

# THE CURSED COLONY OF MESLAMTAEA

AN ADVENTURE SETTING FOR  
BABYLON ON WHICH FAME AND JUBILATION ARE BESTOWED 2ND ED.



G.P. Davis

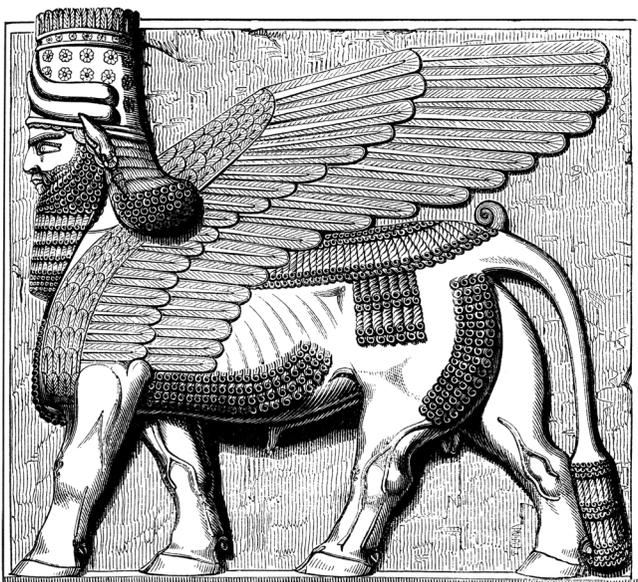
# The Cursed Colony of Meslamtaea

a supplement for the Second Edition of

**BABYLON ON WHICH FAME AND JUBILATION ARE  
BESTOWED**

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Designed by G. P. Davis



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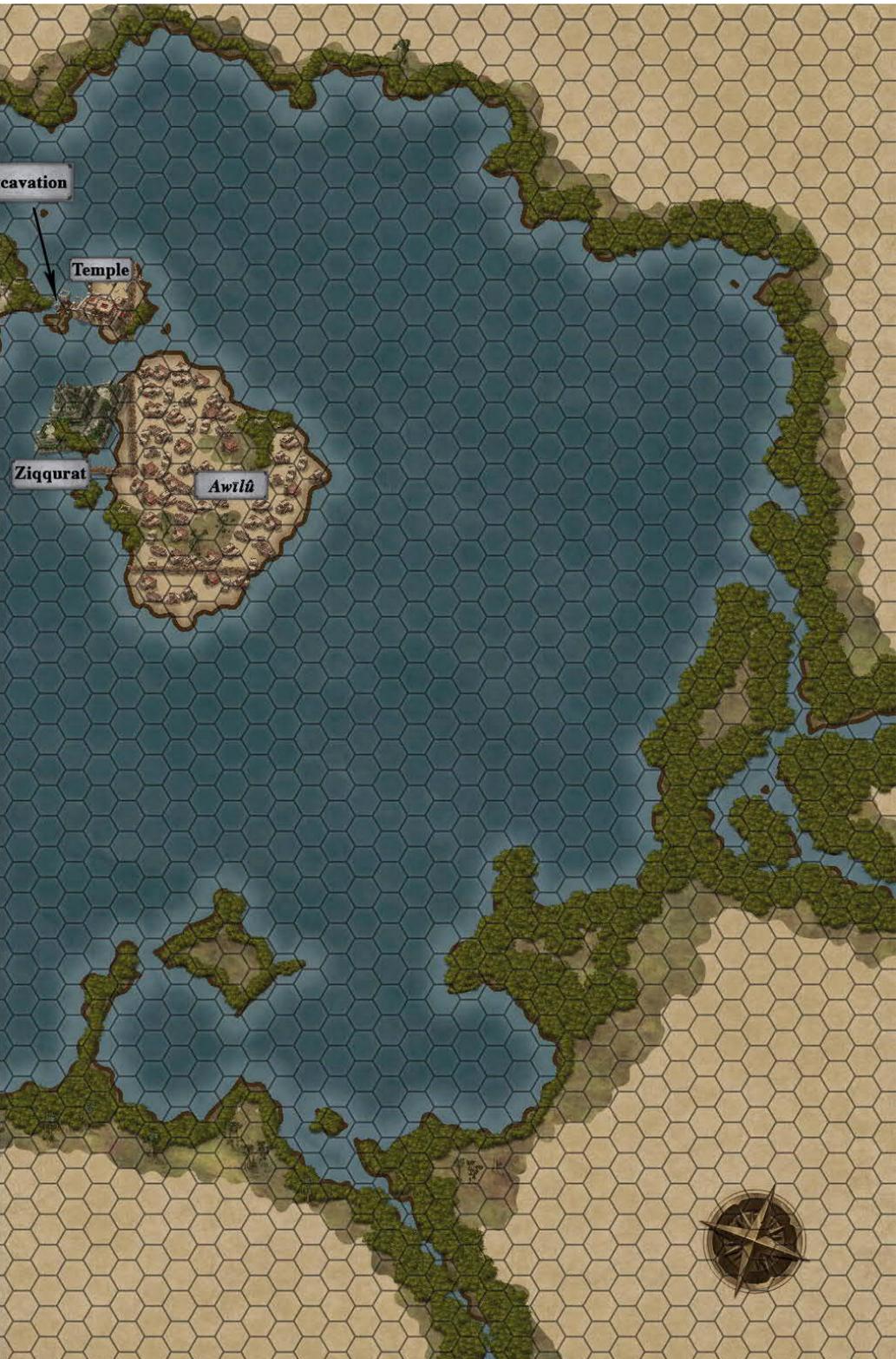
The cuneiform typefaces *Assurbanipal*, *Santakku*, and *SantakkuM* used in this work are available at <http://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/cuneifont/>. They were created by Sylvie Vanséveren.



Ex

Slaves

**Kār-Nergal**  
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## Introduction: Problematic Themes

When I initially outlined this project, I didn't know how difficult it would be to write this introduction. It feels like the world — or at least the culture around politically-sensitive matters in TTRPGs — has changed dramatically these past few months.

That said, what follows does not differ substantially from what I initially intended in April. Moreover, the vast majority of the text of this work was composed in April and early May, prior to the composition, layout, and release of *Ravin' Under the Dark*. I had always planned to draw attention to slavery at the beginning of this product, and in a way, I'm thankful that I can do so with the benefit of the context of the current moment.

As I've mentioned elsewhere, several of the non-player characters who appear in this work are either captured slaves or slave masters. A lot of the potential drama comes from friction between the two factions. Slavery, of course, existed in Mesopotamia during the time of Hammu-rapi. As discussed on page 78 of the second edition of *BFJB*, slavery in Mesopotamia is not racialized, nor do the economies of the Ancient Near East rely on large populations of enslaved labor.

Players and GMs who play *BFJB*, or any other TTRPG, have many choices in the way slaves and slavery are portrayed. These should be considered carefully, because there are themes and aspects of real world slavery that have no place at a game table. Since the initial release of *BFJB* in 2016, this has been my position, though, admittedly, I feel that I've never explicitly articulated it until now.

To be more specific, I do not believe that sexual relations between slavers and the enslaved, or sexual exploitation within the context of slavery are appropriate subjects to be dealt with in-game. Indeed, even with that prohibition, groups should approach the broader issues surrounding the treatment of enslaved persons with caution. Just because the GM, or some of the players, have no more emotional connection to the plight of enslaved peoples than say, the desperate situation of soldiers trapped in a besieged city, doesn't mean that every player will feel this way. Moreover, dealing with slavery in an adult fashion means acknowledging the history of problematic tropes surrounding its depictions, which former generations deliberately promoted to excuse their complicity in an amoral system. These include the role of the sympathetic slave owner, or the idea that slaves are happy with their lot, among others.

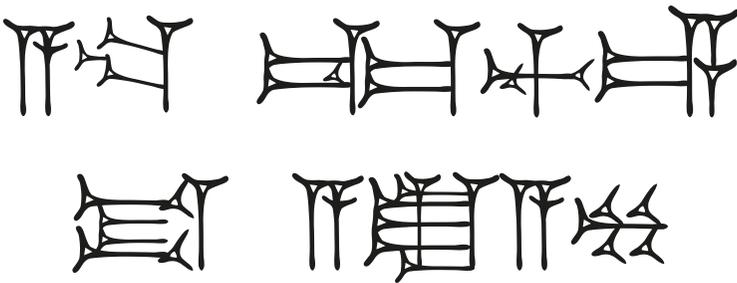
Every GM should educate themselves regarding how to deal with sensitive matters in TTRPGs. This is neither difficult, nor especially time-consuming. There are many fantastic discussions online around the

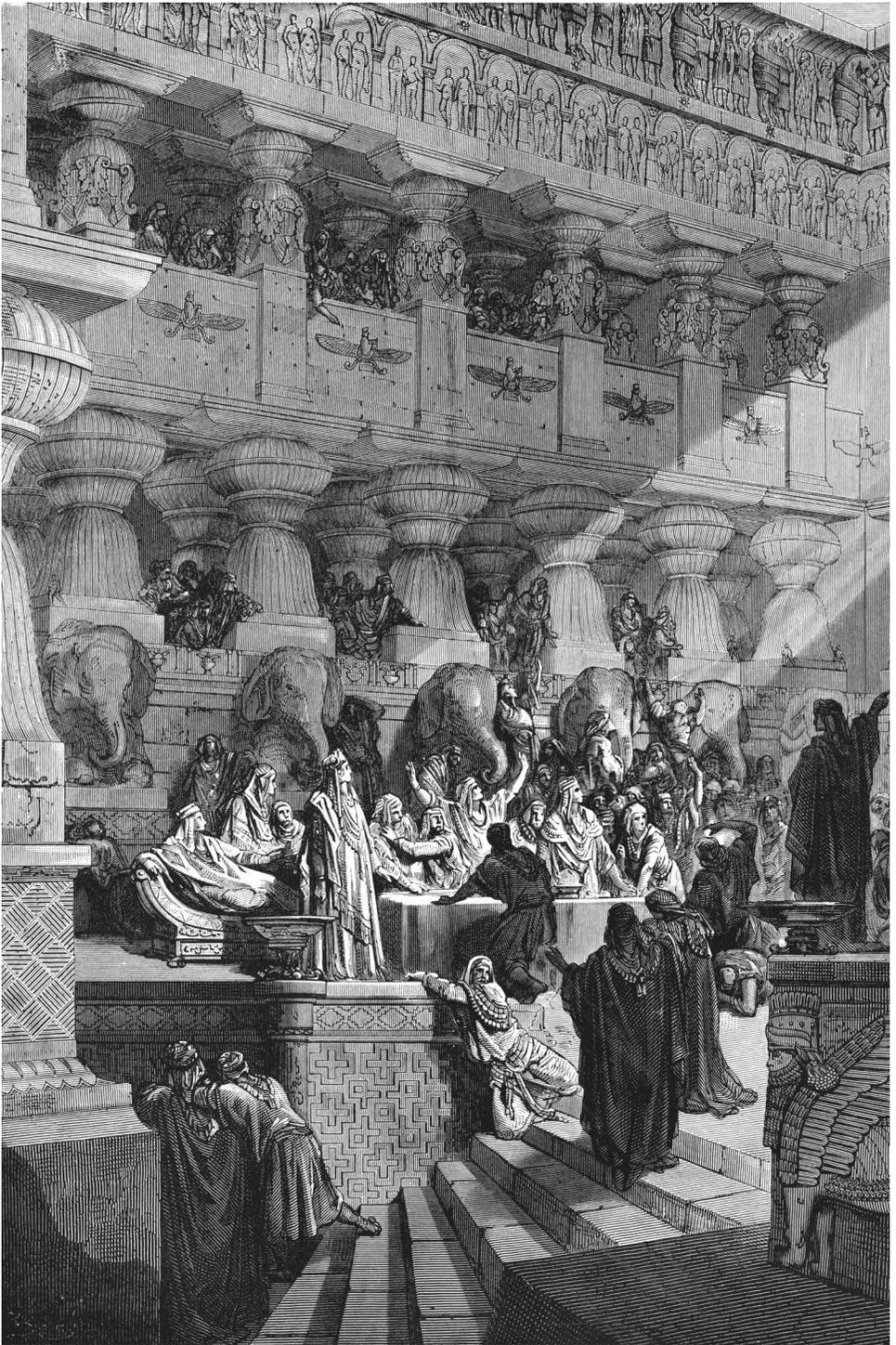
concept of “lines” and “veils” — first articulated by Ron Edwards in a 2003 supplement for his Sorcerer Role Playing Game called *Sex and Sorcery*. Implicit in these discussions is the idea that the GM is the de facto leader of their gaming group. The GM’s job is not merely to make sure that every player is enjoying their gaming experience, but also that they feel safe at the table and among the group. How players feel about issues surrounding slavery — the way the GM and the other players present it — can be a source of significant emotional trauma for some players. GMs should understand this, and be prepared to address it at the appropriate time.

