

• CURSE OF THE WHITE WOOD •

*Out of a place between the Worlds,
Through the Darkness blinding white
Say the Words, and know the path.
Terror walks the Black Road tonight.*

*Ageless gods will never tire.
Darkling touch steals breath away
Water, Earth, Air and Fire
Agoth walks the Black Road today.*

*The Sun is gone; night takes hold.
Wind of ice, boiling rain.
Twisting space and endless time.
Death Walks The Black Road again.*

*Now the Door stands open.
The way is lit by demon-glow.
Fire, blood, and blinding smoke
Walk The Black Road... now.*

Obelisk Inscription, Ruins of Olad.

*(also from the Ninth Spell of Opening,
the Book of Gates)*

PROLOGUE

The characters, always seeking a way to gain some extra special ability, learn of a place on the plains of Uj called the Ruins of Olad. Here two beings may gain Mentalist-like powers—whether they be of that persuasion or not. They journey to the place and the operation works, though the cost is higher than they might have imagined. They are forced to journey through the White Wood... and beyond.

GM SYNOPSIS

The characters are lured by a Mystic to visit the ruins of Olad, an ancient Place of Power not far from the White Wood. (The White Wood is located in Emer, in the Region of Uj under the shadow of the Scorpion Ridge.) At the center of this ruin is an ancient machine/artifact which can create a telepathic link between two beings. It is in fact a Lords of Essence artifact, much older than the surrounding ruins. The ruins were built by a dark cult bent on the worship of Agoth and the Void. It is linked to the White Wood, and an inscription there is the key to a dark portal. The Telepathic link will drive one PC insane, and send him into the Wood. The others must follow, and inside they are transported to the First Pale. They must elude the foul creatures there and solve the riddle of the chant in order to escape.

Note: this is just one way to enter the First pale; The GM should feel free to concoct another way for the PCs to encounter the telepathic slabs described below if that fits better in this campaign.

REQUIREMENTS

A party of 4-6 characters of *at least* 3rd level is suggested. The GM can adapt the physical challenges of the First Pale to fit the capabilities of the Group. This is primarily a mood/mental challenge adventure, so character level is not as important as player experience and sound thinking.

REWARDS

Survival and the Telepathic link are all that the PCs can expect or hope for from this adventure.

PENALTIES

Death or insanity await those who fail.

AIDS

Unless there is a pretty powerful Mentalist willing to risk spell failure (and insanity) every time he uses *Presence*, all the group will have to go on is the Telepathic link between the two characters.

OBSTACLES

These shall become obvious as the adventure proceeds.

SCENE 1: THE MYSTIC

The Characters are in Kaitaine for a little recreation and research, and happen to encounter a Mystic. If they don't go see the Mystic to have their newly 'liberated' magic items analyzed, have him intercept them on the street. He is middle-aged, with wild white hair and piercing grey eyes. He wears shimmering grey robes and has a huge raven on his shoulder. He says "You seem like a curious group; for a mere twenty gold I will give you a map to the Ruins of Olad, a place where a powerful artifact can confer upon you the powers of a Mentalist."

The Mystic will do whatever is necessary to convince the Characters, telling them to meet him at his shop that evening at a specified hour.

They arrive at the address, finding an old but well-maintained building. The first floor is shops, while the upper three floors are apparently apartments. The Mystic's place is small, with a shingle showing a raven and a huge eye, and declaring only "Futures Cast, Lore revealed."

Inside, there is a musty waiting area filled with nondescript furniture. The Mystic will emerge through a back door and motion them through. Inside the door is a thick purple velvet curtain blocking light from entering his inner sanctum. It is a round room, the walls completely covered with the same heavy drapes. The raven sits on a stand in the perimeter, silently eyeing the guests. A round table is in the center of the room, around it enough chairs for the Characters, plus one large, ornate chair. He beckons them to sit. "Gold First." He says.

After he is paid, the Mystic produces a map, and gives detailed directions to the site. Then he says "At the heart of the ruins, in the center of what was once a great domed chamber, is the magical artifact. Exactly how the process works, I do not know, except that it will become obvious to you when you stand before it."

The Mystic will warn them that the area about the ruins is 'perilous' and not to enter the White Wood. He will answer any reasonable questions, then say goodnight.

