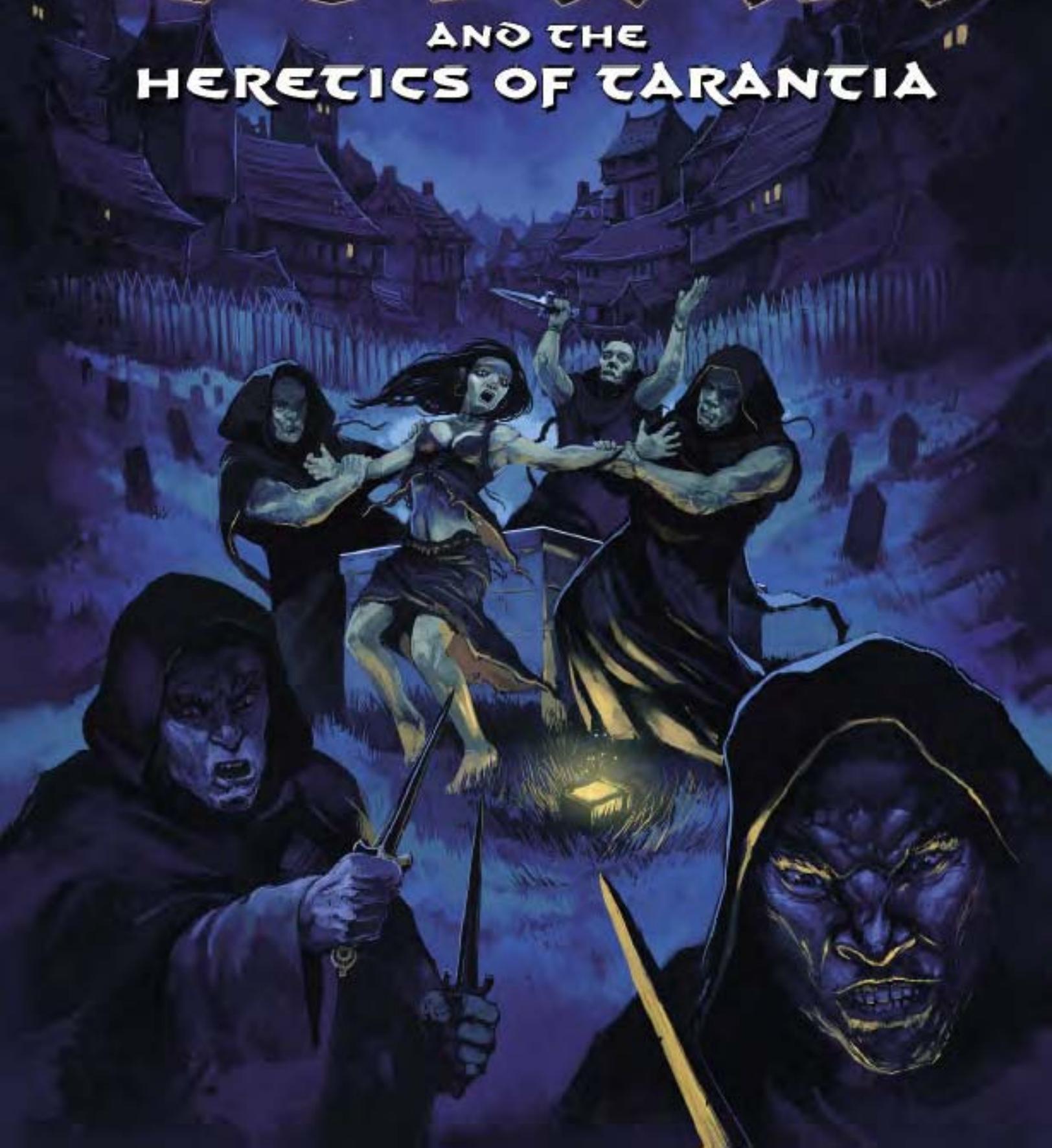
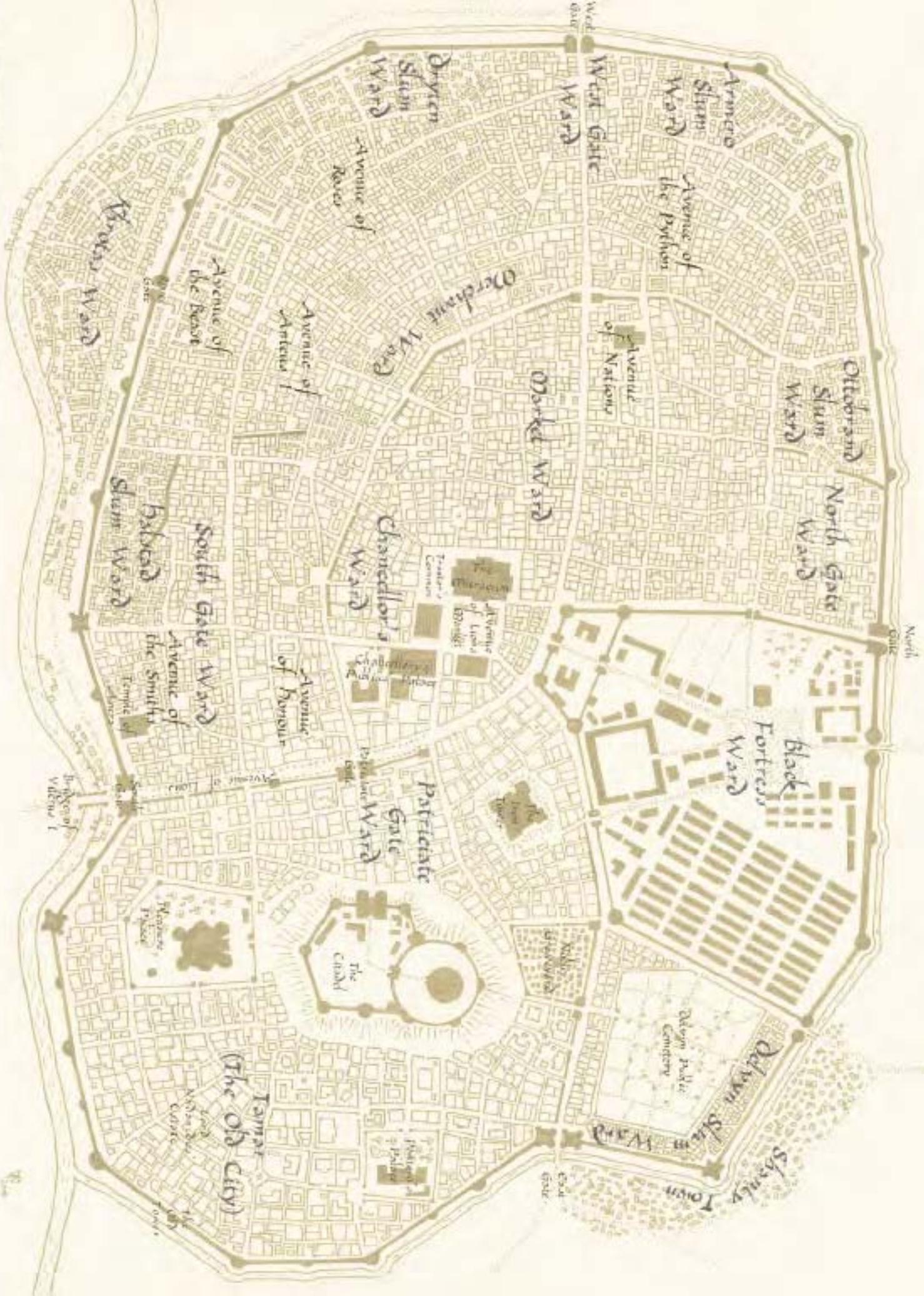


CONAN[®]

AND THE HERETICS OF TARANTIA



THE AQUILONIAN CITY OF CARANNCIA



CONAN[®]

AND THE HERETICS OF TARANTIA

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Introduction

Welcome to the City of Tarantia

FOR CENTURIES, THE cult of Mitra was the only religion allowed in Aquilonia – all others forbidden by edict of the crown. However, the ascension of King Conan to the Aquilonia's throne changed all that. Not only was Conan himself a worshipper of Crom, but his barbarian temperament could not abide the prospect of persecution of others simply because of the gods they chose to follow. After witnessing one act of religious intolerance after another, King Conan decreed that every man in his realm be free to worship whatever god he may chose.

King Conan's edict was, unsurprisingly, unpopular with the cult of Mitra, and was the subject of strident opposition. Many, throughout Aquilonia, feared that allowing Hyboria's other religions to openly exist within the borders of the country would ultimately destroy it, diluting its most powerful unifying force – religion. Despite the protests, outcries and even mumbled threats, however, King Conan would not budge from his position.

Several years have passed since King Conan's edict and thus far Aquilonia has not unravelled nor has the dominance of Mitra ebbed. Of all the country's 'heathen' religions, the most prevalent, other than Bori, still worshipped in some rural corners of Gunderland, is Asura, but even this cult's followers are a tiny minority, meeting in secret and afraid to worship openly, despite the king's pleas for religious tolerance.

Despite the fears of its priests, the cult of Mitra has remained predominant, utterly eclipsing all other faiths now practiced throughout the country. Aquilonia's people, made wary by the Mitran priests' by tales of human sacrifice and devilish blasphemies, have grown ever more fearful and distrusting of other faiths.

Though fears of a decline in its worshippers, and through them its power, remains an unlikely prospect, the possibility of this has preyed on the minds of Mitra's priesthood like a cancer. Now, those priests most troubled by the edict seek one another out, finding like minds with which to share their fears and suspicions of the ultimate result of opening Aquilonia's doors to other religions. Whispering to one another in small groups, fuelling their fears and turning suspicion to certainty, an absolute surety of an ineluctable descent into evil and depravity.

From this certainty, a burning, fervent need to stop the potential spread of other religions and save both Aquilonia and the glory of Mitra from the mad edicts of the barbarian king has developed. Turning to the sacred Mitran texts, seeking answers and justifications, these

priests, in the name of piety, have stripped the words of context and intent, finding within their sacred passages, intended to promote peace, civilisation and forgiveness, rationalisations for the embracing of sin, darkness and violence in the name of what they see as the greater good.

IN THIS ADVENTURE...

...the Brotherhood of the Bull, led by a Mitran priest named Constanus, finally puts their plans into motion. They have chosen to wait until King Conan is once again away from Aquilonia, and the country is under the stewardship of Count Trocero and Publius, the king's chancellor. Though both are unflinchingly loyal to King Conan, Constanus is counting on the fact that both are worshippers of Mitra, and the potential influence of Dexitheus, archpriest of Mitra and one of Conan's counsellors, to make his job a little easier. Moreover, Count Trocero himself is away from Tarantia in his own lands of Poitain tending to urgent business, leaving the true governance of the city in the hands of Publius.

The Brotherhood of the Bull has targeted the cult of Asura as the first religion they must drive from Aquilonia, as it is the most prominent of the country's new faiths. They have attempted to find solid proof that the Asurans are engaging in heathen and barbaric practices, such grisly rites as human sacrifice and cannibalism, but have failed utterly. Some members of the Brotherhood have even opened their minds to the darkest arts of sorcery, justifying this violation of Mitran dogma with the belief they can turn such power to oust the evil magicians of the Asuran cult, but again they have failed to find the knowledge they sought. Rather than give up their quest to cast the other faiths from Aquilonia, the Brotherhood has chosen to invent the evidence they have sought. What matter a few lives when the destiny of the nation and the Mitran faith lie in the balance? Constanus has even laid plans to go so far as to recruit a number of mercenaries and assassins to his cause, carefully keeping them at arm's length and ignorant of his true identity, while at the same time holding them close enough that he can marshal their services to protect his person or carry out his orders with little or no notice. However, just as he began to reach out into the seamy underbelly of Tarantia in search of such fell men, he discovered, as if by the providence of Mitra, a powerful and willing ally in his quest – the wealthy Lord Nadanidus.

More than just vitriolic priests of Mitra have joined Constanus in his quest, however. Knowing he would need financial backing for his divine mission, finances he could not count on receiving from the Mitraeum, he began looking for other allies. He found one in Lord Nadanidus, a wealthy baron with an estate in Tamar, the old city section of

Tarantia. However, Constanus is unaware of Nadanidus' true loyalties. Though he has always put forth the appearance of a forthright and devout worshipper of Mitra, Nadanidus has long been a follower of the cult of Set. The cult of Set, and, indeed, Stygia itself, would very much like to see Aquilonia wracked by internal discord. Now, Constanus' plans to oust all religions save Mitra from the borders of Aquilonia, Nadanidus saw his opportunity to serve Set in a greater way than he had ever imagined would be available to him. As far as Constanus knows, Nadanidus is an ardent supporter of his goals, a faithful man who has given him finances, influence and even a place in which the Brotherhood of the Bull may gather, in the cellars beneath his estate in Tamar. In fact, Nadanidus' Stygian masters hope the strife that they are helping to sow will weaken the country, forcing it to turn inward. Once that is accomplished, they surmise, Aquilonia will no longer be the strong ally of Argos. Weakened in turn by the tumult on its northern border, Argos will be easier prey for the forces of Stygia itself – not to conquer the Argosseans, perhaps, but certainly to weaken them and allow Stygia to reclaim uncontested mastery of the seas.

Sorcerous knowledge has served Constanus well in the past and it will serve him well throughout the course of his current plot. The Asurans are adept at several styles of sorcery, as Constanus has learned, most notably the use of divination. Constanus will, therefore, be using *greater sorcerous news* throughout *Heretics of Tarantia* to prevent the anyone from learning who is truly behind the crimes being blamed upon the Asurans. Fortunately for Constanus, the high priest of Asura in Tarantia, a mighty sorcerer named Hadrathus, is away from the city, or the Mitran priest's attempts at concealing his activities with *greater sorcerous news* would surely prove futile.

Constanus' plan to disgrace the Asuran cult is audacious and vile, the kind of act that could only be justified by the most zealous and fanatical sort. Even if it is not enough to have the Asurans officially driven from the kingdom, Constanus believes it will be enough to force the king and his advisors to require the Asurans practice their worship openly. Once the locations of their temples are revealed, Constanus is counting on the antipathy with which the followers of Mitra regard Asura to ensure the temples of this heathen faith do not stand for long. For his part, Lord Nadanidus, unaware of the extent of his Stygian masters' plans, is counting on the religious strife to weaken Aquilonia and King Conan's grip on the throne. Whether or not these plans have any chance of success is up to the Player Characters and what actions they take throughout the course of *Heretics of Tarantia*.

PREPARING TO PLAY

Conan and the Heretics of Tarantia is a scenario of a different breed. Rather than hunting through a plague-ridden jungle in search of a forgotten city or tracking a corrupt sorcerer to his demon-haunted lair, *Heretics of Tarantia* is a story of intrigue, treachery, politics and murder in the most glorious city of the West.

Games Masters who are concerned that an intrigue-based scenario may not have the fevered pace and clashing of desperate sword blows so integral to the Conan stories need

not worry – there is action aplenty for all within these pages. *Heretics of Tarantia*, however, exercises the strength of the Player Characters' minds as much as it does their sword arms. Those Player Characters who attempt to solve *all* their problems with a furious war cry and a leap into the fray may find themselves out of their depth, as there are enemies within this scenario beyond the immediate reach of sword or bowshot. While such measures may indeed be called for here, those who recognise there are times when a carefully laid plan or a few questions asked of the right person, can be stronger allies than a thousand blades; those individuals must rely on cleverness, guile and intellect.

A copy of *Conan the Roleplaying Game*, a notepad, pencils and a full set of dice (at least one of each of the following; d20, d12, d10, d8, d6 and d4) will be needed to play *Heretics of Tarantia*. Players and Games Masters may also find a copy of *Conan: Aquilonia – Flower of the West* useful, though not essential, as this sourcebook will provide a great deal more background information than can be included in this scenario. Both players and Games Masters may also find a few miniatures of use, but these are, likewise, not essential.

Heretics of Tarantia combines situations and encounters that will require a mix of skills to survive and overcome. Players will find that a party of adventurers from a wide variety of character classes of particular use.

