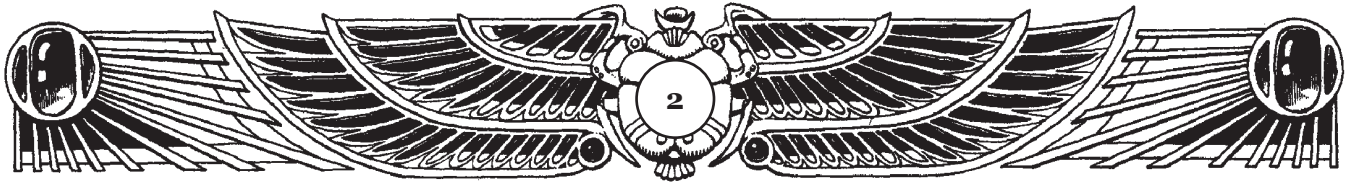


BOOK OF TOMORROW

ISSUE FIVE

JULY 2005





BOOK OF TOMORROW

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BOOK OF TOMORROW

The EDPT's Earthdawn Fanzine

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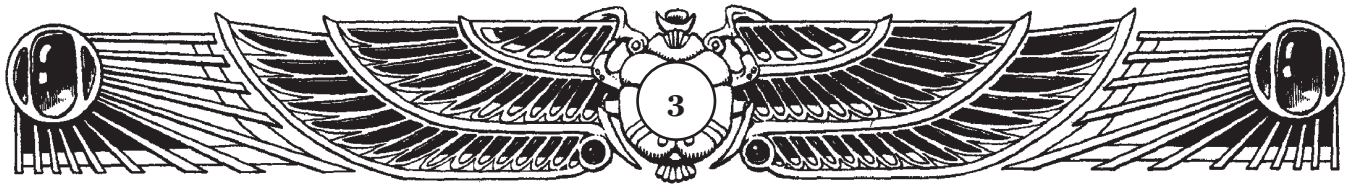
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Earthdawn Abbreviations

EDPT uses the following abbreviations for second and subsequent references to Earthdawn products.

ED Earthdawn

ED2 Earthdawn 2nd Edition

EDC Earthdawn Companion

EDC2 Earthdawn Companion 2nd Edition

EGM Earthdawn Gamemaster Pack

D1 Denizens of Earthdawn, Vol. I

D2 Denizens of Earthdawn, Vol. II

LE Legends of Earthdawn

CoB Creatures of Barsaive

AW The Adept's Way

HOR Horrors

SR Serpent River

BE Book of Exploration

TDK Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom

ESG Earthdawn Survival Guide

BW Blood Wood

TE Theran Empire

SS Secret Societies of Barsaive

CR Crystal Raiders of Barsaive

CF The Ork Nation of Cara Fahd

DRG Dragons

MMS Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets

AM Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive

MoB Mists of Betrayal

TiS Terror in the Skies

Inf Infected

Pad Parlainth Adventures

SP Shattered Pattern

Sky Sky Point Adventures

Bla Blades

Tad Throal Adventures

PtW Prelude to War

PoD Path of Deception

BaW Barsaive at War

BiC Barsaive in Chaos

Bx Barsaive Box

BxP Explorer's Guide to Barsaive

BxG Barsaive Gamemaster's Book

Px Parlainth Box

PxG Parlainth Gamemaster's Guide (first part of the book)

PxR Ruins of Parlainth (second part of the book)

Vx Sky Point & Vivane Box

VxB Barsaivian Vivane

VxT Theran Vivane

VxV Vivane Province

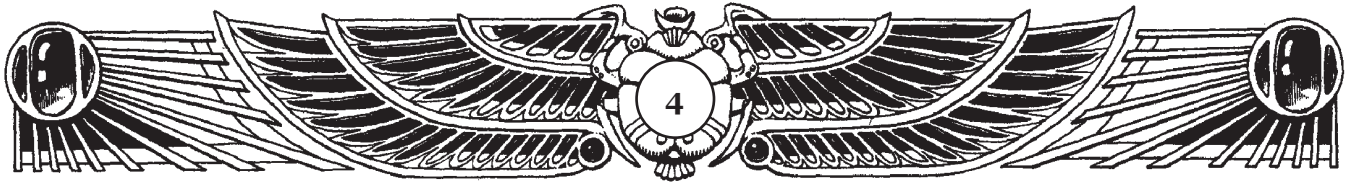
BoT Book of Tomorrow

CX Codex Arcanus

Bjs B'Jados

EDJ Earthdawn Journal





FATE

Something is rotten in the city of Urupa.

The pale sun had barely begun its ascent in the east when Alassea heard wagon wheels groaning from around the bend. Most traffic heading for Urupa either traveled along the Coil using t'skrang riverboats, or hired a galley to take it across to the shore. Land traffic had always been thin, and even rarer still were land travelers who continued on during the night hours.

Alassea patted Manso's shaggy mane while the horse gently nudged her with his nose. "I'm out of apples, Manso. Begging won't help you. Bet you two coppers it's old flat-toothed Katedahu and his squeaking cart." The horse only snorted and nudged her again.

Katedahu wasn't the kind who cared much for traveling by day. The light revealed too many secrets the ork would rather keep unseen. Alassea figured he must have miscalculated his last leg of the journey, or he simply believed Urupa's fields were safe enough to travel openly with his illegal cargo.

Was the old fart getting careless? She could take advantage of it.

The thought brought bile up her throat and she spat on the cold ground. She would rather work in Ealana's pleasure house than have any dealings with the ork slaver. Rubbing some of the dawn chill off her numb fingers, Alassea tried to decide if she cared enough to hide. It wasn't so much that she feared Katedahu, as much as she loathed the old ork.

The wagon finally emerged, two brawny granlains harnessed to it. The midsummer storm-soaked ground made each step a struggle, and their pelts were muddy and glistening with sweat. Katedahu was perched on the driver seat, his brow furrowed. From time to time, he lashed his whip at the poor beasts while his mouth never stopped muttering streams of curses at them, at the road, at the Passions, and at the world in general. For some reason he wasn't accompanied by his regular armed escort. Perhaps the slaver came on lean times?

Then Alassea saw the troll.

An old troll community existed in Urupa, so Alassea wasn't entirely oblivious to the existence of the huge Name-givers. In fact, one of the regulars at the Happy Maiden was a troll, a dribbling, fat fool who went by the name of Tegrat 'Can you spare me a copper?'. She didn't think much of them, but there was something about this particular troll that drew the eye.

Most trolls went about like shambling mountains, oblivious to their surroundings, completely confident in their ability to tackle anything the world might throw at them. Those among them who were more conscious of the little Name-givers running around their feet walked with a hesitant gait, their eyes always cast down, as if apologizing. This troll did neither. He walked like a huge cat, almost as if his feet were not touching the dirt. It was the stroll of a predator, proud and graceful. She wondered how a slug like Katedahu managed to convince such a Name-giver to accompany him. Maybe it wasn't lean times for the old miser after all?

She expected him to pull in beside her and make conversation. Chances were he was on his way to the Golden Triangle to see her master and his colleagues, but as the ork's wagon drew near, he didn't even wave in recognition. Katedahu simply swerved his wagon, attempting to bypass her cart from the left.

Good, pretend you don't know me. Alassea didn't feel like chitchatting either. She held tight on Manso's reins, as the old horse was always fidgety around unfamiliar animals. Suddenly her wagon shuddered, spilling some of the firewood she collected that morning. A crushing sound followed.

Alassea looked down in alarm, though she already knew what she would see. Her wagon's left front wheel was interlocked with the slaver's left rear wheel. The impact must have been the final straw for Katedahu's spindle. His wheel hung broken, and the entire wagon tilted dangerously to one side.

"Ye pox-ridden ugly daughter of a thousand fathers! Who's the dolt who taught you cart driving? By sweet Lochost, I swear your master is going to pay for every copper I've lost."

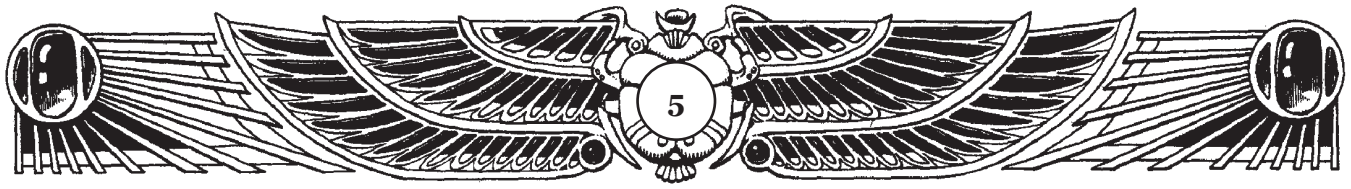
"Odd choice of Passion to swear by for an ork of your profession, Katedahu. And anyway, it was your fault. My horse was standing still." Alassea felt her heart beat in contrast to the bold words.

"I'll tear out that snake tongue of yours, girl!" Katedahu jumped off his seat and started towards her.

"You just come near, and I'll show you who'll cut who." Alassea picked up the small axe she used for chopping firewood.

"Alright, you both calm down. No one is going to cut anybody," the troll said. His voice went a few octaves lower than





human ability. “We have to figure a way to get the merchandise to the city.”

“And how are we supposed to do that, after the vixen broke my wagon? It will take a whole day to fix the wheel.” Katedahu kicked Alassea’s wagon half-heartedly.

“We haven’t got all day,” the troll said. “The merchandise must be delivered before noon. How about we dump the firewood and use your wagon, lass? We could make it worthwhile to you.”

Alassea’s look shifted between her cart and the troll. As if he had read her mind, the huge Name-giver stepped forward and gently took the reins from her hands. “What say you, lass?”

Well, it could have been worse. He could have taken whatever he needed without pretending to give her choice.

“My master is going to beat me black and blue if I don’t bring the firewood in time. I say fifteen coppers is a just compensation.” At least she might squeeze some profit out of a bad situation.

“Done!” The troll spit on his palm and reached towards Alassea in a humanlike gesture. She felt cheated, realizing she should have made a better bargain. Still, fifteen coppers was a small fortune for her.

In less than a minute, the troll got rid of a pile it took her two hours to collect. She held onto Manso’s reins, while he neatly packed her wagon with heavy crates. The hard work made him sweat, despite the cold. He took off his coat, revealing two huge and dangerous-looking axes sitting crosswise on his broad back.

“I could use a hand here, you lazy tusker.” The troll pointed at two huge crates covered by green canvas. Katedahu spat in answer, but a sharp glance from the troll made him run over.

That was strange, she had first figured the Troll to be a simple caravan guard, could it be that Katedahu had decided to take a partner? That was really out of character for him, the ork has always been own boss. She started whistling a happy tune. Seeing Katedahu like that was almost worth the inconvenience of losing her pile of wood.

“What are you so smug about?” Katedahu scoffed. “Don’t think I won’t tell Kebain about the fifteen coppers you’ve made. He’ll put you to the jigger, both for losing the fire wood and for trying to fleece a deal on him.” Alassea gave him the *buunda*, though she made sure his back was turned.

With the ork’s help, the troll removed the canvas from the crates, which were actually two wooden cages. A blond skinny creature with a hanging, wrinkled bluish skin was chained in the first cage. Alassea considered Urupa the most cosmopolitan city in Barsaive, yet she had never seen his kind before. He looked a bit like an ork made to go on bread and water for a year and a day. With Katedahu, she wouldn’t be surprised if this was truly the case.

The other cage held a more mundane Name-giver. Like Alassea, the young girl in the cage was elven, but that’s where the resemblance ended. While calling Alassea plain would have stretched the truth a bit, the girl was the epitome of beauty. High cheekbones, noble nose, perfect lips, and silky black hair, which would make even the Queen of the Blood Elves, turn green with envy.

Unconsciously, Alassea scratched her bald scalp: her master liked his employees free of lice. She wondered what it would feel like to be so beautiful, then the girl tried to stretch, and her arm hit the bars. Alassea decided that she wouldn’t care to trade places after all.

“A nice gem, isn’t she? Ealana would pay a hefty sum, eh?” Katedahu thumped his chest.

“Where did you get your hands on such a girl, Katedahu?” Alassea said. “She looks high born. Someone like her is bound to have an angry relatives somewhere.”

“Stupid little girls shouldn’t meddle in matters not concerning them!”

Alassea showed him her tongue.

“When my business is done, I’ll buy you from Kebain. There are plenty of brothels in the south where lonely Theran soldiers are posted. I hear they are willing to take even ugly little frogs like yourself.”

“I’m not a slave. You can get the noose for buying free men in Urupa.” Alassea said.

“I can buy your mother’s debt from Kebain.” Katedahu smile displayed a row of yellow rotten teeth.

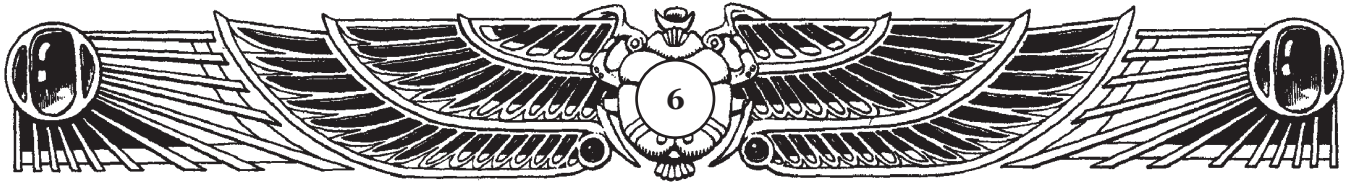
Alassea didn’t have anything to say to that, mainly because he was right. She was a slave in every aspect save name. Her mother sold her against a gambling debt, promising to return the money in a year and a day. That was sixteen years ago. Her mom was long dead, and she once calculated she would be one thousand three hundred by the time she managed to pay Kebain what her mom originally owed. Katedahu could buy her mother’s debt from Kebain, and then she would be his to do with as he wished.

At last, with the ork’s help, the troll managed to get the cages onto her cart. He replaced Manso with one of the sturdier looking granlain. “Your wagon can’t take me as well. I’ll walk beside you, lass,” he said. “Mind you, take care to drive carefully.” He placed a few coins inside her fist.

She opened up her palm, and was stunned to see two Brazas, golden Throal coins, twinkling among the coppers. The troll gave her a meaningful wink and placed his finger to his lips. “This would do as a small compensation for any trouble with your master lass.”

She nodded her thanks. It was far more than a small compensation. During her entire life she never owned half as much.





“Katedahu, leave that wagon alone. Take the other horse and ride ahead to say we’re coming,” the troll boomed as the ork sat down near the broken wheel.

“Yes, and who’s going to guard my wagon while I’m away? I’m not leaving it for the Anglers.”

“Yes, you are! If you don’t, I’ll torch it. Then you’ll have one less dilemma.”

“Be careful Troll, there is just so much as I’m willing to take from you.” Katedahu snarled.

“Don’t be daft, ork, remember our agreement.” The Troll spoke softly but there were volumes of threat beneath it.

Katedahu started saying something, then thought the better of it. Maybe his experience with the troll taught him humility? Usually he wasn’t so docile. He grabbed the reins of the remaining horse and disappeared down the southern track.



“The most interesting talks aren’t always happening in front of an ale.” — Vistirania Eleanor, elf swordmaster



They rode in silence for a while, the troll’s measured steps easily matching those of the horse. She couldn’t help feel attracted to the big warrior, despite his choice of profession. People as a rule never treated her kindly, if they even noticed her.

“You don’t seem to be the type to hang around with Katedahu’s kind.” She heard the words coming out of her mouth, wondering how she found courage to speak them.

“Interesting. Just what kind do I look like to you?” the troll said.

“I’m sorry, master. I didn’t meant to be rude.”

“Hmmm... I’ll let you know when I’m offended. Now answer my question, lass.”

“Well, you look like a warrior master, a true warrior, not the kind to hang around with scum like Katedahu.”

“It’s Bellwhar’g.”

“What?”

“My name’s Bellwhar’g of the Ironclaws.”

“I’m Alassea.” she said shyly.

“Well met Alassea, and you are right, I’ll reckon you that. I am a warrior, and normally you wouldn’t find me traveling with a *kava* like Katedahu.” He spat. “But this is not regular times. It never is.”

“I’m a warrior, too.” She started blushing before she even finished the sentence.

“Of course you are.”

“No truly, I am. There is a human fighter in the Pit who’s teaching me some axe work. He says I’m pretty nimble on my feet. He doesn’t ask much in return, so it’s a good trade.”

“You pay for his lessons?”

“Well, it’s not like I have any money.”

Bellwhar’g scanned her from head to toe, “I see.”

“Oh no, nothing like that! He only makes me stand guard while he shags my master’s wife.”

“A truly noble soul.” Bellwhar’g gave her a huge grin, exposing two enormous tusks with golden points. “Tell me lass, the Pit you’ve mentioned; could it be the one called Dedo’s Pit?”

“The same. It’s connected to the Lucky Virgin. That’s where I work for Master Kebain. Dedo Big Mouth runs it. Why’d you ask?”

“Well, that’s where I’m taking those two.” The troll pointed at the cages behind them. “I should have delivered them yesterday, but things got complicated on the road.”

“The girl must be going to Ealana’s pleasure house. It’s in the same block as Dedo’s and the Lucky Virgin.”

“How very convenient: so a guy can gamble, have fun with the ladies and watch a fight all at the same time.”

“You forgot to mention weed smoking in Chag’s Den. It’s all part of the Golden Triangle: Chag’s Den, the Lucky Virgin, and Ealana’s. Dedo’s Pit is in the middle.”

“Very nice. I’m to deliver them as soon as I can. That guy,” he pointed to the skinny ork, “is supposed to participate in a big fight tonight. That’s why we’re in such a hurry. Our buyer is a fellow named Tiras Merok.”

Alassea tensed.

“You seem to know the man.” The troll said.

“Tiras Merok. Everybody knows him. Well, at least everybody knows of him.”

“And?” The troll gave her a reassuring nod.

“He owns the Golden Triangle. Chag, Ealana, Dedos and my master just run the place for him. Some say he owns half of Urupa’s underworld; some say he owns the other half as well.”

“Bad news, this Tiras Merok, huh?”

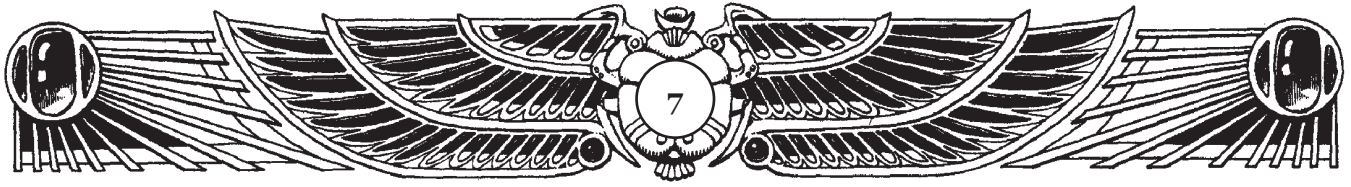
“The worst. I’ll give you a free advice, Master Bellwhar’g, and that’s because you’ve been nice to me and all. If you have to do business with Tiras, don’t ever let him catch you cheating. The last one who did had to learn how to swim without the use of arms and legs, if you catch my drift.”

“I’ll try to keep that in mind.” Bellwhar’g didn’t look too concerned.

The skinny blue ork in the back said something in a foreign language that made the troll give a hearty laugh.

“What kind of gibberish is that ork speaking?” Alassea said.





“That’s Maracan for you, and Iben-Sharif is a jubruq, not an ork. He said that you are a feisty one. He likes that in a girl.”

Alassea looked back in suspicion at the caged creature. The foreign words had a strange, throaty sound to them. “You can tell that Sharif of yours he can stop being so smug. By tonight, he’s going to be crojen shit.”

“Crojen shit?”

“That’s what they do with the leftovers of the fights at Dedo’s; feed them to the crojen. Master Dedo keeps them in a small cave outside the city.”

Iben-Sharif gestured a strange sign with his hands and bowed his head. “What’s he doing now?” Alassea made a sign to ward against evil.

“It’s his way of showing you that your words don’t frighten him. He has made his peace with the Book of Fate.”

“The Book of what?”

“Where he comes from, they believe a Name-giver’s life, from the chapter of his birth to the one foretelling his funeral, are all written down in the Book of Fate. Once you’ve accepted that, nothing in this world can frighten you.”

“Well, I don’t know anything about this Book of Fate, but I don’t think I need to read his in order to know the last chapter includes crojen. That scarecrow wouldn’t last ten seconds in the Pit tonight.”

Bellwhar’g removed his troll helmet and scratched the balding top beneath. “I wouldn’t write the funeral oration for Iben-Sharif yet. You haven’t seen him fight. He may look skinny, but I’ll put my coin on him every time. In fact, I’m going to do just that tonight.”

“You’d be wise to keep your coin in your purse, Master Bellwhar’g. Tonight is Urupa’s Founder’s Festival. Zeiti Chen will be participating in the fights.”

The troll lifted a huge hairy eyebrow. “Founder’s Festival?”

“Yes. Every year at Founder’s Festival, Tiras Merok holds a party at the Triangle. They have real death fights at the Pit. It’s a big occasion. All the high and mighty show up.”

“And this Zeiti Chen character participates?”

“He has been Founder’s Festival champion for the last ten years. They say he’s never lost a fight.”

“Interesting. Tell me more about Zeiti Chen. Sounds like an intriguing fellow.”

“Nothing much to tell. He’s Merok’s right hand, been with him since he first came to Urupa. They say he performs all of Merok’s hits and shakedown, but I wouldn’t know much about that. He sure looks like he is the man for the job, though. He enjoys killing.”

“What do you mean?”

“When he fights, he never lets his opponents die quick or clean. There are bad rumors going around about Chen.”

“Like what?”

“All sort of things, you know, people like to talk. One thing that’s really odd about him, though, is that he never takes his helmet off. A fighter at Dedo’s who saw him once said he’s Merok’s evil twin.”

“Twin?”

“Yep, and that’s a sane version compared to some of the other tales I’ve heard.”

“And what do you think, girl?”

“That generally people are full of thundra crap.”

Bellwhar’g gave a hearty laugh. “You have wit, girl, I’ll give you that.”

Despite Bellwhar’g’s cheerful attitude, a funny feeling came over Alassea. She turned to look at the wagon. The two prisoners appeared to be minding their own business, but for some reason she was certain they both had their ears open. She suddenly felt foolish for giving so much free information to a complete stranger, and decided to be more reserved. Bellwhar’g, for his part, didn’t press her further. Perhaps he sensed her sudden withdrawal and was waiting for a better opportunity, or maybe she simply suspected him for nothing. From one of the trunks, he pulled a troll-sized bejeweled mandolin and started playing a whiny tune. Iben-Sharif joined him, ululating a song in his strange language.



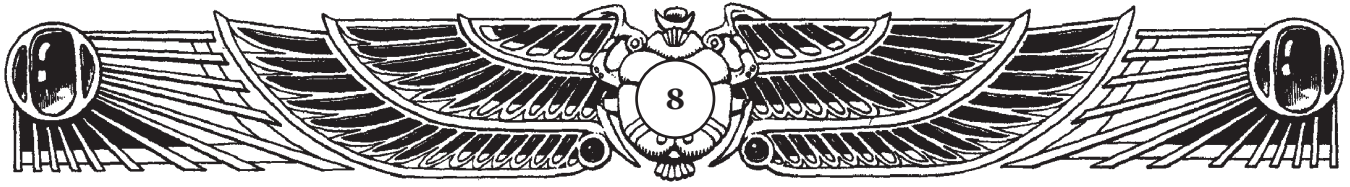
“A slave is a slave, noble blood or not. They just cost more.” — Orcanios, Theran merchant



In Urupa, Name-givers were already up and about all over the city, making preparations for Founder’s Festival. The drakkars in Otosk’s air ships dock were ornamented with numerous colored flags, giving them the appearance of huge shiny birds of prey. In the wharf, shipmasters competed to see who could fly the most outrageously decorated sails. During the last festival, Captain Masae Seorach’s *Mallornica* amazed everyone with a sail made of glowing green and red butterflies. Everyone waited to see what the famous captain would come up with this year.

In Nehem, the obsidiman section of Urupa, the residents somehow caused a creeper of wildflowers to cover the entire merchant house of Omeyras and the adjacent cliffs like a blanket a hundred yards wide. People who walked by simply stopped for awhile and gaped. Even Shabira’s Redoubt, the giant ugly fortress watching over the harbor, looked festive. Each of the fortress’s four huge fire cannons (some said they were the largest cannons in Barsaive) were adorned by colorful giant monster dolls. At midnight, the monsters’ bellies,





along with other smaller, similar versions all around the city, would burst open and shower eager children on the streets with candies. One of the cannons was shooting fireworks over the harbor, to the loud cheers of the spectators below, a last test before the tonight's show.

The Golden Triangle was uncharacteristically busy. On a regular morning, the daylight would illuminate only the last remnants of previous night. The gamblers, lechers and weed smokers would be shoved quietly into Harborside's alley. Most were expected to get home by themselves. For those who wouldn't be going anywhere, there was another arrangement, which included a garbage cart and a pit full of crojen. Today, though the place was teeming with activity, Tiras Merok was personally inspecting the preparations, and everyone was on their toes.

Bellwhar'g untied his granlain from Alassea's wagon and started off towards the Lucky Virgin. "You stay here, lass, and watch the goods for a few more moments. I'll be back in no time to relieve you of my luggage, so you can go back for that precious pile of wood. In the yellow marked bag you'll find sugar leaves. Help yourself while you wait."

Alassea picked up one of the leaves. They were surprisingly fresh and sweet. It was good simply to sit idly, pretending to be a master of your own time. She untied Manso from the back of the cart, and walked him gently to a water trough. The old horse had seen too many winters, and the day when Kebain would sell it to the skimmers was drawing near. As long as he was still capable of working, there was no point in treating him cruelly. When she went by the cages, a slim arm shot out and caught her wrist. It was the elven girl. Alassea tried to pull her hand away, and found that she couldn't. The girl was surprisingly strong for her slim shape.

"What do you want? Let go of my hand, or I'll bite you," Alassea said in alarm.

"Please help me." The girl's voice was shaky, all her apparent resolve gone to the four winds.

"I can't help you. What do you want from me?" Alassea pulled with all her might, finally releasing her arm from the other girl's grip.

