

ASTRENOR

ON THE ARTIFACT TRAIL - PART 4

First Astrenor campaign

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

Action
☆☆☆

Infiltration
☆☆☆

Dialogue
☆☆☆

Reflection
☆☆☆



PROJECT
GAMES



CHARACTER
SHEET ONLINE

SYNOPSIS

In this scenario, players are taken by force to Aethel, 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 taken away. Faced with a fait accompli, the PCs risk ending their lives behind bars. Their only way out is to follow the right people, understand what the artifact represents, and find out who is plotting in secret and for what purpose.

This is the fourth and final part of the «On the Artifact Trail» campaign. It is therefore 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 last game.*

CONTEXT

A week has passed since the attack on Klodenn, and there are no further clashes on the continent. The port of Kingshill Landing has been reclaimed and all Asgure soldiers have been killed or sent to the iron. Despite some losses within the Alliance, the new soldiers who joined after this crushing victory more than filled the ranks. Never before has the Alliance counted so many men and women in its army; every day new soldiers continue to pour in, swelling their ranks.

Unfortunately, even with the momentum of this fervor, rumors of possible traitors within the Alliance began to circulate. In order to quell these rumors, President Panorius had to take drastic measures to oust high dignitaries suspected of treason from certain strategic positions. But the massive arrival of new soldiers has the government of the Republic of Rautha worried about new enemy intrusions into the Alliance.

Most of the population is unaware that Galarond is one of the main perpetrators of the attack on Klodenn, and his public absence is, for the moment, going unnoticed. The government of the Republic of Rautha is doing its utmost to prevent any new rumors from tarnishing the Alliance's image: it would be frowned upon for one of their most prestigious heroes to be linked in any way to this invasion of Asgure.

With the Alliance's rise to power, the kingdoms of Drukh, Irdian and Epheria seem compelled to cede more and more geopolitical ground to the Republic of Rautha. Thanks to this, the safety of the inhabitants is assured, but some of the leaders of the three kingdoms are wary of the Alliance's actions. Among them, members of the Epheria government have suspected the Alliance of meddling in the kingdoms' affairs for years. And rightly so! The recent events at Wolforge bear witness to this, although they have not yet been made public.

THE JUDGMENT OF EPHERIA

Tied up and taken by force to Aethel, the PCs have no choice but to keep a low profile for the duration of the journey. Their captors say little, but one of them, a certain «Virgian», can give them some information. Virgian is one of the elven warriors assigned to watch over the PCs during the journey. If they ask him why they've been arrested, he'll tell them they're suspected of taking part in a secret mission against the kingdom of Drukh. If a PC succeeds in a Charisma roll of medium difficulty (10), Virgian can reveal that the government of Epheria has been monitoring the Alliance's activities for some time.

It's about a day's journey by stagecoach from the village of Hagdan, at the foot of Mount Gigantic, to Aethel, the capital of Epheria. The PCs are fed the bare minimum and struggle to sleep on the coach benches.

They are awakened early in the morning by Virgian, who announces that the journey is drawing to a close. When they open their eyes, the PCs can see the sublime town of Aethel in the distance, overlooking the surrounding forests. Aethel is known as one of Rautha's greatest and most beautiful cities. Its impressive architecture, surrounded by nature, has remained virtually intact for thousands of years, making it the oldest city on the continent.

The map of Aethel is available in the Appendix.

Arriving at the capital's gates, the stagecoach is left in the stables (PI 20) with its horses. The PCs are then led on foot to the castle, escorted by a dozen warriors. Their hands are still firmly tied, and they are stripped of their equipment. Exhausted by the journey, it will be impossible for them to escape without being quickly caught, with the added bonus of a good blow from the pommel of a sword in the abdomen (1d6 damage).

Aethel Castle is a majestic edifice of white polished stone, surrounded by walls. Two guards watch over the castle entrance. One of them is approached by Virgian, then, after a few exchanges, the guard calls two more of his colleagues to lead the PCs to the throne room, leaving the group of kidnappers outside the castle.

The castle is as impressive inside as it is outside. Numerous paintings and sculptures adorn the premises, while a dozen or so guards roam the castle and keep a watchful eye on the surrounding area. When the doors to the throne room are reached, the PCs are announced by one of the guards and invited to enter.

The throne room is the largest room in the castle. Its walls have been sculpted in the form of an immense fresco topped with gilding. At the far end of the room is King Lurius, seated on his magnificent white throne also adorned with various carved motifs all over its surface. Beside him, members of Epheria's government greet the PCs, standing behind two long wooden desks on either side of the room.

Aethel

Capital of the kingdom of Epheria, this splendid thousand-year-old city overlooks the surrounding forests and can be seen for miles around. Almost as old as the birth of Epheria, Aethel has withstood the test of time, protecting a thousand years of knowledge within its walls.



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 an early age and has made his career a priority. He distrusts the Alliance and aspires to shake up the established order.



Lizerios

A former prime minister known for his seriousness and loyalty, Lizerios now serves as royal advisor.



Faemis

Faemis is the oldest member of the government, and holds the position of Great Sage. She is the king's sister and Omaren's aunt.

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

"King Lurius and venerable members of the council... We are here today to judge these individuals, accused of having participated in several acts of interference fomented by the Republic of Rautha. These acts include a deliberate attempt to conceal information likely to jeopardize the security of the Irdian kingdom, as well as the proven theft of property belonging to the kingdom of Drukh.

It is important that we investigate this matter in order to ascertain the intentions of the Republic of Rautha and avoid a total loss of trust between the kingdoms and the Alliance.

Defendants, please answer our questions with the truth and nothing but the truth. I leave it to Faemis, great sage of the kingdom of Epheria, to speak."

When the speech is over, the council members sit down, except for Faemis, the eldest, who stands to speak with a trembling voice. She graces the Prime Minister, then asks the PCs to answer these questions:

"Can you swear to 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 has asked you to steal an object belonging to King Guldrak?

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

Why is the Alliance looking for it? What does it mean to the Alliance?

Who in the Alliance asked you to steal this object?

Why did you accept without hesitation? Did it seem like a normal mission?"

If the PCs try to lie, Treasurer Jorora will stand up and present facts and evidence that prove the PCs are lying. For example, she could state that one of Hagdan's inhabitants recognized Oriel, accompanied by young recruits matching their descriptions.

What's more, Jorora has numerous testimonials from high-ranking Alliance dignitaries who are secretly working for Epheria. According to them, Oriel is on a secret mission to recover an artifact belonging to King Guldrak. If the PCs mention Oriel's name, they'll only be confirming this information. What's more, the fact that they were found in possession of the artifact leaves little room for their presumption of innocence. If the PCs talk about Zico, Jorora won't have any information about him. She does know, however, that their captors attacked Alliance soldiers who were already «escorting» the PCs.

For Elcan, this staged event only serves to demonstrate, in the eyes of the

government, that the Alliance can no longer be trusted. He also wants to use the opportunity to assess the Alliance's level of knowledge of the artifact.

In any case, regardless of their defense, the PCs will be condemned to be sent back to the kingdom of Drukh for trial the very next day. They will also be banished forever from the lands of Epheria.

Once the sentence has been announced, Elcan calls the guards to take the boys to prison while they prepare their convoy. They are dragged by force out of the castle and taken to the prisons in full view of the capital's inhabitants, some of whom look on curiously, others reprovably. Their hands are still firmly bound, and they are escorted by 4 heavily armed guards: no escape is possible under these conditions.

On arrival at the prison, the PCs are taken directly to their cell in the basement. It's a gloomy place, and both the prison guards and the prisoners are uncomfortable. The PCs are untied just before being thrown into their shared cell. Inside, several wooden benches serve as beds, and a bucket is provided for basic needs. Of course, PCs are always stripped of their equipment.

PRISON BREAK

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

In the left-hand cell, a man wearing an iron mask covering his face sits at the back of the room. When he meets the eyes of one of the PCs, he steps forward and sticks his helmet on the bars of his cell. Then, after a few minutes, he returns to his seat, continuing to stare silently at the PCs through the gaps in his helmet.



Jorora

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



Omaren

A young prince of Epheria and 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 his duties.

The prison guards

Aethel's prison guards are known for their severity and rigor. Dressed in light armor and armed with spears, they impose order with authority. If inmates disobey, they do not hesitate to use torture to enforce discipline.



