



LEGENDS OF SIGNUM

DRAGON HUNTERS

RULE BOOK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
GAME CONTENTS	6
CARD TYPES.....	8
CREATURES.....	8
SUPPORT CARDS	9
STANDARD GAME PREPARATIONS	12
START OF THE GAME	14
TURN STRUCTURE.....	16
CREATURE'S ACTIVATION	16
CREATURE'S MOVEMENT.....	17
RUN RULE.....	18
GOLD	18
DRAGON'S CAVE	19
MELEE COMBAT	20
RANGED ATTACK.....	21
DAMAGE AND WOUNDS	22
BACKSTAB	22
STEALTH	22
SUMMONING CREATURES.....	23
VICTORY.....	24
ADDITIONAL GAME MODES	25
SINGLE PLAYER GAME MODE.....	25
FOUR-PLAYER GAME MODE	28
THREE-PLAYER GAME MODE	30
TO SLAY A DRAGON!.....	32
GLOSSARY	54

«You bastard knights.»

Saïd Elia disappointedly,
«I know one of you bragged that
he's the «ultimate dragon hunter»,
and where is he now? He took
my gold and ran off! Robbed
me and fled as soon as he heard
about Praxis the Ruthless.»

Elia carefully prepared her belt
and patted *Dragon Killer* – her
terrifying crossbow which was
decorated with the bones and skulls
of beasts she had killed. The slim
amazon was tall with plenty of scars
peppering her muscular body.

«Let me tell you one thing.»
She continued. «Paraxis the
Ruthless – this is the name of the
dragon which I am going to kill.

And no one can handle
him better than me,
even if you let Ulrich, Roland, or
Lancelot gather their entire entourage
with all of their bards, servants, and
heralds for battle. Ridiculous! When
I was hunting Paraxis in the steppes,
he was called Scarlet Death, as when
the dragon struck, his flames brought
nothing but death and destruction.

One day he burned his master
alive, killing Prince Alvin and
almost killed me - but now it's
my turn to return the favor.»




INTRODUCTION



«Dragon Hunters» is a tabletop wargame based in the «Legends of Signum» world. It is a place where three reckless heroes - an avenging amazon, a savage half-orc, and an intrepid mage explorer face a deadly and terrifying dragon with treasure hidden within its lair. The Dragon is not the only opponent, as the hunters' greed and thirst for glory can ruin a well-executed plan. You will decide who will be the lucky hunter to receive their treasure, and who will fall while facing the dragon - and don't forget about the dragon itself, who will do everything in its power to destroy the intruders and derail your strategy.





Hunters have a great many skills and weapons at their disposal, such as numerous poisons and traps, tactics, tricks, and legendary armor, mighty swords, and ancient powerful artifacts!

They confront a dangerous and armored beast from ancient myth - Paraxis the Ruthless, also known as Scarlet Death, whose power and fury have no bounds! This dragon won't stop until it destroys everyone who dared to invade its lair! Fangs, claws, and wings are the dragon's usual weapons, but Paraxis is also an ancient and terrible beast - creating illusions, burning his enemies, and summoning faithful dragon whelps to aid him in battle.

STANDARD MODE: Two player game - Hunters vs Dragon

PVE MODE (Single Player):

One player for the Hunters' side

Four-player mode: Three Hunters (one player for each Hunter) against the player controlling the Dragon

THREE-PLAYER MODE: Three Hunters (one player for each Hunter) against the Dragon

GAME COMPONENTS



GAME CONTENTS:

~ 3 Hunter Miniatures:



Elia the Amazons Queen; Tulum the Son of the Steppes; Baldassar the Elusive



~1 Dragon Miniature:
Paraxis the Ruthless, known as Scarlet Death



~ 5 Dragon Whelp tokens



~ 9 Hunter, Dragon, and Dragon Whelp Cards



- 2 basic decks with 20 cards for each side: Hunters and the Dragon



- 2 additional decks with 20 cards each for experienced players



- 40 Event cards for the Dragon in Single Player mode



- Character and Support cards for the game «Legends of Signum»



- 6 Dragon Cave Templates



- 6 original dice



- «Legends of Signum» rulers



- 60 cm x 60 cm Battlefield



- Game tokens

CREATURES

Each creature in *Dragon Hunters*, whether it's a Hunter or a Dragon, has a corresponding card that describes all of their abilities and attributes.

In a standard game mode, one player has control of the Dragon and Dragon's summoned creatures, and another player has control of all the three Hunters.



Baldassar the Elusive

1

M

8

Ability

3. **Hunter.**
Battle Mage.
even in contact with an opponent's creature: Place Baldassar at a distance of L without receiving a Backstab, not into contact with a creature or terrain.

Gods are born from the dragons blood.

Relic




SignumGame.com

Ability

Flavor text

Relic

Faction

-  **The Strength** indicates how many dice it can use in melee combat.
-  **The Movement** attribute indicates the maximum distance the creature can move across the Battlefield per turn.
-  **The Health** attribute indicates the number of wounds it can receive until it dies.

The Dragon has the possibility to summon the Minions to aid itself in battle.



SUPPORT CARDS

Players' decks contain support cards, which produce various effects during the battle. There are three types of support cards: spells, relics, and tactics.

The card type is indicated in the bottom left corner. Before using a support card, it is required to pay its cost indicated in the top left corner.



SPELL CARDS

Spell cards produce an immediate effect that has an impact on the battle. A spell card is discarded immediately after it is played.



TACTIC CARDS

Tactics cards are activated during the opponent's turn. A played tactics card isn't triggered right away, but only when a specific event occurs, indicated on the card. To play this card, an active player must pay the cost of a chosen tactic card, declare that they are playing a tactic card, and place this card face-down next to the Battlefield. Triggering a tactic card is up to the player who played it – they can declare it as soon as the specific event occurs for the first time or wait for a better moment to spring the tactic. Triggered tactics cards are discarded.



RELIC CARDS

Relic cards are a way to strengthen creatures or give them additional abilities during battle.

The type of a relic is indicated in the top center of the card.

There are 6 types of relics:



Melee weapon



Ranged weapon



Armour/Cloak



Shield/Banner



Helmet



Treasure



The types of relics that a character can use are indicated on the character's card.



A character can carry as many relics of the same type as there are symbols of this type indicated on this character's card. Played relic cards are placed next to the character's card, and this relic is considered equipped. The relic gives bonus to the creature that is equipped by that relic. The player is required to use the ability of an equipped relic if it gives a bonus to the character's current action.



Relic cards may have «Multiple Uses» \times or «Durability» \times attributes.

«Multiple Uses» defines how many times a player can use the indicated ability. When such a relic is used the specified number of times, it ceases to provide its owner with its specific abilities and is discarded.

If a relic has the «Durability» attribute it is used to defend a creature from non-magical attacks, and after playing this type of relic the player must place an amount of Armor tokens on their relic card equal to the «Durability» attribute this relic possesses. Dealt damage will be absorbed primarily by the «armor» of an equipped relic, so when the character with the equipped relic with «Durability» receives damage, this character removes the corresponding number of Armor tokens. It is important to note that relics with «Durability» defend creatures only from non-magical attacks, which means «armor»

cannot absorb damage from magical attacks or spell damage. If a card interacts with «wounds», it means this card will ignore any number of Armor tokens. Equipped relics cannot be removed as is, but can be replaced by a relic of the same type. In this case, the previous relic is discarded.

If a relic has exhausted all of its armor or «Multiple Uses» – it is discarded.

If the text on the card contradicts the general game rules, treat the card as the correct wording of the rule.





STANDARD GAME PREPARATIONS

There are 2 players that take part in the standard mode – one playing as the Hunters and the other playing as the Dragon.

Before a standard game starts, players need to prepare the Battlefield. For this, they can measure a square 60x60cm (24x24 inches) on a flat surface or use the paper battlefield from the box. Two out of the four battlefield sides will be used by the players to summon the creatures at the start of the game. You should determine these sides before the start of the game, and from this moment onward, they are considered the players' sides of the Battlefield.

For the very first game we highly recommend using basic decks in order to get acquainted with the rules of the game. Experienced players can build a deck by using cards from both the basic and the additional decks. Each player's deck must consist of 20 cards and contain only the cards of their chosen side.

Keep in mind that a particular Hunter's cards can be placed in the deck only if this Hunter takes part in the current game. However, they can be used anytime during the game, even if this Hunter was eliminated.



BASIC DECK FOR
THE DRAGON



ADDITIONAL DECK
FOR THE DRAGON

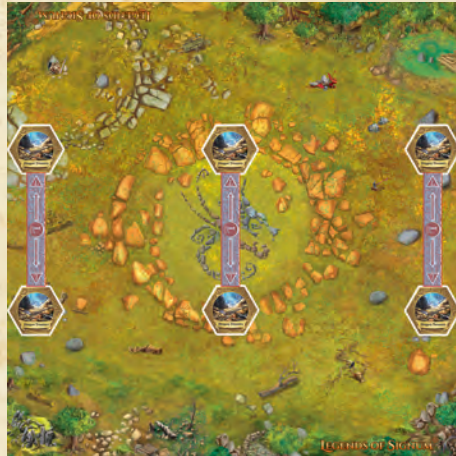


BASIC DECK
FOR HUNTERS



ADDITIONAL DECK
FOR HUNTERS

The Dragon places six Dragon Caves on the Battlefield at a distance of L or more from each other. This player must also put 10 Gold tokens on each Dragon Cave template – this is the treasure that the Hunters are seeking.



As soon as the Dragon Caves are placed, the player controlling the Hunters chooses his side of the Battlefield. The Dragon's player takes the

opposite side. Both players place cards, decks, and game tokens wherever they prefer outside the Battlefield.



START OF THE GAME

Before the game starts, players place miniatures of their creatures adjacent to their sides of the Battlefield in such a way that the bases of the miniatures touch the edge of the Battlefield.



FIELD SIDE OF PLAYER №2



FIELD SIDE OF PLAYER №1



After that, each player draws four cards from their decks. Each player can return up to four cards from their hand to the bottom of the battle deck and replace them with an equal number of cards from the top of their battle decks to form their starting hands. The Battle Deck needs to be shuffled if and after the cards are replaced.

The player controlling the Hunters is always first to move. Each player can activate their own creatures in any order during their turn.



All Hunters start the game with a Stealth token, which means the Dragon cannot attack a Hunter until the Stealth token is removed.



TURN STRUCTURE



In *Dragon Hunters* players alternate their turns. The player whose turn it is is called the **Active Player**.

At the start of the turn, the active player draws one card from the deck. If the deck runs out of cards - the game continues, but the player no longer draws cards. The player can still use cards from their hand.

During the active player's turn, the active player can:

- play cards from their hand;
- discard 1 card from their hand to receive 2 Gold tokens, once per turn;
- activate their creatures on the Battlefield;
- summon a creature (Minions for the Dragon).

The Active Player can take any of these actions in any order.

CREATURE'S ACTIVATION

When a creature starts its turn, it is called its **activation**, and this creature is considered **activated**. Every activated creature in *Dragon Hunters* can take any of the following actions if possible:

- move within its movement distance range, or use the **Run** rule;
- move within its movement distance range and enter into melee combat;
- enter into melee combat if it already was in contact with an opponent's creature at the moment of its activation;

- perform a ranged attack, if the creature has this ability;

- use an activated ability (🔒) indicated on its card;

- a Hunter can move within its movement distance range and declare a search of a Dragon's Cave, or search a Dragon's Cave that they are already in contact with;

- a Hunter can move within its movement distance range and perform movement between Dragon Caves if possible.

The active player can skip a creature's activation.

However, the creature's activation cannot be interrupted – the active player must complete all of the creature's actions before activating another creature or play a card. A Hunter cannot search a Dragon's Cave or use an activated ability (🔒) indicated on its card while in contact with an opponent's creature. Some abilities can ignore this rule – in this case, it's necessary to refer to the description on this card, which has a higher priority.

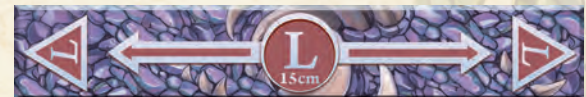
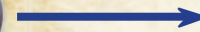
For example, Baldassar's ability allows him to move to another place even if Baldassar is in contact with an opponent's creature.

