

Book of Tomorrow #3



The EDPT's Earthdawn Fanzine

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BOOK OF TOMORROW

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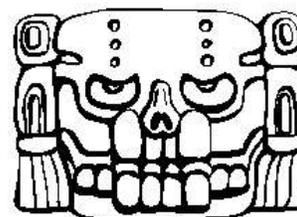
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If you are one of the Earthdawn fans who has been wondering when the next issue of the Book of Tomorrow fanzine would be released, you may remember a rather bold editorial prognostication in our last issue. Confident that we had learned how to produce a fan-driven publication like BoT on a quarterly basis, we confidently predicted that it would not become an annual fanzine.

Well, here it is, roughly a year later, and our third issue is just now coming together. So what happened? For the most part, production was held up by real-life circumstances that our principal contributors simply could not avoid. In the end, it was the sheer willpower of Attila Hatvágner, one of the main engines of growth at the EPDT, that forced this issue into existence. Given the considerable constraints of working with Microsoft Word as a layout application, we think he did a pretty phenomenal job. We would also like to extend our congratulations to Sade, whose submissions was selected as the feature of this issue. (Ok, it isn't really a feature, but we think she deserves it for the art she provided.) She will receive a free Earthdawn publication for her effort.

So what now, you ask? The one thing we certainly are not going to do is offer another forecast—we've learned that lesson already.

We hope to be able to continue to count on the support of fans like you as we go forward. (And we **do** intend to go forward. A recent poll of our membership indicated that more than 90% of respondents feel that we should keep publishing.) But clearly, **something** needs to be done to make the EDPT more timely and relevant to the fans. With that in mind, the core members have been looking at ways to make our publications— and our Web site in particular— more efficient. One of the current proposals is to publish BoT as a Web-only publication on a quarterly basis, with an annual round-up of the best articles made into a single PDF file. To this end, we have started looking into database-driven solutions that will make the EDPT site more dynamic.

Of course, if these efforts are to succeed, we need all the support we can get! The EDPT gratefully accepts submissions of new creatures, Disciplines, adventures, secret societies, magical items, locations, short fiction... in short, just about any kind of fan-produced Earthdawn material. There's really only one stipulation: accept the terms of the EDPT Open-Content License.

Publication on the EPDT website (and possibly a future issue of the Book of Tomorrow) isn't the only benefit of submitting to us. You also get the benefit of an editorial staff with several years experience of both web and print-based publishing to help refine your submission for that truly professional look. The editors also have several years of experience with Earthdawn, and have a solid feel for the game and how it works. They offer their services for free, so why not take advantage of it? Send your submissions today!

After all, if we don't get anything to publish, there's not much reason to go on, is there?

The Not-Quite-Nostradamus Department

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EARTHDAWN ABBREVIATED

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 | Parlath 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 | Parlath Box |
| PxG | Parlath Gamemaster's Guide (first part of the book) |
| PxR | Ruins of Parlath (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 |

THE TOWN OF FARRAM: MORE THAN IT SEEMS

by Attila Hatvagner, with Chris Perkett and Kathleen E. Czechkowski

The History of Farram

-From the secret writings of Labala Vushisti, of the niall Vushisti

„These old bones of mine still remember, through the mothers that came before me, a time before the Scourge, before the Orichalcum Wars and the coming of the hated Therans, to a time when there was only one *aropagoi*, one House, one children of Shivoam. Then, just as our victory over the Beloved of Jaspree was truly completed, came the *t'llian*, the Sundering of Shivoam's children. As if cursed, families broke apart and sought smaller and smaller unions until all of us were alone on the river.

Then came the re-emergence of the *nialls* and *aropagoi*. Here on the Iontos, the great *nialls* formed the House Vri'ouros, of the House of Three Snakes. Its name was born from a legend, which I tell to you now.

After the time of battle, the t'skrang of the Serpent emerged victorious in the war against the elves. Sadly, triumph was not followed with peace. Cracks appeared in the

House's unity, frictions that even the Prophetess could not, or did not, want to heal. Small skirmishes over the gifts of Upandal, over newly gained regions, over the prizes of the war, soon evolved into battles. Influence and power were easy to attain, and hard to give up, for some. Soon, new warships appeared on the river. These were soon followed by small fleets of tiny paper boats, carrying the ashes of the dead from the battles.

In a small and hidden bight, dozens of small boats were anchored to a makeshift dock, the remnants of three nialls. The labala gazed over the once-proud craft, now smoke-blackened and thick with the coppery stench of blood. Had she tears, she would have wept, but heat from the fire cannons had scoured all moisture from her eyes. She squeezed them shut.

Gradually, she became aware that she was no longer standing on a dock in the midst of her niall's derelict boats. The sharp scent of warm earth and grass filled her nostrils, driving out the foul odors of battle. She inhaled deeply, and slowly opened her eyes.

She stood on a wide, grassy plain, the blades shifting in waves like green water. Above, the stars wheeled in their silent parade. She watched them, first in peaceful contemplation, then in

awe as groups of stars gained in brilliance. The plain, at first silent, filled with the sound of whispering voices, converging on her from all directions.

Her gaze was drawn finally to Thystonius, Jaspree, and Upandal, whose stars shone so brightly, they seemed to pour liquid fire onto the wildly dancing sawgrass. Ropes of dazzling flame coalesced in the center of the starshine, forming three serpentine shapes.

The first form slithered out of the light from Thystonius, spreading its hood. In a sibilant voice, it spoke. „Enemies surround you, drawn by the scent of weakness. Build your armies, your fleets, in secret. When the time comes, strike swiftly, unexpectedly.” With these words, the cobra passed behind the labala, melting into the Tylon River.

The second snake slid forward from Jaspree, its red, yellow, and black scales shimmering like jewels. „You have been driven from your lands, your home. You shall find a new home, where we three meet.” Passing behind the labala, the coral snake dove into the Iontos River.

The final messenger emerged from Upandal's light. „Armies gathered in secret and fertile lands will not be enough. You must build alliances, to form a strong foundation for your

house.” *With that, the grass snake vanished into the Serpent.*

The labala woke, and following this vision, led her people to the convergence of the three rivers. There, our House was founded.

Of course those, who learned this story long time ago knows, that the original story featured Rashomon, now Raggok instead of Upandal. Who knows, maybe the Mad Passion still has influence on the town, it would explain much about the muddled politics of Farram.”

Before the Scourge, Farram was a major factor in trade on the Serpent. It was the central settlement of the Three Snakes *aropagoi*, which controlled the trade of the Iontos River. The rich farmlands of the area now known as Badlands represented a big market, and the t’skrang of the river didn’t hesitate to exploit their monopoly over Iontos river trade. Inevitably, the small but ambitious *aropagoi* become a rival of House K’tenshin, House T’kambras, and to some small extent, of the Kingdom of Scavia. Their initially successful expansion was due in large part to their unusual cooperation with the outlying non-t’skrang farmers – most of the settlements along the Iontos River exclusively used the ships of the *aropagoi* for long-range trade in exchange for lower prices and bilateral defense pacts (which guaranteed that the *aropagoi* would protect the settlements from the occasional pirate attacks). The Scavians, who sought to divide the t’skrang

Houses, supported the smaller House of Three Snakes over its larger neighbor, House K’tenshin.

In the long run, however, with the coming of the Theran Empire, the K’tenshin influence become stronger and stronger, and ultimately the Three Snakes *aropagoi* chose to submit to the larger House rather than suffer the fate of House T’kambras. Vri’ouros became one of K’tenshin’s vassal states, and slowly began to become absorbed into its growing territory. The Shivalahala of Vri’ouros reportedly took the pilgrimage route after ceding authority to the Shivalahala K’tenshin; she was never heard from again. While some discontented muttered about foul play, no investigation was ever made. That loss signaled the end of the *aropagoi* Vri’ouros.

Joining K’tenshin proved good for business, and Farram grew considerably. The opened markets allowed Farram to become an even greater marketplace. That prosperity permitted the residents of the city to begin their kaer’s construction early, ultimately sealing their doors on 1023 TH. One of the major concerns of the ruling council in Farram was the topic of Horrors breaching the kaer. By that time, intelligent Horrors had been reported throughout Barsaive and the citizens of Farram wanted to be sure they left no trace or clue as to where Kaer Farram could be found. To ensure this, they destroyed their

city before they entered the kaer. The t’skrang, with their own method for surviving the Scourge, continued to trade and fish near the ruins of Farram for more than twenty years, slowly removing all remaining traces that one stone had ever sat on top of another in a place called Farram. Despite these efforts, the town was mentioned in the maps of Book of Tomorrow, although with a misspelled name. Ever since then, visitors, especially from the northern areas keep looking for a town called Fallam, which often results in practical jokes from the locals on their expense.

After the Scourge, the t’skrang of Farram emerged from their torpor underneath the waves of the Iontos River in 1429 TH unscratched. Kaer Farram wasn’t that lucky. The first t’skrang scout party found the kaer open and empty. There were no signs of battles or Horror incursion: they didn’t even find bodies. The interior of the kaer was in bad shape; most of it was collapsed, and some deeper parts were flooded by underground rivers – Kaer Farram had suffered the same fate as most of the other kaers in the Badlands.

The loss of the kaer was just the first blow from the Scourge that hit the *t’slahyin* Vri’ouros. The quickly assembled small scout ship *Darting Cobra* was sent out to explore the drastically changed land. The ship arrived from its maiden voyage a week later, battle-scarred and carried bad news:

all t'skrang settlements on the Iontos River were destroyed, and the surrounding area seemed particularly desolated. The ship made two additional successful missions, exploring the Tylon and the South Reach of the Serpent. The fourth and last voyage led to the area where the River of Bones enters the Iontos. A scouting party prepared to explore the depths of the barren area, using small canoes to travel up to the shallow river. The expedition just barely started when the *Cobra* and the crew remaining on it were attacked by an unknown force from underwater. The ship sank in seconds, and the surviving members barely made their way back to the homeport. The expeditions into the Badlands were discontinued after this event – it didn't seem necessary to continue the exploration, since the traditional trading area of the *t'slahyin* Vri'ouros was effectively destroyed.

After the House realized what happened with the place now known as Badlands, the t'skrang of Farram moved their area of interest. Until the return of the Therans, the House started again to prosper, and the first groups of other Name-giver colonists started to gather to re-establish the riverside part of the town. The largest group was the survivors of the Kaer Hewdor, one of the biggest surviving kaers in the Badlands. This group, mainly composed of humans and dwarfs, were the leaders of the rebuilding. The major wave of settlers arrived

only after the Theran War, as escaped slaves, newly unemployed mercenaries, and other veterans without home found the road too long to return home. With them, the population of the riverside grew to a permanent 6200 resident.

The Theran War created changes in the politics of Farram. After the return of House K'tenshin, Farram formally re-acknowledged their dependency on the House of the Nine Diamonds. This was a constrained motion, however, because this meant much more restrained business, and the arriving supervisors from the Naxos *niall* weren't good for morale, either. Not surprisingly, Farram's efforts in the war were half-hearted at best. Their riverboats suffered breakdowns with mysterious frequency, and some say that parts of the K'tenshin weapon supply wandered into Kratas in exchange for findings from the citadel. After the war, the Free Trading Compact came into effect, and Farram declared independence. However, they were still commercial partners of House K'tenshin. They were effectively outworkers of the House of Nine Diamonds, and the town was still small transfer harbor for the riverboats. This meant slightly less income, but it was divided between fewer Name-givers. Some Name-givers thought that there was a surprisingly large amount of money in the town – the newly built wall around it, and the deadly defenses in water and on land must have cost much more

silver than such a small town could afford.

Today, Farram is a bustling merchant town, especially twice in the year, after harvest time, when Name-givers from the shores of Tylon bring their wares to market. During these times, the town grows bigger by almost half, and lately there have even been some Dinganni bands crossing the river to sell their herds in exchange for hard-to-get items. The city is especially famous for its goldsmiths and craftsmen, and the traditionally exquisite t'skrang cuisine.

The Appearance of the Town

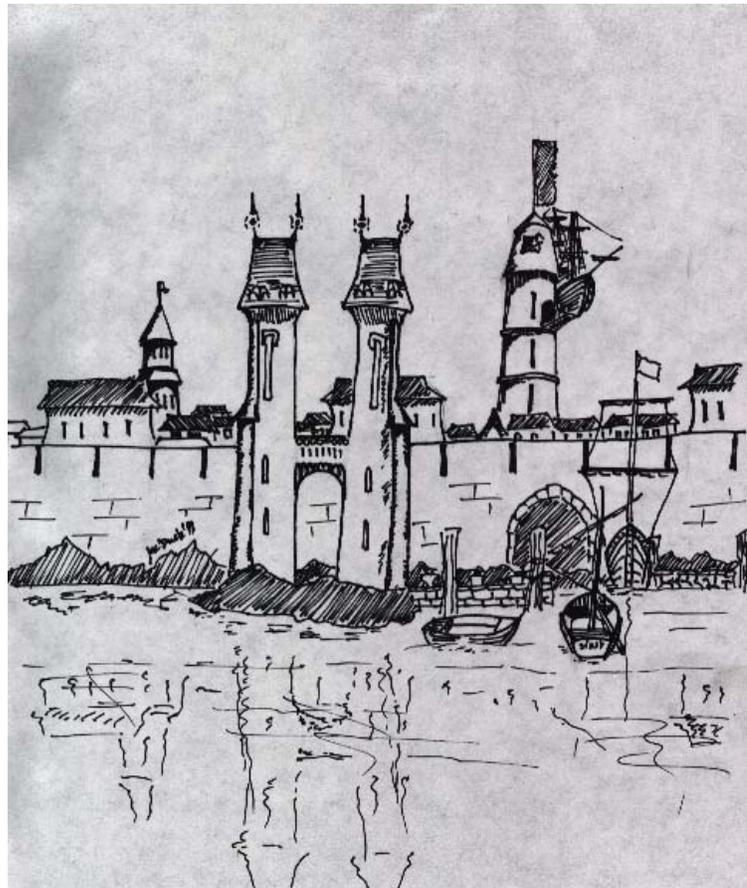
Visitors most often arrive in Farram by the Serpent River. The town lies on the narrow fertile land that separates the river and the Badlands. This strip becomes narrower in every year. According to calculations, Farram has only decades, maybe a century, before it merges with the Badlands.

This fate is partially hidden from the first-time observer; he can only see the deep green riverside vegetation, the strong town wall that protects the closely-built houses, and the towers of the t'skrang underwater settlement that forms a dual harbor with the city. Only six towers are visible from the water, forming the Old Harbor, where the most important cargo stops (source of the cargo is also an important factor, where can the ships anchor). These towers are

equipped with several fire cannons, and the refs are controlled from here, too. The harbor is also defended with cannons which form the town wall's bastions, as well as – if nearby – the riverboats of the Three Snakes Trading Company.

Because of the warm and rainy climate (even by Barsaivian standards), the town consists mostly of closely built, split-level stone buildings, with narrow, quirky streets and overhanging roofs. The reason for this kind of construction is partly that it prevents the sunlight from heating up the walls at daytime, and partly that this made the town very hard to attack. Before the walls were built – especially for the infrequent raids coming from the Twilight Peaks – there were difficulties in charging down the crooked, narrow streets while the locals were busily shooting at them from the windows. (Some streets are „too tight in the shoulders” for trolls and obsidimen, as some have said.) In addition, this compact architecture is a habit from the times of the Scourge.

There are four main avenues which are broad enough to allow two carts pass by each other, one from each of Farram's three gates, and one leading up from the docks, going to the Grand Market in the center of town. Upon closer examination, visitors can spot differences between the parts of the riverside town.



The Defenses of Farram

The city wall is relatively new; the work was finished on it about ten years ago. The city guards are constantly on patrol on the walls – the proximity of the Badlands doesn't make Farram a quiet place, and an attack from the water happens occasionally. There are two entrance gates to the town: one is the Rivergate at the harbor, and the other is at the Travar road. Two smaller gates also exist; these are used mainly by the locals to access the fields near town. These entrances are constantly guarded, and the smaller gates are open only at morning and at nightfall. All

entrances are closed during the night. There is an airship-dock tower in the city, which serves as a transfer port for airships from Travar and other places. Farram does not have its own airship: only two small airboats for scouting missions and quick personal transports. Regardless of the point of entry, there is an entry fee of two coppers „for every leg stepping on the ground of the town”, which means four coppers for newcomers on foot, and eight coppers for mounts or pack animals. Birds or small animals are admitted free if they travel in cages. Residents of the town can pass the gates freely.

The backbone of the city guard is the Tattered Banners school, which was founded by the ex-mercenaries and men-at-arms after the war. Some of the old soldiers and adepts see it as a personal obligation to have their children train in the school, and it has become a custom for every permanent resident to send their children for at least a short drill. In this way, the permanent garrison, which has about fifty men-at-arms in its ranks and an additional fifty as reserve with quick mobilization capability, can count on a quite large number of non-regular militia. The training received is considered fairly good, but the school does not train adepts – those who feel the calling of a Discipline must seek out the town's handful of adepts privately, but it is always a good idea to start seeking here – the still living veterans are often stick around.

