

Symbaroum



GAME MASTER RESOURCE

Monster Codex

SPOILER ALERT!

This document contains many revelations regarding the *Symbaroum Monster Codex* and is only meant for GMs to read. If you intent to play (and not GM) the adventure, you are prompted to stop reading now.

Dear sister,

I am writing to you from inside an egg of golden threads, with a dying candle as my only source of light. The letters spread over the parchment as the poison spreads through my veins. My killer lies next to me, her body pierced by my trusted estoc; death has captured the many joints of her limbs at unnatural angles, and her face features the spider's four eyes in a row. Her jaw's are poisonous mandibles, one of them broken and set deep in my thigh.

My other hand is squeezing the Taar-cross, wrongly called an ancient symbol of Prios by the seller in Thistle Hold. It is not a sun, it is a golden spider, the holy symbol of Angathal Taar whose realm once stretched out around a network of pyramids. Serand's Pyramid is known and surveyed, but I found another, sunken into the ground and untouched for centuries. The taar-cross was my key, the way into the pyramid, down to the lower chambers and the golden egg. Oh, how it sang at my touch; how it opened up, thread by thread, to expose its empty interior.

When the watchers came climbing I fled in here to avoid certain death. It was not until the egg closed that I realized that this was their intent, to drive me into this golden trap. I hear them singing out there, hoarse and with clattering jaws. Initially, I wondered if they sang for me or their fallen sister, but now I realize that it is part of the ritual. I will transform, I will die and be reborn as one of them. You who are reading this letter, please take it to my sister in the town of Thistle Hold.

Beloved sister, the house is now yours, and you won't have to put up with my sloppiness and dreams of the Spider King. I have been drafted into his army, and the next time we meet, your poisonous words will be nothing compared to the venom of my jaw's.

Respectfully, Zemelio Starak

I didn't understand the odd looks and signs of protection that were aimed at us in Thistle Hold, and it took a long while before I realized that they actually were about our choice of guide. The masked girl was reclusive and careful not to show her face in view of others, but there is no doubt she was qualified – she found the quickest route through the forest, and on several occasions her instincts led us unharmed past ambushes and traps. Sure, she tracked like a dog, sniffing along the ground, but this is a method also practiced by barbarians.

Honestly, I couldn't see what caused the alarm and worry – until we were surrounded by dragouls. The girl grew wings and flew over us with her bow singing, to later dive to the ground and launch into battle, suddenly tall, muscular and with long, razor-sharp claws. I must say, in that moment our guide became the most interesting thing about our expedition.

Brother Erbalmer

expedition leader in the name of Prios

It looked like it would be an easy fight. We had hunted the refugees towards the east, all the way to the foothills of the Ravens. There, they took shelter in the remains of a ruined castle, likely fatigued and with limited supplies. We already knew they were prepared to fight to gain access to the Promised Land, so we closed in with great care, right before dawn, weapons at a ready.

They saw us coming and answered with arrows, which stopped our advancement and forced us to cower behind our shields, about halfway up the slope. Once the projectile attacks began to slow, we got up and charged. At that precise moment, the sun came up and its first rays reflected off the head of the refugees' last arrow.

I admit, I ran, like a coward, like a fool. Honestly, I'd rather accept my punishment than undergo an encounter with the Glimmer. When I later dared to go back, the scene was precisely like the cries and clangor had suggested. All were dead, rangers as well as refugees – broken, battered, lifeless. Better the gallows than that, better the gallows...

Loved ones, dear family, I will never return. I set off to find happiness, and I found it in the most peculiar place, in the strangest of circumstance.

The journey through the woods cost us many lives, so many that only four of us finally reached Whitewater and continued towards the Twilight Field. If this field really exists, and if it is full of Twilight Thistles, I will never know, because two days upstream we walked straight into my owners' ambush. We heard nothing, saw nothing, did not get the slightest feeling of unease, until the arrows were lodged in our legs, stopping us from running away.

Slender unhumans appeared from out of the greenery, disarmed us and tied us up in a row. My colleagues were eaten within a couple of weeks, but you know me – my stubborn inquisitiveness must have amused them, or made them curious, because I still live, as their obedient slave, servant and medicus. I am no longer afraid; all that remains is a harmonious, almost euphoric feeling of finally really living, as life is intended to be.

Forget me, just as I will forget about you. Know that I am happy.

hedla, your mother and spouse

For a long time I traveled with the talkative bard Tulgalo and his mistress, a knight whose armor was covered in runes. The bard referred to the knight as Baroness Kelira Homril; the knight did not say a word and kept her visor down even in the most blistering heat. This did not strike me as particularly strange, as the knights of the Realm of the Order are famously disciplined, not unlike the templars of Prios.

