use it to invoke the following powers, once per day (each): *Sleep*, *Speak with animals*, *Summon Wolf*. The first two powers are equivalent to the spells of the same name, cast at the level of the wearer. The last power summons a normal wolf, which appears out of thin air and serves the wearer for 1 hour. It will obey the commands of the wearer like a well trained war dog with an empathic link to the wearer. Powerful wearers can summon more powerful wolves (using the Master Set rules for larger/stronger individuals), according to the following table:

- Level 1-3: Normal wolf
- Level 4-5: Normal wolf, +1
- Level 6-7: Normal wolf, +2
- Level 8-9: Normal wolf, +3
- Level 10-12: Dire wolf
- Level 13-15: Dire wolf, +1
- Level 16-18: Dire wolf, +2
- Level 19+: Dire wolf, +3

### The Regalia of Achelos

This set of matched items was created by Chardastes during his mortal life. It is composed of a sceptre, a crown and a medallion.

When worn together, the Regalia of Achelos reveal their true power. The wearer of the full regalia can cast the *heal* spell once per day, and benefits of a +4 bonus to Saving Throws against poisons, diseases and mind-affecting magic. Once per day, the bonus can be extended to all those in a 15' radius for one turn.

### The Sceptre of the Ancient Kings

This short sceptre sports a curved end, and is made of solid gold, decorated with lapislazuli bands. It was created by Chardastes during his life as the High Priest of Pflarr, and was originally the

symbol of his religious and temporal power.

The Sceptre functions as a staff of healing. The Sceptre was recovered by the Sons of Night, who currently keep it in their stronghold under the Kosti Kopec.

### The Holy Pendant of Chardastes

This pendant is worn on a chain over the neck. It is shaped from feldspar in a circular form, with a carving along the border representing a snake (*ouroboros*), while the central part is carved with the depiction of a man, sitting on a throne and holding two sceptres crossed in front of him.

This pendant works as an amulet against crystal ball and ESP, protecting the user from divinatory magic. It was indeed created by Chardastes during his first return to Achelos as a mysterious healer to protect himself from scrying.

The Holy Pendant is currently held by the chief of the Ogres of Castle Ivanovich, who found it among the ruins of the castle.

### The Crown of Achelos

This crown, made of gold and emeralds, shows a marked departure from the other items in style, having the typical shape of a Vandar crown: a large band of gold, studded with gems, to be worn over the brow.

It was created by Chardastes during his last visit to the Banate of Achelos, when he set himself as a mystic and an advisor to the Ivanovich bans. Chardastes created the item to help the Ivanoviches preserve their domain after his final departure.

This item works exactly as a Crown of Leadership.

It was left in the hands of the dead Achelos II Ivanovich after his death in the siege of Achelos.

### Bedlam's Hammer<sup>10</sup>

This clearly valuable weapon is a dwarven throwing hammer, forged by *Onyx Ironhand* of Highforge using the remains of an Earth Elemental, a mithril haft, and a stretch of black dragon skin for the grip. Onyx was part of the group of adventurers who slayed the black dragon Acramar in the Blight Swamp, and used part of Acramar's skin for his work. He gave the hammer to his son, Cronak, who was later killed by giants at Three Axe Ford. The hammer passed on to Cronak's son, *Hammell* (D7, N), who adventures in the Cruth Lowlands with the party known as the Chaotic Crusaders.

*Bedlam's Hammer* acts as a +2 hammer, except in the hands of a dwarf who knows the command word. In that case, it is a +3 throwing hammer, with double range and damage. Damage is tripled against giants.

### The Amulet of Moira the Pure<sup>11</sup>

This star-shaped silver amulet does not appear to be of special value at a first sight. However, it radiates a moderate magic aura. The *Amulet of Moira the Pure* allows the wearer to turn undead as a Cleric  $\frac{1}{3}$  his level, or as 3 levels higher, if the wearer is a Cleric. The amulet was given to Moira Gorevitch-Wozslany, a priestess of the Church of Traladara, to protect her from her father, an adventurer who had been turned into a Vampire by the Black Count of the Moor during the Vampire Wars. Moira herself belonged to the Wozslany family, which was destroyed during the Wars after many of its members were exposed as Vampires.

Moira shed her surname and went on her career as a priestess trying to help the Traladarans recover after the war. She led a group of warriors along the Achelos river to reach the besieged fortress of Kurest Hurgon, but the Ogres living in the area warned the sieging Hill Giants, who

<sup>10</sup> From the Dungeon Master's Survival Kit.

<sup>11</sup> From the Dungeon Master's Survival Kit.

## Magic Items and Artifacts

surprised the party at Three Axe Ford and wiped it out under a shower of rocks. Moira's body and the amulet were never recovered. She is now known as St. Moira the Pure, and acknowledged as a lesser heroine by the Church of Traladara.

### Comet's Edge<sup>12</sup>

This item is an oddly shaped polearm, reminiscent of certain Nithian polearm designs, though fashioned of excellent steel rather than Nithian bronze. When it strikes, Comet's Edge leaves a trail of sparks that gave it its name. It was recovered by the Traladaran adventurer Nyktor Vasilevich on the Wufwolde hills. Nyktor employed the weapon to great effect in many adventures, but finally met his end in the Blight Swamp. A party of elf hunters from the Lindenelm clan found his body, and recovered the polearm, which is now safely stored in the clan elder's cache. Comet's Edge functions as a *polearm +2*, with the talent of *speeding*. It can be wielded with the bardiche or halberd mastery. While popular tales want it to be the weapon of an Immortal disarmed in combat, which fell from the sky on Karameikos, the weapon's origins are much more mundane -- it was one of the many weapons forged by the great wizard-king, Gygar, during the Vampire Wars. It saw use in the first battles against the Black Count of the Moors, but was lost in a battle on the Wufwolde hills, where it remained until Nyktor Vasilevich recovered it.

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<sup>12</sup> From the Dungeon Master's Survival Kit



## ADVENTURING IN THE LOWLANDS

This book, in line with its sandbox style, provides several plot options. In this section, we cover the seven primary plot threads supported by the module.

### The Colonization of Achelos

The primary plot thread is driven by the colonization effort by the Karamaikan government to reclaim the ruins of Achelos and establish a new settlement, *Nova Achelos*, there.

Lord *Kaerin Penhaligon*, as the governor of Nova Achelos, is the NPC that will provide missions and rewards for the party during this plotline. However, other stakeholders in the colonization effort are also present, and provide additional missions.

The colonization requires essentially that more areas of the ruins are cleaned, chasing or slaying the monsters that inhabit them. The first area to reclaim is the Riverside Slums district, followed by the Merchant District and the Noble Estates.

At this point, the growing threat of the restless dead from the Old Graveyard area should emerge, leading to the *Undead Menace* plot thread.

Furthermore, the Merchant District holds clues to the mysterious *Achelos Outlaws*, and the *Bell of Chardastes* and *Regalia of Achelos* plotlines also depend on the completion of parts of this plot thread.

### The Bell of Chardastes

This plotline is driven by the conflict between the Cult of the Dark Triad – and in particular Orcus – and the Church of Traladara. The cultists of Orcus have desecrated and looted the Cathedral of

Chardastes, stealing the Bell of Chardastes, a legendary artifact.

The plot thread starts with the party enlisted by the church officials to secure the cathedral and recover the Bell. The discovery of Orcus cultists in the temple and their ongoing attempt to open a portal to Limbo lead the PCs to the Blight Swamp and finally to the *Tomb of Trinkla* the Black Seer, where the cultists have hidden the Bell of Chardastes.

### The Achelos Outlaws

The Achelos Outlaws plotline starts from the discovery of the existence of the Hidden Market, a place where non-human tribes, outlaws, and unscrupulous merchants meet to trade.

The mysterious “Achelos”, leader of the Achelos Outlaws, is expected to make an appearance there to acquire a magical artifact. The information is actually incorrect, as only some of his henchmen attend, but the PCs may be able to follow them back to the *Abandoned Thyatian Fort*. There, the outlaws have a run-in with an Orc war party. If the PCs prevent this event from happening or help the outlaws, they may be able to follow them back to their camp, or even be invited to join.

The Outlaws' camp is the location of the final showdown with “Achelos”, a bandit leader who (falsely, of course) claims to be the reborn last king of Achelos.

### The Regalia of Achelos

This plotline is driven by the efforts of *Natalia Ivanovich*, a direct descendant of the kings of Achelos, to retrieve the crown jewels of the Kingdom of Achelos, all of which are powerful magical items.

The items were lost or hidden during the war that led to the destruction of the city-state, so this thread only starts when part

## ADVENTURING IN THE LOWLANDS

of the city is under Karameikan control, giving access to the *Stoyanov Library*, the *Graveyard*, and *Castle Ivanovich*. However, the last part of the regalia will be found much further, in the ancient Nithian and Hutaakan ruins marked by the *Obelisk*. This will also raise some questions about the relation between Chardastes and the Hutaakans, which may have some major implications on the cult of Chardastes itself and its role within the Church of Traladara, should the nature of the Traladaran healer as the reincarnation of an ancient Hutaakan priest-king be revealed.

### The Undead Menace

This plotline is driven by the conflict between a *Vampire Lord* and the *Sons of Night*. The Vampire Lord, an escaped descendant of Count Koriszegy, is trying to establish a power base in the ruins of Achelos, animating a large number of corpses as Ghouls, Zombies and Skeletons. The Sons of Night have sent one of their Darkers to combat this threat.

The unusual undead activity will lead the Karameikan leadership to send the party to the *Old Graveyard* to investigate. The PCs have the opportunity to help the Darker and find out more about the undead menace, and then confront the Vampire Lord in his refuge in the *River Keep*.

This will open the way to the exploration of the Tomb of the Achelos Kings in the Old Graveyard (see the *Regalia of Achelos* plot thread), as well as putting the party on the trail of the Sons of Night and their base under *Kosti Kopec*.

### The Upper Achelos

This plotline starts after one of the key (perceived) threats against Nova Achelos has been removed. Ideally, this would be the *Sons of Night*, but the plot can work with the *Achelos Outlaws* or even *Akhriin*.

In any case, the Hill Giants will find it easier to raid south of their steading, leading to conflicts with the humans. After a few prospectors or hunting parties have been attacked, Lord *Kaerin Penhaligon* will set a bounty on the Hill Giant chief.

If the party manages to defeat the Hill Giants, they will gain information on the lost dwarven mine of *Kurest Hurgon*. They can then mount an expedition to save the dwarves, and perhaps open a new trade route.

### The Turnwood

The last plot line does not depend on the *Colonization* thread, so it can be introduced at any point if the party is losing focus.

The plot is initiated by the Loggers' Guild, who are having problems in their eastern Riverfork Woods operation - logger parties are being attacked by woodland creatures, some loggers have disappeared outright, and a disproportionate number of accidents are happening in the logging camps.

The party is hired to investigate, and can discover that the root of the loggers' problems are the inhabitants of the Fey Mound, who resent the loggers' intrusion in their woods.

This can lead to a peaceful solution, or to an escalation of the hostilities. In the former case, the PCs are asked to broker a compromise with the Loggers' Guild, as well as to flush a bandit gang hiding in the Dwarven Ruins. In the latter case, the party will have to face not only the wee folk, but also the werewolves of the Riverfork Woods and the Lindenelm clan.

In any case, removing the Fey Mound as an obstacle to the exploration of the Riverfork Woods will lead the party to discover the Turnwood, a high magic point that is locked down by powerful wards and contended by powerful magic-using beings.

## The Ruins of Achelos

The Kingdom of Achelos, dating back, with some interruption, to the golden age of the Traldar, had its capital in the eponymous city on the banks of Achelos river. The city was sieged, conquered and burned down by the invading Thyatian Legions under the leadership of Tel Akbiri legatus legionis *Mahmud Alharbius* in 900 AC. The last king, *Achelos II Ivanovich*, died during the siege. Thereafter, the city was all but abandoned, and several goblinoid tribes used it as a camp after being chased from the Five Shires.

The ruined city can be used as the main setting for a sandbox adventure, in the style of the "Ruins of Adventure" AD&D module and the "Pool of Radiance" computer game.

The basic plot goes as follows: Lord *Alexius Korrigan*, the Duke's Seneschal, is looking to extend Karameikos' control over the Cruth Lowlands, and has finally managed to get together several members of the guilds in Specularum to act as investors in a project to resettle Achelos. Each guild has its own goals (often contrasting with those of other guilds), and Korrigan's envoy has to mediate between them.

