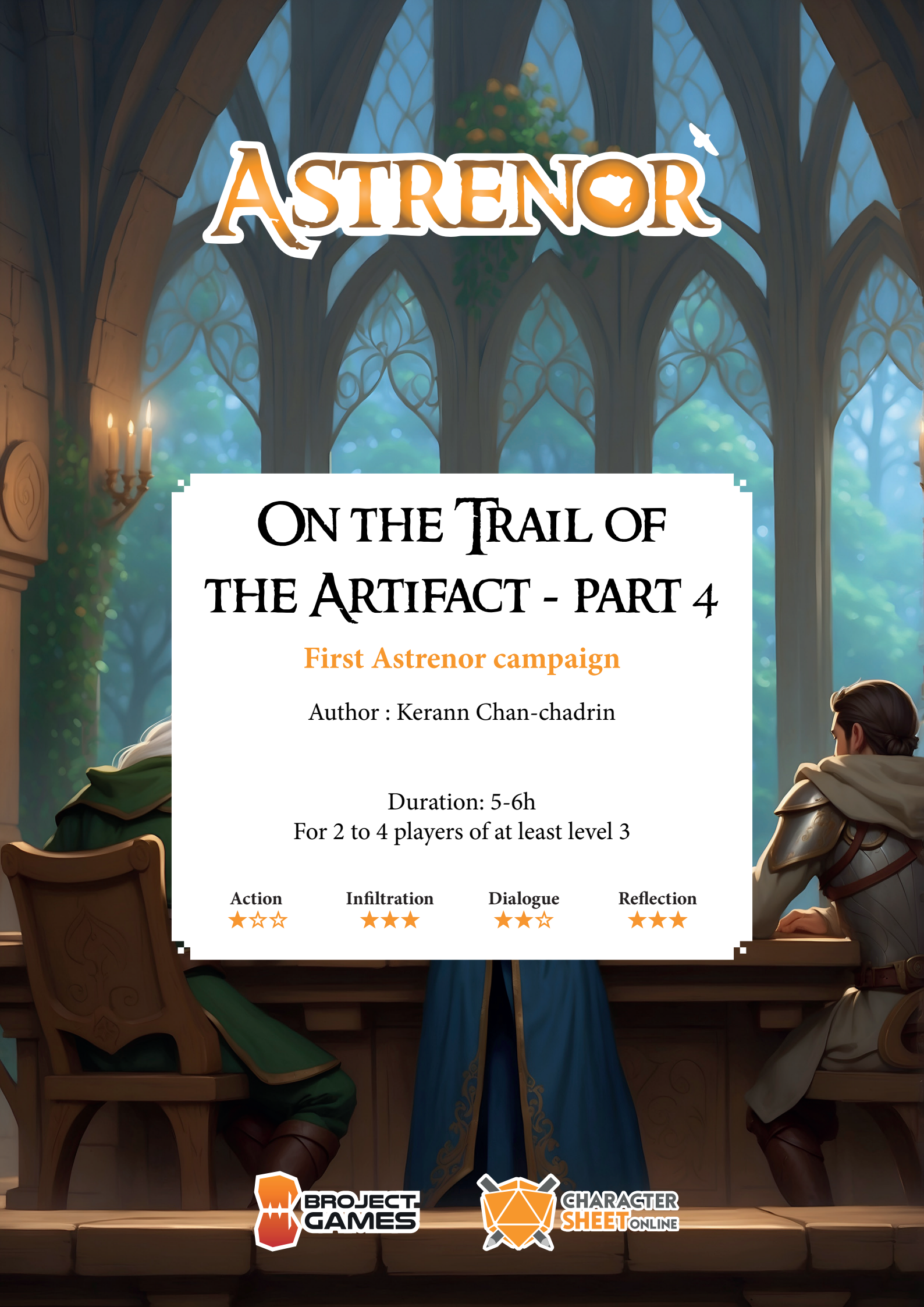

On the Trail of the Artifact - Part 4

First Astrenor campaign

Author : Kerann Chan-chadrin

Duration: 5-6h
For 2 to 4 players of at least level 3

Action	Infiltration	Dialogue	Reflection
★☆☆	★★★	★★☆	★★★

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Synopsis

In this scenario, the players are forcibly taken to Aethel, the capital of the Kingdom of Epheria, to stand trial. They find themselves without Oriel to guide them, and their precious weapons and equipment have been confiscated. Facing this dire situation, the PCs risk spending the rest of their lives behind bars. Their only way out: follow the right people, understand the significance of the artifact, uncover who is secretly conspiring and for what purpose.

This is the fourth and final part of the campaign "On the Trail of the Artifact." It is essential to have played parts 1, 2*, and 3 before starting this scenario.

**Scenario 2 is optional and can be skipped by playing only the final part.*

Context

A week has passed since the attack on Klodenn, and no further conflicts have been reported on the continent. The port of Kingshill Landing has been recaptured, and all Asgure soldiers have been killed or taken prisoner. Despite some losses within the Alliance, the influx of new soldiers following this overwhelming victory more than compensates for the vacancies. The Alliance has never had so many men and women in its army; every day, new soldiers continue to arrive from all corners of Rautha to swell their ranks.

Unfortunately, despite this fervor, rumors of possible traitors within the Alliance have begun to circulate. To silence these whispers, President Panorius has had to take drastic measures to remove certain high-ranking officials suspected of treason from their strategic positions. However, the massive arrival of new soldiers worries the government of the Republic of Rautha, which fears new enemy infiltrations within the Alliance.

Most inhabitants are unaware that Galarond is one of the main perpetrators of the attack on Klodenn, and his public absence has not yet been noticed. The government of the Republic of Rautha is doing everything it can to prevent new rumors from tarnishing the image of the Alliance: it would be ill-advised if one of their most prestigious heroes were linked, even remotely, to the invasion of Klodenn.

With the rise of the Alliance, the kingdoms of Drukh, Irdian, and Epheria seem increasingly forced to cede geopolitical ground to the Republic of Rautha. Thanks to this, the safety of the inhabitants is assured, but some leaders of the three kingdoms distrust the actions of the Alliance. Among them, the government members of Epheria have suspected for years that the Alliance is meddling in the affairs of the kingdoms. And rightly so! The recent events in Wolforge attest to this, although they have not yet been made public.

The Judgment of Epheria

Bound and forcibly taken to Aethel, the PCs have no choice but to keep a low profile during the journey. Their captors speak little, but one of them, a certain «Virkian,» might provide some information. Virkian is one of the elven warriors tasked with watching over the PCs during the trip. If asked about the reasons for their arrest, he will say that the PCs are suspected of participating in a secret mission against the Kingdom of Drukh. If a PC succeeds in a standard difficulty Charisma check (difficulty 10), Virkian might reveal that the government of Epheria has been monitoring the activities of the Alliance for some time.

There is about a day's journey by carriage between the village of Hagdan, located at the foot of Mount Gigantic, and Aethel, the capital of Epheria. The PCs are fed the bare minimum and struggle to find sleep on the benches of the carriage.

They are woken up early in the morning by Virkian, who announces that the journey is coming to an end. When they open their eyes, the PCs admire from afar the sublime city of Aethel, which overlooks all the surrounding forests. Aethel is known to be one of the most beautiful and largest cities in Rautha. Its impressive architecture, surrounded by nature, has remained virtually intact for thousands of years, making it the oldest city on the continent.

A map of Aethel is available in the Appendix.

Upon arriving at the capital's gates, the elven soldiers leave their carriages at the stables (POI 20). They then lead the PCs on foot to the castle. The PCs still have their hands firmly tied and are deprived of their equipment. Exhausted from the journey, it will be impossible for them to escape without being quickly caught, with the added bonus of a good pommel strike to the abdomen (1d6 damage).

The castle of Aethel is a majestic edifice made of polished white stones and surrounded by walls. Two guards watch over the entrance of the castle. One of them is approached by Virkian, who presents a mission letter. After reading it, the guards promptly lead the PCs to the throne room.

The castle is as impressive on the inside as it is on the outside. Numerous paintings and sculptures adorn the premises, while a dozen guards circulate in the castle and watch the surroundings. Upon arriving at the throne room's doors, the PCs are announced by one of the guards and invited to enter.

The throne room is the largest room in the castle. Huge carved frescoes cover the walls, telling the history of the kingdom. At the back of the room sits King Lurius, on his magnificent white throne, also adorned with various carved motifs. Beside him, members of the government of Epheria welcome the PCs, standing behind two long wooden desks on either side of the room.

Aethel

Capital of the kingdom of Epheria, this splendid millennia-old city overlooks the surrounding forests and is visible for several kilometers around. Almost as old as the birth of Epheria itself, Aethel has withstood the test of time and harbors within it ancient knowledge.



King Lurius

The oldest monarch the kingdom of Epheria has ever known. His wisdom and charisma inspire the respect and admiration of the capital's inhabitants, making him an emblematic figure of the elven nobility.



Elcan

Prime Minister of the kingdom of Epheria. A political prodigy, Elcan joined the government at a young age and made his career a priority. He is wary of the Alliance and aspires to disrupt the established order.



Lizerios

Former Prime Minister known for his seriousness and loyalty, Lizerios now serves as royal advisor.



Faemis

Dean of the government, Faemis holds the position of High Sage. She is the king's sister and Prince Omaren's aunt.

The Prime Minister, Elcan, speaks and asks the PCs to approach the center of the room. As soon as they are facing the various government members, Elcan continues:

«King Lurius and honorable council members… We are here today to judge these individuals, accused of participating in several acts of interference orchestrated by the Republic of Rautha. These acts include a deliberate attempt to hide information that could jeopardize the security of the Kingdom of Irdian, as well as the confirmed theft of property belonging to the Kingdom of Drukh. It is important that we examine this matter to ensure the intentions of the Republic of Rautha and thus avoid a complete loss of trust between the kingdoms and the Alliance. Accused, please answer our questions truthfully. I now leave the floor to Faemis, the High Sage of the Kingdom of Epheria.»

The speech finished, the council members sit down except for Faemis, the elder, who remains standing to speak with a trembling voice. She acknowledges the Prime Minister and then asks the PCs to answer these questions:

«Can you swear that you will tell the truth and nothing but the truth?

Is it true that the Alliance asked you to hide information from King Toric?

Is it true that the Alliance asked you to steal an item belonging to King Guldrak?

What do you know about this item coveted by the Alliance?

Why is the Alliance seeking this item?

Who within the Alliance asked you to steal this item?

How is it that you accepted without protest? Did it seem like a normal mission to you?»

If the PCs attempt to lie, Treasurer Jorora will rise, presenting facts and evidence proving that the PCs are lying. She might declare that a resident of Hagdan recognized Oriel, accompanied by young recruits matching their descriptions.

