

# When the Lizards Came to the Sun Province

*Strange lizard-folk threaten the Sun Province! The Realm of Roundwander calls for heroes!*

## Summary

*The Realm of Roundwander is known as the Crossroads of the Spheres, for it is a land of many gates. You are **spherewalkers** - great heroes and mages, able to walk among those spheres, yet often drawn to Roundwander to trade, learn, or settle. But Roundwander is also a great and ancient land in its own right, and sometimes, it needs the aid of heroes and mages.*

*The Sun Province of Roundwander stands strong on the border, able to repel any invasion from beyond. But now, it is threatened from beneath, as strange lizard-folk emerge from the roots of the Sharptooth Mountains. Is this an enemy plot, or the sign of a new gate somewhere in those depths? And could even Roundwander **fall**?*

## Setup

Check if anyone knows anything about **Everyway**, and explain the basics of the game; PCs are great heroes or other exceptional people who wander between *spheres* – worlds linked by magical gates which, in general, only a few people (such as the PCs) can pass through. According to legend, the gates were created by a mysterious deity called **the Walker**, who roamed the spheres, creating gates as they went, and who is believed by many still to be out walking the spheres.

Explain that spherewalkers have a variety of motivations for their wandering, as summarised by the *Backgrounds* and *Motives* they'll see on their character sheets, but they're all the sort of people who'll head into dangerous situations – because they're very capable, and (broadly speaking) heroes.

It's very much a low-tech fantasy game – no gunpowder or other advanced technology, but lots of swords and sorcery. It's also very much a narrative-oriented game; much of the time, any conflicts are resolved by “more capable character wins”, though of course the situation can modify that. Anyway, balanced conflicts or the details of what happens in a given situation can be resolved by use of the Fortune Deck – so show the players that and explain it, mentioning the Usurper as a significant part of the set-up.

Now offer the players their choice of pregen characters and use the character sheets to explain a bit more about the rules, the attributes, Virtue, Flaw, and Fate, powers, magic, etc. It may be worth ensuring that the group have a range of scores in every element, as all may be needed at some point. This particular group will be getting into the scenario by happening to be in the right place at the right time, but they can be assumed to know each other at least a little, so allow some introductions.

Then get into the game...

## GM's Background

The main location for this scenario is the **Sun Province** of the realm of **Roundwander**, on the sphere of **Fourcorner** (p. 29-49); The Usurper here is The Pyramid (cooperative effort vs. dissension). The Sun Province is a rugged wilderness land with many dangerous creatures, but it

also has two great cities; the underground capital, **Glimmer**, with its ornately decorated buildings and great iron mine, and the plainly-built fortress town of **Eastguard**, which guards the border with the expansionist empire of **Phalanx** in the **Sharptooth Pass**. Within Eastguard is a gate to the realm of **Iron Citadel**, which is part of the sometimes-aggressive **Glorious Empire**.

### *Secret Backstory*

The current problem was accidentally caused by agents of Phalanx. Although they aren't currently planning war with Roundwander, they are considering their options in the longer term, and for now, they'd like to be able to slip agents into Roundwander undetected. So they have been exploring the **Sharptooth Mountains**, seeking not only unknown passes over them but possibly paths through the substantial local cavern systems. Unfortunately, some of their cavern scouts delved too deep.

Because... In the early days of the spheres, the mysterious Walker came this way. The gate in Eastguard was one of their creations, of course, but they also tied up some of the loose threads of creation in this area, as was their way. Discovering some ancient, undesirable lizard-creatures in the Sharptooth range, the Walker crushed them down into the roots of the mountains. The Walker's nature was to solve problems by creating gates, and so they granted the lizards a route to a sphere more suited to their nature. However, they had little interest in the lizards, which they found highly unpleasant, and paid little attention to their responses; they gave these beings a path to somewhere suited to them, and if some of them were unable to take it, the Walker didn't much care.

So a substantial population of lizard folk were left lying dormant under the mountains, until the scouts from Phalanx awakened them. Now, they are invading the surface world, outraged by the infestation of ratling, egg-thief creatures since "the Crushing One" came this way. Furthermore, because the lizards predate the current shape of the spheres, they can follow the Walker's tracks, enabling them to attack other adjacent realms as well – significantly the Iron Citadel and Athenia.