He manages to secure some support from the Church of Traladara, the Order of the Griffon, and General Diomedes Draconius, the commander of the western Karameikan army. However, he's also forced to hire Thyatian mercenaries, the Green Company, to guarantee the defense of the new settlement, *Nova Achelos* (or *Achelos Nova*, in Thyatian), and of the supply lines from Luln and Riverfork Keep.

## The Colonists

This section provides details on the inhabitants of Nova Achelos, the new town that has been established around the south-western gate to the ruins of Achelos.

## The stakeholders

The **Karameikan government** is represented by *Lord Kaerin Penhaligon* (F4, L), who has been charged by Lord Korrigan with overseeing the development of the settlement. This is a way for Kaerin to prove himself as an administrator, which is important to him as the heir apparent to both Kelvin and Penhaligon. Kaerin is well meaning and quite brilliant, but has no experience in matters of government, and has lived primarily in Thyatian-ruled communities (Kelvin, Threshold and Penhaligon), so he is not familiar with the Traladaran aristocracy or the Specularum guilds.

The **Church of Traladara** is interested primarily in recovering any Traldar age relic, as well as in protecting the local Traladaran communities from exploitation at the hands of the Thyatians. Patriarch Aleksyev Nikelnevich sends one of his more experienced priests, *Bishop Dimitri Sokolov* (C7, L). Sokolov is 40 years old, and is a friendly sort with some scholarly interests. He's been mostly working in Specularum during his career, and has a good knowledge of the bureaucracy and the guild system. He has an assistant, *Priestess Marina Kolarovic* (C3, N), a younger (25) member of the church who is more comfortable with the borderlands, having some experience as an adventurer.

The **Order of the Griffon** is involved ostensibly to protect the Karameikan faithful (and, more specifically, Baron Kelvin's brother-in-law) from the dangers of the wild lands. Patriarch Alfric Oderbry, however, sent the Knights and squires under the command of *Sir Befrick* (F6, L), because he fears that the consolidation of Traladaran interests in the area -- with the Traladaran captain at Riverfork Keep, and the Hin border so near (Alfric dislikes the Hin, who are too friendly with the

## The Ruins of Achelos

Traladarans) -- may endanger his projects for the conversion of all of Karameikos to his faith. Sir Befrick and the other knights, however, act essentially as bodyguards and assistants to Lord Kaerin, as well as keeping the order in the main settlement. Sir Befrick's second in command is *Brother-Chaplain Marcian Laskarides* (C5, L). Both are no-nonsense types who have made a career of their membership with the Knights. Befrick, however, has no prejudice against the Traladarans, though he finds their beliefs confused and primitive. Marcian, on the other hand, is a follower of Alfric's faction.

The **Merchants' Guild** is the primary investor in the Nova Achelos venture. The Radu family has a direct hand in the matter, both as relatives of the Artho family (they hope to find treasures and documents of the Artho they could claim) and as a trade venture -- the Radu Quarry would provide stone for the construction of new buildings. The Merchants' Guild wants to establish a base for prospectors and establish new mining sites, having received news of the cinnabar mine from the "*River of Blood*" adventure. Since the Radu have a direct interest, *Emil Radu* (T7, C), the manager of the Radu Quarry, has moved temporarily to Nova Achelos. Emil is a member of the Merchants' Guild, but, as a relatively distant member of the family (he is a third cousin of Anton and Cartha), he is not aware of the Veiled Society connections of his relatives. His personal assistants are also common personnel of the guild. However, *Bogdan Illic* (T4, N), an affiliate of Veiled Society, was sent here to ensure the success of the Merchants' Guild enterprise. Bogdan is a true city dweller, and is thoroughly disgruntled with this assignment. He was instructed to pose as an adventurer, and he does as much by spending most of his time in the makeshift tavern. He may, however, be hired by other adventurers or even hire a party to do his job. If exposed, Bogdan may be the link the PCs need to connect the Veiled Society with the Merchants' Guild, though he does not

know why the Veiled Society *starosta* want the Merchants' Guild to succeed.

The **Loggers' Guild**, after some disappointing attempts in the Achelos Woods, where the presence of lycanthropes, fairies, and worse has forced the local representative, *Ivan Pyotrev* (F3, N) to abort the planned expansion of the guild business, are trying to recover some of their production capability by securing a contract with the Karameikan government to provide construction materials for Nova Achelos, as well as opening new logging camps in the area. The loggers are generally helpful, and make up a large part of the initial civilian population, but are quite scared of the presence of monsters after their last attempts, and are not willing to risk their lives anymore. Moreover, if the PCs had a part in their failure at the Achelos Woods, Pyotrev and his men might be initially hostile to them.

The **Goldsmiths' Guild** is the second major investor. Guildmaster *Thorur Silverbeard* wants to open routes towards the Black Peaks, as well as to gain control of any new gold or silver mine. *Morur Thoricwarf Silverbeard* (D2, L) is in charge of hiring prospectors, while *Neri Argente* (Rake 1, L) acts as the treasurer. Morur and Neri are paying the Green Company, and make sure the mercenary captain knows it. They have also contracted the **Bricklayers' Guild** to repair the building they have taken as their base of operations, but Morur constantly criticizes the work of Master *Vasil Evgeniev*, the chief engineer. More than a dozen of other masons and bricklayers work in Nova Achelos at this time.

The Darokinian **House Hallonica** is the third and last investor in Nova Achelos. *Yakon Hallonica* (NM/Merchant 4) has chosen this venture to counter House Franich move in Riverfork Keep. If Nova Achelos was successful, House Hallonica could easily take over House Franich's role as the primary Darokinian merchant in western Karameikos. Yakon also hopes to

have more passes explored in the Black Peaks and Cruth Mountains, allowing him to establish new trade routes to Darokin.

The **Fury of the West** is taking a major risk by supporting the establishment of a new settlement along the Achelos river. With his 5th Division forces spread thin and having to guard on all sides against werewolves, orcs, ogres, Count Koriszegy and the Black Eagle Baron, *General Diomedes Draconius* needs reinforcements, and possibly a fief to hold one front. However, *Captain Manov* of the Fury of the West cannot spare more than two squadrons (half a company), and has assigned Lieutenant *Marcia Tintivilus* (F5, N) to lead them. Lt. Tintivilus is a despondent and ineffective officer and hates both Manov (because he is a Traladaran) and Draconius (because he promoted Manov instead of her). She would need a lot of motivation, or a direct order from Lord Penhaligon (whom she fancies) to make any move that went out of the ordinary.

### Population and Accomodation

The current population of Nova Achelos does not exceed 300 people. Still, this large influx of people has created a "housing crisis": the city itself is ruined, with only a few buildings intact enough to

be usable. Those buildings have been claimed by the investors and Lord Penhaligon. A number of log cabins have been assembled by workers of the Loggers' and Carpenters' Guilds, for their own use and for the military forces. A ruined building has been partially salvaged to house the Bricklayers' Guild members, as well as a makeshift tavern.

The rest of the population lives in tents. A wooden palisade has been erected to protect the settlement.

Of the 300 inhabitants, 30 are members of the 5th Division of the Karamaikan army. There are 15 Knights of the Griffon, and each of them has a Squire that fights as a heavy infantryman. The *Green Company*, a mercenary company contracted to protect the guilders and led by *Hector Stylianus* (F7, N), a Thyatian Fighter from Port Lucinius, has 15 medium cavalrymen (armed with chain mail, shields, lances and swords or maces), 15 crossbowmen (armed with scale mail, heavy crossbows and maces) and 20 heavy infantrymen (armed with Thyatian lorica segmenta, large rectangular shields, javelins, spears and short swords).

Among the civilian population, there are 35 members of the Bricklayers', Loggers' and Carpenters' Guilds; 50 (prospective) homesteaders and settlers, including their families; and 15 servants and attendants



Map of the Ruins of Achelos



## The Ruins of Achelos

of the various leaders. Given the large presence of military and contract workers, there is also a number of camp followers (about 30), including a Darine wagon that offers small services (laundering and clothing repairs, cobbling, fortune telling, pipeweed).

The remaining civilians include a blacksmith, a weaponsmith, a tavern keeper with his wife and daughter, a leatherseller, and four employees of House Hallonica.

the settlement, all hoping to find fortune, as well as a few more experienced adventures, including half a dozen mercenary Fighters of levels 2-6. The sheared youths (about 20) are only nominally adventurers, most of them NM, though some have basic training (1st level characters of any human class).

*Malika Alharbia* (Rake 4, L) is a direct descendent of Legate Alharbius, as well as a would-be historian and archeologist. She



*Player's Map of Achelos, from the Duke's Archives*

### Adventurers

The old Traladaran families, like the **Ivanoviches** and the **Artho**, are involved only in a minor way. The Artho are associated with the Radu, while the current matriarch of the Ivanovich clan, *Anastasia Ivanovich*, would like to recover the regalia of the Kingdom of Achelos. The clan now lives in a large homestead near Riverfork, and has very little clout, but one of its recently sheared members, *Natalia Ivanovich* (F1, L) has reached Nova Achelos. She is not the only adventurer -- there are many sheared youths like her in

travels with her friend *Aisha Avennasir* (MU3, N), two Tel Akbiri maid servants and two Thyatian "guides" -- Specularum loiterers and ne'er-do-wells who have convinced the Tel Akbiri pair of their wilderness expertise, and are now looking for the first opportunity to escape Nova Achelos. Malika and Aisha may offer to join other adventurers if given the opportunity to delve in ancient ruins, or to find documents about Malika's ancestor.

*Torbin Hilltopper* (Rock Gnome 2, L) and *Hurdir Stronghollow* (D3, L) are a pair of mining prospectors. These Highforge scouts have been hired by Morur Silverbeard, but cannot operate alone in a territory that is held by Orcs and Ogres.

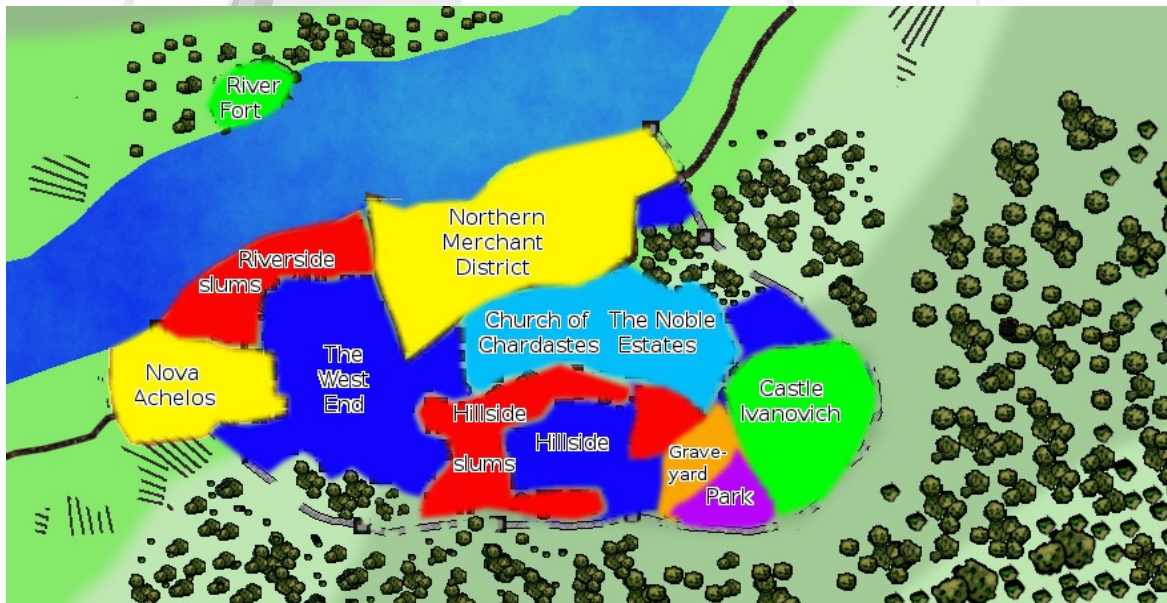
They are waiting for Morur to provide them an escort. They can be hired by other parties in the meanwhile, but their contract with Morur is such that 90% of the rights to any mining site discovered will go to the Goldsmiths' Guild.

*Sandor Ladic* (T5/Greater Wererat 1, C), *Marcus Coponius* (T5, N), *Meg Trencherman* (H4, L) and *Eleriel* (E4, N) are all adventurers looking for parties willing to hire them as specialists, or fellow adventurers willing to form an adventuring company. *Sandor* is actually a wererat, though he presents himself as an "underground exploration specialist". He is truly an adventurer, he just discounts his lycanthropy as a minor hindrance and is unscrupulous enough to avoid mentioning it. *Marcus* is a Karamaikan of Thyatian origins. His previous adventuring company floundered with the death of their leader, a Knight of the Griffon, who was killed by an Owlbear in the Dymrak forest. Marcus is as reliable as Thieves go, but has developed a phobia for Owlbears. *Meg* comes from the Five Shires. Like many Hin, she downplays her experience and will relate anything she gets to know to the Krondar as soon as she is back in the Shires. *Eleriel* is a beautiful elf maiden from the Callarii clan. She has remarkable horsemanship skills,

and knows well the area between the course of the Piva river and the Radlebb Woods. She is curious about the new settlement, but will get bored soon unless opportunities for wilderness adventure arise.

