

BEASTS BARBARIANS

A Sword and Sorcery Savage Worlds setting

By UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

THE SKINNER OF SYRANTHIA





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INTRODUCTION FOR THE GAME MASTER

Enerius arrived at the Great Library in Syranthia many years ago. He was a curious boy, eager to learn, and in the library he hoped to satisfy his craving for knowledge. But despite his intelligence, he couldn't learn how read.

"It isn't your fault, lad." Said Velastios the Old, one of the greatest Sages of the Library. "Sometimes it happens. The brain of some people just isn't made for written words."

Luckily for Enerius, he had other abilities which allowed him to stay in the library. He had nimble hands, and was especially gifted in tanning skins to produce the finest vellum. An indispensable resource for a library where hundreds of precious books are copied to be saved from oblivion. He also excelled in the art of embalming. He processes many of the strange beasts killed in the Arena of Syranthia or brought to the Library by wandering Sages, to be preserved forever and made available for studying.

In the end, Enerius became Master Tanner, a very important position in the Library, but not being able to read a single word from the books he helped preserve greatly frustrated him.

One day while moving some old bookcases in a dusty, out-of-the-way section of the Library, he found a secret door. Curious, he entered the dark passage and followed it to a musty hall, full of ancient tomes and scrolls. His heart was racing as he realized he had found books nobody in the library knew about! He picked one up at random,

ran his fingers over the cover and the pages, which felt strange to the touch, and opened it. It was written in an alphabet he had never seen but, amazingly, he was able to understand it, as if someone was whispering words in his ears! He read the first tome immediately, and spent the night reading through the whole library and learning of things he had never even suspected could exist. All this he did at a speed inconceivable for any human being, and only later did he notice the strange hypnotic words not only stuck in his mind but also appeared on his skin as clear as fresh tattoos.

The books are grimoires of Keronian sorcery, locked away here by the ancient Sages because the sheer malevolence of their secrets was too much for the human mind. The Sages should have burned them but, out of love for all books, they couldn't bring themselves to do so.

As the years went by, the old magic in the cursed books awoke and the dark library slowly became a sentient creature. As its old body rotted away; it needed someone who would carefully copy and replace the crumbling books. The dark library waited until it found a suitable candidate: Enerius. The Master Tanner is now subjugated by the magic in the books and has turned into their faithful slave. He knows the tomes cannot be copied on normal vellum or paper. A very special material is necessary to preserve their power: the smooth, delicate skin of a young girl of fair complexion.

This would have disgusted and shocked the old Enerius, but it won't stop the new one...

TERRORS IN THE NIGHT

The heroes are returning to Syranthia after a journey or adventure. It is past midnight, and all they want is a warm tavern with food, beer, and some merry girls to kiss.

They are making for an inn they know well, the Repented Scribe, where Anastasia and Denera, very pretty sisters, offer their services as courtesans. Some time ago, one of the heroes enjoyed Anastasia's company

and now, with a fat purse, he is eager to see the girl again.

As they are walking past a dark alley, they hear a woman's voice cry out in fear. This is not the safest area in town and the brave heroes decide they should check what's going on. At the end of the alley, they see two figures tangled together in a fight.

The smaller one is a woman, while the other figure, completely concealed by a dark cloak, is by far the largest man the heroes have ever seen.

Just then, a pale moonbeam shines on the girl's face and the recognize Anastasia!

"Help me!" she cries.

As effortlessly as if he were picking up a twig, the hooded figure grabs the girl, and in a show of amazing agility, jumps onto a barrel and up to the roof of a nearby house!

CHASE ON THE ROOFTOPS

The hooded figure is a supernatural creature and one of the main threats of this scenario. Tugg, an embalmed Ape of the Cannibal Islands, was brought to life by Enerius' dark powers to hunt for fair-skinned girls. He is very fast,



and the heroes must chase him on the rooftops if they want to save Anastasia.

The chase is short (5 rounds) and based on Agility. It takes the heroes across most of the neighborhood and past many of Syranthia's monuments and places of interest. Jumping, tumbling, and running on slippery eaves are all part of this scene, giving modifiers to the rolls or using different skills as detailed below.

Use Complications as normal, but Tugg discards any deuce of clubs and draws a new card.

Following from the Ground. Some heroes might not follow the kidnapper on the rooftops, so they have to run down the streets trying to anticipate his moves. They join the Chase using Smarts (-4) and ignore the modifiers below. Heroes on the street treat any card higher than Queen as a Queen for purposes of Range.

Since it is past midnight, the chase takes place in Dim Light.

The chase ends after five rounds or whenever Tugg suffers two wounds. He stops, drops the girl, and disappears by jumping off some very tall building (see **Trapped!** below).

CHASE ON THE ROOFTOPS EVENTS

Round One – Roofs of Grain Sellers Road. Tugg runs along the roofs of Grain Sellers Road, known to be very steep and slippery! Chase rolls are made with Agility (-2) and any melee attack suffers the same modifier. If a hero rolls 1 on the skill die on an Agility-based skill roll, regardless of the Wild Die, he loses his footing and

slides down most of the roof, suffering 2d6 damage and is automatically Shaken.

Round Two – Jump over Philosopher's Alley! Tugg jumps a gap between two buildings and the heroes must do the same! This round the chase roll is based on Strength. Any hero failing the roll doesn't manage to jump onto the next roof but clings to its edge. He doesn't receive any Action Card in this round but he is safe. Only with a critical failure does he fall! It is quite a drop (20 feet, or 4"), but luckily he lands on a pile of garbage. The hero only suffers 2d6 damage but has -2 to Charisma and Stealth rolls until he washes. In addition, he must deal with Philosopher, a Jademan beggar who sleeps in the alley (hence its name) and hates being disturbed.

