



Book Of Tomorrow Issue 4

JANUARY 2004

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- The Kaag Academy*
- Arcane Mutterings*
- Roleplaying Horrors*
- Report from Cara Fahd*
- The Last Laugh*

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BOOK OF TOMORROW

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Earthdawn Abbreviations

EDPT uses the following abbreviations for second and subsequent references to Earthdawn products.

ED Earthdawn

ED2 Earthdawn 2nd Edition

EDC Earthdawn Companion

EDC2 Earthdawn Companion 2nd Edition

EGM Earthdawn Gamemaster Pack

D1 Denizens of Earthdawn,Vol.I

D2 Denizens of Earthdawn,Vol.II

LE Legends of Earthdawn

CoB Creatures of Barsaive

AW The Adept's Way

HOR Horrors

SR Serpent River

BE Book of Exploration

TDK Throal:The Dwarf Kingdom

ESG Earthdawn Survival Guide

BW Blood Wood

TE Theran Empire

SS Secret Societies of Barsaive

CR Crystal Raiders of Barsaive

CF The Ork Nation of Cara Fahd

DRG Dragons

MMS Magic:A Manual of Mystic Secrets

AM Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive

MoB Mists of Betrayal

TiS Terror in the Skies

Inf Infected

Pad Parlainth Adventures

SP Shattered Pattern

Sky Sky Point Adventures

Bla Blades

Tad Throal Adventures

PtW Prelude to War

PoD Path of Deception

BaW Barsaive at War

BiC Barsaive in Chaos

Bx Barsaive Box

BxP Explorer's Guide to Barsaive

BxG Barsaive Gamemaster's Book

Px Parlainth Box

PxG Parlainth Gamemaster's Guide

(first part of the book)

PxR Ruins of Parlainth

(second part of the book)

Vx Sky Point & Vivane Box

VxB Barsaivian Vivane

VxT Theran Vivane

VxV Vivane Province

BoT Book of Tomorrow

CX Codex Arcanus

Bjs B'Jados

EDJ Earthdawn Journal



FEATURE

ARCANE MUTTERINGS

by Kathleen Czechowski

Arcane Mutterings takes the adventurers from Throal to the wilds of Barsaive, where they match wits with the insane spirit of a questor of the Passion formerly known as Erendis, in order to free a dwarf Wizard from a dispiriting curse.

While within the capabilities of even a small group of beginning adventurers, it is best suited for a group of four to six players with a Group Legendary Status of at least 1. Successful social interactions will be the key. A Troubadour will be extremely helpful, but the adventure can be successfully completed without one. Possession of the following sourcebooks is helpful: **The Earthdawn Companion**, and **Magic: Manual of Mystic Secrets**. Familiarity with the adventure before running it is a must.

It is possible that this adventure may be completed successfully without entering any combat whatsoever. Therefore, GMs with more combat-oriented groups may wish to create additional encounters that include combat.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

In the years prior to the Scourge, Erendis was known as the Passion of Order. Name-givers, especially dwarfs, held great regard for the Passion, and questors of Erendis were held in as much esteem as those of Garlen or Upandal.

When word of the coming Scourge came to Barsaive, and kaers were in their planning stages, questors of Erendis often worked hand in hand with those of Upandal to produce protected dwellings in the most efficient manner possible. Followers of Erendis were vital in the efforts of organizing work crews, arranging for proper materials, planning for emergency needs and, when Horror attacks became too strong

to repulse, making certain that the people removed themselves to their new homes as quickly and safely as possible.

The importance of Erendis and his questors diminished a bit in the closed environment of the kaers, as did others. Garlen came to the forefront in importance, as the patron and protector of Home and Health, and questors became increasingly rare. Erendis was definitely not slighted, though. Along with followers of Astendar, Floranuus, and Vestrial, those devoted to Erendis helped organize entertainment and festivals for their fellow kaer dwellers, so their forced imprisonment did not weigh so heavily on their spirits.

All of this changed drastically when the three Passions, Erendis, Rashomon, and Vestrial, began to go mad. No one can say exactly when things began to go awry, but in time, it became apparent that something was quite amiss. Those not devoted to a particular Passion suffered little ill. However, those who followed Erendis as questors, particularly those of high ability, began to do things a bit differently. While they still inventoried food stores or organized agricultural labor, some would continually check the inventory many more times than necessary, or push their work groups to exhaustion.

Being very orderly of mind, he felt an instant kinship with those long-ago questors

Some, realizing that something was dangerously wrong, voluntarily took their own lives to protect others, and prevent themselves from slipping into their patron's madness. Others reveled in the change, and bent whole populations to their knees, either being killed by followers of Lochost or, as some contend, continuing to rule entire kaers as sole master. An unfortunate few were caught in the middle, unable to reconcile what their Passion was with what she had become. They could not go on devoted to Dis, and became confused as to what they should do. Some of these poor souls died without a definite decision, and now are forever stretched between what was, and what is. The ghosts of some of these folk still exist, trapped in their deaths as surely as they were in their lives.

Unfortunately, Mevich Nourand encountered one of these ghosts.

A dwarf Wizard, Mevich Nourand was an avid researcher for the Library of Throal. His favorite subject of study was the Passions, particularly the Mad ones. While not even a prospective questor of any of them himself, he became fairly enamored of Erendis. Being very orderly of mind, he felt an instant kinship with those long-ago questors, and began an in-depth study of Erendis in pre-Scourge times. This research led him to a map pinpointing the location of one of the ancient shrines to Erendis, part of an opened kaer. Outfitting himself and some hired adepts, spending a great majority of his personal funds, he set out with hopes of documenting this location in great



detail, and giving it to the Library, perhaps receiving a generous reward in return, and definitely making a name for himself.

His carefully laid plans snarled when the party arrived at the location of the shrine. Little more than a timeworn ruin, it was still inhabited by the ghost of Alinam Praese, a dwarf questor of Erendis during the Scourge. Angered by the arrogant intrusion, Alinam immediately enslaved all but Mevich, through the use of questor powers. Sensing then the Wizard's appreciation of Erendis, Alinam pronounced a curse on Mevich.

Since Wizards, while lovers of order, debate, and logic, occasionally stoop to confusion through the use of the talent Arcane Mutterings, Alinam created a malediction that made it impossible for Mevich to speak without using that talent on everyone in earshot. Mevich was then cast out by the adepts he hired, now slaves of the insane phantom. Over weeks, Mevich made his way back to Throal.

This is where the adventurers come in. While passing by a Bartertown tavern, they notice a drayer dragging the gaunt, unconscious body of Mevich into the bar, claiming she found the dwarf underneath her cart.

The Wizard is in bad shape. While not at Death's door, he is suffering from severe thirst and malnutrition, as well as a rash inside his mouth from eating poison berries by mistake. Once conscious, the dwarf eats whatever is placed in front of him. The patrons and characters pepper him with questions, but he ignores these, at least until no more food and drink is placed before him. At this point he can no longer shove away the questions, but gives no answers. Suspicious of Horror-taint in the hapless dwarf, a riot nearly touches off.

With the intervention of the city watch, tempers are cooled and the dwarf is permitted to show evidence of his freedom from Horror taint.

Once the Wizard produces evidence with art, the patrons finally allow him to explain himself, through writing.

He writes out answers to as many questions as he is able, and the adventurers begin to piece together the events of the last few weeks of Mevich's life. Once the inquisition is over, he indicates the need for a fresh sheet of paper, then uses this to write a request for the adventurer's help. He knows who they are and what they have done, but he has little to offer but a small amount of silver and his own paltry abilities. He also mentions that he is not without influence in the Library of Throal, and may be able to do a favor or two for the adventurers if they help him now. The adepts agree to help, and begin brainstorming about ways to lift the curse.

While researching, they find a tract describing a similar encounter, where the cursed, with the help of powerful adepts, took advantage of a spirit's brief moment of sanity to convince the being to remove the curse, then proceeded to banish it. While the spirit mentioned in the document was not a questor, it seems that this may be the best way to help Mevich. After making preparations, the adventurers and Mevich leave for the shrine.

Others have a great interest in Mevich's and the adventurers' doings. Unbeknownst to Mevich, one of the adepts from his original group was a freelance operative in the pay of the Eye of Throal, sent to keep an eye on the expedition. When she did not return with Mevich, an additional pair of freelancers was hired to follow Mevich and whoever he is with. The adventurers are not immediately aware that they are being followed, though. The operatives keep a discreet distance, preferably out of sight, using the Tracking talent to keep tabs on their objectives.

While en route to the shrine, which lies to the west of Bartertown, the adventurers are accosted by a band of ork scorchers, who demand

a significant portion of the group's belongings, in exchange for free passage. Outnumbered five to one, Mevich 'negotiates' with the orks. He begins to speak, and his Arcane Mutterings confuses all in earshot, including the adventurers. Mevich then leads the mounts through the now docile orks, riding away with the group in tow. Once the confusion wears off, the orks realize they have been touched by something wholly unnatural, and refuse to follow. Dying of confusion is not a good tale, and leaves an unblemished corpse.

On arrival at the shrine, the adventurers spy a group of skeletally thin, unwashed Name-givers split into pairs: one pair building up a wall, followed closely on the heels by the other pair, who are busily tearing down the wall from behind. From marks and debris on the ground, the adventurers conclude that the wall, circular and ten feet in diameter, has been built up and torn down nearly continually over the last several weeks. The adept's packs and belongings are neatly set aside, with wrappers from consumed food rations neatly stacked under a heavy rock.

The ghost is not immediately noticed, and only reveals itself once the characters begin to search the shrine. Once it notices the characters, it attempts to enslave them one by one with its Living Death power, while mocking the Wizard for his inability to help yet another group of adepts.

In a short time, with carefully guided conversation about the nature of Erendis before the Scourge, the spirit experiences a brief moment of sanity, and one of the adventurers convinces Alinam to lift the curse. It acquiesces, and Mevich, with knowledge gained from research, attempts to exorcise the ghost.

With Alinam gone, the adepts are permanently freed from the ghost's enslavement, and Mevich swears off research of any more mad Passions -- at least, not in the field.



MISTAKEN IMPRESSIONS

Overview

The characters encounter an unconscious dwarf while going past a drinking establishment. The characters must stop a riot when it is learned that the dwarf, now conscious, refuses to speak, and is accused of being Horror-marked.

You've always marveled at the sheer number of Name-givers that can be found in a place such as Bartertown. Passions know, you get little enough company on the road, except for your companions. It's almost stifling -- such a dizzying variety of people, each with their own Names, habits, occupations, fears, and stories to tell...

In this state of thoughtful bemusement, you neglect to keep close watch on your steps, and nearly crash into a drayman's cart. You look for the drayer, prepared to demand an accounting for the lout's carelessness in leaving the dray in front of a bar. When you finally spot the drayer, your fit of pique dissolves into sheepishness. The drayer, a female dwarf in simple clothing, is dragging another dwarf by the ankles, toward the very establishment you were about to patronize. This second dwarf is unconscious, and you think he might be wearing spellcaster's robes.

Setting the Stage

It is difficult to tell, though, caked in mud as he is, but readily apparent is the dwarf's thinness and pallor -- he looks as if he hasn't eaten for days. Spotting you, the female dwarf calls, "Could you give me a hand with this guy? Found him passed out under my cart."

If the characters lend a hand, read the following:

With your help, the poor dwarf is swiftly brought inside. While Imma, the dwarf drayer, calls to the barkeep for warm broth and bread, she indicates to you to find an area to set the dwarf down in. Clearing a section of the floor of chairs and tables, you carefully lay the body down, making sure nothing on him is injured in the process. When placed on the floor, his mouth drops open by reflex; a scarlet rash can be seen covering his gums and tongue, both of which are slightly swollen.

Within moments, Imma returns. "I've sent for a questor, but let's try to wake him." She produces a bowl of cool water, with a dishrag floating in it.

In less than two minutes, your ministrations with the cool, wet cloths elicit a flutter of eyelids. Now awake, but still somewhat confused, the dwarf glances at your faces, then locks his gaze on the still-steaming bowl of broth. With dirty, eager hands, he takes up the bowl and begins to eat ravenously. It takes much convincing from Imma to get him to slow down, so that he doesn't sick it back up.

Just as the broth is finished, your curiosity can bear it no longer. You begin to ask questions, as do some of the other patrons, then wait breathlessly for the answers. But no answers come. The dwarf stares at you, eyes sorrowful. A brief moment of absolute silence passes. Even sounds from outside fade to nothing. Then one of the bar patrons declares, "He can't talk! He must be Marked!" This statement is immediately followed by the sounds of many swords, drawn from many scabbards.

Themes and Images

At the beginning, there should be a breathless, panicked quality to the scene, enhanced by the frenetic, almost nonstop activity of Imma as she takes control of the situation. Once the dwarf awakens, allow a brief moment of suspense, before swiftly bringing down the weight of anger and fear, emphasized by the actions of the bar patrons.

Behind the Scenes

Imma, the drayer, has no idea who the dwarf is, or how he came to be in such a state. She merely stayed overnight at this establishment, had breakfast, and when she went out to check the cart, found the dwarf beneath it. She moved it away from him (consequently partially blocking that approach to the entrance of the inn), and was bringing him inside for help when the group arrived.

The dwarf himself shows no signs of violence. While he doesn't carry any sort of identification, the presence of several coins in his pocket suggests he wasn't robbed and tossed aside. If a close look is taken at his clothing, there are runes embroidered on his robes, possibly of a Wizardly nature. A Wizard in the group can confirm this. This suggests that the dwarf is an adept of the Wizard Discipline. If the rash is analyzed, a character proficient in botany or herb lore may discover that the cause was poison berries consumed by the dwarf in the recent past.

Little else can be determined before the dwarf returns to consciousness. When he does not speak, one of the patrons assumes that he has been Marked by a Despairthought. This accusation mobilizes the hostel's other patrons into something approaching a lynch mob. It will take some quick thinking and decisive action by the adepts to stave off violence.

A counterattack by the group is not the answer. This will likely only touch off a larger riot -- and suggest



that the characters are in league with the presumably tainted dwarf. The best option is to ask that the patrons wait a moment or two, to give the dwarf some chance to prove he is not under a Horror's influence. A second option is to state that the dwarf is many times outnumbered, and there will surely be no trouble with so many around, that perhaps he is simply mute and not tainted, then giving him a chance to offer artistic evidence of his state. A third option is to misdirect the patrons by suggesting that the rash in his mouth prevents him from speaking without pain -- a perfectly plausible explanation. Whatever tack the group takes in convincing the patrons to hold off their attack, make sure to take every advantage of the bonus given by their Legendary Status in interacting with these people. See the **Earthdawn Rulebook**, p. 227 to determine Legendary Status and benefits.

