



THE THRICE-CURSED CROWN

A Diamond Throne adventure for four 1st-level characters

BY MIKE MEARLS

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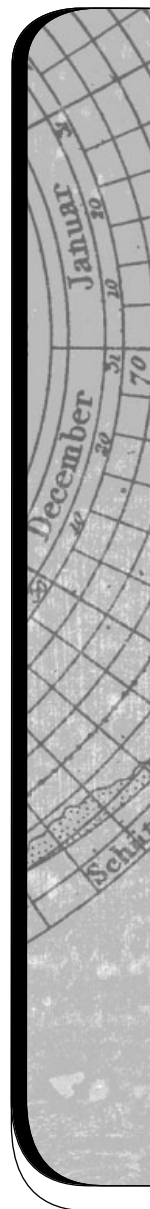
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Malhavoc Press

Malhavoc Press is *Monte Cook's* d20 System imprint devoted to the publication of unusual magic, monsters, and evocative game elements that go beyond traditional fantasy. Malhavoc Press products exhibit the mastery of the d20 System rules that only one of its original designers can offer.

Look for *The Diamond Throne* in stores now. This sourcebook provides prestige classes, magic items, a gazetteer, and creatures for *Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed*. The variant player's handbook offers new rules, races, and classes for advanced roleplayers.

Current Malhavoc Press titles are available to purchase in either print or electronic (PDF) format at Monte's website: <www.montecook.com>.



Introduction

The Thrice-Cursed Crown by Mike Mearls is an introductory adventure for Monte Cook's *Arcana Unearthed* from Malhavoc Press. If you've been looking for a good way to introduce your friends to *Arcana Unearthed*, running this short adventure is a great way to do it. It also makes a fun one-shot as a break from your normal game or a good starting point if you're looking to launch a new campaign in the *Lands of the Diamond Throne*. I hope you enjoy it! —Monte Cook

This adventure is designed to serve as the jumping off point for a *Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed* campaign or as a one-shot that lets you dive into the world of the *Diamond Throne*. It uses some magic items and creatures from *The Diamond Throne* supplement, but you don't need that book to run the adventure. Necessary statistics are provided for all creatures, and you may treat such magic items as single-use devices that deliver the spells listed in their names. All you need to play this introductory adventure is a copy of *Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed* variant player's handbook. Some DMs may also wish to refer to the DMG and MM on certain rules points.

If you use miniatures in your game, the *Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed* line of metal miniatures, produced by Iron Wind Metals, offers some figures appropriate for many of the characters in this adventure. The recommended miniature and its stock number appear with the descriptions of these characters. Find out more about them at <http://www.ironwindmetals.com>.

BACKGROUND

This adventure is the story of the *Crown of Varran*, an ancient artifact that has brought woe and ruin to all who have claimed it. During the giants' successful campaign to purge the land of the foul dramojh, the hero Lar-Karras seized the crown from a dramojh overlord. Supposedly, the crown failed its dramojh master in his hour of need, allowing Lar-Karras to slay him. Despite the crown's sinister reputation, Lar-Karras claimed it as his own and settled down to develop the lands he had liberated.

Soon, however, the crown drove him to madness. He ruled with an iron fist, demanding that the folk he had liberated worship him as a god. As news of his madness reached the other giants, they dispatched a small force to remove Lar-Karras from power. These heroes battled the giant and the allies the crown called to aid him. In the end, only the oathsworn sibeccai, Thersa the Crusader, survived the melee. Horribly injured in the battle, her willpower failed her and she succumbed to the crown's siren song. Realizing her mistake, she summoned the will to carry the crown deep into the burial chambers beneath Lar-Karras' fortress. There, she sealed herself into a burial vault.

Thus, the story of the *Crown of Varran* should have ended. The burial chamber was warded with a powerful curse devised by Lar-Karras. Only one of the five humans who built the door could open it. Thersa believed that the crown would remain

forever lost, but she never suspected that one of the men who created the door would become one of the long-lived mojhs.

Korath was a servant to a dramojh magister. His sharp mind helped him evade his master's more sinister experiments, as he had a talent for flawlessly memorizing formulas, history, and other useful tidbits. His master literally used him as a living catalog of knowledge, with the understanding that if Korath ever made a mistake with a fact or didn't know something about a topic, he would die at his master's hands. With the dramojh vanquished, Korath offered his abilities to Lar-Karras as a debt of service. He helped design the tyrant's burial chambers. With his second master's defeat, Korath fled to the Bitter Peaks. There he discovered the secret of remaking himself as a mojhs. Korath undertook the ritual and gained its current form. (Note: All mojhs are genderless.)

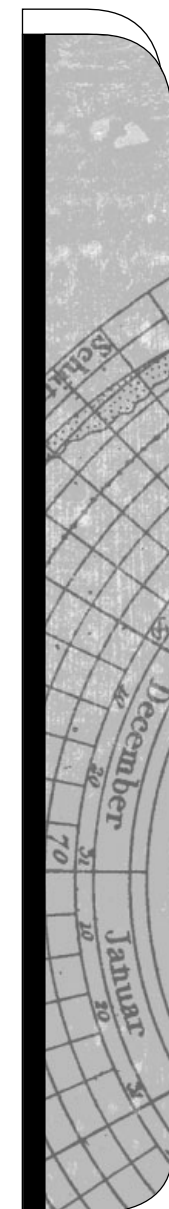
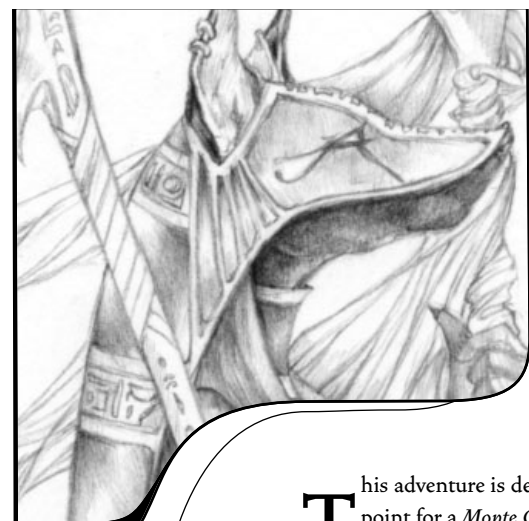
Now quite aged, Korath has returned to the village of Thunderbrook, a settlement close to the ruins of Lar-Karras' castle. The mojhs attempted to explore the ruins in hopes of finding treasure it could use to purchase magical items and perhaps even a small tower or mansion where it could study in peace. Unfortunately, Korath knew nothing of Thersa the Crusader's sacrifice. When Korath opened the tomb where the oathsworn had locked herself, the mojhs found the one-time hero a horrid undead beast. Korath fled in terror, leaving the now corrupted Thersa to gather her strength and prepare a new campaign of conquest, starting with the village of Thunderbrook.

