

RAZORPLAINE VALLEY



A NUMENERA ADVENTURE

By Paul Warmerdam

“The valley is not known for its dangers. To be more precise, it is hardly known at all. The narrow labyrinth left by its spires makes it unattractive for any traveler. Only now, the alternative is even less attractive.”

- Ipseth, merchant and caravaner

SYNOPSIS

The characters join a caravan through the Razorplaine Valley to avoid a disaster on the main roads. The valley is resident to tribes of abhumans whose ancestors engineered the land itself to serve their needs. Only by controlling all three artifacts passed down by these ancestors can the characters reform the valley to allow passage to the other side, and overcome many other dangers besides.

HISTORY

There was once was a civilization in the valley. All that remains of it are abhuman descendants living in its ruins. Their ancestors were once a highly sophisticated people whose elite practiced a deified science steeped in ritual. Their most prestigious achievement was total control of the valley's geography. This ritual involved three artifacts: an obelisk at the center of the valley, a sensory headband which resembles a crown, and a long conductive rod. The people have long since scattered, fracturing into tribes.

RAZORPLAINE VALLEY

"The name? It must be old or it would have made more sense."

- Harc, guard captain

CARAVAN

The only thing the characters need to have in common is that they have joined a caravan group. The customary road between two kingdoms of the Steadfast has been plagued by the Iron Wind. Merchants who ventured there have never been seen again, their merchandise transformed to a terrible new purpose. With no sign that the storm will pass any time soon, all manner of waiting travelers have banded together. They intend to take an untested road through the Razorplaine Valley to get around the Iron Wind. The caravan consists of merchants, guards, Aeon Priests, emigrants, explorers, and one prisoner transport.

CARAVAN NPCs

Merchant: 2 (6), negotiates and appraises as level 5, inflicts 2 damage

Guard: 4 (12), inflicts 4 damage

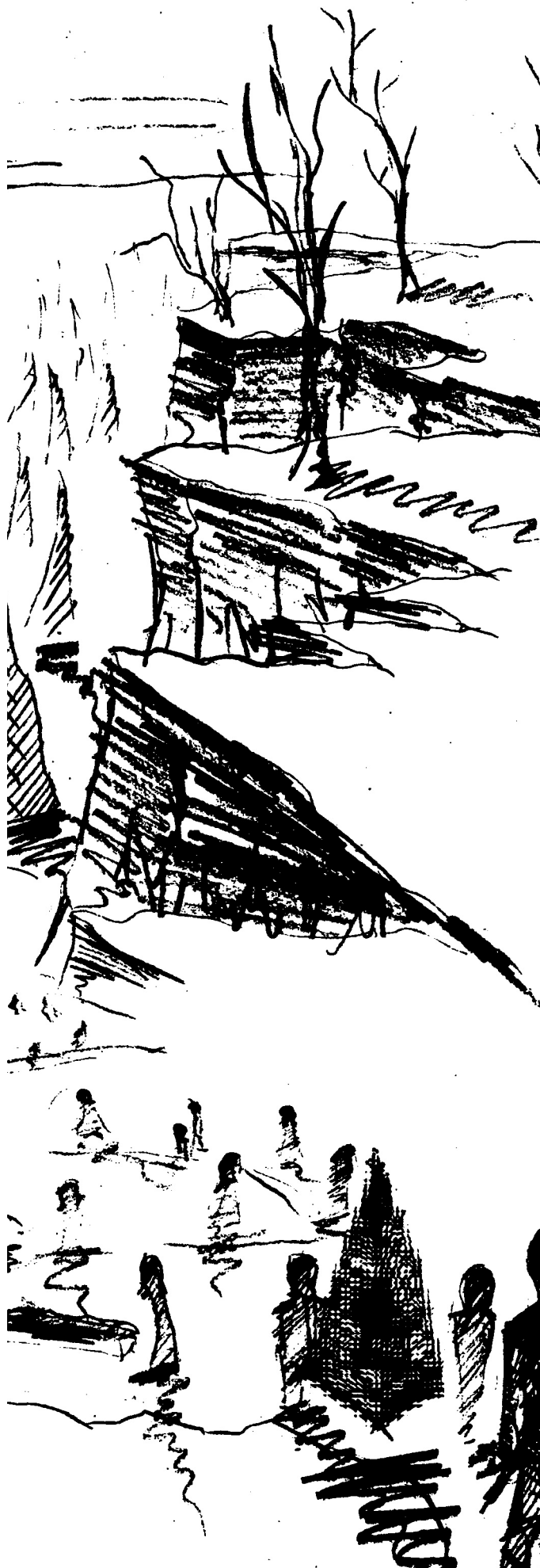
Aeon Priest: 5 (15), defends and resists mental attack as level 6, inflicts 3 damage