The heroes need to work out enough of what's going on (probably negotiating with the Iron Herald, representative of the Iron Citadel, and possibly also representatives of the realm of Athenia along the way), locate "The Walker's Gift" to the lizard folk, and guide the creatures away from the world where they no longer belong.

## The Lizard Folk

These are creatures of a prior creation to the current spheres, when everything was younger and primal chaos-gods and titans held sway. As such, they appear weird and deformed, their dark green scales dripping with slime, though the word that describes them best is "reptilian." They have blunt claws and mouths full of jagged teeth, and wield intricate barbed halberds.

On first encountering them, heroes get impressions based on their Water scores:

**Water 2:** They look like ugly lizards.

**Water 3:** These are strange and unfamiliar creatures, clearly unlike almost anything you're encountered while walking the spheres.

**Water 4:** These lizard-creatures move in strange and inhuman ways; whatever gods created them were not working to the same plan as when humanity was created. They are as inhuman as dragons. (*Explain about dragons in the setting...*)

**Water 5:** There's a sense of utter chaos in the way these creatures move, and also a sense of *age* about them. They doubtless see humans as being as strange as humans see them.

**Water 6:** The sheer strangeness of these creatures makes it hard to read their intentions – which is quite disturbing for you. It's not clear that they have emotions as you understand the word.

**Water 7:** Weird, uncanny energies roil around these creatures – not so much magic as something more primal.

**Water 8:** These creatures must come from an earlier creation than humanity – a time of lost gods and titans – and somehow have been preserved.

**Water 9:** These creatures have long been trapped somehow. Now, they've burst free. They need to be sent or taken to a realm where they belong.

## Creature Attributes & Abilities

Air **2**, Fire **4**, Water **3**, Earth **5**

### *Powers and Features:*

**Primordial Language (Air):** These creatures have their own language, and don't use or understand the Tongue.

**Chaotic Resistance (Earth):** The lizard folk aren't truly part of this version of the universe, which makes it hard to work magic on them, with erratic side-effects. Whenever magic is directed against them, they resist with their Earth score of **5**, and the GM makes a Fortune Deck draw and interprets the result freely, for good or ill.

## Opening Scenes

The heroes were somewhere in eastern Roundwander when word came through, brought by messengers from Sun Province in the east of the realm; the province is under attack, and by strange creatures that seem to be emerging from the mountains, rather than by the armies of Phalanx from beyond the borders. The province calls for heroes and wizards who can aid with this unprecedented threat. The heroes, for whatever reasons, have decided to respond to this call.

This means that they are travelling, probably on horseback, along the King's Highway towards Eastguard in company with a small party of about a dozen cavalry soldiers who they met along the way when they are attacked by a group of about twenty lizard folk, who charge from cover in the hills, issuing what are clearly hissing war cries and waving their halberds. The heroes get just enough time to formulate a simple plan, then the fight begins. The soldiers will cooperate with anyone who offers what sound like reasonable tactics; otherwise, they'll form up and charge, aiming to hit the right wing of the attacking group and hopefully do it serious damage before the other lizards can respond; they'll appreciate it if the heroes can follow up and protect their own flank. In practice, they'll be able to occupy their own number in lizard folk, leaving eight for the heroes to deal with.

The heroes should be able to manage this okay, but it's a chance to demonstrate the combat system and the fortune deck. Note that the lizard folk have no compunction about attacking horses as well as their riders, although they're intelligent enough to mostly engage the greatest threat first; bad card draws despite superior abilities may imply loss of some mounts. Afterwards, they can consider the situations and their options.

The soldiers will say that this was definitely an unpleasant surprise – the lizards fit with what little they know about the problem, but there were no reports of attacks this far west – their orders were to report to the authorities at Eastguard. The attackers came from the north; there’s a gate in that direction, but it leads to the realm of **Athenia**, which is ruled by a strong and capable human government. Further north are the **Dripstone Caverns**, though, which are well known to be infested with unpleasant creatures, and further north again are the ruins of **Griffin Hold**, which are known to be overrun with monsters. These lizard-things are new, though, and nothing out of the Dripstone Caverns area usually ventures this far south, especially as the road is regularly patrolled – and again, the current problem is supposed to have come out of the Sharptooth Mountains around and beyond Eastguard. It seems that the threat may be spreading.