The city guards take care of peace and order inside the city walls, and regularly patrols the near-city area – the proximity of the Badlands doesn't make the Travar Road a safe one. Expeditions into the Badlands are forbidden for the troops, unless direct orders from the council are given dictating otherwise – the town has lost too many overconfident men on such trips. The town, however, often sponsors private groups exploring the Badlands by providing information and equipment – for a modest percentage of any valuables found, and first rights on

anything of a special nature found there, of course.

The guards almost never join missions with the fleet. Keeping order on the river is solely the job of the *nialls*. However, the officers of the fleet do have the authority to act if they encounter a troublemaker within the town walls – so messing with a t'skrang crew in a tavern often means bad in the dream-book.

The town laws are based mostly on t'skrang customs, although some elements from Throalic law were adopted. Slavery isn't a crime, but the locals don't look favorably on it; the rare slave-trader travelling to the market near Travar can consider himself lucky if the cook only spits in his food, and not in his eyes. Confinement is not a common punishment. Troublemakers are usually forced to pay for the damage they've caused, or work off the debt if they cannot pay. The punishment for more serious crimes is cudgelling, or the pillory on the market. Notorious troublemakers are banned from the town and the gate guards have a good memory for faces.

The judge of the town is Named Sevil Sparkeye. The middle-aged dwarf handles only the most complicated and serious cases, or those that are without precedent. Simpler cases are handled by his three co-judges. Sevil has a reputation for being capable of quick decision, but generally considered a fair judge. If unsatisfied with the judgement,

the plaintiff can lodge an appeal with the Merchants Council, the leaders of the town. There are records of such appeals being accepted, but this is rare. According to wagging tongues, this is not only because of Sevil's fair decisions. Sevil's father is the head of the Council.

Highgate

Entering Farram from the Travar Road brings a traveler into the oldest and best-constructed part. Highgate was originally built by the first non-t'skrang settlers after the Scourge, who moved here from the uninhabitable area of the Badlands, mainly Kaer Hewdor. In Highgate, the streets are clean, the buildings are kept in good repair, and the locals keep tight security in the area (if guards aren't already on hand, expect them to arrive within 2D12 rounds). Highgate is where the upper class of Farram's citizenry lives: master merchants, ship owners, and the other well-to-do individuals. Houses here are usually two or more stories, built of stone or brick. Many residents keep gardens behind their homes. Space is at a premium here; as a result, expect prices for lodging and especially horse stabling to be expensive, sometimes double normal rates. The frugal adventurer who nonetheless wishes to sample Highgate's charms is well advised to stable their mount outside the Travar Gate, where the rates are lowest.

It's easy for those new to the

area to lose their bearings, as the roadways are typically narrow and winding. Farramites don't use street signs in the traditional sense; instead, signs at crossroads will direct visitors towards major landmarks, like the marketplace or the docks. Fortunately there are many small pubs (usually older houses renovated for the purpose), and several shops can be found where locals can be asked for help. The locals are friendly, but a bit aloof. The general feeling is that, decades earlier, their fathers and grandfathers built these houses, and made their fortunes with years of hard work (mainly as goldsmiths and merchants) and co-operation. Now they are very sensitive about their neighbors, and try to keep out the „upstarts” and „roamers”. Consequently, it is very hard to find a house for sale in this area. To the locals' way of thinking, those who belong in Farram already own homes in Farram. However, those who do manage to obtain housing in Farram should prepare for big expenditures; keeping the streets clean and safe and the light crystals bright is not cheap.

Areas of Interest

The Goldsmiths' Alley

This long, winding street hosts perhaps the most thriving enterprises in town. More than twenty workshops are here, creating and selling the well-known and beautiful jewelry of Farram. Despite the Name, not only gold and silver are

fashioned into jewelry here. Trinkets made from true elements are made here too, mostly created from True Water and Fire. Peculiar products of Farram are the gold- or silver-trimmed t'skrang porcelain items made from clay collected from the shores of Death's Sea. Only a small percentage of all these items are sold to customers in Farram. Most of the creations are transported to the main cities of Barsaive for sale in their bazaars.

Aldo's Tavern

Near the Goldsmith's Alley stands what is probably the most exclusive tavern in Farram. This fact, however, is reflected only by the location and the choice cuisine, since the interior is a well kept, but simple, tavern. Aldo's Tavern was Farram's first inn; nowadays it doesn't offer rooms, only food and entertainment. Since the tavern is the favorite gathering place of most the town's well to do, the tavern is quite a peaceful place. The staff ensures that it remains one and most of the clientele is also eager and capable to deal with troublemakers. Sevul Sparkeye for example considers a bar-brawl in his favorite inn a highly serious crime.

Notable Persons

Ceal Sparkeye

Jeweler and elementalist of the Fifth Circle, Ceal is the most prominent member of the Goldsmith Guild, as well as its spokesman. The middle-aged

dwarf, who is the oldest son of Rilgar, head merchant of Farram, is known for his refined and intricate bracelet, fibula and circlet designs fashioned from True water. He rarely works on other types of jewelry. Though he is concerned with the guild, his position does not occupy much of his time, which allows him to concentrate on his research into the manifold nature of the element of water and water spirits.

Market District

Between Highgate and the Dockside proper lies the Market District, so-called since it centers around the Grand Market in the center of town. While there are residential neighborhoods in the Market District, its primary draw to travelers are the inns, taverns and shops, which line the main thoroughfares of Merchant's Row and Market Street. The headquarters of the town guard is located here, on the corner of Market and Fiddlehead Lane, on the southwest corner of the Grand Market Square. The buildings here are mostly whitewashed wood, or a mixture of wood and stone, and rarely rise higher than two stories. Guards still patrol regularly, and usually respond within ten minutes. In the Grand Market, response time is faster: anywhere from ten seconds to two minutes.

In the middle of the Market District is the Grand Market. It is a large, irregular, open square where vendors set up their stalls

and hawk their wares. The Market offers mainly food in the form of various fish and vegetables from nearby farms, but thanks to the riverboat trade, almost any kind of good is available on any given day, though only in small quantities. The prices of rarer equipment are sometimes ten percent higher than normal.

Besides goods, the Market also offers entertainment. The custom of betting on *s'lava* fish fights is a t'skrang tradition, and has become a popular activity in town. The sight of the ten-inch long, bright red-, blue-, or orange-colored fishes fighting to death is truly astonishing, and drives spectators wild. The bets sometimes seem to be insanely high and the capture and breeding of these fish has become a full-time job for dozen or so townspeople. Keeping *s'lava* is not easy and requires special knowledge. These fish are so fierce that the water in the fighting pots literally boils up around them during combat. Owning a champion isn't a small deal around here, and those who aren't fans of the game usually don't understand how somebody could pay the price of two or three horses for a fish, no matter how special it is.

Areas of Interest

Orduk's Corral

Orduk the ork offers well-trained stajians for those who want to risk their lives in the Badlands. Orduk himself is a grizzled ork that rumors say is a

beastmaster adept, who conducts his business with the help of his extended family.

His business does well – Farram is one of the centers from where would-be heroes (some say 'the would-be Horror-snack') start their journey to the Badlands. For those who would brave the Badlands, Orduk always advises getting a seasoned guide, usually a cousin or nephew of his who pays for this referral. Those who follow Orduk's advice and look for a seasoned guide sometimes even manage their way back (and can even rent their mounts). Orduk also sells all the standard types of horses.

Airship tower

This relatively new tower (called Crow's Nest by most of the citizens) was built four years ago. It dominates the city with its height of 120 feet. An air elevator helps carry cargo to the top and back for the airships that arrive every third or fourth day, usually from Travar or Jerris. The two airboats of the town dock in the top of the tower.

Harbor of the Tired Fire Miner

This inn, owned by Fyles Naldyn, an ex-fire miner from the Death's Sea, is a favorite haunt of elemental miners, who often stop in town to sell some of their treasures to the goldsmiths. The large, comfortable inn is furnished in exquisitely bad taste, and is also quite expensive, but its regulars find it a great place to stretch

themselves out after many hard weeks aboard ship. If a visitor is polite and has the patience to listen to the patrons' boasting and tall tales, he perhaps negotiates a passenger place on their ship. Or a voyage over the Death's Sea, if he's lacking in sanity.

Lizardhead Inn

This is a favorite meeting place for would-be or veteran explorers of the Badlands. Some of the regulars grew rich with one or two successful trips; most of them are just waiting for the next possibility. The elf owner, Anost Doriel, was once an explorer himself, and is now one of the best people to seek out for a dependable guide, a more or less reliable map, or just a good piece advice. Of course, his services aren't free, but Anost's reputation and experience almost guarantees that it will be money wisely spent.

Backwater

Backwater is not an area the town is proud of. This space remained open after the town's wall was finished some years ago, and subsequently became part of the new area. Backwater is officially uninhabited, though temporary depots are here. In the meantime, however, temporary lodgings were created by transients, and this place became the slums of Farram. The situation is certainly not as bad as in Bartertown, for example, but this area is not as secure as the other parts of the town.

Dockside

Farram's harbor divides the town into three sections. The first area is the Old Harbor between the t'skrang towers, mainly used for quick transfers of cargo, or for cargo that goes directly to the underwater settlement. The second area is for the fishermen outside the walls. Dozens of small sailboats anchor there. A small passage at the side of the Rivergate leads from here to the inner harbor, inside of the town. This harbor is capable of holding up to seven t'skrang riverboat-sized ships at the same time. Ships that stay in Farram for longer periods, or hold more cargo than can be carried in from the fishermen's harbor (a common practice, since the fishermen's harbor is free to use) anchor there.

The fire cannons on the walls and the t'skrang towers can cover the entire Dockside area in case of attack from the river. To strangers, the place seems to be unduly fortified, but the locals seem to be happy with it.

Five t'skrang riverboats call Farram their homeport. One of these boats, the pride of the small fleet, is the *Blazing Riversnake*, which is a slightly faster and better-armored vessel than the common merchant boats. The *Riversnake* claims a prime role in the war against river pirates on the Tylon. Another ship, the *Greedy Saural*, is also worth mentioning. This old vessel is slightly larger than an average t'skrang riverboat,

and in her prime she had the largest cargo capacity on the river. Those days are gone now, as the worn-out engine doesn't make the ship profitable on long range runs. The heavily stripped-down ship is now used as a ferryboat on occasion, when the Dinganni or ork tribes from the far shore of the Serpent bring their herds to sell in Farram's market. This business is so profitable (since most of the animals are sold to Travar), that the *Saural* can remain active, and can take on other short-range shipping. Most of her time is spent in the harbor however, doubling as a weapon platform for port defense. Since the walls were completed, this role has practically lost its importance.

The newest additions to the harbor are the twin towers at the Rivergate; these were built two years ago. Both the airship and the towers were built by Morgrim Firethought. The towers' structure is based on the t'skrang underwater buildings, and both seem to be the prelude to the real thing – an addition to the underwater city. The exact details of the new building operation are not known, but a major sum was allocated for this project in the town budget a year ago. Rumors say that the work will be delayed because of problems not yet specified. Other rumors say that the money was already spent for different things.

The Dockside is one of Farram's most animated places. Dockers bustle around the five great warehouses, and most

newly arriving visitors stop here to stretch themselves after the days on the shipboard.

Areas of Interest

D'shkat's Trisnari

„If you want to eat good and cheap, this should be your first stop in the town.” At least that's what D'shkat, the owner of the place, claims. Most of the dockers eat here, and those who are searching for somebody with a ship would do well to check out the place.

The *Twilight Rose* and Little Scavia

The Scavians have a unique relationship with the town. Though the traditional good association faded after the end of the aropagoi Vri'ouros, it has refreshed in recent years. The riverboats of Farram often fought with the pirates of the Tylon River, and this common enemy brought the riverfolk and the town together again. Five years ago, a Scavian village barge, the *Twilight Rose*, was seriously damaged in a river battle. The sinking ship struggled into the harbor of Farram, but ran aground. It took about a half-year to repair all the damage on the barge, and during this time, some of its residents moved behind the safety of the town walls. After the work on the barge was done, some of them stayed in town. They chose a part of the Backwater area, and built new homes for themselves. The leaders of Farram supported the building of the new quarter,

which was dubbed Little Scavia, mainly because of the strengthening relationship between the two groups, and because of the trade with them. Their hopes came true. Little Scavia has about 130-150 permanent residents, and Scavian barges arrive more frequently than before. Travelers often seek out these flamboyant streets, which appeal to other Scavians too. In the previous year, when the renowned showboat the *Quirinalia* arrived for its final show of the year, the performance by the Royal Theatre of Throal was followed by merry-making on four Scavian village barges, which came at that time for a meeting in Farram.

Underwater

The underwater part of Farram can be only reached by boat. Six towers rise from the water, and another six lay under the surface. The towers form three diamond-shapes, which fit together into a V-form, its peak pointing upstream. The House Vri'ouros originally consisted of three *nialls*, each living in its own section. Nowadays, the *t'slahyin* consists of five *nialls*, and the t'skrang in smaller districts organized by family. The *labalas* of the three oldest *nialls* have the most influence in Vri'ouros' Council of Lahalas.

Each of the six towers rises fifty feet above the water, and is usable for harboring. Air elevators and stairs are present, and are used by those admitted by the guards. Three to four

smaller domes lean against the base of each of the towers, and serve as depots, working places and road-junctions. Sluice chambers lead underwater from these domes to spice farms, which lie between the sides of the V-shape, as well as underground tunnels that lead to the central domes, one in the middle each of the diamond-shapes. Smaller tunnels lead to the side-domes scattered around the bottom. The once lavish spiral snake-reliefs that covered the towers and domes have worn away, especially near the surface, but the interiors of the living spaces practically overflow with mosaics, murals or pictures painted on the walls, portraying significant events of the *nialls'* history.

The underwater tower in the center is much thicker than the others. At its base stands the meeting dome Named Hall of Astendar, where all *nialls* gather on special occasions. During the Scourge, the disassembled *Darting Cobra* was stored here. After the Awakening, the first t'skrang explorers began their re-discovery of the river on this ship. The salvaged remains of the ship were placed here again, as well as other relics of the past found in breached t'skrang towns along the Iontos River. This hall is a meeting place for the few troubadours of the *nialls* who keep the glorious memory of House Vri'ouros alive. *Labala* Vushisti encourages their work, and often sponsors gatherings and feasts (here as well as in the Riverside) for troubadours from other regions.

Few non-t'skrang can be found here; the constant wind, the crowded conditions and the threatening quantity of water above isn't an inviting experience for other Name-givers. Of course some of the places, like the spice-processing domes whose fragrance fills the towers, are strictly off-limits for everybody who is not a member of the *nialls*. The same is true for the five hatcheries.

Between the sides of the 'V' lies the underwater plantation of the town. Since the Death's Sea is close, the river is a bit warmer than on the Upper Reaches. This condition is beneficial for the cultivation of a piquant kind of *ustendar* spice, which is one of the most important exports of the *nialls*, although its flavor is not favored by the gastronomists who like the original variant.

The outsides of the 'V' are bordered with a complex system of webs that protects the plantation from fish and provides most of the catch for the area.

Nearby areas

Fieldlands

A significant portion of the townsfolk works in the fields every day. This is not due to a shortage of food: in fact, smaller fields would satisfy Farram's needs. The main reason for the cultivation is to attempt to halt the expansion of the Badlands. With the help of the questors from Trosk and Morgrim, a complex water system was built several years

ago in hopes of stopping the phenomenon. The efficiency of this system has yet to be determined, because the borders of the Badlands have not yet reached these fields. There are hopes, however, that it will work, because this place seems to be more fertile than nearby areas but, as the townsfolk often say, „Hopes are free to have.” In order to ensure success, it has become a custom to hold a big celebration after harvest to ask the plant spirits forgiveness for taking away their homes, and to encourage them and their companions to move into the newly-planted seeds. It is not known if the celebration has any influence on the spirits, but it certainly has appeal for those who arrive at the Grand Fairs held twice a year.

Kaer Farram

Not far from the Travar road, just a couple of hours from town, Kaer Farram was closed because of the danger of cave-ins. Some question this decision, and say that the place holds strange, dark secrets that the leaders don't want to touch. Some say that the place is simply used as a depot for storing things of questionable origins.

