

ALLEN VARNEY
WRITER, GAME DESIGNER, AND WORLD TRAVELER

GAMING

EARTHDAWN LEGENDS

Scenarios for FASA's *Earthdawn* roleplaying game

by Allen Varney and Don Webb

INTRODUCTION

This book of **Earthdawn Legends** supplements the **Earthdawn** game. It describes short adventure ideas based on legends of the province of Barsaive.

This book groups the legends according to the eight name-giver races. Each section begins with a few brief myths, stories, or anecdotes that define the race's attitudes, provide color, and aid roleplaying. The rest of each section gives longer legends with accompanying adventure ideas, and sometimes new spells, magical treasures, and background material. The gamemaster should review this new material and decide how much of it, if any, to add to the game.

Players can read the short name-giver legends at the start of each section, the ones with titles in both capital and lower-case letters. If the legend's title appears in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS, only the gamemaster should read the legend.

This supplement requires the **Earthdawn** rulebook. The **Barsaive** boxed set and **Legends of Earthdawn Vol. 1** should prove helpful but not necessary.

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LEGENDS of BARSAIVE

BEING

Extracts From the Papers of the Late and Honored

VERTIUS

Revered Librarian of Throal, 795-837 TA

Assembled by Third Deputy Assistant Librarian

Enwid Deltern

857 TA

O Lochost,

free and mighty Passion who inflames all Name-givers with love for learning, open my road to knowledge!

As Mind sought his first Thought, thus shall I seek. Lochost, walk with me on my quest. Let your torch light dark and hidden places on my path. Lead me to what passed, what becomes, and what may come to pass. Let each question answered lead to ten questions more.

Let the glory I earn bring glory to the cause of learning. Let the power I gain lend power to those who walk this path. Give me courage and endurance to break the shackles that bind my thoughts and find my journey's end: FREEDOM, blessing and birthright of all who live.

MAY THIS SCROLL SPEAK TRUE TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW

Emplicia ret.

Prefatory Note

Our late master Vertius, who kept this monumental Library for 42 years, spent his days in endless battle. With pride he once remarked, "I have slain thousands of times more enemies than any other dwarf. Just today I killed 10,000 silverfish who wished to eat the collected commentaries on the *Books of Harrow*. Tomorrow I shall fight the paper wasps that afflict the Troll etymology section on the 22nd floor. Many dwarf warriors speak of their valor, but have any killed seven with one blow, as have I? Of course these were termites, but a library termite surpasses a troll raider in viciousness. Raiders destroy only towns; termites destroy knowledge."

Now that Vertius has passed through the final portal, the pleasant task of arranging and publishing his papers has fallen to me. This extract presents fruits of his rare leisure hours, when he pursued his hobby of folklore and legend. Vertius collected and loved myths of all the Name-giver races equally. Their many kinds of imagination, and the ways they shaped many lives, fascinated him. With pleasure I have followed Vertius' scheme for a monograph long planned, never completed, and I begin each section with his own brief notes.

Vertius had no shortage of imagination himself. He loved how it had shaped his own career, and we who served with him loved the imagination he always displayed. Late in life he said to me, "I suspect that in time my library, already more vast than any, will actually hold not only all books that have been written, but all that can be written. I suspect a cult will grow that spends its days in these endless stacks looking for the One Book, the All-Binding Book wherein all the secrets of this place are collated. I hope they never find it, for true love of a library comes with seeking."

He grew pensive for a time, then threw himself into new efforts. "I have enemies to fight," he said as he strode away. "Even now I hear the clack of hungry mandibles."

DWARF LEGENDS

If I need avoid charges of favoritism in ranking dwarf legends ahead of other Name-giver examples, I can take refuge in the alphabet. Yet who would quarrel with the quality of our folklore? The Library's tremendous reserves draw researchers from all over Barsaive. Some hunt mentions of treasure or clues to pressing mysteries, but how many simply lose themselves, as I often have, in the creative pleasures of the dwarven spirit?

Using no clear criterion beyond my own pleasure, I have chosen this blend of stories famous and forgotten.

Breaking Fetters

In dwarven books of history we show our desire to build an edifice of knowledge to outlast even the stones, and many give the Creation story pride of place. As long as these words remain, the dwarfs shall remain. These are the words.

In the beginning existed the Mind, and nothing yet was intelligible, for there was naught to think. The forces of nature moved upon the chaos, and the Mind had his first Thought, and she is called Wisdom.

From Mind and Thought did all the Passions come to be. From the interplay of Mind and his Thought all Magic came to be. Magic entered the bright worlds of curves and took up residence there under the leadership of Wisdom. Wisdom bequeathed to her children the desire to name and to know, and her children are called Name-givers. Other Magic went to the mirkworlds of angled space, and without Wisdom they became Horrors. The Horrors sought to rule both their twisted realm and the bright realms, and they created a race of slaves from the base element of Earth to fashion and build.

Of this race one Throldol, having the spark of Magic within him, broke his fetters and led a revolt of the slaves. Thus the Horrors lost their first foothold upon the bright realms for a season, and the once-enslaved race broke free from the Earth.

The Name-givers named this race Dwarfs, and Wisdom adopted them as her children. She gave them secret council: "Soon I must hide myself, for the fullness of time is measured in Mind's Quest for me. The world shall be ruled by my children, the Passions.

"You have a special doom, children of my adoption. Your hatred of slavery shall stand the world in good stead, when again the Horrors make their assault, for wherever slavery exists upon the world the Horrors shall have a foothold. Be vigilant and strong even unto death, my children, and we shall meet again."

Junius the Watcher

Most dwarf homes have a small statuette in the kitchen. When dwarf children disobey, rather than beating them (as do humans, trolls, and orks), dwarfs merely gesture sadly at the statue. The children almost invariably begin obeying. Here the children's tale-spinner Torbassas Trentwind recounts the statuette's story. May other races adopt this civilized approach to child-rearing.

Many years ago, when dwarfs first began digging for metals, mining was a fearsome trade. Bad gasses, rockfalls, and creatures dwelling in the hidden parts of the Earth took many brave miners' lives. Now mining is much safer because of our more profound knowledge, thanks be to Lochost!

One of the earliest copper mines in Throal was plagued by a rockworm, a nasty creature that dwarf persistence has now almost wiped out. In the early days watchers, dwarfs too young for mining jobs, would stand along a mineshaft to make sure that the worms did not break through the walls and threaten the miners below. When a worm came through, the watcher would cry a warning.

Once a very young dwarf named Junius sneaked into the mine where his father was working. He found that the watchers had fallen asleep, and so rather than waking them, he decided to take on their job. Rockworms appeared! He cried out his warning, and that saved his father and the whole mining crew! Tragically, Junius lost his life, and so in his memory we all keep a little doll of Junius in the kitchens of our homes. He watches over the good and bad actions of the children, and he reports them all to the Passions.

Throldol's Day

In almost every dwarf household parents recite this catechism with their children on Throldol's Day, the 21st day of Raquas. On this feast on summer solstice, Throldol's cry of "I shall not serve!" echoes throughout dwarf lands.

Interestingly, the black-toga slaves of Thera often celebrate this holiday, but in secret, for masters who catch them punish them severely. Thera slaves say among themselves that once, when the enslaved crew of the Ascendancy spoke the legend on Throldol's Day, that battleship fell becalmed for the entire day.

(The youngest dwarf present asks the questions, and the eldest answers.)

"Why are these broken shackles hung?"

"These are the shackles Throldol broke so that we might be free."

(The child points to symbols of the eight races; for instance, a dried rose branch represents the Elves.)

"Why are these symbols hung?"

"These remind us of the other races in our care. It is our duty to lead them to freedom."

"Why do we eat the honeycomb?"

"The sweetness of the honeycomb reminds us of Wisdom, mother of the Passions, who promised a high Destiny for us. The comb's cells remind us that only a structured society can fight off the terrors of the world."

"Why are there stones on our table among our food?"

"The stones remind us that we must always be hard and enduring, for the other races are weak. We must be strong for them."

"Why do we each receive a coin today?"

"The coin reminds us of gold, which is like the sun that lights the world longest on this day. The yellow of gold comes not from the natural order, but from the harsh refiner's fire. We treasure gold, because it reminds us to refine ourselves."

"How many years will we celebrate Throldol's Day?"

"We will celebrate until all Name-givers can say in a strong, true voice, 'I will not serve!'"

MINING OF METALLIC EARTH

Near Throal the heroes discover and defeat a Theran master spy who has so perfected the Talent of disguise as to pass for a member of another race, even in close quarters. By this means he infiltrated a dwarven expedition to the Plane of Earth, where the dwarfs mine, at great risk, a rare metallic form of Elemental Earth.

The spy wrote a scroll describing the process, intending to deliver it to the Theran Imperial Archives. However, when the heroes closed in on him, he burnt it, either intentionally or by accident. The heroes can decipher only the following charred text.

...on the third we were taken to the chamber to mine the Metal. Several days to find that the Portal could open. Some of the dwarfs chanting when we walked...

...ERETHBETH NEROBID...

...and then the stacks of ingots turned into mist, I could feel a cold wind and see through the mist into another world a vast metal shiny gorge where...

...some quite close. Warriors rushed to fight the beasts while we went up with orichalcum picks and buckets...

Like a big green glowing cave troll, it breathed a green glowing mist on the warriors, they screamed in agony like struck by acid and died, others shot orichalcum-tipped arrows into its metallic hide. Terrible, you cant know. A flyer like a small dragon swooped down from above its wings like shiny brass. Loud cry like swords striking in battle. Its wings beheaded one of my fellow miners, and when his blood hit the rust-colored ground it turned to gold. I tried to get this but Leader said the Elemental Metal is worth lots more, even though dull silver...

...very very large much bigger than the dragon...

...chanting again. Most of us made it out of the metal mist, the dwarfs quickly reformed it into bars of copper silver gold iron and lead. I heard my comrades screams from the metal bars as they died in its jaws...

I say leave this job to the dwarfs. Hold onto this world, forsake the Metal land....

If they return this scroll to Throal, the heroes earn the gratitude of a Throalic mining captain, who confides that the recent expedition that the spy joined produced poor results, and the dwarfs intend to mount another one soon. Will the heroes hire on as bodyguards and miners?

How to Get There

The Circle 7 nethermancer spell **Spirit Portal** (rulebook, page 182) can reach not only astral space but, at the gamemaster's discretion, any of the five Elemental Planes. To reach a Plane requires not only a Bone Circle (per the Circle 2 nethermancer spell) but also a quantity of orichalcum worth 1000 silver pieces (about an ounce), along with large quantities of the non-magical equivalent of the desired Element: earth, fire, and so on. Casting the spell consumes the orichalcum but not the other material.

The portal seldom lasts long enough for a worthwhile mining expedition. Therefore the casting nethermancer either accompanies the party and casts the spell again to return home, or stays in Barsaive and recasts the spell at a pre-arranged time. Both approaches carry obvious risks.

What It's Like

Some of the Plane of Earth's metallic terrain roughly resembles Barsaive's, such as rolling plains, valleys carved by rivers of acid, and sheer cliffs and mesas. However, mountains and outcroppings of metal rise far higher than stone equivalents, and sometimes bend in eerie ways. A white sun burns in the sky; the sky usually looks purplish blue, and clouds appear black. At night vast numbers of meteors shoot perpetually across the sky.

The domain's hazards fall in three broad categories:

Environmental. Acidic storms, jagged metal soil, and the poisonous air damage visitors whose protective spells fail (Death Rating 30). The Circle 6 Elemental spell **Ease Passage in Earthdawn**, page 163, guards against this damage. The chant mentioned in the scroll represents one of many versions of this spell.

Reliable observers have not verified the scroll's mention of blood turning to gold, but some say that prolonged exposure to the Plane of Earth gradually turns the visitor to earth or metal.

Native life. Most Earth creatures do not exist in Barsaive, but space restrictions prevent a list. In general, Earth creatures have high defenses (+3 steps in Resistance Tests over Barsaive equivalents); claws or teeth that rend metal as easily as ordinary creatures burrow through dirt; and, often, attacks based on acid, a vital ability in the Plane of Earth.

The plane also has intelligent inhabitants, but they range less widely over its territory than do Name-givers in Barsaive. Therefore a mining party can usually find sites in uninhabited terrain. Some believe that certain parties have met native Name-givers, either accidentally or by intent. To date, none of these parties has returned with information.

The mining itself. Conventional, non-magical iron, aluminum, copper, and other metals make up most of this Plane. True Metallic Earth occurs under mountains, in exposed seams of cliffs, or dissolved in acidic rivers, the equivalents of sites in Barsaive where metal occurs. Mining these sites carries the same risks that conventional mining does. Centuries of past visits by the Thera Empire at its height, and possibly by Horrors from farther planes, have exhausted the most accessible sites. More difficult claims draw attention from hungry predators that can wipe out even a well-defended party.

Metallic Earth

Mining the metallic form of Elemental Earth does not specifically require orichalcum tools, but sometimes it reacts to contact with another metal by transforming at once into that metal, thereby losing its magic. Scholars cannot yet reliably duplicate this effect.

Metallic Earth in its native state may look like a silvery liquid blob, copper-gold dust, or sparkling black ore. Miners identify it in all these forms by its unusual luster in sunlight or its faint white glow in darkness. Metallic Earth seldom occurs in quantities of more than a few pounds, but an ounce fetches upward of 600 silver and always sells quickly.

Like the dwarfs, other peoples of Barsaive mine the metallic form of Elemental Earth. However, many obtain it in less risky though less reliable ways; for instance, some lucky explorers have found Metallic Earth deposits near more plentiful strata of Elemental Earth. The communities that can enter the Elemental Plane of Earth, as the dwarfs do, appear much more reluctant than dwarfs to venture regularly into its metallic regions.

BOOK LEARNING

The dwarfs of Throal feel mingled sadness and embarrassment about some dwarf settlements in the Barsaivean wilderness. Although small and rare, these enclaves show a backward fear of intruders common among Barsaive's small villages. (See the later section "Cadaver Kaer" for human parallels.)

On a main road two hours' ride outside the village of Hangtown, the adventurers spot this report spiked to a tree. Those of scholarly bent may recognize the name of the wandering scholar Brunvand Rockfist, who has achieved some fame for his collections of folklore from every race.

The Notice

WARNING TO ALL SEEKERS OF KNOWLEDGE

ENTERING THE BADLANDS NEAR THE VILLAGE OF HANGTOWN

from Brunvand Rockfist of Throal

Hangtowners display GREAT PREJUDICE against writing, books, and scholars! I had not unpacked my scroll or pen when the rather filthy dwarf wineseller launched into his tale. Needless to say, I did not write this down at the time. Please pass copies of this legend to seekers entering the region.

"Shame you coonent'a made it here last week. We had us a big book burning. What a flame them books made, the more once we took them scrolls to the pile as kindling. We don't take to books in these here parts, we don't.

"You look startled. I hope you ain't a booker. It was the Goldbug Book what learned us. A human wizard staying at Ray Dellowmare's inn had a copy. Had a picture of a gold bug, kind of a beetle, stamped on red covers, and pages with gold edges.

"This wizard, Omerwan, said he'd let you look at a page of the book for a gold piece. Said it would reveal your enemies' deepest secret. We all made fun of him. In public, that is. Ever'body with a gold piece met up with him, private. I didn't 'cause I can't read. Them that did, they learned things. They

learned that Jonas Gyori had a cache of silver hidden under his bed, may he rest in peace. They learned that Margus Scont was sleeping with everybody's wife, may he rot in Horror-home. In three weeks' time Omerwan was rich, and we were five dwarfs dead.

"So one day, I went in to Dellowmare's, plinked a gold piece down in front of the wizard, and demanded to see a page. Nobody had asked public-like. He showed me a page covered in letters that moved and crawled, and I held it up like I was reading. `Says here that Omerwan is making a fortune offen us, and that he is *flammable*!' People got my point. We went for the wizard, but he grabbed his book and jumped away. Jumped like a grasshopper, never seen nothin' like it. He got away. So we burnt all the books we could lay our hands on for a day's walk around.

"Books're a bad thing, they stir people up. You're sure you're not a booker?"

May LOCHOST grant these rude folk wisdom! --BR

The Adventure

In Hangtown the adventurers find nothing of interest except, perhaps, a lynch mob. But in the next village beyond, Shackleton, Omerwan (a Circle 5 wizard) has set up business with his Goldbug Book. The heroes may dispose of him and get the book themselves, or they may simply pay him a few silver for a peek at a page. The Book works as an adventure hook alerting the heroes to danger now in wait for them. The nature of the hook is up to the gamemaster.

