

HIGH ROAD TO HELL

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HIGH ROAD TO HELL

HIGH ROAD TO HELL is a complete adventure for the role-playing game, DARWIN'S WORLD 2nd Edition. In it the characters help a devastated tribe of mountain primitives save their people from slavery at the hands of the Foundation. Accompanying a war party of mere children, the player characters struggle to catch up to the armored column of trucks that have taken them before they reach the safety of the Foundation fortress known only as "Avernus".

This adventure is best suited for a group of four to six characters of levels 4-5.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventure takes place in the south-central spur of the Sulfur Peaks, a mountainous region once known as the Sierra Nevadas. Since the collapse of civilization these rugged mountains have become inhabited by the primitive tribal survivors of mankind's fall, who live far removed from the technological society that once birthed their ancestors.

Over the years the Sulfur Peaks have become something of an obstacle to the rebirth of civilization. The powerful Twisted Earth faction known as the "Foundation" has long been hemmed in by this natural barrier, unable to spread their self-perceived "holy mission" to bring back the culture, society, and civilization of the Ancient world. In the past year the Foundation's various outposts in the Sulfur Peaks have begun to experience an upsurge in raider activity, primarily of the tribal kind. The 5th Army, stationed at the former town of Ione (now known as "Fort Avernus"), has long been charged with quelling raider activity in the mountains and protecting the vital trade routes south from the Sierra Gehenna region. However the problem is more than the 5th Army can handle, as numerous tribes appear to be joining forces to make their job difficult. For example, when one tribe attacks a Foundation outpost another tribe will provide a diversion elsewhere, forcing the 5th Army to split its forces. Typical, predictable tribal tactics seem to be changing, and the Foundation believes another force may be behind their coordination and planning (namely the Brethren, another faction of the Twisted Earth).

To make matters worse, recruitment into the Foundation has begun to dip in recent months, and some are blaming the recent boldness - and victories - of the tribals for this. It seems that instead of joining the Foundation to make a

name for themselves, many tribals are now staying loyal to their home villages. This, in turn, has made it harder for the Foundation to fight the raiders; without manpower, the Foundation can do little to quell the tide of lawlessness.

In any event a general order has been given to quell the raider activity while at the same time increasing the "recruitment" of slaves.

Paladin-Commander Dover, leader of the Fort Avernus garrison, has decided to kill two birds with one stone. Stationed far from the messy political situation currently embroiling the Foundation high command back at Dis (namely, the crisis which has caused the Foundation to pursue less "totalitarian" means to recruit new members, to avoid going extinct due to dwindling numbers), Dover has great leeway in interpreting his orders. He recently began sending convoys out into the mountains to take *slaves*, in the time-honored tradition of his elitist pureblood human forefathers. His plan will serve two purposes - to garner new "recruits" for re-education, as well as devastating the population of the mountain tribals, diminishing their capability to raid the Foundation in the future.

Dover isn't the only one who thinks this is a brilliant plan. Brother Tagos, a young and ambitious officer of the Foundation (and Dover's favored choice to lead these "slave runs"), admires his commander for coming up with such an efficient strategy. Tagos seeks to make a name for himself and become a Paladin well before his peers. His ambition and ruthlessness make him perfect for the task at hand; he sees the tribals of the mountains as little more than animals, and his desire to curry favors from his commander means he will most certainly keep Dover's activities a secret.

The adventure begins shortly after a recent slave run against a tribal village high in the Sulfur Peaks. Tagos and his small force of Foundationists have just struck, killing or capturing all of the village's mature males in a decisive surprise attack. Loading them into armored trucks they are now heading back to Fort Avernus with a full load of slaves, hoping to reach the protective cover of the mighty fortress in a matter of days.

The party arrives soon after, while the tribe is still mourning the loss of their warriors. The tribals believe their fathers and sons to be dead, and are faced with the grim prospect of facing the other tribes without an entire generation of warriors to defend them. Yet the chief's

FOUNDATION CHARACTERS

The way this adventure is written it is not particularly suitable for characters with an allegiance to the Foundation. However, with a bit of modification it can easily be adapted to run Foundation characters through.

Start by replacing Brother Tagos and/or Lon with player characters, making sure to remind them of their mission parameters and goals - namely, delivering the slaves back to Fort Avernus. In this twisted take on the adventure the PCs will have to be mindful of making the best time possible while evading Tamrok and his war party. Though it probably won't be particularly difficult the way things are presented here, by increasing Tamrok's level (or perhaps automatically adding the Brethren soldiers to his party), the odds may become a little more even.

Likewise this adventure could be even more exciting - and challenging - if some players control Foundationists guarding the caravan, while others play the tribal warriors hunting them!

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young son, Tamrok, believes that his tribe will be saved. Wandering from his village he has gone on a spiritual “quest”, hoping the primitive gods of his tribe will send “spirits” to come to their aid in this time of great need.

Rather coincidentally, a band of wasteland adventurers are passing through the region at the same time...

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The story begins as the PCs make their way through the rugged mountain terrain of the Sulfur Peaks. In the Twisted Earth setting this is a dry and desolate region, its old mountain towns abandoned long ago when civilization collapsed in the Fall. Isolated from the regions of the world where “civilization” has been re-born (albeit in a very twisted and ugly way) those communities that did stay among the mountains more often than not degenerated into a tribal way of life, their old beliefs and understanding of the past slipping into obscure and primitive customs.

To a well-equipped party of adventurers (especially those of the suggested level) this land should prove little threat; the locals are said to be suspicious – but only rarely predatory. Attacks on travelers (at least those unaffiliated with the Foundation) by mountain tribals are infrequent, and the only real danger to those with the know-how to avoid human threats is the Sulfur Peaks’ mutated animal life. And, luckily, at the height of summer most animals prefer to spend their days in the shade rather than hunt under the scorching sun.

Thus it is that the PCs have found themselves high in the south branch of the Sulfur Peaks, when they stumble upon a lone individual awaiting their arrival...

A LONE SENTRY

As elsewhere on this twisted world, your recent travels through the Sulfur Peaks of Old California have been a mixture of highs and lows. These used to be among the most beautiful mountains in the world; now they are a barren barrier where unadorned wind-swept slopes fight for space with deep forests as dry as kindling and massive ramparts of solid stone that rise like sentinels preserved for eons. The old mountain highways – of Ancient creation – you heard crossed these mountains have all but vanished, as if reclaimed by the angry hand of nature in revenge for what the Ancients did to Mother Earth.

Barren trails have turned into precarious mountain paths, and the stone is sharp and loose beneath your tramping boots, but at long last you are reaching the final leg of your journey. As your group moves down an old arroyo – a dried up streambed formed during the rare rain storm that visits the desert mountains every few years – you are instantly aware of a figure up ahead.

Sitting on a mat made from woven animal hair is a half-naked tribal, no older than sixteen years, cross-legged with eyes tightly closed. His body is baked brown by the sun, painted with swirls of pigment, his

LISTENING

At any time during the adventure the PCs can use the sound of the Foundationist convoy to get their bearings or, more accurately, to determine in what direction the column is from their current position.

Because the mountains and canyons are relatively quiet day and night, the engines of the Foundation vehicles are a dead giveaway of the convoy’s position. A Listen check can be made to pick up the sound of the convoy, no matter where the PCs are on the map. The DC depends on the distance the PCs are from the convoy:

1 hour away	DC 14
3 hours away	DC 18
6 hours away	DC 22
More than 6 hours away	NA

hair bound in a single, ragged lock. A spear lies nearby, just within reach.

The boy keeps his eyes closed even as you approach; by the creases near his eyes you can tell he is fighting to keep them shut. Though at first you hadn’t noticed it because of the roar of the wind, he has been mumbling strange mantras over and over under his breath.

Then, all of a sudden, he stops chanting and opens his youthful blue eyes, staring right at you.

The young man is Tamrok, a member of the local tribal village and the chief’s only son. Though the PCs aren’t immediately aware of it, he is on a self-ordained “dream quest” of sorts, gone into the desert to starve himself and receive visions – and advice – from the “spirits” of the land.

When the PCs appear, the boy – already a bit impressionable due to starvation and the recent traumatic events that have occurred in his village (see below) – instantly imagines them to be spirits sent by the “Gods of Light” to make things right. From this point on, regardless of what the PCs say or how they act, he will firmly believe they are benevolent agents of the supernatural.

GM’s Note: The following text assumes the PCs approach the boy cautiously; if they take another course of action, adjust the monologue appropriately.

As you approach it is obvious the boy is taken off guard by your appearance – but not by your presence. It’s as if he expected someone – anyone – to emerge from the swirling heat mirages of the landscape at any moment.

The boy stands up as if to confront you, but he is little over five feet tall – pathetic. But in an instant he has his spear beside him.

“I am Tamrok,” he says, his voice quickly filling with purpose. “So you have come. I have never seen...your kind before. Forgive me...I must admit...though you must certainly know already...”

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The boy seems anguished by his own inability to finish a sentence, no doubt struggling with his own exhaustion and hunger. By the looks of him he appears to have been out here, on the mountaintop, for a good while without food or water.

"I have not always believed," he continues, "But I do now. I will never doubt again."

If the PCs ask what he is referring to, or try to question him in other ways, Tamrok seems amused by what he perceives to be "tests" of his faith. Though they may deny that they are spirits sent to help fight the "Evil Ones" (see below), in his heart he just *knows*.

The boy rolls up his mat and slings it over one bony shoulder.

"Follow me," is all he says, and he begins walking down a stony trail to the west.

The PCs should be suspicious and wary, but Tamrok seems harmless enough. If the PCs seem hesitant, he merely tells them that "time is short" and that the "shaman awaits". If they still seem reluctant to follow, he promises them food and water to refresh their "earthly bodies".

With this last enigmatic statement Tamrok will continue on.

ARRIVAL

For over an hour you walk, following your wordless guide until the rugged mountainside opens onto a wind-swept slope. There, up ahead, is a small village of mud huts surrounded by a collapsed stone wall. A few mangy goats stand on a nearby hill, unimpressed by your arrival or your appearance, turning from a simple glance your way to continue grazing. A little boy, half-naked like your guide, stands with the goats, eyes widening as he watches your party pass by. He says nothing at all – making you wonder if this entire village has been struck dumb.

As the roar of the wind dies down it is replaced by another sound, one wholly disturbing – a distorted opera of shrieks, howls, and wailing. Up ahead you see a large number of robed women clustered near the center of the settlement, kneeling or sitting cross-legged on the sharp and jagged rocks and moving back and forth as if in a trance, swaying to their own discordant music. The sound seems to be coming from them, which now seems to be a horribly uncoordinated attempt at a song.

The tribals of the village are in *mourning*, a common custom among primitive communities when they have been dealt a major blow – usually reserved for periods following times of war, but also more commonly when better-equipped raiders and slavers have attacked and left many of their people dead.

As the PCs approach, the village women, all at once, begin wailing again, this time in a cacophony that is a combination of their continued mourning, intertwined with a new sense of fear that sends their song-like shrieks into a higher octave. As the PCs continue the women begin picking up rocks and hurling them at the group, before taking off in a pack towards huts further away.

The women are surprised by the sudden appearance of the PCs, judging them by their equipment and civilized appearance to be more "evil spirits" come to do further harm to the village.

"Forgive them," says Tamrok, "they have mistaken you for evil spirits. But not me..."

Something about the way the boy says that leaves you with the sudden impression that he expects far more of you than he is letting on...

Tamrok leads the PCs – barefoot over a hard landscape composed almost entirely of sharp shards of sandstone – to the hut of the village "shaman".

THE SHAMAN

The youth leads you through the village – now ominously deserted after your arrival – to a simple mud hut on a barren hill overlooking the settlement. Wind chimes made from intricately carved and decorated bones hang from the crossbeam suspended from two wooden posts over the threshold. The sound they make has a curious appeal here, a place where for days you heard nothing but the tramp of feet and the distant cries of eagles soaring overhead.

The boy lifts a flap of hide, heavy with a musky odor, motioning for your entire party to enter.

Inside the hut seems much larger than it did outside. Cracked walls are decorated with fur hangings and stretched hides, the gravel floor covered in reeds and mats made from dry, woven bark. A single man, older than any you have ever seen, lies cross-legged on the floor, apparently oblivious to your entry. His thin arms, dark from years spent in the mountain sun, remind you of ashen sticks taken from a cold fireplace, but they work with such tremendous vigor at the mortar and pestle in his hands that you quickly realize he must be stronger than you thought. As he finishes grinding a strange white root into a fine powder, he bends over, purses his parchment-dry lips, and blows the dust from the stone vessel into a leather pouch.

Tamrok says nothing, just watches with silent respect.

The shaman ties the pouch with a bit of twine, shakes it up, and puts it aside with a row of others, before turning to look at you and your companions.

"They have come..." Tamrok says, his voice trembling with excitement.

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If the PCs demand to know what is going on, or why the village is in such a strange mood, the shaman will watch them for a few moments before answering.

The old man's eyes seem to regard you...kindly. In the face of your questions a slight smile forms on his face, and as he stands he raises his arms towards you, beginning a strange chant combining a deep throaty hum with the clicking of his dry tongue against the roof of his mouth.