Additionally, Jorora has numerous testimonies from high-ranking officials of the Alliance who secretly work for Epheria. According to them, Oriel is on a secret mission to retrieve an artifact belonging to King Guldrak. If the PCs mention Oriel's name, they will only confirm this information. Furthermore, the fact that they were found in possession of the artifact leaves little room for their presumption of innocence. If the PCs mention Zico, Jorora will have no information about him. However, she knows that their captors attacked Alliance soldiers who were «escorting» the PCs.

For Elcan, this hearing is merely a demonstration to the government

of Epheria that the Alliance is no longer trustworthy. He also wants to use this opportunity to assess the Alliance's level of knowledge about the artifact.

In any case, regardless of their defense, the PCs will be sentenced to be sent the next day to the Kingdom of Drukh to stand trial. They will also be forever banished from the lands of Epheria.

Their sentence announced, Elcan calls the guards to take the PCs to prison while their transport is prepared. The PCs are forcibly dragged out of the castle and taken to the prisons in view of the capital's residents, who give them curious or disapproving looks. The PCs remain tightly bound at the hands and are escorted by four heavily armed guards: no escape is possible under these conditions.

Upon arriving at the prison, the PCs are directly led to their cell in the basement. The place is grim, and the prison guards and inmates are unfriendly. The PCs are untied just before being thrown into their communal cell. Inside, several wooden benches serving as beds and a bucket for their primary needs are at their disposal. The PCs are, of course, still deprived of their equipment.



Jorora
Treasurer and childhood friend of Elcan. Jorora is a serious elf dedicated to her work. Her exemplary professionalism makes her an invaluable resource for the kingdom.



Omaren
Young prince of Epheria, grandson of the king, Omaren is a carefree elf who prefers to shirk his responsibilities. Despite his prestigious status, he is often distracted by his own pleasures and neglects the duties that befall him.

Prison Escape

The PCs' cell is located at the end of the basement corridor (see the GM's map of the prison available in the Appendix). Opposite them are three small individual cells, two of which are occupied.

In the left cell, a man wearing an iron mask covering his face is sitting at the back of the room. When he meets one PC's gaze, he approaches and presses his helmet against the bars of his cell. After a few minutes, he returns to his seat, continuing to silently watch the PCs through the slits of his helmet.

Prison guards

The prison guards of Aethel are known for their severity and rigor. Clad in light armor and armed with spears, they enforce order with authority. In case of disobedience from the prisoners, they do not hesitate to resort to torture to maintain discipline.



Perkas

Eccentric and talkative old prison inmate, Perkas is a real nerve-wrecker. His incessant nonsensical ramblings and endless stream of words exhaust those around him. Every moment in his presence becomes a test of patience, turning tranquility into a constant challenge.

In the middle cell, an old man named Perkas seems willing to talk to the PCs. If they ask him about himself, he will say that he is a habitual thief who has never had any luck in life. This is the fourth time he has ended up in jail, and it is likely to be his last. Perkas knows the prison rules well and is familiar with most of the inmates. However, if the PCs inquire about his masked cellmate, he will say that the man hasn't spoken a word since his arrival two days ago. No one seems to know his identity, not even the prison guards. Once the ice is broken, Perkas will bombard the PCs with questions and start recounting his life story without being prompted.

What the PCs don't know is that Perkas has been isolated in an individual cell because he drove his previous cellmates insane with his incessant talking.

Time in prison seems to stretch endlessly. Fortunately, it's almost noon: the inmates will soon be able to go to the mess hall for their meal. Each time, two guards come to escort the prisoners from their cell to the mess hall, one cell after another. At the slightest inappropriate gesture, the guards will not hesitate to call for reinforcements and beat a prisoner.

Make it clear to your players that if they attempt anything, they will end up seriously injured. You can play a scene where the guards take a defiant prisoner to the torture room for disrespecting one of them and attempting to escape.

In the mess hall, about twenty inmates serve themselves a vile porridge available in a cauldron at the back of the room before sitting at one of the tables. The place is monitored by a dozen guards: no disruptions will be tolerated.

The PCs can use this time to get to know the other inmates. Here are the names of some prisoners: Qincan, Tramyar, Sylvalur, Thefir, Sarven, Glynkian, Adtoris.

They are all here for various offenses, from jewelry theft to premeditated murder, to selling illegal potions. The masked man is not present, and the other inmates know little about him. According to rumors, he is either a member of the royal family or a high-ranking official of the Alliance.

If the PCs try to talk to one of their jailers, they will need to succeed in a hard Charisma check (difficulty 15) to avoid being ignored or rebuffed. The guards have no more information about the masked man: they have just been ordered never to remove his helmet and never to let him out of his cell.

If the PCs attempt to escape, they won't get far because access to the upper floor is heavily guarded. Moreover, the corridor door upstairs is locked. They will be beaten up (1d12 damage) and taken straight back to their cell.

After about an hour of lunch, the inmates are escorted back to their cells for the rest of the day, in the same manner as they arrived at the mess hall.

Behind the bars of their cell, the PCs have no choice but to wait patiently if they want to avoid more trouble. Time drags on, and counting the minutes is not made any easier by the oppressive company of dear Perkas. The prisoners' day is punctuated by the incessant rounds of the prison guards, which take place every 15 minutes.

It is now 7 p.m., and the prisoners are about to receive their dinner, served directly in their cell. The jailers give each inmate a piece of bread and a bowl of soup.

When biting into his piece of bread, one of the PCs encounters a metallic object hidden inside. Upon trying to extract it, he discovers a key wrapped in a small piece of paper with a message written on it.

Ask the PCs to make a luck roll to determine who gets the bread with the key, then show the player the hidden message available in the Appendix.

Once they have the key and the message, the PCs must be very careful not to arouse their jailers' suspicion. Perkas, their cell neighbor, is very curious: if he sees anything unusual, he might call out to the PCs and inadvertently alert the guards.

If they decide to follow the message's plan, they will need to wait for the guard shift at midnight to escape. The problem is that they have no way of knowing the time and have no visibility on the guard post, where the guards stay between their rounds. They can discreetly ask for help from their new inmate friends in the right cells, who have a view of the guard post (see the GM's map of the prison). The PCs can also trust Perkas, who claims to be able to predict the time to the minute. This gift was allegedly passed down from his mother, a seer who developed her connection with the stars after meeting a shaman from the theocracy of Elrig... but I digress.

Surprisingly, Perkas' gift is real and could be useful to the PCs.

From 7 p.m. to midnight, the guards' rounds continue at a regular pace of about one every 15 minutes. To determine when midnight is, the PCs must count 19 rounds and then wait another 15 minutes. At midnight, no guard should appear, as the patrols do not resume until 12:15 a.m., after the shift change.

If the PCs leave their cell 5 minutes before or after midnight, they will not be able to escape without encountering guards.
If the PCs escape at the right time, play the movement of the guards as indicated on the GM's prison map (one group exits the prison while another enters). During their escape, the PCs may catch the eyes of some inmates who have not yet fallen asleep. Fortunately, a promise to return and free them will be enough to keep them from alerting the guards.

The hidden key and message

A key, wrapped in a piece of parchment, is cleverly hidden in the bread. This key is used solely to open the adventurers' cell. On the parchment, a message written by an anonymous author delivers the necessary instructions to successfully escape from the prison.

Show the players the Aethel Prison map for PCs to help them orient themselves. Use the GM's Aethel Prison map without revealing it to the players to describe the locations and NPC encounters.

During their escape, the PCs can easily hear the guards' footsteps approaching or moving away by making an easy Perception check (difficulty 5). The PCs can then hide in the mess hall or the ground floor storage room to let the guards pass, as the other rooms are locked or occupied by prison staff. If the PCs enter an office or the armory, they will encounter a guard who will sound the alarm: in this case, they will have to flee quickly.

After taking the stairs and exiting the West hallway on the ground floor, the PCs come face to face with a guard dozing on one of the reception desks. They must be very careful not to wake him, especially since one of the prisoners has noticed their presence. This prisoner is more difficult to convince and will require a standard Charisma check (difficulty 10) to avoid alerting the sleeping guard. If they fail, the PCs will need to flee quickly.

Once outside the prison, the PCs will notice a cart next to the East door of the building. Onboard, a hooded driver wearing loose black clothes signals them to approach. The man, whose face is hidden by his hood, tells them to quickly hide in the barrels on the cart. If they are being pursued, the PCs will have to make a quick decision.

If the PCs decide to flee without following the hooded man's plan, they will find themselves in the streets of Aethel, still without their equipment. In this case, you will need to find a pretext for them to encounter this man again, but this time with his face uncovered.

If they accept the plan, they will feel the cart move as soon as they are settled in the barrels. The driver will ask them to stay hidden for about ten minutes, the duration of the journey.

If the PCs were being pursued by the guards and accepted to hide in the barrels, you can play a scene where the guards burst out of the prison and ask the driver if he saw any prisoners running away. The man will reply that he saw x people (x being the number of PCs) running towards the East gate of the city. The guards will immediately chase after the PCs, thanking their informant, unaware that they have been sent on a wild goose chase.

The Secrets of the Artifact

Hidden in the barrels of the cart, the PCs are jostled around during the ride. After about ten minutes, the vehicle stops, and the driver informs them they can finally get out. Once they extract themselves from their hiding place and disembark from the cart, the PCs recognize Lizerios, one of the advisors present at their trial. The man asks the PCs to enter his house without delay: he will answer all their questions once inside.

Before anything else, Lizerios offers the adventurers a hot drink and returns their belongings as a gesture of goodwill. Unfortunately, all the PCs' gold has been stolen by their captors, and the artifact has been placed in a safe location by the treasurer Jorora.

Once everyone has gathered their thoughts, Lizerios begins the discussion:

"Dear adventurers, please forgive the way you have been treated up until now. I know that everything that has happened to you is not your fault. You were merely following orders.
Fortunately, you managed to escape. Elcan would never have let you return to the kingdom of Drukh alive. Unfortunately, this respite may be short-lived... I fear that you are no longer safe anywhere.
Before I go any further and explain what the artifact you stole represents, can you tell me everything you have learned about it?"

After the PCs share their information, Lizerios attempts to explain the situation via a long monologue:

"I will tell you everything I know about this matter in which you are involved. It all began 20 years ago. At that time, Aethel still housed an artifact similar to the one from Klodenn. It was hidden within a temple buried under the roots of the World Tree, known only to the members of Epheria's inner council. In the year 288, representatives from Tolan came to us to acquire our artifact. They were ready to offer us an enormous amount of gold and precious materials in exchange. However, knowing nothing of its powers, we wisely decided to refuse their offer. At that time, I was still the Prime Minister of Epheria, and the king trusted me completely.

