

The First Mountain

by Kyle Marquis

Most worlds begin the same way: with a mountain of land rising out of the chaos of the water. Often this first mountain persists, though no one in later ages can agree where it is: the dwarves say the *axis mundi* is their mountain capital, the elves insist it is the World Tree—you know how it goes. The halflings probably insist some unusually large loaf of bread is Where It All Began.

But here's the problem: last year a new one showed up. It's less than a mile off the coast, away from any major cities, but there it is: a new First Mountain. Four rivers flow from it. New beasts have appeared. Half-finished gods await their hour of birth.

The first expeditions to this strange new world found nothing of value, and then primordial dragons ate them. Not good. The current gods are desperate to ignore the new First Mountain, and the nearby kingdoms and mercenary companies seem oddly reluctant to approach. But visionaries, reactionaries, and prophets have already started to enter the land of the First Mountain, seeking new gods, new beginnings, and a way to banish the corruption of the current world.

The First Mountain is an adventure site consisting of sixteen three-mile hexes. The mountain itself is pyramid-shaped, unweathered by time, with four rivers that flow to each of the “new” cardinal directions, which are about 40° off the normal ones.

THE RIVERS

Each river has a substance, a personality, and an ambition. Each has a spirit that can manifest within a mile of the river itself in the form of an adult dragon. If the dragon is killed, the river dries up.

Ralyor, The River of Trade (n): The northwest river, of acid (2d6 damage on splash, 10d6 upon immersion, to animal flesh only). The longest river. He has invented the ideas of mathematics and trade. He wants to construct boats, and eventually ships. Manifests as a black dragon.

Binithi Vex, the Queen-River (ln): The southwest river, of fresh water. She has invented the ideas of agriculture, kingship, and propaganda—she has even invented a title for herself (“Vex”). Manifests as a red dragon.

Elu-Elu, the Free River (cn): The northeast river, of salt water. The shortest and freest river. He has invented the ideas of music, dance, ecstatic trance, and animal-taming. Manifests as a blue dragon.

Macrahanshar, the Curdled River (ne): The southeast river. Originally of milk, but currently curdled and corrupted. Manifests as a green dragon.

Each river bears a Capstone Shard that (1) always points to the peak of the First Mountain, (2) grants use of the breath weapon of the river's dragon-form 1/day, and (3) can be used to open the First Mountain (see Hex 0303). The Capstone Shard appears if the dragon or river is destroyed. Each river will also freely give their shard if the party helps them, though the river can scry through the shard and, if desired, teleport the shard back into their possession as long as it's not within a half-mile of the First Mountain.

The mountain itself displays neither ambition nor sentience, but has started to produce genderless, soulless creatures called **nulls**. They are halfling-sized red clay constructs with stamped cuneiform-style runes where their faces should be. Though not clever, they learn quickly. Nulls that survive hideous

calamities (like becoming hirelings and going on an adventure) can develop faces, character classes, and free will. They speak their own language, which visitors to the island call Wedge because of its written form.

NAVIGATING THE ISLAND

The First Island is mostly hard red clay covered in scrubby yellow grass and vines. There are no signs of erosion and weathering, but huge geometric pillars of hardened brick, like obelisks or ziggurats, rise every few hundred feet, and frequent ten-foot “steps” can slow travel—treat the environment as badlands. Compasses and spells treat the peak of the First Mountain as “north.”

Anything within a quarter-mile of the coast is wreathed in heavy fog at all times. Away from the coast, there is often very low fog (ankle level) leftover from the creation, but visibility is otherwise normal.

OTHER EXPLORERS

Apart from the party, three factions from the outside world have reached the First Mountain.

The Harvesters

The **Harvesters of the Autumn Hand** (ne) are a dwarf mercenary company hired to exploit and expropriate the resources of the First Mountain. All their warriors have a unique and unpleasant ability, the **harvest**: on a melee attack roll of 6, 11, or 19, the harvester lifts a visible item of their choice from the target. If the item is held or worn, make a competing Dexterity roll; if not, success is automatic. This ability is not magical and has limits; a harvester cannot literally lift the shirt off someone’s back, but can lift their weapons, rings, or stored potions.

Led by **Thane Vaskret Craad**, the harvesters are ruthlessly focused on acquiring raw materials. This is a smash-and-grab operation before anyone else shows up. The Harvesters store anything magical they come across but don’t use it. Though mostly unified in purpose, Thane Craad’s second in command, **Enuvet**, is secretly stealing magic items to establish herself as a wealthy woman back home.

The Hounds of Light

The **Hounds of Light** are missionaries of the Winter King (or your setting’s judgmental, patriarchal, overflowing-with-inquisitors religion). They are divided into three factions based on their three leaders.

The most approachable Hound is **Midrian the Ancient** (lg), a scholar who sincerely wants to learn from the First Mountain and incorporate it into his religion. The most dangerous is **Aramir the Maimed** (ne), a one-armed inquisitor and zealot who wants to destroy the four rivers and begin forcible “reeducation” of the locals as a slave labor force to extract resources before the Harvesters of the Autumn Hand strip the place bare. Aramir has no difficulty squaring his judgmental zeal with his greed. In overall command, **Tarund Grayhand** (le) plays the part of the “moderate hardliner”—he wants the locals forcibly reeducated and the island’s evil powers destroyed, of course, but he cautions patience and alliance-building. In truth Tarund is an infernalist loyal to a Devil of Steadfastness who plans to turn the island into a slaughterhouse to prove the foolishness of the Winter King’s religion.

