



A gnoll scout searches the ruins of the Moon Steps.

UNDER A PALE MOON

BY JASON CARL

Remains of the day

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There is no truth to the rumor that Jason Carl is the fictional creation of a trio of Siamese cats who, in addition to being avid roleplayers, are currently trying to discover a means of registering to vote.

“Under a Pale Moon” is an AD&D® and DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE® adventure set in Northern Ergoth, the last great stronghold of human sovereignty on Ansalon. The heroes attempt to explore the legendary Moon Steps, a mystic site located in the Sentinel Mountains.

If played as an AD&D adventure, “Under a Pale Moon” works best with 4–8 heroes of levels 2–4 (about 16 total levels). The party should include at least one priest and one wizard.

If used as a FIFTH AGE adventure, “Under a Pale Moon” plays best with at least one sorcerer and mystic among the heroes. The challenges of this quest are suitable for 4–6 heroes with reputations of Champion and above. Information that is specific to the FIFTH AGE game is presented in shaded text boxes for quick reference:

If this adventure is used in conjunction with the FIFTH AGE game, the Narrator should make sure that every player has a hero sheet and the correct number of cards in his hand. For details on hero cards and sheets, refer to Book One of the FIFTH AGE rules.

For further information on the terrain, conditions, perils, and encounters in Northern Ergoth, as well as a useful map of the region, refer to the FIFTH AGE Dramatic Supplement *Heroes of Defiance*.

Adventure Background

The Moon Steps of Northern Ergoth were once an important and powerful god-mark, one of three “celestial stairways” that reputedly linked Krynn to the home of the gods themselves, while at their base were shrines dedicated to the gods of magic. The Moon Steps collapsed in the wake of the gods’ departure from Krynn, burying the shrines under tons of rubble, leaving only a vast ruin in a long and narrow valley. However, the heroes have reason to believe that the ruins might continue

to harbor powerful magic (see below); such magic might prove invaluable in the struggle to wrest the land from the tyrannical Dragon Overlords.

The adventure begins as the heroes approach the valley where the ruins of the Moon Steps await them. They have just completed a long journey to reach this point, pushing themselves almost beyond their endurance to arrive at the ruins just before the night of the next full moon.

In Act One, the heroes arrive at the valley containing the ruined Moon Steps. The heroes must locate a safe means of entering the valley. After they reach their goal, they find they have little time to examine the ruins before they are opposed by a band of well-armed gnolls making its way through the ruins.

Act Two finds the heroes facing the gnolls' masters: a band of Ackalites, fierce warriors native to Northern Ergoth. They, too, are on a mission to explore the ruins of the Moon Steps seeking evidence of godly magic, although their ulterior motives could place them at odds with the heroes' plans. The Ackalite warband has a much more immediate concern. They seek shelter from the monsters hot on their heels. The heroes and the Ackalites must quickly decide if they wish to fight one another or pool their strength and drive off the beasts that have pursued the Ackalites all the way to the ruins of the Moon Steps.

Before beginning the adventure, the Narrator must establish the heroes' motivation for exploring the ruins. Perhaps they are representatives of the Citadel of Light who wish to verify certain reports from an earlier expedition to the site. The notes of that journey suggest that, despite their ruined state, the Moon Steps might still contain residual magical power common to Krynn's Fourth Age. If the ruins are indeed a repository of such arcane energy, the heroes might find a means to harness these powers. The members of that earlier expedition noted that the site seemed to enhance magical ability. The accounts imply that this effect seemed even more pronounced when Krynn's single, pale moon was full in the night sky. The heroes might wish to confirm the reports' sketchy details to provide a more accurate account to

the Citadel of Light. The heroes could also be adventurers who have recently attended the Imperial Court in Gwynned. The court sponsors numerous expeditions to explore the ruins of the old Ergothian Empire for the express purpose of locating archaic magical items. The Emperor has reputedly offered lavish rewards to those willing to journey to these locations (including the Moon Steps) and return with intact magical items, or proof thereof.

Knowing the heroes' motivations enables the Narrator to determine the route of their journey to the Moon Steps. Setting out from the Emperor's court, the heroes travel northeast overland until they cross into Ackal Province and reach the Moon River. Following the river against the current, they eventually reach its headwaters in the foothills of the Sentinel Mountains. From there, the heroes must enter the mountain range itself, traveling northward—and almost continuously upward—for two days to reach the valley where the ruins lie. Should the heroes begin their journey at the Citadel of Light, or elsewhere, they can choose to sail to Northern Ergoth and seek the mouth of the Moon River along its northeastern coast. This is a perilous alternative; not far from the location where the river meets the sea is Ogara, the homeland of several tribes of savage trolls. The trolls might interpret a river expedition as a prelude to an attack and invasion.

Act One: Valley of the Moon Steps

Scene One: Down In the Valley

This scene locates the heroes high atop a steep hill overlooking a long, narrow valley within the Sentinel Mountains. The adventure presumes that the heroes know one another, and that they have made the difficult journey to the Moon Steps together for a common purpose.

The heroes have just crested the ridge of the steep hill above the valley of the Moon Steps. There appears to be no immediate means of descending the steep hill into the valley.

The heroes, if they have horses, cannot bring their mounts into the valley: The steep, narrow passes that

lead through the Sentinel Mountains to the Moon Steps do not permit passage by earthbound mounts. Knowing this ahead of time, the Narrator should assume that the heroes accomplished the long, draining trek up the rugged terrain on foot. Narrators should refer to the accompanying map of the valley and ruins during this and subsequent scenes.

First Impressions

Your vantage point atop a narrow ridge affords you a splendid view of the valley below. The sun, now past its midday zenith and arcing slowly toward the horizon, reflects off what was once a celestial spiral stairway that rose majestically into the heavens, but is now merely a vast ruin stretching along the valley floor hundreds of yards below. Huge, ragged chunks of dull gray masonry lie strewn across the landscape for over a hundred yards in either direction, silhouetted against the sky like the building blocks of some enormous and forgetful child. The largest sections of rubble are easily ten yards or more across. The spaces between the huge stones are filled with quantities of smaller rubble. The height of the ruins varies across its length, the fallen stones creating peaks and valleys, crevices and caves of varying depth and shape. A thick, almost tangible silence hangs over the ruins. Straining your ears, you hear nothing, and not even the slightest breeze disturbs the air. It is as if the gods themselves decreed a reverent silence around this place—a monument dedicated to the memory of their past glories.

The heroes' mission is to explore the ruins of the Moon Steps and to discover whether the rumors of their effect on magical powers are true. Because these tales also claim that the influence of the Moon Steps is greatest under a full moon, the heroes have wisely planned their arrival at the site to coincide with the night of the full moon. Tonight, when Krynn's single pale moon rises full in the night sky, the heroes might discover whether the tales speak true or are merely disappointing legends.