Finally, and I add this mainly to discourage anyone who will argue this point, I really hope TTRPG culture has moved past the lazy defense of “we’re just being honest to the setting” or “that’s how things were back then.” Yes, I agree, the ancient world was a terrible place in many regards; so too is the modern world. That said, fictional works — even those set in historical epochs — shouldn’t be evaluated on how unpleasant or objectionable their content is. No sane person would argue that TTRPGs, or any other medium, should be forced to present a setting and show every piece of boring minutiae; by the same reasoning, their validity shouldn’t be judged by how much awful and disturbing true-to-life content they include.

As I write this, I hope that you and your players are modern, moral people who care about each other and those around you. In short, please, don’t be careless, think about others, the damage you can do, and the problematic stereotypes you can perpetuate at your table.

— GPD





## 1.0 The History of Kār-Nergal

Over five hundred years ago (c. 2330 BCE) Sargon of Akkad (wr. OB. Šar-ru-GI 𒊕𒍪𒌆𒊕𒍪𒌆𒊕), averted a coup by a tiny religious faction in the city then called Gudea (now, OB. Kutha). This sect, dedicated to the worship of an obscure aspect of the Sumerian god Meslamtaea (wr. <sup>d</sup>Mes-lam-ta-è-a 𒄠𒍪𒌆𒊕𒍪𒌆𒊕𒍪𒌆𒊕), fled east from Gudea, and set up a small colony on the western bank of the Idiglat River. For a century, the the priests of Meslamtaea attracted those displaced by Sargon’s conquests to their new settlement. They constructed a large temple within the city, as well as a ziqqurat dedicated to their god.

Their faith grew quickly in power and influence, and in doing so, they began to acquire secret knowledge and dangerous artifacts from across the lands of Sumer and Akkade. At last, around 2225 BCE, advisors to Sargon’s heir Naram-Sîn convinced that king of the threat posed by the colony. The king promptly invaded, and the community was subjugated, the cult suppressed, and the priests executed.

Several families, however, managed to escape the fall of the colony, to settle elsewhere. Aided in part by the god’s curse (see below) they preserved their curious version of worship of Meslamtaea.

Within a generation the site of the old colony was abandoned by normal folk. As the buildings and temple fell into ruins, pastoral populations, who equated Meslamtaea with the Akkadian god Nergal, began to call the site Kār-Nergal (the “Colony of Nergal”). Sometime around 2000 BCE the main canal which watered the city became clogged with silt south of the ruins. As a result, the canal’s water started to pool, so that today, the remains of the colony stand in the middle of a stagnant marsh.

During this time, the heads of the families who preserved the traditions of the colony made clandestine pilgrimages into Kār-Nergal, so that they could perform the god’s rites in his inner sanctuary. While they worked to preserve these most important areas of the temple, the clergy did nothing to mitigate the colony’s physical decay. Indeed, the state of the city — half-drowned, in the middle of a fetid marsh — made it unattractive to travelers, or regional kings looking to set up a military encampment.

All that changed in 1782 BCE, when two clergy of Meslamtaea (Ur-kalla and Lu-dingirra) reunited the dispersed families and entered Kār-Nergal with the intent to set up permanent habitation there. In doing so, Ur-kalla’s daughter Nin-lamamu — the newly-minted high priestess of Meslamtaea — had a vision that a great artifact lay buried somewhere within the temple grounds, where it was concealed during the siege of Naram-Sîn.

## 1.1 Meslamtaea, and the Cult of Kār-Nergal

Old Babylonian scholars of religion will identify the divine personage known as Meslamtaea as one of two deities (along with Lugalirra) called the “Divine Twins.” Considered minor gods by these learned persons, Meslamtaea and Lugalirra are believed to stand on either side of the gates to the underworld, and regulate access thereto. This association of the two gods with one another, however, is a relatively modern interpretation.

Prior to the Old Babylonian Period, Meslamtaea was considered the principal underworld god in several communities, on par with more modern interpretations of Nergal or Eriškigal. Lugalirra remained obscure.

The cult of Meslamtaea now situated in Kār-Nergal maintains many older traditions of the worship of Meslamtaea. They believe this god to be the chief god of the underworld, one whose power is on par with that of Babylon’s Marduk or Ešnunna’s Tišpak. As such, they hold that he has power over life and death, and the ability to grant his petitioners the ability to pass between the two. Thresholds are an essential element in the faith of this group. The passage between life and death, between land and water, between animal and man are all considered to be the most transcendent experiences to be contemplated in their liturgy and religious practice. They consider jackals (creatures that appear akin to the domesticated dog, yet remain irredeemably wild) to be sacred.



Among families descended from the original inhabitants of Kār-Nergal, there is a lycanthropy-like curse that seemingly manifests at random. Those afflicted by this curse — called the “Curse of Ninkilim” — are able to take on various aspects of wild animals, sometimes transforming into a shape identical to common beasts.

While most Mesopotamians would consider this affliction a curse

on par with any other mundane disease, or a spiritual ill like demonic possession, the people of Meslamtaea believe this to be a blessing from the god, and treat those so afflicted with deference. In 1767 BCE, many of these creatures are present within Kār-Nergal, and given their gifts, can be formidable adversaries.

## 1.2 The Curse of Ninkilim

While the origins of this magical malady are lost, it affects only individuals with a genetic relationship to the original inhabitants of the community of Kār-Nergal. Whether a blessing bestowed by one of the underworld deities revered at the colony, or a curse imposed upon them by some powerful entity opposed to them, the connection between their faith and the affliction is obvious.

Individuals suffering from the curse gain an extra Talent, *Dog of Ninkilim*, at no cost, in addition to those normally available to a character of their class level. While the curse remains dormant, characters so afflicted do not display any recognizable symptoms, although a Doctor or Exorcist-Priest can recognize the presence of the curse with a successful Soul check. Once detected, or after observing the symptoms manifest, a doctor or exorcist-priest can recognize the disease with a successful Mind check at a -3 penalty. This malady is inherited, and cannot be cured using the Doctor's *Cure Disease* talent.

**Activation.** Cursed individuals must make a successful Soul check when any of the following conditions occur:

- Once per combat or encounter, the first time they fail an avoid check for any stat;
- At sunset every night during the month of Kislimum;
- When the light of a full moon touches any part of their exposed skin.

A failed check results in the curse activating, with symptoms manifesting over the course of one round.

On these occasions, afflicted characters can willingly fail their check and allow the curse to take its effect. Moreover, they can also attempt to activate the curse's effects at any other time by succeeding at a simple Soul check.

Regardless of how the curse is activated in a sufferer, the episode lasts 1d6+2 hours, after which the character immediately returns to normal, and must operate at a -2 penalty to all checks until they have properly rested.

**Symptoms.** When symptoms of the curse manifest, the sufferer begins to take on the aspects of one or more animals. The afflicted never have control over which animal aspects develop, even if they willfully encouraged the change themselves; the manifestations are random for every episode.

When an afflicted character manifests the disease, they lose access to all of their “human” talents during the term of the episode, and their Mind score is reduced to 1.

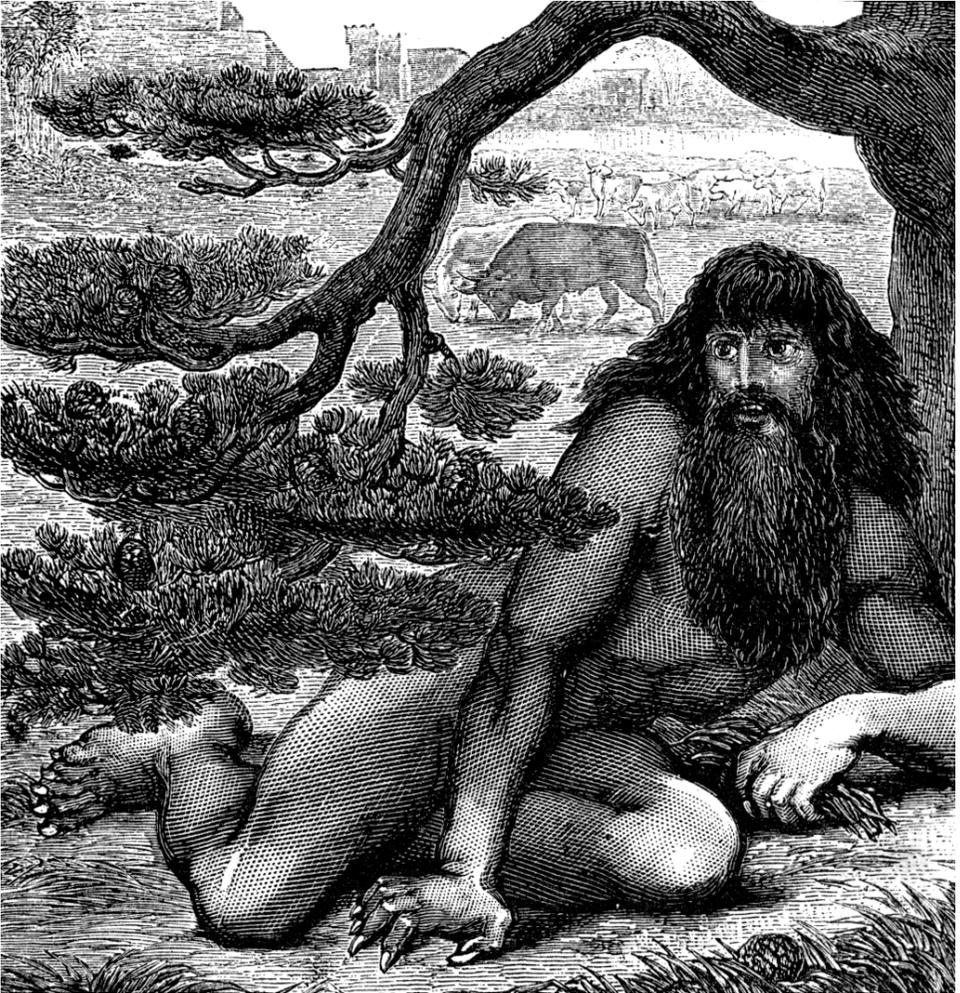
How many different animal aspects are involved is determined by the numerical value of the character’s permanent Body score. For each point of permanent Body score, roll 2d6 and consult the following table, which lists the animal involved, as well as the related mechanical benefits. Duplicated results stack.

<b>2d6 Roll</b>	<b>Animal</b>	<b>Mechanical Benefits</b>	<b>Available Talents</b>
2	Boar	+1 Body, Tusk (Body 2)	Charge, Perceptive (Scent)
3	Bovine	+2 Body, Trample (Body 2)	Coordinate, Tough (Body)
4	Dog	+1 Soul, Bite (Body 1)	Brutal, Resilient (Body), Resilient (Soul)
5	Donkey	+1 Soul, Bite (Body 1)	Cantankerous, Swift, Resilient (Body)
6	Frog	Leap 30 feet, can attack with tongue as whip.	Amphibious, Piercing Blow, Whip-like Tongue (Frog)
7	Lion	+2 Body, Bite (Body 3), Claw (Body 2)	Ambush (Lion), Furious, Brutal, Perceptive (Scent)
8	Ram	+2 Body, Headbutt (Body 1)	Charge, Hardy, Tough (Body), Resilient (Body)
9	Scorpion	Pincers (Body 2), Sting (Body 1)	Piercing Blow, Precise (Body), Perceptive (Sight), Poison Sting (Scorpion)
10	Snake	Bite (Body 1)	Deft (Body), Piercing Blow, Perceptive (Scent), Poisonous Bite (Snake) Swift
11	Vulture	Wings, Flight 60 feet per round, Beak (Body 1)	Carrion Feeder (Vulture), Hardy, Perceptive (Scent or Sight), Tough (Body)
12	Wolf	+1 Body, Bite (Body 2)	Brutal, Hardy, Pack Tactics (Wolf), Perceptive (Scent), Resilient (Body)

An afflicted character gains all of the mechanical benefits of any animal aspects they manifest. For attacks, the associated stat and damage are indicated in parenthesis.

When an entry lists an associated talent, it fills one of the character's normal talent slots for the duration of the manifestation. For the purpose of this determination, the slot created for the Dog of Ninkilim talent is not a "normal slot". As a result, a transformed character should never gain more talents in this fashion that they have talent slots. If a transformed character has access to more animal talents than they have slots, they can choose which ones to benefit from.

Afflicted characters will have a difficult time making reasoned decisions, or following a determined plan of action; doing so requires a successful Soul check.



## 2.0 The People of Kār-Nergal

The city's population breaks down as follows: 96 free persons (including children), 54 slaves, and a cadre of 19 clergy, excluding their non-ordained family members who are counted among the general free population.

Among the clergy and citizens, roughly 10% are afflicted with the curse of Meslamtaea, which generally manifests in late adolescence.