Round Three – Statues of the Merchant Lords. Tugg makes for the famous Lane of the Merchant Lords, flanked by tall statues of the greatest personalities in Syranthian's history. He lands on the stone book the statue of Erkelos the Learned holds in its hands, vaults around the scepter of Nikorios the Greedy and reaches the roofs on the other side of the lane. This round the heroes can decide to make a single Agility based chase roll or two Agility rolls each with a standard multi-action penalty (-2). They add up the values of the cards received. Due to the great abundance of obstacles, any target under a ranged attack is considered to be under Medium Cover.

Round Four – Walls of the Great Library. The chase takes the heroes to the walls of the Great Library, battlements which encircle its gardens. The battlements are adorned with crumbling statues and offer several hiding spots. It is a perfect place to disappear without a trace. During this round, Tugg uses Stealth as chase skill, trying to sneak out of sight, while the heroes use Notice.

Round Five. – Tower of the Candle. Tugg now feels the pursuers are closing in and its ape instinct leads the beast to climb up the Tower of the Candle, the tallest along the southern wall of the Great Library. In this round both Tugg and the heroes use Climbing as chase skill. The top of the tower is a dead end. Even if they fail the roll the heroes manage to corner Tugg, but they are puffing and panting (Vigor roll to avoid being Fatigued for the remainder of the scene).

Now Tugg cannot escape. The beast is trapped!

TRAPPED!

The mysterious kidnapper has made a mistake in climbing the tower and now must turn and fight!

The cloaked figure paces quickly and silently, as he has done throughout your mad chase over the rooftops of Syrantia, and you feel the stare of cold eyes concealed under the hood.

"Please! Help me!" cries Anastasia, still trapped in the giant's arms.

Suddenly, the hooded one throws the girl at you and jumps off the tower!

Any hero on the tower must win an opposed Agility roll with Tugg. If the hero fails, he is hit by the girl's body and falls, becoming Shaken. A hero who wins the opposed roll can run to the parapet and see the creature land in the garden, at least thirty yards below. No normal man could survive a similar jump, but the hooded figure stands up and disappears among the foliage of the Library's Garden!

For now Tugg has escaped, but at least Anastasia is safe.

(WC) Tugg the Ape (1)



ANASTASIA'S STORY

Anastasia hugs you with all the strength of her slender arms. "Thank you! May the First One bless and keep you! Please, take me back to the Repented Scribe."

During the trip, she fills you in on what is happening.

"It all started a week ago. Do you remember my sister, Denera? So tender and sweet, and very religious too, despite what you might think of girls in our profession. We used to visit the Temple of the First One every night. We usually went together, but that evening I was busy with a rich nobleman, so she went alone. Well, she simply didn't come back to the tavern. Her body was found in a dark alley two days later, it was so horribly..."

Anastasia cannot continue and starts sobbing wildly.

Anastasia cannot be persuaded in any way to give more details. She is just too shocked.

When she calms down a little, she continues. "I don't know who could have done something like that to her. And today, I was at the temple to pray for her soul but then it got dark. The thing... that attacked me is the same one that attacked Denera, I am sure!"

The heroes can ask Anastasia to describe her assailant, but the girl only remembers a very pungent smell (embalming liquids) and something shimmering, like silver, under the hood (it was the Glyph of False Life, which Enerius used to give life to the beast).

Then the heroes arrive at the tavern. Despite his rough appearance, the one-eyed bartender Jozum has a good heart and

sends Anastasia to her room to rest. In the meantime, he pours some of his best wine for the party to thank them for saving the courtesan and confirms Anastasia's story. Denera was killed in a gruesome way: she was skinned like a rabbit. The city watch has done some investigating but a dead courtesan isn't the biggest priority for them. They have no suspects.

Just then, a terrible scream is heard from upstairs!

The party rushes to the top floor and finds the room Anastasia used to share with her sister locked from the inside. A Strength roll is enough to bash the door in but the room is in total disarray, the window is broken and Anastasia is missing! A strange pungent smell still lingers in the air.

INVESTIGATION

Unless the heroes persuade him otherwise, Jozum calls the city watch. The guards do some routine questioning, but after a while they just leave. Two days later Anastasia's body will be found in a dark alley, completely skinned like her sister, unless the heroes manage to unravel this mystery.

Their investigation can begin with multiple leads, detailed below.

Anastasia's Room. With a Notice roll, the heroes find a few useful clues. On a success they spot a tuft of long, brown fur on the rug near the bed, which Anastasia probably ripped from her kidnapper. They aren't able to recognize what creature it belongs to because it is very rare. They'll need to find an expert (see **The Great Library**).

With a raise, they also find the impression of a hand on Anastasia's pillow. It is very large and not entirely human.

In addition, on the bedside table they find a strange hollow amulet, a sort of very small vase containing a spent candle. With a Knowledge (Religion) roll it can be recognized as a holy symbol of the First One, the strange divinity both Denera and Anastasia worship.

The heroes need to find at least the tuft of fur. If the whole group misses the clue, Jozum spots it. He also knows what the strange amulet is and suggests the heroes

pay a visit to the House of the First One, the temple of the foreign divinity.

