

GOREAN Adventures THE CAVE OF GOLD



TALES OF
GOR
COREAN ROLEPLAYING



POSTMORTEM
STUDIOS



Tales of Gor

GOREAN ROLEPLAYING

FANTASTICAL ADVENTURES ON THE COUNTER-EARTH

Authorised and based on the Gorean books of John Norman

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The Cave of Gold

The Cave of Gold confronts the adventurers with direct experience of the Priest-Kings – the insectoid, alien Masters of the Gorean world. Much has disrupted these golden, ant-like creatures and weakened their mastery of the planet, though the fear of their power has – until now – kept the kurii at bay and men from rebelling.

The ‘Nest’ has a new queen, one that is truly immortal, one whose children will replace and revitalise the nest after a devastating civil war almost tore it asunder. The older Priest-Kings will inevitably die off, despite immunity to age. They will be replaced, and this newer ‘regime’ seems less fond of its human pets and less present in their lives than they were before.

Nonetheless, there are holdovers and remnants, the fading shadows of old plots and intrigues, and potentially devastating dangers that they represent. The Cave of Gold is but one of these.

The Cave of Gold is an abandoned outpost of the Priest-Kings, monitored by an insane Priest-King from the old nest, a servant of Sarm. The place is full of strange Mul experiments, an artificial egg and is guarded by a golden beetle, which kills and eats intruders.

This adventure errs towards the more science-fantasy side of the Gorean word, with more fantastical and science fiction elements. These may suit a more light-hearted player group or those who are more interested in the science-fictional elements.

POSTMORTEM STUDIOS

Postmortem Studios is an independent role-playing game company formed and run by James ‘Grim’ Desborough, with a reputation for tackling unusual, ‘edgy’ and adult gaming material. Postmortem Studios has published Tales of Gor, but this is far from the company’s only game.

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OVERVIEW

Beneath the Woods of Clearchus, west of Harfax lays a cave of gold, spoken of in hushed tones by bandits and panther girls alike. It is assumed to be nothing more than an insane legend that has sprung up in recent decades. Those who have nothing forced to live in the wilds and on their wits, understandably need a sense of hope in the face of every hardship they have to overcome.

The Agents of the Priest-Kings think there is something accurate to this legend, however, especially since those few who claim to have found or seen the cave report dizziness, disorientation and blackouts. This information means something to the Priest-Kings and their dwindling agents.

The characters are set to travel to Besnit a market town close to, and allied with, Harfax. They are charged with freeing a bandit by the name of Bailey. He has, supposedly, seen the cave and will be able to lead them to it, where they will investigate and, if necessary, deal with any problems that they encounter there.



Chapter 1:

A Bandit in Besnit

PRELUDE

Aloof and a little disdainful the innkeeper of The Golden Tarsk leads you through the high-beamed common room and past the dancing girl, swaying in the circle of sand in the inn. Past the deafening and primal beat of the drum, he raises his voice again: "It's just here."

He opens the door to a private room where, in the warm light of tharlaron oil lamps, waits a man, sipping from a bowl of paga.

"Ah, take a seat. Innkeep? No interruptions."

"Yes Sir," says the innkeeper, retreating, leaving you in the company of Lor, a messenger from Port Kar.

Lor is a strong-armed man with sun-bleached hair and tanned skin, toughened and darkened by wind and salt. He wears a sea-green tunic with a rope net slung over his shoulder – the marks of a pirate and a man of Port Kar. He waits for you to settle, and then speaks.

"There are strange tales out of Besnit; a bandit claims to have found a cave of gold, home to monsters, just beyond the woods of Clearchus. If there are monsters, this needs investigating, if there is gold, it will affect the cities here. These may be the ravings of a man too long alone in the forest, but we need to investigate. It doesn't help that the guards of Besnit arrested him as a bandit and intend to execute him soon publicly.

We need him to find the cave and to get to the truth of the matter."

He tosses a small bag of coins onto the table.

"Find him, free him, find the truth."

The bag contains two silver tarn disks for each character, in mixed coinage, mostly that of the Islands of Cos.

The Golden Tarsk is an inn-complex on the track-road between Esalinius and Besnit and the kind of place outlaws and bandits hang out – the sort of place the adventuring party might wash up at. It houses a slaver's camp as well – as will Besnit – so weapons, armour and slaves are things that are readily available here, should they wish to purchase any. Neither Besnit nor Esalinius pay top coin for slaves, but 'bad' slaves bought here – captured panther girls in particular – might make a small profit when sold on in Besnit.

BESNIT

The path to Besnit is likely to be unmolested, but these are wilder lands and not the regularly patrolled grand roads of Ar or Ko-Ro-Ba. Wild tarns, ranging from the Thentis mountains are a possibility, as are herds of tabuk, slaver's wagons, mining or metal transportation wagons, bandits and even particularly brave panther girls straying from the forests. It is not, however, suggested that you throw your players into a battle at this point. Instead, a non-combat encounter might ease people into their roleplaying and allow them to get a flavour of the stories coming out of Besnit.

Besnit itself is a market town, not a full city. It plays host to a slaver's camp and a grand market, supplying and serving

Harfax, Esalinius and the surrounding villages.

It's reasonably prosperous, but a frequent target for bandits, thieves and disguised panther girls seeking supplies. It is a suspicious and vengeful territory in which the characters should watch their step.

It is not a market day when you arrive in Besnit, though it appears some traders and stall holders are open on the off chance of a little extra trade. Otherwise, the town seems quiet. It is not a huge town; no great cylinders tower above it, it's walls are but a single ring, circumscribed by an ancient, grassy ditch, half filled with trash and spill.

The guards, at least, seem suspicious, asking your business at the gate before they allow you within.

While the guards are watchful and suspicious, provided none of the characters are thieves and so long as they can make a case for being there on legitimate business they will be allowed within. Besnit thrives on trade and cannot afford to be too picky.

Bailey's ravings and imminent execution are the talk of the town. Finding him will not be so difficult at all, he is being held – temporarily – at the town's guardhouse and a simple enquiry, almost anywhere, will reveal this. Besnit has any number of inns and paga taverns – all small – happy to compete for their business on a non-market day.

THE GUARD HOUSE

Bailey, the bandit, is being held in Besnit's main guard house. Besnit has a total of 150 guards under arms, split into two shifts and divided between the guard house and the two gatehouses. The guard house is under guard by five guards day or night with the rest out on patrol or asleep – either in barracks or their own homes.

Bailey's freedom can be bought, officially, for five silver coins (this can be haggled down) or the on-duty guards might be able to be bribed for a lower amount. Otherwise, they may have to come up with some plan to rescue him from the prison.

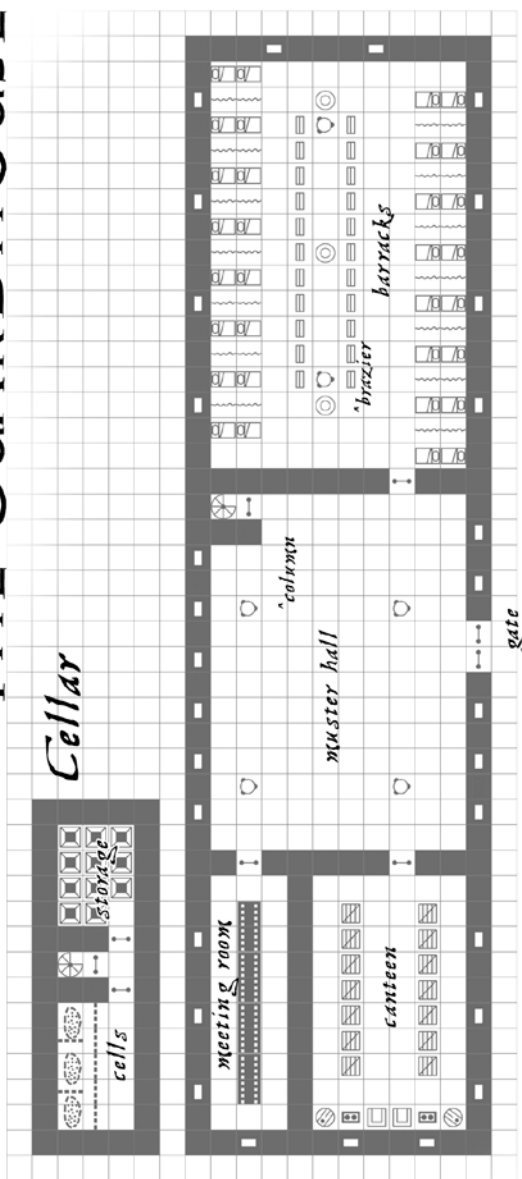
The Square

The guardhouse is surrounded by a wall. Thin, but tall. The gate hangs open, granting admittance to the square beyond. Cobbled and broad the interior is a square, on one side the stables for the guards' tharlarion, grunting and bissing as they eye you from behind their gates.

On the far side of the guardhouse itself, squat and imposing, its roof crenellated, its walls set with fragments of local stone. In the centre of the square itself are the displayed, impaled bodies of men and women on set spears. Grim reminders that this is a place of law, order and punishment.