### The Priesthood

Currently, the priesthood of Meslamtaea at Kār-Nergal are led by three individuals, the priests Ur-kalla and Lu-dingirra, and the high-priestess Nin-lamamu.

With the exception of the high-priestess, all of the lesser clergy are male. They generally follow Sumerian-inspired habits of dress and grooming: simple kilts or plain toga-like robes, along with shaved faces and hair.

Members of the lesser clergy will be either level 1 or level 2 priests, with a mix of skills and backgrounds as befits their role in the cult. Popular spells among them are *Charm*, *Inner Calm*, and *Stun*. More martially-minded clerics may know *Malediction* or *Muddle*. Rituals include *Bless*, *Contact the Dead* (see §6.2), *Curse*, *Hallow*, *Plague*, and *Summon Eṭemmmum*.

<b>Nin-lamamu, High-Priestess of Meslamtaea</b>
Level 5 Akkadian Priestess
<b>Stats</b> Body 3, Mind 3, Soul 7
<b>Talents</b> Charm <sup>S</sup> , Half-Remembered Ritual <sup>P</sup> , Sacrifice, Substitution (Soul), Plague <sup>R</sup>
<b>Notable Equipment</b> <i>Šibirru Meslamtaea</i> . This rod allows a user to summon a number of <i>eṭemmu</i> equal to their Soul score for an equal number of rounds, as per the ritual, at no cost. To control these creatures, the caster only makes one Mind check (not multiple checks for each <i>eṭemmmum</i> ). This power can only be used once per day.

28 years old in 1767 BCE, Nin-lamamu is the daughter of Ur-kalla, and second cousin of Lu-dingirra. She is the mother of two children, 10 and 8, both of whom are afflicted with the god's curse.

A life-long devotee of Meslamtaea, Nin-lamamu has a fanatic belief in herself and her cult's purpose. She insists on rigorous adherence to the god's rituals, and will direct immediate and violent punishment against



anyone whom she suspects might impair their sanctity. In principal, she sits atop the social hierarchy of Kār-Nergal, but in fact most of the *awtlû* defer to Ur-kalla on non-ritual matters, while a significant number of the clergy are loyal to Lu-dingirra. Both Nin-lamamu and her more pragmatic cousin both appreciate these facts; it's a source of conflict between them, but has yet to be brought to a head.

Her father, for his part, defers to Nin-lamamu's judgment completely, partly because he genuinely believes her to be blessed by the god's favor, and partly because he's a pushover.

<b>Ur-kalla, Aging Patriarch</b>
Level 9 Akkadian Soldier
<b>Stats</b> Body 7, Mind 4, Soul 3
<b>Talents</b> Animal Companion (Dog), Apprenticed (Priest), Deadly Force <sup>P</sup> , Fleet-footed, Hidden Reserve (Body), Invigorate <sup>S</sup>
<b>Notable Equipment</b> <i>Huṭṭimānum</i> (OB. "Snouty"). is a large, aged canine who has been Ur-kalla's constant companion for the past ten years. <i>Keen Sword</i> . Ur-kalla also possesses, but does not normally carry, a keen sword which deals +2 Body damage on a successful hit.

The father of Nin-lamamu, Ur-kalla was raised in the city of Isin. He served as a foot soldier in Isin's armies in his youth, and is now 47 years old. When Isin fell to Larsa in 1794 BCE, he pledged his allegiance to Rim-Sîn, and ultimately rose the rank of *wakil huṭṭim* in the king's army. Always a devout worshiper of Meslamtaea, under the influence of his nephew Lu-dingirra, Ur-kalla left the army in 1782 BCE to unite the Meslamtaeaite diaspora and return to Kār-Nergal. In the process, it was decided that his then 13-year-old daughter Nin-lamamu would be groomed as high-priestess. A clever girl, she adapted quickly to her role, and as she matured, Ur-kalla increasingly came to believe that she was divinely-inspired.

As the ostensible founder of the community at Kār-Nergal, most of the older generation of families are loyal to him, and look to him for advice. Unfortunately, Ur-kalla has a weak personality, and is easily influenced by those he trusts, especially Nin-lamamu and Lu-dingirra.

Ur-kalla dresses in Sumerian priest robes, and wears his hair and beard in the Akkadian style.

<b>Lu-dingirra, Manipulative <i>Abarakkum</i></b>
Level 7 Akkadian Priest
<b>Stats</b> Body 1, Mind 6, Soul 6
<b>Talents</b> Amateur (Bureaucrat; <i>Authority</i> ) <sup>P</sup> , Counterspell <sup>S</sup> , In-visibility <sup>S</sup> , Malediction <sup>S</sup> , Summon <i>Eṭemmu</i> <sup>R</sup>
<b>Notable Equipment</b> None

While most of the awīlû of Kār-Nergal consider Ur-kalla to be the man responsible for their return to the city, in fact, it would never have happened without Lu-dingirra’s constant encouragement and advice. A born manipulator, Lu-dingirra has spent the whole of his adult life orchestrating the establishment of the cult in the city. In his own mind, he is devoutly loyal to the theology of Meslamtaea. However, because his own pride and ambition are inextricably tied to the fortunes of the cult and its community, this devotion remains to be tested.

Unfortunately for Lu-dingirra, despite his high position in the faith, no one outside of the clergy trusts him, even if they make nominal attempts to conceal this. For a long time, his only ally was Ur-kalla, whom he found easy to control. Over time, however, Nin-lamamu has learned to exercise her authority as high-priestess — a role for which Lu-dingirra initially nominated her — and now she wastes no opportunity to frustrate and oppose Lu-dingirra’s machinations.

When he is not at the temple, Lu-dingirra can often be found in his secret laboratory at the southern tip of the island that houses the colony’s slave population. Surrounded by corpses in various states of decay, Lu-dingirra has been experimenting with the ritual for summoning eṭem-mū, attempting to perfect it and give him more control over the nature of the creatures summoned, and how long they remain before returning to the underworld. Only three other citizens of Kār-Nergal know about the workshop and his activities there; these are all awīlû priests whom Lu-dingirra selected for their loyalty to him, and their interest in rituals involving death.

Lu-dingirra is a short (5’5”), 35 year old man. He dresses in Sumerian fashion, and follows those traditions of body-hair removal.



## Non-Clerical Awīlû

Like all settled communities, the clergy of Kār-Nergal require a not-insubstantial amount of skilled persons working in professions to support their lives of ritual. The colony boasts a growing number of non-clerical *awīlû* who fill those everyday occupations one would expect to be required in a city.

As a result of the community's small size and common bonds of faith, however, economic activity within Kār-Nergal is rigidly circumscribed. Resources are allocated along ostensibly communal principals, by an assembly comprised of the leading men of every family, and advised by the priesthood.

<b>Qīšti-Nergal, “Mayor” of Kār-Nergal</b>
Level 4 Akkadian Bureaucrat
<b>Stats</b> Body 3, Mind 4, Soul 5
<b>Talents</b> Authority <sup>P</sup> , Dog of Ninkilim*, Eager, Hidden Reserve, Likable, Perfect
<b>Notable Equipment</b> None

In 1767 BCE, the current leader of Kār-Nergal's assembly is Qīšti-Nergal. A favorite of Nin-lamamu, he inherited his position (*rabiānum*, OB. “mayor”) from his father in the past year.

One of the many curse-bearing *awīlû*, Qīšti-Nergal is 24 years old and married with 3 children. He dresses in a style appropriate to a modern, non-laboring *awīlum*. His wife is a half-Ḫurrian woman named Izamu, who attempts to hide her disdain of Nin-lamamu. The feeling is mutual, but the high-priestess is significantly more powerful than Izamu. Qīšti-Nergal's position requires that Izamu tolerate the woman.

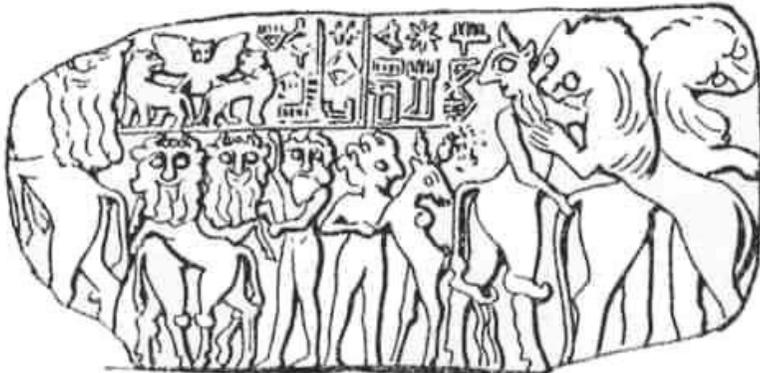
Politically, in addition to the support of the high-priestess, Qīšti-Nergal counts Ur-kalla and most of the important men of the city in his corner. Lu-dingirra is nominally opposed to him, though this stems from his allegiance to Nin-lamamu more than anything. His true enemy in the city is the merchant Išme-Erra, who believes that he could more effectively allocate the community's resources.

<b>Išme-Erra, Monopolistic Merchant</b>
Level 8 Akkadian Merchant
<b>Stats</b> Body 4, Mind 7, Soul 2
<b>Talents</b> An Uncommon Acquisition <sup>p</sup> , Dog of Ninkilim*, Eager, Perfect, Precise (Mind), Substitution (Mind), Tough (Body)
<b>Notable Equipment</b> <i>The Chalcedony Amulet</i>

One of the original supporters of Ur-kalla and Lu-dingirra, Išme-Er-ra runs the city’s import and export business. A prolific man with one living wife, Išme-Erra has nine adult children, eight of whom spend most of their time bringing goods to and from the city, or running satellite agencies in the cities of Southern Mesopotamia. His second-oldest child, Erra-gašer, previously worked to supply the community with slaves, before an injury ended his traveling activities.

Born in Larsa in 1818 BCE, Išme-Erra is an excellent business man, and master of organization and accounting. He also has a reputation as a terrible bully, prone to rashness and fits of anger when he doesn’t get his way. He makes no secret of his loathing for Qišti-Nergal, and frequently expresses negative opinions of both Lu-dingirra and Ur-kalla. Everyone in the city understands that Išme-Erra’s business is integral to the continued life of the city; however, many of the *awīlû* would rather forsake the city than allow him any more power over them.

Now over 50, Išme-Erra is physically robust, with a quick mind. He shaves his head, but maintains a short, well-kept beard. He is afflicted with the *Curse of Ninkilim*, but does not suffer its effects due to an artifact amulet in his possession.



## Išme-Erra's Chalcedony Amulet

This amulet is rectangular, roughly 30 mm x 20 mm. It is inscribed with the following Sumerian text.

Front

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Incantation!

Seed of Anum,  
son whom the Underworld bore,  
reared by a bad wet-nurse,  
fed true milk by a bad nurse  
demon begotten in the land,  
good seed of Anum,  
son of Ereškigal,  
savage, placed at the base of heaven,  
fierce one, evil, evil one  
be exorcised by Heaven, by Underworld

Back

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Be exorcised by Nergal,  
supreme ruler of the Underworld.  
be exorcised by Ereškigal,  
mother of Ninazu.  
be exorcised by Namtar, the great one  
be exorcised by Hušbiša,  
wife of Namtar.  
So long as you do not leave that man.<sup>1</sup>

To its possessor, this amulet grants absolute immunity from all manner of diseases and poisons, actually preventing the infection or poison from taking hold.

If a character who is already diseased or poisoned comes into possession of this amulet, their condition will no longer continue to worsen, and any non-stat damage effects or penalties suffered as a result are alleviated after 1d6 hours. However, diseased or poisoned characters who come into possession mid-affliction are not cured; the circumstances and progression of their malady are merely furloughed until they lose possession of this artifact.

While in possession of this amulet a character suffering from the *Curse of Ninkilim* will not transform or feel any related effects.

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<sup>1</sup>The author's understanding of Sumerian is limited. The text of this incantation, and its translation, have been adapted from Lambert, W. (1976). *An Old Babylonian Letter and Two Amulets*. Iraq, 38(1), 57-64.

<b>Erra-gaşer, Lame Taskmaster</b>
Level 5 Akkadian Merchant
<b>Stats</b> Body 5, Mind 2, Soul 4
<b>Talents</b> An Uncommon Acquisition <sup>p</sup> , Apprenticed (Taskmaster, see §6.1), Brutal, Piercing Blow, Tough (Body)
<b>Notable Equipment</b> <i>Enthralling Whip</i> . When target character's Body score would be reduced to 0 as a result of damage done by this whip, its owner can choose to forgo inflicting Body damage and the resulting injury. Instead, the target is immediately effected by the <i>Enthrall</i> ritual. The target is still allowed an avoid Mind check as per the Ritual description. If the targeted character successfully avoids the <i>Enthrall</i> effect, they still suffer no Body damage or the resulting injury for the successful hit.
<b>Prior Injury</b> As a result of losing his right foot (see <i>BFJB 2.0</i> §10.1 Body Injury no. 10) Erra-gaşer's total Body score has been permanently reduced by 2. A level 5 character, his stats total 11, rather than 13.

