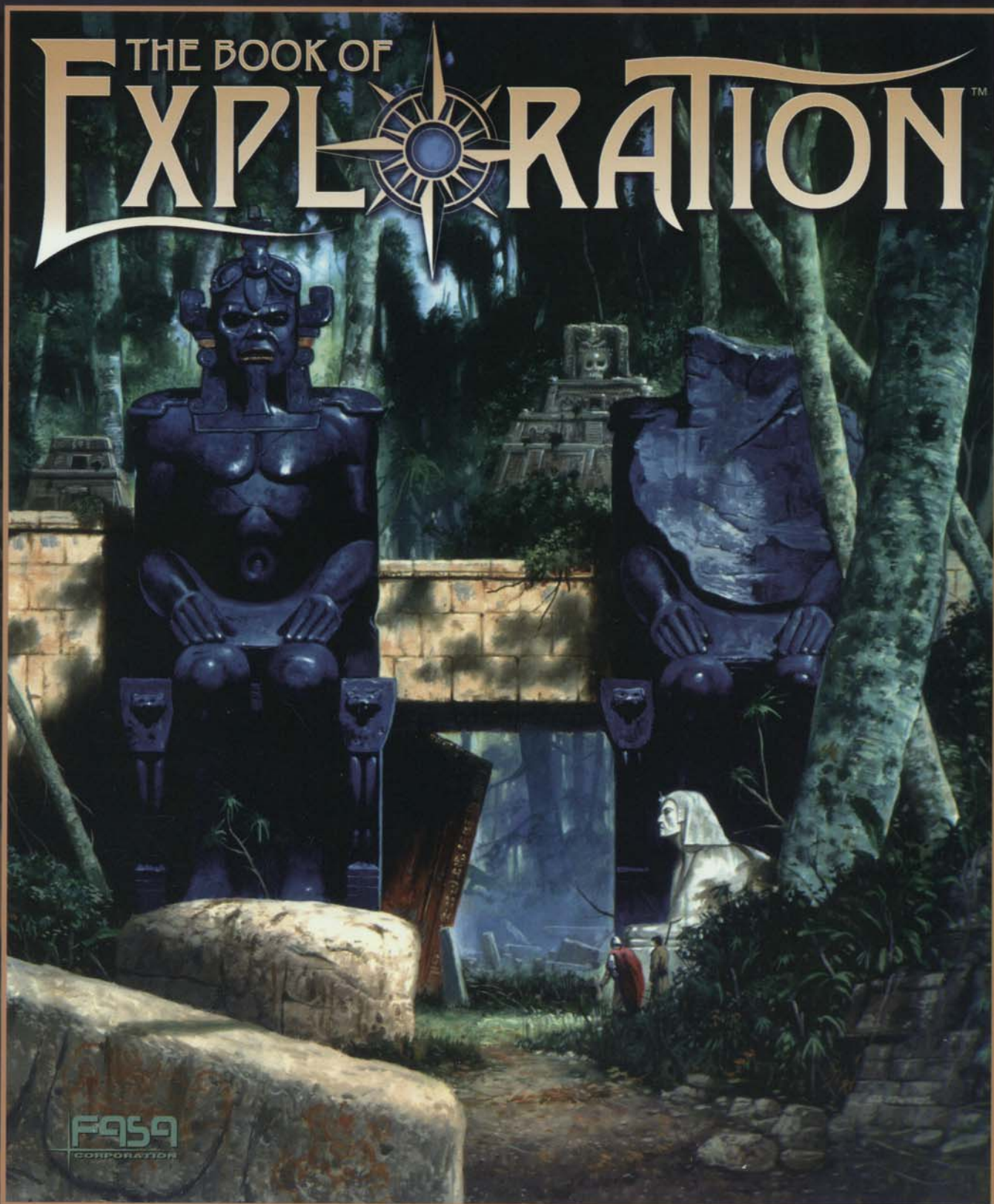


# EARTHDAWN<sup>®</sup>

## THE BOOK OF EXPLORATION<sup>™</sup>





THE BOOK OF  
**EXPLORATION**<sup>TM</sup>

FASA CORPORATION

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# INTRODUCTION

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**M**any widely diverse adventuring groups travel throughout the province of Barsaive, searching for fame and fortune and helping to restore their Scourge-scarred world to its former glory. As these adventurers travel the land, many of them record their experiences, and these personal accounts of Barsaive's dangers and wonders create a compelling picture of what adventurers and explorers may face as they travel across Barsaive.

**Legends of Earthdawn, Volume II: The Book of Exploration** is a collection of twenty-two adventurers' journal entries, explorers' logs, letters, and other writings that describe several of the unusual events and circumstances encountered in Barsaive since the Scourge. These documents give players and gamemasters a unique look at the type of fantastic creatures, forgotten civilizations, peculiar magical episodes and bizarre Name-giver behavior that all adventuring groups must anticipate dealing with as they travel across Barsaive's wilds.

Most importantly, these stories provide a rich source of adventure ideas. The second half of the book, titled **Game Information**, provides suggestions for incorporating these accounts into adventures and campaigns. These suggestions merely scratch the surface of the countless possibilities these stories present. The gamemaster determines the truth behind each entry; the gamemaster decides how much or how little of an entry to use and how to introduce it in his game.

# SUBJECT GUIDE

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The categories in this subject guide highlight the primary elements of each entry. Any landmarks noted indicate that the event took place in or near that location.

## LEGENDS

### *A Plea for Help*

Horrors  
Secret Society (Ristular)

### *The Fountain Parchment*

The Wastes  
Unusual Magic

### *Masquerade of Death's Dreams*

Unusual Magic

### *Carrul and the Therans*

Thunder Mountains  
Airships  
Therans

### *The Lost Kingdom of Lasael*

Throal Mountains  
Unusual Magic

### *In the Bones of the Earth*

Caralkspur Mountains  
Horrors  
Magical Treasure

### *Paradise of Swords*

Scol Mountains  
Horrors  
Passions (Thystonius)

### *Chamber of the Ages*

Scol Mountains  
Obsidimen  
Unusual Magic

### *A Fragment from Nutreva*

Badlands  
Creatures

### *An Ancient Mystery*

Mist Swamps  
Therans  
Unusual Magic

### *Citadel in the Sky*

Airships  
Horrors  
Therans

### *Growing Bones*

Tylon Mountains  
Ork Scorchers

### *The Hidden Hill*

Landis  
Unusual Magic

### *The Corrupted*

Dragon Mountains  
Obsidimen

### *Island of Fear*

Aras Sea  
Horrors  
Secret Society

### *Skytree River*

Servos Jungle  
Creatures  
Unusual Magic

### *First Contact*

Humans  
New Spells

### *The Vanishing Village*

Caucavic Mountains  
Unusual Magic

### *Nightmares*

Near Kratas  
Horrors

### *The Lost City*

Servos Jungle  
Creatures  
Treasure

### *Lighthouse Sanctuary*

Aras Sea  
Horrors

### *The Wreck of the Zephyr*

Caucavic Mountain  
Airships  
Unusual Magic

# ON THE ORIGINS OF THE BOOK OF EXPLORATION



**S**ome time ago, with the generous patronage of His Majesty, King Varulus III, the Great Library of Throal began purchasing journals and personal accounts written by the brave souls adventuring in and exploring the wild lands of Barsaive. His Majesty's intent, with which we at the Great Library enthusiastically agree, was to collect as many accounts as possible in one place and make them available to any Barsaivian who wished to read them. Every year since beginning this enterprise, adventurers and travelers from all across Barsaive have flooded the halls of Throal, eager to share their exploits with the Library (and also, I suspect, to earn a bit of badly needed silver). As the response to our call for these journals has been much greater than we originally anticipated, it has taken us most of the past two years to determine what, precisely, should be done with the hundreds of thousands of documents we received. We meant to make them public, certainly—but in what form, so as to most greatly benefit the largest number of potential readers? After several weeks of debate, I am pleased to say that my own sensible scheme was adopted: to create an encyclopedia of sorts, a multiple-volume collection of these fascinating and valuable documents. As each volume is finished, it will be stored in the Library's main reading room where scholars, students, adepts, magicians and anyone else wishing to examine these writings may most easily do so. This Book of Exploration begins our "adventuring encyclopedia," and we are all proud to say that this initial compilation of documents exceeds our highest expectations.

Though we originally conceived of the Book of Exploration as a collection of journals and diaries written by Barsaive's intrepid adventurers, we received many other kinds of documents as well: letters, maps, personal accounts from ordinary travelers, even a few documents dating from ancient times. Realizing that many of these documents would serve the Book's purpose equally well, we chose to include several of them in this first volume. Almost daily we receive letters, notes, maps and other writings depicting various events and personal experiences in Barsaive and beyond; as we are able, we will incorporate these documents into subsequent volumes of the Book of Exploration.

I remind readers that, as a matter of official policy, the Library still accepts adventurers' journals only once a year.

—Thom Edrull, Archivist and Scribe of the Hall of Records, 1508 TH



# A PLEA FOR HELP

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*The following account—apparently a letter to the unfortunate writer’s kin—was brought to the Great Library by the famed traveled scholar Coram Broadroot. While sojourning through the wild lands not far from the city of Jerris, Coram shot a dove for his evening meal and found, to his great surprise and sorrow, that he had inadvertently slain a messenger bird bearing the text below. As there was no way to determine where the lands of the winding Clan Moshre might lie—or, indeed, if the clan still existed at all—Coram pocketed the message and brought it to the Great Library’s archives. Let it serve as a warning to travelers through Barsaive’s wild lands—peril lurks everywhere, and may entrap even the most prepared.*

—Furlan Solus, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

**T**o Clan Moshre and my darling parents,

I know not how to begin this letter, in such peril as I am. At this moment, I miss you and home more than ever I have throughout all my travels ... partly because I fear I may never see home again. I pray this reaches you in time for my rescue; if not, then I pray you and the clan will avenge my death. For five years I have adventured across the length and breadth of Barsaive, facing many perils from wild beasts to the foulest of Horrors, and yet never has my danger been so great as it is now.

The smell here is terrible. Like the stench of the krillra that Klok and I slew—a stench to close the throat tight as a stoppered wineskin. I faced the krillra bravely as it circled us; its cry pierced through my head-bones, shrill and grating. Then it dove straight at me. I flew as fast as my wings would carry me, staying just out of its reach. Around and around we went, the krillra and I, until I came near to fainting from exhaustion. But still I bedeviled it, swooping and diving and darting as close as I dared to its loathsome face. As I batted my wings near its terrible eyes, distracting it from my comrades below, my good friend Klok the ork swung his sword through its belly. The smell of its entrails made me choke so violently and suddenly that I dropped like a stone; luckily, Klok is a soft-handed ork for all his swordfighting prowess. He caught me scarcely a body-length from the ground.

I am rambling, and I must not. I have not much time to tell my tale. Lack of food has turned my brain a little ... it is hard to keep my mind on the task at hand. The stink of this prison where I lie does not help matters ... remarkable how difficult it is to think clearly when one breathes air as thick and foul as a globberog’s trail!

The krillra’s attack came after a day more full of hardships than any we had lived through in recent memory. Is it any wonder that we slept too soundly? Had luck been with us that night, we would not have paid such a dear price for our lapse; but luck is rarely with the adventurer in Barsaive. We all believed we had learned that lesson, but we were wrong.

I awoke to the rustle of cloth, and rough hands wrapping my wrists in cold metal. By the scant light of our banked fire I could see little; only that dim figures in dark robes were bending over my companions, who all slept on oblivious. I shouted, but too late. Though we fought them with the strength of our very souls, the chains they bound around us would not break. Our wizard, Fatso—his Name is Forso, but none of us call him by it—told us the chains were enchanted. Our captors remained silent, hidden in their enfolding robes. They did not speak, nor did they peel back their hoods. I could not even see if there were faces underneath the overhanging folds of dark cloth. Once they had shackled us, they forced us to our feet. We began to move, the robed ones walking as easily as if they could see in the dark.

When the sun rose, I saw that we were traveling east toward the Aras Sea. Our captors prodded us none too gently with wooden staves whenever we stumbled. The sea birds called to me from above, but I would not fly away and leave my companions. The cloaked creatures kept a constant vigil over us, peering at us from the darkness beneath their hoods.

They gave us neither food nor water for two days. The sun remained as vigilant as they, offering not a moment’s respite from its heat. Poor Klok’s nose looked like an overripe tomato. He sang to us to ease our discomfort. By the middle of the second day, he could not continue ... a small mercy, for which we were grateful.

At last our cloaked guardians stopped at a sheltered clearing near the seashore. Here we found half a house, some three feet tall. Our captors led us inside and down a flight of steps, and we realized that the dwelling lay partly buried underground. Inside, it was as spacious as a hut built large enough for humans. A maze of tunnels led off from the main room, in so many directions that to look at all the openings made me dizzy.



## The Book of Exploration • A Plea for Help

Suddenly, the thought of being buried under the earth seemed worse than death. I panicked and swooped toward the staircase ... or tried to. The weight of the chains proved my undoing; with coils of metal dragging at my wrists and ankles, I could not fly fast enough to escape the hands of our mysterious captors. The hooded monsters caught me. They cut off my wings ...

Now I lie here in their dungeon. Trapped. These cloaked demons have revealed much since we arrived in their den. One by one, they took my friends away. I hear their screams still and I bleed inside for their suffering. But for all the pain inflicted on them, embrace the demons' Horror god they would not. For this, my poor companions paid with their lives. Every cry wrung from them pierced my soul like the point of a sword, and hardened in me the desire for revenge.

When the hooded ones came for me, I told them I needed time to think things over. This answer earned me a dubious reward; they took down their hoods and smiled at me. The sight of them nearly paralyzed me with shock; they were not monstrous creatures or Horrors, but ordinary-looking Name-givers. The face of one of them was even marked with a tattoo that served no other purpose than vanity; I know, for I have seen many a vain fool receiving such marks in Bartertown stalls. As that one told me about the being they call their "Supreme Creator," his wispy white hair floated up and down like a young windling on its first flight. Under any other circumstances, I would have taken him for someone's kindly grandsire telling a fireside tale.

No matter their benign look, these evil beings are a few petals short of a full bloom. The "Supreme Creator" they serve is the Horror called Ristul, which they believe has come to free them from their burdens. Free them, it will—right into their graves, if I am any judge.

I have nearly given up hope of escape, unless this message reaches you in time to save me. But I will not give in to them. I know not precisely where I am, but I know we are by the shores of the Aras in a region almost wholly lacking in animal life. So barren is the land hereabouts that I could not summon any of Barsaive's more chivalrous creatures to help me, save the lone dove that will carry this letter to you. May it arrive with all speed! Klok once told me that in two days time, a dove can fly across half of Barsaive. Treat this bird well, for the poor creature will be exhausted almost to death by the time you read this.

I shall try to match this bird's courage and stamina, and hold out until you come for me.

"To the trees of verdant Moshre,  
Shall my heart always turn.  
No matter how much of the world I see,  
Or how much I learn."

May your wings always be dry!  
Redwing



# THE FOUNTAIN PARCHMENT



*As my son Lorix wished, I have included the following account in this volume. It, and the map he gave us along with it, raise more questions than they answer about the perilous place herein described.*

—Thom Edrull, Archivist and Scribe of the Hall of Records, 1508 TH

**T**ruly, we've come to a place forsaken by the Passions—by the very Universe, I'd say. The dirtiest street in Jerris looks like paradise by comparison. I wish we were back there. Should've listened to my old dad—he said a dwarf was never meant to go traipsing across the wilds of Barsaive looking for who-knows-what, and he was right. I've dust in my mouth and all down my throat, and no amount of water seems to slake the thirst it brings. Midges are biting, too. My body is one giant itch. An extra cloak might keep them away from my tender skin, but in this heat I'd wilt under it faster than young wheat in a drought. No, there's nothing for it but to suffer and hope that what awaits us is worth the discomfort. The risks of battle I can take; it's the nagging unpleasantness I can't stand.

## *The Book of Exploration • The Fountain Parchment*

Mustn't complain, though. Bad for morale, complaining. As a dwarf, it's up to me to set an example.

Been out here for days, we have, and seen nothing. I don't like to say it within Varok's hearing—the old ork does so prize his scraggly bit of parchment—but I wonder if that thing he insists on calling “an ancient treasure map” is anything more than a schoolboy prank. I'm no expert in antiquities, but I've made new paper look old just by soaking it in tea and crumpling it up a bit. (Got me thrown out of the Library scribe school, that one. But it was such fun to see their faces when they first found it.) Varok's clever enough and he knows quite a lot about ancient Barsaive, but even the smart ones can be fooled. Who's to say this isn't one of those times?

Five minutes' rest at the top of this rise, Marelie says. Varok's grumbling, but Marelie's our leader and what she says goes. Thank the Universe; my feet are killing me.

Here's something strange. Down below, along the blasted plains, there's a sort of ... shimmering ... in the air. And the wind suddenly smells overpoweringly of damp earth.

We're camped not too far from the shimmering place. Truly, we've found a wonder! Somewhere behind the veil—or whatever it is—lies a veritable fountain of elemental earth. That's the only explanation, Vardok says, and I think he may be right. Kernels of elemental earth come shooting out from behind the shimmering to land at our feet every few heartbeats, just like water from a fountain. It's an amazing sight—enough to make even Dad's eyes pop out!

The ground is littered with elemental earth. We're camped on top of a fortune, with more appearing to replace whatever we take. I owe Vardok an apology; his bit of parchment said there was “untold wealth” out here in the Wastes, and we've found it right where he expected it to be. Funny, though, that the map doesn't say exactly what this place is. Vardok's pulling out his stylus and ink; I think he means to rectify that little oversight. A stickler for details, is Vardok.

The wind's picking up. No decent-sized rocks nearby to anchor my tent with. Ah, well. I knew I'd find a use for my tool belt sometime on this journey. A couple of rock hammers and chisels at the corners ought to do nicely!

The light is dying as I write this, and somehow my small fire offers me little comfort. I haven't been afraid of the dark since I was a youngling ... until now. My hands are shaking so much, it's hard to write—yet I must tell the end of the story, in case I don't make it back to civilization. Someone's got to warn the fools who're bound to come after us.

We should have known our find was too good to be true. They say riches never come without price. Only I never heard the price could be death before you even get a chance to spend your gains, ill-gotten or otherwise.

Vardok went first. Silly old fool tried some strange magical thing that I didn't half understand—he wanted to step through the veil and get a good look at the fountain. If it was a fountain. He roused something with his spell—a magical trap, a Horror, who knows what. The earth tore open under his feet and swallowed him. We heard him screaming for a long way down, until the fissure closed. After that, Marelie said to break camp, and no one argued. Without our magician, we'd no way to fight bad magic or some Horror we couldn't even see. So we left. Four hours we put between ourselves and that cursed fountain, before making camp for the night. We thought that was far enough, and the horses could go no further. We were wrong.

The shaking of the earth woke me, just in time to see Marelie go sliding in a shower of dirt down a crevasse that hadn't been there before. Great cracks rippled through the ground, leaving the rest of us perched precariously on islands of earth and praying not to fall off. My poor cousin Dinchas, whom I'd talked into this wild chase against his better judgment, plunged to his death when the earth on which he lay dissolved out from under him. Only I survived, clinging to my tiny patch of ground until the earthquake ended and the torn soil knit itself together again.

So here I sit, praying that whatever killed my comrades has had its fill of Name-giver blood and won't come after me. Just for good measure, I've thrown away all the elemental earth I took from the fountain. For all I know, those kernels carry a Horror's curse.

Just let me survive. That's all I ask of the Universe. Let me survive, and I'll carry Vardok's blasted parchment back to the Great Library and make sure everyone knows to stay far away from the elemental earth fountain. Some prices aren't worth paying for riches.

# MASQUERADE OF DEATH'S DREAMS



*This eerie tale was told to me by Socejha Liltvoice, a talented troubadour and good friend, over several flagons of good dwarf ale in the winter of 1503. She told me then that she meant to make a song of it, but recently she said she had changed her mind. When pressed for a reason, she would say only that she feared that, "Death might not like it, and then where would we be?" She would not or could not clarify that odd remark.*

*I considered her story worth a mention, regardless of what Death might think. How is a sleeping Passion (if such Death is) to read this book, anyway?*

—Furlan Solus, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

**I** clutched the ceramic mask to my chest, trying to calm my breathing into the rhythms of sleep. As my fingers traced a soothing pattern over the jade eyes of the mask I held, I pictured Janiser in my mind's eye. I felt the firm shake of his hand, heard his throaty chuckle. I tried to remember everything about him, knowing that to unmask incorrectly is to die.

The cold, wet ground beneath me melted in my dreams to warm, polished wood. Quickly, I concealed my own features and smoothed my dress before joining the masquerade. Dozens of figures danced all around me, some in finery ancient before the Scourge, some in plain raiment, some in the rags of burial shrouds. All flowed through the dance wearing masks, as I did.

## *The Book of Exploration • Masquerade of Death's Dreams*

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A gaunt figure garbed in the burial wrap of Jerris glided across the floor toward me. As the man approached, the nethermancer's last words to me rang in my ears: "Flirt with the truth, for they will use it against you. Tell no lies, for then they will have you. Only one mask holds the key to Janiser's life; the others hold your death."

The dead man bowed deeply. His bony fingers rasped against the palm of my proffered hand, and his mask shifted just enough for desiccated lips to touch the back of my hand with the memory of a kiss. In that brief flash of mummified features, I glimpsed nothing familiar.

"Would Milady honor me with the next dance?" the dead man hissed.

I nodded assent. A skeletal hand scraped into position around my waist, while I placed a faltering hand upon my partner's withered shoulder. He tipped his mask slightly in salute, and pressure from dead fingers shot fear through my spine as he whirled me onto the floor.

The dance moved more quickly than I had expected, and my steps faltered as I fumbled through flourishes last popular in the kaers two centuries ago. The light touch of my companion's bone fingers tickled my skin, but I dared not flinch from this long-dead man.

"What brings such a lovely lady out on such a dark-hearted night?" the dead man asked me. His voice rattled like dry branches in a high wind.

"I am here for much the same reason as my gentleman partner," I answered.

"Ah ... a coquette in conversation. I had forgotten the pleasures of subtle speech," said the dead man.

"A pleasure which can often save face," I said.

The dead man chortled, a low raspy sound that shook his mask slightly. The dance slowed for a heartbeat, and he bent over me in a low dip. The wrinkled flesh of his arms crackled as we bent. His face neared mine; his mask filled my vision, the musty scent of rot filled my nose, and I gasped as cold, ceramic lips lightly brushed my left ear. "Death sleeps not forever. You must choose before she awakes, or forever lose your chance," the dead man whispered.

As the music ended I trembled into a curtsy. The dead man bowed gallantly, then left me as I sought new partners. Nobles and warriors, merchants and questors, beggars and thieves ... all these I danced with, all of them dead. All were hungry for the life that coursed in my blood. Some spoke with circumspection; others wrapped me in lies smoother than silk, softer than fresh-plucked down. My mind spun faster than the dance steps; my gaze flickered across the crowd, seeking through the flashes of brilliant silks and dark leathers for the one whose need had brought me here.

Then I saw him, dressed in leather armor and boots, wearing the same impassive mask that all the others wore. My throat tightened, and my breath seemed to press against my mask. He saw me at the same moment and approached with long, confident strides. As he reached me, he held out his hand. I settled into his arms and began my last dance. His lead was strong and sure. My steps flowed with his. It felt good, familiar; it felt like Janiser.

"Perhaps I have had this pleasure before?" he asked.

"Perhaps we simply enjoy the same dance," I responded.

My partner whirled me to the center of the floor. Memories of our first heady days in Travar flooded my mind—Janiser showing me the frantic steps of the old dance on that tavern roof, ignoring the shouts of the guards. Watching the sunset from the western wall, walking around the city three times to prolong a perfect evening, the last time splashing through puddles left by a sudden rain.

"Would you like to feel the rain?" I asked softly.

"The air, the rain and the sun; I have missed them all, but none more than you," my partner said.

I reached up for his mask, but hesitated as my hands touched its cold surface. My partner felt like Janiser, but some here would have had centuries' worth of practice telling all manner of lies. He sounded like Janiser, but the words he had spoken were too direct for this place of dreams.

The old dance ... I withdrew my hand and turned to face the first dead man who had danced with me.

"Would you like to feel the rain?" I said.

"Milady, I fear this time I can go around but once," the dead man answered.

With trembling hands I took off my mask, then reached up and gently removed his.

# CARRUL AND THE THERANS



*This account I transcribed during an evening's drinking at the Ragged Rat in Bartertown. My drinking companion, the sky raider Ergu Longhorns, first caught my attention by talking of Theran ships swarming around the Thunder Mountains. We at the Great Library had heard disquieting rumors of increased Theran activity in both the Twilight Peaks and the Thunder Mountains, and so I bought Ergu Longhorns a drink and asked to hear his tale. I have written down his words to the best of my recollection, and Master Merrox chose to include the account here so that the heroes of Barsaive might be vigilant against Theran incursions.*

—Neled N'Bar, apprentice archivist of the Great Library of Throal

**T**he best airship captain in Barsaive is Carrul. He can cut a course through the air quicker than a raven, gliding through the roughest currents as smoothly as if sliding over glass. Even a ground-stomper like you would feel at ease with Carrul at the helm. A canny fighter he is, too. Just weeks ago he led us against the Therans in a great battle; I'll remember it if I live to be five hundred.

We'd seen Theran airships off and on for a month or two, sniffing around the Thunder Mountains like hunting dogs on a scent. We thought at first they were trying to draw us into battle, but when we sent a few drakkars after them they turned tail and ran for Sky Point. Some of our warriors sneered at that, saying it only proved what cowards the Therans really are. Carrul wasn't so sure. After the third time a Theran ship fled from us without a fight, Carrul set our moot's best scouts to keep watch for Theran airships in the foothills. A few folk thought he was crazy to go looking for Theran trouble, but Carrul paid them no heed. Lucky thing, too.



## *The Book of Exploration • Carrul and the Therans*

The scouts stayed on watch for thirty days and nights, and in that time they counted forty-six Theran vedettes flying near and into the Thunder Mountains. The vedettes didn't attack a single moot; they just flew over and back and all around. "Spy ships," Carrul called them when the scouts told him their news. He didn't know what the Therans were spying for, but all of us knew it couldn't be good. Those cursed Imperials want Barsaive back under their yoke, and they never give up.

Three days after the scouts returned, rumors reached our moot that Theran airships and soldiers were massing on the plains north of Travar. Now, we didn't know what they were planning, but it involved the Therans, so we knew it wasn't anything good. In this case, Carrul figured the best defense was a good offense, and nobody disagreed with that.

So Carrul gave the order for five drakkars to set sail, each manned by thirty chosen warriors. I rode in the third ship, sharing a bench with Morag the Puss-Eyed. Morag in battle is a fearsome thing to behold, for all she's so dainty-looking. (You needn't laugh; any troll may look huge to little wisps of elves like you, but Morag's every bit as delicate as you are by comparison to me.) Once he'd chosen his warriors, Carrul filled a sixth ship with trolls too old to fight. Now, quite a few of us scratched our heads over this; but Carrul silenced us all with a grin and a few words. "Trust me, as you always have," he told us. "I've plans for this ship. Our success depends on these old ones. Watch, learn and be ready to fight when I tell you." And such was our respect for Carrul that none questioned him, even though we still didn't understand.

That night we slept on the ship—Morag curled beneath the bench, I lying atop it with no blanket but the stars to cover me. I hardly closed my eyes the whole night—just stared up at the stars until the first blue fingers of dawn poked across the sky.

We launched our ships into the morning sunlight, following Carrul down the slopes and into the wooded hills north of Travar. At his order, we set down in a little valley. As we disembarked, he told us to set up our tents and burn as many fires as we could fuel. That done, we packed our war gear and marched southward along the valley's rim. The elders stayed at the valley camp. As we left I heard them strike up a raucous war dance, howling fit to split the air and stomping on the ground.

"If the Theran scouts find the camp, they'll think we're all too old and drunk to fight," said Carrul. I saw slow grins spread across the faces of my fellow warriors as they began to see Carrul's scheme. None of us grudged the slow torment of aching shoulders and sore feet as we marched and marched and marched—we knew that Carrul was leading us to victory.

Long after the sun had set, we reached a clearing and Carrul gestured for us to stop. Six windlings flew out of the trees toward him. He spoke to them in a low voice, then gestured beyond the encircling trees toward the south. The windlings flew off. Carrul watched them go, then saw me staring at him.

"What were those pests doing here?" I asked.

