

The Mine Inspection

By request of their lord the group travels southward into Magár by skyship to personally inspect the safety of a mine owned by one of his more important merchants. It seems that, though profitable, there has been a series of unfortunate deaths reported by the mine's foreman among the miners on numerous occasions. Though the merchant assures the aryah Ayrram that there is no need to trouble himself on the matter, the aryah decides that, whatever the issues, honor demands that his wealth should not come from the pain of others, and that the problems causing these deaths be resolved.

The Characters:

Héshrim (House Guard and Assassin, male 32 year old rattlesnake, House of Sámtra, on loan to the House of Ayrram) - A calm, watchful snake with an air of casual, unsettling menace and strength, Héshrim proved his merits by helping to bring an end to a spy ring being run out of Magár on behalf of the Sustrümi Aminar. He saved the life of Sámtra during this affair. He currently acts as a warrior and assassin for the House of Ayrram.

Valnérah (Seer Sir'hibas, male 40 year old condor, House of Sámtra, on loan to the House of Ayrram) - A mature, wiry-looking bird in silk robes, known for his intense stare, Valnérah was trained under the Great Seer Arddjurnal of Amnol before becoming one of the Line of Inuvkah. He is currently acting as Seer of the House of Ayrram.

Dastánah (Assistant Weapons Master, female 27 year old mockingbird, House of Ayrram) - A sharp-eyed, quick-moving little bird with a lot of weapons, Dastánah was trained with the weapons masters of eastern Tishínia and the Valah masters of the lord Rajtármi before being gifted to the Line of Sisyáh by Rajtármi himself.

Arhazbür (Honor Guard, male 28 year old elephant, House of Ayrram) - A seasoned fighter with a serious disposition and intimidating stature, Arhazbür pledged his life to the Line of Sisyáh after having been rescued as a child from slavery in Sustrüm. He currently serves as an Honor Guard for the House of Ayrram.

Gramír (Assistant Suthra Master, male 25 year old wolf, House of Ayrram) - A savage looking jánah with a commanding presence and bold speech, Gramír hails originally from Ishpuria, where he studied for two years in the Academy of Sakrsa in Dar-Purám before coming to Tishínia to serve as a chinti and kelléndu trainer in the House of Ayrram.

Umratáli (Mángai Healer, male 35 year old sea turtle, House of Ayrram) - A monkish-looking priest with a friendly smile and a gentle disposition, Umratáli was trained in herbalism and medicine at the Academy of Nilám. This Mángai also studied the arts of mystic healing before returning to serve Ayrram's House.

Establishing Intro Scene (The Setup)

High above the russet prairies of southern Magár, an elegant skyship of House Ayrram, Kárdu's Wing, sails along the last leg of its journey southeast upon the warm Hamarian trade wind; it's destination, the small mining settlement of Ráhsala nestled in the garnet-hued Uttara mountains. For five days your group has sailed the skies, emissaries for Great Aryah Ayrram, lord of the Line of Sisyáh; first across the sparkling emerald waters of the Gulf of Bhütai, then finally to the Capital City of Matra, where proper tithes were paid to gain updated writs of legal authority within this foreign nation bearing the seal of the land's high magistrate. This type of authority would be needed to potentially flex the will of an aryah of Tishínia upon Magári citizens. Such are the ways of politics.

Your Great Aryah may own rights to the land where the crystal mine lay, but he cannot own the miners that toil there, peasant-caste laborers and loyal citizens of Magár from the town of Kuthinari, which lies to the east on the coast. To hold any authority over them in his name you must bear the proper writs, but this is the least of your concerns. Though the mine has certainly been profitable for your lord, producing not only beautiful crystals of several varieties, but also a few fairly valuable beds of stones with unique properties, there have been problems that have cropped up recently among the hired miners; namely a recent series of deaths reported directly by the mine's foreman, another hired local employee of the trade-caste.

Normally the merchant Saiteen, a rich Magári native that runs the mine in the name of the aryah, is the one tasked with making the profit reports to your lord, along with other news of interest. But recently, no doubt due to embarrassment over the troubles that have risen, he has been glossing over the deaths as mere occupational hazards while focusing instead on the steady wealth flowing from the mine to the coffers of Ayrram. Though the wealth is certainly pleasing to your lord, the fact that a simple foreman chose to bypass the standard customs and send a message to Ayrram directly about the deaths was somewhat alarming. These were not simply singular accidents, he claimed. What had apparently begun to occur were large-scale collapses killing dozens at a time! This type of karma was unconscionable in the eyes of the aryah, and no honor could come from spending dalán born of such doom.

And so it is that you have all been tasked with investigating the actual safety of the mine to determine if, in the end, the mine should be kept running or if it must be shut down. Saiteen, the merchant, has not been made aware of your "surprise inspection." It will be your duty to decide if these accidents were a fluke, and that safety can be assured for the foreseeable future, or if the foreman's concerns are justified and the mine's danger is being highly underrated by the embarrassed merchant.

