

Chapter 3: The Girl from the Glacier

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Playtesters: Damian, Grace, Kelsie, Sacha

Change History

April 12, 2016 - 1st release

June 15, 2016 - Minor tweaks to exposition, added failure penalties to rooftop chase, and made the market search challenge a more likely to result in unreliable directions.

July 10, 2016 - License text updated

Background Information

The Ashram Academy Vault

One of the functions of the Ashram Academy is the containment and study of (often dangerous) magical artifacts. Located beneath its campus in Sylridian, the Academy Vault has an almost mythic reputation as a hoard of strange and wondrous items. The facility is said to be impossible to scry or teleport into. The only way in is using the access lift located in a small building in the middle of the campus's parade square. The building is guarded by academy warmages and its open location is designed to make sneaking in impossible.

The Helix at Sylridian

Five years ago a rogue wizard named Kraden created a Helix similar to the ones in Tannock within the grounds of Sylridian's Old Castle. He never succeeded in using it, and in the wake of his defeat the Academy have confiscated the items used to create it, cordoned off the area, and placed guards to keep unauthorized onlookers away. Helixes are very poorly understood and everyone is very concerned about preventing the catastrophe that befell Tannock from spreading into Syldar.

Currently the Helix is believed to be inactive. The crystals at the cores of the Helixes in Tannock all glow bright green whereas the one in Sylridian is a faint blue.

Introduction

Late in the morning on Saturday the party are summoned once again to Prof. Taneth's office. If Merle is staying with them, they are asked to come without her. On the way to the history department's building, there is a loud bang and shouting heard from the academy's parade square just the other side of the history building. Warmages from the academy's security force are seen running towards the square from adjacent streets.

The Academy Vault Raided

In the centre of Academy Square, the massive stone doors of the Vault Building stand ajar. Lying to either side are the bodies of four of the academy's warmages. It's unclear if they're still alive.

Another pair of warmages are fighting a [Barbed Devil](#) to one side of the square. As reinforcements arrive from the other streets, they focus on this monster, leaving the vault for the party to investigate.

Street Battle

The party can assist the warmages or rush the vault doors. After one round of combat Oligan, Zerith, and two Retainers emerge from the vault. They enter turn order at the end of the round and act immediately. All 4 stay close to each other, with the retainers taking an obvious defensive stance. First, Zerith casts *Conjure Minor Elementals*, summoning 4 [Dust Mephits](#). Roll initiative for the mephits as normal. Once the mephits are conjured, Oligan casts *Teleport* and the four of them disappear in a gust of suddenly imploding air, leaving behind the mephits for the party and warmages to take care of.

Meeting with Taneth

Prof. Taneth finds the party following the commotion in the parade square. He is concerned about the party and the warmages injured in the fighting. He is also astonished that anyone could successfully rob the academy vault. He explains about how it's supposed to be impossible to teleport into or out of and is guarded around the clock inside and outside by both living and automaton defenders.

Once everything has calmed down, he asks the party to again go over everything that they've learned from Merle so far. He has the following information:

- No idea what was stolen from the vault; he just got here.
- He has been digging up records from other Tannock sites looking for anything to explain "the sleepers". He found some dubious instructions on how to perform such a spell but there is no provision for how to wake such a sleeper.
- Based on the party's description of the horned woman from Site Fourteen he thinks she might be Zerith Amastatica herself, one of the warring claimants to the throne of Tan'Rar.
- Zerith has a reputation as a cunning leader and tactician, but she was known to have a violent temper (possibly owing to her fiendish heritage) and towards the end of the war was having a very hard time recruiting soldiers.
- Zerith is believed to have died 500 years ago when the glacier appeared over Tannock.
- The soldiers and the gnome are presumably some of Zerith's lieutenants.
- One of Taneth's grad students who knows Old Elvish is going to interview Merle and show her around Sylridian. If Merle is staying with a party member, he sent his student to go meet her. Otherwise the student she is staying with is going to bring her in.

