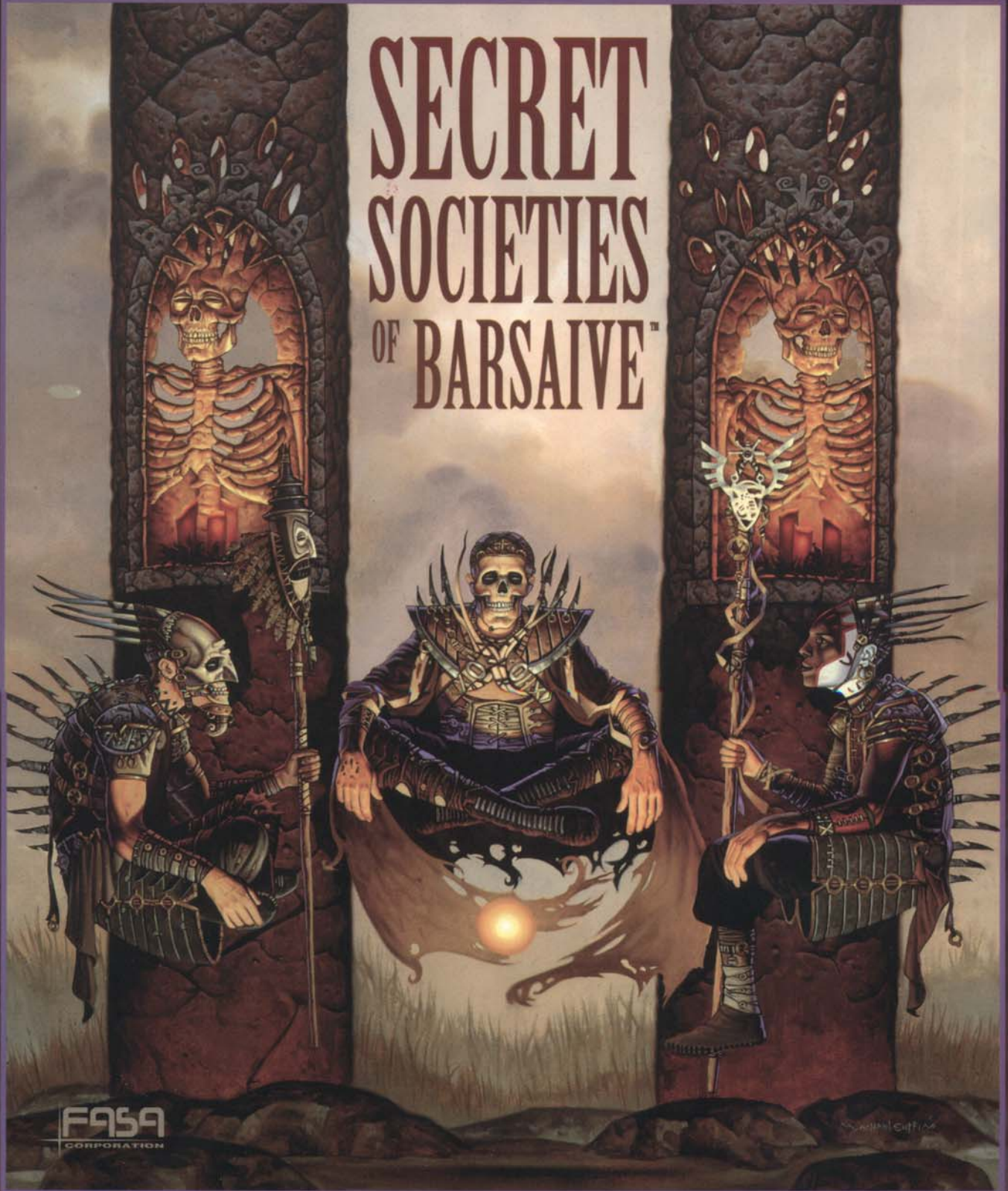


EARTHDAWN®

SECRET SOCIETIES OF BARSVAIVE™



Secret Societies of Barsaive

FASA CORPORATION



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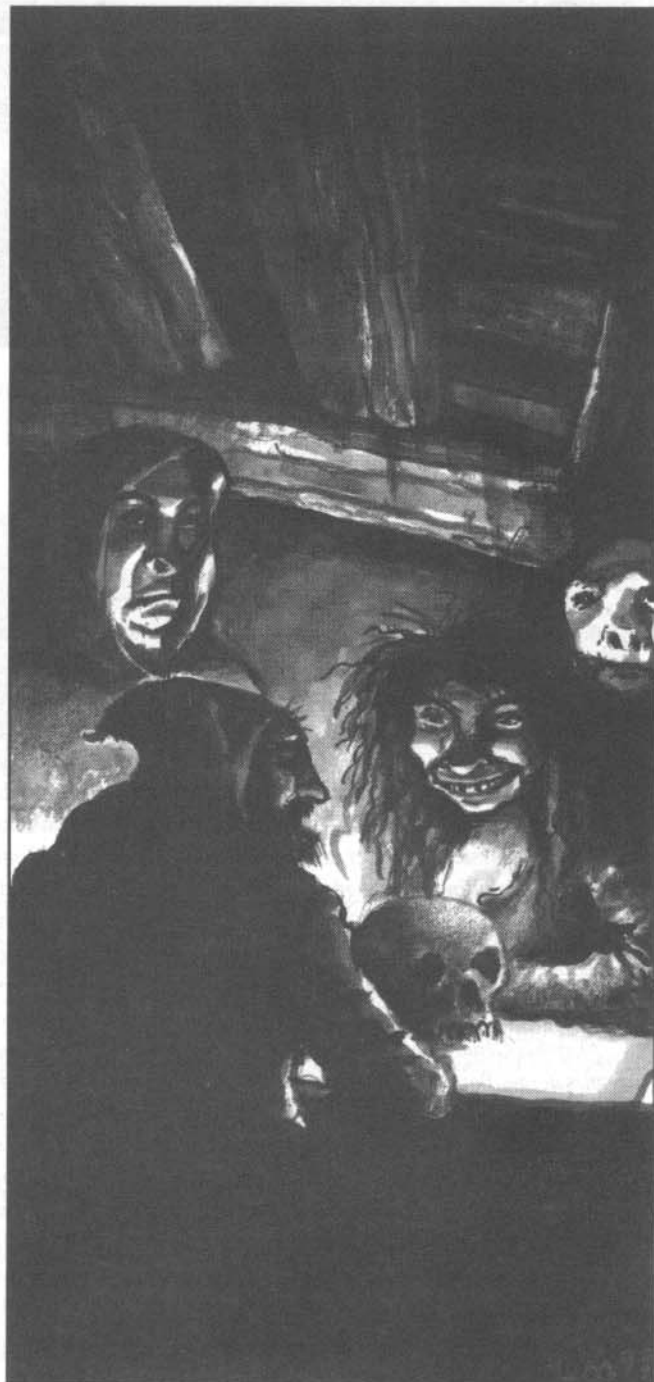
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CONCERNING BARSATIVE'S SECRET SOCIETIES

To: Overgovernor Kypros

From: General Ilfaralek, Akarenti of Vivane

After many months of investigation, we have at last completed our compilation of reports on secret societies known to operate in the province of Barsaive. We have concentrated our efforts on groups we identified as likely to have an impact on Theran interests; those most potentially useful and/or threatening appear in the first half of this collection. All of these reports, compiled by myself and Akarenti Gendel from the work of our respective agents, present the most up-to-date and accurate information available to us.

In the years since the Barsaivian rabble drove our forces back to Vivane and Sky Point, we have monitored the activities of our enemies in the province, most notably the Kingdom of Throal, so that when the time came to retake Barsaive we would know as much as possible about the opposition we might face. While planning for the establishment of the fortress Triumph at Lake Ban, First Governor Kanidris and Arbiter General Andreax ordered us to step up our observations in Barsaive's cities and expand our investigations further, so as to learn of every Barsaivian power or faction that might oppose our efforts. We have, of course, had operatives in most of Barsaive's cities for many years, including the Kingdom of Throal. However, we suspected that a number of other groups—including strange cults and various other secret orders—remained beyond the reach of our existing operatives. Thera's spies in the larger cities had provided more than adequate information about significant news and major events in those locales but could not keep track of the hundreds of small cults and secret groups that call this backwater province home. Given the importance of our efforts to the reconquest of Barsaive, it was imperative that we learn all we could of these smaller factions to determine whether they might threaten our presence or further our interests.

Akarenti Gendel arrived in Vivane just a few weeks prior to the arrival of the Triumph at Sky Point. Using information gathered by our spies across Barsaive, Gendel and I chose the groups that would be the subject of our investigations. When the Triumph arrived at Sky Point, Akarenti Gendel went with it to Lake Ban, where he continued his research. Throughout our investigations we have coordinated our efforts whenever possible and updated each other as necessary on our progress.

As we worked, we learned of other groups worthy of the Empire's attention and assigned operatives to report on them. Some groups we at first thought significant proved otherwise, while others we had initially discounted proved to be more of a threat than first believed.

The reports that make up this document come from several authors and sources: myself and Akarenti Gendel, operatives in our employ and in one case by Azim Keel, chief magician at Triumph. Many are first-hand accounts from our spies who infiltrated the various groups. In some cases our operatives were unfortunately discovered and killed; a few chose to abandon the Empire and join the groups they had been assigned to infiltrate. Luckily, in these few instances we gained considerable information from our errant informants before they turned.

In preparing this document, we have edited only as needed, included cross-referencing notes where applicable and provided explanatory notes when the circumstances by which a given report came into our possession are not clear.

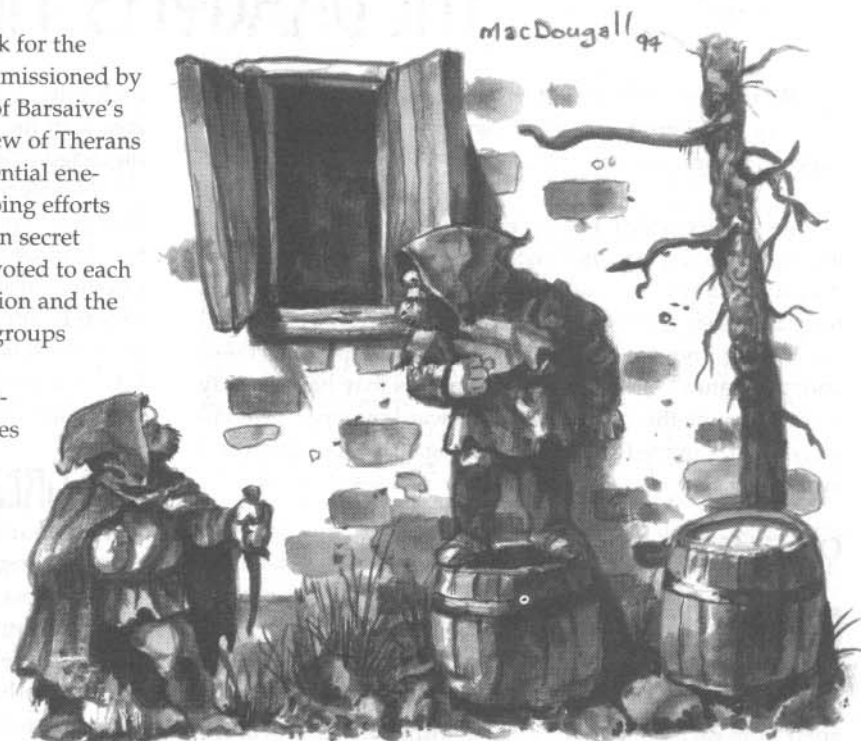
Meanwhile, our efforts to monitor Barsaive's secret societies continue. Should we learn of any new group that warrants attention, we will not hesitate to inform you, General Nikar at Triumph, First Governor Kanidris and Arbiter General Andreax.





INTRODUCTION

Secret Societies of Barsaive is a sourcebook for the **Earthdawn** game line. Presented as a work commissioned by the First Governor of Thera, it describes many of Barsaive's secret societies and groups from the point of view of Therans trying to get a clear picture of the Empire's potential enemies—and, possibly, useful tools—in their ongoing efforts to reclaim Barsaive. This book describes fourteen secret societies known in Barsaive, including cults devoted to each of the three Mad Passions, the Hand of Corruption and the Keys of Death. Also included are several other groups whose activities worry the Thera Empire in Barsaive, even though they pose little or no danger to Barsaivian citizens: the network that serves Barsaive's dragons, the Liferock Rebellion (formed after the landing of the behemoth on the Hill at Ayodhya, as told in the **Earthdawn** epic **Prelude to War**) and the Eye of Throal. Though some of these may not be secret societies in the usual sense, many of their activities are clandestine, and their inclusion in this book offers gamemasters and players a more thorough understanding of their operations and goals.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Secret Societies of Barsaive gives gamemasters all the information needed to run adventures and campaigns based on any of the groups described. Aside from the **Earthdawn** rulebook, no other material is needed to use **Secret Societies**, though gamemasters may find other published **Earthdawn** products useful. Especially helpful is the **Barsaive Gamemaster Book** from the **Barsaive Campaign Set**, which includes brief descriptions of several of the groups in this book, as well as information on the nature of secret societies in Barsaive. In addition, players may want their characters to use and learn some of the additional abilities described in the **Earthdawn Companion**, the **Earthdawn Gamemaster Pack**, **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets** and **Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive** for adventures in which they will be dealing with these secret groups. Finally, this book picks up on many recent events in Barsaive, including the arrival of the Thera behemoth at Lake Ban and the assassination of King Varulus III, both described in **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**.

To give gamemasters and players the flavor of the **Earthdawn** game world, this book is written as first-person fictional accounts. Each fictional entry offers considerable information about the group it describes and can also be used as a jumping-off point for story lines in which the player characters become involved in a secret society's activities. In addition to the specific adventure ideas given with each entry, the goals, methods and plans of each secret society can provide the backdrop for countless adventures in virtually any area of Barsaive. Game information provided with each fictional account may also include suggestions for using the group in adventures and campaigns, statistics for gamemaster characters and creatures or new abilities that some members of these groups may possess.

Though the material in this book is presented as fact and should be treated as accurate in terms of FASA's **Earthdawn** continuity, you are the ultimate author of your campaign. If a fact in this sourcebook contradicts something you have already established in your game or if you find it inconvenient, go ahead and change it in whatever way you feel will work best for your player group, adventure or campaign.





THE DRAGONS' NETWORK

Being a report for Overgovernor Kypros on the nature and activities of the great dragons of Barsaive and their agents, by General Ilfaralek, Akarenti of Vivane.

As you requested, I have personally prepared the following report on the activities and plans of the great dragons of Barsaive, as well as the information we have unearthed regarding their agents (Name-giver and otherwise). You will see how ominous a picture it paints of the plots of these ancient creatures, and how far their agents may have already spread through this unfortunate, backward province. I recommend taking immediate precautions against these dangers; I await your pleasure to discuss possible courses of action.

ON THE DRAGONS' ENMITY TOWARD THERA

Barsaive is home to at least seven great dragons, and possibly more. Like all of their kind, these dragons live far apart from each other in the most inhospitable reaches of the land. Each is a unique being with its own goals and pursuits. In truth, the only thing that seems to unify these diverse, independent-minded wyrms is—unfortunately—their hatred of and anger toward Thera.

Our recent capture of the Barsaivian girl Aardelea has earned us the enmity of the dragons of Barsaive, and perhaps also of their kindred elsewhere. Previously content to let us go about our business in Barsaive, the great dragons have been taking increasingly hostile action against Theran citizens and soldiers. Even more worrisome are signs that the dragons are using Name-givers and others to gather information about Theran activities and occasionally disrupt our affairs. While the dragons' activities have been few and scattered so far, I have reason to believe that we are seeing the beginning of a serious, concerted effort against the Empire in Barsaive.

We have so far been fortunate that great dragons are generally not as cooperative creatures as we are. They are predators by nature and jealously guard their hunting grounds and territory against all who would intrude upon them. Because a creature as huge as a great dragon requires a vast hunting ground indeed, the great dragons of Barsaive have parceled out much of the land between them and steer well clear of

each other's domains, lest a struggle to the death should ensue. In the past, this isolation limited the effectiveness of the dragons' efforts to band together against us.

However, this limit now appears to be vanishing. The dragons may personally dislike working closely together, but their servants are not so limited. Though they owe their primary loyalties to their individual dragon masters, these servants appear to be uniting against Thera and Theran interests. It is this network of Name-giver and other agents, whose members can walk among us virtually undetected, that should most concern us at this time.

THE GREAT DRAGONS OF BARSAIVE

Of course, one cannot understand the slave without first knowing something of the master. Of Barsaive's seven known great dragons, at least three appear to have made common cause against us in Barsaive, and the remaining four may well be aiding the efforts of their fellows in one way or another. The dragons most deeply involved in working against us are those who have taken the greatest interest in Barsaive's people and their affairs; I believe that most of these dragons' anti-Than efforts are part of a plot by the wyrms to seize control of the province.

I will briefly describe Barsaive's great dragons, beginning with the three most immediately dangerous to Theran interests.

Icewing

Icewing, one of the primary instigators of action against us, dwells upon the heights of Mount Vapor in the Throal Mountains and has long been associated with the dwarf Kingdom of Throal. A giant beast of silvery-blue, he prefers the frozen peaks high above Barsaive. Numerous Barsaivian tales and legends claim that he willingly speaks to those Name-givers who survive the treacherous ascent to his ice-bound home, provided they bring him a gift or tribute of sufficient value or uniqueness to catch his interest.

Those who waste Icewing's time are never seen again—no doubt he devours them. Those who please the wyrm often receive some tidbit of arcane knowledge in exchange for their trouble. Icewing sends some of his visitors on errands of his own devising that frequently seem to serve no purpose. The purposes of other errands, however, can be quite pointed. For





example, Icewing sent one such group of adepts to present the wizard Hefera's bones to General Nikar at Triumph—an unmistakable declaration of hostilities between the great dragons and our forces in Barsaive.

Icewing's long association with the kings of Throal dates from the dawning of the Scourge. The great dragon received King Varulus I before the sealing of Throal's underground cities, and it is widely believed that the longevity of Varulus and his heirs springs from some bargain the dwarf king struck with Icewing. The strong ties between the dragon and the rebellious dwarfs of Throal make it entirely likely that the Throal-led uprising against our authority—most recently expressed in the Battle of Prajor's Field—may have been inspired by Icewing for reasons known only to him.

Mountainshadow

Along with Icewing, Mountainshadow appears to be the Barsaivian dragon most interested in the affairs of Name-givers in the province and also the most strongly opposed to our activities of late. He dwells in the aptly Named Dragon Mountains in the southern reaches of Barsaive and is said to surround himself with many Name-giver servants and followers.

Like Icewing, he is silvery-blue. This similarity of color may mean that Mountainshadow and Icewing are related, which might also explain their mutual quickness to ally against us. These two dragons appear to be the prime coordinators of the dragons' network of spies and agents—not surprising, as they have also had the most contact with Name-givers in Barsaive.

According to local legends, Mountainshadow took pity on several Name-giver villages that lay in the shadow of the Dragon Mountains and sheltered their people from the Scourge in his own lair. In exchange, these Name-givers recorded the histories of their villages, to present to the great dragon when the Scourge ended. The purpose of this "tribute," beyond amusing Mountainshadow, is unknown. But given the depth of loyalty shown by the dragons' agents to their masters, it seems that Mountainshadow's alleged generosity may have borne valuable fruit.

Even more interesting is Mountainshadow's actions during the Death Rebellion in the Kingdom of Throal, an uprising that forced King Varulus III and then-Prince Neden to flee for their lives. During that conflict, Neden was abducted by Mordom, a Theran nethermancer (and Heavenherd, according to legend) of great skill, as part of a plan to control the heir to the throne and bring the rebel kingdom back under the Imperial yoke. The effort failed largely due to Mountainshadow's inter-

vention; the dragon used his immense magical powers to restore Neden's damaged body and mind to health. Now the king of Throal, Neden owes his life to Mountainshadow, a debt I am sure the wyrm has not forgotten.

Aban

Of more immediate concern to the Empire is the great dragon Aban, who lairs in the depths of the Mist Swamps. Aban, the only female great dragon known to dwell in Barsaive, has recently become a threat to our forces in Barsaive's heartland. She claims all of the Mist Swamps as her territory—a claim few care to contest, given the boiling heat, scalding water and strange creatures that dwell in the marshland's depths.

However, adventurers have often been attracted to the swamps by legends of the ruins of an ancient city said to lie beneath the muck—a city older than the Theran Empire and the Kingdom of Throal combined, perhaps dating back to the penning of the Books of Harrow. Adventurers and treasure-seekers have sought this fabled city for years, to no avail. A few have discovered fragmentary ruins and other evidence of it, but all who have come too close have been chased away by Aban or swallowed up by the swamps and never seen again.

When we sent out our own expeditions from our fortress at Lake Ban, Aban likewise attacked and drove them away. I suspect that the dragon lairs in the city's ruins and guards them from Name-giver intruders. I have repeatedly warned General Nikar of the dangers of angering a great dragon, but he has chosen to ignore my warnings, and now we all may have to face the consequences.

Of late, Aban has extended the boundaries of her claimed domain to the surrounding area of the Serpent River, the Death's Sea and the Badlands. Some of our vedettes and mining vessels traveling through this region have been attacked by a dragon matching Aban's description. The dragon has not destroyed any vessels yet. At first she merely forced the airships off course and frightened the crews, making it more difficult to fully man the ships. In several recent incidents, however, the dragon has seized airships in her claws as if they were child's toys, shaking out their crews and flying off with the vessels, presumably to her lair in the Mist Swamps. Given that the attacks are occurring along the most direct route between Triumph and Vivane, Aban's intent may well be to hinder trade between Vivane and Triumph and thereby weaken our presence in "her" lands.

General Nikar wishes to send expeditions to find our lost ships, but I recommend against such action. It would only further anger Aban and might increase the ferocity and





frequency of her attacks. As it is, few air sailors want anything to do with ships passing close to the dragon's territory.

Aban is large for a great dragon. Her dark green and black scales allow her to blend well into the dark depths of the swamps. Though she has no servants we know of, she is said to control the creatures that dwell in the Mist Swamps; they allegedly serve as her eyes and ears throughout her domain.

Alamaise

The great dragon Alamaise has involved himself in Name-giver affairs only briefly, but that brief incident made his name known and feared throughout Barsaive and beyond. According to legend, Alamaise slew Queen Dallia of the Elven Court centuries ago, a wound to the hearts of the elven people that may never truly heal. Since then, elves have regarded Alamaise as an enemy—and the great dragons in general have been no friends of the Elven Court or the Blood Wood. We should attempt to exploit this rift; the dragons will never ally with the Empire, but we might well prevent them from aiding our enemies among the elves of the Blood Wood.

Alamaise has not been seen in Barsaive since before the Scourge, though rumors and legends abound of the dragon's lair and plans. The evidence—such as it is—indicates that Alamaise still lairs somewhere in Barsaive's northern reaches, and he may well be involved in plots against us by others of his kind. If Alamaise is involved in the recent activities of the dragons, then his presence may be a wedge we can drive between the Elven Court and the Kingdom of Throal. Given elven distrust of dragons—and their hatred of Alamaise in particular—Alamaise's alliance with Throal can serve to keep these two potential allies apart.

Vasdenjas

Another great dragon who has had some contact with Name-givers, Vasdenjas is the author (of sorts) of a tome on Barsaivian fauna, written down at his dictation by a scholar from the Library of Throal. The scholar, Tiabdjinn by Name, spoke at length with Vasdenjas about the various creatures of Barsaive and recorded the dragon's ramblings for posterity. At the same time, the scholar gave us some potentially useful insights into Vasdenjas' personality.

At first glance, this dragon appears little more than an egotistical buffoon seeking an audience. However, in giving his lore on Barsaive's creatures to the scholars of the Great Library, Vasdenjas demonstrates the same behavior as many other great dragons—doling out knowledge to Name-givers in exchange for some payment in the future. Though

Vasdenjas asked nothing in return for the lore he provided, the scholars of Throal undoubtedly feel indebted to the dragon, and so Vasdenjas will almost certainly be able to collect a favor from them at a later time.

Though Vasdenjas's account makes him appear urbane and pleasant, we must not forget that this is the same Vasdenjas who earned the Names "the Terrible" and "Eater of Cities" in the days before the Scourge. Whatever affable mask he might wear now, Vasdenjas remains as dangerous to us as any of his kind.

Usun

Of all of the great dragons of Barsaive, the elusive Usun is the most mysterious and apparently the least interested in the affairs of Name-givers. However, he too may be of concern to us.

Usun lairs in the depths of the Liaj Jungle in the western part of Barsaive. He is the supreme hunter among all of the fierce, wild creatures native to that place; even the most bloodthirsty jungle predator fears the passing of his dark shadow over the greenery. Usun has declared that no Name-givers may dwell within his territory; he considers any who violate this decree to be prey, just like any creature.

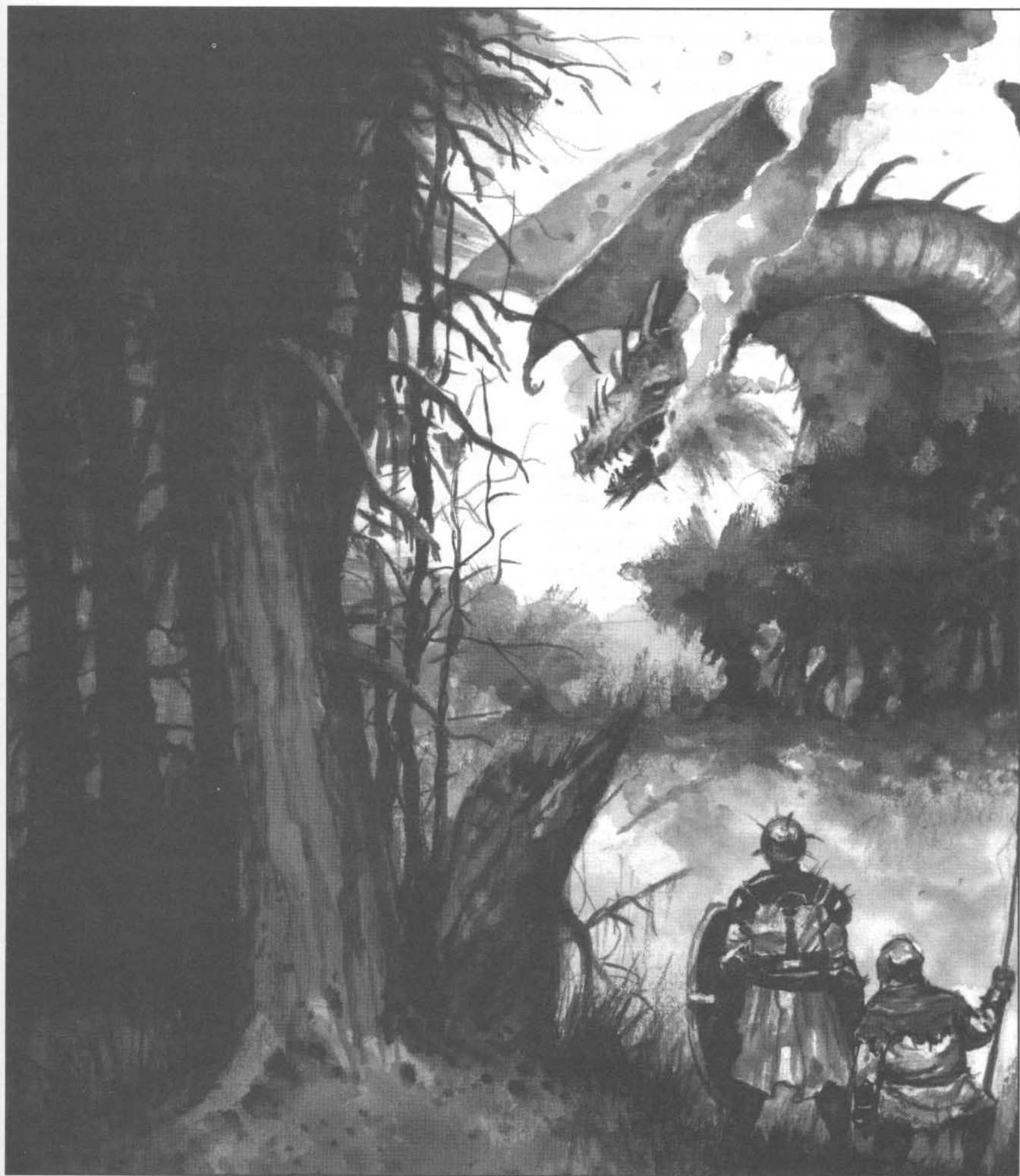
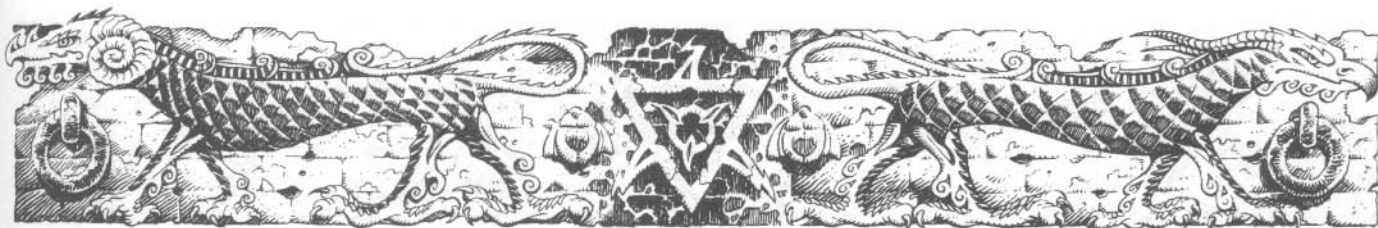
Despite this pronouncement, a tribe of savage Name-givers known as the Tamers lives in Usun's domain, either knowingly flouting the dragon's authority or dwelling there with Usun's permission. In either case, the tribespeople consider staying one step ahead of the dragon a valuable lesson in survival skills. They may also know other lore about Usun or his kind that could be useful to us and may be persuaded to share it with our agents if we approach them properly.

Usun has occasionally attacked airships "trespassing" over his domain, but our vessels have thus far avoided any trouble with the dragon of the Liaj. What intelligence we have suggests that Usun has been seen less and less frequently since our capture of the Ayodhya Liferock. Rumors tell of the dragon working strange and powerful magic in the heart of the jungle, to what purpose we can only guess. The stories may mean that Usun's fellow great dragons have asked him to join their cause; we do not yet know if he has chosen to ally with them or is pursuing interests of his own.

Earthroot

The dragon Named Earthroot is little more than a legend to us—but the legend is strongly bound up with the Kingdom of Throal. Earthroot is said to dwell in the caverns deep beneath the Throal Mountains, attended by a tribe of







’skrang known as the Pale Ones. Supposedly, these underground dwellers rarely leave their cavernous homes and never see the light of the sun. And they call Earthroot their king, a title the dragon seems pleased to accept. Earthroot is said to devour all intruders in the caverns save those who can tell him a tale or legend he does not yet know. As Earthroot seems to know much about the affairs of Barsaive and its people, we can surmise that the dragon has hosted many such visitors. Whether his knowledge of Barsaive includes details of our activities, I have yet to determine.

Though we do not know of any actions Earthroot has so far taken against us, a dragon that purportedly rules a band of mysterious Name-givers who owe him utter loyalty, and who dwells so near Throal, must not be lightly dismissed.

OF THE DRAGONS’ GOALS AND ACTIONS

As you know, relations between the Theran Empire and the great dragons have never been cordial. The last significant conflict between us took place before the Scourge, when the great dragons began to interfere in the dissemination of the Rites of Protection and Passage to the peoples of the Empire. The dragons offered their own magical lore to communities of Name-givers in some cases, undermining the authority of Thera and the First Governor. Efforts to deal with these upstarts were met with murderous reprisals.

Eventually, both sides reached an accord. The dragons left the Empire’s affairs alone, and we in turn left them in peace. So it has remained until recently, when the great dragons of Barsaive rose in anger against us. The source of the dragons’ ire appears to be the work of Hefera, a member of the Fraternity of Thaumaturgical Researches and the late envoy of our First Governor. From the fortress of Triumph, Hefera directed a search for Aardelea, a young human girl from a Barsaivian village who was rumored to possess unusual magical abilities of unknown origin. Hefera found the girl despite the efforts of dragon agents to keep her hidden, and he arranged for her delivery to Sky Point. Hefera himself was captured by agents of the dragon Icewing, who devoured him and sent his bones back to General Nikar as a warning.

Clearly, the girl Aardelea is valuable to Icewing and his fellow great dragons. Since her capture, the dragons have begun working together to oppose Theran interests in Barsaive. Though I believe the recovery of Aardelea remains the great dragons’ primary goal, their actions also seem

intended to intimidate us and disrupt our plans for this province—perhaps for simple vengeance, perhaps for some more devious motive.

In recent weeks the dragons have begun several operations on which I am presently keeping a sharp eye. They have personally attacked agents and outposts of the Empire and have covertly aided our enemies, such as the Kingdom of Throal. Most important, they have apparently built a network of Name-giver and drake agents to infiltrate and spy on Theran activities in Barsaive and perhaps carry out acts of sabotage and terror against us. This network has only recently come to our attention, but I have reason to believe that it has existed for several years. For all that time, its members have been quietly watching us and every other power in Barsaive, keeping their masters informed of all that occurs here.

Direct attacks by the dragons against our people have been few—most of them by Aban, who captured several of our small airships. Caravans traveling between Triumph and Vivane have reported occasional sightings of dragons who may be Mountainshadow or Icewing, as well as three attacks by drakes. Our legate in Urupa has also reported sightings of a dragon we believe to be Mountainshadow in the skies across the Serpent River from the city.

For the time being, the appearances of the great dragons are clearly meant to intimidate rather than cause significant damage, though the loss of airships to Aban’s attacks has become troublesome. Of greater immediate concern are the dragons’ agents and their activities.

THE DRAGONS’ NETWORK

The first indications of the extent of the dragon’s network came from the capture of a spy in Vivane who worked as a domestic slave in my own home, using the Name Jessa. She was observed meeting secretly with an ork male whom we have not yet identified in the city’s Broken Quarter. We attempted to capture Jessa’s confederates as well, but they had been warned somehow and disappeared into the bowels of Barsaivian Vivane.

The following is a transcription of my interrogation of Jessa, recorded by my personal scribe. It reveals worrisome information about the dragons’ Name-giver agents, their organization and their plans. I have excerpted only the most relevant portions of the interrogation for your perusal, along with my own notes where pertinent.

“Where are you from?”





"I was raised under the Shadow of the Mountain, our noble protector. His mighty wings shielded us from the Horrors who wanted our bodies and spirits, and his wisdom and patience taught us the value of service. We gave him tribute and loyalty in return. It has been so since before my great-grandmother's time."

[She refers here to the dragon Mountainshadow and the villages full of pet Name-givers whom he sheltered through the Scourge. Jessa's own village lies somewhere in the Dragon Mountains, but I could not force her to reveal its precise location.]

"What does your master want?"

"The Noble Ones [Jessa's Name for the great dragons] want us to be happy. They are the first-born of Creation and their wisdom is as old as the world. If not for the treachery and short-sightedness of other Name-givers, they would rule the world and there would be peace and prosperity. The Noble Ones have learned to end war among themselves and they could do the same for us."

[Jessa's portrait of the great dragons as noble, superior creatures is not surprising. The dragons' agents clearly believe their masters to have the best interests of other Name-givers at heart, despite common knowledge that dragons are selfish and arrogant creatures. Her mention of the dragons ruling the world is disturbing. We must consider the possibility that the great dragons plan to rule Barsaive, in which case their opposition to Thera's rightful dominion is only one small part of a larger scheme.]

"How many Name-givers serve the Noble Ones?"

"Few of the Younger Peoples [the Name-giver races] know of the Noble Ones' right to rule. Those of us who know the truth serve our rightful leaders faithfully. My own village has more than twenty score Name-givers who honor the gifts of our protector, and many others do so as well."

[Twenty score is four hundred Name-givers, and that is counting only those in Jessa's home village. I could not learn how many of these four hundred work outside the Dragon Mountains. She indicated that many of the other great dragons also have Name-giver servants but claimed not to know how many or who they were.]

"Do the Noble Ones have other servants?"

"Yes. They are served by the Changing Folk—those who are like the Younger Peoples, but who have partaken of the essence of the Noble Ones and also become like them, gaining their divine form and a small portion of their power.

They are the essence of honor and service to the Noble Ones. They live to bring the truth of the Noble Ones' wisdom to all of the Younger Peoples. The Changing Folk are emissaries between us and the Noble Ones. They speak the will of the Noble Ones to us and carry our needs and tributes to him, save when our dear master wishes to honor one of us with an audience."

[The Changing Folk are drakes, servants of the great dragons who can shift between a Name-giver form and that of a small dragon. Jessa believes that Name-givers can become drakes through the blessing of their dragon masters. Perhaps this is so. We know nothing about the origin of the drakes or how they came to be in the dragons' service. It is possible that the dragons use some powerful magic to alter a Name-giver's True Pattern to produce a drake; I have passed this information on to our magicians for consideration.

It appears that the drakes are the lieutenants of the dragons within the network. In their Name-giver forms, they can move among us undetected quite easily and convey orders from their dragon masters to ordinary Name-givers.]

"Why do your masters want the girl Aardelea?"

"She is the bridge, the gateway and the key. You cannot imagine what she really is. My master will save her from you and your Empire. You cannot deny the power of destiny. The Noble Ones will show you the truth ... I see you do not understand. I had hoped to show you, to make you see the light of the Noble Ones. But I cannot bring sight to the blind. You are as Mountainshadow said you would be—like unyielding stone. And there is no reasoning with a stone.

"I have served my master well. I pray Mynbruje will open your eyes before it is too late. Learn the error of your ways before you are taught a harsh lesson."

[After speaking those words, Jessa collapsed and died. Not even our most skilled magicians and healers could bring her back. They did, however, confirm that her death was the result of a powerful blood oath. It allowed her to tell us what little I have related here, but no more. Once her work was done, the magic ended her life and scattered her spirit to prevent us from learning anything further.

I can only surmise that Jessa knew of the fate in store for her, and that we were intended to capture her so that she could deliver this information into our hands. If so, then what we have learned so far is either a complex web of lies created by the dragons to mislead us, or else the great dragons (or Mountainshadow, at least) *wanted* us to have this much of the truth. At the moment, I am hard-pressed to say which possibility concerns me more.





Aardelea and the dragons' plans and find out where the Therans have imprisoned the girl. Though the dragons do not yet know this, the Therans have taken Aardelea to a secret magical facility near the city of Zhofer in the province of Creana (p. 54, **The Theran Empire**).

Subtle and patient, the great dragons have chosen to use their network of drake and Name-giver servants to probe Theran weaknesses, gather information and covertly aid other anti-Theran factions in Barsaive. Ultimately, they hope to drum up united opposition to the Therans across Barsaive so that they will be able to recover Aardelea and teach the Therans a lesson with little danger to themselves or their other goals.

NETWORK OPERATION

The alliance among the great dragons of Barsaive is still tentative and fragile. Great dragons are territorial creatures, lacking the knack for cooperation that most Name-givers have. Therefore, the dragons have left much of the implementation of their plans to their drake servitors. The drakes, hybrid beings of dragon and Name-giver blood, know how to work together to accomplish a goal. The drakes are also uniquely motivated to rescue Aardelea, as she is the key to their becoming a true Name-giver race rather than mere magical constructs.

This goal is foremost in every drake's mind and it makes them even more fanatically devoted to the great dragons' cause. Any drake will gladly give his life—or another's life if necessary—to see the dragons' plans succeed and secure the future of his race. This fanaticism sometimes blinds the drakes to the fact that others are not always as devoted to these goals as they are and should make Name-givers working with drakes wary.

About Drakes

The drakes, magical constructs created by the great dragons, are the keystone of the dragons' network. Though male and female drakes exist, they cannot reproduce on their own. Each drake represents the investment of considerable time, effort and magical power, and the great dragons do not use or create them casually. The drakes understand this; in fact, it is one of the primary reasons that they want the ability to reproduce as Name-givers do.

Drakes can assume two forms—that of a miniature dragon, about five to seven feet long from head to tail, and that of most Name-giver races. Drakes cannot assume windling or obsidiman forms, however, because duplicating the

GAME INFORMATION

The dragons' network is a new thread in the tapestry of Barsaive, spun from a very old source—the great dragons themselves. Spurred by the Therans' recent capture of Aardelea (see **The Dragons' Daughter** in **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**), the dragons have set aside their traditional conflicts and joined forces in a loose alliance to meet the threat which the Theran Empire poses to their power.

Aardelea holds the key to the propagation and survival of the drakes, the dragons' shape-shifting agents. The Therans have not yet learned this; all they know is that Aardelea has demonstrated unusual magical powers and is very, very important to the great dragons. But either piece of knowledge is enough for certain parties in the Theran Empire to want the girl under their control. The impertinence of the Therans in kidnapping her has infuriated the great dragons; they have devoted their considerable resources to recovering Aardelea and teaching the Therans the error of challenging dragon mastery.

The Therans are not exactly powerless, however, and the dragons want to get Aardelea back more than they want to destroy the Empire. Therefore, the dragons have chosen not to launch an all-out assault against the Empire (yet). First they must discover how much the Therans know about





special magical natures of those Name-givers would be too difficult and costly for their dragon creators to bother with. Switching between forms requires a single action.

In Name-giver form, drakes can follow Disciplines and learn talents and skills just like other Name-givers. All known drakes are adepts; most of them follow one or more of the magician Disciplines. Some drakes are also beastmasters, scouts, swordmasters, thieves and warriors. A typical drake is at least Sixth Circle in his or her chosen Discipline. Generally, a drake's talents and Discipline abilities function only when he or she is in Name-giver form, though magician drakes can still cast spells in dragon form.

In addition to their Discipline abilities, drakes share many of the powers of their dragon masters. They can use the Astral Sight, Dispel Magic, Regeneration and Suppress Magic powers when they are in either form. To use all other powers, drakes must be in dragon form. When a drake switches forms, all clothing and equipment from the Name-giver form vanishes into an astral pocket similar to the nethermancer ability of the same name. The garments and equipment reappear when the drake re-assumes Name-giver form.

While working for their dragon masters, drakes prefer to remain in Name-giver form so as not to give away their true nature. They assume their dragon forms only when circumstances require it. A drake in Name-giver form can be detected by someone who examines the drake's pattern in astral space. An Excellent success on an Astral Sensing Test against the drake's Spell Defense is required to detect its true nature.

Gamemasters looking for an unusual **Earthdawn** adventure or campaign might cast the players in the roles of drake servants to one or more of Barsaive's great dragons. Drake player characters would possess some powerful abilities, but would also be limited by service to their masters and their mission (freeing Aardelea and ridding Barsaive of the Therans). They would also need to be very cautious about revealing their true nature to Name-givers, which would force the players to use subtlety rather than brute force to accomplish their characters' goals.

A drake character could even be planted in a group of Name-giver adepts that the dragons' network wishes to employ, such as in the adventure **The Vanishing Scholar** (p. 167, **Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom**). This character can be a gamemaster character or given to a player the gamemaster trusts not to abuse the privilege of playing a character as powerful as a drake.

Attributes

DEX: 12 STR: 15 TOU: 12
PER: 15 WIL: 17 CHA: 16

Initiative: 15

Number of Attacks: 3 [1]*

Attack: 15

Damage:

Bite: 18

Claw (x2): 19

Weapon: (by type)*

Number of Spells: 2

Spellcasting: 16

Effect: See Commentary

Death Rating: 62

Wound Threshold: 18

Unconsciousness Rating: 54

Physical Defense: 16

Spell Defense: 18

Social Defense: 17

Armor: 15 [Rating of Armor]*

Mystic Armor: 9

Knockdown: 20 [15]*

Recovery Tests: 6

Karma Points: 18

Karma Step: 10

Powers: Armored Scales, Astral Sight 10, Dispel Magic 12, Disrupt Fate 5, Dragon Breath 12, Fear 15, Regeneration, Spells (per Discipline, see preceding text), Suppress Magic 3

Legend Points: 3,400

Equipment: Varies in Name-giver form

Loot: Scales and blood worth D6 x 5 silver pieces. Also counts as treasure worth Legend Points.

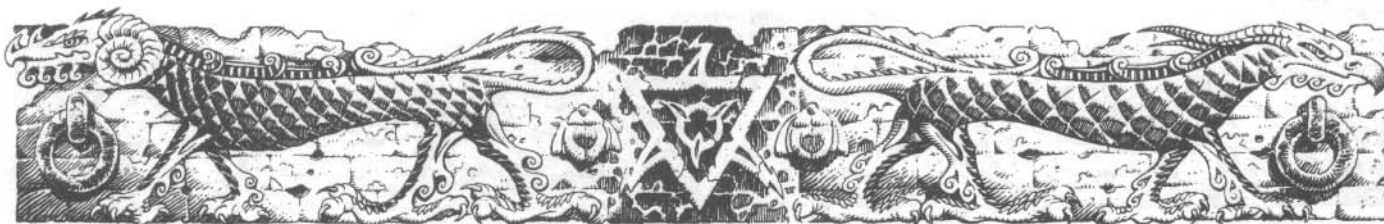
*Figures in brackets refer to the drake's Name-giver form.

Name-giver Agents

Name-giver agents of the dragons' network come from all races and walks of life. Many of them hail from one of the villages that Mountainshadow sheltered from the Scourge. These Name-givers are completely loyal to the great dragons, the network and especially to their individual dragon patrons. Other Name-givers are recruited from the ranks of those who owe the great dragons favors or loyalty for other reasons. If a dragon has done the player characters a good turn at some point, he might decide to call in the favor and draft them into the network.

The dragons choose their agents carefully to ensure that none will betray them to the Therans. Every agent of the dragons' network knows that treachery will earn them the same fate as the magician Hefera (p. 71, **Prelude to War**); they will become a dragon meal, their roasted bones a silent warning to other would-be traitors.





The network often recruits adepts for missions where drakes face too much danger of being detected. Often, these adepts don't know that their employers are great dragons. In most such cases, a drake in Name-giver form contacts the adepts with the job and an offer of payment (provided by the vast wealth of the dragons). The adepts then carry out the work. If they are caught, they know nothing with which to betray their employers. If they succeed, they receive handsome payment and the possibility of more work in the future.

If a group of adepts proves trustworthy and reliable, the dragons may ask them to join the network as full-fledged operatives (as opposed to one-shot hires). Such adepts must swear a blood oath never to reveal what they learn about the network, whether they accept the offer or not. Joining the network has many benefits; its dragon patrons are powerful, ancient and wise beings with a wealth of valuable information to impart to loyal Name-givers. However, adepts who join up will be considered spies and subversives by the Theran Empire. Working for the dragons may also bring them into conflict with the Elven Court (see the **Blood Wood** sourcebook for more details).

Other Agents

With their considerable magical power and influence, many great dragons have managed to recruit other creatures, both intelligent and otherwise, to aid the dragons' network when necessary. Characters might encounter Named spirits (p. 90, **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**) allied with the great dragons, as well as common elemental or ally spirits or even creatures such as jungle griffins and nagas (pp. 46 and 62 respectively, **Creatures of Barsaive**), as well as false drakes (p. 139, **The Blood Wood**).

Adventure Idea: The Dragons' Game

The player characters are contacted by an anonymous human who wants them to carry a valuable piece of artwork to a merchant in Vivane. The object is a beautifully carved obsidian statue of a dragon, about a foot tall. The adepts are asked to tell no one of their errand and to deliver the statue only to the merchant. Their employer refuses to tell them anything more about the statue or its value but offers to pay them handsomely for the trouble.

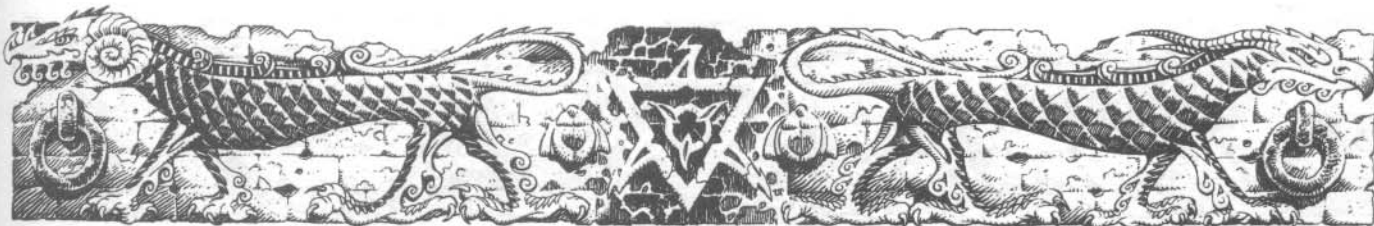
Along the journey to Vivane, the characters are set upon by bandits and other hazards. As these attacks become more and more frequent, the characters may suspect that they are not coincidental. In fact, Theran agents have heard of the adepts' errand; the Therans believe they are working for the dragons' network, delivering something to the Vivane



Resistance. The Therans want to capture the player characters or at least seize the object they are carrying because they believe it is of value to one of the great dragons. Player characters who have played the adventure **Shattered Pattern** may believe the statue is the one taken by the Cult of the Great Hunter in that adventure, and that it is one of Icewing's pattern items.

Actually, the statue is a good copy of the original, created by Icewing. The dragons' network gave the statue to the player characters and leaked information about their trip to Vivane to Theran spies. Icewing wants the Therans to capture the statue; it contains a powerful and unique spell that will allow the great dragon to observe everything that happens within fifteen yards of it. At the very least, Icewing hopes to distract the Therans with a meaningless chase. At best, the dragon will be able to spy on the Therans at will once the statue is taken to Overgovernor Kypros or even to the island of Thera.





THE EYE OF THROAL

To Akarenti Gendel of Triumph, from Nevayas V'ressh, scion of the Naxos niall and humble servant of House K'tenshin.

This report will reach you ahead of the usual time, but my news could not wait. I have made a breakthrough in my assignment to unmask the highest levels of that nest of dwarf vipers known as the Eye of Throal. What I have learned may yet enable the Empire to break the back of this pestilential conglomeration of stubby-legged earthdwellers—or at least to cause the dwarf kingdom considerable grief.

At your request, I have spent much of the past year traveling between Lake Ban and the city of Haven, with frequent stopovers in that ramshackle town. You had reason to believe that Cleotha Splayfoot, supposedly a humble seller of excavating supplies in Haven, might in truth be an agent of the Eye of Throal. I am happy to report that your suspicions were more correct than you knew. Cleotha Splayfoot is not merely an agent of the Eye; she is one of the infamous Five, those important personages through whom the Eye of Throal's mysterious leader funnels his orders and receives his information.

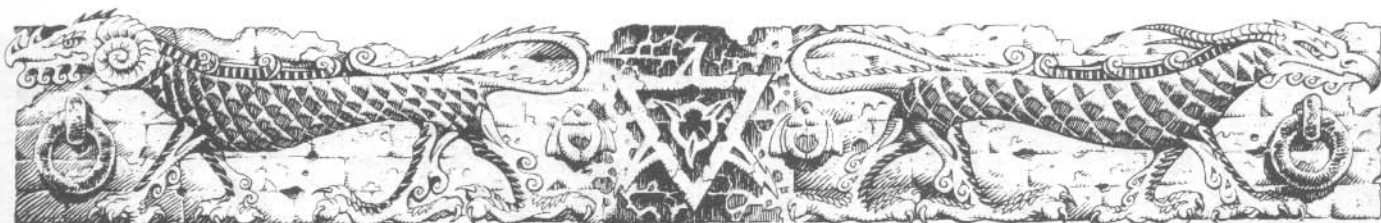
You may be surprised to know that the Five truly exist; I can assure you that they do and can also confirm our guesses at the Eye's inner workings. I have gone to considerable lengths over the past several months to befriend Cleotha Splayfoot, and we have become quite close. (How close, I shall leave to your imagination; suf-

fice it to say that I will do anything necessary to advance the interests of my House and niall through supporting Thera's cause. And any rumors you may have heard concerning the attractiveness of t'skrang to dwarf women are true.) From her, I have learned many things—though I must warn you that my information may not be accurate in every particular. I have had to glean everything through observation, passing glances at Cleotha's private correspondence (much of which lay under encrypt spells), overheard snatches of conversation and the like.

Cleotha displays remarkable intelligence for a dwarf and has told me nothing outright. Indirectly, however, she has told me a great deal that you, as well as your superiors in Great Thera, will be most interested to know.

Of the Eye's inner workings, I can confirm the following. All agents of the Eye ultimately answer to the personage known as the Senior Gatherer. However, most of them do not know his or her true identity. Only the Five know it—and I regret that my efforts to pry this secret from Cleotha have so far proved unsuccessful. (I must discount, however, the persistent contention from certain Theran quarters that the Senior Gatherer is the clownish fellow known as J'role the Honorable Thief. Whatever he may have been in the past, he is now nothing more than a jovial, slightly simple-minded old man. The idea that he is the mastermind behind a network as vast and well-oiled as the Eye of Throal does not warrant serious consideration.)





Below the Five, agents of the Eye fall into several categories. Of those called kaer-dwellers, who take up residence in various places and spend years observing all that transpires, I have identified only Cleotha. The kaer-dwellers operating in Urupa, Travar, Vivane and Vrontok unfortunately remain anonymous, unless another of our people has found them out.

In addition to the kaer-dwellers, the Eye employs adepts whom it sends on various short-term missions: acting against Throal's enemies, sowing dissent, dealing with Horrors and suchlike. Many of these are hired adventurers not formally connected to the Eye, which makes tracing them difficult. Finally, agents of the Eye exist within the ranks of Throal's army and its Diplomatic Corps. I am not certain of the extent to which the Diplomatic Corps or the Arm of Throal is aware of this; however, it may explain why your own agents have been unable to penetrate the Eye beyond its lowest levels. There are simply too many agents in too many places to make swift rising through the ranks possible without attracting unwanted attention from superiors.

And now to the heart of my report: the Eye of Throal's recent doings. I have learned of their activities concerning Barsaive's great dragons; the forces in your own fortress-city of Triumph; the Blood Wood; the Liferock Rebellion; efforts to infiltrate the Holders of Trust; the Diplomatic Corps' dealings with the ork nation of Cara Fahd; and, as always, the machinations of Houses V'strimon and Syrtis, those traitors to the true good of the t'skrang race.

THE EYE AND THE DRAGONS

I understand that your superiors, including General Nikar Carinci, have long suspected some sinister connection between Throal and Barsaive's great dragons. Before beginning my own mission, I was privileged to read a number of reports sent to Triumph by Theran agents within the Eye of Throal, which confirmed that the dragons have been gathering information for the dwarfs on the doings of Thera and her allies. I was distressed to see that the subjects of dragon surveillance include my own niall. (At last I have an explanation for the unusual number of dragon sightings over K'tenshin territory in recent months!) I regret to say, however, that the dragons' precise method of intelligence-gathering so far eludes me. (According to my colleagues' reports, the dragons know more than could reasonably be gleaned by simply flying over patches of earth. I shall redouble my efforts to discover how else they may be getting information.)

Being dragons, they are not aiding Throal for nothing. They have demanded a price, of which I learned by judicious eavesdropping on my dear Cleotha and a certain visitor to her shop just weeks ago—an elderly man Named Raosko, whom I suspect was actually a drake. (His aura looked most peculiar; should I pick up his trail again, I will endeavor to confirm my suspicions.) In exchange for their information, the dragons are receiving aid from the Eye of Throal in locating the young Barsaivian girl known as Aardelea. They want her back, and the dwarfs are more than willing to help them. Assuming I have correctly interpreted certain fragments of the conversation, the dragons seem to be widening their search beyond Barsaive, transporting small bands of adventurers in the service of the Eye to Theran provinces as far away as Indrisa and Creana. The aforesaid bands are not necessarily members of the Eye of Throal; many are merely hirelings in the Eye's pay. This means that your own people may find them difficult to identify.