Finally he stops, his eyes gleaming. "Yes, you know, but I will play along, good spirit, if that is what you want. We are in need of your help. Our village is a great village. It has stood for many generations, since the time our forefathers left the fire of the Ancients. Our people are great warriors; the men-folk have defended against the snuffle hogs, lurking panthers, and rattlecharmers of the wilderness.

"But a great evil has been visited upon us. Our warriors have fallen – they are all gone, dead. We are helpless. We seek the power of the Gods of Light – and they have sent you to us."

Should the PCs laugh or try to explain that they are not agents of these so-called "Gods of Light", both the shaman and the boy merely stare at them, neither amused nor disappointed. They have the fire of total faith in their eyes – and nothing the PCs say will deflate their beliefs.

"Will you help us?" the shaman asks.

If the PCs ask for a reward, Tamrok looks surprised and turns to the shaman, who in turn assures Tamrok that it is common practice, when dealing with spirits, to offer them incentive for their "services" – good spirits and evil spirits alike.

The shaman goes to the back of the hut, retrieves a bundle of hides, and brings them forward. He opens the bundle to reveal a motley collection of grimy, dusty items he has collected over the years. He offers each "spirit" (PC) one item of his/her choice (if there are more PCs than there are items, then the shaman will offer all of the items as a single payment to the whole group, to be divided as they like). The items include:

- 1 A single *energy grenade*, still labeled with Ancient words stenciled on its casing;
- 2 A *minifusion cell* (down to 8 charges);
- 3 An ancient, dust-caked *Geiger counter* (not only does this item lack a power source, it is also broken, requiring a Repair check at DC 20, along with 1 hour of work and 120 cp in raw materials, to fix);
- 4 A small, slim palm-sized object (actually a *hand stunner*, covered in a thick layer of hardened mud and dirt that must be cleaned before the item can be used; it lacks a power source);
- 5 A *Jackhammer Mk3A1* (this last item the shaman

hands over with some reverence, saying it was found at the ambush after the battle, when he and the women combed over the scene; it is empty).

Once they have agreed to help, the shaman beckons for Tamrok to sit and tell his tale, in his own words.

As Tamrok speaks the shaman begins to quietly hum, rocking back and forth to his own rhythm; as he does so the words seem to flow from Tamrok as if the shaman's music brought forth much more vivid memories than he could otherwise remember.

The boy sits, staring into the fire pit that smolders at the heart of the hut. For a moment he looks a lot older than he did when you first met, his youthful appearance turning sad, frightened, and...ashamed.

"It all began a few days ago. I was out in the field practicing my spear thrusts with the other children. A chief's son must be the greatest warrior in his tribe. He must fight to defend his people...that's what father used to say. We were there, hitting each other with sticks and laughing and...oblivious to what was brewing on the horizon.

"And then they came. They were preceded by...by the baying of the hounds of hell – like thunder from a summer storm, but constant, never ending. It started low, quiet, like cicadas on the horizon, until it grew louder, and louder still.

"We saw, from the west, clouds of sand and dust kicked high in the sky. The women and children screamed and scattered – no one had ever seen anything like it. But we knew what it was, from the stories of our elders from the time of the fire of the Ancients. An army of demons had come, the evil spirits were tearing up the landscape as they went, searching for the souls of the living to take with them back to Hell.

"My father gathered his men, the best of the village's greatest warriors, and with javelins and axes they prepared to confront the spirits head-on. The shaman cast his most powerful blessings upon them, gave each man a liquor infused with the wishes and strength of our ancestors. Spears were smeared with the dried paste of desert viper venom. And they headed out, invincible in their coats of bone armor and with the gods looking upon them with favor.

"I walked with my father, carrying his spear as we neared the place where the evil spirits approached. As we stood on the flat stony ground, the warriors all began to sing. We were invincible.

"Up ahead the sky was churning with black clouds, and then, from the unnatural dust storm, they came.

"They were devils, one and all, riding monstrous creatures snatched from the deepest depths of their abyssal prison. The steeds they rode upon were massive and hideous, stuck with the dust their movements kicked up as they tore straight along. Their legs moved so quickly that they were just a blur, leaving in their wake

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deep trenches that cut straight into the valley floor. I imagined for a moment how far back their trail might lead, but found myself not wanting to know – aware that should a mortal follow such a trail, he would no doubt find a direct route to Hell itself.

“Atop these armored beasts sat armored demons. Their faces were not human, so changed were these creatures from their eternity of suffering in the netherworld. Hateful they seemed, and their expressions never changed. They seemed to be made of metal themselves, as if their curse in the afterlife had changed them from living creatures into beings incapable of feelings and emotions. I remember their faces; they were glassy and inhuman, the light of the day gleaming off their golden eyes.

“The thunder grew only louder, until it was deafening, all around us. It seemed to come from the animals, as if they were growling with anger and hatred from centuries of torture and torment beyond our world.

“My father must have been as stunned as I at the appearance of the demons, because he was unable to order the attack. The Evil Ones, instead, were the first to strike.

“One of them merely pointed at my father, and there was a sudden crack of thunder, as if the sky itself was awaiting his command. I turned to see how my father would react to this obvious challenge, but he was not there.”

The boy pauses for a moment, his eyes out of focus as he stares into the dancing flames of the fire.

“He was on the ground, on his back, his head open like a flower. Blood was everywhere.

“What power could do this to a man? What magic had these spirits at their disposal? What evil gods had we angered?

“I ran – I fled, as the thunder erupted again and again, and the warriors of our village fell. Others were overtaken by the cloud of dust, or by the mounted warriors riding their hell-borne beasts. Some were lassoed by wicked demons who laughed and cackled as they dragged our warriors behind their rampaging mounts. The rest simply vanished into the thundering cloud.

“I...am ashamed. I found myself cowering behind a rock, watching and listening, hoping the spirits would be satisfied by the souls they had already reaped. The sky shook, and even the rocks around me began to shake and rumble, until I thought I would go mad.

“Then the sound came to an abrupt end – though the sky was still churning with dust. I peered over a rock, and that’s when I saw it.”

The young man hesitates, and only continues after the shaman nods his approval.

“Many legends of our people speak of it, but I did not recognize it at first. I never imagined it would be so large.”

Still the boy finds it hard to speak “its” name, until

the shaman looks into his eye giving him the strength he needs to continue.

“The ‘Taker of Souls’. The parents of our elders spoke of it. I thought it was just a story. But it was not. It looked like a huge house, rolling along on black rollers. Though it was dusty it gleamed with an unholy shine, as if covered in armor. It was pulled by a grotesque monster at its head, belching and guttering with plumes of noxious smoke, with huge glassy eyes through which I could see more demons inside.

“I watched in terror as the dust cloud began to settle. The devils had gotten off their demonic steeds and rounded up those warriors they had captured. Lashing them with whips they drove them into the belly of the Taker of Souls, until they all vanished from sight. Then, almost as suddenly as they had appeared, the devils took to their mounts and rode off into the desert.”

At this point the shaman cuts in.

“The Taker of Souls is not a worldly beast, but a thing controlled by the Evil Ones. It is a kind of ‘wagon’ they send to collect the souls of the dead, to take back to Hell to suffer an eternity of torment. They do this often; the tribes of the wasteland have many stories related to the Taker and the things the Evil Ones do.”

“My uncle was among those that the Taker of Souls took...” mutters Tamrok, tearing his eyes from the fire to look into each of yours, as if hoping his glance will convey to you his anguish over losing both his father and uncle to these “spirits”.

“There is a chance,” the shaman says, “if we act quickly. The Taker of Souls must return to Hell for the souls of your uncle and our warriors to be condemned forever. Between here and there, they are in a sort of limbo – unable to escape, but still very much alive. If you can track the devils and their wagons, intercept them, you may be able to free our kin before the hell-coaches cross the threshold into Hell. If not...they will be lost forever.”

Tamrok’s eyes gleam with a sudden flood of hope.

“But how do we know which way to go? Where, Holy One, will we go?”

The shaman breathes deeply, looking to each man assembled in the tent, before extending his gnarled walking stick to draw a map in the sand.

“There is a gate to Hell that I know of. It lies in a valley at the furthest reaches of the known world, far to the west. It resembles a fortress, no doubt built by the demons to guard the gate and to mount raids upon the people of the living world.

“As it is heavily laden with the souls of our people, the Taker of Souls must pass through the mountains along the ground. Unless it has a means of leaping tall mountains, I believe it will follow the dried arroyos to the valley floor. That means it must move in a zig-zag pattern. But you, on foot, can cross the mountains and intercept it...here.”

He marks a spot uncomfortably near the alleged

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“gate to Hell”.

“It will not be easy. Demons are not easily slain, nor tricked. And their steeds move quickly, and not even a desert horse can catch them on open ground. Luckily, however, the movements of the Taker of Souls are always preceded by the rumble of ungodly thunder – just follow that sound.”

Tamrok rises, the knuckles of his hand turning white as he grasps his spear.

“I will gather the oldest of the children. We will go and find the Taker of Souls.”

Tamrok turns to you.

“You say you are not spirits, and only men, but the stories speak often of angels moving unseen among mortals, watching us each day. I know this is what you are. I know you must be compelled by some greater force to deny it, but I see you for what you are. I am honored to walk with you.”

With that Tamrok leaves, regardless of the PCs’ protests. The shaman, however, takes advantage of Tamrok’s absence to speak with them.

“You speak strangely, and you deny being sent from the Heavens, but I believe the Gods of Light have brought you here for a reason. Whoever you are...whatever you are...at the very least Tamrok believes in you. With such faith in his heart I find it hard to imagine even a young boy like himself could fail to win the day. Please help us.”

Clever PCs should be able to realize the truth behind the confused “mythology” of the tribals, and discern that, in fact, the village was attacked by slavers (undoubtedly of a far greater technology than the tribesmen), and the survivors were most likely taken away in a large vehicle – a truck perhaps.

The shaman (or Tamrok for that matter) does not concern himself with the “truth”, even if the PCs try to explain. The tribals have no frame of reference when it comes to technology, slavers, and other things that more civilized people take for granted – and so any explanation that the slavers were probably just men like them, or that the “Taker of Souls” was merely a motor vehicle, will leave them just as reverent towards their enemies, as awe-struck by the whole event, and terrified of the idea of what will happen to their kin if they do not act to save them.

Before the PCs leave the shaman gives each of them one of the leather pouches he was putting together when they first entered his tent – each is the equivalent of a *juju potion* (healing 1d4+1 points of damage when taken).

MOUNTAIN GUIDE

Because these mountains have many hidden trails and shortcuts, a character making a successful Navigate check (DC 18) once per hour increases the distance the party travels by an extra 50%. The party can only benefit from one successful roll per hour (i.e. a maximum increase of 10%).

This simulates finding trails and sacrificing a steady pace for reckless progress. As a result if the PCs use this rule more for more than three hours in a row they must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or become *fatigued*.

TAMROK AND THE CHILDREN

Once the PCs agree to the “quest” Tamrok will gather a band of “brave warriors”, who will show up within the hour to join the “war party”. All of these “warriors” are *children*, ranging in age from 8 to 15 - they are, in fact, the only surviving males of the tribe.

The children (and Tamrok) will demand to come, even if the PCs try to talk them out of it. Each boy has lost a father or uncle in the recent raid, and faithfully believes that because their cause is just, they will meet with certain success.

There are eight *child warriors* in Tamrok’s would-be “war party”. Statistics for these brave (if somewhat foolhardy) youths can be found in the *NPC Statistics* section at the end of this module.

CATCHING THE CONVOY

The objective of the adventure is to catch the Foundationist convoy before it reaches Fort Avernus (the so-called “Gates of Hell”) and brings the convoy within the protective range of the fort’s laser cannons and patrol helicopter. Catching up to the convoy will require the PCs to navigate the mountainous terrain and make good time, avoiding delays and setting up ambushes wherever possible.