In truth, what's really going on at the mine concerns the merchant Saiteen, who controls the operation and reports to the aryah Ayrram. The merchant's an incredibly corrupt and self-serving liar who is gladly willing to kill jánah if it means he can potentially increase his own profits. He knows his ancient ancestors once owned the

land the mine is on, and though he has no legitimate legal claim to it himself, he gladly uses this knowledge as a personal justification to steal vast amounts of profits from its operation, filter that wealth to his business contacts in Sustrüm, kill anyone who finds out about it, and lie to the aryah Ayrram concerning the whole affair. This is certainly not the first time he has engaged in such activities, and his unctuous manner conceals a cruel and calculating opponent who with carefully crafted schemes usually manages to emerge from such intrigues a winner.

Even now he realizes that someone has tipped off the aryah to the fact that “something is up” (though he isn’t aware that the players are being sent to investigate), and is planning to soon ditch the mining effort once the next big vein of valuable crystal is found, stage a huge mining “accident” with plenty of explosives to insure that evidence of his treacheries are well buried, resign from the position the aryah Ayrram granted him, and sail away to enjoy all his stolen wealth waiting for him in Sustrüm. Once the characters arrive on the scene, he will immediately decide that waiting for some next “mother lode” is too risky, and endeavor to make sure these emissaries of Ayrram meet the same fate as the rest of the cheap labor he intends to murder to cover his tracks.

Scene 1; A Council Aboard Ship

Awakening at False Dawn to the morning prayers that greet the rise of the smaller sapphire sun Edü, you are all given the chance to have a small breakfast before gathering in a conference chamber to discuss the various things you each may know concerning this issue. Your skyship will be arriving at the mining settlement in merely five hours at midday, and it is important to be as prepared as possible, and to deal with this situation in the most enlightened manner.

Servants take a moment to deliver small, light delicacies and drinks for you all, before Captain Gárvi, a portly male otter, dismisses them to attend other duties so that your group may have the privacy you require for conversation. As he turns to leave, he pauses for a moment, then turns back, bows to you all, and hesitantly speaks.

“I have been a loyal vassal of Aryah Ayrram our blessed lord, may the devah smile upon his name, for over half my life since I came from Dar-Purám. I trust his wisdom and honor his good works, which is why I am glad that he has sent you to see to this affair. Having met the jánah you are about to deal with, however, I must say that I don’t understand what our aryah sees in the merchant Saiteen. Perhaps our lord was unknowingly swayed by unscrupulous jánah in this oily merchant’s pay. Do not take me wrong, I beg of you, for I am not speaking ill of our lord’s judge of character, but I do not like a jánah who smiles with his mouth but not with his eyes, if you understand my meaning. I’ll leave you to your talk now, but I would not trust that merchant as far as I could toss him by his tail.”

In this scene, mere hours before the party arrives at the mining settlement, they will have a chance to each test their **Knowledge Skills**, and other such information-related Skills, to see what they may individually know about the situation, or may have found out in preparation for this journey. Players should be given this chance to

discuss with one another any thoughts they may have about all of this information. In addition, once this information is shared, the seer sir'hibas Valnérah should be encouraged to perform a **Ritual of Dreamwalking** to see if visions of the past, present, or future might assist the group in understanding further details that might be of great help in dealing with the situation into which they are about to be thrust.

First let's deal with what each character may know by making the following successful rolls. Failure in the roll means that particular piece of information is not known.

Valnérah the condor –

Knowledge (ancient history): The Sustrümi trade-caste family to which Saiteen belongs proudly traces its heritage back to Magár during the days of the Twilight Wars over a thousand years ago, when the ancient amín of Visedhárah in the far north conquered and enslaved this land, and many others. Most of the Magári inhabitants were enslaved by the conquering sarpah, and many ended up being sent northward to the land that later became the freed nation of Sustrüm when the war finally ended. However, before the Wars, Saiteen's ancestor merchant family, known as Kürsala, supposedly once owned a small southern region of Magar before being enslaved. Interestingly, that region is the very land upon which the mine you are about to visit rests.

Héshrim the rattlesnake –

Intrigue: It is commonly known that this merchant Saiteen is a cat (an ocelot, in fact), but looking into his family history you discovered that, though the merchant is a native born in Magár, his parents were originally citizens of the Amín of Sustrüm, where cats of all kinds occupy most influential positions within government and commerce. There have been rumors that as much, if not more of Saiteen's wealth comes from Sustrüm than it does from his ties with your own country, of which he has been heard to say "offers doors of opportunities that bring profit only when knocked upon by rich foreign hands". The word on the street is that Saiteen's loyalty to a client is dictated entirely by the weight of that client's purse, and that Saiteen's wealth has bought more than one illegal "favor" to insure his continued influence and power among the elite in Sustrüm.