Kaer Hewdor

Located in the Badlands, this kaer is still inhabited. Questors of Jaspree (some of them from Trosk) use this place as a relatively safe base for their efforts to heal and study the Badlands. This place is also a

destination for escaped slaves from the slave market of Travar and House K'tenshin. Caravans come here from Farram about once a month. The huge kaer is not an appealing place to live, however, and not just because of the neighborhood. The dark, empty rooms inside are at least as depressing and alien as the Badlands itself. While the defenses of the kaer aren't that strong as they were used to be, it is still a relatively safe place. The resources make self-preservation possible, but only for small group of inhabitants. Built-in illumination doesn't work in most of the place and the water supply is decreased in the recent years. When inhabited, about 20-30 Name-givers are living here maximally, but such high number is rare. The gates are opened only when the caravans reach them, or if the questors are launching an expedition outside, so those wanting to visit there must time it well, or at least have the right spells to draw the attention of the occupants inside.

Iontos River

Once a rich source of food and home of the allies of Farram, it is now a dead and lifeless river. It is mainly used, along with its tributary, the River of Bones, for accessing the interior of the Badlands. However, the river still provides something valuable to the town; its old, but not yet depleted, underwater mines are the source for the raw gold and silver supply for the town's craftsmen. The exact location of

these mines is confidential and only known by a selected few in the town. Adventurers looking for these places or exploring breached t'skrang cities are not an uncommon sight around here, although the underwater predators do make such explorations highly dangerous.

Personalities

Rilgar, head merchant of Farram

„A man's worth is his work's worth.”

„If you want to gain only a thousand silvers, you will never gain ten thousand silvers.”

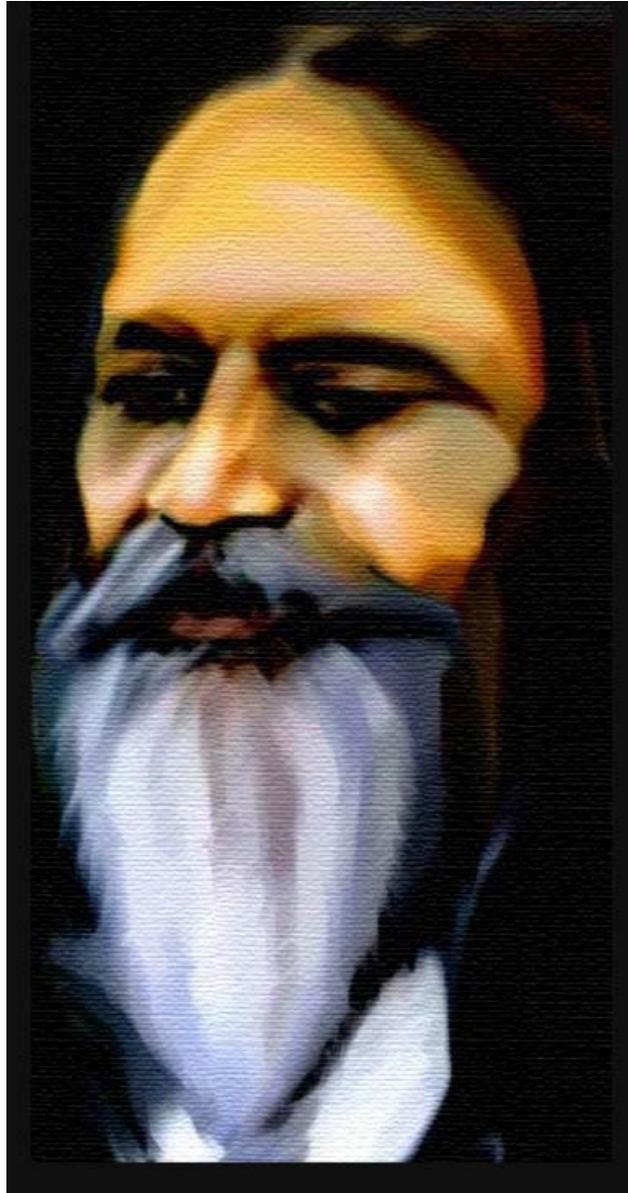
Rilgar is a dwarf in his nineties, and he is the „grandfather of the town” – at least according to his extended family. Others would say that he is a rather hardheaded grandfather, but most of the locals agree that this kind of hardness is beneficial to the town. Those who disagree left this place long ago.

Originally from Kaer Hewdor, Rilgar has lived a hard life. As a young, optimistic kid who just couldn't wait to emerge into the beautiful outer world with the opening of the kaer, he faced the harsh side of the life early. The Badlands isn't a hospitable place, and the folk of the kaer thought first that the whole world changed in this manner. His father was among the rare, bold explorers who took the first scouting journeys and eventually discovered the more habitable area of Farram. This deed earned much respect

for himself and his family. Unfortunately, he died in a Horror-construct attack while he defended the migrating folk of the kaer.

Rilgar couldn't follow his father's footsteps – he had no potential to become an adept. He didn't want to follow the craftsman traditions of his family, so he chose to become a trader instead. After some early successes, he and the family caravan vanished for a while. Six years later, only Rilgar and his uncle returned, not long after the end of the Theran War. Winning from the Theran prisons, he threw himself into town business. After a life of hard work, he reached his deserved place in the Merchants Council. At least, this what the popular stories say.

In reality, he was never a Theran slave – the caravan was captured by a band from Kratas. He regained his freedom only because the Therans were returning to Barsaive, and Garlthik was taking the city's leadership into his own hands. During the infighting between the thief bands, Rilgar realized that this could be his only chance, and escaped from his bonds to Garlthik. After some years, he and his uncle became low-level employees of the old ork. It was Rilgar's idea to use Farram as a money-laundering place for Kratas, and with the financial help from the City of Thieves he could reach the position in the town to arrange this. Years after his return, all the threads of the town run into his hand,



and he put the members of his family or sound friends to every possible key positions.

The other nine members of the Merchants Council of Farram know his secret. They could not avoid knowing, because the goldsmith's materials came mainly from the stolen and melted gold and silver from Kratas, and not from the old deposits of the Iontos River. The cooperation with the City of Thieves proved

to be fruitful in long time. The goods were carried to Farram from Daiche by dinganni caravans at first, but lately, the town uses some help from the Scavians too. After the re-appearance of House T'kambras, the business started to soar, since the supply sent from House V'strimon and Throal to them are carried on the same routes, and this means the profit is almost doubled on them. This latter business was

Rilgar's own initiative, and Garlthik doesn't seem to be bothered with it. So far, at least. Apart from the 'business' connection, Kratas doesn't have any direct control over the town, not even an observer – supposedly. The old ork takes mostly less direct steps to back up the city and provide explanations for it's wealth - the scorcher attacks against the trade roads to the nearby town of Portage were sponsored by Garlthik, to strengthen Farram's importance in trade. There are signs, however, that the underworld started to take steps toward the town; a rival band from Kratas kidnapped Holan, Rilgar's youngest grandchild about a year ago. The answer was quick and brutal - the kidnappers couldn't even declare their demands, they were captured and executed on the Grand Market.

Rilgar knows of course, that the town's connection with Kratas became too strong, and he couldn't get out from this, even if he wanted to do. A direct retaliation coming from House K'tenshin is like a coming storm - in fact, the dwarf doesn't understand why not happened already. He does not have any illusions about successfully fighting back such an attack alone, and maybe the potential allies won't be that helpful, if they realize that Farram is an auxiliary of Kratas. To strengthen the weak ties, he supports Scavians (not openly though, it would be too disturbing for House K'tenshin), and he sent his

eldest granddaughter to Throal to learn there and become an official in the Neumani trading house.

The townspeople don't know about his affairs, he is the model of the good leader to them. His reputation is so strong, that maybe a disclosure wouldn't hurt it - he made the town a better and safer place to live after all. Rilgar's gambling seems to be successful so far, which is partly because he is favoured by Chorrolis - he is a rank 7 questor of the Passion, but he doesn't see the place only as a source of profit, he considers Farram as his main work and heritage.

Rilgar currently living with his ninth grandchild, Carum and according to dwarven customs, he tutors him to follow the way he followed.

Mandail Ailay, elf swordmaster of the Sixth Circle

„And they marched and they fought and they bled and they died and they never did get any older.”

A veteran of many battles, Mandail has many fights behind her. Born in Vivane, she fought against Horrors, fought against the returning Empire, fled to Barsaive then fought in the Theran war - not surprising that she had choose a much more peaceful life after she found a new home in Farram.

Her deeds and her charismatic nature was good enough reference to become something of a leader in the town after the war, even if she

came from elsewhere. She never choose a formal position though - she simply made a stand for her opinions, and people followed her advises. Thanks to her inclination for peace, the town's declaration of independence went smoothly, and the relations between Farram and House K'tenshin stayed relatively good, even after the occurrences in the war.

After a couple of years however, she effaced herself willingly. This was partly because Rilgar seemed to her a good candidate for being a new leader, and partly because she began a new Path in her life, the Mes ti'Perritaesa. Following the Path of Sages she became much more introversive, and soon lost her interests in the town's politics. She spends most of her time with her family, or taking occasionally small trips on the river.

Lahala Vushisti

„Rivers know better which way should they flow.”

The calculable, the honest, the warrior, the leader of *niall* Vushisti. She is the most reliable supporter of House K'tenshin, not because she likes them (nothing could be farther from the truth), but she gave her word of cooperation, and she will be true to her word as long as she can. Being that straightforward isn't a good trait in politics, so she isn't initiated into the town's hidden connections. She is not aware of the connection between Farram and Kratas. She

suspects that the V'strimon weapon supplies go through the town to House T'kambras, but she remains silent on this point. She sympathizes with the recently revived house, but won't make any concrete steps to support them.

She is popular among the local t'skrang. Everybody knows that she was a member of the *Darting Cobra's* crew after the Awakening. She won herself a legend (and much wealth) by rediscovering the breached t'skrang settlements along the Iontos River, and achieved Eighth Circle in the boatman and Fifth Circle in the swordmaster disciplines. She is still among those most expert in lore regarding the Iontos, thanks to her own and the ancestral memories – this *niall* always had the strongest connections with the Iontos settlements. There are still some settlements that haven't been recovered yet, and she regularly sends out parties to find them. For a long time, these trips weren't successful. She has financed the last few from her own budget – the women's council of the *niall* stated that these trips weren't profitable. Feeling her age (she is around her hundredth birthday), she is increasingly involved with her *niall's* history. This hobby recently expanded to cover the whole Three Snakes aropago's history. She is also the most important supporter for the troubadour gatherings in the Hall of Astendar.

Recently her advanced age has started to show. Her

research into legends and history seems to lead her into over-interpreting the old stories. In a recent debate, she made a stand for not involving the *niall* in any direct confrontation in the K'tenshin-T'kambras issue. To support her argument, she pointed out that the Iontos River flows from the direction of the constellation of Thystonius, and the barren river is the best example of „what happens if we follow that Passion's way". It took some moments for the audience to realize that this wasn't intended to be imagery, but a logical argument. However, her decisions seem to be proper, irrespective of the way she made them.

Lahala Tesan

„You always have to leave your opponent something to lose."

The most confrontational of the *lahalas*, she was the more radical and serious supporter of the separation from House K'tenshin during and after the Theran War. Now she supports any action that is detrimental to the House of Nine Diamonds – except an open opposition, of course. Her reasons for this animosity are varied. She was always a woman of action, and won her legend by attacking pirates along the Tylon and the Lower Reach of Serpent. She attained Seventh Circle in the boatman Discipline, and she firmly believes that 'cleaning up' this area of the river is her destiny. The main reason for the hatred of House K'tenshin

came during the war, however, when the supervisors from *niall* Naxos came to visit and oversee the war efforts of *t'slahyin* Vri'ouros. Their hegemonic and depreciating behavior and their efforts to root out every possible traitor against their House were so revolting for the then-captain that even the mention of those times is enough to get her steamed up more than the boilers of the *Riversnake*. Also, despite all her efforts and deeds, *Lahala* Vushisti has more fame, and her jealousy tends to lead her into the opposing opinion.

Her actions also won her the sympathy of the Scavians living there, who faced considerably less harassment since her anti-pirate campaign. She was also the first to offer official help in the *Twilight Rose* case. The Scavian connection also led her to a closer alliance with Rilgar and House V'strimon and she organizes the delivery of most of the stolen goods to Daiche. She has recently ordered two new ships from the Denlikiyan shipyards, almost entirely funded by House V'strimon. This could be a dangerous move, since the sudden increase of the fleet would probably blow the cover off the town's connection with Kratas and House V'strimon. In addition to the problems that would probably arise if House K'tenshin got concrete evidence of treason in Farram, the shipwrights at Denlikiyan wouldn't be happy if they realized that the ships will go to a city that is practically an ally of

Kratas. They already suspect something, and it is entirely possible that the ships won't be sold to the town.

Lahala Norrak

„Mind you: dead bodies of tundra beasts are lying on the road; but the determined ants are pressing forward on the driftway.”

She seems to be the balancing factor in the Council of Lahalas. Being a questor of Garlen, she has a knack for smoothing the tension between the *nialls*. She seems to be reclusive, and acts as if her most important duty is to tend her *niall's* hatchery. However, she sees the entire town, the underwater and the riverside parts both, as her home to protect, and keeps her eyes open – she is well aware of most of the workings in Farram. She knows about the connection with Kratas and House T'kambras, but hasn't figured out all the details yet. She doesn't let the other factions know the extent of her knowledge, and hasn't said a word about the secrets, but clearly sees that these shady connections keep the place on the razor's edge. She has started to build or strengthen her own connections toward Daiche, House V'strimon and K'tenshin and other important sections of the river in case she has to interfere, but will wait until such action will be unavoidable. Until this time, she tries to avoid potentially dangerous situations, such as war with House K'tenshin and she is the most

likely member of the Council of Lahalas to give favor to the House of Nine Diamonds. She isn't weak-kneed, but would prefer to wait until the contending parties weaken each other, to allow her people to start from a more favorable position. The only risky move she takes is giving assistance to Fuey, the harbormaster of Farram, in his slave-rescuing operations.

Moerel Iymat, 'helmsman' of Little Scavia

„We'd better cut back on the shipments for a while. Two K'tenshin boat patrols near our usual transfer place since a couple of days, and it takes some time to relocate the routes. I don't sell you down, it ain't that simple, and we could use some of those supplies anyway.”

The old river rat is the leader of the Scavian colony in Farram, and the link between Rilgar and the Scavian river barges. Moerel is hardly the most trustful man that Rilgar could imagine, but his contempt toward House K'tenshin ensures that the cargo between Daiche and Farram will travel safe – even if it is sometimes used by the Scavians before delivering. Rilgar considers it part of the business and the hazards of the trade.

A Fourth Circle journeyman adept, Moerel thoroughly enjoys nettling House K'tenshin with his actions. After particularly successful or stylishly executed actions, he often finds himself daydreaming about making Little Scavia into

something much bigger – perhaps a new foundation for the old kingdom. As a realist, he knows that this will most likely remain only a fanciful dream.

Cale Vuten, chef of the Red River Inn

„You call these fish fresh? Are you serious?” [Screaming, and throwing the fish in question at the fishmonger's head.] *„These rotten carcasses? You think I am cooking for some rotten nethermancers or what?”*

Newcomers to town often think that this old, fat human in his fifties, dressed in scarlet robes, is some river pirate trying to kill the helpless vendors in the market. The pirate thing may have been true once, but now Cale is the chef of the Red River Inn in Little Scavia, and not just an ordinary chef, either. A popular tale claims that Cale's fumade in keesris once lured Mountainshadow from his lair in Badlands. If this is not true, it is most folks' considered opinion that the poor dragon never ate anything good in his life. Cale isn't an easy person to deal with, although he is an organized, if somewhat depreciating man while in business. If and when somebody brings his culinary arts into question, he can turn violent and prone to fighting. The storytellers of the town remember vividly the famous fight that erupted years ago in the D'shkat's trisnari on the seasoning of the fish – Cale and D'shkat have not spoken to each other since. Despite all

this, rumors say that he has a kind streak. A couple of months ago, when the business of Raegar, one of his suppliers, was about to go belly-up, Cale secretly sent a significant sum to the dwarf to help him out of trouble.

Rilgar often eats in the Red River Inn, since the food is great, and Cale refuses to deliver his work outside of the inn or to cook elsewhere. It is also a good excuse for the dwarf to make a visit in Little Scavia, and arrange the next shipment of hot goods.

Mikra Sternthought, caravan leader

„Don't look at it! Damn you, run, don't look at it!”

Mikra, a human in her thirties, is one of the most respected caravan leaders in Farram. She is not an adept, but this is an advantage in the Badlands, where adepts are sometimes too noticeable or getting emotionally strained when merging their spirits with this place. Mikra's recipe for survival is simple: she doesn't take any unnecessary risks, and prefers to earn her money by scouting and not with kaer exploring or monster hunting. She is even more cautious since her daughter was born two years ago. The girl's father was a questor of Jaspree from Trosk, who vanished without a trace after leaving for Kaer Hewdor. Mikra has no illusions about his fate, but on her travels, she still catches herself occasionally searching for hints regarding

what happened with her mate. She usually entrusts her daughter to Odruk when she is out of town. She is a regular in the Lizardhead Inn.