Perkas

A talkative, eccentric old prison inmate, Perkas is a real torture for the nerves. His incessant wacky 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 by the name of Perkas seems inclined to chat with the PCs. If they ask him about himself, he'll tell them he's an inveterate thief who's never had a chance in life. This is the fourth time he's ended up in the hole, and this may well be the last. Perkas knows the prison rules well, as do most of the inmates. However, if the PCs ask him about his cellmate, he'll say he hasn't said a word since he arrived two days ago. No one seems to know his identity, not even the prison guards. Once the ice is broken, Perkas will ask the PCs a lot of questions and tell his life story without being asked anything.

They don't know it, but Perkas has been isolated in a single cell because he has driven his former cellmates mad with his non-stop talking.

Time in prison seems to last an eternity. Fortunately, it's almost noon, and the inmates are about to go to the refectory for lunch. Each time, two guards escort the prisoners from one cell to the refectory and back again, one cell after the other. At the slightest inappropriate gesture, the guards will not hesitate to call for reinforcements and beat up an inmate.

Let your players know that if they try anything, they'll end up badly beaten. You can play a scene where the guards take a recalcitrant inmate to the torture room for disrespecting one of their own and trying to escape.

In the refectory, twenty or so inmates help themselves to an infamous self-service porridge from a cauldron at the back of the room, before sitting down at one of the tables. The place is watched over by a dozen guards: no excesses will be tolerated.

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

They're all here on a variety of charges, from jewel robbery to premeditated murder and the sale of illegal potions. The masked man is not present, and the other inmates know little about him. Rumor has it that he's a member of the royal family or a high-ranking Alliance dignitary.

If the PCs try to talk to one of their jailers, they will have to pass a Charisma roll of difficult difficulty (15) to avoid being ignored or repackaged. The guards have no further information on this masked man: they have only been ordered never to remove his helmet or let him out of his cell.

If the PCs try to escape, they won't be able to get very far, as access to the floor is highly guarded. What's more, the upstairs corridor door is locked. They will then be beaten (1d12 damage) and taken straight back to their cell.

After a good hour's lunch, the inmates are escorted back to their cells for the rest of the day, in the same way as when they arrived at the refectory.

Behind the bars of their cell, PCs have no choice but to wait quietly if they don't want more trouble. Time seems to be running out, and the PCs are counting the minutes, not helped by the oppressive company of dear Perkash. The prisoners' day is punctuated by the incessant rounds of the prison guards, which take place every 15 minutes.

It's now 7pm and the prisoners are about to receive their dinner, served directly in their cells. The gaolers give each inmate a dime of bread and a bowl of soup.

Just as he is about to bite into his piece of bread, one of the PCs bumps into a piece of metal concealed inside. While 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 roll of Chance to determine who will have the key in their bread, then show them the hidden message available in the Appendix.

Once they have the key and the message, the young men will have to be very vigilant to ensure that their jailers don't suspect a thing. Perkash, their cell neighbor, is very curious: if he sees anything unusual, he's likely to question the PCs and unwittingly alert the guards.

If they decide to follow the message's plan, they'll have to wait for the changing of the guard at midnight to escape. The problem is that they have no way of knowing what time it is, and no visibility of the guard post where the guards set up between rounds. To do this, they can discreetly ask for help from their new friends in the cells on the right, who have a view of the guardhouse (see the prison map on the GM side). The PCs can also trust Perkash, who, according to him, is able to predict the time to the minute. This gift is said to have been inherited from his mother, a clairvoyant who developed her connection with the stars while traveling around the world... but I digress.

Surprisingly, Perkash's gift is very real and could be very useful to the PCs.

From 7 p.m. to midnight, the guards' rounds follow each other at a regular rhythm of about one every 15 minutes. To determine when midnight will be, the PCs must count 19 rounds and then wait 15 minutes. At midnight, there should be no guards at all, as patrols don't resume until 00:15, after the changeover.

If the PCs leave their cells 5 minutes before or after midnight, it will be impossible for them to escape without running into guards.

If the PCs escape at the right moment, play the movement of the guards as shown in the prison map on the GM's side (a first group makes its way out of the prison, then a second makes its way back). During their escape, the PCs may meet the eyes of some inmates who have not yet found sleep. Fortunately, all they have to do is promise to come back and free them, so that they don't alert the guards.

The hidden key and message

A key, wrapped in a piece of parchment, is cleverly concealed in the bread. This key can only be used to open the adventurers' cell. On the parchment, a message written by an anonymous author provides the necessary instructions for escaping from the prison.

Show your players the Aethel Prison map on the PC side to help them find their way around. Use the GM's Aethel Prison map, without revealing it to the players, to describe locations and NPC encounters.

During their escape, the PCs can easily hear the footsteps of the guards moving away or towards them by making a Perception test of easy difficulty (5). The PCs can then hide in the refectory or ground-floor room to let the guards through, as the other rooms are closed or occupied by prison employees. If the PCs enter an office or the armory, they'll come across a guard who will sound the alarm: in this case, they'll have to make a quick getaway.

After taking the stairs and exiting the west corridor on the first floor, the PCs come face to face with a guard snoozing on one of the reception desks. They'll have to be very careful not to wake him, especially as one of the prisoners has noticed their presence. This one is more difficult to convince, and will require a medium-difficulty Charisma roll (10), otherwise he won't hesitate to wake the sleeping guard. If this is the case, the PCs will have to flee quickly.

Once outside the prison, they'll notice a cart beside the building's east door. On board, a hooded coachman wearing loose-fitting black clothing beckons them to approach. The hooded man tells them to quickly hide in the barrels of his cart. If they are pursued, the PCs will quickly have to make a choice.

If the PCs decide to flee without following the hooded man's plan, they'll find themselves back on the streets of Aethel, still without their equipment. In this case, you'll have to find a pretext for them to run into the man again, but this time with their faces uncovered.

If they go along with the plan, they'll be able to feel the cart moving as soon as they're settled into the barrels. The coachman will ask them to remain hidden for ten minutes or so, while the journey continues.

If the PCs were being chased by the guards and agreed to hide in the barrels, you can play a scene in which the guards burst in from outside the prison and ask the coachman if he has seen any prisoners running away. The man will reply that he saw x number of people (x being the number of PCs) running towards the east gate of the town. The guards immediately set off in pursuit, thanking the informant, unaware that he has put them on the wrong track.

THE SECRETS OF THE ARTIFACT

Hidden in the cart's barrels, the PCs are shaken in all directions along the way. After about ten minutes, their vehicle stops and the driver informs them that they can finally get out. Once out of their hiding place and off the cart, they recognize Lizerios, a counselor present at their trial. The man asks them to return to his home without too much delay: he'll answer all their questions once they're inside.

Before anything else, Lizerios will offer the adventurers a hot drink and return their belongings as a token of good faith. Unfortunately, all the PCs' gold has been stolen by their captors, while the artifact has been recovered by the government of Epheria.

Once they've come to their senses, Lizerio begins the discussion:

"Dear adventurers, I apologize for the way you've been treated so far. I know that everything that has happened to you is not your fault. All you've done is obey your superiors.

It's a good thing you were able to escape. Elcan would never have let you return to the kingdom of Drukh alive. Unfortunately, this respite may be short-lived... I'm afraid you're no longer safe anywhere.

Before I go any further and explain the significance of the artifact you stole, can you tell me everything you've learned about it?"

When the PCs' information has been divulged, Lizerios will try to explain the situation to them in a long monologue:

"I'm going to tell you everything I know about this case you're involved in. It all began 20 years ago. At that time, Aethel was still home to an artifact similar to the one in Klodenn. It was hidden in the temple buried beneath the roots of the World Tree, known only to members of Epheria's small council. In the year 288, Tolan representatives came to meet us in order to acquire our artifact. They were prepared to offer us an enormous quantity of gold and precious materials in exchange for it. However, unaware of its powers, we made the wise decision to refuse their offer. At the time, I was still Prime Minister of Epheria and the king had every confidence in me.

After the exchanges with Tolan, I was commissioned to find out more about this artifact. I spent the following days and nights in the castle's great library, leafing through dusty old grimoires. In the course of my research, I came across some strange books written in a language I didn't know. It was written in symbols similar to those on the walls of the artifact temple. It didn't take me long to realize that if I wanted to find out more about this artifact, I would have to decipher this language.

Unfortunately, the time I spent learning this new language was time I didn't have to spend on my research, which was stagnating. Tolan was taking advantage of the situation to make new offers, ever more generous and tempting. At the same time, certain members of the government were beginning to worry about the meteoric growth of the

The revelations of Lizerios

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

Republic of Rautha. They did not approve of the fact that the Alliance, which was to be Rautha's armed arm in the service of the kingdoms, was becoming as powerful and influential as the very nations that had formed it. So it was that in 292, 4 years after our first contact with Tolan, the king finally agreed to hand over the artifact despite my warnings.