He raised an eyebrow at me. "Those pests, young Ergu, are some of the best scouts in Barsaive. And a lot quieter than we trolls." With that, he wrestled a heavy cloak out of his pack, wrapped himself in it, and settled down to rest. The rest of us found comfort where we could. I curled up against the trunk of an old knotbark tree and closed my eyes. I didn't sleep much.

The scouts returned just before dawn, and we followed Carrul through the woods to the edge of a vast field. Ten Theran airships sat in the middle of it, swarmed over by countless Theran soldiers. Several others were building a barricade from brush and sharpened logs. We crouched in the underbrush and waited for Carrul's signal to attack.

Within minutes a cry rose from the Theran camp as their sentries pointed toward six dark shapes hovering just above the tree line. Our elders had come in the drakkars. The Theran soldiers grabbed their swords and spears, and everyone crowded behind the barricade—as if it could protect them from an air attack.

So amazed was I that I spoke my thought aloud. "Why don't they board their ships?"

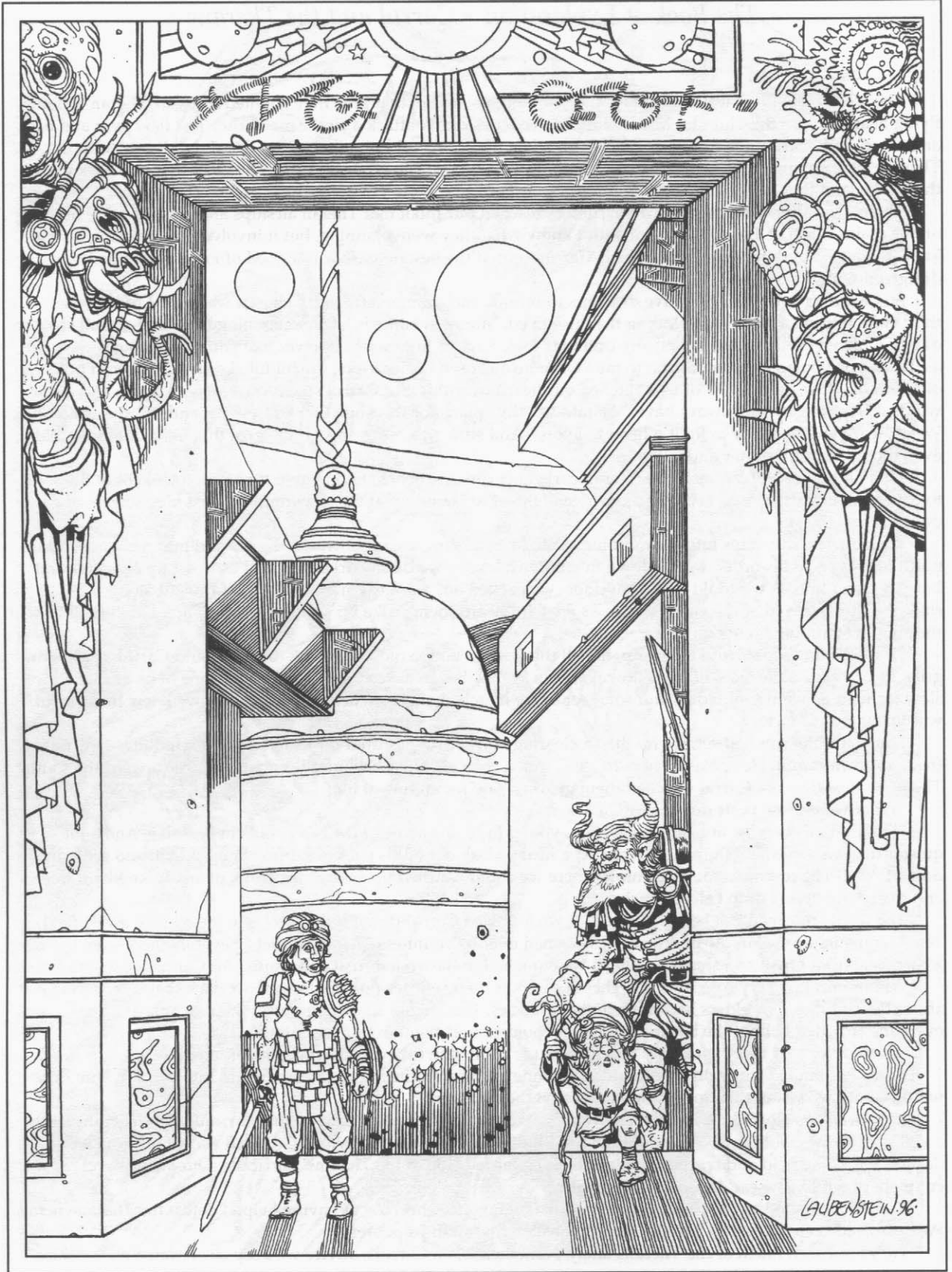
Small feet landed softly on my shoulder, and one of the windling scouts whispered in my ear, "I'm sure they would—only we've cut their guidelines and stolen their rudders."

Our drakkars cleared the trees, then dropped and turned their sides toward the barricade. The Therans let fly a volley of arrows, but they bounced off the solid hulls like straws off a brick wall. Carrul waved his arm; we dashed across the field and crashed through the unguarded side of the Therans' barricade. Our swords and axes cut them down like wheat. Not one escaped alive.

The elders landed as the battle wound down, laughing for sheer joy at having helped defeat the Theran enemy. We destroyed their ships, too, leaving the Therans ten fine airships poorer.

We've not seen much of the Therans lately. Nonetheless, on Carrul's advice we keep close watch on the skies.





# THE LOST KINGDOM OF LASAEL



The following passage was excerpted from the work-in-progress, *Political Units and Structures in Post-Scourge Barsaive*, by the t'skrang troubadour Carnellan. Carnellan adds an entry or two to the volume every time he returns to Throal from his travels across the lands of Barsaive, though he admits that he researched this entry during a single evening at a Bartertown tavern. While I have grave misgivings about the truth of this report, Carnellan has reminded me that in light of such wonders as the *Forgotten City of Parlainth*, scholars of our age should not be so quick to dismiss unsupported tales no matter how fantastic. In any case, the story of the *Lost Kingdom of Lasael* remains a fascinating one.

—Baston Yojj, scribe of the Great Library of Throal, 1507 TH

In late 1505 my travels brought me back to the Gilded Toad, one of the more well-established, if not necessarily well-furnished, drinking houses of Bartertown (about which, see my groundbreaking work, *Inns and Outs of Barsaive*). I had heard that Gillot, the barkeep, had recently passed away, and I was visiting the inn to see if I would need to revise my description of the Toad in my definitive guide to inns and taverns. As it turned out, the description did require a revision to account for the new innkeeper, but Gillot had not died, thank the Passions. He had merely moved to Jerris (not that there's much difference between those states). As a result, the Toad was now being run under the capable guidance of Gillot's former barmaid, Trisea.

As I had already made the effort to visit the inn to confirm one fact, I decided that my professional duty virtually demanded that I also sample the Toad's drink to ensure that its quality had not suffered during the change in ownership. And so I found myself seated at a back table, pondering whether the bottlefly ale had aged properly. As I sipped and contemplated the pleasant bitterness of the draft, a stranger approached my cozy nook. The fellow

appeared young and stringy, but kindly looking. I took an immediate liking to him, which explains the inclusion of his tale in this catalog of political entities of our fair province.

He initially inquired as to my Name, and seemed well pleased by my answer. The youth sat down at my invitation and with no explanation produced from his vest pocket two strange little coins, the likes of which I'd never seen before.

Oh, they were elemental earth coins, of that I am sure, friends. Though I recognized that much, the coins also bore a writing that my well-traveled eyes had never encountered, as well as a rendering of a strange, thirteen-sided tower of some sort on the reverse side. I am not often seized with fanciful imaginings, but the unintelligible script and strange drawing immediately struck me as ominous, though they contained no recognizable signs of evil. I quietly studied the coins for some time, and even with my vast experience in collecting and retelling legends and tales in pursuit of my Discipline, I was completely unable to identify the region, let alone the time in which the coins had been struck. My newfound acquaintance looked disappointed at my failure to identify the origins of the coins, and when I asked where they had come from, his face filled with fear and suspicion. He reached to retrieve his coins as he stood to leave, but after I repeatedly assured him of my honorable intentions toward his safety (and purchased him a large tankard of ale with a generous portion of roast mutton), he settled back into his chair. After taking a deep drink and thoroughly chewing a few mouthfuls of meat, he glanced around the room, leaned toward me, and in a low voice he related an amazing answer, which I will summarize here.

The youth, whose Name was D'yven, turned out to share my Discipline of troubadour, though he referred to himself as a "poet." Some months earlier, he had joined with some other adepts to investigate rumors of a giant lizard that had been roaming the southern reaches of the Throal Mountains. For weeks the expedition trekked through the hidden valleys and glens of the mountains, encountering scattered settlements of Name-givers along the way. Soon the rainy season began, spawning fierce rainstorms and fogs that prevented the party from seeing anything beyond the ground immediately beneath their feet. Eventually, they found themselves in a wild, forgotten place, uninhabited by Name-givers for centuries.

It was there that they spotted the lizard—a great flying snake, not dragonlike yet somehow not entirely snakish—soaring overhead. For three days they walked toward where the beast seemed to have landed, until they came upon a valley filled with strange and unusual creatures unspoken of in the legends of any Name-giver race. At the bottom of the valley lay a huge lake with a vast crystal island in its center. At first, the adventurers believed the lake contained water, but the party's elementalists declared that the lake was as much True water as pure water. And he went on to say that the breeze in the valley seemed to be thick with air spirits, and that the whole valley felt oddly alive to him.

At the far end of the valley the party found a broken stairway and a broken gong. They climbed the stairs, and before them stood a being wrapped in fire, with a shield of water, armor of earth, and a sword of wind, crying to an empty courtyard. The creature's Name was Ullaes, and apparently the thing was as confused as it was powerful. In a mixture of archaic human and elemental tongues, this once-human guardian began to recite an incantation. Within moments the sky became black and the still surface of the lake began to churn and boil. A violent wind rose up, blasting around the party of adventurers with a deafening roar and blinding them to their surroundings.

After some time had passed, the storm subsided as quickly as it had arisen, and the adventurers found themselves in the ruins of an ancient city. Overhead, three massive red suns hung menacingly in the sky, casting weird shadows across the city's weathered ruins and avenues—avenues that seemed much too wide for any race the size of Name-givers. Slowly the party made its way through the metropolis, each new turn revealing yet more wondrous and hideous sights. Everywhere they looked they found massive towers and structures that seemed to defy the laws of nature, looming buildings with doorways large enough to accommodate herds of thundra beasts, oddly shaped windows and stairways leading to nowhere. Eventually the party became hopelessly lost, for the city's streets were arranged according to some foreign logic indecipherable to Name-givers. For days the adventurers wandered the city, vainly searching for a familiar landmark.

Finally, just as the adepts tottered on the brink of madness, they came upon a large clearing. In the center of the clearing stood a massive citadel that reached to the sky itself. Responding to some unseen presence, they slowly began to walk toward the thirteen-sided structure. Suddenly, they were shaken from their trances by the rumbling sound of distant thunder, which shook the very ground on which they walked. Within moments, Ullaes reappeared in their midst, madly chanting in his pidgin tongue. Once again, the whipping wind surrounded them and all went black, and the adventurers woke to find themselves in a remote valley of the Throal Mountains, with nothing but a few strange coins to prove that their adventure was more than a waking dream.

# IN THE BONES OF THE EARTH



The origins of this account remain a mystery. Apparently, it was part of an adventurer's journal, but our research has uncovered no information about its authors or its authenticity. The document was purchased from a trader in the city of Vivane, but he was unable to remember how or when he acquired it. Library researchers conducted interviews with numerous explorers in that city, but none had ever heard of any caves resembling those described in the tale.

—D'rolia, scribe of the Great Library of Throal

## 18th Rua

**B**ad day. Raining all the time. Cold rain, not warm like we get at home. Hate mountains. Especially hate these mountains. Why did I come to this *buunda* Theran land, anyway? Vivane Province, full of Theran money, they said. Pah! No money to be got crawling around rocks in the cold rain. Just like the old ones say—humans got air for brains. Only a human would pay us good coin so we could get stuck in some mountains with no place to go. If he pays us. Hurt him bad if he doesn't, when we get back.

Well, *something* good come out of this—we got out of the rain. Found a cave—little one, not much room for K'raghat Goldtusk and his brothers, but snug enough for us orks and the little butterfly. K'raghat says he's getting rained on. Feel so sorry for him (hah!). We have a fire, maybe—warm up a little.

K'raghat just put his big feet too close to me for the last time. Shoved right past us, said there had to be more room in here because his torch was blowing backwards. I get stepped on because K'raghat can't take a little rain. Tough sky raider, him (hah!). Me, I could break him in—huh, K'raghat found something. Big crack in the back wall. Norga bets me two silvers the sky raider gets stuck.

## The Book of Exploration • In the Bones of the Earth

Beautiful, beautiful place! Won't catch me complaining about crawling through mountains any time soon! Jewels *everywhere*. That little cave almost tricked us—never knew all this was behind it! So many colors on the walls, sparkling in the torchlight—red and purple and smoky yellow like Norga's eyes! All the rocks are jewels, all over ... and more caves beyond the first! I see blue a ways off—wonder what makes blue cave walls?

Sapphire blue. Like being in the sea with the sunlight shining through the water. Blue, blue, blue, bluer than the sky everywhere I look. Couldn't stand it after a while, had to touch the blue. Smooth, cool, felt nice even through sword calluses. Wonder if I can pull a sapphire out of the wall?

Got one. Big as my hand, not a flaw anywhere.

*Mine.*

Norga's laughing, she's so happy. Got a lap full of green stones—emeralds, I think. She keeps tossing the biggest one up in the air, like a child's ball. We looked at all the emeralds and sapphires we got, laughing with each other like little ones. Could buy a big house in a real town now, or maybe some land to farm somewhere. Norga and me can buy anything we want.

K'raghat's sitting in the middle of the red-and-purple cave, looking at something in his lap. Silly grin on his big, stupid face. Doesn't even hear me coming to peek over his shoulder.

He got a ruby. Big one. Bigger than my sapphire. Big as his two hands together, almost. But my stones are prettier. He can have his ruby, color of blood. I get tired of blood sometimes. Water's better.

Why should K'raghat have a jewel bigger than mine?

### 20th Rua

K'raghat's two brothers cut each other over a handful of amethysts. Trolls got no brains! Pretty purple stones, but not worth shedding kin-blood over! Never thought I'd see them come to blows over anything. Groghluc's the worst of them—I picked up one of his purples just to look at it, and he screamed "Thief!" Then K'raghat put a hand on his knife-hilt, so I dropped the stone and went back to Norga. No sense fighting over one little stone.

But that ruby, now—no, I'm thinking crazy.

Can't call ourselves the Six Swords anymore. K'raghat's brothers are dead. Groghluc killed Leghlath because Leghlath spilled stew on his foot. Cut his head off with that big broadsword he carries. Then K'raghat stuck Groghluc through the eye with his knife. Groghluc took a long time to die. Kept twitching.

Didn't feel much like eating after that.

### 23rd Rua, 1502 TH

Norga writes this because Goraat is dead. So is K'raghat. They killed each other. Little Heegra, the windling, flew too close to K'raghat's ruby, so he swung his sword at her and cut her clean in half. Then Goraat attacked K'raghat, shouting "Murderer! Murderer!" They fought a long while. Goraat swore he'd take the ruby as Heegra's blood price—we were the closest kin she had, and K'raghat owed somebody something for her death. That about made K'raghat crazy. He yelled and struck out, stuck my Goraat through the throat just as Goraat ran him through the gut. They fell dead together. No one left now but me. Just Norga, nobody else.

I remember feeling afraid. I wanted to get out. I ran through the caves, looking for the crack we squeezed through. No matter where I went, I couldn't find it. I kept ending up in the cave with the red and purple and smoky gold walls, but no crack. No way out. After a while, I felt too dizzy to try anymore.

I'm not frightened now. The ruby makes me happy. K'raghat's ruby ... *my* ruby. All mine now! So perfect, so lovely—it's more beautiful than any other stone in all these caves. The emeralds I loved so much look like cheap green glass next to this ruby. When I look at it, I feel calm. I feel peace. I can't remember the last time I felt peace. You don't get peace in a life like mine.

I wish I could share this with Goraat. I miss him. Only a little, though. The ruby takes away all the rest of the pain. It's talking to me, I know it. I wish I could understand what it's saying, peace and calmness and quiet, something like that. And understanding. Yes, that's it! If I sit quiet and calm and still, if I think of nothing but peace, I'll understand. I'll understand what it's saying, why this happened, why I'm here ... everything.

I will sit and wait. I will be calm and quiet.

# PARADISE OF SWORDS



*The following account comes from the final volume of famed adventurer Horsk Truthtusk's journal, written in the year 1488 TH. No official report of Truthtusk's death has ever reached us, and in the past twenty years several new volumes of his journals have been offered to the Great Library; upon close examination, however, all have proved to be forgeries. This particular volume was deeded to the Great Library upon the death of Levhas, a windling thief of Kratas who claimed blood kinship with the windling Poorht herein mentioned. The accompanying note said little of the circumstances under which Levhas acquired the journal, only that she had found it in the ruins of Parlainth.*

—Furlan Solus, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

**T**ravel under the strange, violet sky seemed to sap us of our joys, leaving us edgy and quarrelsome. Keras quarreled with me almost every night, drawing blood more than once. Poorht, nettlesome at the best of times, buzzed my tusks every chance he got. Had I been half a finger quicker he'd not have wings today. As our journey across the northwestern plains stretched to four days, then five, I cursed my own ill judgment for having agreed to this journey. What guarantee had we of finding this "Paradise of Swords" that might not even exist?

On the sixth day we arrived at the plateau our employer had described. Tall pillars—one group of three close by us, another of five some distance away—juttied at odd angles from the cold, dry plains, like spears aimed at the sky's heart. Shrieks and the metallic ring of clashing swords led us to the encampment nearby, where countless legions of companions and blood brothers were locked in bitter combat. Whenever one combatant fell, another quickly took his place. I, who had only half-believed in the existence of this battlefield, could only stare in wonder and horror as the fighting raged.

A scimitar-wielding ork squared off against a slight elf armed with two long daggers. The ork's war cries rattled my ears, but the elf's gliding footwork and quick, flashing blades turned those cries into shrieks as his daggers slid up and in. The ork sank to his knees, blood soaking his armor. His lips caught on his tusks as his face twitched in agony, and his arm shook as he raised his scimitar across his chest. "I salute those touched by Thystonius," he gurgled, spitting blood down his chin. Then he pitched forward on his face. A billow of blood-flecked dust settled on his corpse—the only burial the ork would receive. Without a glance at his fallen foe, the elf moved on to another opponent.

Everywhere lay the dead and dying. The injured, left untended, moaned in pain. I stepped forward to aid them, but Keras swung his sword to bar my way.

"Mortals may not interfere with the joys of paradise," Keras said. A strange glitter in his eyes warned me not to cross him.

I stopped; Poorht didn't. He spat on our companion's sword, then looped over and out of Keras's reach. As he flew toward the nearest living body—a dwarf with a right thigh so deeply gashed that white bone showed through—Keras shouted after him. His furious cry cut through the din of battle; combatants all around the wounded dwarf lowered their weapons and looked at Poorht. A howl arose from the throat of every warrior standing on that plain; then they rushed the windling as one. Poorht nimbly dodged the first few blows, but well-aimed stones and arrows downed him before he could get far. The crowd kicked and swatted at him, then abruptly turned away. I went to him, and this time Keras raised no sword to stop me. Poorht lay in an unconscious heap of bent limbs and torn wings. I hesitated a moment before carrying the little fellow away, but none of the fighters so much as glanced at me.

Keras gave Poorht a pitying look. "His heart has not accepted the gifts of Thystonius," he said.

"Perhaps getting stomped on by a howling mob inhibits one's acceptance of such a gift," I said. Keras merely shrugged his broad shoulders and sat down to watch the fighting, now and again cheering a well-placed blow.

Poorht's breathing was shallow and irregular. I dressed his wounds as best I could, though my fingers seemed too slow and thick to tend his small body. Earlier that day, I had dreamed of a chance to throttle the annoying little thief; now he seemed the only other sane person on this plain. If he died, I would be alone amid a desolation of madmen. I used poultices, potions and what meager skill I had to keep Poorht among the living. As the sun set,



## The Book of Exploration • Paradise of Swords

Poorht sank into a fever. I left him wrapped in one of my shirts by our campfire and joined Keras in watching the ongoing battle.

Victorious warriors strode across the plains, making rough jokes and drinking mead. Some stopped long enough to give a sip to the wounded, then poured mead over them. Others poured flasks over the dead. Then they dragged dead and wounded alike to a circle within five pairs of pillars. They threw the bodies atop one another in a huge, wriggling pile.

By each set of pillars, one warrior lit a torch. A great shout arose: "Ignite your hearts!" The warriors threw the torches, which spun end-over-end into the pile of bodies. The flames caught and grew, leaping ever higher as the shrieks of the injured grew louder. Another group of warriors stepped forward, carrying urns of clay and brass. One after the other, they threw ashes from the urns onto the pyre.

I glanced at Keras. The flames from the pyre seemed to disappear in the flat black of his eyes. The stench was unimaginable. My stomach lurched as a few wounded managed to stagger out of the fire. Some collapsed in smoking heaps, the flames that wreathed them guttering into embers. The fire around others grew brighter, blazing blue or white-hot. Those bathed in the hottest flames screamed loudest, but the fire did not consume them, it healed them. When the flames finally died, these few stood alive and whole, though their bodies bore countless scars. The watching warriors carefully swept up the ashes of the others into the waiting urns. Keras watched all this as if enchanted. The rapt look on his face chilled me.

"Brave Keras, Sword Arm of the Scavian Waters ... " I began.

"Save your flattery. Speak plainly," Keras snapped. He looked angry. His right fist clenched and unclenched above the pommel of his sword.

My first finger rose to play with a tuft of ear-hair, a nervous gesture I have. Fortunately, Poorht was not conscious to tease me about it. My first gray hairs appeared last rainy season, a sign of age I did not want to admit. But as I looked at the warriors around me, at the violence smoldering in Keras's eyes, I wanted nothing more than time enough to see my tufts turn entirely gray. Framing my next question properly would go a long way toward allowing me to see old age.

"Keras, those who accept this paradise ... are there legends about what baleful forces can induce them to leave?" I said.

Keras grunted twice, then once more softly. "When the pillars break and the skies crack, those who battle in the world beyond sometimes forget the paradise Thystonius bestowed upon them." He sounded bored, his words merely a recitation of an old legend with little meaning for him. But they fanned hope in me. I turned away from Keras, thinking hard.

A shrill battle cry startled me; Keras had accepted the Paradise of Swords with a savage blow to the side of the dagger-wielding elf's head. Now I had two companions to rescue—one from death, the other from madness.

Two more days I spent on the plain, tending to Poorht and trying to ignore the ceaseless slaughter all around me. By the third day the windling had improved enough to travel.

On the fourth day two pillars of a blue stone brighter than the Aras Sea in summer began to shriek and crack. Between the pillars, night ripped through the violet sky, accompanied by a bloated, many-faced form. The warriors of Thystonius howled in sympathy with the pillars, rushing to attack the monster. Clearly visible amid the swirl of weapons, blood and ichor lay an open path to the netherworlds. With Poorht clinging to my shoulder I dove through the melee, slamming into Keras as I fought to knock him down and drag him away from the battle. My headlong rush pushed him into the darkness of the otherworld, darkness that held horror and perhaps Keras's last chance at sanity.





# CHAMBER OF THE AGES



*This account of the fate of the dwarf Daron Altstruff and his team of explorers comes from the dwarf troubadour Alieff. Alieff claims to have heard the story from Farris Penn, a companion of Daron Altstruff and a member of the team of explorers who set out with him in the year 1490 TH to search in the Scol Mountains for the legendary Valley of the Elders, the seat of obsidiman culture. With the exception of this account, none of the explorers were ever heard from again. Alieff's well-known skill at weaving a tale casts some doubt on the truthfulness of this account, but nevertheless it presents an intriguing tale worthy of consideration.*

—Toris Derrn, historian in the service of King Varulus of Throal, 1507 TH

**T**he Fate of Daron Altstruff,  
As spoken by the troubadour Alieff  
and transcribed by Toris Derrn, historian of Throal.

I came upon Farris Penn, companion to the explorer Daron Altstruff, in the troll village of Dontharggh in the mountains of Scol. Farris was living in a small hut, where several women of the village tended to him. He had been ill for some time, and when I saw him he was near death. He had obviously endured some terrible ordeal, and he punctuated his halting speech with nervous glances, as if he feared his words might fall upon the wrong ears. His illness made him nearly incoherent at times, but he managed to tell his tale. His admiration for Daron Altstruff and his sadness at the fate of his friend are readily apparent in his story. These are the words he spoke to me, shortly before he died:

The strange, enigmatic ways of obsidimen had fascinated Daron Altstruff for almost his entire life. After years of studying the race of stone men, Daron grew convinced that the obsidimen's sacred Valley of the Elders was a real place, rather than a mere mythological metaphor. He grew convinced that it was his destiny to locate the Valley. Most of Daron's acquaintances, myself included, had long believed that Daron's dream would never come true.

Then in 1490 Daron excitedly approached me with news of an incredible discovery. Apparently, some weeks before, he had obtained an ancient map, purchased at great expense from the captain of a t'skrang riverboat. With great care, Daron spread out the crumbling parchment before me, tracing the strange letters with his fingers as he spoke. In hushed tones, he said that the map revealed the location of the Chamber of the Ages, a place of great power according to obsidimen legends. No reputable scholars truly believed the place existed, and Daron admitted that he had shared those sentiments until he saw the map. The Chamber, he went on to explain, was traditionally regarded as the resting place of the Tablets of Krah-Thar, a number of stone tablets created by obsidimen when the world was still young. According to legend, the tablets showed the locations of precious minerals, such as orichalcum—as well as the Valley of the Elders. And so it was that in 1491 the great Daron Altstruff led an expedition into the Scol Mountains to find the fabled Chamber of the Ages.

We followed the map deep into the mountains, and only a few days into our journey a strange mist formed around us. It clung to our group for weeks, until it seemed we would never be free of its smothering grasp. Then, as abruptly as it had formed, the mist parted and we faced a breathtaking sight.

We had been traveling downward for some time, and now found ourselves at the bottom of a deep ravine. Opposite us, through a grove of pine trees, stood an awesome statue, at least forty feet tall, of a robed obsidiman. His dour face looked scornfully down upon us as we approached through the trees. Daron was giddy with excitement. We had found the entrance to the Chamber of the Ages.

The Chamber was sealed with a huge stone slab, covered in magical carvings and runes. The stone looked incredibly ancient, and a huge fissure ran through it, as though some powerful force had attempted to break it apart. I despaired at our chances of ever entering the chamber but Daron never hesitated. Producing the map from his pack, he proceeded to perform an elaborate ritual of gestures, then placed his hands upon the runes of the door. After several minutes, he stepped back and the stone slab *crumbled* before our very eyes. Awestruck, we followed Daron into the Chamber.

## The Book of Exploration • Chamber of the Ages

We walked down a long, dark passageway. As we walked it grew incredibly hot, and we emerged into an immense, circular chamber surrounded by a meager walkway. Steam rose from below us, and we looked down to see molten rock bubbling at the bottom of the chamber. Huge statues of the Passions, sculpted in the forms of obsidimen, lined the chamber walls. The grim, ancient faces of Chorrolis, Raggok and Upandal looked down upon us from high above. The walls glittered with precious gems, and the place was lit by a strange, glowing orb, suspended high above us.

In the center of the Chamber, more than a hundred feet away, a large circular platform rose up from the lava far below. On the platform stood a stone table, on which rested a number of stone tablets, which Daron identified as the Tablets of Krah-Thar! Next to the tablets, however, we spied a sight more startling than any we had yet encountered—an ancient, slumped figure, bound to a pillar at the center of the platform. It was an obsidiman, clothed in dark purple robes, his features as black as the heart of any Horror. We gasped at the sight, but Daron, his eyes wide with wonder, called out to the guardian. The obsidiman raised his head and looked at us with burning red eyes. He said nothing, but grimaced with concentration. His form shook with the effort of his thoughts, and suddenly a bridge of stone formed at Daron's feet, reaching out to the platform. Daron stepped onto it without hesitation.