Now the undead Thersa gathers monsters to her side. She has already made one raid on Thunderbrook. Into this scene step the characters. Far from civilization's protection, the people of Thunderbrook turn to them for help in their hour of need.

THE CROWN OF VARRAN

This ancient artifact quickly dominates and controls its user. It greatly desires to found an empire and uses a variety of magical effects to influence those with black hearts. The crown's user can, once per day, stand under the open sky and send a subtle *suggestion* to greedy, murderous, and aggressive monsters and folk within a 50-mile radius. These evil folk may resist the call (Will save, DC 20); those who fail to do so become the servants of whosoever wears the crown. They fight to the death and without fear so long as they serve their new master.

However, the crown has a terrible drawback. It calls a new, more powerful master to it just as it brings servants and warriors to its wearer. Any creature that the crown calls whose



total Hit Dice equals or exceeds that of its current owner becomes obsessed with seizing it. If faced by a creature who would serve as a superior master, the crown stops providing its benefits to its master.

In addition to the ability outlined above, the crown provides a +2 deflection bonus to Armor Class, a +2 enhancement bonus to all attributes, and regeneration 2. The crown's wearer suffers normal damage from fire and acid. The crown provides more powerful abilities based on its master's total Hit Dice.

Master's HD	Power
6–10	Heal self of a total of 2 hp per day per HD
11–14	Three times per day cast any 7th-level or lower spell as a magister with caster level equal to Hit Dice
15–18	Ability score bonus increases to +4
19	+5 bonus on all saves
20	Regeneration increases to regeneration 8

Anyone who wears the crown must make a Will save (DC 30) each day. On a failed save, the crown overcomes the wearer's personality. It turns him into an aggressive conqueror who immediately sets to recruiting a horde of followers.

The crown is a malign artifact. Chances are that any character who attempts to wear it swiftly succumbs to the crown's influence. Such a player character (PC) becomes a nonplayer character (NPC) and might even rise as a continuing villain. Should they acquire the crown through the course of this adventure, the PCs may have to destroy it somehow (see section at right).

As an intelligent item, the crown can communicate via telepathy with a range of 60 feet. It has no special ability to read minds. Instead, those who would communicate with it must speak aloud. It radiates overwhelming enchantment magic.

The crown has no special magical abilities to compel someone to wear it, aside from the effect it has on the villains who heed its call. Instead, the temptation stems from the easy power it offers to others. It uses its telepathic powers to tempt the PCs, offering them power and glory, even claiming to be an artifact that only reflects its wearer's true desires. Of course, it claims, people as upstanding and strong as the player characters could wear it without worry. After all, the crown can only serve good if its owner allows it to do so. The PCs may find that defeating the undead Thersa, the crown's current owner, only brings them more problems once they are stuck with the malign artifact. The "Continuing the Adventure" chapter at the end of the adventure offers ideas for making the crown a continuing threat in your campaign.

DESTROYING THE CROWN

Once the PCs have recovered the crown, they most likely must destroy it. Learning the process needed to achieve this task should be only as difficult as you want it to be. If you

would like the crown to serve an important role in the campaign, the PCs might have to spend several sessions to learn this secret. On the other hand, if you would rather that the characters immediately depart on the quest to destroy it, they might uncover the secret easily.

The crown can be destroyed if placed in a sack with several heavy rocks and the head of the last person to wear it and cast into the sea. Once the bag reaches the seabed, it bursts open, and the crown dissolves into rust. If villains learn of the crown's existence, carrying it to the sea might prove troublesome for the characters. If they give it to someone else to carry, they had best hope the bearer can resist the urge to indulge in the crown's power.

If the PCs must discover this information on their own, an akashic can tell them of the process with a successful delve into collective memory check (DC 30). Otherwise, a Knowledge (history) check (DC 30) can also reveal this information, as the crown was somewhat infamous for its role in Lar-Karras' downfall. The characters might also find this information in a set of scrolls, a short history of the Thunderbrook region, or in similar works. If you want the party to learn this information easily, Korath can simply tell them of the crown's legend and the ritual needed to destroy it. Perhaps the mojh planned on destroying it personally, but was surprised to find the artifact guarded by the undead Thersa.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

This adventure is broken down into a few chapters, each with various encounters. It describes Lar-Karras' ruined castle and the area around the village of Thunderbrook. It also includes ideas of how to expand the story as part of a campaign. If the PCs do not act quickly, Thersa's rise to power may go unchecked. If they strike fast, they can slay her (or at least drive her off) before her forces pose a threat to the entire region.

The encounters follow this general progression:

1. The Trip to Thunderbrook: While on their way to the village of Thunderbrook, the PCs encounter a refugee and a pack of marauding bandits. Obviously, something foul is afoot: The road to Thunderbrook is known as a quiet, peaceful highway.

2. The Village of Thunderbrook: When the PCs arrive at the village, they find it an armed camp. That night, they must fight off an attack by a band of litorian marauders. If they persist in their investigation, they can pry out the truth of the situation from Korath.