Games Masters should read, and become familiar with the entire adventure before attempting to run it to fully understand how each encounter fits with those which surround it. This is especially important here, as *Heretics of Tarantia* requires a degree of flexibility on the part of the Games Master. Unlike the traditional adventures that may take place entirely in a forgotten crypt or abandoned keep, *Heretics of Tarantia* takes place in one of the largest cities of the Hyborian Age. Rather than a series of rooms for the Player Characters to explore, checking for traps and picking locks, the majority of *Heretics of Tarantia* offers a series of events for Player Characters to take part in as they attempt to unravel a greater mystery. In such an adventure, it is easy for the Player Characters to go off track, and while this offers many interesting possibilities for future adventures, Games Masters should feel free to indulge the Player Characters with an extra hint or two to get them back into the events of the scenario. Alternatively, Games Masters may wish to further embellish the events of *Heretics of Tarantia*, turning it from a short scenario into a long-running campaign.

This adventure is designed for four to six Player Characters of between 5th and 7th character level, though since much of it relies on the Player Characters' problem-solving abilities, it can easily be adjusted to accommodate groups of higher or lower character levels. Should Games Masters have fewer players they should use their own discretion and scale down some of the encounters in this module. Conversely, should Games Masters have more than six players, or should the Player Characters be higher than 3rd level, then he should be prepared to increase the difficulty of the challenges presented in this adventure.

Signs & Sigils in Blood

THIS ADVENTURE ASSUMES the Player Characters are relatively new to Tarantia, perhaps passing through the great city in their search for adventure in some nearby benighted ruin or old fortress, such as the Temple of R'shann. However, even if Tarantia is home to the Player Characters, it will be simple enough for the Games Master to run this scenario, so long as the Player Characters are not conspicuously close to either the faith of Mitra or the government of the city itself. If they are, the Games Master may find it necessary to make some adjustments to the structure of the adventure.

THE MURDERED PRIEST

The Player Characters will become caught up in the machinations of the Brotherhood of the Bull when they are out in the streets of Tarantia one night. The section of the city they are in matters little, though this should not take place within Tamar (the old city) or the Black Fortress ward.

As the Player Characters move through Tarantia's nighttime streets, read the following section aloud to the players;

Torches flare murkily on Tarantia's streets as you make your way through the benighted city. Midnight approaches and a chill creeps through the grimy cobbles, a world apart from the reputed glory and tiled plazas of the Citadel. Ahead of you, a man stumbles, caressing a nearby wall for support; at first glance, he seems to be just another drunkard, staggering home after a long night in the taverns. As he fumbles closer, however, you note that this is no average drunkard. The figure is clad in the black robes of a Mitran priest, and something about his clumsy gait suggests more than mere alcohol has induced it. The faltering priest manages a few more steps before falling to his knees on the filthy cobblestones, a feathered arrow shaft jutting from his back, his hand extended toward you in a sign of desperation.

His lips move as you approach, a trail of bloody spittle leaking from the corner of his mouth. 'Treason,' he gasps in a reedy, failing voice. 'Heresy ... all lies ... stop Brotherhood ... midnight ... cemetery ... in Delvyn...' these last few words seem to tax the last of the dying man's strength, and his final breath rattles from his lungs.

At this point, as the body of the Mitran priest lies on

the dirty cobbles before them, the Player Characters have several options open to them. They may simply ignore the murdered priest, walking on to find the nearest tavern, but this will obviously remove them from the plotline of *Signs and Sigils in Blood*, unless the Games Master chooses to have one of the townspeople see the priest stagger up to the Player Characters, muttering something with his last breath before the Player Characters wander off. In this case, the Player Characters may find their drinking and carousing disturbed by the city's guards looking for answers and drawing the Player Characters back into the plot of the scenario.

The Player Characters may also choose to take the priest's body to the Mitraeum. Moving a dead body through the city, however, will almost certainly arouse suspicion if they are noticed or even stopped by a patrol of the city guard before they reach their destination. The guardsmen are certain to be suspicious, at least initially, of what role if any the Player Characters had in the death of a priest of Mitra. However,



given the fact that the Player Characters are transporting a body, it should not be too difficult for them to convince the guard they had no role in the actual death, this will nevertheless require a Diplomacy check DC 25. Assuming the Player Characters also relay the priest's last words to the guards, they will react accordingly, half of the patrol escorting the Player Characters and the body back to the Mitraeum while the other half rushes towards the slum wards of Delvyn, gathering other guards as they go. They will, however, arrive too late to stop the awful crime Constanus' Brotherhood of the Bull has planned.

Obviously, should they choose to wait for the guard at the spot where they encountered the priest, a patrol will eventually happen by, resulting in much the same series of events as if they were found transporting the body. In the case of any of the above, the Games Master may move directly to pg. 8, *Crossing Swords*.

The third is by far the most likely choice of the Player Characters. Anxious to avoid being seen with a corpse of a priest of Mitra, but intrigued by his last words, they may venture to the slum ward of Delvyn to see if they can discover the meaning of the priest's dying words. They have little time to make it to Delvyn, however; midnight approaches swiftly and should the Player Characters try to find a way to deliver the body to the Mitraeum, they will be too late to have any chance of stopping the awful crime Constanus' Brotherhood of the Bull has planned.

The priest of Mitra is exactly that, a man named Urestes who was once a member of the Brotherhood of the Bull. Upon hearing the depth of Constanus' plan, however, Urestes had a sudden crisis of conscience. As much as he may have wished the Asurans and followers of all other faiths lashed out Aquilonia, he could not countenance the depravity of Constanus' plan. He spoke long and eloquently against it, but his fellows of the Brotherhood would not be dissuaded. Despairing of their path, but promising to remain true to his word and not reveal anything of the Brotherhood, Urestes departed their secret meeting place beneath the estate of Nadanidus, intending to make his way back to the Mitraeum, the grand temple of Mitra in Tarantia.

Constanus, unconvinced of the sincerity of Urestes' oath not to reveal the Brotherhood, had him followed by Essenic, one of a number of bodyguards and assassins the corrupt priest has hired. Once Urestes had travelled far enough from the meeting place of the Brotherhood, outside the borders of Tamar and away from the watchful eyes of the city's guard, ever vigilant in the city's wealthiest district, Essenic shot a poisoned arrow into the priest's back.

If the Player Characters have ever had dealings with a priest of Mitra in Aquilonia, the Games Master should consider substituting that priest for Urestes, in order to create an immediate emotional investment into these events.

Alternatively, if the Games Master is planning to run an adventure or two in Tarantia before starting this adventure, he might consider finding some way to include Urestes into those adventures, again to create an emotional investment for the Player Characters. A murdered friend, or even acquaintance, can be more compelling than a murdered stranger.

Urestes' body has 27 silver pieces and a golden icon of Mitra, worth 125 silver pieces when the Player Characters come across it.

BLASPHEMY IN DELVYN

Delvyn is one of the five slum wards of Tarantia, a place of wattle and daub tenement buildings that house the city's poor. Immigrants, labourers, beggars, drunkards, wastrels and orphans of a dozen different nationalities are pressed together in this place, united only in their poverty.

As the Player Characters arrive at Delvyn's cemetery, read the following section aloud to the players;

Navigating Delvyn's cramped alleyways, ramshackle buildings, mouldy tenements, tiny shops and stinking taverns is a difficult task for anyone not born to its narrow, winding streets and dead-end alleys, making the small ward seem much bigger than it is, particularly now as you hurry through the dark night towards Tarantia's largest public cemetery.

The Delvyn cemetery is a burial ground for the poor, a mostly untended and unkempt field littered with tiny markers, the majority of which have long since been weathered into anonymity. Corpses of those wealthy enough interred individually here, lacking access to family mausoleums, are buried standing up, to make the most use of the available room. Most of those buried here, however, are not even accorded the honour of a private grave, but are cast into deep mass graves, their bodies dusted with lye.

The cemetery also, due to its size and nature, has a constant flow of new occupants, which is why Constanus chose it for the first major stage of his plan. The mercenaries he has hired, under the guise of an Asuran priest, and primed for the job with his skill in the Hypnotism sorcery style are tasked with a grisly duty, one for which they have been well compensated. They are to capture one of the denizens of Delvyn and take their victim to the cemetery by midnight. There, clad in the dark robes of the Asurans, they will disinter one of the fresher corpses. With a corpse and a captive in hand, at the moment of midnight, they will cut out the heart of the captive and anoint the dead body with the heart's blood, daubing the



lifeless bodies with symbols and runes, which Constanus has learned are sacred elements of Asuran worship. Once this is done, they will flee the cemetery, leaving both corpses behind to be found by those brave enough to investigate their victim's screams.

If the Player Characters go straight to the Delvyn cemetery after having found Urestes' body, they will have a chance to catch Constanus' mercenaries at work. The information about Delvyn given above is common knowledge in Tarantia, should the players inquire of the Games Master what their Player Characters know of the region, he should feel free to expand on this information with that found in *Conan: Aquilonia – Flower of the West* if any of the Player Characters hail from or have spent more than a month in Tarantia.

Armed with this information, the Player Characters will likely make straight for the cemetery. If they do not, Games Masters may allow them to overhear some of the locals talking in fearful excitement about a band of robed figures who have stolen a young girl off of the streets and were last seen headed for the cemetery. Whether the Player Characters make it to the cemetery in time to stop the horrible crime before it is committed is, of course, up to the purview of the Games Master.

The mercenaries are, as per Constanus' orders, doing nothing to mask their presence in the cemetery, and will be easily found by anyone seeking them there. They are killers and slayers to a man, lawless, godless and honourless sellswords who care not who they murder, nor why. If they are interrupted or accosted in the midst of carrying out their assignment, they will gladly draw steel and fight back, to the death if need be.

Mercenaries (5)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 4; **HD:** 4d10+8 (33 hp); **Init:** +2; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 15; **DR:** 5; **Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+2, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Bluff, Escape Artist), Background Skills (Escape Artist, Knowledge (local), Listen, Spot), Formation Combat (skirmisher); **SV:** Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Bluff +5, Escape Artist +9, Intimidate +5, Jump +4, Knowledge (local) +4, Listen +2, Spot +2; Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endurance, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: Asuran robes, broadsword, mail shirt

Notes: In addition to their equipment, the five mercenaries have 541 silver pieces between them, half the payment promised them by Constanus, who fully intends to have them killed when they come to collect the second half. Constanus,

knowing quite well the capabilities of *psychometry*, has made certain that the coins given the mercenaries did not pass through his hands or those of his closest followers before giving them to the mercenaries. Aside from the money and the equipment listed above, there is one further clue – one of the mercenaries has a scrap of paper on which are sketched examples of the symbols they are to draw in blood on the corpse and their captive.

If the Player Characters arrive at the cemetery in time to rescue the mercenaries' captive, an attractive young girl named Alida, they will find she has no idea why she was captured or what was to happen to her. She was nabbed from the street by the five men, bound and gagged, and brought directly here. Her only interest is in fleeing back to the relative safety of the dark and mapless alleys of Delvyn; she has no parents and no real home of her own.

If the Player Characters arrive too late to prevent the sacrifice and choose to examine the arcane markings left behind by the mercenaries, they may recognise the symbols as Asuran, doing so requires a Knowledge (religion) check (DC 20, if one of the Player Characters worships Asura, this DC is reduced to 10). Characters who manage to succeed this check by five or more will know that such inhuman practices as those carried out in the cemetery are not part of Asuran worship.

Tarantia's city guard do not patrol the cemetery regularly, but will be attracted by the sounds of combat coming from the cemetery, and will arrive on the scene 2d10 rounds after the battle with the mercenaries ends.

HARD QUESTIONS FOR HARD MEN

The mercenaries, primed as they are through Constanus' use of the Hypnotism sorcery style, have little interest in surrender or parley if the Player Characters catch them in the cemetery. However, the Player Characters may well decide to take one or more of them alive if possible for questioning, whether through the use of nonlethal damage or grappling.

Wrenching answers from these men is no simple task. Beaten or not, they will not willingly co-operate with the Player Characters, who will have to succeed in an Intimidate check (DC 25) to get them to talk. At the end of this section is a list of what exactly the mercenaries do know regarding the events in the cemetery.

There is little time for private questioning of the prisoners – as noted above, Tarantia's city guard will be arriving shortly, and will attempt to take custody of any prisoners the

Player Characters may have captured. Depending upon the circumstances and the condition of the prisoners, the Games Master may choose to allow the Player Characters only one or two attempts at an Intimidate checks before these guard arrive.

Tarantia's city guard are not used to sharing their duties with bloodied bands of Player Characters who happen across a crime scene at midnight in the city's largest cemetery, but with the right amount of persuasion they may be willing to let the Player Characters assist them in questioning the prisoners. This, however, will require a Diplomacy check (DC 15). Of course, the Player Characters must first convince the guard they had no part in the crimes committed this night (see pg. 5). Once the guards have taken them into custody, some of the fire will go out of the belly of any surviving mercenaries, and they will become slightly more co-operative, lowering the difficulty of the Intimidate check needed to make them talk to DC 20.

Here is a list of what the mercenaries know, that might be revealed by some tough questioning.

- ❖ The mercenaries' names are Deon, Hegerd, Jovius, Mannas and Servius.
- ❖ They were recruited in a tavern called the Weary Road in the North Gate Ward of Tarantia six days ago by a man they are certain is an Asuran priest, though they do not remember his name or any other details about him.
- ❖ They had to acquire the robes they are wearing themselves; the priest who hired them did not give them to the mercenaries.
- ❖ The priest who hired the mercenaries showed them the sigils he required them to draw in blood and made them copy them down themselves.
- ❖ Alida, the young girl who was captured by the mercenaries, was chosen at random.
- ❖ The men were promised a payment of 1,000 silver pieces for the crime, half of which was paid in advance and was delivered to them by a messenger. They are to collect the other half the next morning in the alley behind the Weary Road.
- ❖ The mercenaries were not told the purpose of the ritual, nor did they ask.

The Player Characters may decide to take a quick trip to the Weary Road to investigate what the mercenaries have told them; however, they will quickly discover this to be a dead end. The Weary Road is a constantly busy tavern, which sees more than its share of mercenary traffic. No one in the tavern or nearby has any useful information to offer regarding the mercenaries in question.

Crossing Swords

THOUGH THE CITY guard of Tarantia, once they become involved in the events of the scenario, will initially be suspicious of the Player Characters, that suspicion is unlikely to last long unless the Player Characters react in a particularly antagonistic or foolish manner to the guards' reasonable questions. Between the murdered priest of Mitra and the incident in the cemetery, the guards will be quick to recognise the gravity of the situation.

If the Player Characters first encounter the guards following a battle with the mercenaries at the cemetery, they may have a little more difficult time explaining themselves, and it will require some fast talking and a Diplomacy check (DC 15), will avoid their being arrested along with any surviving mercenaries. At the Games Master's option, if Alida is still with the Player Characters, her tale of being rescued by them might suffice to convince the city's guards that the Player Characters played no part in this terrible crime.

Regardless of how they first meet the Player Characters, Tarantia's guards will certainly have some questions, and will escort them to the nearest guard station. Once there, they will be asked to explain the entirety of what has happened to them this night, from the murder of Urestes, the murdered priest of Mitra, to the incident at the cemetery (assuming the Player Characters were involved in this). The murder of a Mitran priest will obviously be regarded as a horrific crime by the guards, who will realise this matter needs to be brought immediately to the attention of their superiors.

The Player Characters are in for an hour or two of waiting at this point, as they are kept at the guard station as more and more senior officers of the guard arrive to hear their story, passing it farther up the chain of command each time. Eventually, word of what has happened goes as high as it can. Nearly two hours after being brought in for questioning by the city guard, a man clad in the blackened armour of the Black Dragons, the king's personal guards, arrives at the guard station, bearing a message for the Player Characters. They may consider themselves released from custody, but are ordered to appear at the Chancellory, the palace of Publius, at first light.

After acknowledging this order, the Player Characters are free to go, most likely returning to their accommodations for a few hours of much-needed rest before their early

morning appointment at the Chancellory. If the Player Characters are already staying (or planning to stay) at an inn while in Tarantia, and have not already made some manner of specific arrangements, the Games Master may consider simply telling them they are staying at the Stag and Whistle, a simple and functional inn in the South Gate Ward of the city.