"What are they going to do with me?"

"They'll sell you to Madam Ealana's pleasure house."

"That's a brothel, right?"

"Were you born on the moon? Of course it is," Alassea said, though she immediately regretted speaking so harshly to the girl. "Look, what's your name?" she asked the elf.

"Ulruviel, Ulruviel of House Anwamane. You're Alassea, right?"

"Right. Come on, wipe your tears. I can think of several much worse options than working at Ealana's."

"How can you say that? I've never been touched by a male before."

"Look Ulruviel, I have a few friends working at Ealana's. The madam is fair, and she keeps her girls well fed. She doesn't allow them to get roughed up by the customers. Someone as beautiful as yourself would probably be kept just for the most wealthy clients."

"Can't you help me? That ork kidnapped me when I went to see my betrothed. I have a wealthy family up north that would be most grateful."

"Sorry sweet, I can't even help myself. They would only capture us and bring you back. Me, they'd hang on the nearest tree. Your best chance is to lay low for awhile. You never know what may come up in a couple of months."

Suddenly someone grabbed her ear from behind, twisting her head with brute force. "Talking out of your ass again, Al? How many times do I have to tell you to keep that ugly pig snout of yours out of business that doesn't concern you!"

The pain brought tears to Alassea eyes, but she was afraid to shout, knowing it would only bring about further abuse. "I'm sorry, Kebain! I was only telling her to shut up. Katedahu and this troll just ran into me on the road and their cart broke..."

"Yes, we know all about the troll and the cart," Kebain said. He was a bear of a man in his late fifties. His dull, constantly red eyes and his girth misled some people into thinking he was a dullard. Nothing could be further than the truth. The manager of the Lucky Maiden could calculate gambler's debts while balanced on his head.

"Here, he gave me these fifteen coppers for my time." She swiftly pulled out her small moneybag.

Kebain slapped her hard across the cheek, scattering the coins to the four winds. "If there's anything that I hate more than stupid little ugly girls, it's stupid little ugly girls who think they can con me and get away with it. Hand over the two golden Throats that troll gave you." He slapped her again as she gave him the coins. "I swear I should have sold you long ago, if only I knew you were so stupid! Now you've really gone and done it!"

"I'm sorry, Kebain! I was going to tell you about the coins, I swear I was!"

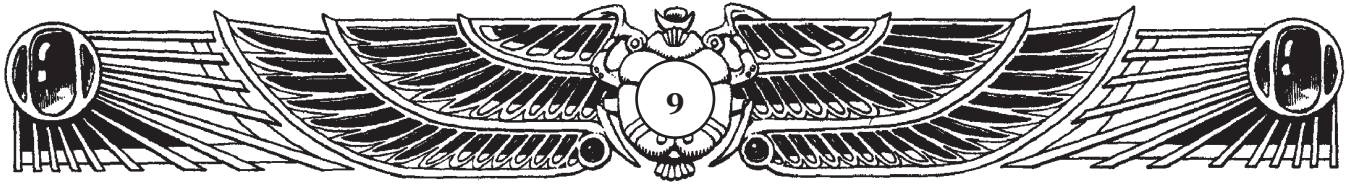
"What? Not the coins, you daft thief, the troll! A fine friend you've picked yourself. Come on, girl, Tiras wants to have a word with you."

Alassea felt her heart sink. "Ti-Tiras? But why? What have I done?"

"For your sake girl, it better be nothing. I've never seen him so mad."

What began as an interesting day was turning into a nightmare. Alassea was so confused, she found herself unable to keep a straight thought.





❖ ❖ ❖
“*Silence is a virtue.*” — T’silla Tereskin,
windling thief



The interior of the Lucky Maiden was dimly lit. Most of the night illumination was put out, and the daylight just barely managed to creep in through the shutters.

The game tables were neatly stacked against the walls, and two small ork boys were sweeping the floor from last night’s excess. Another kid was trying to wipe a dubious-looking stain off the wall. Kebain led her to an alcove where several people stood around a prone form. Tiras Merok was among them.

It took a few seconds for Alassea’s light sensitive elven eyes to register the form as Bellwhar’g. The troll lay face down, hands bound behind its back, his head tied inside a canvas sack. Tiras paced around him, his face twitching. He was in his early forties, but looked much younger. He would have been much better looking had he any taste in clothing. He usually wore the most extravagant clothes around. People usually didn’t care to remark about his bad taste, especially after the last one who did get skinned alive. Merok stopped his fidgety stroll and kicked Bellwhar’g cruelly.

“It can go easy on you, troll, your choice. All you have to do is give me cooperation. Playing tough will only prolong your suffering.”

The sack muffled Bellwhar’g’s answer.

“Looks like he’s trying to say something. Gheno, help him.” One of Tiras Merok’s burly ork boys folded the cloth a bit, revealing the troll’s mouth. It was bleeding, and one of the golden tipped tusks was missing.

“I said, ‘Kiss my horny bottom, Merok...’” Bellwhar’g didn’t even finish the sentence. Five of the crime lord’s bodyguards were on him in a flash. For a few moments, there was nothing more than the sound of a flurry of kicks and punches. From somewhere else, Alassea heard someone weeping and begging: Katedahu was getting a similar treatment on the other side of the room.

It seemed like ages had passed when Merok finally raised his hand, signaling his bullies to halt and raise Bellwhar’g to his feet. “I will ask you one more time, troll, who is your contact?”

In response, Bellwhar’g spat huge wad of phlegm mixed with saliva, blood and teeth. It earned him another session of beating.

“This is of no use. Master Chen, would you come here for a moment?” A dark tall figure emerged from the shadows. Despite the suffocating heat, Zeiti Chen had his full

coat of armor on. It didn’t seem to hinder him in any visible way. When he moved, Chen was more silent than a cat. His armor was black and covered with strange blue runes. With one hand, he lifted Bellwhar’g completely off the ground, and threw him against the brick wall as if he were a small child, and not a fully-grown troll. Bellwhar’g collapsed like a sackful of potatoes. When Chen tried to pick him up for a second spin, Bellwhar’g surprised him and sneaked a nasty kick between the black knight’s legs. It was Chen’s turn to fly through the air, and he landed heavily on his backside. Swift as an enraged mountain lion, he was back on his feet, a long, jagged dagger in his hand. He kneeled over the troll and slowly, in almost a gentle movement, kissed the exposed back with the black naked iron. Bellwhareg’s skin parted like butter wherever the dagger touched. Despite the obvious pain, the troll gritted his remaining teeth, refusing to let out a cry of pain or show any sort of weakness. If Chen was affected by the bold pretense, it all remained hidden under the visor. He simply sat on his knees like a child testing the endurance of a new toy, and continued caressing the troll with the steel.

“Come on, Chen,” Merok said, “we still need him alive for questioning.”

“He will answer all our questions when I’m finished.” Chen voice sounded metallic and hollow through the helmet.

Kebain, who still had a firm grip on Alassea’s ear, chose that moment to intervene. “Master Merok, I’ve brought you the girl and the slaves.”

“Well, well, well. How pleasant of you to join us.” There was nothing pleasant in Tiras Merok that Alassea could spot. “It’s quite all right, Master Kebain, you can let go of her now. It is unlikely that she will try to run on us now, would you, girl?”

Alassea felt her legs had turned to ice blocks. She couldn’t run, even if she thought there was a real chance of escape. “N-no, Master Merok,” she said.

“Look at me when you talk, girl, and speak up.”

“Yes, Master Merok... I mean, no, Master Merok, I would not run.” She looked up.

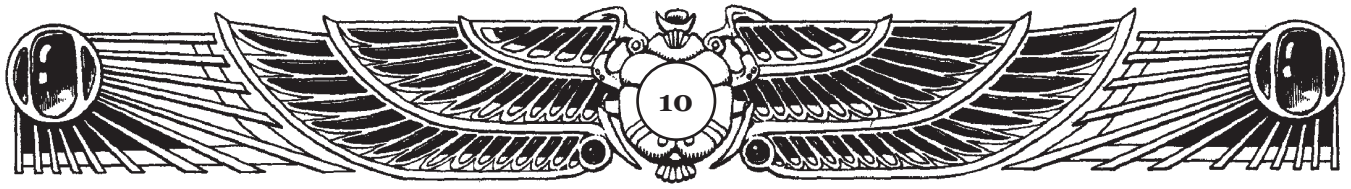
Merok took the few strides separating them and picked up her chin with his hand. Like most humans, he was a few inches shorter than she. Nonetheless Alassea felt herself being looked down upon, like a bug under a glass. “Master Kebain tells me your name is Alassea, and that you had been collecting firewood when you met these two.” He pointed at the troll and the ork, his movements theatrical.

“Yes, Master Merok. I haven’t done anything, Master Merok, honest!”

“Is that so?” Merok gave her a warm smile. She had seen kinder smiles on Eastern Bay’s tiger sharks.

“I swear it on my mother’s grave, Master Merok. I haven’t done anything.”





“A lying mouth would swear on Mynbruje’s justice to get away from the headman’s axe.”

“I didn’t do anything.” To Alassea, it seemed like her own words were coming from far away. She felt that it didn’t really matter if Merok believed her or not. A person like him would kill her just to stay on the safe side.

At that moment, the other elven girl chose to intervene. She stepped boldly forward and gave a courtesy bow. “Master Merok, please let me introduce myself...”

“No need for that dear, you’re probably going to claim to be Ulruviel of House Anwamane.” Tiras Merok gave her his shark smile and bowed right back.

Ulruviel flinched. “I see you are well informed, Master Merok. My name is Ulruviel, daughter of Ellwing and Aleassar of House Anwamane. I was kidnapped from Anwamane by these two villains three months ago. If you’ve heard of my family, then you’ll be aware that they would pay a great sum...”

“Enough!” Merok boomed. His mask of calmness disappeared, and his face became a crisscross of angry red veins. “Enough of this charade.” He took a stained note from the recesses of his fancy coat, which he shoved into her hands. “It came with a spirit messenger. Read it out loud, girl.”

Ulruviel looked at the paper as if it was a scorpion or a burning coal. “I can’t read, master,” she whispered.

“Can’t read? Can’t READ? Noble-born, yet your parents couldn’t afford to pay a decent teacher? What, by bloody Raggok, were you taught in the house of Anwamane?” Disgusted, the crime master snatched the paper from her trembling hands. “It’s a message from my agent in Kratas.” He waved his hands like an actor on a stage, and started reading, intoning the words dramatically.

Master, I write to you in this hour of peril,

A traitor has exposed us. The ork slaver Katedahu has sold us out to Aleassar Anwamane. The noble knows of your plan to kidnap his own daughter, Ulruviel Anwamane. Worse still, he is aware of our network and has managed to lay his hands upon two of our agents. I’ve also learned that Aleassar will attempt to trick you. He will send Katedahu to you with a story. A troll who would claim to be his new partner will accompany him. He is actually a notorious assassin hired by Aleassar, Named Bellwhar’g Golden Tusk. Proceed with caution, there is a traitor among you, but I’ve yet to discover his identity. As it stands, circumstances force me to lie low for a while, so you won’t be hearing from me anytime soon.

“Etceteras... etceteras... etceteras...” Tiras Merok gave the elf maiden a triumphant stare. “Care to change your version, dear?”

Seeing that her game was up, the girl fell to the floor, sobbing hysterically. “It wasn’t me, it wasn’t me! They made me do it.”

“What’s your real name, dear? Now don’t tell me Aleassar sent his own daughter into the wolves’ den?” Merok even sounded compassionate.

“It’s Morwen, Morwen Tasartir. I’m a house servant of the Anwamanes. Lord Aleassar forced me to pose as his daughter. He threatened to send my sister if I wouldn’t go.”

Merok leaned and patted her head in a parental fashion, his face showing true compassion. “There, there, no need for tears. Aren’t we feeling much better now that the truth is out?”

Alassea had a revelation. The crime lord who commanded an army of lackeys, the same person who daily sentenced people to death, was a few clowns short of a circus. If she weren’t so numbly frightened, she would have laughed. Deciding to take her chance now that attention was off her, she started inching backward towards the entrance. Chen grabbed her arm and twisted it in an iron grip behind her back.

“Where you think you’re going, little pigeon?” he hissed. To his boss he said, “The troll fainted, Merok, before he gave me anything interesting. Some sort of resistance.”

“Never mind that, we already know all that we need. Tonight he’ll dance in the Pit. You’ll hear a different tune then. What about Alassea, Master Chen? Is she the traitor?”

“No!” Chen sounded so resolute that Alassea gave out a long breath she wasn’t aware she was holding. “Just a stupid kid in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

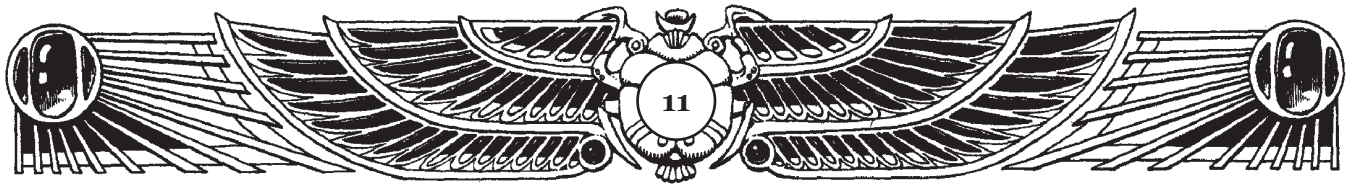
“Should we take her to the Pit? We could claim her to be a traitor. It’s been awhile since the people around here got a lesson in obedience. Maybe they wouldn’t be so eager to double cross me if they did.”

“No, I’ll keep that one myself. There is something special about her,” said Chen. He caressed Alassea’s back with his mailed fist, and she felt herself go numb with fear and revulsion.

Merok arched his eyebrow. “Tired of Svenna already? The last one lasted longer.”

There is a certain psychological point, beyond which a person is considered too addled to care. Alassea was way beyond it. The miserable stinking existence she knew as her life caved in, leaving her naked on hostile ground. She felt like the fire-miner over Death’s Sea whose safety line has been severed, plummeting without control to the waiting arms of the thirteenth Passion below.





❖ ❖ ❖
“A true warrior has his enemies in front of him, not at his back.” — Brentor Two-strike, ork warrior
❖ ❖ ❖

It was high noon in Urupa, the Hour of the River Turtle. Like a stage before the night of the great show, the festively dressed streets were devoid of life. Midsummer heat drove everyone to seek cool shelter. In his cell under the Lucky Virgin, Bellwhar’g had a first hand experience of what it felt like to be pastry inside the oven. The troll’s cell was fixed to accommodate a small human or a large dwarf, which allowed him only uncomfortable crouching. His situation might have induced claustrophobia in a dwarf miner, and Bellwhar’g was a troll of the open plains. On top of it all, his wounds stung mercilessly. Chen’s treatment had hurt him more than he cared to admit. Already he could feel the wounds on his arm and back starting to fester. They would prove fatal unless given professional treatment. One of the folds of his jacket was sewn around small vial of healing potion, concealed especially for such occasions. Luckily it wasn’t discovered during the guards’ search. His hands were tied behind his back, and there was not enough room to maneuver them forward, but it was nothing to hinder a resourceful troll. Using his remaining tusk, Bellwhar’g bit hard until he felt the glass shatter beneath his heavy jaws. The cold refreshing liquid gushed forth and he eagerly drank. Immediately the numbing effect of the potion kicked in, yet he continued to suck, unwilling to waste a single precious drop. It didn’t take care of all the wounds, which were too deep for such a small dosage, but it did relieve him of some pain, clearing his mind a little. Using a meditation technique, he tried to focus his mind on the tasks ahead, failing every time. His mind always wandered back to the same spot.

Alassea.

Unlike most Name-givers, Bellwhar’g didn’t favor any of the Passions. His attitude ran along the line of “I don’t bother with them, and they don’t bother with me,” which he considered a fair trade. Bellwhar’g, as a general rule, didn’t favor anyone and anything, yet surprisingly inside this narrow spectrum, the troll left a place for fate. He couldn’t tell why, but the moment he laid eyes upon Alassea, he knew that she would be more than a sentence or two in his Book. It was not by chance that the girl had gone today to pick firewood, it was not blind luck that he chose the same pass as she did, and it was not a freak accident that made Katedahu drive so recklessly into her wagon. Chen was correct: the lass was special. She was resourceful, smart and full of the promise of

youth. Alassea had an obvious potential to become an adept, though without proper direction it would go to waste. A million people might have passed her by, and none would have noticed, yet he did, and if that wasn’t fate, then Bellwhar’g didn’t know the meaning of the word. He was so immersed in his thoughts that he failed to notice the footsteps, until Alassea was almost upon him.

“Hello Bellwhar’g.”

“Come to say your goodbye to a dying troll, lass?” he said.

“What do I care if this troll lives or dies? You traitor.”

“How so?”

“You made me believe you were a friend, while all you wanted was to take advantage of me, and that really stinks. People like Kebain that treat me like offal are at least easy to predict.”

“I would still like to be your friend, lass.”

“Friends don’t stab each other in the back. Anyway, I didn’t come to hear more lies. I came with an offer.” She drew a set of keys from her pocket and jingled them in front of his eyes.

“I guess you’ll say those are the cell keys. How did you get your hands on them?”

“Never mind that. Care to hear the offer?”

“Freedom for a price? I’m currently short on hard coin, lass.” He smiled.

“Just take me with you.”

“That’s a very surprising offer. Why so anxious to get out all of a sudden?”

“Didn’t you hear? Zeiti Chen chose me to serve as his next consort. That’s like having your death warrant signed.”

“Is that so?”

“He took four girls before me, and all of them disappeared. The last one, Svenna, was found drifting on the Coil.” She pressed her face to the bars. “Please Bellwhar’g.”

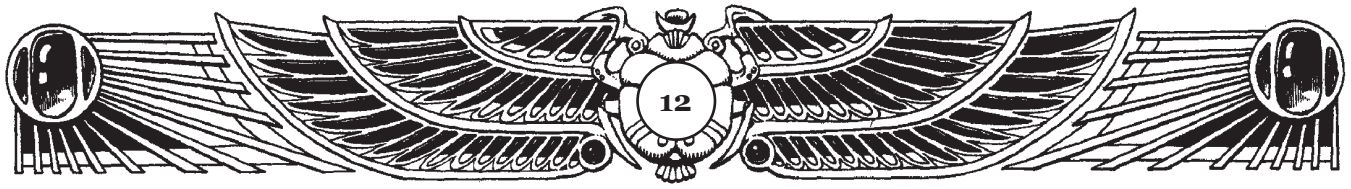
The troll reached out with a rough finger and wiped a single tear. “I’m sorry lass.” He said. “I’ll take my chances in the Pit.”

“But you can’t win. Chen will kill you.”

“Maybe he will, and maybe he won’t. That’s fate for you, lass. I wouldn’t worry about it too much if I were you. Remember lass, if you’ll accept the Book of Fate, then there is nothing in this world that can frighten you. Now run along, before someone catches you here and you’ll get into real trouble.”

She ran back up the stairs, covering her face with one hand. She didn’t care for anyone to see her face.





“The more things you have on you, the more things you can hide.” — Aesraelle Ulkirien, elf thief



Night came like a lover to the eagerly awaiting city. Alasea surveyed the pit from the seat of honor reserved for Merok and his retainers. Dedo’s Pit was a remnant of the old kaer in Urupa, which explained why it was built underground, thirty feet below street level. Three tunnels connected it with the Golden Triangle. Originally, it was meant to serve as an amphitheater for Urupa’s kaer residents during their long years of solitude, but the extravagant project was abandoned due to lack of funding. The arena floor was covered with a dazzling mosaic, depicting scenes from pre-Scourge holidays. There were twenty rows of raised seats above the stage, each with the capacity to accommodate sixty Name-givers. The seats themselves were not plain wooden benches, but were carved into the rock itself. The walls, the seats and the columns were all beautifully decorated with statues of animals and plants, and each was crafted with great care for detail. It contained everything needed to remind the underground Scourge prisoners of how life on the outside used to be. Even the huge dome ceiling was decorated so it would remind the Kaer residents of the sky. The huge crystal chandelier hanging from the Kaer ceiling was shaped in the form of a rising sun. Beside it a silvery moon shone brightly emitting a soft blue beam of light that shifted randomly over the seats below. Small golden stars were etched here and there, depicting real constellations that could be seen on a regular cloudless night.

If not for the white sand that was spread unevenly on the stage floor (for absorbing blood) and the sharpened stakes separating it from the seats, Dedo’s Pit could have easily been mistaken for a fancy opera house. Even the clientele were of the kind one would have expected to see at formal dinners and distinguished parties. Those among them who preferred their participation to remain a secret hid themselves behind decorated masks. It was a known fact that Merok had half the city officials and nobles in his pocket.

Merok himself didn’t wear a mask or a costume. After all, this yearly occasion was his night of glory, and he basked in every ounce of it. He sat on a flamboyant chair in the front row surrounded by lackeys. His left hand held a black strap hooked to a beautifully crafted diamond collar that rested around the neck of Morwen Tasartir. The elven girl was forced to wear a beautiful red dress. The bodice was audaciously low cut at the front, displaying her beautiful breasts.

Morwen’s face, in contrast to her vivid dress, was pale, her eyes glassy and emotionless. It reminded Alasea of the face of a cadaver man she once saw fight in the pit rather than the face of an elven beauty. Alasea shuddered when she imagined what Morwen must have been through, and what awaited her still. Sorry as she felt, she couldn’t help feeling even sorrier for herself. Zeiti Chen had requested her presence beside him for the night. He was standing like a statue to the right of his master. Once though, he turned to her and said, “When I win the festival championship, I’ll declare you queen of honor. You would like that, wouldn’t you, little pigeon?” He took her small hand in his and held onto it.

Alasea just nodded her head. It was all she could do to keep herself from vomiting.

There were people of every color, size, sex and race filling the amphitheater: yellow-green t’skrang captains, wearing outrageous gowns and jewelry; slim, beautiful elven lords and ladies wearing bright colors common to their race; human traders and officials, each paired with one or more lovely escorts. The diversity was stunning, yet there was a universal expression shared on almost every face. These people were thirsty for blood.

They were getting plenty of it tonight.

In the booth below Alasea sat Madonna Isolebiena, the ambassador from Voliano in Talea. At the start of the evening, she had on a jeweled tiara with a veil that concealed her pudgy face, but the heat and the excitement forced her to remove it. Two blond chaperons flanked the obese woman; one was fanning her with a feather fan, and the other kept pushing strawberries into her plump lips. Another boy sat on her lap. He had one hand under her dress and was fondling Isolebiena shamelessly. The Madonna for her part didn’t notice any of his advances. In fact, she didn’t notice anything beyond the stage.

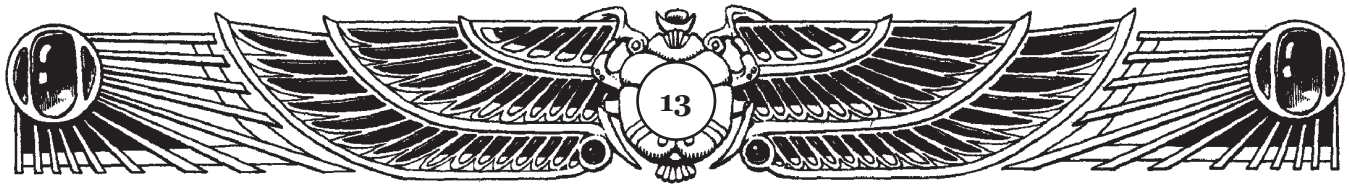
On the sand-covered floor, two elven twins were fighting for their life against Iben-Sharif. Contrary to predictions, the Maracan jubruq was proving to be a tough nut. He already killed two crojen from Dedo’s pen, and ripped apart a Cadaver man.

The two elves, despite their numerical advantage, were hard-pressed. Their bodies glistened with exertion as they tried, time and again, to circle the Maracan. The twins were almost symmetrically identical. They even wore the same breechcloths, the same long silver hair tied with the same blue ribbon. Their attacks were coordinated so smoothly, it looked like they were extensions of a single body.

But all their skill availed them little, they were losing and they knew it.

The boy signaled his sister for another attack and went low, exposing his left flank. Iben-Sharif made as if he has taken the invitation and lunged, but instead of driving for-





ward, he struck to the upper left. His crude sword captured the elven girl, who was relying on her brother's trick for a sneak attack. The sword left a long crimson mark beneath her tiny bosom, to the crowd's shouts of approval. The brother tried to remedy his mistake and lunged, but an impossible leap took the skinny Maracan out of harm's way. He landed heavily, though, and fell backward. The bluish jubruq tried to get up, but failed to set his weight on one leg. He appeared to have twisted it.

Dedo's was not the place for noble chivalry. The elven boy was on his feet in no time, his saber poised for the kill. At the last moment, the jubruq managed to stand up. He threw sand, which he picked up while prone, tossing it straight in the other fighter's face. The elf continued to blindly charge into one of Sharif's outstretched legs and went flying in the air like a straw doll, his arms flailing wildly. Iben-Sharif was on him in a flash, his twisted leg miraculously healed, and immediately started showering the elf with kicks and punches. The crowd laughed, cheered and booed.

"It looks like no one will be collecting bets tonight," said Kebain. He was sitting left of Merok, and was rubbing his palms like a dwarf who had just landed on a seam of orichalcum.

"Notice how he never kills his opponents? People come here to see other people get killed. If they don't see more blood, soon they'll start to doze," said Dedo.

"There'll be enough blood when Chen carves him up," said Merok.

"That one has no fear of death. I wonder what he fears?" said Zeiti Chen, gaining odd looks from everyone.

It was all over on the stage. The elven boy lay unconscious, and his sister was breathing heavily. With one hand she was holding her wound, and with the other she signaled for mercy. Iben-Sharif looked bored.

The amphitheater's back wall was covered by a huge velvet curtain adorned with a picture of the harbor. From time to time, the curtain was raised, revealing small doors and gates in the wall from which combatants and pit animals issued forth to duel. From one of the doors came two of Dedo's arena assistants, who helped the elven twins to the back of the stage. From another stepped Bellwhar'g.

The troll was dressed in his battle gear; someone took care to give him back his two troll-sized war axes. Despite the beating, he carried himself with the same panther-like grace he had shown in the morning. It looked to Alassea like ages had passed since the assault. Bellwhar'g made his way across the stage and stopped below Merok's seat. From his place next to the crime lord, Dedo signaled for the commotion around him to stop, and stood up.