So the heroes might scout around the area, presumably investigating the lands to the north and maybe heading for the Athenia gate, or they can push on to Eastguard and see what more is known there and what the local authorities would like them to do. The soldiers will take the latter option, after finding a local community where they can leave the worst injured of their group to convalesce. These are their orders, after all, and anyway this encounter should be reported to the local authorities.

### Investigating Northwards

The lands north of the road are hill country, with a scattering of villages who make their livings from flocks of sheep. The first sights the heroes will encounter are burned-out cottages and the remains of slaughtered shepherds and sheep – it’s clear that the lizard folk came this way. Eventually, they’ll be approached by living locals who managed to hide from the lizards; they’re understandably traumatised, but they can say that there just seem to have been the one group of attackers so far – and yes, this is unprecedented.

Eventually, the heroes will encounter a pair of capable-looking human warriors on smallish horses, wearing bronze scale armour and armed with spears and swords. These are **Still-Water**, a spherewalker (male, thoughtful), and **Screech-Owl**, a city guard captain (female, clearly battle-hardened, superstitious enough to be wearing a bunch of amulets for good fortune), from Athenia. Any kind of decent Water score picks up that they are cautious, concerned, and likely honourable, so when they announce who they are (“*emissaries from the realm of Athenia*”), it’s likely true.

They’ll say more if the heroes admit to also being spherewalkers or otherwise present as something important. Their story is that the lands near the gate in Athenia have recently been attacked by a couple of bands of lizard folk, and when the priests consulted an oracle of the goddess, they received the reply “*The children of the titans are awoken, and carry horror across the spheres. They must be buried in shadows.*” The implication that this threat encompassed more than one sphere was concerning, so Still-Water was asked to escort Screech-Owl through the gate and seek information in Roundwander – after which, things got strange.

To begin with, travel through the gate proved *disturbing*. Normally, gate travel feels like it only takes a few moments (though externally, hours or days often pass), and feels like falling through a starless night, with perhaps a few mystical visions – but on this occasion, both these two had the sense of being swept through a howling void over a vast pit, with no sense of an informative vision beyond that. Then, after they arrived, they discovered that the creatures were also here. Hence it seems especially important to them that they should reach the local authorities, so

they'll head for the road. They'll appreciate the company if the heroes join them, but won't insist on it.

## The Athenian Gate

However, it is just possible that the heroes will decide to investigate the Athenian gate. This is marked by a plain stone arch, and guarded by a small contingent of Roundwander troops, who have now heard about the lizard folk attacks and are accordingly nervous. If the heroes think of going through the gate, they should be "reminded" that gate travel, while seeming instantaneous to spherewalkers, actually costs a period of time, from hours to days, in the spheres; travel through this particular gate usually uses up a day or two.

If they still insist, the experience is as previously described by the Athenians, or even worse; there's a sense that they have to maintain a state of balance to remain on the path between the gates.

*If they do so*, they arrive in Athenia, in a town grown up around the gate – a town of marble pillars and shrines to Athena and others of the Olympian pantheon. The locals will greet them courteously, if with the caution appropriate to unknown spherewalkers, but haven't much to tell them. Eventually, they'll have to return to Roundwander, where they'll find reports of the lizard folk becoming increasingly widespread and bold; they'll likely have to fight through to Eastguard, where they'll be subject to a certain amount of sarcasm as they struggle to get the plot back on track.

*If anyone deliberately "falls" while between gates*, go to **The Great Gate**. The heroes can try to struggle through with less information, and will probably have to regain the surface, find out more of what's going on, and then return. If they just dump the lizard city into the void, they'll have to deal with a lot of angry lizard folk and irritated stone lizards who were left behind.