The exterior wall is five feet high, the guardhouse itself ten feet high with its crenelations a further two feet tall – one foot of that a low wall.

THE GUARDHOUSE



Main building

The Spears

Closer to the spears you get a whiff of the foul, sweet smell of rotting flesh. The bodies are wet and sagging, their faces transfixed with pain, impaled fundament-to-mouth upon the spears, their feet weighed with stones.

One spear remains unadorned and clean, a man in the brown of the peasants wiping and oiling it with a scrap of rep cloth. He nods slightly to you and continues with his work.

There are four spears, pointing outward in four directions, off from vertical by about 15 degrees. Three of them are impaled with bodies in various states of decomposition. One – mercifully swaddled in a free woman’s robes – has a sign saying ‘thief’ around her neck. Another, a naked woman, bloated and fly-blown, is marked ‘Panther’. The last spear is impaled by a relatively fresh corpse of a swarthy, barrel-chested man, his sign proclaims him as a ‘bandit’.

The peasant’s name is Tormas. He is a simple and pleasant fellow, though he knows little. He is merely employed to clean the spears and prepare them for executions. He puts no stock in Bailey’s pleas, saying that people will say anything to be spared impalement. He has a bent for gallows humour, working hard to fit terms like ‘pierce’, ‘stab’ and ‘sharp’ into regular conversation.

The Tharlarion Stables

The stables are a long, low, wooden building with half-height gates and walls. Behind them, hissing and tasting the air with their tongues, are riding tharlarion. The stables stink, a weird mix of creamy blackwine and a pungent, spicy stink of excrement, with damp straw as a note beneath that.

There are ten stalls, but two are empty. A few stablehands are mucking out and feeding the beasts, wary of their teeth and claws. A closed but is attached to the far end, windowless, with a double door.

There are eight tharlarion currently in the stables and two stablehands working. The dung heap next to the stables is rather ripe and steaming from the heat of the bacteria working away within it. The stable hands supplement their meagre income by selling the composted dung, so are surprisingly protective of it.

The room at the far end of the stable contains a wood-burning stove, where the stablehands make warm drinks and cook their dinner, as well as tharlarion boots, saddles, repair gear and light lances.

The Front Gate

The front gate is an open, metal, double-gate, wide enough for a cart or wagon to come in or out. It is surrounded by a stone gatehouse, made of solid-looking blocks which are further linked into the flint-and-mortar wall that surrounds the rest of the guard building, some six feet high and topped with sharp flint. Arrow slits are a little menacing, and there’s certainly room for guards to be stationed there.

The front gate is well kept, oiled and rust free. It is guarded by two men, alert and read, with an alarm bar hanging in the top section of the gatehouse.

The Rear Gate

The rear gate is a closed, metal, single gate, broad enough for a riding tharlarion to pass. It is surrounded by a stone gatehouse, made of solid-looking blocks which are further linked into the flint-and-mortar wall that surrounds the rest of the guard building, some six feet high and topped with sharp flint. Arrow slits are a little menacing, and there's certainly room for guards to be stationed there.

The rear gate is a little rusty and closed with a chain. It looks like it doesn't see much use – the guards working more in public than in secret. Nonetheless, there is an alarm bar hanging in the upper part of the gatehouse, and two – slightly less alert – guards, standing watch.

Breaking the chain would require a difficulty 20 Fitness roll, or a strike with a weapon doing 15 damage in a single strike.

The Main Hall

The main building is a squat, workmanlike structure of heavy stone blocks with small, iron-barred windows studded throughout it, no single window big enough for someone to squeeze through. The roof is made to look like a fort, but it is unclear whether the crenelations are practical or not.

Two iron-bound doors grant entry to the building and beyond that, its main hall. This is a significant space, lit with braziers and the light from the small windows. A polished, but scuffed, stone floor suggests that many men stand here, often. Perhaps they muster here before their shifts or in times of emergency, but right now there is nobody there.

Two doors to the left-hand side seem to lead through to somewhere else, another door to the right-hand side must lead elsewhere. A square section, 'cut out' of the room has another sturdy door, perhaps a stairwell.

This is the main hall of the guardhouse and where they meet at the beginning of each shift or to mobilise for battle. Save at these times, nobody is normally here. The doors to the left of the entrance lead to the canteen and the meeting room. The door to the right to the barracks. The 'cut out' section is the stairwell, which leads to the roof (up) and the cellar (down) where the storage room and jail cells are.

The Barracks

The large door opens into a barracks-room, curtained into sections, with heavy curtains over its windows to keep out the light. Dozens of men sleep here in triple-bunks, shields, swords, crossbows in or next to locker-boxes. Braziers burn low, little more than coals, heating the room, ready to be flared to life for heat. The sound of many men breathing, snoring, is more than a little unsettling.

No slaves are in here, they are busy running chores, but the whole of another shift (they hot-bunk) is asleep in here, ready to be called to duty if need be. Not the whole shift is here; some have rooms in town, others have unavoidable tasks in the day or are otherwise not here. While most are asleep, some may be awake. There is a good chance of being spotted if someone enters this room.

The Canteen

The big door opens into a brightly lit dining area, littered with stained and battered cushions around long, low tables, sufficient to feed a host of men. The back part of the room is open into a kitchen, where a pair of pot-slaves in stained rags are working on washing and rinsing a mound of wooden bowls. The smell of stewing meat issues from an enormous pot that squats like a fat merchant, in the fireplace.

Four pot-slaves work in the kitchen and do double duty as comfort girls for the guards. They are pretty enough, but in the manner of the peasants (the caste they used to be), rough-handed, broad-hipped and curvy. They'll offer no resistance and will cooperate with any interlopers; they may even believe they are new guards. If left alone, however, they will try to raise the alarm, fearing punishment from the guards that they serve. Both the pot girls and the guards have access to the store room keys, one set hanging in the kitchen for the girls.

The Meeting Room

The door opens to a spacious room with many lantern hooks and extinguished lanterns, as well as several barred windows admitting light. A high table dominates the room, covered with a map – painstakingly drawn – of the town and its surrounds. Several scrolls, pens and ink-bottles weigh it down and keep it in place. This must be where the watch commanders discuss their plans and duties.

Examination of the plans and maps could show patrols and give players ideas of how best to pull off a heist – or similar – but in the context of this adventure, there isn't anything useful here at all.

You could use this opportunity to drop some hooks for future adventures, talking about bandits, panther girls, thieves and intrigues, but that would be for another time.

The Stairs

The small, square room holds the stone steps, leading down into cellars in a tight, square spiral or up to the roof in a similar fashion. The steps have been here some time and are worn quite smooth and slippery. The walls – at least – are rough, giving you something to hold onto as you descend.

The stairs are tight and steep, defensible and only allowing two men abreast to travel up or down at any point.

The Storage Room

The cellar is split into two areas, one part a grand jail, divided into sections by its metal bars, the other a walled-in secure chamber that must be for storage. A clunky lock hangs from the massive, iron-bound door, refusing access to whatever lies beyond.

Upon bypassing the door – it's a solid but not well-made lock (difficulty 15) – they can enter the storage room beyond.

The grand storage chamber is laid up in case of a siege, packed floor to ceiling with barrels of preserved meat, fruit and sacks of grain. It reeks of vinegar, and the ground is littered with dirty salt, worked into the flagstones by the passage of feet. The back of the room contains a huge cistern, a ladder leant against it, flanked by a couple of discarded yokes, their buckets damp from water.

There is enough food and water here to last for weeks – with rationing – as well as other supplies for the oiling and maintenance of weapons and the fletching of arrows and bolts. No actual weapons are stored here, only parts for repair and maintenance, in case of breakouts.

The Jail

The jail is open, a set of interlocking cages built into each other. One is more substantial, more communal; the others are smaller with room for only a couple of men. A pair of drunks are drying out in one of the smaller cells, groaning and banging off the bars. A nervous looking woman sits – alone – in the common area, continually adjusting her veils and eyeing you as you move inside. The last inmate is a man, alone in one of the cells, pacing, frowning, mumbling to himself under his breath.

The drunks are Rosen and Gilder, a pair of down-on-their-luck merchants who are the worse for wear after having drowned their sorrows all night.

The woman, Lady Linton, is a thief and one who has previously been caught and ear-notched. She will beg as best she can for her release fee to be paid (2 silver) before someone in stronger authority examines her and she stands to lose a hand. Bailey is the mumbling, ranting man (his release fee is one gold – given that he's set to be executed).

He's a little unhinged both from what he has seen, and the prospect of being put to death but will grasp at any opportunity to escape and – while a touch 'woolly headed' – may even be a good asset in any escape.

The jail is under constant watch by three guards.

Without a key the difficulty to pick the locks is 20, but will require something to be used as a pick. Barging the prison doors open is difficult 30.

BREAKING OUT BAILEY

There are many different approaches that the players could take to break Bailey from his prison. The easiest and most straightforward would be just to pay his release price – but a full gold tarn is a pretty massive investment for all but the luckiest and wealthiest of sell-swords.

A stealthy approach – such as poisoning, distracting, or knocking out enough of the guards to escape could work, but any problems are likely to result in an alarm – and a lot more guards. Not to mention the suspicions of the citizens of Besnit, many of whom – being Gorean – may try to intervene.

