

SCARRED LANDS



THE SERPENT AMPHORA

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Credits

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Introduction

The Serpent Amphora is an adventure for characters of approximately 6 to 8 total levels. It is set in the small riverside village of Trela, on the border of New Venir and the Blood Steppes, during the Carnival of Flowers, the second Wildday of Tanot. It is suggested that the characters include a divine spellcaster, someone with the Heal skill and several decent fighters.

Player's Background

The PCs are all in the village of Trela during the Carnival of Flowers. The village has decided to celebrate the feast day with games during the day and feasting, music and dancing during the evening. During the day of celebration, the boats that sometimes take caravans up and down the river that forms a border between New Venir and Lageni do not run, meaning that many traders are forced to spend the Carnival day in Trela. The PCs might themselves be citizens of the village, members of a trading caravan waiting for the boats to start running again, or folk from outlying farms who have come to enjoy the festival.

Adventure Background

A small Veshian Vigil have seized a true prize – an amphora, crafted of lead and sealed with a molten metal seal that is marked with the scepter & laurel wreath of Chardun. The Vigil seized the amphora

from the storm hag Hielaa and her minions on the edge of the Hornsaw and Blood Steppes. The hag fled back to its covey with word of this, while the Vigil was pursued all across the Blood Steppes, where time and again they were caught up to. In encounter after encounter, the servants of the covey caught up to them and more of them fell, sacrificing themselves to allow their fellows time to escape, hoping to return the Serpent Amphora to Vesh, where it might be defended against the servitors of Mormo properly.

Unfortunately, it seems as though it will never make it back to Vesh. Eôchaid, a junior ranger of the Vigil is the last to survive. Just outside of the village, he was caught up to by more of the covey's servitors and badly wounded. In the battle, he was poisoned by a crossbow bolt. He finds a PC to give the Amphora to and bids them journey to Vesh if they would prevent the servants of Mormo from gaining yet more power in the Scarred Lands.

In truth, the amphora holds some of the viscera of Mormo. This is not all, however – when Chardun trapped the Queen of Hags – his own mother – in her physical form so that she might be rent asunder without reforming elsewhere, he plucked a fistful of viscera from the very center of her form, drawing upon his own powers as the God of Bindings to lock part of her vital essence within it. He then thrust it within a divinely-crafted leaden amphora lest the sheer elemental power of it corrupt all that it touched, even Chardun himself. The vile ichor seeped down

Friends of Friends

In an effort to cut down on the sheer amount of time it often takes introducing PCs to one another, as well as lessening the improbability factor of absolute strangers undertaking dangerous event with complete strangers, the GM is encouraged to have each of the players' characters know at least one other PC.

Residents of a village the size of Trela are going to invariably know one another, especially if they share interests such as arcane magic, battle, faith or just adventuring. If PCs are travelers, they may have made friends with a resident of the village the last time they passed through here, or they might have relatives in Trela.

Also note that there is no inn in Trela – caravans usually quickly load up aboard a barge and sleep aboard that vessel. Thus, many are forced to seek shelter with denizens of the village who are willing to make some extra coin in exchange for allowing travellers to bed down beside the hearth. Any of these might be reasons why the PCs know one another.

Ranger PCs and the Vigil Story

At the GM's option, it might very well be a ranger PC who is the last part of the Vigil. Replace Eôchaid with a ranger PC in the above scenario, except that he should not be poisoned and on the verge of death; instead, allow him to stumble into town with only 1/3 of his regular hit points.

If the GM decides to use this option, she is encouraged to take the ranger PC aside and explain the events of the previous weeks. The ranger has come to Trela because it sits on the river that might be taken north into Vesh.

The GM is also encouraged to use the 'Friends of Friends' sidebar above and have the ranger PC know at least one other PC that he might go to upon entering town. He might know a villager here, having passed through here before joining the Vigil, he might know a caravaner or even have been born in the village in the first place.

the sides of it, burning serpentine forms into the lead of the vessel, but Chardun bound it with his own seal, empowering it with part of his power to prevent it from ever being opened.

The amphora cannot be opened, nor can the seal be broken. Even the mightiest of blows leaves it unscathed. Chardun has been known to send barbed-whip wielding devils to punish those who try to open it. Throughout the century and a half after the Titanswar, the Serpent Amphora has been gained and lost by countless creatures on either side of the conflict – this adventure details but another such turn of fate.

The Village of Trela

Trela is a small village along the river that runs from the large lake in the midst of the Kelders and into King Virduk's lands, forming the eastern border of New Venir, the western border of Lageni until it empties into Lake Vashon in Calastia.

Trela was founded in response to the number of trading caravans coming from Vesh seeking to use it as a jump-off point for continued travel into Calastia or east along the New Venir border towards the city-states and nations of the west.

The village is ruled by a River-master, who is the appointed representative of Prince Urlis. Trela is supported by taxes taken from caravans coming down the river in the lands of King Virduk, as well as the fees collected from the boatmen who use the village as their main place of business. The village's food comes from the river, as well as a few small farmsteads south of the village.

Authority Figures

River-master Phuram Dayal (LN male human Rog5; Diplomacy +8, Sense Motive +8, Use Rope +7), the head of the river operations and de facto leader of Trela.

Radraan of Belsameth (NE male human Clr4; Alchemy +3, Spellcraft +5), Keeper of the Midnight Shrine, the local shrine to Belsameth. Radraan is a

silken speaker and very charismatic, though his charming smiles rarely reach his eyes.

Jonegar (N male half-orc War7), Captain of the Riverguard, Trela's militia force.

Important Characters

Paransala (LE female human Wiz3) is the only real wizard of note in Trela. It is whispered that she and Radraan are lovers and co-conspirators (though most refrain from commenting on exactly what they are allegedly conspiring on).