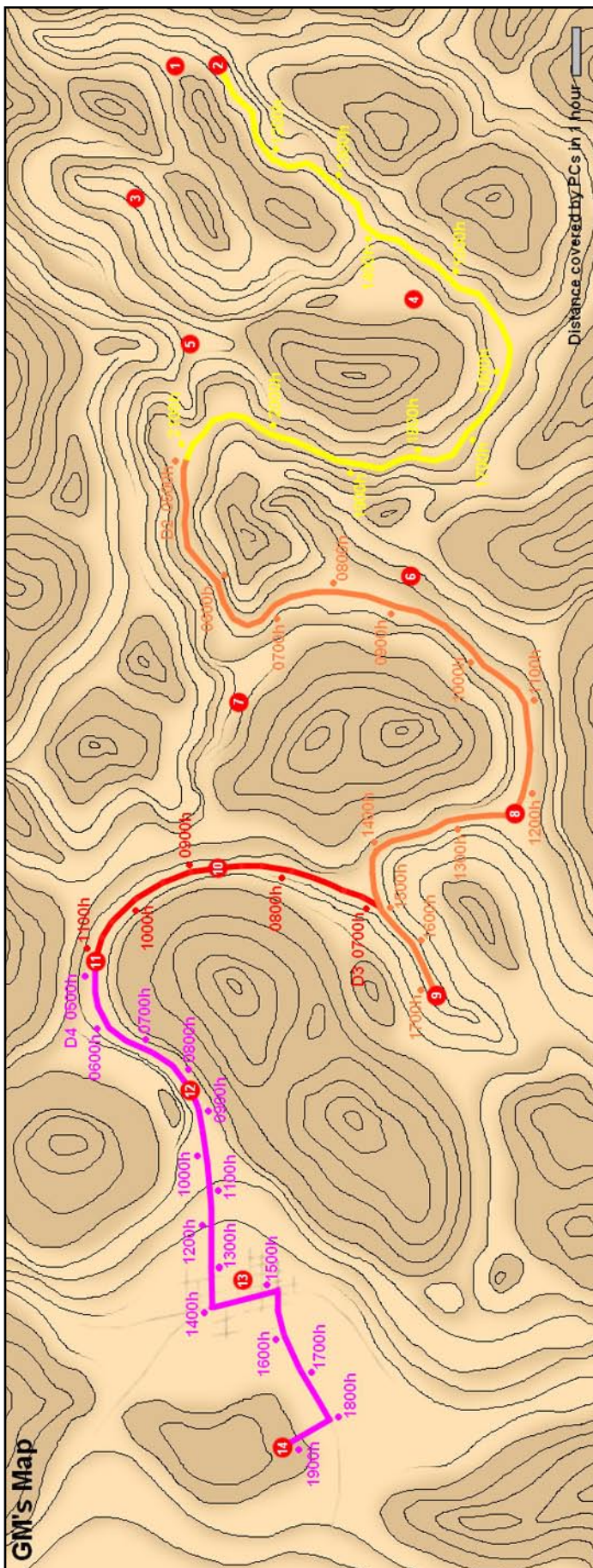
Two main maps accompany this adventure; one is for the players (to get an idea of the terrain, to allow them to decide on a path to take, and to plan their ambushes), while the other is for the GM. The GM map shows the path the Foundationist convoy takes on its way to Fort Avernus, taking the only route possible (a series of interconnected canyons and gorges that provide the only true “road” on which heavy vehicles can move).

Indicated on this map are *time intervals*. These indicate where the convoy is at any given time on any given day. For the sake of continuity the progress of the convoy is set. As such the PCs will have to time their ambushes just right, otherwise they can either be too early, or worse, show up too late to catch it.

TRAVEL ON THE MAP

An important part of running this adventure involves keeping track of how much ground the PCs travel each hour. As such a key is given showing the distance the party will cover in a given hour of travel.

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In essence the PCs are trying to catch up to and hopefully ambush the Foundation prison truck to free the enslaved tribal warriors within. Once the PCs realize they are following terrestrial vehicles (and not some supernatural “caravan of the dead” as first believed), they will probably realize that the convoy is restricted to one route through the mountains – along the winding mountain road that leads to the distant Foundation fort. Once they figure this out it is only a matter of keeping pace with/catching up to the convoy along its painfully obvious course.

However, since the convoy uses vehicles, the PCs have their work cut out for them. Still, the going will not be easy for the heavy Foundation trucks, since the mountain road is treacherous and great care must be taken to avoid natural pitfalls, areas of falling rock, etc. Fate also plays an important role in giving the PCs more time in catching up to the convoy during its return to Fort Avernus.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

In addition to set encounters and encounters with the convoy, you may want to add random encounters to keep the adventure interesting. This will be especially important if the PCs are having too easy a time, or if there is too long a break in the action as the PCs cross open terrain trying to catch the convoy.

Random encounters should be devised by the GM, and should be based on the strength and capabilities of the whole war party. However, as stated before it is the height of summer and as such only truly desperate creatures will have left their dens looking for food.

Suggested encounters (suitable for characters of this level) include a pack of wild dogs, a small group of doom harvesters, a rattlecharmer, ravening hounds, or a snuffle hog.

SET ENCOUNTERS

While much of the action of this adventure requires the PCs to remain mobile, pursuing the caravan doggedly until they catch their quarry, there are a few set encounters dispersed among the canyons and mountains; these are indicated on the map.

The following section details the main set encounters of the adventure. Many of these will have variable outcomes depending on the specific time and day when the PCs arrive. See individual encounters for details.

1. TAMROK’S VILLAGE

This area merely marks the location of Tamrok’s tribal village. Once the PCs have agreed to join Tamrok’s “quest” they start their journey here, at approximately 1300 hours on Day 1.

2. BATTLE SITE

If the PCs ask, Tamrok will take them to the battle site where his people were taken by the “Evil Ones”. The location is marked on the map.

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Tamrok leads you along the floor of the canyon to a spot filled with strange tracks. He and the rest of the children fall quiet, surveying the scene in silence as if any noise might bring the Evil Ones back.

Finally Tamrok speaks. "This is the place where our elders were taken."

Characters with the Track feat can attempt to make some sense of the tracks. A Survival check made at DC 5 reveals that at least 20 attackers struck from ambush. A second check at DC 15 shows that numerous prisoners (at least a dozen) were taken and loaded into one of several vehicles. These then drove off to the southwest.

If the PCs relate this information to Tamrok and the children they listen, but do not believe the men were merely captured. Tamrok tells the PCs that no member of his tribe would surrender - all would fight to the death (this isn't true, but being young and somewhat naive Tamrok has unshakable faith in his elders).

Tamrok tells the war party that though their elders were killed, there is still a chance to "free their souls". He gives them a rallying speech that raises Morale by +1.

Treasure: PCs searching the site will find a few broken spears and javelins left over from the battle. There is a 20% chance that 1d2 spears and 1d3 javelins are still usable.

3. BRETHREN CAMP (EL 3)

Up ahead you see what appears to be a small campsite facing out over a broad canyon. The sun's withering rays beat mercilessly down on the scene, illuminating faded tents that snap smartly in the wind.

As you approach you see a number of figures gathered around the camp, apparently sharing a meal. Even from this distance you notice they are all identically clad in tattered reddish robes, with hoods to cover their faces. They seem to have a great deal of equipment with them including packs, staves, spears, and a small team of mules.

Tamrok motions everyone to take cover, and he peers over a rock to survey the scene. After a full minute he hunkers down and speaks.

"A camp of the Brethren. They are said to be from a place far, far to the west. They say they come to the mountains to teach the tribes to fight for themselves against the demons. But they are not trusted. There is a saying - only a liar gives for free. And they claim to teach men to fight for nothing."

For a moment he considers. "We could approach them and ask for help. They are said to be strong warriors, and we could use their help. But my father once forbade my people from all contact with the Brethren, for fear they would find our village and try to force us to join their movement. I am unsure what to do."

Indeed the camp belongs to the Brethren, its inhabitants part of an expedition sent to the Sulfur Peaks months ago to contact the mountain tribes and teach them how to wage war against their great enemy - the Foundation. This particular group of Brethren "agents" has met with little success, having encountered only suspicion and closed doors wherever they have gone. Sadly for them, the violent reputation of the Brethren has preceded them.

If the PCs attempt to sneak by the Brethren agents do not notice, and the party can get away without event. If they approach, however, the reactions of the Brethren will depend on how the party conducts themselves.

First and foremost because Tamrok (a tribal) is with the PCs, the Brethren will initially be willing to talk instead of attacking. After all they believe they are here to aid and assist the mountain tribals, not harm them. Since they "represent" the Brethren they are acting on their best behavior, so to speak. As such if the PCs come with arms raised (or otherwise showing intent to communicate instead of attacking), the Brethren - though surprised - will warily invite the PCs to parley.

GM's Note: The Brethren agents will remain cautious if there are any party members that bear advanced weapons, armor, or any other form of "flashy" technology. This results in a -4 penalty to all Diplomacy and Intimidate checks with the Brethren agents.

Convincing the Brethren of the party's peaceful intentions requires a Diplomacy check at DC 10 (this should be easy; only if the PCs are exhibiting technology will this become a difficult check). Finding out about their own mission requires a Diplomacy check at DC 14. In either case once Tamrok (or a PC speaking on his tribe's behalf) brings up their mission, the Brethren agents become more interested; the DC to convince them to join the party in their hunt drops to 12.

As Tamrok relates the story of his tribe's fate, the Brethren men seem to get excited, murmuring and whispering amongst themselves. You take the opportunity to try and steal a better look at them, trying to see under the hoods and through the shadows that mask their faces. For a moment you think you see something that terrifies you - a sickly, almost ghostly white face, pinkish predatory eyes ringed with red diseased skin, and the beginnings of sharp animal-like teeth poking past the corners of their deformed mouths.

Oblivious to your staring the Brethren cease their chattering and their leader speaks for the group.

"The Evil Ones you speak of threaten all the people of the mountains. We can think of no better way to show our goodwill than joining you in this sacred quest. The Brethren march with you!"

Though they agree to help hunt the tribals' enemies, the Brethren will make one demand: that all technological items taken from the enemy in battle be given to them so that they

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can destroy them. If the PCs refuse (which is likely), the Brethren will attempt to explain their philosophy. If still refused they eventually become upset; Tamrok (or a neutral PC) will have to make a Diplomacy check at DC 15 to convince the Brethren to compromise. At the very least, the Brethren will demand an equal share of technological items (so they can be destroyed). If refused, they do not go with the party.

There are six Brethren warriors in the group, though one (the weakest) will remain here at the camp to take care of the mules while the others join the party. If the party convinces them to come they will at first follow Tamrok, but in battle will follow their own leadership (preferred tactics involve surrounding an enemy to make the best use of the *Pack Tactics* feat). They will abandon the mission if they lose four or more of their number.

Failed Negotiations: If the party attacks without trying to parley, insults/derides the Brethren agents, or fails any of the listed Diplomacy checks by 5 or more, the Brethren will become enraged and will fight. They attack the character(s) with the most visible technological items first, hoping to put him or her out of the fight early on.

☛ **Brethren (6):** HP 12, 10, 10, 10, 10, and 8.

Treasure: If the PCs attack and kill the Brethren their camp can be searched. In addition to several weeks worth of hardtack and a few waterskins, the Brethren also keep some trade goods for winning over the natives of the mountains. A small coffer in one tent contains 200 bottle caps, a collection of dirt-caked poker chips, fragments of a hand mirror, and several bags filled with glass marbles and cheap plastic beads of all colors. These baubles might be worth 100 cp if used in trade with a tribal community.

4. WINGED ONES (EL 4)

A small flock of winged ones are perched high up on the cliffs at this location, carefully watching the desert canyon below. At roughly 1445 hours on Day 1 the Foundationist convoy passed along this route (see map), and was spotted by a winged one soaring over the cliffs. When the Foundationists saw it they shot it out of the sky; the gunshots alerted the rest of the flock which arrived too late to save their companion.

The winged ones are currently hoping the killers show up again, so that they can exact a bloody revenge.

When the PCs appear the winged ones will assume they are the same group that killed their companion and will attack. When this happens read the following:

Up ahead you see a dead body, apparently some kind of mutated crossbreed between man and vulture. The body, badly broken from a fall, is a mess of blood, broken bone, and feathers. Already numerous desert beetles have begun to descend on the corpse, tearing at the eyes and burrowing into the softer areas of flesh.

As you survey the scene, the crystal clear sky overhead erupts with an ear-piercing shriek, followed by another, then another. Looking up you see more of

the deformed feathery creatures soaring several hundred feet overhead. As they finish their collective shriek the entire flock begins to descend as one, their limbs clutching spears, javelins, and pikes.

The winged ones start by *screeching* as they come within range of the PCs, then hover overhead to attack with their longer-hafted weapons to stay out of reach of any melee attacks from the PCs.

If more than three winged ones are killed the others fly away, perching on a nearby cliff, some hundred feet or so above the party. They then begin throwing rocks (each inflicting 1d6 points of damage due to the height) down on the group.

GM's Note: If the PCs do not come this way the winged ones eventually become impatient, thirsty for revenge. At 1900 hours on Day 1 they take to the sky hoping to find the killers of their companion from the air. They range anywhere on the map looking for signs of passerby; there is a good chance they will spot the PCs wherever they are on the map and assume they are the ones who killed their kin.

Development: If their harassment of the party proves ineffective, the winged ones attempt to parley with the PCs. If the PCs agree to talk, the winged ones angrily accuse them of killing their comrade and demand "reparations" in the form of trade goods and/or baubles. If the PCs give them at least 50 cp in "shiny goods" (anything from corium pieces to shiny bits of metal and/or plastic), or otherwise make a Diplomacy check at DC 17 to convince the winged ones they have everything mixed up, the winged ones will agree to come down from their perch and converse.

Like all inhabitants of the desert the winged ones will not trust the PCs. In addition, Tamrok and the children will be strongly against making deals with (or even talking to) the winged monsters; their tribe, like many other mountain dwellers, have many legends concerning these cruel, predatory beasts. However, the PCs can continue to parley without Tamrok's presence, in which case their diplomatic skills may earn them a potentially useful group of allies.