The heroes will need to enter the valley to examine the ruins more closely. They do not see any safe means of descending the hilltop on foot, as the sides facing the valley appear steep and treacherous. They can negotiate the valley walls by making four successful climbing checks at -25% each. Otherwise, they must reconnoiter the hills if they hope to find a means of entering the valley safely. A search of the nearby hills produces positive results. After about an hour, the heroes manage to locate two clear pathways that lead from the surrounding hilltops down into the valley. Read or paraphrase the following text:

Moonrise is only a few hours away when you spot what appears to be the remnants of a roadway. In bygone days this wide, graded avenue was paved with cobbled stone. It led directly from the ridge of this hilltop in a long, curving route down into the valley, almost to the very foot of the Moon Steps. The route has suffered severe damage, for its surface is now broken and cracked, pitted with deep holes, half-overgrown with scrub brush, and littered with loose shale

and rubble. While steep, the roadway offers what appears to be an easier route to the valley than any of the steep hillsides you have seen thus far.

A brief survey of the surrounding landscape also reveals a narrow game trail, formed much more recently by the passage of many animals. The trail lies about fifty yards from the roadway, sometimes paralleling its course and sometimes veering in another direction. The game trail appears less pitted than the roadway, and almost rubble free. It is narrow and winding, however, permitting travel only in single file.

The game trail is actually more dangerous than the broken road due to its steep grade. Regardless of their choice, the heroes must use care in descending into the vale. Movement rates along either route are halved.

Should the heroes choose the shattered remains of the road, they find it rough going. While sufficiently wide to accommodate heroes walking two abreast, loose rubble and exposed brush roots make for a perilous descent. Unless they are careful, the heroes might slip and fall. Following

the shattered pathway leads the heroes almost directly to the eastern face of the ruins in about an hour.

A hero attempting to navigate the broken road without a walking stick, staff, or other aid must make four Dexterity checks (one check every 100 yards). If the hero has a walking aid, each of these rolls receives a +2 bonus. A failed roll indicates that the hero has twisted his ankle, suffering 1 hp damage and a one-third movement rate reduction until the wound heals.

The game trail can be traversed in single file only. The trail begins on a relatively easy grade but quickly grows steeper, making it difficult for the heroes to maintain their footing. (It was created by four-legged beasts, after all, and was never intended for bipeds.) The trail eventually deposits heroes about 300 yards to the south-east of where the ancient roadway meets the ruins.

The game path is about 200 yards long. Traversing the path requires two Dexterity checks. A failed roll indicates that the hero has slipped and tumbled down the hillside. This danger can be minimized by taking precautions and using proper climbing tools. Otherwise, the hero tumbles

Act One: Scene One Actions

Descending the shattered roadway

Difficulty: Challenging (12)

Action Ability: Agility

Opposition Ability: None

Comments: If a hero takes the precaution of using a walking stick, staff, or other object to probe the ground ahead of him this action becomes one degree easier as the hero detects loose rubble and exposed roots that might impede his progress. Success means the hero navigated the broken roadway from the ridge to the valley floor without complications.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the hero stepped on loose rubble, an exposed root, or a hidden depression in the roadway. The hero slips and falls to the ground, sustaining only minor cuts and bruises. After a short descent, he picks himself up and ascertains that he is not injured and that none of his possessions are broken or missing.

Traversing the game trail

Difficulty: Daunting (16)

Action Ability: Agility

Opposition Ability: None

Comments: The path is only about 200 yards in length (approximately half that of the broken roadway, contributing to its initial appeal), but it is composed almost entirely of loose shale and gravel-like stones. Heroes must make an Agility check for every 50 yards they traverse (a total of four in all, from the ridge to the valley below). After each successful check, the Narrator should inform the hero that his footfalls dislodge an ominous quantity of loose rock and sand as he descends.

If the hero is a centaur, the task is easier by one degree due to the quadruped's increased stability on rough ground.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the loose ground gives way under the hero's weight. The hero loses his footing and begins tumbling and rolling along the slope to the valley floor below, sustaining an injury when he reaches the bottom. The Narrator should determine whether any of the hero's possessions are broken or missing as a result of his tumbling fall down the slope by drawing a card from the Fate Deck. If the card has a black aura, one item is lost. Heroes who slip and tumble to the end of the trail are injured, and lose one card from their Hand of Fate.

Climb the ruins

Difficulty: Challenging (12)

Action Ability: Agility

Opposition Ability: None

Comments: If a hero attempts the climb with proper gear (rope, pitons, etc.), this action becomes one degree easier. Success indicates the hero climbed from the rubble-strewn valley floor to the top of the ruins, nearly 80 feet above the valley floor. If the hero is a centaur, it becomes two degrees more difficult. It takes about a half hour to reach the top of the ruins without any equipment; climbing gear makes the ascent safer but doubles the time spent climbing.

Mishap: A mishap means the hero loses his footing or misses a handhold while climbing and falls from the ruins to the ground. If the hero took precautions, such as attaching himself to a rope and pitons, he sustains only one damage point and falls only as far as his equipment permits. If the hero was attempting the climb without making any such preparations, he falls all the way down to the valley floor, landing amid the jagged rubble and sustaining three damage points. Armor does not protect from this damage.

to the valley floor, landing amid the jagged rubble and sustaining 3d6 hp damage.

Examining the Ruins

Once they reach the valley floor, the heroes may begin exploring the ruins of the Moon Steps. Walking around the ruins to reconnoiter the area takes about an hour and a half. This lengthy circumnavigation is due not only to the ruins' huge size but also to the chunks of rubble spread out across the vicinity, further remnants and reminders of the Moon Steps' destruction. The heroes must pick their way carefully to avoid stumbling over loose rubble.

Walking near the ruins is difficult, as you must avoid the numerous broken chunks of masonry that litter the ground near the Moon Steps. The enormous heap of rubble rises high above the valley floor, a foreboding testament either to the skill of its craftsmen or the unimaginable power of the gods. The silence you noted on the ridge still reigns here in the valley; even your own footfalls and conversation seem muted to your ears.

The heroes may climb the Moon Steps to better view them and the surrounding area. The climb is not easy (requiring a successful climbing check with appropriate modifiers as determined by the Narrator) but rewards the heroes with a spectacular view of the ruins and valley.