After the exchanges with Tolan, I was tasked with learning more about this artifact. I spent the following days and nights in the castle's grand library, leafing through old dusty tomes. As my research progressed, I came across strange books written in a language I didn't recognize. The script consisted of symbols similar to those on the walls of the artifact's temple. It didn't take me long to realize that if I wanted to learn more about it, I would need to decipher this language.

Unfortunately, the time I spent learning this new language was time taken away from my research, which was no longer advancing. Tolan took advantage of this by making new offers, increasingly generous and enticing. At the same time, some government members began to worry

Lizerios's revelations

If there is one person capable of helping the adventurers answer most of their questions, it is Lizerios. During his many years in the Epheria government, the former Prime Minister witnessed troubling events involving Tolan and an artifact similar to Klodenn's. Lizerios has spent the last 20 years trying to learn more about these artifacts, which has ultimately led him to uncover Astrenor's little-known past.

about the rapid growth of the Republic of Rautha. Indeed, they did not look kindly on the Alliance becoming as powerful and influential as the nations that formed it. Thus, in the year 292, four years after our first contact with Tolan, the king finally agreed to sell the artifact to them despite my warnings.

Shortly thereafter, I was relieved of my duties, deemed to have served my time… Elcan thus became my successor as Prime Minister. His first action was to use the freshly acquired gold to bribe many Alliance officers. That's why some of their information reaches us even before President Panorius is aware of it... That's how we knew about your mission in Wolforge.

Now that Elcan possesses this new artifact, I fear he intends to do business with Tolan again to gain more power. According to my research, losing this last artifact could impact Rautha's ecosystem forever. Believe me, for the safety and balance of the continent, we must recover this artifact and secure it away from Elcan's megalomania."

If the PCs ask questions about the artifact, Lizerios will lead them to his library and share his findings while pulling out old grimoires:

"Despite my removal from the post of Prime Minister, I decided to continue my research to regain the king's trust. Unfortunately, despite my discoveries, my relationship with him never improved. However, I have learned much about these artifacts.

After almost five years of analyzing this script, I finally managed to understand the rules and decipher it. This language was used by an ancient civilization called the Scholars. They used the artifacts' power for various purposes, such as growing crops, summoning rain, erecting walls, or lighting their city at nightfall."

Show the players Lizerios' Grimoire page available in the Appendix.

"The Scholars built temples around these artifacts to channel their energy and conduct various experiments. Centuries later, they succeeded in generating portals to travel from temple to temple. That's how, 20 years ago, the inhabitants of Tolan managed to contact us.

Have you never noticed similarities between our world and the one depicted on the stele present in these temples?"

Show the players Lizerios' Old Map available in the Appendix.

"If we believe what is written, centuries ago, Astrenor was a single gigantic continent. Once the pieces of this puzzle are put together, it is easy to guess the location of the various temples. Following this discovery, I decided to keep silent. It was only recently that Elcan himself reached the same conclusion. Curiously, a few weeks later, the city of Klodenn is attacked… The timing is too perfect, don't you think?"

If the PCs ask questions about Elcan, Lizerios will assert:

"That man is mad and power-hungry. He is willing to make any sacrifice to gain control of Rautha. He has been plotting for years to oust President Panorius from power and place one of his henchmen in his place. His actions risk plunging the continent into a fratricidal war. If that happens, Asgure's troops will have no trouble seizing our lands and riches."

If the PCs ask questions about the Alliance and the Republic of Rautha, Lizerios will say:

"We know that the Republic of Rautha is also seeking the artifact. However, we do not know what their government actually knows about it. According to our latest information, the Alliance sent men to capture and eliminate you to keep the artifact secret. It seems you have already encountered some of them. The idea was probably suggested to them by one of the officers secretly working for Elcan. I fear you are no longer safe within the Alliance."

If the PCs ask questions about the ecological risks, Lizerios will elaborate:

"I am not sure, but I believe each artifact is linked to a natural element. Once it is no longer on its pedestal, it ceases to transmit its energy to the surrounding environment. Since we parted with our artifact, I have noticed over the past two decades that our forests have become less dense, and our wildlife has diminished. I have also observed that the World Tree loses more and more leaves each year. I have no certainty about this, but what I am sure of is that we cannot let Elcan use it to gain more wealth and influence."

If the PCs ask questions about Aethel's temple, Lizerios will reply:

"Our temple is hidden under the World Tree, located in the heart of Aethel. This millennia-old tree existed long before the capital was founded. To access it, you must slip between its roots for a few meters. The temple entrance is protected by a mechanism requiring a code in the Scholars' language to unlock. Fortunately, a riddle engraved on the temple door reveals the password. Once the language is mastered, finding the answer is quite simple.
I know this riddle by heart. Would you like to try to solve it?"

If the PCs accept the challenge:

"Here it is:
Some of my kind are square.
You can take me without moving.
I am where you tackle a problem."

If the PCs cannot find the solution after a few minutes, Lizerios can give them a hint:

"A little hint? I am very often part of a plant."

The answer to the riddle is "Root".

If the PCs ask questions about the inhabitants of Tolan, Lizerios will share:

"They are ultimately not much different from the reptilians you know. They wear unusual clothing, but apart from that, there is little that distinguishes them from us. They have a close connection with the Scholars since they can use their technology, but I do not know precisely what it is. They might be their descendants, or perhaps they slaughtered them to steal their knowledge… Honestly, I do not know."

(Bonus: If the PCs recovered the book in Wolforge Castle's treasure room) If the PCs ask Lizerios to translate King Guldrak's grimoire:

"How did good King Guldrak get his hands on this grimoire… It's fascinating. Apparently, these artifacts are dragon eggs left in Astrenor thousands of years ago. Each of these eggs is linked to an element: fire, water, nature, earth, light, and magic. Haha, I knew it! Could you lend it to me longer so I can study it?"

Once all the PCs' questions have been answered, Lizerios will say:

"If Elcan has already made a deal with Tolan and if my memory serves me right, it will take them 48 hours to come and retrieve the artifact. After all, once the artifact is removed from the temple's pedestal, the portal closes instantly. Tolan is thus forced to come by boat to the shores of the kingdom of Epheria. It takes less than half a day to reach Seladorei, the southernmost coastal city of Epheria. So, at worst, we have a little more than a day to find a way to retrieve the artifact before it is too late.

The simplest way would be to discreetly follow Elcan throughout the day tomorrow to find out what he plans to do with the artifact and where he hides it. It seems you have become experts in the art of tailing and infiltrating castles."

The PCs can choose to help Lizerios or not.

If they refuse to help, Lizerios will warn them about the Alliance's intentions. He believes it is very likely that the Alliance will try to eliminate the PCs to keep their last mission secret. If they still refuse to help, go directly to the Conclusion section.

If they agree to help, Lizerios will offer them lodging and food for the night. They will discuss a plan for the next day over a good meal. Lizerios knows that Elcan spends most of his time in the castle, mainly in his quarters on the first floor. He sometimes goes out to eat accompanied by Jorora, the treasurer. They are very close. Lizerios works in an office on the ground floor and can propose that the PCs enter the castle through his office window. However, once inside, the PCs must not be spotted by any guards or government members, or they risk ending up behind bars again. Once their plan is discussed and approved, the PCs can finally enjoy the comfort of a real bed.

After this invigorating night, the PCs regain 7 HP.

Tracking Elcan

The next morning, the PCs are awakened by Lizerios, who has prepared breakfast in his living room. Once everyone is gathered around the table, Lizerios recaps their plan one last time before heading to the castle as usual.

It's about 9 AM when the PCs finish their breakfast. They are free to move about the city as they please. If they decide to go to the castle, they will need to use their ingenuity to avoid being detected.

Show the players the player-side map of Aethel Castle to help them navigate. Use the GM-side map of Aethel Castle to describe locations and NPC encounters without revealing it to the players.

Follow Elcan's schedule to trigger events based on the PCs' actions.

Elcan's Schedule:

09:00 AM
Elcan leaves his quarters and heads to the refectory for breakfast before his morning meeting. The servants are busy serving breakfast to the castle residents. The king and Faemis are already present, while the young prince Omaren is still expected.

10:00 AM
Elcan heads to the council room located in the basement. He meets Jorora and other council members. During this meeting, a guard will inform the attendees that prisoners detained the previous day have escaped.

11:00 AM
Elcan returns to his quarters. He glances left and right before entering and locks the door. If a PC listens at the door, they can hear Elcan talking to someone. A standard difficulty Perception check (difficulty 10) will reveal the following conversation:

Elcan: "Good morning Marat, sorry to rush you, but... Have you thought about my proposal?"
Marat: Indistinct voice
Elcan: "Consider that as soon as I receive the medallion, the artifact will be yours. You know you can trust me."
Marat: Indistinct voice
Elcan: "Perfect... I will contact you this afternoon to confirm the date and time of the transaction. See you soon."

12:00 PM
Elcan leaves his quarters and meets Jorora at the castle entrance. They go out for lunch at The Gourmet (POI 14), a prestigious restaurant in the city's upscale district. Without chic or luxurious attire, the PCs risk drawing attention. If they get close enough, they can overhear part of their conversation with a standard difficulty Perception check (difficulty 10). Be cautious, as Elcan is on the lookout, especially since he knows the PCs have escaped.

Jorora: "Are we celebrating something? It's not every day you invite me to a restaurant."
Elcan: "That depends on you."
Jorora: "What do you mean?"
Elcan: "I need you to put something back in its place. I've made a new deal... If you know what I mean."
Jorora: "I see. But you could have avoided involving me in your schemes."
Elcan: "I would have done it myself, but our friend Lizerios is suspicious of me."
Jorora: "That might be proof he hasn't completely lost his mind."
Elcan: "Haha! I don't know which of us should feel more insulted..."
Jorora: "Be quiet. I think we're being watched."

Following this exchange, Jorora and Elcan will be much more vigilant and will change the subject for the rest of their meal. If the PCs continue to observe them, they can, with a standard difficulty Perception check (difficulty 10), see Elcan discreetly hand a small object to Jorora. The object seems to be attached to a fine silver chain slipping between her fingers.

1:00 PM
Elcan returns to the castle with Jorora. They settle in the council room

to continue their conversation.

2:00 PM
Elcan addresses the requests of citizens who have obtained an audience in the throne room with the king. About ten people from the public take turns entering the throne room, regulated by the guard at the entrance.