CREATURE'S MOVEMENT

The creature's movement distance is indicated on its card and marked with a letter. The active player can move a miniature across the Battlefield within the indicated distance on its card.

There are 4 measures of distance in «Dragon Hunters»:

- small S (8 cm);
- medium M (10 cm);
- large L (15 cm);
- extra-large XL (25 cm).



When the base of the active player's miniature touches the base of an opponent's miniature while moving – it means this miniature enters into contact with an opponent's miniature. The active player's miniature must immediately stop its movement, even if the creature has not completed its movement.

If a miniature ends its movement in contact with two or more creatures, the active player can enter melee combat with the creature of his choosing.

Creatures cannot move through one another and cannot stop their movement on another creature's base. Players must completely move past other miniatures' bases, and take into consideration the size of the bases of the creatures, and the movement distance must always take into account the change in direction of their movement.

Placement is a special type of movement in which all obstacles are ignored (for example, «place a creature within L» ignores any miniatures or other obstacles in its way). Creatures cannot finish their placement on another miniature's base. Placement is not affected by abilities that restrict a creature's movement.





THE RUN RULE

At the beginning of a creature's activation, the active player can declare that this creature is using **Run** during its activation. In this case, the creature's movement increases to its next movement tier: a creature with S movement distance increases it to M, M to L and L to XL correspondingly. A creature with XL movement cannot use **Run**. If the activated creature is in contact with at least one enemy creature – the **Run** rule cannot be used. When using the **Run** rule, the activated creature's activation is terminated immediately after its movement is completed.

If the activated creature enters into contact with an opponent's creature using the **Run** rule, the activated creature immediately ends its movement and receives a **Backstab**.



GOLD

Gold is a game resource, which is used to pay for playing cards and to use some abilities. There are a few ways to receive Gold tokens:



Once per turn, the active player has the opportunity to discard one card from their hand during their turn to receive two Gold tokens.

Hunters can gain Gold by searching the Dragon's Caves on the Battlefield. On the other hand, the Dragon cannot search its own Caves but accumulates this resource in a different way. The Dragon gains 1 Gold token for each point of wounds it receives. Damage that is absorbed by armour does not grant the Dragon a Gold token.



DRAGON CAVES

At the start of the game, each Dragon Cave on the Battlefield has ten Gold tokens. If a Hunter enters into contact or is already in contact with a Cave template, the player of that Hunter can declare that they are going to search the cave.



The result of a search is determined by rolling a die: On a – the searching Hunter takes 2 Gold tokens; on an – 3 Gold tokens; on a – 4 Gold tokens.



A Dragon Cave is considered **Difficult terrain**, which means that if any creature is activated and in contact with the template, this creature's movement is reduced to S and it cannot use the **Run** rule. If a creature has come into contact with a Dragon Cave and has already moved at a distance of more than S this turn, this creature must immediately end their movement once its base has touched the Cave template. Any number of creatures can be in contact with a Cave at the same time.

Dragon Caves are connected with each other via underground passages. If a Dragon Cave has no Gold left, Hunters can use an underground passage and move to another empty Dragon Cave. For this, the Hunter must be in contact with an empty Dragon Cave, and declare movement between the Caves, and roll a die - a roll of an or a means the move is successful, and the Hunter has an opportunity to move into contact with another empty Cave.

The Dragon itself and Dragon Whelps cannot use these underground passages.



MELEE COMBAT

If the active player's creature comes into contact with an opponent's creature, or if the creature is already in contact with an opponent's creature at the start of the active player's turn— this active player's creature can declare that they are in melee combat. A creature can declare melee combat only once per turn. A battle between creatures in melee combat takes place as follows:

The «**Strength**» attribute, indicated on a creature's card, shows how many dice it can use in melee combat, for attack or defense. The player whose creature is attacked must be the first to declare how much dice this player assigns to attack and defense from the overall number of this creature's «**Strength**». Immediately afterwards, the attacker must assign their available dice to attack and defense in the same way – it allows the attacker to take into account their opponent's

decision. In fact, players can assign all available dice to attack or defense, or break it up in any way they see fit.

Each die assigned to attack deals 1 point of damage when the or is rolled. However, a wounded creature deals damage only on the in melee combat. Each die used for defense allows a creature to block 1 point of damage if the player rolls a .

If the creature is in contact with an opponent's creature, it can declare melee combat or just stay in contact to impede its movement, shooting, or activated abilities.

If the active player's creature is in contact with several creatures of an opponent, the active player can choose only one of them to start melee combat with this turn.

If the creature is being attacked by several opponents in a turn, after its first melee combat, this creature can assign all of its «**Strength**» dice only to defense during the subsequent melee combats this turn.





RANGED ATTACK

A creature can perform a ranged attack if it has: «**Shooting X**», «**Throwing X**» or «**Magical Shot X**» - where X is the number of dice available to use with this ability. Ranged attacks are performed by Shooters within the XL range of their targets (25cm). To perform a Ranged Attack, the player must be able to draw a **Line of Sight (LoS)** between the shooter and the target. LoS is a straight line that goes from the base of your miniature to the base of the target, and isn't blocked by anything that would prevent a LoS from being drawn. It doesn't matter if you «see» only a small part of the miniature's base. If you can draw a LoS to any point of the base of the miniature, you can perform a ranged attack. If there is no LoS available, the ranged attack on this target cannot be performed even if the target is within range.

LoS is blocked by creatures, and cannot be blocked by creatures with a Stealth token.



The creature cannot declare a ranged attack if it's in contact with an opponent's creature, though it can declare a ranged attack if it is in contact with an allied creature.



When declaring a ranged attack, the active player must:

- check the distance from the shooter to the target (within XL);
- check LoS;
- roll X dice, where X is a current value of a creature's ranged attack including all modifiers.

The target of a Shooting or Magical Shot receives 1 point of damage for each rolled. If a creature becomes the target of a Shooting or a Throwing Attack, it has the possibility to defend itself from each successful hit. For this, it must roll as many dice for defense as the number of successful hits. Every rolled for defense cancels 1 successful hit. The Strength attribute is not counted in this roll.

Throwing is performed with the same rules as Shooting, but the difference here is that Throwing is considered successful on an or , and the distance of this ranged attack has a range of L.

A Magical Shot is also performed with similar rules. is considered a success, but the target cannot defend from successful hits, so it doesn't roll any dice for defense after a Magical Shot was performed. Furthermore, a successful Magical Shot ignores Armor tokens, dealing wounds to the target directly.



DAMAGE AND WOUNDS

Take note that common non-magical attacks deal damage which is absorbed by armor. Only if the target has no armor does such damage deal wounds. Magical attacks cannot be blocked by armor, which means they deal wounds even if the target has Armor tokens.



BACKSTAB

When a creature breaks contact with an opponent's creature or enters base to base contact using the «**Run**» ability, this creature receives a «**Backstab**». Each creature whose contact was broken, or a creature with which an active player's creature has come into contact using the «**Run**» ability, must roll a die to make an attempt to deal Backstab damage. A Backstab is considered successful on an 8 or 9. It is important to know that a Backstab is not an attack, so a creature cannot defend against it. If a creature is wounded and has no «**Fortitude**» attribute, it performs a successful Backstab only on a 9. If the activated creature moves while it is in contact with an opponent's creature, it still receives a Backstab.

A creature with a Stealth token can declare a Backstab; in this case, it loses their Stealth token.

Creatures can perform a Backstab even if their current «**Strength**» attribute is null, and even if a creature cannot fight in melee combat by common rules at all.



STEALTH

Creatures with a Stealth token are considered hidden. It means they cannot be targeted by any type of attack, but can still be targeted by support cards. Creatures cannot have more than one Stealth token.

A creature loses its Stealth token if it:

- declares melee combat;
- performs a Backstab;
- searches a Dragon's Cave;
- uses an activated ability;
- was detected by an opponent's creature.

When attempting to detect a hidden opponent's creature, the active player's creature must come into contact with this creature and roll a die. This creature loses their Stealth token and is considered detected on a 6. After a creature is successfully detected, the creature that performs it can immediately attack the detected creature. If detection fails, the creature immediately ends its turn.

Creatures with a Stealth token:

- cannot block LoS for ranged attacks;
- cannot be targeted by a Backstab, but can perform a Backstab, losing its Stealth token;
- can use «**Run**» ability.

SUMMONING CREATURES

The Dragon has the ability to summon its Minions - the Dragon Whelps. To do this, the active player must pay 2 Gold tokens and place a Minion's miniature into contact with the Dragon. A Minion can be summoned only once per turn. After summoning, the player must put a Minion's card next to the Dragon's card face-up. A newly summoned Minion can be activated right away. The Dragon player can summon an unlimited number of the Minions throughout the game, even if the Dragon was already activated this turn.





VICTORY



In **Dragon Hunters**, the players follow different objectives, so the win conditions are also different.

The Hunters can achieve victory in one of two ways: eliminate the Dragon, or empty all of the Dragon's Caves on the Battlefield. The Hunters win even if the summoned Minions are on the Battlefield after the Dragon has been eliminated.

The only way for the Dragon to win is to eliminate all three of the Hunters.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Does Tulum gain a Strength token, if he receives damage, but the armor absorbs it?

No. Only the Wound tokens give Tulum the Strength tokens.

Does Tulum gain +1 strength for every received wound?

No. If Tulum simultaneously receives several wounds from a single attack or effect, he still only gains +1 strength.

Is it possible to search the caves with a Dragon Whelp that was taken under control by the Hunters?

No.

Can I declare melee and ranged attacks on my own creatures?

No. Moreover, the Hunters cannot attack the Dragon Whelps that were taken under control. However, creatures can receive damage from effects that can target all creatures without specifying affiliation to a faction.

Does a captured Dragon Whelp get buffs from auras and Dragon's support cards?

The Dragon cannot affect the captured Dragon Whelp with auras and effects, if the description says «YOUR» or «ALL YOUR». But the Dragon can affect it with all other support card effects.

The Dragon miniature is big enough to fully block a cave entrance to the Hunters. Can I just stay in one place, in order to prevent Hunters from collecting all Gold?

Yes. Such situation is possible, but keep in mind that the Dragon will become an easy target for ranged attacks.

If the summoned Dragon Whelp dies while was under control by the Hunters, who gains Gold from its Last Word?

The controlling player gains Gold. In this case - the Hunters.



ADDITIONAL GAME MODES



SINGLE PLAYER GAME MODE

«Dragon Hunters» has a single player mode. In this mode, the player will always be playing for the Hunters' side, confronting the Dragon itself.

The player draws cards, searches for Gold, and performs any other actions by the same rules as in the standard two player mode. On the other hand, the Dragon performs actions according to the text on Event Cards, which are played in a random order.

To achieve victory, the Hunters have to eliminate the Dragon, which, unlike in the standard rules, has 40 Health points and the Dragon's movement distance is increased to XL.

EVENT CARDS

Event Cards are used only for the single player game mode. They can describe both the Dragon's movement and different effects that can be placed on the Hunters or the Dragon itself.

40 Event Cards are divided into 4 groups with 10 cards each, each of which has an appropriate symbol indicating the level of difficulty at the bottom of the card. The player can choose the game difficulty by preparing the Event Deck from 2 groups according to the following table:



Event Cards don't have any cost, so they don't require any payment when playing them.

SINGLE PLAYER GAME PREPARATIONS

Before the start of a single player game, the player must place the Dragon Caves on the Battlefield according to the recommendations on page 13. Each Dragon Cave must contain ten Gold tokens as in the standard mode.

For the next step, the player builds their own battle deck and a deck for the Dragon (Event Deck). The player can adjust the game difficulty by choosing corresponding groups to form the Dragon's deck.

Be aware that the maximum difficulty level will be a real challenge even for the most experienced players and is an opportunity to feel the true power of the Dragon.



When the Dragon Caves are placed on the Battlefield, the player places the miniatures down as follows: All Hunter miniatures are placed into contact with one side of the Battlefield, and the Dragon should be placed into contact with the opposite side.



The player draws four cards from their own battle deck and can return up to four cards from their hand to the battle deck, and then replace them with an equal number of cards from the top of the battle deck. The battle deck needs to be shuffled only after the cards are replaced.

The player is always first to move.



SOLO-MODE TURN STRUCTURE

The player and the Dragon take alternating turns. The Hunters' turn is performed in the same way as in the standard 2 players mode. This mode differs only in that the Dragon's turn is divided into 2 phases – the **Event Phase** and the **Activation Phase**.