Worgs

The island contains **worgs** (cruel, intelligent wolves) from the mainland. Summoned by dreams, they believe they must destroy each of the rivers in order to find something called the “First Wolf.” The worgs are attended by ravens that they use as hands and

spies. With at least one raven present the worgs have an Intelligence of 10. They have no leader, and all speak in the same voice and with the same goal: to find the First Wolf.

How I do Reaction Rolls

I make a 1d20 check modified by the Charisma modifier of the party's leader—just Charisma, no proficiency bonus or anything like that.

5-, or natural 1: Low reaction

6-14: Normal reaction

15+, or natural 20: High reaction

WANDERING ENCOUNTERS

Roll every eight hours on the wandering encounter chart.

Wandering Encounter (d100)

01-05 Signs or tracks. Roll again to determine of what. If another wandering encounter occurs immediately after this one, there's a 50%

chance of it being the same creature as the sign you just rolled; otherwise roll normally.

06-15 Common encounter for the hex. Every hex (listed below) has a common encounter.

16-20 Adjacent hex common encounter. Roll 1d6 to determine which adjacent hex.

21-24 3d6 Nulls loyal to Ralyor, the River of Trade, with 1d10x10 gp in trade goods. 10% chance of a purchased **wedge tablet** (new magic item). 20% chance of an **arbiter** (new monster)

Reaction: Low: Demand "tax" (dim understanding of taxes, but attack if you don't pony up). Medium: Exchange goods, services, and rumors (bad at it). High: The whole lot of 'em are eager to become hirelings.

26-28 3d6 Nulls loyal to Binithi Vex, the Queen-River, patrolling like guards. 20% chance that one of them bears a **wedge tablet**.

Reaction: Low: Try to capture you as an agricultural slave. Medium: Confused demands for obeisance. High: Immediate obeisance; willing to become hirelings.

29-32 3d6 Nulls loyal to Elu-Elu, the Free River. 30% chance that one of them is a **celebrant** (new monster).

Reaction: Low: Maenad frenzy!—they rip you apart. Medium: Invite you to dance and celebrate. High: Friendly; share rumors.

33-36 3d6 Nulls loyal to Macrahanshar, the Curdled River. 10% chance of a stolen **wedge tablet**. Stink of rotten meat, scream about injustice.

Reaction: Low: Immediate attack. Medium: Ritual airing of grievances, then attack to steal. High: Ritual airing of grievances, then demand a one-on-one fight to the death.

37-44 2d6 Harvesters of the Autumn Hand (dwarf

warriors) led by 1d3 low-level fighters. They are planning to, or actively engaged in, robbing the local hex blind.

Reaction: Low: Banditry and attack. Medium: Suspicious of someone else on the island, but willing to exchange information. High: Will offer to team up and rob something.

Random Wedge Tablets

If a group of nulls has a wedge tablet, roll 1d4 to see which they have:

1: Agriculture

2: Lamentation

3: Masonry

4: Understanding

High-Status Nulls

Nulls carry simple weapons (clubs, wooden spears).

The first d6 roll determines how many are "high status." Each high status null wears 1d100 gp worth of jewelry, usually depending on their alignment:

Ralyor: Red garnet

Binithi Vex: Turquoise

Elu-Elu: Amber

Macrahanshar: Pearls

High status nulls are better able to communicate than others, though they only speak their native language.

45-54 2d6 **Hounds of Light** led by 1d2 low-level clerics. Roll to determine their loyalties:

- 1: Loyal to Midrian the Ancient. Curious, scholarly, benevolent.
- 2-3: Loyal to Aramir the Maimed. Cruel, zealous, destructive.
- 4: Loyal to Tarund Grayhand, but unaware that he is an infernalist. Zealous but not immediately aggressive.
- 5: Secret infernalists loyal to Tarund Grayhand. They act like his dupes (above).
- 6: Riven by loyalties to two leaders; roll again twice, then roll 1d6 for number of partisans for each side. Mutually hostile.
- 7-8: Loyal to the Hounds as a whole.

Reaction (Midrian the Ancient or Infernalist): Low: Demand you leave; will attack if you don't. Medium: Cautious but curious; will trade rumors. High: Friendly; will team up to explore.

Reaction (Aramir the Maimed): Low: Immediate, murderous attack. Medium: Demand you surrender to interrogation. High: Sullen, suspicious; no immediate violence.

Reaction (other): Low: Demand you surrender for interrogation. Medium: Suspicious but willing to communicate. High: Willing to trade (rumors, gear, etc.).

55-58 1d4 **Flawed ones**. Runny red-clay slop-giants. Stats as ogres, except:

- When you strike one and cause an even amount of damage, you must make an easy Strength check or your weapon gets stuck
- When reduced to 0 hp they crumble into 1d4 twisted creatures with stats as goblins.
- When struck with a critical hit, they must make a Constitution save or lose a limb (arm, leg, head-blinded and deafened but can still act if headless). The limb has a 50% chance of animating as a "goblin," as above.
- 10% have **flawed runes** on their faces. This grants a gaze attack; if affected, you are confused.

