The Candlekeep Compendium

Volume II

Volume 11

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Produced by

Candlekeep

The Library of Forgotten Realms Lore

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EDITORIAL

elcome to yet another volume of the Candlekeep Compendium, a collection of the finest Realmslore selected from the shelves of Candlekeep and from travels around Faerûn, and beyond.

Within this, our second volume, ye will find a number of articles. Some are further installments to ongoing series, researched by some of our specialist scribes. Yet again, we delve into the ways of the Dwarves, hear of numerous tales and adventures from more recent times and also focus on a renowned elven ranger as well as men from the not-too-distant Moonshae Isles.

Again, Rikos Dughol brings us his detailed tour of Berdusk, and an elven mercenary group from the High Forest is unveiled in another of our regular columns. Further north still, we have reports back from Amarae, Scribe of Candlekeep and traveler of the Silver Marches, giving us information on the finer points of life yonder.

But a thought must go out to three of our Master Scribes, who have traveled beyond Faerûn, even beyond Toril, to venture forth to the dangerous planes to give us an insight into the Barrens of Doom and Despair, Hoar's domain and Talona's realm. Their scrolls made it back in time for this volume; let us also hope that the scribes themselves return sometime soon.

So with these words, I leave ye to peruse this tome of lore, and hope ye enjoy these latest installments from the halls of Candlekeep.

- Alaundo of Candlekeep

The authors, artists and editors of the Compendium would like to dedicate this volume to Alaundo and the staff of Candlekeep for their steadfast and tireless efforts in making a wonderful home here at Candlekeep for all scribes and seekers of knowledge of the Realms.

The Hammer's Stroke

By Kevin Liss

Dwarves are commonly likened to stone, a fitting comparison in most cases. Being compared with a stone, however, does not mean dwarves are dour, cold, and unmoving all the time. Many dwarven communities have taken to keeping bees to harvest their honey, a product that many of the most battle-hardened dwarves enjoy.

It is often surprising to find the frequency with which many shield and gold dwarves turn to honey in their everyday lives. They use the nectar in a variety of ways, ranging from cooking to healing. They even use it to create some of their stonecrafts. First, however, we need to ask where the honey comes from that is so prolific in dwarven society.

Generations ago, a secret society of dwarven druids was formed between neighboring dwarven clans. Druids of the dwarven variety, of course, were as common then as they are today, which is to say that they are rare. While the average dwarf respects the stone, and everything found within it, he looks to Moradin and the Morndinsamman for guidance when dealing with natural phenomenon. Druids are seen as a product of the humans and elves, so more often druids are faerie folk of the woods in the eyes of a good dwarf. Not everyone conforms to the standards of the society, however. A small group of druids, called the Earth and Stone Conclave, met and shared their uniquely dwarven ideas. Every sub-race of dwarf was present, and the wild dwarf druids of Chult introduced their cousins to the secret of beekeeping.

Wishing to take advantage of the knowledge passed on to them, the shield and gold dwarves sought out beehives to farm in order to gain the bees' sweet nectar - honey. With a little-known "sweet tooth", dwarves readily accepted the druid's new ideas of beekeeping into their clan homes. Of course, dwarves previously knew about honey, even craved it so much that they sought out merchants willing to trade the stuff. Yet, being dwarves, they knew nothing about raising bees to harvest their honey. By accepting the unusual ways of their nature-loving brethren, dwarves found a handy source of honey and dwarven druids found their place within society.

Over the centuries the druid Beeskeepers found new and interesting uses for honey, and a few even found larger sources of honey. Several of the Citadels of the North and a few of the larger cities in the Great Rift have mastered the art of keeping giant bees. Giant bees occasionally produce greater quantities of honey, yet this is not always the case. The larger bees often find it harder to harvest enough nectar for honey, so dwarves have found that regular size bees produce a larger volume of honey at a faster rate. Giant bees do create massive honeycombs, however, a vital ingredient in brewing mead. Giant bees, grown large, can also act as mounts for the dwarven druids. It is a fearsome sight to behold a dwarf painted in black and yellow stripes flying into battle atop a large giant bee with a swarm of angry bees acting as shock troops before them!

1001 Uses

The first use many dwarves found for honey is in making mead. Dwarven mead is second to none among brewers of fine fermentation, so the continued need of honey is a priority among the brewer guilds. The diluted, fermented honey is a labor of love among dwarven brewers, with many of the finer kegs taking decades to make. Mixing

together water (usually from fresh mountain streams) and honeycombs, the dwarves use large clay pots to give the fermenting mixture that earthy aroma. Many add some extra herbs, and the occasional ground mushroom, to make a concoction so potent that many non-dwarves barely make it through their first pint. The honeycomb of the giant bees produces the finest brews, and some connoisseurs claim that the end product rivals some of the best elven wines. A few of the labels of mead, each highlighting a particular variety, include Blackhammer Dry, Sparkling Sorndar, Medium Yund, and Sweet Undurr.

Dwarven clerics were quick to accept the druid's beekeeping since they knew of several uses for honey. Honey can be used as a natural remedy for curing minor ailments, and is also an ingredient used in various ointments. Some rare spells have been found to require dabs of honey, and some arcane specialists find that honey works just as well as a live spider when attempting a *spider climb* spell, and it tastes better, too. Some rituals and ceremonies are enhanced through the offering of honey. One such ritual is the groundbreaking of a new mine. Another ceremonial use for honey involves pouring it over the threshold of a newly married couple's abode -- not to mention the uses the couple finds on their consummation of marriage!

Beauty and personal care products are also by-products of honey. While many think of dwarves as having stone skin, they actually prefer soft skin, especially the women. Honey and milk baths naturally soften the skin, and certain masks applied to the face enhance the color and feel of the skin. Dwarven beards and hair benefit from treatments enhanced by honey. Honey also is helpful in brewing magical ointments, in that it allows for better coating and keeps them from irritating the skin.

Few non-dwarves know of the value of honey in construction. Amazingly, yet making perfect sense, honey makes a great ingredient in mixing cement. Adding the right amount of honey into the mixture will create cement as hard as any stone. Another use for honey in construction and crafting is as an additive in glazing. Some surfaces, both for construction and for crafts, benefit from a honey-mixed glaze that enhances not only the beauty of the surface, but also the hardness (it adds +1 to an object's hardness), the after-effect being a golden sheen over the surface of the object.

Of course honey is a common additive for dwarves in their food. Dwarves will add honey to almost anything to enhance its flavor. As much as they like honey, however, dwarves are dwarves, and they do not overindulge in eating honey. They use small amounts, and rarely eat the stuff straight. The exception to this is the occasional treat of honeycomb. Since the honeycomb itself is edible, dwarves will eat it whole, honey and all. However, not wanting to deplete their supply, they save them for special occasions and festivals.

One last use for honey is in warfare. Honey is oftentimes used to coat the ground before an advancing enemy within the confines of a dwarven home. This creates a sticky surface. They take advantage of this effect by enhancing the ground with traps of some sort. In addition, the dwarves will roll large rocks down an incline into the area where those covered with the honey will find it difficult to outrun the trap, or will just slip in it. On slopes, the dwarves will create natural, jagged surfaces that those sliding through the honey will impale upon if they slip. Also, the giant bees many dwarven communities keep are not too keen on outsiders infringing upon their territory. One common defense the dwarves use is to herd opponents to the bee caves, often several natural chambers away from the hold, and let the giant bees finish them off.

Beeskeepers

The druid Beeskeepers are not a Prestige Class. Rather, they follow certain standards that help in their given profession - beekeeping. All Beeskeepers are druids, although many multiclass as fighters, rangers, or even barbarians. They stock up on items to help alleviate or even prevent irritation from bee-stings and poisons, and always *summon* bees when possible.

Beeskeepers spend most of their days tending to the needs of the hives they manage, with most of the balance of their time spent perfecting uses for the honey they harvest. Beeskeepers are spread throughout many dwarven communities across Toril, but are usually limited to the shield and gold dwarf holdings. Wild dwarfs have a unique method of beekeeping that any other race would see as not keeping bees at all. They allow the bees to naturally form hives while lending the occasional spell to enhance productivity, and harvest honey as they need it. They are not officially Beeskeepers, even though they introduced their cousins to hive cultivation.

In battle, Beeskeepers mount their giant bee, if the community keeps such creatures, and wield their "stingers", or spears. They are adept defenders of their community and are not afraid to utilize their main weapons, the bees themselves. Many paint their bodies to match the black and yellow stripes of the bees for added value. While most dwarves take a head-on approach, the style of combat the Beeskeepers use is based on irritating an opponent into retreat with repeated stinging attacks rather than head-on confrontation. When roused to defend their "hive", however, they fight to the death.

Folk of Faerun

Warflechion 'Fletch' Owlfeather

By Lee J Nelson

Warflechion "Fletch" Owlfeather (male, wood elf, Age: 121, AL: CG, High Forest, Ranger 11/Deepwood Sniper 3)

Appearance:

letch is slim, but strong and swift. His mossy-brown hair looks like a patch of grass sitting atop his head, but that helps him blend into the forest more easily. His eyes, a deep shade of green accentuated by gold flecks, shine with strength and intensity. His skin is a coppery brown, typical of those sometimes referred to as "copper elves".

His attire is green and brown, the colors of the forest. He wears a long cape that flows like leaves in the wind, and looks like tree bark when he is not moving. Fletch wears earthy studded leather, and soft puma-skin boots that never leave a track. His bracers are fashioned of bone, and decorated with intricate carvings of owls. His ring, too, is made of bone, as is the knife in his belt -- a knife that looks more suitable for carving than fighting. On his back is a quiver, decorated with owl feathers.

His most precious item, however, hardly leaves his hands -- his composite longbow. Fletch fashioned it himself, from the wing-bones of a giant owl who gave his life to protect both the forest and his elven friend. The only decoration on the bow is an etched arrow, the symbol of Solonor Thelandira.

Personality:

Fletch can seem very aloof, until you get to know him. He only has a few close friends, and doesn't go out of his way to make more. He is very kindhearted when it comes to good people and creatures, but he can be remorseless and unforgiving when it comes to enemies of the forest. He is an elf of few words, preferring to communicate by body language like animals do. He also enjoys bone-crafting, believing that the spirits of the animals live on through their bones.

Background:

Fletch was born and raised in the High Forest. His mother, Olystia, is a high druid of the second circle. His father, Warwren, is an important diplomat between the High Forest wood elves and their surrounding neighbors. With both of his parents busy, Fletch spent a lot of his childhood in the forest, among the animals and the rangers of his people. His mother, of course, wanted him to be a druid, but he wasn't strong in the magic. His father tried to make him a diplomat, but Fletch was never comfortable communicating with people. He found that he was an excellent archer and became a respected ranger.

When Fletch was still very young, his father met with another diplomat from the far off avariel elves. Fletch became fast friends with the diplomat's daughter, Valerie Songfeather, while their fathers talked. They kept in touch over the years, and their friendship deepened. When the two elves came of age, they married by the customs of both of their races. Now they are never far apart, and even when they are, they are in constant rapport with each other. Their fathers are very happy; they see it as a good sign of relations between the two races, and their trade of avariel glasssteel for wood elven bone-made and wooden products has been booming.

Recently, Fletch and Valerie have joined forces with their new friend, Alexia Ghalelani, a paladin of Sune. Valerie and Alexia met while studying at one of the many fine bardic schools in Silverymoon, and became fast

friends. Now the trio are on a mission, suposedly from Alustriel herself, to determine how large a threat the fey'ri are to the Silver Marches.

For Fletch, nothing is more important than his friends, for whom he would do anything. His home, the High Forest, his family, and the animals come next. His is also protective of his companion, Nightfeather, a young giant owl that became his companion after her father died protecting him. He wants to help the Silver Marches as a whole, as he has come to see a strength and goodness in the unity of many good races.

At first, Fletch learned to fight orcs and goblins, but later came to know the true enemies of the High Forest: the drow and the fey'ri. He trained especially to fight both of these races, and counts them as his most hated enemies.

Statistics:

Warflechion "Fletch" Owlfeather: Male Wood-elf Ranger 11/Deepwood Sniper 3; AL: CG, Location: High Forest.

Stats: (based on 32 point buy) HP: 22 + 13d8; Init +5; Speed 30ft; AC 14; BAB +14/+6/+1; Fort +9, Ref +15, Will +6; Str 16, Dex 20, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 10. Height 5'9", weight 145lbs. Age: 121; Languages: Elven and Common.

Skills and feats: Balance +13, Climb +13, Concentration +6, Craft (bonecraft) +10, Hide +9, Knowledge (Nature) +12, Listen +12, Move Silently +10, Ride +15, Search +12, Spot +14, Survival +12. Treetopper, Track, Concentration +6, Craft (bonecraft) +10, Hide +9, Knowledge (Nature) +12, Listen +12, Move Silently +10, Ride +15, Search +12, Spot +14, Survival +12. Treetopper, Track, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (Longbow), Endurance, Manyshot, Point Blank Shot, Far Shot, Improved Precise Shot, Craft Magic Arms and Armor.

Spells: 1 3/day, 2 3/day, 3 2/day. Favorites: Nature's Favor, Briar Web, and Detect Favored Enemy.

Special Abilities: Wood Elf Racial Traits, Favored Enemy: Humanoid (Goblinoid) +2, Outsider (Evil) +4, Humanoid (Elf) +4, Wild Empathy, Archery Combat Style, Animal Companion, Improved Archery Combat Style, Woodland Stride, Swift Tracker, Evasion, Archery Combat Style Mastery, Keen Arrows, Range Increment Bonus +30ft, Concealment Reduction, Magic Weapon, Projectile Improved Critical, Safe Poison Use

Items: *Horned Hunter* (Mighty +2 Composite Longbow +4, Hawkeye), *Bone Bracers of Inspired Aim*, Traceless Boots, Feathered Bonequiver, Carving Boneknife (Keen, Craft Wonderous Item [only bonecraft and only if creator has +2 craft (bonecraft) above the requirement]), Studded Leather +3, *Cloak of the Forest* (+2 Hide and Move Silently, increase to +5 in forested areas), Fortified Bone Ring (immune to disease), *Gloves of Dexterity +2*.

Folk of Faerun

The Brothers of Doom

By Jamey Martin

Stradidar of Moray (a.k.a The Swordwielder) (male, human, AL: CN(G), Fighter 14) *(AD&D 2nd Edition)*

Appearance:

Stradidar is a man of rugged good looks, despite the scar that runs down his forehead, grazing his left eye, to his cheek. He stands an even 6' tall, and is a lean, muscular 215 lbs. His jet black hair is shoulder-length and usually unkempt, while his piercing eyes are emerald green.