ENEMIES AT TRIUMPH

You will not much like my next bit of news, but I believe you may turn it to your advantage. From a piece of secret correspondence—fortunately glimpsed by me while Cleotha was engaged with the drake Raosko—I discovered that a Throalic spy operates in Triumph. Yes, the cursed dwarfs have actually succeeded in planting one of their own in the heart of Thera's fortress-city! I found this difficult to believe at first, but confirmed it beyond doubt only a few days ago.

I was on my way toward Triumph, as it happens, intending to spy out the Eye of Throal's activities on K'tenshin lands before delivering my usual report. As you may recall from my last report, I have had my suspicions about the large numbers of dwarf-led trading caravans traveling lately through the region of the Serpent River's South Reach. If they are all simple merchants, then I am a windling. One caravan chose a road that passes quite close to Triumph—closer than a band of Throalic traders ought to want to get since the dwarfs' defeat at Prajor's Field. I therefore chose to follow it.

I saw nothing remarkable for the first two days, but on the third day my persistence brought rewards. The caravaners made camp for the night, as they had previously ... only, instead of the usual boisterous singing and quaffing of dwarf ale around the fire, this night they were remarkably quiet. And they paid an inordinate amount of attention to the stars, as if marking the night's passing. At length, one of them—an especially stocky fellow with flame-colored hair





and a swordmaster's way of moving—announced over-loudly to his companions that he was going to relieve himself. He strode out of the firelight but did not make for the nearest bush or begin to loosen his clothing. Instead, he strode swiftly northward over a slight rise, in the direction of Triumph.

At first I wondered if he meant to walk all the way to the fortress—a journey of some four hours, at this distance. But he walked for a mere half-hour, then stopped before a small copse of trees and gave a grassbird's whistle. Two such whistles answered him, and a t'skrang stepped out of the trees. The moon chose that moment to slip from behind a small cloud, and in its light I saw the t'skrang clearly. I recognized him: Andr'ax Jabalye, one of your own hand-picked spies. Andr'ax and the dwarf began to speak, too low for me to hear. As I could fathom no reason for Andr'ax meeting a dwarf in the middle of nowhere, I cast a spell that brought me their words. What I heard appalled me. Andr'ax told the dwarf—who identified himself as an Eye of Throal agent—everything we have been doing on V'strimon lands in the past several months. He even revealed the Name of the assassin who had been sent to kill K'senkt of House V'strimon. (Which likely means that this attempt will succeed no better than the ten that preceded it.)

I regretfully concluded that Andr'ax was a turncoat. But a greater shock was in store, when Andr'ax ended the conversation with a certain hand-signal—a sign that members of the Eye use to identify each other in hostile territory. I had seen several otherwise innocent-looking individuals use this sign in Cleotha's presence in Haven, after which she invariably invited them to the Flying Troll tavern for a drink and found some pretext for leaving me behind. Andr'ax could have used this sign for only one reason—he, too, is an agent of the Eye.

My first impulse was to slay him for his treachery, but upon reflection I saw greater merit in leaving him alive and well. You may choose to unmask and punish him, but you might first consider another option. Throal does not know that we have found their spy and will therefore continue to believe whatever Andr'ax tells them. I leave it to you to imagine what use the Empire might make of that.

THE EYE AND THE BLOOD WOOD

After the Empire's glorious victory at Prajor's Field, even the hot-headed fool Neden has realized that he needs support from other powers in Barsaive if he wishes to stand against Theran might. I have kept a sharp eye on King Neden's attempts to curry the favor of the Blood Wood in particular, as the blood elves and their infamously beautiful queen are a power that even the Empire must reckon with. During my recent interlude in Haven, I discovered the dwarf king's latest effort at winning Queen Alachia's regard.

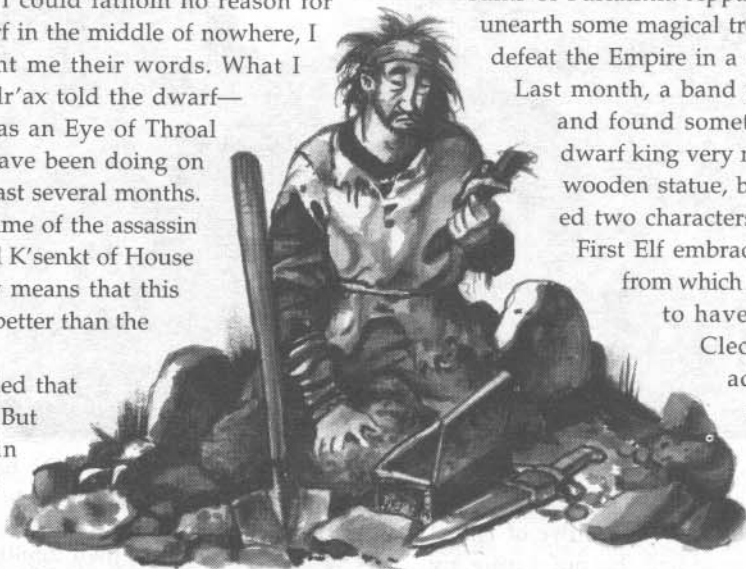
It seems that Cleotha, in addition to her other activities for the Eye, provides supplies and safe lodging for adventurers hired by the Eye in Throal to go sniffing around the ruins of Parlainth. Apparently, King Neden hopes to unearth some magical treasure that will enable him to defeat the Empire in a single blow or some such rot.

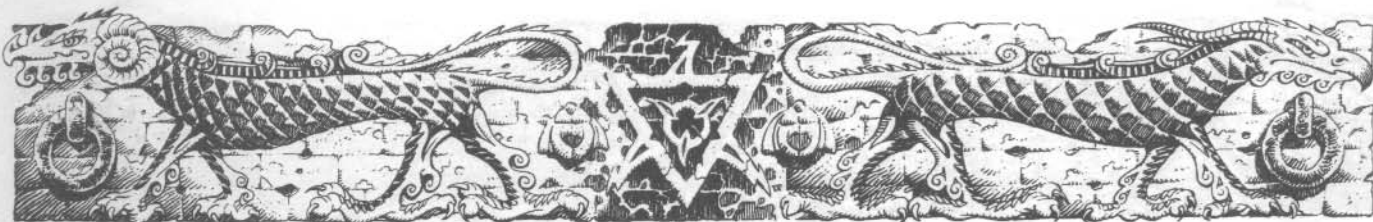
Last month, a band of hired explorers turned up and found something that pleased the young dwarf king very much. They discovered a small wooden statue, beautifully carved, that depicted two characters from elf myth: the so-called First Elf embracing the great tree Oak Heart, from which the ancient Wyrms Wood is said to have sprung. I saw this thing in

Cleotha's storeroom, and I must admit it moved even me. The artist had carved it so as to reveal all of the wood's many colors, from pale gold to the tawny brown of fresh-baked bread. Whether it is magical as well as beautiful,

I cannot tell you; I sensed little magic in it but got only the one quick glimpse. When I asked Cleotha where she had gotten it, she rudely answered, "Never you mind," and then spent the rest of the evening making up for the slight in a manner I can only surmise was intended to distract me from any more such questions.

I discovered the item's importance the next day, when curiosity impelled me to follow the gentleman to whom Cleotha gave it. This gentleman brought it to the Restless Troll, where he handed it over in a back room to a blood elf. This elf, a dark-haired man of middling age whose clothes were of a shade of green brighter than my own skin, is a fixture in Haven; he and a female companion spend a great





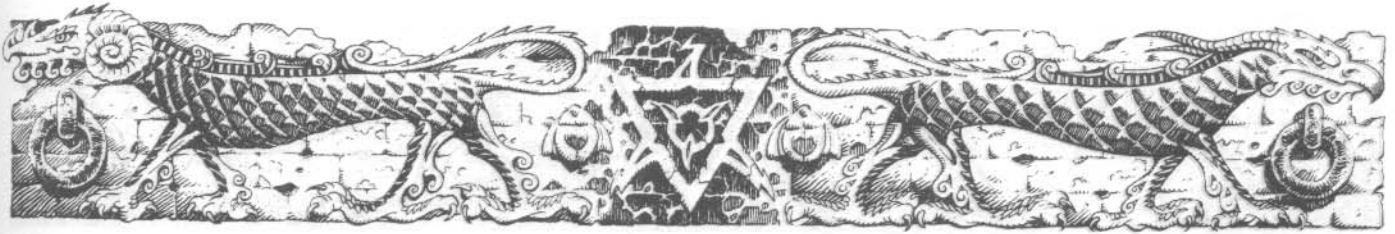
deal of time in the general vicinity of the Restless Troll and Cleotha's shop. (They may also work for the Eye of Throal in some capacity; I shall attempt to find this out during my next interlude in Haven.) Upon receiving the statue, the blood elf left the tavern. I followed him some distance out of Haven, toward the Blood Wood. After an hour's walk, the dark-haired elf met another blood elf on the road. The dark-haired elf handed the statue to him, with the comment that King Neden had sent it as a gift for the queen, "as a token of appreciation for Her Majesty's beauty and wisdom."

Clearly, Neden hopes that this gift will make Alachia think well of him, and therefore of Throal and its doings. The tactic may or may not work; Alachia is notoriously vain but also intelligent enough to recognize such flattery. Neden's gesture may appeal to her or offend her, a gamble he seems willing to take.

ACTIVITIES IN IOPOS

Like the Empire's own intelligence forces, the Eye of Throal has been attempting to place its people in the city of Iopos—specifically, among the organization known as the Holders of Trust, whose members have all sworn fealty to the city's ruling Denairastas clan. Thus far, however, the Eye has had no greater success than we have. Every agent they have sent, save for the last one, has ended up dead in a spectacularly grotesque fashion—flayed alive, partially dissected or something equally unpleasant. As for the Eye agent currently in Iopos, her fate remains unknown. Her Name is Millere Hammerfell, and she is a friend of Cleotha Splayfoot's; Cleotha personally recommended her for the job. When I left Haven, Millere was a full eight weeks overdue in reporting, and fear for her fate was clearly weighing on Cleotha. She did not sleep well for several nights, and was troubled by dreams in which she often spoke Millere's Name.





It is possible that Millere Hammerfell has succeeded in her mission and is simply maintaining an excessively low profile. If so, she should contact the Eye eventually, and we must redouble our efforts to keep them under surveillance. It is likelier, however, that Cleotha's worst fears have come true—Millere has been unmasked, and her corpse has not turned up in an Iopan alley simply because the Holders of Trust have some other use for her. Whatever the truth, this situation bears close watching. If the Holders use Millere as a weapon against the Eye, we must be ready to turn whatever happens to our own advantage.

THE LIFEROCK REBELLION

Turning from my discoveries in Haven to other matters, I have confirmed the existence of an alliance between the Eye of Throal and the Liferock Rebellion, the network of resistance to Thera's presence in Barsaive run by the prominent obsidian merchant Omasu of Travar. You may recall that certain Theran authorities approached the Shivalahala K'tenshin some time ago with an unusual proposition—that she permit waterborne vessels belonging to Omasu's Overland Trading Company to ply the South Reach of the Serpent. We t'skrang have never permitted any other race to send its vessels along the Great Mother River; we are Shivoam's children, and to let others ride upon Her back would show great disrespect (or so our thinking had always gone). But the Shivalahala understood the buried wisdom in the Empire's request and graciously acceded to it. She gave three ships of the Overland Trading Company the right to travel freely down the South Reach and then waited to see what Omasu would do with this gift.

Now the waiting is over. As we suspected, Omasu wanted the right of free travel down a portion of the Serpent so that he could use his trading company as a cover for acts of sedition against Theran forces in Barsaive. I have recently observed agents of the Eye of Throal on the Overland vessels, masquerading as hired deck-swabbers and occasionally as passengers. These "hired hands" and "passengers" invariably disembark in some riverside village or other and soon afterward disappear. I conclude, therefore, that the Liferock Rebellion has placed these three ships at the Eye's disposal, so that Throal may more easily send spies deep into K'tenshin territory.

SPIES AMONG THE DIPLOMATS

During my travels through Barsaive's hinterlands, I have also run across parties of Throalic diplomats bound

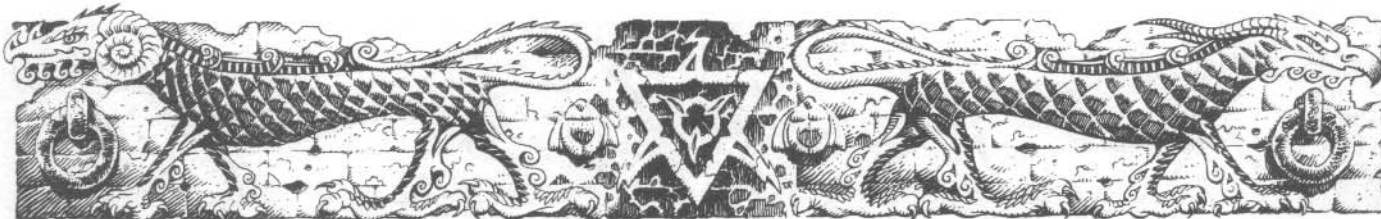
toward reborn Cara Fahd, presumably to parley with the orks there. I made a point of watching them and have discovered that the Eye of Throal is represented in these parties, too. Indeed, the evidence suggests that His Majesty's Diplomatic Corps is riddled with Eye of Throal spies. Certainly, we must assume there is at least one "diplomat" in every Throalic delegation who answers to the Senior Gatherer rather than to Throal's Ambassador General. The Eye agents among Throal's envoys to Cara Fahd have done nothing much so far, largely because they have only just arrived in the ork nation. And it may be that they intend only to observe. However, we can turn their presence in Cara Fahd to our advantage whether they take any action or not. I respectfully suggest that you give the Eye time to settle in Cara Fahd and feel secure; then, when the time is right, expose their presence. Throal has made a great show of supporting the orks in their pathetic attempt at nation-building, and King Neden has sworn himself to be Cara Fahd's true friend. Imagine the howls of betrayal from the orks when they find that their "good and honest friend" Neden has been spying on them! Given the tempestuous nature of orks, such a disclosure might so infuriate them that they will break off relations with Throal. (It is likely too much to hope that the ork nation might turn to the Empire—but so long as they are not aiding Throal, Thera is well served.)

I also observed one curious phenomena, which I leave to you to interpret. Two parties of dwarfs under the Diplomatic Corps banner have recently traveled into the Twilight Peaks, heading toward the slopes where certain crystal raider trollmoots are believed to dwell. As mad as it sounds, I think the dwarf king may be trying to contact these troll tribes with an eye to forming an alliance! Why he would want the help of such bloodthirsty, undisciplined louts as crystal raiders is beyond me, but he may be feeling desperate since the disaster in the Battle of Prajor's Field. At any rate, I doubt King Neden will have much success; both diplomatic delegations have vanished into the mountain heights without a trace.

V'STRIMON TREACHERY

Finally, I report my ongoing observations of Throalic contacts with the traitor Houses V'strimon and Syrtis. You may recall that my birthplace was the village of D'neyka near Lake Ban, whose allegiance V'strimon stole from House K'tenshin the year I came of age. Therefore, you will appreciate my desire to see the V'strimon get their comeup-





pance—and the keenness of my observation of all that transpires on V'strimon lands. House V'strimon has long favored Throal beyond reason, of course, and their lackeys in House Syrtis have followed suit. However, the Eye of Throal has recently taken its alliance with House V'strimon to a new level that could cause genuine trouble for the Empire unless swift action is taken.

I happened to be passing near the village of Morchal—a K'tenshin village that has given my niall trouble of late—when I spied an unmarked riverboat at the village dock. Crowds of villagers were gathered around it, including several children, who gabbled excitedly to one another as the cargo was unloaded. One crate was broken open and its contents passed to the young ones: toys of various kinds, all dwarf-made and quite ingenious. What else was among that cargo, I did not discover until nightfall.

After darkness fell, another crowd—smaller and virtually silent—gathered near the riverboat. The ship's mixed crew of t'skrang and dwarfs distributed the remaining cargo to them: weapons and armor, also of dwarf make. Once every crate had been emptied, the crowd melted away into the darkness and the riverboat pulled silently into the current. The only trace of the night's activity was a fragment of crate with a name on it in Throalic: *Little Dreams*.

I determined to find out what "Little Dreams" was, and why an unmarked riverboat would be shipping weapons disguised as toys to K'tenshin villages. I discovered a plot much deeper and darker than I had expected. Little Dreams turned out to be a toy company, recently founded by one Swordmaster Grindo of the Throalic trading house

Neumani. This Grindo is the leader of his House, and also a close personal friend of King Neden's. So close, in fact, that King Neden himself contributed substantial sums of money to help build Little Dreams.

Now why, you may well ask (as I myself did when I first learned of this situation), is the King of Throal spending funds from the royal treasury on a toy company? Helping out a friend, perhaps? Alas, nothing so simple. House Neumani is noted for exploration more than for trade; indeed, it is proverbial in Throal that other trading houses profit from trade routes bought with Neumani blood. As such, the Neumani produce more than their share of adventure-minded young men and women ... and many of these end up in service to the Eye of Throal. The Eye, House Neumani and the dwarf king ... there remains only one more piece of the puzzle to be revealed. That missing piece is House V'strimon, which entered into a joint venture with Little Dreams to ship its toys wherever V'strimon riverboats can go. Profitable, surely; the craftsmanship of the toys is excellent, and there is apparently no lack of buyers for them in villages up and down the Serpent. But as harmless as it seems? No. Because Little Dreams almost immediately attained a place on House V'strimon's Protocol List—a privilege coveted by every trading concern in Barsaive. Being on the list allows a company to demand service of V'strimon riverboats at any time for any reason. And Little Dreams has not existed for long enough nor made enough money to merit such a position—which means that House V'strimon must have some other motive for placing it there.

As you know, K'senkt of House V'strimon—that House's envoy to Throal—exercises significant influence over the Protocol List. For years, K'senkt has used his influence to give Throalic trading houses loyal to the royal family positions on this list and deny the same to ancient Throalic families, such as House Ueraven, that are known to oppose Throal's rulers. By adding Little Dreams to the list, he has given the Eye of Throal a mechanism by which its Neumani-connected agents can request the services of V'strimon riverboats with no questions asked. The weapons shipments may therefore be regarded as a Throal/V'strimon "joint venture" to spark rebellions against House K'tenshin and undermine the Empire's staunchest Barsaivian ally. And along with the weapons, the V'strimon are likely ferrying Eye of Throal operatives, dropping them off in K'tenshin villages to stir up the common folk against us.

As bad as these developments are, I foresee a worse one. The King of Throal claims part ownership of Little Dreams and of its place on the Protocol List. He is therefore





in a position to command V'strimon riverboats to aid "his" toy company in any way he pleases. They are already shipping weapons and spies at Throal's behest; how long will it be before V'strimon riverboats are carrying Throalic soldiers instead?

I have no more to report at this time. You may expect my next letter according to the usual schedule, unless circumstances warrant otherwise.

I remain your fellow servant of the Empire, for its glory and the honor of House K'tenshin.

GAME INFORMATION

Gamemasters and players can use the Eye of Throal in adventures in various ways. Player characters may be members of the Eye or may be hired by the Eye for a particular job. For information on joining the Eye of Throal, see page 79, **Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom**.

Eye of Throal agents may also serve as gamemaster characters, either as allies or opponents of the adventurers. Most adepts who serve the Eye of Throal follow the thief, scout, and troubadour Disciplines, though warriors, swordmasters, archers, and magician adepts are also found among their ranks. Most adept members of the Eye of Throal are of at least Third Circle in their chosen Discipline, and many hold even higher Circles. The Eye of Throal also makes use of a number of non-adept agents. Game statistics for typical non-adept dwarf agents appear below. As always, the gamemaster may adjust these statistics for members of other races and to better suit his or her player group.

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

Initiative: 5
Number of Attacks: 1
Attack: 5

Damage:
Dagger: 8
Broadsword: 11

Number of Spells: NA
Spellcasting: NA
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 7
Spell Defense: 8
Social Defense: 7
Armor: 3
Mystic Armor: 2
Knockdown: 6
Recovery Tests: 3

Death Rating: 38
Wound Threshold: 10
Unconsciousness Rating: 29

Combat Movement: 25
Full Movement: 50

Skills: Acting: 4/9, Bribery 4/9, Conversation 5/10, Avoid Blow* 4/9, Lip Reading* 4/9, Lock Picking 5/10, Melee Weapons 5/10, Silent Walk* 5/10, Streetwise 5/11, Tracking 5/11,

Legend Points: 150

Equipment: Leather armor, dagger, broadsword

Loot: 1D6 X 10 silver pieces

NOTE: The skills listed above represent the various skills agents of the Eye of Throal are likely to have. Not every agent of the Eye of Throal will have all of these skills. Each skill listing includes two values separated by a slash. The first value is the skill rank, and the second is the skill step number. Skills marked with an asterisk (*) are talents learned as skills (p. 124, ED).

Also, agents may have other equipment at their disposal, and many use blood charms such as Absorb Blow or Absorb Spell as well.

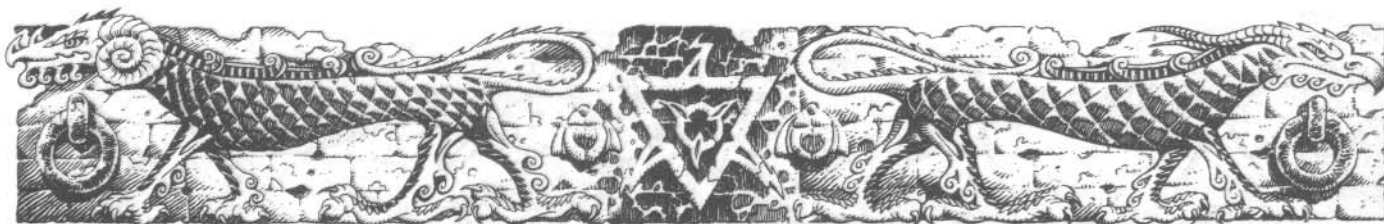
Adventure Idea: Freedom Fighters

The characters may get caught up in the illicit activities of the trading company Little Dreams (p. 20). The connections between company founder Grindo, King Neden and the Eye of Throal make it likely that the Eye supervises every weapon-smuggling trip Little Dreams makes down the Serpent River. The player characters might go on such a trip as Eye of Throal members, assigned to take care of any trouble and/or contact leaders in rebellious river villages, or as hired muscle to fight K'tenshin ships plying the same waters. No matter how they get involved, the player characters will face many hazards, from pirates to hungry river creatures to Theran patrols on the lookout for arms-smuggling riverboats.

Adventure Idea: The Enemy of My Enemy

The player characters accompany a Diplomatic Corps mission into the Twilight Peaks to contact the crystal raider tribes and offer an alliance with Throal. They may be Eye of Throal agents assigned to gather information on the tribes or escorts hired to guide and guard the diplomats on their hazardous mission. This type of adventure is especially well suited for adventuring bands with mountaineering experience or bands that include troll members. The presence of a troll player character, especially a sky raider, might be the deciding factor that gets the diplomatic delegation a hearing instead of a quick, brutal death at the hands of a fierce and suspicious trollmoot.





THE LIFEROCK REBELLION

An urgent missive to His Excellency Overgovernor Kypros, from Akarenti Gendel of Triumph, regarding the organization and activities of the Liferock Rebellion.

My lord,

The capture of the Liferock at the Hill of Ayodhya near Lake Ban has succeeded brilliantly. We have demonstrated the power of the Empire and the danger of defying Barsaive's rightful rulers, but we are not without opposition in these parts. Our recent victory over the rag-tag forces of King Neden has strengthened our position but has also stirred up additional rebelliousness—not only among local Barsaivians, but throughout the province. I speak of a group of which you may already have heard: the so-called Liferock Rebellion.

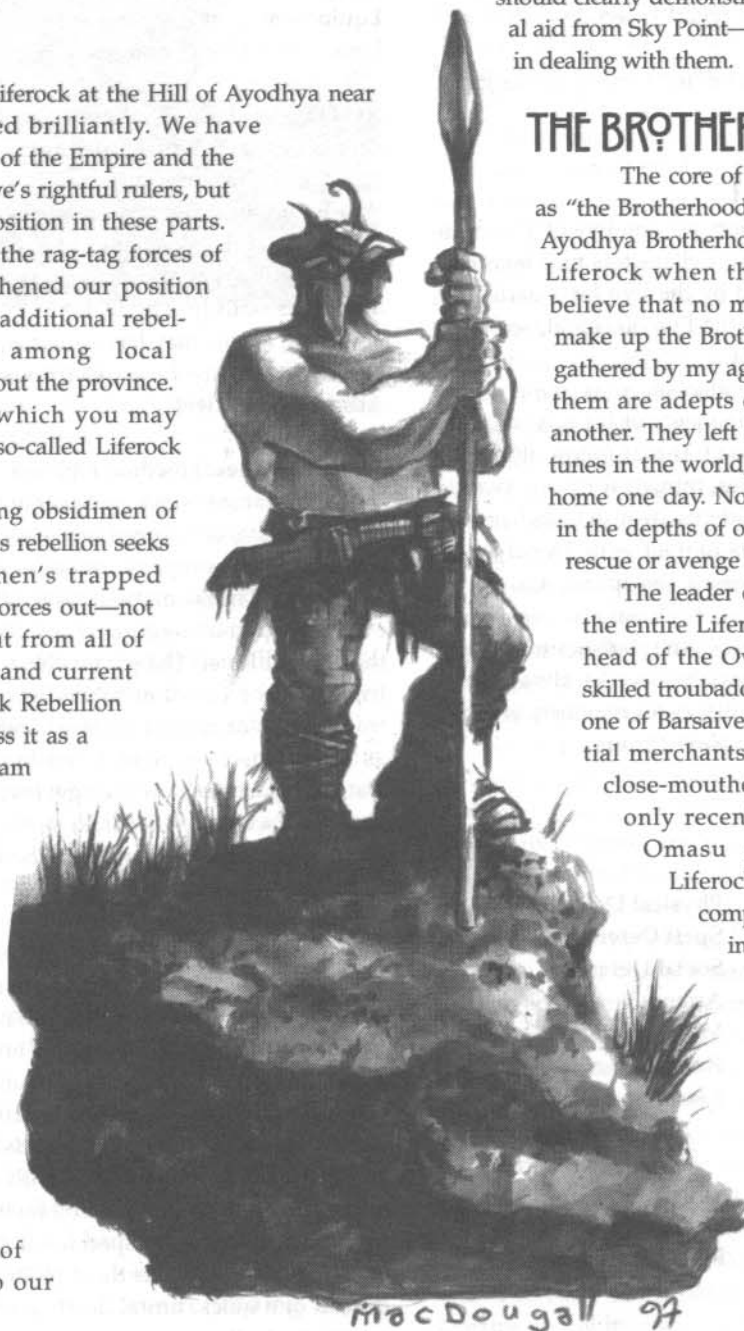
Led by the remaining obsidimen of the Ayodhya Liferock, this rebellion seeks to avenge the obsidimen's trapped brethren and drive our forces out—not only from Ayodhya, but from all of Barsaive. The newness and current small size of the Liferock Rebellion may tempt you to dismiss it as a threat to our interests; I am advising you otherwise. The Liferock Rebellion has connections all over this benighted backwater and is fast becoming an influential rallying point for many Barsaivian factions opposed to our rule here. If its growth is not checked, I fear it may go far beyond a few disgruntled obsidimen and encompass a huge network of operatives opposed to our

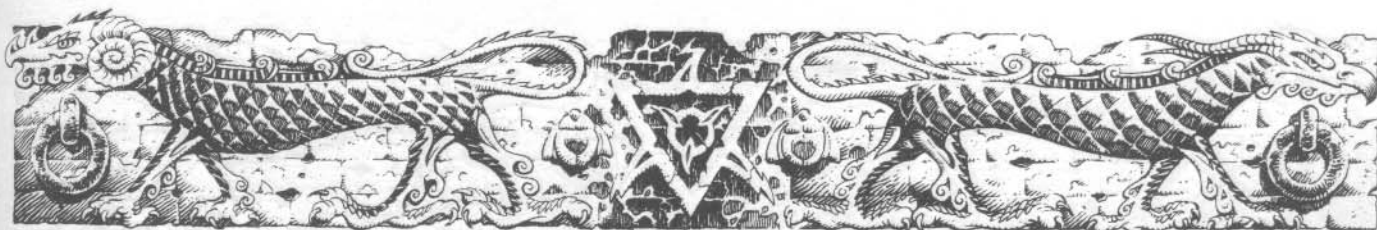
Empire's goals. This report on the Liferock Rebellion's current status and the potential scope of the problem it presents should clearly demonstrate the importance of additional aid from Sky Point—if not from Great Thera itself—in dealing with them.

THE BROTHERHOOD

The core of the Liferock Rebellion, known as "the Brotherhood," consists of obsidimen of the Ayodhya Brotherhood who were not within their Liferock when the behemoth landed on it. I believe that no more than a dozen obsidimen make up the Brotherhood; however, intelligence gathered by my agents indicates that nearly all of them are adepts or adventurers of one sort or another. They left their Liferock to seek their fortunes in the world, no doubt with plans to return home one day. Now, with their Liferock trapped in the depths of our fortress, they have sworn to rescue or avenge their brothers bound within it.

The leader of the Brotherhood—indeed, of the entire Liferock Rebellion—is Omasu, the head of the Overland Trading Company. A skilled troubadour in his youth, Omasu is now one of Barsaive's wealthiest and most influential merchants. Like most obsidimen, he is close-mouthed about his personal affairs; only recently did it come to light that Omasu comes from the Ayodhya Liferock. In the past, Omasu and his company have played a neutral role in the political affairs of Barsaive, owing no allegiance to any faction save the trading company. The landing of the behemoth has changed that, however. Determined upon revenge, Omasu has turned the vast resources of his trading company against Theran interests in Barsaive.





Reportedly, Omasu has taken on the role of Elder of the Ayodhya Brotherhood, in the absence of the Elders who lie trapped within the Liferock. The other Elder chosen to lead the Brotherhood is Named Granal, an obsidiman elemental-ist who adventured in the Badlands and other areas near the Death's Sea for many years. In addition to his skills as an adventurer, Granal's elemental-ist abilities and knowledge undoubtedly will prove useful to the Rebellion.

The other members of the Brotherhood are scattered across Barsaive, though my information suggests that many of them remain within three to four days' travel of Lake Ban, the Kingdom of Throal or Vivane and Sky Point. I have given all of my own agents standing orders to watch all obsidimen who enter or leave the region around our fortress at Lake Ban and the other areas under their observation and have recommended that General Ilfaralek in Vivane do the same.

CONTACT BETWEEN THE BROTHERHOOD

Despite my spies' best efforts, I have so far failed to uncover concrete evidence of covert communications between the members of the Brotherhood or learn how they pass along word of meetings and other plans of the Rebellion. My recent researches about obsidimen, however, may hold the key to this vexing question.

Obsidimen who leave their Liferocks to travel the world often take with them symbolic representations of the Liferock, called "life stones." These life stones are usually taken from the area near the Liferock and are of the same or similar material. Many obsidimen who settle in cities apparently create small shrines to their life stones as a way of honoring their Liferocks.

As the members of the Brotherhood were all wandering before the capture of Ayodhya, they likely possess life stones from the Hill of Ayodhya (or nearby). Azim Keel, our resident elemental-ist and master magician, informs me that these life stones might easily have become magically connected to the Ayodhya Liferock and to the members of its Brotherhood, allowing the obsidimen to create a state they refer to as the Dreaming. This Dreaming, which normally takes place between two or more obsidimen in physical contact, allows them to meld their minds together and enter a state of mental communion. I believe the Brotherhood may be using its life stones for a similar communion over great distances. Such a method of communication would permit

them to share information without having to meet or use such easily traceable devices as letters or carrier birds.

If this theory is correct, perhaps we can gain access to or block this mental communication through our control of the Liferock. I have suggested as much to Azim Keel, and he is intrigued by the possibilities. He offers the following words on his own theory concerning the Liferock:

THE LIFEROCK ADVANTAGE

All obsidimen are intimately connected to their Liferock, from the time when they first emerge from it until they die and are returned to it. Though obsidimen are individual Name-givers, they are also permanently linked to the elemental spirits of their Liferocks. When an obsidiman dies, no matter how great a distance he might be from his Liferock, his spirit always returns to it to be subsumed into its True Pattern and made part of a new obsidiman. Obsidiman custom decrees that the bodies of the dead should be returned to the Liferock as well, so that their material substance can become part of a new life.

In essence, the collected True Patterns of a Liferock's obsidimen, together with the elemental spirit that dwells in and supports the Liferock, together form the True Pattern of a Liferock, much like the group patterns formed by other Name-givers. Thus, obsidimen are effectively living pattern items for their Liferocks, and vice versa. That is why obsidimen so closely guard the True Name of their home Liferock.

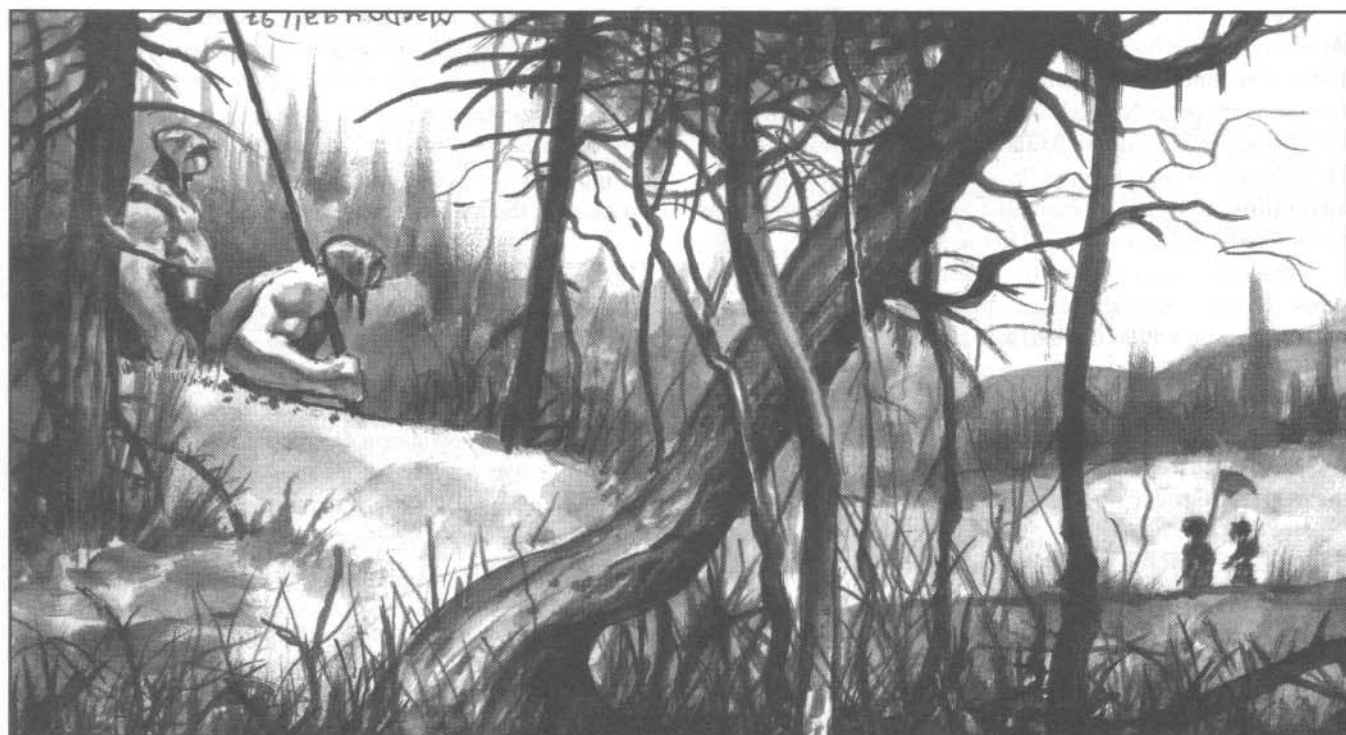
Therefore, if we can learn the secrets of the Ayodhya Liferock and weave threads to it, we should theoretically be able to destroy the members of the Brotherhood through magical means. And once the obsidimen of the Brotherhood are neutralized, the remainder of the Rebellion will quickly collapse.

Indeed, my assistants and I have been studying the pattern of the Ayodhya Liferock in an effort to learn what is needed to begin weaving threads to it, so that we can accomplish this feat. I will continue to report on our progress.

AGENTS AND ALLIES

Aside from the core Brotherhood, the ranks of the Liferock Rebellion include ever-increasing numbers of other Name-givers drawn by the Rebellion's cause and Omasu's charismatic leadership. Most full-fledged agents of the Rebellion are obsidimen who have rallied to free Ayodhya and t'skrang from the V'strimon and Syrtis arpagoi (who bitterly oppose our own ally in the region, House K'tenshin). Like the obsidimen, the t'skrang of the Serpent River consider the Hill of Ayodhya a sacred site; in fact, it is





part of a pilgrimage route that stretches along the river's Mid Reach. House V'strimon has openly opposed our taking of Ayodhya, and many members of that house work closely with the Rebellion.

But the Liferock Rebellion's greatest advantage lies in its extensive network of allies, rather than its full-fledged agents, for the Rebellion's determination to drive Thera out of Barsaive has made it a rallying point for other factions opposed to our rule. Furthermore, Omasu is a master deal-maker (indeed, he may be the best-connected Name-giver in all of Barsaive), and he has called in every favor anyone owes him to aid the Rebellion's cause. As a result, the Liferock Rebellion counts among its allies the Kingdom of Throal, the t'skrang House V'strimon, the Scavians of the Tylon River, some Dinganni bands in the heartland, merchants in Haven and—of greatest concern to us—the Barsaivian Resistance in Vivane. And Omasu is also rumored to be courting other potential allies, including the great dragons of the Province.

Omasu's considerable wealth also allows him to hire mercenaries and adventurers to work with the Rebellion as needed. While some adepts have joined the Rebellion outright, others serve Omasu in exchange for generous payments. I have recently traced some of the scorcher raids

against our trade caravans between Vivane and the fortress at Lake Ban to payments that came out of Omasu's coffers. The coin used was Theran; Omasu has had the audacity to pay his hired bandits and raiders with the money paid to him by our own merchants for the services of his Overland Trading Company. No doubt he finds the irony appropriate.

Rather than striking against Theran forces directly and risking annihilation, the Rebellion and its allies share information on Theran operations in Barsaive, harass those operations (as well as Thera's Barsaivian allies) and foster alliances between various other anti-Theran factions.

THE KINGDOM OF THROAL

Omasu and his Rebellion are not yet allied outright with King Neden of Throal, largely because Neden is concerned with unrest in his own kingdom following his father's murder by an assassin of the sinister Denairastas of Iopos (a death unjustly blamed on the Theran forces at Triumph). Neden's attack on Triumph cost him a portion of his army and a great deal of face once the killer's true identity was revealed. Though the nobles of Throal remain ill-disposed toward the Empire, their wrath has been turned against the Denairastas clan and Iopos for the moment. But Iopos is too





distant and too well protected for Neden to war against it, and so he tries to mollify his angry nobles while building alliances and biding his time. He knows that an offensive against Iopos would leave him vulnerable with Triumph so close to his kingdom's borders, and his failed assault on us showed him the folly of engaging Thera in battle.

Omasu has offered Neden a new means of gathering information about our doings at Triumph and elsewhere in Barsaive so that he need not devote so much of Throal's own resources to the task. The Overland Trading Company and Omasu's vast network of contacts have been placed at the disposal of the Eye of Throal, in exchange for King Neden's quiet support of the Liferock Rebellion. Neden openly opposes our occupation of Ayodhya and supports the Rebellion's goals, but he has so far refused to give the Rebellion military or financial support. He is willing to look the other way when the Rebellion ambushes Thera's trading caravans or expeditions and provides the Rebellion with transportation and rights of passage through Throalic lands, but for now that is all.

We must keep the tentative alliance between Throal and the Rebellion from growing stronger. If we fail, Neden might gain the resources needed to deal with Iopos and his other concerns long enough to turn his attentions toward Triumph again.

HOUSE V'STRIMON

House V'strimon is a powerful ally of the Liferock Rebellion. The Shivalahala V'strimon used her elemental magic to send our airships crashing into Lake Ban on our initial foray into this region of Barsaive; for that and other acts of rebellion against the Empire, House V'strimon is indisputably an enemy of Thera. The occupation of Ayodhya has allowed our forces and those of our allies, House K'tenshin, to extend control over much of Lake Ban and the surrounding regions of the Serpent River. House V'strimon's control over the Coil River and trade with Urupa has been challenged, and the K'tenshin have retaken much of the territory lost to the V'strimon since the end of the Scourge.

The V'strimon t'skrang support the Rebellion with transportation and trade. The Shivalahala has agreed to give the Overland Trading Company preferential status with V'strimon-affiliated t'skrang trading houses and riverboat traffic. Shipments along the river often move Rebellion agents and information along with legitimate trade goods.

THE VIVANE RESISTANCE

Of greatest concern to us are the growing signs of cooperation between the Liferock Rebellion and the Barsaivian Resistance in Vivane. Too isolated and too poorly organized to do much damage, the Resistance has never posed a significant threat to us—until now. With the assistance of the Liferock Rebellion, the Resistance might begin to seriously affect Thera's interests in southern Barsaive—and its aid may enable the Liferock Rebellion to do the same. We must therefore put an end to contact between the Rebellion and the Resistance.

This task will pose an interesting challenge. The Overland Trading Company has a large warehouse in Vivane and Omasu maintains a residence in the city, though he has not visited it in years. Vivane's merchants depend heavily on Omasu's company to transport and store their goods coming into and out of the city. I am certain that every Overland caravan coming into Vivane or Sky Point conceals agents of the Liferock Rebellion, bent on exchanging information and resources with the Resistance. I understand that Omasu's legitimate activities in Vivane cannot be stopped completely; however, I strongly suggest conducting vigorous searches of Overland Trading shipments. Our own merchants may protest, but the danger posed by the free flow of information, funds, supplies and even people between the Rebellion and the Resistance justifies any inconvenience to which our own people may be put.

OTHER ALLIANCES

Omasu also counts among his friends and colleagues many influential merchants and traders from all over Barsaive, most of whom are aiding the Rebellion (knowingly or otherwise). Though none of Omasu's business associates has yet proved willing to risk his livelihood for the cause, many of them owe Omasu a great deal and are therefore willing to pass information, goods or people through their own trading networks. This allows the agents of the Liferock Rebellion to travel across Barsaive masquerading as members of different merchant caravans and trading companies without arousing suspicion. We certainly cannot search every caravan and merchant ship in this entire province for a few rebel agents, and the rebels know it. They use this camouflage to take action in a given area and then disappear quickly.

Omasu seems to be using some of his influence among his fellow merchants to counter Thera's air power in Barsaive as well. Already the Overland Trading Company has placed orders for three new airships to be constructed in





Jerris; I have also learned that Omasu is pressuring airship builders to provide more ships for the fleets of Throal and Travar. Supplies are also being shipped to Lake Ban to assist House V'strimon in the construction of new riverboats and warships to protect their holdings on the Serpent River. The Empire must not allow the Rebellion and its allies to continue to arm themselves against Thera under the guise of "increasing trade fleets." My agents in the Floating City of House V'strimon and in Travar are currently investigating various means of slowing down the production of these new vessels; I expect to hear from them over the next few weeks, and will report to you then.

The ork nation of Cara Fahd, now rebuilding itself in the southwestern corner of Barsaive, may become yet another ally of the Liferock Rebellion. Among other things, Cara Fahd needs economic stability to cement its loose alliance of nomadic ork tribes into a true nation. Omasu and his trading company are in a position to offer precisely that. General Ilfaralek has informed me that agents of the Rebellion have spoken with the rulers of Cara Fahd; I believe they are offering the Overland's assistance in establishing lines of trade with other Barsaivian cities and nations in exchange for Cara Fahd's aid against the Empire. We know that the orks of Cara Fahd have no love of Thera, and so they are very likely to accept any aid Omasu offers. To keep this from happening, we should devise a way to remind the people of Cara Fahd that wise people keep to their own affairs. As with Throal, they may need to be taught the folly meddling in matters concerning the Theran Empire.

ACTIVITIES OF THE REBELLION

The Liferock Rebellion is not strong enough to challenge Theran military might in Barsaive directly. Omasu and his Brotherhood are not fools; they know that fighting an open war against the Empire can only result in their destruction. The Liferock Rebellion therefore takes a more subtle and cautious approach. They seek to weaken our forces in Barsaive through constant harassment and to make maintaining a Theran presence at Ayodhya—or anywhere in Barsaive—so expensive and difficult that we will be forced to withdraw. As a skilled businessman, Omasu knows well how to exploit the weaknesses of his competitors. He is now turning that expertise against us.

A primary focus for the Liferock Rebellion is trade. The Overland Trading Company is one of the wealthiest and most influential merchant companies in Barsaive, and Omasu is using that wealth and influence to cut off trade between the

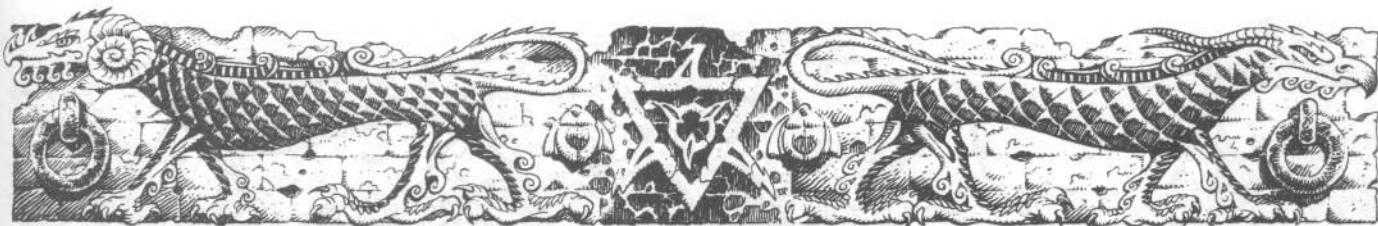
peoples of this province and the Theran forces at Triumph and Vivane. Omasu's business tactics have become hard-edged, and many merchants in Barsaive prefer losing Theran coin to crossing the Overland Trading Company.

Interestingly, Omasu's plan seems to involve positioning the Overland as the sole Barsaivian merchant company that deals with the Empire. Though this seems to run counter to his anti-Theran feelings, it is actually a clever plan to put us in a position of weakness. If the Overland Trading Company corners the market on goods and services flowing to the Lake Ban fortress and to Vivane, then Omasu holds a powerful bargaining tool over us. With his company controlling the food, clothing, True Elements, wine and other supplies that flow into Theran strongholds, Omasu can deprive our people of whatever he wishes—starve us, even—if we refuse to meet his demands. Overland caravans and shipments also provide a perfect cover for the Liferock Rebellion and their allies to operate right under our noses—and we cannot stop them without halting or delaying vital shipments of goods.

To counter these tactics, we must investigate other avenues of supply at once and forge links with independent merchant companies and associations. It will cost more silver in the short term to deal with other merchants and convince them not to work with the Overland Trading Company, but it will cost Thera far more in the long term if Omasu and his company gain a stranglehold on Imperial trade in Barsaive. My agents are even now speaking with merchants in the Lake Ban area, urging them to work with us and our K'tenshin allies in creating a powerful trading pact under our control along the South Reach of the Serpent River. Omasu's agents will doubtless attempt to sabotage this and other such alliances, and so we must be wary.

In addition to economic blackmail, agents of the Liferock Rebellion are also attempting to weaken our military forces and to contact the Ayodhya Liferock. Operatives of the Liferock Rebellion have arranged ambushes of Theran patrols and overland caravans traveling between Vivane and Triumph. My investigations suggest that many of the raids attributed to ork scorcher and highway robbers are the work of the Rebellion, either alone or through hired mercenaries. The migration of ork tribes to Cara Fahd has been used several times to disguise raids on our caravans as the work of the orks. The money and goods taken from the caravans goes into the coffers of the Rebellion; I even heard that Omasu has re-sold some of the stolen goods to Theran citizens in Vivane at reduced prices! This only adds to the Overland Trading Company's economic power in the city and makes it all the more difficult for us to move against it.





Theran patrols and scouting parties in the Servos Jungle and the Mist Swamps have also been ambushed and attacked. Two small patrols sent into the Servos recently never returned. These attacks have been blamed on harsh conditions and wild jungle and swamp creatures—like the ork scorched, a convenient cover for the Rebellion. I have it on good authority that the Liferock Rebellion is recruiting additional support from the villages around Lake Pyros, which were recently re-taken by House K'tenshin. Increasing the size of the patrols we send out has helped prevent some attacks, but it is only a matter of time before the Rebellion finds a new means to harass our forces.

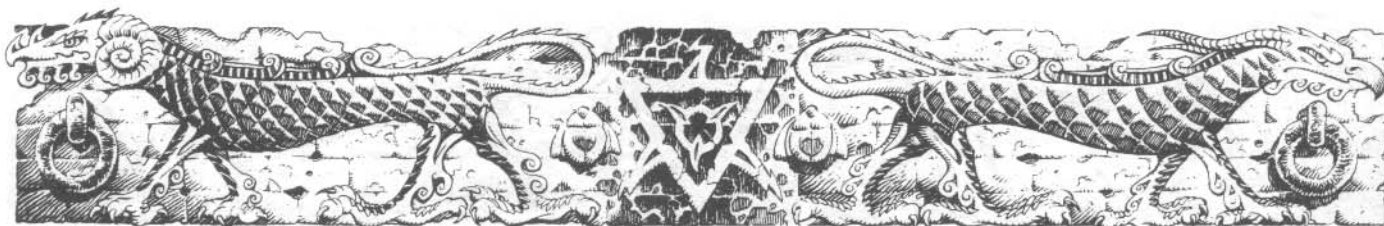
The Liferock Rebellion also gathers information, a task at which it excels. Rebellion agents spy on all Theran activities in Barsaive and pass information about our doings on to such allies as the Eye of Throal. Granal the elemental is also actively seeking magical lore to help free the Ayodhya Liferock from our grasp. Azim Keel has been investigating a nethermantic order known as the Fellowship of Night, and he tells me that this Fellowship may have come to Omasu's

attention. The Fellowship apparently knows how to draw power from Liferocks—a feat of great interest to Keel, and most certainly to Omasu as well. Though the obsidimen would not normally consider cooperation with the Fellowship because of its use of a Liferock for its members' own power, Omasu may consider a tentative alliance with them the lesser evil if it allows his Rebellion to achieve its goals. I have given Azim Keel as much support for his investigations as I can spare to ensure that such cooperation does not happen.

GAME INFORMATION

The Liferock Rebellion provides a ready-made means for gamemasters to involve player characters in the events that began when the Theran behemoth Triumph landed on the Ayodhya Liferock (*Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic*). The Rebellion can be a source of occasional adventures involving player characters in the conflict with the Theran Empire, or it can form the basis for an entire campaign. A group of player characters might become involved





with the Liferock Rebellion by working for the Rebellion directly or indirectly, or by working against the Rebellion.

WORKING FOR THE REBELLION

Player characters can work for the Liferock Rebellion in many different ways. They may be adepts hired by Omasu or one of his agents for a particular mission—for example, spying on Theran operations in Barsaive, carrying important information to one of the Rebellion's allies or taking part in an attack on a Theran trade caravan or exploratory expedition. Such a relationship will likely be temporary, though the player characters might choose to work with the Rebellion more often once they discover how generously Omasu rewards those who serve him well. At first the adepts might not even know the true nature of their employer, as the Rebellion carefully guards the identities of its members. Only after the characters have earned the trust of Omasu and his people will they learn the truth.

Player characters might also seek to join the Liferock Rebellion because they value the rewards Omasu can offer or they sympathize with the Rebellion's goals. Every member of the Liferock Rebellion is considered a criminal by the Theran Empire, and so the characters will risk capture and interrogation at Theran hands if they work with the Rebellion for any length of time. Through valiant service to the cause, characters can be promoted to positions of authority within the Rebellion and given more important tasks. Player characters might even be allowed to plan and carry out their own operations against the Therans at the behemoth fortress of Triumph or at Sky Point, using the resources of the Rebellion to carry out their plan with Omasu's approval.

Gamemasters running a Liferock Rebellion campaign must take care to ensure that the adventures do not become one-note stories of fighting the Therans and ambushing caravans. Rebellion agents can also travel throughout Barsaive to recruit allies, carry messages, or investigate other Theran operations in places such as the Badlands, the Mist Swamps, the Death's Sea and the ruins of Parlainth. They can also become entangled in dealings with other factions described in this book, like *The Dragons' Network*, p. 6, *The Eye of Throal*, p. 15 and *The Fellowship of Night*, p. 56.

ALLIANCES OF CONVENIENCE

Player characters connected with one of Barsaive's other anti-Theran factions might end up working with the Liferock Rebellion if it suits their own organization's goals.

For example, adepts employed by the Eye of Throal (p. 15) might be assigned to aid the Rebellion or to meet with a Rebellion agent to get information that Omasu has offered to share with Throal. Player characters who belong to the Barsaivian Resistance in Vivane are likely to end up working closely with agents of the Liferock Rebellion as the two groups pool their resources to force the Therans out of Barsaive. Adepts working with House V'strimon, House Syrtis or House T'kambras or with any of the other mercantile interests on the Serpent River, may also end up allied with the Rebellion against the Therans.

Other factions in Barsaive may be allied or at cross-purposes with the Rebellion, depending on the circumstances. Though Omasu will not compromise his own principles even in the Rebellion's cause, he was politically neutral before the taking of his Liferock, and so has no particular allegiance to Throal or any other Barsaivian political faction. Also, not every ally of the Rebellion can necessarily be counted among "the good guys." Agents of the Holders of Trust (p. 30) might wish to aid the Rebellion to ignite further sparks of conflict between Thera and Throal. The Dragons' Network (p. 6) is also opposed to the Therans, but it has its own goals. From time to time these may coincide with those of the Rebellion, allowing the two groups to work together; at other times, the Rebellion's activities may get in the dragons' way.

The Fellowship of Night (p. 56) has knowledge that could be valuable in helping to free the Ayodhya Liferock from Theran control. Omasu will want to obtain this knowledge by negotiating with the nethermancers of the Fellowship or by covert means if necessary. He may wish to acquire the missing Chain of Skulls (below) or may send agents to infiltrate the Fellowship's citadel and gain access to their stores of magical lore. Player characters could take roles on either side or could be neutral third parties caught in the middle when they find the Chain of Skulls in the lair of a Horror they have slain.

The Chain of Skulls

The Chain of Skulls is a macabre item of nethermantic magic—seventeen round bone disks, each the size of a human palm, strung on a knotted cord of black silk. The sides of each disk contain carvings of runes and magical symbols that describe various nethermantic spells and enchantments. The chain is allegedly kept in a long, narrow box of dark wood inlaid with bone and lined with black velvet.





The Chain of Skulls represents generations of work by the Fellowship of the Night. These magicians devote themselves to exploring the netherworlds, studying their native spirits and preserving all their knowledge for future generations. One of their most important tasks has been the gathering of information related to the Horrors and the Scourge so that Barsaive's people may one day eliminate the threat that the Horrors pose to the province.

Upon the death of each master of the Fellowship, his fellows cut a disk of bone from his skull, inscribe the master's most powerful spell or enchantment on it and add it to the chain. For seventeen generations, the Fellowship has kept the chain unbroken, and the current members of the Fellowship consider it their most sacred and valuable possession.

Recently, unknown miscreants stole the Chain of Skulls from the Fellowship of the Night. A short time after the nethermancers discovered that the chain was missing, they found an acolyte of the Fellowship dead in his rooms. They also sensed the presence of a powerful spirit in the chamber, and magical investigation revealed that the acolyte died of terror strong enough to stop his heart. The Fellowship believes that the chain has been taken by a powerful spirit or Horror, and have been trying to recover it ever since. Any adepts or adventurers who have knowledge of the chain's whereabouts will surely attract the Fellowship's attention.