"Dear friends, honored guests!" He sounded like an actor standing on a stage, reciting dramatically out of a well-pre-

pared speech. Dedo was well known for his ability to enchant a crowd, whatever the occasion. "We have gathered here to celebrate our joy in this glorious day. Each and every year we celebrate the Founding of our beloved city by our great ancestors with drink, merriment, and entertainment. First, let me raise a toast for our beloved city, and for many Founder's Festivals to come."

The crowd roared, raising their hands, while servant boys ran quickly, carrying flagons to refill empty cups. "I wouldn't want to bore you with words, ladies and gentlemen. I know you're all anxious to see what we have in store for you." There were more cheers. "We have a special treat for you tonight, a delicacy. A slave against the slaver who put him in chains, in a battle for life and death. In one corner, we have the exotic ork warrior slave from the far continent of Marac, Ibeennnnn-Shaaaaaurif. In the other corner ladies and gentlemen, a troll slaver and assassin who's too smart for his own good, please welcome, Belllllllwhar'gggg!" The crowd clapped politely; the pit had a long tradition of settling scores.

Dedo waited for the clapping to subside before continuing, "The winner of this match shall have the honor of fighting our very own Zeeeeeeiti Chennnnnnn." Dedo signaled again, and somewhere above someone started chanting "Chen, Chen, Chen, Chen..." These sorts of things had a life of their own; soon, the entire amphitheater was chanting along. Dedo let it build to a crescendo, then abruptly raised his hand for silence again.

"But before we proceed, let's say thanks to our generous host, Master Tiras Merok." Merok stood up and bowed, receiving a round of polite applause.

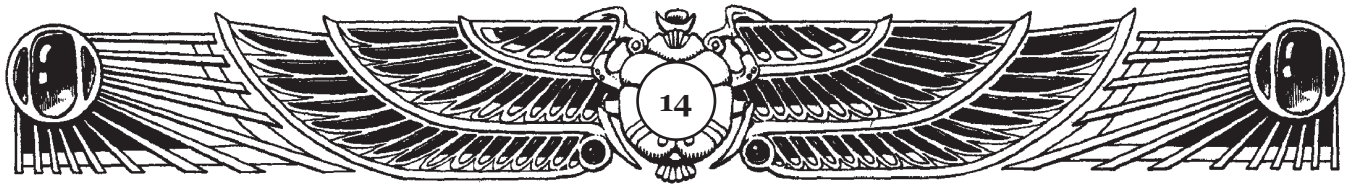
"Dear friends, honored guests, it warms my heart to see so many of you here. This year marks a special occasion in the ever-growing Merok syndicate. This year stands under the sign of prosperity and growth. We have spread beyond the borders of this magnificent city and founded chapter houses in all the major cities of Barsaive.

"Alas my friends, I am grieved to say that such success does not always sit well with all people. There are envious forces in this world that would sabotage our efforts in every possible way. These people would even sink so low as to send assassins against me." He waited for the impact of his words to sink before continuing. "Yes, yes, as hard as it might be to believe, there are people willing to sink so low..."

"Why don't you shut up already, you pompous ass?" Bellwhar'g's deep tone carried over the excellent stage acoustics, stunning everyone, including Merok. Alassea felt her heart leap.

"You..." Merok's face changed several hues in a matter of seconds. He tried to say something but no sound came out of his mouth. No one had ever dared to speak to him like that during his entire reign of terror.





“There are two kinds of fools in this world,” the troll continued. “One who knows he is a fool and the one who thinks is smart, which only makes him a bigger fool. You are of the latter kind Merok, a clown chosen by fate who can’t even recognize his own insignificance. Nobody sent an assassin after you Merok, because nobody would waste time and money just to get rid of a fool.”

Merok finally found a grip on his voice. “You’re dead, troll!” he screamed.

Bellwhar’g gave him a one-toothed grin, “No, I’m not, but you are.”

The next seconds were a blur. When Alassea tried later to reconstruct everything that had happened, she only managed to remember bits of images. People stood up, some in shock, some were shouting angrily. On the stage, Iben-Sharif was chanting in his ululating language. The jubruq raised his hands; the ceiling crystals above flickered once and then, as if a giant hand snuffed them, went black. There was a deafening boom, and suddenly the velvet curtains adorning the walls caught fire, followed by the wooden beams supporting the ceiling. In the eerie light Alassea looked at Merok. His mouth was open, but no sound was coming out. He staggered as if attempting to vomit, and a river of blood gushed forth. A fine dagger, sharp and thin almost to the point of translucency, was sticking out of his throat.

Morwen Tasartir turned into a blur of movement. Alassea had time for a single thought.

Fast!

Master Kebain tried to block the elven girl, but he might as well have tried blocking the wind in the field. She hit him once in the face with an open palm. Kebain’s skull caved in where her hand made contact, and he fell backward like a rag doll. Continuing with the momentum, Morwen pulled her dagger from Merok’s face and, with one deft motion, slid it into Chen’s throat from behind, pinning the impossible crack between the gorget and the helmet.

Quick as a snake Chen turned, but she had the advantage of surprise. Morwen raised her leg in a perfect kick, sending him reeling into Madonna Isolebiena below them. Unfortunately for Alassea, Chen still had her hand in an iron grip. They all went down together, dragged by the incredible weight of Chen’s armor, over the rail and onto the sharpened stakes above the arena.

Alassea heard a high wail, it took her a second to register it was the sound of Madonna Isolebiena screaming. They hung frozen for a few seconds: then the crude wooden stakes gave in to physics and snapped.

The impact was painful. Alassea felt the wind going out of her lungs, leaving her stunned. The screaming stopped abruptly and below her she felt the plump form of Madonna Isolebiena. By some miracle, the fat lady had absorbed most

of the impact for her. Beside her, Chen was trying to recover. He looked like one of those mechanical toys that had been played with by a rough kid, the elf’s knife still sticking from the back of his neck.

Bellwhar’g wasn’t going to give him a chance to get up. With a battle cry that echoed from wall to wall, the troll charged. Both axes rang like thunder on Chen’s helmet, with the weight of five hundred pounds of pure muscle behind them. Amazingly, despite the beating that he took, Chen’s right hand managed to roll free of the troll. Leaning on his left arm, he tried to push himself up. Bellwhar’g was on him in no time and struck again with the axe. This time he aimed for the supporting arm, cleanly severing it above the elbow. The other axe came down for the final blow, again capturing Chen’s already dented helmet. This time, though, there was a sizzling sound, followed by a painful scream from Bellwhar’g. The troll let go of his weapon, as the skin on his arm rippled and blackened. Alassea could smell the heavy scent of burnt flesh.

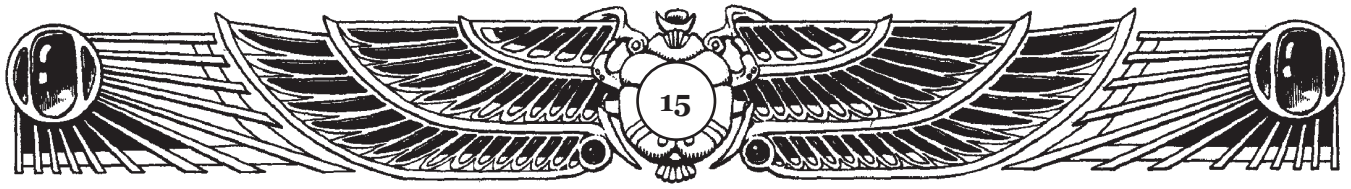
Chen took the chance and charged the stunned troll like a battalion of thundra cavalry. With his healthy arm, Bellwhar’g swung but missed completely. They tackled and rolled together into the ground. Chen rose first; he had the troll’s weapon in his hand raised high. A beam of searing white light caught him in the middle of the face, shattering the already ruptured helmet into a dozen fragments.. Alassea looked in wonder at Iben-Sharif, who was readying another spell. She looked back at Chen, expecting to see a corpse, and her blood froze. Below the helmet there was no face, only a mass of whirling worms. They swayed independently from side to side, like weeds in a soft breeze. Each of the worms ended in an eye-like appendage, which surveyed its surroundings with inhuman malice.

Iben-Sharif finished his chant and raised his hand toward the burning ceiling. Slivers of smoldering wood and burning curtains begun raining down. It started as a trickle, but it gained intensity in each passing moment. The embers fell from all directions, merging into a stream of fire, and it all flew straight at Zeiti Chen, engulfing the monster knight and transforming him into a living torch.

Somewhere above her, Alassea heard people screaming and running for their lives. She hoped she would find time to get out of the Amphitheatre before the ceiling collapsed.

Suddenly, the jubruq fell writhing to the sand. Flayed skin came off his body like sheets of paper, exposing blood vessels, muscle and viscera. The stream of fire stopped abruptly, letting Chen step out of the inferno. He was bleeding, and most of his wormy eye stems were charred and peeled, but it was obvious he was not ready to say his last words. Chen reached back with his remaining arm, and pulled out the dagger that was still wedged inside his flesh. It appeared to have made





him stronger because some of the damaged worms started healing immediately, and from his ichor-dripping stump, a white worm like appendage was forming faster than the eye could follow.

Silent as a tiger on a hunt and quicker than the hawk on his dive, Morwen was on him. Gone was the haughty elven noble act and the submissive maid. The masks were off, the real person revealed; she was death in its purest form. Morwen held a beautiful scimitar taken off Merok's corpse. She flew through the air and stabbed, slicing the fast-growing appendage to a bloody ribbon. To Alassea's tear-blinded eyes, she was like an artist performing an intricate dance, and it was the most beautiful thing she had seen in her life. The Horror Chen roared in frustration. He tried to catch her again and again, but he was no match for her speed in his current state. The worms on his head formed a shape resembling a caricature of a human mouth, and he screamed something in a horrible language.

To Alassea's surprise, Morwen stopped. "You can't shift into Astral, we have you blocked. There is no easy way out, Chen."

Chen's worms hissed in anger like little snakes.

"That's fate for you, Chen. Sometimes we have to admit loss. Now be a good sport. I promise to make it quick."

But Chen had no intention of giving up. He screamed again. At first there was no apparent effect, but suddenly Morwen clutched at her throat. The leather collar that still hung there turned into a fat, milky-white worm. Morwen scratched at it with no success; the stronger she pulled, the tighter the worm squeezed. Finally exhausted, the elven girl went to her knees. Chen stepped lightly and stood above her triumphantly.

"Now what was this about being a good sport?" he hissed.

It can't end like this, Alassea thought. *Somebody's got to help her*. She looked around. Bellwhar'g was trying to get up but kept failing miserably, the jubruq Iben-Sharif lay motionless in a pool of blood, and the seats above were devoid of life as all the remaining guests fled. The entire theatre was fast becoming a firetrap. A tiny spark of resolve blossomed inside her. She searched for something, a weapon she could use. The troll's axe she canceled out immediately for being too heavy, but then she saw, sticking from the sand, Morwen's dagger. She picked it up and sneaked in what she hoped was a mouse-like crawl behind Chen's back. Luckily for her, the Horror was focused on Morwen.

"How does it feel now, little elf? You know I can taste your fear. It's like a sweet, sweet candy, almost as sweet as you are, girl." He made a sound not unlike a human smacking his lips in pleasure. "Ever figured you'll end as an appetizer? How's that for fate, little elf?"

Alassea was almost upon him. She held her breath and raised the dagger. Chen's good hand shot backward at an impossible angle, capturing her neck and lifting her off the ground. The dagger fell to the sand. She realized too late that the worm stems allowed Chen peripheral vision. He was probably monitoring her the entire time.

Alassea panicked. She tried to dislodge his fingers, but his hand proved to be like iron pincers. The pain was unbearable.

"What is it, pigeon? Find it hard to breathe?" Her vision narrowed to a small tunnel, as the monster squeezed more and more life essence out of her.

There was something that Bellwhar'g said about fate and fear.

Her hand shot into the whirling mass of worms in front of her. It closed around something slimy and pudgy. Alassea started pulling and scratching like a mad cat, white soft worms coming apart under her hands. The monster squeezed tighter, but she continued despite the pain. The last thing she heard, before blessed darkness swept her away, was Chen's horrendous sharp screams.



"Freedom comes along with choices."

— Ardenavar Resnor, human wizard



There were many voices. They came from a great distance, but were getting closer. Finally, she realized her Name was being called. Gentle fingers were inspecting her wounds. Her entire body felt like she spent her day lying in the path of thundra stampedes.

"Look, I do working now, you big lout, you stopping to interrupting now." That was Iben-Sharif. So he could manage a little Throalic after all. She had suspected as much.

Alassea opened her eyes carefully, to find the worried face of Bellwhar'g looking down at her. Iben-Sharif kneeled nearby. He was massaging a smelly ointment onto her arm. When he saw she had awakened, he gave her his crooked smile. Bellwhar'g's face remained worried. They both carried injuries, but didn't look half as bad as Alassea would have expected.

"Don't try to speak lass. You will have a very sore throat for a couple of days," the troll said.

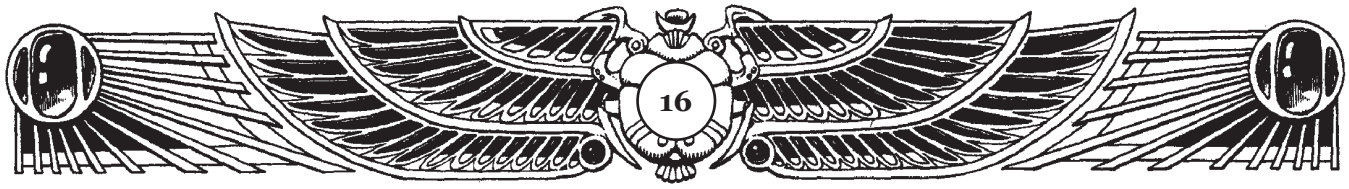
"I got to know what happened," she whispered.

"We got you out, obviously."

"Chen?"

"Dead. You saved the day." Bellwhar'g sounded almost proud.





“And Merok?”

“A puppet. Chen was running this cruel show behind the scenes. He simply needed a more or less acceptable front.”

“So the assassin letter was phony?” She tried to rise, but Iben-Sharif gently pushed her back.

“You’re catching on fast, girl. The boss caught Merok’s spy in the north three months ago. All the letters Merok received since were faked. The assassination, the traitor... it was all a sham.”

“Why?”

“We needed a smoke screen, lass. Chen surrounded himself with too many Marked victims, which made him almost inaccessible.”

“You said the boss? Who is he?” Alassea puzzled.

“Alright boys, on your feet. We’ve got a ship to catch. Sharif, stop treating her like a porcelain doll. She’s tougher than she looks.” Morwen stepped out of the shadows and offered Alassea her arm. The black-haired beauty had removed the ridiculous outfit she had on before and was now wearing a black cloak.

“Thanks, Morwen,” Alassea said shyly and took the extended hand.

“Her Name is not really Morwen, you know,” Bellwhar’g said.

“I figured that out, but I don’t have another Name to call her by.”

“They call me Boss. It’ll do fine for you, too.” The elf winked at her and started striding in the general direction of the docks.

“You coming or what, girl?” Iben-Sharif said as he followed her lead.

Alassea looked at their disappearing backs, confused. “Kebain is dead, you know. I can start a fresh life in Urupa. What should I do, Bellwhar’g? I can’t decide.”

“This is where it becomes tricky, lass. Only you can answer that question. That’s fate for you. Surprisingly, it comes hand in hand with free choice. Sharif once tried to explain it to me, but I can’t really say I fully got the depth of it.” He turned his back and started walking.

Alassea looked at what had been her home for almost her entire life. The Golden Triangle was burning merrily with orange flames. A group of curious spectators gathered to watch, but none had yet suggested anything useful, like forming a bucket chain. Actually, some of the braver souls were in the act of looting. A huge hand tapped her shoulder, making her jump.

“Sorry to have alarmed you, Miss Alassea, but is that the Maiden on fire?” It was Tegrat, one of the regular troll drunkards who frequented the Golden Triangle. “I guess they won’t be serving free ale tonight after all, huh?” he said.

“I’m afraid not, Tegrat. You can try at Heenrey’s. I hear they have an open drinking competition.”

The huge childlike face lit up. “Thanks for the tip, Miss Alassea. I’ll be right off.”

“Take care, Tegrat, take care and farewell,” she said.

“You’re going somewhere, Miss Alassea?”

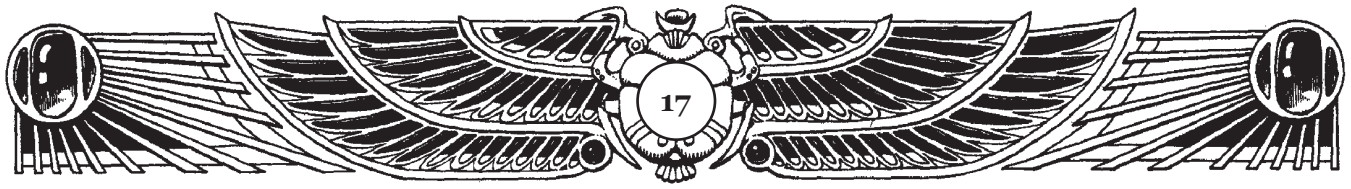
She smiled. “Yes, I’m leaving Urupa on a ship, got myself a meeting with fate.”

The troll scratched his head. “Whatever you say, Miss Alassea.” Then he added as an afterthought, “Merry Founder’s Festival, Miss Alassea, Merry Founder’s Festival.”

“Merry Founder’s Festival to you, Tegrat.” She turned her back on the Triangle and marched into the shadows. Above the harbor, a thousand fireworks lit the starry sky.

— FIN —





SWORDMASTER FELLOWSHIPS

A source article describing organizations that swordmasters may join.

The following document was provided by Draev Thurdan, known as Draev Swordspinner in swordmaster circles. A swordmaster and scholar, his life pursuit was the study of what he called the 'Path of the Blade'. His excitement on the subject of secret fellowships of swordmasters was received skeptically as the idea of swordmasters doing things in secret makes as much sense as a guild of taciturn troubadours. But his untimely demise at the hands of the Flashing Blades Guild may prove his words more true than most are willing to believe. — Thom Edrull, Archivist and Scribe of the Great Library of Throal



As I was traveling through the village of Krukus, I encountered a sullen swordmaster drinking at the only tavern in town. After a few rounds, he took to me and inquired if I was also a swordmaster. I admitted I was. Then he asked if I had come to train with K'tk'Silanass. He revealed that he was a great swordmaster and that he was rumored to be Fourteenth Circle. I found this hard to believe, as I am learned in the Names of most high ranking swordmasters. After a few more drinks, I received instructions on where I could find this master of the sword, and decided to retire for the night so I could be of clear mind when I went to find him in the morning.

I found K'tk'Silanass in a rundown hovel of a home. The roof was in need of thatching, and the walls looked as though they might buckle at any moment. In spite of this, I walked through the curtained doorway into the one room house. Light shone in through a single window, as well as a few holes in the roof. The room was sparsely furnished, with a number of nondescript items. There was no place to prepare food, and aside from some pots and a single small chest, there was not even a place to keep personal items. There was a single cot and two chairs in the room, all of which appeared to be mended by someone unskilled in wood working. The house was hardly worthy of the rodents that scurried across the dirt floors, much less a great swordmaster.

A t'skrang of some years sat on a chair opposite the doorway, his eyes fixed on me from the moment I entered the room. His skin had lost the luster that I had seen in so many of his kin, and wondered when he last visited the Great River. One of his swords lay on his cot, just out of reach and still

in its sheath. The other lay on the floor on the opposite side. Although it was common for a swordmaster to test a student by having them attack while the teacher appeared unarmed, the placement of the swords appeared obvious for even the lowliest of students. I assumed incorrectly that he had placed them there so that he could reach one or the other before an opponent could attack him. I knew I could stop him from reaching one, but would be hard-pressed to keep him from reaching the other. He motioned for me to sit in the chair opposite him. As I did, I could feel his penetrating stare measuring me, determining my worthiness.

"You have come seeking knowledge, no?" K'tk'Silanass asked.

"I have."

"Yet you are not ready to advance. What knowledge do you seek?" I was not sure if he honestly knew I was unready for my next Circle, but the look in his eyes told me not to question him.

"I am told that you are a great swordmaster. I am a seeker of knowledge. I have long studied the Path of the Sword, and would hope that you could pass on some of the knowledge you have gained through the years. How is it such a great swordmaster such as yourself comes to live so far from the Great River?"

His eyes lost focus for a minute, as if remembering something long ago. Silently, he traveled to another place, and it was a long moment before his gaze refocused on me. "One place is just as good as the next," he said with a shrug.

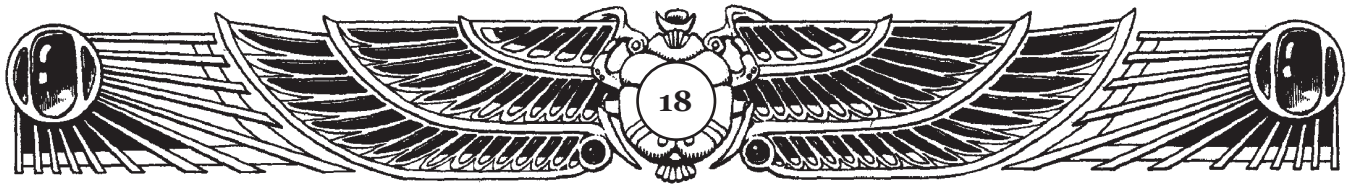
"I am a learned and traveled dwarf. How is it I have never heard of you before?" I saw his eyes flash with a cold calculation: how difficult would it be to dispatch me? I had seen it many times, and although I now believe it would have done me no good, I felt my hand grip my sword hilt tightly for reassurance. He smiled suddenly and shrugged again, the gleam in his eyes gone.

"I am sure you have. If I give you the Name given to me at my hatching, I am sure that we would be forced to duel." With this statement, I started to gain an understanding of who he was, although it did not dawn on me at the time. "Tell me, what fellowship do you follow?"

"I was trained by..."

He cut me off before I could finish. "NO! I do not care who trained you! I wish to know what fellowship you follow."





His eyes flashed again, although his posture remained unchanged. As he sat casually on the chair, I wondered what boundary I had trespassed.

"I do not know what it is you refer to, *sala*." I used the t'skrang honorific word for teacher, in hopes I could assuage his anger. "I know only who and where I have been trained. I meant no disrespect. I just assumed that is what you were referring to. If you could give me an example of a fellowship, I might be able to tell you which one I belong to. I am only an apprentice in the way of the sword, but have studied..."

He waved his hand for me to stop, as if my prattling hurt his head. He studied me for a long moment, deciding whether or not to continue. His eyes held a burning knowledge that he wanted to pass to someone, but he was unsure if I was worthy. "Are you aware of the Flashing Blades?"

"If you mean the guild comprised mostly of swordmasters in Kratas, then yes."

"They are comprised entirely of swordmasters. If someone has told you otherwise, it is to hide that fact. They are a fellowship of swordmasters, and they support each other. They are more open than other fellowships, although they prefer to hide their fellowship in the guise of a guild."

I was quite intrigued at these fellowships he spoke of, and as I shifted in my seat I saw a smile cross his face. "Are you a member of this fellowship?" I asked.

"Once, for a short time. They did not really suit me, and I sought greater adventures than besting commoners for Garlthik's pleasure. You must be wary, as a fellowship is a double-edged sword. They will help you when you ask, but expect you to return the favor."

I suspected that his fellowship had a difference of opinion with him, and I decided to try a different approach to this topic. "How did these fellowships come about?"

"They just did. The Dance of the Sword is like the Great River. It goes where it wills, but other influences direct its course. Even though you can see the path it takes, and put on paper where it flows, you can never know when a stream will spring from the river and take its own route. It is these streams, still fed from the Great River, that are dangerous, for even if you have lived on the river your entire life, you know not where a new stream will take you." His eyes had again lost their focus on me, traveling to another place and time.

I patiently waited for him to continue. When it appeared that he would not, I prodded him back to the present. "How many fellowships are you aware of?"

His eyes refocused on me and thought for a minute. "Several. Some are adventuring bands, some are secret societies. Some are training halls. I encountered my first fellowship while training for House K'tenshin. You will notice some shipmates on house river boats wearing colorful sashes. Some believe that these sashes represent the Circle of the swordmasters trained by House K'tenshin, but they actually signify a fellowship within their war college." He paused momentarily, as if debating on saying something.

"And what color sash did you wear?"

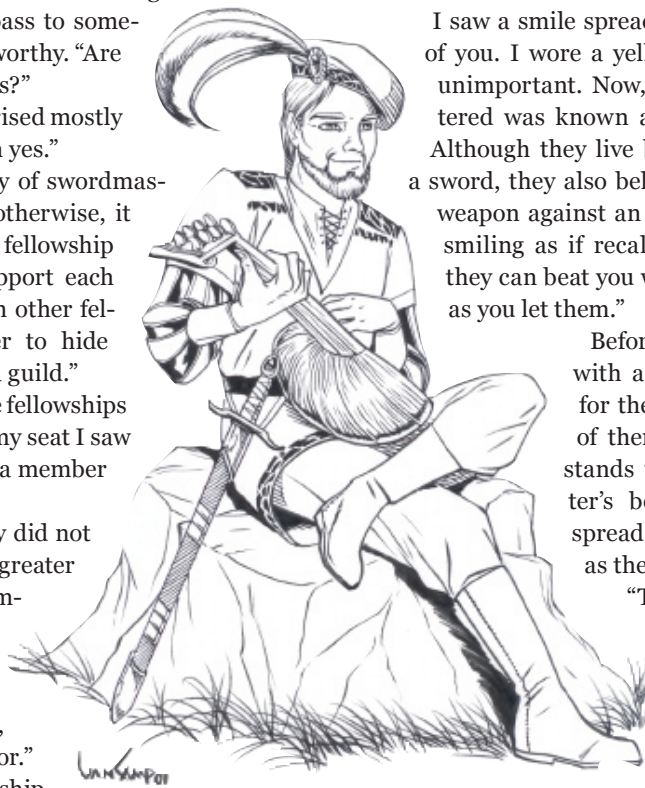
I saw a smile spread on his face. "Hmm, very astute of you. I wore a yellow sash when I left, but that is unimportant. Now, the second fellowship I encountered was known as the Brotherhood of the Blade. Although they live by a code of being the best with a sword, they also believe in not drawing their chosen weapon against an unworthy opponent." He paused, smiling as if recalling a fond memory. "Of course, they can beat you with their sheathed sword as long as you let them."