Personality:

Stradidar tends to be a quiet, sombre man of great confidence ("best there is, best there ever was, best there ever will be") and hidden sorrows. He has a great love for his native Morayans, as well as the other Ffolkish tribes of the Moonshaes, and he will freely risk his life for the good of Ffolk and Goddess. His years of travel across Faerûn have also softened his feelings for Northmen, though he still carries a "soft" or "friendly" prejudice against them. However, while he will take each person as they come, mainlanders are almost always viewed with suspicion and mistrust; he tends to regard them as two-faced, arrogant and/or naïve troublemakers. In dealings with them, Stradidar gives nothing freely, but will undertake almost any task for the right price.

Statistics:

Stradidar of Moray: Male human Fighter 14; AL: CN(G), Location: Moray, the Moonshae Isles.

Stats: (2nd Edition AD&D) Armour Class: -6, Move: 12", Hit Points: 92, Thac0: 7, Attacks: 2/1, STR 18/07 INT 14 WIS 16 DEX 21 CON 16 CHA 17

Weapon Proficiencies: Ambidexterity, Longsword (3) + Weapon-Shield Style + Two Weapon Style + Two Handed Style, Longbow, Dagger, Battle Axe, Flail.

Non-Weapon Proficiencies: Endurance, Fire Building, Hunting, Running, Swimming, Seamanship.

Special Abilities: Stradidar has been rendered immune to all scrying and location magic by Midnight\Mystra, her own included.

Also, Stradidar receives a +1 to-hit in melee combat due to his fierce Morayan temper.

Items: *Studded Leather +2, Shield +3, Dagger +1, Torc of the Goddess +2, Boots of the North, Longsword +4 ("Deathrise").*

Deathrise

The origin of the fabled blade Deathrise is unknown, but it has been speculated that it was created long ago at the command of Talos, using a small portion of his essence. Exactly how one comes into possession of the blade, and indeed, how Stradidar himself came into possession of the blade, is not entirely known. When the sword is grasped, the wielder is beset with powerful emotions and whispering thoughts that prompt him or her to deeds of death and destruction. Only in the hands of a strong-willed wielder, who also serves its purpose (to kill), does the sword make its special abilities available.

Longsword +4, Int 17, Ego: 16, Alignment: CN(E)

Special Powers: Deathrise generally resides in a pocket dimension until summoned to the hand of its rightful keeper by an act of will. It can be dismissed by a similar act of will. Furthermore, it can heal its wielder, as per the *heal* spell, once/week, and has a special vampiric ability that enables it to restore 1 hp to its wielder for every 3 HP it inflicts.

* * * *

The Reacher (male, human, AL: CN, Fighter 17) *(AD&D 2nd Edition)*

Appearance:

The Reacher is a fierce, pop-eyed man of sneering visage. Though he stands only 5'8", he is a stocky powerhouse of iron sinew and uncanny grace of movement. His long black hair is tied back into braids and hangs past the small of his back, while his glaring eyes are crystal blue. He is not pleasing to look upon.

Personality:

The Reacher is a crude, boisterous man, of loud, sneering disposition and mocking chuckles, who revels in warfare and the glory of warfare. While he has a great love of his clan, a true friendship with Stradidar, and a rather unhealthy respect for warrior-prowess, he tends to be anywhere from tolerant to rapidly bigoted towards virtually all outsiders. Nevertheless, he exudes strength and ability, naturally inspiring confidence in those in his charge, and is willing to muster some grudging respect for favourable displays of strength and courage.

Statistics:

The Reacher: Male human Fighter 17 (as at 1368DR); AL: CN, Location: Moray, the Moonshae Isles.

Stats: (2nd Edition AD&D) Armour Class: -1, Move: 12", Hit Points: 145, Thac0: 4, Attacks: 2/1, STR 18/00 INT 9 WIS 9 DEX 15 CON 19 CHA 15

Weapon Proficiencies: Two-handed Sword (2), Longbow (2), Bastard Sword + Weapon Shield Style, Battle Axe, Short Sword, Dagger, Morning Star.

Non-Weapon Proficiencies: Endurance, Seamanship, Hunting, Fishing, Fire Building, Animal Lore, Animal Handling (Canines).

Special Abilities: The Reacher's fierce Morayan temper affords him a +1 to-hit in melee combat.

Items: *Bracers of Defence (AC4), Torc of the Goddess +2, Cloak of Protection +2, Boots of the North, Two-handed Sword +4 Defender, Short Sword of Sharpness.*

* * * *

History of the Brothers of Doom

According to the tales of the bards of Moray, the lad who would grow into Stradidar was born in the fierce Morayan clan MacFinnian. When Stradidar was just 14 winters old, his clan fell to an exceptionally bloodthirsty Northmen raid. The MacFinnians were slaughtered to a man. Young Stradidar survived by virtue of having been away, receiving the hospitality of the mighty clan MacArt.

The MacArts were perhaps the most powerful and warlike clan on all of Moray. Amongst their fellow Morayans, the MacArts were greatly renowned for their legendary "reavers", the seafaring bands of raiders they sent forth to harry the yellow beards. Thus, when the slaughter of the MacFinnians was discovered, it took little for young Stradidar to inspire them to vengeance and slaughter.

And so it was that the last of the MacFinnians led a band of wild Morayan reavers on the trail of what turned out to be an outlaw band of Northmen. The folk of Oman's Island suffered gravely that spring, but in the end the savage marauders were found and slaughtered to a man.

For the next two years, Stradidar lived amongst the MacArts as one of them, learning each of the heroic skills they taught. It was during this time that he formed his great friendship with the short, stocky powerhouse foreigners know as "the Reacher". In due time, the last of the MacFinnians is known to have ventured forth on his own.

Some bards say that Stradidar went forth into Myrloch Vale during this time, there to die and find his way to the halls of his ancestors. Here it is said he came face to face with the Shee, but rather than dying, as is the fate of all who behold the fabled rider, he is said to have lain with her, to have learned from her the art of swordsmanship, and to have at last been awarded the fabled blade *Deathrise*.

Other bards say that he ventured to Waterdeep during this time, where he joined a band of deceitful adventurers who betrayed

him and left him for dead at a ruin some days east of the City of Splendours. These bards go on to tell of how Stradidar was found, nursed back to health, and taught the art of swordsmanship by a mysterious hermit known only as the Prince of Swords. Before his departure, this hermit gifted him with the blade *Deathrise*.

Either way, it eventually came to pass that in the Year of the Saddle (1345 DR), Stradidar returned to the Moonshaes, where he became a scout in the army of King Brian Kendrick of Corwell. Over the next two years, the man who would become renowned as the Swordwielder met up with his old friend the Reacher, and together aided the young Tristan Kendrick in defeating Kazgoroth and establishing his rule as High-King of the Ffolk.

In the Year of the Bright Blade (1347 DR), the first year of the reign of High-King Tristan Kendrick, Stradidar and the Reacher departed the Moonshaes. They soon came to rest in Tethyr, and found employment in the service of Baron Draknoth of the Purple Marches. After saving the Baron from an attempted assassination, and consequently undertaking a couple of missions on his behalf, the Morayans earned the contempt of a certain Count Albreks of Vintor. Albreks subsequently arranged the death of Baron Draknoth's wife and children, and then had the Morayans framed for it.

During their time in prison, they met a former pirate captain named Harguth the Black. He spoke often of a map concealed in a tattoo found on the back of the daughter of a powerful Amnian merchant -- a map whispered to lead to an unimaginable horde of gold and treasure.

It soon came to pass that the Morayans and a host of other prisoners were released during the Alemandrian Interregnum, when the folk of Tethyr rose up to slay and drive out their decadent nobility. Escaping with Harguth, the two eventually found themselves as members of the pirate-captains crew, plundering the coasts of Tethyr and Amn. In time, the pirates managed a bold kidnapping of the aforementioned merchant's daughter, who turned out to be a beautiful lass by the name of Cassalandra. As soon as she was brought aboard, Harguth attempted to rape the lass, only to be discovered and slain by Stradidar.

Having been wise to the fact that Harguth had been withholding loot from the rest of the crew, the Swordwielder used this as a justification for his killing of pirate captain. Then, with the backing of the Reacher, the Swordwielder assumed command of the ship.

Following the map to the jungles of Chult, the vessel was intercepted by a trio of Amnian warships. Cassalandra was rescued, and, despite her pleas, the pirate ship destroyed off the coast of Calimshan.

The Morayans washed up on the shores of Calimshan, where they were found by Schaminder, the daughter of the Syl-Pasha Rashid of Calimshan. Taking pity on the barbarians, especially the dashing one, the princess had her servants take them back to the palace and nurse them back to health. Her father, however, did not take well to the foreigners, and immediately sent them forth to break a curse that had brought an endless drought to the eastern reaches of his realm. When the Morayans returned, successful, the Syl-Pasha and his would-be son-in-law, Brahanu of Schamedar, feigned glee and ordered a great victory feast for the heroes. Their food and drink, however, were drugged. When next they awoke, they were in chains and en route to the mines of Sa'Hallum, in the Wormbone Hills of the Western Shaar.

They did not linger there very long before staging a general escape in the Year of the Morningstar (1350 DR). From the mines, they made their way northward. While being chased through the lands of the Balithzarites, the duo took refuge in an old ruin into which their pursuers would not follow. Within they encountered a hideous demon, managed to slay it, and in the process brought the ruin down. When the Morayans emerged, they found themselves surrounded by Balithzarites. Rather than attacking them, however, the tribesmen bowed deeply and brought the duo back to their camp to meet their chieftain. It was here that they were

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first called the "dra'uk omerdras" or "Brothers of Doom".

The pair traveled through the Border Kingdoms and the Vilhon Reach, into Sembia and the Moonsea South. As they crossed the land, the legend of the Brothers of Doom began to grow. In Chondath, the First Lord Hadrian of Arrabar was toppled and Eles Wianar put in his stead by the Morayans. In Sembia, they placed the severed head of a relatively high-ranking member of the Sembian Cult of the Dragon upon a pike atop the tallest hill in sight of Urmlaspyr.

With the eruption of civil war in Yûlash, the Brothers of Doom moved north from Urmlaspyr to enlist in the army of Lord Melvuth Greystone. Over the course of the next year, they completed a number of missions and scored many fine military victories for House Greystone. They soon found themselves ranking officers and confidants of Lord Greystone himself.

As the war heated up, the Zhents began to back certain factions in the war, sending their troops in under the aegis of "peace-keepers". Hillsfar responded in kind, offering Melvuth (amongst others) its aid. The Brothers of Doom strongly discouraged Melvuth from accepting an outside alliance, and he followed their counsel. Unfortunately, within the month Melvuth was assassinated and the Brothers of Doom captured and thrown into the arena at Hillsfar.

Having won the favour of the crowd, it came to pass that Maalthiir offered the Brothers of Doom their freedom if they could complete his "nine trials". Though successful in this endeavour, Maalthiir sought to keep the Morayans imprisoned in the darkest dungeons of Hillsfar, but they were aided in escaping by a sympathetic Red Plume named Braccio of Ordulin.

Escaping to Braccio's Ordulin estate with Maalthiir's prized possession, the priceless gem known as the Emerald Tear, it was not long before assassins came for the lot of them. Eventually, a frustrated Maalthiir hired the feared assassin Thistlork of Thay. Like the others, however, both the assassin and his minions were set upon and slain by the Morayan savages. The Brothers then took Thistlork's severed head, cut the rune of warning into its forehead, and then sent it to Maalthiir in a box.

In the Year of the Worm (1356 DR), the Brothers signed on as mercenaries in Sembia's war against Lashan of Scardale. Meeting up with a fellow islander, a Northman by the name of Illyass Vandervin, the duo next spent some time exploring the ruins of Myth Drannor.

In the Year of the Prince (1357 DR), it came to pass that the Brothers of Doom were hired by a mysterious employer to slay an evil witch named Midnight. When Stradidar first came face to face with the witch, however, he found himself smitten with her beauty. The great womanizer submitted his sword to her service, and much time was spent fighting off a string of Zhentarim assassins, until at length, the lot of them found themselves embroiled in the Avatar Wars.

During the course of this legendary adventure, the love between Stradidar and Midnight grew to heights every bit as great as the depths of contempt that the Brothers came to hold for Cyric. That shifty-eyed knave was often the subject of ridicule and abuse from the Morayans, who gave him all of the worst trail jobs. Some sages credit their abuse to Cyric's later madness.

As is well known, the Tablets of Fate were restored to Ao in the end, and Midnight, Cyric, and Kelemvor ascended to godhood. What is less known, however, is that Stradidar and the Reacher were also offered godhood by Ao. Their reply was plain and simple, "as Morayans, it would be redundant."

As Midnight's first act of godhood, Ao allowed her to grant the Brothers of Doom a gift: complete immunity to all scrying, such that Cyric could never locate them in search of vengeance.

Returning to the Moonshaes in the Year of Shadows (1358 DR), the Brothers of Doom arrived to find High-King Tristan recently murdered, the lands of the Ffolk in chaos, and the Beast roaming the isles once more.

So it was that the legendary brothers helped install Tristan's young daughter Alicia upon the throne of Callidyr, reunited the Ffolk under her rule, and beat the less sensible of the Northmen into submission.

Finally, in the Year of the Turret (1360 DR), Stradidar went forth alone into Myrloch Vale. He was armed with the legendary Sword of Cymrych Hugh, and within the Bosom of the Earthmother, fought a vicious duel with Kazgoroth.

For a long time the bards of the Moonshaes sang of how each destroyed the other in this final battle. The truth of the matter however, was that the worshippers of the dead god Bhaal had followed the Brothers of Doom to the Moonshaes following the Avatar War, seeking vengeance for the death of their god. Thus, servants of Bhaal ambushed a greatly weakened Stradidar as he made his way out of Myrloch Vale. They mystically encased the hero in a block of amber and subsequently buried him deep beneath an ancient ruin in the eastern reaches of Corwell.

Untold Stories

Collection 11

By Chris Jameson (Adventures I – VI)
& Scott Kujawa (Adventure VII - XI)

Being a collection of adventure hooks and starting tales for use in the Forgotten Realms

Adventure Hook I

For many years, Renler Arlsdane has bemoaned his ill luck to all who would listen. In his youth he suffered what he called "Talona's Kiss," a disease that left his face pockmarked and rough. This and "Sune's Snubbin'" caused him no small amount of trouble with members of the opposite sex. His failure to master the sword was Torm's fault; his failure at other endeavors was the fault of Beshaba or any other deity he could blame. In short, Renler has spent his life being miserable and blaming it on the gods, and he's only too willing to share his tale with anyone he meets.

The one good thing in Renler's life -- and he would argue this point -- is his high rank in Waterdeep's Cellarers' and Plumbers' Guild. Though disliked by all, Renler pushes his crews hard to always do their work fast, and do it well. His outstanding performance resulted in a swift rise within the Guild hierarchy. Renler might be eternally unhappy, but his superiors know he can be trusted to produce results.