In addition to the spells engraved upon it, the chain is also a talisman that enables anyone who knows the Ritual of the Ghost Master to call upon the dead master nethermancers whose bones form part of the chain. This property of the chain is the one most prized by the Fellowship, and the one of the reasons they wish to recover it.

WORKING AGAINST THE REBELLION

Casting the player characters as Therans or adventurers loyal to the Empire makes for an interesting campaign. In this type of campaign, the characters would work against the Liferock Rebellion as they try to maintain order in a rebellious province. Player characters would have to track down agents of the Rebellion and thwart their plans or perhaps tangle with several of the Rebellion's allies—all the time negotiating the complex and treacherous waters of Theran politics. The Elite adepts of Triumph (p. 31, **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**) make a good model for a Theran adept team. In this type of campaign, the player characters may even be the Elite, assigned to serve General Nikar to further Theran interests in the area of Triumph and Lake Ban.

Adventure Idea: Fight for Freedom

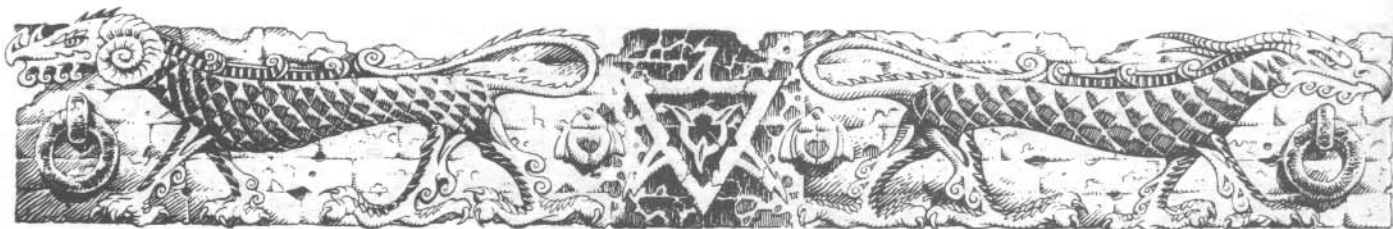
The Liferock Rebellion recruits the player characters to help them disrupt Theran activity near Lake Ban by striking at the Theran slave trade. Theran slavers have been capturing the inhabitants of many settlements near the Theran fortress, including the Name-givers whose villages were razed by the magician Hefera and his agents (see **The Dragons' Daughter**, p. 64, **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**). Some of these slaves work the mines and perform other tasks in Triumph; the rest are shipped back to Sky Point for sale there or shipment to other Imperial provinces. Omasu wants to hurt the Theran slave trade and thereby win the support of anti-slavery factions such as Throal and recruit freed slaves into the Rebellion. House V'strimon supports the plan, because much of the slave trade travels down the South Reach of the Serpent River through the domain of its rival, House K'tenshin.

The Rebellion's scheme calls for the ambush of slave shipments traveling down the Serpent near Lake Pyros. Many of the Name-givers living in the area were driven from their homes by House K'tenshin and its Theran allies, while others were taken as slaves. The Rebellion has recruited some displaced villagers who know the area of the Servos Jungle around Lake Pyros well. Omasu also wants to recruit t'skrang of House T'kambras to disrupt shipments further south along the Serpent.

The player characters and their Rebellion allies must first acquire information about the slave shipments: which ships will be used and what their crew compliments will be. After finding these things out, they lie in wait at the mouth of Lake Pyros to ambush the slave ships. The ships are standard t'skrang riverboats (p. 100, **Serpent River**), mostly crewed by t'skrang sailors and boatman adepts, along with a few members of the Theran Eighth Legion. The slave master is a Rank 5 Questor of Dis, with the appropriate abilities (p. 95, **Earthdawn Companion**). If the gamemaster feels some additional challenge is needed, he may add a magician or adept from the Theran Elite (p. 31, **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**) to each ship's crew.

Once the player characters have successfully freed the slaves, they must guide them through the Servos Jungle to a rendezvous point where they will meet one of Omasu's trading caravans. The caravan will take the slaves to safety with the Rebellion. During the jungle trek, the characters will face trouble from the savage native flora and fauna, as well as with the Cathan or jungle t'skrang tribes.





THE HOLDERS OF TRUST

To: General Ilfaralek, Akarenti of Vivane, from Tolos Shadowfane, by courier from Iopos

Subject: The Holders of Trust, the Denairastas clan and their activities

Once again, sir, I bring to your attention the nefarious activities of the Denairastas of Iopos and the clandestine organization that serves them, the Holders of Trust. Throughout my term of covert service to Thera in this city, I have tried many times to make clear the danger posed to our interests by the Holders and their patrons. To date, my reports have unfortunately fallen on deaf ears. Now, with the slaying of King Varulus III of Throal—a death carried out by the Holders, but blamed on Thera—and of our own ambassador to Urupa, perhaps my warnings will finally be heard—not too late, I hope. Though King Neden's ill-considered attack on our fortress at Lake Ban failed, the Holders succeeded for a time in achieving one of their goals—namely, setting Throal and Thera at each other's throats. They also nearly ended our relations with the Barsaivian city of Urupa.

Officially, the Holders of Trust are the police force of Iopos. In truth they are much more. They are the eyes and ears and grasping hands of the Denairastas family that rules this city. The Holders of Trust and their master, Uhl Denairastas, wish to promote conflict between Throal and the Empire, as well as between other factions in Barsaive, so that the Denairastas clan may rule over this entire province. They have shown their willingness to use any means to achieve this end, including espionage and assassination. If Thera is to pacify Barsaive and bring it once more within the fold of the Empire, we must deal with the Denairastas and their sinister agents—sooner rather than later.

This report contains all the information I have gathered on the Holders of Trust and their home city during five grueling months of living in that cursed place. The Holders continue to sow dissent between the different factions in Barsaive, which some among our leaders may wish to turn to Thera's advantage. Such a thing might be done, with careful monitoring and understanding of the Holders' tactics. However, we must take extreme care not to underestimate them or act without full knowledge of the consequences if we are to manipulate the Holders and their powerful backers into serving the Empire's cause.

THE DENAIRASTAS FAMILY

No discussion of the Holders of Trust or the city of Iopos can begin without considering the Denairastas family. This extended clan of humans rules Iopos and is the driving force behind the Holders' efforts to destabilize Barsaive; they are the head that controls the Holders' many arms. They possess considerable power, cunning and influence; the average Iopan citizen regards them with a reverence normally given to the Passions. They are people of legend, and their legend grows with their every deed. The family's rise to power is a tale told again and again in Iopos; where possible, I have attempted to separate the wheat from the chaff in the account.

The Denairastas clan has lived in Iopos since the beginning of the city's written history, and they have always been gifted magicians. The legends of Iopos are filled with the deeds of this or that Denairastas for centuries before the Scourge. How many of these tales can be considered true in light of the family's current dominance in Iopos is questionable.

The Denairastas rose to power in Iopos not long before the Scourge. Like every great city of ancient Barsaive, Iopos swore loyalty to the Thera Empire in exchange for the Rites of Protection and Passage. The people of Iopos began to build a vast citadel to protect their city. This work required powerful magic, and none were more skilled in magical arts than the Denairastas. Many of them helped complete the enchanted dome that would protect the city from the Horrors, for which their fellow Iopans greatly honored them.

Throughout the centuries of the Scourge, the Denairastas continued to distinguish themselves as protectors of their people from the ravages of the Horrors. Like most Barsaivian citadels, which were constructed without the skill or resources of the Empire's magicians, the citadel of Iopos was breached several times by powerful Horrors. Each time, the Denairastas used their powerful magic to drive the Horrors back and re-seal the citadel, saving Iopos from corruption—or so the tales say.

Over the years of confinement, Iopans grew to depend more and more upon their magical protectors, and the Denairastas grew more accustomed to the power and privilege that came with their work. Eventually—though the precise catalyst for this act remains unclear—the Denairastas





seized the reins of power in Iopos. Since then, they have shown no inclination to relinquish them. Perhaps the Denairastas grew to like power too much, or perhaps their battles with Horrors tainted them. I cannot be sure, for voicing such speculation even in one's own home is considered high treason in Iopos. The shopkeeper who told me of the Horror-taint rumor was taken away by the Holders of Trust the following week and publicly executed. (I had prudently disguised myself while we spoke together, so that he could not betray me to the Holders.)

The Denairastas encouraged the people's hero-worship and the growth of living legend cults devoted to them, until Iopan veneration for them was so great that Vidar Denairastas was chosen as First Minister of Iopos by popular demand. Within the year, the Denairastas had claimed control of the city and its destiny.

Vidar Denairastas had three wives, as is permitted by Iopan custom. Each bore him children; he was rumored to have numerous mistresses and illegitimate offspring as well. His children, raised to believe in their family's superiority and their destiny to lead Iopos to greatness, learned all of the skills expected of noble rulers. Most also followed family tradition and learned the arts of magic.

As the offspring of Vidar Denairastas grew to adulthood, political infighting broke out among them. Iopan history records little about these conflicts. I believe, however, that many of the stories told of struggles against Horrors in the later years of the Scourge were carefully disguised battles within the Denairastas clan, as Vidar's children fought each other to become the next First Minister.

UHL DENAIRASTAS

Vidar's successor was his third son, Uhl, a child of his second wife. Iopan official history describes Uhl Denairastas as a reluctant heir who took up the duty when his older siblings fell defending the city from outside threats during the Scourge. It is far more likely, however, that Uhl arranged for their deaths to clear his own path to the Malachite Seat (as they call the throne of the First Minister), just as he later arranged to eliminate those of his relatives who opposed him or dared accuse him of treason.

Uhl ascended to the leadership of the Denairastas clan, as well as the city, only a few decades before the Scourge ended and Iopos emerged from its sheltering citadel. He has ruled the city ever since; stories abound in Iopos that Uhl is immortal and will rule forever. Certainly the patriarch of the Denairastas shows keen interest in research into alchemy

and blood magic; he may be seeking a means to extend his life further and make the rumors of immortality true. It is even possible that Uhl's longevity and that of his family might stem from some magical experiment conducted during the Scourge, or even from a pact with a powerful Horror.

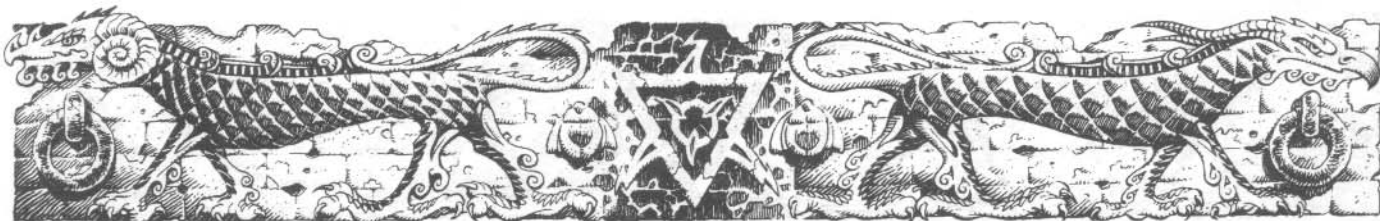
(The long lifespan of Uhl Denairastas is similar to those of the Throalic kings. I see a connection between the two, and believe that we should investigate the matter. If the legend of King Varulus I receiving his long life from the great dragon Icewing is true, then the Denairastas may likewise be puppets of the great dragons of Barsaive.)

Whatever the case, Uhl Denairastas remains the undisputed ruler of Iopos. He maintains the humble role of "First Minister," but his power is absolute. Even visitors to Iopos are required to swear the following oath of loyalty to Uhl and the Denairastas family: "Uhl is our beacon, our light, our all." Those who refuse are arrested and imprisoned, sometimes even executed at the will of the First Minister. Loyalty to the Denairastas clan, and Uhl Denairastas in particular, is paramount throughout Iopos. Even I, who am quite accustomed to dissembling, found it disturbing to swear the Iopan oath. There is great power in those words.

Like his ancestors, Uhl Denairastas is a wizard adept of considerable power. He controls access to the magical lore gathered by generations of his ancestors, a library said to rival Throal's Great Library and even—if you can imagine—the Eternal Library of Thera. The Minister's Palace also holds extensive magical laboratories where Uhl conducts experiments in spell magic, enchanting, alchemy, blood magic and other, more arcane, sorceries. To hear the Iopans talk, Uhl commands magical power that rivals that of the Passions and even the dragons. The true extent of his power is unknown, however, since he refrains from showy public displays of spellcasting.

Uhl Denairastas appears fully convinced of his destiny to rule Iopos and eventually all of Barsaive. He has taken ruthless measures necessary to ensure that his rule over Iopos cannot be disputed, and he now directs the Holders of Trust in operations that will make Iopos the greatest power in the province (if they succeed). He is an opponent of considerable guile as well as power. If we underestimate him, we will pay the price of another incident like the Battle of Prajor's Field, or worse. He may even turn his murderous intentions toward Thera, having succeeded so brilliantly in killing King Varulus. We must therefore be watchful.





THE SCIONS

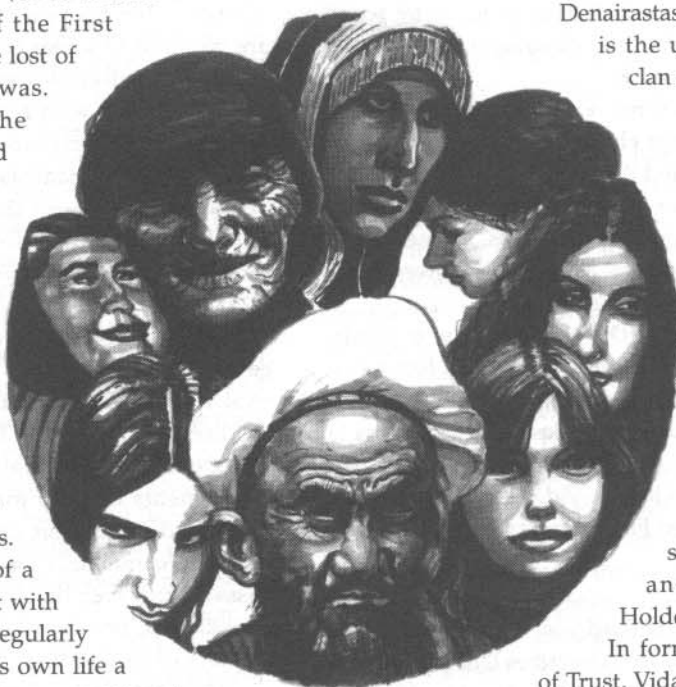
Vidar Denairastas had thirteen acknowledged children, all of whom, save for Uhl, have died—most of them “in honorable service to Iopos and her people.” Nearly all of them left behind families of their own: Uhl’s numerous nieces and nephews, their children and even their grandchildren. The Denairastas clan is a sprawling extended family, all of them worshipped as living legends by their fellow Iopans.

Uhl himself has no children by any of the seven wives he has taken over the past seventy-odd years. Three of Uhl’s wives died in “misfortunes” of various sorts, including one who died birthing a stillborn infant. (Or so said the official word from the Palace of the First Minister.) All of Iopos mourned the lost of Uhl’s only child—if lost it truly was. One wife was set aside when she failed to produce an heir and died years later in isolation. His three current surviving wives remain childless, but Uhl has turned this to his advantage by pointing to his lack of offspring as proof of his immortality. Who needs an heir when you are destined to rule forever?

I have heard rumors outside of Iopos that Uhl is incapable of siring a child because of a curse or because of his magical experiments. Other stories say that Uhl’s lack of a direct heir stems from a secret pact with otherworldly powers, or that he regularly sacrifices his progeny to sustain his own life a few more years. All such rumors are considered treason by the Holders of Trust, and anyone who spreads them is immediately executed. I heard not a whisper of these stories during my time in Iopos; they only reached my ears once I had left the city.

In the absence of a direct heir, Uhl is most likely preparing one of his nieces or nephews as his successor. The designated heir’s identity is a well-kept secret from everyone, including the rest of the family. The First Minister plays his relations like a master troubadour, controlling the family’s various factions as they struggle to curry favor with their ancient patriarch.

Clearly, Uhl Denairastas knows the wisdom of the proverb, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” One way Uhl keeps control over rest of his clan is by inducting them into the Holders of Trust. The ranks of the Gold Branch are filled with the Denairastas clan’s more aggressive and ambitious members, a stratagem that allows Uhl to cultivate their loyalty through the training the Holders receive and the oaths they swear. He also gains agents who are tied to him and to their city’s future (as they see it) through bonds of blood far stronger than a blood oath. Even if they wanted to betray him, they are loyal to Iopos and will do nothing to interfere with what they believe to be the destiny of their city. So long as Uhl Denairastas embodies that destiny, he is the undisputed master of his clan and of Iopos.



THE HOLDERS OF TRUST

The Holders of Trust, founded by Vidar Denairastas, owe their expanded size and present-day incarnation to Uhl Denairastas. Our own spymasters could take lessons from the fear-somely effective structure and operations of the Holders of Trust.

In forming the original Holders of Trust, Vidar Denairastas declared the city militia responsible for “aiding in the defense of Iopos against all forces that would destroy her.” This originally meant the Horrors, but has since taken on a new meaning. These men and women were called “Holders of the Trust of Iopos” and answered directly to the First Minister. Naturally, drawing upon the patriotism of Iopan citizens assured Vidar that his new organization would not lack for volunteers. The Holders of Trust quickly became the support and enforcement arm of the Denairastas family throughout Iopos.

After his ascension to the Malachite Seat, Uhl Denairastas expanded the ranks, duties and powers of the Holders of Trust. He tied the Holders to the idea of Iopos’s





destiny and placed in their hands the responsibility of assuring that nothing would prevent Iopos from "bringing peace and order to all of Barsaive." These actions greatly strengthened the Holders' power. By the time Iopos emerged from its citadel, the Holders of Trust controlled almost every aspect of life in the city.

The Holders today are almost as much a living legend cult as a military or political body. Every Holder is fanatically devoted to the Denairastas clan and Iopos (which are inseparable in their minds). Every Iopan fears the power of the Holders, but most also honor and respect them as agents of the divine Denairastas family. The unique way in which the Holders recruit new members demonstrates this clearly.

New members of the Holders of Trust are drawn from a unique "child tax" in Iopos, known as "the Selection," which is held every summer. The Selection requires Iopans to offer their children to the Holders so that they may train a new generation and maintain their ranks.

I was fortunate enough to witness a Selection during my time in Iopos. Proud parents bring their children to be tested by representatives of the Holders of Trust, in an atmosphere reminiscent of a public holiday. The children, from age eight to twelve, compete in games of physical and mental skill to the cheers and encouragement of their families. The competition was fierce; one boy suffered a broken arm when he fell from a climb during a difficult race. The boy did not withdraw, however. He continued on with his arm in a sling. And his devotion was rewarded; he was Selected at the end of the competition. The Selection culminates in a joyous celebration that honors the children chosen to be the next Holders of Trust. Every family I spoke with hoped that one of their children would be Selected one day. As one mother told me, "Every parent in Iopos dreams of that honor."

The children are raised by the Holders to believe that the Denairastas are divine beings destined to lead Iopos to greatness and that serving and obeying them in all things is their sacred duty. The children are trained in whatever field for which they seem suited. Many become adepts; in fact, nearly all Iopan adepts are Holders. The Selection may well help the Holders choose children with the potential to be adepts. Adepts from outside Iopos are regarded with great suspicion by Iopans and the Holders.

In addition to their training and indoctrination, all Holders must swear a powerful blood oath to serve Uhl Denairastas and Iopos (in that order). The oath ensures that the Holders cannot betray their master; no member of the Holders has ever defected or betrayed this oath and lived to tell of it. Such traitors always suffer an agonizing death as

the power of their blood oath consumes them. I have heard rumors that the Holders of Trust also have a powerful group pattern created with blood magic, but I could find no evidence to support this tale. The existence of pattern items for the Holders as a group is a potential weakness I doubt Uhl Denairastas would permit.

The Holders of Trust are divided into three main branches: the Copper, Silver and Gold Branches. Above these three is the elite Orichalcum Branch, named for that most precious of metals. Each branch represents a certain wizardly Idea and serves a particular function in the structure of the organization. The motto of the Holders is taken from the three Ideas of the first three branches: "Loyalty, Order, Success."

THE COPPER BRANCH

The Copper Branch represents the Idea of Loyalty. The so-called Coppers are the lowest-ranked members of the Holders of Trust and the most numerous. In fact, the expression "common as coppers" is used in Iopos to refer to anything that is a regular part of everyday life, such as the members of this branch. The Coppers form a complex network of informants and spies that operates throughout much of Barsaive. The majority, however, are concentrated in Iopos, where they act as the Holders' eyes and ears throughout the city. Iopans often refer to them as "the Conscience of Iopos" or "our conscience."

The members of the Copper Branch are given the same training and indoctrination as other members of the Holders of Trust, after which they return to seemingly ordinary lives in Iopos or elsewhere. They live and work as craftspeople, traders, scholars, merchants, innkeepers, even humble farmers. They seem no different from their neighbors; they display no badge of office or other sign of their affiliation with the Holders of Trust, and they keep their activities secret.

This anonymity allows the Coppers to intermingle with the people of Iopos and elsewhere without raising suspicion, so that they can observe and report all that goes on in and around their homes. The rest of the Holders may then take action accordingly. A wrong word to anyone in Iopos may result in a Copper making a report, swiftly followed by an investigation into any possible threat to the security of the city or its rulers.

This intricate spy network provides the Holders of Trust with considerable information on all aspects of life in Barsaive and near-complete surveillance over their home city. Many Iopans believe that the Holders of Trust can hear





disloyal thoughts on the wind, and the efficiency of the Coppers makes that rumor seem true. Spies, criminals and traitors in the city are unearthed by the Coppers and swiftly dealt with by the Silver Branch.

During my months in Iopos, the near-constant scrutiny of the Coppers posed a daunting challenge. Surviving meant assuming that every person in the city was a member of the Copper Branch and acting accordingly. I kept my cover identity as a humble trader free from any breath of trouble and conducted all my work in the city in various other disguises. As Iopans do not trust strangers, I was forced to spend nearly half my time in the city developing friendships and associates for my other identities. Once I used a cover identity to pry useful information from someone, I discarded the disguise, lest the Holders come looking for me. That precaution saved me three times from being caught by the Holders when they arrested my informants. I believe that those among my informants who were not arrested were actually members of the Copper Branch, but I cannot be sure.

All Iopan citizens consider it their duty to inform the Holders of any disloyalty to the Denairastas of which they become aware. It is therefore difficult to judge whether an informant is one of the Coppers or simply a loyal citizen, and that is how Uhl Denairastas prefers to keep it. I estimate that as many as one out of every ten persons in Iopos is a member of the Copper Branch. However, the true number of Coppers could be far less or far more than that.

Though no legitimately acknowledged member of the Denairastas family would willingly serve as a low-ranking Copper, I have heard rumors that Uhl Denairastas has inducted some of the more distant branches of his family, descended from Vidar's illegitimate children, into the Copper Branch. If true, this rumor suggests Uhl's desire to keep these bastard relations alive and under his watchful eye rather than eliminating them as potential threats.

The constant presence of the Coppers has only exacerbated the renowned Iopan fascination with other people's business. Like the dwarfs of Throal, who are known for having what many Name-givers consider an unhealthy interest in the affairs of others, the average Iopan will ask the most probing personal questions on the slightest acquaintance. Unlike Throalic citizens, however, Iopans do not ask out of misplaced notions of politeness. They question for far more calculating reasons.

Iopans take interest in all of their neighbors' comings and goings, particularly those of strangers, and many of them go to great effort to keep track of the latest gossip.

They do this to ferret out any sign of possible danger to Iopos or her rulers. An Iopan who discovers such information is quick to report it to the Holders of Trust. Failure to do so is considered treason, and brings a severe penalty.

This brings up a contradiction of Iopan life. On the one hand, they must be willing to talk freely about their affairs because any pretense at secrecy could be seen as treasonous. At the same time, they learn to guard every thought and action because a wrong word could lead to an encounter with the Holders of Trust. Ordinary Iopans are therefore spies in the making, capable of concealing their true thoughts and feelings beneath a veneer of unexceptional behavior. This ability serves the Holders of Trust well when they infiltrate places outside Iopos. The Holders' agents blend into an area with amazing facility, easily maintaining a double life.

The surface similarity between Throalic and Iopan culture also seems to have served the Holders well. The dwarfs of Throal think nothing of a stranger asking them probing questions about their lives, which has allowed agents of the Holders in Throal to operate undetected for years. Fortunately, Theran respect for individual privacy provides some protection from this tactic.

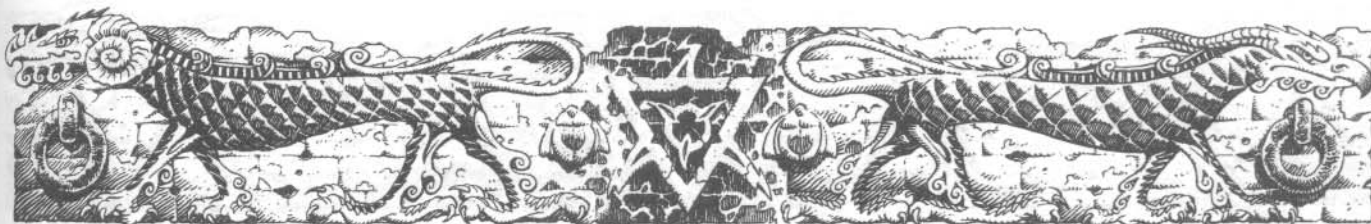
THE SILVER BRANCH

The Silver Branch represents the Idea of Order; keeping order in Iopos is its duty. The Silvers are the Holders most Barsaivians and Therans know—the city guardsmen in their shining silver armor. The Silver Branch is also the core of Iopos's military and of the Holders in general. Iopans liken them to the silver coin: valuable and stable, a constant to rely on.

Members of the Silver Branch interact openly with their fellow Iopans more often than any other branch of the Holders. While the Coppers rely on anonymity to carry out their duties and the Golds concern themselves with matters outside the city, the Silvers work openly among the people as city guardsmen and soldiers. Consequently, the image and reputation of the Holders of Trust among the people of Iopos is a matter of great concern to the Silver Branch, and the Silvers work to portray themselves as stalwart and sober guardians of order, loyal to the Denairastas and to their city, unswayable and incorruptible.

Unfortunately, this reputation for utter loyalty is true. The members of the Silver Branch, like all of the Holders of Trust, are fanatically loyal to the Denairastas and Iopos. Most have been raised since childhood to follow their duty above all else. Neither bribes nor threats will sway them.





Indeed, my attempt to subvert a Silver nearly resulted in my capture. The man went along with my efforts merely to set a trap that I narrowly escaped. (I understand that a flatteringly large reward has been posted for my capture.)

The Silver Branch keeps Iopos a clean, orderly and beautiful city. Indeed, Iopos rivals the glory of Travar, long considered one of Barsaive's loveliest cities—quite unusual for such a provincial backwater. Though Iopos cannot match the majesty of the Great City of Thera, its broad avenues, marble columns and tall stone buildings and towers nonetheless please the eye. The city is encircled in a tall wall of pale stone reinforced with elemental earth, the remains of the citadel that protected the city from the Scourge. The buildings within the wall are of white and gray native stone, often tinted with different shades of pink, blue and gold.

The Silver Branch takes its duty to protect this beauty and order seriously—so much so that, according to local rumor, anyone so much as littering on an Iopan street may be slain by the Silvers. In truth, littering or otherwise despoiling the city is subject to fifteen lashes or a public beating by members of the Silver Branch. Death is reserved for more serious crimes such as treason, murder or espionage. Executions for these offenses are often carried out on the spot by members of the Silver Branch. Most involve public beheading by the sword, though the exact method seems to be at the discretion of the Silvers on the scene.

Punishments for other crimes in Iopos are typically enslavement or marking, such as cutting off the hand of a thief or branding a known swindler. All slaves in Iopos belong to the Denairastas clan and are taken directly into their service. Most are put to work as elemental miners, often aboard the dangerous air- and fire-mining airships, which operate much like our own mining vessels based in Vivane, Sky Point and Triumph. Slaves in Iopos number only a few hundred, as serious crime is rare in the city because of widespread fear of the Holders.

Though Iopos is generally peaceful, members of the Silver Branch are prepared for conflict at any time. They travel the streets in groups known as *triads*, a reflection of the Iopan fascination with doing and counting things in threes. All Silvers on duty carry swords and wear the shining silver armor that symbolizes their presence of the streets of Iopos. It is rare to walk down any major street without seeing a Silver triad on patrol, given a respectful berth by passers-by—but not too wide, lest the Silvers think the passing people have something to hide.

The sole member of the Denairastas family involved with the Silver Branch is the branch's commander, Argo Denairastas. The Iopan Minister of Order, Argo is a nephew of the First Minister and quite proud of his position, even though some consider it a kind of exile from his work with the Gold Branch. More likely, Uhl wants to keep the charismatic and ambitious Argo close at hand rather than out wandering Barsaive. Argo is a skilled warrior and keeps himself in excellent fighting condition. He trains with the Silvers and is reputed to be more down-to-earth than other members of his family, which makes him popular with his troops. I watched one of Argo's sparring sessions with his troops and can attest to his skill. It is possible that he has designs on the Malachite Seat but, if so, he has concealed them well enough to keep his head even under the watchful eye of his uncle.





THE GOLD BRANCH

The Gold Branch represents the Idea of Success, and its members are the key to Uhl Denairastas's plot to increase his power in Barsaive. Near-legendary in Iopos, the Golds are the elite spies and agents of the Holders who operate outside of the city. They are also the Holders of particular interest to us. Jada Denairastas, the assassin who killed King Varulus III, is an agent of the Gold Branch (or was; her fate remains unknown). The Holders currently stirring up trouble throughout Barsaive are also Golds. They may be an asset or a deadly liability, depending on how we deal with them.

Unlike the other two main branches, many members of the Gold Branch are recruited from the Denairastas clan. Uhl Denairastas seems to believe that ties of blood are strongest, and he keeps his younger relations under control by making them part of his dreams of conquest. Legitimate scions of the Denairastas are raised by the Holders and trained in the arts and Disciplines that will allow them to join the Gold Branch one day. Those who prove themselves incapable end up as ministers and functionaries serving Uhl Denairastas's government in Iopos, while the most capable become part of the Holders of Trust elite.

The Gold Branch also recruits promising adepts from the ranks of the Silver Branch, particularly those who have shown a talent for espionage and deception. (Uhl Denairastas no doubt believes it is better to promote such Name-givers into positions where he can use their talents rather than allowing someone else to use them against him.)

All members of the Gold Branch seem to be adepts of considerable skill. The most elite of the Golds rival the champions of cities like Travar and Throal. Exactly how many of these adepts make up the Gold Branch is uncertain, but I estimate that they number no more than a hundred. The highest-ranked and most trusted Golds are all members of the Denairastas clan and are fanatically devoted to their patriarch. Any exceptions are no doubt dealt with swiftly and decisively, if the justice carried out by the Silver Branch is any indication. Jerleth Denairastas, the Iopan "envoy" to the Blood Wood, is one of the Golds, and I have identified three other members who operate in areas of interest to Thera.

The first of them, Elom Denairastas, operates in Urupa, doing his best to sabotage relations between Thera, our House K'tenshin allies and the seaside trading city. He plays the role of a minor functionary on the ambassador's staff, but he is actually a skilled illusionist and wizard adept.

The second, a woman Named Gentine, frequently associates with suspected members of the so-called Liferock

Rebellion. I believe she is an agent of the Holders passing information on to the Rebellion that will undermine the security of our fortress-city of Triumph, thereby directing the rebels' activities in a way that benefits Iopos. Gentine may be coordinating her efforts with those of Elom in Urupa, but I cannot yet confirm this. I believe Gentine is also a Denairastas, since Uhl would never trust so important a mission to anyone not of his own blood.

The last of the three, Sidanna Denairastas, has taken up residence in Haven near the ruins of Parlainth. She claims to be an exile and runs a small but profitable business trading in finds taken from the ruins by adventurers. Numerous investigations have so far discovered no evidence that her story is anything but true; however, her position in Haven permits her to examine many Thera artifacts and materials recovered from the ruins. It seems unlikely that Uhl would exile a wizard of Sidanna's skill, or allow her to set up shop in Haven, unless it served some purpose of his. After examining the records of our agent in Haven, I believe that one of the items Sidanna purchased has shown up in Iopos. This, among other things, leads me to believe that Sidanna is an agent of the Gold Branch involved in funneling magical artifacts back to Iopos.

In accordance with family tradition, most of the Denairastas Golds follow the magician Disciplines. Many learn the arts of more than one magical Discipline and can combine them with terrible efficiency, as evidenced by the gruesome work of Jada Denairastas. The wizard Discipline seems most common, followed by nethermancer and illusionist. Elementalism, though vital to the city's livelihood, is less often practiced among members of the Gold Branch.

Among Golds who are not of Denairastas blood, the thief, scout, troubadour, warrior and swordmaster Disciplines seem the most common. The Gold Branch emphasizes stealth, illusion and deception over brawn, and even its warriors are skilled in the arts of espionage.

The Gold Branch protects Iopan interests in Barsaive and sows seeds of conflict between Iopos's enemies, such as the Kingdom of Throal and the Empire. The assassination of King Varulus III is a prime example of a typical Gold Branch plot: the perpetration of a crime under the guise of another faction so that blame for the crime will fall on that faction. While the injured party is busy attacking their supposed enemy, agents of the Holders use the confusion to further their own goals. This is exactly what occurred when King Neden, believing Thera responsible for his father's death, launched his foolish assault on our fortress at Lake Ban. The death of our ambassador in Urupa, which has been traced to agents of the Holders of Trust, is part of a similar scheme.





The Golds are gifted at disguising their work as that of others. In Barsaive, they often use the activities of scorchers or crystal raiders to make their own actions look like a random act of violence. With the rise of Cara Fahd in southwestern Barsaive, agents of the Gold Branch are likely to use conflict between the orks and others to their advantage. With Vivane and Sky Point so close by, we should be wary of Holder activity in the region.

The Golds may also be making use of House Ishkarat, which enjoys a profitable trading partnership with Iopos and relies on the city's elemental mining operations for the True elements needed for its riverboats, fire cannons and other goods. The t'skrang transport agents of the Holders along the Serpent River from time to time, which makes Ishkarat riverboats doubly suspicious in the eyes of the other aropagoi. Ishkarat spies also exchange information with the Holders, though the Holders of Trust doubtless come out ahead in that bargain.

THE ORICHALCUM BRANCH

The Orichalcum Branch represents the Idea of Protection and makes up the Denairastas clan's personal elite bodyguard. They are also known as "the Scales," perhaps because of the design on their golden armor, which echoes the Serpent Crest of the Denairastas clan. Chosen for their skill and utter loyalty, any member of the Orichalcum Branch would kill or die instantly at Uhl's command—as I personally found out.

As the Empire's agent in Iopos, I was chosen to coordinate an effort to repay the Denairastas for setting King Neden upon us. We intended to assassinate Argo Denairastas, the head of the Silver Branch. I managed to bring additional Theran agents into the city, but the timetable given to me was too demanding for the delicacy of operations required in Iopos. The mission was compromised by our need to subvert one of the Silvers, an attempt that unfortunately failed. All of the other Theran agents were killed by the Scales or captured by other Holders and executed. I barely escaped with my life, using all the resources I had carefully cultivated during my time in the city. As a result of that botched operation, all of my other efforts in Iopos have been wasted. The Holders are more alert than ever to infiltration, Theran or otherwise. You will have great difficulty getting another agent into the city. I wish whoever is chosen the best of luck—they will need it.

All members of the Orichalcum Branch are adepts modified with blood magic and blood charms to enhance their already formidable abilities. Their duty is to protect the

Denairastas, but Uhl sometimes assigns them other tasks that he does not wish to entrust even to the Golds.

Unlike the Gold Branch, none of the Scales are members of the Denairastas family, but are recruited from the elite of the Silver Branch. (The Silvers, after all, are the Holders most accomplished in the arts of fighting and subduing attackers, while the Golds are most skilled in espionage.) The bodyguards also undergo significant blood magic enchantments that no Denairastas could be seen to take without tarnishing the family's near-divine reputation among the Iopan people. Finally, of course, setting ambitious blood relations who are skilled in the arts of secret mayhem to guard the rulers they may wish to displace is like hiring a thief to guard your treasure-house. Uhl Denairastas is many things, but he is not a fool.

The Scales are encased from head to foot in armor made of a blend of orichalcum and other metals. The armor is bonded to each guard's body through blood magic, creating a kind of "living metal" shell. It gives the Scales considerable protection but does not appear to greatly encumber them, as they are reported to be swift and deadly fighters. Damage to the armor heals along with the guard's own injuries. The Scales are reputed to recover remarkably quickly from most damage and are amazingly difficult to kill.

Other blood charms or magic may be part of the making of the Scales, though many of their abilities may stem from their adept status. Most of the Scales appear to be warriors, a Discipline well suited for fighting anything that threatens their charges. Their ranks may include adepts of other Disciplines, but I know of none. Given the Scales' remarkable abilities and constant presence at their master's side, any efforts we make to remove Uhl Denairastas require the utmost subtlety and finesse.

THE BROKEN KEYS

Though this rumor has not been confirmed, I have heard of a group in the far-off province of Indrisa who claim to have been Holders of Trust. Known as the Broken Keys, the group is a mercenary band aiding the Empire in Indrisa against bandits and raiders. My experience with the Holders tells me that the Broken Keys are either bald-faced liars who have nothing to do with the Holders of Trust, or are (as I believe) active agents of the Holders assigned to Indrisa for some purpose known only to the Denairastas. In either event, I suggest we contact our people in Indrisa and warn them of the true power of the Holders of Trust, so that they may be prepared should my suspicions prove correct.





GAME INFORMATION

The Holders of Trust and the plans of Uhl Denairastas and his family for the future of Iopos can have long-reaching implications in an **Earthdawn** campaign. Player characters can become peripherally involved in some of the schemes of the Denairastas and the Holders, or they can deal with the Holders directly. Most game uses of the Holders of Trust fall into two categories: adventures in Iopos and—more commonly—encounters with the Holders and their activities outside the city.

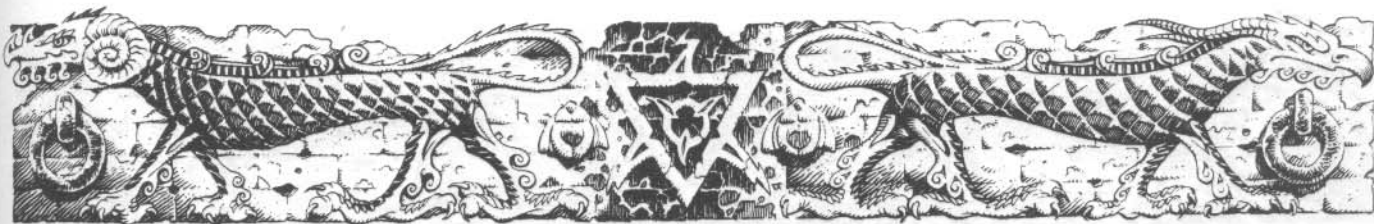
ADVENTURES IN IOPOS

With the Copper Branch carefully observing and reporting on the actions of all strangers in Iopos and the Silver Branch prepared to enforce order by the sword, traditional adventures in Iopos are next to impossible. Adventures can still take place there, but characters cannot operate as openly in Iopos as they can in places such as Bartertown, Haven or Travar.

Iopos more closely resembles an occupied city like Vivane, but with one important difference. Iopos is not occupied by an outside force, as Vivane is by the Therans. Instead, the people of Iopos are fanatically loyal to the Denairastas who rule them, and the Holders ruthlessly maintain that loyalty. Characters in Iopos must therefore operate under constant surveillance, not just from the ubiquitous Coppers, but also from ordinary citizens. One slip can mean a death sentence from the Holders for espionage.

Despite the difficulties, outside elements do operate in Iopos, and many factions in Barsaive want information about the plans of Uhl Denairastas and his family. Player characters could be part of the Eye of Throal, assigned the difficult task of entering Iopos and learning more about goings-on in the city or even infiltrating the ranks of the Holders. Characters could also be agents of the Theran Empire from Vivane or the





fortress of Triumph, such as the author of the above report, seeking to confirm the information given here or to gather more intelligence about Iopos for the Theran forces in Barsaive.

Player characters might also come to Iopos on business, such as guarding a merchant caravan or delivering a message to someone in the city. In this case, Iopos and the Holders of Trust function as more of a background element, though adventurers who forget about the rule of law in Iopos can quickly find themselves in trouble with the Holders when their "suspicious" activities are reported.

The Copper Branch

Most members of the Copper Branch are ordinary Name-givers who live unremarkable lives while quietly going about their duties. Very few are adepts and fewer still involve themselves directly in the activities of the Holders, so their combat abilities are negligible and their statistics unremarkable. Law enforcement in Iopos is carried out by the Silver Branch, and operations against the city's enemies are carried out by the Gold Branch. The job of the Coppers is simply to observe and report.

Gamemasters can use agents of the Copper Branch to sow paranoia about the Holders among the player characters. Members of the Copper Branch are everywhere in Iopos (or at least, they *seem* to be everywhere). Characters can never be sure if their actions and conversations are being observed or if the kind person they encounter on the street or at an inn is actually a Holder of Trust. Characters in Iopos should quickly learn to be always on their guard.

Members of the Copper Branch also operate elsewhere in Barsaive, sending back information to Iopos about goings-on in distant parts of the province. Gamemasters can use anonymous agents of the Copper Branch to allow the Holders to keep tabs on a group of player characters almost anywhere.

The Silver Branch

The Silver Branch are all trained soldiers. Most of them have abilities similar to those of the Guard Veteran (p. 297, ED) including the ability to judge a character's intentions and increase their Social Defense against attempts at deception. The senior member of each Silver Triad is an adept—usually a warrior—of Third Circle or higher. Silver Branch captains are adepts of at least Fourth Circle; higher-ranked officers are of even higher Circles.

Silvers are armed with broadswords forged to do STR + 7 steps damage. Their silver-colored plate armor gives them an Armor Rating of 9, +2 points of Mystic Armor and a -3

step Initiative penalty. Such armor is worth at least 8,000 silver pieces, but anyone selling it would soon receive an unwanted visit from the Holders of Trust. Higher-ranked officers in the Silver Branch may also carry threaded weapons and armor such as those described in the **Magical Items** section of the **Earthdawn Companion**.

A Silver Triad immediately assesses the danger of any threat they encounter in the city and will quickly summon aid if needed. All Silver Branch members carry a horn they can sound to summon other triads nearby. Generally, a blast on the horn will summon 1D4 + 1 additional triads to the area within 2D4 Combat Rounds. The Silvers rely on their sizable numbers and fearsome reputation to overpower any hazards they encounter.

Holders of the Silver Branch may legally dispense justice as they see fit for most occasions and will do so on the spot. Only in the case of foreign spies or other activities of interest to the Gold Branch will the matter be brought before a government minister.

The Orichalcum Guards and the Denairastas Clan

Player characters may encounter members of the Denairastas clan in and outside of Iopos. In the city, clan members are always protected by bodyguards. They rarely leave their strongholds without at least one member of the Orichalcum Branch at their side, and usually at least one Silver Triad as well.

The Scales of the Orichalcum Branch are all warriors of at least Sixth Circle. Each one has a unique suit of "living metal" armor grafted onto him by blood magic. This armor gives the wearer 9 points of Armor and +6 points of Mystic Armor, as well as a -2 step Initiative penalty. It costs the wearer 6 permanent Damage Points. The rituals to make and graft the armor are known only to Denairastas magicians.

In addition to their armor and their talents, the Scales have various other blood charms implanted in them by their Denairastas masters. Gamemasters can choose from any of the blood charms in the **Earthdawn** rulebook (pp. 258–259), **Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive** (pp. 67–70), or even from the **Theran Empire** sourcebook (pp. 165–167). Common charms include Absorb Blow, Desperate Blow, Death Cheat, Blood Knuckles, Garlen Stones, Horn Needles and Elemental Fend. These charms, in combination with talents such as Life Check, make the Scales very hard to kill.

Members of the Denairastas clan are all adepts, usually magicians. Wizards are the most common, followed by nethermancers, illusionists and elementalists. Humans all, the Denairastas often use their inborn versatility to learn





more than one thread-weaving talent and cast spells of more than one Discipline. Some of them also train in more than one spellcasting Discipline. Members of the Denairastas are at least Sixth Circle in their chosen Discipline; many are Eighth Circle or higher.

An interesting campaign idea is to have the players play members of the Denairastas clan. Their characters can be members of the Gold Branch of the Holders of Trust, or perhaps ministers in the Iopan government. Denairastas characters must navigate the difficult waters of family politics, forging alliances and advancing their own positions in the clan without drawing suspicion on themselves. The characters might object to Uhl Denairastas's treatment of the people of Iopos, or to his dreams of conquest, or may want to seize the Malachite Seat for themselves.

Denairastas player characters who are members of the Gold Branch can operate outside Iopos as agents of the Holders to disrupt relations between different factions in Barsaive. They can act against Throal, the Theran Empire and other cities and secret societies while protecting Iopan interests. Individual characters might also try to advance their personal agendas while carrying out the will of their patriarch. Such complex motivations and political maneuverings could make a fascinating **Earthdawn** campaign for the player group willing to take it on.

Denairastas characters start out more powerful than most **Earthdawn** player characters because of their lengthy training. Gamemasters might wish to give player characters in such a campaign a large initial bonus Legend Point award—for example, as much as 40,000 Legend Points—with which they can increase their talents and abilities. Denairastas characters must be skilled at their work, as they include among their enemies such competent opponents as the Eye of Throal and agents of the Theran Empire. Players can use the material in this section on the Gold Branch (p. 36) and the Denairastas clan to design suitable characters.

The Holders Elsewhere in Barsaive

Most **Earthdawn** player characters will encounter the Holders of Trust outside Iopos, in the form of Holder agents working to set the various factions of Barsaive against each other. This means that player characters will most often encounter members of the Gold Branch, though members of other branches might assist the Golds in a given operation.

Members of the Gold Branch are all adepts, usually at least Seventh Circle; some are Tenth Circle or higher. They may have various thread items or blood magic charms at their command in addition to their formidable talents and

abilities. Most Holders of Trust are human, but members of all Name-giver races are among their ranks. The Holders are also skilled at disguising themselves, and the Golds frequently masquerade as Therans or members of another Barsaivian faction or power.

Most Gold Branch members work alone or with small groups of subordinate agents. Occasionally the Golds work in teams, and such a team might have its own group pattern (p. 52, **Earthdawn Companion**). Working alone means that a single Holder must be extremely capable, so that he can pose a credible challenge to an entire group of player character adepts. A good example of a typical Gold is Jada Denairastas, the assassin who killed King Varulus III (see **The King is Dead**, p. 42, **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**).

The most common tactic employed by the Holders of Trust is sowing dissent between Barsaive's various factions through deceit, blackmail and murder. The Holders often strike against a particular faction in the guise of an enemy or an ally. The faction then retaliates against the party they believe is responsible, and the Holders can act unopposed while their enemies are at each others' throats. The death of King Varulus III and other adventure hooks in **Prelude to War** offer examples of this technique.

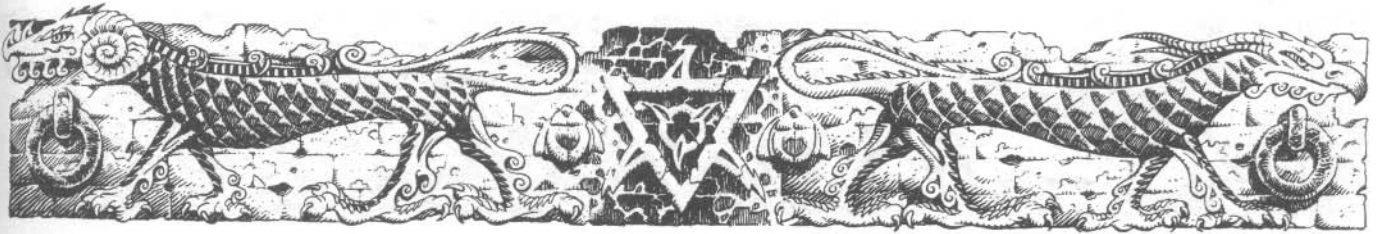
The key to the activities of the Holders of Trust is secrecy. If their involvement in an affair is exposed, the jig is up and the Holders have nothing more to gain. Therefore, the Holders always operate covertly. Characters involved with the Holders of Trust may not know that the sinister agents of Uhl Denairastas are their opponents until it is too late to stop the Holders' plans from going forward. Gamemasters should stress paranoia and deception when using the Holders of Trust in an adventure.

Adventure Idea: Eye Spy

In this adventure, the player characters experience life in Iopos—and the Holders of Trust—first-hand when the Eye of Throal asks them to go into Iopos to rescue a Throalic spy. The player characters may have worked for the Eye of Throal in the past or done other favors for the Throalic government. Alternatively, they may be unknowns chosen precisely because the leader of the Eye does not want to use recognizable agents for this delicate mission. For more information on the Eye of Throal, refer to page 78 of **Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom** and pages 15–21 of this book.

After learning that Jada Denairastas killed King Varulus III, agents of the Eye of Throal in Iopos have been working to gather more information on the Holders of Trust and the plans of Uhl Denairastas. Unfortunately, the bungled Theran





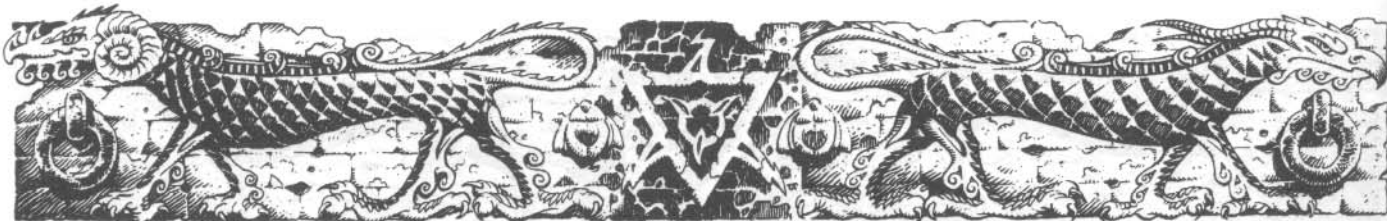
assassination attempt described in the preceding narrative alerted the Holders to nests of Theran and Throalic spies in Iopos, and all but one of the Throalic agents in the city were killed. The remaining agent, Millere Hammerfell, is hiding out with a few local allies in Iopos, but her position is precarious and it is only a matter of time before she is exposed. The information she has gathered could be vital to the Kingdom of Throal, so J'Role has hired or assigned the player characters to go to Iopos incognito and bring her out safely.

The characters enter Iopos disguised as guards with a merchant caravan doing business in the city. They seek out the spy using a countersign given to them by J'Role. Unfortunately, the countersign has been compromised and the Holders of Trust are on the alert for the player characters. Rather than simply arresting them, the Gold Branch arranges for one of its members to pose as the Throalic spy and meet the player characters. This woman, a female dwarf

named Emer, is a Seventh Circle troubadour adept who loosely matches Millere's description. Emer will give the characters the correct countersign and try to convince them that she is the agent they were sent to rescue. Once she has gotten all the information she can from the characters, she will claim to know a secret way out of the city through abandoned tunnels under the walls. In reality, she is leading the adepts into a trap set by the Holders to capture the characters for interrogation.

The adepts must fight their way free and try to escape from Iopos. The real Millere might show up and aid them at the last minute; she will have heard about their presence but been unable to contact them before their disastrous meeting with Emer. The characters and Millere must get out of the city while agents of the Silver and Gold branches of the Holders of Trust are hunting for them.





THE SONGBIRDS

My Lord Spymaster Gendel,

This report comes from Grankar Swordbreaker, one of our few troll agents in Barsaive. He operates in Kratas and is our sole remaining agent in the ranks of Brocher's Brood, the band of thugs led by the exiled blood elf Vistrosh. After our other two infiltrators were discovered and executed, we made avoiding detection Grankar's primary mission. Only if an absolutely secure opportunity arose was he to report, unless he discovered something critical enough to warrant risking exposure. It seems he has done so.

Our reasons for infiltrating Brocher's Brood have proven sound, though not precisely in the manner we expected. We hoped that by keeping an eye on Vistrosh, we might eventually persuade him to spy on his former queen. It seems, however, that Alachia of the Blood Wood is in fact spying on her former blood warder. Vistrosh is looking for information about Aardelea, the young Barsaivian girl recently given over to the Heavenherds. It seems that knowledge of her whereabouts also matters to Queen Alachia, and the queen hopes to avail herself of any information Vistrosh might unearth. Though the girl is far from Barsaive, it might be prudent to alert the Heavenherds to Alachia's interest.

This report is the first concrete evidence we have of the activities of a group of spies I will for the moment call "the Songbirds" (the name is taken from Grankar's report). However, we cannot yet act on this evidence, as Grankar's narrative will explain. I believe we will have other opportunities, if we can get additional agents in place. With your lordship's approval, I will send two more agents to Kratas in the next few weeks—after suspicions of Theran activity have died down—and increase our presence in Brocher's Brood.

—Sorranal Parthistrian, Senior Operative

A few weeks ago, Vistrosh ordered Brocher's Brood to keep their ears to the ground for rumors about a little girl who'd been kidnapped by Therans. I knew who he meant, but I didn't think anything of it at the time. Vistrosh is

always on the lookout for news that will give him some advantage over someone or net him some quick silver. I didn't know that this little tidbit would turn into something a lot more important to us.

A few days after the order'd gone out, I lost at dicing with Othrick, an ork and fellow member of the Brood. Othrick had caravan duty the next night but wanted to visit his sweetheart instead. Caravan duty means making sure that caravans headed for Kratas come in on time and intact; it's only the ones passing near Kratas that Vistrosh sends his men out to steal from. When I lost the dice game, I took Othrick's duty for him. So I left Kratas the next morning for the village of Starford, about half a day southwest of here, to meet up with the caravan of Damar the Younger.

Damar's small band of ponies arrived shortly before sunset the next evening. When I introduced myself as the agent of his most important customer, he looked inclined to argue, but not for long. People usually get along with trolls, the easy way or the hard way. Damar's no idiot; he picked the easy way. He ordered one of his men to show me to the storeroom where Vistrosh's goods were being kept for the evening while the merchant and his men rested in the inn. Starford's a minor trade stop; the merchants who use it most are the ones whose caravans are too small to load things in wagons, so the townspeople put up a building full of small storage chambers where passing merchants can keep things under lock and key overnight. Everything looked fine when I got there, so I spent the early evening in the tavern, drinking ale and tossing knives.

A few hours later, I went back to the storage building to check on Vistrosh's things. The guard recognized me from my earlier visit and let me in. When I got to the door of the storeroom, I saw the padlock hanging on its ring, but the hasp was in front of the lock instead of behind it. Then I saw a thin thread tied to the hasp, which disappeared into the





room beyond the door. Someone had opened the lock and then used the thread to pull the hasp over it so that the door would appear sealed if the guard didn't look closely. I drew my belt axe and opened the door.

My steps in the hall must have been loud, because the thief inside was ready for me. As soon as the door started to open, he hit it from inside, sending it crashing into my shoulder. I was expecting something like that, though. The door bounced off my shoulder and almost closed again. I threw it open and saw an elf standing in the cramped space, a short sword in one hand. A thin, clear liquid dripped from the blade to the floor. The elf swung at me; he moved pretty fast, but one quick swipe with the blunt end of the axe sent him crashing face-first to the floor. I expected the building guard to come running at all the noise, but he never showed—which means he was stupid or a coward, or the elf paid him off in advance.