For purposes of determining the success of Interaction Tests, assume that the patrons are Neutral toward the characters, and Hostile toward the dwarf. The average bar patron has a Social Defense of 7. For information on Interaction Tests, see **Earthdawn Rulebook**, pp. 237-8.

Once the heroes have calmed everyone down and allowed the dwarf a chance to prove his freedom from taint (no dice need be rolled for this -- merely describe it), move to **A Tale of Woe**.

Troubleshooting

This encounter can lead to several problems. The first, most obvious problem is that the characters may choose not to help Imma with her burden. If so, she recognizes the characters as heroic adepts, and berates them for being too high-and-mighty to help an honest dwarf -- effectively browbeating them until they give in. If this doesn't work, find another adventure for them, and make sure news of this refusal to render meager assistance passes

through the grapevine. While not necessarily required to be thrifty and entirely honest, Barsaive's heroes should be helpful and courageous. Any news about the heroes contrary to these last two should be detrimental to their image.

Once the characters lend a hand, it should be smooth sailing until the dwarf wakes up. Many problems could occur after this point, though. For example, the characters may accept the hasty judgment of the bar patrons, and turn to attack the dwarf themselves. If so, there are several options for patching up the situation. First, a sympathetic Troubadour in the bar may rush to the aid of the dwarf, and convince the party and patrons to lay down their arms for a few moments. Second, you may let the attack proceed, but allow the dwarf a chance to use his curse-enhanced Arcane Mutterings to effect an escape, before the first blow is struck. Third, the city guard can intervene.

Whatever your choice, consider the ramifications. If the Troubadour successfully averts the riot, the adventure can proceed as normal. Once the players discover they were mistaken, they may give others the benefit of the doubt later. If the Arcane Mutterings route is taken, the dwarf will run off in search of fairer-minded helpers -- perhaps fellow scholars at the library, who later hire the group to help Mevich. If the city guard is needed, make certain that the adventurers learn that murder is not welcome, and that is exactly what they would have done if they had not given Mevich a chance to prove himself free of taint.

The last problem likely to occur is that the characters make the attempt to convince the patrons to hold back, but fail to do so successfully. If this happens, there are several options. First, a Troubadour of Fifth Circle or higher may speak up in agreement of allowing the dwarf a chance to explain, thus adding one of his Karma Points to the Interaction Test

(for the details of this ability, see the **Earthdawn Rulebook**, p. 84). Second (or if the first option fails), and less desirable, you may proceed with combat, giving the dwarf a chance to use his augmented Arcane Mutterings before the first blows fall, then have him escape, to find the characters later. Third (or as an adjunct to the second option), the city watch may arrive and break up the riot. Whatever befalls, Mevich will recognize their attempt to help, and contact them later. The characters will eventually get the full story from the dwarf.

A TALE OF WOƎ

Overview

After proving he is free of Horror influence, the dwarf Mevich Nourand explains his situation without speaking, and asks the help of the adepts, whose Names he recognizes.

Setting the Stage

You watch breathlessly as the dwarf offers artistic proof of his freedom from Horror-taint, quickly and nimbly stitching an ornate design in a handkerchief provided by one of the sullen customers. After it is completed, Imma holds it up for all to see. The bar patrons slowly disperse, some still looking slightly unconvinced, but resigned. Looking back at the dwarf, you see him making gestures with his hands, miming writing. Getting the meaning, you offer him pen and paper, then begin questioning him.

Themes and Images

The quiet urgency and tenseness of ascertaining Mevich's freedom from Horror-taint should mark the beginning. As Mevich spins his tale on paper, it is helpful if the GM writes Mevich's replies to the player's questions, rather than telling the players what was written. This use of props will heighten the pity for this cursed individual, by highlighting the



debilitating nature of this curse.

Behind the Scenes

At this point, the characters may ask questions of Mevich. They will likely start off with his Name, which is simple enough to answer. He will write, "I am Mevich Nourand of Throal. And you are?", prompting them to introduce themselves. His expression will show some familiarity with the Names.

Any other questions the characters have, he will answer to the best of his knowledge, and after the inquiries are over, he will write a request for the group's help. For answers to the group's questions, be familiar with the information presented in the **Plot Synopsis**. A brief biography of Mevich Nourand can be found following this section. If any questions fall outside the scope of either of the above sources, feel free to make up a suitable reply. Be familiar enough with the adventure that any answer you give to such questions does not impair story continuity.

Sometime during the questioning, the questor of Garlen sent for previously will arrive, examine Mevich, and give a prognosis. His problem is simply weakness from malnutrition and thirst, and a few days rest and good food should set him right. The rash is of little consequence, and will clear up in a day or so.

One of the bar patrons is very interested in Mevich's story as well. This individual often freelances for the Eye of Throal, and is a friend of the freelancer sent with Mevich on the expedition. Her Name is Cheleb Gienah, and she is a Fourth Circle ork Scout. After gleaning whatever information she can, she will leave to report her findings to her immediate superiors.

At GM's discretion, a Perception (8) Test may be made to notice this adept leaving the bar after the dwarf's questioning is finished, or while moving to a more private location

to continue. Should the adventurers note the Scout's departure and attempt to intercept her, Cheleb will simply explain that she's had enough to drink, and will be leaving now, if you don't mind.

If one or more of the adventurers decides to follow this adept, make a Perception Test with a Step of 7. The target number will vary, depending on whether or not the adventurers are attempting to be sneaky, if there are any Thieves or Scouts in the



group, etc. The GM should use his best judgment when determining the target number. Using the Difficulty Number chart on p. 244 of the **Earthdawn Rulebook** may help, as will the Perception Difficulty and Perception Modifier tables on p. 247 of the same.

If the Test is successful, the Eye Scout adept notes their presence, and takes them on a wild goose chase for an hour or more, stopping at tavern after tavern, ducking into various shops to purchase things, and generally trying to shake the adventurers. If the Test is unsuccessful, the same will happen,

but will only last 15 minutes before the Scout heads toward the offices of His Majesty's Exploratory Force. This particular Scout has made a habit of taking the roundabout way to the office, to shake potential tails.

If the adventurers attempt to follow the Scout inside, they find the door locked behind her. Any attempt to pick the lock will bring the Throal city guard. This will effectively end the chase.

After the group decides to help Mevich and take his suggestion about research, move to the next section, **Books, Books, Books.**

Mevich Nourand: A Short Biography

Currently a Wizard of the Seventh Circle, Mevich has been a researcher in the employ of the Library of Throal for three or four years. In that time, he uncovered a document regarding the Passion

Erendis, now known as Dis. As he read, he began to identify with the Passion's former ideals, and began to research more deeply into what was known about Erendis, then and now. This led to the discovery of the documentation of a pre-Scourge shrine to Erendis, located in a successfully opened kaer to the west of Throal, several days journey.

Excited by the prospect of research in the field, Mevich pooled his funds to hire a group of adepts to escort him to the remains of Kaer Pravisha, assure his safety while he took what information he could, then return to Throal. The journey



there held only the expected dangers, and the adepts he had hired -- two dwarfs, a Thief and a Warrior; an elf Archer; and a human Elementalist -- proved to be more than a match for them.

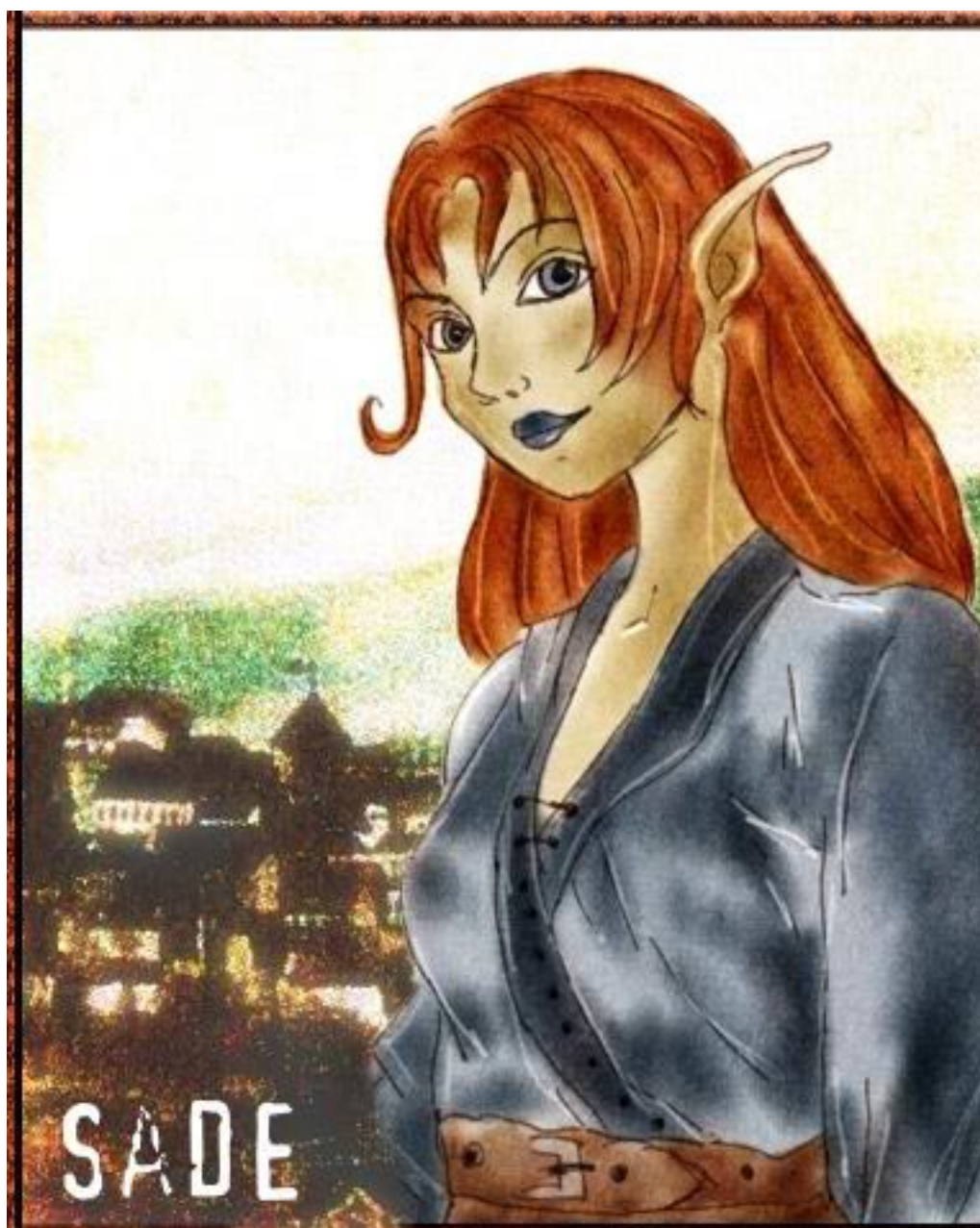
Things seemed to be going exceptionally smoothly, in fact. When they reached Pravisha, the claims appeared to be true. There were no signs of violence to the kaer, all the traps had been disarmed, and the dwellings within were falling into ruin through disuse. All in all,

it appeared as though the place had been abandoned, rather than breached and ransacked.

It was easy to find the shrine. The statue of Erendis stood imposingly at the far side of the shrine, holding a book in its arms. It appeared that all was well. Upon crossing the threshold, though, the group was accosted by an angry ghost of a questor of Erendis, who had quite evidently gone mad. The phantom enslaved all but Mevich, whom she pronounced a curse on. He could

never speak, she said, without causing confusion in all who heard. With that, she had the now-enslaved adepts throw Mevich out.

Little is remembered of the last few weeks. Only scant impressions of rainstorms, lack of food, and cold nights remain. He feels research may hold the key to free him of this curse. As a reward, he can offer them his services as a researcher on occasion, but little else -- much of his savings was spent on the first group of adepts he hired.





Troubleshooting

Very little difficulty should be encountered. If the characters miss some vital information while conducting their inquiry, Mevich will volunteer it.

It is unlikely, having involved themselves with Mevich's problem so far, but the group may refuse to help him when it is discovered that he has little to pay them with. If this is the case, have a gallant NPC take up the gauntlet... preferably a rival of the group, if one exists. Perhaps they will then help Mevich out of sheer spite.

Shame is also an excellent motivator. There is a tavern full of Name-givers who will be witnesses to their refusal to help. One or more of them may express disappointment at the adepts' lack of charity.

BOOKS, BOOKS BOOKS

Overview

This encounter involves little but research at the Library while Mevich recovers his strength. Eventually, a document is uncovered that holds a possible solution to this problem.

Setting the Stage

Now that you know the reason for Mevich's strange silence, you feel a little better... but only a little. While less immediate than the threat of a Horror, a Passion-wrought curse is nothing to scoff at. Therefore, in hopes of finding a solution, you arrive on the doorsteps of the Library of Throal. It may take weeks, but a remedy must be found. And if one can be found, it can be found here.

Themes and Images

Hope is the tone, muted by the drudgery of flipping through countless books and scrolls.

Behind the Scenes

Most characters should be familiar by now with the procedures at the Library of Throal. No one but

the staff are permitted to go through the stacks, though if they inform the clerk that they are helping Mevich, the clerk may allow access to more restricted works. The characters will still need to request the subject they wish to research, and the appropriate tomes and documents will be brought to them. There will be no charge for the service this time, as the group is helping out a staff researcher. This is not a license to research whatever the group wants, however. An extra scroll or two, off-subject, is not frowned upon, but if it seems as though there is more work being done, for example, to find Key Knowledges of items than helping Mevich, the library attendants will make their displeasure known.

There are several possible topics that the group may research, but likely they will focus on two subjects: dealing with spirits, or the kaer itself. Information on Kaer Pravisha's history is provided in **Rumors and Research**, as it has little direct bearing on this adventure.

This research will take time. A day, or even two, may pass with little result. The Difficulty Number for the Research Test is 11. Please refer to the **Earthdawn Rulebook** p. 132 for more information on the Research Skill. (**Earthdawn Journal** issue 1, p. 31 has expanded information on the Research Skill, as well.)

Once a successful Test has been made, the group discovers a tract describing a situation similar to Mevich's, where an adept was cursed by an insane spirit. With the help of some powerful adepts, the cursed individual was able to take advantage of a moment of sanity, convinced the spirit to lift the curse. A Nethermancer accompanying the group then quickly banished the spirit. It even describes, in precise terms, the banishing procedure.

Further study proves fruitless. It looks as if, for the moment, this is the best option.

Eye of Throal Activity

The Scout adept mentioned in the previous section is keeping busy while the group is involved in research. She reports the arrival of Mevich without other adepts. After some consideration, her immediate superiors assign her another freelancer. Their mission: follow the group and Mevich, find out what happened, and possibly recover the freelance elf Archer sent with the first entourage.