The oldest son and second child of Išme-Erra, Erra-gaşer is a tall, solidly built man in his early thirties. He regularly shaves his thinning hair and beard, and day-to-day wears nothing more than a kilt and sandals. Formerly an itinerant slave merchant, he lost his right foot in a fight with a fleeing *amtum*. As a result, he now oversees the slave population of Kār-Nergal.

Erra-gaşer is a bully, and a bit of a sadist. To control the slaves, he leads a team of six other men, all of whom are fiercely loyal to him. Kār-Nergal's *awīlû* shun Erra-gaşer and his crew; as a result, they live and spend most of their time in the slave area of the colony.

### Slaves

The slaves of Kār-Nergal fall into two categories, *viz.* the laborers who toil and sleep beyond the *awīlû* areas of the colony, and domestic

slaves who live alongside their masters.

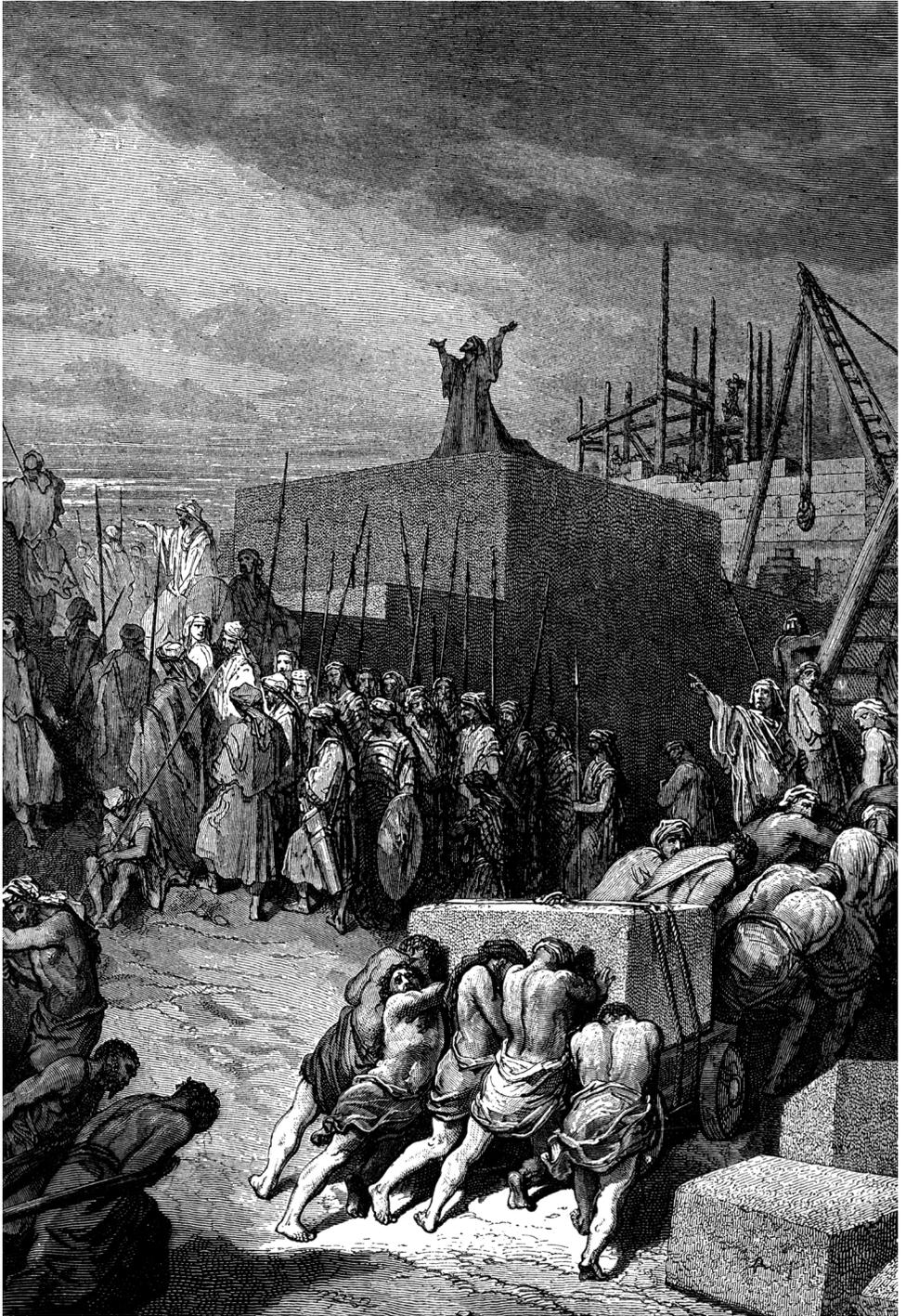
The majority of the colony's slave population belongs to the corps of laboring slaves. Invariably men, they were acquired by agents of the cult and brought to Kār-Nergal for this purpose. Several were formerly free men who ran afoul of Išme-Erra's trading operations. Laboring at Kār-Nergal is a hard life, fraught with peril, and subject to the casual brutality of Erra-gašer and his men. Virtually all of the colony's manual labor is performed by these *wardū*, with a significant portion of them engaged in the dangerous work of dredging and excavation.

The second group of slaves, the domestics, are fewer in number. Most are women. Their work assignments generally do not involve hard labor, so that the chief source of danger to them comes from the whims of their *awīlû* masters. This group undertakes most of the menial tasks of cleaning, food preparation, and unskilled domestic manufacturing within the colony. Many of these individuals were already owned by the families who moved to Kār-Nergal in the last generation.

With respect to both groups of slaves, the *awīlû* of Kār-Nergal allow slaves a degree of autonomy to interact with one another, so long as their work is completed, and they remain in their respective areas of the city. The reason for this laxity is due in large part to the many significant natural impediments that runaway slaves face. All of the slaves know that the marsh itself is inimical to human life. Moreover, they understand that once past it, they would find themselves alone and un-provisioned on the arid Mesopotamian steppe with little chance of reaching the nearest community.

<b>Dadanum, Burly Protector</b>
Level 6 Amorite Slave
<b>Stats</b> Body 7, Mind 2, Soul 4
<b>Talents</b> Deft (Body), Inconspicuous <sup>P</sup> , Hidden Reserve (Mind), Tough (Body), Substitution (Body), Secondary Profession (Day-laborer; Everyman) <sup>P</sup>
<b>Notable Equipment</b> None

A giant of a man, Dadanum was sold into slavery at age 8 in 1783 BCE, and brought to the colony in 1775. Since that time he has developed a following among the slave laborers of Kār-Nergal, who trust him to settle disputes among them, and to protect them insofar as is possible from the



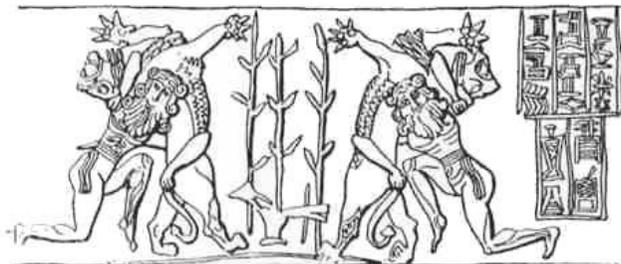
more extreme predations of Erra-gašer's overseers.

Dadanum does not shy away from hard work, but he also enjoys drinking. Erra-gašer knows this, and not infrequently uses alcohol to pacify or incapacitate him when he wants to punish or otherwise exploit Dadanum's fellow slaves.

<b>Atkal-ana-Tišpak, Ex-Thief and Snitch</b>
Level 5 Amorite/Elamite Thief
<b>Stats</b> Body 5, Mind 6, Soul 2
<b>Talents</b> Desperate Measures <sup>p</sup> , Eager, Fleet-footed, Hidden Reserve (Soul), Piercing Blow
<b>Notable Equipment</b> None
<b>Prior Injury</b> As a result of losing his right eye, Atkal-ana-Tišpak suffers appropriate penalties (see <i>BFJB</i> 2.0 §10.1 Body Injury no. 8).

Brought to Kār-Nergal as a captive three years ago, Atkal-ana-Tišpak was born in the city of Ešnunna, where he lived as a petty criminal and burglar. Almost immediately after he arrived in the colony, Erra-gašer caught him pilfering the slave community's granary. The overseer took his right eye for the offense, and ever since Atkal-ana-Tišpak has confined his victims to the colony's slave population.

Atkal-ana-Tišpak is 32 in 1767 BCE. He should not be trusted by anyone, especially his fellow slaves. Following the incident with his eye, Atkal-ana-Tišpak has determined that short of his death, the only way to end his life of labor is to bargain for his freedom with Erra-gašer. While nothing has as yet occurred to enable him to do so, he carefully watches the activities of his fellow slaves for an opportunity.

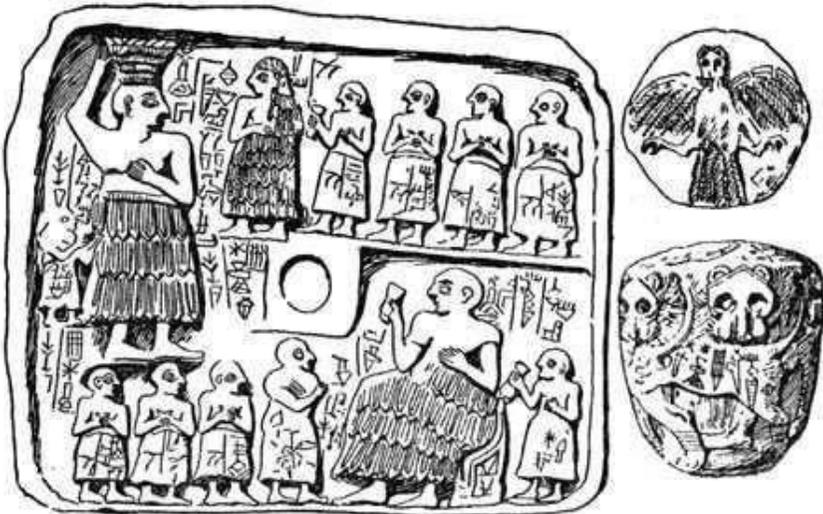


<b>Mārat-erṣeti, Confidant and Scribe</b>
Level 4 Akkadian Slave
<b>Stats</b> Body 2, Mind 7, Soul 4
<b>Talents</b> Inconspicuous <sup>P</sup> , Invigorate <sup>S</sup> , Resilient (Body), Secondary Profession (Scribe; Avid Reader) <sup>P</sup> , Stat Increase (Mind), Substitution (Mind)
<b>Notable Equipment</b> None

Mārat-erṣeti was raised in the *gagûm* of Shamash at Sippar as a domestic and administrative slave. She fell in love with a young *nadītum* there, who taught her to read and write. Six years ago both she and her master were traveling from Sippar to Kiš when they were set upon by slavers working for Išme-Erra. Mārat-erṣeti assumes her master was killed, while Mārat-erṣeti was taken captive.

Originally assigned to domestic work, the *awīlû* population of the colony quickly appreciated her intelligence and literacy. Within a few months she was living in Nin-lamamu's apartments at the reclaimed temple, where she continues to serve her as scribe and amanuensis.

In 1767, Mārat-erṣeti is 23 years old. As part of Nin-lamamu's household, she dresses well, if plainly. In that time she has become close to Nin-lamamu and her children. Circumstances encourage her to be loyal to them — what other choice does she have? — and she is, even if intellectually she realizes that she is their prisoner.



### 3.0. The Colony Itself

Originally, the site of Kār-Nergal covered an area of roughly 50 ha. (0.19 sq. miles; 0.5 sq. km). As noted above, most of the city is now perpetually inundated, although with a few exceptions the water level varies between ankle- to chest-deep. Most of the waterlogged buildings in these areas have collapsed over the past two centuries, but here and there a pilgrim can sight the eroded portions of walls jutting out from the surface of the mere. The city's tallest structure, the four-story ziqqurat E-erimḫašḫaš (Sum. "House Which Smites the Wicked" wr. É.ÉRIM.ḪAŠ.ḪAŠ 𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗), is surrounded by five feet of water. Originally, this structure was solid, constructed from an outer layer of mud-brick and filled with debris, with a small, two-room gegunnûm located at its top. This little temple has long since collapsed, and much of the ziqqurat's southwestern side has eroded, exposing the loosening construction fill inside.

Four tracts of land remain dry and above the level of the marsh. The first of these is a neighborhood of closely-built houses, which once served as residences for the city's working class. This area now shelters a majority of the cult's slaves, as well as their overseer Erra-gašer, his lieutenants, and their families. Irrigated field plots are also present in this area, the colony's main source of grain.