4:00 PM
Elcan returns to his quarters, somewhat tired from the complaints of the common people. If a PC listens at the door, they can hear Elcan talking to someone. A standard difficulty Perception check (difficulty 10) will reveal the following conversation:

Elcan: "Hello again, Marat! I have good news... Everything should be ready for tonight."
Marat: Indistinct voice
Elcan: "Perfect, in that case, I propose the delivery at 9 PM. If that suits you..."
Marat: Indistinct voice
Elcan: "Great! See you tonight then."

After this brief meeting, Elcan will stay in his quarters, working quietly.

7:00 PM
Elcan goes to the castle refectory for dinner with King Lurius, Faemis, and Prince Omaren.

8:00 PM
Elcan leaves the castle and heads to the World Tree. He carries a small leather briefcase containing several documents to finalize the transaction. If the PCs observe him, they will notice the briefcase is too small to hide the artifact, so it would be unwise to intervene now. If they decide to confront him on the way, Elcan will not hesitate to call for the city guards, who will arrive almost instantly. The PCs are wanted throughout the capital, and if a confrontation with the guards occurs, they will have no choice but to flee before reinforcements arrive.

Jorora's Secret Mission (never disclose to players):

Between 2:00 PM and 7:00 PM, Jorora will retrieve the artifact from the treasury. She will use a secret passage to discreetly exit the castle with the artifact. She will then head to Aethel's dungeons, release the iron-masked prisoner, and employ him as a bodyguard. Then, she will go to the temple under the World Tree. Once there, she will wait for Elcan to arrive.

Tip: Ensure Jorora never encounters the PCs during her secret mission. If the PCs want to go to the temple before Elcan arrives at 9 PM, arrange for Lizerios to be busy, as only he can enter the code to unlock the door. Lizerios might even suggest the PCs wait for Elcan to catch him in the act.

Castle guards
The castle guards of Aethel represent the elite soldiers of Epheria. They wear heavy Half Plate marked with the royal family's crest. Their imposing presence and constant vigilance deter any intrusion.

Additional Information:

Access to the throne room is guarded, making it nearly impossible for the PCs to enter without being noticed. In the basement, a guard patrols the corridor, complicating intrusion on this level.

The PCs know, thanks to Lizerios, where Elcan's quarters are. It would be beneficial for them to search his room in his absence. The door to his quarters can be broken with a difficult Strength check (difficulty 15) or picked with a standard difficulty Dexterity check (difficulty 10) per attempt (Reminder: Requires a Lockpicking Kit per attempt and the Lockpicker Edge).

Once inside, the PCs discover a luxurious suite with an enormous canopy bed in the center, a large oak desk, and gold-plated furniture.

By searching one of the wardrobes in Elcan's room, the PCs can find a strange metal-framed mirror inscribed with a word in the Scholars' language. If the PCs copy the word onto a piece of paper and show it to Lizerios, he can translate it as "Communication Device." The mirror measures about a meter high and fifty centimeters wide and is firmly fixed inside the cabinet. It will be difficult to take it and transport it without being noticed. When a PC touches the mirror, it lights up slightly and displays numbered buttons from 0 to 9.

The device can be unlocked by entering the code "292," the year of Elcan's investiture as Prime Minister. Once unlocked, the device initiates a call to Tolan. After a few seconds, a reptilian in strange, shiny armor appears in the mirror. He seems surprised to see the PCs' faces through the mirror. He will ask to speak to Elcan and will end the call if he suspects the PCs are not working for him. If the PCs are cunning and succeed in a difficult Charisma check (difficulty 15), they can learn that the man's name is Marat and that he has agreed with Elcan to send a package through the portal tonight.

Everything indicates that Elcan plans to use the artifact tonight to open a portal to Tolan. Elcan seems to be acting in secret and is not accompanied by guards, making this the perfect moment to intervene and retrieve the artifact. The PCs need Lizerios to enter the temple under the World Tree, as only he can enter the code for the door in the Scholars' language.

The magic mirror

This mysterious mirror is actually a technological object originating from Tolan. It allows communication with someone thousands of kilometers away.



Marat

A resident of Tolan, Marat seeks to retrieve Klodenn's artifact. He has already dealt with Elcan in the past and intends to make a pact with him again.

Final Confrontation

The PCs and Lizerios follow Elcan to the World Tree. Along the way, Elcan appears nervous, frequently glancing around to ensure he isn't being followed. If the group is detected, Elcan will alert a city guard. Since their prison break, the PCs are actively being sought, and some of their sketches are circulating among the guards. Dexterity checks may be required based on their proximity to Elcan or a guard. Failure will draw unwanted attention.

Upon nearing the World Tree, Lizerios asks the PCs to wait for a few minutes to ensure they aren't seen. After the wait, Lizerios signals for the PCs to follow him discreetly to the temple entrance. The path is steep and requires navigating between giant roots. After a few meters, Lizerios arrives at the temple door, which has a command interface similar to the altar in Klodenn's temple. Lizerios enters the code word "Root" in the Scholars' language, opening the door to reveal a narrow, eerie corridor leading to the temple's main hall.

The main hall is illuminated with blue light, its architecture resembling that of Klodenn's temple. At the center, the artifact is placed on a pedestal, seemingly powering the location. As they approach, the PCs see Elcan and Jorora to the left of the artifact, facing a magical portal. The portal shows a humanoid silhouette in a white room surrounded by strange machines before abruptly closing. Without turning towards Lizerios, Elcan addresses him, as if expecting his arrival.

Elcan: "Well, well, isn't it the good old Lizerios… and his new friends?"

Lizerios: "What have you done, Elcan? What has Tolan promised you this time? Don't you understand that this artifact is of paramount importance? Without it, Epheria… No, the entire continent of Rautha will be doomed!"

Elcan: "They promised me nothing; I asked them for a favor… You see, despite our efforts to thwart the Alliance, it seems our dear Panorius has ousted most of my informants… It's unfortunate. Many men seem to have absolute faith in him. And honestly, it suits me. Epheria is far too small for my ambitions. With this little object, I will finally be able to put Rautha back on the right track!"

Elcan holds a strange medallion glowing with a violet light. He hastily puts it around his neck. Suddenly, his body and face deform, transforming instantly into the appearance of President Panorius.

Elcan: "Don't you think I have a more… Presidential look? I'm sure I will make a much better leader for the Alliance."

Lizerios: "Elcan, you're mad! If the Alliance learns of this, you risk triggering a fratricidal war across Rautha!"

Elcan: "That's your problem, Lizerios. Always afraid to take risks! You're outdated, my poor friend!"

Transformation Medallion

A technological object from Tolan, allowing the wearer to take on the appearance of a known person or creature. It is used by Elcan during the final confrontation.

The medallion glows again, and Elcan begins to grow, slowly transforming into a massive Ogre. As Elcan is about to complete his transformation, an individual discreetly enters the temple and charges at the PCs near the entrance. They recognize their cell neighbor's helmet, but this time he is unchained, wielding a long sword and wearing thick armor.

With his transformation complete, Elcan rips one of the temple's pylons to use as a giant club. The building's walls tremble, and small debris falls from the ceiling.

A battle ensues between the masked man, Elcan in ogre form, and the group of PCs. Elcan gains +15 additional hit points per PC. The map of the Temple of Aethel, the sheet of the Masked Man, and the sheet of Elcan in ogre form are available in the Appendix. The masked man benefits from a surprise attack and plays first.

Jorora and Lizerios are unarmed and will try to hide in one of the temple's corners to avoid the fight as much as possible.

Elcan's medallion is hidden among the folds of his enormous neck, making it nearly impossible to remove without first defeating him.

Elcan protects the artifact. If a PC attempts to steal it, they will automatically be targeted. It is impossible to approach the object without attracting his attention.

If Lizerios is left unprotected, Elcan will use debris on the ground as projectiles to hit Lizerios (1d12 damage). Lizerios has 15 hit points. If they drop to 0, he will succumb to his injuries.

If, during the fight, a PC passes near the stela (structure to the right on the Temple of Aethel map), they can make an Intelligence check of standard difficulty (10) to notice that the stela is not quite the same as the one in Klodenn's temple: some jewels seem to be missing. Show the stela map available in the Appendix if a PC wishes to examine it.

If a PC tries to escape, they will automatically be targeted by the masked man.

Secret:
Jorora controls the masked man. She hides a medallion in her dress's bustier, allowing her to manipulate someone's mind. This medallion was the object of the first exchange between Marat and Elcan 15 years ago. Elcan used it many times on King Lurius, convincing him to hand over the artifact to Tolan and securing the position of Prime Minister. Elcan gave the medallion to Jorora to accomplish her mission with proper protection.

If the PCs are attentive, they can notice a small chain around Jorora's neck and a faint violet glow passing through her dress. This requires a difficult Perception check (15).

Elcan's ogre form

Elcan has completed his transformation into a Mountain Ogre. This is a race of Ogre believed to be completely extinct, much larger and more violent than those captured by the Alliance. No one knows where Elcan could have seen them with his own eyes.

The stele

A huge thick wooden plaque depicting the map of another world. Three jewels are embedded in the wood and seem impossible to dislodge without damaging the stele. Two of them shine with a yellow and blue light. Three other holes on the stele seem to indicate the absence of jewels.

The Mind-Control Medallion

A technological object from Tolan, allowing the wearer to control the mind of an individual a few meters away. It is used by Jorora during the final confrontation.

If the masked man is defeated, his helmet breaks, revealing it to be Galarond. He will remain unconscious on the ground. Immediately, Jorora will choose to control the PC she considers the strongest to attack their comrades. The chosen player can attempt a very difficult Constitution check (20) to resist the medallion's influence (Note: a natural 20 always succeeds). If they fail, the GM takes control of their character until Jorora's medallion is removed. The treasurer is not very brave: if she finds herself in close combat with an armed PC and is threatened, she will hand over her medallion without opposition.

If Lizerios is still standing, he can warn the PCs that Jorora is controlling their friend. Lizerios recognizes Elcan's medallion around Jorora's neck and can link it to the king's strange behavior.

Defeating Elcan

If Elcan is defeated, he falls to the ground, and in his fall, his enormous arm crashes into the artifact. Blue light bursts from the artifact, striking the temple walls, which threaten to collapse.

If Lizerios is still alive, he will ask the PCs to retrieve the artifact and escape. However, if a PC tries to seize the artifact, they will burn their hands on contact and be unable to remove it from its pedestal. The impact from Elcan's fall seems to have embedded the artifact in the structure.

For a brief moment, as the PCs are about to leave, a small portal opens, releasing a letter. The portal closes as quickly as it appeared.

Show the letter from Tolan available in the Appendix if the PCs decide to retrieve it.

Time is running out, the falling debris from the temple's vaults is increasingly large, and the place is about to collapse at any moment. The PCs have no choice but to flee.