If the heroes complete the climb successfully, read the following:

You pull yourself to the top of the ruins. From this vantage point, you can imagine the awesome sight the unbroken steps must have presented to those on the ground below. The air is cool and dry against your skin. The sun has already started its descent toward the western horizon—soon dusk will fall, then night, and finally the moon will rise over the ruins. From here the sunlight heightens the contrast between the gray ruins and the shadows formed the holes and depressions in the rubble. A lonely, lingering desolation clings to the valley and the toppled ruins.

The initial approach and reconnaissance of the Moon Steps should be tense. However, the valley has few permanent inhabitants, as the magic surrounding the valley tends to scare away the more timid beasts.

The heroes have journeyed far and faced many hardships to find this place, and they have no idea what they might encounter here. A sense of anticipation should underlay the heroes' apprehension—they are, after all, near the conclusion of their quest. Lower your voice and speak in hushed, but energetic, tones when you answer the players questions about what they see before them.

Climbing the fallen Moon Steps and making a complete circuit of the valley floor enables the heroes to discover the gnolls already making their way through the rubble. Proceed with Scene Two.

Magic of the Moon Steps

The Moon Steps have a peculiar enhancing effect on magic. The true nature of the effect varies depending on whether it is day or night in the valley. See the sidebars on pages 52 and 53 for details.

The Narrator should review the "Daylight Magic" sidebar for information on the effects that the ruins have on magic energies while the sun is still in the sky, as this scene and the next might present the heroes with their first opportunity to test the rumors and legends surrounding the valley ruins.

Scene Two: We Are Not Alone

This scene takes place shortly after the heroes have had an opportunity to explore the ruins. In the midst of their examinations, they are surprised to learn that a band of gnolls is also exploring the vicinity.

The gnolls are advance scouts for an approaching party of Ackalite warriors and are currently exploring the northern portion of the valley ruins.

The gnolls are not likely to observe the heroes first, engrossed as they are with searching the ruins for a defensible position. They are making a hurried examination of the ruins, hoping to find somewhere they and their Ackalite masters can hide from a trio of pursuing manticores. They know the Ackalites and manticores

are not far behind them. Therefore, the gnolls' attention is focused primarily on the task at hand.

If the heroes walk around the entire ruins area, the chances of one party spotting the other are roughly equal. (In AD&D terms, the DM and players should roll for surprise as usual.) If, however, the heroes choose to climb the ruins, their chances of observing the gnolls before the gnolls see them increase significantly.

If left alone, the gnolls eventually conclude their examination of the western face of the Moon Steps and proceed to the southern face, followed by the east, and finally the north.

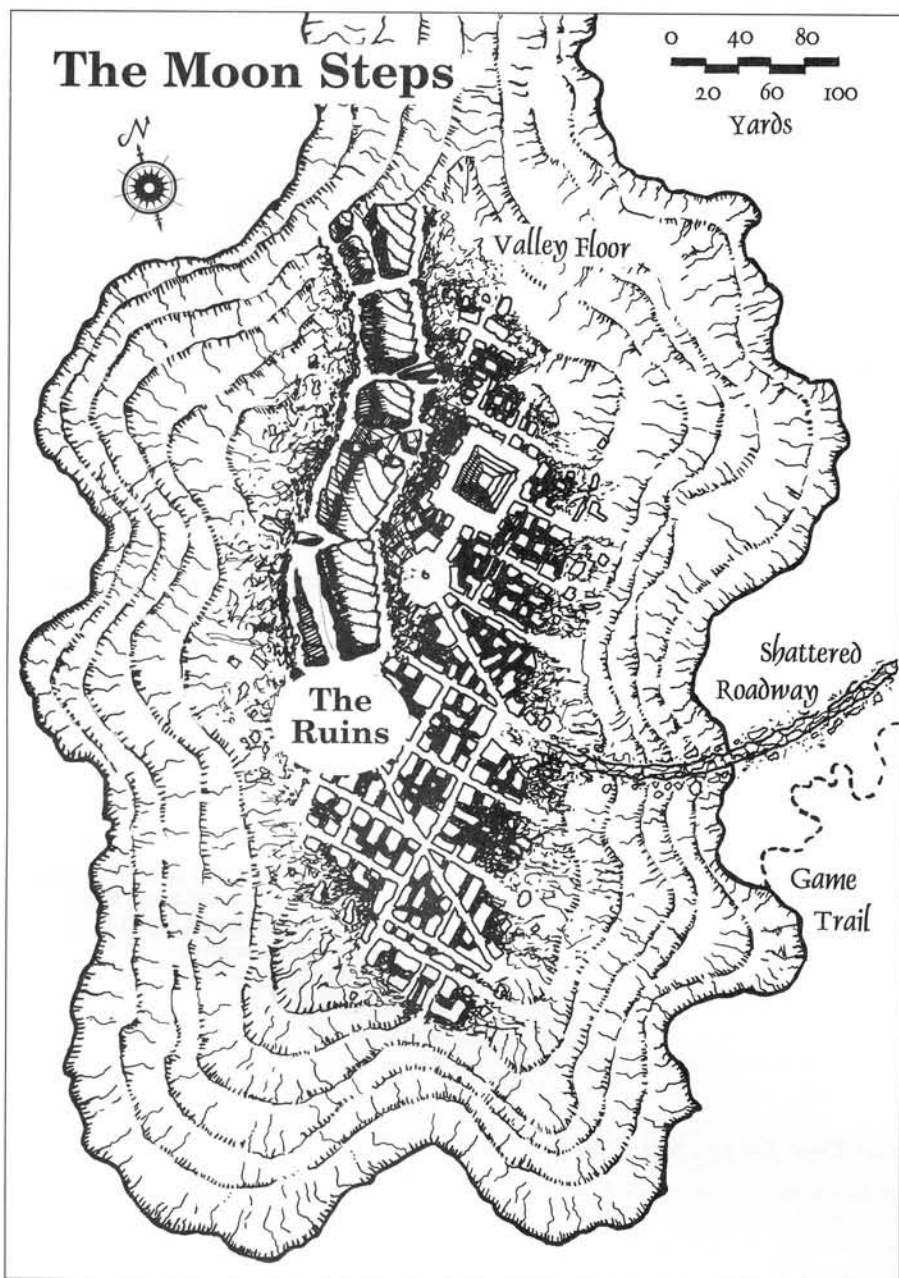
Spotting the Gnolls

If the heroes climb the ruins of the Moon Steps and successfully spot the gnolls from that position, read or paraphrase the following:

From your lofty vantage point atop the stones, you spot something moving through the northern section of the ruins. You recognize the shapes of ten brutish, dog-headed humanoids making their way carefully through the ruins, ten of them in all, each outfitted in leather armor and brandishing assorted weapons. The creatures are quickly but methodically scanning the southern portion of the valley, as if searching for something. You realize that the creatures are working their way southward.