An added benefit of service in the Plumbers' Guild is that members often find treasures lost or hidden underneath the streets of the city. Even in a strongly lawful metropolis like Waterdeep, there are those who need to operate in shadows and dark places; these folk often use the sewers to conceal things from the vigilant eyes of the Watch. It is not at all an infrequent occurrence for these secret caches to be discovered by the Plumbers' Guild, who, by Guild rules, are allowed to keep anything they can carry away unseen.

After more than two decades in the Guild, Renler knows Waterdeep's underways better than most residents know the streets above. He's managed to find and put away a tidy sum of gold, as well, and is looking forward to retiring soon -- or was, until his recent disappearance.

Two months ago, Renler's traditionally bad luck took a turn for the worse. He was attacked by a wererat, and fell victim to the curse of lycanthropy. Scarcely a month later, Renler was attacked and killed by a greater doppelganger. His very identity was consumed, so that his knowledge could be used to benefit the Unseen.

Soruth, the mirrorkin who slew Renler, didn't know about Renler's curse. The first night that Selûne was full, however, he learned his mistake. As a natural shapechanger, he was able to retain a semblance of control over the change. But the stress of doing so was too much for the mirrorkin -- something in his mind fractured, and Soruth fled into the sewers.

Hlaavin has heard about his subordinate's fate. The last thing the master of the Unseen wants is a greater doppelganger running wild and stirring up trouble for his organization. He has ordered that no one aid Soruth in any way, and that the rogue mirrorkin be kept away from any Unseen holdings.

Through intermediaries, Hlaavin hires the PCs to track down and slay Soruth. Perhaps the

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PCs are even told the truth about Soruth and why Hlaavin wants him stopped -- though of course the PCs won't know who their real employer is. It's also likely that agents of the Unseen will follow the PCs, so that when they find Soruth, they don't get the chance to question him.

Adventure Hook II

The PCs are staying at a relatively luxurious inn. There, they meet Bennik Thissel, a wealthy merchant in town to conduct some business. Though clearly an intelligent man, it becomes obvious from his conversation that Bennik has little interest in entertainment that doesn't include women and alcohol. When the PCs retire for the night, Bennik is trying mightily to entice a barmaid into visiting him when her shift ends.

The next morning, when the PCs go down for breakfast, the innkeeper approaches them. An associate of Bennik's is there to meet with him, but Bennik has not left his room and does not reply to knocks on his door. The innkeeper is about to open the door, but he wants the PCs there in case something goes -- or has gone -- awry.

When the door is opened, the PCs make a startling discovery: Bennik is missing. Both the door and the windows were locked from within, and there appears to be no other means of entering or leaving the room. The bed is slightly rumpled, but does not look like it was slept in. All of Bennik's belongings appear to be present, and there is no sign of a struggle. Nonetheless, it is evident that the merchant is not in his room, and there is no indication of where he could be.

There is one other odd thing... A single book, lying with its cover open, rests upon the floor. Based on what Bennik said the night before, it's not likely that the book is his. But the innkeeper doesn't recall having seen it before...

Adventure Hook III

This hook can be used in any community, from a tiny fishing village to the bustling streets of Waterdeep, Calimport, or Suzail.

Jalyssa has led an uneventful life. The only daughter of Janter and Sylrina Colp, Jalyssa has spent her entire life -- a mere fourteen summers -- in this community. She has been a dutiful child, doing her chores without complaint and helping raise her younger brother. She is known to be a cheerful girl, and is becoming popular with the teenage boys of her community.

Two mornings ago, something unusual finally happened in Jalyssa's life. When she awoke that day, her entire back was covered with strange runes. The spidery, inch-high runes appear to be written in black ink, but no amount of scrubbing can eradicate them. The language they were written in is not one that's known to Jalyssa, her family, or any of the PCs.

The only clue Jalyssa can offer is that the night before, she dreamed of a hooded and robed man whose eyes glowed as he chanted in an unknown tongue. This dream might not be connected to the mysterious appearance of the runes, or it could portend something dark for Jalyssa...

Adventure Hook IV

During the course of an adventure, the PCs find a small locked case containing a *wand of magic missiles*. The wand is fashioned of polished weirwood, with a silver inlay tracing out what could be a mage's sigil. If the PCs use the wand, it functions normally, with no extraordinary effects.

Soon after returning to whatever city is convenient for the PCs, the wand disappears.

Within days, bodies start to be found. Some people were obviously slain by *magic missiles*, but others appear to be withered and desiccated -- as if their life's essence was drained from them. These latter corpses all bear an unusual marking: a single silvery

scar, about 10 inches long and three-quarters of an inch wide -- approximately the same dimensions as the wand. Astute PCs will observe that the scar is always found on visible skin; it is never hidden under clothing.

After a week or so of the mysterious deaths, a festhall escort comes forward with an unusual tale. She was in bed with a client, laying in a half-doze. A wand flew in through the open window, and settled gently on her thigh. Within seconds, she began to feel an excruciating pain, as if the wand was lined with fiery needles that had been forced into her flesh. Coming fully awake, the escort screamed and frantically tried to rid herself of the wand. It hovered over the bed for several seconds, then darted back out the window, leaving behind a silvery scar on her leg. Her description of the wand matches the description of the one the PCs found and lost.

What the PCs don't know is that the wand contains the spirit of a malevolent mage. For reasons known only to himself, he chose to cheat death by imbuing a specially prepared *wand of magic missiles* with his spirit. The wand is, for all intents, the wizard's new body, and as such, he has full control over it. The wand can fly at a speed of 90, with good maneuverability. The wand can be recharged in the usual fashion, or the mage can opt to drain the life force from living creatures to regain charges. If the latter option is used, the wand gains one charge for every 4 hit points drained.

The wand had been imprisoned in the case in which it was found, and now that it is free, the mage in the wand is only too happy to sow chaos with his random slayings.

The PCs freed the wand. They should naturally feel responsible for the consequences of this action, and try to stop it.

Adventure Hook V

The town which the PCs are in experiences a heavy fog one evening. When the fog burns off the next morning, the town's residents are surprised to discover that a large statue now occupies a previously empty public courtyard or square.

The statue depicts an elven female in full plate mail, with a shield in one hand and the hilt of her sheathed sword in the other. Her head is uncovered, revealing that her hair is twisted into a single braid that hangs down nearly to her knees. Her expression is serious, and she appears to be gazing at something high and distant.

The statue itself is ten feet tall, and stands on a simple, round, five-foot high pedestal carved from the same kind of blue-tinted stone. The entire statue radiates a faint aura of magic, and glows with a soft blue light barely visible in daylight. It likely weighs several tons.

No one recognizes the elven woman depicted, and no one has any idea where the statue came from or how it got here. A man says he passed through the courtyard shortly before midnight, and the statue was not there at that time. No one else saw or heard anything unusual.

It's up to the PCs to determine the origin of the statue, how it got there, and most importantly, *why* it's there.

Adventure Hook VI

The PCs are traveling through or near a heavily wooded area when this hook happens.

Shortly after sunrise, but before the PCs have broken camp, a red fox fearlessly enters their camp. The fox strides up to one of the PCs (any obvious rangers or druids would be chosen first, followed by elves and then fighters) and, in Common, asks for the assistance of the PC and his/her companions!

The fox, Davios, was the recipient of an *awaken* spell about a year ago. Since then, he has been the constant companion of a half-elven ranger, Gwaeron Raelos. Yesterday, Gwaeron explored an abandoned wizard's tower, located just a few miles from the PCs' present location. He found many various items there, including an amulet

depicting a stooping falcon. Though Gwaeron left most of what he'd discovered, he chose to keep and wear the amulet.

Gwaeron was sleeping last night when Davios left the camp to hunt for food. When the fox returned in the morning, Gwaeron's bedroll had been tossed aside, and Gwaeron was missing. Davios couldn't detect the smells of any strange creatures or persons in the camp, nor was there a scent left by Gwaeron's departure.

Davios has no goods or treasure of his own to offer as reward. He can, however, lead the PCs to the wizard's tower, if they would like to explore it.

Adventure Hook VII

The Sisters of Synnoria, a group of female Llewyrr elven guardians on the Moonshaes, have been seen riding their white horses across the length of Gwynneth. One night when they stopped in one of the Cantravs for supplies and food, the lord asked what they sought. One of the fair female elves smiled at his words and answered, "That which was lost decades ago. The Bracer of the Earthmother's Children will help restore the Llewyrr, since our numbers have been dwindling and the wars that took place on the Moonshaes have weakened us. We were given a sign from the Earthmother that it is time to seek that lost item, and so we search."

Adventure Hook VIII

Juryn Thernus, a Naturalist and a ranger, wandered Cormanthyr. His specialty is to research and keep track of the wandering magical effects from the *mythal* and its effects on the local flora and fauna. One day, while observing one plant attacking the other plants around it, he noticed a strange plant he had never seen before within Cormanthyr. This brownish-red plant seemed to keep back from the floral combatants. Its thick, broad, bluish leaves also seemed to shimmer in the light, while giving off a thick liquid. As the liquid dripped onto the forest floor, it quickly sprouted into more shoots that then connected with the parent plant. Juryn is seeking anyone who knows more about this plant, its substance, and anything else about it. After taking a sample of its leaves and the liquid, he returned to Shadowdale and nailed a flyer to the message post in the town square, offering a reward for this information.

Adventure Hook IX

Despite the return of the Shades and the release of other dark forces in the desert, forces of Zhentil Keep still dare to cross the Anauroch. One such force has found an abandoned lair, once home to something both long and round. The marks on the rock seem to indicate that whatever laired within had a way to eat and digest rock. The lair also contained countless bones. In addition to animal bones, the bones of humans, demihumans, humanoids and other races were discovered. However, unlike the rock, they are not harmed in any way. Deep within the lair, the Zhents found a dry sand bed that appeared to be where the creature slept. After digging deep within the sand bed, they found a large buried chest. The chest, fashioned of bronze and copper and chased with silver, resisted all attempts at being opened. Now a caravan is bearing the chest across the desert, intending to return with it to Zhentil Keep.

Adventure Hook X

The midwife of Lady <DM's choice of name> has been seen around <DM's choice of location>, telling everyone that the child that was born isn't really what it seems. She is sure that the child that came out of the mother had horns, small bat-like wings, clawed hands, and other strange body parts, even though the child looks human now. Soon after the child was born, the midwife was dismissed from her position and tossed out onto the street. The shape-changed demon is seeking a way to get back into the family's lands to take the child back from its mother. The Lady of the manor has been a widow also for many years and so how she

got with child is a mystery as well. (Actually, the maid was killed and her form was taken by a demon that can change its shape. The demon, likely a succubus or a different female demon, has also cast spells over the babe to hide its demonic nature. An incubus works just as well for this, and it could explain the child.)

Adventure Hook XI

Eshera, a female moon elven seer of Selûne, has given this prophecy:

"When the Moonmaiden cries
For her lost love again
All of Faerûn will feel
Her sorrow. Beware!
Faerûn will be unguarded
And her dark twin
Will be able to harm
The Moonmaiden at this time.
Death and darkness will soon follow."

Soon after saying these words to her apprentice, Eshera gave a single heart-wrenching sob and passed into Selûne's embrace. Before the astonished apprentice's eyes, the body turned to dust, leaving nothing to bury or burn. When the screams of the apprentice brought forth the clergy of the temple, they found her staring down at the piece of parchment she held in her hand, and no sign of her teacher. The temple has since been trying to research the matter and find if there is any truth to this prophecy, and what would result if and when this prophecy comes true. The PCs can hear of the activity of Selûne's clergy in any of the places where her clergy has a temple or shrine, or the rumors of Eshera's death could have spread to other areas.

Flora and Fauna of the Marches

By Erica Connolly

I apologize for the late submission and arrival of this piece to be included within the Compendium. However, every time I sat down to begin crafting the final submission for sending to you, one thing or another would arrive, and I would find myself journeying into the Unicorn Run or along the Adbar Road to find such rumors as the starshell or stoneroot greenspires. Unfortunately, all of my searches returned empty in both heart and hand, and all I can offer is a synopsis of the Marches' wondrous plant family called the greenspire, particularly the bluestar greenspire.

-Amarae, Priestess of Chauntea, Scribe of Candlekeep

Mirtul 19, 1372 DR (Year of Wild Magic)

The Greenspire

decided to walk the distance from Candlekeep to Silverymoon, where I would create my home for the extent of my time in the Silver Marches. During that long walk of five tendays, I encountered a wondrous array of flora, but that is for future study and development.

I arrived in Silverymoon on Tarsakh the 29th, during the late evening. Wandering around the city's streets, I eventually found myself at my inn of preference: The Golden Oak. I entered inside, made my arrangements for the night, and descended to the taproom, hoping for perhaps a leftover portion of vegetables. I did not find what I had come for, but I did find something even more important: new knowledge.

The barkeep had already begun to put away his various wines, yet I convinced him to pour me a glass of a local fruitwine.

The wine was a deep purple, with three of the berries from which it is made floating within. It smelled almost sickly sweet, yet when I drank it, it was bitter on my tongue. The berries were unusual - they were a deep blue, yet had a pale star radiating from where they would connect to the branch of the mother plant. Inquiring about what berries they were, I received this response: *bluestar greenspire*. Having never heard of this plant, I asked if he had a sample of the plant behind the bar, for flavoring perhaps? The barkeep's quick search of the collection of herbs he kept revealed nothing, and I retired to my room, intrigued by this plant, yet frustrated at my luck so far.

When I awoke the next day, I discovered that it was, luckily for me, market day. I found myself at a smaller market, looking for a seller of these greenspires. It was there that I saw him: an middle-aged man driving a cart emblazoned with a picture of the deep blue berry with the pale star. Following the seller, I found myself speaking to one Telthram, a local farmer of bluestar greenspires. He agreed to let me ride back to his farm with him, to learn more about these plants and their characteristics. Speaking with him while we were traveling back to his farm, he gave me some information about greenspires, which I carefully transcribed and now include for readers' information:

> *"A greenspire is just that, a greenspire. The distinguishing characteristic of a greenspire is that it*

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is a green-stemmed flowering plant (In my time with them, they are more like very thin shrubs, or very short trees - Amarae) that creates berries, and that it is tall, thin, and presents light foliage."

"Greenspires come in nearly any color you can imagine."

"By far, bluestar greenspires are the most common. They occur all over the Marches, followed by redrim greenspires, which are only found in Sundabar Vale."

"The effects of eating or drinking the products of greenspires vary wildly. Some cause you to see things, some make you think you can fight a bear one-handed, some you become addicted to, as did my brother."

"The inner liquid of a greenspire branch tastes foul, and is extremely poisonous. Always use the berries and leaves for cooking."

"Bluestar greenspires are often used in teas, wines and pies. They have no unusual effects, in contrast to redrim greenspires, for example."