Shortly afterwards, I was dismissed: it was felt that I had served my time... Elcan thus became my successor as Prime Minister. His first act was to use his newly-acquired gold to bribe a number of Alliance officers. That's why some of their information reaches us before President Panorius even knows about it... That's how we knew about your mission to Wolforge.

Now that Elcan is in possession of this new artifact, I'm afraid he'll want to do business with Tolan again to gain ever more power. According to my research, the loss of this latest artifact could affect the Rautha ecosystem forever. Believe me, for the safety and balance of the continent, this artifact must be recovered at all costs and placed in a safe place, far from Elcan's megalomania."

If the PCs have any questions about the artifact, Lizerios will take them to his library and explain the information, while pulling out old grimoires:

"Despite my ousting as Prime Minister, I decided to continue my research in order to regain our King's trust. Unfortunately, despite my discoveries, my relationship with him never improved. However, I was able to learn a great deal about these artifacts.

After almost 5 years of analyzing this writing, I finally managed to understand its rules and decipher it. This language was used by an ancient civilization called the Scholars. They used the power of artifacts to do all sorts of things, such as make their crops grow, call down rain, build walls or light up their city after dark."

Show the players the page from the Grimoire de Lizerios available in the Appendix.

"The Scholars built temples around these artifacts to channel their energy and perform all kinds of experiments. Centuries later, they succeeded in generating portals to navigate from temple to temple. That's how, 20 years ago, the people of Tolan were able to make contact with us.

Have you ever noticed any similarities between our world and the one depicted on the stele in these temples?"

Show the players the Old Lizerios map, available in the Appendix.

"If we are to believe what it says, centuries ago Astrenor was one gigantic continent. Once you put the pieces of the puzzle together, it's easy to guess where the various temples are located. Following this discovery, I decided to keep quiet. It was only very recently that Elcan came to the same conclusion. Strangely enough, a few months later, the town of Klodenn

was attacked... Perfect timing, don't you think?"

If the PCs ask about Elcan, Lizerios will say:

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

If the PCs ask about the Alliance and the Republic of Rautha, Lizerios will reply as follows:

"We know that the Republic of Rautha is also looking for the artifact. However, we don't know what their government really knows about it. According to our latest information, the Alliance has sent men to capture and eliminate you in order to keep the artifact secret. It seems to me that you've already come across several of them. I'm sure they got the idea from one of the officers secretly working for Elcan. I'm afraid you're no longer safe within the Alliance."

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

"I'm not sure, but my guess is that each artifact is linked to a natural element. Once it is no longer on its base, it ceases to transmit its energy to the surrounding environment. Since we parted company with our artifact, I've noticed over the past two decades that our forests have become less dense and our wildlife rarer. I've also noticed that the World Tree is losing more and more leaves, year after year. I can't say for sure, but what I can say for sure is that we can't let Elcan use it to gain more wealth and influence."

If the PCs ask questions about Aethel's temple, Lizerios' answer will be as follows:

"Our temple is hidden beneath the World Tree, right in the heart of Aethel. This thousand-year-old tree existed even before the creation of the capital. To reach the temple, you have to squeeze a few meters between its roots. The entrance to the temple is blocked by a code in the language of Erudit. Fortunately, a riddle inscribed on the temple door can be used to find the password. Once you know the language, it's actually quite easy to find the answer.

I know this riddle by heart. Would you like to try answering it?"

If the PCs accept the challenge:

"Here it is:

Square ones are available,

You can take it without moving,

It's the way to attack evil."

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

“A little hint? It’s often plant-based.”

The answer to the riddle is «The root».

If the PCs ask questions about Tolan’s inhabitants, Lizerios will have a few things:

“In the end, they have very little in common with the reptilians you know. They wear atypical clothing, but apart from that, there’s little to distinguish us from them. They have a close link with the Scholars in that they are able to use their technology, but I don’t know exactly what it is. It could be their descendants, or they could have massacred them to steal their knowledge... I honestly don’t know!”

(Bonus: If the PCs have retrieved the book from the treasure room of Wolforge Castle) If the PCs ask Lizerios to translate King Guldrak’s grimoire :

“How did the 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 for a while, so I can study it?”

When all the PCs’ questions have been asked, Lizerios will say this:

“If Elcan has already reached an agreement with Tolan, and if I remember correctly, it will take them 48 hours to come and retrieve the artifact. After all, once the artifact is removed from the temple base, the portal closes instantly. So Tolan has to come by boat to the shores of the kingdom of Epheria. It takes less than half a day to reach Seladorei, Epheria’s southernmost coastal town. We therefore have, in the worst-case scenario, just over a day to find a way of recovering the artifact before it’s too late.

The easiest thing would be to discreetly follow Elcan all day tomorrow to find out what he intends to do with the artifact and where he’s hiding it. I hear you’ve become experts in the art of tailing and infiltrating castles..”

The PCs can choose whether or not to help Lizerios.

If they refuse, Lizerios will warn them of the Alliance’s intentions. In his opinion, it is highly likely that the Alliance is seeking to eliminate the PCs in order to keep their latest mission a secret. If they still refuse to help him, go straight to the Conclusion section.

If they agree to help her, Lizerios will offer them room and board for the night. Together, they’ll discuss a plan for the following day over a good meal. Lizerios knows that Elcan spends most of his time at the castle, mainly in his apartments on the second floor. He sometimes goes out to eat with Jorora, the treasurer. The two are very close. Lizerios works in an office on the first floor, so he may suggest that

PCs climb through his office window to enter the castle. However, once inside, the PCs must not be spotted by a guard or a member of the government, otherwise they risk ending up behind bars again. Once their plan has been worked out and approved, the PCs can finally return to the comfort of a real bed.

They regain all their health and energy points.

THE ELCAN SPINNING MILL

The next morning, the PCs are awakened by Lizerios, who has prepared breakfast for them in his living room. When everyone is gathered around the table, Lizerios recapitulates their plan one last time and leaves to work in the castle as usual.

It's around 9 a.m. when the PCs finish wolfing down their breakfast. They are free to move about the city as they please. If they decide to go to the castle, they'll have to use their wits to avoid detection. Concealment spells can be particularly effective in such circumstances.

Show your players the map of Aethel Castle on the PC side to help them find their way around. Use the GM's map of Aethel Castle, without revealing it to the players, to describe locations and NPC encounters.

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

Elcan's schedule:

09:00 Elcan leaves his apartments and heads to the refectory to eat before his morning meeting. The servants are busy serving breakfast to the castle's inhabitants.

The king and Faemis are already present, while the young prince Omaren is still waiting.

10:00 Elcan joins the council chamber in the basement. There he meets up with Jorora and the other members of the council. During this meeting, a guard will warn those present that prisoners incarcerated the previous day have escaped.

11:00 Elcan returns to his apartments. He glances left and right before entering, and locks his door. If a PC listens at the door, he can hear Elcan talking to someone. A Perception test of medium difficulty (10) will reveal the following words:

Elcan: «Hello Marat, sorry to rush you, but... Have you given any thought to my proposal?»

Marat: Inaudible voice

Elcan: «Consider that once I've received the medallion, the artifact will belong to you. You know you can trust me.»

Marat: Inaudible voice

Elcan: «Perfect... I'll get back to you in the afternoon to confirm the date and time of the transaction. See you soon.»

12:00 Elcan leaves his apartments and joins Jorora at the castle entrance. They head outside for lunch. They head for Le Gourmet restaurant (PI 14), a prestigious uptown establishment. If they don't wear fancy clothes, the PCs risk attracting attention. If they get close enough, the PCs will be able to hear part of their conversation by passing a medium-difficulty Perception test (10). Be careful not to get too close, as Elcan will be watching the area, especially since he knows the PCs have escaped.

Jorora: «Are we celebrating? It's not every day you invite me to a restaurant.»

Elcan: «It's up to you.»

Jorora: «What do you mean?»

Elcan: «I need you to put a certain thing in its place. I've made a new agreement... if you know what I mean.»

Jorora: «I know what you mean. But you could have kept me out of your affairs.»

Elcan: «I'd have done it myself, but our friend Lizerios doesn't trust me.»

Jorora: «Maybe that's proof that he hasn't totally lost his mind.»

Elcan: «Haha! I don't know who's more offended, him or me...»

Jorora: «Shut up. I think we're being watched.»

Following this exchange, Jorora and Elcan will be much more vigilant and change the subject of their conversation while they eat.

If the PCs continue to observe them, they may, with a medium difficulty Perception roll (10), see Elcan discreetly hand a small object to Jorora. The object appears to be attached to a thin silver chain that slips through his fingers.