We followed our friend across the bridge. Upon reaching the platform, Daron walked straight to the obsidiman while the rest of us hurried to the tablets, eagerly anticipating the secrets they might reveal to us. To my disappointment, the tablets were covered in the same strange letters as the map. I could not decipher them. Frustrated, I turned to Daron, but his attention was focused on the coal-black visage of the obsidiman.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Ja Kae-Rik, Guardian of the Chamber of the Ages," replied the obsidiman.

"Why are you bound?" asked Daron.

"My shackles ensure my loyalty to my task. I am bound to ensure that I guard the Chamber and the Tablets of Krah-Thar. I have performed my duty faithfully over the centuries, but now I grow weary. Release me, I beseech you! Grant me my freedom and I will give you the secrets of the tablets, for I crave to see the light of day once again. I beg of you, merciful Name-givers that you be, in that Name of the Passions use your sword and smash my bonds, for an oath prevents me from freeing myself!"

The obsidiman looked pleadingly at Daron, and held forth his bound hands. Daron hesitated for only a moment, then stepped forward. With one blow of his sword, he destroyed the bonds that held Ja Kae-Rik.

At that, the obsidiman rose up, seeming to grow before our very eyes. He no longer appeared a desperate, ancient figure. He radiated power. His eyes glowed hot with hatred. His deep, powerful voice boomed, and his hideous laughter echoed through the chamber. Fear clutched my heart, and I stood frozen as Ja Kae-Rik struck Daron Altstruff with the back of his hand and sent my friend reeling and screaming over the edge of the platform. Panic struck me and I bolted to the bridge, shamefully fleeing for my life. I heard the screams of the others, but I never looked back. Behind me, Ja Kae-Rik's laughter echoed, mocking my cowardice. I heard the bridge crumble and fall into the molten hell below and I heard his feet in the passageway behind me as I fled, but I never looked back. I ran from the Chamber of the Ages and from the nightmare we had released upon the world.

I wandered in the mountains for what seemed like weeks and finally came to this village. I have waited here to tell my story and to warn the world of the evil sorcerer, Ja Kae-Rik. I dwell here in shame, for I deserted my comrades. ...

Here, Farris Penn broke down. His shame and sadness would not allow him to continue, and I left him for the night. The next day I returned to his hut, hoping to speak with him again and perhaps lift his spirits. He was dead. The troll woman who had been watching him said that he took his own life during the night. He had plunged the blade of his great dagger through his own, aching heart.

# A FRAGMENT FROM NUTREVA



The following account comes from a surviving fragment of an adventurer's journal. The pages on which the entry below was written were the only ones left intact from what we presume to have been a larger document—from the marks on the edges of these surviving pages, we must conclude that the remainder of the journal was eaten (or at any rate, chewed into pulp). The pages were recovered from the village of Nutreva in the Badlands, and based on this document, we urge travelers to give the area a wide berth.

—Furlan Solus, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

**Y**ou who read this, leave this place. Leave now. Linger too long, and you will not live to regret it. Not even I, Orteol the Brave, can hope to defeat the terrible creatures that even now are scabbling at the door. No barricade can keep them out for long, not even the sturdy oak door of this still-room where despair has forced me to hide. My companions—Lhenda the wizard, Makto of the Rockfist sky raider clan, and even my most faithful friend Tchoke of the lowland trolls—are all dead. I alone remain, to fight this enemy as best I can before succumbing.

The door shakes under their assault. It cannot be long now before they break through. I will die with the fading sunlight, unless some miracle happens.

We entered Nutreva only this morning. The streets rang with silence. No children played. No merchants bargained to sell their wares. No old men exchanged stories of youth and courage.

We called out, but no one answered! Seeking an answer to this mystery, we went to the inn, but found only

## The Book of Exploration • A Fragment from Nutreva

more food for questions. Coals from what had clearly been a hearty fire glowed warmly in the fireplace. Plates of stew, cold and congealing, stood untouched on the tables. Forks stood at alert, stuck in baked potatoes, and melted butter lay in dried pools on serving dishes. Of those who should have eaten this feast, we saw no sign.

In the kitchen we found a pot of beef, the water in which it must have boiled long gone cold. Carrots and asparagus lay splayed out on a carving board, some peeled and sliced, some untouched. Lhenda saw something move in a corner, but it was only a wooden doll falling from a precarious perch upon a tiny stool. The doll's eyes stared up at us, blank and lifeless.

The rooms upstairs gave us no better answers than the kitchen and the common room. In the first, the bed sheets had been carelessly thrown back. A nightgown and a pair of slippers lay on the floor nearby. Upon the dressing table lay a wooden comb, several long strands of silken red hair curling among its teeth. A letter, half-finished, had long since soaked up the ink from a hastily discarded pen. The letter read, "My darling mother, I shall soon be home to comfort you in your time of need. I depart at sunrise tomorrow, and expect to arrive—" A giant ink blot obscured the rest.

In the next room an empty cradle stood in one corner, rocking gently in the breeze coming through the open window. Tiny bells hung over it to amuse the babe that had lain there. They jingled softly, their gentle music scarcely relieving the growing weight of the silence. Everywhere, we saw evidence of life ... but of the Name-givers who had led those lives, no trace.

From the window, I gazed out at the deserted village. The Badlands stretched away in the distance, the racked landscape reminding us that Nutreva stood at the edge of civilization. "Where are all the people?" Tchoke grunted at last, voicing the question we had all feared to ask. "No people. No bodies, even. No nothing."

I kept looking out the window, unable to answer him. Then I saw something moving, far out toward the horizon. The landscape seemed to ripple, like water when a stiff breeze blows across it.

"What is that?" Lhenda breathed in my ear, gazing over my shoulder at the shuddering earth. It was coming closer even as she spoke. Behind us, Makto drew his sword.

When the first wave of creatures struck Nutreva, we rallied against them and won. Makto laughed as they fled, swinging his blade above his head in a victory dance. We should have known that others would follow—so many others!

They came in a great swarm, a moving red tide that swept us before it. Makto was the first to falter. I watched in dread as he fell among them. They surged over him, a great writhing throng of legs and red bodies covering him like a blanket. I rushed to aid him, but too late. As he lay gasping for air, the creatures crawled into his mouth and choked him. They crawled into his clothes, giant lumps that wriggled beneath the cloth. Their antennae tickled his face, and their clawed feet scratched his skin hard enough to draw blood. He did not flinch, or even look away; venom from a thousand bites had paralyzed him. He could not even scream, but died without a sound.

Lhenda fell next, shrieking in agony as they swarmed over her back and tangled themselves in her hair. She batted wildly at them, trying to knock them off, but stumbled and fell. Her screams faded into moans, then died away to nothing as the creatures' poison did its work.

Tchoke ran to her, crushing insect bodies beneath his heavy boots. Ignoring the creatures that crawled up his body, he bent down and gathered Lhenda into his arms. He made it halfway to the inn's front door before they slumped to the floor together. The red tide covered them both, and I fled.

I ran as fast as I could, knocking the creatures from me as I went. Pain stabbed through my forearm, followed by cold numbness; one of the monsters was clinging to my sleeve, and had bitten my sword arm. I beat at the thing. When it fell off, I kicked it into the fireplace. The creature burned quickly, exploding with a pop. I ran through the kitchen and into the still-room, slammed the heavy door behind me, and locked it. I hoped the creatures would go away. With no more prey visible, they should have gone away. They should have. Then I could have unlocked the door and left the inn and this cursed village far behind me. The door is my only way out; the still-room window is too small for a human to pass through.

But they are massing on the other side of the door. They know I am here. They want me.

I do not know how much time has passed. From the window I can see more of them coming, marching in lines like a great army moving into battle. I lost count of their numbers long ago. A sea of them carried my dead companions through the village and out across the Badlands, presumably to some hidden hive. The rest—wave upon wave of them—keep coming this way.

I can hear them scabbling up the outside wall toward the window. The door is beginning to splinter. I cannot escape death. Heed this warning—get out, before they come for *[parchment torn away beyond this point.]*

# AN ANCIENT MYSTERY



*This account is taken from the journal of Korben Shadowfire, windscout of the Fourth Circle. He gave it into our hands, along with a tattered map and the words: "Do what you like with this—publish it, burn it, I don't care. May you have better luck with it than we did."*

—Neled N'Bar, apprentice archivist of the Great Library of Throal

**A** good inn with competent guards is a wonderful thing ... especially after the week we've just lived through. In all these months of adventuring, we've never come back to civilization so sorely hurt and exhausted as this. Norvel is healing quickly, thanks be to Garlen. I must remember to compose a proper tribute to the healing Passion. All of us are tired to death, wounded in both body and soul. We managed to repair our Pattern after poor Khav's death, but the effects of the damage remain. Still, there are others who fare worse than we do. Fate chose to remind us of this just last night.

As we were rehashing the whole cursed journey over our dinner, a human at the next table turned around and said, with a sympathetic smile, "Run of bad luck?"

"Bad luck?" retorted G'tuth, ready to start up out of his seat and fling himself on the offending inquirer. Senna put a hand on his shoulder and he sat back down, but with obvious effort. Such touchy folk, orks.

"You're lucky you only lost one," said the man. "I went adventuring in the same place you did—and I lost everything."

Well, after a beginning like that, who *wouldn't* want to hear the tale? We made room for one more at our table, and the human—D'zar Illedets, lone survivor of the adventuring band known as the Falcon's Talons—told us the story I have here set down.

"We'd gone to the Mist Swamps, looking for a rare plant that our employer—a wealthy Bartertown merchant—swore would fetch a prettier penny than we'd ever seen before. I know it's been said there's some strange things in the Mist Swamps, but we've been around the town a few times—not much we didn't know about adventuring, or so we thought. The risk seemed worth the pay, so we went. When we reached the place where fire burns atop the water, we knew we'd found the place where the plant was said to grow. All we had to do was find some, cut a few, and pack them careful. Easy money.

"We camped, tried to eat a little dinner in spite of the smell of the swamp, and went to bed. Ghikel, our nethermancer, seemed uneasy—kept starting up and staring across the dark swamp waters—but she couldn't say exactly what was troubling her. T'skrang can get awfully flighty sometimes, so we put her fits down to that and thought nothing more of it. When morning came and nothing strange had happened, that only seemed to prove everything was fine.

"Slow and careful, we wandered down the edges of the swamp, looking for clumps of the plant we sought. Suddenly, our scout Ariel let out a whoop and pointed across the swamp to a clump of scrubby trees. Through the leaves and thin trunks, we could just see the ruins of some stone building—a small one, not a palace or anything like that. It looked like it had exploded from the inside out.

"We got as close as we could to the ruin without actually setting foot in the swamp, but we couldn't get near enough to see much. As we drew closer, the air seemed to tingle—you know, the way it feels just before lightning strikes. Hairs on your arms rising, that kind of thing. It was magic, so strong we could almost smell it. Couldn't be sure what kind, though.

"So Ghikel and Shosala—Shosi's our elemental—start arguing about what to do next. Both of them're wild to find out what the magic is—some treasure or weapon, they're hoping—but Shosi's afraid that the magic might be tainted somehow. A cautious one, she always was. Ghikel's all for throwing caution to the four winds—she's a nethermancer, by the Passions, she says, and she'd have smelled taint if it was there. Finally she's had enough of Shosi's warnings, and she steps into the swamp.

"See," she calls out, striding toward the ruins, 'there's nothing to be afraid—' And then all of a sudden, Ghikel clutches at her head, gives a wild scream, and drops like a felled tree. Without thinking, I ran to pull her out before she could drown. I happened to look toward the ruins as I stood up with Ghikel in tow, and I saw on part of the



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wall still standing was a Theran Imperial seal. Whatever the stone building had been, the Therans had used it as some kind of outpost.

"Well, that bit of news made Shosala wild to get inside the place. Whatever dangers the ruined building offered, she was sure that the Therans must have left behind some powerful magical item. Anything that could make itself felt so strongly after several hundred years and remain free from Horror-taint must be powerful enough to be worth just about any risk—or so she said. So—after waving her hands around and muttering a bit to keep herself safe from harm—Shosala waded into the swamp.

"She got farther than Ghikel, I'll give her that. About ten paces from the ruins, she wavered and disappeared, like a reflection when you drop a pebble in it.

"We just stared, too shocked even to cry out. We were sure Shosala was dead—disembodied by ancient Theran magic, or whatever it was. You could have knocked us all over with a breath of wind when she turned up the next morning, her clothes covered in green stains and bug spots, swearing about thrice-damned Theran magicians and their half-baked ideas. After she got a cup of hot tea in her and had calmed down a bit, she told us that she'd somehow jumped, or shifted—she had trouble finding the right word—from the middle of the swamp to an entirely different part of it, between one step and another. She said she'd felt a pulling sensation, like a giant hand plucking at her clothes and hair—then she'd heard a terrible ripping sound, felt horribly sick for just a moment, and found herself in an unfamiliar part of the bogs. Nowhere near the burning waters she knew we'd camped by. Once she got over feeling sick and dizzy, she'd plotted out the direction where she thought our camp lay as best she could, and struck out toward it. She hadn't even stopped for nightfall, just slowed down a little so as not to wander into a quicksand patch. It had taken her close to a day to get back.

"Well, nothing would do after that but for Morgwn, our warrior, to give it a go. He strode out into the swamp, the black waters coming up higher than his waist and puffs of swamp fire almost singing his beard. Ten paces from the ruins, he vanished.

"I told him so," muttered Shosala, and stomped off to find a little washing water.

"Morgwn turned up as the sun was setting, looking peevish. It seemed the Therans' magic was working to keep interlopers like us away from whatever they'd left in the ruins. I pointed out that we'd come for something else entirely, that our employer was waiting for us with cold hard coin in Bartertown, and that poor Ghikel needed help that we weren't going to find out in the Mist Swamps. After a little grumbling, the others gave up on the Theran ruin and hunted for the plants we'd come for instead. We found a nice little stand of the stuff a day and a half later, and I thought we were fair on our way to spending the merchant's payment. Little did I know, eh?

"The trouble started as soon as we left the area. One of our horses stepped into quicksand—Morgwn tried to free the beast and fell into a neighboring pool. Before we could pull him out, some horrible creature with tentacles like thick ropes pulled him under. Ghikel went next—died of a fever that burned her to nothing from the inside out in less than three days. Then a thief tried to rob us at a roadside inn and stabbed poor Shosi in the gut. The wound wouldn't drain right, and infection set in. I couldn't stay, so I left her to the care of a traveling healer who'd shared a meal with us. And to top it all off, I lost the pack with the plants in it fording a stream that shouldn't have been in spate for another three months. The strap gave way, even though I'd taken care to repair all our leather gear before setting out. That strap shouldn't have broken, but it did.

"So here I am, stuck in Bartertown with no pay and no prospect of work. No companions, either. I don't suppose you'd consider buying my journal for a few silvers, would you?"

We bought the journal, though G'tuth swore that D'zar had made up his tale. At first, it seemed G'tuth was right—the journal was poorly written, full of misspellings, and contained no accounts of interest. However, on the last page of it we found a map to the Place of Burning Waters in the Mist Swamps, with the location of the Theran ruin precisely marked. If there is a powerful magical item hidden within those ancient stones, surely there must be some way to defeat the strange displacement spell and reach the ruins themselves. Who better than myself and my companions to attempt such a heroic feat?





# CITADEL IN THE SKY



The following document was an anonymous bequest to the Great Library. As is often the case with such offerings, we assume the donor acquired this document through less than savory means. Though we sometimes refuse such gifts, our work at the library is too important to be overly scrupulous, for the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge is the primary means by which we will restore our world to its true glory.

This account appears to be an excerpt of a log kept by one Quin Zeraph while he served as sergeant at arms of the airship Storm's Delight, a Theran air-mining vessel.

—Relford of Lutane, scribe of the Great Library of Throal

62/4/1046

**T**oday began like all others. We woke at dawn to a meager breakfast, then took to the sky. As always, the rush of the early morning gave way to dull routine. Hours passed as the sharp-eyed watchers scanned the sky for the telltale shimmer of True air and the rest of the crew took turns watching over the slaves or readying the fire-cannons.

The last few months had seemed to stretch forever. We had found an occasional haul, but most of the time we had simply shuffled about the ship's deck performing various chores to relieve the tedium. Today, however, would end differently.

Jharka, the newest of our watchers, was the first to spot the faint shimmer dancing above the clouds. Captain Valis bellowed his familiar orders, and the ship's bow swung toward our quarry. With the sound of whip cracks rising from the hold, the ship lurched forward, and a fresh breeze washed across the deck.

Our slaves had good strong backs and *Storm's Delight* was a fast vedette, but the shimmering continued to dance ahead of us. Slowly we realized that it was no small pocket of air that we chased, for as we edged closer the shimmering grew until it filled the entire sky.

Valis smiled, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "Men, even a hundredth of this catch would fill our hold," he said, his eyes sparkling with greed. "Extend the nets! Ready the cannons! And let's hope our mates will be happy to see us return so soon."

## The Book of Exploration • Citadel in the Sky

The captain's enthusiasm infected the entire crew, and within moments the deck hands had the long poles set and the orichalcum nets stretched out like wings. The net boys waited along the *Storm's* railing with their orichalcum-laced pots in hand, ready to scramble across the nets' wiry surfaces and collect the falling shards of True air.

The gunners cried out from the front of the ship as they finished their preparations. At the captain's word, a single cannon belched, and a ball of flame crashed into the shimmering sky.

As hundreds of glass-like shards of True air rained down on the ship and nets, a stale breath seemed to wrap around the ship. Every crewman froze, as if shackled to the deck. Even the net boys forgot to collect the rapidly evaporating treasure. The charge had not just knocked True air free—it had pierced a hole in the shimmering sky itself, revealing a glistening city, an entire kaer floating within the pocket of True air.

It was minutes before anyone moved. As usual, Valis's voice broke the silence. "Well then, Quin," he said, turning to me, "gather some men and check her out."

I chose twenty sailors and we piled into the *Storm's* launch. Within a few minutes we reached the breach. Only the bow of our craft fit through, but it was enough. One by one, my men scrambled onto the bow of the launch, then jumped the short gap to the kaer's deck. I followed, carrying a docking rope.

The air smelled like dust and tickled the back of my throat, though I could not see a spot of dirt. The kaer was made from field stones, but they were covered with some kind of glossy coating, like the shiny crust on a well-baked loaf of bread. I counted sixteen decks from where I stood, with undoubtedly more hidden below. Overhead, I counted a dozen towers connected by a web-like maze of bridges.

I tied the launch to the deck's railing and gestured toward a large archway. Without a word, my men fell into step behind me, crossbows in hand.

The portal opened into a great hall with vaulted ceilings hundreds of feet overhead and walls covered with delicate marble carvings. For a moment, I stood transfixed by the beauty and grandeur of the sight. Then my gaze fell upon the floor, which was covered by a carpet of gray, twisted bodies. No scent of rotting flesh, no trace of decay was present. Just the sharply contorted corpses, their faces still bent around their dying screams.

My body stiffened like a spring wound too tight. Horrors had been here—may still be here, I thought. I took a step back and opened my mouth to order a withdrawal, when a smoke-like shadow burst through the floor.

Creaking laughter rolled through the room as the Horror—I knew it was a Horror—attacked my men, their bodies withering from a mere brush of its scythe-like arms. It swept between us and the exit, forcing us farther into the room. I ordered my men to spread out, hoping we could slip around the creature. But as we picked our way through the bodies, the floor itself began to writhe. The corpses unwound their tangled limbs, staggered to their feet and began to raise their voices in a crescendo of inhuman ululation.

I do not remember giving the order, but within seconds my men had drawn their swords and we hacked our way through the clawing jungle of corpses. At the railing we turned to fight, as one by one we leapt back through the breach. As we battled our way free, the gray shadow lurked above us. Its unceasing laughter made my flesh crawl, but I pushed away my fear and focused on my attacks. Blow followed blow, as my world shrank down to a sea of dead flesh and the silvery flash of my blade. Then a rough pair of hands grabbed my shoulder and shoved me toward the launch.

Jumping the chasm, I crawled through the opening and into the craft. Then I turned to see Thasill, my second, land on the edge of the small, rocking craft. He reached his hands toward me—the very hands that had pushed me to safety. But as I reached out to help him the air shook with the ringing of a giant bell, and the bow of the launch splintered as the breach crashed shut. Thasill's severed hands fell to the deck beside my feet.

Only eight of us returned to *Storm's Delight*. I begged Captain Valis to open another breach and let me save the men we had left behind. But he simply shook his head and ordered the navigators to plot a course for camp. I could read his thoughts in his eyes. He had lost too many men already, and though I hate to admit it, a part of me rejoiced at his refusal.

# THE GROWING BONES



The following account comes from a journal that records the adventures of a group known as the Five Wheels. Regretfully, the journal's author, the dwarf archer Hansig True-Eye, did not provide even the Names of the scorchers mentioned in this entry, an omission that has severely hampered the few explorers who have attempted to retrace the Five Wheels's path. Unfortunately, Hansig may never have a chance to expand on his account, as no one has heard from the Five Wheels since they ventured into the Badlands several months ago.

—Thom Edrull, Archivist and Scribe of the Hall of Records

## Day 13

**F**or nearly two weeks we have traveled from Kratas. Tylons in sight, no sign of slavers—feels like two months. We're running low on food, and Riggo died in a crakbill attack, of all things. So now we're short an elemental as well. No matter. I can see the slavers in my dreams, and the archer that can see does not miss. Trasken sees only the gold.

You can't eat gold. You can eat crakbills, though, Gommoj assured me. He said they taste like hurlg. Rancid hurlg, I say.

## Day 15, morning

Under the Tylons. Have encountered a scorcher tribe. They claim all this land from the left peak of the Tylons on down to the Faded River. Gommoj is handling them now. Scorchers appreciate having a famous cavalrywoman giving them a one-two, I'm sure. At least we brought an adept the scorchers will accept without laughing—nothing else is working right.

## *The Book of Exploration • The Growing Bones*

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### **Day 16**

Gommoj has earned us passage through the tribe's land—apparently the orks consider roasted crakbill a delicacy. Trasken has detected fresh signs of the slavers at last. Fewer tracks this time, apparently they lost a few men. Maybe they had trouble with the scorchers. Sometimes scorchers are a slaver-hunter's best friend.

Gommoj looks concerned. Trasken points up towards a low ridge. We are deep in the Tylons now, but still in scorcher territory. Trasken says the tracks lead there. Gommoj shakes her head. The scorchers said we could not go up there, on the ridge. Why?, I ask. No matter. Gommoj didn't ask why. Orks. Dip them in batter and leave them for the dragons, I say.

Trasken asks if Gommoj would rather have the friendship of scorchers or the blood of slavers on her spear. That turns the shaft. We go up now, up the ridge.

Trasken makes a face. He does not like what he senses at the top of the climb.

### **Day 18**

On top of the ridge. It commands a view of a valley that turns into a pass and runs through the side of mountain. The entire valley is dead. A vast stretch of dry, brown and gray earth—no living plants in sight. Weird place. Ahead of us looms a dark form. Gommoj is chanting her Horror-fend.

### **Day 21**

At closer range, the dark form appears to be a some sort of building—a castle, perhaps. It is made of bone—gleaming bones and metal, jewelry and bodies, stone and plants and more bleached bones. Shields of shattered foes hang from it like banners, long lances stick out like arms, skulls festooned with gems are haphazardly set in it like keystones. A dark, buzzing cloud of carrion birds and bugs hangs over the entire structure.

The building is vast. It stretches across almost the entire blasted valley. There is very little smell, however—most odd. A low, rough-looking fence of spears and ribcages surround the place—none of us has dared cross it yet.

Trasken senses no Horrors in the area. I see no signs of undead creatures. We are all still uneasy, however. The sky remains dark as night, even at high noon. Gommoj is shuddering along with her horse.

### **Day 22**

Today we crossed the terrible fence. We found no opening in the bone building itself, but as we ventured to its far side we encountered a most fantastic sight. At the other end of the valley stood another, almost identical castle of the dead! Even more puzzling, we spied two obsidimen, each sitting in front of one of the castles. Both rockmen sit, unmoving, on some sort of colored rug or mat, a single wooden bowl resting next to each one. The obsidimen stare at one another across two vast mazes of bones. Neither of them acknowledges our presence.

Trasken assures me that they are alive. Trasken has the scout's sight. I have the archer's, and what I can see here disturbs me. I look at one obsidiman close up. His eyes never move, never blink. Do obsidimen blink? No matter. He has no pupils, just eyes of pale yellow, yet I know what he is staring at. I look at his rival, across the way.

Later, I realize that we have spent six days investigating the terrible valley of death and its mysterious inhabitants—six days that undoubtedly the slavers have spent riding away from us. Casting nervous glances at the awesome towers of bone, we return to the slavers' trail, which leads us past the second tower, down the valley and into the countryside beyond. No matter. I can see the slavers now, on the horizon. The archer who can see never misses.

### **Day 27**

Finally we are heading homeward. Two of the slavers escaped us initially—the scout and the train driver. Trasken tracked them doubling back, heading back into the Tylons. He had their scent, and he could not lose them.

Their trail has led us back into the dark valley. The rockmen are still here. Trasken guesses they haven't moved in years.

The terrible towers have grown since we were gone! Gommoj, with his horse sense, realizes it first. From the top of the northern tower the banner of the slave driver hangs in the still air, mounted on a crude flag mast fashioned from the scout's arm—which still bears his distinctive armor. The slave driver's head sits atop the flag mast, surveying the valley with unseeing eyes.

No matter. The bounty pays for the slave driver himself—or evidence of his death. We shall borrow the gruesome trophy and use it to gain our gold. Archers can always see how best to reach a goal. I can see the slave driver's face in my sights now. ...

# THE HIDDEN HILL



*The following documents were obtained from a book merchant in a town located within the territory covered by the ancient human kingdom of Landis. The first account comes from the journal of Lessen Chiun, a legendary explorer of that region. The second account is attributed to an elementalists from Kokosa called Meschullah. Scholars at the Great Library remain divided over whether this is the same Meschullah mentioned in Lessen Chiun's account.*

—Neled N'Bar, apprentice archivist of the Great Library of Throal

**3rd Week, 5th Day, TE 560**

**F**or the first time in our many days' journey across these barren lands, we have found some evidence of inhabitants. Late in the afternoon our pack horses topped a small rise, and we saw below us a great hill rising from the heart of the wide plain like a sea serpent's humped back rising from a becalmed ocean. When we drew nearer, we realized that this was no ordinary hill. So tall was it that seven obsidimen standing on each other's shoulders could scarcely have touched its crown. And so smooth were its sides and so regular its shape that it could only be the work of Name-giver hands. It somewhat resembled the burial mounds of the Nachmane people, a tribe of humans whose domain covers much of Landis's southern plains. This "burial mound," though—if such it is—could hold an entire Nachmane town and still have room left to graze cattle in.

We examined the hill and found only more strangeness. The hill has no entry passage or door of any kind, and Meschullah says that the earth is undisturbed by any Name-giver's touch. There is no tunnel beneath the surface, no burial chamber—yet this mound is not of Nature, either. Truly, it is a great mystery.

As its bulk provides us with admirable shelter from the west wind (which blows fierce and cold across the plains, especially after dusk), we have made camp here for the night. Meschullah advises against it, as usual muttering darkly about "mysterious influences" and "angering the spirits." Upon our return to Kokosa, I shall



## *The Book of Exploration • The Hidden Hill*

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speak to our employer about canceling Meschullah's contract—I tire of putting up with his notions. Surely Lord Marras makes enough coin from his trading empire to hire a more fit magician than this half-crazed elemental!

### **4th Week, 1st Day, TE 560**

I can see the great hill far behind us, black against the sunset like some malignant spirit. Despite the full day's distance between us and it, the sight of the place unnerves me. Meschullah was right, curse him. The hill is the abode of spirits, or some other strange manner of being—we heard them last night. Their laughter kept us from slumber, and unnatural lights gleamed from within the solid earth. The lights moved in patterns, as if performing some strange dance. Watching them made us feel sick and dizzy—save for Meschullah. The lights and the voices entranced him—spoke to him, he said. And to think he warned us against stopping there!

We should never have left him behind.

### **4th Week, 2nd Day, TE 560**

At the request of the others, we have returned to the accursed hill. But Meschullah is not here, nor any trace of him but his dagger and a cloak-brooch, both wrought of iron. I should never have agreed to let him stay, not even for one night. We will wait, as close to this spot as we dare, in hope that whatever has taken him from this world may return him unharmed. ...