3. The Castle: In the final part of the adventure, the PCs must penetrate the dungeons beneath the castle and defeat Thersa. The crown remains a threat, one that promises further adventures for the PCs. Luckily, the upper levels are clear, but the tombs are home to Thersa and her most trusted minions.

The Trip to Thunderbrook

The adventure begins as the player characters embark on their journey to a village called Thunderbrook.

Thunderbrook is intentionally designed so that you can place it anywhere in the lands of the Diamond Throne or a world of your own creation. The village's exact location is left vague for you to insert it where you see fit. Officially, it is located east of Erdaenos, at the edge of the Harrowdeep. As that city's population dwindled, Thunderbrook slowly transformed from a small but vibrant community to an isolated, lonely homestead. The folk who dwell there choose to do so precisely because of its quiet isolation. Otherwise, you can place Thunderbrook in any relatively remote area, such as the edge of the Bitter Peaks or the Elder Mountains.

Thunderbrook is a small village in a lightly forested region, noteworthy primarily for its proximity to the ruins of Lar-Karras' castle. Explorers and treasure seekers sometimes plumb its depths, usually battling one of the motley gangs of bandits or monsters that use it as a convenient lair. The characters might travel to the village for one of a few reasons:


- They've heard stories of the castle and wish to explore it.
- The characters are merely passing through. They seek their fortune elsewhere, but the village's pressing need demands their attention.
- Korath (or someone else in town) has something the PCs want or need, such as information on a lost relative, the location of an old foe, or something similar. They journey to the village to meet with the mojh.
- A local lord, having heard of the troubles at Thunderbrook, commissions the PCs to visit the village and report back. Unfortunately, the lord doesn't expect anything out of the ordinary.
- An elderly greenbond approaches the party members on the road and begs for their help. She lacks the strength to make the journey herself, but she is certain that something foul is afoot near Thunderbrook.


Finding an excuse to get the PCs to Thunderbrook doesn't take much effort. Once the action starts, they'll stop asking why they're on an adventure and start asking what happens next.


This chapter presents two encounters you can use on the road. They are designed to set the stage for the PCs, giving players a chance to learn something about the situation in Thunderbrook and to test out their 1st-level characters' combat abilities in a relatively easy encounter.


You can use the following encounters in any order, though if you run "The Refugee" first, Drtharaan should warn the PCs about the bandits in "The Toll Road."

THE TOLL ROAD (EL 2)

 A small group of human bandits has set up an impromptu toll station along the road to Thunderbrook. Influenced by the *Crown of Varran*, they seek to warn Thersa of any approaching patrols or attackers. When faced with smaller groups, they try to shake down travelers for a few coins.

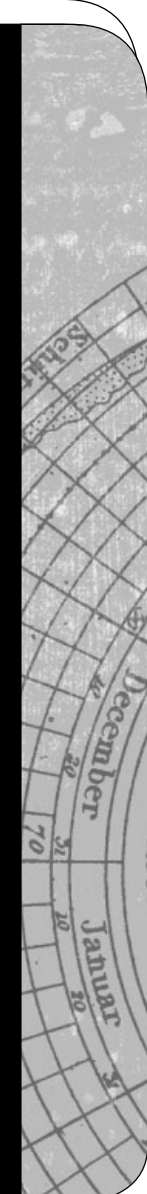
 The bandits watch over a little bridge that spans a fast-running river. Two of them stand behind a crude log wall at the bridge's far end. The log wall has a gap just wide enough for a wagon to move through it. A third bandit hides in a tree beyond the bridge, while a fourth lurks beneath the bridge on the PCs' side.

 The guards on the bridge call out for the characters to throw a sack of 10 gp to them. If the player characters do so, the guards let them pass without incident. They retreat into the forest, careful to keep out of melee range, while the watcher in the trees keeps an eye on the PCs to ensure they don't double back.

 The PCs have no chance of seeing the guard on their side of the bank unless they look beneath the bridge. If they do clamber beneath the bridge, they see her automatically. The guard in the trees is considered to have taken 20 on his Sneak check and gains a +4 bonus for the foliage, for a total result of 28.

TACTICS

If a fight breaks out, the guards on the bridge use their bows and spears to hold the PCs at bay from behind their barrier. The guard in the trees uses his bow. If the battle goes poorly, he flees to warn Thersa. The guard on the PCs' side of the



bridge tries to sneak up from behind to attack a runethane, magister, or other lightly armored PC. She tries to grapple and hold her victim hostage.

In addition to the gear listed here, the guards have four horses tethered in the woods near the treetop sniper. The guard in the tree drops down to his horse and rides off if the fight goes poorly. The guards make a break for the horses when two of them have fallen. If the PCs capture and question any of them, the bandits reveal that they know of the castle ruins and Thersa, but they describe her only in vague terms. They along with a few other bandits report to a chorim who works with her (see Chapter Three), but otherwise they have learned little of her operation.

Note that this encounter is EL 2 rather than EL 3 due to the guards' poor armor.

Human Bandits (4), War: CR 1/2; Medium humanoid

(human); HD 1d8+2; hp 10, dying -3, dead -15; Init +2; Speed 30 feet; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +2 leather jack, +1 round shield, +1 natural), flat-footed 13, touch 12; Attack +2 melee (1d6+1, scimitar) or +2 melee (1d8+1, long spear) or +4 ranged (1d8+1, longbow); SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills and Feats: Hide +4, Intimidate +4, Listen +3, Spot +3; Iron Flesh, Natural Archer, Weapon Focus (longbow)

Possessions: Scimitar, long spear, longbow, arrows (40), leather jack, round shield

TREASURE

The bandit group has a small chest along with camping gear near their horses. The locked chest (DC 20 to open) contains 50 gp, 500 sp, a *potion of canny effort* and a *potion of resistance*. Hidden in a false compartment (Search check, DC 20) in the chest's lid are a small garnet worth 100 gp and a *potion of lesser battle healing*.

THE REFUGEE



Drtharaan the verrik (a 6th-level expert) has fled from Thunderbrook. He sees the town as a dangerous place in light of the recent bandit attacks and other violence and suspects the townsfolk may start looking for a scapegoat. Smart enough to know that he was always an outsider there, he has taken to the road with a horse and cart laden with his belongings.