A directly combative approach is not particularly likely to succeed, given the number of guards, the alarm bars they can ring and the status of the guardhouse as a miniature fortress. A tarn rider might be able to drop men onto the roof swiftly and – equally promptly – escape. It will take about two ehns for guards within the guardhouse to respond to such an attack, with other guards from around Besnit arriving to assist within about five ehns.

Players being players they may come up with other, wilder schemes and the Games Master is encouraged to indulge them and to try to adapt to whatever ploys they might happen to come up with.

If they fail to break Bailey out, they will have no real way to proceed in this adventure without immense good fortune in wandering the woods.

You might allow some exceptional tracking rolls to find the cave or the Panther girls that they are likely to encounter may know where it is – though they will be staying far away from it.

If Bailey is successfully rescued he will be immensely grateful to the group, but once he realises the reason for his rescue he will become agitated and may require further persuasion on top of the dubious, honour of a bandit. With suitable fiscal, physical or other encouragement he will describe what he saw, how to get there, and may even be persuaded to join them on their journey, otherwise taking to the woods, never to be seen again. He will, however, need to be armed and equipped.

BAILEY'S TALE

I used to run with a small band, me and... well, I suppose names don't matter anymore, dead is dead and names are no use in the Cities of Dust. We clashed with Panthers in the woods, as well as attacking caravans and taking skins and slaves for market when we could. Game's been getting scarcer and scarcer, and there's been more and more Panthers straying closer to the fringes of the forest though, and times had been getting tough.

Our leader suggested we move deeper into the woods since everyone else was coming into our territory. We were all accomplished woodsmen and if there were more game in the woods than at the edges, all the better for us.

It was good for a while, and we wandered deeper until we found that cave. It glittered in the moss and stone like a tiara on a pot-slave, and we were drawn to it. It was strange, warm and perfumed air came out of it, like a hot spring or spa, but sweeter, heady. We tried to remove some of the gold and then men began to pass out.

My own head got cloudy, and I could barely see, but I know that something... something terrible came out of that cave.

I could barely see or think like I was several bota of paga into a drinking session, but I saw enough. Something big, towering over men, came out of that cave. It was hissing, clattering, it made snapping noises and cut grown men in two. The fear and the smell of blood cleared my head a little, and I ran. So much as I know, I'm the only one that got away.

And now you talk of me going back...





Chapter 2:

The Woods of Clearchus

The Woods of Clearchus lie between Besnit and Harfax and are a haunt to bandits and Panther Girls as well as wild beasts.

Harfax and Besnit heavily patrol the roads, and Harfax is the last stop before the Sardar Mountains and the Northern Forests – both of which are considered dangerous and impassable. The Woods of Clearchus are – virtually – the Northern Forests in miniature, dense old woodland with a mix of deciduous and evergreen growth that scales the foothills of the Sardar to the East and which blends into the Northern forests to the North and West.

THE ROAD TO THE NORTH

The road between Besnit and Harfax is well maintained. To be sure, it doesn't meet the precise, military standards of the roads of Ar, but it is smooth, clear, well drained, and every pasang is marked by a rock. It cuts a clear – almost straight – path, passing like a draped ribbon over hill and dale.

While they are sticking to the road, they are unlikely to run into any particular trouble, given the patrols and armed caravans as well as the consistency of traffic to and from Besnit and Harfax. If you have plenty of time for your game or want to spice things up a little, you can – however – introduce a random encounter or two. It is about 50 pasangs from Besnit to Harfax (35 miles). This takes about 12 hours of walking in total (10 ahn), or one day's march, with a significant encounter chance every six hours or so. On a riding beast, this is going to be reduced to about three-and-a-half hours of travel and one real possibility of a meaningful encounter.

NORTHERN ROAD ENCOUNTERS

Roll 2d6	Day	Night
2	A prowling Forest Sleen (or sometimes a pair – on a roll of 5-6).	A prowling Larl (or sometimes a pair – on a roll of 5-6). It is unlikely to attack unless confronted, attacked or very hungry.
3	A venomous forest snake, sunning itself on the road. It may startle beasts of burden but will not seek to attack.	A Forest Panther skulking at the edge of the road in the scrub.
4	A gang of 1d6+1 Bandits who will only try their luck if they think they have the upper hand.	A gang of 2d6 Bandits stealing out of the darkness to attack.
5	A small group of 2d6 Qualae, grazing in the brush.	A band of 2d6 Panther Girls looking to steal supplies or kidnap men from the edge of the encampment.
6	A medium-sized trade caravan (4-6 wagons) and 3d6 guards travelling North (1-3) or South (4-6).	A medium-sized trade caravan (4-6 wagons) and 3d6 guards encamped at the side of the road.
7	A small trade caravan (1-3 wagons) and 2d6 guards travelling North (1-3) or South (4-6).	A small, encamped trade caravan (1-3 wagons) and 2d6 guards.
8	A medium-sized trade caravan (4-6 wagons) and 3d6 guards travelling North (1-3) or South (4-6).	A medium-sized trade caravan (4-6 wagons) and 3d6 guards encamped at the side of the road.
9	A slaver caravan, with 2d6 guards, travelling North (1-3) or South (4-6)	A slaver caravan, with 2d6 guards, encamped for the night.
10	A wild Tarsk.	A wild Tarsk.
11	A group of Northern Tabuk 2d6 strong.	A group of Northern Tabuk 2d6 strong.
12	A hungry Tharlaron, in search of prey.	A pack (1d6+1) of Varts seeking an easy meal.

Off the Beaten Track

At first, you notice merely that the scattered trees and shrubs are growing a little denser and then – soon enough – the road brings you to the outskirts of The Woods of Clearchus. This cave of gold – if it indeed exists – must lie somewhere within. While the trees nearest the woods have been cut – repeatedly – for campfires, the forest further in looks thick, dark, dense with foliage, pine needles, fallen branches and dead leaves.

If Bailey is with them, his agitation will only increase with proximity to the woods, but once they are there, he judges his best chance at survival to be to stick with the group and to help them as best as he can. With his assistance, they'll be able to easily find The Cave of Gold – with just one little hitch, described below.

Without him, it will be challenging to find, and they will throw themselves open to the possibility of dangerous encounters in the woods (throw an additional obstacle of a patrol of $1d6+1$ Panthers or bandits at them along with the encounter detailed below). They are free to keep searching as long as they wish, but you should raise the threat level with more encounters the longer they stay in the woods – especially overnight. Finding the cave without Bailey's help – or other informants – requires a Survival roll against a difficulty of 25, every few hours.



WOODS OF CLEARCHUS ENCOUNTERS

Roll 2d6	Day	Night
2	Panther Encampment and 3d6 Panther Girls.	Panther Encampment and 3d6 Panther Girls.
3	Panther Girl patrol of 1d6+1 Panther Girls	Panther Girl patrol of 1d6+1 Panther Girls
4	Bee Swarm	Gitch Swarm
5	Forest Sleen 1d6/2	Forest Panthers 2d6/2 (round down)
6	Forest Panthers 2d6/2 (round down)	Forest Panthers 2d6/2 (round down)
7	Leech Plant patch	Leech Plant patch
8	Dangerous mud-bog	Dangerous mud-bog
9	Rock Spiders 1d6	Rock Spiders 1d6
10	Larl 1d6/2	Larl 1d6/2
11	Bandit patrol of 1d6 bandits.	Bandit patrol of 1d6 bandits.
12	Bandit Encampment and 2d6 bandits.	Bandit Encampment and 2d6 bandits.

PANTHERS

The monotony of trudging through the forest, the slow going, the constant clambering and cutting becomes wearing after a while, lulling you with its mind-numbing tedium. It, therefore, comes as something of a shock as a half-dozen black-feathered arrows take flight from the surrounding trees and swarm on you like a flock of hungry jays.

They will have a chance to spot the ambush, just in the nick of time, which will allow them to take cover. Meanwhile, the Panther Girls will have been taking their time, daubing their arrows with paralytic poison (at least the first shot) and aiming at the group as they swagger through the forest like a paga-drunk kailiauk.

If the group are alert, have posted a scout or are otherwise acting as though they expect trouble, spotting the hidden panther girls has a difficulty of 30.



There are six Panther Girls in this group, led by Blodwyn, an escaped slave girl. They aim to incapacitate some of the group and to capture them, either to join their band or to serve their pleasure and then be sold – depending on their gender. Those they can't catch they will work hard to kill, capturing only if the chance presents itself. Women and slaves will be given the choice of surrender.

They will have surprisingly little sympathy for any male slaves who are a part of the party and will require even female slaves or free women to prove themselves.

If they are unable to escape, men are likely to spend about ten days as captives of the Panthers and the rest of their tribe members being dominated and abused in their rites, before being sold to an unscrupulous slaver on the northern road.

Captured Panther Girls can help the group find their way to The Cave of Gold – along with warnings to stay away from it. This group have staked out the path leading to it, hoping to capture more bandits or people, like the players, drawn to investigate the strange cave. They have tales of strange vapours from the cave that confuse the mind, and they have lost some of their number to some sort of beast that lives within the cave.