Another dry neighborhood lies immediately east of the dilapidated ziqqurat. When Ur-kalla and Lu-dingirra arrived in 1782 BCE, one of their first acts was to organize the draining and reconstruction of this district, which housed the clergy before the sack of Naram-Sîn. The homes here, while modest and single-story, are essentially new construction, built on top of the remains of the original settlement. This area now houses the city's free population, with the exception of Nin-lamamu and her household. Also located here are several more fields and the city's main granary and larder. Unlike many Mesopotamians, the residents of Kār-Nergal subsist on a diet primarily composed of fish and water-fowl; at this time, they lack the capacity to produce grain-based foods in volume.

The third dry region of the city includes the eastern and northern precincts of the Temple of Meslamtaea. A fair portion of these have been reclaimed from the marsh, but the southern and eastern portions are mostly inundated and collapsed, so that restoring them would be a massive undertaking. Nin-lamamu and her servants reside in several apartments on the eastern side of the temple, and the sanctuary is located midway along the structure's northeastern side.

A final dry region lies between the fallen western portion of the temple and the slave laborer's neighborhood. This naturally low-lying area is

protected from the marsh by a series of artificial dikes, which were recently constructed so that the cult's slaves could excavate here. Nin-lamamu believes some artifact of great power was buried during the final days of Nar-am-Sîn's siege, and has directed Erra-gašer to keep the cult's slaves busy until it is unearthed.

### 3.1 Entering the Colony

No wall has surrounded Kār-Nergal in living memory, and the current occupants of the colony feel secure enough in their isolation that they do not deem it necessary to post guards.

The foul nature of the marsh is the main obstacle to curious travelers, who would be wise to utilize a small raft or coracle to remain dry and out of its grasp. The marsh itself covers an area of 800 hectares.

**Boating.** A competent sailor can navigate the waters relatively easily with a Mind check at no penalty, while characters without a sailor's knowledge will suffer a -3 penalty. Failure means that the watercraft gets stuck on some half-submerged obstacle. In the event of a critical failure, the boat becomes damaged, and will sink in 1d6 rounds.

A boat or a coracle paddled across the marsh has a base movement rate of 10 hexes per hour per two points of Body score for every character paddling divided by the number of passengers.

$$\frac{(\text{Body score of each paddler} \div 2)}{\text{Number of passengers (including paddlers)}} \times 10 = \frac{\text{Number of Hexes Traversed Per Hour}}$$

The GM should feel comfortable modifying this number further based on the condition of the watercraft involved.

**Wading.** Of course, as a result of the relatively low-depth of the marsh, players may choose to traverse it on foot. Below the surface, the floor of the marsh-bed is markedly uneven, and littered with debris. Consult the map of Kār-Nergal. For every hex that a player enters, the GM should roll 1d6, with the result equaling the depth of that hex in feet.

Each hex is roughly 1000 feet across. A character can wade through the marsh at a base strategic movement rate of 2 hexes per hour per point of Body score. For every 2 feet of water a character encounters, the character's strategic movement rate is reduced by one hex per hour to a minimum of 1 hex per hour.

Should the characters resort to tactical movement in the marsh (e.g. in the case of a combat encounter), their base movement rate is reduced by 1 square per foot of water encountered. Additionally, they will suffer a -1

penalty per foot of water to all Body checks (including combat) unrelated to wading or swimming.

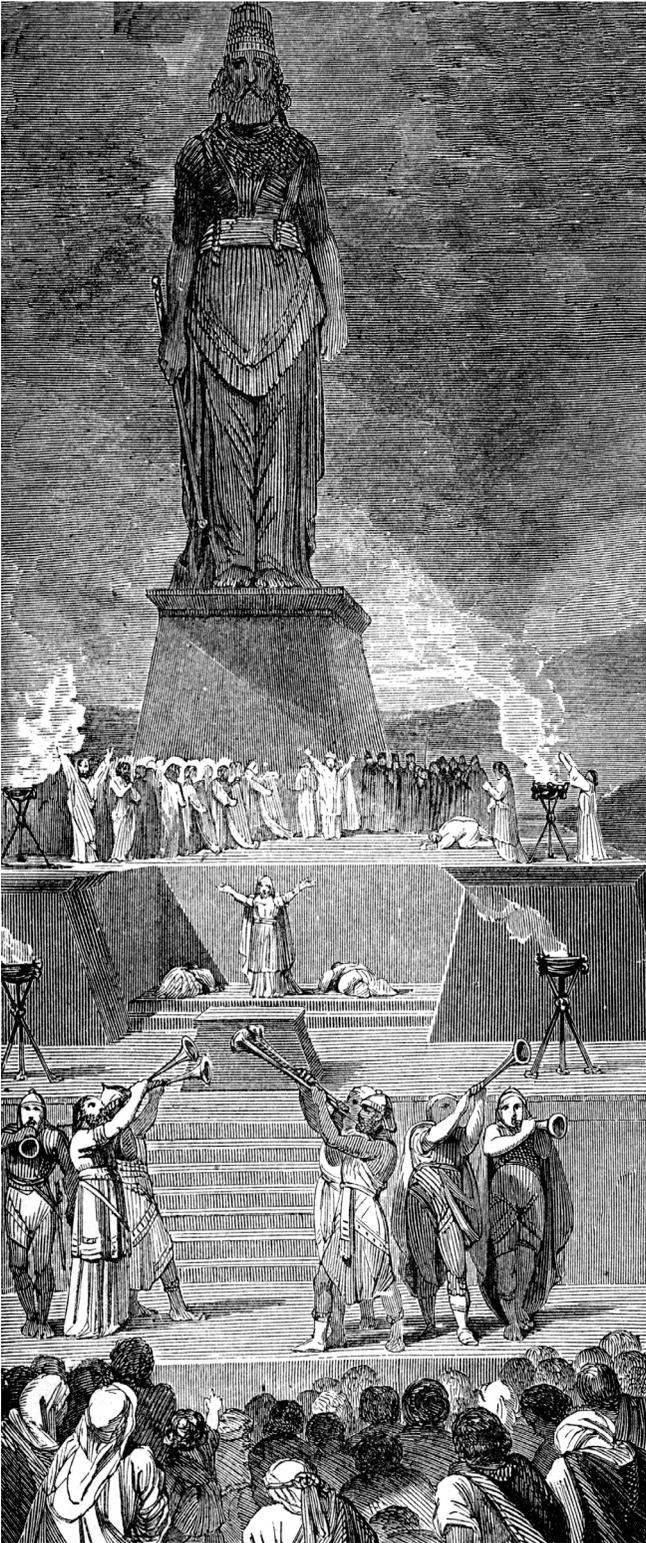
Several pests live or breed in the marsh, and characters will have to contend with them. These include flies, leeches, and snakes, as well as the occasional lower-level demon. Several of these pose no threat to PCs who stay out of the water, while a few will trouble them regardless. Entries for creatures not found in the core rulebook are listed in §7.

For random encounters, roll 4d6 and consult the following table.

Roll (4d6)	Encounter
4-6	<b>Hole.</b> Beneath the water, the ground drops off dramatically, and the PCs are temporarily submerged. This deeper region covers an area of 1d6+3 tactical squares in front of them, and 1d6 squares to either side. They must either swim back to high ground (a Body check, Sailors automatically succeed) and circumnavigate the depression, or swim across it at a rate equal to their Body score.
6-9	<b>Swarm of Flies.</b> The PCs encounter a swarm of disease-carrying flies. See that entry in §7.1.
10-15	<b>Leeches.</b> Each PC must succeed at a Soul check, or be afflicted by 1d6 leeches.
16-20	<b>Snakes.</b> The PCs have entered a nest of 2d6 snakes, who aren't particularly happy to see them. See that entry in §7.1.
21	<b>Men from Kār-Nergal.</b> 1d6 free men of the city are encountered. These will normally be on a boat or raft of some kind, and might include mundane citizens, fishermen, soldiers, or magic-users.
22-23	<b>Slaves.</b> The PCs encounter 1d6-3 (min. 1) slaves, who will either be on foot or in a boat. Their motivations for being out in the marsh are up to the GM.
24	<b>Marsh Demon.</b> The PCs encounter a demon loping through the marsh. See §7.3.

### 3.2 The Temple

Before Naram-Sîn depopulated the colony, E-melamsulimguru (Sum. “House Clad In Fearsome Radiance” wr. É.ME.LÁM.SU.LIM.GÛR. RU 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪) covered an area of roughly six acres. After two centuries of partial inundation, most of the southwestern precincts have



collapsed, and their remains lie at least partially submerged in the marsh. No doubt the whole of the eastern side would have followed, but these areas include Meslamtaea's cella and consecrated antechambers. Thus, generations of worshippers have braved the marsh to shore up these rooms, and maintain the god's image here.

Entry into the temple is forbidden to all but Nin-lamamu, her family and attendants, and the clergy. During the the reign of Sargon I, the temple boasted large gate-house style entrances on its northern and southern sides, with two smaller entrances on its eastern side. Nowadays, with the collapse of the southwestern side, the southern entrance is half-clogged with debris. Most of the temple staff therefore use the northern gate, while Nin-lamamu's household uses the eastern entrances for domestic matters.

Despite its depredations, E-melamsulimurru remains a large edifice. Like many Mesopotamian temples constructed during the Old Akkadian Era, at the heart of the temple is a great open courtyard. A smaller open court exists on the western side, where it forms the penultimate antechamber before entering the cella proper. A person entering the eastern portions of the temple would find it little different from those of other well-maintained public buildings in Mesopotamia. Nin-lamamu's apartments are furnished in the same fashion as those of other prominent *awīlātum*, and no sense betrays the fact that a portion of the opposite end of the building is now exposed to the elements.

It is only as one passes out of the fresh air of the grand courtyard and into the western and southern portions of the temple that decay becomes noticeable. Stale or foul odors of the swamp are present here, though the clergy perpetually burn incense in Meslamtaea's cella to cover this up. Several of the southern rooms are filled with a layer of debris, and quickly become damp, with pools of standing water. Eventually, the rooms become unstable, the water level rises, and the roof is collapsed. These areas can be dangerous to move through (requiring a Mind check, with penalties determined by the state of the room, and failure resulting in further collapse and possible Body injury to everyone nearby), or may be so clogged with debris that they would have to be cleared before a character could move further.

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**Author's Note:** After some deliberation, I've chosen not to include a map of the temple here. Reflecting on the use of maps at my table, I often alter or ignore the official versions, so I can scale encounters to my players' interests and needs. More to the point, the temple isn't a "dungeon" in the Gygaxian sense. It's a place where people live and work, located at the heart of an isolated community that as-yet feels unthreatened by the world at large. Detailing domestic and ceremonial spaces here would be a true waste of space, especially since a simple Google search will turn up a host of floor-plans for Mesopotamian temples.

Near Nin-lamamu's apartments is the temple's library. The high-priestess has assembled a modest collection of tablets, including several complete omen series, multiple religious ceremonies, and a comprehensive set of spell and ritual tablets. Mārat-erṣeti spends most of her time here.

Finally, it bears mentioning that Meslamtaea himself appears much like any other sacred Mesopotamian idol. His main body is carved from the wood of a meš-tree, and he is dressed as befits a god, in garments of fine blue cloth, with golden jewelry worth upwards of ten talents (36,000 shekels of silver).

### 3.3 The *Awīlū* Section

At first glance, travelers familiar with the newer, wealthier neighborhoods of Mesopotamian cities will find nothing amiss in the *awīlū* area of Kār-Nergal. The sounds and smells of domestic life generally overpower those of the wild marsh that surrounds the island, and even the flies are less annoying.

Virtually all of the structures in this district have been rebuilt by the community over the past fifteen years; most of the area was inundated when the settlers arrived. These homes and other buildings are modern and spacious, having been erected under the direction of an architect who served Rim-Sîn in Larsa, Rā'im-kitti. Rā'im-kitti died three years ago, but passed most of his skill on to one of his daughters and her husband.

As a result of the communal principals around which the colony is organized, all of the buildings in the *awīlū* section are residences, with a handful of notable exceptions. These are the public granary and nearby larder, a few barns and warehouses, and a wide barn that serves as a threshing floor (OB. *maškanum*, wr. KISLAḪ 𒀭𒌦𒀭), trading house, and indoor assembly place.

### 3.4 The Slave Area

The government of Kār-Nergal has paid little attention to the state of the island which houses the colony's slave labor. Most buildings, including those that house the *wardū*, are dilapidated and half-collapsed. A generation of trash and detritus clutter the streets, and the wild plants of the marsh grow to their terminal height in every place that collects enough moisture to support them.

The slaves of Kār-Nergal are not assigned to any specific living space. They may rest where ever they like, so long as they are not disruptive, and prepared to work the next morning. The possession of weapons

is forbidden, but the slaves often have tools lying near to hand which can serve adequately in a fight. As stated in §2.0, no walls or chains ensure these men remain in bondage. The *awîlû* trust to the constant strain of their workload and the inimical nature of the marsh to do that.