Arhazbür the elephant (who has an intolerance of slavery as a Drawback)–

Knowledge (customs): The Magári people have no reason to necessarily treat the lesser castes with more than a modicum of respect. It should not be forgotten that many of the freedoms most Tishíni citizens, such as yourselves, take for granted, do not necessarily apply to the Magári mentality, who have been accustomed to the foul using and abusing of slaves for thousands of years. Since the merchant Saiteen has been forbidden to use slave labor in the mines at the request of the lord Ayrram, it is only natural that he might stoop so low as to treat the peasant-caste laborers he is forced to employ with less dignity and care than might be seen in your own nation.

Dastánah the mockingbird –

Knowledge (current history): There have been peasant laborer revolts recently in the town of Vathnu, just a day's travel by skyship north of the mine. These revolts have been against prominent members of the trade-caste, merchants

who not only deal in the selling of slaves, but in general importation and exportation of goods between Magár and Sustrüm. It seems that laborers working for these merchants have seen members of their own families bought and sold by their employers, or by other merchants known to them, simply because they happened to be caught by marauders (known as the " Scourge") in the desert while delivering such trade-goods in caravan, and sold in Sustrümi slave markets right back to agents of the very Magári merchants who once employed them! Instead of freeing them on principal, the merchants, attempting to make up for the value of their goods that were lost in the desert raids, sold these new slaves for a profit to lands far and near. With the heads of merchants recently appearing on the pitchforks of angry peasants, one would think that the merchant Saiteen would not risk his own laborers' ire by mistreating them or discounting their safety.

Gramír the wolf –

Knowledge (Sadahm area): You can attest to the captain's character assessment of the merchant. Your time in the seedier areas of the city of Sadahm has given you an understanding of the existence of several illicit gambling dens, one of which, known as the Makri's Den, offers questionable entertainment including fights to the death against deadly giant suthra and other such monstrosities. Having once stealthily shadowed the merchant Saiteen when he was visiting the area to make the trade agreements with your lord, you discovered he enjoys frequenting such establishments, and is gladly willing to pay to see, and gamble his wealth away upon, such vile spectacles.

Umratáli the sea turtle –

Knowledge (tradition): It is traditional, among the rural peasants of the Magári people, that after the ritual cremations of the dead, their ashes are gathered in small, decorative ceramic urns and given to the priest of a community to keep as a public remembrance of those who have gone to dance at the Edge of Heaven. This small settlement would most likely be no different. If the foreman, a male iguana named Raésul who sent private word to your lord, spoke the truth about the true number of recent deaths, then you will see the real numbers by finding the one among them treated as a priest, and asking to see the crematory urns. It is possible the merchant will have no idea they are being kept.

Allow the players a few minutes to discuss these pieces of information to see if they come to any conclusions on their own. Then encourage Valnérah's player to attempt a **Ritual of Dreamwalking** to see if these pieces of the puzzle inspire visions that might shed even more light on what the group may be about the experience when they reach the settlement. As with the performance of all such rituals, the seer's player will need to perform several different Discipline of varying difficulty, each of which will allow the seer to generate various effects that may be of value.

The first of these **Disciplines** will simple be to enter into a deep trance that will allow the player to **part the veils of Dream** (performed at no penalty to their **Ritual Skill roll**). This Discipline must be performed by the seer to initialize the ritual itself so that they can successfully move on to more difficult tasks. This event can be described as the character seeing, in their mind's eye, colorful veils of light and shadow opening before them like a flower to reveal the Dream Realm beyond, into

which their *duháma* (their spirit or soul) enters so that may gain full access to the many powers of spiritual sight available to them there. This counts as the first Unique Discipline of the eight that Valnérah may perform between times of full rest.

The second Discipline, if they choose to do so, is to attempt to bring the other players into the Dream as well so that they may see the same visions that the seer can conjure up. This requires that the other players have successfully entered into a state of meditation as well, meaning they each need to successfully make an **Essence Roll** themselves first. If they succeed, then Valnérah may make another **Ritual Skill roll** (this time at a difficulty modifier of -3) for each of them, to see how many he is able to bring into the Dream with him. Use of this Discipline, regardless of how many times it is used again during this ritual, counts as the second Unique Discipline he has used.

Now it is time for Valnérah to attempt to see his visions. This requires the use of a third Unique Discipline (rolled at a -1 modifier) so that he can look into the past, present, or future to see what the Dream will reveal to him. The Dream can reveal such truths in vision in a variety of ways, depending on the GM's whim, and how the player describes what they are trying to achieve. The visions can seem iconic and vague, or they could be crystal clear and full of vivid detail. Be creative when describing what the character might see, without revealing too much of the plot to ruin the specifics of the "surprise" the wicked merchant has in store for them. They already have reasons not to like him, and perhaps to truly mistrust him. Feel free to feed these feelings with juicy images of his past cruelties, his present injustices and dishonesty, and perhaps a hint or clue to his terrible plans for the mine and its workers, without actually giving away specific plot-points that would thoroughly incriminate him right away. Perhaps you could conclude the ritual with some sensation of a terrible explosion and a mine collapse that buries the Dream observers amidst the falling rubble and darkness in such a shocking way that everyone suddenly awakens from the vision as they involuntarily cry out!