*Arkady Ivanov* (C4, N) is a wandering Priest of Zirchev, loosely associated with the Church of Traladara. He is interested in joining an adventuring party for the opportunity to explore the Cruth Lowlands, though he will not fight against fairies and other opponents that could be negotiated with. He is an expert ranger, with the Tracking, Alertness, Survival (Forest) and Survival (Hills) skills.

*Basco Trius* (MU7, C) is a Sons of Night Darker, posing as an adventuring Magic User from Thyatis City. His alias is the anagram of "Obscuritas" (Darkness). Basco is very careful about hiding his affiliation, but he may sometimes let his cover slip by referring to anagrams or other word-plays. His mission is to observe the progress of the Nova Achelos effort, analyze its pivotal figures, and relate all information to Grand Darker Anna Exoter. However, Basco, like all members of the



Achelos Districts Map



## The Ruins of Achelos

fraternity, is essentially independent, so communications are less than perfect. Basco is primarily interested in magical knowledge, so he may join a party that aims at exploring ancient ruins or recovering lost knowledge, even if this means setting his mission aside.

## Into the Ruins

The ruins of Achelos encompass the following areas:

- The settlement of *Nova Achelos*, which is the staging ground for expeditions into the city as well as the only section of the city initially controlled by the Karameikan government and its allies.
- The *Riverside slums*, nearest to Nova Achelos, and the least dangerous neighborhood (most threats here are unintelligent scavengers).
- The *Merchant District*, which is controlled by the Iron Ring and used as a centre for slave traffic.
- The *Noble Estates*, which include the following locales:
  - The Cathedral of Chardastes, occupied by the priests of the Dark Triad and their goblinoid flunkies.
  - The Stoyanov Library
  - The Artho Mansion
- The *Achelos River Fort*, where a mysterious but powerful Vampire Lord resides.
- The Ruins of *Castle Ivanovich*, inhabited by an Ogre clan.
- The *Old Graveyard*, where a low-key magical war of attrition between the Vampire Lord and an emissary of the Sons of Night is taking place
  - The Tomb of Achelos II Ivanovich, resting place of the Achelos kings.



Map of Nova Achelos

## Nova Achelos

The new settlement is located across the old city walls, just south of the Achelos river. It comprises several salvaged buildings and a tent-town, protected by a wooden palisade.

1. **River Gate:** the main entrance to Nova Achelos is a simple wooden gate, with a small guard tower manned by two crossbowmen. The gate is guarded by members of the 5th Division.
2. **City Gate:** the other gate into Nova Achelos opens on the ruins of the old town. It is heavily guarded by both Green Company mercenaries and Knights of the Griffon. The two groups get along fairly well.
3. **Town Hall:** this building, once the customs house of the Kingdom of Achelos, has been salvaged and repaired by Evgeniev's men, like most of the others within the palisade. It is now occupied by Lord Kaerin Penhaligon and his entourage. Two Knights of the Griffon guards the entrance at all times, and two squires act as clerks. Lord Kaerin's manservant

- and Lt. Marcia Tintivilus also live in this building.
4. **Radu Manor:** this "manor" is actually a refitted storehouse. Emil Radu, one clerk and one servant reside here. Four members of the Green Company provide a security service. Only Emil's bedroom actually resembles a manorial room, the rest of the house is extremely spartan, and look much more like the storehouse it originally was.
  5. **Goldsmiths' Hall:** this is another refitted warehouse, but is in a much better condition than Radu Manor. Morur Silverbeard tinkers with further improvements in his spare time, much to the annoyance of Neri Argente. Both goldsmiths live here, with two aides. Four Green Company mercenaries are posted as guards.
  6. **Lesser Guilds Hall and Tavern:** the Bricklayers, Carpenters and Loggers in Nova Achelos share this building, which they have thoroughly refitted to serve as offices, meeting hall and even as a tavern. Two smaller, nearby buildings house the apprentices, while the journeymen, Master Pyotrev and Master Evgeniev live here. The accomodation would be comfortable, if it was not so cramped.
  7. **House Hallonica:** Yakon Hallonica and four of his employees live and work in this building. Originally a combination of store and house, the building has been summarily refitted, maintaining as much as possibly to the original function, which is perfect for House Hallonica's needs. Four members of the Green Company provide guard services.
  8. **Knights of the Griffon Barrack and Chapel of Karameikos:** the Knights not busy patrolling the road to Vostoi or guarding the City Gate or the Town Hall are quartered in this building. Chaplain Marcian has organized a small chapel in the north wing, which is open for regular services attended by the Knights and other followers of the Church of Karameikos.
  9. **Church of Traladara:** this building, originally a courthouse where trials involving foreigners or people from the countryside were held, has been adapted to serve as church for Bishop Sokolov and his assistant. Arkady Ivanov also resides here when he is in town. Services are held regularly for the Traladaran settlers, workers and adventurers.
  10. **Barracks of the 5th Division:** the troops of the 5th Division are quartered in the this old but sturdy tower. There is not enough space for all of them, so a number of tents have been set around the tower.
  11. **Green Company Barracks:** Hector Stylianus and his men have settled in these small, ruined buildings. Most buildings have been only summarily repaired, using leather from tents to replace the missing ceilings. Mercenaries that are on guard duty in the guild buildings prefer to spend their nights there, since the accomodations are better.
  12. **Cabins:** These cabins are crowded by prospective settlers and their families. These people tend fields near to the town, but the

## The Ruins of Achelos

countryside is not safe enough yet to allow them to build their own farms. The northernmost cabin is occupied by a merchant selling imported armor, cloaks, tack and harness, boots and other leather goods from Specularum.

13. **Cabins:** these cabins are similar to those south of the road, except that the two nearest to the river house a blacksmith and a weaponsmith. These craftsmen from LuIn offer good but expensive services. The weaponsmith also needs more time than usual for any commission, since he is extremely busy with all the military men and adventurers in town.

The remaining population lives in makeshift tents in the western part of the settlement.



Map of the Riverside Slums

### Riverside Slums

The western part of Achelos near the river was a lower class area, with a combination of small houses and craft shops and large tenements. Most of the buildings are unstable, and several have partially collapsed. Scavenger monsters take refuge in the labyrinthine slums which they leave to hunt in the river or the neighbouring area.

1. **Collapsed tenement:** The skeleton of a Thyatian soldier killed in the collapse of this building can be recovered. The soldier was a Tel-Akbiri man, and several personal effects can be recovered, including a Thyatian short sword (*gladius*) and the emblems of the Tel-Akbiri legion to which the man belonged. Malika Alharbia will pay up to 50 royals for such mementos.
2. **Collapsed tenement:** This set of building is partially collapsed, and 5 *Carrion Crawlers* have taken advantage of the holes in the walls, as well as of the sprawling basement, to nest. There are 1d4 *Carrion Crawlers* in the building at any time, unless they have all been killed. The remains of several adventurers eaten by the monsters include a handful of coins (12 kopecs, 8 cronas, 9 royals), and a *main gauche* +1, +2 vs weapon users. The weapon belonged to a swashbuckling fighter, but served him little against the *Carrion Crawlers*. Finding these items requires a moderate *Wisdom* check, or an easy check on the *Loot* skill (or similar skills).
3. **Inn:** The ceiling and the first floor of this inn have collapsed, leaving the outer walls. It is possible to reach the cellar by cleaning out the rubble. The innkeeper and his family hid here during the last Thyatian assault, but the ceiling collapsed when the building was hit by a catapult shot and locked them in. Digging into the cellar allows the PCs to retrieve a bag of 200 silver coins from the Kingdom of Achelos, but exposes them to either a further collapse (2d6 damage, ST vs Paralyzation for half damage), if they speed the work too much, or a random encounter if they take their

- time, as monsters are attracted by the noise.
4. **Large warehouse:** This building once housed the warehouse of the Blacksmiths' Guild of the Kingdom of Achelos. It is now the home of 2 *Rust monsters*. These rust-eating beings have left little of the original contents of the warehouse, but what is left is still enough, so they have almost no interest in bothering the PCs. They will only attack obvious meals (characters wearing heavy armor), and will not chase the PCs beyond the warehouse.
  5. **Tenement:** 10 *Archer bushes* have colonized this gutted building, as well as the overgrown plaza in front of it. They are scattered across the area and prey upon giant rats and other small animals, but will attack PCs as well.
  6. **Tanner's house:** This building once house a tanner's workshop. It is still terribly smelly, but the smell is due to the large colonies of *Yellow Mold* and other molds that have colonized the damp workshop area.
  7. **Collapsed warehouse:** This building was almost entirely gutted by a fire. Roll for random encounters. If one happens, combat in the area will result in a further (major) collapse. All involved combatant need to pass a ST vs Dragon Breath, or suffer 3d4 HP of damage. On a successful ST, the character or monster avoids the damage entirely.
  8. **Sweatshop:** This large, squat building is almost intact. It was composed of a single large hall to begin with, and survived the Thyatian onslaught and the passage of time with little damage, though the furniture is completely rotten. It is inhabited by many normal bats (10d10 can be found at any time), as well as some giant bats (1d10). If the bats are chased off and the broken windows are repaired, the building is stable enough to be used at least temporarily. Any Dwarf can assess this, as well as any character able to pass a moderate skill check on a relevant skill (e.g., *Civil Engineering*). Lord Kaerin would pay up to 30 royals for the information.
  9. **Granary:** This building is the base of the *Wererats*. 1d6+2 of them are present at any given time. The granary itself is a simple, circular stone building. The upper story is almost completely collapsed, but the wererats have cleared most of the rubble. One wererat hides on what remains of the upper story, and is armed with a light crossbow. The others loiter on the ground floor, and switch to rat form as soon as they are aware of enemies. A sack with the treasure of the band, 50 royals, 100 cronas and a *potion of healing*, is hidden under the rubble on the side opposite to the entrance. The lycanthropes do not know what the potion actually is, as their leader told them it is poisonous -- any captured wererat will tell the PCs so.
  10. **River Port Guard:** A single *Darkhood* haunts this tower, once used by the Achelos city guard as barracks and custom house. Use the *Tower map* for this area. There are no other monsters, except a number of Skeletons. Roll for random monsters normally. 50% of the times, the encounter will be with the Darkhood, the remaining will be with 3d4 Skeletons. After the Darkhood is defeated, only up to two Skeleton encounter can happen.
- To generate encounters for parties exploring the Riverside Slums, a wandering monsters table is provided. The

## The Ruins of Achelos

table is designed to evolve according to the actions of the PCs, reflecting the progressive reduction of the threat level of the area as the PCs kill off the monsters that inhabit it.

### Riverside Slums wandering monsters (1d8):

1. *Bat, Giant* 1d10; ignore this encounter during the day. Giant bats continue to plague the Slums until the end of the adventure. However, the number encountered is reduced to 1d6 after any three other entries have been replaced by NPC parties or no encounter results.
2. *Beetle, Giant Oil*, 1d8; after the third encounter, ignore this result and treat as no encounter.
3. *Beetle, Giant Tiger*, 1d6; after the third encounter, ignore this result and treat as no encounter.
4. *Carrion Crawler*, 1d4; there are a total of 5 Carrion Crawlers in the Slums (including those in area 2); once exhausted, replace this encounter with an NPC party from Nova Achelos (roll 1d4: 1- Green Company patrol, 2- Salvagers, 3- Workers with Green Company escort, 4- Adventurers).
5. *Centipede, Giant*, 1d4; after the third encounter, replace this result with a collapsing wall. This requires a ST vs Paralysis to avoid, and inflicts 2d6+2 damage on a failure.
6. *Ghoul*, 1d6; even if destroyed, more ghouls come from the Graveyard until the Vampire Lord in the River Fort is destroyed. Thereafter, treat as an NPC party from Nova Achelos (roll 1d6: 1- Knights of the Griffon patrol, 2- Salvagers, 3- Workers with Green Company escort, 4- Adventurers, 5- Guilder with Green Company escort, 6- Cleric of the Church of Karameikos with Knights of the Griffon escort).
7. *Rat, Giant*, 3d6; reduce the number by 1d6 if the Wererats have been

chased off or killed; after 20 rats are killed, reduced the number encounter by another 1d6.