SCENE 2: UJ

The PCs should have no trouble booking passage on a boat which will sail up the river Hallas to within 100 miles of their destination. The journey through Uj along the southern foothills of the Scorpion Ridge should be uneventful (almost eerily so).

Any PC at watch during the night who rolls a successful Sheer Folly (-50) Perception will see a huge black bird (resembling the Mystic's raven) sitting in a nearby tree watching him.

Finally, at about dusk (no matter how many days it takes), the group comes over a rise and sees the sprawl of grey stone before them, and just beyond it, the eerie bleached trees of the White Wood. A dark haze seems to hang over the wood, while the ruins are as clear and bare as a skeleton picked clean in the desert.

SCENE 3: THE RUIN OF OLAD

The ruins are in bad shape, consisting of little more than eroded stone pillars and tumbled walls. They stretch for nearly a mile in diameter, so it will take some wandering to find the broken domed chamber at the center of the ruin, but it is there, the entire structure built on a great stepped platform a hundred feet across.

At the heart of the ruin is a pair of horizontal slabs, each about 8' long and four wide, with a shallow, humanoid-shaped indentation on each. The material of the slabs is impossible to determine; it could be metal or some kind of dense, smooth stone. Their bases descend deep into the earth. They are different in form than any other material in the ruins. The GM should entice the PCs into laying on the slabs...

By laying on the slabs two people can establish a telepathic link. This is true *Telepathy*, a power released by the slabs, which alter the electrical functions of the brains and release their telepathic potential. Telepathy is unrelated to any of the Realms of Power, being a latent ability in all thinking beings.

Unfortunately, one of the two beings linked inevitably suffers from temporary psychosis. Both should roll and add his Reasoning bonus. Whomever rolls lower becomes violently insane. Possessed with seemingly superhuman power, he leaps up and runs from the ruins, shouting aloud the verse from the obelisk (See the beginning of the adventure) in his native language, over and over, punctuated with inarticulate screams and cries of "They're after me, they're inside my head! I have to hide!"

The insane PC then runs directly into the White Wood.

The other Character senses the linked person's madness, but only peripherally (lucky for him). The Telepathic link isn't like mind reading; it is more like being able to talk to each other at will, with no range limitation.

SCENE 2: THE WHITE WOOD

This strange, haunted place is a vast forest made up entirely of grotesque, gnarled trees of bleached-white wood. If one passes under the eaves of this barren place, it seems suddenly cooler, and a mist hangs over the bleached trees so that it always seems darkly overcast—even though it is bright daylight. Through the maze of pale trunks one can see nothing but dull grey soil and moss, and gnarled branches.

A legend is told of an evil sorcerer and his singing daughter at the heart of the forest; that is only part of the tale. For the White Wood is a place on the threshold between the Worlds.

INSIDE THE WOOD

The characters must rush headlong into the forest or risk losing their friend (the Telepathic link has yet to be firmly established). Horses or other animals will not enter the Wood.

GM Note: *Tired of your characters' familiars? This is a good way to get rid of them. Otherwise let them enter because they are linked to their masters.*

The linked PC can sense his fellow's presence, and is able to get a directional bearing. He can try to 'talk' to the other, but gets no coherent response. The characters will run for a few minutes, far enough to be deep inside the Wood. Then the shift will occur.

SCENE 3: THE FIRST PALE

The shift from the White Wood into the First Pale is subtle, and is signified as much by internal signs as visual cues. It requires anyone not trained in *Sense Reality Warp* to make a successful *Extremely Hard* (-30) Perception. (Those with *Sense Reality Warp* realize that they have shifted into another reality if they make a *Routine* (+30) roll). The shift is marked by a feeling of nausea and disorientation. Then the trees begin to thin out somewhat...

The entirety of the First Pale would seem to be a vast grey savannah, broken only by clumps of skeletal woods: gnarled, spindly trees bleached white. The light, which is a grey twilight seeming to come from the horizon all around leaving the zenith an unrelieved black, never changes. The temperature remains the same: a bone-chilling cold. This is not alleviated by the icy breezes which blow from random directions, flowing through the tree-branches with a low moaning wail. There are occasional patches of dry grass, but these, like the trees, are completely dead.