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—From the journal of Meschullah, elemental of Kokosa

I am alone. I have no one. The Hill People cast me out, and my comrades broke their promise to wait for me. I cannot understand it. I spent only six days in the Hill, and I am traveling faster than my companions—I should have overtaken them by now. Has some calamity befallen them—the same that seems to have befallen all this land? The grasses are blighted and blackened, and the earth stinks of corruption. I hear it scream with every step I take. The balance of the elements is shattered—it feels like broken glass scraping my soul. I know of no power that could so change the world in so short a time.

Anguish hangs over the land like a shroud. Where is everyone? What has happened here?

The Passions save me, I fear I am losing my mind! I encountered the residents of a small hamlet today, clad in strange dress and conversing in some peculiar dialect—both undoubtedly the results of the extreme isolation of the wretched little settlement. The villagers seemed frightened of me, whispering among themselves and pointing at me when they thought I wasn't looking. Then one of them—the headman, I believe—approached me. Despite the weird inflections of his speech, I recognized many of his words and we were able to communicate with one another. To my pleasant surprise he seemed reasonable and sane enough. That is, until he told me that his family had first settled the hamlet some fifty years ago—in the year TE 960! At first I thought he had misspoke, or counted years according to a different calendar. But there was no mistake. Still, I can't believe it. I was in the Hill for six days, not more than four hundred years! I *won't* believe it. These villagers must be mad, after all, or playing some cruel trick on me.

If only I could have remained in the Hill. The Hill People gave me so many gifts, so many precious things. Gold and gems they gave me, filling my arms with more jewels and coin than I could hold. Why did I ask for more? What possessed me to ask where to find their magical treasures? I should have asked them something else. Something harmless. Something that did not reveal the naked greed at the root of my soul. Or I should have asked nothing at all. They warned me, but I asked my question anyway. My heart's desire—they said my question would reveal it, and it did. My poor luck that they found my heart's desire distasteful. Be careful what you ask for, because you may get it—my teacher told me that, and I was foolish enough to forget it. Is this their revenge? Have the Hill People cast me out into a world full of madmen, or some world that is not my own?

Am I mad or sane? I don't know. I don't know any more. ...





# THE CORRUPTED

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*Aronn Torem spent his life in the service of Throal, exploring the farthest reaches of Barsaive, seeking to bring news of the Scourge's end to the denizens of unopened kaers and working to unite the people of Barsaive against Theran oppression. He died recently in the Thunder Mountains, still carrying out his life's work. His journals have been placed, in their entirety, in the Library of Throal. The following entries were written during a journey he made to the Dragon Mountains three years ago. The events these entries describe disturbed him so deeply that he consistently refused to speak of them, and so these accounts are the only existing record of the events. This account is unsettling indeed—will we never be free of the Scourge and the plagues it has brought upon us?*

—Dorrin Tharr, scribe in the service of King Varulus of Throal, 1507 TH

## **Dragon Mountains, Day 6**

**S** torms have raged since we entered the mountains. The harsh weather weighs heavily on my spirits, but the men seem to bear it well. We were told by the people of Arnatt that two small human villages lie four days' walk along this path. These villages are reclusive, and the people of Arnatt have few dealings with them. If the folk of Arnatt spoke truly, we should arrive at the first village tomorrow.

## **Dragon Mountains, Day 7**

We arrived at the first of the villages this afternoon. A gruesome sight greeted our weary eyes. The village lay in ruins, its inhabitants destroyed. Bodies littered the streets. The place came to a violent, bloody end. What could have happened?

We came upon the second village scant hours after leaving the first. An awful fate had befallen this village as well. Broken bodies lay everywhere and the buildings were little more than piles of rubble. Upon closer inspection, it appeared that the destruction had been carried out methodically and with tremendous physical force. This was not the result of a cyclone or storm, nor does it seem likely that a Horror was responsible. The ways of such beings are generally far more subtle and insidious.

We will camp outside this village tonight. Tomorrow we continue deeper into the mountains.

## **Dragon Mountains, Day 8**

The devastation we have seen has sobered my men. The obsidiman, Kahr-ach, seems particularly distraught by the discoveries of the past few days, though I must admit that my ability to determine the emotional state of these inscrutable giants is limited at best. The obsidimen remain, to me at least, one of the greatest mysteries in all of Barsaive. They walk among us, they are familiar to us, but we do not understand them. Their ways and thoughts are utterly foreign.

We continue upward into the heart of the mountains. The terrain grows more difficult and I am afraid of what lies ahead.

## **Dragon Mountains, Day 9**

Unexpectedly, we arrived at a third village today, intact and inhabited. However, something is wrong here. The villagers were clearly disturbed by our arrival. They were particularly upset upon seeing Kahr-ach, and acted nervous and uncommunicative, almost as if they were trying to deliberately ignore our presence. No one offered us food or shelter. The village contains no inn, so we are camping outside of town.

A large, unusual sculpture stands at the center of town. Its aspect is disturbing. Kahr-ach said it looked like the work of obsidimen, but he too found it unsettling. Could this explain the villagers' reaction to him?

## **Dragon Mountains, Day 10**

I have convinced a reluctant villager, a man named Janus, to guide us deeper into the mountains. He is less fearful than the others, more talkative. He refuses to comment on the unusual statue, even when pressed.

## The Book of Exploration • The Corrupted



### Dragon Mountains, Day 12

Janus has led us deep into the range. Disturbing carvings that resemble the statue in the village have been chiseled into the rock that surrounds this forsaken mountain path. Janus says they are the work of the *Corrupted*, but he will not say more. Kahr-ach shuddered as Janus spoke the word, if an obsidiman can be said to shudder. What lies ahead on this path?

### Dragon Mountains, Day 22

My journey to the Dragon Mountains is over. I will not return. All but two of my party are dead. I write now of what befell us on that mountain pass, but I will not speak of it again.

On the fourteenth day of our journey, we entered a particularly narrow pathway. The hideous carvings had been increasing in frequency and their aspect had grown more horrible as we proceeded. Monumental images of writhing, twisted figures were fashioned into the rock all around us. The workmanship was clearly that of obsidimen, but like nothing we had seen before. As we rounded a bend in the trail, a huge, bone-white obsidiman stepped into our path. His hollow eyes stared directly into mine. His piercing stare will remain with me forever. I heard a whisper escape Janus's lips: "The Corrupted," and then in a quick, nervous movement that belied both his size and race, the obsidiman struck him a vicious blow. Behind me chaos erupted, as several more obsidimen, all the same white color, attacked our party from the rear. Within seconds, we were defeated. Half of the men were dead, their skulls crushed by the powerful blows of the pale giants. I lay on the rocky path, barely conscious.

The obsidimen carried us deeper into the mountains, to a strange dwelling overlooking a small, rocky valley. The dwelling was hewn from the rock itself and covered in the hideous writhing figures we had seen carved along the path. I drifted feverishly in and out of consciousness and much of what I write here I learned later from Kahr-ach. The Corrupted formed a circle around us and began a strange chant. The haunting sound of their voices seemed to pull apart the very space around us. Their forms bent and twisted before my eyes, and soon the whole dwelling became for me a swirling vortex of colors and shapes. After that I remember only nightmare. Huge, stony hands seemed to grip at my chest and I felt as if I was being torn from my very body. Through the whirling lights and colors, I could hear the screams of my comrades. They were horrible sounds, not of the dying but of the damned. My mind reeled and, mercifully, I lost consciousness.

When I awoke, Kahr-ach was bent over me, a grim expression on his face. We were no longer in the dwelling, and the Corrupted were nowhere to be seen. Kahr-ach refused to speak of our escape or the fate of our comrades. He had managed to get away and had carried me with him. Now we were only a few days journey from Arnatt and safety—what price had he paid to liberate us that he would not speak of it now?

Of the Corrupted, he would say only this: they are known to the obsidimen, but are spoken of in whispers, as if their existence was a myth. According to legend, their Liferock was rent asunder by a Horror at the onset of the Scourge, and, in a desperate attempt to avoid the Scourge, they entered into the Dreaming by joining together to become their own Liferock. This desperate act enabled them to withstand the onslaught of the Horrors, but it left them horribly changed. He would say no more, though I sensed he knew more. Instead, he helped me to my feet and we began our journey home.

We arrived at Arnatt only to learn that our guide Janus's village had been destroyed. Two survivors had staggered, horribly wounded, into Arnatt a day before our arrival. Neither could speak, the shock of what they had seen apparently rendering them mute.

I write these words so that all of Barsaive may know of the danger that lurks in the Dragon Mountains, and of the tragic price exacted from the Corrupted by the Scourge. I will not speak of these things again.

# ISLAND OF FEAR



*The diary from which this account was taken washed up on the shore near the city of Urupa, where it was found by Apprentice Scribe M'Calo Noryn of the Great Library. Long exposure to salt water had rendered many of the pages illegible; however, those that remained relatively intact told a frightening story. With the help of our esteemed Chief Archivist Thom Edrull and an occasional helpful tip from Master Merrox, M'Calo reconstructed the following text. The Library staff cannot vouch for perfect accuracy, but we believe we have come close enough to the original for this document to be of use to Barsaive's brave explorers.*

—Furlan Solus, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

**T**he storm drove us badly off course, but the captain spent the morning taking sightings and was able to approximate our position on his copious charts. We have drifted quite a long way from the marked route, and attempting to regain it would get us to port far too late to gain profit from our cargo. The captain proposes instead that we sail toward our destination by a direct route, cutting across uncharted waters but ensuring our timely arrival in Urupa. Captain Peglim assures us that his crew has skill enough to cope with anything we might encounter, be it a legendary sea monster (most unlikely) or a summer storm (much more likely). I suspect he also looks forward to mapping this little-known region of the world's waters, both to establish his Name more firmly among sailing adepts and to reap a profit from selling copies of his maps. Be that as it may, if he can get us to Urupa by the 6th of next month, I shall be deeply in Captain Peglim's debt.

Land sighted off the starboard bow. A slight squall is brewing—nothing serious enough to send us to the bottom, but enough to make our captain prefer a sheltered harbor to the open seas. He has given orders to make for the coast—an hour's sail with this wind, according to the ship's mate.

The coast is that of an island, quite large and with a gentle cove in the middle of its expanse where the ship can ride out the storm. If there is a storm—the wind seems to be dying down.

The island has caused great excitement among the crew. Land offers a chance to stretch, to relax off the ship—a thing always welcome to sailors, I imagine. We may also pick up fresh provisions. Truly, fresh fruits and vegetables would be most welcome after the diet of salt meat, hardtack and mine rations on which we have been subsisting! After several days of drinking flat, distilled sea water that still tastes faintly of brine, the thought of fresh spring water is another vision I cannot dismiss.

We will drop anchor in the cove this evening and take launches to the beach in the morning. The captain has prudently decided not to sail too far into the cove, not knowing where reefs and sandbars might lie beneath the waves.

The first sailors to go ashore brought back a most alarming report of faces glaring at them out of the jungle that covers most of this island. Huge faces, they said, each taller than a dwarf, with red glittering eyes. The captain is putting together a war party, made up of the brawniest sailors armed with daggers, knives from the galley, and the occasional sword. I have persuaded him to let me accompany them; merchant though I am, my trusty axe and I have fought a battle or two in our day.

The faces are carved stone, not living beings. We have seen no trace yet of anyone alive on this island, nor any beasts larger than a hawk or small rodent. Still, Captain Peglim has warned us to be watchful. The terrible aspect of the carvings does not suggest innate benevolence on the part of the island's inhabitants ... if Name-givers truly live here.

We have come upon a clearing ringed with stone pillars. The figures carved on them do not resemble any Name-giver race, save that they all appear to walk upright on two legs. Several of the figures have four or more arms, and all have fearsome-looking heads: some with jutting forked tongues, some with teeth as long as a troll's



## The Book of Exploration • Island of Fear

but pointing downward, other with what looks like two or three extra eyes where nose and ears should be. They are quite terrifying to behold. But still there is no sign of any living being save ourselves.

We have found the islanders. Or rather, they found us. Half a dozen sailors are dead, and we may yet lose those suffering terrible wounds. Can this ship reach safe haven in time to heal the injured? I don't know. I don't know.

Some time late this morning we emerged from the jungle into an eerily deserted village with a vast stone temple rising from its heart. Cautiously, we approached the temple for a closer look. What we saw made even the hardest sailor flinch. Scenes of hideous tortures had been carved across the temple walls—Name-givers being stretched and torn and devoured by the teeth and claws of ravening beasts. Shock and dread rooted us to the spot; we could not move before the inhabitants of this nightmare village were upon us. They stepped out from behind the surrounding trees as suddenly and silently as if walking through a gateway to some netherworld, enveloping us in a sea of spears and axes. We could not see their faces; they all wore wooden masks carved in hideous leers and snarls. For several heartbeats we all stood frozen, staring at one another—then the masked islanders attacked with bloodcurdling yells. During the battle, Captain Peglim knocked the mask from one islander's face, and we saw that the man's own features had been twisted and pulled by some mysterious force to the mask's exact shape. Most horrible of all were his eyes—dark holes in his face, with no flesh in them or even bone behind. Only darkness that seemed to stretch on forever.

We fought as best we could, and managed to break through the ring of islanders surrounding us. I snatched up the fallen mask as we fled—I am still not certain why. They pursued us down to the beach, where two noble sailors sacrificed their lives to buy us time to board the launches and shove off shipward.

Now we are under full sail, hoping against all hope to reach civilized landfall before any of our wounded succumb. The mask seems to watch me as I write this; remarkable how the imagination works when one is exhausted. I can almost fancy it is glaring at me: hungry, angry and vengeful, as if the blood of all the Name-givers in the world would not satisfy it.

*Archivist's Note: The remaining lines were a fearful scrawl, most difficult to interpret. We have attempted to reconstruct them as best we could.*

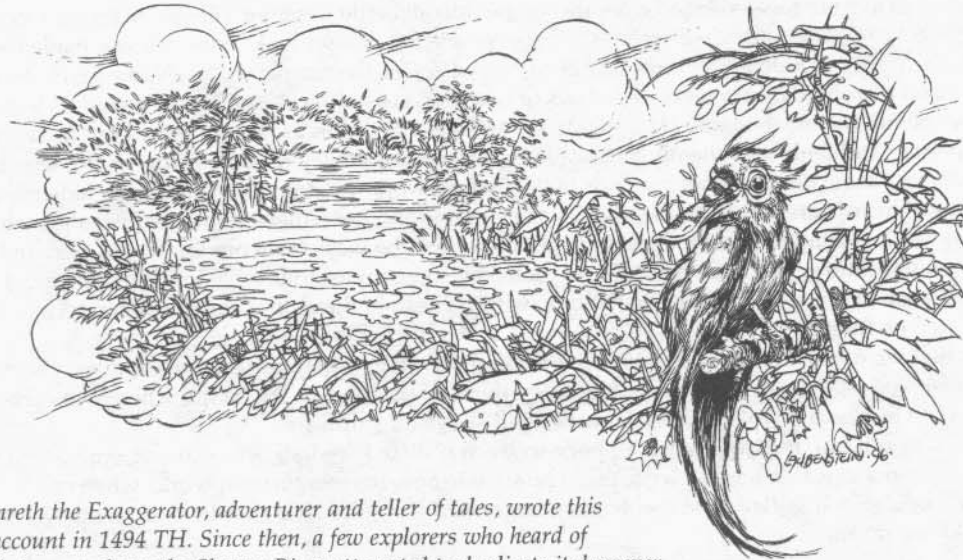
—Furlan Solus

I can hear shouts up on the deck. The ship is rolling so wildly that I have twice pitched to the floor of my cabin. I'd swear there were no storms on the horizon when last I went on deck, not half an hour ago. Why has the sky gone so dark?

*Here ends the legible portion of the diary. Sea water and time have done irreparable damage to the rest. Shipping records from Godova, drawn up in the year 1502 TH, record the casting off of the sailing ship Watermark, bound for Urupa and eventually reported as missing with all hands.*



# SKYTREE RIVER



*Gamreth the Exaggerator, adventurer and teller of tales, wrote this strange account in 1494 TH. Since then, a few explorers who heard of Gamreth's journey down the Skytree River attempted to duplicate it; however, none of them could find the river. The prevalence of local legends concerning this river keeps us from dismissing this journal entry as pure fiction; it may well be that some magical phenomenon accounts for the river's apparent disappearance.*

—Furlan Solus, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

**K**ricklen loves the jungle. Crazy t'skrang. While the rest of us drip sweat, slog through rotted undergrowth, and try to remember when we last felt cool, dry and clean, Kricklen watches the buzzing insects with the wonder of a small child. He says their wings "sparkle like opals in the soft green light." While we worry about possible poisoning from snakes coiled in the tree branches, he marvels at the pattern of their scales. Nothing is more annoying than an overly cheerful t'skrang when you're feeling miserable.

He was irritating us so much that we hardly noticed when he climbed up a large tree's slime-slicked bark to investigate a soft rushing sound he'd heard in the canopy above. His startled yelp prompted us to action; Torvik had climbed about a third of the way up the tree, grumbling audibly, when Kricklen crashed down nearly fifty yards away. As he brushed away twigs and scraped leaves out of his nostrils, he babbled about a river—a living river flowing through the tops of the trees.

We tried ignoring him, but he wouldn't shut up. So we decided to investigate. We roped ourselves together, then found a likely tree. Kricklen led the way, Luanna and I took the middle, and Torvik secured the rear. As soon as Kricklen vanished into the leaf canopy, we felt a strong tugging on the rope. When Luanna entered the leafy cover, the pull became so strong that I lost my grip. Torvik had just enough time to swear at my mother for bearing such a weak son before he too slipped from the rope.

I plunged into a flow of glittering green, as if the jungle growth had liquefied into an emerald river. I bobbed to the surface, spitting out water the color of green tea. As I got my bearings, I laughed—what I saw was so absurd, I couldn't help it. I was treading water in a river that rushed like the wind through the leaves, a shiny ribbon stretching from sky-edge to sky-edge. Birds with iridescent plumage swooped and wheeled in the sunlight. Transfixed by their beauty, I paid no attention to the current, which promptly tangled me in branches. As I struggled with the rope around my waist, Torvik drifted toward me.

## The Book of Exploration • Skytree River

"We're supposed to join Kricklen on the shore and take off our clothes," he said, nodding shoreward to where the t'skrang was disrobing.

I blinked. "Who says?"

"That bird," Torvik answered, pointing to a macaw with brilliant blue, green and gold feathers. I gaped, first at the bird, then at Torvik. The dwarf shrugged.

"Come on, come on!" squawked the bird. "Won't do, won't do to insult the piranha!"

"Piranha?" said Torvik and I simultaneously.

"Their river, their rules," said the bird. Cautiously, I found my footing by the bank. I did not much enjoy the idea of traveling naked through piranha-infested waters, but what choice did we have?

Kricklen had finished undressing and was wrapping his possessions in several broad leaves. Luanna was still disrobing. I caught myself looking longer than was proper, but averted my eyes before she saw me. As I shed my wet clothes, a slap and a grunt behind me told me that Torvik had been less circumspect. Someone slapped a cold, wet leaf on my posterior, and I jumped.

"You can wear this," Luanna said. "Think of the leaf as a garment." I did so, and the leaf wrapped itself around me. I looked down; not a flattering fit, but it would have to do.

"The river does not want things made by Name-givers to soil its waters," Luanna continued, "but it tries to provide for our needs while we travel it. So the bird says, anyway." I tried to nod sagely, but my expression must have shown how fetching I thought Luanna looked in foliage. Her eyes hooded; I blinked and paid extremely close attention to wrapping my equipment in leaves.

"The bird told you all that?" Torvik said.

"Some of us know enough to ask questions," Luanna said sharply.

"Ask, ask, ask she did," said the bird.

"Enough talk, time for a swim!" Kricklen shouted, punctuating his words with a splash as he and his bundles hit the water. Luanna and Torvik and I followed.

"Where does the river go?" I asked the bird as I broke the surface.

"Where it wants to," said the bird, "or where it must, must, must."

A small wave sent a mouthful of water my way, and the bird flew away to join its fellows. The current picked up speed, bumping and jostling me against obstructions in the river. The water dragged me under more than once, and each time I surfaced the roar of the river grew louder. Moss-covered boulders of crystal dotted the riverbed, and the current ran even faster as it danced between the rocks. I bounced off a boulder and heard my shoulder pop. The pain made me gasp; trying not to panic, I looked around for quieter waters. The rushing river swept me over a short ledge, submerging me in green-flecked foam. I scabbled for purchase against the slick crystals, but the moss tore easily away from the surface. My knees banged hard against a rock, I scraped my back raw against a crystal's edge, the fierce current began to drag me toward the edge of a looming cataract ... and suddenly I was free. The river shoved me past the waterfall and spit me out near shore, in calm waters not two hand-spans from the raging current. I staggered up on the bank and fell flat.

As I lay on my back catching my breath, a macaw landed beside me. I looked at it, then looked the other way and saw Luanna walking down the shore toward me. She looked as bedraggled as I felt. When Luanna reached me, the bird said, "Resting, resting, restful waters after the rapids."

Luanna dropped to a cross-legged position and wrung out her wet hair. "Let's see if the river spit out the other two, then take a long rest."

"Not too long, or the piranhas will get hungry, hungry, hungry," said the bird. I flung a twig at it. It squawked angrily, then took off and circled overhead. "Anger the river and you'll never find the living, living, living emeralds," it cawed, then disappeared from sight.

I found the thought of living emeralds far more appealing than piranhas. As Luanna and I pried ourselves from the ground and searched for Torvik and Kricklen, I couldn't help wondering exactly what they might be ... and what price they might fetch in Bartertown.

*Here ends the account; water damage and the busy attentions of insects have obscured the rest. Gamreth himself says of the living emeralds only this: that those who are meant to find them must prove themselves capable of doing so without any help from him.*



# FIRST CONTACT



This account was discovered in a journal found among the possessions of Magus Elloran, a t'skrang wizard who served the Kingdom of Throal in His Majesty's Exploratory Force. Despite their efforts, present-day scholars have been unable to conclusively identify the location of the Kaer Gellington referred to in the account. Some claim that the kaer was located along the northern shore of Lake Vors, and others claim the kaer was located somewhere in the western foothills of the Scytha Mountains.

—Derleth of Ipswich, scribe of the Great Library of Throal

## 24th Veltom

**I**t has been five days since I promised the others that I could design spells that would breach the wards of Kaer Gellington. Understandably, both my superiors in the Exploratory Force and my companions have grown impatient. They are all creatures of action and do not understand the delicacies of spell magic.

Of course, the problem is really my own skills. If only the power of my spells warranted my confident promises.

I need just a few more days of testing. I know I can stall them that long.

## 28th Veltom

The last tests were successful, and now I find myself perched on the back of a half-trained thundra beast, plodding through the wilds of Barsaive. My last night of comfortable sleep is a mere memory, with nothing but rocky ground to look forward to. Perhaps my *chaida* was right when he warned me that t'skrang belong in the river, not in the dwarf court. We certainly don't belong on the trail.

Ah, but if this succeeds! The advance party assured us that the kaer was still closed. They saw signs of Horror attack, but no evidence that the monsters had breached the kaer's defenses. If I can convince the survivors to come out, it will be like conjuring an entire town from thin air.

## 2nd Charassa

This land is even more desolate than the warriors described. And to think, scorchers actually *choose* to live here. Now there's a comforting thought—scorchers. And we did see smoke rising from the next valley ...

In any case, the kaer is much as I imagined it. Wellthar, our windling thief, scouted the exposed walls and surrounding landscape. Something tried to get in, by the looks of the six-inch-deep claw marks in the walls. But is the kaer still intact? Right now we can only hope.

## The Book of Exploration • First Contact

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### 5th Charassa

My plan is simple. The kaer's designers constructed its defenses to keep magic from penetrating. But to communicate with any surviving inhabitants, my spells need not penetrate those defenses, they need only leave a visible mark inside. When my spells meet the kaer's defenses, they will trigger a reaction that burns a pattern on the inside of the kaer's wall. By carefully controlling the spells, I can pass written messages, simple pictures and other types of communications through the kaer's magical barriers.

If it's so simple, why don't they answer?

Wellthar says that the spell does not work, but you can always count on him to criticize others. Boruk, our troll warrior, believes that the kaer is dead—or worse, Horror-tainted. I must admit that I have my own doubts. Something is wrong with this land. I hear strange noises at night—and I have no interest in meeting the creatures that make those sounds.

### 7th Charassa

Last night a pack of scorchers attacked our camp. Three of the King's guards died in the battle. Only a strong constitution and a powerful healing salve saved Wellthar's legs. Boruk sports more injuries than I can count, though he claims none are serious. As for myself, my mage armor saw me through the fight, but not without incident. The cut to my left arm still stings. The pain will undoubtedly keep me awake for weeks.

But even worse, we still have not heard anything from inside the kaer. I made one last attempt to communicate with anyone inside by creating a giant pictograph that covered the entire interior south wall of the kaer. But if we don't receive any reply by noon tomorrow, I'm afraid we will return to Throal empty-handed.

### 8th Charassa

The blessing of the Passions has finally descended upon us. Late last night, the door to the kaer cracked open and several heavily armed humans stepped out. The meeting was tense. My pictograph convinced them that I was free of any Horror taint, but they remain suspicious of anything from the surface.

For our part, we did not trust them either. Horrors travel in many guises—not all of them readily apparent. Still, as the hours passed, a sliver of hope began to grow. They were obviously disappointed that we had no humans in our group but seemed willing to continue our talks.

I cannot wait until tomorrow. The prospect of reintegrating a culture is both fascinating and exhilarating.

### 9th Charassa

Of all the ungrateful, stubborn and ignorant attitudes! I cannot believe the arrogance of these humans. Alone in their hole, without any other races for company, they convinced themselves that they are superior to all others. How did they put it? "It is the destiny of the human race to guide the lesser races in the world after the Scourge."

They claim that bit of wisdom came from the Book of Tomorrow. Furthermore, they honestly believe that humans *wrote* the Book and founded Throal as well. One of them even had the audacity to order Boruk to fetch a plate of food for him. I must say, the poor troll handled it well. He stormed away and vented his anger on a few defenseless trees. Had it been me, I would have ripped the ingrate's eyes out.

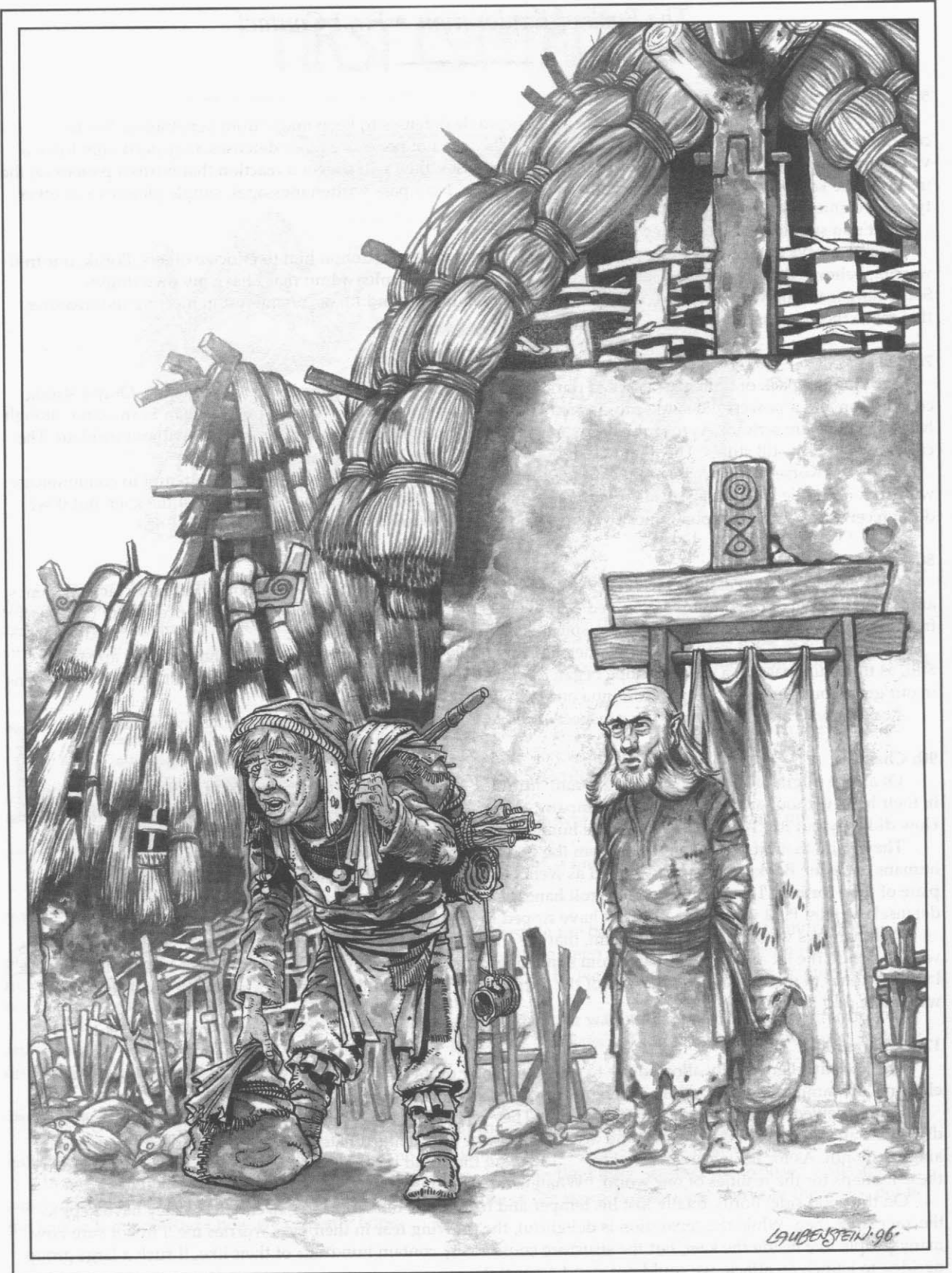
Wellthar says we should abandon them, that we should never have released them in the first place. Boruk feels we should kill the lot and prevent them from spreading their ignorance. As for myself, I do not know what to think. I sent a runner to the Throal headquarters of the Exploratory Force. Until we receive a reply, we will keep talking with these odd humans.