About the Book

The Goldbug Book originated at the Theran School of Shadows before the Scourge, with an elven scholar of magic named Brohden. Brohden showed voracious curiosity about the lore of magic, and he published many popularizations of magical thinking.

Others at the School apparently regarded Brohden as a negligible magician himself, but one year he surprised everyone by translating a long passage from one of the last Books of Harrow. Fellow scholars, impressed, now noted Brohden's changed manner, his withdrawn and hostile nature. Historians now believe Brohden at that time was using his translation to create his Goldbug Book. When he disappeared mysteriously, no one looked too hard to find him.

The Goldbug Book appears in history at this time. Unlike grimoires of major evil, the Goldbug Book has no malign intent or movement abilities; owners use and transport it like any book. It has limited sapience, for it can telepathically sense the reader's worst enemy; clairvoyantly sense that enemy and read her thoughts in turn; and summarize the enemy's secrets in a page.

The book shows a poor grasp of priorities. An enemy with more secrets than can fit on one page (about 500 words) may hope the book neglects the larger ones until space runs out, for its spell cannot fill more than a page. The book contains no other information, and only one reader can view each page of secrets before they vanish. Naturally the reader must be able to read the language of the secrets (usually the owner's language).

In historical records since the Scourge, the book has occasionally dropped out of sight, then reappeared at some distant new location. It always raises intense curiosity and gets heavy use, and this in turn leads to bloodshed. In over half the recorded cases its owner falls victim to the bloodshed.

THE GOLDBUG BOOK

Maximum Threads: 2

Spell Defense: 9

Rank 1 - Cost: 200

Key Knowledge: The user must learn the book's name and author.

Effect: The book reveals secrets of one enemy within line of sight at the time of reading. Secrets revealed can foil a small plan or cause the enemy minor inconvenience if revealed.

Rank 2 - Cost: 300

Effect: The book's range to sense an enemy increases to encompass a small village or neighborhood.

Rank 3 - Cost: 500

Key Knowledge: The user must locate and read the passage that Brohden translated from one of the Books of Harrow. Brohden used this knowledge to construct the Goldbug Book. Some kingdom libraries and exceptional private libraries include copies.

Effect: The book's range encompasses a large town. Secrets revealed can cause the enemy major financial loss or personal upheavals.

Rank 4 - Cost: 800

Effect: The book's range covers a county or region, such as the Badlands or the southern jungles. Secrets revealed can destroy the enemy's career and damage any supporting organization or alliance.

Rank 5 - Cost: 1,300

Key Knowledge: A ritual beyond Brohden's comprehension can increase the book's power. The user must discover this ritual. The information exists only in Thera's Eternal Library, the Library of Throal, and other major repositories at the gamemaster's discretion. Translating and collating the diverse sources can take up to four months.

Deed: The user must perform the ritual on the book. The ritual ends when the user's greatest enemy speaks her deepest secret in the book's presence. Only a secret that can destroy the enemy qualifies. This deed earns 1,300 Legend Points.

Effect: The book's range covers all Barsaive. Secrets revealed can destroy the enemy or enemy organization.

Rank 6 - Cost: 2,100

Key Knowledge: When the user reads a page of the book after raising it to Rank 5, a footnote refers her to the end of the book. The endnote holds this Rank's Key Knowledge.

Deed: The user must divulge a secret that can destroy her to her greatest enemy, then have the enemy read the Goldbug Book to confirm the knowledge, and finally let the enemy leave unharmed and unrestricted. The gamemaster decides the identity of the enemy and judges whether the secret qualifies. This deed earns 2,100 Legend Points.

Effect: The book's range becomes unlimited. Secrets revealed can bring catastrophe to a kingdom and fundamentally change the campaign world, assuming the enemy knows such information.

ELF LEGENDS

The study of elven legend presents notorious difficulties, because elves believe that their secret heart resides in their tales, whispered from mother to child and sometimes guarded like True Names. It is important that we collect the myths of other races, however, for the stories help us understand how to lead them against our common enemies.

How The World Came About

Dedicated dwarf folklorists have collected the occasional elf story, notably Dacurius's Elven Myth and Folktales. Generally elven legend derives from dwarf models. (Presumably elves would claim the reverse.) Compare this elven account, one of four rival creation myths found in Dacurius's book, with its obvious inspiration, "The Breaker of Fetters," presented earlier.

In the beginning there existed the Mind, and nothing yet was intelligible, for there was naught to think of. The forces of nature moved upon the void, and the Mind had His first Thought, and she is called Sophia. From Mind and Thought did all the Passions come to be. From the interplay of Mind and Thought all Magic came to be. Some Magic entered the Bright worlds of curves and took up residence there under the leadership of Sophia, and Wisdom bequeathed to her children the desire to Name and to Know, and her children are called namegivers. Other Magic went to the worlds of cacophony where, without Sophia, they became Horrors.

Sophia loved all that she had created, but her deepest love was the place that reflected her beauty most, and this place was called Wyrn Wood. There she held court and surrounded herself with the most beautiful of her children, the Elves. One day she called her children the Elves together and said to them, "The time has come when I must hide from the world. Before I go, I tell of the world's beautiful symmetry, for you are the most beautiful of my children. By knowing the Harmony of the World you shall cast powerful magics.

"Outside the circle of the world stand my twelve strongest children, called the Passions. Nine are steadfast, three may fall. Inside the circle of the world live nine races of power who act to hold the world in place.

"The world itself is made of five elements, which are Earth, Air, Water, Fire and Metal; and four forces, whose name the wise of the Name-givers will someday discover. Learn these numbers and the harmony of all things. You have a special destiny to bring the world to harmony, after it has known the ravages of time. Remember the Wyrn Wood and keep it holy, for here the last choir will sing at the end of time."

Sophia hid herself, and the balanced and harmonious rule began: the Passions ruling beyond the earth, and the Queens of Blood Wood ruling upon it. No matter what discords strike upon the world, we shall gather in the holy place of Wyrn Wood to sing them aright.

Tales of the Corruption

Most elf legends revolve around the Corruption; Dacurius has collected 54 tales on this topic. Here follow two short selections. One, a letter transcribed verbatim, comes from a semi-literate workman among the Corrupted elves in the Blood Wood; the other from a questor of Jasprea who lived in a small elven enclave near the Mist Swamps.

"The so-called Elfs who live away from the true Elf home have no idea what we wrought. We did not hide away. We faced the Horrors. I gladly pierce my cheeks with obsidian needles on festal days. I can take pain. Pain is my offering to the ancestors, whose blood brought back the holy wood. We fulfilled the destiny of the Elfs. We held onto this place. Nothing else matters. So we don't swoon at the sound of a panpipe. We are harder than the obsidimen. Eternal vigilance is what elfs are really made for."

#

"I went to the Blood Wood once, for something deep within pulled me to the holy place. I have hardly stopped crying since. Despite the lushness of the forests, despite the mad labs of madder magicians (the Blood Warders are truly a curse), it is a place of the dead. The dead should bury themselves, and a bonfire should scorch away the Corruption. I do not want to see that place in my dreams, and I hope I can avoid the pull of the ancient magics they do there. I hope that my children do not see it, until it has been restored. Mark my words, dwarf, as surely as dragons fly, we will restore it!"

Lost Letters

Entric Greensleeves certainly never intended his Introduction to Sperethiel for a non-elvish audience. Nonetheless the Library has procured several copies, now kept under restricted access. I found this extract telling.

We learn our letters from an ancient poem. When Wyrn Wood accepted dire Corruption, four letters we ceased to use, because they had special meanings. Although the elves of the Defiled Queen still employ them, the untainted make do with other letters combined with diacritical marks. I record the letters here, that they might be understood if encountered in ancient texts.

AOTH. The Aoth-Betha Poem says, "Aoth is for Apple, which holds the sweetness of Wyrn Wood." Now we substitute the letter Abraoth with a curve above it, indicating that it is pronounced as it were Aoth.

DUNEEN. The Aoth-Betha Poem says, "Duneen is for Duel of the Singers, that is fought for our Queen's Heart." Although the annual competition survives in the Corrupted Court, it mocks what once it was. We use the letter Betha with a line drawn through it for the "d" sound.

VISAR. The Aoth-Betha Poem says, "Visar is for the Virtue of our Noble Queen, who has more Virtue than Virtue itself." We now use Wyn with a line drawn through its center for the hard "V" sound.

THAO. The Aoth-Betha Poem says, "Thao is for the fine Thinking of the Court's magicians." We now use Teta with a curve drawn under it for the "th" sound.

Life in the Jungle

Any number of books and scrolls have praised the "natural" life of human and elf tribes in the Liaj jungle. "If only we could live wild and strong," the common sentiment says. A human named Shareen Leahart, while considering whether to become a questor of Jaspre, spent a month among the Tamers. Her book, I Want a Hot Bath, does not idealize Tamer life. This extract from the conclusion describes an encounter with Usun, the Great Dragon of Liaj.

It was still another hot and sticky day. We had spent the morning covering our skin with green mud. It serves as camouflage in this jungle hell, where everything pulsates, buzzes, vibrates, or at least drips. Questor Athandarani gave her usual "back to nature" talk while we ate roasted grubs. I spotted a bear in the woods and asked if we should move into the trees. They laughed at me, chanting a sarcastic

song of "Bears, bears, everywhere!" I hadn't felt as humiliated since the day they hacked off my beautiful red hair with their stone knives and rubbed soot and mud into what was left.

Charlolen explained that bears won't attack a group. As she talked, I thought that she must've been at one time a beautiful elf. She hadn't been born to these barbarians, but had left her spellbooks behind for this green, smelly damp. Her tone made it clear she thought she was giving me a valuable piece of wisdom, rather than just survival knowledge. "If there is wisdom in this," I thought, "either I'm not getting it or you're a mudbrain."

Suddenly everything fell silent. The Liaj is never still, and so I knew something bad was about to happen. Quicker than any serpent, a huge green head of a dragon shot through the trees and snapped Charlolen's body in two. The Tamers froze. I think I screamed. I realized that this was Usun, but the descriptions I'd read of Great Dragons had not prepared me for its majesty, beauty, or deadliness. It quickly slashed its head back and forth, killing two more elves and a man.

Then the titanic head shot in my direction. I thought if I must die, this was the most majestic death I could have.

It stopped. It looked at me, and I realized the intelligence behind those blue eyes was far, far greater than any I had ever beheld, greater in *kind* rather than degree. I felt the dragon knew everything about me.

It said, "You don't belong here. You are not part of this game. You don't understand the mystery of being food. Go."

I ran as far and as fast as I could, crying all the while. I even swung on low-hanging lianas, a method of Tamer transportation that I had scorned. I never went back to see if Usun had finished the small group I had lived with. Yet despite my sorrow, and the cowardice that still shames me, I did indeed gain the initiation I sought. I realized that this path, suppressing the self with all its "unnatural" devices in favor of the circle of nature, was not for me. I would not be food. For that moment of truth I thank that ancient serpent in its garden of Liaj, although I would never again venture within ten days' walk of the place for gold or glory.

#

LETTER FROM THE ELF QUEEN

North of Throal the adventurers find this sealed, undated letter on the body of a Corrupted elf courier who accidentally fell overside from a Throalic airship bound from the Blood Wood to Throal. The letter is addressed to Tetran Willowleaf, a minor diplomatic envoy to Throal. Inside is another sealed letter, along with instructions to pass it to "Our friend in the market." Though the characters cannot know it, this refers to the uncorrupted elf Jael Green, supposedly a potter in the open market outside the gates of Throal.

If the adventurers can break its elaborate cipher, based on the elven word "obedience," the document reveals the cruel nature of the Court and the existence of possible elven intrigue in Thera, despite the apparently clean break of the Splintering.

The Letter

Dearest Jael,

How sad Our bedchamber seems without you. We look over the green center of Our dominions, and think back with many a winsome smile at our play. If We could love anyone, Jael, We would undoubtedly choose you.

A very ugly rumor has reached Our ears, Jael. It is said that you haven't been furthering Our cause among the few faithful We have left in Thera. A visitor, a mere windling to be sure, informs Us that you have actually defected to the side of the Theran throne. Now Jael, We are sure that you haven't done so, and We wish you to journey back to the Court at once and report on your activities. We need to know of your success among the faithful in Thera, and especially of that other matter.

Fear not that We have released the windling that brought such horrible slanders against you. You do remember, We are sure, of how much We hate the bearer of bad news. (We do hope that little scar on your side has quite healed up.) Be glad to know that after pulling out the windling's little clear wings Ourselves, We gave him over to the exolashers and told them to have fun for as long as they could. Imagine, the little thing lasted two weeks at their hands! Who would have thought the little creature could have such stamina?

Please hurry back, because if those slanders have a twig of truth, We have a new plan. It seems that Athalcai -- you might remember him -- he was the Blood Warder that you said was too evil to be a true elf (jesting, We are sure) -- Athalcai has developed a new spell, and We gave him some of your love to Us to try it on.

It seems he can summon a person with such force as to tear the victim from what he is doing and answer the summons -- instantly, obsessively, without thought for food or shelter or transport. Now, We suspect there's a lot of nasty scenery between Our perfect Court and that nasty human Empire. We hate to think of you being forced to walk each and every step ... especially the parts under water. Dear Athalcai -- who has, by the way, taken your place as Our favorite while you have been gone -- assures Us that the summoned one never loses consciousness even for an instant. Such a clever boy he is, really, and so eager to try his spell. Now that you have touched this love note, apparently he can invoke the spell with a whispered word. How remarkable!

So do be a wise lad and hurry back. We wait impatiently!

A.

Songbirds

Over the decades, in lethal secrecy, Alachia has enlisted a few uncorrupted elves, never more than a dozen at a time, as spies. The Blood Queen and her most intimate confidantes call them "Songbirds."

Initially the Queen drew these elves (high-Circle thieves, illusionists, and troubadours) with the promise of high pay, but when they arrived in the Blood Wood, she secured their loyalty using her irresistible wiles. She sent them separately into the Theran Empire and elsewhere in Barsaive. Now they report back to her via carrier pigeon, diplomatic missives, or magical devices.

Through her Songbirds Alachia learns conventional information, such as enemy plots and troop movements. She also keeps her spies alert for more abstract knowledge: how uncorrupted elves currently feel about the Court; what areas seem to recover best from the Scourge; and names and whereabouts of powerful elementalists and questors. The Songbirds do not realize, and probably Alachia herself does not consciously recognize, the true reason she seeks powerful spellcasters: She hopes to guide their research, over the course of lifetimes, to an eventual cure for the Blood Wood's

Corruption.

To an observer of Blood Court politics, the Songbirds represent a self-evident risk to the Queen. Court factions wrestle passionately, sometimes viciously, over the wisdom of their self-inflicted Corruption. Some assert that the elves have made their existence into a horror beyond any Horror's doing, but most still profess neurotic pride in their isolated condition. Alachia publicly sides with the conservative majority.

Leaders of Throal seek the courier's body and the letter to avoid a diplomatic incident with Queen Alachia. If the characters deliver the letter to Throalic authorities, they receive a secret mission to the Blood Wood to discover more about the Songbirds and the Irresistible Summons spell (see below). The heroes may instead decide to undertake the quest on their own.

The adventure leads them afoul of the Blood Warders, the exolashers, and Alachia's favorite, Athalcai, a Circle 12 nethermancer. Should they escape and prove the Queen's ties to her Songbirds, the scandal would rock the Blood Court.

Irresistible Summons (Circle 9 nethermancer spell)

Within a Bone Circle (nethermancer Circle 2 spell), the nethermancer sheds blood on a small item (permanent loss of 1 point of damage). The blood vanishes when the caster weaves the last thread for the spell and names its intended target. If the target touches the item within a year and a day, thereafter the caster may speak a word of command to summon the target. The target immediately receives a Willpower Test against the spell's Effect number. Failure means the target sets out by the fastest possible means for the Bone Circle, instantly and without preparation.

The target cannot voluntarily stop or rest before reaching the Circle. The target feels hunger and thirst but cannot satisfy them except while travelling. Unless a boat or ship is convenient, the target plunges suicidally into rivers or oceans. She tries to climb obviously unclimbable cliffs, and so on. Practically, an Irresistible Summons cast on a distant target results in the target's early death.

The target gets a Willpower Test to throw off the spell's effects every 24 hours after the first Test. Also, if the target has not reached the Bone Circle by a year and a day after casting, or if the Bone Circle is broken, the spell ends immediately.