Drtharaan is a historian and researcher. Distant, cold, and calculating, he looks at even the simplest event in terms of its greater historical context. Like all verrik, he prides himself on this detached demeanor. While he'd never admit it, he enjoys watching lesser minds grow angry or flustered over his approach. To his eyes, a single death is a trivial event. The

deaths of thousands, on the other hand, is an event of interest. Needless to say, this attitude made him unpopular with the folk of Thunderbrook, especially in light of recent events.

He tries to ride past the PCs without talking to them, but a Sense Motive check (DC 10) reveals that he is nervous about their presence. He keeps a loaded light crossbow next to him on his cart. He hates the thought of fighting and tries to flee at the first sign of trouble.

If the PCs stop him, they find him guarded and reticent until he sees they don't mean to rob him. He then regales them with stories of the "trivial" incidents at the town. He was there for the first bandit raid (see Chapter Two for a summary of events in Thunderbrook), and he makes it quite clear that a few people in town blamed him. He paints Aynar (a minor nobleman and figurehead in Thunderbrook, described in the next chapter) as a xenophobic, suicidal fool. He has little knowledge of anyone else in town.

Play Drtharaan as detached, snooty, and something of a know-it-all. He plans to return to his homeland and makes his disdain for other races obvious. However, any verrik, akashics, magisters, or PCs with 4 or more ranks in Knowledge (history or a similar topic, providing they make this obvious to him) instantly earn his respect. He makes a point of talking to them rather than the other, less intellectually gifted player characters.

Use Drtharaan to give the PCs an idea of what's going on and to catch them up on the basics of the situation. It should be obvious that something important is happening, but with events filtered through Drtharaan's warped lens, the characters shouldn't feel confident they have a handle on what's happening. Perhaps Drtharaan can make references to other events, such as great battles, to show his unique perspective on events and history. Remember, to him these attacks are nothing more than a footnote in the greater story of the world.


If the PCs impress Drtharaan, either through roleplay, Diplomacy, or Knowledge (history) checks (DC 20 in both cases), he tells them the story outlined under "Background" in the Introduction. He knows the *Crown of Varran* was an artifact of evil and might speculate that it is behind the recent events. However, he knows of Thersa only as a great hero who died to defeat Lar-Karras. He has no idea of her true fate.

OPTIONAL TWIST

If the PCs developed a liking for Drtharaan (however unlikely), you can later place in the castle evidence that he was attacked and slain by Thersa's followers (see Chapter Three). There's nothing like a blood vendetta to get the players to hate a villain.

The Village of Thunderbrook

The adventure's pace picks up as the player characters arrive in the small village.



Named for a small set of falls situated in the forest near this place, Thunderbrook is known as a haven for thinkers, sages, and even spellcasters of moderate power who wish to study in peace. Aside from caravans that visit with trade goods, few ever have reason to come here. Occasionally, adventurers spend a few nights in Thunderbrook while exploring the nearby ruins of Lar-Karras' castle. Invariably, such bands return home empty handed and disappointed.

This section of the adventure demands roleplaying, careful thought, and diplomacy. The PCs walk into a small community rife with fear, paranoia, and worry. The mojh chronicler Korath bears the brunt of this suspicion and, while the mojh did unleash Thersa, it did so unwittingly. The rest of the townsfolk, particularly the village elders, blame Korath for meddling in things best left alone. Even the verrik Drtharaan (see "The Refugee," Chapter One) was better liked.

This "encounter" is designed as a free-form experience. It presents important info for each of the major NPCs in town, along with their attitudes and goals. The PCs need to deflect suspicion away from Korath—or at least convince the mojh to tell the truth about what happened at the castle—to avoid a lynching. If the characters prove themselves heroic figures, the villagers help them as best they can in fighting the evil within the castle. On the other hand, if the party members make fools of themselves, anger the villagers, or otherwise fail to win their support, they might be blamed for what's going on.

RECENT EVENTS AND CURRENT SITUATION

As Thersa began to use the *Crown of Varran*, monsters, bandits, and other threats filtered into the area. Unfortunately, many of these invaders see Thunderbrook as an easy target. Bandits have already attacked the village twice, killing several people and carrying off food, supplies, and valuables. The sibeccai magister Ellara used her spells to hold them at bay, but she knows her magic is not strong enough to hold back a determined attack. The village's tiny militia, little more than farmers and artisans outfitted with spears and leather jacks, poses little match for a major attack.

After the second attack, Ellara called a town meeting to prepare to evacuate the people from the area. However, her plan met with opposition from the human aristocrat Aynar. Aynar owns a small fortified manor house near the village. Officially, he is the Diamond Throne's recognized administrator for the area, but this is little more than an honorary title. In reality, the independent farmers, sages, and craftsfolk of Thunderbrook prefer to keep to their own business. Aynar believes that holding out in the manor house offers the best hope for safety. Sooner or later, an army will arrive to sack the castle and remove its dangerous denizens. Ellara counters that, if the number of monsters and bandits increases, the manor cannot provide much protection.

KEY CHARACTERS

This section summarizes the important people in town. They lack game statistics—if the PCs are psychotic enough to attack them, they merely flee in terror. In any event, they refuse to take part in the attack on the castle (assuming the player characters are heroic enough to undertake such an expedition). While they fight Thersa's minions, the NPCs' discussions take place off camera and do not directly involve the PCs.