In the northern part of the slave area lies several closely-arranged houses that quarter Erra-gaşer, his men, and their families. These homes have received minor renovations since the cult reclaimed the colony, yet still, they seem more like a military barracks than a true domestic living quarters.

Interspersed with the slave quarters are many fields supported by crude irrigation networks. These areas produce the bulk of the colony's meager grain supply. A good harvest barely supports the population; in poorer times, the colony has to rely on the efforts of itinerant merchants like Išme-Erra's sons to supplement local production with imports.

Finally, the southern end of the island is generally untenanted, and the buildings there are in more severe states of decay. One exception to this is the large warehouse which Lu-dingirra has converted into his workshop. At any time, this building contains several corpses (both human and animal) in various states of decomposition. As a result, the building is surrounded by a foul odor, and attracts decay-loving creatures like dogs, vultures, and flies.

### **3.5. The Excavation**

Nin-lamamu's divinations indicate that an object of great significance was buried under the neighborhood that once stood between the southwestern edge of the temple and the northern shore of the slave precinct. As a result, a significant part of the colony's slave labor is devoted to excavating this area. A network of dikes and dredged ditches keep the marsh's waters at bay, and require regular maintenance to keep the dug out areas dry enough for work to progress.

Several long trenches crisscross this area, some as deep as ten or fifteen feet. Tools and other equipment litter these sections, and the exhumed detritus of centuries can be found tossed about haphazardly. During the day the colony's slaves and their overseers are busy at work here. At night the trenches are deserted, and anyone found snooping about is likely to be held for interrogation.

Interesting or valuable items are occasionally unearthed, but more often than not any objects found are mundane and worthless. Any discoveries belong to the community, and should be transported to the temple for Nin-lamamu's inspection. The taskmasters are supposed to search the



slaves, as well as enforcing this policy as to one another; in practice, security procedures here are lax, and occasionally a small object or bit of precious metal will be secreted away by a slave or one of their taskmasters.

### 3.5.1 Tables for Items Found at the Excavation

Roll (2d6)	Category of Item
2-7	Detritus
8-10	Tablet
11	Weapon
12	Religious Artifact

Roll (1d6)	Detritus Found
1	Pottery
2	Old Tool, Roll 1d6: 1-4 Ruined, 5-6 Whole
3	Rotted Wooden Object
4	Bones, Roll 1d6: 1-5 Animal, 6 Human
5	Toy or Figurine
6	1d6 Shekels of Silver

Roll (1d6)	Weapon Found
1-3	Useless; Broken or Rotted
4-5	Mundane
6	Magical (Roll on Magical Weapons Table)

Roll (1d6)	Magical Weapon
1	Ignores 1 point of target's armor
2	Ignores 2 points of target's armor
3	Adds +1 to Body damage
4	Adds +2 to Body damage
5	Does Soul damage instead of Body damage.
6	Attacks once per combat as if weilder had <i>Piercing Blow</i> talent.

Roll (1d6)	Tablets Found
1-2	Letter
3-4	Contract or Receipt
5	Literature
6	Roll 1d6: 1-4 Spell, 5-6 Ritual

Roll (1d6)	Condition of Found Tablet
1-3	Too damaged or incomplete to read; spells or ritual tablets cannot be used
4-5	Damaged, but intelligible on a successful Mind check
6	Prestine

Roll (2d6)	Religious Artifact Found
2	Sacred fabric or cloth, rotted
3-4	Consecrated Vessel, Roll 1d6: 1-4 Broken, 5-6 Whole
5-8	Figurine, Roll 1d6: 1-4 Meslamtaea, 5 Ninšubur, 6 Inanna
9	Stella
10-11	Non-magical Religious Paraphernalia of Precious Metal
12	Unique Magical Artifact

#### **4.0. The Breath of the God**

Nin-lamamu's visions give her a vague sense that something powerful was hidden in the area of the excavation by the fleeing Meslamtaeaites. She does not know what lies buried southwest of the temple, only that it is powerful and dangerous.

The object she seeks is small, and could easily be missed by excavators. It is a 8"x9"x12" box of mottled, black-gray diorite decorated with figures and an inscription in Sumerian that dates from the 2nd Dynasty of Kiš (c. 26th Century BCE). With a successful Mind check, a priest can identify the figures as those of underworld gods. A scribe will be able to date the inscription, but they must first succeed on a Mind check at -2.

Any one who knows Sumerian can read the words: "They are like rampaging lions, who wander across the steppe. No god tells them whom to kill and devour, or whither to spread death and terror." A priest or scribe may recall (a Mind Check at -3) an obscure legend about the Lord of the Underworld.

#### **4.1 The Seven Champions and the God's Breath**

There are a number of ways the PCs might learn of this obscure legend. If they are not able to recall it as above, they might instead find a tablet that relates the tale in Nin-lamamu's library. Otherwise, one of the NPCs, Nin-lamamu, Lu-dingirra, or Mārat-eršeti can narrate it to them. Modern PCs will usually assign the role of the Lord of the Underworld to Nergal, or even Eriškigal, while those who live in the colony will name Meslamtaea instead.

The tale is as follows:

Many years before the flood, the Lord of the Underworld unleashed his Seven Champions into the land. The people cried out to Marduk, but even that greatest of gods was afraid of their combined might, and he abandoned the land.

The people starved and died, righteous and the unrighteous alike lay dead and unburied. Enemies invaded the land, the canals dried up and the fields lay fallow. It was then that calm and noble Išum, advisor to the Lord of the Underworld, begged his lord to recall the Seven Champions, to give men a reprieve and allow the land to flourish again.

Long into the night Išum debated with his lord, but the Lord of the Underworld steadfastly refused to corral the evil demons. At dawn, clever Išum spoke to his lord thus, “So be it, my lord. The Seven will control the lands, they will reign as kings. Foreigners will worship them as mighty gods.”

His lord said nothing, yet this statement troubled him. The following evening, the Lord of the Underworld spoke to Išum, “Do you not think men will worship me as greatest of all gods, now that I have chased away Marduk, and I control all the land?”

Wise Išum answered his lord, “Hunankind knows who have defeated them, sees who control their lands. It is your Seven Champions, whom you have released.”

“But is it not I who have released them? Do I not control them?”

The shrewd advisor bowed his head. He answered, “No, terrible lord. No god controls them. They are like rampaging lions, who wander across the steppe. No god tells them whom to kill and devour, or whither to spread death and terror.”

At Išum’s words, the Lord of the Underworld became angry, so that only his calm advisor was not driven mad by his presence. For a full day, from sunset to sunrise, he raged about his throne. Then at last the Lord of the Underworld inhaled. He breathed in all of his malice and caustic ire, which surrounded him like a mighty storm. When he exhaled, he gave his breath to Išum. Thus he commanded his servant, “Recall the Seven Champions to me. If they are unwilling and will not obey, use my breath, which I gave to you.”

Išum was not negligent. The Seven Gods feared the breath of the Lord of the Underworld. They obeyed Išum and returned to court of their Lord.

When the world was again secure, and humankind returned to the land, the clever advisor went among the men of Kiš. He had a stone vessel made, and into the vessel he placed a portion of the god's breath. "Use this," he said, "Should my lord ever again cede dominion to his Seven Champions."

#### 4.2. Releasing the Breath of the God

The first time a character opens the stone container holding the god's breath (Lit. OB. *napšat ilim* wr. syll. or ZI DINGIR 𒀭𒌆𒌆), they must succeed on a Soul check. A character who fails this check cannot open the casket; their Soul score is reduced to 0 and they suffer an automatic Soul injury. A character who succeeds on this check can open the box, and will not have to make a similar check when they again open it, even if they lose possession of the vessel in the interim.

A character who opens the casket is immune to the effects of the god's breath while the box remains in their possession. Once opened, the god's breath is released. It affects all non-animal creatures in a five-foot radius around the character who holds the vessel. For each round it remains open, the breath's area of effect expands on all sides by five feet, to a maximum radius of 500 feet.

The breath persists until the casket is closed, at which point it slowly dissipates beginning with the area within a five foot radius around the vessel. This area of dissipation expands in much the same way the god's breath spread: at a rate of five feet per round until it has all dissipated.

The area affected by the god's breath is treated as if both the *Curse* and *Famine* rituals have been cast upon it. Moreover, for every round that a non-animal creature is within the area of effect of the god's breath, they must succeed at a Soul check. Failure means that they suffer 1 point of Soul damage, as well as one of the following maladies. These persists until the character leaves the area of the god's breath, falls unconscious, or the breath dissipates.

Any character already afflicted with the Curse of Ninkilim is immune to the effects of the god's breath.

<b>Roll (4d6)</b>	<b>Effect Suffered</b>
4-6	The character strips off their clothes. Using their first language, they begin to shout, disgorging their deepest, most embarrassing secrets. Disguised characters, or characters operating undercover will reveal themselves, emphasizing to all hearers their true nature and the reason for their charade.
7-9	The character becomes ridiculously greedy. They will immediately try to seize any items of value nearby, and will fight to the death anyone who stands in their way. While affected, no amount of wealth will sate their avarice, and they will go to extreme lengths to attempt to carry it all. This effect ends when the character is no longer within an area effected by the god's breath.
10-12	The character grows extremely hungry and thirsty. They will instantly try to consume all the food and water on their person, and then attempt to take whatever food or water is nearby. Afflicted characters who remain in the area of the god's breath too long usually end up injuring themselves. This might be as simple as over eating, or something more serious as water intoxication. They may attempt to eat things that are meant to be eaten, or even attack and attempt to cannibalize other characters.
13-19	The character becomes incredibly violent. If a weapon is at hand, or a tool that can be used as a weapon, they will seize it and immediately attack the creature nearest to them. If nothing nearby can be used as a weapon, they will use their hands and teeth. Should the character down their first opponent, the character will spend a round making sure the fallen opponent is dead, then proceed to attack the next closest creature. Heedless of any risk to their own person, they will keep up the fight until they are killed or rendered unconscious, or they are no longer within an area effected by the god's breath.
20-23	The character ages at a rate of five years per round. This aging cannot kill a character, but they grow progressively more infirm, as their Body stat falls by 1 every other round, to a minimum of 1. Affected characters do not gain bonuses to their Mind score (see <i>BFJB 2.0</i> , §3.7) for this kind of magical aging. Once the character is no longer within an area effected by the god's breath, they will return to their actual age slowly, losing five years of added age every round, and regaining their lost Body stat points accordingly.
24	The character is affected by the Curse of Ninkilim (see §1.2), which immediately manifests. This manifestation of the curse ends when the character is no longer within an area effected by the god's breath. However, any character who has suffered this effect of the god's breath permanently becomes one of the accursed. They gain the Curse of Ninkilim talent, and have a two-in-six chance of passing it on to any future children.



## 5.0 Hooks for Kār-Nergal

The following paragraphs include suggestions for introducing Kār-Nergal into your campaign. Of course, these are not meant to be exhaustive, nor should groups be limited to only one motivation. Individual PCs can have discrete reasons for investigating the community, and might even have developed several.

### Intrepid Merchants

Observant merchants have grown suspicious about the activities of Išme-Erra's sons, and have determined that a wealthy community is living in the marsh. They hire the PCs to investigate the commercial opportunities there. While members of the older generation of colonists have fond memories of the functioning economies of their home cities, they aren't really interested in trading with outsiders. Išme-Erra, moreover, will protect his family's monopoly at all costs.

### Discovering the fate of Mārat-erṣeti

Mārat-erṣeti's old mistress wasn't killed when the slave was captured. Now back in Sippar, the nadītum is mounting an expedition to discover what happened to her. With magical means, the nadītum may have learned that Mārat-erṣeti still lives. The PCs in this scenario aren't merely limited to covert methods of extracting her; the nadītum may be willing to ransom Mārat-erṣeti, though whether or not Nin-lamamu and the community at Kār-Nergal are interested in allowing her to leave is another matter.

### Spies of Babylon

The network of spies maintained by Ḫammu-rapi's *sukkal ubāri*, Sîn-bēl-alpim, has reported the existence of a community at Kār-Nergal. The spymaster has determined to investigate the reports, and secures the services of the PCs through his surrogates. The PCs are directed to enter the colony and take note of every detail — how the city is organized, what its resources are, and most importantly, who controls the major political factions.

### Stolen Property / Kidnapped Friends

While traveling near Kār-Nergal, a group of travelers including the PCs are set upon by one of Išme-Erra's sons and their men. While they fail to capture or kill the whole party, the men of the colony are able to seize someone or something of value to the PCs and depart. This could even be as simple as taking all of the PCs food and water, and leaving them to die.