I stepped inside the chamber and kicked away the sword before the elf could react, then planted a foot on his back to keep him lying down. I pulled the door closed and then lit the place with a small light crystal I keep with me. Between the light and how hard he had to work to breathe, the fight went out of the elf. Once he'd finally realized he wasn't going anywhere, we settled down to talk. That is, I talked. He wasn't inclined to answer me. He just lay there, silent. I asked him who he was, what he wanted, who he worked for and where he'd planned to take whatever he was after. He didn't say a word. Then the strangest thing happened. I said, "You might be quiet now, but you'll sing later on like a good little songbird." No sooner were the words out of my mouth than he started thrashing around and shaking. He was having some kind of fit, like a horse had kicked him in the head. It surprised me, so I stepped back. He flopped over on his side and spasms wracked his body for a few more seconds. Then he stopped moving. His eyes looked glassy and a thin line of spit trickled out of his mouth. I knew then he was dead.

Now I had a corpse on my hands. I searched him for anything that might give me a clue to his identity, or why he'd expired so suddenly. There wasn't much—a small pouch of silver, a few throwing daggers, a length of thin, light rope. Nothing of any real value. Then I found a scrap of paper folded up and tucked behind his belt buckle. Lucky for me I read the elf language. The paper said, "Find my niece at any cost. Her uncle likely means her harm, and her friends miss her greatly. -A."

The fact that the paper was written in the elf tongue and signed with a big letter "A" mightn't have meant anything by itself. I've known a lot of women whose names started with the letter "A," and some of them were elves. The unusual thing was the long, reddish thorn that the paper'd been wrapped around. That made me suspicious, so I searched him again more closely. In a secret pocket in one of the elf's pouches, I found a thin gold ring worked to look like intertwined rose stems with small buds. Vistrosh has one just like it, a memento of the days when he dallied with the Blood Queen. (I heard about the ring from Caleb, an old dwarf who's been with Vistrosh almost since the beginning of the Brood.) The ring made it pretty clear that this thief was in touch with Alachia; he might have been one of her lovers.

What the Blood Queen wants with Vistrosh or his belongings I don't know, but I can guess. From the thief's message, it looks like Alachia wants to track down the dragons' little girl. Maybe she thought this caravan had information on the child's whereabouts—either someone who knew something or some object being transported that would've meant something to her—and sent a thief to steal it. If that's so, then she knows Vistrosh is looking for the girl himself, which means she's got her own people spying on him. Just like Alachia to keep using people after she gets rid of them.

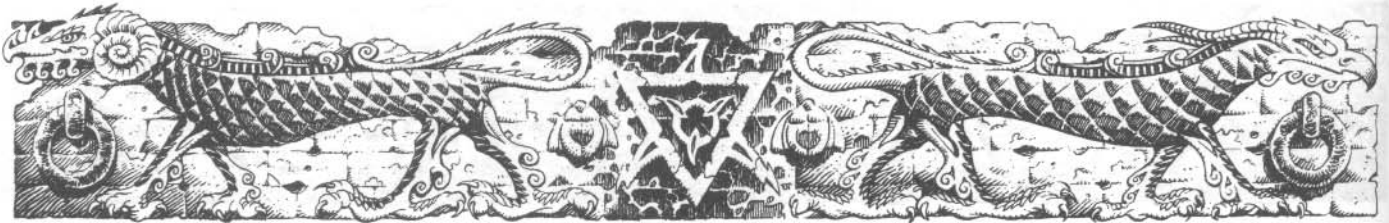
I distracted the guard and got rid of the body. It's too bad the elf died, but I'm enclosing his message and the thorn with this report. I escorted the caravan back to Kratas and reported that everything went as expected. I said nothing of the elf incident to Vistrosh. If he knows Alachia is watching him, he might take more precautions that would make it tougher for me to spot the Blood Queen's other spies. If I find any other evidence of them, I'll report again.

I'm still trying to determine what set off the elf's fatal fit. The word "songbird" seemed to trigger it, though I can't imagine how. Knowing blood elves, though, it's likely some warped kind of magic. I suppose it might even be the Blood Queen's Name for her spies. If and when I find out anything useful, I'll let you know.

GAME INFORMATION

The Songbirds are adepts—mostly elves—dedicated to serving the interests of Queen Alachia of the Blood Wood. Her eyes and ears in and beyond Barsaive, they help chart her course through the turbulent waters of Barsaivian politics. With the recent goings-on in Barsaive, the Songbirds are busy keeping tabs on the Theran Empire, the Holders of





Trust, House K'tenshin and known agents of the great dragons. Their skill largely makes up for their small numbers, which are supplemented by the large group of spies and thugs who answer to the Songbirds' leader, Vistrosh.

As described on page 42 of *The Blood Wood*, the "exiled" blood warder Vistrosh secretly coordinates the Songbirds' efforts on his queen's behalf. To compensate for the small number of Songbirds, Vistrosh often uses members of Brocher's Brood to help Alachia without their knowledge. Though many Songbirds report directly to Alachia, most assignments go through Vistrosh, who manages an extensive and convoluted system of contacts and agents intended to make it virtually impossible to trace the connection between the Songbirds and himself. Vistrosh is such a masterful manipulator that even some of Garlthik One-Eye's men unknowingly carry messages and packages for him.

Vistrosh's network uses mundane and magical means to convey orders and operates on a wider scale than even Brocher's Brood is capable of. The blood elf frequently hires people to carry messages and packages without disclosing the contents. Short messages are often sent via magically trained messenger birds, while longer reports are sometimes planted in trade caravans without the knowledge of the caravan owner. They are invariably "stolen" from the innocent merchant by an agent who knows that the caravan contains this shipment. Some Songbirds, nethermancers and elementalists in particular, use ally or elemental spirits as messengers (this method is rarely used to send information to Alachia directly, as the magical defenses of the queen's palace often get in the spirits' way). Furthermore, Vistrosh is trying to develop a spell to allow long-distance, two-way communication to improve the Songbirds' ability to pass word to one another. He uses the Call spell (p. 48, *Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive*) on occasion to send brief messages to agents within 4 days' walk of Kratas—taking care to mask his appearance before casting the spell—but this spell is of limited use as the Songbirds are usually more widely scattered.

One of Vistrosh's favorite tricks is a double-blind switch, which he uses to create a smokescreen that will obscure the movement of a particular message or item. First, a package containing messages or objects is delivered to reputable individuals with no connection to the Songbirds. These people agree to hold the goods until someone comes to claim them a few days later. In the interim, an agent steals the packages and replaces them with others, which also contain messages or objects. The "thief" and the agent who later makes the legitimate pickup end up with packages original-





ly delivered to the other. When this method is used to shuffle many packages simultaneously, keeping track of each package's origins and sifting the important message or item from all the chaff becomes difficult.

Vistrosh recently discovered that the great dragons are searching for Aardelea, a young girl who was kidnapped by Therans and spirited to an unknown location. Alachia saw the kidnapping as a two-fold opportunity. Learning the girl's location might put Alachia in a position to negotiate an end to the hostility the great dragons have shown toward her people (evidenced by Alamaise's destruction of Queen Dallia and her retinue before the Scourge). Then, armed with this knowledge, the great dragons could attempt to rescue the girl and strike a blow at Alachia's Theran enemies. Better yet, the Songbirds might rescue the girl themselves and give Alachia the maximum leverage in dealing with the dragons. Toward these ends, Alachia has made finding the girl one of the Songbirds' highest priorities. So far they have met with no success, but one agent has followed a nebulous trail as far away as the province of Creana (p. 43, **The Theran Empire**). His information has not yet reached Vistrosh or Alachia.

Though the Therans have few details concerning the Songbirds, they have long assumed that Alachia has spies throughout Barsaive. They have not yet discovered Vistrosh's true relationship to the Songbirds, but decided to spy on him anyway, reasoning that the only blood warder ever exiled from his home would be most likely to possess sufficient knowledge and motive to find Alachia's spy network. Kratas is a place worth watching anyway, so infiltrating Brocher's Brood served two purposes. Two Theran agents in the Brood were recently discovered and killed, but a third remains hidden. Fortunately for Vistrosh and Alachia, the Therans have wrongly concluded that the queen is spying on her former warder. However, it may only be a matter of time before they learn the truth.

All of the Songbirds are utterly loyal to Queen Alachia, some for inscrutable reasons. Upon accepting service with the queen, each Songbird swears a powerful blood oath that prevents him from revealing the existence of the group or his part in it. Breaking this oath means a swift, agonizing death; the mere thought of breaking it can cause extreme pain. On several occasions, the mere belief that he has been compromised has killed a Songbird, even if he did not reveal any information.

Adventure Idea: Caught in the Act

Hired to guard a caravan passing near Kratas, some of the characters pull a night watch and hear a muffled thump. Upon investigating, they spot an elf with a leather-bound bundle cradled in one arm jumping down from one of the wagons. The elf bolts; if the characters catch up with him, he does everything in his power to escape. If captured, he refuses to answer questions and takes advantage of any negligence on the part of his guards to slip away. He carries a perfumed silk handkerchief embroidered with the Sperethiel equivalent of a capital "A" in deep red. The package he was stealing contains an assortment of seemingly worthless warehouse inventory sheets; buried in one of these is a cryptic message that hints at the elf's purpose. The caravan master does not recognize the documents or the package.

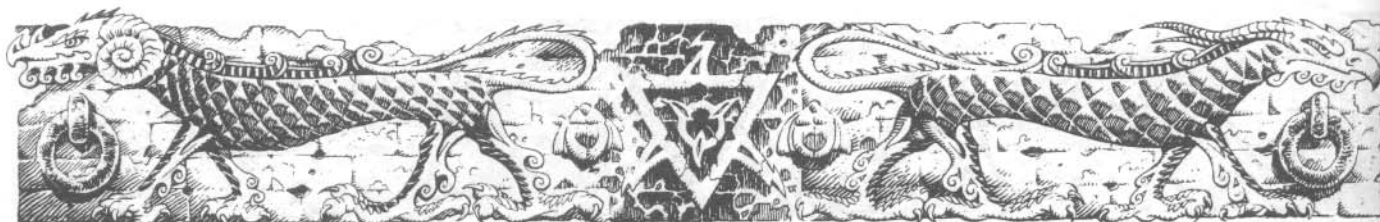
If the characters do not capture the elf, an examination of the caravan's inventory reveals that nothing is missing. This leaves the characters to wonder exactly what the elf stole and why, and might also implicate the merchant in smuggling operations.

Adventure Idea: Mistaken Identity

While one of the characters is taking his leisure in a small tavern, a female elf wearing a dark green cloak walks up to him. She presses a large leather pouch into one hand, says, "Jerrone will be here in three days to get this," and leaves before he can react. The pouch contains a warded message stone, and the elven woman has clearly mistaken the character for someone else. A few days later, Jerrone—a large ork—comes to the same tavern to look for his expected contact. He finds no one; the real contact has gone missing, and the character who received the package has no idea what he's gotten into. Once Jerrone and the elf woman realize what happened, they come looking for the character and his friends, convinced that they have done something to the missing contact.

If the characters penetrate the stone's ward, they find a message from someone Named Drusalien, who thinks he has found "our patron's niece" near the city of Zhofer in the far-off province of Creana. What the message means is anyone's guess, but Jerrone and the elf won't be happy to discover that the characters have heard it.





REGARDING THE CULT OF THE GREAT HUNTER

My Lord Overgovernor Kypros,

By now you will doubtless have learned of the death of Hefera, the skilled magician and protégé of the First Governor assigned to our fortress behemoth at Lake Ban. His demise at the hands of Icewing the Dragon is a terrible loss to our forces here in Barsaive.

When word of Hefera's death reached the First Governor, he ordered me to gather the magician's belongings—including his notes, research and correspondence—for return to Thera so that others might continue Hefera's work. As akarenti of the fortress of Triumph, it fell to me to review Hefera's journals prior to shipment, in case they held information important to our efforts in Barsaive. These writings told me more than I had heretofore known of a matter we dare not ignore—namely, the presence and recent activities of a group Named the Cult of the Great Hunter. This cult is devoted to the Horror Verjigorm, also known as the Hunter of Great Dragons.

I obtained permission from the First Governor to use excerpts from Hefera's journals and correspondence in preparing this document, which outlines the activities and methods of the Cult of the Great Hunter. Hefera's various writings make up the bulk of this report, with my own comments inserted where necessary or appropriate.

—Akarenti Gendel of Triumph

DISCOVERING THE CULT

From Hefera's notes, it appears he stumbled on the Cult of the Great Hunter while seeking the Barsaivian girl, Aardelea. As the following letters show, his search for the connection between Aardelea and Barsaive's dragons led him to far more knowledge than he had anticipated.

26/5/1065 TE

Master Kanidris,

I have begun my search for the girl, Aardelea. Though I have not yet discovered the extent of her abilities or the reason for her importance to the dragons of Barsaive, I have made some progress. While my people are looking for the village of Hanto, I have commanded Akarenti Gendel's spies to seek out stories, tales or rumors pertinent to that village, to the girl and to the incidents that led to our learning of her existence. In doing so, I have stumbled onto what I believe is part of the reason the dragons seek to protect this girl.

According to reports from Gendel's spies, Aardelea gained her powers from an ancient tome known as the Book of Blue Spirits. How she gained her abilities from this book is unknown; the book has since crumbled to dust and is lost forever. Hidden with the Book of Blue Spirits was another item of interest: a small obsidian sculpture in the shape of a common dragon. What role the sculpture plays in the girl's abilities remains unknown to me, but upon learning of the statue and tome, I recalled a report I'd reviewed during my studies of our pre-Scourge efforts against the dragons.

In the short-lived conflict between the Empire and the dragons of Barsaive, one target of our actions was the lair of Icewing the Dragon. Though the dragon had fled before our forces arrived, we recovered a number of items from his lair, among them an obsidian dragon sculpture and a tome that matches the description of the Book of Blue Spirits. If this sculpture and book are the ones identified with Aardelea, then we have found one more link between the girl and the dragons.

I shall continue to investigate the dragon sculpture and the Book of Blue Spirits (though with its destruction there seems to be little more to learn), and will report if I learn anything of significance.

28/3/1065 TE

Master Kanidris,

I have continued my investigation of the dragon sculpture and the Book of Blue Spirits, both of which seem to have somehow helped the girl Aardelea gain her mysterious powers. I have learned nothing concerning the book, but the dragon sculpture is fortunately a different story. My discoveries confirm in my mind the connection between Aardelea and the dragons; they also point toward the existence of a group in Barsaive that considers the dragons of Barsaive—in particular, the great dragons—its enemies.

After being unearthed in Hanto, the dragon sculpture was obtained by agents working for the dragon Icewing; this confirms my suspicion that this sculpture and the one our forces found in Icewing's lair so long ago are one and the same. However, the story does not end there. Shortly after Icewing acquired the sculpture, it was stolen by agents working for a group known as the Cult of the Great Hunter. Somehow the cultists used the sculpture to locate and cap-





ture a number of dragon eggs under Icewing's care. Though I was unable to learn much specific detail, the cult apparently planned to corrupt the dragon eggs before they hatched, thus creating tainted dragons that might eventually serve the goals of their patron Horror. Their plan also involved the capture of several of Icewing's drake servants—an escapade that turned out to be the flaw in their plans. One of the drakes escaped and eventually led certain adventurers to stop the cult's plans. In the end, the eggs were saved and the sculpture was returned to Icewing.

I have since learned more about this Horror cult and I believe they are worthy of further attention. Their motives and goals remain unclear. Do they serve Verjigorm simply by aiding in the hunt of great dragons (a risky proposition at best), or as described in Icewing's treatise on this Horror (which appears in a tome dedicated to the Horrors, compiled by the librarians of Throal)? Though you are doubtless fully versed on the rumors and legends regarding the Great Hunter, I have sent you a copy of the Throalic library's work on the Horrors (which I was able to obtain while visiting that library in disguise), so that you might review the information pertaining to The Great Hunter when considering the following request.

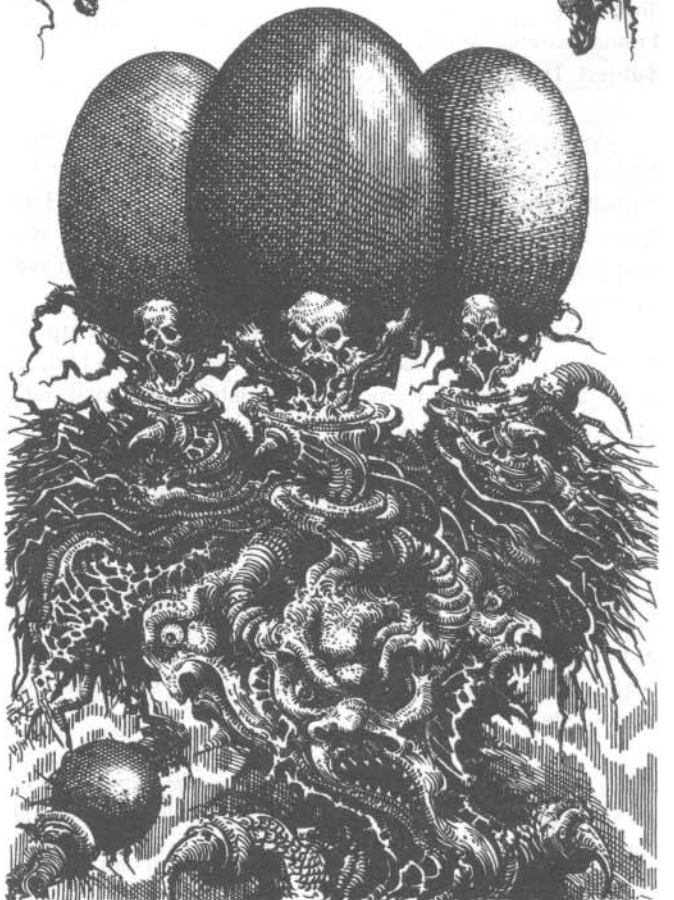
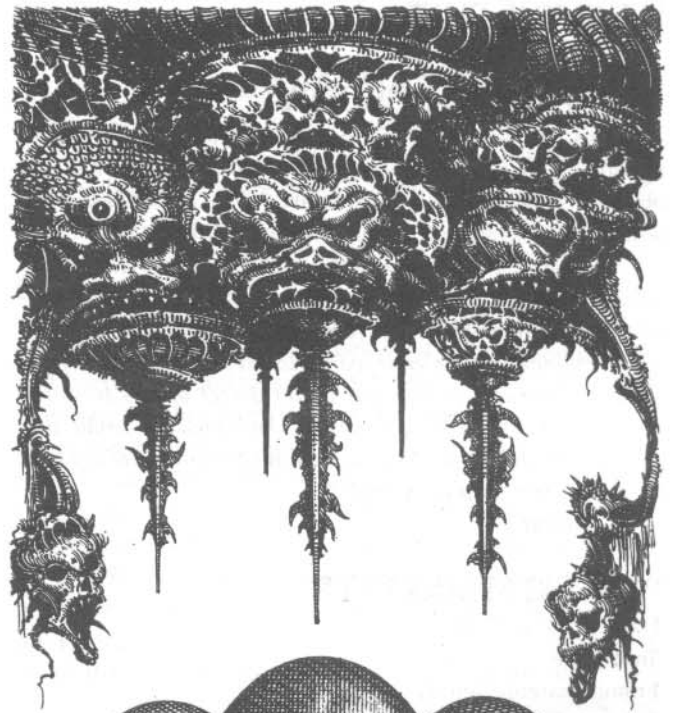
I know it is well beyond the scope of my orders, but the apparent ease with which this Cult of the Great Hunter was able to obtain the dragon sculpture from Icewing's lair, capture the dragon's eggs and subdue his drakes has intrigued me. I therefore seek your permission to pursue my investigation of this cult. Though they serve a Horror—perhaps the most powerful and corrupt of all Horrors—they nonetheless share some of our goals. Even if we decide not to involve ourselves in their affairs, we clearly stand to learn a great deal from them about how to combat Barsaive's great dragons—knowledge we are likely to need in the near future.

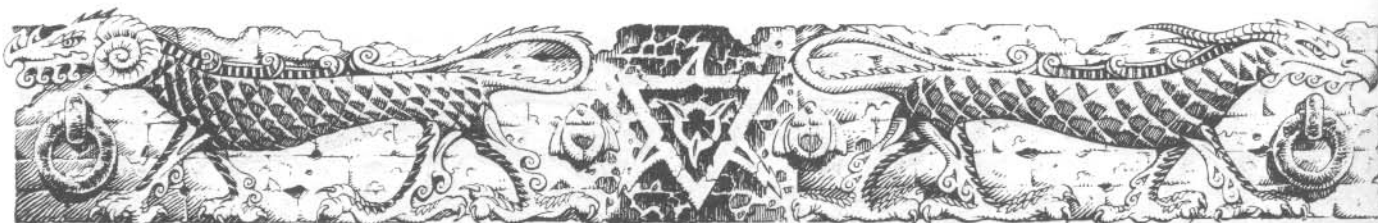
I await your response and remain

Your Servant,
Hefera

Soon after receiving the permission he sought, Hefera ordered my operatives and me to help him investigate this cult. Unfortunately, our efforts gained us little useful information.

—Gendel





HOW THE CULT OPERATES IN BARSATIVE

This next section explains how the Cult of the Great Hunter operates in Barsative. Though much of this information was obtained through spies and informants, Hefera himself uncovered some of the more interesting (and perhaps disturbing) facts.

The bulk of the following material is drawn from Hefera's letters, journals and personal notes, but begins with a report I compiled for Hefera. Hefera added comments to it at the time, which I have retained. I have endeavored to keep the passages from Hefera's journals intact, but under direct orders from the Heavenherds and the First Governor, I have removed certain portions. In addition, I have added headings to clarify and organize the information for your perusal.

—Gendel

ON THE CULT'S DIVERSE NATURE

Date: 37/3/1065 TE

To: Hefera

From: Akarenti Gendel

Subject: The Cult of the Great Hunter

As requested, my people are investigating the organization and operations of the Cult of the Great Hunter in Barsative. Our efforts have been moderately successful, but given the diverse and divided nature of this group, I fear we may have more questions about them now than when we began.

The Cult of the Great Hunter is actually made up of several small groups, each of which serves its patron Horror in the manner its deems most appropriate. These small cells operate independently of each other; we learned of no instance where two such groups cooperated or even established contact with one another. In fact, we found no evidence to confirm that these various groups even know that the others exist.

All the cells we learned of nonetheless all use the same Name—Cult of the Great Hunter—without exception. This apparent ability of more than one group to use the same Name puzzles me; I would have thought such a thing impossible.

The fact that several small groups all use the Name "Cult of the Great Hunter" is of particular interest given the importance of Names. By taking on the same Name, each group contributes to the

True Pattern of the Cult of the Great Hunter, making it stronger and thereby strengthening each cell of the cult. The sharing of this Name grants each small cell greater power than it might have on its own. In fact, the individual nature of these groups may actually make them more powerful than if they worked together. This phenomenon alone warrants continued investigation.

New cells seem to form according to no predictable pattern. Most simply appear, discovered only after their activities attract the attention of nearby settlements or adventurers. Numerous rumors and stories claim that the groups form after the Horror Verjigorm appears to a worthy subject and commands him or her to serve it. Why these individuals form cults is not addressed in these stories, nor is the manner in which these groups gain new members. Why would anyone serve a Horror or its minions?

One characteristic common to most cells is the presence of a high-Circle magician in their ranks, most often as their leader. Nethermancers are by far the most common Discipline followed by these leaders, most likely due to nethermancers' well-known affinity for Horrors and Horror magic, but we also uncovered cells led by beastmasters, wizards and even troubadours. In addition, though we were not able to confirm this rumor, we heard tell of more than one Cult of the Great Hunter led by corrupted dragons or drakes.

If this rumor is true, then the legends of Verjigorm's corrupted dragons awakening in this age might also be true. We should find the answer as soon as possible; the presence of corrupted dragons serving the Hunter of Great Dragons could have a significant impact on our future plans.

Below the leader, most cells consist of fifteen to twenty other members. A few large cells have thirty members. Typically, one to four lieutenants—nearly all of them adepts—serve the leader; they command the rest of the cultists, most of whom are usually not adepts. When the activities of a cell are uncovered, it is most often the lieutenants and ordinary cultists who are responsible; the cells' leaders are rarely encountered outside their strongholds, which frequently lie in the ruins of fallen citadels or in kaers lost to the Horrors during the Scourge. Whether the cults simply prefer locales likely to discourage unwanted visitors or if the past involvement of Horrors with these chosen sites grants the cultists some other benefit, we could not discover. I would assume the former, but my knowledge of Horrors and their magic is limited.





This concludes our findings concerning the Cult of the Great Hunter. I regret the lack of substantive information, but so little is known of the cult that we cannot help but present an incomplete picture. I only hope that our gleanings, limited as they are, will be of some use to you.

WHY THEY SERVE

I have included as much of the following letter as was permitted by the First Governor. Omitted sections are clearly indicated.

—Gendel

40/4/1065 TE
Master Kanidris,

Using Akarenti Gendel's report as a basis, I have continued my investigation of the Cult of the Great Hunter, and I am pleased to report that my agents and I have had better success than our resident spymaster. I mean no slight to Spymaster Gendel; he and his people did well, considering the resources at their disposal and the nature of the cult. This cult defies easy explanation; its objectives and goals, insofar as I can guess at them, seem so diverse as to make it difficult to properly assess the threat they pose. The following tale will illustrate my point.

When I set out to discern why the cultists serve and what they hope to achieve, I soon learned that these things were as varied as everything else I have managed to learn about them. In the main, however, members of this cult fall into three types: those dedicated to Verjigorm's goal of re-creating the world by corrupting all the dragons (as described in the treatise by Icewing I mentioned earlier), those who serve out of devotion to what they deem the most powerful and corrupt of Horrors and those who serve because they fear and loathe dragons.

The most prominent cells are made up of Name-givers devoted to re-creating the world by corrupting the dragons. Though these cells disagree from time to time on how best to achieve this goal, they all believe that Verjigorm wishes the world remade in this fashion, and they seek to help the Horror re-create the world in its image. Because their objective is so extreme, these cells tend to use the most excessive measures and tactics, including every conceivable form of blood magic, as well as other forms of nethermancy and Horror magic. They appear to believe that once they usher in Verjigorm's new world, they will have a place in it serving their Horror master.

Personally, I wonder if Icewing's pronouncements on the desires of Verjigorm—by which these cultists live and die—are true. The dragon's treatise may merely be propa-

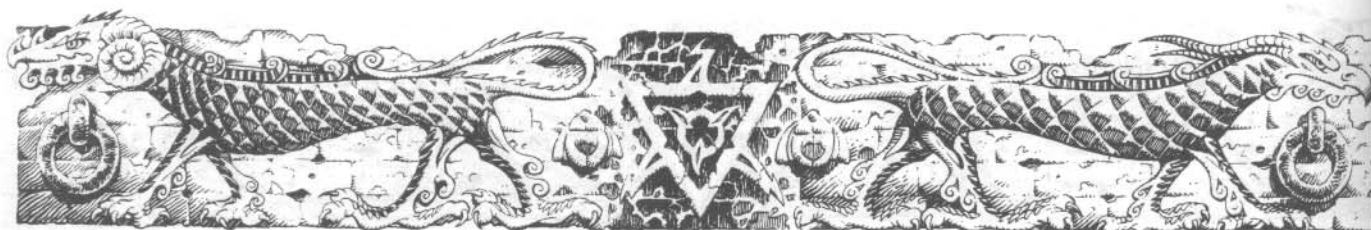
ganda aimed at the one foe that even the great dragons of Barsaive fear. Of course, if the Horror Verjigorm is even a fraction as powerful as legends and tales portray it, the dragons' fear is valid. Nonetheless, Icewing's diatribe is clearly an effort to convince readers that Verjigorm is the source of all corruption, and that the Horror's "revenge" (as the treatise puts it) would spell doom for all living things. Could the truth simply be, as other legends insist, that for Verjigorm, only terror drawn from the heart of a great dragon is nourishing?

The next most common type of cultists are those who serve Verjigorm because they believe it is the most powerful and corrupt of Horrors. These cultists are the most like devotees of other Horror cults—delusional people in desperate need of some higher power before whom they may abase themselves. These people apparently find a powerful Horror the only thing worthy of their devotion, and feed a nihilistic desire for destruction by serving this astral monstrosity. Delusional or not, however, we cannot underestimate the danger these individuals represent. According to my findings, they are no less skilled in the ways of dark magic than their counterparts in other cells of the cult.

This type of cultist focuses his efforts on harassing and eventually exterminating Barsaive's dragons because the dragons are the prey of their patron. They hunt the dragons and their servants in any way their twisted imaginations can devise. I believe we can manipulate the actions of these cells to aid our efforts against the dragons, provided we take great care.

The least prominent cells serve out of fear and loathing of dragons. Lacking any other method of dealing with dragons and their servants, members of these cells serve Verjigorm to strike at their enemies. They all have some reason for hating and fearing dragons. Some are descendants of the survivors of settlements rumored to have been razed by dragons; others feel betrayed by the dragons for, as one informant I spoke to put it, "forcing the free people of Barsaive into Theran servitude when they refused to share their own secrets for surviving the Scourge." This latter motive highlights a common misconception that stems from the conflict between the Empire and dragons before the Scourge. Hard as it may be to believe, some Barsaivians think that the dragons could have saved them from the Horrors but chose not to, leaving them with no choice but to turn to us for the Rites of Protection and Passage. Though this notion is preposterous, we may find it beneficial to play up as propaganda; it is likely to serve us well in the conflict we will inevitably face against the dragons of Barsaive.





[[Section Omitted]]

Cells that serve Verjigorm for this reason do whatever they can to directly harm the dragons and anyone who serves or aids them. As is to be expected, these cells are by far the shortest-lived, as direct assault against dragons or their minions brings swift retribution. These cells are likely to be the most open to working with us against the dragons, and so are potentially quite useful despite their often-brief existence. Because most of these cultists serve Verjigorm from hatred and fear of dragons rather than honest devotion to the Horror, we may be able to sway them so that they will fight the dragons for the glory of the Theran Empire rather than for the sake of the Hunter of Great Dragons.

[[Section Omitted]]

In conclusion, there have been no confirmed sightings of Verjigorm itself since the end of the Scourge. Though the presence of the cult suggests otherwise, the Horror may no longer be present on this plane of existence or may no longer be interested in Barsaive. Rumors insist that many of the cult's cells have contacted or even summoned the Horror, but I have so far confirmed none of these tales.

My agents and I did discover one common element among all the cells of this cult aside from their Name and their general organization. Though they all serve Verjigorm, none have ever been supported by their patron Horror in any manner. Unlike other Horror cults and most Mad Passion cults, cells of the Cult of the Great Hunter do not appear to receive aid from their patron. In fact, in the few tales of cultists summoning the Horror, Verjigorm has sought to devour its worshippers. What this means, I do not yet know. Such tales, however, have not apparently kept other cells from forming.

I shall continue my investigations concurrently with the search for Aardelea. I remain

Your Servant,
Hefera

CULT METHODS

The following entries from Hefera's journals and excerpts from letters to the First Governor describe some of the methods employed by various cells of the Cult of the Great Hunter. The cultists serve their dread master in a variety of ways, ranging from spying on agents of the dragons to direct confrontation. The

methods described below appear common to cells of all three types described in Hefera's letter above.

—Gendel

—From the personal journal of Hefera

52/3/1065 TE

To learn how the Cult of the Great Hunter serves its terrible master, my agents and I have followed up on several leads in our continuing investigation. In order to ascertain the threat this group may pose to Theran efforts in Barsaive, we must first know what actions they typically undertake. As might be expected given the sheer power of the cult's enemies, the cultists markedly prefer to tackle the dragons indirectly, dealing mostly with their drake or Name-giver servants and agents.

The most frequent targets of the cultists' efforts appear to be the drakes, those dragon-like servants of the great dragons of Barsaive. Though we know little of the origins of these creatures, we do know that they dwell in other lands than Barsaive. Drakes have been seen in the provinces of Creana, Marac and Indrisa, as well as in other lands beyond the Empire. The cultists appear indifferent to the secrets of the drakes' origins; instead, they see them merely as a means through which to attack the dragons and thereby aid Verjigorm. Most often the cultists attempt to corrupt or control drakes, apparently hoping to turn them against their dragon masters. In all the incidents I learned of, this tactic has failed; invariably, the drakes overcame the cultists' magic, or the dragons detected it and either dispelled its effects or destroyed the corrupted drakes outright. I do not yet know how much—if anything—the cultists who attempted such feats were able to learn of the dragons' ultimate plans from the drakes they had captured.

[[Section Omitted]]

Given the difficulty of capturing drakes, many cells have taken to capturing Name-givers working for the dragons. These Name-giver agents come largely from settlements in the Dragon Mountains; according to legend, the villagers' ancestors were saved from the Scourge by the dragon Mountainshadow. Other Name-giver agents include bands of adepts who have chosen to aid the dragons for one reason or another. [Note: Refer to the entry on **The Dragons' Network** for more about these dragon agents—Gendel]. Though mere Name-givers are less close to the dragons and therefore not quite so rich a target as drakes, the Cult of the Great Hunter seeks any advantage when dealing with the





prey of their patron Horror. Most often, cult cells capture Name-giver agents in the hope of learning something about the dragons' activities or present whereabouts. However, most such Name-givers work through go-betweens (usually drakes) and seldom know anything of value.

One tactic rumored to be effective, though seldom used, is the capture of dragon eggs. As in the tale that first brought this cult to my attention, more than one cell has attempted to taint dragon eggs in hopes of corrupting future dragons, or at least forcing the dragons to destroy their eggs rather than allow them to hatch. The difficulty involved in finding, let alone stealing, dragon eggs beggars the imagination; only the most powerful or resourceful cells of the cult are likely to try such a thing. The cell that stole Icewing's eggs, led by an elven nethermancer Named Tyrllaan, managed to find the eggs by using the dragon sculpture found with the Book of Blue Spirits (which I believe is one of Icewing's pattern items). I know of only one other instance where cultists successfully made off with a clutch of dragon eggs; later tales of this incident, however, said that the cultists responsible were slain and the eggs destroyed.

Only a few extremely powerful cells of the cult have attempted to confront the dragons directly, and then only after securing the services of several skilled mercenary and adept bands. Even with these hired hands however, none of these dangerous expeditions appears to have survived.

Such an exploit requires a hefty bankroll, of course, which most cells build up through raids on trade caravans and prosperous villages. Indeed, many of the cult's operations require considerable quantities of silver, and so simple robbery is common to all the cells.

I believe we have learned all we can by keeping our ears open and asking questions in taverns. I will endeavor to find some more direct method of observing this cult.

54/1/1065 TE

Master Kanidris,

I have recently learned of a new cell of the Cult of the Great Hunter that operates in the Thunder Mountains (the same area where the nethermancer Tyrllaan attempted to corrupt Icewing's stolen eggs). According to rumor, this cell has lately met with a disaster that only a few members survived. I plan to seek out these survivors and discover what occurred. I shall inform you at once as to the success of my mission. I remain

Your Servant,
Hefera

55/1/1065 TE

Master Kanidris,

Our expedition to the Thunder Mountains was successful, though not quite in the way I had expected. I found the survivors of the cell I mentioned in my last letter—but the morning after I spoke with them, before I could interrogate them about the calamitous incident that killed their colleagues, I found them dead by poison. Near the bodies, however, I discovered what may be a pattern item of the cell's leader, a dwarf nethermancer Named Torland. This item is a magical staff used in the ill-fated operation that killed Torland and most of his underlings. My agents and I took the staff and made a hasty return to our fortress at Lake Ban.

I have begun my study of the staff and have an idea of how I might learn more about the destruction of this cell. I will pursue this avenue of investigation and report when I have significant news.

Of particular interest is this final entry, in which Hefera describes how he used divination magic to experience the operation that destroyed the cell. If nothing else in this document causes you concern, this entry should, as it portrays the terrible extent to which the Cult of the Great Hunter will go in service to its master.

—Gendel

56/3/1065 TE

This Cult of the Great Hunter is more extreme than even I had believed. They may be more of a threat to us than I had thought.

Using a spell of my own creation, I was able to meld my consciousness with the True Pattern of the staff and thereby experience some of the events in the staff's past as if I had lived through them. After several hours of intense boredom (in which I experienced the staff lying in a corner for hours or being carried on long and tedious journeys through barren wilds), I finally accomplished the task I had set myself. I witnessed the events that led to Torland's death and the destruction of his cult cell.

Bound to the staff's pattern, I first seemed to be in the foothills of the Thunder Mountains, heading into a small cave. From the entrance of the cave, we walked down a long tunnel (or at least it seemed long; the perspective of a wooden staff does not allow for very accurate perception), until we reached a large chamber. Here a circle of bones was laid out on the ground. Moments later, within the circle, a portal into astral space opened. (I did not hear the precise spell chanted to





accomplish this, though I know it must have been some variant of a Bone Circle spell. Unfortunately, my own divination spell did not allow me to hear what was happening, merely to watch.) I watched in fascination as, one by one, the cultists—dwarfs, orks and humans—stepped through the portal.

The nethermancer Torland followed last, carrying the staff (and my own avidly watching consciousness) into astral space. As we crossed the astral threshold, my sight shifted. I could see swirls of dark astral energy dancing around Torland and his companions, as well as up and over me (the staff). I had not realized that the region surrounding the Thunder Mountains was so corrupt—and I had no idea what Torland and his cultists sought in astral space here. After taking a few moments to adjust to this strange new environment, Torland gestured to his underlings, and they began walking through astral space out of the tunnel.

We emerged from the tunnel and began to climb through the foothills, quickly making our way up to a low cliff near the bottom of one mountain peak. Haste was needed because of the polluted nature of the space through which we traveled; the contorted expressions on the faces of Torland's cultists showed that every step was causing them pain. A few minutes later we had scaled the cliff and began walking around a bend. When we reached the other side, I saw why we had come—and I am not ashamed to admit, it frightened me. There before us, tucked in a small crevice in the side of the mountain, was a cocoon. It pulsed with magical energy, illuminating the surrounding area with the light of a thousand torches. Within the cocoon—which was made of a substance I couldn't identify—I could dimly see the outlines of a massive creature stirring. It was easily the size of a dragon. No sooner had this thought crossed my mind than I began fervently hoping my guess was wrong. It wasn't.

As the creature shifted, I could make out a rough shape. It did indeed seem to be a dragon, wrapped tightly in the mysterious cocoon. The material was definitely magical and seemed almost alive, constricting around the creature within it as the creature moved. Slowly, it dawned on me why these cultists had come to this place. Legends tell us that the Hunter of Great Dragons does not simply hunt and kill its prey; it entraps them and corrupts them, encasing them in cocoons in astral space where they are remade over millennia. I had thought these legends surely false—but now I was standing before one such dragon, proof that the tales were true. Had I been there in body, I would have frozen in terror as I watched the bound dragon slither and shift like a baby in its mother's womb. The faces of Torland's underlings

showed me that I was not alone in my fear. Physical pain had given way to the stark terror of looking upon corruption incarnate. Only Torland seemed unafraid; his expression was one of triumph.

He gestured suddenly, sending out waves of astral energy from his hands. As the tendrils struck his companions, their fear appeared to lessen. Then he raised the staff and I felt a pulse of magical energy shoot through me. My consciousness seemed to spread throughout the area, anchoring itself simultaneously on Torland and each of his companions while also remaining in the staff. I realized that the staff was a Counterspell Staff; Torland had just used it to strengthen himself and his underlings against other magics. Because my mind was melded with the staff's pattern, my consciousness had spread out among all those affected by the staff's powers. From this unique perspective, I was able to witness subsequent events from each cultist's point of view.

I felt a renewed jolt of fear as Torland moved toward the cocoon. A scintillating blade of astral energy formed in his hand. It was twice Torland's height, with a shallow curve ending in a sharp point. Torland raised the blade to the cocoon and sliced it open.

With a blinding flash, the cocoon burst and its inhabitant clawed its way out. Most of the cultists stared, dumbfounded, at the Horror-tainted dragon, unable to move even as a huge talon swung down impossibly fast. It struck Torland, hurling him backward through the air until he hit the stone face of the mountain. As their eyes followed their leader's body, half the cultists were consumed by a sudden blast of dark astral fire; the dragon was belching its corrupt breath down upon them. I saw this carnage from outside and from within the blast, and the memory has given me nightmares since. The dark fire nearly blinded my view within it, but my vision beyond did not spare me the doomed cultists' final agonizing moments. Their bodies boiled into steaming puddles of what had once been flesh and bone, their very blood charred black on the cold stone of the mountainside.

At the same time, a searing beam of astral energy shot from the dragon's talon, hitting Torland square in the chest. As if through Torland's dying eyes, I saw the bolt shoot directly toward me; I also watched it strike the dwarf and press him hard against the stone behind him. Screaming in agony, Torland dropped the staff. As I watched, his body melted into the astral imprint of the mountain. The fallen staff and the dark red stain left on the stone wall were the only reminders of his existence.







The dragon then turned its huge head to face the rest of the cultists. It breathed a second gout of dark fire at a knot of five underlings. The fire made their skin twist around their flesh and bones, tearing them apart. Only two cultists—the very two I had met in another reality only days before—were spared. As their companions were dying, one of the two grabbed the staff. Then both fled down the mountain. They jumped down from the cliff, stumbling as they fell. They staggered to their feet and ran in terror toward the cave entrance from which we had so recently emerged. I expected to see or hear the dragon behind us, but it never appeared. Perhaps it was content with the death it had sown, or it may have been tired from its unexpected birth. Whatever the reason, the cultists and the staff made it to the astral portal and jumped from it into the physical world. Neither of them appeared to know much of nethermancy; they made no attempt to disrupt the bone circle and close the portal behind them. They simply fled until they could run no more.

At that point my divination spell expired, and my consciousness returned to my private study. My heart was racing and I was drenched in sweat; it took me a moment or two to recall that I was not in any genuine danger.

All this occurred a scant few hours ago. I have written down everything so as not to forget any details. Still, even having witnessed these events, there remain many questions about this expedition to which I have no answers. For what purpose did Torland wish to free the dragon? Did he hope to serve it, and thus his Horror master? Was this dragon the spawn of Verjigorm or something else entirely? Is this the only dragon of its kind, or are there more? Has the dragon escaped from astral space, and if so, where does it lair?

It is imperative that we find these answers. The very survival of the Empire may depend on it.

CONCLUSIONS

56/4/1065 TE

Master Kanidris,

We have found the village of Hanto, home of the girl Aardelea. Certain persons at the Throalic library, and possibly also some of the dragons' servants, led us to believe that Hanto was near Lake Ban; in truth, it lies near Lake Vors far to the northwest. I have made arrangements to travel to Hanto to take the girl as planned. From there she will be sent to the City and then on to Zhofer. I will follow her to the City within a few weeks.

I hope to return to Barsaive soon afterward, to continue my investigation of the Cult of the Great Hunter. I enclose with this letter a copy of yesterday's journal entry, in which you may read for yourself the terrifying discoveries I have made concerning them. I have ordered Akarenti Gendel to monitor the cult's activities during my absence and make regular reports to me, as well as to General Nikar, Overgovernor Kypros and you.

As I mentioned in a previous letter, it may be in our best interests to find a way to cooperate with or covertly aid select cells of this cult, as they may prove useful in our efforts against the dragons of Barsaive. However, we must take extreme care; the Cult of the Great Hunter deals with vast and destructive powers whose might should give even the most accomplished Heavenherd pause.

I will report on the matter of Aardelea as soon as I have news. Until that time, I remain

Your Servant,
Hefera

My Lord Overgovernor,

Neither I nor my agents have learned anything new concerning the Cult of the Great Hunter, but we will continue to observe them as best we can until you or General Nikar order otherwise.

Though I hesitate to take issue with a magician of Hefera's stature, I cannot support his recommendation to covertly aid this cult. Everything I know about them suggests that they are a threat not only to Barsaive and its dragons, but to us. The extreme measures to which they will go in serving their Horror master make them far too dangerous for us to contemplate any dealings with them.

—Gendel

GAME INFORMATION

As described in the preceding account, the Cult of the Great Hunter is comprised of anywhere from three to ten individual groups, or cells, all of which use the same Name. In general, these groups do not work together or even acknowledge each other's existence; instead, they serve the Horror Verjigorm separately. As an interesting twist, the gamemaster may wish to create an adventure in which two or more such groups pool their resources to accomplish a specific, large-scale goal, but such occurrences should be rare.

Like most cults and secretive groups in Barsaive, the cells of the Cult of the Great Hunter are most often led by adepts, usually magicians. Nethermancers are by far the





most common leaders, as with many Horror cults, but cells may also be led by wizards, beastmasters and even troubadours. Most cells average ten to twenty members, of which the leader and four or five lieutenants are adepts. The rest are almost always non-adepts. Leaders are always high Circle, most often between the Tenth and Thirteenth Circles; other adept members have usually attained from Fifth to Seventh Circle in their respective Disciplines. These lieutenants frequently follow combat and magician Disciplines, with swordmasters, warriors, wizards and beastmasters being the most common.

Each cell of the cult serves Verjigorm in the manner its members deem most appropriate, using whatever methods best serve their immediate and long-term goals. One especially favored method is capturing and interrogating drakes and Name-giver agents of the dragons (such as those described in **The Dragons' Network**, p. 12). When possible, some extreme cells prefer to capture dragon eggs or even direct assault on a dragon's lair. The adventure **Shattered Pattern** describes one such plan by a cell of this cult.

GROUP PATTERNS AND THREAD WEAVING

The most unusual aspect of this cult is the sharing of the same Name by all of its individual groups, regardless of their reasons for serving Verjigorm, their methods, or any other differences. This phenomenon has created an unusual side-effect that greatly benefits members of the cells when they employ thread magic.

Because all cells of the Cult of the Great Hunter share the same Name, they all contribute to the cult's True Pattern, making that pattern significantly stronger than it would have been otherwise. By sharing a Name, each group contributes to the True Pattern in much the same way that individual members of a group pattern contribute to that pattern. When individual cells of the cult form a group pattern—which nearly all of them do at one time or another—the strength of the True Pattern of the Cult of the Great Hunter makes each group pattern more powerful than most such patterns, and the cultists who weave threads to these patterns gain higher than normal benefits. Each thread rank woven to a group pattern of the Cult of the Great Hunter grants an additional +1 bonus to the rank of the talent or to the ability to which the thread is woven. For example, a Rank 1 thread grants a +2 bonus, a Rank 2 thread grants a +3 bonus, Rank 3 grants +4, and so on.

Difficulty Numbers for weaving these threads and Legend Point costs are per standard rules. If a member of a cult cell weaves a Rank 3 thread to his Spell Defense, the thread costs 800 Legend Points and the Difficulty Number for weaving the thread is 10, as normal. Assuming the cultist is successful, he gains a +4 bonus to his Spell Defense rather than the standard +3 when acting as a member of the Cult of the Great Hunter and serving the cult's interests.

Adventure Idea: False Connections

This adventure assumes that the characters have worked for the dragons in the past or are presently working for them in some capacity, either as full-fledged members of the Dragons' Network or as freelance operatives. In either case, a cell of the Cult of the Great Hunter that operates out of a lair in the Smalls of Parlainth (p. 54, **Ruins of Parlainth**) has identified the characters as agents of the dragons and has targeted them for an attack.

The characters are hired by agents of the Dragons' Network to carry a message from an agent in Bartertown to an agent in Haven. Upon their arrival in Haven, the characters are to meet their contact at the Restless Troll (p. 20, **Parlainth Gamemaster Book**). They are given a description of their contact, as well as a password and countersign that will help them identify that individual.

The cultists learn of the characters' mission. After following the characters roughly halfway from Throal to Parlainth, they deduce the characters' destination and arrive in Haven a day before the characters show up. The cultists capture the Haven agent and put one of their own in his or her place to intercept the message; they hope it will contain information about the dragons' plans. To relay the message to its rightful destination, the characters must discover that their contact has been captured and free him or her from the cult's hideout in the Smalls.





THE FELLOWSHIP OF NIGHT

A report from Azim Keel, Chief Magician of the Thera fortress of Triumph

I am pleased to report that all of the magical defenses at our fortress at Ayodhya are working perfectly and our elemental mining operations are producing abundant True earth, much of which is being shipped back to Vivane. Our presence thus far in this region of Barsaive has been a success, and I will do all I can to see that it continues to be so.

Akarenti Gendel has told me of recent efforts at gathering information on some of the many different groups and factions in Barsaive so that we might use them to our Empire's advantage. I have information on one such faction that might greatly aid us in tapping the elemental power of the Ayodhya Liferock: an order of nethermancers known as the Fellowship of Night. Its members live in a cloistered community built around an ancient Liferock in the Delaris Mountains, and they study the secrets of astral space and the netherworlds. The following report relates what I have learned so far regarding the Fellowship and its potential value to Thera.

THE FOUNDING OF THE FELLOWSHIP

In the years before the Scourge and the sealing of Thera, the obsidimen of the Liferock from which the Fellowship now draws its magical power entered into a state they call the Dreaming to protect themselves from the Horrors. The Dreaming, however, proved insufficient to safeguard the obsidiman Brotherhood from the tortures of one powerful Horror (probably a despairthought, though I cannot say for certain). The Horror wormed its way into the dreaming minds of the obsidimen and drove all of them into catatonia. Then it lured the remainder of the Brotherhood back to the Liferock, where it proceeded to torture and destroy each of them as well. The Horror ultimately created a living Liferock in a permanent state of stasis; no new obsidimen emerged from it, and those within the Liferock were forever lost inside its pattern.

Some years after this occurrence, the Liferock's obsidian spire was discovered by a nethermancer Named Sovik Nightwalker and his followers. This little band of travelers

had been exiled from the kingdom of Landis; according to the few records available, Sovik and his people were banished because of their dangerous explorations into astral space and investigations into the nature of the Horrors. The rulers of Landis believed that such inquiries would draw the Horrors' attention to their kaers and citadels, and so they exiled the group of nethermancers just before the final sealing of Landis's kaers. Ironically, Sovik's exile spared him and his followers the fate of the kingdom, which now lies in ruins.

Sovik chose to explore the dark depths of the Liferock and was nearly destroyed by the Horror that controlled it. He battled the Horror in astral space, eventually destroyed it and then began examining the Liferock and the remains of the obsidimen slain outside it. He used nethermantic magic to speak with their spirits and, according to legend, with the spirit of the Liferock itself.

In time, Sovik and his followers built a citadel around the Liferock and used Sovik's new knowledge to tap the Liferock's elemental power as protection during the Scourge. The isolated, cloistered community devoted itself to studying and preserving everything its members could learn of astral space, the netherworlds and the Horrors throughout the Long Night of the Scourge. In honor of the fallen obsidiman Brotherhood and the knowledge he gained from them, Sovik founded a school of nethermancy and Named it the Fellowship of Night. He was its first grand master.

Throughout the Scourge, the Fellowship tapped the power of the Liferock to sustain its citadel and its magical arts, and used the rock as a source of first-hand knowledge about the world of spirit and the actions and powers of the Horrors. Fellowship members animated the bodies of the dead obsidimen outside the Liferock and used them to maintain the citadel and defend its inhabitants, sustaining them through the years with blood magic. Thus this nethermantic order survived the Scourge and continues to prosper—if we are to believe the tales told by local folk, that is.

THE FELLOWSHIP TODAY

In addition to ancient legends, I have heard several tales and rumors of more recent vintage about the order of nethermancers in the Delaris Mountains from the people of the region. This report contains all the information I have gathered about the Fellowship of Night from Name-givers





who claim to have heard of them or to have dealt with them on one of their rare forays outside of their citadel.

It appears that the Fellowship has no ambitions beyond continuing its ancient work: the exploration of astral space and the netherworlds and the accumulation of magical lore. I find this claim doubtful, however. With the power at their command from the Liferock and other magical secrets they may have discovered, I believe the Fellowship must have some other purpose.

Some rumors claim that the Fellowship seeks to discover more about the Horrors and perhaps even visit the netherworld that is their home (if such a place exists). If so, the members of the Fellowship are clearly mad, and we may have to find a way to stop them before they unleash a terrible disaster on Barsaive. Others claim that the Fellowship has degenerated into a cult that worships the Liferock or even the essence of the slain Horror that dwells within it. For my own part, the motives of the Fellowship interest me far less than the resource they represent.

Much of the knowledge gleaned by the Fellowship is of great potential use to us. Sovik Nightwalker and his followers discovered a way to tap into the spirit and elemental power of the dormant Liferock in ways unknown to other magicians—even the Heavenherds. They were able to use that power to create a citadel strong enough to repel the Horrors hunting through those mountains throughout the Scourge, without the benefit of the Rites of Protection and Passage. If we could learn their techniques and apply them to the Ayodhya Liferock, we might be able to tap into far more of its power than our current methods will allow. Thus far, we have drawn only a small trickle from the well. Properly controlled, however, the full power of the Ayodhya Liferock could make the fortress of Triumph invulnerable to attack by Barsaivian upstarts. The techniques and lore of the Fellowship may be the key to securing our control over this region of the province, and ultimately over all of Barsaive.

The difficulty lies in obtaining the knowledge we seek. The Fellowship is a secretive order, a habit doubtless prompted by their founders' long-ago banishment. Members of the Fellowship—and the small community of Name-givers that has grown up around them—remain isolated in the Delaris Mountains, and their precise location remains unknown. Legends of the Fellowship also make it clear that many Name-givers consider the tapping of the Liferock's power a foul and evil act, and no doubt some obsidian Brotherhoods would gladly see the Fellowship of Night wiped out for what it has done. And so the

Fellowship has more than a few reasons to keep hidden from the rest of Barsaive.

Despite these obstacles, the stories and rumors of the Fellowship's existence proved interesting enough for me to dispatch scouts to explore the region where the Fellowship's citadel is rumored to lie. The area is most inhospitable and difficult to reach. My scouts traveled by airship to Jerris and into the mountains from there, posing as a merchant and his associates. When more than two weeks passed without word from them, I dispatched other scouts to locate them. They found the bodies of the first scouts in a high mountain pass and brought them back to Triumph. With the aid of my nethermantic assistants, I have been able to piece together some of what happened.

The Fellowship's citadel, built around the Liferock that they call "the Heartstone," is extremely well-hidden. The citadel is built atop the original structure that the founders put up to shelter themselves through the Scourge and is believed to have grown since then. The Fellowship receives support and aid from a settlement of Name-givers whom they protected and guided through the Scourge. These people look on the members of the Fellowship as their leaders and guardians, and the Fellowship recruits new apprentices from them as needed to replenish their ranks.

On the outskirts of the citadel's territory, the scouts met a sentry party: a nethermancer of the Fellowship, accompanied by two armored figures larger than trolls. The local people called these giants Black Guards. The sentry accepted the scouts' tale of being humble travelers lost in the mountain passes and took them to the settlement near the citadel. They were able to learn something about the settlement and the Fellowship before the master of the order, a human woman Named Tana Lunnar, grew suspicious of them. Though I cannot be certain, I believe the Fellowship discovered that they were not what they seemed, killed them and left them in the pass so that it would seem they had died of exposure. Depending on how much they were able to learn of the scouts' true identities, the Fellowship may well be aware of our interest in them.

Nonetheless, the information I have gleaned from the dead scouts is promising. The Fellowship has considerable magical lore and power at its command, and the members still observe certain intriguing rituals concerning the Heartstone. They appear to use it as a focus for their most powerful rites and exist in an almost symbiotic relationship with it. Most interestingly, the Black Guards who protect them from intruders are in fact the re-animated obsidimen who once lived at the Liferock, the same ones lured home





and slain by the Horror. Shorn of their living minds, these obsidimen have no compunction about wearing unliving armor, and so the nethermancers clothe them in heavy plate from head to foot. This armor affords protection and makes them look like huge, hulking warriors of some unknown Name-giver race. Powerful spells and enchantments have apparently preserved their bodies over the centuries. These servants make formidable defenders; they do not feel pain or fear, need neither food nor sleep nor warmth, and are utterly obedient to their masters. (I have ordered some of my assistants to look into the possibility of using the few obsidiman bodies inside the fortress of Triumph in a similar manner. The early results seem promising.)