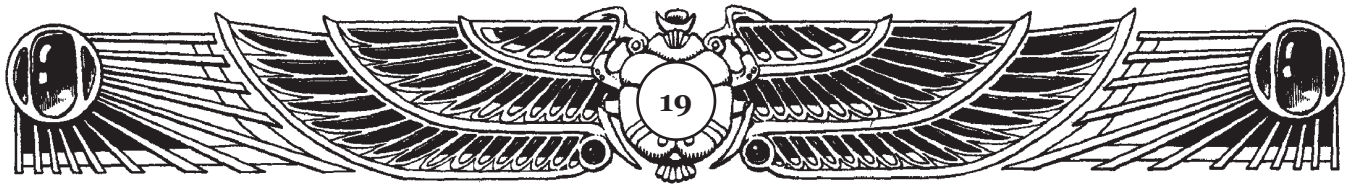
Before he could continue, I interjected with a question. "What is the purpose for these fellowships? I have not heard of them, at least not as fellowships. It stands to reason that with a swordmaster's boisterous nature, stories would spread. Why are they not as well known as the swordmasters in them?"

"That is the way of things: swordmasters are the only discipline that consistently seeks out other members of their own to test their skill, for other disciplines would hold no challenge. More than once, a feud started

between two fellowships and duels were fought to the death. So fellowships started recruiting members secretly, so the rest of the fellowship was not sought for retribution on a duel they considered unjust. Often a fellowship will disguise themselves as group with other goals. The Wearers of the Mask, for example, disguise themselves as a hero from legends past. You may meet him in your travels, but he will probably not be the same person twice."

Being a good judge of character, I suspected that he was trying to come to terms with something from his past, possibly a falling out with one of these fellowships. "Will you honor me with your teachings of these fellowships, and what you have learned from them?"





K'tk'Silanass seemed surprised by this question. I sat there for a mere moment, but it seemed an eternity before he answered. "Perhaps it is time to visit the Great River once again." He stood quickly, belying his age, producing an unsheathed sword from behind that I realized he had been holding the entire time. His bare foot caught the blade on the floor, just under the basket hilt, and he deftly kicked it up to his waiting hand. Before I even thought to draw my sword, K'tk'Silanass had both of his weapons in his hands. After returning the two blades to his sides, he grabbed the sword off the bed, strapped it to his back and walked towards the doorway, leaving me sitting there more than a little befuddled. He paused at the door and looked back at me with a lopsided grin. "Come, we can learn on the road."

GAME INFORMATION

Knacks are oftentimes the defining point of a character. Although the Earthdawn system allows for very customizable characters, it is usually talent knacks that allow a character to perform different actions from others in the same Discipline. The following article presents an alternative way to present Talent Knacks in the Earthdawn RPG. The ideas in this article can be tailored to any specific Discipline; swordmasters are used in this article only as an example.

Of all the Disciplines, swordmasters are probably the most flamboyant in their world view. Oftentimes swordmasters will attempt ridiculously difficult maneuvers to show that they are better swordsmen. Where do they learn these awesome maneuvers? Usually, players flip through books and find one they like, hoping that the GM will present an NPC to teach it to them. While this method is acceptable, a GM or even a PC may look for something more in character development.

This article presents four fellowships of swordmasters that teach roughly the same talent knacks to their members. Most fellowships are loosely based, requiring no prerequisites to join or be taught by other members. Characters joining a fellowship should have a common ideology with a group, giving a reason to maintain a good relationship with its members and also a basis for returning to learn additional knacks.

Non-player characters teaching knacks might require payment for their time, but this cost is usually low in comparison to hunting down an appropriate circle swordmaster and trying to convince him to train the player character. More often, the NPCs can be used as plot hooks for adventures, as a player character will be more willing to help a friend in need than a stranger that is asking for a dangerous quest in order to learn a simple trick with a sword. Perhaps a group

of characters are seeking information from Garlthik, and have a run in with the Flashing Blades. The group's swordmaster impresses the leader, and he is asked to join the gang, allowing them to get on Garlthik's good side. The gang may ask favors of the PC, and may even be requested by Garlthik on occasion. House K'tenshin allows a number of adepts into their War College every year. The Eyes of Throal have a member in Blademaster School that they need information from. The characters may have to ferry information for the 'eyes' and perhaps gain a few valuable knacks in the process.

Finally, the fellowships here are presented as secret groups. This may not always be the case. Some groups will form publicly and be known throughout Barsaive. The GM should determine how 'secret' fellowships are in his/her game.

FELLOWSHIPS

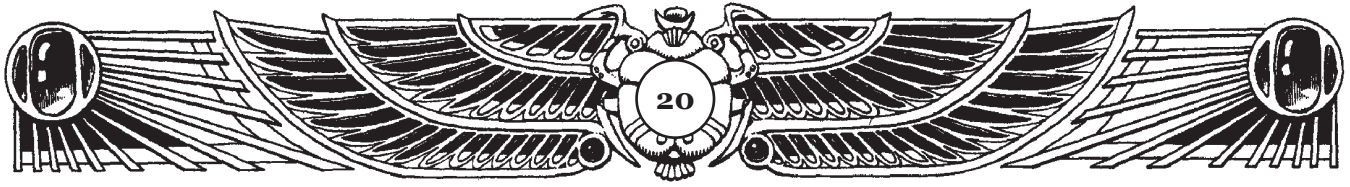
Presented here are four swordmaster fellowships that characters may encounter in their travels. The descriptions include information on the name and size of the fellowship, and the Knacks that they generally teach each other.

HOUSE K'TENSHIN BLADEMASTER SCHOOL (40)

The t'skrang of House K'tenshin boast some of the best swordmasters in all of Barsaive. Their War College (see page 24 of **The Serpent River** sourcebook) is well known for producing worthy warriors and swordmasters. Within the halls of the War College, a fellowship of swordmasters was formed for honor and defense of House K'tenshin. This fellowship is probably the most organized and rigid of all swordmaster fellowships found in Barsaive. There is an actual training hall and a base curriculum one must attend before being allowed into the fellowship. It is also one of the few that requires its members to master certain knacks before circle advancement is allowed. While this fellowship is exclusive to t'skrang and House K'tenshin, there are some former members who might be willing to teach other Name-givers the tricks of the school.

Between fifth and tenth circles, blademasters are required to master specific knacks before they are allowed to train to the next circle. After each new circle is attained, the blademaker is awarded a colored sash that denotes his ranking in the fellowship. They are given an honorific title that is usually prefixed with 'blade' — Blade Novice, Blade Disciple, etc. The following table shows the name, sash, and knack required for each Circle:





Name	Circle	Sash	Knacks
Novice	1-4	White	None
Adept	5	Purple	Kick up
Disciple	6	Azure	Roll the Deck
Journeyman	7	Green	Matched Weapons
Maven	8	Yellow	Second Tail
Expert	9	Orange	Second Riposte
Master	10	Red	Tail Spin
Master	11-15	Crimson	1 chosen

After tenth circle, bladesters are no longer required to learn specific knacks when advancing to the next circle. They must show mastery of at least one knack they had not learned before, but the knack is of their choice.

Knacks Taught: Kick Up, Matched Weapons, Roll the Deck, Second Riposte, Second Tail, Tail Spin

WEARERS OF THE MASK (4)

The great swordmaster known only as the 'Shadow' was well known in Thera as a slave pirate. He roamed the skies above Barsaive, attacking Theran slave ships. A champion to slaves everywhere, he hid his face so that Thera could not exact revenge on his friends and family. The Wearers of the Mask were started after the Shadow had disappeared after a number of years of raiding. Because no one knew who he was, the rumors of his disappearance are wide and varied. He reappeared some two years later, and attacked Theran slave ships for a few months before disappearing again. It would be some years before the Shadow found his way to the Halls of the Blade, a Thystonian shrine in Travar. It was there he revealed that he was not the true Shadow, but rather wore the mask of the original swordmaster. The new swordmaster had made a blood oath with the dying Shadow and took his mask, starting a new crusade against Theran slavers. It was after this that the Wearers of the Mask began recruiting members, and the loosely based fellowship formed.

Knacks Taught: Flourish, Forced Ground, Lock Blades, Loose with Grace, Second Riposte, Sword Crash

FLASHING BLADES GUILD (8)

The Flashing Blades Guild is a very loose fellowship that patrols the city of Kratas and enforces Garlthik's laws in the city. It is believed that the guild is comprised of multiple disciplines, but the leader of the gang, Grosh Bloodgroove, only uses this rumor to ensure people do not pry into the guild's business. The inner circle of the guild is a fellowship of swordmasters that support each other in their dealings. The gang

recruits many non-swordmaster Disciplines as well as non-adepts, but only Grosh's lieutenants, all swordmasters, hold any real influence in the guild. Grosh has hopes of becoming one of Garlthik's lieutenants, and putting the Flashing Blades in as the main body of the Force of the Eye (see page 106 of the **Secret Societies of Barsaive** sourcebook).

Knacks Taught: Flourish, Matched Weapons, Set Up, Snag Weapon, Spill the Beans, Sword Crash

BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLADE (20)

The Brotherhood of the Blade was started by a swordmaster from the land of Cathay. Renowned as undefeatable, the swordsman quickly gained a following begging for his tutelage. As he gained more disciples, a fellowship formed, taking his teachings to heart. One of the teachings the fellowship follows is 'never draw your sword against an unworthy opponent'. Often when challenged to a duel, they will fight with their main sword still in its scabbard, only drawing their chosen weapon when threatened with losing. While still flashy and flamboyant, Brothers of the Blade, as they refer to themselves, are quick to show their expertise with their weapon, but will never openly challenge an opponent. They will also rarely turn down the first challenge from a swordmaster, unless it means foregoing a greater goal. Brothers of the Blade seek to end a duel as quickly as possible, and often strike with unerring precision.

Knacks Taught: Acrobatic Recovery, Armor Beater, Locked Scabbard, Precision Strike, Sword Display, Sword Rattler

NEW KNACKS

ACROBATIC RECOVERY

Swordmaster

Talent: Wound Balance

Rank: 5

Cost: 300

Strain: 1

The way a swordmaster looks in combat is almost as important as the duel itself. By using this knack, a swordmaster forced to make a Knockdown Test performs an acrobatic maneuver when making a Wound Balance Test in order to make the fact that he lost his balance look more impressive. The character makes a Wound Balance Test as normal. If successful, the character performs an impressive feat of acrobatics. On an Excellent success or better, the character also adds +1 to his Physical Defense for the rest of the round.





FORCED GROUND

Swordmaster

Talent: Melee Weapons **Rank:** 5
Cost: 300 **Strain:** 1

To perform this knack, the character must be using the Giving Ground combat option. When the character successfully wins initiative and is using the Giving Ground combat option, the character may choose to switch facing direction with his opponent by deftly stepping around him. Use of this knack will never force an opponent into a hazardous area, as the opponent does not have to go anywhere that might cause him harm. A character could lead his opponent all the way up to a wall and step around so that his opponent's back is facing the wall, but the opponent is not actually up against the wall.

KICK UP

Swordmaster

Talent: Melee Weapons **Rank:** 3
Cost: 200 **Strain:** 1

It is never good to be without your blade in a fight. This knack allows you to kick a blade up to your hands and be ready to attack at a moment's notice. As long as there is a blade within a few feet of the character, he can use the Kick Up knack to arm himself, and still be able to attack in the same round. This knack is often used when a t'skrang is disarmed during a riverboat battle, as there are usually plenty of swords lying about the boat from fallen combatants. T'skrang may perform Kick Up with their tail.

LOCK BLADES

Swordmaster

Talent: Melee Weapons **Rank:** 7
Cost: 500 **Strain:** 2

The Lock Blades talent knack allows a swordmaster to pin an opponent's sword, making it impossible for him to attack without first breaking the lock. Often used to draw out a duel, the swordmaster makes a Melee Weapons test normally. If successful, the swordmaster does no damage, but neither combatant can use the locked weapons until the lock is broken. To break the lock, his opponent must make a Strength Test versus the attackers Melee Weapons Test result. If successful, the lock is broken, and the opponent can take actions normally. Combatants may still use other talents that do not require the locked weapon, like Second Weapon or Unarmed Combat. The opponent may choose to end the lock at any time by letting go of his blade, causing it to fall

to the ground. This knack does not prevent the use of talents like Parry/Riposte or Avoid Blow to counter the attack.

LOCKED SCABBARD

Swordmaster

Talent: Melee Weapons **Rank:** 4
Cost: 200 **Strain:** 1

By use of this knack, a swordmaster can attack with his sword without fear of his scabbard falling off. This knack will hold the scabbard in place for the entire round, but each extra talent the swordmaster uses the weapon with (i.e. Parry, Riposte, etc), incurs an additional point of strain each. The damage step rolled with a Locked Scabbard is Strength + 2 step damage.

LOSE WITH GRACE

Swordmaster

Talent: Taunt **Rank:** 6
Cost: 300 **Strain:** 2

Losing a duel is never good for a swordmaster. While some can play off the fact, this knack calls into question if the swordmaster actually lost. Performing this knack after a swordmaster has lost a duel not only enrages his opponent, but also gives the opponent the impression that the swordmaster let him win. Even after the anger subsides, the opponent will have a nagging feeling that, even though he won the duel, somehow he still lost.

PRECISION STRIKE

Swordmaster

Talent: Melee Weapons **Rank:** 6
Cost: 300 **Strain:** 2

Precision Strike allows a swordmaster to make unerring strikes with his blade. When used against an opponent, a successful Melee Weapons Test barely nicks the opponent, drawing out a single bead of blood. A character using Precision Strike will only cause one point of damage, but the opponent still gets to apply Physical Armor. Using it against an armored foe requires an Armor Defeating hit or a called shot to an unprotected area to be successful. This knack may be used with the Armor Beater talent knack.





ROLL THE DECK

Swordmaster

Talent: Wound Balance **Rank:** 4
Cost: 200 **Strain:** 2

T'skrang boat fights are often a chaotic place. Often participants are caught unaware by a combatant that was not near them a second ago. With Roll the Deck, the character can make a Wound Balance check for any attack that causes damage, even if the attack does not require a Knockdown test. The result of the test is the number of yards, up to half his combat movement, he can roll and come up on his feet, ready for combat. If he has an attack left for the current round, he may make it at that time. If his opponent is different from the one who caused the damage, the character gains the advantage of a Blindsight Attack. This is considered the character's movement for the round and may not perform this knack more than once per round or if the character has already made his movement for that round.

SPILL THE BEANS

Swordmaster

Talent: Engaging Banter **Rank:** 8
Cost: 500 **Strain:** 2

By use of this knack, a swordmaster tricks his opponent into giving away some vital piece of information. The player character must state what information he is looking for, and when engaged with another in conversation, must make some erroneous comment that the other person will feel the need to correct. The character makes an Engaging Banter Test against the Social Defense of his opponent. On an Excellent or better success, he manages to trick his opponent into giving the information that he wants (if the opponent knows the information).

Marek is trying to find out which kaer some adventurers just came back from. He knows that the new sword the adventurer is wearing came from the kaer, but won't tell him what kaer it is. So Marek performs Engaging Banter, and comments that the sword must have come from Kaer Talla. Without thinking, the adventurer corrects him, giving Marek the name of the kaer.

WORD DISPLAY

Swordmaster

Talent: Melee Weapons **Rank:** 6
Cost: 200 **Strain:** 1

Sword Display is a swordmaster's way of showing his expertise with a sword. Similar to his Karma Ritual, the

swordmaster fights imaginary opponents for five to ten minutes in front of an audience. When using the Sword Display talent knack, the swordmaster makes a Melee Weapons Test against the highest Social Defense among the observers, adding +1 for each additional person that is watching. If successful, the character receives a +1 step bonus to all social-based tests for the next 24 hours against any who watched the display.

TAIL SPIN

Swordmaster (t'skrang only)

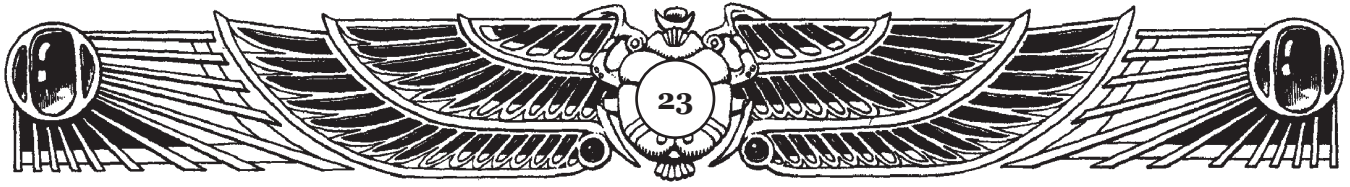
Talent: Wound Balance **Rank:** 7
Cost: 300 **Strain:** 3

T'skrangs are generally better balanced than the other Name-giver races. T'skrang training teaches how to use the tail as a weapon in combat. Swordmasters often overlook this fact in combat. This knack allows a t'skrang swordmaster who must make a Knockdown Test to make one attack as he is apparently trying to regain his balance. The character makes a Wound Balance Test as normal. The character compares the result with the attacker's Physical Defense. On an Extraordinary success, the character has hit his opponent, and may roll damage for a tail attack.

Additional Talent Knack Information

- Armor Beater — **AM**, page 54.
- Flourish — **AM**, page 57.
- Matched Weapons — **AM**, page 59.
- Second Riposte — **AM**, page 61.
- Second Tail — **AM**, page 61.
- Set Up — **AM**, page 61.
- Snag Weapon — **AM**, page 62.
- Sword Rattler — **AM**, page 62.
- Sword Crash — **MMS**, page 23.





THE GREATEST WARRIOR

A windling legend.

— From a telling by El Wita, an accomplished windling wind-dancer



Gather 'round, my little windlings! I know that you have heard this tale many times before, but it is a tale worth repeating, about change, freedom and the joy of experiencing life. Although many Name-givers lay claim to the greatest warrior, we windlings know that Tar Matar was the greatest warrior ever.

Tar Matar, the legendary weapon-smith, was the embodiment of what makes a windling great. He traveled Barsaive at the most dangerous time in its history. Tar led a group of adventurers across our great province to gather as many windling clans as possible into the great Kaer Zeanda at the foothills of a mountain. The Kaer was the culmination of the windlings' preparations for the Scourge but was designed to accommodate all Name-givers so that no one would be turned away. Tar and his adventuring group, the Prism Guard, went to gather fellow windlings who had not yet found the safety of a Kaer. They departed from Zeanda just two years before Throal closed its doors in preparation for the Scourge.

They traveled across Barsaive, from the Aras Sea to Iopos, from Landis to the Scythia Mountains, from Death's Sea to Wurm Wood, and from the Delaris Mountains to the Throal Mountains. It was a four-year journey that continually placed the group in great peril. They battled many Horrors and suspicious people. People were understandably leery of a group of adventurers giving out maps to their Kaer.

Tar fought the most valiantly, the hardest. He was determined that none should fall under the sway of the Horrors,

that no Name-giver should be forced to give up his freedom. Tar never forgot what it was to be a windling, always laughing and pulling pranks even in the face of such great despair. The "dunking" was a favourite prank of Tar's. Although we windlings do not enjoy getting wet, seeing other Name-givers soaked is truly funny. Oh the mischief a clever windling can get into with a full water skin and a feather. I'll say no more as

you're parents would not appreciate me passing that knowledge unto you.

Everywhere he went, Tar also continued to forge his heartblade, the Rainbow Blade. He took elements from every place he visited, hoping to preserve something of the golden age of Barsaive before the Horrors could ravage the land. The Rainbow Blade is said to be the finest windling weapon ever made, a tribute to our race. It was said that upon first glance many mistook it for a ceremonial sword. Too elaborate, too ornate, too awkward they said. All windlings, however, could tell the worth of the blade upon a glance. The blazing colours, the perfect balance, all showed clearly to those you could see it's true pattern. Other races had only to see one swipe of the sword through the air to realize it was the perfect blade.

Can you imagine the danger Tar and the Prism Guard faced as they raced across Barsaive at the provinces most dangerous time? Tar constructed his heartblade from the heart of our beautiful province at its darkest hour. A true inspiration; remember his act of courage whenever you are afraid.

The Prism Guard were finding it harder to find windling clans and they were battling Horrors or their constructs daily. They had decided to turn back when a beast out of nightmares confronted them: a creature with tentacles and eyes everywhere. It was more powerful than any monster the group had yet faced; yet the warriors had no thought





for their own safety, caring only about saving the village the nightmare was brutalizing. Tar led the way with a mighty battle cry, the Rainbow Blade catching the sun's rays as he punched it into the creature again and again. Following Tar's brave example, the rest of the Prism Guard also attacked the Horror. The beast was defeated but at a grave cost, Tar's life.

The remaining Prism Guard lead the last of the refugees back to Kaer Zeanda. The Kaer was sealed that day. Only Tar's blade returned with them.

Kaer Zeanda remains undiscovered, unopened to this day. Although the Prism Guard had given out dozens of maps, none have yet been found, and today we still tell tall tales about the location of the windling Kaer Zeanada. So how do we know of Tar's fate and the construction of his wondrous heartblade? Those that Tar protected, and who survived the Scourge, wanted to offer their gratitude to the windling who saved them. Their ancestors had heard the tales and were instructed to offer their thanks to the windling race for its bravery. We hope, as they do, to find the fantastic windling Kaer and to recover the blade of the greatest windling warrior ever.

Remember well the lessons of Tar Matar, my little windlings! Life is to be lived to its fullest, and no matter how hard times are, never forget what it means to be a windling.

THE RAINBOW BLADE

The masterfully crafted windling blade was the heartblade of legendary weaponsmith Tar Matar. The blade is oversized, almost awkward looking, and the sword itself looks more like art than a weapon, but it is a deadly blade. A single swing shows the blade's perfect balance. Tar's blade incorporated elements from all the areas that he visited before the Scourge. With no threads woven, the blade does Strength + 4 damage.

Rank 1

Cost: 300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must discover that this is the heartblade of Tar Matar.

Effect: The blade does strength +6 damage. The blade glows a very faint white.

Rank 2

Cost: 500

Key Knowledge: The character must discover where the hilt was made. The hilt was forged on the Aras Sea out of

elemental water, as the Prism Guard battled the elements themselves.

Effect: The hilt adds one Recovery Test to the character daily, and the blade glows blue.

Rank 3

Cost: 800

Key Knowledge: The character must discover where the pommel was embellished. The pommel was made from the bones of a falcon that was an animal companion of one of the Prism Guard. The animal was slain saving a child near Iopos.

Effect: The guard appears to flutter to block blows. Add +2 to the character Physical Defense. The blade now inflicts Strength + 7 damage. The blade glows both blue and green simultaneously, the two colors seem to swirl around the blade.

Rank 4

Cost: 1300

Key Knowledge: The character must discover where the guard of the blade was made. The guard was made from a piece of gold discovered near Landis, which was already closed to outsiders when the Prism Guard arrived.

Effect: The character may store up to his thread rank in Karma in the sword. To access the extra karma requires one strain. The Karma Points stored do not count towards the character's maximum, and are replenished through use of the character's karma ritual. The blade now also glows violet.

Rank 5

Cost: 2100

Key Knowledge: The character must discover what metal was used in forging the blade. The metal was mined in the Scythia Mountains, as the Prism Guard fought off a Horror so that a Kaer might be sealed.

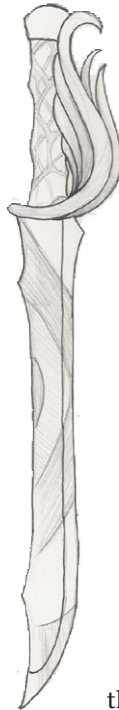
Effect: A yellow glow now also surrounds the blade, which strikes with astonishing speed, adding +3 steps to the character's Initiative. The blade now inflicts Strength + 8 damage.

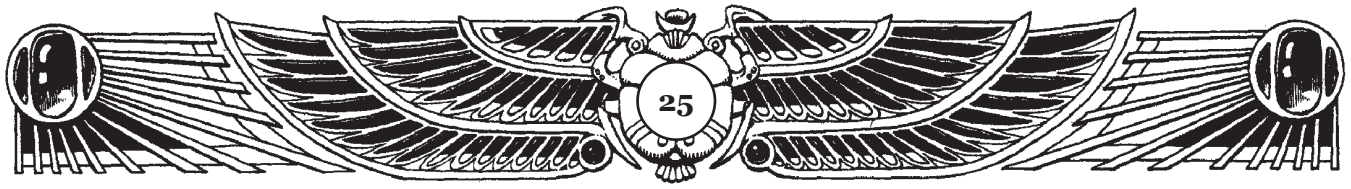
Rank 6

Cost: 3400

Key Knowledge: The character must discover where the blade was purified. The sword was purified in the Death's Sea.

Effect: The metal of the blade has a red tinge to it. If the blade inflicts a Wound, the wound will bleed, causing step 4





damage every round. The bleeding continues for a number of rounds equal to the current thread rank woven to the sword. The bleeding can also be stopped if the effected creature uses a Recovery Test.

Rank 7

Cost: 5500

Key Knowledge: The character must discover where the blade was forged. The blade was forged in the Wurm Wood (now Blood Wood), as the Prism Guard tried to persuade the elves to join them in their Kaer.

Effects: The beauty of the glowing blade is unmistakable. The blade adds +2 steps to the character Charisma step. It now also offers +3 to the character's Physical Defense. The blade now inflicts Strength + 9 damage and also glows indigo.

Rank 8

Cost: 8900

Key Knowledge: The character must discover where the blade was joined to the hilt. The blade was first joined to the hilt in the Delaris Mountains.

Effect: The blade confers the strength of Tar Matar to the character, giving them +5 steps to their Steel Thought talent, or the Steel Thought talent at Rank 5 if they do not already have it. The blade now grants the character a total of two additional Recovery Tests per day. The blade now also glows orange.

Rank 9

Cost: 14400

Key Knowledge: The character must discover that Tar Matar sharpened the blade in the Throal Mountains and saved a troll moot from a Horror.