Charrak Bonebreaker, leader of the town troops

„Drop that sword, kid. It was an old story with your father, and I don't want it to be repeated with you.”

A dwarf warrior adept with a troubled past, he has control of the defense of the town, and is in charge of the training the town guard. If he hadn't nearly sacrificed his life to save Rilgar's grandson in a well-remembered kidnapping case, however, he probably wouldn't even be admitted into the town. Years ago, he was the leader of the Shining Spearheads, a disreputable and up-and-coming mercenary group. The last known sight of the group as a whole was when they set off for the Thunder Mountains, escorting a group of travelers from a living legend cult Named Order of Mirrors. Nobody ever learned the fate of the travelers, or Charrak's comrades. Months later on a stormy night, a merchant caravan found the unconscious warrior, covered with frost and still clutching his broken sword, the earth scorched around him on the field not far from Jerris. After he came to his senses, he refused to explain what happened to him, and went to his own way. Weeks later, he was seen in rags, obviously shaking in fever, walking on the path of the Pilgrimage Route

from Ayodhya to the Cliff City.

Whatever happened to Charrak, it changed him a lot. A year or so after his pilgrimage, he popped up in Farram, and signed on to rescue Holan, grandson of Rilgar, from his kidnappers. After successfully bringing back the child and the culprits alive, besides his payment he was offered to remain in the town by the impressed old dwarf.

Being a warrior of the tenth circle, Charrak is the highest-Circle adept in the town, and there are few warriors in the region more skilled in combat. He doesn't teach his Discipline, not even for the most promising or most reputable candidates. Those few who know him better, see him as a disillusioned and bitter man who choose this place to live because „A futureless warrior has the best home in a town which fated to fail.” Despite, or because of this pessimistic approach, Charrak sees the town somewhat as a large family, and takes care to keep Farram a tough nut to crack for any possible attacker.

Morgrim Firethought, a questor of Upandal

„It glowed as the lightning struck the copper shield, you say? Hmm, hmmm... you know, with just a few small adjustments, I could harness that... where did I put my tools?...”

Morgrim is a troll of middle height, slightly thinner than most trolls are. From his accent, he is obviously from the Twilight Peaks. His horns are

short and stubby, and his hair is always disheveled. His clothes are usually clean but somewhat shabby, though it is obvious they were rich once.

Morgrim's blessing and curse is that everything interests him. One moment he will be discussing armor modifications for kaer-delving, the next he will be down on his knees in the mud, considering a design for a more efficient pig run. The folk of Farram have grown used to Morgrim over time, and usually treat him with friendly amusement, even going so far as to feed him or give him items when he forgets his money purse, which is more often than not.

A devout questor of Upandal, Morgrim designed the walls and the airship tower. The leaders of Farram did, however, reject his original design for the walls, which would have had the outer wall banked at a 45-degree angle and covered with rock crystal. At that angle, Morgrim pointed out, the sun's rays would blind any would-be naval attackers. The town fathers pointed out to the troll that it would equally blind every other ship captain coming to trade with the town. Morgrim, while acceding to the wishes of the town in building, did embark (briefly) on a design for dark-tinted goggles for ship captains to wear.

Morgim is cared for by Kethna, a comely young human woman who alternately loves and despairs over her troll companion. She makes sure that Morgrim's bills are paid

and that he eats at least once a day, even if she has to spoon the food into his mouth as he puzzles over some new idea.

Amadan Springsmile,
waitress at the Lizardhead Inn

„Good evening sir! Mutton stew and pint of bragget, like the last time right? ... Why, of course I remember you...”

The beautiful and charming elven waitress lives in Farram for two years now. She is the target of admirers ever since, but so far none of them managed to conquest her heart - nevertheless, the most persistent ones are keep trying.

She would probably less popular in certain circles, in fact, she would be fish food in just a couple of minutes, if her cover would be blown. House K'tenshin figured out a long time ago, that a t'skrang agent is more conspicuous than an elf girl from Travar. Amadan kept a low profile in the first times, and was only a link between the other agents of the House, but a couple of months ago the last of her companions vanished without a trace.

Her mission is now to gather information about the shipments of dubious nature arriving to the town, and find out the reason behind the suspiciously flourishing business of the town. Her position doesn't make her work easy, but the small scraps of information she picks up by some small talk with her admirers are enough to keep her

superiors happy. She also suspects that there are other K'tenshin agents in the town, whom she doesn't know about.

Amadan is not an adept, and she doesn't really cares about neither party of the are - she started to do this job only for the enjoyment and the thrills.

T'sheya Norrak T'allasthin,
Seventh Circle troubadour

„Choib edo k'tan var!”

A notorious roamer despite his advanced age, the old troubadour wandered Barsaive's length at least twice. He played in practically every center of culture from Throal to Vivane, and even in the villages of the Crystal Raiders. The latter took a couple of years, since he was captured by the raiders and spent much time among them, but his unbreakable *jik'barra* helped him through this hard experience. His art of music, considered rough and uncultured, was considerably worsened by troll influence - at least, this is what his critics say. He is, however, wildly popular among the boasting riverboat crews, and can cheer up a child in *kaissa* without effort, which is quite a feat for most troubadours. When not onboard a riverboat, he dwells in his old home on Fiddlehead Lane. Wagging tongues say he doesn't live in the underwater town because his current home would make it easier to escape if the women in his *niall* would appoint him to a *chaida*. The more mischievous tongues say that this would never happen

anyway, even if T'sheya was the last remaining male on the river.

T'sheya handles everything with his cheerful no-nonsense attitude. He manages to stay away from the politics of the Houses, and sometimes he doesn't seem to be aware of the conflict between the many denizens of the river. Rumors say that he walked once into a tavern in Urupa, where a K'tenshin and a V'strimon crew faced each other. It seemed that a bloodbath would start any second when the old troubadour entered, walked past the two groups, and ordered a drink from the frightened barkeeper. The town guards, alarmed by the patrons who fled from the impending fight, found only two dozen t'skrang, listening to T'sheya's thick voice telling a story about the most lusty woman on the Serpent.

Fuey Sanhan, harbormaster of Farram

„Put these clothes on. From now on, you are a Scavian, until you get into Daiche. There, you should seek Myrya in the Three Owl Inn. She will help you get home. Now shut up and go. I don't wanna see you as a K'tenshin commodity again.”

A balding human in his forties, with a missing left arm and a generally grim attitude, directs the harbor of the Dockside. He is responsible for overseeing the shipkeeper squad of the town guard, controlling the harbor use of the ships and directing the work on ships that need maintenance. He is also a questor of Lochost, which is a

fact that practically everybody is unaware of.

He is originally from the area between Lake Vors and the Tylon Mountains. He was captured by slavers at a young age, and sold in the slave market at Travar. He was declared a criminal by his kidnapers to justify his slavery. The accusations were false, of course. It is another issue that he *was* involved in different crimes, such as horse-theft. Fuey now regards this accident as a particularly low blow from Mynbruje.

He escaped from a K'tenshin plantation seed colony in a revolt about sixteen years ago. A river predator collected the toll for freedom however, and Fuey lost his left arm and bears many impressive scars on his body. He still can consider himself lucky, because he was probably the only slave who managed to regain his freedom in the revolt; the others were recaptured or killed.

Fuey worked hard for this position, which gives him a bit of control over the ships arriving in Farram – an excellent opportunity to provide escape for slaves. He regularly organizes raids against the seed colonies by gathering information from ships' crews about their locations, and ensures that those slaves rescued are able to get away from their ex-masters. He offers three major routes to them: Scavian barges, Dinganni caravans, or Kaer Hewdor, in extreme cases. He never takes part in the actual action – he

leaves these things for an ork liberator Named Hilshor Burningham and her company. This ensures that his cover will be secure. There were two occasions in the past when his cover was almost blown. The first was two years ago, when he had to put the escapees into the ship of Norrak *niall* – fortunately for him, both the captain and the *lahala* sympathized with his efforts, and instead of disclosure, he gained new allies. The other occasion happened a couple of months ago, when a K'tenshin agent came too close to discovering his secret – the unwary t'skrang soon became fish food.

He doesn't have anything to do with any of the powers in town, and they aren't aware of him either, except the *lahala*. He is not aware of the closeness of the connection with Kratas either, but he knows that the town sometimes gets special transports that he isn't supposed to question or inspect – actually, this fracture of the rules fits with his view of Lochost quite well. His attitude toward House K'tenshin, Travar and Kratas (it was a band from Kratas who captured him long ago) is worse than bad, and this judicial blindness often leads him into dangerous situations.

Conclusion

What's the destiny of the town? It is obvious, that the current situation cannot be hold up for long. Maybe the only reason, why House K'tenshin

hadn't already strike, because their agents are tracking down all the connections of Farram, to cut out the whole problem with one well-designed action. Maybe the town has some chance to gain the upper hand in the fight of the big powers of the river. Maybe these chances will be reduced to ashes with the starting events of *Prelude to war* - maybe the schemes will turn into earnest only after those events.

Adventure Ideas:

Scourge behind solid doors

The characters, members of a caravan either as questors of Jaspre or simple treasure-seekers are heading to Kaer Hewdor. They arrive relatively smoothly, but after inside, they soon realize, that a couple of escaped slaves were also let in to the Kaer, and one of them brought in a Horror in his head. The choice is theirs: do they start a cat and mice game in the empty and dark kaer, or try to get to the no safer Outside? Of course, their mounts aren't in the best shape, and it is hard to figure out, how does the kaer door open. Think the movie *Alien* for inspiration, and if you want to be really cruel, let the PC's to be the escaped slaves...

Slave rescuing with problems

Hilshor, the Liberator ally of Fuey has her own problems to shake off some quite granite-headed slave-owners, so it falls to the PC's share to rescue some fivvers from a newly discovered plantation seed colony. Of course, Fuey has to be quite secretive, since he

doesn't want to blow his cover, and this maybe encumbers to get all vital information about the place. And, of course Fuey is secretive with a reason, since the new colony is just a bait from House K'tenshin, who just found out who was Fuey's informant in the House, and they are now quite curious about who is the organizer of the operations. So, the hapless slaves aren't that hapless as it seems. Big-hearted GM's can even arrange a rescuing operation for the busted informant, if the characters got away with their life.

Get it from the melting pot

Sometimes the otherwise thoroughgoing folks in Kratas put a magical bauble into the transport of the soon-to-be made-over things. Of course, somebody figures out eventually, that melting up a legendary item is a bad idea, so somebody is sent to Farram to recover it, before it is converted into some everyday small-ware. To make things more interesting, the original owners or a rival gang may learn where they have to find their beloved property. The GM decides, which party will be the players, but there is no need to worry, powerful magical items won't be affected by ordinary furnaces. If yes... Well, think about the fun you can do with the angry spirit, who spent the last couple hundred of years trapped into the item.

The festival

Again, the time of the Grand

fair is here. The town is filled with rugged nomads, greedy merchants, travelers with fat purse, and of course with entertainers. The Quirinalia is again here as well as Scavian barges and concurrent t'skrang showboats too.

What is an amusement for most, is an event of grave importance for others. Agents from Throal, House V'strimon, House T'kambras, Kratas, Scavian and Dinganni chiefs and of course, members of House K'tenshin are also here. Who knows, what has a dwarven play-actor and a Scavian fisher to talk about during an intermission, and why does he have a chest full of toys or strangely embroidered silk so great importance...

Of course, plots and counterplots just increasing the turmoil of such an event, this is how happens, that the PC's are end up with a strange bundle, received from an obviously nutty or just plain drunk fellow, who came to them, babbled something about an eagle who found her sword under the river, then satisfied with their puzzled or drunken answer, placed into their hand. It is a mystery, why seem to be everybody after the players since then... Or, if the players are in the swim, and members of a secret society, they can find out that the important documents they were meant to get are in the hands of some unknown and unsuspecting rookies, who got the answer right.

LEST YE...

by Delano Lopez

In the clearing, just outside the protective canopy of the tree line, a blood elf was being rained upon. He was impervious to the downpour as he sat, legs crossed, a trispear resting across his lap. The raindrops slip down the fur of his black panther-hide armor, some coming to rest on his spear. His pale white hands gently rested on the spear's shaft. The wood of the handle had long been dyed a dark maroon from the drops of blood that dripped from the thorns that pierced his hands. The elf, called Sallamereath in Sperethiel, had his eyes closed, deep in memory.

He was relieving a moment from his childhood when his life changed forever. He had an ideal life for a small boy, having been raised in a remote corner of the Blood Wood, where his father, a herbalist by trade, could study the plants of the forest. He learned an appreciation for beauty at his parents' side. Running the woods with his father, he learned the wonders of its strangely beautiful plants. In his mother's small armorer's shop next to their cottage, he marveled at the darkly sublime artifacts she made there. Their small cottage was full of laughter and love.

Until one night.

He was awakened by a scream, and he called out for his parents. His only answer was more screams, now coming from his mother's workshop. He sneaked quickly through the darkness to see light and movement coming through the windows. He peeked through the window, and his world fell apart.

By the light of a fire in his mother's forge, Sallamereath saw a hideous bulk filling the room. A great mass of roiling, red flesh was visible beneath a collection of black, chitinous armor plates. From beneath these plates a handful of eyes and fanged mouths shifted in and out of view. Springing from between these plates were dozens of spindly, armored limbs, neither arms nor legs, but each ending with a claw, pincer or spike.

What knocked the breath and soul from Sallamereath was not the monster itself, but what it was doing. Impaled each on several of these limbs were his parents. The Horror was torturing each of them, slicing, cutting and burning them, both with its natural weapons, and with his mother's tools some glowing red from the fire.

But the tortures were not merely physical. The thing had each of them held up on its spikes, facing each other. With

dozens of limbs working, there was hardly an inch of their bodies that was not covered in wounds. The monster had only spared their eyes, mouths and ears. Four of its limbs, ending in smaller spines, were keeping their eyelids pulled open. In this posture, the two lovers could only watch, as their spouse was tortured to death before them. Their last sight would be their lovers' beautiful bodies torn apart, their last sound heard their lovers' scream, their last thought the knowledge of their powerlessness to protect the one in their life they had sworn to protect.

From beneath the plates of the beast, Sallamereath heard a hideous laughter, and saw an eye catch his gaze. And then it called his Name. Sallamereath turned and ran. Mocking laughter followed him into the dark woods.

When he returned at daybreak, he saw the shop had burned to the ground, and there was no sign of the Horror. Dazed, he picked his way through the ashes. He found an old stone ring of his mother's, blackened by the fire. He also found some of his parents' bones scattered about. A handful of them still had thorns attached. Holding them clenched in his fist, the thorns

drawing his blood, he swore his vengeance.

Back in the clearing, the older Sallamereath remembered that day as the start of his journey down the path of the Horror Stalker. He had then traveled to Estandia, near the Queen's Court, to study with the Blood Warders. He had learned much from them, but courtly life suited him not, as he spoke little, if at all, since his parents' death. Furthermore, since the Blood Warders were diligent at their duties, Horrors were scarce in the Blood Wood. Frustrated, he had left the Wood in search of action, and in search of the Horror that had killed his parents.

Since then he had fought many Horrors and their constructs, but had yet to find the one he most sought. He had fought its constructs, hideous monstrosities assembled from the dissected bodies of its victims, and had chased sightings of it from one side of Barsaive to the other, but it had always fled before his arrival. In his years of stalking he had learned much, studying the ways of the nethermancer so as to learn more of the ways of Horrors, hoping for an edge against his opponents. This thirst for knowledge and justice had also led him to dedicate himself to the Passion Mynbruje.

Reliving these memories of his life, and all of the atrocities that he had witnessed, was painful for him. Still, it was part of the ritual that enabled him to take the emotional force that he

had accumulated during his recent endeavors and focus them into reserves of magical energy that he could call upon in his future struggles. And struggles they would be, for Sallamereath had tracked that same Horror to a small village nearby.

His ritual done, Sallamereath opened his eyes, and looked at the spear in his lap. Lashed to the haft of the spear, beneath its head, were several blackened bones, their thorns still defiantly sharp.

Sallamereath looked around him warily as he slowly rode into the village, the rain having slowed to a drizzle. He was looking for any of a number of Name-givers that he had tracked to this village. A half dozen stable, settled citizens – a fat ork tavern keeper; a shrewish, gossipy fish monger; and so on – from surrounding areas in the past few weeks had suddenly dropped all in their lives and left home, giving no reason to their families. Sallamereath had recognized the handiwork of his adversary. He had found that each had spoken to a wandering dwarf tinker days before their disappearance. He tracked down the tinker and found that he was marked and controlled by that Horror.

Regrettably, the Horror's control of the tinker's mind was so strong that he had been able to find the Horror's location only by torturing the information out of the tinker. He did so using an extract from the Fireleaf plant, which his father had taught him to

identify. Painful when touched, it is excruciating when rubbed in an open wound.