Merle is Missing

A short while later...

Aleen Rickard is Taneth's student assigned to watching Merle. She is a 24 year old Human. When Aleen tried showing Merle around the city, she ran off. Panicked, Aleen seeks out party members to help her find Merle. Merle was last seen in the maze of shops west of Market Street. She wants the party to search the surrounding areas while she waits to see if Merle will return on her own.



The Market

People in the market district are generally willing to help, but most of them don't have useful information. Worse still, Merle blends in well enough that some people may *think* they saw her when they did not. **Do not tell players if the lead they get is correct or not.** The party have to reconstruct Merle's path through the market until they find her. Treat this with a skill encounter with these rules:

- Each round, one or more party members can make an **investigation** skill check.
- For each check that is made, secretly roll a d6
- An investigation result of 6 or less yields no information - "Haven't seen her." Characters can try again in this zone next round or randomly move to another zone.
- An investigation result of 16 or more yields a correct lead (indicated in **bold** on the table)
- A result between 7 and 15 (inclusive) may be incorrect. Use the d6 result with the numbers in the table below to determine where they think they saw Merle. *(For example, if the party are in the Central Market and the d6 result is a 2, the person they're talking to thinks they saw Merle at Buttriss Corner).*
- If multiple party members are investigating and get different results, it's up to them to decide where to search next. Splitting the party is ok in this case.
- If a result would send a character back to where they already were, that's fine. It's up to them to decide if they want to follow it or not.
- Each round represents about 10 minutes of searching.

If the party are in...	... and the d6 is ...	...someone thinks they saw Merle...
A: Central Market Street	1-2	at Buttress Corner. (F)
	3	in the Warehouse District east of the market. (C)
	4	in the maze of streets east of Market St. (B)
	5	in Capitol Park (D)
	6	at the Knight Street Promenade (G)
B: East of Market St.	1-2	in Capitol Park (D)
	3-6	in the Central Market (A)
C: Warehouse District	1-3	heading towards Buttress Corner (F)
	4-6	in the Central Market (A)
D: Capitol Park	1	in the Central Market (A)
	2	heading down Armoury Way towards Foundry St. (H)
	3-6	around the North side of the Stadium (E)
E: North of the Stadium	1	in Capitol Park (D)
	2-3	heading towards Buttress Corner (F)
	4-6	at the Knight Street Promenade (G)
F: Buttress Corner	1	at the Front Street Trading Hall (I)
	2	around the North side of the Stadium (E)
	3-6	at the Knight Street Promenade (G)
G: Knight Street Promenade	1-3	on Foundry Street northwest of the promenade (H)
	4-6	on Foundry Street southwest of the promenade (J)
H: Foundry St. & Armoury Wy.	1-4	to the South of here, towards Front Street (J)
	5-6	heading west towards Smith Street (L)
I: Front Street Trading Hall	1	on Foundry Street outside (J)
	2-3	she went towards the guildhall on Smith Street (K)
	4-6	she went towards the shops on Smith Street (L)
J: Foundry & Front Streets	1	North of here, towards Armoury Way (H)
	2	heading towards the Guildhall (K)
	3-4	she went into the Trading Hall (I)
	5-6	she went towards the shops on Smith Street (L)
K: Near the Guildhall	1	on Front street east of here (J)
	2-6	in the shopping plaza (L)
L: Smith Street Plaza	Merle is here, proceed to Chase	

Chase

Merle is wearing normal commoner's clothes now but the party can still recognize her. They finally spot Merle going into a knife shop in a small square on Smith Street. As soon as she

notices the party she shouts at them “I’m not for study! Not again!” and runs into the back of the shop.

Merle is desperate to get away from her pursuers but doesn’t want to do them any harm. Fortunately, Merle is very agile. She is capable of jumping between rooftops and climbing railings almost effortlessly. Treat this as a skill challenge rather than a combat encounter. Party members with speed of 30 feet or more can keep pace with Merle in a flat run but may have difficulty pursuing her over rooftops. Party members with speed of 40 feet or more have **advantage** on acrobatics checks during the pursuit. Party members with speed of 20 or less have **disadvantage**.