THE CHANCELLORY

As dawn breaks over the golden city of Tarantia, a rapping at their chamber door wakes the Player Characters. A young pageboy, dressed in the livery of the king, will introduce himself as Arn and tell them that he has been sent by the Chancellor to accompany them to Chancellory.

As the Player Characters approach the Chancellory, read the following section aloud to the players;

Though strictly speaking a mansion, the Chancellory seems to be designed to withstand a siege. Parapets and crenulations line the rooftop, and four of Aquilonia's Black Dragons, the king's personal guard, stand to attention before the building's ironbound door. Clad in their trademark blackened armour and horned great helmets, they rap the butts of their spears on the flagstones three times in unison as you approach, signalling you to halt.

'The king's chancellor is expecting us,' announces Arn, stepping forward. 'I am to escort these guests to him.' The quartet of menacing warriors eye the young man a moment longer before stepping to one side and beckoning you forward.

The chancellor's Black Dragon guards are expecting the arrival of the Player Characters, and have orders to send them ahead into the Chancellory. Once they have relieved the Player Characters of any weapons, as none may enter the Chancellory armed, the Player Characters are allowed to continue their journey into the Chancellory with the page.

As the Player Characters are lead into the Chancellory by the pageboy, read the following section aloud to the players;

Arn leads you down a long, columned hall lit by narrow windows high above and through a heavy wooden door at the passageway's end. You pass through two large reception rooms before your young guide stops in front of a well-worn door, flanked on either side by another pair of Black Dragon guards, every bit as regal as those at the front gate. The young pageboy opens the door and gestures for you to enter.

The room beyond the guarded door is small, its ornate mosaic floor all but hidden beneath a large collection of rugs. One wall hosts a large bookshelf, while the opposite wall contains a wide hearth, on which a low fire smoulders. The room is lit by three tall windows in the wall opposite the door you came through, as well as a brass chandelier laden with candles hanging from the ceiling. Between the bookshelf and the hearth is a long wooden table, eight chairs set about it.

The pageboy bows briefly and leaves, closing the door behind him. A moment later, another door, almost hidden by the bookcase, opens and an elderly man in fine clothing walks into the room. A gauntleted hand reaches in from behind him and pulls the door closed again.

‘Please take a seat,’ the man says, gesturing to the table. ‘I am Publius, Chancellor of Aquilonia, and I would like to speak to you about last night.’

Publius will ask the Player Characters to recite their version of what happened, often interrupting them to ask for more details on a specific incident. He will dwell primarily on the words the dying priest, Urestes as Publius will identify the priest, and the particulars of what happened at the Delvyn cemetery. Publius is a patient and careful listener, but is also extremely insightful and very nearly impossible to fool. He has a gift for judging people and understanding situations that very nearly borders on the psychic. He is particularly interested in the opinions and insights the Player Characters may have into these events, asking what they think the events of the previous evening mean, whether they have any reason to believe Urestes sought them out after being shot, or if they were simply the first people he stumbled upon and whether they have any knowledge as to the meaning or origin of the symbols found on the Asuran priests, or that may have been daubed on their victims. Only after weighing the answers of the Player Characters he receives will Publius divulge the truths he knows – for example, that the symbols seem to be markings sacred to the cult of Asura, but there is no indication they have ever been used in such a manner before, certainly not in Tarantia.

Publius, The Chancellor of Aquilonia

Medium Human Aquilonian noble 12; HD: 10d8+4+20 (69 hp); Init: +5; Spd: 30 ft.; Dodge DV: 15; Parry DV: 16; DR: –; BAB/Grp: +9/+9; Atk: Broadsword +12 melee; Full Atk: Broadsword +12/+7 melee; Dmg: Broadsword 1d10, 19-20/x2, AP 4; Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); SA: +3 bonus to attack rolls with broadsword, hunting bow, heavy lance and war spear; SQ: Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Sense Motive, Spot), Background Skills (Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Sense Motive), Title, Rank Hath its Privileges, Wealth, Special Regional Feature +3, Social Ability (*refuge, etiquette*), Enhanced Leadership, Lead by Example +4, Do You Know Who I Am?; SV: Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +16 (+19 vs.

Corruption); Str 10, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 19, Wis 16, Cha 16
Skills & Feats: Appraise +9, Bluff +23, Diplomacy +23, Disguise +6, Gather Information +20, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (history) +12, Knowledge (local) +12, Knowledge (nobility) +12, Search +8, Sense Motive +25, Spot +14; Investigator, Iron Will, Knowledgeable, Leadership, Negotiator, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive)
Possessions: Superior noble’s outfit, broadsword, dagger
Notes: Publius is entrusted with the day to day operations of the Aquilonian government, the absolute head of the civil service in Tarantia. He is answerable to King Conan only. He works closely with Count Trocero, Prospero and Conan’s other advisors. Nearly every member of the governmental bureaucracy serves Publius, organising tax collection, politics and the public announcement of all royal decrees.

Publius appears as a gentle, patient and even sympathetic listener but he is often preoccupied with his own problems and often times complains endlessly about how mistreated he is by everybody. Still, he manages to be helpful and ready to go to work to get things done. He needs constant support and encouragement and resents needing those things so desperately. He is utterly loyal to those who continually give him that support and encouragement. He is a worrier and a brooder. He also guards his secrets well. He has a tough exterior but is a softie on the inside – people are better off to judge Publius by what he does, not by what he says. He is possessive and nostalgic. He is devoted to the idea of family, hearth and home.

Publius is not easily deceived. His personality is one of complex defences, and these defences give him the ability to read people well. He has intense powers of observation that border on psychic. He is also indirect and diplomatic in his approach to people. He never takes the direct approach, always stepping to one side, then another, occasionally going completely around an issue, but he always gets where he intends to go. He is shrewd in business and possesses a strong sense of public taste and opinion. Publius can always sense new trends as they begin.

When Publius has any information he wants from the Player Characters, read the following section aloud to the players; ‘Very well,’ Publius says once all his questions have been answered. ‘I thank you for your assistance thus far, and would like to impose upon you further, if I may. This is a troublesome business indeed, one that I sense is more complex than it may seem. Where religion is concerned, passions run high – already rumours of last night’s activities in Delvyn are beginning to circulate through other parts of the city, and I fear the rumours will soon become accusations, breeding violence. I must know exactly what is happening, but I sense I would be best served



by not making the king's interest in this matter public, and that precludes my use of more traditional channels of investigation, therefore, I turn to you. I wish you to investigate this incident, discover if there is indeed a deeper truth, and, if possible, resolve this situation before it festers too long. You will, of course, be compensated.'

Though Publius is asking nicely, he is not truly asking at all, but rather phrasing an order in the form of a request, which the Player Characters will quickly realise if they try to refuse. They may, of course, accept it with no intention of fulfilling it, but Publius is likely to sense any deception. If they accept the mission, then turn around and leave Tarantia anyway, they will likely get away with it for now. Publius is not one to forget such a slight, however, and will certainly remember it should the Player Characters ever show their faces in Tarantia again.

Publius, while he would never admit it, is also not telling the whole truth and in fact does not wholly trust the guard to remain objective in this matter. Many of the king's loyal guards are worshippers of Mitra to a man, and share the same distaste and loathing for the Asurans as most other Aquilonians. The Player Characters may ask to be provided with some kind of writ, establishing in writing their authority to investigate this matter, but Publius will not provide it. After all, a large part of his reason for using outsiders to resolve this problem is to keep the government out

of it. He will offer the Player Characters a reward of 1,000 silver pieces if they are able to unravel this mystery to his satisfaction, and is even willing to pay half of it in advance, so long as he senses the Player Characters intend to keep their word and truly work to investigate this matter.

Once the Player Characters agree to help, Publius will give them the information they need to get started, identifying the arrow that killed Urestes as one fired by a man named Essenic, an infamous sellsword of Tarantia who can often be found on the Avenue of Roses. If the Player Characters ask him how he knows this, he will politely pretend he did not hear the question, and will immediately segue to another point of interest. In fact, he knows it was Essenic who fired the fateful shot because he has had a *psychometry* spell cast upon the poisoned arrow. Naturally, this is not the kind of thing Publius can admit to publicly.

THE AVENUE OF ROSES

Where the Player Characters go next is, of course, up to them, but they will likely find all roads lead to this next section. Should they choose to go to the Mitraeum to inquire about Urestes, they will find little information of value. He was well known and well liked by his fellow priests, who cannot suggest any reason for his murder beyond a blasphemous robbery. Urestes has been a priest at the Mitraeum for almost two decades, relocating here from his home city of Sicas. His fellow priests describe him as a quiet and studious man, steeped in learning of the sacred Mitran texts and possessed of a near encyclopaedic knowledge of even the least-known scriptural works. He was less inclined towards proselytising than most of the priests in the Mitraeum, preferring to spend his days seeking deeper mysteries within their holy texts. He was, however, given to occasionally bemoaning of what he saw as indications the people of Tarantia were moving further from their faith – not abandoning it, perhaps, but assigning it a less vital role in their lives. It seems, however, his death may have served to reverse this trend...

As the Player Characters make their way through the streets of the city this day, they will soon learn that Publius was right. Rumours of what happened the night before – the unholy murder of a Mitran priest and the terrible rites conducted in the public cemetery – are the talk of the town. Most citizens of Tarantia are only now hearing of it, but still, the Games Master should describe the alternating tones of shock and anger the Player Characters hear as they journey through the city.

The Avenue of Roses, where Publius told the Player Characters they would be most likely to find Essenic, is Tarantia's haven of prostitutes, a three-acre section of the city containing all but four of Tarantia's 53 brothels. Most of the interconnected buildings here, at least three storeys high, create a maze of

narrow, winding paths. The streets and byways of this region of the city snake their way between buildings, each filled with those hawking themselves and their wares to passers-by.

Finding someone who knows of Essenic in the Avenue of Roses is not terribly difficult, as he is a common sight in this ward. Player Characters who make a successful Gather Information check (DC 15) and are willing to spread around a handful of silver pieces will discover that he went into the House of Nine Jewels late last night and, as far as the informant knows, has not left since.

Unfortunately for the Player Characters, the informant is wrong – Essenic left the House of Nine Jewels only an hour after arriving. If they wish, the Player Characters may speak to Yarina, the prostitute Essenic hired, but there is little she can tell them, as he did not wish to spend his time with her talking. She will still charge them the going rate of ten silver pieces for her time, however.

HUNTING THE HUNTER

With Essenic not where they hoped he would be, the Player Characters have some legwork ahead of them. Finding a one particular man in a city with a population of over 80,000 is not an easy job, but it can be done.

Fortunately for the Player Characters, Essenic is not an entirely unknown person in Tarantia. So long as they are willing to spend the time and coins required for several Gather Information checks, they have a good chance of hunting him down. The following table provides the pieces of information the Player Characters have the opportunity to discover, along with the associated DC of the Gather Information check required to uncover it. Games Masters may pick and choose as they like from this table, passing out the information to the Player Characters as they ask questions and dole out coins.

Finding Essenic Gather Information DCs

DC	Information Gathered
5	Essenic is a tall, broad-shouldered man with an unkempt mane of tawny hair, willing to sell his services to anyone with the coin to pay him, and does not care what he is ordered to do.
10	Essenic once killed a man by picking him up by his ankles and flinging him headfirst into a stone wall.
15	Essenic is originally from Shamar, but came to Tarantia a decade ago.
20	Essenic has a wife he never sees named Lyness, who works as a laundress.
25	Essenic has a house in the Khorotas Ward of Tarantia.

The Player Characters may, of course, spend as much time as they like trying to uncover Essenic's whereabouts, but should

be reminded that each use of the Gather Information skill can take hours (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* core rulebook). Once the Player Characters have discovered consider they have enough information about the priest's killer (likely by succeeding a Gather information check (DC 20+)), they can head to the Khorotas Ward of Tarantia. Even if none of the Non-Player Characters they have spoken to about Essenic specifically mentioned the Khorotas Ward, they will likely know that the Khorotas Ward is home to all of the city's laundries.

While the Player Characters are searching for Essenic, the rest of the city is hardly sitting idle. Constantus and his Brotherhood of the Bull are gladly taking advantage of the rumours in the streets of Tarantia, carefully teasing men's fears of the Asurans into anger and whipping up the fervour of the faithful against the Asurans. Games Masters should have the players make a Listen check (DC 15) to notice that by mid-afternoon, the discussion of Urestes' murder and the desecration in the cemetery have become the sole topic of conversation they overhear as they move through the city, and most of the shocked tones are gone, replaced by dark threats of violence against the foreign religions. They may also begin to hear such rumours being reported as absolute truth.

Among Tarantia's many purported truths are the following heard;

- ✘ The Asurans and their foul sorceries have caused King Conan and Lord Trocero to flee the city.
- ✘ The bodies of a number of children, murdered and marked with arcane symbols were found inside a locked warehouse in the South Gate Ward of the city this morning.
- ✘ Symbols daubed in blood on a corpse are meant to wake it as some kind of undead abomination.
- ✘ The funeral boats of the Asurans are actually slave ships, carrying the citizens of Tarantia away to a life of servitude in the custody of their blasphemous cult.
- ✘ A number of trade barges plying the Khorotas River between Tarantia and Messantia have vanished recently. Each time, an Asuran funeral boat was spotted heading downriver within hours of the barge's departure from the docks.

If the Player Characters take an interest in pursuing any of these rumours, they are likely to find them either nonsense, such as in case that the Asurans are somehow responsible for King Conan and Lord Trocero being absent from the city, or the belief that the symbols found in the cemetery were meant to wake the dead, or they will discover them to be utterly false, as is the case with the reports of murdered children and the missing trade barges. However, if the Player

Characters spend too much time establishing the verity of such rumours, they may waste the entire day and still be no closer to tracking down Essenic or speaking to Constanus. While this certainly does not preclude them from resolving the problem, the Games Master should bear in mind that for every day that passing, the citizenry of Tarantia will become more and more emboldened in their insistence the Asurans be held accountable for the death of Urestes and the sacrifice in the cemetery. Should the Player Characters tarry too long on side paths, the city itself may erupt into violence.

ON THE BANKS OF THE KHOROTAS

At this point the Player Characters will likely be heading to Tarantia's Khorotas Ward in search of Urestes' assassin and another clue to the mysterious events that promise to plunge one of Hyboria's greatest cities into turmoil.

Once the Player Characters reach the Khorotas Ward, read the following section aloud to the players;

The Khorotas Ward of Tarantia actually lies outside the city proper, spread out along the banks of the river from which it takes its name. It is home to much of the city's industry – at least those industries that produce the tremendously unpleasant stench that fills the air here. Docks and jetties project out into the river from both banks here and trade barges come and go at all hours, being loaded and unloaded in a near-constant flurry of activity before leaving to ply their wares up and down the Khorotas River. Many of the barges are marked with the crests of the Messantian merchant houses, whose wealth seems boundless, and these relatively grand vessels seem ditictly out of place in this stinking, crowded place, full of warehouses, tenements, unfriendly taverns and the grinding industry.

Once the Player Characters reach the Khorotas ward of Tarantia, they will find it a relatively easy matter to track down Essenic's wife Lyness, who lives in a tiny room on the second floor of a small clapboard tenement. However, she has not seen Essenic in nearly a month, so has little to offer the Player Characters. It is clear from the moment they speak to her that she bears little love for her wayward husband.

Though Lyness has not seen Essenic in some time, others in this ward have. A Gather Information check (DC 15) will be enough for the Player Characters to find out Essenic has spent most of the day in the House of Lions, a riverfront tavern frequented by bargemen and dock workers.