Reaction: Low: Smash! Medium: Threats, demand you leave; any hesitation results in attack. High: Try to communicate, growing ever more frustrated until... smash!

59-60 A **red ghost** (night only; otherwise no encounter): The ghostly remains of a null that got itself free will. Stats as a specter. Always hostile.

61-64 1d4+2 **blood takers**. Null vampires, cursed by the rivers for cannibalism, native to the First Desert of Hex 0305. Always thirsty. Mindless and spiteful. Stats as a halfling-sized stirge, except undead. Always hostile.

65-68 1d4 **worgs** with 1d6-1 **ravens** that serve as hands. The worgs have been summoned to the island by dreams of something they call the "First Wolf." They are desperate to find the First Wolf. Their dreams tell them that if they can destroy or imprison the four rivers, they can find out what happened to the First Wolf.

Reaction: Low: Instincts take over—they attack. Medium: Wary. Will mention the First Wolf and demand information. High: They want to collaborate with the party in destroying a river. Though cruel and bestial, the worgs are practical; if they realize they can enter the First Mountain by befriendng the river spirits, they will.

69-72 1d4 **ravens** loyal to the worgs, acting as scouts. They will not approach.

73-76 2d4 **harpies**. They flew in from a nearby island. They suck as much as regular harpies. *Reaction:* Low: Attack out of a mixed love of sadism and theft. Medium: Demand tribute and flattery. High: Willing to talk and exchange rumors.

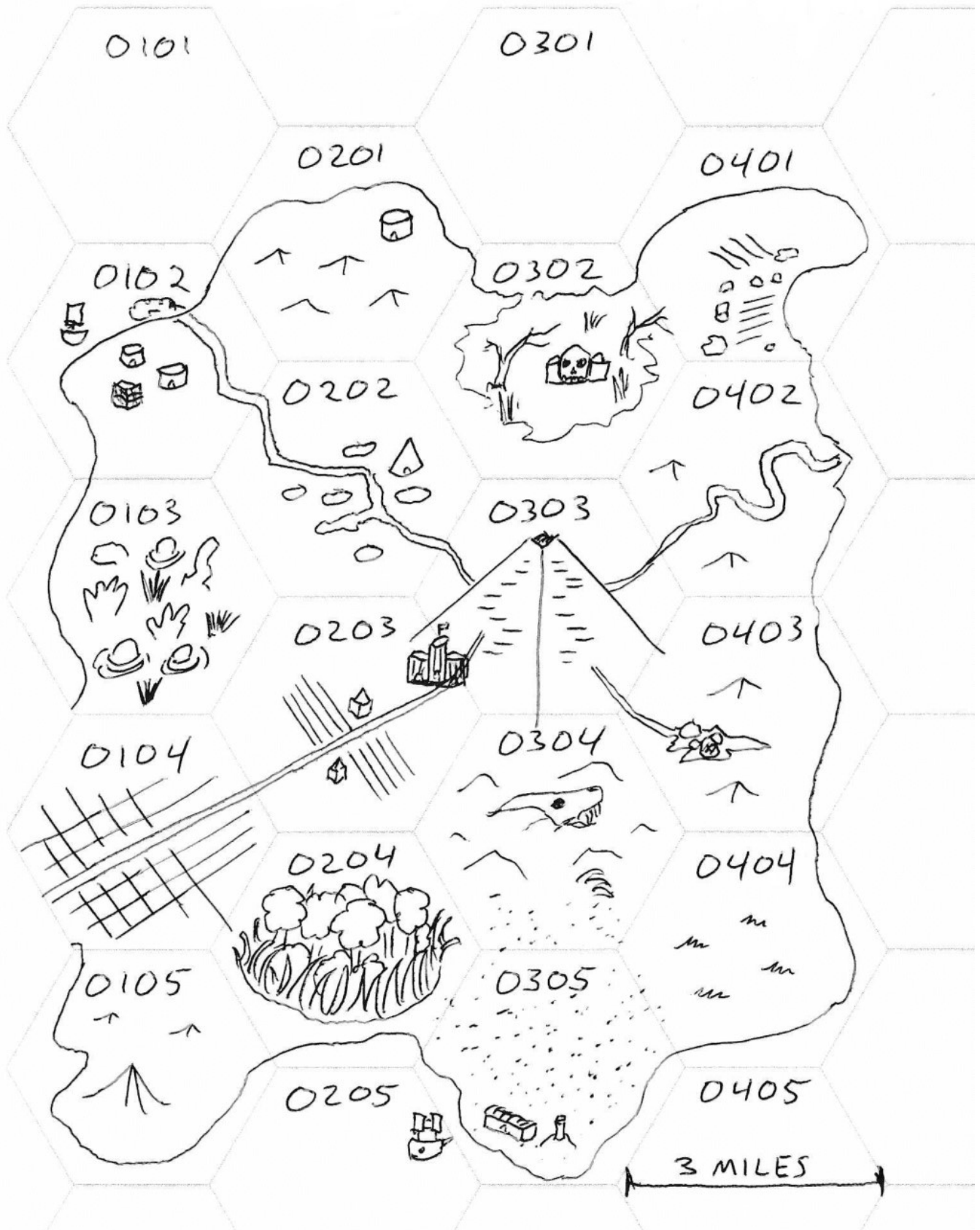
77-80 1 **ankheg**. The gods only know how it got here, but here it is, doing ankheg stuff. Always hostile.