The Fellowship also makes use of the Heartstone in ways most likely unimagined by the obsidimen who originally dwelt there. Each member of the Fellowship is given a small fragment of the Heartstone, polished and prepared with special alchemical elixirs, which he uses as a touchstone to tap into the Heartstone's power. These *lifeshard*s, as they are known, allow the members of the Fellowship to communicate with each other over vast distances, much in the same way an obsidiman feels the Call of his Liferock when it is time for him to return to it. These lifeshard's can also serve as spell matrix items. I have considered using fragments of the Ayodhya Liferock to produce similar talismans but have not yet discovered how the Fellowship prepares these artifacts.

THE CHAIN OF SKULLS

The difficulty of infiltrating or invading the Fellowship to take their knowledge is considerable; doing so successfully would require many soldiers and magicians, possibly more than the First Governor might wish to dispatch to Barsaive at this time. Fortunately, such efforts may not be necessary if a certain legend I have heard is true.

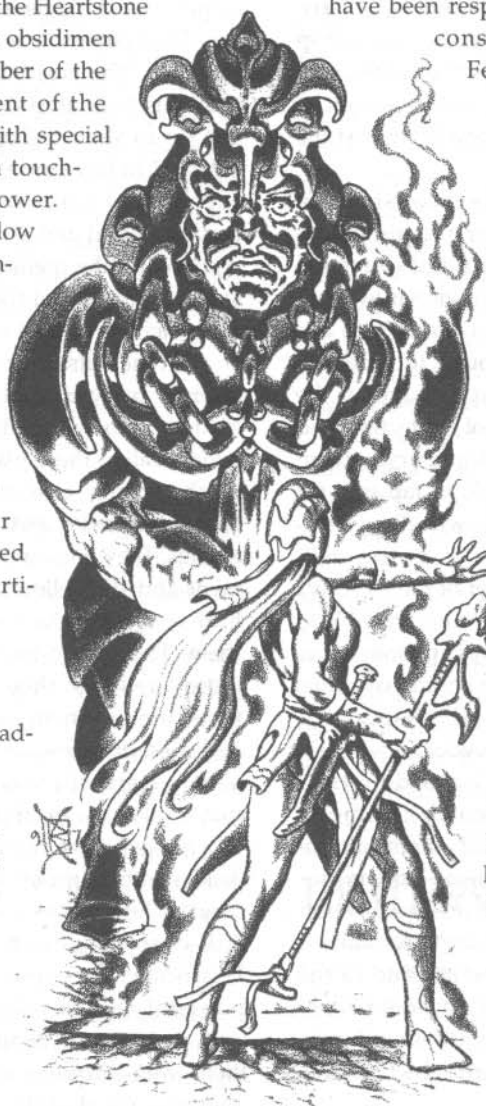
It is said that on his deathbed, Sovik Nightwalker developed a rit-

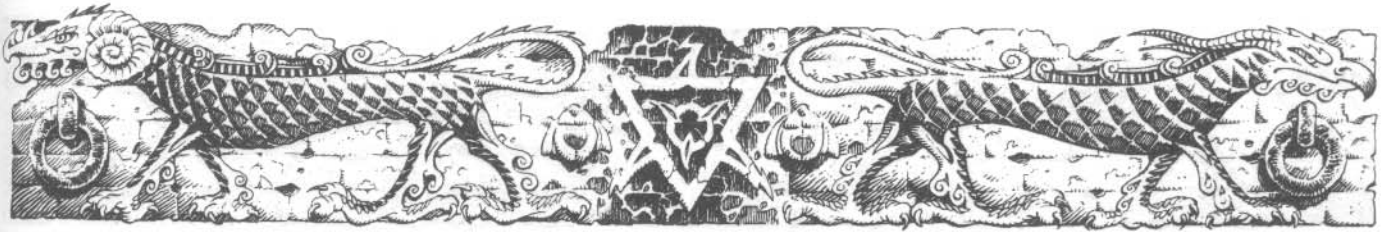
ual for creating the Chain of Skulls, a powerful nethermantic grimoire that serves as a repository of the order's knowledge. Each grand master of the Fellowship of Night arranges for a piece of bone cut to be cut from his skull upon his death and inscribed with the most powerful spell or most significant piece of magical lore the master created or discovered during his lifetime. These bone disks are strung on a cord of black silk and hung around the Heartstone like a macabre necklace, through which the nethermancers of the order may summon the spirits of past masters and learn their wisdom.

According to the spirits of our dead scouts, the Chain of Skulls was recently stolen. It seems likely that the culprit was either a Horror or an agent of one. (Indeed, this Horror may have been responsible for the scouts' deaths, though I consider it unlikely.) One acolyte of the Fellowship was found dead around the time of the Chain's disappearance, but left no clues about the manner of his death or how the thief gained entry to the citadel. The members of the Fellowship are apparently investigating but so far have met with no success.

The Chain of Skulls may be precisely what we need to fully tap into the power of the Ayodhya Liferock. With it, I can learn the secrets of all the grand masters of the Fellowship of Night, including how to draw upon the elemental power of the Ayodhya Liferock. I have already committed some of my own humble resources to this goal, but I ask your permission to call upon additional sources from Vivane and Sky Point to aid in the search for the Chain.

With the power of the Ayodhya Liferock, we can end the annoyance of the Liferock Rebellion and deal with the upstart merchant Omasu and his allies. If I am correct, the method by which the Horror drew the obsidimen of the Delaris Brotherhood to their doom is also contained in the Chain. If so, we might be able to draw the leaders of the Liferock Rebellion to us at no risk to ourselves and lop off the Rebellion's head in a single, swift stroke.





The Rebellion may have caught wind of our efforts to recover the Chain of Skulls; if so, they have doubtless passed this information on to other factions in Barsaive, as is their habit. Fortune favors us, however, in one thing: the Brotherhood leading the Liferock Rebellion will likely consider the Fellowship of Night nearly as great an enemy as they consider us. Omasu and his allies are highly unlikely to aid in any way an order of nethermancers who enslaved one of their precious Liferocks for their own purposes, and so the Fellowship will find no allies among the Rebellion.

As for rebel agents and others in Barsaive who may be seeking out of the Chain of Skulls, the Eye of Throal and agents of Queen Alachia of the Blood Wood are likely searching for it simply to thwart us. Secret societies such as cults of the Mad Passions or the Keys of Death might find the promise of forbidden magical lore tempting. Certainly the Holders of Trust would want such a powerful grimoire for their masters in the Denairastas clan. Therefore, it is vital that we find this artifact first and make use of its secrets.

I await your response to this opportunity with great anticipation. I remain,

Your servant,
Azim Keel
Chief Magician and Elementalist

GAME INFORMATION

The Fellowship of Night is a secret society of nethermancers located in the Delaris Mountains. Its members pursue knowledge and magical lore concerning astral space, the Horrors and the netherworlds (p. 70, **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**). If they desire, **Earthdawn** gamemasters can use the Fellowship of Night in adventures related to the story lines and events described in **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**.

Azim Keel, the ghareez elementalist of the Theran fortress of Triumph, is intrigued by legends of the Fellowship and wishes to learn their secrets to tap into the vast elemental and spiritual power contained in the Liferock of Ayodhya, which lies imprisoned beneath the Theran behemoth that landed on it. Though Keel and his elementarists have managed to draw on the Liferock to power Triumph's elemental defenses, Keel believes that far more power exists to be taken from it. And he thinks that the Fellowship's knowledge is the key to tapping the Liferock's entire reserves of power.

The Chain of Skulls (p. 93, **Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive**) is a powerful nethermantic grimoire. It can be used as part of a Ghost Master Ritual (p. 225, **ED**) to summon the spirits of past grand masters of the Fellowship of Night. Keel believes that the Chain and the spirits linked with it hold the knowledge he needs to gain complete control over the Ayodhya Liferock. The ghareez has therefore sent out agents from the behemoth to find the Chain and bring it to him. He has also made it known among certain parties that any Name-giver who provides the Therans with information about the Fellowship or the location of the Chain will receive a substantial reward.

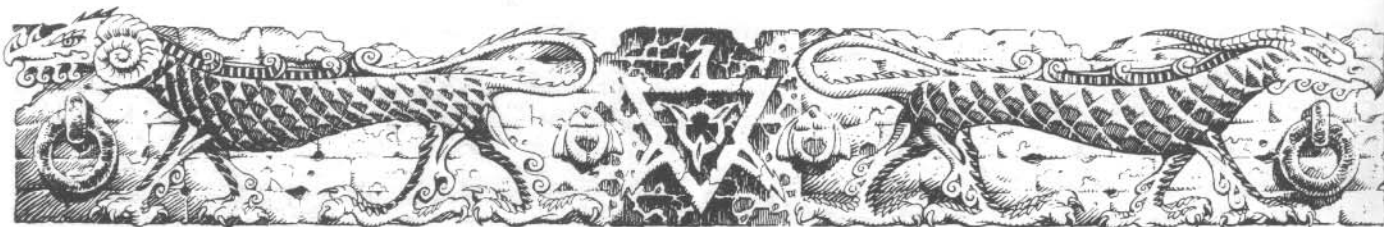
Keel's actions do not sit well with the Fellowship of Night, whose members are trying to recover their stolen property. Naturally distrustful of outsiders, the nethermancers of the Fellowship want to recover the Chain to prevent it from being misused by the Horrors and their servants, or by Name-givers such as Keel. In fact, members of the Fellowship have begun traveling through Barsaive incognito to seek information about the Chain and whoever might have engineered its theft.

Player characters can come into this series of events on the side of the Fellowship or the Therans, or as third parties who know nothing of the Chain of Skulls, the Fellowship or Keel's plans for the Ayodhya Liferock. If the characters are dealing with the Theran behemoth in any way, they might hear rumors of the elementalist's plans or discover evidence that Keel's agents are looking for something important. Player characters involved with the Liferock Rebellion (see p. 22 and p. 17 of **Prelude to War**) may also take an interest in Azim Keel's plans to tap the power of the Ayodhya Liferock. The characters may attempt to arrange an alliance between the Rebellion and the Fellowship of Night, or find the Chain of Skulls before the Therans do and return it to its rightful owners. The Fellowship's extensive body of magical lore could aid the Liferock Rebellion in freeing the Ayodhya Liferock from Theran control, provided that Omasu and his fellow obsidimen can overcome their revulsion at working with a group that has, in their view, desecrated a Liferock almost as much as the Therans have done to Ayodhya.

FELLOWSHIP NETHERMANCERS

The nethermancers of the Fellowship of Night are skilled at their craft; those encountered outside of their citadel are at least Fifth Circle and may be as high as Eighth or Ninth Circle. The current Grand Master of the Fellowship, Tana Lunnar, is a Thirteenth Circle nether-





mancer and has used Versatility to learn talents from various non-magician Disciplines as well. The Fellowship has created a group pattern (p. 52, **Earthdawn Companion**) interwoven with the pattern of the Heartstone to which individual members can weave threads to increase their abilities while working to further the Fellowship's goals. (Recovering the Chain of Skulls certainly counts as one of these important goals.) Most members weave threads to their Spellcasting and Thread Weaving talents, as well as their Spell Defense and Mystic Armor Ratings.

A player character nethermancer might join the Fellowship, but such an occurrence would be rare, as the group has never before taken a member from outside its surrounding community. Such an offer would have to result from a heroic effort by the character on the Fellowship's behalf—for example, a player-character nethermancer who helped to return the Chain of Skulls to its resting place. Joining the Fellowship requires the character to swear a blood peace oath with the members of the Fellowship and become part of their group pattern. Additionally, characters of Fifth Circle or higher may be offered a lifeshard and a chance to bond with one of the Black Guards (see below).

Lifeshards

Lifeshards are flat, polished pieces of obsidian cut from the Heartstone at the center of the Fellowship's citadel and enchanted with secret alchemical rituals known only to the Fellowship. Each shard is about the size of a human's palm and is usually worn as an amulet. To use a lifeshard, its owner must weave a thread to it. Threads woven to lifeshards cost the same as a Circle 5 talent (p. 221, ED).

A Rank 1 thread allows the nethermancer to use the shard to magically communicate with any other holder of an active lifeshard anywhere. The user's image appears in the surface of the shard being contacted and the recipient of the message can hear the user's voice while touching the shard. The lifeshard cannot be used to determine the location of another shard, only to communicate.

Each lifeshard also functions as a spell matrix object (p. 39, **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**) with a rank equal to the thread rank woven to it. The matrix in the lifeshard can be split into smaller matrices, but such a split is always permanent. Additionally, the nethermancer must divide the rank of the thread among the multiple matrices to determine their ranks. This distribution is also permanent.

At a cost of 4 Strain Points, the lifeshard can draw upon the power of the Heartstone to provide a momentary boost of magical power to its wielder. This boost adds a step

bonus to a single Spellcasting or Willforce Test. The bonus is equal to the thread rank of the thread woven to the shard. A lifeshard can provide only one step bonus per day.

Lastly, a nethermancer with an active lifeshard can use it in place of a bone circle for the Grave Message (p. 178, ED) and Spirit Portal (p. 182, ED) spells and then cast those spells as if he stood in a bone circle of his own construction.

Black Guards

Each of the nethermancers of the Fellowship, upon graduating to journeyman level (Fifth Circle), is bonded with a Black Guard, one of the re-animated Delaris obsidimen. The bonding involves a blood magic ritual that costs the nethermancer 1 permanent Damage Point and binds the blood magic to sustain the enchantments that keep the Black Guard functioning. From that time on, the guard will obey only its bonded master. The bond lasts until the master's death, after which the guard may be bonded to a new master if it is still intact.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 9 TOU: 10
PER: 4 WIL: 6 CHA: 4

Initiative: 3

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 9

Damage: 15 (troll sword)

Number of Spells: 0

Spellcasting: N/A

Effect: N/A

Death Rating: 65

Wound Threshold: 16

Unconsciousness Rating: 50

Physical Defense: 7

Spell Defense: 9

Social Defense: 14

Armor: 12

Mystic Armor: 2

Knockdown: 8

Recovery Tests: 4

Combat Movement: 22

Full Movement: 43

Legend Points: 300

Equipment: Plate armor, troll sword

Loot: Gilded armor plates worth 1D6 x 10 silver pieces. The armor counts as treasure worth Legend Points.

Adventure Idea: Dead Man's Testament

The player characters come upon the remains of a small group of adventurers during their travels. Among the possessions of the dead Name-givers is a journal of their travels that might be of some value to the Library of Throal or other scholars. Among the various passages in the journal are entries describing the adepts' encounter with several cadaver





men and Horror constructs on their way south from Haven; the adventurers believed that these beings were controlled by a Horror in the Caucavic Mountains. The cadaver men accompanied a Name-giver in a black cloak and hood who wore a strange necklace of bone plates strung on a black cord. While the adepts fought the constructs, the black-cloaked figure escaped. They believed it was heading for Parlainth, but another group of Horror-constructs ambushed and killed the adventurers before they could investigate further.

The adventurers' story and other information in the journal is of great interest to the Fellowship of Night and the agents of Azim Keel. Both sides eventually catch wind of the slain adepts and begin investigating, perhaps only a few steps behind the player characters. Each side wants to obtain the journal to further its search for the Chain of Skulls. At first they may attempt to get the information from the player characters through persuasion or bribery, but eventually both sides resort to force. If the player characters cut a deal with one side, the other tries to steal the journal.

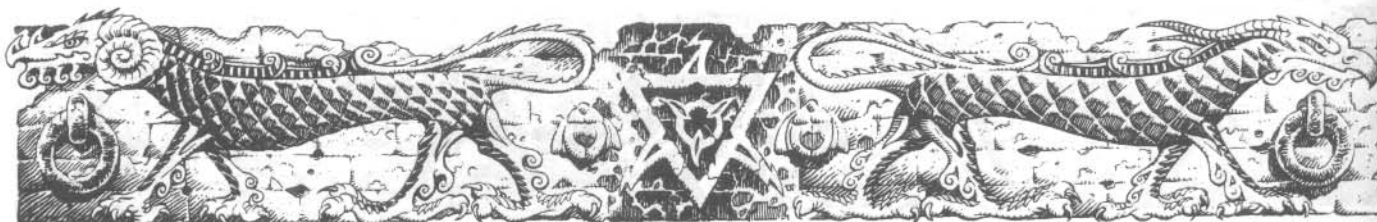
The Fellowship will send two nethermancers whose Circles are roughly equal to the average Circle of the player characters, accompanied by two to four of the Black Guards.

The Theran agents will be soldiers accompanied by a few Theran adepts, possibly members of the Elite of Triumph (p. 31, *Prelude to War*).

If the player characters want to pursue the hints in the journal on their own, they can try to locate the dark-cloaked figure in Parlainth. Careful investigation will turn up the fact that the figure was not an agent of a Horror, but a cadaver-man servant of Twiceborn, self-proclaimed Queen of the Undead (p. 63, *Ruins of Parlainth*). Twiceborn has learned of the Fellowship of Night and the Chain of Skulls, and she believes that the Chain's nethermantic lore holds the key to returning her and her undead followers to true life. Therefore, she sent a group of cadaver-men adepts to get the Chain and bring it to her. Being undead, the cadaver men avoided many of the Fellowship's defenses and stole the Chain.

Twiceborn will not surrender the Chain of Skulls easily, and she has hundreds of cadaver men to back her up. Agents of the Fellowship and the Therans can show up in Parlainth to make negotiations with the queen more interesting. Player characters might be able to work out an agreement between Twiceborn and the Fellowship, but the Therans will not negotiate except as a delaying tactic.





NAAMAN'S HAND

*To: General Ilfaralek
From: Hanlon Blackfist
Concerning: Naaman's Hand*

*For: Hanlon Blackfist, General Ilfaralek
From: K'staril Stonetail
Subject: Naaman's Hand*

After learning of the Empire's interest in the legendary Naaman Y'ross, I have arranged for several of my agents in Travar to monitor and aid four distinct groups that are part of the Cult of Naaman Y'ross, the Barsaivian living legend cult dedicated to discovering Y'ross's final resting place. Members of one such group, Naaman's Hand, were recently seen in Travar's markets buying supplies for an extended wilderness journey. The supplies they bought suggested that they planned to head into the Mist Swamps, which—considering our own activity in the area—warranted a closer look at them.

One member of the Hand had a taste for drink and a tongue that loosens easily. K'staril Stonetail, a t'skrang agent of ours, plied him with drink and convinced him to tell his story. To summarize K'staril's report (presented in full below), Naaman's Hand recently resurrected a man who died before the Scourge, using a unique ritual spell devised by their leader, an elven magician Named Imirisal. They believed—wrongly—that the man was Naaman Y'ross. However, he knows much about pre-Scourge Barsaive, including the locations of lost outposts and settlements. He claimed that Naaman's final resting place lay in the Lost City in the Mist Swamps. Imirisal hopes to find the ancient hero and return him to life.

Based on K'staril's report, I sent another agent—Thoruniel, an elf—to infiltrate the group. Their leader is well-known in this area, and Thoruniel had no trouble locating Naaman's Hand. He carried several warded message stones and will send them to you with full reports as chance allows.

These individuals have no idea how much they will help the Empire if they succeed in their eccentric quest. At the least, they may find the Lost City that still eludes us. If their source's knowledge is accurate, a simple abduction will put it all in your hands. And if this cult actually finds and raises Naaman Y'ross from the dead, they will be returning one of Thera's greatest heroes to her. How could the great Naaman Y'ross do anything but swear devotion to the Empire that birthed him, once he learns of Barsaive's treachery toward us?

I found the ork warrior Named Churag at The Cackling Hag, a trisnari near Travar's markets. He was sitting with two other orks, drinking ale and swapping tales. From the loud laughter, you'd've thought my cousin was telling jokes. I pulled up a chair and sat down, then grabbed an ale from a passing wench. The orks looked me over, but they must have decided I had a lot of jik'harra to sit uninvited at a table of orks. My size must've helped—my chaida always said I was too big to be a thief—not to mention the blood pebbles in my tail.

I introduced myself and we got acquainted by swapping stories. They talked about things they'd done; I told tales I'd heard from blade-happy friends of mine. A pouch of silver kept the drinks coming and made me the orks' best friend. They drank my silver for a couple of hours and got drunk, thinking I was as stinking pickled as they were. A touch of d'janduin on the tip of one finger rubbed into the eyes works wonders. It stings for a while, but when you're faking being drunk, it's the final line that docks the boat.

Two of them finally wobbled away, leaving me with Churag. We swapped more stories and then I asked him where he was going. He sobered up a bit at that and asked what I meant. I'd seen him in the market buying enough supplies for ten people headed into the wilds. If they had him for protection, maybe they needed extra muscle for when the mud got thick. I told him I might be looking for work and excitement, if there was room. He thought it over, then started talking.

He told me he was part of Naaman's Hand, a group that investigates ancient kaers looking for clues to lead them to Naaman Y'ross's tomb. (I'd heard of the Cult of Naaman Y'ross, of course. Who hasn't? I've known more than a few folk who got all starfish-eyed and went off to look for the great hero. Waste of time, if you ask me.) Churag had served with this group for two years and had searched his share of kaers without much luck until Naaman's Hand recently stumbled on some remains and evidence that made them think they'd finally found Naaman Y'ross.





Their leader—an elf who's a wizard and a nether-mancer (and combines the worst of both, if you ask me; nothing's worse than being both spooky and crazy)—took the remains to a safe place and worked some bizarre ritual he'd cooked up to bring them back to life. It took a couple of months to perform, and Churag had to be nearby all that time, helping out. He said the magician needed the group's True Pattern to give him a chance of succeeding. I'd think a warrior helping with a ritual would be as useful as a sideways-mounted paddlewheel, but who's to argue with a magician?

Anyway, the two months passed and then there was this resurrected elf from before the Scourge sleeping on the magician's table. The elf was sick and weak for another month but glad to be alive. The magician let him rest for awhile before pestering him with questions. The elf's Throalic was as ancient as he, so Churag didn't catch all of his answers. One thing was clear, though: his Name was Alainyn, not Naaman Y'ross. The Hand's information was wrong; they'd spent months raising the wrong elf from the dead. Too bad for them, but lucky for him.

Well, the magician was upset that his net had dragged up the wrong fish—but the ritual wasn't a total waste even from his point of view. This Alainyn was so grateful to be brought back to life that he offered to work for the magician to express his thanks. He was a wanderer before the Scourge and knew a lot that could be useful. Knowing how much things had changed since the Scourge and how much knowledge had been lost, the magician agreed.

Once Alainyn was strong enough, Naaman's Hand got back to kaer-diving and book-searching. Then one day, Alainyn told the magician he knew a thing or two about Naaman's favorite places. Even said he'd shared a mug or two with Naaman in his day. The magician was skeptical at first. I'd be skeptical, too, if a man selling sting cream showed up just after I'd tangled with a jellyfish. But Alainyn answered all the magician's questions and proved he knew whereof he spoke. According to Churag, the magician now thinks Alainyn is descended from Naaman Y'ross and is as hot as an overworked fire engine to find the great hero.

The magician and Alainyn sat down with some old maps, and Alainyn pointed out a few places where Naaman's tomb might be. The most likely, he said, was in the Mist Swamps. Now, the Swamps aren't friendly to travelers, especially with Aban lurking in there. But Alainyn convinced the magician that Naaman had spent a lot of time looking for an old city in the area and might well have died there. Sounded like the same Lost City we've been hunting for.

I'd just bought Churag another ale and begged him to continue when the front door opened and I felt a chill, like cold water poured into an incubation pot. The elf magician came in, as spooky and crazy-looking as I guessed he'd be. He walked to our table and looked at me like he could spit me with his eyes and set me to roasting. I got up in a hurry and blurted out that trekking around in the Mist Swamps wasn't my idea of a good time. As I left, I heard the elf chewing out Churag for getting drunk and spilling secrets, but I didn't stay long enough to hear the whole thing. That elf unnerved me; I still haven't completely shaken off the encounter. So if you send someone to keep an eye on this Mist Swamps expedition—which is an excellent idea—don't send me. They may suspect who I am, and if they do my life won't be worth a plugged copper penny.

My Lord General,

Attached are the transcripts of the message stones sent by Thoruniel. The third stone contained a conversation between Thoruniel and Alainyn, the resurrected elf. For the sake of brevity, I eliminated random chatter; you have the original stone if you wish to hear it. Otherwise, I have copied the contents exactly, and I encourage you to examine the conversation closely. Some of what is said seems outlandish, but nonetheless this report hints at many interesting possibilities.

—Tombarrel Oprisken, Intelligence Archivist

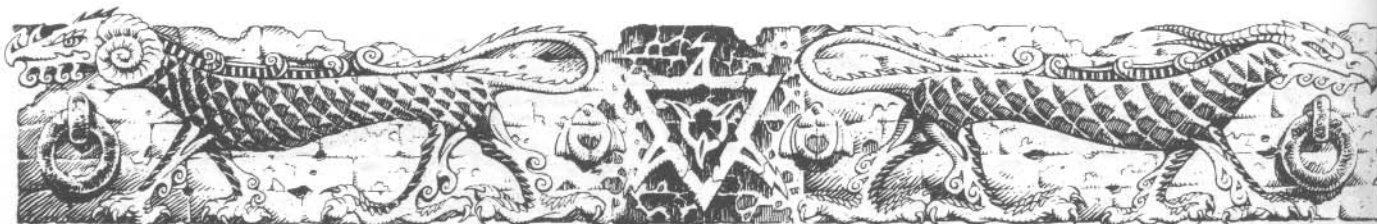
First Message Stone

"Our first week was largely uneventful. We struck northwest from Travar, skirting the Badlands and making for the lower reaches of the Serpent. We fought two skirmishes in the first days, one with some jehuthra and the other with a large pack of gnashers. Imirisal has many potent spells, and his power turned both battles. After the second fight, we struck northward to put more distance between us and the Badlands.

"When Alainyn first saw the Badlands, he seemed deeply wounded. When I asked about it, he said he remembered the region as a place of rolling green fields, comfortable villages and dense forests. His descriptions of the forests brought tears to both our eyes.

"Imirisal led us around the northernmost edge of the Badlands. Though following the Serpent would ease our journey, he does not want to deal with K'tenshin ships. Since the Ayodhya incident, the K'tenshin have been very aggressive along their stretch of river. He wants no encounter with angry and greedy t'skrang."





Second Message Stone

"Three more days brought us near the Mist Swamps. Everything in the distance is obscured by a cloud of rolling gray. It resembles cool morning fog, but I know how hot the mists truly are. Fortunately, our elementalist Ankar knows a spell that can protect us from the heat. He said it doesn't last long, so we'll stop for rest every hour so that he can use it on us.

"Alainyn has been telling us about the land as it existed before the Scourge. He has spoken of numerous villages along the river, Naming places such as Byshara and Mankevren. He clearly feels the pain of their loss.

"I have struck up a friendship of sorts with Alainyn. He has a unique perspective on many things that I can appreciate as a fellow elf. I sense a great secret in him that is somehow related to our destination. I have several times seen him in a sort of waking dream, staring into the distance as though listening to an unheard voice. On occasion he even goes into this trance while we talk. He sometimes seems confused and uncertain, as though his wits have abandoned him. Very strange.

"During my watch tonight, I heard Alainyn talking in his sleep. I had heard him muttering several times before, when he thought no one close enough to hear. His words sound like Sperethiel at first, but I could not understand many of them. I was not sure if I didn't know the language he spoke or if his dialect and the distance conspired to create a greater mystery than truly exists, but I listened carefully as he slept. His dialect is ancient and I am a poor student, but I had no doubt in the end that he was speaking Theran. I heard the words for "brother" and "home," as well as something about being complete again. At my first opportunity, I will speak to him alone. Perhaps I can arrange for us to share a watch. If so, I will record our conversation in a message stone."

Third Message Stone

This stone contains a conversation in Sperethiel between two men, their identities clear from their comments. The voices were low, even whispered in places. Despite this, the recording is remarkably clear. Various portions were slightly muffled, but I am confident I have accurately deciphered them.

—Tombarral Oprisken

Thoruniel: I'd like to talk to you about something.

Alainyn: About what?

Thoruniel: Three nights ago, before we actually entered the Swamps ...

(pause)

Alainyn: Yes?

Thoruniel: I heard you talking in your sleep.

Alainyn: Is that unusual?

Thoruniel: No. I've known people who do that. I'm just curious about some of the things you said.

Alainyn: Like what?

Thoruniel: The language you spoke—it wasn't Sperethiel.

Alainyn: Likely not. I know many tongues.

Thoruniel: It sounded like a language rarely spoken in these lands—Theran.

(long pause)

Alainyn: I often spoke that tongue in earlier days.

Thoruniel: How did you come to learn it?

Alainyn: I was born and raised in Vasgothia, the son of a petty noble.

Thoruniel: Vasgothia? You died far from home.

Alainyn: That's true. Barsaive was wilder than my homeland then, and I was a wild young man with dreams of fame. I came here hoping to make a great Name for myself. How do you know the Theran tongue? Or, at least well enough to know its sound?

[Archivist's Note: The next portion of this conversation is in Theran, and is whispered.]





Thoruniel: Fear not, brother. You have friends where you may not expect them. I can be of help to you.

Alainyn: Do you serve the Empire?

Thoruniel: Do you wish to reclaim your citizenship?

Alainyn: Yes, in time. There is something I must do first.

Thoruniel: I do serve Thera. I was sent to watch this group and report on their progress. They will prove useful if they find what they seek. The Empire seeks any tool she may use to properly censure her wayward subjects.

[Archivist's Note: Here, the conversation switches back to Sperethiel.]

Alainyn: The story of Barsaive's rebellion surprised me, though it should not have. This land never sat well under the First Governor's rule.

Thoruniel: I know a tale about a Thera elf from Vastothia.

Alainyn: Really?

Thoruniel: Yes. Whatever these cultists know, Thera knows more.

(pause)

Alainyn: What do you mean?

Thoruniel: Many records were lost to the Scourge, but not all. I have studied what records remain of a certain Thera hero of elven blood, an elf from Vastothia who built his legend in Barsaive.

Alainyn: I see.

Thoruniel: His Name was not Alainyn, however.

Alainyn: Oh? What was it?

Thoruniel: Naaman Y'ross.

(long pause)

Alainyn: Surely this Naaman wasn't the only elf to come to Barsaive from Vastothia?

Thoruniel: Probably not, but how many of those who did would be found in a place with evidence that suggests he is Naaman Y'ross?

Alainyn: Only one or two I can imagine.

Thoruniel: Are you truly Naaman Y'ross then, despite your claim otherwise?

Alainyn: Shhhhh! You'll wake the others! No, I am not Y'ross.

Thoruniel: Then why did you say, "Only one or two?"

Alainyn: Naaman Y'ross was my brother.

Thoruniel: That's why you said "brother" in your sleep.

Alainyn: Yes.

Thoruniel: You also said something about being complete. What did you mean?

Alainyn: My brother and I shared a special bond. We are each incomplete without the other. He would feel as I do now if he had been raised from death before me. Without him, I am less than I was. Many of the warrior's talents I once mastered are now beyond my reach. I feel fear and confusion where once a lion's heart beat in my breast. I must find my brother, and Imirisal must raise him to life.

Thoruniel: I have never heard of such a bond. How did it come to be?

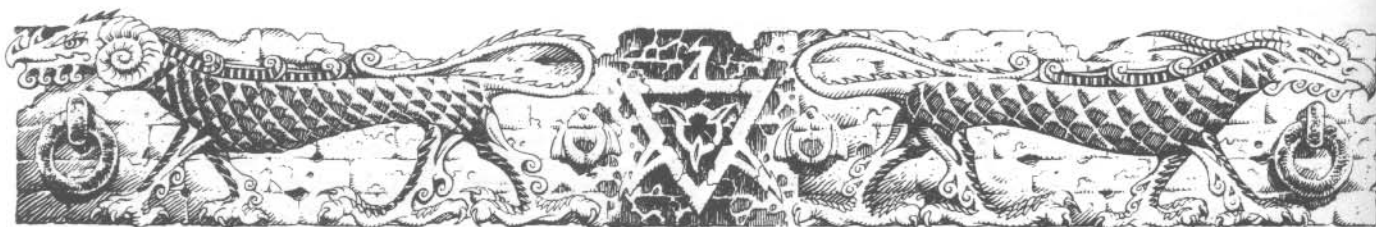
Alainyn: I have told you much that I intended to keep secret. If I want you to know more, I will tell you. Your secret is safe with me, so long as you keep mine.

Thoruniel: I will.

Fourth Message Stone

"Another week has passed, and we are returning to Travar. Our time in the Swamps was misery and drudgery punctuated by terror. We were fortunate not to encounter the great dragon Aban, but we may not be so lucky on the next visit.





"The brother of Naaman Y'ross, alive and seeking the great hero! Who would have imagined that Imirisa's failure would strike so close to success? Since our nighttime conversation, Alainyn has been guarded and quiet. He still guards an important secret, I am sure.

"I find myself wondering if his tale of being Naaman Y'ross's brother is true. I never heard of a brother, nor do the records mention one. Also, I would have expected a scholar such as Imirisa to know of such a thing. But whatever his reasons for hiding his identity, if he truly is Naaman Y'ross, he represents a valuable resource for Thera. He is searching for something, and he knows the Empire will give him a home once he has found it."

GAME INFORMATION

Naaman's Hand is part of the Cult of Naaman Y'ross, a collection of groups dedicated to finding the great pre-Scourge hero or returning him to life. Naaman's Hand is led by an elf Named Imirisa Vemmarren, a Tenth Circle nethermancer and wizard who claims to be a descendant of the great Y'ross. Other members of the Hand are adepts ranging from Fifth to Eighth circle in Disciplines that run the gamut of those practiced in Barsaive. They spend most of their time researching Naaman Y'ross in the Great Library of Throal and other smaller libraries across Barsaive, amassing Barsaive's most authoritative collection of literature about the great hero in their private library in Travar. When not plumbing ancient tomes, they search for lost tales and clues among the villages and lost kaers scattered throughout the wilderness, following the slightest hint until it bears fruit or proves false. They perform acts of bravery and heroism in Naaman Y'ross's Name, destroying Horrors, defeating slavers and recovering ancient artifacts to keep his legend alive and link their own to it. They wish to return Naaman Y'ross to life, believing that such a hero can help Barsaive in her struggle against the dark forces of the Thera Empire. Naaman's resurrection would also resolve debates over the facts of his life, as he could set the record straight. Lastly, to walk and fight beside his legendary ancestor has been Imirisa's dream since childhood.

The elf Alainyn, resurrected by the Hand in the belief that he was Naaman Y'ross, actually is the great hero—or at least a part of him. Unknown to Naaman's Hand and to most scholars, the legend of Naaman Y'ross is in fact based on the actions of two men, twin elven brothers born to a minor noble family in the Thera province of Vagothia (p. 142, *The Thera Empire*). These two undertook separate

adventures under the same Name. Their combined exploits built the Name of Naaman Y'ross into a greater legend than either might have accomplished on his own, with the far-flung nature of the brothers' adventures augmenting "Naaman's" stature. Details concerning "his" death are confusing, since each twin's death can be taken as "Naaman's" demise.

This cooperative legend bound each brother into a unique True Pattern that represents the collective person known to Barsaive as Naaman Y'ross. Thus, while Alainyn has some of his talents and memories, he is incomplete until his brother is also returned to life. Working toward his brother's resurrection, he uses his knowledge of pre-Scourge Barsaive to suggest areas of research to Imirisa. Alainyn knew that his brother spent a lot of time looking for the Lost City in the Mist Swamps, and so that area is currently the group's focus.

For the time being, Alainyn wants to preserve his secret for several reasons. First, he enjoys hearing of exploits credited to him, and second, he wonders what sort of man this self-proclaimed descendant of his might be.

Alainyn represents a valuable source of pre-Scourge information. Many Thera outposts and kaers remain undiscovered, and Alainyn can lead searchers to them. Such places are likely to contain magical treasures and knowledge of significant power, certain to give their finders a decided edge in Barsaive's turbulent environment. Once Alainyn finds his long-dead brother and returns him to life, they will both regain their full, pre-Scourge strength. Such powerful heroes as these two are certain to have a significant impact on events in Barsaive.

NEW SPELL

Recall the Ancient Spirit

Circle 10 Nethermancer/Wizard

Threads: Variable

Weaving Difficulty: 18/26

Range: 10 yards

Duration: Permanent

Effect: Returns a long-dead character to life

Casting Difficulty: 18

Recall the Ancient Spirit enables its casters to resurrect a character who has been dead for many years or even many centuries. This powerful multi-Discipline spell combines the principles of the Journey to Life spell (p. 86, *Earthdawn Companion*) with nethermantic knowledge of spirits. This ritual spell requires a portion of the dead character's physical remains and only works if the character has been dead for at





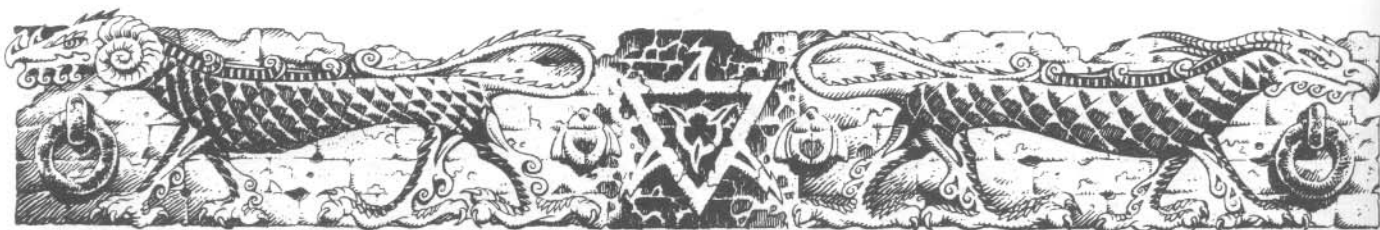
least a year. The spell requires six threads plus one thread per century (or portion thereof) that the target character has been dead. Weaving each thread requires one week; if the caster stops the spell before completing it, he suffers 1 permanent Damage Point per thread already woven.

The first six threads recreate the deceased character's body from the fragment in the caster's possession. Once all six threads are woven, a living, soulless body lies waiting for its spirit to return. The seventh and additional threads call out to the deceased spirit and draw it toward the newly re-formed body. During this time, other astral spirits, especially Horrors, may attempt to possess the body. The spirit or Horror makes a Spellcasting Test against the body's Spell Defense, which is equal to the sum of the magician's Spell Defense and his rank in Willforce. If the test succeeds, the spirit or Horror possesses the body in lieu of its owner's spirit. If this happens, the spell is disrupted and the magician suffers the effects of having aborted the spell prematurely. A possessed body has the attributes of the possessing spirit, and the spirit may use any of its powers and abilities on characters in the physical world, using the body as a conduit between the physical and the astral. Destroying the possessed body returns the occupying spirit to astral space, but the targeted spirit to whom the body belonged cannot be raised again, just as if the spell had failed (see below). For these reasons, it is best to cast this spell in Safe regions of astral space (p. 155, ED) and in an area well warded against spirit intrusion.

After all the threads have been woven, the magician makes a Spellcasting Test against a Casting Difficulty of 18. If this test fails, the spirit to whom the body originally belonged is forever beyond the reach of any resurrection magic. If the Spellcasting Test succeeds, the spirit returns and inhabits the new body. The shock of returning to life initially makes the character weak and helpless; he needs complete rest to regain his health and strength. On an Average success, this condition lasts for seven weeks. Each success level above Average reduces the newly resurrected character's convalescence by one week. The character returns to life with all of his or her memories and talents intact but has no knowledge of anything that happened to his spirit while he was dead.

Though the duration of the spell is permanent, the resurrected character is subject to dying in any of the usual ways and can be killed as easily as during his former life. If the character dies a second time, no magic will return him to life again.





Adventure Idea: Relics of Legend

While exploring an old kaer, the characters find a dented helm with a strong magical pattern. Beneath the grime that covers it, the helm has intricate filigree that marks it as elven work. Research indicates that it may once have been worn by the great Naaman Y'ross, a find that occasions excitement and gossip among scholars. The gossip attracts the attention of Naaman's Hand, and the group visits the characters to investigate the truth of the rumors. When Alainyn recognizes the helm, Imirisal invites the group to dinner and spends the evening trying to convince the characters to join his quest to raise Naaman Y'ross to life. He knows of several rumors the characters can follow up on, and he can be a source of numerous adventures.

Adventure Idea: A Kidnapped Legend

While the characters are resting in a small village near the Servos Jungle, Naaman's Hand arrives in the night and loudly demands whatever supplies or assistance the village can provide. If the characters ask what the group members need, they explain that they clashed with Therans nearby and several members group were captured. They hint that one of the captured—Alainyn—is the key to discovering one of the greatest treasures of all time, a treasure sure to bring Thera to her knees. They also invite the characters to help them in the rescue attempt and thereby link their Names to one of the world's most famous legends. If the characters agree, they embark on a wild nighttime chase through the jungle to find and defeat the Theran patrol and save the captives.





THE IRON LEGACY

To his Excellency General Ilfaralek,

Enclosed are selected reports from Sorga Fireheart, an ork agent sent to report on the status of the new ork nation of Cara Fahd. She has reported on the comings and goings of various scorchers and notable groups of adepts in the area while Krathis Gron, leader of this so-called sovereign realm, prepares to build a new city at Claw Ridge. Over the past two months, Fireheart wormed her way into Gron's confidence and has become one of her advisors. Her most recent reports are exceptionally detailed and accurate, and she has some influence over Gron's decisions—an advantage we should carefully press.

The following reports describe the activities of the Iron Legacy, a mysterious organization whose existence is new to us. The Iron Legacy displays a virulent antipathy to all orks, and Cara Fahd bears the brunt of its hostility. The Empire might do well to support the Legacy and its immediate goals, though not necessarily overtly. Given the orks' feelings toward our Empire and the institution of slavery, Cara Fahd is likely to become Thera's enemy; we should therefore consider using the Iron Legacy to destroy the ork nation.

Given the group's hatred of orks, infiltrating the Iron Legacy and obtaining more detailed information about it is clearly impossible for Fireheart. However, she will continue to report on the activities of Krathis Gron; meanwhile, I recommend dispatching non-ork agents to join the Iron Legacy and report on the group from within.

—K'nedrick T'pashir

Report #17

Week 42, Day 4

An hour after Krathis Gron gathered her counselors today, shouts from outside stopped the meeting. A dust cloud to the east revealed the approach of a band of riders, but we could see nothing through the haphazard maze of tents that so far make up the town. Then a young runner came, shouting about a wounded ork with an important message. The ork had passed out from pain and blood loss; a detachment from Asok's Armbreakers was bringing him to us. Krathis Gron sent the runner to fetch old Muktar Bonemender, an herbalist and skilled healer. The boy ran off, disappearing around the base of what will be the first permanent building in the new city of Claw Ridge (built on the site of the infamous Incident at Claw Ridge).

A few minutes later, two scorcher arrived carrying an unconscious ork. His clothes were rags; the shape of the tatters and the blood-crusts stripes on his back made it clear he had been whipped. His left hand was swollen, crushed and scraped raw; a manacle dangled from a chain attached to his right. The manacle was encrusted with fur and blood, as if the ork had used it as a weapon. The claw and bite marks on his thighs and left arm told of a fight with wolves or some similar beast. He had defeated them and torn their skins off for makeshift boots, or so we gathered from the ragged skins wrapped around his feet. A survivor, this one.

Krathis Gron sent for a bedroll and furs, then directed the two carrying the unconscious ork into a nearby empty tent. Muktar arrived and made the ork comfortable, then got to work. Gron gathered her counselors and returned to the meeting, leaving me to help Muktar and await the ork's awakening. Bonemender looked amused to have an assistant but otherwise ignored me. First, he applied poultices to the ork's wounds and rubbed a sharp-smelling ointment into the whip marks on his back. Then he pulled the ork's left thumb into place, causing a loud grinding sound and prompting a groan from the ork. Next, he cut the swollen flesh of the ork's left hand and drained it of black, dead blood, then wrapped it in stiff leather to brace it. As he left, he pointed out a pitcher of water for the ork to drink from when he awoke. I waited.

Half an hour later, the ork groaned and opened his eyes. He looked around for a few seconds, then sat up wide-eyed, putting one hand to his head. He tried to stand, but failed.

"Don't be stupid," I said. "Stay down a little longer. Prove you're not full of quaalz."

"Where is this?" he grunted, leaning back on his right elbow. "Don't look like no slaver tent."

"Would slavers bind your wounds and tuck you into a comfy bed? Would slavers sit waiting until you woke up to make sure you didn't die of stupidity in your sleep?" I poured a mug of water and thrust it at him.

He looked at me, and I saw anger and fear. He'd never admit the fear, though. Finally, he said "Guess not." He took the mug and drank deeply.

I let him drink and then said, "Before you passed out, you said you had an important message."

At that he sat up again, more slowly this time. "Yes, I have a message for Krathis Gron—something she needs to know."





"Tell me and I'll bring the message to her."

"Why should I tell you?"

"Because I told you to," I said. "I'm one of Gron's advisors. She told me to get your message when you woke up."

After some thought, he started talking. His Name was Tokarag, and he was a member of a scorcher band Named Krug's Plainshakers. They had come to Cara Fahd to earn a place as Gron's most trusted warriors. In the hills to the northeast, they saw camp smoke and detoured toward it, hoping for news and hurl.

When the Plainshakers crested the hill, they saw a handful of humans and dwarfs in a shallow valley. A disorderly camp spread out around a pair of campfires, but the riders' eyes were drawn to some ponies with the look of scorcher mounts and two orks bound to tall wooden stakes. One bound ork's head hung as if unconscious. A dwarf took a metal rod from the fire and laid it on the other ork's torso. The tortured ork let out a scream as smoke rose from his burned flesh. The Plainshakers charged the camp, howling for blood.

It was an ambush. Blankets and bedrolls were cast aside to reveal warriors hiding in shallow trenches, and archers

stood up from cover along the top of the valley. Two volleys of arrows took down several of the charging orks before the remaining Plainshakers crashed into the footmen in the camp. The battle was quick and fierce; though the scorchers fought well, they lost.

Tokarag woke up in chains, stripped of his belongings and lying in a corral in the center of a large camp. His surviving companions were also bound, alongside other orks he didn't know. One of these told him he was to be sold into slavery. That didn't sit well with him, so he tried to escape, only to be pummeled into unconsciousness by his captors. He woke up in the corral some time later, covered with bruises.

After his third failed escape attempt, he was taken from the corral under heavy guard to a tent, where he was chained to an iron ring sunk into the ground. He could not stand without bending all the way over, so he was forced to kneel. Left alone for several minutes, he tried to lift the ring from the ground but could not. He dug at the dirt around the ring until a human entered the tent—a lean and dark-haired man, cruel of face and dressed in plain clothing.

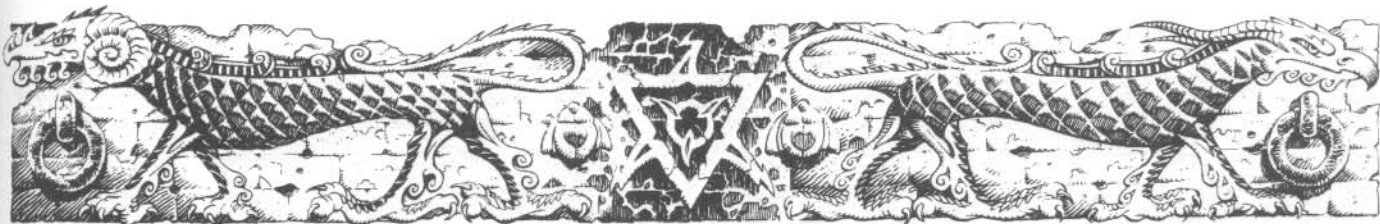
The human's swift kick caught Tokarag in the face and knocked him to the dirt. He got back up on his knees and threw himself at the human, but his chains pulled him up short. The human smiled and kicked him again from the other side. As Tokarag lay gasping on the ground, the human leaned down and put a dagger to his throat, pressing hard enough to let Tokarag know that any movement would mean his death. He spat in Tokarag's face and spoke in a harsh whisper.

"Know this, ork." He said the word as though it was the vilest insult he could imagine. "Hundreds of my people—my friends, my family—lie dead at the hands of your kind. We were innocents, newly emerged into the light of day. Filthy vermin like you cut us down where we stood, unarmed and helpless. Men and women slain, children dashed against rocks. I escaped, and now I bring the vengeance their spirits demand. The Iron Legacy will not rest until your entire race labors under the merciless sun, bound to the land in chains of slavery. This pathetic gathering you call a nation will wither and die at our hands, and I will sow the earth with salt and the broken bones of Krathis Gron."

The human pulled back. Tokarag remained still, then said, "Lochost won't allow it."

The human's laugh was chilling. "Lochost?" he said. "Lochost cannot prevent it. That weakling will learn what it means to be overcome by the power of Dis. Soon Lochost himself will be bound in the Slaver's chains, and the light of freedom will be crushed forever."





The human leaned over and touched the iron ring and Tokarag's chain, concentrating for a moment. He wiped sweat from his brow and spoke again.

"You are a wily one, I am told. I will leave you bound here to prevent any more escapes. That ring is sunk deeply, and the chains are strengthened by the will of Dis. When the slavers come, you will fetch a good price." He paused. "When you feel the sting of the whip forcing you to move your aching muscles and throbbing bones, know that I brought this destiny upon you. When you are shackled to a wall, helpless to brush away the vermin that crawl across you in your sleep, know that I am the Snare of Dis and your fate is my doing. When you die a young man, broken by a life of hard labor for someone else's benefit, know that all of your brethren will suffer the same fate. On my Name, Talyrin Kale, I swear this."

The human left. The tent was stifling, but no one brought food or water. For a night and a day, Tokarag remained alone in that tent. He tried to dig out the iron ring, but Kale had spoken truth when he said it was sunk deep. On the second night, thirst and the desire for freedom made Tokarag desperate. He put his left hand on the ground, then slammed his knee down quickly to dislocate the thumb. He forced the manacle over his wounded hand, tearing flesh to do so. Then he passed the chain—which was still attached to his right hand—through the iron ring, and he was free.

Only one guard waited outside the tent, a blessing from Lochost. Tokarag dispatched him quickly and silently, then made his way out of the camp. The prisoner compound was heavily guarded, making a rescue impossible. He vowed to return with help for his captured brothers and left. On his way to Cara Fahd, he encountered a pack of jackals, which he dispatched with difficulty.

I relayed his tale to Gron, who plans to save the imprisoned orks. For now, only her counselors know of the Iron Legacy and its plans.

Report #18

Week 43, Day 5

On the strength of Tokarag's tale, Krathis Gron organized riders to rescue the orks held prisoner by the human Talyrin Kale. But Tokarag's sufferings made his memory of the route he'd taken incomplete. With little hope of finding the camp, Gron thought to search out the slavers the human had mentioned. She brought beastmaster adepts, hoping they could track the slavers back to Kale's camp.

It was most likely that the slavers came from the Vivane area, but I suggested the Theran lands west of Cara Fahd as another possibility, leading Gron to split her forces. Riders from the Broken Fang tribe and the Thunderborn Cavalry were sent northwest to intercept slavers heading westward, while Gron took riders from the Metal Fist and Hankarr's Spears northeast. Slavers headed for Vivane from the area where Tokarag was captured would likely skirt Cara Fahd to the east. That area is mostly hills and wilderness until you reach the Twilight Peaks, and it is easy to travel unseen through the wilds of ancient Landis.

After nearly three days of searching, we found the slavers' trail. They were south of us and moving toward Vivane. Gron sent a small group of riders and a beastmaster to backtrack the trail to Talyrin Kale's camp while the rest rode to overtake the slavers. We found them early the next day. They fought well for a time, but Tokarag's story had whipped the orks of Cara Fahd into a frenzy and the slavers were soon destroyed. We rescued nearly two dozen captives, less than half the number Tokarag had seen in Kale's camp.

Gron assigned a patrol to take the rescued orks back to Cara Fahd, and we retraced our path to the rest of our band. They had tracked the slavers' route for some distance, but recent rain made it impossible to follow it all the way back to Kale's camp. We returned to Claw Ridge to await news from the other group and to organize search parties.

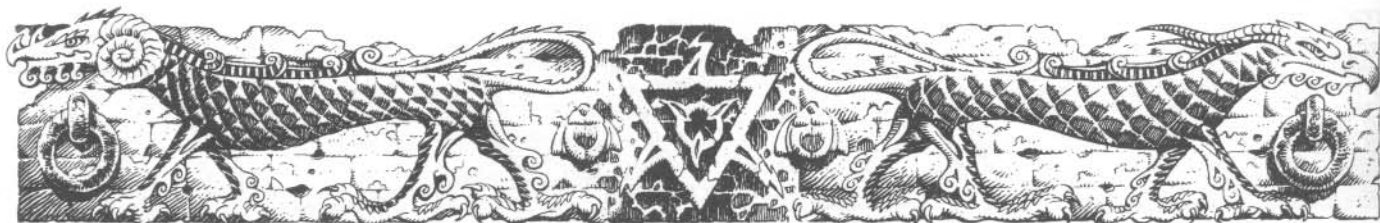
Report #20

Week 44, Day 3

The Broken Fang and Thunderborn Cavalry riders returned today. They found no trace of slavers headed west. Gron believes the remaining prisoners might still be at Kale's camp. She doubled the number of orks searching for the camp, weakening the eastern patrols to do so. With the Iron Legacy to the north and Theran lands to the south and west, she could not spare riders from those areas. Some argued for riders to be taken from all areas equally, to keep them at the same strength, but Gron preferred not to weaken the other borders. Bronze Eyes, the chieftain of the Metal Fist, disagreed strongly but agreed to follow her orders.

The riders described a tragedy they discovered on their way back from the northwest. Krathis Gron does not require all orks to settle in Claw Ridge; those who come to Cara Fahd may settle in any place they choose within the borders of the new nation (between the southern Delaris Mountains, the southwestern Twilight Peaks and the Greenheart River). Many cavalry tribes and other settlers have established small villages by making permanent camp. These settle-



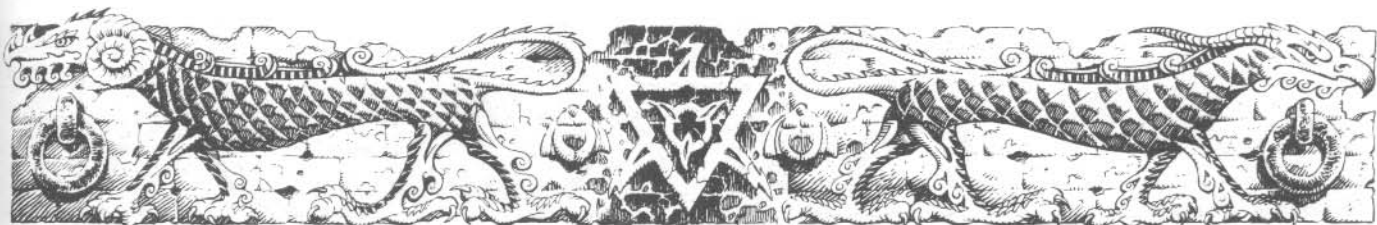


ments have attracted other orks from cities and villages across Barsaive. One of these settlements was a village called Manak Fahd.

When the riders came to Manak Fahd, only a few of its residents were left alive. In every home orks lay dead, slumped over the cold remains of the morning meal. One of the riders, a battlefield healer, knew enough about herbs to recognize that the victims had been poisoned. Someone had apparently poisoned every larder during the night. The riders searched for survivors and found three orks still struggling against the toxin's effects. Only after gathering the survivors together to tend them did they realize there were no children among the bodies.