Chapter 3:

The Cave of Gold

You must be approaching the cave, finally. The signs point to it, the ground loose and soft beneath your feet, thinner, newer trees sprouting scattershot from the earth, older trees half buried in the dirt, their trunks seeming to emerge with surreal suddenness from the ground. The air smells sweet, fragrant, like a flowering garden, but vague and distant. You cannot place the smell.

The Cave of Gold lies quite deep within the woodland. Once you're close enough, it isn't that hard to find. A 'spoil heap' of loose dirt lays in a very loose and flat 'cone' around it, covering the leaf litter and burying various trees to one degree or another. This loose dirt has had time for new plants to grow and even trees, but despite the cave having been established for nearly fifty years, the more recent growth still stands out compared to the surrounding trees.

THE MOUTH

The opening of the cave is rather unimpressive. The gold that has been spoken of is a loose covering of foil, spread out like the petals of some peculiar flower all around the entrance and disappearing into the darkness of the tunnel. Within it seems the gold continues, lining the walls of the tunnel. It's a near-vertical drop down into the pit, and there are lines of scrapes around the entrance, as though a sledge had been dragged in and out many times.

The 'gold' is not gold, but an unnatural alloy created by the Priest-Kings. It is warm to the touch – dissipating heat from within the cave.

If any of the foil is cut away, it flares, briefly, blue-purple and burns away leaving nothing but a minute amount of pale ash.

The sickly sweet smell of the Golden Beetle's perfume wafts out of the entrance and – here – has a strength of 10, rising to full-strength for those inside the entrance to the cave, forcing them to make a roll or succumb to the effects on every turn. Putting together masks from cloth, alcohol or other filters will give them a +3 bonus to resist the perfume and people who are still awake can attempt to wake those who have fallen asleep, allowing them another roll against a difficulty of 12 to awaken.

The entrance is steep and slippery, climbing down without slipping (unless using a rope or similar) is Difficulty 16 on an Athletics roll. Climbing back out of the glassy walls is Difficulty 21. The entrance is, in its way, a trap.

GOLDEN BEETLE

As you slip lower, the light coming in through the entrance dims to a honeyed, autumnal glow, reflecting everywhere off the copper-gold of the walls. It is stiflingly warm in here, and that sweet scent is now so thick you can practically taste it. Here and there the floor is pierced by columns of no regular height or thickness, joining the ground to the ceiling with black, glassy pillars. The floor is littered with bones, gleaming white, picked clean, cracked for the marrow. Some of them seem to be human. Something clatters and flutters deeper in the cave, concealed by the columns.

Lurking within the cave is a Golden Beetle, the natural predator of the Priest-Kings and a creature of peculiar and almost religious reverence to the Priest-Kings.

This creature is the ‘guard dog’ of the Cave of Gold, a being powerful enough to take on Priest-Kings and undoubtedly able to dispose of any other interlopers, as it has up until now.

This one has been altered, blasphemy to the Priest-Kings, to allow it to live a vastly expanded lifespan via a version of the immortality serums. It has also been neutered, its eggs infertile – though it will still lay them into paralysed victims. As a solitary and utterly alien beast, it has rarely needed to pass far beyond the cave to hunt.

THE DOOR

Beyond the Golden Beetle lay a set of enormous hexagonal doors, taller than you, about as tall as the beetle itself and made of a more solid-seeming chunk of this golden metal. A barely discernible, hairline crack runs diagonally across it and two slits – about as thin as sword blades, lay in either half. It does not budge when pushed, nor does there seem to be any lock or other mechanism.

Opening the door technically requires the use of the arm-blades and powerful strength of a Priest-King, but men working together may accomplish the same. In order to open the door, swords will need to be pushed into the slits and then used to pry both halves of the door open. This will take two pushes, the first only opens the door a finger-width, the second push opening it entirely. Forcing it open in this way is difficulty 20 (15 for a Priest-King) though up to four people can work on the problem at once and combine their strength (see ‘Complicating Factors’ in the main rulebook).

Once the door is opened it reveals a small antechamber; great spherical tanks are half-set either side into the wall, and – if examined closely – the floor has a nozzle, exactly where the first opening of the door would stop. This is to allow the tanks (which are activated by smell receptors, and thus unusable to humans) to gas and knock out the Golden Beetle should anyone need to get in or out. The gas in the tanks is also foul smelling and capable of neutralising the Golden Beetle’s scent for 20-30 minutes.

The walls here are black, dirty-looking glass (fused soil) and the floor is the same, but roughed up and sandpapered, to provide grip. Approaching the second hexagonal door at the far end of this antechamber mists the characters with antibacterial, antiparasitic, antifungal and antiviral droplets so fine they instantly seep into the skin. This ‘delousing’ will also have the lovely side effect of giving the characters catastrophic diarrhoea on their return to the food and drink of the world of men, at least until their gut flora recover.

THE FUNGUS FARM

The door slides open to reveal a large, oval chamber. Glassy black walls reflect light in strange, multi-faceted ways and several, irregular columns of square blocks – looking as though they have been amateurishly stacked by a small child – stretch floor to ceiling, each one festooned with masses of ‘blooming’, pale, white fungus. The room is dim, stiflingly hot, with a triangular door in its far side and a dark, steaming pit in its centre. Listless looking, pale-skinned men wander between the columns, loading bags with fungus.

THE CAVE OF GOLD

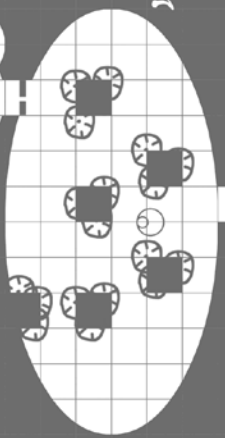
bio-tubes



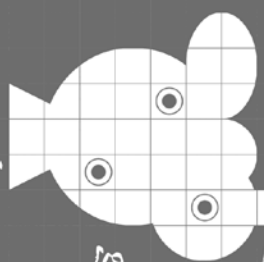
barracks



fungus farm

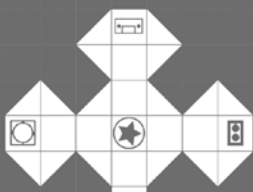


golden beetle



mouth

laboratory



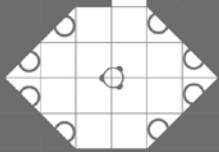
quarters



power



egg chamber



There are five men, a kind of cloned mul, working these vertical fields. The cubes are five metres to a side, stacked irregularly, with fungus growing on every available surface of them. They circle the pit, eight of them in a rough octagon, each one four boxes high to reach the ceiling, with the mul climbing – without aid – to reach the upper mushrooms.

These mul have never seen anyone but each other and are genetically programmed with their task – cutting and loading the mushrooms into an automated machine that processes them into food cubes and other materials. They have never seen a woman before and are likely to be driven into a crazed lust the moment they do encounter a woman, their primal needs untouched by the genetic manipulations. Otherwise, they are all identical and do not even know how to speak, though they can understand things explained to them using crude dumb-sign.

Each mul is afflicted with some manner of genetic disorder, making them a somewhat intimidating band of freaks to behold. This is because Sask's understanding of cloning is imperfect, and his constant experimentation has many blind alleys.

They will fight hostile intruders with their tiny harvesting knives but are not built for combat. They can also be bribed or controlled with food (that isn't mushrooms), salt, or access to a woman. That last, especially, will win their complete loyalty.

Five work while five sleep in the barracks (see below), though the sounds of battle – should that happen – will rouse the sleeping mul to fight.

THE POWER SOURCE

Some strange and unfathomable device dominates the room. You see no working parts, but only a jumble of shapes, here a cube, there a pyramid, there a sphere, blending and bleeding into one another. The whole seems encased in some filigree web of golden threads and glows with a seemingly random rhythm. The heat from the thing is like standing close to a fire, any closer and you fear your hair might singe. Three doors lead from this chamber, each with an irregular – and different – number of sides or facets.

This device is entirely unknown to Goreans who will have no real concept of how it works. A builder may speculate that the web carries power in the same way that the primitive batteries they use in plating metals works, or that it uses some of the same principles as glow-globes. Someone from Earth with the appropriate technological expertise may believe it to be a fusion or fission plant, perhaps even a radioisotope plant. Attempting to fiddle with or damage it will only cause it to shut down, the cave to switch over to backup power (batteries concealed beneath the power source) and Sask to come seeking the intruders.

The webbing runs into the black-glass walls and disappears, conveying power and heat to the other parts of the cave, and out into the golden 'petals' around the cave entrance.

The doors from this chamber require the same 'blade leverage' as the front entrance. They lead, variously, to the laboratory, egg chamber and Sask's quarters.

THE BARRACKS

The triangular door opens with a slight 'whoosh' and a puff of air. Five simple benches line one wall while three small alcoves, with flat, waist-high shelves, line the other. The floor is of the same rough glass as the floor elsewhere, with nothing but a small, slatted grille to mark it. The light is dim and soporific, especially mixed with the omnipresent beat. At the back, beyond the benches, is a secure looking, round door – similar to the entrance.