The two adepts keep tabs on the group through contacts in the Library and around Throal and Bartertown, and will be ready to leave when the group discovers the possible key to lifting the curse. Once the group has decided to take advantage of the tract found in the Library and are on their way to the shrine, move to **The Road To Pravisha**.

Troubleshooting

Little should derail the adventure at this point. Since the section consists entirely of researching Mevich's problem, the only trouble spot that could be encountered is the party taking advantage of free Library use for their own benefit. An off-topic scroll or two will not be met with displeasure, but should the majority of the group's requests be unrelated to Mevich's problem, the library attendants will let the group know that their dawdling is not appreciated. If the abuse continues, the adepts will be thrown out, and the attendants themselves will help Mevich. Whether or not Mevich will continue with the group is up to the GM.

THE ROAD TO PRAVISHA

Overview

After a day and a half on the road, the group encounters an overwhelming number of ork scorchers, demanding an outrageous toll to allow the adventurers to pass.



Setting the Stage

The open airiness of the road is a welcome change from the stuffy, musty piles of tomes you subjected yourselves to in recent days.

Mevich has informed you that Kaer Pravisha is only three or so days away, and so far a day and a half have passed with nothing more dangerous than an angry sparrow.

You ride into a valley between two hills, looking about for a good place to have a noontime meal.

It's little more than a rockfall, but suddenly you are alert to the possible presence of danger. Senses sharpened, you cast about for some sign, some indication of the nature of this alarming feeling.

Your instincts prove correct, but it is of little consequence. With whoops and cries, a company of ork cavalry plunges down the hill, surrounding you, before you have time to draw a weapon. Nerves keyed to high pitch, you wait for some clue as to their intentions.

An ork steps forward, dressed in chain mail and ill-cured hides stitched into a gaudy cape. In broken Throalic, he demands, "You want safe passage, ha? All you have in your packs, and your mounts... here!" He points an ill-kempt fingernail at the dirt in front of his feet.

Themes and Images

The mind-numbingly boring pace of the road is punctured by the sudden appearance of the scorchers, who provide another one of the brief moments of heart-pounding fright. The action should move quickly, leaving little time for thought or planning.

Behind the Scenes

The orks like this area very much. It provides them perfect opportunities for ambush, like

the one that happened here. If the GM wishes, the players may make Perception Tests to notice signs of ambush, but it should fall on them with the speed of an avalanche, leaving little time for preparation. A Cloaksense brooch may help detect the ambush, but the orks have practiced their maneuvers well. The only value such warning may have would be to the owner of the brooch. There will be no time to warn others.

There should be five orks for every character, including Mevich. Odds like these are not conducive to survival, even if the adepts are quite powerful. Stats for the orks can be found in the Creatures section of the **Earthdawn Rulebook**, pp. 307-8, under the heading 'Ork', with perhaps a few Cavalrymen adepts thrown in for good measure. If the characters play their cards right, though, all that will be necessary will be the highest Social Defense among the orks, plus one for every character and NPC within ten meters of Mevich (which should be everyone).

Particularly crafty characters may suggest that the 'group leader,' Mevich, will 'negotiate for them,' or some similar statement. Mevich will quickly get the hint, but shoot a look of distaste at the character before speaking. Once he does, roll his curse-augmented Arcane Mutterings talent, using the rules in the curse description found in his statistics in the **Loose Ends** section following the adventure.

Once the Mutterings take effect, Mevich, unaffected by the use of the talent himself, quietly leads away the adepts and their horses through the non-protesting orks. Wary of such power, the orks will not follow.

At GM discretion, the players may make another Perception (11) Test. If one or more of them make it, they may notice that they are being followed. The followers will be the

freelancers from the Eye of Throal.

Should the adventurers notice the followers and force a confrontation, the Eye of Throal adepts will explain that they have friends among those who went with Mevich last, and have been trying to find them. They remained back and away from the adventurers because they feared the curse on Mevich, which they heard about in Bartertown. It is up to the GM whether or not the Eye of Throal adepts continue on with or without the group. Keep in mind how the adventurers treated them when making this decision. Absolutely no mention will be made of the Eye of Throal, unless the adepts are forced by spell to be truthful.

When the players are ready, go to **Pravisha**.

PRAVISHA

Overview

The adventurers finally reach Pravisha, where they encounter the adepts in Mevich's previous employ, now building up (and pulling down) a stone wall. Once inside the shrine, the ghost-questor manifests, and begins enslaving the characters. The group must work quickly, or join the painfully thin, pale adepts outside in perpetual meaningless labor.

Setting the Stage

At the entrance of the kaer, it looks as if everything is just as Mevich wrote. The kaer seems to have been opened without incident. As you move through the halls of the underground citadel, you note that the dwellings have been pretty much abandoned, with no sign of violence. Only the ravages of time, weather, and small creatures are apparent.



Stepping quietly, you detect the sounds of movement ahead. From a hastily-assumed vantage point, you see four Name-givers: two dwarfs, male and female; one female elf; and one male human, vacant of expression, all clad in grimy tatters, engaged in a seemingly pointless exercise. Two of them stack up rocks to form part of a circular wall, while the other two follow a few steps behind, tearing down work only just completed. From marks on the ground, it seems that this has gone on for at least the past week.

To one side of the adepts, you notice a pile of bags and weapons, stacks of neatly flattened food wrappers held down by a large rock, and rabbit bones picked clean of meat, laid on the ground as if the defleshed coneys were resting on their backs.

Directly behind them, there is a jagged opening into darkness. Mevich indicates that the shrine is beyond that hole. Bracing yourselves, you descend toward the shrine.

Themes and Images

Hope of success and fear of failure war here, raising tension, as the adventure reaches its climax.

Behind the Scenes

No map has been provided for this kaer, as none is really necessary. If the GM feels one is needed, he may create one.

The adepts toiling on the wall are little better than starved zombies in threadbare rags. If the adventurers attempt to stop the enslaved adepts or interfere in any way with their work, they will stop until the interference ceases, then continue their pointless task. They will not in any way prevent the adventurers from entering the shrine.

The shrine itself is a round room with multiple niches containing life-sized statues dedicated to all the

Passions, but Erendis and Garlen take pride of place, and their statues are correspondingly larger than the others, and placed towards the opposite of the opening. The characters will have little trouble getting into the shrine -- the opening is quite large, perhaps even larger than it might have been at its construction. Once inside, the ghost will immediately manifest. Read the following aloud, or paraphrase:

A cold wind whips dust around the shrine, spinning and tightening until it forms a drab, brown, humanoid figure. It appears to be a dwarf female in a slim robe with a short train, but little else can be determined. It turns its gaze on you, and giggles. "More workers!" she shrills with delight. "Mevich, you have outdone yourself. Of course, I may have to reward you again, but not until after I make these mine...." With that, she begins her attempts to enslave you...

She will enslave characters, one per round, using the questor power Enslave, leaving Mevich, spellcasters, Troubadours, and anyone who looks weak for last. If she succeeds, she will direct the players to accomplish pointless, menial tasks, such as cleaning the floor, the statues (this may allow the group to find her journal, described below), or help the other Name-givers in building and tearing down the wall. Spells such as Counterspell may thwart her attempts, and give the players more time to deal with this troublesome spirit. During this time, the characters may attempt to talk some sense into the ghost. Social interaction is again needed. Certain spells, such as the Wizard spell Trust, may elicit a sane response from the phantom for a brief period of time, allowing more conventional conversation to begin. Another tack

is to speak to the spirit of times past, when her patron was not insane. A play may be enacted, attempting to mimic events that may have called for the assistance of a questor of Erendis.

Any other methods of recalling the past or appealing to the questor-spirit's old ways may be effective, at the GM's discretion. This will take time, but any reasonable attempt to gain the spirit's attention will stop it from enslaving the adventurers until they can convince it to lift the curse. Otherwise, the characters may have to wait, and hope, for a brief moment of sanity.

The ghost remembers little more than its Name and what it has been doing lately, but will agree to lift the curse if the speaking character is suitably reasonable and personable. Roleplaying this interaction is best, but if the speaking character's arguments seem a bit weak, make a Charisma (10) Test or two to see if there is any effect. Assume that an Extraordinary success will deliver an opportunity for the adventurers to convince the spirit to lift the curse. The spirit's mind is caught between Erendis' Order and Dis' Confusion -- the first must win out sometimes, if only infrequently.

If a moment of sanity is not in the offing through spell or convincing dialogue, don't make the characters wait too long. Give them a day or two of enslavement, then open a window of opportunity.

This may be read or paraphrased when the players succeed in convincing her to lift the curse:

For a moment, her expression lightens, becoming less severe. She seems to gain substance: her robes begin to flush blue, her face gains more definition. She smiles sadly, coming forward to touch Mevich lightly with three fingers. "It is done."

Mevich blinks, then looks up to her. "Thank you. May you find peace."



Alinam bows her head, her mouth suddenly tightening. You can see that something in her is warring for control, which may spell more trouble. It is time to give this tortured soul rest.

Once the curse is lifted, a spellcaster may begin the procedure for exorcising the ghost. With the procedure described in the tract found at the Library, even a Wizard or Illusionist has a chance exorcising this phantom. In this instance, the ghost is considered to be a Named spirit for purposes of banishing, with all attendant modifiers. In addition, the tract adds a +5 step modifier to the Banishing Test. For Wizards and Illusionists, use the modifier for the tract as the sole step number, allowing them to add one Karma Point if the GM wishes. In this latter case, an Excellent success is required, though other Wizards and Illusionists may add steps to this Test by making it a ritual, and through

pushing talents and abilities, based on the information found in **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**, p. 10. Banishing and ritual magic information may also be found in this sourcebook on pp. 95-96 and 97-100, respectively.

When the players succeed in banishing her, read or paraphrase the following:

It is as if a fireball has exploded within the chamber. There is a brief, blinding flash, then blue-white light coruscates over the questor; she struggles, then goes slack. As you watch, her form seems to shrivel, curling at the edges as would paper in a flame. Before she burns completely, you see her face turn toward you. Her smile is triumphant, but also kind. She vanishes in a wink of flame.

It seems you have at last given her the peace she wanted.

Once the ghost is gone, the Eye of Throal freelancers that have been

following the group will finally arrive, offering whatever assistance they can and expressing apologies for not being here sooner -- they were so far behind, after all. If pressed, they will explain their reasons for following secretly, but will not go into too much detail, leaving out the Eye of Throal's involvement unless they are compelled to be truthful. If the Eye of Throal adepts were already present prior to the banishing, ignore this paragraph.

If the characters wish to search the shrine after the ghost is gone, they may locate the journal of the questor with a Perception (7) Test. If the Test is successful, they will find the book cradled in the arms of the statue of Erendis, blocked from immediate view by a larger carving of a book there. The last entries are confusing, giving insight on the state of mind of the ghost. The first entries, though, give excellent information on Erendis before the Scourge, and what it was like to be a questor for this Passion before she went mad. The Library of Throal may pay up to 500 silver for this journal. Because of the way the journal was obtained, it is also treasure worth Legend Points. Alternately, the GM may allow the characters to locate the book by having Alinam force them to clean the statue.

Troubleshooting

It is unlikely, having gone this far, that the adventurers will engage in combat with the ghost. If they do, the ghost, on its initiative, will wink back into astral space, making surprise forays into the material plane to create more slaves. If the ghost is disrupted, it will take another adventure of the GM's devising to rid Mevich of his curse, if he isn't already disgusted with the characters for their ham-handed tactics.

If the characters fail in their first attempt to exorcise the ghost, wait a day or two, then give them another window of opportunity -- as said above, occasionally Order should

Creative Roleplay and Heroics

Award Legend Points for creative roleplaying and heroics if the characters take any of the actions described below.

Helping care for Mevich while he is unconscious	50 per character
Breaking up the riot without violence	200 per character
Agreeing to help without demanding heavy payment	100 per character
Finding the tract and exorcism information	100 for finder
Suggesting Mevich use curse to get rid of scorchers	200 for suggestor
Convincing ghost to lift curse	300 for speaker
Giving speaker of above time to negotiate	100 per character
Assisting the enslaved after questor power wears off	100 per character

Creature/Opponent Award Table

Creature / Opponent	4 players	5 players	6 players
Ork scorchers (5 per character, incl. Mevich)	1250	1500	1750
Alinam Praese, Mad questor	600*	600*	600*
Total	1850	2100	2350
Award Per Character	460	420	390

* - This amount may be increased due to information found in Alinam's game statistics. See the listing for more information



win out in the questor-spirit's mind, but not for very long. Sooner or later, they should succeed, even if only through the intercession of the freelancers from the Eye of Throal who have been following them. Give the adventurers the opportunity to succeed on their own, though, before allowing the Eye adepts to help out.

LOOSE ENDS

Possible Outcomes

If the curse is lifted and the ghost is exorcised, Mevich may become a valuable ally. With his connections at the Library of Throal, he may sometimes be able to assist the characters with research. As a Seventh Circle Wizard, he may also become a mentor for any Wizard in the group.

This adventure may also provide a connection to the Eye of Throal. While this escapade may not rocket them to prominence in the organization, it may get the attention of the Eye, and if they like what they see in this and future situations, the group may be approached in the future to become freelancers, or perhaps even full-fledged operatives.

Awarding Legend Points

Award the characters Legend Points for this adventure as described in the **Earthdawn Rulebook**, pp. 241-3. The specific awards to be granted are described below. The Adventure Award for Arcane Mutterings is 600 points.

Defeating Creatures

Award Legend Points for defeating creatures/opponents in this adventure as shown on the Creature/Opponent Award Table.

Treasure

If the characters locate the journal of the questor, they may sell it to the Library of Throal for 500 silver. The journal is treasure worth Legend

Points.

Total Legend Award

Based on the information presented above, a single character who completes Arcane Mutterings may receive roughly 2200 points. This assumes five players in a group, and does not include points earned for battling additional opponents or finding treasure placed by the GM.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

This section provides information and game statistics for GM characters who play a major role in Arcane Mutterings. Minor non-player characters, such as the Eye of Throal freelancers and the missing adepts, are given only brief sketches. The GM may flesh these characters out further if necessary or desired.

Mevich Nourand

Mevich is a Seventh Circle Wizard. Information on his background may be found in the section **A Tale of Woe**, under **Mevich Nourand: A Short Biography**.