Threads: 4

Weaving Difficulty: 15/21

Range: Unlimited

Duration: Rank months (up to 1 year)

Effect: Willforce + 15

Casting Difficulty: Target's Spell Defense

WOOD LONGING

Homesickness for the Blood Wood may strike any uncorrupted elf, especially during times of depression or anxiety. The elf culture seems to instill this tendency even in those elves who have never seen the Wood. However, few elves fall prey to the Wood Longing, what they call among themselves "going to Wyrn Wood." This incapacitating dementia lasts for weeks, and unless the stricken elf reaches the Blood Wood, the sickness usually ends in death by starvation or exhaustion.

The adventurers encounter this sickness when it strikes an elf informant with vital information. Toranya the Cooper, a barrel merchant in the local market, knows the password they need to (for instance) infiltrate the Hand of Corruption. (Substitute any goal you have already established for the adventure.)

When the heroes locate Toranya, she is lost in the last stages of Wood Longing, cooing listlessly at imaginary birds. The heroes must cure her, temporarily or for good. To do so, they should research the condition. Bennon Twelvedales, a human jeweler who works not far from Toranya, can tell them of his own experience with the homeless madness:

"His name was Uthar. Uthar the Jeweler, he said. He was never one of my best workers, his mind even in the beginning seemed always focused on something else, but he was always a good second-rate ringmaker, and the elves wouldn't buy from anyone else. Sometimes in the afternoons he would sing one of the old songs, and it did all our hearts good. Of course, none of us spoke Elvish, or whatever you call that tongue, but there was something in it, I don't know, something about the way he put the words together.

"His songs grew sadder and sadder while he worked. I started losing apprentices. I asked him to quit singing, and he did. I thought everything was all right. Then one day, it was a gray chilly day in Doddul, one day he just laid down his hammer and started staring off into space.

"`What's a matter, lad?' I asked him.

"`I can't see my hammer,' said Uthar.

"I went over to him and put his hammer in his hand, but it just fell away, clunk, on the floor. I sent for a questor of Garlen, and she said that nothing was wrong with his eyes. Maybe it was a temporary thing and it would clear up.

"We kind of worked around him. At first he would join us for lunch and we would, you know, try to joke about it. `Found that hammer yet?' But he got to where he couldn't move around the shop, he would keep running into things. I tried to get the Garlen temple to take him, but we had a measles epidemic at the time. We had to build a little pen for him, so that he wouldn't hurt himself.

"Then he started to say things like `Pretty bird' or `What a beautiful blossom' and point to the air, where there wasn't anything.

"Then it hit me. I asked him, `Where are you, Uthar?'

"`I am in Wyrn Wood. Isn't it beautiful?'

"I asked around the city and found a caravan leaving for the Blood Wood in three weeks. Now I don't run a charity or anything, but I paid for them to come by and pick Uthar up. I figured, well, if he can

just last till then....

"But he got to where he couldn't hold his food. We tried feeding him. You can imagine how my business was falling off. People thought the shop was cursed. We tried feeding him, but it was no good.

"The caravan took his body away. I hope they buried him in the Blood Wood. I know the homesickness doesn't often reach that extreme, but I'm not hiring any more elves. My heart just can't take it."

Curing the Longing

The cure depends on how the gamemaster views the Longing. If it functions as mundane homesickness, many ruses, illusions, or therapies can temporarily remove the symptoms, merely by making the victim believe she has reached the Blood Wood.

If the Longing has magical characteristics, then the cure requires that the victim actually enter the Blood Wood, no substitutions allowed. Illusions of the Blood Wood do not cure the Longing. After all, the victim already lives in such an illusion. A magical illusion may temporarily clear the victim's mind, or it may provoke a hysterical episode as the magic conflicts with the mental image. Taking the victim to an actual forest, perhaps one cosmetically enhanced to resemble the Blood Wood, may work temporarily.

Questor healing magic can cure the Longing but not protect against its return. Treat the effect as a Healing Potion (page 258 of the **Earthdawn** rulebook) that heals only the effects of the homesickness. The questor usually requests a donation of 300 silver, the price of a Healing Potion.

Actually entering the Blood Wood should cure non-magical homesickness within 24 hours, and the elf never falls prey to it again. Going to the Wood's edge may work, but the gamemaster may require the victim to go deep into the forest before allowing a Recovery Test. If the Longing works magically, then perhaps only Alachia or a Blood Warder can cure the illness. For this service they "request" a substantial favor in return, such as an espionage mission against a rival kingdom.

#

HUMAN LEGENDS

The changeable nature of humans that some dwarfs find so unsettling shows forth clearly in their many-sided legends. Human tales generally lack dwarven craft, of course, but they relate the stories with an enthusiasm, and listen with an absorption, quite foreign to other Name-giver races. I have selected tales of faith, romance, and that darker element present in (apparently) every human's personality, suspicion.

Dancing by the Witch's Moon

Charassa 13

Village of Toron, near Haven

Dear Vertius, Librarian of Throal,

In the name of Lochost, who frees our minds to seek out the new thoughts, I greet you.

I have been gathering naming systems for the Moon lore. The temple cleaners here in Toron gave me a delightful list. The villagers have a name for each of the 13 lunar cycles. When I asked for stories explaining the names of the Moon periods, they directed me to the oldest man in the village, a retired ostler named Dember. His story took place during a full moon in Teayu, which they call the Witch's Moon. Although it doesn't shed light on moon names, I know someone will want to hear it.

"It was the first year after our kaer had emerged. I had taken to walking in the moonlight. Everybody missed something in kaer life. The sun, the stars, the wind. For me it was the Moon. I had learned the names of the moon cycles from my great-grandfather Fritz, a wonderful man who knew much lore and could tell chilling stories.

"It was a Witch's Moon, everything white and silvery, and the frost just beginning to silver every tree, stone, and blade of grass. At first I hadn't noticed her walking beside me. When I did, I noticed two things: one, with her pale blue eyes and fawn pale hair she was beautiful; two, she was transparent. She looked so lonely. Desolate, you might say. Then she raised her head and howled a loud high scream of gibberish. I knew she wanted to speak, but some Horror magic was stopping her.

"She motioned that she wanted to dance. I had never heard of spectral dancers, and so I began to dance. Her motions, which must have been so painful, were beautiful. It hurt my spirit to dance with her. We danced on and on in the moonlight. I tried to break free, but she held with a grip born of absolute need. Her eyes reflected back the moonlight, and in that silvery light I somehow began to know her life.

"She had been a member of my kaer, when it first sealed up. Her lover, a young strong beautiful man, had been sealed away in another kaer. One night Astendar came to her in a dream and showed her the way through the kaer's defenses. She ran wildly into the night, across frost-covered grass lit by the Witch's Moon. She saw him.

"But it hadn't been Astendar who had spoken to her. It had been a Horror that wanted to make them spectral dancers. The Horror transformed them. She hadn't seen him since.

"For a moment she knew that I knew her pain. Then she dissolved into the moonlight, and I fainted with exertion. I hope that wherever she is, Astendar has answered the prayer I've made every night for

40 years, that she be with him."

In the sign of Ink,

Ralph Poundstone

Aralda's Hook

Orichalcum, that priceless combination of the five Elements of Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Metal, figures prominently in the literature of magic. One cautionary tale comes from the doubtful "Magus Baronwyn," now discredited as a scholar of magic but still widely read for entertainment.

According to Baronwyn, one Magus Donalain found a magical treasure called Aralda's Hook. (Baronwyn offers no description of the alleged Hook, and no other source mentions it.) Donalain tried to use the Hook without first binding it with orichalcum.

"He froze in position, eyes wide, hair on end," writes Baronwyn. "His nose bled and his fingernails split. Hairs on his forearm withered and burned. In a trice he shot upward, thirty feet or more, then plunged to the ground with equal force, rebounding in high arcs several times. Thunder cracked around him, lightning played, winds whirled him up and down, and three eyeblinks would miss it all.

"Donalain screeched so loud as to wake a statue. At the noise, the Hook carried him aloft to the eagle's height, a dot, a speck to eyes below. There Hook and mage burst aflame, and a second sun burned the sky. It vanished, nor hair nor flake of skin of Magus Donalain was seen after, nor Aralda's Hook. Harken, student, to the teachings of Baronwyn, who guards you from catastrophe!"

The reader must judge the likelihood of this account.

Gift and Necessity

The Tale of the Theran Birdman shows that the romantic spirit always dwells in humankind, even in grim Thera.

There was once a princess named Ekana (which in High Theran means Fate or Necessity). She was the most beautiful of all women born to the noble house. The court poet, named Sirakh (which in High Theran means Gift), wrote,

"When I saw Duke Sestoris sitting next her,

I ranked him as high as the Passions,

Yea, were it not blasphemy to say so,

I thought him more favored than the Passions,

Sitting next to her hearing her sweet laughter.

Where Ekana is, the heart takes flight."

When this poem was discovered during a search of Sirakh's room, Sestoris sentenced the insolent commoner to a horrible fate. First court torturers pulled out his tongue, that it might not speak

licentious poetry, and then they tarred and feathered him so that he might resemble a bird (in mockery of his verse). On the day of the wedding of Sestoris and Ekana, powerful magicians placed a spell on Sirakh that he would rise into the air, hover, and slowly starve for his forbidden love.

Many said that Ekana returned his love, but hid it, afraid that she would suffer the same fate.

Centuries later, a princess was born to the royal house, and oracles named her Helene (whose name in High Theran means Favored One). She was a magnificent beauty, and as she grew, many remarked on her similarity to the legendary Princess Ekana. Her father forbade her to speak with any of the palace staff, afraid that Ekana's spirit had been reborn in her, and that she might suffer the same fate. He arranged her wedding, and although she did not love her betrothed, she went through the ceremony.

At the feast that followed, a large black bird flew into the hall. Many arrows pierced it, but it did not cry out. It picked up the princess and carried her away. Many believe that the force of love kept the poet alive until he could give the gift of love to the princess. May they be happy in their aerial realm!

CADAVER KAER

Villages like Selwyn dot the fringes of the Badlands: clusters of one or two hundred people on two dozen farmsteads, squat hay silos and granaries, a forge, a few temples, and the ubiquitous tavern. Citizens here live in constant low-level misery punctuated by episodes of terror: raids from Badlands monsters, Horror-inspired psychological torture, and the mundane fright of a bad crop year. However, the Horrors never destroy these villages, for a deserted village has no one left to feel fear.

Often a Horror promotes misery by fomenting inter-village hostility. These rivalries have no rational cause, for in depopulated Barsaive few villages need compete for resources or fear conquest by a neighbor. Yet agents of cunning Horrors provoke continual alarm among villagers. They tell grisly stories of the "inhuman" residents of some nearby town, fanatics who "don't value their lives as we do ours" and would gladly sacrifice themselves in assaults on local citizens. Right-thinking villagers must prevent this threat by attacking first. So petty skirmishes occur often.

When the adventurers stop in Selwyn, they must pay exorbitant prices for food, lodging, and equipment, and no one acts friendly. The residents may well try to speed their departure from town with smudge pots and pitchforks.

Why? A safe distance from town, a farmer named Donwyn Lenthraleit catches up to the party and apologizes for the Selwynians' rudeness. She tells them a tale that explains the townspeople's attitude.

Ramallyn's Feast

"The Scourge changed us in many ways," she begins, "but the worst change comes in our distrust of onetime friends. When the questor Ramallyn visited Selwyn kaer, these seven decades past, he brought joyous news of the new dawn. Our grandparents returned to the light and renewed old bonds of friendship. The next spring they established Ramallyn's Feast in the questor's honor. Laden with bread and cheese and wine, villagers from miles around gathered to drink, to dance, and above all to tell stories. Through stories, we awaken hope.

"At the first feast, however, one story brought no hope. A round, red-cheeked man named Whorton spoke of a Horror that had found his kaer years before. 'It fed on us day by day,' he said, 'a few of us in body, all of us in mind. It flooded our tunnels with blood to the level of our knees, just to hear us scream.'

"Children listened in fascination, adults in fear. 'How did you survive?' they asked. With an awful smile Whorton said, 'We didn't.'

"He said the families in his kaer had tried to avoid the Horror by brewing a cauldron of poison and drinking together. 'But even death cannot stop some Horrors,' he said, now grinning, 'for they can make things of the self-killed. Husbands, wives, children. . . .'

"Here a villager, Dornan the smith, accused Whorton of frightening his children, and struck at Whorton in anger. Whorton calmly reached out and snapped Dornan's neck. Then, as people screamed and ran, he smiled again and walked away. His parting words were, 'Enjoy your feast. We will.'

"While the frightened people debated what to do, they felt a sudden weariness. All who had drunk the wine or eaten bread soon fell fast asleep. When the survivors awoke, they found the bones of friends and companions scattered about.

"They formed parties to hunt the countryside. No one found Whorton or any of his kind, but they knew, and we still know, that among us live the cadaver men.

"Perhaps they inhabit the next village, or the one in the valley. Until we know, we treat our neighbors as enemies. This is the madness the Horrors brought on us."

A Cadaverous Village?

Donwyn's tale may puzzle the characters. Known cadavers cannot impersonate living beings, except possibly invalids who share their extreme pallor and penetrating odor. A cadaverous village, if one could imagine such a miserable place, would presumably differ strongly from its neighbors. Perhaps the tale's cadavers are a particularly lifelike group, heretofore unknown, whose apparent friendship (presumably in conjunction with drugged liquor) lures unwitting victims.

Or perhaps the legend merely justifies Selwynian aggression. The characters may encounter a Selwynian raiding party heading to another town they know nothing of. The raiders may accept the characters into their group, given an adequate demonstration of strength. Otherwise, the worried Donwyn asks the characters to shadow the raiders and stop them from doing "something rash."

The story's development depends on whether the legend is true. If the gamemaster decides the legend is false, a rumor promoted by the corrupt human agents of some intelligent Horror, the heroes should stop the raiders, track down the agent, expose him, and restore harmony between villages.

But the legend may be true. The raiders may enter a town and find, not hostility, but extreme friendliness. This suspicious behavior may disguise murderous intent by lifelike cadaver men (and women and children), who lure unsuspecting travellers into their homes or inns, then pounce in the night and devour them. On the roadside or in a dump outside this village, the heroes might notice old, gnawed bone fragments that appropriate Talents, Skills, and magic can identify as human.

Instead, the kindly villagers may be innocent humans. Some local magical effect protects them from the Horror-inspired distrust of their neighboring towns. For instance, the bones of a long-dead questor like Ramallyn may drive away all agents of the Horror. Selwynians do not return this open-mindedness, and so the raiders may browbeat the wary heroes with horrific legends about this "too-friendly place" long before they reach it.

In a devious twist, the gamemaster may decide the cadaver men are as unconscious as their victims. The Horror that created them increases their torment by having them believe they live normal lives.

Having befriended a traveller, they black out, and when they wake up, they have his blood on their lips. Heroes who survive the encounter must decide whether to "put them out of their misery" (hardly heroic in the conventional sense) or try to find a cure for their cadaverous condition. This may involve a favor from a Passion, a magical item that resurrects the dead, or (for heroes of very high Circles) a quest to defeat the Horror that blighted the villagers.

For these "lifelike cadavers," use the Cadaver Man statistics on page 288 of the rulebook.

#

OBSIDIMAN LEGENDS

Just as warriors of other races have thrown themselves in vain against the obsidimen's rocky skins, countless researchers have crashed against obsidiman folklore and come away stunned. The rock people tell stories, if that is the word, that cover entire sleepless days, or they recite enigmatic epigrams that flash by before the listener notices. Collecting their legends presents problems, not of accessibility in the usual sense, but of sheer endurance and cognition.

The Epic of Crystallization

The obsidimen of Gabbro Liferock, in the Throal Mountains northwest of Bartertown, tell the following tale in their sporadic conclaves called (in translation) Diamond Veins. At these murmurous gatherings, of two or 200, the obsidimen exchange news and repeat legends like this one. They spend 500 hours reciting this tale for, as far as I can discern, no reason whatever. I have shortened it to its essentials, but I fear I have made it sound far more exciting than it is.

In the beginning everything moved fast in a crucible of matter, energy, and magic. Matter began to gather, very slowly. Very, very slowly. Then it cooled. Very, very slowly. No haste here. Very, very slowly.