Talbot Cormath (NG male half-elf Brd3), the Bard of Trela, is well-loved by most of the citizens of Trela, for he spends most of his days wandering the town with a tune on his harp and a song on his lips.

Locales of Note

The Riverhouse: The large dock-side offices and warehouses of the River-master, the Riverhouse also serves Trela as a defacto town center and meeting hall. At any time of the day, citizens of the town can be found here, seeking the council or permission of the River-master for some piece of bureaucracy or another.

The Midnight Shrine: This small windowless building houses the town's only altar – dedicated, in this case, to Belsameth. The large door is engraved with the symbol of the Slayer, and remains shut during the daylight hours. Only during the night is it open for the prayers and sacrifices required of the faithful of Belsameth.

Trela

Village, Pop. 450

(Humans: 70%, Halflings: 26%, Half-orcs: 2%, Elves: 1%, Dwarves: 1%)

Gold Piece Limit: 200 gp

Assets: 4500 gp

Militia:

- 5 Riverguards (Full-time)
- 23 Conscriptable Individuals

Chapter 1: The Carnival of Flowers

At the GM's option, the PCs might be allowed to enter games, though they should be made aware that no magic is allowed, a restriction enforced by the town's cleric and wizard who use *detect magic*. Indeed, if the GM chooses, the PCs might even gain XP awards for winning

these competitions. It should be decided beforehand how these XP awards are going to be handled, however – either giving individually to those who win, or simply added to the general pool divided up at the end of the game session. Each competition is considered to be a CR 1/2 encounter.

Also, in order to avoid boredom on the part of the other PCs, it is suggested that the GM have the other PCs play the roles of the contestants, including role-playing them as appropriate. Allow them to decide on personality and other minor traits for their contestants, while the GM gives them their relevant scores (mainly skill or ability bonuses).

The Footraces

The first competition, scheduled for about two hours before noon are the footraces. There are about five contestants signed up, plus any of the PCs. A large track has been delineated around the outside of the village, around which the runners will run a total of five circuits. The prize is a bag of fifty silvers and a pair of extraordinarily comfortable masterwork traveler's boots which grant a +1 circumstance bonus to the Constitution save to resist subdual damage when performing a forced march.

System: Roll and add the character's Dexterity bonus for each circuit. Those with a speed other than 30 ft. must add or subtract the difference as a bonus or penalty; for example, a halfling with a speed of 20 ft will subtract 10 from every roll, whereas the barbarian with a speed of 40 adds 10.

At the end of each circuit, tally the total roll from that circuit and add it to the totals from the circuit before. The character with the highest total is first, followed by the second highest total, etc. At the end of the fifth circuit, tally all five totals to determine finish order.

At any point, a character can "push himself," granting his roll for that circuit a +5 circumstance modifier, but inflicting 1d6 subdual damage on himself. Assume that the competing runners have Dexterity bonuses of 1d6-1 and are Commoners of 1d4 levels. Each has a 10% chance of having a higher speed (assume a speed of 40); those who do not have a higher speed have a 5% chance of having a lower speed (assume a speed of 20).

Elder Rod Duels

After the footraces, duels are held in the town square. Combatants are armed with elder rod weapons (heavy but flexible bamboo-like plants) that inflict subdual damage. Only melee weapons are allowed, and all combatants must be fitted with padded armor, provided by the contest. There are a large number of contestants; a PC will end up battling between three and five opponents. The victor of this competition is given a suit of chain mail and the weapon of his choice.

System: This contest uses standard combat rules. For ease's sake, allow each of the other PCs to create one of the opponents the competing PC will face. The first two opponents should be 1st level Warriors, with each opponent after that increasing in Warrior level by one. Assume that opponents have Strength, Dexterity and Constitution of 10+1d8; calculate hit points, Base Attack Bonus, Feats and AC appropriately.

If two PCs sign up for the duels, have the last duel be between them (assuming they defeat their opponents). In such an instance, the other PCs must create additional combatants as necessary.

Archery Competition

Following the dueling, an archery competition is held. Contestants are to take turns in front of the straw target, which is placed a goodly distance away and covered with a length of tied-down canvas painted with a rough bull's-eye. Each contestant takes turns firing three arrows into the target. The top three contestants are then allowed to continue to the next phase of the competition where the target is moved further back and each of them fires again. The winner is chosen from the best archer of these three and awarded with a fine new quiver and ten masterwork arrows.

System: Each contestant simply rolls his normal attack roll with his bow. To hit the first target is a base DC of 12; those who roll below this number simply fail to hit the target at all. The higher the actual result, the closer the arrow is to the center when it impacts the target. Record the highest of those three rolls. The three contestants who score the highest go on to the second part of the competition, which is handled the same way as the first, save that the base DC is 16.

Competitors are assumed to have attack roll bonuses of 1d8 + 1. The GM should allow the players of those characters not participating in this contest to take on the roles of the competition, simply giving them an attack bonus as determined above.

The Horse Rounds

A large mid-day meal is held while the racing rounds are set up around the town. Once that is finished, the folk of Trela gather to watch the horses race. There are three laps around the town, with the race starting and ending in the large square near the docks. The prize is a fine masterwork saddle and stirrups, which grants a +2 circumstance bonus to Ride checks, worth some 75 gp.

System: The system for this race is simple. Each half-lap requires the contestant to make a Ride check. At the end of the first lap, the highest total is in the lead. The results of each subsequent lap's roll are added to the running total to determine relative places. There will be a total of six rolls throughout the race. Any roll of '1' indicates that the rider is thrown from his horse. He spends the next half-lap returning to his seat and building speed back up, thus losing one roll during the competition. Thrown riders should be permitted a Tumble check (DC 12) to avoid taking any damage; failure in this roll results in 1d6 subdual damage.