Emigrant: 1 (3), inflicts 2 damage

Explorer: 3 (8), climbs and rides as level 4, inflicts 4 damage

Prisoner: 5 (15), inflicts 6 damage





VALLEY

The caravan first gets a look of the Razorplaine Valley from the heights of the road that the travelers leave behind. It stretches all the way to the horizon, closed in by dark cliffs. Tall spires glimmer in the sunlight all throughout. They obscure much of the valley floor itself. A keen eye may notice one spire larger than all the others at the center. Keener eyes may notice it is more symmetrically shaped, less like the curved claws that surround it.

The easiest road down is through a dried-up riverbed. At the bottom of the cliff, the characters may discover a cave which serves as a good place to set up camp. Its walls were painted and chiseled long ago with the image of a crowned figure holding a staff at the foot of a tower. No other signs remain of anyone having set foot here in years. The morning light further shows that the spires that now loom over them are made of an opaque crystalline mineral that's unlike the cliffs or the floor. Ingenious geologists may note by the patterns of oxidation that by a small margin, they are less than an epoch old.

PRISONER

The prisoner in the caravan is being transported in a levitating artifact that looks like a cage. It subdues the prisoner both physically and psychically, preventing violence and forcing the subject to speak only the truth. Only one guard has been assigned to escort the cage. Slowly, however, defects appear to crop up as the artifact starts to malfunction. First, the characters may catch the prisoner in a lie where before this was impossible. Later, the prisoner may attempt to escape. Even if the attempt does not succeed, a choice needs to be made. With the cage slowly failing to subdue the prisoner, more incidents will follow.

SONG

In the night, noises may be heard of nearby abhumans. Two of the tribes remain nomadic throughout the valley and another lingers nears the center. In particular, they may hear a ritual singing that they practice at midnight. Each tribe has a distinguishing song. One is guttural and percussive, another is more like dissonant howling, and the last is high-pitched and keening.

Should they ever come close or even go looking, the characters are likely to find the abhumans hostile. Only the tribe that lingers near the obelisk at the center of the valley will be more curious than violent. They are all hunched, misshapen creatures with opposable thumbs on both hands and feet for ease of climbing. They are fond of drinking the blood of their enemies as a means of obtaining rare moisture. In all, each tribe consists of a score of members, including the young and old. A scouting party usually consists of a handful.

TRIBE OF THE STAFF

Distinguishing characteristic: short legs and broad shoulders

Staff-bearer: a female with twisted stumps for legs revered by the tribe and carried by an intimate circle of handmaidens

Statistics: 3 (9), defends as level 4 when charging the enemy, inflicts 4 damage, staff-bearer may call down lightning from the sky

TRIBE OF THE CROWN

Distinguishing characteristic: a shaggy mane of hair down the spine

Crown-bearer: the tallest and strongest male whose head is left bald with scars where the crown rests

Statistics: 3 (9), defends as level 4 when encircling the enemy, inflicts 4 damage, crown-bearer may create rifts in the very ground

TRIBE OF THE OBELISK

Distinguishing characteristic: large, round eyes and a short stature

Leader: none

Statistics: 2 (6), diplomatic as level 5, inflicts 3 damage

HUNTERS

Very little edible grows in the valley. In some places, moss grows on the floor and in others a blood red vine covers both the ground and the spires. A small burrowing creature feeds on the moss. Packs of chirogs in turn feed mostly on the burrowers, just as the abhumans do. Chirogs and abhumans will hunt one another for territory. At the very top of the foodchain, however, stands the blood red vine that permeates the valley. It secretes a poisonous oily mist from its leaves. If this mist enters the food chain, anything that indirectly consumes it will suffer hemorrhages and die, with new shoots of the blood red vine sprouting from the corpse. Cyphers and other equipment can be seen near the roots of these vines years later.