If the heroes fail to notice the gnolls atop the ruins but spot them by walking around the piles of rubble in the northern portion of the valley, read or paraphrase the following:

Roughly 40 yards ahead of you, moving with deliberate caution but surprising agility through the rubble, are a group of armed gnolls! You take a moment to observe them and count ten in all, each wearing leather armor and bearing several weapons. They appear to be searching the ruins for something, but they haven't seen you—yet. You realize that they are working their way toward the base of the ruined Moon Steps. You have only a few moments to act before any chance of surprise is lost.



If the gnolls spot the heroes first, they adopt a predesignated battle plan. All but one of the gnolls immediately seek partial cover and launch sling stones at the heroes, hoping to provide cover sufficient for one gnoll to break away and beat a hasty retreat away from the ruins with the intention of warning the Ackalites. The half-hidden gnolls receive a -4 bonus to their AC.

The heroes may get the drop on the gnolls if they saw the creatures first. In this case, the heroes must

then decide whether to attack or observe the intruders. If the heroes choose to observe the gnolls before deciding on any actions, they note that the creatures appear to be combing through the shattered landscape as if searching for something.

If attacked, the gnolls defend themselves first with their slings, then their javelins, and finally their short swords if the heroes close to melee range. Their strategy is to put up a sufficiently vigorous fight so that at least one of their number can

sneak away from the battle and warn the approaching Ackalites. Their tactics call for using their missile weapons as long as possible to keep the heroes at a distance. Any gnolls who flee the encounter attempt to move northward until they intercept their employers. If cornered or otherwise unable to flee, the gnolls put up a ferocious struggle but eventually surrender if more than two-thirds of their number are killed, or if they are surrounded at melee range by an obviously superior force.

Questioning the Gnolls

Should the heroes capture any gnolls, they might question the gnolls in regards to their presence among the ruins of the Moon Steps. The Narrator should choose one of the gnolls as the designated speaker and read the following response when the time is appropriate:

The gnoll puffs out his chest and tilts his head upward as he thrusts his lower jaw forward in a display of defiant pride. Though a prisoner, his face betrays neither fear nor concern.

"We're not scared of you, mutton-face!" he snarls. "We are scouts for a great warrior! You better watch out, 'cause our boss is coming this way right now, and you'll be sorry if you hurt us!" The gnoll seems utterly sincere in his predictions.

The gnolls are scouts in the service of Karyn'na, an Ackalite war leader who is even now approaching the ruins with her retinue of followers. The Ackalites are about 30 minutes north of the valley when the heroes first encounter the gnolls. The Ackalites are moving at a fast trot, hoping to reach the relative safety of the ruins before they are again spotted by the manticores that have dogged their trail for the last two days. Karyn'na hopes the ruins of the Moon Steps will provide a defensible position from which she and her warriors can fend off the manticores, once the bloodthirsty monsters catch up to them.

Captured gnolls answer the heroes' questions truculently and are purposefully vague about the facts concerning their true motives, hoping

to stall for time. Their time among the Ackalites has instilled in them a sense of honor, and they dare not betray Karyn'na to these strangers. (The gnolls have shifted from chaotic to lawful evil.)

If the heroes ask about the exact number of warriors currently en route to the Moon Steps, the gnolls vary the answer between 10 and 50 each time the question is repeated. They are similarly vague about the type of equipment and weapons these warriors possess, declaring one moment that the Ackalite warriors bear heavy crossbows and spears, and the next minute saying they carry long swords and are capable of working powerful, deadly magic. The gnolls carefully omit any mention of the manticores.

If pressed about the nature of their scouting mission, the speaker for the prisoners replies as follows:

The groll growls. "Our boss told us to search the valley for danger. She is our leader, so we do as she commands. You have any questions, ask our boss. We know nothing, and even if we did, we wouldn't tell you anything unless our boss told us to."

Because the gnolls know that Karyn'na and her warband are due to arrive, they do not try to escape, hoping to provide a distraction when the heroes first encounter the Ackalites.

If the Ackalites are alerted to the heroes' presence, the Ackalites alter their approach, splitting into two

even groups and tackling the north and west walls of the valley, hoping to surprise the heroes shortly after dusk (see Act Two). Otherwise, the Ackalites follow their original plan and approach the ruins from the north, moving quickly down the center of the valley without benefit of any foreknowledge about the heroes or the fate of their scouts.

Gnoll scouts (10): INT low (7); AL LE; AC 7 (8 without shield); MV 9; HD 2; hp 16, 15, 14 (x2), 12, 11 (x3), 10, 9; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SZ L; ML 11; XP 65; MM/158; leather armor, shield, sling, two javelins, short sword.

Ten gnoll mercenaries, Non-human. Co 5, Ph 7, In 3, Es 5, Dmg +4 [claws], +3 [short sword], +2 [sling], +1 [javelins], Def -2 [leather armor].

Act Two: Moonrise Over Krynn

Scene One: The Ackalites Arrive

This scene quickly follows the heroes' discovery of, and encounter with, the gnoll scouts. Approximately 30 minutes after the heroes face the gnolls, the Ackalites arrive on the scene.

If the heroes are as yet unaware of the Ackalites' approach, one of two things should occur. Heroes on watch should make an Intelligence check at -4 to spot the warriors as they descend into the valley.

If the heroes are warned of the warband's imminent arrival, they must make a regular Intelligence check to spot the Ackalites' approach from the north. If Karyn'na knows the heroes are waiting for her, her warband splits into two smaller groups and approaches from the west and north, in which case the heroes' Intelligence checks are made at -4.

Each hero should make a *Challenging Perception* action to notice the Ackalites moving along the northern rim of the valley.

If the heroes are forewarned of the warband's arrival, they need to make an *Easy Perception* action to observe the Ackalites' approach. Add one degree of difficulty to the action if Karyn'na knows the heroes are waiting for her.

Read or paraphrase the following if the Ackalites are spotted:

The setting sun casts long shadows across of the valley. A number of figures are moving quickly toward the ruins from the northern end of the vale. At this range, you can make out few details, but the westering sun reflects off their armor and weapons, bathing the figures in a blood-red glow. The newcomers are making a hasty descent and rapidly closing the distance between themselves and you.

The surviving gnolls realize that their employers have arrived at last

Act One: Scene Two Actions

Spot the gnoll scouts

Difficulty: Average (8)

Action Ability: Perception

Opposition Ability: None

Comments: The heroes may spot the gnolls only if they are near, or looking at, the northern portion of the valley. If the heroes are watching the north from atop the ruins, this action becomes one degree easier. If they are in the southern part of the vale, the action becomes one degree harder. Success indicates that the heroes observe the gnolls making their way through the rubble to the north, seemingly searching the ruins for something.