81-88 1d6 **giant bees**. Always indifferent, unless you annoy them.

89-95 Corpse(s) or remains. Roll again to determine of what.

96-100 Roll again twice.

The First Mountain



THE HEXES

The First Mountain is organized into three-mile hexes.

0102 Harvester Base

The **Harvesters of the Autumn Hand** are here. 20+1d10 harvester warriors plus about 20 noncombatant porters/unskilled workers and 1d6 specialists. **Carrack** anchored offshore holds 5 harvesters, 5 sailors, 3000 gp to pay for the expedition, books on economics and maritime travel, and 5000 gp in various gems and ores (in a locked 20-pound chest) that the harvesters have taken.

Their leader, **Thane Vaskret Craad** (dwarf fighter 5, ne) is not here for long. His base has no walls; only a few tents, some scouts on a nearby hill, and a single wooden cage that holds 3d6 nulls. If not hostile, Vaskret trades fairly. He pays 10 gp per null until he has 20 nulls and accepts nonmagic items at fair market value. Craad will rob an excessively weak and rich party, but prefers to deal fairly with “civilized people.” He would love one of the local monsters (500+ gp for a live specimen), and would really love to know where his second, **Enuvet**, got off to. He will pay 1,000 gp for a detailed map of the Hounds of Light base (Hex 0305), though he does not want their enmity.

Common Encounter: 2d6 harvesters

0103 Spawn Marsh

A stinking, bubbling marsh between Ralyor and Binithi Vex constantly spawns new life. Roll on the **marsh encounter chart** every 10 minutes. All the creatures encountered from the chart are new, more-or-less mindless (Int 1), made of a material like rough red clay, and dissolve at 0 hp.

Marsh Encounter Chart (d10)

- 1: Crocodile
- 2: Hippopotamus
- 3: Human-size scorpion
- 4: Girallon
- 5: Bat swarm
- 6: Black dragon wyrmling
- 7: Roll again twice
- 8: You find a **spawn egg** (new magic item).
- 9: You're covered in leeches!
- 10: You find a **vital stone** (new magic item).

Common Encounter: You're covered in leeches!

0104 The Infinite Plain

Binithi Vex flows through here...and keeps flowing. Some kind of error in dimensionality or Law causes the plains here to be infinite to the southwest (in the direction of the river). As the landscape continues, it becomes more regular, with fewer hills and striations, until it is completely flat, the unbreakable gray stone etched by a red grid. The only form of life on the grid are **gridbirds**. They have the stats of terror birds, except they move at 3x human speed and are limited to the grid lines, which are 15' apart.

The harvester wizard, **La-Su** (former dwarf wizard 5), got killed by gridbirds and the harvesters fled when they could not find the body. She has 85 gp, a **vital stone**, a wand of *disintegrate* that only targets objects and constructs (10 charges), and the **Wedge Tablet of Music**. Her spellbook is destroyed (the light spell is salvageable), but her journal (locked, written in Dwarvish and using a simple cipher) contains notes on the expedition, her petty jealousies and rivalries, dissection notes on a null, and clear descriptions on how to read and use the wedge tablets.

Common Encounter: 1d3 gridbirds. (If they appear in an adjacent hex, it's because the grid has temporarily spread.)

0105 The False Mountain

A small, five-sided mountain rises here, stepped like a five-tiered ziggurat and covered in scrubby grass. This was some kind of failed godhead that now plans to assert itself as a kind of **Adversary** to the First Mountain. This has proven difficult since the First Mountain has made no pronouncements and may not even be sentient, but we're all doing our best here.

The mountain is patrolled by five free-willed nulls (stats as 2nd-level fighters) armed with spears and wearing stone-slab armor (as scale; speed halved). One has a loyal marsh spawn crocodile (see Hex 0103). These proto-infernalists despise the First Mountain and servants of the other rivers.

The false mountain's interior contains five large, irregularly shaped rooms. The central room contains the Adversary himself (stats as a clay golem, except genius intelligence), three red ghosts, a marsh spawn black dragon (see Hex 0103) loyal to the Adversary, the **Wedge Tablet of Strife**, 1d6 unhatched **spawn eggs** (new magic items) placed in cold storage pits (it slows their hatching), three **vital stones** (new magic items), and 8,000 gp in stolen jewelry.

The Adversary has discovered how to extract power from the torment of souls. Unfortunately he only has five souls right now (free-willed nulls are rare). By torturing them he can create wings for himself, letting him fly, but it only works for a couple of hours and he cannot travel more than a mile. The throne from the Dead Swamps (Hex 0302) would grant the Adversary permanent wings and allow him to move freely—he would pay all his treasure for it, but he cannot enter the swamps.

Common Encounter: The Adversary's marsh spawn black dragon.

0201 Enuvet's Camp

The harvester lieutenant **Enuвет** (dwarf ranger 4, ce) is here with 10 loyal harvesters and 5 porters. Tempers are frayed after the loss of the wizard **La-Su** (her body is in Hex 0104); Enuvet's second in command, **Tophin**, wants to find the body, while Enuvet just wants to collect as many magic items as she can while their boss, Thane Craad, "wastes his time" with ore and gems.