AYNAR (4TH-LEVEL MALE HUMAN ARISTOCRAT)

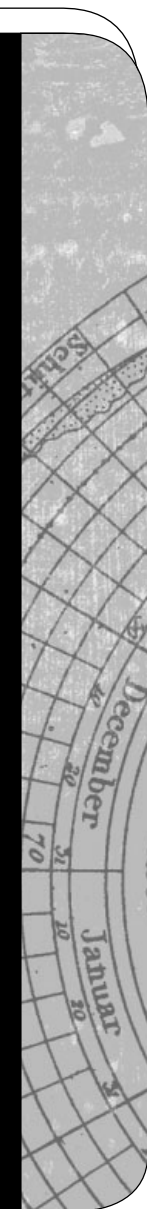


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This aristocrat is tall, slim, and relatively young. He carries a rapier, more for show than anything else, and enjoys a quiet existence. Before the recent attacks, his greatest ambition in life was to find a suitable wife and live in comfort. He lives off a large fortune his family amassed over several generations. Most of his folk long ago left the region for more interesting areas.

Aynar's reputation suffers because the others see him as lazy, spoiled, and decadent. He travels for much of the year, leaving the village to its own devices, and has managed to isolate himself from his neighbors. He senses their barely restrained disgust and condescension and believes he can win their respect by leading them out of this crisis.

Aynar's plans are simple. He believes that his family's fortified stone manor house can hold back the attackers. He has weapons and armor in storage for the militia and genuinely believes that help will arrive in less than a week. He could be



right, depending on where you set this adventure, but the others in the village prefer to trust in themselves rather than the far-off government.

Aynar is handsome, confident, and a bit egotistical. He respects those who show respect for his position and family, as any such signs come as a welcome respite from his outsider status. The PCs must take him seriously to win his trust, and any plan that casts him as a leader or hero earns his support. When roleplaying Aynar, think of him as the male lead from a generic romantic comedy. He's handsome and likable, but he rarely takes things seriously. He's self-absorbed and has difficulty relating to others.

ELLARA (3RD-LEVEL FEMALE SIBECCAI MAGISTER)



67-005

Practical, testy, and prone to needle others, Ellara is difficult to like but makes a strong friend. She came to Thunderbrook at the behest of her teacher, who saw that she could benefit from living a year or two in peace and quiet. With time, she may learn to calm her emotions. Unfortunately, the recent crisis has done nothing to help her tumultuous mood swings.

Ellara is a study in contrasts. Much of the time, she is restrained, stuffy, and precise. However, when dealing with others, particularly those who disagree with her, she quickly becomes angry, petty, and insulting. The locals like and trust her, as she readily offers her spells and wisdom to aid them. She views outsiders as a threat to the respect and authority she feels she has earned. Aynar in particular enrages her. She sees him as an encroaching lackwit. Where was he last winter when wolves threatened the herd animals? Did he help with the last outbreak of river fever? Ellara has let her anger get the better of her in dealing with Aynar, and she refuses to treat him with the respect he so desperately craves.

Ellara respects those who acknowledge the important role she plays in the community. Appeals to her sense of duty and obligation gain her attention. Anyone who accuses her of being self-centered or belligerent only makes her angrier. Once she has decided someone is stupid or working against her, it is difficult to convince her to change her mind.

KORATH (9TH-LEVEL MOJH EXPERT)



67-015

Korath is a bundle of nerves. The others consider the mojh responsible for awakening something in the castle, as Korath was known to poke around the ruins. When the PCs arrive, the mojh latches onto them like a lovesick puppy. Korath begs for their protection from the seething villagers and uses flattery and promises to make them allies. Desperate for friends, Korath is a coward deep down inside.

Korath is wracked with guilt. The mojh knows it is

responsible for loosing Thersa on the village and fears the people of Thunderbrook will kill or maim it in revenge. This is unlikely, though the mojh fails to see that these locals are more civilized than the masters it served in the past. Korath spent many long years in the mountains, living in isolation and allowing its fears and misconceptions of other folk to gnaw at its mind. In many ways, Korath chose to become a mojh because it never felt comfortable with other humans.

The PCs can win Korath's trust merely by making a show of sticking up for the mojh. If they speak to any of the other NPCs listed here in an effort to defend Korath, the mojh quickly latches onto them. Korath becomes willing to confide in them, telling them of the crown's powers and history and even sketching a simple map of the dungeon beneath the castle's ruins (this map includes the mazelike inner burial chamber from Chapter Three). Otherwise, Korath clamps up and refuses to deal with them, especially if it feels betrayed. If the PCs outright accuse the mojh of working with the bandits, it flees to the woods, where the marauders quickly hunt it down and kill it. The mojh's death should weigh heavily on any honorable character's mind.

TOLLON (5TH-LEVEL MALE HUMAN EXPERT)



67-017

The acknowledged leader of the artisans and farmers in Thunderbrook, Tollon is an old, bent man who has seen everything there is to see in the region. He believes this violence heralds some greater calamity, as he has never seen bandits and other attackers in such great numbers. He feels torn between the opposing plans put forth by Ellara and Aynar. On the one hand, he sees that staying in the area may lead to the entire town's destruction if the bandits continue to mass in great numbers. On the other, he fears that Ellara's plan is too risky to attempt. Many of the oldest and youngest citizens of Thunderbrook might not survive the flight, and putting the entire town in such an exposed position courts disaster.

Tollon is quiet and thoughtful. He borders on meekness and prefers to speak only when he has something important to say. The PCs may overlook his importance in the debate, as he merely sits back and lets Ellara and Aynar argue. He knows better than to try to come between them, and in his own mind he believes that the bandits will force the village to make a decision one way or the other. It was his insistence that led many people in the village to move to the manor house, but he also ordered wagons and supplies set aside for a trip out of the area. Both Ellara and Aynar treat him with respect and hope to win his support, but thus far he has been inscrutable. Until the villagers can learn more about the threat they face, he honestly does not know which path is the better one.

The PCs can win Tollon's support by handling the situation with tact and diplomacy. If they are insulting, overly aggressive, or boorish, he writes them off as fools. He quietly approaches the other NPCs and tells them it would be best if they kept the characters from any important meetings or decisions, for fear that they may be in league with the bandits. Needless to say, this is disastrous for the PCs if they wish to help the village.