EVENT PHASE

The Dragon starts its turn with the Event Phase. In this phase, the player draws a card from the top of the Event Deck and performs the effect indicated on this card. Usually, this effect is performed immediately.

Playing Event Cards, the Dragon can perform unexpected actions: move across the Battlefield, perform melee and ranged attacks, or influence the Hunters in other ways. When the condition of the Event Card is met, the Dragon begins the Activation Phase.


ACTIVATION PHASE

In the Activation Phase, the Dragon moves across the Battlefield and attacks its opponents. The Dragon starts its movement by choosing the Hunter with the highest level of current Health. If there are a few Hunters with an equal level of Health, the Dragon chooses the nearest possible target. If there are several Hunters that are within the same distance from the Dragon, it attacks the one with the highest level of Strength. In this mode, the Hunters cannot be hidden. Even if they have a Stealth token, the Dragon attacks them by common rules.

Moving to its target, the Dragon flies a distance of XL in a straight line, ignoring any obstacles. Nevertheless, the Dragon can be affected by the

Difficult terrain effect of a Dragon Cave. At the end of its movement, if the Dragon comes into contact with a Hunter who isn't its current target, the Dragon attacks this Hunter in melee. If the Dragon's movement is finished in a space occupied by a Hunter, the Dragon comes into contact with this Hunter, choosing a spot of the player's choosing, but taking into account the already travelled distance.

The Dragon doesn't receive a Backstab if breaks contact with anyone. However, the Dragon itself can perform a Backstab and it's always successful - so if the Hunter breaks contact with the Dragon, they automatically receive 1 point of damage from a Backstab.

Unlike the standard 2 player mode, the Dragon doesn't roll dice during its attack. Although the Dragon has 6 Strength points, it always deals 5 successful hits in melee combat. Similarly, when the Dragon is attacked by Hunters during their turn, the Dragon deals 3 successful hits. The player can defend from the Dragon's successful hits via the standard rules, rolling  for a successful defense while the Dragon cannot defend itself from Hunters' hits at all. If the Dragon is granted modifiers that increase or decrease its Strength, the Dragon increases or decreases the number of successful hits.

Take note that the Dragon in the single-player mode never rolls dice, which means that it can't defend itself against Ranged Attacks.

In order to make a difference between Magical Shot and non-magical Ranged Attacks, the shooter should re-roll all of their successful shooting dice when Shooting or Throwing.

VICTORY

In single player mode, the Hunters can achieve victory only by eliminating the Dragon. The Dragon wins if all the Hunters have been eliminated.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: SINGLE PLAYER MODE

When my Hunter equipped with «Runic Shield» relic is being attacked - the Dragon has «Cautious 3». How much damage does the Dragon deal in a single-player game?

The Dragon deals 3 damage.

My Hunter armed with the «Pike for the Dragon» attacks the Dragon. How does the Dragon defend itself?

The Dragon cannot defend from the Pike in Solo mode, so the Hunter just rolls the dice to make their attack.

My Hunter with the «Crown of Distortion» is being attacked. Gaining the «Veteran» ability, how much damage does the Hunter receive?

The Hunter receives 3 damage.

How does «Ghost from the Past» work in a single-player game? Does the Dragon deal less damage or does it deal the same 5 or 3 damage depending on whose turn it is?

The Dragon deals less damage: 3 damage during its turn, and 2 during the Hunters' turn.

When the Dragon is forced to skip its turn, how does it work? Does the Dragon skip both of its phases or only one?

The Dragon skips only its Activation phase, and the Hunters still draw an Event card and play its effect.

If a Hunter gains a Stealth token, does a Dragon attack him?

If Dragon's current target has a Stealth token, the Dragon moves to it, but before the attack, the Dragon attempts to detect it by using common rules. If the detection fails, Dragon's turn immediately ends.

FOUR-PLAYER GAME MODE

This cooperative four-player game mode turns the game into an epic battle where each Hunter fights not only against a big and terrifying beast, but also each others interests - as they might not be ready to sacrifice themselves to save an ally.

In this mode, each of the three players control a single Hunter while the fourth player controls the Dragon.

GAME PREPARATIONS

Hunters have a common deck with 40 support cards. Before the game begins, Hunters should start with particular cards in their hands as follows:

Baldassar's starting hand consists of the «Crown of Distortion», «Collar for Pet», and «Weakening».

Tulum's starting hand contains «I'm no wimp!», «Defend the Weak», and «Dragon Bones Shell».

Elia's starting hand begins play with «Rain of Arrows», «Double Shot», and «Arrows of Wrath».

As a result, the Hunters have 31 cards in the rest of their deck.

The Dragon's deck consists of 20 cards, while the Dragon's starting hand must include «Gust of Wind», «Wings of the Storm», «I smell you, little man!», and «Gold Rush».

After that, the player controlling the Dragon places 6 Dragon Caves on the Battlefield at a distance of L from one another and puts 10 Gold tokens in each.

Once the Dragon Caves are placed, the players controlling the Hunters determine their activation order and place their Hunter miniatures in any available corner of the Battlefield in the same determined order. The Dragon is placed in the last available corner. The Dragon is always last to move in this game mode. During the game, the corners where creatures started the game are considered «their sides of the battlefield».



TURN STRUCTURE

The Effects of the cards played by the Hunters work until the end of the turn of all three Hunters. For instance, the spell «Rain of Arrows» allows Elia or Baldassar to gain this effect until the end of their turn, despite the fact that this card was played by Tulum.

Each player has their own hand and collects their own Gold. At the start of a Hunter's turn, the player for this Hunter draws a card from their common deck. The Hunters are allies, but in this

mode they are separate characters who might have their own plans and objectives in the game. Thus, if the players controlling the Hunters have relics in their hands, they can play such relics only on their own Hunter and have no possibility to have allied creatures «wear» them. Allied players cannot show cards from their hands to each other, but they can discuss and develop strategies together. If a Hunter's player wants to discard a card to receive 2 Gold tokens, this Gold will be received only by this player, so they cannot discard a card to give this Gold to another Hunter. If the deck runs out of cards - the game continues, but the player no longer draws cards.

The Hunters cannot freely exchange cards or Gold between one another. To do so, at the start of the active player's turn, the active player must declare they are giving a card or Gold tokens to another player. The player who declared such a transfer can give another player no more than one card from their hand and any number of Gold tokens the active player has in their possession. Moreover, after the transfer, the active player must skip their current turn.

A player cannot continue the game if they have no creature under control - that player is considered eliminated. All cards and Gold tokens of the eliminated player are immediately discarded, no longer being a part of the current game. If the eliminated player had prepared tactic cards, they remain in the game and the eliminated player determines an ally who will control them during the rest of the game.

VICTORY

This mode has the same win conditions as in the standard two-player game mode: Players for Hunters can achieve victory in two ways: eliminate the Dragon or empty all of the Dragon Caves on the Battlefield.

The player for the Dragon has only one way to win - eliminate each of the three Hunters.

THREE-PLAYER GAME MODE

In this cooperative mode, each player chooses a Hunter to confront the Dragon as in the single-player mode.

The players in this game mode may also have their own interests, as with the four-player mode. They are separate characters, so they have their own hands, gain their own gold, and so on. The Dragon performs actions according to the text on Event Cards, which are played in a random order.

To achieve victory, Hunters have to eliminate the Dragon, which, unlike in the standard rules, has 40 Health points and the Dragon's movement distance is increased to XL.

GAME PREPARATIONS

Hunters have a common deck with 40 support cards. Before the game starts, Hunters should have particular cards in their starting hands as follows:

Baldassar's starting hand consists of the: «Crown of Distortion», «Collar for Pet», and «Weakening».

Tulum's starting hand contains: «I'm no wimp!», «Defend the Weak», and «Dragon Bones Shell».

Elia's starting hand begins play with: «Rain of Arrows», «Double Shot», and «Arrows of Wrath».

As a result, Hunters should have 31 cards remaining in their deck.

For the next step, the player builds their own battle deck and a deck for the Dragon (Event Deck). The player can adjust the game difficulty by choosing corresponding groups to form the Dragon's deck.

Be aware that the maximum difficulty level will be a real challenge even for the most experienced players and is an opportunity to feel the true power of the Dragon.

After that, the player for the Dragon places 6 Dragon Caves on the Battlefield at a distance of L from each other and puts 10 Gold tokens in each. Once the Dragon Caves are placed, players controlling the Hunters determine the order of each Hunter's turn and place their miniatures in any available corner of the Battlefield in the same determined order. The Dragon is placed into the last available corner. The Dragon's player is always last to move. During the game, the corners from which the creatures started the game are considered «their sides of the battlefield».



TURN STRUCTURE

Players for the Hunters determine among themselves their turn order, which stays the same until the end of the game. The Dragon's turn is always the last.

Players and the Dragon take turns one after the other. The Hunters' turn goes just as in a 4-player mode. This mode differs only in the Dragon's turn.

The Dragon's turn consists of two phases: the Event Phase and the Activation Phase.

EVENT PHASE

The Dragon starts its turn with the Event Phase. In this phase, a player draws a card from the top of the Event Deck and performs the indicated effect on this card. Usually, this effect is performed immediately.

Playing Event Cards, the Dragon can perform unexpected actions: move across the Battlefield, perform melee and ranged attacks, or even influence the Hunters. When the condition of Event Card is met, the Dragon begins the Activation Phase.


ACTIVATION PHASE

In the Activation Phase, the Dragon moves across the Battlefield and attacks its opponents. The Dragon begins its movement by choosing the Hunter with the highest current Health. If there are several Hunters with an equal level of Health, the Dragon chooses the nearest possible target. If there are several Hunters that are at the same distance from the Dragon, it attacks the one with the highest Strength attribute. Moving to its target, the Dragon flies at a distance of XL in a straight line, ignoring any obstacles. Nevertheless, the Dragon can still be affected by the **Difficult terrain** effect of a Dragon Cave. At the end of its movement, if the Dragon comes into contact with a Hunter

who isn't its current target, the Dragon attacks this Hunter in melee. If the Dragon's movement is finished on an area occupied by the Hunter, the Dragon comes into contact with this Hunter, with a player choosing the point of contact and taking into account the distance it has already travelled.

The Dragon doesn't receive a Backstab if it breaks contact with another creature. However, the Dragon itself can perform a Backstab, which is always successful. For example, if a Hunter breaks contact with the Dragon, the Hunter automatically receives 1 point of damage from the Backstab.

Unlike in the standard 2 player mode, the Dragon doesn't roll dice during its attack.

The Dragon has 6 Strength points, but it's considered that the Dragon always deals 5 successful hits in melee combat. Similarly, when the Dragon is attacked by Hunters during their turn, the Dragon deals 3 successful hits. The player can defend from the Dragon's successful hits via the standard rules, by rolling a  for a defensive roll while the Dragon cannot defend itself from the Hunters' hits at all. If the Dragon is granted modifiers that increase or decrease its Strength, it is considered that the Dragon increases or decreases the number of successful hits.

Take note that the Dragon in the three-player mode never rolls dice, which means that it also can't defend itself against Ranged Attacks.

In order to make a difference between Magical Shot and non-magical Ranged Attacks, the shooter should re-roll all of their successful shooting dice when Shooting or Throwing.

VICTORY

The Hunters can achieve victory only by eliminating the Dragon. Alternatively, the Dragon wins if all the Hunters are eliminated.



TO SLAY A DRAGON!

I

The three travelers were standing on top of a low hill opposite a grey rock covering the entrance to a cave. A fierce Amazon, a brooding warrior and a silver-haired mage. Numerous spots of grass that faded due to the long drought were looming darkly, and animal bones gleamed white among the stones. The cave entrance was not visible, but they knew He was there. They were hunters who managed to corner a rare and savage beast. But it was not yet completely clear who was the prey and who – the hunter.

The dragon was older than the three of them combined, he was smarter and definitely stronger. But what did they care? Each of them strived to achieve their goal by any means necessary and did not consider the dangers. Just like children who want their wish to be granted at any cost and do not think about consequences. Compared to the dragon they really were children, naive children who believed in their fearlessness and power.

Finally He felt them and woke up. Dragons sleep a lot, so they need a secluded and safe shelter. They are very cautious by nature and remarkably intelligent, and become even more so with passing years. The hunters saw the grey rock covering the cave entrance from prying eyes shake and become blurred. The rough stone began melting and swiftly changing its shape and color.