### 12th Charassa

The kaer-dwellers finally allowed me to read their copy of the Book of Tomorrow. While a few of the key elements are familiar, most is wildly different from the version I remember!

I also received word from my superiors today. They report that King Varulus has issued orders for a group of diplomats and adepts to visit the kaer and acclimatize these folk. Unfortunately, they will not arrive for at least another month. As for us, we are ordered to, "... Remain there and continue your work. Try your best to prepare these humans for the realities of our world." Whatever that means.

On the good side, Boruk finally lost his temper and tossed one human nearly twenty feet. They have kept to the kaer since then. While the separation is delightful, the growing fear in their eyes worries me. I'm not sure how many people live inside the kaer, but the structure could easily contain hundreds of their like. If such a large group decided to launch an attack, we could not stand against it. ...



# THE VANISHING VILLAGE

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*This puzzling account was provided to the library by Coram Broadroot, khavro'am of Ten Coppers. As Coram is a regular and respected contributor to the Great Library, no reason exists to doubt the veracity of his tale, fantastic though it may be. A few months after his return to Throal, Coram led a small expedition in an attempt to locate the mysterious village. Unfortunately, their efforts proved fruitless.*

—B'Rigga Duun, archivist of the Great Library of Throal

## 6th Gamil, 1507 TH

**T**he journey through the Caucavics was as difficult as all the books said it would be. My provisions have fallen so low that in the past two days I have eaten but a single meal of journeybread and a little dried fruit. Truly, I shall be glad when my journey has ended and I may return to the Great Library to write of my experiences. I do so look forward to sleeping in a bed with proper pillows and a feather coverlet, to eating fresh food instead of trail rations, to conversing with my fellow scholars! Solitude is a wonderful thing, but it begins to pall when one has spent too many months in Barsaive's desolate spaces. At this moment, I would give all I possess to see another Name-giver's face.

What I want most of all, however, is to find some settlement where I might replenish my food. Within another day I shall be forced to live off the land—and these barren plains do not look promising. As my teachers were ever fond of saying, faith manages where even knowledge fails. I will keep my mind on those words as I travel onward—and hope they are true.

## 7th Gamil, 1507 TH

What a day this has been, for my faith has managed, apparently! I write this from a comfortable spot by the hearth of a village shepherd, who graciously gave me hospitality. My belly is full of mutton stew—not so good as Mother made, but welcome all the same.

Twilight was falling, and I had just begun to feel faint when I saw the smoke of cooking fires rising from beyond a small slope. That welcome sight gave wings to my feet, and I reached the outlying houses of this village before darkness overwhelmed me. When I regained my senses, I was lying on a straw pallet in this warm and smoky hut, with the shepherd gazing at me in fascination. His Name is Avgad, and he is a curious fellow. Though he hears perfectly, he does not speak and must convey his thoughts and wishes with looks and gestures. He is not mute, however—he laughed at my puzzlement when I woke. He is most curious about me—specifically, about my writing. From the intensity with which he watches my quill move across this page, I surmise that he has never seen writing before, let alone been taught letters. Perhaps I shall correct this deficiency as payment for his kindness to me.

## 9th Gamil, 1507 TH

Today Avgad wrote his Name. He took hold of the stylus as if it were a sheep's hoof that needed cleansing of foot-rot. With difficulty, I persuaded him to hold it more gently so that it would not tear the parchment. He did make a great ragged gash in the page with his first stroke, at which he looked anguished until I reassured him that I was not angry. (A waste of good parchment, but then students are all too apt to carelessness, as my teachers used to say.)

On his second pass with the stylus, Avgad slowly and carefully wrote the letters of his Name. They sprawled a little, like tipsy orks, but we could read them clearly. Avgad is good with his hands—over the past two days in his company, I have seen how delicately his fingers moved as he bandaged the leg of a wounded lamb. His first attempt at writing went so well that I fully expected him to make a second—perhaps asking me for some other words, or at least writing his Name over until the letters did not stumble.

He surprised me. After he had written his Name, he stared at it for several heartbeats. Then he touched it, so lightly that the still-damp ink did not smudge. His eyes filled with tears, and he abruptly left the hut. He has not come back, and it is near sundown now. I do not know what to make of him.

## *The Book of Exploration • The Vanishing Village*

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### **10th Gamil, 1507 TH**

This is a strange village. Or perhaps only my host is strange. Until today none of the villagers save Avgad has given me more than a momentary glance. They have not been hostile, but neither have I felt any great friendliness from them. This morning, however, a child with a basket of eggs smiled at me and offered me one. She then bade me come to her parents' house for the noon meal, with as pretty a curtsy as any I have seen in Throal. As the day began, so it went on—everyone I met greeted me with shy smiles and innocent warmth, remarking upon the weather or inviting me to share a meal with them. Perhaps I have passed some sort of test. Perhaps the villagers, seeing that I have not become some Horror or other over these four days, have decided to show me proper hospitality.

Avgad alone does not smile on me—he scowls, as sullen as a boy made to harvest corn when he would far rather go fishing. He who befriended me from the first now seems to have turned enemy—I wonder what I have done to offend him? This evening, when I went to take some stew from the pot, he took the bowl from my hands and placed it on a high shelf out of my reach. When I chided him, he scowled fiercely at me, and barred my way to the hearth for the rest of the evening. I made a meal out of some journeybread he gave me when I first arrived—otherwise, I should have gone hungry to bed. And this in return for the gift of my teaching!

### **12th Gamil, 1507 TH**

I must leave this village tomorrow—or at least Avgad's house. He has barred me from my bed—what little sleep I get will be atop a few piled blankets from my now-unpacked bags. I do not understand this behavior!

### **13th Gamil, 1507 TH**

Such strangeness has befallen me, I hardly know where to begin. Perhaps when it is all written down, I may make some sense of this day.

I went to wash in the little creek, and when I returned I found Avgad packing up my bags. He set them by the door and pointed outside, his meaning all too clear. I had planned to leave the village, as it happens—but when I went out, the light was a strange color and the wind smelled of storms. The village blacksmith, whom I met on my way from bathing, said the storm season in these parts was just beginning and advised me to stay at least another week. He even suggested that I stay with him for the season, a matter of two months or so. Such a stay would keep me from Throal longer than I like, but I found his kind offer tempting. Certainly, I thought, I will stay until this first storm passes.

Thinking this, I was annoyed to find Avgad so eager for my departure. I picked up my bags and announced that I was going to the blacksmith's, since Avgad had grown tired of my company. At this, Avgad looked stricken. He ran past me and blocked the door, then tore both bags out of my grasp and sat on them. This bewildered me. He had made it as clear as any man could that he wished me gone—but the moment I did what he seemed to want, he changed his mind! Angered, I plucked my bags from under him and stepped out. He pushed past me, twisting from my grasp the bag containing my journal and writing materials. With it, he dashed toward the edge of the village.

I could not leave these precious possessions in the hands of a madman, so I pursued him. He stopped just shy of the village boundary and threw my bag several feet beyond, out of sight.

I believe I swore, though I do not remember my exact words. I ran toward my bag and picked it up, immensely relieved that it had landed on dry ground. I brushed dirt off of it, then turned to give Avgad a tongue-lashing.

He was not there. Neither was the village.

I walked back toward the village bounds, unable to accept what my eyes told me. I walked all around the area where the village had been, seeing in my mind's eye the neat little huts and narrow streets. There had stood the blacksmith's hut with his forge. Just there had been the little house where the children went to school. And over there, the pasture where Avgad had grazed his sheep. But now the area stood bare, save for tufts of brown grass, clearly undisturbed by Name-givers' hands.

Much perturbed, I sat down to write this journal entry. As I pulled my stylus out of the bag, a small scrap of parchment fluttered to the ground. On it were printed large letters that leaned like tipsy orks. They read, "Trap. Go. Save us."

# NIGHTMARES



*This account comes from the journal of Klavena Tallarbre, elven adventurer of the village of Skara. It was brought to us by Klavena's only surviving companion, Quelsoul Ma'zan. Quelsoul left his three compatriots in a wood while he journeyed to nearby Kratas to meet with their employer. He returned to find his companions vanished without a trace, save for Klavena's journal and a satchel of extra travel rations.*

*He has sworn to discover his friends' fate, and expressed his hope that publishing his companion's last words may help to shed light on their disappearance.*

—Matias Nollaig, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

## 4th Rua, 1507 TH

**F**or three nights, the dreams have come to us. Neither Dinra nor Xenio have mentioned them, but they both cry out in the night. I am sure they hear my cries, too. Yet none of us wishes to speak of the dreams, as if silence will keep these strange nightmares from returning.

The days pass too quickly, rushing toward dusk and the time for sleep. I dread the setting of the sun. Why has Quelsoul not returned? Has something happened to him, or is he merely enjoying the fleshpots of Kratas too long? Three days and three long nights have passed since he left us to find our intended employer, the merchant Hovrel Strongfer, in Kratas. We arrived here at Calamar Clearing a day late, delayed by a bruising encounter with a skeorx the day before. When we saw no sign of Strongfer, we feared he had returned to the Thieves' City. We decided to send Quelsoul to Kratas to inquire after him and assure him that we still wanted employment. Quelsoul is a swift-footed scout, and one person can always travel more quickly than four. Kratas is not more than a day's walk from here. He should have returned by now.

## 6th Rua, 1507 TH

This morning I awoke in a panic. The sun has yet to light the sky. I search the darkness, convinced that I am being watched by a hundred pairs of eyes. The feeling makes my skin squirm. No wind or sound disturbs the clearing. Dinra and Xenio lie quiet next to each other, wrapped in sleep, on the far side of the dying fire. Aside from a newly spun spider web and fresh-fallen dew, the camp looks undisturbed. I will not, however, sleep again this morn.

## 7th Rua, 1507 TH

Quelsoul will surely return today. Unless he has met with some ill fortune, there is no reason why he should be away any longer.

To pass the time, Dinra, Xenio and I take turns relating our nightmares. They have occupied our every conversation since yesterday, when Xenio woke from an afternoon's nap babbling about giant blades of grass that tried to stab him through the eyes and drain him of blood. Last night, I dreamed that bedbugs had crawled into my ears and were eating away at my brain. As they devoured it, I could feel my faculties slipping away from me one by one: movement, memory, speech, sight, hearing ... I awoke shuddering, too terrified even to scream.



## *The Book of Exploration • Nightmares*

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Dinra believes a message lies within the dreams—from the Passions, no less. Not being wizardly, I know nothing of such things ... but our dreams do seem to share a common thread. I find this disturbing. What if Dinra is right that they are messages—but wrong about their source?

### **9th Rua, 1507 TH**

We have abandoned our watches. After eight days in the clearing, any threat would surely have shown itself. Dinra spends a great deal of time sleeping, convinced that the answers she seeks lie in the dreams themselves. She has begun to use powders to deepen her slumber, over Xenio's objections. When she awakens, she relates her dreams. We all do, in the hope of understanding them. Or perhaps we talk of it only to ease our fears, to remind ourselves that we are suffering together and not alone.

The strange thing is, I want to sleep—to dream—even as the thought of dreaming terrifies me. This desire has crept up on me slowly, growing just a little stronger than my fear every day. As I write this before sleeping tonight, dread and excitement war within me. To sleep ... or not?

### **10th Rua, 1507 TH**

When fear keeps me from sleep, the summer hum of the jungle lulls me as no other sweet lullaby could. The droning of cicadas calls to something deep in my soul. I will remember their dulcet song for the rest of my days.

Even as I wake, shaken and afraid, the croon of the insects brings me back to myself. Like a gentle lover cradling me in his sheltering embrace, the sound wraps me in safety. My fears subside, and I fall back into sleep.

### **11th Rua, 1507 TH**

I dreamed I walked into a lake. No moon, no stars, just cold black water smooth as glass. I lay suspended on the surface, unable to move. As I floated face down, I saw my companions sink slowly away from me. They were dead, bloated with water, their eyes bulging out like a frog's and their mouths locked in silent screams. I woke dizzy with the horror of it, tears streaming down my face.

I could not tell this dream to Dinra and Xenio. I lied—I told them I had not dreamt. They do not believe me. They look at me suspiciously, as if they think I have learned some great secret that I will not share with them. They demand to know—even threaten—but I cannot speak. The words will not pass my lips.

### **12th Rua, 1507 TH**

A rabbit's corpse lies near me, stinking to the high heavens. Xenio brought it for breakfast this morning; he snared it in one of his traps, but we found it too much trouble to cook. I wasn't hungry anyway. Dinra woke up just long enough to mix her powders and take a dose. For some time now I have been sitting and staring into the jungle, writing a line here, a line there. My eyes burn like the fires from the mouths of a thousand dragons. My body rebels against me. I would fight this lethargy, but nowhere in my bones can I find the strength. I fear for my life, but I know not why. I crave sleep, and yet ... no.

The humming of insects rings loudly in my ears. I can feel it in my bones. Louder and louder ... the world is nothing but this sound. Nothing but sound.

### **13th Rua, 1507 TH**

I am alone. Suddenly sane, after so many days of madness. Dinra and Xenio are gone, Quelsoul has not returned. I am alone ... save for the thing that sits nearby, watching me.

My legs have gone numb. I can feel the cold weakness creeping up my arms. I will write this last entry in my journal, before the strength in my arms deserts me. Just to spite the thing, I'll manage it.

I see it watching me. I hear the sweet hum of its body singing in the night. From its mouth spews the sticky threads that will wrap around me like a lover's arms. In its eyes I see intelligence. It plans to let me finish my journal, which has meant so much to me over all these years of journeying. So it has begun its work at my feet. It understands the value of bringing things to a proper end ... it understands the elegant seduction of a last, compassionate gesture before dispatching its victim.

Or am I dreaming again? When, when will I wake?





# THE LOST CITY, OR THE FATE OF T'SKRISS R'SCRIIMON



Several years ago, while traveling in southwestern Barsaive, the troubadour Erin Skrye visited a small village along the northern edge of the Servos Jungle. There, he received a gift from a villager—the lost journal of the great t'skrang explorer T'Skriss R'Scriimon, famed for his detailed maps of the Serpent River. The villager claimed that T'Skriss emerged from the jungle one day and staggered into the village, clutching the journal to his chest. The villager said the t'skrang was half-starved and delirious, so he and his family provided shelter and care for the explorer. For two days T'Skriss remained trapped in a feverish dream, screaming and mumbling gibberish about a lost city, his dead crew, and the Servos Jungle. Then he died.

The following excerpt from the journal tells the strange and terrifying story of a remarkable discovery. I present the document in the hope that it might inspire future explorers, and serve as a warning to those explorers whose lust for the treasures of Barsaive's past outweighs their desire for the true reward of exploration: knowledge.

—Nobb Tenn, archivist and historian, Great Library of Throal, 1507 TH

## Day 5

**A**s the sun rose this morning, the Serpent carried us into the Servos Jungle. Shafts of orange light shone like beacons through the trees, guiding us toward our destination. The dwarfs are uncomfortable with the jungle. They prefer the oppressive darkness of their subterranean dwellings to the sweet scents and glorious green caverns of the Servos. I find the jungle's sights and smells intoxicating. They speak to me of dreams to be fulfilled, and exotic sights that no living eyes have beheld. I am eager to discover its secrets.

## Day 6

My dwarf comrade, Aris Stonecarver, has grown impatient with the Servos already. He tells me that I am mad to map this worthless tangle. He and his dwarf fellows are here to satisfy a desire of their own—they seek fortune. They hope to find rare minerals and gems. I search for Barsaive's past and seek *[entry obscured by water damage]*.

## Day 12

We are now deep in the Servos and it has not gone well for us. Three days ago, our boat was destroyed by a terrible force that exploded out of the Serpent, shattering the timbers of our vessel and killing nearly a third of the crew. The river itself seemed to attack us, as though our intrusion into the Servos had somehow offended it. Pillars of water exploded up through the decks like hammers, rending the ship to pieces. The water behaved as though alive! In all my years of sailing I have never seen such a thing. Aris believes that we intruded upon the domain of a powerful water elemental. I am at a loss to explain the phenomenon myself.

We managed to salvage about a third of our supplies, but that will not sustain the remainder of our party for long. We face difficult times.

## Day 13

Morale is low. The Servos is an unforgiving place. Many of our party have fallen ill already, and the t'skrang crew members have begun bickering with the dwarfs. They talk of turning back and following the river out of here. I am determined to push forward.

## Day 14

We have made a remarkable discovery! Late in the day we emerged from thick jungle into a strange and wonderful place. A beautiful waterfall cascaded down before us, emptying into a large, circular lagoon. Hundreds of colorful, screeching birds perched on the rock face near the falls and cavorted about the lagoon. Glittering shafts of light shone down through a break in the jungle foliage and reflected off the surface of the water. The beauty of

## The Book of Exploration • The Lost City

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the scene lifted an oppressive weight from our weary souls. Then one of the dwarfs commented on the oddly regular shape of the lagoon. When we examined our surroundings more closely, we discovered that the entire scene was artificial! We stood in the midst of an ancient ruin! The water of a nearby stream had been redirected to form both the falls and the lagoon.

As we explored more thoroughly, the jungle around us transformed. What we had taken to be trees and rocks were revealed as the ruins of an ancient city, buried beneath centuries of jungle growth. As the light failed, Aris's men found a doorway just north of the falls in a particularly overgrown area of the ruins. It appears to lead down into the city itself!

We set up camp near the lagoon. Tomorrow, Aris and I shall lead a group through the doorway and into the heart of the city itself! I am too excited to sleep, though the jungle is unusually quiet here. Apparently, I am not the only one feeling restless, for I can hear the rustling movement of others outside my tent.

### Day 15

The day began with disappointment. Several members of our party deserted during the night. Shameless wretches! The Servos will deal them the fate they deserve!

The loss of the deserters left us with a smaller party with which to explore the inner ruins. Nevertheless, Aris, myself, and two others set out this morning with torches and entered the darkness of the city. We left the remaining crew behind to map the ruins and guard our rapidly dwindling supplies.

The city revealed itself under the flickering light of our torches. Carvings along the walls told the tale of its construction but provided no clues about the fate of its inhabitants. The place is far older than I had imagined. Older, perhaps, than anything I've ever seen. The carvings also unveiled a greater mystery—the people who created this city do not appear to belong to any of the Name-giver races with which I am familiar. Rather, they seem to have been a race that *[the remainder of the entry and the next two pages of the journal are missing]*.

*[The remainder of the journal was heavily damaged. The fragments that remain legible were written in a shaky, hasty scrawl that suggests T'Skriss was probably not well at the time he recorded them.]*

### Day 17

... The dwarfs argue that the gems and other treasures we found in the city are reward enough for our efforts. They are afraid of the jungle after the bodies we found. I too, fear the loss of more men, but I must know more about this place. I will return to the city tomorrow and copy that remarkable carving. Its implications regarding our history are frightening.

... returned to find them all dead! The bodies ... horribly mutilated ... torn apart ... blood, foliage everywhere ... a terrific struggle ... The remaining crew is in disarray, we must break camp and leave tomorrow morning. What could have done this? Before Eron died, Aris said he mumbled something about the trees ...

... the jungle itself! We are doomed! Aris is dead. His head was ...

# LIGHTHOUSE SANCTUARY



*This strange document—an excerpt from the daily logbook of the Lighthouse Sanctuary at Sanctuary Cove—seems to have been written not by the lighthouse-keeper, Thadium Chokshak, but by a new and fearsome kind of Horror. The account was found by a t'skrang crew whose vessel ran aground at Sanctuary Cove because the lighthouse beacon no longer signaled the dangerous waters. Concerned, the t'skrang investigated and found the place deserted. They rescued the logbook, thinking it might hold some clue to the mystery. When we at the Library read this account, we realized the awful truth.*

*The logbook does not indicate whether the Horror intends to return to Sanctuary Cove, nor its reasons for writing this account of its actions. Our most likely theory to date is that the Horror simply wished the Name-givers of Barsaive to know of its cleverness, and to fear it.*

—Matias Nollaig, apprentice scribe of the Great Library of Throal

6th Gamil, 1504 TH

**T**onight the fury of nature tears open the sea, sending waves crashing into the cliffs that rise defiantly above it. For one tiny ship on a giant body of churning water, tossed about by a wrathful storm, no hope remains. Oh, the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I watched, entranced, as the winds drove the sailing ship into the sharp rocks near the mouth of Sanctuary Cove. Such an ill-begotten name for such a treacherous place ... most curious. As the ship sank, its lights went out one by one. I considered the ship's crew and fancied that each light meant a life. When all went dark—too quickly, far too quickly—I turned away, disappointed at the brevity of the moment.

## The Book of Exploration • Lighthouse Sanctuary

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The thick stone walls of the lighthouse shut out all but the loudest rumbles of thunder. I wandered from room to room looking for something to do. The life of a lighthouse keeper seemed dull at best, and boredom soon gave way to irritation. Then I heard pounding at the lighthouse door—rapid and urgent—and my annoyance vanished.

Curious, I walked down the curving steps to the door and looked through the peephole. Three t'skrang stood there, rain dripping off their long, green-gray snouts.

"Who is it?" I called.

"Let us in!" they cried. "Give us shelter, we beg you." The raging storm nearly drowned out their words, but I heard them. How could I refuse such a gracious request?

Their large, naked feet made flapping noises on the stone as they bustled in out of the rain. I found their movements fascinating, as they stamped and shook the wet from their clothes. One by one, they removed their colorful garments and wrung them out.

I did not want to seem a poor host, so I invited them into the study where a fire burned on the hearth. They laid out their clothes to dry and then sat down, content to stretch themselves out near the flames. The firelight glowed on their skin in a most enchanting manner. With each lap of the flames on the burning wood, their eyes seemed to flicker. These odd creatures entranced me; my unanticipated interest gave me pleasure.

One by one, the t'skrang introduced themselves. All were survivors of the shipwreck I had witnessed. In turn, I introduced myself as Thadium Chokshak, keeper of Lighthouse Sanctuary. I knew they would presume I was a troll from my stature, and I felt no need to enlighten them.

When my guests had dried off somewhat, I apologized for not fixing them a meal. "I don't cook, I'm afraid," I said, "and the woman who usually does it for me is gone." They understood—gracious guests that they were, they offered to cook for me. I fussed a bit, but in the end, it seemed best to acquiesce. The poor fellows did look famished.

Warm, dry and with food in their bellies, the t'skrang sailors relaxed and began to talk about the storm. Back and forth they jabbered among themselves, cursing the tempest whose fury they had barely escaped. They seemed to think the wild wind and rain were the doing of some great evil being.

"The creature rides the lightning and howls louder than the wind itself!" one of them announced, with a loud laugh and a sweeping gesture of his hand. His companions made appreciative sounds, beating their hands and feet upon the floor. I tried to contain my mirth, but they noticed it nonetheless. Rather than feeling hurt by it, they told me they would show me the evil creature that had made the storm.

Together we climbed the long, winding stairs to the very top of the lighthouse. As we slipped through the trap door onto the balcony, the wind whipped at us as if to throw us over into the boiling sea. Giant balls of rain, slamming sideways, pelted us until we were drenched to the skin. The lightning cast a blue tint on everything, making the t'skrang appear already dead. With each flash, they cringed and covered their faces.

They stood, heads tilted to one side, watching the lightning and rain, listening for the call of their demon. Their breath came in gasps as they watched, their gazes flicking back and forth from the angry skies to me.

"There!" one of them shouted at last, as a bolt of purple-edged lightning split the sky. The violence of the storm tore his words from his mouth. "You see! Something evil is out there!"

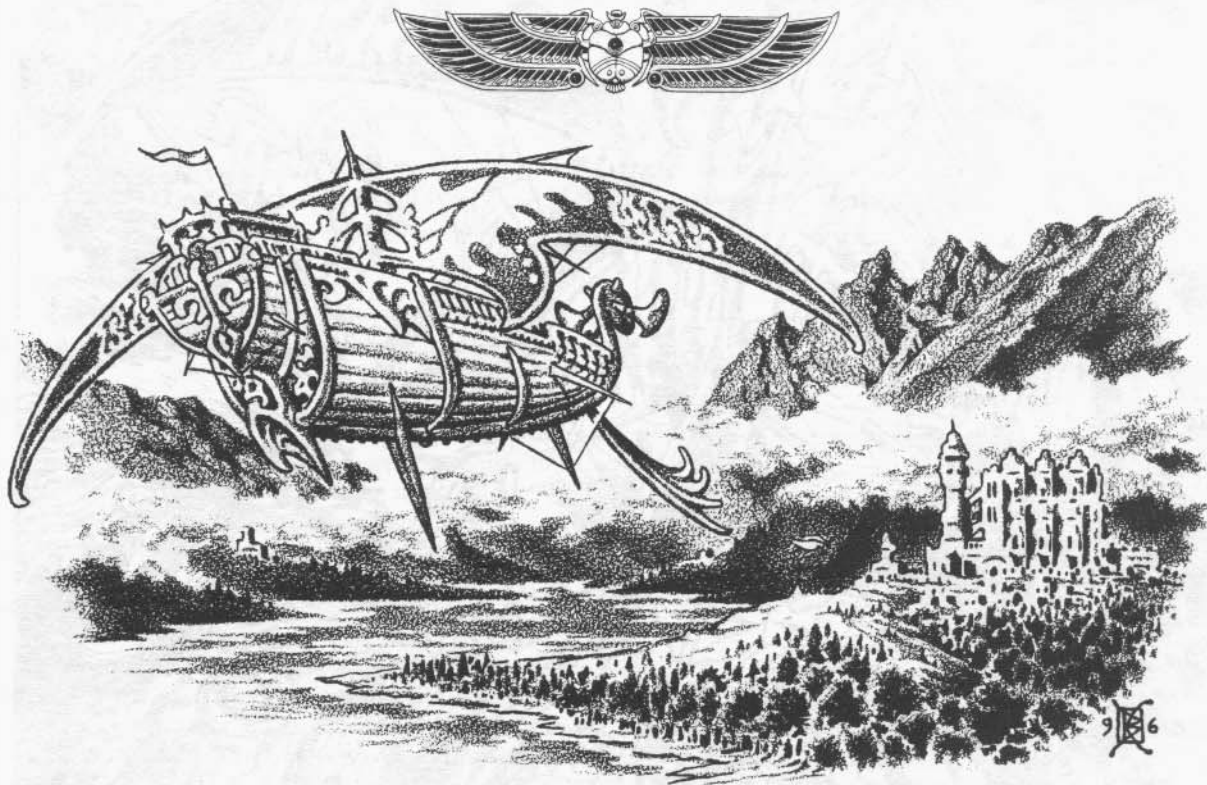
"No, my friend," I replied, turning toward my three visitors. "This is but a storm—only wind and rain and lightning. However ... " And I gave them my widest smile. At that moment, another bolt of violet lightning streaked across the sky. It colored the t'skrang a ghastly shade, and showed me to them clearly. All three t'skrang took a step away from me.

I advanced on them, thrilling at their terror. Their thick skin and straining muscles felt as good in my grip as I had expected. One by one, I threw them over the railing—down, down to the rocks and churning water at the base of the lighthouse.