ZACHARUS (7TH-LEVEL MALE LITORIAN WARMAIN)



67-001

Zacharus adopted his human name in an effort to put his past behind him. In his youth he was a great warrior who fought for whichever side offered him the greatest payment. For years, he worked for heartless warlords, thugs, and other killers. In time, he came to see his actions as a violation of his litorian honor. It was neither money nor strife he sought, he realized, but the clarity of purpose and inner calm he felt in combat. Ashamed of his personal betrayal, he threw aside his weapons and came to Thunderbrook to take up the simple life of a woodcarver.

Zacharus is scarred and old. His right ear is little more than a tattered mess of scars and old cuts, and he walks with a noticeable limp from his encroaching arthritis. His skill at arms has long since faded, but he remains a master tactician.

Zacharus, along with Tollon, represents the swing faction among the village leaders. He hates the thought of fighting again and is simply too old to lift a weapon in anger. However, he believes the villagers need to understand the threat they face before they can make an informed decision about their next step. The PCs can win his respect and support by demonstrating that they are thoughtful, honorable, and intelligent. If they offer to risk dangers to defend the village, he quickly throws his support behind them. Braggarts or those who obviously enjoy violence earn his suspicion.

RUNNING THIS ENCOUNTER

As mentioned earlier, this part of the adventure is fairly open-ended. In essence, the player characters must earn the village leaders' support in order to secure the information and supplies they need. If the PCs manage to heal the rift between Aynar and Ellara, the village rallies behind whichever plan the characters support. Keep in mind that both plans are valid courses of action—neither side is obviously right or wrong. The key here lies in the PCs' abilities to act as diplomats and counselors, not tacticians or warriors.

When the PCs arrive in the village, the locals meet them with suspicion and fear. Militia members are armed with worn tools and old weapons. The common folk may flee before the party members, especially if they are armed. The

militia escorts them to the town hall, where the local leaders convene to question them. The militia keeps Korath under guard at the town hall, as the village lacks a jail cell. While technically not under arrest, the mojh is accompanied by two guards at all times.

The PCs should have a chance to meet each of the NPCs detailed above. Give the characters about a day to speak with them, learn their personalities, and gauge the current situation. Play this by ear, as the NPCs should adjourn to their private residences or help move supplies to the manor house, depending on their attitude toward the current effort to fortify the place. If the PCs can peacefully bring out Korath's confession, they learn some useful information as described above.

Award the PCs experience and treasure based on how well they manage the situation in the village. The treasure represents the support offered to them by the grateful villagers, who turn over their cache of useful items to their newfound champions. The more supporters the player characters gather, the more donations they accrue.

Result

PCs anger all villagers.
The PCs make at least two allies among the village leaders

The PCs make at least three allies among the village leaders.

The PCs gain the support of all the leaders.

Reward

None

EL 1 experience, *oil of magic weapon* (2), *detonation of touch of pain*, *token of lesser glowglobe*, *potion of acrobatics*

EL 2 experience, reward as above plus *+1 arrows* (7)

EL 3 experience, reward as both situations above plus a *potion of lesser battle healing*

THE RAID (EL 1)

At some point during the PCs' stay in the village, a small gang of bandits tries to attack and carry off a few villagers as hostages. This encounter is optional. You can use it to give player characters who would rather smash some opponents the chance to do something while the others roleplay negotiations with the villagers.

At some point during the day, the PCs hear a cry for help. Arrange this so that the characters are the only ones close by or in a position to offer assistance. Perhaps the group's warmain and oathbound wander away from the negotiations to stretch their legs. If a few of the players seem bored, look for an excuse to separate their characters from the group and spring this encounter on them.

A pair of litorian mercenaries, both of whom answered Thersa's call, hope to carry away a villager or two for a ran-



67-011

som. They attacked a few workers out in the fields, killing one and chasing another up a tree. One of the farmers rushes into the village, crying for help. If the PCs respond quickly, they can arrive on the scene before the litorians flush their quarry from the branches.



67-006

Like “The Toll Road” in Chapter One, this encounter provides a good chance for new players (or even old hands with new characters) to test out their PCs’ abilities. Make a point of suggesting that the players try out new feats, spells, and so forth. They should have the chance to rest up after this encounter before heading out to the castle ruins in Chapter Three.

Litorian Bandits (2), War: CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (litorian);

HD 1d8+2; hp 10, dying -3, dead -14; Init +2; Speed 30 feet; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +4 beastscale armor, +2 long shield), flat-footed 14, touch 12; Attack +4 melee (1d8+2, battleaxe); SQ Low-light vision; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will -1; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 8, Cha 12

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +7, Wilderness Survival +3; Fleet of Foot, Weapon Focus (battleaxe)

Possessions: Battleaxe, dagger, beastscale armor, long shield

TREASURE

The two litorians have a small cache of coins and other treasures in their pouches and belts. One carries 25 gp and 50 sp, while the other has 30 gp and a small diamond worth 40 gp.

The Castle

The ruins of Lar-Karras' castle lie about a half-day's journey away from Thunderbrook, nestled among the trees.

Only a faint track marks the pathway that leads here.

The castle's upper levels have long since crumbled, save for a single tower. The rubble and bricks have been pushed aside to reveal a single set of stairs heading down into the catacombs. This was Korath's handiwork, and Thersa's new followers have improved upon the mojh's efforts.

Currently, the castle is little more than a ring of stone wreckage. It serves as the camp for Thersa's minions, most notably her lieutenant Vaskar the chorrin exile. Almost killed for slaying a warrior ranked above him in the chorrin's highly stratified society, he fled his homeland to seek his fortune as a mercenary and thief. Many of the bandits the PCs have already fought, such as the human warriors at the bridge, are under his command.

Vaskar hears the crown's call and hopes to destroy Thersa and seize the artifact for himself. He has ordered his men away from the castle, as he suspects that the crown's power over them is too great to turn them against the undead horror below. For now, he plots his new master's death and dreams of the empire to come.

Vaskar lives in the single tower that still stands. Thersa rests below in the ancient crypts, with her personal guards to defend her.

Areas 3 to 6 below are keyed to the map on the next page.