– Well, it's starting, – Baldassar said impatiently, and he nervously clenched his staff.

In less than a minute they saw an elven portal, every feature of which spoke of grace and grandeur, with a pearly passage mirror in the centre instead of the rock. A tall figure came out of the portal and strode towards them.

Elia's heart missed a beat. It was her Iatael, just as she remembered him – in shining dragon armor, with a scarlet cloak waving behind his back, and his long blond hair skillfully and elaborately styled as Draggaris elves often do. Iatael's face had exquisite elven makeup on, and his blue eyes looked directly at her.

– Why did you come here, Elia?

Elia unconsciously backed away when she heard his voice again after such a long time.



– Why do you pursue me? Why don't you want to let me be... after all that? You know you are the only one to blame for everything that happened. I am here because of you. Is it not enough for you? You run after me as a tenacious murderer. Leave me alone, Elia. Please, go away. Do not torment us both.

His face was twisted with genuine malice. And his gaze... His eyes were emanating cold inhuman hatred.

Elia was choking with tears. His words made her feel pain that was almost physical, though she knew that none of this was true, it was a deception, an illusion, and she shouldn't react like this.

«Don't listen to him, just don't! Everything is not like he says», – Elia repeated to herself, but tears were flooding her face.

– I am here for you, Iatael, – she forced herself to speak, and her voice, weak and quivering, sounded pathetic and strange to her. A weeping Amazon! There was a time when Elia would kill anyone who'd day such a thing to her without hesitation.

– Kill yourself for me! – Iatael ordered coldly. – Why didn't you dive off a cliff at once if your vows of love were true? Why didn't you do it later? Kill yourself if you love me. Do it!

An enormous axe made of dragon teeth and bones twanged in the air in a wide arc and hit the elf just between his eyes, but it didn't meet any obstacles; it flew further through the dim glass of the portal and dully clanked when it reached the rock.

– Forgive me, my fierce mistress, but I cannot watch this slobbery whimpering any more. How could you love a wuss such as this elf? – Tulum said. He looked like a brutal warrior, a cross between an orc and a human, with his wide shoulders, robust jaw bone and narrow forehead. He wanted to add something else, but he stopped halfway and opened his mouth in astonishment.

And there was something to be astonished about. The picture reeled before their eyes, changing with incredible speed. Iatael in his shining armor and the grandiose portal disappeared, and a totally different landscape emerged. It was a prairie with grasslands

all the way up to the horizon. And in the middle of it stood a nomads camp – animal skins sprawled on poles, tents made of the same skins, and wagons along with huge small-headed animals with thick horns grazing on the grass next to them. Orcs walked freely among the tents. Their greenish-blue well-greased skin glistened in the sun. None of the nomads paid any attention to the trio standing at a distance.

At first Elia couldn't understand why they were being shown this.

– I grew up here, – Tulum finally moaned, kneeling. – This is my camp. I can recognize every tent, every cart, and every ox.

As if in reply to his words one of the tall warriors noticed them. He turned his head with a massive, jut out jawbone towards them and breathed in loudly with his wide nostrils. His deep-set little eyes stopped on Tulum.

– What are you doing here, worm? – He approached Tulum and sharply prodded him with his long clawed finger. – I have known from the very beginning that you would turn out to be a traitor and a coward ill-fitted for free life, just like your father was – a pathetic and weak little man. Your mother must have cursed the day when she brought you to the camp. She should have fed you to the pigs when you were born!

Tulum's rough and usually impassible face turned to a mask of true terror and dismay. Elia had never seen the brute like this during their travels. He seemed on the verge of tears, as if he was a naughty five-year old boy.

– Chief, I will prove it to you, chief... – Tulum's lips were trembling.

– You had already proven to me that you are scum once, when you abandoned your camp, worm. Commit at least one worthy deed in your good-for-nothing life – prove that you have at least a drop of real orc blood in your veins. Kill yourself!

Tulum grabbed the huge knife with a bone handle on his chest decidedly.

Elia wanted to scream: «Don't do this, he is provoking you on purpose!»

She rushed to him, but Baldassar beat her to it. The mage's staff with a heavy carved dragon knob hit Tulum's head hard, and she heard the mage's abrasive voice.

– Dragon's dung, are you nuts to believe this? What have I done that the Great Wizards sent me such feeble-minded companions?!

Elia doubted that those were the words of an ancient and powerful spell, but they had a wonderful effect on Tulum. He dropped his dagger and shook his head from side to side, as if trying to shake out something alien which crept in there beyond his will. The staff blow that would definitely crack anybody's else's head open, was quite sobering for Tulum.

Meanwhile, the picture before them changed for the third time, and Elia was no longer surprised to see the speed of the changes. She saw a distant yellow desert with dunes quivering in the heat. It seemed that nothing could survive in this desert, and the white skeleton lying amidst in the dunes was a tell-tale confirmation of this. Hot wind, like a famished dog, fluttered the yellow pages of a book that lay open next to the dead man's bony hand.

«I won't be surprised if the skeleton raises his smiling skull and addresses us», – Elia thought. She seemed to be getting used to the show.

And indeed there was a voice. But it came somewhere from the sky.

– You are too old and frail for this, Baldassar. Admit it, the Phoenix Lodge will never find out all the secrets known to the ancient wizards of Signum. Neither you, nor your brothers are proficient enough in magic. Didn't the elves from Caendir island warn you about this? You will find only death and oblivion here. Go away now, until it's too late. Run and you might survive. Tell your brothers from the Lodge what you've seen and heard. Let them know not to dare go after the Greater Knowledge. Leave those two, why would you waste the precious sand of your life for these fools?

The roaring voice from the sky was commanding and all-powerful, and the skeleton and the open book

only enhanced the impression. It seemed as if one of the Great ancient wizards, who were now worshipped as gods in Signum, was actually talking to them. Indeed, the wizards were still somewhere in the world, though unseen.

The Amazon and the warrior turned to the mage. The last performance was clearly intended for him. Sure, he was a cranky old man, sometimes completely unbearable, but they couldn't afford to lose the mage's support now. Their only chance of winning was to act together.

The voice from the sky went on and on, convincing the mage to surrender and retreat, it promised rewards and punishments. Elia saw large sweat drops appear on the old man's forehead, he pressed his lips together, and his eyes were restless. He was clearly hesitating and confused.

Finally the mage snapped and came down on his companions:

– Dragon's gill, why are you looking at me like this, you cow-faced dung lickers!? Are you waiting for me to run and let you grab everything for yourselves? Fat chance! Dragon's slime to your throats! I will stay and receive the share that I'm due!

The desert and the voice from the sky started to melt. The grey rock still hiding the entrance to the dragon's lair appeared before the hunters again. The mage spat out, turned away and started walking to their temporary camp nearby.

Elia and Tulum exchanged looks and silently followed the mage. It was getting dark fast, and they had to get a good sleep before the next morning.

II

The three travelers entered the tiny camp at the foot of one of the nearby hills, still silent. None of them was in the mood to discuss what they had seen. Each of them wished to remain alone with their own thoughts for the remainder of the day.

Their mule and two horses were still tethered. The animals had already eaten their oats and were snorting

timidly, looking around them. They too felt uneasy. Their instincts told them about the danger waiting in the dragon's cave.

The bulk of their belongings and supplies were packed on a small cart which the mage usually rode. Their hunting gear was also there. Harpoons, snares, various traps, hooks of every imaginable size, bundles of robust string, chains, a portable bolt thrower, several smaller crossbows, a supply of arrows and heads for them, a dozen axes, flanged maces, swords and lances. They might need all of this the next day, when they went hunting.

A cage as high as half a human covered with tattered canvas was standing next to the cart, in the dust. When the hunters returned to the camp, the thing in the cage felt them approaching and grumbled angrily, rocking the cage and making unpleasant screeching noises that vaguely resembled a bird's cackling.

– Baldassar, it looks like your pet has missed you a lot. See, the cage is in a flurry, – the half-orc grinned and thrust his thick finger toward the cage.

– Tulum, your head is empty as a dragon's shell. This thing is hungry, and we are just walking slabs of meat for it, like steaks.

The canvas came off half the cage, and a reptile's eye – green with a golden iris – stared at the people through the thick wooden bars.

– It seems to be really glad to see you, Baldassar. It will eat you with its gaze any minute, – the muscular Amazon pointed out, adjusting her primitive diadem made of animal bones and fangs.

The mage swore angrily, mentioning every dragon and their close and distant relatives ten generations back.

– I am conducting an important scientific study of this species, draco de volucris carnivore, and it's absolutely necessary that I retain this specimen. And I don't care about your congenital stupidity which prevents you from understanding the value of this study.

– Aren't you bored of catering to it yourself? – Elia asked.

The mage deliberately ignored her question and addressed the half-orc:

– Tulum, feed it already, before it shatters the cage.

In a way Baldassar was not just their companion, but also their employer, so both of them were forced to carry out his wishes and listen to his endless grumbling patiently.

The warrior took a bag from the cart, and it immediately burst into worried chicken cackling. After the little dragon in the cage was sated, it was the hunters' turn to eat. The following day was going to be hard, and no one wanted to start it on an empty stomach. Tulum made a fire, and Baldassar got around to cooking dinner – he didn't trust the half-orc's culinary abilities. And forcing the Amazon to cook would be a huge mistake.

One wouldn't call their trio a close-knit group. Though they were dragon hunters, they were rather fellows in misfortune, than trusty friends.



Their paths intertwined not long ago. Elia met Tulum three years before, when she wandered into a prairie while following a burned down trail left by a dragon. The trail consisted of ruined and scorched orc camps. Apparently, the green-skinned people suited the killer's taste, so he visited the prairie regularly.

The Amazon set an ambush for the dragon, and when it appeared again, she managed to wound him, but almost died herself. Tulum watched Elia fight the beast, and the half-orc came to respect the girl deeply after he was a witness to her courage and resourcefulness. After the dragon flew away to lick his wounds, Tulum picked unconscious Elia up and cared for her until she was able to mount a horse herself. Tulum joined with her to get the head of the dragon that destroyed his settlement.

They did not succeed in finding and slaying the monster that, as Elia said, was called Paraxis the Ruthless, and whom the orcs nicknamed the Scarlet Death. But during their years of travel around Signum they became rather adept at hunting certain types of dragons. They were especially skilled in taking on smaller beasts: various Dirt-clutchers, Mud-floppers, Bone-suckers and Snake-tails.

Their glory, though not too great, got ahead of them, when Elia met Ulrich von Eichenwald, a vagabond knight from the Western baronies. This young and charming man came from an impoverished, but ancient baronial family, and he also 'worked' as a monster hunter. Ulrich could be devilishly gallant and courteous, especially when he spotted some personal gain for himself. Very soon the young knight became their new companion, and up to a certain point things were smooth between them. Every time when the hunters heard about a dragon-like beast terrorizing a region they would immediately set off. Local authorities – a baron, a governor or just a village elder – willingly offered them generous payment for the monster's head. After all, if a draconid got into the habit of it, it could do great harm to property, especially to the cattle, and it could easily injure or even kill a man. Besides the reward for slaying the monster, the hunters were very interested in its lair. Draconids usually were real hoarders, and their caves, along with bones, rusty armor and lots of useless gear, sometimes contained real relics – silver, gold and even jewels.

Very soon the bags of all three hunters were filled with impressive treasures. But wealth was not the main motivation for Elia. She was looking for the real killer dragon, Paraxis the Ruthless, to slay the beast whatever the cost. Ulrich found out about the girl's obsession at the moment of her weakness (she told him about everything herself when she fell for the young knight's charm and found herself in his bed), and one fine morning he decided that they had different paths to follow. He disappeared and took the contents of their bags with him, so Elia and Tulum were left completely broke.



The Amazon was furious but she could do nothing. Ulrich's treachery hit Elia the hardest, as they finally picked Paraxis' trail whom they had been searching for for such a long time. But continuing a pursuit that could last for weeks or even months without money even for oats for the horses, let alone without real equipment necessary to kill such a beast, was impossible.