"Cultivating greenspires is a tough task. They never want to seem to stay cultivated, and must oft be replanted in rows and trimmed. Unkept, they grow large, but thin, generally in clumps of three or five."

Telthram's farm lay some distance away from the city, closer to Khelb actually, than to Silverymoon. Descending into a small valley encircled by silverbark thickets, we followed a trail between fields of cultivated bluestars. Telthram stopped the cart every so often, retrieved a pack of tools from the back of the cart, and proceeded to replant some of the greenspires, moving them back into their rows and trimming some of their branches. Once, he returned with a handful of berries from one of the greenspires, offering them to me. The berries were sweet, yet slightly acidic - oddly different from the product of their wine. We stopped at his dwelling, a small moss hut in the center of the fields, where he prepared a meal and bluestar tea for me to try while I walked around the fields.

Walking around the fields, I noticed a few more things about the bluestar greenspire. First of all, they appear to be a favored meal of the local deer, which devour the leaves, flowers, and berries, leaving the branches behind, stripped of all they normally bear. Berrygobblers (as described in what few notes on bluestars Methram Tyldaren sent to Candlekeep, prior to his disappearence) also prefer the bluestar, climbing adeptly its long, thin branches to nibble its berries. The only bird I saw in the area, the tereep, perched on the bluestar's branches as it ate the berries.

Kneeling, I sliced open one of the branches of the closest greenspire plant, drinking a small amount of the liquid within it. Telthram had been right - it did taste foul, like milk gone sour then boiled! I have high suspicions it was that drink that put me in bed for a few days after I returned to Silverymoon.

Returning to Telthram's hut, I was presented by a feast - bluestar tea, roast turkey, a side of spiced bread, and a slice of bluestar pie for dessert. As this is not "Foods and Drink of the Marches", I will decline to comment upon the meal, except to state that bluestar tea tasted quite good, emphasizing the sweetness that lay in each bluestar berry. It was reminiscent of some of the teas of the Jalmar family from my homeland of Amn. Apparently, the same process that bluestar wine goes through is applied to the berries that go into bluestar pies, creating a nice mix of bitter and sweet tastes. During the meal, Telthram told me the story of the greenspire's creation, which I am again reproducing here:

"An untold time ago, Chauntea wandered Toril, reveling in the innate beauty of its wilderness. One day, she encountered a patch of land, where although the grasses and trees were many, there were no flowers. And to cultivate that patch, she created the first greenspire, which is said to be as black as night and just as deadly. This was during the height of Shar's first

machinations against Selûne, and as such, the first greenspire had been corrupted by Shar, being influenced by her in a myriad of ways.

Then Mystryl was created. She did not grow into her powers immediately, and a spare blast of uncontrolled magical energy hit the patch of greenspires, transforming each into a different type of greenspire-except for the one at the very center of the patch, which remained dedicated to Shar. (An alternate version I heard of this tale later told of a balancing effort from either Selûne or Mystryl being responsible for the different greenspires - Amarae)*.*

Since then, the greenspires have only expanded their range-and they now cover the Marches in all their different varieties."

With our meal finished, I returned to Silverymoon. My next article will deal with yet another type of greenspire - assuming I can find another before then.

Game Information

This section deals with 3.5 rules for some of the items and concepts mentioned within this article.

Bluestar Greenspires: Bluestar greenspires, like any other greenspires, are thin, tall bushes. They grow to about 3 feet high, with long, thin, brown branches and large, triangular mottled blue and green leaves. Their flowers are a brilliant blue fading to white in the center, while their berries are blue with a white ring around the stem. Bluestar berries can be eaten, and are often used in pies, teas, and wines.

Greenspire Cultivation Kit: This skill kit consists of a series of phandar and duskwood shims, a small knife, a shovel, and small pieces of cloth, generally inside a cloth bag. All the contents are specifically designed for aiding in the cultivation of greenspires. A character using a greenspire cultivation kit gains a +2 bonus on any *Profession (herbalist)* or *Craft (weaving)* check related to greenspires. A greenspire cultivation kit can be used 50 times, then must be replaced.

Cost: 10 gp. Weight: 3 pounds.

Bluestar Wine: Bluestar greenspire wine is commonly served in the Silver Marches, and is considered a delicacy outside of the Marches. It is often served with whole bluestar berries in it. Bluestar wine is a poison like other alcoholic drinks, and as such as a Fortitude save (DC 11) is required, or the drinker takes 1d2 Wisdom damage. Stronger versions of bluestar wine have been created - these generally are created by adding greenspire extract (see below) to the wine, in which case the drinker must make an additional Fortitude save against the bluestar extract as normal. If you are using the optional alcohol rules from the *Arms and Equipment Guide*, consider bluestar wine to be wine, common, and stronger versions of bluestar wine to be wine, fortified. The drinker of stronger versions of bluestar wine must still make a separate Fortitude save against the greenspire extract.

Cost: 10 gp (in the Marches), 20 gp elsewhere. Weight: 1 pound (including bottle).

Greenspire Extract: Greenspire extract is the clear liquid extracted from the center of greenspire branches. It is a poison (Resist DC 12, Ingested, initial damage 1d3 Wisdom, secondary damage 1d2 Constitution, Craft(poisonmaking) DC 15).

Cost: 50 gp (selling it has been outlawed in the Marches). Weight: -

Planar Lore

The Barrens of Doom and Despair

By Gray Richardson

reetings, First Reader Tethtoril, from Grimbuckle the Gnome! I'm reporting to you the account of my recent expedition to the Barrens of Doom and Despair.

After my last report to you, I left port out of Squamous Carbuncle, a nighthag town on an island in the Incarnadine Archipelago in Umberlee's Blood Sea on the plane of Fury's Heart. From there, I chartered a marraenaloth ferry to my destination, the Barrens of Doom and Despair.

They say a marraenaloth charges only 2 coins from the dead. But in my experience, they demand a steeper fare from those who still live. From me he wanted a living memory — a rare commodity on the lower planes, where the amnesia of death erases any recollection of a petitioner's mortal life, and a dip in the River of Blood can wipe away all your memories. Fortunately, I keep a few *memory globes* in my sack for just such a purpose — I'll brook no fiend tampering with *my* head! You can buy them in certain markets on the lower planes, captured remembrances of treasured moments. These are as readily accepted as gold in some fiendish circles, notably the Marketplace Infernal in the Blood Rift, and marraenoloth ports up and down the River of Blood.

As I handed over the fare, I glanced within the tiny soap-bubble of glass, to see an image of a young girl. The memory of a favored daughter? A forgotten lover? It made little difference to the ferryman, who snatched it greedily from my hand.

His little skiff seemed almost too fragile to make the crossing, but it passed easily across the turbulent waves of the Blood Sea, and afore long the canyon cliffs of the Blood Rift rose up around us. Soon after, the clotted shores of the Barrens appeared on the horizon.

We skirted the coast to land a bit south of where I would have liked, in order to avoid a blood dragon (some call them Styx dragons, after an archaic name for the River of Blood). The beast was frolicking along the banks, fishing for razor eels and small sharks, which infest the river in these parts.

As I disembarked, a bat-winged lamprey jumped out of the carmine current and lunged at my face. My *torque of vigilant redoubt* repelled the thing, as well as the loathsome swarms of blood-sucking flies that congregate along the shores of the Blood River in the Barrens.

The Barrens of Doom and Despair are inimical to life. There is no liquid water to be found naturally on the plane, save perhaps in the swamps of Talona's realm (if you can call that poisonous muck water!) There are clouds, and the atmosphere can be oppressively humid, especially near Talona's lands, but it never rains here and potable water is non-existent. However, moisture does precipitate as snow and ice in the far north, in the cold lands around the realms of Hoar and Loviatar.

Because water is nigh impossible to come by for those creatures without access to *create water* spells, the ecosystem of the Barrens depends entirely on blood for its liquid nourishment. What life there is thrives most densely near the shores of the River of Blood as it branches throughout the plane.

Aside from the fish and aquatic inhabitants of the river, the ecological niches of the Barrens are filled primarily by insects. Along the banks of the river teem all manner of midges, mosquitoes, mites, ticks, leeches,

flies, wasps and other fearsome pests. These creatures disseminate inland, where they and their precious moisture become prey for larger insects (such as hellwasps, stirges and bonespears) and carnivorous plants (including flytraps, bloodthorns, plague brushes and iron maws.) This, in turn, supports a food chain of larger and larger carnivores extending deeper into the arid interior.

I suspect that insects may dominate the Barrens due to the influence of Talona, goddess (among other things) of venomous and plague-bearing creatures. Talona is the oldest deity on the plane, far older than such younger godlings as Bane, Hoar, and Beshaba. According to some myths, Talona is as old as the universe itself. And though she is considered a lesser power, she has had many eons to populate the plane with her favored creatures. Some even say it was Talona who chose the vermiform shape of the larva to be the default form taken by petitioners in the Barrens.

On the shore I unfurled my *flying carpet*. I wanted to stay well above the swarms of flying pests and roving predators, and this would afford me the opportunity to get the lay of the land from an aerial view. I procured this woven wonder in Calimshan, a gift from the Sultan of Memnon. It's barely larger than a prayer rug — too small for a human, but the perfect size for a gnome!

As I ascended, a pair of ferocious ticks the size of boars charged at me. My carpet bucked into the air as they pounced, nearly snagging the tassels of my textile transport with their fearsome chelicerae. My, how they could leap!

From the air, I headed north along the river towards Beshaba's realm. Veering slightly west, I tarried briefly over the broken mountains where Kezef the Chaos Hound was chained for many centuries. According to legend, when that elder evil closed its jaws upon the hand of Tyr, gouts of the god's blood fell upon the soil of the Barrens, leaving stains of ichor that gape like open wounds in the ground. These "wounds" still bleed to this day, forming the headspring of a crimson stream called *Tyr's Price*. This rivulet wends its way through a shallow canyon across the Barrens, eventually becoming a tributary to the River of Blood.

As I traveled over a vast, flat plain of grey slate, I saw a band of humans below. Zhentarim, by the look of them, wandering unusually far from Bane's stern realm. Lassoes in hand, they were sneaking up on a herd of nightmares. The fools! Couldn't they see there was no grass anywhere?

The Zhents bolted from their cover and rushed at the herd. *Herd*, hah! Nightmares are no skittish herbivores. What a woefully deficient word to describe such a collection of rapacious carnivores! "Pack" or "pride" would be more befitting. The fiendish equines fell upon the would-be wranglers, and in short order the nightmares were grazing on Zhentarim.

Onward I flew, perusing the plane. It's interesting to note that the geometry of this plane is flat — not a sphere, like Toril. The horizon appears odd, and can play tricks on your sense of perspective. Sights don't disappear or rise up over the horizon. Instead, they dwindle into miniscularity at great distances or are occulted by interposing features of the landscape. But if you are elevated well above any such obstacles, you have line-of-sight to where the edges of the plane fade to infinity.

Thus, from the high vantage of my little flying carpet, I had a startlingly panoramic view of the dark and grotesque vistas of the Barrens. Black sand deserts. Jagged, obsidian cliffs jut like knife-blades into the sky. Canyons and fjords of blood trace the path of the Blood River.

Far to the west I saw the Black Bastion of Bane, his adamantine citadel ringed with towers of obsidian and jet. I could see massive formations of troops perpetually marching about his realm, in the shadow of cyclopean statues of the iron-fisted tyrant. These monuments to Bane's dark glory are scattered abundantly across his territory.

Not far from Bane's domain, I could see Iyachtu Xvim's volcanic land. The lava flows of Mount Xvim now overflow the moat of Xvim's Bastion of Hate. All of Xvim's

petitioners are long since repatriated to his father's dread realm, and the foundations of his dying demesne are crumbling into magma.

In the center of the plane I could see Talona's swampy realm, spreading out from her hive-like pyramid. To the north I could see the frosty realm of Hoar, the marble walls of his Doomcourt ringed by heads on pikes. And northeast of his realm, I could just make out the sparkling aurora that overhangs Loviatar's realm, but her Palace of Pain was obscured at this distance by all the mist and snow.

Despite its name, the Barrens is not all that devoid of life or civilization. As I flew over the plane, I saw sprawling khaasta fortress complexes, steel predator warrens and the occasional yugoloth stronghold, crawling on colossal legs to unknown destinations.

I passed above a pack of hellhounds and beasts of Xvim hunting together, tracking a flock of Abrians. But Beshaba must have graced them with her dark smile, as fortune flip-flopped for the flightless, feathered fiends and the houndish hunters swiftly became the hunted.

As I crested the Peaks of Affliction, Beshaba's realm hove into view beyond.

Beshaba's Blood Tor lies near the base of Misfortune Falls, an awe-inspiring waterfall some 2000 feet wide and 400 feet high, where the florid flow of the Blood River cascades down from the heights of the Cliffs of Destiny Scorned. In the shadow of this dread landmark, Beshaba's realm has become the premier destination on the lower planes for the pursuit of dark entertainments.

Grand inns, festhalls and gambling houses line the edge of the river on either side of Beshaba's estate. Gambling, of course, is the primary draw. But the entertainment district of the Blood Tor caters to any number of dark pleasures, and offers amusements aplenty to satisfy the vile appetites of the elite fiends of the nether realms.

Beshaba's palace is a red-stained, granite tower overlooking the banks of the River of Blood. It sits at the apex of a rocky hill in the center of her realm. This tall, lone spire is marked by rivulets of blood that drip continuously down the sides to run off into the river.

They say the tower bleeds for every life lost to the whims of misfortune, although one dubious fellow told me he believes there is a system of pipes and pumps which simply siphons blood up from the river below.

Inland from the river, behind the row of inns and south of Beshaba's tower, is the colossal Canomorph Arena. Gladiatorial games of all varieties are presented here daily, and though large enough to stage chariot races and small naval battles, the arena is best known for its dogfights.

Here you can see hellhounds fight barghests, glabrezu battle canoloths, and fiendish werewolves square off against enslaved and broken lupinals. These combats are always to the death.

Canomorphs such as haraknins, vultivors and shadurakuls are the celebrities of the games. They possess a stamina, cunning and ferocity that allows the best of their breeds to go undefeated for years. Current favorites include Ulzorex the Shorn and Mekhinash Tailcatcher. Crowds pack the arena whenever they fight.

The grandeur and opulence of the entertainment quarter diminishes to the west where smaller, more austere buildings spread inland. Here dwell the ordinary inhabitants of the realm. The majority are Beshaba's petitioners, whom she uses primarily to serve the entertainment quarter as maids, groundskeepers, cooks, and all manner of servants needed to staff the inns, taverns, casinos and festhalls.

Other inhabitants include fiends of all races as well as mortals — tieflings, humans and humanoids — who have settled here and spend their lives far from the material plane. Some mortals are recent immigrants, whereas others come from families that have lived among the planes for many generations, going back hundreds of years.