So far Enuvet has collected several interesting artifacts: the **Wedge Tablet of Understanding** (she can't read it), three vital stones, a spawn companion (a girallon), and something the dwarves are calling the hammer against the bird god because of the defeated, winged god depicted on it. The crude stone weapon is a +1 throwing and returning warhammer that, when struck on the ground, knocks all flying creatures within 60' laterally from the wielder out of the sky (they drift down as if affected by featherfall) unless they make a Strength save. This power can be used twice per encounter. A flying creature struck by the hammer is struck from the sky (no save). Enuvet, who favors short swords, has given Tophin the hammer.

The hammer against the bird god exists to defeat

the Adversary in the False Mountain (Hex 0105), though Enuvet does not know that. The weapon causes double damage against him and his followers.

Enuvet knows the location of several powerful magic items and promises a flat 3,000 gp fee for each. Unlike Thane Craad, Enuvet is constitutionally incapable of honest dealing and will betray the party at the earliest opportunity.

Common Encounter: 1d4 harvesters loyal to Enuvet.

0202 Ralyor, the River of Acid

The landscape here is stony, with circular pools of acid etched into the rock. Ralyor flows down waterfalls out toward the sea. In several places his acid has etched words and formulas into the rock, as Ralyor is the river of trade, mathematics, and writing.

There is a small trading post here of about 20 nulls, with a 20% chance of 1d6 Hounds of Light and a 20% chance of 1d6 harvesters. Nulls need to eat, and they like to make jewelry, so a rudimentary economy has emerged. You can acquire gems and Stone Age equipment here. While the nulls are rather stupid and a clever party can expect a 20%-30% profit on their transactions, Ralyor himself is a genius-level haggler and has repeatedly thwarted both Hound and harvester attempts to defraud the merchants. Serious market manipulation will draw his attention.

Ralyor, who manifests as a black dragon in one of the larger acid pools, has the **Wedge Tablet of Counting**. He will befriend anyone who brings him the Wedge Tablet of Writing or who can procure for him an economic textbook (there's at least one in the harvesters' carrack in Hex 0201).

Common Encounter: 1d6 **arbiters** (new monster) and 2d6 regular nulls.

0203 Foothills of Binithi Vex

Grassy hills and waterfalls. **Binithi Vex**, the freshwater river of agriculture, has established fields of emmer here, and over a hundred nulls toil to complete complex irrigation projects. Several nulls loyal to Ralyor, the river of trade, watch the work, uncertain how they might exploit the situation.

Binithi Vex has established a **waterfall palace** from which she rules. She has insulated herself from her

petitioners using seven layers of courtiers, who always subtly misinterpret what she says to her followers or what they request of her. She wants the Wedge Tablet of Shepherding (found in Hex 0404) to stop frequent boar attacks on her people, and for someone to explore the Primal Forest in Hex 0204, to destroy or make peace with it. She is willing to pay in fish (which she considers valuable) and river-pearls (which she does not).

The first time the party enters this hex, they witness 2d6 boar rush in from the south to attack the nulls. These talking boar are loyal to the Heart Tree in Hex 0204.

Common Encounter: 2d6 nulls loyal to Binithi Vex led by 1d3-1 independent nulls (low-level fighters, rangers, or rogues).

0204 The Primal Forest

The “first” forest, screened by a thick hedge of deadly thorns. Almost impossible to enter, though the Tablet of Agriculture can push the thorns back enough to let you in, or you could fly over. Also, the worgs have found a way to wiggle in—you could follow them. 2d6 worgs are usually present around the Big Stone Claw, which is exactly what it sounds like and which is (unknown to everyone) the claw of the First Wolf.

Once inside, the Heart Tree (stats as young treant) is easy to find. You can even ask the swine here, which are plentiful, and which speak Sylvan.

Young, quick-speaking, and eager, the Heart Tree plans to spread across the South and West of the world. He is unaware that other forests exist and alarmed if any foreign wood is brought to his attention. He spends most of his time sending boar to attack the “noise” to his north (Binithi Vex), but is not really malevolent: the party may be able to negotiate some kind of treaty. A druidic proto-deity, the Heart Tree can create low-level “forestry” magic items such as *boots of elvenkind* and *figurines of wondrous power*, and will reward the party with one such item per favor rendered. He wants (1) Binithi Vex destroyed or her construction moved away from the forest edge, (2) his own bee hive (from Hex 0304), and (3) the False Mountain of the Adversary (in Hex 0105) explored and the source of the Adversary’s flying power explained.

The Heart Tree’s sister was supposed to be the

goddess of death (see Hex 0302); he is aware of her death and wants to know who will replace her.

Common Encounter: 1d6 talking boar.

0302 The Dead Swamps

Still, dead water. A failed attempt at an afterlife, abandoned after only a few weeks when the would-be “queen of death” accidentally exposed herself to sunlight. Weird grave markers, fetish-poles, lights in the distance.

In the middle of the swamps is a **Temple of Death** haunted by four creatures of raw death-energy (stats as wights). A central pit within leads straight into the Underworld. Hung above it, an ever-smoking brazier grants control over all undead local to the island and lets you rebuke undead as an evil cleric of your level 3/day.