This is where the five off-duty mul are sleeping, on their plane, grey, plastic beds. The alcoves contain dispensers which, when pressed with a mul's scent-marker will dispense a ration of water or food cubes (white and tasteless). The mul merely defecate or urinate onto the floor, and it passes through the grille, the ground being flushed with cleansing fluid several times a day.

The door at the back of the room can be opened in the same manner as the entrance door. Doing so will admit the characters to the room that houses the bio-tubes.

THE BIO-TUBES

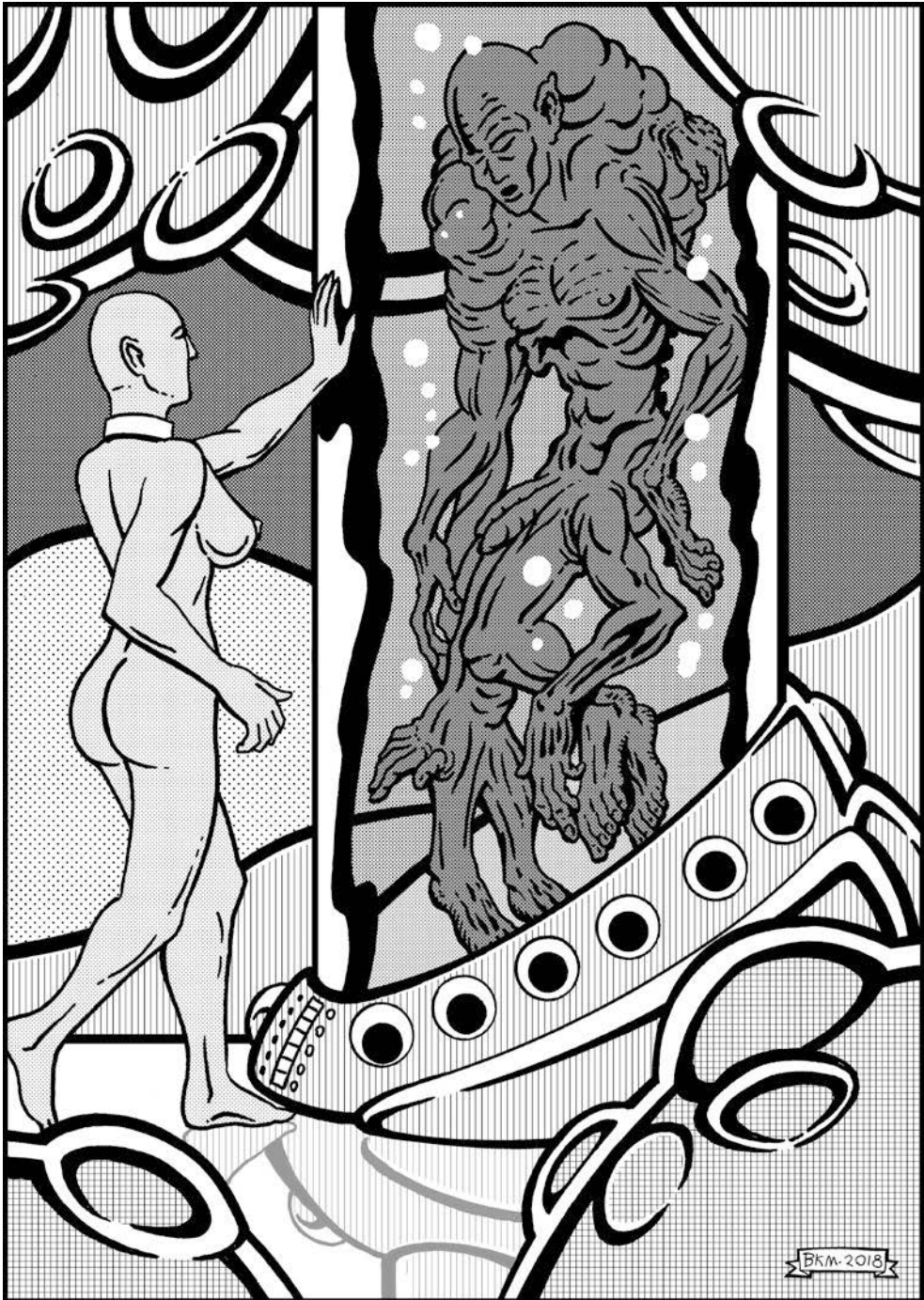
The door opens to a hideous and unsettling sight. The top of the chamber is arrayed with what appear to be dozens of mechanical arms, covered in needles, saws and tools you do not even know the name of. They dip and sway and curtsey over a series of man-size tubes, disfigured men – in various stages of development – barely visible through the opaque, pinkish fluid they are suspended in.

This is a smaller laboratory where Sask experiments on the muls and grows new ones as old ones 'wear out' or succumb to his 'improvements'. If the flasks that contain the muls are shattered, they will drown in the fluid that fills their lungs, but only two are even viable to this extent, the others being foetuses in various stages of development.

Breaching this chamber will alert Sask, meaning he will be ready for a fight. He will also use the robotic armature to attack interlopers while they are in this chamber.

Of particular note is a metallic hood, festooned with gold webbing. It is attached to a spool of 'tape' within a device in the wall. This is used to imprint the mul when they mature. A character could don the hood themselves, in which case the tape automatically runs, over the course of six turns (one minute) and forces knowledge and behavioural cues into their minds.

The result of donning the hood will be the removal of 1D of Will – even going below base statistic level – and the gaining of +1 pip each in Craft (Mushroom Growing), Language (Gorean) and Philosophy – things that Sask determines necessary for the muls to work in his farms or lab.



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THE LABORATORY

The door cycles open – finally – and you’re admitted to the room beyond. Strange and blasphemous devices surround the chamber and fill virtually every niche, floor, ceiling and walls, divided into hexagonal sections. You have no idea what they do, the mechanisms clatter and whirl continuously, spinning vials, humming and giving off puffs of strange and acrid smells every so often. Occasionally a device will also glow with a purplish light that hurts your eyes. You don’t know what to make of anything in here; only one thing makes sense – a window that shows a view of an array of tubes, but then changes to show the entrance, and again to show the outside. How can a window see three places at once?

These devices are all meant for the use of Priest-Kings, which means they mostly operate by and on scent, occasionally helped along by visual readouts or displays, but not in any language – or even visual spectrum – that humans can use. Someone from Earth may recognise some of the instruments as being to do with biology and genetics, but only if they have the appropriate skills.

Sask is most likely in here, working if he is unaware of the invasion of the characters.

THE EGG CHAMBER

The door slides open to reveal another strange and alien chamber. Tanks and tubes line the walls, every last one of them leading to a central case, in which floats a single, large, golden egg. Almost perfectly spherical, but blotched and flaking. Lights pulse in spectra that hurt your eyes and the whole place has a smell that stings your nostrils with sharpness and citrus acidity.

Here Sask works on his experiments to create a mul version of Priest-Kings. The apparatus here includes memory tapes for education and indoctrination, though these only work on Priest-Kings and are only designed to work on eggs and pupae. Sask is not having much luck, and even this egg is deformed and non-viable. A source of endless frustration to him as it is only his latest failed attempt of hundreds.

If Sask is aware of the intruders, he will be in here, waiting to protect the central plank of his experiments.

SASKS QUARTERS

This chamber opens into a dimly lit room, rounder and softer than the others you have seen. The walls are covered with some soft substance that feels like loose soil but holds its shape. Dotted here and there golden spheres stand out from the surface, and as you move a variety of sweet scents waft over you. A strange couch rises from the floor, sloped and cushioned to take the weight of some inhuman occupant.

Priest-Kings don’t need much rest, but if he requires a break Sask will be here, resting, letting his bulk rest on the couch, head towards the door, antennae at rest. Stashes of metallic scrolls in his alien language and scent ropes can be found behind the various golden balls which, if tugged on, open up into cylindrical drawers.