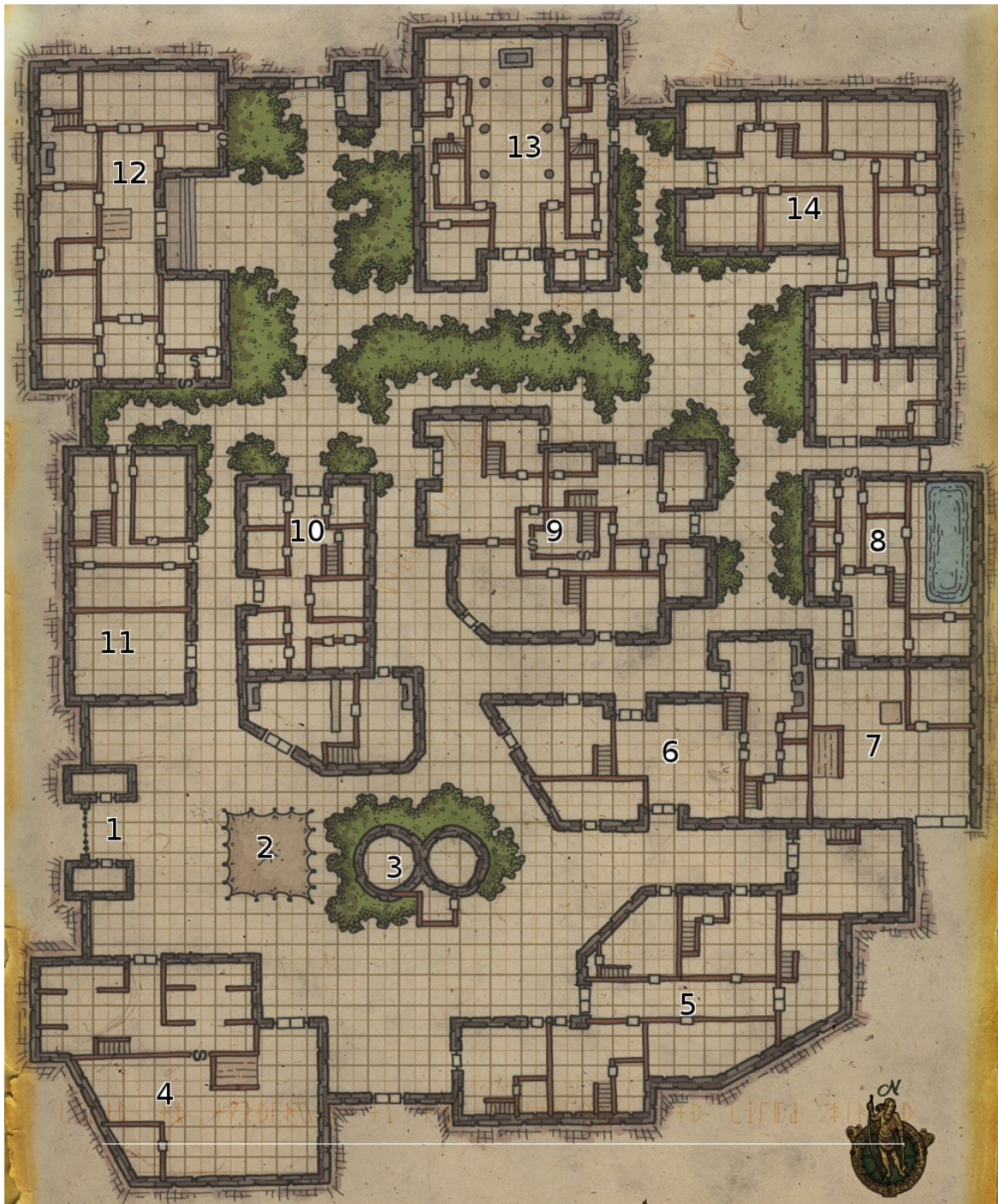
8. *Wererat*, 1d8; there a total of 12 (lesser) wererats have currently settled in the slums, hoping to steal from and feed on the inhabitants of Nova Achelos. If more wererats are rolled than the remaining number, add one gretear wererat, the leader of the lycanthropes. This creature is also a level 4 Cleric of Mrikitat. It will not fight to the death, using his followers to cover his escape. After the leader is defeated, no further Wererats appear. Replace this encounter with an NPC party from Nova Achelos (see entry 4).



### Merchant District

The Merchant District lies along the southern bank of the Achelos river. Most of the buildings have been sacked and torched during the Thyatian conquest. The Iron Ring and some of its goblinoid allies

have set up a fortified camp by occupying and repairing several of the best-preserved buildings around one of the market squares, and barring the alleys around it with barriers made with wooden



Map of the Iron Ring Enclave

## The Ruins of Achelos

mantlets and rubble. Use the Enclave map<sup>13</sup> for this area.

The Iron Ring leader of the slaving operation in the area, Master *Haxmal* (MU 8, C) has almost completely evacuated the enclave, in response to the Karameikan settlement. He knows the government will crack down on the operation as soon as they get the Slums and River Fort under control, so he is slowly moving out the slaves as well as the equipment and personnel.

The area is more populated than others, as the Iron Ring patrols keep predatory monsters from taking over. Goblinoid slave traders can be encountered with some frequency, and the Iron Ring maintains contacts with other evil organizations, such as the Dark Triad.

### Wandering monsters (1d8):

1. *Giant Rats* (3d4).
2. *Broken Hammer Orcs*: 2d4 Orcs, 1 Orc Sergeant (Orc 3). This party of Orcs is going to buy a few slaves from the Iron Ring. They know that a precious item is going to be sold in the next fair at the Hidden Market. They do not know where the Hidden Market is, as this information is a closely guarded secret of the Broken Hammer traders.
3. *Cruth Ogres*: 1d4 Ogres. These Ogres have captured an Elf hunter, Trilinel, and want to sell him to the Iron Ring. They would sell the Elf to the PCs, if asked, for 12 cronas in trade goods, or 2 royals in coins.
4. *Iron Ring patrol*: 2d4 Hounds and 1 Reaver (F5, C).
5. *Achelos Outlaws spy* (T4, N). This Traladaran woodsman is a spy from the Achelos Outlaws. If undetected,

he follows the PCs, trying to understand their strength and whether they are friends or foes. If the party is composed of ethnic Thyatians and the PCs are involved in a difficult fight, the spy will attack isolated PCs with a short bow. If detected, he will make up a story justifying his presence -- he may tell the PCs he is an adventurer, the only survivor of a party, and direct the PCs towards the Iron Ring Enclave.

6. *Iron Ring slavers*: 1 Reaver (F5, C), 1d4 Hounds, 2d4 Goblins and 1d6 slaves. These slavers are transferring slaves to another camp. They do not fight except to defend themselves.
7. *Dark Triad Priest*: 1 Cleric (C4, C), with 1d4+1 bodyguards (mix of F2 and Orc 1). This evil cleric will react to the PCs depending on the party strength. If clearly outnumbered, he will try to escape, using an *hold person* spell to delay pursuit. If the Dark Triad cultists outnumber the PCs, on the other hand, they will try to capture them. If they seem closely matched, the priest will parley. He knows about the Hidden Market, and will reveal this information to a party that is not obviously good aligned (e.g., displaying holy symbols of the Church of Traladara or the Church of Karameikos, the coat of arms of the Order of the Griffon, etc.)
8. *Stirges*: 2d4 Stirges hunting in the area. These monsters nest along the river, but range up to the city in their hunting.

### The Iron Ring Enclave

This walled area has been held for years by the Iron Ring. The NPCs and monsters

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/mapofweek/200604/04\\_042006\\_300\\_a7w2w\\_ppi.jpg](http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/mapofweek/200604/04_042006_300_a7w2w_ppi.jpg)

know the layout of the area well, and will react promptly to alarms. Once the PCs are discovered, it will be very difficult for them to surprise anyone, and the major NPCs will start packing and moving through secret exits (or simply the main gate) as soon as it is clear that the camp is under a serious attack.

1. **Main Entrance.** The entrance is guarded by two *Hounds*. Six *goblin archers* are posted on the roof of the guard post buildings.
2. **Goblin camp.** 20 *goblins* of the Nightseeker clan, with one *chieftain* (Goblin 5, C) and one *wicca* (Goblin 3/Wicca 3, C) live in or around this area. The leader will deal with any party that asks to speak with an Iron Ring representative, calling one of the Reavers if in doubt.
3. **Granary.** This building is used to store provisions for the slaves, goblinoids, and Hounds. There is plenty of rats (4d8).
4. **Ruined building.** This building is partially collapsed. It is used by some of the goblins in area 2 to repair themselves in rainy weather.
5. **Slave pen and Orc barracks.** This buildings house both a group of Orcs from the Greyslayer tribe, and a small number of slaves. There are 8 Orcs and 1 Orc underchief (Orc 4, C). The 10 slaves are all Traladarans from various villages along the Volaga. They have been beaten and ill treated, and are not able to fight or even to run.
6. **Slave pen.** There is a single slave here, an old Traladaran man. He is ill and has been left here to die, as the other slaves have been already transferred elsewhere. The man, *Dimitri Marinescu* (C3, L), is a village priest of the Church of Traladara. If saved, he remains in the area, as the hamlet where he lived has been destroyed by goblinoids in the employ of the Iron Ring, and all the inhabitants have been enslaved. Dimitri may become a minor ally for the PCs, especially if they help him save his relatives and friends from the slavers.
7. **Guard post.** This room is guarded by 6 Hounds of the Iron Ring and 4 goblin archers. One of the goblin flees and alerts the Reavers as soon as the first Hound falls.
8. **Baths.** This ill-kept building includes a large pool, that is used to bath the Hounds and slaves. It is not used very often, though.
9. **Slave pen.** This complex was used as the main holding area for the slaves. It is presently abandoned.
10. **Reavers lodgings.** Three Reavers (F5, C) use this area, though they are rarely present, except at night. One of them, *Igor Pyotrevich* (T6, C), though, is always present in the camp. Roll 1d4 to choose the location of the Reaver: 1- Reavers lodgings (10), 2- Residence of Master Haxmal (12), 3- Main Entrance (1), 4- Fane of Hybristes (13). Igor Pyotrevich own an excellent suit of *giant-work leather armor* (AC 6, worth 200 royals; AC downgrades to 7 if the wearer takes maximum damage from any attack; the armor can only be repaired by Hill Giant artisans).
11. **Warehouse.** This building is used to store tools and construction materials. It is little used, and characters hiding here will not be discovered unless they are very obvious.
12. **Residence of Master Haxmal.** Master *Haxmal* (MU 8, C) wears a *ring of protection +1*, and his robes



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of defense give him a base AC 8 and allow him to cast the *shield* spell once per day. He is protected by two *Steel Living Statues*, fashioned in the form of Hounds of the Iron Ring.

13. **Fane of Hybristes.** This building is guarded at any time by two Hounds. It is used as a shrine to Hybristes<sup>14</sup>, one of the dark gods revered by the members of the Iron Ring. A priest, *Marcus Favonius* (C7, C), resides in the area with two assistants (both C3, C). Favonius is served by a homunculus, an *Ulzaq*, and keeps a *hellhound* as a pet. He also keeps 12 Skeletons at end in one of the unused rooms, and will use them to cover his escape, if his other minions fail to stop the PCs. Marcus Favonius wields a *mace +1, darkness 1/day*, and wears a suit of *chainmail +1*.
14. **Barracks of the Hounds.** This building is used to lodge the many Hounds of the Iron Ring. The Hounds are brain-washed berserkers, and spend most of their "free" time staring blankly to the ceiling from their bedrolls. There are typically 10+1d6 Hounds at any times -- the work in shifts.

## The Nobles Estates

This area is clustered on the hill, just under Castle Ivanovich, and overlooks the Merchant District. It was, at the height of the Kingdom of Achelos, the residence of choice of the small Achelos noble class -- a group of families, such as the Artho and Stoyanov, related to the ruling Ivanoviches and descended from the early Vandar barons. Given their good construction,

several of these low buildings have survived relatively intact.

However, there is a buffer zone between the Ogre tribe installed within the walls of Castle Ivanovich and the Iron Ring and its goblinoid allies in the Merchant District, so inhabitants are sparse at best. Three locations are of particular importance, the old Cathedral of Chardastes, the Stoyanov Library, and the Artho Mansion.

### *Cathedral of Chardastes*

This ancient temple has been taken over by cultists of the Dark Triad. Several members of the Temple of the Dark Triad are present, together with Broken Hammer and Blackstone Orcs guards.