## Continuing Along the Road

If they continue along the road or return to it with the Athenians without too much delay, the heroes will find the communities along the road currently untouched, though the more the locals hear, the more worried they naturally become – and if the heroes are behind the soldiers, those locals have already heard something, and are nursing a wounded soldier or two. They've mostly heard of these lizard-folk from the lands to the east, and assumed that they were coming down from the mountains, though reports of the depredations of the band that the heroes encountered are beginning to trickle in.

## To Eastguard

After another couple of days' travel, the King's Highway brings the party to Eastguard, a small but strong fortress city with walls that block the Sharptooth Pass from side to side. Riding through the city streets shows them that this is a military town which is preparing for war; smiths are forging weapons, porters are immediately carrying them to the walls or barracks, and troops are drilling.

*If they arrive with the soldiers*

the leader takes them to the Mayor's Palace, and brushes past the local guards and secretaries, insisting on reporting directly to **Griffinheart Crow**, the soldierly, middle-aged mayor of Eastguard. He will of course be concerned, and immediately start organising patrols and scouting parties to the west and north to look for more lizards. He'll be fairly polite to the heroes,

albeit brisk, asking them what they make of the creatures and listening to their suggestions; he'll say that he's tempted to ask them to reinforce his forces, but it seems like these creatures may be from another sphere, and he may need people who can deal with that. In fact, he should call a conference with **Gauntlet Keeper**, Master of the Gates throughout this province.

However, they are informed by the clerk who is sent ahead that Master Gauntlet Keeper is occupied at the gate and not in his office. The mayor frowns and leads everyone to the gate, which is encircled by a fortified building not far from the mayor's palace. There, they find **Gauntlet Keeper**, who proves to be a grey-bearded scholar-bureaucrat with a perpetually stern expression and, less obviously, a bone-dry sense of humour, standing on a raised platform watching the gate, which shimmers as it admits a party from the Iron Citadel. One wears plain grey robes, an iron circlet, and iron bracers, one is clad head to toe in steel chainmail with a pair of swords at his waist, and the other two wear banded steel armour and are armed with short spears and large daggers at their sides.

These are **Indigo**, a priestess and spherewalker with the power to bring the rest, **Willowstaff**, the "Iron Herald" (an officer of the citadel), and a couple of guards. They declare themselves and look around and upwards, noting the heroes and locals. Gauntlet Keeper looks back at them and welcomes them to Roundwander, commenting that he can see that they are clearly emissaries from the Iron Citadel rather than wanderers from across the spheres.

*"We are here because our lands are suffering an infestation, and it seems it may have originated in this land,"* Willowstaff snaps back. Griffinheart Crow looks startled by this, and is somewhat offended, but suggests that everyone moves to a council chamber in the mayor's palace where these visitors can explain the nature of this "infestation."

Griffinheart Crow ushers everyone to the chamber, and the newcomers start talking. It soon becomes clear that the Iron Citadel too has been attacked by lizard folk, who erupted from what seemed to be temporary gates near the gate from Roundwander. They were as strange and sinister to the people of the Iron Citadel as they were to those of Roundwander, but the fact that they appeared near the gate made the humans there suspicious. Griffinheart Crow and Gauntlet Keeper will swear that this is nothing of which they have knowledge; the heroes can offer verbal support, and perhaps use powers to make this more convincing.

The new arrivals will add that, whoever is responsible, something strange is certainly happening with the gate; when they came through, the experience was unfamiliar – rather than a simple sensation of walking through a starless night, it felt to them that they were moving along a knife edge that could cut them at any moment, above a great dark pit and beneath a swirling storm. This makes Gauntlet Keeper blink; he is an expert on the gates, and he says that he should take some time to consult his reference scrolls and perform some divinations. Hence, the first meeting breaks up while Griffinheart Crow organises accommodation for all the newcomers.

Then, the next morning, as polite messengers summon the heroes to a renewed meeting, a cry comes from the gates; more outlanders have appeared. These turn out to be Still-Water and Screech-Owl, the Athenians. Gauntlet Keeper greets Still-Water as an old acquaintance, and the Athenians remark that both their realms seem to be suffering the same problem. Obviously, it's time for a great council to review the situation. Go to **The Council of War**.