Neither was I unsettled by the knight's extraordinary composure. When we were attacked by the Ice Witch's robbers in the borderlands of the Titans, she took blows and strikes like no one I have ever seen. Not even the most hardened Pansar could remain standing after such a beating, but Tulgalo simply put it down to the holy power which the knights of the Realm of the Order draw from their deep faith in the Young Gods. Although this answer offended me, as a follower of Prios, I did not inquire any further.

Only when we arrived in Yndaros and went our separate ways did my critical faculties come into play. With growing suspicion, I headed to the open section of the Triplet Towers, where I learned the true state of things: the fiefdom of Homril, near the Realm of the Order's southern border, was devastated in year 4 by raging abominations from the wastes of the Mastodon, and Baroness Kelira died defending her lands. I immediately notified the liturgs at the Cathedral of Martyrs, and received the disconcerting reply that they have been hunting this death prince ever since Master Malesio - who was later exposed as a sorcerer - died and Kelira Homril became her own black princess.

Honorable Eumenos,

Brother Almagast's scornful smile and ill-concealed accusations regarding our tendency to underestimate the Dark have proved justified, as befitting as the warnings spoken by the blight-crazed treasure hunter.

We have arrived at the gorge where he found the artifact, the Sun Mirror. All in our company trusted in the assessment that you, esteemed brother, shared with me and Routefinder – that the beast the treasure hunter spoke of in his sleep must have been a lindworm, and that his speech on “fiery breath” and “roaring wings” were exaggerations caused by fear. But we were wrong, so wrong.

I hear them now, the roaring wings, and I have seen the creature's shadow. Moments from now, as we leave this shelter, we will all die. But when starvation is the only alternative, the choice is no real choice. With the grace of Prios, the beast may yet prove reasonable; if not we shall meet again, kneeling by the Lawgiver's side.

Your obedient servant, Sister Disera

The rumor spread like wildfire around the Antique Plaza: "There is an ettermite colony midway between Odaban and the Columns of Haganor!" The news was barely out there before the first bodies fell in the gutter, victims of rivals hunting for Etter Sleep to make the infernal ettermites drowsy. It was at that time I got involved, as the Commandant's special investigator.

My thankless assignment was to stop the murder spree, a truly challenging task when such sums of thaler and such dreams are at stake. But I am a loyal servant of the Crown and obviously I did my best. For a moment, when I found out how the rumors had started, I actually believed I could succeed - a fortune hunter named Broona had returned from the designated area with ettercopal in a knapsack; however, not from any ettermite colony but from the lair of a liege troll. I thought myself sly when I spread this news, convinced that it would put an end to the murders. But alas!

Another, just as damaging, rumor quickly took root: that Mayor Nightpitch tried to silence the affair with false information, hoping to claim the colony's wealth for himself. Numerous treasure hunting expeditions left for the woods, and few of them ever returned. If it was ettermites or something else that killed them I honestly do not know, but no inflow of ettercopal was ever noticed - this I kept careful track of as part of the investigation.

We arrived at Outback late in the evening. All was still. Too still. The massive oak gates, worthy of an Ambrian fort, were intact. The palisade, standing upon mighty embankments, remained unbroken. Initially, our cries and knocks at the gate went unanswered and we could do nothing but wait, irresolute with darkening Davokar at our backs.

One of the scouts spilled the air and wheezed: "The stench, can you smell it?" Before we had time to respond, a weak, trembling voice was heard from the gatehouse: "Climb, quickly, climb!" A rope was lowered down and we hurried up. In the light of the fading sun, standing atop the palisade, we saw the many dirt piles around the settlement – and inside it. "Gwahn," our most experienced scout muttered and spit three times over his shoulder. "This explains the stench: this place is doomed and we along with it."

The outcome of the battle was certain before it began. The sheer number of rage trolls and swarming goblins that sundered our column made it impossible to form a unified defense. The attackers came with a kind of black power, as if strengthened by something, or someone. At times I thought I heard the rhyming words of a lisping child, like an ancient nursery rhyme forcing my warriors to attack their comrades.

Divided we fell, group by group. I was one of those who were spellbound, and found myself kneeling before a wall of trolls and goblins, barely able to move. With all my willpower, I raised my book of prayers like a shield, but no words came past my lips. The enemies stepped aside to make way for a small creature. The rhyming child. A goblin? No, a former goblin.

Its eyes were a serpent's, its tongue forked, the light danced across its scaly skin. Its gaze was hypnotic and its voice hissing as it spoke: "You travel the land of the King Serpent Gadraltos; half of what you harvest around Gadralt's Rock will befall the ruler, death being the penalty for tax evaders. Remind your queen of this simple fact and our realms will prosper, side by side." The creature, who called itself Squagmatus, let me leave after having used its claws to carve the tax statutes of its master into my chest.