The Great Library. Understanding what creature the fur belongs to is also crucial to the investigation. Luckily, Syranthia City is the main center of learning in the Dominions, so the most logical thing to do is to go to the Great Library and ask a Sage. The Library is guarded but the heroes are admitted inside. The main hall is buzzing with activity and Sages, scribes, students and servants are constantly walking back and forth. Finding an expert in exotic animals requires a Persuasion (-2) roll or a good bribe to a servant (at least 30 Moons).

In the end, they are sent to Enerius, a Sage who has long been studying exotic animals.

Enerius is a plain-looking, stiff man. He has no idea what this creature is but tries to hide his lack of knowledge by being rude.

"Why you are wasting my time in this way? This fur is too ruined to be identified. It could belong to a bear or even to a large dog. I must go now, I have a tannery to run and much else to do. Please, excuse me."

Enerius knows perfectly well where the fur came from and is worried the heroes might find out too. He goes to the tannery at once and starts



working on something to stop them (see **Haunted Birds**).

The characters leave the Library disheartened and are walking through the garden when they see a very old man, a Sage, sitting on a bench eating a peach. The man greets them and asks what's the matter. He is Velastios the Old, a semi-retired Sage, but still one of the most learned men in the whole Library.

If shown the fur, he examines it, smells it and tastes it with the tip of his tongue. Then, he says:

"This belongs to a Royal Ape of the Cannibal Islands. No doubt about it. It tastes a bit salty because the soil on the islands is volcanic and this influences... well, I don't think this is of any interest to you. It is a very exotic beast, at least in Syranthia."

If asked where he thinks this creature could be found in the city, he suggests trying the Arena, where all sorts of exotic beasts fight and die for the amusement of the crowds.

Velastios wants no reward or payment, he only asks the heroes to come back every now and then and entertain an old man with the stories of their adventures. He has been feeling lonely and useless since his pupil, Justinus, left the Library to explore the world.

The Arena. The Arena of Syranthia isn't as big as the one in Faberterra, but it still looks impressive. The fights take place in the evenings and on holy days. Even when not open to the public, the Arena is full of gladiators training, cursing and boasting, while servants sweep the steps, feed the beasts, and so on. The heroes are looking for the Master of Beasts, who is in charge of all the animals in the Arena. But he is a very important person, second only to the

Master of Games, and surely he has no time to see the characters.

Instead they can speak to Runikos, who works in the beasts' pens. If tempted with a few Moons and some witty chat (a Persuasion roll, some good role-playing or big smiles from a pretty heroine), he can reveal some useful information.

"An Ape from the Cannibal Islands, you say? Aye, we had one, but now it is gone. Ndami got it." And he chuckles as he remembers the story.

He explains a little bit more.

"The people who work here are sometimes paid with 'shares' in the pens, which means they come to own a little portion of all the animals kept in the Arena. It's a gamble, because if the worker dies before retiring, his family can claim no right. But if he doesn't get killed by some of these nasty critters, he can become the owner of a whole pen and its content. Usually he sells the beasts back to the Arena before retiring. Well, Ndami, an old Savannah man who worked here for many years, ended his career owing three pits. Or better the three beasts contained in them. He decided to keep them and took them home with him! He said they were old and tired, just as he was, and deserved a quiet old age. The Master of Beasts was really mad! He had planned to make the old animals die in the Arena in some gruesome way. Tugg, the Cannibal Ape, was one of them."

Ndami now lives in an abandoned villa, a few miles south of Syranthia. Finding it won't be difficult, since Runikos' directions are very accurate. If questioned about what other beasts Ndami took home, he mentions a lion and a tiger, both as old and shabby as the ape.

THE MASTER OF BEASTS

The trip to the abandoned villa where Ndami lives takes an hour on foot. The harvest season has just ended, and the fields are empty except for some crows pecking at the few grains of wheat left on the ground.

The villa is quite big and it must have once belonged to a rich man. If the party has investigated a little (Streetwise roll), they know it is called the Contested Palace. Its former owner, the son of a rich merchant, lost it at the gambling table and, overcome by shame, committed suicide. Therefore the debt couldn't be settled and nobody managed to claim ownership of the villa. It is now abandoned and its garden overgrown.

The gates are missing, stolen by thieves, and the overgrown garden is as thick as a jungle. The faint noise of flowing water is the only sound perturbing the peace of this place.

Following the sound, the party finds a small clearing where a monumental fountain, covered with ivy but still working, is spouting water.

A small path leads off, probably to the main building of the estate. Before the heroes have a chance to take it, something unexpected happens.

You hear something heavy moving in the vegetation, and then you see it. A huge tiger is staring at you with bright green eyes! At the same moment, you also hear a low growl coming from behind you. You turn around and see the imposing shape of a lion cautiously approaching and sniffing the air!

Despite their appearance, these beasts aren't dangerous. With a Notice roll (+2 if the hero has any beast-related edge or the Woodsman Edge), he can see they are very

old. With a raise, he also understands they look more curious than hungry.

Let the players role-play the encounter. The animals won't attack unless threatened.

If the heroes keep their cool for a couple of rounds, Ndami appears on the path. He is an old Savannah Tribesman with an exaggerated limp in his right leg.

"Keep calm, strangers. Dharma and Rogbro aren't dangerous, and neither am I. We are too old to pose any threat." He adds with a toothless smile.

If the heroes attacked the beasts, Ndami tries to console them (with a Smarts roll he can calm them down). He isn't very collaborative, and the heroes must use Persuasion, Intimidation or some money (50 Moons) to appease him.