At this very moment they met Baldassar. Or rather the mage found them himself and proposed to combine their efforts. He undertook to solve their financial difficulties in exchange for the carcass of the slain dragon for his studies. Of course, Elia immediately refused. She didn't trust Baldassar, and after the incident with Ulrich she didn't want to deal with anybody else. But the mage was willing to wait and didn't push them. And Elia was short for time. The trail of the dragon whom she had been hunting so stubbornly for so long was fading every day.

Besides, dragons lived for hundreds of years – much longer than people and even elves, whom many a man considered to be almost immortal. The dragon could fly to another part of Signum at any moment or even cross the endless sea beyond which there were other lands, if you believed rumors. And finally, he could just go to sleep for a hundred years or more. Such lethargic sleep was not rare for adult beasts who had been living for a long time.

Moreover, Elia found out that Ulrich declared himself the greatest Dragonslayer that ever lived and promised to kill Paraxis. No doubt, he ran out of the money he stole from them. Most likely, the pretty bastard wasted it on women or just gambled it away, and now he needed a new source of income as soon as possible. The hunt for Paraxis could give him a lot. Several neighboring rulers set a price on his head, and innumerable treasure which the dragon had accumulated during his many raids was definitely stored in his lair. Elia decided that she would better go hunting with the crazy mage than let Ulrich kill the dragon.

Tracking the dragon and finding his lair took another half a year. And now they almost reached their

target. Elia knew that Ulrich was nearby and also trailing Paraxis. The Amazon was genuinely infuriated with this. If the scumbag dares to cross her path, she wouldn't hesitate to send an arrow between his eyes and another one downtown.

The loud gurgle of stream and hiss of a dying fire pulled Elia out of her dreams about first getting rid of the dragon and then setting the score with Ulrich von Eichenwald whom she hated. Baldassar was standing with his back turned to her and urinating on the fire, which was burning away, with obvious pleasure.

Elia pulled a disgusted face:

– Mage, I hope this is a smart magic ritual that will protect us from intruders – the dragon or at least wolves – at night.

– You can believe whatever you want, woman. But, to tell you the truth, I don't think my urine is capable of repelling a dragon and any other nocturnal creatures, – Baldassar said, adjusting his robe.

– Then, maybe, you shouldn't do it quite so ostentatiously? – She asked.

The mage said sardonically:

– Oh, I am sorry, my mistress, I didn't think about your tender feelings at all. Maybe I should have asked for the permission of our green-skinned friend before urinating into the fire? I thought you had seen all sorts of things during your adventures.

– What are you insinuating? – The Amazon asked with a clear menace in her voice.

– I am not insinuating anything specific, – the mage hurried to add. – But you and your orc friend are quite a strange couple.

– We are companions. And Tulum is not an orc.

Baldassar commented tartly:

– Dragon's udder, then who is he? He looks like an orc, walks like an orc, dresses and even talks like an orc.

Elia didn't rush to answer, giving Tulum a chance to answer himself if he chose to.

The warrior got up unhurriedly, went to the cart and returned with a wineskin full of new wine. Pulling the cork out with his teeth, he turned the wineskin over and took several large gulps. Then he gave a drunken belch and said:

– My mother is from the Moon Jackal clan. She was a famed warriorress. Such women are very rare among orcs.

– See, I was right, woman. He is an orc! – Baldassar exclaimed.

Tulum made him shut up with a gesture.

– My mother was an orc, but my father was a human. People in my tribe said that my mother hid her pregnancy till the very last day, and when it was time for me to come into the world under the Jackal's Moon, she went to the prairie and had me.

The mage whistled in surprise:

– I met a lot of half-bloods, mainly from elves and humans, to the west from the Celestial mountains, especially in Vallor. But I have never heard about half-blood orcs. May I be covered in dragon scales from head to toes if your fellow tribesmen didn't want to

kill you as soon as they saw you!

– They did, – Tulum nodded. – A child like me brought great shame to my tribe. The warriors wanted to kill me, and they could have easily done that. But they treated my mother like an equal, so they asked her: 'Woman, why did you bring such shame on the tribe and didn't leave this child in the prairie for the wolves and jackals to devour?' My mother replied that she wanted to do so at first. But then she saw me and realized that she couldn't abandon me, and now, if they wanted to kill me, they had to kill her first.

– Looks like your mother was one of us – Amazons, – Elia edged in. – Though a real Amazon would never put up with men's power or consider them her equals.

Tulum drank some more wine and continued:

– After a discussion the warriors decided: he is only half orc, and his second half is human, so the rough prairie life – piercing cold wind, burning sun, constant roaming and coarse food – will kill him without their help. So I stayed to live with the tribe. My mother cared for and tended to me more than other mothers care for and tend to their children. She taught me everything she knew: how to hunt in the prairie, how to make weapons, how to read the stars, how to search for water during a drought, how to get away from a prairie fire, how to ride a bronotop, and the main skill for an orc – how to fight. I grew up in the prairie among my people, but still I didn't become a rightful member of my tribe. So I decided to leave.

– I see, so you decided to slay a dragon to earn fame for your family, – the mage said. – It's a stupid decision, though it is quite worthy of an orc. You had better choose something less dangerous. For example, kill a woolly rhinoceros or a saber-toothed tiger by yourself, or challenge a mountain troll. But becoming a dragon hunter and going after the most terrifying monster alive – Paraxis the Ruthless...

– I didn't want to become a dragon hunter, – Tulum replied. – I left so that my mother could be proud of me. But on the day when I went to the prairie a huge shadow flew above me towards our camp.

I rushed back. But I was late: when I returned to the camp, I found only burned wagons and my tribesmen's corpses. The dragon killed them all and was having a feast over their remains. I hid in a ditch in horror when I saw her, – the half-orc pointed at the Amazon who was sitting opposite to him. – This woman was dashing to the dragon without fear. I thought the beast would devour her in a blink of an eye as it did my tribesmen before. But the young warrior fought with such fierceness that the dragon was powerless when he encountered her wrath. She resembled my

mother, and for a moment I even thought that it was my mother's spirit that returned to get her revenge.

Tulum went silent; he seemed to be completely absorbed by his memories.

When the mage was tired of waiting, he addressed Elia:

– That dragon in the prairie – it was Paraxis?

The Amazon nodded in reply.

– So you have been hunting him for a long time?

Elia nodded again:

– Yes, I have an old score to settle with him.

– Let a dragon eat my liver if it is not about that elf prince in shining armor, – Baldassar said.

– Don't poke your long nose into other people's affairs, mage, – Elia squinted threateningly.

– Our lives will depend on each other tomorrow, and I'd like to know if I can trust the ones who will cover my back, – the mage retorted.

– Well then, you first, – the Amazon said. – Tell us, why are you here? I bet you have things to tell too.

III

The pale blue disc of the moon appeared in the sky, casting its ghostly light on the hills near the dragon's lair.

– I think I already told you that I am conducting important scientific studies, – the mage started, but Elia interrupted him:

– Your ring.

– What about my ring? – The mage looked at his hands one at a time. Several rings sparkled on his fingers, some of them with rather

noticeable large gems. It was customary for mages to turn jewelry into magical artifacts.

Elia shook her head:

– The one you are hiding on your neck under your clothes. Don't be surprised, I only glanced at it, but I recognized the symbol. A fire phoenix – the sign of the secret Phoenix Lodge. We heard about this order at the dragon's cave, and I don't think it was an accident.

– Dragon's heartburn, it's all fairy tales and fiction! There is no such lodge. You seem to have listened to too much gossip at a roadside inn, – the mage dismissed her.

– Then show me the chain and ring on your neck, – the Amazon demanded.

The mage felt Tulum's unpleasant heavy gaze on himself. Both his companions were looking at him expectantly. Baldassar hesitated for some time, and then gave up:

– So be it! I mustn't talk about it under penalty of death, but who will learn about it, if we will be roasted by a dragon tomorrow?

The mage groped around in his robe and produced a thin golden chain with a small grey metal ring and lifted it up against the moonlight. The ring was decorated with a signet featuring a phoenix reborn in flames.

– What is it? – Tulum asked. By the looks of it, he was not impressed with the artifact at all; on the contrary, had the half-orc found it on the road, he would have likely stepped over it.

– It is a symbol of membership in the order, – Elia explained.

– Dragon's testicles, how do you know this? – The mage asked.

– You hunt for ancient secrets, – the Amazon answered. – Iatael told me that the Phoenix Lodge had tried to send its spies to the Celestial mountains and Talanis island more than once.

– Ah, the elf in shining armor, – the mage squinted. – Well, it is true. I had a chance to visit the ancestral homeland of all elves – Talanis island – myself.

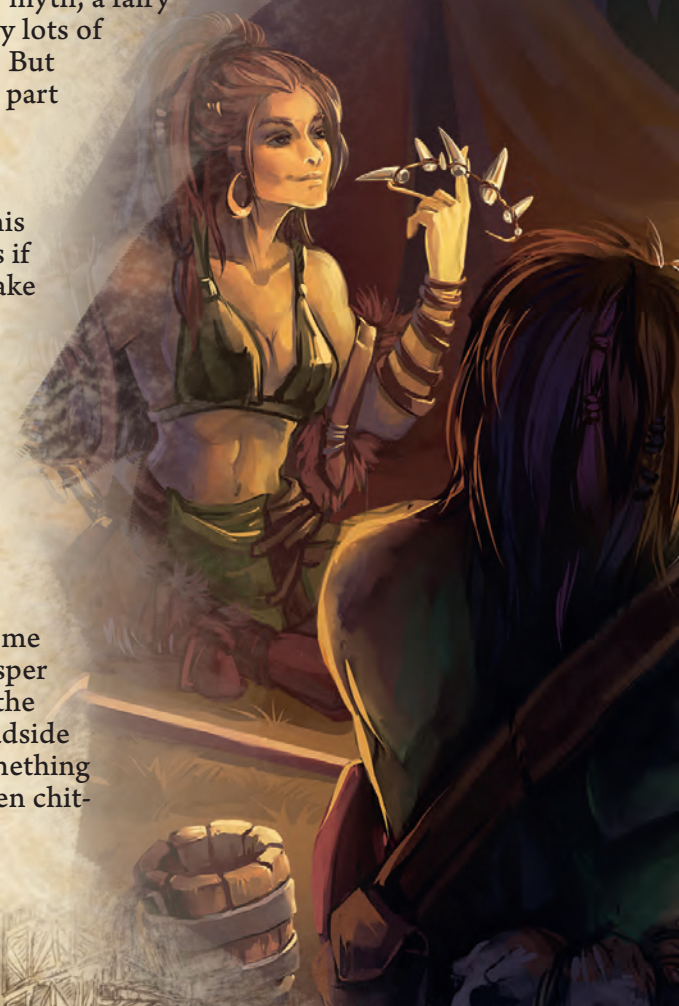
Of course, I went there with a merchant mission, but this didn't protect me against the nagging attention of elf guards. Elves sense everything related to magic a mile away, and they see it through. – The mage went silent and pensively stroked his long beard.

– What were you doing in elf lands and why did you hide your real name? – Elia returned him to the conversation.

– I was a spy for the Lodge, – the mage told them casually, as if they were talking about prices for last-year herring or yesterday's rain. – The Phoenix Lodge does exist, though no self-respecting master of magical science or scientist will admit it. The Lodge has long ago become a popular myth, a fairy tale surrounded by lots of stories and fables. But believe me, it's all part of a well-thought plan. You will ask me whose plan? –

The mage raised his index finger up, as if he intended to make a hole in the sky, next to the moon and stars, with it.

– We spread the rumors ourselves. Our principle is: if you wish to hide something well, put it where everyone can see it. A little gold, some connections, whisper a thing or two to the innkeeper at a roadside dump, babble something out during drunken chit-chat...



And all the people are buzzing, repeating to each other the same tale – about the Phoenix Lodge. Everyone tries to embroider his story, to think something up or invent details, and after a time the tale turns into a horde of rumors and gossip, which a sensible common man shouldn't believe, of course. We put in some good effort, and we had our motives for this. Wizards are not just weirdos well up in old books and manuscripts, royal diviners or doctors who are summoned when someone needs to find their beloved cat or put leeches on a boil. Many adepts of magical sciences occupy rather high positions at barons' and even kings' courts. As a rule, those positions are not very conspicuous, like a king's counselor or a secret advisor. The Lodge includes very influential people from all over Signum.

– Mages always conspire and always create some secret societies or orders. Because they are mages, – Tulum spoke thoughtfully. – What is so special about this Lodge?