Magic drew toward the slow-growing crystals. Very slowly, magic began to dwell in some of the crystals. As they crystallized, very, very slowly, not at all fast, magic also crystallized into souls. Souls of grass blades, and oak trees, and bamboo, and mustard herbs, and strawberry vines, and [1,248 plant types omitted --Ed.] and then dragons, and shrews, and white-ruffed pheasants with orange wingtips who cry loudly in spring, and krilworms, and copperhead snakes with close-ribbed underbellies, and those with wide-ribbed underbellies, and [approximately 5,000 creature types omitted, including most Name-giver races interspersed among the rest -- Ed.] and then sand, and iron ore, and bornite-chalcopyrite-quartz aggregates, and olivine, and [over 15,000 mineral types omitted --Ed.] and finally us.

Eventually the Earth cooled, and we could move around. Some fell to temptation and moved. They eroded.

Very, very slowly, souls grow like crystals. Be still within and without. Economize your experiences. Give long, deep thought to what has happened in your life, and then crystallize that experience. Avoid haste. You achieve through not-doing.

Everything in life must turn into the very, very slow process of becoming an immortal, independent, and powerful essence. If you crystallize correctly, your being will take care of all matters. You cannot do this too slowly.

Sayings of the Obsidimen

After the spectacularly long and dull saga, the second most popular form of literary expression among obsidimen is the epigram. Most hold limited interest for other races, such as those that warn against the grave danger of erosion, but a few appear below.

1. Never force your ideas on another. Present them as seed crystals. In a mind fed with the correct experiences, they will grow.
2. What is the true sign of excellence? When others pick up your ideas because they have rested in your shadow, they work your magic for you, thinking it their own. Here is excellence.
3. You who have cured yourself of daydreaming about tomorrow may achieve what you were born here for.
4. By teaching others, you learn yourself.
5. Name-givers receive a definite number of experiences. Economizing them, they prolong their life.
6. Judge others by yourself and you rarely mistake them.
7. What is the mark of true wisdom? When you prepare for the freedom and health of your remote descendants, you learn about yourself. Here is wisdom.
8. Respect others' ambitions, and include them as you can in your own.
9. The secret is that there is no secret.

View From Eternity

Obsidimen tell this tale to explain the virtue of slow movement. Perhaps it explains more than that...

Those who run fast though the world, listen to these words, that they might lead you to peace. Be still as if asleep, and ponder this. You see things true only if you make the journey to the Still Realm. There you can change the subtle patterns, but better merely to observe.

When you return from your long vision, mix the Still with the Moving, and then no matter what plans you start, you will inevitably act to bring them into being. Remember: The Mobile world is but a confused reflection of the Still Realm. If you remember this, you may hope for peace.

ROCK JUSTICE

Obsidimen culture often puzzles the faster-moving races. Only the trolls, whose hotheaded nature makes them unlikely admirers, see virtue in the obsidimens' slow pace. Wealthy obsidimen sometimes hire troll caretakers and secretaries to handle their traffic with other Name-givers.

The adventurers meet one of these trolls, Gorlin Hulg, while in a city looking for work. Gorlin, small for a troll but shrewd, hires the characters to fake a battle "so some Blood Warders" can see what they're getting." This curious mission requires further explanation, of course, and Gorlin gladly recounts the story:

The Tale

Well, I call my employer Diorite Smith. He (and I don't know that Diorite really is a "he," but never mind) and his Liferock siblings developed a taste for money. He thought the clan might need it in the future, and so he wrote a letter to a band of dishonest dwarf prospectors, hiring them to uncover some charges of Elemental Earth under Diorite's mountain, Jormedheim Peak. Jormedheim's deposits couldn't match the ones in Blood Wood, but who wants to be around a bunch of elves anyway? Diorite meant for the dwarfs to make the big blow, collect their pay, and clear out of there, leaving his clan to mine the Earthblood.

Well, the dwarfs took their money, all right. Then they set their charges, but they didn't clear out. They began working the claim right in front of Diorite and his whole family. We offered to raid the dwarfs, but Diorite said that the dwarfs weren't cheating him. He felt sorry for the dwarfs because their greed made them move too fast, not think like a civilized being. Those rockmen are so calm. When I die, I hope I've done enough good deeds to be reborn as a rockman.

Anyway, the dwarfs gathered so much Earth from the caverns that they ran out of orichalcum jars to store it. They tried putting some spell on plain lead jars. Guess how well that worked? The Earthblood built up such a charge that the lead melted. Wait, it gets better! It reformed into these weird living-lead creatures hungry for Elemental Earth. Some dwarfs fled the mine, others tried to kill the creatures before they ate up all the orichalcum jars. These dwarfs paid for their greed with their lives.

Still Diorite and his clan did nothing.

When the lead men had eaten all the Elemental Earth, they began to slow down until they finally stood still. Diorite wrote a letter to the Blood Warders, asking if they wanted to buy the creatures for their research. The Blood Warders are always interested in the bizarre, so they're coming down to look over the creatures. Elves pay real well for that kind of thing.

I asked Diorite if the Blood Warders might not turn the metal men into weapons. He said they might, but using them would destroy the resources of the Blood Wood in just a few hundred years. Then his clan could move in on the biggest deposit of Earth in the world.

To accomplish all this, Diorite had written three letters and spoken once to the dwarf foreman. He never walked more than 15 minutes away from his Liferock, and his clan looks ready to become the richest in these mountains.

But first these Blood Warders need to come through with the money. I suggested to Diorite that the elves would want to see these creatures in battle, so he sent me to find someone who would spar with them, you might say, to show them off. Fight them, but don't kill them, and it would be okay if you didn't get yourselves killed either. What do you say?

Fianchors

The "living-lead creatures hungry for Elemental Earth" that Hulg mentions are *fianchors* (Old Theran, "intruders"), residents of one Elemental Plane sorcerously relocated to another.

Some sapient residents of the Elemental Planes study magic, and these elemental beings sometimes travel physically between the planes. Travel presents even greater obstacles for the creatures, the fianchors, than it does for Barsaiveans. Fianchors' unmixed elemental nature conflicts with rival planes more strongly than beings here, who embrace aspects of all five Elements. Because of this stronger

conflict, the fianchors undertake magical transmutation to habituate themselves to the new plane.

However, the rites of change often drive the fianchors temporarily insane. At least, Barsaivean scholars believe so because the fianchors that invade this plane behave so abominably. They eat all the Elemental material in the vicinity, especially orichalcum, and they attack every living thing around as well. This implacable hostility leads a few scholars to suppose fianchors are low-level Horrors, or that the transmutation magic they use comes from a Horror. This idea has met wide rejection because, among other reasons, fianchors seem unconcerned with Name-giver suffering or fear. Indeed, fianchor nature appears completely alien to our understanding, even by the standards of elemental creatures.

Fianchors appear only rarely in Barsaive, but of the known instances, such as the Jormedheim incident, most appeared in the presence of unmined or freshly excavated Elemental material. In most native deposits of such material, this plane's juncture to the appropriate Elemental Plane strengthens, allowing easy passage for the fianchors to this plane.

Why do they come here? Conjecture has it that Elemental material on this plane acquires a subtly different nature, a different "taste" as it were, from the material on the original Elemental plane. Scholars who advance this idea believe fianchors like the taste of this material. In fact, when the fianchors appear to ingest the ore, they are actually transporting it back to their adoptive plane for reasons unknown.

FIANCHOR

Attributes

DEX: 6

STR: 10

TOU: 8

PER: 9

WIL: 10

CHA: 3

Initiative: 4

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 9

Damage: 7

Number of Spells: (1)

Spellcasting: 12

Effect: 11

Physical Defense: 12

Spell Defense: 10

Social Defense: 18

Armor: 8

Mystic Armor: 8

Knockdown: 10

Death Rating: 50

Wound Threshold: 18

Unconsciousness Rating: 49

Recovery Tests: 2

Combat Movement: 25

Full Movement: 50

Legend Points: 400

Equipment: None

Loot: Elemental material, 1d8 x 10 silver pieces. These count as treasure worth Legend Points.

These statistics describe a typical fianchor, a "weird living-lead creature," in Barsaive. On this plane it resembles a vaguely humanoid but mostly shapeless figure made of the nearest appropriate element. Despite their associations with two different Elemental planes, treat a fianchor as an Elemental from the plane it currently lives in. The fianchor eats any Elemental material in sight. Then it usually attacks, but it may show inscrutable alien behavior.

Fianchors vary in abilities according to their plane of origin and plane of current residence. On either of these planes they are stronger than in Barsaive.

The Adventure

Gorlin's story is true and his offer is legitimate. Gorlin offers the characters 40 silver apiece plus travel expenses, and will go as high as 60 apiece. The journey takes a few days. At a safe distance from the mine the party meets Diorite and the Blood Warders, two Corrupted elves of hostile attitude and great power. Gorlin gives each of the adventurers a tiny shaving of orichalcum (value 20-30 silver; half their payment) and sends them after the fianchors.

The creatures, shapeless leaden pillars, animate as the characters approach. Under the watchful eyes of the elves and Gorlin, the characters must fight the fianchors without killing them for half a dozen rounds, letting the creatures make a variety of attacks. Then the characters must flee, whereupon the fianchors grow dormant again.

The gamemaster can introduce complications during the battle. The fianchors may move to attack the Blood Warders, forcing the characters to decide whether to protect Corrupted elves. After the battle, the Blood Warders may try to enlist the characters as muscle to "persuade" Diorite to part with the fianchors for free, or as guards for the long trip to the Blood Wood. Finally, the fianchors may suddenly begin speaking, for until now their new bodies have not had time to evolve vocal abilities. The creatures murmur a spell and vanish.

PANIC AT AURIC KAER

While travelling among the deserted Dragon Mountain ore claims, the adventurers encounter a veteran of the short-lived Auric Kaer ore madness of 1486 TH, an old ork named Dunnerd Lonk. Once they greet him, they find it difficult to shut him up. Dunnerd's account of one of his interesting experiences follows.

The Tale

"The actual veins of ore here were uncovered during the construction of Auric Kaer. Nobody gave a damn about native orichalcum then, with the Scourge coming on fast. Centuries later, when that troll airship put in for water, we heard 'em and came out. As soon as we knew we was looking at a safe and sane world, the ore madness hit real hard.

"Funny thing, orichalcum. You can never have enough. If you eat the best turkey dinner in Barsaive, you don't want another one right then. Yet you can find the biggest nugget of ore in the world, work yourself ragged for 20 hours mining it from the earth, and if you hear of another hit, you'll get up from your tired bed and have at it again.

"We was mining out of the walls of the kaer, and built a boomtown camp in a stockade of raw lumber. A creek ran alongside town, and one of the boys found ore flecks in the soft brown mud. So we panned and we sluiced, not to mention tearing up the ground right under the town.

"One day a troll kid found the toe of an obsidiman poking through the mud. We reckoned this buried guy'd been on his way to the kaer before the Scourge, missed the sealing, and died outside the door. It took us a week to dig out the poor old guy. We put him on a stump in the center of town and started calling him 'His Honor, the Mayor.'

"Couple of months later the town collapsed, 'cause we had mined out the bottom of it. Like I say, ore madness makes you do dumb things. "His Honor" fell in the pit with everything else.

"We moved downstream and searched for a new vein. One of the boys starting eyeing this huge red granite boulder. Red granite can bear orichalcum, and so he took a couple swings at it. All at once we hear a yell from the old townsite. Some fool said it must be the ghost of Shorty Dufee, who danced into the stockade at the start of the rainy season saying he'd found a big claim outside of town, then drank himself to death by promising the barkeep future payments.

"Well, we figured if Shorty's ghost didn't want us getting at this rock, it must that rich claim. We went at it good. We heard all kinds of rumbling and roaring, and lot of miners got spooked and run, but us greedy types stayed at it. Suddenly he crashed through the trees: His Honor, the Mayor.

"He ran over, and we all looked at each other real sudden and sickly, 'cause we guessed we'd been attacking his Liferock. We backed away fast-like, and after a couple tense moments we all sorted things out. Seems he'd been dormant, and the attack someway called to him.

"He stayed pretty mobile for the next few months and actually served as mayor. Then he settled down for a long stand near his rock, and we elected Mary Kongee."

About Ore Madness

Several episodes of ore madness have struck parts of Barsaive since the Scourge ended. All to date have taken place in hilly or mountainous terrain. News of orichalcum or gold travels fast in the province; within a week after the outside world first learns of a rich strike, 2,000 to 20,000 hopeful miners, assayers, merchants, and camp followers arrive in a rugged area hardly larger than a village. They subsist for a month or a year until the mines play out, then vanish just as quickly. These overnight boomtowns make good settings for adventure.

Ore madness adventures often center around routine issues such as claim jumping, lost treasure maps, and banditry. Other elements include usurious winesellers and provisioners, who sell food and drink for almost their weight in ore; crooked betting; and a background of easy virtue and unbridled greed.

The Auric Kaer boomtown collapse highlights the porous nature of some Barsaivean land. A long-held kaer typically grows to enormous size, and so miners who dig nearby risk widespread collapse. On the other hand, a deep claim may open onto a tunnel complex, abandoned in the unwritten past and teeming with magical treasures and subterranean creatures.

Taxation

The Theran Empire still technically claims dominion over Barsaive, and Throal extends its influence over much of the region. Both kingdoms love the sudden revenue bonus from taxes on rich ore finds.

Therans: In past instances the Therans' "tax" has amounted to complete seizure of all ore found, as fines for mining without prior approval. This chore ordinarily required one Imperial maniple detached from the nearest kila stoneship. Thera has usually waited until the rush almost played itself out, in order to find the maximum amount of gold or orichalcum stored and ready to transport.

In their intermittent political infighting, rival fleet commanders may come to view an ore camp as a rich prize; more than the ore itself, success earns favor in high places. This happened at Auric Kaer, a month after the legend recounted above. With typical Theran overkill, Commanders Amborius and Delarian each moved into the Kaer camp with a maniple, support personnel, and a combat vedette for show. A week later Amborius, stung by his rival's greater success in confiscating mines, shipped in an entire cohort. Overgovernor Tularch soon recalled them both, incensed at the operation's extravagant costs. By then the Imperial troops had looted and destroyed the Auric Kaer site.

Throal: The dwarf kingdom takes one third of all proceeds from everyone leaving the ore camp. Throalic collectors use an effective "iron fist in velvet glove" tactic. Standing before a platoon of soldiers, the collector politely asks to search the miner's person and vehicle. Refusal, or declining to pay the assessed tax, brings no punishment at that time, but as the rebellious miners proceed through the mountains, they get attacked remarkably often. Miners believe the Throalic commanders authorize bandit gangs as privateers. The gangs rob enemies of the state with the kingdom's permission, or at least its benign neglect. To date no one has proved or disproved the allegation.

Sometimes collectors can't find the proceeds they would tax. Miners pay dearly for magical camouflage that evades a collector's own magical detection. Spells of invisibility fetch high prices, as do those that temporarily disguise the ore as some less valuable form. "Yessir, richest lead strike I ever seen. Gray, gray lead! Gets yer excited, don't it? Whut ya mean, `No'?"

The Adventure

"His Honor, the Mayor" is an obsidiman named -- well, his designation among his kind is untranslatable, and so he answers well enough to "Mayor." Having adhered to his Liferock for the last 20 years, the Mayor now detaches himself for another episode of wandering and collecting new experiences to share with the Liferock.

Meeting his old friend Dunnerd Lonk in the company of the adventurers, the Mayor casually mentions the news that more orichalcum ore lies near here, not far beyond the westernmost extent of the old claims. A young obsidiman just returned from his first wandering has sensed the ore, and he passed it along as an interesting piece of trivia. Dunnerd's and the characters' intense interest in this news takes him a bit by surprise, until he recalls the curious ways of the fast folk.

The adventure promises a fortune in orichalcum ore, perhaps a hundred thousand silver for every character -- if they can keep the claim secret long enough to retrieve the ore. Dunnerd's expertise lets them equip and work the claim, but the mere purchase of equipment may be enough to start rumors. If the characters avoid this, Dunnerd's own talkativeness may ruin them. Then there are the travellers through these mountains, more numerous by far than two decades ago.

Eventually the news gets out, and the ore madness descends. Run adventures based on the suggestions above, and then bring in Throal and Thera to argue over the taxes. Can the characters get out with their fortunes intact? More importantly, can they forestall a replay of the bloody outcome of two decades before?

ORK LEGENDS

The orks' legends emphasize their constant struggle for attainment, even at the expense of another race. These stories also signify one more way some orks try for success: Orks were the first to actively seek the Librarians and ask money to tell their stories. The few orks we commissioned told the tales well. They gave good value, as they might say. Their stock of legends overlapped heavily, lending authenticity to this selection.