Ndami politely asks the party why they are here if they didn't attack the animals. Ndami is a kind man, and once he is sure the heroes aren't here to send him and his beasts away from the villa, he answers their questions.

"Tugg the Ape, you ask? He...—yes, I say 'he', not 'it'—was my friend. He died of old age a month ago. He killed many gladiators in his life, but with me he was always as sweet as a lamb."

If questioned about where he buried the beast, he becomes uneasy, as if ashamed, then continues.

"I didn't bury Tugg. The day after his death a strange man came to the villa. He said he was a servant of the First One, some weird god of the Independent Cities. Tall and gaunt as a vulture, he was. He told me Tugg had the shape of a man and deserved to be buried as a man. A very crazy thing it seemed to me, but he gave me one hundred Moons for the body. Dharma and Rogbro need a lot of meat,

so I took the money and he took Tugg away in a cart."

HAUNTED BIRDS

While the heroes are chatting with Ndami, have them make a Notice (-4) roll. If they succeed, they notice a crow sitting in a tree. It looks just like the ones they saw in the fields on their way to the villa. Then, another one arrives, then a third, a fourth, and so on. A whole murder arrives over a few seconds.

These crows aren't normal beasts, but embalmed creatures animated by Enerius' dark magic. He sent them here to kill Ndami and the heroes and eliminate anyone who can link him to Tugg.

The crows are vicious opponents and fight to the last feather.

Once the beasts are taken down, the heroes discover they are embalmed specimens and each has a strange silver symbol painted on its head. With a Knowledge (Arcana) (-2) roll, it is recognized as an ancient Keronian rune meaning "awake", common in corpse animating sorcery. The rune disappears in a few minutes.

"These aren't common crows" says Ndami with curiosity. "The big one is an Imperial Crow of Faberterra, those over there are Eye Peckers of the Caledlands, and the small one is a Gemthief of Jalizor. They are all rare specimens, embalmed in such a perfect way! Surely this is the work of a master, but I don't know anyone capable of bringing them back from death."

It is definitely time for the heroes to visit the House of the First One if they haven't already.

(M) Ndami, Master of Beasts (1)

(M) Dharma the Tiger (1)

(M) Roghro the Lion (1)

(WC) Murder of Embalmed Crows (1)

THE HOUSE OF THE FIRST ONE

The temple stands in a run-down part of the city. Despite being big, the building is old and in need of repairs. Only one priest lives in the temple; a tall, gaunt man simply called the Caretaker.

The heroes have two opportunities to visit the Caretaker, and his behavior changes depending on the heroes' attitude. On the first visit, the party hasn't yet discovered he bought Tugg's corpse from Ndami. On the second visit, they question him directly about the ape.

First Visit. The heroes see the Caretaker about Anastasia, Denara and the gruesome death of the first and the mysterious kidnapping of the second one. The Caretaker doesn't like speaking to non-believers, so the quantity of information he reveals depends on how well the players do in a Social Conflict roll based on Persuasion.

Margin of Success

Result

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 0 | The Caretaker doesn't reveal any new information. Both Denara and Anastasia are part of his small flock. |
| 1-2 | Feeling the heroes are trying to help, the Caretaker adds the girls came to pray for the souls of their parents, who died of the plague a long time ago. He also hints he saw Denara's body, which was totally skinned. |
| 3+ | The party earns the Caretaker's trust. He reveals Denara's body is still in his custody, in the crypt under the |

temple. He is embalming it, trying to make the disfigurement less visible. He can show it to the heroes (Spirit roll to avoid being Nauseated for 1d6 hours). With a Notice (-4) or Healing roll, they understand every inch of the girl's skin was removed with great care to avoid ruining it. The tool used was probably an embalmer's knife and its wielder must have been a tanner or someone of comparable skill.

Second Visit. The heroes return to the Caretaker when they discover he bought Tugg's corpse. If directly questioned about it, his face clearly shows he is troubled, but not for the reason the heroes think.

"Yes, I bought the corpse from the man at the old villa when I heard the ape was dead. I did it because I wasn't quite sure if it was a man or not and, in doubt, it was my duty to give him proper burial.

Look around. The temple is falling to pieces. I have fewer followers every day; the new gods are luring them away like bees with honey.

I paid a lot of money for the body, more than I could afford, and I kept feeling uneasy while I took the ape's body to the crypt.

Then, a man wearing the robes of the Library's Sages came. He said he was an embalmer and wanted the ape so it could be preserved for study. He offered me a handsome sum and I accepted, thinking embalming was as good as a burial! I thought my god had sent the Sage, but he did so only to test the strength of my beliefs, and I failed! I sent that poor body to be desecrated!"

The Caretaker doesn't know who the man was. He only knows he was a Sage of the Library, with no remarkable physical features, and an expert in embalming animals.

When the Sage arrived at the temple, the Caretaker was busy praying with Denera and Anastasia and thinks he introduced them to him!

At this point, it is time for the heroes to go back to the Library and to identify the mysterious person.

If the heroes tell the Caretaker some nightmarish creatures are involved in this story, he turns pale, goes to the altar, picks up a small metal lamp, and gives it to the party.

"This is the Light of the First One, who leads the dead ones to the otherworld. It will help you against this great evil." Then he bows and leaves.

See the sidebar to learn more about the powers of the Lamp of the First One.