Now that they have bought a temporary peace, if the PCs agree to give the winged ones even more baubles (another 200 cp in goods) the winged ones may agree to do some scouting for the group. Though they aren't strong enough to carry individual PCs, the winged ones will be willing to take to the air and locate the current whereabouts of the Foundation column.

If the PCs pay the winged ones they will honor their part of the bargain and find the Foundationist convoy, return by air, and report on its current whereabouts (including heading, number of vehicles, and a general description of the column - if the PCs haven't already seen it). Once this is done they take their promised reward and fly away. They will not assist the PCs further in hunting or attacking their quarry.

☛ **Winged Ones (7):** HP 20, 15, 14, 14, 12, 12, and 12 (see page 323 of DARWIN'S WORLD 2nd Edition).

Treasure: The leader of the winged ones wears an ancient piece of jewelry (a slightly tarnished silver bracer set with

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turquoises) scavenged from the ruins of some desert town. The item might fetch a price of 150 cp due to its beauty and age.

5. DESERT CAVE (EL 6)

You've been climbing up a treacherous cliff face for a full fifteen minutes before you come to a leveling off point almost 50 feet above the canyon floor. Here, on a broad sun-baked ledge covered in sand carried by summer sand storms, sits a small natural cave. The cool shadows within seem a welcome respite from the bitter heat of the day.

Some of the children prepare to enter the cave, their footsteps kicking up puffs of dust that drift slowly away in the breeze.

Unbeknownst to the tribals this cave is already inhabited, by a terrible predatory creature known as a "dust devil". The creature is currently awake, but resting deep inside the cave to avoid the brutal effects of the summer heat. When the war party arrives it will prepare to defend its lair, charging out and hopefully taking the group by surprise.

Dust Devil (1): HP 39. See *New Creatures* at the end of this module.

Treasure: Inside its cave the dust devil keeps a small amount of treasure gleaned from the numerous tribals it has killed over the years. This treasure includes jewelry and other items (such as torcs and decorative armbands) made from hammered copper; all told these items would fetch a total price of 250 cp in a tribal community (including Tamrok's).

6. ESCAPEE

This encounter only occurs after the Foundation convoy has passed this spot (presumably at approximately 0900 hours on Day 2), and if the convoy has at least one slave truck remaining.

Tamrok and the other children stop dead in their tracks as a figure emerges into sight. Stumbling out from behind the boulders along the canyon wall comes a weak-looking man, bloody, bruised, and malnourished. Covered in the tattoos of a tribal warrior, he stumbles on bare bloody feet, his arms outstretched as he rushes forward.

The man proves to be one of Tamrok's kin, a tribal warrior thought "killed" in the recent visit by the Taker of Souls. At first Tamrok and the other children are confused and scared, until at last the old warrior speaks:

"Tamrok," he says between weak, injured breaths, "Do not be afraid. I have come back from the dead. I have escaped the Taker of Souls! The others, their souls continue on to the place of eternal torment. I heard... I heard the demons laughing...mocking our people and speaking freely of the tortures they will face...they call it... 're-education'...Their leader, he is the worst...a creature whose body seems made of metal, with a sword made of the most brilliant fire...so hot...so bright, that to look at it blinds the eyes...Your uncle is with them, with the others..."



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The children are shaken, suffering a -2 to Morale. Tamrok remains committed, however, and leads what warriors remain away from the escapee and after the convoy.

The escapee, believing himself dead, wanders off into the wilderness.

7. CANYON GROVE (EL 6)

Climbing to the top of this cliff you gaze down the other side into what appears to be a deep, narrow gorge, lushly vegetated. Tamrok looks as surprised as you when he sees the tall ferns, palm fronds, and fully-grown trees living in abundance in this forgotten crevasse, all but concealing the valley floor in a rich canopy of leaves. Apparently the right combination of factors keep this place well supplied with mountain runoff and out of the withering sun.

On the far side of the gorge you see a pass leading out the other side, continuing west.

The PCs have stumbled across a small forested gorge in which all manner of vegetation has managed to survive despite the withering elements. Mountain streams manage to provide just enough water here to sustain a veritable forest of trees and mutated flora.

Getting to the other side of the gorge will require descending into the forest and getting through on foot. At the east end of the gorge the PCs will need rope to descend the 30 feet to the valley floor (they can also try climbing, though the DC is 17).

Once the PCs descend into the valley they find various trees, plants, and other holdouts, including strange mutated varieties of plants. Tamrok and the children are amazed, and spend several minutes marveling at the hidden bounty. It is forested enough that the PCs will need machetes (or something similar) to hack their way through the undergrowth.

A successful Search check (DC 15) uncovers several fruit-bearing trees ("pongo trees") at the heart of the forgotten grove. There are 1d4 of these trees, each currently bearing 2d8 edible, moisture-rich fruit (each *pongo fruit*, if eaten, provides as much nutrition as a full liter of water). If these remarkable fruits are discovered, Tamrok and the children will certainly stop to gather them.

Unfortunately the fruit trees are situated in the vicinity of a *desert anemone*, a gnarled and knobby specimen that has stood here for many years. When it senses the presence of living creatures nearby the desert anemone will attack. It will try to grapple and swallow the easiest prey (probably a child warrior) whole and digest him.

☛ **Desert Anemone (1):** HP 60 (see page 289 of DARWIN'S WORLD 2nd Edition).

GM's Note: The west end of the gorge ends in a shallow pass that leads up and out over a craggy but navigable slope. The PCs can navigate this by foot (unlike the east end, which requires rope).

8. ABANDONED VILLAGE

Up ahead the gorge widens, flanked along the north and south by towering cliffs of striated rock. Lying on the smooth sandy floor of the gorge is what appears to be an old village, long deserted. Stucco huts and other sun-baked buildings stand as lifeless reminders of an even older people that once inhabited these mountains.

Tamrok stands beside you and gives the village a long cautious look. "The elders say this was once a village of people like our own. Legends say the entire tribe vanished in one night when the Taker of Souls passed through."

A powerful wind blows through the canyon, echoing with an empty sound through the shells of old huts and shacks.

Though this former tribal community was destroyed (and looted) long ago, it is still ideal as a place to set an ambush along the Foundation convoy's route. A search of the ruins uncovers nothing of use.

If the PCs arrive here *before* the convoy (any time before 1210 hours on Day 2) they can use the old village buildings to hide in and set up positions. The accompanying map shows the general layout of the old village and gives information on the bonus PCs will get from hiding within (it also shows the course of the convoy as it passes through).

If the PCs arrive at exactly the *same time* as the convoy (at roughly 1210 hours on Day 2), assume the Foundationists are passing through the village when the PCs show up. If forced to stay and fight, the Foundationists can just as easily use the old stucco huts for cover!

If the PCs arrive *after* the convoy passes through (any time after 1220 hours on Day 2) they merely find a deserted village.

9. WRONG TURN

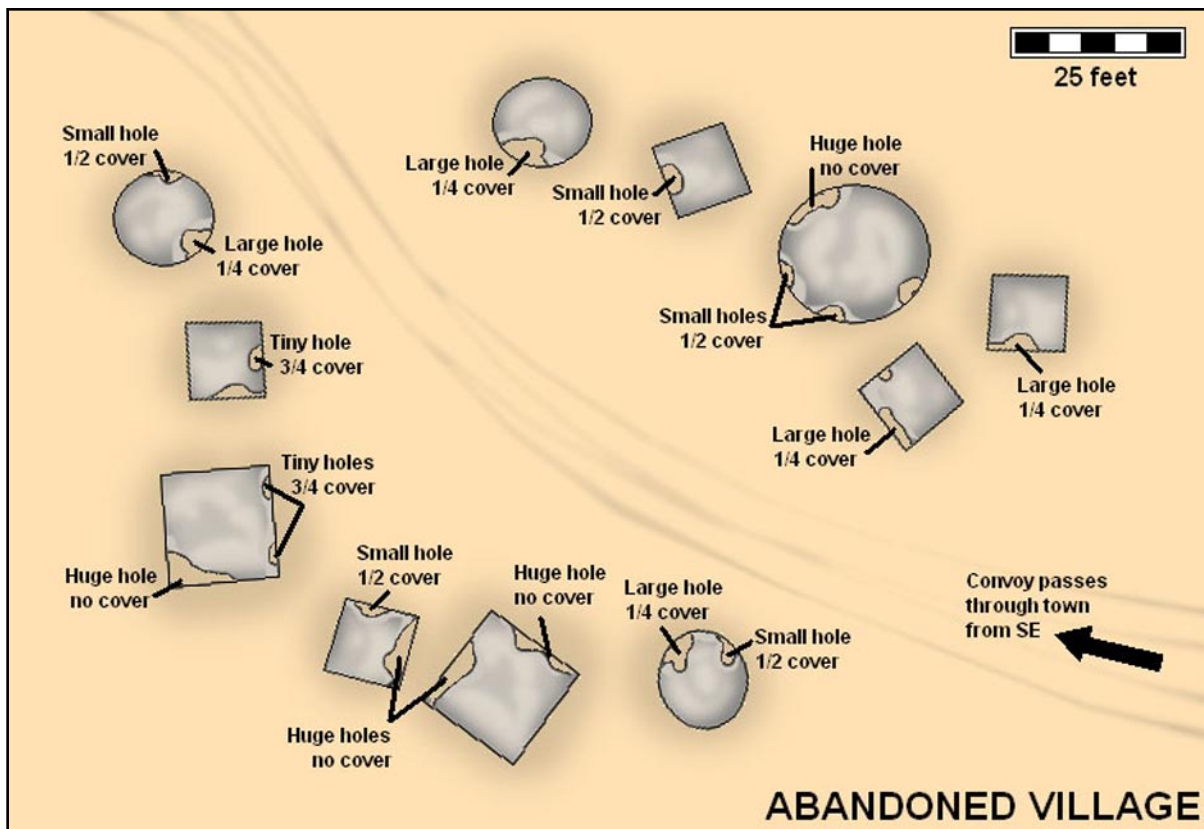
At 1500 hours on Day 2 the Foundationists make a costly error. The driver of Tagos' command car accidentally makes a wrong turn at this juncture, mistaking this branch in the labyrinthine canyon network for the turn off leading back towards Fort Avernus. In reality his mistake leads the entire column down a dead-end gorge that costs the convoy almost 16 hours.

At 1700 hours the Foundationists realize their error when they come to the dead end at the far side of the canyon. At this point the column grinds to a halt as Tagos and Lon break out their maps and begin discussing what went wrong.

At 1800 hours Tagos finally realizes the mistake made by his driver. However due to the setting of the sun he takes this opportunity to let his steaming trucks cool down and give his men some rest. He decides to set up camp here until the next morning.

This event gives the PCs a chance to make up for lost time, since the Foundationists must backtrack to make up for their mistake. In addition, if the PCs catch up to the Foundationist convoy while they are camped here they

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have an opportunity to attack them when they can't easily escape. Cornered at the far end of the canyon they will still try to flee, but the PCs may have a better chance of crippling one or more trucks before they get away.

GM's Note: The convoy moves out again at 0500 hours the next morning. At 0700 hours they make it back to the main canyon and continue north, getting back on track.

10. OIL SLICK

This encounter only occurs after the Foundationist convoy has passed this point. In addition the encounter assumes there is at least one Foundationist vehicle remaining in the convoy at 0845 hours on Day 3. If the Foundationists have lost all of their vehicles before this time (unlikely, but possible) this encounter does not occur. Likewise if the convoy hasn't yet reached this spot, this encounter does not occur.

Coming down the canyon you see the sandy bottom has been disturbed by deep ruts. Obviously your enemy has passed through this stretch of canyon not long ago.

Tamrok and the remaining children notice the tracks and continue jogging along, with a renewed sense of hope now that the trail is fresh. You, however, notice something that makes you stop.

There, between the tracks left by the Taker of Souls, you see a long black smudge. Even a cursory look reveals what appears to be a trail of oil, staining the soil beneath where the Taker of Souls must have passed.

By the time the Foundationist convoy reaches this point at 0845 hours on Day 3 one of the slave trucks has sprung a catastrophic leak (this can either be due to damage caused by the PCs in previous encounters or as a product of sheer bad luck). The Foundationists remain unaware of the leak until 1000 hours, at which time they begin to worry, but continue hoping to get as far as possible before being forced to make repairs.

At 1100 hours Brother Tagos orders the remaining vehicles in the convoy to stop (see *Encounter 11*) so that the leaking truck can be repaired.

GM's Note: At this spot (*Encounter 10*) the PCs merely find evidence of the oil leak. Any character with at least one rank in Repair will realize that the Foundationists will be forced to stop soon, perhaps within two or three hours. This will give the PCs the opportunity to catch up (if they are so inclined) while the enemy makes repairs.

11. EMERGENCY REPAIRS

This encounter only occurs if the Foundationists have at least one vehicle remaining. See *Encounter 10* for details.

At 1100 hours the Foundationist convoy grinds to a halt at this spot as the damaged slave truck breaks down. Enraged but unable to do anything about it, Brother Tagos (assuming he is alive; otherwise Lon or another Foundationist) orders the convoy to stop while the damage is assessed.