13:00 Elcan returns to the castle accompanied by Jorora. They sit down in the council chamber to continue their conversation.

14:00 Elcan deals with the requests of the inhabitants who have been granted an audience with the king in the throne room. A dozen or so locals file into the throne room, regulated by the guard at the entrance.

16:00 Elcan returns to his chambers, somewhat weary from the whining of the populace. If a player listens at the door, he may hear Elcan talking to someone. A Perception test of medium difficulty (10) will reveal the following words:

Elcan: «Hello again, Marat! I've got good news... Everything should be ready for tonight.»

Marat: Inaudible voice

Elcan: «Perfect, in that case I'll propose delivery at 9pm. If that suits you...»

Marat: Inaudible voice

Elcan: «Great! See you then.»

After this brief interview, Elcan remains to work in silence in his apartments.

19:00 Elcan leaves to dine in the castle refectory with King Lurius, Faemis and Prince Omaren.

20:00 Elcan leaves the castle and heads for the World Tree. He carries a small leather briefcase, including several documents to validate the transaction. If the PCs observe him, they'll realize that his briefcase is far too small to conceal the artifact. It would therefore be unwise for them to intervene now. If they do decide to stop him on the way, Elcan won't hesitate to shout to alert the city guards, who will intervene almost instantly. The PCs are wanted throughout the capital, and if a confrontation with the guards breaks out, they'll have no choice but to flee the scene before reinforcements arrive.

Jorora's secret mission (never to be divulged):

Between 14:00 and 19:00, Jorora will retrieve the artifact from the treasure room. She will use a secret passageway to sneak out of the castle with the artifact in her possession. She will then go to Aethel's gaols, free the prisoner in the iron mask and employ him as her henchman. Then, accompanied by her new bodyguard, she'll head for the temple beneath the World Tree. Once there, she'll await Elcan's arrival.

Tip: make sure Jorora never crosses paths with the PCs during her secret mission. If they want to get to the temple before Elcan arrives at 9 p.m., make sure Lizerios is busy at the time, or that guards are watching the area. Lizerios may even suggest that the PCs wait for Elcan's misdeed before catching him red-handed.

Additional information:

Castle guards

Aethel's castle guards are Epheria's elite soldiers. They wear heavy half-plate armor emblazoned with the royal family crest. Their imposing presence and constant vigilance deter any intrusion.

The magic mirror

This mysterious mirror is actually a technological object from Tolan. It allows you to communicate with someone thousands of kilometers away.



Marat

A resident of Tolan, Marat is seeking to recover the Klodenn artifact. He has done business with Elcan in the past and intends to do so again.

Access to the throne room is protected by a guard, making it virtually impossible for PCs to enter unnoticed. In the basement, a guard patrols the corridor, making it very difficult to gain access to this floor.

Thanks to information from Lizerios, the PCs know where Elcan's apartments are located. It would be worthwhile for them to take advantage of any time Elcan is in the throne room or basement to search his room. The door to his apartments can be broken down with a Difficulty 15 Strength test, or picked with a Medium Difficulty 10 Dexterity test per attempt (Reminder: Requires a Picking Kit per attempt and the Locksmith trump card).

Once inside, the PCs discover a luxurious suite featuring a huge four-poster bed in the center, a large oak desk and gilded furniture.

While rummaging through one of the cupboards in Elcan's room, the PCs may find a strange metal-framed mirror on which is inscribed a word in the Erudite language. If they reproduce the word on a piece of paper and show it to Lizerios, he'll be able to translate it as «Communication Device». The mirror is about a metre high and fifty centimetres wide, and is firmly fixed to the inside of the cabinet. This makes it difficult to grab and carry without being noticed. When a PC touches the mirror, it lights up slightly, revealing buttons numbered 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 wearing strange, gleaming 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 cut off the call if he suspects that the PCs are not working for him. If the PCs are clever and pass a Charisma test of difficult difficulty (15), they may learn that the man's name is Marat and that he has agreed with Elcan to send him a package through the portal this evening.

All indications are that Elcan intends to use the artifact tonight to open a portal to Tolan. Elcan seems to be acting in secret and is unaccompanied by guards, so there's no doubt that this is the perfect time to intervene and retrieve the artifact. The PCs need Lizerios to enter the temple beneath the World Tree, as only he can enter the door code in the language of the Scholar.

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

The PCs and Lizerios follow Elcan to the World Tree. On the way, Elcan will appear nervous: he'll glance around several times to make sure he's not being followed. If the group is spotted, Elcan will alert a city guard. Since their escape from prison, the PCs have been actively sought after, and some of their sketches are circulating among the guards. The PCs may be asked to make a Dexterity roll, depending on their proximity to Elcan or a guard. If they fail, they will attract their attention.

A few steps from the World Tree, Lizerios will ask the PCs to wait a few minutes, to make sure they haven't been spotted. Once the wait is over, Lizerios will signal to the PCs to follow him discreetly to the temple entrance. The path is steep, requiring them to squeeze through giant roots. After a few meters, Lizerios arrives at the temple door. It features a command interface similar to the altar in Klodenn's temple. Lizerios types the code word «Root» in the language of the Erudite, which triggers the door to open, revealing a narrow, sinister corridor leading to the temple's great hall.

The great hall is lit by a blue light, and the architecture is similar to that of the Klodenn temple. In the center, the artifact sits on a pedestal that seems to power the place. As they approach, the PCs see Elcan and Jorora to the left of the artifact: they are facing a magical portal. The portal reveals a humanoid figure in the middle of a white room, surrounded by strange machines, before closing again. Without even turning back to Lizerios, Elcan calls out to him, as if awaiting his arrival.

Elcan: «Well, who's this? If it isn't good old Lizerios... and his new friends.»

Lizerios: «What have you done, Elcan? What did Tolan promise you this time? Don't you understand that this artifact is of the utmost importance?! Without it, Epheria... No, the entire continent of Rautha is doomed!»

Elcan: «They didn't promise me anything, it was me who asked them for a favor... You see, despite our efforts to thwart the Alliance, it seems that dear Panorius has ousted most of my informers... It's unfortunate. Many men seem to trust him completely. And to tell the truth, that's good enough for me. Epheria is far too small for my ambitions. With this little object, I'll finally be able to put Rautha back on track!»

Elcan holds in his hand a strange medallion glowing with violet light. He quickly puts it around his neck. Suddenly, his body and face are distorted, and in an instant he takes on the appearance of President Panorius.

Elcan: «Don't you think I look more... Presidential? I'm sure I'd make a much better leader for the Alliance.»

Lizerios: «Elcan, you're crazy! If the Alliance finds out about this, you risk provoking a fratricidal war throughout Rautha!»

Elcan: «That's your problem, Lizerios. Always afraid to take risks! You're in over your head, poor thing!»

Metamorphosis

medallion

A technological object from Tolan, enabling its wearer to take on the appearance of a being or creature known to him. It is used by Elcan in the final confrontation.

Elcan's ogre form

Elcan has successfully completed his transformation into a Mountain Ogre. This is a race of Ogre thought to be completely extinct, far more imposing and violent than those captured by the Alliance. Where Elcan could have seen them with his own eyes is anyone's guess.

The stele

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

The control medallion

Technological object from Tolan, enabling the wearer to control the mind of someone just a few meters away. It is used by Jorora in the final confrontation.

The medallion shines again and Elcan begins to grow, gradually transforming into a huge Ogre. Just as Elcan is about to complete his transformation, an individual discreetly enters the temple and charges the PCs who have remained at the entrance. They recognize their cellmate's helmet, but this time it's no longer chained, and he's wearing a long sword and thick armor.

With his transformation complete, Elcan rips out one of the temple's pylons and uses it as a giant club. The building's walls shake and small pieces of rubble fall from the ceiling.

A battle ensues between the masked man, Elcan in ogre form and the group of PCs. Elcan gains +15 health points per character. The map of the Temple of Aethel, the Masked Man's profile and Elcan's profile in ogre form are available in the Appendix. The masked man takes advantage of his surprise attack and plays first.

Jorora and Lizerios are unarmed, and will try to hide in one of the temple's nooks and crannies to avoid confrontation as much as possible.

Elcan's medallion is hidden between the folds of his enormous neck: it will be virtually impossible to remove it without first defeating him.

Elcan protects the artifact, so any PC attempting to steal it will automatically be targeted. Even with a concealment spell, it is not possible to approach the object without attracting his attention.