The eastern passage to the burned temples is closed. There are shield beasts lurking underground. They broke through our front after only two attack waves. I am surprised that we could even withstand the first crushing assault; such was its shielded might. Once they had broken through, when they were in our midst, it was staff mage against shield beast, duel upon duel. We all know how such battles usually end.

I retreated, staff whirling, toward a broken pillar whose top now serves as my writing desk. I am the only one left. There are forsaken staves, broken staves, scattered across the ground below. The beasts dragged their crushed victims down into the burrows. Their own dead, too, to strengthen the survivors through cold-blooded cannibalism. I cannot but feel a certain respect for this foe. As someone said: it is as if they were created to battle staff mages. Even if they were not bred for that purpose, they are certainly very well equipped to withstand the power of our staves, break through our warriors' ranks, and strike directly at our pathetically feeble flesh.

The sun is slowly setting, and the violings are gathering. I must either head back down and risk the fury of the shield beasts, or be pecked to death by a hundred greedy beaks as soon as night falls.

"Living thorns? Like some kind of strangling vines? Folly and fantasies, it may be the stupidest thing I've ever heard!" Aside from a heretical expletive at the moment of surprise, those were Order Master Ulagra's last words in life.

We had travelled long through Wild Davokar, and were hopelessly lost. Our supplies were dwindling and what we found in the woods only made us sicker and more confused - a clear sign that we had entered the dark: even if the forest seemed relatively bright and harmonious, it was treacherous in many ways. Just when we feared that all was lost, our guide warned that we were not alone. Only moments later, we all could see her: a witch, sitting on a huge, moss-covered stone, as if in a trance, listening to the wind whispering in the leaves.

She looked up as we approached. Nothing but a thorny bush separated us from her. Master Ulagra opened his mouth and aske - no, he ordered the witch to help us. When she didn't react, our honorable Master of the Order was offended and grew angry, threatening to burn her off the boulder, even summoning an orb of sulfurous fire between his hands to underline the threat. The guide, whispering and pleading, tried to calm the pyromancer's fiery wrath, but in vain. Not even the information that the thorny bush at the base of the stone was moving in answer to the threat had any effect besides the previously quoted, patronizing harangue about folly and fantasies.

We stood in a row, silent and excited. All of us were marked by corruption; all of us hoped to get rid of the stigmas, dreaming of being able to walk around undisguised, unmasked, without fear. The thought made my heart beat faster. **T**he creature before us was fettered to the wall, like a pinned up, gigantic bat. It squirmed and hissed; it reached for us with the thorny tongue playing in its predatory maw. It was thirsty and we were willing. The row moved steadily forward, as one by one we were licked bloody by the creature. Our Master's death lord stood ready to pull monster and cultist apart, so that the latter would not be licked to death.

It was nearly my turn, but the woman before me refused to be separated from the monster's kiss. Master saw the danger and cried out to his death lord to part the two; the edge of the rusty sword cut through the head and shoulder of the woman, and the creature jerked back its tongue to save it. Then our Master berated us, about never allowing the beast to drink itself full. And after that, you charged in, so I never received the cleansing kiss. **T**hat you mean to burn me, I know. But what will you do with the blight beast?

They fought in close formation, moving as one large body, rather than as individuals. They fought without words or spoken orders; grunts of exertion and moans of pain were all that came from them. Only when one of them fell did they scream. First one called out the name of the fallen, then the others did the same, all at once. They then fought on in silence, though, if possible, even more frenetically. **I** They were few, we were many – we slew them all, at the cost of heavy casualties. I heard rumors that there are more like them; that what we fought was but the rearguard of a larger force. Bahiti, Ceremun, Madaai, Hadar, Idona. Yes, even now, my beloved will sometimes wake me up as, in a cold sweat, I scream their names in my sleep.

Uncle Janos was always a peculiar man, slightly odd, but not in a threatening way. Just different, you see – a bit too interested in the macabre, perhaps, but no more than the average bored scholar. You know how these bookworms can be, isolated from reality, from the blood, the stench, and the squalor. I have seen a lot of them in my family circle. My mother was in many ways the same. She did not even give birth to me, and therefore never physically experienced the connection between life, pain, and blood. For her, bodily fluids would instead be exclusively associated with unhealthy desires and death.

Of course, it bothered me when my dear uncle started spending time with the poets in the graveyard; they met at night, reciting poetry over open, empty graves or, even worse, to the decay. From there, perhaps it was not such a big leap to enter the mausoleums as well, and do the same in the direct vicinity of the dead. Then something happened; what I do not know. The City Watch was called to the burial grounds after someone had dug open a grave; shortly thereafter, one of the poets was found dead in an otherwise empty crypt. That was when I decided to confront my uncle, and went to see him.