At 1130 hours the Foundationists begin repairs on the damaged vehicle. Tagos orders his men to take up positions as in *Illustration B* until the repairs can be finished.

The repairs last all night, and unless the PCs mount

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another attack while they are stalled, the vehicle is fixed at 0400 hours the next morning (Day 5). At 0500 hours Tagos orders his men to move out, and the convoy moves on.

GM's Note: From this point on the Foundationist convoy moves at a reduced speed (see map), with all remaining vehicles keeping pace with the damaged truck. Tagos' tactics (including driving away to escape) remain; only the distance the convoy on the *strategic map* changes.

Attacking The Convoy: If the PCs attack the convoy while it is being repaired, use the standard guidelines for encounters (see *First Encounter*, etc.). Tagos will try to flee if possible, abandoning the damaged truck if necessary.

12. ANCIENT BRIDGE

The canyons roar with the sound of the wind. Up ahead you hear a loud creaking and groan. Turning the bend along the canyon floor you are confronted by a curious sight.

There, crossing a shallow but broad dry riverbed, is an old bridge, completely rusted over. Though dilapidated, it looks sturdy enough for the largest truck to pass over.

The bridge is an Ancient-era bridge that once crossed a small river. Though the river dried up long ago, the bridge remains as the most likely crossing point over its dry bed.

The Foundationists at Fort Avernus use this bridge regularly on their slave-gathering raids. They will not think twice to use it on their return (the only alternative is to drive down into the riverbed and out the other side, and risk sinking into the soft sand).

GM's Note: Clever PCs may think of either setting up an ambush here or, alternatively, sabotaging the bridge. If the bridge is taken out and the Foundationists notice beforehand (when they arrive at 0830 hours on Day 4), they will be forced to stop and try to navigate the gulch.

If the Foundationists are forced to navigate the gulch the vehicles will only be able to move at a rate of 10 feet per round while crossing. They will cross one at a time. Roll the dice secretly each time a vehicle crosses, to build suspense; however, only the *supply truck* will actually become stuck. The Foundationists will abandon the vehicle (including its contents) and board other vehicles before proceeding.

If the PCs have already captured the supply truck, none of the vehicles will get stuck.

Development: If the PCs blow the bridge or otherwise sabotage it, it may be possible to cripple one of the trucks or other vehicles as it passes over. Either cars (or the motorcycle) may be destroyed. If a truck is indicated as being destroyed, assume the specific vehicle was the supply truck, unless the PCs have already captured it. In this case the vehicle that gets destroyed or crippled will be one of the slave trucks.

13. DEVASTATED RUIN

From 1300 to 1500 hours on Day 4 the remnants of the Foundation convoy limp their way through the ruins of the former town of Ione, located in the foothills of the Sulfur Peaks. If the PCs arrive early they will find abundant opportunity to mount an effective ambush as the column snakes its way through the rubble towards Fort Avernus, situated on the far side of the valley on a massive promontory of solid rock.

The mountain road you've been following opens up into a small valley ringed with high peaks. There in the center of the valley you see what appears to be the ruin of a large town, blasted and wrecked. The skeletal shapes of old buildings and storefronts stand as a mute reminder of the chaos and anarchy that swept the world during the last days of mankind's reign on earth. Having been destroyed by riots or some other calamity, all that remains of this ancient town are a few streets congested with the disintegrating remnants of cars and a maze of two and three story buildings of stone and rusted steel.

Tamrok and the other members of his tribe merely stare in awe, gazing at a sight none of their primitive eyes have ever seen before.

"This must be the way...a graveyard of the Ancients... and beyond, the gates to Hell itself..."

The town itself is almost totally destroyed; the only route through the ruins navigable by vehicles is marked on the map. All other roads are either blocked by collapsed rubble or by pileups of rusted, abandoned cars. In any event the Foundationists will follow this route as it offers the least chance of obstruction and/or encounters with potential creatures dwelling in the old town.

If the PCs arrive here before the Foundationists (before 1300 hours on Day 4) they can potentially set up an ambush anywhere. There are two- and three story buildings that could provide excellent vantage points and/or crossfire setups, as well as garbage heaps, ruined cars, and other structures (of virtually every junk material imaginable) to hide in and wait.

As GM you should work with the characters to set up an ambush situation to their liking, through cover should only vary from one-quarter (the ruins of brick walls, stacks of oil drums, etc.) to one-half (firing from an upper story window).

At 1300 hours the Foundation remnants enter the ruins from the east. They drive (or, if lacking vehicles, walk cautiously) along the indicated route hoping to make it to Fort Avernus before nightfall.

GM's Note: If the PCs have already had two or more encounters with the Foundationists, Tagos will use the ruins to his advantage in plotting a final demise for his pursuers. If he arrived before the PCs show up he makes one final mistake - instead of fleeing he orders his remaining men to set up a decisive ambush to hopefully crush the PCs when they arrive in the ruins.

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Set up the encounter to suit Tagos' understanding of the PCs' tactics, and to make use of what remaining men and materiel he has left. In general he will place two or three men in upper-story windows to serve as lookouts and snipers, while the remainder of his force will wait in hiding within ground floor buildings and storefronts. He may even arrange for any remaining cars in the convoy to be carefully driven into hollow storefronts, so that they can emerge from hiding to surprise the PCs with machinegun fire at close range.

If Tagos arrives late and is ambushed (and assuming this is their third or succeeding encounter with Tagos), he still attempts to make this a decisive battle. He will try to adapt to the situation by dispersing his men to protective cover (away from snipers), and sending Lon (if alive) with a handful of men to root out the PCs one by one. He will join the remaining men in a similar sweep for the PCs, hoping to trap them between his soldiers and Lon's. The convoy vehicles will remain put - most likely in the middle of the street - firing at anything and everything not wearing Foundation colors.

14. FORT AVERNUS

There, overlooking the valley from a tall promontory of rock, is what you can only surmise to be the alleged "gate to Hell" - a mighty fortress of bleached stone, its ramparts as smooth as cliff faces as they soar up into the sky. The sky is already turning to twilight, wreathing the silhouette of the monstrous citadel in the fiery colors of the setting sun. Eerie red lights burn deep within the fortress, the hellish glow emanating from the massive front portal that even now is opening slowly like the maw of some unearthly creature of colossal size.

If all goes well for Tagos and his expedition they will arrive under the shadow of Fort Avernus at 1900 hours on Day 4. If they have made it this far, they quickly drive (or run) into Fort Avernus and to safety. If the PCs don't act quickly, they have failed!

If the PCs attempt to pursue Tagos or try to cut him down before he reaches the security of Avernus, they have only two rounds to do so. On the third round the defenders within the fortress respond to protect their own. Two of the laser batteries on the fortress open fire at the tribals, hoping to scatter them (or at least scare them off). Each of these laser turrets contain a single *laser cannon* (firing once per round with a +3 attack bonus).

In addition, the garrison commander sends out a single *Reaver* helicopter to harass the war party to buy Tagos (and any remaining Foundationists) some time to get inside the fort. The *Reaver* will attack the party by laying down a hail of fire with its *M214 Minigun*; if the party takes cover (behind boulders, for example), it instead uses its *Hydra 70* (with *M261 rockets*) to root them out.

The statistics for the *Reaver* are found in *The Foundationists*. If you do not have this sourcebook

substitute a *UH-60 Blackhawk* (with identical armament) instead.

GM's Note: The PCs should be made to realize that once Tagos reaches the fort, their pursuit is at an end whether they like it or not. Even Tamrok (if alive) will realize that they are too late to stop the Taker of Souls. The fort itself is impenetrable, and a large force of Foundationists move to the "gatehouse" in case the PCs try to enter (this force should use the same statistics as the Foundation Thralls, but there should be enough of them present to dissuade a frontal attack). The laser batteries have the potential to kill characters of this level in one hit; as such describe each miss as a near-miss, going into detail about the size of the crater each blast makes on the pitted, barren landscape (you may even want to roll the damage, to give the PCs an idea of what's in store for them if they don't flee now).

If the PCs don't get the message, two rounds before the *Reaver* arrives describe to them a strange "chopping" sound emanating from the fort. One round before it arrives, the PCs will see the heavily-armed and armored chopper rise up from behind the walls and make a circuit of the landscape before finally arriving. Make sure to point out that the characters see a minigun and rocket launcher mounted on this flying "machine of death".

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE CONVOY

Each time the PCs manage to catch up with the convoy the actions of the Foundationists will change, as they come to realize they are in fact being pursued by a vengeful band of tribals. The following section gives a few guidelines on how to run each encounter, including NPC reactions, tactics, and special rules for each encounter.

FIRST ENCOUNTER (EL 4)

In their first encounter with the tribal war party the Foundationists are likely to be taken off guard; after all they don't expect such an audacious attack following their recent crippling raid on Tamrok's village.

ON THE MOVE

If the PCs catch up to the convoy while it is on the move, they will see the convoy for the first time in all its glory:

The sky up ahead is choked with a cloud of dust, kicked up by what you can only assume to be the tribals' alleged "demon caravan" and its so-called "Taker of Souls". Taking up concealed positions you peer over rocks and across the canyon floor, hoping to catch for yourself a glimpse of the legendary "Evil Ones".

There, snaking its way through the sand and dust at a snail's pace is a convoy of rusted vehicles, including several cars, a motorcycle, and a trio of heavily armored trucks. All of the vehicles seem modified to drive off-road, but even with heavy solid tires and high suspensions they appear to be laboring on the soft sand.

Strange blue symbols can be seen painted on the

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations A and B indicate how the Foundationists set up when camping. Each circle indicates a Foundationist (including Tagos and Lon). The numbers indicate the placement of the 20 initial thralls.

If the PCs have killed any thralls, remove the highest numbered positions first. For example, if the PCs have killed three Foundationists, positions 20, 19, and 18 will not be present. Notice that this way Tagos and Lon will always be surrounded by allies (unless all thralls have been killed, of course).

Illustration A marks the positions for the first encounter, when the Foundationists aren't expecting an attack and are comfortably dispersed.

Illustration B marks the positions for the second encounter; the Foundationists anticipate a second attack, and are prepared.

Illustration C shows how the convoy looks when on the move.

These illustrations are, of course, merely typical setup scenarios, and should be modified by the GM if the circumstances dictate a different strategy would be more logical.

sides of trucks and cars. From open hatches, as well as manning machinegun cupolas on the trucks, can be seen several men clad in all-white armor, their faces concealed by eerie dust masks with reflective mirror lenses.

The sides of the trucks are pierced with small barred windows, just enough to allow the occupants inside to breathe in the terrific heat. From inside you hear weak cries, and between the bars bloody and bruised arms jut out as if begging for release. Every now and again one of the men in white armor, walking steadily along the top of the truck, reaches down and whips them, forcing them back into their mobile "cage".

These, you surmise, are the demons that took Tamrok's people!

Illustration C depicts the setup of the convoy at any given time. In the lead is Tagos' command car, followed by the first of the three slave trucks (the so-called "Taker of Souls"). A motorcycle, used exclusively to scout up and down the mountain trail, runs parallel to the trucks when not being sent ahead. Finally, in the rear is another car, guarding the rear of the convoy. *Illustration C* also shows how the Foundation troops are distributed among these vehicles.

If the PCs attack they automatically take the Foundationist convoy by surprise. Keep in mind that only the motorcycle sentry and truck gunners are exposed; the rest are inside their vehicles.

Once the battle starts the Foundationists will continue driving. Gunners will open fire to pick off attackers if possible, but none of the vehicles will stop.

Assume that the PCs have 2d4 rounds before the convoy rounds a bend or otherwise drives out of range. Once they get away, the PCs will have to catch them somewhere else.

CAMPING

If the Foundationists are camping (from 2100 hours to 0500 hours) the PCs have a good chance of catching them in a more vulnerable position - on foot.

Replace the description above ("On The Move") with the following:

The darkness up ahead is broken by the glow of small campfires. Taking cover, you peer over rocks to see a strange sight on the valley floor.

There, bathed in the glow of cooking fires, are a number of heavily armored trucks, cars, and even a motorcycle, painted white with strange blue symbols. A large group of humanoids - which you assume to be men - lounge about the fires maintaining firearms and engaging in rowdy conversations. Even from your concealed positions you can hear their cruel, rolling laughter, sending chills down your spines.

Tamrok and the other children look terrified, staring at the assembly with wide eyes. These are the "Evil Ones" that took their people - and instead of one Taker of Souls, there are three!

In game terms only roll Spot and Listen checks for the two outermost sentries (see *Illustration A*), since the rest of the Foundationist party isn't anticipating an attack and will be camping. If the PCs can bypass these guards it is highly probable that the PCs will be able to ambush the rest of the Foundation force without tipping them off first.

Assuming the PCs take them by surprise, the Foundationists will attempt to flee as soon as possible to regroup and figure out a plan of action. For the time being they are confused, and so will try to get away. As such the PCs have the best chance of causing casualties in the first few rounds of fighting, before the Foundationists get away.