Pity. The noise of the storm drowned out their screams, and the satisfying crunch of them hitting the jagged rocks below. Ah, well. A pleasant diversion, this Lighthouse Sanctuary ... but it is time to move elsewhere.

As I close this lighthouse-keeper's book on its last entry, I cannot help but think of the wretched troll Thadium Chokshak, who lived his brief life in this dreadful place. His dead shell will rot away in time ... living flesh does that. Meanwhile, I will turn northward to continue exploring this place they call Barsaive; I have yet to meet many of its strange and entertaining inhabitants. I doubt, however, that I will ever again see so magnificent a storm.

# THE WRECK OF THE ZEPHYR



*The authenticity of the following account is difficult to verify. Most scholars believe the document was penned by an adventurer Named Jannut Farr, who was known to have been aboard the airship Zephyr when it departed from Throal en route to Parlainth on its ill-fated journey begun in the year 990 TH. Additionally, the writing in the journal closely resembles the writing on several existing documents signed by the adventurer. The legendary Zephyr and its ultimate fate have been the topics of a great deal of speculation over the years. This now-famous journal, found by an anonymous traveler in the Caucavic Mountains some years ago, is the only tangible evidence of the Zephyr ever recovered.*

—Toris Derrn, historian in the service of King Varulus of Throal, 1507 TH

## 3rd Doddul

**T**he thrill of exploration is upon me! I have never flown in an airship before, and it is a truly remarkable experience! To soar over the beautiful land of Barsaive is a thrill like none I have ever known. We are several days out from Throal, and I have yet to grow weary of the beautiful landscape below me. The Throal mountains were awe-inspiring, yet they have given way now to equally beautiful forest land. The captain tells me we will be in sight of the Caucavic Mountains tomorrow. I cannot wait!

## 4th Doddul

Today we approached the Caucavic mountains. The air is colder now, and my first glimpse of the mountains proved a little disappointing. The Caucavics are a bleaker range than the Throal mountains, stark in their beauty, and a little foreboding. Nevertheless, I look forward to our arrival.

## 5th Doddul

We have encountered serious trouble! This morning, shortly after we entered the Caucavic Mountains, a severe storm engulfed the *Zephyr*. The captain ordered me below decks, where I write these words as the tempest buffets and throws the ship about. We cannot land, for the mountains below are too rugged. We must simply persevere.



## The Book of Exploration • The Wreck of the Zephyr

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The *Zephyr* is a good ship, and Captain Arthon a good sailor. I am confident that we shall endure this setback and reach our destination safely.

### 6th Doddul

I just came from the deck of the ship. The crew is uneasy, as is the captain. The storm rages unabated outside, and we can see little more than a troll's length past the *Zephyr's* railings. The captain intends to keep the ship high above the mountains to prevent it from being dashed to pieces on the rocks below, but the storm has made it nearly impossible to navigate with any certainty. The rain stings my face like needles and the rocking of the ship has made me terribly ill. I'm regretting ever coming aboard.

### 7th Doddul

The rain has given way to snow, and the wind has died a little. We are still flying blind, however, and it seems clear that we are lost. How much longer can this weather last?

### 8th Doddul

The storm is over, but it has pushed the *Zephyr* hopelessly off course. The captain believes that we are now far to the north of Barsaive and flying over previously unexplored lands. I must admit that, with the storm past, his statement provided me with a bit of a thrill. Unexplored lands! What wonders might we see before we make our way home? I am thrilled at the possibility of discovery. We are pioneers! If only the foggy mess we are sailing through would clear.

### 11th Doddul

Disaster! The *Zephyr* is no more!

We were flying south on the morning of the 9th over some unknown range of mountains when the lookout shouted a warning. The ship jolted suddenly, and I was thrown against the railing. Chaos erupted! The crewmen were shouting and screaming. A tree had smashed through the bottom of the ship! Several men were clinging to the railing, holding on for their lives. The air was rushing past me and I could sense that we were going down. A mere dwarf's length away from me a boulder crashed through the deck, killing a sailor and shredding wood. The ship lurched again and I was looking down into oblivion. For a moment, the mist parted and I saw—well, I believe I saw a giant!

It was just a moment, and in the chaos it could have been my imagination, but it *was* a giant. He was huge. A huge, white-bearded, monstrous being on the mountainside below. In his arms he held what looked like a tree, and he appeared to be preparing to hurtle it directly at us. A moment later, I lost consciousness and saw no more.

I awoke amidst the wreckage of the *Zephyr*, my face in the snow. All around me were the dead and dying. The captain was nowhere to be seen. I have spent the last few days, along with the few other survivors, tending to the wounded and burying the dead. We are alone, with no supplies, in the wilderness.

### 12th Doddul

We are attempting to make our way south. A snowstorm is raging and we have little to sustain us. The terrain is rugged, and we are ill-equipped to travel. Only five of us remain. The rest of the *Zephyr* is no more. As we make our way forward, all I can think of is the vision I had from the airship. Did I really see a giant? The thought fills me with dread. What else may dwell in these mountains around us?

### 15th Doddul

Only three of us are left. I am weak from lack of food. We eat snow for water. Despite the cold, I feel warm.

### 16th Doddul

I fear I will never see Throal again. We killed a small animal today and built a fire. Whatever it was, it tasted delicious. It is the first meal I've had in days. We continue south. I pray that the Passions will guide us.



# GAME INFORMATION

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This section provides guidelines for creating adventures or even entire campaigns based on the accounts presented in **The Book of Exploration**. Incorporating these journal entries, letters and other descriptions of events into your games can be as simple as introducing a magical item described in one of the accounts or as involved as creating an epic-scale quest based on one of the adventuring journals that takes your players from one end of Barsaive to the other. The choice of how to use these accounts is entirely yours.

The first part of the section provides some general notes on using **The Book of Exploration** and awarding Legend Points in your adventures. It also describes the adventure framework format, an easy-to-use template for creating your own adventures. The second part of this section offers suggestions and guidelines for incorporating each account in this book into your **Earthdawn** game.

## USING THE BOOK OF EXPLORATION

When using the journal entries in this book, keep the following points in mind. First, not all of these accounts can be considered strictly reliable. The gamemaster decides which are true and which are merely folklore, forgeries or the product of an adventurer's damaged mind. In fact, tracking down the supposed truth behind a fanciful story may be an excellent way for characters to encounter some strange event or phenomenon that leads to an entirely different and new adventure. Second, remember that not every story must lead directly to an adventure. These accounts can also be used to add atmosphere or set the mood for an adventure or campaign. Most important, keep in mind that the game information presented in this section (including creature statistics and other numbers) may simply serve as suggestions. Feel free to alter any game information to suit your adventures.

Creating adventures based on the adventuring journals involves two major steps—presenting the story to the characters and preparing the adventure itself. Gamemasters may present a journal account by having their players visit the Great Library of Throal, where they can read **The Book of Exploration** for themselves, a tome maintained by the staff of the library. In this case, simply hand the players a photocopy of the appropriate excerpt. Alternatively, a gamemaster character may relate the story to the player characters and hire them to investigate the events it

## The Book of Exploration • Game Information

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describes. Or the gamemaster may arrange to have the player characters find a journal or fragments of a journal entry while exploring a kaer or visiting a small town or village.

To create adventures based on the tales told in this book, we recommend using the adventure framework.

### ADVENTURE FRAMEWORK

No two gamemasters design adventures in the same way. Some prefer to plan in advance for every possibility they can foresee, leaving as little as possible to chance. Others prefer to plan the most significant events in the adventure and improvise the rest as the adventure progresses. The adventure framework is simply a method of outlining adventures that enables gamemasters to plan the events of an adventure while maintaining as much flexibility as they desire.

The adventure framework has five parts: **Premise**, **Setup**, **Events**, **Climax** and **Sequels**.

#### Premise

The **Premise** briefly summarizes the adventure and describes its major sources of conflict or drama.

#### Setup

The **Setup** describes how the adventure begins and how the characters become involved in it. This section may also include events that have led to the adventure, and background on other ideas touched on in the **Premise**. This section is often the longest and most detailed in the framework.

#### Events

The **Events** describe encounters and events that occur during the course of the adventure. These may include situations that pose problems for the characters, actions of the adventure's antagonists, creature encounters or simply unexpected occurrences. In other words, events are the obstacles or problems the player characters must overcome to complete the adventure successfully.

#### Climax

The **Climax** describes the conclusion or resolution of the adventure—how the adventure is likely to end. The climax is usually the likeliest resolution based on actions that the gamemaster expects the players to take. As a result, it may differ considerably from the way the adventure actually ends, depending on the player's actions. Gamemasters may find it useful to plan for more than one possible climax.

#### Sequels

**Sequels** are stories that might happen after the adventure or as a result of the adventure. Sequels may be adventures that feature the same non-player characters or include a magical item discovered in the first adventure. Sequels help create a sense of continuity in a campaign. See pages 15 through 17 of the **Gamemastering Earthdawn** book in the **Earthdawn Gamemaster Pack** for more information about creating **Earthdawn** campaigns and maintaining campaign continuity.

### AWARDING LEGEND POINTS

The collection of journal entries that makes up **The Book of Exploration** is well known all across Barsaive. Adventurers of all sorts contribute to the book. As characters take part in adventures based on the accounts related in the book, they associate themselves with the events and deeds depicted in the journal entries. These associations lend extra significance to the characters' actions during adventures inspired by tales from the Book. Thus, as characters find items, visit places or search for truths related to the legends described in **The Book of Exploration**, they add to their own legends.

This means that adventures based on the legends in this book, as well as other legends devised by the gamemaster, should earn characters more Legend Points than other, more "mundane" adventures. The number of bonus Legend Points that characters may earn in adventuring journal-based adventures should be based on the Legend Award the gamemaster assigns to the adventure. Refer to **Awarding Legend Points** (pp. 241–43, ED) for guidelines on determining Legend Awards. The bonus should range from 50 to 100 percent of the Legend Award. This bonus is awarded to each character at the successful completion of the adventure (rather than at the end of each game session).

## The Book of Exploration • Game Information

A gamemaster creates an adventure based on the Chamber of the Ages account. The player characters range from Fourth to Sixth Circle. Using the Legend Award Table (p. 242, ED), the gamemaster sets the Legend Award for the adventure at 300 Legend Points and sets a bonus Legend Award of 300 Legend Points. This means that at the end of the adventure, each character who successfully completes it receives a total of 600 Legend Points.

### SPECIFIC ADVENTURE IDEAS

The following section provides ideas and suggestions for incorporating the accounts in this book into your **Earthdawn** adventure or campaign. These suggestions appear in the same order as the journal entries are arranged in the book.



#### A PLEA FOR HELP

The author of this letter and his companions had the misfortune of encountering the Ristular, the Name-giver cult devoted to the Horror known as Ristul (p. 51, **Horrors**). The Ristular are Name-givers who have been forever corrupted by Ristul. As a result, they serve the Horror's goal of eternal, all-encompassing corruption. Ristular members may be of any race, Discipline or Circle. Though not all Ristular are adepts, many of them follow the magician Disciplines.

The Ristular are most often encountered in areas that correspond to Tainted or Corrupt regions of astral space, such as the Badlands, the Wastes and the ruins of Parlainth, though they can be found in virtually all areas of Barsaive. Their goals are many and varied,

organized only by the Ristular's desire to serve their patron Horror. Though they are essentially part of the Horror Ristul, the Ristular show no outward indications of their corruption. Even their astral patterns conceal their corrupted natures; only by detecting Ristul's Horror mark (p. 98, **Horrors**) can a character detect the Horror's presence in the pattern of a Ristular member.

The Ristular most often operate in small groups, much like other Horror cults. These groups generally operate independently of one another, but in rare instances, several groups may join together to accomplish a goal.

The gamemaster may determine the specific goals of the Ristular described in **A Plea for Help**, or he can use one of the following suggested scenarios. In the first scenario, the Ristular plan to use their victims in some form of ritual at the Abyss at Aras Nehem. Located along the shore of the Aras Sea southwest of Urupa, the Abyss is one of the few known stationary manifestations of Ristul. The ritual might involve tossing the victims into astral space through the gateway at the center of the Abyss, or some form of death magic (see p. 17, **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**). Alternatively, the Ristular may have a stronghold near the Aras Sea and simply plan to imprison their victims there. Lastly, the Ristular may be planning to wreak some havoc on the settlements along the Aras Sea, or perhaps on the lands that lie across the sea.

The Ristular statistics represent a typical,

#### RISTULAR

##### Attributes

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

Initiative: 4

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 8

Damage: 10

Number of Spells: 2

Spellcasting: 18

Effect: See below

Death Rating: 31

Wound Threshold: 8

Unconsciousness Rating: 22

Karma Points: 5\*

Physical Defense: 6

Spell Defense: 7

Social Defense: 8

Armor: 5

Mystic Armor: 2

Knockdown: 5

Recovery Tests: 2

Combat Movement: 27

Full Movement: 54

Karma Step: 18

**Powers\*:** Corrupt Karma 18, Horror Mark 18, Horror Thread 18, Karma Tap 18

**Legend Points:** 200

**Equipment:** Broadsword, hardened leather armor

**Loot:** 15 silver pieces

\*The listed Karma Points and powers are those of Ristul itself. Only one member of the Ristular can use these powers in a single round. The Karma Points can be used for any action.

non-adept human member of the Ristular. When using the Ristular in adventures, use these statistics as guidelines and modify them according to the individual Ristular's race, Discipline and Circle, which are determined by the gamemaster. As noted previously, many Ristular members are magician adepts. These adepts range from Third Circle to Tenth Circle.

All Ristular are connected to the Horror Ristul via the Horror Thread power (pp. 101–2, **Horrors**). As a result, Ristul can use its powers through the members of the Ristular. For this reason, a list of the Horror's powers are included in the description on page 66.



### THE FOUNTAIN PARCHMENT

The elemental earth "fountain" described in this tale is actually a naturally occurring gateway between the physical world and the elemental Plane of Earth. Once every 10 to 12 days, 1 or 2 kernels of True earth pop out of the gateway, leading observers to falsely assume it is a fountain. Unless someone picks them up, the kernels are simply absorbed back into the ground within a few days.

As hinted at in the adventurer's journal, the gateway is guarded—though not by a Horror. The gateway's guardian is actually a Strength 3 earth spirit stationed at the gateway to prevent any trespassers from looting the Plane of Earth. Over time the spirit has become twisted by dwelling in the Corrupt astral space associated with the gateway's physical location, deep within the Wastes. As a result of its corruption, the

spirit has developed a power similar to the Horror power Corrupt Karma. The corruption has also altered the spirit's physical form, leading Name-givers who have seen the spirit to mistake it for a Horror. (Descriptions of spirits and spirit powers appear in **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**.)

The earth spirit tries to frighten off anyone who approaches the gateway by manifesting itself in physical form. If the intruder remains, the spirit attacks with its Spear power. If that fails, the spirit attacks with its Engulf and Enrage Element powers. The spirit also possesses the Corrupt Karma Horror power (p. 297, ED).

The parchment described in this entry is a page from an adventurer's journal. One side contains a map that shows the location of the gateway relative to Jerris, along with partial notes on supplies required for the trip. A minimum of six days of hard riding is needed to reach the site from the city. The second side of the parchment contains a map of the caverns, partially obscured and smeared by a pair of bloody fingerprints. Notes in the margin mention a Horror guarding the inner cavern. The text consists largely of the phrase, "Once past the Horror, we gathered what we could in haste before it recovered. ..." Unfortunately, the rest of the marginal notes are illegible.

Adventures based on this tale typically begin with player characters seeking out what is reputedly an elemental earth fountain, only to encounter a powerful opponent. If the characters defeat or somehow avoid the spirit, perhaps by banishing it, they may approach the gateway closely enough to retrieve up to 3 or 4 kernels of True earth. But more important,

#### EARTH SPIRIT (Strength 3)

##### Attributes

DEX: 8                      STR: 11                      TOU: 12  
PER: 6                      WIL: 9                      CHA: 5

Initiative: 9

Number of Attacks: 2

Attack: 10

Damage: 15

Number of Spells: 3

Spellcasting: 9

Effect: See Powers

Physical Defense: 15

Spell Defense: 13

Social Defense: 13

Armor: 10

Mystic Armor: 5

Knockdown: 10

Recovery Tests: 4

Death Rating: 59

Wound Threshold: 17

Unconsciousness Rating: 52

Combat Movement: 120

Full Movement: 240

Karma Points: 15

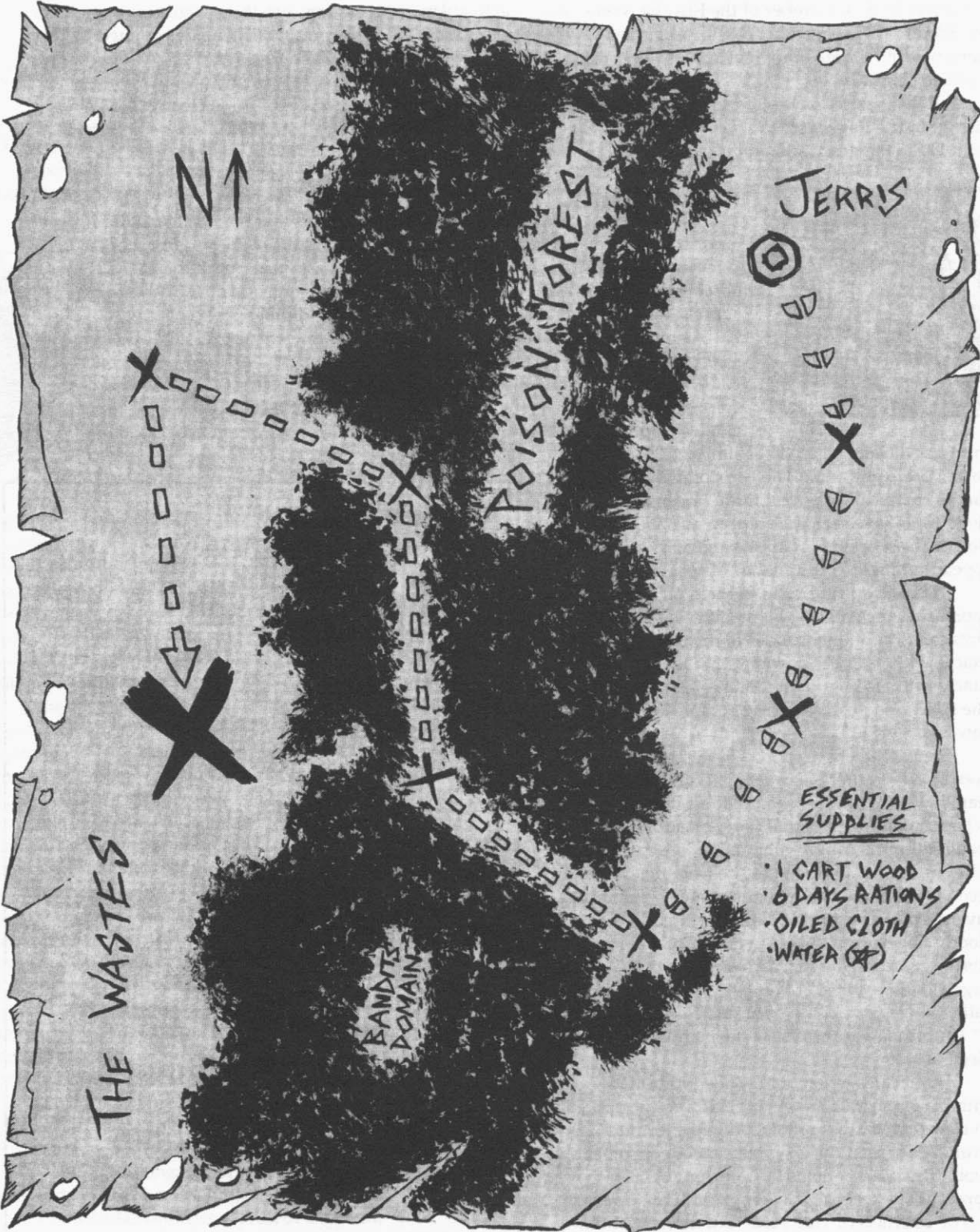
Karma Step: 7

**Powers:** Aid Summoner, Astral Sight, Corrupt Karma 12, Detect True Element, Engulf 12, Enrage Element 12, Lifesense 9, Manifest, Manipulate Element, Share Knowledge, Spear 14

Legend Points: 600

Equipment: None

Loot: None



they may examine the fountain. Any elementalists who makes a successful Perception-based Half-Magic Test against a Difficulty Number of 7 recognizes the true nature of the gateway. Nethermancers must make successful Half-Magic Tests against a Difficulty Number of 9 to recognize the gateway's true nature.

This discovery can lead to many different adventures. For example, the player characters may believe they can enter astral space through the gateway, not realizing that it leads to the earth plane. Additionally, the gateway is located within a Corrupt region of astral space, so if player characters do manage to enter astral space through it, they find themselves in a very hazardous and deadly environment.



### MASQUERADE OF DEATH'S DREAMS

The Masquerade of Death's Dreams is a bizarre ritual that enables player characters to restore life to deceased friends or loved ones. The masquerade is held during the times when Death sleeps in its domain, when Death's power is at its weakest. Death still holds sway during these periods, but it rules its domain through dreams; the masquerade is the most regular feature of these dreams.

To enter the masquerade, a player character must first obtain a death mask. Obtaining a death mask is never an easy task and often involves either purchasing one from a nethermancer or finding one. Few nethermancers will part with a death mask easily. Generally, they demand some service in exchange for a mask. The secrets of crafting these masks must be learned from ghost masters, who teach them only to

select nethermancers of Circle 9 or higher. A nethermancer who possesses this knowledge may create a death mask by making a successful Perception-based Half-Magic Test against a Difficulty Number of 13.

Once a player character possesses a death mask, he can enter the masquerade by simply holding the mask and going to sleep. If Death is also asleep at the time, the character's spirit is transported to the masquerade, mask in hand.

Death rules the masquerade and controls which talents player characters may use there. Visiting characters may use any of their conversational, physical and social talents per standard rules. However, player characters must use only their Attribute steps when employing magic or combat talents such as Spellcasting or Melee Weapons. A character's talent ranks add nothing to tests made for such talents.

If a visiting player character can find the person he is looking for at the masquerade and remove the person's mask, the individual is returned to life. If a player character removes the wrong person's mask, the player character dies as the unmasked individual takes the character's life to rejoin the land of the living. If a player character visits the masquerade but does not take a mask from anyone, the character may never return to the masquerade.

The dead who participate in the masquerade are adroit at lying and do not hesitate to do so. They can also manipulate the masquerade's dream environment with illusory effects. Player characters may disbelieve these effects by making Sensing Tests against them as if they were Circle 5 through Circle 8 illusionist spells, though the gamemaster may rule that some are more difficult to disbelieve. (See p. 166, *ED*, for Sensing Test rules.)

If a dead dancer catches a player character in a lie (not an exaggeration, not a half-truth, but a *lie*) the dancer may unmask the character and take his life. Death has never allowed a living liar to leave a masquerade, and it is highly unlikely that Death will ever do so.

Player characters may enter the masquerade for a number of reasons. For example, a faction of discontented dwarf merchants who are dissatisfied with Prince Neden and King Varulus III may hire player characters to enter the masquerade and bring King Varulus II back to life. Or an old enemy of the player characters may hatch a plot to trick the characters into entering the masquerade. The enemy prepares a detailed, fictitious background of a "valued hero of the realm" named Kolin, who was purportedly slain by treachery. Other conspirators posing as Kolin's kin approach the characters and ask them to rescue Kolin from Death. Unknown to the characters, the old enemy has hired nethermancers to coach several dead dancers with details from the fictitious background—details that "only Kolin could know." Alternatively, agents of a royal house may hire player characters to foil an attempt to bring back an infamous nethermancer (most likely of Twelfth Circle or higher). To accomplish their task, the characters must attend the masquerade and stop the plotters from completing their foolish quest.



### CARRUL AND THE THERANS

Though the Therans have largely kept to themselves in the far southwest corner of Barsaive and Vivane Province during the past few decades, from time to time they make slaving raids deeper into Barsaive. This journal entry describes one such raid and the ensuing battle between a crystal raider troll moot and a group of Theran airships near the Thunder Mountains. Such raids are fairly infrequent, especially so far from Sky Point and Vivane. Most Theran raids take place closer to the safety of Sky Point/Vivane, in the lands that once belonged to the human kingdom of Landis and the ork kingdom of Cara Fahd.

In recent months, however, Theran airships have been spotted along the southernmost stretch of the Serpent River. According to rumors, the Therans are searching for an outpost that dates back to the time before the Scourge. While this may be partially true (see *An Ancient Mystery*, p. 29), several sightings indicate the Therans are interested in more than some rumored outpost, and some members of The Eye of Throal (Throal's intelligence organization) and His Majesty's Exploratory Force insist that the Therans are up to no good.

Throal is also abuzz with numerous reports of Theran officials traveling the southern stretch of the Serpent River controlled by House K'tenshin. This t'skrang trading house enjoyed beneficial trade relations with Thera before the Scourge, and some of King Varulus' advisors believe the Therans, House K'tenshin, or both wish to re-establish their former relations. Such an alliance could be quite troublesome for Throal, as well as for any Name-giver who travels this stretch of the Serpent River.

The heightened Theran presence along the southern Serpent River could surely lead to many different adventures. For example, the Kingdom of Throal may send player characters to meet with leaders of House K'tenshin to offer trade relations of some sort, in hopes of pre-empting any similar arrangements with the Therans. Or player characters traveling near the Serpent River or the Thunder Mountains might encounter a Theran scouting party. (The gamemaster determines the object of the Therans' search.) Lastly, player characters may find themselves aboard a crystal raider ship that runs into a Theran airship. Such a confrontation could lead to a battle and provide player characters with an opportunity to play a key role in a Theran defeat.



### THE LOST KINGDOM OF LASAEL

The mysterious city described in the legend is actually the Lost Kingdom of Lasael, home to a group of humans that calls itself the Lasaeli. The Lasaeli people are not Horror-tainted, have no desire to rule the world, and otherwise are quite content to be left alone. They do possess a fear of Throal that borders on paranoia, but otherwise they are not notably dangerous or violent.

The most distinctive element of Lasaeli society is its close relationship to the elements. The lands of the Lasaeli contain prominent veins of True earth, as well as copious amounts of True air, water and wood. The Lasaeli refer to these elemental deposits collectively as the Lifetree. They believe that the Lifetree is the work of an entity they call the Passion Lasael and that by worshipping the Passion Lasael they ensure the continued generosity of the Lifetree. (Actually, the Passion Lasael is probably nothing more than one or more powerful elemental spirits, but gamemasters may determine the true nature of the Passion Lasael as they see fit.)

Unsurprisingly, Lasaeli are among the most proficient elementalists in Barsaive, though they almost certainly follow practices that would make other elementalists a bit apprehensive. They also practice unique Disciplines that combine elementalism and fighting styles based on the unique elemental creatures that inhabit the Lasaeli lands.

For centuries the Lasaeli have isolated themselves from the rest of the world. In fact, they have isolated themselves so effectively that the vast majority of Name-givers know only the handful of facts contained in the account written by Carnellan. The Lasaeli's most effective means of isolating themselves is the magical mist they use to conceal their valley and the surrounding area. This mist reduces vision to mere feet and makes travel through the Lasaeli lands slow and treacherous. The perpetual mist has also led some explorers to mistakenly conclude that the Lasaeli lands are home to one or more Horrors.

Despite the Lasaeli's self-imposed isolation, some Barsaivian Name-givers do know of their existence. The V'strimon Aropagoi traded with the Lasaeli in the years before the Scourge. Undoubtedly the Shivalahala V'strimon retains information on the Lasaeli in her racial memory, and she may be willing to fund an expedition or two to re-establish trading contacts with such a wealthy partner. Ironically, the dwarfs of Throal, whom the Lasaeli

consider their greatest enemy, know literally nothing about their long-hidden neighbor. Any dwarf bearing signs of affiliation with Throal who visits Lasael may find his visit cut very short.

Simply exploring Lasael can become an epic dungeon/kaer crawl for player characters—a crawl that can be quite profitable, considering Lasael's enormous elemental wealth. Of course, the Lasaeli have spent almost two thousand years perfecting their defenses, so such an expedition is not without its dangers. Player characters might also attempt to reunite Lasael with Barsaivian society. Doing so would be a task feasible only for high-Circle troubadours, scouts or questors of Chorrolis. Anyone attempting this feat must contend with the long-held paranoia of the Lasaeli when attempting to convince them to reveal themselves to the rest of the Name-giver world. And if the Lasaeli did emerge from their exile, the reappearance of such a wealthy and powerful group would undoubtedly stir up the geopolitical climate. All of Barsaive's major cities, Throal and even Thera would likely court the Lasaeli as allies.