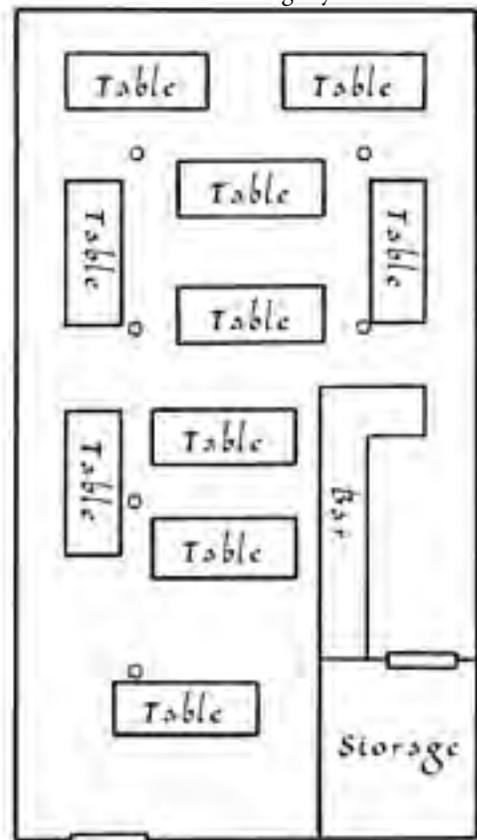
Luck is finally with the Player Characters, for if they go to the House of Lions, they will find that Essenic is still

there. At the Games Master's option, Essenic may have heard that a gang of armed men looking for him throughout the city. In this case, Essenic will still be at the tavern, but will be accompanied by a group of fellow mercenaries.

Once the Player Characters enter the House of Lions, read the following section aloud to the players;

The House of Lions is a rowdy place filled with equally rowdy men – river traders, bargemen and dock workers all come to deaden the pains and aches of a day's toil in a jack of beer. The boisterous tavern offers nothing in the way of entertainment – no minstrels pluck at strings, no girls dance for the hollering crowd. Still, it is loud, and you can hear short snippets of bawdy songs even as you approach the door. Within the taverns gloomy confines, the air is heavy with smoke and thick with the irksome reek of stale sweat, wine and beer. Men gather about the tavern's battered tables, playing at dice and calling out cries of victory or anger upon the luck of a single roll. Others hover about the bar itself, waiting like vultures for a fresh mug before rejoining the revelry. In the centre of the room, one man teeters atop a rickety table, the flash of steel in his hand and the flash of silver in the hands of those about the table as he plays a drunken game of mumbletypog. A few heads turn in your direction as you enter, take a cautious look, then turn back to their amusements.

If one or more of the Player Characters is female, the events described above will be slightly different. Seeing a



woman walk into the House of Lions is a rare event indeed, and something sure to gain the immediate and undivided attention of virtually every man here.

The House of Lions is a single-storey building jutting out onto one of the dozens of docks that line the banks of the Khorotas River as it passes through this district of Tarantia, built so that half of the building is on land, while the other half hovers over the water, a fitting symbol of the men who make up the majority of its clientele. The wall facing the river is pierced with several windows that can be shuttered in the event of a terrible storm or during the coldest days of winter, but are usually left open, as they are now. Most of the eastern wall is occupied by a long bar of battered wood, attached to a small storeroom. Five wooden posts support the weight of the roof.

If the Player Characters managed to obtain a physical description of Essenic at any point in their investigation, the Games Master should call for Spot checks (DC 15) to pick him out of the crowd. Otherwise, they will likely have to ask one of the tavern's patrons for assistance, any of whom can easily point him out to the Player Characters, and will willingly do so, as Essenic is not terribly well-liked here. His reputation, however, is more than enough to keep the rest of the patrons from making a fuss about his presence.

Whether the Player Characters spot him on their own or have to have someone point Essenic out to them, read the following section aloud to the players;

Your eyes scan a sea of hard, weathered faces, the rough patrons of the House of the Lion, looking for your quarry. Your attention falls on the table in the centre of the room, if for no other reason than the sudden and blood-curdling scream rising from it. One of the men playing mumbletypeg seems to have badly misjudged his own skill and has impaled his own foot with his blade. A raucous laugh rises above the screams, emanating mockingly from a tall, broad-shouldered man scooping a small pile of silver from the table and into a worn leather pouch. Clad in a mail shirt and boasting a mane of unkempt, tawny hair, there is little doubt in your mind this is the man you seek.

Essenic is an arrogant, obnoxious braggart, but he is also quite capable, a man who has seen his fair share of battle and is long past any compunctions about killing. If the Player Characters approach him peacefully, trying to engage him in conversation, he will speak with them briefly, but will flatly deny any knowledge of Urestes' murder, pleading ignorance about any evidence he is presented with. He does not have the patience to keep this up for long, however, and after a few minutes of a conversation he is not interested in having, he will order the Player Characters to leave. If they do not, he will gladly start the battle himself. At the Games Master's option, he may have some mercenary drinking companions with him.

Essenic

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 8/thief 3; HD: 8d10+2d8+34 (84 hp); **Init:** +9; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 17; **Parry DV:** 21; **DR:** 5; **BAB/Grp:** +10/+14; **Atk:** Greatsword +15 melee *or* Shemite bow +13 ranged; **Full Atk:** Greatsword +15/+10 melee *or* Shemite bow +13/+6 ranged; **Dmg:** Greatsword 2d10+4, 19–20/x2, AP 4 *or* Shemite bow 1d10+4, x3, AP 4; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); **SA:** Sneak Attack +2d6/+2d8; **SQ:** Hyborean qualities, Adaptability (Escape Artist, Gather Information), Background Skills (Escape Artist, Gather Information, Hide, Intimidation), Formation Combat (heavy infantry), Formation Combat (skirmisher), Sneak Attack Style (broadsword), Trap Disarming, Trap Sense +1; **SV:** Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 10

Skills & Feats: Bluff +7, Climb +8, Disable Device +6, Escape Artist +13, Gather Information +8, Hide +8, Intimidate +17, Jump +8, Knowledge (local) +12; Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Shemite bow), Eyes of the Cat, Far Shot, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (broadsword);

Possessions: Broadsword, mail shirt, Shemite bow, 20 arrows, 74 silver pieces

Notes: Once battle is joined, Essenic will show no mercy. If the battle begins to go against him, he will flee if possible, but will do all in his power to prevent himself from being captured. Most likely, he will make a break for the riverward side of the House of the Lion, flinging himself through one of the open windows and taking his chances with the uncertain mercy of the Khorotas.

Mercenaries (3)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 4; HD: 4d10+8 (33 hp); **Init:** +2; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 15; **DR:** 5; **BAB/Grp:** +4/+6; **Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+2, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborean qualities, Adaptability (Bluff, Escape Artist), Background Skills (Escape Artist, Knowledge (local), Listen, Spot), Formation Combat (skirmisher); **SV:** Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Bluff +5, Escape Artist +9, Intimidate +5, Jump +4, Knowledge (local) +4, Listen +2, Spot +2; Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endurance, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: Asuran robes, broadsword, mail shirt

If the Player Characters are exceptionally fortunate, they may indeed capture Essenic alive. However, it will be extremely difficult to get any information out of him, as he knows the gibbet waits for him if he is convicted of murdering Urestes.

Despite Essenic's obstinacy, he knows a great deal of what is really happening, simply from what he has observed

in the service of Constanus and Lord Nadanidus. He does not know Constanus' actual name, thinking him instead to be called Parnas, nor does he know the names of any other members of the Brotherhood of the Bull, but he does know that they are a secret group comprised entirely of priests of Mitra, and where they meet. Having been involved in some small degree with putting Constanus' brotherhood in contact with the mercenaries hired to frame the Asurans for the crime in the cemetery the night before, he is, obviously, aware of their involvement. He is unaware of Lord Nadanidus' true motives and allegiances, though he does know that he is the owner of the property where the Brotherhood of the Bull meet, however, fear of Lord Nadanidus will help seal his lips as well as any terror of the gibbet and he will not reveal this.

If the Player Characters are somehow able to capture Essenic and force him to talk, they have a good chance of jumping almost to the end of the scenario. However, many of the events that follow assume that the infamous sellsword goes down fighting or somehow escapes, meaning the Player Characters still have their work cut out for them.

MEETING IN TWILIGHT

As night begins to fall upon the city of Tarantia the Player Characters will likely return to their lodgings to take stock of the day's events. When they do, they will receive an unexpected visit from Constanus. By now, he has learned through the faithful worshippers of Mitra most of the circumstances behind the Player Characters' involvement in these events, and is as yet unsure whether their participation in this matter represents a liability or an opportunity.

Constanus knows that Urestes survived long enough after being shot with Essenic's poisoned arrow that he was able to find and speak, albeit briefly, to a group of people on the street, and he is aware that the Player Characters are those people. He has also been made aware that they were at the Chancellory this morning, and that they have spent the day roving around the city, asking awkward questions that Constanus would have preferred to have gone unanswered. Lastly, if the Player characters successfully defeated Essenic, then he will recognise them as potentially dangerous enemies, or potentially useful allies.

He suspects the Player Characters were called to the Chancellory by Publius to uncover his plot against the Asurans, as he knows the Chancellor well enough (at least by reputation) to know he would rather keep the city government out of this situation, given the conflict between King Conan's edict of religious tolerance and the antipathy with which the city's guards view all religions save that of Mitra. However, he wishes to make confirm this suspicion

before he continues with his plans. He has little doubt as to how the Player Characters and Publius, more accurately, were able to discover Essenic's involvement in the murder of Urestes. He had told the man to remove any evidence of his involvement in the priest's killing by removing the arrow, but Essenic, upon seeing the priest of Mitra he had just slain stagger towards an armed group, though better of the order and fled into the night. It is no great leap for Constanus to presume the arrow was traced back to Essenic by sorcerous means.

As the Player Characters make their way back to their lodgings, read the following section aloud to the players;

The sun is just touching the western horizon, colouring the buildings of Tarantia crimson and orange and casting long, thin shadows across the narrow cobbled streets you have spent the day walking. Your limbs aching and the wounds left by your battle with the mercenary Essenic stinging, you find yourselves looking forward wistfully to hearth and rest, and perhaps a solid meal and a few skins of ale when a carriage rattles to a stop beside you and the door swings open. It seems hearth and rest might have to wait.

A man in his late middle years, clad in the dark robes of a Mitran priest, leans out of the carriage to beckon you closer. He is a thickly-built, broad-shouldered man who looks as though he would have made an exceptional warrior, and judging by the crook of his nose, it seems as if he has been in a fight or two during his life. His head is shaven, but he boasts a neatly trimmed beard of dark, if greying, hair.

'May I offer you a ride?' he asks. 'I would like to speak to you for a few moments, and you have the look of those in need of a rest.'

As you all clamber aboard, he asks your destination, calls it out to the driver, and waits until the carriage is under way again.

'I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to you,' he continues. 'My name is Constanus, and, as you may have guessed, I am a priest of the one god Mitra. We were all most distraught to learn of the pious Urestes' murder at the hands of the blasphemous Asura worshippers. I understand you were the last to speak to him before he went on to the halls of Mitra?'

During the ride back to their accommodations, Constanus will pump the Player Characters for as much information as he can get regarding what they heard from Urestes, what they have discovered during their investigation and what they intend to do next. This conversation should be roleplayed out between the Games Master and the players, as it is, in many ways, one of the cusp events of this adventure. At the Games Masters' discretion, if the Player Characters seem

to be foundering in their search for clues, Constanus may unwittingly drop one or two hints during the course of the conversation. For example, if the Player Characters do not specifically mention to him that Urestes mentioned the word 'Brotherhood' on his dying breath, Constanus may use that word himself, referring to the 'brotherhood' of the Mitra priests.

Constanus is primarily interested in what the Player Characters have discovered, and in which direction their basic loyalties lie. If possible, he will do his best to befriend them but will not use any sorcery, as he deems that far too great a risk. If he believes he has been successful, he will urge them to go ahead and report back to Publius that it was indeed the Asurans behind Urestes' murder and the ritual in the Delvyn cemetery, even going so far as to 'tease' the Player Characters with hints that the priests of Mitra have discovered evidence that is indeed the case, evidence he is not yet able to reveal.

If the Player Characters seem combative or refuse to co-operate with Constanus, he will not respond in kind, preferring to continue his charm campaign in the hope of turning them around. However, if it becomes clear to him that is impossible, his temper will begin to get the better of him, and he may even go so far as to issue a thickly-veiled warning, something like: **'I do, of course, applaud your sense of duty in this matter, my friends. My greatest concern is for you, and that the faithful of Tarantia do not see your activities as some manner of an attempt at protecting the Asurans, who are, as I mentioned, clearly guilty when viewed objectively. I am troubled at the thought of some of them seeking to remove what they perceive as an obstacle to the justice they feel is so desperately needed in this case.'**

On the other hand, if the Player Characters seem friendly towards Constanus, he will pursue an entirely different tack in the conversation. After all, these are the people who just dispatched Essenic, a deadly warrior indeed, and a man Constanus needs to see about replacing. If the Player Characters seem eager to place the blame for the two crimes squarely on worshippers of Asura, he may even go so far as to begin grooming them for a place within his organisation, stepping into the shoes left behind by Essenic.

It is possible, if one of the Player Characters is a scholar, that he might look into Constanus' eyes and see that the priest of Mitra is corrupted (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for complete rules on the Sorcerer's Soul).

KNIVES IN THE DARK

Unless the Player Characters were eager to befriend Constanus and gladly agree to follow his advice and report to Publius that the Asurans were indeed behind the crimes of the previous night, they will be receiving some unwelcome visitors that evening.

After receiving a less enthusiastic response than he had hoped for from the Player Characters, Constanus has decided that he needs to hedge his bets where they are concerned. Working through his other mercenary bodyguard, Taspus, a contact provided to him by Lord Nadanidus, Constanus will dispatch a small group of hired assassins to the Player Characters' lodgings. Like the mercenaries from the cemetery the night before, these assassins will be prepared to plant false evidence linking the Asurans to the assassination of the Player Characters, though Constanus has made certain to provide evidence that will be discovered whether his assassins succeed or not.

Should they succeed, they are to use the Player Characters' blood to paint the same symbols and glyphs painted in blood at the Delvyn cemetery. On the other hand, if they fail and are killed, each one has, on a leather thong about his neck, a leather disk on which is painted one of the Asuran symbols, items which were initially prepared by Essenic for use in the cemetery sacrifice, but which Constanus decided against at the last moment. He has made certain neither he, nor any other living member of the Brotherhood, has touched the false talismans, ever mindful of the dangers the *psychometry* sorcery spell poses to his plans. Taspus presented them to the assassins in a wooden box, claiming them to be good luck charms. Constanus assumes, logically enough, that if the assassins are killed by the Player Characters, the discovery of the fake talismans will serve to bolster their case against the Asurans.

Constanus' belief that he is guided by the ultimate will of Mitra, that the god's desire for all foreign religions to be purged from Aquilonia and, eventually, the world is more than sufficient for him to justify to himself the act of sending assassins after the very people who might unravel his plans. His belief makes him optimistic enough to assume the Player Characters will, indeed, not succeed in their task, but he is still realistic enough to know that he must act to prevent them from doing so.

Whether the assassins succeed or fail in their mission is something Constanus cannot predict, but he believes that no matter the outcome, it will be good for him. If the assassins succeed, the very people assigned by Publius to determine if the Asurans were behind the incident in Delvyn will be found dead, with evidence implicating the Asurans once again. If the assassins fail, the bloodied Player Characters will still find evidence of Asuran involvement, in the form of the talismans worn by their would-be assassins. In this event, Constanus is hopeful the Player Characters may be far more willing to entertain the idea that the Asurans are behind the crimes, and thus far more willing to help Constanus in his ultimate goal.

The exact tactics used by the assassins are wholly dependent upon the sleeping arrangements and location of the Player Characters. This adventure assumes the Player Characters are staying in the Stag and Whistle, one of Tarantia's many inns, occupying one or more rooms on the second storey of the building.

The assassins will come for the Player Characters while they sleep. If they are in more than one room at the Stag and Whistle, the assassins will divide themselves up accordingly, attempting to strike each group of Player Characters simultaneously. They are adept at slipping into locked rooms, and at the Games Master's discretion, may either try coming through the doors or sneaking through the windows.