Competitors are assumed to have Ride checks of +1d8. As in previous competitions, the GM should allow the players of the characters not participating in this contest to take the roles of the competition.

Bardic Competition

The bardic competition is perhaps the most eagerly looked forward to of all the competitions. The folk of the town turn out to enjoy the music, dancing and listening in rapt fascination at the weavings of the bards and performers who come to compete for the prize: a harp touched in gold and crafted of fine woods (masterwork, granting a +2 circumstance bonus to Perform checks with it). The bardic competitions are also the beginnings of the true festival atmosphere of the day – as the bards play, tables of food and drink are brought out. By the time half of the competitors have performed, night has fallen. The festival continues well into the wee hours of the morning, with music, food and gaiety enjoyed by all.

System: Much like the horse race, each competitor makes several rolls, one for each quarter-hour of performance. Each competitor performs for an hour, permitting him four rolls. The results of all four performances are tallied at the end of the night, once all the musicians have performed to determine the winner.

Competitors are assumed to have Perform checks of +1d8. As in previous competitions, the GM should allow the players of the characters not participating in this contest to take the roles of the competition.

Additional Roleplaying Opportunities

Even those PCs who choose not to become involved in the games will find the Carnival a fine opportunity to engage in some roleplaying.

Spiritual Dilemma: At some point during the day, Radraan of Belsameth approaches a cleric or paladin PC. He explains that he has nothing but

respect for the servants of the other gods, but he must ask that the PC not attempt to proselytize to the flock of Belsameth. Several hours later, the PC is approached by one of the villagers asking about their god and the proper way to worship.

Merchant's Request: An arcane spellcaster PC is approached by a merchant. He has recently come into possession of a fine blade and wishes to know if it is magical. He is of course willing to pay. The longsword is indeed magical – it is a *longsword +1*. He then asks if the mage can determine the exact nature of the enchantment; he is of course willing to pay more. It will take him an hour to get a pearl for the casting of the *identify* spell, during which time he treats the mage to a fine meal.

Note: The merchant has some knowledge of magic, possessing a rank of Spellcraft. He is aware of the standard cost for spellcasting – Caster Level x 5gp for the *detect magic*, Caster Level x 10gp for the *identify*. His has Profession (Merchant) +6 in case the PC wishes to bargain for higher prices.

Bargaining

When haggling for better prices, both parties roll a Diplomacy or Profession (Merchant) check. If the merchant wins, the base price is lowered by 5% for every point above the PC he scored. If the PC wins, the price is increased by the same amount. Note that the price should never drop to less than 50% or increase to more than 150% of normal cost.

Chapter 11: A Midnight IncurSION

As night falls, the winners are congratulated and the losers are slapped on the back and wished better luck next year. Tables are dragged out into the town square and laden down with ample food and drink, as well as huge bouquets of the freshest flowers of the season. Musicians of every ilk play – from professionals and the winners of the bardic competition to the fisherwife and her fiddle. The night is clear and all is beautiful, except for one thing: the Unnamed Moon shines full, eclipsing the sliver of Belsameth's moon, an ill omen that almost everyone notices, but few comment on.

A Stranger in Need

One PC is grabbed roughly by an ill-shaven man in tattered traveler's clothing. The man is obviously dying from the venom on the crossbow bolt. He calls for a priest or other servant of the gods to attend him. PC clerics, druids and paladins are certainly closer than Radraan, who Eôchaid will not have in any event – he demands to be heard by the servant of a god that does not work evil in the lands. Once such a character is with him, he relates his story:

“I thank the gods and the mother of gods for your presence here, priest. I am dying, but before I surrender my soul to Tanil’s mercies, I must tell a tale. I am Eôchaid, of the Vigils of Vesh. In our investigations, we learned of a small covey of hags on the edge of the Hornsaw and the Blood Steppes. We discovered that they had somehow come into possession of a prize that they claimed contained part of the very essence of the foul Hag-queen Mormo.

“Naturally, unwilling to allow them to perform whatever foul rites their kind use such a trophy for, we raided their encampment. At the cost of the lives of two of our men, we seized the amphora, which was marked with the seal of Chardun. We were pursued all across the Blood Steppes, where time and again the minions of the hags caught up to us. Each time more of us fell, providing time to allow the rest of us to escape.

“This must be returned to Vesh. Only there will it be kept safely. I am poisoned, however, and dying. I slew the creatures – foul asaathi snake-men – who pursued me. Will you take this on to Vesh, guarding it with your life until it is safely in the hands of the Vigils? Please, it is of utmost importance – though we don’t know precisely what is in the vessel, the titanspawn have fought too hard to reclaim it. Surely that alone is reason enough to prevent them from getting it? Swear! Swear you shall do this, in the name of your god!”

If the PCs agree to do this task, he croaks out his thanks, blood slightly flecking his lips as he coughs,

Saving the Ranger

If the PCs are adamant about saving the man’s life, don’t quash their wish to do a good deed – these are the deeds that heroes are about, not killing monsters. At the end of his story, he is going to have to make a Fortitude save (DC 13, damage 1d6 temporary Constitution). This would normally be a relatively simple thing for Eôchaid to do, considering his normal Fortitude save of +5 (2nd level ranger + Constitution of 14). However, he has taken 11 points of Constitution damage from various hits, meaning that his Fortitude saves are now at –1. A skilled healer, however, might be able to help him (see the *core rulebook I*, p69 for details on how the Heal skill can be used to help those who are poisoned).