Elcan is on the ground, unconscious, gradually returning to his elven form. If a PC tries to retrieve Elcan's medallion, in a last spurt, he will wake up and grab the PC's hand to pull them into his tomb. The player concerned can make a standard Strength check (10) to free their arm or a difficult check (15) to rip off the medallion at the same time. They will then need to make a standard Dexterity check (10) to escape in time, avoiding the falling debris.

Jorora will take advantage of the chaos and confusion to escape the temple discreetly.

Regardless, the PCs must quickly flee after their battle if they don't want to perish under the rubble.



Galarond, the masked man

Galarond had been tasked by King Lurius, himself controlled by Elcan, to organize the invasion of Klodenn. After his last encounter with the adventurers, Galarond managed to escape and return to Epheria, with the help of corrupt members of the Alliance. Unfortunately for him, once facing the king, the latter decided to imprison him in the dungeons of Aethel to prevent the matter from leaking. He is now used as a mere puppet in Elcan's service and his ambitions.

Tolan's letter

Intriguing note, aimed at inviting whoever finds it to join its mysterious author on Tolan. It is written on stiff white paper contrasting with the parchment paper commonly used. This letter is signed with the initials X. J.

Losing to Elcan

If the PCs lose to Elcan, their only solution for survival is to flee. Unfortunately, if they haven't recovered or destroyed Jorora's medallion, they risk being blocked by Galarond or, worse, a comrade under control.

The PCs must then make a standard Dexterity check (10) to escape the temple while evading their opponents. Some PCs can heroically sacrifice themselves to clear the way for others to escape.

Anyone who falls in battle or fails to escape will be executed by Elcan.

Conclusion

The PCs have just escaped from the temple, but their safety is compromised. They must quickly leave Aethel as they are actively being hunted by the city guards, and there's no doubt that Jorora will inform them as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, the Alliance is likely to seek to silence them permanently. The future of the PCs seems uncertain and fraught with obstacles. Their only way out seems to be to leave Rautha for good and explore the world to find a new homeland. Alternatively, they can choose to confront all their enemies!

Depending on their choices and actions, several pieces of information can be provided to the PCs for the continuation of their adventure.

The PCs have retrieved the letter from the portal:

The letter indicates that someone at Tolan is seeking to help the people of Rautha. To do this, they plan to open a passage during the next eclipse to facilitate dialogue between these two peoples.

Problem: Klodenn's temple lacks an artifact, and the collapse of Epheria's temple buried the last artifact.

If the PCs remember the stela from Klodenn's temple, they may recall that a jewel was still lit there. It was located east of the old Astrenor map. If their deductions are correct, the PCs can conclude that an active temple is hidden in the lands of the theocracy of Elrig.

Lizerios is alive:

If Lizerios survives the temple, he will tell the PCs that they must flee Aethel as soon as possible. Lizerios knows the capital well and will lead the PCs out of the city using paths less monitored by the guards. Once outside, he will warmly thank the PCs for trusting him and attempting to avoid the inevitable. He will ask the PCs what they plan to do next.

If the PCs wish to return to the Republic of Rautha, Lizerios will warn them: he is convinced that the Alliance is ready to do anything to silence them to avoid conflict with the three kingdoms. If the PCs still wish to trust the Alliance, Lizerios will wish them good luck and bid them farewell.

If the PCs decide to contact Tolan by going to Asgure, Lizerios will offer to accompany them. After all these years of searching, Lizerios wants more than anything to uncover the mysteries of Astrenor's past. He believes that Tolan holds the answers he seeks. Lizerios is a skilled navigator, and his abilities could be very useful in reaching Asgure safely.

The PCs decide to return to the Alliance:

Unfortunately, Lizerios was right. Barely arrived in Castle City, the PCs are apprehended by Alliance soldiers and brought before President Panorius. Regardless of what they say, they will be condemned to silence in the capital's dungeons... unless the president has other plans for them after all.

The PCs decide to go to the last active temple:

The City of Fire seems to be the most likely place to hide the last active temple. However, reaching the theocracy of Elrig will not be easy. With the Crater Ocean impassable by boat and Tolan protected by a magical shield, the fastest route is to cross the Sea of Blood, Dezolation, and the Empire of Korimdor.

A new adventure awaits our heroes, far more perilous and complex than anything they have experienced before. However, it remains the only solution if they want to uncover the secrets of this world and one day return home.

Rewards

Here is the list of end-of-scenario rewards available, depending on the objectives reached:

Goals	Rewards
Save Lizerios	1 morale point + 100 experience points + 200 gold coins
Defeat Elcan	300 experience points
Defeat Galarond	200 experience points
Have contacted Marat	1 morale point + 50 gold coins
Followed Elcan without attracting his attention or that of the guards	90 experience points
Gave Wolforge's old grimoire to Lizerios	1 morale point + 100 gold coins
Solved the enigma of the temple enunciated by Lizerios without his help	100 experience points
Understanding that the three continents of Astrenor were one without Lizerios' help	70 experience points
Escaping from prison without attracting the attention of the guards	90 experience points
Complete the scenario	100 gold coins

Congratulations, you have completed the first campaign of Astrenor. It is now up to you to write the continuation of your adventures!

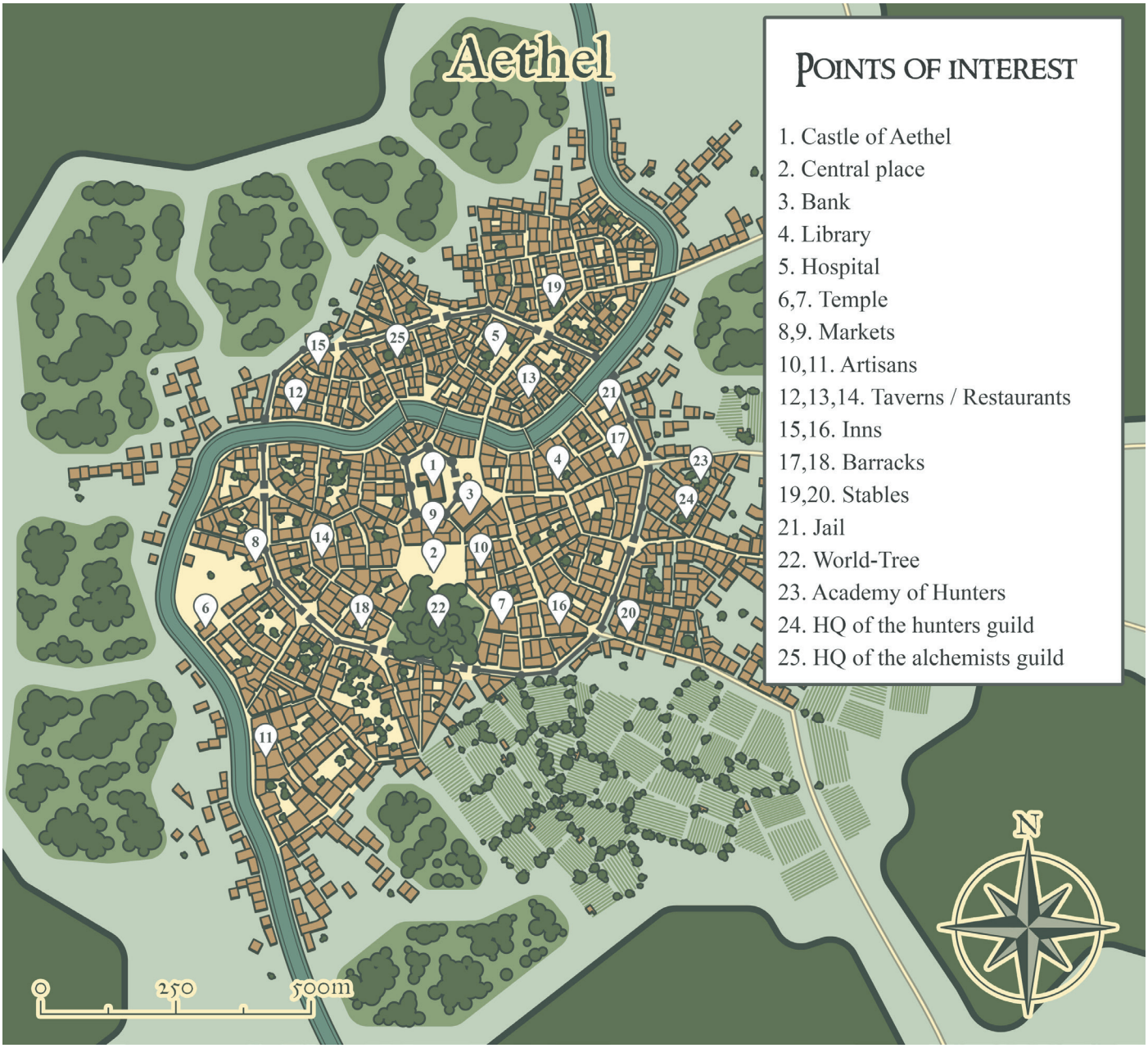
Do you want to continue the adventure and support the project?

For this, you can purchase our document «The Secrets of Astrenor» to obtain all the information to understand the universe and uncover its mysteries.