I found him emaciated, exhausted, showing signs of madness, with bruises on his hands and dirt under his fingernails. Still, he ensured me that he was well, and that he no longer had anything to do with the poets. To verify whether he was telling the truth, I waited outside his house, and as suspected, he climbed out of his bedroom window wearing nothing but his nightgown. I called out to him, and as he turned toward me, I was petrified. Believe me, the eyes staring back at me from Uncle Janos' eye sockets were not his own.

It was unbelievable! We made it all the way to the legendary Serpent Temple of Syraban without casualties, actually without suffering any kind of wounds, infections or poisons. Master Muldar was like a child at Queen's Day. He jumped around by the foot of the hill and shouted profanities at his mother, who apparently had never believed in or supported his ambitions, saying that the treasures would become the death of him. Boy, was she right...

We waited until the following morning before parading up the slope and entering through the vines covering the entrance. Many of us immediately heard it – the clicking, the crunching and the skitter of falling pebbles. But Muldar would not listen, and he did not heed our warnings. He refused to permit us to turn around. I was the only one who disobeyed.

As soon as I saw the pale, tiny creatures emerge out of the ground, the walls and the vegetation I turned and ran. Before I even reached the entrance, the creatures had assembled in several hungry swarms that soon attacked my companions. Shortly thereafter, howls and abominable screams echoed from the top of the hill. If Muldar's men had happened to awake something or if the howls came from them... Well, I'd rather not know...



I should never have insulted Baron Oramei. The rumors about him being in league with sorcerers are not the least exaggerated: to this I can testify in these, the final hours of my miserable life. The Baron's troops are circling my castle, and the fortifications I once raised to my protection are now the walls of my death chamber. They killed my alchemist first, with an arrow, so now they can just sit and wait while the Baron's death magic murders us in here, one by one: crushes us to shapeless skin sacks full of broken, pulverized bones.

I write this alone in my chamber, with wife and children chased out into the hallway, as pointless offerings to the abomination. It will not settle with them. I am wearing armor that will not protect, am locked behind a door that will not hinder, and on the table rests my mother's sword, which hardly can save me from an enemy that cannot be seen. The abomination's embrace will soon crush my lungs and break my spine, while I sit with sword in one hand and pen in the other. May all abominable beings of the Yonderworld haunt the Baron of Haaras for all eternity.

Grown Spites are inclined to target hibernating or cocooned members of the elder folk, sinking their barbed stings into the back of the victim's neck. The insect then sheds the rear part of its own body, thus leaving its offspring behind to thrive and evolve.

The infestation manifests itself in a red, swollen, purulent amniotic sac far down on the host's neck, with a forked outgrowth along its throat, protruding from the skin on both sides of the larynx. The larvae then grow inside this attached sac, while the host's body is poisoned and its mind and senses clouded – the latter to such an extent that the creature no longer has the self-control and awareness necessary to perceive the infestation of the spite.

The venom in the host's blood provides perfect conditions for the maturation of the larvae, but also seems to be the insect's greatest weakness. Tests have shown that a strong antidote can neutralize the toxin, thus, effectively and immediately, eliminating the parasite. The sting, the amniotic sack, and the larvae can then be removed by a trained Medicus, although doing so often results in great pain and serious injury.

Incident report

Witnesses claim that the woman was pale, dirty, drooling, and making guttural sounds which were sometimes reminiscent of a rooting pig, sometimes of an angry goose or a rutting young bull. She was jumping up and down, waving her fists and attacking anyone who came near. Eventually Watchman Lerk saw past the dirt and recognized her as Lea, one of Goldengrasp's assistants. He approached the woman, unarmed, attempting to calm her down, which explains how she managed to leap forward and bite his throat open. I saw no option but to order my men to fire. She died gargling with five crossbow bolts through her body.

Squad Leader Pellio
Town Watch, Thistle Hold



Troll Shadow



- 74 **T**hese creatures, recognized by their gaunt physique and unhealthy complexion, should be avoided whenever possible. Alone they are merely a distraction, but in groups they become a growing threat; they steal whatever they can find, often destroying what they do not understand. In larger groups they generate some kind of mystical power that is a serious threat to the integrity of a ranger squad.
- 75 ✦ It should also be said that troll shadows seldom have any knowledge worth collecting or using, unless one happens to be in search of an artifact, as these pitiful lifeforms seem able to detect the scent of such items. The downside is that what little help one receives comes at a greater cost than the mission can afford.
- 76 ✦ The basic rule is simple: Keep a safe distance, or increase the distance by leaving something small for them to eat or occupy themselves with.

*Better to kill them on sight,
or you will regret it!*