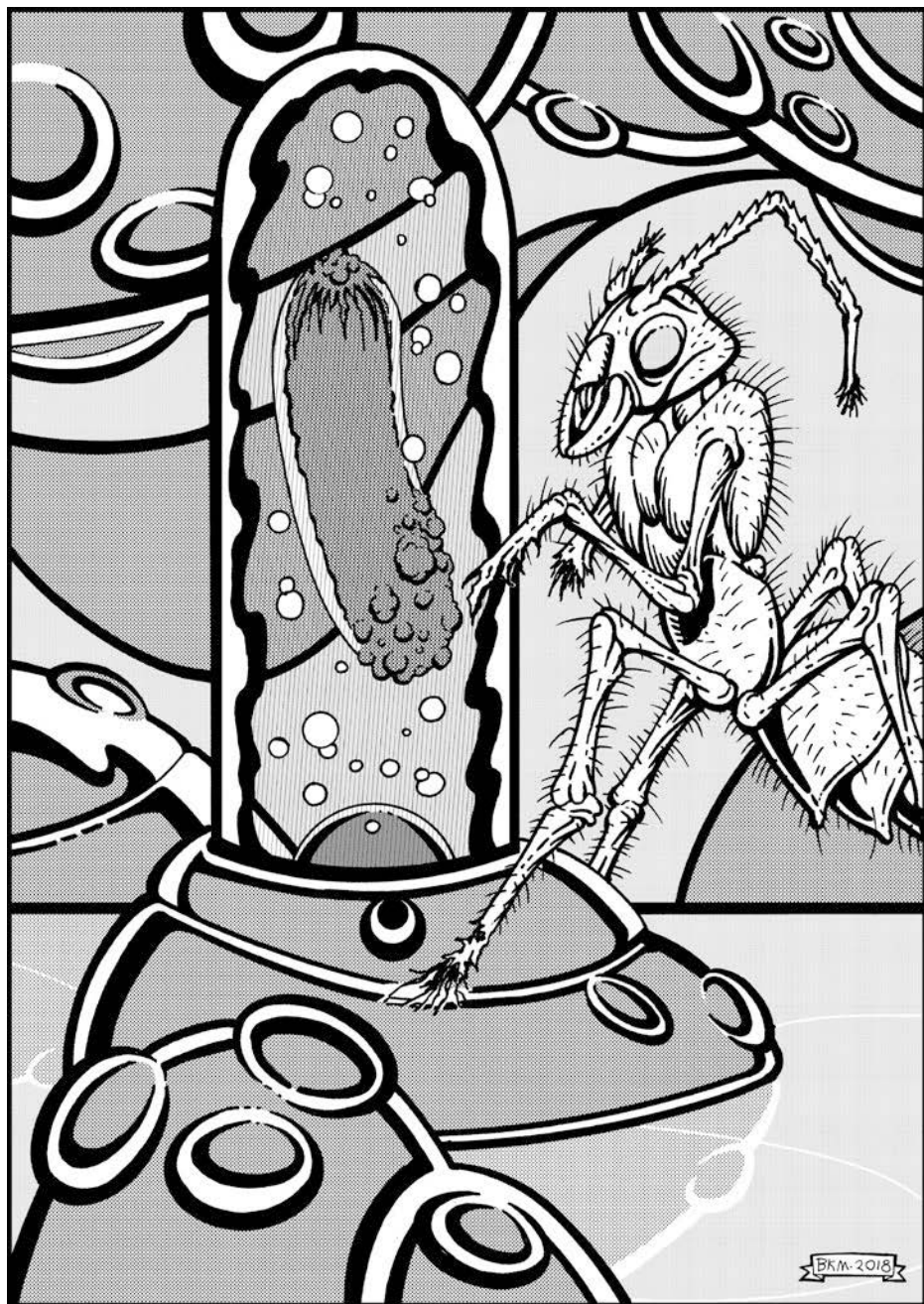


The Conclusion

Sask is insane, a rare holdover from the previous Nest and one of the rebels that followed Sarm. His – mad – goal is to supplant the new Nest with a race of genetically superior synthetic Priest-Kings, without the ‘primitive’ attachments to the queen or devotion to old ways. He intends a regicide and a takeover and after that to prosecute a full-scale war with the kurii, which would devastate Gor, Earth and the rest of the solar system. He is insane, and it is unlikely that the characters would side with him or that he would even debate with lesser beings or try to win them over.

In all likelihood, the characters will kill him and destroy his work, in which case they will be well rewarded as agents of the Priest-Kings with a full gold tarn each when one of their agents catches up to them to get a debrief. They will have prevented a Priest-King civil war and a much greater war that would burn the solar system.

If out of some bizarre twist of fate, they side with the insane scientist Sask, then you need not worry. It will still take him decades to master a way of creating the eggs artificially, let alone bringing them to maturity or commencing his war. It could easily be another fifty years before his plan even begins to swing into action.



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Characters

BESNIT GUARDS

The guards of Besnit are better trained in the use of the crossbow than the sword and are particularly alert, always on the look-out for disguised Panther Girls and bandits.

Agility: 3D

Athletics 5D

Blades 5D

Evade 5D

Fistfight 4D

Dexterity: 3D

Care 4D

Crossbow 5D

Body: 3D+2

Fitness 4D+2

Run 5D+2

Reason: 3D

Initiative 5D

Senses 6D

Arts: 2D

Charm: 3D

Bluff 5D

Command 5D

Intimidation 5D

Slave Handling 4D

Will 5D

Health: 36/18

Power Damage Bonus: 2D

Accuracy Damage Bonus: 2D

Movement: 15/22/45/75

Short Sword: 3D+2

Light Crossbow: 4D+2

Armour: Helm, buckler & leathers. 1D+1

GUARD THARLARION

The tharlarion ridden by the guards are war tharlarion, since they also operate as Besnit's cavalry when needed. For the most part they are used within and around the town and so have been trained to be a little more tractable and less vicious.

Scale: 4

Agility: 2D

Athletics 3D

Evade 4D

Fistfight 4D

Dexterity: 1D

Body: 5D

Fitness 8D

Endurance 8D

Run 6D

Reason: 1D+1

Initiative 2D

Senses 2D+1

Arts: 1D

Charm: 2D+1

Confidence 4D

Intimidation 4D

Will 3D.

Health: 52/26

Power Bonus: 4D

Movement: 18/27/54/90

Claws: 5D

Teeth: 5D+2

Armour: Thick Hide +6

LADY LINTON

Tattered and torn her dark blue robes are almost scandalous, revealing flashes of leg and hair, though she tries to hunch up as best she can. It seems the lady has fallen very far from rather lofty heights. It is almost reluctantly that she begs you to pay her release price – swearing that she can be a useful and powerful friend.

Lady Linton has become a thief by necessity, not by vocation. She is a thief, but not of the Caste of Thieves. She prefers to style herself as one of the explorers of the blue caste, seeking out places and things and bringing them back to civilisation. She has had a disturbing tendency to steal artefacts from collectors however. She has a strong, bratty and independent spirit and would not make a very good slave without a lot of training.

Agility: 3D

Athletics 3D+1
Blades 3D+1
Evade 3D+1
Fistfight 3D+1
Stealth 3D+1

Dexterity: 3D

Care 4D
Sleight of Hand 4D
Burglary 3D+1

Body: 3D

Run 3D+1

Reason: 4D

Philosophy 5D
Culture 5D
Kaissa 5D
Navigation 4D+2
Scholar 6D
Trading 4D+1.

Arts: 3D

Aesthetics 3D+1
Composition 4D+1
Poetry 3D+2

Charm: 2D

Speaking 3D
Bluff 3D
Confidence 2D+1

Health: 32/16

Power Bonus: 2D

Accuracy Bonus: 2D

Movement: 9/14/27/45

BAILEY THE BANDIT

Bailey is gaunt and sunken cheeked, a shabby mess with a stare that seems to focus on a point just behind you. No doubt his mind has been weakened by the strange things he has witnessed, and his time in the cells.

Agility: 3D+2

Blades 5D+2
Clubs 5D+2
Evade 6D+2
Fistfight 5D+2
Riding 4D+2
Stealth 6D+2
Throwing 5D+2.

Dexterity: 3D

Care 4D
Bow 5D
Crossbow 5D
Draft Beast 4D
Rope Work 4D

Body: 3D

Fitness 5D
Endurance 4D
Run 4D
Survival 5D.

Reason: 2D

Senses 4D
Trading 4D

Arts: 1D

Charm: 2D

Bluff 4D
Slave Handling 3D

Health: 38/14

Power Damage Bonus: 3D

Accuracy Damage Bonus: 2D

Movement: 12/18/36/60

PANTHER GIRLS

The panther girls that lurk in the Woods of Clearchus are slightly more civilised than those elsewhere. Their proximity to the roads – and to Besnit – grant them more opportunities for subterfuge than most bands of panthers and some bands are almost thieves and spies as much as they are bandits.

Agility: 3D

Acrobatics 4D
Athletics 5D
Blades 6D
Clubs 4D
Evade 5D
Fistfight 5D
Spears 5D
Stealth 6D
Throwing 5D.

Dexterity: 3D+1

Care 6D+1
Bow 6D+1
Rope Work 5D+1

Body: 3D

Fitness 5D
Endurance 4D
Run 6D
Survival 5D

Reason: 2D

Healing 3D
Initiative 4D
Senses 4D
Trading 4D

Arts: 2D

Art (Dancing) 4D

Charm: 3D+1

Bluff 5D+1
Convince 5D+1
Intimidation 4D+1
Slave Handling 5D+1, Will 6D+1

Health: 38/14

Power Damage Bonus: 3D

Accuracy Damage Bonus: 3D

Movement: 18/27/54/90

Short Spear: Damage 5D, Effective Range 20 ft.

Dagger: 4D

Shortbow: Effective range 70 ft, Damage 4D+2.

Armour: +1 (Skins)

BLODWYN THE PANTHER GIRL

As the leader of this band, Blodwyn has shown herself to be the strongest and most capable. She's a formidable opponent – for a woman.

Agility: 4D

Acrobatics 5D
Athletics 6D
Blades 7D
Clubs 5D
Evade 6D
Fistfight 6D+1
Spears 6D+1
Stealth 7D
Throwing 6D.