Effect: The blade inflicts Strength + 10 damage, and an additional +2 steps of damage to any Horror or Horror constructs. Bleeding wounds inflicted by the blade now bleed for Step 7 damage per round, the bleeding continues for a number of rounds equal to the current thread rank woven to the sword. The bleeding can also be stopped if the effected creature uses a Recovery Test. For one point of strain, the character may spend one additional point of Karma from the blade, in addition to any karma points he is normally entitled to spend. The blade now glows purple.

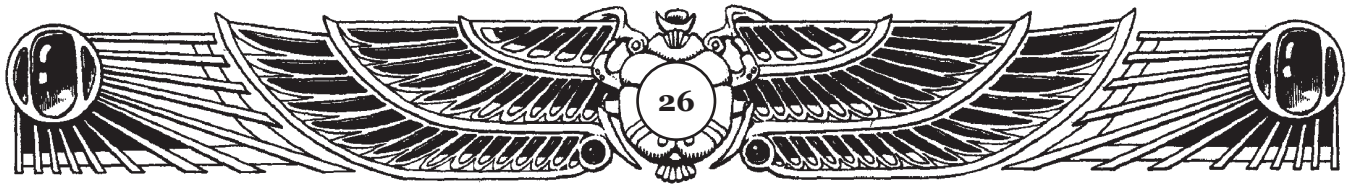
Rank 10

Cost: 23300

Deed: The character must discover where and how Tar Matar died, and then build a shrine to him. The deed is worth 14400 Legend Points.

Effect: The blade now blazes with all the colours of a rainbow whenever it is unsheathed. The blade glows like the sun whenever it is used in combat against Horror's or Horror constructs and can inflict Strength + 15 damage against Horror or Horror constructs. The character's Physical Defense bonus is now + 4, and the character's Charisma step bonus is now +3.





ACTION, BUT AT WHAT COST?

A chance encounter in the Tylon Mountains leads a group of adepts to uncover a plot about which they would have preferred to remain ignorant.

The nightmare had come again. At least Rielle managed not to cry out this time when the trees started driving the thorns into her flesh. Blood was splashing everywhere, seeping into the ground, flowing into the trees and empowering them to drive in more spikes. Soon they would reach into her heart, and they would never come out again. And the pain, the blinding pain-no, if only it were blinding. She was always so aware of the pain, the blood, the trees... She had to do something, anything...



It was morning-another bright, clear day in the Tylon Mountains. Rielle stood up, stretched, and saw that her companions were already awake, as usual. Grental was sitting a short distance away, washing her teacups. The nethermancer always rose early, since the others were still not comfortable seeing her speak with her “guest.” Pierren had fluttered off somewhere. Rielle knew he was happiest flitting between shadows in a dense forest, but here he could find only scattered trees. In another day’s travel there would not be any trees at all, which was exactly why Rielle had insisted on taking this journey. She hoped the trees would stop haunting her if she rose above them, but they were still lurking right behind her eyes, right under her skin. No thorns pierced her, but she had seen those who had them. She had wanted to rip each and every thorn out with her bare hands. Who cared if that wouldn’t work! She had always been able to do something-action! That’s the soul of a swordmaster. Visiting the Wood had been excruciating: there had been nothing to do. That questor of Jaspree had thought they would be able to heal some trees and somehow make people better. The Blood Wood was so vast and its corruption so extreme. They had not even made a dent in it. Jaspree’s power was enormous-look at the Servos Jungle! It had grown so much in only a few decades. But how much progress has been made in the Blood Wood? Any? What could she do?

Something cold and wet slapped the back of her neck. She spun around, grasping air instead of her sword, which was still lying on the ground. Pierren hovered behind her, holding a small fish. “Going to go off and taunt your invisible foes into submission this morning? Or are you ready for breakfast?”

If only she could taunt them and make them go away. She sighed and wiped the water off her neck. She was going to smell fishy now. “I don’t like fish, and neither do you for that matter.”

“But T’rapthe does. Was it yesterday, or the day before, when he went on again about how his family makes the best spiced fish anywhere on the Serpent?”

“He has told us that a few times, hasn’t he?” said Rielle with a small laugh.

“He’ll be thrilled that I caught this fish!”

“Did you sit there quietly and make a sudden grab for it, like he showed you?”

“Well, no. I threw a dart at it as usual, but I got it through the eye! It’s hard to tell, isn’t it?”

“It might have been, if you’d kept your voice down.” T’rapthe snatched the fish from Pierren’s tiny fingers. “I thought you lot were supposed to be quiet. Your voice carries like the wind.” T’rapthe reached for his pan, his tail twitching in anticipation. “This fish will make a lovely snack. You should try to catch a bigger one next time. This one’s hardly more than a few bites. Then again, it’s better than trail rations for breakfast. Why don’t we find another elemental? We used to eat so well.”

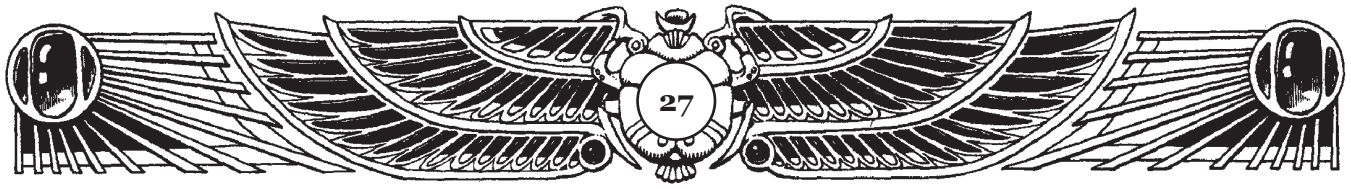
“You could have gone to Parlainth with your old friend.” Grental had walked over and was munching on a rock she claimed was edible. “If you’d caught a Horror there, you could have had him cook it and eat it. Then you could have eaten Horror-flavored leaves for months.”

T’rapthe’s jaw dropped. “No way! Not even an ork would eat a Horror. That’s crazy!”

Even though Grental was a dwarf, Pierren had long since decided to treat her like another windling-never take anything she said too seriously and never take offense. Speaking a little too loudly, he said, “Yeah, she’s obviously insane. But anyway, Rielle, I also found some berries by the stream. They’re not quite sweet, but they are better than rocks. Or Horrors! Come on, a smile will get you a berry.”

Grental sighed as she watched the windling toss berries at Rielle. Sometimes their behavior was so childish. Grental crunched down loudly on her trail rations. She had tried at first to pretend they tasted good, but now she did not bother. They knew she did not like the “rocks” either. She did know,





however, that she had been very lucky to find these adepts, despite their occasional silliness. They were such powerful Name-givers, and they were willing to travel to one of the highest peaks in Barsaive with no definite promise of a reward. Grental was still not certain why they had come. She glanced over at Rielle, who was now throwing berries back at Pierren, one of which hit him directly on the nose. Rielle was so quick with her smart remarks and her smiles, but slight twinges of pain lurked in the corners of her eyes. She was probably thinking about that other elf. He was perhaps a Circle more advanced than she was, and he had swept the floor at the swordmaster competition that day in Throal. Grental was not usually taken with elven beauty, but Varaylian was amazing. She had almost not dared to approach him after the games. Then she reminded herself that she was the master of fear and decided that being awed by an elf was pure foolishness. Varaylian had explained that he was soon off to Parlainth, but his “former apprentice” might be available. Although Rielle had not been an “apprentice” for several decades, she was very eager to travel. Grental, Rielle, and her two friends had set off almost immediately.



The journey to the Tylon Mountains had passed quickly. Trekking through the edge of the Servos Jungle had been brutal, as the group was much better prepared for bitter cold than for humidity and heat. On the plains, they once caught sight of a large group of t’skrang “merchants” heading north toward Lake Vors, likely coming from the City of Thieves. T’rapthe mumbled something about pirates in his own tongue and watched them so intently that Grental thought he was about to shoot off a flurry of arrows. After they had passed, T’rapthe stood up, spat over his shoulder, and set off again without another word.

In the foothills, they found an ork village, where T’rapthe easily convinced the villagers that the group was not from Kratas. He explained at great length the pain that pirates had inflicted on his home village, and the orks sympathized. T’rapthe’s story, however, ended with him hanging upside down by his tail and impaling an arrow in the pirate captain’s arm. With dazzling acrobatics, he flipped down off the boat’s rigging and shot a fiery arrow straight into the same wound. As the first arrow also caught fire, the captain dropped his sword, collapsed to the deck, and howled in pain and defeat. The day was theirs!

After the travelers were welcomed into the village and offered a meal, Grental asked T’rapthe why he had left his home.

“We negotiated a trade discount, and they agreed to stop raiding us. Not a perfect solution, but it worked. My home

was safe, but Barsaive is a large place. There are lots of other people who have problems.” T’rapthe hesitated and glanced at Rielle.

“It could be that I asked you to come,” Rielle said. “We needed an archer, and it was clear that our tales had infected you with the adventure bug. You aren’t sorry you left the river, are you?”

“I do miss the spiced fish.” Pierren gave an exaggerated sigh and fluttered a little ways away from T’rapthe’s swatting tail. “But seriously, Rielle, thanks for convincing Varaylian to let me join you. I’m doing what I should be.”

“I think she likes unleashing troublemakers into the world,” Pierren said.

Rielle winked at Pierren, but a glimmer of pain twitched at the edge of her eye. If only she could do something about what mattered most to her. Damn Varaylian for saying it was hopeless.



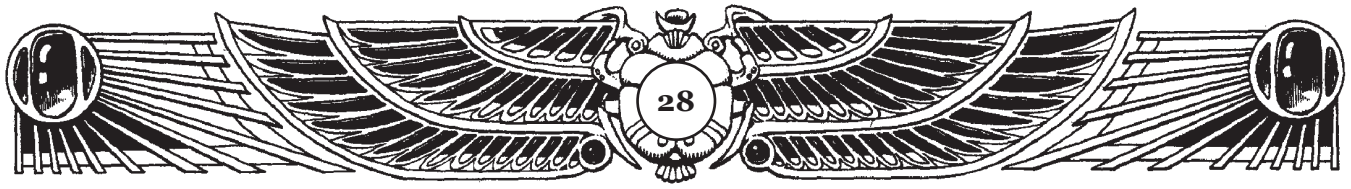
The group rested for a few days and questioned the orks thoroughly about the hazards of traveling in avalanche territory. They also learned that the best way to Karel’s Corner was no longer the path they had heard about in Throal and updated their map accordingly.

T’rapthe agreed to take a few messages to Plana Tolt, another ork village located much further up the mountain. The leader of Plana Tolt did not initially want to allow the travelers into town, but he relented when T’rapthe displayed the letters and offered to help the village in any way he could. The village leader explained that a child had recently fallen down a ravine and every breath wracked her small body with pain. Grental assured him that her magic could help. She sent the girl’s brother and Pierren off to gather some plants that she had noticed along what had passed for a trail. She also started boiling a concoction, which she claimed would need to simmer overnight. The girl’s mother was glad to watch over it. She could barely sleep anyway with her daughter in such pain.

The next morning, Grental dipped a cloth in her potion and bound the girl’s chest with it. She then asked to be left alone with the girl for a few minutes, and Rielle assured the girl’s mother that everything would be all right. Rielle had never seen Grental cast any healing magic, but she assumed that the gestures and incantations of the nethermancer’s spell would probably frighten those who were not prepared. Grental had done such a good job of passing herself off as an elemental; it would be a shame to break that misconception now.

The night after they left Plana Tolt, Rielle awoke with a start. She looked around, but it was so dark that she could





not even see the couple of embers that were still burning for warmth. Her hearing was extraordinary: several owls and a number of other nocturnal creatures seemed to be right on top of her. Then the fire embers reappeared.

Rielle grabbed her sword. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you. I just needed it to be dark." Grental jabbed a stick at the embers, extinguishing one. "I hate pulling deceptions like that one back in Plana Tolt, but the last time I cast that spell in a village, they became convinced I had Horror-marked a man. You wouldn't believe what my companions went through to convince the villagers not to kill that poor farmer (and myself!), after I fixed his broken arm. What idiots. I've devoted my life to fighting Horrors and the undead. As if I could be a Horror! Ridiculous. I perform a nice, goody-goody service, just like people always expect from me, and they're still not satisfied."

"What do you mean?"

"People always expect adepts to save them from all their petty problems. As in the story T'rapthe told the orks. Such perfect adept behavior! Come into a village, save it from pirates, then head off in to the great wide world looking for more problems to solve."

"Are you saying we shouldn't do things like that?" Rielle ran her fingers along the inscription on her sword. It didn't comfort her. She wasn't used to running from problems.

"All I'm saying is that people shouldn't feel they can expect us to drop everything, just because they think they need help." Grental shook her head, and some of her anger melted away. "It's not that I don't want to help people. I was happy to help that kid yesterday. It was the right thing to do, and I was glad I could, but I can't always do everything." She slipped her fingers into her pocket and touched a small pouch filled with ashes. She remembered gathering them, vowing that no one else would die that way if she could prevent it. She also remembered the last time she had been in Throal with Brennan. They were sitting on their favorite bench, and she had taken his hand. She wanted to ask him to marry her. Was he thinking the same thing? Was he also afraid to ask? The moment passed and neither of them had spoken. Not that it would have made any difference in the end.

Grental stared into the dying embers and wanted to extinguish every fire in Barsaive. It wouldn't bring back Brennan,

but it would feel good. She shoved a stick into the embers again and scowled as it caught fire and burned brightly. She turned away from the fire and rubbed her eyes. The blazing fire in her mind would not go away. "Rielle, is it wrong to want to be happy?"

"No, it's not wrong, but it is hard to do." Rielle returned her sword to its scabbard and placed it carefully at her side. "What happened to your last companions?" she asked gently.

Grental's voice was quiet, distant. "We were down by Death's Sea. We were following some idiots who had been killing people around the edges of the Mist Swamps. They hoped to gain a favor from Death if they killed enough people. Total lunacy. We stopped them before they could collect their favor. We were within sight of Death's Sea. Horrible place. A couple of the fools were adepts, but they weren't too tough. We were fine, until a pack of great form fire wraiths appeared. They

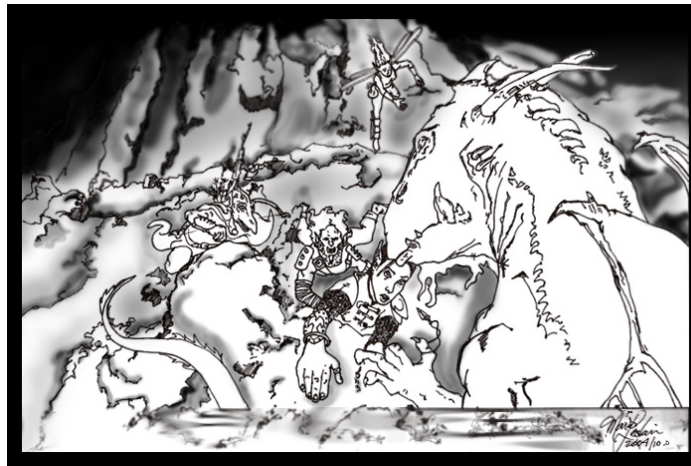
look undead, but they aren't quite. My spells didn't work properly against them. They engulfed the Death cultists and then they turned on us."

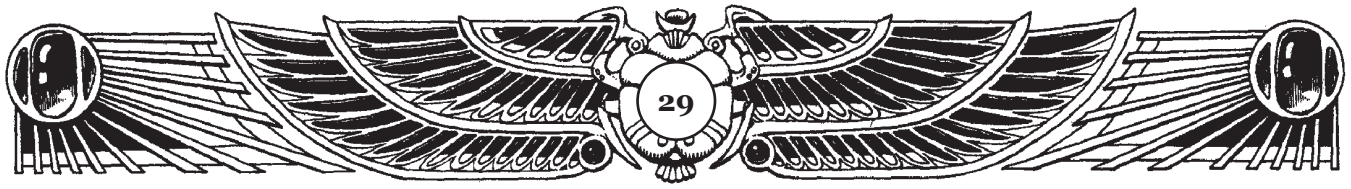
Grental was back at Death's Sea. Brennan was burning, surrounded by a fire wraith. She struck the wraith with everything she had, but it wasn't enough. She concentrated on the fire wraith's spirit. It didn't belong on this plane, but she couldn't send it back to its netherworld. It had

changed since it left its home. But how? She had to counter it, banish it, kill it. Reaching into astral space for more power, she cast again, and this time her spell felt different. The wraith wavered, but it was still lunging for her. She cast again, and it evaporated. She cast several more times, and more wraiths turned to steam. The last of the fire wraiths fled toward the lava, allowing her to see that all of them...

"They were all dead. All of them. The cultists were ashes, as were my... my friends." The last word was little more than a whisper. Grental had so few friends and there had never been anyone like Brennan. When would the Scourge be over? When would all the Horrors be gone? Grental clenched her fist around the pouch of ashes. *When we've killed them all*, she thought. *When we've killed them all*.

Grental inhaled deeply and slowly let go of Brennan's remains. She forced herself to continue with a steady voice. "I returned to Throal and immersed myself in every scroll and book about Death's Sea and wraiths I could find. You





know the rest. We're off to find an ice spirit now, so that I can understand what happened there with the fire wraiths."

"What don't you understand?"

"I'm not an elemental. I can pretend to be one, if I have to, but I understand spirits, not fire and ice. Yet somehow I cast a spell that countered the strength of the fire wraiths. The Library's records speculate endlessly about whether fire wraiths are spirits or undead or some combination of the two. I think they are fire spirits that have been Horror touched. Similar ice elementals have been observed in these mountains, and a powerful elemental spirit is said to live in the shadow of Karel's Corner. I must find it."

"I'm sure we will." Rielle spoke confidently, but she knew that only one explorer had observed this ice spirit, and his report was vague and self-contradictory. She considered it unlikely that there was an undead elemental living permanently under a block of ice near the top of a mountain, but she didn't care what they found at Karel's Corner. Grental was doing something for her fallen friends, and tomorrow night they would be high enough that they would have left behind anything that could even remotely be considered a tree. She was looking forward to a good night's rest.



The next morning, after their breakfast of fish, berries, and trail rations (a.k.a. rocks), the group started off again. The mountain face was increasingly steep and rocky, and sometimes they feared that their passing would cause another avalanche. The sun was fierce, and the icy wind bit through their cloaks, but Pierren's good cheer was infectious. He rode on Rielle's shoulders and regaled them with windling legends and tales of "lost" things he had "liberated." Pierren continually teased T'rapthe and hovered mere inches from his swinging tail. Someday T'rapthe was actually going to hit the windling, and Rielle wondered which one of them would be more surprised.

"Think you can hit me with that bulky tail of yours? You need more flexible, lightweight appendages like mine."

"Yeah, a lightweight, that's what you are. Isn't it hard to stay aloft on those 'flexible, light' wings? You need sturdier wings, like a hawk's." T'rapthe offered his arm to Pierren as if he were a hawk.

"But then my wings wouldn't shimmer so nicely, would they?"

Rielle ran a hand through her brilliant red hair and flourished her long, bright cloak with its glistening black trim. It hardly showed a speck of dust from their travels, and it complemented her hair perfectly. "We all know how much you care about color and style, Pierren. What was it you said

when I bought this gorgeous cloak? That I would stand out in the trees like a-

Several screams burst forth and echoed off the hills. They originated from a crevice not far ahead. Rielle instantly drew her sword. "What kind of creature makes that awful howl?"

"That last cry wasn't an animal. It was a Name-giver." T'rapthe's voice was now focused and clear.

They started running up the hill. Rielle reached the crevice and found a cave entrance. She hesitated, allowing the others to catch up, and then started in. She rounded a bend, sword ready, but the battle was over. Two large beasts with shining white fur were drenched in blood, clearly dead, and a human lay collapsed on the ground not far away. He noticed them immediately. He clutched his side and began to stand.

"You can stay where you are. We were coming to help you." Rielle lowered her sword. "Are you alright? Who are you?"

"Shouldn't you simply ask whether I'm friend or foe?" The man settled back down and examined each of the new arrivals in turn.

"What are you doing up here by yourself?" Grental moved up next to Rielle.

"I can take care of myself."

"As long as more of those things don't come along. You going to take out two more of them with your sword arm looking like that?" Pierren looked quizzically at the man. He'd never seen a Pattern quite like his.

"I can heal myself."

"If you hadn't taken that tone, you might have gotten some help with that healing," Grental said.

"I don't exactly need most of your spells cast on me, do I?"

"I have never heard such."

"Hold it you two." Rielle lightly tossed her sword to her left hand. "Word fights are my specialty. You two can keep your tongues out of my Discipline."

"How do you know I'm not a swordmaster?"

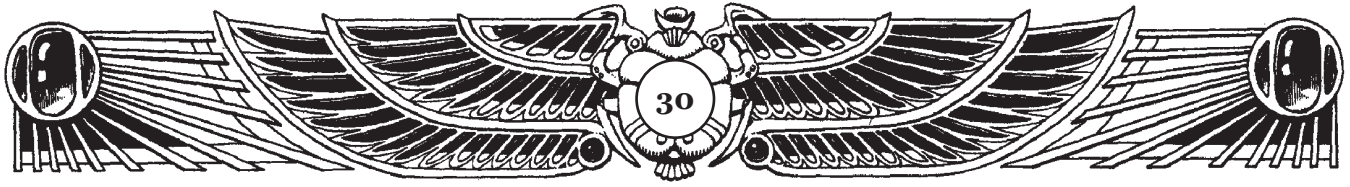
"You don't carry yourself like one. The way you sit there and bleed, the way you hold your side, the way you tried to stand-it all just screams warrior. But I think you're a spell slinger as well."

"What makes you say that, my lady?" His eyes sparkled. Was it merely a trick of the dim cavern light?

"Cut the charm act. I'm a swordmaster and an elf. Think you stand a chance?" She flung a smirk his way. "Can't hurt to try though, can it?" He would be handsome once they washed the blood off him. "Look at the animals' wounds there... and there." Her long, thin fingers indicated some nasty scorch marks on the animals. She smiled again, this time with both sides of her mouth. "Not made by that fancy sword of yours, were they?"

"I suppose not." The man's teeth glinted when he smiled.





"There's something else further in the cave." T'rapthe's arrow was still nocked and ready. "We should move out."

Grental realized this man would make a formidable opponent, despite his injuries, but she assumed he was unlikely to attack them when hostile beasts were nearby. She and T'rapthe watched the cave while Rielle helped the man limp outside. They stopped a short distance above the crevice.

"Alright," Grental said. "You tell us politely who you are and what you're doing up here. Then I might help fix up that arm and leg of yours."

"Looks like the beasties nearly made a snack of your foot." Pierren's stomach churned; he had never gotten used to the sight of so much blood.

"I think it's the other cave dwellers who will be eating well tonight. I'm called Mellarn. And you are?"

"I'm Pierren. And this is Rielle, Grental, and T'rapthe. You look awful. Grental, are you going to do something for him?"

"Once he tells me what he's doing up here."

"Never trust a stranger, eh? Wise philosophy. I'm up here hunting kraulen beasts."

"You came up here by yourself to fight those beasts? That doesn't seem to have been a good plan," Grental said.

"I was hoping to find a young one with black fur. They're incredibly rare. Some of the orks think they're a sign of luck and want to have one living near them. They think the howl of a black kraulen beast will keep away Horrors. They pay well for the animals." The man knew the first rule of lying: always inject as much truth as possible. Grental had heard that tale from the orks back in the foothills, as Mellarn undoubtedly had as well.

"Perhaps," she said, "but you know that wherever you find a young animal, you'll find its mother, and this time it seems you found both parents. Why don't you try again. You aren't an animal hunter."

Mellarn flashed Grental a fleeting smile. "True enough. I'm actually a treasure hunter. In a cave near here, there is an item that is of some interest to my, uh, 'employer.' I thought it might be in that cave there, but instead I found those animals' lair. There have been a number of avalanches since my employer was last here, so I'm in the unfortunate position of looking for a cave entrance that may not even be open anymore." He sighed loudly and reached for the wound on his arm, wincing terribly as he pulled some of his shirt out of the congealing blood.

"There's no need to make such a display." Grental thought that last story was probably true. A bit vague, perhaps, but she could hardly expect him to tell her exactly what magic item he sought. His accent placed him as coming from one of the villages around Bartertown. Nothing to do but trust him for now. She stepped over to him. "Sit still for a moment."

Mellarn did not flinch as the shadow fell over him. Rielle was impressed. She was glad Grental had cast this spell in private back in Plana Tolt. It seemed that Grental was trying to scare the wounds out of Mellarn, and they were fleeing in terror. Once the shadow cleared, Pierren offered the man some water, and Rielle extended her handkerchief.

"A token from my lady, so soon?" His eyes sparkled again.

"Just wipe off your face." Rielle rolled her eyes. The man was magic, but she knew better than to trust a young and handsome wizard. In her nearly fifty years, she had known several quite well. Not that any of them could compare to Varaylian. By Jaspree, what an idiot.

"Mellarn, can you walk now?" T'rapthe asked. "Several creatures have come up. I think they are eating the dead kraulen beasts. If you have no further interest in this cave, we should move on."

"What I'm looking for is definitely not in there. Where are you headed?"

Grental considered whether she trusted the man with that information.

"Further up," said Pierren. "We want to get up where the ice layers are. They are said to reflect light in a unique way and I can't wait for my wings to glisten like the ice up there!" Sometimes windlings made wonderful companions. Grental knew she would never have gotten away with a story like that.

Mellarn laughed. "Further up. Sounds like the way I should be heading as well. May I join you?"

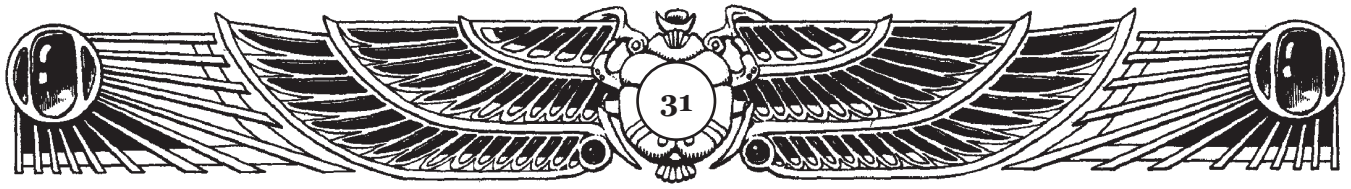
"Come on. Bring the handkerchief, it's your admittance token." Rielle offered him her hand, but he declined and tried to stand gracefully on his own. Unfortunately, his injured foot slipped on the uneven rocks. He managed to right himself and tried to pretend he had merely been bowing to Rielle.