Attributes

Dexterity (11): 5/d8
Strength (11): 5/d8
Toughness (13): 6/d10
Perception (19): 8/2d6
Willpower (19): 8/2d6
Charisma (12): 5/d8

Talents

Arcane Mutterings (7): 15/d20 + d6*
Astral Sight (5): 13/d12 + d10
Book Memory (7): 15/d20 + d6
Book Recall (5): 13/d12 + d10
Enhanced Matrix (7)
Evidence Analysis (5): 13/d12 + d10
Hold Thread (2): 10/d10 + d6
Karma Ritual (5)
Lip Reading (2): 7/d12
Melee Weapons (2): 7/d12
R/W Language (3): 11/d10 + d8

R/W Magic (7): 15/d20 + d6
Speak Language (3): 11/d10 + d8
Spellcasting (7): 15/d20 + d6
3 Spell Matrices (7)
Thread Weaving (Wizardry) (7): 15/d20 + d6
Willforce (7): 15/d20 + d6
Wizard Durability (7)

Skills

R/W Throalic (1)
R/W Human (2)
Speak Throalic (1)
Craftsman (1): 6/d10
Robe Embroidery (4): 9/d8 + d6
Research (5): 13/d12 + d10
Legends and Lore (4): 12/2d10
The Mad Passions (3): 11/d10 + d8

Karma

Dice: 4/d6
Points: 20

Damage

Death Rating: 63
Wound Threshold: 9
Unconsciousness Rating: 48
Recovery Tests/Day: 2
Recovery Dice: 6/d10

Combat

Physical Defense: 7
Spell Defense: 11
Social Defense: 8
Armor: 0
Mystic Armor: 3

Racial Ability: Heat Sight

Spells: All Wizard spells up to Seventh Circle.

Equipment: Embroidered robes, 15 silver in mixed coin, mountain boots.

Notes: Mevich may spend Karma for Charisma, Willforce, and Willpower Tests.

*The numbers following the Arcane Mutterings talent are for the uncursed version. While the curse is in effect, the following changes apply



to the use of this talent:

a. Step number is equal to Rank + Willpower + ghost's Questor Rank.

b. It is targeted on all in earshot (or everyone within ten meters, whichever is less), instead of one character. The Difficulty Number is the highest Social Defense in the area of effect, plus one for each additional person.

c. Mevich must use one Karma Point each time he speaks. If he doesn't succeed in affecting all in the defined area, he must spend additional Karma Points, one at a time, until the target number is reached.

d. Duration is equal to the twice the Step number in rounds, and lasts the entire duration, even if speaking is stopped after one round.

e. Only an Average success is needed to generate the basic effects of the talent.

Once the curse is lifted, the talent returns to its normal description. While cursed, Mevich cannot use Flame Flash, Wake-Up Call, Combat Fury, Shatter Lock, Mage Armor, Blood Boil, Spell Cage, or any other spell that requires verbal effects or deliberately produced sounds. What will be produced instead are Arcane Mutterings, which foul the spell attempt.

Alinam Praese, questor of Eren/Dis

In life, Alinam was extremely devoted to Erendis. As the Passion went mad, Alinam became confused and easily distracted, then began plotting to enslave the kaer. When this plot was discovered, she was killed by the kaer's inhabitants while she knelt at the base of Erendis' statue. Her body was left in the shrine, which was walled up with rock and earth. Her ghost remained in the shrine, unable to escape, until the wall fell due to neglect. Though now physically able to wander at will, her confusion keeps her rooted to the

area where she lived and died.

Attributes

Dexterity: 8
Strength: 7
Toughness: 8
Perception: 8
Willpower: 8
Charisma: 7

Initiative: 9
Number of Attacks: 1
Attack: 9
Damage: 10
Number of Spells: NA
Spellcasting: NA
Effect: NA

Karma

Karma Points: 10
Karma Step: 4

Damage

Death Rating: 46
Wound Threshold: 13
Unconsciousness Rating: 39
Combat Movement: 120
Full Movement: 240

Combat

Physical Defense: 12 (15)*
Spell Defense: 10
Social Defense: 10
Armor: 10
Mystic Armor: 5
Knockdown: 8
Recovery Tests per Day: 4

Powers: Astral Sight (9), Lifesense (9), Manifest (up to two hours per day), Confusion (Questor Rank^ + 8), Enslave (Questor Rank^ + 8), Living Death (Questor Rank^ + 8). Descriptions of above questor powers may be found in the **Earthdawn Companion**, pp. 95-6. Other powers may be found in **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**, pp. 80-2. Unlike living questors, Praese's questor abilities are not limited to a finite number of uses per day.

Legend Points: 600^
Equipment: None

Loot: A journal, hidden on the statue of Erendis. This journal may be sold to the Library at Throal for up to 500 silver. This counts as treasure worth Legend Points.

*The number in parentheses refers to the ghost's Physical Defense when physically manifested.

Notes: ^The Questor rank for this particular spirit will be equal to the average of the party's Circles, plus three. For each rank above 7, add 100 Legend Points to the ghost's Legend Point award. In addition, this spirit gains one Karma Point each time it enslaves a character. Its statistics are based on the Strength 1 Ally spirit, found on page 89 of **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**.

The Four Adepts First Hired By Mevich

Denif Grivanas

Denif is a Third Circle dwarf Thief. He has developed a reputation for completing any task given in a minimum of time, and works quite well with others.

Attributes

DEX: 7
STR: 5
TOU: 5
PER: 7
WIL: 5
CHA: 4

Gemma Najarian

Gemma is a Fourth Circle dwarf Warrior. She is quiet and solicitous, but doesn't suffer fools gladly.

Attributes

DEX: 6
STR: 6
TOU: 6
PER: 5
WIL: 6
CHA: 5



Graffia Estvanik

Graffia is a Fourth Circle elf Archer. Chatty and down-to-earth, she is nonetheless remarkably good at keeping secrets. She is a freelancer for the Eye of Throal.

Attributes

DEX: 7
STR: 5
TOU: 5
PER: 7
WIL: 5
CHA: 5

Joachim Talenfust

Joachim is a Third Circle human Elementalist. He is a competent spellcaster, but sometimes experiences concentration problems.

Attributes

DEX: 6
STR: 5
TOU: 6
PER: 7
WIL: 5
CHA: 5

The Eye of Throal Freelancers Following Mevich and The Group

Chekal Goslak

Chekal is a Fourth Circle ork Scout. She is gruff and often makes a bad first impression.

Attributes

DEX: 7
STR: 6
TOU: 6
PER: 7
WIL: 5
CHA: 4

Maseyla Waslar

Maseyla is a Fifth Circle dwarf Nethermancer. She is winsome and friendly, in direct contrast to the

stereotype of that sort of spellcaster.

Attributes

DEX: 5
STR: 5
TOU: 5
PER: 6
WIL: 6
CHA: 6

RUMORS AND RESEARCH

Kaer Pravisha

Founded by the largely human population of the village of Pravisha and its outlying farms, Kaer Pravisha was built to sustain four hundred or more Name-givers over the centuries of the Scourge. Kaer records show that the population never rose above two hundred and fifty, however.

Kaer Pravisha's fall came late in the Scourge. According to extant kaer records, the resident questor of Erendis, Alinam Praese, began coordinating longer shifts in the kaer's garden. Complaints were brought to the resident questor of Rashomon, who also served as the kaer leader, but he seemed to be more occupied with engaging in petty arguments with those who disagreed with his administrative policies than dealing with 'an obviously ambitious and efficient member of the kaer'. The questor of Rashomon was later killed in a duel he instigated, over a disagreement regarding the questor's interpretation of the position of kaer mucker.

Even without their leader, the folk of Kaer Pravisha soldiered on. A new governing board was chosen, and in secret, they began discussing options for their increasingly wayward questor of Erendis. She was working her groups to exhaustion cataloging every plant in the garden. It was clear to them that something was wrong with her. Eventually, the decision was made for them, when one of the

kaerfolk died as a result of overwork.

His widow called for harsh punishment, and kaer sentiment was in her favor. There were murmurs that Alinam may have even been Marked, and those who could view her pattern astrally confirmed that there was indeed something odd, and unsettling, about her. They decided that she should be imprisoned, and because of the way the kaer was constructed, the furthest possible place from the rest of the kaer population was the chamber dedicated to the Passions. There they sealed her, bringing her food and water, replacing her clothing when needed. Eventually, it became too much trouble to shield their ears from her ravings, which seemed to drive others mad. They stopped coming -- or at least, the records no longer showed who was responsible for bringing her food. In time, the corridor that lead to the chamber of the Passions was blocked off by chunks of rock, food waste, and other refuse.

Fifty years after her imprisonment, the kaer was opened its occupants. The opening date is recorded by the kaerfolk is roughly the same time as Throal opened its doors. If anyone from the kaer still lives, they would likely not remember the mad questor, only that they were forbidden as children to go near the 'fallen hall'.

A REPORT FROM CARA FAHD

by Christopher Mahoney

Always search the pockets of deceased Therans - you never know what you might find...

Milady:

The following is an excerpt from the notes of a deceased Theran spy. These notes, somewhat burned and blood-stained after the battle, were found in the possession of an elf traveling with a group of slavers that were attempting to flee towards Vivane province. I do not know how long they have been trying to leave Barsaive, since these notes seem somewhat dated. Thanks to what we have discovered, we can assume that:

- The Therans and their followers will continue to be a threat to the

peoples of Barsaive, and specifically Cara Fahd, for the foreseeable future.

- We still need to bring more high-Circle spell-casting adepts into the Nation as soon as possible. While we choose not to rely solely on the might of magic, having something extra in our corner would never hurt.

Please let me know when and how I may be of further service to you.

Warmest regards...

Twambo Tightfist

OBSERVATION REPORTS

Report #43 - 45/4/1066 TE

I don't know how spell researchers such as these have come to reside in what amounts to a hole in a hill, but their results are most impressive. One of the Wizards demonstrated something he called a "safety" Razor Orb on one of my former contacts. Rather than seriously injuring or killing the "volunteer" slaver outright, he was merely stunned into submission. I am sure Theran researchers have thought of a spell such as this decades ago, but the fact that these provincials are now doing so does not bode well for the war effort...

Report #55 53/2/1066 TE

Once again these Barsaivian spellcasters have managed to pull a trick out of their mud-stained robes. I would suggest to the local *akarenti* of other rebellious areas that disclosing names of disposable sympathizers to local "patriots" works well for Theran interests. It only cost the Empire one group of annoying slavers that were easily replaced.

This afternoon, an Elementalist tested what he called a "personal" Fireball. From my own experience, the normal Fireball spell is large and impressive, and must be used with care in combat situations. Whatever had been done with this spell limited the size of the blast, but seemed to keep all of the damage intact. Indeed, the persons holding the slaver at arms' length were unaffected by the blast! If these Barsaivians learn





to broadly share their knowledge, we will face a radically different battlefield in this Province.

I will attempt to gather whatever information I can before I must leave to meet another group of slave “merchants” that are my assigned cover in this area. We must pass by the piteous lands that are Cara Fahd, and sidestep the laughable Crystal Raiders, before we can return to the civilized realms of Thera...

GAME INFORMATION

Concussion Orb - Circle 7 Spell

Threads: 2

Weaving Difficulty: 12/18

Range: 100 yards

Duration: 1 round

Effect: Willforce + 20

Casting Difficulty: Target's Spell Defense (see text)

The Concussion Orb (a.k.a. the “safety razor orb”) is a gleaming, spinning, stunning weapon of blue light and force. The wizard casts Concussion Orb against one target. If the Spellcasting Test is successful, the Wizard rolls the Effect dice for damage. A Concussion Orb is designed to deliver a stun-only, knockout blow in one hit against a tough opponent. The spell Armor-Defeats at the normal success levels. However Mystic, and not Physical, Armor is the only defense against a Concussion Orb.

“Personal” Fireball - Circle 6 Spell

Threads: 1

Weaving Difficulty: 13/21

Range: 100 yards

Duration: 1 round

Effect: Willforce + 12

Casting Difficulty: Target's Spell Defense (see text)

The Elementalist needs a source of flame to cast the “Personal” Fireball spell. As they weave the Thread, one hand is placed to the side of the flame, and then moved over the top in a very tight circular motion. When cast, the fireball expands to the size of a grapefruit.

As the fireball reaches the point of impact, the Elementalist makes a Spellcasting test against the Spell Defense of the intended target. A successful Spellcasting Test explodes the fireball. The Elementalist then rolls the Effect dice. The target takes damage equal to the result of the Effect dice roll. Any other beings outside of the 1-yard explosive radius take no damage (other than having their wits shaken). Untargeted beings inside the 1-yard explosive radius may save on Willpower versus the caster's unmodified Spellcasting Step to avoid the effects from the blast radius. Only Mystic armor protects against the “Personal” Fireball.

BOOK OF TOMORROW 5

Have something you'd like to contribute to our next issue of the Book of Tomorrow? If your article submission is chosen as the best contribution in Book of Tomorrow 5, you could receive a limited first edition Earthdawn hardcover rulebook!

The book is numbered 234 out of 1000, and is in excellent shape -- almost like new! The EDPT will ship it anywhere that the United States Postal Service delivers.

The Rules:

1. Submit your article for consideration by May 31, 2004. Articles must be in English, and submitted via e-mail to charcoalgrin@parlainth.net. Please see submission guidelines for more information about file types, fonts, etc. accepted.

2. Articles must be accepted by EDPT staff for inclusion in Book of Tomorrow 5, and published in that issue, in order to be eligible. A confirmation e-mail will be sent from an EDPT staff member to the author noting acceptance into that issue, and a second e-mail will be sent confirming publication in Book of Tomorrow 5.

3. A winner will be chosen prior to publication of Book of Tomorrow 5, and announced in the issue.

The winner will provide an accurate shipping address. Every precaution will be taken to ensure that the book arrives in good condition, but the EDPT and its members will not accept responsibility for late, lost, misdirected, or damaged mail. Any questions regarding this competition can be directed to charcoalgrin@parlainth.net.





INSIGHT

ROLEPLAYING HORRORS

by Lasse Overgaard

The written world is full of mysteries, strange magic, and Horrors. Unfortunately, it's a heck of a job maintaining this illusion with the players

INTRODUCTION

Reading the Earthdawn book, and playing the game as a player, made me realize that there are two Earthdawn worlds: the world written, and the world played. The written world is full of mysteries, strange magic, and Horrors. These Horrors are the embodiment of the indescribable; their motives are alien, their appetites are unfathomable, and their methods are terrifying.

Unfortunately, it's a heck of a job maintaining this illusion with the players. At any time, a player can open a rule book and compare their statistics to that of a Horror. At some point, that player will conclude that his character is tough enough to take one out.

When I started my Earthdawn campaign, I had to find a way to make Horrors truly horrible, and not just another Legend Point-awarding beastie. I used the Horrors in the Earthdawn books as inspiration, and devised the following system for the creation of Horrors. The players can have their fun hacking the Horror constructs to atoms, but when it comes to the Horror itself, only good old-fashioned thinking and roleplaying can do the trick.