### IN THE BONES OF THE EARTH

The gemstone caverns lie somewhere in the Caralkspur Mountains of northwest Vivane Province, though no one knows exactly where. The gems in the caverns are of very high quality and would fetch a high price in any market in Barsaive. Unfortunately, the gems are Horror-cursed as well. The curse on the gems causes characters to become extremely possessive of them and seek to claim all the gems of a given type within the caverns. For instance, a player character who touches a ruby in the caverns begins to think that all the rubies in the cavern are rightfully his and soon will attempt to claim all of them.

Whenever a player character picks up one of the gems, make a Curse Test against the character's Spell Defense. The Step Number for the test is 13. If the test succeeds, the character is cursed. To resist the effects of the curse, a character must make a successful Willpower Test each day he remains in the caverns. Use a Difficulty Number of 6 for the first test, and increase the Difficulty Number by 1 for each successive test. Cursed characters may also free themselves of the curse effects by leaving the caverns. Gamemasters may determine the identity and nature of the Horror that cursed the gemstone caverns.

Player characters may be hired to collect gems from the caverns by merchants or elementalists seeking magical stones for enchanting purposes. Alternatively, additional reports of Horror activity in the caverns may inspire player characters to seek out the caverns with the intention of destroying the Horror that cursed the gems. Or player characters may seek the ruby mentioned in the journal entry itself—for its impressive beauty, size or purported magical properties. Gamemasters may even work the caverns into unrelated adventures by having one of the long-dead members of the Six Swords appear in a player character's dreams. This dream figure may haunt the character until he agrees to find the dead explorer's hoard and give some of it to the family of a comrade the explorer killed.



### PARADISE OF SWORDS

Located in the high plains of the Scol Mountains, the Paradise of Swords is a battleground that straddles several rifts in the fabric of the physical world. More than one thousand years ago, several tears in reality opened at this spot. The Passions repaired the rifts and charged Thystonius with guarding them and preventing Horrors, as well as other netherworldly creatures, from spilling over into the physical world. To this day, warriors cursed (or blessed?) by Thystonius fight incessantly on this spot, honing the skills they need to defend this entrance to the physical world. According to followers of Thystonius, the Paradise of Swords is an afterlife an adept can enter while living—and never leave.

The Paradise of Swords holds a mysterious allure for adventurers who visit. Any player character who enters the area must make two daily Willpower Tests against a Difficulty Number of 5, one test at dawn and one at dusk. If either test fails, the character succumbs to the Paradise of Swords. If a character is a questor of Thystonius, he adds his questor rank to the Difficulty Number of the Willpower Tests. If the character is a questor of a Passion other than Thystonius, he adds his questor rank to his Willpower step for these tests. Any character may voluntarily accept the Paradise of Swords.

Characters who succumb to the Paradise will not leave voluntarily. To break the hold of the Paradise, a character must break free of Thystonius's influence by spending 24 hours in a place where Thystonius holds very little influence. Astral space is certainly one such place, as are special areas devoted to Passions other than Thystonius.



Characters who succumb to the Paradise of Swords fight an endless string of battles each day. (The gamemaster determines the exact number of battles.) At the end of each day, food and mead appear by the pillars that mark the Paradise. Weapons and armor also appear, replacing those damaged or lost in combat.

When a character dies fighting at the Paradise of Swords, his body is tossed into the Healing Pyre. To be revived, a wounded or dead character who has succumbed to the Paradise must make a Willpower Test against a Difficulty Number of 5. If the test succeeds, the flames of the pyre magically restore the character's full Recovery Tests for a day. The character immediately makes all of these Recovery Tests as if a new day has dawned. If a character is not completely healed after these tests (no damage taken, no wounds) he can make another Willpower Test to gain additional Recovery Tests. The character can repeat this process until he is completely healed or fails a Willpower Test. If the character fails a Willpower Test, his ashes are swept into an urn and the process starts again the next night. Damage may be healed over the course of many nights, but a character remains nothing but ashes until he regains his full health.

The Paradise's pillars act as stitches that hold the fabric of the world together. Minor Horrors are constantly pushing at the weak spots in the rifts and often manage to get through. Major Horrors are unlikely to pass through these rifts, for legend has it that the Passion himself is committed to defending this area and his followers—and few of the more intelligent Horrors are willing to test the veracity of the legend themselves.

A myriad of adventures can be designed around the Paradise's relationship to astral space, the Horrors, and the Passions. For example, certain scholars might obtain evidence that a Named Horror plans to enter the world through the Paradise of Swords. These same scholars might then hire player characters to locate the mysterious Paradise of Swords and reconnoiter the area.

Questors of Garlen, Lochost or Astendar might also hire player characters to rescue some of the eternal warriors who long ago succumbed to the Paradise of Swords. Some of these warriors may not have intended to serve Thystonius forever or may be needed elsewhere.



### CHAMBER OF THE AGES

Most scholars of obsidiman history are familiar with the Valley of the Elders, the legendary seat of obsidiman culture. However, only the most informed and determined of those scholars are familiar with the fabled

Chamber of the Ages and the black obsidiman sorcerer Ja Kae-Rik.

If players search for the chamber, keep in mind that it is well hidden and nearly impossible to find without a map. If a group of adventurers manages to locate the chamber, they'll find it essentially as Farris Penn describes it, though Ja Kae-Rik will not be present. The Tablets of Krah-Thar remain in the center of the chamber, surrounded by a moat of molten rock. Additionally, the chamber is rife with waiting traps incorporated into its design by its ancient obsidiman builders. It is the Gamemasters responsibility to determine the exact nature and effects of these traps, but they should be both formidable and deadly.

Ja Kae-Rik, who remains at large, can provide a powerful enemy for player characters. From the moment of his Emergence, the obsidiman was

### JA KAE-RIK

#### Attributes

DEX: 7      STR: 11      TOU: 11  
PER: 9      WIL: 11      CHA: 9

Initiative: 8	Physical Defense: 9
Number of Attacks: 1	Spell Defense: 12
Attack: 9	Social Defense: 12
Damage: 13	Armor: 6
Number of Spells: 2	Mystic Armor: 7
Spellcasting: 12	Knockdown: 11
Effect: See Powers	Recovery Tests: 5

Death Rating: 75	Combat Movement: 35
Wound Threshold: 17	Full Movement: 70
Unconsciousness Rating: 65	

Karma Points: 25	Karma Step: 6
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**Powers:** Corrupt Karma 13, Cursed Luck 11, Disrupt Magic 13, Spells: Circle 12 Nethermancer, Circle 12 Wizard

**Legend Points:** 1,000

**Equipment:** Stone quarterstaff (Damage 15)

**Loot:** None

different from the others of his Brotherhood. When Ja's thirst for power and contempt for all life became apparent, his brothers banished him from his Liferock and Brotherhood. Ja then spent many years studying the darker aspects of the nethermancer and wizard Disciplines and obtaining a number of Horror powers through the use of arcane rituals. Later, Ja was apprehended and imprisoned in the chamber, where he remained for centuries until Daron Altstruff inadvertently loosed the black-hearted magician on the world.

Since his release Ja has created a power base in a remote location of Barsaive, where he plots and plans. An archvillain in the tradition of sword and sorcery movies, Ja's plans always threaten large numbers of Name-givers and large areas of Barsaive. As a result, Ja Kae-Rik would make an excellent recurring opponent for characters in a long campaign.



### A FRAGMENT FROM NUTREVA

In this account, a young human adventurer, Orteol, tells how he and his traveling companions happen upon the village of Nutreva, which had come under attack from a swarm of giant-sized insects known as red ants. Native to the Badlands, the ants seldom venture out of that area. However, a lack of food in the Badlands has driven a swarm of the ants to seek food in new places, including nearby villages such as Nutreva. Though no other settlements have reported seeing any red ants, the swarm may be migrating eastward, out of the Badlands and toward more populated areas. Adventurers may encounter the insects in any number of ways.

For example, the player characters may be traveling near or through the Badlands when they discover a village much like Nutreva. Depending on how they deal with

the situation, they might suffer the same fate as Orteol and his companions, or they may seek out and attempt to destroy the ants' nest.

The player characters also may receive a plea for aid from a small village located near the Badlands. This village may be the home of one of the characters, or a place the characters have visited in the past. The village sentries have been disappearing and no one knows why. The sentries never shout an alarm—they simply leave to make their rounds outside the village walls and never return. Nearly all the able-bodied workers of the village are gone, leaving the village populated by older residents, children and young mothers. Fortunately for the villagers, the red ants have not discovered their existence—yet.

Alternatively, an alchemist may hire the player characters to obtain a sample of red ant venom for use in new potions or blood charms.

### Commentary (Red Ant)

The origins of these creatures remain uncertain, but some scholars suggest that the red ants were born from the corruption of the Badlands during the Scourge. Others believe they are Horror constructs, and yet others think the species is nothing more than a giant-sized cousin of Barsaive's common ants.

Red ants range in size from 8 to 12 inches long. Red ant bites deliver a powerful poison that eventually immobilizes a victim. For each successful bite attack in which a target takes damage, make a Spellcasting Test against the victim's Spell Defense. If the test succeeds, the victim must make a successful Poison Resistance (9) Test (p. 208, ED) to resist the poison's effects or suffer a -1 step penalty to his Initiative and Dexterity (and related talents/skills). Once a victim has been affected by this poison, he can no longer resist its effects, and each subsequent attack automatically reduces the victim's Dexterity/Initiative by 1 step. Victims who escape from the red ants recover their lost Dexterity/Initiative steps at a rate of 1 per minute.

### RED ANT

#### Attributes

DEX: 4                      STR: 5                      TOU: 2  
PER: 3                      WIL: 6                      CHA: 4

Initiative: 4

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 8

Damage: 7 (Bite)

Number of Spells: 1

Spellcasting: 8

Effect: See Commentary

Physical Defense: 6

Spell Defense: 5

Social Defense: 12

Armor: 4

Mystic Armor: 0

Knockdown: 12

Recovery Tests: 1

Death Rating: 19

Wound Threshold: 4

Unconsciousness Rating: 12

Combat Movement: 15

Full Movement: 30

Legend Points: 10 each

Equipment: None

Loot: None

Lone red ants pose little danger. However, red ants most often attack by swarming, paralyzing, then carrying a victim back to their ant hill, where the victim becomes food for the ants' larvae. For this reason, red ant attacks leave few, if any clues. Use the Pack/Swarm Attacks guidelines on pages 114 and 115 of the **Creatures of Barsaive** book for resolving attacks made by red ant swarms.



### AN ANCIENT MYSTERY

The Theran outpost mentioned in this legend was a Theran magical laboratory before the Scourge. Magicians from Parlainth, the Theran capital at the time, performed all manner of magical experimentation at the site. Later, many of the same magicians continued their experiments in Parlainth's Western Catacombs.

Gamemasters determine the specific research conducted at the laboratory. One possibility is that magicians here performed early stages of research for the ritual spell later used to remove Parlainth from the world. In this case, the lab might conceal a gateway leading to astral space or one or more of the netherworlds. Alternatively, the Theran magicians at the lab may have attempted to summon or create a new form of spirit by merging air and water spirits. In all likelihood, such experimentation would have failed and produced disastrous—and perhaps long-lasting—effects.

Alternatively, the ancient Therans may have used the outpost as a base for expeditions into the ruins that are rumored to lie beneath the Mist Swamps. These ruins supposedly date back to a time long before the Scourge, and the Therans would have been extremely interested in exploring them. In any case, their findings have remained a mystery in Barsaive.

Player characters may travel to the Theran outpost during a search for magical knowledge or items that may have been left behind. Groups such as the Cult of the Great Hunter or Theran agents may trick player characters into venturing into the Mist Swamps in search of the outpost. At any rate, anyone who treks into the area runs a high risk of accidentally trespassing into the territory of Aban the Great Dragon.

Player characters may also be drawn to the area when the residents of several towns and villages near the Mist Swamps and the surrounding region begin seeing Theran airships, apparently surveying the area. Undoubtedly, these sightings cause King Varulus III no small amount of concern. Some of the king's advisors may believe the Therans are planning a new invasion of Barsaive, while others may contend that the Therans are simply searching for something—possibly their legendary outpost. The king, of course, will want to hire adventurers to discover the reason behind the Theran airship activity, and if necessary, retrieve any valuable items or secrets before the Therans manage to do so.



### CITADEL IN THE SKY

The kaer/citadel described in this legend is a result of but one of many known attempts to create floating kaers. The most famous, or perhaps infamous, of these floating kaers is known as Findas's Flight, which was created by the legendary Theran elementalist Nonan Findas (see **The Brightest Star in the Sky**, p. 58 of **Legends of Earthdawn, Volume I**).

Most accounts of floating kaers are considered mere legends and folk tales, but the Citadel in the Sky is revered as one of Barsaive's greatest mysteries. The journal entry is but one of numerous reports of the Citadel's existence, and each report makes at least a passing reference to the Horror that dwells within the Citadel's protective dome of True air. These repeated sightings of the Citadel lend an air of credibility to its rumored existence.

Many individuals wish to gain control over the Citadel. If properly harnessed, the Citadel could be an extremely valuable military weapon. Additionally, the Citadel is rumored to contain numerous hidden treasures. However, anyone attempting to capture and control the Citadel must overcome several obstacles.

The first obstacle is the bubble of True air that surrounds the Citadel. The bubble makes the Citadel all but invisible to the naked eye. And while the Citadel might be located by tracking the high levels of elemental magic needed to keep it aloft, this same magic might also attract Horrors and other spirits. Adventurers might also locate

the Citadel by tracking the appearances of Wintersbreath when it makes its forays in search of food. Any adventurer who locates the Citadel must still breach the bubble, a feat that requires nothing less than a fire cannon, or perhaps the combined efforts of a number of elementalists.

But locating the Citadel and breaching its bubble are only the first obstacles adventurers must overcome to control the Citadel. More important, adventurers would have to defeat the Horrors that inhabit the Citadel. At least one Horror, Wintersbreath, resides in the Citadel permanently, and many scholars suspect that the Citadel is home to an entire horde of Horrors. Of course, even after locating the Citadel and ridding it of any Horrors, adventurers must actually take control of the Citadel. Anyone attempting to do so would first have to dissolve the Citadel's bubble, a task that would likely require several high-Circle elementalists.

Numerous powerful patrons might hire player characters to find and claim the Citadel. As previously noted, the Citadel's potential as a strategic weapon would make it particularly attractive to a military power such as Throal. Other interested parties, such as airship makers, might simply want to study the Citadel in hopes of learning the secrets of levitating such a mammoth object. Any attempt to locate and claim the Citadel will require the use of an airship and will likely involve several weeks of searching.

Alternatively, player characters might be on an airship that accidentally runs into the Citadel, much like the airship described in the journal entry. Or an elementalists guild might seek the Citadel in the hope of learning the secrets of its True air bubble. Keep in mind that the Citadel's bubble itself might be the target of elemental mining, as it represents a concentrated source of True air unlike any available anywhere in Barsaive or the Theran Empire.

#### Commentary (Wintersbreath)

Wintersbreath is a Horror in the form of a twisted air elemental, embodying all the dark aspects of air: biting winter winds, dry desert air, the winds of fate that blow bad luck, and haunted breezes that howl after midnight.

Wintersbreath's human-shaped form consists of thick gray vapors. The Horror usually stands 9 feet tall, but it can stretch or shrink its form to suit its whims. Capable of flying its full movement, Wintersbreath can pass through solid objects at half-speed. Though the Horror has no visible mouth, it produces a variety of howling, shrieking and clattering noises.

Wintersbreath enjoys living in the Citadel, where it races up and down the buildings' empty halls and swirls around its many spires. However, at least once every month the Horror must leave the floating city in search of food. Usually Wintersbreath hunts for food in small villages or towns, but on rare occasions it hunts in cities, glutting itself on the pain and terror it causes.

While living in the Citadel for the past hundred years, Wintersbreath has learned to control the Citadel. The Horror can direct the Citadel's flight, raise or lower the bubble of True air and even manipulate the True air's shimmer to lure air miners to their deaths.

When Wintersbreath attacks, it uses its control over air to hurl objects (stones, rubble and the like) at its targets. Wintersbreath also possesses a number of Horror powers and elementalists spells. But Wintersbreath's most terrifying weapon is probably its Windstrike ability, which enables the Horror to draw moisture and life energy

#### WINTERSBREATH

##### Attributes

DEX: 19      STR: 10      TOU: 20  
PER: 12      WIL: 13      CHA: 8

Initiative: 15

Number of Attacks: 2

Attack: 20

Damage: 15

Number of Spells: 2

Spellcasting: 18

Effect: See below

Death Rating: 56

Wound Threshold: 20

Unconsciousness Rating: Immune

Karma Points: 20

Powers: Animate Dead 12, Cursed Luck 12, Terror 15, Windstrike 15 (see text), Elementalists spells: Air Blast, Weather Change, Whirlwind

Legend Points: 33,000

Equipment: None

Loot: Citadel and the treasures it holds. Worth at least 50,000 silver pieces. This counts as treasure worth Legend Points.

Physical Defense: 25

Spell Defense: 20

Social Defense: 15

Armor: None

Mystical Armor: 8

Knockdown: Immune

Recovery Tests: 8

Combat Movement: 70

Full Movement: 140

Karma Step: 15

from its victims, leaving their corpses perfectly preserved. To use this ability, Wintersbreath must touch its target and make a successful Attack Test. Use Wintersbreath's Windstrike Step Number when calculating damage from the attack. If a Windstrike attack inflicts a Wound on the target, the target must make a Toughness Test against a Difficulty Number equal to the Damage Test result. If the target's test succeeds, the attack paralyzes the target for 4 rounds. If the test fails, the area of the victim's body touched by the Horror withers and becomes useless. Only powerful magic, such as the Reverse Withering spell (p. 182, ED) can restore a withered body part.



### GROWING BONES

The blasted valley described in the journal entry lies between lands once controlled by two ork scorcher bands. For decades, these bands have skirmished over important issues such as which side a horse's braided mane should hang on, whose tusks are bigger, and less important things such as territorial disputes and old war debts. The valley was worthless for farming, and the scorcher tribes showed unusual intelligence when they decided that the valley was the best place to hold their regularly scheduled skirmishes.

All went well until one day, just a few years ago, the tribes gathered for yet another important battle and noticed two obsidimen sitting in the valley and staring at each other across a few hundred feet. The scorchers called a quick truce and checked out the two obsidimen. The obsidimen, however, refused all communication with the orks, whose magicians could detect very strong auras of power radiating from each of the interlopers.

Orks being orks, the scorchers decided to hold their battle anyway. All went well until their charging horses obscured the view of one obsidiman. Suddenly, both obsidimen launched into action, slamming orks from horses and shrugging off the ork shamans' most powerful spells. When it was all over, dozens of orks lay stunned and hurt, and the obsidimen were calmly sitting, facing each other once again.

The initial anger of the orks turned to wonder when they realized the obsidimen had not slain a single ork. Fearing what might happen should the obsidimen take actual offense, the ork warlords called off the fight and puzzled over this break in their tradition. They obviously could no longer hold their battles in the blasted valley. Yet the scorcher's aggression and desire to prove themselves against one another remained unabated. So in a display of typical ork adaptability, each scorcher band "adopted" one of the obsidimen as their "champion." Each ork band began to channel their competitive urge into amassing as many war trophies as possible and piling these trophies into the gruesome towers that stand behind each obsidiman. Each band's magicians use numerous spells and spirits to ensure the gory glory towers do not become corrupted by thieves or worse things. Additionally, each scorcher band supplies a steady stream of food and water to "their" obsidiman, so their champions do not have to break off their contest.

Recently, these two scorcher bands have joined together under a single ruler, as have several other ork scorcher tribes across Barsaive. Despite this new alliance, some of the old rivalry between the two scorcher bands survives, as does their tradition of building the bone tower.

The two obsidimen in the valley are powerful adepts who, on a point of honor lost to all but their own Liferocks, happened to choose the valley to finish a test of endurance and patience that began decades ago. The rules of the test forbid each obsidiman from getting their own food or water, but say nothing about nourishment that someone happens to put in front of them. Thus, the orks' devotion has actually exaggerated the length and duration of the silent showdown. The obsidimen react with great (but non-lethal) force to anyone who blocks their view of their rival.

The situation in the valley remains static, but several adventure possibilities may arise when one obsidiman finally concedes defeat. Will the two competitors search for new adventuring companions? Will they turn on the orks for making such a gruesome spectacle of their contest? Will they just leave? The new alliance that unites the two scorcher bands provides adventure opportunities as well. Undoubtedly, the alliance will have a major impact on the political situation in the Tylon Mountains—and perhaps even in the rest of Barsaive. Once word of the alliance spreads to Throal, King Varulus will be most curious about the identity and plans of the alliance.



### THE HIDDEN HILL

The Hidden Hill lies in the unexplored wilds of Vivane Province. Though the Hill was a known landmark in the centuries before the Scourge, most post-Scourge Barsaivians have never heard of it. No known force can penetrate the Hill, and all efforts to enter it forcibly have failed. Adventurers may enter the Hill only with the consent of the Hill People, who prohibit visitors from bringing weapons and armor of any sort (including grimoires) into the Hill. The reasons for this prohibition are not known for certain, but some legends contend that the Hill People abhor violence and so prohibit Name-givers from bringing tools of violence into the Hill.

Time seems to flow at a different rate inside the Hill. As evidenced by the journal entry, more than four hundred years passed in the outside world during a mere six-day period inside the Hill. This time differential is not consistent, however. One adept may spend 2 days in the Hill while only 2 years pass outside, while another adept might spend 4 days in the Hill only to discover that 100 years have passed on the outside. Regardless of its rate of passage, time always flows forward within the Hill.

The Hill People are powerful beings whose desires are often incomprehensible to ordinary folk. They are not Horrors or stock "evil spirits." They are simply strange and powerful beings with their own agenda.

Beyond these characteristics, gamemasters may flesh out details of the Hill and its inhabitants as they desire. For example, a gamemaster may determine that the Hill is actually one of the netherworlds and that the Hill People are spirits of some sort. Or the Hill People may be a community of Name-givers who have used powerful and ancient magic to seal themselves off from the world. Or one or more great dragons may have created the Hidden Hill for some unknown purpose. This last option may seem unlikely, as no evidence links the Hill to dragons, but a lack of evidence does not prove anything.

Player characters may be drawn to the Hill for a variety of reasons. For example, characters may believe the Hill contains gold, gems or magical treasures, or frightened villagers who live near the Hill may beseech player characters to investigate mysterious disappearances in its vicinity. Player characters may simply become curious about the lights and laughter that emanate from the mound. Alternatively, player characters may seek out the Hill's inhabitants to ask them a question whose answer will determine the characters' course of action. The characters may seek the Key Knowledge of a magic item, the identity of an enemy, the most likely outcome of a character's quest, the Name of a Horror, or anything else of genuine importance. Player characters must be careful when posing questions to the Hill People, however. The Hill People allow visitors only one question, and they have little patience for frivolous questions. If the Hill People decide that a visitor is wasting their time with such a question, they won't hesitate to throw the character out or provide an obtuse answer that borders on the unintelligible.

Regardless of a visitor's purpose, getting inside the hill should be a bit of a mystery. Consider making the entrance requirement the opposite of what the visitor expects it to be. For example, if players seem inclined to put their characters through all kinds of mystical mumbo-jumbo, have the Hill People ignore such activity and respond to a character who simply stands near the hill and asks to come inside. Or if players favor simple approaches, have the Hill People respond to a character who performs some obscure ritual gesture or utters arcane incantations or spells. Either way, force player characters to do something unexpected to accomplish their goal.



### THE CORRUPTED

The information the journal account supplies on the Corrupted is essentially accurate. These beings are members of an obsidiman Brotherhood who irrevocably changed and corrupted themselves in a desperate attempt to survive the Scourge after a Horror violated their Liferock. Their experience radically altered their senses of beauty and morality, as well as their entire perception of the world, and now they survive as empty and nearly soulless creatures—a state reflected by their bone-white color. Aggressive and violent, the Corrupted exist in a manic state that is utterly alien to normal obsidimen. Their warped, terrifying sculptures and carvings represent a desperate attempt to focus their crazed energy and reassure themselves, through artistic endeavor, that they are not Horror-tainted.

The Corrupted are obsessed with regaining the life they have lost and they are not concerned with the effects of their efforts on others. Any resistance to the Corrupted elicits violent, aggressive outbursts from the insane obsidimen, as evidenced by the ravaged villages referred to in Aronn Torem's journal.

### THE CORRUPTED

#### Attributes

DEX: 6            STR: 9            TOU: 9  
 PER: 5            WIL: 7            CHA: 6

Initiative: 8	Physical Defense: 8
Number of Attacks: 2	Spell Defense: 9
Attack: 8	Social Defense: 12
Damage: 12	Armor: 3
Number of Spells: 1	Mystic Armor: 3
Spellcasting: 9	Knockdown: 9
Effect: Ritual (see text)*	Recovery Tests: 4
*Cannot be used in combat	

Death Rating: 50	Combat Movement: 35
Wound Threshold: 14	Full Movement: 70
Unconsciousness Rating: 43	

Karma Points: 10	Karma Step: 3
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Legend Points: 200  
 Equipment: None  
 Loot: None

When possible, the Corrupted take their captives to the obsidimen's valley home. There, the Corrupted attempt to drain the life essence from their captives with blood magic rituals of the most vile order. The ritual takes several hours to perform, and is known only to the Corrupted. First, the obsidimen cut their victims across the arms or legs until they are Wounded (i.e., the victim takes a number of Damage Points equal to his Wound Threshold). The ritual leader then makes a Spellcasting Test against the victim's Spell Defense. If the test succeeds, the victim's life energy is drained from him and infused into one or more of the Corrupted obsidimen. Each hour after this test, the victim suffers a number of Damage Points equal to his Wound Threshold, thereby taking an additional Wound. The victim continues to take this damage until he is freed or dies. A victim may free himself by simply moving more than 10 yards away from the Corrupted obsidimen who is receiving the victim's life energy. The Corrupted who receive this life energy gain no benefit from it beyond survival.

Player characters may encounter the Corrupted while performing an unrelated quest in the Dragon Mountains. They might stumble on the valley abode of the Corrupted or simply meet an individual Corrupted obsidimen on a lonely path in the

mountains. Corrupted obsidimen try to capture any adventurers they encounter, then take the victim back to the Corrupted's valley home for the life-draining blood magic ritual.

Adventurers also may stumble across a small mountain village whose residents pay tribute or offer sacrifices to the Corrupted. The object of the fearful villagers' devotion may not be immediately apparent, and so the adventurers may need to deduce the true nature of the situation before taking action—all the while preventing themselves from becoming sacrifices.

Alternatively, player characters may be searching for the obsidimen Kahr-ach when they encounter the Corrupted. A key figure in the events described by Aronn Torem, Kahr-ach has not been heard from in years. Discovering his whereabouts could be an adventure in itself, and obtaining his unique knowledge of the Corrupted would be an important advantage for any group of adventurers heading into the Dragon Mountains.



### ISLAND OF FEAR

The village on the island described in this legend is populated by a Horror cult devoted to the Horror known as J'Rora, which also resides on the island. Squat and scaly, J'Rora walks on four legs equally spaced around its barrel-shaped torso. From its upper torso spring four tentacles, each ending in a claw. The Horror's head is wider than its body's height, lending J'Rora an unpleasant resemblance to a crushed Name-Giver. The Horror's wide, lipless mouth is stretched in a permanent leer, revealing square, yellowed teeth. J'Rora's red eyes glow as if lit from within.

J'Rora demands blood sacrifices on a regular and frequent basis, which forces the island's cultists to travel to the mainland of Barsaive in search of victims. Needless to say, the crews and passengers of any ship that lands at the island are

likely to end up as sacrifices to J'Rora. In addition to supplying J'Rora with sacrificial victims, the cult members protect the Horror from would-be Horror hunters.

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J'Rora also likes to keep certain victims alive, so that it can force them to slay other Name-givers. This allows J'Rora to feed on the victim's anguish, as well as on the pain and fear of those who are killed. The Horror uses its masks to take control of Name-givers. Any time a Name-giver looks at one of these wooden masks, which mimic J'Rora's terrible visage, make a Spellcasting Test for the Horror against the Name-giver's Spell Defense. If the test succeeds, the Name-giver must make a successful Willpower Test against a Difficulty Number of 5 to resist donning the mask. Adepts may use Karma on this test.