If Lizerios is left unprotected, Elcan will use the rubble on the ground as projectiles to hit Lizerios (1d10 damage). Lizerios has 15 health points. If they fall to 0, he will succumb to his wounds.

If, during the fight, a player passes near the stele (structure on the right of the Aethel temple map), he or she can make a medium-difficulty Intelligence test (10) to realize that the stele is not quite the same as the one in the Klodenn temple: some jewels seem to be missing. Show the map of the stele, available in the Appendix, if a player wishes to examine it.

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

They don't know it, but it's Jorora who controls the masked man. In the bustier of her dress, she hides a medallion that allows her to manipulate a person's mind. This medallion was the object of the first exchange between Marat and Elcan, 15 years ago. Elcan used it on King Lurius on numerous occasions. This is how he convinced the king to give the artifact to Tolan, and how he obtained the position of Prime Minister. Elcan entrusted the medallion to Jorora so that she could carry out her mission under guard.

If the PCs are attentive, they may notice a small chain around Jorora's

neck and a faint violet glow showing through the fabrics of her dress. To do so, they need to pass a Perception test of difficult difficulty (15).

If the masked man is defeated, his helmet will break, revealing him to be Galarond. Galarond will remain unconscious on the ground. Immediately, Jorora will choose the PC she deems strongest to attack his comrades. The chosen player can attempt a Constitution test of very difficult difficulty (20) to resist the medallion's hold (Remember: a natural 20 is always a success). If he fails, the GM takes control of his character until Jorora's medallion is removed. The treasurer isn't very brave, so if she finds herself hand-to-hand with an armed PC and he asks for her medallion, she'll comply.

If Lizerios is still up to it, he can warn the PCs that it's Jorora who's controlling their friend. Indeed, Lizerios recognized Elcan's medallion around the treasurer's neck and was able to establish the link with the king's strange behavior.

Defeating Elcan

If Elcan is defeated, he falls to the ground and, in his fall, his enormous arm comes crashing down on the artifact. Flashes of blue light erupt from the artifact and strike the temple walls, which threaten to collapse.

If Lizerios is still alive, he'll tell the PCs to retrieve the artifact and flee from here.

However, if a PC tries to grab hold of the artifact, he will burn his hands on contact with it, and it will be impossible to remove it from its base. The impact of Elcan's fall seems to have embedded the artifact in the building.

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

Show Tolan's letter, available in the Appendix, if the PCs decide to pick it up.

Time is running out, and the rubble falling from the temple's vault is growing ever more imposing, threatening to topple the place at any moment. The PCs have no choice but to flee.

Elcan lies unconscious on the ground. He gradually regains his elven form. If a player tries to retrieve Elcan's medallion, then, in a last gasp, he will awaken and grab the player's hand, dragging him with him to his grave. The player concerned can make a Strength test of medium difficulty (10) to free his arm, or hard (15) if he wishes to snatch the medallion at the same time. He must then pass a Dexterity test of medium difficulty (10) to escape in time, avoiding the rockslides.

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



Galarond, the masked man

Galarond had been commissioned 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 Alliance members. Unfortunately for him, once he came face to face with the king, the latter decided to lock him up in Aethel's gaols to keep the matter quiet. He is now used as a mere puppet in the service of Elcan and his ambitions.

Tolan's letter

An intriguing word, inviting those who find it to join its mysterious author on Tolan. It's written on stiff white paper, in stark contrast to the parchment paper commonly used. The letter is signed with the initials X. J.

In any case, the PCs will have to flee quickly after their fight if they don't want to perish under the rubble.

Losing to Elcan

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

The PCs will then have to pass a Dexterity roll of medium difficulty (10) to escape from the temple while dodging their opponents. Some PCs may sacrifice themselves heroically to leave the field clear 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 leave Aethel quickly: they are being actively sought by the city's guards, and no doubt Jorora will go and warn them as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, there's a good chance that the Alliance will try to silence them for good. The PCs' future seems uncertain and full of pitfalls. Their only option seems to be to leave Rautha for good and explore the world to find a new home. If not, they can face all their enemies!

Depending on their choices and actions, the PCs can be given several pieces of information for the rest of their adventure.

The PCs have retrieved the letter from the portal

The letter indicates that someone in Tolan is looking to help the people of Rautha. To this end, she intends to open a passage during the next eclipse, to enable dialogue between these two peoples.

Problem: Klodenn's temple is devoid of artifacts, and the collapse of

Epheria's temple resulted in the burial of the last artifact.

If the PCs remember the stele at Klodenn temple, they may recall that a jewel was still lit there. This was located to the east of the ancient map of Astrenor. If their deductions are correct, they may conclude that a still-active temple is hidden in the lands of the Elrig theocracy.

Lizerios is alive

If Lizerios emerges from the temple alive, he will tell the young men that they must flee Aethel as quickly as possible. Lizerios knows the capital well, and will lead the PCs out of the city along paths with few guards. Once outside, he will warmly thank the PCs for trusting him and trying to avoid the inevitable. He will ask them what they intend to do next.

If they wish to return to the Republic of Rautha, Lizerios will warn them: he is convinced that the Alliance will do anything to silence them in order to avoid a 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 they decide to make contact with Tolan by going to Asgure, Lizerios will offer to accompany them. After all these years of research, Lizerios wants more than anything to unravel the mysteries of Astrenor's past, and there's no doubt that Tolan is where he'll find the answers he's looking for. Lizerios is a good navigator, and his skills could be very useful in reaching Asgure safely.

The PCs decide to return to the Alliance

Unfortunately for them, Lizerios was right. As soon as they arrive in Castle City, the PCs are arrested by Alliance soldiers and brought before President Panorius. Despite everything they say, they are condemned to silence in the capital's gaols... 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 the perfect place to hide the last active temple. However, reaching the theocracy of Elrig is no mean feat. Since the Crater Ocean is impassable by boat, and Tolan is protected by a magical shield, the quickest way is to cross the Sea of Blood, as well as the territories of Dezolation and the Empire of Korimdor.

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

AWARDS

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

Objectives	Awards
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've completed the first Astrenor campaign. Now it's your turn to write the next chapter in your adventures!

Would you like to continue the adventure and support the project?

If so, you can purchase our «Secrets of Astrenor» document, which provides all the information you need to understand the universe and unlock its mysteries.

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

APPENDIX

MAP OF AETHEL



MESSAGE HIDDEN IN BREAD

Alliance adventurers, you're in great danger here!

This key will open the door to your cell.

Wait for the changing of the guard, which should take place around midnight, and take advantage of the opportunity to escape.

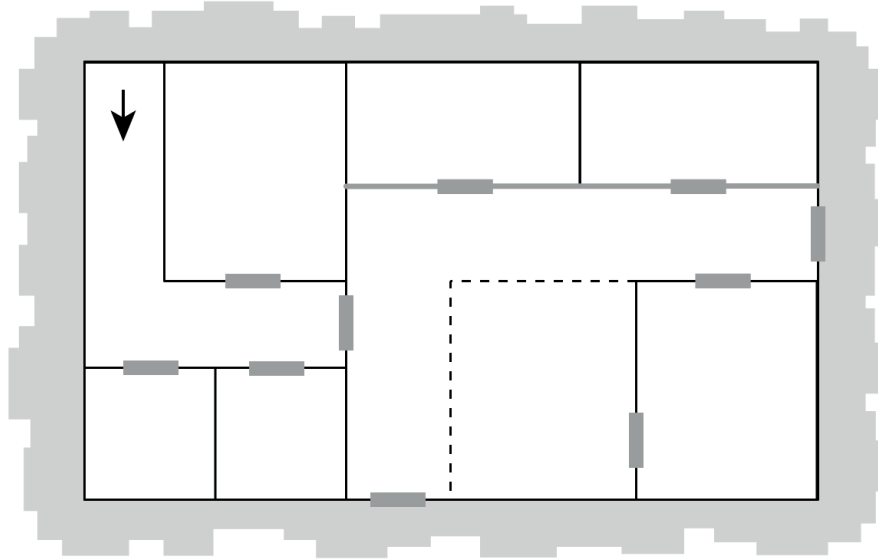
Stay vigilant and don't let anyone spot you.

I'll be waiting for you at the east entrance to the building.