Commerce in Beshaba's realm is different from trade elsewhere in the planes. Beshaba forbids any buying or selling or barter in her realm. She decrees that all such transactions must be couched in the terms of a bet. Workers are paid in the form of wagers, in lieu of wages. All contracts must be aleatory. Her clergy serve as oddsmakers, money holders and brokers, and throughout her domain, they adjudicate any disputes arising from such bets.

Instead of haggling in the marketplaces of the Blood Tor, you hear constant oddsmaking and betting and cheering. For instance, when I wanted to buy a flask of water, the water vendor wagered his jug against my silver and we flipped a coin for it. He won my coins the first two tosses, but I got my water on the third try.

There is never an equal exchange of goods in the Blood Tor; Beshaba demands that there must always be a winner and a loser — or at least a loser. Yet the marketplace adjusts its prices according to the odds and the number of times one must bet in order to acquire the goods, so that the economy of the town functions just as well and goods still change hands as smoothly as in any other city.

For those who take no sport in the practice, there is the custom of making two "sure" bets that conform to the letter of Beshaba's law but amount in effect to an equivalent trade. "I will bet you eight coppers against your next breath that Beshaba's tower will stop bleeding if you will bet me your bag of grain against a handful of dirt that it won't rain before this pebble hits the floor." Although such a wager does not technically violate Beshaba's taboo, she has been known on occasion to vex such flouters by surprising them with unexpected outcomes to the conditions of their wagers.

A startling array of currencies change hands in this realm. While silver, gold and gems are accepted as readily here as in Faerûn, you also see coins made of dried and pressed fungi from Talona's realm, iron coins and trade bars from Bane's realm, and tiny imps trapped in teardrops of amber from the jungles of Fury's Heart. Larvae are the preferred currency of hags and demons, while devils and yugoloths employ slips of parchment as currency.

Baatezu prefer their hell notes — pledges to pay a quantity of larvae signed with the maker's sigil. These notes are in theory redeemable by the bearer for actual larvae, but they are exchanged as freely as gold or gems among the devils and are rarely, if ever, redeemed.

The yugoloth notes represent even more complex forms of financial instrument: from contracts for specific souls, fractional interests in souls, pain debentures and options on sins, to shares in the souls of entire clans or bloodlines. And those are relatively simple to fathom. Arcanaloths revel in creating subtle and intricate documents to memorialize their interests across the spectrum of iniquity and pain.

All these and more are acceptable wagers in Beshaba's gambling houses, where I headed now to discover how the denizens of the dark planes delight in their dastardly diversions.

As I entered the *House of Beshaba's Smile*, the smell overwhelmed me. The atmosphere was saturated with the confined aromas of excited fiends, pipe smoke and the pungent odor of gore and viscera. I quickly dabbed strong perfume under each nostril, which helped quell my gut by masking the stench.

The hostess, a marilith named Kalesta, approached and greeted me warmly. "Why, Sir Grimbuckle! How wonderful to have your esteemed patronage!" I had never before met her, yet, disconcertingly, she knew my name.

She smiled and embraced me with all six arms. Scooping me up, she squeezed me against her beguiling and bounteous bosom. Both desire and revulsion mingled in my own breast as she pressed me tight to hers. Her warm flesh was delectable, but her cold and malevolent eyes belied her welcoming demeanor.

She offered me a spin on a huge wheel of fortune in the entryway. The prizes around the rim included the numbers 12, 72, 144, and 1728. I wondered if these were sums of

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gold or larvae or something stranger, like teeth perhaps. There was a space marked "wish" — the jackpot I suppose — and in between the prizes were spaces marked "hand", "eye", "foot", "liver", "lung", and "servitude." I politely declined her hospitality and absconded to the interior.

Within the walls of the great gambling houses in this realm, powerful abjurations prevent any divinations, illusions, ordinary acts of legerdemain and other cheats from predetermining or confounding the random outcomes of the games. This guarantees the clientele a semblance of security that they cannot ordinarily find in their dealings elsewhere. The allure of a level playing field accounts in large part for the attraction this place holds for the fiends.

In the main room I saw demons rolling dice, nighthags throwing knucklebones and devils playing talis cards. Planar denizens of every kind were raucously engaged in games of chance and other depraved divertissements.

In the corner, a group of tanar'ri clustered around an unfortunate wretch depended from a small gallows. A croupier told me they were playing a game called "hangman." As I observed, the demons tried to reveal a secret word by guessing letters. Incorrect guesses resulted in successive acts of mayhem on the poor victim's limbs. A fifth failure tightened the noose, blessedly ending the victim's suffering as the crowd cheered "hangman!"

I followed a group of vrocks through a door into the back room where a huge crowd clustered tightly around the edges of a fighting pit, howling their support and clamoring for bets. Due to my height, I could not see past the spectators into the pit. Snarls and screams from the combatants were all I could make out over the roar of the crowd. I wandered away from the pit to find a game I could try my own hand at.

Back in the main hall, a nalfeshnee demon ("Lord Azkaro", he styled himself) challenged me to a game of cards. I took a tall stool at his table which, though large for me, seemed tiny compared to his massive size. The human-sized chair could barely contain his twenty-foot frame. He daintily held the talis cards between his thumb and foretalon. Hunched over the table, intent on his little cards, he presented a comical appearance, which was mitigated by his pet fiendish dire tiger that lolled next to his feet. It glowered at me from beneath the table as the nalfeshnee scratched it behind the ear.

Beshaba must have smiled on Azkaro that day, because hand after hand, the dealer dealt me the better cards. Afore long I had won several sacks of squirming, wriggling larvae, which were piling up around my knees as Azkaro simmered in his tiny chair.

Azkaro bellowed for a flagon of elf lymph. The serving wenches will bring you free beverages so long as you are gambling. While fiends tend to prefer bloodwine and other odious libations, the house stocks fine ales, liqueurs and wines for those of mortal palate. I sampled a delightful Amnish port and the barmaid kept refilling my glass.

It was unwise of me to taunt Azkaro so. The port, I fear, had loosened my tongue and inflated my bravado. I should not, on reflection, have impugned his manhood.

Azkaro lunged at me over the table. I fell backwards off my stool as the demon's cat reared back to pounce. It was only by the benefit of a contingent, quickened *plane shift* spell that I escaped with my life from the gambling den.

I materialized rather unceremoniously, tumbling out of the ceiling of an inn in Beregost into the bed of a poor sleeping fellow. It was terribly rude of me to interrupt his slumber, and ruder still of me to kick him from his bed a moment later when a loud, popping whoosh alerted me to a *gate* spell opening in the air above us.

Just then, the demon and his fiendish dire tiger came crashing down upon the bed behind us, all spit and snarl and fur, their collective seven tons making a blizzard of the ruptured goose-down mattress.

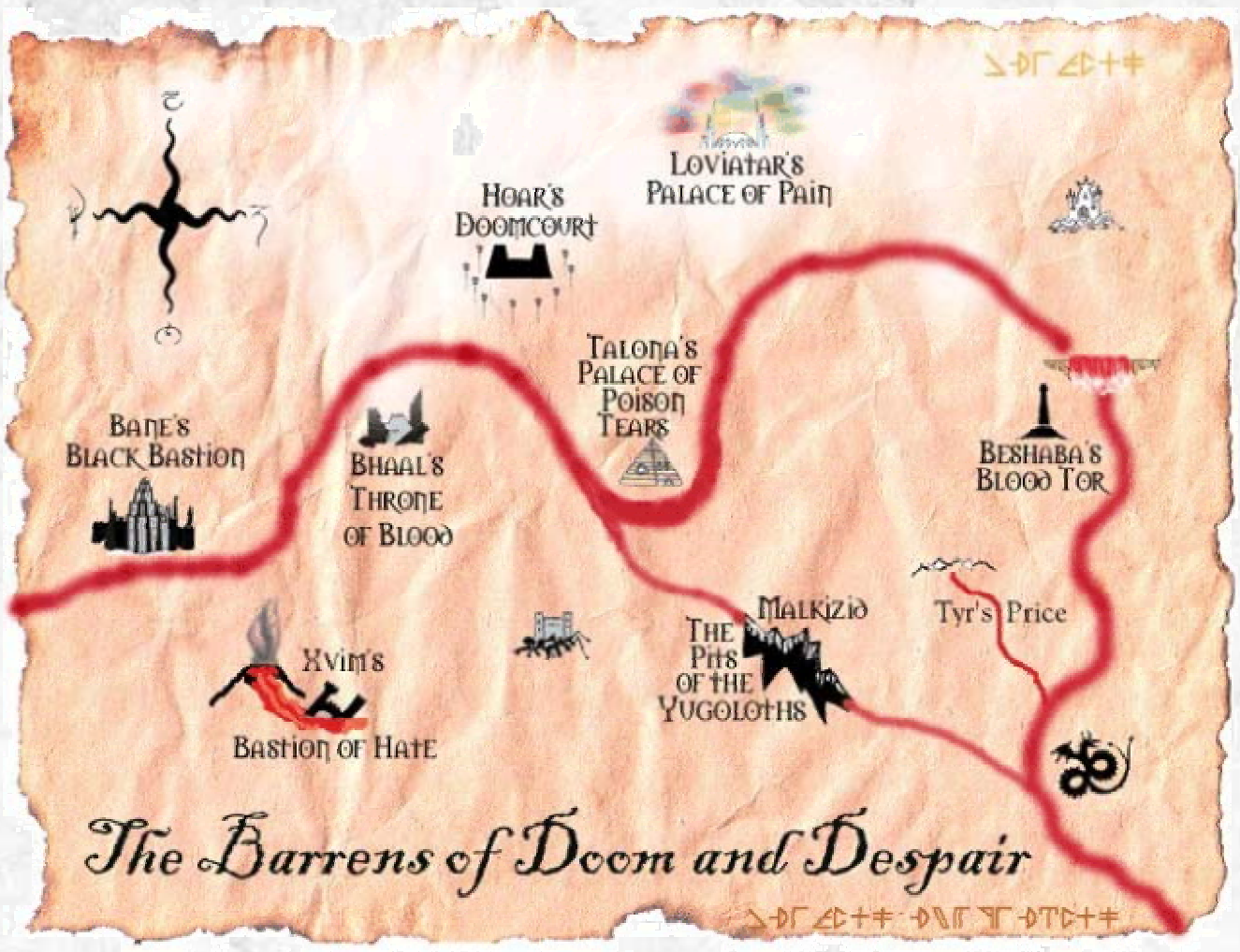
I swiftly scribed my own *gate* spell and yelled at the hapless fellow to follow me through it. I *plane shifted* us several more jumps before we finally managed to duck Azkaro and his

fearsome feline. He seems to have lost interest in the chase — I hope! I dropped my companion off in Baldur's Gate, from where I am sending this letter to you now.

First Reader Tethtoril, I hope this report finds you well and contains something of interest for you. Blessings of Oghma upon you, and may you bless me back, because I will need his help on my next expedition!

Yours in knowledge,

Grimbuckle Thurn,
Itinerant Planographer



Planar Lore

Hoar's Domain

By Bradley Russo

Journey with the Sage of Perth as he wanders up, down, and across the World Tree, the River of Blood and Beyond.

"Greetings fellow traveler, and welcome to my true home in the Realms-- the Planes. Yes, it is upon the myriad planes of cosmological belief beyond Toril that I, Rastromo Meradoc, the famed Sage of Perth, first made a name for myself. It is my honour, on behalf of the scribes and loremasters of Candlekeep, to present to you some of my writings from the hundreds of journals that I have composed during my many journeys to the realms beyond that which you are no doubt familiar and comfortable with. Join with me now as we explore these curious places of faith and danger, where the true power of the gods who involve themselves in the lives of the common Realmsian, reside.

There are plenty of secrets here... just waiting for those with the curiosity and daring to find."

ontaracul!

That is the only phrase in the yugoloth tongue that I could find that even comes close to the connotations for the word 'Greetings' in the Common tongue of which we are all more immediately familiar... Greetings! Rather unsurprisingly, the masters of manipulation do not appear to have a word in their dialect that holds the same meaning as the term 'Greetings' does in the many and diverse languages of the Realms.

As specifically as I can be, I've learned that "contaracul" means "association through relation". Now, as we know, yugoloths tend not to form close bonds with anyone, even other yugoloths, so this phrase holds some significant meaning about 'loth society. But, that is enough of that. I am meandering... again. So, let me begin... again.

Well met and warm welcoming to you, Tethtoril, First Reader of Candlekeep. I trust my missives from the City that Dwells on the Edge have been more than appreciated during my extended period of silence, thanks largely to the fact that my most recent adventures unexpectedly led me to a planar expanse appropriately named the Barrens of Doom and Despair.

I present to you now a complete report of many of my encounters from that outer plane. I will note before we begin though, that this account deals specifically with the domains held by the Doombringer. But first, a little background...

It is often said, in the few planar travelogues that grace the courts of power and prestige in the Realms, that the lands of Hoar are a frigid wasteland. Cold and frost both do their utmost to mark the entrance to a far distant and gradually shrinking planar region that Hoar is trying his best to maintain in the face of decreasing worship and power. This could not be further from the truth.

Although his domain is slowly turning in upon itself, for whatever reason, the realm of Hoar is neither cold nor a complete wasteland. In

fact, it is the very opposite. Perhaps indicative of the changes that come to a power's decreasing mortal influence. It is almost as if the whole layer of the Barrens of Doom and Despair are, slowly encroaching upon the Doombringer's realm as a direct result of the passing of each and every day of decreased worship. Looking back on it now, I feel that it almost seems as though the layer itself was reclaiming those fallen lands, returning it to the type of landscape that gives the Barrens its name.

Some of the senior-most clerics among the circles of Tyrists and Sharrans claim that, as happened during his earlier days as an Untheric power, Hoar is rapidly losing his influence in Faerûn. They believe that slowly and inevitably, the worship of Hoar will decrease to such a level that he will be no longer able to maintain his portfolio and his duty as the Doombringer. No doubt, the ambitions of their gods have been busy influencing the opinions and motivations of their mortal worshippers.

Before departing on my ill-fated planar journey to and from the City that Dwells on the Edge, I took the time to study some of the most respected tomes on lower planar lore in Candlekeep. Although, I should point out that even I required special permission from the most senior and monkish Great Readers to even be allowed to suggest the titles that I may have wished to peruse. Reflecting on that decision now, I am glad that I made the effort and that the Great Readers, in their near-infinite and scholarly wisdom, saw fit to permit me access.