Regardless of this, Eôchaid is going to be need plenty of recovery time. That evening when the asaathi attack, they are going to be looking for him. If they find him, they will simply kill him, especially when they discover that he doesn’t have the amphora.

giving them the amphora. The amphora is crafted of lead and sealed with a metal seal impressed with the scepter and laurel-wreath symbol of Chardun. The amphora itself is decorated with a twisting, intricate pattern of intertwined snakes that just seems to move at the edge of sight and makes most folk queasy when looked upon directly.

Unless one of the PCs decides to do something quickly to help him, Eôchaid enters a deep sleep. Sometime during the night, he dies, peacefully. If the PCs do decide to try and save him, see the sidebar entitled “Saving the Ranger.”

A Visit from Radraan

During the evening, the PCs are visited by Radraan, the cleric of Belsameth. He asks if the story he has heard about the Veshan Vigilant are true. He offers to take the amphora and see that it reaches the hands of King Virduk himself, who will undoubtedly be better able to defend it than a nation besieged on all sides by titanspawn. He makes it very clear that the king will undoubtedly be thankful to them and undoubtedly offer them a reward of some kind. He becomes increasingly insistent that he be allowed to take the amphora.

It will be difficult to escape this encounter without making Radraan an enemy, short of simply giving him the amphora. He does not attack them, however, unless they initiate the aggression. His goal is to get the amphora and deliver it to his elders in the church, who might be able to turn its power – whatever it may be – to their advantage.

Serpent-men in Trela

It is deep at night when the amphora begins to quake and tremble. A strange purple-blue glow begins to emanate from the symbol of Chardun in the leaden seal. As all the PCs become aware of it, the glow surrounds the amphora and suddenly a man in white regalia whose sandaled feet are spattered with blood and powdered bone is standing before it. His countenance is terrible to behold and all who try to gaze upon it are forced to avert their gaze. Chains rattle at his belt and then he speaks.

“Fools. Flee this place, for the spawn of the Hag are upon thee.”

The image then disappears. Anyone with any ranks in Knowledge (Religion) knows that this image matches that of common depictions of Chardun. A scant few moments pass to allow the PCs discuss this among themselves. In the midst of their preparations, their location is attacked by asaathi.

The asaathi are just one of three groups who are searching for the ranger and the amphora he bears. Two asaathi burst into the room, but once they catch sight of the amphora, one sounds a horn, which brings other

A Vision of Chardun

The sight of Chardun is a momentous occurrence. This should be the first indication to the PCs that something important is going on and it has to do with the amphora.

The image of Chardun is not solid. All who see it are forced to make Will saves, DC 18. Those who succeed may simply avert their gaze from the image; failure indicates that the character collapses to his knees in silent, fearful supplication. For a full day afterward, any time the PCs close their eyes, they are assailed with a vision of the horrible glory of Chardun, burned into their minds like an afterimage of the sun.

asaathi running. Every minute (ten rounds), another trio of asaathi show up at the site where the horn was blown.

Asaathi Hunting Groups

Encounter Level: 4

The asaathi have been organized into parties of two while raiding the village. They will not stay to fight, but rather burst through rooms, gaining surprise on its inhabitants and striking down those who appear as though they might be a danger, searching frantically for the amphora.

There are three hunting parties, made up of an asaath wizard and a normal asaathi. All the asaathi carry bags into which they will drop or scoop the amphora, even ignoring an opponent if necessary, thereby provoking an attack of opportunity.

It is frankly essential that the asaathi carry off the amphora. Use the following tactics to help achieve this aim:

- An asaathi wizard casts *grease* upon the amphora, causing those who hold it to drop it.
- Multiple asaathi grapple the one holding the amphora while others dart in and snatch it up.
- An asaathi wizard can cast *mage hand* upon a dropped amphora, whisking it to himself or another asaath.
- Some of the asaathi may lurk in the rooftops, waiting to be thrown the amphora. They are quick to escape or hide.

Note that the asaathi are very powerful opponents against first level characters. It should be emphasized that they are not here to slay the PCs – they are here to seize the amphora. They will virtually ignore attackers unless those attacks inflict damage on them. If the PCs do not surrender the amphora, however, the asaathi do not hesitate to kill those who actually hold it.

Asaathi

CR 2; Size M (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 3d8+3; hp 16; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 20 (+3 Dex, +5 Natural, +2 serpent leather); Attack +4 scimitar (1d6+1), +4 bite (1d3+1 + poison), +4 tail slap (1d6+1), +4 unarmed strike (1d3+1), +8 javelin (1d6+1); Face: 5 ft by 5 ft./5 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +5; AL CE; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 13.

Special Attacks: Poison (Fortitude save DC 14 or fall into toxic shock for 2d4+2 minutes); *Special Qualities:* Keen Senses (lowlight at triple range, darkvision 60', scent 30').

Skills: Alchemy +5, Escape Artist +3, Hide +3, Jump +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +10, Search +4, Spellcraft +9, Spot +3, Use Magic Device +3;

Languages: Asaathi, Draconic

Feats: Blind Fight, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Expertise, Run.

Possessions: burlap sacks, scimitars, serpent-skin leather, 3 javelins.

Source: Creature Collection, p12-13.

Asaath Wizards

CR 3; Size M (6 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 3d8+3 + 1d4+1; hp 15; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 18 (+3 Dex, +5 Natural); Attack +5 scimitar (1d6+1), +6 thrown daggers (1d4+1); Face: 5 ft by 5 ft./5 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +8; AL CE; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 12.

Special Attacks: Poison (Fortitude save DC 14 or fall into toxic shock for 2d4+2 minutes); *Special Qualities:* Keen Senses (lowlight at triple range, darkvision 60', scent 30').