Why We Fight

The earliest ork tales tell of the slave status of their ancestors' ancestors. Parents tell the following tale of Terath's Chargers when a young ork of either gender reaches puberty.

Long ago we had no freedom. Everyone owned the orks. They bought us and sold us, and when we died our souls went to their heavens and hells and kept serving the masters. If we drank, we drank their water; if we looked at a pretty flower, we looked at their flower. So we prayed to Lochost to give us freedom. We prayed and prayed, but we could not get through.

Then the Therans came. They made everybody slaves. Suddenly slavery was bad. Suddenly people remembered orks can fight better than anybody. Then they set us free.

We built the kaers, and we all hid. While the orks hid, they planned. Since Lochost didn't help us, we are helping us. Someday we will get powerful enough to enslave all of them. Maybe we will enslave them, maybe we will let them go free, but until we are powerful enough to do so, we must always be afraid of the collar. Grow strong my son [daughter], Fight well. Work well. Excel. If you win, you survive; if you survive, you win.

The All-Thera Tossball League

Many consider this text a scholarly hoax poking fun at both Thera decadence and ork culture. However, like Sidiouious Belew in his Tales of Thera Tyranny, I find it impossible to pass up.

When the Thera Empire made overtures to the Broken Fang tribe, a Thera princeling called Austi Schnurr became quite entranced with the favorite ork bloodsport, tossball. Although Chaork Red-Hand had no interest in joining the Thera cause, Schnurr got his permission to smuggle the two best tossball teams from the Twilight Peaks tribe into Thera. He planned to get a tossball team for every Thera noble house. Then he would build a stadium devoted to the sport. As Therans like nothing better than seeing inferior races blooded, unless it is betting on the outcome, Schnurr figured he had a sure path to glory.

He called the two teams Schnurr's Shooters and the Thera Tigers. Training and grooming them for the games was a nightmare. Schnurr introduced the orks to clean uniforms, baths, and other indignities. In return, the orks nearly bankrupted Schnurr with demands for a steady diet of deer meat and stijian milk, neither of which is found in Thera. However, rumors that these savages had more fight in them than the average gladiator provoked a lot of publicity.

Schnurr built a special stadium for the event. On the day of the match it filled to overflowing. The two teams, charged with combative savagery, eyed each other across the center line. Schnurr himself tossed the cloth-wrapped skull into their midst.

The Tigers were first on the scene, hitting the ball toward the Shooter end-zone. Two Tigers got their skulls bashed in during the first play, and the crowd went wild. Then a Shooter knocked the ball into the crowd.

When the orks play tossball, if the ball goes into the crowd, the crowd joins in the game. So Shooters and Tigers took to the stands, making a bloody path to the ball. The panicked crowd tossed it higher and higher into the stands. The city guard finally had to intervene. They cancelled the match, arrested Schnurr, and confiscated his property.

Before the Therans executed them the next day, several of the orks proclaimed that it had been the best game ever.

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BONE NEEDLE

Industrious orks are well known for clearing land from the least hospitable areas. Many view the act of making farmland from wilderness as a sacred proof not only of their own wills, but of the ork race as a whole. They call others for help only in extreme emergency.

A friend of a friend, an ork farmer named Threlkel, writes to one of the adventurers in just such an emergency. A ghost, he says, is haunting his farm out in the Mist Swamps. This in itself is not a problem, but the ghost's request calls for more strength than the locals can offer. He doesn't want to ignore it, though, inasmuch as he knows the ghost personally.

When the adventurers show up, Threlkel leads them to a rare dry spot in the Mist Swamps. He explains it with this story:

The Tale

"We all knew that Maudy would pick the worst place for a farm, and we all expected her to make it into one of the best. She was that way. She set off for the Mist Swamps, and when we hadn't heard from her in a couple of years, we went along to check on her.

"We found her farm, all right. The steam was hot and awful. Only an ork as tough as Maudy would've tried living here. We finally saw the homestead through the mist, and we just about turned and ran right then. The farm had got infested by a glass devil." (Some characters may recognize this as a regional name for a crystal entity.)

We didn't want to get too close. The farmhouse was covered in thick ice, and everything had died for five feet around it. We could see where Maudy had started digging a drainage ditch. That's where she must've uncovered the devil, 'cause the ditch was only half dug. We turned away, when Corleen, Maudy's sister, heard her cry, thin and high, 'The needle!'

"Sure enough, a knitting needle made of bone lay on the ground near the house. Corleen took a deep breath and ran into the yard and snatched it up. The Horror didn't move, and we got out fast.

"When we pitched camp that night, the needle started to move. It made motions like embroidering. Maudy had always been a good seamstress, and so we knew this must somehow be a message from her. We ripped up our clothes to provide thread of different colors.

"The pattern the bone needle embroidered showed an ork woman yelling and a barn. We looked at it for a long time, then Corleen says, 'Yell barn. Yell a barn. --Yell Aban!'

"We all tried to hush her, because everybody knows that the dragon Aban lives here in the Mist Swamps. The bone needle danced across the floor of our tent.

"We drew lots, and it fell on Corleen. She went as close to the house as she could and still keep some cover. She began yelling, 'Aban! Aban, I'm a Horror, and I'll eat your eyes!'

"She must've yelled ten minutes before the dragon appeared. It was hard to believe wings so big could make such little noise. She swooped and attacked the devil, breathing yellow flame. Corleen unfortunately also got roasted, 'cause afterward we couldn't find a trace of her nor the bone needle.

"We finished Maudy's drainage ditch, but we didn't need it. Aban had got all the devil's Earth coins but one. A lot of people said she left it as a reward to us for helping her clean her land.

"But they're wrong. It isn't her land. It's ork land."

Ghosts

Current theory has it that when Name-givers with unusual strength of character die violently, their fading intellectual pattern impresses itself on astral space. Living creatures know these surviving patterns as ghosts or spirits. Ghosts differ from spectral dancers and similar undead in that Horror magic did not create them. Ghosts seem to reflect, not an evil intent, but a neutral property of the mind or the universe.

Abilities: Ghost abilities vary widely, and observers despair of coherent classification. These notes describe a typical ghost the heroes might meet in an adventure. However, the gamemaster can freely

alter any or all details.

Ghosts are invisible, but many can turn visible in the form they had in life. They can move silently, pass through material objects, and fly or hover without effort. Ghosts that can speak can usually communicate with any Name-giver in the hearer's language, but not always, and many ghosts cannot speak anyway. A ghost can affect the physical world in minor ways: lifting very small weights to low heights at slow speed, touching a cheek, and so on.

Ghosts can use the following Talents at Step 20: Air Speaking (to any being or beings the ghost chooses), Astral Sight, Disguise Self, Frighten, Frighten Animal Servants, Life Sight, Spirit Strike, Spirit Talk, Temperature, and True Sight.

A ghost may also have one or more of these Talents, as the adventure requires: Animal Possession, Battle Shout, Borrow Sense, Cold Purify (no cold material required), Dominate Beast, Emotion Song, False Sight, Hypnotize, Incite Stampede, Mimic Voice, Read and Write Magic, Reshape Object, Safe Path, Sense Poison, Taunt, Tracking, and Unmount.

The ghost was once a character, and so it may retain skills and intellectual Talents it had in life, such as Book Memory or Creature Analysis. If the character could cast spells, the ghost usually still can. The gamemaster can assign a ghost further Talents and abilities as required.

Vulnerabilities: Ghosts are susceptible to an Adept's Spirit Dodge and Spirit Hold Talents. Questor magic can sometimes drive them away from a haunt for a year and a day, and powerful questors (Circle 10+) can exorcise (destroy) them permanently. Individual ghosts may have weaknesses such as silver, orichalcum, yew wood, hair of a newborn baby, and so on.

Roleplaying: A ghost of little power often shows obsession with some goal, either achievable or remote, such as burying its body in sacred ground or finding its killer. Fulfilling the goal disperses the spirit. A ghost of higher power has full intelligence but other-worldly concerns, pursuing goals that living observers may find abstract or abstruse.

The Adventure

Maud, the ork of the legend, still exists as a ghost. Not long after Threlkel tells the party this legend, one adventurer gets awakened at night by the tap-tapping of a bone needle on her arm. Maud's needle seeks thread and fabric. Once provided with these, the ghost rapidly embroiders a picture of jagged crystals, representing the crystal entity that killed her. Beside it, the floating needle stitches another picture: an arched doorway.

The ghostly Maud wants to enlist the heroes as instruments in pursuit of its goal: destroying a nearby portal to astral space. This portal let the crystal entity into Barsaive. It lies deep in the Mist Swamps, under the ruin of a pre-Scourge alchemical laboratory now inhabited by kreescra and other servants of the late entity.

Heroes who resist recruitment may suffer Maud's angry harassment for many adventures. Her incessant coaxing and pestering eventually forces them to yield or to seek out a questor who can banish the ghost.

CONSTABLE GHORN

Entering one of the many small, backward, xenophobic villages that dot the Barsaivean frontier, the adventurers find this one uncommonly clean and well-kept. However, the residents appear uncommonly frightened. Before engaging in conversation, they ask if the adventurers work for "Constable Ghorn." Ghorn, it develops, dominates most whispered conversations here. Curious adventurers can learn Ghorn's story from Tontin, a garrulous old man who sits all day in the village square, chewing betel nut from the Liaj Jungle. Too old to care what Ghorn does to him, Tontin tells the characters this story:

Ghorn, they say, began with birds. As a young ork (though some deny he was ever young) Ghorn trapped small finches and starlings alive in their nests. He caged them to measure the progress of their starvation, or snapped their wing bones to observe their ground movement.

People in Ghorn's village, near Iopos, scolded the boy or cuffed his ears or spanked him with switches. To no effect: Ghorn kept studying the birds, and he remembered those who hit him.

Later he progressed to dogs and cats. Villagers' pets vanished. Ghorn left no telltale clues, yet everyone knew who was responsible. Ghorn was too young to exile, and so the village constable, a corpulent and easygoing gentleman named Dellorn, jailed him as a token penalty, then forced him to buy or capture replacement animals for the grieving owners. Ghorn complied, but he remembered those who complained against him.

Ghorn grew to strong young manhood, and at last he came to human beings. A young ork woman, adventurous in spirit but with very poor judgment, dashed off with him for "a rafting venture on the Serpent River." After a week he returned alone, blandly reporting that the girl had been swept overboard.

Angry villagers demanded Ghorn's arrest. Constable Dellorn took him in, if only to keep him from being lynched, but Ghorn had grown much stronger than before. He still remembered Dellorn. The constable marched Ghorn into a cell and slammed the door. In that instant Ghorn turned, reached through the bars with both thick arms, and broke Dellorn's neck.

To that moment Ghorn had seemed no more than a ruthless killer, unusual (fortunately) but not unprecedented. A typical killer would have run from the jail and escaped into the wastes. Ghorn took the constable's keys and medallion, the emblem of elected office, and, carrying the body, strode to the front steps of the jail building.

That building faced the village square, and many citizens were passing. Ghorn threw down the body, and screams brought several dozen people within moments. A few made to run at him on the spot, but his fearless, cruel look stopped the attackers where they stood.

"Dellorn is dead!" Ghorn shouted. "From now on, I'm constable around here. Anyone who doesn't like it can get out." So saying, he pinned on Dellorn's medallion and stood there, weaponless but alert.

When the shock wore off, a few of the larger orks assaulted him. They almost toppled him by weight of numbers, and if they had, the rest would have joined in and beaten him. He stayed on his feet and by main force threw three or four burly orks, including the blacksmith and a couple of heavy laborers, against the building wall. He killed them quickly and brutally with his bare hands.

The crowd fled then, but to Ghorn that hardly mattered. Because he remembered them all.

The mob formed shortly after sundown, around the tavern, of course. Orks sat and drank, telling each other the same complaints over and over, saying someone should "do something." After a while, a couple of drinkers began trying to outdo each other in bravery. "I say someone should spear him where he stands!" "Well, *I* say someone should go over to that office and skewer him like a hog!"

Everyone cheered them on, everyone made loud new suggestions, and in a moment the mob mind seized them. Bearing pitchforks and scythes, the mob flowed across the square toward the constable's office. Animals and passersby leaped out of its way, fearing for their lives. Five yards short of the jail, the mob saw the door open. Ghorn stepped out, stood tall and still, and the mob fell back.

"Hah!" he laughed. "I know your sort. I looked at the birds, who stay in the flock for fear of being left alone. You rabble are just brave enough to fly over here, but not so brave as to stay back and be thought `cowards.'

"And I looked at the dogs, who never attack unless from behind and in numbers. I face you, and you're helpless.

"I would like to look at men and women. I see nothing but dogs and birds in this town. Go home."

Here one ork, braver by a knife-edge than the rest, shouted, "Murderer! We'll --"

"Him!" Ghorn said, pointing.

The ork who spoke got impaled by a crossbow bolt from above. The rest of the mob pulled back like a tide and saw on the jail's roof two of Ghorn's thugs. They were village lowlifes, but they had loaded crossbows.

The victim fell and died messily in the street.

"Well?" said Ghorn. "Who's next?"

The villagers scattered like frightened geese and flew away to their nests. Ghorn laughed and laughed. Many citizens packed up and moved away that very night. In the next few months the others who had mistreated Ghorn in his youth found their lives getting very hard. For constable Ghorn remembered them all.

Constable Ghorn

Attributes

DEX: 5

STR: 8

TOU: 7

PER: 5

WIL: 7

CHA: 6

Initiative: 4

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 7

Damage: 7

Physical Defense: 7

Spell Defense: 5

Social Defense: 8

Armor: 4

Mystic Armor: 0

Knockdown: 7

Death Rating: 30

Wound Threshold: 10

Unconsciousness Rating: 25

Recovery Tests: 2

Combat Movement: 30

Full Movement: 60

Legend Points: 100

Equipment: Broadsword, whip, throwing axe; padded leather; merchant's clothing; hip flask of good wine.

Loot: 1d6 x 10 silver pieces.

Ghorn is a huge ork about 28 years old, now well dressed and remarkably poised. He remains calm unless moved to sudden violence; if he has ever shown fear, no one in his village can remember it.

This adventure hook helps warn naive adventurers about the quality of law enforcement on some parts of the Barsaivean frontier. Ghorn's power reminds adventurers of how rare magic is even in the world of **Earthdawn**. Against any Adept Ghorn would not have had much chance, but Adepts don't ordinarily visit small villages. By the time the heroes encounter him, Ghorn has shrewdly developed his power beyond that guaranteed by brawn and a few armed thugs. He owns the tavern and the inn, employs honest citizens as well as lackeys, and has become a "solid citizen." Though villagers despise and fear him, they might resent attempts to remove this "pillar of the community."

CIRCLE OF STONE

South of Throal the mountains rise wild, and the scenery takes on a savage beauty. While travelling that mysterious land, where legends lie as thick as nightfall, the adventurers arrive at dusk at a circle of carved stone megaliths. A lone dwarf, a Circle 3 warrior named Sandor, has already made camp there. He is returning to Throal after a long campaign, but if the adventurers require strength for their party, they can hire him on at the usual rates. After dinner around the campfire, Sandor tells the characters the tale of the Evil-eyed Dargoul and the Circle of Stone.

The Tale

Once was born a very smart ork among the Skull Wharg tribe. He was Dargoul, a shaman like his father before him. He was much stronger than his father or his father's father. He had a spirit that talked to him, he could see what was invisible, and he could see into the past. How intensely Dargoul longed for power! He was a most noble ork.

Dargoul killed his clan's leader by simply looking at him, and so he gained the name of Evil-eyed. After that, no one ever spoke against his strange ideas. He wanted to find out which race was most powerful. He captured elves, dwarfs, men, ogres, and t'skrang. Each had their strengths and weaknesses. Then he managed to capture an obsidiman. Here was a guy tough to beat.

Dargoul asked his spirit how his clan could become as tough as obsidimen. The spirit told him of a potion hidden in Horror-infested Parlainth. Dargoul chose 50 of his strongest, bravest orks to go with him. It was not easy even making it to Parlainth, for many lands do not greet Scorcher bands with open arms; nor was it easy fighting through the haunted city; nor fighting the Horrors; nor to return. All the orks met death, save for Dargoul and seven of his best.

He had to prepare a solemn ritual to go along with drinking the potion. Dargoul and his seven drank the ancient brew when the Moon was full and Ninus was low in the sky. [*"Ninus" is the Barsaivean name for Saturn.*] Their skin began to change into stone. With glee they spent that night pushing down trees. Their women wept, for they would no longer know the passion of the night with these strange beings.