Baldassar snorted angrily, and Elia explained:

– I agree with you, Tulum, that wizards have been prone to conspiracies and scheming since olden times. And the Phoenix Lodge is probably the most legendary secret mage society. Even lunar eclipses and the search for the philosopher's stone have been connected to their activity.

– All that gossip isn't worth a straw, – Baldassar stated confidently. – Ignorant people usually mention the Lodge all over the place. We have something to do with less than a tenth of what is attributed to us. But nevertheless, the Phoenix Lodge exists, and it is a rather far-reaching organization. I have been a part of it for a long time, and I have hardly reached its higher levels, though I know some members of the Lodge Chapter.

Elia was not surprised with Baldassar's story. She was interested in something else:

– And what did Paraxis do to the Phoenix Lodge?

– The Lodge doesn't care at all whether I kill the dragon, – Baldassar replied. – My brothers and I have absolutely different goals.

– Then why are you here?

– If I tell you, you'll probably have to live looking over your shoulders for the rest of your lives. The Lodge doesn't forgive when its secrets get to the wrong ears.

– What can be more dangerous than being a dragon hunter? – The orc said and had another pull at the bag which was already almost empty.

– Let me wet my whistle with this dragon's hogwash – the mage grabbed the wineskin from Tulum. He made several big gulps, belched loudly and continued:

– Keledanis elves still live on Talanis island. The elves call their island Caendir. They keep lots of ancient secrets there, including those about the first people and the birth of gods on Signum. I had to find out as much as I could about these mysteries.

– What exactly? – Elia exhaled, pulling herself away from the wineskin. She was the last one to get to the wine, and the Amazon proved that she could drink as well as men with dignity.

– For example, how to kill a god. Or how to deprive him of a part of his divine power, – Baldassar replied.

At this the half-orc dropped his jaw to the ground and Elia forgot about the wine:

– What? Are you out of your mind? What god are you talking about?

– Emris, Aria, any of them. We do not care. The Phoenix Lodge intends to challenge all gods.

– But why?

– Because we want to put an end to their rule and to get hold of their power, – the mage's eyes ignited determinedly, and his beard straightened up as if electrified with a mighty spell. – Do you know that the great wizards of giants – the first people – became gods of Signum? They achieved incredible magical mastery, and managed to outlive their age.

– I heard these myths, but gods are gods – they cannot be killed, – Elia said.

– You are wrong! – The mage snapped. – In the past the gods were of the same flesh and blood as us, great minds and scientists of their people. Due to their deep knowledge of magic they found a way to improve their bodies. So even a tiny bit of a god's body, be it tears, blood, saliva, bile or even urine, contains an unparalleled charge of magical energy. These bits of sacred gods' liquors are valued among the people of Signum more than gold or precious gems. I have spent long years experimenting with liquors of different gods, and I can confidently say that killing a god, or rather depriving him of his divine power, is a challenging, yet achievable goal.

Tulum was excited with the mage's intense speech:

– Is it more difficult than slaying a dragon? – The half-orc asked.

– I don't think so. It's hard to say for sure. No one has ever tried to do this, – Baldassar was contemplating aloud. – But when I was on Talanis island, I managed to learn something about how gods appeared on Signum. Some legends of Keledanis elves, the most ancient ones, tell how the gods acquired their power. In those times the great wizards united to banish Vortirus, the horrific chaos dragon, from the center of the world. Echoes of this battle reverberate through realities like ripples on water, and even now one can feel them in the most distant worlds on the edge, where time slows down and flows differently. The chaos dragon represented the unrestrained force of the magic itself. He could not be killed. But the great wizards managed to wound him, and to banish him far away from Signum.

– Ha, so the young gods were dragon slayers like us? – Tulum asked.



– Dragon’s eggs, don’t interrupt me, – the mage snapped tetchily. – I’m just getting to the most important thing. On Talanis I was able to bribe some elves with spice. You know that this hard drug has a special effect on elves, and it is strictly prohibited on Talanis. The elves I bribed stole a few manuscripts from the Eternal Knowledge Vault. They were written by elven historians during the first age after the battle with the dragon. From these manuscripts I learned a secret that the gods tried to expunge from people’s memory. The ancient wizards who defeated Vortirus used the blood he spilled to acquire their power. They created a magical elixir from the dragon’s blood. No one could predict the elixir’s effect with certainty. They had only vague speculations and obscure theories, but the thirst for knowledge, and mainly the desire to obtain incredible power got the best of them. The ancient wizards decided that all of them should go through a rite of initiation and take a few drops of the miraculous elixir.

– And what if it was a poison? – Tulum couldn’t control himself.

– Well, then they would all die, – the mage shrugged.

– In this case wouldn’t it be better to choose one to take the elixir? – Elia asked.

– They were afraid.

– Of what? – The half-orc wondered.

– That the one who takes the elixir will obtain unlimited power and destroy the others, – Baldassar explained. – So each of them drank the potion.

– And what then? – Tulum asked. – Did they become gods?

– Not all of them, – the mage shook his head. – Only some of them. For part of them the elixir was a deadly poison, others just lost their mind or underwent horrific changes and are now wandering in the lower worlds as monsters. There was too much original power of order and chaos – which we usually call magic – in the blood of the world dragon. A selected few were able to accept this gift. We now know their names as the names of the gods. Moreover, the elixir

had absolutely different effects on the gods. Some of them received the ability to control various elements – earth, water, fire, wind, rock or iron, others received smaller gifts – for example, the power to open any locks and latches, bewitch metal or perform wonderful melodies on any instruments.

– Baldassar, everything you just told us is truly amazing, – the Amazon said reservedly, casting a tell-tale sidelong look at Tulum. – But even if the gods wanted to hide the secret of their power’s origin, what use will this knowledge be to the Phoenix Lodge? The chaos dragon wandered around the InterWorld, and his appearance in Signum almost destroyed all things living here. Even we, dragon slayers, cannot find and, moreover, wound this dragon.

Elia did not believe the mage’s story completely. All of this very well could be the ravings of a disturbed mind. Mages and alchemists often went mad during their long studies and complicated experiments. Such was the price of discovering the secrets of the universe. Who in their right mind would believe that the gods who banished the great dragon from Signum drank an elixir prepared from his blood in order to acquire superpowers?

– I am not asking you to fight Vortirus. This dragon is dreadfully strong, and even the gods were able to defeat him only by using deception. But Vortirus is not the only dragon with original magic in his veins. His children and offspring remain on Signum. All dragons, including snake-like ophidians, who once were a large race on Signum, are descendants of Vortirus. Surely, not every dragon has so much power. As a rule, dragons live for hundreds, and even thousands of years. A dragon never stops growing with years, and his physical strength, his mind and his magical power grow with him. Paraxis is one of the oldest dragons in Signum. His magic is incredibly strong, which we saw for ourselves today. He was easily able to penetrate our minds at a distance and find our most deep-seated fears, and then skillfully use them to create illusions.

– So you want to kill Paraxis to gain his power? – Elia concluded.

– Nobody knows exactly how it is done, – the mage admitted unwillingly. – Only imprecise descriptions of some experiments have been preserved in our time. But even these vague instructions are enough to understand that a dragon's blood is the Juice of Magic. One can perform miracles, create incredibly powerful artifacts and potent spells with it. Perhaps, one could even create a weapon able to harm gods and finally liberate Signum from their tyranny. So I need all of Paraxis's blood for experiments.

– This is real madness! – Elia said. – But I swear with the mother of all Amazons, you will get what you are looking for.

All three of them stayed silent for some time, thoughtfully gazing at the bright-red coals smoldering in the fire-pit. These coals reminded Elia of the dragon's eyes. Slumbering flame waiting for its time was smoldering in those eyes when she looked into them for the first time. This flame was destined to destroy her life and to turn her into what she was now – a fearless hunter.

IV

– I used to be a freedom-loving Amazon, one of thousands of courageous warriors of my people. We don't live like other people on Signum. Amazons do not serve men, they do not cook for them, do not wash their clothes, do not clean and sew from dawn till dusk. We not only refuse to accept men's power over us, we do not even consider them equal to us. If one of us decides to have a child, she does it of her own free will and often against the will of the future father. We use men only for conception, and after the deed is done, we do not have to see the father of our child ever again.

There is only one man whom we are willing to recognize as our equal, and he is a god. We worship Arakat, the god of war, and Inara, the goddess of the hunt. The best of us are proud to call themselves the

brides of Arakat. We go raiding along the coast of the Inner Sea far to the west and the east.

Hippolyta, who was known as the Unrivaled, had been our queen for a very long time. No one could beat her in archery while riding a horse or in knife throwing. Many warriors admired her and loved her. Hippolyta was my mentor, and I sincerely thought that I loved her more than others. I wanted to follow her example in everything. But that was before Hippolyta met a man.

His name was Linos, and he wasn't even a warrior. A meager slave from sunny Hellas. This man was a sculptor; he carved stone statues of gods and goddesses. They say he had no equals in his art. Hippolyta wished that he sculpted a lifelike statue of her, and for this she posed for him. The hands of the master who created living sculptures from dead stone fascinated Hippolyta, and she gave herself to him of her own will. After this Hippolyta should have forgotten about this man immediately, she should have executed him or at least banished him. But his charms, more treacherous than anything in the world, had already taken their effect on her. Soon she realized she was pregnant and she didn't hide it. On the contrary, Hippolyta announced that she wanted to live with Linos as husband and wife. Many of us, including me, thought that her decision was a sign of weakness, moreover, that it was a betrayal.

– Loving someone who is not from your tribe does not mean a betrayal, – Tulum said unexpectedly.

Elia nodded in reply:

– At that time I didn't think so, Tulum. Later I received a cruel lesson. Listen to me, all in good time.

Hippolyta was expecting her first child and basking in love and happiness next to her beloved Linos. And I was burning with hatred and jealousy. Many times I imagined how I would sneak into my queen's tent under the veil of night to carry out my bloody vengeance. Sometimes I imagined that I would kill Linos before Hippolyta, and sometimes – that I would kill them both. Filled with such thoughts, I often wandered around the foreland of the Celestial mountains.

I was accompanied by a small squad of Amazons, young adventure seekers just like me.

One day, after a tempest had raged throughout the night, we saw a sky ship. It was heavily beaten by the night storm, and it was swimming above the ground, almost touching the hill tops with its bottom and lurching to one side. Its flying bubble, which allowed the ship to fly above ground, lost its shape and looked like a deflated balloon. Usually, I saw sky ships only high above the ground, proudly emerging from snow-white clouds, like ethereal creatures. They were heading from the Dragon Riders' harbors to every corner of Signum, majestic and unapproachable.

– Who are these Dragon Riders, and are dragons like horses or mules, that they would allow anyone to ride them? – Tulum was astonished.

Baldassar, who possessed impressive knowledge on any topic related to the history of Signum, replied to him:

– Dragon Riders. Draggaris elves, descendants of those who went with prince Icanor from Talanis island to the Celestial mountains to find a new home there in union with the oldest creatures on Signum – dragons – call themselves that. Draggaris elves are so arrogant and selfish that other people often call them High elves. Thanks to their ancient knowledge on aerial navigation, which they received from dragons, the Draggaris learned how to build spectacular flying ships, and now they control the transportation of the most profitable and expensive goods on Signum. Due to this they are one of the richest peoples of Signum. But Dragon Riders are not really interested in precious metals or gems. They mainly focus on self-understanding and mastering the higher laws of harmony. Draggaris elves believe that knowing the canons of beauty and harmony is possible only through meditation and entering a special, «open» state of mind. For this they frequently use jannat, a strong drug prohibited in many nations of Signum due to its noticeable side effects.

– Some orc warriors use special mushrooms to gain a wild boar's frenzy or a bear's fury during battle,

– Tulum shared.

– Draggaris riders handle dragons, and they are able to defeat a whole army single-handedly. That's why there are not many madmen who dare cross their path on Signum, – the mage noted.

– The sky ship that we saw belonged to High elves, but we didn't see any dragons nearby, – Elia continued. – But the ship made of beautiful white wood that was shining in the sun due to its gilded paneling was about to fall right before our eyes. It could not gain the necessary altitude to fly over the nearest hill, and my estimation was that it would run into it with its gilded snout. I couldn't miss such prey. My mind was already drawing pictures of the ship's holds filled with the most exotic goods. Besides, no other Amazon could boast that she was able to even approach a sky ship. I imagined how everyone would envy me when I delivered the ship to Temiskira, our capital.