Assassins (4)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 3/thief 3; HD: 3d10+3d8+12 (41 hp); **Init:** +10; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 15; **Parry DV:** 15; **DR:** 4; **BAB/Grp:** +5/+7; **Atk:** Short sword +8 finesse melee; **Full Atk:** Short sword +8 finesse melee; **Dmg:** Short sword 1d8+2, 19–20/x2, AP 1; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); **SA:** Sneak Attack +2d6/+2d8; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Escape Artist, Gather Information), Background Skills (Escape Artist, Gather Information, Hide, Intimidation), Formation Combat (skirmisher), Sneak Attack Style (short sword), Trap Disarming, Trap Sense +1; **SV:** Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 8
Skills & Feats: Bluff +3, Climb +4, Escape Artist +13, Gather Information +7, Hide +8, Intimidate +3, Jump +4, Knowledge (local) +6, Open Lock +6; Combat Reflexes, Deft Hands, Eyes of the Cat, Point Blank Shot, Poison Use, Power Attack, Quick Draw
Possessions: Leather jerkin, short sword, fake talisman of Asura

Games Masters should bear in mind that with this attack happening at night while the Player Characters are likely sleeping and will be unlikely to be wearing their armour, though they may have a weapon close by..

If the assassins are not successful in simply killing the Player Characters as they sleep and end up in a battle with them, their would-be assassins will not stay around to fight for long, making their escape at the first possible opportunity. However, these are not brave men, nor are they committed to a cause, and if it becomes clear escape is impossible, they will surrender. The assassins know little of why they have been sent after the Player Characters, only that they were paid good coin to do so; having been offered the princely sum of 1,000 silver pieces each for eliminating the Player Characters. If the

Games Master is feeling generous and would like to drop another clue into the Player Characters' laps, he might wish to reward their luck or skill in capturing one of the assassins by having the assassin know the name of the man who hired them, Taspus. They know nothing of Constanus or the Brotherhood of the Bull and spotting the assassins' Asuran talismans requires a Spot check (DC 15).

The commotion of battle is certain to draw attention from other guests at the Stag and Whistle, who will nonetheless wait until the fracas dies down before coming to investigate. Once the other guests in the inn, as well as some of its staff, come to the Player Characters' rooms, the Games Master should roll a few Spot checks (DC 15) for the patrons to determine if any of them notice the false talismans of Asura around the necks of the assassins. If they do (or if the Player Characters do nothing to prevent the existence of the talismans from coming out when the guard arrives at the Stag and Whistle to collect the bodies and ask questions), by morning the rumours of this latest dastardly crime by the Asurans will be circulating through the streets of the city.



The Trail of Truth

AS ANOTHER DAY dawns on their investigation, the Player Characters are likely to be fervently wishing Urestes, the murdered priest of Mitra, had stumbled down another street. However much they may wish that, of course, it was them that Urestes encountered, and it was them that Publius charged with discovering the truth behind the murder of the Mitran priest.

With the new dawn comes a new spate of rumours and accusations about the Asurans and the situation shows no sign of blowing over or abating. In fact, these tales have grown dramatically overnight, and tension and tempers are running high in the light of the rising sun.

Unless the Player Characters took special care to collect and conceal the fake Asuran talismans around the necks of each of last night's assassins, they will surely have been seen by now, whether by the other guests at their lodgings or by the city guard who came to collect any bodies. If the talismans have been seen, even more new rumours will be added to the mix of xenophobic and suspicious rumours of new attacks by the worshippers of Asura and new tales of black-hearted sorcery and unfathomable depravity begin to take on a life of its own on Tarantia's streets,

This section of *Heretics of Tarantia* involves a number of meetings between the Player Characters and other individuals who are interested, for one reason or another, in the drama playing out in the streets of Tarantia. It also demands more of the Games Master, an ability to think on his feet and keep several balls in the air at once, as the religious strife in the city, until a few days ago only a slowly simmering problem, now threatens to boil over, setting the city, and even the country, aflame. The meetings detailed in this chapter can take place in almost any order the Games Master desires, though it is advised that the meeting with Gaulan is first. Games Masters may also feel free to alter the meetings in any way they wish. For example, if one or more of the Player Characters has a dark secret in his past, something he would not wish to see revealed, it is entirely appropriate for the Games Master to add a meeting to those detailed below, with someone who happens to have some degree of knowledge of such secrets and could use this knowledge as leverage against the Player Characters and their investigation to their own ends. Many in the city of Tarantia will have some stake in what is happening, or have some way to turn the impending violence to their own benefit; such individuals will not hesitate to use any means available to them to ensure their desired outcome.

Meanwhile, Games Masters should bear in mind that a good amount of action in *Heretics of Tarantia* is taking place 'off

stage,' away from the Player Characters, though it still has an effect, whether direct or indirect, upon the plotline. Today, Publius, chancellor of Aquilonia, is at the centre of much of this action. Since the later hours of the previous day, and resuming almost immediately this morning, Publius has found himself very nearly under siege by Tarantia's various and numerous nobles, many of whom want the exposure or exile of the Asurans. By early afternoon, Publius is beginning to become very nervous about the situation, and will be calling for the Player Characters, hoping for some manner of good news (see pg. 24 for more details).

OUT OF HIDING

With the sun rising on another day of investigation, the Player Characters will receive a visit from someone few in Tarantia have met openly, and those that have, have never realised the true identity of Asuran High Priest Hadrathus' second in command in Aquilonia, Gaulan.

As the Player Characters ready themselves for another day of investigation, read the following section aloud to the players;

The sun has risen high enough to clear the eastern buildings of the city, spreading enough light that you can see the general outline of the buildings outside through the murky glass of your rooms' windows. As you prepare to leave your lodgings for another day attempting to unravel the city's mysteries, there is a soft, almost hesitant knock on your door.

The Player Characters may be understandably skittish after the attack by Constanus' assassins mere hours before, and may wish to take certain precautions before opening the door. The man on the other side is planning no foul play against them, rendering any such precautions effectively moot. He will demand to be let in before discussing his business, however, refusing to give even so much as his name, insisting in a loud whisper that it is unsafe for him to speak to the Player Characters through the door, but he has information for them which is vital to their work. Of course, the Player Characters may refuse to speak to him, keeping the door firmly locked, but this scenario assumes they will be curious enough about what this stranger has to say that they will open the door for him.

When the Player Characters open the door, read the following section aloud to the players;

The man steps into the room as the door is opening, moving with the kind of swiftness most often seen in a thief eluding his pursuers, closing the door behind him just as swiftly. He is tall and thin, dressed in a long, dark coloured cloak bearing more than a few stains of travel. The cloak's cowl is drawn far forward, concealing his face.

With the door behind him closed again, he turns to you, pulling back the cowl of the cloak to reveal a pale oval of a face, with calm, delicately chiseled features. His hair is dark, with several streaks of grey running through it, and he is clean-shaven.

'My thanks for receiving me under such odd conditions,' he says, his voice carrying the accent of one native to Tarantia. 'After your ... recent excitement, I can certainly understand if you feel cautious or uneasy, but allow me to assure you I mean you no harm whatsoever. Indeed, I fear we face a common foe.

'I could not be certain of your role in what is now happening throughout the city. That is until last night, so you must forgive me for not approaching you earlier. Indeed, it was not until you yourselves came under assault by that band of assassins that I knew you were not actively working as part of some larger plot. Ah, but you must forgive me again. In my haste to explain to you my reasons for not presenting myself sooner, I have forgotten to tell you why I am here now. I am Gaulan, priest of Asura, and neither I nor any of my followers have had a hand in the crimes being ascribed to us.'

'Sadly, oaths I have sworn prevent me from discussing much of our customs and rituals with those who do not follow our path. Indeed, were the circumstances any less dire, I would never have come to you, revealing myself as I have. It may be that these oaths of ours are unwise, that our very secrecy, and the ignorance it breeds, has allowed these terrible rumours now infesting the streets of Tarantia to gain currency. Wise or unwise, however, what is done is done, and it is too late now to reconsider.

'These terrible crimes – the murder of the Mitran priest, the abhorrent acts in the cemetery, the vile attempt on your own lives – have come as an utter surprise to us. I have attempted, through some eldritch means, to find out more of what is happening, but someone or something has successfully managed to block all such attempts. Logic indicates it must be the same person who is behind these crimes, or at least someone closely allied with them.

'I regret I cannot tell you who it is that has orchestrated these terrible deeds. I can only tell you again that it



was not I, nor was it any worshipper of Asura who follows our creeds of justice and scholarship. If you have any questions for me, I shall answer them as fully as my oaths allow, and if you have any need of me, I shall serve you as well as I can so long as your endeavour is truly to uncover the architect of these terrible deeds.

'I have one boon to ask of you as well. Tell no one of me, or of our conversation this morning. I freely admit that, given the mood of the city, I fear for my safety, and that of all my followers, should my identity become known. I place my trust in your honour.'

Unless the Player Characters see this admission as a reason to draw steel and attack, Gaulan's demeanour will be one of patience and mollification. Should the Player Characters choose to attack, of course, he will attempt to flee. He is here, after all, to make the Player Characters, who, unless one of them is a worshipper of Asura, will likely have little or no knowledge of Asuran worship, understand that his cult is not, indeed, could not be, responsible for the crimes being ascribed to Asurans.

Gaulan, Priest of Asura

Medium Human Aquilonian scholar 14; HD: 10d6+20+4 (59 hp); **Init:** +6; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 17; **Parry DV:** 16; **DR:** –; **BAB/Grp:** +10/+11; **Atk:** Dagger +12 finesse melee *or* Kothic Demon-Fire +12 ranged; **Full Atk:** Dagger +12/+7 finesse melee *or* Kothic Demon-Fire +12/+7 ranged; **Dmg:** Dagger 1d4+1, 19–20/x2, AP 1 *or* Kothic Demon-Fire 5d6 plus stun; **Space/Reach:** 5ft. (1)/5ft. (1); **SA:** Defensive

Blast, Spells; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Background Skills (Perform (ritual), Sense Motive, Heal, Profession (priest)), Adaptability (Gather Information, Search), Background (lay priest), Knowledge is Power, Scholar; **MAB:** +12 (+5 Cha, +7 Level); **PP:** 12 (base 4, +4 Wis, +4 Level) (56 maximum); **SV:** Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +18 (+21 vs. Corruption); Str 12, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 19, Wis 18, Cha 20

Skills & Feats: Appraise +5, Bluff +11, Concentration +10, Craft (herbalism) +14, Decipher Script +16, Diplomacy +7, Gather Information +19, Heal +21, Knowledge (arcana) +23, Knowledge (local) +23, Knowledge (religion) +26, Listen +11, Perform (ritual) +22, Perform (song) +20, Profession (priest) +21, Search +18, Sense Motive +19, Sleight-of-Hand +8; Adept (divination), Diligent, Iron Will, Investigator, Knowledgeable, Negotiator, Priest, Quick Draw, Skill Focus (knowledge (religion))

Sorcery Styles: Counterspells, Divination, Oriental Magic, Prestidigitation, Summonings

Spells: *Astrological prediction, burst barrier, calm of the adept, conjuring, darting serpent, dream of wisdom, greater sorcerous news, greater telekinesis, greater warding, master words and signs, mind-reading, psychometry, rune of Jhebbal Sag, sorcerous news, summon elemental, telekinesis, visions, warding, warrior trance, yimsha's carpet*

Possessions: Dagger, Robes, 10 doses of Kothic Demon Fire
Notes: Though the roots of the cult of Asura are in distant Vendhya, Gaulan is a man of Aquilonia. Quiet and studious, he is a man of impressive charisma when he chooses to use it. He is intensely loyal to Aquilonia and to Asura. He is also very loyal to King Conan, the man who granted his religion asylum and, he had hoped, freedom from persecution.

He is horrified at the crimes that have been carried out and blamed on the followers of Asura, and is anxious to do all he can to clear his cult of any suspicion. Usually, the leadership of the cult of Asura in Tarantia falls to Hadrathus, one of the most powerful scholars in the western world. However, Hadrathus is out of the city at the moment, on a pilgrimage to Vendhya, leaving the leadership of the cult in his hands.

True to his word, Gaulan will answer any of the Player Characters' questions as well as he can, though he is forbidden by his oaths from revealing any of the specifics required of Asuran worship to those who do not worship Asura. The priest will also not accept an instantaneous conversion clearly undertaken for the sole purpose of gaining information. Likewise, he cannot take them to the temple of Asura, nor tell them its location, hidden beneath a nondescript building on the Avenue of the Smiths in the Market Ward of Tarantia, less than a mile from the Mitraeum itself. If he is presented with any of the supposedly Asuran symbols found in the cemetery or the fake talismans worn by the assassins, he will confirm they are indeed Asuran in origin, but wholly divorced from their proper meaning. For example, the symbol on the assassins' talismans means 'balance'. Also, if the Player Characters ask him about the name Taspilus, if they were able to get that information from one of the previous

night's assassins, Gaulan will tell them it sounds familiar, and promise to get back to them when he knows more.

Gaulan is also true to his word in that he will do whatever he can to help the Player Characters, so long as it is indeed their intention to find out who truly is behind this series of crimes. As long as the intentions of the Player Characters are honourable, he will lend what aid he can. However, he does not think it a wise idea for him to accompany the Player Characters as they move throughout the city, as his presence is certain to raise questions he thinks are best left unasked. Though Gaulan prefers to avoid combat, at the Games Master's discretion he may join the Player Characters in the final battle beneath the villa of Lord Nadanidus. This should only be done if the Games Master truly feels the Player Characters will need the help survive the conflict. Gaulan is, understandably, extremely worried about this situation, the more so because Hadrathus, the high priest of Asura in Tarantia, is currently out of the city, leaving Gaulan in charge of the temple and of the congregation during his absence.

Once the Player Characters have asked all their questions, Gaulan will tell them that, if they wish to get in touch with him again for any reason, they should place a pair of lighted candles in the windows of their rooms, and he will be there as soon as he can. Likewise, should he discover anything, he will send word to them here.

CONCERNED CITIZENS

Throughout the day, the anger of the citizens of Tarantia against the crimes supposedly committed by the Asurans continues to grow, a fact the Games Master should make clear to the Player Characters through his descriptions of what is happening in the city around them.

The tales of the 'Asuran's' crimes continue to grow more and more fanciful, and more and more loathsome, almost by the hour. Though only two murders have truly occurred as a result of Constanus and Nadanidus' plans, one would not know it to hear the stories being told on the streets. By noontime, almost every corner or marketplace in Tarantia is the chosen site of someone exclaiming the evils of the Asurans and the need for all good and loyal Tarantians to drive them from the city. Several people, mostly foreigners, are accused of worshipping Asura, an accusation that leads swiftly to a brutal beating at the hands of a zealous mob.

As the Player Characters go about their business, they are likely to find themselves meeting suddenly and, in some cases, unexpectedly, with some of Tarantia's nobles who either could not get in to see Publius, have already seen him and wish to repeat themselves

to the Player Characters who are investigating this matter or have decided to go straight to the investigators themselves. The exact number of these meetings, and who instigates them, is left up to the Games Master. If the Player Characters are relative newcomers to Tarantia, there are likely to be very few such meetings. However, if the Player Characters have made a name for themselves in the city, they may find themselves besieged throughout the day by those interested only in the confirmation of the Asurans' guilt.

SECOND CHANCE

Shortly after Gaulan takes his leave of the Player Characters, indeed, only a few moments after they leave their lodgings, a familiar carriage pulls to a stop beside them. It is Constanus, who has decided to make another attempt at converting the Player Characters to his cause. Just as he did last night, he will open the door and beckon the Player Characters over to speak with him. He will also offer them a ride to wherever they may be headed, but whether or not they take him up on the offer has little to do with the rest of the encounter, save that Constanus will know where they went.

As Constanus hails the Player Characters from his carriage, read the following section aloud to the players;

'I am quite relieved to see you all still hale and hearty,' Constanus says, dropping his voice low enough to prevent it from being overheard. 'Word reached me this morning of an attack against your good selves, but I was unable to discover whether you had all survived the attempt on your lives. I was lead to believe that these assassins bore more sigils of the murderous cult of Asura? I trust you are now convinced of the culpability of these heathen foreigners in the spate of crimes gripping our city?'

Constanus may have just made a terrible mistake by mentioning the talismans carried by the assassins, especially if the Player characters had taken steps to suppress this piece of information. The priest will make an ardent and earnest effort to bring the Player Characters around to his way of thinking, pointing out to them again and again the obvious guilt of the Asurans. He is unwilling to hear any arguments to the contrary, though he will keep his temper under control. If the Player Characters mention anything about Gaulan, or even of receiving a visit from a priest of Asura, however, Constanus' temper will flare as he denounces all such worshippers as fiends and demons of the vilest order.