The entire scene could end once the players have had a chance to discuss what they think the vision really means. At that point a crystal bell could be rung on deck to indicate that they are within an hour of their time of arrival.

Scene 2; Arrival at the Settlement

The skyship sails amazingly close to the crystal-studded foothills and lower peaks of the stunning Uttara Mountains as the capable pilot navigates tricky gusts to bring the vessel gently down into the valley of the mining settlement. The suns are high in the amber sky, and their light plays across the windswept prairies below, which flow northward further than the eye can see.

At the base of the mountains lay sparsely-forested valleys and hillocks upon which the settlement nestles, sprawling with tiny huts and dwellings, larger buildings meant for processing and storage of the raw crystals, patches of land reserved for the agricultural needs of the community, various other pieces of architecture such as huge wooden frameworks, pulleys, and platforms providing access to the mine entrance itself, as well as communal gathering areas such as a recognizable temple and great hall where meals are taken by the workers. Several dirt roads stretch like a spider's web to and from these many areas, and the small

moving forms of hundreds of workers can be seen to pause as they watch your skyship descend towards a wide, stilted dock attached to a large building below.



The merchant Saiteen, unaware that Ayrram had decided to send a group of inspectors to the site, will not at first suspect that the skyship is anything other than a trade vessel arriving for either the delivery or pickup of goods. Laborers will arrive on the dock assuming that they will be required for unloading, but once the banners of the House of Ayrram are recognized by one of the trusted direct servants of the merchant, that individual might be seen to scurry away toward the temple, with obvious concern, to alert Saiteen of the arrival of vassals of the Great Aryah. Players successfully rolling either the **Animal Ability of Wide Peripheral Vision**, or a **Perception Roll** at a difficulty of -1 will notice this individual (a male, lanky, beaded lizard). The dockworkers and laborers do not speak Tishíni, though they may be able to understand a few words of it, and will merely stare at the players and their skyship, muttering to each other in the Magári tongue. The only members of the settlement that speak the players' language are Saiteen himself, some of his loyal henchmen, the old mángai (priest) of the settlement, and one other who will be mentioned later.

As the players land, the merchant is in fact currently busy speaking with that very priest, a milky-eyed brown king-snake called Sháuliva. The elderly priest and many

of the other miners not directly loyal to the merchant are displeased and angered by the recent deaths, including, merely yesterday, that of the foreman Raésul, whose body even now lies upon a crystal slab near the altar of the temple while awaiting cremation, and who happens to be the one who directly contacted the aryah Ayrram. Apparently a huge pulley, used to lift larger crystals to be lowered into wheeled carts below the mine entrance, snapped and fell, killing the foreman as he stood below directing the laborers. With so much tragedy, and with the miners now without their kind and supportive foreman, the priest is finding it difficult to convince the simple laborers that the mine is not cursed. In fact, there are many who despise the merchant, and feel that the devah do not smile upon him or his endeavors. Many jánah are threatening to simply leave. Players continuing to watch the temple will see Saiteen emerge, apparently flustered, with his loyal assistant struggling to keep up as he quickly strides toward the dock.

Upon ascending the dock stairs, however, Saiteen will have transformed into all smiles and unctuous greetings, with bows and honorifics aplenty for all noble members of the line of Sisyáh and the blessed House of Ayrram. He will mention how glad he is that they have surprised him with a visit, and how impressed they will certainly be with the recent vein of ruddy-glowing Rabíshu stones that will no-doubt swell the coffers of their lord. If told of the intended inspection of the mine's safety, he will act as if he already assumed that as a matter of course, and will be only too glad to provide them a tour of the mine so that they can return home assured that this streak of ill-luck is merely a regrettable, but fleeting, circumstance that won't continue to trouble the aryah. The recent cave-ins that had sadly taken the lives of his loyal and diligent workers occurred in areas of the mine that he wisely chose to evacuate, ceasing all work in that area. In fact, this very day, handlers of explosive valah powder are carefully preparing that area to be completely sealed up to insure that section of the mine is never used again. Saiteen seems certain that once this is done, the only dangers will be the typical daily ones associated with normal accidents that are always a part of such a dangerous job.

If asked to speak to the foreman Raésul, the merchant will regrettably inform them that he died yesterday as the result of just such a danger. And he will describe the pulley accident that regrettably took the foreman's life, pointing to the area of the cliff, clearly visible from the dock, where the huge crystal that fell still sits near a section of destroyed stair-stepped scaffolding near the entrance of the mine. Tonight he intends to honor the loyal jánah with a solemn feast for the community after his cremation at dusk, merely five hours from now, and he knows that the laborers would be overjoyed to see that emissaries of the lord Ayrram have come to join them to pay respects to one of their favored own.