I gave the signal to my friends, and we began pursuit, whooping and hooting. We caught up with the ship when it drew level with the hilltop and caught the rocks with its shredded rigging. The small elf crew was trying to detach the ropes in vain. When they saw us they grabbed their crossbows. But what could soft elves who were used to looking down upon other people of Signum from a bird's eye view do against Amazons? We managed to take the ship over in a matter of minutes. Its crew was partially killed and partially taken as prisoners – someone had to navigate the ship, after all.

I decided to check the hold first. But, to our great disappointment, jannat was the only cargo transported by the sky ship. Of course, this drug cost an insane amount on one of the Sphinx Caliphate markets. But it had virtually no value to us, which was not the case for the ship. I decided to deliver it to Temiskira no matter what. I can't say it was easy. The sky vessel was damaged heavily, especially the flying balloon. The ship could not rise more than a few meters above the ground. In addition, it was almost uncontrollable, so we had to drag it with our horses. But notwithstanding all the difficulties, we reached Temiskira in a few days with no incident.

A huge crowd of Amazons gathered on the central square of the city to stare at the sky ship. The queen's court was nearby. Hippolyta's house, as most other houses in the city, was a giant tent made from skins and bones of wild animals such as saber-toothed tigers, rocky bears and woolly rhinoceroses. The queen herself went out to meet us, but I saw no smile on her pale face. When I came closer to tell her about my trophy, she asked me quietly:

– What have you done, Elia? Don't you know whose ship this is and what punishment awaits those who dare encroach on the property of High elves?

I replied rudely:

– My queen, it seems that you've grown very soft staying here. Didn't you teach me that Amazons are not afraid of anyone and anything under the moons of Signum?

Hippolyta's baby started crying in the wet nurse's hands behind her back. The queen eyed me from head to foot heavily and said:


– Remember my words, Elia: this ship will bring us great trouble.

Though Hippolyta was not happy, the other Amazons took my trophy as amazing luck. A magnificent feast was organized in Temiskira at once; wine was flowing and half-naked amazons were dancing in the torchlight late into the night. I lost count of how many times famous huntresses raised their cups in my honor and shouted my name. I felt as a new queen. It seemed that everyone forgot about Hippolyta. By morning I went to sleep, exhausted from all the drinking and dancing.

– Dragon's gills, how could you be so cock-sure and careless! – Baldassar exclaimed. – A sky ship is too dangerous a trophy. Draggaris elves would never let anyone take over their ship unpunished, especially if its holds are filled to the brim with jannat.

– You are right. Me and my vanity are to blame for what happened next. Indeed, it was I who decided to bring the sky ship to Temiskira. The Dragon Riders wasted little time. The next day I woke up to loud screams and the choking smoke of fire in the city. That day death itself came to us, and death was called Paraxis the Ruthless. The dragon was not alone, there were at least three of them, but none could match Paraxis' cruelty. He burned,





trampled in the ground, and tore with his enormous fangs and talons everything that crossed his path, leaving scorched earth and mountains of corpses behind him. No doubt, I would have died that day, had it not been for Hippolyta. She saved me at the expense of her own life, literally pulling me out of the dragon's clutches. I saw her brave face for the last time just before the flames devoured her.

Roaring from pain and fury, I decided I would get my revenge, even if it would cost me my life. From a young age every Amazon is taught how to handle a lasso, so that she could catch wild horses in the prairie. I managed to get hooked on the dragon's back with my lasso and hopped onto him.

A rider in red armor controlled Paraxis. He also noticed me and made the beast rise high into the sky. I got dizzy. The city under us was rapidly turning into crumbles spilled on the ground. I clenched my teeth and tried not to look down. The rider was my target. We started fighting at incredible height, with hurricane wind whistling in our ears. The dragon couldn't help his rider in any way, so we were evenly matched. I almost out the rider when Paraxis turned sharply in the air. Having lost my balance, I hit my head on the armor on the dragon's back and fell down. I expected that I would inevitably crash down, so I closed my eyes calmly.

When I opened them again, I found myself in a strange cave next to a blonde blue-eyed warrior, who

was cooking something from herbs on a little fire. The warrior's armor seemed vaguely familiar, but when I tried to remember where I saw it, I felt dizzy again and I had a splitting headache.

– Are you Arakat, the god of war? – I asked him.

Seeing that I opened my eyes, he smiled and answered:

– You could say that, since I ride a dragon. But no one has ever called me this.

The warrior turned out to be Iatael, an elf prince, a Dragon Rider, one of the sons of Icanor. He saved me when I was falling down unconscious. He didn't say why he did this, for I almost killed him. So I found myself not at Arakat's feasting table, but in a narrow rock cave high in the mountains.

– Am I your prisoner now? – I asked.

Iatael was silent for some time, and then he said:

– I would prefer to call you my guest. I am sorry; I cannot take you to the Celestial Citadels, where the Hall of Silence and Contemplative Serenity is located. It is not customary for my fellow elves to keep the company of outlanders. But no one will disturb us here.

And while Iatael refused to call me his prisoner, in fact I was one – imprisoned in my individual cell high in the mountains, though without doors or grates. I must admit, I did not lack anything, neither food, nor water. I used to get by with much less sometimes. Iatael came almost every day, and he brought me everything I needed. His dragon descended to a stone ledge next to the entrance to the cave, so that the rider could enter.

I thought that Iatael kept my life only on his elfish whim. After he was done playing with his new toy, he would feed me to the dragon or (I didn't know which was worse) leave me for dead alone here, high in the mountains. A few times, when he was not there, I tried to escape, but the cave was surrounded by sharp cliffs. Getting out of my prison without growing some wings was all but impossible.

I felt unbearable loneliness staying alone in the tiny stone cave. I could sleep and eat as much as I wanted.

The rest of the time I just sat on the edge of the abyss and looked into the endless wilderness until my eyes were sore, waiting for the dragon to appear.

Iatael came at different times. Sometimes he told me wonderful stories about the things he saw flying over unknown lands in the far north or west. Sometimes he just played his silver flute – a magical, slightly sad melody which would echo around the rocky mountain cliffs.

Gradually I stopped wishing to kill him. What was the sense of killing my only guard, if I couldn't come down from there without his help? Of course, the fire of vengeance was still smoldering in me, and at first, during the long hours when Iatael was not with me, I imagined how I would crack his head open with a sharp stone. He was considerate enough not to leave me any other weapons, be it a knife or a bow. But when the tall and handsome elf appeared in my cave, the thoughts about murder just went away. My life as an Amazon was left far below, and many things I used to consider important lost all their significance and meaning. But I began to value every glance of the piercing blue eyes I was given, every light step when he entered the cave, every casual touch when he examined the rapidly healing wound on my head.

Iatael often brought me gifts. A rare shell of the finest, almost transparent mother-of-pearl. An amazingly beautiful carved comb from reindeer antlers. A funny outfit of a woman from the Nipan islands. A wonderful fiery-red feather of a Roc, which shined in the night. A necklace sparkling with diamonds.

Once Iatael brought in his shirt a small adroit animal with beautiful fur opalescent in the sunlight. He said it was a marten. I named the animal Sparkle. We became quick friends, and since then, when Iatael was absent, I often played with it. Sparkle turned out to be a very loyal and smart little thing. Loyal to death, – Elia could not contain herself, and a tear glistened on the proud Amazon's cheek.

After picking at his long beard a bit Baldassar said:

– It seems to me that I heard something about your elfish prince, Amazon. He was a brother of their ruler.

The High elves composed a song of praise for him; in the song he dies at the hand of a devious traitor.

Elia spit on the ground angrily:

– I did wish him death the first moment we met. But when I looked into his blue eyes there, on the mountain, I lost my balance and my very self forever. The blue flame burned my heart and melted all my fury drop by drop. At one point I realized that I lived only for our next meeting. It was a revelation for me. I came to know the feeling for which I hated Hippolyta.

And in part it was her posthumous gift to me.

– It looks like magic.

All elves are sorcerers, – Tulum stated.

– Yes, Tulum. It was magic, but unlike usual magic, it is usable by all people. Iatael didn't understand what was happening to him either. It is not customary among his people to express any feelings openly, especially the feelings that bound us together.

Iatael told me a lot about the customs of High elves. Believe me, they are a strange race, and all their traditions are really old. They virtually haven't changed since their prince Icanor became the first Dragon Rider. Dragons gave their ancient knowledge to Draggaris elves, and they taught them how to build air ships. Iatael told me that dragons agreed to this union because they knew their time was running out. Dragons used to be a large and wise race once. Now we consider

them monsters. This is what time does. It wipes entire races, once powerful nations and their achievements off the map without mercy. Iatael told me all of this. And he also told me that dragons taught the elves how to use jannat.

– What is so special about this drug, besides the fact that when one uses it, his brain starts resembling liquid feces? – The mage wondered.

– To us jannat is mostly known as a very potent drug, but High elf riders can communicate with their dragons using it. If you take jannat following a special recipe that dragons disclosed to Draggarris elves, it will allow you to easily converse with other creatures at a distance without using words.

– Telepathy! – Baldassar exclaimed.

– Yes, I think it's the word Iatael used, – Elia agreed.

– That is very interesting. Very interesting!

– That is why the High elves value this drug so much. They use it very sparingly and cautiously. Surely, the bodies of High elves are much more resistant to the effects of jannat, and they use different mental practices to rid their minds from the remaining intoxication. Nevertheless, long-term consumption does have some effects on the riders: their mind gradually changes, and their eyes acquire a blue shade so bright that they resemble crystals of frozen blue flame.

– Yes, – Baldassar confirmed. – Jannat users are usually called «blue-eyed ones».

The blue-eyed ones usually don't live long.

– I tried jannat for the first time on the day when Iatael offered me to ride the dragon with him.

«Trust me, – he said, – You will be able to touch the most unusual and exciting thing in your life – the mind of a dragon, a creature that has lived immeasurably more lives than you and has absorbed an incredible volume of knowledge, including magic. Dragons can exchange thoughts telepathically without jannat, but we cannot do without it».

Iatael took jannat with me. First I felt nothing, but very soon the world around me faded and become half-transparent. It looked as if I fell through the mirror of normal reality. I closed my eyes and I saw a world consisting of thousands of sparkling threads and pulsating springs resembling far-away stars. Some of these stars were dazzlingly bright, and others hardly gleamed. I was scared and lost, but Iatael found me. He told me that this was what the lining of the world looked like: the threads are the magic woven into our world, and each live thought spring is a star. He led me farther and I faced Paraxis. If before I saw just the distant sparkling stars around me, now I encountered the sun. The dragon's mind shimmered with unthinkable shades; it was enormous and unbearably bright.

– Greetings, little warrior. Finally we can talk.

– You are a dragon. You killed queen Hippolyta and the other Amazons!

– I am Paraxis, who is called the Ruthless in this age. I do not care about the death of those who live mere moments by my standards.

– What do you care about?

– Answering this question is not easy. I have lived long enough to satisfy my curiosity. But I am still interested in meeting people like you, little warrior.

– What is so special about me? I live mere moments by your standards, don't I?

– Your mind shines incredibly bright, little warrior, though it will last just a moment for me. Your thoughts, your will, your obsession with victory – this light cannot be outshined. I would say that this is still interesting to me. Connecting to your mind, seeing the world with your eyes, feeling the stream of your thoughts and energy.

Ride me, little warrior. Feel yourself a Rider, and then we will truly touch each other's thoughts. Believe me, such things happen very rarely. Dragons choose their Riders only once. They open to them their minds, bottomless treasuries of knowledge and experience, and in return the Riders let us enter their minds and feel all the things we have forgotten with years again. Elves live long by human standards, but for dragons this time is also very short.

– The dragon talked to you? – Baldassar couldn't restrain himself. He even jumped to his feet in excitement. – Did all of this really happen or was it just a product of your mind befuddled with jannat?

Elia hissed at him grumpily:

– As I already said, Iatael taught me how to use jannat to open my mind to the fullest and protect myself from its side effects as much as possible. Everything I told you actually happened.

– What else did the dragon tell you?