OBELISK

As the characters venture deeper into the valley, they will catch glimpses of the obelisk in the distance. It resembles the spires in that it is made of the same material, but it is far larger and appears to have been cut symmetrically unlike the more natural shapes in the rest of the valley.

Precisely once each day, rain will gather in the valley and pour in a small circumference around the obelisk, which the tribe of abhumans who make their homes around it gathers and stores. Unlike their cousins, these abhumans are more

likely to negotiate with the characters than attack them outright. Their survival has depended on balancing out the other tribes and trading water against food with both.

COMET

Just after dawn, a comet crashes out of the sky. There is a streak of light that grows ever closer, brighter, and louder. It crashes somewhere in the valley, causing a shockwave followed by hours of impenetrable dust.

If the characters go looking to find the crash site, they may discover a newly formed crater. It reveals strange coils set into the base of some of the destroyed spires and hints of more infrastructure below ground. The crater itself holds a cooling half-melted vessel. The vessel is slowly failing, making strange noises, then exuding multicolored smoke, then creating a great gust of wind as it sucks all the air inward through a vacuum.

Inside the core, there is strange wormlike creature with skin as dark as the night sky. It writhes and slowly dies in the Ninth World's atmosphere. Any number of strange cyphers may be salvaged from the wreck.

The characters may not be the only ones to have come looking for the meteor. An abhuman raiding party might be willing to shed blood over its treasures.

RAID

If the characters linger in one place too long, it is not unlikely that one of the nomadic tribes attack them in the night for their food and their water. Unless the characters have already encountered both the crown-bearing tribe and the staff-bearing tribe in the preceding scenes, they will be the victims of a raid.

MERCY

The characters are not the only ones to explore around the caravan. A self-proclaimed explorer who had come on the journey only to see the valley has survived the hazards of the vines and come away with a black-legged device. As she tinkers with it, one day the characters see it has attached to the side of her skull.

Before long, she takes to herself. Then, she starts screaming. She begs for anyone in camp to end her life. The device cannot be removed without killing her. She can't stand its intrusions anymore.

WINDS

When the caravan is deep into the valley, the attentive will notice a shift in the winds. The implications may escape them at first, until a grey dust can be seen in the sky from the direction of the road the caravan has left behind. The Iron Wind rolls over the cliffside like a wave and starts to spread through the spires, altering anything in its path. The

characters may be faced with the victims of its mutations before they actually come into contact with it.

WALL

When the caravan has moved deep into the valley where they intend to cross through and away from its center, the characters may notice that each morning, they appear to awaken in a different place. Careful watchers in the night will report that the camp isn't moved anywhere. Instead, each spire moves slowly enough for the naked eye to miss, altering the landscape around them. Worse, it becomes clear that the spires grow in any direction that leads away from the center. The caravan is being rerouted every hour of every day, preventing them from reaching the rim again.

REIGNING THE VALLEY

If the caravan has encountered all three tribes of abhumans and the characters recall the inscriptions in the caves where they started, they may have a clue about the nature and working of the valley. If both the staff and the crown are rejoined at the obelisk, a cunning character may be able to take control of the valley and alter its shape. Not only the spires can be controlled, but also the weather. Even the strange red vines are a self-defense mechanism employed by the valley.

In order to command the valley, an Intellect task against a difficulty of 8 is required. Possessing the crown reduces this difficulty by 1, as does the staff. Succeeding results in the characters' communion with the vast network of numenera below the valley. A single change may be exacted, such as clearing the way for the caravan to leave the valley. A wise group may think to use the valley's weather to clear the Iron Wind of the bordering lands.

HANDOUTS

CARVING OF THE ANCIENTS