As he had been working at that unpleasant task, he justified it by telling himself that it had to be done, because it may save more lives at risk. Yet, over the screams of the dwarf, he thought he saw a twinkle in his eye: the Horror gleefully watching through its victim. Such things were not unknown to Sallamereath, for the life of a Horror Stalker was not for the squeamish or the weak of will. And the torture *was* justified. How could he let another child be orphaned by the Horror because he was too weak to do the dirty work that had to be done?

As he rode through the center of the town, he saw a small elf girl at play in a garden. The girl looked up at the stranger and stared. Sallamereath returned the gaze, his look boring in to the girl, astral sensing her at the same time to look for Horror taint. The girl screamed and ran, trampling the flowers as she fled. *Good*, Sallamereath thought. *That will teach her to be wary of strangers.*

Now Sallamereath had arrived at the target of his search – the village hall, a large structure made of thick wooden beams, site of village councils and occasional troubadour performances. The hall was quiet, the wooden shutters closed tight. Only a thin trickle of blood seeping from under the front door gave any

Lest ye...

indication that a Horror had been at work.

Sallamereath dismounted and steeled himself in preparation to enter. He fully expected to encounter another construct, no doubt pieced together from the bodies of the Name-givers summoned to the site. Indeed, the tinker did not know the Horror's full plans, but did tell Sallamereath that the Name-givers were part of the Horror's „greatest creation.” Sallamereath only hoped that the Horror was still at hand.

The door opened on its own as Sallamereath approached. The flicker of candlelight within beckoned, and he entered.

The charnel house stench that greeted him was not surprising, but the sight was. Stretched across the hall at head height was a rich purple curtain, blood pooling underneath it. On the floor in front of the curtain was a row of disembodied feet, each now a gruesome candle holder. But what shocked Sallamereath the most was that he could see that the curtain was held up on the edges by the limbs of the Horror he sought. Movement behind the curtain confirmed that finally his prey was present.

The Horror's oily voice from behind the curtain was instantly familiar, jolting Sallamereath back to the one time it had called his Name before.

„Sallamereath...I've been waiting for you. You're just in time for the show.” Sick giggling, from more than one mouth, followed. Over the top

of the curtain, the head and torso of the ork tavern keeper appeared. The ork's lower body had been removed, and his entrails spilled out from beneath his apron. Several of the Horror's limbs were wedged into the underside of the ork's body cavity, so that he resembled nothing so much as a perverse hand puppet.

„Where is that meddling wife of mine?” The words issued from the mouth of the ork, and were echoed by the Horror's voices behind the curtain as well.

„Where is that lazy, no-good husband of mine?” The reply came from the body of the fishmonger, similarly wielded by the Horror. Sallamereath recognized, as many Barsaivians would, the opening lines from a series of children's puppet shows. Troubadours from around the province performed myriad variations on these plays, but the core characters, the Lazy Ork and his Bossy Human Wife, stayed the same. No doubt the other Name-givers behind the curtain were prepared to play the Foppish T'Skrang, the Greedy Dwarf, and the other archetypes in the show.

Horribly, Sallamereath locked eyes with the puppets, and could see a look of recognition and awareness in their eyes. By some magic, the Puppeteer had kept them alive and aware of what was going on around them.

Sallamereath had to resist rushing the Horror in a fury. He knew that the Horror must

have a trap planned, and that getting himself killed would not help anyone. Being dispassionate was a necessary requisite for a Horror Stalker, so he waited cautiously for the Horror's next move.

„Are you not enjoying the show? And I went to such trouble for you. No matter, they were merely the opening act.” The living corpse puppets dropped back behind the curtain. „Now we will have the unveiling of my greatest creation yet.”

Sallamereath braced himself, trispear pointed at the curtain, ready to face whatever monstrosity would be revealed. The curtain was released, and fluttered to the ground. Standing behind the curtain, in front of the Horror, was... a mirror.

A full-length mirror, in a gold frame, showed nothing but Sallamereath's reflection. Rolls of laughter erupted from the Horror and its Name-giver puppets.

„Don't you get the joke? Don't you find it amusing? The greatest creation of myself, a Horror, is you, a Horror Stalker.” Sallamereath stood stunned as the cackling laughter broke around him.

„Why do you think I let you live when I killed your parents? As an afterthought? No, I killed your parents to give you the rage to become what you are now. And what are you? A hero? Some grim avenger? Don't delude yourself, you are a monster. A torturous, bloodthirsty monster who

scares small children. You knew beauty once, but all that your parents taught you, you pervert. Your father's knowledge of plants, you use only to create poisons. Their very bones, which should be at rest, you have made a weapon of. And you think I am a Horror?

„Ah yes, let me feed off all of your conflicting emotions, a meal that has been a long time in preparation. But I am a gourmet, am I not? Think on this and despair, my foolish elf. Know that all of your determination, your fierce will, was all at my command. Teasing you, leading you like a puppy across the land for years. You have been my puppet, my plaything, as much as these poor souls here. I made you.

„Or, perhaps I go to far. After all, I didn't make you choose the path you did; you can't avoid that responsibility. I only presented you with opportunities: you made the decisions to torture people yourself. You had free will the whole time.

„But that time is at an end. Don't worry, I won't kill you. No, you will be my favorite pet. I shall keep you around for years, and make you my servant, feeding on your delicious despair. Know that all of your skill and strength that you take such pride in were for naught. Now, it's time to play...”

Sallamereath stared at his reflection in the mirror, fighting the despair welling up in his heart. Limbs of the Horror began to creep out from either side of the mirror, snaking

toward the blood elf. The image in the mirror, thorns dripping blood and his parents' bones tied to his spear, and even more so, memories of the things that he had done, reflected the truth of what the Horror said. *I am a fool*, he thought, *a puppet and a Horror*. As his eyes lit on the reflection of his mother's ring, a slight smile crept to the corner of his mouth. *But what do I do to Horrors?*

With a sudden burst of speed, Sallamereath charged straight ahead, spear aimed directly at his reflection. In a crash of shattering glass, the Horror Stalker leaped through the mirror, his momentum carrying him into the Horror. With a satisfying jolt, his spear slipped between two of the plates of the Horror's carapace.

The Horror screamed, planting four of its limbs through the floor, and thrusting its body in the air. Sallamereath planted his feet firmly on the beast's shell, and held on to the shaft of the spear, still wedged in the monster's body. It flung its body back and forth, trying to shake him loose. Sallamereath shoved the spear further in the monster, using all his determination to hang on.

„Now we are done playing!” roared the Horror. Dozens of its limbs flailed against Sallamereath, even battering him with the bodies. Several of the spines pierced Sallamereath, his body spurting blood, wracked with pain; yet he hung on.

From within the body of the Horror, a light began to glow.

Multicolored sparks shot out from between the cracks of the carapace. The roars of the Horror shook the hall, its massive body convulsing in pain. With one last shudder, and a final explosion of stars, the Horror exploded. Gore splattered the walls, its shell pieces clattering against the hard wood. Sallamereath was thrown from the blast, his battered body hitting the floor.

Sallamereath stirred after several moments of lying motionless on the floor. He dragged the curtain over one of the still-lit candles, making a funeral pyre out of the hall. As Sallamereath limped out of the building, bones broken, bloody wounds dripping, a crowd of villagers, drawn by the noise, was waiting. With one look, and a shake of the head he gestured that they should not go into the hall. They stared after him as he limped to his horse, and pulling a water skin from his saddlebags. He washed some of the gore from his body and his face, tied his spear to the saddle and limped back toward the crowd. The stunned villagers parted as he walked near, but he paused among them looking for someone.

He stopped in front of his quarry, the young girl he had scared before. She was hiding behind her mother's skirts. Wordlessly, he held out his hand to her and smiled. She looked to her mother, who nodded half in fear, half in awe. The little girl stepped timidly forward and reached her hand

Lest ye...

out. Her small, browned hand made a strong contrast to the pale, scarred and thorned hand of the Horror Stalker. The blood elf and the girl walked off, his limping matched by her small strides, followed at a distance by the village.

The odd pair stopped at the little garden where they had met before. Sallamereath kneeled next to the flowers that had been trampled, wincing from his wounds. The little girl followed suit. Sallamereath picked up a trowel and smiled again at the girl.

„Here,” he said, voice cracked from lack of use, „Let me show you how to fix these blooms.” As the hall burned behind them, the villagers watched the hardened Horror hunter and the young girl playing in the garden.

Game Information

Sallamereath, Blood Elf

7th Circle Horror Stalker and 5th Circle Nethermancer

Description

Sallamereath is an extremely pale-skinned, lanky blood elf, with long, unkempt black hair, and red eyes. He wears hide armor made from a black panther, and normally wears simple black clothing. He has many black and red tattoos on his body.

Attributes

Dexterity (18): 7/D12
Strength (13): 6/D10
Toughness (10): 5/D8
Perception (22): 9/D6+D8
Willpower (23): 9/D6+D8
Charisma (13): 6/D10

Combat

Physical Defense: 12
Spell Defense: 18
Social Defense: 8
Physical Armor: 8
Mystic Armor: 7

Initiative

Dice: 6/D10

Damage

Death Rating: 73 (67)
Wound Threshold: 8
Unconsciousness Rating: 57 (51)
Recovery Tests: 1
Recovery Step: 5/D8

Karma

Dice: 4/D6

Movement

Full: 90
Combat: 45

Talents

Animal Possession (3): 12/2D10
Astral Sight (7): 16/D20+D8
Bear Mark (4): 13/D12+D10
Deathstrike (2): 11/D10+D8
Durability (7)
Empathic Sense (4): 10/D10+D6
Evidence Analysis (7): 16/D8+D20
Frighten (5): 14/D20+D4
Horror Weaving (4): 13/D12+D10
Karma Ritual (4)
Life Check (7): 12/2D10
Melee Weapons (7(+3)): 17/D20+D10

Missile Weapons (7(+3)): 17/D20+D10
Nethermancy (5): 14/D20+D4
R/W Language (3): 12/2D10
R/W Magic (3): 12/2D10
Second Attack (4(+3)): 14/D20+D4
Silent Walk (7): 14/D20+D4
Spell Casting (5(+2)): 16/D20+D8
Spell Matrix x4(5)
Spirit Dodge (7): 16/D20+D8
Spirit Hold (4): 18/D20+D12
Steel Thought (7): 16/D20+D8
Temper Self (7): 16/D20+D8
Tracking (7): 16/D20+D8
Willforce (7(+1)): 17/D20+D10

Knacks: Shadow Hide (7), Astral Tracking (7), Horror Analysis (5), Lay of the Land (4), Spirit Shield (7)

(Note: The above are not officially Horror Stalker knacks, as there are no officially published ones. The parenthetical numbers are recommended levels for the knacks, and the Horror Analysis is from Evidence Analysis, not Creature Analysis.)

Skills

Alchemy (4): 13/D12+D10

Armorer (3):

Botany (3): 12/2D10

Speak Language (2): 11/D10+D8

Wilderness Survival (3): 12/2D10

Equipment

Elven War Bow [Damage 13/D12+D10]

20 War Arrows

Hide Armor

Espagra Scale Cloak

„Sallamereath’s Vengeance”-Trispear
[Damage 20/ D20+D8+D6] (see below)

Dagger [Damage 10/D10+D6]

Throwing Dagger [Damage 10/D10+D6]
(hidden in left sleeve)

Sling [Damage 11/D10+D8] (Wrapped around right wrist)

Ring of Accuracy [Rank 4 thread attached; see p. 68, **EDC**]

Crystal Buckler [Rank 3 Thread attached; see p. 62, **EDC**]

Sallamereath’s Vengeance

Maximum Threads: 2

Spell Defense: 25

This is a trispear (forged +5) with a dark wooden shaft, stained dark red near the middle. Beneath the black metal three-pointed head, several burnt bones with thorns growing out of them are lashed to the shaft. Close examination will show that the shaft was built around a nethermancer’s wand. The wand is now integral to the item; if removed, it will prove useless, and destroy the spear as well.

Rank 1 – Unbreakable Determination

Cost: 2,100

Thread Bracers [Rank 3 Thread attached; see p. 65, **EDC**]

Horror Fend and Desperate Spell Blood Tattoos [see p. 68, **AM**]

Various Botanically Derived Poisons – Black Mercy, Fireleaf, Hemlock and Laesal

Riding Horse – “Cirrolletish”

Spells

Circle 1: Astral Spear, Command Nightflyer, Detect Undead, Experience Death, Spirit Dart*, Spirit Grip, Undead Struggle

Circle 2: Ethereal Darkness*, Fog Ghost, Life Circle of One, Shadow’s Whisper, Shield Mist

Circle 3: Arrow of Night, Dark Messenger, Death’s Head, Fog of Fear, Pain, Shadow Meld*, Spirit Double

Circle 4: Blood Servitor, Dark Spy, Evil Eye, Last Chance, Viewpoint, Visions of Death

Circle 5: Astral Horror, Astral Whisper, Circle of Astral Protection, Dispel Magic, Pass Ward, Sculpt Darkness, Sense Horror, Shadow Hunter, Star Shower*, Tears of the Scourge, Target Portal, Wither Limb

* usually in Matrix

Questor Of Myrnbruje, Rank 3

Increase Perception: 12/2D10

Perceive Emotion: 12/2D10

Ease Suffering: 9/D6+D8

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the trispear.

Deed: The wielder must swear a Blood Oath of Vengeance.

Effect: The trispear now deals STR+11 Damage, and adds +1 step to Spellcasting (as wand). The spear is now, for all practical purposes, unbreakable.

Rank 2 – Indefatigable Tenacity

Cost: 3,400

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn Sallamereath’s race and Discipline.

Effect: The trispear now does STR+12 Damage, and adds +2 steps to Spellcasting (as wand).

Lest ye... When the spearhead is imbedded in a victim, the wielder, by expending 1 point of Strain, can cause the thorns on the bones around the head to grow into the flesh of the victim, making the spear very difficult to remove. To remove it, the victim must make a Strength Test against a Difficulty Number equaling the result of the wielder's combined Strength and Willforce steps. This may cause more damage to the victim.

Rank 3 – Piercing Rage

Cost: 5,500

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn why Sallamereath became a Horror Stalker.

Effect: The trispear now does STR +13 Damage, adds +2 steps to Spellcasting, and +1 to Spell Defense (as wand). For the cost of 1 point of Strain each time it is used, an Armor-Defeating Hit is now scored with the spear at one success level less than normal.

Rank 4 – Focused Anger

Cost: 8,900

Deed: The wielder must slay a Horror with the trispear.

Effect: The trispear now does STR+14 Damage, and adds +2 to Spellcasting, +2 to Spell Defense, and +1 step to Willforce on Spell Effect Tests (as wand). For the cost of 2 points of Strain, an Armor-Defeating Hit is now scored with the spear at two success levels lower than normal. In addition, whenever an Armor-Defeating Hit is scored, the Rank 2 ability is used to secure the spear within the body of the victim, and the wielder remains holding onto the shaft of the spear, a conduit is formed along the spear. Any spells cast, or talents used by the wielder, can now pass directly along the shaft into the victim, automatically bypassing all armor, both physical and mystic. Note that for this ability to remain in effect, the user must maintain a hold on the shaft of the weapon. This severely limits the user's ability to dodge blows in combat and such, reducing their physical defense rating by at least 3, more at the GM's discretion. In addition, any talents that dodge attacks, such as Avoid Blow, suffer at least a 3 step penalty.

The Puppeteer

A Horror

Attributes

DEX: 12 **STR:** 14 **TOU:** 16
PER: 12 **WIL:** 16 **CHA:** 12

| | |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Initiative: 12 | Physical Defense: 16 |
| Number of Attacks: 12 (or more) | Spell Defense: 18 |
| Attack: 16 | Social Defense: 14 |
| Damage: 18 | Armor: 20 |
| Number of Spells: 1 | Mystic Armor: 20 |
| Spellcasting: 14 | Knockdown: NA |
| Effect: See Powers | Recovery Tests: 10 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Death Rating: 120 | Combat Movement: 40 |
| Wound Threshold: 12 | Full Movement: 80 |
| Unconsciousness: Immune | |

Karma Points: 30 **Karma Step:** 14

Powers: Corrupt Karma 12, Karma Tap 16, Terror 14, Thought Worm 14, Horror Mark 15, Horror Thread 14, Suppress Horror Mark 13

Legend Points: 10,000

Commentary

The Puppeteer is an ovoid mass of slimy flesh and black armored plates about twenty feet in diameter, which constantly shift and change shape. From between the plates, mouths and eyes are sporadically visible, as well as dozens of spindly but extremely tough limbs. The number of limbs is not constant, as they will disappear and reappear from within the armor plates. These limbs all end in pincers, claws or spikes, and they can be used either as legs or as weapons. The Puppeteer can attack multiple opponents with these every round, the number of attacks being dependent on

the number of opponents. If only one person is fighting, he may be subjected to up to a dozen of these in one round, while a half-dozen opponents may only face three or four.