#### *If they arrive with the Athenians*

They'll pass a number of patrols heading out; evidently the city's mayor is reacting to the news of lizard folk to the west, and some of the patrol leaders will ask the heroes what they know.

Once they enter the city, Still-Water will scrag a passer-by and ask if the Master of the Gates is here presently, and if so where; hearing that he is, Still-Water will head straight for his office, suggesting that the heroes come along. This brings them to the office of **Gauntlet Keeper**, who proves to be a grey-bearded scholar-bureaucrat with a perpetually stern expression and, less obviously, a bone-dry sense of humour.

He'll raise an eyebrow at the sight of Still-Water; they evidently know each other from past meetings, but this is unexpected. (*"By the gods, Still-Water, I did not expect your company this day. You must forgive me if I am a little distracted, but our mayor seems to believe that I should know something about his present problems."*) He'll also recognise the heroes as so obviously spherewalkers that the fact doesn't merit comment. On hearing the Athenians' story, he'll raise an eyebrow and suggest that this calls for a council of war with Griffinheart Crow, the mayor of the town. *"We should also invite our other guests of the moment. This will be quite the party."*

Griffinheart Crow is the first to arrive at the meeting in a council room in the mayor's palace. He'll look at the heroes and nod. *"Spherewalkers, I take it? I hear that you helped with the fight on the King's Highway. We could have used your knowledge sooner... Well, you're here now."* He then addresses the Athenians respectfully as Gauntlet Keeper makes quick introductions. Then the visitors from the Iron Citadel, Indigo and Willowstaff, arrive; they seem guarded, and it's obvious to anyone with Water 4+ that discussions between them and the locals have been difficult; Water 5 picks up a strong sense of mutual suspicion, 6 senses that each side blames the other for something with the Iron Citadel party being especially guarded, albeit for honest reasons, and 7+ notes that both sides are suffering a clash between honour and caution.

It quickly emerges that the Iron Citadel has been attacked by lizard folk, and they believe that this infestation somehow originates in Roundwander. Anyway, Griffinheart Crow ushers everyone through to a council room where all this can be discussed.

### *The Council of War*

The two local officials start matters by saying that the lizards started emerging from the mountains a couple of weeks ago, but not from any known gate – from the mountains to the east and south, in fact. At first, people wondered if they were serving the Empire of Phalanx, Roundwander's expansionist and ruthless rival beyond this border, but it is clear that they are savage and uncontrollable, and of a previously unknown species, so that seemed unlikely. The heroes are probably among the first people with significant mystical senses to encounter them, so their reports may be interesting here.

Anyway, Gauntlet Keeper has now had a chance to consult some records and perform some divinations, and the latter seem to confirm what he has sensed since around the time this problem began; the gates in this region are behaving oddly, their mystical auras spreading, swirling, and becoming diffuse – and this strangeness seems to be growing stronger. (This is obviously not good.) He also cross-examines the visitors from Athenia and the Iron Citadel about the events in their spheres, performs calculations based on the usual time loss when passing through their gates, and concludes that the problem definitely erupted here first. Also, the lizards seem to have appeared in the other spheres close to their respective gates to this one, whereas here, they seem to be appearing over wider areas. However, they certainly first appeared from the mountains to the east and south, and there are still reports of attacks coming from that direction.

He has also consulted some texts, which make little reference to creatures of this kind, though there are some passing mentions of reptilian monsters in the oldest manuscripts – creatures that emerged from caves in the mountains, described as *ancient beyond measure* for some reason. At this point, the Athenians may remind everyone of the words of their oracle: “*The children of the titans are awoken, and carry horror across the spheres. They must be buried in shadows.*” The titans, of course, were gods before the Olympian gods.

This isn’t much to go on, but Gauntlet Keeper believes that there must be *something* in the Sharptooth Mountains worthy of investigation. Of course, entering the mountains, dealing with or evading any lizard folk there, and learning what there is to be found there, will be a challenge.

Everyone else in the room looks at the heroes.