Skills: Alchemy +5, Concentration +5, Escape artist +3, Hide +3, Jump +6, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Listen +5, Move silently +10, Profession +6, Search +4, Spellcraft +9, Spot +2, Use magic device +1; *Languages:* Asaathi, Common, Draconic

Feats: Blind-fight, Combat reflexes, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Run, Scribe scroll.

Possessions: 2 potions of cure light wounds, burlap sacks, hip-flasks of swamp-melon wine, masterwork scimitar, spellbook (see below for details)

Spells Prepared (3/2): 0-lvl – detect magic, mage hand x2; 1st – acid spittle*, grease.

Spellbook: 0-lvl – all 0-lvl spells from core rulebook I, plus Relics & Rituals; 1st – acid spittle*, grease, magic missile, summon monster I.

Source: Creature Collection, p12-13.

(* Spells marked with an asterisk are from **Relics & Rituals**)

Chapter III:

Hunt for the Amphora

The characters may very well be disheartened and bloodied after the battle. If necessary, remind them of the oaths they made to Eóchaid. Should any decide to give up their oath, the after-image of Chardun's baleful glare reappears in their mind's eye, blocking out all other sights – clearly a threat from the Slaver.

Additionally, Radraan finds them shortly thereafter, very fearfully telling them of the vision of Chardun he just had. He has arrived to help anyone that he may, using healing spells and even willing to utilize a prized *raise dead* scroll to aid them – so long as they continue on and recapture the amphora, so that Chardun will release his mind.

The townsfolk are unwilling to assist the PCs in this – they have little in the way of weapons and equipment to spare, nor are they willing to permit the PCs to take away some of their valuable soldiers, lest the creatures attack again.

Into the Blood Steppes

The PCs venture out into the Blood Steppes, following the trail of the asaathi. The asaathi trail is relatively easy to follow, as they are moving as quickly as possible and not bothering to remain secretive; anyone who makes a Search roll (DC 10) may follow this trail without need of the Track feat.

A day out of the town, it appears that they stopped for a while and milled about as well. A body of an asaathi lies pulled away from the main area and aban-

doned under some scrub bushes. It is very dead and appears to have been killed by some kind of energy.

A Track roll using Wilderness Lore (DC 14) will tell the tale of what occurred here. It appears that a creature that walks bipedally on rat feet – one of the slitheren, no doubt – met the asaathi. There was some kind of scuffle and the asaathi was slain, undoubtedly by spell.

The Doll Trap

Encounter Level: 2

The red witch Storm of Blood made sure to leave readily observable, if confusing signs, hoping that the PCs might investigate. She has left a trio of the tiny constructs referred to as the totems of Mormo in the area, gifts given to her by Heliaa, her storm hag mistress.

These little creatures have been ordered to hitch rides with the PCs in saddlebags and the like. When the PCs arrive, have them make Spot checks (DC 25) to spot the small constructs hidden in the underbrush. As the PCs search, the little creatures creep up into the saddlebags of the PCs' horses, granting an opportunity to spot them with a Spot check (DC 20). Note that the PCs are only allowed to make these Spot checks if the totems move into sight range of the PC. They will attempt to sneak around the clearing to gain access to the horses and saddlebags.

Should the PCs spot one of them, the creature will attack, while the others secure hiding places in backpacks and other such spots. The totems are imbued with *shocking grasp*, cast at the 3rd level of ability.

The second part of the totems' orders involves waiting until nightfall, when the PCs are camping. As the PCs camp and sleep, while only a few of them are on watch, the little totems sneak out of the bags and launch their spells. Note that because they are attacking those who are sleeping helplessly, they are assumed to be performing a *coup de grace*. The characters on watch do gain the chance to Spot them (again, DC 20). In such a case, he is only going to see the first one he actually spots, unless he starts looking for more after he spots the first one.

If he attacks immediately, he is permitted a single partial action before the little construct can attack its sleeping victim. Alternately, if he shouts a warning, he may be able to prevent the *coup de grace* from occurring. Those who are sleeping need only make a Listen roll (DC 8) in order to not only hear him but to jerk up out of sleep in time.

What Actually Happened

The asaathi met their immediate superior, the red witch slitheren called Storm of Blood, at this pre-arranged spot. She demanded that they hand over the amphora to her immediately, but one of the asaath wizards proved resistant to that idea. Storm of Blood slew him with her spells and immediately challenged the other asaathi, who backed down before her might.

It is unlikely that the PCs will be able to discover this, unless they have access to some kind of magic that allows them to see in the past or the ability to speak with the animals of the area.

Random Encounters: Blood Steppes Borderlands [ECL: 2]

Day	Night	Creature(number)	ECL	Source
01-04	01-04	Acid Shambler (1)	1	CC2 p6
05-09	–	Badger, Dire (1)	2	CRBIII p56
10-12	–	Blood Moth (12)	3	CC2 p21
13-17	05-10	Charfiend (3)	2	CC p42
–	11-16	Ghoul (1)	1	CRBIII p97
18-24	–	Giant ant, soldier (1)	2	CRBIII p205
25-30	17-19	Giant bombardier beetle (1)	2	CRBIII p206
31-36	20-22	Giant Fire Beetle (3)	1	CRBIII p206
–	23-31	Goblin (8)	2	CRBIII p107
37-42	32-36	Monstrous Centipede, Huge (1)	2	CRBIII p208
43-47	37-41	Monstrous Centipede, Lg (2)	2	CRBIII p208
48-54	42-46	Monstrous Centipede, Med (9)	3	CRBIII p207
55-58	–	Monstrous Scorpion, Lg (2)	3	CRBIII p209
59-63	–	Monstrous Scorpion, Med (1)	1	CRBIII p209
64-68	47-51	Monstrous Spider, Lg (1)	2	CRBIII p210
69-74	52-57	Monstrous Spider, Med (3)	2	CRBIII p210
75-78	58-62	Preychaser (3)	3	CC2 p129
–	63-70	Ratman (5)	2	CC p150
79-83	71-77	Scythe Falcon (1)	2	CC p165
84-87	78-81	Skeleton, Med (3)	1	CRBIII p165
–	82-85	Unlife (2)	1	CC2 p201
88-95	–	Viper, large (1)	2	CRBIII p202
–	86-95	Wolfrat (3)	2	CC2 p213
96-00	96-00	Zombie, Med (4)	2	CRBIII p191