The riders searched beyond the village, looking for places where the children might have hidden, but their hearts were heavy with doubt, as if they already knew the search was hopeless. One survivor briefly regained his senses and told a chilling tale of parents falling over dead while children looked on fearfully, unaffected by the poison. He told of armed Name-givers coming to the village and rounding up the children, leaving the adults to rot. He told of a voice crying out the Name of Dis, thanking the Mad Passion for enslaving the children and giving them a life of nothing but the chain and the lash. After describing the last, the ork gave a gurgling cough and died. The other two never regained consciousness, and died before sunset.





The beastmasters with the riders set to tracking the slavers. The trail was fresh and presented little difficulty until it reached a rocky stream several hours away. From there the trail turned north to follow the river for a short time and then faded away. The beastmasters searched the far bank for several days but found no tracks.

Report #23

Week 46, Day 2

Today Krathis Gron received a letter from Grandor Inirian, master of the Golden Hammer Company, a small trading concern in Jerris. The letter demanded an explanation for Gron's attack upon his caravan and restitution for the loss of goods and men. Inirian said an ork cavalry attacked his caravan, shouting, "For the glory of Cara Fahd," then slaughtered the men and burned the goods. A few men escaped and reported the attack. The letter gave no description of the attackers' colors or standard, so we cannot identify the cavalry responsible. Charok Redhand, the leader of the Broken Fang tribe, suggested that the attack was the work of the Iron Legacy, trying to drive away merchants by making Cara Fahd look untrustworthy and hostile.

Report #25

Week 47, Day 5

Yesterday, riders from Thunderaxe's Cleavers captured three from the Iron Legacy. The cavalry found some city orks under attack and rode to help. After the first crash of the Cleavers' charge, those attackers who weren't unconscious or dead fled the battle. Some riders gave pursuit while the rest saw to the needs of the wounded. Many were caught up in gahad when they found chains and slavers' tools among the downed attackers, and several who might have lived to be questioned died at their hands.

Of the three surviving prisoners, two were human, the third an elf. Gron bound them in their own chains and doused them with vinegar to awaken them. The sting of the vinegar in their wounds made them cry out despite their best efforts to remain silent. We moved them into three separate tents and questioned them one at a time.

While Gron was questioning one of the humans, shouts came from the elf's tent. We found the elf and one guard unconscious, with a second guard standing over them. The elf had spoken a few words in his elven tongue, and one of the guards—the unconscious one—had begun to undo the prisoner's chains. To stop him, the other guard knocked him out and then did the same to the elf so he could not use his dark power again.

At Gron's orders, the unconscious guard was removed and the elf propped up. Two guards held daggers to his throat while another splashed more vinegar on him. When he came around, he smiled an evil smile and said, "Ah, the lovely Krathis Gron. What a delight to be treated to your hospitality."

"Who are you and why do you attack my people?" Gron said.

The elf sneered. "The Iron Legacy will see this charade of yours ended and your people in chains."

"Where is your camp located?"

"Soon, Dis herself will walk among us, crushing the hope from your breast with her presence."

"Where is Talyrin Kale, and how may I contact him to negotiate a peace?"

"Peace?" the elf said. "The only peace Kale will grant you is the peace of the grave." With that, he began to giggle and would speak no more.

Outside the tent, Gron's counselors suggested killing the elf. But Gron said she needed him to find Talyrin Kale and end the hostility. Over several objections, she ordered the elf gagged and watched.

In the dark of night, we heard a shout of alarm followed by a scream from the horse pickets. Horses and ponies began galloping in all directions, scattering widely. Swarms of insects flew around the animals, stinging them and driving them mad with pain. Near one picket-pole, we found one of the elf's guards, a dagger through his heart and his life's blood fast running out. With the last of his strength, he whispered, "Forgive ... weakness. Could not ... disobey ... him."

At the elf's tent, two of the three other guards stood confounded, unable to think or act. The third had raised the alarm seconds before bedlam broke out; he told us what had happened. While keeping their watch, the guards were struck by a strange confusion that stole their minds. The elf touched one of them—the dead one by the picket-pole—who immediately began to undo his chains. The mental fog prevented the other guards from stopping him. The ensorcelled ork called the elf "Master" and seemed eager as a puppy to obey him. A few moments after the pair walked off into the darkness, the guard telling the tale got his wits about him and raised an alarm, but it was too late.

It took so long to get the horses under control that the elf had long escaped before we could organize any pursuit. Gron continues to question the human prisoners and hopes they will reveal the location of Kale's camp. They have not yet, but I think she will soon be desperate enough to use painful methods of persuasion.





GAME INFORMATION

The Iron Legacy is a cult devoted to the Mad Passion Dis and dedicated to reviving what it sees as the forgotten inheritance of every ork in Barsaive—namely, a return to the slavery that was once the lot of most orks throughout the Thera Empire. Members of the Iron Legacy see themselves as champions of Dis in that Passion's newly begun active opposition to Lochost. They serve their patron by attacking Lochost's favorite children, the orks of Barsaive.

The group's leader is Talyrin Kale, a middle-aged human who is an accomplished questor of Dis. The administrator of a kaer loyal to Thera, he was one of a handful who survived the kaer's destruction at the hands of gahad-crazed scorched. He fled the destruction and found his way to Jerris, where he met a small group devoted to Dis—a disorganized band of misfits with little cunning. He quickly took over the group and has since directed its efforts toward actions that benefit his Passion.

Attacking and enslaving orks wherever and whenever they can, the Iron Legacy currently concentrates most of its efforts on destroying the newly formed ork nation of Cara Fahd. If Talyrin has his way, the new nation will be broken before a year is out, its people bound as slaves in far-flung corners of the Empire. The Iron Legacy attacks orks in many ways. Its members raid any ork settlements they find for slaves, concentrating especially on bands of scorched coming to join Cara Fahd; by attacking the scorched, they hope to prevent the growth of the new nation's power and demoralize orks throughout Barsaive. They also destroy vital supplies of established villages wherever possible, burning crops and fouling water to inflict hunger and thirst on the inhabitants. They often fly scorched colors and dress like ork cavalry when attacking caravans, hoping to shift blame to Cara Fahd. Currently, Talyrin does not have the strength of numbers to attack Gron's main camp at Cara Fahd. Some of Talyrin's lieutenants have suggested more subtle plans, including manipulating discontented factions within the new nation against Krathis Gron, but Talyrin's blind hatred of orks precludes such approaches. He wants all orks dead or in chains.

The Iron Legacy is made up of several bands, each led by several questors of Dis, with the most senior member having a questor rank of at least 7. The Iron Legacy's primary camp is somewhere in the northern foothills of the Delaris Mountains, administered by Kale, a Seventh Circle troubadour and a Rank 11 questor of Dis. The bulk of the Iron Legacy's members aren't questors, however, just thugs

who enjoy beating innocent people or bitter bigots who hate orks in general. The following statistics represent a typical human cult member. There are no orks, obsidimen, trolls or windlings in the Iron Legacy, although it does contain elves, dwarfs and a handful of t'skrang along with its human members.

In addition to questors and soldiers, the ranks of the Iron Legacy also include several adepts, whom Kale uses for particularly dangerous or sensitive missions. Most of these adepts range from Fourth to Fifth Circle. A select group of them have recently formed a group pattern, Naming themselves the Linch Pins, to reflect their importance to Kale and the Iron Legacy. The Linch Pins are led by Umbarsis Tyrenien, a Sixth Circle elf cavalryman and Rank 4 questor of Dis.

Player characters who were involved in **Rise of the Ork Nation** (pp. 86-109, **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic**) and remained in the area to advise and assist Krathis Gron can quickly find themselves at odds with the Iron Legacy. If they proved themselves devoted to Gron's cause, the leader of the ork nation will undoubtedly ask them to investigate and put an end to this new threat.

IRON LEGACY MEMBER (HUMAN)

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

Initiative: 5

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 9

Damage: Varies by weapon

Number of Spells: NA

Spellcasting: NA

Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 8

Spell Defense: 6

Social Defense: 6

Armor: 6

Mystic Armor: 0

Knockdown: 6

Recovery Tests: 3

Death Rating: 36

Wound Threshold: 10

Unconsciousness Rating: 28

Legend Points: 60

Equipment: Leather armor, footman's shield, weapon (typically broadsword, short sword or short bow)

Loot: 1D6 silver pieces, 3D6 copper pieces each





For elven cult members, make the following changes: Dexterity 7, Toughness 5, Perception 5, Initiative 6, Spell Defense 7, Recovery Tests 2, Death Rating 34, Wound Threshold 9, Unconsciousness Rating 26.

For dwarf cult members, make the following changes: Toughness 7, Social Defense 5, Death Rating 39, Wound Threshold 11, Unconsciousness Rating 31.

NEW QUESTOR POWERS

Questors of Dis who are members of the Iron Legacy may also receive unique powers in addition to the powers listed in the **Earthdawn Companion**. These powers are available only to Iron Legacy questors who have reached the minimum questor rank listed in each power's description. Upon reaching the required minimum rank, the questor must learn the new power from a questor who already possesses it. This process takes at least forty hours of training and instruction, which must be completed within three weeks. Upon learning the new power, the questor calculates its step number using his full questor rank. Though ordinarily these powers are only available to questors of Dis who are members of the Iron Legacy, the gamemaster may make them available to other questors if he desires. Most Iron Legacy questors of Rank 7 or higher, including Talyrin Kale, possess all of these powers.

Shackle Will

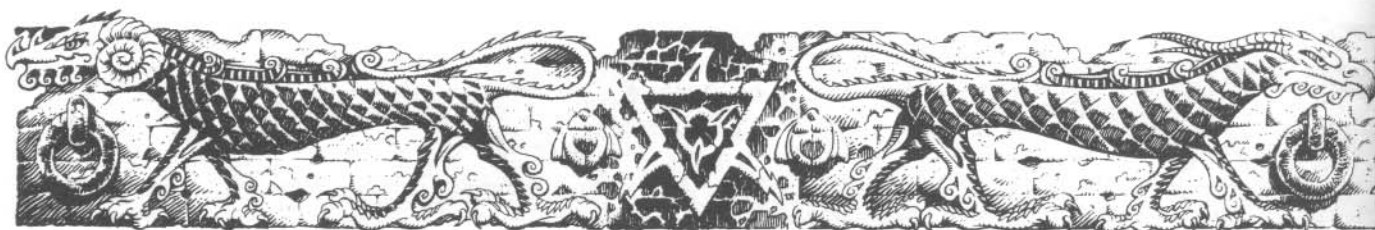
Step Number: Rank + Willpower

Minimum Rank: 7

The Shackle Will power enables a questor to enslave the mind of a single target, instilling in the character an overwhelming desire to please the questor with his obedience. Unlike the Living Death power (p. 96, **Earthdawn Companion**), which forces ceaseless physical activity but leaves the target's mind his own, Shackle Will makes the character a puppet, unable to think for himself and wanting only to obey the questor.

To use the power, the questor concentrates for 3 rounds and then touches the target character. If the questor takes any action or suffers any damage during the 3 rounds, he or she must begin again. Upon touching the target, the questor makes a Shackle Will Test against the target character's Spell Defense. On a Good or better success, the power takes effect. Each use of Shackle Will causes the questor to suffer Strain Points equal to the target's Willpower Step whether the test succeeds or fails. Each use lasts for a number of hours equal to the questor's rank.





Throughout the power's duration, the target cheerfully obeys any command the questor gives, including commands to harm friends and loved ones. The character can take no independent action; he or she can act only at the questor's explicit direction. If ordered to harm himself, the character may make a Willpower Test against a Difficulty Number equal to the questor's original Shackle Will Test result. If the character is ordered to kill himself, he gets a +5 step bonus to his Willpower for this test. If the Willpower Test succeeds, the character breaks free of Shackle Will and the questor suffers Strain Points equal to the number of hours remaining in the power's duration.

Strengthen Bonds

Step Number: Rank + Willpower

Minimum Rank: 2

The Strengthen Bonds power can make anything used to bind another Name-giver stronger and more resistant to damage. The questor touches the bonds to be strengthened, concentrates for 1 round and takes 1 Strain Point. He then makes a Strengthen Bonds Test against the Spell Defense of the bonds (usually 2) or against the character being restrained (if the bonds are in use), whichever is higher. If the test succeeds, the bonds become stronger for a number of days based on the success level. An Average success strengthens them for one day, a Good success two days, and so on. Increase the Difficulty Number for Strength Tests required to break the bonds by the questor's rank.

For purposes of breaking or cutting them with weapons, the bonds gain a Physical Armor Rating equal to the questor's rank and a Damage Rating equal to the Strengthen Bonds Test result. If the bonds already have these values, as might be the case with metal chains or shackles, increase the existing ratings by the above amounts. See **Barriers and Structures** (p. 209, ED) for an explanation of these ratings and how to use them in the game.

This power works on bonds sufficient for a single Name-giver; it must be used multiple times to improve more than one set of restraints. The improvements take effect only when the bonds are used to restrain a Name-giver; the questor may not use this power to strengthen rope or chains used for other purposes.

Adventure Idea: An Invitation

While the characters are resting in a village or town in southwest Barsaive, a t'skrang and an elf wearing gray cloaks over hardened leather armor approach them. They strike up an amiable conversation, talking about various

adventuring experiences. Gradually, they move toward the topic of the Name-giver races, feeling out the characters for anti-ork sentiment (this adventure works best with groups that have no orks). If the characters play along, the two mention that they are part of a group working to put orks "back in their place," and they try to recruit the characters. If the characters attack them, they defend themselves and then try to flee.

Characters who express interest in joining up are brought to a meeting with other recruits from nearby villages, where they meet other members of the Iron Legacy and are asked to swear a blood oath to the service of Dis. The Iron Legacy members attack any characters who refuse to keep their existence a secret.

Adventure Idea: Raid by Night!

The characters are sleeping in a village inn when shouts and screams awaken them and they find the homes of several ork villagers on fire. Armed men in gray hoods dance around the fires while several others capture the orks fleeing their burning homes and bind them in chains. The village, ill-prepared to deal with the situation, requires immediate assistance from the characters. Though the characters save some orks and the village eventually extinguishes the flames, several cultists escape with captives. The characters must track down the cultists and rescue the orks before they are sold into slavery.

Adventure Idea: Flying False Colors

While traveling toward Cara Fahd, the characters see columns of smoke rising beyond the next hill and find a band of scorcher attacking a caravan. Several wagons are aflame and numerous guards lie unmoving on the ground. From their position behind the scorcher, the characters can surprise the attackers and drive them off with a swift attack. When the battle is over, the characters discover that there are no orks among the fallen scorcher; there are only humans and elves dressed in scorcher garb and colors. The caravan master tells the characters that the attackers yelled, "Death to the enemies of Cara Fahd!" before attacking. Tracking those who fled, the characters find an Iron Legacy camp equipped with captured scorcher gear. Several orks are chained to thick posts in the center of the camp, awaiting delivery to slavers. The characters have a chance to free the chained orks and learn about the activities of the Iron Legacy, which may lead them into deeper involvement with it or with Cara Fahd.





THE HAND OF CORRUPTION

My lord Overgovernor,

The following report on the Hand of Corruption came to us from Falen D'mer, once a trusted agent in my employ. Her recent defection from Eternal Thera's service may cause you to doubt many of the observations contained herein, but I believe that the facts are accurate. We should take great care in dealing with the Hand of Corruption in the future, not only because Falen has likely told them a great deal about us, but also because her fate might befall other loyal Thera citizens if we allow the Hand's twisted philosophy to spread too far in Barsaive.

*Your servant,
General Ilfaralek*

Our Empire has dealt with the Hand of Corruption in the past and will no doubt do so in the future. The Hand has long desired the overthrow of all order and authority in the province of Barsaive, a goal that has made its members useful to Thera. They disrupt the affairs of Thera's enemies, sow trouble among Barsaive's rebellious kingdoms and cities and keep the various petty Barsaivian powers from building a united front against the restoration of Imperial rule. However, for many years the Hand's true motives and plans were unknown to Thera. Therefore, General Ilfaralek dispatched me to infiltrate the Hand and report my findings. (After all, no ally who keeps such deep secrets can be trusted.) My discoveries—most especially the Hand's knowledge of what the Scourge has done to our world—will doubtless shock and surprise many. But the truth must be told, so that the Work may be done all the more swiftly.

I ENTER THE HAND

I began my investigation with a faction of the Hand known as the Brokers. These members of the Hand are the ones best known to certain of the Empire's agents in Barsaive. The Brokers generally sabotage efforts to create safe communities in the province, efforts in which the Empire has supported them from time to time—especially in areas of Barsaive that are in dispute or could fall under the influence of the rebel Kingdom of Throal. Certain Brokers are responsible for the well-poisonings that have forced Throal to abandon some of its outermost mountain villages and settlements; others have been passing information regarding various trade caravans to raiders and bandits

so that they may attack the caravans and disrupt the trade that is Throal's lifeblood. Because of the Empire's occasional direct support of these activities, I had some inkling of who the Brokers were and where I might find them.

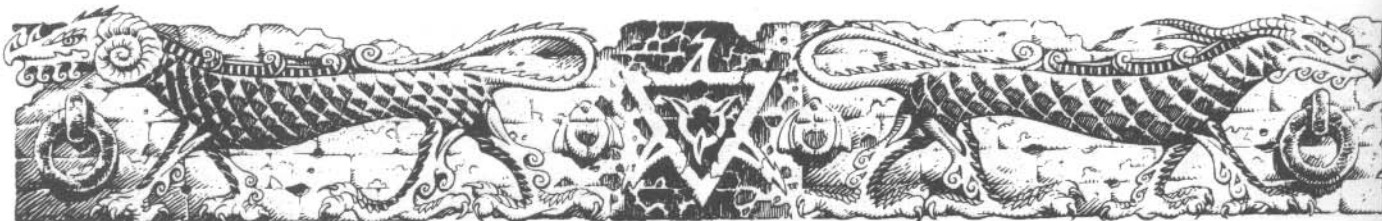
I went to Remilard Holden, a Bartertown merchant with whom I had worked in the past. Remilard is nothing like the image most Barsavians have of the Hand of Corruption members; portly and middle-aged, he is a modestly wealthy seller of fine rugs and other woven goods. Several years ago, Remilard's wife was driven mad by a Horror; she killed their two children before attempting to murder her husband with a rug-cutting knife. She was unsuccessful, but the local guardsmen were forced to kill her when she fought to avoid capture. The tragedy cast a shadow over Remilard's business and life, but his neighbors have only praise for the quiet nobility with which he has endured his sufferings. They know nothing of the truth about him.

Remilard once told me that the death of his family nearly killed him as well, until a certain someone came to him and showed him the truth of things. That truth brought Remilard Holden into the Hand of Corruption and made him willing to kill to further the Hand's goals. His customers and fellow citizens would doubtless call him Horror-tainted if they knew of certain things he has done—but I have seen no sign that Remilard has ever encountered a Horror, much less been touched by one.

Remilard knew me not as an agent of the Empire, but simply as a fellow merchant with the occasional need to cause trouble for my competitors. Over the years of our acquaintance he helped me willingly in exchange for the gold I offered, though at times he varied his price depending on how much the work amused him. I told him tales of my adventures as a soldier in my youth and he often commented that his friends might be interested in talking with me if I should ever need services that he could not provide. I had politely declined this oblique offer in the past, but now the time had come to presume upon it. I went to Remilard with a tale of scorcher raids wiping out my business. He gladly took me in and promised to arrange for me to speak with one of his "friends" immediately.

The "friend" was a woman who arrived at Remilard's shop the following day. Named Postrish, she was human and quite beautiful, with glossy black hair and dark, soulful





eyes. I estimated her age at forty years, but her face had a timeless quality to it. She wore a long, hooded gray cloak outdoors and carried all her possessions on her back. She listened kindly to my tale of woe, nodding knowingly throughout. When I had finished telling my story, she leaned close to me, and I felt as if her eyes were boring into my soul.

"You have begun to understand the truth—that life is struggle and nothing is permanent," she said. "You may yet become one of us. Do you desire that?"

Before I could reply, she raised a hand to silence me. "Do not answer lightly. Our work is not for dabblers. We are not a Throalic olzim where worshippers come once a week to give their pointless lives the illusion of meaning. If you join us, you will learn many truths that can be a heavy burden to bear."

I nodded and told her that I understood and would like to know more. She clasped my hand but did not smile.

"So be it," she replied.

THE BROKER'S APPRENTICE

Postrish told me that my skills as a warrior and traveler made me well suited for membership in the Hand. She believed I could learn much from traveling with her, so we left from Bartertown the very next day on a journey southward. We were heading toward the Mist Swamps, though I did not know our destination when we set out.

We went on foot, carrying all we needed to sustain ourselves. Postrish was a capable traveler and I found myself hard-pressed at times to keep pace with her. I was accustomed to traveling by horse or airship, not walking all day long. But Postrish was patient with me, saying, "This life will harden you over time, as it has me." I understand now what she meant, how certain things about the world beat and temper you as if you were a weapon being forged.

As we traveled, Postrish told me about herself and the work of the Hand. She revealed that she was a nether-mancer adept, and she had sensed I was an adept as well. That was why she had taken me under her wing, because an adept should not be left in the hands of a non-adept Broker like Remilard. "I am not as limited in my work as he," she said. "My talents give me additional responsibilities and duties in the Hand, as yours will. We adepts have a greater duty to fulfill the Work."

I asked Postrish about the things the Hand of Corruption did. Why did they tear down Barsaive's towns and villages? Were they enemies of Throal?

"We are no one's enemies," was her reply. "We do only what must be done. Think of all the things you have worked to achieve in your life.

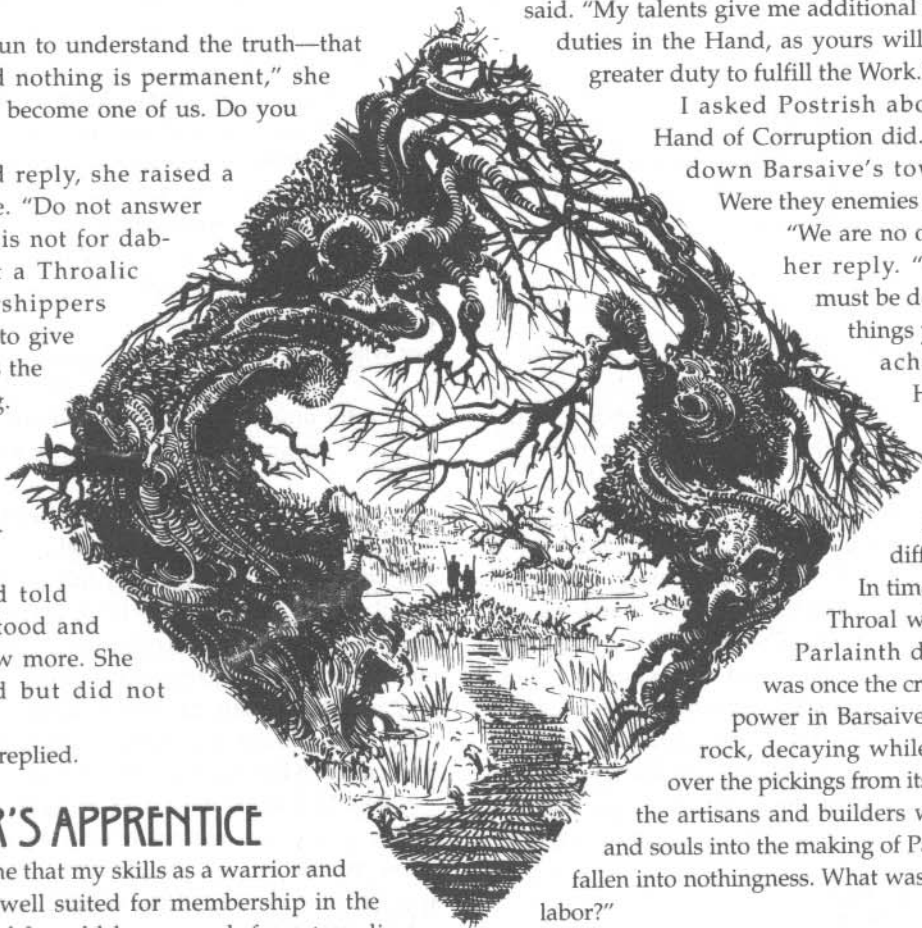
Have any of them lasted? Will any of Throal's achievements make one whit of difference in the world?

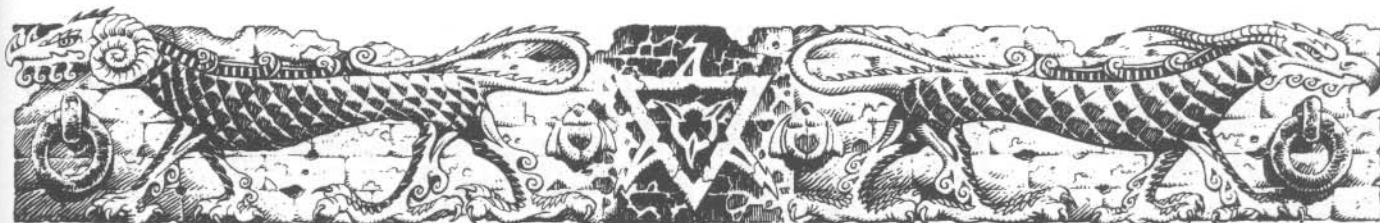
In time, the monuments of Throal will crumble to dust.

Parlaint did. That great city was once the crown jewel of Thera's power in Barsaive. Now it is a pile of rock, decaying while Name-givers fight over the pickings from its carcass. Think of all the artisans and builders who put their hearts and souls into the making of Parlaint ... and it has fallen into nothingness. What was the point of all their labor?"

When I did not respond, Postrish continued as if speaking to herself. "Think of life since the Scourge," she said. "All the feeble efforts by Name-givers to stave off the inevitable. We walled ourselves up in the ground to stay alive, then emerged into a shattered world. Foolish people believe that a few new buildings and new laws will heal the damage done, like pressing a dirty rag against a pumping wound to staunch the flow of blood. The world is corrupt, Falen. That is why we are the Hand of Corruption. We serve the needs of the world more than any king, scholar or questor can imagine."

Over the days of our journey, Postrish spoke often of the Hand's work and of how the damage done to the world





by the Horrors and the Scourge could not be healed through the naive efforts of the people of Barsaive or elsewhere. I could not grasp her full meaning at first; outsiders, as I was then, often find it difficult to accept the Hand's wisdom. To help me understand, Postrish tried to demonstrate the truth of the Hand to me.

We had stopped for the night in a village near the shore of Lake Pyros. It had recently come back under the sway of the t'skrang House K'tenshin (after some years of a freer existence), and many of the village folk opposed the renewed rule of the t'skrang warrior house. Postrish's magic earned us a room at the local inn, where we heard much resentful talk against the K'tenshin in the common room. Postrish suggested that we retire early; she spent the rest of the evening at the open window, gathering information about goings-on in the village from the jungle night flyers called by her spells.

The next morning, while breakfasting in the common room, we heard a commotion outside. We rushed out and saw dark smoke rising into the clear morning air from several houses that had been set aflame. Postrish showed no shock or dismay; she merely suggested that we take our leave. We gathered our belongings and left while the villagers fought to contain the blaze. The few comments I overheard as we departed blamed the Therans or House K'tenshin in one breath, savage jungle tribes or rebel forces in the next. When I asked Postrish about it, she smiled and said, "A few well-placed words and thoughts can accomplish a great deal."

I knew then why the Hand so easily stirs up trouble in Barsaive. Trouble is always brewing between this group or that group of these fractious barbarians. All it takes is a spark to ignite it into flame.

Our journey took us down the Serpent River and past the Badlands toward the Mist Swamps. Postrish arranged passage on a K'tenshin riverboat, with an ease that made me suspect she had done so many times before. While we floated past the Badlands, Postrish stood on the deck with me and looked out over the blasted earth.

"Some fools want to restore this place—to give it back the beauty it once had," she said. "They will fail, of course. They do not understand that there is no escape from what the Scourge has done. Every effort made to save a body so wracked with disease and wounds can only extend its suffering. Death must come to all things in time. Did you know that the Badlands are growing? Their corruption is spreading across the land, inexorably and inevitably. The only way out is through."

We left our K'tenshin boat and made our way afoot into the depths of the Mist Swamps. I had heard tales of this place, but nothing had quite prepared me for the reality of steaming muck and boiling pools and insects and the smell. Fortunately for my sanity, Postrish led the way through the Mist Swamps as if she had been through it many times before. She showed me hidden trails I would never have found on my own. The trails kept us relatively dry and safe from the swamp's many hazards as we walked deeper and deeper into the mists.

Then a dark shape loomed out of the fog ahead of us. As the thick white mists began to part, I saw a vast edifice of black, volcanic stone. Plumes of grey smoke weighted the air around it, mixing with the paler mists to create a perpetual shroud of darkness. The high walls loomed overhead, and I could feel countless eyes watching us from the walls and parapets—eyes that did not belong to any Name-giver.

"The Castle of Assassins," Postrish said. "Your new home."

THE CASTLE OF ASSASSINS

Life in the Castle was not as difficult as I imagined it would be. Though members of the Hand care little for physical comfort—why bother being comfortable in a life that doesn't matter?—they support themselves well. Treasures looted from various places destroyed by the Hand help to fund their great Work and provide them with the resources they need to bait traps for greedy Name-givers. I found my quarters in the Castle no less comfortable than the average barracks.

Postrish stayed at the Castle only long enough to re-provision herself and learn the latest intelligence from the other members of the Hand. She bade me farewell the next morning and asked me to remember what she had shown me on our journey. "It will serve you well as you work your way towards the truth," she said. I was not certain at the time whether or not she knew who I truly was.

At the Castle I met Nugh, the Master of Assassins. In my time I have fought bloodthirsty Vagothians and savage monsters, but none of them compare to this man. He terrified me utterly the moment I laid eyes on him; a sense of deadly purpose radiated from him as light does from the sun.

Nugh is a t'skrang, but to me he resembled an Indrisan cobra. His scales were a glossy green, so dark they were nearly black, and his golden eyes were cold and flat like a serpent's. Skin and muscle stretched tight over his bones, giving him a cadaverous look, but his whipcord muscles belied his speed and strength. He wore the plain black robes common to everyone at the Castle, but carried them as if he







were clad in the finest silken cloak. Though he bore no visible weapons, I knew he never went unarmed. His entire body was a weapon honed to killing sharpness. My warrior's senses acknowledged this in an instant. Here was a killer from whom I might learn something.

"Sssso," he whispered, his voice hissing like a snake's. "Postrish believes you can become one of us. You have the bearing of a warrior. Have you killed before?" I nodded and his golden eyes gleamed.

"A true warrior, then," he said, drawing the words out like a caress. "You know the glory of battle, the joy of seeing your enemy's hot blood gush forth around the edges of your blade—and the thrill of victory at knowing you will live to fight again." My blood stirred at his words as my warrior's heart felt the call of battle. Then his eyes darkened to bronze and he glared at me.

"Those teachings are lies!" he shouted, so furiously that I thought he would attack me. "There is no glory in battle, no victory in life. A warrior who believes in victory is weak, flawed, like the fools who believe that battle can turn the tide of the Scourge and snatch life from the jaws of death." He stepped closer and I could feel his hot breath on my face. He raised one clawed, bony hand toward my eye, but I did not flinch.

"Only by accepting death can you become a true warrior," he hissed. "We acknowledge that we are already dead, and so we fear nothing. The Scourge killed the world, but the kill was not a clean one. It is a lingering, wasting death. On the battlefield, you have seen comrades fall with wounds no potion or spell could staunch, wounds that condemned them to days of pain before Death's embrace took them. What did you do for them?" Nugh's golden eyes burned into me; I could not tear my gaze away from them.

"The stroke of mercy," I said. I had given it many times, for no true warrior withholds the comfort of Death from a comrade in pain.

"Yessss," Nugh said. "The stroke of mercy, offering sweet, peaceful Death in place of pain and corruption. That is what we offer the dying world—a final stroke to end the lingering agony of the Scourge. Mercy, final and everlasting."

That is the secret of the Hand's assassins. They embrace Death like a long-sought lover. They do not wish to be spared Death's touch; they long for it, and they wish to bring the peace of Death to everything in this corrupt, twisted world. As Nugh said, "If Death himself can die, then I will strike the killing blow when every other thing has been slain before turning my blade on myself. Only then will the world be clean."

During my training with the Assassins, I was privileged to observe certain rituals they perform with the remains of the slain. The Assassins draw upon the energies of blood to bring the power of their Passion into being—and that Passion is not one of the foolish Nine who pretend to embody a life beyond hope of reclamation, nor of the Mad Three who are symbols of the corruption that the Hand seeks to end. That Passion is not even Death, if Death truly is a Passion. The Assassins call upon the Passion of Oblivion, the force that can scour all life and thereby all corruption from this world and restore it to its beginning so that the cycle of existence may start anew.

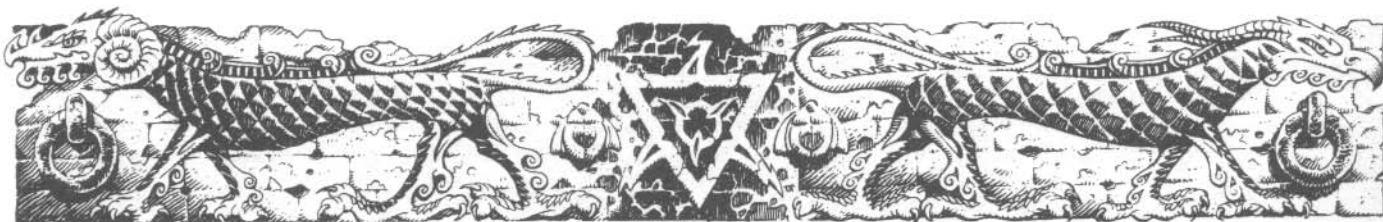
They use blood magic for this work, a complex ritual taught only to members of the Assassins. The ritual begins with the power of the killing, which fills the assassin's pattern. Then the killer cuts up the victim's body with the skill of a butcher, arranging the organs and the blood in patterns and signs depending on the placement of the stars above. The signs and symbols call the stars to witness the end of all that is, because the stars will be the witnesses to the world's end. The ritual sends forth the power of the victim's blood to move the stars from their places, thereby breaking the patterns of the Passions so that a new constellation will form. While performing the ritual, oblivion fills the assassin as water fills a vessel. The power of the kill makes time stop. An assassin can perform this rite anywhere, even under the very noses of his victim's friends, and will not be seen until the ritual is complete.

I learned much more within the walls of the Castle of Assassins: a hundred secret ways to bring the touch of Death, how to turn any common object into a weapon, how to brew poisons from plants that grow throughout Barsaive. The ways of killing I had learned as a soldier and a spy seemed crude and primitive when compared to the elegant death-dealing methods of the Hand. I did as Nugh told me and carried out the work of the Hand to prove my worth to them. The Name-givers I killed are better off for the gift of Death's peace. And one day I too will be at peace, when the Work is complete. Nugh has promised me so.

THE NIHILISTS

Once my assassin's training was complete, Nugh sent me on a journey to complete my initiation into the Hand of Corruption. I was to travel to a village in the heartland of Barsaive, a place no one would consider twice upon seeing it. There I would learn the ultimate truth that would make me ready to take my place in the Hand.





The village was a humble collection of wood, mud and straw huts, surrounded by fields tilled by somber-faced Name-givers in dark robes. A traveler passing through it would find it no different from a hundred such villages dotting the face of the province. I entered it and made my way to the house on its northern edge, as Nugh had told me. I knocked on the hut's wooden door and waited, my heart pounding in anticipation.

"Enter," a voice said from within.

The hut was dim and reeked of smoke and fragrant herbs that hung drying from the ceiling beams. I recognized many of the herbs I had learned to use hanging there; black mercy, elfbane, nightshade and others, as well as plants used for cooking and other humble tasks. Near a fire-pit in the middle of the hut sat an ancient elf, his skin weathered like old parchment. His gray hair fell in a long braid down his back, and his face had been ravaged by painful experience as the Scourge had savaged the Badlands. With a thin, gnarled hand he motioned for me to sit beside him.

"Welcome, child," he said. His voice was calm, firm, gentle. "I am Daron. I will show you the truth you have come to learn, but first you must be certain you wish to know it. The truth is not an easy thing, and you must be willing to accept it. Otherwise my words will be wasted."

I looked into Daron's dark eyes and saw something unexpected in their depths. Nugh had said that the greatest power of a warrior was to accept Death, and Daron's eyes told me that he had done so. Frail and withered old man though he was, I knew he was a greater warrior than I. And I wanted to know his secret.

"I am ready," I said.

He sat up a touch straighter, assuming a storyteller's posture. "The Horrors are not evil beings, as you and others have been taught. They are natural forces in this world and others, no more evil than the earthquake, the flood or the storm. There are cycles in this world, child. The Books of Harrow speak of a Scourge that came long ago, before history was recorded. That world was wiped away by their Scourge so that this world could come into being. Our Scourge would have destroyed this world, had it not been for the interference of your Theran masters."

I was struck speechless for a moment—he knew!—but the training of a skilled spy is not easily forgotten. "My masters? I don't—"

Daron raised a hand. Something dangerous flashed in his dark eyes, and I fell silent.

"The Therans, with their Rites of Protection and Passage, altered the natural course of events. The Scourge, which was meant to scour this world clean and make ready for the next, could not complete its work. Name-givers, protected by Theran magic, survived. Our world kept living. Instead of a quick and clean end so that the next world could begin, the Scourge inflicted a lingering, mortal wound. The Horrors tried to overcome the unnatural kaers, but the Therans were too clever.

"And so now the world is dead but does not know it, and we inhabit its rotting corpse. And fools without number try to infuse life back into it. We are taking life meant not for us, but for the next world. Who knows what damage to the cycle of nature has been done by this interference? If not for the supreme arrogance of the Theran Empire, the world would have been cleansed and born anew. Why do you think astral space still shows the scars of the Scourge? Why do places like the Badlands and the Wastes exist? Why are they spreading? Why have the Horrors not yet returned to the place from whence they came?

"These things are happening because the Scourge is not yet finished. Name-giver intervention has altered the natural way of things, and so Name-giver intervention must bring things back to their destined course. Otherwise, the world is doomed to an eternity of corruption. We must unravel the tapestry of this life so that the Universe can use the threads to weave another world, strong and pure, as it was meant to be."

This truth is the reason I have written this report. Blinded by the illusory glory of our Empire, we could not see what we were truly doing. We did not save the world with our magic—we destroyed it. I have seen what Thera's magic has wrought. But it is not too late. There may yet be hope of setting the natural cycle right again, of ending this





flawed and corrupted world and allowing the next to be born. The Empire must accept death; we must all act to correct this terrible error. Barsaive does not matter; reclaiming Imperial power does not matter. Only by joining the Hand in its great Work can Thera redeem itself.

I beg you to send this report to His Excellency the First Governor, so that the redemption may begin.

GAME INFORMATION

The Hand of Corruption is one of the most dangerous secret societies in Barsaive. The members of the Hand do not hunger for power, prestige or anything else that player characters might understand. Instead, they act on their belief that the world is irredeemably corrupted and must be destroyed so that the forces of Nature can begin the cycle of life anew. In their own way, members of the Hand believe that they are aiding the world by helping the process of its destruction along. They do not see themselves or their actions as evil; they are simply using every means available to bring the world to its inevitable end so that a new world can be born. Because each branch of the Hand works according to its own methods, player characters may encounter the Hand in many different ways.

BROKERS

The Brokers are the members of the Hand that player characters will most often encounter. These shadowy opponents operate from behind the scenes. Brokers rarely possess formidable combat abilities, and even the adepts among them usually practice non-combat-oriented Disciplines such as scout, troubadour or one of the magician Disciplines. Postrish, a senior Broker, is a Tenth Circle nethermancer.

Brokers avoid open conflict; instead, they sow seeds of dissent and trouble to help break down order and authority in Barsaive. A Broker might poison a water supply with a drug that causes Name-givers to commit mindless acts of violence or arrange the destruction of inspirational works of art. Brokers also act as spies, passing along information to cause the most damage. They may work with any of the other secret societies of Barsaive, including others in this book, if doing so causes chaos and carnage.

Player characters should encounter the plots of the Brokers gradually, discovering an increasingly complex web of connections between seemingly unrelated acts of violence and destruction. Only after much investigation and some attacks by Hand assassins should the characters begin to get a clear picture of their true enemy. Brokers close to being

exposed are likely to disappear into the night, forcing player characters to wait for their enemy to strike again before they can hope to track him or her.

ASSASSINS

The Assassins seek people out and kill them to further the group's goals. They act on the orders of the Brokers and the Nihilists, and also on their own. Often, Hand assassins work for hire with other groups in Barsaive. Efficient and deadly, they will take on any work that destabilizes the world, making them a valuable asset to the Therans and various other secret societies, as well as individuals working toward similar ends.

Members of the Assassins are almost always adepts; most follow the scout, thief and warrior Disciplines, though they can follow any Discipline. Assassins are always Fifth Circle at least, often higher. Nugh, the leader of the Assassins, is a Tenth Circle thief adept who "steals" lives rather than possessions. Assassins use any means at hand to accomplish their work, but they always try to kill according to the killing ritual mentioned in the preceding account. They particularly favor poisoned weapons (p. 208, ED).

The killing ritual is a form of death magic (p. 17, **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**). When enacting this ritual, the Assassin temporarily absorbs the life force of the slain Name-giver as he arranges the victim's blood and remains into a complex pattern dictated by the positions of the stars. While doing this, the Assassin gains a +10 Step bonus to all skills and talents related to stealth. This allows the Assassin to perform the ritual almost invisibly. Another character might walk through the same room without seeing the assassin at his macabre task. Once the ritual is complete, the stolen life force is supposedly channeled through the pattern of blood and body parts to bring the Assassins' Passion of Oblivion into being. As no record exists of this particular Passion, it is doubtful that the ritual has any real effect.

NIHILISTS

Initially, the Nihilists seem to be the most innocuous members of the group. In truth, however, they can be the most dangerous. Their fanatical belief in the world's irredeemable corruption inspires that same conviction in much of the rest of the Hand, and they also wreak their own slow destruction on many of the patterns that make up the world. Should player characters ever encounter one of the Nihilists' villages (a mercifully rare occurrence), the power of the Nihilists' concentrated beliefs will inflict actual damage on them.





The Nihilists pose little physical threat to most **Earthdawn** player characters, as few of them are adepts. However, the Nihilists do have a couple of special abilities. Much as the Lightbearers can draw upon the Great Pattern of the Universe, the Nihilists can draw upon the magical power of the world through their strong belief in the natural cycle and their conviction that the world's time is done. This ability allows Nihilists to overcome others with their fanaticism through conversation. By revealing the "truth" that the world is corrupt and must be destroyed, Nihilists can convince others to serve their cause. When using this ability, a Nihilist may spend any number of Karma Points on Interaction or Charisma Tests to try to persuade others to share his world view.

The most powerful Nihilists, like Daron, have an additional special ability. Their belief in the corruption of all things is so strong that they can use it to break down other Name-givers' patterns, in a manner similar to the nethermancer talent Soul Shatter (p. 39, **Earthdawn Companion**). This Nihilism power works like the Soul Shatter talent but is taught only among the Hand of Corruption and only to the most devoted, veteran Nihilists. Only those utterly committed to the Hand's beliefs and goals can gain the Nihilism ability. Ranks in it cost the same as ranks of a 13th Circle talent.

USING THE HAND OF CORRUPTION

Members of the Hand make useful enemies for **Earthdawn** campaigns. Anyone who supports the rebuilding of civilization, the rule of law or any other effort to save the **Earthdawn** world from sliding into total corruption or being destroyed—which includes most player characters—is impeding the Hand's great work and will be marked by them for elimination.

The gamemaster should take care not to let members of the Hand degenerate into faceless, mindless villains. The Hand does not consider itself evil; its goals are beyond petty considerations of right and wrong. All members of the Hand believe to some degree that what they are doing will bring about the naturally ordained destruction of a hopelessly tainted world. Members of the Hand might try to convince player characters of the rightness of their goals, as they did with Falen D'mer in the preceding fictional account. If persuasion fails, however, members of the Hand will likely try to kill the characters so that they cannot interfere with the Hand's mission.

Adventure Idea: Curse of the Lost Kaer

The player characters come upon a small village called Gattor in the hinterlands of Barsaive and find it in the midst of a crisis. Many of the villagers are fleeing from a terrible plague, a curse they claim was brought on by the foolish actions of one of their own. The rest of the villagers remain barricaded in their homes, suspicious of everyone. When the adepts arrive, a small mob in the middle of the village is preparing to burn an elderly dwarf woman at the stake. If the player characters intervene and save her, she is extremely grateful. Her Name is Wassalyn, and she is a traveled scholar (p. 112, **Denizens of Earthdawn Volume 2**). She came to Gattor in the company of a colleague and a small group of assistants from the Library of Throal in search of a nearby kaer said to have been the home of Drogar, a dwarf hero who died defending the kaer from a Horror during the Scourge.

The villagers believe the old kaer to be cursed by the lingering spirit of the slain Horror and have left it alone since settling in the area. When Wassalyn arrived and asked for permission to open it and explore, the people of Gattor wanted nothing to do with it, but they did not stop the dwarfs from going about their work. After a few days Wassalyn returned to the village to gather additional lore about the kaer. Not long thereafter, her colleague Thalin stumbled into the village, covered in burns and sores, raving that the scholars had unleashed something "dark and terrible" when they opened the kaer. All of the other workers at the kaer were dead; Thalin himself left the village to die in the wilderness soon after delivering his dire warning. The villagers panicked and were about to kill Wassalyn when the player characters arrived.

In fact, there is no curse. Thalin is an illusionist and a member of the Hand of Corruption posing as a traveled scholar. He and some other members of the Hand killed the workers at the kaer and made it appear as if the visiting dwarfs had unleashed a terrible curse to disrupt life in the village, turn the villagers against Throal and make sure that the inspirational deeds of Drogar were lost forever. If the player characters investigate, they find members of the Hand looting Kaer Gattor of whatever valuables they can and destroying the rest.

Thalin is a Seventh Circle illusionist who will use cunning and guile to trick the adepts, possibly posing as a prisoner of the Hand to win their trust. If the adepts defeat the Hand agents and show the people of Gattor the truth, Wassalyn manages to recover some of the lost history she came to obtain.





THE CROWNBREAKERS

Lord Spymaster Gendel,

The following journal entries come from Brianna Kyrenden, a dwarf operative who came into our service shortly before the end of the recent conflict with Throal. She was investigating several incidents of violence and rebellion in villages scattered to the north and east of Throal. As you will read, she has discovered a Cult of Raggok behind the disorder, a group of men and women who call themselves The Crownbreakers. These questors seem devoted to destroying what Raggok once built up; where Raggok was once the Passion of Rulership, these folk attack and discredit leaders and destroy the communities they lead.

—Dresden Malhaute, Senior Operative

Week 37, Day 3

I arrived in Triple Oak today and learned that I am near those I seek. I saw a wooden palisade surrounding the village, probably erected to defend against the scorchers that ride these plains below the Caucavic Mountains. No watchers stood on the walls, and the gate was unmanned. Despite the stillness, dust rose from inside the wall, hinting at a large gathering. As I approached the undefended gate, a roar of angry voices went up from within the village. The wall kept me from seeing whatever event had drawn the guards from their posts, so I decided to explore.

The houses near the wall were as abandoned as the palisade. Rakes and tools lay discarded; toys lay unused. Doors stood ajar, entrance curtains were pulled aside and shutters stood open. The place had the same eerie sense of recent abandonment I have felt in villages consumed by certain types of Horrors; the tension seemed a living thing. Another cry went up from deeper within the village, and I proceeded cautiously.

If not for the carnage that took my children during the conflict with Throal and turned my heart into the cold lump it is now, what I saw at the village's central green would have horrified me. A hundred or more villagers gathered in a ragged circle around a wagon. Four humans stood in the wagon's bed, raised above the level of the crowd. Three of them, two men and a woman, looked to be warriors, dressed in hardened leather and carrying swords. The fourth was an old man with stringy gray hair and a wispy white beard; his face was stark with terror as two of the warriors held his arms firmly behind his back.

The third warrior wore his beard woven in the twin braids of the dwarf style, and thick crusts of blood and gore covered his hair and the broadsword he held aloft in his right hand. He cried out something about destroying the final betrayer, then grabbed the old man's hair in his left hand. The old man let out a thin, pitiful scream as the broadsword fell and bit deeply into his neck. Blood sprayed on the humans in the wagon and those closest to the spectacle, feeding the crowd's frenzy.

The executioner severed the old man's head with three more quick swings, then turned to the crowd and held up the dripping head. The villagers responded with a terrible animal cry of fury like the roars I had heard as I approached the accursed village. The warrior impaled the head on the point of a spear set in the earth near the wagon, and it was then that I noticed five other heads similarly arrayed. When I saw that all the heads were gray of hair, I suddenly realized that the crowd was cheering the execution of the village elders.

The villagers looked like other simple folk I have seen. The men wore homespun and leather, while the women clothed themselves in simple dresses and clutched their children. But as they celebrated the gruesome spectacle before them, I knew these ordinary people had been transformed by some bestial force. For a few moments, I thought some Horror had twisted these folk with its foul touch, and I nearly left.

But as I hesitated, a woman noticed me, nudging a man beside her and pointing me out. He tapped the shoulders of two nearby village men and they turned toward me, looking me over as they approached. I'd seen people turn ugly with strangers before, and the atmosphere in the village certainly wasn't hospitable. I knew I'd never outrun them, so I braced myself for a fight, whispering a prayer to Thystonius to calm my nerves.

The humans stopped ten feet away and held up their hands in a gesture of peace. The first villager told me I would come to no harm so long as I had no dealings with Horrors or scorchers. He led me to the village's tavern where I could prove myself innocent of such activities. The crowd broke up as we walked, but I could see the blood-spattered executioners speaking to a group of other warriors who had been scattered through the crowd. Some village boys, clearly enamored with the weapons and armor, lingered to talk with them. I asked about the warriors, but my escort refused to answer until I'd proven myself untainted.





In the tavern, I pulled colored cord from my pack; strangers frequently demand that I prove myself untainted, so I always keep my supplies well stocked. Half an hour later, I held a braided cord suitable for a shoulder strap or a belt. The colored patterns satisfied my escorts, who had stood by drinking ale as I worked. They asked me numerous questions about scorchers. Either my apparent ignorance or my distant accent convinced them I was not a scorch agent, whereupon they relented and allowed me to buy a drink.

When I asked about the executions, they explained that the elders had been conspiring with scorchers, planning to open the village gates to a scorch band in exchange for half the village's valuables. This was ludicrous, because the elders would surely have died in such a scenario—scorchers don't share their loot. That these half-wits believed such a story shows how poorly governed they are. It's amazing to think such people would willingly choose to be without Thera's guidance, but that is just further proof of their stupidity.

When I asked how the village came by their information, my escort, who proved to be the tavernkeep, spoke of a stranger called Cantrell, an elf who spied upon a meeting between the elders and the scorchers. This Cantrell brought the information to Triple Oak, where he secretly met with nearly everyone in the village and told the story. Unanimously, the villagers decided to kill the elders for their betrayal, a decision they reached only hours before I arrived.

When I asked to meet Cantrell, my escort stared at me for several moments, trying to gauge my intent. I must have passed his scrutiny, as he agreed to introduce me to Cantrell when the elf returned in a few days' time. Apparently, Cantrell left moments after the villagers began to act against the elders.

My escort's story makes me believe this elf is connected to the violence and rebellion I have been sent to investigate. In a short time, he turned the villagers against leaders who had cared for them for years. Yes, I had found what I sought.

Week 37, Day 5

The warriors who executed the village elders are in charge. Their leader, a human Named Gurdrim, is now learning the difficulties of administering even so small a population. He keeps his small militia tightly organized and tries to order the village in the same way, demanding that people be in their homes by sunset and remain there, to prevent any deals with scorchers. For now, the villagers obey his commands, but that likely won't last long.

Some farmers from outlying homes who did not witness the executions came to the village. They were astonished at the news and asked many questions, apparently

skeptical about the story about the elders' duplicity. Several villagers loudly supported Cantrell's claims, but some looked troubled. The farmers left, muttering about Horrors and corruption.

Week 38, Day 2

Uncertainty pervades Triple Oak. I hear whispered questions about the wisdom of executing the elders on the strength of one man's story. The first individuals who openly voiced such concerns were questioned at length in Gurdrim's Hall, the re-Named building where the elders formerly met to discuss village business. All of the questioned villagers emerged fearful and nervous; one had several spreading bruises across his face. Others are now careful to whisper their conjectures.

A few people stare at me as I sit in the tavern. The questions are obvious, but so is the fear.

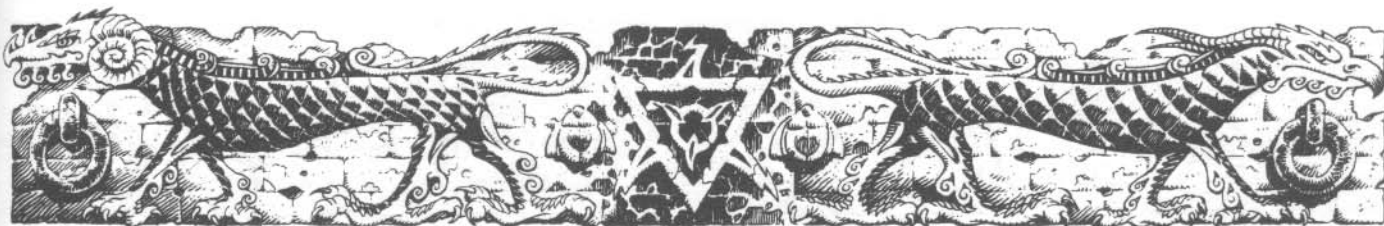
Week 38, Day 3

Cantrell arrived this morning. Word spread quickly, and a question-shouting crowd gathered at the gate. Gurdrim and five warriors met him and waved the villagers away, leading Cantrell to the Hall for private conversation. Many folk waited outside to hear what would come of the meeting, and guardsmen forcibly prevented villagers from eavesdropping. After two hours, Gurdrim and Cantrell emerged and announced that Cantrell had evidence to support his story. Despite shouted demands, Gurdrim insisted that the evidence was best kept secret. Gurdrim's words evoked disturbed mutters, and the guards forced the villagers to disperse.

Eventually, the tavernkeep brought Cantrell to the tavern and introduced us. Cantrell asked for a private place in which to talk, and the tavernkeep showed us to a small basement room.

We talked for about an hour. I told him how a band of riders flying Throalic colors wiped out my village (just one of many Throalic atrocities leading up to the Incident at Claw Ridge). Since that day I've wanted to hurt Barsaive, especially Throal. If Barsaive had submitted to rightful Theran rule, there would have been no war and my children would be alive. I want to take every drop of my dead children's blood out of the hide of Barsaive. It was obvious that Cantrell had whipped Triple Oak into a murderous frenzy, so it seemed natural he could help me. He considered my story for several minutes, then offered to introduce me to some people he knew. I had been ready to leave since I arrived, and moments later we left Triple Oak together.





I am now camped in the wild several hours west of Triple Oak, en route to Cantrell's small base of operations. This trip should take two to three days, if we don't run into scorchers or bad weather. Cantrell is not very talkative, telling me I'll get answers when we arrive at our destination. He is tall and pretty like any elf, but his eyes have an intensity that is compelling and almost frightening. With everything he says and does, he moves with the absolute certainty that he is right.

Week 38, Day 5

This afternoon we ran into advance scouts from a scorcher band. The three orks were mounted and heavily armed, so two people afoot seemed little threat. They saw us first, so hiding was no option. I drew my sword and dropped into the tall grass, hoping it would screen me from the orks so that I might strike with surprise and take at least one mount from under its rider. The drumming of the horses' hooves nearly drowned out Cantrell, but I heard him invoking Raggok. How ironic. Vengeance for my dead children is all that moves me most days, and I meet a questor of the Passion of Vengeance himself. They say the Passions work in strange ways.