After 1d2+1 rounds the Foundationists will make a fighting retreat to their vehicles, boarding up and preparing to leave. On the following round the vehicles begin to move away from the scene, and by the next round they are gone. Once they get away, the PCs will have to catch them somewhere else.

Once the convoy is on the move again they continue on the trail, moving for three more hours before setting up camp again. If the PCs follow they may be able to attack again. Note, however, that this will require the GM to adjust the timetable to reflect the additional distance covered by the convoy after the attack.

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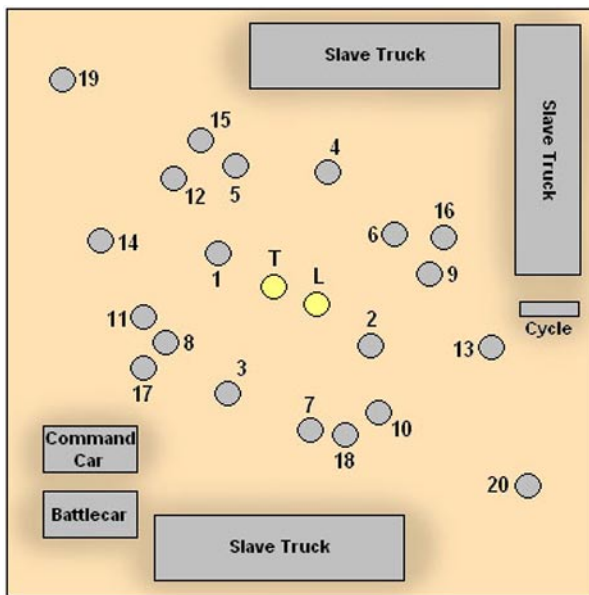


Illustration A

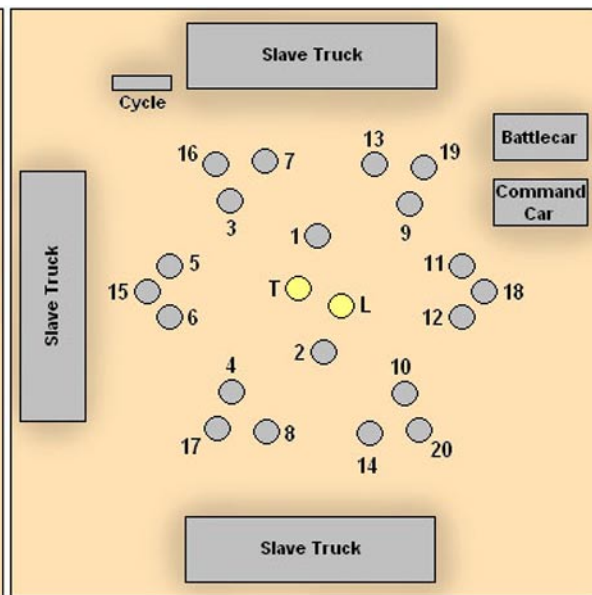


Illustration B

Note: Keep in mind that if the PCs attack at night, they will catch all but the two sentries on duty without their armor.

KILLING A FOUNDATIONIST

Though affecting Foundationist morale, killing one of the gunners does nothing for the party since the corpse will still be inside the vehicle, and will drop nothing for them to pick up later. Killing the motorcyclist will cause him to crash, giving the PCs a damaged motorcycle as well as any equipment. Read the following if they accomplish this task:

You run up to the dead humanoid, somehow expecting it to get back up and continue fighting. The tribal children approach cautiously, murmuring protective prayers as they brandish their spears in an ever-tightening circle.

But the body doesn't move. Its white armor appears to be stained red in places. It isn't metal, but rather hardened leather. Finally, gathering your courage you approach and tear off its helmet, revealing its face.

The tribal children gasp, stunned. Though the face appears tough, calloused, and scarred, it is unmistakably derived from human stock. It is most definitely dead.

Tamrok stares for a few moments before speaking.

"These demons take the form of men. But at least they can be killed."

Though the PCs may know better, Tamrok and the children are convinced they are fighting a supernatural enemy. The PCs can take the weapons/armor of the dead Foundationist(s); don't forget to also adjust the tribe's morale for future battles.

CRIPPLING/DESTROYING A TRUCK

If the PCs manage to take one of the trucks out - no matter which one - the crew will abandon the vehicle and jump onto the next vehicle passing by (if there are no other vehicles, the stranded Foundationists will fight to the death).

Once a vehicle is crippled, the PCs can loot it. However, this early in the adventure the vehicle proves to be the convoy *supply truck*, not a slave truck, but the PCs net some interesting loot nonetheless.

Treasure: Inside the crippled supply truck the PCs will find a crate of six *fragmentation grenades*, a Jackhammer Mk3A1, 10 rounds of 12-gauge ammunition, an *anti-tank grenade*, and a single *M72A3 LAW*.

SECOND ENCOUNTER (EL 5)

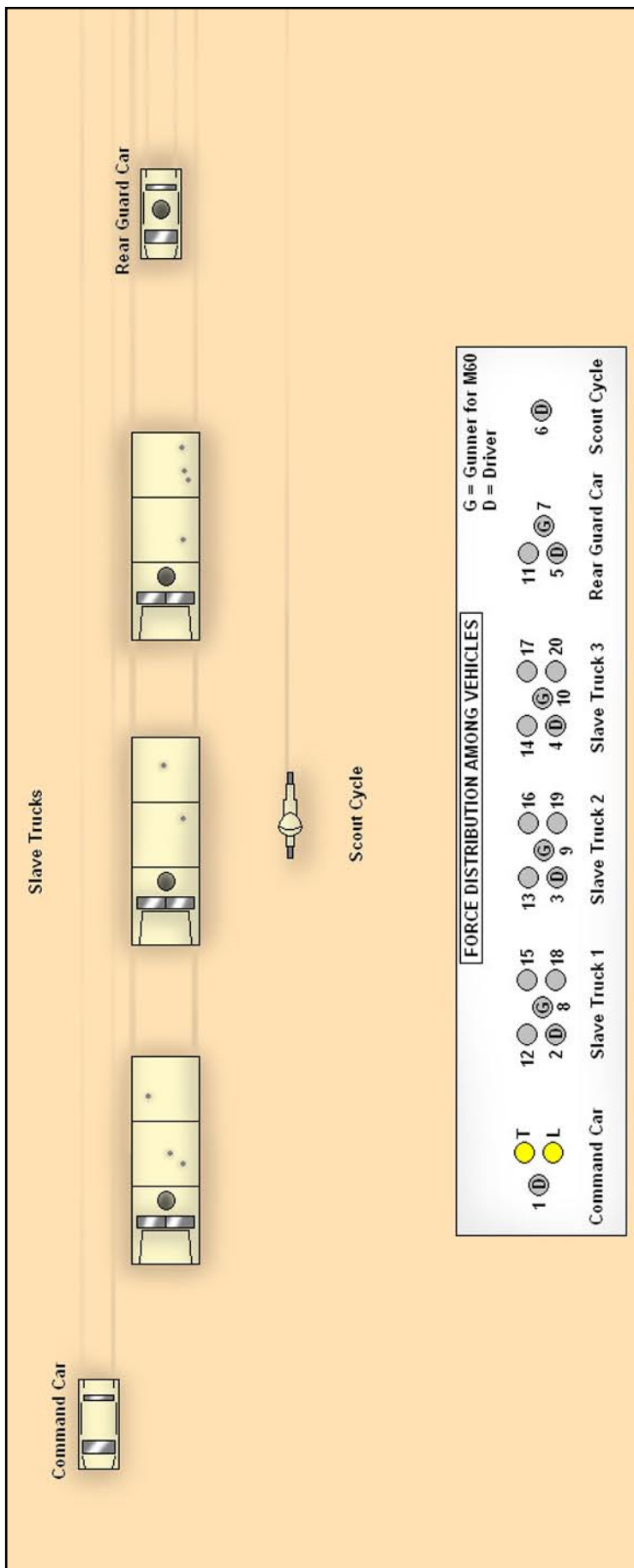
In the second encounter with the Foundationists the enemy is better prepared, but they still don't take the threat of the tribals (and PCs) all that seriously. They continue to follow standing orders to preserve ammo, and will ultimately try to get away instead of fighting a decisive encounter.

ON THE MOVE

This scenario assumes the PCs catch up to the convoy while it is on the move (or set up an ambush for when it crosses their path). At this point the Foundationists are wary of an attack, so they take a 10 on their Spot and Listen checks. If the PCs are spotted they do not hesitate to open fire to get the first hit in (the thralls are feeling a little vengeful after being caught off guard the first time around).

When battle erupts the Foundationists attack with everything they have, but remain on board their vehicles. Any gunners killed in the last encounter will be replaced by men from the Foundationist force pool (remember there are 20 thralls total), allowing them to fire at the PCs as they drive by.

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If the PCs haven't yet taken out the convoy's scout motorcycle, it will break off to attack the PCs and/or run them over to buy the rest of the convoy some time to drive away. The driver will continue these tactics until he or his vehicle are reduced to 50% hit points, at which time he will drive away and flee.

CAMPING

If the PCs manage to attack the convoy as it camps, the encounter occurs much like the one described in *First Encounter*, except now the Foundationists are a little better prepared. Both sentries take a 10 on their Spot and Listen checks; in addition, one out of every four Foundationists will be wearing his armor and will be armed and ready for action.

Once the PCs attack the camp the Foundationists stand their ground and fight for 1d4+2 rounds, making sure to keep the slave trucks at the center of their fighting defense. At the end of this time, their leader, Tagos, will sound a withdrawal. On the following round all Foundationists will get on their vehicles and pull away.

KILLING A FOUNDATIONIST

If the PCs haven't yet killed any of the Foundationists, refer to the *First Encounter* for details on Tamrok's reaction to seeing one of the "demons" slain. Otherwise killing a Foundationist has no effect except to improve the tribe's morale.

CRIPPLING/DESTROYING A TRUCK

As before if the PCs manage to take one of the trucks out the crew will abandon the vehicle and jump onto the next vehicle passing by (if there are no other vehicles, the stranded Foundationists will fight to the death).

If this is the first truck the PCs have taken it will be the convoy supply truck (see *First Encounter*). If this is the second truck, however, it will be the first slave truck, and the PCs can free some of the tribal slaves. Read the following:

As the dust settles you hear coughing and weak cries coming from the smoking hulk of the slave truck. Soot-blackened hands reach out through the bars on one side, groping at the air while their owners call pitifully for help.

Breaking the padlock and pulling the handles you open the doors to reveal a gut-wrenching scene inside. Sprawled about, one on top of the other, are almost a dozen tribal warriors, stripped naked and badly beaten. A few of them are dead, either from wounds incurred in the initial raid, from mistreatment at the hands of their captors, or from the crash.

Tamrok and the children glare in horror. Then, one by one, a child recognizes his father, erupts in tears, and cries "Papa"! A few of the children are reunited with their fathers and embrace for a few moments with tears running down both their cheeks. The rest of the children merely stare, wondering where their fathers are, or

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worse, recognize their loved ones among the dead.

Once the commotion dies down, one of the elders speaks in a solemn but hopeful tone.

"Tamrok, you have saved our souls from damnation. They planned to take us through the Gates of Hell; they spoke of it often, saying it lay beyond the mountains to the west."

Tamrok speaks. "My uncle...?"

The elders shake their heads sadly. "He was taken in the belly of the other iron beast. Even now he and the last of the warriors are being taken to the Underworld."

For a few moments Tamrok is silent, contemplating his uncle's fate. Finally he speaks, summoning all his courage. "Though you were once dead your spirits are now free. Go home and join your families - live again. Go, ancestor-spirits."

"No," they say, almost in unison, "We cannot let you go alone, boy. The Gods have already given us a second chance, an escape from our humiliation. We will not be shamed again. We will take up spears and fight with you, our chief!"

The PCs have rescued 1d10 captive tribal warriors (see *NPC Statistics*; these fighters will join the party if asked). Since the warriors already believe themselves to be "dead", they will fight with absolute fearlessness for the rest of the adventure.

THIRD ENCOUNTER (EL 7)

By the third encounter Brother Tagos realizes that there is more to the tribals' tenacity than mere primitive bravado, and recognizes the PCs in particular as the true threat to his mission. He holds the PCs responsible for the war party's relentless attacks, and considers their actions as a personal challenge, a welcome break from the typical raids he has been assigned to. He sees in the PCs a worthy group of adversaries, and by the third encounter he decides to lure the PCs into a decisive fight to test their mettle.

ON THE MOVE

If attacked for a third time while on the move Tagos orders the motorcycle (if still around) to harass and tie down the PCs. The slave trucks slow so that they can shoot at the PCs with their machineguns, but keep a respectable distance. Tagos orders his driver to bring his car around to support the motorcycle, while the rear guard car drives around, hoping to cut the PCs off - and preventing them from escaping.

Tagos will be aggressive in his tactics, encouraging his men to use their vehicles to ram and run over the members of the tribal war party. Tagos will remain in his vehicle, energetically shouting orders over the radio. Only if his vehicle is hit will he emerge to do battle.