Source Abbreviations: Creature Collection (CC), Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie (CC2), Core Rulebook III (CRBIII)

Totems of Mormo (3)

CR 1; Size T; HD 1d10; hp 5; Init +5 (+3 Dex, +2 size); Spd 30 ft., climb 30 ft.; AC 17 (+3 Dex, +2 size, +2 Natural); Attack +0 2 claws (1d2); Face: 2 1/2 by 2 1/2 /0 ft.; SV Fort –, Ref +3, Will -1; AL CE; Str 10, Dex 17, Con –, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 8.

Special Attacks: Spell (*shocking grasp*); *Special Qualities:* Camouflage (DC 25 to Spot while still, DC 20 when moving), Regeneration 1 (all damage is subdual, except fire and acid), SR 7, damage reduction 5/+1, Construct.

Source: Creature Collection 2, p194.

Coup de Grace with shocking grasp

Because *shocking grasp* requires an attack roll to hit, it may be used to perform a *coup de grace*. The totem is assumed to automatically hit and inflict a critical; thus damage from the spell attack is doubled to 2d8 +6 points of damage. Additionally, those who are successfully hit with a *coup de grace* must make a Fortitude save (DC of 10 + the amount of damage taken) or simply die.

Travel through the Blood Steppes

The PCs are taking their lives in their hands by traveling through the Blood Steppes, known for its danger barrenness and the proliferation of Titanspawn and other horrors. The following chart includes random encounters. Such encounters occur at a distance of 6d6 x 10 ft, or at the limit of sight during the night. Use Table 3-2 in the *core rulebook II*, pg 60 in order to determine the Spot rolls for such encounters to notice the PCs, and for the PCs to notice them.

The PCs continue to travel through the Blood Steppes for another three days. The chance to get a random encounter is 5% per hour; the GM is encouraged to simply make one roll per six hour block, at a 30% chance. If a block of six hours comes up with a random encounter, it is rolled using d100 on the lists below, rolling on the Day or Night column as appropriate. It should be noted that the creatures on the list below can be slightly above the power level of a 1st – 2nd level party, though not by too much. The PCs are still relatively close to the border of New Venir, a line that most monsters tend to avoid, forcing those weaker than they closer to the dangerous border.

Asaathi Camp

In time, the trail that the PCs are following comes to a small gully with a cliff-face at the furthest end. A small spring jets from the very face of the cliff, forming a small waterfall. At the base of this waterfall is a small marshy area with a number of small slipshod wooden structures, housing the asaathi. Behind the waterfall is a large gaping cavern within which Storm of Blood, the red witch slitheren and her servant ratmen dwell.

On the horizon, a squall seems to be rising from the direction of the Hornsaw Forest. A Wilderness Lore roll (DC 15) will indicate that this sudden storm, which is moving with great rapidity towards them, is not natural.

If the PCs are careful to remain unseen it will be relatively easy to sneak up on the encampment. There are four normal ratmen, working in pairs, patrolling the area around the waterfall. A Spot roll (DC 15) also reveals a pair of ratmen at the top of the cliff watching the gully and its environs. If the PCs are not careful, these watchers will see them and blow a horn to alert the rest of the encampment.

The asaathi from the raid are quartered in the three ramshackle structures at the base of the waterfall. There are six of them, three normal asaathi and three wizards, minus any that the PCs managed to slay during the attack on Trela in Chapter 2. The sounds of battle will draw the patrolling ratmen, as well as alert the six ratmen within the cavern behind the waterfall, who will rush out three rounds after battle has begun to assist. One of the ratmen stays behind at Storm of Blood's behest.

Asaathi

CR 2; Size M (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 3d8+3; hp 16; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 20 (+3 Dex, +5 Natural, +2 serpent leather); Attack +4 scimitar (1d6+1), +4 bite (1d3+1 + poison), +4 tail slap (1d6+1), +4 unarmed strike (1d3+1), +8 javelin (1d6+1); Face: 5 ft by 5 ft./5 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +5; AL CE; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 13.

Special Attacks: Poison (Fortitude save DC 14 or fall into toxic shock for 2d4+2 minutes); *Special Qualities:* Keen Senses (lowlight at triple range, darkvision 60', scent 30').

Skills: Alchemy +5, Escape Artist +3, Hide +3, Jump +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +10, Search +4, Spellcraft +9, Spot +3, Use Magic Device +3;

Languages: Asaathi, Draconic

Feats: Blind Fight, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Expertise, Run.

Possessions: burlap sacks, scimitars, serpent-skin leather, 3 javelins.

Source: Creature Collection, p12-13.

Asaath Wizards

CR 3; Size M (6 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 3d8+3 + 1d4+1; hp 15; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 18 (+3 Dex, +5 Natural); Attack +5 scimitar (1d6+1); +6 thrown daggers (1d4+1); +4 bite (1d3+1 + poison), +4 tail slap (1d6+1), +4 unarmed strike (1d3+1); Face: 5 ft by 5 ft./5 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +8; AL CE; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 12.

Special Attacks: Poison (Fortitude save DC 14 or fall into toxic shock for 2d4+2 minutes); *Special Qualities:* Keen Senses (lowlight at triple range, darkvision 60', scent 30').