A half-carved throne of basalt is missing its deity of death. If anyone were to finish the throne (the plans are on the walls, under a tarp, but require the Wedge Tablet of Masonry or similar stonemagic), fill it with blood, and sit upon it, they would instantly become a vampire—and the **recognized death god** of the First Mountain, responsible for the disposition of souls. The Heart Tree in Hex 0204 and the Adversary in Hex 0105 are aware of this, but the rivers are not. The Adversary wants the throne, but it loses its effectiveness if transported out of the temple. Once he realizes this, he will try to court one of the PCs as his “bride” and make them sit on the throne.

Common Encounter: 2d4 halfling-sized zombies (day) or 1d4 will-o-wisps (night).

0303 The Source

The mountain peak, accessible only by befriending or destroying all four rivers and getting their Capstone Shards, then climbing up to the pyramid-mountain’s vertex and descending. Only someone who has all four shards can open the vertex entrance, and that is the only way in (except maybe the *disintegrate* wand of La-Su in Hex 0104).

Within, murals created by the Summer Queen (or your setting’s Hermes- or Thoth-like god) explain how a fragment of energy from the world’s creation was eaten by a wolf. The creature fled into the sea, where it existed for ages, divine and immortal. But when the Summer Queen found him, she killed him,

triggering this minor genesis.

A central fountain of creative energy sustains the First Mountain and the island. Once inside, there are no real security measures, just the murals and some scaffolding that lets you reach the Capstone Shards and spin 'em around. Whoever gets inside has four real options, also explained by the murals:

- Let the First Mountain **persist**. The Capstone Shards can be interlinked to **permanently seal the mountain**, even making it immune to *disintegrate* and *teleport*. (Make sure you're outside when you do it!)
- Let the First Mountain **persist with a guardian**. Anyone who enters fountain of energy becomes the island's permanent and **immortal guardian**, gaining the stats of a solar and becoming an NPC.
- **Destroy the First Mountain** by aiming the energy from the fountain back on itself with the Captain Shards. Any clerics will be strongly compelled by their gods to do this; PCs can resist, but NPC clerics may not have the willpower. Destroying the First Mountain releases its pent-up energy into the greater Creation where it belongs, triggering an **age of magic and new life**. The island **sinks into the sea** after a few hours and all non-free-willed creatures on it perish. Its unique magic items (like the Wedge Tablets) lose their power.
- **Seize the power** of the First Mountain by pointing the fountain of energy at yourself using the Capstone Shards. This grants 12 total levels of experience, of which one person can absorb up to 4 without exploding and 6 with some chance of exploding. (There's no user manual for this; you just pick how much you want.) It also burns each of the Tablets onto your body, granting you their powers permanently, and deposits all of the magic items created for this world at your feet. The island then immediately starts to sink.

Obviously, everyone on the island has a plan for what they would do here.

The Hounds of Light: Destroy the First Mountain (even Midrian, the most approachable Hound, will be compelled to destroy it).

Tarund Grayhand, Hound leader and secret Infernalist: Persist with a guardian (himself).

The Harvesters: Let it persist (so they can finish looting the island).

Enuvet, Ambitious Harvester Lieutenant: Seize the

power of the First Mountain (she will almost certainly blow herself up)

The Worgs: Once they realize the First Wolf is dead, they will destroy the First Mountain.

Common Encounter: Worg ravens (circling above).

0304 Fang Foothills

The hills of the First Mountain resemble a huge open wolf's mouth. That's because this is literally the smashed skull of the dead First Wolf.

The First Wolf's left eye socket contains the copper head of the **divine arrow** that killed him. Now damaged and useless as a weapon (and way too big for humans in any case), it still flies. It can be used as a flying carpet for one human (or two halflings) or as a +2 tower shield. The only problem is that when used in either capacity, it glows like a torch and recites prayers to the First Wolf's slayer in a speaking voice.

The right eye socket contains the hive of the island's giant bees. The honey the bees make is flavorful and nutritious: a spoonful can sustain someone for a day. The bees will let a person take a spoonful—a spoonful—before growing restless. They are not intelligent. They are extremely vulnerable to the Tablet of Shepherding.

Common Encounter: 2d6 giant bees.

0305 The First Desert/Hounds of Light Base

The nulls imprisoned here tell a story: once, nulls lived here who learned that they did not need to toil in the fields, trade, or even celebrate to eat. Instead, they could eat each-other. But the rivers were sickened by this behavior. They blighted the land here, turning it into the First Desert, and turned the cannibals into the **blood takers**. The nulls here also know much about the Temple of Death in 0302.

The nulls are imprisoned because the beach here serves as the main base for the **Hounds of Light**. The base has 10+1d10 warriors, 2d6 low-level clerics, 3 ballistas, and 2d6 noncombatant laborers/specialists. The merchant sloop anchored offshore has 5 more warriors, 5 sailors, a catapult, and 50,000 sp in locked chests. The Hounds plan to be here a while converting the natives and destroying "demons";

they have just started to fortify their base and want a way into the Primal Forest to cut down the trees.