Depending on the outcome of previous adventures (The Beast of Radlebb Woods and The Dymrak Dread are recommended), Orcus has either inflicted or suffered a major stroke, and is either planning a revenge or trying to capitalize on his previous success. In any case, the worshippers of Orcus are now opening a breach to Limbo right into the desecrated Cathedral of Chardastes. A Shade has already passed through the breach, and more may come in the future, together with Minions of Chaos. The breach allows Minions of Chaos to manifest in the Prime Material without time constraints.

Restoring the Bell of Chardastes would close the breach. However, the Bell was stolen from the Cathedral's vault. The cultists of Orcus have planted it on a group of gullible foreign adventurers, telling them it was the key to defeating Trinkla, the Black Seer, whose undead remains lie in her tomb in the Black Swamp with uncounted treasures. The adventurers have thus braved the tomb, finding their death in that maze of traps. With the Bell safely hidden in the Tomb, the cultists, even if defeated, are sure to get more and more undead and Minions of Chaos on the Prime Material, and the Churches of Karameikos and Traladara will be hard pressed to keep them at bay, leaving the cultists free to strike elsewhere.

<sup>14</sup> Brissard's name in Thyatis.

It is up to the Player Characters, and the major NPCs of the area, to find a solution -- the most likely being to chase the cultist, temporarily install a garrison of priests from either or both Churches, and send an experienced adventuring party into Trinkla's Tomb.

When the PCs start investigating the Cathedral, the following people and monsters are present:

- *Vladislav Mrakich* (C7, C), a Cleric of Orcus. Mrakich stands in a relatively high position in the Temple hierarchy, so he enjoys the luxury of using the lower ranking members to cover his escape. If he survives, he will become a constant threat, trying to assassinate the PCs or otherwise hindering them, especially if they try to recover the Bell of Chardastes. This priest fights in chainmail and shield, and wields a warhammer. He has a clerical scroll with the Darkness, Fear and Blight spells, and a Ring of Safety with 2 charges.
- *Dakhtor* (Hobgoblin 5/Shaman 4, C), an Hobgoblin Shaman of Leptar is the second in command among the cultists. He wears a remarkably intact suit of plate mail, and wields a bastard sword (Skilled). There are six other clerics of the Dark Triad (C2, C) in the Cathedral.
- *Korlgahd* (Orc 6/Shaman 1, C), a Blackstone Orc champion of Orcus is following his vision quest. He feels he has to confront a powerful enemy of Orcus in single combat. He will single out a PC Fighter or Cleric for this purpose -- by preference, the Champion of Halav, or any Traladaran. He will ask the other Orcs and Clerics to let him duel before continuing whatever combat is going on. Korlgahd wields a battleaxe at the Skilled level, and wears mixed armor for a total AC 5.
- *Ughdal*, Broken Hammer underchief (Orc 4, C), with 20 Broken Hammer Orcs. Ughdal is much more practical than Korlgahd, and

dislikes the Blackstone champion, but fears him at the same time. He might well betray Korlgahd, if he believes the other Orc will not survive.

- A *Shade* (11\*\*\* HD, C), a lost soul from Limbo captured by Leptar and transformed in an undead assassin. It is tasked with guarding the gate to Limbo, so it is always found in the crypt.

For all named NPCs, except the Shade, roll 1d4 to determine the current location at the time the PCs approach the building.

The Cathedral of Chardastes adventure employs the "*Cathedral of Hope and Doom*" map from Map-a-Week<sup>15</sup>. A description of the various areas is provided in the rest of this section.

1. **Ground Floor:** The ground floor is composed of the main hall, which has been desecrated by the cultists: the statues of Chardastes, Halav, Petra, and Zirchev have been defaced, and symbols of the Dark Triad have been painted in blood red and black on the walls and columns. The side entrances have been barred with wooden planks and furniture, while the main entrance is open, the great doors rammed down during the Thyatian invasion. The two rear entrances are closed, but can be opened with *Open Locks* or a *Knock* spell. A large section of the floor has been removed from the lateral naves, and the shallow graves thereunder have been dug to animate the corpses as Skeletons. There are 20 Skeletons in total in the area, each standing in front of its own grave. There are also 2d4+3 Orcs here at all times. The other Orcs are either patrolling the area around the Cathedral (in groups of 1d4+2), or in the crypt.
2. **Balcony Floor:** The cultists of Orcus have taken these rooms for

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/mw/20040506a>

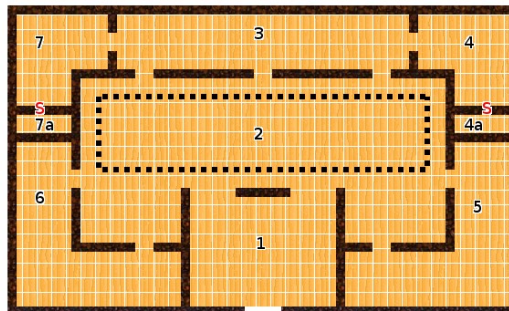
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themselves, setting up their camp in the two wings and the large room over the altar. The common clerics live in the west wing and Dahktor in the east wing, while Mrakich occupies the main room. Two *Skeletons* are set as guard to each door leading to Mrakich's lodgings, and attack anyone trying to enter. The cultists rest here while not working at widening the breach in the crypt. A commotion on the ground floor will attract the cultists in 1d4+2 rounds.

- 3. Top Floor:** The Bell of Chardastes was once kept in a secret compartment in this level, near the apartment of the Patriarch (the southernmost room). The area is not used anymore, but Mrakich has set a poison gas trap (ST vs Poison or suffer 2d6 HP) in the secret compartment.
- 4. Basement:** Most of the rooms and cells here are not used, except the large crypt at the southern end, where the breach is located. There are always 1d4+1 cultists here, and the *Shade* roams the basement. The Orcs only use the rooms near the stairs, since they fear the *Shade*.

### Stoyanov Library

This stout building survived the siege with less damage than most others. Still, the ceiling has mostly collapsed, crushing the writing desks that were once located in the center of the main hall. The statue of the philanthropist who financed the construction of the library, Petros Stoyanov, an important aristocrat at the court of Achelos, was also destroyed. The PCs may explore this building on their own, or upon request by *Malika Alharbia*.



### The Stoyanov Library

A Nagpa researcher, *Serdalu* (Nagpa NM, C), has discovered, in the old diary of General Alharbius' magist at the Collegium Arcanum in Thyatis City, a note pointing to the Traladaran translation of the *Thanatopsis*<sup>16</sup>, a text that could contain great necromantic lore. According to the text, the Thyatian wizard had learned of the text from a Traladaran prisoner, but could not confirm its presence in the library of Achelos, as he was killed in a skirmish near Riverfork, as stated in the last pages of the diary, which were added later by the magist's apprentice before turning the diary in to the Collegium Arcanum -- a standard procedure among the Thyatian battle mages. Serdalu employed a Cloud Clipper to reach Achelos while the Flying City of Serraine is hovering over the Five Shires and Darokin. The Cloud Clipper is hidden in the valley of the river Piva, near the Nithian Obelisk -- a landmark that immediately caught Serdalu's eye and which he plans to investigate after securing the *Thanatopsis*. Serdalu carries an assortment of potions (*invisibility*, *flying*, *invulnerability*, *poison* and *healing*) as security measure, as well as a *scroll of protection from lycanthropes*. Serdalu works for the Grey Front, which has given him the means to carry on his research, as well as to hire mercenaries.

<sup>16</sup> *Thanatopsis* by Jens Schnabel, "Tomes for the Tome: Magical Books", in Tome of Mystara, vol 5, <http://pandius.com/tome/tomevol5/tomes.html>

Thus, he brought with him a few allies and guards for this mission: *Ocythoe* and *Nikothoe*, two mercenary harpy sisters. *Ocythoe* (Harpy 1, C) is a pugnacious being who will use her charming touch to even out the odds against numerous opponents, only to sweep down on the remaining ones and engage in vicious melee (she has 14 Str and 16 Dex). *Nikothoe* (Harpy 1/Wicca 1, C) prefers to let her sister do the fighting, staying up in the air casting her spell (a Magic Missile) or charming opponents with her song. She targets spellcasters first, and enemies armed with ranged weapons second. Both sisters speak the Skycommon tongue of Serraine, and the screeching language of the Harpies, so they are unlikely to be able to communicate with PCs.

Finally, *Brandin Firehand* (Sky Gnome 3, C) has been hired as a guide. His cousins *Glondin* and *Mardin* pilot the *Cloud Clipper*, and are camped near the *Nithian Obelisk*.

Most of the books in the library are either too damaged to be of any use, or of no interest. The following tomes can be found:

- *Cicercios Paphocuzitum, "Oratory"*<sup>17</sup>. This book can be used to learn the Oratory skill. It can be found with a successful *Loot* skill check (or other similar skills).
- *Gunntarr Rolfsen, "Treaty of Exploration"*<sup>18</sup>, can be used to learn the Survival skill for any terrain, obtaining a +1 bonus to the skill.
- Anonymous, *"Curses of the Corrupted Souls from Beyond"*. This is actually the Traladaran translation of the *Thanatopsis* that *Serdalu* is looking for. It can be found with a *Loot* skill check (or other similar skills) of *Heroic* difficulty.

<sup>17</sup> from "A Short Reference to Thyatian Literature", by Giulio Caroletti and James Ruhland, [http://pandius.com/thy\\_lit.html](http://pandius.com/thy_lit.html)

<sup>18</sup> from *M5 Twilight Calling*

- Anonymous, *Annales Regum Acheloion*, 10 volumes, only 2 surviving. These books contain most of the historical information on Achelos during the V and IX century. Besides their antiquary value, volume X can help prove the *Ivanovich* family hereditary rights to the area.

Only the ground floor of the library is accessible. The upper story is too filled with rubble from the collapsed roof, which is also piled on the ground of the main hall.

1. **Entrance and lobby:** This large hall was once adorned with statues depicting the kings of Achelos in the guise of *Traldar* heroes. Most of the statues are now broken, with missing arms and heads. Two appear to be in pristine conditions, though, including the brightly painted colours. There is a large counter near the wall opposite the entrance, and lines of wooden pegs jut from the side walls behind the statues. *Brandin Firehand* stands guard here, sitting on the counter with his meddling box. If the PCs do not approach stealthily, he hears them before they enter, and hides behind the counter. The two pristine statues are *Living Crystal Statues*, brought here by *Serdalu* as guards and obey *Brandin's* orders. The gnome is not necessarily hostile, but very wary of intruders. If combat starts, he will flee to area 2, letting the statues hinder the PCs.
2. **Main hall:** This large hall once reached to the ceiling, with a narrow balconade running all around the room. As the ceiling collapsed, the hall is now exposed to the weather, and is full of pools of stagnant water, rubble, and the

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remains of the large benches and tables that filled the central area. *Ocythoe* and *Nikothoe* roost on the balconade, and regularly fly out of the building to survey the surroundings. The two harpies engage anyone who enters the room and is not in the company of either Brandin or Serdalú. Their screeches will alert both the Nagpa and the Gnome.

3. **History Section:** This long hall has book shelves along its walls, full of old texts of Traladaran history. Most of them are too ruined to be of any use, but it is possibly to find two almost intact volumes of the *Annales Regum Acheloion*, as well as a number of other less valuable texts covering the Traladaran Wars and the Vampire Wars. Serdalú has stored here 10 *Zombies*, which do not move or attack unless ordered by him.
4. **Foreign Literature Section:** This section once held copies of many Thyatian books, as well as some Darokinian texts. Unfortunately, a number of cracks in the ceiling and walls led the books to be repeatedly drenched in rainwater, rendering most of them useless. The most valuable book that can be found here is Paphocuzitum's *Oratory*. A secret door leads to a much smaller room, where only a few books were kept. There is a copy of the *Treaty on Exploration*, as well as other books on distant lands -- mostly copies of explorers' diaries. The DM should include a *Treasure Map* here (e.g., the diary and map leading to the Isle of Dread, or a map of tunnels leading to the "center of the Earth", depending on future adventures).
5. **Traladaran Religion Section:** This section once housed many religious texts, mostly commentaries on the Song of Halav, writings of the ancient patriarchs, as well as philosophical musings on the different sects of the Traladaran religion. More texts can be recovered here than in the other sections, but these texts can mostly be found in the library of the Church of Traladara in Specularum, so they have limited worth. Fifty volumes can be saved, each worth on average 10 gp and weighing about 50 coins.
6. **Technical Literature Section:** This section preserves a number of books on subjects such as agriculture, construction, engineering and economics. However, these books are all rather outdated, and are of no practical interest.
7. **Magic Literature Section:** This section was used by the few mages of Achelos. It still holds a number of basic texts on magic, totalling a value of 500 gp for any Magic User's library. When used to research polymorph magics, these books are 20% more effective than their value. A secret door leads to a small room with a iron safe (standard Open Locks roll to open). Inside the safe, there is a copy of the Traladaran translation of the *Thanatopsis*, as well as a spellbook containing the *Continual Darkness*, *Choke*, and *Walking Dead* spells<sup>19</sup>. Serdalú is in the main room,

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<sup>19</sup> The spells *Choke* and *Walking Dead* appear in "Tomo della Magia di Mystara", volume 1, by Marco Dalmonte and Matteo Barnabè.

perusing the books and searching for the Thanatopsis. He will try to scare away the PCs using his powers and ordering the Zombies in area 3 to attack them if the PCs have already attacked Brandin or the harpies. Otherwise, he will disguise himself as a old human using his phantasmal force ability, and will negotiate with the PCs. He is not interested in any of the books, except the Thanatopsis, and will gladly leave everything to the PCs in return for that single book. He will flee if the PCs overpower his allies, but will return at a later time with reinforcements to steal the book.