"That move needs a little work, but there's really no need to bow to me, my lord." Rielle gave an elegant, courtly bow to Mellarn and effortlessly tossed her cloak behind her as she started up the mountain. The very fringe of the cloak just barely touched Mellarn. Grental wondered if apprentice swordmasters practiced with cloaks before they even started training with swords. It seemed likely.



They struggled up as far as they could that afternoon. The mountain was even rockier than before, and all of them were having trouble keeping their footing. Pierren had thought it would take Mellarn several days to heal fully, but within minutes of setting out, his arm and chest barely looked wounded. Soon only his foot remained injured. The warrior-wizard had some remarkable healing magic.





Patches of ice and snow dotted the ground, but the group found an ice-free patch where they could make a camp that evening. Mellarn had traveled extensively, and he shared anecdotes from strange places he had visited outside of Barsaive. He also listened carefully to their stories and was especially captivated by Rielle's tale of her brief trip to the Blood Wood, as he had never been there himself. For a non-elf, he empathized so strongly with Rielle's pain and loss. She wondered about his connection to the Wood. Old elven companions? Did he grow up with elves?

They showed him their map of the Tylon Mountains and the changes the orks had made regarding the recent avalanches. "You're heading to Karel's Corner," he noticed.

"Perhaps." Grental still didn't trust him. He was hiding something, and it disturbed her that she could see nothing of his Pattern. There was something magic about him, and it wasn't only the way he kept trying to ensorcell Rielle. Thankfully, she seemed well aware of his tricks. It was truly shameless, however, how she resisted him, and then used her charms right back at him.



Much later, only Pierren was still awake. The sky was so clear that more stars than usual seemed to be visible. Pierren was connecting them to form the outline of a great tree and had hung twelve apples from its branches, when something burst in out of nowhere and knocked him to the ground. He tried to right himself, but a flaming arrow pinned his left wing to the ground. "Get it out!" he screamed.

More arrows rained down on the campsite. T'rapthe yanked the arrow out of Pierren's wing and shot it back. He then loosed a few fiery arrows of his own. Now Rielle could see her opponents: three archers shooting at them, another who had dropped a bow and was drawing a sword, and a mage of some sort. She rushed towards them, saying, "Don't think you can cut me down without giving my sword a chance to reach you." She sliced several arrows in half. The spellcaster finished an incantation just as Rielle sprang between two archers and swung at him. A green burst of light jumped from the mage's fingers, darted past Rielle, and slammed into Mellarn. He gasped in pain, but kept his focus in astral space. Soon a black and purple cloud appeared over his head, and bolts of lightning sizzled toward the attackers with unerring precision. Grental had moved off a few steps and disappeared into a deep darkness. Moments later, an archer collapsed behind Rielle, his leg bones shattered.

The fight was soon over. Rielle held her sword over the elven warrior who had attempted to engage her. He was lying on the ground as the final crackles of lightning slowly dissipated from his armor. His eyes darted left and right.

"Looking for this?" Rielle asked, waving his sword. "I caught it as you fell. Tell me why I shouldn't kill you." She spoke in Sperethiel, as she had noticed during the fight that he did not seem to understand the common tongue of Throal.

"Because it wouldn't be sporting?" The elf tried to move, but felt Rielle's sword touching his throat. His accent was hard to place, but he could be Theran.

"We don't all ascribe to that kind of code. Who are you?" Mellarn had jogged over, suppressing his limp with a few controlled intakes of breath. His Sperethiel was flawless, and his accent was perfect. He could have stepped out of a tapestry of the Elven Court.

The elf on the ground wasn't impressed. "We know what you're here for. It would be best for you to hand it over. You let me return with it, and I'll forget about this little altercation. My companions could have died in an avalanche."

"If you truly knew why I was here, then you would know that I couldn't possibly agree to that suggestion. Why don't we start again. Who are you?" Mellarn's eyes were somewhat unfocused; he was looking at a point slightly above the elf's head.

"You'll never get it off this mountain. Even if you do, we'll track you all the way back. You'll never make it. If we fail to report, the next force that attacks you will be overwhelming. She won't get it. You can be sure of that." Rielle had to give him credit for self-confidence. These were strong words for someone lying on his back with a blade at his neck.

Suddenly Rielle's head exploded with pain. The elf pushed Rielle's sword aside, but Mellarn's blade cut him through as he tried to stand. Mellarn stepped toward the Theran wizard, just as an arrow pierced the wizard's cheek, hitting with enough force to shatter his cheekbone.

"Good shot." Mellarn nodded to T'rapthe.

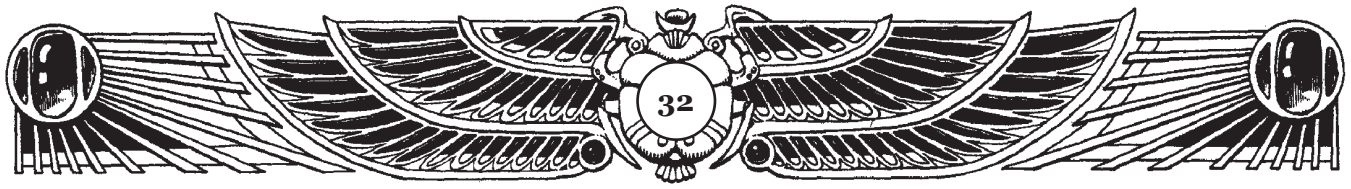
"I guess the time for talking is over." T'rapthe lowered his bow and sighed.

"Over? I thought it might just be beginning." Pierren glanced at the nethermancer and was unable to hide his unease at the prospect.

"Not much point. I know who sent them." Mellarn said. "I am surprised that they caught up to me here; information has traveled faster than we thought. I'd hoped to be able to travel with you charming people for a day or two while this foot heals. I'd love to find out what brought you to these forsaken slopes, but now I'm going to have to hurry. There's no fear they'll find what I'm looking for, but I shouldn't give them any more time to prepare that 'overwhelming' force than I have to." Mellarn started limping toward his pack.

"You're going now?" Rielle said. "Don't be absurd. It's pitch dark. You'll never find a cave entrance in the middle of the night. Besides, if there were any other Therans around-they





were Therans, right?" Mellarn agreed. "If more Therans were nearby, they would have all attacked together. We shouldn't be in any danger before morning. You'll break your other ankle and probably your neck if you wander off now. In the morning we could help you."

"I suppose." Mellarn did not sound convinced.

"True, we could help," Grental said, "but we really don't know anything about our new companion here, except that he has a large number of powerfully connected enemies."

"Who doesn't?" Pierren flapped his one uninjured wing and gasped as the other tried to move as well.

Mellarn looked at Rielle for a few seconds and made a decision. "I would not have asked for your help, but if your offer stands, I would accept it."

"How gracious of you," Grental said. "Care to explain why this offer should be left standing? Who are you? What are you here for? Who are you working for? And who opposes you?" Grental's face was set, and she was prepared for any of his magical tricks.

Mellarn kept the sparkle out of his eyes. "So many questions. So many possible answers."

"Only one set of true ones."

"Perhaps." Mellarn paused. "I'm here for an item that will assist in the restoration of Wyrn Wood. This item is obviously very powerful, and a group of Therans is also aware of it. They don't want it to reach the Blood Wood, because they want it for themselves."

"Come now, you have to do better than that. If you expect us to take on the wrath of whoever sent that lot, you'll have to trust us a bit more. Who are you working for?"

Mellarn looked Grental up and down. Then he turned to Rielle and stated decisively, "I work for the rightful ruler of Wyrn Wood."

Pierren's anger flared suddenly. "We won't work for Alachia."

Grental gasped: Mellarn was quick. She had never seen anyone strike so fast.

Rielle winced: Pierren was going to hurt when he landed. He hit the ground with a loud thud and looked stunned. "Pierren, don't be an idiot. He doesn't work for her." Rielle caught Mellarn's gaze and held it. "You're working for... Alamaise." Dragons were so powerful; it seemed odd to think of one needing a Name-giver to do something for him. Rielle had heard that Alamaise wanted to remove Alachia from the Blood Wood and then restore the Wood to its former beauty. He obviously still wanted to rule the Wood as well. Rielle didn't care. If Alamaise could help the blood elves, she could work with him. Between Jaspree and Alamaise, there might be hope for Wyrn Wood yet. Was this her chance to do something that could actually help the Wood? At last!

Silence hung over the group. Grental realized that Rielle was ready to move mountains for this man (or at least slice one to ribbons). T'rapthe and Pierren would certainly follow her lead. They had passed up the opportunity to visit Parlainth to accompany her here. They were Rielle's friends, as Brennan, Garlith and Devon had once been Grental's. Could she abandon them now?

Then Grental remembered how even the ever-cheerful Pierren paled when he spoke of his visit to the Blood Wood, and how Rielle's eyes glazed over at the first thought of a blood elf. Grental had never seen one and wondered what the thorns looked like. What would they feel like? She asked herself how she'd feel if someone found a kaer of dwarfs who had tortured themselves to survive the Scourge. What would her ancestors have done if the walls of Throal had not been enough to keep out the Horrors? She shuddered as her skin began to crawl.

"What we are here for can wait," she said. *Forgive me, Brennan. I won't leave here without what I came for, I promise you.*

"What are you here for, if I may ask?" Sarcasm dripped from Mellarn's tone, but Grental decided he deserved an answer anyway.

"We're looking for an ice spirit. A few years ago an explorer observed several 'undead ice elementals' around here and reported a particularly powerful spirit living in the shadow of Karel's Corner. I plan to study it and learn more about the undead elementals."

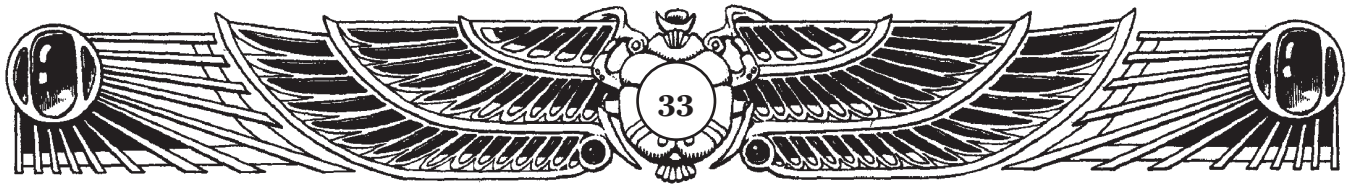
"Interesting. I've never heard of such a thing, but then again, neither elementals nor undead are my specialty. Hmmm. You say this spirit is powerful?"

"Yes. It drove off the explorer and his party. They learned almost nothing of its nature. We intend to have more success."

"If a powerful spirit lives at the base of Karel's Corner, it may know about the cave I'm looking for." Mellarn wondered what he was doing, seeking help from yet another source. On the other hand, that Theran spellcaster had been very powerful. After the fight with the kraulen beasts, he might not have survived the battle tonight without these people. He knew that finding Kresalonar's lair without knowing the location of its entrance was virtually impossible. His only chance was to catch sight of her flying around, and that chance was quite slim. He did not relish the thought of returning to his master and reporting that his mission had been a complete failure. He would have to accept these adepts' help and worry about the consequences later.

"It's settled then." Rielle's heart was doing flips and leaps. "Another day or two and we should reach Karel's Corner. Let's move back out of the wind and get some sleep." Not that she





truly thought she would be able to sleep. Alamaise! The Blood Wood! Action!



They had little opportunity to talk during the next several days, as the mountain slope became more treacherous and the wind bit constantly into their cheeks and eyes. At night, however, Mellarn was willing to talk about interesting places he had seen in Vastgothia and Arancia, but he never once mentioned dragons. He continued to flirt with Rielle and asked many questions about her travels.

Pierren recounted a particularly glowing story about Rielle's ability to charm her way through a battle, and Mellarn commented that she followed the advice on her sword. "You are familiar with the quote's source, right Rielle?"

"Obviously. Know a swordmaster who isn't? I inscribed it there myself." Varaylian had the same line on his sword. It was how they had known they were meant for each other.

"What's it say?" Grental asked. She had never been able to decipher the Sperethiel runes.

Rielle was lost in her thoughts, so Mellarn answered for her. "When the blade is not enough, just add a touch of flair."

"What's it from?"

Rielle pulled herself back to the present. "It's from a story about two young swordmasters who once faced an overwhelming number of exotic beasts-'Our blades won't be enough!' says one. 'So let's add a touch of flair,' says the other, while entangling two creatures in his flowing cloak. They use the same tagline when facing power-crazed wizards, whose spells they reflect off their gleaming blades, and when fighting brutal slavers, whom they taunt into humiliating submission." Rielle noticed Grental's incredulous look. "Alright, I'll admit it-the tale is basically a piece of swordmaster propaganda. Not that we need it, of course, since there are always young people simply tripping over themselves to become as stylish and talented as we are." Pierren coughed as he suppressed a laugh, and Rielle waved her arm in his general direction. Then she started running a finger lightly along the inscription, and Grental saw a glint of sadness return to her eyes.

"They have it easy in the story, don't they?"

Rielle held out her sword and read the inscription one more time. "Yeah. It's only the two of them. They don't lose any companions. They never face anything they can't handle. They're always able to help everyone they meet..." Rielle's voice trailed off. An image of a blood elf superimposed itself over Grental, and she had to look away to blink back tears.

"I couldn't help them. There was nothing we could do. So much for 'just add a touch of flair.' And all Varaylian could do was give up. 'We should leave now,' he said. What kind of

an answer is that? How could we give up on them? I'd never give up on a village that was under a Horror's spell. I'd never abandon a family to a band of slavers. How could I give up on the entire Wood? But what could I do? What could any of us do?"

"There was nothing we could do there, Rielle," T'rapthe said gently. "That questor of Jaspree seemed to get some corruption out of a couple of bushes and then they died. That was it. He didn't have a plan to rescue the Blood Wood. There was no point in staying with him."

Rielle didn't answer. She clenched her sword and felt the blade pressing on her palm. Was that a reason to scoff at her nightmares? To call them unbecoming to a swordmaster? To think less of her because she couldn't run away and forget? Varaylian, had to be the most unfeeling-

"There are others who have, shall we say, more promising ideas for restoring Wyrn Wood." Rielle's attention snapped to Mellarn. "You certainly know of one such person, but there's also a group called the Seekers of the Heart. When you get back to Throal you should look up Argelwyth. He's an elementalists who's known for researching particularly obscure topics at the Great Library. Ask for him there. Tell him you've heard of the Seekers and mention your experience in the Blood Wood. He'll like you. He's always got things going on. I'm sure he'll find something for one as talented as you are."

The pain cleared out of Rielle's eyes and she managed to say "Thank you," with only a slight quiver in her voice.

"It's nothing," Mellarn said. Recruitment was part of the job.



The next day, the group reached two sheer rock faces, both of which rose several hundred feet straight up and met at a ninety-degree angle. The rock formation did not look natural. It did, however, provide nearly constant shade for the eternal snow that lingered in the shadow of the corner. The weary group approached cautiously, alert for any sign of an elemental, undead or otherwise.

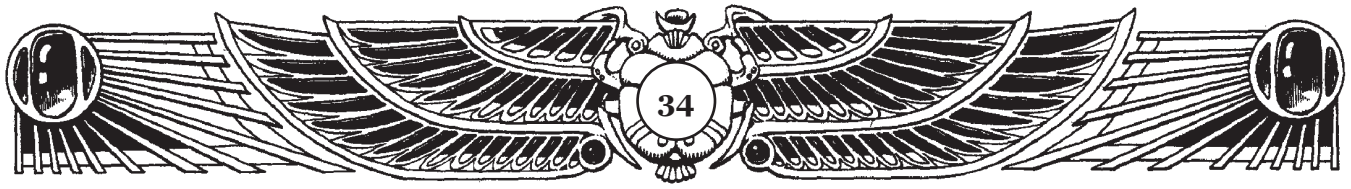
Pierren studied the snow under the rock faces. "That's strange. Look at the rock walls. They make two sides of a square. The snow is different there."

"I agree. There's something powerful in that square," Grental said. "Let's approach right to the edge-"

"Stay where you are." An ancient, rumbling voice reverberated off the rock faces. "Or better yet, go away."

"Hello!" The voice caught Pierren completely by surprise. "Who are you? Where are you?" He blinked several times but could not find the source of the voice. Ice wraiths were sup-





posed to have a visible form; he certainly was not talking to one of them.

"There's nothing for you here. Go away."

"We are here looking for some beings we call 'ice wraiths.'" Grental said. "We hope they can help us fight some fire wraiths near Death's Sea." Grental had heard that ice and fire elementals often did not get along.

"Ice wraith.' You mean a type of spirit that is neither elemental nor from one of your kind? A spirit that seems to have been touched by those you call Horrors? Never seen such a thing."

"Sure you have," Pierren said. "They live around here, don't they?"

A cold mist began to swirl angrily around the group's feet. "They do not live here. Not on my mountain."

"Do they visit sometimes?"

"No." The mist had reached Rielle and T'rapthe's thighs, and they looked about ready to bolt.

"We're here to fight these ice wraiths." Grental noticed that the mist stopped rising. "These spirits are evil. They are wrong. They do not belong here, not on your mountain, nor on this plane. We will get rid of them, but we need to know where they are."

"You said you wanted to fight fire wraiths. What do you care of ice and earth? Go back to your plains, lakes, and forests. Go now."

The mist was rising again, and Grental knew she had only one more chance. "We care about this world. We care about the people in it and we care that they should not be killed by unnatural creatures. My friends were killed by fire wraiths, and I vowed to find a better way to fight them. Studying and fighting ice wraiths will help me do that, and it will eliminate the ice wraiths that live near you and bother your mountain. I'm not asking for your help—just tell me where the ice wraiths are."

The mist spiraled around Grental, covering her completely. She sensed the almost incomprehensible size and age of the mountain. All of it, from the soil and plants on its surface, to the earth and stone inside it, was alive in a way that she had never suspected. She felt that it was all linked to the ice below Karel's Corner. She looked to the surrounding mountain peaks and felt that they were not alive in the way this one was, but they still felt natural. Part way up the peak to the west, however, were several splotches of ice that felt wrong. Grental concentrated and noticed similar spirits to those she had observed at Death's Sea. They were definitely ice wraiths. Using the senses of the mountain spirit, she felt a connection between the wraiths and the netherworld where they had originated. She saw what they had once been and sensed how their Patterns had been altered. Perfect! She could yank that taint from these ice wraiths, just as she had

intuitively ripped it off the fire wraiths, destroying them in the process. She would eliminate these ice wraiths and then return to Death's Sea to avenge Brennan's death. This trek hadn't been for nothing.

The mist slowly dissipated from Grental, leaving only a faint layer along the ground. "Thank you," she said. "You won't be bothered by those ice wraiths again, I promise you."

Grental was ready to leave, but Mellarn said casually, "One more thing, have you seen a dragon around here?" The rest of the group froze.

"The blue one, with the emerald green eyes? Yes. We've spoken a few times. She's not very friendly, but she respects the mountain."

"Do you know where she makes her home?"

"The opening to her caverns is down that way." The mist near Mellarn's feet gathered into a line pointing down and around the mountainside. "She doesn't like visitors, but you're related to her servant, aren't you? A brother perhaps?"

Mellarn's expression hardened. "I should not be compared to the servant of a 'common' dragon." He turned and strutted off in the direction of the mist line. Rielle thought, *We're going to see a dragon!* and started after him immediately. The others hesitated for several long, cold seconds before deciding to follow.



The group climbed and slid down the mountain for several hours. Mellarn squinted at a couple gaps in the rocks, only to mutter something about the trustworthiness of a line formed from mist. The fourth time he found an opening, however, he scrutinized it longer than before, and then called out in an unrecognizable language. He also cast a spell, with a type of magic Grental had never seen before.

Mellarn waited for a response. He called out again and cast a slightly different spell. After another long wait, he said, "She must not be home. Let's go in."

"Just go in?" Rielle had heard that people who invaded dragon lairs were tortured with unspeakable magic and then eaten limb by limb. "Are you insane? Even if she's not there, won't we become dragon-marked or something?"

"I think he already is." Pierren said softly.

"What?" Rielle said.

"So he is," Grental said. Pierren nodded.

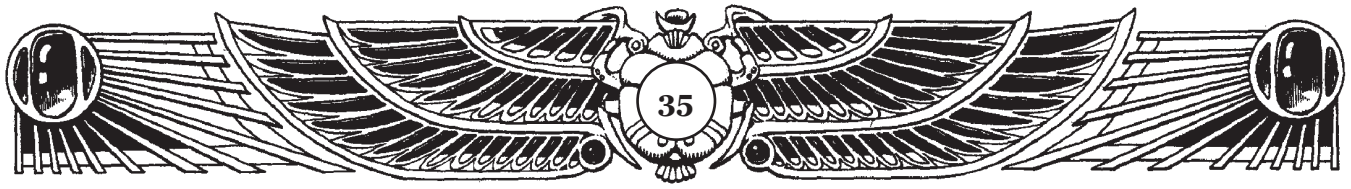
"What?"

"Our friend here is a drake." Grental expected him to make some move when she said that, but he didn't even blink.

"Dragon-marked, as I said!"

"I won't hear that term again. It's not accurate." Mellarn slowly peeled his cold gaze off Pierren and looked around at





the others. "I'm going in. You all want to stay out here and risk blowing off the mountainside? Be my guest."

"No one invited you to be my guests." A voice appeared inside their heads. It was deep, loud, and profoundly unwelcoming. "Who are you?"

Mellarn bowed toward the opening in the rocks. He stood there respectfully for a short while and then bowed again. He took a deep breath, finally speaking aloud. "I am Mellarn ren Raestelliar. I have been sent here by Elfbane to collect an item which once belonged to him."

"That is not possible. Elfbane has not made any of your kind."

"You presume to know what a Great Dragon has or has not done?" Mellarn's audacity shocked Rielle. She had the distinct impression that something was contemplating how she would taste.

"Look at me," Mellarn continued. "You know what I say is true. I am here for the Amulet of Spirit Weaving."

When Mellarn spoke the amulet's Name, a shiver ran through Grental's soul. There was something about that Name. It called to her. She wanted it and it was so close. *Straight through those rocks, down the path to the right, on to the cavern where...* Hold on there! Grental ran a hand through her hair and shivered again. She was considering entering a dragon's lair. It was insane. What was wrong with her? *It's only a short distance down to the right...* No! She had to forget about it, to think about anything else...

"As you know," Mellarn said, "Elfbane created this amulet, and he commands that you hand it over to me."

"I cannot do that. It is no longer the item that your master created. I have been protecting it for several decades." A strong wind arose from nowhere, directing everyone's attention to Grental. "Look at the effect the amulet's Name is having on your companion. She wants it very badly."

"No, I, I, I..." Grental was unable to speak. Whether it was out of fear of the dragon or the thoughts in her head, she did not know. *I don't want it, she thought. It wants me.*

"You are right, of course," the dragon said.

The dragon heard me! Grental looked around for any sign of a dragon. Nothing.

"Yes, little one, I heard you. The amulet wants you. There is a spirit bound to it now, a spirit that likes your kind. It will promise you power, and it will give you power. After all, the item Elfbane created had many gifts to offer a Name-giver such as you. Bind yourself closely enough to it, however, and this spirit will enchant you and warp your spirit, ultimately stealing it entirely. Your friends will consider you an abomination and kill you. It happened to several others. The world will consider you nothing more than the puppet of a Horror. You will become a mere footnote to history, one more

nethermancer who danced too closely with the Enemy and ultimately joined them."

The dragon paused. "It's a strange effect. What enjoyment does the Horror get from your death? Why pick on nethermancers? Revenge? Perhaps I ascribe too much thought to an item that could have been corrupted by accident. Anyway, Mellarn ren Raestelliar, I assume you understand now why I cannot allow this amulet to leave my custody."

"Nothing you have said is new to me," Mellarn said. He was surprised the amulet could affect Grental before she had even tied a thread to it, but he had known about the bound Horror and the way that Horror could snatch the spirit from anyone wearing the amulet. This power was precisely why his master wanted the amulet back. Once a certain nethermancer at the Elven Court had obtained this item, events would certainly become interesting.

"Have no fear that my companion will become tainted by the amulet. I will personally take it away immediately."

"No."

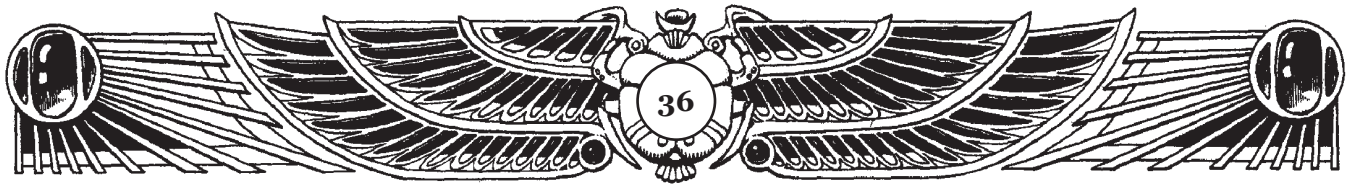
"Let me remind you of certain favors which my master granted..." Mellarn's voice halted mid-sentence, but his focus on the cave entrance did not waver. They must be communicating somehow with magic, Grental thought, just as the dragon had magically plucked the thoughts out of her head. The amulet continued to call to her, but she kept her fear of the dragon foremost in her mind. If she could not master her fears, she could at least use the strongest one to prevent herself from doing something foolish.

After an indescribably long time, Mellarn shifted his weight and turned towards the others. He did not say a word, but he looked somewhat relieved. A short time later, Pierren noticed an astral shadow emerge from the cave. Then astral space virtually exploded. When he opened his eyes again, something with deep blue scales, enormous wings, and piercing green eyes as large as his entire body loomed over them. Pierren stopped breathing and fell several feet to the ground.

"Give my regards to Elfbane." The dragon's voice had a ritually polite timbre. She made a series of gestures with her wings and tail before effortlessly tossing an amulet to Mellarn, who responded with a complicated gesture and a bow. Pierren looked away as the dragon disappeared. Even with his eyes closed, he sensed powerful magic flowing back into the cave.