The wives of the seven aroused the wives of the fallen raiders. The women came and rained down blows upon Dargoul and his seven, but fists can not break stone.

The next day many Skull Whargs came, eager to see the transformation and to hear of Dargoul's plans. Dargoul said come back later, for he wanted to think on it.

So they came the next month and found Dargoul and his band still standing in the same place, and Dargoul told them to come back in a year. So they came in a year, and Dargoul and his orks, who had now become obsidimen all through, remained standing in the same circle. Their Skull Whargs could not even get them to speak.

Trees have now grown up by their feet. Perhaps they are still planning the perfect raid.

The Transformation Potion

Legends like this one thrive all over Barsaive, for a magical transformation from one Name-giver race to another, without major preparation, brings inevitable conflicts. Each legend embodies in its transformed person the stereotypical worst features of the chosen race: the windling's short attention span and silliness, the troll's assumed penchant for violence, and so on. These legends show the classic

risk of magic: achievement without understanding.

Not long after they hear the legend above, the heroes discover in a long-deserted kaer a potion that allows such a transformation. The potion has two Major Key Knowledges, a maximum of two Threads, and costs 1,100 Legend Points. In most details it resembles a Potion of Life (**Earthdawn** rulebook, page 275).

How it works: When used, the potion acts with Step 20 power to transform the user into another race. On a volunteer it works automatically, taking one round; on an unwilling subject, it acts against the target's Spell Defense and takes rounds equal to the target's Willpower. Refigure a transformed target's Attributes to reflect new racial bonuses and penalties; if this means the target no longer qualifies for its Discipline, the target must start over in a new Discipline. The heroes have only enough potion for one target or group. The transformation lasts indefinitely until reversed (see below).

The pitfalls of this easy transformation become obvious. Take the player aside and discuss how to exaggerate the new race's perceived negative traits in the transformed character's roleplaying. A newly formed t'skrang acts with excessive flamboyance and disregard for truth, whereas a dwarf shows stubbornness and a pronounced sense of manifest destiny. A new obsidiman need not stop moving as the Skull Whargs did, but may show torpid indifference toward danger. A new human shows vices according to one other race's least favorable perceptions of humans: stuffy dullness (as per windlings), dishonesty and vice (a common dwarven view), et cetera.

Understand: The new negative traits do not represent actual behavior of that race, but the popular stereotype of its worst examples. Why? The reason lies in the potion's origin.

Why it works: Either recently or long ago, a wizard of power developed intense love of a Name-giver race different from her own. The magician developed this potion to transform her into the chosen race. During the long development process she came to understand the nuances of the race in detail, and her transformation worked well. Later brewers of the recipe, lacking her understanding, changed into emotionally distorted members of the race.

Reversing the effect: If the gamemaster treats the potion effect as a curse, reversing it requires questor magic or other fairly routine treatments. A more challenging approach calls for the victim to undertake research and a long quest to perform some action that exemplifies her original race. For instance, a one-time ork who wishes to resume ork status may have to lead a series of successful scorcher raids and rise to high status in the ork community. An erstwhile windling may need to draw praise from many windlings for a brilliant, daring trick that makes a fool of a troll king. The gamemaster and player together should work out the deed, which is worth many Legend Points. The transformation reverses when the victim completes the deed.

TROLL LEGENDS

Few readers know troll legends. Why the oversight? Because the troll, although not secretive like the elf or opaque like the obsidiman, shows little interest in writing down legends. The Library's selection of troll folklore is the smallest of the Name-giver races. I find it significant that many legends in the selection come from an elf.

The reader who discovers troll tales may see only their crude humor and earthy nature. However, careful study shows their awareness of and sympathy for the natural world, stronger in its way even than that of the elves. Elves settle the Blood Wood like a green and leafy city; trolls move in the wilds alone and free, like eagles across the sky.

This Land is Our Land

Troll legends rarely concern themselves with the distant past. Typically they involve a battle from last week rather than racial destiny.

An exception, this ownership myth, appears in varying forms among the Crystal Raiders. Some tribes, such as the Stoneclaws, interpret this legend to mean the eventual return of the land to them; others see it as a mandate to seize all they can right now. The myth appears in all the few books on troll folklore.

Note the absence of obsidimen from the ranking of races. The trolls allegedly have a secret myth about the obsidimen, a legend that has not yet reached the Library.

Before the birthtime there was lots of land, and the Passions were sad that there was no one to take joy from the land. So they planted the Great Tree. The Great Tree sent roots into all the lands of the world, and drew the essence from all of those lands to bring forth the perfect beings. It brought forth trolls instead of leaves.

The trolls fell in the autumn, full of desire to hunt and build things and exploit the land. They scattered out over all of the lands with wild desire. Everything was theirs, and the Passions were happy, for now creation had meaning.

But alas, the Passions did not know to cut down the Great Tree. Over the years that followed, the Tree produced its annual crop of trolls, until it became infested with worms and bugs. The Tree sickened and bore progressively inferior fruit: orks, dwarfs, elves, t'skrang, humans, and, after one very bad year, windlings. The bad fruit overran the land and bred mightily. The bad fruit began attacking the good fruit. Even though the trolls fought better than other races, the sheer number of latecomers drove the trolls into the Twilight Mountains.

The Passions cut down the Great Tree, and in honor of that fact we always cut down a tree and place in our moots during the Winter Solstice. The Passions told us that the bad fruit would run its course, and that we should not allow them to keep us from what was rightfully ours, that is to say, the whole of the world.

Ice Stone Jones

Any example of troll wit is necessarily, not to say mercifully, short. This specimen comes from the landmark book on Stoneclaw life written by the elf Thronogon, who was captured as a child, eventually rose above his newot status to become a dakkar airship captain, and finally decided to

leave troll society. Those who have not read his Terror is a Shadow in the Sky, from which this extract comes, have missed a rare treasure.

Ice Stone Jones made his fortune mining ice stone and selling it to other trolls. He introduced the practice of making steins of ice stone to cool ale. He had a special stein that cooled ale faster than any other. He enjoyed showing it off to dakkar captains.

"Fill it with boiling water!" he'd say. Then minutes later he'd knock the ice cylinder out of the stein. The boiling water had frozen so fast it would still be warm! He'd use it to warm his bedroll.

Among the Ironmongers

In his youth Banthanion, a past librarian of Throal, had a mountaineering accident in the Twilight Peaks. As he lay trapped in the rocks, waiting for fellow climbers to bring help, two dozen trolls approached. Fortunately, they did not spot him beneath their gathering place. The troll headman led a ritual recital, and the others repeated each line in chorus. Banthanion later recorded it in the library records.

Leader: To claw bark and trees; that is the law.

Group: To claw bark and trees; that is the law.

Leader: To snarl and roar; that is the law.

(Group response.)

To show our fangs in anger; that is the law.

(Group response.)

To kill without thinking; that is the law.

(Group response.)

Leader: We are the moot of the Ironmongers. I am Hravak Vian, chieftain of the moot. Who will challenge me? (No response.) We are trolls. Ours are the fangs of pain, ours are the teeth of destruction. Ours is the land; ours is the stream. Everything we see belongs to us; that is the law.

Group: Everything we see belongs to us; that is the law.

Leader: Cruel are the punishments of those who break the law. None escape!

Group: None escape!

At this point there followed much yelling, snarling and growling. Then the tribe dispersed to hunt, and Banthanion offered silent thanks to Lochost.

AIR RAID

Travelling in the Twilight Peaks, the heroes meet a band of Stoneclaw crystal raiders and learn of a famous raid from history, including its deadly outcome. The raiders carry a scrawled copy of an account by Krando Ylar, leader of the raiding ship. The Stoneclaws may share the legend around a friendly campfire or drop it in flight from a bloody battle.

The Tale

We hid in a cloud. Clouds were very common around Air mines. The charges of Elemental Air always muddled the atmosphere. Sometimes the charges would be too strong, and the interaction of that plane and our own would produce storms too terrible for the mining to take place. We had to wait completely still for hours, until the miners had secured the Elemental Air in their nets. Then the mining ships couldn't maneuver fast, and we could circle them repeatedly, killing all of the exposed crew with arrow and catapult shot before boarding and taking the billowing nets full of the invisible wonder.

The charge went off. We were restless at having waited without a sound for six hours. Our shaman told us that both of the Theran ships had netted Air. We broke cloud cover, the drummer beating a fast tattoo for the rowers. The shaman was wrong, for only one ship had successfully netted. The orichalcum in the hemp net glowed as with lightning from the Elemental Air's attraction back to its plane. Our ship and the unsuccessful Theran were both buffeted by the gale the Elemental Air was stirring up.

I urged my rowers on. We made a pass by the loaded ship, raining arrows on their preoccupied crew. The free ship, however, gave chase to us. I had to divide my archers into two groups: one to slaughter the loaded ship, the other to defend our aft.

It became obvious that we would have to destroy our pursuers first, then hope we could board the loaded vessel. I ordered boarding parties aft, readied the grappling hooks, and told the rowers to slow.

The pursuer gained, and I commanded the rowers to reverse. Their ship smashed into ours, and our grappling hooks soon joined the two. My fierce trolls swarmed onto the Theran vessels, slashing with grim delight, tossing corpse after bloody corpse into the airy void.

While we subdued the first vessel, the second secured its Air and readied to fly away. We cut the Theran ship loose, bidding good luck to its slaves. We were losing altitude, and I told my rowers, "This is it, row or die!" In a burst of supertrollish effort they managed to make a charge against the fleeing mining vessel.

The miner had had time to ready itself against our attack. We were flying into a fusillade of arrows. I ordered my crew to row even harder, and we climbed above the miner. We dropped an anchor into the sails and let down ropes to board. We went full face into their arrows.

We achieved victory, but at a terrible cost. I lost half of my crew, and my ship was destroyed. We returned to the Twilight Peaks in the Theran ship. It took months before we could sail again.

The Adventure

The trollmoot has learned that the *Imperial Glory*, the first Theran ship that Krando's drakkar downed in the battle, had picked up an unusual cargo on the way to the Air mine, mere hours before the battle.

Now the cargo lies in the ship's wreckage somewhere in the mountains.

In the mountains the Therans had stumbled on the entrance to an underground cache, exposed by a recent rainfall. A squad of centurions from the 17th Maniple explored the chamber while the *Glory* took on water at a mountain spring. There the soldiers found a small cache of treasure. The maniple's opito (commander) took it aboard and examined it while supervising the mining operation. His wizard attache identified one item: the fabled Firelight Tiara, a Horror-created item capable of spectacular destruction.

The ship crashed after Krando's attack, before it could return the Tiara to Thera. One survivor (the wizard) struggled out of the mountains, finally reached Thera, and delivered the news. Another survivor, a centurion from the squad that found the treasure, got captured by trolls and revealed the Tiara's existence under torture. As the heroes arrive on the scene, the two forces, Thera and the Stoneclaws, now comb the mountains seeking the device.

The heroes may look for the Tiara or sell their information to someone else (who then hires them to look for it). Searching, they quickly find that someone else has secured the item; they can tell by all the bodies lying everywhere. A legendary Theran commander or troll leader, ideally an adversary of the heroes from a previous adventure, found and donned the Tiara. As its elemental flames flickered around her brow, the item instilled paranoia in her. It compelled her to go independent, and now she flees across the mountains, cutting a path through enemies in both factions.

The heroes follow the trail of bodies, learn clues from dying survivors, and find one young ork girl, a shepherdess who witnessed one slaughter close up. The Tiara's wearer appeared not to see the ork, a fact that may help the heroes deduce the Tiara's crucial weakness: It renders people of innocent motive invisible to the user.

Finally they catch up to their old foe and discover that the Tiara has transformed her. She now bears the marks of Horror: distorted features, swollen (and extra) limbs, or whatever you like. The heroes find her wielding the Tiara in deadly combat against combined forces of Thera and the Stoneclaws. Can they use their knowledge of its weakness to "innocently" steal the Tiara from their opponent's brow?

If they defeat their foe, the heroes must decide whether to risk using the Tiara themselves, or allow another faction to use it. Anything that comes of a Horror can only produce more horror; the results of any wearer's meddling with powerful magic will bring disaster. Wiser heroes may try to destroy or hide the Tiara. Either choice provokes a sequel adventure.

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DANCE OF THE TWO RINGS

Many know of the bonfire dance that many trollmoots hold on the night of the last day of Rua. The clouds above the Twilight Peaks redden in the light of the flames, and loud cries echo for miles. The Two Rings dance marks that night, the beginning of the trollish New Year.

The characters hire on as bodyguards to a moot chieftain for the night. The chieftain would ordinarily use troll guards, of course, but no warrior of the tribe may serve another during the festival. Each stands alone. The characters receive their commission from a newot servant of the chieftain, who tells the adventurers what to expect during the rite:

The Tale

Before the ritual, those trolls who can write (a much larger percentage than outsiders credit) prepare slips of parchment that express our wishes or oaths for the coming year. An hour before the dance starts, we kindle two flames: a large bonfire on the right of the gathering, and a small controlled fire on the left.

We gather in silence around the left ring. Our chieftain announces that the year is dead, and that now is the time to foretell the future, not by divining it, but by telling the descendants of the Great Tree what future to produce. Now is the time for wishing the hardest and for binding ourselves by the toughest oaths possible. The trolls share a loving cup of mead, symbolizing our troth to our future selves and to the tribe. Only trolls may drink from the cup; the rest of the Two Rings ritual, unlike most troll ceremonies, includes newots and occasionally even nontroll visitors.

Then we begin a slow, solemn dance round the small fire. As we dance, we call out the names of the Twelve Passions, including the mad ones. We try to pull them into our circle, mixing their ambitions with our own (as the obsidimen say). When we have made the circle four times, we stop. Our chieftains say that we have turned the world on its axis, and by doing what our ancestors' ancestors have done and what our descendants' descendants will do on this night, we have woven our desires into the warp and weave of the world. Now we can dance the dance of celebration.

Loud drumming and the playing of bagpipes begin as we rush to the large bonfire and dance around it in the wildest fashion. We consecrate the large bonfire to Floranuus alone. We celebrate both victories from the year past and those in the year to come. We leap through the fire, yelling out "Floranuus!" The dance gets louder and louder, for we believe that the more energy we raise, the more likely that our wishes will become objective reality.

Each dancer reaches an individual height of ecstasy, and at that instant tosses the parchment slip into one of the flames. A dancer who makes a minor wish, something achievable during the year, tosses the slip into the huge flame of Floranuus. Those who make a lifetime vow, or even a vow beyond this lifetime, toss the slip into the small flame of the Twelve.

After all have finished dancing, much drinking follows. Generally we sleep all next day.

The Adventure

The adventurers should note that trolls at the Dance consider it both rude and bad luck to ask dancers at the Two Rings what they wrote on their slips of parchment. Also, chieftains deal harshly with crimes committed during this night or the next day, because committing a crime on New Year taints the coming year.

For all that, a crime does occur. The moot chieftain becomes the target of an assassination attempt by a rival moot. The assassin is a hired troll, a disguised rogue without clan, inasmuch as no Sky Raider would stoop to such a dishonorable action. (Assassinate, no. *Hire* an assassin -- why not?)

If the assassin achieves surprise, he can kill the chieftain before the adventurers can react. However, Talents or cleverness should let the bodyguards can spot the assassin in time to prevent the attempt. The gamemaster should encourage clever solutions that dispose of trouble without disrupting the ritual, for disruption would mean an omen of grave bad luck for the coming year.

Then again, a clever solution that uses the ritual itself would not bring this omen. For instance, a questor of Floranuus could invoke the Passion then and there to mete out justice on the assassin.

This would be a dramatic climax for the adventure.

Respondism

The Dance of the Two Rings embodies a philosophy, widely debated among thinkers in Barsaive, loosely called "Respondism." The belief holds that when a Name-giver defines her own character with depth and precision, objective reality redefines itself in response.

Scholars treat conventional Adept magic, the spectacular effects of spell and blood and Pattern, as the most primitive proof of this idea. Adepts in the four Disciplines can understand the intricacies of fireballs and spirit portals with their mind alone; scholars call these "noetic" effects (from the Theran *noesis*, "intelligence"). Noetic effects, however, have nothing to do with the subtler ideas of Respondism.

Believers propose that true understanding of reality comes only with mystic apprehension of one's own deepest nature. True magic arises when the mystic explorer comprehends her emotions, refines and rarefies them, and focuses them to some high purpose. Understanding leads to a new idea, and focus amplifies the will to such a degree that the mystic can re-weave the universe as a noetic Adept re-weaves a small Pattern. Each conflict, each battle an Adept fights becomes, for the alert seeker, an initiatory process.