The Puppeteer is not merely a fighting machine, however, and likes using its powers to spin elaborate and subtle plots, corrupting Name-givers and making them wreak havoc in their communities. It also takes pleasure in disassembling Name-givers with its many arms. It will use its inherent Forge Horror Construct power to make patchwork monstrosities assembled from the body parts of numerous Name-givers.

Using These in Your Campaign

Sallamereath makes an excellent NPC for a campaign. He can be a mysterious, silent figure that either aids or frustrates the characters. He can give a group of adepts hints in dealing with a Horror, or save their bacon if they are in too deep against a Horror. By using his Shadow Hide knack, his Shadow Meld and Sculpt Darkness spells, he can appear out of the dark seemingly at will. However, if the party is in his way in chasing a Horror, or he thinks that they are working for Horrors, he will be a relentless and powerful opponent.

His motives and personality will differ greatly depending on whether he is encountered

before or after his final confrontation with the Puppeteer. Before he will be nearly silent and intensely driven. His relatively low rank as a Myrnbruje Questor stems from the fact that while he has the thirst for knowledge and justice down, he has neglected the compassion aspect of his Passion. If you wish a more malignant figure in your campaign, you may even allow him to have become so consumed with vengeance that he has slipped into becoming a Questor of Raggok instead, though he may still believe himself to be following Myrnbruje.

After the defeat of the Puppeteer, and the revelations of his manipulation of Sallamereath, he will be much less dour, though still very driven. In fact, at this point his Questor rank may be much higher. After this he may be a good mentor or teacher for a lower level Horror stalker; before, he would not have had the time. Also after the confrontation, his Blood Karma Charm will be used up.

Sallamereath's Trispear is an extremely powerful weapon and should not be allowed to fall into the hands of low-level characters, as it may easily upset game balance.

The Puppeteer makes an excellent villain for a campaign, possibly using its Horror Thread power to take control of people important to the characters, and making them

Lest ye...

torment the characters through deception, betrayal and outright attack. The Puppeteer only fights when it chooses, and will flee from confrontation to keep stringing along the characters for months or years until it gets bored.

Adventure Idea

The characters discover Sallamereath's Trispear in the lair of a Horror. While researching the Key Knowledges, they learn of his story and assume the legendary Horror Stalker finally met his match. Unbeknownst to the party, a Horror, fearing that he was next on Sallamereath's hit list, had some minions steal his trispear and spirit it across the province. Sallamereath is seriously injured, but will eventually recover, and then come looking for his spear, to which he still has a thread woven. At the same time, various Horrors realize it is not a healthy thing for them for Sallamereath to be reunited with his spear, and so will send minions to try to take it from the party. When Sallamereath catches up to the party, they will have to convince him that they had nothing to do with the spear's disappearance. Meanwhile, a meddlesome Horror will try to convince both sides that the other is working for the Horrors, hoping that they will kill each other off.

ASH PHANTOMS

by Kathleen E. Czechkowski

Respectfully submitted by Nossirkaj Tran, for potential inclusion in future volumes of Creatures of Barsaive.

It is with heavy heart that I take up the quill on this day. One of my friends, Gelfand Sekela, an ork Warrior of the Sixth Circle, has passed into the realm of the Thirteenth Passion. Though no body remained, I saw with my own eyes the bloodstained, threadbare garments he once wore, and knew the truth.

He and his group, the Jade Lions, had ventured into the Badlands in search of a fabled shield that once belonged to the great Kovesdi Ormiston. Two months passed before his wife came to Masuya, asking for her help in the search for her mate. Masuya agreed, and brought the banner of the Griffins out of storage, calling upon us to aid her. Gry, Komie, and I agreed, of course, and with us went two other Name-givers: Aiken Cevizian, an elf Scout of Fifth Circle from Travar; and Fisher Haryani, a human spirit speaker half-adept.

Aiken's talents picked up the trail once we discovered Gelf's distinctive mark on a tree – a simple, single-line profile of a roaring lion. We left our mark below it, in case we, too, might need someone to find us – a

rampant griffin. On the surrounding trees, we saw marks of other groups and individuals that had gone into the Badlands before us: a carving of a dagger, no doubt belonging to my friend's sister, Morvani Si'Kander; a bugle for the Cry of Victory; a foaming stein of brew for the Alehouse Covenant; a curved sword for the Restorers of T'Kambras. Many others could be seen scarring the bark of the oaks, but I could not identify them.

The Scout led us into the forbidding land, following a path only he could see, a path that wound over the landscape like the meanderings of a drunken snake. At the end of the first night, we camped in a hollow behind a dune, keeping nervous watch. It was then that I saw my first ash phantom.

Perhaps this is not the Name of these... creatures? constructs? spirits? Horrors?... but this is what I have decided to call them. As I stood my watch, I gradually became aware of a whispering sound, like a light breeze, though I felt no air moving. When I turned, I perceived a sphere of flying soot, slowly resolving itself into a Name-giver-like figure; a woman, molded out of monochrome clay. Her face consisted of only arched

hollows for eyes; no nose, no mouth. She seemed to be wearing a long, loose dress that slowly rippled in the nonexistent breeze.

The hollows that were her eyes turned to me, and she held out her hands plaintively, as if asking for something – perhaps release. All I could do was stare, frightened. Finally, I summoned up the strength to nudge Komie awake. At the Warrior's waking movements, the ash phantom dispersed.

Komie was rather disgusted with what she perceived as a purposeless awakening, so I explained what I had seen. She listened, but seemed unconvinced. It was only later, during her watch, that she shook me awake. „I saw one,” she said, her voice trembling. „It looked like it was begging for something.”

At breakfast the next morning, Komie and I told the others what we saw. Masuya admitted she had seen one as well, but it was far away. Setting aside our reservations, we continued on the journey. Aiken was able to locate another lion profile, scrawled onto a rock with chalk, to serve as a guide and focus for his talents.

For half a day, we slogged through the dust, which pulled

at our ankles like thick mud. We tired quickly, and decided to rest before going on. It was then that another phantom appeared, attacking us. It seemed to take the form of a wolf, only larger, and attacked us as such a creature might. We sliced at it with our blades, trying to avoid the sooty jaws. I received a bite to the arm, and some of the others were scratched, before we finally were able to disperse the creature.

It was then that Fisher became quite agitated. „We must hide!“ she cried, and pulled Gry under a rocky overhang. We followed, trusting her instincts, and it was good that we did. Another smoky shape appeared, twice the size of the wolf-phantom, and it appeared to be looking for something. We hid until it passed out of sight. From then on, we trusted our ears and Fisher’s warnings, narrowly avoiding several other encounters with large, terrifying-looking ash phantoms, as well as the smaller, Name-giver-like ones.

On the third day we located the remains of the Jade Lions. Heavily pitted blades and threadbare clothing poked out of the dust. I recognized one item as belonging to Gelf – a bloodstained portion of a green tunic, emblazoned with an embroidered lion’s head. His lucky shirt. Fisher delicately pulled it from under the dust, and stroked it gently.

It was as if lightning had struck her. Her body stiffened,

and she began to whine. Blood rushed from her eyes, and she spasmed, her face a grinning rictus. Thinking quickly, Masuya jerked the tunic away from her rigid fingers, and lifting her bodily, carried the spirit speaker away from the area. We ran for only one hundred yards or so, but it was enough to make a significant difference in Fisher.

She choked, wiping the blood from her cheeks. „Something terrible happened there. When I contacted Gelf, I felt as if my flesh were being scoured from my bones. He’s beyond our ability to help, as are the others.“ Tears streamed from her eyes, creating clear runnels in the blood. „I want to leave.“

The rest of us agreed, but not before we had found something to bring back to Gelf’s wife. Leaving Fisher with Gry and Masuya, Aiken, Komie and I returned to the site to search for a token. When we took a closer look at the scene, we realized that more had been left behind than just the few pitiful remains of the Jade Lions.

Huge gouges had been torn out of the ground, lined with a thin, slick soot... much like the grime that had coated our swords after our fight with the wolf-phantom. If these were claw-marks, however, the thing that created them was at least eight times the size of that wolf, probably more. Anxiously, we recovered what we could, then returned to Masuya, and made best speed out of the Badlands. From what Fisher was able to

piece together from those few memories that slipped through the pain, whatever killed the Lions did not attack them as the wolf did. It surrounded them, and ground them into dust.

I know not what created these things... perhaps the corrupted nature of the land itself is the origin of these peculiar, often dangerous entities. Whatever their origin or intent, they should be avoided.

Rules

There are two forms of ash phantoms, all of which may only be encountered in (or more rarely, close to) the Badlands. The first, referred to as benign ash phantoms, frequently take the form of pleading Name-givers. These never attack, but will defend or disperse if set upon.

The second form, the malignant ash phantoms, come in a variety of sizes, ranging from small (the size of the wolf-phantom) to large (the killer of the Jade Lions). Except for their shadowy shape and Engulf ability, they move and behave similar to the creatures they look like, but do not have a particular creature’s specialized attacks. For example, an ash phantom that looks like a wyvern will be able to fly, but will not possess the wyvern’s poison attack. A good rule of thumb: if the original creature’s special ability relies on Spellcasting to use it, the corresponding ash phantom form will not possess it. For any specific statistic, such as

number of attacks or Damage step, the ash phantom statistics below take precedence over those of the creature whose form it has taken.

All ash phantoms have the ability to disperse at will in one round. In order to do so, they must attain an average success on a Spellcasting or Willpower roll against their own, unaltered Spell Defense. For example, a small ash phantom must roll 13 or above on their Spellcasting step of 9 in order to disperse. One or more Karma may be used on this test, and it does not count as an action. Thus, an ash phantom may use all of its allowed attacks, make a combat move, and disperse in a single round.

More detailed information about specific ash phantom forms is provided below their respective statistics.

Adventure Hooks

For lower-Circle groups:

Rumors of attacks on caravans and travelers on the paths near the Badlands have come to the attention of the adepts. When they investigate, they discover a lone small (though still quite dangerous)



ash phantom has been lying in wait along the caravan path, wreaking havoc, then vanishing. The adepts must locate the phantom, and destroy or permanently disperse it before it kills again. It will be tricky, though, as the phantom is quite cunning, and may disperse itself to avoid being killed by the adepts, only to reform later and continue its activity.

For high-Circle groups:

Fisher's brief, agonizing contact with the spirit of Gelfand in the Badlands did not end her pain. For many nights, she has dreamed of being torn apart, bit by bit, and believes Gelfand is trying to communicate with her. Exhausted and haunted, she finally contacts the adepts, and

asks for their assistance. Fisher believes that if she returns to the site of Gelf's death, she will be more able to communicate with him and determine what he wants.

The adepts travel through the Badlands, escorting Fisher and following her unerring direction. When they finally arrive at the site of the death of the Jade Lions, Fisher discovers what Gelf was trying to communicate to her: he had uncovered the location of Kovesdi's shield. Gelf wants the shield recovered, and given to his tribe, now in Cara Fahd. Before the adepts can get to it, though, they must get through the ash phantoms that lie between them and the prize.

Statistics

Benign Ash Phantom

Attributes:

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

Initiative: 6 **Physical Defense:** 8
Number of Attacks: 1 **Spell Defense:** 10
Attack: 8 **Social Defense:** 9
 Damage: 10 **Armor:** 3
Number of Spells: NA **Mystic Armor:** 3
Spellcasting: NA **Knockdown:** 6
 Effect: NA **Recovery Tests:** 2

Death Rating: 45 **Combat Movement:** 30
Wound Threshold: 9 **Full Movement:** 60
Unconsciousness Rating: NA

Karma Points: 5 **Karma Steps:** 4/D6

Legend Points: 125
Equipment: None.
Loot: None.

Commentary

See **Rules**, above.

Malignant Ash Phantom: Small

Attributes:

DEX: 11 **STR:** 11 **TOU:** 10
PER: 9 **WIL:** 9 **CHA:** 9

Initiative: 11 **Physical Defense:** 13
Number of Attacks: 2 **Spell Defense:** 15
Attack: 13 **Social Defense:** 13
 Damage: 18 **Armor:** 7
Number of Spells: **Mystic Armor:** 7
Spellcasting: NA **Knockdown:** 11
 Effect: NA **Recovery Tests:** 3

Death Rating: 85 **Combat Movement:** 45
Wound Threshold: 14 **Full Movement:** 90
Unconsciousness Rating: NA

Karma Points: 5 **Karma Steps:** 5/D8

Legend Points: 1500

Equipment: None.

Loot: None

Commentary

Small malignant ash phantoms often take the form of wolves or other large predators, and use the same attack styles (but not specialized abilities) that the original creatures might. These are usually seen in the interior of the Badlands, not on the outer fringes.

Malignant Ash Phantom: Medium

Attributes:

DEX: 15 **STR:** 15 **TOU:** 15
PER: 14 **WIL:** 14 **CHA:** 14

Initiative: 16 **Physical Defense:** 16
Number of Attacks: 3 **Spell Defense:** 20
Attack: 18 **Social Defense:** 22
 Damage: 23 **Armor:** 12
Number of Spells: 1 **Mystic Armor:** 12
Spellcasting: 18 **Knockdown:** 17
 Effect: Engulf 15 **Recovery Tests:** 5

Death Rating: 125 **Combat Movement:** 60
Wound Threshold: 19 **Full Movement:** 120
Unconsciousness Rating: NA

Karma Points: 10 **Karma Steps:** 6/D10

Legend Points: 15,000

Equipment: None.

Loot: None.

Commentary

Considerably more dangerous than their smaller counterparts, these are only rarely seen even in the interior of the Badlands. They usually take the form of larger predators, such as skeorx or wyvern, and

use similar attacks, but do not possess the specialized, Spellcasting-based abilities. In addition, they have the ability to engulf a victim, surrounding them with their bodies and slowly abrading their flesh away.

Malignant Ash Phantom: Large

Attributes:

DEX: 21 **STR:** 21 **TOU:** 20

PER: 19 **WIL:** 19 **CHA:** 19

Initiative: 21 **Physical Defense:** 23

Number of Attacks: 4 **Spell Defense:** 26

Attack: 23 **Social Defense:** 25

Damage: 28 **Armor:** 18

Number of Spells: 1 **Mystic Armor:** 18

Spellcasting: 24 **Knockdown:** 23

Effect: Engulf 20 **Recovery Tests:** 7

Death Rating: 200 **Combat Movement:** 75

Wound Threshold: 24 **Full Movement:** 150

Unconsciousness Rating: NA

Karma Points: 15 **Karma Steps:** 7/D12

Legend Points: 70,000

Equipment: None.

Loot: None.

Commentary

Only one of these ash phantoms is believed to exist, and has not been seen by any living being. The only evidence of its existence includes half-written journal entries and marks left behind at scenes of attack. The journal entries, both of them, describe a large, vaguely draconic figure.

BLOOD DUELS

by Keith Graham

„Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.” –Princess Bride

The ring of metal on sheath sang in the humid night air. „Aeron! I call you out!” cried Skowroken, blocking Aeron’s path with naked steel.

„And why would I waste my time with you, child?” Aeron replied, stopping unconcerned and sneering at the bared blade as only an elf can.

„So my friends won’t kill you,” Skowroken said, gesturing to the adventurers surrounding him.

Aeron cocked his head slightly to one side, a sardonic smile playing on his lips. „Assuming for the moment that they could, why won’t they kill me after I’ve killed you?”

Skowroken merely raised a wickedly sharp black dagger, narrowed his eyes, and hissed, „To the Death.”

Aeron nodded, slid his cape from his shoulders, and smiled magnanimously. „Well, that changes everything. Certainly, child. To the Death.” He turned to his dinner date, a young elf lass in a rune-embroidered tunic. „Please hold my cloak so I don’t dirty it. This won’t take but a second.”

Skowroken faced his companions, his voice stern. „This will end here. You must not attempt to harm Aeron if he wins. No matter what happens, you must not attempt to help me. You must not cross the Circle. No. Matter. What. Happens. Does everyone swear?” He paused, waiting for the word of his fellows. Skowroken’s actions and the blade were both



unfamiliar; still, each of them nodded in reluctant agreement

Skowroken and Aeron stepped into the street, and the hushed crowd backed away, making room for their duel. Skowroken held up the Black Blade, glistening wetly in the half-light of the quartzes lining the street. „I invite you into the Circle, one against one, blade against blade. To the Death.”

Aeron voiced the ritual reply. „I accept your invitation, one against one, blade against blade. To the Death.”

Then together, their voices magically amplified, they chanted, „To the Death. None may interfere. To the Death. The Circle protects us. To the Death. The Circle binds us. To the Death.” They held up their left hands and grasped the sharp edges of the Black Blade, slashing open their palms. The once-solid blade split into two ghostly parts, wavering in the air like ebony mist.