Later in the night, the Caretaker will desert the temple, never to return. He let his god down and cannot bear it. He leaves this story for good, but the Game Master can devise some way to make him return later in the campaign.

(M) Caretaker, Priest of the First One (1)

HEROES' JOURNAL: THE FIRST ONE

The First One is a very old god. He is mainly worshipped in the Independent City of Hillias, but his cult is probably far older. He is depicted as a tall, hooded man, holding a lamp in his right hand. The First One stands at the head of the line of souls making their way to the otherworld. His temples are lit by hundreds of lamps and candles brought by his followers.

Worshippers of the First One have great respect for the dead. It is their duty to ensure the dead are properly buried so they can reach the next state of existence, a concept similar to the doctrines of the Path of the Enlightenment.

This is what most people know about the cult, but some say the worshippers of the First One can actually communicate with the dead.

No priest of the First One will meddle with the undead. Their very existence is an offense to their god.

THE LIGHT OF THE FIRST ONE

This bronze lamp is obviously very ancient and crafted with skills now forgotten. Its pale flame burns light blue and gives off a faint smell of sandalwood. It is held from above by a length of chain.

The Lamp is a powerful relic. Its wielder gains the Champion Edge against undead creatures. In addition, any ally in his command radius gains +1 Toughness against Undead attacks.

The Lamp contains enough blessed oil to work for the whole adventure. Without the oil, which can be made only by priests of the First One, it has no power.

THE SKINNER REVEALED

When the heroes arrive at the Library, they might have only a vague idea of who their man is (a Sage of the Library who embalms beasts) or they might have made the connection and know Enerius is the man they are looking for.

If they already know Enerius is the culprit, they deserve a Bennie.

Enerius is nowhere to be found in the huge, chaotic library. But they soon bump into old Velastios, walking while reading an ancient scroll and muttering to himself. He is happy to help.

"A Sage expert in embalming, you say? You must be looking for Enerius. He is the best tanner the library has had in decades. He

makes the finest vellum I have ever seen, as smooth as the hips of a pretty girl... ehm... not that I have touched any in the last fifty years, obviously. And he also embalms exotic animals for the Library. At this time of the day he'll surely be in the Scriptorium scolding some student for wasting precious vellum with their poor handwriting. Let me show you the way."

Going to the Scriptorium requires only five minutes, but the party won't get there. Enerius is speaking to a student at the far end of the corridor when he spots the party. He immediately darts off down a side corridor!

The heroes run after him but, when they reach the door at the end of the side corridor, they find it locked.

If they ask the puzzled student or Velastios, they answer it's the door to the embalming laboratory.

THE EMBALMING LABORATORY

The door is locked and quite sturdy. The heroes can pick the lock or bash it in (Strength roll). It isn't a very difficult task but it must be done quickly; the more time Enerius has the more nasty traps he can set on his path. Treat the lockpicking or bashing attempt as a Dramatic Task but without a fixed number of rounds. The task ends when the party manages to gather three successes, with each raise counting as an additional success. Up to two heroes can work on the door in the same round but they must be doing the same thing. One cannot pick the lock while the other one is trying to bash the door in.

Note the number of rounds the heroes use to open the door. In the paragraphs below they are referred to as Late Rounds.

Laboratory. Once the door is open, the heroes walk into a large embalming laboratory. It is full of benches, bookshelves and so on, but the main feature is a large metal tube in the middle, where the corpses are kept in a mixture of exotic liquids. An elevated wooden balcony, accessible via a staircase, runs around the perimeter of the room, to allow students to watch the master at work from above without hindering him.

There are numerous workbenches, full of acids and other Lotus substances used in embalming. To slow down the heroes, Enerius has put a glass bowl (plus one additional bowl per two Late Rounds) full of acid perched precariously on the balcony's handrail. The acid pours onto the heroes' heads as soon as they enter the room! Each character must make an Agility roll, with -2 for each additional bowl. An adventurer who fails the roll is sprayed by acid and suffers 2d8 damage.

Enerius leaves through another door while the heroes are busy dodging the bowls.

"You cannot stop me! I have only started saving them!" he says, running away.

He is speaking about the books of the Dark Library.

Gallery of Beasts. The second door leads to a large, long corridor, where most of the Library's embalmed beasts are on display. There are cats, snakes, dogs, and much stranger beasts. Among them is Tugg. Enerius has the power to animate them by placing the Mark of False Life on their heads. But he has little time now and only manages to bring to life Tugg and a few other creatures. Let the heroes make a

Notice roll to avoid being Surprised, since the embalmed beasts attack them to cover their master's escape through another door. Enerius keeps muttering nonsense:

"The words! The words are crawling upon me! You cannot understand..."

The words written on Enerius' skin are driving him madder every day.

(WC) Tugg the Ape (1)

(M) Embalmed Beasts (1 per 2 heroes plus 1 per 2 Late Rounds)

Empty Room. After dispatching the embalmed beasts, the heroes rush after Enerius. They enter a dusty hall with empty bookshelves along the walls. There are no doors, so Enerius must be hiding somewhere. Just then, Velastios the Sage reaches the party, holding a torch, with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Wonderful!" He says "I haven't been in this room in ages."

There must be a secret passage somewhere, and the heroes must find it. Let the group make a Notice (-2) roll, which can be cooperative. In case of success, they find the passage. Otherwise, at some point Velastios says:

"Weird, the light of the torch flickers if I stand here? There must be a gap in this wall."

The heroes discover a shelf can be moved, revealing a dark passage.