The main point of this article is to explore the motives and methods of the Horrors presented in the Earthdawn rulebook, and devising an alternative system for using Horrors. I don't see Horrors as something you put your sword in, and then it's history. I see Horrors as spirit-beings, immune to harm in any regular way, but with their weaknesses as well.

This system makes Horrors into Horrors, and adds a lot of spice to a campaign. Suddenly, hiding in a kaer for centuries is something you needed to do, and not something you had to do because you didn't have a big enough sword.

The four basics in creating Horrors, in this system, are the following: Appearance, Food/Feeding Habits, Constructs, and Weak Spot/Achilles' Heel.

APPEARANCE

Appearance (or appearances) is how the Horror looks... if you ever see it, that is. Sometimes, what you don't see is much more frightening than what you can see. Appearance can include mere physical detail, or can include information about body position, how it moves, and the like.

Think about what frightens you. What is it about Hannibal Lecter that gives you shivers, and what is about mimes that makes you want to avoid them? Remember these things, write them down, and use them in your descriptions. Be sure that the descriptions don't include too much, as overdoing has a tendency to make things less spooky. The evil-eyed-tentacle-hairy-spider-snake is a bit much, especially when just a hairy spider can do the trick.

Remember to leave stuff hidden. The part of the monster you can't see is much scarier than the one you can. The ork with the battle axe is scary, but the red-eyed noble with one hand hidden in his cloak can be terrifying.

Food/Feeding Habits

Food/Feeding Habits are probably the most important aspect of a Horror. What nasty feeling does the Horror like to 'eat', and more importantly, how does it make the feelings manifest? This aspect is why the Horror doesn't just leave when players arrive, and determines how it interacts with them. The best method for creating reasonable feeding habits is pragmatism and expediency. For example, if a Horror eats jealousy, why should it torture people physically? Instead, it makes them see and hear things that aren't necessarily true, simply because it's the easiest way to feed. If, on the other hand, the Horror eats pain, why should it bother speaking to people, when good old-fashioned torture works just as well?

Examples of food and feeding habits include eating the pain caused by skin-burrowing worm constructs, eating the distrust and confusion caused by shapeshifting constructs, and eating the sadness felt by incurably ill children.

Constructs

Constructs are every Horror's favorite minion, and every player's favorite hack-toy. But what constructs are right for the Horror you are making? Are they just mindless cadaver men, or are they intelligent monstrous beings? Maybe the Horror likes using Marked Name-givers as minions, or perhaps it doesn't use constructs at all.

Remember that the constructs have to be a logical part of how the Horror works. If the Horror eats fear,



does it really need a horde of cadaver men to spoil the mood? If it eats revulsion, wouldn't plague bearing insects do the trick?

Weak Spot/Achilles' Heel

Weak Spot/Achilles' Heel is the most important part of a Horror if you want the players to actually fight it. The weak spot has to be well considered, and hinted at, both in appearance, feeding habits and construct description. Bear in mind that the way to beat a Horror has to be dramatic, and create a huge climax.

I like the thought that if a Horror prefers to eat a specific feeling, then it is disgusted by the opposite. This gives clever, thoughtful players who discover what and how the Horror eats a way to fight it, or perhaps even destroy it.

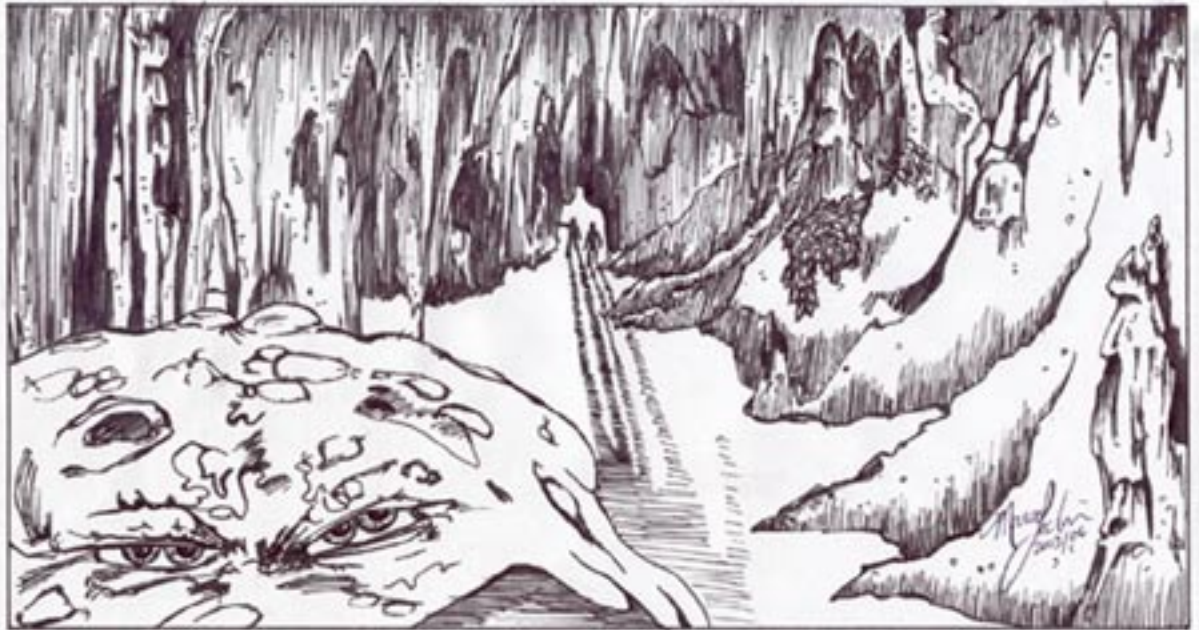
It also makes sense that a Horror's constructs adopt that Horror's weak spots. Depending on the Horror, this could make some interesting experimentation-on-captured-construct situations.

Using the above guidelines, you'll have a terrifying Horror in no time. Adding a little adventure around it will not be hard, and you will have plenty of game time full of fun, with a minimum of work. More importantly, the players will not know the Horror, won't be able to compare their characters to it, and will have an easier time getting into the mood for the adventure. All in all, a win-win situation, at least in my experience.

Although all I have written so far makes sense in my world, maybe it won't in yours. Luckily, I have included the examples below to demonstrate how I have used my own guidelines. These example Horrors

Constructs

It usually just uses mindless cadaver men, or other undead. They are used as bait against unfortunate explorers, making them think that the place is easy pickings until they



have all been tested in my game group. Feel free to use them for your own fun.

SHADOWS

Appearance

A moving, liquid shadow that is able to take humanoid form if necessary. It can only move in shadows, not in direct light.

Food/Feeding

This beast eats fear: fear of the unknown, fear of what can't be seen. It enjoys playing with its food: extinguishing the lights slowly, making shadows move, whispering in people's ears, and silencing people's voices, making them scream in vain. It lives in caves or abandoned or infiltrated kaers, making sure intruders are thoroughly trapped before starting to play with them.

are too deep inside the cave or kaer to easily escape. Later on, other constructs or cadaver men, in larger numbers, can be used to keep Name-givers inside.

Weak Spot

There has to be light for shadows to exist and therefore Shadows are powerless, but not trapped, in true darkness. It will reduce lighting all it can, but never remove it completely. Full light will kill Shadows, but this light has to reach everywhere. It is also possible to trap this Horror using lights to make sure it can't move from the shadow it's in.

Personal Note

When my game group met this Horror, they did the thing that first came to their minds. They ran. Never looked back, never came back. A pity, really. I would have liked them to beat this one, but on the other hand, it was the first Horror they met, so who can blame them?



GUILT

Appearance

This Horror's form isn't really creature-like, but much more like a plant. It can look like any moss, most probably a moss that is common to the area in which it lives.

Food/Feeding

This Horror eats guilt, and loves self-blame. It uses existing feelings and magnifies them until the subject sees nothing but his hate or fear. Then the Horror urges the subject to do something about it. Just as the subject does exactly that, the Horror lets go, and enjoys the guilt the subject feels when it realizes just what it has done.

Constructs

This Horror has no need of constructs.

Weak Spot

As this Horror's power grows, so does the moss grow. This moss can be removed like any moss, with fire or garden tools.

Personal Note

My game group only met the remains of this Horror in a kaer they explored. It had manipulated the adults of the kaer to hate their children so much that they threw them out. When the Horror let go of its hold in the adults, it was too late

for them to save the children. Alone and outside during the Scourge, they died quickly.

The kaer's infrastructure collapsed when the adults realized what they had done. A few powerful Wizards, who failed to realize the Horror was the same as the weird moss that was growing everywhere, devised a plan to kill the Horror. They made a ritual that sealed the kaer from the inside, and at the same time trapped every Name-giver at the exact thought they had at the time the ritual was completed. This ritual made sure of two things: the Horror would starve to death with no new thoughts, and the inhabitants of the kaer would pay for their crime forever. The unforeseen side effect of the ritual was that forever was truly forever. When my game group opened the kaer a hundred years later, all the adults were still in there, trapped in their minds and bodies for eternity.

DESPAIR

Appearance

The players should never meet this Horror in combat personally, as it is too powerful. Its appearance would be something resembling a giant serpent with arms. Its skin not scaled, but covered in thousands of small mouths, all whispering about how pointless it is to fight.

Food/Feeding

This Horror lives on despair and lack of hope. It usually lairs near a settlement, then uses its minions to take control of the place. When the inhabitants realize that there are ways out alive and begin to despair, the Horror begins its feast.

Constructs

This Horror needs lots of constructs to maintain its regime. The constructs are probably unique to the Horror in some way, so that they can hint to the Horror's weak spot.

Weak Spot

Strong hope will weaken this Horror, but not kill it. Direct combat is only an option if you have an army, so what is needed here is something different, something the players can only figure out by fighting the Horror's constructs.

Personal Note

When my game group came across this guy, they pretty quickly figured out that the weak spot was water. Unfortunately, their biggest problem wasn't the Horror, its dwarf/bat hybrid constructs, or their own fear. It was getting the demoralized inhabitants of the dwarf settlement the Horror was feeding from to cooperate.



ADVENTURE

GYPSIES IN THE PALACE

by Kathleen Czechowski

This lighthearted encounter demonstrates just how dangerous combining a questor of Floranuus, a tidy sum of silver, and a borrowed mansion can be.

(with apologies to Jimmy Buffett)

*In days of old when knights
were bold and journeyed from their
castles,*

*Trusty men were left behind:
knights needed not the hassles.*

*They helped themselves to pig
and peach, and drank from king's
own chalice,*

*Oh, it was a stirring sight, these
gypsies in the palace!*

-- Jimmy Buffett,
"Gypsies in the Palace"

The tone of the adventure is just this side of absurd; keep that in mind (and your tongue in cheek) when using this scenario. It is suitable for any number of adventurers of any Discipline and Circle, but it is helpful (though not necessary) to have an Elementalist, Illusionist, or Wizard of at least Fourth Circle, or a higher-Circle Troubadour. Having the **Throal** sourcebook is likewise helpful but not necessary.

The scenario may need preparation to run, depending on how much detail the gamemaster wishes to employ when running the party. In any case, a full read of the scenario before running it is necessary, if only to determine ways to sidestep dangerous questions (like, "So, is this your home?"). The ability to improvise situations and descriptions is also useful. If the gamemaster wishes, this scenario can be used as a campaign drop-in by starting at the section titled **The Engagement** and modifying the text to reflect the conditions under which the adventurers attend the party.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Little Gehret Carulli was a ray of sunshine ever since he was born. Everybody always said so. He was a happy child who brought a smile to all he met, so no one was surprised that he became a questor of Floranuus when he got older.

Lately, Gehret has been having a hard time finding a place to hold a party. He's looked at location after location, finding none that suited his requirements. He felt the tiniest inkling of...despair? No. Disappointment? *Nah*. Lessening of his optimism? Maybe...

Then, Floranuus touched Hraba Deneb, and convinced the otherwise close-fisted dwarf merchant to ask Gehret, a family friend, to watch over his estate in Wishon, while he and his family left to visit relatives outside Throal, leaving the questor roughly five hundred silver "for expenses." Or at least, that's how Gehret saw it. Once the questor saw the ballroom, he knew it was the perfect place for the party he had been planning. The dwarf's silver, along with the one thousand five hundred Gehret had saved up to this point, would work well toward paying for the food, drink, and entertainment.

However, the questor knows that he needs help.

He locates the adventurers, and hires them to help with the arrangements. Certainly, it surprises the heroes that they've been hired to assist with a party, but the money is good, and when they see the place

where Gehret (supposedly) lives...

The heroes get to work, putting their best foot forward in hopes of gaining Gehret's patronage. Such a wealthy questor must, after all, need the services of freelance troubleshooters from time to time.

Soon, everything is in place, and the party goes into full swing. Of course, with all the wine and ale available, things soon get rowdy, especially when the *hach'var* players come over and decide to set up a court on one side of the ballroom. Gehret doesn't seem overly concerned when one of the *hach'var* balls breaks the crystal chandelier, though, so everything must be cool.

When the festivities reach a peak, an out-of-breath dwarf runs into the party, and, dodging drunken revelers, makes it to Gehret to whisper a short message into his ear. The questor looks surprised for a second, then manages to call the attention of most of the partiers (except the ones who have passed out). He announces that anyone with good janitorial skills step forward, as Hraba Deneb will soon be here.

Everyone looks puzzled. "Who is Hraba?" someone asks.

"Oh, I forgot to mention that," Gehret answers. "He owns the place." He grins sheepishly.

What follows would best be described as organized panic, as almost two hundred besotted revelers attempt to clean up their messes. It looks like it's up to the adventurers to make sure things get done right...



THE STRATEGY

Overview

The adventurers meet Gehret for the first time, when he asks them if they would mind helping him with a celebration. He can pay, of course.

Setting the Stage

Someone clearing his throat draws your attention. You turn, and find yourself looking down at a widely beaming young human, dressed in brilliant colored clothing. "I am most extraordinarily pleased to finally meet you!" he exclaims, offering his hand to you. "I am Gehret Carulli... I have heard so many good things about you! How would you like to help me? I can pay, of course, but I really need your expertise..."

Themes and Images

Gehret is extremely perky, and it is not entirely unlikely that the group will be suspicious of him. However, he is the real deal, an entirely too cheerful and upbeat questor of Floranuus. Play up these qualities, but try to make sure that no matter how cloying he gets, it is difficult to wholly dislike Gehret. Allow the players to get the idea that this is not a serious adventure. Throughout, it should play a lot like an episode of *I Love Lucy* or other daffy sitcom.

Behind the Scenes

This meeting is the last bit of preparation that Gehret needs to make in organizing his celebration. He sought out the group for several reasons:

- 1) They are famous adventurers known by many, and therefore must have lots of friends who may want to attend.
- 2) As successful adventurers, they are obviously quite resourceful, and he needs some help with deliveries,

decorations and other stuff.