WHISPERS IN THE TEMPLE

This encounter may take place anywhere the Games Master deems appropriate. If the Player Characters have become suspicious of Constanus and have come to the Mitraeum to see what they can discover about him, it should take place there. Otherwise, it can take place virtually anywhere in the city, with the exceptions of Tamar and the Player Characters' lodgings.

If the Player Characters have not yet been successful on following up on any other clues, this meeting may be the break in the investigation they have been hoping for.

If the encounter takes place at the Mitraeum, the Player Characters will notice a lone priest, Caudius, standing in a barely-open doorway, gesturing to them to come to him. If it takes place outside the great temple, Caudius will approach them nervously, glancing over his shoulders and taking sidelong looks up and down the street, seemingly unaware of how suspicious such activities may seem to an onlooker.

Caudius has taken the death of Urestes quite hard, as he had a great deal of respect for the senior priest. Driven by curiosity as much as anything else, he has striven to find out all he can about Urestes' death, and has managed to piece together a more or less complete picture of the events that preceded the Player Characters happening upon the poisoned priest. Caudius is terribly afraid that he has stumbled onto something very dangerous and is unwilling to expose himself by meeting with the Player Characters anywhere that he might be recognised.

As Caudius approaches the Player Characters, read the following section aloud to the players;

'Please, good lords and ladies, I understand you do not know me, but I feel I must speak to you. First, though, I must know – did the most pious Urestes say anything about a group called the Brotherhood before going to Mitra's halls?'

Of course, the Player Characters may outright lie, they may refuse to answer and they may tell the truth. Caudius is, despite his nervousness, quite anxious to share his information, and can be fairly easily persuaded to do so even if the Player Characters confirm nothing about Urestes' last words. Doing so requires a Diplomacy check (DC 15).

As soon as the Player Characters confirm whether or not Urestes mentioned the Brotherhood, or as soon as Caudius is convinced to speak, read the following section aloud to the players;

'Very well,' the priest says, nodding. 'Then there is something I fear I must tell you. I overheard two priests speaking this morning, though I could see only one of

them. They appeared to be arguing, though in hushed tones, but at one point the priest I could not see let his anger best him, and his voice rose high enough that I could pick out his words. He told Barthias, the priest I could see, that, though it was regrettable, Urestes could not be allowed to betray the Brotherhood. Barthias paused for a moment, and then nodded his assent before they quickly went their separate ways. I saw Barthias again perhaps an hour later, and his face still had a haunted look about it. I have never heard of this Brotherhood before, and I know nothing more of it, but if they are behind Urestes' murder, they must be brought to justice.'

Cadius is telling the Player Characters the absolute truth. Though he has no more love for the Asurans than any other priest of Mitra, his loyalty to Urestes has made him value justice for his murderers over any other concerns, save perhaps his own safety. The Player Characters may question Cadius all they like, but he knows nothing more.

The Player Characters will likely wish to meet this Barthias, which will be a difficult prospect without the help of Cadius or another Mitran priest. Cadius does not wish to become involved any further in this matter than he already is, but with a successful Diplomacy skill check (DC 15), he will agree to help as best he can. He will insist any meeting between the player characters and Barthias must take place outside the Mitraeum, but other than that will let them plan the details of the meeting.

THE ASSASSINS' MASTER

If the Player Characters discovered the name Tapsius from one of Constanus' assassins, mentioned it to Gaulan and return to their lodgings any time after noon, they will find a note slipped under their door. The note is unsigned, simply reads:

Tapsius is a mercenary retainer in the service of Lord Nadanidus. He has served Nadanidus for three years, and is a veteran of several mercenary companies.

Any Player Character with even a single rank in Knowledge (local) (Tarantia) will know who Lord Nadanidus is, as will any Player Character who can succeed in a Knowledge (nobility) check (DC 15).

Regardless of how well the Player Characters do on their checks, they know nothing of Nadanidus' connection with the cult of Set. As far as anyone in Tarantia is aware, Nadanidus is simply another very rich, moderately unscrupulous noble. However, a Gather Information check (DC 20) is sufficient to reveal that Nadanidus and Constanus have been seen together regularly. A successful Gather Information check (DC 25) is enough to reveal that there is a series of old

catacombs beneath Lord Nadanidus' manor in Tamar, but there is no one who seems to know how to get to them, if it is even possible.

Upon this discovery, the Player Characters may decide that their next order of business is to track down Tapsius and explain to him quite clearly how little they appreciate the assaults of his assassins. However, Tapsius is a little more difficult to find than Essenic, and is spending the entire day with Lord Nadanidus in the noble's manor.

The Player Characters may try to find out more about this man with Gather Information checks, but will find that information on Tapsius is harder to find than was information on the more flamboyant Essenic. A Gather Information check (DC 25) might reveal the mercenary companies in which Tapsius served before becoming a retainer of Lord Nadanidus three years ago, but unless the Games Master wishes to tie them into his campaign somehow, they are not germane to the plot of *Heretics of Tarantia*.

As for discovering Tapsius' actual location, a Gather Information check (DC 25) will confirm that the wily mercenary resides at Lord Nadanidus' manor, maintaining no private home of his own. If the Player Characters go to the manor in search of Tapsius, however, they will be told he is not currently in residence, and no time for his return has been given. This is a bald-faced lie, a fact that is fairly easily determined with a Sense Motive check (DC 15), but unless the Player Characters wish to attempt to force their way into the manor, there is little they can do other than accept it and leave.

The Player Characters' visit to Lord Nadanidus' manor will not go unremarked, however. The fact that they came looking for Tapsius is more than enough to convince the mercenary and his noble master that the Player Characters know more than either man suspected they did. This will yield three possible results.

Firstly, if the Player Characters spend enough time on other matters today that the meeting with Barthias must be put off by one day (this is left to the discretion of the Games Master, who must be the judge of how the day is progressing), and therefore must spend another night with the mystery unresolved, during which they will be attacked by another team of Tapsius' assassins.

Secondly, though the revelation that the Player Characters are somehow suspicious of Tapsius will not cause Nadanidus or Constanus to change their plans regarding the meeting of the Brotherhood of the Bull that night, it will cause them to be considerably more alert. In this case, the guards in the catacombs will be on the watch for anyone trying to slip

in under any circumstances, and the Player Characters will not be able to bluff their way in disguised as Mitran priests.

Finally, if the Player Characters have not already met with Lord Nadanidus, this will certainly cause him to abandon any thoughts of speaking to the Player Characters himself.

CONFESSION

If the Player Characters were wise enough to have Caudius arrange a meeting with Barthias, he will be able to set it up on relatively short notice. The exact circumstances of the meeting, as well as its location, are dependent upon what plans the Player Characters made for it.

Barthias will not be pleased when he learns Caudius has effectively lured him into a trap. Still, he is not a foolish man, and will not immediately attempt to fight his way free.

Barthias

Medium Human Aquilonian scholar 5; HD: 5d6 (19 hp); **Init:** +2; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 12; **Parry DV:** 10; **DR:** –; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+2; **Atk:** Dagger +4 finesse melee *or* Kothic demon-fire +4 ranged (5d6 plus stun); **Full Atk:** Dagger +4 finesse melee *or* Kothic demon-fire +4 ranged (5d6 plus stun); **Dmg:** Dagger 1d4-1, 19–20/x2 AP 1; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); **SA:** Spells; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Background skills (perform (song), heal, diplomacy, bluff), Adaptability (search, gather information), Background (lay priest), Iron Will, Knowledge is Power, Scholar; **MAB:** +4; **PP:** 7 (base 4, +2 Wis, +1 Level) (14 maximum); **SV:** Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +11 (14 vs. Corruption); Str 9, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 15

Skills & Feats: Bluff +4, Concentration +4, Craft (alchemy) +11, Craft (herbalism) +11, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +4, Gather Information +17, Heal +5, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (local) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Perform (ritual) +10, Perform (song) +4, Search +18, Sense Motive +5, Sleight-of-Hand +9; Investigator, Knowledgeable, Priest, Skill Focus (gather information), Skill Focus (search)

Sorcery Styles: Counterspells, Divination, Prestidigitation

Spells: *Astrological prediction, conjuring, telekinesis, mind-reading, psychometry, rune of Jhebbal Sag, warding*

Possessions: Dagger, priest's robes, 2 doses of Kothic demon-fire

Barthias feels he is on the horns of a dilemma, a predicament that is likely to serve the Player Characters well, so long as they are careful in how they handle this situation. He is extremely loyal to both Constanus and the Brotherhood of the Bull, holding the banishment of all foreign religions from Aquilonia as his highest calling. However, that loyalty does not extend to Lord Nadanidus. A

suspicion has been growing in his mind for some time that Nadanidus does not have the interests of the Brotherhood at heart. Finally, Barthias mustered up his courage to attempt to read Nadanidus' soul and managed to see the corruption so carefully hidden within. He now believes that Nadanidus is attempting to use the Brotherhood in some way he does not yet understand, but is unsure how to broach the subject with Constanus. He also believes something very unnatural is going on in the catacombs beneath the noble's Tamar manor, a suspicion given some credence by his discovery, ten days ago, of a scale about twice the size of his thumbnail, that he thinks came from some kind of enormous snake.

Of course, he will only be interested in sharing this information with the Player Characters if they can convince him to do so, using either Diplomacy or Intimidate to get Barthias to talk. The process may be very arduous; the Player Characters will have to drag the answers they want out of him one by one. The DCs for the skill check rolls will vary depending upon the question being asked, and Games Masters should assign a difficulty to each check. In general, Barthias is more likely to answer questions about Nadanidus (DC 15+) than he is to answer questions about the Brotherhood (DC 25+). If the Player Characters manage to recruit Caudius to their side, he will urge Barthias to help the Player Characters, and the Games Master should consider lowering the DC of these checks by as much as five.

If the Player Characters manage to succeed on three skill checks in a row, Barthias' resolve will break and he will begin to volunteer information. The exact extent of his knowledge is up to the Games Master to determine, with due consideration given to how much help, if any, the Player Characters currently need to unravel the events of *Heretics of Tarantia*. There are, however, certain things Barthias absolutely does know, such as the Brotherhood's culpability in the crimes in the Delvyn cemetery, the Brotherhood's goal of exiling all religions save Mitra from Aquilonia and the fact that the Brotherhood is to meet in the catacombs beneath Nadanidus' manor tonight. There are also some things he absolutely does not know, such as the fact that Constanus ordered the attempted assassination of the Player Characters. He has, however, kept the scale he discovered with him, and if asked, will present it to the Player Characters, even allowing them to keep it if they wish. A Knowledge (nature) check (DC 15) will confirm Barthias' suspicions about the origin of the scale, it is indeed that of a snake, while a Knowledge (nature) check (DC 25) will reveal that it once belonged to a lesser son of Set.

It is important for the Games Master and players to roleplay this conversation. If the Player Characters are particularly lucky and persuasive, they might be able to recruit Barthias to their cause. In this case, Barthias will agree to work to help them, whether by providing details on what he knows of the catacombs, though he has never been farther inside than the larder (see pg. 27, the larder (7)), or by trying to arrange for

them to meet Constanus. If the Player Characters express a desire to launch their own assault on Lord Nadanidus' catacombs or, if they have already spoken to Publius and taken up his request that they finish the job, Barthias will ask them not to make the attempt during the gathering of the Brotherhood, which is set to begin two hours past sundown. He can tell them how to get into the sewers at the closest access point to Nadanidus' catacombs, and will reveal the location of the hidden door from the sewers into the catacombs themselves, as well as provide them with a key to the lock. For a complete description of the sewers and catacombs, see pg. 25, *The Serpent's Lair*.

WOLVES IN PRIESTS' CLOTHING

It is entirely possible, even likely, that once the Player Characters find out about the impending meeting of the Brotherhood of the Bull to take place that night in the catacombs beneath Lord Nadanidus' Tamar estate, they will hit upon the idea of sneaking into the catacombs disguised as priests of Mitra. To do so, they will obviously need the robes of Mitran priests, not something that is commonly available for sale and not something that can be convincingly patched together in the space of a few hours. To acquire an adequate disguise, the Player Characters will have to appeal for help from Caudius or Barthias.

Neither Mitran priest is terribly pleased with the idea of anyone not ordained a priest of Mitra wearing their holy vestments, but again, a Diplomacy check (DC 20) will convince either Barthias or Caudius into procuring Mitran robes for the Player Characters, which will allow them to slip into Lord Nadanidus' catacombs without raising suspicion.

FOLLOWING CONSTANUS

The Player Characters may have become suspicious of Constanus after their first meeting with him, subsequently deciding to spend the day investigating him, an exercise in the use of the Gather Information skill that is not likely to yield any great results. Constanus is fairly well known in Tarantia, ranking among the upper echelon of the priesthood at the Mitraeum. However, despite his moderate fame, very few people know much of anything about Constanus the man – to most of the city, he is a face, a name and a priestly robe. Asking questions at the Mitraeum is unlikely to yield any better results. Though the priests may have been willing to speak about Urestes, given that he was recently murdered in the city's benighted streets, there is no similar compelling reason for them to discuss Constanus, a priest who is still very much alive and who outranks most of them. If the Player Characters succeed in a Diplomacy check (DC 20), they may find a priest who is willing to talk about Constanus,

describing him as a pious and uncompromising man, a priest who adheres unswervingly to teachings of Mitra without reservation or reticence. At the Games Master's discretion, a particularly successful Diplomacy check (DC 25+) might be enough for this priest to inadvertently go into a bit more detail than he intended, perhaps touching on Constanus' intolerance of anyone who has not embraced the Mitran faith, or his concerns over the allowing of foreign religions to operate freely on Aquilonian soil. This should not be anything damning, but considering what else the Player Characters may already know, it might be just enough to cast the shadow of suspicion wholly upon Constanus.

Likely, the best way for the Player Characters to learn more about Constanus is if they choose to follow him about as he conducts his business in the city. If they choose this option, they may learn some things of great value. Constanus spends most of his day travelling from one lord's manor in Tamar to another, always going inside for a short time (15 to 20 minutes) before emerging again and travelling on to the next noble. Though the Player Characters have no way to know this at the time, most of these nobles being visited by Constanus are the same nobles who, shortly afterward, make their way to the Chancellory to pressure to Publius into overturning the king's edict.

Once Constanus leaves Tamar, his first activity will be to have his carriage take him around the outside of the ancient wall surrounding the old city, coming to a stop outside a short and narrow alleyway that terminates at an old tower. Constanus approaches the tower, making his way to where the tower joins with the wall itself, and opens a hidden door. He descends a winding stair into the sewers beneath the old city (see pg. 26, the entry (1)). If the Player Characters wish to, of course, they may follow him now, heading straight into the climax of the adventure. If they do this, Games Masters should bear in mind that the Brotherhood of the Bull is not yet in session – of all the priests of Mitra, only Constanus will be in the catacombs.

After several hours in the catacombs, Constanus returns to his waiting carriage. His activities after this are up to the Games Master, depending upon whether he wishes the Player Characters to have a chance to meet Constanus again or not. Games Masters should remember, if the Player Characters are attempting to follow Constanus, that he is moving about in a carriage, which makes following him on foot an exhausting and potentially futile exercise for the Player Characters, particularly if they are taking pains to disguise the fact they are pursuing him.

If the Player Characters have not been keeping track of Constanus' movements throughout the day, they will have to rely on Barthias to find him for them, should they wish to speak to him. Whether

Barthias is able to find him or not depends upon the wishes of the Games Master.

Ultimately, speaking to Constanus may be a fruitless endeavour, unless the Player Characters are true masters of diplomacy. Utterly convinced of his cause, Constanus will admit nothing of the crimes he has been a part of, putting on a masterful show of righteous indignation at the implication he might have played some part in them. Only if the Player Characters are somehow able to prove to his satisfaction that Lord Nadanidus is a worshipper of Set will he begin to listen to them. He views Set as even worse than Asura, a belief which, coupled with his rage at being deceived by Nadanidus, might net the Player Characters an extremely powerful ally.