## Alternatives

Well... The heroes could try passing through the gate to the Iron Citadel, though the time delay (of the order of days with that gate) would take them out of things for a while. They’ll suffer the weird experience previously mentioned on the way through. On the other side, they’ll find a suspicious military state suffering more reptilian attacks, but not much more they can do. If they deliberately allow themselves to fall while passing through the gate, or if they fight their way through to a temporary reptile-gate in that sphere, go to **The Great Gate**. The heroes can try to struggle through with less information, and will probably have to regain the surface, find out more of what’s going on, and then return. If they just dump the lizard city into the void, they’ll have to deal with a lot of angry lizard folk and irritated stone lizards who were left behind.

## Into the Mountains

There are of course people in Eastguard who know something about the mountains, and who can give the heroes some advice, and also provide them with basic climbing gear. The Sharptooth Mountains are well named, virtually impossible to traverse save by a few well-known (and well-guarded) passes, but there are some paths and climbable routes, used by the handful of trappers and goatherds who scrape a living up there, owing allegiance neither to Roundwander nor to Phalanx. In fact, it might be worth locating some such mountain folk, to see what they might know; the locals can provide some suggestions as to paths to take, as well

## Heroes Ascending

Getting up into the mountains soon proves a test of abilities, though the heroes can of course handle it as well as anyone can. Those with good Fire scores are agile, good Earth makes them tireless, good Air grants some ingenuity in tackling tricky problems, and good Water helps in spotting subtle problems and guessing best routes. Some heroes may also have some helpful special abilities. Ask the players if they have any particular ideas about how they’ll be tackling steep slopes and other problems, and then make one or more fortune deck draws to see how well these work.

### *Option: Lizards!*

If things seem to be going too quickly, the heroes can also tangle with a party of half-a-dozen lizard folk. This can be a quick fight, but not without risk.



## The Mountain People

Eventually, the heroes find a small, high valley, with a small pocket of greenery, and pause there to rest. Whoever in the party has the highest Water score gets the feeling of being watched; ask how they react to that.

Hopefully, this will lead to some kind of interaction with **Polished Bone** and **Fallen Ice**, a couple of hunters. They are dressed in furs, though neatly sewn, and carry self bows and steel-tipped spears; however, they are cautious and nervous around outsiders – especially when they are outnumbered by capable-looking people. Still, they are perfectly capable of talking to other people; they also have enough minor ailments and supplies shortages that they can be persuaded to make friends.

They do know about the lizard folk, and they and others of their kind have been evading them for days; fortunately, the lizards don't know the mountains and aren't as used to running and hiding in them as the locals. They also seem more interested in going to attack the town people than anything else. Most usefully, they know where the lizards come from; they emerged from the **“the forbidden caves,”** of course.

The forbidden caves, it turns out, are a number of dark caves scattered through the mountains, which these locals know far better than to enter – most people who do, don't come back, or come back glassy-eyed and raving, often from a different cave far from the one they entered. Nothing has emerged from them like this before, but they're regarded as so terrible that the idea of them producing monsters is no great surprise.

And yes, these locals can direct the heroes to the nearest one of them, if these crazy outsiders really insist on dying. They'd appreciate it if the heroes gave them time to get well clear before entering the cave, though.

## At the Roots of the World

The cave proves to be as dark and ominous as its name implies; as they watch on first catching sight of it, a band of lizard folk emerge and begin scrambling down the slope. Anyone approaching the cave closely gets a waft of a strange, perhaps animalistic scent. The supplies the heroes were provided with do include lanterns if necessary.

Assuming the heroes do enter and begin descending, check their Water scores; the hero with the highest score is the first to realise that the entire cave system is somehow equivalent to one enormous gate. Normally, gate travel is a distinct and distinctive experience, but passing through this one is more of a gradual experience, akin to what is reported of those rare gates which link two realms on the same sphere. Anyway, these “caves” certainly have the feeling of a whole different realm, and quite an alien one; a purple mist swirls everywhere, unfamiliar and somehow disturbing odours and sounds are everywhere, and distances are hard to judge.