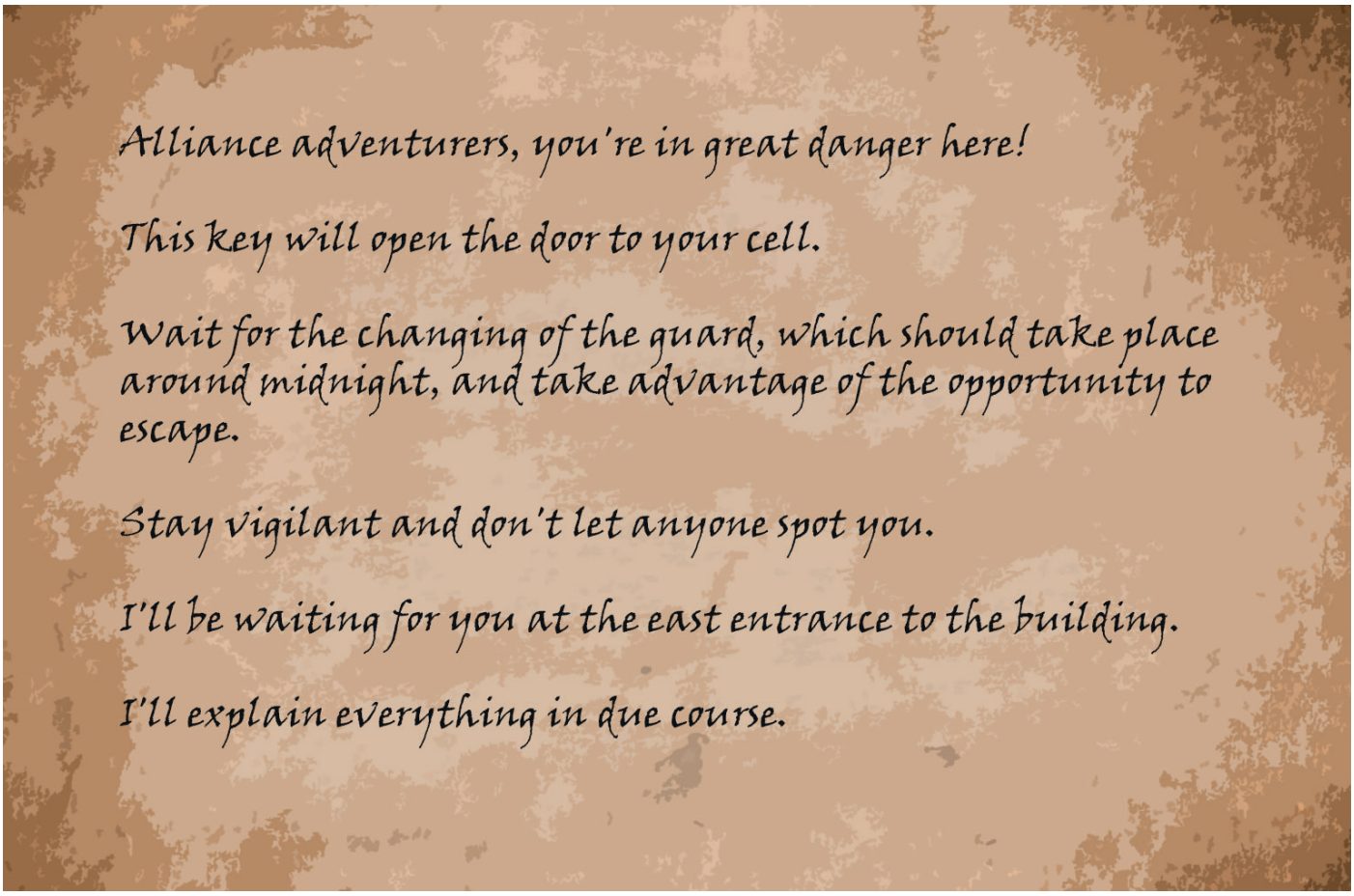
This booklet contains a summary of the main plot, an explanatory diagram of the plot, a chronological timeline of all major events in Astrenor's history, a mysterious letter about Astrenor's secret history, the list of all the protagonists of this world, and additional information about the universe.