Mishap: A mishap means that the heroes completely fail to notice the gnolls, who gain the advantage of surprise as they close toward the heroes' position.

Outflank the gnolls

Difficulty: Average (8)

Action Ability: Dexterity

Opposed Ability: Perception

Comments: If a hero successfully outflanks the gnolls, enabling the hero to maneuver around and behind the gnolls without being detected. The hero can use this advantage to gain surprise in a combat situation.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the hero not only failed to outflank the gnolls, but unwittingly exposed himself clearly against the lighter background of the ruins. The gnolls spot the hero at once and either duck for cover or beat a hasty retreat back the way they came. The hero cannot attempt this action again before the gnolls are either under cover or retreating across the valley floor.

Intimidate the gnolls

Difficulty: Challenging (12)

Action Ability: Presence

Opposed Ability: Spirit

Comments: The gnolls are proud to associate with Karyn'na's warband. They have traveled together as her scouts for almost an entire year, and they have come to trust her as few gnolls trust humans. Success means that the heroes break down the gnolls' resolve to remain faithful to their employer, and the gnolls reveal to the heroes the true purpose of the Ackalites' visit to the ruins.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the heroes' mishandling of the situation has only strengthened the gnolls' resolve, and they say absolutely nothing at all, maintaining a determined silence even under further threats.

AD&D Daylight Magic

During daylight hours, wizards and priests within 100 yards of the valley ruins experience magical enhancements to their spells and spell scrolls. These changes should not be announced to the players; rather, the players should be forced to discover the true nature of the valley on their own:

- ❖ Spells have their casting time reduced by 1 (to a minimum of 1).
- ❖ Saving throws against spells cast within 100 yards of the ruins are made at -1.
- ❖ The ranges of all spells cast within 100 yards of the ruins are increased by 50%.
- ❖ Spellcasters have a 25% chance of mentally retaining any spell they cast. The spell remains in the caster's memory and can be cast again. This effect is lost when the caster moves beyond the valley.

and begin distracting the heroes to give Karyn'na every possible advantage. If their limbs and mouths are free, they begin to howl and attempt to flee their position and rejoin the Ackalites. Should their limbs be bound or their mouths gagged, they do their level best to escape at this point, crawling away across the ground, rolling about in hopes of knocking the heroes over, and struggling to the their feet despite their bonds.

If the Ackalites hear or see their scouts struggling in their captivity, they immediately begin moving in the heroes' direction. As the Ackalites draw near, the heroes can note more detail in the newcomers' appearance:

The figures are clearly human—seven men and one woman. The men are outfitted in ornately engraved leather armor and carry wickedly curved scimitars at their sides. The woman wears a suit of intricately engraved scale mail and bears both an elegantly forged longsword and a shield emblazoned with the design of a storm-tossed ship. The people are tanned and weathered, and the men's heads are braided in complex patterns. The woman wears her long dark hair tied back away from her face.

You note that all wear various types of bracers, necklaces, and other simple jewelry, while each of the men bears a red smear of paint across his forehead.

The Ackalites stop just out of melee range. They regard the heroes with stern, determined faces and expressionless dark eyes, their hands near their scimitar hilts. However, they refrain from drawing the blades at this point. The heroes notice that almost all of them carry bows, but that their quivers are nearly empty of arrows. All eight appear road-weary and disheveled. The Ackalites refrain from attacking unless the heroes do

so first. Though aggressive and territorial, the Ackalites are also highly disciplined fighters—their leader has ordered them to wait for her orders, and they would not dishonor themselves or her by attacking without permission. Moreover, they are acutely aware that any fight against the strangers, whose skills and capabilities are as yet unknown, might expend too much of their strength, wearying them further and making them easier prey for the monsters that are still somewhere behind them. Instead they face the heroes silently but resolutely, awaiting some word or sign of their intentions.

When the heroes at last make some overture, Karyn'na responds in a proud, almost regal tone:

"I am Karyn'na, Daughter of Sarkhem Nord, Chief of the Karthan tribe." She intones each word with the air of one accustomed to command. The warriors at her side stare straight at you, ready to lash out at the merest breath of a command from their leader. Karyn'na continues: "Know that you are within the lands claimed by my father without his permission. What answer do you make, strangers?"

The heroes' response determines Karyn'na's next actions. She knows that the manticores are somewhere close behind them and that the monsters are quite capable of following her warband's trail to the ruins.

SAGA Daylight Magic

Sorcerers and mystics can begin testing the effects the ruins have on their powers right away, perhaps even as soon as they first view the site from the surrounding hills. Attempts to cast spells of any sort on the hilltops or hillsides result only in the normal, expected outcomes. Despite the ominous, unnatural silence of the place, the ruins appear to have no effect at that distance.

Casting spells within the ruins is another matter entirely.

During daylight hours, heroes find that their spells are significantly easier to cast as long as they are within 100 yards of the ruins of the Moon Steps. The Narrator should decrease the Difficulty of any spell effect by one point while daylight conditions prevail. No spell effect Difficulty

should drop below 1 point, however. The energy with which the gods once imbued the celestial stairway is waning fast and can no longer provide the vast reserves of magical power they once held, at least not while the sun is still in the sky.

Invocation Time	Difficulty
30 minutes	1 point
20 minutes	1 point
10 minutes	2 points
1 minute	3 points
Instant	4 points

The heroes might later discover an additional side effect of remaining within the ruins' area of magical influence. The power of the Moon Steps, even ruined as they are, increases the difficulty of avoiding even the simplest spells by +4 so long as the target of the spell is within 100

yards of the ruins.

Furthermore, sorcerers and mystics alike find their total number of Spell Points enhanced while they remain in the vicinity of the ruins (within 100 yards) during the day. The Narrator should secretly add 10 Spell Points to each spellcasters' Spell Point total, but the Narrator is encouraged to conceal this fact from the heroes until such time as the presence of the extra Spell Points would become apparent—such as when a hero believes himself completely drained of Spell Points and does not expect to muster the energy needed to cast more spells. At this point, the Narrator should inform the spellcaster that, much to his astonishment, his store of Spell Points is not entirely depleted. Indeed, he detects within himself an additional, previously unnoticed reservoir of magical power that he may tap at will.

Should the heroes prove honorable or approachable, she sees the hope for a truce and chooses to warn them:

Karyn'na gestures toward her warband, pausing to weigh her next words with care. "We are tired from our journey to this valley. We set out from Beacon, my father's chief city, more than three weeks ago with twice the number you see before you. All was well until we were set upon by three monsters that combine the worst features of lion and dragon.