The few tomes that I managed to collect up in my small arms were penned by daring explorers from many of the lands of Faerûn. There were even two tomes written in a language that is now no longer spoken in the Realms! Imagine my wonder... It is a dark tongue, and one that I shall not name here, for I hold great respect for the ancient bedtime tales told to young ones about those souls of good who chose to speak the midnight language. Ruin came to their lives and their hearts, these stories say. Only those whose hearts are as black as Bane's Black Bastion can know and understand the words and the language without fear. To which I normally add... "Because they have nothing left to lose."

I studied most of the more appropriate tomes for several days. Some of them mentioned details about various sites of power and interest among the fiendish planes, while others dedicated their pages to sites that could provide a respite for those brave (or foolish) enough to journey down the River of Blood which, I thought, pulsed through the center of many of the lower planes like the beating heart of a pit fiend. I took the time to note several important planar features, recording them in my notebook in case I needed a particular reference during my travels. Aside from all of this, and purely, I do believe, by the hand of either the All-Seeing, or Lady Luck herself, I took special interest in the few (and I would like to emphasize "few", because there appears to be very little written with regard to Hoar himself, or even his faith... I took this as another sign that perhaps, this was again a reflection of the decreasing influence of Hoar) notes that had been hurriedly jotted down in a compiled travelogue, from several adventuring explorers, about a traveler’s experiences in the Doomcourt and surrounding lands of Hoar in the Barrens of Doom and Despair.

The author of the notes, a (somewhat strangely) nomadic astrologer of the Order of the White Crane from the Emerald Empire of Shou Lung in eastern Kara-Tur, had written her observations in an elegant script (which I immediately noted was only supposed to be used for official Celestial documentation for important scrolls meant only for the eyes of the Son of Heaven himself) and bound the few parched and dry sand-like pages together with a reddish reed that the author of the notes said had come from clumps of reed plants that tried their best to grow and thrive along the shores of the Blood River, just after entering Hoar's dominion.

There didn't apparently seem to be the name of the White Crane astrologer written anywhere among the few papers collected, and so I can only assume that she either wanted to keep her identity secret, or there were originally, I assumed, more pages of parchment to this section of the travelogue

which were now missing (perhaps on purpose). My sometimes overactive imagination quickly began to play upon those details, suggesting many possible reasons, one of which I didn't even want to give heed to. Although I did wonder why, for just a moment and among the other thoughts coursing through my mind, how the acolytes here at Candlekeep had first acquired information destined for the halls of the Celestial Throne.

The few sporadic details recorded by the astrologer claimed that contrary to popular priestly belief, the lands held by Hoar were not in fact, cold- or ice-encrusted. They were actually, the astrologer noted, wildly hot, as well as sand-blasted by repeated winds of varying ferocity seemingly coming from every direction at once. This, more than anything else I read about Hoar's domain, I considered to be the most crucial, because it directly challenged all of my (and that of other planar explorers') notions of what the realm of the Doombringer was actually like. I dismissed the details almost as quickly as I had read them, though. While they were intriguing, they didn't help me learn about the place that I was actually supposed to visit on my next journey. Collecting my journal and other notes, and praising the acolytes at the Great Library for their efficiency and considerable efforts to assist me, I left Candlekeep.

Perhaps it was arrogance on my part, or maybe rather it was just because I was tired from my studies, but I should have immediately taken note of the strange arcane energies which quickly enveloped my form when I read the magical symbols on the scroll in my hands and spoke the incantations contained in a *planar shifting* spell. They were, I have come to believe, the first indication that there was something very wrong with the way these scrolls had been written and cast. The next time I used another *planar shift* scroll was just before I left the City that Dwells on the Edge. And that is how I came to end up in the Barrens of Doom and Despair, instead of returning to the Material Plane of Faerûn like I was originally expecting to.

And so, my perhaps poorly cast and ill-timed spell had led me here... to the holdings of The One Who Shall Be Named Only When in the Presence of Many Paladins, or so some of the rarely encountered petitioners tell me. The realm of Hoar, the power of Retribution and Revenge. He Who Walks With Vengeance in His Heart and Malice in His Hand. That is another colourful description a local undead (and particularly friendly) wemic traveler used.

That was just before I began to cross an expansive larvae pit that was spanned by a bridge of which at first glance, appeared to be made from stretched leather pieces flapping in the hatefully-tinged planar wind.

As you know, my curiosity for planar architecture knows no bounds. So, upon closer inspection, I discovered that the bridge was actually constructed from living, writhing imps! That's right... you did indeed read that last sentence correctly. Imagine my immediate shock upon learning the fact that I was traversing a bridged path, over a deep pit of squirming white masses, that was built from live creatures. And imps, no less! Apparently, these wretched creatures, some of which had unfortunately endured the non-arcane process of painful wing removal (which my fellow explorer/associate Grimbuckle suggests originated in the realms held by the Maiden of Pain), had been bound to each other in rows and rows through some perverse use of a spell of mending. Of even greater interest (after I'd been able to assuage my initial feelings of revulsion) was the curious fact that some of the imps still possessed a fraction of their inherent ability for limited shapeshifting. As I slowly made my way, always delicately so as not to cause the poor creatures too much more pain, I progressed to the far side of the bridge over the expanse while the occasional imp *polymorphed* into the shape of a spider, a raven, or worse, even a rat!

Having experienced this new form of planar architecture, and deciding for a moment that a slight rest might be in order, I passed away from the bridge's end and the edge of the pit. I then moved across and continued down what seemed to be a now-disused pathway through the lightning-blasted red and dusty plain that formed this side of the low rise,

which apparently came to be one of the most unimpressive entrances into the domains of a god that I had ever had the pleasure (or, in the case of the Lord of Shadow's domain, not encountering). The air here seemed particularly dry, and yet, for all the apparent dust and redness that seemed prevalent across much of the more recent terrain, this plain seemed unusual by the fact that it was... *usual*. I've seen many planar landscapes in my time and through many of my journeys across foreign lands. But to be here now, in a planar realm, which by definition should be more than a little different than the average Material Plane's plain, and bear witness to something so usual and so normal... Well, it was unexpected, that is what it was. It was almost enough to make yourself doubt that this was indeed the realm of a god.

And so, I looked for a moment for somewhere to rest my short but scholarly frame. There didn't seem to be any hewn stones or boulders that could serve as a convenient back rest, again usual for such an environment, but not for an outer plane. Defeated by this prospect of not being able to find a place to rest, I decided to continue on my way into the lands of the Doombringer. But first, I thought that I might avail myself of a sample from a new beverage that I had picked up from one of my most recent excursions beyond. I knew that, from my recent studies, water, or indeed any type of moisture, would be hard to come by in the open plains of dust and dryness here in the Barrens. And while there was always plenty of blood-red lightning, little to no rain ever seemed to pour from the thick dark clouds above, which looked to pulsate with a radiance full of hate and anger. It was almost intrusive at times, until you began to concentrate on something else.

So, I unhooked the small and thin cylindrical water bottle (although in this rare case, it did not contain water. You see, I didn't have anything to collect the new and unusual beverage I was just talking about earlier in, so I emptied what little water remained in my bottle at the time and had the wizard who had brewed the liquid, fill it up with his strange concoction). I slowly twisted off the cap, sniffing at the contents for just a moment. There didn't seem to be much of a fragrance emanating from the bottle, so I put it to my dry and cracked lips and took a sip of the strange liquid called *Winkle's Old Peculiar*. Immediately satisfied, or at least I thought so, I returned the cap to the bottle and stuffed the container in my carryall. Looking around at the surrounding land for another moment, I then proceeded on down the long-forgotten and dusty trail.

* * * * *

Join with me again next issue as we continue to explore the secrets and mysteries of the planes of Faerûn...

Planar Lore

Talona's Realm

By Scott Kujawa

The fifth day into Tarsakh, of 1373

To First Reader Tethtoril at Candlekeep, I send you greetings. I have started my research on the planes and domains of the gods, since you requested it of me. Currently I find myself in the Barrens of Doom and Despair.

It took a bit of work getting here; there are not many portals that lead to this evil plane and the few that do so are guarded or watched. After a little negotiation with a resident of the plane, I managed to get through one that was left unguarded.

At the moment, I'm in a settlement that is near the portal I used to come to this plane. The portal is far enough away that I don't fear for my life, or at least not greatly. Anyone who is a mortal on this plane should fear for their life, unless they are insane or greatly protected from this harsh climate. Granted, it isn't like the Abyss, but the residents and climate of this plane will harm planar travelers unless they know what they are getting into or are protected.

Since I mentioned the climate, I am going to give you some of my observations about the weather in this part of the Barrens. Of course, some of this might be different in the other parts of this plane, or in the other realms of the deities.

The air outside of this hamlet is overcast, muggy and warm. The insects and other flying pests are most persistent and they like to bite, sting, swarm, and drink blood. Luckily, you made sure I had a magical item to protect me from these insects while I explore the area around Talona's realm. Later I plan to visit her realm when I find a guide that I can trust to take me there.

I write this report to you in a moldy shack in the settlement I just mentioned. I've learned that the locals and petitioners call the settlement Amanite. They tell me that it's named after a mushroom that grows in the forest to the north, called Talona's Amanita. I learned that this forest surrounds some plains, and that the plains surround Talona's Palace of Poison.

But back to the plane!

The sky seems to be perpetually overcast. The constant cloud cover keeps the heat and moisture trapped within, which keeps this part of the Barrens warm and moist, as I mentioned earlier. A sickly light, unlike that of any of the suns found in the Prime Material, illuminates this region of the Barrens. I haven't been to the other parts of this plane to tell if this light is found in the realms of the other deities or if it is part of the plane. This light keeps the atmosphere heated and moist. It burns the skin of humans and humanoids, unless they are protected with clothing from head to toe or with a spell or item. I took the lesser path, for now, and I'm wearing clothing that covered me and a turban protected my head and hair.

The air is thick and difficult to breathe. It's filled with toxic water that burns my lungs and throat and makes my entire being ache. Anyone not used to this plane better be prepared to cover their bodies, because the water burns bare flesh. Anyone who spends a lot of time on this plane learns that the toxic water and water vapor leaves pock marks and craters in the skin of those that are still alive. I am not sure how it would affect metal or organic clothing, though, but I assume that it starts to rot or mark those materials as well. Luckily, the clothing I found on this plane is created here. It's created out of some type of material I haven't seen before.

I tried to find out more, but the locals will not discuss it with me. I believe, but I may be wrong, that is made out of some plant found in the swampy forests. If I had to guess I believe that its made from the fungus that is found growing every where in this part of the Barrens, since I'm still close to Talona's realm and her influence extends this far. For some reason, the extraplanar beings on this plane are not effected by this, but I for one am not going to try to research that and I'll leave that to others to find out why, if they dare. Oh, I almost forgot! The clouds release a steady drizzle that never seems to go away, and it soaks into everything!

I'm going to change topics now and discuss a little about the inhabitants I've seen in this settlement.

The tenth day into Tarsakh, of 1373

But before I get too deeply involved in describing Amanite, I wish to discuss the Amanita mushrooms, since they are so vital to this settlement. One of the herbalists, whom I shall discuss in a bit, allowed me to look at them in the plot of land where she cultivates them. She wouldn't discuss her trade with me until I pestered her with requests, and even then, she only told me what she wanted me to know.

The Amanita mushroom is egg-shaped, and grows to about twelve inches in height. The cap of the mushroom is a sickly yellow, and stems are a mixture of red, blue, and black colors.. Lastly, they have a cap that grows below ground, and I'm told that even a small sample of this cap can kill someone quickly.

More about the settlement, though. It is a small hamlet of about thirty buildings. Over half of them are like the moldy shack that I currently occupy. All of the buildings in Amanite, and I believe most of the other buildings found in other settlements in this part of the Barrens, are covered with fungus, mold, and mildew. Because of this, I can't tell what the buildings themselves are made of, but I suspect that they are constructed from the wood of the forest.

There is a tavern and inn, called The Mushroom Patch. It serves as a place to rest or find some liquid that can quench your thirst. Beware of the mushroom liquor, though! It knocks you off your feet, and I speak from experience. I drank a small sample of it, and it knocked me unconscious for three days!

The proprietor of the Patch is Ezzrel, a female tiefling of unknown heritage. I was curious, but I didn't ask and she told me plainly that I'd better not, unless I wanted my tongue cut out! I took her warning to heart. She has dark skin that is marked like the others of this settlement, clawed hands, and dark brown hair and eyes. Of course she doesn't care about her looks now, so she wore a pair of breeches and a shirt, while leaving the rest of her flesh uncovered.

There is a general store. Some of the items that are stocked here have been sold to the proprietor by adventurers or others that manage to survive on this plane. Anything that is one hundred gold pieces or less can be found here, unless, of course, he doesn't have the item in stock. Since this is a planar store, the times he gets items in varies. The proprietor, whose body is covered with spikes that protrude directly from his flesh, told me his name is Soth. I believe he is a petitioner of Talona's, but he could be something else, since his physical form is so different from many of the others here. There is a mark, which he proudly displays, seared into his chest. It is Talona's triangular holy symbol.

A weaver has a two-story building here. The lower floor is her shop and studio, while the upper floor is her home. Rythree told me that she once lived on Faerûn, in Amn, but somehow she accidentally found herself in this place. It seems that she was delivering a few bolts of cloth to Athkatla, and before she could make it to that city a dark mist covered her and her wagons. The next thing she knew she was elsewhere. With a shrug she set off, and finally found this town. This adult human is pock-marked like the others, but she still has her lush black hair.

There isn't much more to say about this settlement, and so I'm going to move on to the herbalists I mentioned earlier.

The herbalist I spoke to was unwilling to share any information about the other herbalists. Thankfully, though, some of the petitioners, humanoids, and members of the insectoid races were willing to talk to me. It seems that the herbalists were once independent, until the whims of Talona turned against them. Her forces roamed the realm, killing the herbalists whenever they could find them. Finally, when too many of them were killed, the herbalists banded together to protect themselves and increase their power. Now they are all members of a guild that spans the Lady of Poison's realm. Each settlement has at least one herbalist within it, but the larger settlements have many. I doubt that there are more than twenty or thirty members, but I've been known to be wrong before.

Amanite's herbalist dwells in a stone structure. This is not uncommon, as the buildings of the herbalists are all made of stone. However, I don't know where they manage to find this stone. There are no mountains where they could quarry it, and the stone is grey with blue and green streaks running through it. Of course, it too is covered with the endless fungal growth that is found in this humid realm, but for some reason, this stone doesn't decay and it isn't marked by the toxic weather. This is the only building in town that is more then four stories.

Finally, after leaving notes with the herbalist, Dhauril allowed me to meet with her. This female human came from Faerûn, I believe, but if so, her humanity has been stripped from her. I fear that all members of this guild have the same appearance she does. For you see, First Reader, all of her flesh is hairless. But that's not all! Oh no! Each guild member has ingested the poisons and willingly contracted the diseases found in this part of the plane. These toxins cause other changes to happen to their minds and bodies. Their eyes are clear, with no whites or pupils. There are blotches, scales, sores, and other markings on their bodies from the poisons. Their skin has paled to alabaster, no matter how dark it was before they came here.