1. THE COURTYARD

The castle courtyard is littered with shattered stone blocks and the signs that a group of armed warriors once camped here. Small fire pits, a few tents, and cast-off arrows, clothes, and other garbage lie scattered about. A Wilderness Survival check (DC 15) reveals that about 20 humanoids camped here not long ago.

2. THE TOWER (EL 3)



67-101

Vaskar waits on the tower's upper floor, biding his time to launch his coup. Thersa believes that he has left with the other warriors to raid the area and find new recruits. In truth, he plans to kill her personal guards when they emerge from the vaults below. The PCs' arrival is a fortuitous event. If they descend into the tunnels, he follows them about a half-hour later to defeat both sides of the fight. Otherwise, he ambushes them when they enter his domain.

Vaskar keeps to the tower's second floor. This floor's center has long ago crumbled away, requiring a Climb check (DC 10) to scramble up the ruins to the second floor ledge. Vaskar hurls rocks at PCs who enter his tower. Since he is cornered, he fights to the death. Otherwise, he flees when reduced to half his hit points and plots to track the characters, defeat them, and seize the crown for himself.

Vaskar the Chorrin: CR 3; Large Giant; HD 4d8+4; hp 22, dying –2, dead –13; Init +0; Speed 30 feet; AC 18 (–1 size, +4 natural, +5 breastplate), flat-footed 18, touch 9; Attack +8 melee (2d8+8, giant's sword); Reach 10 feet, SQ Dark-vision 60 feet, +1 AC against foes with swords, natural tactician, well-trained; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 12

Skills and Feats: Climb +5, Ride +9, Spot +6; Exotic Weapon Proficiency (heavy), Fleet of Foot, Natural Swordsman, Weapon Focus (giant's sword), Weapon Specialization (giant's sword)

Possessions: Giant's sword, breastplate

TREASURE

Vaskar has a small treasure cache hidden beneath a pile of rubble in his lair (Search check, DC 15). It consists of a jeweled golden necklace worth 300 gp and five rubies worth 60 gp each.

3. OUTER BURIAL CHAMBER (EL 1)



67-011

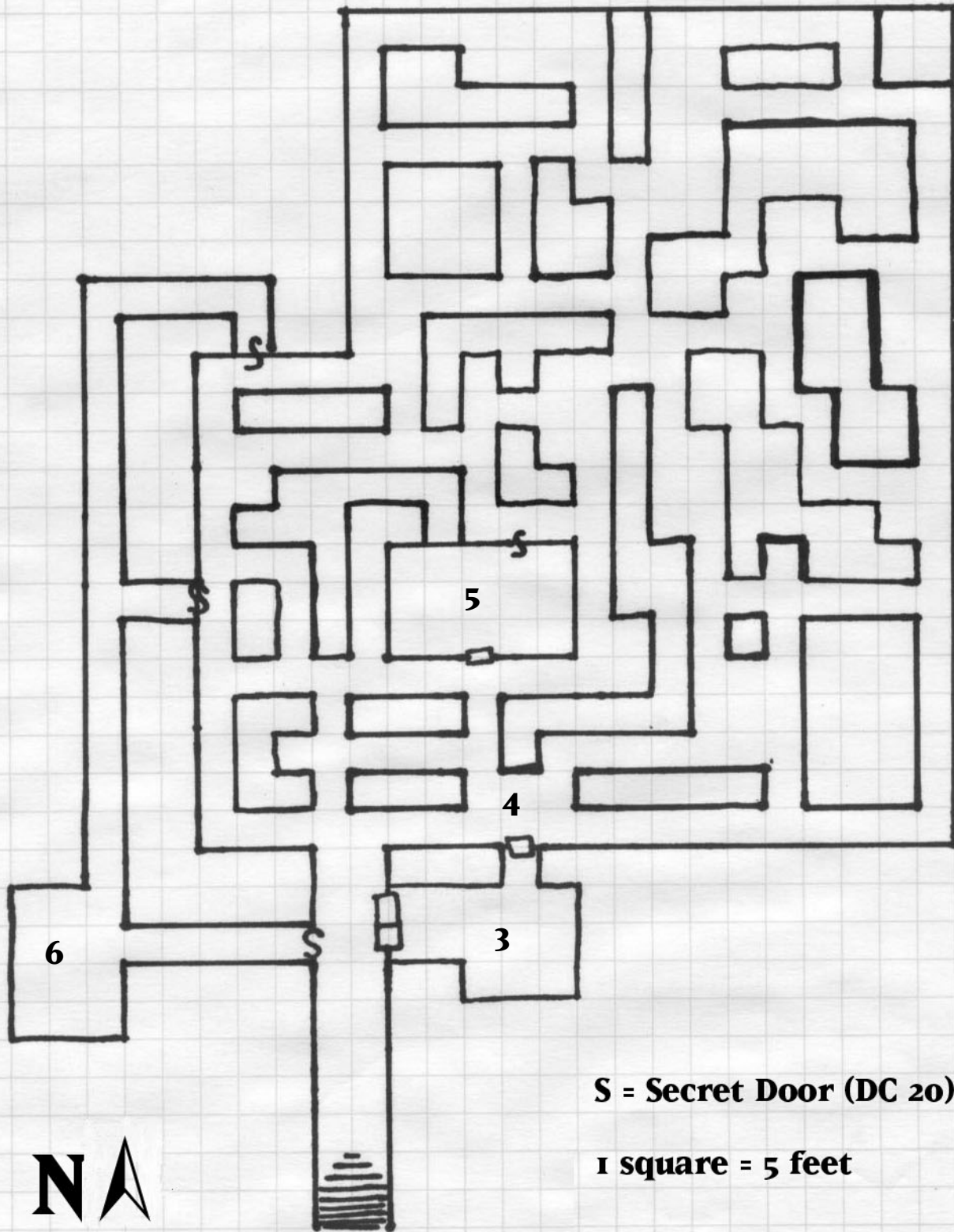
This chamber serves as a barracks and guard-room for two litorian warriors who act as Thersa's personal guards. While she would prefer a larger armed presence, the crown insisted that she was safe here, assuring her that a minimal guard could protect her. In truth, the crown hopes Vaskar will seize it from its current master.