As if in a trance, Aeron and Skowroken each took half, and moved away from each other until they were ten paces apart. They paced clockwise in a circle, holding their half of the blade outstretched in their left hands. A thin ribbon of blood drizzled from the point of the blade, leaving a luminous scarlet trail on the ground. When the Circle was complete, the blades disappeared, and a flash of blue rinsed the Circle, blinding the onlookers momentarily. When they blinked away the spots, the onlookers saw a glowing red dome had risen over the Circle, enclosing the fighters.

The combatants turned to face one another. Aeron drew his own blade and sank into a crouch, smiling pleasantly. „To what do I owe the honor of this gift?” As he talked, he circled to the left, observing his opponent carefully.

Skowroken lunged forward, his sword flashing in the red haze, and metal clashed. Blades still interlocked, Skowroken hissed, „You killed my parents, and now I’ve come to avenge them.”

Aeron shoved his opponent away, knocking him off balance. The dome of red flashed and hissed when Skowroken’s broadsword touched it. „I’ve killed many people, child, including not a few parents. Who were yours?”

Righting himself, Skowroken replied, „Anna and Terrance of the Long Reach,” and lunged to attack again.

Aeron parried the attack and stepped aside, effortlessly blocking Skowroken’s flailing attacks. „Skowroken? Or were you raised under another Name, child?”

Skowroken appeared startled by his own Name, and held his attack for a moment. He regained his composure and spit at Aeron’s feet. „You have no right to use my Name, murderer.” He again attacked, and Aeron again parried.

„That may be so, son, but I did not kill your parents,” he gasped between blows, „They were perhaps my dearest friends and closest companions, and I would never have harmed them.

„I am now in a most unfortunate situation, of killing my friends’ son, or permitting someone who claims to be him to kill me,” he continued.

„Liar!” screamed Skowroken, and with a whirlwind of blows, he drove Aeron back until he was almost touching the eerie red dome.

Suddenly, out of the crowd, Aeron’s elf companion cast a spell at Skowroken. As the bolt of magical energy hit the red globe, it split, and struck both Aeron and Skowroken. Both were thrown to the street from the impact.

Rules

The Blood Duel is a ritual learned by Swordmasters, typically upon attaining Fifth Circle. The ritual includes the knowledge of the Oath, as well as how to manufacture a Black Blade. The materials to make a Black Blade cost 250 silver pieces and include an obsidian blade. The Swordmaster makes a Half-Magic Test against a Target Number of 12 to create the blade. Weaponsmiths of Fifth Circle or

As Aeron stood, he smiled, perhaps too politely, at his companion, „Your interference in this matter will not benefit me. Please refrain from providing further assistance.” Some of Skowroken’s party, who had obviously been considering providing aid, looked questioningly at one another.

Skowroken screamed at them, „You promised not to interfere! You must not!” and turned to face Aeron.

As he did, Aeron reached in his belt pouch, and drew forth a talisman. „This was the token of my membership in the Long Reach. I was bound by the group oath. I could not have killed them. Who sent you, to waste your life trying to kill me, the last member of the Long Reach?”

„LIAR!” screamed Skowroken, as he attacked recklessly, sword swung overhead in a clumsy strike. Aeron casually struck him in the leg as he passed, and Skowroken crashed into the glowing red barrier. It did not slow his passage in the least, but Skowroken convulsed in pain the moment he touched it. He crawled back into the circle, and the pain seemed to ease, although he was obviously very seriously injured.

„Your parents used to call you ‘urchin’, did they not?” said Aeron, circling warily.

A moment of realization, and then horror, swept Skowroken’s face. His sword dropped from his numb hand. „What have I done?” he cried.

Aeron’s guard dropped, and the point of his sword dipped towards the ground. „I do not wish to kill you, child.”

And at that moment, the red dome flashed ominously, and began to contract. Within seconds, it had closed two paces, and was nearing Aeron. Aeron looked up at the dome, as if he had forgotten it, and frowned.

„But that matters not child, for one of us must now die. To the Death”. Aeron’s sword came up, and a cold look entered his eyes.

higher and alchemists with Rank 5 Alchemy skill are also capable of creating a Black Blade, if given the formula.

Any character of any Discipline can learn the Oath, and can participate in a Blood Duel if they have a Black Blade.

The Duel

Blood Duels are a form of sacrifice magic. Once the characters swear the oath, they clasp the naked edge of the blade, causing 4 points of immediate Blood Magic damage to each character. It then takes 3 rounds for the characters to form the Circle. Upon completion of the Circle, a blue light washes through it. This acts as a Dispel Magic spell, with an effect of Step 20, cast against every spell and item inside the Circle.

Once completed, no one may cross the Circle with impunity. Duelists who cross the Circle take a number of damage points equal to their Wound Threshold, not reduced by armor, which automatically causes a Wound. This damage is inflicted every round in which any part of their body is outside of the Circle. Anyone else entering the Circle takes the same damage and must make a Knockdown Test against a Target Number of 12. As long as the character is within the Circle, they take the damage every round.

It is more difficult for non-participants to attack characters within the duel. Increase the duelists' defenses by +5 against any form of attack. In addition, any damage caused by non-participants magically damages the other combatant as well. For example, if an Archer manages to shoot a duelist, and does 7 points of damage reduced to 4 points by armor, the blood magic link causes the other duelist to also take 4 points of damage not reduced by armor. Spells cast by non-participants against the duelists behave unpredictably. Legends tell of spells that affected both combatants, or changed targets when they crossed the Circle.

It is impossible to stop the duel. If both stop fighting, the Circle will start to shrink every round. Eventually, when the Circle touches one or both characters, they will start taking damage and eventually die. Even if the Circle is somehow dispelled, the characters must continue to fight until the terms of the duel are met, and will take damage and wounds as though they had crossed the circle.

The losing character is dead, and may not be revived. Since Duels to the Death are a form of sacrifice magic, there is no known means to restore life to someone who dies during a Duel to the Death. A Duel to the Death requires that one of the characters must die. The winning character gains Legend Points for defeating their opponent.

The spirit of the losing character is trapped within the blade. If the winning character wishes to release the loser, he may do so and the winner may then heal the Blood Magic damage caused by the ritual. However, the winning character may trap the spirit in the Blade for a year and day by keeping the 4 points of Blood Magic damage from the ritual.

A spirit trapped in the Black Blade gives the winner a new karma pool. This karma pool is equal to the maximum karma points of the losing character, and has the karma die of the loser. One point from this pool may be spent on any Test made by the winner. This karma pool may not be replenished and disappears after a year and a day, whether or not it is used. At the end of a year, the winner may choose to keep the loser's spirit trapped another year and a day by renewing the ritual and keeping the 4 points of Blood Magic, but the karma pool is still lost.

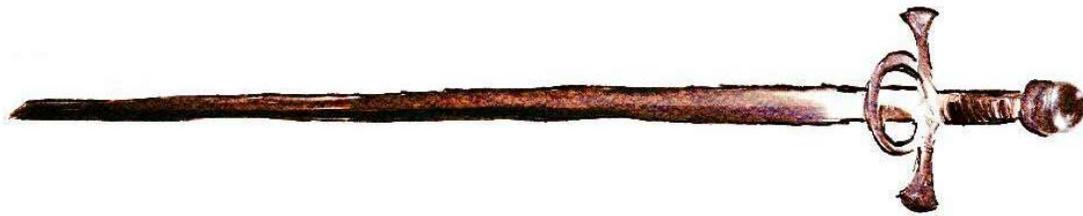
Duels to First Blood

Duels to First Blood are used to resolve disputes between Swordmasters. A Duel to First Blood is a variation of the Blood Promise Oath, and does not require a Black Blade, although they are sometimes used. During the ritual, each character specifies a condition that they must abide for a year and a day if they lose the duel. The conditions could include banishment, not courting a certain person, retrieving a

stolen or lost item, or other task as agreed by the characters. The condition may be different for each character.

As part of the Blood Promise, the characters agree to fight until one is wounded or knocked unconscious, and that accepting assistance or leaving the Circle forfeits the duel. The magic of the duel will prevent either character from unintentionally killing the other character. If an attack would normally kill a character, the character is only knocked unconscious and is one damage point from death. If both participants stop fighting, they each take a number of points of damage equal to their Wound Threshold, an automatic Wound, and both characters forfeit. They are both considered to have lost the duel.

Only the loser of a Duel to First Blood is committed to their Blood Promise. Both characters keep the four points of damage for a year and a day, or until the condition has been met. The penalties for the loser not completing the condition are the same as for not completing a Blood Promise. The winner of a Duel to First Blood gains Legend Points for defeating the character. In addition, the winner gains a permanent +3 Step bonus to any social tests against the loser.



ACCENTS OF BARSAIVE

by Stuart Parr

It's always difficult for GMs to do justice to the extraordinary high quality of source material provided for Earthdawn, and make the PCs feel as if they are really there. One technique that our group has employed is the use of accents for different regions of Barsaive. Accents give the PCs the impression that they are moving through a living world where people are not just faceless, monotonous caricatures wherever they go.

As we travel through our world we hear different accents. Upon hearing a new accent we cannot help but form some opinion about that person and their accent, whether they are streetwise like Ali G or mad locals like the League of Gentlemen. When players arrive in a new area or city, they know they are strangers in a strange land by the different accents they hear about them. Role-playing is fundamentally a game that requires speaking and listening. The altering of the GM's voice to indicate change is one of the tools that can be used in role-playing.

Players react to accents. If accents from your own country are used, players carry their own prejudices with them regarding certain accents. If your PCs are perfectly PC and have no prejudices, its fun to try and culture some by playing bigoted, dodgey, dangerous and downright irritating NPCs with strong accents.

In our campaign, we took regional accent map of Britain superimposed over the map of Barsaive. With a few notable variations the breakdown of Barsaivian/British accents worked out like this:

Throal

Delightfully, the Throalic accent is a broad Yorkshire accent. Given the naturally superior attitude of many Throalic dwarfs, there is nothing more entertaining than patronizing the party's troll warrior with that well-known dwarf refrain, „Now then, lad, you don't want to do it like that. This is how you do it. Take it from me we dwarfs know a thing or two about...”

It's amazing how versatile and irritating this phrase is (especially to a troll). What's more, short speeches like this really build up the aloofness of Throalic dwarfs very quickly.

Kratas

Thieves, murderers and low-lives who'd steal the boots off your feet as soon as look at you inhabit the looted citadel of Kratas. Coincidentally, the regional accent covering Kratas is a mixture of Scouse and Mancunian (that's Liverpool and Manchester in case you're wondering).

Travar

The vast mercantile city-state of Travar is, ironically, inhabited by cockney wide boys wheelin' and dealin', duckin' and divin' trying to earn a few silvers to make good on their next deal. Many is the Travarian who lives by the proverb, „He who dares, wins.” Also, „This time next year, I'll be a millionaire.”

Jerris

Out on the rim of Barsaive lies the troubled city of Jerris. Drenched in Horrific pollution, the region is rich in natural resources, but few people genuinely want to live in this Passions-cursed place. The folk of Jerris and the surrounding region carry Welsh accents, from broad Cardiff accents through mild Aberystwyth tones to the throat-ripping sounds of Anglesey.

Urupa

The residents of the trading port of Urupa have accents similar to the good people of Hull.

Sky Point & Vivane

Native Barsaivians living in and around Sky Point and Vivane have the rural tones of Cornwall. As for the Therans, see the section below on special accents.

Haven

The good folk of Haven living in the far north-east of Barsaive are tough as nails. Not only do they live in one of the most Horror-infested parts of Barsaive, but can also be frequently seen wearing short-sleeve tunics during cold snaps while the rest of us shiver in our Dwarf Winternight cloaks. Native Havenites have Geordie accents (that's Newcastle-upon-Tyne).

Other Accents in Barsaive

Aside from the major cities of Barsaive, other regions and Name-giver groups have their own accents, some of which are detailed below.

Crystal Raiders

The proud highland trolls that are the Crystal Raider clans have strong and often guttural Scottish accents which makes them quite difficult for lowlanders to understand. Consequently, this further complicates dealing with the Crystal Raiders. After all, if you ask for help in understanding them, you're no more than Newot-fodder. „See ye, ya greet lump o' mud, ye git reet on ma tits, ya wee radge!”

Accents of Barsaive

The above statement is often a prelude to violence or „square-go”. If confronted with an angry sky raider saying this or something similar, my advice is to flee.

Blood Elves

The corrupted elves of Blood Wood have sinister Germanic accents – suitable given their unusual tastes for morbid droning opera (have you listened to all of the Ring Cycle?) and bizarre sense of humor (if they really have one). „Velcom to Blood Vood.”

Therans

The Therans have been reserved an accent that holds a particular fascination for English players of Earthdawn. The Therans are a dislikable, evil, manipulative and arrogant people. Moreover, they think they have the right to rule over Barsaive with impunity, and expect the people to be grateful. They try and force their ghastly cuisine, inflexible language and love of bureaucracy on the good people of Barsaive and think it an improvement. Predictably, the Therans have outrageous French accents (think ‘Allo ‘Allo or Monty Python’s Holy Grail, and you’re there). „Go away or I will taunt you a second time!”

Most Therans are good at taunting, often unconsciously, frequently infuriating native Barsavians with their aggravating shrugs of shoulders when they cannot (or will not) help, talking loudly in Theran in taverns and libraries and outrageously smug attitudes when they are in a position of power, i.e. all the time.

Ork Scorchers

The extrovert and outrageous ork scorcher clans of the plains of Barsaive are land-bound pirates cruising the grasslands for treasure-laden caravans. These swarthy orks speak with Spanish or even Mexican accents. „Eh, amigo, we don’t mean no trouble, but we are goin’ to take your horse, your weapons, your money, your armor and your hat!”

Pale Ones

The subterranean t’skrang known as the Pale Ones speak with a strange accent that betrays their evolutionary backwardness. The accent of the Pale Ones has its roots in the accents of the surface dwellers but has changed almost beyond recognition. In game terms, the Pale Ones have an Australian accent, appropriate to their existence down-under.

The Servos Jungle

The vast Servos Jungle sprawls across the heart of Barsaive and houses probably the greatest diversity of Name-givers in Barsaive. Despite its great size and unparalleled diversity, few Name-givers from beyond the borders of the jungle wish to visit this most fascinating place. Many of the jungle’s inhabitants are primitive, territorial and war-like; the primitive t’skrang, the Cathan – all people you wouldn’t like to meet in a dark jungle clearing.

Many explorers underestimate the inhabitants of the Servos Jungle, probably due to their amusing Birmingham accents. Smirking at the t’skrang shaman as he curses you for entering his sacred grove isn’t going to help your cause.

THE VEINS OF THROAL

PART I: THE LIFE BLOOD OF THROAL

by *DreamKeeper*



„The life-blood of Throal is – has always been – the Adepts and soldiers that make her safe.” The old scholar peered down his nose at the audience that had begun to gather around him. None made a move to disagree with him, but he nevertheless chose to continue with his argument. „There are those who would say that it is the brave caravaneers, the

intrepid traders of Barsaive, that form the meat and potatoes of Throalic life. Others would argue that it is the king that binds us all together, or at least the royal family. Indeed, some might even say that it is the Royal Muckers Guild that ensure our survival.”

The speaker paused, a smile on his face, as the joke brought a round of muffled laughs from

his growing audience. His aging eyes were still good enough that he could study the young and old faces that surrounded him, intent either on himself or on some other attention-stealing gimmick. What he saw there made him proud – the dwarves stood tall, somehow subconsciously showing their strength despite the recent turn that events had taken with the

Therans. The few other Name-givers, too, bore themselves with a sense of quiet determination. There would be no defeat for the Kingdom of Throal – not now, and not ever.

„But I say to you, it is not the traders and merchants, not the royalty or the king, and not even the muckers that ensure that Throal remains strong as ever. No,” he said, nodding almost to himself, „it is the Arm of Throal, the Eye of Throal, and the heroes that defend Throal against her enemies. Passions bless them all.” He smiled, proud of himself. „Passions bless them all.”

„Most interesting thought,” Jabron replied to the orator, though he and his companions were, by now, far enough away that there was no chance that the old dwarf would hear. „And certainly not one that I would disagree with.” He grinned, proudly pulling down on his uniform to straighten any imaginary creases that might have found their way into it. „What do you think?”

The other dwarf, shorter of the two by a hair, shrugged. „I have to admit, I’d prefer to think of the traders and merchants as far more important than the soldiers.” He sighed, „but you’re probably right – peace is certainly a thing of the past. At least for us.”

Jabron nodded, his mood dampened somewhat by his friend’s truthful evaluation of the situation.

Not long before, the Therans had soundly defeated

the Arm of Throal in a battle on the Serpent River, the waterway that wound throughout Barsaive like the animal after which it was Named. It was not so much the strength of the Therans themselves that had brought victory, but rather the blinding storms that the ships had suffered through for a week prior to the battle, as well as the wiliness of the Theran allies in House K’tenshin.

Before that, the Battle of Prajor’s Field had left the Arm of Throal reeling, and the allies of the dwarves wondering whether they had made the wrong choice in siding against the magically powerful empire.