Every subsequent time the Name-giver looks at a mask, repeat the Horror's Spellcasting Test (the Horror can make only 1 Spellcasting Test against a single target per day, however). The Name-giver may also repeat the Willpower Test, but each time he does so the Difficulty Number increases by 1.

Once J'Rora successfully compels a Name-giver to wear one of the masks, make a Spellcasting Test for the Horror against the Name-giver's Spell Defense. If the test succeeds, the victim falls under the complete control of the Horror. Any Name-giver under J'Rora's control begins practicing the cult's blood-sacrifice rites. The Name-giver may also begin crafting more masks, which J'Rora enchants with its Horror Thread power. Thus far, the cult has not spread from the island. But if one of the masks were to wash up along the shore of the Aras Sea, a new J'Rora cult might form in Barsaive.

A Name-giver can remove one of J'Rora's masks and escape the Horror's control by making a successful Willpower Test against the result of the Spellcasting Test made to control the character. However, characters who free themselves from J'Rora's control may still suffer from J'Rora's Horror mark. If the marked character puts on a J'Rora mask, the Horror can immediately use its Horror Thread against the character. J'Rora also uses its Horror mark to continually remind the character of all the deeds he performed while under the Horror's control. Many unfortunate victims fall prey to insanity from such memories.

Use the following statistics for J'Rora's cultists. Most are non-adept human Name-givers, but the cult also includes dwarfs, elves and orks. About 10 percent of the cultists are adepts, most of them of the warrior and archer Disciplines. The cult's leaders are mostly elementalists and illusionists. J'Rora has a special hatred of nethermancers, and the Horror and its cultists attack any readily identifiable nethermancer on sight.

### CULTISTS

#### Attributes

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

#### Initiative: 4

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 8

Damage: 10

Number of Spells: 2

Spellcasting: 18

Effect: See below

Physical Defense: 6

Spell Defense: 7

Social Defense: 8

Armor: 5

Mystic Armor: 2

Knockdown: 5

Recovery Tests per Day: 2

Death Rating: 31

Wound Threshold: 8

Unconsciousness Rating: 22

Combat Movement: 27

Full Movement: 54

Karma Points: 5

Karma Step: 13

**Powers:** J'Rora is able to use any and all of its powers through the cultists. The Horror may grant its powers to only 1 cult member each round. The Karma points listed can be used for any action.

**Legend Points:** 200

**Equipment:** Broadsword, hardened leather armor

**Loot:** 15 silver pieces

### J'RORA

#### Attributes

DEX: 16                      STR: 14                      TOU: 15  
PER: 19                      WIL: 18                      CHA: 19

Initiative: 17

Number of Attacks: 2

Attack: 18

Damage: 17

Number of Spells: 2

Spellcasting: 21

Effect: See Powers

Physical Defense: 21

Spell Defense: 25

Social Defense: 25

Armor: 16

Mystic Armor: 19

Knockdown: 21

Recovery Tests: 7

Death Rating: 100

Wound Threshold: 21

Unconsciousness Rating: 88

Combat Movement: 50

Full Movement: 100

Karma Points: 30

Karma Step: 13

**Powers:** Corrupt Karma 14, Horror Mark 16, Horror Thread 13, Karma Drain 12, Karma Tap 14, Spells: Circle 6 Elementalist, Circle 7 Illusionist

**Legend Points:** 57,000

**Equipment:** None

**Loot:** None





### SKYTREE RIVER

The Skytree River flows atop the trees and canopy of the Servos Jungle. This rare phenomena appears so infrequently that most explorers and scholars refuse to believe it is anything more than a tall tale. However, the river does exist.

When present, the Skytree River usually flows in a northerly direction over the Servos Jungle. The Skytree stays within the confines of the jungle but can meander quite a bit within its boundaries. The river's speed may vary as it passes through still lakes to rushing rapids, but travelers can expect to make about three days' walking distance for each day spent drifting on the river.

Name-giver items are not appreciated on the Skytree, and adventurers are advised to carry as few items as possible when traveling on the river. Any character who fails to heed this precaution or otherwise ignores the advice of the river spirits must achieve Good or better successes on his Charisma and Interaction tests for these tests to succeed. Characters who respect the river's wishes need achieve only Average successes on these tests. The river preserves equipment as best it can. Possessions bundled in leaves will float in the river and tend to follow their owners, whether they are tethered or not. However, untethered possessions may lag a few minutes behind a traveler.

Still water in the Skytree provides a +10 step bonus to Recovery Tests and a +6 step bonus to all uses of ritual magic and Read and Write Magic Tests. At the gamemaster's discretion, still water may provide a +6 step bonus to other mental or spiritual tests as well, as long as the tests take at least a few minutes to perform.

The Skytree's rapids demand respect. Safely negotiating the rapids requires a successful Strength or Dexterity Test (gamemaster's option) against a Difficulty Number ranging from 8 to 12. If the test fails, the character takes damage (use the Difficulty Number of the failed test as the Damage step). One or two rounds after a character is damaged or tries to exit the rapids, the rapids are satisfied and spit the character out to shore. The rapids also release unconscious characters.

As noted in the journal entry, living emeralds are found darting around the piranha-infested waters of the river. The emeralds range from pea-size to the size of a large dwarf's thumb. Living emeralds are worth from 400 to 1,200 silver pieces apiece and count as treasure worth Legend Points. Living emeralds are in fact living creatures, though they are incapable of independent movement. These emeralds store the memories of their past wearers, memories which can be recalled with full sensory detail by a current wearer of the emerald. Larger emeralds often retain one or two talents of a previous owner, and the gems can use these talents, as long as doing so does not require physical action. Emeralds speak in ringing voices.

All manner of creatures that inhabit the Servos Jungle may be found along the shore of the Skytree River. The blessings of the river spirits make these creatures much more intelligent than their ground-bound equivalents and provide them with the ability to speak as well. The river itself is home to several types of water creatures, most notably the Skytree piranhas.

Player characters may seek out the Skytree River if they need to catch a boat already heading upstream through the Servos Jungle. By riding the swift current of the Skytree, the characters can easily overtake their target and drop down through the forest onto the vessel of their unsuspecting target. Or a wealthy patron might hire player characters to chart the Skytree and determine if its appearances are predictable enough for traders to take advantage of its waters. Lastly, a Urupan noble dying from a wasting disease might wish to leave his successor a secure version of his will. In this case, a necklace of living emeralds could be just what the doctor ordered.

### SKYTREE PIRANHA

#### Attributes

DEX: 7                      STR: 7                      TOU: 5  
PER: 6                      WIL: 5                      CHA: 8

Initiative: 9

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 9

Damage: 10

Number of Spells: 1

Spellcasting: 17

Effect: Rivermatch

Physical Defense: 11

Spell Defense: 8

Social Defense: 12

Armor: 3

Mystic Armor: 8

Knockdown: 7

Recovery Tests: 2

Death Rating: 22

Wound Threshold: 6

Unconsciousness Rating: 16

Combat Movement: 40

Full Movement: 80

Legend Points: 75

Equipment: None

Loot: None, but they often guard living emeralds, 2 to 4 piranha per living emerald.

### Commentary (Skytree Piranha)

Skytree piranhas differ from those found in rivers that flow along the ground. Skytree piranhas are highly intelligent and not nearly as aggressive as their dimmer cousins. They enjoy pleasant and spirited conversation and are curious about the goings-on in the world below. They abhor Name-giver items polluting their river, and they will warn offenders only once before they attack. If the piranhas particularly enjoy a character's company, they may give him a living emerald.

The piranhas' Rivermatch ability enables them to take on the exact coloration of the surrounding water, rendering them nearly invisible. The result of the Rivermatch Test (the Spellcasting Test) is the Difficulty Number for spotting a Skytree piranha using this ability.



### FIRST CONTACT

Though most of Barsaive's kaers and citadels were reopened in the first few years after the Scourge ended, numerous smaller kaers across the province remain sealed. Horrors have corrupted many of these kaers, but some still contain communities that have remained hidden for decades, unaware of the Scourge's end. Isolated for centuries, these communities often develop their own strange beliefs and grow suspicious and paranoid of all outsiders—a phenomenon that can pose serious dangers to anyone who unseals such a kaer.

The reaction of Kaer Gellington's community to outsiders typifies the reception adventurers can expect when unsealing a kaer. Generally, kaer dwellers remain convinced that the Scourge is still raging and assume that any outsider who attempts to contact them is a pawn of a Horror or a Horror himself. And if years of isolation have led the community's beliefs to mutate in strange, unexpected ways, contact with Barsaive's mainstream culture may reinforce the kaer dwellers' paranoia.

Despite these dangers, the Kingdom of Throal remains committed to contacting such communities and unsealing their kaers. Generally, His Majesty's Exploratory Force handles such duties, but freelance adventurers are often hired to help on such missions. (The Kaer Knocking and Kaer Pictographs spells were developed by Exploratory Force magicians specifically for unsealing kaers.) Independent merchants, intent on opening new markets for their goods, also hire adventurers on a regular basis to unseal kaers.

When creating adventures of this sort, feel free to make the kaer community as paranoid, strange and dangerous as you like. Remember, such communities have lived in isolated, extreme conditions for centuries. What may seem perfectly normal to them may seem horrendous to other Name-givers. For example, a community forced to live in a confined space with limited food supplies may have developed authoritarian laws to keep order—they may behead individuals who question the decisions of the kaer's leaders, or they may punish couples for having too many children.

Also consider how the Scourge may have influenced a kaer community's views of magic, blood magic, Horrors, Throal, Thera, other races, and so on. For example, a community may revere the Scourge as a purifying act that cleanses the world. Another community may believe that the use of magic is responsible for the Scourge and thus view all magic and magicians as evil.

### Kaer Knocking

#### Circle 4 Wizard

Threads: 4

Range: Touch

Effect: Willforce + 5

Casting Difficulty: Target's Spell Defense (average kaer = 18)

Weaving Difficulty: 7/15

Duration: 1 minute

The Kaer Knocking spell creates a knocking sound when it interacts with a kaer's magical defenses. To cast the spell, a magician taps his knuckle against the kaer's wall and makes a Spellcasting Test. If the Spellcasting Test succeeds, the wizard makes an Effect Test. Anyone within a number of yards equal to the Effect Test result hears the spell's knocking sound. In most instances, kaer residents will investigate the sound in the hopes that their self-imposed exile is at last at an end.

The Kaer Knocking spell's Casting Difficulty is based on the target kaer's Spell Defense and varies according to the kaer's defenses. Average kaers have a Spell Defense of 18 for purposes of this spell, though their actual Spell Defenses may be much higher.

### Kaer Pictographs

#### Circle 5 Wizard

**Threads:** 4

**Weaving Difficulty:** 9/17

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** 10 minutes

**Effect:** Creates pictograph

**Casting Difficulty:** Target's Spell Defense (average kaer = 18)

To use the Kaer Pictographs spell, a magician first traces a picture on the outside of the target kaer. Then he makes a Spellcasting Test. If the test succeeds, the Kaer Pictographs spell reacts with the kaer's magical defenses and burns the same image on the inside wall of the kaer.

The spell's Casting Difficulty is based on the target kaer's Spell Defense and varies according to the kaer's defenses. Average kaers have a Spell Defense of 18 for purposes of this spell, though their actual Spell Defenses may be much higher.

Magicians can use the spell to "transmit" words and written messages, but a kaer's residents may be unable to read the message. Also, no resident may be nearby to notice the pictograph before the spell expires. For this reason, many wizards use the Kaer Knocking spell to get the kaer residents' attention before employing the Kaer Pictographs spell.



### THE VANISHING VILLAGE

Several variations of the vanishing village story are told throughout Barsaive, but all share a few common features. First, all the variations contend that the village exists in the real world for seven days out of every year. Second, all the stories warn that any traveler who remains in the village after the seventh day becomes trapped in the village forever. Many of the stories tell of travelers who attempted to "lift the curse" from the hamlet, but all of them invariably do something wrong and the village disappears instantly.

In most of these tales, the village's residents believe that escape from the village is impossible and are resigned to their fate. Usually, some villagers try to prevent visitors from entering the village or urge them to leave before they become trapped. Other villagers become embittered by their fate, however, and attempt to lure visitors into remaining past the seventh day and becoming trapped. In all the tales, the villagers are unable to directly tell visitors the truth about the village, though they can do so by indirect means. If asked about the village's sudden appearance, the villagers insist that the village has always been there and that the visitor must have simply missed it during his travels.

Gamemasters may determine the true story behind the village. In one scenario, the hamlet is controlled by a Horror, which uses it to lure fresh victims from outside. In this case, the Horror uses magic to make the village vanish and reappear, and characters will have to defeat the Horror to free the village. Or the villagers may be madmen who believe they are keeping their village free from Horror-taint by killing all passing strangers. In this scenario, the village leaders use powerful sacrificial blood magic to control the village's appearances. To free the village, characters will have to defeat the village leaders. In either case, the villagers may be under the control of the Horror or village leaders and turn against their would-be rescuers.

Alternatively, the village may be enchanted with the same some sort of magic used to keep Parlainth hidden for so long. In this case, player characters may be able to lift the enchantment by doing exactly the right thing at exactly the right time. For example, characters may be able to free the village by locating and using a unique magical treasure hidden somewhere in the village. Or perhaps a magician must cast a particular spell under the first full moon of the month of Raquas, or a troubadour must sing a particular song on the village green during the summer solstice to lift the enchantment. Gamemasters may set any conditions they want, but these conditions should always require the player characters be physically present in the village to free it.

Gamemasters can bring player characters to the village in a number of ways. For example, adventurers may stumble on it en route to someplace else, unaware that they may be trapped forever unless they figure out what's

going on before the seven days are up. Alternatively, player characters may intentionally travel to the village with the intent of breaking its "curse" and returning it to the physical world. Lightbearers or questors of Garlen or Mynbruje might hire adventurers for such a task, intent on bringing healing or justice to all the trapped people. Or player characters may hear of a legendary magical item belonging to an adept rumored to have disappeared seven years prior in the vicinity of the village. In turn, the item may be a key to freeing the village and have other related uses as well—such as freeing slaves from some Theran stronghold in Vivane Province, freeing someone from the grip of a Horror, dispelling the evil magic of a Horror or powerful magician who has kept people enslaved, and so on.



## NIGHTMARES

This entry describes an encounter with the bizarre Horror constructs known as nightworms. These creatures prey on the dreams of their victims, causing them to experience terrible nightmares. Nightworms are common to the Servos Jungle and other jungles of Barsaive, most notably the jungle that lies just south of the city of Kratas. As a result, player characters risk an encounter with nightworms any time they travel through one of Barsaive's jungles.

Klavena Tallarbre's journal entry describes just one possible encounter with nightworms. Alternatively, the daughter of a wealthy merchant who falls prey to nightworms during a hunting expedition into the Servos Jungle may hire the player characters to find her father and ensure his safe return. Or the player characters may

meet an individual who experiences nightmares as a result of a nightworm encounter. The survivor has convinced himself that he will find peace only if he returns to the jungle where his nightmares first began, and he hires the characters to take him there.

To make an encounter with the nightworms particularly unsettling, the gamemaster may choose to handle the initial nightmare as a waking dream. In other words, after the characters settle down for the night, the gamemaster may describe them getting up in the morning and pursuing their usual routine. At some point, the scene degenerates into a horrible tragedy or particularly bizarre series of events. When the players and characters seem thoroughly confused, the gamemaster simply states that the characters wake up, finally letting the players know that the whole event was just a bad dream. When the nightmares continue, the player characters should figure out fairly quickly that the dreams have an unnatural origin.

### Commentary (Nightworms)

Nightworms resemble giant silkworms with bulbous bodies. Individual worms may be as small as dogs or as large as calves. Their translucent skin and viscera camouflages them well, especially when hanging in trees. As many as six nightworms may inhabit a single nest.

As soon as a potential victim drifts off to sleep, the nightworms vibrate their own bodies to produce a sound similar to that created by cicadas. Make a Spellcasting Test against the victim's Spell Defense. If the test succeeds, the hum produces vivid nightmares in the victim. If the victim awakes, the hum immediately eases any of his fears and induces a deep level of relaxation that encourages further slumber. Over time, the combination of nightmares and subsequent comfort unbalance the victim's mind.

Though quite disturbing and terrifying in its own right, the nightworms' nightmare-inducing

## NIGHTWORMS

### Attributes

DEX: 6      STR: 6      TOU: 9  
PER: 9      WIL: 11      CHA: 6

Initiative: 7

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 12

Damage: See below

Number of Spells: 1

Spellcasting: 12

Effect: See below

Death Rating: 45

Wound Threshold: 10

Unconsciousness Rating: 40

Karma Points: 10

Legend Points: 300 each

Equipment: None

Loot: A variety of objects belonging to previous victims can be found in a giant cocoon hidden up in the trees.

Physical Defense: 8

Spell Defense: 12

Social Defense: 6

Armor: NA

Mystic Armor: 7

Knockdown: 6

Recovery Tests: 5

Combat Movement: 10

Full Movement: 40

Karma Step: 8

power is not the only threat these creatures pose. Nightworms have also been known to attack sleeping victims for food. Nightworms attack in this manner only if their natural food supply is low.

When attacking, nightworms drop down from the trees on strong threads of silk they extrude from their mouths. The nightworms then attempt to wrap their victim in a cocoon of silk. If successful, the nightworms carry the victim into the trees, where they suspend him in their nest. The nightworms gain sustenance from their prey by biting a small hole in the victim's abdomen and feeding at their leisure by sucking out the victim's internal organs.

Nightworms rely on surprise when attacking. If a victim awakens during an attack or another character discovers an attack in progress, the nightworms attempt to flee back into the trees using their threads. If cornered, they spit a thin mixture of silk into an attacker's face. This silk does Step 5 damage to the target and also has a paralyzing effect on any creature wrapped in it. Make a Spellcasting Test against the Spell Defense of any character who comes in contact with nightworm silk. If the test succeeds, the character suffers a -4 step penalty to all actions for the next 2 minutes.



### THE LOST CITY

The setting of **The Lost City** provides an excellent arena in which player characters may satisfy their tastes for jungle exploration, ruined cities and danger. If necessary, gamemasters can always lure players to the Servos Jungle by dropping hints about the physical and magical treasures hidden there. Once in the dark reaches of the jungle, characters may encounter a tangle of wild animals and mysterious forces, such as the water elemental (or was it a spell cast by some powerful jungle elementalist?) that destroyed the ship of T'Skriss R'scriimon and company. Jungle explorers—especially any who venture into the vicinity of the Lost City—may also face the creatures responsible for the deaths of R'scriimon's party of explorers. These beings, known by the primitive human tribes in the area as the *chidra* (pronounced chee-dra), are strong, wiry, plant-like creatures.

The Lost City itself presents one of the Servos's greatest mysteries. Even Barsaive's most renowned historians have no idea who or what built the ruined metropolis, which dates back to an age long before the Scourge. The walls of the city's central plaza contain numerous carvings, weathered by the winds and rains of millennia.

These inscriptions may be a historical or mythological record of the city's builders and their origins, but they are written in

some archaic, long-dead language that has baffled even Barsaive's most learned lexicographers.

Whomever they were, the city's builders were consummate architects and craftsmen—and wealthy beyond belief. Thousands of years of jungle growth have done little to obscure the beauty of the city's crumbling ruins and the numerous artifacts of gold, orichalcum and other precious metals still hidden within it. And even the city's most humble buildings and sculptures are studded with dazzling arrays of jewels and precious metals. Would-be explorers should take care, however, for the city's ruins also conceal a variety of jungle creatures, ranging from harmless critters to deadly beasts.

#### CHIDRA

##### Attributes

DEX: 7                      STR: 10                      TOU: 15  
PER: 7                      WIL: 7                      CHA: 5

Initiative: 9

Number of Attacks: 3

Attack: 10

Damage: 13

Number of Spells: NA

Spellcasting: NA

Effect: NA

Death Rating: 100

Wound Threshold: 20

Unconsciousness Rating: Immune

Physical Defense: 13

Spell Defense: 10

Social Defense: 7

Armor: 5

Mystic Armor: 5

Knockdown: 12

Recovery Tests: 5

Combat Movement: 42

Full Movement: 85

Legend Points: 200

Equipment: None

Loot: None

**Commentary (Chidra)**

Found only in the deepest regions of the Servos Jungle, chidra are known of only by a handful of jungle tribes. These large creatures resemble plant or wood elementals, but they constitute a distinct species apparently produced by the Servos Jungle's unique evolutionary environment, or perhaps spawned by elemental magic gone awry.

The well-camouflaged chidra usually possess two main appendages, which they use for walking, as well as any number of other appendages. They are extremely strong, difficult to kill (they can lose appendages and feel almost no pain) and vicious. Extremely territorial creatures, chidra will attack any creature that enters their territory without warning. Finally, the carnivorous chidra sustain themselves on the flesh of large animals and Name-givers.

Generally, chidra cannot be distinguished from the surrounding jungle until they move. To detect a chidra, a character must make a successful Perception Test against a Difficulty Number of 12. Reduce the Difficulty Number to 9 for characters with the Wilderness Survival skill or knowledge skills in areas such as Botany or Natural Sciences.





### LIGHTHOUSE SANCTUARY

Horrors may assume many guises in Barsaive, taking the form of anything from Name-givers to shapes born of nightmares. The author of this journal entry is one such Horror, a Horror whose only known Name is the Lightkeeper. The Lightkeeper is a parasitic type of Horror that can reside within a host victim's body and assume the host's identity. Thus disguised, the Lightkeeper lulls other unsuspecting prey into a false sense of security before striking.

The Lightkeeper can be introduced into adventures in a number of ways. For example, the Lightkeeper might assume the identity of one of the player characters' allies. The ally might be one whom the characters have already met or one that they have been directed to contact by another person. Alternatively, the player characters may meet a harmless-looking troubadour or farmer that the

Lightkeeper has possessed. The Lightkeeper will surreptitiously let it slip that he knows the location of some sort of great treasure, while in truth he is merely toying with the characters. Or the Lightkeeper might assume the identity of a highly placed official within the Kingdom of Throal, such as a visiting emissary or an advisor to King Varulus. In this case, some of Throal's noblemen may suspect the emissary or advisor is a Theran spy and hire the characters to uncover the truth. Gamemasters can expand the scope of adventures with the Lightkeeper by having the Horror possess powerful individuals, such as the head of a troll clan or King Varulus himself. The fate of Barsaive may hang in the balance during such adventures.

#### Commentary (The Lightkeeper)

The Lightkeeper is a parasitic minor Horror that enters the body of a host victim and assumes the victim's identity. Curious by nature, the Lightkeeper uses its disguise to pass among Barsaive's Name-givers and learn more about the province and its inhabitants. The Horror has no qualms, however, about killing anyone who gets in its way or who just happens to be available. Once the Lightkeeper becomes bored with its surroundings, it kills any nearby Name-givers who have witnessed its actions and exits its host by tearing through the host's body somewhere between the base of the neck and the lower back.

In its natural form, the Lightkeeper resembles a large black locust, approximately the size of a man's hand. It moves around on six legs, climbing trees easily and even flying for short distances. When confronted in this form, the Lightkeeper is a relatively weak combatant, though its powers and agility make it difficult to kill. When inside a host, the Horror uses the host's statistics, as well as its own powers and Karma dice.

To possess a host, the Lightkeeper pries open the host's jaws and crawls into his mouth while the host is asleep or unconscious. From there, the Horror eats its way to the host's brain cavity, where it chews out a place for itself and attaches itself to the host's brain stem. The host is virtually powerless to stop the Lightkeeper once the Horror gains entrance to his mouth. The host can do little but suffer excruciating agony as the Lightkeeper eats its way into his brain cavity.

While occupying a host's body, the Lightkeeper mingles well with other Name-givers, carrying on witty conversation with ease. However, it merely wears the host's body like a suit of clothing—it

#### THE LIGHTKEEPER\*

##### Attributes

DEX: 11      STR: 10      TOU: 9  
PER: 12      WIL: 11      CHA: 8

Initiative: 11      Physical Defense: 15  
Number of Attacks: 1      Spell Defense: 16  
Attack: 12      Social Defense: 11  
Damage: 13 (Bite)      Armor: 5  
Number of Spells: 1      Mystic Armor: 4  
Spellcasting: 18      Knockdown: 5  
Effect: See below      Recovery Tests: 3

Death Rating: 50      Combat Movement: 90  
Wound Threshold: 13      Full Movement: 180  
Unconsciousness Rating: 43      Flight: 90/45

Karma Points: 25      Karma Step: 9

Powers: Horror Mark 12, Spell: Evil Eye

Legend Points: 1,500

Equipment: None

Loot: None

\*These stats represent the Lightkeeper in its natural form.

makes no effort to imitate the host's speech patterns or physical mannerisms. As a result, anyone who is acquainted with the host will recognize immediately that something is amiss.



### THE WRECK OF THE ZEPHYR

Player characters who wish to investigate the fate of the *Zephyr* and the possible existence of giants in Barsaive will need ample provisions and airship passage to get them near their destination. In fact, the *Zephyr* was blown far off course during its ill-fated voyage. The airship actually overshot Parlainth and went down in an area beyond Barsaive's borders. Any explorers who search for the wreck must venture literally off the map, into lands uncharted by Name-givers. The journal probably ended up in the Caucavik Mountains thanks to another intrepid hero who explored the lands beyond Barsaive's borders but died on his journey home.

Most likely, explorers will need to obtain airship passage at least to the northeast border of Barsaive. Few, if any, airship crews are willing to travel beyond the border—most fear the terrible creatures rumored to live in the

unexplored regions, and some air sailors believe they would sail past the edge of the world and be unable to return. As a result, explorers will be on their own once they reach the border. The border area itself is rugged, unforgiving wilderness, and so adventurers should take extra provisions. The scattered, isolated tribes that inhabit the region may still tell tales of an airship that passed by long ago, and they may even be able to point the adventurers in the general direction of where they believe it might lie. Beyond that, player characters must rely on their own powers of investigation and observation.

After passing into the uncharted land beyond the border, player characters should encounter severe weather conditions and wild animals—some known, some unknown. Otherwise, gamemasters may present the uncharted regions in any manner they desire. Fabulous creatures, monsters, lost civilizations—gamemasters can throw anything they like at the player characters.

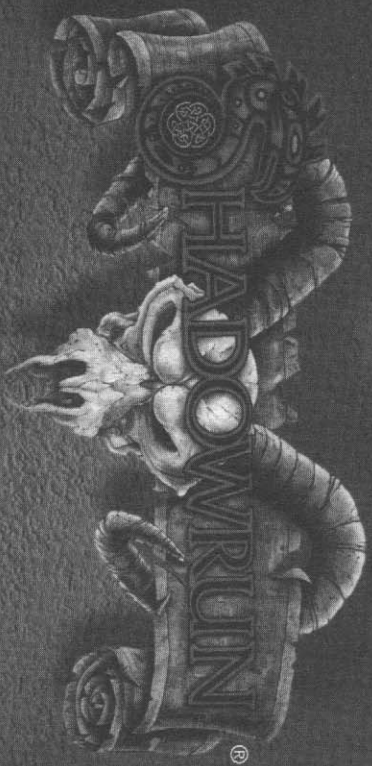
Gamemasters can also use the *Zephyr's* cargo to lure player characters into an expedition to find the wreck. Jannut Farr's journal mentions Parlainth, the pre-Scourge Theran capital of Barsaive, as the airship's destination. But the journal makes no mention of the trip's purpose or the airship's cargo. At the time of the *Zephyr's* trip, Parlainth was one of Barsaive's mightiest cities, so it is entirely plausible that the airship was carrying a shipment of orichalcum, gold or precious gems, or the ship may have been carrying a powerful, priceless Theran magical device or weapon. At any rate, the airship's purpose and cargo are entirely up to the gamemaster.

Finally the gamemaster may determine whether or not giants really exist in the lands northeast of Barsaive. If gamemasters decide that the true nature of the "giant" can be classified as something already known to Name-givers, he may choose one of the following options or create an entirely different explanation. Most likely, Jannut Farr saw a great form air elemental. The motivations and behaviors of such beings remain unfathomable to most Name-givers, but the spirit might have been guarding the mountain range for some unknown reason and viewed the airship as a trespasser. Or the giant may have been a manifestation of one of Passions, such as Thystonius, Mynbruje or even Jaspree. In this case, the *Zephyr's* mission or cargo may have angered the Passion. Alternatively, the giant may have really been a giant, and Jannut Farr's journal may simply be the first documented Barsaivian account of such a creature.



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