**The New/Old Realm:** Because this realm predates the current structure of the spheres, it has *no* Virtue, Flaw, or Fate. (Or perhaps all three are the Usurper.) Fortune deck draws still work here, but as a rough guideline to how events play out rather than a sign of cosmic forces at work. If the Usurper is drawn, it represents *The Usurpation of Reality*; upright, it shows the laws of the prehuman world resurgent, implying considerable problems for the intruding heroes, while inverted, it enables the new laws of the spheres to impose themselves, benefitting the heroes.

### Lizard Folk

Parties of lizard folk are occasionally to be encountered tramping through the cavern system, but should be easy enough to avoid if the heroes display some caution and ingenuity; if their plans seem shaky, a fortune deck card may be appropriate. Actually fighting them runs into the problem that the supply of opponents is functionally unlimited.

### The Bodies

As the heroes descend into the realm, they come upon a pair of human bodies, evidently killed by the lizards and cast aside. They are dressed in plain, rugged garb, appropriate for an expedition into the mountains, and were wearing backpacks with supplies of food and water. Searching these packs turn up a journal in the form of a message to a superior; skimming this, it is clear that these two people were scouts of the Empire of Phalanx, seeking new paths through the mountains for future military use; discovering one of the caves, they wondered if it might be possible to travel *under* rather than over the mountain range. The last note comments on the disturbing nature of these caverns, but expresses a determination to press on.

### The City and the Wall Carvings

In the depths of the realm, the passage opens out and the heroes are confronted by a striking sight; a whole city, under what may be a high cavern roof filled with swirling vapours lit from beneath or may be a dark and turbulent sky. It is located on a great ledge, with a rough, rocky slope plunging into the dark depths beyond. Its architecture is utterly bizarre in ways that hint of nonhuman origins, with twisted obsidian towers, and indeed it seems to be inhabited by numerous lizard folk – many of them mustering as for war.

Closer to hand, though, the heroes will see a great series of low-relief carvings on the walls of the cavern and the closest buildings. These are strikingly intricate and detailed, and anyone examining them can determine that they represent a narrative. (Good Air scores will help a lot here – at least let the hero with the highest Air handle most of the interpretation.) They show lizard folk living in what seems to be an even greater version of the city, seemingly peacefully, though the nature of their lives is hard for a human to interpret. Then, a gigantic and terrible figure appears on the scene; Air 5+ notes that, while this figure is vaguely depicted and odd, it looks more *human* than reptilian. It does something – makes a gesture, adopts a stance – and a great pit opens up under the lizard city, into which the buildings fall. However, some of the lizards clearly escape this pit, scrambling out of it by heroic effort, and the last scenes show them gathering together and beginning to rebuild.

Meanwhile, the highest Water score in the party will sense an accumulation of magical forces beyond the city, seemingly reaching up from the strange depths beyond. These are too distant to assess at the moment, but they clearly represent some great if inactive power. The heroes will have to work their way around there cautiously and examine things at close quarters to learn more, but there's clearly some great power there – if the lizards control it, that's terrifying, and if they don't, it could be useful.

### Encounter En Route (Optional)

If there's time, the heroes can have one encounter to keep things interesting. This is a **Stone Lizard**, a gigantic creature from the same age of the spheres as the lizard folk that was melded into the rocks by the power of the Walker; awoken by the resurgence of the city creatures, it can

manifest out of the stone for brief periods, starting as a skeletal shape impressed on the walls of the cavern, but forming a body out of the rocks that lurches towards passers-by.

It looks *terrifying*, like a gigantic stone-armoured hybrid of a crocodile and a tortoise with yard-long fangs, but its personality is that of a semi-domesticated animal, and being as much animal and spirit as anything else, it's actually easier to communicate with than the lizard-folk, if someone has appropriate powers. (Check how good any of the heroes are at sensing spirits, communicating with animals, and so on.) It will only attack if directly threatened, and anyone communicating with it will discover a limited intellect that is mostly confused but which can be persuaded that it should back down. If things do come to a fight, however, it's as robust as it looks:

**Air 1, Fire 3, Water 2, Earth 7**

*Creature Powers and Features:*

**Lumbering Crush (Earth):** The monster attacks by charging forward, seeking to batter opponents into the ground before mauling them with those huge teeth. This allows it to attack with its Earth score against opponents' Fire. It can be confused or evaded by clever tactics and agile opponents, though, allowing them to combine their Fire scores.