Saiteen will insist that the players enjoy the opulence of a well-appointed cottage set aside especially for visiting dignitaries and prominent guests, and will have his trusted assistant Mahapah (the beaded lizard) guide them there so that they can get settled in before the evening's ceremonies. The merchant promises that once the proper respects have been shown their fallen comrade, and after a good night's rest, he will personally give them a tour of the mine after the rising of the suns tomorrow morning. If the players insist that the tour occur immediately, Saiteen will reluctantly agree, though he will mention that the workers may take offense at such a thing on

the eve of their beloved foreman's funerary ceremony, though of course he will make them understand that the will of the aryah Ayrram must come before their moment of grieving. He hopes the workers will understand why it is that they will be forced to delay their solemn ceremony while he provides the group with their tour. Again he will ask his assistant to show the players to the guest house so that they can unpack their belongings for their stay, while he sends a runner to the mines to let the workers still there know that they should not yet quit early for the day as originally planned, and should instead clean up their areas and prepare for the tour of their exalted guests.

Whether the players wait until tomorrow, or whether they insist upon the tour now, while they are shown to their quarters Saiteen will instantly gather his most trusted people around him to hastily plan the characters' untimely demise. Runners will indeed be sent to the mines, and unnecessary (or less-than-loyal) laborers will be sent down into the settlement with unexpected orders to take the rest of the day off (ostensibly to prepare for a grand cremation ceremony for the foreman). Meanwhile, the most loyal of his workers (thugs he hired to work alongside the common laborers to whip them into submission, and to kill those who seemed to catch wind of the merchant's schemes) will begin to lay out the explosives that will be used to bury the players in an "accidental" mine collapse, along with any others unlucky enough to be with them when the trap is sprung. Saiteen intends to have all the players murdered at the hands of his henchmen deep within the mine, at which point he personally intends to light the long line of powder that will act as the fuse, covering all evidence under tons of pulverized crystal and solid stone.

Scene 3; Tour of the Mine

Up the steep trail to the mine's entrance your group travels, making its way along the wide reinforced road that makes several switchbacks to scale the face of the cliff itself. Against the mountain's face, intricate scaffolding of thick local timbers rises to support various platforms holding various constructs and pulley mechanisms used to move the larger crystals dug from the mine. You can at one point clearly see the broken arm of the pulley that cost the foreman his life, and the damaged sections of scaffolding leading up to it, where the huge crystal that was being moved crashed through it when it fell. At the end of the shattered platform that once led to the pulley arm and mechanism lay dozens of small offerings to the local nature spirits in memorial to the tragic accident, so that they may be kind enough to lead the duháma of the foreman on its way to the Edge of Heaven.

Not far ahead the final set of ramps leads onto the rock ledge at the dark mouth of the mine. The assistants of the merchant and several members of a team of burly miners of various jenu begin to uncover the wicker cages they had been carrying throughout your trek to the top, revealing as they do so the fat, greenish jugánu worms that rest on a bed of fresh leaves inside. As each of these grub-like worms are petted and "cooed" to, enticed to feed from the succulent leaves, the translucent suthra begin glowing with an inner bio-luminescence that casts a dim light within the shadowy entrance into the solid rock face. The merchant turns to you, smiling and bowing.

“Of course we dare not enter into the mine with fire or sources of open heat now that the most dangerous places have been set with sticks and casks of powder to be sealed. It simply wouldn’t be safe! Luckily we have many jugánu.”



The players are now generally at eye-level to the broken section of the enormous pulley’s arm, and though only a winged individual who can use their **Flight Animal Ability** would be able to reach it to examine it more closely, those that do will be warned by a worried Saiteen that the scaffolding supporting it is no longer safe to land on since the heavy crystal that killed the foreman crashed through it. The whole structure will, in fact, come crashing down moments after anyone tries to stand upon it long enough to get a quick look, requiring another **Flight Roll at -2** to keep from getting entangled in the falling timbers as they tumble to the ground below. Allow the character that tries this, however, to take a momentary glance at the support structure before it falls by letting them roll either an **Observation Roll**, or a **Perception Roll** at

-2 in the seconds before the collapse. Characters with the **Animal Ability Far Sight** may do the same thing.

Those who are successful will notice that there seems to be some strange looking areas of rot on some of the timbers, or signs that they may have been eaten by some kind of wood-boring suthra. Players with appropriate **Knowledge Skills** or a **Professional Skill** concerning **suthra** can make rolls to see if this is suthra behavior that they recognize. Those that succeed will know that there is an unfortunately pesky type of bore-worm that lives in the forests near the southern mountains that is often responsible for such damage, and can voraciously eat through such structures undetected within mere hours if not carefully watched for. The merchant, if he hears this, will shake his head sadly, admitting that this was a fairly new structure, and that he had been warning his workers for weeks about needing to have it properly treated with pitch to avoid just such a calamity. He knows his workers would be devastated to hear that their own delay in following his suggestions may have caused their friend's death, and begs the characters not to mention this to them when they return from their tour of the mine. He is concerned that such news might dishearten the miners, and make them question their own competence. In light of these current tragedies, further damage to morale at this point could jeopardize the progress of the whole operation!