Appendix

Map of Aethel

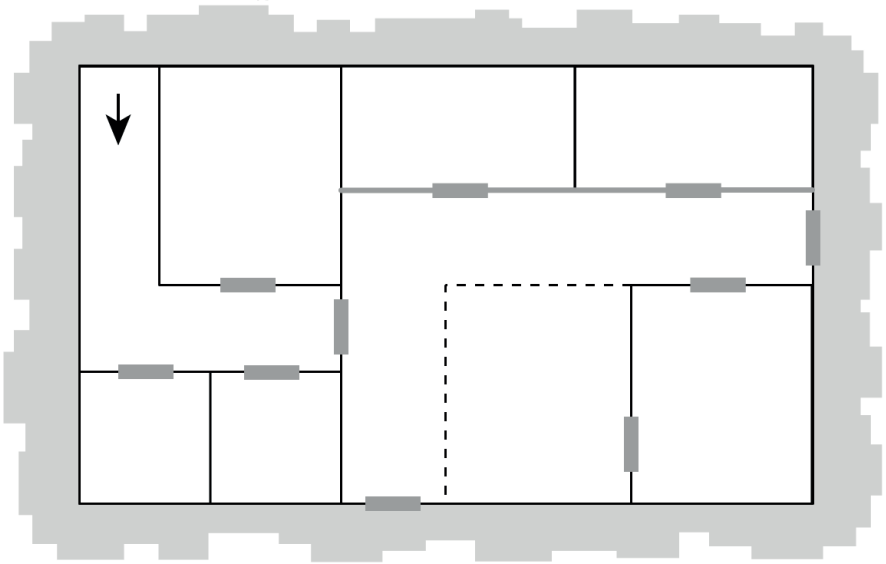


Message Hidden in Bread

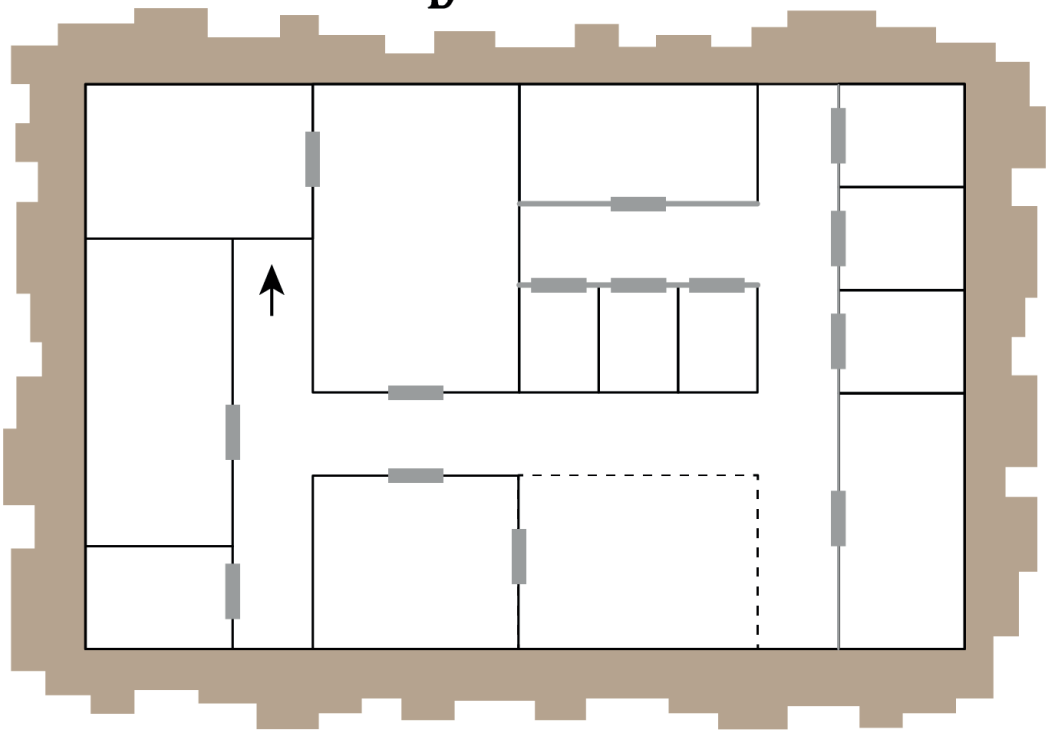


Plan of the prison PC side

First floor

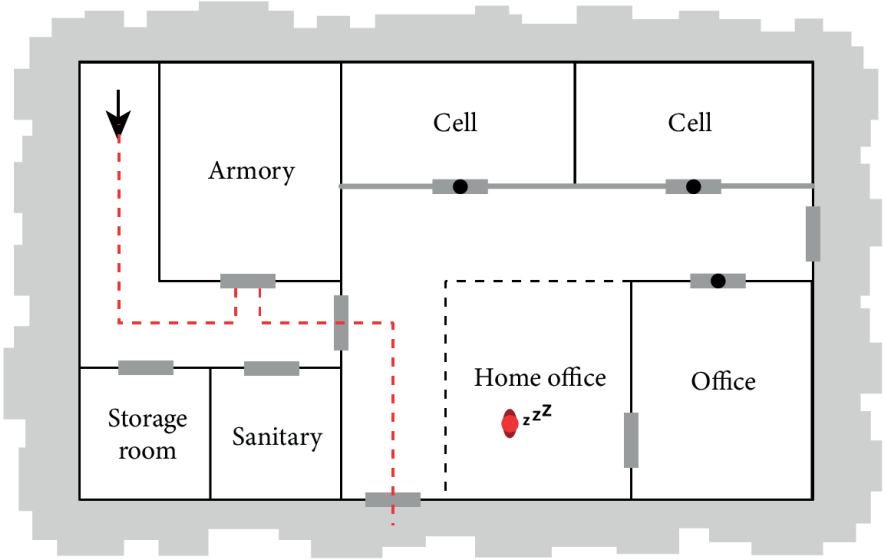


Basement

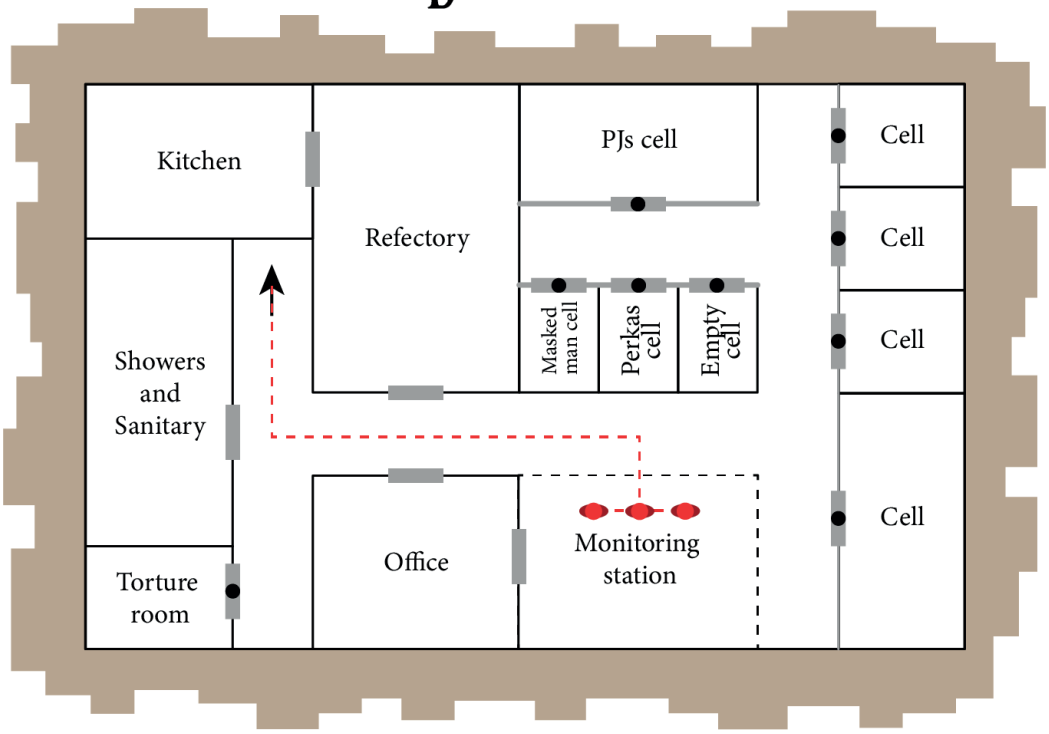


Plan of the prison GM side

First floor



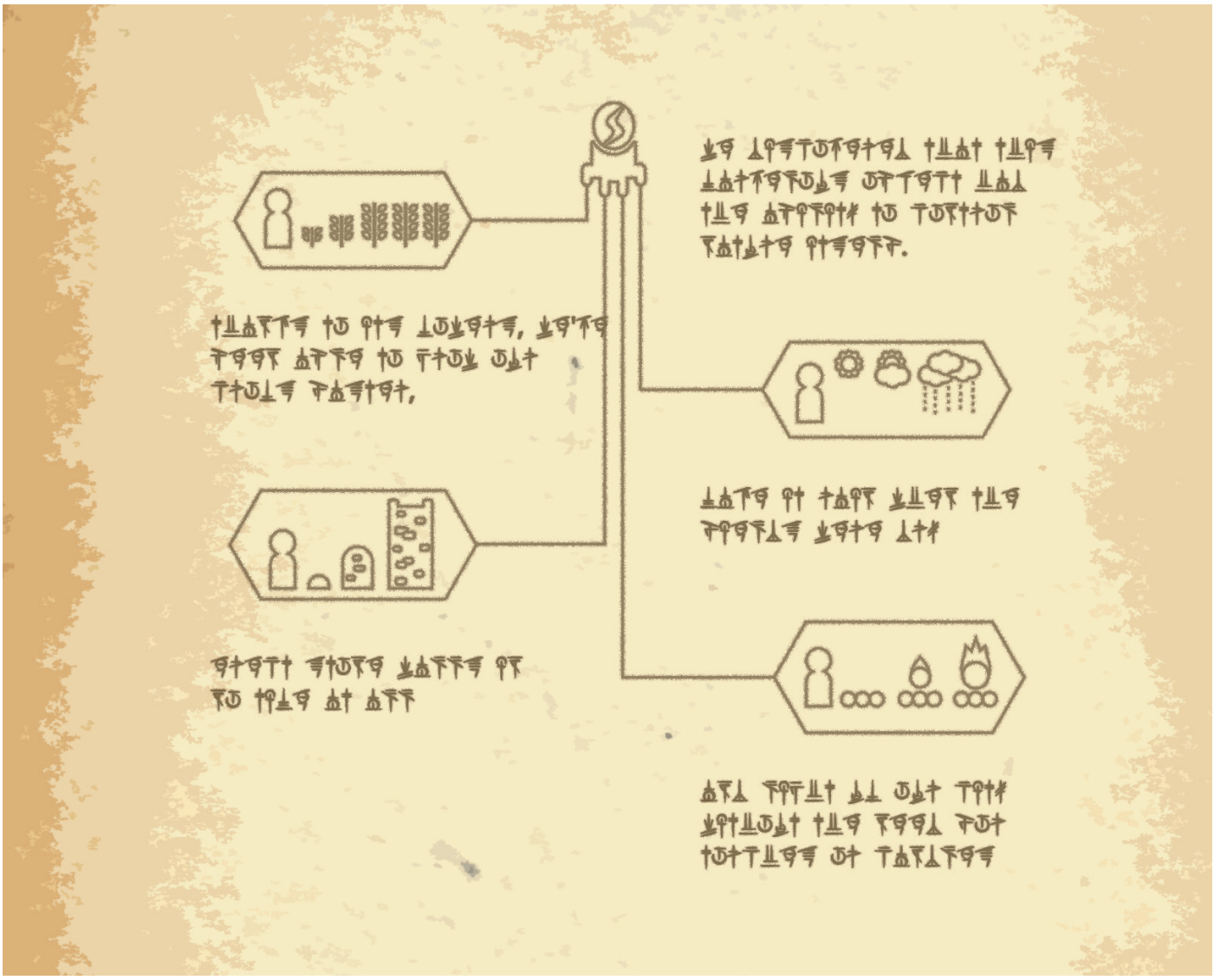
Basement



Legend

- Door
- Locked door
  Can be hooked or pushed in
- Prison bars
- Stairs
- Guard
- Route taken by guards during changeover