As the orks closed, Cantrell chanted more loudly, calling upon Raggok again. He grew taller, and his eyes lit up with angry fire. Just before the orks struck, he pointed at one of them. The ork grabbed his chest and fell off his charging horse, which veered away, leaving only two.

Both attacked Cantrell. One missed, but the other's axe struck the elf squarely on the shoulder. Cantrell screamed, though his leather armor turned some of the blow and probably saved his arm. The ork bellowed in pain and dropped the axe, cradling a wounded and bleeding arm. It looked like he had suffered exactly the same wound he'd delivered to Cantrell. I was so surprised I nearly forgot to attack, but I recovered just in time to gut the last ork's horse as he passed.

The first pass shook the orks' resolve, and the battle was over quickly. I bandaged Cantrell's arm and took the orks' few valuables. We left the horses so as not to attract attention from scorchers and continued due west.

While setting up camp, I mentioned I had heard Cantrell invoke Raggok. After a pause, he told me of a group Named the Crownbreakers, and said he was taking me to meet them. Some are questors of Raggok, he said. They work to destroy authority in any form and promote chaos and anarchy. I told him that sounded like just the thing for me, and he laughed.

Week 39, Day 1

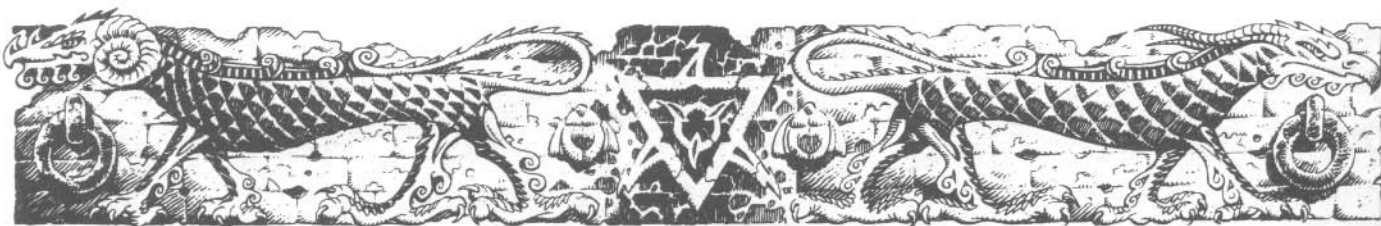
While breaking camp, I offered Cantrell advice about Triple Oak, mentioning the growing uncertainty I had seen. The villagers no longer quite believed his story, and they weren't happy with Gurdrim, either. If Cantrell turned the villagers against the elders in the first place, turning them against Gurdrim would be as easy as falling off a horse. Gurdrim and his men would resist, so there would naturally be a few deaths. In the villagers' anger at Gurdrim's supposed betrayal, it probably wouldn't occur to them that killing the militia would leave them virtually helpless, and Triple Oak might well be wiped out by the next band of scorchers to ride by. Given the little I knew about Cantrell's group, it seemed something they would do.

Cantrell said nothing at first, but he stopped and turned around a moment later. He smiled slightly as he told me I'd just proposed what he already planned. He apparently thought that a good thing, saying something about needing someone who could think for herself.

Three hours later, we arrived at Cantrell's camp. In some rocky foothills on the northeast side of the Throat Mountains, we entered a narrow gully strewn with boulders. Cantrell picked up a rock and tapped on a large boulder with a narrow vein of quartz running through its center. With a faint squeal of hidden hinges, the boulder swung out from the hillside, revealing a low, dark passage and the glint of crossbows held by an ork and a human.

Cantrell assured the two guards that everything was in order, then gave them my Name. The quartz in the boulder allowed a clear view of the entire gully, and small chambers in the passage gave the guards comfortable seats. Metal rings hung from the ceiling in several places, attached to thick, short ropes. I'm no expert, but they looked deliberately rigged to collapse. After several sharp twists and turns, we reached a low-ceilinged chamber that served as a crossroads, with three other openings leading away from it. Cantrell gave me a quick tour, showing me storage chambers, a small aviary for messenger birds and a large common sleeping chamber. He pointed out tunnels leading to two other entrances like the one I'd used, showed me the eating area and then brought me to the "meeting hall," a narrow chamber with a few scattered benches and a large map on one wall. A female elf was making notes on the map as we entered, and Cantrell introduced her as Thyresia. He instructed her to acquaint me with daily life in the Crownbreakers, get me a pallet and put me to work. A short time later, I had a bed in the sleeping chamber and was guarding one of the entrances.





Week 39, Day 3

This group of the Crownbreakers numbers eighteen, including myself. Most are as intelligent as the stone I sit upon and simply serve as guards and muscle. Thyresia is Cantrell's second. She keeps track of the group's information and helps formulate plans and schemes. Two others, a dwarf Named Tavros and an ork Named Kugtar, serve as scouts and infiltrators. An eccentric human woman Named Elwhin cares for the messenger birds; she has a touch of magical talent when dealing with them, but any mention of it makes her hysterically upset. The others told me she's sensitive about not being a beastmaster adept.

Daily routine consists of a shift of guard duty at an entrance, preparing meals, cleaning up and disposing of garbage. When Cantrell or Thyresia requires muscle, they pick a few people and leave a few to guard the place. An attack on these caves during one of those times would be most effective.

I've guarded this entrance for two days. I managed to get a look outside shortly after sundown. The Throal Mountains are on the right, meaning this entrance faces south. The constellation Mynbruje was just visible on the northwest horizon, and a thin spire of red rock rises above the gully. I can give no better landmarks for this site, save that it is due west of Triple Oak, but I could easily lead others here if necessary.

Week 39, Day 4

Today someone went through my possessions. The spy re-packed them neatly, but I noticed the disturbance nonetheless. Whoever did it found little of interest, I'm sure. I keep these entries on my person, awaiting an opportunity to send them, and I have scribbled a second set of passages describing a desire to be accepted by these Crownbreakers. Whoever went through my things would have found only those pages and should know nothing of my connection to Thera.

Cantrell told me tonight that we will put my plan into action in Triple Oak. We leave first thing in the morning.

Week 40, Day 5

Our work in Triple Oak was easier than I expected. The villagers had concluded that dark magic had befuddled them and driven them to kill their elders. Some thought Gurdrim a tool of some Horror who waited to destroy them all. They whispered their stories while huddling in dark corners, however; three bodies hanging from a gallows provided mute testament to the consequences of questioning Gurdrim openly. Things might have come to a head even if we hadn't come to

push the villagers into action. The place was like a kernel of True Fire waiting for the touch of True Air.

The first few villagers suspected us of being in league with Gurdrim, but our tales of how he had bent Cantrell to his evil will were readily accepted. Cantrell's words had a dark magic, transforming Gurdrim's every word and action into uncontrovertible evidence of a deliberate betrayal. It took most of the night to reach everyone, but at dawn a mob stormed Gurdrim's Hall and dragged him screaming from his bed. The militia tried to defend him and themselves, but ten armed men can do little against a raging mob, even if the mob is largely unarmed and unskilled. Some thirty villagers died, but the remainder danced a vicious dance of victory around a bonfire on the village green.

As we left, I felt a momentary twinge of regret at what I had done. Images of my children came unbidden to my mind, however, and I felt my rage at Throal and Barsaive burn with newfound strength.

Week 42, Day 2

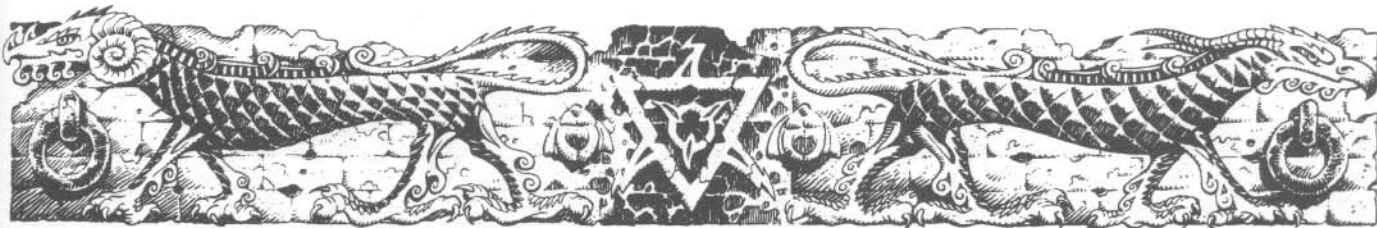
My involvement in the Triple Oak affair earned me the right to scheme and plan with Cantrell and the others. Thyresia's map is a detailed rendering of the area, showing numerous villages in the foothills, on the lower slopes of the mountains and in the plains to the east. She tries to track the scorcher bands as well, but Kugtar is only one ork and can't keep tabs on them all.

We gathered all of the "thinkers" in this group together today. I noticed they all have the same intensity I saw in Cantrell. They are all questors of Raggok, secure in the knowledge that they enact their Passion's will. Such certainty and zeal is contagious.

Our plans move slowly, however, because we are few. Other chapters are scattered along the northeast face of the Throal Mountains, with a few in the west. We deal in blood and death for those who lead settlements in our area. We have plans to turn villages against their leaders, much like in Triple Oak. We have other plans to kill some leaders in their sleep, relying on the resultant chaos and uncertainty to weaken those settlements. I suggested we push our efforts east to the Serpent River and strike at t'skrang villages, working against House Syrtis. Cantrell applauded my ambition but pointed out that such work would be quite difficult, considering our lack of t'skrang agents.

I learned today that the Crownbreakers have a secret chapter in Bartertown, where our leader, a dwarf Named Endaren Oakhaft, works to create chaos and confusion in that town and the cities of Throal itself. The death of Varulus





III (was there a more satisfying day?) and the tumultuous rule of Neden (curse the day he escaped his Theran captors) have made Oakhaft's work much easier.

Week 43, Day 4

A band of Throalic soldiers entered the plains today looking for scorcher bands in the area, probably in answer to complaints from villages in the foothills. They were ill-prepared to act once their captain was found dead in his bed, however, and the scorchers we'd told of their arrival made short work of them. During the scorchers' celebration, we easily killed their chieftain. The last I saw of the scorchers, they were breaking up into smaller factions, each supporting a different candidate to take over command of the band. Maybe they will kill themselves trying to sort it all out.

Week 45, Day 1

We have received word from Oakhaft himself! He ordered Cantrell to join him in Bartertown to put the next stage of his grand plan into action. Cantrell has asked me to join him. My passion for the destruction of Throal will make me very useful to Oakhaft, and I have proven myself trustworthy. Cantrell thinks that Oakhaft might even invite me to become a questor of Raggok. Though I'd never considered becoming a questor before, the prospect of having the power of Raggok at my command was definitely enticing.

Week 48, Day 4

Our travel through the Throal Mountains was slow and difficult. Bad weather and distrustful villagers made much of the journey unpleasant, and I found myself growing more agitated and angry as we approached the heart of the kingdom that took my family from me. Cantrell warned me about my demeanor; we don't want to attract the attention of a Throalic patrol. I must control my anger, he said, or I will never achieve my vengeance. Raggok whispers of it in my sleep, and his voice grows stronger each night.

Cantrell says that in Throal there are others outside our cult that serve Raggok, though they do so in a different way. He mentioned that Oakhaft's plan involves using them; they have apparently managed to secure some influence. These other servants of the Vengeful One do not know we live and work beside them.

I met Oakhaft for the briefest moment. He is a dwarf of handsome bearing, his beard heavily shot with gray. His eyes burn with the zealous fire of the righteous, and when his gaze swept across me, I could hear the voice of Raggok whispering from everywhere. The simultaneous pain and

joy was intoxicating, and before I knew it, he had greeted me and moved on. Cantrell tells me that I am to meet privately with Oakhaft tomorrow.

This final page was our last communication from Brianna. We have had no further word from her of this private meeting and know nothing of her current status. The spiritflower attuned to her still lives, so she has not died at the hands of the Crownbreakers. I have dispatched instructions to other operatives in the area, giving orders to find Brianna and learn the reason for her silence. You will have this information within moments of its availability.

Given the tone of her last few messages, I am more concerned that Brianna has been swayed to join the Crownbreakers in heart and mind. If this is true, her usefulness and trustworthiness are most certainly doubtful, and I fear we've lost a competent operative to the lure of the Passion of Vengeance.

At present, these Crownbreakers limit their activities to northeast Barsaive. Their focus on Throal is obviously of value to Thera, and we might consider aiding them covertly in some way. If they can capitalize on the unsteady situation in the dwarf kingdom, they might weaken Throal enough to seriously diminish its influence over the other peoples of Barsaive and facilitate the reconquest of the province. Of course, after regaining firm control of these lands, I suspect we would have to destroy the Crownbreakers, as they would undoubtedly find the Empire a tempting target.

—Dresden Malhaute

GAME INFORMATION

The Crownbreakers are a cult devoted to the Mad Passion Raggok. Led by Endaren Oakhaft, an aging dwarf slightly more than 100 years old, these cultists devote themselves to deposing rulers of any type—from kings to mayors to leaders of mercenary bands. These cultists weaken and destroy communities by discrediting and killing the leaders. They commonly engage in acts of violence but are capable of subtle, long-range schemes as well. Their favorite tactic is to foment rebellion, especially when the common folk are ill-equipped or unprepared for it. Even if the rebellion fails, the death and anguish that result appease Raggok's nature.

Before the Scourge, Raggok was known as Rashomon, the Passion of Rulership. Though some called him the King's Passion, his questors supported those in any position of leadership. Rashomon's ideals included wise rulership, responsibility for the ruled and the importance of law. Those who ruled were due the respect of their subjects, but only if





they respected their subjects in turn. When Rashomon went insane and became Raggok, many of his questors went insane as well.

Oakhaft descends from one such questor of Rashomon who went mad and slaughtered several dozen kaer-dwellers before being brought down. The madness touched this ancestor's children in a more subtle way, and they secretly devoted themselves to the service of Raggok throughout the centuries of the Scourge. Raised from the cradle with the knowledge that he would serve Raggok, Oakhaft has devoted himself to the Mad Passion with great fervor.

Oakhaft spent decades building the Crownbreakers, recruiting questors and other sympathetic souls to his cause. He has always felt something pulling him toward the Kingdom of Throal, and the dwarf kingdom has become the main target of Oakhaft and the Crownbreakers' efforts. The Crownbreakers hope to weaken Throal by attacking the villages and small towns that exist in and around the mountains. By drawing some of the military away from Throal and creating more difficulties for Neden, they hope to foment imbalance and weakness at the higher levels of the Throalic government, so that they may strike at the kingdom itself and plunge Throal into anarchy. Recent developments in Throal have made this easier, and the Crownbreakers are putting into action a plan that they hope will give them influence among Throal's noble houses. The Crownbreakers have considered attacking the t'skrang of House Syrtis in much the same manner, but do not yet have sufficient manpower for the undertaking.

From his headquarters in Bartertown, Oakhaft does his best to coordinate the activities of more than a dozen small chapters scattered throughout the Throal Mountains. He relies on well-trusted questors that he personally trained to run each chapter, and he communicates with them via messenger birds and trusted couriers. He has recently become aware of the Hive of Ashes (p. 107, **Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom**), though not of Crarites, and hopes to make use of group to further his own plans. He knows that the Hive has established influence over several merchants in the Grand Bazaar and hopes to use that to build influence with one or more of Throal's noble houses. He has identified House Ueraven as a likely candidate, because that house holds no love for the ruler of Throal. Oakhaft wants to keep his group separate from the Hive of Ashes, however, so that the destruction of one of Raggok's cults in Throal will not completely destroy the Passion's influence in Throal.

Oakhaft is not an adept himself but is a Rank 12 questor of Raggok. Other questors that serve him directly in Bartertown range in questor rank from 1-6, though no more than five such questors are usually in Bartertown with him at any time. Other Name-givers in service to Raggok work with Oakhaft as well. These Name-givers range in number from 3 to 6 (their total strength fluctuates as tasks take some of them away from Bartertown). A few of Oakhaft's people are adepts, though only few of these are above Fifth Circle. Of these adepts, three are also questors of Ranks 3-5. These adepts are Jimall, a Fourth Circle elven wizard; Kurlun, a Fifth Circle human archer; and T'rishtall, a Fourth Circle





t'skrang swordmaster. The combination of these adepts' talents and questor powers makes them possibly the most dangerous members of the Crownbreakers. Oakhaft keeps a careful eye on them but is confident that his vastly superior questor powers could overcome them if such action became necessary. The questors in charge of the various chapters have questor ranks ranging from 6-9, and the chapters usually have 1-3 additional questors whose ranks range from 1-5.

NEW QUESTOR POWERS

Questors of Raggok who are members of the Crownbreakers may also receive a number of unique powers in addition to the powers listed in the **Earthdawn Companion**. Each power is available only to Crownbreaker questors who have reached the specified minimum questor rank listed in the power's description. On reaching the required minimum rank, the questor must learn the new power from a questor who already possesses the power; the learning process takes at least 40 hours of training and instruction, which must be completed within a three-week period. On learning the new power, the questor calculates the power's Step Number using his full questor rank. Ordinarily, these powers are only available to questors of Raggok who are members of the Crownbreakers, but the gamemaster may make these powers available to other questors if he so desires. Most of the Crownbreakers' questors of Rank 6 or higher (including Oakhaft) possess all of these powers.

Aura of Intimidation

Step Number: Rank + Charisma

Minimum Rank: 5

This ability enables a questor to cloak himself in the majesty and power of Raggok and make his presence more commanding and impressive. This change of demeanor allows a questor to dominate and cow potential opponents, filling them with fear of the questor's might. The questor seems to grow taller and darker of aspect. His hair blows in an unseen wind and his voice rings with potent authority. Barely restrained fury colors his face and a dark angry light fills his eyes. He becomes a vessel containing a small part of the Passion's spirit, a state that allows him to transcend mere mortal anger.

Each use of this power requires an Action and lasts for a number of rounds equal to the questor's rank. Once each round, the questor may select a target to intimidate, making threats and the like as appropriate. The questor makes an

Aura of Intimidation Test against the target's Social Defense. If the test succeeds, the Passion-inspired anger behind the threats unnerves the target for the duration of the power. An Average success makes the target hesitant and unsure of himself, and the target receives a -2 step penalty to all tests. On a Good success, increase the step penalty to -5. An Excellent success fills the target with fear and forces him to flee, while an Extraordinary success fills the target with such dread that he can do nothing but stand by helplessly.

At any time, an affected target may make a Willpower Test against the questor's test result to resist the power's effect. (Willpower Tests made to resist the Aura of Intimidation do not receive the step penalty imposed by the power.) Each such attempt requires an Action and causes the target to suffer 1 Strain Point. An Average success allows the target to regain some control of himself and lowers the effective success of the power by one level, reducing the severity of the effect. Each success level beyond Average reduces the effect by another level, until the target accumulates enough success levels—using multiple Willpower Tests, if necessary—to completely overcome the power's effects. Characters may substitute Willforce for Willpower in these tests, and any talent that increases a character's Willpower for the purpose of resisting fear effects may be used as well.

Using the Aura of Intimidation carries a measure of risk for a questor, because a failed use of the power intimidates the questor attempting to use the power. In this case, the questor receives a -1 step penalty on all further actions against the target for a day. If the Aura of Intimidation Test produces a Poor success, the target is so filled with disdain that he gains +1 step bonus to all actions directed against the questor and is immune to further uses of the power for one day.

Heartwist

Step Number: Rank + Charisma

Minimum Rank: 6

The Heartwist power is a variant of the Inspire Rage and Painful Memory powers (p. 103, **Earthdawn Companion**), combining elements of both in a more enduring form. By filling the target's mind with imagined slights and tales of deception and betrayal, the questor evokes intense jealousy and anger and turns the target against a friend or a lover. This power inspires emotions that are completely irrational and destructive; victims sometimes go into a blind, murderous rage at the imagined treachery.





The questor must spend three minutes speaking with the target, adopting the role of a concerned friend revealing the horrible truth about a person the target trusts and even loves. The questor then makes a Heartwist Test against the target's Social Defense. If the test succeeds, the target believes the questor's lies and becomes consumed with anger and jealousy directed against the person of whom the questor spoke. The target remains angry for a number of days equal to the questor's rank. If presented with convincing evidence of the questor's duplicity, the target may attempt a Willpower Test against a Difficulty Number equal to the original Heartwist Test result; success means the target overcomes the power's effect and realizes that he has been deceived.

Retribution's Bite

Step Number: Rank + Perception

Minimum Rank: 3

The Retribution's Bite power enables questors of Raggok to strike back magically at those who harm them. The questor must spend one entire round calling upon the Name of Raggok, entreating the Passion to grant him vengeance against any who strike at him. Once invoked, the power lasts for a number of rounds equal to the questor's rank. While the power is active, the questor makes a Retribution's Bite Test against the Spell Defense of any character who damages the questor with an attack or spell. If the test succeeds, the attacker feels an intense wave of pain and suffers damage equal to that suffered by the questor. Mystic Armor protects against this damage, and the damage may cause a Wound. The target suffers the same damage inflicted on the questor; the target does not suffer any damage absorbed by armor the questor is wearing.

In addition to the damage, the target receives cuts, bruises and wounds identical to those inflicted on the questor.

This power functions only against Name-givers and continues to function even while the questor is unconscious. If the questor dies, the final blow or spell that killed him is visited upon the attacker, but any further attacks on the questor's body are not. This power has no effect on attacks that do not cause actual damage (e.g., a grapple attack or a spell with a non-damage effect).

Adventure Idea: Smoke on the Horizon

While making their way across the plains to the east of the Throal Mountains, the characters see a thick column of smoke rising from a small village in the distance. They encounter a small band of riders coming from the direction

of the village. If asked, the riders say that they were making their way toward the village when the smoke began, so they rode around it and continued their journey.

If the characters investigate, they find many buildings in smoking ruins. People lie dead and wounded everywhere, and a handful of swordsmen hold off five times their number of Name-givers armed with pitchforks, frying pans and candlesticks. The characters may aid either side or try to negotiate a peace.

Afterward, the characters learn that the conflict began when some visitors to town overheard the militia plotting to kill everyone in their sleep, take all of their valuables and flee in the night. The descriptions of the visitors match the riders whom the characters met earlier. If the characters decide to track down the riders to find out why they attacked the village and lied to the characters, they eventually confront a chapter of Oakhaft's Crownbreakers, which may lead them into further involvement and conflict with other chapters of the cult and even with Oakhaft himself.

Adventure Idea: Guard Trouble

While visiting Throal, the characters hear whispers of dissatisfaction and displeasure among the citizens. Dwarfs on street corners talk about a recent decline in the number of guardsmen patrolling the halls and the increased unease among many citizens in the poorer sections of the city. Then a minor noble responsible for the city guard becomes seriously ill, and the characters are hired to investigate the cause.

After several tense nights of searching and stalking, the characters find three individuals poisoning the city guard's food supply with small doses of a substance that causes illness. If the characters capture these individuals, they admit only that they were making the guards sick to make the streets less safe. On the night that the characters discover the poisoners, the ailing noble has a miraculous recovery and downplays the severity of anything the characters report. He ends the characters' contract and promises to assign guards to deal with the situation but never actually does anything.

Characters who speak with the noble's servants might learn that on the night of the noble's recovery, he received a visit from either a distinguished-looking dwarf (Oakhaft) or a huge troll (Crarites, p. 108, *Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom*), at the gamemaster's choice. What they do with this information is up to them, but they could easily find themselves involved in further conflict with the Crownbreakers and the Hive of Ashes.





THE KEYS OF DEATH

Prepared for Overgovernor Kypros by Oortal, nethermancer of the Elite of Triumph

As requested by Akarenti Gendel, I have prepared a report on the information that I and the other members of the Elite have gathered regarding the Barsavian secret society Named the Keys of Death. We learned most of what follows after tracking a member of the Keys to Kratas, the City of Thieves. Regrettably, one of our agents died on this mission, but we now have a reasonably clear picture of the Barsavian death cult and how we might use it to the Empire's advantage.

The Keys of Death operates throughout Barsaive and is organized in a fashion similar to the cults that follow the Mad Passions. Considering that the Keys of Death worship Death as the thirteenth Passion, this similarity is hardly surprising. But the Keys are even more fanatical than the Mad Passion-worshippers, because their faith prospers despite a total lack of intervention in the world's affairs by the object of their devotion.

In the past, the Empire has employed the Keys of Death to take certain lives in Barsaive for the benefit of Thera. The Keys' single-minded devotion to the art of murder makes them useful tools for carrying out killings with little or no connection back to the Empire. So devoted are they to their bizarre acts of "worship" that they can often be convinced to forgo any fee. The simple opportunity to kill in Death's name is enough for them.

Without the proper care, however, the Keys of Death can be turned against their wielder just like any other dangerous weapon. Thera agents and citizens have become their victims over the years, and our own city of Vivane is often no safer from these silent killers than the Kingdom of Throal. The Keys of Death know no loyalty other than to Death. They desire nothing except to free Death from his imprisonment, which they believe they will do by killing enough people. (This fanaticism can make the Keys less useful than more professional assassins, who may be bought in various ways and who are more likely to confine themselves to their designated victims.)

Despite this danger, the death cult is an influential force in the minds of Barsaive's people, and we can certainly use it to remove inconveniently loud voices of dissent against Thera rule. And by employing the Keys of Death against

Throal, we can fan the fires of Throal's righteous anger against them, which will only make Throal's inhabitants all the more tempting targets.

After Barsaive's rebellious elements have been dealt with, we will likely have learned enough about the Keys to arrange their quick and decisive elimination. This will end any threat they might pose to our Empire or to the rule of Imperial law in Barsaive.

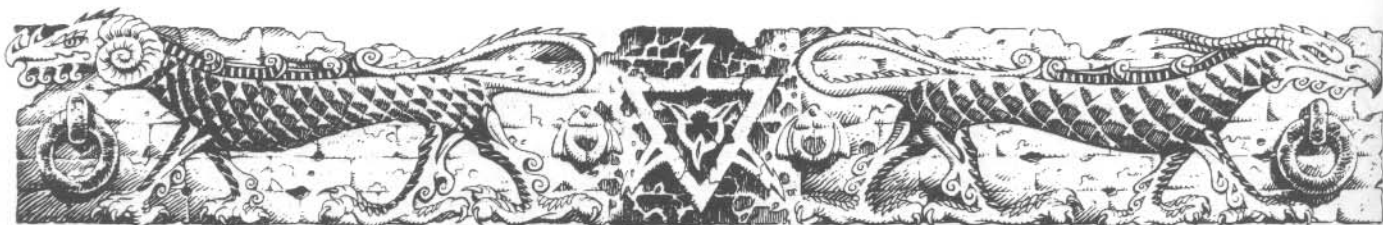
ON THE ORIGINS OF THE BARSAIVIAN DEATH CULT

Barsaivians' worship of Death as a power in the Universe appears to pre-date the Scourge by several hundred years. Indeed, ancient Imperial records from Parlainth and other sources describe scattered followers of a Barsavian death cult as long ago as the Orichalcum Wars. Similar ancient death-worshipping cults exist in other areas of the Empire, such as my native Vasgothia, but few have reached the proportions of the cult in Barsaive. The growth of death-worship in Barsaive stems, in my opinion, from two sources: the obsession with Death and other morbid topics during and after the Scourge, and the legend of Death's Sea.

The people of Barsaive learned to fear death and the arts of nethermancy during the Scourge, but a powerful fascination with forbidden and profane things lurks deep in the minds of Name-givers. Almost all of Barsaive's people lived in kaers rather than above-ground citadels, buried alive, for centuries. They used their own dead to enrich the soil needed to grow the food that supported their kaers. In some ways they lived like the dead and depended on the dead to survive. The longer their exposure to symbols of death, the more Barsaivians gained an interest in—even an empathy for—Death, who, according to legend, was imprisoned just as they were.

Also, Barsaive is home to the sea of molten stone beneath which the Passions are said to have imprisoned Death. Barsaivians can therefore be said to live closer to Death than any other citizens of the Empire, both literally and figuratively, so it should surprise no one that Death preys heavily on the Barsaivian mind. The ancient belief of certain Barsaivian humans that Death is the thirteenth







Passion has become the seed for a flowering of Death-worship since the Scourge, exemplified by the Keys of Death cult. More importantly, the legend of Death's betrayal by his fellow Passions has motivated the cult to expand their "worship" to their fellow Barsaivians in an effort to enhance the power of their patron.

THE LEGEND OF THE BETRAYAL OF DEATH

Most Barsaivians believe that the Passions imprisoned Death beneath Death's Sea to spare Name-givers the pain of dying. The mortality of Name-givers seems to cast doubt on the success of the Passions' act, but many scholars speculate that the imprisonment of Death made possible various means of resurrection that had previously been impossible.

Whatever the case, the Keys of Death relate a somewhat different version of Death's imprisonment. They agree with the standard tale to a point: namely, that the Passions imprisoned Death by tricking him into traveling beneath the surface of a certain sea to recover a life gone uncounted. The "life" was a coin from the purse of Chorrolis, imbued with the power of his greed and also with Astendar's power of desire. When the enchanted coin had drawn Death beneath the waters, the Passions cast over them a cloak of fire, created on Upandal's forge, and then shed blood upon those same waters. As they did this, they chanted the following binding spell: "By fire and blood are you bound, so by blood and fire will you be freed." The sea turned to molten rock and trapped Death beneath it, where he remains to this day.

At this point, the worshippers of Death part company with others. They say that the Passions imprisoned Death not to protect Name-givers from him, but out of fear and jealousy. The Keys believe that Death was the first and most powerful of the Passions because Death came before all the others and has the power to end the life that they embody. According to this tale, the "younger" Passions feared and envied Death's power and conspired to imprison him and seize power for themselves. To the Keys, the other Passions are deceitful and treacherous. They say that Death is the only certainty because Death never attempts to hide his true purpose in the world as the other Passions do.

The Keys claim that the other Passions have indeed gained power over Death since imprisoning him. They say that undead creatures such as spectral dancers, cadaver men and demi-wraiths did not exist before Death went beneath the sea. With Death's power limited, some Name-givers cling to

love, anger or hatred strongly enough to defy Death and exist in a state between death and life. The Keys consider such creatures abominations and slay them whenever possible.

The Keys of Death also believe that the Passions' binding spell has a flaw in it. If enough blood can be shed on the soil of Barsaive, it will quench the fires of Death's Sea and Death will be free to walk the world again as he did in ancient times. And they are doing everything they can to make that belief a reality.

METHODS AND TRAINING

The cult Named itself the Keys of Death because its members believe that their work is the key that will unlock Death's prison. In a macabre sense they might be called questors of Death, worshippers who devote themselves to Death above all. Devout members of the death cult become assassins as part of their worship, ritually spilling the blood of their victims on the ground to help release Death.

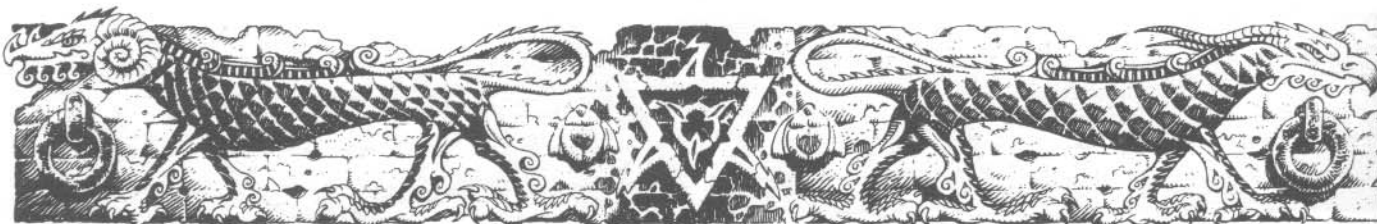
The Keys are masterful and feared assassins. Their favored targets are those who—in their view—mock the power of Death, such as healers, diplomats or even humble merchants who deal in healing aids. Questors of the other Passions are especially favored victims. The Keys believe that the blood of the servants of Death's betrayers holds special potency and will further speed Death's release.

The Keys do not intend to die themselves, however. They believe that Death will reward their loyalty to him by sparing them his long-overdue vengeance against all living things, and that they will become the rulers of a world that worships Death above all other Passions. (Many of the Keys believe that Death will slay the other Passions once freed and will then reign supreme.)

The Keys of Death recruit new members by simply inviting likely candidates to join them. If the prospective recruit refuses, he or she is killed as a sacrifice to Death. New members are taught Death's rituals and lore and trained to commit murder in several unpleasant ways. Rumor has it that in some isolated villages in the hinterlands of Barsaive, the death cult has taken complete control; the inhabitants of such places are said to sacrifice unwary travelers to speed the time of Death's release.

Thus far, every member of the Keys of Death that I have identified is an adept, though I have heard that many cult members are ordinary folk. Adept Key assassins most commonly follow the thief, scout or warrior Discipline, though they can follow others just as true questors of the Passions do.





The Keys of Death fight fiercely when cornered and will take their own lives rather than betray their cause. Whenever possible, they ensure that their blood falls upon the earth when they die. The assassin who slew our agent in Kratas did this when we finally tracked her down in the home of a wealthy merchant. But the spells I cast to immobilize her by drawing upon the fear of death that lurks within all living things had no effect. The killer simply laughed and said, "Death is my power and my Passion. It does not frighten me." She took her own life before we could capture her. Her frozen smile as blood seeped from her slashed throat into the dry dirt of her small house-garden showed me the true face of the Keys of Death.

ON THE SPILLING OF BLOOD

The Keys of Death are not ordinary assassins. Because they seek to spill blood on Barsaive's soil in the ritual manner prescribed by their beliefs, they generally disdain bloodless methods of killing. I have heard tales about Keys who have used other methods to kill, then drained the victim's blood to pour it upon the earth as part of a later ritual, but these seem to be exceptions to the rule.

Most of the Keys of Death favor murdering with bladed weapons such as swords or daggers. This is in keeping with the lore of death magic, which requires that the magic used to capture the subject's life-force be performed at the moment of death. After death, the blood holds little or no potency since the living pattern has already fled from it.

The Keys also prefer to kill victims in places where their blood will fall upon soil or packed earth rather than on worked stone or wood. This means many assassinations carried out by the Keys take place outside, though being indoors is not necessarily any protection from an attack. Basements, caves, alleys and other dark places are ideal for these ritual killings. Even household gardens can serve as killing grounds for the worshippers of Death, as they did in Kratas.

I have been unable to discern any other special rituals or features that distinguish the assassinations of the Keys of Death from ordinary murders. A killing carried out by one of the Keys often appears no different than a back-alley knifing by a member of a Kratas gang or any other brigand. I suspect many of the murders committed in cities such as Kratas or Bartertown are in fact carried out by the Keys. Camouflaging their killings as "ordinary" crimes allows the Keys to operate undetected in any area with a fairly large population among whom violence is common. This is in

contrast to the assassins of the Hand of Corruption, whose complex rituals mark the bodies of their victims unmistakably. The Hand of Corruption is frightening because the gruesomeness of its killings adds to the Hand's fearsome reputation. The Keys of Death are frightening in their anonymity.



ON DOUBLE LIVES AND DECEPTION

The worship of Death as a Passion is frowned on in the more civilized areas of Barsaive, and murder is a crime throughout the province. Because of this, the

Keys of Death are truly a secret society. No Name-giver declares his membership in the death cult, nor do the

Keys openly demonstrate their devotion to Death or try to force others to worship him. Instead, members of the Keys of Death lead double lives, masquerading as ordinary Name-givers. They come from all walks of life, and cult members pass their beliefs and teachings from master to student in secret. Some of the Keys may have no contact with anyone else from the society; they are inspired solely by their personal beliefs. Those Keys who know others of their kind do not acknowledge them openly. All of the Keys go veiled when they carry out their work, to further conceal their identities.





This secrecy has led many Barsaivians—and many of our own people as well—to consider the Keys of Death nothing more than a fantasy told to frighten children and provide a convenient explanation for unsolved murders. Name-givers who discover the truth usually either join the cult or become one of its victims.

Anyone can be a member of the Keys of Death. The one who died in Kratas was the wife of an influential merchant. She performed her terrible work for years under the very noses of her husband and other members of her household. She used her husband's wealth and influence, as well as the bodyguards he hired to protect her, to keep herself safe from discovery. She even converted some of the guards to the worship of Death and allowed them to join her on her grisly escapades.

ON THE USE OF POISONS

The Keys of Death are masters of all forms of killing, including poisons. They use poisons of many different kinds prepared from Barsaive's native flora and fauna. Most often, they coat the edge of a bladed weapon with it and thereby poison a wound. Such a blade allows the assassin to spill blood as ritually required while ensuring a quick, clean kill with a single thrust. A powerful enough poison can incapacitate a victim, allowing the assassin to complete the kill at leisure.

Members of the Keys of Death have been known to sell small quantities of the toxins they prepare to earn money for their cause and to spread the power of Death even further. Several poisoners in Kratas acquire their wares through the Keys of Death, knowingly or otherwise. I have no doubt that it is the same in Barsaive's other large cities.

The concoction called Death's Tears is a poison unique to the Keys of Death. Upon ingesting it, the victim weeps bloody tears; as the poison runs its course, the victim coughs up blood from the very depths of his body. The poison causes terrible pain and victims often die in minutes. Our agent in Kratas died in this manner; the assassin responsible was most likely working for Garlthik or some other criminal faction in the city. I magically experienced his death after the fact and can attest that it was swift and painful.

POWERS OF THE KEYS OF DEATH

As genuine questors often point out, the Keys of Death receive no powers from their devotion to Death. This, the questors say, proves that the death cult worships a false Passion. The Keys of Death counter that the abilities they

should rightfully receive as a reward for their devotion are inhibited by Death's imprisonment. Once Death is freed, the Keys of Death believe they will receive great magical powers from him. Until then they must make do with their own resources, which include powerful pattern items known as death robes.

DEATH ROBES

Each member of the Keys of Death owns a death robe, a night-black garment made by the wearer's own hand. These robes are ritual clothes, much like those worn by questors for particular devotions. The Keys wear their death robes while carrying out murders. Name-givers in Barsaive have learned to fear the image of the black-robed figure waiting to strike from the shadows.

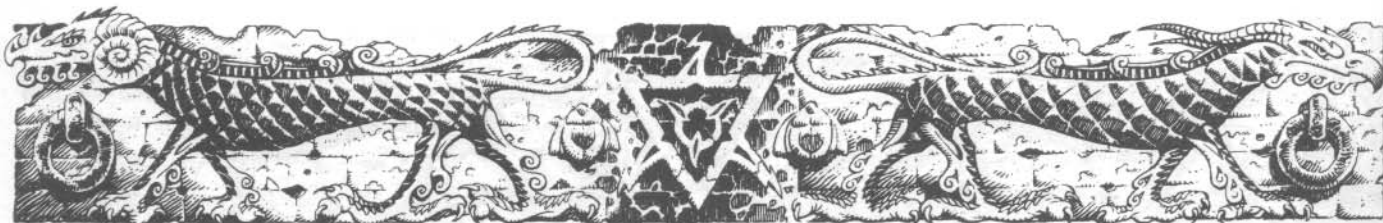
Because individual Keys make their own robes, each one is unique. The design often includes nethermantic symbols twisted by the Keys to suit their bizarre worship. Each death robe also features a unique symbol that represents the wearer's personal connection with Death. It nearly always involves some element of the revelation of Death's divinity that brought a particular Name-giver into Death's service.

Death robes serve members of the Keys as pattern items representing both the Keys' collective connection to Death and the individual member's connection to the cult. They appear to be able to create these items without performing any of the usual rituals necessary when dealing with such a large and powerful group pattern—a mystery I intend to solve, if I can. Keys of Death weave threads to their death robes that improve their abilities as they carry out their ritual assassinations. Most often, the threads enhance a member's ability to silently stalk and strike a victim. The robe we recovered from the slain Key of Death in Kratas displayed traces of these properties. Whatever their nature, improved abilities granted by the death robes reinforce each member's belief that he embodies Death for as long as he wears his ceremonial garb. Clad in their garments of night, the Keys of Death become avatars of their dark master, striking down the living without warning or pity.

GAME INFORMATION

This section contains information about the techniques, weapons and tools used by the Keys to carry out their mission and suggests ways to use the Keys of Death in an **Earthdawn** campaign.





ABILITIES, TOOLS AND TACTICS

Most active Keys of Death follow Disciplines appropriate to shadowy assassins and dealers in death: thief, warrior, scout and so on. Some are nethermancers, but most of these also have some skill in combat so they can easily fulfill the requirement about spilling their victims' blood. Members of most other Disciplines rarely become assassins, but Keys of Death may turn up in all walks of life and in all parts of Barsaive. A sky raider, troubadour or weaponsmith could make a surprising and effective assassin if the gamemaster wants to catch the player characters off guard. Most of the Keys are at least Fourth Circle in their chosen Discipline; the most skilled members of the cult might be as powerful as Ninth or Tenth Circle or higher.

Death Robes

Each member of the Keys wears a death robe that acts as a pattern item for the group's true pattern (see **Group True Patterns**, p. 52, *Earthdawn Companion*). The robe allows its wearer to weave up to five threads, each up to Rank 5, to enhance different abilities. The most common abilities so enhanced are movement and attack talents such as Silent Walk, Surprise Strike, Melee Weapons and Cobra Strike (depending on the assassin's Discipline). The Keys may also weave threads to enhance their various Defense Ratings and Mystic Armor.

The increases from the threads woven to the robes apply only while a particular Key is wearing his robe (Keys only wear their robes while killing). The threads can make a member of the Keys of Death much more formidable than player characters might expect, especially if they have learned his true identity and expect him or her to be a weaker opponent.

Player characters who manage to acquire an assassin's death robe can use it like any other pattern item, weaving threads of their own to it to increase their abilities against the Keys of Death. For this reason—as well as the fact that possession of a death robe is a capital crime in most of Barsaive—the Keys of Death carefully conceal their robes. Any adept who acquires one will certainly become the target of other Key assassins who seek to keep their pattern items out of the hands of unbelievers.

Poisons

The Keys may use any of the poisons described in the *Earthdawn* rulebook, *The Earthdawn Survival Guide* or other *Earthdawn* products, but poisons used on edged

weapons are the most common. Members of the Keys usually know how to brew poisons and may also sell them on the side.

The poison called Death's Tears is unique to the Keys. The formula for making it is never sold, though small quantities of the poison itself might be; two doses cost 1,000 silver pieces. This magical poison causes terrible pain and internal bleeding; as it does its work, the victim coughs or vomits blood and weeps tears of blood. Once the poison takes effect, victims must make a successful Willpower Test with a Difficulty of 10 to overcome the wracking pains enough to take any action. Statistics for Death's Tears are as follows.

Type	Step Number/ Spell Defense	Onset Time	Duration
Death	12	2–12 minutes	1–6 minutes

Magic Resistance

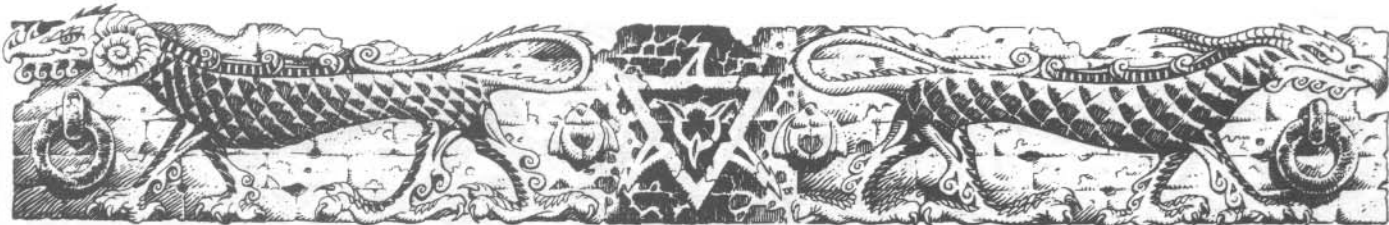
Because the Keys of Death worship Death as their Passion and believe in Death's power above all other Passions in their lives, they gain a certain degree of resistance to spells and talents intended to draw on most Name-givers' natural fear of death and the macabre. Increase the Spell Defense and Social Defense ratings of members of the Keys of Death by 5 against the effects of spells or talents such as Frighten, Death Vision, Death's Head and similar talents and spells. The gamemaster determines if this bonus applies to any given spell or talent beyond those previously mentioned.

GAMEMASTERING THE KEYS

The challenge an *Earthdawn* gamemaster faces in using the Keys of Death is keeping them from becoming generic assassins in black who attack the player characters for no reason. To differentiate them from other murderous secret societies such as the Hand of Corruption, keep in mind their unique motivations and methods.

Members of the Keys of Death operate almost everywhere in Barsaive. Generally, they live ordinary lives; only occasionally do they don their death robes and commit ritual murder in homage to Death. The gamemaster can use this ordinary exterior to good effect in a campaign or adventure by having a seemingly harmless gamemaster character—such as a jovial merchant, fellow adventurer, dandified noble or humble flower girl—become a member of the death cult. If the assassin is someone in regular contact with the player characters, the adepts will be surprised at how much their mysterious enemy seems to know about them. The revelation of the assassin's true identity can be the culmination





of a series of adventures where the player characters struggle against the complex machinations of their unknown foe.

The Keys of Death are subtle opponents. They are not Horrors or mindless monsters who will attack a group of adepts in the open. The Keys work in secret, striking from the shadows and vanishing before anyone knows they are there. Adventures involving the Keys of Death should build suspicion, a feeling that an assassin may lurk around every corner as the adepts seek the identity of a mysterious killer ... and all the while, the body count grows until they realize that one of *them* might be the next victim. The final confrontation with the assassin should come as something of a relief to the adventurers—finally they can meet their opponent face-to-face.

Always make the death scene of a member of the Keys of Death dramatic. The Keys do not allow themselves to be captured alive; they are perfectly willing to shed their own lifeblood on the soil of Barsaive to bring Death one step closer to freedom. The death of a Key can end an adventure on a somber note. The adepts have defeated the assassins, but in doing so, have they actually furthered the killers' terrible goal?

Adventure Idea: Pattern of Death

A series of murders has occurred in Bartertown, and rumors abound that the killings are the work of the Keys of Death. The victims all had their throats slashed and were left face-down on the ground so that their blood would seep into the earth. The citizens of Bartertown are growing concerned about the "blood killer," as they've dubbed the mysterious assassin, and are demanding that something be done. The player characters, who are staying for a time in Bartertown, get involved when a friend or acquaintance of theirs is killed. This victim is clutching a scrap of black cloth embroidered with a few nethermantic symbols, a sure sign the Keys of Death are responsible. The situation has come to the attention of Throal, and the Royal Guard has offered assistance to Magistrate Clystone (p. 142, **Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom**) in solving the murders.

Britaine, a sergeant of a Guard patrol assigned to find the killer, is extremely cooperative in investigating the murders. If the player characters go to him with their evidence, he requests their assistance in tracking the killer. Local rumors say Britaine is afraid of the Keys of Death and what they might do to anyone who looks too deeply into their activities. In truth, Britaine is actually a member of the death cult himself. He is concerned because the killings are not the work of any member of the Keys he recognizes. He fears



that a new, rogue element in Bartertown will ruin the work of the other cult members, who customarily work more covertly. Britaine hopes that tracking down the killer will keep the other members of the Keys safe from discovery. Anyone who stumbles too close to the Guard captain's secret will end up as the next victim of the "blood killer."

The true assassin is a Theran agent Named Solon, a thief adept sent to Bartertown to stir up anger against the Keys of Death among the leaders of Bartertown and Throal. If the Keys feel forced into a corner, the Therans believe they will strike back against Throal, inviting reprisals and putting the death-cultists in an excellent position to become genuine agents of the Theran Empire in Barsaive. Solon eventually tries to implicate Britaine as the blood killer, putting the player characters in the odd position of defending a member of the Keys of Death against the Therans or vice versa.





THE WHISPERERS

My Lord General Ilfarelek,

I have gathered these reports under one heading because they strike me as evidence of a widespread organization that has managed to elude the observations of our agents in Barsaive. Each report describes activities suspicious enough to bear further watching. No single report, save perhaps the last, gives unequivocal evidence of this group's existence in any given location. When taken as a whole, however, they seem to indicate an organization that spans Barsaive—but which has such a small presence in most places that it draws no attention to itself. Only the wide reach of our agents and our diligence in examining these reports made us aware of this group. It is unlikely that any other power in Barsaive knows of it, save perhaps the Eye of Throal and those who work for the dragons.

Each report mentions a tattoo or tattoos worn by the miscreants in question, which I believe may be the method by which members of this organization identify themselves to one another. In every case, the individual being described uses deception, often to sow discord and misery. In the final report, the dwarf being watched refers to someone he calls "the Deceiver"; I believe this is a reference to the Passion Vestrial. From the contents of these reports, it is clear that this group—Named the Whisperers—is devoted to spreading chaos and deception. I cannot guess what larger purpose they might serve, but they are a destabilizing element that we should watch carefully. Their work in Barsaive is useful to us now, but they cannot be allowed to continue once the province returns to Theran control.

—Milanis Anberrican, Archivist

Report from an agent Named Satrasan in Jerris

Today three adepts approached my boot-peddler's stall. Crusts of dried blood and Waste-dust covered their cloaks, faces and hair, making them look like vengeful spirits described in tales to frighten children. Two of them carried the clearly unconscious third, even though they looked in need of support themselves. When they reached my stall, they laid their friend on the ground before it and leaned on my counter. They were trying to look intimidating, but their relief at having a convenient support to lean against was far too evident.

"How may I help you, good sirs?" I said.

The taller one, an ork, said, "Where is that miserable maggot Tharandar?"

At the name, I recognized them as part of a group I had seen a week previously. They had been in The Falling Star, a tavern on the south side of town, sitting around a table and discussing rumors of Horror constructs in the foothills just inside the Wastes. A bald elf soon approached them; he apologized for eavesdropping, then offered them what he called "invaluable information." Most of the elf's head and arms were covered with tattoos—snakes, eyes and daggers. The tattoos and his intense eyes gave him an unsettling appearance, but such is not unusual for this part of town. The elf confirmed the adepts' rumors and told them about the creatures that he'd heard lived in the area. There had been eight adepts at the table at the time, and they all looked a lot better than these two did now.

I remembered all this in a flash, but put on my best bewildered look and said, "Tharandar, good sir? I know not the Name."

"You lying sack of scum-covered thundra testicles!" the ork shouted. He grabbed my tunic and drew me close, pressing his tusks painfully into my face. I was surprised he had such strength in his condition. He railed for a few seconds more, giving me the buunda and saying I wasn't good enough to lance the boils on his bottom before his companion—a human woman—interceded.

"Chakanu, beating this man won't do us any good," she said.

"You sure?" the ork replied, holding me at arm's length and turning to look at her.

"I'm sure."

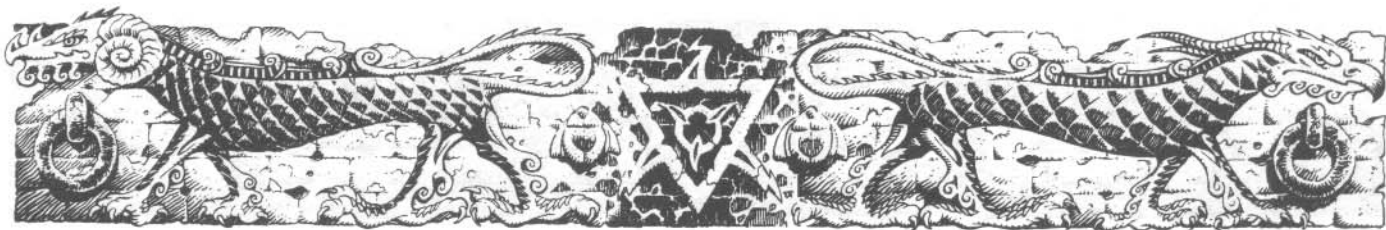
The ork said that beating me would make him feel better but threw me down anyway. I stood slowly and dusted myself off. "Please forgive my friend's rudeness," the woman said. "Tharandar told us we could find him through you when we returned to the city."

"But I do not know this Tharandar," I lied. I did know him, sort of—though I couldn't have told them how to find him.

"If you see him, tell him we want a word with him," the ork snapped. "His information about the foothills was nothing but rotten quaalz. Five of our friends lie dead in a dark pit and a sixth may join them soon. He owes us an explanation."

With that, the two adepts picked up their unconscious friend and stumbled away in search of help and rest. I haven't seen them since.





Ordinarily, I would have passed off this encounter as an everyday hazard of life in Barsaive, but this was the third story of this kind I'd heard recently. And Tharandar was mentioned in each one.

Tharandar showed up in Jerris a few weeks ago. He was quiet and private, staying in the shadows and not saying much. Then he started selling information. Within a week he'd earned a reputation as a peddler of accurate, if minor, knowledge. No one knew where he got his facts but that didn't matter. Those who acted on his tips did well for themselves—at first. Then came the first hint of inaccuracy, when five thieves got caught in a dead-end tunnel that was supposedly a secret entrance to Pihgram Tor's money vault. Tor's guards made short work of them and displayed their bodies as a warning. Later, after a thug Named Bishetin and six of his friends were executed for attacking a caravan that carried cheap common cloth instead of the luxuries they'd expected, I wondered if Tharandar had lost whatever touch he'd had. And now these adepts had come to me, claiming that Tharandar had given them false information—as well as my name, as if we were friends.

I haven't been able to find Tharandar to ask him why he gave those adepts my name. He left Jerris shortly after the caravan incident. Maybe he lied to those thieves and those adepts and stole away before anyone could come looking for him. Wherever he is, he's probably still selling information. Which means he may be getting people killed, if what happened here is anything to judge by. I don't know how someone as odd-looking as he got out of the city without attracting notice, but he should be easy to recognize wherever he ends up next.

Fragment of a report from an agent Named Elusis in Iopos

As I made my way along an alley that led toward the warehouse, I heard a deep voice above me, as if it was coming from the rooftops. I don't know why, but I stopped and listened as the voice explained that air was as solid as earth for those with a strong will. The voice was very persuasive; had the speaker been addressing me, I likely would have believed him. A moment later, I heard several heavy thuds from the alley ahead of me, and then people crying out in agony. The bizarre situation woke me from my reverie; I backed out of the alley, determined to find another route to the warehouse.

When I reached the street, I heard a door open. A dark-cloaked ork came out of the building that stood on one side of the alley. He stepped into the dim light from the light-crystal that illuminated the corner, and I noticed that his

hands and face were covered in tattoos. Being polite, I wished him a good evening. His response turned my blood to ice; I recognized his voice as the one I had heard from the rooftops a moment before. I could not keep from turning toward him, with what must have been a look of fright on my face. He caught the look and laughed. Then he started to speak, but the booted footfalls of an approaching patrol cut him off. He nodded to me and walked away into the night.

Report from an agent Named Lucian, en route to Kratas

Tarksbridge looked like any hinterland village. If I hadn't overheard a lover's spat, I'd never have thought about it again. I was in the village's excuse for a tavern when a wisp of a human girl walked in. She might have been pretty, but her hair was messed up, her dress was torn and she was crying. She looked around the room and then ran over to a big human male who was sitting at a table with two others. He looked up when she got near, and seemed surprised when she started hitting him with her tiny fists. She socked him a good one to his left eye before he got his hands up to defend himself. Once she saw she wasn't hurting him any more, she stepped back and screamed at him.

"Toby Granfar," she bawled, "I never want to see your face again. Nikolas told me what you've been doing with that tramp Sophia." With that, she turned and ran for the door.

Toby stood up and shouted at the girl's back. "You deserve it after what you been doin' with Bertram Honeywhistle. Nikolas told me all about that!" The door slamming was the girl's only answer. Toby sat back down and took a long pull from his mug of ale. One of his friends grinned and nudged him with an elbow.

"What you been doin' with Sophia?" the lout asked.