Of course, the Player Characters will need more than Barthias' suspicions and a large snake scale to convince Constanus, and finding any more evidence of Nadanidus' allegiances without raiding his catacombs would be very nearly impossible.

PUBLIUS' REQUEST

By early afternoon, the mood on the streets and the pressure brought by the nobles has put Publius into a foul and desperate mood, and he will begin trying to find the Player Characters, sending scouts out to find them with orders for them to report to him at the Chancellery. Whether or not those scouts are successful in locating the Player Characters is, of course, up to the Games Master, who should also consider exactly what the Player Characters are doing when making his decision.

Heretics of Tarantia assumes that, if the Player Characters do go to see Publius, it will be after they have spoken to Barthias. As at their first visit to the Chancellory, the Player Characters are relieved of weapons and escorted to Publius' study by the pageboy, Arn.

Once the Player Characters have been led to Publius, read the following section aloud to the players;

Publius looks far more tired than he did when you saw him last, as though he has not slept in days. The table in his study, so neat before, is now littered with sheets of parchment, gathered into loose piles. The fire in the hearth is long dead, and a smell of cold ashes gives an acrid tinge to the air in this room. Publius looks up at you as you enter, his face a grey and impassive mask.

'I hope you have something to report to me,' he says gravely. 'I fear this situation is becoming more dire by the hour.'

Assuming the Player Characters have spoken to Cadius and Barthias by this point, they do indeed have something to report aside from their confrontation with Essenic and the assassin attack of the night before, both of which Publius is already aware of. He will listen intently as the Player Characters speak, asking probing and insightful questions to draw out the details, but is not at all pleased by the news they have brought him.

Though Publius will not say as much, he is dismayed at the thought of Mitran priests being responsible for the spate of crimes blamed on the Asurans, and not simply because he himself is a worshipper of Mitra. Given the current climate, and the sheer power the cult of Mitra carries, he sees no way to expose the Brotherhood of the Bull and he sees the possibility of the involvement of the cult of Set as both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, if Lord Nadanidus is truly an acolyte of the Stygian god, the entirety of the crimes can be blamed on him. On the other hand, if it is true, it means the Stygians are taking a more active interest than before in the affairs of Aquilonia.

With the Player Characters' report concluded, read the following section aloud to the players;

'This is disturbing news,' Publius says as you finish your tale. 'Very well. I've a favour to ask of you, one for which you will be compensated, of course. You have brought me speculation about Lord Nadanidus, but not proof, and without that proof, I cannot move against him. He is a wealthy and exceedingly influential individual, and if I were to send the guard after him and later be proven wrong, the results would be unfortunate for all concerned. I would, therefore, like you to find the proof I need to justify such a move. If you agree, you will be operating without my official sanction. Should you find no evidence of an alliance to Set, I can likely get you out of Tarantia, but you can never return. If you do find it, however – well, that is how heroes are made. Do you feel you are capable of such a challenge?'

Although the first time Publius asked a favour of the Player Characters, it was truly more an order than anything else, this is an actual request. He knows that if what the Player Characters have told him is correct, they will be facing great danger within the catacombs, and cannot in good conscience order men not under his actual command into such a situation. However, he will offer the Player Characters an additional reward of 2,000 silver pieces each should they undertake this mission and return with proof of Lord Nadanidus' misdeeds. If the Player Characters agree, he will send them on their way, telling them to report back to him immediately following their foray into the catacombs.

The Serpent's Lair

GAINING ACCESS TO the catacombs beneath Lord Nadanidus' manor is no easy task. The catacombs themselves are incredibly old, parts of them dating back to before the existence of Aquilonia itself.

The Games Master need not feel constrained by the descriptions given for catacomb's many rooms. The catacombs beneath the manor are hardly some dusty and abandoned labyrinth, but rather serve as home for a number of Nadanidus' retainers and a permanent force of his guards, also quartered here. From the moment it becomes known that the Player Characters have infiltrated the catacombs, the entire place will become very active. The guards, priests and others in the catacombs will not simply wait for the Player Characters to arrive at their respective rooms, but instead will actively move to engage and destroy the invaders.

The descriptions given below list the potential enemies that are in each room of the catacombs *before* the alarm is sounded. Obviously, the Games Master must be the final arbiter of which Non-Player Characters do what, and when, but the following timeline represents the most likely order of events,



beginning with the Player Characters' entry into the Guard Room (4). Games Masters should feel free to use all, some or none of the actions described below for the catacomb's inhabitants. Games Masters are reminded that time is of the essence here, and the running of this part of *Heretics of Tarantia* requires a careful accounting of time.

Round 1: As the Player Characters enter the Guard Room (4), the three guards within are alerted, and one heads for the door.

Round 2: One of the guards runs from the Guard Room (4), calling out an alarm.

Round 8: Five guards from the Barracks (8) are the first to respond to the fleeing guard's cries of alarm.

Round 9: The members of the Brotherhood of the Bull, if they are in session, flee the Larder (7).

Round 15: Six guards and one officer from the Officers' Barracks (9) arrive.

Round 18: Five guards and one officer from Officers' Barracks (9) arrive.

Round 20 and beyond: Lord Nadanidus and Taspilus arrive. If things are going poorly for the guards, Lord Nadanidus will attempt to release the lesser son of Set from the Lair (14).

Lord Nadanidus and Taspilus have no official position on the map of the catacombs, but may arrive at any point the Games Master deems appropriate. Statistics for both Lord Nadanidus and Taspilus are, therefore, given here.

Lord Nadanidus

Medium Human Aquilonian noble 5/scholar 5; HD: 5d8+5d6+20 (71 hp); **Init:** +4; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 20; **DR:** 6; **BAB/Grp:** +6/+9; **Atk:** Akbitanan broadsword +11 melee; **Full Atk:** Akbitanan broadsword +11/+5 melee; **Dmg:** Akbitanan broadsword 1d10+3, 19-20/x2, AP 5; **Space/Reach:** 5ft. (1)/5ft. (1); **SA:** Defensive Blast, Spells; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Diplomacy, Sense Motive), Background Skills (Diplomacy, Knowledge (nobility), Ride, Sense Motive), Background (acolyte), Iron Will, Knowledge is Power, Lead By Example +2, Rank Hath Its Privileges, Scholar, Social Ability (*smear another*), Special Regional Feature +1, Title, Wealth; **MAB:** +4; **PP:** 7 (base 4, +2 Wis, +1 Level) (14 maximum); **SV:** Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +12; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 14
Skills & Feats: Bluff +10, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +10, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (history) +11,

Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (nobility) +11, Knowledge (religion) +10, Ride +11, Sense Motive +15; Leadership, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Steely Gaze

Sorcery Styles: Curses, Divination, Summonings

Spells: *Astrological prediction, demonic pact, greater ill-fortune, ill-fortune, lesser ill-fortune, mind-reading, psychometry.*

Possessions: Akbitanan broadsword, breastplate, large shield

Notes: Lord Nadanidus is the descendant of an old, old family that has lived in Tamar for dozens of generations, one that has never felt itself overburdened with a need to adhere to the law. Driven by greed and material gluttony, Lord Nadanidus went further than any of his forebears, striking a deal with the cult of Set in his search for greater power.

At the command of the cult, he took on an active role at the Mitraeum, where he met Constanus. The two became allies in what Constanus saw as their common loathing of all foreign religions in Aquilonia. Nadanidus stoked the fires of resentment burning in Constanus into a blaze, which soon led to the formation of the Brotherhood of the Bull.

Taspius

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 9/thief 2; HD: 9d10+1d8+34 (87 hp); **Init:** +10; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 18; **Parry DV:** 15; **DR:** 5; **BAB/Grp:** +9/+13; **Atk:** Akbitanan arming sword +16 melee; **Full Atk:** Akbitanan arming sword +16/+11 melee; **Dmg:** Akbitanan arming sword 1d10+4, 19–20/x2, AP 4; **SA:** Sneak Attack +1d6/+1d8; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Escape Artist, Gather Information), Background Skills (Escape Artist, Gather Information, Hide, Intimidation), Eyes of the Cat, Formation Combat (heavy infantry), Formation Combat (skirmisher), Sneak Attack Style (arming sword), Trap Disarming; **SV:** Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +5; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 10

Skills & Feats: Bluff +4, Climb +8, Escape Artist +15, Gather Information +6, Hide +7, Intimidate +15, Jump +8, Knowledge (local) +16, Open Lock +5; Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Far Shot, Great Cleave, Greater Weapon Focus (arming sword), Improved Bull Rush, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (arming sword)

Possessions: Akbitanan arming sword, mail shirt

THE ENTRY [1]

This is the entry point to the sewers that the Brotherhood of the Bull members have been using to access the catacombs. The Player Characters may have learned of its existence from Barthias, or from following Constanus.

JUNCTION ROOM [2]

This junction room is in most ways just like all other junction rooms in Tarantia's sewer system, but with one important

difference. In the southeast corner of the junction room is a cleverly concealed door leading into the catacombs beneath Lord Nadanidus' Tamar manor. Finding the door without a careful search is nearly impossible, requiring a Search check (DC 20) to locate.

As the Player Characters arrive in the junction room, read the following section aloud to the players;

If the information you were given is correct, this dismal junction room holds the entryway into Lord Nadanidus' catacombs. Glancing around, there is no door in evidence, only the room's old stone walls, slick and green with lichen. The room itself is more or less square, though its low ceiling, supported by four square pillars of brick, causes you to stoop. Including the entry you used, there are three tunnels leading out of this room, heading, you assume, deeper into the sewers. A narrow, filth-slick walkway runs around the perimeter of the room, bridging the three exits with rotted wood catwalks. Aside from this walkway, none of the room's floor is visible, concealed beneath a slow-moving tide of deep and noxious sludge. Stains on the walls mark the level to which the sludge has risen in the past, and you can only be grateful there has been little rain in Tarantia of late.

Manoeuvring on the narrow ledge around the junction room is difficult, but can be accomplished with a successful Balance check (DC 19). If a Player Character does fail the roll and fall into the sewage, he is in no true danger, as it is only about three feet deep. The concealed door itself is locked. If the Player Characters have the key from Barthias, of course, they may open it with ease, otherwise, they must pick it, requiring an Open Lock check (DC 20).

TO SEWERS [3]

These passageways lead deeper into the aged sewer system of Tamar. The sewers, even here, are a dizzying, rat-haunted maze, and the Player Characters, should they choose to explore, will find they cannot go far before the tunnels begin to narrow, forcing them to plunge beneath the sewage itself if they wish to go forward. Places in which to surface and breathe are rare indeed, meaning that any would-be explorers will have to hold their breath as they crawl through a pitch-black pipe filled with sewage, hoping to find an opening before their air runs out.

GUARD ROOM [4]

This room was once, many years ago, used as a storage facility for the smuggling operations that made Lord Nadanidus' forebears so wealthy. However, now it stands empty, save for the three guards Nadanidus keeps stationed here to ensure no one enters the catacombs beneath his manor without his knowledge. If the Player Characters have come up with some way to disguise themselves as members of the Brotherhood of the Bull, or have come at the time of the meeting, the guards



will let them pass. Otherwise, one of the guards will run through the southeastern door to tell his lord that invaders have breached the catacombs while the other two take up positions to block the door and prepare to do battle with the Player Characters.

Guards (3)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 2; **HD:** 2d10+4 (16 hp); **Init:** +1; **Spd:** 25 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 12; **Parry DV:** 17; **DR:** 8; **BAB/Grp:** +2/+4; **Atk:** Broadsword +5 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +5 melee; **Atk:** Broadsword 1d10+2, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)); **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Intimidate +6, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +7; Cleave, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: Mail shirt and scale corselet, steel cap, broadsword, large shield

Unless the Player Characters are able to stop the third guard before he reaches either the Larder (7) or the Barracks (8), the entire armed forces of the manor will soon be roused against them.

STORAGE ROOM [5]

This room has been empty and unused for so long the door no longer works and must be forced open, requiring a Strength

check (DC 15). Inside is nothing but the dank odour of rooting wood dust and rust.

WINE CELLAR [6]

The cool room is furnished with wooden racks along each wall, holding nearly 200 bottles of wine, including 10 bottle of black lotus wine (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). The wines are from a variety of countries, though many of the bottles are labeled in some a number of unknown scripts. Still, if they could be transported out of here, the wine alone would be worth a total of 6,500 silver pieces to an interested buyer, while the black lotus wine would fetch another 1,000 silver pieces.

If one of the guards from the Guard Room (4) managed to get away and sound the alarm, there will be another group of guards responding by the time the Player Characters reach this area of the catacombs. They are not interested in taking prisoners; Lord Nadanidus, in his concern that someone might discover his worship of Set, has commanded that any intruders found in the catacombs be killed.

Guards (5)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 3; **HD:** 3d10+6 (23 hp); **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 25 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 19; **DR:** 8; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+6; **Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+3, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)), Formation Combat (heavy infantry); **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Intimidate +8, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +7; Cleave, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: mail shirt and scale corselet, steel cap, broadsword, large shield

LARDER [7]

This room is, officially, the larder for the manor above, containing sacks of grain, wheels of cheese, salted meats and various other foodstuffs to supply Lord Nadanidus, his family and his retainers. However, that is not the sole purpose of this room.

The larder in the catacombs has been set aside for the meetings of the Brotherhood of the Bull. There are ten members of the Brotherhood, not including Constanus, all Mitran priests for whom the goal of driving all other religions out of Aquilonia outweighs any other concerns or precepts of their faith.

The room itself is inordinately large for an underground chamber, some 35 feet by 40 feet, its seven-foot,

smoke-blackened ceiling held up with five immense columns. The majority of the provisions are stacked against the eastern and southern walls, leaving much of the northern and western areas of the room clear.

If the Player Characters have come during the time of one of the meetings, the members of the Brotherhood will be there. If the alarm has been sounded, they will be trying to make their way out of the room to join with some of the guards from the barrack rooms (8 and 9). Ultimately, it is up to the judgement of the Games Master as to whether or not the members of the Brotherhood have had enough warning to make it out of their meeting room and unite with the Nadanidus' soldiers. If the Player Characters have come straight to this point as quickly as they could manage, the members of the Brotherhood are likely still here. On the other hand, if the Player Characters have spent an inordinate amount of time checking every nook and cranny they have passed, the members of the Brotherhood will almost certainly have made their way to the barrack rooms (8 and 9), and the Player Characters will soon be facing a combined group of priests and soldiers.