Grental could not keep her eyes off the amulet in Mellarn's hand, and she did not trust herself to speak. Rielle was about to say something, when Mellarn jumped into the air and transformed into a small golden dragon. Without a word or a glance back, he started flying north. Perhaps his tail waved good-bye, or perhaps it just swooshed back and forth as he flew.





As the amulet was carried further away, color began returning to Grental's cheeks. "What was that thing? What has Mellarn unleashed?"

"Something that will 'assist in the restoration of Wyrn Wood.'" Rielle's voice sounded strange and distant as she recalled Mellarn's words.

"Did you expect anything done by a dragon to be simple and direct?" T'rapthe was still watching the indistinct golden shape that glinted in the sunlight.

Rielle thought about Mellarn, his enchanting smile, the way he empathized with her feelings of pain regarding Wyrn Wood, and how he left without a "good bye" or a "thank you." She would have to investigate these "Seekers of the Heart" carefully before contacting them. Did she want to become entangled in this type of mission again? Was this type of work better than no action at all? After one last glance toward the golden glimmer, she turned to the others. "Come on, Grental. We've got some straight-forward, 'goody-goody' work to do, don't we?"

"Yes we do. Let's go melt some ice wraiths."

GAME INFORMATION

The expedition to the Tylon Mountains sponsored by the Great Library investigated rumors that the creatures known as kraulen beasts have remarkable abilities to ward off Horrors. Although the following report is inconclusive on this point, it has added immeasurably to our understanding of the animals. I humbly present the account of Jerstan, beastmaster of the Red Plains.

—Thar Trimmal, scholar and scribe of
the Great Library of Throal

A splotch of shining, lush white fur with bright blue eyes had staked out a location above and upwind of where his prey would pass. The magnificent creature had waited, motionless, for several hours. In a sudden burst of speed, he rushed down the mountainside, knocking a wolf to the ground with one swift blow. There was a flash of teeth and claws: kraulens' front legs have joints which swivel even further around than a Name-giver's elbow. The wolf tried to escape, but the kraulen's left paw came around from an unexpected angle, hitting the prey square in the jaw. If the wolf had escaped, the kraulen would likely not have eaten that day. Kraulens' back legs are weaker and somewhat shorter than their long, muscular front legs. Many animals can outrun a kraulen going uphill, and even on level ground a kraulen's gait seems a bit loping and awkward. Nothing should even try to outrun a kraulen sprinting downhill, however.

Kraulens are six feet of pure, lean muscle, with an additional three feet of tail, which helps them maintain their

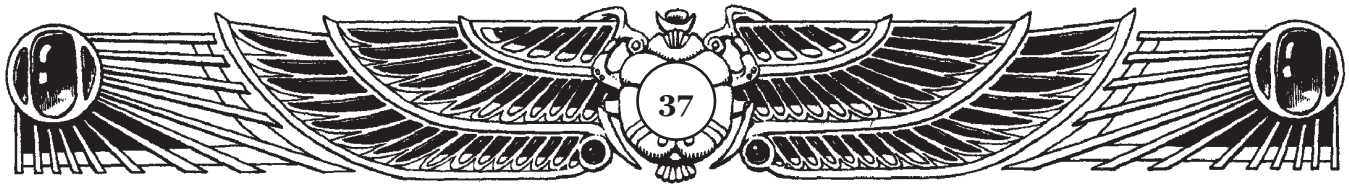
balance on rocky, uneven surfaces. Their elongated faces have a large mouth with sharp front teeth. My companions were impressed by their fierce appearance, but our group was never in any danger from a kraulen. They are not constantly ravenous like a skeorx, nor are they Horror-touched and crazed, as so many other intelligent animals have become. They attack solitary prey-stay with your herd and you will not be in danger. The term "beast" has only become attached to the animals' name because of their admirable ferocity when protecting their cubs, not their generally violent nature. Both the male and female kraulens spend several years raising a single cub, of which they are exceedingly protective.

They are also remarkably intelligent creatures: they have bred slarints to resemble them more closely, just as we have bred cows to yield more milk. Every pair of kraulens adopts a family of slarints and shares their den with them. Unlike Name-givers, who always expect a quantifiable service from the animals they house and feed, the kraulens merely expect these slarints to stay near them. A full-grown slarint is about one to two feet long, with fluffy white fur, just like a kraulen cub's. Most predators avoid the slarint, as its bite is poisonous and stings terribly. Although the face of a slarint is rounder and its canine teeth are much smaller than a kraulen's, its general build is identical. Unable to distinguish at a distance between a young kraulen and a slarint, many predators simply avoid both. The adopted slarints are always the ones in the area that most resemble a kraulen cub, and it is worth noting that slarints in the Dragon Mountains, where there are no kraulens, are noticeably less fluffy and less muscular than the ones in the Tylon Mountains.

The cry of a kraulen pouncing on his prey is deafening. It starts with an unusual throaty noise and rises into a fearsome howl, which I would write as hkhrau'eh. Occasionally a kraulen is born with black fur and the howl of these kraulens is apparently different, sounding more like hzhlau'ah. It is reputedly so frightening that even Horrors flee from it. The orks in Pralk and Traven are convinced that their villages survive today only because nearby black kraulens howled so fiercely that approaching Horrors retreated back into the netherworlds.

Kraulens, both black and white, are now considered almost sacred in many villages. Although orks used to kill kraulens for their soft, thick fur (and several village chiefs still wear a kraulen pelt as a badge of office), they now forbid the hunting of kraulens. The extremely unfortunate incident caused by my companion prevented us from observing a black kraulen, so it is with great regret that I cannot personally confirm or deny anything special about the howl of a black kraulen.





Sroikar, nethermancer of Jerris, submitted the following addendum to his colleague's report.

I observed several kraulen beasts attacking other creatures. Although their howls were extremely loud, I detected nothing magically fearsome about them. In fact, I consider it quite likely that the villagers of Pralk forced us out because they were afraid I would disprove the legend about their black kraulen beast savior.

I used my Talent for frightening others to intimidate a kraulen beast. I wanted to determine if it had some magical resistance to my abilities, which might have lent credence to the idea that kraulen beasts can defend themselves from Horrors. The beast fled from me immediately, abandoning its cub, which I had not noticed in the underbrush. It was not my fault: I did not intend for that other animal to attack the three-foot long cub, which apparently could not yet defend itself. Death is a part of life; there was no call to make us leave the area. Perhaps a future expedition will have better luck finding a black kraulen beast, but I doubt there is much to be gained from one.

KRAULEN BEAST (WHITE)

DEX: 8	STR: 12	TOU: 10
PER: 4	WIL: 5	CHA: 7
Initiative: 10/D10+D6	Physical Defense: 10	
Number of Attacks: 3	Spell Defense: 8	
Attack: 15/D20+D6	Social Defense: 10	
Damage:	Armor: 6	
Bite: 20/D20+D8+D6	Mystic Armor: 2	
Claws: 15/D20+D6	Knockdown: 12/2D10	
Number of Spells: 1	Recovery Tests: 3	
Spellcasting: 7/D12		
Effect: Howl (see below)		
Death Rating: 70	Combat Movement: 38	
Wound Threshold: 13	Full Movement: 75*	
Unconsciousness Rating: 60		
Creature Durability: 0-7		

* Increased to 150 yards when charging downhill

Legend Points: 1100

Equipment: NA

Loot: Pelt worth 3D6×10 silver pieces. Many ork settlements in the Tylon Mountains forbid hunting kraulens and consider possession of a fresh pelt as proof of hunting. The soft, warm kraulen pelt is still greatly desired, however, and some orks are willing to purchase the pelts of kraulens which were found dead.

Commentary/Rules

The howl of the kraulen beast, made while charging into combat, is intimidating. If the spellcasting test vs. the tar-

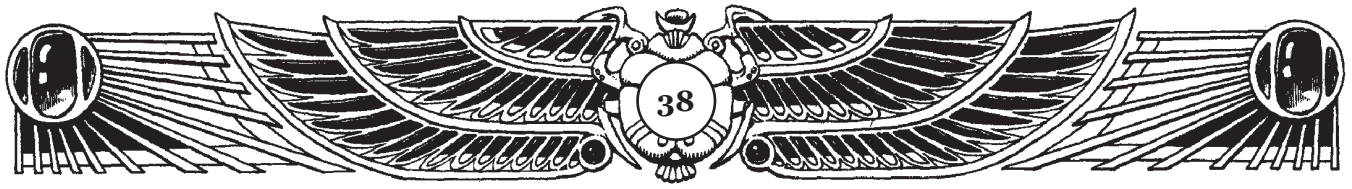
get's social defense is successful, reduce all the target's steps by 2 for 2 rounds. The kraulen beast may only howl once at a single target at the beginning of combat. Its first physical attack will always be against this same target.

SLARINT

DEX: 5	STR: 5	TOU: 3
PER: 3	WIL: 4	CHA: 4
Initiative: 5/D8	Physical Defense: 7	
Number of Attacks: 1	Spell Defense: 6	
Attack: 7/D12	Social Defense: 6	
Damage: 5/D8 (+5 steps poison)	Armor: 1	
Number of Spells: NA	Mystic Armor: 1	
Spellcasting: NA	Knockdown: 4/D6	
Effect: NA	Recovery Tests: 1	
Death Rating: 23	Combat Movement: 30	
Wound Threshold: 5	Full Movement: 60	
Unconsciousness Rating: 16		
Legend Points: 35		
Equipment: None		

Loot: Venom sack, worth 20 silver pieces. Slarint venom is used as a spice, primarily by orks, who say that meat spiced with slarint causes the mouth to tingle pleasantly. Others claim eating slarint-laced food is like having one's tongue repeatedly stung by bees and then tied into a knot.





THE LEGEND OF TRIAD

This is a legend of an adventuring group named Triad and the three weapons and items that made them legends.

— *By Tristan Songblade, elf Troubadour Extraordinaire*



Our story begins long ago, in an age when the dragons of Barsaive were arrogant and cruel, and thought that because they were greater in stature and magic, they could rule their fellow Name-givers. Hrak Gron, the first liberator, a Discipline given by the Passion Lochost himself to the orks, had led the orks of Barsaive out of slavery, and they refused to be enslaved again.

My people, the elves of Barsaive and of the Wyrms Wood, were proud and would not bow down to the dragons. It was during this time that the ill-fated meeting between Queen Dallia and Alamaise occurred. Alamaise demanded that the elves bow down to him as the rightful ruler of the Wyrms Wood. Queen Dallia refused, and the terrible dragon devoured the beloved elf Queen.

In this time of darkness, hundreds of years before the Scourge of Horrors that befell us, there lived a mighty hero. His name was Dracuth Crevase, an obsidiman warrior, whose might and power were respected and feared by his fellow Name-givers... except the dragons. One day, a dragon flew above him as he was traveling through a canyon. The dragon hovered directly above him, his great form blotting out the sun and covering the obsidiman completely in his shadow. The dragon's voice shook the canyon as he yelled down to the warrior, "Poor little obsidiman, unable to fly or use magic as easily as you breathe. So weak and puny in my presence, nothing but a pebble to be crushed with ease, elemental earth skin or not! Even with all your might and that of your Liferock, you could never hope to defeat me. Your race too shall be ruled by us dragons." With that, the dragon swooped down towards the obsidiman, turning effortlessly away at the last moment, and cackling, and then glided off, allowing the sun's rays to once again shine on the Obsidiman.

He shook with ferocious anger at the insult to his Liferock, but knew he could do nothing to defeat the dragon in the open skies. As the dragon flew off, he noted the direction and started his pilgrimage to the dragon's lair. The obsidiman journeyed for over a month, crossing the countryside, fighting off bandits and ork scorchers and helping the common

folk, his path taking him from the Throal Mountains all the way to the Tylon Mountains. When he saw the dragon flying overhead one night in the Tylon Mountains, holding a large black shape in its maw, he knew he was close to the lair, and started his climb up the peak.

It took Dracuth two days to climb up the Tylon peaks and reach the entrance of the dragon's lair. He entered the dragon's lair that very night, and found the dragon to be asleep. The mighty obsidiman was consumed with all the suppressed rage that had been building for a month. He screamed out, saying, "I accept your challenge, weakling dragon!" and struck the dragon with a devastating blow across the chest.

The dragon, in all his haughtiness, had forgotten his slight to the obsidiman, screaming in rage, "Who are you, and what business do you have with me?"

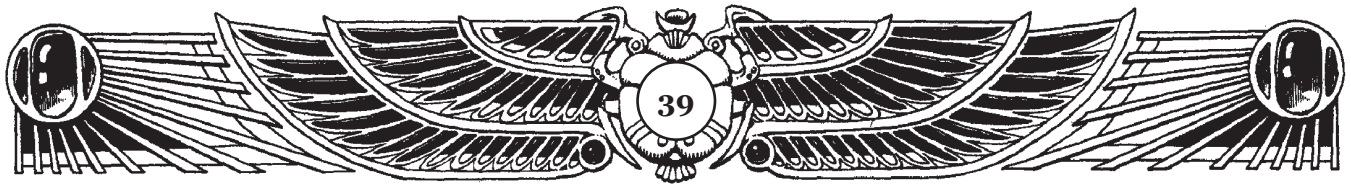
The obsidiman raised his massive troll sword and said, "I am Dracuth Crevase, obsidiman warrior, legend, hero, wielder of Orkuth, and you have challenged me to a duel by insulting my race, my Liferock, and my love of freedom! Here you will die!" And with that he struck again, delivering a punishing blow that knocked off a piece of the dragon's tail.

The dragon howled in rage, spewing forth gouts of flame from its massive jaws. This stream of flame burned the obsidiman badly, and his beloved Orkuth was melted away to nothing. The dragon arrogantly declared, "I, have burned away all your precious armor, your sword, and your other gear to nothing but pools of metal and ash. What will you do without your equipment, powerless little warrior?"

The warrior replied succinctly, "Weapons are everywhere." With that, he picked up the dragon's own loose tail spike. He thrust the tail spike into the open wound in the dragon's breast, the purple blood of the dragon mingling with the blue-gray blood of the obsidiman. The dragon attacked mercilessly in close combat, clawing and biting the warrior, as the warrior kept stabbing with the tail spike, continuously attacking the wound, and driving the tail spike further and further into the dragon's flesh with each blow. After this fierce battle, both fell to the ground from their wounds.

The next day, only the obsidiman woke up, somehow surviving the horrendous battle. He then sliced off the dragon's head and claws, placing them in a large sack only an obsidiman could hold, and gathered a few gold and silver coins





from Cara Fahd and Landis. He then returned to his Liferock in the Throal Mountains to rest and recover. He entered the state known as the Dreaming, remaining there for many centuries.

He came to Throal, where he met Fafhniel Lunesword, a dwarf weaponsmith, and me, Tristan Songblade, elf troubadour extraordinaire. As surrogates of the Theran Empire, the dwarfs of Throal were gaining much wealth. It was here that the obsidiman revealed to Fafhniel the bones, teeth, and scales of the dragon long dead. The weaponsmith found the tail spike to be emanating incredible magical power. He took the dragon pieces from the obsidiman and enchanted them with spells and elemental kernels, forging a weapon of great power. Dracuth and Fafhniel argued over the Name for some time, the obsidiman wanting the rather direct and practical Name Dragontail, and the dwarf opting for the flashier Dragon's Bane. The dwarf eventually won. He then scribed the Name in Scythan, and the blade Dragon's Bane was born.

We had magical items of our own. Before meeting the obsidiman, we had found a rare metal called Silvermoon deep in the Tylon Mountains. From this material, Fafhniel created a sword for himself called Moonblade, and a harp for me called the Lunar Harp. We left Throal after Dragon's Bane was created, traveling far and wide across Barsaive. We fought Horrors and their constructs wherever we found them. The Moonblade and Lunar Harp we found to be ideal for this purpose, perhaps due to the Silvermoon metal from which they were forged. We eventually created a group pattern, calling ourselves The Triad. Our most memorable battle was with a tainted Cathay dragon that had gone mad in the Caucavic Mountains. I played the Lunar Harp, increasing our power versus the Horror-tainted dragon. Fafhniel stood his ground, waiting for the dragon to swoop down so he could strike with Moonblade. When the tainted Cathay dragon swooped down to kill the dwarf, Fafhniel lashed out with the Moonblade, wounding the dragon, and somehow surviving the dragon's attacks after a bright blue flash of light was emitted from the blade. Dracuth swung at the tainted dragon and discovered the true power of Dragon's Bane that day, killing the dragon in one blow with Dragon Strike. I've never seen anything like it before or since.

The final stop in our adventures was a village called Callendia, in whose kaer I currently reside, although my long lifespan is finally coming to an end. I wonder if I have enough

time to teach my students to the next Circle, or even to finish this final biography of our group and our legend...

But I digress. Our great adventure was coming to an end. At any rate, the people of Callendia were terrified. The leaders of Callendia had with great trepidation purchased the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage. However, the people of Callendia feared the Rites would not be enough to save them from the Horrors, so the leaders of Callendia decided to make a deal with a dragon Named Blazeheart. It was after the short Thera-Dragon War, and the unspoken and unwritten treaty between the Dragons and Thera did not allow this cooperation. Blazeheart asked for an item she feared more than the wrath of her fellow dragons: Dragon's Bane. The people of Callendia begged Dracuth to surrender the sword to her. In the end, he relented, promising to relinquish Dragon's Bane once the magical protections were in place.

Preparations were made to place the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage and the Dragon's seal on the kaer,

as the people of Callendia dug out the kaer's internal framework, and built the kaer's shelters. Meanwhile we readied ourselves for the fierce battle that was coming, honing our skills, caring for our weapons, and practicing together.

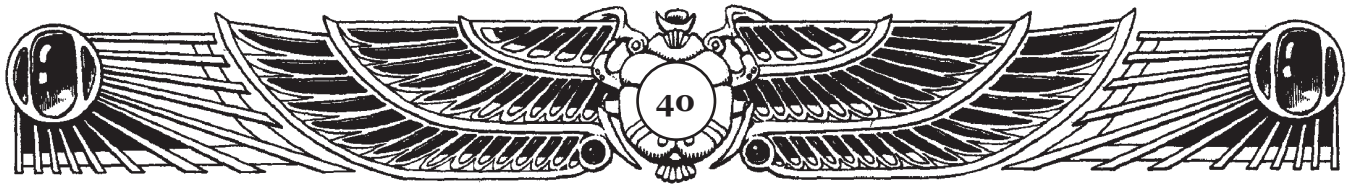
The dragon would be defenseless as she created her impenetrable magic seal for the kaer, and while

she meditated after drawing the seal with her massive, clawed hands, enchanting it with forbidden and forgotten magics. We three guarded her against an army of darkness against which lesser men would have fled in terror and still died. An army of undead, Horror constructs, and minor Horrors assailed us at every turn. Eventually, not even my Lunar Harp could keep them all back. The wounds became too great for Dracuth and Fafhniel, and they succumbed, dying while fending off a wormskull and a bloatform.

My friends were dead, and I was in danger of joining them. After retrieving Moonblade and Dragon's Bane from my dead friend's hands and setting their remains on fire with flasks of oil, I made haste to the kaer. Blazeheart stopped me, demanding the sword. I gave her Dragon's Bane and went into the kaer before she spoke the final incantation. Blazeheart was attacked as she finished her spell, sealing us inside. She sailed up, burning away the hordes with her fiery breath, then glided southwest towards her lair, sword in claw.

To my great sorrow, Queen Alachia refused the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage, instead opting for wooden





kaers. I hope my children get to see the Wyrms Wood for what it was, as I remember it in all its majesty and beauty. How I long to be there now, instead of in this kaer of iron and earth, sealed by a dragon of all things! May Jaspree and all of the Passions protect my homeland. I will never see my beloved Wyrms Wood again. Will the Elven Schism ever be repaired, my people reuniting their torn hearts and the land of Barsaive? Will Blazeheart let these people, my own children, out? I have sealed Moonblade, the Lunar Harp, and this letter in a secret place. I can only hope that true heroes worthy of them find them one day. Maybe one day they will be reunited with Dragon's Bane, and the items will work in tandem once again.

GAME INFORMATION

It is up to the GM whether the information in any legend is indeed accurate or merely a fable. If this is just a fable, the moral of the tale is that pride comes before a fall, in both the case of Tagmaroth and Queen Alachia. The location of the kaer and the dragon's lair are also up to the GM, if the legend is true.

Silvermoon is a rare silver/limestone alloy that shines a pale white in moonlight. It was originally found by Tristan and Fafhniel in the Tylon Mountains, in a cave with an opening to the sky. They entered the cave and explored it. Water had worn down the cave walls from the nearby Tylon River, rivulets producing a partially submerged cave. The cave walls were made of limestone and had a pale white glow. Fafhniel took out his pick and dug into the wall, discovering a silver ore underneath, and he cut away as much as he could before the nocturnal creatures that lived in the cave returned in the morning. After forging the items into a sword and harp, they discovered that Silvermoon had a great effect against undead Horror constructs. Weapons made of Silvermoon always add +1 step to attack and damage against undead Horror constructs such as cadaver men.

Unknown to Fafhniel or Tristan, an earthquake in the Tylon Mountains had caused the ceiling of Tagmaroth's lair to collapse, opening it to the sky. This allowed the moonlight to react with the residual magic of the cave and the unique limestone-silver mineral deposits in Tagmaroth's lair to create the Silvermoon metal. Erosion caused the cave to deepen significantly until it dropped down to the level of the Tylon River, thus submerging the cave partially.

HOW IT HAPPENED IN MY BARSVAIVE

Summary: After finding the kaer entrance and the red dragon, the heroes proposed a deal with Blazeheart, a favor

in exchange for unsealing Kaer Callendia. What the dragon desired in exchange was the Seeds of Life for unsealing the kaer as a favor. Once unsealed, the characters had to deal with the paranoid government of Kaer Callendia. When they managed to free the town, the descendants of Songblade presented to them Moonblade, and the Lunar Harp. Dragon's Bane will have to be stolen from Blazeheart or obtained through other means.

In my game, the kaer was located in between Throal and Kratas, on the outskirts of the Servos Jungle, and Blazeheart laired in a mountain surrounded by fog deep within the Servos Jungle. Blazeheart had completely forgotten about Kaer Callendia. The heroes were exploring the Servos Jungle and came upon the kaer, noticing the red dragon seal emblazoned on the kaer entrance. They investigated and found out the red dragon lived in the southwest near Griffin Falls.

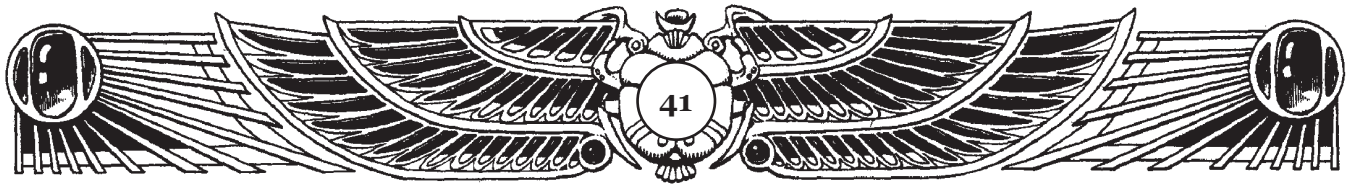
They traveled there and entered the red dragon's lair to ask about the seal. The red dragon introduced herself as Blazeheart, and was reminded of the kaer. She promised to unseal the place for the adventurers, if they performed a task for her.

Her jungle servants were desperate for answers, having lost many children due to miscarriages recently, so she commissioned the heroes to find the Passion Jaspree himself to find out why this was happening. The heroes were incredulous, but she promised to pay them 300 silver and any one treasure from her hoard, as well as unseal the kaer, if they were successful. When they agreed, she told them the legend of the Passion's Dance (See **Legends of Earthdawn: Volume 1** for more information), and said that the Passion's temple must be somewhere in the Servos Jungle.

When they reached the temple after much effort, Jaspree spoke with the PCs. The Passion Jaspree told the party that an evil ork spirit called Barlok the Cruel and his band had finally succeeded in stealing his treasure, by possessing a group of ork scorchers who then did his bidding. Jaspree's treasure was neither gold nor silver, but the nine Seeds of Life, one for each Name-giver race, which were dug out of the ground by the orks. The loss of the Seeds of Life meant that no new life could be created. Jaspree didn't bother to explain how this exactly worked, but asked the adventurers to get the Seeds of Life back from the orks. Jaspree had sent his questors and followers out to track them throughout the Servos Jungle, and a windscout had recently returned telling of Barlok's current location, heading due east of the temple. Thus he requested that the party go and defeat Barlok and return the Seeds of Life to the temple, as time was of the essence and it would take time to rally his followers to defeat Barlok.

The heroes defeated the orks and the vengeful ork spirits, and returned the Seeds of Life to Jaspree, who had them replanted by his questors. The heroes returned to Blazeheart





who gave them their money, let them pick one treasure, a sword the swordmaster liked (which was Dragon's Bane; the absent-minded Blazeheart had forgotten about the item being in her hoard in the first place), and had them fly with her to Kaer Callendia, which she unsealed. The heroes entered the kaer.

Meanwhile, Kaer Callendia had developed an extremely paranoid government that refused to unseal even the kaer's inner layer of defense. They were so distrustful of outsiders that the heroes had to convince the guards to let them through to even talk to the kaer's council. The kaer's leaders called them Horror-marked, Horror spawn, and worse, then threw them in jail. Eventually, they proved to their jailers that they weren't Horror-marked.

The jailers then got orders to execute their prisoners by the end of the day. Realizing that their leaders were mad and the heroes had done no crime deserving of such brutality, the guards freed them. The heroes and guard escort fought past the council guards. They tried to negotiate with the leaders of Callendia for peace. The council shouted out orders to kill the heroes at the converted guards, to no avail. Realizing that negotiation was impossible with such lunatics, the heroes disbanded the council and had its members imprisoned indefinitely.

A community meeting was held to decide whether to fully unseal the kaer. The people decided, despite their fears, to unseal the kaer. Out of gratitude for finally being outside of the confines of the kaer, the descendants of Songblade gave the heroes the location of a secret hoard of treasure, and told them that by taking these items, they would become the guardians of Kaer Callendia and it was their responsibility to save the kaer if any trouble occurred. The heroes spent a month building a viable outdoor city for the town, then left for further adventure, including finding a questor of Garlen and leading her to Callendia to try and heal the council.