All sounds but the moaning wind are curiously dampened. Conversational voice carries only a few feet; a shout no more than twenty feet.

Fires will not burn; torches cannot be lit. A spark can be made, but nothing seems flammable. Magical light can be summoned, but it is a poor, flickering illumination (e.g., Utterlight casts an illumination as bright as a small lamp in about a 3' radius).

In general, spells will work but all have a standard 20% chance of failure (on top of normal failure modifiers). There is also a 5% chance every time that he casts a spell here that the Character will go *Insane* (see penalties below). Food and water could become a problem, since there is no water here; food and water production spells work at about 10% capacity. Sleep is impossible, though it is uncertain why.

One cannot judge direction here, as the light comes from all around, and normal navigational techniques are useless. After wandering for fifty feet or so, someone will spot the Black Road. Stretching as far as the eye can see in either direction, it is perfectly straight. It is ten feet wide and made out of a substance like wet asphalt, cold and slightly sticky, but none of the material clings to shoes.

If anyone gets the idea of marking a tree or the road, allow it (unless someone attempts to damage a tree; this causes a high, keening wail, delivering 1-10 hits to everyone for each attempt to wound a tree). After the group has travelled about a thousand feet, the mark made by the character will appear again... on the other side of the road. Attempts to set off through the trees perpendicular to the road only mean encountering it again ahead, just after the road passes out of sight behind them.

In other words, it is impossible to use any normal means to figure out location or direction. Any clever ideas should be rewarded with Experience Points later, but thwarted nevertheless.

About the time the PCs realize that they are in a completely alien place, the linked PC will realize that his fellow has become more quiet and passive. He still has a directional bearing (straight down the road) but further communication remains impossible.

SCENE 4: RANDOM ENCOUNTERS IN THE PALE

Refer to the Demons and beasts listed below.

DEMONS OF THE FIRST PALE

Easily the weakest of the Demons, these tend to travel in groups

(2-20). Averaging about 7 feet in height, they have pale grey skin and are naked and hairless except for a single clump of wiry hair protruding from the top of their large skulls. Although capable of wielding clubs, they have no understanding of sophisticated fighting techniques and are in fact quite stupid. If they see the PCs, they will attack.

OTHER CREATURES

None of these creatures is ever seen within fifty feet of the Black Road. Unlike the Demons, they all are solitary creatures.

Orgal: Resembling white, hairy, ten-legged spiders about five feet across, Orgal are less aggressive but can be very dangerous if threatened. Their poisoned bite is deadly. Orgal spin webs among the white trees, sometimes snaring the demons in them. PCs wandering off the road and rolling an Orgal Web encounter must make a successful Medium Maneuver or be caught in one. It requires five rolls of over 80 (modified by Strength bonus) to get free, one roll per round, or else if others can deliver 50 hits to the web. It is AT 11 (-0).

Shaan: Not unlike a white stingray, a Shaan hides itself under the surface of the dusty grey earth and remains there unless disturbed. If stepped on or otherwise bothered, the Shaan will curl up and wrap itself around the offending limb. Using leech-like mouths all over the creature's body, it bites and feeds on the target's blood. Shaan can fly like a stingray swims, though they never go higher than a foot or so above the ground.

Rale: Flying silently overhead, Rales are white, batlike creatures with a wingspan of about a foot. They are completely silent and flap their leathery wings with unnatural slowness. They never drop very close to the ground. While the Rale appear to be silent, they do emit a continuous, eerie sound which is almost felt more than heard. A low thrumming/jingling sound, it causes a slight dizziness and feeling of disquiet.

Althoi: Often called 'The Eyes of Agoth', Althoi resembles more than anything else a large (8' long), inflated blowfish, except that its body is covered with eyes on short, wavering stalks. Over two dozen sight organs bulge from the creature's cold, slimy skin, blinking and staring. Althoi's fins are of a shimmering diaphanous nature and seem to propel it as if it were swimming in water, though it hovers in the air with no apparent effort. Several prehensile tentacles emerge from the large-jawed mouth, organs of sense and manipulation. Though not strong by Demonic standards, they can take hold of a man —paralyzing him with poisoned barbs— and drag him to the gaping maw. Then the creature drains its victim of blood and drops the empty carcass.