3) Having heard of the group's exploits, he has determined that their lives, so full of adventure and danger, are in desperate need of fun. What's more fun than a party?

4) (If the group has a Troubadour or Illusionist) And what party could do without entertainment?

There are many other reasons as well, but the ones given above give a fairly good idea of Gehret's motives in asking the adventurers to help him. He offers each of the adventurers 50 silver; the group can very easily negotiate up to 150 silver apiece, but under no condition will Gehret increase it beyond that figure. He has promised money to others, and for all his rabid cheerfulness, he is not incapable of basic mathematics.

If suggestion is made that he is not on the level, he waves off that idea, and willingly answers any questions the adventurers have. Keep in mind Gehret's feelings on the subject. If any of the players ask the questor if the house is his, he will answer an emphatic "Yes!" on the basis of a single statement made by the actual owner of the house before he left: "Treat this as your home, Gehret." The questor, of course, took it quite literally.

If Gehret is asked why he wants them in particular, he launches into a rapid fire, breathless explanation of his reasoning, including those examples listed under the first paragraph, plus others that range from astute to absurd. He also includes the location of the party, an idea of who may be attending, the dishes to be served, activities, etc.

As for the purpose behind the party, i.e. why it is being held, Gehret thinks for a moment, then replies, "Oh, yes! It's the Feast of Floranuus!" Those player characters already well acquainted with questors of that Passion know that the "Feast of Floranuus" is a catchall excuse for throwing a party when no other reason is forthcoming. It is not a

regularly occurring holiday; rather, the only method for determining what day the Feast is held is the whim of those throwing the celebration.

Once the player characters accept, Gehret passes them their fee in advance... all of it, and asks them to show up at the Wishon address he gave them tomorrow at noon. Go to **The Execution**, next.

Troubleshooting

The adventurers could refuse the request, or rebuff Gehret. If they do so, Gehret may persist for a while, until the player characters give in just to be rid of him, or the questor finally determines his pleas are futile. If the latter occurs, so be it. Gehret will find other helpers: ones who have a better sense of humor.

Since the questor is giving the adventurers their fee up front, it is possible that they could dodge the work and run off with the coin. If this occurs, word will be passed to other questors of Floranuus (perhaps other questors, period). The adventurers may find it difficult, in the future, to deal with questors of any stripe... and that might only be the beginning of their troubles, especially once word gets out to Troubadours.

THE EXECUTION

Overview

The adventurers arrive at the opulent manse in Wishon, and are set to work with decorations, inventorying food supplies, etc.

Setting the Stage

Maneuvering through the noontide crowds and convoluted halls of Throal, you soon set foot in Wishon. According to Gehret's directions, the home you seek should be in the center of the city. Therefore, you continue down the wheel-spoke that is one of Wishon's main streets.



When you reach the address, you do a double take to be sure you didn't mix up the location and timing. The palatial manse before you couldn't possibly be Gehret's home. Obviously, this questor is more influential than you thought. There is definitely more to him than meets the eye...

Your suspicions are confirmed when Gehret steps out to greet you, clad in garments more outrageously colorful than the first time you saw him. "Ah, you're here... good, good, good. We've got so much time and so little to do...." He pauses for a moment, lips pursed. "Strike that -- reverse it." He waves you inside. "Come on in, things are ready to set up."

He leads you through the lush reception room into the main part of the house. You feel strange, walking through the private parts of a home built in dwarf style, but then you realize that Gehret isn't a dwarf, and wouldn't follow the same cultural mandates.

The first room you see after the reception room is the main ballroom. Your breath catches at the sheer size and opulence of it. Richly polished wooden floors reflect the lights of hundreds of quartzes above, most of them cunningly mounted in a chandelier of gargantuan proportions. There are no works of art hanging from the walls, but from the mass of party paraphernalia in the corner, decorations will soon be taken care of.

"Everything needs to be ready by the eighteenth hour," he comments, indicating a candle that has just reached the quarter past twelfth hour mark.

"I have some people I need to talk to about things. You can get started here, and if anyone arrives delivering food or drink, please show them to the pantry, through that door there and down a bit. You can't miss it. The door to the pantry will be open." He indicates a pair of wooden doors to your left. "I will return in a few hours."

He claps his hands, rubs them together vigorously. "I'm so glad to have you helping. Please, feel free to decorate as festively as you choose. I'm off!" he suddenly shouts, and rushes out the ballroom to the outside.

He sure is, you think to yourselves, and begin to decide who does what.

Themes and Images

Give the impression that Gehret is now in his element, perhaps inspiring a bit of grudging respect in the heroes. He takes control of the situation with his trademark exuberance. Make certain the comedic aspects of this are not lost on the adventurers, either.

Behind the Scenes

The situation should be fairly straightforward. Gehret has put a lot of work into organizing tonight's festivities, and he wants everyone to have fun, even while in preparation. Therefore, encourage the player characters to be as resourceful as possible in the execution of their respective duties. Gehret himself has his own responsibilities, which means the characters are left to their own devices to get the job done.

Many talents and spells could be put to use in preparing for the evening's celebration, the most obvious examples of which follow: Gliding Stride, for hanging bunting and ribbon rosettes high up on the walls; Missile Weapons, for securing streamers to the ceiling; Claw Shape, for creating said streamers

from whole cloth or parchment; the Wizard spell Inventory, for making sure the supplies gathered in the pantry match the list of needed supplies provided by Gehret; etc.

Encourage inventiveness and cleverness, award the players for it with Legend Points, and be sure to count such uses of talents as successful for the purposes of increasing Rank. Of course, give out more Legend Points for particularly ingenious uses for talents and spells, if such arise. Illusionists are truly in their element here, and artisan skills may come into play.

Duties include: hanging decorations, making sure the pantry is stocked with everything on Gehret's list, preparing mixed beverages in advance, setting up the tables and delineating the dance floor, etc.

Gehret himself is off securing an ice sculpture for the main table, and when he returns, he will be pleased with whatever the adepts have accomplished (unless it is absolutely nothing). He will give suggestions as to what the adventurers could do next, but after a few hours, he will let them leave to clean up and prepare for tonight's celebration, at which they will be honored guests. Move to **The Engagement**.

Troubleshooting

If the characters have gotten this far, it is unlikely they'd refuse to help now. Still, it is a possibility, especially if they get overly concerned with the logic of this enterprise. They're heroes sung of in legend, so why should they be putting up pink and purple streamers? The answer to that is... well, why not? Logic should not be a big concern with this scenario. If it becomes so, something has gone wrong. In this instance, it would be best to scrap the whole thing and save it for another night when the characters are feeling a little less serious.



Another, less pressing problem is that the characters may have no ideas about party preparations and how they should be accomplished. Throw out a few suggestions based on their talents. Hopefully, things will snowball from there.

THE ENGAGEMENT

Overview

The party gets under way. Included in this section are possible encounters that can occur. If this is being used as a campaign drop-in, modify the text and situations based on how they were invited to the party.

Setting the Stage

From the sounds of music and laughter wafting up the street from Gehret's, the party must have begun in grand style. Once there, you find a motley group assembled. Name-givers of all stripes mix and mingle, partaking of the food and drink and enjoying themselves immensely.

Gehret notes your presence almost immediately and greets you effusively, introducing you by turns to the esteemed members of a local spellcaster enclave, famous Troubadours, the captain of a hach'var team, orks from the Bonesnapper tribe, and other colorful characters. Tonight will be... interesting...

Themes and Images

Encourage a carefree attitude. Gehret seems composed and in control, so the adventurers shouldn't worry for more than a moment, no matter what happens.

Behind the Scenes

There isn't much moving behind the action... aside from a few bumps, the party is going well. If a layout of the home is needed, one may be found on page 125 of the **Throal** sourcebook.

Below is a list of possible

encounters arranged in the following format:

The Scene: a brief description of the action the PCs see, designed to be read aloud. (similar to **Setting the Stage**). This text is surrounded by a box.

The Backstage: what's actually going on, or options for what's going on if there are several possible explanations (similar to **Behind the Scenes**).

Resolution: suggestions for how the situation could be dealt with (a combination of **Behind the Scenes** and **Troubleshooting**).

You can use as many or as few of the below situations as you wish, in any order, modify them however you wish, or devise your own. Keep in mind the comedic tone, though. None of these situations should involve serious fighting (but a few flying cakes are not out of the question).

Legend Points should be awarded based on involvement, appropriateness of actions taken, ingenuity and role-playing.

Encounter #1

A wizened dwarf woman in coarsely woven brown robes sits at a table, calling "A silver for your fate!" while displaying a yellowed deck of elven path cards.

The Backstage

At gamemaster's discretion, the dwarf woman could be a simple peasant with a touch of the Second Sight, a powerful psychic, a slightly psychotic (but harmless) bit of local color, or a manifestation of a Passion.

Resolution

The adventurers may be curious that a dwarf would have such a divination tool. The woman will explain that it was a gift, refusing to elaborate. At that point, they may either move on or have their fortunes read. It is helpful to have some visual props such as a deck of playing

cards, and to have at least some idea what fortunes to give to each character (which may be used to hint at later adventures, at gamemaster's discretion).

Encounter #2

Sounds of a minor scuffle draw your attention. In that direction, you spy a sparring match involving a t'skrang and an elf. Various other Name-givers clamor about the two, shouting encouragement and shaking bags of coins.

The Backstage

This is a friendly bout between the two combatants. Those well versed in martial arts (Warriors, Swordmasters, anyone in possession of a talent or skill ending in the word "combat" or "weapons") will realize that punches are being pulled. Only bruises will result from this tussle.

Resolution

The group could ignore this, keep an eye on it to make sure aggressions do not escalate, or actively involve themselves in betting. Odds are 4 to 3 against the elf (the elf is a Sixth Circle Warrior, the t'skrang is Eighth. The odds are a fraction of their Circles). If necessary, the gamemaster can create their exact statistics, Names, and legends.

Encounter #3

As you make your rounds, you pass by a female Troubadour, tuning her harp and brushing her long hair out of the way. She looks up, and her face brightens. She calls to you, "Greetings! Care to share some tales of the road?" She seems eager to hear what tales you have.

The Backstage

This Troubadour is Second Circle, and is looking for a few legends to write about. She thinks the group's adventures may just fit the bill.



Resolution

The adventurers may rebuff her, say that they aren't all that interested and graciously move on, or may sit and talk with her about their exploits. If they choose the latter course, within an hour their praises are being sung over the crowd. The first two alternatives may result (at gamemaster's discretion, and based on how diplomatically they acted) in a most vitriolic demonstration of the power of the pen over the sword, at the group's expense.

Encounter #4

Without warning, a hand grasps your arm firmly. "You want to dance?" a voice in your ear asks.

The Backstage

This encounter may be used more than once, with a variety of dancers. They can range from ugly, battle scarred elves to fair, delicate trolls and everything in between. At gamemaster's discretion, a prospective dance partner could be useful in a later adventure, or have a task for the group. This will require some extra work on the gamemaster's part.

Resolution

The adventurer could accept, in which case the pair dance for a while. This may lead to a friendship, a valuable contact, or a simple farewell. Refusals may have varied results, depending on how gracious the character was.

Encounter #5

Uh oh, something's wrong... you smell smoke. There are a trio of besotted orks along a wall, roasting a dripping haunch of meat over a burning chair.

The Backstage

These particular orks thought that the party was BYOB (Bring Your Own Beef), and have decided to cook theirs.

Resolution

This situation demands intervention by someone; if not by the adventurers, then someone else. Diplomacy and tact will be useful, lest the orks pass out while attempting to fight and vomit all over the combatant's boots.

Encounter #6

You pass by a table where an ork and an elf seem to be engaged in a drinking contest of some sort. Silver is piled up on the table, and both contestants eye it greedily as they knock back a flagon of drink. Once you have moved away, the ork calls out, "That's water! You're cheating!" in a slurred voice, followed by the rasping of many chairs.

The Backstage

The elf in question is an Elementalist looking to win this bet. Therefore, he is using the Purify Water spell to turn *hurlg* into clear drinking water. The ork, having already consumed five flagons of *hurlg*, has just noticed this. It could come to blows (of a most comical sort, of course).

Resolution

This also demands quick intervention of a diplomatic sort, lest it devolve into a food fight *a la* the Three Stooges (which, admittedly, has its own merits in this scenario). An excellent (and devilish) solution is to compel the elf to match the ork's current drink total, flagon for flagon, while all watch. The elf will pass out at the first sip.

Encounter #7

A thunderous slurred roar echoes over the crowd, "Lookie what I found!" Standing in front of a door with a smoldering lock is a troll in recently stained Wizard's robes, his face flushed with drink, holding aloft two huge casks of wine.

The Backstage

This should occur later in the party, when conversation lubrication is becoming scarce. This enterprising troll Wizard has just found the home's wine cellar, after shattering the lock to the dining area.

Resolution

This demands no immediate action. It does, however, have some impact on what comes later. The wine is of good quality.

Encounter #8

You note with some alarm that a few hach'var players have turned one wall of the ballroom into a ball court. As you watch, one of the balls is flung wildly out of bounds, bounces off a wall, and crashes into the crystal chandelier hanging over the center of the ballroom. Shards of crystal rain down on the floor below, and an ominous creaking and groaning signals the imminent fall of the monstrous fixture.

The Backstage

Oops...this should probably be the last major event before **The Aftermath**, the next section.

Resolution

Unfortunately, the chandelier will fall and shatter, and there is little anyone can do about that (aside from the Sky Lattice spell). However, there are some attendees standing frozen beneath the light, and the characters could move them away. Any attempt to prevent the chandelier from falling will only work for a short time. Inevitably, the person holding the rope will lose his grip, or the spell will expire, and the lamp will come down (unless the spell is extended with blood magic). Such an act may buy time for those moving people out from underneath it, though.

Once you have finished with the final major event, and the time seems appropriate, move to **The Aftermath**.



Troubleshooting

There is an awful lot that can go awry here, but nothing serious enough to derail the adventure: except for, perhaps, the wish of the adepts to leave early. Entice them to stay by having Gehret introduce them to Throalic luminaries and other important folks. A copy of the **Throal** sourcebook is particularly useful if this becomes the case, though it doesn't preclude the gamemaster from developing his own local celebrities.

Each encounter has its own set of problems as well, but possible fixes are suggested within the **Resolution** portion of each encounter, if

problems should arise.

THE AFTERMATH

Overview

Gehret learns that the owner of the mansion is on his way home, and urges everyone to start cleaning up.

Setting the Stage

At this pronouncement, your eyes rove over the ballroom. Smoke from the orks' cookfire hangs in the air, mingling with the scent of wine from the bottles that the troll dropped.