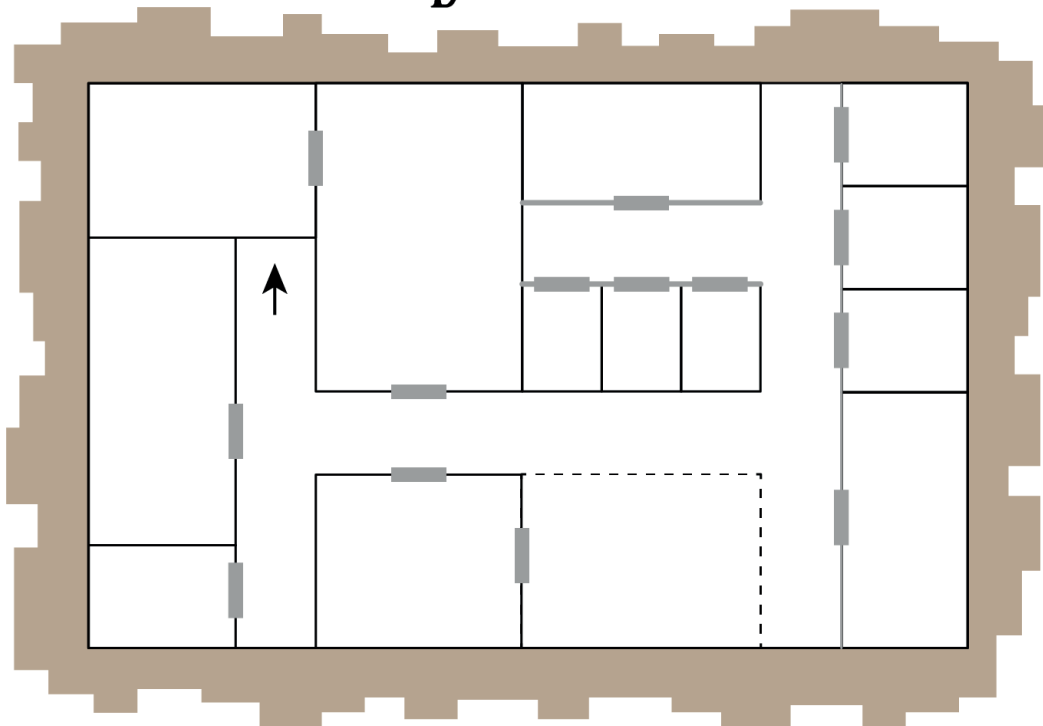
I'll explain everything in due course.