Skills: Alchemy +5, Concentration +5, Escape artist +3, Hide +3, Jump +6, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Listen +5, Move silently +10, Profession +6, Search +4, Spellcraft +9, Spot +2, Use magic device +1; *Languages:* Asaathi, Common, Draconic

Feats: Blind-fight, Combat reflexes, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Run, Scribe scroll.

Possessions: 2 potions of cure light wounds, burlap sacks, hip-flasks of swamp-melon wine, masterwork scimitar, spellbook (see below for details)

Spells Prepared (3/2): 0-lvl – detect magic, mage hand x2; 1st – acid spittle*, grease.

Spellbook: 0-lvl – all 0-lvl spells from core rulebook I, plus Relics & Rituals; 1st – acid spittle*, grease, magic missile, summon monster I.

Source: Creature Collection, p12-13.

(* Spells marked with an asterisk are from **Relics & Rituals**)

Slitheren Ratmen

CR 1/2; Size M; HD 1d8+3; hp 7; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft. climb 15 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +1 Natural, +2 leather armor, +1 small shield); Attack +1 scimitar (1d6); or +1 bite (1d3) & -4 claws (2) (1d4); Face: 5 ft by 5 ft./5 ft.; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0; AL LE; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Special Attacks: none; *Special Qualities:* Darkvision 60 ft.

Skills: Escape Artist +3, Hide +2, Jump +1; *Languages:* Slitheren, Common.

Feats: Dodge.

The Storm of Battle

As the PCs battle, a chill, brisk wind picks up and the skies darken. The thunderstorm they saw earlier breaks overhead and the PCs are pelted with fat drops of rain and other debris picked up by the winds. Consult the "Fighting in a Storm" sidebar for the effects of fighting in this kind of weather.

As the storm grows worse, the PCs suddenly notice that there is a figure swooping to and fro among the clouds and peals of thunder. It appears to be that of a vaguely feminine form some nine feet tall,

Fighting in a Storm

Taking actions in the powerful thunderstorm that accompanies the storm hag Hielaa is difficult. The following conditions apply to the environment in which the PCs battle, as per *core rulebook II*, p87:

- **Severe Wind:** In addition to automatically extinguishing any unprotected flames, winds of this magnitude cause protected flames (such as those of lanterns) to dance wildly and have a 50% chance of extinguishing these lights. Ranged weapon attacks and Listen checks are at a -4 penalty. This is the velocity of wind produced by the gust of wind spell.
- **Rain:** Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a -4 penalty to Spot and Search checks. It has the same effect on flames, ranged weapon attacks, and Listen checks as severe wind (see above).
- **Thunderstorm:** In addition to wind and precipitation (usually rain, but sometimes also hail), thunderstorms are accompanied by lightning that can pose a hazard to characters without proper shelter (especially those in metal armor). As a rule of thumb, assume one bolt per minute for a 1-hour period at the center of the storm. Each bolt causes electrical damage equal to 1d10 eight-sided dice.

with hair that whips and writhes about in the strong winds. She swoops down low and comes upon the scene of battle, cackling all the while.

"Fool servants of the usurper gods! Your end is at hand!"

Suddenly, however, the wan light of the area turns a deep purple; the PCs will remember precisely that hue from the manifestation that Chardun made in Trela. Hielaa looks about in confusion and fear. With a clap of thunder that seems to reel even the storm hag, two demonic scaled creatures with wickedly barbed prehensile tails appear. Each bears a wicked, barbed whip and manacle-like bracers about their whips. Their chests are seared with the laurel and scepter symbol of Chardun and they swoop down to attack the hag, who flees to a higher position in the sky. The devils give chase and a fantastic battle begins overhead.

The appearance of these horrific beasts spooks any remaining combatants that the PCs might be facing. These creatures immediately try to flee, even provoking attacks of opportunity in their mad dash to escape.

The Red Witch

As the other combatants escape, the PCs spot another pair of ratmen emerge from the waterfall. They do not engage the PCs, however – one throws a

heavy bag over its back and begins to scale the cliff-wall, obviously trying to reach the top. A Spot roll (DC 15) reveals the shape of the amphora through the wet canvas bag. The rat-creature is climbing slowly, as the wind and rain make the ascent treacherous.

The other slitheren is dressed in deep crimson robes. This is Storm of Blood, Hielaa's red witch slitheren servant. She stands at the base of the cliff and waits for the other ratman to make the ascent. Any who try to stop the climbing slitheren – whether through following it or firing upon it with missile weapons – will be subject to magical attack from Storm of Blood. She is considered to have readied an action, to cast *magic missile* upon anyone who make an aggressive action (including spellcasting) towards the climbing ratman.

Storm of Blood

Female red witch slitheren, Nec3: CR 3; Size M (6 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 3d4+18; hp 30; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 Natural); Attack +3 melee, or +5 ranged; SV Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +7; AL NE; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 23, Int 17, Wis 15, Cha 8.

Special Attacks: Spell; *Special Qualities:* Darkvision 60 ft., Necromancy specialist (+2 to Spellcraft rolls to learn necromancy spells, Forbidden School: Enchantment)

Skills: Alchemy +8, Concentration +11, Escape Artist +5, Hide +5, Jump +3, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (religion) +6, Profession (apothecary) +5, Scry +7, Spellcraft +8; *Languages:* Aquan, Asaathi, Common, Slitheren, Terran.

Feats: Brew Potion, Scribe scroll, Spell Focus (Necromancy)

Possessions: bracers of armor +1, potion of *chameleon skin* (3rd lv1), potion of *rabbit feet* (3rd lv1), scroll of *magic missile* (3rd lv1), scroll of *chill touch* (3rd lv1), scroll of *cause fear* (3rd lv1), small pouch (23 gp and a hematite worth 8 gp), bronze key to chest in cavern.