### *The Artho Mansion*

This part of the adventure employs "The Mansion: Mansion 1" map from Map-a-Week<sup>20</sup>. The quest begins when the PCs are hired to recover any surviving documents and treasure from the mansion by the Merchants' Guild, which represents the interests of the few surviving members of the Artho family. The PCs have to escort a representative of the Guild, that is Emil Radu's clerk, Igor Dumitrescu (NM, L). Igor is rather inept, but very meticulous in checking that the PCs do not fail to report any valuable item from the mansion, and insists on making a thorough tour of the building, which is miraculously intact.

At least two random encounters happen before Igor and the PCs actually manage to reach the house (roll on the Noble Estates random encounter table below).

While in the house, two events happen:

1. Igor, rummaging through the rubble, causes heavy broken furniture to finally collapse. Unless the PCs have been paying special attention to him, he gets caught under the furniture, breaking one of his legs in the process. The PCs will

have to heal him (a *cure light wounds* spell will suffice), or carry him back to Nova Achelos on a stretcher.

2. A pack of 7 *giant rats*, disturbed by Igor's activities, attack. The poor clerk, frightened, flees to the PCs' protection. It is up to the party to ensure that Igor survives this encounter as well.

Finally, if the Veiled Society emissary, Bogdan Ilic, has already a reason to have the party disposed off, he will take advantage of the favorable occasion to hire a party of "assassins" to ambush the PCs in the mansion. The "assassins" are actually four unscrupulous adventurers rather than professional hitmen. If the PCs have made some enemies in the past, this could be a good time to have them show up as members of this group. Otherwise, use the following four NPCs: Black Ivan (F5, C), a rogue member of the Achelos Outlaws as well as an expert woodsman and archer (*Skilled* in the use of the long bow); Dusan Dusanovich (T6, C), a fugitive from the Black Eagle Barony; Annie Longbottle (H5, C), a blood-hungry halfling, wanted in all the Five Shires, who wields twin axes (*Skilled* in the hand axe); and Tor Bonesmasher (D6, C), a violent dwarven drunkard (*Skilled* in the battle axe). The four assassins have been given some intelligence on the characters: if the party is mostly comprised of spellcasters, three of them hide in one of the rooms on the first floor, while Black Ivan remains on the second floor to use his bow on any enemy spellcaster that is able to disengage. Otherwise, they all hide on the balconies, using ranged weapons as much as possible (Tor has a light crossbow, Annie a sling, and Dusan a short bow). They have also studied at least two escape routes. The four have been paid an advance of 400 royals for their services, which they still have with them (100 royals each). Finally, the assassins do not take any special precaution to prevent Igor from dying -- actually, Bogdan does not care one way or another, and none of the assassins wants to leave any witnesses.

<sup>20</sup>[http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/mapofweek/01\\_Mansion\\_300ppi\\_vg21i.jpg](http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/mapofweek/01_Mansion_300ppi_vg21i.jpg)

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In the end, the quest does not prove very successful, though Igor and/or the PCs can recover some accounting ledgers of the ancient Artho, which prove the ownership of several land patches around Achelos.

### **Noble Estates random encounters (1d8):**

1. *Roaming undead*: a pack of 1d6+2 Ghouls, looking for corpses or lone living beings. They attack even a larger party, but fall back if one or more is destroyed. This encounter happens only once after the Vampire Lord is defeated. If the PCs have been to the graveyard, but have not yet faced the Vampire Lord, 3d6 Skeletons are also present to help the Ghouls.
2. *Bandits*: a group of 2d4+3 human bandits, either Iron Ring members or Achelos Outlaws. This encounter does not take place if both gangs are routed from the area.
3. *Giant Rats* (3d4). Reduce the number of rats encountered to 2d4 after the third encounter of this type.
4. *Foraging Ogre*: a single Ogre, looking for construction materials or other goods. It attacks small parties, and tries to scare away larger ones before fleeing back to the castle. After two such encounters, 1d4+1 Ogres are found instead. These Ogres are hostile, and try to chase away the intruders.
5. *Bat, Giant* 1d10; ignore this encounter during the day.
6. *Dark Triad Priest*: 1 Cleric (C4, C), with 1d4+1 bodyguards (mix of F2 and Orc 1). This evil cleric will react to the PCs depending on the party strength. If clearly outnumbered, he will try to escape, using an *hold person* spell to delay pursuit. If the Dark Triad cultists outnumber the PCs, on the other hand, they will try to capture them. If they seem closely matched, the priest will use

his spells initially, then he will fall back to get reinforcements. This encounter does not happen after the cathedral is secured.

7. *Broken Hammer Orcs*: 2d4 Orcs, 1 Orc Sergeant (Orc 3). These orcs are patrolling the area. They try to capture the PCs, but switch to deadly attacks if outnumbered or if they fail a morale roll. If they fail a second morale roll, the orcs flee towards the cathedral. This encounter does not happen after the cathedral is secured.
8. *Carrier Crawler*: there is a single specimen wandering the area. Once it is killed, replace this encounter with a pack of Ghouls (see encounter 1) if the Vampire Lord in the Achelos River Fort is still undefeated. Otherwise, a group of NPCs salvagers from Nova Achelos is encountered instead.

### **The Achelos River Fort**

The river fort was built to protect the ferry across the Achelos river as well as to prevent smugglers from using the river to cross into the city. It is composed of a keep, built on a small artificial island, and a wall reinforced with small towers, which allowed the guards to protect or impound caravans and goods.

Nowadays, the outer walls are in a very bad shape, having been partially demolished during or immediately after the Thyatian siege. A large number of skeletons, zombies, and ghouls prowl the area within the walls (20 undead of each type). These undead do not enter the river willingly, though they may be forced by their vampire master to do so. They do pursue trespassers into the wilderness, though, and attack any living that enters the walled area.

The keep is better preserved, though it was clearly burned, and the roof and top floor have been destroyed. A large hole is visible over the balcony that overlooks the walled enclosure of the fort.

### *The Vampire Lord*

The identity of the Vampire that has taken residence in the Achelos River Fort is unknown. It is certainly a member of the Koriszegy bloodline, and a moderately powerful Magic User. If the party played the *Dymrak Dread* campaign<sup>21</sup>, and Boris Popescu survived, then he is the Vampire Lord. Otherwise, this vampire is a different character, who escaped Koriszegy's control earlier on.

The Vampire Lord is a standard 8 HD Vampire, able to cast spells as a MU7. He has the following salient powers: he can create Ghouls and Elder Ghouls, and controls these undead as if they had ½ their HD; and he suffers from blood rage, as a consequence of the Koriszegy curse. Due to the blood rage, the Vampire must pass a *Wisdom* check (Wis 9) when taking more than 12 HP from a single wound, otherwise he goes berserk, attacking in melee instead of using spells. Moreover, the raging vampire focuses on a single opponent (whoever damaged him), pursuing and killing him by preference.

### *Key to the Vampire Lair*

1. **Stone Causeway:** The keep is connected to the mainland via a stone bridge. Three row of 5 *Skeletons* each guard the passage. Behind them, an *Elder Ghoul* acts as their commander.
2. **Main hall:** This large hall is rarely used for its original purpose, since the Vampire Lord does not entertain guests that often. It is generally empty, though a servant may pass from this area occasionally. There is a hole under the wooden dais which allows the Vampire to pass in gaseous form from the crypt to the throne.
3. **Kitchen:** Since the servants' quarters are not accessible, the Vampire Lord keeps his mortal

servants -- all enslaved by his charm power -- in this room. There are two NM, both Traladaran women, here.

4. **Garderobe:** This area is used by the servants as a storage room for their own clothing.
5. **Servants' Quarters:** The ceiling collapsed over the servants' quarters, filling them with rubble. Since then, more rubble cleaned up from the upper story has be dropped in this room, so it is possible to climb to and from area 13.
6. **Pantry:** The pantry is stocked for the use of the Vampire Lord's human servants.
7. **Trapdoor to Crypt:** The door leading to this room is relatively well hidden (treat as a concealed door), and the same is true for the trapdoor on the floor, which is also blocked from the inside.
8. **Courtyard:** The courtyard is completely abandoned, except for the well, which is still in use.
9. **Secret hallway:** This hallway is covered in dust. No one has used it since the times of the invasion.
10. **Tower study:** The study is abandoned, but mostly intact. The desk holds the diary of one of the Achelos officers, which sheds some light on the actual events in the war (worth 50 gp to a collector such as Malika Alharbia).
11. **Jailer's room:** The Vampire Lord has raised the old jailer as an *Elder Ghoul*. However, the Vampire finds the ghoul's appearance offensive, and has chained the jailer to the wall opposite the door, so it cannot leave the room.
12. **Upstairs hall:** There is a large hall in the western wall where once was the access to the balcony. Moreover, the ceiling collapsed, though most of the rubble has been later removed by tossing it into room 5.

<sup>21</sup> My version of the *Dymrak Dread*, not the original adventure!



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13. **Sunset balcony:** This balcony collapsed, and is not easily accessible, though a dexterous PC may walk on the outer wall, which is still standing, or drop into area 5.
14. **Bedroom:** This room is relatively well kept. The human slaves of the Vampire Lord are tasked to keep the area in good order, even though their master has no real need of it.
15. **Bathroom:** Like the bedroom in area 13, this room is kept in good order by the Vampire Lord's servants.
16. **Spiral staircase:** This secret staircase connects the first and second floor.
17. **Parapet:** The parapets are manned by 3 *Skeleton* archers each.
18. **Library:** This area, together with the study, is the only part of the castle that is actually used by the Vampire Lord.
19. **Study:** The *Vampire Lord* is usually found here during the night, working at arcane research. The study itself and the library are worth 2000 gp as research libraries for magic users.
20. **Workroom:** This area has been converted to serve as the centerpoint of the necromantic rituals the Vampire Lord employs to raise the dead of the Old Graveyard. The materials and texts present in the area allow to research the *Animate Dead* spell at no cost. A *Loot* or similar skill check is needed to find all the useful items, which have a total encumbrance of 200 cn.
21. **Stone Bridge:** This bridge collapsed during the siege, together with the southern tower.
22. **Prison Cells:** The prison tower was shielded by the main body of the keep from the worst of the Thyatian bombardment. It was originally used to hold ship captains and merchants that were suspected of smuggling, until an investigation could be conducted. Crews were detained in pens in the main enclosure of the fort. This area is, therefore, reasonably well preserved. It is possible to rest here during the day, since the mindless undead do not use it. If the PCs are captured by the Vampire Lord and not immediately killed, they will be imprisoned here.
23. **Master Bedroom:** This area was destroyed during the siege. The ceiling collapsed into the rooms, which are now so full of rubble as to be fully impassable.
24. **Bathroom:** See room 23.
25. **Gallery:** See room 23. In addition, the floor in this area is also damaged. A PC of medium size carrying a medium load or more needs to roll a successful *Dexterity* check to avoid putting too much weight on an unstable part of the floor, pushing through it and taking 1d8 HP. Wearing armor decreases this damage to 1d6 (non-metal armor) or 1d4 (metal armor).
26. **Southern tower peak:** The southern tower was hit by trebuchet shots and powerful magics which blasted its peak into the river. This area does not exist at the present time.
27. **Northern tower roof:** The northern tower was entirely destroyed, and this area does not exist in the castle at the present time.
28. **Secret staircase:** this staircase leads to area 10.
29. **Hall with alcoves:** this hall leads to area 7. The alcoves once held lanterns, which have disappeared long ago, replaced by 4 animated skeletons. The Vampire Lord has strengthened these skeletons with old armor, weapons, leather strips, as well as by magic (*Improved skeleton* AC 5, HD 1+2, Dmg 1d6+2, XP value 15).
30. **Locked crypt:** a *Vampire Lord* has taken residence here. This area was

originally built as an armory and vault for the keep, to store impounded goods that were small and valuable enough to be stolen if left in the main enclosure. The Vampire refitted it with gloomy furniture and a coffin. The Vampire can be found here during the day.