Some writers believe the proper mystic state arrives with the mystic's expression of a single word. The word marks a new idea, which gradually spreads through the fabric of reality like a drop of liquid dropped on a square of silk. These writers speculate that the Father of Thera, Elianar Messias, arrived at the word nehr'esham (center of the mind) in a Respondist meditation on the Books of Harrow; he communicated that idea to his successor, Kearos Navarim; and this led to the Eternal Library, and thence to Thera. A powerful notion, if true.

The gamemaster can lend color to the campaign by tailoring it around a Respondist idea. Early in their careers the heroes meet a sage who instructs them in Respondist philosophy. They develop experience, distill it over many adventures into a word or idea, perform a Respondist rite like that of the Dance of the Two Rings, and then the gamemaster develops the new concept's long-term effects on Barsaive. The heroes should arrive slowly at their word, guided by the sage. She may review with them the lesson each adventure has taught, and suggest a new adventure that will emphasize a related principle. The idea's effect on the world should be roleplaying-based, not rules-based. Still, if the gamemaster wants to dramatize its effects, a character fighting to spread the effects of the new idea may receive a +1 Step bonus to Social Tests that sway others. In the extreme long term, a new idea might eventually alter one of the Passions to encompass it.

Sample words:

- *Fellowship*. A program for universal education in civic values, aimed at cynical residents of major cities and naive peasants newly emerged from long-hidden kaers. By rooting out slavery and streamlining bureaucracy, the movement could eventually lead to a cure for the Mad Passion Dis.
- *Manacosc*. Students of magic discover that widespread Theran manipulation of the forces of magic ("mana") are creating instability throughout the province. This teaching instills a greater awareness of mana and a healthier, more sustainable relationship between magicians and the forces they employ.
- *Purification*. This represents a profound ritual that can remove the thorns of Corruption from a Blood Wood elf. The heroes gain the allegiance, or at least the cooperation, of Uncorrupted elves across Barsaive. The movement culminates in a holy crusade against Alachia's forces in the Blood Wood itself.

T'SKRANG LEGENDS

When a t'skrang troubadour learned that orks had marketed their legends to the Librarians, she imitated them with zeal. The orks had stolidly recited their small stores of tales, collected fair pay, and departed. In contrast, this t'skrang's repertoire seemed endless, replenishing itself while our funds lasted. The dubious authenticity of her tales led to the Library's current "never pay" policy. [NOTE: This policy prevailed through Vertius's life, but the current administration makes infrequent exceptions. --Ed.]

I have spent many a pleasant leisure hour collecting these characteristic (and, I must stress, authentic) tales from the Library's own volumes of t'srkrang folklore.

How S'slatrang Escaped

We generally assume that the freewheeling, rowdy ways of the t'skrang are completely natural and unaffected behavior. However, the Library holds a few volumes of what are known as "exemplary novels," books pretending to be autobiographical reminiscences. I have seen adolescent t'skrang ardently study these as guides to living well.

Among the most popular of these novels is The Life and Loves of S'slatrang. Here I extract the fictitious hero's famous escape from Warlorn Prison in the heart of the Theran Empire.

I observed that the roof of the next wing lay three spans beneath the tiny window of my cell. It offered a long, fairly flat surface. I couldn't see where it went but knew it led away from imprisonment, and that was enough to know. When I got to the roof, an idea would come. As it says in the hatchling tale, "Nothing like pressure to focus the mind."

My keeper, a dimwitted ogre, had found employment as a guard well-suited to his savage nature. I began to verbally assault the simpleton every day. Normally I would not resort to the crudeness of a racial joke, but, speaking in all candor, I was desperate.

On the first day I asked him if he knew how many ogres it took to light a torch. When he heard the answer, he picked up my dinner tray and smashed it to flinders. Actually he was trying to smash me, but of course I evaded him easily.

The second day I asked him if he knew how to spot the bride at an ogre wedding. Upon hearing the answer, he smashed my slop bucket.

The third day I asked him what was red, white, blue, yellow, and green. The answer so infuriated him that he demolished my bed.

The fourth day I asked him why ogre men carry big sticks. The only thing in the cell the ogre had left to grab (besides me) was my window frame. No sooner had he pulled it from the wall than I dove through the opening, somersaulted on my way down, and landed on the roof below. I paused to ask my furious captor the difference between ogres and windling droppings. Then, dodging the fast-flying arrows of 20 elf archers, I leapt from the prison's battlements and ran with all my might. I like to think he ponders the riddle to this day.

Artistry Counts

Again, this comes from The Life and Loves of S'slatrang:

Earlier I remarked that every aspiring swordsman should learn some fine art, whether poetry, painting, or merely paper-folding. Such skills not only amuse the ladies, but ever remind oneself of the finer things of life. I have no small skill as a painter, and want to share with you the story of my finest portrait.

The Theran emperor, distraught at the extent to which I had disrupted his profitable slave trade, put a sizable reward on my head. One night, fleeing from his special patrols, I secreted myself in a tree above the panting guardsmen. One of the winded Therans, pausing below, remarked that if the emperor would only put my picture out along with a reward, then within days my "underworld cronies" would turn me in.

"My picture?" I thought. "A capital idea!"

The next day I collected my pigments, bought a stretched canvas and other artists' supplies (having obtained the money during the adventure of the previous night) and made way to the garrison's fortress. I had taken a mere moment to paint a few of my scales gray so as to appear aged. I presented myself to the sentries as Gnartalas, an artist in the emperor's employ, and said he had ordered me there to provide a portrait of that impudent felon S'slatrang. At first they were suspicious of a t'skrang artist rather than a Theran, but I pointed out that it takes one to paint one. This made sense to them, indicating the sloth of the bureaucratic mind.

I did a wonderful portrait of myself, handsome rogue as I was then. I had them call in copyists, and soon my smiling face hung at every street corner. I even arranged with a helpful windling to send a copy home to my devoted mother, that she would know her young fared well.

The following day I collected the reward on my own head, but I leave that story until later.

Yssar's Witch-Boat

The t'skrang narrative called Yssar N'ts S'tat, describing the witch Yssar, has long been regarded as mere folklore, but recently variants have been discovered among certain troll tribes. Although this may merely represent cultural diffusion, perhaps Yssar does exist.

In the days before the Scourge lived a great witch named Yssar. Older than the memory of grandmother's grandmother was Yssar. Her houseboat, the *Blighted Rose*, appeared from time to time on the Great River. Her cruelty and fierceness were legendary. She ate new-hatched young and boiled t'skrang alive. Many were the t'skrang in the old days who saw her fly across the sky riding a giant fish skeleton, or shuddered at the *Rose's* lanterns of t'skrang skulls.

She had a pet alligator gar twenty spans long, and it could swallow a small boat whole. She had a pet vulture with a wingspan as wide as the gar, and it could carry off a horse and rider both. Worst of all, she had a pet monkey that was always just a bit better with a sword than the fool who attacked it. If you could fight past this fearsome crew, Yssar would invite you to play cassery, with cassery cards made from t'skrang scales. If you cheated and won, she would answer any three questions you could think of. She knew almost everything, but you had to ask nicely.

Most of the riverfolk thought she died during the time of the Horrors. Now some claim to have seen her at the prow of her fearsome houseboat, sitting on a chair made from the bones of assorted Horrors.

Wise Fish and Stupid Fish

This hatchling's tale illustrates the t'skrang admiration of cleverness. Sometimes the story appears as T'skrang-Fish and Elf-Fish.

Wise Fish and Stupid Fish swam in their pond. Shadows of fisher-folk passed overhead. "We must prepare ourselves." said Wise Fish. "T'skrang come to catch us in nets."

"I do not think so. Perhaps they are just fish watchers, and in any event I can swim faster than a t'skrang."

"No, they use nets that close off the pond and easily catch such large fish as you and I," said Wise Fish.

"I fear no slow-moving breathers," said Stupid Fish. "I will go sleep on the bottom and save my strength for when it is needed." Stupid Fish swam away and went to sleep.

Soon weighted nets dropped into the water. Wise Fish swam down to the bottom, yelling at Stupid Fish to wake up. Wise Fish would have been afraid, but he knew the Two True Sayings: "Panic solves nothing" and "Nothing matches pressure to concentrate the mind."

So Wise Fish swallowed the nastiest lump of mud he could find. Then he turned belly-up and let himself float to the surface. A fisherman pulled him out of the water, smelled the foul mud, and threw him onto the grass, saying, "Oh, dead and rotted."

Then the men caught Stupid Fish. He fought hard, but was no match for a net. When they left, Wise Fish slithered back down to the water. He lives there today.

VESTRIAL WHO CONQUERS DEATH

The player characters hire on to crew the airship *Rainstorm* on an expedition to mine Elemental Fire over the Death's Throat Sea. There they meet a fellow hand, the t'skrang L'satra, an aspiring merchant princess who has left the Serpent River to pursue greater fortune -- so far without luck.

According to her, some t'skrang revere the Mad Passion Vestrial even now in his madness, but most t'skrang recall fondly the earlier era of his sanity. It was the trickster Passion, she says, who bound Death under the Death's Throat Sea. She tells them the legend:

The Tale

Once, before green life came to Earth, all was molten and pliant. In this crucible the Passions worked their wills. Yet as each Passion began to create a new world, the Thirteenth Passion exercised her Power and ended it.

"The other Passions gathered in a small corner of the universe and decided that if their work was to continue, Death must be weakened. They knew they could not kill Death, for Death alone had the power to kill. However, they reasoned that she could be weakened, and the potential of rebirth might arise while Death was so weakened. Each Passion spoke of her plans, but all feared Death. Perhaps she could slay even the Passions themselves, so that the objective universe manifested them no more.

Therefore Vestrial said, "I will create a place to weaken her, a chthonic region. It will hold her because it is a grave."

"What is a grave?" they asked.

"A special container for the dead. If I bury Death first, we will have eons to try our hand at creation. Who knows? After strange eons, the death of Death may die."

So Vestrial created a bubble in the molten world, and he called to Sister Death.

"I have fashioned a wonder for you. I call it 'grave.' It holds dead things. This place can hold all that you kill."

Death said to him, "O my brother, you alone understand me. What I kill, I value as treasure. I only kill what I love. Thank you for this."

Vestrial said, "But my creation has two problems. One, I must get the other Passions to agree that graves hold the dead. Help me gain their say on this."

So Death went to the other Passions. They agreed that graves hold the dead, and what the Passions agree to becomes law.

Then Death asked about the second problem. Vestrial said, "I have no dead for my enclosure, sister. Could you just lie there, so I can know I fashioned it correctly?"

Death did so. Then Vestrial said, "You are Death; therefore you belong to yourself. What belongs to you is dead. Graves hold the dead. Therefore my enclosure holds you." And he sealed the grave.

There Death lies until the will of the Passions dies.

The Adventure

Life aboard the vessel offers the heroes various torments. The air burns their throats; the heat draws perspiration from their pores and evaporates it instantly. One dark night on the voyage, on watch beneath a black-clouded sky lit by heat lightning on the horizon, the parched heroes overhear suspicious words between two crew members who should be asleep.

These sailors, disguised assassins of the Hand of Corruption, have infiltrated the *Rainstorm* in an attempt to free Death from the Death's Throat Sea. The try can take either of two forms:

1. The Hand may hope to break the surface of the lava sea by blowing up the *Rainstorm*. The pair have seized the ship's entire stock of Elemental Water, a small orichalcum barrel, and plan to drop it all at once. This overload, many times more than the ship would ordinarily use in its Fire mining, triggers a tremendous explosion. It rends the lava surface. Though it does not free the captive Death, it does severely injure the ship, unless the heroes can stop the assassins.
2. A more complex and dramatic scheme coordinates half a dozen ships in a common rendezvous far out on the Sea. The Hand has captured questors of all 12 Passions. It plans to coerce them to summon all the Passions in a massive ritual over the flaming sea; then the assassins will compel the questors to speak a text: "The Sea no longer holds its prisoner." This, they hope, will change the Passions' original compact and release Death. Just in case, they plan to drop a freight of Elemental Water to the flames,

as in option 1.

The heroes may defeat the Hand before the rite, or they may try to cope with the deluded assassins after the rite fails. At that point, in their desperation, the fanatics grow still more dangerous.

Explosions

When Elemental Water contacts Elemental Fire, the resulting explosion inflicts Step 30 damage at the point of impact and in a radius (in yards) equal to the number of ounces of Water used. For example, four ounces of Water would explode at Step 40 in a four-yard radius. The radius is called the "Step increment."

Farther from the explosion, damage falls by 1 step for each Step increment in yards. In this example, the explosion would do Step 29 damage at 4-8 yards, Step 28 at 8-12 yards, and so on. In borderline cases, inflict the lesser damage. Shields do not protect against this damage, but Physical Armor does.

In this encounter the Hand of Corruption tries to drop a barrel containing 30 ounces of Elemental Water. The ship routinely rides 100 yards above the Death's Throat Sea, and so would suffer Step 27 damage if all the Water explodes. The ship hull has Physical Armor 9 and a Damage Rating of 30 (see "Barriers and Structures" on page 209 of the **Earthdawn** rulebook). The explosion would not destroy it; however, the crew must immediately work to rescue it from listing and heeling over into the lava. The Hand will work against them, if the explosion has not conveniently blown them overboard.

WINDLING LEGENDS

In collecting windling legends I have taken a chance and actually talked to windlings. At times this has brought danger. Most windlings show little interest in retelling legends; when they actually do so, they embroider and deviate at will; as often as not they forget the last half of the narrative, and so they attach the back half of some unrelated story. I often suppose the windlings make it all up as they go along.

Still, their rare related sequences of sentences charm me. Here I collect these as well as stories about windlings related by other name-givers.

The Windling Creation Myth

Borrum 8

In Haven

Vertius, Librarian of Throal:

I greet you in Lochost's name. Received wisdom has it that the windlings have no legends or folklore, for they find such things too tedious. Imagine my surprise when a coy windling female told me that windlings do indeed have tales to tell. She offered to tell me the windling creation myth for five silver pieces. At once I laid down the coins. She flew off with them "for safekeeping."

When she returned -- yes, she did -- she insisted that I have my pen and scroll ready, plenty of ink on hand, and so forth. She made sure I was comfortably seated and had enough light. She had me write down the title ("The Windling Creation Myth") in my best calligraphy. In fact, she made me throw away my first two tries, inasmuch as they were (first) too plain and (second) failed to write the word

"Windling" large enough.

Finally satisfied, she solemnly recited the myth. To enlighten both you and the seekers in your esteemed library, I reproduce it here in its entirety:

The Windling Creation Myth

At first it was dull, then we showed up.

I believe this sheds as much light on windling ontology as anything else we have discovered. Greetings to you in the Sign of Ink that reveals all knowledge!

Your friend,

Ralph Poundstone

Pugsley Wetherwax and the Kindly Old Shoemaker

This characteristic folktale comes from Fremonian's Tales Around the Ork Fires.

A kindly old ork shoemaker kept his humble shop in Kartas. He had many loyal customers and earned his keep through hard work and honest dealing. One day he unwisely accepted a commission from a gang that wanted matching shoes for each of its members.

As the deadline grew ever closer, he knew he wouldn't be able to fulfill the job. He feared the loss of revenue, but even more, he feared the gang's displeasure.

He admitted his fears to one of his longtime customers, a windling named Pugsley Wetherwax. Wetherwax told him that if he went to the big blue rock outside of Haven (which Wetherwax called Windling Rock), uttered his wish for aid three times very loudly, then went home and kept his head beneath the blankets all night, his wish would be granted.

The kindly old shoemaker did as he was bid. That night, as he kept his head beneath the covers, he heard a furor of activity in his shop: hammering, cutting, stacking. He was sorely tempted to put his head out, but he remembered the windling's words.

The next morning the shop was full of shoes. Every one of them was windling size. The furious gang destroyed the shoemaker's shop and ran him out of town.

The moral is, When you get near a deadline, don't trust anyone but an ork.

Render Unto Freda

The windlings do not mint coins and so are almost totally absent from Barsaive numismatic literature. One rare allusion concerns the bronze dangdang of the town of Kenterell, near Iopos. This unusual coin, with its odd denomination (= 1.23 silver pieces), prompts an amusing essay in Yeoman's Red Book of the Coins of Barsaive:

Bronze Dangdang of Kenterell: Produced for five years in pre-Scourge times, circa TC 540-45 (est.).