PLAN OF THE PRISON PC SIDE

FIRST FLOOR

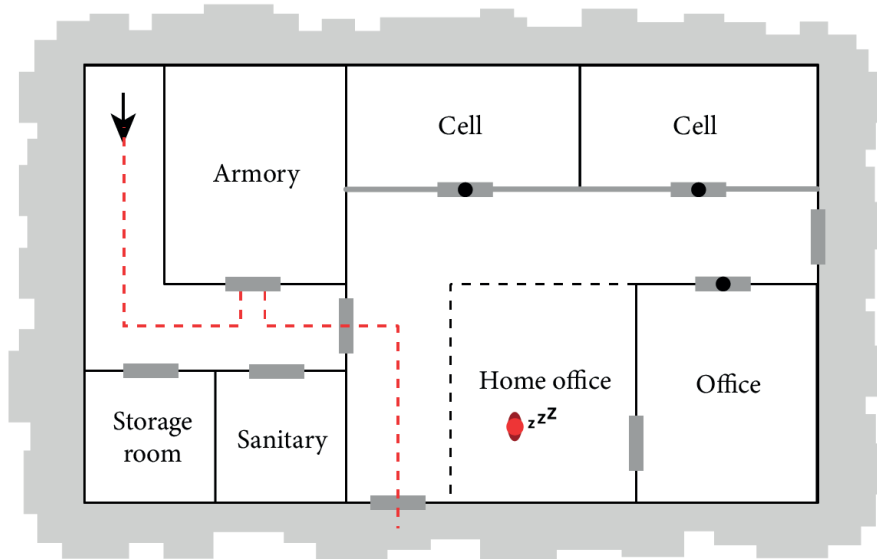


BASEMENT

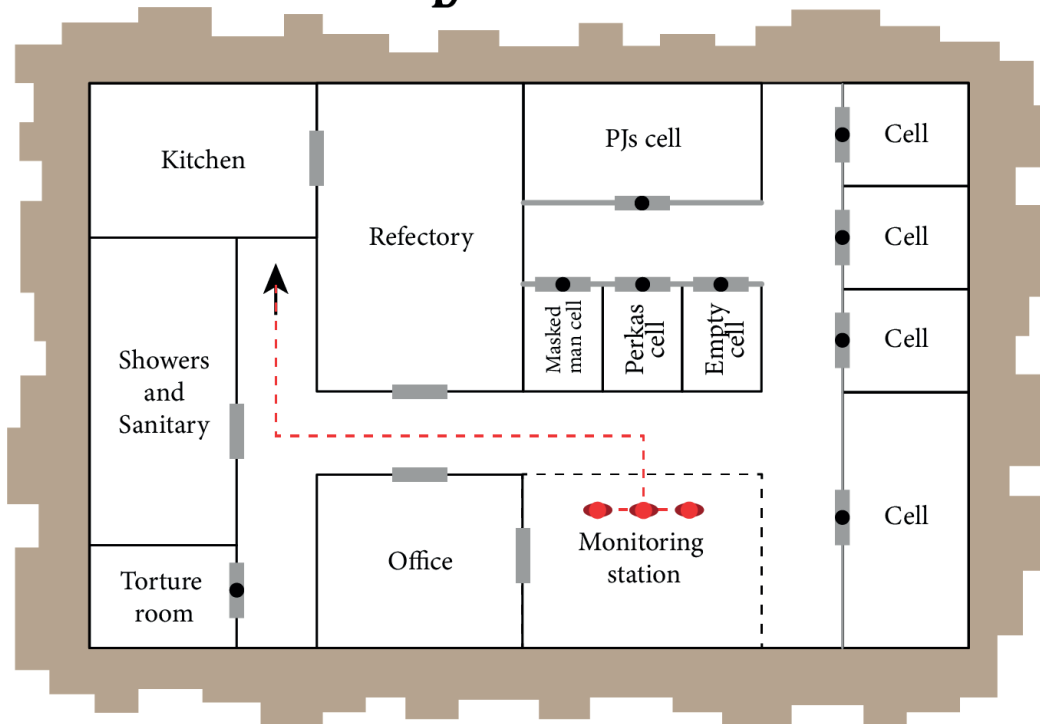


PLAN OF THE PRISON GM SIDE







FIRST FLOOR



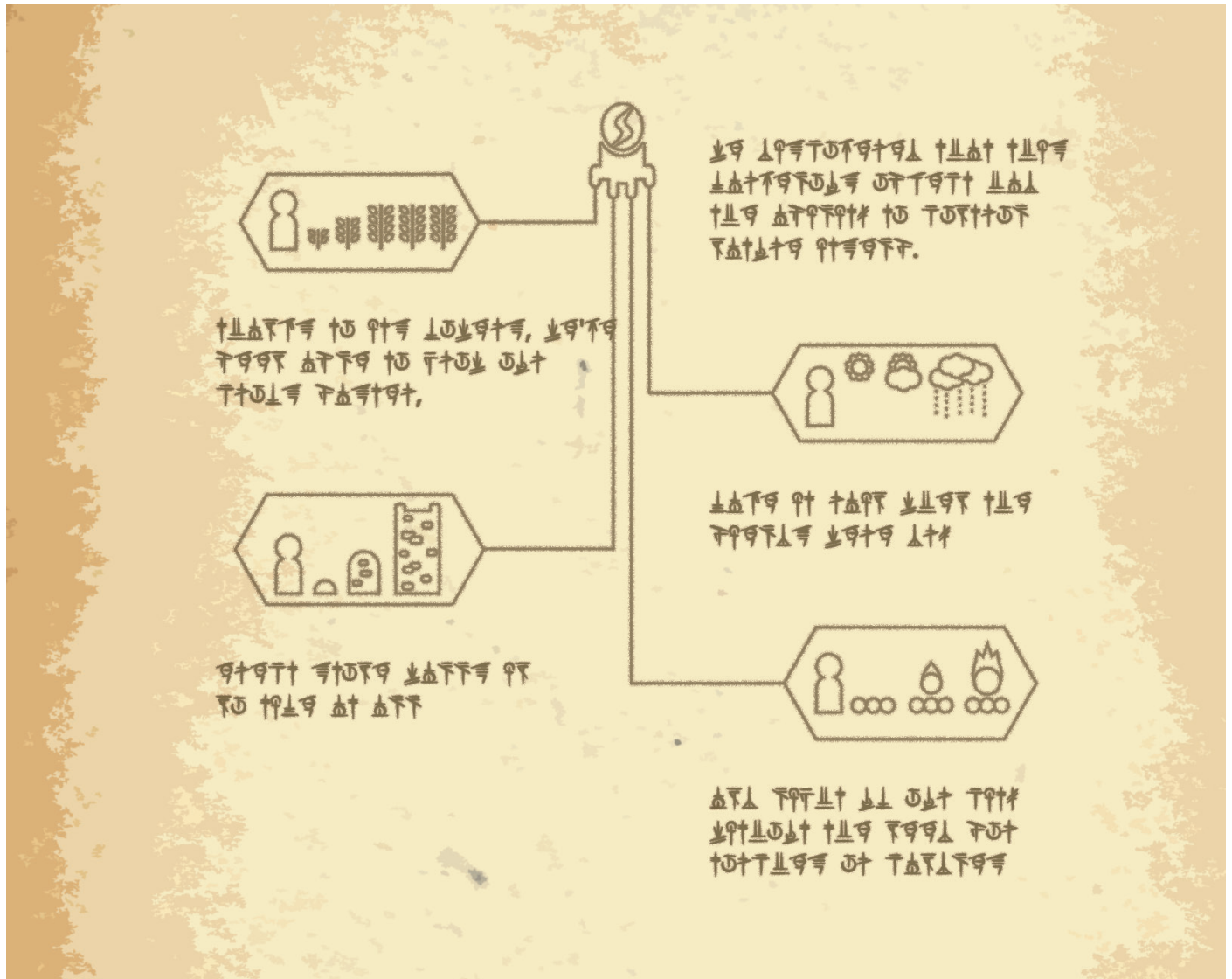
BASEMENT



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

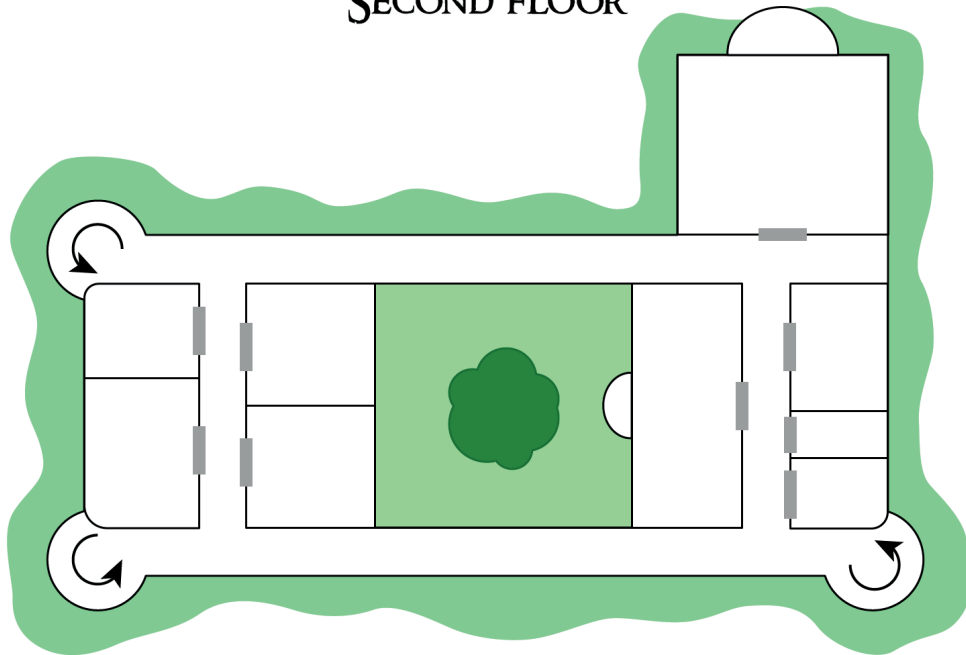


OLD MAP OF IZERIOS - AFTER

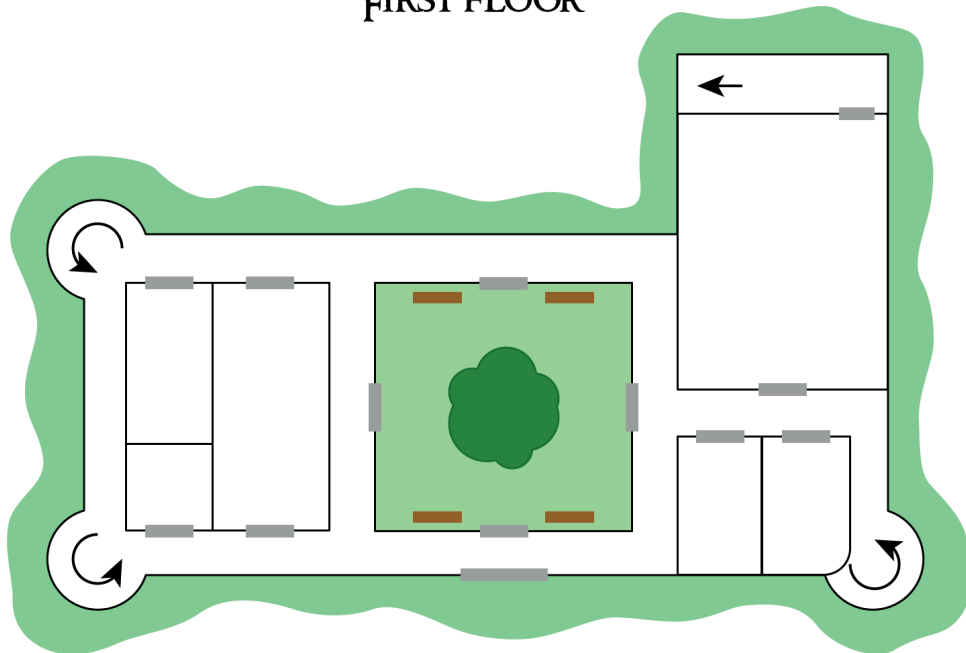


PLAN OF AETHEL CASTLE PC SIDE

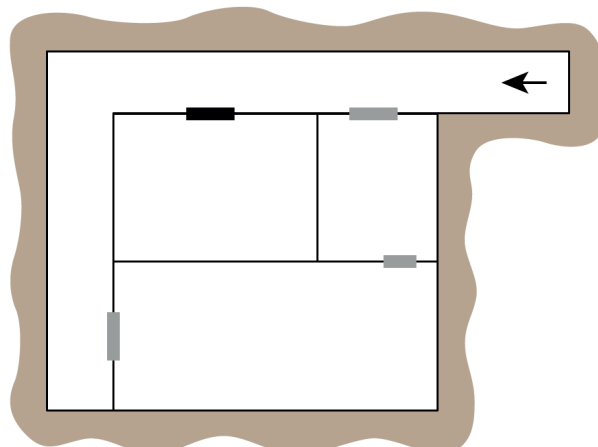
SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