If badly injured (brought to below 50% starting hit points) Tagos will try to flee, either by getting back into his vehicle or jumping onto a passing vehicle. He will always order any nearby men to screen his retreat.

CAMPING

Tagos and his men assume positions as in *Illustration A*, pretending to be off guard. They are fully armed and armored, using blankets to cover their bodies and bedrolls to conceal their locked and loaded weaponry.

All of the Foundationists (including Tagos and Lon) take 10 on their Spot and Listen checks, hoping to spot the PCs before they strike. As soon as they are spotted the Foundationists attack.

If the PCs get the jump on Tagos' men despite their precautions, the Foundationists still stand their ground and fight. Only if morale breaks (see *Morale*), or if Tagos loses more than 50% of his starting hit points, will he order a retreat to the vehicles - driving off.

Killing A Foundationist: If the PCs haven't yet killed any of the Foundationists, refer to the *First Encounter* for details on Tamrok's reaction to seeing one of the "demons" slain. Otherwise killing a Foundationist has no effect except to improve the tribe's morale.

Crippling/Destroying A Truck: As before if the PCs manage to take one of the trucks out the crew will abandon the vehicle and jump onto the next vehicle passing by (if there are no other vehicles, the stranded Foundationists will fight to the death).

If this is the first truck the PCs have taken it will be the convoy supply truck (see *First Encounter*). If this is the second truck, however, it will be one of the slave trucks, and the PCs can free some of the tribal slaves (see *Second Encounter*).

If the PCs manage to take out the final (third) truck, the remaining Foundationists will flee either by car (if any remain), or by foot. *If they are consigned to fleeing by foot, keep in mind that they now move as fast as the PCs (see map).*

Once the last truck is stopped the PCs can open it and rescue the last of Tamrok's people:

The doors of the last truck open and the remaining children gather to peer inside. Coughing, soot-covered, and injured men spill out, gasping for air. The children immediately rush to embrace their injured fathers. One of the men is much older than the others, with graying hair, but seems strong and defiant nonetheless. Tamrok's eyes widen as he instantly recognizes his uncle, despite the terrible injuries he has suffered.

In addition to Tamrok's uncle, there are 1d6 additional tribal warriors in the slave truck. These are the last surviving tribal warriors taken in the Foundation's raid.

If the PCs wish they can end the adventure here, as the war party has succeeded in rescuing Tamrok's people. However, they may be inclined to continue hounding the Foundationists, especially now that Tagos and the surviving thralls are on the run (see *Ending The Adventure*).

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FURTHER ENCOUNTERS

After the third encounter Tagos either succeeds or fails in eliminating the PCs. Most likely he will fail. If this is the case, and yet he somehow survives, he will try to flee back to Fort Avernus with all haste. He will do this either in a vehicle (if any remain), or by foot if necessary. All remaining Foundationists join him in this full-scale retreat.

To buy his force time Tagos will make sure the last slave truck is left behind. He believes the tribal war party will probably stop chasing him if they get what they want; though this will make the mission a total loss (and put a black mark on his record), he is no fool and knows his life is more important than a handful of pathetic slaves.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure can end in a number of ways. Ideally the war party will have saved Tamrok's uncle and the rest of the tribe's warriors before the Foundationist column reaches Fort Avernus. If this happens the tribals will want to return home (and if the PCs have gotten that far, the remaining Foundationists will most likely let them). Alternatively the PCs may want to finish Tagos off - especially if the Foundationists were shaken and executed some of the prisoners just to spite the tribals (see *Morale*). In this case the adventure continues, with the PCs pursuing Tagos and the remainder of his command on foot (or by car, if any remain).

If the war party breaks up due to low morale, the PCs may still continue on their own, hoping to catch the column and free the slaves with or without the help of the children. If this is the case you may need to adjust the description of certain encounters and events.

Assuming the PCs succeed in freeing the tribals, their return to Tamrok's tribe is met with great jubilation. In addition to a great celebration, the night is crowned by a mystical ritual in which the village shaman ritually "resurrects" each "dead warrior" - so that they can shed the "taint of undeath" and rejoin the living. For their effort the PCs are treated as heroes, and if any of the Brethren accompanied the PCs (and survived), Tamrok's uncle will honor them as well - and possibly agree to form an alliance with that faction to better prepare themselves for future encounters with the "Evil Ones".

Regardless of what deals and alliances are made, by night's end the entire tribe gathers around to listen to the characters retell the events of the quest. Though the PCs don't know it, the tribe remembers their names and commits their tale to memory. Once the PCs depart the tribals record each character as a minor "god" in their pantheon of primitive deities, never to be forgotten.

NPC STATISTICS

Below are the game statistics for the NPCs and creatures encountered in *High Road To Hell*.

TAMROK

While young (15 years old), Tamrok has something that few men possess - bravery and the unwavering strength of his convictions. Though primitive and superstitious like all tribal folk of the Sulfur Peaks, he believes he and his war party have a chance to stop the Taker of Souls and free the spirits of his uncle and the rest of the tribe's warriors.

Throughout the adventure Tamrok proves to be a leader, guiding the war party along and continuously bringing them around when morale is low. He will not shy away from a fight, and whenever possible will lead the attack with spear (or javelin) in hand to embolden the other children.

☛ **Tamrok, Post-Apocalyptic 3 (1):** CR 3; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 3d8; HP 24; Mas 8; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 14, touch 12, flatfooted 13 (+1 Dex, +1 class, +2 leather armor); BAB +2; Grap +3; Atk +3 melee (1d8+1, spear), or +3 ranged (1d6+1, javelin); Full Atk +3 melee (1d8+1, spear), or +3 ranged (1d6+1, javelin); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Wasteland Lore; AL Tribe; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0; AP 6; Rep +0; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Occupation and Background: Herdsman, Tribal.

Skills: Disguise -4, Hide +4, Jump +3, Listen +2, Move Silently +4, Navigate +5, Speak Language (Unislang), Spot +2, Survival +6.

Feats: Primitive Technology, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Track, Weapon Focus (javelin), Weapon Focus (spear).

Mutations and Defects: Extreme Resilience, Aberrant Deformity.

Possessions: Spear, 1d4+1 javelins, leather armor, one dose of juju salve (1d4+1).

CHILD WARRIORS

Tamrok's "war party" is composed solely of children, ages ranging from 8 to 15, who have picked up the weapons of their fathers and uncles in a desperate attempt to catch up to the Taker of Souls and free them. The children believe the player characters have been sent by the "Gods of Light" to assist them, but their dedication is not as unwavering as Tamrok's. As more and more of their number are killed off they begin pleading with Tamrok to return home, breaking down, crying, etc.. They are, after all, merely children.

☛ **Child Warriors, Post-Apocalyptic 1 (8):** CR 1; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 1d8-1; HP 3 each; Mas 8; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 12, touch 12, flatfooted 11 (+1 Dex, +1 class); BAB +0; Grap +0; Atk +0 melee (1d8, spear), or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); Full Atk +0 melee (1d8, spear), or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Wasteland Lore; AL Tribe; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 7.

Occupation and Background: Herdsman, Tribal.

Skills: Disguise -7, Hide +4, Jump +2, Listen +2, Move Silently +4, Navigate +1, Speak Language (Unislang), Spot

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+2, Survival +2.

Feats: Primitive Technology, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Track.

Mutations and Defects: Extreme Resilience, Aberrant Deformity.

Possessions: Spear, 1d4 javelins.

TRIBAL WARRIORS

The tribal warriors of Tamrok's village all believe themselves to be "dead"

- custom dictates that to avoid the unbearable shame of defeat, the only escape from failure is death. As such they have themselves convinced they were "killed" in the battle with the Foundation.

When first encountered (and rescued) the tribal warriors act as if emerging from a trance, followed by a period of elation. They truly believe they have been freed from the hands of demons, and become fearless fighters.

☛ **Tribal Warriors, Post-Apocalyptic 3 (10+):** CR 3; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 3d8+2; HP 15 each; Mas 14; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 14, touch 12, flatfooted 13 (+1 Dex, +1 class, +2 leather armor); BAB +2; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d8+2, spear), or +3 ranged (1d6+2, javelin); Full Atk +4 melee (1d8+2, spear), or +3 ranged (1d6+2, javelin); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Wasteland Lore; AL Tribe; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Occupation and Background: Herdsman, Tribal.

Skills: Disguise -6, Craft (any) +1, Hide +2, Jump +4, Listen +3, Move Silently +2, Navigate +6, Speak Language (Unislang), Spot +3, Survival +6.

Feats: Primitive Technology, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Track, Weapon Focus (javelin), Weapon Focus (spear).

Mutations and Defects: Extreme Resilience, Aberrant Deformity.

Possessions: None (will arm themselves with spears and javelins as soon as possible).

BRETHREN

The Brethren have sent small cells of their followers to the Sulfur Peaks in an ongoing campaign to infiltrate the mountain tribes and prepare them for all-out war against the Foundation. The Brethren have by and large met with a great degree of success in this endeavor, as the tribes of the mountains have little love for the Foundation, its "evil" technology, and their long history of slavery and racism.

The small Brethren cell near Tamrok's village are currently moving between tribal villages, hoping to raise support for a war. When Tamrok and the children explain their story they see this as a chance to make lasting allies of Tamrok's tribe. As such the Brethren will fight to the death (for the sake of their faction's honor).

PACK TACTICS (NEW FEAT)

When fighting opponents you make the most of your superior numbers to confuse and distract your enemy, allowing you to hit more easily.

Prerequisite: Bluff 4 ranks.

Benefit: Whenever you and another person with this feat flank an opponent you gain a flanking bonus of +4 against that target.

Normal: Normally when flanking an opponent you only gain a +2 bonus to your attack roll.

☛ **Brethren, Strong 1 (6):** HP 12, 10, 10, 10, 10, and 8; Mas 13; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+2 Dex, +1 class, +2 leather armor); BAB +1; Grap +3; Atk +3 melee (1d8+3, spear); Full Atk +3 melee (1d8+3, spear); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Melee Smash; AL Brethren; SV Fort +2 (+6 chemical, poisons, drugs, and diseases), Ref +2, Will +1; AP 5; Rep +0; Str 15, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Occupation and Background: Demagogue, Tribal.

Skills: Bluff +3, Climb +4, Jump +4, Knowledge (tactics) +2, Listen +2, Speak Language (Unislang).

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), *Pack Tactics**, Post Apocalyptic Technology, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Toughness.

Mutations and Defects: Accumulated Resistance, Albinism.

Possessions: Spear, leather armor, filthy robes.

CONVOY VEHICLES

The Foundation convoy is made up of one *battle hummer* (Tagos' command car), one *battle car* (the rear guard), one *Yamaha YZ250F dirt bike*, and three *heavy movers*. One of the cars and all of the trucks have each been modified to mount an *M60 machinegun* in a ring mount on the roof. These require one man to operate, but from this position the "gunner" can fire in a full 360 degree arc. Gunners manning these weapons have 50% cover (they can go back inside as a move action, getting normal cover for being inside a vehicle of that type).

Except for the dirt bike the stats for these vehicles are to be found in *The Foundationists*. If you do not have this sourcebook substitute the *battle hummer* with an *AM General Hummer*, the *battle car* with a *Ford Crown Victoria*, and the *heavy movers* with *moving trucks*.

GM's Note: Since none of the Foundationists (including Lon and Tagos) have the requisite feat to use the *M60 machineguns*, they attack with these weapons with a -4 penalty.

☛ **Battle Hummer (1):** HP 40.

☛ **Battle Car (1):** HP 36.

☛ **Yamaha YZ250F (1):** HP 18.

☛ **Heavy Movers (3):** HP 50 each.

FOUNDATION THRALLS

Remarkably the Foundation force is mostly made up of “thralls”, former tribals and slaves who have spent an average of 10 years in the service. Seasoned from years of fighting and completely re-educated as loyal soldiers of the Foundation, none of these men resembles (or remembers) the tribal he once was, bearing the weapons and armor of a Foundation soldier with newfound pride and purpose.

These men are particularly cruel to tribals and other primitives, whom they view as an embarrassment, a reminder of how backwards they once were. Aching from the daily prejudices and slurs spoken against them by their more civilized masters (including Brother Tagos), these soldiers all resent their origins and take it out on their prisoners through sadistic beatings and near-constant taunting and humiliation. The tribal captives will find no allies or sympathizers among these thugs.

❖ **Foundation Thralls, Post-Apocalyptic 2 (20):** CR 2; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 2d8+4; HP 13 each; Mas 15; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 19, touch 13, flatfooted 17 (+4 natural, +2 Dex, +1 class, +2 equipment); BAB +1; Grap +2; Atk +3 ranged (2d8, Jackhammer Mk3A1), or +2 melee (1d6+1, rifle butt); Full Atk +3 ranged (2d8, Jackhammer Mk3A1), or +2 melee (1d6+1, rifle butt); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Technologist; AL Foundation; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +0; AP 1; Rep +0; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Occupation and Background: Military, Resurrector.