– Nothing of essence. I swung aboard the dragon, Iatael behind me, and we soared upwards to meet the wind. It was incredible. I could close my eyes and see the world through the eyes of the dragon. His mind was incomprehensible, and I dived into it as if into the ocean. I saw the images of far-away eras, fragments of sentences in forgotten languages, reflections of ancient wars and cataclysms – everything that the dragon lived through.

Baldassar twisted his arms in desperation and moaned:

– Oh wizards almighty, I would trade my soul for a chance to look into his mind! I could learn so much if I had such an experience!

Elia pulled a disdainful face:

– The dragon is a monster. And when we go hunting it tomorrow, you'll see it with your own eyes.

To endorse her words Tulum raised his enormous axe and banged it loudly on the ground.

Elia started talking again, but now her voice was much more quiet and humorless:

– Iatael, my beloved prince, still flew to me, and we met among mountain peaks, in secret. Or so we thought. Using jannat, we often practiced our conversations without words. This was our undoing. That day Iatael was extremely excited when he came to me. His blue eyes were truly shining. He hugged me and said:

– Get ready, Elia, we are flying away.

– Flying away? But where to?

– It doesn't matter. What matters is that we will still be together – you and I.

Though we discussed our plans for the future many times, I was not ready. Sparkle climbed on my shoulder and tried to shove her sharp snout closer for a kiss, but I moved it away. I had to find out what had happened.

– Listen, Iatael, you are a prince and a Dragon Rider. You told me many times that you can't just disappear from your people. They will look for you and they will find you.

Iatael pushed me away angrily. His blue eyes almost burned me through.

– Do not remind me of who I am, Elia, I know it all too well. But I have made my choice, and I told them about my decision today.

– What have you done?

– I did what I should have done a long time ago.

– And what did they reply? Did they try to stop you? Did they send pursuers after you?

– Not yet, as far as I know. Paraxis will warn me. For now they are discussing it. But I am sure that they will try to get me back whatever it takes. So we have to hurry.

I was still completely confused:

– You said they would try to get you back whatever it takes? Are you in danger because of me?

– No, – Iatael replied adamantly and confidently.

– You are in danger because of me. After their discussion they will conclude that you are the cause of it all and you have to be killed. Don't stand still, hurry up.

He already gathered part of the supplies we might have needed on the way and turned to exit the cave, when he suddenly stopped. I understood why at once. I already knew when Iatael was mentally talking to his dragon. In a minute he confirmed my suspicions:

– We have no time. They are coming here for you.

– But we can't run from them forever. If they want, they can find me anywhere on Signum, – I said.

– Then we'll fly away from Signum, – Iatael declared.

«No, you are not flying anywhere», – the dragon's voice burned my head as a furious lash. I knew: he wanted not just Iatael to hear him. We exchanged looks waiting for the dragon to continue. He was always near us, though unseen, he heard us and followed us. This creature had its own will and its own twisted intelligence, a cold logic. Failing to take him into account was our grave mistake.

«You are not flying anywhere, – Paraxis continued, – because I decided so».

«Paraxis, I am prince Iatael, son of Icanor the Honorable, I am your Rider, and I order you to obey».

«Not anymore».

«Not anymore what?»

«You are not my rider anymore. I am breaking our union on my own volition».

And after this I saw a stream of fire, terrifying roaring flames bursting into the cave and engulfing Iatael. I still couldn't believe it had happened when I heard the voice of the dragon talking to me again.

«I have saved you, little warrior. Iatael is dead, and now Draggaris elves have no reason to wish you dead. I told you that a dragon selects only one Rider in his life. I think I can make an exception from the rule for you. Become my Rider – Elia the Fierce Flame, the first among the Amazons».

Paraxis's voice sounded like thunder in my head. I closed my eyes, trying to banish it, but suddenly I saw myself riding a dragon. Winding threads of rivers, greenish moss of forests and uneven folds of hills were floating far below us. The dragon was taking me to the escaping horizon, and I could hear only his mighty wings, beating the wind with the force of a hammer. Between my thighs was awe invoking power that brought sheer terror to all inhabitants of Signum. I was drunk from the sensation of this power more than from the strongest of wines. I was Elia the Fierce Flame, Dragon Mistress, Queen of the Amazons, terror of every tribe both near and far. My eyes were flaming blue.

«Do you like gold, little warrior? I will give you more gold than you can imagine».

The next moment I was in the dragon's underground treasury. The enormous cave was filled to the brim with gold and jewelry. I was standing knee-deep in gold. It shone so brightly, that I almost went blind, as if I were looking at the molten sun. Paraxis lied down, and almost two thirds of his massive body were immersed in the gold. I could stretch out my arm and gather a handful of the metal. I could even feel the heat emanating from the metal warmed by the dragon's body.

By sheer force of will I shunned away all my thoughts and desires and found myself back in my sky prison. Paraxis was waiting for my answer. Keeping my mind clear, as Iatael taught me, I made a step forward, then another one and another one... I picked up Iatael's sword from the spot where the heap of still-smoking armor lay. The hot metal burned my hands to blisters. But I wasn't thinking about that. I approached Paraxis and looked straight into his huge yellow eyes.

Though I made an effort to hide my thoughts, the dragon guessed. I also understood that he knew what I was going to do. I would definitely burn right there, but Sparkle was faster and attacked the dragon's amber eye. Paraxis was distracted for a moment, trying to shake the little animal off his head and kill it with one click of his mighty jaws. At that moment I jumped forward and stuck Iatael's sword between the steel plates of his armor. Paraxis roared in fury and pushed away from the rock with a wide wing stroke. Still clutching the sword hilt, I hang on the monster's chest. The dragon's blood was spilling from the deep wound in hot spurts, washing over my hands and face.

– How do you like my answer, old-born?! Do you enjoy it?!

I don't remember what else I screamed at him. Paraxis was flying with difficulty, staggering from side to side. Sharp mountain peaks and bottomless chasms passed under us with amazing speed. He was trying to throw me off his chest with various air stunts. He didn't manage to do it right away. He was definitely descending, and on his way he scraped a cliff edge and sent stones raining down. After hitting another rock everything blurred before my eyes and my fingers just let go.

I woke up to coldness and a pungent pain in my palms burned by the sword. The dragon was not around, just a few pulled out rocks and traces of blood on the snow remained. He flew away, and I was left lying alone on the snowy mountainside.

Elia looked at her companions inquiringly:

– What is a dragon? A fierce monster, a sentient being or, perhaps, a living god? I have been fighting dragons for many years, and I still don't know the answer to this question. The thing I do know is why I am here. To slay a dragon!



GLOSSARY

Agile – the creature cannot be targeted by a Backstab.

Aura X: [text] – all of your creatures, unless indicated otherwise, at a distance within X receive an ability or effect described in [text]. The source of the Aura cannot receive the same benefits.

Armor X – means that the creature has X Armor tokens. It prevents the first X wounds from non-magical attacks on the creature with armor. When the creature receives 1 damage, this creature removes 1 Armor token.

Battle Mage – the creature can declare a Magical Shot if it moved this turn.

Cautious X – the creature with this ability must assign at least X dice into defense in melee combat, but no more than the creature's strength.



Charge: [text] – the creature receives [text] till the end of the current turn, if it moved before attacking in melee, once per turn.

Contract: [text] – at the start of the turn of the creature with Contract, the active player can pay 1 Gold and the creature will receive all effects indicated in [text] until the end of the active player's turn.

Durability X – relic ability. When a relic with durability is played, this relic receives X armor. Any non-magical attack on a creature with the equipped relic deals damage first to the relic with this ability. When the relic no longer has Armor tokens, it is destroyed and the hero loses all of its effects.

First Word – triggered ability. Triggers when the card is being played from the player's Hand.

Flight – the miniature can ignore obstacles when moving across the Battlefield, including other miniatures and terrain. Miniatures with this ability still can't end their movement on the bases of other miniatures or in impassable areas. When a creature with Flight is activating in contact with a Difficult terrain, its movement becomes S until the end of the activation.


Fortitude – creatures with this ability always hit its target in melee when rolling  or , whether they are wounded or not.

Hammerblow – when attacking in melee combat, every successful hit deals 2 points of damage.

Heal X – remove X Wound tokens from a target. If there are fewer wounds than the ability can heal, they all are removed and a creature is considered fully healed.

Initiative – players assign their Strength to their dice following standard rules. The creature with Initiative strikes first. Its target can defend as normal, but it attacks second and will not attack if it is killed by a character with Initiative.

Last word – takes effect when the character is eliminated or a played relic card is destroyed.

Magical Shot X – a magical ranged attack within XL distance, which allows you to roll X dice. Magical Shot is considered successful on a  result. Each successful hit deals 1 wound. Creatures cannot defend from a successful Magical Shot.

Magical Strike X – a magical melee attack that can be declared on a creature in contact with the attacker. You can roll X attack dice, each successful hit inflicts 1 wound, and creatures cannot defend from a successful Magical Strike.

Master of Attack X – the creature can reroll X or fewer dice that are assigned to attack in melee combat.

Master of Defense X – the creature can reroll X or fewer dice that are assigned to defense in melee combat.

Master of Shooting X – the creature can reroll X or fewer dice that it used for Shooting or Throwing

Multiple uses X: [text] – the relic ability, specified in [text] can be used X times. The relic is destroyed immediately after the hero used it the specified number of times, and all effects that it grants cease to function.

Quick shooter, ability – a creature can declare Shooting or Throwing even if it moved in its turn, if the Run ability was not used.

Reckless X – in melee combat, this creature must assign at least X dice to its attack, but no more than its Strength value. If the creature is in melee combat again during the opponent's turn, after the first attack, it must assign all its dice to defense.

Shooting X – a non-magical ranged attack within XL distance and with a line of sight that allows you to roll X dice. A shot is considered successful for every \geq result. Each successful hit deals 1 point of damage. The target rolls a number of dice equal to the number of successful hits for defense. Each rolled \leq decreases the number of successful hits by 1.

Slow – a creature with this ability cannot use the Run ability.

Throwing X – non-magical ranged attack that can be declared on a target within L distance and within line of sight. Allows you to roll X dice. A Throw is successful if an \geq or \leq is rolled. Each successful hit deals 1 point of damage. The target rolls a number of dice equal to the number of successful hits for defense. Each rolled \leq decreases the number of successful hits by 1.

Veteran – when attacking a creature with Veteran in melee combat, the attacker must reroll all successful die results.

















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LEGEND

 Activation	 Armour	Dise	Basic Attributes
 Gold	 Durability	 - 1-2 D6	 Strenght
 Shot	 Multiple Use	 - 3-4 D6	 Movement
 Throwing	 First Word	 - 5-6 D6	 Health
 Magical Shot	 Last Word		

GAME PREPARATIONS AND TURN STRUCTURE IN SOLO MODE

Difficulty levels



TURN STRUCTURE IN STANDARD MODE

Turn Structure (page 16)

- You can activate your creatures in any order and play any amount of cards from the Hand if possible.
- Once per turn, you can discard any card from your Hand to gain 2 Gold.
- Once per turn, the Dragon can pay 2 Gold tokens and place a Minions miniature into contact with the Dragon.

Creature Activation (page 16)

Once the creature is activated, it can perform one of the following actions of your choice:

- move within its movement distance range, or use the Run ability;
- move within its movement distance range and enter into melee combat;
- enter into melee combat if it already was in contact with an opponent's creature at the moment of its activation;
- perform a ranged attack, if the creature has this ability;
- use an ability indicated on its card;
- a Hunter can declare a search of a Dragon Cave, or perform movement between already searched Dragon Caves.

Game preparations

- Choose 20 event cards of suitable difficulty.
- Compose Battle Decks for Hunters using common rules.
- Place your miniatures and the Dragon into contact with the appropriate side of the Battlefield.
- The player draws 4 cards from his Battle Deck and can return up to 4 cards from his hand to the bottom of the Battle Deck and replace them with an equal number of cards from the top of his Battle Deck to form his starting Hand, and shuffle the Battle Deck after that.

- Hunters are always the first to move.

Flow of the game

- The player makes their turn.
- Draw a card from the top of the Event Deck and perform the effect indicated on this card.
- The Dragon moves and attacks its opponent with the highest level of current Health.

Dragon's Turn

- The Dragon never rolls dice. In its turn, the Dragon always deals 5 successful hits and 3 in the Hunter's turn.
- The Dragon doesn't receive a Backstab and deals only successful Backstabs.