All of the herbalists are immune to every poison or disease on this plane, and when they find a new poison or disease, they give a sample to the other herbalists. Each of them takes small doses of it until it no longer affects them, thus building an immunity to it. In my observation, this has made them insane. Dhauril's insanity is that she talks to other beings that are not really there, and she thinks that the plane talks to her! When she finally realized I was still here, she continued to answer my questions. I learned that the guild doesn't care to whom it sells its poisons and diseases. Tanar'ri, baatezu, hags, mortals, petitioners, planars, extraplanars - anyone with the wealth to pay for their wares is fair game. I hope to someday to learn more of this guild, but for now I don't have the stomach for it, and so I am moving on.

I only saw one room of the building that she said is hers, and it is the same room the others see when they come to purchase from her. Unlabeled bottles, jars, vials, and other items were hung or stored on shelves. I assume that she knows the contents of each container, but doesn't want others to know. There was a stone door leading somewhere deeper into the building, but since it was closed, I'm not sure what is behind it.

Enough about these herbalists, though.

I'm going to give a little information about the currency of Talona's realm and the settlements around it before I relate my information about the lands outside of the settlement.

Of course they take the standard currency of the planes and Faerûn: platinum, gold, silver, and copper pieces. But there is a different exchange of currency here. It seems they use a hardened fungus as currency. There is a place in the Palace of Tears where someone or something takes this fungus and shapes and hardens it into small circles, which signify different amounts of wealth. The disks seem to have the same standards as the metal coins of Faerûn, though. The larger the circle, the more it is worth. As one would expect, the smallest circle is worth the same as a copper piece. The locals call them "Circles of Tears" or just "Circles."

I now relate my trip through the lands outside of the settlement, and the trouble I ran into when I left.

I managed to find a male human guide by the name of Saedin. After much persuasion on my part, he agreed to show me the mushroom fields outside of the settlement, which are used for food in this part of Talona's realm.

Her petitioners work most of the farms, but I noticed some others, like lepers and other sick or diseased humans, tending the fields. You can't imagine the many different varieties of mushrooms, fungi, molds, and mildews that are grown on these farms. It's a shame that we can't send a Naturalist or two here to take some samples, but only those that are native to this plane, or who have died and been reborn in Talona's service, can harvest them.

I learned this firsthand when we continued on and entered the forest. Saedin decided to pick and eat a purple fruit from one of the trees. As I watched in horror, his skin started to fester, and then a few moments later, as he screamed in anguish, all the blood burst from his flesh as his skin sloughed off his bones. I turned away in horror, and vowed that it was time to move on to see what other horrors I could find in this disease-infested realm. I vowed to watch myself, in case I felt the urge of my curiosity starting to overcome me. That's one of the reasons you sent me on this trip, as you should know.

The fifteenth day into Tarsakh, of 1373

It's been many days since I wrote in this journal, or so I assume. I've followed a trail heading deeper into Talona's realm and through the forest. As I walked, I saw many sights that left me losing my guts on the side of the road, or turning away, white-faced.

Once I passed a group of zombies that were once human. Each of them dripped ichor and gore from their bodies as they shuffled along the road. They were headed in the same direction I was, and so I assume they passed through the settlement I had left behind. Luckily, I never ran into them again.

I managed to find someone who would talk with me again as I passed through an even smaller hamlet, one that was mostly made of hunters. I learned that the zombies I'd seen were victims of a disease that hasn't been spread on Faerûn yet. Yes, First Reader, Talona has made a disease that turns mortals into walking zombies! We must find out more of this disease and research a cure, if there is one!

Of course this hamlet had a herbalist and one of their stone buildings. This building, too, was four stories. While in this hamlet, I slept in a small shack that was barely large enough to move around in.

The forest was blighted and sick. The flora and fauna were unlike any I have ever seen. Plants dripped blood. Trees wept ichor, blood, and other liquids. The leaves of both were sickly shades of many different colors, as was the bark of the trees. Some even had limbs that reached for me and tried to sting or bite me. Again, I'm lucky that my magic and the items you prepared me with kept me from harm.

The fauna of this forest is blighted. Some of the creatures drip poison, or their bodies are covered with open sores and other signs of infection. The insects seem to be the most harmed. They have stingers or fangs that spread poison and disease to those who are not prepared for it. I was attacked once by a swarm of flying insects that seemed to be a cross of bees and mosquitoes. A quick fireball removed them from me, but they were pressing against my shield magic. I'll admit that there was a moment or two when I feared that it would fail and I would fall prey to what ever contagion they carried.

Talona, that sick deity, has made creatures that I hope to never see on Faerûn.

But enough of that for now. I have more to relate to you about the scenes I witnessed as I followed this trail northward. I will tell you that there are scenes I will not relate to you, because they will give me nightmares for all the years I have left. Here is one tale I am comfortable relating to you and to the other scribes of Candlekeep.

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I managed to find a safe place that was off the trail. I was just in time, since I heard the sounds of many footsteps heading my way. Just as I found some foliage to hide behind, a group of fifty humans came around the bend. At least, I assumed they were human. Shaking in my boots, I hid in the patch of sickly bushes and watched.

They went off the trail and passed by my hiding place. As I watched, they followed a very faint path that soon led to an entrance of a stone catacomb, one that I hadn't seen until they pushed aside the foliage covering it.

Once all of them were within and I didn't hear anything threatening, I left my hiding place and made my way to the entrance. As I looked downwards, I saw a stairwell descending into darkness. My curiosity finally overtook me, as you know it will after I have seen too much of interest. So, with a prayer sent to Tymora and Oghma, asking them to watch over me, and with a magical light burning over my shoulder, I made my way down the slick and slippery stairs and into a room that had four exits leading from it.

At this point I started to hear the sounds of rats scraping against stone and the earthen floor. Seeing that I didn't know my way through these catacombs, and the sounds were getting closer, I quickly rushed up the stairs. Just as I came back into the light the sounds of the rats stopped but I could feel them watching me as they glared at my back. As I caught my breath from fear, I listened to make sure I wasn't going to be eaten. Before I could turn to look back I heard a deep and gravely voice. It said, "Human, do not enter our den again. If you do, then you will be dinner, and we will enjoy feasting on your flesh, your bones, and your insides. You do not need to know what lies within, unless you wish to make your way through the maze. If you accomplish that feat and can stay free of the infection, then you would be the first one who has managed to do so."

With those words, I just kept my back turned away from whatever was staring at me and made my way back to the trail. Once there, I got myself under control and then continued on through the forest.

The twenty-fifth day into Tarsakh, of 1373

It seemed like days later when I finally saw the trees thin. Open plains rolled out before me as I stepped out of the gloomy, sick, and disease-ridden forest. Looking across the plains and ferns that stretched before me, I realized I was on the border of Talona's realm. The River of Blood flowed along to my right, then curved to the left and continued on to the south of me. I realized I had to cross that river if I wanted to continue on.

Following the trail that continued north, I came to another small settlement. This nameless village had few residents, but a diverse populace. In the short time I was there, I saw members of about ten different races. This settlement seemed be built up around the ferry that helped bring passengers from one side to the other.

The settlement was little more than a market. Looking over the wares, I was left feeling nauseous and a little nervous. Most of the items for sale were larvae. These worm-like creatures wriggled around in containers while they stared at me. Their faces resembled the faces they wore in life, and some of them sent chills through me.

The loudest of the yugoloths, an arcanaloth named Nizibel, tried to get me to purchase some of the larvae, but I turned and made my way to the stone landing where the ferry was tied up.

There I met another yugoloth, a marraenoloth, but this one wouldn't tell me his or her name. After haggling, which I don't recommend to anyone, I managed to get passage. I will not discuss what price I had to pay for such passage, since that is my business.

Crossing the River of Blood wasn't such an interesting experience, either. Skeletal fish swam around us, their fleshless fins somehow propelling them through the noisome river. The insects were worse here

because they drank from the river or were born along its banks. I kept to the middle of the ferry, just in case the ferryman decided to double-cross me. As we crossed this wide river, I saw other ships crewed by tanar'ri and baatezu. Some of them even swam in the river! There were other creatures that swam in the river, as well, but it was hard to tell what they were, and all I saw was the ripples of their passage.

As I stepped off the ferry, the fiend that helped me cross reminded me of my bargain, growling at me, "Remember our deal, human."

"I shall."

There was nothing more to say and I continued on my way. As soon as I stepped into the plains and followed a trail that led away from the pier, I was surrounded by a swarm of ruby-red insects. Most of the swarm didn't make it through the shield of magic I surrounded myself with, but a handful managed to injure me before my magics finished activating. A flame burst from my shields burned away the insects. Taking a vial, I quickly drank its contents to make sure I was safe from disease or poison, and then drank another to heal my wounds.

Seeing that the way was clear, I quickly strode north across the plains after casting invisibility on myself. I prayed to Tymora and Mystra that that spell would protect me long enough to get to Talona's realm, which was growing closer to me as I walked.

The further I traveled, the marshier the land became. As I made my way through the fen using a water walk spell, I noticed that the realm spread outward in the same way an insect hive would.

Before I passed within I dropped my invisibility. As I followed the road leading north, I saw that in the center of the city was Talona's pyramid palace. All of the buildings of the city spread outward from that building in an organized fashion. The palace is the biggest and longest structure in the entire city. Roads lead up to it from every direction, coming together at the palace grounds.

Looking around the city for a while, I finally decided to find a place to stay. The Bloody Doom inn and tavern is the place where I felt most comfortable. It, like almost everything in this city, was covered with fungus, mold, and mildew. But at least the room had a door and a lock. The innkeeper is a male half-elf, of moon elven stock, known as Bloody. I didn't ask why he has that name, this being one of the few times my curiosity didn't get the better of me.

After procuring the room, I decided to head to the palace grounds to see if I would be allowed within. The palace is surrounded by open land, which is patrolled by Talona's diseased petitioners. From my observations, she allows most of them to retain their human shape, save for some that are used to guard the entrance of the palace. They are about the size of the smallest giants, muscular and very burly. Like the rest, though, they too are diseased, scarred, pock-marked, scaled, and the like.

I was told to leave when I got too close, but I did manage to get a good look at the palace. It, as I said, rises above the rest of the buildings. It has steps rising up the sides that lead to the top. I'm told her two proxies hold services up there for those who are in the graces of the Lady of Poison. The names of these proxies are Poison and Disease. Yes, I know, really imaginative… But that is what they are called.

I turned away and returned to the city, because the guards were really starting to stare at me and the swarms of insects coming from within the palace were growing even thicker. Not that there were any less insects in the city!

The neighborhood surrounding The Bloody Doom inn was near the gate, but to the east. This part of the city was sparsely occupied: a smithy or two; one of the herbalist buildings, which was the tallest edifice in the neighborhood; a general store; and a weaver. Near those buildings is a market where goods, larvae, and other supplies could be bought and sold.

As for the races that could be found in the city, there were some humans and

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humanoids, but most of the races are planars, like tanar'ri, baazetu, bladelings, achaierai, and other races that I can't name. Tieflings seem to be at home here. I think they enjoy it here because of the toxic nature of the realm and the insects, which they like to eat.

Well, First Reader, that is my report for now. I plan to make my way to Loviatar's realm next. Trust me when I say this, I am not looking forward to that, but I know my duty!

Scribe Lychrina Surstyn of Candlekeep

Mercenary Companies of the Realms

By Daniel Rosenquist

The men and women from countless regions and races that fight goes under many names may it be Sellsword, Soldier of fortune, Mercenary, or Hiresword. Even thought they seem to be set apart at a first glance, they do follow a common cause. They fight for gold, the battlefield is their home and the death cries of the fallen is their lullaby. The lust for more power, for those that have it, is an endless cycle and so these men and women always find work when the horn of battle sounds.

The Scourge of Eaerlann

Type: Support, scout and skirmish
Base: Somewhere in the High Forest
Current Sphere(s) of Operation: The Highforest**,** Silverymoon, and The North
Leader: Veliantalir of the Green Arrow, and Elmienna of the Swift Blade.
Government: Democratic hierarchy
Number of Members: Unknown, but believed to be somewhere around 50 - 100
General Alignment: CG, LN, N

istory:

The Scourge of Eaerlann was born of two smaller groups. One group consisted of Veliantalir (em R12) and several friends, who were seeking the glories of fallen Eaerlann. The other group, led by Elmienna (ef F10), had formerly been charged with guarding the Nameless Dungeon, until its fall earlier that year (1369 DR) to demon and orc forces from Hellgate Keep. Since that day, she and her two dozen warriors had wandered the forest, doing battle where able. From the fateful meeting of these two groups arose a mercenary unit whose fame is spreading throughout the North.

Veliantalir, the leader of the Scourge, is a wood elf from the distant island of Evermeet. His father had been among those fleeing the fading realm of Eaerlann during its fall in the Year of the Curse (882 DR). Veliantalir, interested in his ancestors' lives within the High Forest, journeyed to the ruined cities of Eaerlann. He wanted to see what was left of them, and to see if the splendors of the High Forest were truly as enchanting as his father said they were. With him followed other elves with an equal lust for adventure and exploration.

Much to his horror, Veliantalir found the fallen cities had been occupied by humanoid monsters -- or worse. During an exploration near the Nameless Dungeon, they were attacked by yuan-ti who had taken the ruin as their home. Had it not been for the timely arrival of the wild elf Elmienna and her group of soldiers, they would have surely been lost that day.

Elmienna led the two groups to the wood elven settlement of Reitheillaethor, at the banks of the Heartblood River, where they rested and planned what to do next. After many hours of discussion, Veliantalir and Elmienna came to the conclusion that they had a common love for the forest realm. They both wanted the realm restored to its old glory, or at least free from the evil forces that hold sway over different parts of the High Forest. It seemed a simple enough goal, even though it was a far-fetched one.

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However, as they fought to reach their goal, they saw that either the forces of evil were too strong or that new ones moved in from the surrounding regions. Not willing to give up, they instead began hiring out their services to help secure the realms around the High Forest. The following years were a mixture of successes and setbacks as the League of the Silver Marches rose in the north. The Year of the Unstrung Harp (1371 DR) saw the birth of the new realm, but the same year also saw the Scourged Legion take control of Northpeak. The Scourge of Eaerlann tried to harrow the forces of the Scourged Legion, but met fierce resistance from the tanarukks. Instead, they concentrated on taking out easier targets, such as orcs.

This plan almost ended in disaster, with Veliantalir and Elmienna becoming separated from the main force. The two held out against an overwhelming number of orcs, felling them by the dozens. By the time the rest of the Scourge of Eaerlann caught up with their leaders, there wasn't much work left. Scores of orcs lay dead around the two; the green arrows of Veliantalir pierced those that hadn't fallen to Elmienna's swift blade.