"They swooped low to claim eight of my warband with their cruel tail spikes. My men have spent almost all their arrows fighting off the beasts. We sent our gnoll scouts ahead, hoping to find a defensible position among the ruins. The creatures are even now behind us and will no doubt find us shortly. Your words tell me that you are brave people—we offer you the chance to do what few may boast of: Fight beside the warriors of the Karthan Tribe and drive these monsters away for once and all!"

Karyn'na reasons that even if they all survive the encounter with the manticores, she can perhaps turn the situation to her advantage later. She still wishes to question the strangers more thoroughly to determine why

they are in Ackal Province and visiting the ruins, but she knows this can wait until after the coming battle. If the heroes agree to stand with the Ackalites against the manticores, Karyn'na immediately orders her warband to begin searching the ruins for adequate hiding places and defensible spots, urging the heroes to do likewise before the beasts are upon them.

The heroes might wish to ask further questions of Karyn'na before committing their aid. The heroes know all too well that more than a few of Krynn's human inhabitants are under the influence of the Dragon Overlords, some reluctantly and some less so. How do they know that the Ackalites are fleeing any monsters at all? They might wish to inquire about who the Karthan Tribe is, and what the daughter of its chieftain might be doing this far from her home. Karyn'na answers such questions briefly and impatiently. She informs the heroes that the Karthan tribe dwells in the section of Ackal province to the north and east of the Moon Steps. The Karthans are primarily a seafaring people, and though most of the Ackalite tribes are rebelling against the Ergothian Empire, she assures the heroes that the Karthans seek only the right to do as they will with their own affairs. If the heroes journeyed to the Moon

AD&D Moonlight Magic

During moonlit hours, wizards and priests within 100 yards of the valley ruins experience even greater magical enhancements to spells and spell scrolls. The players should be forced to discover the true nature of the valley on their own:

- ❖ Casting times for spells are reduced by 2 (minimum of 1).
- ❖ Spells cast within range inflict maximum damage.
- ❖ Saving throws against spells cast within 100 yards of the ruins are made at -2.
- ❖ The ranges of all spells are doubled.
- ❖ Spellcasters have a 50% chance of mentally retaining any spell they cast, enabling the spell to be cast again. In effect, the spell remains in the caster's memory like it was never cast to begin with. This effect is lost when the caster moves beyond the valley.

Steps at the behest of the Emperor of Ergoth, they find relations with Karyn'na strained should they choose to reveal this fact.

Karyn'na is less forthcoming about her own reasons for being in this area. She attempts to evade the question, insisting that there is too little

SAGA Moonlight Magic

The moonrise brings a startling change both to the Moon Steps' appearance and their effect on magical powers. When the full moon finally clears the surrounding hills and bathes the valley with its silvery-white light, the ancient, god-hewn stones release a small measure of their once awesome magical energies. The ruins reflect the moonlight with a surprising intensity, creating a brilliant glow which all but transforms night into day. The heroes and the Ackalites, who until now have fought the manticores in near darkness, are now able to see almost as well as in full daylight. The most profound changes wrought by the moonrise are, however, those of a magical nature.

While the full moon shines down upon the ruins of the Moon Steps, the Narrator should decrease the Difficulty of any spell effect's by three points, making spells con-

siderably less difficult to cast. No spell effect Difficulty should drop below 1 point, however. For example:

Invocation Time	Difficulty
30 minutes	1 point
20 minutes	1 point
10 minutes	1 point
1 minute	1 points
Instant	2 points

Likewise, sorcerers and mystics alike are aware that they harbor markedly increased reserves of magical energy, finding their total number of Spell Points enhanced while they remain in the vicinity of the ruins (within 100 yards) when they are bathed in the light of the full moon. The Narrator should add 25 Spell Points to each spell casters' total and should not conceal this fact from the heroes—they are feeling the power of Krynn's vanished gods shine directly upon

them, and it is difficult to ignore such circumstances even when one is distracted by a life-or-death battle.

As might be expected, the difficulty of resisting any spells becomes even greater under these conditions, as the very air around the ruins of the Moon Steps fairly crackles with magical energy. The Narrator should apply a +4 difficulty modifier to an action intended to avoid a spell cast within 100 yards of the moonlit ruins.

These effects prevail only as long as the full moon shines in the night sky. When the moon sinks below the horizon, the effects of the ruins on magic return to the conditions which prevail during daylight. The enhancing effect cannot be prolonged or duplicated by removing a portion of the ruins of the Moon Steps (such as by carrying a rock or piece of masonry away from the ruins); it can only be experienced when the circumstances described above are met.

time to dwell on such details before the manticores find them. If forced to choose between discussing the subject and foregoing the heroes' aid, she relents:

Karyn'na's expression betrays her exasperation. She breathes deeply of the twilight air and fixes her stare on you once more. "My father claims these ruins are all that remain of a great stairway that ascended to the heavens, to the very home of the gods themselves. He bids me explore this place to determine whether it is safe for the sorcerers and shamans of the Karthan Tribe to make a journey to the ruins. My father believes he will find some great magic here that could help him keep the Karthans free of Ergoth's greedy hands. Whether this is true or not, I cannot say. I am here to do as my father bids."

Should the heroes make any hostile motions toward the Ackalites, Karyn'na orders her men to attack, and at her command the warband throws itself into battle with fierce abandon. While in melee range, the warriors use their scimitars; their

ultimate goal is to defeat the heroes as quickly as possible so that they still have time to prepare before their pursuers' arrival. The gnolls do their best to aid the Ackalites, if possible. If combat between the heroes and Ackalites breaks out, the Narrator should move immediately to Scene Two—the manticores' arrival.

The heroes might decide to try to outflank the newcomers when they first see the Ackalites making their way down the valley toward the ruins. They might also choose to hide in the ruins to conceal themselves from the Ackalites, hoping thereby to gain surprise. When the heroes and Ackalites stand face to face, the heroes may attempt to impress the Ackalites. This is rather difficult, as the heroes are technically trespassing on lands claimed by Karyn'na's tribe. Impressing the Ackalites requires a successful Charisma check, with a -3 penalty if any of the heroes are rude or behave suspiciously.

Karyn'na is the only surviving child of Sarkhem Nord, the reigning Chieftain of the Karthan Tribe who dwells in Ackal Province. She had an older brother—her father's only son—who perished in a shipwreck two years ago. Ackalite tribes are patriar-

chal, and it is their custom that women are forever the property of their fathers until such time as they give birth to a child, at which point they become the lifelong property of their husbands. However, it is also an Ackalite custom that a man who has no sons may instead raise a daughter to continue the family line. When her brother died, Karyn'na's father chose to adopt this custom and raise her as he would his son.