Skills: Computer Use +2, Drive +4, Knowledge (ancient lore) +3, Knowledge (tactics) +4, Knowledge (technology) +5, Navigate +2, Read/Write (Ancient, Gutter Talk, Unislang), Repair +5, Search +2, Speak Language (Ancient, Gutter Talk, Unislang), Spot +1, Survival +3.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Post-Apocalyptic Technology, Rigorous Training.

Mutations and Defects: Protective Dermal Development, Negative Chemical Reaction.

Possessions: Jackhammer Mk3A1, 20 rounds of 12-gauge ammunition, dust mask, flash goggles, web belt, light rod, two juju potions (1d4+4), leather armor, multipurpose tool.

LON, FOUNDATION TRUSTED

Lon is Tagos’ “second-in-command”, a member of the ranks of the “trusted”. Lon is older than Tagos, having spent 20 years serving the Foundation as a soldier, first as a thrall in the Brethren War and later earning his “trusted” position (and reputation) in the ill-fated Necropolis expedition of 2263.

Lon is generally quiet, allowing his reputation and fearsome appearance to do much of his talking. However, when forced to he distributes discipline quickly and decisively. Dealing with the force’s thralls as a kind of “sergeant” and “liaison” for Tagos, he knows that brutal methods are required to maintain order when things get

rough.

Though he spent numerous years as a thug himself, Lon is getting on in years and as such has changed and matured considerably. This doesn’t make him weak, but rather experienced and savvy. He still has something of the tribal in him, but he is utterly loyal to the Foundation and Tagos. Still he knows much of tribal ways and may be the only one in the group to really anticipate the war party’s moves and motivations. While at first the arrogant Tagos will probably ignore Lon’s suggestions and tactical advice, as he is proven right time and again Tagos will begin to listen to his sergeant more often in the heat of battle. When Lon’s knowledge of tribal tactics (including the Brethren warriors’ use of the *Pack Tactics* feat) is finally taken into account, the PCs have a harder time in store.

Lon resembles a bald hulking brute in buff-colored armor, with a wide stripe of red pigment painted vertically down his face.

It is possible that if Tagos is killed (leaving Lon in command) Lon may seek to make peace with the PCs to save his comrades. Knowing why the tribals are attacking, Lon will release the prisoners in the trucks and lead his force away. Once Tagos is dead he doesn’t care about the prisoners; his only concern is making it back to Avernus and avoiding falling into the hands of enraged tribal enemies!

❖ **Lon, Post-Apocalyptic 4 (1):** CR 4; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 4d8+12; HP 29; Mas 16; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 20, touch 14, flatfooted 18 (+4 natural, +2 Dex, +2 class, +2 equipment); BAB +3; Grap +4; Atk +6 ranged (2d8, Jackhammer Mk3A1), or +4 melee (1d6+1, rifle butt); Full Atk +6 ranged (2d8, Jackhammer Mk3A1), or +4 melee (1d6+1, rifle butt); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Historian, Technologist; AL Foundation; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +1; AP 2; Rep +1; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Occupation and Background: Military, Resurrector.

Skills: Computer Use +3, Drive +5, Knowledge (ancient lore) +8, Knowledge (tactics) +5, Knowledge (technology) +8, Navigate +3, Read/Write (Ancient, Gutter Talk, Unislang), Repair +5, Search +3, Speak Language (Ancient, Gutter Talk, Unislang), Spot +2, Survival +5.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Double Tap, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Post-Apocalyptic Technology, Rigorous Training, Weapon Focus (M4 Carbine).

Mutations and Defects: Protective Dermal Development, Negative Chemical Reaction.

Possessions: Jackhammer Mk3A1, 30 rounds of 12-gauge ammunition, dust mask, flash goggles, web belt, light rod, two juju potions (1d4+4), survival kit, leather armor, multipurpose tool.

BROTHER TAGOS, FOUNDATION BROTHER

Young and handsome, Tagos is a dangerous kind of man. This is his first command, and he arrogantly wants to prove himself.

HIGH ROAD TO HELL

Born with a native Foundationist's culture, bearing, and arrogance, Tagos believes he is an inheritor of the Foundation's legacy and birthright to lead the effort to rebuild civilization. Few people embody this powerful belief more than Tagos; though only 22, he was an excellent student of war, and he has lustfully pursued his assignment to the 5th Army as a chance to make a name for himself and rise like a rocket through the ranks. He is not content with merely being a "brother"; he hopes his trial period here in the mountains is short, and plans to make *squire*, *knight*, and eventually *paladin* before he turns 25.

Though he expertly hides it from scrutiny, Tagos is secretly afraid to be out in the field without another civilized Foundationist to help keep the thralls in line; he views them with disdain like a pack of barely-controllable jackals. In fact Tagos sees the entire mission as if it was some 19th century hunting expedition, with himself as the big game hunter and the rest of his force as "native porters".

Tagos is an interesting NPC with an individual character that makes him ideal as a long-term enemy of the characters. It is possible that he will survive this mission, but his failure will forever taint his record - and put him at odds with the PCs. If you like, Tagos can be a recurring villain; he will slowly rise through the Foundation ranks (denied the glory he so desired it will no doubt be a tedious ascent), always using his power and connections looking for those who shamed him during his formative years. If he ever finds the PCs in the future, he will certainly do everything in his power to have them killed to satisfy his taste for revenge.

☛ **Brother Tagos, Strong 3/Foundation Guardian 3 (1):**

CR 6; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 3d8+6 plus 3d10+6; HP 42; Mas 14; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 21, touch 15, flatfooted 20 (+1 Dex, +4 class, +6 equipment); BAB +6; Grap +8; Atk +9 melee (2d6+4, *power sword*); Full Atk +9/+4 melee (2d6+4, *power sword*); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Improved Melee Smash, Melee Smash; AL Foundation; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +1; AP 9; Rep +0; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Occupation and Background: Military, Guardian.

Skills: Drive +5, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (ancient lore) +6, Knowledge (current events) +3, Knowledge (tactics) +7, Knowledge (technology) +6, Navigate +3, Read/Write (Ancient, Unislang), Speak Language (Ancient, Unislang), Survival +2.

Feats: Advanced Technology, Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (light), Armor Proficiency (medium), Armor Proficiency (heavy), Guide, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Weapon Focus (*power sword*).

Mutations and Defects: None.

Possessions: Power sword, power backpack, military combat suit, dust mask, flash goggles, web belt, light rod, two ready syringes (loaded with stimshot A), survival kit, multipurpose tool, walkie-talkie, power cell.



HIGH ROAD TO HELL

NEW CREATURE

The following section details the *dust devil*, a new creature introduced in *High Road To Hell*.

DUST DEVIL

Legends of the elusive mutant beast known to the natives of the Twisted Earth as the *dust devil* portray it as something of a “Tasmanian devil” figure. The hunting and slaying of this hideous desert predator has been the target of many a young tribal’s trial of manhood.

The dust devil is an ornery and vicious roaming beast that resembles a monstrous wildcat, but with an oversized rat-like head with great bulging eyes and jagged teeth. Instead of claws its legs end in wide padded feet, not unlike a desert horse, and its ropy tail continuously writhes back and forth like a living snake.

The dust devil generally prefers small prey such as rabbits and coyote, but they have been known to attack humanoids and even larger animals such as ravening hounds and otydnt. Once it has decided to attack, a dust devil stubbornly refuses to relent until either it or its prey is slain.

When a dust devil cannot kill an opponent quickly with its powerful, over-sized jaws, it turns to defending itself by stamping its feet to generate clouds of swirling dust (hence its name). A dust devil has thin transparent membranes over its enormous eyes, as well as slitted nostrils, that allow it to see and breathe normally in such conditions.

Dust devils are generally most active during the day, and appear to enjoy hunting during sandstorms when potential prey is confused, disoriented, and most vulnerable.

SPECIES TRAITS

Dust devils have the following species traits:

Choking Cloud (Ex): As long as it is in a sandy area, as a standard action the dust devil can pound its feet vigorously to generate a cloud of choking dust that spreads out from it like a cone out to 20 feet. All creatures in the area of effect must make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or be dazed due to sneezing, choking, and gagging. The effect lasts for 1d2 rounds.

Obscuring Cloud (Ex): As long as it is in a sandy area, as a full-round action the dust devil can pound its wide feet vigorously to produce a cloud of obscuring dust. While it is in the cloud the dust devil benefits from a 20% miss chance from attacks coming from 5 feet away, and 50% from attacks coming from any distance greater than that. Once a cloud has been generated it will last for 1d4+1 rounds (half that in windy conditions, rounded up).

Scent (Ex): This ability allows the dust devil to detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell.

Screech (Ex): Once per round as a free action the dust devil can emit a shrill rat-like screech of tremendous volume that affects all within 30 feet. Those within this area must make a Will save (DC 15) or be unable to coordinate their efforts (receiving no flanking bonuses, and prohibiting the use of such tactics as *aiding another*).

Dust Devil: CR 6; Large Mutated Animal; HD 6d10+6; HP 39; Mas 13; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; Defense 16, touch 11, flatfooted 14 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +5 natural); BAB +6; Grap +10; Atk +10 melee (1d8+6, bite); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d8+6, bite); FS 10 ft. by 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Choking Cloud, Obscuring Cloud, Scent, Screech; AL none; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +4; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills: Intimidate +11, Listen +5, Spot +5, Survival +4.

Feats: Frightful Presence, Power Attack.

Advancement: 7-8 HD (Large), 9-10 HD (Huge).

HIGH ROAD TO HELL

MORALE

An important factor in *High Road To Hell* will be the morale and spirits of both the tribal war party and the Foundationists. For the tribals being able to catch up to the convoy, only to see it get away, will be devastating to morale. Similarly, the death(s) of each child warrior killed on the “quest” will take a heavy toll, and as losses mount the others will begin to lose hope. Since the PCs are viewed almost as “angels”, their deaths will deal a crippling blow as well and if Tamrok, their most charismatic leader, is killed, the tribal effort will all but fall apart.

For the Foundationists, each time they slip out of the pursuing war party’s grasp they get more and more emboldened. Similarly picking off tribals (and especially Brethren, if they are present) keeps the men in good spirits. However, their morale is fragile; they view the tribals as mere animals, and dying at the hands of such inferior warriors is unimaginable. Once the tribals begin killing Foundationists, the convoy’s morale begins to drop dramatically.

Keep track of the morale of each group separately, adding to or penalizing the current morale as events unfold. Below are listed the most likely factors that will affect each group’s morale score:

Tribal Villagers	Mod
If Tamrok is killed	-5
Each PC that is killed	-5
For each child warrior killed	-1
Each Brethren follower that is killed	-1
Each time the party is unable to stop the convoy	-2
For finding the escapee and hearing his story	-2
For Tamrok’s speech at Area 2	+1
For each Foundationist killed	+3
For each truck crippled, destroyed, or captured	+3
For each tribal warrior rescued	+2

Morale	Effect
-25	War party abandons the chase; because they have suffered so many losses/setbacks, all remaining children give up the quest and go home. Only Tamrok (if still alive) and the PCs remain.
-15	War party begins to desert; unless at least one PC (or Tamrok) makes a Charisma check at DC 18, 1d2 child warriors will desert.
-5	War party is shaken; all child warriors suffer a –2 morale penalty to saves and skill checks until morale rises.
0	No change in morale.
5	Morale is high; all child warriors receive a +1 morale bonus to attacks, saves, and skill checks until morale drops.
20	Morale is fearless; because they have done so well up to this point the child warriors think they are destined to save their families. As a result penalties to morale are no longer counted (though positive factors are still accumulated).
50	Morale is fanatic; because of their successes up to this point the child warriors are on the verge of going berserk, and can now whip themselves into a rage once per day. This acts just like the Barbarian ability of the same name.

Foundationists	Mod
If Brother Tagos is killed	-10
If Brother Tagos is forced to flee due to injury	-5
If Lon is killed	-5
First Foundationist that is killed	-5
Each Foundationist killed thereafter	-2
For each vehicle the convoy is forced to abandon	-5
Each time the convoy gets away	+2
For each tribal killed (including PCs)	+1
For each Brethren follower killed	+2

Morale	Effect
-30	The thrall soldiers begin to desert; Brother Tagos and Lon must succeed in a Charisma check (DC 18) to prevent 1d2 thralls from deserting.
-25	The Foundationists begin to take spiteful action; due to low morale the Foundationists begin to take their frustration out on the prisoners. 1d2 tribal warriors are executed.*
-20	The thralls begin to question their commanders; unless either Brother Tagos or Lon is awake and present, 1d2 Foundationists will desert.
-10	The thralls are shaken; all thralls suffer a –2 morale penalty to saves and skill checks until morale rises.
0	No change in morale.
10	Morale is high; all Foundationists receive a +1 morale bonus to attacks, saves, and skill checks until morale drops.
20	Morale is fearless; because they have done so well up to this point the Foundationists are confident they will get home despite any future losses. As a result all penalties to morale from here on out are halved (at least until morale drops to high).

* The PCs may stumble upon evidence of this punitive action as they track the column, as the Foundationists will dump the bodies of the dead warriors from the slave trucks (as “unnecessary baggage”).

HIGH ROAD TO HELL

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