Of course he is attempting to lull the players into a false sense of security that they will actually return from this little jaunt at all. Saiteen has no intention of ever letting that happen.

From this point on feel free to describe the various passages and chambers of the mine as you see fit. Saiteen will lead the players through the labyrinthine depths of the mine while telling them that he wishes to avoid the most dangerous of areas where the deadly collapses occurred, especially since those areas are currently being laid to blow with explosives by his most experienced team of powder specialists. Instead he will gladly take them to some of the more stable and beautiful natural caverns the miners discovered, which just so happen to have held some of the more valuable deposits of minerals and gems that now grace their aryah's vaults. In actuality he is merely avoiding those areas of past deaths because he doesn't want to have the characters accidentally discover evidence of his treacheries too early by finding remnants of the explosives he used to trigger those fatal cave-ins.

If the players insist on being taken to these "more dangerous" areas, it really won't matter in the long run, as far as the merchant is concerned, since regardless of where he takes the characters, he intends to have the burly thugs (many of them tall, muscular horses from Bakári, and even a huge rhino) he brought along masquerading as miners slay them all and drag their bodies to the caves currently being rigged with explosives. This well-laid plan, however, is about to suddenly change literally moments before he reaches the end of his "tour" and tells his goons to strike.

Scene 4; Blue Rabíshu, Black Betrayal

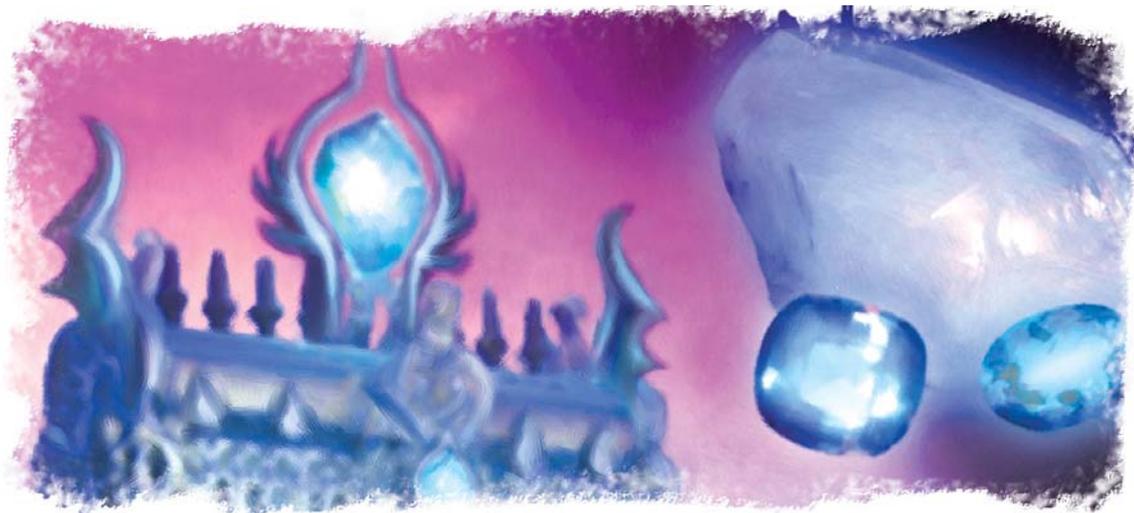
Jubilant cries can be heard to echo through the hollow halls of the mine from some place not very far away, and the patter of bare running feet interrupt whatever it is that the merchant Saiteen was about to say. Two miners, one a

large moose, and the other a small and lithe, but fairly muscular tegu-lizard, come skidding excitedly into the chamber.

The tegu starts to happily speak in what sounds like Magári, but is interrupted by the deep voice of the moose speaking the Bakári tongue, and seeming just as eager to share some sort of excellent news. The scaled tegu's right claw tightly grasps a brightly-glowing blue stone, which the moose then pries from the lizard's grip to show it to the suddenly-intent merchant, whose spotted tail now twitches with impatient energy. The ocelot merchant stares at the shining stone as its illuminant shape reflects upon his wide orange eyes. He exchanges a few quick words with the moose, then seems to think to himself for a moment before turning back to address you all, pleasure quite evident in his expression.

"It seems there has been an important discovery in one of the more dangerous chambers where they are setting the explosives. I must attend to this momentarily before we can continue the tour. This fine sarpah (grasping the tegu by the shoulder) is called Úvak, he will show you the rest of this chamber. He doesn't speak your tongue, but he can show you some of the more beautiful formations! Please stay with him until I return, since movement in the adjoining passages is quite treacherous, as is the place I must go to attend to this wonderful change of luck for us. We will certainly have cause to celebrate this evening! And you will have amazing news to carry back to your great aryah!"