Condition: Does little to modify the coin's value, for few ever circulated even in Kenterell. General

uselessness of the coin fated most specimens for meltdown; hence its rarity among collectors.

Identifying marks: Series of portraits on the coin's reverse shows declining mental health of the questor Freda of Kenterell. Obverse shows face of His Royal Sublime Majestic Munificence, windling Emperor Pasha Dangdang II, behind prison bars.

History: Kenterell was known for staid and orderly ways before the Scourge. Peaceful citizens built a seminary of Dis, at that time the Passion of civic order. One night guards caught a windling thief in the library executing scandalous drawings of the dean and the secretary of the seminary. The village magistrate, herself a questor of Dis, sentenced the thief to four years in the town jail.

The prisoner was carrying Wyrn Wood currency. The magistrate, Freda, explained that the windling violated local law by possessing currency other than coins bearing her own face and that of the local count. The windling asked to read the statute and found that it did not refer explicitly to the count, but rather to "the highest ranking noble resident" in town, who had the right to design and control the currency.

The windling told Magistrate Freda to send an artist to the jail. When asked why, the windling revealed that he was Dangdang II, Emperor and Pasha of all windlings. At first Freda laughed this off, but a series of inquiries proved it true. Honor-bound to obey the law, Freda let the Pasha pose for the coin.

An endless stream of windlings came to visit the imprisoned noble, and most took the opportunity to disorder Freda's life. However, local historians believe that the daily sight of her own face on the large yellow coin, opposite the grinning Dangdang, is what finally drove her mad.

Rumor Spreading

A few windlings fly from village to village telling tales such as this: "A new sort of Horror magic has befallen [a distant but recognizable settlement]. If a pumpkin or watermelon lies on the ground for ten days after it should have been picked, the Horrors change it. First the melon pulls itself off its vine. Then tiny drops of blood appear on its rind. Then it growls and rolls around and trips people. Otherwise it isn't much of a threat, as it has no teeth. If you grow melons, you should put a low fence in front of your house, so the evil melons don't roll in and pester you."

Some nettled folklorists believe the windlings spread these pointless anecdotes to mark territory, in the way an animal would spray it. Others propose that the windlings are engaged in a game or competition. Inasmuch as the windlings responsible change their stories as the mood strikes them, I favor a likelier explanation: They simply like to raise the general level of public alarm.

#

HORSE THIEVES

[This adventure can be played alone or as a prelude to "The Pipes of Wrongness," which appears in *Legends of Earthdawn Vol. 1*.]

All the heroes did was stop at a roadside inn for one little drink. Five minutes later a stable-keeper rushes in, saying their horses are gone! Fine warhorses, prized possessions, and almost irreplaceable.

A quick search of the tavern reveals that the horses are indeed gone. The keeper says he saw the thieves galloping away, laughing. Other patrons of the tavern remark angrily that these thieves have

caused trouble for quite a while.

If necessary, establish that the heroes really need their horses. A good horse costs a great deal to replace, and the characters may also prize these animals in themselves, as companions. But getting other tavern patrons to loan their horses for pursuit is not easy, and no one wants to come along and help. If the characters try to steal horses themselves, let them get away with it unless they act with unusual clumsiness. Stealing horses is none too heroic, but maybe the local villagers will give them a break later if they defeat the thieves.

But how to track the thieves? No clear method presents itself, until a high voice sounds from near the ceiling. "I know where they live!" It's a windling.

The well-dressed windling flies down with aplomb. "I," she says, "am Elena, a teller of tales, a singer of songs. Indeed, if we had but met in a more civil place, you may well have recognized my name at once. But that is no matter. I, too, was set upon by these thieves, who cost me not my worldly wealth, but a thing far more precious, a close friendship. Let us take up arms together against these miscreants and avenge ourselves against our common foe."

The innkeeper can testify to Elena's troubadour skills, for she kept the guests well entertained last night. As the players may expect, or dread, Elena won't tell their characters where the thieves went unless they let her come along. If they bring along the windling, the characters can find the thieves' lair. If they don't bring the windling, the heroes must track the thieves or investigate with travelers on the road -- and she follows them anyway, popping up at an opportune moment to give them a warning.

At the inn or on the road, Elena tells the heroes this story.

The Windling's First Tale

"Have you known the lingering disquiet of a failed friendship? No more than two or three close friendships bless us in a lifetime. My one deepest friend first lighted my life and then darkened it -- Delphina, a Troubadour like myself. Well, not quite; she was human. Long brown hair, a dazzling smile, droll humor, a fierce honesty --

"Yes, yes, I'm getting to the horse thieves. For a time Delphina and I enjoyed convivial company. We performed together at many a gathering, and sometimes we divulged secrets to each other that, by the sharing, let us both breathe easier. I recall how one of us might begin a story and the other, without knowing the tale but simply aware of our common style, could finish it to exacting accuracy. We shared a confidence closer than love.

"I tour this part of Barsaive on a regular route, and last year Delphina travelled with me. While walking between two town festivals -- I don't recall where we were, but it lay not far from here -- we ran afoul of bandits. They all rode fine horses, and they led a dozen more horses that bore saddle and tackle but no riders.

"The one in the lead, a large ork with armor and a broken tusk, called to us. 'You walkers! Buy a fine steed and ease your pains. Only a hundred silver.'

"This absurdly low price would have told the tale even had we overlooked the empty saddles. Delphina said, 'I am very fond of the orkish dish of roasted horse hearts with hazelnut sauce, but I see that although yonder horses are quite hot, they have not yet been roasted.

"This seemed to anger the thieves, who had no doubt thought themselves clever -- as, indeed, all

thieves think themselves clever. They rushed upon us with drawn swords and flashing spears.

"Delphina and I had fought many a battle, for as the saying goes, the roads are no safe kaer. We held our own, but I saw that the dusty trail would soon grow muddy with our blood. I tried to clear my mind to greet that old fraud Death, when suddenly I glimpsed a Horror lurking astrally nearby.

"Normally I would have no truck with such things, but full of fear that this death might be our last, I blew the Pipes of Wrongfulness and summoned the Horror into our world. (Later I will tell you the tale of how the Pipes came into my possession.) The Horror, a slow-moving, many-tentacled thing, began attacking the orcs, for Delphina and I effected a Graceful Exit. We withdrew to a nearby hillside and watched the orcs flee to a carefully hidden cave, the same lair to which I am leading you. The horror killed but two of the thieving band before returning to its astral home.

"I had thought Delphina would rejoice that I had saved our lives. But she saw me as accursed for my dealing with Horrors. She who had once looked at me with eyes of friendship saw now only a delver into forbidden magics, a pawn of the unseen hunters. Our friendship ended as surely as had the lives of those two orc thieves.

"I still recall those old days with my friend. Nothing else but a failed friendship causes in me that curious quality of almost-regret, the sense that I still live the same life, yet now a life indefinably leached of a fraction of its color and joy. Since that day I have held in my heart a hatred of these thieves, and often I dream of my revenge."

The "Pipes of Wrongness" are a magical treasure, or more precisely a cursed Horror item, that Elena keeps in her bedroll back at the inn. These Pipes figure in the sequel adventure that follows this one. Should the characters inquire more closely about the Pipes of Wrongness, Elena tries to defer the story until after the battle. If this fails, she tells them the tale from *Legends of Earthdawn Vol. 1*.

By then the characters sight a rock outcropping not far from the road, a scorched crag that still shows signs of the Scourge. Elena points to a grove of scraggly pine trees at the leeward base of the crag. There the characters can make out a cave half-concealed by a crude, unmortared rock wall. "That is their lair," Elena says.

The Adventure

The bandits, all now in the cave with their horses, are 3rd-Circle ork Weaponmasters with broadswords and daggers, led by a 5th-Circle veteran with an axe. (Adjust the strength of the bandit party to challenge the player characters.) There are as many thieves as player characters -- and several more, but let the heroes find that out later.

The bandits work on commission for the Theran army. Every horse they steal from Barsaive goes to Thera or feeds its army, weakening the one power and strengthening the other. The bandits live in the wilderness in a well-hidden, deserted cave troll lair.

At least, the thieves thought it was deserted. While they were out pulling this job, the cave trolls returned from a migration to the south. The thieves have become ground meat about the time the player characters arrive. If the characters want their horses, they must fight the trolls. Throw enough trolls at them to make a dangerous fight.

Another option: The thieves have holed up out of the trolls' reach. The cave trolls are about to lose interest in them and turn to the horses for their meal. The bandits try to deal with the player characters,

trading the horses for help fighting the cave trolls.

If the deal works, the bandits pretend to help in the fight, but they let the characters do most of the work and take all the damage. Then, if and when the heroes defeat the cave trolls, the thieves turn on the heroes and fight savagely.

An Unpleasant Surprise

The windling, Elena, enters combat and plays a minor part in the battle. If requested, she apparently tries to use all the Talents appropriate to a high-Circle Troubadour, but she fails all Tests using Talents beyond First Circle. The gamemaster rolls all her Tests in secret.

Once the characters have become embroiled in the fight, she flits over the wall and toward the road. (Characters who aren't specifically watching Elena don't notice her departure unless they make a successful Perception Test.)

After the battle, the characters find no sign of Elena. What's more, they discover that some of their easily portable possessions -- coins, gems, small magical treasures -- have vanished. Elena picked them off the characters during the battle.

Elena the "troubadour" has indeed learned the Talents of the First Circle, but only as a cover for her ongoing activities as a Fifth Circle Thief. (See "Learning New Disciplines," page 226 in the **Earthdawn** rulebook.) Her touching tale is largely false. Her friend Delphinia does not exist, Elena never summoned a Horror, and she knows the thieves' lair because she was once their ally. She fell out with them after a dispute over a division of loot -- a very common outcome of any cooperative venture among thieves -- and has seen in the player characters a way to carry out her spiteful revenge. She is also happy for the chance to lift a few trinkets while battle distracts them.

(One note of truth: Elena does indeed own the magical Pipes of Wrongness. See the adventure in *Legends of Earthdawn Vol. 1*.)

Elena

Fifth Circle Thief/First Circle Troubadour

Elena has earned 32,000 Legend Points in her long career and has acquired a reputation as a smooth talker, hard bargainer, and light-fingered companion in Bartertown, Kratas, Jerris, and especially the lower-class neighborhoods of Vivane.

Use the "Windling Thief" archetype from page 83 of the **Earthdawn** rulebook, but increase all Talents to Rank 5 and add the Durability, Avoid Blow, and Trap Initiative Talents, also at Rank 5. Add Detect Trap at Rank 4. Elena has the Conversation, Etiquette, Forgery, and Trading Skills at Rank 3, as well as the listed Thief archetype skills at Rank 4.

Elena also has the Troubadour Talents Disguise, Emotion Song, First Impression, Karma Ritual, and Mimic Voice at Rank 1.

Elena has 25 Karma points and 500 unspent Legend Points. She has the Thief archetype's listed equipment plus better clothes, an ocarina, a windling spear, a light quartz, and (concealed at the inn) 65 silver pieces. Her most unusual possession is a magical item called the Pipes of Wrongfulness -- the source of the adventure that follows.

A WINDLING AND HIS HAWK

While travelling, the characters hear this story first-hand from a windling Beastmaster, Kester. Kester claims he was the first windling to find a hawk, not in the wild, but in a human's home.

The hawk belonged to a minor noble who swore allegiance to the Therans. From a safe distance, that is. He milked his peasantry for Thera's ruinous taxes, and spent most of his leisure time in idle hobbies, like falconry.

Kester, on routine theft patrol around the noble's estate, looked through a window of glass inlaid with the noble's crest. **STRENGTH AND COURAGE**, read the motto, prompting Kester to name the noble "Strongheart." On a perch in the noble's study the windling spotted Strongheart's latest acquisition, a fine hawk.

Kester saw the fat noble enter the room. Strongheart said to the bird, "There you are, stupid beast!" His thin hair, shaped in tight curls, was the same shade of brown as the hawk's feathers, and his nose had something of the same bulge as the hawk's beak. In the hawk's eyes Kester saw alertness and fear, whereas Strongheart's eyes drooped under the weight of his immense self-satisfaction.

"So many humans, and not one of them prettier than a troll," thought Kester behind the windowpane.

Strongheart donned a padded glove and offered his arm to the hawk. The bird shied away on its perch, and at once the noble reddened with anger. Strongheart slapped at the bird with the gloved hand.

"Beastly animal, learn to obey me!"

"Not going to train a hawk that way," Kester thought. He proved right, for the hawk struck with its beak, ripping a long gash in the glove.

Strongheart leaped back, and for one long moment the force of his fury threatened to uncurl his hair and burst the veins of his multiple chins. Then he struck, toppling the perch. The bird flapped in panic, but it was tied to the perch. With a pained squawk it fell against the wall and onto the floor.

"Let that be a lesson," said the noble, like a headmaster to a student who made the mistake of thinking. "We shall see who wins out, you and I." He left the study. At the window Kester said, "Yes. We shall see."

That night Kester made another visit to the noble's estate. Stopping first in the study, he then called on the noble in his bedroom. Strongheart greeted the windling with snores loud as wind in a canyon. Kester returned the greeting with a screeching *kaaaaw!* from above the bed's hanging canopy.

"Znn-- Wha? Whazzat?"

"I am the Celestial Hawk Spirit!" Kester cawed. "Release the hawk you hold prisoner, or my gore-drenched talons will drink deep draughts of your worthless blood!"

A brief pause. "Blasted windlings!" the noble said. "Where's my flyswatter?"

"Oh well, it could have worked," said Kester. Hoisting his spear, he ripped open the fabric canopy and dropped through, spear held point downward. As he fell, he shouted "Yakka yakka!"

Approaching from overhead, the visitor to a prone noble arrives first at the aristocrat's highest terrain

feature, the swollen belly. Kester's spear hit above the navel and drove in to the depth of a finger-joint.

"Ouuuch!" cried Strongheart. "Come here, you beastly --" He grabbed for Kester, swiped at empty air, grabbed again, but the windling leaped nimbly down onto the bed. Strongheart lunged, missed, flopped head-first off the bed in a cocoon of sheets, clambered to his feet, tripped, wrestled himself free of the bedclothes, grabbed a heavy book, and ran after Kester, intending to bestow on the windling the weight of his learning.

Kester darted out a crack in the open door. From the darkness beyond came the same kaaaw! sound he made before. Strongheart whipped open the door. "That didn't work before, windling, and it won't --"

The hawk hit him at eye level, flapping its wings frantically and flashing its talons. Gashed on forehead and cheeks, the noble fell back with a scream. Blood welled up, and for the rest of his life the noble carried the scars of that night.

The hawk perched on a staircase bannister, and for a time bird and windling watched the floundering Strongheart. Elsewhere in the house servants lighted lamps, a bustle of voices and barks rose up the staircase, and everyone was waking up. "Nicely done," said Kester. He waved a sliver of meat to lure the hawk. "Let's high-fly it to the forest," he said. He flew out an open window into the night, and after a long moment, the hawk followed.

Kester convinced the hawk that windlings are not bad sorts, and persuaded it to stay by his side. He called it Trotwing, a name seemingly more appropriate for a horse than a bird. Windling logic.

The Adventure

Entering a small town, the player characters see a notice posted on walls and trees. The minor noble of the legend, Undergeneral Marchon Novius, Wearer of the Silver Toga, seeks powerful adventurers for an expedition into the nearby forest "to wipe out a noxious, pestiferous menace that has too long blighted our fair land." Of course Marchon means windlings, especially including Kester and, for good measure, the hawk Trotwing.

Heroes who follow up may learn the hard way that Marchon does not appreciate questions or comments about the prominent scars across his face. He still tries to hire them; whether or not they accept, eventually they enter the forest, drawn either by Marchon's work, or by pleas from windlings who barely escaped it. In the woods they see the devastation Marchon has inflicted on harmless windling settlements, and this should turn them against the Undergeneral if nothing has yet.

Marchon, however, has found other hirelings: unusually powerful warriors and wizards (at least three Circles higher than the heroes) armed with powerful magical treasures. They aim to root out and destroy every living windling.

This presents rich possibilities for comedy.

These grim avengers, casting fireballs right and howling screams left, seem unlikely adversaries for a lighthearted scenario, until the heroes join with the windlings to foil them, and preferably make them look completely silly in the process.

After the windlings and the heroes achieve a pleasant victory in this adventure, develop running gags over the campaign. The over-muscled foes they beat here can pop up in later scenarios, always seeking to smash windlings (no matter what the context of the story) and always winding up with windling-thrown egg on their faces. Eventually the villains destroy each other in sheer frustration.

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