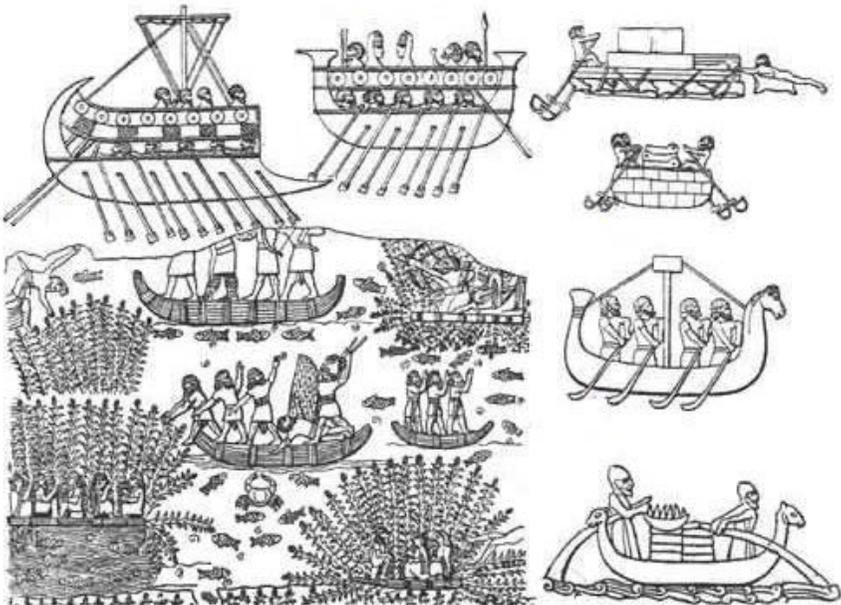
Whatever the case, the PCs have to track the men back to the marsh and reclaim that which was taken from them.

### Ties to an Old Life

Before the families that resettled Kār-Nergal left the cities of their birth, those *awīlū* lived as other men and women. They borrowed money, inherited wealth, got in trouble, and married and produced children. As a result of the secrecy surrounding the cult and their return to the colony, many members left unfinished business when they cut ties with their old lives. This can include unpaid debts, criminal or civil penalties, deserted spouses, or illegitimate children. Perhaps someone has become heir to a substantial amount of wealth? Regardless of the reason, someone with a connection to one of the settlers of Kār-Nergal needs to find them, and tasks the PCs to discover their whereabouts.

### Cursed!

One (or several) of the PCs are descendants of the original community of Kār-Nergal, and as such, are afflicted with the mysterious Curse of Ninkilim. In a desire to learn about the affliction and a potential cure, the PCs discover the connection to Kār-Nergal and decide to travel to the city. Of course, as progeny the original inhabitants, the colonists will be interested in inviting afflicted PCs into their midst, provided they follow the cult's rules — cut all ties with their prior life, discontinue the worship of their old gods, and accept the will of the community's leaders in all matters.





should an enslaved person try to avoid the labor, or otherwise make trouble, the *wākil aštrim* is in charge of their punishment.

The nature of every *wākil aštrim*'s relationship with their community depends in large part on how their role is viewed by the ruling *awīlū*. Regardless, individuals who choose this occupation are hardened to human suffering, and can be outright cruel or sadistic. As a result, their relationships and involvement with other members of their social class can be circumscribed.

**Allowed Classes:** *Awīlum*, *Muškēnum*

**Relevant Checks:** A taskmaster has some of the organizational skill of a bureaucrat, but their talents involve motivating enslaved persons through the application or threat of physical harm. They have basic knowledge of physical injuries, the effects of dehydration, malnutrition, and exhaustion, as well as the average value of slaves of a certain calibre and demographic.

**Weapon Training:** Taskmasters are skilled with unarmed strikes and the club, as well as the whip (see §6.2).

**Professional Talent:** *Bully* (Attack, Soul). Operating much like the Bureaucrat's *Authority* talent, this talent only affects *wardū*, *amātum*, or captives. Upon a successful attack check, all affected slaves and captives within hearing distance must obey the wishes of the taskmaster, even if those would otherwise go against their nature or own self interest. This attack automatically succeeds against any targets that are four or more levels below the level of the overseer.

**Starting Equipment and Wealth:** Basic clothing, a club or whip, and 3d6+3 shekels of personal wealth.

## 6.2 New Ritual

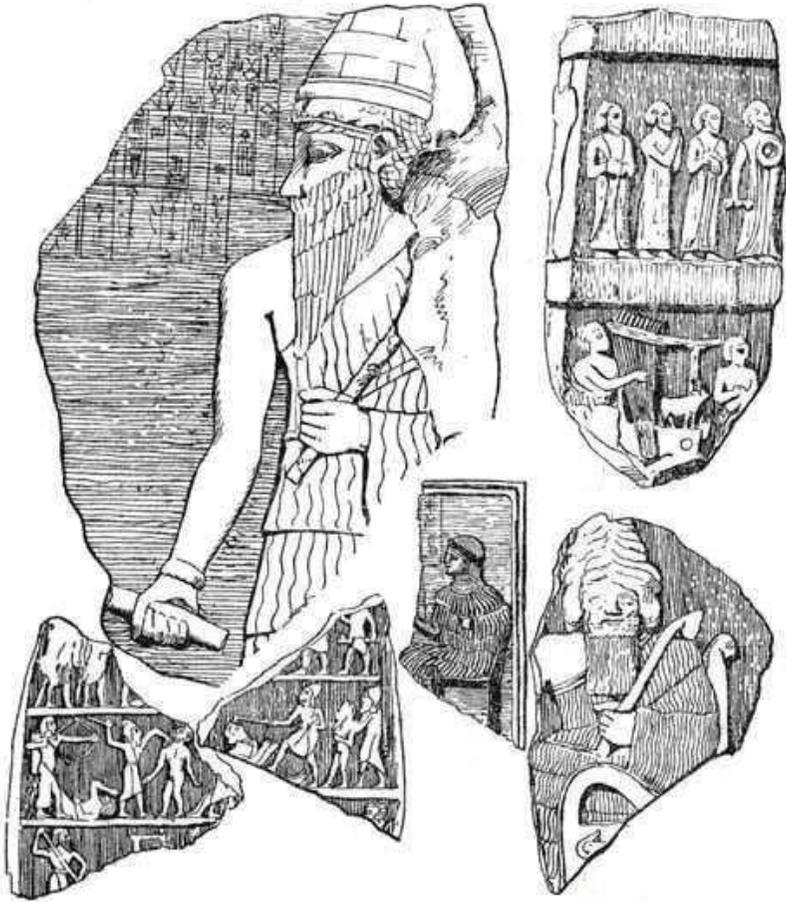
**Contact the Dead.** (Cost 2, Soul). The caster contacts the spirit of a deceased human. The spirit will manifest before the caster in a guise of the spirit's choosing, but only the caster will be able to hear and see the spirit. The spirit cannot interact with the physical world, nor can it get further away from the caster than a number of feet equal to the numerical value of the caster's Soul score prior to paying the cost of this ritual. A spirit contacted in this way will manifest for a number of minutes equal to the caster's Soul score prior to paying the cost of this ritual. During this time, the caster can ask the spirit any number of questions. The spirit possesses all of the knowledge it had at its death, but is not up-to-date on events since its passing. It is free to reply truthfully, lie, or simply refuse to answer, but the caster can compel a true answer to a query at the cost of one temporary

point of Soul. Once a spirit is contacted using this ritual, that same spirit cannot be summoned again for a full lunar month.

### 6.3 New Equipment

**Whip.** While entangled, the defender takes a -4 on all checks using their Body stat. Escaping from a net during combat takes the entangled defender’s round action. To do so, they must succeed at a Body check with a single -2 penalty to tear the net (the aforementioned -4 penalty does not apply when attempting to break the net).

Weapon	Cost (shekels)	Hands	Damage	Range	Professions Trained in Use
Whip	0.2	1	1	Melee	Farmers, Merchants (of slaves), Pastoralists, Taskmasters



## 7.0 New Bestiary Entries

The following entries can be added as normal encounters in any *BJFB* game. Entries

### 7.1 Mundane Animals

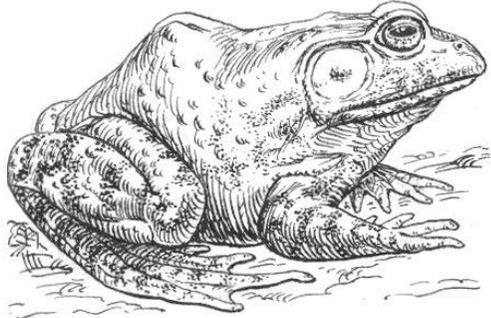
Entries for mundane animals are primarily given here to fill out the mechanical aspects of the transformations that result from the Curse of Ninkilim (§1.2).

#### FROG

(OB. *muša'irānu*, wr. syll. and  
BIL.ZA.ZA 𒍪𒍪𒍪𒍪 or BÍL.ZA.ZA 𒍪𒍪𒍪𒍪)

The common frog is ubiquitous in marshy, muddy, and well-watered areas. They are harmless to anything bigger than their mouths.

<b>Level</b>		1/4
<b>Stats</b>		
<b>Body 1</b>	<b>Mind 1</b>	<b>Soul 1</b>
<b># of Talents</b>		2
<b>Attacks and Damage</b>		Tongue, 0
<b>Armor Penalty</b>		0
<b>Size</b>		0.25 squares
<b>Movement</b>		
15 feet (3 squares)		1 mph
Swim 25 feet (5 squares)		Swim 4 mph



#### Frog Talents

Frogs have access to the following talents:

**Amphibious.** As amphibians, frogs live and breed in water. Under normal conditions, they suffer no penalties related to actions taken in water.

**Whip-like Tongue.** The frog can make an attack with its tongue as if it was a whip.

## RAM

(OB. *immerum*, wr. UDU(.NÍTA) 𒌦(𒌦))

A male sheep, rams can be hostile when faced with a threat to the flock, or their dominance.

<b>Level</b>		1/3	
<b>Stats</b>			
<b>Body 2</b>	<b>Mind 1</b>	<b>Soul 1</b>	
<b># of Talents</b>		2	
<b>Attacks and Damage</b>		Headbutt (Body) 1	
<b>Armor Penalty</b>		0	
<b>Size</b>		1 square	
<b>Movement</b>			
40 feet (8 squares)		2 mph	

### Ram Talents

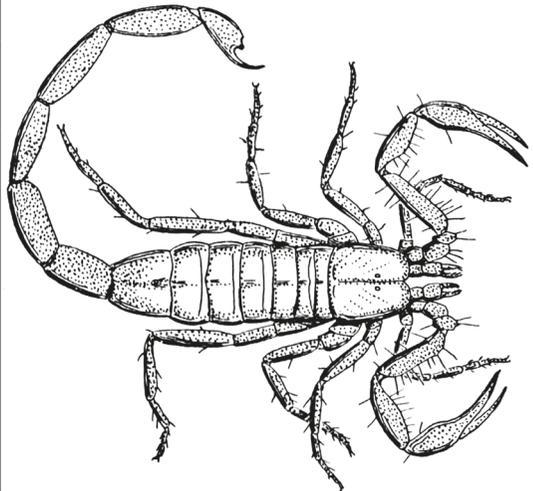
Rams frequently have the *Hardy*, *Resilient (Body)* and *Tough (Body)* talents. They also have access to the following talent:

**Charge.** A ram suffers no penalties to its attack rolls related to movement within a combat round.

## SCORPION

(OB. *zuqiqīpum*, wr. GÍR.TAB 𒌦(𒌦))

<b>Level</b>		1/3	
<b>Stats</b>			
<b>Body 2</b>	<b>Mind 1</b>	<b>Soul 1</b>	
<b># of Talents</b>		2	
<b>Attacks and Damage</b>		Sting, (Body) 1	
<b>Armor Penalty</b>		0	
<b>Size</b>		0.25 squares	
<b>Movement</b>			
15 feet (3 squares)		1 mph	



Despite their small size, scorpions are among the few animals whose venomous sting can kill a healthy, adult human.

### Scorpion Talents

Scorpions often have one of the *Piercing Blow*, *Precise (Body)*, or *Perceptive (Sight)* talents, in addition to the following:

**Poison Sting.** An opponent whose Body stat is reduced to 0 by a scorpion's sting does not suffer an injury on the normal Body injury table. Instead, they are removed from combat, and after 1d6x5 minutes the character begins to vomit and experience shortness of breath. Their skin becomes very cold and clammy to the touch, and fall into a deep coma for 5d6 hours. During this time, they may begin to recover their Body stat as normal. Normally, a character awakes after this period and their Body stat is temporarily reduced by 1. If this reduction would reduce that stat to 0 again (i.e., if their permanent Body stat was 1, they restored that during the recovery period, but this reduction returned it to zero) the character does not awaken, but dies.

A character who survives this ordeal sees their symptoms abate soon after they wake; except that the poisoned limb remains swollen and the wound continually oozes pus for another 1d6 days. After this period, the limb returns to normal, and the character no longer suffers the temporary reduction to their Body stat.

### SNAKE

(OB. *ṣerrum*, wr. syll. and MUŠ 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁)

𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁  
𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁

One hundred and twenty *beru* of land; sand, thistles, and gazelle-tooth stones, where snakes and scorpions fill the plain like ants.