Dirty scuffs pepper the wall where the hach'var court was set up. Tables and chairs are strewn about, upended or broken. The floor is soiled by spilled food and drink. Torn paper streamers dangle from the ceiling. In the center of the room, there is a besotted human lying face-up in a puddle of ale, snoring gently. And the chandelier...

Silence smothers the room. Into it Gehret continues, "It would be much appreciated if you all would help me straighten up his place for him. Let's organize into teams!"

It has been a most fascinating evening thus far... at least, that's the kindest word you can come up with. It seems as if everything that can go wrong, has. Still, there is no sign of the party slowing down, even when a young dwarf quickly dashes through the crowd, causing one of the Bonesnapper orks to splash his flagon of hurlg over his patchwork mail coat. The ork's eyes narrow as he gazes at the dwarf's back; then, he breaks into gruff laughter, thrusting his drink above his head. The sudden motion causes the ork to topple over, barely missing a prominent businesswoman and her favorite consort, currently in conversation with a troll dressed in the rags of a mendicant.

The party is still going strong when Gehret suddenly commands the attention of all present and upright. "I have an announcement to make," he calls. "Hraba Deneb is on his way, and I would ask all those well skilled in janitorial arts to step forward, so we can clean up this place before he arrives." Standing next to Gehret is the young dwarf who caused the ork to spill his drink.





His face is flushed, and he pants with exertion. Gehret himself is as composed and chipper as ever.

From the crowd comes a single question, "Who is Hraba Deneb?"

Gehret grins sheepishly. "Oh, I forgot to mention that. He owns this house."

Themes and Images

Gehret's composure is a jarring counterpoint to the pandemonium that erupts when drunken partygoers either attempt to clean up their messes, or refuse and leave. Nothing seems to ruffle the questor, though. He feels that everything will come out all right in the end, and that he has done nothing wrong. Emphasize this contrast for its comedic effect.

Behind the Scenes

The other shoe has now dropped. Hraba has returned home early, and is currently visiting a business associate before arriving at his home. The dwarf who brought Gehret the message figures that one hour remains before Hraba walks through the front door. Looking about the ballroom and the dining hall, it seems only a miracle will pull this place together in that time. It's a good thing the adventurers are here...

For his part, Gehret feels that he has done nothing wrong, since Hraba said to "treat my home as your home" when he asked Gehret to housesit. Hraba also gave him some silver, and Gehret thought that it was a gift and a mandate from Floranus to throw this party. Hraba did not realize this, of course. He expects to come home to a house in one piece (or a reasonable facsimile). No matter how bad the situation looks, Gehret remains cheerful and upbeat, to the annoyance of all present (with little doubt).

This party was, in fact, a Zealous Act of Devotion to Floranus. If you opt to use Gehret in the future, keep this in mind.

There are several actions the adventurers may take. They may wash their hands of the entire situation and leave. That is, of course, their prerogative, but a rather saucy tale may later circulate about the only terror that would cause the heroes to retreat: the anger of a dwarf merchant.

If they choose to help with the cleanup, they may again opt to use their talents creatively. A few spells, such as the Second Circle Wizard spell Clean and the Third Circle Elementalist spell Repair are obviously helpful in this situation, but others may also be useful. A few of the mages attending the party will have these spells if the heroes don't. They'll just need someone to hold the pieces steady, since they can't see straight right now.

Inebriated attempts at actions will naturally take a negative modifier, depending on how inebriated the character or NPC is. The exact modifier is left to gamemaster's discretion. The result of this whole operation will end up one of two ways: the place is cleaned up in time, or Hraba walks in on a suddenly guilty-looking assemblage of sweepers and dusters. Either has much comic potential. Play it for all it's worth.

Troubleshooting

There shouldn't be much difficulty. The ending is extremely variable, and almost any ending counts as a successful completion (provided the players don't wash their hands of the situation entirely). If it looks like this is the case, make sure they note that the Second Circle Troubadour from earlier in the evening is watching them, and her extemporaneous tale was pretty well on the mark.

LOOSE ENDS

After the Adventure

How all this ends depends greatly on how the characters decide to deal with Gehret, and in what condition Hraba found his house on his return. Of course, if the place was still a mess, the cat is out of the bag. If, however, a miracle did occur and the place was put back together, the group has a choice: do they turn Gehret in, or do they keep quiet? Either way, Gehret is not ashamed of what he did. He will not tell Hraba of the party, but neither will he try to deny it if it should happen to come out.

If Hraba finds out about the party, though, he is liable to go into apoplexy. He will also lose some respect for the characters, since they

Creative Roleplay and Heroics

The gamemaster is given a lot of leeway in awarding Legend Points for these types of actions in this scenario. However, it is helpful to use the guidelines below, modifying the award to suit the degree of cleverness of the action taken:

Ingenious uses of talents during party preparations	25-50 for each use
Satisfactory resolution of party encounters	25-50 each
Clever uses of abilities in cleaning up	25-50 each

Also award characters Legend Points for taking any of the following actions:

Accepting Gehret's request for help	25 pts. each player
Not haggling the fee upward	25 pts. each player



were quite obviously accomplices. If they do not inform Hraba of the feast, the merchant will assume that all is well, and will be gratified to meet such illustrious heroes.

Later, as news of the celebration spreads, Hraba may find that his position among Throalic society rising, both socially and later economically. Many of the attendees of the party were members of Throal's high society, and may look favorably on Hraba after discovering he wasn't as uptight as they thought. A small scene, inserted in a later adventure, where Hraba is forced to eat crow and apologize to Gehret for his anger, may be something the group can be privy to (especially if the merchant lost his temper with them, as well).

Awarding Legend Points

The Adventure Award for successful completion of **Gypsies in the Palace** is 300 Legend Points (or 200 if only a portion of **Gypsies** is used as a drop-in).

Defeating Creatures

There are no creatures or opponents in this scenario.

Treasure

The characters gain no treasure in this adventure.

Total Legend Award

Due to the free-form nature of this adventure, and the fact that the gamemaster is given a lot of latitude in determining individual Legend Awards for actions taken, the average total Legend Award is hard to determine. However, successful completion of this adventure should net a single player no less than 300 Legend Points and no more than 1000.

Cast of Characters

Included below are statistics for Gehret and Hraba, the two characters given the most emphasis in this scenario. There are other characters in this scenario, and a few sample NPCs are included below. However, it is left up to the gamemaster to determine their exact statistics, characteristics, and personality to suit his campaign.

Gehret Carulli

As a child, Gehret was cheerful and exuberant, throwing himself into all he did with amazing energy and determination. Some thought he might be an adept, and all but Gehret himself were disappointed when he found out he had no aptitude for any Discipline. Gehret heard a different call, and found his vocation as a questor of Floranuus.

The trials of growing up have had little appreciable effect on his natural geniality, except to make his efforts to bring good cheer a little more organized and thoughtful. He prefers clothes of eye-searing hues, though for all their brightness, colors are matched pretty well. His hair is generally somewhat tousled, and is a coppery brown in color. Combined with his sky-blue eyes and dazzling smile, he cuts quite a figure. He is a Rank 3 questor of Floranuus.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 5
PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Skills and Powers

Artisan (Embroidery) 1, Floranuus Questor 3. Questor powers (Inspire Stamina, Increase Speed, and Speed Ships) have the same rank as the Questor talent (Earthdawn Companion, p. 89).

Hraba Deneb

Truly a self-made dwarf, Hraba worked up to the position he holds today, that of a well respected, though struggling, merchant. Of late, many little things have gone wrong in his operation, which led to Hraba investing more of his assets in setting things straight. To do this, he has had to sell off some of his belongings and let his servants go, but things seem to be turning around for him.

About a month ago, Hraba decided to visit an elderly uncle outside of Throal, to ask for the gentleman's astute advice on a business matter, and not coincidentally to oversee some business dealings nearby. He was not sure how to deal with the house, though. When Gehret arrived to see him off, Hraba saw an inexpensive way to make sure his home was taken care of. He quickly handed the human a small sum of silver (small considering the wages of a full staff of servants and guards for several months, that is), and urged Gehret to treat the place as his own, never realizing the full import of those words to the new house sitter. Hraba is a tense, brooding dwarf, due mostly to his plunge in fortunes of the last few months. Normally, he is placid and thoughtful, and his actions tend to be deliberate and well considered. He has returned home a month ahead of schedule due to movement on a new deal, and stopped at his business associate's house to discuss the deal before returning home.

He is of average frame and height for a dwarf, with a droopy black moustache and no beard. He has a tendency to wear circular caps with no brims.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 5

Skills

Conversation 1 (6), Etiquette 1 (6), Haggle 2 (7), Trading 4 (9)



Teliskan Rebensal, dwarf hach'var player

Very taken up with 'running the show', it is he that organizes the impromptu hach'var game. He is very outgoing and domineering, and does not brook any challenge to his authority.

Attributes

**DEX: 5 STR: 6 TOU: 6
PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 4**

Skills

Hach'var 4 (9), Unarmed Combat 4 (9)

Sujatha Viveros, human songstress

Sujatha is a free-spirited soul, and refuses to worry about how others think of her. She has a reputation as a troublemaker, because she tends to resist authority if it interferes with her freedom, or that of others.

Attributes

**DEX: 5 STR: 4 TOU: 4
PER: 5 WIL: 7 CHA: 6**

Skills

Artist 4 (10), Conversation 2 (8), Etiquette 2 (8)

Jarnsaxa Windless, elf businesswoman

Jarnsaxa tends to take what she does seriously, and no matter how relaxed she looks, she is here to further her goals. She tends to place heavy burdens on herself as a result. Still, she has an impulsive side.

Attributes

**DEX: 4 STR: 4 TOU: 4
PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 5**

Skills

Etiquette 3 (9), Trading 5 (10)

Gulvas Darmofal, troll blacksmith

Gulvas is not the type to seek out confrontation, but some feel as though he takes too many risks in dealing with his business. Even those who feel he is foolhardy, however, admit some risks he took in the past seemed quite shrewdly assessed. He has a fascination with gambling.

Attributes

**DEX: 5 STR: 7 TOU: 7
PER: 5 WIL: 4 CHA: 4**

Skills

Artist 1 (5), Craftsman 4 (9), Haggle 1 (5), Trading 2 (6)



ARTICLE

THE KAAG ACADEMY FOR TALENTED NAME-GIVERS

by William Hohl

Deep in the jungles of Cara Fahd....

Deep in the jungles of Cara Fahd lies a newly constructed group of buildings. Most of these buildings are of modest construction, made from the jungle trees that were cleared to make room. More construction is going on as you watch. One of these is set in a more prominent position and is larger than the others. In front of this one is a statue of a female ork. The inscription on the statue's foundation reads *From the Gahad for Knowledge Comes the Soul of Cara Fahd*. In the big building is a great hall, and on the walls are portraits. There are a number of orks among them, in particular the woman of the statue, but other Name-givers are represented as well. Some of the paintings seem familiar, as the subjects painted are adepts of moderate to high Circle.

While you are looking at the pictures, a male Cathayan human and a female ork approach you. He glances at the portrait and says,

"She is Sika Kaag, the founder of this academy. My name is Mingbai. This is Casta Firebrand, her first apprentice. May I help you? Or shall I start with telling you the tale of this place?"

"First, all of the portraits here are of people who have aided in the training of adepts and half-adepts. One of the things that Lady Sika saw this land needed was a center to train

else in Barsaive is there a school for all adepts in one place. Here, an adept group can come and train together.

"We have resident here representatives of most of the Disciplines -- even a Shaman.. Anyone who wants to be trained can come here and request training. Giving training is up to the teacher as it would be anywhere else. What

we require for training is either standard training costs or your services in training others for a period of time. We have many... shall we say traditional?... adepts as well as the newer, younger expressions of the Disciplines. This younger generation doesn't seem to want to do things the same as we

have done for generations."

At this point Casta, who has been quiet till now, speaks up. "The way you have done for generations? You mean the way the Therans taught us



acknowledged adepts and discover potential adepts. Certainly, there are schools to train certain Disciplines; in fact, Sika herself came from a Swordmaster school. But nowhere



that Disciplines should be? Or the way the Throalics continue to teach? I am an ork of Cara Fahd! I choose to cast off the shackles of those thoughts as well! Those adepts who want to follow the old ways because that is the way they know are fine to do things their way, but we are the future! Just like we created the way of the scorcher after emerging from the kaers, orks are re-creating the ways of the Disciplines!"

Mingbai puts his hand on Casta's shoulder and says, "Easy, young one. You are scaring the visitor. Putting the Theran view of Disciplines behind will be good for Barsaive. As for this school, we try to be open to all learning. One of our staff members is a Questor of Mynbruje, or here I should say a Questor of Mikbruug. She is trying to amass the knowledge of all the adepts and half-adepts. I wish her luck.

"Feel free to look around, just stay away from that low building over there. It is mostly built into the ground and covered with lots of earth. That is where the spellcasters experiment and practice." You notice Mingbai shudder.

GAME INFORMATION

The grounds of the academy are made of a number of buildings with more being built. There is an archery

range, cavalry grounds, study halls, library, and of course a forge. Any necessary buildings are in existence or being built.

Some of the notables here at the academy include:

- **Mingbai**, from Cathay, a Twelfth Circle Swordmaster and Twelfth Circle Warrior. He is in effect the leader of the academy, though he would not like the designation.

- **Morvani Si'kander**, a Tenth Circle Beastmaster and Seventh Circle Wizard. She is the consort of Mingbai and rumored to be a powerful Lightbearer.

- **Grellig Zhor**, a Ninth Circle Weaponsmith.

- **Kali Ice-eye**, an old ork woman with a blind eye, Eighth Circle Nethermancer and Seventh Circle Wizard. She has little patience with slackers.

- **Porscht**, a windling Thief, Seventh Circle. Kali keeps him in line.

- **Casta Firebrand**, a Swordmaster, Ninth Circle. She is passionate about the new ways.

- **Sika Kaag**, one of the Rangers of Cara Fahd, an adventuring group. She is an ork Swordmaster of the Tenth Circle and a Cavalryman of the Sixth Circle. Legend has it that she learned the Cavalryman Discipline

from the Namdroth overnight and has trained with the great Charok Redhand.

- **Teqil El-Adrel**, a human from Creana. He is an Explorer Scout of the Tenth Circle and a Liberator of the Fourth Circle. Yes, a human Liberator, touched by Lochost, if the legends are true. He is also a Ranger of Cara Fahd.

- **Imloch Viare**, an elf Nethermancer of the Thirteenth Circle. He is the third Ranger of Cara Fahd and one of the most lethal individuals you are likely to ever meet. He is likely to kill you, and then speak with your spirit to ask why you annoyed him. Beware!

- **Tarantor Kalebson**, human, an Eighth Circle Shaman and First Circle Beastmaster. Lately he has been adventuring in the Twilight Peaks with a human Swordmaster and a windling Wind Dancer.