With that the feline merchant turns to the tegu miner and gives him hurried orders while gesturing absently further into the chamber in which you stand. Saiteen then passes his jugánu worm cage to Úvak, and he and the large moose, with the rest of the miners that had accompanied you on the tour, quickly make their way back along the passage from which the moose and lizard had initially come.



Players with any **Knowledge Skills** dealing with **minerals or crystals** may make a roll to see if they know what that valuable gem was. Those without such skills may still **roll their Wit** at a -1 modifier. Successful rolls let the characters know that was an extremely rare blue Stone of Rabíshu, like its orange-red cousins (which give off light as well as heat when touched together), but giving off a heatless blue glow all by

itself, without needing to touch another. The light of such stones has never been seen to fade unless shattered, and they have been used as expensive adornments for thousands of years. Apparently the miners, while digging the holes in which the charges were to be set, stumbled upon a vein of these incredibly valuable crystals.

If the players decide to try to follow the merchant despite his request that they stay with the tegu lizard, nervous-looking Úvak will thrust his arm in front of them silently as if trying to hold them back, while looking expectantly toward the quickly vanishing forms of the merchant and his followers. If the players persist, he will actually be bold enough to grab at their clothes while desperately signaling with his hands to them and shaking his head in a silent, wide-eyed “no”. He will “shush” them if they try to protest, while indicating with gestures that they should wait still a moment longer. He will then quickly lead them a little further away from the exit taken by the ocelot before attempting to communicate with them in hushed, very broken Tishíni.

He will say that the merchant doesn’t know he can actually speak the players’ language, as well as the tongue of the brutish enforcers Saiteen hired to be his loyal muscle at the mine. He begs the players to leave the mine with him immediately and escape on their ship, since he overheard the merchant and his henchmen discussing the arrival of the players, and knows that the merchant intends to have them murdered and left in the mine when it collapses. He is gladly willing to return with them to Tishínia to testify as to the corruption of the merchant, and to the many murders Saiteen has committed in the name of his unquenchable greed.

Whether the players choose to flee the mine, or seek the merchant out to confront him, they will pass close enough to the entrance of the chamber where the precious stone was found to smell the valah-powder and see the shadows of many forms being cast upon the rough walls by some bright source of glowing blue at the far end of the chamber. Successful **Stealth Rolls** (and the momentary covering of their jugánu worm cage) will be required by all to insure the players are able to move through this area without being heard by the merchant and his crew of bruisers. Characters successfully making either an **Observation Roll, or a Perception Roll** at –3 will see the rubble-strewn floor of this chamber crisscrossed with thick black lines of sparkling explosive powder just waiting for some flame to set them burning. It is then that they will hear the sound of crumbling earth and stone, and the sudden screams that echo from the back of the chamber near the exposed blue Rabíshu deposit.

Scene 5; Explosive Infestation

Revealed in the bright sapphire light of the exposed glowing blue patch of crystals, numerous patches of vertical stone at the end of the chamber have apparently begun crumbling to the floor as something, in fact several things, begin digging their way out through the very walls. Appearing like tall, ghastly pale four-legged spiders these horrors, as large as Héshrim, emerge from the darkness like hungry ghouls intent on a meal, which is apparently exactly what they are seeking, since those jánah nearest to the monsters are being seized and viciously dismembered!

The humid air of the mine is instantly filled with the screams of the terrified and the dieing, while many jugánu worm cages are dropped or flung aside by

scrambling jánah who all begin fleeing in frantic panic! Amidst all the screams you can hear the words “Karcha! KARCHA!” rise above the tumult, perhaps their name for these beasts. As the frightened figures approach your end of the chamber, they begin running into one another in the deepening darkness as even closer areas of the surrounding walls begin to crumble away as well, revealing the emerging, pale bluish limbs of more of these subterranean predators.



Karcha (CAR-chah) - Nesting in caverns deep beneath the earth, or in elaborate burrows that they dig together in groups, the cunning karcha are seen as dangerous horrors by explorers and miners alike. Though they have a sharp protrusion at the end of their abdomen which they will use to stab overwhelmed prey, these 7-foot tall monsters are not poisonous, merely incredibly strong and swift, with an uncanny intelligence for a suthra. They work together in close-knit groups of dozens, building subterranean additions to their dens and seemingly assisting one another when in combat, dragging

wounded fellows out of harm's way. Many jánah consider them to be demons, for the Karcha have been known to lie silently in wait, attacking unsuspecting crystal miners, drawing them away from entrances to their actual lairs. Their tendencies to nest near choice veins of valuable crystal lead many to believe that they "protect" these crystals for some reason.