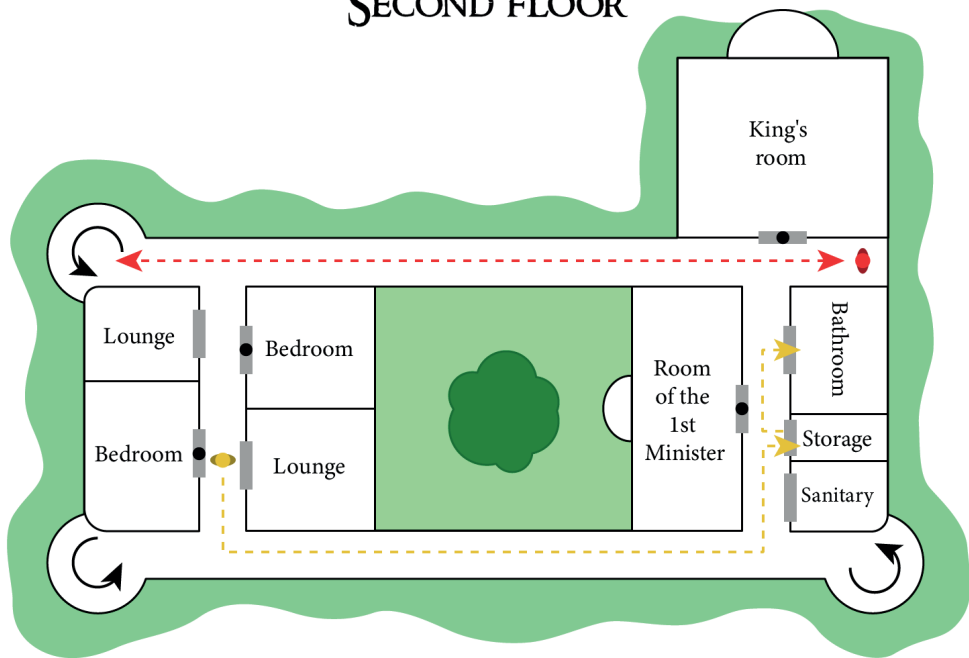


BASEMENT

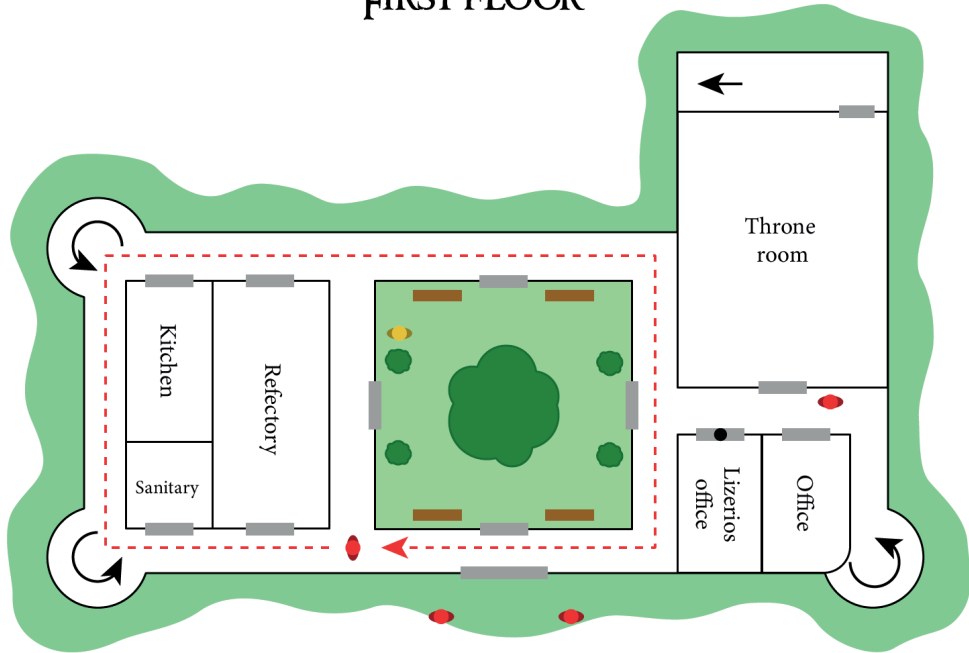


PLAN OF AETHEL CASTLE GM SIDE

SECOND FLOOR



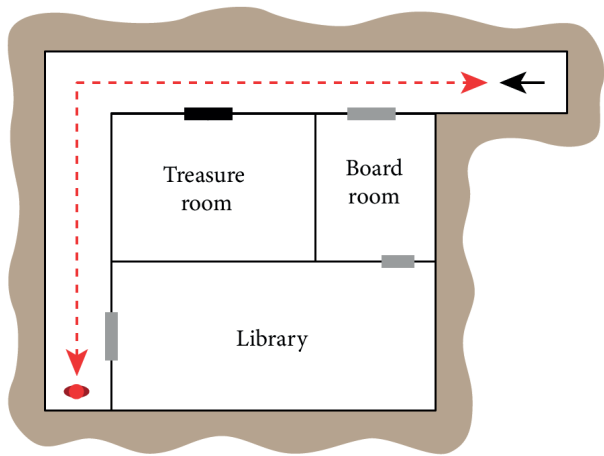
FIRST FLOOR



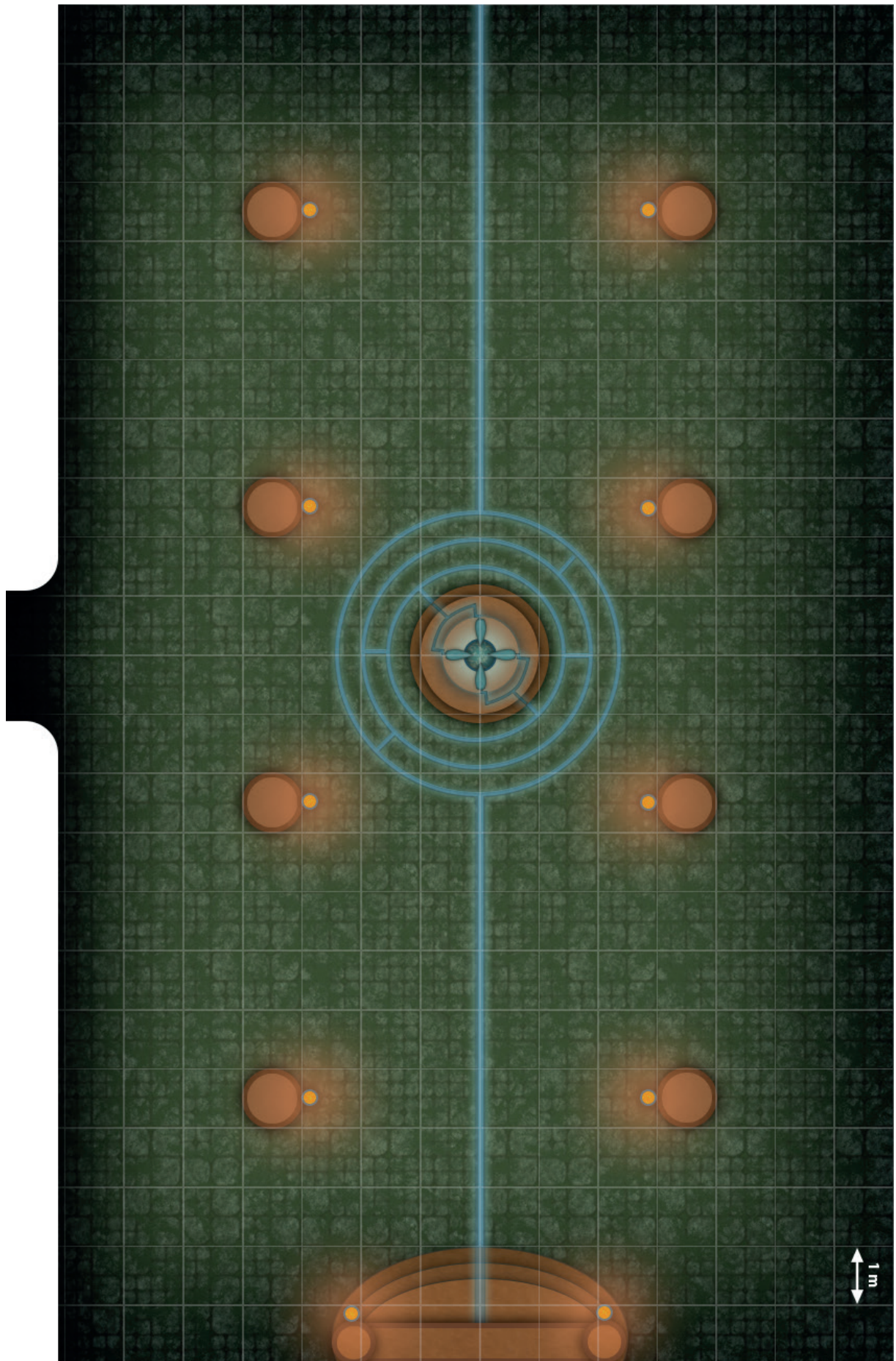
BASEMENT

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 AETHIEL



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

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Spear	2m max	D20-2	1D8+STR+DEX

Armor	Prerequis.	Malus	AP
Studded leather armor	None		2

CASTLE GUARD

Warrior : 4

HP : 20 4-6 EP : 15

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

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Sword	Melee	D20	1D10+STR

Armor	Prerequis.	Malus	AP
Half-plate armor	Constitution > 1	-2 Dexterity	4
Shield	Strength > 1	-	2*

*only applicable in defensive position

ELCAN IN OGRE SHAPE

HP : 10+15/PJ 2 EP : 20

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

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Pylon	2m max multi-target*	D20	1D10+STR
Stone throwing	15m max	D20	1D12

*all targets within a 2m radius of him

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

Strengths : Robust+, Giant

Special moves : Fury, Reversal

MASKED MAN

Warrior / Wizard : 4

HP : 29 4 EP : 16

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

Weapon	Range	ATK	DMG
Quality sword	Melee	D20+4	1D12+STR

Armor	Prerequis.	Malus	AP
Half-plate armor	Constitution > 1	-2 Dexterity	4

Special moves : Fury, Health, Reversal, Absorption, Divine Shield

LIZERIOS

HP : 15 EP : 15

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

JORORA

HP : 15 EP : 15

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