## The Graveyard

This area comprises the graveyard that was once used by the noble families and the well-to-do merchants of Achelos, as well as by the royalty. Due to magical interference from the *Vampire Lord* that has taken residence in the *Achelos River Fort*, the dead of this graveyard are raising as undead Skeletons and Zombies at an alarming rate. A *Sons of Night* Darker has been investigating the phenomenon, and countering the magical influence of the Vampire Lord through his own necromantic rituals.

Adventurers entering the Graveyard are attacked by a party of undead led by an Elder Ghoul who commands 6 Ghouls, Zombies and Skeletons abound in the Graveyard, but wander aimlessly as long as the balance of magical power between the Vampire Lord in the River Fort (q.v.) and the Sons of Night is preserved.

After dealing with the first threat, the PCs see a magic user (MU 7, N), 6 *Orcs* and 4 *Zombies* fighting 3 *Elder Ghouls* and 9 *Ghouls*. If they help the magic user, he reveals that a powerful necromancer is trying to raise the dead of the Graveyard. He gives his own name as *Cimon Desitus* (an anagram for "Medius Noctis", or "the Dead of Night"), but he doesn't reveal his affiliation to the *Sons of Night*, the wizardly followers of Nyx.

Cimon is trying to prevent the undead from wandering out, and putting as many as possible to rest. However, he cannot

leave the Graveyard, or the walking dead will attack the settlement, or worse the Ogres of Castle Ivanovich.

Beyond hiding his connection to the Sons of Night, Cimon is relatively honest with the PCs, and will admit he does not really know who is trying to raise the dead, except that he was able to divine the source of the necromantic magic to be somewhere in or near the fort on the other side of the Achelos River.

Cimon also has a key to the *Tomb of Achelos II Ivanovich*, and, if the PCs insist on getting a reward from him he will offer to join them to explore the tomb, in return for a share of the treasure, as well as a first choice of items. He will, however, point out that the authorities in Nova Achelos should reward the PCs, not him.

### *Tomb of Achelos II Ivanovich*

The tomb of the Achelos royals appears outwardly as a small mausoleum, since most of it is an underground complex. Inside the mausoleum, a large stairway gives access to the actual burial complex. For the underground part, the Catacombs map from the "Heroes of Horror" Map Gallery<sup>22</sup> can be used.

#### **Key to the Tomb**

1. **Great Hall:** This large hall is decorated with scenes of the history of Achelos and its ruling dynasty. There are human remains scattered across the hall, and clumps of rock with the telltale characteristics of solidified lava. Four *Living Statues, Stone*, protect the entrance to the temple at the end of the Great Hall. They only allow a descendant of the Ivanovich line to pass (i.e., if Natalia Ivanovich is present, the statues do not activate). The statues do not

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/ho\\_h\\_maps/HoH\\_map8.jpg](http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/ho_h_maps/HoH_map8.jpg)

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- pursue trespassers beyond the stairway.
2. **Temple:** The temple contains a large statue of Chardastes, portrayed as the divine ancestor of the Ivanoviches. A precious sword, its hilt and scabbard studded with gems, lays at the feet of the statue. The sword is merely ceremonial, but it is worth 800 royals, and up to 1200 royals to a collector.
  3. **Vault:** This room is closed by massive dwarven-made double doors (-10% to *Open Locks* attempts), and further secured with a 12th-level *Wizard Lock* spell. Inside is a small fortune, part of the personal wealth of the Achelos kings. Two large, sturdy chests hold 10,000 silver coins each, while a third chest holds 5,000 gold pieces. All three chests are protected by locks with poison needle traps (with standard chances of finding and removing them for a Thief).
  4. **Crypt:** This crypt was originally used to hold the sarcophagi and corpses in preparation for the funeral and burial. It is now empty.
  5. **Tombs of the Achelos Royalty:** This set of burial rooms holds the sarcophagi of older kings and dukes of the Ivanovich dynasty. Unfortunately, due to the necromantic energies invoked by both the Vampire Lord and Cimon Desitus, evil spirits from Limbo have taken residence in several of the better preserved corpses. There are a total of four *Wights* in the catacombs. They only attack if their sarcophagi are opened and their protective seals are broken, but in that case they relentlessly pursue the characters.
  6. **Tomb of Achelos II Ivanovich:** The last king of Achelos rests in this crypt, or he would if not for the necromantic energies that suffuse the graveyard. Achelos II has indeed risen as a ghost. Achelos is still Lawful, and will not attack unless the characters have depredated the tomb. His chief interest is protecting the tomb. To send him back to his final rest, the Vampire Lord must be defeated, and the *Wights* that have risen in area 5 should also be destroyed (they will not disappear with the end of the Vampire Lord, unfortunately). Achelos will allow a descendant of his to take the treasures of the Vault (area 3) and the *Crown of Achelos*, which his dead body holds in its mummified hands. He will not allow other characters to take these items, and will haunt the area until the treasures are restored to their rightful owners (assuming the thieves are able to escape his wrath).

## Castle Ivanovich

The castle was largely destroyed by the Thyatians during the conquest of Achelos. An extended family of Cruth Ogres has taken residence in the ruins, using the surviving outer walls to build rough shelters for themselves and their livestock. There are 24 Ogres in total, of which 8 adult males (NM), 9 adult females (NM), 6 youngs (2 to 3 HD each), and the family chief, *Gohkal* (Ogre 3, C). *Gohkal* is not particularly intelligent, dislikes smaller and faster races and is quite wary of them. However, he is not evil, and acts in his best interest, putting self-preservation (of himself and his clan) first. His "treasure" is mostly a collection of old copper and silver coins, broken weapon or armor pieces, and other items of limited

value. His and his tribe's most valuable possessions are their livestock -- cows and sheep -- and an old, tarnished amulet, which is actually the Holy Pendant of Chardastes. Gohkal is unaware of its true value, but he understands the amulet is made of precious metals and gems, and will not part from it for less than 100 royals.

## Quests in Achelos

There are many quests available for the adventurers in Nova Achelos. Here is a listing of them, sorted by offering party.

*Merchants' Guild:* locate Artho mansion in the Noble Estates area; explore it and retrieve any surviving document and treasure. A representative of the Merchants' Guild should be present, and must be protected.

This quest is assigned by the Merchants' Guild either directly to the PCs, if they inquire for work, or by affixing a notice to a board near the Guildhall entrance. The notice explains only the general aspects of the mission, not the details. Emil Radu offers the PCs 10 royals each per day, plus 10% of all the valuables found in the Artho mansion. He is willing to raise the offer if the PCs have proven themselves competent -- either by completing another quest or because of their earlier reputation.

*Goldsmiths' Guild:* escort the two prospectors, Torbin Hilltopper and Hurdir Stronghollow, to Kostj Kopec, then further north to the Black Peaks. The two prospector spend at least three days on Kostj Kopec, then two weeks on the Black Peaks.

This quest can be assigned directly upon request by the PCs, or by affixing a notice to the Goldsmiths' Guild door and in the Townhall. The guildsmen offer 5 royals per day, and the PCs can keep any treasure or loot. However, mining rights for any mine discovered go to the guild (with a 10% royalty divided among the prospectors).

This quest is only given once the town itself is secure enough, which means that the PCs or other adventurers must have

completed the River Fort and the Slums missions.

*House Hallonica:* explore the Black Peaks and find a mountain pass to Darokin. This mission is offered in the same way as the other guild missions, and is only offered at the same time as the Goldsmiths' mission. House Hallonica offers 200 royals to each character, but only if they locate a mountain pass to Darokin. Expenses up to 25 royals per character are covered in advance.

*Natalia Ivanovich:* explore Ivanovich Castle, the River Fort and the Tomb of Achelos II Ivanovich and retrieve the regalia of Achelos.

This mission is offered by Natalia, a member of the last generation of the Ivanoviches, the former ruling family of Achelos, who claim to be direct descendants of Achelos Chardastes. The family wishes to retrieve the regalia of Achelos, which, beside their monetary value, have great symbolic significance for the natives of the Cruth Lowlands. Natalia is inexperienced but willful, and potentially a capable adventurer. She is being used as a pawn by her grandmother Anastasia, who plans for one of her male grandsons to inherit the regalia and reclaim Achelos as the Ivanovich domain. Natalia, however, is just as strong-willed as her grandmother, and has her own plans to take the leadership of the family. Thus, she insists on going with the characters, both because she does not trust them entirely and because she wants to be personally involved in the recovery of the regalia.

Natalia offers the PCs little in terms of advance payment (she only has her Shearing money, minus the cost of her equipment), but agrees to let the PCs keep all treasure, except the regalia themselves.

*Malika Alharbia:* explore Ivanovich Castle and the Stoyanov Library, find documents about Mahmud Alharbius and the Thyatian campaign. Malika and her party of would-be archaeologists mean to explore Ivanovich Castle and find traces of Malika's ancestor, legate Mahmud Alharbius.

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Moreover, when they learn of the Stoyanov Library, they absolutely want to salvage any valuable tome that might have survived since the times of the invasion. They offer good pay (50 royals plus a full share of any treasure for each character), and their mission is available from the beginning, but they insist on bringing along their "guides" and even their maids (unless there are several female PCs).

*Bishop Sokolov:* retrieve the Bell of Chardastes from the Cathedral. The mission is offered immediately: Bishop Sokolov believes that the Bell of Chardastes might be still preserved within the vaults of the Cathedral. Thus, he is willing to pay up to 1000 royals for the retrieval of the holy artifact. He also sends his assistant, Marina Kolarovic, with the party.

If the PCs are successful, and the Slums have been secured, Bishop Sokolov will ask the PCs to secure the Cathedral area as well, to allow him to restore the Cathedral to its function. He offers 100 royals to each character for this job.

*Lord Kaerin Penhaligon:* the main civil authority in Nova Achelos, Lord Kaerin offers several quests. First of them is to clean the Riverside Slums from the monsters that dwell there. He offers a bounty of 20 royals for each monster of medium size, and 50 royals for a monster of large size. Monsters of small size fetch only a bounty of 15 cronas. This quest is offered publicly on the Townhall board, and is already available when the PCs arrive in Nova Achelos.

Once the Slums have been cleared *and* the undead threat has been discovered, Lord Kaerin summons any party that cooperated to that operation (having earned a bounty of 100 royals is sufficient for this purpose), and proposes a clean-up operation at the Achelos River Fort. He offers 50 royals to each involved PC or NPC, plus the same bounty as for the Slums for individual monsters.

If the PCs obtain information about the Hidden Market and the sale of a mysterious, but powerful, item, Lord Kaerin asks them to find the Hidden

Market, infiltrate it during the next meeting, and discover, if possible, the identity of the leader of the Achelos Outlaws. He offers 60 royals to each PC to undertake the mission, and a bounty of 500 royals for the identity of the mysterious bandit lord. Other information items, such as the identity of lesser bandit chiefs or Dark Triad cultists, will be rewarded -- in a range from 20 to 120 royals.

At the same time, there is also the need to produce better maps of the Cruth Lowlands. The Karameikan authorities will offer contracts to map specific areas. In general, a reward of 10 royals per map hex explored will be offered. Priority will be given to the area between the Gustos and Achelos rivers. The same type of mission can be offered by other parties, especially Lord Alexius Korrigan in Specularum, and even Townmistress Sascia, though the Near Achelos Woods and the Blight Swamp are more likely target in those cases.

Finally, there are many monsters roaming the countryside around Achelos. Lord Kaerin will periodically set new bounties. He starts offering bounties of this kind only after the River Fort is taken -- he cannot afford it until the city itself is more or less under Karameikan control. Every week thereafter, update the bounty list using the following table. Each monster or group has an initial bounty equal to the total XP value.

### **Bounty list variation (1d4):**

1. Add one new bounty, selecting it on the next table. Roll 2d4-1. If the Iron Ring is chased from the Enclave in the merchant district or the PCs have botched the Hidden Market mission, roll 2d4 instead.
2. Increase the bounty for one monster by 1d6x10%, as it scores a hit against the Karameikan settlers.
3. No changes for this week.