Dexterity: 3D+1

Care 6D+1
Bow 6D+1
Rope Work 5D+1

Body: 3D

Fitness 5D
Endurance 4D
Run 6D
Survival 5D

Reason: 3D

Healing 4D
Initiative 5D+2
Senses 5D
Trading 5D

Arts: 2D

Art (Dancing) 4D

Charm: 3D+1

Bluff 5D+1
Convince 5D+1
Intimidation 5D
Slave Handling 5D+1
Will 6D+1

Health: 38/14

Power Damage Bonus: 3D

Accuracy Damage Bonus: 3D

Movement: 18/27/54/90

Short Spear: Damage 5D, Effective Range 20 ft.

Dagger: 4D

Shortbow: Effective range 70 ft, Damage 4D+2.

Armour: 2D+2 (Skins, stolen helm & hide shield)

BANDITS

The bandits of this region are nothing special, the usual bands of dispossessed criminals and outcasts.

Agility: 3D

Athletics 4D

Blades 5D

Clubs 5D

Evade 5D

Fistfight 4D

Riding 4D

Spears 5D

Stealth 5D

Throwing 5D

Dexterity: 3D

Care 4D

Bow 5D

Crossbow 5D

Draft Beast 4D

Rope Work 4D

Body: 3D+2

Fitness 5D+2

Endurance 4D+2

Run 4D+1

Survival 5D+2

Reason: 2D

Senses 3D

Trading 3D

Arts: 1D

Charm: 2D

Bluff 3D

Intimidation 3D

Slave Handling 3D

Health: 40/20

Power Damage Bonus: 3D

Accuracy Damage Bonus: 2D

Movement: 12/18/36/60

Dagger: 4D

Short Spear: Damage 5D, Effective Range 20 ft.

Light Crossbow: Effective Range: 100 ft, Damage 4D+2 Armour: Leathers +2

THE GOLDEN BEETLE

This creature is a sorry specimen. Denied its natural prey and eating only forest animals – and people – as well as having been surgically altered, its carapace is cracked and dull, its antennae drooping. Nonetheless, it is a formidable foe.

Scale: +3

Agility: 2D

Athletics 3D

Evade 2D

Fistfight 3D

Stealth 3D

Dexterity: 1D

Body: 6D

Fitness 8D

Endurance 6D

Reason: 1D

Senses 4D

Arts: 1D

Charm: 2D

Intimidation 4D

Will 4D

Their paralytic poison requires a difficulty 20 Endurance roll to avoid being paralysed for a number of minus equal to the amount the roll was failed by.

Their soporific scent affects everyone within ten metres, requiring a difficulty 15 Endurance roll or a penalty of -1D to all actions. If they fail to roll over 5 they fall asleep.

Health: 55/28

Power Damage Bonus: 7D (Bite).

Movement: 18/27/54/90

Armour: 3D

TWISTED MULS

Imperfect, synthetic people, these twisted beings are the result of Sask's compromised genius.

Agility: 3D

Athletics 4D

Evade 4D

Fistfight 4D

Spears 3D+2

Dexterity: 3D

Care 4D

Body: 3D

Fitness 3D+2

Endurance 3D+2

Run 4D+1

Reason: 4D

Philosophy 4D+1

Senses 5D

Arts: 4D

Craft: Mushroom Growing 8D

Charm: 4D

Animal Handling 4D

Health: 34/17

Power Damage Bonus: 2D

Accuracy Damage Bonus: 2D

Movement: 12/18/36/60

Harvest Knife: 2D+1

Mutations (roll 2d6)

2. No mutations.
3. Gigantism: +1D Power Damage Bonus, +10/5 Health, +2 Difficulty to all Dexterity and Agility actions.
4. Hyperactive: +2 Initiative, +2 on all Dexterity actions, Reduce Health by 5/3.
5. Tumours: +10/5 Health, +1 Armour, +5 difficulty on Charm rolls.
6. Numb: +10/5 Health, but +2 Difficulty to all physical actions.
7. Tics & Tremors: +2 Difficulty to all physical actions.
8. Primitive Regression: +5/3 Health, +2 Power Damage Bonus. +5 difficulty to all intellectual actions.
9. Metal Absorption: Greyish pallor, +1 Armour, +2 difficulty on Senses rolls.
10. Obesity: +1 Armour, +10/5 Health, halve movement.
11. Cave Adapted: +2 Senses, +2 Dexterity, +2 Arts, -10/5 Health.
12. Roll twice and combine.

ROBOTIC ARMATURE

This set of mechanical arms in the ceiling is covered in surgical tools which also make good weapons.

Agility: 6D
Blades, 7D

Dexterity: 6D
Care 7D

Body: 6D
Fitness 9D

Arts: 1D

Charm: 1D

Reason: 6D
Healing 9D

Power Damage Bonus: 5D

Health: 52/26

Blades: 6D
Armour: 2D

SASK THE PRIEST KING

One golden eye is cloudy and cracked, but the other shines with a wicked and vivid intelligence. This maimed creature looks more like a devil than a god, one side of its body broken, scarred and coated with a green gleaming, glassy substance.

Despite its crippled and loneliness-maddened state it is still a strong opponent.

Scale: +2

Agility: 2D

Coordination 3D

Athletics 3D

Evade 3D

Fistfight 3D

Dexterity: 4D

Care 7D

Body: 5D

Fitness 6D

Endurance 5D

Reason: 6D

Healing 7D

Initiative 6D

Scholar 9D

Senses 6D

Technology 8D

Genetic Science 12D

Arts: 3D

Craft (medical instruments) 5D

Charm: 3D

Command 6D

Intimidation 7D

Will 5D

Health: 33/17

Power Damage Bonus: 3D

Accuracy Damage Bonus: 4D

Movement: 15/22/45/75

Arm Blades: 5D

Armour: 3d6+2

A PRIEST KING DID IT

In a lot of games you can excuse a lot of strange events by doing what Lucy Lawless did in *The Simpsons*, and saying *'A wizard did it'*.

Gor doesn't have magic though, Gor is a world – despite being so different to ours – that doesn't have any magic. Your game is your own, of course, and you may decide to stray from canon to bring in psychic powers or spells, but that doesn't fit Gor as it is written.

The character of Gor is more like that of the 'planetary romance' or 'science fantasy' genres. While strange and unnatural things are possible, the excuse is scientific rather than magical. To do unusual or strange things requires devices, chemicals, computers and other technical equipment which is – normally – not available to someone on Gor. Then again, there are some things on that planet which show a high degree of technical skill in certain areas.

Goreans are accustomed to immortality, at least when it comes to the rigours of ageing. The salves, unguents and injections of the healers seem able to heal most wounds and cure most diseases – with only one notable exception. Short of that disease and some particularly virulent poisons there's no reason to think a person won't be able to recover from almost any non-fatal wound.

There are also devices like the glow-globes, machines used for analysing blood, scroll winders and others which seem to move beyond the strictest interpretations of the Priest King laws against technology.

Translation devices for the swamp spiders and the Priest Kings are manufactured and distributed somehow, and not – it seems – by men. The kurii also have access to their own technological devices, though not as advanced as those of the Priest Kings, and don't seem as averse when it comes to handing them to their agents.

Priest King technology borders on the magical though. They're a species advanced enough to be able to move a planet, harness limitless energy, manipulate gravity, implant cybernetic devices into people, annihilate and constitute matter and even to clone or build humans from scratch.

If you need to introduce fantastical elements into your games, your excuse is either that a kur or a Priest King did it. With the high level of technology that the Priest Kings have access to you can allow for almost anything, but stay cautious when it comes to bringing in these elements. They can rapidly distort a campaign or make it too strange or even laughable to those who prefer a more grounded game.

TYPES OF SMELL

Scent is an important part of life for Priest Kings and in The Nest. They have personal scents, leave scent messages in the air or against surfaces and impregnate scent-ropes with messages to be taken elsewhere. They can also transmit scent, converting it from smell to electrical signals and back again. The human nose is nothing like as powerful, but it may be useful – for role-playing purposes – to delve a bit deeper into scent, how it might be used in reference to the Priest Kings and in regard to role-playing in general.

Here I will describe some scents, what they're associated with, what they invoke and how they might relate to Priest Kings and The Nest.

According to scientists there are ten basic scents:

Fragrant

A fragrant scent is flowery, perfumed. It brings to mind flowers or even cut grass or herbal scents. As a seasonal cue it might mean spring or summer and it can invoke beauty, tranquillity and peace. This may be part of a Priest King's natural scent and can be described using flowers, herbs or descriptions of sweetness. Emotionally they might emit these scents when trying to be persuasive, peaceful or offering deference.

Chemical

Chemical smells are notable for being artificial, or alien. They're associated with things that do not readily occur in nature such as plastics, gasoline, alcoholic spirit, bleach and similar scents. Due to their alien nature these may also form a part of a Priest King's natural scent and their more technical and abstract thoughts. Priest King scientists are likely to develop stronger scents of these kinds. You can describe these using comparisons with chemical, metallic and other technologically dependant smells. Emotionally a Priest King might emit these scents when talking about something technical, abstract or mathematical.