Unless the party is obviously full of heretics or barbarians, the Hounds consider them “civilized” and treat them with respect. **Aramir the Maimed** (the fanatical inquisitor, ne cleric 5) and **Tarund Grayhand** (the “voice of reason” and secret infernalist, le cleric/warlock 7) are both here. Aramir wants the Primal Forest (0204) broken into and will pay 1,000 gp for anyone who can do it. Tarund will pay 10 gp per null captured and 50 gp per local magic item destroyed. Eventually they will become aware of the following threats, which they will pay 1,000 gp each to have destroyed: Enuvet (Hex 0201) and the Heart Tree (Hex 0204). When they become aware of the Adversary (Hex 0105) they will start planning a massed attack on his mountain. They have instructions not to attack the river spirits unless threatened or they can destroy them all at once.

Common Encounter: 1d4 Hound clerics + 1d6 warriors.

0401 Fertile Fields

100 semi-independent nulls are attempting agriculture and coastal fishing. There are always 2d6 nulls from each of Binithi Vex, Ralyor, and Elu-Elu here, studying, trading, and proselytizing.

The Hound of Light **Midrian the Ancient** (lg cleric 5) is here with 1d4 low-level clerics and 2d6 Hound warriors, studying the nulls and engaging them in theological debates. (He is quite a bit better at it than the locals.) Though pious, he believes he can learn from the nulls. Midrian can create healing potions and will sell them at market value. He wants to speak with Binithi Vex without her network of courtiers, and if he learns about the Capstone Shards, he will try to keep the knowledge from the other high clerics.

0402 Elu-Elu, the River of Wine

The shortest river, **Elu-Elu** is a Dionysian spirit of dance, music, revelry, and mystery cults. Well, a mystery cult—there’s only one so far, and its secret mysteries take place in a nearby cave. But its public “mysteries” are a **permanent party** attended by 4d20 nulls who dance and sing. Their rituals please Elu-Elu, who feeds them from his bounty of grapes and wine-drunk fish.

Elu-Elu wanders the nearby seas as a dragon, digging up treasures and annoying local locathah. His **secret cave** contains 7,000 gp (mostly in golden treasures looted from shipwrecks—goblets, necklaces, etc.), while the revelers usually wear a total of 1d4x100 gp. Elu-Elu has discovered and handed out the following magical items, which the revelers carry or wear but have no idea how to use:

- The *razor dancer*. A music box with a tiny “ballerina” (actually a figure skater) who, once the mechanism is wound (possible 1/day), expands to human size, starts spinning around and attacking with her razor feet. The ballerina has 4 HD, AC as plate, and attacks everyone within 5' (2d6 slashing, 3d6 if on ice). She moves randomly, ignoring difficult terrain, within 60' of the box holder but won't come within 5' of the box holder or one other person (their name must be written under the box). The effect lasts one minute.
- A gold necklace that can take the following forms when a command word is spoken: a rope of climbing, dimensional shackles, a +1 scourge.
- A pearl *helm of water breathing* that also grants darkvision and the ability to see through murk and mud, but only when underwater.

The Elu-Elites are usually pleasant (if drunk), only turning on “the impure” in a frenzy of **maenad-style ritual murder** 10% of the time.

An aggrieved locathah delegation (4d6 locathah) is present 20% of the time. Elu-Elu stole something they regard as theirs, and they want it back—or at least a fair price for it. Dealing with them, introducing new rituals and revels, or breaking the riding animals in Hex 0404 can all earn Elu-Elu’s respect.

Common Encounter: 1d6 **celebrants** (new monster) + 2d6 regular nulls.

0403 Macrahanshar, the Curdled River

Originally a beautiful river of milk intended to feed the multitudes, Macrahanshar refused to help worgs who sought the First Wolf. They **dammed up her river** and she curdled. Now a vile stink hangs over the stinking, lifeless land. Macrahanshar occasionally emerges to attack anything nearby. The damage to

her river has rendered the dragon-spirit almost mindless: an animalistic force of rage, barely able to channel her null followers into acts of violence and theft.

The air here is heavy with giant flies that feed on the filthy milk, which is full of maggots. Even Macrahanshar's null followers prefer to avoid the site.

It is almost impossible to remove the stones blocking Macrahanshar's way to the sea—the worgs dropped a small hill onto her—though if they could be removed, she would recover in a day. Another possibility is to claim some of the queen bee's royal honey from Hex 0304. This would trigger a rapid metamorphosis of Macrahanshar, banishing the corruption and turning her environment into a land of literal milk and honey. Anyone healing her would receive her Capstone Shard and the love of her followers.

Common Encounter: 1d6 dog-sized flies.

0404 Beast Plains

1d20 nulls loyal to each of the three non-broken rivers are here trying to tame the pony-like red animals that dwell on this plain. Compelled to perform this task for different reasons, they have had some success. Their leader (loyal to Elu-Elu) bears the **Wedge Tablet of Shepherding**, which allows control over animals, but controlling the pony-things without magic has proven tricky. A skilled equestrian could probably break the pony-things and teach the nulls how to do it, which would earn Elu-Elu's respect and the nulls' friendship.

Common Encounter: 2d6 pony-like creatures.

NEW MONSTERS

Nulls: Stats as halflings. Armed with a mix of clubs and wooden spears. Speak their own language, called Wedge.

Arbiters: Free-willed nulls (usually low-level rangers or rogues) loyal to Ralyor with the ability to forge binding contracts. Anyone who verbally states an oath or promise, however casually, can be bound by an arbiter to abide by the terms of the contract or fulfil the oath, as a geas spell. The first time this happens the target receives no saving throw; after that they can save.