Karyn'na enjoys far more freedom than the majority of Ackalite women, and she revels in it. She relishes her authority over her personal warband, and she is accustomed to being obeyed. An expert sailor and competent warrior, Karyn'na has never demonstrated the slightest unworthiness for the trust placed in her. She privately considers herself proof that there is little fundamental difference between Ackalite men and women, and has begun to wonder if there is not something she can do to effect some change in this direction among her own tribe.

The daughter of a chieftain, Karyn'na is always accompanied by her personal retinue of Karthan soldiers, a warband under her command and pledged to defend her with their

Act Two: Scene One Actions

Outflank the Ackalites

Difficulty: Challenging (12)

Action Ability: Agility

Opposed Ability: Perception

Comments: If the heroes were forewarned of the Ackalites approach by the gnolls (see **Act One, Scene Two**), the difficulty of this action is reduced by one degree. The warband is moving rapidly across the valley floor toward the ruins, and from their position they command a good view of the land before them. Outflanking them requires the heroes to circle around and intercept the Ackalites before they reach the ruins.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the heroes not only failed to outflank the approaching warriors but unwittingly exposed themselves clearly against the lighter background of the ruins. The Ackalites spy them at once and change their direction, moving toward the heroes' exact position. The heroes cannot attempt this action again until the Ackalites are at melee range.

Hide in the ruins

Difficulty: Challenging (12)

Action Ability: Agility

Opposition Ability: Perception

Comments: The ruins offer many places of possible concealment, from the shelter of large blocks of masonry to the deep cranies formed when the Moon Steps tumbled to the earth. Reduce the Difficulty of this action by one degree for heroes who are dwarves, gnomes, and kender, and increase it by one degree for heroes who are centaurs or minotaurs.

Success indicates that the hero has successfully concealed himself in the ruins and may remain unseen provided he does not break cover or otherwise call attention to himself.

Mishap: A mishap means that the hero failed to locate any useful cover nearby and is exposed to the Ackalites. He may not even attempt to gain surprise against the Ackalites as they approach.

Impress the Ackalites

Difficulty: Daunting (16)

Action Ability: Presence

Opposed Ability: None

Comments: If the heroes respect the Ackalites' nonthreatening posture and refrain from hostile actions, perhaps making a friendly or at least neutral overture, Karyn'na takes a gamble and greets them with relative cordiality (see text above). To make this impression lasting, however, the heroes must agree to join forces with the Ackalites against the pursuing manticores. Furthermore, the heroes must acknowledge that the valley where the ruins of the Moon Steps rest are in Ackal Province, this particular portion of which properly belongs to the Karthan Tribe.

Should the heroes prove themselves to be honest and honorable people, the Ackalites treat them with respect and civility.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the heroes' words or behavior has angered and offended one or more of Karyn'na's warband. The warriors openly treat the heroes with suspicion, continuing this grudge until such time as the heroes prove themselves worthy associates (perhaps by helping the Ackalites defeat the manticores).

lives. An ambitious young woman, Karyn'na eagerly accepted her father's command to explore the ruins of the Moon Steps. She, too, has heard of the legendary celestial stairway, and believes she will find powerful magic somewhere in the ruins of the Moon Steps that might prove useful in her father's plans. Meanwhile, this mission may further demonstrate the capabilities of Ackalite women both to her father and her fellow Karthan tribespeople.

Karyn'na Nord (3rd-level human fighter): AL NG; AC 6; MV 12; F3; hp 21; THAC0 18 (base); #AT 1 or 3/2; Dmg by weapon type +1 (Strength bonus), +2 (specialization bonus); S 16, D 11, C 12, I 12, W 10, Ch 15; ML 15; scale mail, long sword (specialized), long bow, four flight arrows.

Ackalite warriors (7 2nd-level fighters): AL NG; AC 8; MV 12; F2; hp 19, 16, 15, 12 (×3), 11; THAC0 19 (base); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type +1 (Strength bonus); S 17, roll 2d4+6 for other ability scores; ML 15; leather armor, scimitar, long bow, four flight arrows.

Karyn'na Nord, Ackalite warrior (Karthan Tribe). *Human adult female, authoritative demeanor, Adventurer.* Ag 5A, Dx 6B, St 6B, En 8B, Re 7C, Pe 8B, Sp 7C, Pr 7A, Dmg +7 [long sword], also missile weapons [self bow/+2], four arrows, Def -4 [scale mail].

Ackalite warriors (Karthan Tribe), *Seven human adult males, various demeanors, Novice-Adventurer.* Co 8, Ph 8, In 4, Es 6, Dmg +5 [scimitar], also missile weapons [self bows/+2], four arrows each, Def -3 [leather armor].

Scene Two: Trial by Moonlight

In this scene, the three manticores finally overtake their quarry, just as twilight fades into night and the full moon is poised to rise over the horizon, unleashing the Moon Steps' hidden magical powers.

This scene takes place after the heroes and the Ackalites have agreed to combine their strength and defeat the manticores. Alternatively, this scene can occur if the heroes and Ackalites are unable to reach an accord and fall to blows. Review the

sidebars on "Moonlight Magic" (see page 53) to determine the effect the ruins have on magic while the full moon is in the sky.

Night's Roar

Twilight gives way to full night. Within moments, a silvery glow touches the hilltops as Krynn's pale moon begins to rise over the horizon. Without warning, an unearthly, guttural roar splits the night air, reverberating up and down the valley. It is followed by several more roars that seem to shatter the very sky itself. It is difficult to determine exactly where the terrible sounds originate, as they seem to come from the sky all around you. Then you see them—three enormous silhouettes gliding silently, with the leonine bodies and bat-like wings, their manes streaming behind them. The pale moonlight gleams menacingly off the rows of deadly spikes embedded in their tails.

If Karyn'na and the Ackalites did not come to terms with the heroes in Scene One, they dive for cover and ready their bows as soon as the manticores roar their challenge.

The manticores are fierce opponents. While they are clumsy fliers, their tail spikes give them aerial superiority over their grounded prey. Each manticore prefers to fire volleys of tail spikes (1–6 spikes per volley, range as a light crossbow) at targets on the ground. Each beast is capable of firing up to three volleys in this scene. (Normally they would be capable of firing up to four volleys of tail spikes per day, but they have already engaged the Ackalites once earlier this same day.) Following these missile attacks, the manticores prefer to remain in the air to present a difficult target, waiting for their injured prey to bleed to death or to break cover and run. When the manticores sense their prey is too tired or wounded to present further opposition, they attempt to close to melee range, using their wings to maneuver into favorable position. Manticores are not capable of effective dive attacks but instead attempt to glide down behind fleeing prey and use their considerable bulk to bear their prey to the earth while slashing with





Heroes find no reprieve amid the tumbled stones and toppled columns of the Moon Steps.

their front claws. (They cannot use their teeth while flying).