There are also a varying number of other people around. Some are here for training. Some are here doing the training as repayment. There could even be some young people who are not yet adepts, but hope they will be. This location is designed to be dynamic with people coming and going.



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THE LAST LAUGH

by Peter Lydall

Adventuring alone isn't always a good idea...

Soft leather riding boots stepped lithely over the desiccated bones. It must have been at least five hundred years since fresh blood had flowed in veins surrounding the lifeless husk, now of little use to anyone save a Nethermancer.

Atakor smiled.

Pausing for no more than a second to examine the skeleton, the tall human extended back to his full height, pulling out a finely crafted piece of crystal from the recesses of his travelling robe. Light from the setting sun, through the doorway he had just entered, barely illuminated the dark tunnel ahead, but the incandescent light of the crystal provided a slightly better picture.

From outside Atakor could hear Amy whinny.

"Relax girl, I'll be there in a minute," he responded, then to himself, "This is most intriguing."

Clearly no one had walked down this passage in a very long time. Another few days would not hurt. Besides which, in a few hours he was due to meet with a group of friends whom he had not seen in a very long time. Exploration of the kaer could be handled by those who still yearned for adventure. Still, standing there reminded him of days long gone, days when he and his companions would not have hesitated to head intrepidly down that dark corridor to face the unknown. Resisting the temptation now was somewhat easier, the taste of anticipation a mere shadow of what it once was.

Interrupting his thoughts, and taking Atakor by surprise, came a low rumbling noise, drowning out the sounds from his horse that he

had, until then, been ignoring. Atakor whipped around, and stared at the closing door for a brief second. The realization of what was happening infused him with a sudden sense of urgency and he leapt towards the rapidly shrinking exit. Why it should be closing now was quite beyond him, but that question could be answered later.

Perhaps it was his haste, or possibly the tricks the shadows played on his eyes, but in what would under any other circumstances have been a comic blunder, he caught his foot on the arm of the skeleton. Slowly, inexorably, he felt himself falling towards the earth. In a desperate effort, he held onto his light crystal. It bit deeply into his flesh as his hands impacted the cold stone floor. Right now he considered this a small sacrifice in preventing it from being smashed.

The entrance, however, was vanishing fast, and Atakor knew he could not get there in time now. Still, a small piece of initiative in the succeeding seconds might well save him considerable trouble later. He could see a fist-sized rock right next to the doorway, and as he scrambled toward the receding portal, he shoved it into the gap. There was a terrible grinding sound, and though he was almost certain the obstruction would be crushed to powder, he closed his eyes, offering a quick utterance to Floranuus. Miraculously, the huge stone mechanism ground to a halt, leaving a gap of a few inches through which Atakor could see the fading light outside. Atakor was thankful for at least that small piece of fortune. Even a spirit would have had

difficulty escaping from a magically sealed kaer.

To waste time relaxing now would be foolish. Atakor was fully aware of that. Wincing at the pain coming from his left hand, he used his right to brush aside the greying hair that had fallen across his face. Gazing once again down the tunnel, the Nethermancer began to concentrate, this time not focusing on the objects dimly illumined by the light crystal he still held gingerly in his lacerated hand. His dark blue eyes seemed to flash for barely an instant as they pierced through the reality of the waking world, and beyond.

To simply refer to the plane as Astral was to demonstrate an ignorance of its true nature. It is a place well known to any Nethermancer, beautiful yet dark, dangerous yet compelling. It holds secrets and creatures that few are able to appreciate. Creatures living right on our doorstep, yet separated by a magical chasm - a chasm bridged far too easily for those who know how.

He closed his eyes, offering a quick utterance to Floranuus

It took but one glance into the mystical plane to confirm Atakor's worst suspicions. The twisted and polluted astral energies that he could see revulsed him and presented all the proof he needed that he was indeed trapped in this prison. Despite the fact that they seemed to inhabit it, Horrors are no more part of the astral plane than they are of the physical. Very little doubt



existed in Atakor's mind now as to whether the closing of the door had been a coincidence. As the realization crawled up his spine, so too did a sense of dread. Repressing the urge to run, Atakor forcibly calmed himself. He concentrated on his breathing, taking one breath at a time, tasting the dry, earthy air that only an Elementalist could truly appreciate. Atakor grimaced and spat onto the floor. He appreciated nothing about his situation.

He cast his mind back to a time when an event such as this would have held a certain appeal, been a challenge. The Shards had been more than just travelling companions, more than friends even. He clutched at the pendant hanging from the delicate orichalcum chain around his neck. It was as it had been when they had first found the stone, a perfect diamond, smashed into five pieces, each identical, beautiful in their symmetry and absolute perfection, a

the same spot as he had sliced using the gem fragment so long ago. A small wound necessary to create a bond that went beyond time and distance. He was, and always would be, connected to the Shards. He clenched his fist, watching as a single drop of blood fell to the floor.

As long as he kept his wits about him, he may yet live to tell the tale, and rid the world of yet another relic of a tortured history.

Snapping out of his reverie, Atakor began hastily to move his hands in the well-practiced gestures necessary to weave a pattern out of the magical energies permeating this world. It had been a long time since he had been required to recall these patterns, but it all came back to him as if it had been mere days. A fine mist began to form around him and he was aware that the spirit would offer protection -- at least from physical attack. Somehow the comfort seemed small to Atakor

The sight of a kaer never ceased to amaze Atakor. The genius of his ancestors, the skill of those artisans from all eight Name-giver races, who, almost a thousand years ago, had foreseen the coming disaster, and made contingency plans to ensure that their progeny could endure. They were a People who now existed only in the memories of their descendants, and in the Spirit world.

Atakor knew that no one from this kaer could possibly have survived that which must have occurred. They had died, trapped in a cage of their own making. Ironically at the hands of a creature it was designed to keep out. Perhaps they were still here, their spirits trapped forever, tormented by something that felt no satisfaction, except in the suffering of sentient beings.

It was this thought more than anything else that chilled Atakor to the bone. Death itself holds little fear for a practitioner of the nethermantic



arts, but when facing a Horror, death is not guaranteed to end one's suffering. It had been a long time since Atakor had truly felt fear, a terror that grips the heart in a clutch of cold steel, yet at that moment, as he stood there, that was all that he could do. How ironic -- this was the sort of reaction he was used to eliciting from other Name-

reflection of what they had been.

They had defeated powerful Horrors in the past and lived to tell the tale, becoming legends in their time. In his time.

Atakor looked again at the drying blood on his hand. The wound was deep, perfectly superimposed over

and the additional enchantments he proceeded to cast in order to protect himself did not make him feel significantly better about the trial he was certain lay ahead.

With a grim sense of determination, he headed into the fading gloom.

givers.

Horrors feed on fear. Atakor knew this and purposefully hardened his resolve. He was not going to allow the abomination the pleasure of feeding off his fear. It would have to fight for it, and he would sooner die than give it away.



So he stood there, attempting to compose himself, his steely resolve slowly forcing the fear back into the recesses of his consciousness. He was aware of its presence. He could sense it within a hundred yards of him, though he could not tell where. It was stalking him, watching from the shadows -- like a cat -- waiting.

The fear was less now. He was a Nethermancer. He understood fear and was its master. Fear held no power over him. He would defeat the Horror, as he had many others in the past.

Atakor began once again to draw upon his magical power. He slowly traced a circle around himself, on the floor, and as he finished it, it began to glow with a faint yellow light. To be a Nethermancer means having an understanding of the denizens that inhabit the world bordering our own. Without that knowledge Atakor knew he would have been doomed. Perhaps his opponent had underestimated him.

With the completion of the ritual he began to straighten once again, preparing to scan his surroundings for his hunter. He stopped short as his eyes reached level. It had come to him, snuck up silently, and was standing watching him from no more than twenty yards away.

Atakor could not see its features in the dim light, and for that he was thankful. It did not appear to be any larger than a human. Not that it made much of a difference. A Horror does not need size to possess powerful magic. Its shape was definitely not human though -- it was hideously deformed, a corruption of life, with arms that appeared to be more tentacle than limb, and no distinguishable legs. Oddly it was not moving at all.

Atakor cleared his throat audibly: "Haven't you heard yet? The Scourge is over."

His voice was clear and ice cold. Against any Name-giver, that taunt would have all but paralyzed his target, yet the Horror showed

absolutely no sign of being fazed in any way; it simply remained as it was, motionless, except for the slow rhythmic movements of the appendages at its side. It seemed to be contemplating him, measuring him, waiting. Waiting for what?

Atakor shifted uneasily, trying desperately to come up with a strategy that might help him. With just a small amount of concentration he activated the blood charm he kept planted in his chest in case of just such an occurrence. A tiny piece of his life force had been invested in the small fragment of crystal, and now it was being used to feed a protective barrier against the thing standing opposite him: a barrier imperceptible to all, save he whose life force was powering it.

The Horror replied in a voice that sounded unlike anything Atakor had heard before. It took him a moment to realize that the voice was coming from inside his head. Mocking and confident, it created in him a sense of loathing unlike anything he had experienced before.

"I know. Now my prey comes to me, instead of me having to pry it out of a little hole."

Without waiting for a reply, it moved with the speed of a striking serpent, breaking through the circle as a thundra beast would through a picket fence. Before Atakor even had a chance to react he was assaulted by a series of blows. Had it not been for his protective enchantments, Atakor suspected his head would by then have been another trophy adorning the lair of this diabolical manifestation. Despite his wards though, a single blow succeeded in landing on his chest, knocking him cleanly off his feet, tossing him to the floor like a discarded rag doll. The tentacle had been aimed at his heart. Not for the first time in his life, Atakor reaffirmed his belief that wearing a suit of magical chain mail beneath his robes was worth the discomfort.

Gingerly picking himself up off

the rough-hewn surface, the mage reached for a small pouch at his belt with his left hand and began weaving what he knew to be his most powerful attack spell. The Horror did not seem to be overly concerned, content merely to watch him as he straightened up, preparing for a fresh assault. Its tentacles still were wavering and this time Atakor could see its eyes, pools of black from which nothing escaped; eyes which stirred within him a memory from a previous chapter in his life.

"I know. Now my prey comes to me, instead of me having to pry it out of a little hole."

There was a time when it was he who hunted the like of what stood before him. The Shards had devoted a portion of their lives to destroying the taint that still infested the world. Had he encountered this creature before?

He had no time for this conjecture now. All his concentration was needed for the spell he was weaving. Thinking of the past would almost certainly get him killed. His opponent had made the mistake of giving him respite, and he was determined not to let the opportunity slip. His mind remained focused on the task at hand.

He tied off one of the threads, and began to weave the second, a sense of desperate hope and urgency growing inside him as the threads of magical energy began to coalesce, forming a pattern of their own, a pattern that was his only hope. Atakor could taste the blood in his mouth, and feel the throb from his hand, which had started to bleed again from his fall. Another tool to seal this Horror's fate. Powering magic with one's own life energy had its risks, but the effect was worth the price.

Without warning the fiend moved again. This time it wrapped tentacles around his throat and began to channel its twisted magic into him.



Pain exploded all over Atakor as he felt his very skin begin to move tearing itself from his muscles and moving at will -- the will of the Horror in front of him. The pain almost caused him to pass out. It felt as though all of his skin had been torn from his flesh, reattached, and then torn away again. It was all he could do just to stand, yet Atakor knew that if he gave in now he was done for. Using his last reserves of will, he completed the weaving of his spell, and with his last strength crushed the bone fragments he had secured in his bleeding hand, the sound of snapping bones greeting his ears just as his vision turned black.

Death itself holds little fear for a practitioner of the nethermantic arts, but when facing a Horror, death is not guaranteed to end one's suffering.

Atakor opened his eyes. Slowly he began to examine his surroundings. The pain from his flesh was still overwhelming, yet if he did not move it almost seemed to subside for a second. His breathing was labored. Surely that blow to the chest had broken his breastbone. He did not even want to know what he looked like. But that did not matter. He was alive. That could only mean he had defeated the Horror. In his last moments before losing consciousness, his spell must have succeeded. He sat upright, and released a stifled cry from the pain it caused him.

A few yards to his right lay a crumpled form that he assumed could only be the remains of the Horror he had just defeated. Slowly he reached into his robe to pull out a small vial that seemed to have survived the encounter. The fact that his pocket was damp indicated that a second identical one had not.

He removed the stopper, with fingers that seemed to have no skin left at all, and drank the contents in

a single gulp. The effect was almost immediate. Heat radiated from his stomach until it touched his entire body, an effect that seemed to last an eternity, yet which he knew was only a few seconds.

The potion had definitely helped, but Atakor knew that it was a far cry from the kind of medical attention he would need, and he was certainly not in any condition to be leaving this place on his own, let alone find out how to open that door. Fortunately he had managed to ensure that there was an exit to the kaer, one which, although he could not get out of, a spirit would have no problem with. He chuckled softly at how ironic it would have been had he survived the Horror, only to be killed by the kaer.

The spell he would use was not difficult even in his current condition. He knew that it would reach Elric, who was in Travar, not ten miles from his current location. In fact Elric would probably be wondering where he was. All five of the Shards were due to be meeting in the Lifted Veil Inn this evening.

Funny it was to think that it had been three years since they had officially retired from adventuring but he would never have predicted their meeting under these conditions. Atakor could not help but appreciate how appropriate it was. It would be just like old times again.

He cut his reminiscence short to complete the message, detailing his location, as well as the events that had transpired. With its completion, he lay back, wincing in pain, and tried to concentrate on not feeling the burning pain, which was still very much real.

As he lay in the silence, he became dimly aware of a noise in the distance. It sounded almost like the door being opened, yet that seemed odd, for it had been only a few minutes since he had sent his message. Atakor sat bolt upright, this time ignoring his pain completely. The shattered body of the Horror

was gone, and in its stead stood a shadowy form.

With the light of the crystal next to him, he could make out the form -- not the beast he thought had just slain, but a form that unlocked the memory that had been nagging at his consciousness since the encounter had begun. They had always known it was skilled in the ways of Illusion magic, yet in every encounter it had been unable, or unwilling, to change one feature -- its eyes. Pitch black eyes. Eyes that seemed to have the ability to suck out one's soul. Eyes whose owner had been destroyed many years ago.

Atakor believed that what he was seeing was impossible, but the evidence before him betrayed any confidence he may have had deep down inside of himself.

"You have served me well Atakor." The voice was familiar, as if he had last heard it yesterday -- a world shattering confirmation that Atakor was correct. How could he not have known those eyes earlier?

"But I thought we had destroyed you." Atakor's voice was trembling, now, no semblance of self-control remaining.

The Horror simply let out a subtle, evil laugh of pure malice, and moved towards him.

Atakor began to scream.