To follow Merle successfully, a pursuing character must be able to keep up and succeed at 3 **acrobatics** checks, one each to follow Merle from one “scene” to the next. Characters who succeed on all 3 checks make it to the last scene and see her fall. Characters who are too slow or fail a check lose track of Merle but may be able to catch up if at least one party member is still pursuing. If the party all lose track of Merle, see the next section. If a character somehow manages to catch up with Merle, she blasts them with an unfocused surge of wild magic, requiring a DC 15 **constitution** save to resist being stunned for a second allowing Merle to gain some distance.

In the back of the knife shop, Merle runs up some stairs to the second floor, across the sparsely-furnished office room at the top, and dives out the window onto the roof of the 1-storey building next door.

Acrobatics DC 10 to continue chase. On failure you trip and lose sight of Merle.

Merle dashes across the roof, leaps over the alley on the other side, and climbs up a balcony to the third floor of the next building.

Acrobatics DC 14 to continue chase. On failure you fall 15 feet into the alley, take 4 (1d6) fall damage, and lose sight of Merle.

Merle barges through the balcony’s door, runs through the (occupied) parlor of the balcony’s apartment, and out into the hall. From there she sprints down to the far end of the hall, and dives out the open window at the end of the hall.

Acrobatics DC 12 to continue chase. On failure you trip and Merle gets further ahead of you, so you only see her fall.

Merle lands on the roof of an adjacent 2-storey building with a roll and continues dashing across the roof. You’re gaining on her. She looks back and you can see a flash of panic on her face. At the next alley she jumps but the building’s masonry cracks under her foot. Instead of leaping to the next rooftop she plummets 2 storeys to the ground, crashing through an awning on the way down.

Merle gets to her feet by the time her pursuer(s) catch up with her. They have her cornered in a dead-end alley now. “No (huff) stay back...”

Merle raises her hands and a dimly-burning torch on one side of the alley suddenly bursts to life. The flame leaps from the torch to the cobblestones and grows to become a roaring wall of fire.

The flames only last for a second, though. Merle suddenly starts shaking and collapses. The wall of fire disappears.

Merle is suffering from the effects of overusing her emotion-fueled wild surge power combined with exhaustion. This effect is like a mini-seizure followed by several hours of unconsciousness.

Aftermath

While in the market Merle managed to steal some proper clothes, a small satchel, and a dagger. She has these items on her if the party catch her.

If the party failed to pursue Merle, she is apprehended by the Sylridian City Guard for thieving. Prof. Taneth will find her in the guard’s custody that night and pay the fines out of Academy funds. Merle is chaperoned by an Academy warmage for the rest of her time in Sylridian, which she is very unhappy about.

If the party caught Merle and she had the described seizure, she is cared for by clerics affiliated with the Academy (or a party member with requisite skills) until she regains consciousness that night. Prof. Taneth insists that she remain under guard until he can figure out what to do with her. He offers an Academy warmage to fulfill this duty if the party do not want to.

Regardless of the outcome, the party are invited to join Prof. Taneth in his office the next morning while he and his senior grad student Hasan interview Merle.

Interview with Merle

Prof. Taneth and Hasan question Merle all morning on Sunday. Taneth asks questions and Hasan translates. Old Elvish is an almost-dead dialect, only used in certain Elvish religious circles. The interview starts slowly but picks up speed as Merle begins to pick up more modern Elvish and Hasan gets more comfortable doing live translation. By midday all three participants are exhausted and the interview ends. Through Taneth’s interview the party learn more about Merle’s story:

- Merle is from a town called Hessdar located in Tannock’s eastern foothills. Her father was a tinsmith.
- She got good at climbing and running in the rocky crags east of town.
- When she was fifteen her father took her to see Helix #8 while on a trip to another town
- While there she snuck past the Helix’s guards to get a better look at the massive glowing crystal at its core (she feels guilty about this)