67-006

The litorians howl as the PCs enter the room, alerting Thersa to the presence of intruders. They then try to flee to the inner burial chambers, where they hope to use their superior knowledge of the terrain to defeat the party.

The Catacombs



Litorian Bandits (2), War: CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (litorian); HD 1d8+2; hp 10, dying -3, dead -14; Init +2; Speed 30 feet; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +4 beastscale armor, +2 long shield), flat-footed 14, touch 12; Attack +4 melee (1d8+2, battleaxe); SQ Low-light vision; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will -1; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 8, Cha 12

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +7, Wilderness Survival +3; Fleet of Foot, Weapon Focus (battleaxe)

Possessions: Battleaxe, dagger, beastscale armor, long shield, 5 gp

4. INNER BURIAL CHAMBER

The mazelike inner burial chamber is filled with vaults. Narrow shelves set into the walls here hold the remains of one of the castle's ancient lords, retainers, or servants. Though long ago looted of any valuables, this place serves as a convenient battleground for Thersa and her followers. They attempt to lure the PCs here in order to isolate, surround, and slay them. The litorians know this maze like the backs of their hands, as does Thersa. One of them makes noise and attracts attention while the other crouches in a corner, ready to pounce on an unaware character. Remember that the litorians have low-light vision. They can navigate the maze without light sources and use the party's own torches or lanterns to ready ambushes.

5. FORGOTTEN HALL (EL 4)



An ancient chamber near the center of the maze was supposed to serve as Lar-Karras' personal tomb. It is now Thersa's living chambers. She has set up a small base of operations here, with maps arrayed on the walls and battle plans outlined on parchment scrolls. Her ambition knows few bounds, as her plans make it obvious that she intends slowly to build up the forces needed to conquer the continent.

If the litorians roar an alert to her, she slips into the maze at Area 4 and waits for the opportunity to pounce upon a character. She seeks out spellcasters and similar opponents. If the group sticks together, she waits for her guards to soften up the PCs before wading into the melee.

The years have not been kind to Thersa. She has decayed significantly and rose from the dead only when Korath penetrated her tomb. She looks like a withered, desiccated sibeccai corpse dressed in a ragged black cloak. She wears a simple leather mask over her rotted face and has wrapped herself in a gray burial shroud that resembles a simple toga.

Thersa, undead female litorian Oathsworn: CR 4; Medium undead; HD 3d12; hp 25, dying -, dead -; Init +2; Speed 40 feet; AC 19 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, +2 oathsworn insight, +2 deflection), flat-footed 16, touch 17; Attack +5 melee (1d6+2, unarmed) or +3/+3 flurry of blows melee (1d6+2, unarmed); SA Flurry of blows, shattering blow (ignore 3 points of DR); SQ Darkvision 60 feet, evasion, undead immunities, +1 on saves against magic; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 16, Con -, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 16

Skills and Feats: Balance +9, Climb +8, Intimidate +9, Jump +8, Sneak +9; Fleet of Foot, Resistance to Magic, Weapon Focus (unarmed)

Possessions: *Crown of Varran* (grants a +2 deflection bonus to Armor Class, a +2 enhancement bonus to all abilities, and regeneration 2, though fire and acid deal normal damage).

TREASURE

As an undead creature, Thersa has little appreciation for treasure. She has hidden what loot she does have in Area 6, below.

6. THE HIDDEN CACHE

A secret room at the southwest corner of the maze's burial chambers holds Thersa's fortune. Most of this loot was culled from the bodies in the catacombs or seized from the bandits who came to serve her. It consists of the following items in several small chests:

- A +1 breastplate
- 300 gp in coins
- 200 gp in small gems in a variety of colors, most of which were taken from burial shrouds, talismans, and other items looted from Area 4
- A set of four golden cups, each worth 50 gp

If the PCs return the gems to their rightful resting place, award them XP for an EL 1 encounter.

EPILOGUE: CONTINUING

THE ADVENTURE

With Thersa defeated, the characters can overcome the bandits piecemeal. Without a single force uniting and guiding them, they fall into squabbling, poorly coordinated attacks and eventually face defeat.

The people of Thunderbrook host a great feast for the player characters and honor them as heroes. They insist that the PCs take part in a ritual to consecrate a site for a memorial to their deeds. If the characters later return to the village, they find a small statue and plaque erected on the ceremony's spot in their honor.

Once the PCs have possession of the *Crown of Varran*, they must determine how best to dispose of it. You can allow them to simply leave it with a friendly magister who can easily destroy it. However, if you want to use this adventure as the starting point for a campaign, the artifact can introduce a variety of complexities.

The crown tries to attract new masters to it, hoping to find someone capable of defeating the party and putting it to good use. The characters might also face dangerous enemies who hear rumors of the crown's power. Assassins, thieves, and others might track them for the prize they hold.

Two competing though benevolent groups may demand the crown. The characters might have to decide which faction to trust—or evade both to destroy the crown on their own. One group might be untrustworthy, with one of its leaders secretly coveting the artifact.

You can run an entire series of adventures as the PCs must travel with the crown to destroy it in the sea's waters. On the road, they can face terrible dangers, marauders, and enemies who want to crown. This also gives you a good chance to send the party across the Lands of the Diamond Throne.

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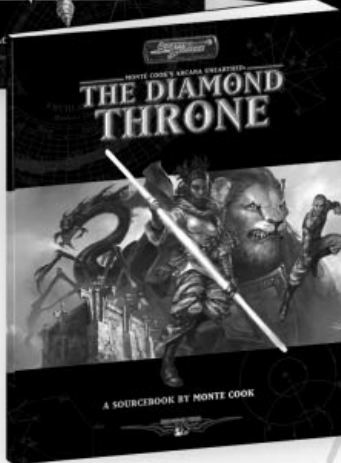
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