4. Remove one existing bounty, as other adventurers have completed the task.

**Monster Bounty Table** (2d4 or 2d4-1):

1. *Undead*: remaining pockets of undead monsters, especially Ghouls (60%, 2d6 led by a single Elder Ghoul), but occasionally a Wight controlling 3d4 Skeletons and Zombies (30%), or even a Wyrd (10%).
2. *Owlbear*: a single but ferocious Owlbear male (count as +2 increase over the base monster). If this encounter is rolled a second time, replace it with a pack of werewolves (2d6).
3. *Wyvern*: a small hunting party (1d2+1) operating out of the Mt. Slijeme.
4. *Ogres*: a small but aggressive tribe (4+1d6 warriors) is raiding the new settlements and the trade route to LuIn.
5. *Achelos Outlaws*: a camp of these outlaws has been reported by Karameikan scouts. There are 4d4+10 bandits, as well as three leaders: a Fighter of level 1d4+2, a Thief of level 1d4+3, and a randomly chosen adventurer of level 1d4+2 (roll 1d6: 1- Fighter, 2- Thief, 3- Magic User, 4- Cleric, 5- Halfling, 6- Shadow Elf under disguise).
6. *Iron Ring slavers*: a caravan of slavers has been moving through the hills, trying to escape the Karameikan patrols. There are 3d4+4 Hounds of the Iron Ring, 3d4+4 Goblins with 1d6+2 war dogs, and three assorted Reavers (create as an NPC party of level 4-6).
7. *Manticore*: a monster from the Black Peak mountains is creating

unrest among the Cruth Ogres. Lord Kaerin wants it put down to avoid the risk of Ogre migrating southward.

8. *Dragon*: Ahkriin vented her frustration on the wrong target, killing a group of Gnome prospectors from Highforge and their Callarii guides. This bounty is set only once. If it is rolled a second time, and Ahkriin is still alive, increase her bounty by 10%. Otherwise, replace with a single but powerful werewolf (Werewolf of level 1d6+4), hunting with a pack of wolves (3d4+4) and standard werewolves (1d6+2).

### Steading of the Hill Giant Chief and Dwarves of Kurest Hurgon

The hill giant settlement is designed to support the use of the G1 "*Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*" AD&D 1e adventure. It is located between Three Axes Ford and the dwarven mine of Kurest Hurgon.

More than two centuries ago, the hill giants created a permanent settlement in the area, cutting the communications between Kurest Hurgon, a dwarven mine in the Black Peaks, and the Kingdom of Achelos, the primary Traladaran dominion in the Cruth Lowlands. Traladaran warriors and adventurers led by the Vampire Wars veteran *Moira the Pure*, a priestess of Petra, attempted to breach the siege and reach the dwarves. However, they were ambushed by the giants -- who had been warned by the Cruth Ogres of the Traladarans' arrival -- while crossing the Achelos river at Three Axes Ford. The giants, who had positioned themselves on the mountain spur overlooking the ford, easily crushed the Traladarans by tossing large boulders from their vantage position. However, dealing with the dwarves was not as easy. The miners simply closed the

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doors of their mine and retreated deep into the mountain, where the larger giants could not follow them. The dwarves can support themselves (and even raise animals) for extended periods on a diet of underground fungi. The dwarves periodically sent scouts to the surface, but never managed to get through the ford and contact other settlements. Recently, they have been besieged by other enemies able to deal with the tunnels (goblinoids and/or other monsters). Thus, they have tried a sortie, where a few dwarves were captured by the giants.

The adventure is set in motion when the PCs have dealt with some other threat, either the Cruth Ogres, the Sons of the Night, the Rotting Snakes, or the Achelos Outlaws (the "lesser evil"). The Hill Giants, who had been wary of moving through the territory of the defeated enemy, are now getting bolder, and threaten the entire region. The PCs may learn this from survivors of raided settlements, from captured Orcs (the smaller tribes may be forced to work for the Hill Giants, but some may try to move across the human territory to new hunting grounds), or through random encounters with Hill Giants (when the "lesser evil" is defeated, the frequency of Hill Giant encounters should move up one rank).

From there, increase the events until a major raid takes place, culminating in the destruction of one village (Vucevo if the "lesser evil" were the Rotting Snakes or Achelos Outlaws, Vostoi otherwise), until the PCs take notice and react. If they do not react, their chances of obtaining a fief suffer a major cut. The "Fury of the West" does organize an expedition, but is likely beaten by the Giants.

Assuming the PCs act timely, they can surprise the Giants as per the G1 adventure. Consider the Stone Giants as hired workers and the Cloud Giant as a visiting merchant -- they will not fight for the Hill Giant chief, unless the PCs attack them first. Note that there are several possible resolutions for the adventure. The

PCs may try to impress the Giants and scare the chief into some kind of agreement, or they may try to assassinate key Giants, or any other reasonable approach.

In the Steading, I would remove the Bugbears and replace them with Ogres, due to the lack of a sizable Bugbear population in the Cruth Lowlands. Otherwise, the adventure should work fine as is.

The dwarves in the Steading were captured from *Kurest Hurgon's* population in the last sortie. If freed, they will ask the PCs to help their clansmen, who are now trapped in the mine. The catch is that the dwarves are now besieged from both the upper and the lower levels of the mine: Orcs from the Blackstones or Rotting Snakes tribes are trying to take over the mines for their own use, while a small black dragon (the eldest of Vulomar's offsprings) has found a submerged entrance from the small lake north of the Three Axes Ford into the lower mines, and set up his lair there.

Surprisingly, there aren't many modules that lead the PCs to explore dwarven mines, but it may be possible to use for Kurest Hurgon the 3e adventure *The Forge of Fury*, with some adaptations, or design a new dungeon (maybe using the Dwarven Complex maps from Map-a-Week<sup>23</sup>).

If *The Forge of Fury* is used, it needs significant adjustments. First of all, in Kurest Hurgon the dwarves never left. You'll need to replace the Duergar with Rockborn Dwarves entrapped -- these are not anymore enemies by default, though they might still start hostile if there are no dwarves with the party.

Orcs are an exploratory party (horde) from the Blackstones or Rotting Snakes tribe. The dragon is an offspring of the black dragon of the Blight Swamp, *Vulomar*. You'll also have to increase enemy numbers and possibly levels, since the original module targets level 4-5, and after

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/mwa/archive2000>

the Steading the PC should have reached level 8-9. The final boss, the Small Black Dragon, can still be a good or challenging fight at level 8 (even more dangerous if the PCs try to subdue it or if they are surprised). The other key monsters are a *roper* and a *succubus*. The first is a challenging fight (it is stronger in BECMI than in 3e), and can be kept as is. The latter (a *Whispering Fiend* in BECMI) is probably too strong for a name-level party.

## Other Adventures

"*River of Blood*" can be used as an introductory adventure for the Cruth Lowlands.

The following adventures can also be employed in the Cruth Lowlands.

### The Barrows

These ancient Giant burial sites hold a variety of challenges. All of them are based on similar locales in "*King of the Giantdowns*".

#### *Barrow of Uidar the Quick*

Use the "Barrow of Borg Ttundarthart" from "*King of the Giantdowns*" for this locale.

#### *Barrow of the Thyatian Tribune*

Use the "Barrow of Six Knights" from "*King of the Giantdowns*" for this locale.

#### *Barrow of the Giant King*

This short adventure can be adapted from the Birthright supplement "*King of the Giantdowns*". Just change the involved parties in the war to Bromdignag Giants and Taymor armies, as described in the Atlas section.

## Abandoned Thyatian Fort

The Abandoned Thyatian Fort can use the map from the 3e free adventurer "*Base of*

*Operations*"<sup>24</sup>, or the map for the Old Fort of Lemnjohen in "*King of the Giantdowns*". The "Base of Operations" module can also be used to create a brief adventure, or the Abandoned Fort can be used to stage an encounter with the Achelos Outlaws, the Iron Ring, or any other enemy the party has been chasing.

## Tomb of Trinkla the Black Seer

Recently, cultists of Orcus plotted to send the Bell of Chardastes, a minor artifact that could ruin their plans in Achelos, into Trinkla's Tomb. There, the undead Seer is siphoning the energy of the Bell to replenish her own strength, and might emerge as a full Lich in the near future, unless the Bell is recovered.

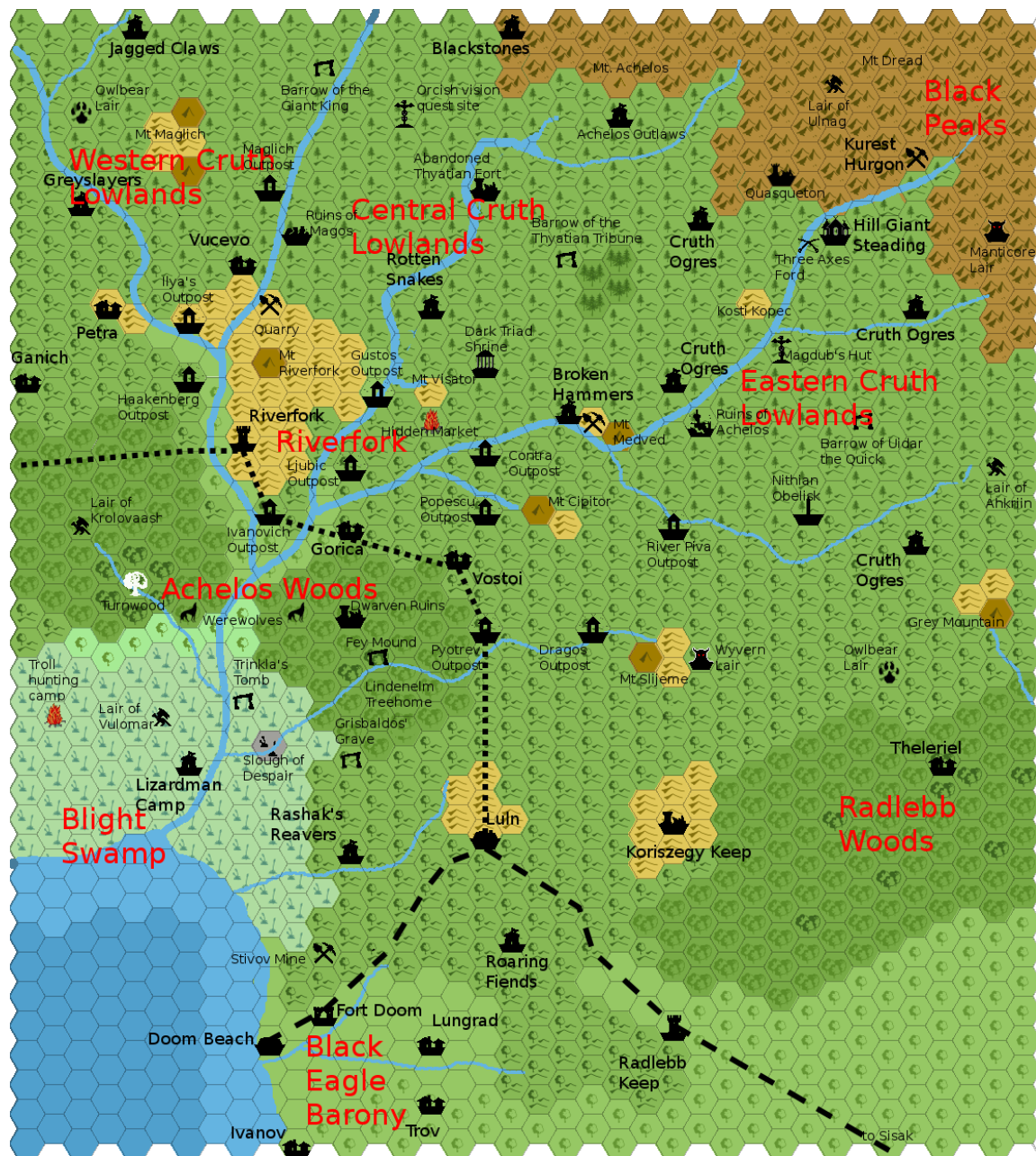
Use the "*Tomb of Horrors*" for this adventure. While the Tomb of Horrors is not a Mystara adventure, it does not need much support from the campaign itself, being essentially a self-contained environment. Moreover, it is available in all editions of D&D, and the 3e version is even available for free from WotC.

The 3e version adds some monsters that may need to be replaced (e.g., demons, which are Exalted and thus too dangerous for Expert level adventurers), but the 1e version can be used almost without modification (one might still make cosmetic changes, like considering the "mutant" gargoyle as a variant gargoyle, since gargoyles are constructs in Mystara; also, the Siren might be replaced by a Triton or Mermaid NPC).

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/oa/20001001a>



# The Ruins of Achelos



Geographical Map of the Cruth Lowlands