The Althoi encountered here travels alone except for the Yathlu guard it may summon. True to its purpose, the Althoi is an observer, not a warrior. However, if attacked, it can be a deadly opponent.

Althoi has the power of inter-planar travel; it can also propel itself through the air at about 5 mph.

Althoi System Data:

Spells: Seer Base True Sight and True Visions to 30th; Bard Base Mystical Change 20th; Mentalist Base Mind Speech to 10th. It can also use the spell *Passing* to get through physical barriers.

Yathlu: Luminous, transparent beasts, the Yathlu manifest as large jellyfish-like creatures, about three feet wide with dozens of multicolored tentacles hanging from the underside. The main body pulses and undulates as it floats in the air. The tentacles waver and drift, seeming aimless but actually searching. It seeks life-force and is drawn to it.

Each tentacle has an eye on the end, allowing the creature a very complex (if disjointed) vision. While not strong, these tentacles also deliver a powerful sting if they touch unprotected skin.

Once the target is stunned, the creature can actually carry a single beast as large as a cow away, draining its fluids and leaving a husk. A Yathlu can attack as many as three foes at once, and if not surprised, can hold them at tentacles' length (the tentacles have a better defensive ability than the vulnerable body).

Yathlu System Data:

Attacks: Yathlu tentacles deliver a powerful (10th level) poison which immediately paralyzes the foe. However, they must touch bare skin. This is indicated by a Medium Stinger Crit (a Stinger Attack roll is automatic after a Grapple Critical is achieved).

Defenses: Yathlu are immune to all but Elemental Spells. They take half damage from all but Fire, which delivers 2x hits but regular (i.e., Large) criticals.

ENCOUNTER CHART

Roll every hour:

Type (% will attack)	On the Road	Off the Road
Demons (100%)	01-08	01-05
Orgal (50%)	—	06-10
Orgal (Web)	—	08-12
Shaan (flying; 0%)	—	13-15
Shaan (100%)*	—	16-17
Rale (0%)	09-25	18-30
Althoi†	26-28	31-33
Yathlu	27-28	32-33
No Encounter	21-00	31-00

* this is essentially the chance of stepping on one, which is the only time it will attack.

† Once the group has encountered the Althoi once, roll again for a regular encounter that hour. There is a 25% every hour after that that someone in the group spots the Althoi; it is indeed following them, hoping to see their method of passing between planes.

SCENE 4: THE END OF THE ROAD

After travelling at least 6 hours (though time will be hard to distinguish in this place; if in the unlikely event the characters have something that tells time, it will give random times or run backwards) the group reaches the end of the road (at least for them). This is if they trust the sense of the linked PC; if they try other things first, they could waste hours or even days.

The first thing the PCs will see is a monstrous trilithon (three stones arranged as two uprights and a third laid across the top of the first two, forming a gateway) twenty feet tall and as wide as the road. It emanates raw power. The characters can feel waves of energy washing over them; detect Power, Essence, and Evil spells go off automatically (no PP expense). The stone is a smooth sickening pinkish-white. The road actually passes between the uprights and continues straight on.

The missing member is curled up in the fetal position a few feet from the Portal. His hands are bloody (he cut his hands with his own knife or dagger, lying nearby), and he is trembling, and still mumbling the verse from the Olad Obelisk.

This 'insane' character has written the last stanza of the verse in his own blood. Blood is also smeared all across the sides of the portalway. It is a lurid bright red, wet and sticky, and showing no sign of drying. There seems to be a tremendous amount of it, but the insane PC is not in any immediate danger of dying due to blood loss.

The PCs must figure out that they need the *set the blood on fire* (this is hinted at in the verse). Blood will burn brightly and with

lots of smoke here. It will open the portal, allowing the Characters about a minute to get through. Anything (including demons) stepping through during that minute will pass into the Shadow World with the Characters.

OTHER FACTORS

While there will be no other creatures at the site when the characters arrive, roll a 20% chance of First Pale Demons arriving every 5 minutes of real time. If the Althoi spotted them earlier, it will arrive within 5 minutes and hover about 50 feet away. The Yathlu will float up within a minute or so more. They will wait, not closing unless attacked. They only want to see the Characters pass through the Portal.