- An Inscription of Aššur-aḫa-iddina (Esarhaddon), wr. 673-672 BCE

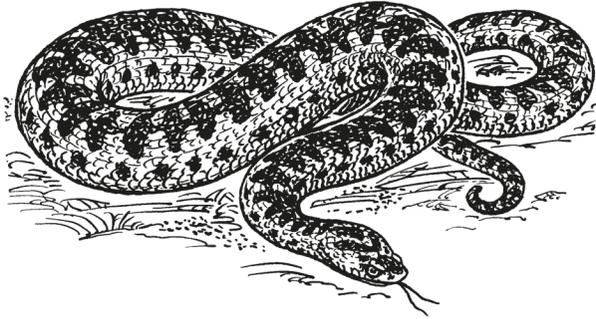
Like scorpions, snakes present a very real danger to Ancient Near Eastern communities. They can be found in any environment, and urban legends tell of them lying-in-wait inside of privies and other shady places within the home.

### Snake Talents

Snakes often have the *Deft (Body)*, *Piercing Blow*, *Perceptive (Scent)*, and *Swift* talents, in addition to the following:

**Poisonous Bite.** An opponent whose Body stat is reduced to 0 by a snake's bite does not suffer an injury on the normal Body injury table. Instead, they are removed from combat and suffer the effects of *Snake Venom (BFJB 2.0 §11.8)*.

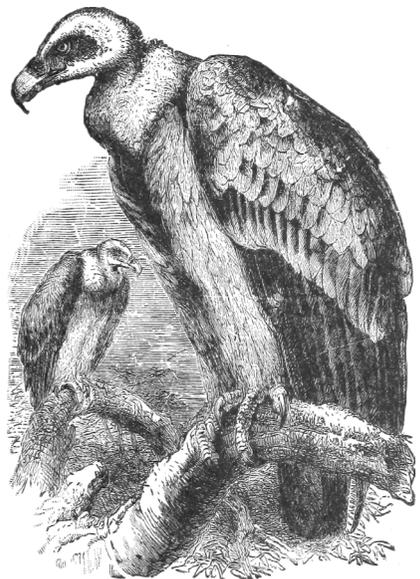
<b>Level</b>		1/3	
<b>Stats</b>			
<b>Body 2</b>	<b>Mind 1</b>	<b>Soul 1</b>	
<b># of Talents</b>		2	
<b>Attacks and Damage</b>		Bite, (Body) 1	
<b>Armor Penalty</b>		0	
<b>Size</b>		0.25 squares	
<b>Movement</b>			
20 feet (4 squares)		1 mph	



## VULTURE

(OB. *zībum*, wr. NU.UM.MA<sup>MUŠEN</sup> 𒌦𒍪𒍪𒍪)

<b>Level</b>		1/3	
<b>Stats</b>			
<b>Body 2</b>	<b>Mind 1</b>	<b>Soul 1</b>	
<b># of Talents</b>		2	
<b>Attacks and Damage</b>		Beak, (Body) 1	
<b>Armor Penalty</b>		0	
<b>Size</b>		1 square	
<b>Movement</b>			
10 feet (2 squares)		1 mph	
Fly 60 feet (12 squares)		Fly 60 mph	



Large scavenging birds, the pronunciation of the Akkadian name for a vulture is identical to that for a jackal. In writing, it is distinguished by a determinative.

### **Vulture Talents**

Vultures usually have one of the *Hardy*, *Perceptive (Scent or Sight)*, and *Tough* talents, in addition to the following:

***Carrion Feeder.*** Vultures can gain sustenance from any kind of meat, regardless of its state of decay. Their stomach acid is incredibly corrosive; as a result, they are immune to any ingested poisons or contagions.

## **7.2 Marsh Pests**

As mentioned in §3.1, characters who enter the marsh that surrounds Kār-Nergal risk encountering several pests and aquatic vermin. Mechanics related to two of these are given below. While technically mundane members of the animal kingdom, these creatures are not treated as “monstrous” encounters with stat blocks, but rather conditions akin to a disease or poison effect.

### **Leeches**

A parasitic worm usually found in freshwater lakes, ponds and marshes, mundane leeches usually grow no longer than six inches. Characters who enter an area inhabited by leeches must succeed on a Soul check or be afflicted by 1d6 of these creatures. The leeches attach themselves to a portion of the character’s exposed skin, and began to suck their blood. Injuries from leeches are normally minor enough that a character does not take Body damage. However, because most humans find the creatures disgusting, they suffer 1 point of Soul damage for each encounter with leeches (but not for each leech bite during an encounter). This damage may be recovered normally. Leeches can be removed by a character at a rate of one leech per round. This leaves a bloody bite mark, which continues to ooze blood for 1d6x20 minutes.

### **Swarm of Flies**

A swarm of flies is composed of several different kinds of flying insects, some biting, others merely annoying. These can include common gnats and house flies, as well as potentially disease-carrying gadflies and mosquitos. All characters who occupy a square beset by a swarm of flies suffer a -1 penalty on any Mind checks. Moreover, for every round they are in the area affected by the swarm, they must make a successful Soul check or be bitten. Every time a character is bitten, they must roll a 1d6. On a result of 1, they are infected with the disease di’um (*BFJB 2.0* §11.7) which

has the same incubation period, progression and other mechanics given in that entry.

### 7.3 Additional Talents for Demons

A demon found in the marsh that surrounds Kār-Nergal will be acclimated to its aquatic environment. This demon's stats will be roughly identical to those given for generic *utukkū* in *BFJB 2.0* § 15.7, except that you may replace any of its given talents with the following.

**Amphibious.** The demon gains a swimming movement score in addition to this normal land movement, and their numerical values are identical. In addition, the demon can breathe water as air. A common tactic of demons with this talent is to drag their victims underwater, and hold them there until they drown.

**Inundate.** The demon can cast the *Control Water* ritual as a spell.

**Pest-friend.** The demon can summon a swarm of flies (§7.2). This swarm affects one square, though once per round the demon may command it to move into an adjacent square or to disperse altogether. A demon can only summon one swarm at a time using this ability.

**Venomous.** An opponent whose Body stat is reduced to 0 by the demon's bite does not suffer an injury on the normal Body injury table. Instead, they are removed from combat and suffer the effects of *Snake Venom* (*BFJB 2.0* §11.8).



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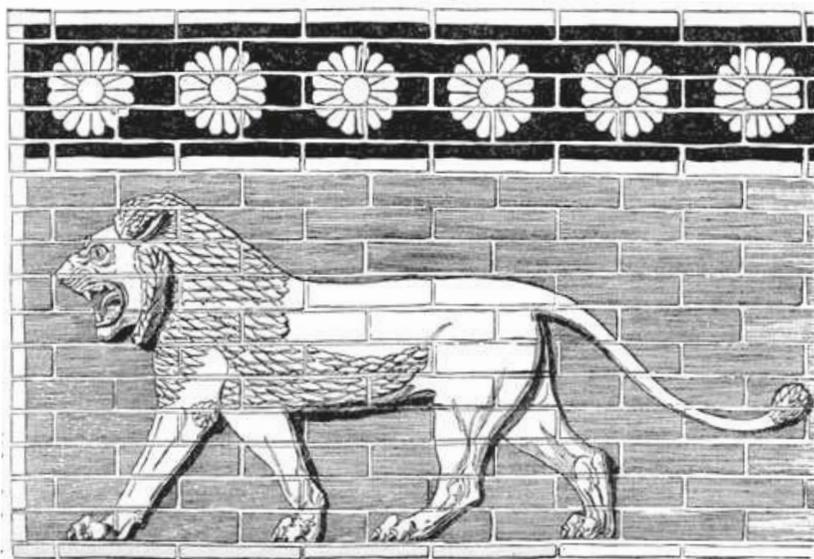
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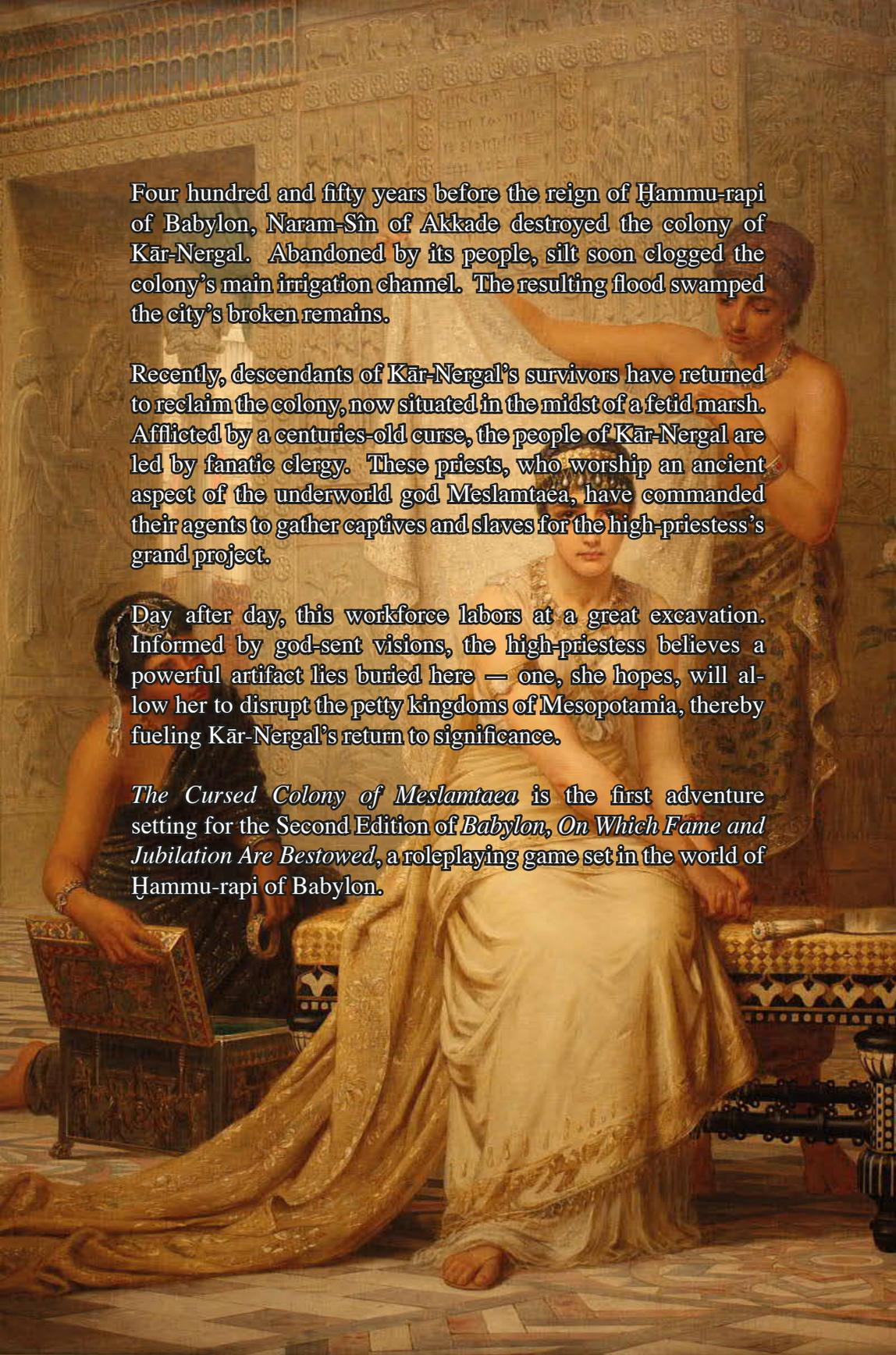
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An illustration of a woman in a white dress sitting on a throne in a room with stone walls and a woman in a dark dress kneeling by a chest.

Four hundred and fifty years before the reign of Ḥammu-rapi of Babylon, Naram-Sîn of Akkade destroyed the colony of Kār-Nergal. Abandoned by its people, silt soon clogged the colony's main irrigation channel. The resulting flood swamped the city's broken remains.

Recently, descendants of Kār-Nergal's survivors have returned to reclaim the colony, now situated in the midst of a fetid marsh. Afflicted by a centuries-old curse, the people of Kār-Nergal are led by fanatic clergy. These priests, who worship an ancient aspect of the underworld god Meslamtaea, have commanded their agents to gather captives and slaves for the high-priestess's grand project.

Day after day, this workforce labors at a great excavation. Informed by god-sent visions, the high-priestess believes a powerful artifact lies buried here — one, she hopes, will allow her to disrupt the petty kingdoms of Mesopotamia, thereby fueling Kār-Nergal's return to significance.

*The Cursed Colony of Meslamtaea* is the first adventure setting for the Second Edition of *Babylon, On Which Fame and Jubilation Are Bestowed*, a roleplaying game set in the world of Ḥammu-rapi of Babylon.