Celebrants: Free-willed nulls (usually low-level rogues) loyal to Elu-Elu. By singing and/or dancing, they can cast the following spells: fear, uncontrollable hideous laughter, sleep, calm emotions, bless. They can use this ability once per encounter.

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

Wedge Tablets: Spontaneously created by the First Mountain to grant civilization to the nulls, each of the ten tablets is a somewhat bulky magical item made of fire-hardened clay with deep-chiseled cuneiform writing that shifts to fulfil its own agendas. All wedge tablets are intelligent and want to (1) spread their art and (2) unite with other tablets.

Anyone who can read the cuneiform can ask the wedge tablet to teach its art, which it does exceptionally well, granting the ability in whatever skill system your game uses (skills, feats, nonweapon proficiencies, even class features) in about a week of full-time study. Each wedge tablet also has a special power or powers. These are usable at-will unless otherwise noted.

Wedge Tablet	Location	Powers
Agriculture	Random Null Encounter	Grants immunity to harmful plant effects and plants will not attack you (always active). Touching the tablet to a plant or a field of plants (up to 100 acres) cures it of all disease and renders it immune to disease for one year.
Counting	Ralyor, The River of Trade, Hex 0202	Works like a graphing calculator; also instantly calculates the distance, mass, and number of anything you point it at within 1 mile.
Lamentation	Random Null Encounter	<i>Uncontrollable hideous weeping (as uncontrollable hideous laughter)</i> 1/day.
Masonry	Random Null Encounter	1/day, creates a number of <i>unseen servants</i> equal to the user's level who can only be used to build structures out of stone or clay. They last for 24 hours.
Monarchy	Binithi Vex, the Queen-River, Hex 0203	The bearer can always choose to be considered a foreign monarch when meeting new people.
Music	Corpse of La-Su, Hex 0104	Can create an aural illusion of any music, up to the sound of a full orchestra.
Shepherding	Leader of the Beast Riders in Hex 0404	2/day <i>mass charm animals</i> . Domesticated animals that aren't animal companions automatically fail their saving throw.
Strife	The False Mountain, Hex 0105	This works like the opposite of <i>charm person</i> . Pick two people—each gets a saving throw and failure means the one who fails goes from friendly to indifferent or indifferent to hostile. If both saving throws fail, you can use this ability again; otherwise it recharges at dawn.
Understanding	Enuvet, Hex 0201	Explain a situation and identify a person the tablet has seen; the tablet will explain how the person would likely react in that situation. It is at least 90% accurate and works 1/week. The tablet is also highly intelligent and communicates normally by writing.
Writing	Random Null Encounter	<i>Comprehend languages</i> (writing only). The tablet can also write, visibly or invisibly, on any nonliving surface within 100' at normal writing speed. This writing can be deliberately effaced (even with a hand) but does not fade naturally.

Spawn Egg: Found in the Spawn Marsh (Hex 0103). In 1d100 hours, the egg hatches into a random Spawn Marsh creature:

Spawn Marsh Creature (d6)

- 1: Crocodile
- 2: Hippopotamus
- 3: Human-size scorpion
- 4: Girallon
- 5: Bat swarm
- 6: Black dragon wyrmling

The creature is loyal to whoever is holding the egg when it hatches. The creature grows to its full size in 3d4 days. Only one marsh spawn marsh creature will bond to you in this way.

Vital Stone: Found in the Spawn Marsh (Hex 0103), this fist-sized stone can be sold as a quartz gem for 100 gp. If broken, it heals 10 hp and you must make a Constitution save or become pregnant with a **spawn egg** (biological males have advantage on this roll).

UNFOLDING EVENTS

As time passes, the different factions interact and try to accomplish various goals. Roll 1d6 for the number of days that pass between events. On an event day, roll a d10 and consult the following chart:

1: Harvesters try to despoil an adjacent hex. If they succeed, they expand into that hex and steal everything they can find of value.

2: Hounds of Light try to claim and convert an adjacent hex. If they succeed, they expand into that hex, destroy all the magic items, and enslave the inhabitants.

3: Worgs attack a river's defenders. If they are victorious, the next time they act, they attack the river itself. If they destroy all four rivers, the next time they act, they enter the First Mountain and destroy it.

4: Hounds of Light get the Tablet of Agriculture! If they already have it, they attack the Primal Forest.

5: Nulls attack the harvesters. If successful, they drive the harvesters from that Hex. If completely driven off, the harvesters flee the island.

6: Nulls attack the Hounds of Light, as above.

7: Enuvet finds or steals a random magic item.

8: Enuvet swindles a river spirit, secures an alliance with it, and claims its Capstone Shard.

9: The Adversary's followers claim and secure the Temple of Death in Hex 0302. If this is rolled again, the Adversary claims the Wedge Tablet of Masonry. If rolled a third time, the Adversary finishes the throne and establishes one of his followers as the new deity of death.

10: The harvesters and Hounds meet and immediately start attacking each-other.

Outside of PC interference, these attempts have a 50/50 chance of success. If the harvesters and Hounds are fighting, roll 1d6 for each and whoever rolls higher claims one of the others' hexes.

END OF THE FIRST MOUNTAIN