Other Adventure Hooks

After discovering the kaer to be breached, the heroes enter the kaer to eliminate the intruders. They search the kaer but find no Horrors; instead they find Tristan's letter and the Lunar Harp, and learn about the three magical items, although Moonblade is gone. Should the party decide to continue the chase, they find the Horrors' trail going deeper and deeper into the Servos Jungle. The Horrors are more than likely doppelgangers, who carry the sword away to prevent its use against their number, and plan to infiltrate the ranks of the dragon's servants, steal Dragon's Bane and kill the dragon with it. The heroes must solve the mystery of the Horror's trail ending at the servants' village, why the servants are acting strangely, and discover the plot to kill Blazeheart before it's too late.

DRAGON'S BANE

Maximum Threads: 2

Spell Defense: 17

Dragon's Bane features a wickedly sharp dragon's tail as the blade with its Name carved on it in Scythan runes. The cross guard is made of two dragon's claws; three clawed fingers to the left and right with an emerald in the middle. The hilt is made of bone, meticulously carved from the forehead piece of the dragon's skull, ending with a pommel carved from the eyebrow ridge. Unthreaded, the sword has a STR+5 Damage step.

Thread Ranks

Rank 1

Cost: 300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know that the Name of this sword is Dragon's Bane. It is written in Scythan on the blade itself.

Effect: Add +6 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests.

Rank 2

Cost: 500

Effect: Add +7 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests, +8 steps if being used against a dragon or drake.

Rank 3

Cost: 800

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know the Name of the last wielder of the sword.

Effect: Add +8 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests, +9 steps if being used against a dragon or drake.

Rank 4

Cost: 1300

Effect: The sword gains the ability Chilling Edge. For 1 Strain, a brilliant blue light surrounds the sword for a number of rounds equal to Thread Rank, adding step 3/1D4 cold damage on attacks. For every bonus die rolled with this extra damage, the wielder receives 1 point of cold damage.

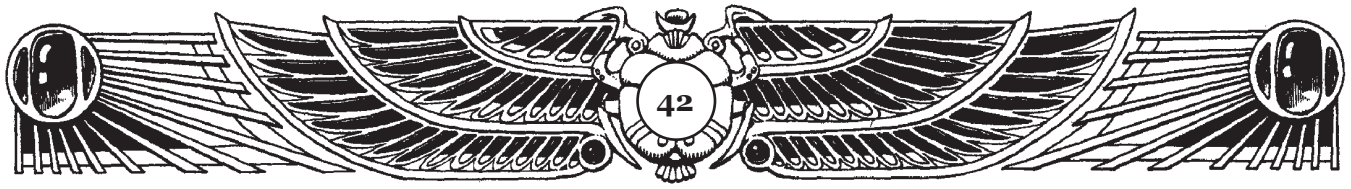
Rank 5

Cost: 2100

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know what materials were used to make the sword: five kernels apiece of Elemental Earth and Water, and a dragon's tail, claws, and skull, as well as an emerald.

Effect: Add +9 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests, +10 steps if being used against a dragon or





drake. Also, the sword can now detect the presence of dragons and drakes. The wielder of the sword must make a Spellcasting or Perception Test + Thread Rank against the Spell Defense of nearby dragons and drakes to detect their presence. The range of this effect is thread rank times 100 yards. If the test is successful, the sword glows a pale green.

Rank 6

Cost: 3400

Effect: The sword becomes resistant to Dragon's Breath, gaining a Spell Defense Bonus of + Thread Rank versus that power. The wielder also gains +1 to Spell Defense and Mystic Armor when fighting dragons and drakes.

Rank 7

Cost: 5500

Deed: The wielder must hunt down a dragon or drake and slay him in single combat. The Legend Award for this Deed is double the creature's Legend Award.

Effect: The sword gains the ability Dragon Strike. For 4 points of permanent damage, the character can attempt to defeat a dragon or drake in a single blow. The blade becomes freezing cold, adding +35 steps to the wielder's Strength step for the Damage step, and also bypassing their Armored Scales ability. A dragon or drake struck by this attack immediately takes six Wounds.

MOONBLADE

Maximum Threads: 2 **Spell Defense:** 16

The weapon is of a simple design, appearing to be a normal broadsword, except for the silver sheen seen during the day on the blade and cross guard and the pale white luster seen at night. The hilt is constructed of strong granite wrapped with leather, and a pommel with a sapphire embedded in silver. Unthreaded, the sword has a STR+5 Damage step. As this sword is made of Silvermoon, it adds +1 attack and damage steps when wielded versus undead Horror constructs.

Thread Ranks

Rank 1

Cost: 300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know that the Name of this sword is Moonblade.

Effect: Add +6 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests.

Rank 2

Cost: 500

Effect: Add +7 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests. Also, the wielder gains +1 Physical Defense against Horrors.

Rank 3

Cost: 800

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know the Name of the Weaponsmith who created the sword.

Effect: Add +8 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests, +9 steps if being used against a Horror. Also, the wielder gains +1 Spell Defense against Horrors.

Rank 4

Cost: 1300

Effect: Add +9 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests, +10 steps if being used against a Horror. Also, the wielder gains +1 Social Defense against Horrors.

Rank 5

Cost: 2100

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know what materials were used to make the sword.

Effect: Add +10 steps to the wielder's Strength step for Damage Tests, +11 steps if being used against a Horror. Also, the wielder gains +1 Mystic Armor against Horrors.

Rank 6

Cost: 3400

Deed: The wielder must hunt down a Horror or Horror construct and slay him in single combat, with the only exception being a character assisting the battle with the Lunar Harp. The Legend Award for this Deed is double the Creature Award for defeating the Horror or construct.

Effect: The sword gains the ability True Horror Fend. For 3 strain, the wielder attempts to defend against a Horrors incoming attacks. Add 6 to the wielder's Physical, Spell, and Social Defenses for a duration of 6 rounds.

LUNAR HARP

Maximum Threads: 1 **Spell Defense:** 15

The harp is moon-shaped and made of Silvermoon: thus, it has the same-silvered sheen during the day and pale white luster at night as Moonblade. Its silk strings are attached in a diagonal fashion.

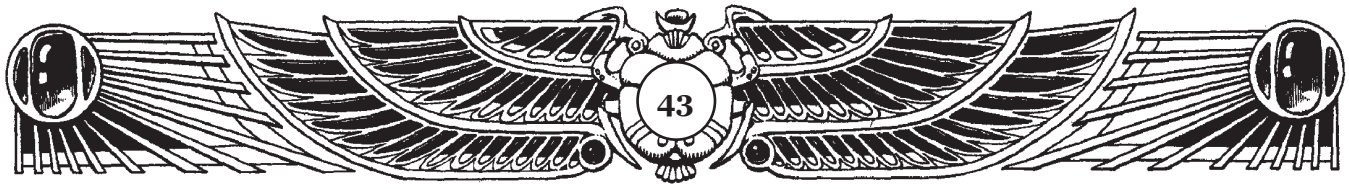
Thread Ranks

Rank 1

Cost: 200

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know that the Name of this item is Lunar Harp.





Effect: Add +1 Rank to Emotion Song. If the wielder does not have the Emotion Song talent, he gains the talent at Rank 1. As this harp is made of Silvermoon, the wielder and all allies add +1 steps to their attack and damage against undead Horror constructs when they hear the wielder singing and playing the harp.

Rank 2

Cost: 300

Effect: The wielder and all allies gain +1 Social Defense against Horrors when they can hear the wielder singing and playing the harp.

Rank 3

Cost: 500

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know the Name of the last wielder of the harp.

Effect: The wielder and all allies gain +1 Spell Defense against Horrors when they can hear the wielder singing and playing the harp.

Rank 4

Cost: 800

Effect: The wielder and all allies gain +1 Mystic Armor against Horrors when they can hear the wielder singing and playing the harp.

Rank 5

Cost: 1300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must know what materials were used to make the harp.

Effect: The harp gains the ability Life Circle of Song. To use this ability, make an Emotion Song Test against the Spell Defense of any entities trying to approach within ten yards of the troubadour and his companions. Entities whose Spell Defense is equal or lower than the Emotion Song test result are repelled, and dealt damage equal to Thread Rank + Willforce. Entities with the lowest Spell Defense are repelled first before moving onto to entities with higher Spell Defenses. This ability can repel a number of entities equal to the Thread Rank of the harp.

Rank 6

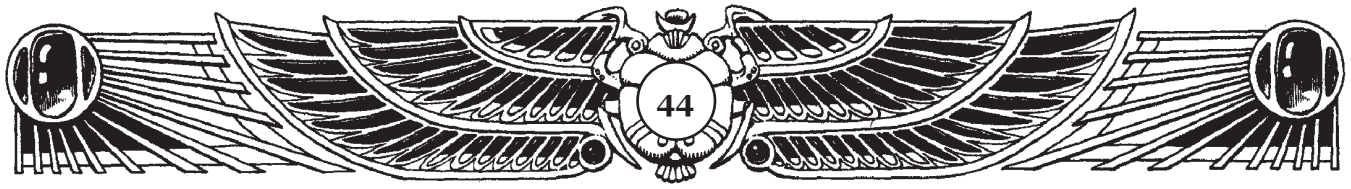
Cost: 2100

Deed: The wielder must hunt down a Horror or Horror construct with a companion, and use the Lunar Harp to aid the companion in combat against the Horror. The Legend Award for this Deed is double the Creature Award for defeating the Horror or construct.

Effect: The harp gains the ability Horror Struggle. This ability is similar to the nethermancer spell Undead Struggle, except that the target is Horrors. To use this ability, make an

Emotion Song Test against the Spell Defense of the Horror. Success forces the Horror and the wielder into a Contest of Wills, causing 1 point of permanent damage to the wielder. The wielder looks as if in a trance, but continues to play. For each round of use, the wielder makes an [opposed] Thread Rank + Willforce test against the Horror's Willpower step. The winner takes no damage, while the loser takes damage equal to the opponent's Willforce Test result. Considering that the Willpower step of most Horrors is rather large, this power is very risky to use. As in Undead Struggle, this contest continues until the user of the power or the Horror dies.





SELF DESTRUCTION

A new Horror for use in Earthdawn campaigns.

Micha walked with fast measured steps under the dim light of the street lamps, one leg on the paved walkway, one on the brown dirt road. He was tall and lanky for a human, a fact that was only stressed by clothes that were few sizes too small. His face, which might have once been handsome, was withered with lines of hunger and neglect. The height difference between the road and the paved walkway made his gait jumpy, and it raised small clouds of summer dust. His bushy eyebrows were furrowed. Below them, burning black eyes were fixed on some invisible point in the road. Micha was mumbling. “One two three four five, one two three four five...”

A human child beggar sleeping on the pavement raised an imploring palm. “A copper, sir? A copper for a blessing?” The boy’s other arm was missing. Micha remembered being told that beggars sometimes maimed themselves intentionally. He didn’t miss a step, oblivious to the small street tragedy; he almost ran over the child in his rush.

“One two three four five, One two three four five...”

“Dis take you!” the child called after him.

One!

It was another child. The kid stood on the boat, crying. He and his mother had been household slaves in his Micha’s parents villa for over a decade, but now they would be sold to the Theran slaver. There was no alternative with so many heavy debts Micha owed. The youth’s frightened wails accompanied him as the K’tenshin riverboat slowly cleared the bend. The craving had taken them both.

“One two three four five, one two three four five...”

A black-haired elven prostitute on a street corner winked at him.

“Looking for a good time, Micha?”

The ageless beauty associated with her kind was ruined, just like the left side of her face. He knew the story; a jealous lover once dipped her in boiling oil.

“One two three four five, one two three four five...”

Two!

Another black-haired girl, this one with her face whole, holding his hand in intimacy.

“Promise you will ask my dad this week, Micha. Promise me.”

“I promise.”

“I can’t wait any longer for you, Micha. Promise you’ll ask for his blessing tomorrow.”

“I promise.”

The same week his father married him to a rich friend’s daughter. The loan sharks promised to slice Micha to tiny pieces unless he settles his debts. The hefty dowry was used to cover most of the damages caused by his gambling. But seeing that he can pay the loan sharks again gave him credit. It was a cyclic road, and Micha couldn’t find the strength to get off.

So many lies, so many unkept promises; the craving took them all. Sinayah, his black haired lover committed suicide when she found out. The craving had taken her too.

“One two three four five, one two three four five...”

Another street corner. He went past a tall red brick house. There was a big sign on the front, ‘Nesar and Sons Trading Company’. Most of the doors and windows were shuttered due to the late hour, but in the second story window a candle flickered.

Nesar must be doing some late night catching-up. He’s always been the diligent type.

Three!

He stood in front of the same red brick house. The sign on the front said ‘Micha’s Trading Company’, but the dwarf laborers were taking it down. Micha’s father had built the business from scratch and had given him management on his retirement. In ten years of hard labor, Micha’s father had become the sole middleman between the numerous farms around the city and the river trading T’skrang of House K’tenshin. And now Micha was selling it just to cover another gambling hole. Nesar stood there, accompanied by his twelve sons. The dwarf had the decency to look uncomfortable.

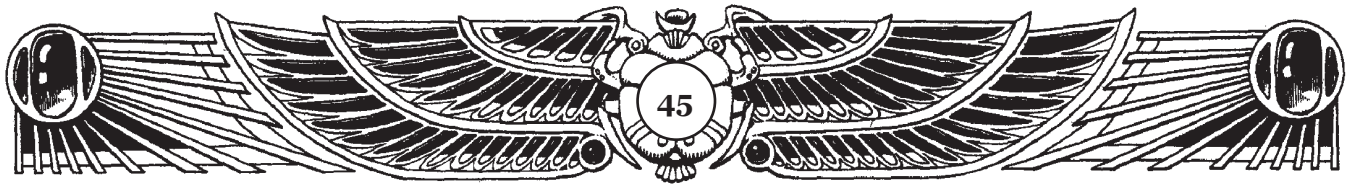
“You can still come everyday, Micha. There’s tons of work to be done, and no one here knows it better than you,” Nesar said.

To become a simple employee in his own former business? That was too much. “No. Thanks for the offer, but no. I’ll manage by myself,” he mumbled.

When his father heard that his son had sold his life’s work to cover another gambling debt, he died of heartbreak. The craving had taken him, too.

“One two three four five, one two three four five...”





Midsummer drizzle started, scorching the heat-tormented earth. There were not enough drops to penetrate the hard soil, and the water began collecting in small puddles. His foot splashed inside one such puddle, but he didn't miss a step. It was much-needed water for the dust-choked farms around the city. Once he owned such a farm.

Four!

He was standing for the last time in his furnished living room.

His wife crying, his three young children clutching at her apron, frightened of the looming change. The loan sharks were there, too. A local crime lord Named Mahooni accepted his villa and the surrounding fields as payment for his debts. The house had belonged to his family for almost a century. He would never go near it again. The pain of seeing strangers in it was unbearable.

It was during this period that he began walking with one leg on the sidewalk, one leg on the road. It was a way to prevent the evil eye, according to a local wizard. The same wizard taught him omens for calculating lucky numbers.

It didn't help. The craving just kept taking and taking.

"One two three four five, one two three four five..."

Five is my lucky number tonight. Micha was near his goal now. His pace quickened, his nostrils flared and he could feel his heartbeat growing faster. He was almost at a full run when he burst into the Lucky Turkey entryway. In his rashness he collided with Teraga, the gambling hall's troll bouncer and one of the owners. Teraga politely picked him up from the floor and dusted an invisible speck from his sleeveless blouse.

"What are you doing here, Micha?" Teraga said.

"I want to play." Micha's eyes were downcast.

"You know your credit is no good here anymore, Micha. Go home. Your wife is probably worried."

Micha took a green lizard hide bag from beneath his coat, and showed the contents to the troll. Teraga looked at the glimmering coins and squinted his eyes.

"Where did you get it Micha?"

"None of your business." He looked at the troll, suddenly alarmed by his own impudence. "Please let me in. I have a sure hand; all the omens point to five as my lucky number tonight."

The troll simply shrugged his huge shoulders and stepped aside.

Five!

The elven Theran slaver wiped sweat from his high brow every minute or so and jumped at the faintest rustle. Slavery was a dangerous occupation in Barsaive nowadays. Even here in the Deep South, an innocent invitation like this could turn into a trap laid by Throalic liberators.

Micha counted the coins in the green lizard hide bag "There isn't enough money here. You're short by a hundred," he said

"I pay according to the quality of the goods."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. Your wife has little value, being the skinny scarecrow she is. Your sons would fetch a nice sum, I agree, but she is hardly worth the trouble of dragging that miserable hide of hers all the way to the Island."

"You're taking my family nowhere. I've told you I'm gonna return the money tonight, plus interest," Micha said.

"Just remember the riverboat leaves before dawn. If you don't show up by four, I'll take it you don't have the money."

"I'll be back in two hours."

"Sure buddy, just wanted to make things clear."

Micha looked at the cages where his family was chained to a long row of Name-givers. The look his wife gave him was one of utter horror. No blame, no hatred, just complete shock over the unthinkable atrocity.

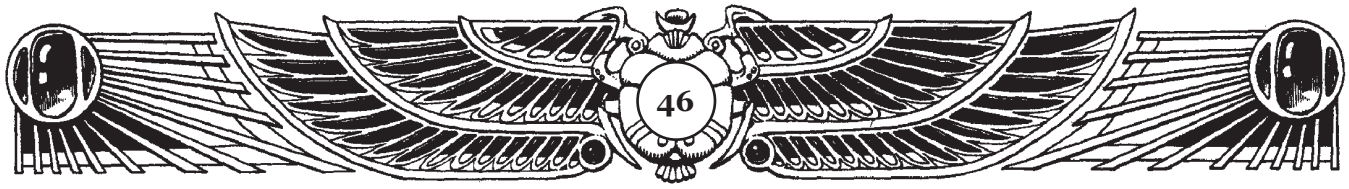
"Don't worry, dear, you won't be staying here long. I'll come back with the money and then everything will go back to be the way it was."

"You're mad!" Her sudden shout caused some of the other cage occupants to jump. "You have lost it completely, Micha, look at you! You have gambled everything you ever owned on Scourge-ridden dice and card games. Now you're gonna gamble your own flesh and blood?"

Micha had a moment of regret. He wanted to call off the deal. Suddenly, he knew that even if he got the money, nothing would ever be the same again between himself and his family. But the craving had already grown too strong in his stomach, and he ran into the gloom.

The rain had stopped falling an hour before dawn. The double doors of the Lucky Turkey were flung open and Teraga





came out, dragging the sobbing Micha by the scruff of the neck.

“Go home, Micha”, the troll said, “there is nothing more for you here. You already owe the house more money than you brought in.”

“But you don’t understand, I can’t lose, not tonight. I need to win back the money.”

“Sorry, Micha, you know the rules. Your credit is no good here anymore. Go back to your family.”

“Then lend me some money, I promise I’ll return it to you tenfold. I know my luck is about to change.”

The troll made a disgusted face and flung Micha into the dirty road. He then turned around and slammed the doors behind him.

Slowly Micha sat up on his knees, dripping brown muddy drops. With shaking hands, he took some water out of the puddle he had landed in and started wiping mud off his eyelids. The moon reflected on the little pool of water, and for a moment, the water became clear as a mirror. Micha looked at the reflection that stared back at him in mute accusation.

Suddenly, he shuddered and rose in alarm. A baby-sized humanoid creature was sitting on the shoulder of the image in the pool. He looked at his own shoulder. It was devoid of anything but his old coat. Sure that his eyes deceived him, Micha looked again in the pool. There it was again, its features clearer in the pale moonlight. It had an ugly goblinoid face, and it was leering and pointing with its index finger.

Micha felt his shoulder with his opposite arm, and looked behind him to see if maybe the little ugly baby creature was hiding behind his back. Nothing!

He looked yet again in the small pool. There was something familiar in those wizened features. The eyes, the mouth, the nose; it was a contorted picture, but Micha couldn’t help thinking he had seen it before. The creature standing on the image’s shoulder suddenly smiled, gaping a mouth full of rotting teeth. The wrinkles on its diminutive face straightened and Micha shuddered. The small face looking over his shoulder was his own. With a cry of fear and anguish, Micha ran screaming into the shadows.

The elven prostitute heard the tall man coming long before he reached her, and decided it was good time to hide. He was howling like a mad harpy and making such a racket that she figured all the Horrors in Parlainth had come down to the south. She sneaked a quick look at him from her hideout, and felt a sudden chill despite the suffocating heat. In the pale moonlight, the tall man cast two shadows. One was tall and lanky, the other a diminutive monster. She made a sign to ward against evil and decided it was time to return home. In the distance, a foghorn blasted the night, signaling a riverboat leaving the docks.

DUDA

Small Horror

DEX (20): 8 **STR** (5): 3 **TOU** (12): 5
PER (15): 6 **WIL** (12): 5 **CHA** (8): 4

Initiative: 9/D8+D6

Number of Attacks: 1

Attack: 9/D8+D6

Damage: 8/2D6 (claws)

Number of Spells: (1)

Spellcasting: 6/D10

Effect: 5/D8

Death Rating: 48 (66)

Wound Threshold: 13

Unconsciousness Rating: 40 (60)

Karma Points: 15

Powers:

Astral Veil 9/D8+D6

Duda Craving 10/D10+D6

Legend Points: 350

Equipment: NA

Loot: NA

Physical Defense: 10

Spell Defense: 8

Social Defense: 5

Armor: 3

Mystic Armor: 6

Knockdown: 8/2D6

Recovery Tests: 4

Combat Movement: 10

Full Movement: 20

Karma Step: 12/2D10

Cursed Luck 7/D12

Horror-Mark 13/D12+D10

Commentary/Rules

Some Horrors do not aspire to great orgies of blood and suffering. They leave the destruction of entire cities and kaers and corrupting people to their colleagues. These (usually less powerful) Horrors, like the Dudas, prefer the more intimate touch.

The Duda, translated from a Scythian dialect meaning the ‘fire that consumes from within’, spends almost its entire existence perched on the shoulder of its victim, hidden in astral space. Even a Name-giver with means of observing the astral might have difficulties locating it. The Horror rolls its Astral Veil Test, the result is added to his spell defense increasing the Difficulty Number for the Perception Test of anyone who tries to see it in the astral.

Dudas usually seek out weak-willed individuals, those with postponement gratification problems that also have much to lose. Name-givers who have drug, gambling, shopping or sex addictions are prime targets. Dudas will corrupt simple objects pattern in astral space, objects like gambling dice, weed smoking tubes and pipes, etc... This limited form of corruption allows them to make their ‘Horror Mark’ test against Name-givers using these objects. The method used by Horrors to corrupt small items is unknown but it is suspected it is similar to thread weaving.

Once it Marks a victim, the Horror will spend time getting to know him intimately, in order to figure out ways of





exploiting his weaknesses. It will then use its Craving power to corrupt and further strengthen that person's addiction, dragging him slowly but surely into self-ruination. During the Name-giver's downfall, the Duda will gorge itself on the victim's shame and feelings of guilt, and also on the sorrow that the Marked person brings upon his family and friends.

For unknown reasons, full moonlight causes the Dudas to appear, though only in reflections or as a shadow. Those who are able to see a Duda say the Horror appears like a baby-sized humanoid with a wretched and wrinkled face. Others claim that its face resembled that of its Marked victim.

Duda Craving: The Duda can only use this power against people it has Marked. Whenever the Duda uses Duda Craving against a Marked target, the target must roll his Willforce step against a Difficulty Number of 12 (The fact that Willforce is used rather than Willpower makes spellcasters undesirable targets for Dudas.). A failure means that an unstoppable craving of the Duda's choice (drugs, alcohol, gambling, women) hits the victim with self-consuming inner fire. The victim will not rest until he has satisfied his need. A person who is already physically or mentally addicted suffers from a -4 step penalty. A person who succumbs three times to the craving is considered addicted and suffers from the -4 penalty when trying to resist the next craving. After achieving the desired drink/weed/gambling effect, there is never a sense of accomplishment. The victim is left with immense feelings of shame and guilt. The Duda craving leaves the victim after 24 hours, whether he managed to satisfy the craving or not.

Adventure Seeds

The Duda is based on a mythical being (from Mediterranean mythology) that supposedly forces gamblers, drug addicts and manic-depressive people to act the way they do. The self-destructive behavior of people under the effect of addiction was explained in older times by the presence of a malicious spirit, the Duda, which forces people to act against reasonable nature. When psychology replaced superstition, the Duda remained a street lingo synonym for the medical term 'craving'. People under the effect of psychological craving often describe their situation with similar

words: a burning gut feeling that won't subside unless they satisfy their need.

An adventure based on a group of adepts trying to rid some poor soul of its Duda wouldn't be a great challenge to players of medium and higher Circle. After all, the Duda is not meant for fighting, as it is a weakling compared to most Horrors. A GM might try it against a low Circle group but he must tread with caution. The Duda is after all, a Horror. It does have good potential when used directly against your player characters. There is a lot of gaming and good role-

playing that can be extracted from such a situation. For example, I had a player who never saw the point in adventuring for the sole purpose of building a legend. He would refuse any adventure unless there was sufficient cash incentive. He was quite a charismatic fellow, a natural leader, so his attitude rubbed off on the other players.

I could have said something like "a thief stole the pouch with all your money" or "Chorrolis withdrew his favor, you are too greedy even for the Passion of greed". But that would have lacked class. Instead, I inflicted him with a nasty Duda. He was a good role-player, so when I explained the situation to him, he went along smoothly without the others noticing. He gambled half his fortune away and had to pay the other half to get away from a marriage with a peasant girl that he simply felt he had to sleep with. Also, suddenly he started convincing everyone to take strange adventuring jobs without payment. Again the others went along. To be honest, the guy never got cured of his greed but we did have a lot of fun.

"Garerik, tell me again why did we have to kidnap that high-ranking questor of Dis?

We got all these crazy mad believers on our tails."

"I don't know why, but when she came through that curtain with the chains and the dripping knife, I simply felt I had to have her, then and there."

"She is forty-five, looks sixty, and has more warts on her than a thundra beast."

"I know, I know. It simply seemed like a good idea at the time."





Ree