Velastios looks very tired now. All the commotion is too much for his old body. He leans against a shelf and says: "I think I'll wait here. Take this torch, you will need it. And be careful, the Library is much bigger and more dangerous than you might think. We

have never explored all of it, and I have no idea where this passage leads."

THE DARK LIBRARY

In the Darkness. The passage is dark and full of strange whispers, emanations of the Dark Library and the light of the torches can't dispel it. Even the glow of the Light of the First One is reduced to a pale, grayish halo.

Advancing in this spooky place is dangerous. The strange voices constantly whisper words to the heroes, incomprehensible yet terrifying. The only thing the adventurers can do is tighten the grip on their weapons, trust their companions, and go on, ignoring the whispers.

Leaving the darkness is a Dramatic Task based on Spirit (-2). The roll is cooperative and every member of the party *must* participate. Any supporting hero rolling 1 on the Spirit die, regardless of the Wilde Die, causes the leading hero to suffer -1 to the roll because he has a negative influence on his comrades (he says something unnerving, trembles, and so on).

The leading hero has a +2 bonus if the group is holding the Light of the First One. If the cooperative roll fails, every party member must do a Fear check.

The task lasts five rounds. There is no need to count successes, the heroes must simply endure the time.

This scene is based on the heroes trying to overcome fear as a group, so good role-playing (encouraging words to friends and

so on) should be rewarded (+2 to the roll at the Game Master's discretion).

The *dispel* power, cast against Sorcery d12, can drive away the darkness for one round or for the entire scene if the caster wins the opposed roll with a raise.

ROTting KNOWLEDGE

You manage to cross the passage and you see a faint light in front of you. The whispers fade in the shadows, but you are aware they are still there, like predators ready to pounce.

You enter a large room, its ceiling so high you cannot see it in the darkness. The hall hosts a large number of very old bookcases, and you see pieces of books hanging down from the shelves like the arms of rotting corpses.

But it isn't the books that catch your attention. In the middle of the room, a naked girl is tied to a rack. Anastasia is still alive! She looks unharmed, except for being asleep.

There are various other racks, on which several sheets of the purest vellum you have ever seen are carefully placed to dry. A freshly made book lies on a table, ready to be written upon. You realize the book is made with poor Den-era's skin!

Enerius' voice suddenly comes from behind the bookcases. In his madness he has torn off his vest and is now bare-chested.

"You don't understand! I have to do it! Skin for these books! Copy them to preserve them from oblivion! See the words, they are crawling upon me, asking for it!"

And then to your dismay you see dozens of black letters and runes moving under his skin, like living tattoos!

With wild laughter, Enerius attacks you wielding a razor-sharp skinning knife!

This is the final fight of the adventure, in which the heroes either perish or save Anastasia!

The room is 12" by 12". The heroes came through the only door, which opens along the southern wall and is 2" wide.

Place Anastasia's rack in the middle of the room. She is sleeping, drugged, so no stats are necessary for her. Place the six Ensorcelled Bookshelves (see below) around the room as you see fit, but at least 2" away from each other.

Enerius starts in a place of the Game Master's choice, between 6" and 12" away from the heroes.

The main enemy isn't Enerius, but the Dark Library itself. The heroes are in its territory now and its power is larger because the bookcases can summon creatures made of pure shadow, called Library Shadows (see below). There is one sentient bookshelf per hero, while the remaining shelves have no power. Before the start of the fight, the Game Master should secretly decide which bookcases are ensorcelled. The heroes have no way of telling them apart from the normal ones.

The only way to actually destroy the library and win the day is to burn the shelves (see below), killing the malevolent intelligence animating them.

Enerius fights to the death to save his beloved library.

(WC) Enerius the Skinner (1)

(M) Library Shadows (1 per hero)

TERRAIN AND PROPS

Ensorcelled Bookshelves: Each bookshelf is 1" wide and 4" long. It has the power to create a Library Shadow and to spawn another when the current one is dispatched. The Shadows are created within 3" of the Ensorcelled Shelf.

Given their size, the bookshelves have Toughness 8 but they suffer double damage from fire attacks. A torch causes 1d10 damage, while the Light of the First One causes 2d10 damage (both dice results must be doubled). Whenever a shelf takes a Wound it is destroyed and a terrible howl is heard. Any living person within 12" must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken. Any Library Shadow the bookshelf spawned disappears. There is no need to keep track of which shelf the Shadow belongs to, simply destroy one at random.

Improvised Torches: The heroes may arm themselves with torches or similar flaming implements. A simple torch can be made by grabbing a handful of paper from any bookcase and by setting it on fire (requires a full round). This makeshift torch is considered an Improvised Weapon but burns out when a 1 is rolled on the Fighting Die, regardless of the Wild Die.

Rack: Anastasia's rack is sturdy, but the ropes restraining her aren't. They have Toughness 4, but there are four of them and each must be cut to actually free the girl. The rack is 2" by 1".

THE END

When the entire library is burning, read the following:

A huge blaze engulfs the room, and you hear a thousand shrieking voices while the ancient pages, full of forbidden knowledge, are destroyed. You see Enerius' shape among the flames for the last time, but you have no time for him. Taking Anastasia in your arms, you flee the room. As you run down the corridor, you meet a pair of Library Guards who see the fire and quickly run off to ask for help.

It takes all night to put out the fire but luckily it is stopped before it spreads to other parts of the Library.

The Captain of the Library Guards would like to imprison you and throw away the key, but luckily Velastios' words still have great weight and, after an endless number of questions, you are free to go.