Since the day of that incredible battle, the Scourge of Eaerlann has used a strange but well-known battle cry while fighting the orcs of the High Forest. Veliantalir's group shouts, "The green arrow strikes!" Elmienna's comrades-in-arms reply by shouting, "The swift blade falls!"

The Scourge of Eaerlann's greatest threat, as well as their biggest victory, came in the Year of the Lightning Storms (1374 DR). It was then that the forces of the High Forest, combined with soldiers from Evereska, Evermeet and Silverymoon, defeated the armies raised by the daemonfey Sarya Dlardrageth. Having survived the ordeal at Myth Glaurach, the group currently roams the High Forest. They have promised Lord Seiveril Miritar, the commander of Evermeet's host at Myth Glaurach, to help in the search for Sarya's new hiding place.

The emblem stitched to the armor of every member of the Scourge of Eaerlann is a green-fletched arrow and a longsword, against a green tree. The Scourge of Eaerlann currently consists of fifteen swordsmen and thirty-five longbow-wielding archers. Though numbering only fifty members, the group is often thought to be larger. This is because the archers strike from concealment, never revealing themselves, and also because the entire company never gathers in one place. This secrecy even applies to employers; the group trusts in their leaders to deal with those who retain the Scourge's service. The Scourge of Eaerlann is primarily composed of elves, though some half-elves can be found as well. Both sexes are more or less evenly represented, with the males having a slightly higher percentage.

If one wants to hire them, there are several ways to do this. One can leave a message with Captain Hulrune Silverbow in Reitheillaethor. There is also a pair of trees near the settlement that have leather hides with the insignia of the Scourge of Eaerlann on them. Other areas with such trees include Olostin's Hold, and also at the outskirts of Turlang's Wood near Everlund. Leaving a note at any of these trees will sooner or later result in a visit by Veliantalir or Elmienna. There is also a third option, which is to leave a message with Izai Thunnvangan, a senior Harper who takes great interest in the ancient realm of Eaerlann and who usually knows where the Scourge of Eaerlann can be found, or at least its latest whereabouts.

Strategies and Tactics:

They usually stay concealed for as long as possible, letting the enemy walk into a well-prepared ambush. If no such options are available, the group's swordsmen draw the enemy's wrath while the rest rain death upon their adversaries.

Personality:

The Scourge of Eaerlann is led by Veliantalir, and second in command is Elmienna. At least, this is how it seems to an outsider. The leaders of the Scourge of Eaerlann always discuss their next job assignment, as well as how to best complete it, openly with the members of the company. They usually favor

jobs that concern the High Forest over other areas, or jobs that involve fighting demons. In such cases, they have even been known to lend a hand for free, happy to thwart the plans of an enemy of the Tel'Quessir.

Logistics:

The Scourge of Eaerlann has two different dress codes. Swordsmen are attired in chainmail and helm, and wield a longsword and shield. Archers are dressed in leather armor, either studded or plain, and are armed with a longbow and either a short sword, dagger or other small melee weapon. The archers are more lightly armed and armored because they often take up position in trees, and heavier equipment would restrict their movement in such conditions.

Cost:

50 – 100 gold per day, depending on the job.

Insignia of the Scourge of Eaerlann, pinned to a tree

Journal of an Apprentice Scribe

Berdusk, part 11

By J P Hazelhoff

Well met, fellow scribes and learned scholars!

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Rikos Dughol, late of Saradush, in Tethyr. I have been traveling across Faerûn, at least across the regions known as the Western Heartlands and the North, as an apprentice scribe with my master Brin Orgul.

During my travels, I have kept a journal of the places I have visited and things I have seen. As I retrieve and edit these journal entries while staying in Candlekeep, I will make them available for all to read. My journal might resemble the works of Volothamp Geddarm, whose writings I came across during my studies, but are by no means copies of his excellent work, which has served as a wonderful source of inspiration.

Most of the journal has been written during those moments when I did not have to perform some tasks for my master, or when I wasn't occupied with the physical part of traveling. Because of this, the entries in the journal may sometimes seem disjointed. Also, the entries might not be published in chronological order; the pages were scattered during an unfortunate incident with an overeager air mephit.

I hope that for the places I've visited, the journals will provide you as much insight as Volothamp's journals provided me.

Till swords meet,
Rikos Dughol of Saradush

* * * *

Journal of an apprentice scribe by Rikos Dughol of Saradush

13th Hammer 1371, Year of the Unstrung Harp

y feet are weary from spending a day out in a cold and windy city; though I tried to see as much of Berdusk as possible, I still feel that I have only seen a small part. After breaking fast with Master Orgul, I wrapped myself in a warm cloak and headed out of the Three Harpists. The city's inhabitants were already hurrying about, taking care of their morning activities. A main thoroughfare close to the Tankard House was my first objective: The Minstrelride.

A large thoroughfare indeed, the Minstrelride runs from Shortarrow Gate uphill to the heart of the city. From a street vendor hawking her wares - roasted nuts – I learned that the street starts just inside of the massive stone gate. From its crossing with Shondaleir Street, the Minstrelride marks the boundary between two city districts: Sulduskoon and Ironward. Sulduskoon comprises both banks of the Clearspring up to the Leaping Lynx Bridge, and it is predominantly a collection of warehouses, shipping offices and several small tankard houses and eateries.
Ironward is predominantly dedicated to liveries and to smiths of all kinds. It didn't

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need much introduction from the street vendor; the clang of hammers and whinnying of horses was audible enough. I felt no need to visit the domain of the metalworkers and, after buying a handful of roasted nuts to munch on, turned to ascend the Minstrelride towards the twin hills.

Two buildings a little uphill from where I started my journey on Minstrelride caught my eye: a small, keep-like structure and a slender tower. Several pennants were flying from the small keep's turrets; because of the wind, I couldn't see initially whose colors they were, but soon after crossing Shondaleir Street it became clear. No mistaking the upright hand and the eye that forms the symbol of Helm. Though not interested in entering the rather martial building, I did say a brief prayer of thanks to The Watcher for having looked after over Master Orgul and me from Beregost to Berdusk.

The second building that caught my attention also featured a hand, this one being the common symbol of Azuth. With two of these religious buildings close together, I wondered if I were in a temple district of sorts. With that thought, I started to pay a little more attention to the people in the street, and indeed it seemed there were several people displaying religious symbols on tunics, tabards and shields.

Helmites, magistrati, deneirrath, morninglords, joybringers: a small variety of representatives of the Faerûnian deities, and a joy to behold so many priesthoods dedicated to lore, script, music and knowledge. Clearly, Berdusk belongs to the more intellectually developed places in the sometimes barbaric Sword Coast.

The visual aspect of the tower was not the only part that attracted my attention – there was also the audible element. I had heard the bells before, a clear ringing sound that seemed to sound at the same strength throughout the city and for some distance beyond the walls. With regular intervals, the bells serve to keep the time from early morning to late evening.[1] The sounds don't seem to emanate from a regular bell; no such heavy bronze affair could conceivably fit within the confines of the tower - and the tower belonging to the faith of Azuth, I wouldn't be surprised if the whole thing is not some cleverly constructed magical effect.

The tower[2] looks ancient, and so slender that one cannot help but surmise that magic must have been used in its construction, and that magic is likely keeping the structure together. The adjacent buildings look blunt in comparison with the tower, but have a charm of their own. The architecture reminds me of similar styles that I'm familiar with back in Tethyr.

When I asked a guardsman wearing a tabard emblazoned with the Lord of Spells' symbol about the building, he told me that the original tower was erected around 375 DR by Calishite wizards in a brigade of Shoonite forces[3] during their campaign into the Western Heartlands. The Calishites were eventually driven back by the forces of Azoun I of Cormyr, in 376 DR. The guardsman pointed to one of the cornerstones, in which still vaguely recognizable the mage-symbol of one of these Calishite wizards was etched.[4]
A building across from the House of the High Hand featured a small fountain on the

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[1] The intervals of the twelve bells of the Berduskan day are equivalent to the daylight hours on Earth, with highsun being the midway point of the day. As Elminster says; "*Time in the Realms is NEVER measured in 'hours' or 'minutes.' Short-term waits can be measured in 'breaths' but in cities, temples, and monasteries, the equivalent of hours are so many 'bells' (yes, a bell is rung) or 'candles' (which do visibly burn down) from or to a measurable event, such as dawn/daybreak, dusk/nightfall, or noon (in the Realms, noon is 'highsun').*"

[2] The slender tower resembles a minaret, and is reminiscent of architecture in Calimshan. It was actually raised by a wizard in the Shoon armies during their campaigns into the Sword Coast.

[3] To be more precise, the forces belonged to King Ashar of Valashar, a vassal to the Shoon Empire, and were primarily Tethyrian and Amnian troops under Calishite command. The most senior of the wizards was Shalgar the Masked, the same wizard credited with destroying Bellowbar's inn.

[4] The sorceress who commanded the tower was Sarsora yn Nadim al Amun, ancestor of the Calishite wizard Iththaerus, who was responsible for the first fall of Dragonspear Castle.

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structure's corner; the water flowed from an amphora held by a small devilish-looking creature into a bowl decorated with fish. The roasted nuts had made me thirsty, and I drank a little from the clear water. A few yards from the fountain is the entry of the building, and the arch of the doorway holds a faintly glowing symbol: a typical mage sigil, not too surprising with the shrine to the Lord of Spells across the street.

Refreshed, I continued my way up the hill, a wide street leading up to a plaza paralleling the Minstrelride. Abruptly the street's cobblestones give way to a mosaic of various sorts of colored marble. At first I did not notice anything special other then the variety of colors used; only when I noticed two large pillars at the far end of the plaza did I look again – the mosaic depicts a large scroll with all manner of glyphs. The plaza is a natural extension of the temple complex - a collection of buildings dedicated to the Scribe of Oghma, Denier.

The plaza runs up to a low stone wall, behind which can be found rock gardens, trees, grass and other greenery. These, in turn, surround the interconnected low stone buildings, built in gentle sweeping curves as if elegantly drawn with a feathered quill rather than being built by engineers. I was not sure if the whole complex comprised the Inner Chamber,[5] though the two pillars that flank the gate leading into the complex seemed to indicate it was.

Behind the temple and viewed between the flag decorated turrets, the slope of Castle Hill goes steeply upward to the walls of the castle proper. Though it seemed a good destination for a visit - the park adjacent to the castle looked especially inviting - I decided against climbing further up the hill. Amberside, the large market of which Master Orgul had told me, seemed a more attractive venture for the day.

Passing between the two tors, I ended up on Minstrelride again, where the street had rounded the rocky tor on which the castle stands. Following it downhill brought me to Amberside, a huge open area in the district of the same name. The buildings that ring the market square are without exception shops, eateries or tankard houses, and they form the only apparent permanent businesses; hundreds of tent stalls, platform wagons and the like form the heart of the market.

The place is bustling with activity, and cries of hawkers and fishmongers mix with the sounds of small livestock and the general din of humanity. Despite the size of the area, the market is crowded, with nary space enough for a wagon to pass through. I imagined it resembles the famous bazaars in Calimport.

Besides fresh vegetables, fish, herbs and spices, the market offers much more, including household ironmongery of all sorts and forms - and judging by the way the merchants presented their goods, much came from exotic and faraway places. Textiles of all sorts and colors can be found aplenty: damask, velvet, and silk, as well as more plain linen and wool.

I found myself spending most of my day on the market. Only when the sunlight was starting to change into the orangey-red of the sunsets did I realize the time of day and wrenched my attention from the market. Rather than returning the same way, I set out on a southerly course, and ended up on Steelspur Way. A wide thoroughfare, easily three wagons wide, the cobbled street seems to lead slightly downhill towards the Chionthar.

The first thing I noticed when leaving the market was the large statue. The bronze statue of a young warrior on horseback, holding a sword aloft while the horse tramples over fallen foes – the fallen looking very much like Calishite warriors - did not ring a bell. Intrigued, I walked up to the statue, trying to find a plaque with some information. The marble socket bears an inscription in Chondathan on the south side; where the warrior is facing: *Crown Prince Azoun I of Cormyr, liberator of Sulduskoon in the Year of the Leaping Hare.*

For some reason the image of the sword plucked at my memory, as if somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind I realized that

[5] Master Orgul later pointed out the right building.

there was a story behind the weapon. Yet no matter how much I tried – and even now while penning this entry into my journal – I could not seem to recall that piece of lore[6].

Dragon Square, where the statue is located, is located where Steelspur Street and Clearspring Climb meet just south of Amberside. Clearspring Climb runs in an east-westerly direction and is appropriately named, since it runs at a relatively steep incline up from Berdusk's easterly wall towards the Clearspring Tor. Since I didn't feel like climbing uphill once more, I continued further down Steelspur Way, until I came to a larger intersection.

Being quite unfamiliar with the city, I found myself wondering again where I was. At The Riverbarge tankard house on the south-easterly corner of the intersection, I decided to ask for directions. I was about to enter the tankard house, when I noticed a young man standing guard in front of a large mansion across from the tankard house on Steelspur Way.

At first I didn't notice, but when I drew closer and addressed the man I noticed the gray drapes hanging down on both sides of the large double doors – one of which was open. Prominently displayed on the drapes were the scales and the skeletal hand that form the symbol of Kelemvor[7].

The man, a young priest-in-training, was quite helpful and sent me on my way into the sidestreet off of Steelspur Way. I was to follow Orcslayer Street until it crossed the Uldoon Trail. From there I had to go south to the intersection with the Gollahaer – a name I recognized. I thanked the priest and went along his directions, which indeed sped me on my way back to the Three Harpists.

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[6] Later research revealed to me the name of the sword. It was "The Mistress of Battles", Ilbratha.

[7] The Crystal Mansion is a relatively new addition to the collection of shrines and temples in Berdusk. The temple is a converted mansion and could pass for a mundane building, were it not for the gray drapes depicting the Lord of the Dead's symbol on both sides of the front entrance.

The Crystal Mansion's clergy look after the needs of the dead and the dying in Berdusk. South of Berdusk, across the Chionthar, they maintain a large cemetery. High Priest Sillisten, Death's Hand of Kelemvor, presides over a small contingent of priests and a slightly larger flock of laymen.

Besides looking after the local needs, the more militant of the clergy often patrol the Fields of the Dead to aid in laying restless souls down.

Credits

Volume II of the *Candlekeep Compendium* contains the work of many people, who have put much time and effort into penning these articles of lore. Many thanks to all who contributed and helped on this project.

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We hope you have enjoyed this volume of Realmslore. Any feedback is greatly appreciated. Please email us at **compendium@candlekeep.com** or visit the Candlekeep forum at **http://www.candlekeep.com/forum**

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Volume III

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