Priests (8)

Medium Human Aquilonian scholar 5; HD: 5d6 (19 hp); **Init:** +2; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 12; **Parry DV:** 10; **DR:** -; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+2; **Atk:** Dagger +5 finesse melee; **Full Atk:** Dagger +5 finesse melee; **Dmg:** Dagger 1d4-1, 19-20/x2, AP 1; **Space/Reach:** 5ft. (1)/5ft. (1); **SA:** Spells; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Decipher Script, Profession (priest)), Background Skills (Craft (illumination), Knowledge (religion), Perform (ritual), Profession (priest)), Background (*lay priest*), Iron Will, Knowledge is Power, Scholar; **MAB:** +4; **PP:** 7 (base 4, +2 Wis, +1 Level) (14 maximum); **SV:** Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +6; Str 9, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 15

Skills & Feats: Appraise +3, Bluff +10, Craft (herbalism) +7, Craft (illumination) +7, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +4, Gather Information +10, Heal +10, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Knowledge (local) +13, Perform (ritual) +10, Profession (priest) +14, Sense Motive +12; Knowledgeable, Negotiator, Noble Blood, Priest

Sorcery Styles: Counterspells, Divination, Hypnotism

Spells: *Astrological prediction, entrance, hypnotic suggestion, mind-reading, psychometry, rune of Jhebbal Sag, warding*

Possessions: Priest's robes; dagger

Priests (3)

Medium Human Aquilonian Scholar 7; HD: 7d6+7 (31 hp); **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 11; **DR:** -; **BAB/Grp:** +5/+4; **Atk:** Dagger +6 finesse melee; **Full Atk:** Dagger +6 finesse melee; **Dmg:** Dagger 1d4-1, 19-20/x2, AP 1; **Space/Reach:** 5ft. (1)/5ft. (1); **SA:** Spells; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Decipher Script,

Profession (priest)), Background Skills (Craft (illumination), Knowledge (religion), Perform (ritual), Profession (priest)), Background (*lay priest*), Iron Will, Knowledge is Power, Scholar; **MAB:** +6; **PP:** 8 (base 4, +2 Wis, +2 Level) (24 maximum); **SV:** Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +7; Str 9, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 16

Skills & Feats: Appraise +3, Bluff +12, Craft (herbalism) +7, Craft (illumination) +7, Decipher Script +13, Diplomacy +9, Gather Information +12, Heal +12, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (religion) +15, Knowledge (local) +15, Perform (ritual) +12, Profession (priest) +16, Sense Motive +14; Knowledgeable, Negotiator, Noble Blood, Priest, Skill Focus (Diplomacy)

Sorcery Styles: Counterspells, Divination, Hypnotism

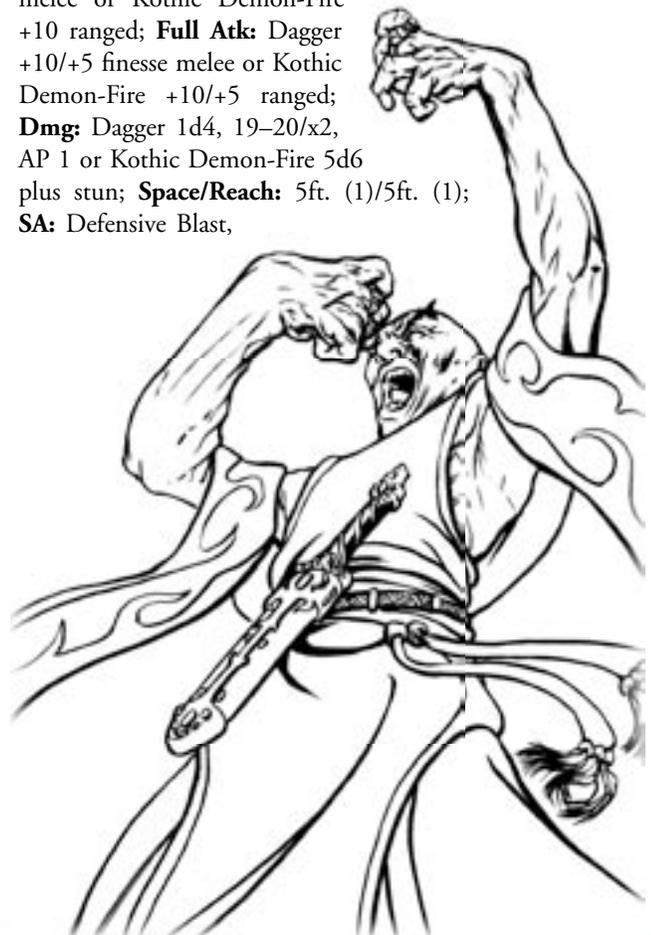
Spells: *Astrological prediction, domination, entrance, greater warding, hypnotic suggestion, mind-reading, psychometry, rune of Jhebbal Sag, visions, warding*

Possessions: Priest's robes; dagger

If Constanus is here as well, the Games Master should consult the Non-Player Characters chapter of *Faith and Blood* for his complete statistics.

Constanus, Priest of Mitra

Medium Human Aquilonian scholar 12; HD: 10d6+20+2 (63 hp); **Init:** +6; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 15; **Parry DV:** 14; **DR:** -; **BAB/Grp:** +9/+9; **Atk:** Dagger +10 finesse melee or Kothic Demon-Fire +10 ranged; **Full Atk:** Dagger +10/+5 finesse melee or Kothic Demon-Fire +10/+5 ranged; **Dmg:** Dagger 1d4, 19-20/x2, AP 1 or Kothic Demon-Fire 5d6 plus stun; **Space/Reach:** 5ft. (1)/5ft. (1); **SA:** Defensive Blast,



Spells; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Knowledge (religion), Profession (priest)), Background Skills (Knowledge (religion), Sense Motive, Bluff, Decipher Script), Background (lay priest), Iron Will, Knowledge is Power, Scholar; **MAB:** +9; **PP:** 11 (base 4, +4 Wis, +3 Level) (33 maximum); **SV:** Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +14; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 16

Skills & Feats: Appraise +11, Bluff +17, Concentration +15, Craft (alchemy) +11, Craft (herbalism) +11, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +17, Gather Information +17, Heal +11, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (local) +18, Knowledge (religion) +20, Listen +17, Perform (ritual) +11, Profession (priest) +20, Sense Motive +18; Adept (Divination), Adept (Hypnotism), Diligent, Leadership, Priest, Skill Focus (Knowledge (local)), Skill Focus (Profession (priest))

Sorcery Styles: Counterspells, Divination, Hypnotism, Nature Magic, Prestidigitation

Spells: *Astrological prediction, burst barrier, conjuring, domination, dream of wisdom, entrance, greater sorcerous news, greater warding, hypnotic suggestion, mass hypnotic suggestion, mind-reading, psychometry, ranged hypnotism, rune of Jhebbal Sag, sorcerous news, summon beast, visions, warding*

Possessions: Dagger, priest's robes, 8 doses of Kothic Demon Fire

Constanus is the worst kind of religious zealot, a man so convinced of the ultimate rightness of his cause that he is able to justify easily anything he might feel necessary to further that cause. For Constanus, that cause is ridding Aquilonia of all faiths save that of Mitra, and he is willing to commit murder, and acts even darker still, in order to see it through. He is certain that any acts he commits in this endeavour, no matter how much they may seem to violate basic Mitran dogma, are done with the full blessing of Mitra in the interest of the greater good.

BARRACKS [8]

This room is 15 feet by 20 feet, supported in the centre by a single column. It is one of two barracks for the guards and mercenaries retained by Lord Nadanidus. If the Player Characters manage to get here without rousing the alarm, they will find five soldiers awake, playing a game of cards by the light of a flickering lamp, while four more sleep in their bunks.

Guards (5)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 3; **HD:** 3d10+6 (23 hp); **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 25 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 19; **DR:** 8; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+6; **Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+3, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)), Formation Combat (heavy infantry); **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Intimidate +8, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +7; Cleave, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: mail shirt and scale corselet, steel cap, broadsword, large shield

Guards (4)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 3; **HD:** 3d10+6 (23 hp); **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 15; **DR:** –; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+6; **Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+3, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)), Formation Combat (heavy infantry); **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Intimidate +8, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +7; Cleave, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: broadsword

Notes: These statistics represent the four guards sleeping in their bunks.

If the Player Characters have set off an alarm, five of the soldiers will be missing and presumably dealt with outside the Wine Cellar (6), while the other four are busily struggling into their armour.

OFFICERS' BARRACKS [9]:

This is the second, larger barracks for Lord Nadanidus' men-at-arms. The room differs from others in the catacombs in as much as it is not entirely man-made. Instead, it is a natural cave that has been enlarged and finished, and the broken stumps of stalactites still dangle from the ceiling, supported by four rough stone pillars.

This barracks is home to 16 men, including the three standing watch in the Guard Room (4) when the Player Characters arrive in the catacombs. If the Player Characters have set off the alarm, they may have already met and dealt with some or all of these men before reaching this room.

Guards (6)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 2; **HD:** 2d10+4 (16 hp); **Init:** +1; **Spd:** 25 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 12; **Parry DV:** 17; **DR:** 8; **BAB/Grp:** +2/+4; **Atk:** Broadsword +5 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +5 melee; **Atk:** Broadsword 1d10+2, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)); **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Intimidate +6, Jump +7, Knowledge (local)

+7; Cleave, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: Mail shirt and scale corselet, steel cap, broadsword, large shield

Guards (5)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 3; HD: 3d10+6 (23 hp); **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 25 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 19; **DR:** 8; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+6; **Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+3, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)), Formation Combat (heavy infantry); **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Intimidate +8, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +7; Cleave, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: Mail shirt and scale corselet, steel cap, broadsword, large shield

Officers (2)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 5; HD: 5d10+10 (38 hp); **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 25 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 14; **Parry DV:** 20; **DR:** 8; **BAB/Grp:** +5/+8; **Atk:** Broadsword +9 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +9 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+3, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)), Formation Combat (heavy infantry); **SV:** Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +8, Intimidate +9, Jump +8, Knowledge (local) +8; Cleave, Diehard, Endurance, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword), Weapon Specialisation (broadsword)

Possessions: Mail shirt and scale corselet, steel cap, broadsword, large shield

STORAGE [10]

This room is very nearly packed full with crates and boxes, containing the dozens of minor supplies of Lord Nadanidus' manor, such as lamp oil, bolts of cloth, extra pots and so forth.

STAIRS [11]

These stairs lead up into the main part of Lord Nadanidus' manor. Access into the manor is barred by a locked heavy wooden door. Picking the door's lock requires an Open Lock check (DC 35), while breaking the door down will require a Strength check (DC 23) and will almost certainly alert the ten guards that watch over the interior of the manor.

Guards (10)

Medium Human Aquilonian soldier 3; HD: 3d10+6 (23 hp); **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 25 ft.; **Dodge DV:** 13; **Parry DV:** 19; **DR:** 8; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+6; **Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Broadsword +7 melee; **Dmg:** Broadsword 1d10+3, 19–20/x2, AP 3; **SA:** –; **SQ:** Hyborian qualities, Adaptability (Intimidate, Knowledge (local)), Background Skills (Climb, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (local)), Formation Combat (heavy infantry); **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills & Feats: Climb +7, Intimidate +8, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +7; Cleave, Eyes of the Cat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Possessions: Mail shirt and scale corselet, steel cap, broadsword, large shield

TREASURY [12]

Behind a cleverly concealed door in the wall at the corner of the corridor lies the treasury of Lord Nadanidus. Finding this door requires a detailed search of the area, as well as a successful Search check (DC 25). The door itself is locked, and only Lord Nadanidus has the key. Picking the lock will require an Open Lock check (DC 30).

Within his treasury, Lord Nadanidus keeps coins, precious gems, art objects and other items of great value, totaling a wealth of 15,425 silver pieces. The actual wealth of Lord Nadanidus far exceeds this amount, of course, but the majority of this is tied up in a wide variety of investments such as caravan trains. Of course, the Games Master is free to adjust the wealth in the treasury up or down dependent upon his own campaign.

Player Characters might also be reminded before raiding Lord Nadanidus' treasury, that the man has heirs who know nothing of his involvement with the cult of Set, but will certainly be anxious to get their hands on his wealth. If they are robbed of that chance, they are not likely to look kindly upon those who have plundered their inheritance.

In the northwest corner of the treasury is another locked and secret door, identical to the first, leading into a rough-hewn corridor leading to a Shrine of Set (13).

SHRINE OF SET [13]

The rough walls of this natural cave are covered with heavy black hangings, framing the dark altar in the centre of the room. Atop the altar are several golden vessels set with rubies and onyx. Though there is no writing of any kind in the room, a Knowledge (religion) check (DC 15) will identify this place as a shrine to the Stygian god, Set.

The five sacramental vessels on the altar of Set are worth a total of 2,500 silver pieces.



A spiral staircase, concealed behind one of the black wall hangings, ascends to the manor above, though the way is blocked by an iron trap door bolted and locked from the other side (see pg. 30, Stairs (11), for more information). Aside for the staircase and the entrance through which the Player Characters have just come, a single iron-bound door in the northern wall leads out of this room and on to the Lair (14).

THE LAIR [14]

Behind the door leading from the northern wall of the Shrine of Set (13) lurks a creature the Player Characters certainly do not wish to meet. It is a Lesser Son of Set, and if Lord Nadanidus becomes desperate, he will attempt to make his way here in order to release it, in the hopes that the animal will cover his escape.

Lesser Son of Set

Huge Animal; HD: 11d8+21 (70 hp); **Init:** +10; **Spd:** 20 ft.; **DV:** 19; **DR:** 5; **BAB/Grp:** +8/+23; **Atk:** Bite +13 melee; **Full Atk:** Bite +13 melee; **Dmg:** Bite 1d10+10; **SA:** Constrict 1d8+10 (AP 8), Improved Grab; **SQ:** Scent; **SV:** Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +4; Str 25, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2
Skills & Feats: Balance +11, Climb +17, Hide +10, Listen +9, Spot +9, Swim +16; Alertness, Endurance, Skill Focus (Hide), Toughness

THE CRYPT [15]

This enormous natural cavern has dozens of graves dug into the walls, in which the ancestors of Lord Nadanidus lie in slumber. Though they were all buried with their finery, Nadanidus has stripped them of any valuable possessions long

ago, reasoning that the living could better use such wealth. Aside from the desiccated corpses of Nadanidus' ancestors, there is nothing of any interest here.

CONCLUSION

Following their brutal battle through the catacombs, the Player Characters should report back to Publius, as requested, to inform him of the outcome and present to him any evidence they have uncovered concerning Lord Nadanidus' involvement with the cult of Set and agents of Stygia. The extent of this evidence, of course, rests on the thoroughness of the Player Characters' search of the catacombs, but *Heretics of Tarantia* assumes they were reasonably assiduous and able to discover enough information to suit Publius' purposes.

As promised, Publius will pay each surviving Player Character a sum of 2,000 silver pieces and admonish them not to discuss their intimate knowledge of the events of the past few days. The reason for this is fairly simple – justice is not truly going to be served.

After the past few days of religious strife in the streets of Tarantia, the last thing Publius or the Mitraeum wants is for the people of the city to feel betrayed by their faith. Moreover, the Mitraeum will make these concerns extremely clear to Publius, who is unwilling to set himself against a faction as powerful as the church of Mitra without better cause than the events described here. The full blame for the actions that started all of this – the assassination of the Mitran priest Urestes and the subsequent crimes that have plagued the streets of Tarantia for the past few days – will be placed fully and completely at the feet of the cult of Set. Not only will this help allay peoples' fears regarding the cult of Asura, it will serve to focus the peoples' enmity towards Set and Stygia, something Publius is sure King Conan will not disapprove of.

As for Constanus and his Brotherhood of the Bull, their involvement in their proceedings will be forever concealed. They will face no charges, no trial in a court of Tarantia, but will instead be remanded to the Mitraeum. What fate awaits them at the hands of their fellow Mitran priests is left to the Games Master to determine.

The Player Characters will be paid and sent on their way. Though Publius will certainly not acknowledge it to them, he will feel a debt of honour towards them for their efforts in unraveling the twisted plots of the Constanus, Lord Nadanidus and the Brotherhood of the Bull. In the future, should the Player Characters ever find themselves in a situation where Publius could be of help, the Chancellor will devote his considerable resources to helping them – but this will only happen once; heroes are not made on the efforts of others.

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THE CATACOMBS

CONAN[®]

AND THE HERETICS OF TARANTIA

For centuries, the cult of Mitra was the only religion allowed in Aquilonia – all others forbidden by edict of the crown. However, the ascension of King Conan to the Aquilonian throne changed all that. Not only was Conan himself a worshipper of Crom, but his barbarian temperament could not abide the prospect of persecution of others simply because of the gods they chose to follow. After witnessing one act of religious intolerance after another, King Conan decreed that every man in his realm be free to worship whatever god he may chose.

King Conan's edict was the subject of strident opposition. Many, throughout Aquilonia, feared that allowing Hyboria's other religions to openly exist within the borders of the country would ultimately destroy it, diluting its most powerful unifying force – religion.

Several years have passed since King Conan's edict and thus far Aquilonia has not unravelled. Still, a burning, fervent need to stop the potential spread of other religions and save Aquilonia from the mad edicts of the barbarian king has prevailed. Now a band of zealous priests have turned to their sacred texts, seeking answers and justifications and, in the name of piety, have stripped the words of context and intent, finding within their sacred passages, intended to promote peace, civilisation and forgiveness, rationalisations for the embracing of sin, darkness and violence in the name of the greater good.

Heretics of Tarantia is a scenario of a different breed. Designed for four to six Player Characters of between 5th and 7th character level, this adventure combines situations and encounters that will require a wide range of skills to survive and overcome as Player Characters become embroiled in a story of intrigue, treachery, politics and murder in the most glorious city of the West.



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