DENOUEMENT

The group will pass through the Portal, exiting at a place of the GM's choosing. It could be one of the trilithons at the Ruins of Olad, or virtually anywhere else in the world. A day will have passed for every hour in the First Pale.

Immediately upon exiting, the previously insane group member will make an instant recovery and the linked character will sink into a state of insanity (see below). He will recover naturally in 10-100 days, but will have a lingering, unnatural fear of fish and spiders.

The PCs might decide to return to Kaitaine to get their money back from or take revenge on the Mystic. They will return to the site of his shop to find it occupied by a stuffy apothecary, who will insist that he owns the building and has never had such a tenant before. The decoration of the place is completely different. If neighbors are asked, no one will have any recollection of any such man.

GM NOTES

INSANITY

The concept of insanity hasn't been dealt with very thoroughly in Rolemaster, even though it can be a very interesting aspect of a role-playing game (witness the most excellent Call of Cthulhu, which I suggest as a further reference in the aspects of Insanity, as well as a damn fine game in itself).

Hopefully in some future supplement, we will deal with sanity more completely, but in the In the meantime, however, we must be satisfied with a few basics:

TYPES OF INSANITY

- 01-20 **Amnesic:** All memory of the Character's own background, who his friends are, even his own name, are lost. Basic maneuvering skills (including Picking Locks, etc) are not lost, but Spells are forgotten. Character may also mistrust these people he does not know...
- 21-40 **Catatonic:** Character assumes the fetal position and is completely unresponsive. He cannot move or be fed normally. He will require medical attention very soon or die of dehydration.
- 41-60 **Paranoid:** More subtle than the other maladies, the Paranoid seems fine at first (the GM must be careful how the insanity is revealed to the PC so that the others do not suspect). The paranoid is certain that everyone is out to get him; he will trust no one, and in fact will begin forming complex schemes for revenge and escape. He will become very nervous and jumpy.
- 61-80 **Psychotic:** (particularly severe manifestation) Character laughs hysterically, then begins sobbing. He claims that "they" are after him, and seems to recognize friends only intermittently. If restrained, he has bouts of superior strength trying to break away. He seems to be constantly hallucinating and crazed. He might randomly attack someone or try to injure himself.
- 81-00 **Stupefied:** This is not as bad as Catatonic, since the character can be led about and fed without too much trouble, but is completely unresponsive to other stimulus. He will not speak or show any reaction. He has a tendency to drool.

Calm spells will prevent the character from injuring himself or others and from running off, but it is not a cure.

Certain herbs may cure insanity; one such is called Irona. Others exist, but they are rare.

A Clerical *Mind Disease Cures* (Spell Law, pg 39) can cure insanity; but it requires a *Mind Disease Cures True* to cure it in less than 1-50 days.

CREATURES TABLE

Type	Lvl	Base Rate	Max Pace/MM Bonus	Speed MS/AQ	Size/Crit	Hits	AT(DB)	Attacks (Prim/Sec/Tert)	# Enc	Outlook (IQ)
Demons/Creatures of the First Pale										
Pale I										
Demon	1	90	Dash/10	MF/FA	M/I	35	1(20)	40MCl(2x)/30MBa/60MCR\$/50cl(2D)	2-5	Berserk(LI)
Orgal	8	80	Spt/20	MF/FA	M/I	160	4(40)	70LPi/75LSt/poison/Special	1-4	Normal
Shaan	3	60	Run/20	MD/FA	M/—	45	1(40)	80wp100/60MSt€/Poison€6	1-2	Normal
Rale	2	90	Dash/30	VF/VF	S/—	20	1(70)	—	1	
Agothu										
Althoi	30	60	20	MD/FA	L/LA	200	11 (40)	+60 MGrapple/+40 SStinger/Spells	1	
Yathlu										
Body	8	10	10	F/VF	no stun	80	1(10)	—	1	
Tntcles	—	—	—	—	none	120	3(40)	1-4Whip60Special20	—	

CODES:

For a complete key, see the Master Beast Chart in the *Emer* Book or *Creatures and Treasures*.