Lizerios grimoire page



Old map of Lizerios - Before

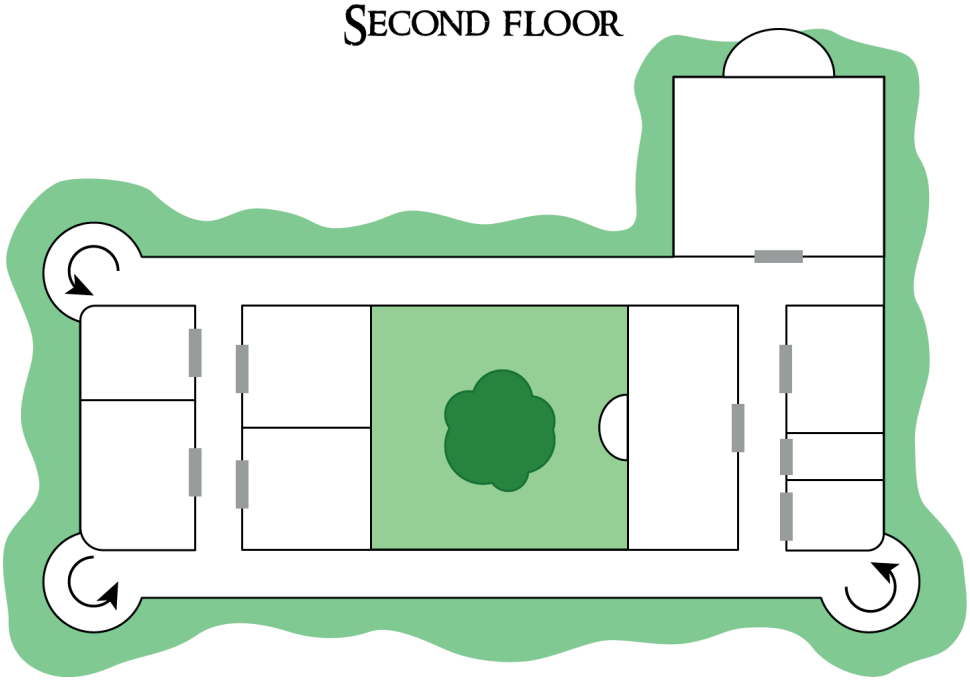


Old map of Lizerios - After

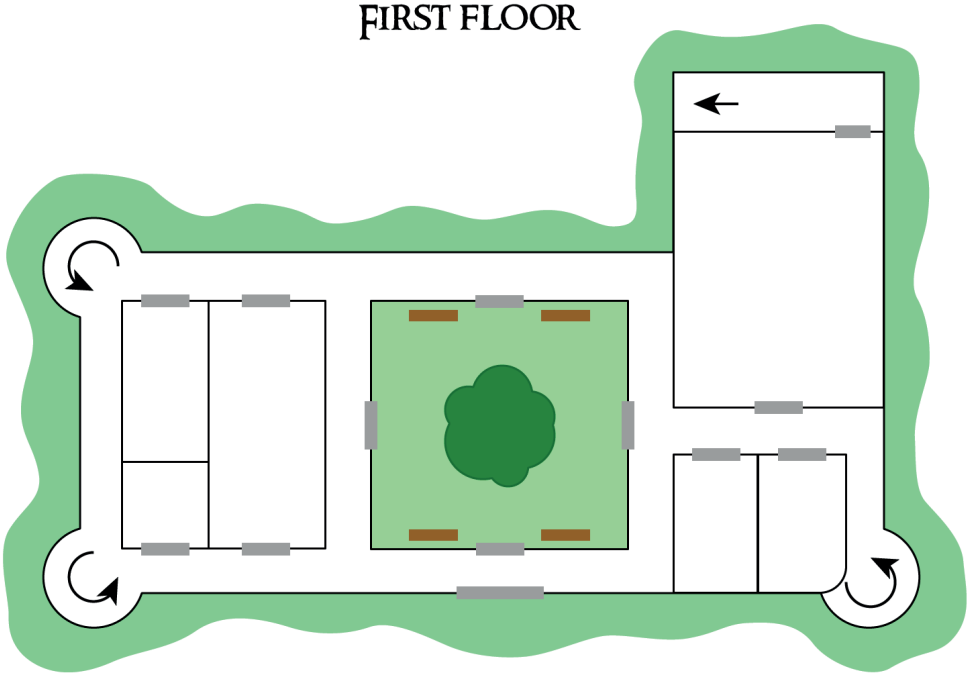


Plan of Aethel castle PC side

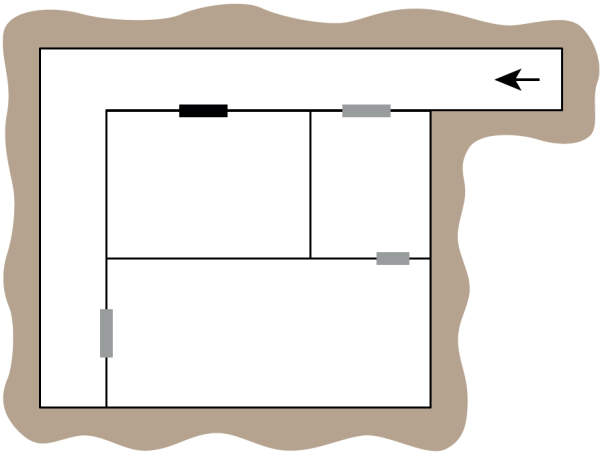
Second floor



First floor

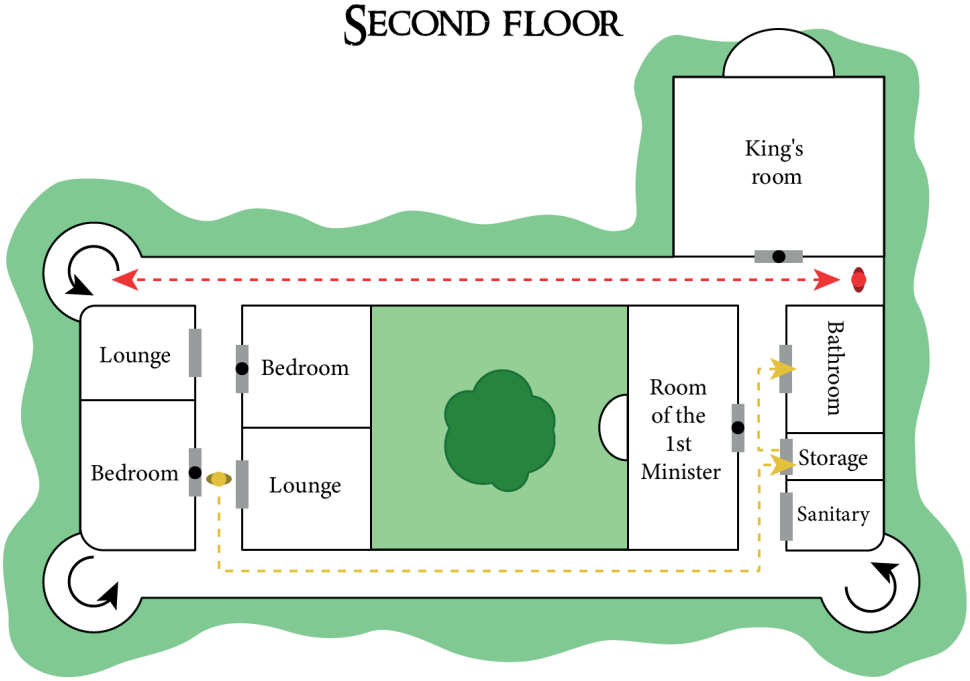


Basement

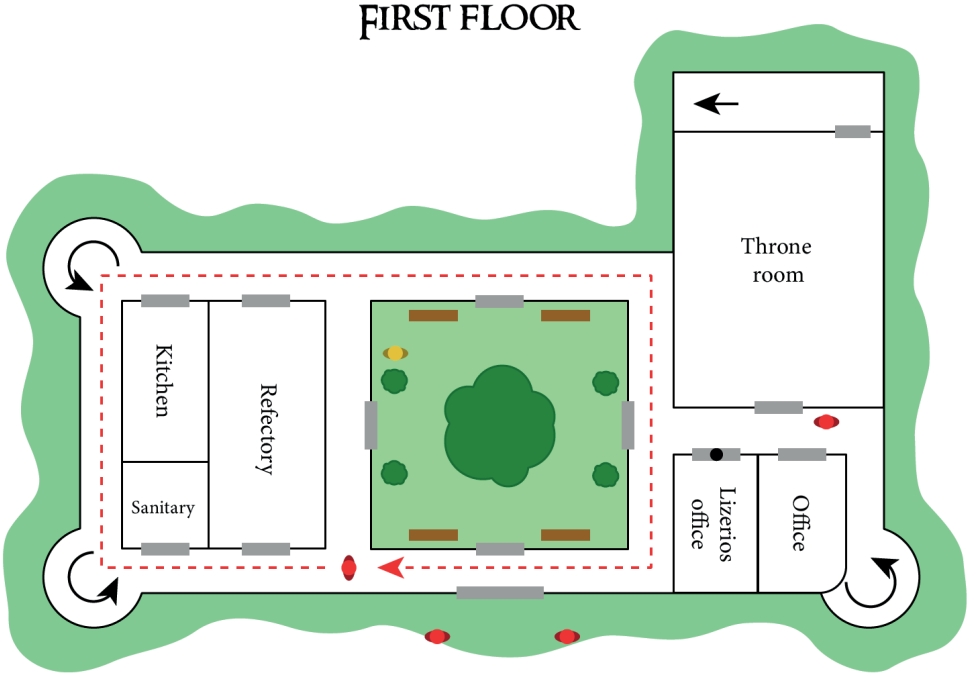


Plan of Aethel castle GM side

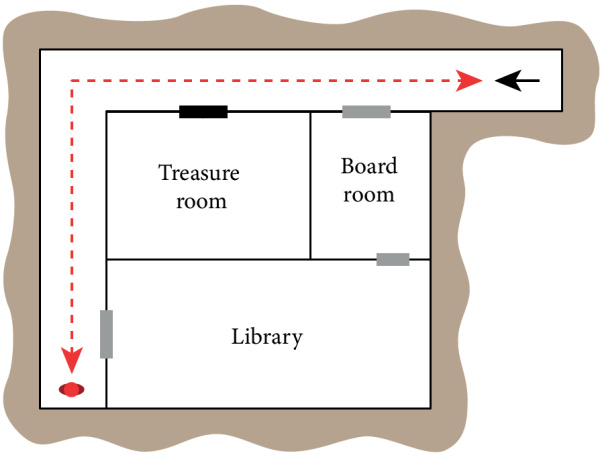
Second floor



First floor



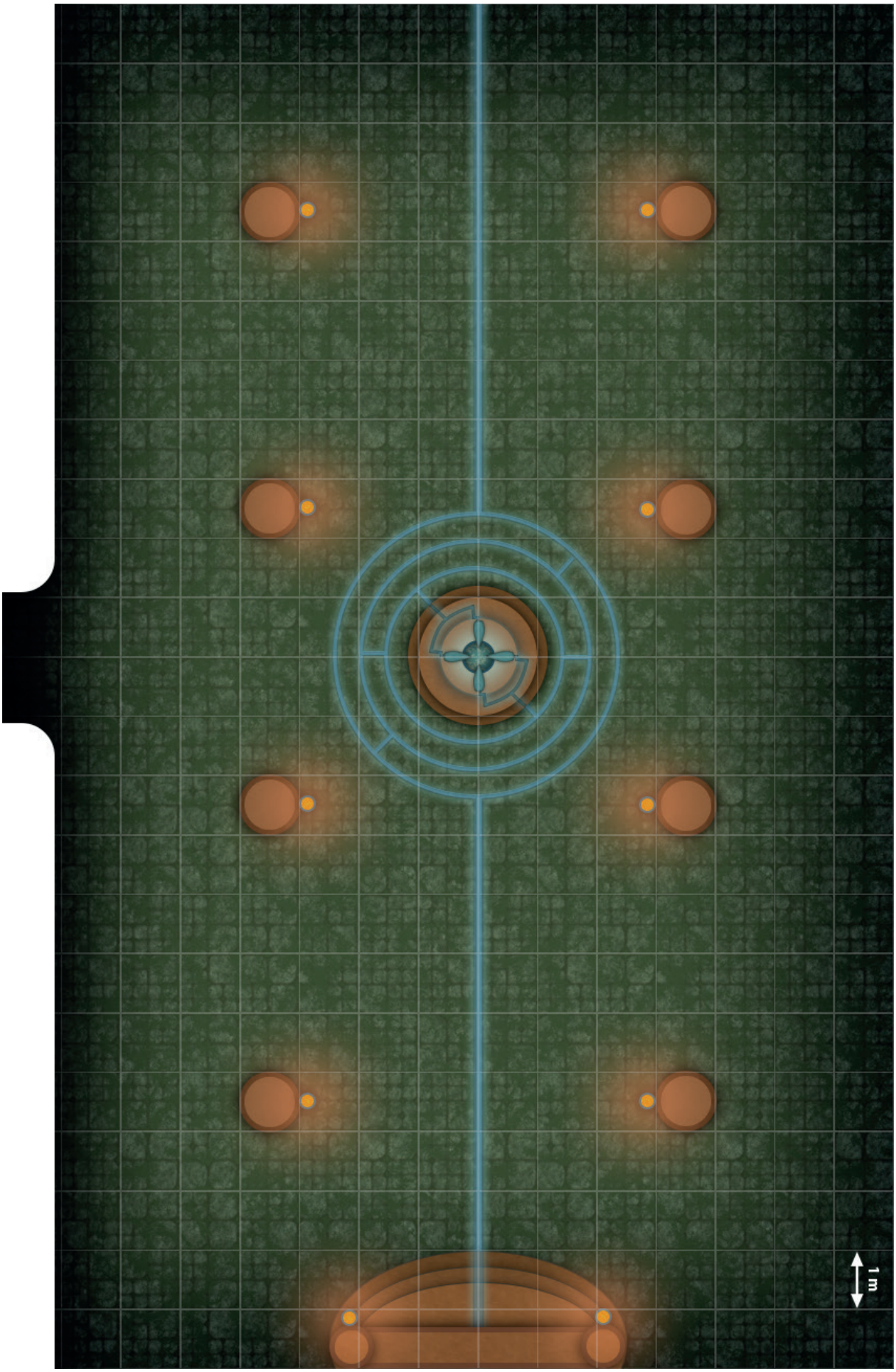
Basement



Legend

- Door
- Locked door
  Can be hooked or pushed in
- Locked armoured door
- Stairs
- Guard
- Domestic
- The guard's route
- The domestic route

Temple of Aethel



Map of the Aethel temple stele



TOLAN'S LETTER

If you wish to preserve your territory and your magic, keep the artifact and join me on Tolan during the next eclipse, when I and my men will open a passage.

X.J.

Creatures and NPCs

PRISON GUARD

Warrior : 4

HP : 20 | 2 | EP : 15

STR	DEX	INT	CON	PER	CHA
3	2	-1	2	2	0(-1)

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Spear	2m max	1d20-2	1d8+STR+DEX

Armor	Require	Penalty	AP
Studded Leather Armor	None	-1 Charisma	2

CITADEL GUARD

Warrior : 4

HP : 20 | 3-7 | EP : 13

STR	DEX	INT	CON	PER	CHA
3	0(-1)	-2	2	-2	1

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Sword	Melee	1d20+4	1d10+STR

Armor	Require	Penalty	AP
Scale Mail	Constitution > 1	-1 Dexterity	3
Shield	Strength > 2	~~Dodge~~	+4

Special move : Fury, Overturn

ELCAN IN OGRE SHAPE

HP : 10+15/PC | 2 | EP : 20

STR	DEX	INT	CON	PER	CHA
7	-2	-5	7	0	-5

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Pillar	2m max multi-target*	1d20	1d10+STR
Rock Throw	15m max	1d20	1d12

**all targets within a 2m radius of him*

Ogres look like giants and are known for their irritable nature. When provoked, an ogre will lash out in a fit of frustrated anger until it has no more objects or creatures to crush.

Edges : Tough+, Elusive, Giant
Special moves : Fury, Overturn, Charge

MASKED MAN

Warrior & Priest : 4

HP : 29 | 4 | EP : 16

STR	DEX	INT	CON	PER	CHA
3	-1(-2)	1	3	-3	3

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Enchanted Sword	Melee	1d20+4 CB	1d12+STR

Armor	Require	Penalty	AP
Half Plate	Constitution > 2	-2 Dexterity	4

Special moves : Fury, Prayer, Lay on Hands, Overturn, Blessing, Light Shield

LIZERIOS

HP : 12 EP : 10

STR	DEX	INT	CON	PER	CHA
-3	0	4	-3	2	2

JORORA

HP : 12 EP : 10

STR	DEX	INT	CON	PER	CHA
-3	1	3	-3	3	1