"Abh..." says the old Sage, walking with you toward the exit. "Love for knowledge can lead a man astray, and that's what happened to poor Enerius. He never learned to read — he cannot — and it caused him anguish. By the way..." He rummages in his pocket and takes out a strange walnut "...my pupil Justinus sent me this strange fruit from the Cannibal Islands. His letter says it has amazing effects on the man who eats it."

"Would you like to try it?" He asks, his eyes shimmering with curiosity and expectation.

AFTERMATH

The heroes don't get any richer in this adventure. They have saved a girl and stopped a madman, reward enough. They also make friends with Velastios the Old, who knows much about a great number of disciplines and has a lot of connections both in Syrnthia and abroad.

If the Game Master feels the heroes should be rewarded in a more tangible way, he can decide Anastasia insists on giving them some of her savings (500 Moons) or the Library pays them to keep their mouths shut about one of the Sages being a madman (1,000 Moons).

This adventure can lead to several interesting places. For example, the heroes might go looking for the Caretaker, who is nowhere to be found.

CREATURES AND NPCs

CARETAKER, PRIEST OF THE FIRST ONE

Caretaker is more of a title than a name, but it is the custom of the clergy of the First One to drop their own name and take a simple title. Nobody knows where Caretaker came from, but something in his accent suggests the Independent Cities or maybe Caldeia.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d4, Knowledge (Embalm- ing) d8, Knowledge (Religion) d8, Investigation d4, Notice d6, Persuasion d6

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: Charismatic, Priest

Hindrances: Vow (tenets of his faith)

Gear: Staff (Str+d4, +1 parry, reach 1, 2 hands), robes

Special Abilities

- **Curse of the Gods:** An NPC priest can invoke a curse upon someone. To do so, the priest must make an opposed Spirit roll (–2). If he wins, the target of the curse is

affected by the Bad Luck Hindrance or the *lower trait* power (Game Master's decision) until the end of the scenario. If he scores a raise, the curse is permanent, at least until the priest lifts it or the player atones in some way. The Game Master should use this ability only when strictly appropriate. It is never wise to call upon the gods needlessly...

DHARMA THE TIGER

This old tiger was the terror of the arena, but now she is old and tired. She is a playful beast, if not threatened, and very fond of milk and honey.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Stealth d8

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities

- **Bite or Claw:** Str+d6.
- **Improved Frenzy:** Tigers may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.
- **Low Light Vision:** Tigers ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
- **Pounce:** A skilled tiger often pounces on its prey to best bring its mass and claws to bear. It can leap 1d4" to gain +4 to its attack and damage. However, its Parry is reduced (-2) until its next action when performing this maneuver.
- **Size +3:** Dharma weighs over 700 pounds.

EMBALMED BEAST

Beasts animated by Enerius' dark powers.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d16, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Stealth d6

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities

- **Bite or Claw:** Str+d4.

• **Beast Type:** There are many types of beasts in the Library preserved for study. Roll a d8 for each beast and check the list below to determine its type:

Die Beast Type.

- 1 **Dog/Wolf:** Go for the Throat. Automatically hits the least armored location on a raise.
 - 2 **Weasel:** Iron Jaw. Str+d6 damage.
 - 3 **Giant Bat:** Fly. Pace 7 and Climb -3.
 - 4 **Boa Snake:** Grappler. +4 to Grapple rolls.
 - 5 **Hunting Leopard:** Very Fast. Pace 10.
 - 6 **Striped Boar:** Thick Hide. Size +1 and Armor +1. Toughness 8 (1).
 - 7 **Tricarnian Hairy Spider:** Wall Crawler. Can move on inverted surfaces.
 - 8 **Lake of Tears Crawling Octopus:** Many Tentacles. The octopus can perform up to four attacks without any penalty to its Fighting rolls. The attacks can target different opponents and have Reach 2.
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recovering from being Shaken; immune to poison, disease and called shots, except those linked to its weakness.
 - **Weakness (Glyph of False Life):** Enerius isn't a true sorcerer, his powers derive from the words written in the Keronian books he found. He must place a silver symbol on the head an Embalmed Beast to animate it. A called shot (-4), strong enough to cancel the Glyph (Toughness 4), destroys the creature.



ENERIUS THE SKINNER

Enerius is a stern man, always ready to presume other people pity him because he cannot read or write. He is meticulous in his work making vellum and embalming animals, and demands the highest standards from his assistants.

The Dark Library has made Enerius mad, turning him into a remorseless killer who would do anything to reach his goal of preserving and copying the ancient books, the only ones he can read. The Library has infected his body too, which is now covered in small, alien letters and runes, migrated from the books to his own flesh. Enerius does his best to conceal them with long robes and bandages, saying he has a skin condition. The runes also give him supernatural speed and fighting skills.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Healing d6, Notice d8, Knowledge (Embalming) d10, Knowledge (Tannery) d10, Investigation d8, Persuasion d6

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Scholar, Trade-mark Weapon (skinning knife)

Hindrances: Outsider (cannot learn to read, a social stigma in the Great Library of Syranthia)

Gear: Iron skinning knife (Str+d4+1, AP 2), robes

- **Marks of Sorcery:** Enerius has acquired dark powers that manifest in the form of glowing marks he can impress on people and things with the touch of his hands. In particular, he knows the following powers: *armor* (the runes on his body glow), *blindness* (mark of hidden darkness), *stun* (mark of pain), *zombie* (mark of false life — raises an undead creature, works only on embalmed creatures). All these Powers have Touch range (except the armor power, which is personal). Enerius has 15 Power Points and uses Spirit as Arcane skill.
- **Skin of Words:** Enerius' body is covered with arcane runes which protect him. As long as he is unarmored and the runes are exposed, he receives a free soak roll for each wounding attack, as per the Loincloth Hero Edge (see Beasts and Barbarians).