- She accidentally put a hand through the gap in the Helix's spiraling outer sheath. There was a surge of energy from the crystal within which knocked her out. When she came to she could hear the surface thoughts of anyone she made eye contact with.
- Seizures and other weird powers manifested over the next few weeks.
- A man called "Professor" came and offered to help Merle learn to control her powers.
- She was taken to an underground facility in the south (Site Fifteen) where she was tormented and pushed to unleash her power until she blacked out again and again.
- There were other students there as well who got similar treatment. Sometimes they made them use their power on each other.
- If they attacked the "teachers" bottle knights would be sent in to restrain them.
- The students all slept in stasis to prevent their powers from activating while they slept. Intense dreams could trigger them.
- She thinks she was at the facility about 10 months, but being underground and sleeping in stasis means it could have been much longer.

During the interview Taneth lets slip that there is a Helix in Sylridian. Merle is frustrated by not being able to hear surface thoughts and needing to use a translator. She wants to reach into the Sylridian Helix to see if it restores that ability. Taneth asks the party to escort her so he and Hasan can have a break and compare notes from the interview.

The Sylridian Helix

The Helix is located on the grounds of The Old Castle in Sylridian. The Old Castle is a sprawling 4-storey stone keep with large windows surrounded by a broad lawn and walls. In Syldar's past it was the seat of the reagent but after the breakup of the Tan'Rar empire it fell into disuse. In recent times it was restored and used for state functions until the rogue wizard Kraden summoned a helix in the middle of its north lawn. Now the castle is again disused except for a small number of Academy guards and researchers studying the Helix.

Access to the Helix is via the castle's northern gate. The lone Academy Guard standing on duty outside will allow the party in if they mention Taneth.

Inside of the wall the Helix stands in the middle of the lawn before the castle. It is five storeys tall; a massive, glowing, blue crystal surrounded to its full height by a coil of rough black stone fifteen feet across. Cut into the lawn just next to it is a earthen ramp running into the ground at the coil's base. Merle excitedly points at the ramp. "It's open below" she says.

The ramp spirals down into a blue-lit chamber a few feet below the ground. Here the black stone coil is spread out more; almost enough to fit through. Zerith and Oligan are standing in the chamber arguing about why the Helix Control Amulet they stole from the Academy Vault isn't working on this Helix.

As the party approach the bottom of the ramp, they hear the argument. If they heard Zerith speaking in chapter 1 they recognize her voice, otherwise just describe the voice as a woman speaking old elvish. If they stay on the ramp they do not need to sneak any closer to hear them.

Zerith and Oligan are not interested in fighting. If the party approach and break cover or attack, Oligan does not hesitate to teleport Zerith and himself away.

The party can glean the following information if they stay hidden and listen:

- They stole an amulet that is supposed to be able to control the Helix from the Academy Vault (this is also a tip that the speakers are the ones from earlier if the party can only hear them)
- The Helix towers in Tannock are still “active”
- Zerith wants to turn them off
- The amulet is supposed to do that, but it’s not working. Zerith is furious
- They now want to find spellbooks belonging to someone called “Valasir”
- Valasir’s spellbooks were not in the vault

After Zerith is done fuming, Oligan teleports them both away.

Is is possible for a particularly stealthy or suicidal party member to steal the amulet from Zerith before they teleport away. The amulet is a simple golden circle set with four square emeralds arranged in a diamond pattern. The artifact is clearly magical though there is no apparent way to make it do anything. For this adventure, the amulet has no significance, though if the party return it to the Academy, they can negotiate a reward of up to 300gp (total).

Once Zerith and Oligan are gone, Merle rushes into the chamber. With only a breath of hesitation she plunges her arm through the gap in the Helix’s outer coil. There is an arc of blue light from the central crystal into her arm and a sharp buzzing sound. After a few seconds of this she pulls her arm out, dismayed. “Nothing. I still can’t hear your minds.”

Rewards

The party advance to **Level 3**.