Lemon

The scent of citrus is a common smell for insects, including ants, and therefore various kinds of citrus scent are likely associated with many Priest Kings. A citrus smell feels clean, fresh and sharp and carries those implications. You can describe it using fruit comparisons, and even sweeter fruit that could otherwise be called 'fragrant' if you call them unripe. A Priest King might put forth these scents when relaxed, evoking honesty, friendliness and familiarity.

Peppermint

The smell of mint, or menthol, also evokes a sense of coolness and cleanliness, much like lemon, but with a stronger association with cold. It is usually a dominant smell. Spicy scents are also kept under this heading, so as well as mint or menthol you could also describe these scents with the names of spices. A Priest King might emit these scents when excited, enthusiastic, angry or fearful.

Fruity

These are the fuller scents, somewhere between earthy and sharp. Ripe apples, strawberries, bananas, they indicate ripeness, fullness and goodness. You can describe them using comparisons with these fruits and other, natural, sweet smells. A Priest King might emit these scents when satiated, happy or settled.

Nutty

A scent like peanuts, popcorn or smoke. This is an earthy scent with a touch of sweetness but can also describe burnt toast, bread or similar smells. A Priest King might emit a nutty scent when hungry, confused or cautious.

Pungent

These are offensive, natural smells though they also include scents that we might like – such as onions or garlic. These are the sorts of smells you immediately notice the moment they hit your nose. You can describe them using the smells of rot, sweat, body odour, fecal matter and strong smelling food ingredients. A Priest King might give off a scent like this as a warning, as an expression of disgust or hatred.

Sickening

These are the kinds of stink that make you feel dizzy or sick. These are smells like vomit, burning rubber, sulphur, rotten eggs or acid. A Priest King may give off these scents as it dies, is injured or has a full on emotion of terror or absolute loathing.

Sweet

This is a purer, more aromatic sweetness as you might find from chocolate, vanilla pods, honey or malt. They evoke a sort of light warmth and indulgence and speak of richness and smoothness. A Priest King might emit these scents when trying to be flattering, subservient or lying.

Woody

These are the kinds of scents that feel earthy and loamy. Leaf litter, soil, petrichor after the rain, even the smell of wet stone or dust. These can be comfortable, familiar and speak of nature. You can describe them less positively as musty, mouldy, earthy and even mushroomy. A Priest King might carry these kinds of notes as part of their 'Nest Scent' to identify whether they belong.

Alien Mindset

While Priest Kings are alien beings, they are insectoid and live in a hive they call 'The Nest'. They are much closer to 'eusocial' creatures like ants or bees than humans are. Humans evolved to exist in extended family groups, like other apes, and have extended beyond that using cognitive tools like ideology and identity to bind their 'troupes' together into larger entities. The kur are even more individualistic than humans and fight with each other as much as anything else, only forged into unity by their need to survive as a race.

It stands to reason, then, that the Priest Kings have a vastly different outlook on life than humans do. Even on Gor, humans haven't really adjusted to the fact of their physical immortality and still tend to think on the scale of the personal and the individual.

Priest Kings do not think this way, they cannot help but think in terms of the collective – despite their individual personalities. They will happily sacrifice themselves for The Nest and tend to think in collectivist terms. Acting as individuals or for the good of an individual’s ambition is almost anathema to them and the likes of Sarm were renegades in every sense of the word.

Priest King plots and plans can take decades, centuries, even millennia to reach their conclusion and they are cautious to the point of seeming inactivity to outside observers, a constant source of stress to their human ‘pets’. They also tend to plan for many eventualities, having the time and group resources to anticipate virtually any turn of events. All of this is in service to the hive and also in service to The Nest’s only true individual – the queen.

Despite a whole book spent delving into the Priest Kings there are aspects about them which are not fully explored, though we can see their behaviour and speculate from the other aspects of Norman’s writing. The Priest Kings seem to hold the ‘state of nature’ in some esteem, despite being technologically accomplished. They preserve animal species from different worlds and eons. They keep humans in an artificially primitive technological state where their biology determines their fate far more than it does on Earth. They modify nature often, when they need something (such as the mul subspecies, the slime worms and others) rather than necessarily going straight to tools. They even hold nature in such high and purposeful regard that they allow their one natural predator – the golden beetle – to occupy their nest alongside them and even kill them. Something that, perversely, also brings them pleasure.

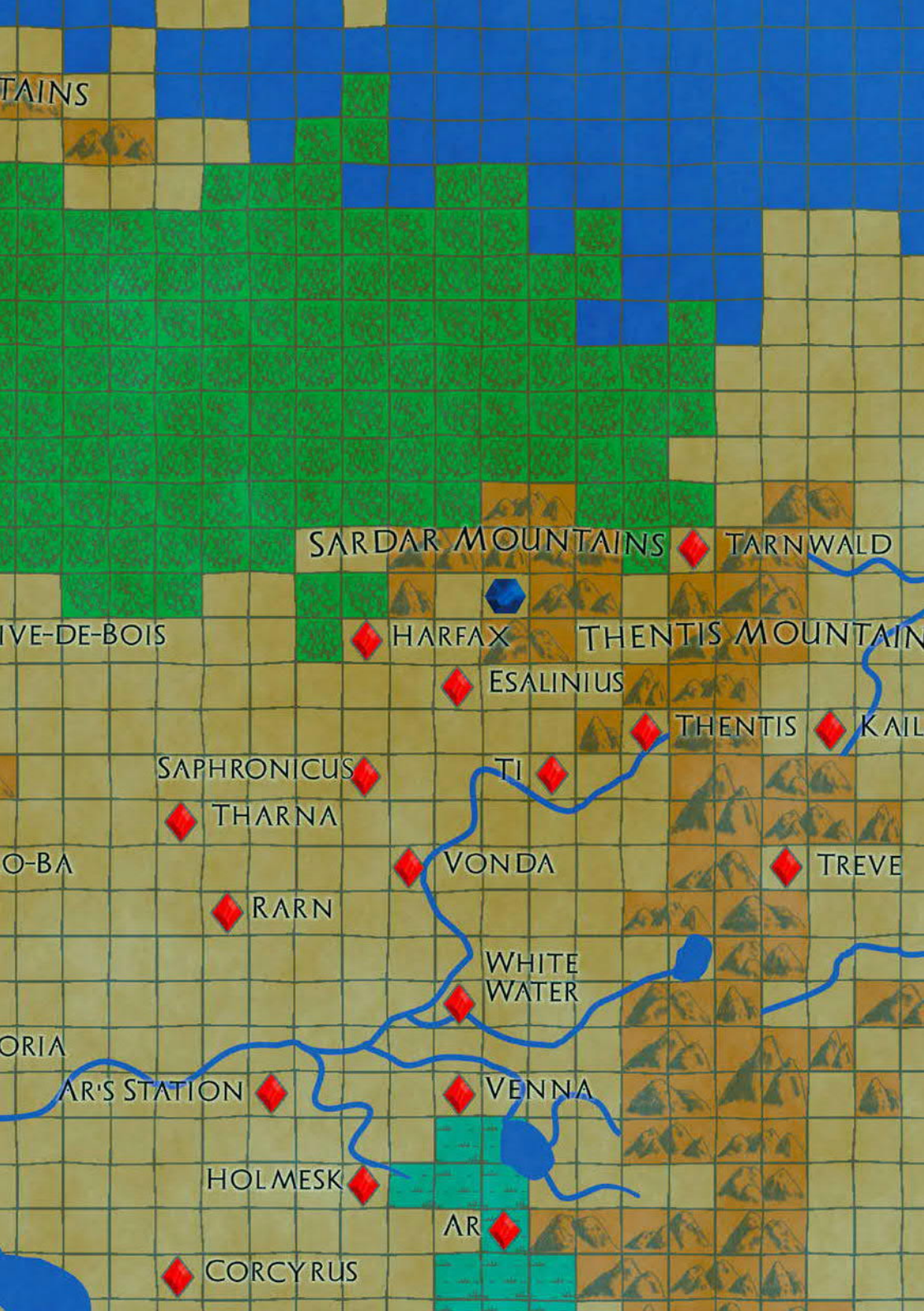
This is a fully Communist society where virtually every individual wants the same thing and the entire apparatus of the hive, including the lives of those who live there, are bent to a singular purpose and the life of one member – the queen.

Sarm, and some few other individuals, are aberrations, having developed much more independent personalities and means of reasoning to themselves why their way of doing things is better. In this adventure this aberrant behaviour is personified in the mutilated Priest King ‘Sask’ and his plans to create a rival Nest, justified to himself as being the best thing for his species as a whole.

Priest Kings should be played, for the most part, as aloof, stern, objective thinkers who are absolutely confident in everything they believe or do. Rare is the individual Priest King who differs from this inscrutable nature, or even – truly – gets angry.







TAINS

VE-DE-BOIS

O-BA

ORIA

SARDAR MOUNTAINS

HARFAX

ESALINIUS

SAPHRONICUS

THARNA

RARN

AR'S STATION

HOLMESK

CORCYRUS

VONDA

WHITE
WATER

VENNA

AR

THENTIS MOUNTAIN

THENTIS

TI

VONDA

WHITE
WATER

VENNA

AR

TARNWALD

KAIL

TREVE