"I don't know what that crazy girl's talking about. I know I ain't lettin' her make a fool of me with that lump-face, though." He finished his ale and slammed the mug on the table. "Come on. I want to add a few more lumps to Bertram's ugly face for what he done with my Lauria."

The other two looked uncertain, but they got up and followed Toby out the door. A few minutes later, I heard shouting from the other side of the village. The tavern was full of talk that evening about how Toby beat Bertram within an inch of his life, and the two of them lifelong friends before that.

All the talk about Toby and Bertram didn't drown out other subjects, though—the baker's wife secretly dallying with the blacksmith, the cooper rolling in the hay with the





cobbler's wife, and the tavernkeeper sleeping with half a dozen of the village matrons. I kept hearing the Name Nikolas. He sounded like a matchmaker who'd gone mad and revealed everyone's secrets.

The tavernkeeper told me that Nikolas was a newcomer. He'd arrived one night about a month ago and slept on the common-room floor. In the morning, he'd said he was looking for a new home and thought Tarksbridge the perfect place. The villagers were skeptical, the tavernkeeper said—typical village suspicion of outsiders. But Nikolas knew a lot and was skilled in several trades, so the villagers let him stay. They gave him a small house that had belonged to a young man who'd died accidentally, and he quickly became friends with everyone. I decided to pay Nikolas a visit.

I found his house on the edge of the village. On the way, I heard people everywhere accusing each other of cheating and naming Nikolas as the source of the information. I was amazed that this man had earned the trust of so many so soon, but even more surprised that so many villagers in this tiny place were enjoying themselves with people other than their mates.

When I got to the house, I saw a horse loaded with small bundles tied to a post out front. It looked as if Nikolas was going somewhere else for a while. The front door opened and a short human in a plain, gray tunic stepped out. He walked toward the horse, but stopped when he saw me. We stared at each other for a moment; he looked uneasy.

"Who are you," he said, "and what do you want?"

"I'm just curious to meet the man who's been spreading so many stories around this village." I smiled but it didn't seem to set him at ease any.

"Stories?" He reached the horse and checked the lines that held down the bundles. "I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, come now," I said, moving around the horse to get a better look at him. "You don't need to pretend with me. I find it amusing, to be honest."

I never expected him to hit me; he didn't look like the brawling type. Next thing I knew, I was flat on my back staring up at the sky and he was galloping away. The last thing I remembered seeing was a strange tattoo of an eye on his forearm as he punched me.

I was on foot, so I let him go. He's probably nothing more than a local troublemaker, but I thought I should report the incident anyway. I left Tarksbridge the next morning. Some people had started making up from the fights of the night before, but there was still a lot of anger floating around.

Report from an agent Named Garl in Urupa

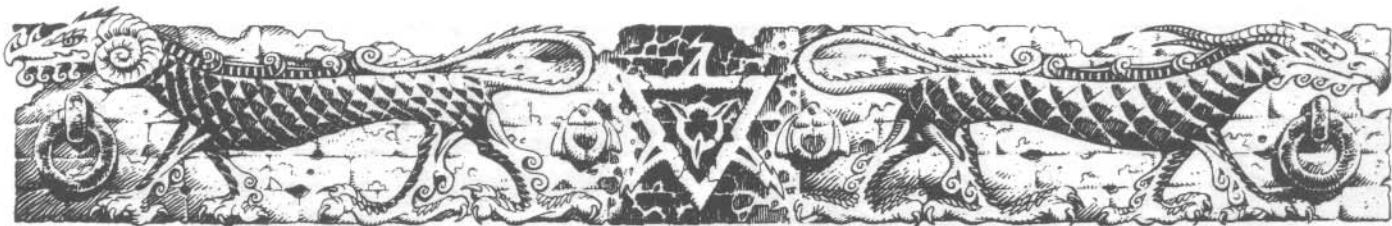
All of my attempts to break into the embassy of the People from Across the Aras Sea have failed. That black block is as tightly sealed as the money pouch of a questor of Chorrolis. Somebody got in there, though, if the stories floating around the waterfront taverns have any truth to them. To hear people talk, the People are worse than Horrors, what with everything they plan. The information comes third and fourth hand, but everyone telling the stories is vehement about the truth of them, saying they came from someone who got them straight out of the embassy.

The first I heard of these tales, I was taking a drink at The Frayed Net. It's a dark, smoky place with plenty of corner tables a wary eye can use to watch a lot of goings-on. On this night, the favorite topic of conversation was a story about the People from Across the Aras Sea, who were allegedly performing blood rituals in service to the Horrors. The story goes that they kidnap poor folk from around the city and spill their blood to feed pet Horrors that live in the embassy. There have been disappearances lately, and this tale—if true—might explain why the People are so touchy about letting anyone into that black slab. I have to say, though, that it seems far-fetched. The only reason I didn't dismiss the story right off was because in every case, the tale-teller seemed utterly convinced that he or she spoke the truth.

The stories in The Frayed Net weren't the only ones I heard. In The Split Reed they talked about the People's plans to take over the minds of the Council and control the city through them. Over at Three Maids Weeping, the story was that the People plan to invade Barsaive, starting with Urupa. The folks at The Brass Peg were full of stories about how the People are secretly bringing Invae into the city and how the insect-men are building a nest under the People's embassy. I'll admit the People are mysterious, but it's hard to believe they're up to so much rotten stuff.

I spent two days tracking down the source of these stories. I wanted to meet the man or woman who broke into the embassy when I couldn't—or find out why that person was making up all these rumors, if the stories weren't true. I tracked the stories to a dwarf Named Borovin and arranged to meet him in a tavern called The Silver Starfish. I waited for three hours before I decided to leave. As I stood up, a deep voice from the next table asked me if I really wanted to go. I would've told the speaker to mind his own business, but I couldn't say anything. I was confused, not sure if I should leave or stay a little longer. While I sat and thought about this choice, which had suddenly become the most difficult choice I ever made, someone stepped up to my table.





He had a deep hood, so I couldn't make out his features. He was about a dwarf's height and the tip of his beard stuck out of the hood's shadow. He leaned against the table, and I saw a tattoo of a partly-closed eye on the back of his left hand. The firelight made his eyes gleam from the depths of the hood; there was something scary about them, even though I couldn't see them clearly.

"Tell your masters not to bother themselves with the Whisperers," he said. "I know who you work for, and these people would tear you limb from limb with just a hint of the truth. Should your masters not heed my warning, remember that no one, not even the Theran Empire, is free of the Deceiver."

He turned to go and I stood to follow. He stopped and said, "Are you really sure you want to follow me?" I was again gripped by confusion while I thought about the question. By the time I decided I really did want to follow him, he was gone.

GAME INFORMATION

The Whisperers are a cult that serves the Mad Passion Vestrial, engaging in acts of deception great and small. No opportunity to deceive is to be missed, because deception in every form glorifies the Trickster. Some Whisperers move around constantly, looking for new places and people to toy with; others live in large cities, cultivating their bitter fruit. The deceptions practiced by these cultists are as varied as the cultists themselves. Some spend time in a village or settlement learning the threads of romance that run through the residents' lives, then spread rumors and lies that twist them and cause heartbreak. Others feed false information about the locations and powers of Horrors to adepts, luring would-be heroes to their deaths in conflict with creatures more numerous or powerful than expected. Some look for men and women far from home—adventurers, caravan guards, soldiers—and offer to bring news of their good health to their families. To the families, however, they tell false stories of death that bring anguish to their hearers.

A loosely organized lot, the Whisperers are dedicated to the service of Vestrial through deceit. Some of them claim that Vestrial himself speaks with them on occasion. Each cultist bears a tattoo of a lidded eye somewhere on one arm, by which other cultists can identify him. Though cultists occasionally work together for large-scale plans, such collaboration is rare; more often, Whisperers avoid each other. The cult's apparent lack of leadership should not be taken for weakness, however. One of the Whisperers' greatest

strengths is their anonymity. Should they decide to act in concert, they would prove a formidable and slippery foe. Luckily for Barsaive, drawing the Whisperers together in this fashion would require a particularly clever and resourceful person and might be impossible for anyone except Vestrial himself. When the Whisperers come into conflict with any group, they rarely fight their own battles; they much prefer to manipulate others into fighting on their behalf.

NEW QUESTOR POWERS

Questors of Vestrial who are members of the Whisperers receive the following powers in addition to the powers listed in the **Earthdawn Companion**. These powers are only available to Whisperers who have reached the minimum questor rank listed in each power's description. Upon reaching the required rank, the questor must learn the new power from a questor who already possesses it, a process which takes at least forty hours of training and instruction and which must be completed within three weeks. Upon learning the new power, the questor calculates the power's step number using his full questor rank. Ordinarily, these powers are only available to questors of Vestrial who are members of the Whisperers, but the gamemaster may also make these powers available to other questors of Vestrial if he so desires. Most Whisperer questors of Rank 6 or higher possess all of these powers.

Befuddle

Step Number: Rank + Charisma

Minimum Rank: 2

The Befuddle power makes a target character more susceptible to social manipulation of all kinds. This power requires the questor to speak to his target for 3 rounds about a bizarre view of some aspect of life, using twisted logic to "prove" a wildly inaccurate conclusion about reality. At the end of this time, the questor makes a Befuddle Test against the target's Social Defense. A successful result fills the target with uncertainty and confusion. Each success level of the Befuddle Test reduces the target's Social Defense by 1 for a number of minutes equal to the questor's rank. This reduced Social Defense applies to all tests made against the target character for the duration of the power, not just tests the questor makes.

Throughout the power's duration, the affected character may make Willpower Tests to dispel the uncertainty that plagues him. Each such test requires an Action and costs the





character 1 point of Strain. The character makes a Willpower Test against a difficulty number equal to the questor's original Befuddle Test result. If the test succeeds, the character overcomes the power's effects and his Social Defense returns to normal. The questor may not use the power against a character already suffering from its effects.

Hesitation

Step Number: Rank + Perception

Minimum Rank: 4

The Hesitation power allows a questor to fill a target character with uncertainty, making him doubt himself and requiring him or her to spend extra time thinking through the appropriateness of a single action. Using this power does not require an Action, but the questor may make only one Hesitation Test per round. When the target is about to do something, the questor asks if he really wants to. The questor then takes 1 Strain Point and makes a Hesitation Test against the target's Spell Defense. If the test succeeds, the target character can take no action for 1 round per success level, except for self-defense. Instead, he or she must spend that time considering all the angles and possible effects of doing whatever he or she intended. After the required number of rounds has passed, the target may proceed with his or her intended act. Defensive talents and skills that do not require an Action are not affected by this power.

The questor may use Hesitation in successive rounds to delay a given action even further. As long as the questor continues to make successful Hesitation Tests, the targeted character will spend time pondering instead of acting. If any Hesitation Test fails, however, the targeted character may immediately take his or her intended action and is also rendered immune to the power for one full day.

Voice of Authority

Step Number: Rank + Perception

Minimum Rank: 5

The Voice of Authority power allows a questor to magically make the target believe any one statement the questor makes. This power can overcome magical truth-sensing abilities and is often used as a fail-safe when the Deceit power (p. 106, *Earthdawn Companion*) fails. The questor makes the statement that he wishes his target to believe, takes 3 Strain Points and makes a Voice of Authority Test against the target's Spell Defense. If the test succeeds, the power affects the target for a duration based on the success level of the test and the questor's rank. An Average success means





that the power lasts for a number of rounds equal to the questor's rank; a Good success indicates that it lasts for the questor's rank in minutes; an Excellent success, hours; and an Extraordinary success, days. If the character has a strong reason to suspect the truth of what the questor claims (for example, his personal experience tells him otherwise or the questor recently failed in an attempted use of the Deceit power), he gains a +3 bonus to his Spell Defense against Voice of Authority.

The questor may use this power against more than one target at a time. The Difficulty Number is equal to the highest Spell Defense among the targeted characters plus 1 for every character in addition to the first. In addition, the Strain cost increases by 1 for each character beyond the first that the questor wishes to influence. Because of the effort involved, questors of Vestrial rarely use this power to manipulate large groups. When a target character is protected by magic that makes him resistant to deceit and manipulation, the questor must score a Good or better success on a Voice of Authority Test to affect the character at all, and the duration of the power is calculated as though the success level achieved was 1 level lower.

USING THE WHISPERERS

Gamemasters can involve their player characters in the Whisperers' activities in a number of different ways. The characters may come upon the after-effects of the Whisperers' work when visiting a new town or village or even in their home towns. Characters might also be personally misled by one or more members of the cult; a cultist may manipulate them into taking certain ill-advised actions or not taking other important actions.

A gamemaster can also use the Whisperers in his campaign by causing opposing factions of some kind to act against one another based on false information. These actions will eventually lead to open confrontation or even war, depending on the parties involved. Factions used in this type of adventure can be anything the gamemaster wants, from a small village guild to a secret society described in this book, or even a powerful **Earthdawn** political power such as the Kingdom of Throal, the newly formed ork nation of Cara Fahd or even the Theran Empire.

Adventure Idea: "Excuse me sir, could you direct me to ..."

Arriving for the first time one evening in a large Barsaivian city, the characters get lost while looking for a particular inn. They meet a helpful soul who gives them complicated directions to a place on the far side of town. Following the directions, the characters find themselves in a rough-and-tumble neighborhood, being watched by street toughs. The thugs take exception to the characters' presence and decide to extort a toll ... in blood, their preferred currency. After the fight, the characters discover that the inn they sought is actually very near the place where they first got lost. Their helpful guide misled them deliberately and could have cost them their lives.

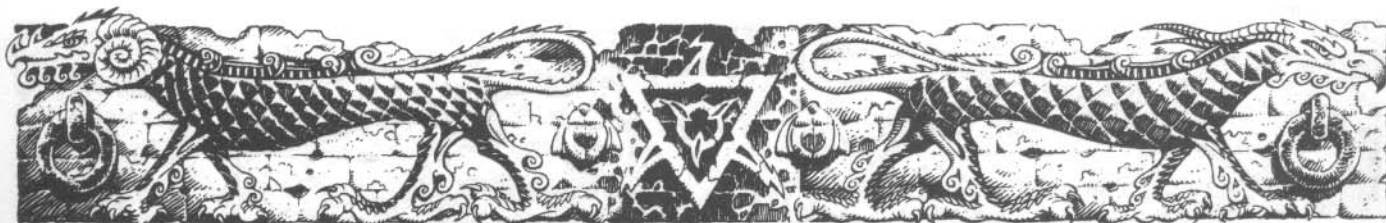
Adventure Idea: Misdirected Couriers

The characters are hired to deliver a valuable treasure to a merchant in a distant city. Upon arrival, they ask for directions to the merchant's shop. A guide offers to take them there for a few silvers but gives them directions for a smaller fee if they refuse his escort. The characters deliver the treasure to the merchant and go about their business. Unknown to the characters, their guide and the "merchant" are both Whisperers. When they return home, their employer demands to know what they did with the treasure and reveals that the merchant never received it. The characters must return to the distant city, find the treasure and deliver it to the correct merchant to preserve their reputations.

Adventure Idea: Sticks and Stones

The characters return home after a long journey to find their friends and loved ones acting very strange. No one wants to talk to them, their old haunts are barred to them, and people give them suspicious looks as they pass on the street. At length, the characters learn from one old friend—who speaks to them with extreme reluctance—that rumors have been going around about a terrible thing they did on their last trip away from home. Worse, everyone who's heard the story swears that the tale-teller proved it was true. When questioned more closely, however, various people confess that they don't remember exactly what the proof was or who started the story in the first place. All they can recall are a few tantalizing details—just enough to start the characters off on a search for the mysterious rumormonger. Only by finding and exposing him as the liar he is can they regain the trust of those who know them and resume their normal lives.





THE FORCE OF THE EYE

Prepared for Overgovernor Kypros by Landrial, scout of the Elite of Triumph

Your Excellency,

I and several others of the Elite were recently assigned to investigate the death of one of our agents in Kratas, an investigation that led us to a member of the Keys of Death who was operating in the city. What we uncovered about the Keys is described in another report by Oortal, who as a nethermancer is better suited to understanding such things. This report speaks of different matters that I believe may be of equal importance to Thera.

While in Kratas, my men and I learned that the so-called City of Thieves is a hotbed of Barsaivian intrigue. The leading players in this benighted place are the Force of the Eye—agents and enforcers of Garlthik One-Eye, the de facto ruler of Kratas. Having met Garlthik in person, I can tell you that we must not underestimate him. To dismiss Kratas, its ruler or his Force of the Eye as unimportant or insignificant would be a grave mistake.

THE CITY OF THIEVES

To understand Garlthik One-Eye and his band of loyalist thugs, you must first understand Kratas. In the time before the Scourge, Kratas was a prosperous center of trade, a place of learning and culture. When the Scourge came, its inhabitants—like those of other great cities in our province of Barsaive—built a citadel of True elements beneath which to shelter from the depredations of the Horrors.

But unlike the citadels of Travar and Vivane, the citadel of Kratas failed utterly. Our records do not tell us when, but sometime during the Scourge, Horrors broke through the citadel dome and ravaged Kratas. They slew its people in the most hideous ways imaginable, leaving only the ruined buildings and empty streets behind as silent monuments to their dreadful work. The Horrors were exceedingly thorough; none of the citadel's inhabitants survived, though many of their works and possessions remained intact.

After the Scourge, the Name-givers of Barsaive emerged from their kaers and citadels and began to explore the world that the Horrors had left to them. They rebuilt ruined towns and homes, and the great cities that had survived the Long Night became the focus of these rebuilding

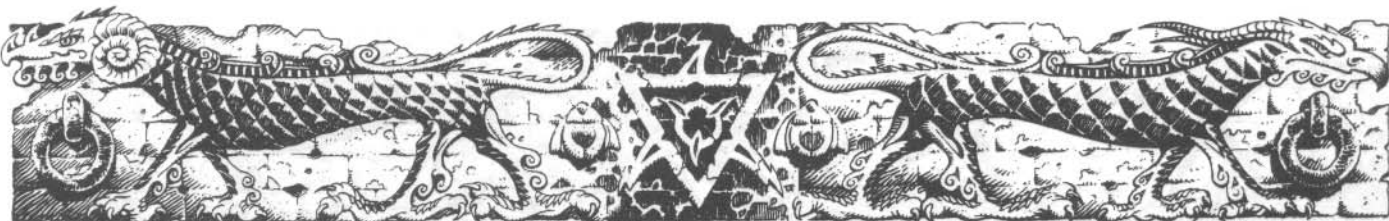
efforts. The ruins of Kratas, filled with discarded valuables as they were, began to attract treasure seekers and adventurers who came to loot and plunder. All too soon, it became a haven for thieves and bandits. Gangs of these miscreants hid in the city's crumbling buildings and used the fearsome tales of Kratas being a Horror-cursed place to discourage anyone from pursuing them to their new home. Over time, hundreds upon thousands of thieves and cutthroats came to Kratas and made it their own.

As the population of Kratas grew, the city began to attract other Name-givers, merchants and tradesmen who made their livings offering the various goods and services needed to support such a large community. Smithies, bazaars, stables, inns and taverns were established in Kratas and allowed to thrive by the mutual agreement of all the city's inhabitants. As is the case with all such societies, the gangs of thieves and cutthroats frequently needed the services that the new arrivals offered, and so began limiting their thievery to outsiders. Kratas became a livable place—if one can call such a den of infamy "livable"—and earned the Name "City of Thieves."

For many years, the city was run by this or that gang of thieves and criminals—the strongest or most vicious were self-styled rulers of Kratas until some other band of thugs displaced them. The most powerful gangs warred among themselves for control of the choicest areas of the ruins; the lesser bands of criminals squabbled over the scraps. Then Garlthik One-Eye unified the city under his own gang, the Force of the Eye, which took control of Kratas around the time of our Empire's return to Barsaive. Garlthik knew full well that the Theran Empire was not likely to permit the continued existence of the City of Thieves once provincial rule was re-established, so he unified the warring factions of Kratas and threw in his lot with King Varulus and the rebellious kingdom of Throal. Kratas provided spies and soldiers during the first Throalic rebellion against the Empire, earning favors from the dwarf kingdom that Garlthik has since used to his advantage.

Following our forces' withdrawal to Sky Point, the alliance between Kratas and Throal vanished like smoke. Garlthik wished to keep Kratas independent of any other power, and raiders from the city attacked Throalic caravans and citizens as often as they preyed on anyone else (more often, in fact, as Throalic merchants were often the most





prosperous). Naturally, Garlthik denied knowledge of these attacks, while Throalic goods flowed freely through the black markets of Kratas and swelled the coffers of the Force of the Eye and other gangs. The dwarfs of Throal lacked the strength and, more importantly, the will to deal with Garlthik and his thievery decisively, and so the raids continued. The character of Kratas became more firmly established as the power of the City of Thieves grew, and the city has since stretched tendrils of its criminal influence throughout the heartland of Barsaive. At the center of this web of thievery and spying sits Garlthik and the Force of the Eye.

A MEETING WITH GARLTHIK ONE-EYE

My men and I arrived in Kratas in response to news of the death of one of our agents, who was posing as a merchant to infiltrate Kratas's black market. We approached the crumbling wall that surrounds the city—the remains of the citadel that once protected Kratas—and paid the so-called entry tax. This gave us our first look at the Force of the Eye, though we did not know it then. Our entry fees were collected by scruffy-looking Name-givers wearing triangular amulets of bronze, point downward. In the center of the amulet was carved the likeness of an open eye. The fee-collectors appraised us carefully before passing us on into the streets of the city. We were soon to learn what their scrutiny meant.

Despite its many inhabitants, Kratas feels like an abandoned ruin, its corners and crannies occupied by rats and other skulkers. Fifty thousand or so people live in it now, but the city can house more than three times that number. Whole areas of the ruins remain deserted, making it difficult to estimate the true population. Even the inhabited sections feel run-down and desolate. The ancient buildings lie in various states of disrepair, leaning on each other like drunken revelers. The streets are littered with crumbling brick and stonework and other refuse, living and otherwise. One always has the feeling of being watched from the dark windows and doorways. Certainly, as Theran adepts, we must have been an unusual sight in Kratas—yet I had the distinct impression that the city's inhabitants watch all strangers closely. And of course, we were under more direct surveillance, though we did not yet guess at its nature.

The first hint came just as we had settled into the common room of an inn Named the Cutthroat's Rest (and it possessed all the charm you might expect from such a Name). Within half an hour we were approached by three Name-givers, all of whom wore the same triangle amulet with the

open eye as we had seen on those manning the city gate. Their leader—an ork with beady eyes that darted from side to side like a cornered rat's—approached our table and made it clear he had come to speak with us.

"Garlthik One-Eye, Magistrate of Kratas, requests the pleasure of your company," he said in broken Theran. Though he spoke in a polite tone, the ork's manner was mocking, and the two trolls who accompanied him made it quite clear that Garlthik's invitation was not a request, but a command. Having no desire to start a conflict with a band of thieves when we might be able to learn something more of Garlthik and what he wanted, we agreed to meet with the "magistrate," as Garlthik styles himself.

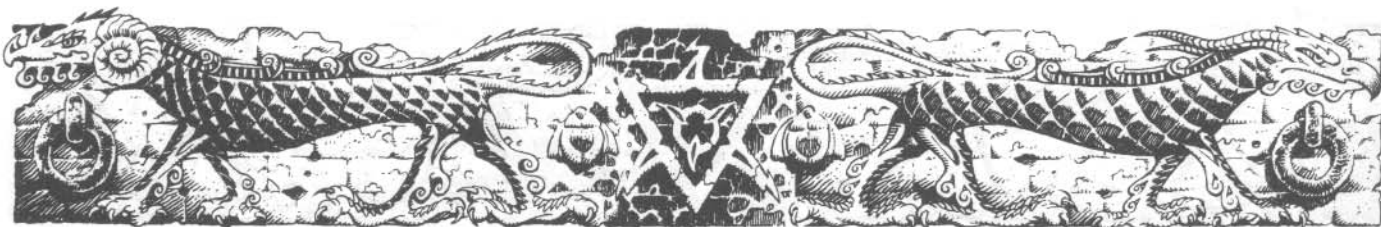
Our guides led us through the twisting maze of broken streets and crumbling buildings in the very depths of Kratas. Several times they led us down blind alleys and around turns that clearly led away from where we were intended to go. Our guide apologized profusely for "getting lost," but clearly his efforts were intended to confuse us regarding our destination. For the final leg of our journey, our ork guide insisted that we be blindfolded. This we agreed to with some reluctance, though it was unlikely that Garlthik would go to such trouble in order to murder the Elite of Triumph and risk conflict with the Empire. Though my vision was obscured, my other scout-trained senses detected a passage underground through a series of dank tunnels that held the scent of great age, perhaps dating back to the original citadel of Kratas or even earlier.

Finally, we arrived at our destination. Upon removing our blindfolds, we saw a grand audience chamber dominated by a long wooden table, which was laden with a feast. Seated around the table was a motley collection of cutthroats and bandits, all eating and drinking and talking among themselves. At the head of the table sat the oldest ork I have ever seen. His frame was thin and wiry, all skin and bones. His long hair was stark white. A single yellowed tusk protruded from his mouth, giving him a lopsided smile. He wore a fine cloak as dark as a shadow, and jewelry winked from his ears, throat and fingers. A black patch covered his right eye, his other eye gleamed with keen intelligence. This was Garlthik One-Eye, the legendary King of Thieves, self-proclaimed ruler of Kratas.

"Welcome to Kratas," Garlthik said in a gravelly voice, waving his hand toward empty seats at his right. "Please join us."

We sat near the head of the table. As I seated myself closest to Garlthik, I noticed someone else near at hand—lit-





erally. A windling, dressed in night-dark leathers that made a shadow of her in the dim light, was leaning on the hilt of a dagger embedded in the tabletop. She wore her pale hair chopped short like a spiky flower, and her wings were shades of black and gray. Small scars and tattoos decorated her pale skin. On noticing my scrutiny, she gave me a smile I can only describe as poisonous.

"Allow me to introduce Terricia, my good right hand," Garlthik said. I acknowledged the windling with a nod, which she returned with an air of mockery. Then she drew a needle-like dagger from a sheath strapped to one leg and began to pick her fingernails with its tip. Despite her bored expression, she was clearly aware of everything going on around her.

"So," Garlthik said, as silent servers set plates of food and flagons of drink before us. "What brings the Elite of Triumph to my humble city?" His visible eye gleamed in anticipation as he drank deeply from the flagon in front of him.

"A crime," I replied.

Garlthik responded with a choking noise that I belatedly identified as wheezing laughter, which was quickly echoed by all of the Name-givers around the table. "Well then, you've come to the right place!" he sputtered, then took another swig of his drink and composed himself.

"And what crime is it?" he asked after a pause. His manner had turned serious, and I suddenly realized that Garlthik knew everything already—why the Elite was in Kratas and how our purpose here could best be used to suit his needs. I saw this knowledge in the eager gleam in his eye. He simply wanted to hear the words from my lips.

So I told him about the murder of "a Theran citizen, a merchant in Kratas with influential friends in the Empire." I said nothing of our agent's duties or purpose, but there was no doubt in my mind that Garlthik already knew that the "merchant" was a spy. Nor did I doubt that he had been expecting—perhaps even waiting for—the Empire to respond to our agent's death. After I had finished my tale, Garlthik leaned back in his chair, wiping his lips on a grease-stained napkin.

"I do not know who the killer is," he said after a long pause. "This disturbs me. As magistrate, it is my duty to know what happens in Kratas. So I will assign some of my men to assist you in finding this murderer and bringing him to justice." Though his tone was polite enough, I knew that this was not an offer, but an order. Fortunately—or so I thought—working with Garlthik's people posed no obstacle to our goal and offered us an opportunity to learn more

about the Force of the Eye. And had we refused, we would almost certainly have been escorted to the far side of the city walls posthaste. What else could we do but accept?

I had no way to know how much we would end up telling Garlthik—and all without saying a single unguarded word.

THE EVERWATCHING EYE

As the details of our investigation are provided in Oortal's report, I will relate what we learned about the Force of the Eye in the process of working with them.

The Force of the Eye is the largest criminal gang in Kratas, numbering at least a thousand members. A substantial portion of the gang—I estimate a quarter or more—engages in business outside the city, directing the vast network of bandits and thieves loyal to Garlthik and bringing in the stolen goods on which the black market of Kratas thrives. These agents remain largely anonymous and represent a considerable intelligence network upon which Garlthik can draw, particularly considering the unique connection between the magistrate and his forces. Garlthik may well use this network to pass information to the Kingdom of Throal, but more likely he keeps his secrets or sells them to the highest bidder.

The remainder of the Force of the Eye lives in Kratas and serves many functions within the city. On the one hand, Garlthik's gang represents the most powerful criminal band in the City of Thieves; they control much of the black market and collect a take of all criminal activity within the city as well, in addition to the various "taxes" and "entry fees" collected from residents and visitors. In this respect, the Force of the Eye can be said to be at war with every other criminal gang in the city. However, it is a war in which Garlthik and his gang have few worthy opponents. Therefore, we should not hope for their downfall any time soon, if ever.

On the other hand, the Force of the Eye also serves as the closest thing to the law in a lawless place. Its members support Garlthik's leadership of the city and enforce his dictates and declarations. In Kratas, the thieves literally hold the keys to the dungeon. This is perhaps the strongest advantage that the Force of the Eye can claim over all the other criminal gangs of Kratas: legitimacy of a sort. The ordinary citizens of Kratas—the innkeepers, weaponsmiths, merchants, weavers and other folk—support Garlthik as magistrate because most of his decrees are designed for their protection. He is clever enough to recognize the benefits of legitimate businesses operating alongside criminal





enterprises, and takes pains to safeguard them from rampant thievery and extortion. Because of this popular support, the activities of the Force of the Eye have the force of law behind them. Through them, Garlthik can persecute other gangs as "genuine" criminals while at the same time running the city's black market and skimming profits from other lucrative activities—criminal and otherwise—as he sees fit. He apparently subscribes to the idea that some of the greatest thieves are men and women in positions of power.

It was Moggar, one of the brigands assigned to assist us, who first hinted to me how the thief-master keeps control over his gang and over Kratas. The City of Thieves is vast, with more hiding places in the ruins than one could count or search in a lifetime. It seemed impossible that one ork, however crafty, could possibly know of every thief or cutpurse or extortionist operating in Kratas. How, then, could he maintain his iron grip on power? During an evening of drink with Moggar, while he was in his cups, I questioned how Garlthik could possibly know everything that went on throughout a city this large.

"He doesn't need to," the thief told me. And he tapped one blunt finger against the bronze medallion he wore, that marked him as Garlthik's man. The significance of the gesture escaped me at the time; I had no thought of magic at work while I puzzled out what I thought was the meaning behind Moggar's cryptic statement. Instead, my thoughts ran along more ordinary lines. Of course Garlthik need not control everything that goes on everywhere in the city; he needs only to control the people, businesses and interests vital to the city's continued survival to maintain his position as magistrate. And certainly Kratas is large, but its population is fairly small by comparison. So it seemed perfectly plausible that a force of loyalists the size of the Force of the Eye should be more than enough to cement Garlthik's power. If other bandits or thief-gangs choose to lair in the city, so much the better, since those folk spend their money in the very inns and businesses that pay taxes and tribute to Garlthik's gang. In this way, Garlthik legitimately takes a cut of all of the ill-gotten gains flowing through Kratas without the difficulty of tracking down every criminal scum hiding in the city's nooks and crannies. This arrangement suits the Force of the Eye quite well, providing them with a way to keep their position as the de facto government of Kratas.

"Garlthik is a great leader," my drinking friend went on to say. "He is the greatest thief in all of Barsaive." He leaned close, speaking in a conspiratorial whisper. The heavy scent of hurlg on his breath nearly made me retch. How orks can

drink it is beyond me. "They say Garlthik has achieved the greatest theft of all."

"And what is that?" I asked.

Moggar looked around for a moment to see if anyone was listening. Then he leaned in closer.

"He steals from Death himself," he said in a loud whisper. "Each night in his dreams, Garlthik steals another day of life from Death's treasure house. He is more than one hundred years old now, older than any ork, because he has learned to do more than seize life and shake it. He's learned to seize life and take it!" Moggar began to wheeze at his own joke, and the conversation quickly turned to other matters. Meanwhile, I pondered the implications of what he said ... if it was true.

Garlthik is ancient for an ork—his true age is uncertain, but folk claim he has lived for a century or more. If the tale of the master-thief stealing life from Death is true, it would explain why Kratas has become a hotbed of activity for the Keys of Death, apart from the sordid reputation of the City of Thieves. If Garlthik steals from the Keys' master, then perhaps they plot the magistrate's death in retribution. Certainly sending such an enemy of Death into his clutches would be considered a zealous act on the part of the Death-worshippers. Perhaps this is why Garlthik was so quick to allow us into his city; he was only too happy to have the Elite investigating what he may have seen as an assassination carried out by the Keys.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH BROCHER'S BROOD

That same night, I met Garlthik's closest rival in Kratas, though in an unexpected way. I went outside the tavern to relieve myself of the night's consumption. I was not drunk like my ork companion, who was passing out in a puddle of hurlg on the tavern table, but I did drink a fair amount to keep him talking. As I left the tavern outhouse, a massive hand seized my arm and pulled me into a nearby alley. I reached for my sword, then froze at a harsh whisper in my ear.

"Do nothing!" my would-be assailant said. In Theran. Not a language usually used by trolls in Barsaive. I looked him in the eyes and received the slightest of nods. Then two other Name-givers, an ork and a rat-faced human, made their way down the alley, daggers drawn. The troll gestured to them to hurry, then turned back toward me. His expression was unreadable.

"Come with us," he said, this time in Throalic. "Someone wants to see you."





They took me through the maze of ruins to an ancient structure that was once a temple of worship. Statues of all twelve Passions as they were known before the Scourge stood in shadowed alcoves, many of them cracked and covered in a thick layer of dust. The place looked like a bizarre kind of court, filled with thieves and criminals, most of them playing dice games at the feet of the Passions while hard-eyed guards kept watch from the shadows.

There I met Vistrosh, leader of the gang known as Brocher's Brood. The Brood is a little more than half the size of the Force of the Eye, but is rife with assassins and nether-mancers taught by Vistrosh, who is himself an exiled Blood Warder of the Elven Court. His thorn-covered face was terrible to behold, but he spoke quietly and almost pleasantly with me. He was interested in the Elite's presence in Kratas and he knew of our investigation. He offered us information that his gang had acquired, which he believed would be of great use to us. When I asked why he was aiding representatives of the Theran Empire, he smiled—a hideous expression on a blood elf's face—and answered that we might learn much from investigating some of the dead merchant's business associates. With that, my escort returned me to the tavern.

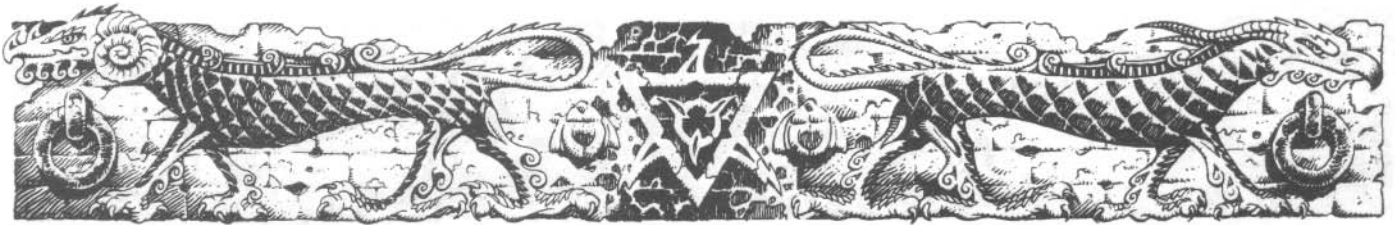
The information provided by Vistrosh allowed us to more quickly determine that the assassin was the wife of a prominent merchant in Kratas who'd had dealings with our agent. It appears the death of our agent was a miscalculation on the woman's part—she was a member of the Keys of Death, who seemed to know nothing of her victim's role as an agent of the Empire.

THE SOURCE OF GARLTHIK'S POWER

As you will note from Oortal's report, we successfully dealt with the assassin. Our own forces took only one light casualty in a brief confrontation with the woman's houseguards—one of them struck me a sword-blow high on my left arm that caused me great pain, but did not incapacitate me. Moggar was with us, and his dagger dispatched the guard as I was switching my sword to my right hand. When the assassin's body lay cooling on the earth of her small garden, I turned to Moggar and asked him to inform Garlthik that our business in Kratas was concluded. He smiled and once again tapped a finger against his bronze medallion. It struck me this time that he was touching the Force of the Eye symbol carved in it.

"Garlthik knows," he said. "Garlthik sees everything that goes on in Kratas. Everything."





I did not realize how literally he meant his words until a short time later, when he brought us once again before Garlthik. The master-thief received us graciously and thanked us for our efforts "on behalf of my beloved city." We acknowledged his words with what grace we could, after which he informed us that an "honor guard" would escort us to the city gates. His meaning was quite clear; as our usefulness to him was ended, we were not to be allowed to wander freely in Kratas for even a short while. As we turned to go, he addressed me one last time.

"By the way, Landrial," he said, "you ought to have a healer take a look at that arm. The dwarf who gave you that sword-wound served in Marac once, before deserting the Theran legions to take up a new life in Kratas. He's known for lacing his blades with obscure, slow-acting poisons. Better cautious than dead, eh?"

I was astounded. That I had been wounded, anyone could see; that it had happened in the course of a fight with the assassin's guards was a simple guess to make. But that the only dwarf among them had struck the blow—this Garlthik could only have known through some magical means. None of our "assistants" among the Force of the Eye had told him; there had not been time. The old ork noticed my amazement and chuckled, then waved us out of his presence. "Safe journey, Landrial," I heard him say as we were once more blindfolded and led into the maze of ruins. The last thing I saw before the blindfold took my sight was Moggar, grinning and once more tapping his Force of the Eye badge. "Everything," he murmured. "Our master sees all."

GAME INFORMATION

Garlthik One-Eye is, without a doubt, the greatest thief adept in all of Barsaive. His only close rival is J'Role, the head of the Eye of Throal, and Garlthik taught J'Role everything he knows (or so he will tell you). If a Fifteenth Circle thief exists anywhere in Barsaive, Garlthik is that thief. At the very least, the Magistrate of Kratas has reached the Twelfth or Thirteenth circle in his Discipline. His advanced age does not seem to have dulled his considerable talents or abilities, though he rarely takes a direct hand in thievery these days. Instead, he directs the Force of the Eye from his hidden headquarters in Kratas.

Terricia, Garlthik's most trusted lieutenant, is a Ninth Circle windling thief. She is skilled in the preparation and use of poisons and in various assassination techniques. Her small size, dark coloration and windling Karma allow her to

make frighteningly effective use of Surprise Strike and many of her other thief talents. Though cold, calculating and merciless, she is utterly loyal to Garlthik and will kill anyone she believes has betrayed him or the Force of the Eye.

Typical members of the Force of the Eye have thief and warrior skills. For every five to ten members, there is also an adept member of Second Circle or better. Higher-ranking lieutenants are thieves or warriors of at least Fifth Circle. Other members are illusionists, troubadours, scouts and swordmasters. Disciplines other than these are less common. Sky raiders and air sailors are especially rare, as Kratas sees little airship traffic and Garlthik prefers to leave airship raids to the crystal raiders, in order to avoid conflict with the savage trollmoots.

Statistics for a typical non-adept member of the Force of the Eye appear below. These statistics are for an ork thief; the gamemaster may adjust them for characters of other races. For the skills listed below, the number before the slash is the thief's skill rank; the number after the slash is the character's Step Number when using the skill.

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

Initiative: 5
Number of Attacks: 1
Attack: 9
Damage: 13 (broadsword)
Number of Spells: NA
Spellcasting: NA
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 7
Spell Defense: 7
Social Defense: 7
Armor: 3
Mystic Armor: 1
Knockdown: 6
Recovery Tests per Day: 3

Death Rating: 36
Wound Threshold: 10
Unconsciousness Rating: 28

Combat Movement: 33
Full Movement: 65

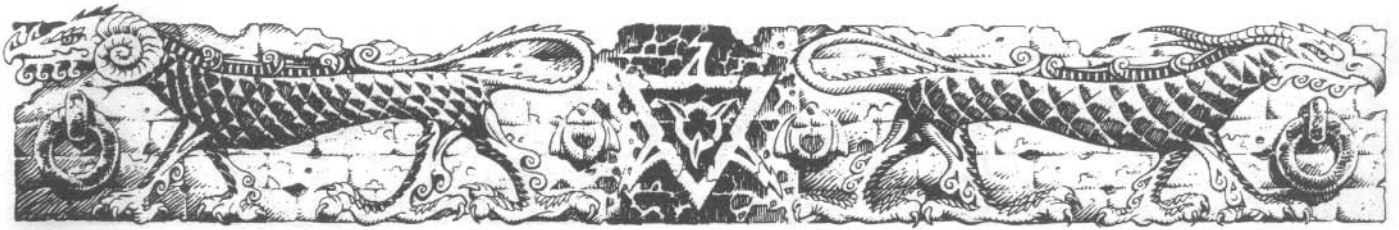
Skills: Lock Pick 5/10, Melee Weapons 4/9, Picking Pockets 4/9, Silent Walk 3/8, Streetwise 5/11, Surprise Strike 5/10

Legend Points: 200

Equipment: Broadsword (forged +2), dagger [Damage Step 8], leather armor, Amulet of the Eye (see p. 113)

Loot: 1D10 x 10 silver pieces







AMULETS OF THE EYE

All members of the Force of the Eye wear triangular bronze amulets, point down, with an open eye carved in the center. Called Amulets of the Eye, they identify members of the gang to the people of Kratas, and also serve a more important function. All of the amulets are blood charms magically linked to the eye patch worn by Garlthik. This magical link allows the magistrate to see and hear through any of the amulets as though he were physically present in its vicinity. The blood magic used to power the amulets also forms a blood oath between Garlthik and each member of the Force of the Eye.

The amulets' magic lets Garlthik keep abreast of everything his agents discover in their daily activities in Kratas and elsewhere in Barsaive. It also serves to keep members of the gang loyal, as they never know when their master might be listening in on their conversations. A member of the Force of the Eye who removes his amulet for any length of time had better have a good explanation in order to avoid arousing Garlthik's suspicions. This "magical spy network" is one of the things that has defeated many attempts by other factions (including Brocher's Brood) to infiltrate and undermine the Force of the Eye.

No one knows how Garlthik acquired the magical amulets or precisely what enchantment allows them to function. When questioned on the subject, the old ork makes vague references to a quest from his youth. Speculation is rife that the amulets come from secret lore Garlthik discovered when he helped find the Forgotten City of Parlainth or one of the many other ancient ruins the thief-master explored in his adventuring days.

Though the Force of the Eye nominally keeps order in Kratas, it is more accurate to say they work to keep the other criminals in the City of Thieves under control—and under Garlthik's thumb—so that the Force of the Eye can remain unchallenged as the city's supreme criminal gang. "Justice" in Kratas is a flexible concept and generally means whatever Garlthik and his lieutenants want it to mean. The Force is, first and foremost, a criminal gang interested in profit, not a secret police force or a mad cult. Where other secret societies might be driven to act out of devotion to a cause, the Force of the Eye acts only as it benefits the interests of the gang and Garlthik. Those who misuse the resources of the Force of the Eye for personal revenge or anything else that threatens the profitability of Garlthik's enterprises in Kratas are very likely to end up on the business end of one of Terricia's poisoned blades.

Adventure Idea: The Missing Eye

Garlthik lost his right eye long ago, in his adventurous youth. The loss was more than an injury; Garlthik's eye was one of his pattern items, a vital part of his True Pattern. The eye was stolen by a Theran magician Named Mordom (described in the *Earthdawn* novel *The Longing Ring*). Mordom used Garlthik's eye to improve the power of his own magic against the ork thief, but eventually the Theran magician became involved in the Death Rebellion and met his end at King Varulus's own hand.

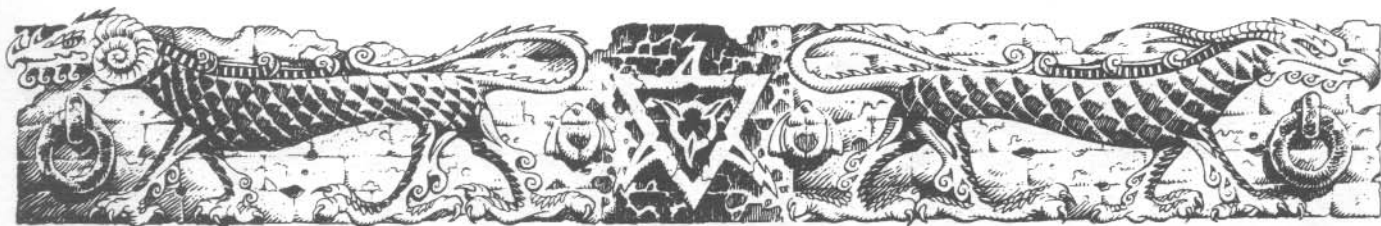
Garlthik recovered his lost eye in Parlainth before Mordom's death, and he kept his pattern item close at hand from then on. Stories tell of how the eye's long association with the magician imbued it with part of Mordom's nethermantic magic, and how it gave Garlthik visions and insights he had never had before. This wisdom is said to have allowed him to both gain control of Kratas and sustain his life for as long as he has.

The eye, which Garlthik kept in a crystalline container, was stolen recently by an elf Named Kobblad, an ambitious member of the Force of the Eye who has decided to betray Garlthik to Vistrosh in hopes of gaining greater power and prestige when Brocher's Brood takes control of Kratas. Kobblad believes his own legend will increase greatly when it becomes public knowledge that he stole from Garlthik, the master thief himself.

Before he can turn the eye over to Vistrosh, however, Kobblad is nearly cornered by other members of Garlthik's gang. In a panic, he secretly plants the eye amid one of the player characters' belongings, in a pack, pouch or the like. When the Force of the Eye finally catches up with Kobblad, they discover he is no longer carrying the eye. They eventually find out where he put it, and then both the Force of the Eye and Brocher's Brood race to catch up to the unsuspecting player characters to recover Garlthik's eye.

The player characters discover the pattern item in their possessions at some point and must decide what they are going to do with it. Both gangs are ready and willing to kill to acquire the eye, and giving it to either side means making an enemy of the other. Vistrosh's efforts to gain the eye might involve agents of the Songbirds (p. 42), as well as members of Brocher's Brood. Theran agents in Kratas might also wish to acquire Garlthik's pattern item, should they learn about it, and so the player characters may have to deal with a third potential enemy.





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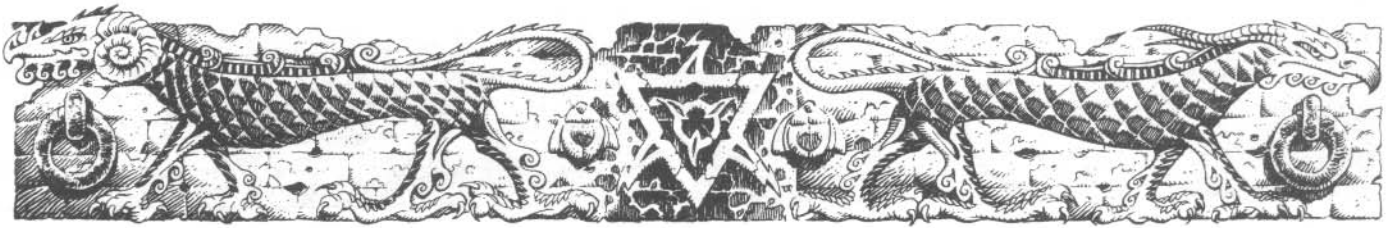
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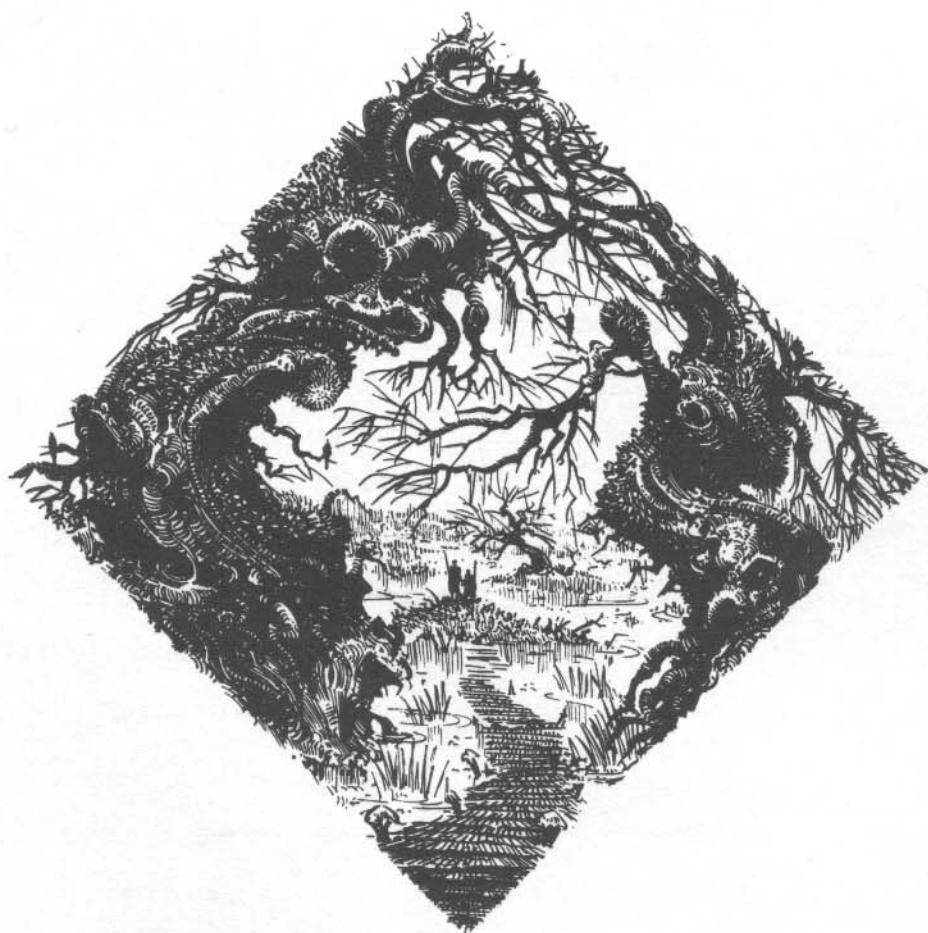
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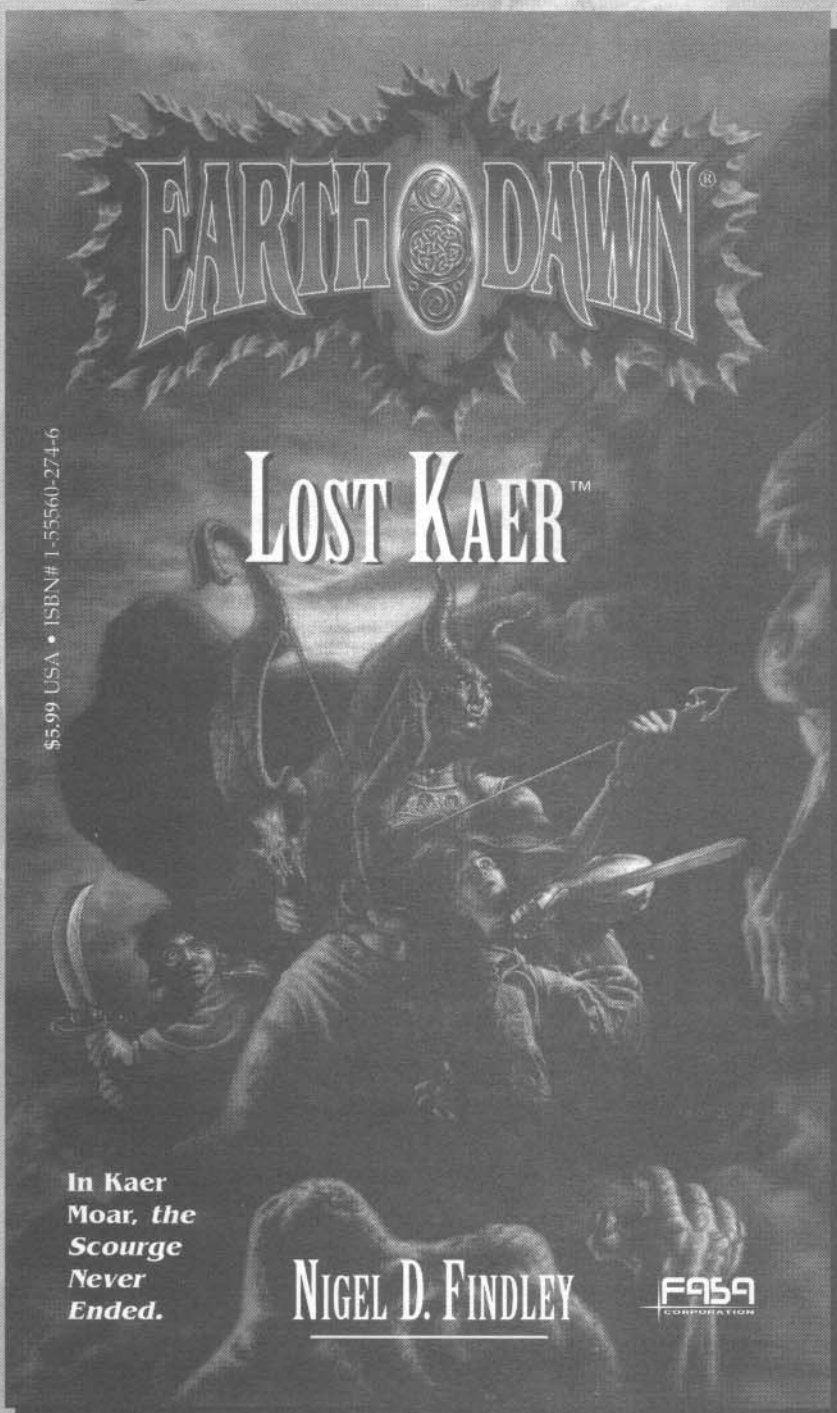




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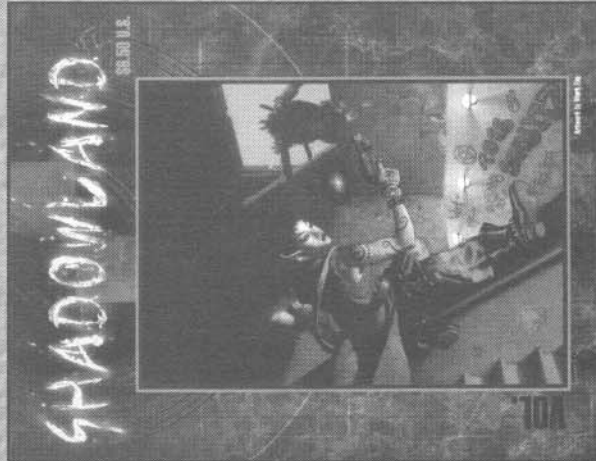
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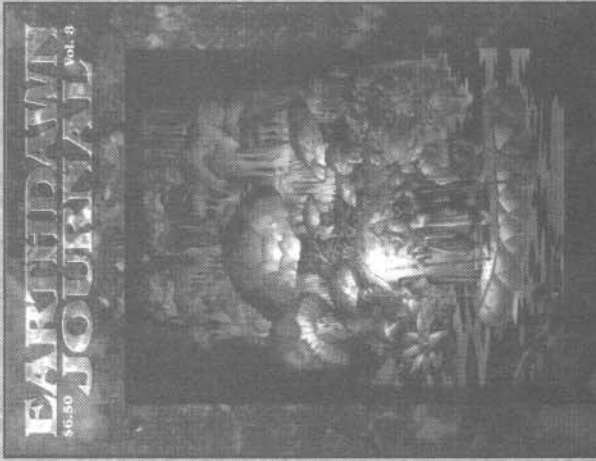
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