LIBRARY SHADOW

A vaguely human silhouette made of pure darkness with burning red fissures for eyes. It has long, dark claws and is mute.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d16, Vigor d4

Skills: Fighting d8, Stealth d12

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 4

Special Abilities

- **Claws:** Str+d4.
- **Demon:** The Library Shadow is a demonic creature. It is immune to poison and illness and has +2 to recovering from Shaken.
- **Invulnerability:** Mundane weapons, except those made of steel, cause no damage to a Library Shadow.
- **Weakness (Fire and Light):** The Library Shadows are made of pure darkness, so they are vulnerable to light and fire. A torch deals them Str+d6 damage, while the Light of the First One deals Str+d10 damage. The light power causes them 2d6 damage per round if they are caught in its Large Burst Template, but a Shadow can make an Agility roll to jump out of harm's way.
- **Weakness (Bookshelf):** Every Library Shadow is created by one of the Ensorcelled Bookshelves. Destroying a shelf destroys the Shadow it created and prevents the spawning of a new one.



MURDER OF EMBALMED CROWS

With a Survival (-2) roll, any character with a good knowledge of beasts spots something very strange in this murder of crows. Each bird belongs to a different and rare species: Imperial Crows from Faberterra, Eye Peckers from the Caledlands, and even Gemthieves from Jalizor. And they are all silent, embalmed specimens from the Great Library brought to life by Enerius' dark magic.

Swarms are treated as one creature. They cover an area equal to a Medium Burst Template and attack everyone within it every round. When a Swarm is wounded, its size decreases to a Small Burst Template (see the Split Special Ability for smaller Swarms). A further hit disperses the swarm.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 9

Special Abilities

- **Flight:** The Murder of Embalmed Crows flies at Pace 8 and has a Climb of -3.
- **Split:** This murder is clever enough to split into two smaller flocks (Small Burst Template) should its foes split up. The Toughness of the smaller flocks is lowered by 2 (to 7 each) and their Agility is lowered by a die type.
- **Beaks:** These crows are vicious beasts, hitting automatically with their beaks and talons and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. The damage is applied to the least armored location (victims in completely sealed suits are immune).
- **Swarm:** Parry +2. The flock includes dozens of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons only deal half damage. Area-effect weapons work normally.
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recovering from being Shaken; immune to poison, disease and called shots, except those linked to its weakness.
- **Weakness (Glyph of False Life):** The murder comes to life when Enerius places a Glyph of False Life on the head of three of the crows. Destroying one of these glyphs considerably weakens the magic. First a hero must make a Notice (-2) roll to spot one of the three birds. Then with a Called Shot (-4) he can hit the Glyph (Toughness 4). Any destroyed glyph automatically deals a Wound to the swarm which cannot be soaked.

NDAMI, MASTER OF BEASTS

Ndami came to Syrantia forty years ago. He worked in the arena, nursing animals doomed to die, a fact which always saddened him. When he left the job he managed to save and take with him three of his dearest animal companions: Dharma the Tiger, Roghro the Lion, and Tugg the Ape.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Gambling d4, Healing d6, Notice d6, Knowledge (Animals) d8, Survival d8

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Edges: Beast Bond, Beastmaster

Hindrances: Lame

Gear: Bronze knife (Str+d4)

ROGHRO THE LION

The king of the jungle is a fierce predator, particularly in open grasslands where its prey cannot seek refuge. Roghro has quite a number of scars, left by the wounds he received in the arena, but he is still a fearful opponent.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities

- **Bite or Claw:** Str+d6.
- **Improved Frenzy:** Lions may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.
- **Low Light Vision:** Lions ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
- **Pounce:** Lions often pounce on their prey to best bring their mass and claws to bear. A lion can leap 1d4" to gain +4 to its attack and damage. However, its Parry is reduced (-2) until its next action when performing this maneuver.
- **Size +2:** Roghro weighs over 500 pounds.



TUGG THE APE

This powerful ape, bigger than a man, comes from the fabled Cannibal Islands. The Royal Apes of the Cannibal Islands have a very erect posture, which can make them pass for men of incredible height if properly disguised.

Tugg lived a hard life in the Arena of Syranthia. He always killed his opponents before becoming too old to fight. A kind beastmaster, Ndami, took him away from the Arena, but Tugg died of old age a few months later.

His body ended up in the hands of Enerius, the embalmer of the Great Library of Syranthia, who animated him with his foul magic, turning him into an undead slave.

Many years in the Arena have made Tugg a very skilled fighter.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d12+2, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10

Special Abilities

- **Fists:** Str+d4.
- **Undead:** +2 **Toughness**; +2 to recovering from being Shaken; immune to poison, disease and called shots, except those linked to his weakness.
- **Size +2:** Tugg is nine feet tall.
- **Weakness (Glyph of False Life):** Enerius isn't a true sorcerer, his powers derive from the words written in the Keronian books he found. He must place a silver symbol on the head an Embalmed Beast to animate it. A called shot (–4), strong enough to cancel the Glyph (**Toughness** 4), destroys the creature.