STAMINA: 2-20 levels

ARMOR: 3 points

NORMAL ACTION DICE:

Standard Movement, Great Leap, Night Vision, Clinging, Climb, Standard Sensory Rolls, etc. : 5

SPECIAL ACTIONS:

Using its sharp abdominal stinger to impale its prey : 7

The karcha are terrible indeed, and certainly challenging foes for the players, though one can fairly easily be killed by several determined characters. Karcha, like most predators, are opportunists, and will retreat from a battle if they realize they are outmatched. The miners have dug too close to their lair, and they are defending it with all they are worth. Slain miners will later be dragged back into the darkness to be fed, piece by piece, to their young, while other worker drones would busily begin collapsing all surrounding caves to insure the "invaders" are kept away from their lair. They will not pursue the characters or the NPCs beyond the surrounding caves. Though the players should be allowed the experience of fighting one if there is time, there are far too many karcha for the characters to handle on their own.

The real issue here is the fleeing merchant, as well as his hired thugs and innocent miners who are being slain by the monsters. In all the chaotic activity and extremely poor light, only characters with the **Animal Abilities** of either **Tracking Scent**, or **Thermal Sensing** will have a chance to recognize the distinctive signature of the merchant Saiteen as he has fled past them into the confusing passages that lead safely out of the mine. Attempting to follow the merchant to escape will require successful use of the same Abilities mentioned above, or the use of the **Tracking Skill**, any of which can be augmented by rolling additional dice offered by the **Direction Sense Talent**, if a character has it.

Saiteen is fleeing because he has decided that even the value of the blue stones of Rabíshu is not worth risking his own life, so he has decided to cut his losses, flee to the mine's entrance, and light the several powder-line fuses that lead to the half-dozen chambers rigged with enough explosives to bring down the entire mine under a heap of rubble that would take years to clear away. The characters will realize this as they try to follow his trail, because they will all smell the burning gunpowder and watch as the rapidly-burning fuse-fire races past them back toward the way they have just come, where even now jánah are still being slaughtered by the karcha infestation. Even if the players manage to extinguish the single powder-line passing through the tunnel they are fleeing through, they will soon see that there are several branching tunnels with fuses of their own already ignited and burned away leading deeper into the mountain. The mine is doomed.

As long as the players choose to move as fast as they can, and at least one of them succeeds in making one more **Tracking Skill** or appropriate **Animal Ability** roll to follow the merchant, they will manage to reach the exit of the mine in time, jumping

free to the scaffolding on the cliff-side below just as the explosion rips the mine apart, collapsing part of the entrance and most of the passages and chambers within. From the relative safety of this vantage point, as debris from the mountainside rains around them, the players who make successful **Perception Rolls** will see the fleeing merchant and three of his loyal thugs as they scramble down the lower scaffolding to the road below, obviously intent on a quick escape.

Hired Thug - (the male moose, mid 30's) Cutthroat from Bakári. Uses a crystal sword and chitin punch dagger as his primary weapons.

Action Dice: 5

Stamina Levels: 18

Hired Thug - (a male zebra, early 20's) Cutthroat from Bakári. Uses an amber sword and crystal dagger as his primary weapons.

Action Dice: 4

Stamina Levels: 16

Hired Thug - (a male dapple-gray horse, late 20's) Cutthroat from Bakári. Uses a whip and crystal hurling disks.

Action Dice: 4

Stamina Levels: 14

Merchant Saiteen - (male ocelot, well-dressed and groomed, late 30's) A selfish, cunning jánah with vile, heartless ambitions. Wields a poison crystal dagger, with level 5 makri venom (5 levels of damage for 5 rounds) that causes painful burning wounds.

Action Dice: 5

Stamina Levels: 18

If the players do not stop them they will run all the way to the sky-docks to escape on Saiteen's swift sky-skiff, which can outpace the slower vessel of house Ayrram. If the players choose to fire at them or catch them, then they will need to immediately enter combat, roll Initiative, and determine their number of Actions to see how long it will take them to catch up to the fleeing NPCs, or what difficulty modifiers they must endure to fire missiles because of range. Currently their opponents are at Medium Range (100-300 feet), causing a -1 modifier on missile attacks, and requiring 6 Actions to cover that distance at a run. If the players fire at them without moving that round, their opponents will achieve Long Range (over 300-900 feet), causing a -3 modifier on missile attacks, and requiring 18 Actions to cover that distance at a run. If they allow another two rounds to pass without pursuit, the NPCs will be entirely out of range for distance attacks, and only flying players will be able to catch them before the merchant and his remaining thugs make their escape.

Conclusions

Anyone within the mine when the explosives went off is forever lost, and surely dead or soon to die, and the poor miners that escaped that terrible fate by being in the settlement at the time will certainly be attracted by the sound of the explosions, and will gather wanting to know what happened. Assume that the tegu lizard made it out of the mine with the players, and will mollify the crowd by explaining to them, in their own tongue, what has happened.

Unless there is time for a drawn-out conclusion, inform the players that it would be wise to take the merchant, if alive and captured, back to their aryah for justice, which would certainly include an attempt at seizing any of the foul merchant's illegally-obtained wealth. The mine, however will need to be closed, though luckily there is enough of the merchants ill-gotten riches at the settlement to pay the remaining laborers for their troubles, and even send them on their way with reparations, in the name of Ayrram, for the widows of those that died in the tragedy.