**Armour of Stone (Earth):** The creature really is quite tough; light weapons and unarmed attacks do very little against it unless backed up by clever tactics.

## The Great Gate

Arriving at the location of the swirling magical forces, anyone with Water 4+ will recognise it as another enormous gate, albeit currently closed. Water 5+ senses something significant about it; the whole lizard folk city is balanced on its very mouth, and if the gate were to be fully opened, would very likely fall through to whatever realm is beyond. However, opening it would take more than the usual use of Water 5+; several people with scores at that level who could coordinate somehow could achieve the effect with great effort, while Water 6+ would reduce the effort and numbers required, and Water 7+ could manage it with exhausting solitary ritual. On the other hand, Water 5 could ease it open a crack and allow a small group to pass through.

Of course, dropping an entire city and ever creature in it into an unknown realm might or might not be a good or moral thing, and might have strange consequences; it's up to the heroes (and the players) to think about that.

*The Lizard Paradise*

If the heroes do venture through a smaller gate-opening to see where they would be sending the lizards, they find themselves in a tropical realm of swamps and unrecognisable vegetation under what seems to be a lighter version of the swirling purple skies they have just left behind. Looking round, they soon encounter a number of lizard folk, who are clearly even more startled to see the heroes than the heroes are to see them, but who do not seem especially inclined to violence, especially as most of them are unarmed. Looking round further, they will soon find an even more startling sight in the distance; another city, built in a version of the now familiar lizard folk style, but this one has an unearthly beauty, with soaring, glittering towers rather than twisted obsidian. The lizard folk seem to be doing okay for themselves here.

Hopefully this will reassure any heroes with ethical qualms about casting the lizard folk through the gate, though they might warn to warn the local lizards to get clear of this immediate area. As

they aren't automatically hostile, someone with Air 5+ should be able to convey this by gestures and drawings.

Returning through the gate, which fortunately proves fairly easy to accomplish after a short rest, the heroes may be relieved to realise that their doesn't seem to have been too much lag in this travel; things are much as they left them.

### *The Ritual*

Hence, it seems that this threat can be cleared up by conducting the requisite ritual and sending the lizard folk where they belong. Of course, this will take a little while, in which time some nearby lizards (perhaps 4-6 in number) may well notice something going on and attack. This should give any low-Water heroes something to do while their colleagues complete their task. Then, the whole group will have to get out of the way as a whole city falls through a dimensional rift; some high Fire characters may have to help others get clear. In the worst case, given some bad fortune deck draws, some or all of the heroes may end up in the primeval lizard realm, and have to hastily reopen a small gate to get back home. The heroes should also ideally work up another *ad hoc* ritual to close the great gate once more, though they may realise that it seems actually to draw lizard folk and the like into it, so it may be better not to close it entirely.

However, all this has left the cave-realm in some chaos, and finding the path back out may be tricky. Some heroes with Air 5+ will need to decide what paths to take; use a fortune deck draw or two to determine how well they do.

## Wrap-Up

Hopefully, the heroes can make their way back the way they came, up through the caves to the Sharptooth Mountains. If their navigation seems sloppy and there's time, they could actually emerge in the wrong realm, facing suspicious locals in Athenia or the Iron Citadel; it would be up to them to negotiate their way out of this situation.

Of course, there are still some lizard folk wandering around at least three realms, causing trouble, but they can be dealt with by local forces. The best option is to drive them back to their caves and temporary gates; the great gate may well draw them in if they come close enough, and hopefully they won't want to return to the "Upper World" once they've experienced the one shaped for them.

Meanwhile, Gauntlet Keeper can report that his divinations suggest that the local gates are settling down again, so the heroes have prevailed. They get the customary award of formal honours from Griffinheart Crow and the government of Eastguard. They may also be asked to deliver a formal diplomatic communication to the government of Phalanx, explaining politely that rummaging around in the ancient roots of the mountains may not be a great idea.