Spells Prepared (4/4/3): 0-lvl – detect magic, mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost; 1st – glue*, magic missile, shocking grasp x2; 2nd – blazing shield*, ghoulish touch, spectral hand. (Spells marked with an asterisk * are from **Relics & Rituals**.)

Within the Cavern

The cavern itself is very damp, as it is continually filled with the misty spray from the waterfall that forms its entrance. The floor is spread with furs, giving it a musky scent, similar to that of a wet dog. Niches have been carved in the wall up and down its length and filled with scraps of cloth, fur and foliage to serve as cushioning. There are twelve of these niches; those who search the niches thoroughly may make a roll on the following table:

Niche Discoveries

d100 roll	Result
01-30	Nothing
31-40	1d12 gp
41-60	a small collection of bones and teeth
61-70	a wineskin, half filled with soured wine
71-85	1d20 sp
86-00	2d20 cp

Along the eastern side of the cavern hangs a threadbare and moldy tapestry. Pulling it aside reveals the much larger nest used by the red witch. Along the north wall hangs a suit of half-plate which is covered with a thin sheen of rust; three hours of work will clean it up and bring it back to its full worth (600 gp). Nestled down in the nest is a chest. There is little of worth in the rest of the cavern – it was obviously meant only as temporary dwelling.

The Chest

The chest is crafted of strong wood and bound with iron at its corners. It also has iron strips across its length, strengthening the wood. The locking mechanism is kept in good repair, oiled frequently.

Chest: Hardness 5, Hit Points 15, Break DC 23, Open Lock DC 25.

Storm of Blood's Spellbook

The spellbook of the red witch is a large tome given to her by the hag Heliala. It is covered in cracked and faded leather, with brass rivets securing the leather to the wooden cover underneath. The corners and spine are bound in the same rough brass. The pages are crafted of fine parchment.

This spellbook, like many, is made up of 100 pages, 59 of which are filled. The first page serves as something of a title page, enscribed with Storm of Blood's *arcane mark*, a crimson swirl around a name-sigil in the Slitheren writing. It contains the following spells:

0-lvl – *arcane mark*, *chill/warmth*, *clean*, dancing lights, detect magic, detect poison, disrupt undead, *distort shadow*, *dowsing*, *enumerate*, flare, ghost sound, light, mage hand, mending, open/close, prestidigitation, *quick sober*, ray of frost, read magic, resistance, *spark*;

1st – cause fear, *chameleon skin*, chill touch, *glue*, magic missile, message, *rabbit feet*, ray of enfeeblement, shield, shocking grasp;

2nd – *blazing shield*, ghoul touch, spectral hand.

Those spells written in *italics* are from **Relics & Rituals**.

Within this chest is the small treasure accumulated by Storm of Blood and her ratmen. It contains a number of gold and silver coins (1829 sp and 299 gp), as well as a trio of gemstones wrapped in old canvas (a fine piece of amber worth 75 gp, and two tiny chunks of obsidian worth 4 gp and 9 gp). It also contains the spellbook of Storm of Blood, wrapped in oilcloth.

Conclusion

By the time the PCs have defeated Storm of Blood and recovered the Serpent Amphora, the storm hag Heliala has fled toward the Hornsaw, Chardun's devils just behind her. The PCs are free to undertake the journey to Vesh. This journey is beyond the scope of this adventure, but some ideas can be found in the "Journey to Vesh" sidebar.

The Journey to Vesh

There are a number of things that might happen, both good and ill. The PCs have fought long and hard, risking life and limb to recover the Serpent Amphora. Undoubtedly they are going to want to see it to safety. What follows are some basic ideas for continuing with this journey:

- Radraan, the Belsamethan cleric of Trela may have gathered the allies and power he needs to come after the PCs, trying to seize the Amphora. He may have even garnered the assistance of a small troupe of *belsamaug* (Creature Collection, p.16).
- There are many creatures that travel the Blood Steppes that might prove a danger to those seeking to cross its desolate expanses. From the servants of hags to rampaging humanoid tribes to shambling undead, it seems there is no end to the horrors that await those who near this ill place.
- Pursued by enemies, or simply badly wounded and low on supplies, the PCs might seek sanctuary from the normally taciturn dwarves of Burok Torn, repaying them for their assistance by aiding them against the dark elves of Dier Drendal, who may very well seek to seize the Amphora themselves, seeking to harness its vast power.

The Serpent Amphora

Ultimately, the Amphora is sealed against all mortal tampering. No amount of damage will open it or break the seal. The ultimate fate of the Amphora is up to the GM. Perhaps it is hidden away in Vesh, defended against further assaults by the minions of Mormo. Other Titanspawn might manage to seize it, hoping to

use its power to return their own titanic masters to wholeness. Or, the servants of Mormo may find a way to gain the Amphora after all, necessitating a whole new quest into the twisted depths of the Hornsaw in order to stop them from opening and using it.

Rewards

This adventure is very dangerous. There are many instances where the PCs might possibly be killed; the rewards are appropriately high for surviving these events. Remember that the party level is

based off of an assumed roster of four members – thus, to determine the actual level of your party, add up all of their character levels and divide by four.

For instance, a part of three 2nd level characters and three 1st level characters is a 2nd level party (2+2+2+1+1+1 = 9, divided by 4 for a total of 2.25, rounded to 2).

Should the GM choose to reward role-playing situations and other non-combat challenges, an appropriate reward might be to consider each such event as CR 1/2 (equating to about 150 gp per encounter).

The story of the Serpent Amphora continues in
A Serpent in the Fold,
 a full-length, Scarred Lands adventure
 available in September 2002

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