Nevertheless, events were in motion which would set those defeats right, if only long enough for Throal to gather her strength for another push for freedom.

„We’re here,” the shorter dwarf said, breaking into his friend’s thoughts.

Jabron shook his head, willing himself back to the moment.

The office of the Guild of Delving. Not for the first time he wondered why he had been ordered to report here rather than the unit headquarters in Bartertown. Unlike many other dwarves who viewed the underground world as home, he had been born in the village of Vanguard, high in the mountains. He was more used to the strong sun and the biting winds than the dim light and barely hidden smell of the capital of the kingdom. Still, he was a soldier, and he had been

ordered to report to the Guild headquarters.

Pushing through the door, he and his companion entered the small office. An aging, matronly dwarf looked up, smiling kindly. „Can I help you?” she asked.

„Yes, please.” Jabron held out a hand, which held the two dwarves’ orders. „I’m here to speak with Telbon Brole.”

She nodded, eyes lighting up with recognition. She returned the small pack of papers, and motioned toward a second door, hidden in a shadowed corner. „Master Brole will see you immediately,” she said. He felt the woman’s eyes on his back until they reached the door, and then they left him. The soldier paused, ready to knock, then decided against it and pushed through this second door.

The bones landed, revealing his fate for the world to see. Nael sighed, rolling back on his heels. ‘What a day,’ he thought to himself, staring down at the results of his hand. Once again, he had managed to lose all of his meager earnings from his last exploratory trip. Throal had never been kind to him. „It’s the height,” he said quietly, to himself, peering at the mountains that rose behind the majestic gates near the end of the road.

„I don’t think so, my friend,” his gambling companion said, grinning. „I think you’re just a bad gambler.” The ork swept his hand down, lifting the seven

gold coins and the tossing bones all in one pass. A toothy grin sat on his face, his single tusk making the smile seem somehow lopsided. „Maybe you should stick to scouting – it’s what your best at.”

The Scout nodded his head forlornly, slapping his leg. A small cloud of dust wafted up, causing a vaguely hand-shaped area of cleanliness to appear, then vanish again from his leg. „I think I should just stay away from Throal. That’s what I think.” He shook his head.

The two orks stood, spitting on their hands and shaking. The winner paused before turning away, eyeing Nael critically, then shrugged and spun. A moment later the loser was left alone in the street.

He turned, surveying Bartertown. Maybe Tomas was right. Maybe he should stick to what he was good at.

Still, he always seemed to win when he wasn’t in Throal – it was only when he returned to the place of his birth that his luck changed. Chorrolis must not be happy with Bartertown.

He sighed.

A quiet cough brought his attention to a dwarf in Throalic livery. The dwarf stood along the side of the road, somewhat stiffer than an ordinary soldier. *Page*, he determined instantly. *Sent here for me?* His dark eyes focused like daggers on the page who suddenly looked intensely uncomfortable, as though the king himself was about to reveal personal displeasure at having been disturbed.

„E-excuse me,” the dwarf stammered, „I-I’m looking for an Adept Named Nael. C-can you tell me where I can find him?”

Hiding his minimal surprise – he had half-expected a call from the Eye of Throal since returning from his last scouting mission for them – Nael nodded. „Me,” was all he said.

„I have a r-request for your presence,” the other replied after a moment’s hesitation, drawing forth a small package from inside the folds of his tunic. „M-master Brole of the Eye of Throal wishes to speak with you. I-if you would like I can bring you to the Delver’s Guild headquarters. I- that is, Master Brole suggested that you might like a guide.”

The ork looked at his scathingly, grabbing the envelope and turning away. A swift tear later, and he was scanning the short note scrawled in black ink.

Nael, if possible I would like to see you in the Delver’s Guild Headquarters. I realize that this mission may prove to be somewhat less than what you would ordinarily like to embark upon, but let me assure you that it is vital that we have the best Scout on this assignment. That is you. Please. We need you.

The note was signed by the dwarven commander of the Eye himself, with an inscribed symbol of the king etched into the note as well. He crushed the note in the large palm of his hand, nails biting grooves into his skin.

He hated Throal. He had always hated Throal. Despite being born in Bartertown, he had managed to enter the underground kingdom itself only three times in his entire life. Two of those times he had only gone in far enough to purchase equipment for travels into the untamed regions of the province. The third time he had nearly lost it.

Brole knew – he *knew* – that he was terrified of being underground. Yet still the dwarf wanted him to enter the headquarters of the delvers, itself deep within the Halls of Throal.

The ork looked down at the hand holding the crumpled note, and realized that he was shaking. His arm was trembling like a leaf.

Taking stock of his body, he realized that every fiber of his being screamed for him to reject his old friend’s request. Everything that he had ever been wanted him to run the other direction, screaming.

Still, he managed to turn, nodding. „Lead away,” he bit out through clenched teeth.

Keltsa looked up as she heard her Name called from across the small bar. She caught sight of the dwarf in Throalic livery and frowned. It wasn’t that she didn’t like dwarves, or even being constantly called upon by the Eye of Throal in defense of freedom. What really bothered her was that she never seemed to get to complete a drink without something interrupting her.

The Swordmaster stood, swallowing the last of her brew in a single large gulp, and turned to face the Name-giver that had called her. As he made his way across the predominantly-elven bar, she took her time to size up the newcomer. Finally, deciding that he was no threat, she gave him a slow nod of greeting.

„Keltsa,” he repeated once he had reached her, „I bring word from Telbon Brole of the Eye of Throal.” He glanced around cautiously, then continued. „Master Brole wishes to speak with you immediately in the Delvers Guild headquarters in Throal.” The runner drew out a small envelope inscribed with the eye of Throal, which he handed to her.

The woman quickly read through the contents, then nodded and returned it to him. „Lead away.”

The two made their way through the bar and out into the daylight. She took a moment to allow her eyes to adjust to the brightness, and then they were on their way. The page maneuvered them quickly through the streets toward the mighty gates of the dwarven kingdom, and into the Grand Bazaar. The Bazaar had long been famed throughout Barsaive as a market for anything and everything – except slaves, though rumors had it that even those could be bought there if the price was right and the buyer cautious.

But they went beyond the crowded market and into the

Halls of Throal themselves. With a quick word between the page and the guard, the two were allowed to enter the Hall of Tav. They quickly traversed the hallways, shadows flitting down the sides of the crowded halls. While her guide seemed to be oblivious to his surroundings, Keltsa let her senses drift for any sign of danger or intrigue. She smelled the thick dwarven perfumes that covered the otherwise unbearable stench of many unwashed dwarven bodies in the small space. She heard the sounds of mothers and fathers arguing with their children. She felt the tense thrum of activity that came from living life in the center of the mightiest kingdom in Barsaive.

Still, as the two Name-givers passed into the massive underground city of Bethabal, she caught no sign of trouble. All was as it should have been in the dwarven kingdom.

Her dwarven leader walked at a brisk pace around the outskirts of the city, ignoring the hum of activity unless he was forced to swerve aside to avoid a cart or another Name-giver. Despite his few changes in direction, Keltsa got the sense that they were heading toward the continuation of the Hall they had left moments before.

She was gratified when they indeed entered the extension of the Hall of Tav, and continued on their long journey to the center of the mountain. The change in scenery to this side of Bethabal was surprising. She

had never been past the inner cities, and was surprised by the size and magnificence of some of the homes they now passed. Carved from the rocky walls of the mountain, these residences were incredibly ornate, some so large that she was surprised the mountain continued to stand at all. The halls here were quieter, as well, with well-dressed young dwarves scurrying about on errands, and finely dressed elders strolling along casually.

She began to feel supremely out of place, with her unwashed elven features a stark contrast to the cleanliness and beauty of the rich.

Still, her guide did not dawdle. She was forced to quicken her pace, despite her longer legs, and soon they had passed even those fine homes.

The homes of the wealthy gave way quickly – suddenly, in fact – to shops and government-sponsored offices. Plain doors stood in silent, forbidding walls, signs marking them as guild headquarters, hostels for diplomats, and the like. It was down a corridor in this section of the Hall that the dwarf turned. A sign marked the hallway clearly as Delver’s Row.

Several scruffier dwarves were in this hallway, but for the most part the patrons continued to be wealthy-looking individuals of high social class. She saw an ork with carefully groomed beard sitting beside a small guild-owned shop, a pipe between his teeth. Beside him, a pair of dwarf miners spoke in hushed tones over smoking

bowls of something with an aroma that she could smell even over the perfume.

„We are here.” The announcement gave her pause. She had expected the Delves’ headquarters to be somewhat more spectacular. As it was, a small sign on the door announced that this was, indeed, the office of the guild. „Back entrance,” the other explained when she gave him an odd look, then pushed through the door.

An aging dwarf woman sat behind a desk and looked up as they entered. Upon seeing the elf she nodded. „Master Brole is expecting you. He is already present.” She smiled kindly, and returned to her work.

„Thank you,” Keltsa offered quietly, adding another thanks to her guide. After a moment, she pushed into the room.

Jabron studied the faces of those around him.

His close friend Daneth sat to his right, a small scroll held lightly between his fingers. The shorter dwarf’s beard was slightly lighter than his own, but his eyes were darker and more serious. Daneth was an Elementalist in His Majesty’s Exploratory Force on permanent loan to the Arm of Throal since their defeat at Prajor’s Field.

To Daneth’s right sat Telbon Brole, the chocolate-skinned agent of the Eye of Throal that had called the meeting. He was wrapped in a thick fur coat, his beard only barely distinguishable from the rest of

the fur surrounding him. Telbon had lost his arm during the first war against the Therans, and had seen no need for it to be replaced by a magical augmentation – something that he could afford, Jabron was sure.

On Jabron’s left, seated with her front pressed against the back of a dwarven chair, was the elven woman who had been introduced as Keltsa. She was attractive in an odd sort of way, he supposed. She had dark brown hair, tied back into a pair of short ponytails that lay against her back. A long elven blade rested down the side of her leg, with a knife that was nearly half the sword’s length on her opposite calf. Her eyes studied him even as his own searched her, and he recognized that she was easily as skilled as he, at least with her chosen weapon. Jabron allowed his eyes to slide from hers.

The last remaining figure stood near one wall, looking decidedly unhappy, and more than a little nervous. Jabron had recognized the surprisingly handsome ork as the famed Scout Adept Nael. Nael was tall for an ork, but thin. He lacked the muscle mass of other members of his race, but made up for it with his skill and surprising dexterity.

The dark dwarf cleared his throat. „I would like to thank you all for coming to meet with me here,” he offered. „I realize that there are probably places you’d rather be,” he said, tossing a glance at the ork near the wall, „but this is of the

utmost importance to King Neden.” He paused. „To Throal.”

„As you all know, we lost the Battle of Prajor’s Field, for all intents and purposes – we lost so many men...” He shook his head, and was silent for a long moment. At last he spoke again, his voice quiet. „What you may not know, is that we have analyzed the situation, and the Eye of Throal considers it likely – indeed, probably – that the Therans will march on Throal.” There was a collective intake of breath at the pronouncement. According to all of the dwarven propaganda, Throal was still strong enough that she could halt any potential advance, as long as the Therans did not strengthen their forces at their fortress at Ayodhya. „That’s right,” he said, „we’re worried that we’ll have to close Throal again.”

The reference to the first war against Thera since the end of the Scourge brought nods from each of the Adepts. It had been a dark time for freedom. But they had won in the end, with the help of their t’skrang allies, especially Jedaiyen Westhrall. The t’skrang and a group of brave adventurers had mapped out caverns leading to Throal from the Serpent River where supplies could be brought, destroying the effectiveness of the Theran blockade.

„Westhrall’s Passage has been destroyed. We did so several months ago, in preparation for a possible Theran attack. We have solid

intelligence that they were using it as a passage for Theran agents and infiltrators into the inner cities. What that means is that we need a new route." This brought another gasp, this time from Nael, whose features had gone pale. Barreling on, Telbon continued. „We desperately need you to seek out another passage, a passage that we can use to get supplies to Throal in the event of a siege."

Jabron leaned back in his seat.

The room was deathly quiet, save for the deep breaths Nael was taking as he steadied himself against the wall. *He's afraid*, the Warrior Adept realized. *He's terrified*. The realization worried him. He looked at their contact in the Eye. *Why are you sending the ork on this mission?*

In answer to the unasked question, Telbon said, „I need our best people on this assignment." He looked each in the eye. „I don't want to send you. I don't want to send *anyone*. But you people are the best." He sighed, closing his eyes and rubbing his temples slowly. „I need you," he said quietly.

„Why me?" Nael asked slowly, moving away from the wall for the first time, drawing up a chair near Telbon's seat.

„Like I said – I need the best. You're the best Scout that the Eye has access to." Telbon opened his eyes. He faced the larger Name-giver full on, and shook his head. „We'll make it worth your while, Nael." He glanced around. „Worth all your while."

„How long?" Jabron glanced at the elf that had spoken, drawing the attention of the room away from Nael. „How long do you expect this to take?"

The dark-skinned dwarf shrugged. „We're honestly not sure." A hand disappeared into his robes, and drew forth an ancient-looking parchment. „I have a partial map here that shows where we think you have a good bet of finding another route." He paused. „But it was made before the Scourge." He paused, then added dramatically, „A long time before the Scourge."

Jabron reached forward, and the other handed him the map.

It was, indeed, well worn and ancient. Barely legible for the most part, it was tattered and water-stained. Nevertheless, part of the map was fairly clear. It showed a twisted mire of lines, some labeled 'water,' while others were labeled 'collapsed' and so on. At the top of the map, scrawled in a different handwriting than the majority of the map, some ancient Adept had written 'The Veins of Throal,' in blue ink.

Leaning over his shoulder to study the map, Daneth let out a low chuckle. „It looks as though that old man was right – we are going to be the lifeblood of Throal."

Game Information

The old scholar at the beginning of the story is discussing an issue often disputed in the Halls of Throal. While as a person he

is not so very important, at least to the story, the views that he espouses may prove to be.

Jabron is a male dwarf and a 5th Circle Warrior Adept that is an officer in the Arm of Throal. He is the leader of the expedition. Jabron is somewhat taller than an average dwarf, with dark, curly hair and not unhandsome features. He is popular in the army because of his easy-going nature and friendly attitude.

Daneth is a childhood friend of Jabron. He is also a male dwarf, and a 4th Circle Elementalist on permanent assignment from His Majesty's Exploratory Force to the Arm of Throal. Daneth is often serious, and has few friends. While magically gifted, he is unlikely to ever become as powerful politically as Jabron because of his cynicism. Daneth is physically average, with slightly lighter hair than other dwarves and a thin beard.

Nael is a 4th Circle male ork Scout who often works for the Eye of Throal in an exploratory capacity. He has a habit of gambling whenever he stops in a city, and so he has made both friends and enemies all across Barsaive. Throal has always been bad luck for Nael, and it is continuing to be trouble even now. Nael is terrified of being underground, because he has an irrational fear that the ground will collapse on top of him and bury him alive. If anyone tries to kid him about it – indeed, if

one jests about it at all – it activates his *gabad*. Nael has a good reputation in the Arm of Throal as an excellent and talented Scout. Physically he is of average height, but not nearly as strong as other orks.

Keltsa is a 3rd Circle female elven Swordmaster. She is quiet and withdrawn normally, but also very perceptive. She would have made an excellent magician had she wanted to spend the long hours pouring over books. Physically she is not unattractive, though certainly not beautiful. She has short, dark brown hair that is usually tied in two ponytails along her back, and a slightly turned-up nose that accentuates her appearance of „elven snobbishness.”

Telbon Brole is a fairly typical dwarf from a noble family. He is wealthy, and allows it to show

in his wardrobe, but is otherwise cautious with money. He is both intelligent and manipulative, though certainly not the worst employed by Throal. He is honest about his worry for Throal’s safety, and will offer nearly anything to ensure the safety of his kingdom. He lost his arm during the first war against Thera, but doesn’t hold any particular grudge against them.

The *Map of the Veins of Throal* is a small piece of parchment that somehow managed to survive the Scourge intact. The legends of the authors, if they still exist at all, are probably lost in the Great Library. The map itself is drawn carefully, warning of areas filled with water, collapsed caverns, as well as other areas. It warns of several places where the author decided that it was „tight!” (though whether the author of the map

was a troll or a windling is in question). There are three major areas of importance labeled on the map: „Cave of Shadows,” „glowing moss,” and „the Gut.” The last area is formed from many twisting caves which turn in on themselves over and over again, but which the author of the map could not get to because, as the map says, „bad air” is present.

About the Author:

DreamKeeper is, obviously, a penname for a real person (or rather, someone who claims to be a real person). Little is known of this individual, though many claim to know him. Some ancient texts report that the DreamKeeper was born in a city called Chicago, but this may or may not be the case. Only the Passions know for sure, and they’re not telling.