Manticores are carnivores with a voracious appetite. They have a taste for the flesh of humans, preferring it to any other meal. They normally devour their prey immediately after slaying it but sometimes carry carcasses back to their lair for their young. Once manticores begin hunting a particular creature, there is little chance of convincing them to give up the chase. They are capable of working together to bring down their prey, communicating with each other through their guttural roars. Beings of low intelligence at best, manticores seldom retreat, even from creatures that defend themselves with vigor. Only if two of the manticores are vanquished does the remaining monster exercise discretion and retreat, making its way back to its lair north of the valley.

The Ackalites fire their bows at the manticores each time the beasts pass overhead. When their remaining supply of arrows is expended, they attempt to lure the monsters to the ground and engage them in melee combat until either the monsters or they are defeated. The Ackalites have no intention of giving up, for they realize that if they do not defeat the manticores here and now, they will have almost no chance of preventing the creatures from pursuing them until they are all dead.

There are numerous actions the heroes might take if they demonstrate sufficient foresight to join forces with the Ackalites before the manticores reach the ruins. They might wish to seek concealment amid the ruins to hide from the monsters or otherwise make ready for the imminent battle. Heroes might wish to prepare a trap of some variety; this

requires a successful set snares proficiency check at -4. If the heroes have not already done so before the manticores arrive on the scene, they can quickly dive for cover amid the ruins when the monsters appear.

This tone of this scene should reflect the tension of a pitched battle. The manticores are ecstatic to have run their prey to earth at last, and the Ackalites are desperate to fend off the monsters once and for all. This grim mood should prevail until the heroes discover the magic-enhancing power of the moonlit ruins, which should instill them with relief and enable them to turn the tide of the battle.

Manticores (3): INT low (7); AL LE; AC 4; MV 12, fly 18 (E); HD 6+3; hp 47, 40, 35; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-8; SA tail spikes (1-4 spikes for 1-6 hp damage each); SZ H (15' tall); ML 14; XP 975; MM/246.

Three manticores. *Monsters.* Co 9, Ph 21, In 3, Es 7, Dmg +7, Def -3, plus missile weapons [tail spikes/+7].

The creatures can launch their tail spikes as missile weapons at either near missile or melee range. Every time they do, the Narrator should flip the top card in the Fate Deck. If the aura is white, the manticore has depleted its fully developed spikes and may not attack with them again for a number of days equal to the card's value.

Epilogue

If the heroes had a chance to experiment with their magic under the light of the moon, the heroes now possess the knowledge they sought: The ruins of the Moon Steps do indeed have a startling effect on magical energies, but only under certain conditions. This effect—to the best of the heroes' knowledge—can only be experienced within close proximity to the ruins themselves. Nonetheless, this information is significant in and of itself, for it is possible that the Citadel of Light (or the Emperor of Ergoth) might decide on the basis of the heroes' report to establish an outpost here for further research. If the heroes return to the Emperor's court with this information, they receive

whatever reward was promised them in return for their services.

If the heroes did not discover the secret of the Moon Steps over the course of their stay, they might choose to remain in the valley for a few more days to gather as much information as they can. The Narrator might have these heroes encounter some other monsters, affording them more chances to test their spells by day and night. Perhaps a group of draconian spies are surveying the valley, searching for lost artifacts. The ruins that surround and encompass the Moon Steps could hold any number of treasures from the Fourth Age of Krynn. Heroes are free to delve into these ruins, perhaps finding some relic that could give the Emperor of Ergoth an edge when dealing with the Dragon Overlords.

The relationship between the heroes and the Ackalites is in the hands of the Narrator. Regardless of the political differences that might simmer beneath the surface of their interactions, both the heroes and the Ackalites should gain a measure of

mutual respect following the battle with the manticores. If the heroes readily agreed to join Karyn'na against the monsters, or if they displayed a measurable sense of honor and bravery in battle, she may invite them to return to the court of her father, the Karthan Tribe chieftain, and add their words to hers when she reports on her findings at the Moon Steps. Even if the heroes are agents of the Ergothian Empire, their assistance to Karyn'na should earn them the right to depart Ackal Province without further hostilities.

The heroes should receive a story award of 500 XP each for befriending the Ackalites, plus another 500 XP for discovering the true nature of the Moon Steps' magic.

All heroes should increase one Quest after completing this expedition to the ruins of the Moon Steps. Should this result in an increase in their Reputation, they can make an attempt to improve a single ability (see the FIFTH AGE boxed set for more information). Ω



For an example of how this scenario can be developed based on the ideas given in the Epilogue, see page 86.

Act Two: Scene Two Actions

Find concealment

Difficulty: Average (8)

Action Ability: Agility

Opposition Ability: Presence

Comments: The degree of Difficulty is one less for kender, dwarf, and gnome heroes who attempt this action, due to their smaller stature, and one degree greater for centaur and minotaur heroes, due to their larger size. Success means that the hero has successfully concealed himself in a large crevice, ruined building, or niche within the ruins.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the hero is not only unable to conceal himself adequately but also has unwittingly presented a clear target for the manticores. The hero must immediately defend himself against an attack from one of the manticores, which takes places outside the normal combat round sequence.

Prepare a trap

Difficulty: Daunting (16)

Action Ability: Dexterity

Opposition Ability: None

Comments: The ruins of the Moon Steps offer few available resources that might aid in the construction of an effective trap. Nonetheless it is possible that the heroes can gather sufficient debris and rubble and arrange them such that a manticore alighting on them might dislodge the rocks and upset the monster. Success means that the heroes are able to construct one trap and complete it several minutes before the manticores arrive.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the heroes miscalculate the proper weight and angle of the rubble trap, accidentally triggering it as they strive to complete it before the manticores show up. Each character involved in creating the trap is injured by the shower of falling rock, losing one card from his Hand of Fate.

Dive for cover during combat

Difficulty: Challenging (12)

Action Ability: Agility

Opposition Ability: None

Comments: This action becomes one degree easier for heroes who are kender, dwarves, or gnomes, due to their smaller stature. Centaurs and minotaurs suffer a one degree difficulty penalty due to their larger size. Success indicates that the hero was able to dive to the ground and conceal himself under or behind nearby rubble, giving them an automatic trump when attempting Missile Defense actions.

Mishap: A mishap indicates that the character misjudged the distance between himself and available cover, leaving himself exposed to the manticores. The hero must immediately defend himself from an attack from one of the manticores, which occurs outside the normal combat round.